



The Cherwell School, Oxford, Oxfordshire

Detailed Gradiometer Survey Report

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RG20 0HA

On behalf of: The Cherwell School
Address: Marston Ferry Road
Oxford
OX2 7EE

Site location Marston Ferry Road, Oxford
County Oxfordshire
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Quality Assurance

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Contents

Summary	ii
Acknowledgements.....	ii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Project background.....	1
1.2 Scope of document.....	1
1.3 The site.....	1
2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND.....	1
2.2 Archaeological and historical context.....	2
3 METHODOLOGY	3
3.1 Introduction.....	3
3.2 Aims and objectives.....	3
3.3 Fieldwork methodology.....	3
3.4 Data processing.....	3
4 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION	4
4.1 Introduction.....	4
4.2 Gradiometer survey results and interpretation	4
5 DISCUSSION	5
REFERENCES	6
Bibliography.....	6
Cartographic and documentary sources.....	6
APPENDICES	7
Appendix 1: Survey Equipment and Data Processing.....	7
Appendix 2: Geophysical Interpretation	9
Appendix 3: OASIS form	10

List of Figures

- Figure 1** Site location and survey extent
Figure 2 Detailed gradiometer survey results: greyscale plot (-2 - +3 nT)
Figure 3 Detailed gradiometer survey results: interpretation



Summary

A detailed gradiometer survey was conducted over land at the Cherwell School, Oxford, Oxfordshire (centred on NGR 451440 208880). The project was commissioned by S&C Slatter Limited on behalf of The Cherwell School, Oxford with the aim of establishing the presence, or otherwise, and nature of detectable archaeological features in support of a planning application for the development of the site.

The site comprises an area of grass land located east of The Cherwell School, Oxford, covering an area of 2.9 ha. The geophysical survey was undertaken on 26 October 2020 and has identified numerous magnetic anomalies across the site. This includes an increased magnetic response indicative of the sports fields and equipment present during the survey, as well as underlying field drains traversing the site on a predominantly north to south alignment. The strong background response limits the effectiveness of the survey and it is possible that weaker archaeological anomalies have not been identified.

Despite the strong background response, the survey has successfully identified possible archaeological anomalies. A possible enclosure, as well as several pit-like features have been identified. However, it is equally likely these anomalies relate to modern features, such as a former cricket wicket and surrounding field drains.

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank S&C Slatter Limited and The Cherwell School for commissioning the geophysical survey. The assistance of Tom Betts and Hazel Moss is gratefully acknowledged in this regard.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Brett Howard and Scott Chaussée. Alexander Schmidt processed and interpreted the geophysical data and wrote the report and prepared the illustrations. The geophysical work was quality controlled by Nicholas Crabb and Tom Richardson managed the project on behalf of Wessex Archaeology.



The Cherwell School, Oxford, Oxfordshire

Detailed Gradiometer Survey Report

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by S&C Slatter Ltd, on behalf of The Cherwell School to carry out a geophysical survey at land off Marston Ferry Road, Oxford, Oxfordshire (centred on NGR 451440 208880) (**Figure 1**). The survey forms part of an ongoing programme of archaeological works being undertaken in support of a planning application for the development of the site.

1.1.2 The proposed development comprises the erection of new football pitch and the installation of various facilities surrounding this, including a new floodlight system, fencing, barrier and entrance gates, an equipment store, a new hard standing area, and vehicular access.

1.2 Scope of document

1.2.1 This report presents a brief description of the methodology followed by the detailed survey results and the archaeological interpretation of the geophysical data.

1.3 The site

1.3.1 The site is located 2.5 km north of central Oxford, and is 5.6 km south-east of Kidlington, in the county of Oxfordshire.

1.3.2 The survey comprises 2.9 ha of recreation ground, currently utilised by The Cherwell School. The site is bounded by recreational ground to the north-west and agricultural land to the north-east, The Cherwell School North Site buildings to the west, Marston Ferry Road to the south, and allotments to the east.

1.3.3 The site is flat, resting at 54 m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

1.3.4 The solid geology comprises mudstone of the Oxford Clay and West Walton Formation with overlying superficial geological deposits of sand and gravel of the Northmoor Member (BGS 2020).

1.3.5 The soils underlying the site are unrecorded due to the urban environment of the site (SSEW SE Sheet 4 1983).

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The following historical and archaeological background has been compiled using publicly available online resources, combined with the results of Wessex Archaeology's previous investigations in the area, and in-house resources. Although not exhaustive, the following is summarised from aspects that are considered relevant to the interpretation of the geophysical survey data within a 500 m area.



2.2 Archaeological and historical context

- 2.2.1 The site is situated around 2.5 km north of the historic town of Oxford, an area renowned for its rich and outstanding archaeological and historical importance.
- 2.2.2 After the Palaeolithic and the last Ice Age, communities adopted agriculture, more sedentary lifestyles, and additional components of material culture. Part of this new suite of technology is the use of pottery, which is evidenced in the study area by a find of a ceramic sherd recovered in 1911 from Lathbury Road, 750 m west of the site (Manning & Leeds 1921).
- 2.2.3 The watercourse now known as the River Cherwell remained a focus for human activity throughout the prehistoric period. Possible enclosures dating to this broad period are located by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) on the Thames Gravels Survey (1993). An intensive complex of crop marks identified at Summerfields School by Archaeological Warwickshire were interpreted as ring ditches or hut circles thought to originate in the Bronze Age, and further indicate the focus of settlement near the River Cherwell 700 m north of the site.
- 2.2.4 The intensive occupation of the earlier Prehistoric period is followed by relatively fewer features and finds from the Iron Age. Archaeology from this period comprises an undated gully, a ditch, and a pit or ditch terminal of possible Iron Age date at God's Little Acre, Ferry Pool Road, 350 m north west of the site (Ford 1996). The paucity of evidence at least indicates that the interventions were in an area at the potential limit of more extensive occupation.
- 2.2.5 Although no sites datable to the Romano-British period occur within boundaries of the study area, a farmstead was discovered on the gravel spur formed by the Summertown Radley terrace 1.3 km north-west of the site. Excavations at Middle Way, Summertown recorded a sequence of wooden buildings (perhaps granaries) and areas of compacted ground creating a hard standing within an enclosure, all datable from the Late Iron Age or early Romano-British period through to the 2nd or 3rd century AD (Williams 2007).
- 2.2.6 The excavation of a service trench by Archaeology Warwickshire at Summerfields School uncovered the remains of the inhumation burial of a likely young adult female (MOC 26910). Bone fragments returned a calibrated radiocarbon date of AD 346-540 at 95.4% probability (Rann 2016). Further mortuary activity is attested by the antiquarian recovery of several finds suggesting a cemetery dating between AD 450-650 including: shield fittings, a knife, at least 3 spearheads, a disc brooch, and 23 beads found around the area to the west of the site (Dickinson 1976). An early medieval spearhead was found in 1957 at the Oxford Bowls Club, 850 m north of the site (Dickinson 1972). While chance finds such as the above are not entirely reliable, it does suggest an active mortuary landscape in the 5th and 6th centuries and potentially associated settlement.
- 2.2.7 No estates are recorded in the area in the Domesday survey, though Oxford itself was owned by King William after the conquest (OpenDomesday). Oxford was besieged for three months in 1142 during the Anarchy, the civil war between Stephen of Blois and Empress Matilda. Stephen surrounded Oxford with Matilda within the town, though she escaped to Wallingford and later Abingdon. The site is on the outskirts of the medieval city and so could potentially produce evidence of activity related to this episode.
- 2.2.8 A total of 21 Grade II/II* Listed buildings are recorded in the study area. These are largely attributed to the 17th to 19th century and are largely associated with residential dwellings and outbuildings.



3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The geophysical survey was undertaken by Wessex Archaeology's in-house geophysics team on 26 October 2020. Field conditions were good throughout the period of survey. An overall coverage of 2.6 ha was achieved with any reduction the result of encroaching hedgerows.

3.1.2 The methods and standards employed throughout the geophysical survey conform to that set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (Wessex archaeology 2020), as well as to current best practice, and guidance outlined by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA 2014) and European Archaeologiae Consilium (Schmidt *et al.* 2015).

3.2 Aims and objectives

3.2.1 The aims of the survey comprise the following:

- To determine, as far as is reasonably possible, the nature of the detectable archaeological resource within a specified area using appropriate methods and practices; and
- To inform either the scope and nature of any further archaeological work that may be required; or the formation of a mitigation strategy (to offset the impact of the development on the archaeological resource); or a management strategy.

3.2.2 In order to achieve the above aims, the objectives of the geophysical survey are:

- To conduct a geophysical survey covering as much of the specified area as possible, allowing for on-site obstructions;
- To clarify the presence/absence of anomalies of archaeological potential; and
- Where possible, to determine the general nature of any anomalies of archaeological potential.

3.3 Fieldwork methodology

3.3.1 The cart-based gradiometer system used a Leica Captivate RTK GNSS instrument, which receives corrections from a network of reference stations operated by the Ordnance Survey (OS) and Leica Geosystems. Such instruments allow positions to be determined with a precision of 0.02 m in real-time and therefore exceeds European Archaeologiae Consilium recommendations (Schmidt *et al.* 2015).

3.3.2 The detailed gradiometer survey was undertaken using four SenSys FGM650/3 gradiometers spaced at 1 m intervals and mounted on a non-magnetic cart. Data were collected with an effective sensitivity of 0.03 nT at a rate of 20 Hz, producing intervals of 0.08 m along transects spaced 4 m apart.

3.4 Data processing

3.4.1 Data from the survey were subjected to minimal correction processes. These comprise a 'DeStripe' function (± 5 nT thresholds), applied to correct for any variation between the sensors, and an interpolation used to grid the data and discard overlaps where transects have been collected too close together.

3.4.2 Further details of the geophysical and survey equipment, methods and processing are described in **Appendix 1**.



4 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The detailed gradiometer survey has identified magnetic anomalies across the site. Results are presented as a series of greyscale plots and archaeological interpretations at a scale of 1:750 (**Figures 2 to 3**). The data are displayed at -2 nT (white) to +3 nT (black) for the greyscale image due to strong magnetic responses across the site.
- 4.1.2 The interpretation of the datasets highlights the presence of potential archaeological anomalies, ferrous responses, burnt or fired objects, and magnetic trends (**Figure 3**). Full definitions of the interpretation terms used in this report are provided in **Appendix 2**.
- 4.1.3 Numerous ferrous anomalies are visible throughout the dataset. These are presumed to be modern in provenance and are not referred to, unless considered relevant to the archaeological interpretation.
- 4.1.4 It should be noted that small, weakly magnetised features may produce responses that are below the detection threshold of magnetometers. It may therefore be the case that more archaeological features may be present than have been identified through geophysical survey.
- 4.1.5 Gradiometer survey may not detect all services present on site. This report and accompanying illustrations should not be used as the sole source for service locations and appropriate equipment (e.g. CAT and Genny) should be used to confirm the location of buried services before any trenches are opened on site.

4.2 Gradiometer survey results and interpretation

- 4.2.1 The background magnetic response recorded is significantly increased throughout the site. This is likely to be associated with the sites modern land use as a school playing field. The modern infrastructure on site included sports pitches, a cricket wicket, and a running track. It is likely the background magnetic response has limited the detection of weaker archaeological anomalies that may be present.
- 4.2.2 In the centre of the survey area, a weakly positive recti-linear anomaly has been identified (**4000**). The anomaly is visible for 11.5 m north – south and 8.5 m east – west. The anomaly is interpreted as possible archaeology and indicates a ditch feature, such as an enclosure. However, it is equally possible this anomaly relates to a more modern feature, such as field drains or the location of a former cricket wicket, the modern example of which is noted immediately to the east. Due to the high level of disturbance recorded on site, it is not possible the confidently interpret this anomaly.
- 4.2.3 To the south-east of the survey area, several amorphous positive anomalies have been identified at **4001**. The anomalies indicate pits that could be evidence of wider settlement, such as refuse or extraction activity. However, it is equally possible these anomalies are localised variation in the magnetic susceptibility of the topsoil or geological deposits. It is also possible the anomalies are associated with the sites current land use. Again, due to the high level of disturbance recorded on site, it is not possible the confidently interpret these anomalies.
- 4.2.4 Some highly magnetic, dipolar linear anomalies have been identified. These indicate drains as they are largely noted on a north – south alignment. Parallel, largely negative linear anomalies have been identified traversing the site on the same alignment. These are also thought to be drains.



5 DISCUSSION

- 5.1.1 The survey has identified extensive evidence of the modern land use of the site. This includes an increased magnetic response indicative of the sports fields and equipment present during the survey, as well as underlying field drains traversing the site the on a predominantly north to south alignment. The strong background response limits the effectiveness of the survey and it is possible that weaker archaeological anomalies have not been identified.
- 5.1.2 Despite the strong background response, the survey has successfully identified possible archaeological anomalies. A possible enclosure, as well as several pit-like features have been identified. However, it is equally likely these anomalies relate to modern features, such as a former cricket wicket and surrounding field drains.



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Cartographic and documentary sources

Ordnance Survey 1983 *Soil Survey of England and Wales Sheet 6, Soils of South East England*. Ordnance Survey, Southampton

Online resources

British Geological Survey Geology of Britain Viewer (accessed October 2020) <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

Google Earth (accessed October 2020)

Heritage Gateway (accessed October 2020) <https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/>

Magic Maps (accessed October 2020) <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

National Library of Scotland (accessed October 2020) <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore>

Old Maps (accessed October 2020) <https://www.old-maps.co.uk>

Open Domesday (accessed October 2020). <https://opendomesday.org>



APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Survey Equipment and Data Processing

Survey methods and equipment

The magnetic data for this project were acquired using a non-magnetic cart fitted with four SenSys FGM650/3 magnetic gradiometers. The instrument has four sensor assemblies fixed horizontally 1 m apart allowing four traverses to be recorded simultaneously. Each sensor contains two fluxgate magnetometers arranged vertically with a 1m separation and measures the difference between the vertical components of the total magnetic field within each sensor array. This arrangement of magnetometers suppresses any diurnal or low frequency effects.

The gradiometers have an effective resolution of 0.03 nT over a ± 100 nT range, and measurements from each sensor are logged at intervals of 0.25 m. All of the data are then relayed to a tablet, running the MonMX program, which is used to record the survey data from the array of probes at a rate of 20 Hz. The program also receives measurements from a GPS system, which is fixed to the cart at a measured distance from the sensors, providing real time locational data for each data point.

The cart-based system relies upon accurate GPS location data which is collected using a Leica Viva system with rover and base station. This receives corrections from a network of reference stations operated by the Ordnance Survey and Leica Geosystems, allowing positions to be determined with a precision of 0.02m in real-time and therefore exceed the level of accuracy recommended by European Archaeologiae Consilium recommendations (Schmidt *et al.* 2015) for geophysical surveys.

Data may be collected with a higher sample density where complex archaeological anomalies are encountered, to aid the detection and characterisation of small and ephemeral features. Data may be collected at up to 0.125 m intervals along traverses spaced up to 0.25m apart.

Post-processing

The magnetic data collected during the detail survey are downloaded from the SenSys cart system for processing and analysis using both commercial and in-house software. This software allows for both the data and the images to be processed in order to enhance the results for analysis; however, it should be noted that minimal data processing is conducted so as not to distort the anomalies.

The cart-based system generally requires a lesser amount of post-processing than the handheld Bartington Grad 601-2 fluxgate gradiometer instrument. This is largely because mounting the gradiometers on the cart reduces the occurrence of operator error; caused by inconsistent walking speeds and deviation in traverse position due to varying ground cover and topography.

Typical data and image processing steps may include:

- GPS DeStripe – Determines the median of each transect and then subtracts that value from each datapoint in the transect. May be used to remove the striping effect seen within a survey caused by directional effects, drift, etc.
- GPS Base Interpolation – Sets the X & Y interval of the interpolated data and the track radius (area around each datapoint that is included in the interpolated result).
- Discard Overlaps - Intended to eliminate a track(s) that have been collected too close to one another. Without this, the results of the interpolation process can be distorted as it tries to accommodate very close points with potentially differing values.



Typical displays of the data used during processing and analysis:

- XY Plot – Presents the data as a trace or graph line for each traverse. Each traverse is displaced down the image to produce a stacked profile effect. This type of image is useful as it shows the full range of individual anomalies. XY plots are available upon request.
- Greyscale – Presents the data in plan using a greyscale to indicate the relative strength of the signal at each measurement point. These plots can be produced in colour to highlight certain features but generally greyscale plots are used during analysis of the data.



Appendix 2: Geophysical Interpretation

The interpretation methodology used by Wessex Archaeology separates the anomalies into four main categories: archaeological, modern, agricultural, and uncertain origin/geological.

The archaeological category is used for features when the form, nature and pattern of the anomaly are indicative of archaeological material. Further sources of information such as aerial photographs may also have been incorporated in providing the final interpretation. This category is further sub-divided into three groups, implying a decreasing level of confidence:

- Archaeology – used when there is a clear geophysical response and anthropogenic pattern.
- Possible archaeology – used for features which give a response, but which form no discernible pattern or trend.

The modern category is used for anomalies that are presumed to be relatively modern in date:

- Ferrous – used for responses caused by ferrous material. These anomalies are likely to be of modern origin.
- Modern service – used for responses considered relating to cables and pipes; most are composed of ferrous/ceramic material although services made from non-magnetic material can sometimes be observed.

The agricultural category is used for the following:

- Former field boundaries – used for ditch sections that correspond to the position of boundaries marked on earlier mapping.
- Ridge and furrow – used for broad and diffuse linear anomalies that are considered to indicate areas of former ridge and furrow.
- Ploughing – used for well-defined narrow linear responses, usually aligned parallel to existing field boundaries.
- Drainage – used to define the course of ceramic field drains that are visible in the data as a series of repeating bipolar (black and white) responses.

The uncertain origin/geological category is used for features when the form, nature and pattern of the anomaly are not sufficient to warrant a classification as an archaeological feature. This category is further sub-divided into:

- Increased magnetic response – used for areas dominated by indistinct anomalies which may have some archaeological potential.
- Trend – used for low amplitude or indistinct linear anomalies.
- Superficial geology – used for diffuse edged spreads considered to relate to shallow geological deposits. They can be distinguished as areas of positive, negative, or broad bipolar (positive and negative) anomalies.



Appendix 3: OASIS form

Project Details:

Project name		The Cherwell School, Oxford, Oxfordshire			
Type of project		Detailed gradiometer survey (Field evaluation)			
Project description		<p>The site comprises an area of grass land located east of The Cherwell School, Oxford, covering an area of 2.9 ha. The geophysical survey was undertaken on Monday 26 October 2020 and has successfully identified numerous magnetic anomalies across the site. These are thought to be largely modern in origin and no anomalies that can confidently be interpreted as archaeological in origin have been identified. It is likely the background magnetic response has limited the detection of possible features due to the magnitude of these responses.</p> <p>Several anomalies that are tentatively interpreted as archaeological in origin are noted. A possible enclosure, as well as several pit-like features have been identified. However, it is equally likely these anomalies indicate modern features.</p> <p>The survey has identified extensive evidence of the modern land use of the site. This includes an increased magnetic response indicative of the sports fields and equipment present during the survey, as well as underlying field drains traversing the site the on a predominantly north to south alignment.</p>			
Project dates		Start: 26-10-2020	End: 26-10-2020		
Previous work		Not known			
Future work		Not known			
Project Code:	239200	HER event no.	N/A	OASIS form ID:	wessexar1-407199
		NMR no.	N/A		
		SM no.	N/A		
Planning Application Ref.		20/01524/PAC			
Site Status		None			
Land use		Other 14 – Recreational usage			
Monument type		Period			

Project Location:

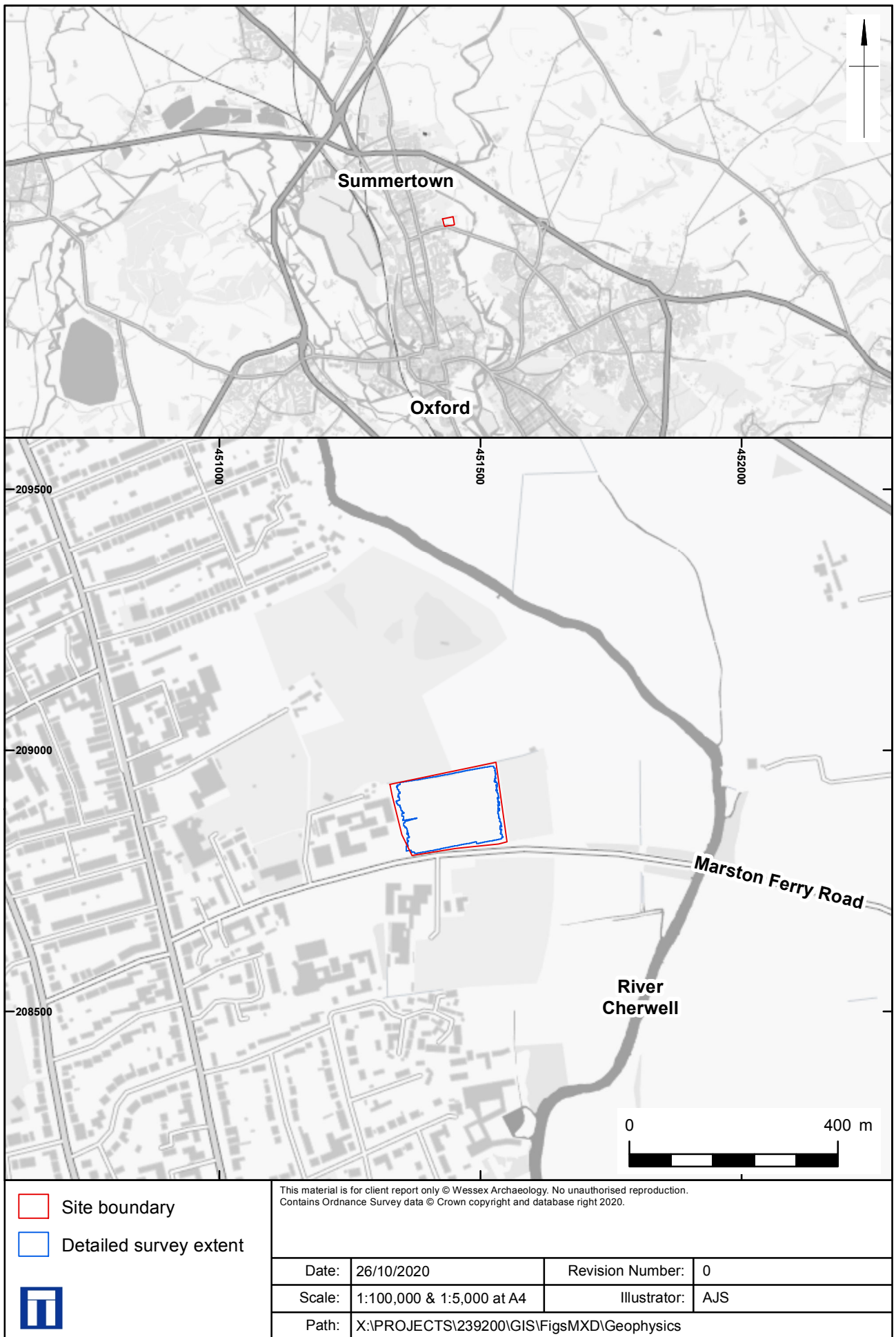
Site Address	The Cherwell School, Oxford, Oxfordshire			Postcode	OX2 7EE
County	Oxfordshire	District	Oxford	Parish	Oxford
Study Area	2.9 ha	Height OD	54 m aOD	NGR	451440 208880

Project Creators:

Name of Organisation	Wessex Archaeology				
Project brief originator	S&C Slatter Limited	Project design originator		Wessex Archaeology	
Project Manager	Tom Richardson	Project Supervisor			
Sponsor or funding body	S&C Slatter Limited	Type of Sponsor			

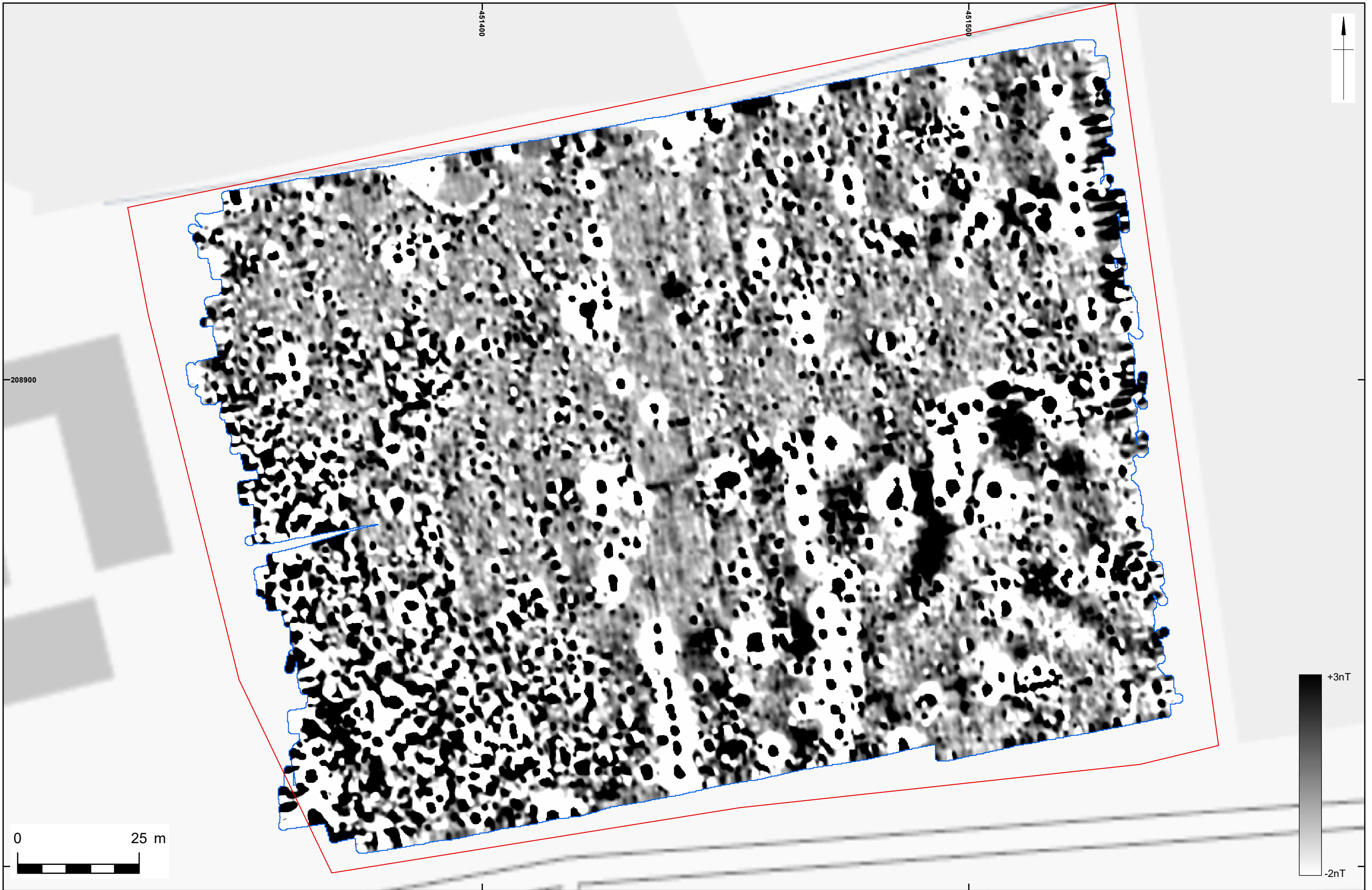
Project Archive and Bibliography:


Physical archive	N/A	Digital Archive	Geophysical survey and report	Paper Archive	N/A
Report title	The Cherwell School, Oxford, Oxfordshire Detailed Gradiometer Survey Report			Date	2020
Author	Wessex Archaeology	Description	Unpublished report	Report ref.	239200.03



Site location and survey extent

Figure 1



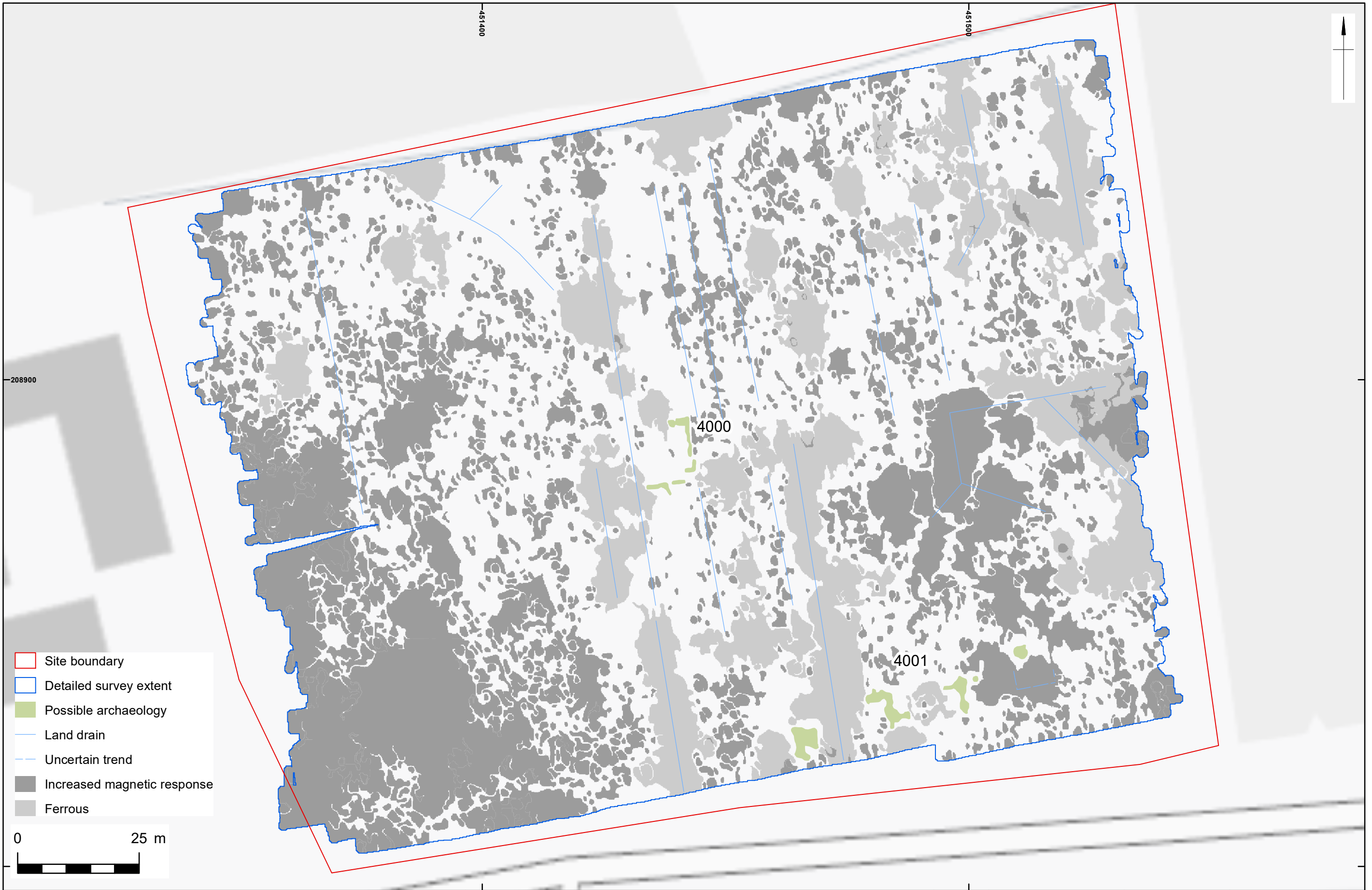

 Site boundary
 Detailed survey extent


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Date:	26/10/2020	Revision Number:	0
Scale:	1:750 at A3	Illustrator:	AJS
Path:	X:\PROJECTS\239200\GIS\FigsMXD\Geophysics		

Detailed gradiometer survey results: greyscale plot (-2 - +3 nT)

Figure 2



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Detailed gradiometer survey results: interpretation

Figure 3



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