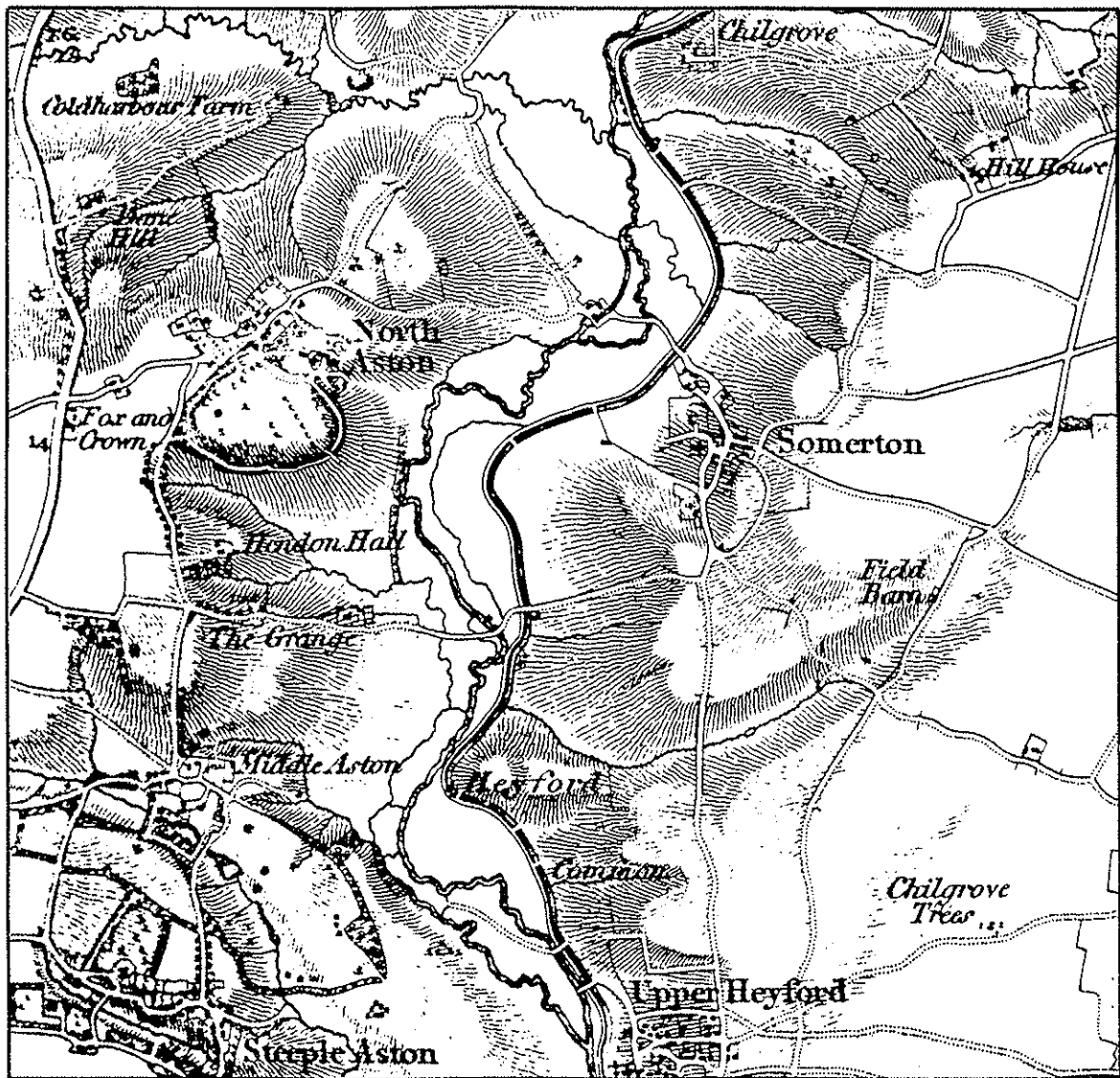


Manor Farm, Somerton, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

NGR SP 4970 2822



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

August 1994

MANOR FARM, SOMERTON,

OXFORDSHIRE

WATCHING BRIEF

NGR SP 4970 2822

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OXFORDSHIRE

WATCHING BRIEF

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INTRODUCTION

In August 1994 a watching brief was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) during the construction of a Woolaway Bungalow at plot 7127, Manor Farm, Somerton (Planning ref: CHS 114/91).

AIMS AND STRATEGY

The aim of the watching brief was to identify any significant archaeological deposits or features during groundwork disturbance. The deposits to then be recorded to assess the distribution of activity within the development site.

LOCATION (see Figure 1a)

The site is situated on the southern edge of the village of Somerton, which slopes down to the N. It had previously been an area of grassland which had been used for some time as a horse paddock. Manor Farm is situated 200m to the N and there are some agricultural buildings immediately W of the site.

GEOLOGY

The geology of the exposed area consisted of bedded limestone and layers of silt and sand.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Somerton is a well defined shrunken medieval village surrounding the present village and Norman church. Elements of the former village which have been identified include a 'castle', house platforms, hollow ways, earthwork enclosures and evidence for ridge and furrow cultivation NE and SW of the village.

The site of the early 16th century manor house built by William Fermor occupies the high ground 350m NE of the development site. Pottery recovered during

extensive drainage work in 1973 ranged in date from 11th to 13th century (Chambers R. A. 1977).

SUMMARY

Four ditches were recorded running E-W across the site, which were sectioned by a foundation trench. Pottery from the ditches dated to the middle Iron Age.

RESULTS (see Figures 1b and 2)

For dimensions of layers, features and finds see Appendix 1.

The area stripped for the bungalow measured 25m (E-W) by 17m (N-S). The reduced level of the site varied from 0.60m to approximately 2m below the present ground surface. The area to the S showing the deepest reduction in level. In the southern half of the site, between 1.00m and 1.50m of the natural subsoil had been removed. The stripped area comprised a slightly larger area than the footprint of the Bungalow (Bungalow footprint was L-Shaped approximately 17m x 14m.)

Four ditches were revealed, all orientated E-W. Ditch 105 contained two fills, the latest, 103, produced a large fragile sherd of middle Iron Age pottery and four animal bones.

Ditch 105 cut a ditch 107, which was on approximately the same alignment. The fill of ditch 107, (106) consisted of a reddish brown silty sand. It appeared in plan that the ditches crossed over, which was confirmed in the exposed section to the E. Both ditches appeared to terminate in the same area, although the terminal for ditch 107 was unclear.

Two further ditches were exposed, 109 and 111, again both orientated E-W. Ditch 109 appeared to cut ditch 111 but the relationship was uncertain. Ditch 111 terminated after a length of 5m and 109 after a length of 12m. Neither produced finds but two middle Iron Age pottery sherds recovered during surface cleaning of the area could probably be attributed to ditch 109.

The fills of ditches 107, 109 and 111 consisted of a reddish brown silty sand with pieces of limestone mixed in. In contrast the fill of ditch 105, consisted of a much darker silty sand with moderate charcoal flecking. The fills of ditches 107, 109 and 111 were very similar to the patches of natural subsoil observed on the site. These ditch fills could only be differentiated by their slightly dull hue and occasional charcoal flecking.

POTTERY

A total of eight sherds were recovered, the pottery was examined by Paul Booth (OAU). All the pottery recovered dated to the middle Iron Age and the results are summarised below:

Summary of Pottery				
Context	Number	Weight	Inclusions	Date
103	1 large sherd + fragments	69gm	Shell and sand	MIA
112	5 sherds	21	4 shell and sand. 1 sandy (base angle)	MIA
113	2 sherds	5g	1 shell and sand. 1 sand	MIA
TOTAL	8 sherds	95gm	-	

MIA = Middle Iron Age

CONCLUSIONS

Although only a small area was exposed the results appear to show a tradition of ditches orientated E-W. Ditches 107, 109 and 111 all give the appearance of 'clean' deposits filling the ditches in a relatively short time with little indication of activity nearby.

In contrast the fill of ditch 105 was darker with a higher occurrence of charcoal flecking probably reflecting a greater degree of activity. The pottery recovered from ditch 105 was fairly fragile indicating it would not have survived as a stray piece for any length of time, so it is unlikely to be a residual deposit. The size of the sherd would indicate some form of middle Iron Age settlement exists nearby, which would be supported by the well preserved bone in ditch 105.

CONSIDERATION OF THE RESULTS

The area exposed by the stripping would have revealed linear features, especially in the northern area of the site. The probability of shallow discrete features surviving (if they were present) in the southern half of the site is unlikely.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chambers R. A. 'Observations at Somerton, Oxon., 1973' *Oxoniensia* XLII 216-225
1977

Andrew Parkinson
Oxford Archaeological Unit
Aug. 1994

APPENDIX 1: Table of Contexts and dimensions

SOMERTON, MANOR FARM SOMF 94					
Context	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comments	Findings
101	Layer		0.25	Topsoil	
102	Layer		0.25	Earlier Ploughsoil	
103	Fill		0.38	Fill of 105	1 pottery sherd MIA pottery. Total of 4 bone fragments: 3 were bovine and 1 sheep/goat
104	Fill		0.19	Fill of 105	
105	Ditch	1.48	0.56	E-W Ditch	
106	Fill		0.61	Fill of 107	
107	Ditch	0.57+	0.61	E-W Ditch	
108	Fill		0.70	Fill of 109	
109	Ditch	1.19	0.70	E-W Ditch	
110	Fill		0.43	Fill of 111	
111	Ditch	0.61	0.43	E-W Ditch	
112	Findings reference		-	Surface collection of pottery probably from 103	5 pottery sherds MIA pottery
113	Findings reference		-	Surface collection of pottery probably from 108	2 pottery sherds MIA pottery

MIA = middle Iron Age

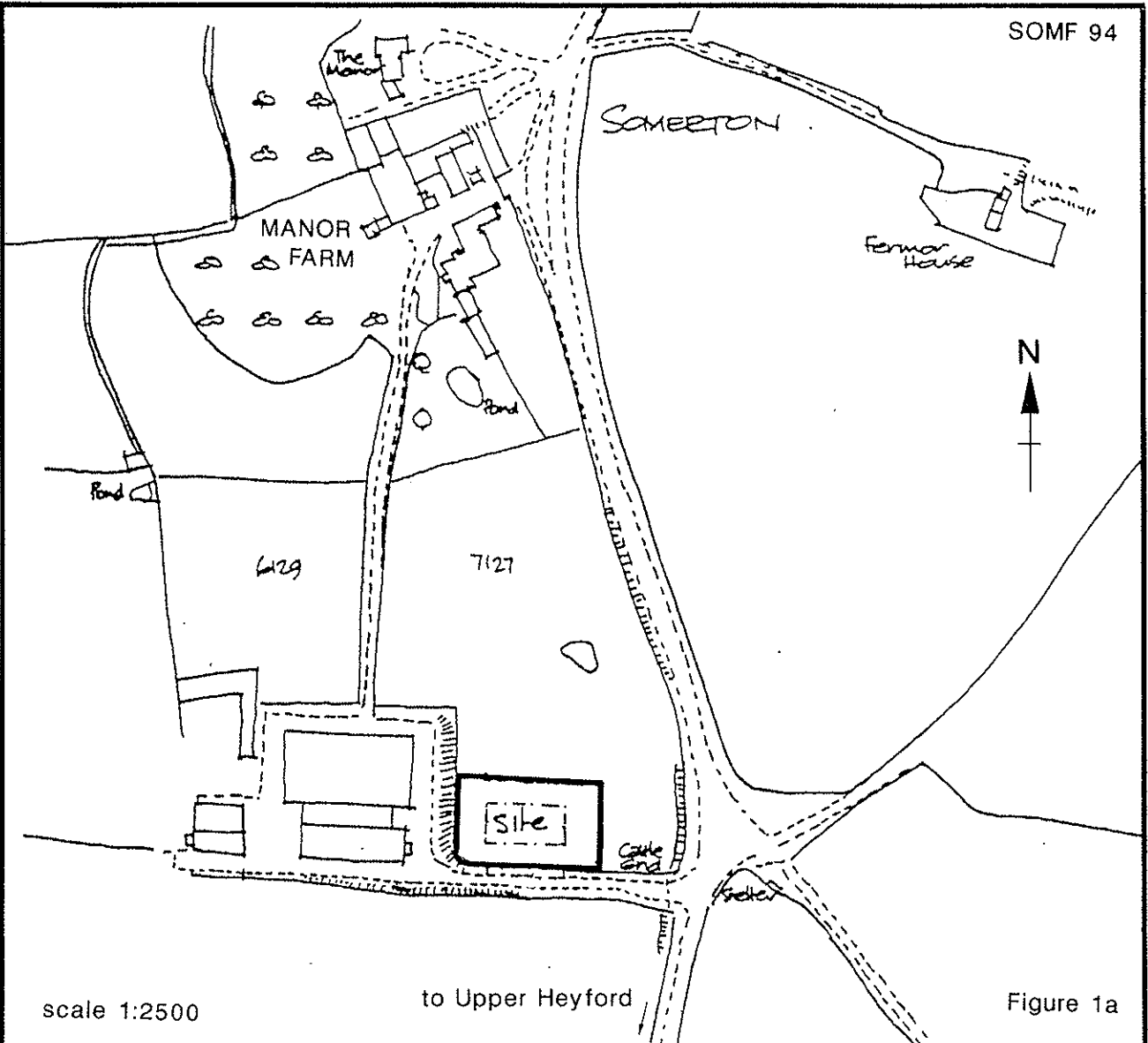


Figure 1a

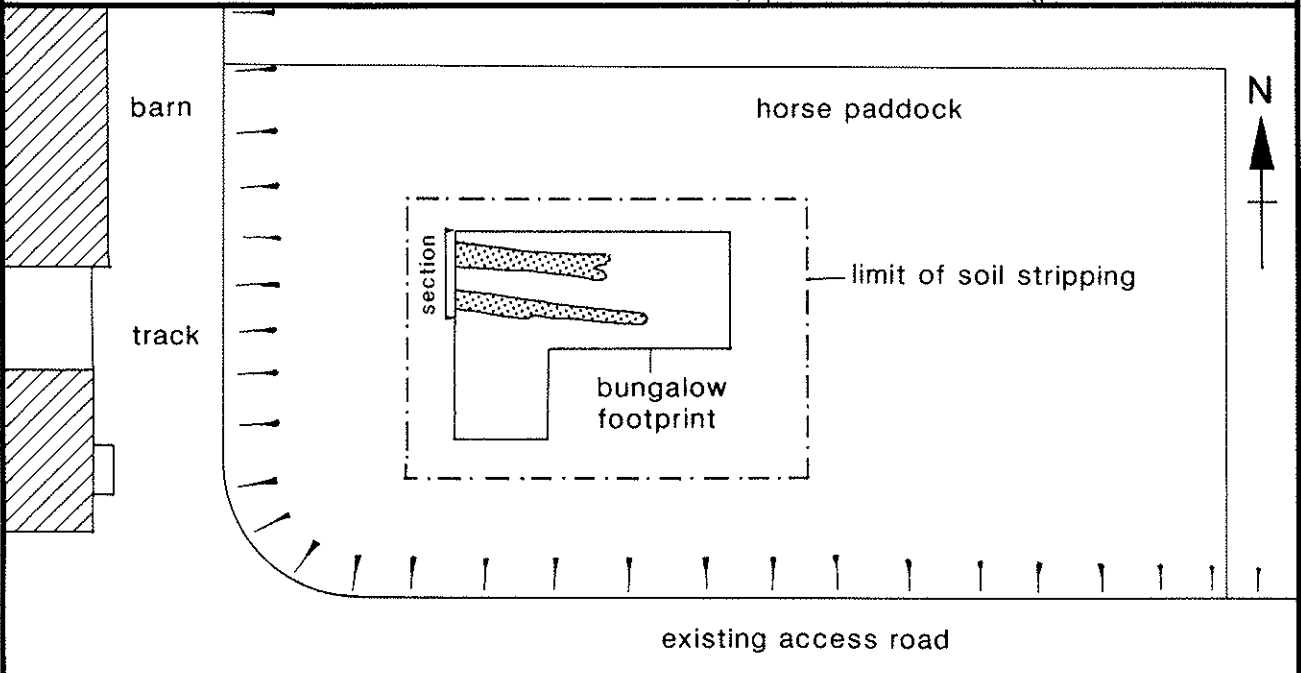
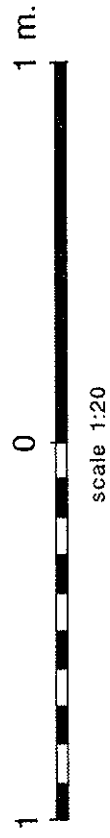
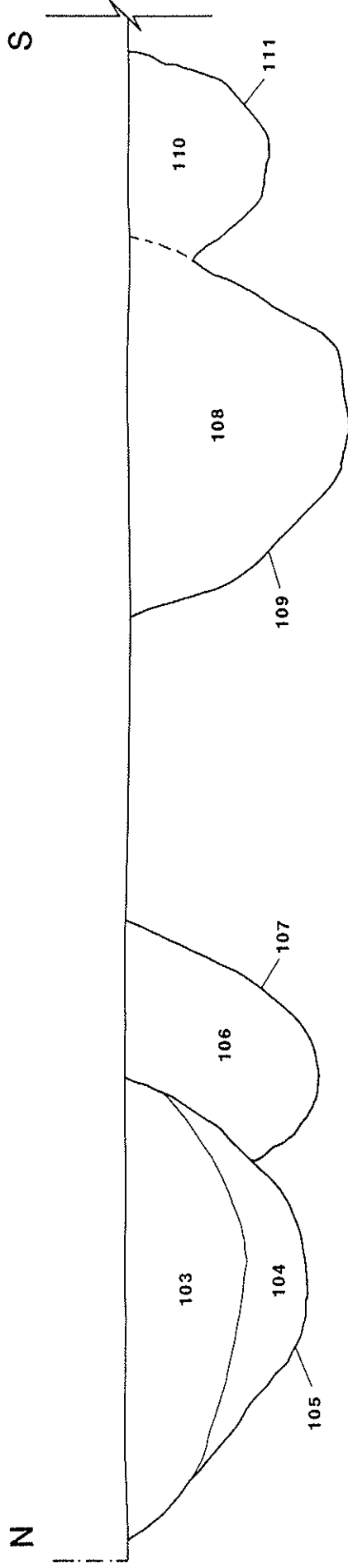


Figure 1b

Site and trench location

section



Trench section

Figure 2



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