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# Land at Church Cottages Buckland, Oxfordshire

NGR SU 3430 9810

Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief Report

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

November 1995

Queensgate Group Ltd

**Land at Church Cottages, Buckland, Oxon.  
Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief**

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# Land at Church Cottages, Buckland, Oxon. Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief

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## Summary

An archaeological evaluation and subsequent watching brief were undertaken on land opposite Church Cottages, Buckland, Oxon. in advance of a residential development at the site comprising the construction of four dwellings. Limited evidence for features and deposits of medieval date was recovered.

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by Queensgate Group Ltd to undertake an archaeological field evaluation on land opposite Church Cottages, Buckland, Oxon. (NGR: SU 3430 9810) in respect of planning permission for the construction of four residential properties on the site.
- 1.2 The development site is located in the centre of the village of Buckland to the east of Buckland Road and due south of the Parish Church of St Mary (see figure 1). It lies at an elevation of approximately 95 m OD and the soils are coarse loam and sandy. The land use immediately prior to the redevelopment was as grassland.
- 1.3 The evaluation was carried out between 21st and 22nd June 1995 in accordance with a brief set by the Oxfordshire Deputy County Archaeologist, to a specification agreed verbally between OAU and the County Archaeological Services.
- 1.4 Further to the initial evaluation, an archaeological watching brief was maintained on the excavation of foundation trenches on the site in August and September 1995. The results of the watching brief are summarised in section 6 below.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 A search of the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record revealed that no known archaeological finds or sites have been recorded in the immediate vicinity of the development area. However, this is likely to be the result of limited archaeological research being undertaken in the area and should not be taken to indicate an absence of archaeological remains. Documentary evidence for the historic settlement is strong.
  - 2.2 The settlement of Buckland dates to at least the late Anglo-Saxon period when it is recorded in AD 957 in the Cartularium Saxonicum (as 'Boclande') and then later in the Domesday Survey of AD 1086. Documentary evidence indicates that a fortified Manor House was erected in c AD 1100 by Hugh de Buckland, High
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Sheriff of Berkshire. A valuation of the Manor made in AD 1260 records 'a certain capital messuage too much in disrepair with one garden and two dovecotes' worth 12 shillings a year.

- 2.3 John Rocque's "Topographical Map of the County of Berkshire" of 1761 appears to indicate buildings in the area of the proposed development. It should be borne in mind that while Rocque's map is a reliable source for large scale topographical features, its accuracy with respect to specific individual buildings need not be.
- 2.4 The first edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1876 shows the development area laid out as a semi-formal garden perhaps related to the surviving church cottages.

### **3 Aims**

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation were as follows:
  - i to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the development area.
  - ii to establish the character and date of any archaeological remains exposed.
  - iii to obtain sufficient information to determine a further strategy for evaluation of any archaeological remains exposed.

### **4 Evaluation Strategy**

- 4.1 Two evaluation trenches c 20 m x 1.6 m, representing a c 2.5% sample of the development area, were excavated. The locations of the two trenches, dictated to an extent by the proposed building footprints, by access requirements and by extant trees on the site, are shown in Fig 2.
- 4.2 Trenches were machine excavated, under archaeological supervision, down to the level of natural subsoil by JCB using a 1.5 m toothless ditching bucket. Surfaces were cleaned by hand to enable the identification of archaeological features cut into the natural. Features were hand excavated to establish as far as possible their form, function and approximate date. Trench plans were made at a scale of 1:100 and excavated sections were recorded at a scale of 1:20. Written records of each context were also made.
- 4.3 A full colour slide and black and white negative film record was made of the evaluation.

## 5 Results (Figs 2 and 3)

### 5.1 *Trench 1* (full details of all contexts, including dimensions, can be found in Appendix A)

5.1.1 Trench 1, 20 m long x 1.6 m wide, was orientated N-S and was located towards the SE of the development area (see Fig 2). The natural subsoil (104) was cut by three roughly circular pits (105, 107 and 109) located towards the centre of the trench. They were of similar dimensions, c 1 m in diameter, and each contained pottery sherds dating to the 12th century.

5.1.2 Towards the S end of the trench were two ditches (116 and 118, see Fig 3 section 1) aligned E-W and ENE-WSW. Both were filled with dark grey clay silt (117 and 119 respectively). These fills were overlaid by layer 114, a brown silty loam similar to the overlying deposit 102, but additionally incorporating large quantities of limestone rubble. This layer was confined to the area cut by the underlying ditches. N of the medieval pits a straight narrow gully (111) ran across the trench from E to W. This feature was considered to have the appearance of a modern service trench, though no pipe or cable was located in it.

5.1.3 All the cut features and the layer 114 overlying the ditch fills appeared to have been sealed by 103, a layer of silty sand c 0.10 m thick. In parts of the trench not affected by cut features this was an interface layer between the natural 104 and the overlying general silt loam layer 102. Neither layer produced any datable finds, but the latter was probably of post-medieval date. While it is possible that some of the cut features were inserted through layer 103 all were sealed by 102, which was overlaid by modern topsoil 101.

### 5.2 *Trench 2*

5.2.1 Trench 2, 17 m long x 1.6 m wide, was aligned N-S and was located towards the NW corner of the development area (see Fig 2). Natural silty sand (204) was located at a level of 97.50 m OD. No archaeological features were identified within the excavated trench. Two amorphous areas of brown clayey sand probably represented tree root disturbance.

## 6 Results of Watching Brief

6.1 The site was visited by OAU personnel on a number of occasions between 22nd August and 11th September to monitor topsoil stripping and the excavation of foundation trenches and service trenches to establish the presence/absence of archaeological deposits within plots 1, 2 and 3. The natural deposit seen within all the plots was yellow sand.

### 6.2 *Plot 1*

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- 6.2.1 Plot 1, 21 m N-S x 13 m E-W, was located in the SW corner of the site. The earliest deposit in this area was a probable medieval horizon (1004) of reddish brown sandy loam with occasional charcoal flecks. Cutting layer 1004 at the N end of the area were three closely spaced E/W aligned ditches filled with mid brown sand silt deposits. The middle one of these (1008) cut the two outer ditches (1006 and 1010). Its fill contained three sherds with a 12th-the century date range. No dating material was recovered from the two earlier ditches.
- 6.2.2 The fills of the medieval ditches were overlaid by a layer of reddish brown sandy loam (1003). This deposit, up to 0.18 m thick, was sealed in turn by 1002, a greyish brown sandy loam containing post-medieval pottery and brick fragments (not retained). Layer 1002 was cut by three ditches or gullies, from N to S 1012, 1016 and 1014 and aligned c E-W, ESE-WNW and SE-NW respectively. All these features extended W of the area but terminated within it. They were filled with grey or brown sandy loams and silts.
- 6.2.3 In the SW corner of the plot was a footing for a brick built greenhouse (1001) set into 1002 and overlaid by topsoil 1000. 1000 and 1001 were removed during machining.

### 6.3 *Plot 2*

- 6.3.1 Plot 2, 20 m long x 10 m wide, was located in the NW corner of the site. The sequence of layers in this area was similar to that seen elsewhere. Natural subsoil 2004 was overlaid by a brown sandy loam horizon (2003) c 0.08 m thick which was overlaid by grey brown sandy loam layers 2002 and 2001 beneath the modern topsoil 2000. No archaeological features were identified in this area and no finds were recovered from it.

### 6.4 *Plot 3*

- 6.4.1 Plot 3, 21 m N-S x 11 m E-W, was located on the E of the site. The natural subsoil (3004) was overlaid by a reddish brown sandy loam (3003) up to 0.12 m thick. This layer contained charcoal flecks.
- 6.4.2 Cutting layer 3003 within the southern baulk was 3007, a circular pit measuring c 0.58 m across x 0.36 m deep. 3007 was filled by 3008, a mid brown silty clay with charcoal flecking, which contained ten pottery sherds dated 12th-15th century. The fill of 3007 was overlaid by 3002, a grey brown sandy loam up to 0.23 m thick which extended across the trench. This was cut by a c NW-SE aligned modern service trench (3009) which ran across the width of the site.
- 6.4.1 A stone foundation (3006) for a modern structure was cut through layers from 3002 downwards and obscured the natural subsoil in the NE corner of the plot. Superficial layers 3001 and 3000 clearly postdated this structure. 3006 was subsequently removed by the contractors' excavation and no features were identified beneath its former position.

## 7 The Pottery

7.1 A small assemblage of pottery totalling 43 sherds was retrieved from the excavated evaluation trenches and during the watching brief. This is summarised in the table below.

Context	No. sherds	Fabric	Date and Comments
106	3	OXAQ	Late C12-early C15, very coarse
108	1 2	OXR OXAQ	C10-early C11, St Neots type Late C12-early C15, (1 cooking pot rim late C12-early C13 form)
110	1	OXAQ	Late C12-early C15
114	1 3	OXAC OXAQ	Mid C11-early C13 Late C12-early C15, (1 cooking pot rim C13-early C14 type)
201	2		C19-20, creamware & stoneware
203	1 3	OXAQ	Late C12-early C15 C17-19, red & transfer printed wares
Trench 2 unstrat.	10		C19-20, redwares and stoneware
1004	1 1	OXBB	Late C13-15 C18-20, redware
1009	1 2	OXBK OXBB	Late C12-C14 Late C13-mid C15
1013	1		C16-18 glazed red earthenware
3008	10	OXAQ?	Late C12-early C15, possibly OXBF

Table 1: Medieval and post-medieval pottery by context

7.2 The medieval assemblage was dominated by fabric OXAQ, thought to originate in East Wiltshire (Mellor 1995, 100), though not all sherds assigned to this fabric had the limestone inclusions which are one of its characteristic features. OXAQ was supplemented by OXBB, Minety type ware. Single sherds of OXAC, OXBK and OXR were also present. The late Saxon date of the last of these, St Neots type ware, is of interest, though it was occurred residually with later material. Only two vessels, both cooking pots, were represented by rims.

Reference: Mellor, M, 1995, A synthesis of Middle and Late Saxon, Medieval and early Post-Medieval pottery in the Oxford region, *Oxoniensia* 59 (for 1994), 13-217



## 8 Discussion and Conclusions

- 8.1 Most of the trenches and observed house plots showed a similar sequence of deposits, in which the natural subsoil was overlain by a deposit, typically c 0.10 m thick, seen as an interface between the natural and overlying material (103, 203, 1004, 2003 and 3003). Such a deposit may represent an episode of ploughing on the site. It was generally undated, but in both 203 and 1004 medieval sherds were associated with post-medieval pottery. It is quite likely that the post-medieval material was intrusive in these layers, but this cannot be assumed automatically.
- 8.2 Most if not all the features containing medieval pottery were cut from directly above or below the possible plough deposit. In some cases the relationship of cuts to these layers was ambiguous. In Trench 1 the majority of features were recorded as underneath 103, though the recorded sections indicate a degree of doubt about this, except in the case of the ditches 116 and 118. Gully 111 was undated but was perhaps more likely to be medieval than later, as at one time thought. Cut features in Plots 1 and 3 were considered to postdate the possible plough layer. It is unclear if this indicates two different phases of medieval activity. Indeed, if the post-medieval material from the layer is taken at face value it would indicate that the later phase of cut features was also of post-medieval date, despite the consistent medieval assemblages in its' fills.
- 8.3 On balance, it seems most likely that the possible plough soil was of medieval date. It was predated in Trench 1 by at least two features, 116 and 118, neither of which produced dating material from its fill. They need not necessarily have been medieval. The character of these features is uncertain: described as ditches, they did not appear in the adjacent Plot 3 nor in the more distant Plot 1. They either terminated just short of or curved very considerably away from Plot 3, or perhaps were elongated discrete features rather than truly linear ones. The stone layer (114) sealing their fills then underlay the possible plough deposit 103. It produced four medieval sherds, not necessarily later in date than 13th century, which therefore provide a terminus post quem for that layer and perhaps imply an earlier medieval date for the underlying 'ditches'.
- 8.4 Pit 105 was thought to have cut layer 114 (and probably 103 above it), although this was not certain. This, the other two pits in Trench 1 and 3007 in Plot 3, form a coherent group of features for which a later medieval date is quite possible, despite the residual inclusion of a late Saxon sherd in the fill of pit 107. West of these features a group of E-W ditches, of broadly the same phase, must have terminated or turned (perhaps to the S) between Plot 1 and Trench 1, where they were not seen. In view of the apparent absence of medieval features both N and S of this alignment it is possible that this sequence of ditches marks a boundary of an agricultural or horticultural area in the medieval period, rather than serving to define an area of domestic activity.
- 8.5 The medieval features in Plots 1 and 3 and in Trench 1 were all sealed by a thick deposit of grey-brown loam (102, 202, 1003, 2002 and 3002). This deposit was consistently removed by machine, but some post-medieval finds were noted (see above) and there is little doubt that it must belong to the 15th century at the earliest, on the basis of the dating of pottery sealed by the layer. This deposit was cut by three ditches of uncertain function in Plot 1, by modern foundations and

by service trench 3009 in Plot 3.

- 8.6 In summary, the site sequence appears to consist of a possible early medieval phase, represented by two features in Trench 1 and hinted at by a sherds of residual late Saxon pottery, perhaps followed by an episode of ploughing. This was succeeded by a phase of pit and ditch digging, broadly assignable to the 14th-15th century. Thereafter there was sporadic post-medieval and modern activity. This has been locally destructive, and the possible medieval plough soil has suffered some contamination, but it is apparent that, where not truncated by 19th century activity, a medieval horizon may survive.
- 8.7 The density and distribution of medieval features suggest that the site was relatively peripheral to the focus of activity in the village. This may have lain further south and east. The location of the church, to the north of the present site, may have had more to do with its relationship to a sequence of manor houses, the latest phase of which is represented by the present (old) Manor House, than to the village.

Ric Tyler, Duncan Wood & Paul Booth  
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## Appendix A

### Table of Contexts

Context No.	Context Type	Depth	Dimensions in Plan	Comments
101	Layer	c.0.25m	n/a	Topsoil: Highly compacted mid grey/brown silt loam with occasional degraded limestone inclusions. Extends over whole trench.
102	Layer	c.0.20m	n/a	Subsoil: Highly compacted mid grey/brown silt loam with frequent degraded limestone inclusions and occasional charcoal fragments. Extends over whole trench.
103	Layer	c.0.10m	n/a	Subsoil: Mixed layer of fairly well compacted mid grey silty sand, pale orange mottling and occasional beige clayey patches. Extends over whole trench.
104	Layer	n/a	n/a	Natural: Mid orange silty sand with pale brown mottling. Extends over whole trench.
105	Cut			Pit.
106	Fill of [105]			Mid-dark grey/brown silty sand, clayey in parts, degraded limestone inclusions and occasional larger frags. Frequent charcoal flecks.
107	Cut	0.40m	(max. vis.) 0.94m N/S x 0.49m E/W.	Pit.
108	Fill of [107]			Mid-dark grey/brown silty sand, clayey in parts, degraded limestone inclusions and occasional larger frags. (some burnt) pale brown-orange sandy lenses.
109	Cut		(max. vis.) 1.00m E/W x 1.20m N/S.	Pit.
110	Fill of [109]			Compacted mid grey silty sand, clayey in parts with small limestone fragments.
111	Cut	0.25m	0.25m N/S x > 1.60m E/W	Linear feature, mod. pipe trench ?. No pipe in situ.
112	Upper fill of [111]	0.13m		Mid grey/brown slightly silty sand occasional degraded limestone inclusions.
113	Cut			Number void - part of 116.
114	Layer	0.12		Concentration of limestone rubble.
115	Lower fill of [111]	0.12m		Mid grey silty sand, pale brown sandy lenses.
116	Cut	0.60m	2.00m N/S x 1.60m E/W	Linear ditch.

117	Fill of [116]			Dark grey/black clayey silt, brown sandy lenses.
118	Cut	1.00m	2.56m NW/SE x 3.60m NE/SW	Linear ditch.
119	Fill of [118]			Dark grey/black clayey silt, brown sandy lenses.
201	Layer	0.19m - 0.33m	n/a	Topsoil.
202	Layer	0.25m- 0.45m	n/a	Subsoil.
203	Layer	c.0.15m	n/a	Subsoil.
204	Layer	n/a	n/a	Natural.

Context no.	Context Type	Depth	Dimensions in plan	Comments
1000	Layer	0.24m	n/a	Topsoil.
1001	Layer	n/a	0.80m N/S x 5.00m E/W	Footing for greenhouse. Depth not determined as it extends below excavated level.
1002	Layer	0.3	n/a	Post-Medieval soil horizon.
1003	Layer	0.18	n/a	Subsoil.
1004	Layer	0.20	n/a	Medieval soil horizon.
1005	Layer	n/a	n/a	Natural.
1006	Cut	0.16m	0.75m N/S	E/W aligned ditch running across whole site.
1007	Fill of [1006]			Sandy silt fill of ditch.
1008	Cut	0.45m	0.60m N/S	E/W aligned ditch running across whole site.
1009	Fill of [1008]			Sandy silt fill of ditch.
1010	Cut	0.38m	0.80m N/S	E/W aligned ditch running across whole site.
1011	Fill of [1010]			Silty sand fill of ditch.
1012	Cut	0.12m	0.80m N/S x 6.00m E/W	Modern ditch.
1013	Fill of [1012]			Sandy loam fill of ditch.
1014	Cut	0.70m	2.00m N/S x 12.00m E/W	Modern ditch.
1015	Fill of [1014]			Sandy silt fill of ditch.
1016	Cut	0.30m	0.94m N/S x 7.50m E/W	Modern ditch.

1017	Fill of [1016]			Sandy silt fill of ditch.
2000	Layer	0.16m	n/a	Topsoil.
2001	Layer	0.10m	n/a	Post-Medieval soil horizon.
2002	Layer	0.20m	n/a	Subsoil.
2003	Layer	0.08m	n/a	Medieval soil horizon.
2004	Layer	n/a	n/a	Natural.
3000	Layer	0.22m	n/a	Topsoil.
3001	Layer	0.16m	n/a	Post-Medieval soil horizon.
3002	Layer	0.23m	n/a	subsoil.
3003	Layer	0.12m	n/a	Medieval soil horizon.
3004	Layer	n/a	n/a	Natural.
3005	Cut		5.00m E/W x 12.00m N/S	Foundation trench cut.
3006	Fill of [3005]			Post-Modern structure.
3007	Cut	0.36m	0.58m N/S	Circular Pit.
3008	Fill of [3007]			Silty clay fill of ditch.
3009	Cut	0.24m	0.90m N/S	E/W aligned ditch running across whole trench.
3010	Fill of [3009]			Sandy clay fill of ditch.

## Appendix B

### List of Sources

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#### *Archival Sources*

Centre for Oxfordshire Studies

Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record

#### *Cartographic sources*

John Rocque's 'Topographical Map of the County of Berkshire', 1761.

Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:2500 map, 1876.

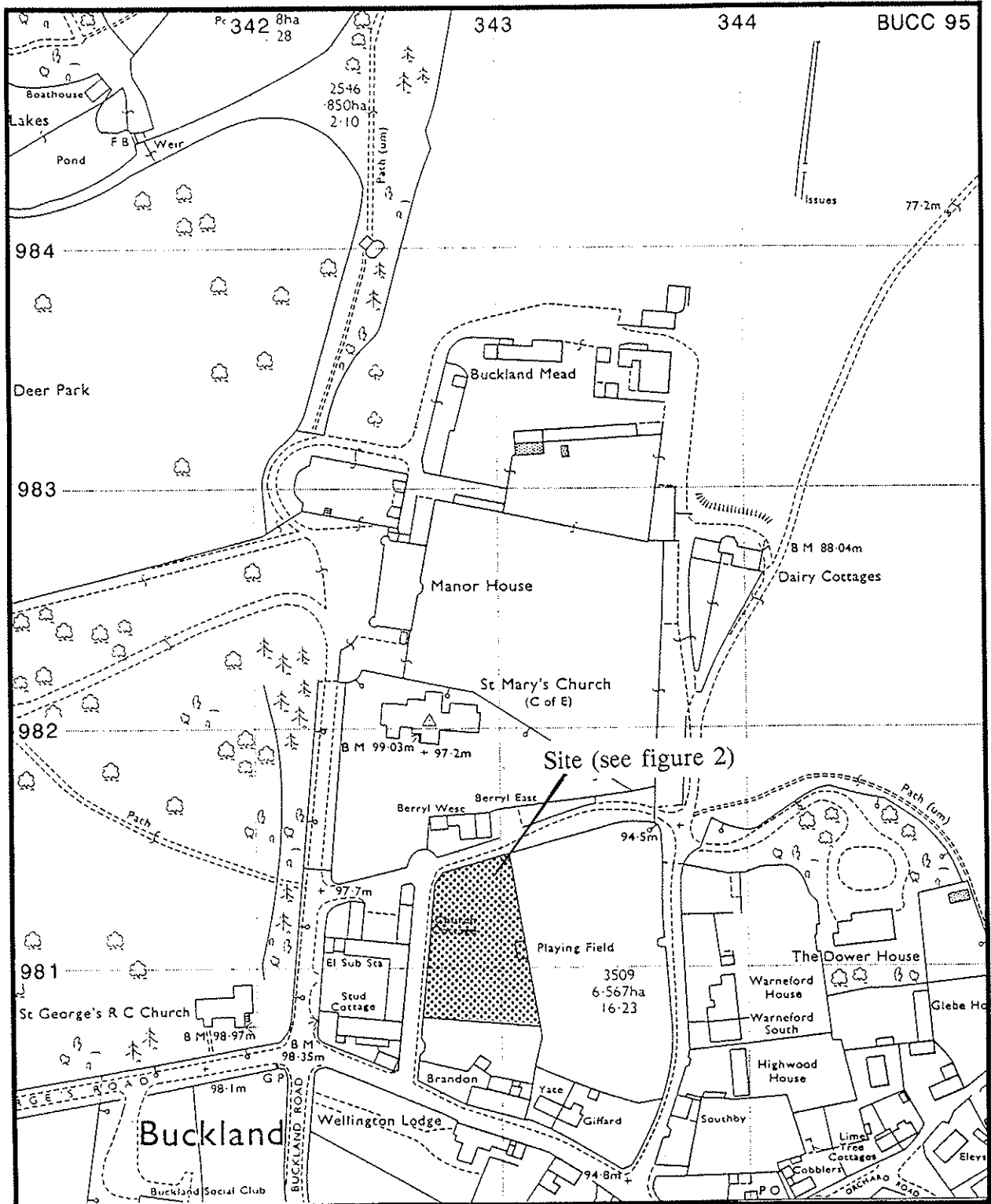
Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 1:2500 map, 1910.

#### *Published Sources*

Victoria County History (Berks) iv, 1972, 453-460.

Wright, ASN, 1966. *The History of Buckland in the County of Berkshire*.

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Based on Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1974.  
 Used by permission of the Controller of Her  
 Majesty's Stationary Office. Crown Copyright.

Figure 1: Site Location Plan

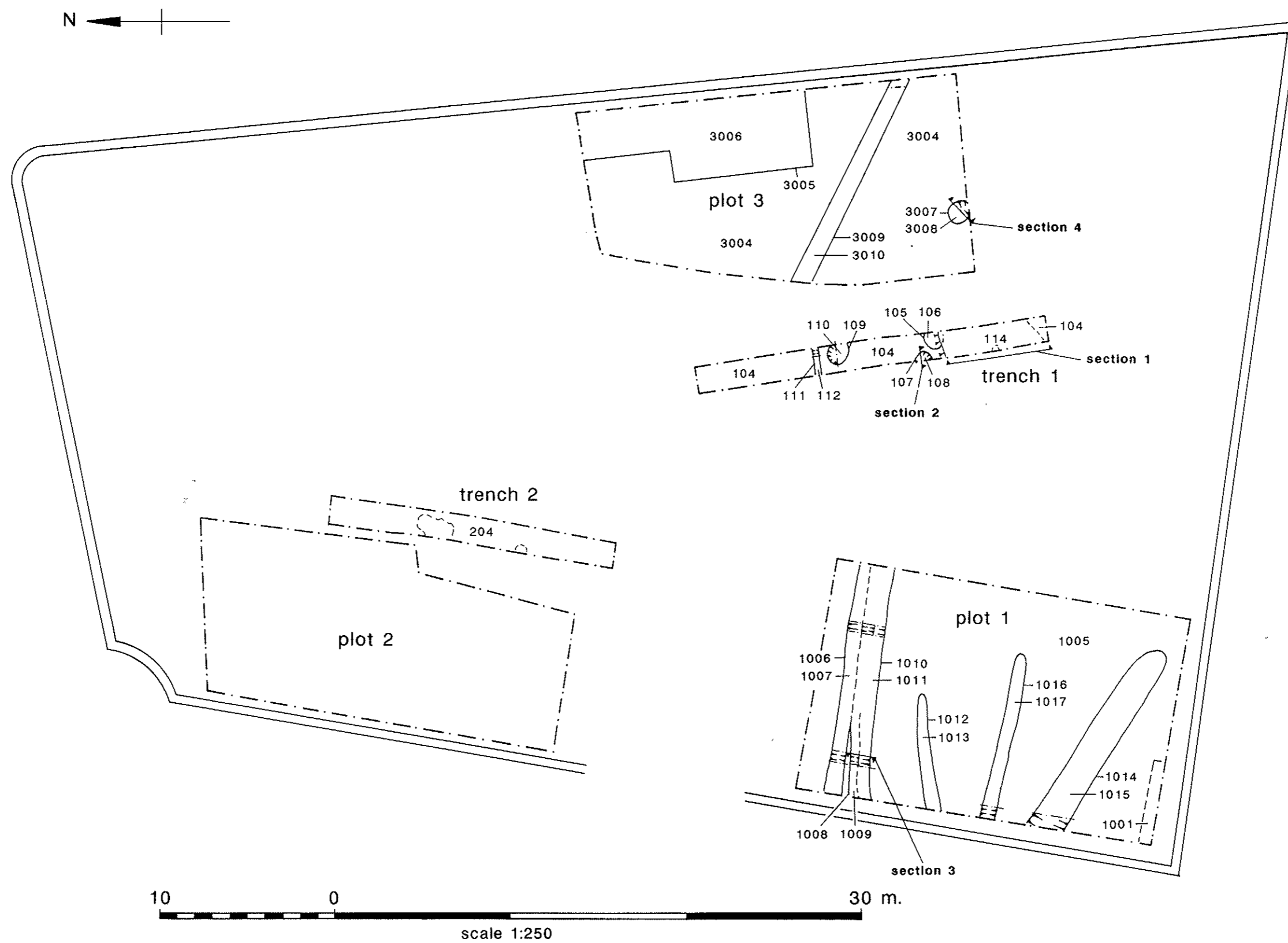
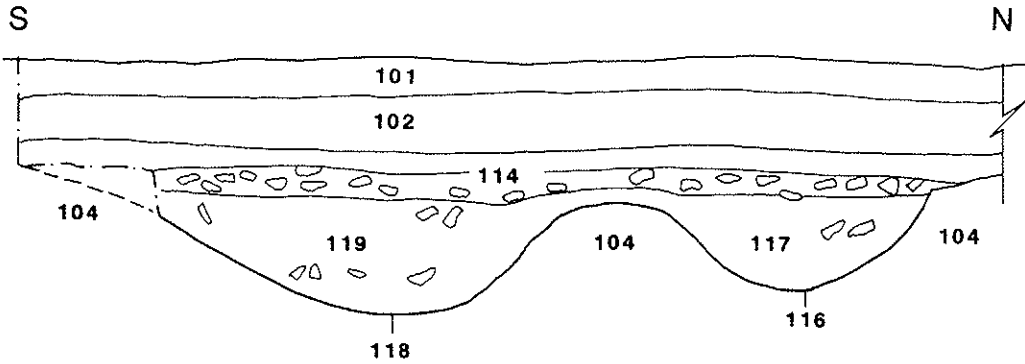


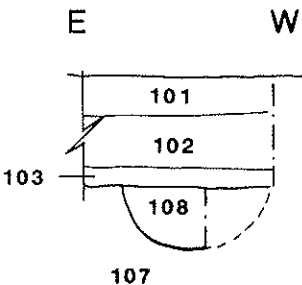
figure 2



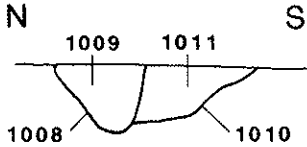
section 1 ditch 116 and 118



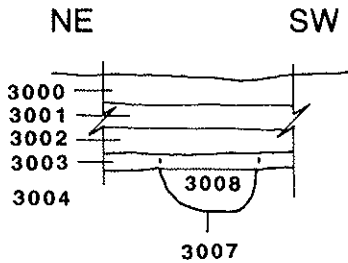
section 2 pit 107



section 3 ditch 1008 and 1010

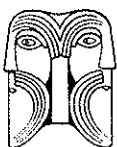


section 4 pit 3007



scale 1:50

figure 3



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