

Transco

Burghfield Gas Pipeline, Shinfield, Berkshire.

*ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF*

SU 7068 7168



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

December 1997



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Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

### SUMMARY

*The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief on topsoil stripping for the Burghfield Power Station Gas Pipeline, on behalf of Transco. The only archaeological remains encountered were a group of medieval features located to the south of Hartley Court Farm, Shinfield. The medieval features included a boundary ditch, a pit and a well, which were dated by associated pottery to the 11th and 12th centuries.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a watching brief on topsoil stripping along the 10km route of the Burghfield Power Station Gas Pipeline, between 29 September and 1 October 1997, on behalf of Transco. Archaeological deposits of medieval date were identified immediately to the south of Hartley Court Road, Shinfield, within a strip c.680 sq. metres in extent (SU 703688). A small rescue excavation was carried out on 1-3 October to investigate and record these remains.

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

The site is situated on arable land to the south of Hartley Court Farm, on the first terrace of the River Kennet. The land is low lying (38 - 41m O.D.) and generally flat, but drops 2-3 metres onto the river floodplain to the north of the farm. The Foudry Brook, a tributary of the Kennet, lies 300m to the west.

The first terrace consists of mixed silts, sands and gravels of Pleistocene origin, being predominantly silty in the east, with a higher concentration of gravel in the west with scattered patches of dense clay. The floodplain to the north is covered with alluvial clay of both Pleistocene and more recent origin.

A number of relict stream channels of Pleistocene and more recent dates have been encountered in these areas, in the course of recent archaeological work. These are believed to be associated with the Foudry Brook (OAU 1997).

### 1.3 Historical and archaeological background

Babtie Group carried out a desk based assessment of the area, the results of which are summarised below:

The pipeline route lies between the Kennet and Loddon valleys, in an area which has been well studied and documented archaeologically, but has been heavily damaged by recent development.

The well-drained gravel soils have proved attractive for settlement from the Neolithic onwards. Such soils also produce cropmarks in dry years, so that archaeological sites are highly visible and easily recorded by aerial survey. Archaeological work in the area has included major field-walking programmes in the Kennet and Loddon valleys and extensive excavation work on sites such as Knights Farm and Reading Business Park. The large number of recent developments in the area has created a demand for construction aggregates, satisfied by the quarrying of gravel reserves. Gravel extraction has added to the archaeological record by pre-extraction surveys and excavation, and through chance finds. However, not all developments in the area have been preceded by archaeological investigation. Many sites now survive only as truncated remains and fragmentary elements of what were once much more extensive systems.

The present site adds to a substantial body of archaeological evidence from the immediate vicinity of Hartley Court Farm, collected during assessments and excavations at the Reading Business Park development site. This major development lies immediately to the west, north and north east of the Farm and c. 100m north of the pipeline route:

An archaeological assessment carried out for Caversham Bridge Group by the OAU in 1990, on approximately 18ha of land, identified archaeological features and finds including early Mesolithic and late Neolithic deposits, evidence for late Bronze Age settlement, a Roman settlement and associated field system, and a small Medieval settlement or isolated farmhouse located to the west of Hartley Court Farm (OAU 1991).

Further assessment and excavations of the Reading Business Park site was carried out by the OAU from 1986 in response to the redevelopment of approximately 80 hectares of land at Smallmead Farm (SU 700695), approximately 1.3 km to the north west of Hartley Court Farm. The assessment and subsequent excavations in this area have produced a range of archaeological evidence including Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age, Later Bronze Age and Roman settlement sites, and a medieval site comprising a rectangular enclosure to the north of Smallmead Farm (OAU 1996).

A desktop study carried out by the OAU on the Shinfield area, in response to a major housing development proposed by Reading University (OAU 1997), has identified archaeological sites and features including a series of undated cropmarks in and to the north of Great Lea Common (SU 710685), approximately 0.5m east of Hartley Court Farm. These cropmarks are recorded in the Berkshire SMR, but not numbered.

## 2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS

The aims of the watching brief are as stated in the Written Scheme of Investigation:

- (i) To establish the presence/ absence of archaeological remains within the area affected by the pipeline.
- (ii) To determine, as far as is reasonably possible, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeology.
- (iii) To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- (iv) To make available the results of the investigation.

## 3 WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The fieldwork comprised a watching brief on topsoil stripping of archaeologically sensitive sections of the 10km long pipeline route, with a contingency for excavation and recording work in the event of significant deposits being discovered.

The archaeologically sensitive areas examined were as defined in an environmental impact assessment by RSK Environment using information contained in Berkshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record.

### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

Topsoil stripping along the pipeline route was carried out using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision.

The only significant deposits identified were a group of medieval features located along the southern side of Hartley Court Road. Contractors' vehicles tracked over this area after the topsoil had been removed, depositing a layer of mixed, compacted topsoil which obscured the features. This layer was removed by a machine with a toothless bucket under close archaeological supervision to allow recording work to take place.

The trench was cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. All archaeological features were planned at 1:50 (Fig.3). Sections were drawn at 1:20 (Fig.4). All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

### 3.3 Finds

Finds recovered from the excavated features and surface cleaning were collected by context and submitted for specialist examination.

### 3.4 Environmental sampling

A series of eight samples were taken from successive fills of the medieval well (23) for the retrieval of charred and waterlogged plant remains.

## 4 RESULTS: GENERAL

### 4.1 Soils and ground conditions

The natural subsoil consisted of alluvial silts and gravels. The ground surface was dry with waterlogged conditions occurring at a depth of c.1.30 metres in the excavated well (23) and large boundary ditch (17). A layer of compacted topsoil, deposited by contractors' vehicles tracking over the site after it had been stripped, was removed by machine from the surface of the trench, resulting in some truncation of the features.

### 4.2 Distribution of Archaeological Deposits

The only archaeological remains discovered were located to the south of Hartley Court Farm, within a strip measuring 68m x 10m (Trench 1, Fig.3).

## 5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTION

### 5.1 Description of deposits

Five features were identified in trench 1, including a well, a pit, a large boundary ditch and two severely truncated gullies. In addition, large fragments of medieval pottery were recovered from a layer of soil extending along the southern side of the boundary with Hartley Court Road (21). No features were visible cutting this layer, although it contained the largely intact base of a large mid 11th century+ jar, apparently lying *in situ*. It is likely that this layer represents a comparatively undisturbed band of topsoil, protected from the effects of plough damage by the plough headland at the edge of the field.

#### *The Well (23)*

At the eastern end of trench 1 was a large circular pit (23) c.3.55m in diameter, interpreted as a well. It was c.1.40m deep and was filled with a sequence of 8 very dark greyish brown humic silt deposits (22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33) of which the lower three were waterlogged (23, 31, 30) (Fig.4, Section 4). Fills 22 and 27 each produced medieval pottery, suggesting a date in the 11th or 12th century.



The well was cut by a modern mole drain and a service pipe, which had severely disturbed the upper three fills of the feature (26, 31, 27).

The waterlogged deposits included a dense mass of matted organic material which was found to consist almost entirely of modern tree roots (see Appendix 3). The degree of recent disturbance to this feature means that the environmental data is of little value as an indicator of the local medieval environment.

#### *Pit 24*

A large pit (24), 2.55m in diameter and 0.95m deep, was located 12m east of the well. The feature was partially obscured beyond the edge of the trench (Fig.4, Section 3). Two mid-yellowish brown clay silt fills (25, 32) were identified, of which the upper (25) produced medieval pottery of the mid-11th century+.

#### *Feature 4*

A very severely truncated feature (4), possibly a linear boundary or drainage ditch, was identified close to the southern edge of the trench. The two identified fills (5, 6), produced no datable finds.

#### *Ditch 17*

This substantial linear feature ran from north to south across the trench, on a perpendicular alignment to Hartley Court Road. The ditch was 1.2m wide and survived to a depth of 0.35m. The only identified fill (18), a dark greyish brown silty loam, produced 4 fragments of late 12th-13th century pottery. The alignment of the ditch corresponds with that of a post-medieval boundary marked on the 1st edition OS map (OS 1883). This suggests either that the boundary has existed since the medieval period, or that the pottery recovered is residual.

#### *Gully 7*

A very shallow gully (7), on a perpendicular alignment to Ditch 17, produced a single sherd of medieval pottery of the 11th century or later, which cannot be considered reliable dating evidence. The feature was severely truncated and was indistinctly defined for most of its length.

### 5.2 The Finds - by Paul Blinkhorn

A number of finds, mainly of pottery, were recovered from archaeological features. The pottery types present suggest that all the assemblages at the site date to the early medieval period, i.e. the 11th and 12th centuries. This is implied not only by the range of wares present, but also the fact that 'high' medieval wares such as Ashampton types, are present in very small quantities, and later wares, such as Surrey Whitewares, are completely absent from the assemblage. The fact that the pottery from the sub-soil overlying the site, contexts 2, 21 produced only medieval pottery with a *terminus post quem* of the later 12th century (table 1, appendix 2) provides strong support for this dating framework.



The large, partially complete East Wiltshire ware storage jar from context 21 is worthy of comment, as is the decorated rim sherd in the same fabric from context 22. It is unusual, in the case of the former, to find such large vessels in a relatively intact state, and suggests that there was contemporary activity in very close proximity to the place of deposition. In the case of the latter, decoration is very unusual on vessels of this tradition. The tubular spout, which is almost certainly from a glazed tripod pitcher, can be exactly paralleled by another example from the kiln site at Ashampton (Mephram and Heaton 1995, fig. 5.31).

### 5.3 The Charred and Waterlogged Plant Remains - by Ruth Pelling

A series of 8 samples were taken from successive deposits in the well for the retrieval of charred and waterlogged plant remains. Samples of 10 litres were processed using a bulk water separation machine and flots were collected onto a 500µm mesh. Three samples taken from below the water table were kept wet to preserve any waterlogged remains while the remaining flots were allowed to air dry.

#### *Laboratory Methods*

Each sample was put through a stack of sieves down to 500µm. Fractions were then scanned under a binocular microscope at magnification of x10 and x20. The waterlogged flots were scanned while still wet. Any plant remains noted were provisionally identified and an approximation of their abundance was made. Charcoal was also provisionally identified.

#### *Results*

Occasional poorly preserved charred seeds are present in the samples, shown in Table One (Appendix 2). Grains of free-threshing *Triticum* sp. (wheat) and *Avena* sp. (oats) were identified, which are common cereals in medieval assemblages. More poorly preserved grain was identified as indeterminate *Triticum* sp. and *Secale/Triticum* sp. (rye/wheat).

The occasional weed seeds of *Agrostemma githago* (corn cockle), *Vicia/Lathyrus* sp. (vetch/vetchling), *Polygonum* sp. (knotgrass) and *Bromus* sp. (brome grass) are all common within medieval weed floras.

*Quercus* sp. (oak) charcoal was present in all samples and was very abundant in sample 9 (context 29). Occasional fragments of Pomoideae (apple, pear, hawthorn etc.) and *Alnus/Corlyus* sp. (alder/hazel) charcoal were also noted.

The samples taken from below the water table were dominated by roots which obscured potential waterlogged seeds to a large degree. Occasional seeds were noted in sample 1 (context 22), but of a limited flora. Seeds of *Carex* sp. (sedges) dominated, many species of which grow in damp or marshy conditions or on the sides of rivers, ponds and so on. Seeds of *Rubus idaeus* (raspberry) and nut shell fragments of *Corylus avellana* (hazel nut) suggest the presence of hedgerow type vegetation. A single seed of *Alnus glutinosa* (alder) was also noted, a species also common in wet or riverside locations. Occasional seeds of *Carex* sp. were also noted in sample 2 (context 33) while waterlogged remains were absent from sample 7 (context 30).

## Discussion

The charred species of cereals and weeds recognised are all in keeping with medieval period assemblages, although the number of seeds is very low. Likewise oak generally dominates charcoal assemblages, presumably having been the favoured wood for structural purposes. There is no potential for any further analysis of the samples.

Preservation of the waterlogged remains is poor and the vast quantity of roots tends to obscure the few seeds that are present. It will not be productive to look at the samples in any more detail.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

### 6.1 Reliability of field investigation

Excavated features at the Hartley Court Farm site were mostly heavily truncated by ploughing, except in a narrow band alongside Hartley Court Road, where the plough headland appears to have partially protected a medieval soil layer. Some disturbance of archaeological deposits occurred as a result of machines tracking over the site after topsoil stripping had taken place. Further truncation inevitably occurred when the resulting layer of compacted topsoil was removed by machine.

A modern service pipe and field drain run along the length of the trench, severely disturbing several features. They were recorded in section in the well (23) (Fig.3, Fig.4, Section 4).

### 6.2 Overall interpretation

A group of medieval features, probably dating from the 11th -12th century and including a well, a pit and a series of linear features, were uncovered to the south of Hartley Court Farm in the course of a watching brief on the Burghfield Power Station Gas Pipeline. Although waterlogged deposits were present in the well, modern disturbance of the feature has largely negated the value of the environmental evidence recovered. The site is nevertheless a useful addition to the body of archaeological material from the Reading Business Park site, 100m to the north. The presence of the well, and a nearly complete medieval jar, suggests that a medieval settlement existed on or close to the site of the present Hartley Court Farm in the 11th-12th century. It is likely that the site is associated with the small medieval settlement excavated at Hartley Court Farm by the OAU in 1991 (OAU 1991), which may well have been part of a larger complex. The archaeology of the site is of moderate local significance.

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- Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992)

## Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory

| Trench | Ctxt | Type      | width (m) | thick. (m) | Comment   | Finds                         | No. | Date        |
|--------|------|-----------|-----------|------------|---|-------------------------------|-----|-------------|
| 1      |      |           |           |            |   |                               |     |             |
|        | 001  | layer     |           | 0.3        | Topsoil   |                               |     |             |
|        | 002  | layer     |           | +0.25      | Sub-soil  | pottery                       | 14  | L12th-13thC |
|        | 003  | layer     |           |            | Natural   |                               |     |             |
|        | 004  | cut       | 1.14      | 0.10       | Boundary or drainage ditch?   |                               |     |             |
|        | 005  | fill      | 1.06      | 0.10       | Secondary fill of cut 004   |                               |     |             |
|        | 006  | fill      | 0.18      | 0.12       | First fill of cut 004   |                               |     |             |
|        | 007  | cut       | 0.94      | 0.10       | Boundary or drainage ditch  |                               |     |             |
|        | 008  | fill      | 0.94      | 0.10       | Fill of ditch cut 007   | pottery                       | 1   | M11thC+?    |
|        | 009  | cut       | 0.35      | 0.38       | Boundary or drainage ditch  |                               |     |             |
|        | 010  | layer     |           |            | Mixed Natural   |                               |     |             |
|        | 011  | cut       | 1.20      | 0.30       | Boundary or drainage ditch - associated with 009  |                               |     |             |
|        | 012  | fill      | 0.30      | 0.35       | Fill of ditch cut 009   | pottery                       | 8   | M11thC+?    |
|        | 013  | cut       | 1.30      | 0.40       | Gully   |                               |     |             |
|        | 014  | fill      | 1.30      | 0.45       | Fill of gully cut 013   | pottery                       | 11  | M11thC+?    |
|        | 015  | cut       | 0.40      | 0.23       | Secondary gully   |                               |     |             |
|        | 016  | fill      | 0.70      | 0.24       | Fill of gully cut 015   | pottery                       | 3   | M11thC+?    |
|        | 017  | cut       | 1.20      | 0.35       | Boundary ditch  |                               |     |             |
|        | 018  | fill      | 1.20      | 0.35       | Fill of ditch cut 017   | pottery                       | 4   | L12th-13thC |
|        | 019  | layer     |           |            | Mixed natural   |                               |     |             |
|        | 020  | layer     | 0.42      | 0.30       | Mixed natural   |                               |     |             |
|        | 021  | finds no. | 0.60      | 0.20       | Context number applied to deposit in which cooking pot rested. Equivalent to layer 02, but less plough-disturbed. | partially complete, large jar | 1   | M11thC+?    |
|        | 022  | fill      | 0.78      | 0.26       | Secondary fill of well cut 023  | pottery                       | 1   | M11thC+?    |



|     |       |      |      |                               |         |    |             |
|-----|-------|------|------|-------------------------------|---------|----|-------------|
| 023 | cut   | 3.54 | 1.44 | Well                          |         |    |             |
| 024 | cut   | 2.15 | 0.95 | Pit                           |         |    |             |
| 025 | fill  | 2.15 | 0.95 | Fill of pit cut 024           | pottery | 20 | M11thC+?    |
| 026 | fill  | 1.52 | 0.26 | Upper fill of well 023        |         |    |             |
| 027 | fill  | 2.98 | 0.34 | Sixth fill of well cut 023    | pottery | 43 | L12th-13thC |
| 028 | fill  | 1.98 | 0.20 | Fifth fill of well cut 023    |         |    |             |
| 029 | fill  | 2.30 | 0.26 | Fourth fill of well cut 023   |         |    |             |
| 030 | fill  | 3.20 | 0.52 | Third fill of well cut 023    |         |    |             |
| 031 | fill  | 2.0  | 0.32 | Seventh fill of well cut 023  |         |    |             |
| 032 | layer |      |      | Waterlogged natural           |         |    |             |
| 033 | fill  | 0.44 | 0.14 | Earliest fill of well cut 023 |         |    |             |
| 034 | fill  | 1.20 | 0.20 | Fill of ditch cut 011         |         |    |             |

## Appendix 2 Pottery spot dating

The post-Roman pottery assemblage from Hartley Court Farm, Shinfield comprised 98 sherds with a total weight of 4,649g. The occurrence by number and weight of sherds per fabric per context is listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per fabric per context

| Context | No | Wt (gm) | Fabric | Ware Date    | Assemblage Date | Comments                                |
|---------|----|---------|--------|--------------|-----------------|---|
| 2       | 7  | 45      | 202    | M11th-L15thC | L12th-13thC     |   |
| 2       | 6  | 29      | 300    | E11th-L15thC | L12th-13thC     |   |
| 2       | 1  | 42      | 358    | L12th-13thC  | L12th-13thC     | Long tubular spout                      |
| 8       | 1  | 32      | 202    | M11th-L15thC | M11thC+?        |   |
| 12      | 8  | 121     | 202    | M11th-L15thC | M11thC+?        | 3 vessels                               |
| 14      | 2  | 26      | 202    | M11th-L15thC | M11thC+?        |   |
| 14      | 1  | 1       | 300    | E11th-L15thC | M11thC+?        |   |
| 16      | 2  | 7       | 202    | M11th-L15thC | M11thC+?        |   |
| 16      | 1  | 5       | 300    | E11th-L15thC | M11thC+?        |   |
| 18      | 1  | 4       | 200    | 10th-15thC   | L12th-13thC     |   |
| 18      | 1  | 13      | 202    | M11th-L15thC | L12th-13thC     | Glazed tile frag.                       |
| 18      | 1  | 19      | 300    | E11th-L15thC | L12th-13thC     |   |
| 18      | 1  | 8       | 358    | L12th-13thC  | L12th-13thC     |   |
| 21      | 1  | 3524    | 202    | M11th-L15thC | M11thC+?        | Partially complete, extremely large jar |
| 22      | 1  | 26      | 202    | M11th-L15thC | M11thC+?        | Stabbed rim-bead decoration             |
| 25      | 12 | 65      | 202    | M11th-L15thC | M11thC+?        |   |
| 25      | 8  | 143     | 300    | E11th-L15thC | M11thC+?        |   |
| 27      | 30 | 377     | 202    | M11th-L15thC | L12th-13thC     |   |
| 27      | 12 | 155     | 300    | E11th-L15thC | L12th-13thC     |   |
| 27      | 1  | 7       | 358    | L12th-13thC  | L12th-13thC     | Glazed                                  |

The fabric types, are as follows:

F200: Late Saxon/Early Medieval West Oxfordshire ware and Early medieval Oxford ware (Oxford fabric OXAC), c. 10th-15thC.

F202: Early Medieval-Late Medieval East Wiltshire Ware (Oxford fabric OXAQ), M11th-L15thC.

F300: F300: Late Saxon/Medieval Oxford Ware (Oxford fabric OXY), E11th-L15thC.

F358: Ashampton ware (Mephram and Heaton 1995), L12th-13thC.

The alphabetical fabric codes all refer to the Oxfordshire type-series (Mellor 1994) unless otherwise specified.

### Appendix 3 Environmental Data

Table 1: The Charred Plant Remains

|                              | Sample                     | 4  | 5  | 6   | 8  | 9        |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|----|----|-----|----|----------|
|                              | Context                    | 26 | 31 | 27  | 28 | 29       |
| <b>CEREAL REMAINS</b>        |                            |    |    |     |    |          |
| <i>Triticum</i> sp.          | free-threshing wheat grain | 2  | -  | 7   | -  | -        |
| <i>Triticum</i> sp.          | wheat grain                | -  | 1  | -   | -  | -        |
| <i>Secale/Triticum</i> sp.   | rye/wheat grain            | -  | 2  | -   | -  | -        |
| <i>Avena</i> sp.             | oat grain                  | -  | 1  | -   | -  | 1        |
| <b>WEEDS</b>                 |                            |    |    |     |    |          |
| <i>Agrostemma githago</i> L. | corn cockle                | -  | -  | 1   | -  | -        |
| <i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> sp.    | vetch/vetchling            | -  | -  | -   | -  | 4        |
| <i>Polygonum</i> sp.         | knotgrass                  | 1  | -  | -   | -  | -        |
| <i>Bromus</i> sp.            | brome grass                | -  | -  | -   | 1  | -        |
| <b>CHARCOAL</b>              |                            |    |    |     |    |          |
| Pomoideae                    | apple, pear, hawthorn etc. | -  | -  | +   | -  | -        |
| <i>Alnus/Corylus</i> sp.     | alder/hazel                | +  | -  | -   | -  | -        |
| <i>Quercus</i> sp.           | oak                        | ++ | +  | +++ | ++ | +++<br>+ |

+ = present; ++ = common; +++ = frequent; ++++ = abundant

Table 2: A Summary of the Plant Remains from the Waterlogged Samples

|                                      | Sample                | 1  | 2  | 7  |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|----|----|----|
|                                      | Context               | 22 | 33 | 30 |
| <i>Rubus idaeus</i> L.               | raspberry             | +  | -  | -  |
| <i>Corylus avellana</i> L.           | hazel nut shell frag. | +  | -  | -  |
| <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> (L.) Gaertner | alder                 | +  | -  | -  |
| <i>Carex</i> sp.                     | sedges                | ++ | +  | -  |
|                                      |                       |    |    |    |
| <i>Quercus</i>                       | oak charcoal          | +  | +  | +  |

+ = present; ++ = common; +++ = frequent; ++++ = abundant

Illustrations

- Fig.1 Burghfield Gas Pipeline route and site location
- Fig 2 Hartley Court Farm site location
- Fig 3 Plan of archaeological deposits
- Fig 4 Sections



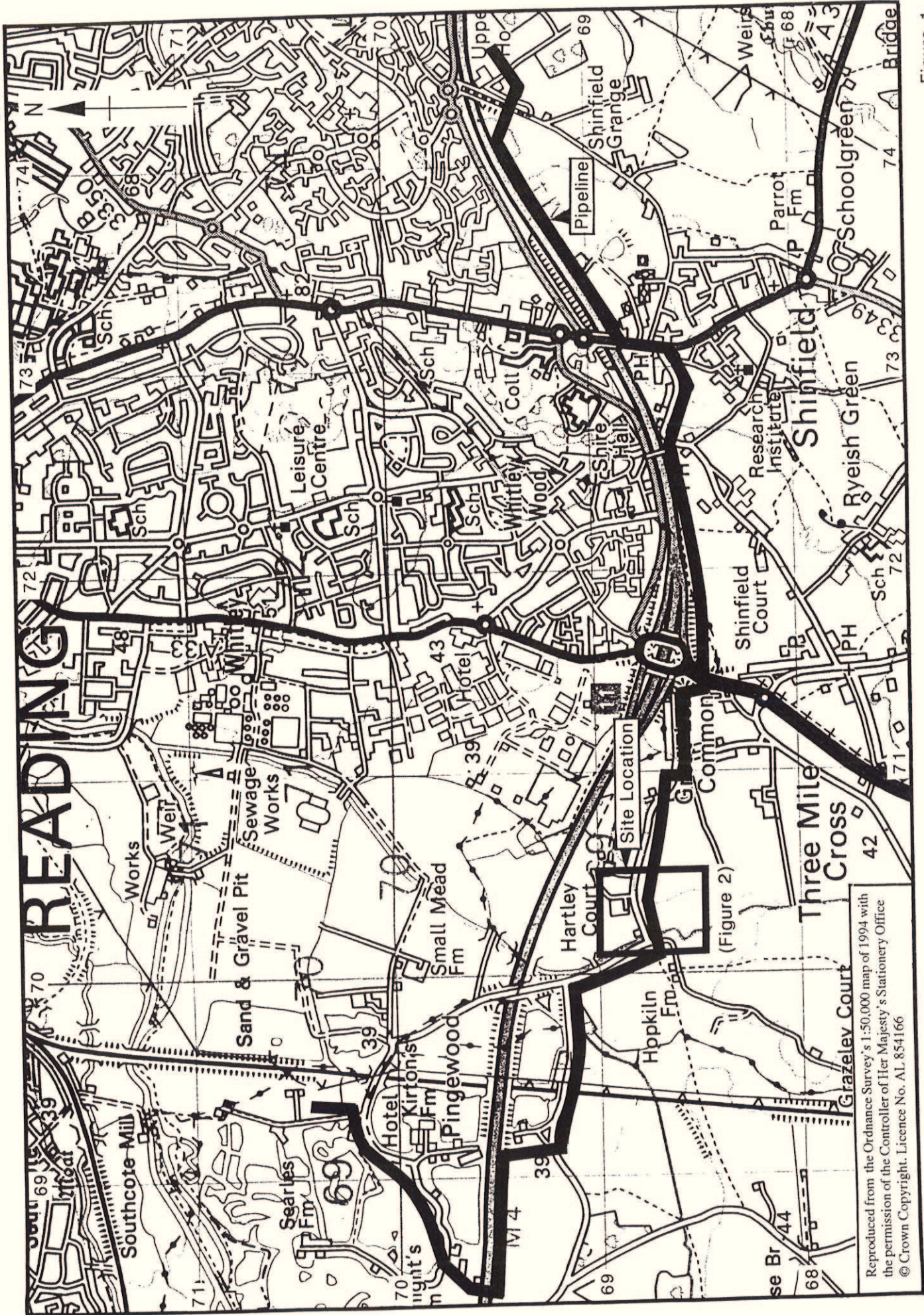


Figure 1

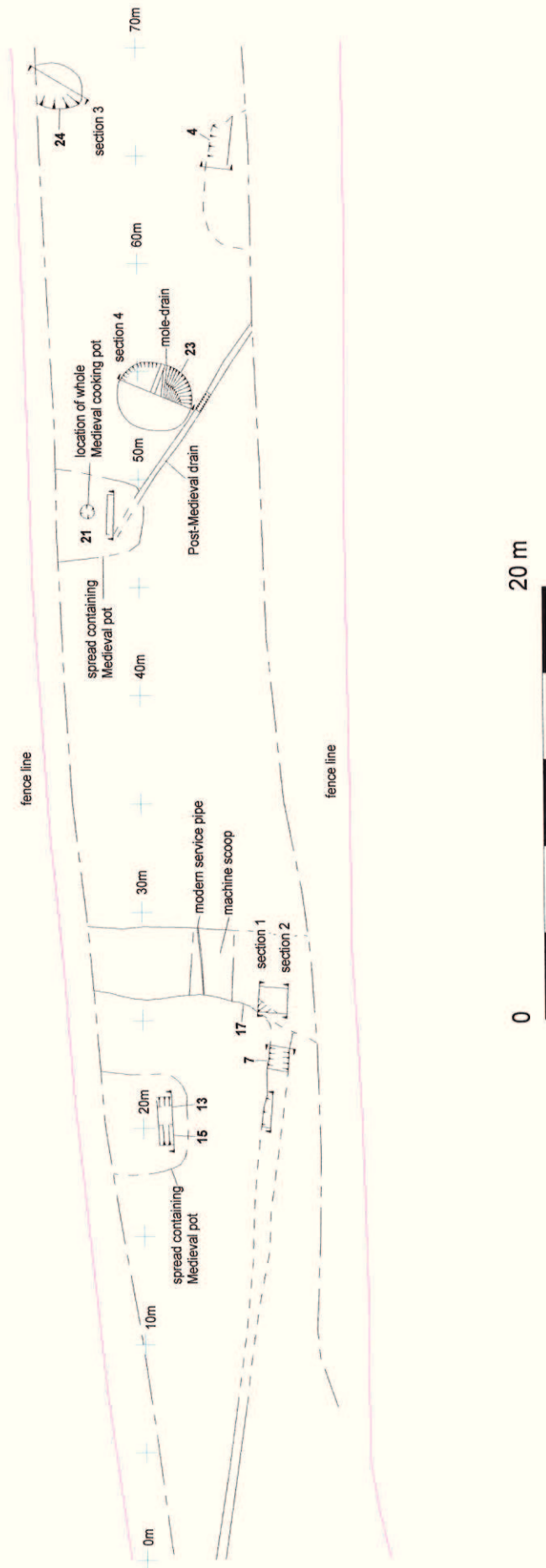
Site Location map

Scale 1:25 000

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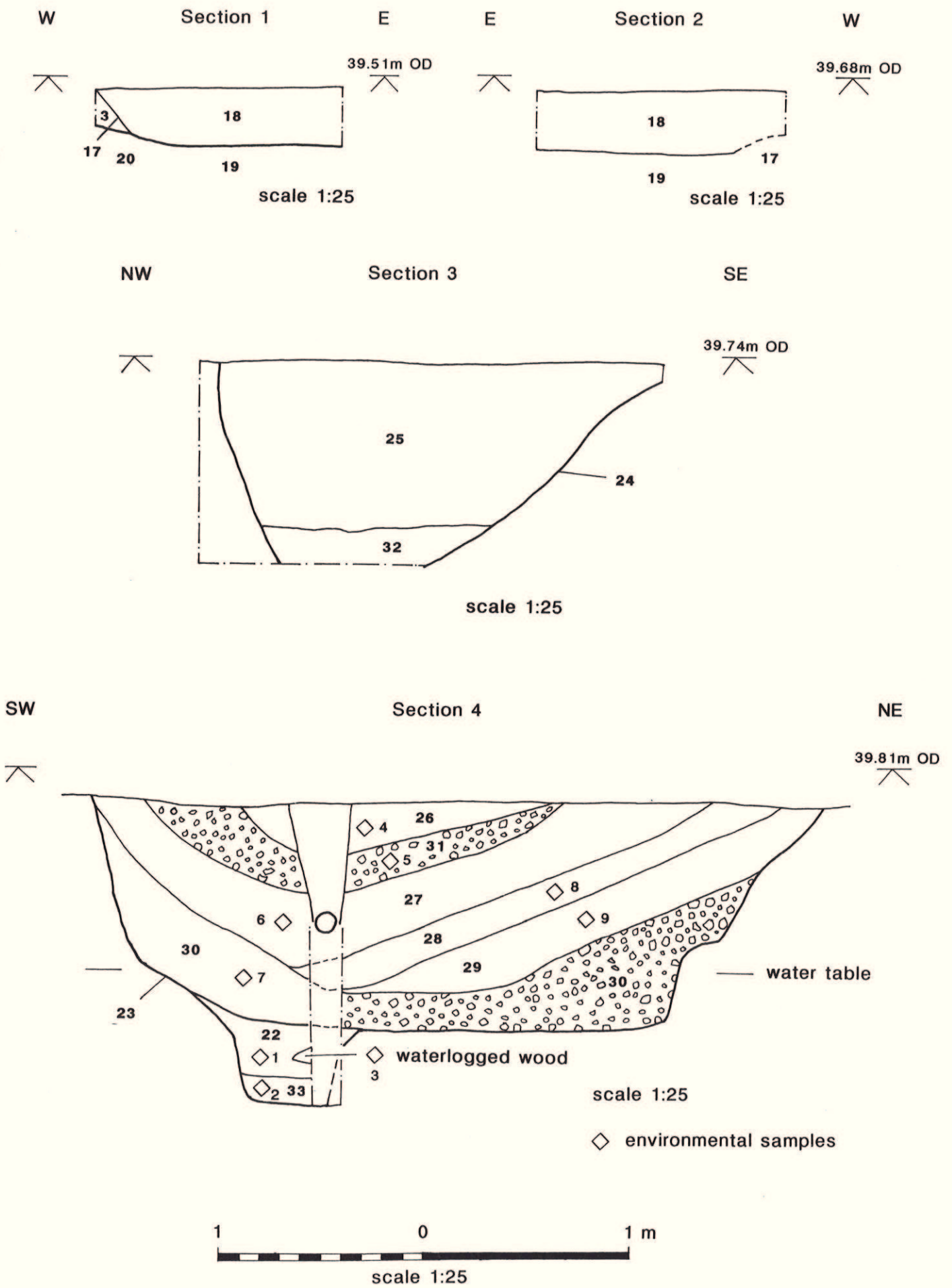






Plan of archaeological deposits

Figure 3



Sections

Figure 4





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