

Furze Platt, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire



Archaeological Evaluation Report

oxfordarchaeology

southsouthsouth
February 2016

Client: Blenheim Estate

Issue No: 1
OA Job No: 6350
NGR: SP 4310 1840



Client Name: Blenheim Estate
Client Ref No: 6350
Document Title: Furze Platt, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire
Document Type: Evaluation Report
Issue/Version Number: 1
Grid Reference: SP 431 184
Planning Reference: Pre-application
Site Code: WOBFZ 16
Invoice Code: WOBFZEV
Receiving Museum: Blenheim Estate
Museum Accession No: WOBFZ 16

Issue	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by	Signature
1	Jim Mumford and Vix Hughes Project Officers	Edward Biddulph Senior Project Manager	Carl Champness Senior Project Manager	

Document File Location \\Samba-1\projects\b\Blenheim, Furze Platt\Reports\Eval report
Graphics File Location \\Server1\invoice codes r thru z\W_codes\WOBZFEV and \\Samba-
1\projects\b\Blenheim, Furze Platt\GIS
Illustrated by Vicky Hosegood and Conan Parsons

Disclaimer:

This document has been prepared for the titled project or named part thereof and should not be relied upon or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and prior written authority of Oxford Archaeology being obtained. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this document being used for a purpose other than the purposes for which it was commissioned. Any person/party using or relying on the document for such other purposes agrees, and will by such use or reliance be taken to confirm their agreement to indemnify Oxford Archaeology for all loss or damage resulting therefrom. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for this document to any party other than the person/party by whom it was commissioned.

© Oxford Archaeology Ltd 2016

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793496

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: oxfordarchaeology.com

Oxford Archaeology Limited is a Registered Charity No: 285627



Table of Contents

1 Introduction.....	4
1.1 Location and scope of work.....	4
1.2 Geology and topography.....	4
1.3 Archaeological and historical background.....	4
1.4 Archaeological potential.....	9
1.5 Acknowledgements.....	10
2 Aims and Methodology.....	10
2.1 General aims.....	10
2.2 Research aims and objectives.....	10
2.3 Methodology.....	10
3 Results.....	11
3.1 Introduction and presentation of results.....	11
3.2 General soils and ground conditions.....	11
3.3 Trench 1 (Figures 4 and 5, Plates 2-4).....	11
3.4 Trench 2 (Plates 5 and 6).....	12
3.5 Finds summary.....	12
4 Discussion.....	12
4.1 Reliability of field investigation.....	12
4.2 Evaluation objectives and results.....	12
4.3 Interpretation.....	13
Appendix A. Trench Descriptions and Context Inventory.....	14
Appendix B. Finds Reports.....	16
B.1 Pottery.....	16
B.2 Ceramic Building Material.....	16
B.3 Animal bone.....	16
B.4 Glass.....	16
B.5 Iron.....	17
B.6 Stone.....	17



Appendix C. Bibliography and References.....	18
Appendix D. Summary of Site Details.....	20

List of Figures

- Fig. 1* *Site location map*
- Fig. 2* *Proposed development area*
- Fig. 3* *Trench location plan*
- Fig. 4* *Plan of Trench 1*
- Fig. 5* *Sections of Trench 1*

List of Plates

- Plate 1* *General view of Trench 1 location, looking south-west*
- Plate 2* *Trench 1 plan view, looking north*
- Plate 3* *Trench 1 view of ditch 104, looking west*
- Plate 4* *Trench 1 view of road deposits, looking south-east*
- Plate 5* *Trench 2 plan view, looking west*
- Plate 6* *Trench 2 section view, looking north*

Summary

In January 2016 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by the Blenheim Estate to undertake an archaeological evaluation prior to the submission of a planning application for potential development at Furze Platt, within Blenheim Park. The Park is a Grade I Registered Park and Garden, most of which has been designated as a World Heritage Site (WHS). Furze Platt, is an area of former farm buildings proposed for redevelopment, centred on NGR SP 431 184.

The evaluation consisted of two trenches targeted on landscape features identified during the previous walkover survey. Trench 1 was positioned across the projected line of the Roman road known as Akeman Street which runs east-to-west across the site. A second trench was located set back from the road to the south to look for any associated features. The aim was to establish the presence and state of preservation of the road within the boundaries of the present farm.

The evaluation confirmed that the road survived between the farm house and animal feed building, and the cracks observed in the north east corner of the animal feed buildings is where the building is subsiding into the northern roadside ditch. The road was found to be in a good state of preservation, showing two layers of stony material deliberately deposited and forming a notable agger. The associated roadside drainage ditch was also located on the southern side.

Trench 2 was located within area of the proposed development. The trench contained no archaeological remains, except the former cobble farmyard surface.

Only a small area of the road surface was examined, but there is the potential of survival of both the road and ancillary features along the northern edge of the proposed development.



Furze Platt, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by the Blenheim Estate to undertake an archaeological evaluation to inform proposals for potential development at Furze Platt, within Blenheim Park. The development proposes to construct a new residential development at the site. The evaluation consisted of two trenches, one within the area of the proposed development and the other trench was located across the line of the Roman road, Akeman Street, which runs east to west across the site, in order to establish the state of preservation within the boundaries of the present farm.
- 1.1.2 Blenheim Park is a Grade I Registered Park and Garden, most of which has been designated as a World Heritage Site (WHS). Furze Platt, referred to in this report as the area of proposed development, is centred on NGR SP 431 184 in the northern part of the park and its location is shown on Figures 1 and 2. It occupies c.0.5 hectares and is currently occupied by a house and former farm buildings, surrounded by trees.
- 1.1.3 The work was undertaken in response to a pre-application advice in relation to the World Heritage Site, and the intention of the evaluation is to help inform the detailed design of the development and support a future planning application. A brief was set through discussion with David Wilkinson, Assistant Inspector for ancient monuments, in discussions with Hugh Coddington, Oxfordshire County Archaeologist; this document outlines how OA implemented those requirements.
- 1.1.4 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' *'Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation'* (revised 2014) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Furze Platt lies within the northern part of Blenheim Great Park, c. 500m east of the Great Avenue. The park boundary lies c. 340m further to the east with the A44 from Woodstock to Chipping Norton running outside it. A roughly triangular wooded area surrounds the former farmhouse and outbuildings. This northern part of the park falls within the Character Area, 'The Great Park', in the WHS Management Plan (Historic Landscape Management 2006, 24).
- 1.2.2 Furze Platt lies at c. 105m OD at the head of a shallow dry valley stretching southwards to the lakes in front of Blenheim Palace. The geology of that part of the Great Park is white oolitic limestone (BGS 1:10,000 scale, sheet 236, 1972).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The area of proposed development lies within the Grade I Registered Park and Garden of Blenheim Park which, in 1987, was accorded World Heritage Site status. Within the area lies part of the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch, a Scheduled Monument. The scheduled area at this point includes its intersection with the Roman Akeman Street, lying c. 360m west of the area of proposed development at its closest point. A Bronze



Age bowl barrow, c. 410m south-west of the area of proposed development is also a Scheduled Monument, as is a rectangular enclosure, c. 500m to the north.

- 1.3.2 Blenheim Park is surrounded by a stone wall, dating from 1722-9, which is a Grade II Listed Building. Ditchley Gate and Gate Lodge, c. 990m to the north-west are Grade II Listed. Outside the Park, on the B4437 c. 820m north of the area of proposed development, is The Thatch Cottage, Grade II Listed.
- 1.3.3 The following archaeological background has been taken from the desk-based assessment (Oxford Archaeology 2016) and is summarised below:

Prehistoric Period (500,000 BP – 43 AD)

- 1.3.4 No evidence for Palaeolithic, Mesolithic or Neolithic activity has been found from within the study area. A small undated lithic scatter was found on the line of the Woodstock by-pass in 1992, c. 860m south-east of the area of proposed development.
- 1.3.5 Palaeolithic and Mesolithic populations were hunter-gatherers and few in number. Populations of these periods may potentially have been periodically exploiting the resources of the region, utilising river valleys to access hunting territories within the peripheries of the Thames watershed (Lewis *et al* 1992). By the later Mesolithic period, the valleys may potentially have been the focus for seasonal camps and small scale clearances of woodland during spring to summer with winter hunting on higher ground.
- 1.3.6 Evidence for earlier Neolithic activity has mostly been discovered during investigations of later sites. Few domestic sites for the early Neolithic period have yet been identified but evidence for this date appears to be concentrated on upper slopes of river valleys (Holgate 1988). The Neolithic clearances initially appear to have consisted of relatively temporary assarts within the woodland. The Cotswold region has been identified as having significant potential for Neolithic activity with a concentration of long barrows identified within the confines of Wychwood, approximately 7km to the west of Blenheim Park, (OA 2006).
- 1.3.7 During the Bronze Age an intensification of land-use may be associated with a change in agricultural practices in response to increasing population and associated greater social complexity (Cunliffe 1991). This may potentially be recognised by the placement of funerary monuments such as round barrows and dyke systems to delineate land divisions. Natural divisions of land such as river lines and ridges would also probably have become more important as boundaries (Bradley *et al* 1994). These natural boundaries may have been affirmed by the placement of round barrows that are usually sited on crest lines overlooking valleys (Welch 1985). River valleys would also have become important communication routes.
- 1.3.8 A round barrow is known to exist c. 410m south-west of the area of proposed development. This barrow comprises a low circular mound c 20m in diameter and 0.5m high that has been accorded Scheduled Monument status. The barrow has an in-filled external ring ditch that is not visible to surface survey and has a depression caused by excavation in the mound. Two more circular earthworks lie c. 360m south-west of the area of proposed development, which may be hut circles or more barrows. Aerial photographs from 2008 show further cropmarks c. 630m to the south-west of the area of proposed development, including a rectangular enclosure and possible pillow mounds (man-made rabbit warrens), as well as evidence for former landscape planting.
- 1.3.9 The Iron Age was a period of burgeoning population growth with an increasingly complex social hierarchy becoming established. The population of Britain, by the onset of Roman rule in the 1st century AD, was probably not equalled again until the 13th century and a similar extent of land may have been utilised for agriculture as during the



height of the Middle Ages. It is suggested that Iron Age Oxfordshire was a land of small, and largely self sufficient, farms and hamlets (Henig & Booth 2000).

- 1.3.10 During the Iron Age period the Blenheim area was influenced by the changing fortunes of three tribes, the Atrebates, the Dobunni and the Catuvellani. During the first quarter of the first century AD a large linear earthwork known as Grim's Ditch was constructed enclosing land north west of Woodstock. This North Oxfordshire section of the Ditch consists of a series of banks and ditches enclosing about 80 square kilometres that runs in a semi-circular course from Blenheim Park passing through numerous parishes (OA 2005). Some sections can no longer be traced, while others are visible and have been Scheduled. Grim's Ditch passes through the Park, one section lying c. 360m west of the area of proposed development at its closest point.
- 1.3.11 Coin evidence suggests that the Atrebatian influence from the south was gradually replaced by that of the Catuvellani to the east, and it was suggested by Crawford (1930) that the Ditch was an attempt to restrict access and protect territory in open country which existed between heavily wooded areas between the valleys of the Rivers Evenlode, Glyme and Windrush (Crawford 1930). It has also been suggested that the function of the Ditch was political and economic rather than military (Copeland 1988).
- 1.3.12 The presence of a huge territorial boundary in the form of a large bank and ditch, suggests that the area was the focus of considerable activity, especially at the time of construction. The earthwork is not complete. The most relevant evidence available is from Harden, who excavated parts of the north and east section of the Grim's Ditch at Ditchley and Blenheim in 1936: "the Dyke was never a continuous earthwork as Crawford had suggested, but built with large intervening gaps. The red plough soil which under-lay the bank in every cross section showed that the Dyke was constructed in cultivated country. It is probable therefore that the gaps in the Dyke were occasioned by the existence of woodland areas across which it would have been neither necessary nor possible to build an earthwork" (Harden 1937. 90).

Roman Period (43 AD – 410 AD)

- 1.3.13 The pattern of later Iron Age settlement continues into the Roman period with an apparent intensification of agriculture in river valley locations. It has been suggested that by the first century AD settlement was becoming increasingly nucleated as the emphasis shifted from agricultural production to a more trade orientated economy (Cunliffe 1991). This shift can be recognised more fully in the centuries after AD 43 with the establishment of roads and towns supported by nearby settlements.
- 1.3.14 The Roman Akeman Street passes through Blenheim Park, along the north side of Furze Platt, on an approximately east - west alignment from Wootton Gate to Mapleton Lodge. Akeman Street was a major road linking Alchester, near Bicester with Cirencester (*Corinium*). Excavations within Blenheim Park in 1898 (Haversfield 1899) and 1936 (Harden 1937) showed the roadway to be made of stone chippings over a larger stone foundation bed. Akeman Street still survives in part as a 10 - 15m wide agger standing up to 1m high with slight ditches to either side in this area.
- 1.3.15 Another possible Roman road, from Wootton to Hanwell, may have run along the line of the modern A44, outside the eastern boundary of the Park, c. 360m east of the area of proposed development. A possible Roman farmstead lies on its east side.
- 1.3.16 Romano-British activity within the study area is further represented by scatters of Roman pottery, c. 200m east of the area of proposed development, and coins from the same general area. In addition a Roman period pit was identified during a watching brief on the Charlbury to Arccott pipeline, c. 640m to the north-west.



Early Medieval Period (AD 410 – 1066)

- 1.3.17 There is a dearth of archaeological evidence for the period following the decline of Roman infrastructure in the 5th to 6th-centuries AD. Many early Saxon sites could easily have not been recognised during the excavation of the later phases of Romano-British sites or the earlier phases of later medieval sites, due to the relative lack of cultural material (Williams 1989). It has been suggested that there was a significant decrease in the population during the Early Medieval period (Higham 1992). This demographic collapse was in all probability the result of a deterioration in the climate, affecting crop yields and/or the outbreak of widespread disease (*ibid*).
- 1.3.18 The collapse of the wealthy villa based estates in the Blenheim area and the apparent reversion of ostensibly good agricultural land to waste and regenerated woodland may reflect the areas location within a possible debatable zone between formative states during the early Saxon period (Schumer 1984). To a certain extent the established road system of the area probably remained at least partially in use and further drovers routes and saltways may have become established or re-established. The Oxford Ridgeway, a possible Roman Road, is recorded in Saxon charters and Akeman Street may also have remained important communication routes and potential foci for settlement.
- 1.3.19 Blenheim Park falls within the limits of the ancient Royal Forest of Wychwood. It has been suggested that Wychwood was so called because it was the common wood-pasture of the early Saxon kingdom of the Hwicce, a kingdom that was eventually absorbed into Mercia recorded from 603 (Schumer 1984). A written record of the royal forests is given in Domesday Book of 1086. The entry states that the king's demesne forests of Shotover, Stowood, Woodstock, Cornbury and Wychwood were 9 leagues in length and breadth, that six villeins and eight bordars had 3.5 plough on 4.5 hides within these forests, and that a certain Rainald paid the king £10 each year for all the profits arising out of them (VCH 1907).
- 1.3.20 Evidence of pre-conquest Wychwood is provided by the record of a council held by Aethelred II 'at Woodstock in the land of the Mercians', which anticipates the numerous assemblies of magnates held at the king's hunting-quarters in that place during the 12th century. (VCH 1907). A number of the great parks of England originated as Royal Forests belonging to the Saxon kings and it seems reasonable to surmise that the Royal hunting lodge at Woodstock was one such.

Later Medieval Period (AD1066-1550)

- 1.3.21 Oxfordshire was one of the most wooded shires in England in the early medieval period and continued to be so through to the 12th and 13th-centuries (VCH 1939). A park enclosure had been established at Woodstock by the reign of Henry I (1100-35). Throughout the medieval period, Woodstock continued to be a favourite residence of kings, no doubt owing to its excellent hunting and the fact that it was within easy reach of London and Winchester.
- 1.3.22 Medieval parks were established as royal or private hunting reserves, with areas of woodland, wood pasture, open common land and heath (Rackham 1986). Areas of parkland also provided managed large timber trees for building and to a lesser extent ship construction. Woodstock was a special case and is also recorded as having mills, fishponds, reed beds, meadowland, a royal stud and even a menagerie (Bond 1987). The park contains a number of pillow mounds and other possible examples within the study area appear on aerial photographs, c. 630m south-west of the area of proposed development. The area of proposed development itself does not appear to have been

included within the Park Pale during the medieval period but may have existed as common pasture land within the greater forest of Wychwood (Bond 1987).

Post-Medieval Period (AD1550-1705)

- 1.3.23 The northern portion of Blenheim Park was probably first enclosed in 1572-73 (at which point the area of proposed development was first included within the park), with further additions made in 1635 - 1637. By the later 17th century the park appears to have been in decline. Lord Lovelace had been given custodianship of the park and had established a four-mile racecourse that followed the edge of the park outside the area of proposed development by 1676 (Bond 1987). The racecourse continued in use until at least 1710 when it appears in a sketch of the park. A milestone, c. 630m north-west of the area of proposed development, recorded within the north eastern part of the great park may be associated with this course. Despite the landscaping of the park after its acquisition by the Duke of Marlborough, racing continued sporadically until at least 1734 and a shorter course was laid out c. 1810, although it was soon removed (Bond 1987).

Blenheim Park (AD1705 - present)

- 1.3.24 The manor and park of Woodstock were presented to John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough in 1705, in recognition of his services in wars with France. The Churchills commissioned Vanburgh to design a new house and the estate was renamed Blenheim after the successful battle. The 1710 plan shows the house, its formal gardens and the original layout of the park. The wide avenue lined with trees running northwards is shown with North Lodge, then known as Brigadier Cadogan's house, to its west. The plan is not particularly accurate and the position of the area of proposed development is rather uncertain, although Bridgman's plan from 1709 does show a triangle of planting (Bapasola 2009, 23), demonstrating that it originated in the early stages of the park's landscaping. The distinctive triangular planting at Furze Platt is clearly shown on Campbell's plan from 1731.
- 1.3.25 In the mid-18th century 'Capability' Brown was commissioned to produce a new landscape design for Blenheim Park. Among his changes was the planting of a shelter belt of trees around the perimeter of the Great Park. Some new farm buildings were constructed and in 1751 a new dairy farm was constructed, called Furze Platt from the gorse surrounding it (Bapasola 2009, 53). Spyer's plan of 1763 shows the area of proposed development with a double row of planting along the edge facing the avenue and sparser vegetation across the remaining area. A single building, labelled as a barn is present on the site (*Ibid.*, 58-9).
- 1.3.26 In 1765 Brown produced designs for a Gothic screen hiding the granary, cart sheds and carter's house at Park Farm, although it was not ever built (Moggridge 1987, 104). Park Farm combined its role as a farm with that of menagerie into the 19th century when it was rebuilt (Bapasola 2009, 82). There does not appear to be any link between the farming operations at Park Farm and at Furze Platt. Pride's plan from 1772 (*Ibid.*, 76) shows more buildings within the area of proposed development, including some along the northern perimeter. In the southern tip is an enclosure, where features were identified during the walkover survey. It is the first to show the line of the Akeman Street across the park. Davis map of 1797 shows the area of proposed development blending into the perimeter shelter belt.
- 1.3.27 On the Ordnance Surveyors' Drawing of 1817 the detail of the area of proposed development is not good, but several buildings are shown. The planting in the avenue

had become irregular by that date. By 1806, much of the grazing land in the Great Park had been converted to arable including the areas east of the area of proposed development (Green 1987, 130).

- 1.3.28 The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (OS) Map of 1884 is the first to show a clear layout of buildings within the area of proposed development, which has broadly survived to the present. The L-shaped animal sheds on the north side then extended westwards to the perimeter of the site. South-east of the existing barn was a range of buildings along the perimeter wall, buttresses for which were identified on the walkover survey. The map also shows a garden on the south side of another building, possibly a house.
- 1.3.29 In the late 19th-century a quarry had been opened on the north side of the Roman Road on the east side of the avenue, c. 580m west of the area of proposed development. The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (OS) Map of 1884 shows little of the original planting of the avenue had survived and also shows the earthwork of Grim's Ditch. Furze Farm had been lent to the town of Woodstock for use as a pest house following the smallpox epidemic in 1893 (VCH XII 1990, 397).
- 1.3.30 The 2nd Edition 25" Ordnance Survey map shows the same layout, but also shows the stone outbuilding on the north side of the possible house. By 1923 within Furze Platt the line of animal sheds along the north side had been reduced to its current extent. This map appears to show a new building on the east side of the possible house. This pair of buildings continues to appear on the OS maps until 1979, when only one is marked. The OS map shows it on the site of the 19th-century building, but this appears incorrect. The surviving structure lies on the site of the new building from the 20th-century structure and is of that date.
- 1.3.31 The barn has appeared on all the maps from 1763, although the extent of the building complex has changed, with the loss of some buildings on its south side.

Historic Landscape Character

- 1.3.32 The area of proposed development has lain within a landscaped park since the late 16th century. The north part of Blenheim Park was always intended for agricultural use (VCH XII 1990) and the landscaping in the Great Park reflected this. Tree planting was confined to the central avenue and some small plantations. Dispersed across the area were a number of sets of farm buildings including those at Furze Platt.
- 1.3.33 Although the number and size of the plantations, shelter belts of trees around the perimeter and the design of the avenue have varied, the character of the Great Park has not changed significantly.
- 1.3.34 The area of proposed development was covered in gorse or trees since at least the early 18th century, with areas within it cleared for construction of the farm buildings.

1.4 Archaeological potential

- 1.4.1 The successive phases of landscaping of Blenheim Park and the construction of Furze Platt Farm in the 18th-century have all reduced the level of survival of the Roman road and its flanking ditches. However, there is clear evidence of the earthwork within the area of proposed development below some of the existing buildings, as shown on aerial photographs and by the site survey (OA 2016). The persistence of the cropmark along its alignment even where no upstanding earthworks remain suggest that even in these areas the road will survive in a truncated form below ground in the area of proposed development.



1.5 Acknowledgements

- 1.5.1 Oxford Archaeology was appointed to undertake the evaluation by the Blenheim Estate, who funded the project. David Wilkinson, Assistant Inspector for ancient monuments, in discussions with Hugh Coddington, Oxfordshire County Archaeologist, monitored the work. The fieldwork was conducted by Jim Mumford assisted by Ben McAndrew. The report was written by Jim Mumford. The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Carl Champness.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 General aims

- 2.1.1 The main aim of the evaluation was to identify the presence and/or absence of archaeological remains at the site that will help inform the future design of the development and any future planning application.
- 2.1.2 The general aims and objectives of the evaluation were to:
- (i) identify and characterise any archaeological remains (if present) or deposits that could be impacted by a proposed development;
 - (ii) identify the depth and density of any archaeological features or artefacts across the site;
 - (iii) To provide baseline information to help inform any further mitigation strategies for the site;
 - (iv) disseminate the results through the production of a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Oxfordshire HER.

2.2 Research aims and objectives

- 2.2.1 The specific research aims and objectives of the evaluation were to:
- (v) identify any features or structures associated with the Roman road;
 - (vi) investigate and characterise the sedimentary sequence of road surfaces at the site;
 - (vii) characterise any features or deposits associated with Iron Age, Roman or Saxon activity recorded at the site.

2.3 Methodology

- 2.3.1 The two trenches both measured between 15m and 23m x 1.6m (Figure 3). Trench 1 was positioned across the line of the Roman road known as Akeman Street which runs east-to-west across the site. This was in order to establish the state of preservation within the boundaries of the present farm. Trench 2 was located within area of the proposed development.
- 2.3.2 All trenches were excavated using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist. Machining continued in spits down to the top of the undisturbed natural geology or the first archaeological horizon depending upon which was encountered first. Once archaeological deposits were exposed, further excavation proceeded by hand and the appropriate use of machine.
- 2.3.3 A sample of each feature was excavated and recorded. Sufficient excavation was undertaken to resolve the principal aims of the evaluation.

- 2.3.4 All fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with standard OAS practices (Wilkinson 1992) and the WSI (OA 2016).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of the trenches which contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with the dimensions and depths of all deposits form the content of Appendix A. Only one of the two trenches contained features of archaeological origin.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 Archaeological features were all cut into the underlying geology and were sealed by, in the west either by the remnants of an old ploughsoil or dumped subsoil, and to the east by either subsoil or modern layers.
- 3.2.2 The ground conditions were generally good and the weather conditions were reasonable.

3.3 Trench 1 (Figures 4 and 5, Plates 2-4)

- 3.3.1 The trench was aligned north-south and positioned just east of the animal sheds across the line of the Akeman street Roman road (Plate 1). It measured 23m long and 1.6m wide.
- 3.3.2 The earliest deposits identified within the trench was a natural feature in the top of the limestone. It was only observed in the 1.1m x 0.6m sondage excavated through the road. The feature (110) had an uneven base and only 1.1m x 0.6m x 0.24m was exposed (fig 5; section 101). It was filled by a light reddish brown silty clay (111) with limestone fragments and sat on top of the natural limestone brash (100).
- 3.3.3 Above this were visible features, which were dated to the Roman period and consisted of a road and an adjacent roadside drainage ditch. The ditch (104) had sloping sides and flattish base measuring 1.6m x 1.5m x 0.34m and had a main lower fill of reddish brown silty clay (106) with limestone fragments of material washed into and silting up the ditch.
- 3.3.4 Just to the north of the ditch was the Roman road (107), being approximately 10m wide with a 0.5m high agger in the middle and was constructed of a base of rough limestone fragments with clay and gravel infilling (108). This was covered with a 0.10m thick surface of compacted coarse yellowish brown sandy gravel with small fragments of limestone (109). A number of possible wheel ruts were observed in the top of the surface. Although there were no finds recovered from the deposits. The surface was consistent with the typical attributes of a Roman road.
- 3.3.5 The road was sealed by a 0.10m thick upper fill (105) of light reddish brown silty clay, which was also found in the top of the roadside ditch.
- 3.3.6 This was overlain by a 0.10m thick layer of disturbed subsoil (103) of reddish brown silty clay with patches of stone, gravel and charcoal and a linear feature with sloping sides rounding to a concave base (112). It measured 1.6m x 0.78m x 0.40m and was filled by a dark brown silty clay with a lot of limestone rubble, which was material originating from the road backfilling the feature. This was thought to be a soakaway for the animal feed building to east of the site.



3.3.7 The subsoil was a 0.12m to 0.24m thick compact crushed limestone and dark brown silty clay farmyard surface (102) with various repair patches. This was sealed by 0.16m thick very dark grey brown silty clay loam topsoil (101).

3.4 Trench 2 (Plates 5 and 6)

3.4.1 The trench was aligned east to west and measured 15m long and 1.6m wide.

3.4.2 The earliest deposit was the natural limestone brash geology (200). A natural feature (204) was seen in the east end of the trench. The feature was an irregular linear, aligned north-west to south-east, and filled by a reddish brown silty clay (206) with limestone fragments. The feature formed a channel-like feature in the natural.

3.4.3 Above this was a 0.10m thick farmyard surface (202) of compact crushed limestone and dark grey brown silty clay. The surface was truncated by a service trench (203) that measured 3m x 0.65m x 0.35m and was filled by a dark grey brown silty clay (205).

3.4.4 This was sealed by 0.20m thick dark grey brown silty clay loam topsoil (201).

3.5 Finds summary

3.5.1 There was a very small assemblage of material from three contexts (101, 102 and 113) from soakaway (112). The material included pottery, ceramic building material (CBM), glass, animal bone iron and stone. The items that could be dated were all between 1790 – 1950, indicating the upper deposits were of post-medieval date.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The trenches were excavated in reasonable weather, and conditions were sufficiently good in all of the trenches to identify the presence or absence of archaeological features.

4.1.2 It is therefore felt that the recorded density and distribution of archaeological features provides an accurate representation of the evaluation area as a whole.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The evaluation confirmed that the Roman road survived between the farm house and animal feed building, and the cracks observed in the north-east corner of the animal feed buildings is where the building is subsiding into the Roman roadside ditch. Overlying the road were deposits and features of the post-medieval period, namely the farmyard surfaces.

4.2.2 The Roman road was found in the northern part of the trench, extending over 10m in width. It was identified at a depth of 0.25m below the present ground level. The survival of the Roman road within Trench 1 beneath the farmyard area suggests that although there may have been limited truncation from services, the present building's foundations may not have significantly disturbed the road. Even though only a small area of the road was examined within the evaluation, there is the potential of both the road and roadside ditch surviving along its east-west projected line across the proposed development area.

4.2.3 The Roman road comprised a base of rough limestone fragments with clay and gravel infilling covered by compacted coarse yellowish brown sandy gravel with frequent inclusions of small limestone fragments. This appeared to be the upper surface of the road itself. The sediments were deliberately deposited and formed a notable agger.



- 4.2.4 The area of proposed development may contain surviving archaeological remains of the Roman through to post-medieval periods, given that the evaluation uncovered Roman road remains and post-medieval farm features. There was no evidence within the evaluation of any earlier remains.

4.3 Interpretation

- 4.3.1 In Trench 1 at the northern end where the projected line of the Roman road was predicted, a well-preserved section of the road was observed. It was visible as a relatively undamaged metalled surface over a solid base of rough stone, forming a routeway approximately 10m wide with pronounced agger in the centre. Along the south side of the road an accompanying drainage ditch was observed cutting into the natural stone. The northern boundary was just outside the trench, beyond the limits of the site.
- 4.3.2 In addition to this a later 19th to 20th century farmyard surface was identified across the proposed development area.



APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description				Orientation		N-S
The trench contained a section of the Akeman Street. Consisting of topsoil overlying farmyard surfaces over disturbed subsoil and 19 th C feature. These were on the Roman road and its southern roadside ditch. The road overlay a natural feature in the top of the natural of limestone brash.				Avg. depth (m)		0.4
				Width (m)		1.6
				Length (m)		23
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.16	Topsoil	Pottery and glass	19 th & 20 th century
102	Layer	-	0.24	Farmyard Surfaces	Pottery and glass	19 th & 20 th century
103	Layer	-	0.10	Disturbed subsoil	-	-
104	Cut	1.50	0.34	Roadside ditch	-	-
105	Fill	-	0.10	Fill of ditch 104	-	-
106	Fill	-	0.24	Fill of ditch 104	-	-
107	Structure	10	0.50	Road	-	-
108	Layer	8.60	0.48	Road make up	-	-
109	Layer	8.60	0.10	Road surface	-	-
110	Cut	1.10	26	Natural feature	-	-
111	Fill	-	-	Fill of 110	-	-
112	Cut	0.78	0.40	19 th C feature	-	-
113	Fill	-	-	Fill of feature 112	Pottery	19 th & 20 th century



Trench 2						
General description				Orientation		E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and Farmyard surfaces overlying a natural feature in the top of the natural of limestone brash. A service trench for power to barn from farmhouse was exposed but not excavated.				Avg. depth (m)		0.4
				Width (m)		1.6
				Length (m)		15
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.20	Topsoil	-	-
202	Layer	-	0.10	Farmyard surface	-	-
203	Cut	0.65	0.35	Service trench	-	-
204	Cut	1.40	0.12	Natural feature	-	-
205	Fill	-	-	Fill of service trench	-	-
206	Fill	-	-	Fill of natural feature	-	-



APPENDIX B. FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

By John Cotter

Context	Description	Date
101	Sherds including transfer printed white ware (TPW), refined white ware (REFW), black teapot ware, modern English stoneware (ENGS BRST), 1 sherd of a shallow dish in a red unglazed stoneware with foot ring, 166g	1880 - 1920
102	Transfer printed ware (TPW) sherds including willow pattern, feather edged, lid from butter/cheese dish, 1 sherd stoneware preserve jar, 1 Leclanché cell battery porous pot body sherd, 228g	1850 - 1900
113	1 sherd white developed creamware (CREA DEV), 3g	1790 - 1830

Discussion and recommendations.

The pottery assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work. It should be included in any further analysis that is undertaken following future work on site.

B.2 Ceramic Building Material

by John Cotter

Context	Description	Date
101	1 very worn fragment post medieval floor/quarry tile, 25g	18 th – 19 th century
102	3 fragments press-moulded nibbed roofing tile, very late fabric, 180g	1880 - 1950

Discussion and recommendations.

The ceramic building material assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work.

B.3 Animal bone

by Lena Strid

Context	Description
101	1 sheep/goat tooth, 1 sheep/goat metacarpal, 1 juvenile mammal tibia, 14g

Discussion and recommendations.

The animal bone assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work.

B.4 Glass

by Ian Scott

Context	Description	Date
101	Sherds of glass including wine bottle top, wine glass stem, undiagnostic vessel glass and 2 sherds moulded vessel glass - see context 102, 66g	18 th – 19 th century
102	Sherds from 2 milk bottle rims, 2 milk bottle necks, milk bottle	Late 19 th – 20 th



Context	Description	Date
	base, modern bottle body sherds, wine bottle glass, 3 pieces undiagnostic plain cylindrical bottle, fluted neck from 20 th century bottle, 11 sherds including machine moulded base and dimpled body sherds of bottle with possible panel for label leading to plain neck – 2 sherds of same vessel in context 101, 472g	century

Discussion and recommendations.

The glass assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work.

B.5 Iron

by Ian Scott

Context	Description	Date
101	1 handmade nail, 9g	-
102	1 handmade nail, 24g	-

Discussion and recommendations

The iron assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work.

B.6 Stone

by Geraldine Crann

Context	Description	Date
101	1 small thin fragment of slate, possibly from tile, 7g	-

Discussion and recommendations.

The stone assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work.



APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Unpublished Sources

Oxford Archaeology, 1992, Fieldwork Manual, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

Oxford Archaeology, 2006. *North Lodge, Blenheim Park: Archaeological Desk-based Assessment*. Oxford Archaeology, Unpublished Client Report.

Oxford Archaeology, 2016, Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Evaluation. Furze Platt, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire

Published Sources:

Bapasola, J. 2009 *The Finest View in England: The Landscape and Gardens at Blenheim Palace*.

BGS. 1972. *Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales Solid and Drift) sheet 236. Witney*.

Bond, J (1987) in Bond, J and Tiller, K (Eds.) 1987. *Blenheim: Landscape for a Palace*.

Bradley, R, Entwistle, R and Raymond, F. 1994. *Prehistoric Land Divisions on Salisbury Plain. The Work of the Wessex Linear Ditches Project*

Copeland T. 1988 *Iron Age and Roman Wychwood*.

Crawford, O.G.S. 1930. *Grim's Ditch in Wychwood, Oxon*. Oxoniensia Vol III 1938.

Cunliffe, B. 1991. *Iron Age Communities in Britain (3rd Ed.)*.

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 2102, *National planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*

English Heritage 2007, *Understanding the Archaeology of Landscapes*

Green, D (1987) in Bond, J and Tiller, K (Eds.) 1987. *Blenheim: Landscape for a Palace*.

Harden, D.B. 1937 *Excavations on the Grim's Ditch, North Oxfordshire*. Oxoniensia ii

Haverfield, F. 1899. *Notes on the Excavation of a Roman Road in Blenheim Park*. Proc. of Soc. of Antiq. of London (Ser. 2) Vol. XVII

Henig, M & Booth P. 2000 *Roman Oxfordshire*

Higham, N. 1992. *Rome, Britain and the Anglo – Saxons*

Holgate, R. 1988. *Neolithic Settlement of the Thames Basin*. BAR (Brit.) 194.

Lewis et al. 1992. *A Late Devensian/Early Flandrian Site at Three Ways Wharf, Uxbridge: Environmental Implications*. In Needham, S and Machlin, M (Eds.) *Alluvial Archaeology in Britain*.



Margary, I. 1967. *Roman Roads in Britain*.

Mavor, W. 1806. *New Description of Blenheim (6th Ed.)*

Moggridge, H. 1987. 'Capability' Brown at Blenheim in Bond, J and Tiller, K (Eds.) 1987. *Blenheim: Landscape for a Palace*.

Schumer, B. 1984. *The Evolution of Wychwood to 1400: Pioneers, Frontiers and Forests*

VCH, 1907. *Victoria County History. Oxon Vol. II*

VCH, 1939. *Victoria County History. Oxon Vol. I*

VCH, 1990. *Victoria County History. Oxon Vol. XII*

Heritage Landscape Management (2006). *Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site Management Plan*

Welch, M. 1985. *Rural settlement Patterns in the Early and Middle Saxon Periods*. *Landscape History* 7.

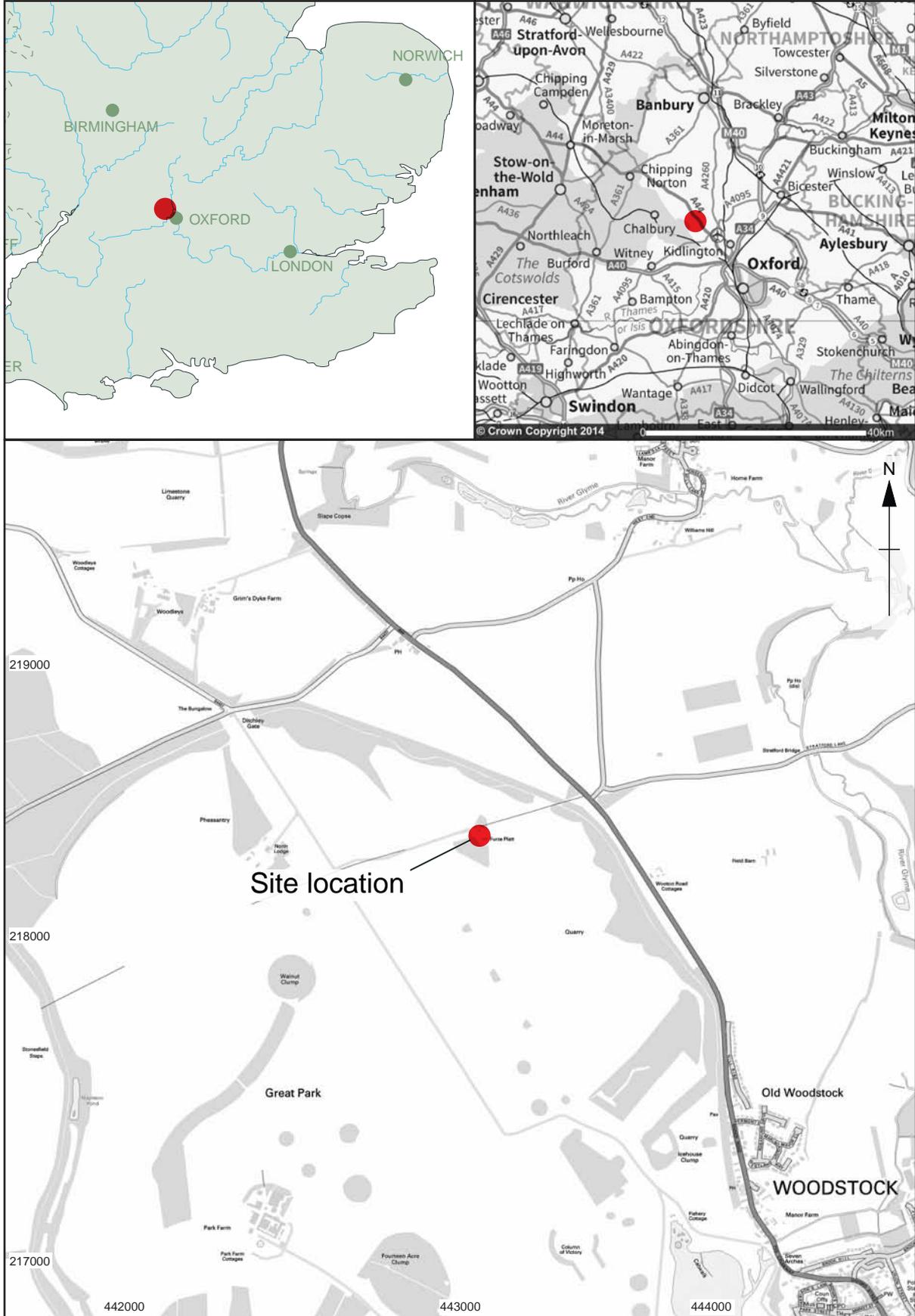
Whittle, A. 1978. *Resources and Population in the British Neolithic* *Antiquity* 52.

Williams, R. 1989. *Wavendon Gate, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon Settlement*. *South Midlands Archaeology* 19.



APPENDIX D. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Furze Platt, Blenheim Park, Oxfordshire
Site code:	WOBFZ 16
Grid reference:	SP 431 184
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	18th and 21st January 2016
Area of site:	0.5 hectares
Summary of results:	<p>Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by the Blenheim Estate to carry out an archaeological evaluation prior to planning for potential development at Furze Platt, within Blenheim Park. Blenheim Park is a Grade I Registered Park and Garden, most of which has been designated as a World Heritage Site (WHS). Furze Platt, referred to in this report as the area of proposed development, is centred on NGR SP 431 184. The fieldwork was undertaken between 18th and 21st January 2016.</p> <p>The evaluation consisted of two trenches. Trench 1 was positioned across the line of the Roman road known as Akeman Street which runs east-to-west across the site. This was in order to establish the state of preservation within the boundaries of the present farm. The road was found to be in a good state of preservation, showing two layers of stony material deliberately deposited and forming a notable agger. The associated roadside drainage ditch was also located on the southern side.</p> <p>The evaluation confirmed that the road survived between the farm house and animal feed building, and the cracks observed in the north east corner of the animal feed buildings is where the build is subsiding into the roadside ditch. Only a small area was examined there is the potential of survival of both the road and ancillary features associated with it along the east-west projected line of the road.</p> <p>Trench 2 was located within area of the proposed development. The trench contained no archaeological remains.</p>
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Blenheim Estate in due course, under the following accession number: WOBFZ 16



Reproduced from the Landranger 1:50,000 scale by permission of the Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright 1998. All rights reserved. Licence No. AL 100005569

Figure 1: Site location



X:\b\Blenheim, Furze Platt\010Geomatics\03 GIS\current\001_projects\WOBZFEV Fig 2_16-02-11.mxd\matt.bradley\11/02/2016

Figure 2: Proposed development area

1:4,000 @ A4

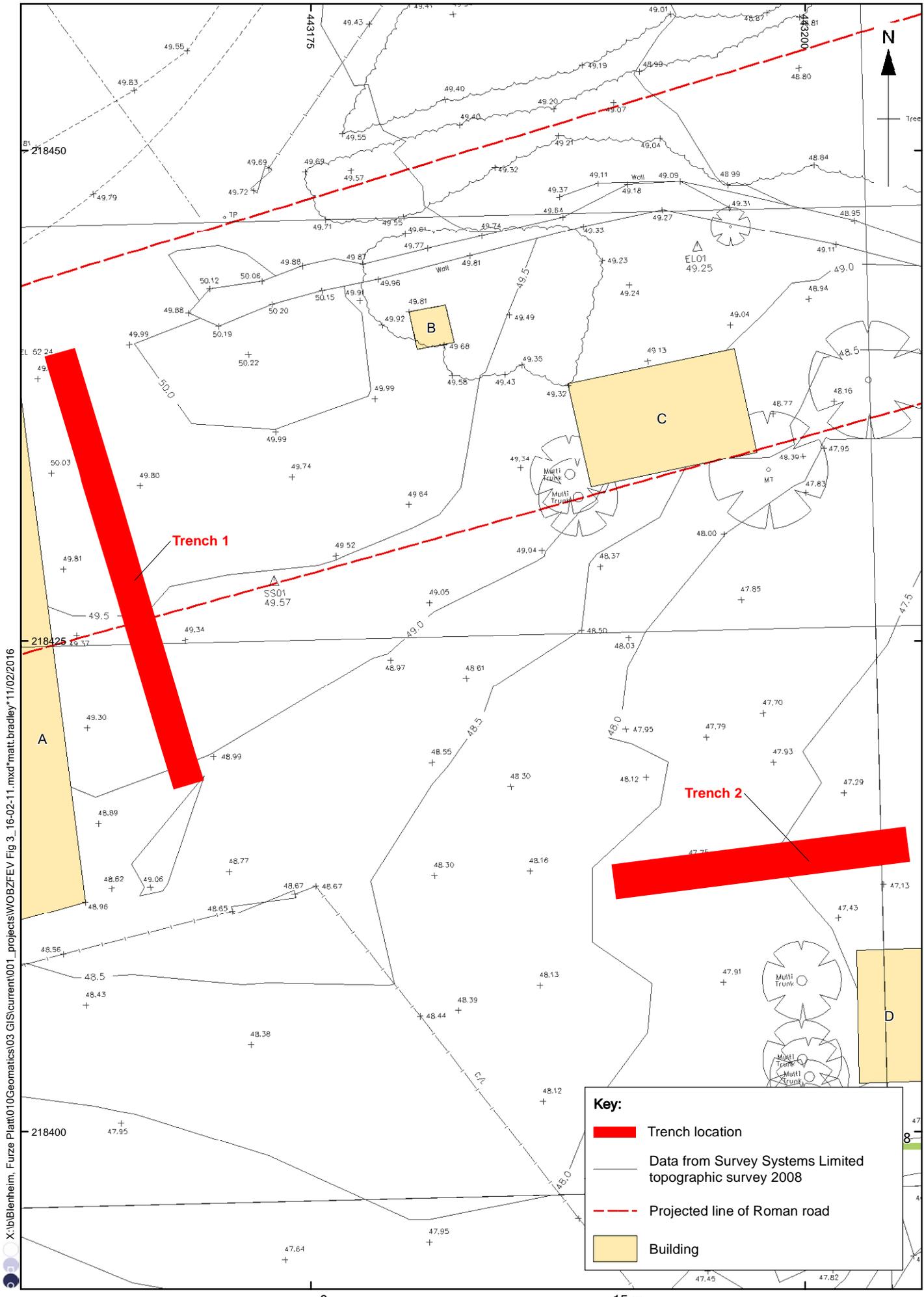


Figure 3: Trench location plan

1:250 @ A4

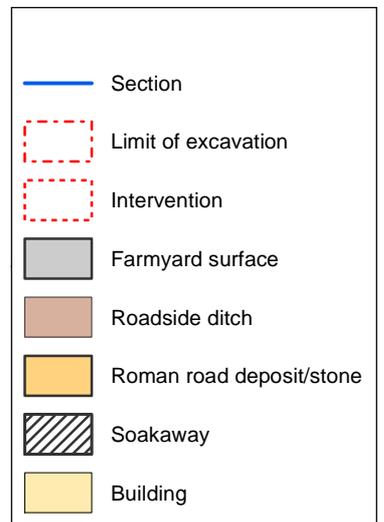
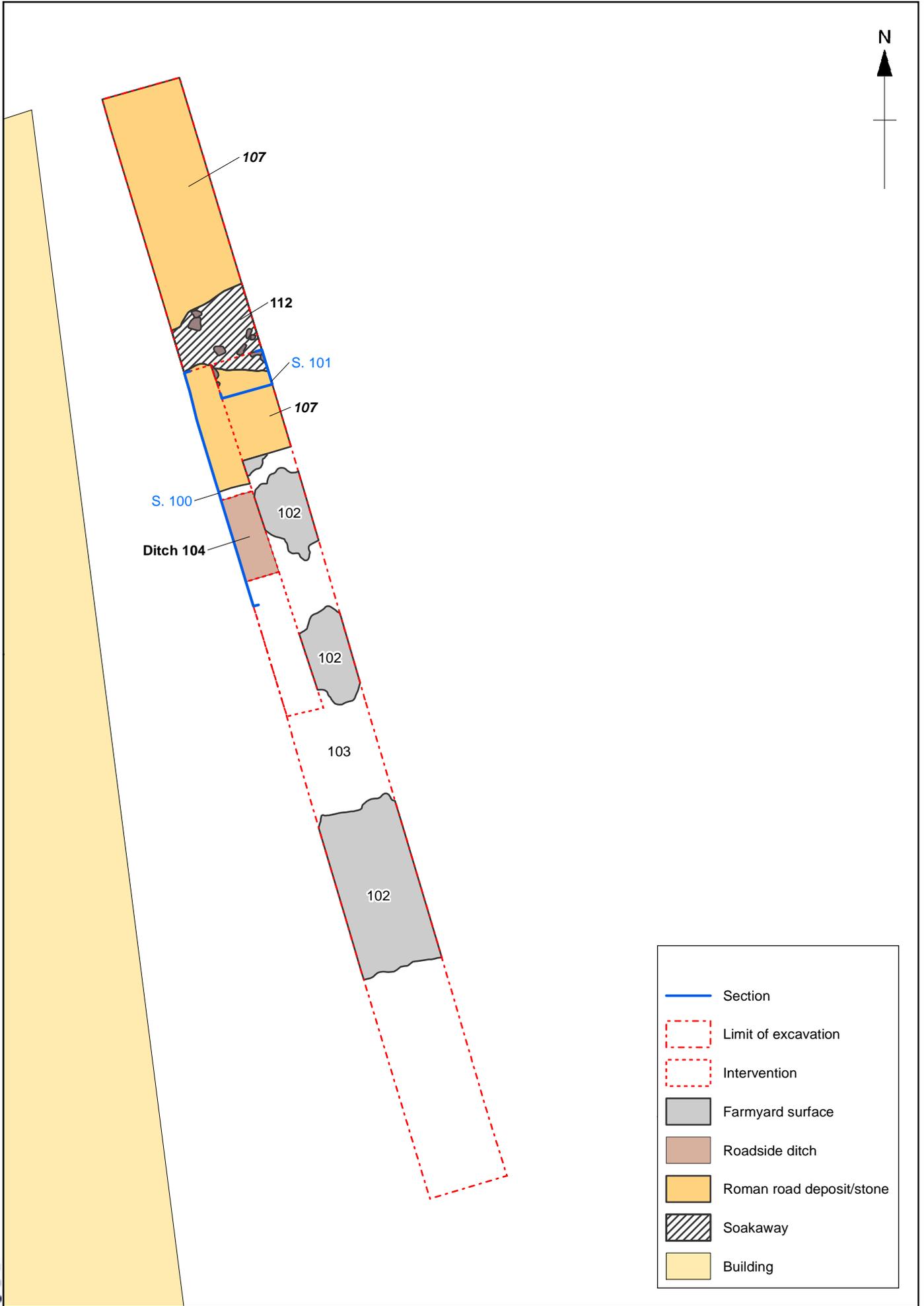


Figure 4: Plan of trench 1

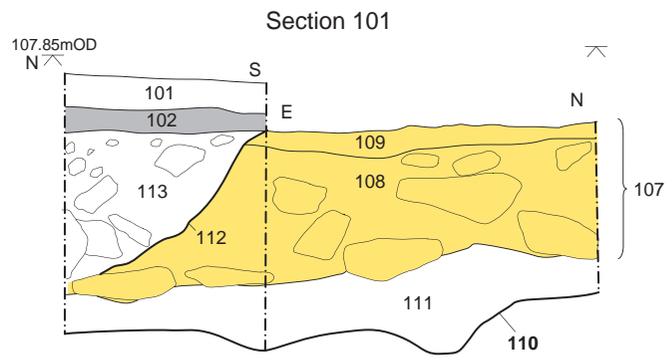
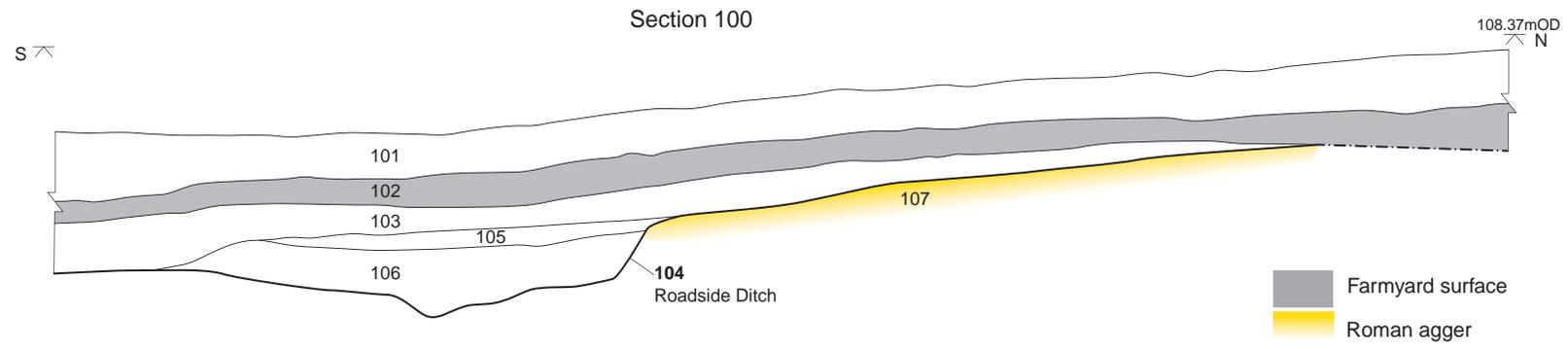


Figure 5: Sections of Trench 1



Plate 1: *General view of Trench 1 location, looking south-west*



Plate 2: *Trench 1 plan view, looking north*



Plate 3: *Trench 1 view of ditch 104, looking west*



Plate 4: *Trench 1 view of road deposits, looking south-east*



Plate 5: Trench 2 plan view, looking west



Plate 6: Trench 2 section view, looking north



**Head Office/Registered Office/
OA South**

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



Director: Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MIFA
*Oxford Archaeology Ltd is a
Private Limited Company, N^o: 1618597
and a Registered Charity, N^o: 285627*