HERITAGE NETWORK

OAK TREE FARM
Potton Road, Biggleswade, Beds.

HN575

Archaeological Evaluation Report

REGISTERED IFA ORGANISATION

THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD
Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation
Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

OAK TREE FARM
Potton Road, Biggleswade, Beds.

HN575

Archaeological Evaluation

Prepared on behalf of Mr R. Sturman

by

David Kaye, BA, PIFA

Report no.338

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Contents

The cover illustration shows the evaluation of the study area, looking NE

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by David Kaye and Abigail Rothwell. Illustrations were prepared by David Kaye, and the report was edited by David Hillelson.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to Richard Sturman; Leslie-Ann Mather & Stephen Coleman, Heritage & Environment Service, Bedfordshire County Council, for their co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

Summary

Site name and address:	Oak Tree Farm, Potton Road, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire		
County:	Bedfordshire	**District:**	Mid Bedfordshire
Village/town:	Biggleswade	**Parish:**	Sutton
Planning reference:	05/00606/FULL	**NGR:**	TL 2097 4658
Client name and address:	Richard Sturman, Oak Tree Farm, Potton Road, Biggleswade, Beds.		
Nature of work:	New showroom & car park	**Former land use:**	Meadow and copse
Site status:	None	**Reason for investigation:**	Direction of local planning authority (PPG 16)
Position in planning process:	Predetermination	**Project brief originator:**	Local authority
Size of affected area:	c.15284m^2	**Size of area investigated:**	c.288m^2
Site Code:	HN575	**Other reference:**	n/a
Organisation:	Heritage Network	**Site Director:**	David Hillelson
Project type, methods etc.:	Evaluation	**Archive recipient:**	Bedford Museum Service
Start of work	28/02/2006	**Finish of work**	03/03/2006
Related SMR Nos:	n/a	**Periods represented:**	Not determined
Oasis UID	heritage1-13665	**Significant finds:**	No significant finds
Monument types:	n/a		
Physical archive:	n/a		
Previous summaries/reports:	n/a		

Synopsis: In order to determine the archaeological risk posed by a proposal to build a new showroom, car park and access road on land adjacent to Oak Tree Farm, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, the Heritage Network was commissioned by the owner to undertake a programme of archaeological evaluation.

Five 1.6m wide trenches were excavated, measuring between 20m and 50m in length. Trenches 1 to 3 contained no archaeological features. Trench 4 contained a small ditch and Trench 5 contained two ditches, a machine cut trench and a small unidentified feature close to the baulk. Significant root activity and tree boles were present in all the trenches. No dating evidence was recovered from any of the features.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of *Mr. Richard Sturman*, as part of the archaeological evaluation of a development site located at Oak Tree Farm, Potton Road, Biggleswade, Beds. The planning permission for the development (ref. 05/00606/FULL), controlled by the Mid Bedfordshire District Council (MBDC), has been granted subject to a standard archaeological condition in accordance with the provisions set out in *Planning Policy Guidance Note No.16* (PPG16) on Archaeology and Planning. The scope of the required investigation was defined in a *Brief for an Archaeological Field Evaluation of Land at Oak Tree Farm, Potton Road, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire* (ref. L-AM 04/10/05) prepared by the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) from the Heritage and Environment Section of Bedfordshire County Council, as advisers to the planning authority. The evaluation followed the provisions set out in the Heritage Network's approved Project Design dated February 2006.

1.2 The site, which is centred on grid reference TL 2097 4658 approximately 1.5km north-east of Biggleswade on the B1040, lies between two tributaries of the River Ivel. The site is bounded by a trackway to the west and Potton Road to the north (Figure 1). The existing buildings of Oak Tree Farm lie immediately to the east of the development area. The site is currently fallow ground with an area of tree planting in the north-west corner. The development proposes the construction of a new retail building with associated access, parking and landscaping.

1.3 The site lies within a documented archaeological landscape including activity ranging from the early prehistoric through to the Roman period. Cropmarks indicating possible enclosure complexes have been identified in the immediate vicinity of the site (HER 3543) as well as in the surrounding area (HER 509 & 1615). Archaeological investigation less than 1km to the south-west, undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit, identified remains of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman date (HER 3544). It is therefore considered by the planning authority that the site may have the potential to preserve archaeological remains from the prehistoric period onwards, of at least local or regional significance

1.4 The aim of the evaluation has been to consider the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any such remains which are liable to be threatened by the development, and to provide a local and regional archaeological and historical context for them, in accordance with the current published regional research agenda (Glazebrook 1997, Brown and Glazebrook 2000), if they are discovered.

1.5 The present report is intended to provide the planning authority with sufficient data to allow it to consider the archaeological implications of the proposed development, and to determine what further, if any, mitigation measures may be required to allow the development to proceed.

2. Fieldwork

SITE TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 The study area sits approximately 1m below the level of the nearby B1040 and the ground slopes from south to north by approximately 2.4m.

2.2 The drift geology is formed of Jurassic and Cretaceous clay of the Evesham 3 association (SSEW 1983). In practice, it was a mixture of yellowish brown (10YR 5/8) clay and gravel.

METHODOLOGY

2.3 All work was carried out in accordance with the approved *Project Design*, current health and safety legislation, and both IFA and ALGAO standards.

2.4 The trenches were triangulated from known points using fibreglass tape measures.

2.5 Five trenches were opened using a wheeled JCB excavator fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless bucket, under close archaeological supervision (Figure 2).

2.6 Spoil from the machining was inspected for archaeological artefacts. Trenches were machined to the first significant archaeological horizon.

2.7 All potential archaeological features and deposits were sampled to ascertain their nature, depth, date, and quality of preservation.

2.8 All identified contexts were photographed and recorded using the appropriate pro-forma. Scaled plans and sections were drawn on drafting film at scales of 1:20 and 1:50.

RESULTS

Stratigraphy

2.9 The stratigraphy observed within Trenches 1 and 2 appeared to have been undisturbed by ploughing being located in a copse which is recorded on the 1890 Ordance Survey. It consisted of 0.45-0.58m of dark brown (10YR 3/3), sandy silt topsoil overlying 0.3m of dark, yellowish brown (10YR 4/4), sandy silt subsoil. Trenches 3-5 were located in meadowland which had formerly been under the plough. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.3-0.5m of dark, yellowish brown (10YR 4/4) ploughsoil overlying a yellowish brown (10YR 5/8), sand and gravel natural which was consistent across the site.

Trench 1

Length (m):	20	**Width (m):**	1.6	**Maximum Depth (m):**	1.05	**Orientation**	N-S
Level at North End of Trench (mOD)		**Top**	29.51	**Level at South End of Trench (mOD)**		**Top**	30.01
		Base	28.46			**Base**	29.26

Context	**Type**	**Description**	**Dimensions (m)**		
			Length	**Width**	**Depth**
101	Natural feature	Tree bole	1.6+	0.8	c0.05
102	Natural feature	Tree bole	0.85+	0.8+	c0.1
103	Layer	Topsoil. Dark brown, sandy silt (10YR 3/3)	20+	1.6+	0.58
104	Layer	Subsoil. Dark yellowish brown, sandy silt (10YR 4/4)	20+	1.6+	0.3
105	Layer	Natural. Yellowish brown, sand and gravel (10YR 5/8)	20+	1.6+	-

2.10 Trench 1 was located in a former copse and consequently there was a large amount of root activity throughout. Features [101] and [102] were tree boles.

2.11 No archaeological features or deposits were observed in this trench

Trench 2

Length (m):	40	**Width (m):**	1.6	**Maximum Depth (m):**	0.85	**Orientation**	E-W
Level at East End of Trench (mOD)		**Top**	28.21	**Level at West End of Trench (mOD)**		**Top**	28.06
		Base	27.66			**Base**	27.41

Context	**Type**	**Description**	**Dimensions (m)**		
			Length	**Width**	**Depth**
201	Natural feature	Tree bole	2.1	0.75+	0.36
202	Fill	Fill of [201]	0.8+	0.75+	0.36
203	Natural feature	Tree bole	1.8+	1.35	c0.25
204	Natural feature	Tree bole	2.1	0.4+	c0.05
205	Natural feature	Tree bole	1.0+	0.8	unexcavated
206	Layer	Topsoil. Dark brown, sandy silt (10YR 3/3)	40+	1.6+	0.45
207	Layer	Subsoil. Dark yellowish brown, sandy silt (10YR 4/4)	40+	1.6+	0.3
208	Layer	Natural. Yellowish brown, sand and gravel (10YR 5/8)	40+	1.6+	-

2.12 Trench 2 was located such that it crossed the boundary between the copse and meadowland. Tree boles [201], [203] and [205] were all situated in the meadowland and [204] in the copse.

2.13 No archaeological features or deposits were observed in this trench.

Trench 3

Length (m):	50	**Width (m):**	1.6	**Maximum Depth (m):**	0.5	**Orientation**	NE-SW
Level at Northeast End of Trench (mOD)		**Top**	29.42	**Level at Southwest End of Trench (mOD)**		**Top**	28.82
		Base	29.17			**Base**	27.46

Context	**Type**	**Description**	**Dimensions (m)**		
			Length	**Width**	**Depth**
301	Natural feature	Tree bole	6.2	0.85+	0.29
302	Fill	Fill of [301]. Yellowish brown, sandy gravel (10YR 5/4)	1.8+	0.9+	0.29
303	Natural feature	Tree bole	3.25+	1.2	0.34
304	Fill	Fill of [303]. Very dark grey, silty clay and sand (10YR 3/1)	1.15+	0.8+	0.34
305	Natural feature	Tree bole. Fill as [303]	0.4	0.4	c0.05
306	Natural feature	Tree bole. Fill as [303]	2.5	1.0+	c0.2
307	Natural feature	Tree bole. Fill as [303]	1.2+	1.10	c0.3
308	Natural feature	Tree bole. Fill as [303]	3.0	0.75+	unexcavated
309	Layer	Ploughsoil. Dark yellowish brown, sandy silt (10YR 4/4)			
310	Layer	Natural. Yellowish brown, sand and gravel (10YR 5/8)	10+	1.6+	-

2.14 Trench 3 contained five large tree boles, [301], [303], [306], [307] and [308]. There was also one small tree bole [305].

2.15 The topsoil and subsoil layers identified in Trenches 1 and 2 had become a single homogenised layer of ploughsoil.

2.16 No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.

Trench 4

Length (m):	40	**Width (m):**	1.6	**Maximum Depth (m):**	1.5	**Orientation**	NW-SE
Level at North End of Trench (mOD)		**Top**	29.04	**Level at South End of Trench (mOD)**		**Top**	27.99
		Base	28.59			**Base**	27.49

Context	**Type**	**Description**	**Dimensions (m)**		
			Length	**Width**	**Depth**
401	Cut	Ditch	0.5+	1.5	0.76
402	Fill	Primary fill of [401]. Strong brown gravel (7.5YR 5/6)	0.5+	0.48	0.08
403	Fill	Secondary fill of [401]. Dark grey, silty clay (5Y 4/1)	0.5+	0.9	0.13
404	Fill	Tertiary fill of [401]. Black silty clay (5Y 2.5/1)	0.5+	0.82	0.18

405	Fill	Quarternary fill of [401]. Olive brown silty clay (2.5Y 4/3)	0.5+	1.02	0.35
406	Natural feature	Tree bole	1.3+	0.8	unexcavated
407	Cut	Geological test pit	1.8+	1.0+	unexcavated
408	Layer	Ploughsoil. Dark yellowish brown, sandy silt (10YR 4/4)	40+	1.6+	0.33
409	Layer	Natural. Yellowish brown, sand and gravel (10YR 5/8)	40+	1.6+	-

2.17 Ditch [401] within Trench 4 was the largest archaeological feature on the site. The primary fill [402] was similar in composition to the natural geology and may represent some erosion of the cut. The secondary fill [403] was a dark grey, silty clay. Its profile suggests that it may have once filled the ditch and which was subsequently recut. This recut is defined by the tertiary fill [404] which is also a silty clay though black in colour. The olive brown, silty clay quarternary fill [405] may be the result of backfilling.

2.18 The only other features in Trench 4 were a tree bole [406] and a geotechnical test pit [407] which had been previously dug by the client.

Trench 5

Length (m):	30	**Width (m):**	1.6	**Maximum Depth (m):**	0.8	**Orientation**	NE-SW
Level at Northeast End of Trench (mOD)		**Top**	28.78	**Level at Southwest End of Trench (mOD)**		**Top**	28.63
		Base	28.13			**Base**	28.13

Context	**Type**	**Description**	**Dimensions (m)**		
			Length	**Width**	**Depth**
501	Cut	Ditch	0.4+	1.2	0.42
502	Fill	Primary fill of [501]. Dark yellowish brown, sandy clay (10YR 4/6)	0.4+	0.9	0.16
503	Fill	Secondary fill of [501]. Dusky red, sandy silt (2.5YR 3/2)	0.4+	1.2	0.25
504	Cut	Ditch	0.4+	0.45+	0.29
505	Cut	Ditch	0.4+	1.2	0.33
506	Fill	Fill of [505]. Very dark greyish brown, silty clay (10YR 3/2)	0.4+	1.2	0.33
507	Cut	Machine cut trench	0.3+	0.5	0.25
508	Fill	Fill of [507]. Dark olive brown, silty clay (2.5Y 3/3)	0.3+	0.5	0.25
509	Cut	Unidentified	0.2+	0.9	0.22
510	Fill	Fill of [509]. Dark yellowish brown, silty clay (10YR 3/4)	0.2+	0.9	0.22
511	Fill	Fill of [504]. Strong brown, gravel (7.5YR 4/6)	0.4+	0.45+	0.29
512	Natural feature	Tree bole	0.4+	0.4+	c0.1
513	Layer	Ploughsoil. Dark yellowish brown, sandy silt (10YR 4/4)	30+	1.6+	0.3
514	Layer	Natural. Yellowish brown, sand and gravel (10YR 5/8)	30+	1.6+	-

2.19 Trench 5 contained two ditches and a small unidentified feature. Cut [501] represents a recut of ditch [504] of which only a single fill survives, a strong brown (7.5YR 4/6) gravel. Cut [501] contained two fills. The primary fill [502] was a dark, yellowish brown (10YR 4/6) sandy clay. The secondary fill [503] was dusky red (2.5YR 3/2) sandy silt. This ditch appears to be a later recut of [504], significantly increasing the overall size of the original.

2.20 Approximately 1m to the west of ditch [504] was ditch [505]. This contained a single, very dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay fill (506). Its alignment suggests that both ditches may converge approximately 4m north of the trench.

2.21 Feature [509] was unidentified due to the limited amount of it that was exposed within the trench. No assessment could be made of its form or function other than that there was no sign of root activity and it is therefore unlikely to be a tree bole.

2.22 The other features within Trench 5 were a modern machine cut trench [507], and a tree bole [512].

Concordance of finds

2.23 No datable artefacts were recovered from any context during this evaluation.

3. Discussion

3.1 Examination of Bedfordshire County Council Historic Environment Record showed the site to be situated within an archaeological landscape consisting mainly of undated crop marks and earthworks. The only securely dated features are associated with the crop marks HER 3544, located approximately 800m south west of the site. The principal periods of activity from this area are Iron Age and Roman, though two features were dated as Bronze Age and Saxon.

3.2 The recorded archaeology consisted of three ditches and one unidentified feature, all located in Trenches 4 and 5 (Figure 3). The ditch in Trench 4 is 1.5m wide and appears to have silted up over time and been recut at least once. Its alignment is the same as that of existing field boundaries to the south of the site. The ditches in Trench 5 were not as substantial as that in Trench 4, however one of them appears to have been recut suggesting they may have been in use for some time. Their alignment appears to be the same as that of existing field boundaries to the east of the site.

3.3 The lack of any stratified or unstratified dating evidence makes any assessment of the period and duration of activity on the site impossible. However, the lack of finds does support the suggestion that the site contains only the remnants of an earlier field system, and no evidence of settlement activity.

3.4 The tree boles located in the meadowland may be the result of the uprooting of some large elms in the early 20th century. A previous owner of the property reportedly could remember them being taken down with the use a steam traction engine (R. Sturman, pers. comm.). However, the number and quantity of the tree boles suggests that the area formed woodland prior to being cleared at an unknown date in antiquity.

Conclusion

3.5 The evaluation of the site has demonstrated the presence of a previous, but undated, field system focused towards the eastern side of the site. However, no evidence of domestic settlement from any period was revealed.

3.6 On this basis, it is considered that there is a low risk that the development will disturb any significant archaeological remains.

Confidence Rating

3.7 In the course of the fieldwork, weather and ground conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation. There were no circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the work which was less than High.

4. Bibliography

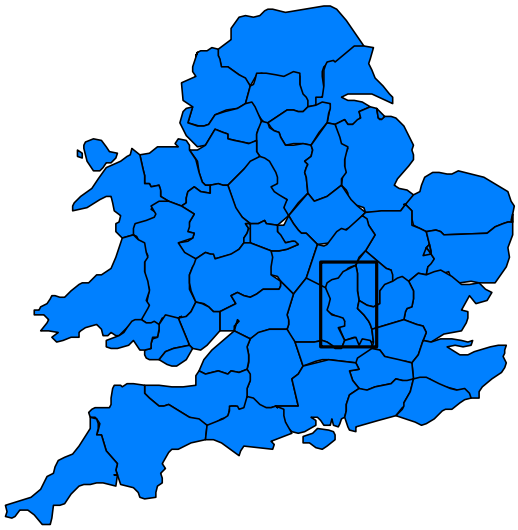
Brossles, A, 2004, *Land to the East of Biggleswade,* Archaeological Evaluation Report, Oxford Archaeology.

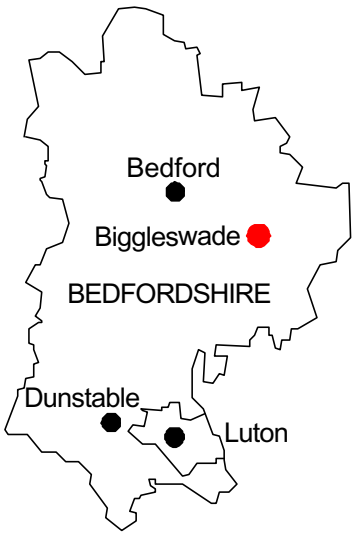
Turner, C, 2006 *Land at Oak Tree Farm, Potton Road, Biggleswade, Beds*. Project Design: Archaeological Evaluation. Heritage Network.

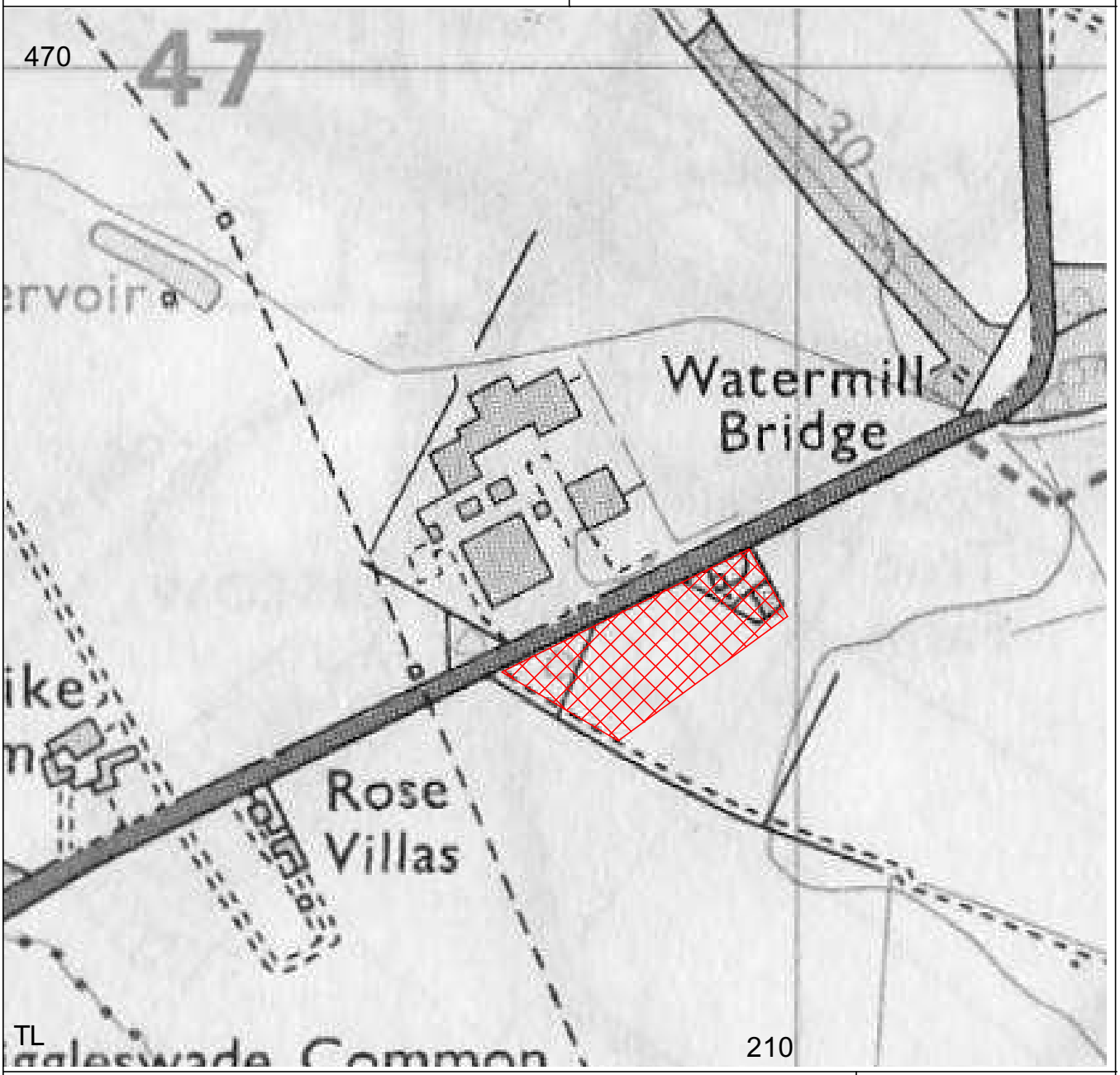
Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983 *Soil Map Sheet 4, Eastern England, Scale 1:250,000*

5. Illustrations & Appendix

THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD	Oak Tree Farm, Biggleswade	HN575





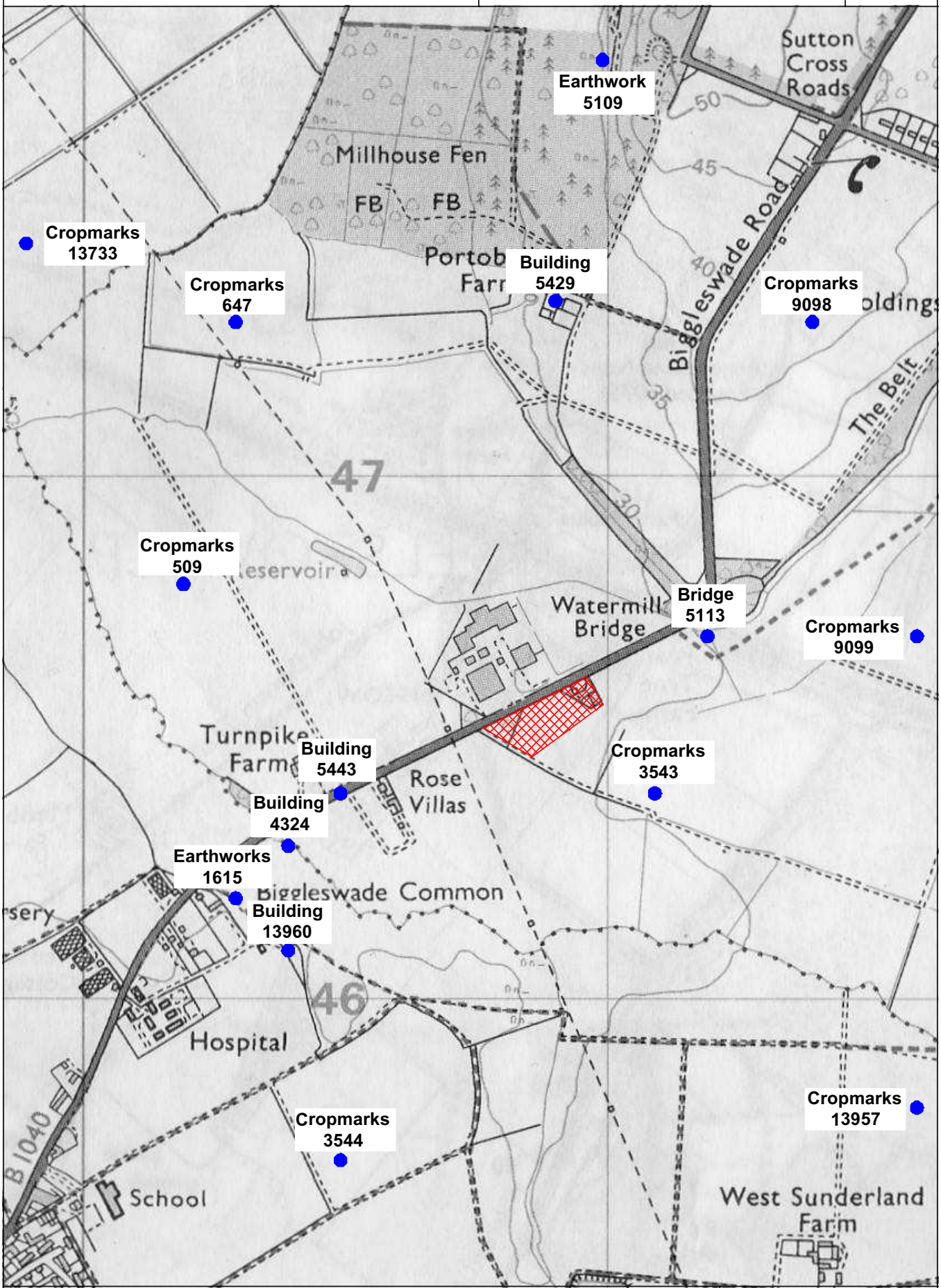


Site Location

Scale 1:5000

Figure 1

THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD	Oak Tree Farm, Biggleswade	HN575

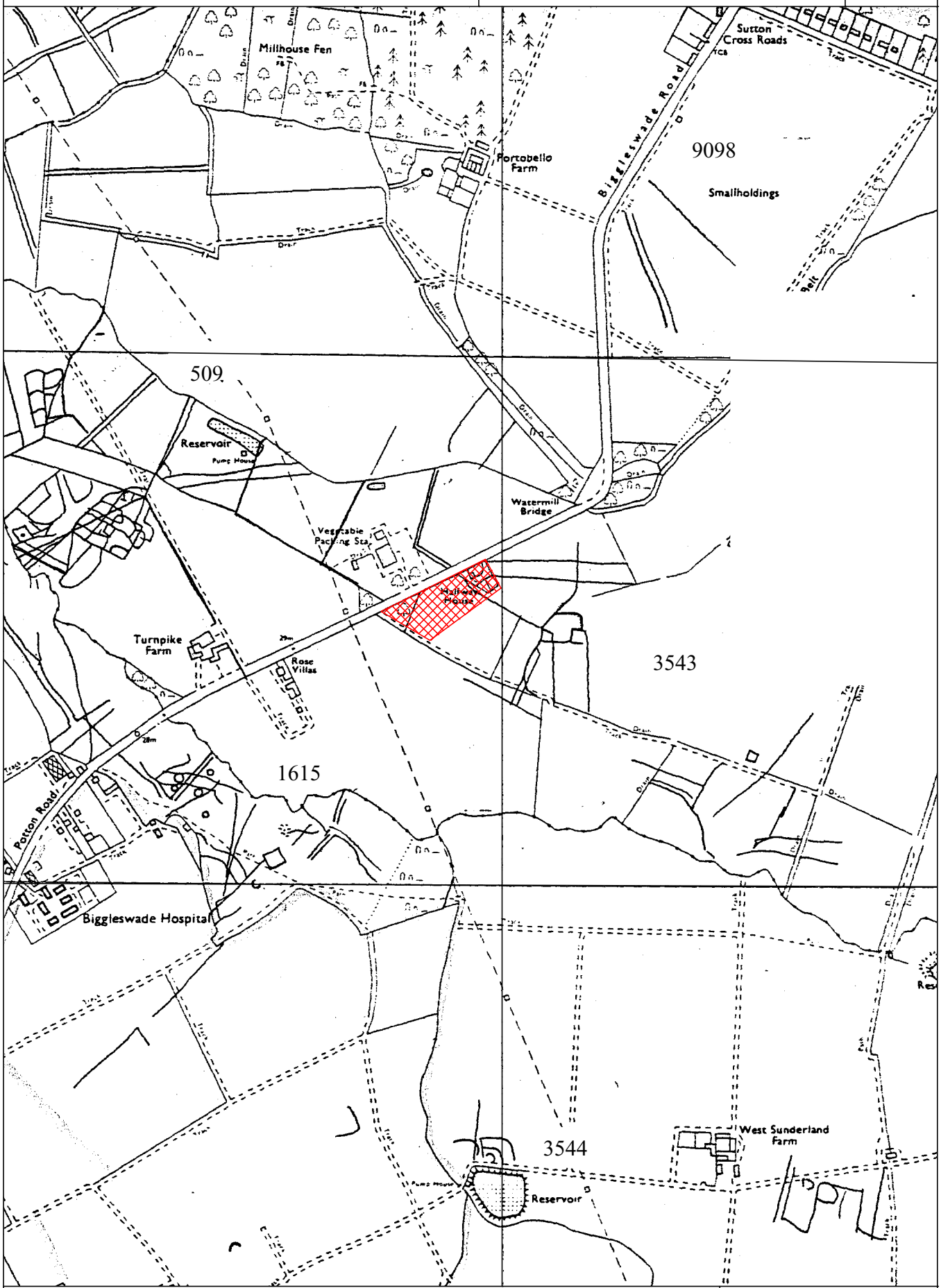


Bedfordshire HER Entries

Scale 1:10,000

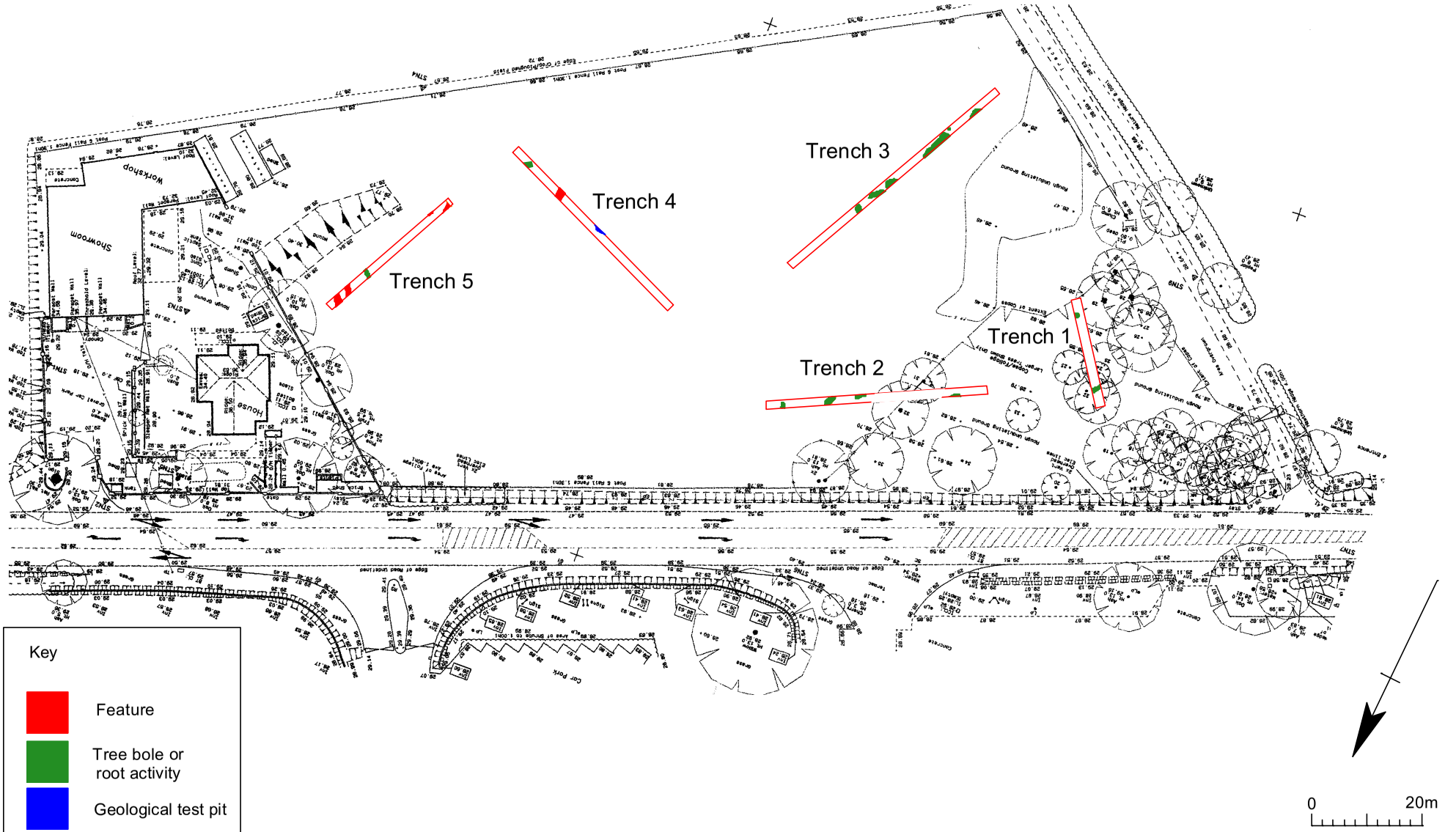
Figure 2

THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD	Oak Tree Farm, Biggleswade	HN575



Crop Marks Surrounding the Site (HER 3543)	Scale 1:10,000
	Figure 3

THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD	Oak Tree Farm, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire	HN575

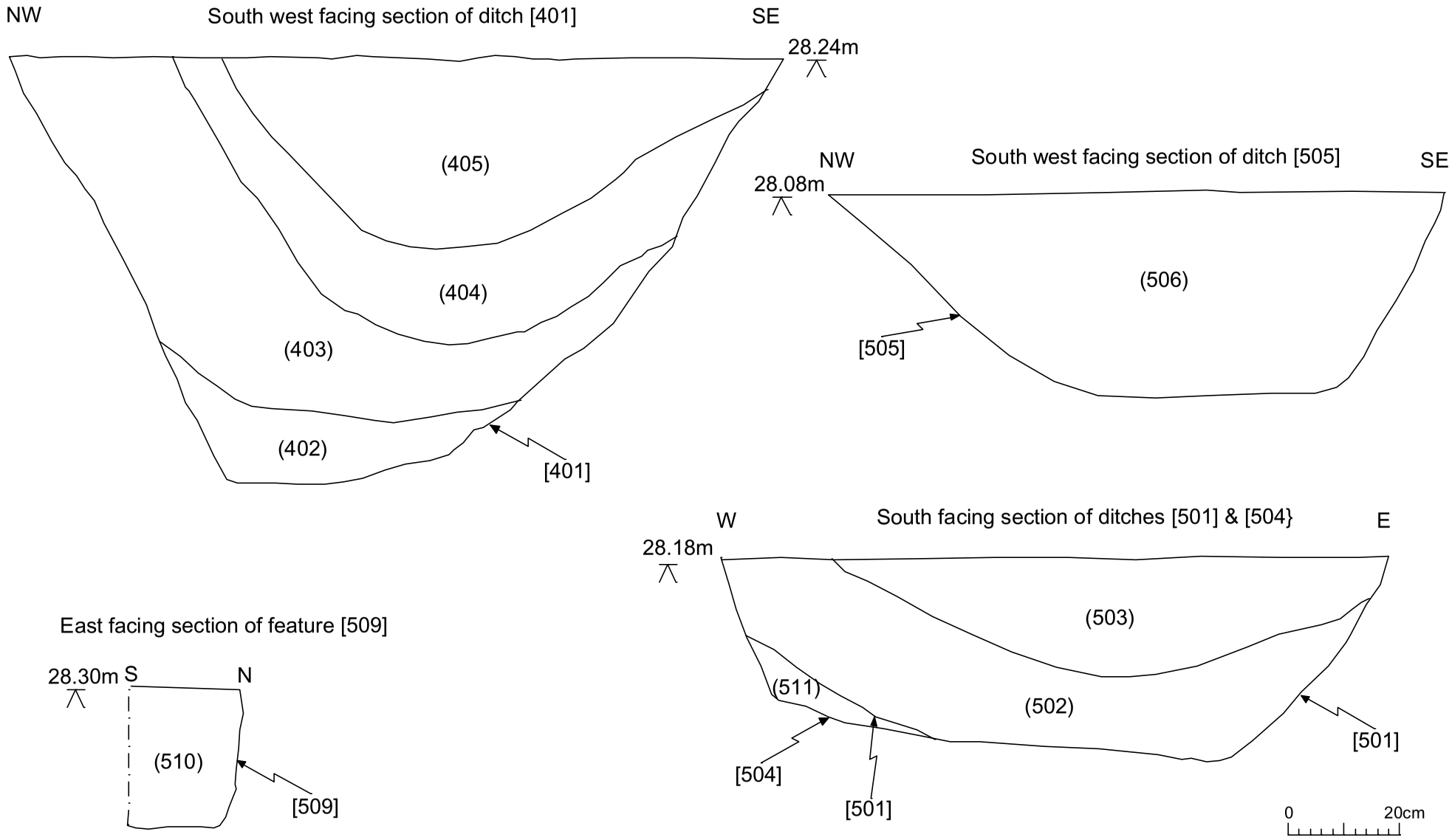


Trench and Feature Location

Scale 1:1000

Figure 4

THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD	Oak Tree Farm, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire	HN575



Feature Sections	Scale 1:10
	Figure 5

Appendix 1

Extract from Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record

Records from a 1km radius around the present site in period order

HER	NGR (TL)	Period	Remarks
3544	205 457	Bronze Age / Late Iron Age / Roman / Saxon / Uncertain	Sub-rectangular & curvilinear enclosures. Archaeological Evaluation by Oxford Archaeology in 2004 identified 4 areas of activity provisionally dated to the Bronze Age & Roman Periods. The Bronze Age activity comprises of a single ring ditch. The main period of activity was late Iron Age & Roman, identified features include ditches that appear to form enclosure boundaries and possible settlement activity identified by the presence of water holes & large ditches that may have provided a defence function. Evidence for Saxon activity was limited to a single ditch.
509	202 468	Uncertain / Medieval?	Complex cropmarks, may be associated with the deserted medieval village Kinwick
5443	205 464	Post-Medieval	Turnpike Farmhouse. 17th century and later, 2 storeys, timber framed & plastered, tiled roof. Has original central chimney. Grade III listed
4324	204 463	Post-Medieval	Toll House or Turnpike Cottage. Small 1 storey 18th –19th century cottage with central chimney stack. Timber framed & plastered. Has been demolished
13960	204 461	Post-Medieval	Beer House. Pub/Inn
5113	212 467	Post-Medieval	Watermill Bridge / Mill site? The stream is fast running through the wood at a higher level to the present stream, may well have been a mill stream. The field to the south indicates possible associated earthworks.
5429	2091 4734	Post-Medieval	Portobello Farmhouse. Grade III listed. 18th-19th century. Red brick encasing and extending a timber core.
647	203 473	Uncertain / Post-Medieval?	Cropmarks. Linear marks, mostly double
3543	211 464	Uncertain	Cropmark complex
1615	203 462	Uncertain	Earthworks. Extensive area of linear earthworks in meadow land alongside a stream. Includes rectangular & circular features & the probable edge of medieval fields.
13957	216 458	Uncertain	Cropmark
9098	214 473	Uncertain	Cropmark. Double ditched trackway & other linear features
9099	216 467	Uncertain	Cropmark. Linear & circular
5109	210 478	Uncertain	Earthwork. Bank, may have been an earlier track
13733	1990 4745	Uncertain	Cropmark. Irregular. circular, rectangular & linear features