Land Adjacent Grand Union Canal Hollow Hill Lane Iver Buckinghamshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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1	Andrew Simmonds (Project Officer) and Carl Champness (Senior Project Manager)	Ian Scott (Project Officer)	Carl Champness (Senior Project Manager)	

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Illustrated by	Markus Dylewski and Gary Jones

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES
t: +44 (0) 1865 263800 e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
f: +44 (0) 1865 793496 w: oxfordarchaeology.com
Oxford Archaeology Limited is a Registered Charity No: 285627

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Plates

Summary

Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by BPA to undertake an archaeological watching brief during installation of a section of pipeline beneath the Grand Union Canal at Shreding Green, Iver, Buckinghamshire. The watching brief monitored the excavation of the thrust pit and reception pit that were dug for the installation of the pipe, as well as the stripping of topsoil for the associated working area and a compound and temporary haul road.

The only feature of possible archaeological origin that was exposed during the stripping was a compacted gravel surface that produced late 18th to 19th Century pottery and glass and may have been associated with the very edge of a post medieval road from Shredding Green. One residue piece of prehistoric pottery and a possible worked flint was also recovered from the topsoil.

The excavations of the Lynch Hill gravels within the two pits was monitored and recorded on site by a geoarchaeologist. No early prehistoric artefacts or remains were identified within the limited disturbance of the pits. The very edge of a possible palaeochannel sequence was recorded within the sequence but no deposits of archaeological interest were identified.

The results of the watching brief indicated no significant archaeological remains were impacted by these works.

Land Adjacent Grand Union Canal, Hollow Hill Lane, Iver, Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

Oxford Archaeology (OA), was commissioned by BPA to undertake an archaeological watching brief during installation of a pipeline at Shreding Green, Iver, Buckinghamshire. The purpose of the development was to replace a section of currently above-ground pipeline with a sub-surface version which would run beneath the Grand Union Canal at Dudley Wharf. The pipeline crossed the canal by means of auger boring which involves the excavation of a thrust pit to the south of the canal and a reception pit to the north. The watching brief monitored the excavation of the pits, as well as stripping of topsoil for the associated working area and a compound and temporary haul road.

1.1.1 The work was undertaken as a condition of planning permission (planning ref: CBC10587) due to the potential for recovery of Palaeolithic and Neolithic finds, a large quantity of which had been recovered previously during gravel extraction in the vicinity of the site.

1.1.2 The requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition were detailed in a brief set by Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC 2014) and the work was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by OA (OA 2014) and with the Institute for Archaeologists' 'Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief' (revised 2008), as well as local and national planning policies.

1.1.3 The work was carried out between 28th August and 15th September 2014. This report outlines the results of the watching brief.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The site was situated on the boundary between the parishes of Iver, in the District of South Buckinghamshire, and Langley Marish, in the Unitary Borough of Slough in Berkshire. It lay adjacent to the Grand Union Canal on the west side of Hollow Hill Lane, centred at NGR TQ 02198 80036 (Fig. 1).

1.2.2 The reception pit was situated on the north side of the canal and the thrusting pit and associated working area on the south side, along with the compound and haul road (Fig. 2). The working area provided a platform for the piling rig and works associated with the thrust pit and measured *c* 40 x 40m. The compound was situated to the south and measured *c* 60 x 50m. The haul road linked the two area and was *c* 50m long and 6m wide.

1.2.3 The geology of the site was mapped as bedrock deposits of London Clay dating from the Palaeogene Period, overlain by a drift geology consisting of Lynch Hill Gravel dating to the Quaternary Period (BGS Website). The site lay at *c* 30m OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site was previously outlined in the desk-based assessment (OA 2013) and is summarised here.

1.3.2 The terrace gravels of the Thames Valley are a well-known source of Lower Palaeolithic material (Wymer, 1968). Much of this material was found in the early years of gravel extraction across Berkshire and Buckinghamshire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when much of the sorting and grading of aggregates was done by hand and spotting worked flint was consequently more practicable. The site was located in an area that contains a large number of Palaeolithic finds, with large concentrations of finds recorded within 100m. The finds made at Lavender's Pit were recovered from the Lynch Hill gravels, on which the site is located, although the depth below ground level at which the finds were made is unclear

1.3.3 Neolithic flint implements were recovered from Lavender's Pit during the early 20th century and settlement evidence dated to the early fourth millennium has been excavated at Runnymede *c* 7 km south-west of the site (Needham 1985).

1.3.4 Although later prehistoric settlement within the Thames Valley as a whole is extensive (Ford 1987), finds from this period within the vicinity of the site are limited to a small number of flint implements found at Lavender's Pit that may be either late Neolithic or early Bronze Age in origin and a collection of Iron Age pottery sherds from Langley.

1.3.5 The projected line of the Roman road from Lower Winchendon to Staines extends across the site. The evidence for the road, however, is limited to two speculative lines drawn between known Roman population centres and its precise alignment is unknown.

1.3.6 Two early Medieval artefacts, one described as a 'Saxon sword' and the other as a 'Viking dagger' were found during quarrying at Lavender Pit. Both of these finds were recorded as being found with burials by A.D. Lacaille during the early 20th century but no records of the burials themselves, or any remains, survive.

1.3.7 The earliest surviving maps of the area are the Iver and Langley Marish Inclosure maps of 1801 and 1809 respectively. They show the area as having been divided into fields. The Paddington to Maidenhead section of the Great Western Railway, which runs east-west *c* 230 metres the south of the site, was constructed in 1838. The Slough arm of the Grand Union Canal, which the pipeline was designed to cross, was built between 1879 and 1883.

2 Aims and Methodology

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The aims of the watching brief, as stated in the WSI, were:

(i) To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains across the proposed development area;

(ii) To identify and record any significant archaeological remains revealed by the ground works, paying particular regard to the potential for early prehistoric remains;

(iii) To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the site and to take samples where appropriate;

(iv) To prepare an appropriate archaeological archive of the site and make available the results of the investigation.

2.1.2 Specific objectives were:

(v) To undertake geoarchaeological assessment of the potential of the gravel sequence to contain Palaeolithic evidence and environmental remains;

(vi) To establish the presence or absence for early prehistoric remains within the proposed development;

(vii) To record any evidence of industrial activity and features associated with the Grand Union Canal.

2.2 Methodology

Working area, compound and haul road

2.2.1 The overburden, comprising topsoil (500) and subsoil (501), was stripped to an average depth of 0.30m. Stripping was done in a series of brief stages, with Terram geo-textile and hardcore/rubble being laid over the stripped area to the form a temporary surface. Stripping was undertaken using a large 360 degree machine fitted with a toothless bucket (Plate 1). The deposits as exposed were recorded according to standard OA practice (Wilkinson 1992).

Geoarchaeological recording

2.2.2 The gravel sequences exposed during the digging of the thrust pit and reception pit were recorded by a suitable qualified geoarchaeologist. The sediments were recorded in accordance with Jones *et al.* 1999, to include information about depth, texture, composition and including colour, clast orientation, structure (bedding, ped characteristics etc) and contacts between deposits. Note was also made of any visible ecofactual or artefactual inclusions.

3 Results

3.1 Archaeological monitoring

3.1.1 Due to the shallow depth to which the areas were stripped, the natural geology was exposed only in the haul road, the western part of the working area and intermittent patches in the compound. It comprised a pale orange-brown silty sandy clay brickearth (502). The only possible archaeological feature was a gravel deposit (503) that was partly exposed at the north-eastern corner of the working area (Fig. 2 and Plate 2). It measured *c* 4.5 x 3.0m and consisted of small angular flints and rounded pebbles, possibly forming a surface. No evidence was found for a continuation of the layer further west or within the haul road to the south. Several large sherds of 18th-20th century glass and a sherd of cream ware pottery of similar date were found lying directly on its surface.

3.1.2 The gravel deposit and the brickearth were overlain by a layer of pale brown sandy silt subsoil (501), which was 0.08m thick and remained *in situ* in the eastern part of the working area and over much of the compound. A small scrap of prehistoric pottery was recovered from the subsoil within the compound. Above the subsoil lay the modern topsoil (500), which was 0.22m thick.

3.2 Geoarchaeological recording

3.2.1 Only limited disturbance of the gravel deposits were observed during the watching brief; this was principally within the area of the two tunnelling pits. The small size and the circular shape of reception pit meant that recording of the gravel deposits was restricted within this area (Plates 3-5). The large thrust pit allowed for greater visibility and access, but again no signs of any early prehistoric artefacts or remains were present (Plates 6-8).

3.2.2 Both of the recorded sequences suggested the potential presence of a possible palaeochannel cut within the gravels (2010). Within the reception pit (Figure 3 section 501) the London Clay (1009) and its weather upper surface (1008) was overlain by thick well sorted Pleistocene gravel deposits (1005 and 1004), mapped as Lynch Hill Gravels. This sequence was sealed by a thin subsoil (1002) and modern topsoil (1001). To the east a potential palaeochannel cut (1010) was recorded within the gravels and filled by series of stratified deposits which included gravelly sands (1006), clayey silts (1007) and brownish yellow clayey silts (1003).

3.2.3 A similar sequence of deposits were recorded within the launch pit (Figure 3 section 503), consisting of a thin Pleistocene gravel deposit (2006) overlying London Clay (2009) and its weathered upper surface (2008). The gravels dip down towards the north of the trench and increase in thickness. A Potential palaeochannel cut (2007) is also recorded at the northern edge of the trench.

3.3 Finds

3.3.1 A small assemblage of pottery, glass and one worked flint was recovered during the watching brief. The full finds lists can be found within Appendix 2 and are summarised below.

3.3.2 Gravel deposits 503 (Fig. 2) produced 1 sherd of Georgian period pottery dating from 1760-1830, one 19th-century wine bottle and 4 sherds of a 20th-century milk bottle. These are all consistent with deriving from material associated with the very edge of a late post-medieval road surface or trackway.

3.3.3 One residual sherd of prehistoric pottery, an abraded rolled flint and flower pot sherd were also recovered from the ploughsoil.

4 Discussion

4.1.1 The only feature of possible archaeological origin was gravel deposit 503 located in the north-east corner of the site next to the Grand Union Canal. The late 18th to 19th century artefacts recovered from the deposit indicates that it is likely to represent the very edge of potential post-medieval road that is depicted on the historical maps from 1809 (Figure 4). The road surface continues into the north-eastern bulk and may be better preserved to the north and east of the excavation. Although its location also corresponds with the projected alignment of the Roman road between Lower Winchendon and Staines, the route of the road is limited to two speculative lines drawn between known Roman population centres and its precise alignment is unknown. Moreover, if the deposit was indeed a Roman road it should be associated with a pair of flanking ditches, the western of which should have lain within the working area, but no such feature was identified. The correspondence with the projected alignment of the road is therefore likely to be coincidental.

4.1.2 The geoarchaeological recording of the gravel disturbance did not identify any finds or early prehistoric remains within the Lynch Hill Gravels. The presence of a potential palaeochannel cut is intriguing but its interpretation is hampered by the limited impact of the works on the Pleistocene gravels.

4.1.3 Only a small percentage of the site was taken down to the archaeological horizon and therefore there is the potential for archaeological remains to still be preserved on the majority of the site. Based on the results of the watching brief, the works did not impact upon any significant archaeological remains.

Appendix A. Trench Descriptions and Context Inventory

Compound, working area and haul road						
Context no.	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Comment**	**Finds**	**Date**
500	Layer	-	0.22	Topsoil	-	Modern
501	Layer	-	0.08	Subsoil	Pottery, flint	18th-20th century
502	Layer	-	-	Brickearth	-	-
503	Layer	-	-	Gravel surface	Pottery, glass	19th-20th century
504				Same as 500		
505				Same as 501		
506				Same as 502		

Reception pit						
Context no.	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Comment**	**Finds**	**Date**
1001	Layer	-	0-0.25	Friable greyish brown humic silt, large pebbles common, sub-angular rounded flint (25%), grass roots present, abrupt contact.	-	-
1002	Layer	-	0.25-0.45	Friable greyish brown silt, common flint pebbles and brick frags, lenses of clinker (50mm) at top, abrupt contact. MADE GROUND.	-	-
1003	Layer	-	0.45-0.90	Firm brownish yellow clay slit, traces of sand, small olive grey mottles, large (200mm) lenses of grey clay silt with frequent flint pebbles. Clear contact. BRICKEARTH.	-	-
1004	Layer	-		Loose olive brown clayey fine-course sand with common mainly small-medium sub-angular/sub-rounded flint pebbles (30%), clear contact. GRAVELLY SAND DEPOSIT (Pleistocene).		
1005	Layer	-		Loose olive yellow clay sand (soft), gritty, fine-		

				coarse with abundant (60%) sub-angular/well-rounded pebbles and small cobbles of flint. PLEISTOCENE GRAVEL. Becomes coarser down to 3m with additional large cobbles and little clay remaining. Apparent inversion from 3..-3.50m below ground, with fewer and smaller cobbles mainly medium-small pebbles and sand containing more fine substance.		
1006	Layer	-		Soft to moderately firm light greenish grey, yellowish olive mottles (15%), very sandy (medium/coarse) CLAY WITH COMMON SMALL-MEDIUM SUB-ANGULAR/ANGULAR FLINT PEBBLES.		
1007	Layer	-		Soft to moderately firm light grey with vertical yellow mottles (25%) from top, firm/medium clay sand, rare coarse angular grains, diffuse contact. CLAYEY SAND.		
1008	Layer	-		Firm to stiff brown, mottled strong brown (20%), silty clay (common angular-rounded flint pebbles (15%) are contamination from overlying gravels. Massive, homogeneous. WEATHERED LONDON CLAY.		
1009	Layer	-		Stiff dark olive grey 'soapy' silty clay. LONDON CLAY.		
1010	Cut			Palaeochannel cut		

Thrusting pit						
Context no.	**Type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**Comment**	**Finds**	**Date**
2001	Layer	-	-	HARD STANDING	-	-

2002	Layer	-	0-0.5	Firm olive yellow slightly fine sandy silt, small-medium sub-angular/sub-rounded flint pebbles (10%), fine strong brown mottles (5%), clear contact. BRICKEARTH.	-	-
2003	Layer	-	-	Firm grey fine silty clayey sand (sandy loam) with common flint pebbles (25%) GRAVELLY SILTY SAND. Pebbles are mainly small, angular-sub-rounded, randomly positioned.	-	-
2004	Layer	-	-	Firm bluish grey silty clay with many (25%) small-medium angular to sub-rounded flint pebbles, diffuse contact. POSSIBLE FILL OF PALAEOCHANNEL.		
2005	Layer	-	-	Moderate-firm light grey silty fine sand, rare small pebbles, clear contact. POSS PALAEOCHANNEL FILL/FLUVIAL SAND.		
2006	Layer	-	-	Loose greyish brown, few dark brown large mottles (Fe concretions/stains) clayey f/c sand (20%), abundant small/large sub-angular/sub-rounded flint pebbles, poorly sorted. PLEISTOCENE SANDY (LOAMY) GRAVELS.		
2007	Cut	-	-	Possible palaeochannel		
2008	Layer	-	-	Firm plastic brown silty clay, massive, diffuse contact. WEATHERED LONDON CLAY.		
2009	Layer	-	-	Firm plastic dark olive grey silty clay, massive. LONDON CLAY.		
2010	Layer	-	-	Firm grey sandy clay, clear contact, lenses of cryoturbated sediment, Periglacial.		

APPENDIX B. FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

Identified by John Cotter

Context	Description	Date
501	1 residual flint tempered prehistoric scrap, 18g 1 flowerpot sherd	Prehistoric 18th-20th century
503	1 sherd cream ware (CREA DEV), 7g	1760-1830

B.2 Glass

Identified by Ian Scott

Context	Description	Date
503	1 sherd thick-walled wine bottle in dark green metal, 79g 4 sherds glass ?milk bottle – United Glass Bottle Company	19th century 20th century

B.3 Flint

Identified by Geraldine Crann

Context	Description
501	Single heavily abraded, rolled, irregular natural flake, with sub-parallel irregular retouch and notch, 11g

The single natural flint was retained because of the presence of a short length of sub-parallel retouch and a notch. The flint is heavily abraded and worn and it is very likely that the apparent retouch was formed as a result of natural processes. The notch is more recent natural edge damage. The assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work.

APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Appendix D. Summary of Site Details

Site name:	Land Adjacent Grand Union Canal, Hollow Hill Lane, Iver, Buckinghamshire
Site code:	IVSGR14
Grid reference:	TQ 02198 80036 (centred)
Type:	Watching brief
Date and duration:	28th August-15th September 2014
Area of site:	0.5 hectares
Summary of results:	The watching brief only identified one possible archaeological feature that was a compacted gravel surface that produced late 18th to 20th Century pottery and glass and may represent the very edge of a post medieval road. One residue piece of prehistoric pottery and a possible worked flint was also recovered from the topsoil. The excavations of the Lynch Hill gravels within the two pits was monitored and recorded on site by a geoarchaeologist. No early prehistoric artefacts or remains were identified within the limited disturbance of the pits. The results of the watching brief indicated no significant archaeological remains were impacted by the works.
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM : 2014.83

Plate 1: Topsoil stripping in the compound

Plate 2: Gravel deposit 503

Plate 3: The location of the reception pit beside the north bank of the canal

Plate 4: Excavating the reception pit

Plate 5: The sediment sequence exposed in the upper part of the reception pit

Plate 6: Mini-digger excavating the thrust pit

Plate 7: The thrust pit fully excavated

Plate 8: Fluvial channel fills overlying London Clay at the northern end of the thrust pit

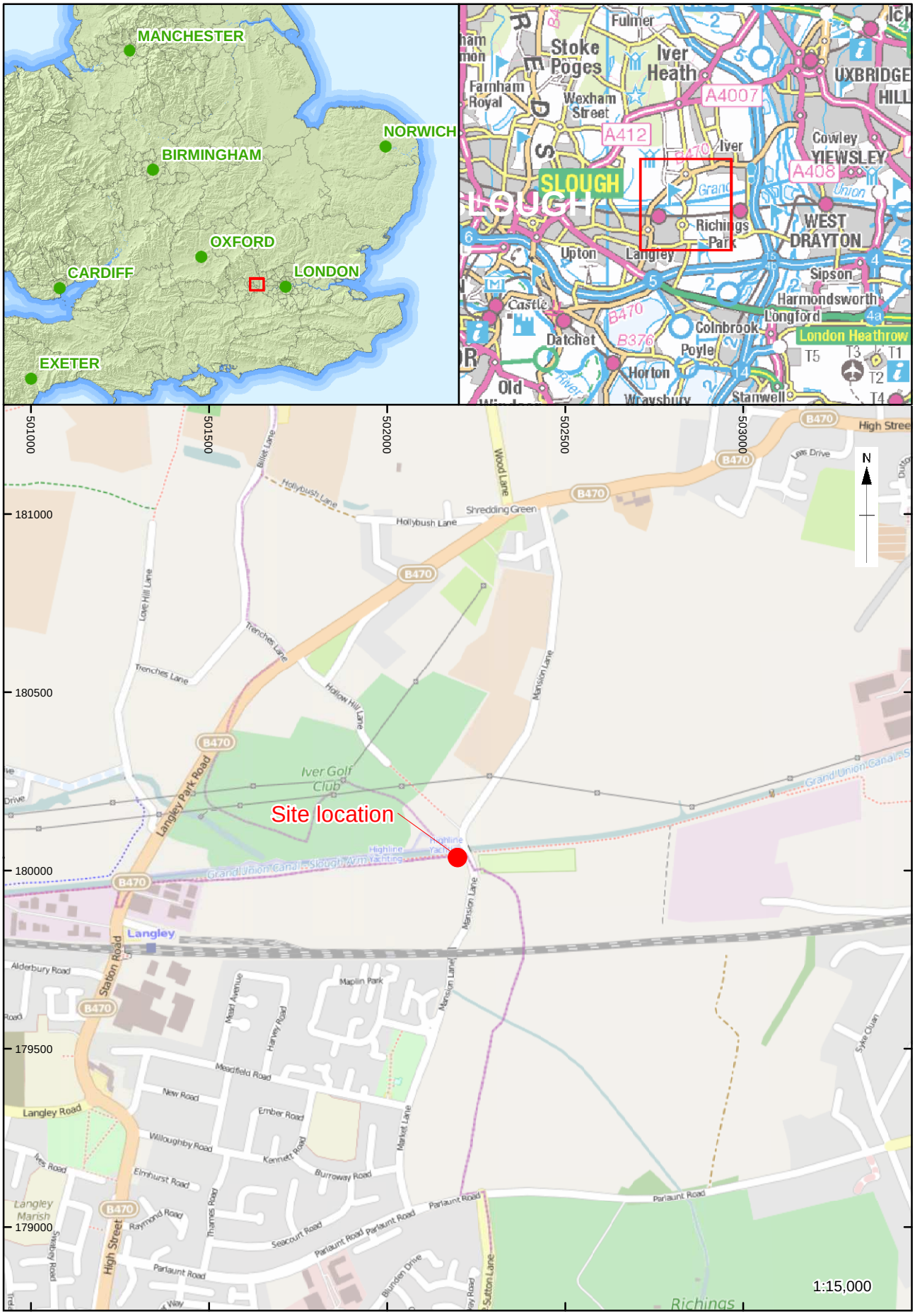

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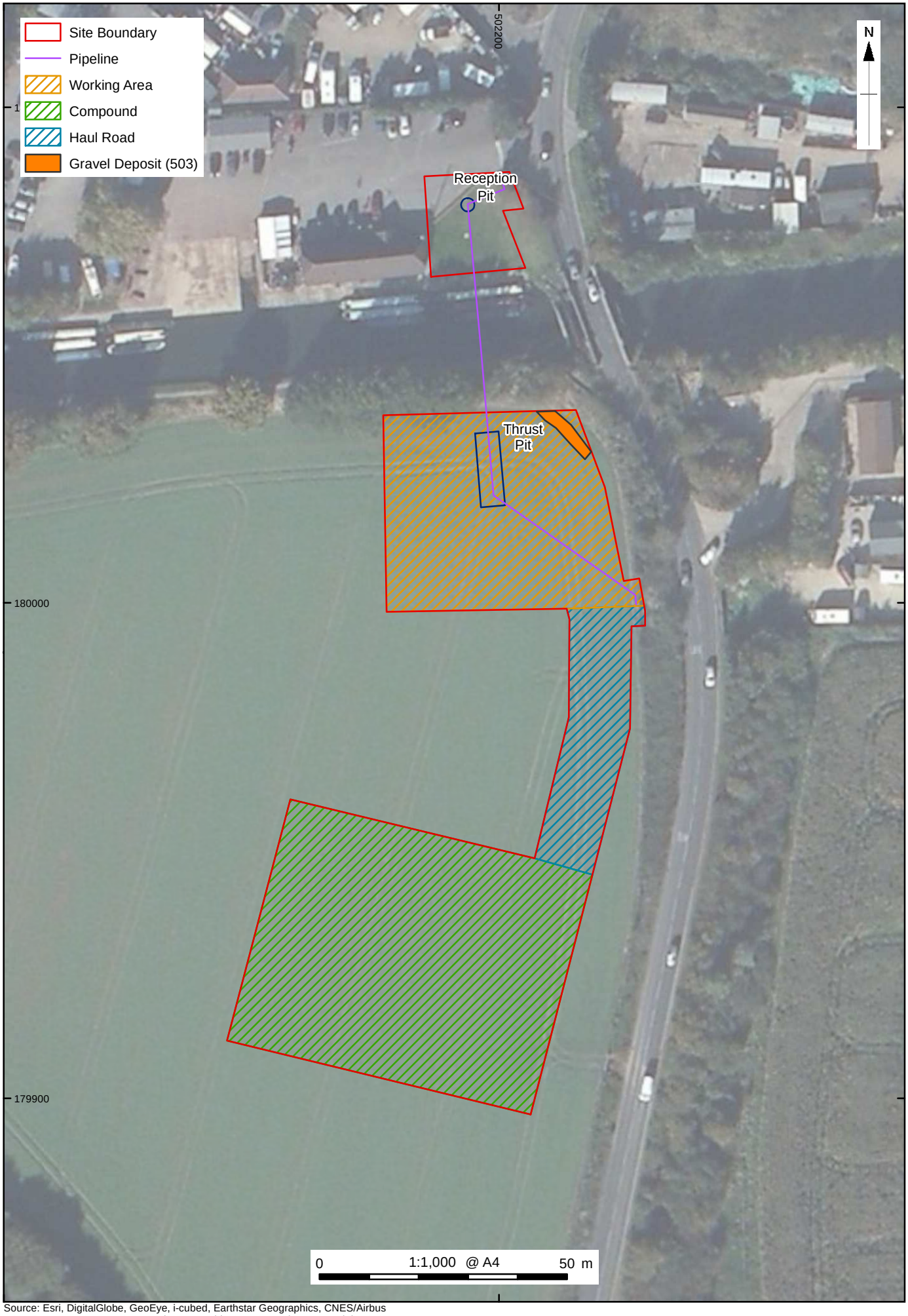
Figure 1: Site location



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Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS

Fig. 2: Plan of the watching brief

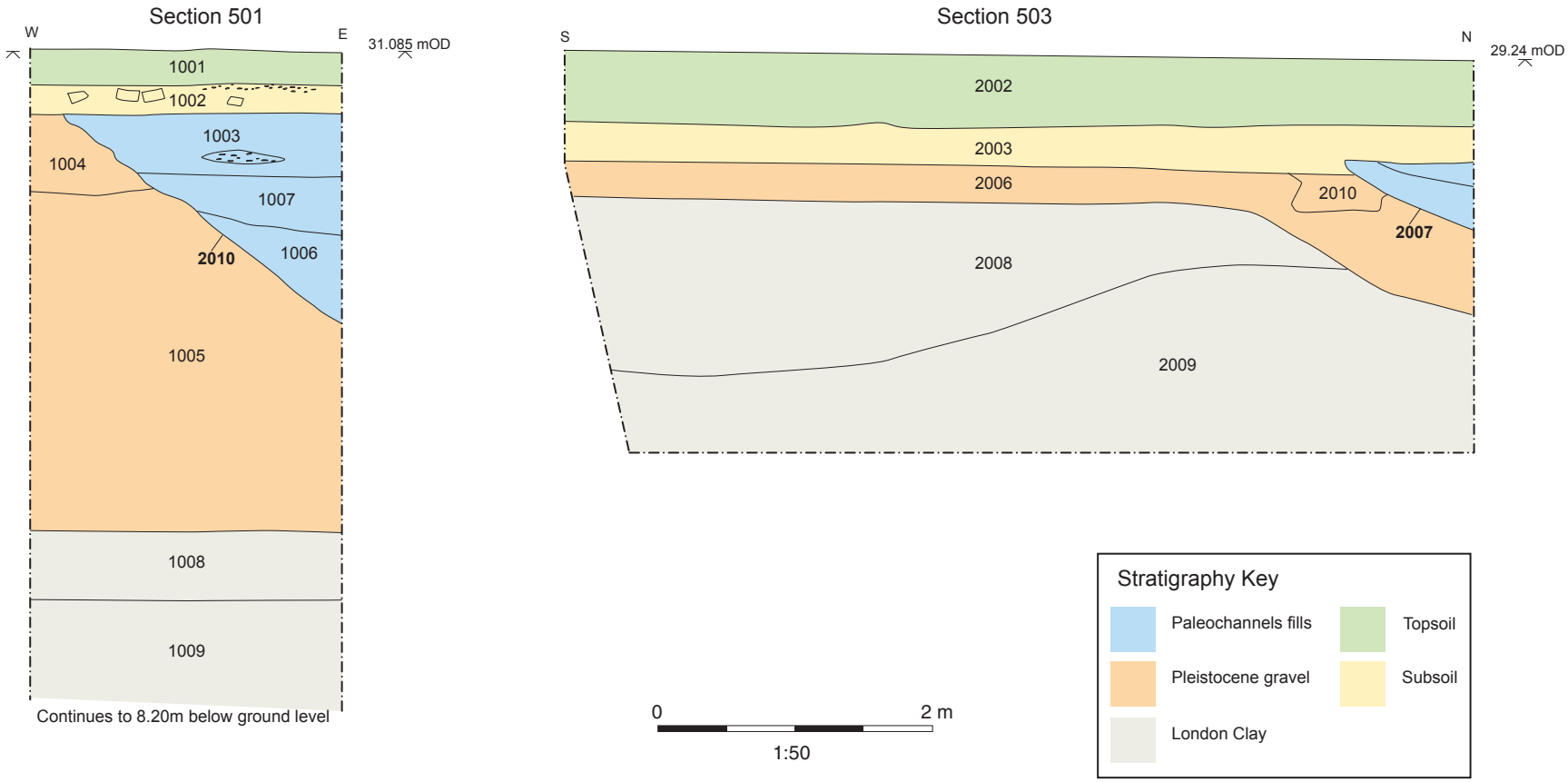

Figure 3: Sections through the sediment sequence through the reception pit (501) and in the thrust pit (503).

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Figure 4: Langley Marish Inclosure Map 1809

Head Office/Registered Office/ OA South

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: http://oxfordarchaeology.com

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: http://oxfordarchaeology.com

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
e: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: http://oxfordarchaeology.com