

# Ringdale Manor Fernham Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



**Oxford Archaeology**

April 2003

**Client Name: Mr Fish**

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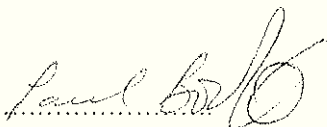
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**Ringdale Manor, Fernham, Oxfordshire*****ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*****CONTENTS**

Summary.....	1
1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Location and scope of work .....	1
1.2 Geology and topography .....	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background.....	1
2 Project Aims and Methodology.....	2
2.1 Aims .....	2
2.2 Methodology.....	2
3 Results .....	3
3.1 Description of deposits .....	3
3.2 Finds .....	3
3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains .....	5
4 Discussion and Conclusions .....	5
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory .....	6
Appendix 2 Bibliography and references.....	6
Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details.....	6

**LIST OF FIGURES**

- Fig. 1 Site location  
 Fig. 2 Site Location showing earthworks and ridge and furrow.  
 Fig. 3 Plan of features  
 Fig. 4 Sections

## SUMMARY

*In February to March 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Ringdale Manor, Fernham, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 289 927). The work was commissioned by Mr Fish in advance of a new access road and an outbuilding. The watching brief revealed the location of the east rampart of the known Iron Age camp and part of a late Roman field system, overlain by medieval ridge and furrow.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In February to March 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Ringdale Manor, Fernham, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Fish in respect of a planning application for a new access road and a new outbuilding (Planning Application No. FER/17343/1).
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by Hugh Coddington, the Deputy County Archaeological Officer of Oxfordshire County Council (OCAS 2003).
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2003).

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on low-lying ground immediately south-east of Ringdale Hillfort at approximately 135 m OD (NGR SU 2896 9276). The underlying geology comprises Ferruginous stoniness sands over Lower Greensand (BGS Map 253, 1971). The site is currently occupied by a manor house built in the 1930s.

#### 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 2003) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The development site lies adjacent to the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Little Coxwell Camp (Lyson's Camp – SAM 207). The Camp was first described by Lyson (1813) as *"the remains of a camp, which appears to have been of square form. Its double ditch is nearly entire on the west side: few traces of the work remain in other parts. This camp commands very extensive views of the Vale of White Horse"* (quoted in Cotton 1962). Other early references may be found in *Archaeology of Berkshire* (Peake 1931), BAJ 40 (Huntingford, 1936) and BAJ 42 (Underhill, 1938). It is Huntingford who first refers to the site as Lysons Camp.
- 1.3.3 Underhill records a bank encircling some three-quarters of the hill from the west to the northwest, and definite entrances were seen at the southern end and northwest corner (Cotton 1962). No mention is made of the double ditch referred to by Lyson

though a field inspection in 1948 identified a well-defined single bank and ditch (OAU, 2000).

- 1.3.4 The camp occupies an unusual position on the scarp, almost at the foot of the ridge (in the vicinity of the 137 m contour), which would make a defensive role questionable. The camp has never been excavated and its date is uncertain, although during a site visit in 1983 pottery sherds dated to the late Iron Age and Romano-British (3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century AD) periods were found where a section of the southern end of the bank had slid down the natural slope. (OAU 2000) It is therefore possible, although by no means certain, that the camp was utilized during these periods.
- 1.3.5 A second, more substantial hillfort lies 3 km to the north-west at Badbury Camp. Cropmarks immediately to the east of Badbury Camp show a series of rectilinear features, possibly representing a field system and giving evidence for possible Iron Age activity around the two hillforts. In addition, a recent excavation at Coxwell Road, Faringdon, 2 km to the north (OA forthcoming) has identified at least three phases of activity dating to the Bronze Age/early Iron Age, middle Iron Age and early Romano-British periods. The excavation provided evidence for the agricultural regime as well as for domestic and small-scale industrial activity.
- 1.3.6 A watching brief by OA was previously undertaken on the construction of a new barn at Ringdale Manor in 1999. This revealed no occupation evidence associated with the hillfort but did establish a stratigraphic sequence of limestone cornbrash overlain by c 0.4 m of colluvium and 0.4 m of topsoil (OAU, 1999).

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 Part of the line of the new road lay through a spinney. The trees here were felled and the stumps pulled out with a JCB excavator. The road line was then excavated by the machine to a depth of 0.40 m and then filled with hard core and gravel. The area for the new outbuilding and car parking was also first cleared of trees. The area was then reduced in level and a layer of hard core laid over the site. The foundations of the new outbuilding were marked out and excavated with the JCB (Figs 2 and 3).
- 2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn 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* (Wilkinson, 1992).

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Description of deposits

##### *Access Road*

3.1.1 This was located to the north of the house and looped from the driveway on the west side of the house, through the spinney to join the roadway to the barns. The new road was 3 m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.3 - 0.4 m. This exposed the natural subsoil of light yellowish brown sand with sandstone fragments (3). This was overlain by the partly exposed base of the hill fort rampart, which comprised a compacted orange brown silty sand with a lot of sandstone fragments (9) (Figs 3 and 4, Section 4). Overlying this was a light brown silty sand (8), which was interpreted as material slumping from the rampart due to natural erosion and later ploughing (Figs 3 and 4, Section 3).

3.1.2 Two Roman field boundary ditches were discovered crossing the line of the road. These consisted of ditch (4) to the west with a concave profile measuring 0.7 m x 0.12 m and cut into the natural (3) (Figs 3 and 4, Section 1). It contained a fill of dark reddish brown silty sand loam (5) with some fragments of pottery. To the east of this was a second ditch (6) with a concave base measuring 0.9 m x 0.15 m cutting into the natural (3) (Figs 3 and 4, Section 2). This was filled by a dark brown silty sand (7) with frequent pottery inclusions.

3.1.3 These features were sealed below a layer of dark reddish brown silty sand (2), an old plough soil, which varied in thickness from 0.06 m to 0.12 m. This was overlain by a 0.20-0.30 m thick layer of dark brown silty sand loam (1) topsoil.

##### *Outbuilding and Landscaped area*

3.1.4 Once the trees were removed from the area of development, a 15 m x 4 m area along the north side of the existing road was reduced to 0.5 m below ground level. This was then filled with hardcore for the car parking area. This exposed natural (3) was overlain by a deposit old plough soil (2) 0.25 - 30 m thick, and sealed below a 0.15 m thick layer of topsoil (1), which had all been heavily disturbed by tree roots from the spinney.

3.1.5 The area was leveled up with stone and the foundations were excavated. These were 0.45 m wide and to a depth of 0.6 - 0.8 m. They cut just into the natural (3) and old ploughsoil (2), which was uneven in depth due to ridges and furrows running north-east to south-west across the site. This layer had been cut by tree roots (10) and filled by a reddish brown silty sand (11), overlain by topsoil (1) (Figs 3 and 4, Section 5).

#### 3.2 Finds

##### *Flint*

3.2.1 Three pieces of struck flint were recovered. These were a large flake from context 1 and a further (broken) flake and a fragment of irregular waste from context 7. These

pieces are not closely datable but are likely to lie within a broad Neolithic/Bronze Age date range. A piece of natural flint and several fragments of unworked stone were also present.

### *Pottery*

- 3.2.2 Some 30 sherds (544 g) of pottery were recovered. These fall into two main groups: hand-made fabrics (4 sherds, 140 g) and Roman fabrics (26 sherds, 404 g). The material was recorded rapidly using standard OA recording systems and codes at a medium level of precision.
- 3.2.3 The hand-made sherds were all in fairly fine sand-tempered fabrics but with a range of firing variation resulting in different colours. There were no feature sherds and surfaces were mostly poorly preserved so it is difficult to assess the character of this material. Superficially, however, a middle Iron Age date seems most likely. This material came from contexts 1, 2 and 5, and in context 2 was associated with late Roman pottery.
- 3.2.4 The Roman assemblage consisted of the following fabrics or fabric groupings:
- F51. Oxford red-brown colour-coated ware. 5 sherds, 33 g.
  - M31. Oxford white-slipped oxidised mortarium fabric. 1 sherd, 69 g.
  - O30. Fine sandy oxidised coarse wares. 1 sherd, 15 g.
  - R30. Moderately sandy reduced coarse wares. 11 sherds, 185 g.
  - R35. Fine sandy reduced coarse ware- North Wiltshire industries. 3 sherds, 59 g.
  - R90. Coarse- (usually grog-) tempered reduced wares. 1 sherd, 9 g.
  - B10. Black-burnished type ware, may include Dorset BB1. 2 sherds, 17 g.
  - C11. Late Midlands shell-tempered wares. 2 sherds, 17 g.
- 3.2.5 The reduced coarse wares which form the bulk of the group probably derived from a variety of sources including the Oxford industry and are not closely datable - a single jar rim in fabric R30 was of a type which could have been in production from the 2nd to the 4th centuries. More chronological definition is provided by some of the other fabrics and their associated forms. Oxford products from the phase of that industry dated after AD 240 included colour-coated ware (F51) and white-slipped mortaria (M31). Identifiable vessels within the former fabric were of Young (1977) types C51 and C78, the latter dated after AD 340. Other late Roman vessel types in the assemblage included (from context 2) a flanged bowl in fabric C11 - for which a date after AD 350 is most likely in this region - and a small rim in a grog-tempered fabric (R90) which is likely to be from a late dish form with concave sides. If this is the case a late 4th century date is likely.
- 3.2.6 The majority of the pottery (18 sherds, 248 g), including the two identified Oxford colour-coated ware types, derived from a single ditch fill (7), which also produced the only fragment of ceramic building material from the site. This was of Roman date, from a 'brick' 39 mm thick.

3.2.7 Overall the more closely identifiable elements of the Roman pottery assemblage suggest a late Roman date, and none of the less closely dated material needs be incompatible with this. It is possible that the entire Roman assemblage is of the 4th century, and a late 4th century component is clearly present. The date of the small group of hand-made material remains uncertain. This may represent residual middle Iron Age material, but the sherds are quite large and it is just possible that despite their hand-made character they were associated with, or later than, the very late Roman material on the site. The assemblage is much too small to allow certainty on this matter, however.

### 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 A number of features were exposed during the watching brief along the line of the new access road. No new light was shed on the date of the construction of the rampart of the 'camp'. A few sherds of possible middle Iron Age pottery but were either unstratified or came from features probably or certainly of Roman date. The main feature revealed was the back of the rampart running along the east side of the camp, with a thick layer of material spreading out from the rampart. This contained late Roman material contemporary with material found in the two field boundary ditches to the west. This suggests that the site was partly levelled and an agricultural field system was laid out in the late Roman period. The agricultural use of the site continued in the medieval period with ridge and furrow running east to west and north-east to south-west across the site. The site was probably used for pasture in the late medieval and post medieval periods.

4.1.2 The site appears not have changed much until the building of the manor house in the 1930s and the contemporary planting of the trees.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>
1	Layer	0.2 - 3 m			Topsoil	Pottery and Flint
2	Layer	0.06 - 12 m			Old plough soil	
3	Natural				Natural	
4	Cut	0.12 m	0.70 m	3 m	Boundary ditch	
5	Fill				Fill of ditch 4	Pottery, Flint and Stone
6	Cut	0.15 m	0.90 m	3 m	Boundary ditch	
7	Fill				Fill of ditch 6	Pottery, CBM and Flint
8	Layer				Spread from rampart	Pottery
9	Layer		3 m	35 m	Rampart base	
10	Cut				Tree root holes	
11	Fill				Fill of tree holes	

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Cotton, M 1962 Berkshire Hillforts Berkshire Archaeological Journal, 60

Young, C J, 1977, *The Roman pottery industry of the Oxford region*, Brit Archaeol Rep (Brit Ser) 43, Oxford

Tingle, M 1991 The Vale of the White Horse Survey: The study of a changing landscape in the clay lowlands of southern England from prehistory to the present BAR Brit. Ser.218, Oxford

OAU, 1999 *The Garden House, Ringdale Manor, Fernham, Oxon* Archaeological Watching Brief Report

OAU 2000 Land at Coxwell Road, Faringdon, Oxfordshire Post-Excavation Assessment and Research Design

OA 2003, *Ringdale Manor, Fernham, Oxfordshire* Written Scheme of Investigation

D Wilkinson, 1992, *OAU Fieldwork Manual*

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Ringdale Manor, Fernham, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** FERING 02

**Grid reference:** NGR SU 289 927

**Type of watching brief:** Ground works for new access road and out building.

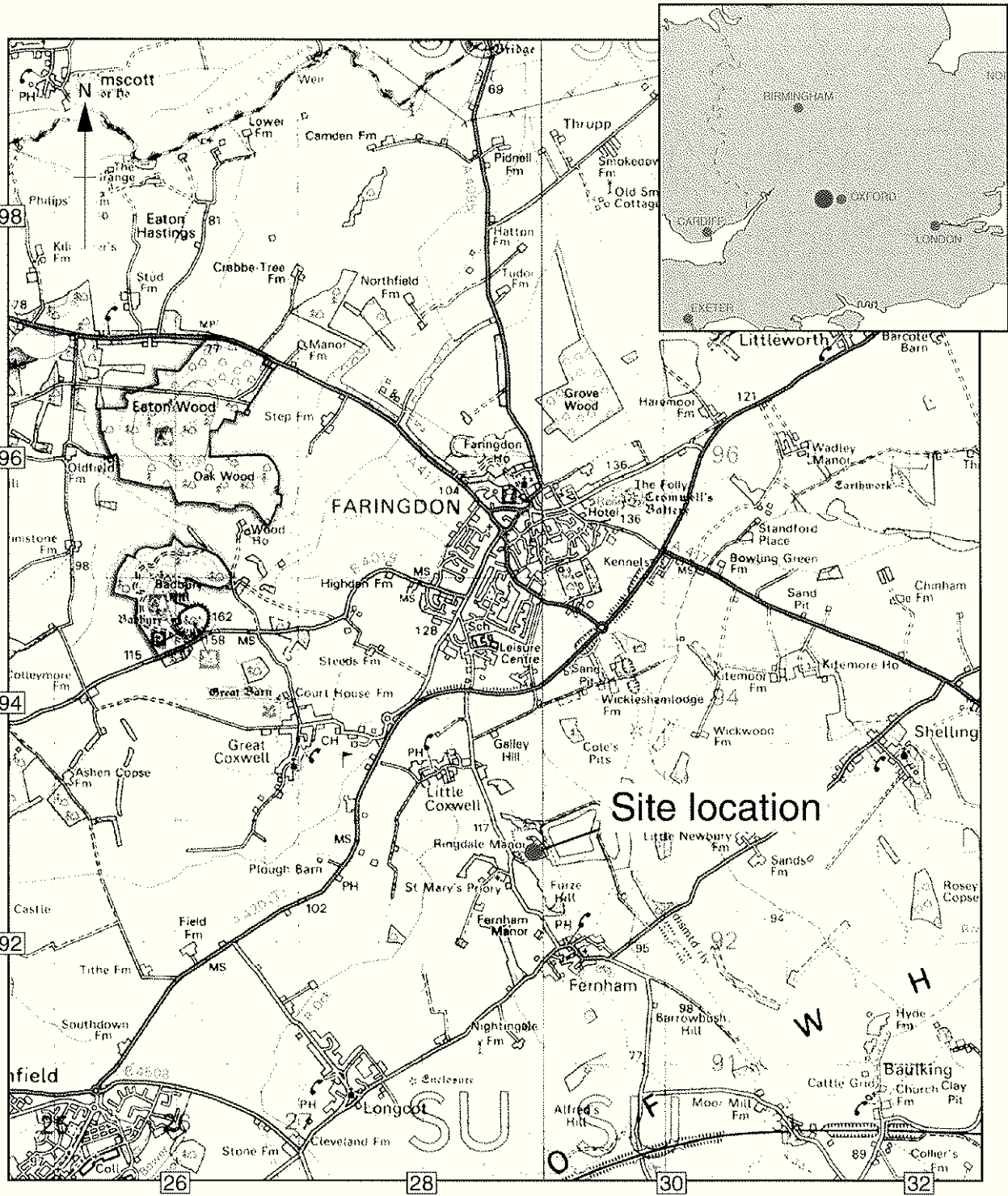
**Date and duration of project:** A total of eight site visits from the 17th February to 13th March 2003.

**Area of site:** 130 m x 40 m

**Summary of results:** The watching brief exposed the location of the east rampart to the Iron Age camp and part of a late Roman field system overlain by medieval ridge and furrow.

**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 2003.23

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Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

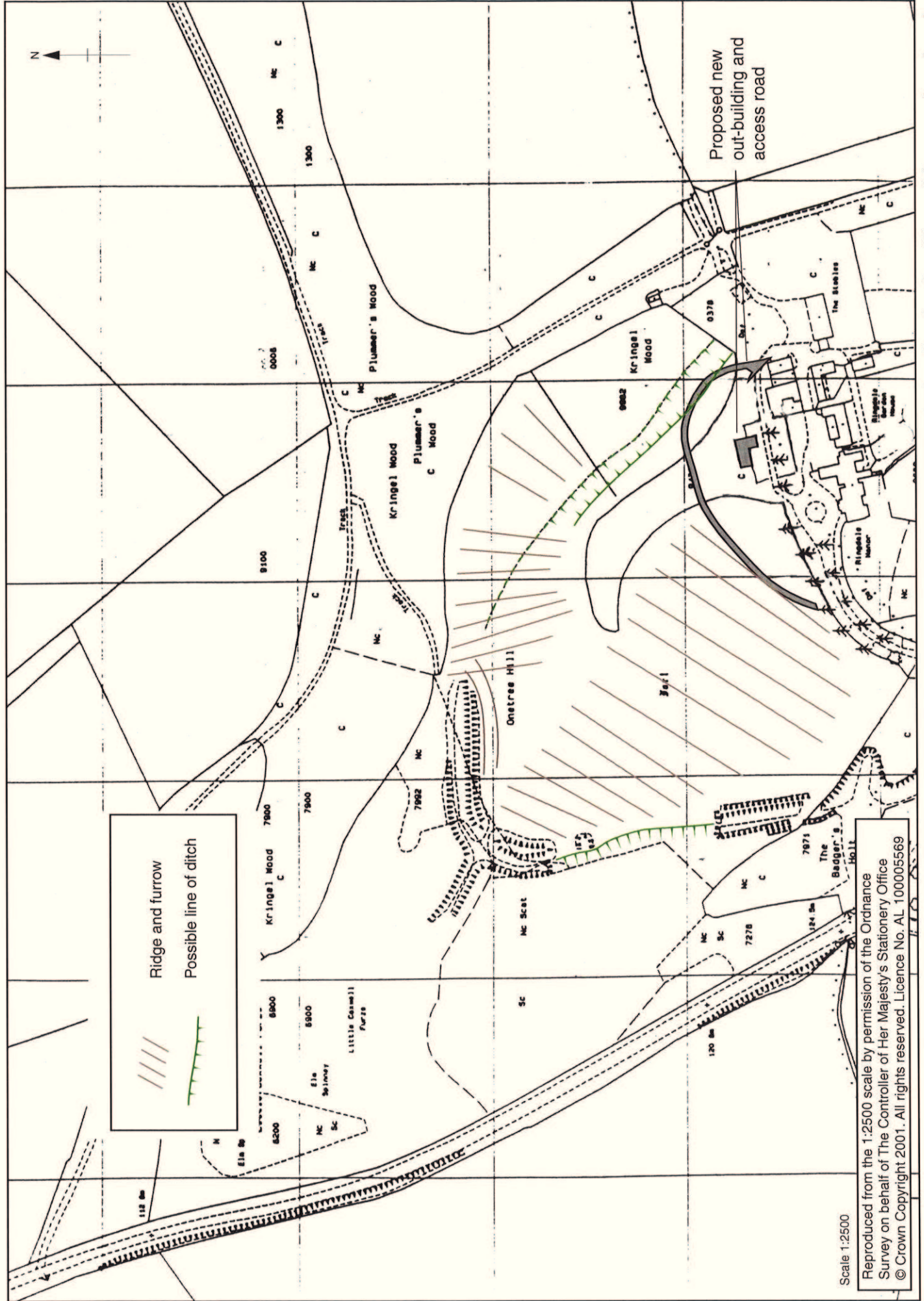


Figure 2: Site location showing ridge and furrow and earthworks

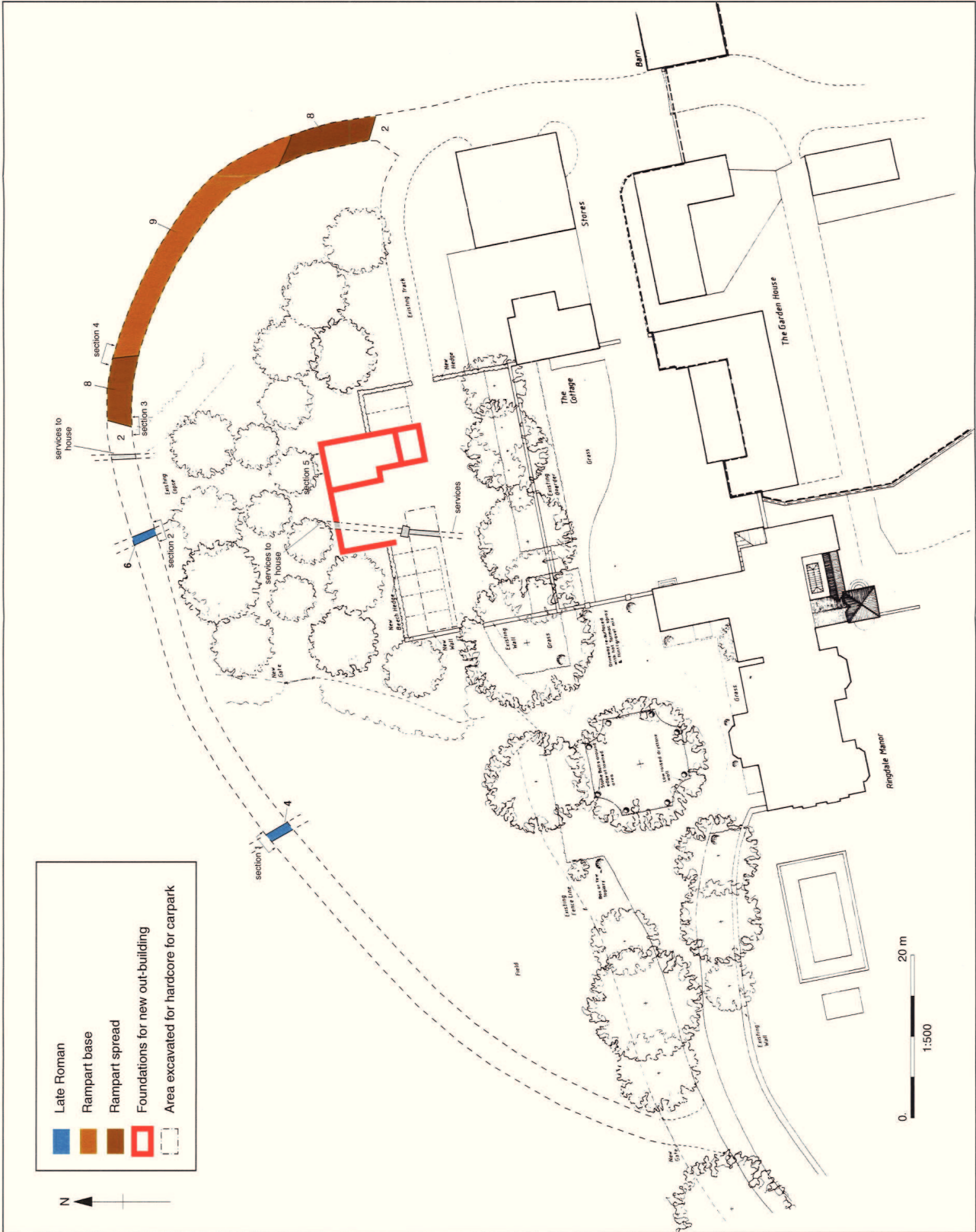


Figure 3: Plan of features

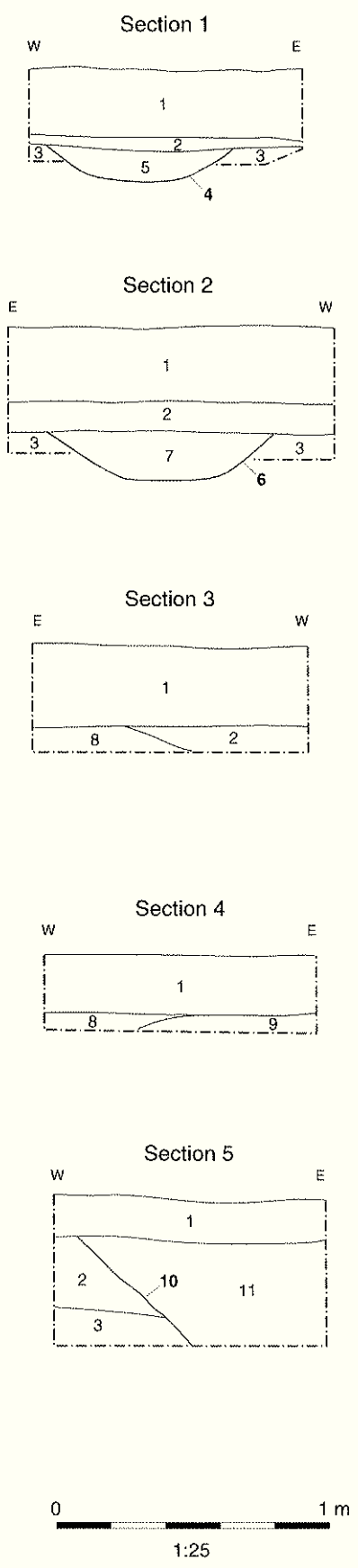


Figure 4: Sections



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