

T H A M E S V A L L E Y

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**New Barn, Sherwood Farm,
Mackney, Wallingford, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Recording Action

by Steve Crabb

Site Code: SFM12/67

(SU 5799 8980)

**New Barn, Sherwood Farm,
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An Archaeological Recording Action

For M E S Dart and Partners

by Steven Crabb

Thames Valley Archaeological Services

Ltd

Site Code SFM12/67

July 2012

Summary

Site name: New Barn, Sherwood Farm, Mackney, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 5796 8981

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 16th – 23rd April

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Steve Crabb

Site code: SFM12/67

Area of site: c. 0.2ha

Summary: Excavations in advance of development of a new barn complex revealed a number of phases of archaeological activity on the site. The main activity comprised part of a middle Iron Age farmstead with a ring gully house and associated pits and postholes. A substantial later Roman ditch, subsequently recut, was also recorded. Both of these components were overlain by ridge and furrow field system of medieval or post-medieval date.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

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www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp.*

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 30.07.12
	Steve Preston ✓ 27.07.12

New Barn, Sherwood Farm, Mackney, Wallingford, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Recording Action

by Steven Crabb

Report 12/67

Background

The site comprises a c.2000 sq m plot of land at Sherwood Farm, Mackney, near Wallingford, Oxfordshire (SU 5796 8981) (Fig.1) It lies on the southern side of Mackney; which is located to the south of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell (Fig. 2). Planning permission (P11/W2364) has been granted by South Oxfordshire District Council for the construction of a new grain store, hard standing and new access. The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief for the project prepared by Mr. Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service. In summary, this potential stems from its location close to a series of cropmark enclosures visible from the air, thought probably to be of Iron Age or Roman date. The work was carried out following a specification agreed with Mr Richard Oram and in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012) and the District Council policies on archaeology, in order to satisfy the archaeological condition placed on the planning permission

The fieldwork was carried out by Steve Crabb assisted by Aidan Colyer, Tim Dawson, James Earley and Andrew Taylor, between 1st – 26th June 2012. The archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services but it is anticipated that it will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

Topography and geology

The development site is part hard standing and part agricultural land immediately to the south of the existing farm buildings, at a height of 55m above Ordnance Datum, at the plateau of a low rise which marks the watershed between numerous small streams (Kibble Ditch to west, Mill Brook to south, unnamed streams to north and east) which feed the Thames. Beyond these streams to the north the land rises sharply to the Sinudon hills on which sit Brightwell Barrow, Wittenham Clumps and Castle Hill hillfort. Geological maps indicate the presence of 2nd Terrace River Gravels and greensand with malmstone (BGS 1980).

Archaeological background

The area of the proposed development lies in an area with several archaeological sites and findspots recorded in the county historic environment record. A series of cropmarks visible from the air immediately to the west

indicate a series of enclosures and trackways, probably of Iron Age and Roman date (Benson and Miles 1974 map 71)(Fig. 2). Further cropmarks have also been observed to the south and south-west of the site and several of the latter have been examined by fieldwork carried out in advance of a pipeline project, and dated through surface finds of Iron Age pottery. To the north-west a large amount of Roman pottery was recovered from the topsoil along with daub and three Roman coins, and probably represents an occupation site. The projected route of the Roman road from Dorchester to Silchester passes to the west of the site.

At Sherwood Farm itself, a cemetery of medieval or later date was uncovered during the construction of a large rubbish pit (Pike 1963-4) (Fig. 2). Nine Christian burials were found as a group sealed by 18th century cobbling, a further nine skeletons were dated by medieval pottery. Also investigated was a medieval well containing a wooden platter, two iron buckles and pottery dating to the 12th-13th century. The cemetery is thought to be the burial plot of the Mackney family dating from the 14th century when they were tenants..

Methodology

The site was stripped using a small 360° type tracked excavator with a toothless bucket under archaeological supervision. The whole area of the development was not stripped to the level of archaeological interest as the formation level of the project in part lay at a higher level (Fig. 3). However, the excavation took place on those deposits that would eventually be removed by a further phase of ground reduction. In a small part of the site (to the south-west) where features were exposed but were already at the formation level of the groundworks, features were planned but not dug and were re-buried beneath a geotextile membrane and thus preserved *in situ*.

Results

The stripping of the site revealed ridge and furrow earthworks, a Roman ditch, an Iron Age ditch, ring gully and pits, and undated features. The results are presented below by phase.

Phase 1: Middle Iron Age

Ring gully 500

A circular gully (500) was excavated and contained 34 sherds of middle Iron Age pottery (Fig. 4). Three sherds of Roman date were found on the surface of slot 4. Eight slots (4 to 6 and 8 to 12) were dug through the gully which was thus close to fully excavated, except where truncated. Seven slots were sampled for charred plant remains; however, only a modest number of cereal grains and weed seeds were recovered.

The gully measured between 0.4m and 0.6m wide and 0.05m and 0.2m deep. It was c.8m in diameter. It was filled with a dark grey brown silty clay containing occasional angular fragments of flint (Pls 2 and 4). An entrance lay on the east side but only one terminal was present as a corresponding one was lost beneath the baulk.

Two features lay within the ring gully. Pit 3 measured 1.0m by 1.5m and 0.62m deep. It had a profile with a flat base with near vertical sides with four fills (54–7) which produced 18 sherds of middle Iron Age pottery (Pl. 1). Pit 21 was a small pit or posthole which had been truncated by furrow 20. It measured 0.4m long by 0.2m wide and 0.1m deep. Six sherds of middle Iron Age pottery were recovered from this feature.

Other features

A small posthole (14) was excavated approximately 7m west of the ring gully. This contained two sherds of middle Iron Age pottery. A ditch (22) and pit (23) were observed in the south-west of the area (Fig. 3). Neither of these features was excavated as they lay below the level of the development. They were covered with a geotextile membrane and reburied. However, surface finds of four sherds were recovered from the ditch and one from the pit all of which can be dated to the middle Iron Age. The ditch was not fully exposed during the stripping but it could conceivably be a continuation of a linear feature visible in the crop marks to the north west.

Phase 2: Roman

A second ditch (501) which was recut (502) was also recorded. Three slots were dug across the feature. The original ditch (501) was recorded in two slots (16 and 19) excavated through this feature. No artefacts were recovered from this ditch, which had been largely removed by the recut but was up to 1.0 m deep and presumably of similar width to the recut..

The recut (502) was recorded in three all slots (17, 18 and 24). Five sherds of Roman pottery along with five residual sherds of Iron Age pottery, 40 fragments of animal bone, a quernstone and hobnail were recovered from this ditch. It measured between 2.1m and 2.8m wide and 0.9m to 1.45m deep. The sides of the ditch have a steep v-shaped profile leading to a stepped and steeper base (Fig. 5 and Pl. 3).

Phase 3: Medieval or Post-Medieval

A series of furrows forming part of a system of ridge and furrow were aligned roughly north to south across the site. Two slots (1 and 2) were dug through these to confirm their nature. No artefacts were recovered from these, although visible on the surface of the fill of the unexcavated furrows were fragments of brick/tile.

Phase 4: Modern

A large rectangular pit was observed in the western portion of the site, it had iron bedsprings and plastic visible in the surface and was not excavated.

Undated features

Two small discreet features were excavated to the west of the ring gully. Pit 13 measured 0.6m by 0.45m by 0.15m deep. This was sampled for environmental analysis, and over 3.5kg of burnt stone was recovered. No charcoal was recovered from this feature suggesting a dump of stone rather than *in-situ* burning. It was filled with a single fill (67) of dark grey brown clayey silt with moderate to frequent burnt cobbles observed.

Feature 15 measured 0.5m by 0.6m by 0.1m deep. It contained a single dark grey brown to black fill containing very frequent charcoal. The base of this feature was affected by root disturbance this along with the recovery of a large amount of charcoal suggests this was a burnt out tree stump.

No datable finds were recovered from either of these features.

Finds

Pottery by Jane Timby

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of a small assemblage of 81 sherds of pottery weighing 403.5g dating to the Iron Age and Roman periods. Pottery was recovered from 14 individual cuts, a total 18 deposits, thus the quantity of material per context is low. The sherds were relatively fragmented with an overall average sherd weight of 5g. Featured diagnostic sherds were very sparse. For the purposes of this assessment the pottery was scanned to assess its likely date and quantified by sherd number and weight. Freshly broken sherds were counted as single pieces. The resulting data are summarized in Appendix 2.

Iron Age

Pottery of probable middle Iron Age date was recovered from twelve features or slots with further material in cut [7 associated with Roman sherds. In total the later prehistoric material accounts for 90% of the recovered assemblage. Four main wares are present: calcined flint-tempered ware, sandy wares, limestone-tempered ware and an organic-tempered ware, all used to make handmade vessels. These can be sub-divided into nine fabrics based on the size, frequency and character of the inclusions. The only featured sherds were two rims from a simple everted rim globular jar from the ring gully (cut 10) and a small rim fragment from ring gully cut 11. Some of the sandy wares had a burnished or smoothed finish and one flint-tempered ware from gully cut 5 was decorated with three horizontal grooves.

Although a small group, sandy wares dominate accounting for 70% of the prehistoric assemblage. On the basis of the character of the fabrics the assemblage is likely to date to the middle Iron Age.

Roman

Eight sherds of Roman pottery were recovered; four from ditch slot 24 and one from slot 17, both of which were part of the recut ditch 502. Three sherds came from the surface of ring gully 500, terminus 4. The sherds from slot 24 comprise three sherds of Oxfordshire colour-coated *mortarium* which is partly burnt, and a white-slipped oxidized local ware indicating a date after *c* AD 240. Features 4 and 17 produced local Roman grey wares which are less easy to date within the Roman period, mixed with Iron Age sherds suggesting either contamination or re-deposition of the early material.

Animal Bone by Ceri Falys

A small assemblage of animal bone was recovered from six contexts within the excavated area. A total of 72 fragments of bone were present for analysis, weighing 1176g (Appendix 3). The overall preservation of the remains was poor, with the majority of pieces highly fragmented. Initial analyses roughly sorted elements into categories based on size, not by species, into one of three categories: 'large, medium, and small. Horse and cow are represented by the large size category, sheep/goat and pigs are represented in the medium size category: no bones were designated to the 'small' category. Wherever possible, a more specific identification to species and side of origin was made for each fragment. The minimum number of individuals both within and between the species was determined.

The minimum number of animals present in this assemblage was two, one large and one medium sized individual. Although several contexts contained pieces of 'large size' skeletal elements (Appendix 3), the only fragments identified to species were recovered from ditch 17, which contained the femur, tibia, metatarsal and calcaneus of the right leg of a cow (deposit 71), and a single loose cow tooth from deposit (73). The medium sized animal was represented by sheep/goat sized loose teeth recovered from contexts 67, 74 and 77.

No evidence suggesting butchery practices was observed, and no further information could be retrieved from these poorly preserved skeletal remains.

Metalwork by Steven Crabb

Three pieces of ferrous metalwork were recovered from this site, a small lump and a nail were recovered from the topsoil and were not retained. A single hobnail from Roman ditch 502 (24,79) weighed 2g and consists of a damaged diamond shaped head on a short bent shaft.

Stone by David Williams

A small segment (218g) from the outer edge of a quernstone was recovered from Roman ditch 502 (24, 77). It was made from an arkose sandstone, most probably from a coarse facies of the Millstone Grit from the Yorkshire/Derbyshire region. One thing of particular interest is that the projected diameter of the stone suggests that it is from a millstone using water power than the more common rotary hand quern.

Macrobotanical plant material and charcoal by Jo Pine

Some 9 samples of 10-40L were processed from the site. The flots were wet sieved using a 0.25mm and air dried. The flots were examined under a low-power binocular microscope at magnification of x10.

Carbonized remains were recovered from three of the samples taken from the ring gully slots (4, 8 and 12). A weed seed (*Chenopodium* spp.) and indeterminate cereal grain were identified from sample 1 (4, 58). There were two indeterminate cereal grains from sample 3 (8, 62) and one indeterminate cereal grain from sample 5 (12, 64). Charcoal fragments were present in all samples; the fragments within the flots were less than 1mm in size. The only exception to this where the fragments were larger in size (>2mm) were from sample 9 (treehole 15, 69) with over 100 fragments.

Conclusions

The site at Sherwood Farm is located in an area of previously recorded archaeology with a medieval cemetery to the north and a cropmark complex of assumed Iron Age or Roman date to the west. The fieldwork here has revealed an additional area containing archaeological deposits and confirmed the presence of Iron Age and Roman activity in the area. The earliest deposits on the site were represented by a ring gully roundhouse and associated pits of middle Iron Age date. An unexcavated ditch and posthole are probably also of Iron Age date. The site would appear to be either a small, self-contained farmstead or, as adjacent areas have not been examined, perhaps part of a larger farming complex. Data on subsistence activities were few but a few charred cereal grains seem to point towards arable production. The Upper Thames Valley is already considered to have been densely settled within the Iron Age and this small site adds another component to the known distribution and range of settlement at this time.

Several hundred years following abandonment of the Iron Age settlement (at least in this location), a substantial Roman ditch was dug and was maintained by being recut. The date of the original cutting of the ditch is not precisely known but to have been recut closely following the original ditch line suggests it was still visible

as an earthwork. The recut contained pottery of later Roman date (c. AD240–400). Apart from a few stray sherds of pottery, the ditch is the only Roman activity on the examined site. This ditch does not correspond with any of the features observed as cropmarks further to the west but it seems likely that the latter cropmark complex does now include a Roman component and that the excavated ditch here is a part of this complex, albeit perhaps a peripheral one. There is little further that can or needs to be said about this ditch. However, it is interesting to note that the quernstone fragment made from millstone grit is not only an import from a distant source in northern England but also that is likely to be derived from stone used in a water-powered mill.

References

- Benson, D and Miles, D, 1974, *The Upper Thames Valley: an archaeological survey of the river gravels*, Oxfordshire Archaeol Unit Survey 2, Oxford
- BGS, 1980, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50,000, Sheet 254, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Oram, R, 2012, 'Design Brief for New Barn at Sherwood Farm, Mackney, Oxfordshire', Oxford
- Pike, G, 1964, A Medieval cemetery at Mackney Court Farm, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, *Berkshire Archaeol J*, 61, (for 1963–4), 40–7

APPENDIX 1: Feature list

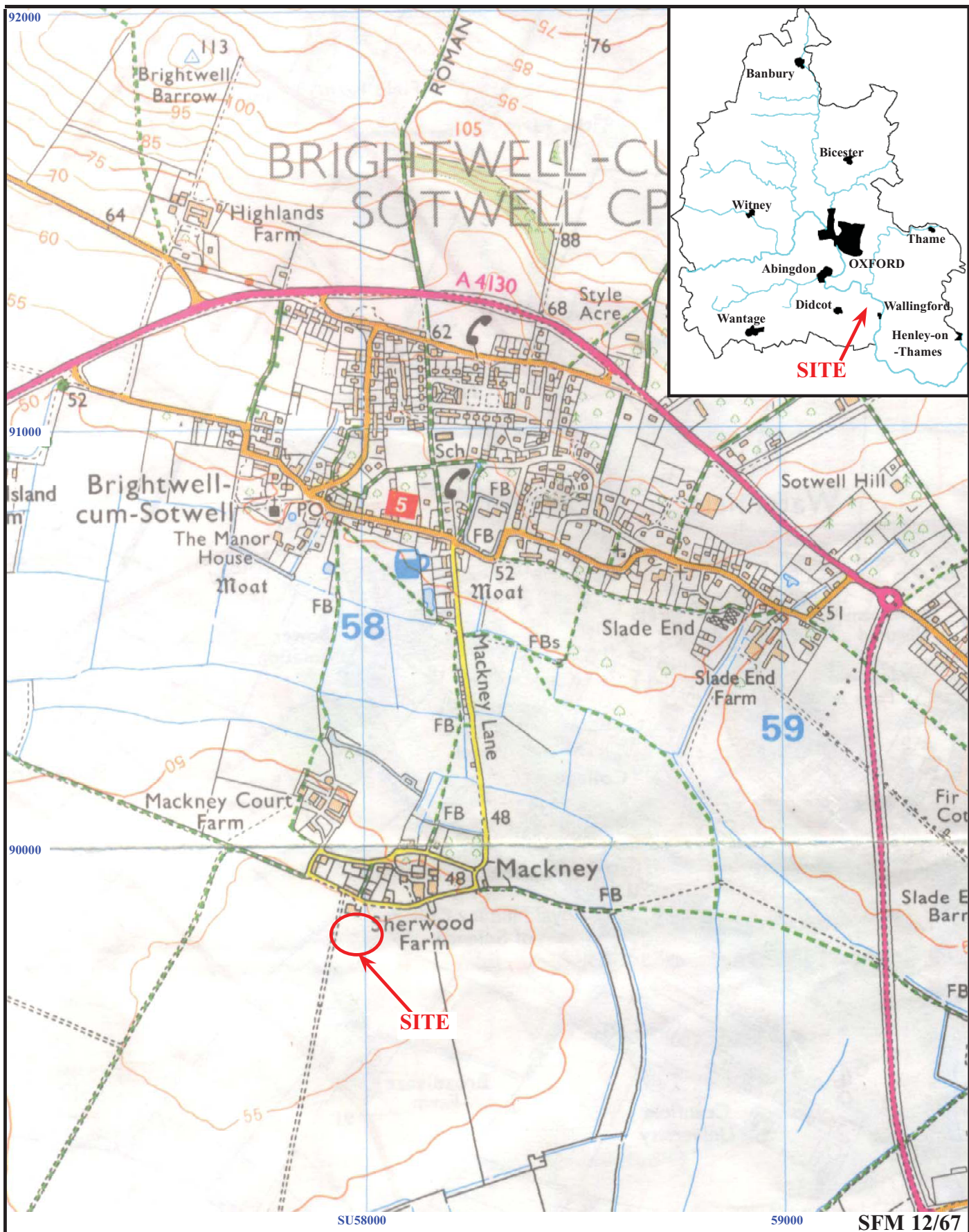
<i>Group</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating Evidence</i>
		50	Topsoil		
		51	Subsoil		
	1	52	Furrow		
	2	53	Furrow		
	3	54-7	Pit	MIA	Pot
500	4	58	Ring gully terminus	MIA	Pot
500	5	59	Ring gully slot	MIA	Pot
500	6	60	Ring gully slot	MIA	By association
	7	61	Gully slot	Modern	Stratigraphic
500	8	62	Ring gully slot	MIA	Pot
500	9	63	Ring gully slot	MIA	By association
500	12	64	Gully slot	MIA	Pot
500	10	65	Gully slot	MIA	Pot
500	11	66	Gully slot	MIA	Pot
	13	67	Pit		
	14	68	Posthole	MIA	Pot
	15	69	Treebole		
501	16	70	Ditch slot	Roman	By association
502	17	71-3	Ditch recut	Roman	Pot
502	18	74-6	Ditch slot	Roman	Pot
501	19	78	Ditch slot	Roman	By association
	20	81	Furrow	Medieval or later	Stratigraphic
	21	82	Pit	MIA	
	22	83	Ditch slot	MIA	
	23	84	Pit	MIA	
502	24	77,79 80	Ditch recut	Roman	
	25		Pit?		Not dug
	26		Pit?		Not dug
	27		Pit?		Not dug

APPENDIX 2: Pottery

Group	Cut	Deposit	Iron Age				Roman	Tot No	Tot Wt
			Sandy	Limestone	Organic	Flint			
	3	54	1	-	-	-	-	1	11
	3	55	6	10	-	1	-	17	38
	3	56	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
500	4	58	1	1	-	-	(3)	5	39
500	5	59	-	-	-	1	-	1	7
500	8	62	9	-	-	-	-	9	23
500	10	65	12	3	2	-	-	17	102
500	11	66	6	-	-	-	-	6	15
500	12	64	1	-	-	-	-	1	14
	14	68	2	-	-	-	-	2	9
502	17	71	2	-	-	-	1	3	14
502	17	73	1	-	-	-	-	1	14
502	18	74	1	1	-	-	-	2	9
	21	83	5	1	-	-	-	6	42
	22	83	3	-	-	1	-	4	15
	23	84	1	-	-	-	-	1	0.5
502	24	77	-	-	-	-	2	2	8
502	24	79	-	-	-	-	2	2	41
	TOTAL		51	17	2	3	8	81	403.5

APPENDIX 3: Inventory of animal bone

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>No. Frags</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>	<i>Large</i>	<i>Cow</i>	<i>Sheep/goat</i>	<i>Unidentified</i>
13	67			3		29 (loose teeth)	-
17	71	16	930	-	16 (right limb)	-	-
17	73	2	38	-	1 (loose tooth)	-	1
18	74	2	10	-		2 (loose tooth)	-
18	76	4	32	4		-	-
24	77	16	102	15		1 (loose tooth)	-
Total / MNI		72	1176		1 cow	1 sheep/goat	-

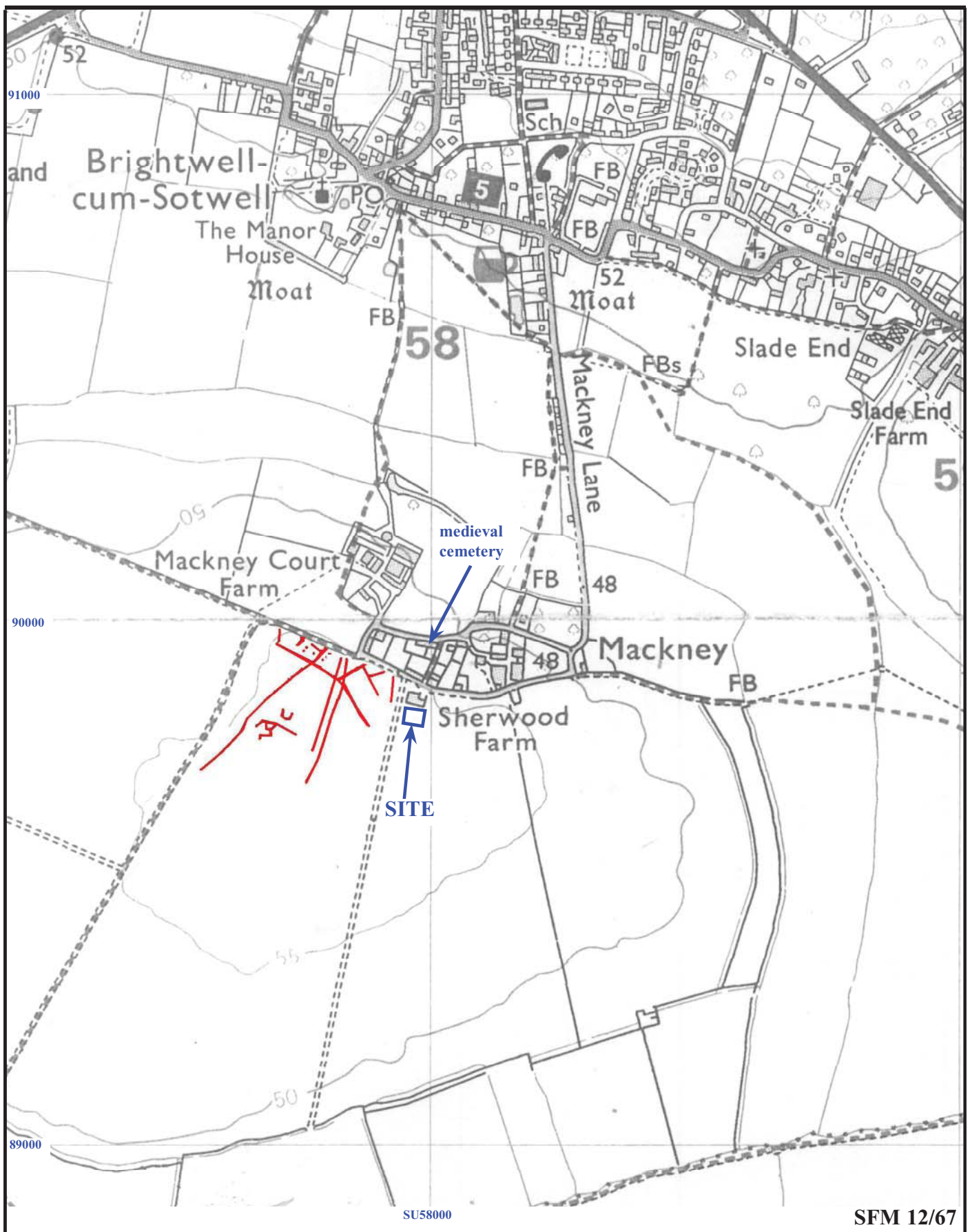


**New Barn, Sherwood Farm, Mackney, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell,
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Figure 1. Location of site within Mackney and Oxfordshire.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Explorer 170 at 1:12500
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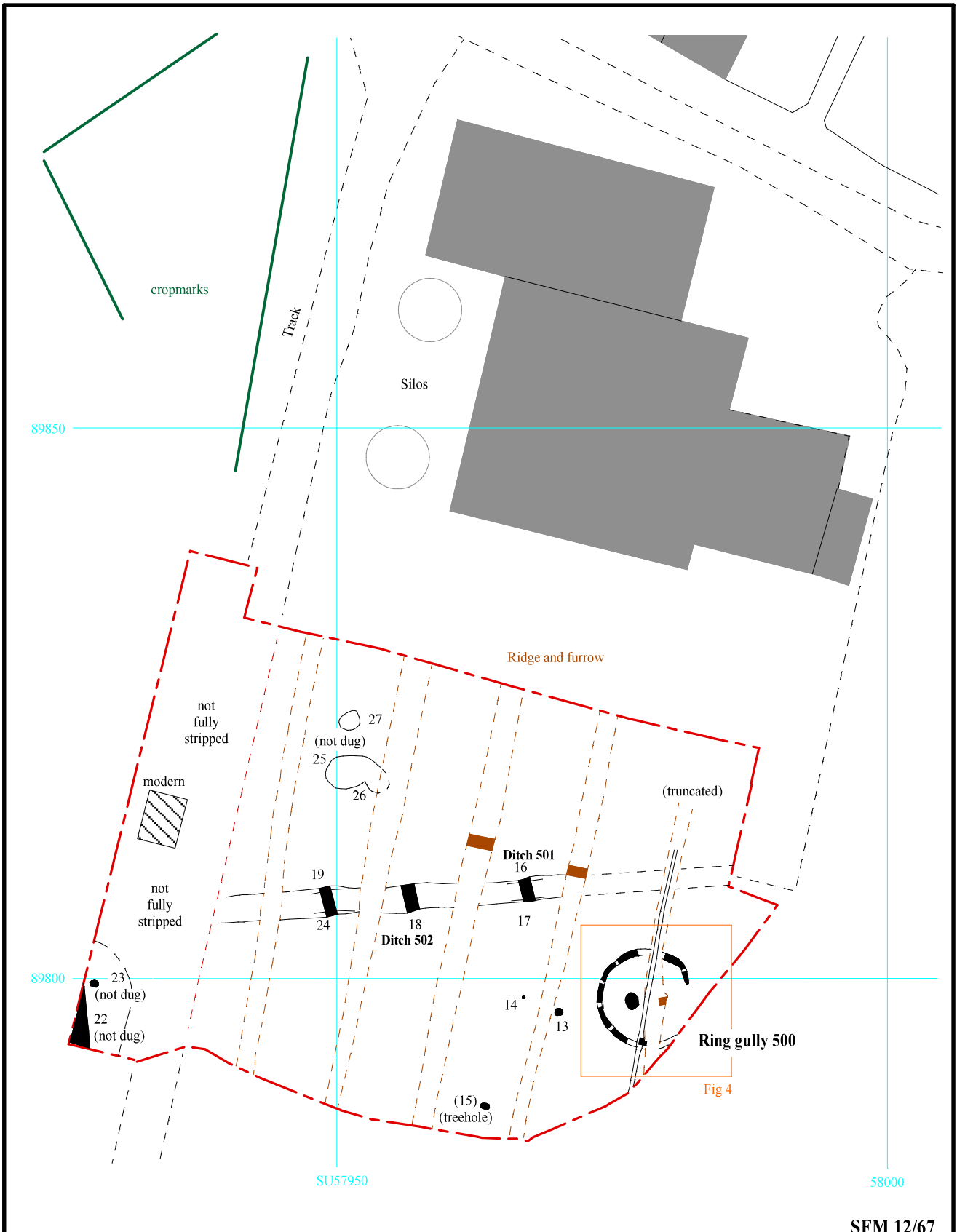
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**New Barn, Sherwood Farm, Mackney,
Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Oxfordshire, 2012
Archaeological watching brief**

Figure 2. Location of site in relation to cropmarks.
(after Benson and Miles 1974).

Modified from Ordnance Survey Explorer map 170 at 1:10 000
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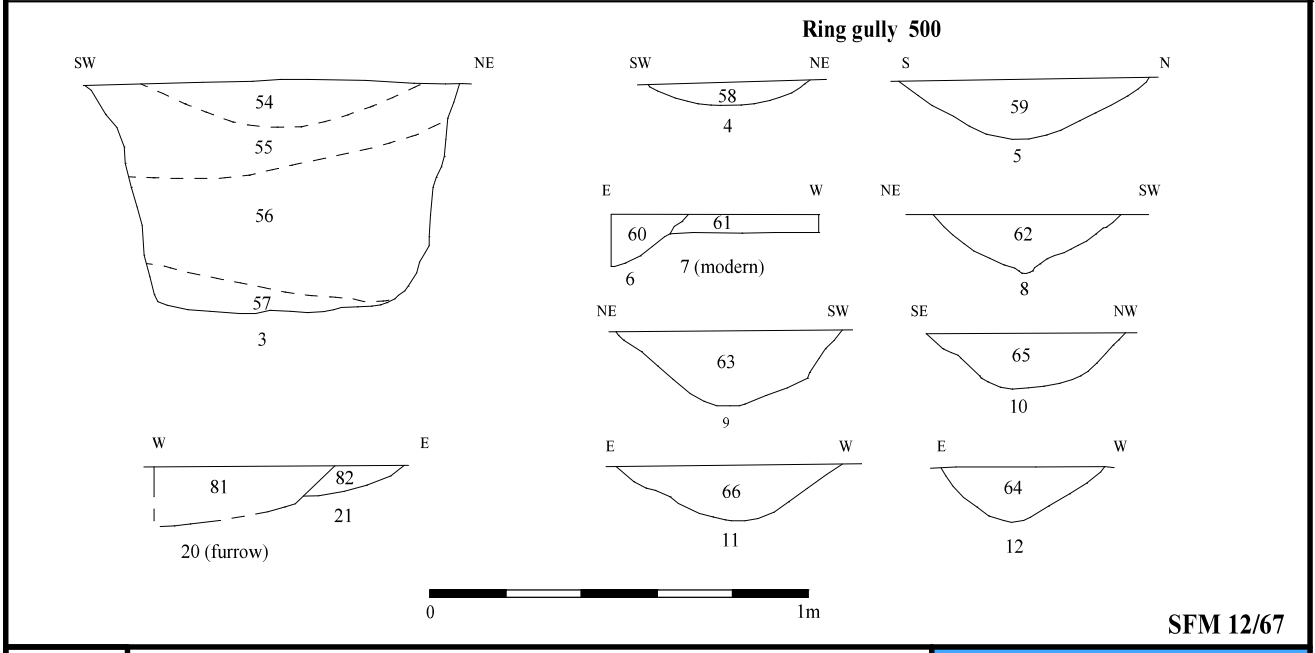
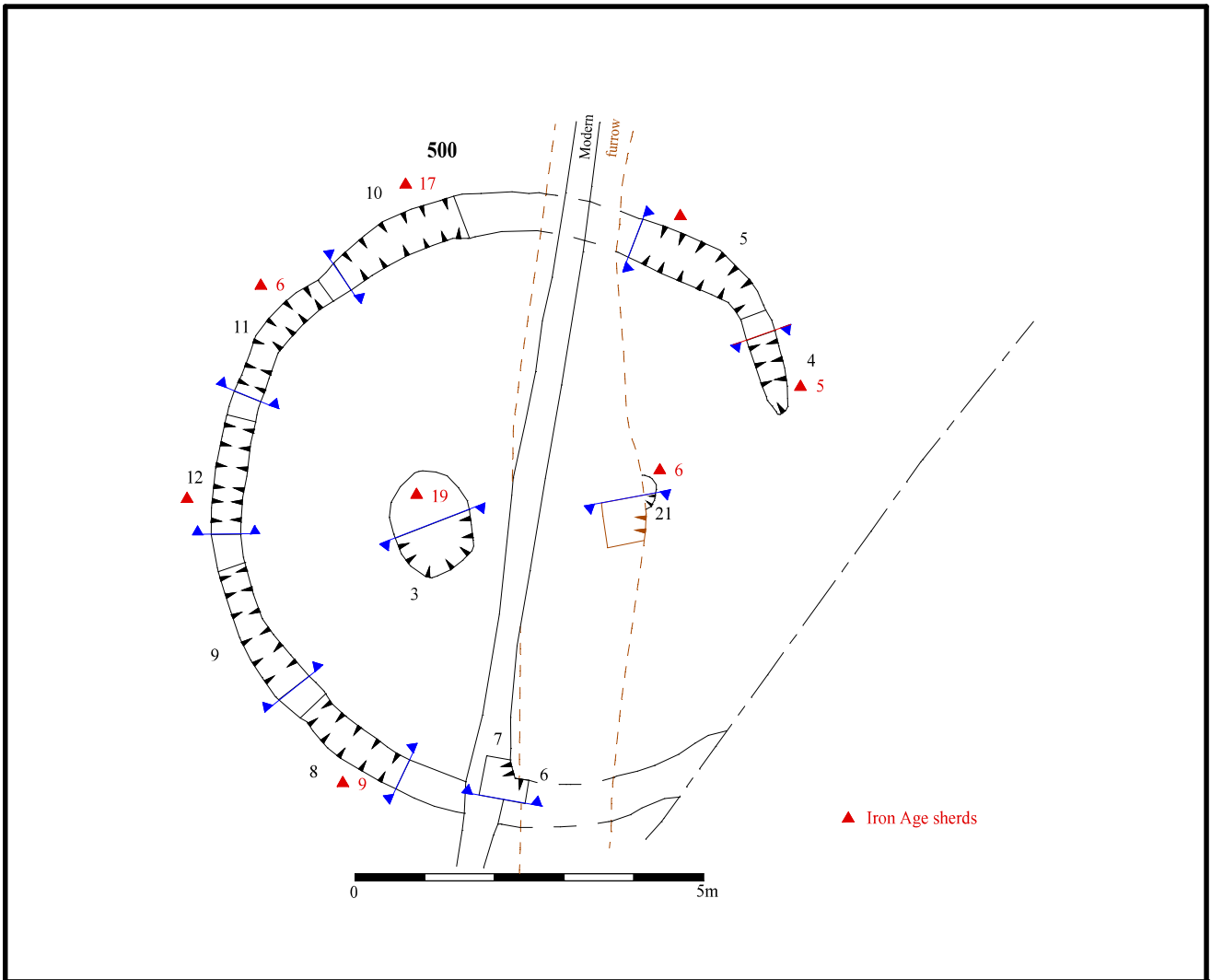
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**New barn, Sherwood Farm, Mackney,
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Figure 3. Plan of excavated area.

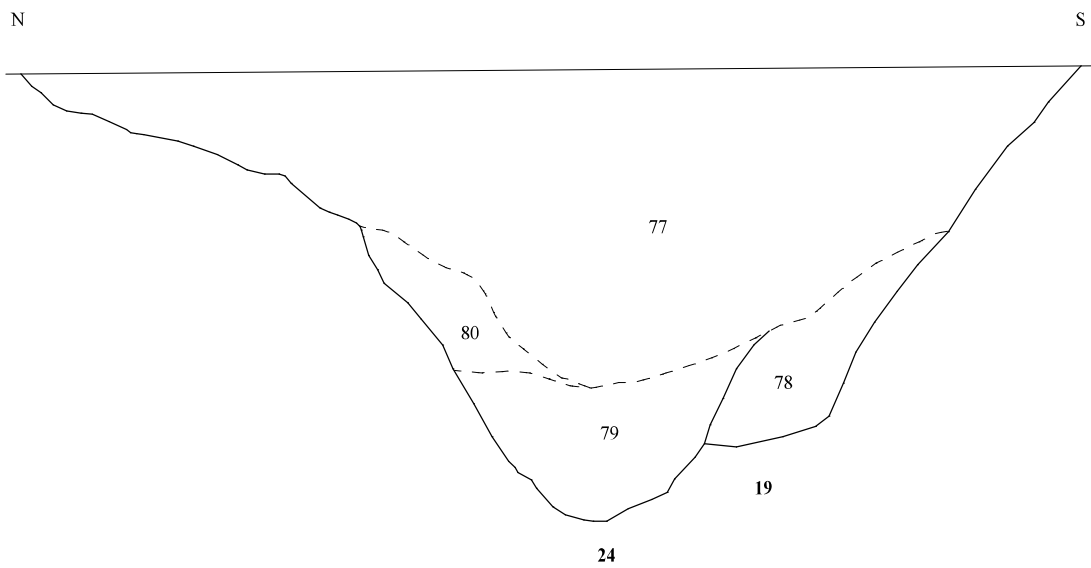
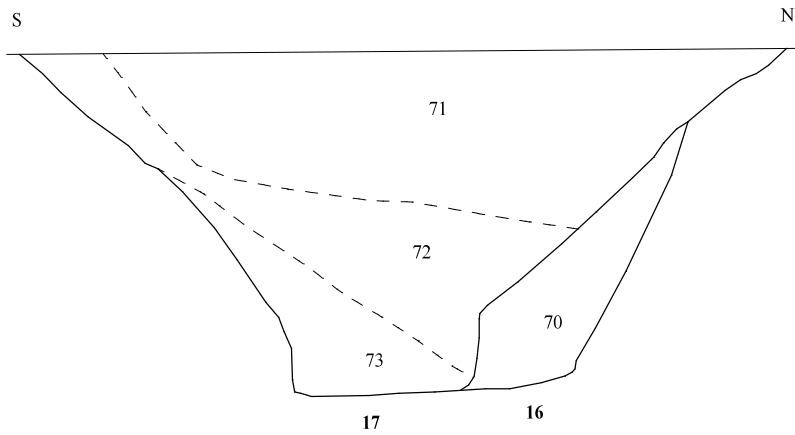




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Figure 4. Roundhouse detail.





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Figure 5. Sections of Roman ditch



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Plate 1. Iron Age pit 3, looking north , Scales: 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 2. Ring gully 500 (slot 9), looking east, Scales: 0.5m and 0.1m.

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Plates 1 and 2.

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Plate 3. Roman ditch 501 (slot 18), looking south west , Scales: 2m and 0.5m.



Plate 4. Ring gully 500, looking south west, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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Archaeological Recording action

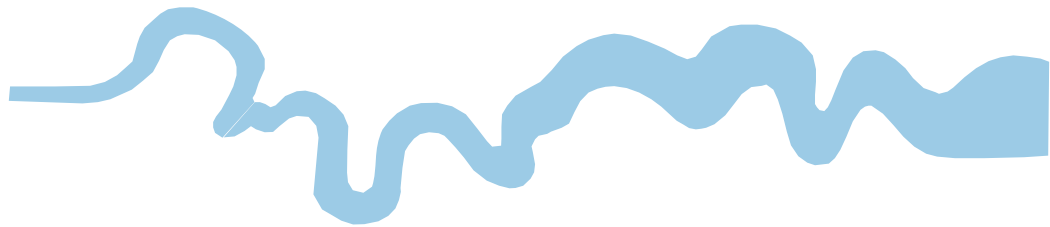
Plates 3 and 4.

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TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 750 BC
Bronze Age: Late _____	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle _____	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early _____	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower	2,000,000 BC





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