

# The Walkdens, Ashwell, Hertfordshire



## Archaeological Evaluation Report



October 2013

**Client: Robert Lombardelli Partnership**

OA East Report No: 1538

OASIS No: oxfordar3-161792

NGR: TL 27356 39711

## **The Walkdens, Ashwell, Hertfordshire**

*Archaeological Evaluation*

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*Report Date: October 2013*

**Report Number:** 1538  
**Site Name:** The Walkdens, Ashwell  
**HER Event No:** n/a  
**Date of Works:** October 2013  
**Client Name:** Robert Lombardelli Partnership  
**Client Ref:**  
**Planning Ref:**  
**Grid Ref:** TL 27356 39711  
**Site Code:** HXT ASH 13  
**Finance Code:** HXT ASH 13  
**Receiving Body:** North Hertfordshire Museums Service

**Accession No:**

**Prepared by:** Tom Phillips  
**Position:** Project Officer  
**Date:** October 2013

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**Position:** Project Manager  
**Date:** October 2013  
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## Summary

*Between 8th – 9th October 2013 Oxford Archaeology East conducted an evaluation on land to the rear of The Walkdens, Ashwell, Hertfordshire. The site was approximately 0.5 ha in size and the evaluation comprised six trenches totalling 180m. Geophysics had previously been carried out at the site and had identified a Bronze Age barrow, approximately 25m in diameter, which is one of three located within the field. Trench 1 was positioned across the diameter of the barrow; in both excavated sections the ring-ditch was shallow, measuring a maximum of 0.2m deep. As a result, Trench 6 was opened, to determine whether the ditch was a similar depth to the east. Surprisingly, the ring-ditch was deeper in Trench 6, measuring 0.5m deep. No burial or human remains were identified, either within, or associated with, the barrow. A small undated pit or hollow was excavated inside the area of the barrow, close to its southern edge. Nearby, a similar feature was only partially exposed and remained unexcavated. The only other features encountered during the evaluation were two tree throws in Trenches 2 and 4.*

*Finds were rare, totalling two small fragments of animal bone (one cattle tooth and one pig tooth, 32g), a small heavily patinated flint blade of Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic date, which had broken in antiquity (1g) and a single tiny sherd of pot (1g), all from the barrow ring-ditch in Trench 6. Three bulk samples were taken to assess the quality of preservation of plant remains and their potential to provide useful data. Plant remains are sparse and are preserved by carbonization (charring) caused by exposure to fire. The better preserved grains can be tentatively identified as a prehistoric hulled wheat, either emmer or spelt.*





## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was conducted at The Walkdens, Ashwell, Hertfordshire (TL 27356 39711). The site is located in North Hertfordshire District, on the eastern side of the village of Ashwell, to the south of Ashwell Street and to the rear of The Walkdens – a cul de sac (Fig. 1). The site covers c. 0.5 ha within the northern corner of a large field, which is currently under arable cultivation. It is bordered by a hedgerow/trees to the north and by houses to the east.
- 1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Instone of Hertfordshire County Council, supplemented by a Specification prepared by OA East.
- 1.1.3 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *National Planning Policy Framework* (Department for Communities and Local Government March 2012). The results will enable decisions to be made by Hertfordshire County Council, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.
- 1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The underlying solid geology is chalk. No superficial deposits are recorded (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).
- 1.2.2 Ashwell parish is located along a chalk belt which is part of the Chiltern Hills and runs from the south-west of England in a north-easterly direction to East Anglia. The village is located on a scarp of this chalk belt, on a spring line where the chalk of the hills meets the impermeable clay of the lowlands. Ashwell Springs can be found 250m to the north-west of the site, to the north of the High Street and west of Springhead where they form the source of the River Rhee.
- 1.2.3 The site lies on a north-east facing slope (Plate 5), ranging from approximately 60m OD in the north to 64.5m OD in the south.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site was been examined in detail in the desk-based assessment (Clover 2013) and is summarised here, drawing mainly on the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) and the Historic Environment Record for Hertfordshire, for which a 0.5km radius search was conducted (Fig. 2).

#### ***Neolithic (c. 3500 – c. 2000 BC) and Bronze Age (c. 2000 – c. 800 BC)***

- 1.3.2 Ashwell parish has been settled, apparently densely, since the Neolithic. Around the village, there is a great deal of evidence for burial on the higher ground in the form of

cropmarks of ploughed-out Neolithic long barrows and a plethora of Late Neolithic/Bronze Age round barrows. The long barrows are placed where they would be visible against the skyline from below. Most of the ring-ditches are in similar positions, clustering near three of the earlier long barrows and sometimes in 'cemeteries' (Thompson 2002, 2). One possible long barrow lies within the Search Area to the south-west of the site (HER 2360) and shows as a very clearly-defined oval cropmark on aerial photographs.

- 1.3.3 There are seven ring-ditches within the search area, all south of Ashwell Street and showing on aerial photographs as cropmarks (HER 2469, 2468, 2424, 4717, 6113, 7687, 7911). These are likely to be barrows of probable Late Neolithic or earlier Bronze Age date. The two closest to the site are HER 2468 and 2469, with ring-ditch 2469 just 40m from the western boundary of the site. The EUS casts some doubt on whether all the cropmarks attributed to being long barrows and round barrows are genuine (Thompson 2002, 2).
- 1.3.4 A large group of prehistoric and later finds found in the garden of 'The Steppes' near Ashwell Springs includes 258 Neolithic and Bronze Age flints (HER 6979). These finds may be placed deposits, suggesting that the springs were a special place of possible religious significance for several centuries.
- 1.3.5 An archaeological evaluation carried out at Station Road in 2001, on what was to become The Walkdens, revealed the terminal ends of two parallel ditches (HER 11397; Ashworth 2001). Although of Roman date they contained residual worked flint flakes of probable Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date.

#### ***Iron Age (c. 800 BC – AD 43)***

- 1.3.6 An archaeological evaluation carried out at Station Road in 2001 revealed the terminal ends of two parallel ditches containing Late Iron Age to 2nd century AD pottery and a small amount of animal bone (HER 11397; Ashworth 2001). This is the only Iron Age evidence from within the Search Area, although locally there are historic monuments and cropmarks of this date.
- 1.3.7 Arbury Banks Iron Age hillfort, now largely removed by agriculture, is located 1.5km to the south-west. Medium-sized univallate hillforts such as Arbury Banks are generally thought to have been built as stock enclosures, redistribution centres, places of refuge or permanent settlements (Forde-Johnston 1976, 51). Excavations in the mid 19th century showed evidence of occupation within the banks of the hillfort, and also for lynchets and cropmarks outside it. Arbury Banks may have functioned as a 'special place' for the wider population of the time, a centre of the territorial unit in the eastern Chilterns (Thompson 2002, 3).
- 1.3.8 By the mid 1st century BC the focus of this territory had shifted from Arbury to Baldock, where a settlement with religious as well as domestic functions grew up (Thompson 2002, 4).
- 1.3.9 Through this organised landscape ran the Icknield Way, a term applied to what was probably a series of long-distance routes extending south-west to north-east along the chalk from Wessex as far as Norfolk and Suffolk. In this area the A505 from Letchworth to Royston roughly follows one possible course. In Ashwell, the broadly parallel routes of Ashwell Street and High Street may have been used as seasonal alternatives.

### ***Roman (AD 43 – 410)***

- 1.3.10 Ashwell did not develop into a Roman town; the nearest small town to Ashwell in this period being Baldock. Cropmark evidence shows that during the Roman period it was a well-organised rural area (Thompson 2002, 4). However, until systematic fieldwork is carried out, there remain unanswered questions as to how this area developed.
- 1.3.11 Approximately 0.75km to the north of the evaluation area is the site of a Roman villa (<http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results>), while 1km to the north-east, a Late Iron Age and Romano-British cemetery has been excavated in a chalk pit at Guilden Morden (English Heritage Pastcape No. 365913, <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway>). Both sites are in Cambridgeshire.
- 1.3.12 Finds of Roman coins and pottery around the Ashwell Springs (HER 2973, 6979 and 4848), and towards the confluence of streams north of Ashwell End, have been recorded on the HER but they provide an incomplete picture and the nature of activity here is obscure (Thompson 2002, 4). Outside the Search Area many other Roman coins have been found in Ashwell and Ashwell End, some of which formed part of hoards.
- 1.3.13 The site is located to the south of Ashwell Street, which is marked on old Ordnance Survey maps as a Roman Road and sometimes called 'Ashwell Street Way' (HER 4692). The road is ancient and, as mentioned in Section 1.3.9, may have been one element of the Icknield Way during the Iron Age. Nothing Roman has been recorded from the site itself but its location alongside a possible Roman or earlier routeway makes it a likely location for settlement or possibly burial.
- 1.3.14 An archaeological evaluation carried out adjacent to the site at Station Road in 2001 revealed the terminal ends of two parallel ditches (HER 11397; Ashworth 2001). They contained Late Iron Age to 2nd century AD pottery, a small amount of animal bone and one oyster shell. All the finds were small and abraded and were interpreted as being rubbish from nearby occupation; there were also five undated pits. Another Roman ditch and an undated pit was recorded at 22 Lucas Lane Ashwell, during an archaeological evaluation and later monitoring (Jones 2011a and 2011b; HER 17600).
- 1.3.15 The site of the 'Senuna Hoard' is located 1.5km to the north-west of the site at Bluegates Farm, Ashwell End, to the south of the River Rhee. This was a major discovery made by a metal detectorist in 2002 comprising a hoard of 3rd to 4th century gold and silver objects, including votive leaves decorated with the image of a goddess, a silver figurine of a similar goddess and a gold brooch with a central intaglio of a lion. Several of the plaques have inscriptions that show they were dedicated to a previously unknown goddess named Senuna, who may have been a water goddess local to the region. Limited excavations on the site revealed a chalk surface surrounding a hollow which was full of earlier Roman objects dating to the 1st and 2nd centuries. Hearths and debris around the hollow are thought to be evidence of ritual feasting. The Late Roman goddess plaques and jewellery are thought to have been a special deposit, possibly originally dedicated in a temple (HER 11726). Although well outside the Search Area this find serves to demonstrate the importance of the area that was to become 'Ashwell', and sheds some light perhaps on the Roman finds near Ashwell Springs. To quote the EUS 'the possibility of a religious focus centred on the springs needs to be considered' (Thompson 2002, 5).

### ***Anglo-Saxon (AD 410 – 1066)***

- 1.3.16 An inhumation burial was found in the field to the south-west of the site (HER 456) and was seen by a representative from Ashwell Museum. This appears to be an isolated burial and the date is unknown as there were no accompanying grave goods. The NGR is not precise, but the HER puts it 300m to the south-west of the site and very close to the cropmark of a small rectangular enclosure (HER 2319). The HER tentatively dates the burial as possibly Anglo-Saxon; buried before the practice of inhumation within church graveyards. The burial was not within or near a ring-ditch and therefore seems unlikely to be Bronze Age, although this possibility cannot be ruled out.
- 1.3.17 The nearest known Anglo-Saxon inhumation burials are from outside the Search Area at the Shire Bank; Slip End and at Odsey – all located at the edges of the parish.
- 1.3.18 The rectangular enclosure (HER 2319) shows up as an extremely well-defined cropmark with angular corners and measuring c. 25m x 16m. It is visible on certain aerial photographs which were viewed at the HER. No internal features and no entrance are visible and it remains undated. Although the enclosure is in a prominent position on the edge of the rising ground overlooking Ashwell Street and the spring, it is unclear whether it is associated with the burial HER 456 or indeed if it is ancient at all. Historic maps do not show any former buildings where the cropmark is located.
- 1.3.19 The EUS gives an account of Ashwell's later Anglo-Saxon archaeology. In 1086 Ashwell was described as a borough - a planned town with rights given to its burgesses, and intended as a place of trade. It was not a Norman foundation, and its origin is usually assigned to the 9th century. Those boroughs established in the 9th and 10th centuries often had a defensive as well as a trading function, but there is no sign of any defences at Ashwell. The town is more likely to have been founded after the Danish attacks, in the later 10th or early 11th century. It would have been laid out by the owner of the existing Saxon estate for purposes of trade. The advantages of the location must have appeared greater than they do now. The source of the river Rhee is one obvious factor as is the road system.
- 1.3.20 It is possible that the curving boundaries of Mill Street and the rectory grounds represent the original Saxon estate centre of Ashwell Bury, with a timber hall possibly located where the rectory stands now, with a timber church, the watermill, and the springs adjacent. This is at the east end of the High Street. At the other end of the High Street the 'west manor', Westbury, also has Saxon origins and has yielded Saxo-Norman pottery. Both of these estates are likely to be earlier in date than the borough. The planned town consists of the slightly sinuous High Street running from one estate to the other, with an open market area at the western corner of Mill Street. The properties along the High Street consisted of a line of sizeable tofts. Back Street provided rear access to the properties on the south side. Many of these tofts are larger than the usual narrow burgage plot seen in medieval towns (Thompson 2002, 5).
- 1.3.21 Anglo-Saxon and medieval pottery, including a good deal of Saxo-Norman pottery was found in the garden of 'The Steppes', near Ashwell Springs (HER 6979) and this area is shown as near the site of a Late Saxon or medieval farmstead in the EUS (Thompson 2002, fig 6).
- 1.3.22 The site appears to be just outside the borough centre and therefore it is unclear what the usage of the land was during this period.

### ***Medieval (AD 1066 – c. 1500)***

- 1.3.23 A summary of Ashwell in the middle ages and its surviving medieval elements can be found in the EUS and will only be summarised here. In 1086 the borough of Ashwell was a thriving market town. Following the laying out of Baldock in the 1140s and the foundation of its market, the road from Baldock to Royston became the preferred line of the Icknield Way and Ashwell was bypassed. In 1300 Ashwell's market was still flourishing, but the other market towns gradually overtook it (Thompson 2002, 7).
- 1.3.24 Ashwell was a nucleated village surrounded by two open fields, to the south and north. There are also a number of hamlets or 'ends' within the parish which had their origins in Late Saxon or medieval times. There is no evidence for medieval archaeology within the site itself and the EUS shows this area as part of a medieval open field, to the rear of tofts backing onto Ashwell Street (Thompson 2002, fig. 6).
- 1.3.25 To the south of the site and outside the Search Area are several rabbit warrens or 'pillow mounds', the nearest being 0.7km south-west of the site.

### ***Post-medieval (c. AD 1500 – c. 1900)***

- 1.3.26 At Ashwell Springs and outcropping elsewhere in the parish is a band of hard chalk - Totternhoe Stone - which can be used for building. Chalk from the pits was also converted into lime to use to fertilise the fields. A chalk pit and lime kiln can be seen to the south of Ashwell Street on historic maps (HER 11359). Others are recorded on the HER outside the Search Area and there is a further chalk pit that was recorded during archaeological investigations at Station Road, on the site that was to become The Walkdens (HER 11397). All these quarries line Ashwell Street.
- 1.3.27 A cropmark of a former postmill is recorded on the HER south of Ashwell Street (HER 4457) and seems to be in a different place to the one shown on the Ordnance Survey 1st Edition map of 1877. These are located on rising ground to the south-west of the site.

## **1.4 Acknowledgements**

- 1.4.1 The project was commissioned by Sam Jarman of Robert Lombardelli Partnership on behalf of the client, Origin Homes. Andy Instone of Hertfordshire County Council monitored the archaeological evaluation. The project was managed by James Drummond-Murray, while the fieldwork was undertaken by Dave Brown, Toby Knight, Jemima Woolverton and the author. The GPS survey was conducted by Dave Brown. The author would also like to thank Richard Slatter, who captured the aerial photo reproduced on the front cover and in Plate 6



## 2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The objective of this archaeological evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The Brief required that a 5% sample of the site be evaluated by targeted trenching.
- 2.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a tracked 360° excavator using a 2.2m wide toothless ditching bucket.
- 2.2.3 The site survey was carried out by Dave Brown using a Leica 1200 GPS system.
- 2.2.4 Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. The surface of the field over the barrow was also metal detected.
- 2.2.5 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.
- 2.2.6 Three bulk soil samples were collected to investigate the possible survival of micro and macro botanical remains (see Appendix B).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The results begin with a summary of the geophysical survey, followed by the fieldwork results, starting with the earliest deposit in each. Trench and context details can be found in Appendix A.

### 3.2 Geophysical Survey

- 3.2.1 The full geophysical survey report can be found in Appendix C. A gradiometry survey was carried out on the site using a Bartington Grad 601 dual fluxgate gradiometer with DL601 data logger, to determine the presence/absence of some classes of sub-surface archaeological features (e.g. pits, ditches, kilns, and occasionally stone walls). The results can be seen in Figure 3.
- 3.2.2 Generally, a series of isolated individual anomalies were detected close to the north-west boundary that reflect areas of modern ferrous remains such as brick and tile fragments as well as horse shoes, which lie just below or on the surface of the plough soil (Fig. 4, pink lines). A sub-circular positive magnetic anomaly was detected towards the south-eastern end of the survey area representing the presence of a ring-ditch (Fig. 4, red line). The south-eastern arc appears to be non-existent, possibly due to plough damage or the fill of the ditch containing very little magnetic material. The ring-ditch is of probable Bronze Age date and lies to the north-east of the known Bronze Age barrows in this field.
- 3.2.3 A series of faint linear anomalies denote plough lines running in a north-west to south-east direction (Fig. 4, yellow lines). Several appear to respect the position of the barrow, stopping short of its northern side.
- 3.2.4 No other significant archaeological anomalies were detected.

### 3.3 Trench 1

- 3.3.1 Trench 1 was orientated north-west to south-east and measured 44.5m long (Fig. 5). It was positioned in order to reveal both sides of the barrow identified during geophysical survey and to determine whether there was a central burial. The ring-ditch correlated with the geophysics (Fig. 6) and proved to be shallow on both sides; at the south-east end cut **102** measured 4.3m wide and 0.2m deep with almost imperceptible sides and a flat base (Fig. 7, section 1 and Plates 1 and 3). The single fill contained no finds. Similarly, at the north-west end of the trench, cut **109** measured 3.5m wide and 0.2m deep with a comparable profile to **102** (Fig. 7, section 4). It was barely visible in the base of the trench; part of it could only be seen in section. The single fill again contained no finds.
- 3.3.2 There were two features within the interior of the barrow, although no central burial was identified. Sub-circular pit or hollow **105** was located close to the south-eastern side of the ring-ditch, measuring 1m wide and 0.2m deep with gently sloping sides and a concave base. No finds were recovered from the single fill. A second sub-circular features was located under 1m to the west of **105**. It was only partially exposed within the trench and was not excavated.
- 3.3.3 There was no evidence for the barrow mound in the trench sections; as expected it had been totally ploughed away. Subsoil 101 was present in some parts of the trench, measuring up to 0.12m thick. It was sealed by topsoil 100, measuring up to 0.3m thick.



### **3.4 Trench 2**

- 3.4.1 Trench 2 was orientated north-north-east to south-south-west and measured 35.5m long. It contained a single feature at the northern end of the trench, tree throw **107**. The tree throw measured 0.75m wide and 0.2m deep with gently sloping sides and an irregular base. It contained a single fill; no finds were recovered. Subsoil 101 measured up to 0.1m thick and topsoil 100 measured up to 0.25m thick.

### **3.5 Trench 3**

- 3.5.1 Trench 3 was orientated north-east to south-west and measured 30m long. It was devoid of archaeological features. Subsoil 101 measured up to 0.2m thick and topsoil 100 measured up to 0.25m thick.

### **3.6 Trench 4**

- 3.6.1 Trench 4 was orientated north-west to south-east and measured 40m long. It contained a single feature at the north-west end of the trench, tree throw **114**. The tree throw measured 0.82m wide and 0.19m deep with gently sloping sides and an irregular base. It contained a single fill; no finds were recovered. Subsoil 101 measured up to 0.18m thick and topsoil 100 measured up to 0.27m thick.

### **3.7 Trench 5**

- 3.7.1 Trench 5 was orientated east to west and measured 23m long. It was devoid of archaeological features. Subsoil 101 measured up to 0.2m thick and topsoil 100 measured up to 0.3m thick.

### **3.8 Trench 6**

- 3.8.1 Trench 6 was orientated north-west to south-east and measured 6.5m long (Plate 4). It was an additional trench, opened adjacent to Trench 1, to help characterise the barrow ring-ditch, which was very shallow in Trench 1. Despite being only 5m to the north-east of **109**, ring-ditch **110** measured 3.05m wide and 0.5m deep with gently sloping sides and a concave base (Fig. 7, section 5 and Plate 2). It contained two fills, the upper of which contained two small fragments of animal bone (one cattle tooth and one pig tooth, 32g), a small flint blade of Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic date (1g) and a single tiny sherd of pot (1g), which is either Late Iron Age or Early Roman in date and is thought to be intrusive. The pot sherd was located close to the edge of the cut and must have entered the ditch sometime later.
- 3.8.2 Subsoil 101 in Trench 6 measured up to 0.1m thick and topsoil 100 measured 0.2m thick.

### **3.9 Finds Summary**

- 3.9.1 Total finds from the site comprised two small fragments of animal bone (one cattle tooth and one pig tooth, 32g), a small heavily patinated flint blade of Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic date, which had broken in antiquity (1g) and a single tiny sherd of pot (1g), all from barrow ring-ditch **110**.

### **3.10 Environmental Summary**

- 3.10.1 Three bulk samples were taken from two features; barrow ditch **110** and pit or hollow **105**, located within the barrow. Each of the bulk samples contain abundant snail shells as is typical for the chalk geology of the area. Plant remains are sparse and are

preserved by carbonization (charring) caused by exposure to fire. Charred grain is found in both samples 1 (fill 104 of pit **105**) and 2 (fill 111 of ditch **110**). The grains are not well preserved and those from the ditch fill are particularly abraded. The better preserved grains can be tentatively identified as a prehistoric hulled wheat, emmer or spelt (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*). Sample 1 and sample 3 (fill 112 of ditch **110**) also contain a single charred cotyledon of a rounded legume likely to be either a wild or cultivated pea (*Lathyrus/Pisum sp.*). Charcoal fragments are sparse. The findings represent the remains of food products that have been cultivated and either accidentally burnt during food preparation, or deliberately as waste discarded on a fire.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 The barrow

4.1.1 The ring-ditch initially identified in the geophysical survey was investigated within Trenches 1 and 6. Although no burial or human remains were found, this is believed to be a burial monument or barrow of Early Bronze Age date (c. 2000 – 1500 BC). Two further ring-ditches from barrows are located in the same field (HER 2468 and 2469), with larger ring-ditch 2469 positioned only 40m from the western boundary of the site. The barrow ring-ditch within the site had previously been tentatively identified in one oblique aerial photograph taken in 1976 (viewed at Hertfordshire HER, copyright of Ashwell Field Study Centre). A more recent aerial photograph, captured by Richard Slatter, was given to the author by local archaeologist Sarah Talks while on site. It clearly shows the ring-ditch on the site, as well as the other two in the field (Plate 6). A number of other burial monuments, both Neolithic long barrows and Bronze Age round barrows, are located on the higher ground around Ashwell. Many are placed where they would have been visible against the skyline from different positions in the surrounding valley. Barrows are also positioned in places which appear to have special meaning (Thompson 2002, 2) and it may be that the group close to and including the one on the site, are overlooking Ashwell Springs, the source of the River Rhee, 250m to the north at Springhead.

4.1.2 The morphology of the barrow in Trenches 1 and 6 is unusual. Both cuts in Trench 1 (**102** and **109**) were wide but shallow, measuring only 0.2m deep. The diameter of the ring-ditch, c. 25m, would require a substantial amount of spoil to create a visible mound. The ring-ditch was deeper in Trench 6 – cut **110** measured 0.5m deep – but still not large enough to create a sizeable mound. Ploughing must have truncated the ditch to a certain extent, but only partially; it is more likely that the ditch was never substantial to begin with and that this barrow had only a very low mound. The variation in ditch size over such a short distance between **109** and **110** is also interesting and suggests that there may be further variation within the remainder of the ring-ditch. A barrow formed by a similarly shallow ditch was excavated at Brigg's Farm, Thorney, to the east of Peterborough (Pickstone and Mortimer 2011). The barrow was c. 33m in diameter with a ditch measuring up to 9m wide and 0.2m deep. The up-cast material from the shallow ditch had been used to form a slight mound measuring 12.7m x 14.6m in size, which survived at the time of excavation (*ibid.* 19).

4.1.3 The lack of human remains suggest the barrow did not see a large number of secondary burials placed in the barrow ditch, either cremations or inhumations. If truncation has affected the feature then there is the possibility that any burials which once existed have been lost. However, only a small part of the barrow has been investigated and if the ditch is deeper in some parts than in others, then there remains the possibility of finding at least one burial. Similarly, the primary burial does not necessarily have to be central, it may be located to the east or west of Trench 1.

### 4.2 The area surrounding the barrow

4.2.1 The only features encountered in Trenches 2 – 5 were tree throws in Trenches 2 and 4. The presence of a barrow means that discrete cremations could be located nearby. None were found during the evaluation although this may be because small discrete features can easily be missed if trenches do not happen to be positioned over them.

#### **4.3 Significance**

- 4.3.1 There are many Neolithic and Bronze Age burial mounds in the local area although few have been excavated. In addition, the unusual form of this barrow illustrates the variability which exists within the broader definition of Bronze Age burial mounds.

#### **4.4 Recommendations**

- 4.4.1 Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

## APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench positioned over a ring-ditch c. 25m in diameter, interpreted as a Bronze Age barrow. A small pit or hollow was located within the barrow.					Avg. depth (m)	0.3
					Width (m)	2.2
					Length (m)	44.5
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
100	Layer	-	0.12	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown silty loam		
101	Layer	-	0.3	Subsoil. Mid grey silty loam		
102	Cut	4.3	0.2	Barrow ring-ditch		Early Bronze Age
103	Fill	-	-	Fill of <b>102</b> , light brownish grey silty sand		
104	Fill	-	-	Fill of <b>105</b> , mid greyish brown silty loam		
105	Cut	1	0.2	Small pit or hollow		
108	Fill	-	-	Fill of <b>109</b> , light greyish brown silty loam		
109	Cut	3.5	0.2	Barrow ring-ditch		Early Bronze Age

Trench 2						
General description				Orientation		NNE-SSW
Only feature was a tree throw in the northern end of the trench.				Avg. depth (m)		0.3
				Width (m)		2.2
				Length (m)		35.5
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
100	Layer		0.1	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown silty loam		
101	Layer		0.25	Subsoil. Mid grey silty loam		
106	Fill	-	-	Fill of <b>107</b> , light brownish grey silty loam		
107	Cut	0.75	0.2	Tree throw		

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology					Avg. depth (m)	0.35
					Width (m)	2.2
					Length (m)	30
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
100	Layer		0.2	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown silty loam		
101	Layer		0.25	Subsoil. Mid grey silty loam		

Trench 4						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
Only feature was a tree throw in the northern end of the trench.				Avg. depth (m)		0.35
				Width (m)		2.2
				Length (m)		40
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
100	Layer		0.18	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown silty loam		
101	Layer		0.27	Subsoil. Mid grey silty loam		
113	Fill	-	-	Fill of <b>114</b> , light brownish grey silty loam		
114	Cut	0.82	0.19	Tree throw		

Trench 5						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology					Avg. depth (m)	0.4
					Width (m)	2.2
					Length (m)	23
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
100	Layer		0.2	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown silty loam		
101	Layer		0.3	Subsoil. Mid grey silty loam		

Trench 6						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Additional trench over the barrow ring-ditch. Ditch was deeper in this trench					Avg. depth (m)	0.3
					Width (m)	2.2
					Length (m)	6.5
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
100	Layer		0.1	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown silty loam		
101	Layer		0.2	Subsoil. Mid grey silty loam		
110	Cut	3.05	0.5	Barrow ring-ditch		Early Bronze Age
111	Fill	-	-	Fill of <b>110</b> , light brownish grey silty loam	Animal bone, flint, pot x 1	
112	Fill	-	-	Fill of <b>110</b> , mid brownish grey silty loam		

## APPENDIX B. ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES

*By Rachel Fosberry*

### B.1 Introduction

- B.1.1 Three bulk samples were taken from features within the evaluation trenches, in order to assess the quality of preservation of plant remains and their potential to provide useful data as part of further archaeological investigations. The deposits sampled came from prehistoric features; namely a barrow ditch (**110**) and a pit or tree-throw (**105**), located within the barrow.

### B.2 Methodology

- B.2.1 The total volume (up to twenty litres) of each bulk sample was processed by water flotation (using a modified Siraff three-tank system) for the recovery of charred plant remains, dating evidence and any other artefactual evidence that might be present. The floating component (flot) of the samples was collected in a 0.3mm nylon mesh and the residue was washed through 10mm, 5mm, 2mm and a 0.5mm sieve. Both flot and residues were allowed to air dry. A magnet was dragged through each residue fraction prior to sorting for artefacts. The dried flots were subsequently sorted using a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x 60. Identification of plant remains is with reference to the Digital Seed Atlas of the Netherlands and the authors' own reference collection. Nomenclature is according to Stace (1997). Carbonized seeds and grains, by the process of burning and burial, become blackened and often distort and fragment leading to difficulty in identification. Plant remains have been identified to species where possible. The identification of cereals has been based on the characteristic morphology of the grains and chaff as described by Jacomet (2006).

### B.3 Results

- B.3.1 Each of the bulk samples contain abundant snail shells as is typical for the chalk geology of the area. Plant remains are sparse and are preserved by carbonization (charring) caused by exposure to fire. Charred grain is found in both samples 1 (fill 104 of pit **105**) and 2 (fill 111 of ditch **110**). The grains are not well preserved and those from the ditch fill are particularly abraded. The better preserved grains can be tentatively identified as a prehistoric hulled wheat emmer or spelt (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*). Sample 1 and Sample 3 (fill 112 of ditch **110**) also contain a single charred cotyledon of a rounded legume likely to be either a wild or cultivated pea (*Lathyrus/Pisum sp.*). Charcoal fragments are sparse.

### B.4 Discussion

- B.4.1 The three samples produced a sparse assemblage of charred plant remains, representing the remains of food products that have been cultivated and either accidentally burnt during food preparation or deliberately as waste discarded on a fire. Their association with a barrow may suggest a more ritual interpretation.



## APPENDIX C. GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY REPORT

*By Peter Masters*

### C.1 Introduction

- C.1.1 OA East commissioned the Centre for Archaeological and Forensic Analysis, Cranfield University to undertake a fluxgate gradiometer survey on land proposed for residential development to the rear of The Walkdens, Ashwell, Hertfordshire. This work was carried out in September 2013.
- C.1.2 The purpose of the survey was to identify areas of archaeological potential within the site. The survey methodology described in this report was based upon guidelines set out in the English Heritage document '*Geophysical Survey in Archaeological Field Evaluation*' (EH 2008).
- C.1.3 The underlying geology is comprised of chalk. The magnetic susceptibility of these types of geologies is generally good (Gaffney & Gater 2003, 78; EH 2008, 15, 10; Clark 1990, 92).

### C.2 Methodology – Gradiometry

- C.2.1 Gradiometry is a non-intrusive scientific prospecting technique used to determine the presence/absence of some classes of sub-surface archaeological features (e.g. pits, ditches, kilns, and occasionally stone walls). By scanning the soil surface, geophysicists identify areas of varying magnetic susceptibility and can interpret such variation by presenting data in various graphical formats and identifying images that share morphological affinities with diagnostic archaeological as well as other detectable remains (Clark 1990).
- C.2.2 Gradiometry is used to establish the presence/absence of buried magnetic anomalies, which may reflect sub-surface archaeological features.
- C.2.3 The area survey was conducted using a Bartington Grad 601 dual fluxgate gradiometer with DL601 data logger set to take 4 readings per metre (a sample Draft Only Cranfield Forensic Institute Report No. 083 4 interval of 0.25m). The zigzag traverse method of survey was used, with 1m wide traverses across 30m x 30m grids. The sensitivity of the machine was set to detect magnetic variation in the order of 0.1 nanoTesla.
- C.2.4 The data was processed using *Archeosurveyor* v.2. The results were plotted as greyscale and trace plot images.
- C.2.5 The enhanced data was processed by using zero-mean functions to correct the unevenness of the image in order to produce a smoother graphical appearance. It was also processed using an algorithm to remove magnetic spikes, thereby reducing extreme readings caused by stray iron fragments and spurious effects due to the inherent magnetism of soils. The data was also clipped to reduce the distorting effect of extremely high or low readings caused by discrete pieces of ferrous metal.

### C.3 Interpretation and Analysis of Results

- C.3.1 A fluxgate gradiometer survey was undertaken over the area of investigation covering approximately 0.7ha.

- C.3.2 Generally, a series of isolated individual anomalies were detected (Fig. 4, line/circled pink) that reflect areas of modern ferrous remains such as brick and tile fragments as well as horseshoes, which lie just below or on the surface of the plough soil.
- C.3.3 A sub-circular positive magnetic anomaly (Figs. 3 and 4) was detected towards the south-eastern end of the survey area representing the presence of a ring-ditch. The south-eastern arc appears to be non-existent possibly due to plough damage or the fill of the ditch containing very little magnetic material.
- C.3.4 A series of faint linear anomalies (Fig. 4, yellow lines) denote plough lines running in a north-east to south-west direction.
- C.3.5 No other significant archaeological anomalies were detected.

#### **C.4 Conclusions**

- C.4.1 A number of significant anomalies of an archaeological nature have been recorded in the resultant plot.
- C.4.2 The survey has recorded the presence of a ring-ditch of probable Bronze Age date, which lies to the north-east of the known Bronze Age barrows in this field. This clearly fits in with the prehistoric landscape known in this area.
- C.4.3 Zones of ferrous magnetic disturbances have also been recorded in the resultant plot due to the close proximity of fences as well as other ferrous remains such as brick and tile fragments that lie on or just beneath the present ground surface.

## APPENDIX D. HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY SHEET

Site name and address: The Walkdens, Ashwell, SG7 5RU		
County: Hertfordshire	District: North Hertfordshire	
Village/Town: Ashwell	Parish: Ashwell	
Planning application reference: n/a		
HER Enquiry reference: n/a		
Client name, address, and tel. no.: Robert Lombardelli Partnership (Tel. 01462 436318), on behalf of Origin Housing		
Nature of application: Residential housing		
Present land use: Agricultural (arable)		
Size of application area: 0.5ha	Size of area investigated: 180m of trenching	
NGR (to 8 figures): TL 27356 39711		
Site code (if applicable): XHTASH 13		
Site director/Organization: Tom Phillips/ Oxford Archaeology East		
Type of work: Evaluation trenching		
Date of work:	Start: 08/10/13	Finish: 09/10/13
Location of finds & site archive/Curating museum: North Hertfordshire Museums Service		
Related HER Nos: N/a		Periods represented: Bronze Age
Relevant previous summaries/reports: Clover, K., 2013, <i>Land to the Rear of The Walkdens, Ashwell, Herts, SG7 5RU. Archaeological desk-based assessment</i> . OA East Report 1517		
Summary of fieldwork results: The evaluation comprised six trenches totalling 180m. Geophysics had previously been carried out at the site and had identified a Bronze Age barrow, approximately 25m in diameter, which is one of three located within the field. Trench 1 was positioned across the diameter of the barrow; in both excavated sections the ring-ditch was shallow, measuring a maximum of 0.2m deep. As a result, Trench 6 was opened, to determine whether the ditch was a similar depth to the east. Surprisingly, the ring-ditch was deeper in Trench 6, measuring 0.5m deep. No burial or human remains were identified, either within, or associated with, the barrow. A small undated pit or hollow was excavated inside the area of the barrow, close to its southern edge. Nearby, a similar feature was only partially exposed and remained unexcavated. The only other features were two tree throws in Trenches 2 and 4.  Finds were rare, totalling two small fragments of animal bone (one cattle tooth and one pig tooth, 32g), a small heavily patinated flint blade of Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic date, which had broken in antiquity (1g) and a single tiny sherd of pot (1g), all from the barrow ring-ditch in Trench 6.		
Author of summary: Tom Phillips		Date of summary: 17/10/13

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## APPENDIX F. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

### Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-161792		
Project Name	The Walkdens, Ashwell		
Project Dates (fieldwork)	Start	08-10-2013	Finish 09-10-2013
Previous Work (by OA East)	No	Future Work	Unknown

### Project Reference Codes

Site Code	XHTASH13	Planning App. No.	n/a
HER No.	n/a	Related HER/OASIS No.	

### Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS 5
Development Type	Rural Residential

### Please select all techniques used:

<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - interpretation	<input type="checkbox"/> Grab-Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Gravity-Core	<input type="checkbox"/> Sample Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Annotated Sketch	<input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Augering	<input type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Targeted Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Metal Detectors	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pits
<input type="checkbox"/> Documentary Search	<input type="checkbox"/> Phosphate Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Topographic Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Vibro-core
<input type="checkbox"/> Fieldwalking	<input type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography	

### Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
Barrow	Bronze Age -2.5k to -700	Animal bone	Uncertain
Tree throw	Uncertain	Flint	Neolithic -4k to -2k
	Select period...	Pottery	Iron Age -800 to 43

### Project Location

County	Hertfordshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible) The Walkdens, Ashwell, SG7 5RU	
District	North Hertfordshire		
Parish	Ashwell		
HER	Hertfordshire		
Study Area	0.5 ha	National Grid Reference	TL 27356 39711

## Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	Andy Instone
Project Design Originator	James Drummond-Murray
Project Manager	James Drummond-Murray
Supervisor	Tom Phillips

## Project Archives

Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
North Herts Museum Service	OA East	North Herts Museum Service
XHTASH 13	XHTASH 13	XHTASH 13

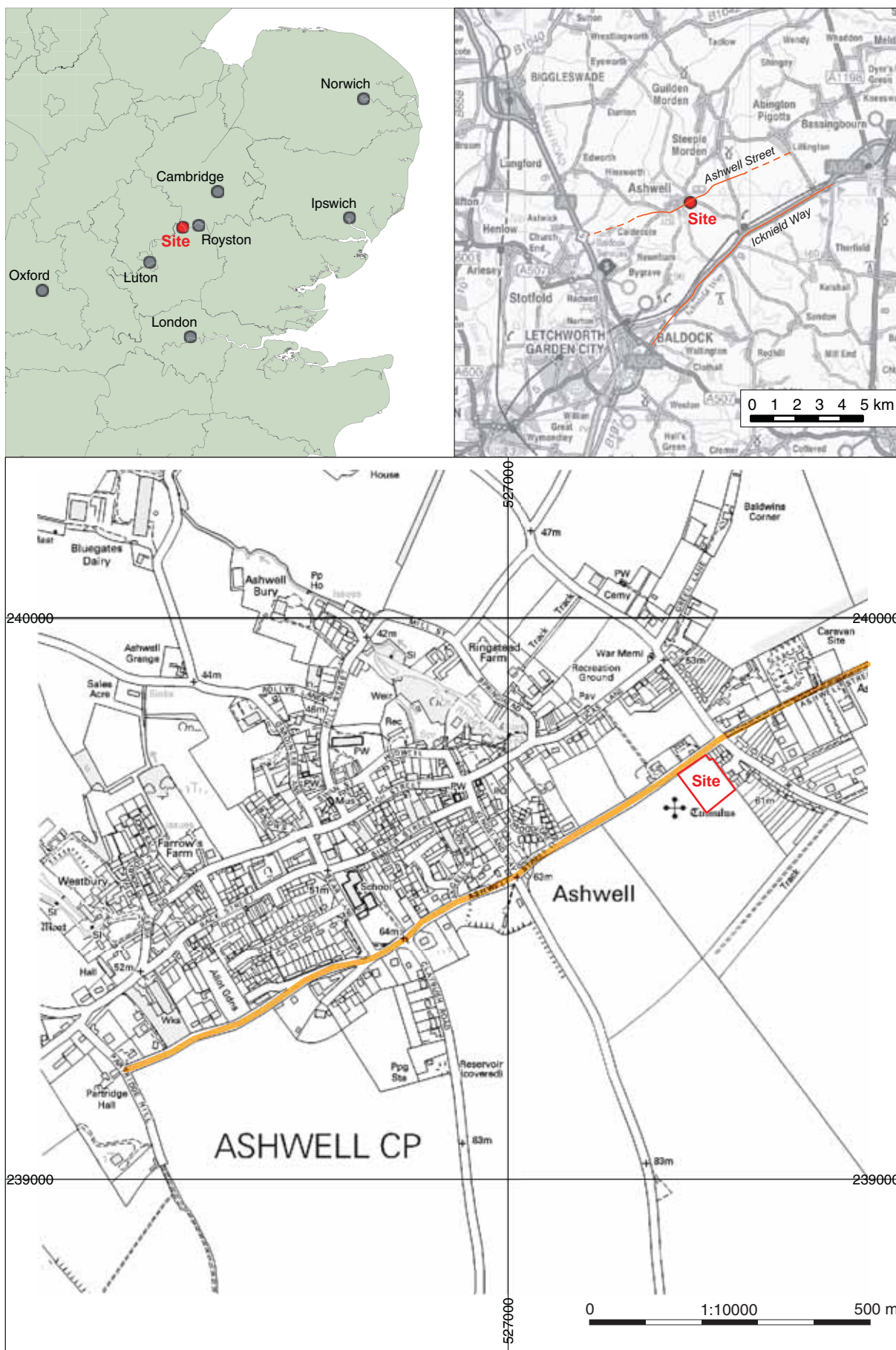
## Archive Contents/Media

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Ceramics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Geophysics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
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<input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheets	<input type="checkbox"/> Map
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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

### Notes:





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Figure 1: Site location showing proposed development area (red)

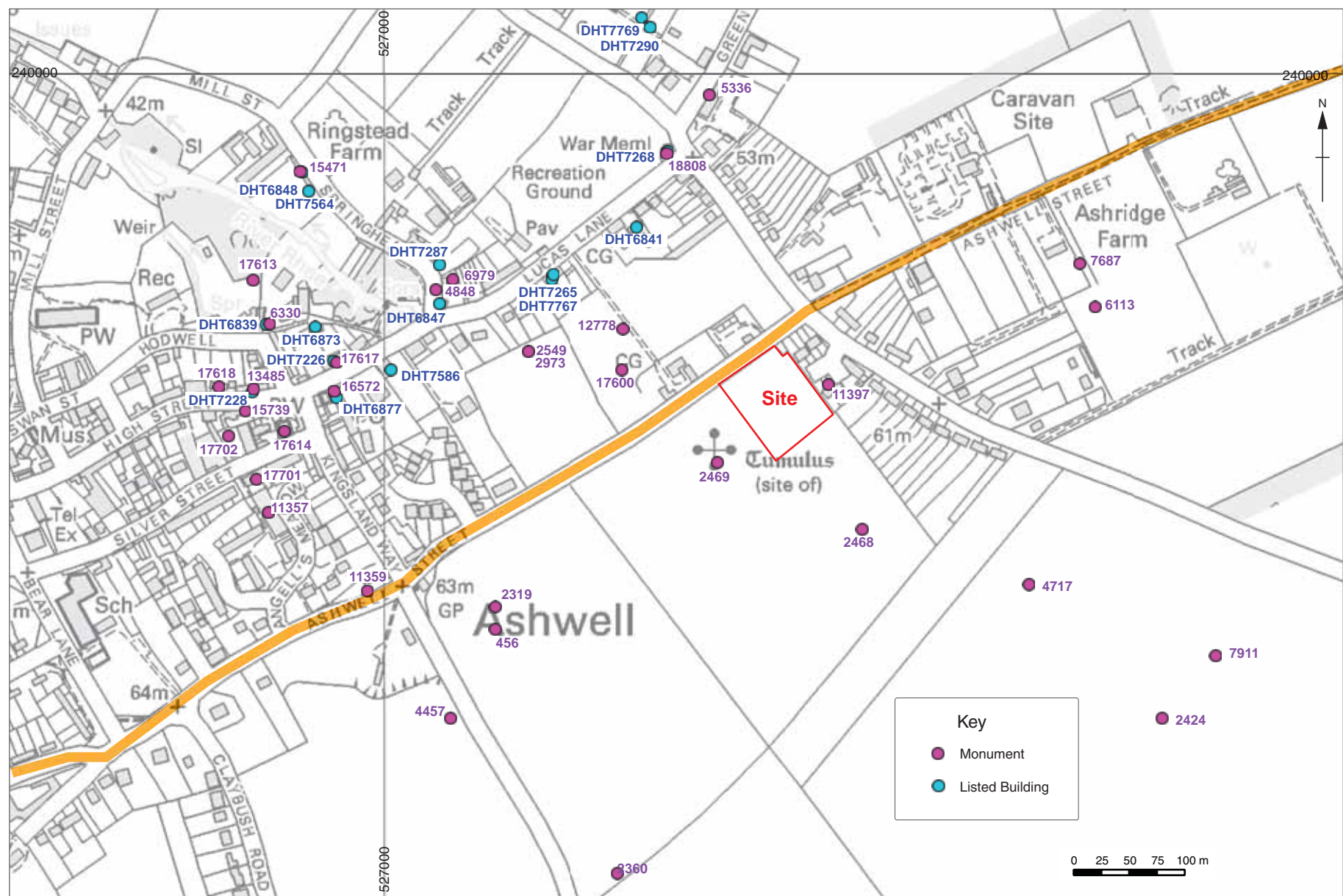


Figure 2: HER entries within a 0.5km radius of the site. Scale 1:5000

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Figure 3: Geophysics plot- gradiometry survey

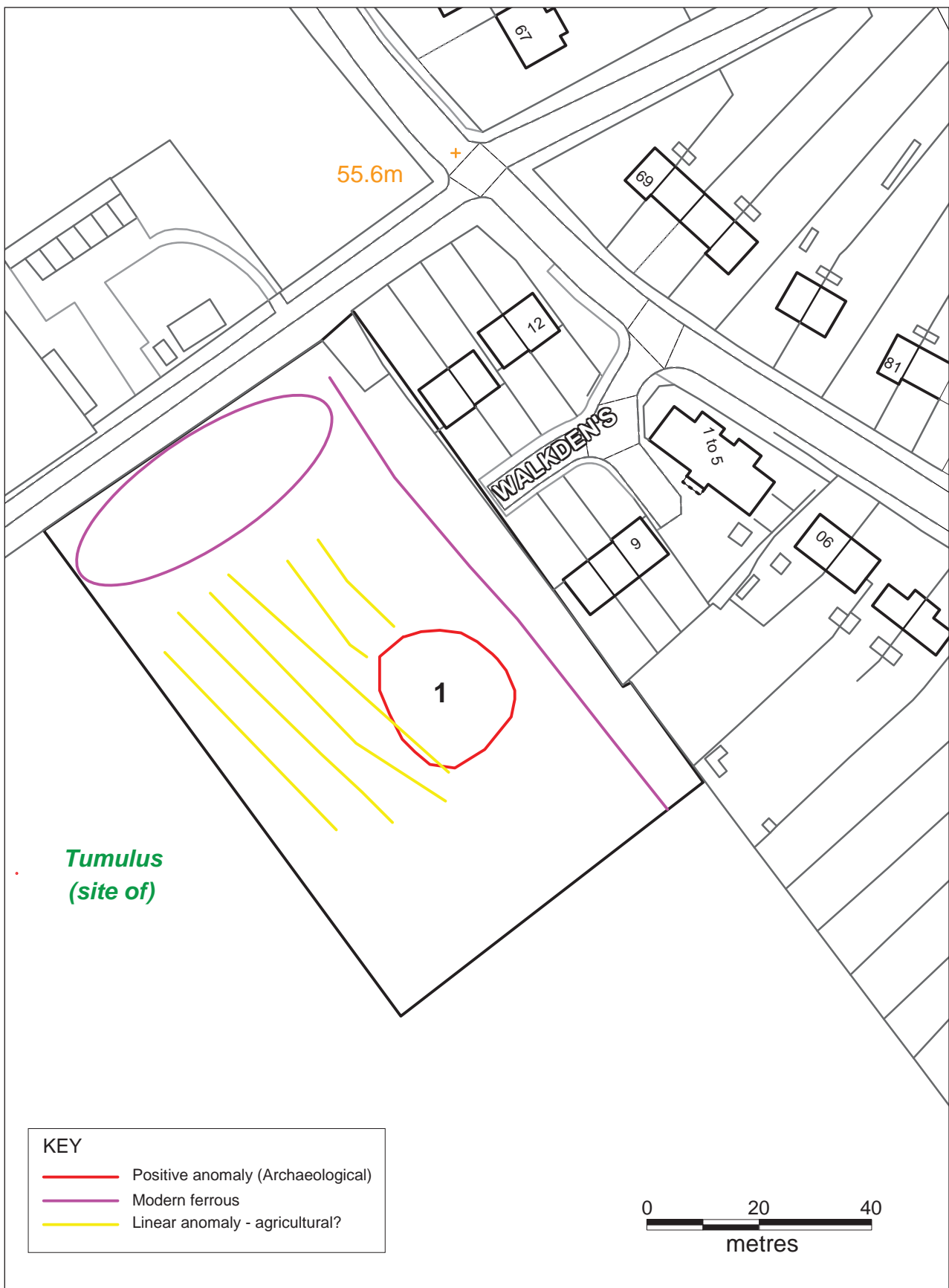


Figure 4: Geophysics interpretation plan

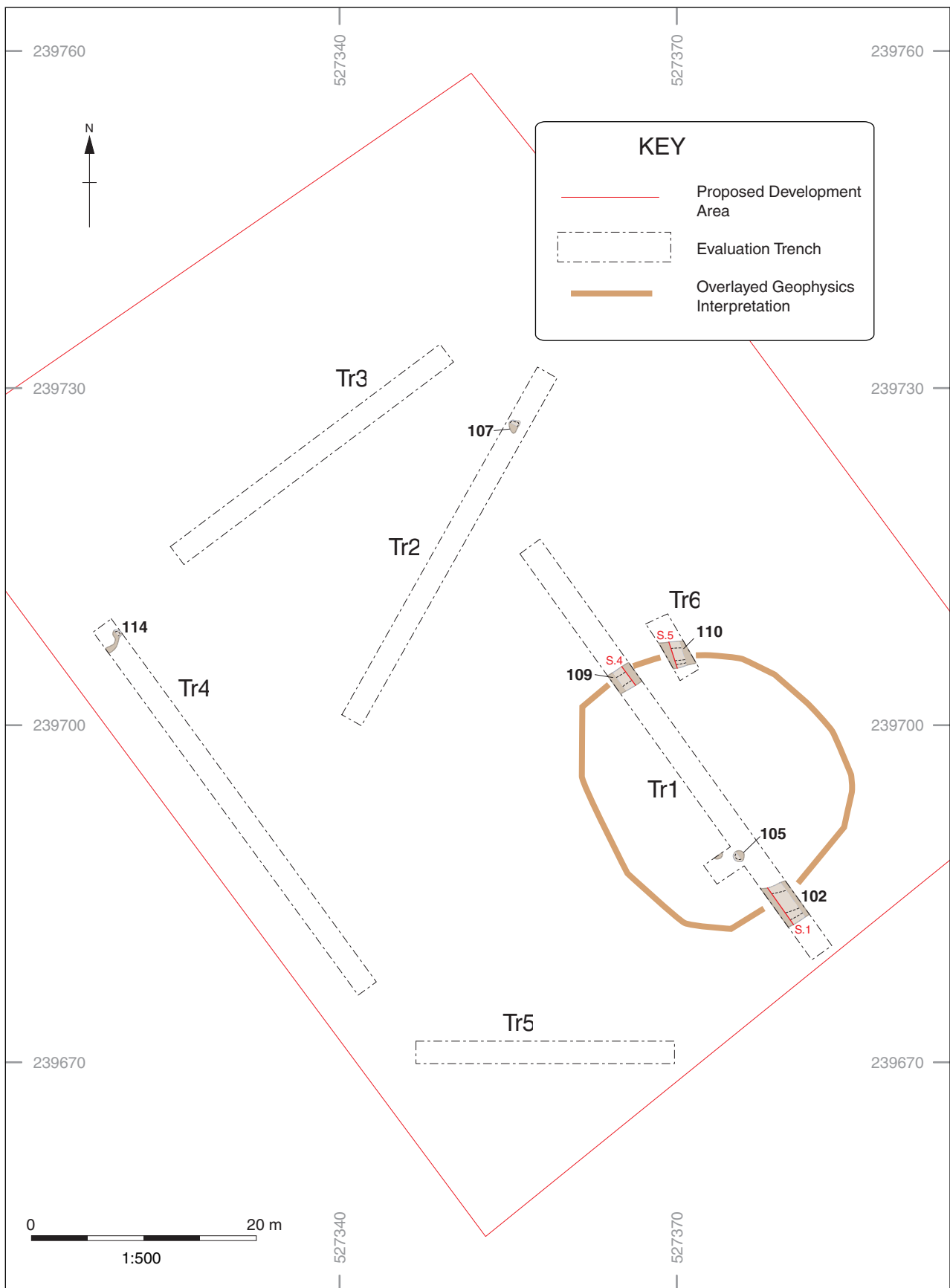


Figure 5: Trench Plan

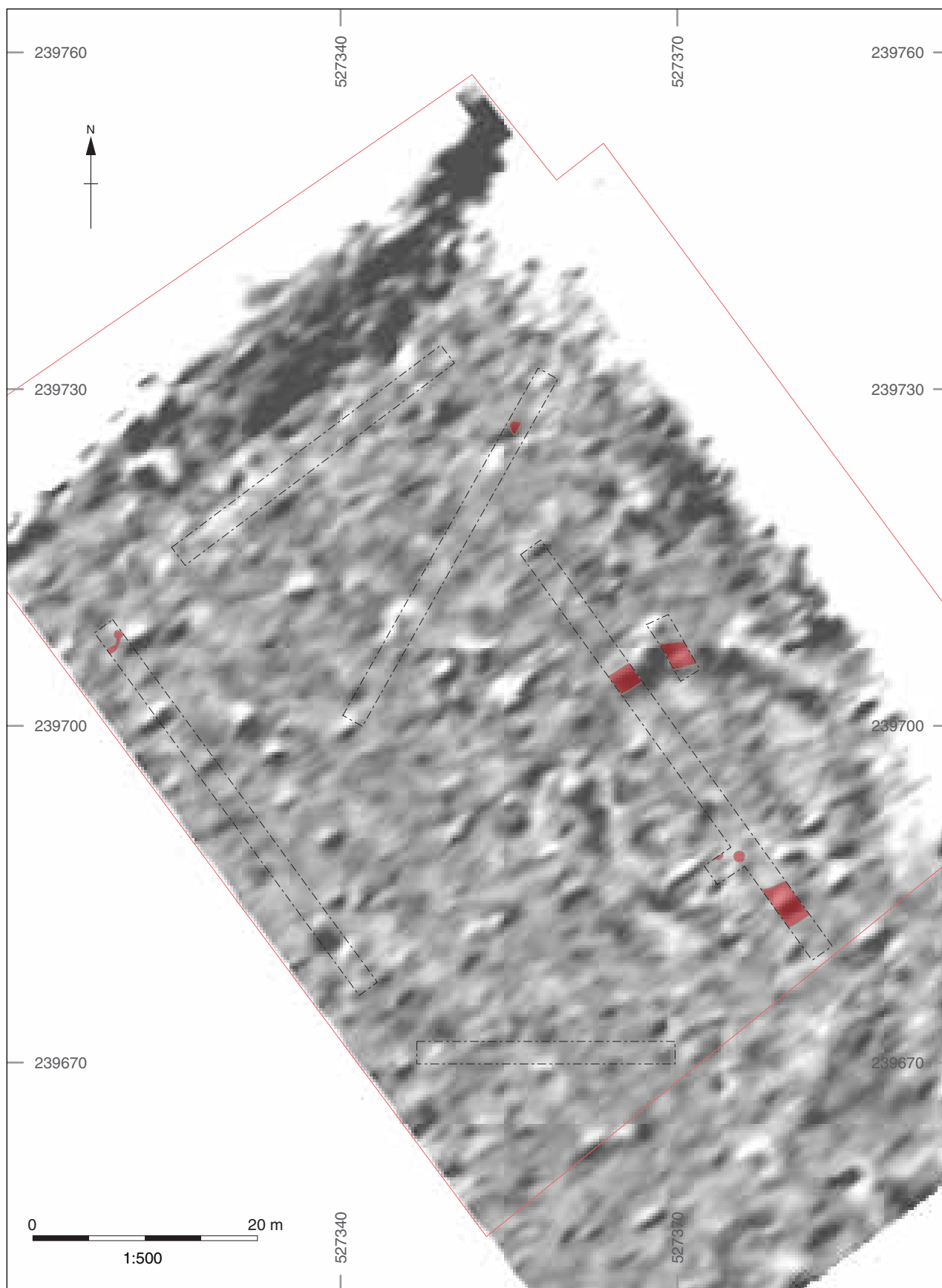


Figure 6: Trench Plan and geophysics

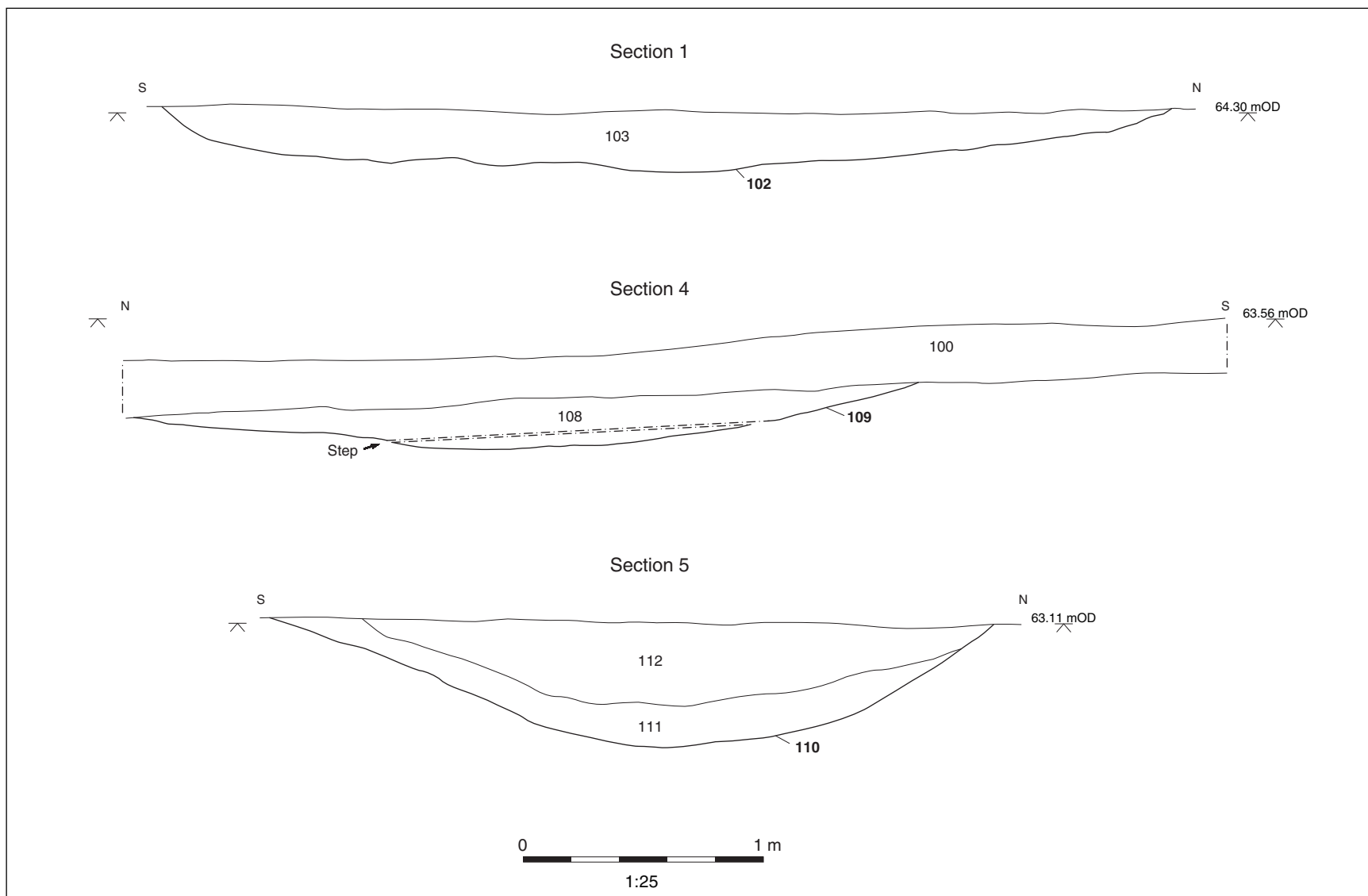


Figure 7: Section drawings





Plate 1: Barrow ditch 102 in Trench 1 looking south-west. 2m scale



Plate 2: Barrow ditch 110 in Trench 6 looking west. 2m scale



Plate 3: Trench 1 looking north-west. 1m and 2m scale

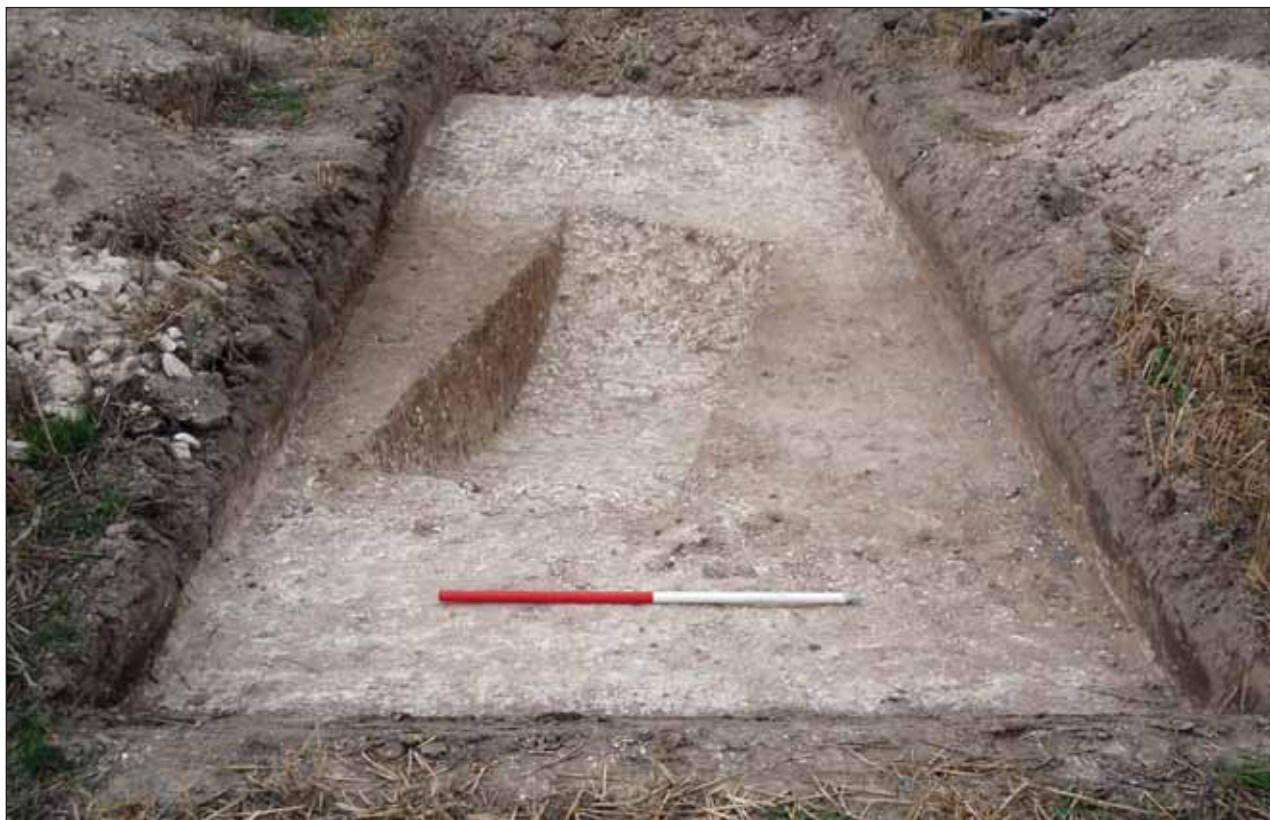


Plate 4: Trench 6 looking north-west. 1m scale





Plate 5: Trench 1 from the north showing gradient of the field



Plate 6: Aerial photograph of the site and surrounding area. Reproduced with the permission of Richard Slatter



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