

Land at
Browse Antiques
Lichfield Road
Stafford



Archaeological Excavation Report



Oxford Archaeology

February 2004



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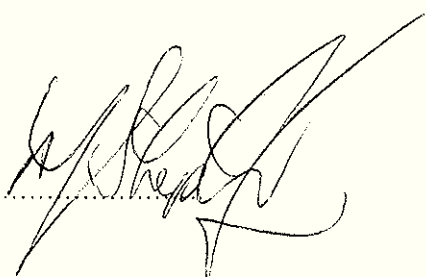
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Prepared by: Gerry Thacker
Position: Archaeological Supervisor
Date: 16th January 2004

Checked by: Alan Hardy
Position: Senior Project Manager
Date: 23rd January 2004

Approved by: Nick Shepherd
Position: Head of Fieldwork
Date: 00th January 2001

Signed.....



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Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800

f: (0044) 01865 793496

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk

w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

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**Land at Browse Antiques
Lichfield Road Stafford**

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CgMs for McCarthy and Stone (Developments Ltd)

**Land at Browse Antiques,
Lichfield Road Stafford**

Summary

Oxford Archaeology carried out an excavation on land between Lichfield Road and Wolverhampton Road in Stafford. The majority of the site was found to have been subject to considerable truncation during the post-medieval period. The north-west part of the site contained a scatter of truncated rubbish pits and an associated wall, all dating to the post-medieval period and sealed by a layer of made ground. In the south-east part of the site there had been less truncation and a ditch of late medieval date was revealed running in a north-west to south-east direction. This ditch probably represents the remains of a plot boundary.

1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Oxford Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation and subsequent excavation on land at Browse Antiques, Lichfield Road, Stafford on behalf of CgMs in advance of development by McCarthy and Stone (Developments) Ltd.

1.2 Location, topography and geology (Fig. 1)

The site is centred on SJ 9249 2275 and situated immediately to the south-east of the centre of Stafford, within the district of Forebridge. The site is bounded to the north by Lichfield Road, to the west by Wolverhampton Road, to the south-west by a doctors' surgery and to the east by properties adjacent to Lichfield Road. The underlying geology consists of compact orange sand overlying fine yellow sand.

At the time of the excavation the site was in use as a car park for the adjacent doctors' surgery.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

The Domesday record of 1086 records Stafford as the main county town, bounded by timber defences. The development site lies outside and to the south-east of the former position of these defences, within the later medieval suburb of Forebridge. Forebridge continued to be developed into the post-medieval period, and Speed's map of 1610 shows roads that follow the lines of the current Wolverhampton and Lichfield roads. The map also indicates the presence of burgage plots relating to buildings along the now truncated White Lion Street (which provided a junction between the predecessors of the two main roads).

Ordnance Survey maps of the late 19th and early 20th centuries show a building which is probably that later occupied by Browse Antiques. This building was demolished prior to the excavation.

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Birmingham University Field

Archaeological Unit (BUFAU) in February 2002, during which a single trial trench was excavated in the development area (see Fig. 1). A shallow linear feature, two shallow pits and a post hole were revealed (BUFAU 2002). These features produced no finds but were sealed by a layer containing late medieval pottery. Medieval pottery dating to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was also recovered from patches of root disturbed natural sediments. Late post-medieval pits and a modern demolition levelling layer were also recorded.

Oxford Archaeology (OA 2002) carried out a further evaluation to the north-east of the BUFAU investigation (Fig.1), revealing a modest amount of archaeological activity. Three pits were identified, two of which were firmly dated to the 18th century or later by the presence of porcelain. A third undated pit may have represented earlier activity on the site. In addition a modern brick foundation and a possible boundary ditch were recorded within the trench.

1.4 Excavation strategy and methodology (Fig. 2)

Excavation was focused on the area surrounding the 2002 BUFAU trench. The excavation area was broken out by a 180° mechanical excavator. All undifferentiated material (tarmac and made ground) was removed down to the first significant archaeological horizon by a JCB fitted with a toothless bucket. Archaeological deposits were excavated by hand, and recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson, 1992).

2 RESULTS (Figs 3 & 4)

2.1 General

Three principal phases of activity were evident, as determined by a combination of the limited stratigraphy and artefactual evidence.

The natural (5003/5030), a yellow/orange sand, was revealed throughout the trench; its OD level decreased by approximately 0.70 m (c 75.80 to c 75.10 m) from south to north across the site, possibly the result of post-medieval truncation and/or levelling.

2.2 Phase 1 (12th-13th century)

The earliest activity was represented by the truncated remains of a ditch (5069), situated at the south-east end of the site. It was oriented NW - SE, and at approximate right angles to the original line of White Lion Street. The ditch was up to 1.05m in width with a surviving depth of 0.30 m and a shallow 'U' shaped profile (see Fig. 4 - Section 2). A total length of 8.5 m of the ditch was revealed and three sections were excavated through it to obtain dating and profiles.

A total of 6 sherds of 11th/12th century pottery were recovered from the excavated sections of the ditch (see Blinkhorn below).

It became clear that this ditch had been clipped by the edge of the BUFAU trial trench, which ran parallel with it. Because only a small part of the ditch was present within the evaluated area it appears to have been misinterpreted as

a beam slot. No evidence for postholes were evident in the ditch comparable to those recorded in the evaluation trench.

2.3 Phase 2 (17th-18th century)

The remains of a brick wall (5034) was uncovered that ran across the site in a NE - SW alignment. It measured 0.40 m wide, was constructed of unfrosted bricks bonded with soft mortar, and survived to a height of three courses. To the west of this structure a considerable amount of post-medieval activity and general truncation was evident.

Another brick structure (5009) was situated at the north-west end of the trench. Constructed of similar unfrosted bricks to those in wall 5034, the structure is interpreted as a possible cellar. The internal deposits were sample excavated, but the base of the structure was not revealed.

To the west of the wall 5034 two truncated pits were identified (5039 and 5023). Pit 5039 was truncated by two Phase 3 features (5041 and 5036) but survived to a depth of 0.66 m. Three sherds of 17th century pottery were recovered from the sandy silt fill.

Pit 5023 has been cautiously assigned to this phase on the artefactual evidence. It was not excavated and appeared very similar in the appearance of its fill (dark brown silty sand) to the other Phase 3 features; however, a single 17th century pottery fragment recovered from its fill - although this may be may be residual.

A possibly contemporary pit (5004) was also partly exposed in the excavation. Oval in plan, it measured a maximum of 0.25 m deep, and produced 18th century pottery from its sandy silt fill.

2.4 Phase 3 (19th-20th century)

A scatter of pits were assigned to this phase. On stripping the overburden, these features were seen to contain evident 19th and 20th century material, comprising principally CBM fragments and some pottery in their upper fills, so only a selection of the features were excavated (see Fig. 3) to recover dating evidence.

Four of the pits were half sectioned to retrieve securely dated finds, (5025, 5004, 5036 and 5039). Due to the quantity of datable material visible in the upper fills of the remainder, these were not excavated although material was retained and context numbers allocated.

To the south-east of wall 5034 there was less evidence for post-medieval activity, although three small pits (5043, 5050 and 5056) were assigned to this phase; none produced any dating evidence, but their loose silty clay fills were very similar to the fills of Phase 3 features to the north-west of the wall 5034.

Sealing all the pits and the entire area from wall 5034 to the possible cellar 5009 was a deep deposit (up to 0.60 m) of made ground (5002 - see Fig. 5), consisting of dark brown silty sand with numerous inclusions of 19th and 20th century pottery and brick and tile fragments. Sealing layer 5002 was a bedding layer of pinkish gravel (5001) for the modern tarmac surface (5000).

A functioning modern drain (5033) was identified across the north-western

end of the site, cutting layer 5002. The cut for the latest phase of Wolverhampton Road was identified in the extreme north-west of the site (5059), also cutting layer 5002.

3 THE ARTEFACTUAL EVIDENCE

Apart from a modest pottery assemblage, reported below, no significant finds were recovered from the excavation or evaluation.

3.1 The Pottery

by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 70 sherds with a total weight of 1117g. All the pottery was medieval or later, with the bulk of the assemblage being post-medieval or modern in date. The majority of the medieval material was redeposited in later contexts, but the range of ware types present indicate that there was activity at the site throughout the medieval period and to the present day.

3.1.1 Fabric

The following fabric types were noted:

Iron-rich Sandy Ware, 11th – 14th century (Ford 1995, 32). 12 sherds, 48g.

Midlands White Ware, late 12th – 14th century (ibid., 34). 3 sherds, 113g.

Late Medieval Orange wares, late 14th – 15th century (ibid., 36). 1 sherd, 20g.

Cistercian wares, late 15th – 17th century (ibid.). 1 sherd, 1g.

Staffordshire Slipware, 1640-1740 (Barker 1999). 1 sherd, 2g.

Staffordshire Coarse Earthenware, late 17th – 19th century (ibid.). 18 sherds, 239g.

Staffordshire Mottled Ware, late 17th – 18th century (ibid.). 3 sherds, 9g.

Creamware, 1750 – 1820 (ibid.). 9 sherds, 41g.

Mass-produced white earthenware, 1830+ (ibid.). 22 sherds, 644g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

The bulk of the medieval assemblage comprised fairly small, plain bodysherds from vessels of indeterminate type, apart from a long Midlands Whiteware strap handle with thumbled edges from context 5002, and a small fragment of a jar rim in iron-rich sandy ware from context 5038 which appears typical of the tradition (e.g. Ford 1995, Fig. 9).

The post-medieval assemblage comprised a typical mixture of both utilitarian earthenwares and finer vessels associated with the consumption of food and drink.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g.) of sherds per context by fabric type (evaluation contexts indicated 200-)

Context	IRSW		MWW		LMO		CW		SS		SMW		SCE		CRM		WW		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
2002																	2	16	19thC
2006											2	7					2	2	19thC
2008																	4	25	19thC
5002			1	89											3	11	3	115	19thC
5006	2	10											7	28	3	3			M18thC
5012																	1	419	19thC
5013																	1	3	19thC
5014									1	2							2	5	19thC
5016	1	4																	11thC?
5018											1	2	1	26			1	1	19thC
5020													1	51			2	23	19thC
5022													1	4					L17thC
5024	1	10											5	81	3	27	2	29	19thC
5038	2	53											2	35					L17thC
5040	1	19	1	11	1	20							1	14					L17thC
5042																	1	5	19thC
5047	1	3																	11thC?
5049	4	49																	11thC?
5052							1	1									1	1	19thC
5055			1	13															L12thC
Total	12	148	3	113	1	20	1	1	1	2	3	9	18	239	9	41	22	644	

4 DISCUSSION

The limited results of the fieldwork appear to broadly support the documentary evidence of the development of this part of Stafford in the medieval and post-medieval periods. Although the pottery from the Phase 1 ditch (5069) could date the feature as early as the 11th century, it is more likely that the ditch represents a 12th-13th-century boundary within the developing suburb of Forebridge, possibly of a property fronting onto the original line of White Lion Street. It is reasonable to suggest that the ditch would have originally continued to the north-west, and has been completely removed by post-medieval truncation. The absence of associated pits and other detritus from domestic activity, and the modest assemblage of contemporary finds probably means that this part of the ditch was some distance from any habitation.

The scarcity of late medieval/early post-medieval pottery in the ceramic sequence could indicate that this area was unoccupied from the 14th century until the 17th century.

The late medieval stagnation and (in some cases) shrinkage in urban centres in

both Lowland and Highland England is well attested, both historically and archaeologically. Staffordshire was no exception (see Palliser 1976, 80-5), and extra-mural suburbs like Forebridge could be particularly vulnerable to depopulation and temporary abandonment. Certainly the situation on the Browse Antiques site does not contradict this scenario, although arguably one should look much closer to home for possible reasons to explain the evidence. The apparent absence of occupation may, in fact, be related to the medieval presence in the area of the hospital of St John the Baptist, which was believed to be situated to the north of the site, where the present ring-road now runs. The development site may lie within the hospital grounds, which would be consistent with the lack of contemporary (i.e late-medieval) domestic activity. It may also not be coincidence that the marked resurgence in activity on the site in the post-medieval period coincides with the decline of the hospital in the 16th and 17th centuries.

This increased activity is represented by a spate of pit-digging (possibly quarrying), and the construction of brick features 5009 and 5034. The latter may represent a rear boundary wall of the same property defined earlier by ditch 5069.

The heavy truncation and levelling of the western part of the site appears to relate to the 19th-century redevelopment of the area.

5 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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BUFAU 2002 Land at Browse Antiques, 127 Lichfield Road Stafford. An archaeological evaluation (unpublished)

Ford, DA, 1995 *Medieval Pottery in Staffordshire, AD800-1600: A Review* Staffordshire Archaeological Studies 7

OA, 2002 Browse Antiques, Lichfield Road, Stafford. Archaeological Evaluation Report (unpublished)

Palliser, D M, 1975 *The Staffordshire Landscape* London

APPENDIX 1

TABLE OF EXCAVATION CONTEXTS

Context	Type	Description	Comments	Illustrated
5000	layer	tarmac car park surface		√
5001	layer	gravel made ground		x
5002	layer	post-medieval levelling		√
5003	layer	yellow sand natural		√
5004	cut	pit cut		√
5005	fill	fill of 5004		x
5006	fill	fill of 5004		√
5007	wall	part of 5009		√
5008	cut	5009 construction cut		√
5009	structure	cellar		√
5010	fill	construction cut (5008) backfill		x
5011	fill	lower fill 5009		√
5012	fill	middle fill 5009		x
5013	fill	upper fill 5009		√
5014	fill	fill of 5015		√
5015	cut	pit cut		√
5016	fill	fill of 5017		√
5017	cut	pit cut		√
5018	fill	fill of 5019		√
5019	cut	pit cut		√
5020	fill	fill of 5021		√
5021	cut	pit cut		√
5022	fill	fill of 5023		√
5023	cut	pit cut		√
5024	fill	fill of 5025		√
5025	cut	pit cut		√
5026	fill	fill of 5027		√
5027	cut	pit cut		√
5028	fill	fill of 5029		√
5029	cut	pit cut		√
5030	layer	orange sand natural (above 5003)		√
5031	fill	fill of 5032		√
5032	cut	pit cut		√
5033	structure	modern drain		√
5034	wall	wall footing		√
5035	cut	construction cut for wall 5034		√
5036	cut	pit / tree throw		√
5037	fill	fill of 5036		x
5038	fill	fill of 5036		√
5039	cut	pit / tree throw		√

5040	fill	fill of 5039		√
5041	cut	pit / tree throw		√
5042	fill	fill of 5041		√
5043	cut	pit cut		√
5044	fill	fill of 5043		x
5045	fill	fill of 5043		√
5046	cut	ditch cut	part of 5069	√
5047	fill	fill of 5046		√
5048	cut	ditch cut	part of 5069	√
5049	fill	fill of 5048		√
5050	cut	post hole / root disturbance		√
5051	fill	fill of above		√
5052	fill	fill of 5053		√
5053	cut	pit cut		√
5054	cut	ditch cut	part of 5069	√
5055	fill	fill of 5054		√
5056	cut	pit cut		√
5057	fill	fill of 5056		√
5058	fill	fill of 5025		x
5059	cut	construction cut for main road		√
5060	fill	fill of 5059		√
5061	cut	cut for levelling deposit 5002		√
5062	cut	cut for modern drain 5033		√
5063	fill	backfill of 5062		x
5064	layer	garden soil layer		x
5065	layer	modern hardcore		x
5066	layer	modern hardcore		√
5067	fill	fill of 5068		√
5068	cut	pit associated with road construction		√
5069	group	group number for medieval ditch		√

APPENDIX 2: Summary of Site Details

Site name: Land at Browse Antiques, Lichfield Road, Stafford

Site code: STLR02

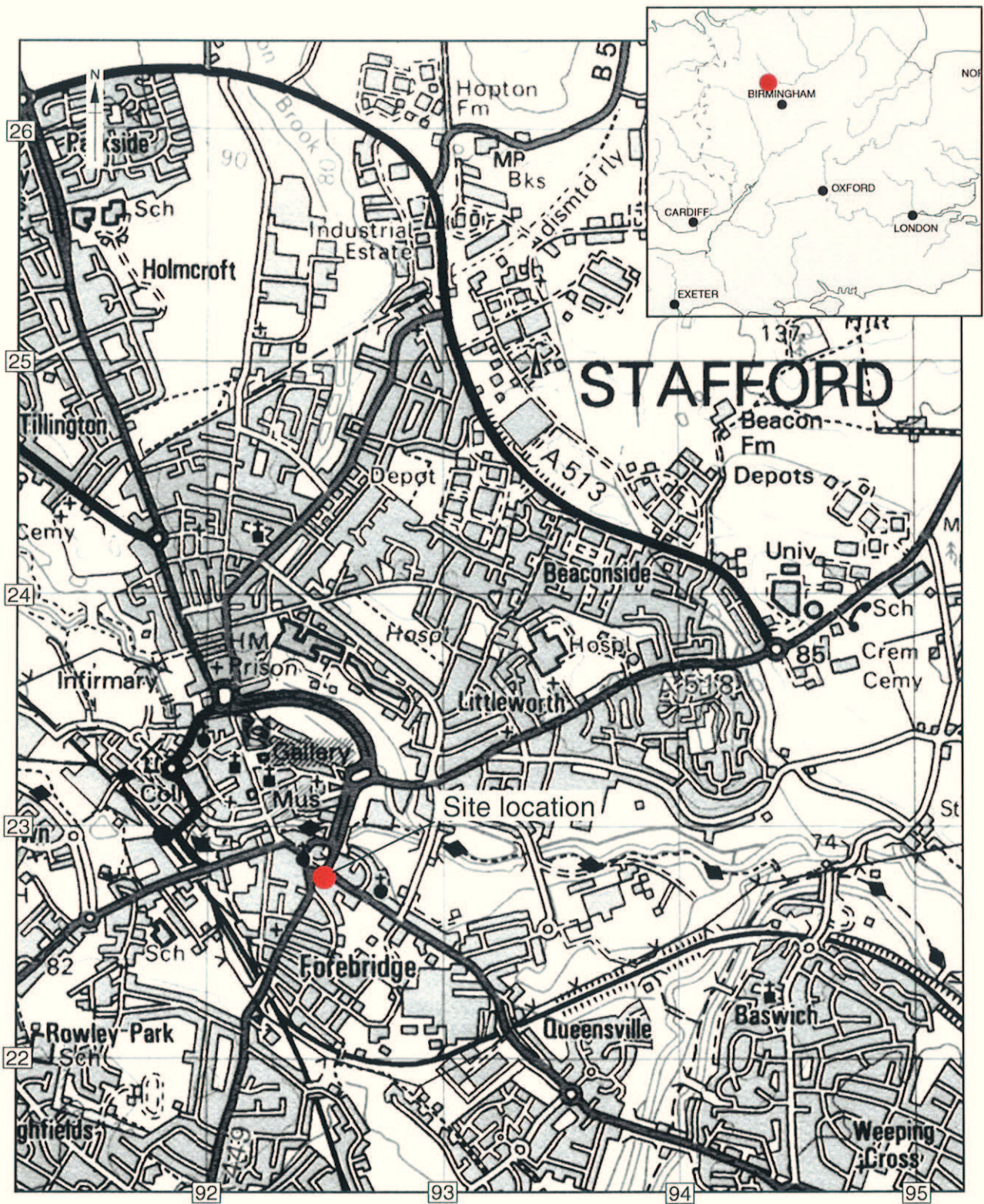
NGR: SJ 9249 2275.

Date and duration of project: October 2003

Area of site: *c* 190 sq m

Summary of results: Medieval property boundary and associated pits, a post-medieval wall and cellar, quarry pits, and 19th-20th century landfill.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Potteries Museum, Bethesda Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

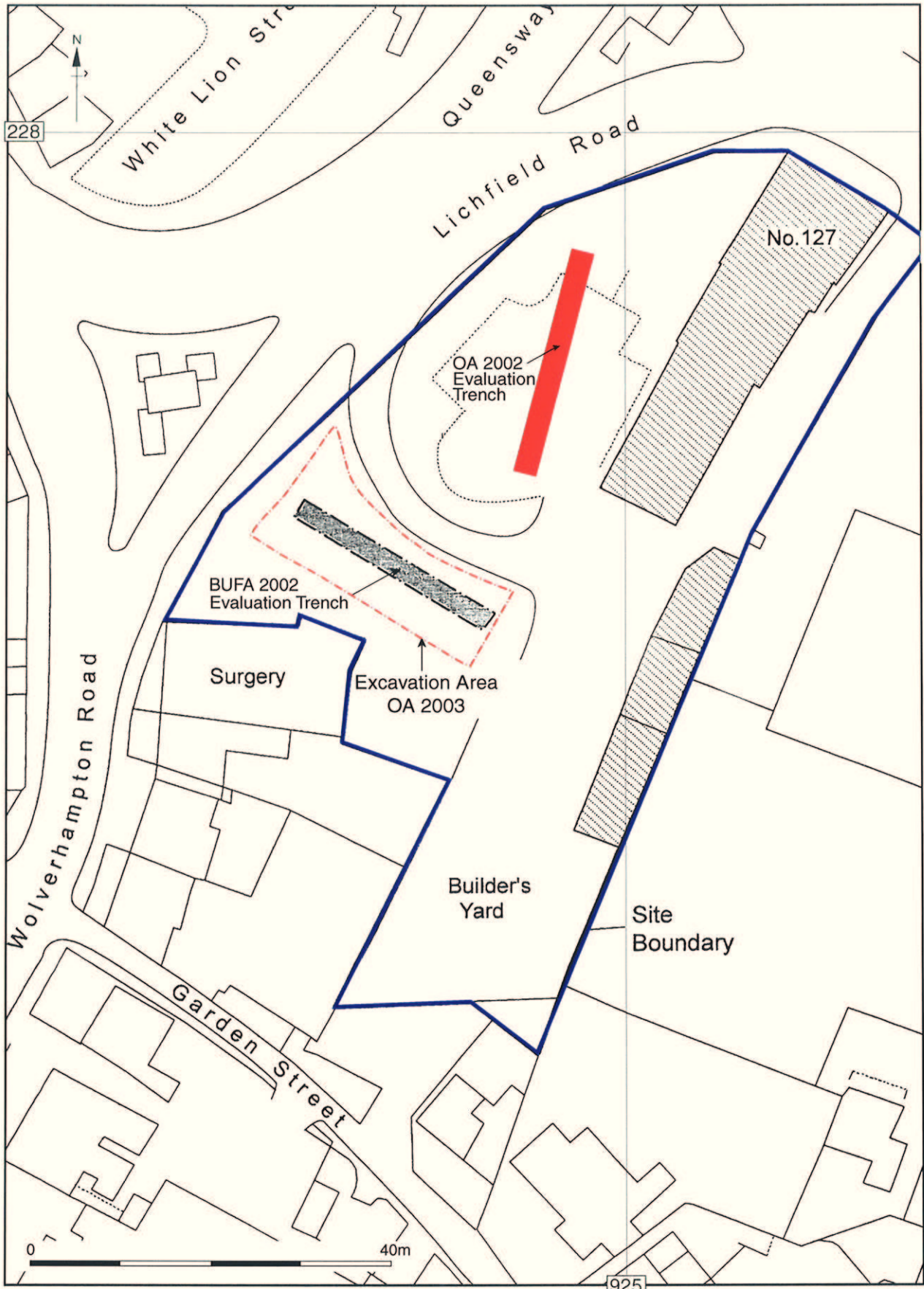


Figure 2: Excavation and trench location

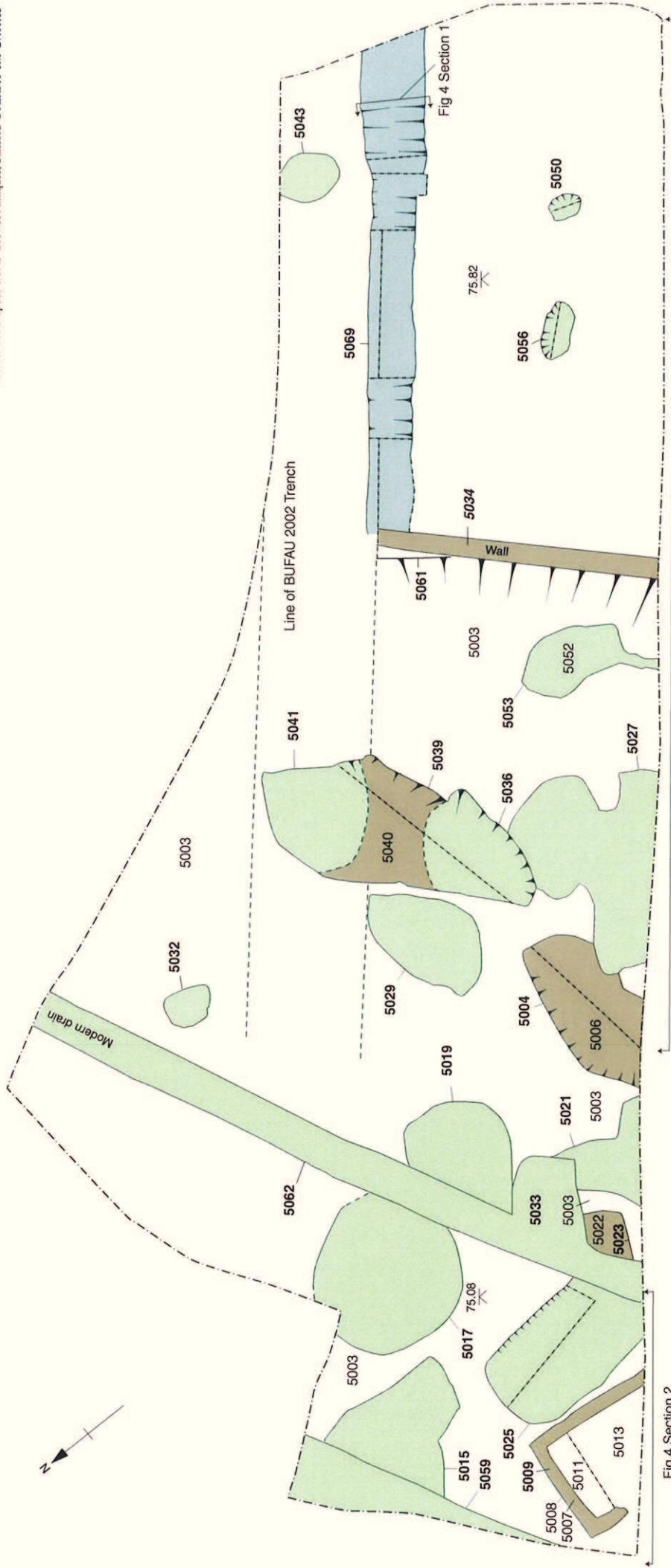


Fig 4 Section 2

0 5 m
1:100

- Phase 1 12th -13th Century
- Phase 2 17th -18th Century
- Phase 3 19th-20th Century

Figure 3: Site plan

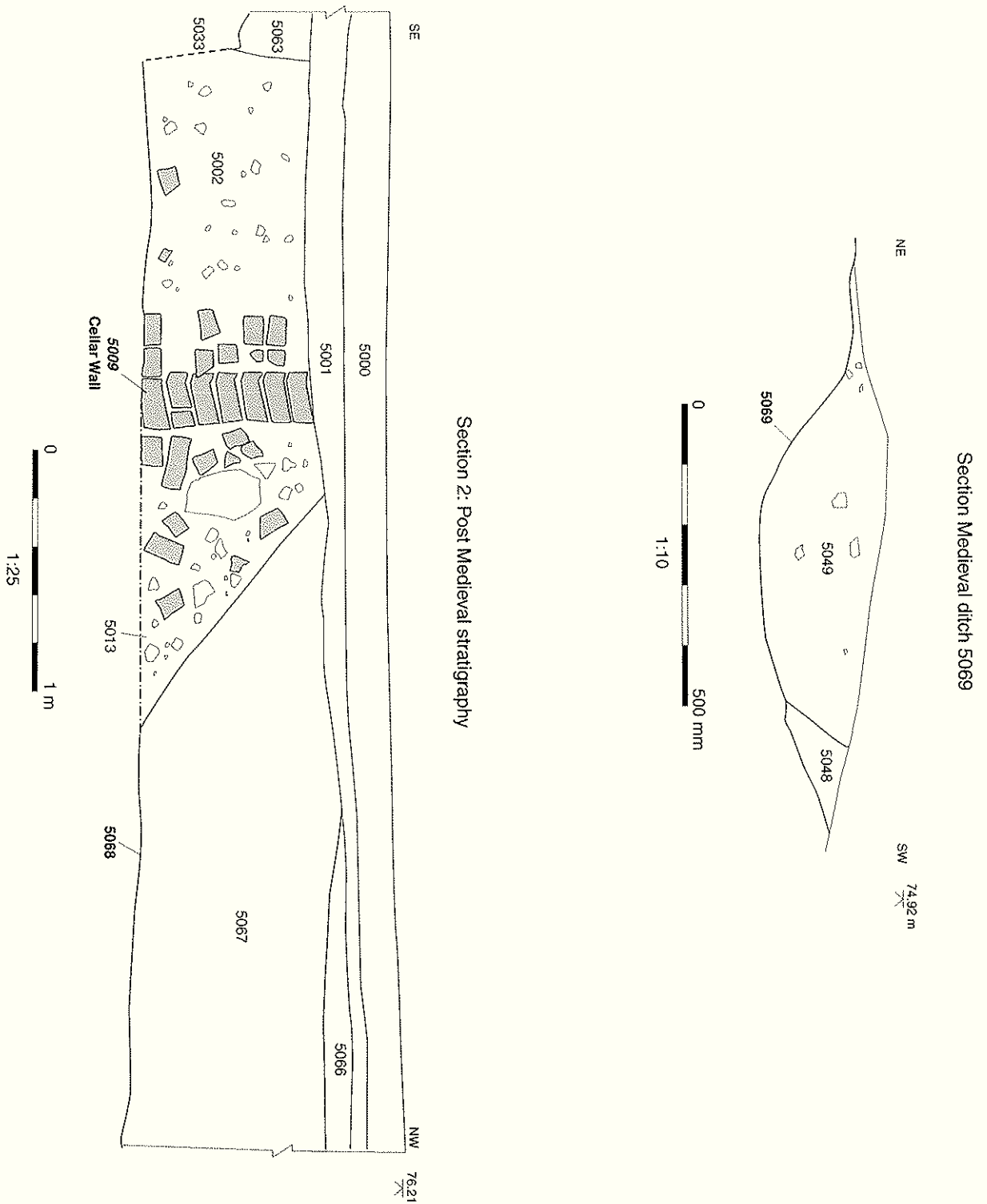
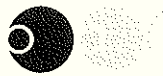


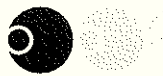
Figure 4: Site sections



Oxford Archaeology

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800
f: (0044) 01865 793496
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk



Oxford Archaeology North

Storey Institute
Meeting House Lane
Lancaster LA1 1TF

t: (0044) 01524 541000
f: (0044) 01524 848606
e: lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk



Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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