River of Life North Farm Shillingford Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief Report

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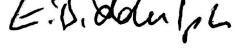
1	Mike Sims Project Supervisor	Tim Allen Project Manager	Edward Biddulph Post-excavation Deputy Manager	

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River of Life, North Farm, Shillingford, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Between the 14th and 16th of August 2013 Oxford Archaeology excavated five evaluation trenches on the site of the proposed wetland development 'The River of Life' at North Farm, Shillingford, Oxfordshire (centred at NGR: SU 5868 9318).

The investigation exposed alluvial deposits in excess of 1.2m depth within four of the trenches, with the underlying terrace gravel only encountered within one, at a depth of 1m below the current ground level. No evidence of human activity or peat deposits was observed within any of these strata.

Evidence of 20th-century made ground directly overlying the alluvium was observed within the northernmost trench, elsewhere the alluvial deposits were overlaid by cultivated soils.

No evidence for Romano-British activity alongside the line of the Roman Road was encountered during the course of the evaluation.

On 29th November 2013 Oxford Archaeology was called out to deal with suspected human bones revealed during the excavation of an area to create a fenland environment. The bones proved to belong to a heavily-truncated supine burial, and was without associated finds. The Oxfordshire Planning Archaeologist Richard Oram instructed that the burial be left in situ and carefully covered over. One bone that had already been disturbed was removed for sampling for radiocarbon dating before being returned to the ground. A date of 370-180 cal BC was obtained on the bone, placing the burial in the middle Iron Age.

Some 3m to the south a ditch running north-west to south-east was found, and a small sample excavated by hand. There were no finds, but a sherd of late Iron Age or early Romano-British pottery was recovered from the surface of the ditch.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (hereafter OA) was commissioned by Lizzie Rhymes, Project Officer for the Environment Agency, to undertake an archaeological evaluation at North Farm, Shillingford, Oxfordshire (centred on NGR SU 5868 9318; see Fig. 1), in advance of the creation of a wetland landscape alongside the river Thames, called River of Life, to be managed by the landowner, Earthtrust.

1.1.2 The development included a mixture of backwaters, ponds, reed fen and wet woodland, with a maximum impact depth of 1.2m. The work was undertaken by the Environment Agency under permitted development rights, but due to the archaeological potential of the area the Oxfordshire County Archaeology Service advised that a programme of archaeological investigation should be undertaken during the development to ensure that any archaeological deposits encountered were adequately recorded.

1.1.3 An archaeological brief was issued for the evaluation, prepared by OCC Planning Archaeologist Richard Oram in consultation with Environment Agency Archaeologist Catherine Grindey (Oxfordshire County Council 2013).

1.1.4 The area of the site is over 40 hectares (ha.), but the areas of impact total about 3.5ha in area, and are concentrated close to the river Thames. Five trenches each 15m long and 1.6m wide were requested in the archaeological brief. These were to be excavated to either the first significant archaeological horizon or to the maximum depth of impact of 1.2m.

1.1.5 The trenches were targeted on the areas of deepest impact, which comprise the backwaters and the fen extension, with a lesser level of investigation of the ponds. The proposed development, and the layout of the trenches, is shown in Figure 2.

1.1.6 OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), which detailed how it would implement the requirements of the brief (Oxford Archaeology 2013).

1.1.7 All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies.

1.1.8 During the subsequent construction work, human remains were uncovered during excavation of the fenland area (Fig. 2), and OA was asked by Richard Oram to record the remains, and to conduct a watching brief on the excavation of the immediately surrounding area.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The site covers an area of *c* 42 ha. and is located to the north of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell on the south bank of the river Thames, extending for over 2 km from Little Wittenham Wood on the west to 350m short of Shillingford Bridge on the east (Fig. 1).

1.2.2 The majority of the site is relatively level, lying at approximately 45m above Ordnance Datum (hereafter aOD), with a slight rise along the southern edge of the site increasing to 47m aOD. It is currently open farmland used mainly as pasture, with some arable. A fen area lies at the south edge of the site, where water from the greensand and chalk ridge to the south drains down. A large and deep watercourse runs north from this to the river Thames.

1.2.3 The geology of the site is mainly alluvial floodplain of the Thames over first terrace gravel deposits (BGS online viewer). A borehole survey undertaken previously by the project hydrologist Curt Lamberth showed that there is an island of gravel under

alluvium at shallow depth in the centre of the site, surrounded both to the north and south by much deeper deposits of alluvium. The borehole in the fen area was the only one to contain peat.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The site lies downstream of the Bronze Age and Iron Age hillfort at Wittenham Clumps, and of the valley-fort or oppidum at Dyke Hills on the opposite bank of the Thames. Adjacent to the oppidum was the Roman town at Dorchester-on-Thames.

1.3.2 Suburban development has recently been found by geophysical survey along the road leading south-east from the Roman town (information kindly provided by Abingdon Archaeological Geophysics), along the road that leads south to the river Thames, linking Dorchester to Silchester.

1.3.3 The route of the Dorchester to Silchester Roman road passes through the project area (PRN 8924), and is still visible as a hedge boundary.

1.3.4 Roman pottery was found in the 19th century within the project site during gravel extraction (PRN 2931). Human remains have also been found along the route of this road, just to the south of the project area (PRN 7675).

1.3.5 Further Roman pottery has been recorded at North Farm itself (south of the project area), along with an enclosure recorded from aerial photographs (PRN 12305).

1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 We are grateful to Lizzie Rhymes of the Environment Agency for giving us the opportunity to carry out the work, and to Chris Parker of Earth Trust for his assistance with site set-up and access arrangements. We are grateful to Nick Connell of RPS Energy for checking the trenches for unexploded ordnance (UXO) in advance of machine excavation. Plant was supplied by David Beecroft Ltd, and a portakabin by QikGroup. The work was supervised on site by Mike Sims, who also carried out the Watching Brief in December, and he was assisted during the evaluation by Al Zochowski. Survey was carried out by Leo Heatley and Rebecca Peacock. The project was managed at OA by Tim Allen, who is grateful to Steve Lawrence for stepping in to manage the fieldwork during his absence on leave.

2 Evaluation Aims and Methodology

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The general aims of the investigation were:

- To determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains.
- To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains.
- To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means.
- To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains.
- To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy.
- To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.
- To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeo-environmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive.
- To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.
- To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

2.1.2 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

- To investigate the areas close to the Roman road, both on the floodplain close to the modern Thames, and adjacent to the fen area on the south side of the site, both to look for structural evidence related to the road, and for associated activity adjacent.
- To investigate the alluvial activity across the site, in order to determine the complexity of the upper depositional sequence, and specifically whether occupation horizons are present within the alluvial accumulation.
- To investigate the edge of the fen and recover waterlogged peat samples to date them and establish their level of preservation and potential for information about past environments, if peat exists within the development area.

2.2 Methodology

Evaluation

2.2.1 The evaluation consisted of the five trenches, each 15m long and 1.6m wide, requested in the archaeological brief (Oxfordshire County Council 2013). The location of the trenches was targeted upon the areas of maximum impact, to provide spatial coverage across the site, and to investigate possible activity associated with the line of the Roman road (Fig. 2).

2.2.2 The trenches were surveyed in using a Total Station Theodolite (TST) with GPS location. This was also used to provide benchmarks for each trench.

2.2.3 Before work began, the area of each trench and its immediate vicinity was checked for UXO by RPS Energy, who were in attendance throughout the machine excavation of the trenches.

2.2.4 The trenches were excavated using a wheeled mechanical excavator (JCB) fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless grading bucket. Excavation proceeded in spits of approximately 0.1m depth until either the first significant archaeological horizon was encountered or until the maximum depth of impact of 1.2m below ground level was achieved.

2.2.5 Recording was undertaken using the methods outlined in the Oxford Archaeology Field Manual (ed. Wilkinson 1992), supplemented by the OA Crib Sheets issued to all field staff since 2008. Provision was made for the collection of palaeo-environmental samples should suitable deposits be encountered.

Watching Brief

2.2.6 The area was machined without archaeological supervision, and the bones were noticed by a surveyor, who contacted the Oxfordshire Planning Archaeologist Richard Oram. Machining halted until he had visited, inspected the remains, and determined the appropriate mitigation strategy, and contacted OA to come out and record the remains.

2.2.7 The area surrounding the inhumation was recorded by carefully cleaning around the remains in order to expose the remnants of the grave cut, Scale drawings of the inhumation were drawn and both digital colour photographs and black and white negatives were taken. The plans were surveyed in using GPS.

2.2.8 Following recording the inhumation was covered with geotextile fabric and soft material to a thickness of 0.2m and covered with bulk material to a depth of 0.5m.

2.2.9 The watching brief was conducted as a continuous archaeological presence during the machining operations within the area as specified by Richard Oram. These were carried out using a tracked excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. The material was removed in 0.1m spits until the final depth was achieved. Machining was suspended whilst any potential archaeology or artefacts were investigated.

2.2.10 A ditch was revealed, and this was sampled by hand excavated, photographed and recorded in plan and section.

3 Results

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 Sections 3.3-3.8 summarise the results from each trench. Detailed context descriptions are presented in the context inventory (Appendix A) and within the descriptive text where appropriate.

3.1.2 The Watching Brief deposits are described in section 3.9.

3.1.3 Finds and scientific dating reports are summarised in section 3.10.

3.1.4 Discussion and interpretation of this evidence can be found in Section 4.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 Ground conditions were good throughout the evaluation, with stable soils encountered in all of the trenches. Encroachment by groundwater only occurred within two of the trenches, Trenches 2 and 5.

3.2.2 Slight variations within the natural geology was observed between the trenches. The underlying solid geology, terrace gravel, was encountered only within Trench 2.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 No deposits containing any evidence of past human activity were found, other than recent dredging in Trench 1.

3.4 Trench 1 (Fig.3, Section 100; Plate 1)

3.4.1 This measured 15m in length and 1.6m in width, and was sited on the northernmost edge of the proposed development, approximately 10m south of the river. The trench was situated on level pastureland and was excavated to the full depth of 1.2m along its length.

3.4.2 At the base of the trench a layer of orange-grey silty clay with some mangenese staining was exposed (103). This could be seen to slope gently down to the north, towards the river. Above 103 was a layer of mid brownish grey silty clay (102) some 0.5m thick, which also sloped down towards the river. Both of these are interpreted as alluvial deposits. No finds or environmental material were seen in either of these deposits.

3.4.3 Lying directly above layer 102 was thick deposit of grey-brown silty sand containing quantities of small rounded pebbles and numerous fresh water mussel shells (101). This deposit varied in thickness from 0.35m at the southern end of the trench to 0.65m depth at the northern end, with the top of the layer being roughly level. Dating evidence consisting of nylon sandbags, plastic bags, pottery, bottle glass and blocks of concrete was observed. Only the pottery was retained, and this comprised three post-medieval sherds, all probably of 19th-century date. This deposit represents deliberate dumping, the freshwater mussel shells indicating that the material was probably derived in part from dredging the river bottom or banks.

3.4.4 Overlying 101 was a 0.2m deep layer of dark grey-brown silty loam (100), the present day topsoil and turf.

3.5 Trench 2 (Fig. 3, Section 200; Plate 2)

3.5.1 This trench was sited in level pasture towards the north edge of the scheme, approximately 85m south of the river and 25m east of the line of the Roman road. The

trench measured 15m in length and 1.6m in width, and was excavated to a depth of between 1m and 1.2m below ground level.

3.5.2 In the centre of the trench the underlying terrace gravel (203) was encountered at a depth of 1m below ground level in the middle of the trench. Overlying the gravel was a layer of mid orange-brown silty clay (202), which was 0.5m thick above the gravel, increasing to over 0.7m at either end of the trench.

3.5.3 Above 202 was a layer of friable pale brown silty clay (201), which was 0.14m thick. This was overlain by the present-day topsoil and turf (200), a layer of dark grey-brown silty loam 0.2m thick.

3.5.4 All of the deposits overlying the gravel and below the topsoil are interpreted as alluvial deposits, although the uppermost (201) may have been reworked by ploughing.

3.5.5 No finds, charcoal or other environmental remains were seen in this trench.

3.6 Trench 3 (Fig. 3, Section 300; Plate 3)

3.6.1 This trench was located towards the south-west edge of the scheme. It was situated on noticeably higher ground which gradually sloped down to the north, and this part of the site had been used for arable cultivation rather than for pasture. The trench was located close to an existing fen, from which peat had been recovered in one of the boreholes. The trench measured 15m in length and was excavated to a depth of 1.2m below ground level.

3.6.2 A compact layer of mid brown silty clay with light grey clay inclusions (304) was encountered at a depth of 1.15m below ground level. This was probably an alluvial deposit. Overlying this was a layer of light brown silty clay 0.24m in depth and which contained occasional small pebbles (303).

3.6.3 Above 303 was a layer of dark brown silty clay 0.3m thick, also with occasional pebbles (302). Overlying this was a layer of light brown silty clay (301) around 0.4m thick, again with occasional pebbles. Deposits 303, 302 and 301 may have been alluvial or colluvial, or a mixture of both.

3.6.4 Overlying 301 was the present day ploughsoil (300), a layer of dark grey-brown silty loam 0.32m thick.

3.6.5 A deep vertically sided field drain could be seen to cross the trench on a diagonal, but was not bottomed at a depth of 1.4m below ground level.

3.6.6 No finds or environmental remains were seen in this trench.

3.7 Trench 4 (Fig. 3, Section 400; Plate 4)

3.7.1 This trench was located in the south-east part of the scheme on level pastureland, just east of the residential buildings at North Farm and 120m from the river Thames. The trench measured 15m in length and was excavated to a depth of 1.2m below ground level along its whole length.

3.7.2 A layer of orange-yellow sandy clay with white clay inclusions (403) was encountered at a depth of 0.9m below ground level. Overlying this was a layer of orange-brown clay with manganese flecking (402), which was 0.52m thick. Both of these are likely to represent early Holocene alluvial deposits.

3.7.3 Above 402 was layer 401, a layer of friable light brown silty clay 0.12m thick, overlain by the present-day topsoil and turf (400), a layer of grey-brown silty clay loam 0.24m thick. Layer 401 is likely to be an alluvial deposit reworked by ploughing.

3.7.4 No finds or environmental remains were seen in this trench.

3.8 Trench 5 (Fig. 3, Section 500; Plate 5)

3.8.1 This trench was sited on level pasture in the south-east corner of the scheme, within a loop of the Thames opposite the village of Shillingford, and approximately 30m south of the river. The trench measured 15m in length and was excavated to a depth of 1.2m below ground level along its whole length.

3.8.2 A layer of blue-grey saturated clay was encountered at a depth of 0.96m below ground level and formed the base of the trench (503). This was overlaid by a 0.32m deep layer of waterlogged orange-brown clay with manganese flecking (502), similar to layer 402 in Trench 4. Layer 503 may be a channel fill of fluvial origin, and is similar to deposits found in the boreholes closest to the present river Thames along the length of the site. Layer 502 was probably alluvial.

3.8.3 Sealing 502 was a 0.1m deep layer of friable light brown silty clay containing occasional pebbles (501). Layer 501 was probably a layer of alluvium. Above 501 was the present-day topsoil and turf (500), a layer of dark grey silty clay loam 0.3m deep.

3.8.4 No finds or environmental remains were seen in this trench.

3.9 Watching Brief (Figs 2, 4, 5 and 6)

3.9.1 During the excavation of a shallow standing water feature intended to become a lowland fen, situated just west of centre along the south edge of the development (Fig. 2), the truncated remains of a human inhumation were observed in the base of the excavations (Fig. 4). Following discussions with the County Archaeologist, Richard Oram, a strategy was designed to deal with the discovery. The inhumation was to be recorded, then covered over and left *in situ* and a watching brief to be undertaken during further machining over an area of 10m radius around the discovery.

3.9.2 The base of the excavations was approximately 0.7m below the original ground level and exposed the underlying light brown silty clay alluvium (1007). Overlying this was another layer of alluvium (1006), a dark brown silty clay 0.2m deep.

3.9.3 The truncated burial (1000) was exposed in the base by the machine. After cleaning the remains of the grave cut (1001) measured 0.6m long and 0.3m wide (Fig. 5). The surviving human remains comprised the right femur and upper parts of the right tibia and fibula, the upper part of the left femur and part of the right humerus. Examination of the remains suggested that they related to an adult female. The outstretched legs may indicate that the body was buried supine. No finds were associated with the burial.

3.9.4 It is assumed that the grave cut extended down from the top of the alluvial deposits and would originally have been at least 0.4m deep.

3.9.5 Cut into the top of layer 1106 was a ditch (1002) running north-west to south-east across the full width of the excavation (Fig. 4). Upon excavation this proved to have steeply sloping sides and a flat base, and was up to 1.8m in width and 0.6m deep (Fig. 6, Section 1001). It had a single fill of light greenish-grey silty clay containing charcoal flecking (1003), which produced fragments of animal bone and a single shard of late Iron Age or Early Romano-British pottery.

3.9.6 Overlying the fill of the ditch was a 0.12m deep layer of light brown silty clay containing occasional sub-angular stone and charcoal flecks (1005). Above this was a 0.3m deep layer of dark grey-brown silty clay loam (1004), the present day ploughsoil.

3.10 Finds summary

Evaluation

3.10.1 Visual examination of all the potential alluvial deposits showed no evidence for artefacts, charred or organic environmental remains or snails within them, and were therefore not suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling for macroscopic remains. In the absence of any dating evidence, it was not thought that palaeo-environmental sampling for pollen or other micro-analysis was appropriate.

3.10.2 The only artefacts observed during the course of the evaluation came from Trench 1. These included plastic wrapping, nylon sandbags, bottle glass, pottery and concrete, all of which dated to the 19th and 20th centuries. The pottery was retained (see Appendix B.1); the presence of the remainder was recorded on the trench sheet, but they were not kept.

Watching Brief

3.10.3 A single bodysherd of late Iron Age or early Roman pottery, that is of 1st century BC/AD date, was found on the surface of layer 1003, the fill of ditch 1002 (see Appendix B.2).

3.10.4 A variety of bone fragments and teeth from a horse skull, together with two cattle calcanea, were recovered from the ditch fill 1003 (see Appendix B.3).

3.10.5 The charcoal flecks within the ditch fill were too small to make identification possible.

3.10.6 The distal shaft of the right humerus of skeleton 1000 was retained for osteological examination and radiocarbon sampling. The distal epiphyses were completely fused, and the humerus was small and of gracile proportions, suggesting that this was an adult female, although this is not conclusive (see Appendix B.4).

3.10.7 A sample was taken from the humerus and submitted to SUERC, East Kilbride, Glasgow, for radiocarbon dating. The bone gave a date range of 370-180 cal BC at 95% confidence, indicating that the skeleton was of middle Iron Age date (see Appendix B.5 and Figure 7).

4 Discussion

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 Ground conditions were good throughout the evaluation and there was good definition of the boundaries between the strata within all the trenches.

4.1.2 The results of the evaluation, in terms of the character of the deposits encountered, broadly agree with the findings of the earlier borehole survey.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The principal aims of the evaluation are laid out in Section 2.

4.2.2 The evaluation has shown that there are no significant archaeological deposits or features within any of the trenches. No suitable palaeo-environmental evidence, such as peat deposits or organic material was encountered within the five trenches, although waterlogged deposits were encountered in Trenches 2 and 5.

4.2.3 No occupation layers were observed within the sequence of alluvial deposits.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 The interpretations of the stratigraphy encountered within each trench will be presented individually followed by an overall discussion and conclusion.

Trench 1

4.3.2 The homogeneous appearance and composition of both layers 102 and 103 is representative of deposits of alluvial material. There was no evidence for the development of a buried topsoil between them. Topsoil horizons within alluvial sequences are rare, possibly because there was insufficient time for plantlife to colonise the area between the deposition of the layers, or perhaps because successive flooding events were aggressive enough to scour the area.

4.3.3 The absence of any topsoil or ploughsoil directly overlying the alluvium would suggest that the area has been truncated. This presumably took place as part of the landscaping operations within this field prior to the deposition of the thick layer of made ground (101). The composition of the made ground suggests that it originated as material dredged from the river channel in the recent past. The dumping may have taken place here in order to raise the level of the field above localised flooding. It is reasonable to presume that the present-day topsoil and turf, 100, represents the original topsoil redeposited over the area, augmented by more recent topsoil development.

Trench 2

4.3.4 The top of a ridge or island of the underlying terrace gravel, 203, was exposed in the centre of the trench, with the gravel gently sloping away to the east and west. The similarity between layers 202 and 103 suggest that they are probably part of one sequence of alluvial deposition. Layer 201 may also have been alluvial in origin, but is likely to have been reworked by ploughing. Layer 200 is the present-day topsoil and turf.

4.3.5 The low lying nature of the area suggests that this area would only have been cultivated in particularly dry periods, because of the risk of flooding or waterlogging.

Trench 3

4.3.6 The deposits recorded within this trench were noticeably more compact than those elsewhere, possibly because the location of the trench approximately 2m above the level of the floodplain, together with the presence of field drains has reduced the moisture content of the clay components.

4.3.7 Three deposits of material suggestive of alluvial origin were recorded within the trench (layers 302, 303 and 304), although the presence of high ground to the south may alternatively suggest a colluvial origin, or at least some colluvial input into these deposits.

4.3.8 The composition of layer 301 is representative of a layer of soil reworked by ploughing. Layer 300 is the present day ploughsoil.

Trench 4

4.3.9 Clean sandy clays were recorded in the base of the trench, both of which (402 and 403) were interpreted as layers of alluvium. These were overlaid by a friable layer of reworked soil (401), similar to layer 301 in Trench 3, and this was in turn sealed by the present-day topsoil and turf (400).

Trench 5

4.3.10 The blue-grey clay deposit (503) exposed within the base of the trench is probably a channel fill of fluvial origin. This was overlaid by a layer of clean silty clay 502, similar to, and a probable continuation of, layer 402 within Trench 4. The sequence of worked soil 501 and present day topsoil 500 is also similar to that in Trench 4.

4.4 Watching Brief

4.4.1 The composition of layers 1006 and 1007 is consistent with alluvial or flood deposits and is similar to that of the deposits recorded during the excavation of Trench 3 close by.

4.4.2 The burial produced a middle Iron Age (4th to 2nd century BC) radiocarbon date. Iron Age burials are still relatively rare in Oxfordshire. A wide variety of burial practices is known, and the majority of Iron Age burials occur in pits on settlement or hillfort sites, such as at Little Wittenham close by (Allen *et al.* 2010). Burials in purpose-dug graves are rarer still; a cemetery of such graves, some of which were extended in a supine position, is known from Yarnton, Oxfordshire (Hey *et al.* 2011), and three at Spring Road, Abingdon (Allen and Kamash 2008).

4.4.3 Extended burials of this period are particularly unusual; Whimster (1981, 16-21) does not show a single example in Oxfordshire, and the majority of those at Yarnton were crouched or flexed, as were all of those at Spring Road.

4.4.4 There is however a large number of isolated and undated burials recorded in the Oxfordshire HER. As the radiocarbon-dating of isolated burials has until recently rarely been carried out, it is therefore possible that the practice of extended burial in the Iron Age was less unusual than is currently thought.

4.4.5 Isolated burials are sometimes made alongside boundaries in the Iron Age (Whimster 1981, 25-30; Wilson 1981), and as the sherd of late Iron Age or early Roman pottery from adjacent ditch 1002 was found at the surface, it does not date the digging of this feature, merely its final disuse. It is therefore possible that the burial was contemporary with the use of the ditch.

4.4.6 The alignment of Ditch 1002 appears to follow the contour at the base of the slope leading down from the higher ground to the south. This may therefore have been a

drainage ditch, catching water runoff from the higher ground. The alignment of the ditch may indicate that it ran into the area of peat fen just to the south-east indicated by the borehole survey, supporting the view that this was an ancient area of wet ground. The alignment of the ditch is at an oblique angle to the Romano-British roadway leading down to the river crossing located approximately 100m to the east, and is unlikely to have been associated. It probably went out of use before this road was constructed.

4.4.7 Layer 1005 is a buried ploughsoil horizon, probably 19th century in date. Layer 1004 is the present day ploughsoil, and is of similar depth to that recorded elsewhere in the evaluation

4.5 Significance

4.5.1 The presence of alluvial deposits throughout the area of the investigation suggest that this low-lying area had formed as part of a wide channel cut through the gravel terrace by the river Thames. The blue-grey clay in Trench 5 (503) is a relict of an earlier channel, though whether this represents a formerly wider channel of the river, or channel movement over time, is unclear. No evidence of earlier channels was found elsewhere within the site, although the limited depth and scale of evaluation does not mean that such channels can be ruled out within the site.

4.5.2 The presence of a number of distinct alluvial deposits suggests a long history of alluvial deposition, with numerous fluctuations of flow in the past. The differences in composition of these deposits across the site may be chronological, although no dating evidence was recovered to support this. Variations in alluvial deposits often occur within floodplains over distances as great as on this site, and the lack of dating evidence makes further discussion unprofitable.

4.5.3 The discovery of an Iron Age burial at the south edge of the site, and of a ditch of probable later prehistoric date adjacent, is of some significance, although the wider context of these discoveries is unclear. There is a cropmark enclosure some distance to the south-west, and it is possible that both the burial and the ditch are peripheral to this.

4.5.4 Buried worked soil horizons overlying the alluviums within Trenches 2, 3, 4 and 5 would indicate that the area around these trenches was under cultivation prior to the present day. No dating evidence was recorded to place these deposits within the time line. As no evidence for ridge and furrow working could be determined either by visual observation or within the trench sections, it is possible that these deposits are post-medieval, and may have been caused by steam ploughing. The cultivation of the marginal ground around Trench 2 may alternatively suggest that that this occurred as part of the “WarAg” efforts during the Second World War.

4.5.5 Evidence for earlier cultivation has been destroyed in the area of Trench 1, probably prior to dumpings from dredging to raise the ground level.

4.5.6 No evidence for occupation, either in the form of truncated features or residual finds was observed within the areas covered by the evaluation trenches. Given the intermittent nature of occupation on the alluvial floodplain found elsewhere along the Thames (Allen 1998, 37; Hey 1998), however, the limited scale of evaluation cannot be used to generalise about the presence or absence of such activity elsewhere within the site, as the watching brief demonstrated.

4.5.7 No activity that is likely to have related to the Roman road crossing the site was found, although the proposed works had already been designed not to come too close to this, so activity closer to the line of the road cannot be ruled out.

Appendix A. Trench Descriptions and Context Inventory

Trench 1						
General description					**Orientation**	SW-NE
Trench devoid of significant archaeology. The underlying alluvial deposits slope gently down to the north, towards the river. Directly overlying these was a tapered layer of modern made ground composed of dredged material levelling the area. This was covered by a layer of topsoil and turf, presumably redeposited material.					**Avg. depth (m)**	1.2m
					Width (m)	1.6m
					Length (m)	15m
Contexts						
Context no	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Comment**	**Finds**	**Date**
100	Layer	-	0.2m	Topsoil (probably redeposited) and turf	Pottery	C20th
101	Layer	-	0.3m - 0.56m	Made ground/ levelling deposit. Composition suggests that it is material dredged from the nearby river	Plastic bags, iron, wood, glass, pottery	C20th
102	Layer	-	0.5m	Silty clay alluvium	-	-
103	Layer	-	> 0.2m	Silty clay alluvium	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					**Orientation**	SE-NW
Sterile trench. Ridge of the underlying natural, a terrace gravel, was exposed in the centre of the trench, sealed by a layer of alluvium. Two probable phases of worked soil were recorded overlying the alluvium.					**Avg. depth (m)**	1.1m
					Width (m)	1.6m
					Length (m)	15m
Contexts						
Context no	**type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Comment**	**Finds**	**Date**
200	Layer	-	0.2m	Present day topsoil and turf	-	C20th
201	Layer	-	0.14m	Alluvium reworked by ploughing	-	-
202	Layer	-	0.35m – 0.8m	Alluvial clay	-	-
203	Layer	-	> 0.12m	Terrace Gravel	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					**Orientation**	SE-NW
No significant archaeology observed. Sequence of alluvial deposits recorded overlaid by a deep deposit of modern ploughsoil.					**Avg. depth (m)**	1.2m
					Width (m)	1.6m
					Length (m)	15m
Contexts						
Context no	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Comment**	**Finds**	**Date**
300	Layer	-	0.32m	Present day ploughsoil	-	C20th
301	Layer	-	0.14m	Alluvium reworked by ploughing	-	-
302	Layer	-	0.3m	Alluvium, possibly with colluvial input	-	-
303	Layer	-	0.28m	Alluvium, possibly with colluvial input	-	-
304	Layer	-	> 0.2m	Alluvium, possibly with colluvial input	-	-

Trench 4						
General description					**Orientation**	SE-NW
No significant archaeology observed. Two layers of alluvial deposits recorded overlaid by two phases of worked soil.					**Avg. depth (m)**	1.2m
					Width (m)	1.6m
					Length (m)	15m
Contexts						
Context no	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Comment**	**Finds**	**Date**
400	Layer	-	0.24m	Present day ploughsoil	-	C20th
401	Layer	-	0.12m	Alluvium reworked by ploughing	-	-
402	Layer	-	0.52m	Alluvium	-	-
403	Layer	-	> 0.3m	Alluvium	-	-

Trench 5						
General description					**Orientation**	SW-NE
No significant archaeology observed. Two layers of waterlogged alluvial clays recorded overlaid by two phases of worked soil. There was no evidence for organic inclusions within either of the alluviums.					**Avg. depth (m)**	1.2m
					Width (m)	1.6m
					Length (m)	15m
Contexts						
Context no	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Comment**	**Finds**	**Date**
500	Layer	-	0.3m	Present day topsoil and turf	-	C20th
501	Layer	-	0.1m	Alluvium reworked by ploughing	-	-
502	Layer	-	0.32m	Alluvial clay	-	-
503	Layer	-	> 0.5m	Fluvial clay	-	-

APPENDIX B. FINDS AND SCIENTIFIC REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

By John Cotter

Introduction and methodology

B.1.1 A total of three sherds of pottery weighing 48g was recovered from two contexts. All of this is of post-medieval date. Given the small size of the assemblage a separate catalogue has not been constructed and instead the pottery is simply described and spot-dated below. Museum of London (MoLAS) post-medieval fabric codes have been used in this report. No further work is recommended.

Context 100 Spot-date c 1750-1900

B.1.2 Description: Two joining sherds (33g). The smaller has recently been broken off the larger. This is either in a common post-medieval glazed red earthenware fabric (London Fabric PMR, dated 1580-1900), or more likely in red border ware (RBOR, dated 1550-1900) which has a similar but lighter orange-buff fabric. Red border ware was made at a number of potteries along the Surrey/Hampshire border. The sherd, which is probably from a jar or a thick-walled jug, has a pale orange-buff fine sandy fabric with a thick internal clear brown glaze. These characteristics suggest a fairly late dating within the range of this fabric. It is evident that the sherd has been considerably water-worn - probably from lying in a stream or river bed for a considerable period of time.

Context 101 Spot-date c 1830-1900

B.1.3 Description: A single rim sherd (15g) probably from a hemispherical teacup with a plain tapering upright rim (diam. 100mm). The fabric is a plain glazed industrial whiteware known as 'plain refined white earthenware' (London Fabric REFW, *c* 1805-1900). This is a typical mass-produced 19th-century product of the Staffordshire or Midlands potteries. The external surface shows some evidence of wear, possibly from lying in a stream or river bed for a period of time.

B.2 Pottery from the watching brief

identified by Paul Booth

Context	Description	Date
1003	Single body sherd, 35g, grog-tempered (OA fabric code E80)	Late Iron Age – early Roman

Description/recommendations

A single sherd of late Iron age or early Roman pottery was recovered, no further work is recommended.

B.3 The animal bone

by Lena Strid

Context	Description
1003	2 cattle calcanea, 1 horse skull temporal bone, 4 maxillary teeth and 7 horse skull fragments, 429g

Description/recommendations

The assemblage is of low potential and no further work is recommended.

B.4 Human bone

by Helen Webb

B.4.1 A single fragment of human bone from skeleton 1000 was submitted for osteological analysis and sampling for carbon 14 dating. The fragment comprised the distal shaft and articular surface of the right humerus. The bone exhibited just slight, patchy surface erosion, consistent with McKinley's (2004, 16) grade 1.

B.4.2 The distal humerus epiphyses were completely fused, with no traces of the fusion line visible, indicating that this was probably an adult individual. The bone was very small and gracile, with an epicondylar breadth of 52mm. Whilst these features alone are not considered reliable for estimation of sex, they are more in keeping with a female individual, although this is a very tentative estimate. No lesions of pathology or non-metric traits were present.

B.4.3 A fragment of the shaft of the bone, totalling 6.3g, was removed for carbon 14 dating. The remainder of the bone has been returned to site and reburied with the rest of the skeleton.

B.5 Radiocarbon date

Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre
Director: Professor R M Ellam
Rankine Avenue, Scottish Enterprise Technology Park,
East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0QF, Scotland, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1355 223332 Fax: +44 (0)1355 229898 www.glasgow.ac.uk/suerc

RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

24 February 2014

Laboratory Code	SUERC-50816 (GU32794)
Submitter	Rebecca Nicholson Oxford Archaeology South Janus House Osney Mead Oxford OX2 0ES
Site Reference	SHNF13
Context Reference	SK1000
Sample Reference	humerus shaft ®
Material	Bone : human
$\delta^{13}C$ relative to VPDB	-20.1 ‰
$\delta^{15}N$ relative to air	11.1 ‰
C/N ratio (Molar)	3.3
Radiocarbon Age BP	2195 ± 31

N.B. The above ^{14}C age is quoted in conventional years BP (before 1950 AD). The error, which is expressed at the one sigma level of confidence, includes components from the counting statistics on the sample, modern reference standard and blank and the random machine error.

The calibrated age ranges are determined from the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration program (OxCal4).

Samples with a SUERC coding are measured at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre AMS Facility and should be quoted as such in any reports within the scientific literature. Any questions directed to the Radiocarbon Laboratory should also quote the GU coding given in parentheses after the SUERC code. The contact details for the laboratory are email g.cook@suerc.gla.ac.uk or telephone 01355 270136 direct line.

Conventional age and calibration age ranges calculated by :- N. Rudd Date :- 24/02/2014

Checked and signed off by :- P. Naysmith Date :- 24/02/2014

Appendix C. Bibliography and References

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Appendix D. Summary of Site Details

Site name: River of Life, North Farm, Shillingford, Oxfordshire

Site code: SHNF 13

Grid reference: Centred at SU 5868 9318

Type: Evaluation and Watching Brief

Date and duration: 14th to 16th August 2013; 29th November 2013

Area of site: 42 hectares

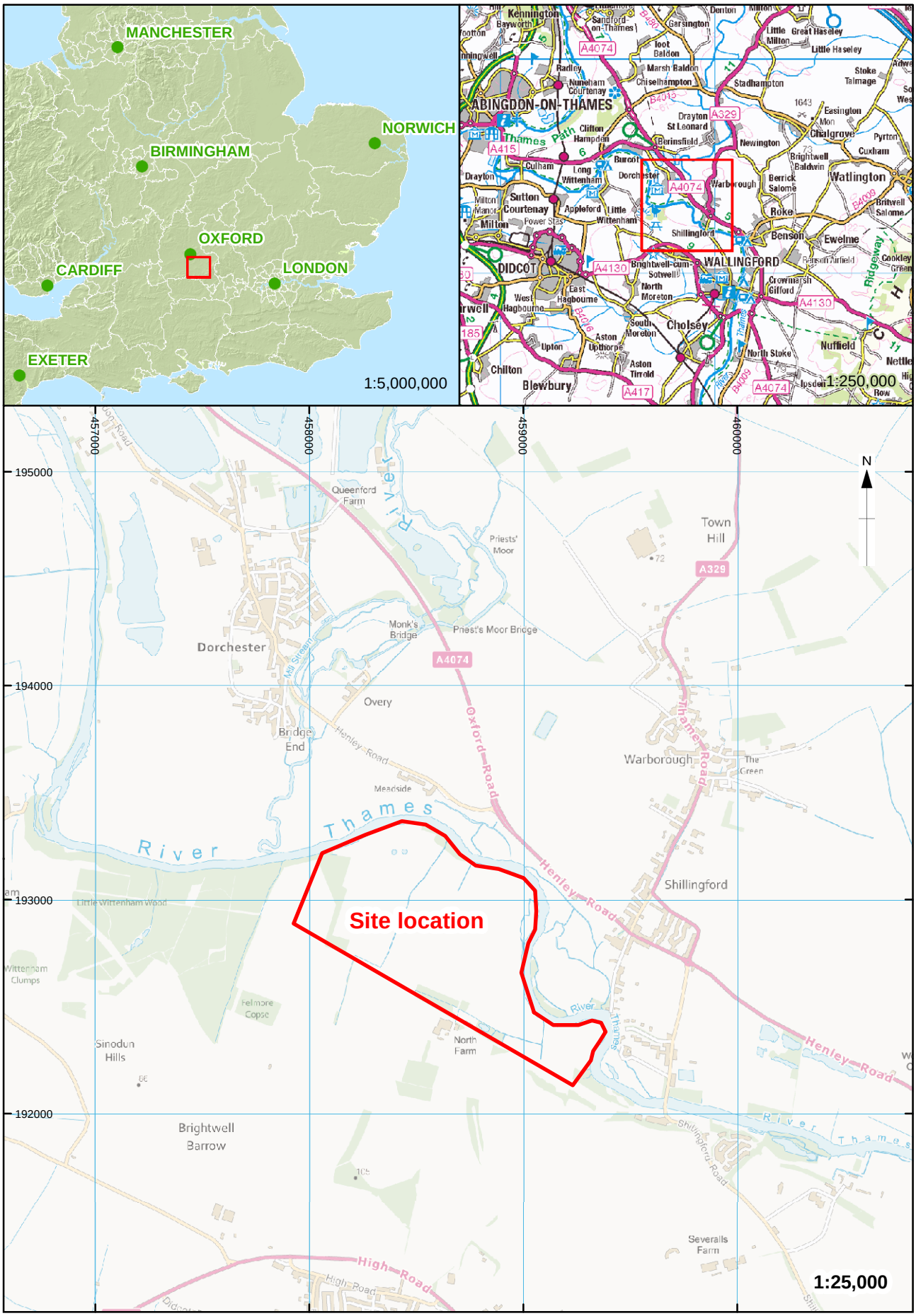
Summary of results: The investigation exposed alluvial deposits in excess of 1.2m depth within four of the trenches, with the underlying terrace gravel only encountered within one, at a depth of 1m below the current ground level. No evidence of archaeological features, artefacts or macroscopic environmental remains was observed within any of these strata.

No evidence for Romano-British activity alongside the line of the Roman Road was encountered during the course of the evaluation.

Evidence of 19th-20th century made ground directly overlying the alluvium was observed within the northernmost trench, elsewhere the alluvial deposits were overlaid by cultivated soils.

Watching Brief recorded an inhumation burial of midde Iron Age date and an adjacent ditch of Iron Age or early Roman date in the fenland area at the centre of the southern edge of the site.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course under accession number 2013:130



\\Samba-1\invoice codes a thru hi\BIDS, WSIs and TNs\15908_North Farm\figure1mxd.mxd"Hannah.Kennedy"09/08/2013

Figure 1: Site location

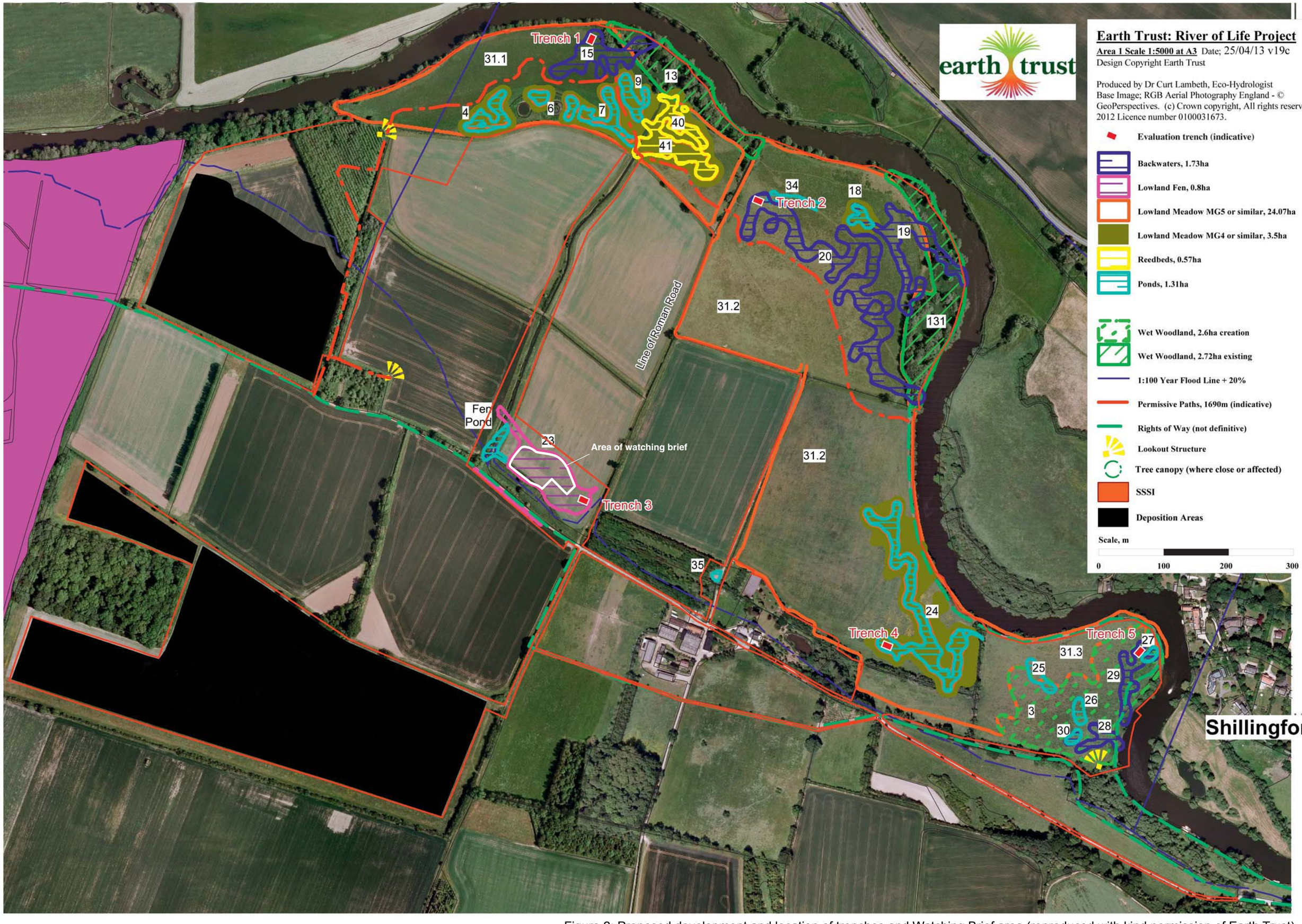


Figure 2: Proposed development and location of trenches and Watching Brief area (reproduced with kind permission of Earth Trust)

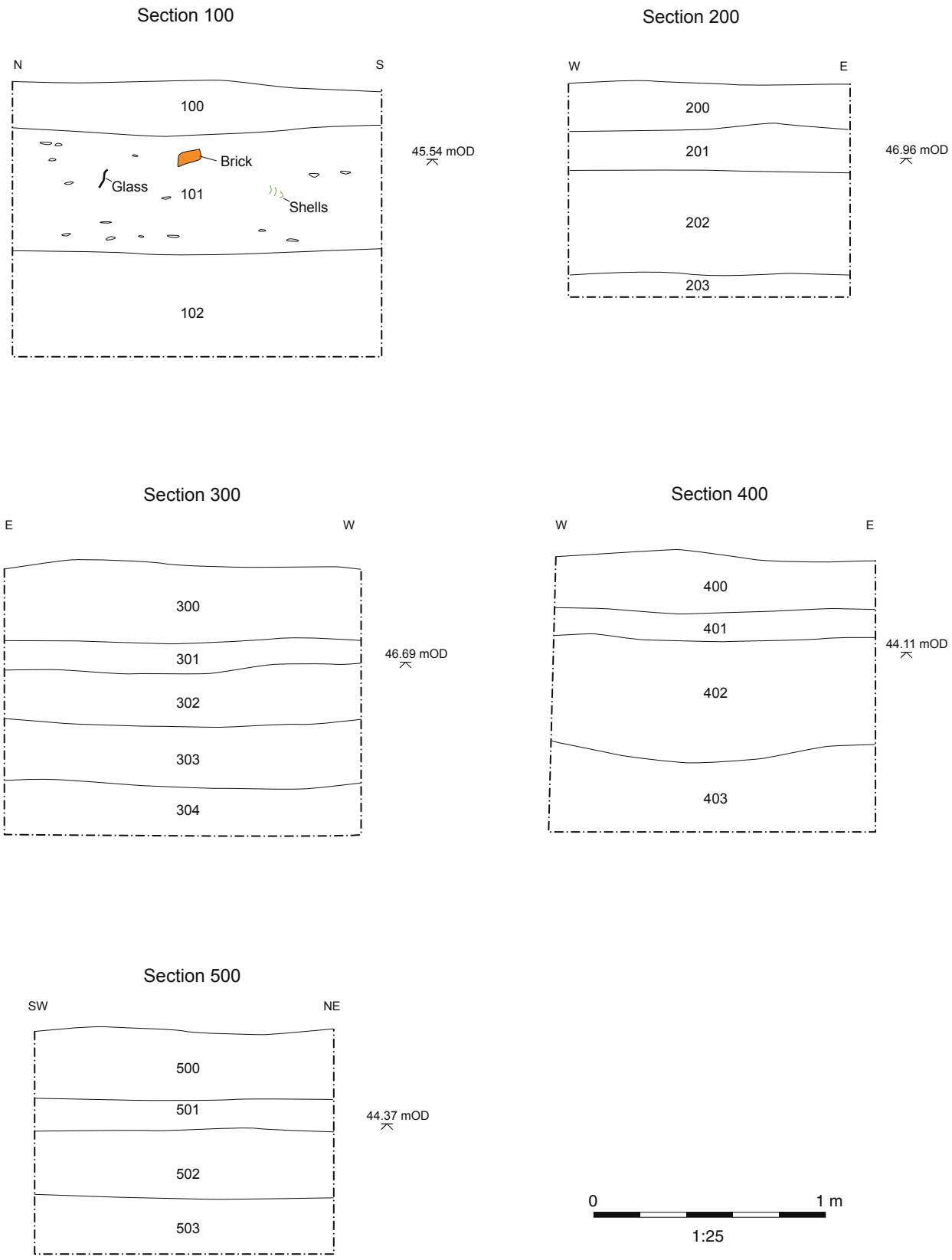


Figure 3: Sections

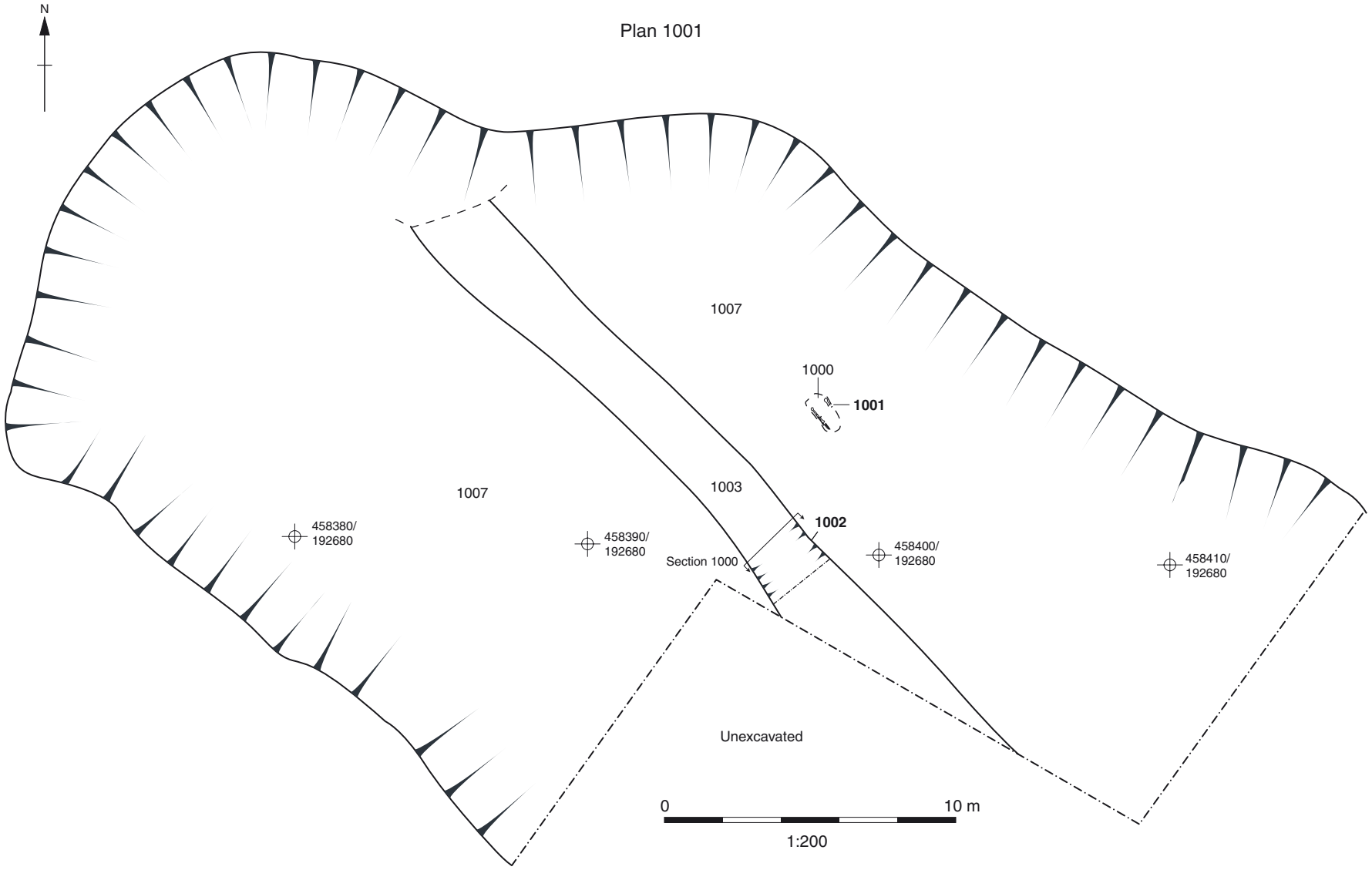


Figure 4: Plan of the north-east end of the Fen land excavations

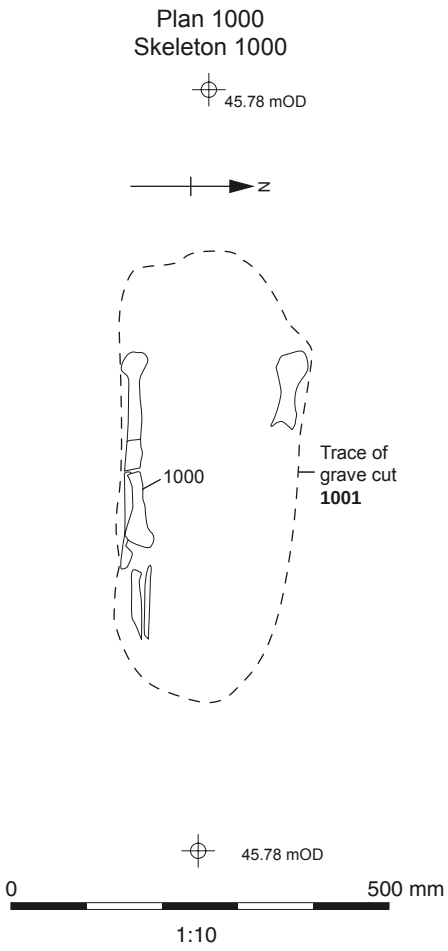


Figure 5: Plan of Inhumation 1000

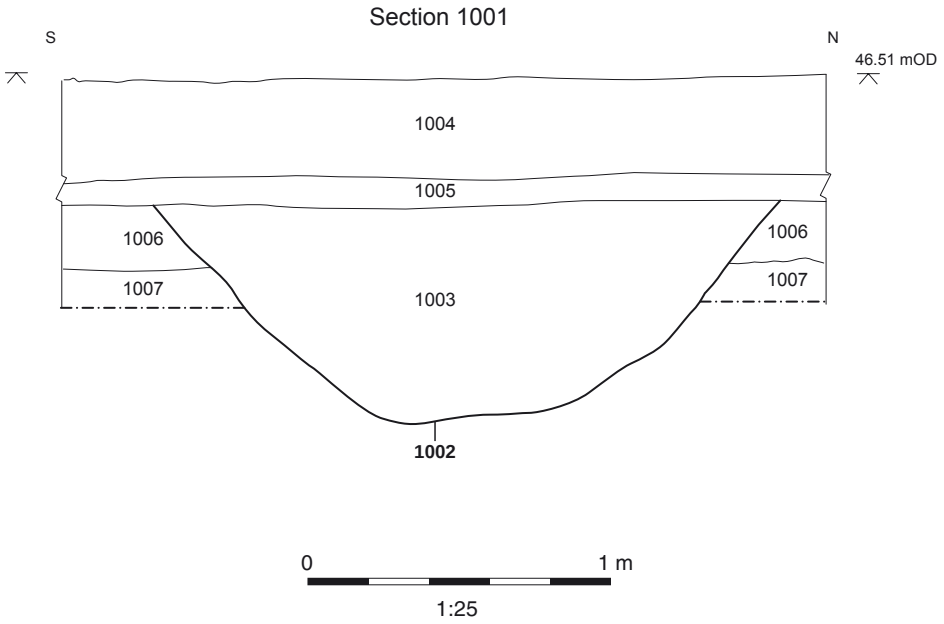


Figure 6: Composite section across ditch 1002

Calibration Plot

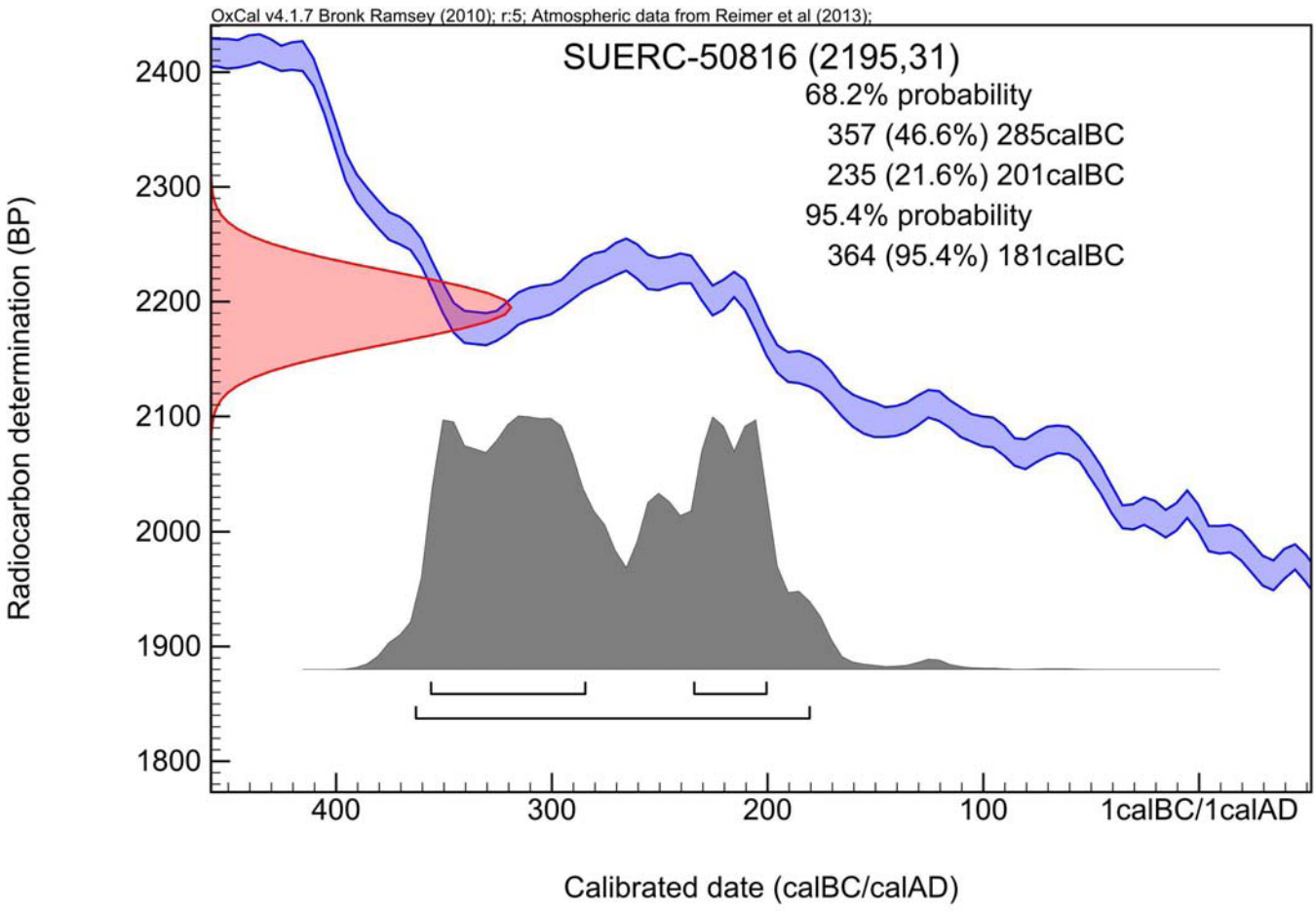


Figure 7: Radiocarbon calibration plot

Plate 1: Trench 1

Plate 2: Trench 2

Plate 3: Trench 3

Plate 4: Trench 4

Plate 5: Trench 5

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