



Post Office Lane Wantage, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



**Post Office Lane
Wantage
Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Prepared on behalf of
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Report reference:
69880.02

August 2008

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Contents

	Summary	iii
	Acknowledgements	iv
1	INTRODUCTION	1
	1.1 Project Background	1
2	THE SITE.....	1
	2.1 Location, topography and geology.....	1
	2.2 Archaeological and Historical Background	2
3	WATCHING BRIEF AIMS	2
	3.1 Archaeological Monitoring	2
4	WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY	2
	4.1 Introduction.....	2
	4.2 Fieldwork.....	2
	4.3 Health and Safety	3
	4.4 Survey.....	3
	4.5 Recording.....	3
5	WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS.....	3
	5.1 Introduction.....	3
	5.2 Stratigraphy	4
	5.3 Archaeological Remains.....	4
6	FINDS	4
	6.1 Introduction.....	4
7	ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE	5
	7.1 Introduction.....	5
	7.2 Assessment Methods.....	5
	7.3 Results.....	6
	7.4 Conclusions	6
	7.5 Potential and Recommendation	6
8	DISCUSSION.....	7
9	RECOMMENDATIONS	7
10	ARCHIVE STORAGE AND CURATION	7
	10.1 Museum	7
	10.2 Archive Storage	7
	10.3 Copyright.....	7
	10.4 Security Copy	8
11	REFERENCES	8
12	APPENDIX 1: 'ROUTE' TRENCH SUMMARY	9

List of Figures and Plates

Cover	Location of Pits 5, 9 and 15 in cable trench viewed from the north-west
Figure 1	Location of pits within the watching brief area
Plate 1	North facing representative section showing old ground surface/ occupation Layer 3 with perimeter wall in background
Plate 2	North facing baulk section of Pits (5) and (15)
Plate 3	West facing section of Pit 9
Back	Machining of cable trench in car park area viewed from the north

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by Scottish and Southern Energy Power Distribution (the Client), to undertake an archaeological watching brief to monitor ground works during excavation of a trench for proposed electricity underground cabling (hereafter, 'the Route') along Post Office Lane, Wantage, Oxfordshire. The proposed Route currently comprises a lane and open car park area. The Route runs between NGR 439952 187831 down Post Office lane and NGR 439928 187835 to the existing electricity sub-station.

The Route is located in close proximity to the market place in Wantage which was an important town in the late Anglo Saxon and Medieval periods. Previous archaeological investigations in the vicinity of Post Office Lane revealed features dating to these eras. The Route is therefore considered to have some potential for archaeological features dating to the Saxon, medieval and post medieval periods.

The watching brief fieldwork was carried out in August 2008.

The watching brief uncovered three substantial domestic refuse pits **(5)**, **(9)** and **(15)** dating to the post-medieval period including residual medieval pottery sherds retrieved from pits **(5)** and **(9)**. All were partially exposed within the trench limits located in a cluster towards the west end of the cable trench within the car park area.

No evidence of archaeological features were found in the remainder of the Route.

It is recommended that the results of the watching brief be published as a summary note in the 'Oxoniensia'.

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Scottish and Southern Energy power Distribution. Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Richard Refroy (The Client) for commissioning the project and the advice of Hugh Coddington, Deputy County Officer (CAO) of OCAS (Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service).

The Project was managed by Damian De Rosa of Wessex Archaeology. The watching brief fieldwork was undertaken by Steve George, Oliver Good and Rebecca Fitzpatrick. This report was compiled by Rebecca Fitzpatrick. Illustrations were prepared by Linda Coleman. The finds assessed by Lorraine Mephram and the environmental sample was processed by Marta Perez-Fernandez and assessed by Chris.J.Stevens

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Scottish and Southern Energy Power Distribution (The Client) to undertake an archaeological watching brief to monitor groundworks during excavation of a trench for proposed electricity underground cabling (hereafter 'the Route') along Post Office Lane, Wantage, Oxfordshire. (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2 Scottish and Southern Energy Power Distribution propose to lay approximately 8 x 90 metres (i.e. 8 cables each 90m long) of underground cabling within a 2m wide trench along Post Office Lane and west to the existing substation. In line with the regulations within the Electricity Act their agents (Savills Ltd) consulted the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (OCAS) about the potential impact of the scheme upon below ground archaeological features. Given the archaeological potential of the immediate area OCAS recommended that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken whilst the cabling trench is excavated south along Post Office Lane and west to the existing electricity substation (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.3 A Brief (OCC 2008) was prepared by Hugh Coddington, Deputy County Archaeological Officer (CAO) of OCAS setting out how the watching brief should be conducted and stating that a specification should be submitted to and approved by the CAO in advance of works commencing .
- 1.1.4 A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (WA, 69880.01) was submitted and approved by the CAO prior to the commencement of fieldwork.
- 1.1.5 The watching brief fieldwork took place on the 1st, 3rd, 10th, 14th and 15th August 2008.
- 1.1.6 This report sets out the results of the watching brief.

2 THE SITE

2.1 Location, topography and geology

- 2.1.1 The Route runs south from Wallingford Street at National Grid Reference (NGR) 439958 187892 for 60 metres down Post Office Lane at NGR 439952 187831 and then 30 metres west to the existing electricity substation through an area that has not been developed at NGR 439928 187835 (**Figure 1**).
- 2.1.2 The Route lies at approximately 93m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).
- 2.1.3 The underlying geology is Upper Greensand (GSGB, 1971, Sheet 253).

2.2 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 2.2.1 The site of the proposed cabling lies just to the south east of the Market place in Wantage which was an important town in the late Anglo Saxon and Medieval periods. The exact location of the Anglo Saxon settlement is unclear but there is no reason to believe that it was not located in the area of the current Market place and Church that has been suggested as occupying the site of an earlier Minster Church. Wantage was the birth place of King Alfred and the manor remained in royal ownership until 1199. In 1213 permission was granted for a fair. No written grant for a market has been found for Wantage but its level of prosperity in the twelfth century strongly suggests that one was in existence.
- 2.2.2 In March 2006 archaeological field evaluation was undertaken some 50m to the south at St Mary's School. Trenches in the northern part of the school revealed ditches and post holes dating to the later Saxon and earlier Medieval periods. There is no reason to suggest that these or other contemporary features do not extend north to Post Office Lane. The cartographic evidence suggest that burgage plots extended eastwards from Newbury Street to a back lane, now Post Office Lane.

3 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS

3.1 Archaeological Monitoring

- 3.1.1 The aims of the archaeological monitoring were:
- determine the presence/absence and extent of any buried archaeological remains within the Route that may be impacted.
 - identify, within the constraints of the watching brief, the date, character, condition and depth of any surviving remains within the Route.
 - assess the degree of existing impacts to sub-surface horizons to document the extent of survival of buried archaeological deposits.

4 WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The following methodology was proposed in order to meet the aims and objectives of the archaeological watching brief. All works were undertaken in accordance with the standards set out within the WSI and the requirements of the Client and the County Archaeologist for OCAS (Oxford County Archaeological Services). All fieldwork was conducted in accordance with the guidance and standards outlined in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (revised 1999).

4.2 Fieldwork

- 4.2.1 The location and Route of the trench was predetermined by the Client in accordance with the Electricity Act. The cable trench was 90m long by 2m wide (**Figure 1**).

4.2.2 The whole line of the Route (cabling trench and easement strip) was excavated by the principal contractor using a machine (mini excavator) under constant archaeological supervision. All machining was carried out using a toothless ditching bucket. The spoil was stored on Site within the confines of Heras fenced zones within the car park area. The Route was machined to the level of existing services in Post Office Lane and to the upper surface of archaeological features and/or geology (Upper Green Sand) whichever was encountered first in the car park area.

4.2.3 Areas of the Route or stages of the ground work that were monitored and were of no archaeological interest were made clear to the Client so that development could proceed in those areas. The fieldwork was concluded when it was clear that no further archaeological remains would be revealed.

4.3 Health and Safety

4.3.1 All work was carried in accordance with Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety regulations 1992 and all other relevant Health and Safety legislation and regulations and codes of practice in force at the time.

4.3.2 Prior to the commencement of the field work a Risk Assessment was produced. All staff involved in works signed and complied with this document.

4.4 Survey

4.4.1 Areas under archaeological observation were surveyed using a GPS (1200), to an accuracy of $\pm 100\text{mm}$ and tied in to the Ordnance Survey.

4.5 Recording

4.5.1 Written recording was undertaken using Wessex Archaeology *pro-forma* recording sheets. Representative sections of trial trenches and test pits were recorded at a scale of 1:10. Archaeological features were recorded at 1:10 in section and 1:20 in plan. The spot height of all principal features and levels were calculated in metres relative to Ordnance Datum, correct to two decimal places. Plans, sections and elevations were annotated with spot heights as appropriate.

4.5.2 A unique number was issued for each feature and deposit, relating to the trench and test pit in which it was found.

4.5.3 A photographic record was produced consisting of monochrome prints and colour transparencies. Digital images were also taken to support general site recording.

5 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Archaeological features were present in the east-west part of the Route located towards the existing electricity substation, immediately north of the perimeter wall (**Figure 1**). The remains comprise three substantial pits (**5**), (**9**) and (**15**). All the features were located towards the west end of the Route and

partially exposed within the trench limits on the south side. The remaining north-south section of the Route contained no archaeological features or deposits. A detailed trench summary is contained in **Appendix 1**.

5.2 Stratigraphy

- 5.2.1 The north-south stretch of the Route consisted of tarmac overlying modern levelling layers and disturbed ground to a depth of 1.50m. In the east-west trench of the Route the modern tarmac (1) and hogging levelling layer (2) was present to a depth of 0.35m and sealed the upper deposits of pits (5), (9) and (15). All the pits were located towards the west end of the Route and appeared to cut an old surface/ occupation layer (3) (**Plate 1**) that consisted of sandy silty clay with chalk/very soft sandstone fragments.
- 5.2.2 The natural geology, Upper Green Sand, was revealed in the east-west part of the Route. The natural geology, as exposed, comprised of sands with low clay content with no coarse components.

5.3 Archaeological Remains

- 5.3.1 Within the trench a substantial pit (5) (**Plate 2**) was recorded this was located at the westernmost edge of the pit group. The pit was partially exposed within the trench and measured 1.13m in width and 1.26m in depth. The pit contained a series of deliberate backfills derived from refuse activity. Artefacts were retrieved from fill (8) (*Environmental sample 1*) and included fragments of animal bone, oyster shell, CBM (ceramic building material) and pottery sherds dating to the post-medieval period.
- 5.3.2 A relatively deep pit (9) (**Plate 3**), also located to the west end of the trench, was recorded. The pit was partially exposed within the trench limit and measured 1.20m in length and 0.97 in depth. The pit was found to comprise of a sequence of deliberate backfilled deposits. Artefacts were retrieved from the lower fills of the pit. A sherd of post-medieval pottery and sherd of residual medieval pottery was recovered from basal fill (10). Animal bone and a stamped fragment of post-medieval clay pipe stem were recovered from deliberately backfill deposit (11). Deposit (12) yielded metal objects of iron as well as a relatively high quantity of CBM of post-medieval date and a sherd of residual medieval pottery.
- 5.3.3 A third substantial pit (15) (**Plate 2**) situated in close proximity to and located on the east side of pit (5) was also recorded in the trench and measured 0.85m in width and 1.07m in depth. The pit was partially exposed within the trench limit and comprised of a two deliberately backfilled deposits. The latest and most substantial deposit (16) contained pottery dating to the post medieval period and animal bone.

6 FINDS

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 A small quantity of finds was recovered during the watching brief, including material of medieval and post-medieval date. The finds are quantified by material type in **Table 1**.

- 6.1.2 Medieval material comprises four sherds of pottery – one coarseware of 12th/13th century date from context 10, a jar rim in a coarse sandy fabric, probably 13th or early 14th century, from context 12, and two late medieval sandy wares from context 8. Some of the roof tile included in the category of ceramic building material (CBM) could also be medieval, although most of this is post-medieval.
- 6.1.3 The remaining two sherds of pottery are post-medieval (both coarse redwares, from contexts 10 and 16 respectively). The single piece of clay pipe (context 11) is a stem with the maker's stamp of William Pearce, who was working at East Woodhay in Berkshire in the early 18th century (Cannon 1997, fig. 69, 4).
- 6.1.4 Other finds, which are undatable, comprise a small quantity of animal bone, one oyster shell, a piece of limestone which may have been used as building material, and some very corroded iron objects, probably nails.
- 6.1.5 Given the small quantities represented here, this small assemblage is not recommended for long-term curation, and the finds will be discarded prior to archive deposition.

Table 1: All finds by context (number / weight in grammes)

Context	Animal Bone	CBM	Pottery	Other Finds
8	8/23		2/35	
10			2/10	
16	4/58		1/7	1 shell
17	2/22			
11	4/42	1/2		1 clay pipe
12		14/1509	1/1	1 stone; 5 iron
TOTAL	18/145	15/1511	6/53	

7 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 A single bulk sample of 13 litres was taken from a dump deposit (8) in a post-medieval rubbish pit (5). The sample was processed for charred plant remains.

7.2 Assessment Methods

- 7.2.1 The sample was processed by standard flotation methods; the flot retained on a 0.5 mm mesh, residues fractionated into 5.6 mm, 2mm and 1mm fractions and dried. The coarse fractions (>5.6 mm) were sorted, weighed and discarded. The flot was scanned under a x10 – x40 stereo-binocular microscope and the presence of charred remains quantified (Table 2) to record the preservation and nature of the charred plant and wood charcoal remains. Preliminary identifications of dominant or important taxa are noted below, following the nomenclature of Stace (1997).
- 7.2.2 The flot has quite high numbers of roots which may indicate the possibility of intrusive or reworked material, however, charred material was reasonably plentiful and well preserved.

7.3 Results

- 7.3.1 The flot had relatively high numbers of free-threshing (*Triticum aestivum* sl.) wheat grains (over 50 grains), but no chaff was recovered. Two grains of barley (*Hordeum vulgare* sl.) were also recovered. More unusual and quite possibly reworked were three degraded glume bases of probable spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta*). No other definite crop remains were seen, although it is possible that the single grain of oat (*Avena* sp.) may have been of the domesticated variety rather than the wild type. A single fragment of hazelnut shell (*Corylus avellana*), probably also represents the collection of hazelnuts for food.
- 7.3.2 The sample had relatively few probable weed seeds, these being represented by single seeds of vetches/wild pea (*Vicia/ Lathyrus* sp.), dock (*Rumex* sp.), clover (*Trifolium* sp.) and goosefoot (*Chenopodium* sp.). The sample also has a single stone of hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*).
- 7.3.3 Wood charcoal was present although comprised mainly smaller fragments. Some of the larger fragments were clearly ring-porous and probably therefore of oak (*Quercus* sp.).
- 7.3.4 A single small fish vertebrae was recovered.

7.4 Conclusions

- 7.4.1 The finding of free-threshing wheat is common throughout medieval and post-medieval England period (Greig 1991) and has been recovered from sites nearby, such as Abingdon along with barley and hazelnut (Jones 1979). The charred material can be associated with general food preparation and is in keeping with the general interpretation of the material as discarded refuse.
- 7.4.2 The presence of spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta*) is of some interest. The crop is unlikely to have been grown in the local region in the post-medieval period being more common in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. As such it is probable that such remains were reworked from earlier activity upon the site. It might be noted in this respect that such remains were recovered from previous excavations in Wantage (Stevens 1999; Fairbairn and Austin 2001).

7.5 Potential and Recommendation

- 7.5.1 The samples have no further potential and no further work is recommended.

Table 2: Assessment of the charred plant remains and charcoal

Feature type/no	Context	Sample	size litre s	Flot						Residue Charcoal analysis >4mm	
				flot % size ml	% root s	Grain	Chaff	Charred other	Charcoal >4/2mm		Other
Pit											
5	8	1	13	80	⁶⁰	A*	-	C	1/5ml	fish (C)	-

KEY: A*** = exceptional, A** = 100+, A* = 30- 99, A = ≥10 items, B = 9 - 5 items, C = < 5 items, sab/f = small animal/fish bones; Moll-t = terrestrial molluscs Moll-f = freshwater molluscs; Analysis: C = charcoal, P = plant, M = molluscs, C14 = radiocarbon suggestions.

8 DISCUSSION

- 8.1.1 The watching brief has identified archaeological features in the south west part of the Route within the east-west cable trench. These comprised three, probably contemporary, substantial post-medieval refuse pits.
- 8.1.2 The nature of the finds and environmental sample material indicate the possibility of domestic activity in the vicinity of the south-west section of the Route.
- 8.1.3 The location of the pits, in close proximity to the perimeter wall of the car park may indicate the rear of an earlier property(ies) that once occupied the Route in this zone. The evidence of an old ground surface further supports this idea.
- 8.1.4 It is also notable that a small quantity of residual medieval pottery sherds were retrieved from pits (5) and (9). This is consistent with the archaeological potential as defined in the WSI which highlighted medieval activity in the vicinity of the Route.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1.1 The watching brief has demonstrated that the Route was largely devoid of archaeology, except at the west end where a group of three post-medieval pits were identified. No further archaeological field work is recommended as no further groundwork is proposed in this area. However the results should be published at summary level as a note in 'Oxoniensia'.

10 ARCHIVE STORAGE AND CURATION

10.1 Museum

- 10.1.1 It is recommended that the project archive is deposited with the Oxford County Museum Service. It is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology, under the site code reference 69880.

10.2 Archive Storage

- 10.2.1 The complete site archive, which will include records, plans and photos, will be prepared to comply with guidelines set out in *Environmental Standards for the permanent storage of excavated material from archaeological sites* (UKIC 1984, Conservation Guidelines 3), and *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage* (Walker 1990).

10.3 Copyright

- 10.3.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the site will be retained by Wessex Archaeology Ltd under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act* 1988 with all rights reserved. The Museum, however, will be granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such use shall be non-profitmaking, and conforms to the Copyright and Related Rights regulations 2003.

10.4 Security Copy

- 10.4.1 In line with current best practice, on completion of the project a security copy of the paper records will be prepared, in the form of microfilm. The master jackets and one diazo copy of the microfilm will be submitted to the National Monuments Record Centre (Swindon); a second diazo copy will be deposited with the paper records at the Museum, and a third diazo copy will be retained by Wessex Archaeology

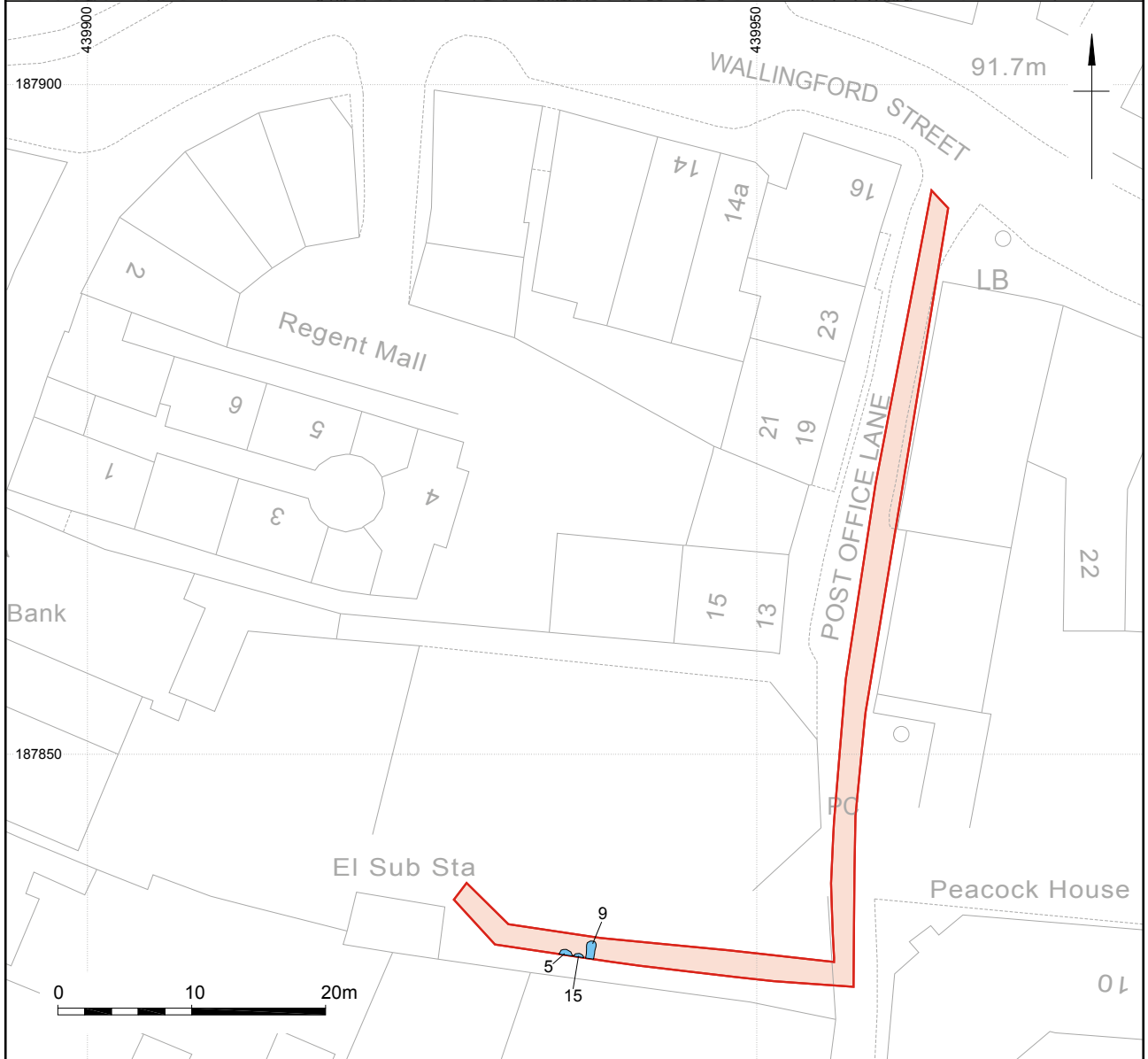
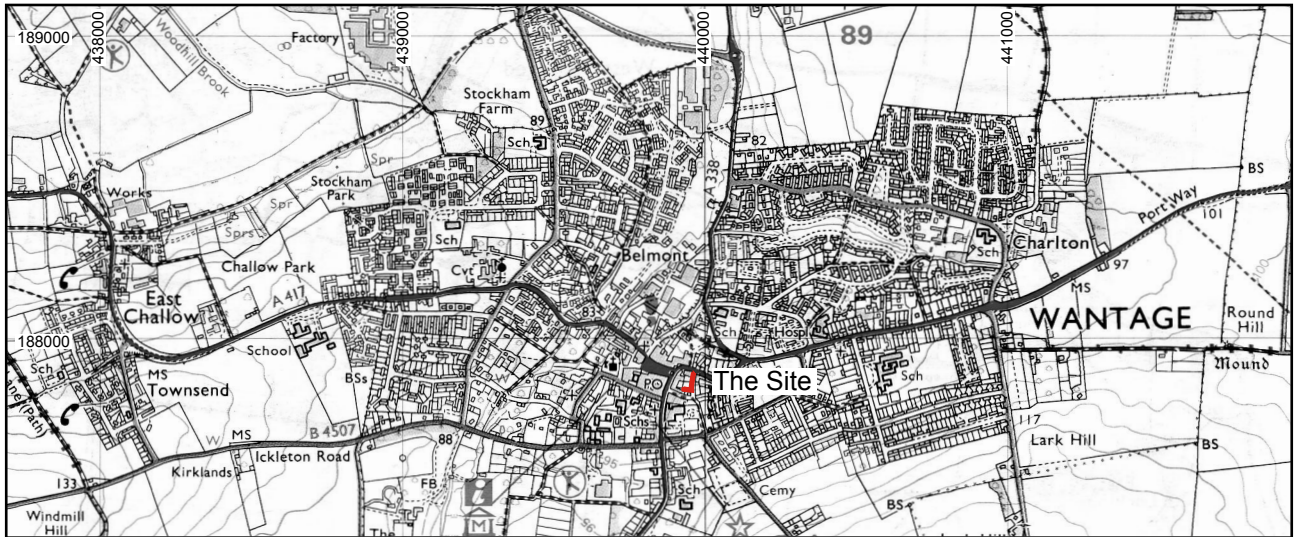
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12 APPENDIX 1: 'ROUTE' TRENCH SUMMARY

Trench The Route		Max Depth: 1.20 Ground Level (m aOD):	Length:90m	Width:2m
Context	Type	Description		Depth (m)
1	Layer	Tarmac: modern surface located in lane and car park areas.		0-0.0-0.10
2	Layer	Hogging: Light yellow/red loose sands, gravels and concrete fragments. Modern levelling layer for tarmac surface. Evident throughout the Route. Seals latest fills of archaeological features and physically the older surface/occupation layer (3). Evident in car park area of the Route only.		0.10-0.35
3	Layer	Old ground surface/occupation layer: Mid-light grey/green sandy silts with low clay content. Compact in areas where there is higher chalk (?)/ very porous (soft) sandstone fragments. The latter do not appear to be deliberate lain surface but a layer in which the pits were cut. Was evident from approximately 8m from the east end of the Route in the car park area and extended the remainder of the cable trench to the substation in the west.		0.35-0.70max
4	Layer	Natural geology: Upper Green Sands. Light green/grey slightly mottled orange form oxidisation of clay that is present. Is sealed by older ground surface/occupation layer (3). Evident in car park zone of the Route only.		0.70-1.20+
5	Cut	Cut of pit: located towards west end of the Route and west of similar features. Contains succession of deliberate dumps artefacts retrieved date to post med era.		1.26 from tarmac
6	Fill	Secondary fill: Dark black/brown compact silty clay material. Very organic. Lines base of pit. Initial deliberate dump of refuse material in pit.		0.25
7	Fill	Secondary fill: dark black brown/grey silty clay (very moist). Clear and well defined interfaces with upper and lower fills. Contains more chalk fragments than (6) and is more grey in hue than (8). Represents deliberate dump of refuse material in pit.		0.31
8	Fill	Secondary fill: dark black brown silty clay material. Contains less chalk fragments than (7). Fills almost entire feature. Is capped by modern hogging layer. Artefacts retrieved date to post med. period. Fill bulk sampled for CPR, artefacts and charcoal. Latest episode of deliberate dump of refuse material in pit.		0.72
9	Cut	Cut of pit: Located to the east of similar features. Is sub ovate in plan and partially runs under south baulk. Contains a series of compact clay and silt and chalk fragments with CBM mix. Represents substantial refuse pit of post med. date.		0.97 from tarmac
10	Fill	Secondary fill: Thin layer of dark black/brown compact silty clay. Lines base of pit. Sealed by thick deposit of dumped material (11), which is more mottled and lighter in hue. Represents initial dump of organic refuse material in pit.		0.14
12	Fill	Secondary fill: Mottled mid-dark black/grey clay with silts. Runs length of pit located towards the base. Seals organic fill (10) and is capped by thick layer of compact chalk fragments and CBM (12). Represents deliberate dump of material in pit.		0.49
13	Fill	Primary fill: Light green/grey sandy silts with low clay content. Located on north side of feature only. Represents redeposited natural from erosion of feature sides.		0.29

14	<i>Fill</i>	Secondary fill: Mottled mid-dark black/grey compact silty clay. Upper deposit in feature that is capped by modern hogging (3). No artefacts retrieved.	0.35
15	<i>Cut</i>	Cut of pit: Located in the middle of similar features and particularly in close proximity to pit (5). Filled with two layers of refuse material that date to the post med period.	1.07 from tarmac
16	<i>Fill</i>	Secondary fill: Dark black grey/brown silts with high clay content. Contains moderate amount of chalk fragment inclusions. Fill almost entire feature and is capped by hogging (3). Represents deliberate dump of refuse material in pit. Artefacts dating to the post med period were retrieved.	0.67
17	<i>Fill</i>	Secondary fill: Dark black/brown compact silty clay material that lines the base of the feature. Contains less chalk inclusions and is more organic than upper fill (16). Represents initial deliberate dump of refuse material in post med pit.	0.27



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Location of pits within watching brief area

Figure 1



Plate 1: North facing representative section showing old ground surface/occupation layer 3 with perimeter wall in background



Plate 2: North facing baulk section of Pits 5 and 15



Plate 3: West facing section of Pit 9

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