

The Smithy Thorpe Street Aston Upthorpe Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



February 2008

Client: Mr and Mrs N Marks

Issue N^o: 1
Planning Ref N^o: P06/W1269
NGR: SU 5534 8619

Client Name: Mr and Mrs N Marks

Client Ref No:

Document Title: The Smithy, Thorpe Street, Aston Upthorpe, Oxfordshire

Document Type: Watching Brief

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: SU 5534 8619

Planning Reference: P06/W1269

OA Job Number:

Site Code: ASTUTS 07

Invoice Code: ASTUTSWB

Receiving Museum: Oxfordshire County Museum Service

Museum Accession No: OXCMS:2007.10

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Document File Location H:\PROJECTS\Oxfordshire OX\South Oxfordshire
SO\7432 The Smithy, Ashton Upthorpe WB\wbREP.doc
Graphics File Location Servergo:?oaupubs 1_AtoH*ASTDTSWB*Smithy, Aston
Upthorpe*MEB*01.02.08
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The Smithy, Thorpe Street, Aston Upthorpe, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In March 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at The Smithy, Thorpe Street, Aston Upthorpe, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 55337 86194). The work was commissioned by Mr and Mrs N. Marks in advance of the construction of a swimming pool and water features and the stripping of an access road. The watching brief revealed large deposits of post-medieval garden soil and the post-medieval backfilling of part of the spring valley but no other significant archaeology was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In March 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at The Smithy, Thorpe Street, Aston Upthorpe, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 55337 86194). The work was commissioned by Mr and Mrs N Marks in respect of a planning application for the construction of a swimming pool and water features and the stripping of an access road (Planning Application No. P06/W1269)
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by Paul Smith, the County Archaeological Officer outlining the framework for a detailed archaeological investigation (OCAS, 2006).
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA, 2007).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The village of Aston Upthorpe is located 4 km south east of Didcot. The site is situated on the southern edge of the village and is bordered to the south and west by Thorpe Street, to the north by a stream and to the east by a domestic residence. The site lies on a gentle north facing slope at between 60 m and 65 m above OD. The site is approximately 0.51 hectares in area and the underlying geology is Totternhoe Stone over Lower Chalk (Geological Survey of England and Wales, sheet no 254). The site is currently grassland and domestic gardens.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA, 2006) and is reproduced below.

The following background information is reproduced from the Design Brief produced by the County Archaeological Officer

- 1.3.2 The hamlet and parish of Aston Upthorpe was originally formed from the 10th century Royal manor held by King Edgar and granted to his queen Elfthyth in AD 964. Late Roman activity in the immediate area is suggested by the chance find of a

solidus of Honorius found about 0.45 m below the modern ground surface at a property in Thorpe Street (HBSMR 10618).

- 1.3.3 Rocque's map of 1761 shows several buildings located within the application area, but the accuracy of Rocque's mapping of individual buildings is difficult to verify. However, there is a possibility that below ground remains of medieval or early post medieval could be affected by this development.
- 1.3.4 The County Archaeological Officer also suggests that the application area and land to the north, bounded in a loop by Thorpe Street and the Fullers Road, may be part of a manorial enclosure. Fullers Road also delineated the parish and manorial boundary between Aston Upthorpe and Aston Tirrold. The spring line rising within the development area may also have been a significant resource during the early colonisation of this settlement, and may have acted as a focus for Saxon activity. Map regression tends to suggest that a similar enclosed area containing the 11th century church and churchyard may have originally existed to the south, but was later encroached upon by domestic settlement. This curvilinear pattern created by two conjoined enclosures both outlined by streets can be seen in places such as Thame, where it has been postulated that one enclosure contained the minster precinct while the second may have contained Anglo-Saxon royal or Episcopal residence. While Aston Upthorpe is on a very different scale, and the Church of All Saints was a small hamlet church, not a minster, the potential for long extinct enclosures to have a lasting influence on the topographic character of settlement is well known.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of these works.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the site and to take samples where appropriate.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was undertaken as a series of site visits during those works likely to impinge or disturb any potential archaeological deposits. These works included the construction of an access road, ground reduction and the excavation of a swimming pool.

- 2.2.2 A 9 tonne mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket was used for these works. All the material excavated was retained on site.
- 2.2.3 A plan showing the extent of the excavations and the locations of any features and sections was maintained at a scale of 1:100 and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

The Swimming Pool

- 3.1.1 This was a roughly rectangular feature measuring 25 m by 15 m and up to 1.7 m in depth dug to the north-west of the house. A 0.8 m wide by 1.4 m deep trench was dug from the northern edge of the pool to the existing stream to contain an overflow pipe.
- 3.1.2 The underlying natural chalk (4) was encountered at a depth of between 1.2 m and 1.5 m below the current ground level in both the pool excavation and the overflow trench (Fig. 2, Sections 1 and 2). At the northern end of the overflow trench, where it approached the stream, it was overlaid by a layer of mid grey silt clay containing numerous small pebbles and charcoal flecking (11) (Fig. 2, Section 2). This is a probable alluvial deposit. Overlying layer 11 and the natural chalk elsewhere was a 0.35 m deep layer of olive-grey silt clay containing chalk flecking (3). This was a very clean deposit and probably represents a layer of colluvium.
- 3.1.3 This was overlain by a layer of grey clay silt (2), whose depth varied between 0.6 m and 0.8 m with the depth increasing towards the north. This deposit contained chalk and charcoal flecking and produced some fragments of 18th-century pottery and abraded brick, and probably represents a layer of earlier worked garden soil. Sealing this layer was a 0.3 m deep layer of dark grey clay loam (1). This had a high organic content and produced many fragments of 18th and 19th-century pottery suggesting that it was also a layer of worked garden soil.

Access Road

- 3.1.4 This was dug from an existing gateway accessed from Thorpe Street across grassland to the southern edge of the pool. It measured approximately 70 m long by 3 m wide and was stripped to an average depth of 0.3 m.
- 3.1.5 The ground transversed was noticeably higher at the western end, dipped in the centre and rose again at the eastern end (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.6 The underlying natural chalk (9) was encountered at the lowest point of the roadway. This was overlain by a layer of pale grey clay silt (5). This layer contained much

chalk flecking, could be seen to be in excess of 0.2 m deep in places and probably represents a layer of colluvium similar to layer 3.

- 3.1.7 At the western end of the roadway this layer was cut by an 11.4 m wide linear feature (8), running approximately south-west to north-east towards the current spring rising. This feature could be seen as a shallow depression running southwards across the pasture.
- 3.1.8 Filling the majority of this feature was a deposit of compacted chalk mixed with crushed brick (7). This appeared on both the eastern and western edges of the feature. Filling the centre of the feature was a pale orange-brown clay silt (6), containing some charcoal flecking. This feature is a probable old watercourse which has been backfilled fairly recently.
- 3.1.9 At the eastern end of the roadway the colluvium 5 was overlaid by a layer of dark grey-brown clay loam (10). This deposit contained charcoal flecking and abraded fragments of brick suggesting that it may be an earlier layer of worked soil.
- 3.1.10 The length of the trackway was sealed by a 0.25 m deep layer of the present day topsoil 1.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 All the finds recovered were post-medieval in date (18th and 19th-century). These included both earthenware and creamware pottery, clay pipe stem, bottle glass, brick and tile. The presence of ashes and clinkers within the deposits which produced these finds suggest they formed part of domestic occupation debris. The finds were evaluated on site and were not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 No evidence for any earlier structures were observed during the course of the watching brief. The depth of cultivation represented by layers 1 and 2, may have truncated any evidence pertaining to timber structures such as post holes and beam slots, however any residual dating evidence which may indicate earlier occupation of the land were absent. The absence of any truncated deeper features within the colluvial deposits would also mitigate against earlier occupation.
- 4.1.2 Feature 8 may be an old watercourse formed by the spring rising however there is the possibility that it may represent an earlier enclosure ditch, unfortunately the depth of excavation was such that none of its primary deposits and any possible dating evidence was exposed.

APPENDICES**APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Dates</i>
1	Layer	0.3 m - 0.6 m	-	Present day topsoil and turf	Pottery, brick	C20th
2	Layer	0.4 m - 1 m	-	Earlier worked soil	Pottery, brick	C18th/ C19th
3	Layer	0.35 m	-	Possible colluvium	-	-
4	Layer	> 0.2 m	-	Natural chalk	-	-
5	Layer	> 0.2 m	-	Probable colluvium	-	-
6	Fill	> 0.2 m	-	Modern made ground/ backfilling	Brick, slate	C20th
7	Fill	> 0.2 m	-	Modern backfilling	Brick, slate	C20th
8	Cut	> 0.2 m	-	Probable original spring valley	-	-
9	Layer	> 0.2 m	-	Natural chalk	-	-
10	Layer	> 0.2 m	-	Earlier worked soil	Pottery, brick	C18th/ C19th
11	Layer	> 0.2 m	-	Probable alluvium	-	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

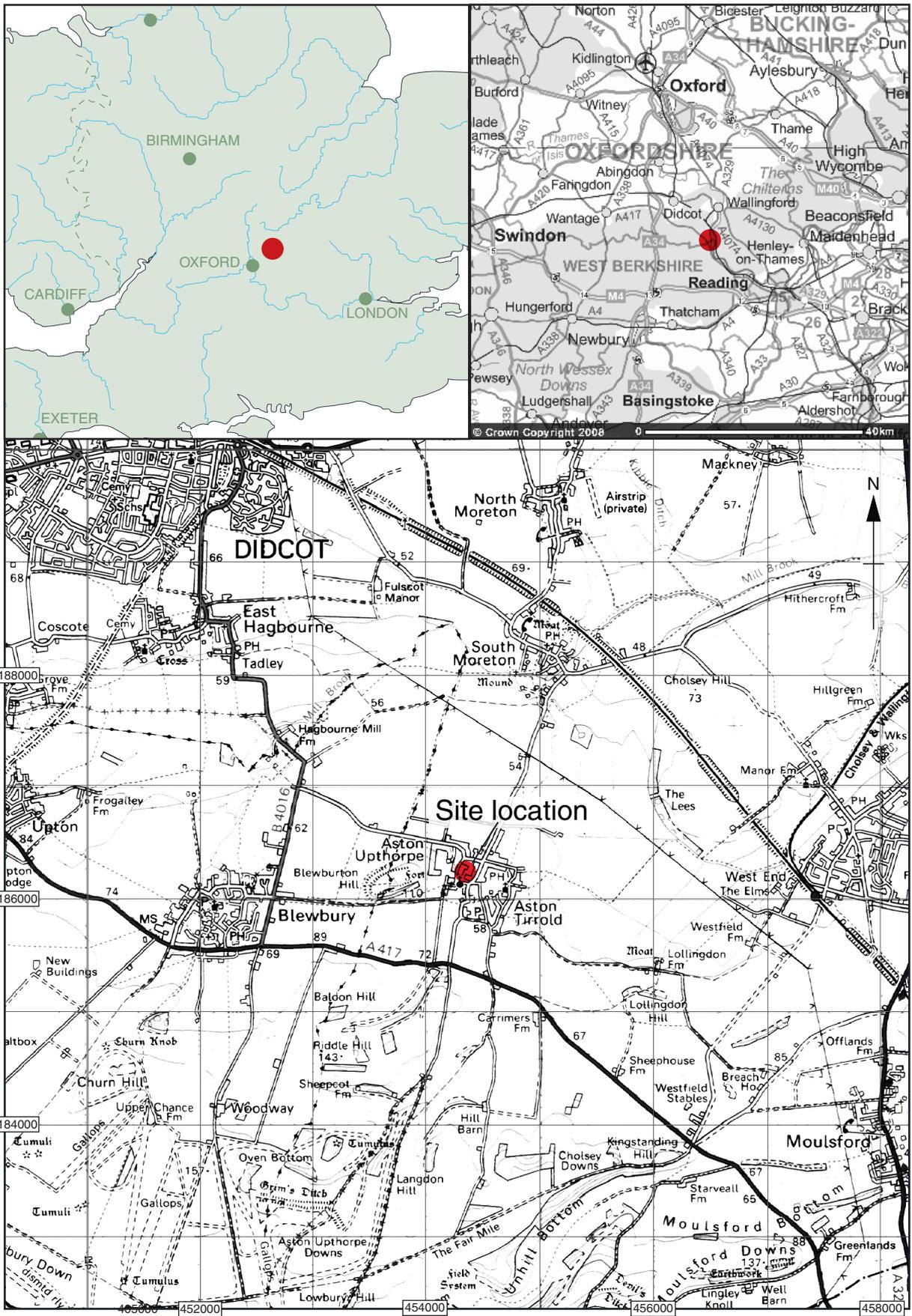
IFA 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations*

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA 2007 *The Smithy, Thorpe Street, Ashton Upthorpe, Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OCAS 2006 *Design Brief for Archaeological Recording Action*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**Site name:** The Smithy, Thorpe Street, Aston Upthorpe, Oxfordshire**Site code:** ASTUTS 07**Grid reference:** SU 5534 8619**Type of watching brief:** Machine excavation of a new pond and soil stripping over the route of an access road.**Date and duration of project:** 26/02/07 to 8/03/07, 4 site visits**Area of site:** 0.51 hectare**Summary of results:** Evidence of post-medieval backfilling of part of the spring valley and thick deposits of alluvium. No significant archaeology was observed.**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2007.10



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Figure 1: Site location

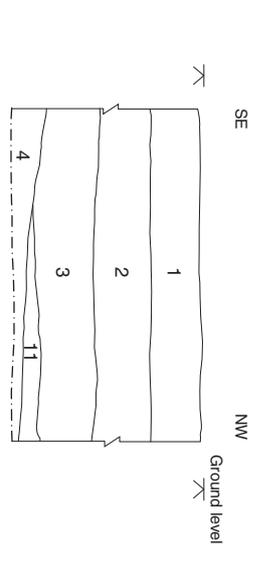
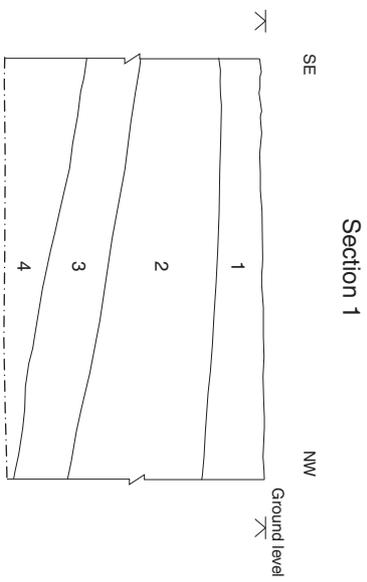
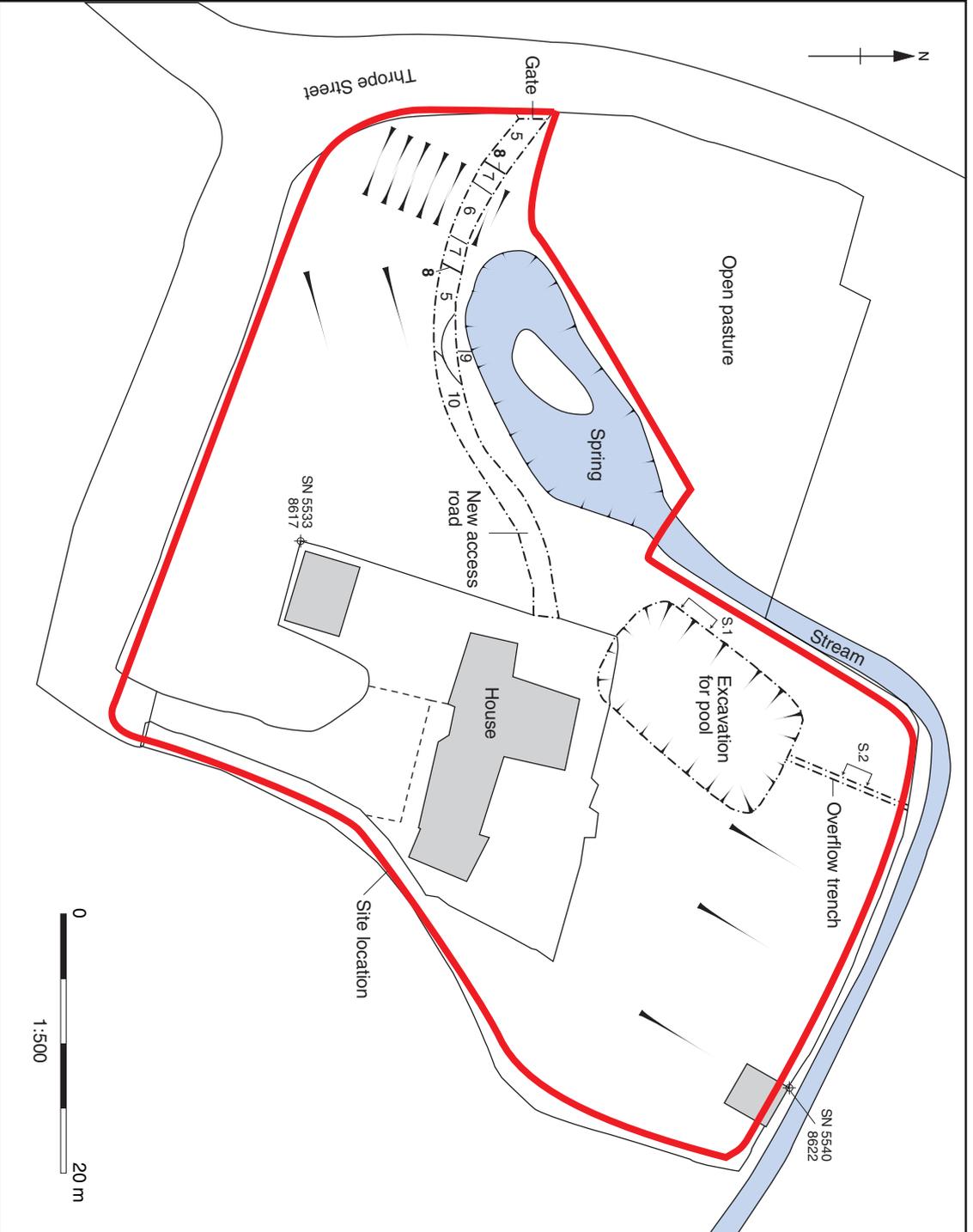


Figure 2: Site plan and sections



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