

Ashby Farm, The Hollows, Long Compton, Warwickshire

Archaeological Evaluation



understanding heritage matters

Report No 1109
November 2011



*Working for
Warwickshire*

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation at Ashby Farm, The Hollows, Long Compton, revealed no significant archaeological deposits or remains. The site lies close to possible prehistoric or Romano-British earthworks at the southern limit of the medieval settlement of Long Compton. However, as no evidence of prehistoric, Romano-British or medieval activity was revealed it is likely that the site remained beyond limits of any settlement and formed part of agricultural fields or was not intensively utilised for much of its history.

1. Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Stratford on Avon District Council for the construction of a single dwelling at Ashby Farm, The Hollows, Long Compton, Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire (08/02484/FUL). The site is located on the west side of The Hollows and the current southern edge of the village within the parish of Long Compton (SP 2894 3165). The site is currently occupied by existing farm buildings or agricultural land. The proposed development includes the construction of a detached building and associated parking and access with associated services. A condition of planning permission required the applicant to secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work to be carried out in conjunction with the development.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of two archaeological trenches in accordance with a brief prepared by the County Planning Archaeologist on behalf of the Planning Authority (March 2010), was commissioned from Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire and carried out in October 2011 and this report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under the site code LA11.

2. Location

2.1 The proposed development site is located on the southern edge of Warwickshire, overlooking the valley of the Nethercote Brook and south of the village of Long Compton. It is situated on the shoulder of a prominent ridge with a sharp, steep slope to the north and the land rising gradually to the south.

2.2 The underlying geology is a Jurassic formation of Middle Lias clays and silts capped by Ferruginous Sandstone and Oolitic Limestone which make up the remnant Marlestone Rock Bed (BGS 1974). Historically this rock was mined for iron ore, and the surrounding landscape is pockmarked by quarry pits.

3. Aims and Methods of the Evaluation

3.1 The evaluation was designed to discover the date, nature and state of preservation of any archaeological deposits which might be present in the area of the proposed development.

3.2 The work undertaken involved the examination of historical and early map evidence as well as aerial photographs, records of archaeological remains in the area and local historical journals and other publications. This was followed by excavation of two trial trenches in positions agreed with by the Planning Archaeologist and current landowners.

4. Archaeological and Historical Background

PALAEOLITHIC AND MESOLITHIC (800,000 BC – 4000 BC)

4.1 There is only a single record for evidence of Palaeolithic or Mesolithic activity in the area of the proposed development. Warwickshire Historic Environment Record MWA 6041 records 'a tight cluster of snapped blades, two possible microliths, one Mesolithic arrowhead and a few unbroken bladelets in the soil below a round barrow (MWA 2399 below).

NEOLITHIC AND EARLIER BRONZE AGE (4000 BC – 1500 BC)

4.2 Just over 1km to the east of the site lies the Rollright Stones (Lambrick 1988). This is a complex of megalithic and other monuments that straddle the border with Oxfordshire and probably represents a regionally important gathering place throughout the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. The location is well-appointed for the construction and display of ceremonial monumental architecture. The Rollright Stone circle and the Whispering Knights portal dolmen lie over the border, whilst Warwickshire's only known standing stone, known as the King Stone (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record MWA 2394) was probably constructed to mark the location of a cemetery.

4.3 Excavations in the early 1980s recorded a round limestone cairn with a central cist (WMA 2395) with a large capstone. Traces of a probable funeral pyre and a child's tooth were found to the NW of the cairn. The charcoal produced a radiocarbon date of 1540 +/- 70bp. On the SW of the cairn a second cremation deposit was located. This was covered by a small mini-cairn of stone which produced a radiocarbon date of 1420 +/- 40bc. The mini-cairn had been extended to the north-west and south-west and this stone contained indeterminate Neolithic/Bronze Age sherds and a few fragments of cremated bone. Three hollows in the top of the cairn contained cremations, one possibly associated with Beaker sherds.

4.4 The 18th century antiquarian William Stukeley described a barrow to the east of the King Stone, crossed by a dry-stone wall, which had stonework on its east side and this is clearly visible on air photographs (MWA 2398).

4.5 Another barrow first recorded by Stukeley (MWA 2399) was excavated in the early 1980s to reveal a central cremation pit dug into an earlier pit which contained traces of burnt stone. Other cremation deposits lay to the south of the barrow including an adult burial and an upturned collared urn with the remains of an infant. Charcoal from this feature had a radiocarbon date of 1370 +/- 90bc. A further cremation associated with a posthole was dated to 1530 +/- 50bc. Stukeley described a further barrow (MWA 2397) which Thomas Fisher later illustrated showing two large stones and some lesser ones which suggest a megalithic barrow of Neolithic date, although excavation in the 1980s failed to confirm this.

LATER BRONZE AGE AND IRON AGE (1500 BC – AD 43)

4.6 An enclosure (MWA 5536), first recorded by Stukeley as an earthwork, was partly excavated in the early 1980s to reveal grain storage pits, two cesspits, an infant burial and animal skulls indicative of ritual deposits. The enclosure was formed by a substantial rock-cut ditch and probably an internal wall. A double ditched trackway was aligned on the enclosure (MWA 3800).

ROMANO-BRITISH (AD 43 – 410)

4.7 There is some evidence for Roman period settlement on the hillside above the site in the form of rectilinear cropmark enclosures which may represent a significant farmstead site (MWA 12196). Pottery scatters (MWA 3801 and MWA 9552) of this period have also been recorded.

MEDIEVAL (410 – 1500)

4.8 An Anglo-Saxon cemetery (MWA 2396) has been identified from various finds reported by labourers in the 19th century. These included 'an urn of black clay' containing fragments of burnt bone and the 'blade of an old razor' - probably an Anglo Saxon knife. A ribbed bronze annular brooch, found by the jaw of a skeleton, a ring the same size as the brooch, and seven glass beads were also found. The labourers also recalled round flattish pieces of brass; possibly a saucer brooch. Skeletons were found on both sides of the road.

4.9 Medieval Long Compton (MWA 8968) can be traced as far as back Domesday (1086) when the manor was held by Geoffrey de Mandeville for the King. Before the conquest it was held by Asgar the Staller and legend has St Augustine performing a miracle in the church here, which implies that one such existed very much earlier as St Augustine lived in the 4th century AD. In 1086 Long Compton was a huge settlement and very valuable, with 30 *hides* and land for 20 ploughs, the lord being responsible for 25 slaves, 45 villagers with a priest, 13 smallholders and 2 men-at-arms with 10 ploughs. A license to hold a market on Mondays was granted 15th May 1231. The Holloway (MWA 2371) is named after a hollow way street of medieval date.

4.10 The earliest detailed map of the area dates to 1882 (Ordnance Survey 1882, Fig 2). This shows the site was unoccupied, with a footpath running along its northern edge and a stream going into a culvert in the south-eastern part of the site.

4.11 That much of the parish was under the plough in the medieval period is clear from the evidence left in the fields in the form of ridge and furrow (Fig 1).

POST-MEDIEVAL AND MODERN

4.12 Aerial photographs taken in March 1944 by the US Air Force show about 300 individual vehicles or covered dumps of material stored in preparation for the invasion of Europe in June 1944 (MWA 12159). Other aerial photographs show a variety of undated earthworks (MWA 4779, MWA 12198 and MWA 4780).

4.13 Recent archaeological work around Long Compton includes archaeological evaluations undertaken at South Hill Farm during 2011 revealed no significant archaeological remains, but revealed evidence of medieval agricultural fields (Archaeology Warwickshire 2011a and 2011b).

5. Evaluation Trenches

5.1 Two trial trenches were machine-dug by a JCB-type mechanical excavator with a 1.4m wide, toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were both seven metres long and were approximately 1.7m wide.

Trench 1

5.2 Trench 1 was aligned north-east to south-west and was machined to a depth of 0.49m at the north end, 0.64m in the centre and 0.57m at the southern end. Geological natural (102) clay was uncovered, and slightly over-cut by 0.10m, to confirm that it was not a redeposited layer or fill.

5.3 The natural clay was covered by 0.26m of yellowish brown clay loam (101). This layer contained limestone fragments, but no archaeological artefacts.

5.4 The topsoil (100) in Trench 1 was 0.17m thick and was composed of dark yellowish brown clay loam that also contained limestone fragments, but no archaeological remains.

Trench 2

5.5 Trench 2 was aligned approximately north to south and was machined to a depth of 0.60m at the northern end, 0.58m in the middle and 0.23m at the south end. Geological natural clay (204) was uncovered, and slightly over-cut by 0.08-0.12m to confirm that it was not re-deposited.

5.6 Geological natural was overlaid by a 0.25m thick layer of yellowish brown clay loam (201). This layer contained limestone fragments, but no archaeological remains.

5.7 A spring-fed water supply, to the current farm buildings, was known to exist on site but its exact location was uncertain. A linear feature was observed in the south-eastern corner of Trench 2. It was aligned north-west to south-east and cut the yellowish brown clay loam layer (201) and natural (204). The feature was interpreted as a pipe trench or culvert and was, therefore, not excavated. It was filled with very dark greyish grown loam (203).

5.8 The topsoil (200) in Trench 2 was 0.16m thick and was composed of dark yellowish brown clay loam that also contained limestone fragments but no archaeological finds.

Table 1 Recorded deposits and OD levels

		Topsoil	Layer (Relic Ploughsoil)	Natural Clay
Trench 1	Context No OD Levels	100 132.15m- 131.77m	101 131.98m- 131.60m	102 131.55m
2	Context No OD Levels	200 132.29m- 131.96m	201 132.13m- 131.80m	204 131.72m- 131.47m

* Ordnance Datum (OD) levels on top of revealed deposits showing slope variation

6. Conclusions

6.1 No significant archaeological deposits, features or finds were revealed in the two evaluation trenches. The deposit sequence revealed was consistent and comprised natural clay, a possible relic ploughsoil or topsoil and the existing topsoil. This sequence most probably reflects the current and historic use of the site as part of agricultural fields.

6.2 The only man-made feature on site was a modern service trench, probably for the spring-fed water pipe anon (*anon pers comm.*). This was the water supply to the current buildings at Ashby Farm and remained unexcavated.

6.3 The results of the evaluation and the surviving deposit sequence suggest that it is highly unlikely that any significant archaeological deposits would be disturbed by the proposed development.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix: List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>
100	Topsoil layer	Natural geology
101	Yellowish brown clay loam	
102	Yellowish brown clay	
200	Topsoil layer	Fill of 202 Natural geology
201	Yellowish brown clay loam	
202	Linear pipe trench	
203	Greyish brown loam	
204	Yellowish brown clay	

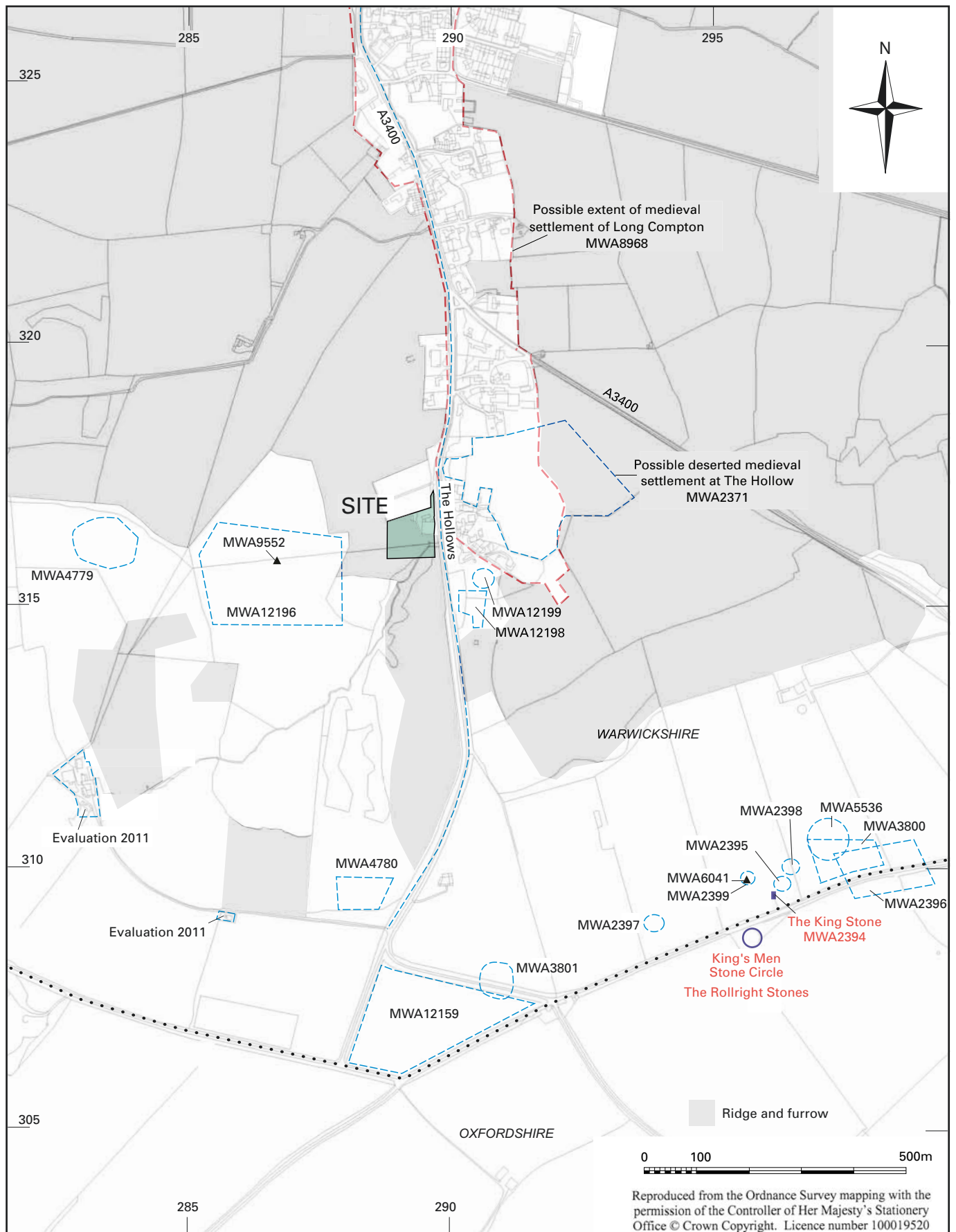


Fig 1: Site location showing archaeological sites in the vicinity

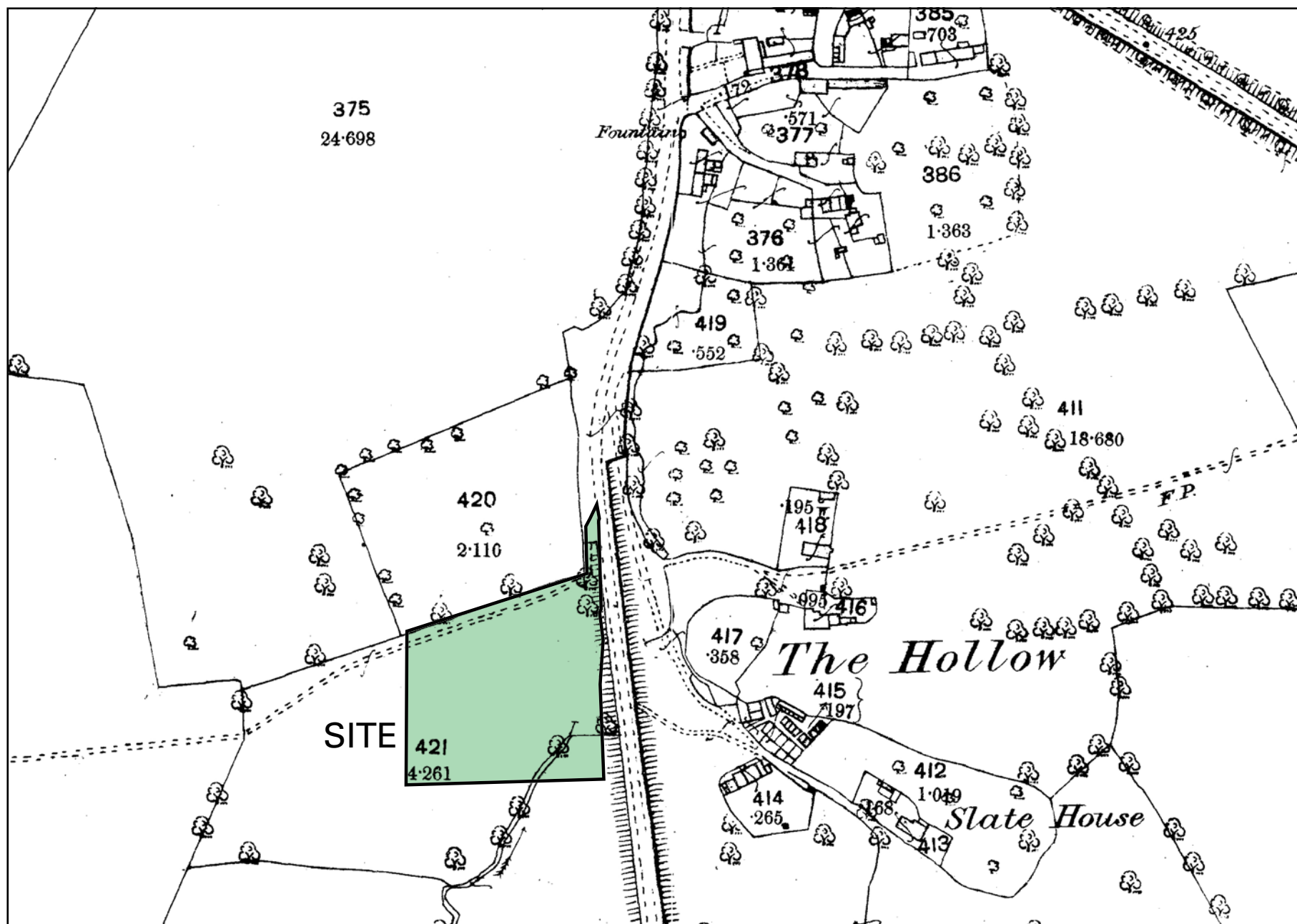


Fig 2: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1882

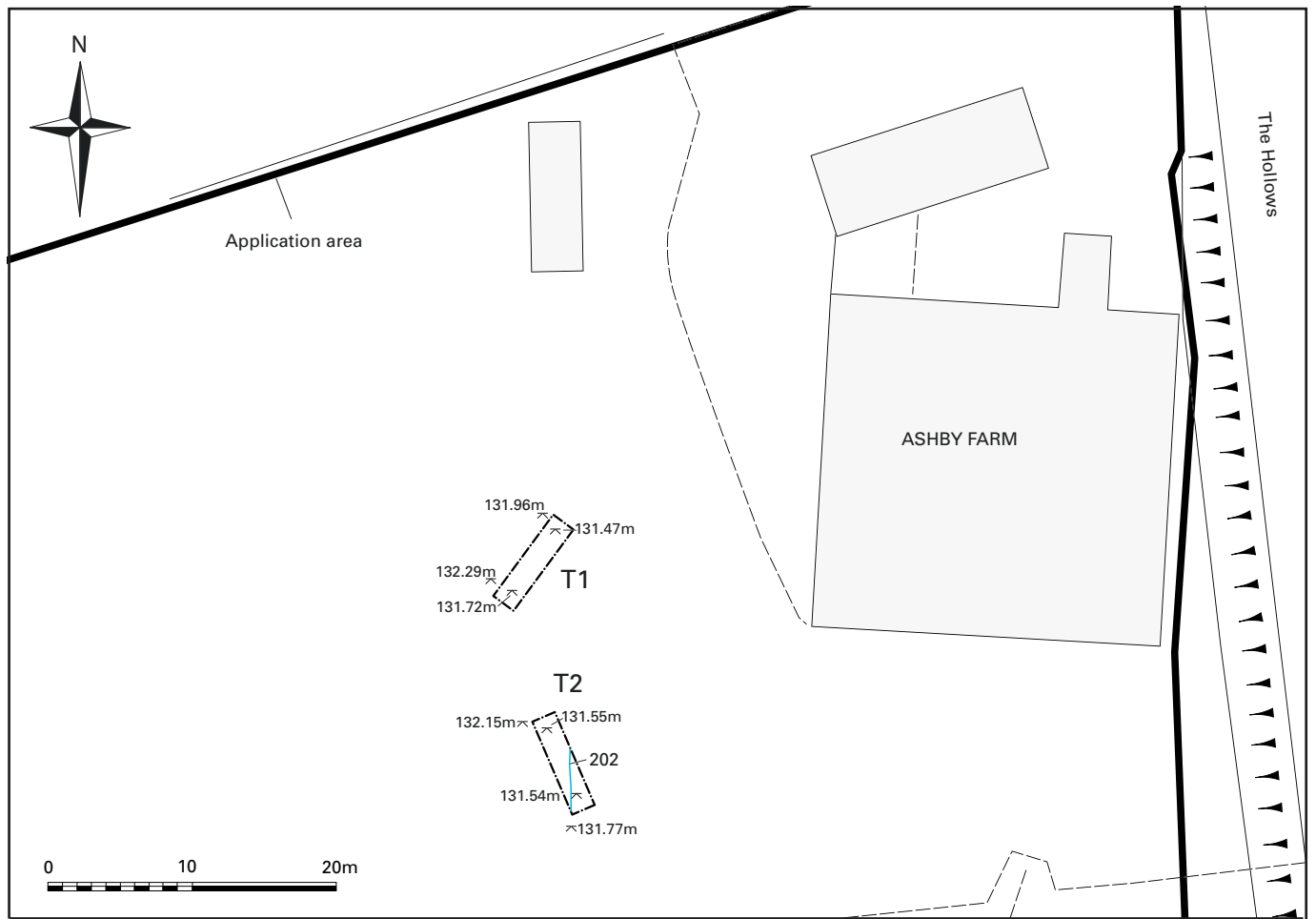


Fig 3: Evaluation trenches showing excavated levels



Fig 4: Trench 1 looking north-east



Fig 5: Trench 2 looking south



Fig 6: View of evaluation trenches