

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Finmere Quarry Extension, Banbury Road,
Finmere, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Steve Ford

Site Code: FQO13/102

(SP 6220 3220)

Finmere Quarry Extension, Banbury Road, Finmere, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Evaluation for Opes Industries

by Steve Ford

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code FQO13/102

October 2013

Summary

Site name: Finmere Quarry Extension, Banbury Road, Finmere, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SP 6220 3220

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 30th September to 8th October 2013

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Steve Ford

Site code: FQO13/102

Area of site: 15.4ha

Summary of results: The evaluation trenching revealed a small complex of archaeological deposits located at the northern end of the site. These closely match a series of curvilinear and circular anomalies identified by geophysical survey, but with additional small features beyond this zone. Sample excavation of the archaeological deposits revealed they were certainly or probably of later Iron Age date. Other geophysical anomalies elsewhere on the site were not obviously of archaeological origin. A few Neolithic or Bronze age struck flints and a single sherd of post-medieval pottery were recovered from the trench spoilheaps.

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

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Preston✓ 15.10.13

Finmere Quarry Extension, Banbury Road, Finmere, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation

By Steve Ford

Report 13/102

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out on land at Finmere Quarry Extension, Banbury Road, Finmere, Oxfordshire (SP 6220 3220) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Ben Wragg, of Opes Industries Finmere Quarry, Banbury Road, Finmere, Buckingham, MK18 4AJ .

The evaluation was undertaken to inform plans for mineral extraction of the site, in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012) and Oxfordshire County Council's heritage policies.. The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief for the project prepared Mr. Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeology Service drawing on information provided in a desk-based assessment (Josephs 2005) and geophysical survey (NA 2006).

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Hugh Coddington, Principal Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council, adviser to the Mineral Planning Authority on archaeological matters. The fieldwork was undertaken by Steve Ford, Kyle Beaverstock and Sophie Frampton between 30th September and 8th October 2013 and the site code is FQO13/102. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site lies at Widmore Farm to the south of Banbury Road and to the west of a disused railway. The existing quarry lies to the east. The site occupies three fields and is currently used as a mixture of arable land and set aside land. The site is flat and lies at a height of 124m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The underlying geology is mostly glacio-fluvial deposits (fine sand and gravel but with variable extents of clayey silt patches) with boulder clay (till: stony clay with flint and chalk pebbles) to the south (BGS 2002).

Archaeological background

The site lies adjacent to an existing quarry which has been subject to previous archaeological excavation. That excavation revealed a Bronze Age cremation cemetery and an area of Middle or Late Iron Age occupation (Hart and Kenyon 2011). Fieldwalking to the north-east revealed a modest volume of prehistoric struck flint (Ford 2010) and to the south-east evaluation trenching revealed only a few undated linear features and some late medieval or post-medieval pottery (Mundin and Ford 2008).

As a part of this proposal geophysical survey was carried out which revealed circular and linear anomalies in one area (Field 1, north) which lies relatively close to the previously excavated areas and may represent a continuation of the occupied area. Other areas revealed few anomalies of archaeological interest (NA 2006).

A field evaluation was requested by Oxfordshire County Council in order to provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site so as to inform the planning process and if necessary mitigate the effects of the development.

Objectives

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits within the area of development.

The specific research aims of the project were:

To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site.

To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

To determine if archaeological deposits representing further Bronze Age and Iron Age occupation is present.

To determine the nature of geophysical anomalies thought to be of archaeological interest especially in the north part of field 1.

To provide sufficient information to draw up an appropriate archaeological mitigation strategy.

Methodology

It was proposed to excavate 39 trenches, all 2m wide, and 20m in length. Topsoil and other overburden was to be removed by a 360⁰-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket to expose archaeologically sensitive levels, under constant archaeological supervision.

Where archaeological features were certainly or probably present, the stripped areas were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools. Sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed were to be excavated or sampled by hand to satisfy the aims of the brief. Spoil heaps were to be scanned by eye and with a metal detector for the recovery of artefacts. The fieldwork was carried out in a manner which would not

compromise the integrity of any archaeological features or deposits which might warrant preservation *in situ*, or might better be investigated by full excavation.

Results

A total of forty trenches were eventually dug. The trenches varied in length from 16.9m–32.10m and all were 2.2m wide. The trench depths were remarkably consistent at between 0.35m and 0.4m with just one trench partly deeper to 0.55m. Similarly the stratigraphy was very similar usually with 0.25m of topsoil overlying up to c. 0.05m of subsoil above the natural geology. Modern plough stripes were frequently observed cut into the natural geology suggesting the subsoil was more of a topsoil/ natural geology mix than a distinct layer.

Only four, possibly five trenches contained archaeological deposits and these are described below. Details of all trenches giving dimensions and stratigraphy can be found in Appendix 1. A list of all features excavated forms Appendix 2.

Trench 3 (Figs 5 and 6; Pls 8 and 9)

This trench was orientated SW–NE across the northern area containing geophysical anomalies. It was 22.5m long and mostly 0.35m deep. The stratigraphy comprised 0.25m of topsoil overlying 0.05m of subsoil above sandy gravel with brown silt patches. Three, probably four archaeological features were identified.

Gully 7 was curvilinear in plan and was 0.5m wide and 0.18m deep. It had a bowl shaped profile and contained a single fill (58) of grey sandy silt with some gravel. It contained no artefacts but cut pit 8.

Pit 8 was not fully defined but was at least 0.6m across and was 0.26m deep. It contained a single fill (59) comprising a dark brown/grey clayey silty with some gravel and charcoal flecks. It also contained 5 sherds of Iron Age pottery.

Nearby was pit 6 which was 0.78m wide and 0.36m deep. It had a deep bowl-shaped profile and contained a single fill (57) of brown grey sandy silt with some gravel and a number of quartzite cobbles. It contained no other artefacts.

Post hole-sized feature 11 was unexcavated.

Gully 7 seems to correspond with a linear geophysical anomaly which traverses the trench.

Trench 5 (Figs 5 and 6; Pl. 3)

This trench was orientated W–E and lay to the west of the area containing geophysical anomalies. It was 22.6m long and 0.4m deep. The stratigraphy comprised 0.25m of topsoil overlying 0.05m of subsoil above sandy gravel with silt patches. It contained a single pit. Pit 1 was 0.5m in diameter and 0.3m deep. It contained a single

fill (50) which comprised a silty sand with some pea grit, fired clay and charcoal, especially in the lower fill. The lower part of the pit was lined with a grey/green clay up to 0.03m thick. A single sherd of Iron Age pottery and a quartzite cobble were recovered from the main fill.

Trench 39 (Figs 5 and 6; Pl. 7)

This trench was orientated N - S and was 20.0m long and 0.35m deep. The stratigraphy comprised 0.25m of topsoil overlying 0.05m of subsoil above sandy gravel with silt patches. It contained two and probably four features. Pit 4 was 0.75m in diameter and 0.33m deep. It contained a single fill (55) of grey clayey sand with charcoal flecks and a quartzite cobble. Some 10 conjoining sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered from the uppermost level of the pit.

Pit 5 lay close to pit 4 and was initially thought to be the same feature. It was 0.9m in diameter and 0.34m deep. It contained a single fill (56) of grey clayey sand with rare charcoal flecks. It contained no artefacts.

Two probable postholes (9 and 10), marked by the presence quartzite cobbles and lumps produced 5 sherds and one sherd respectively of Iron Age pottery from their uppermost levels but were otherwise unexcavated.

Trench 40 (Figs 5 and 6; Pls 4-6)

This trench was orientated SW- NE and was 16.9m long and 0.33m deep. The stratigraphy comprised 0.25m of topsoil overlying 0.05m of subsoil above sandy gravel with silt patches. It contained two and possibly three features.

Ditch 2 was 1.6m wide and up to 0.87m deep with a V-shaped profile with rounded bottom. The excavated slot appears to have been located across a gang junction with the ditch to the north-west being only 0.43m deep. The deeper part of the ditch had three fills (51–53). The lower fill (53) was mostly comprised of a fine gravel in a matrix of light brown/grey silty sand with frequent gravel pieces, and forms the primary infill of the ditch. It contained two sherds of Iron Age pottery. Above this, layer (52) was a light brown/grey sandy silt with some gravel reflecting the stabilization of the ditch infill. No artefacts were recovered. The upper fill (52), a soft light brown sandy silt, reflects a tertiary layer and contained 28 sherds of Iron Age pottery.

Ditch 3 was 0.88m wide and 0.56m deep. It contained a single fill (54) which was a brown/grey silty sand with some gravel and quartzite cobbles. It also contained 59 sherds of Iron Age pottery.

Both ditches 2 and 3 correspond well with geophysical anomalies.

Trenches with non-archaeological features

Several trenches contained land drains, usually ceramic pipes, but two drains within Trench 8 were made of stone rubble. A possible posthole but more likely a root hole was also investigated in this trench. In Trench 14

immediately beneath the topsoil was a dense but irregular area of charcoal along with fire-reddened clay. It is likely to reflect the presence of a small bonfire or the burning out of a tree root. The northern end of Trench 9 intersected a straight linear geophysical anomaly. This feature appears to be an old field boundary that predates the construction of the railway. It was not further investigated.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 120 sherds with a total weight of 722g. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 3. It was entirely of Iron Age date, other than a single small sherd of post-medieval material. The following Iron Age fabric types were noted:

F1: Fine Shell. Moderate to dense pounded shell up to 1mm. Moderate organic material up to 2mm. 24 sherds, 215g.

F2: Coarse shell. Slightly sandy texture, moderate to dense shell fragments up to 10mm. 78 sherds, 359g.

F3: Fine sand. Sparse to moderate sub-angular quartz up to 0.5mm, most 0.2mm or less. 17 sherds, 144g.

The fabrics are typical of Iron Age sites in the area. Similar types were noted at previous excavations at Finmere Quarry, and were said to be of later Iron Age (*c* 400 – 100BC) date. They also have parallels with a group of material from nearby Bicester, and are typical of the north Cotswolds tradition (McSloy 2010, 126).

All the Iron Age pottery is in very poor condition and very fragmented, being generally low-fired, and with many of the sherds having had the calcareous inclusions largely leached away. Most of the context-specific groups comprised large numbers of sherds from a small number of vessels. Given the generally friable nature of the pottery it seems likely that the groups originally mainly comprised just one or two very large sherds which have since disintegrated, but were probably primary deposits. The only rim-sherd present was from context 52. It was in the sandy fabric F3, and has a simple upright profile with a very slight bead, and is similar to a number of examples from the previous excavations at Finmere Quarry (McSloy 2010, fig. 22). A sherd from the base of a small bowl or cup occurred in Trench 3 unstratified (15-20m). The rest of the assemblage consisted of undecorated bodysherds, almost all of which were from large vessels.

The post-medieval sherd was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as **OXDR: Red Earthenwares**, 1550 onwards. 1 sherd, 4g.

Struck flint by Steve Ford

Just two struck flints were recovered from evaluation trench spoilheaps. Both were flakes, one from Trench 4 and one from Trench 40. Both were made on flint pebbles locally available. Neither are closely datable and only a broad Neolithic/Bronze Age date can be suggested.

Palaeoenvironmental assessment by Joanna Pine

Two sub-samples of 5-10L were assessed for their palaeoenvironmental potential. The samples were floated and wet sieved using a 0.25mm mesh. Sample 1 (Trench 5, cut 1, fill 50) contained a few small flecks of wood charcoal only. Sample 2 (Trench 40, cut 3, fill 54) also contained a very little charcoal along with a weed seed (Fat Hen/*Chenopodium album*).

Conclusion

This evaluation has confirmed that a part of the site has archaeological potential. The evaluation trenching revealed a small complex of archaeological deposits located at the northern end of the site. These closely match a series of curvilinear and circular anomalies identified by geophysical survey. Three small outlying features further to the west were not obviously revealed by the geophysical survey but extend the area of interest in that direction. Sample excavation of the archaeological deposits revealed they were certainly or probably of later Iron Age date.

Other geophysical anomalies elsewhere on the site were not obviously of archaeological origin with a few other modern or natural features recorded.

References

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details
0m at west or south end

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	20.00	2.20	0.40	0-0.02m woodchips; 0.02-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ brown silty clay with gravel patches natural geology.
2	23.60	2.20	0.45	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.35m subsoil; 0.35m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology .
3	22.50	2.20	0.35-0.40	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology. Gully 7, pit 8 postholes 6 and 11 [Pls 8 and 9]
4	25.70	2.20	0.30	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ brown silty clay with gravel patches natural geology.
5	22.60	2.20	0.40	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology. Pit 5. [Pl. 3]
6	22.40	2.20	0.38	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
7	23.80	2.20	0.32	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ light brown/ white clayey silt with gravel patches, natural geology.
8	22.60	2.20	0.38	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.35m subsoil; 0.35m+ light brown/ white clayey silt with gravel patches, natural geology. Two stone rubble drains and a possible posthole or root hole.
9	32.10	2.20	0.42	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.35m subsoil; 0.35m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
10	21.00	2.20	0.35	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
11	22.20	2.20	0.35	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ light brown/ white clayey silt with gravel patches, natural geology. [Pl. 1]
12	20.10	2.20	0.40	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology. Rectangular geotechnical test pit..
13	21.40	2.20	0.38	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
14	20.70	2.20	0.38	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology. Charcoal patch/fired clay at 4m (burnt root?)
15	22.60	2.20	0.33	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.28m subsoil; 0.28m+ light brown/ white clayey silt with gravel patches, natural geology.
16	21.20	2.20	0.36	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.28m subsoil; 0.28m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
17	20.80	2.20	0.25	0-0.20m topsoil; 0.20-0.22m subsoil; 0.22m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
18	20.00	2.20	0.33	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.28m subsoil; 0.28m+ light brown/ white clayey silt with gravel patches, natural geology.
19	20.70	2.20	0.33	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.28m subsoil; 0.28m+ light brown/ white clayey silt with gravel patches, natural geology.
20	21.90	2.20	0.35	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ light brown/ white clayey silt with gravel patches, natural geology.
21	20.20	2.20	0.35	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ light brown/ white clayey silt with gravel patches, natural geology.
22	19.20	2.20	0.40	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
23	21.50	2.20	0.30	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.28m subsoil; 0.28m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
24	23.00	2.20	0.37	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
25	23.50	2.20	0.35	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
26	23.30	2.20	0.33	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ natural geology.
27	23.00	2.20	0.30	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ Brown clay natural geology.
28	25.60	2.20	0.35-0.55	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ Brown clay natural geology.
29	23.00	2.20	0.30	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ light brown clayey silt with gravel patches, natural geology.
30	23.20	2.20	0.38	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ light brown/ white clayey silt with gravel patches, natural geology.
31	20.80	2.20	0.38	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
32	21.10	2.20	0.36	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ light brown/ white clayey silt with gravel patches, natural geology.
33	21.30	2.20	0.33	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ light brown/ white clayey silt natural geology.
34	21.10	2.20	0.35	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ light brown/ white clayey silt natural geology.

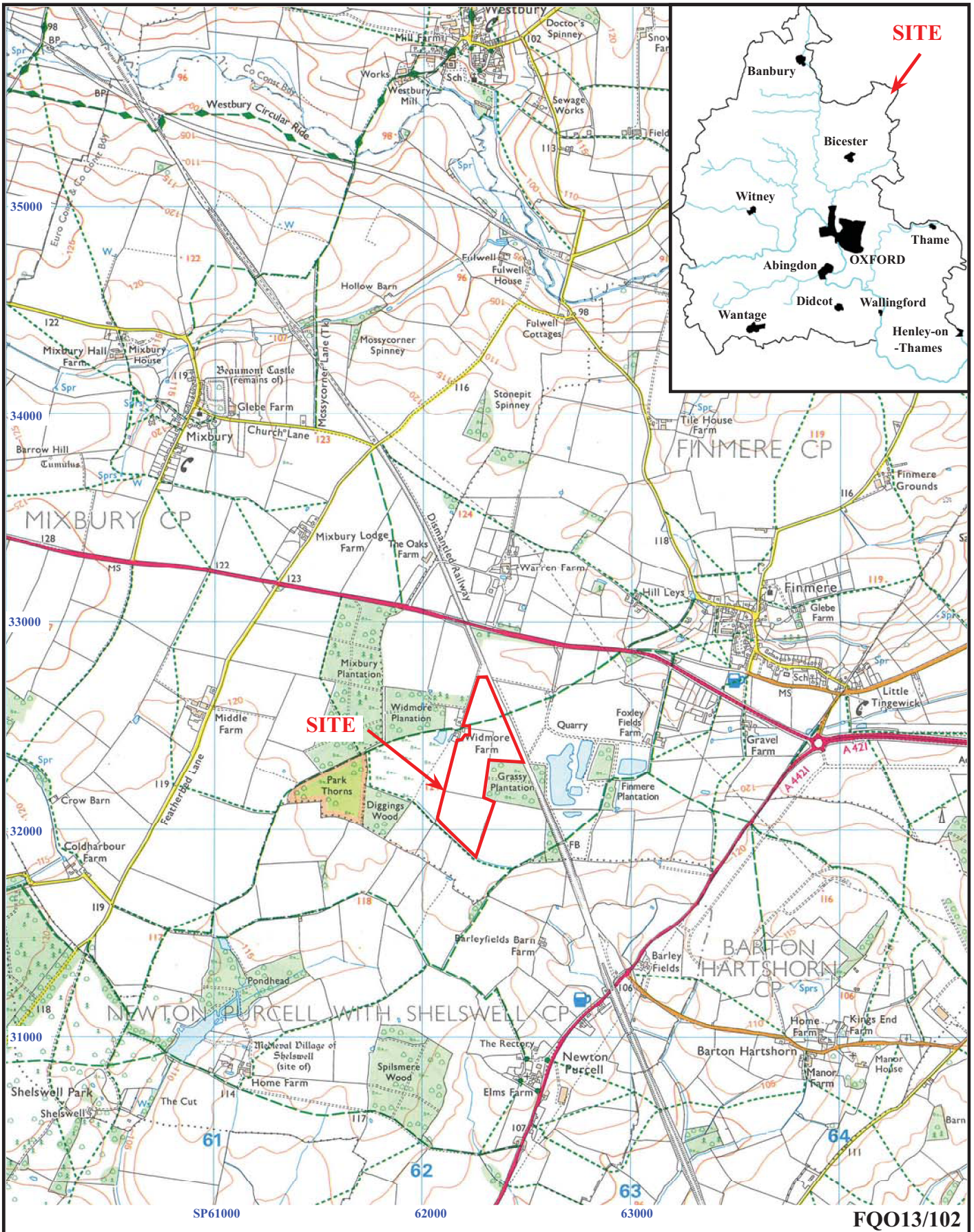
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
35	22.50	2.20	0.32	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.28m subsoil; 0.28m+ Brown clay natural geology.
36	25.80	2.20	0.35	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.28m subsoil; 0.28m+ light brown/ white clayey silt natural geology.
37	24.50	2.20	0.38	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology.
38	23.00	2.20	0.40	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology. [Pl. 2]
39	20.00	2.20	0.35	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology. Pits 4 and 5, postholes 9 and 10. [Pl. 7]
40	16.90	2.20	0.33	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.30m subsoil; 0.30m+ gravel with silty patches natural geology. Ditches 2 and 3 [Pls 4-6]

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
5	1	50	Pit (clay lined)	Iron Age	pottery
40	2	51-53	Ditch	Iron Age	pottery
40	3	54	Ditch	Iron Age	pottery
39	4	55	Pit	Iron Age	pottery
39	5	56	Pit	Undated	
3	6	57	Pit	Undated	
3	7	58	Gully	Iron Age or later	Stratigraphy
3	8	59	Pit	Iron Age	pottery
39	9	60	Posthole (not dug)	Iron Age?	pottery
39	10	61	Posthole (not dug)	Iron Age?	pottery
3	11	62	Posthole (not dug)	-	

APPENDIX 3: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Context</i>	F1		F2		F3		OXDR	
			<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>
3	8	59			5	14				
3	U/S				1	4				
3	U/S	15-20m	1	3	6					
3	9	60	4	10	1	8				
3	10	61			1	2				
5	1	50	1	3						
10	U/S	5-10m							1	4
39	4	top	10	48						
40	2	52	8	151	4	23	16	140		
40	2	53			2	31				
40	3	54			58	277	1	4		
		Total	24	215	78	359	17	144	1	4

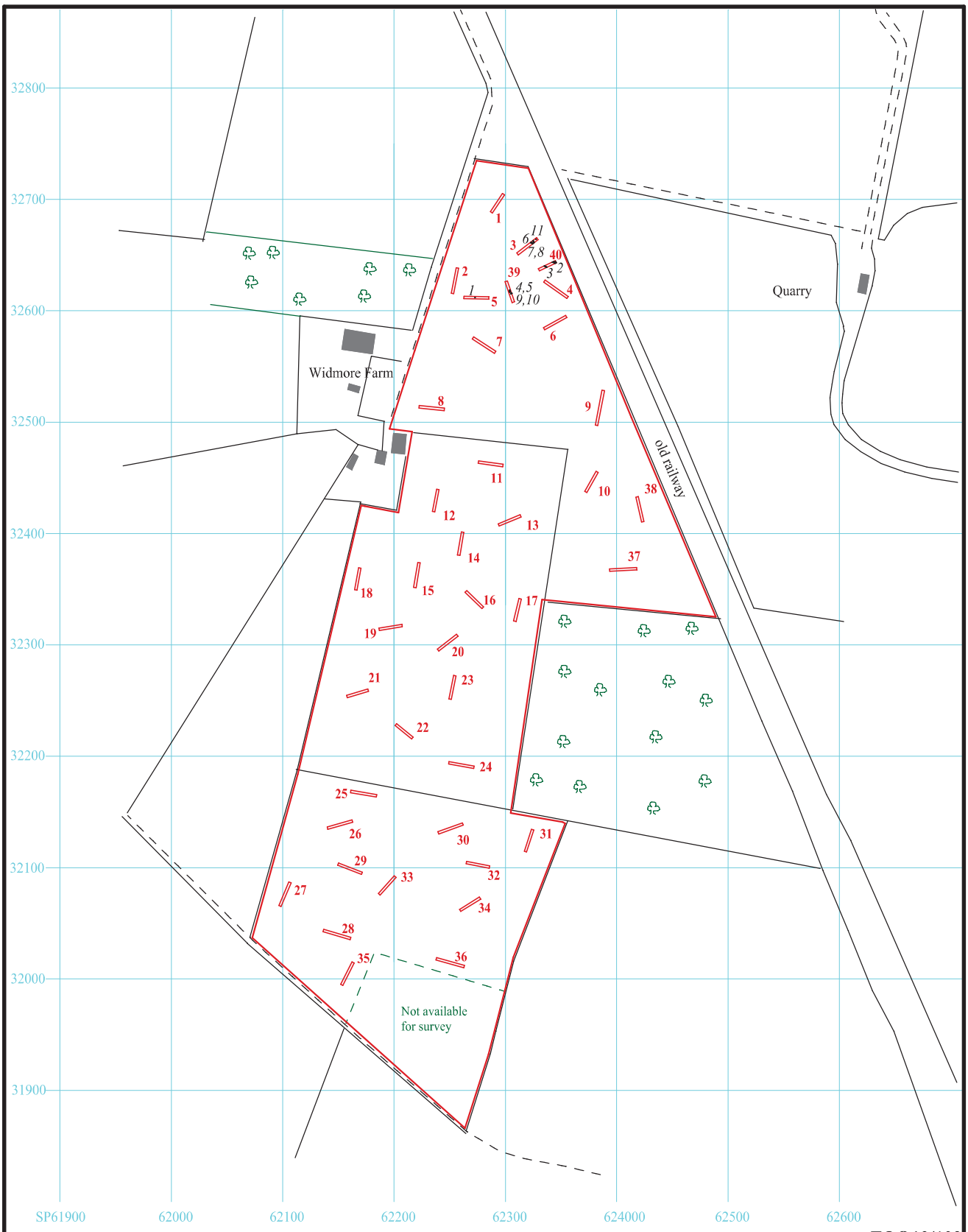


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Figure 1. Location of site within Finmere and Oxfordshire

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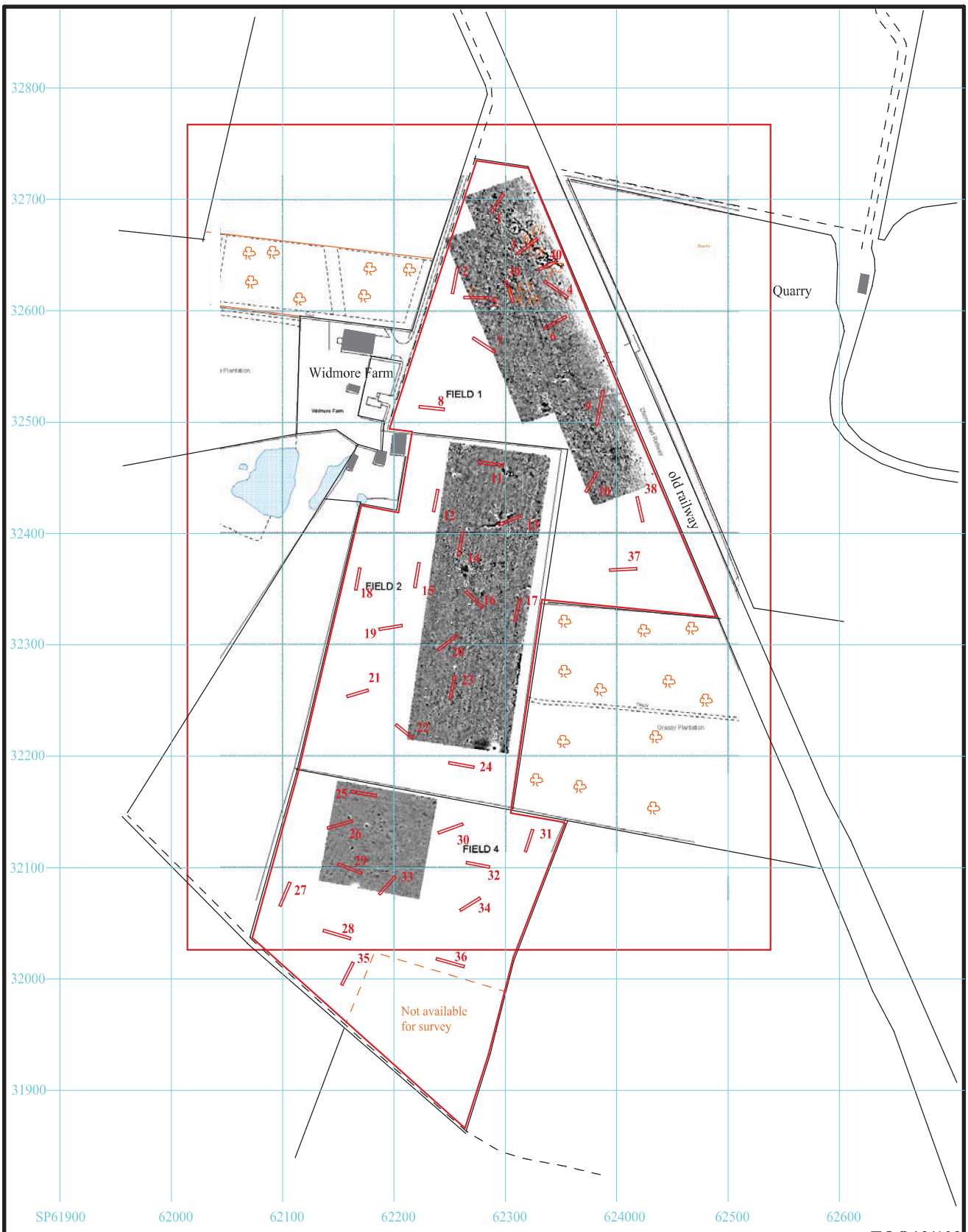
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Figure 2. Location of trenches.





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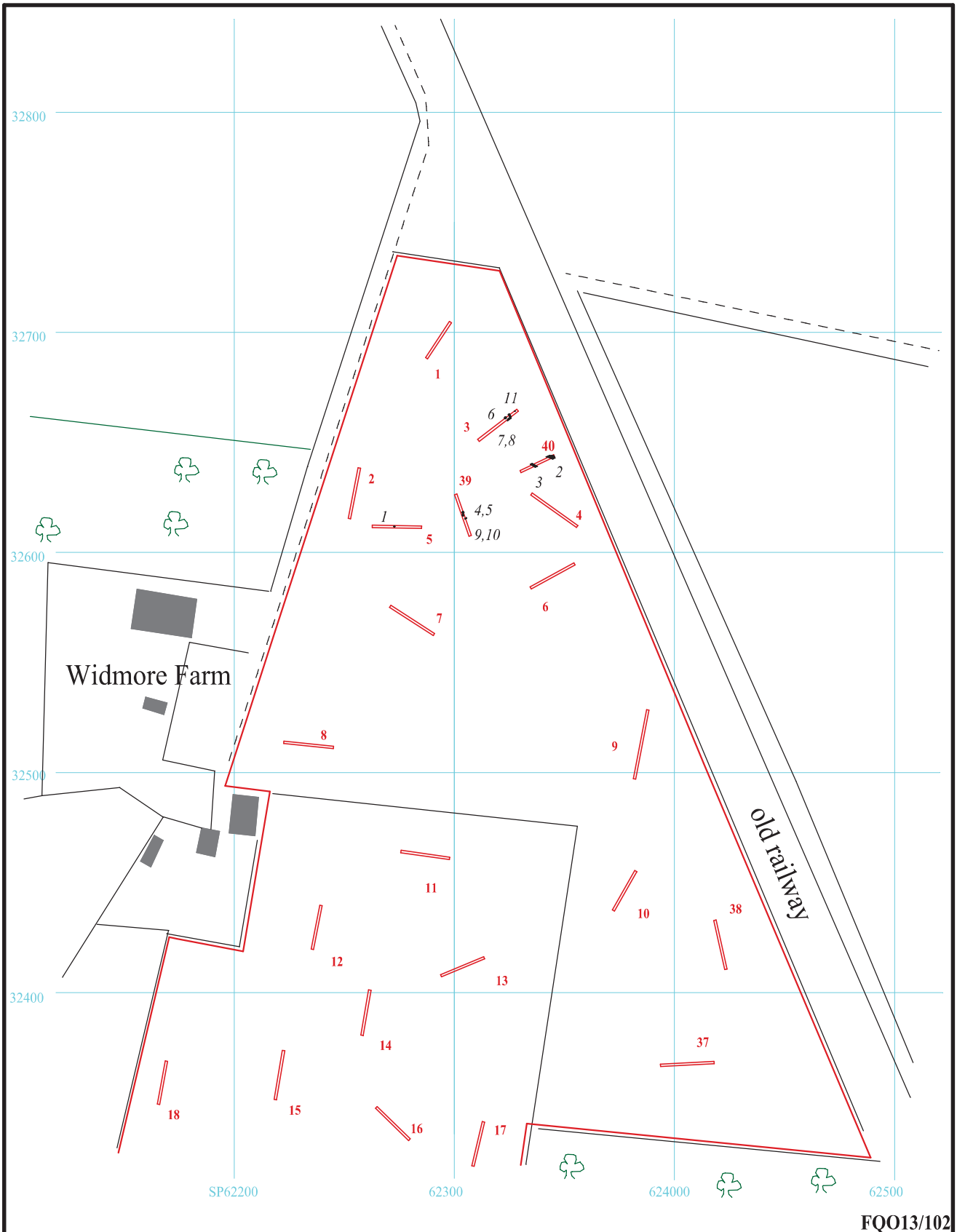


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Figure 3. Location of trenches and geophysical anomalies (after Northamptonshire Archaeology).



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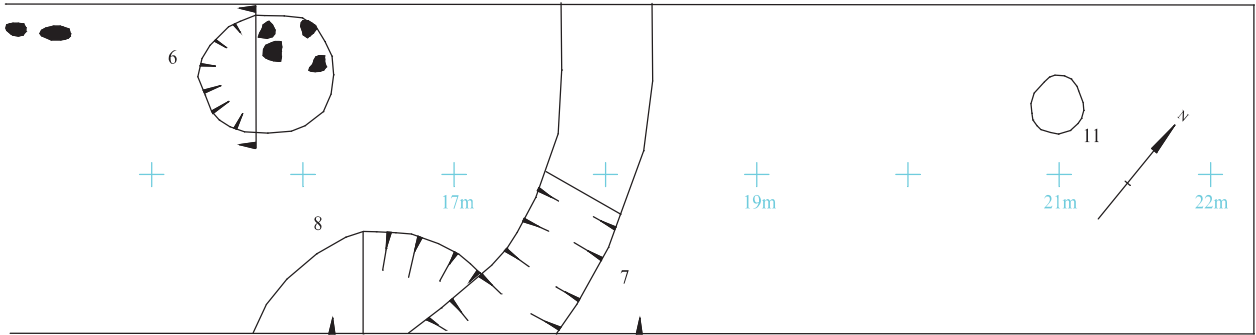
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Figure 4. Detailed location of trenches in northern field.

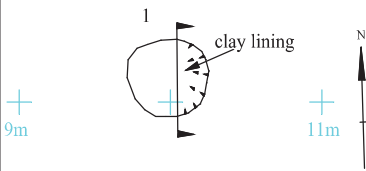


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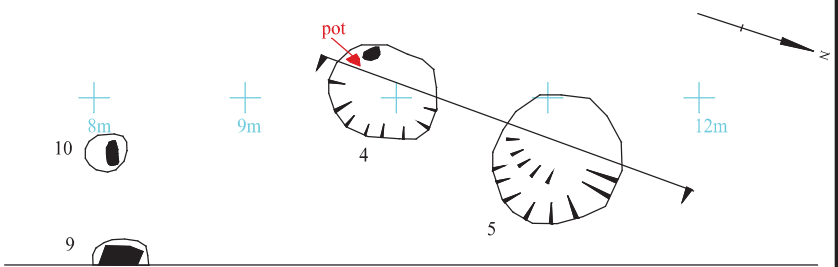
Trench 3



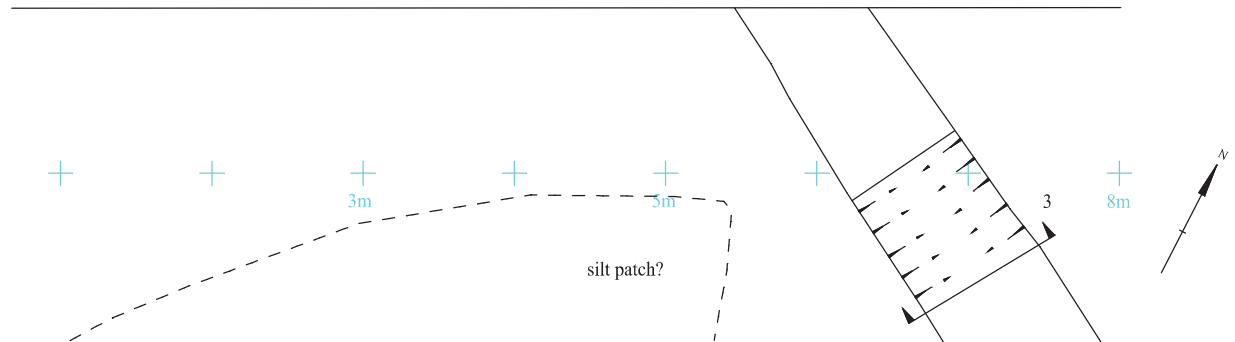
Trench 5



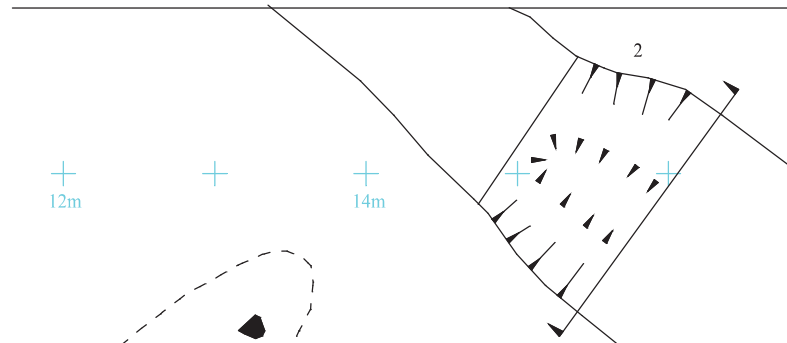
Trench 39



Trench 40



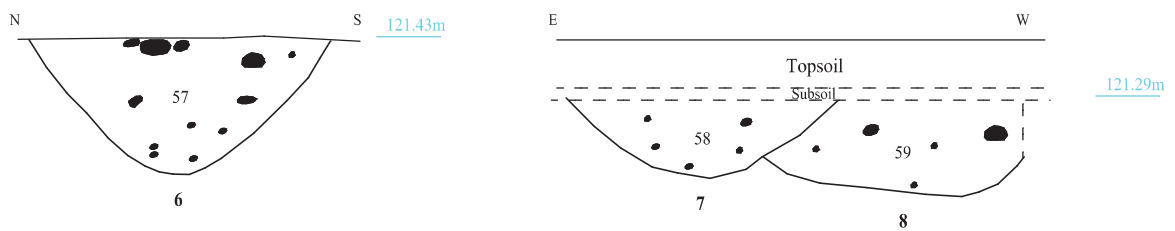
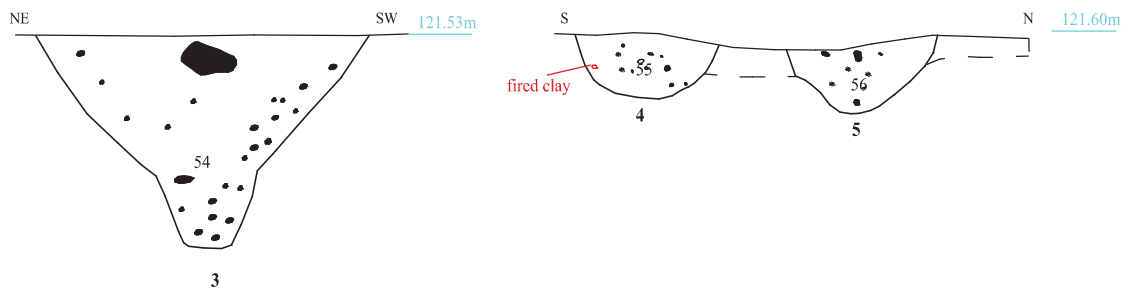
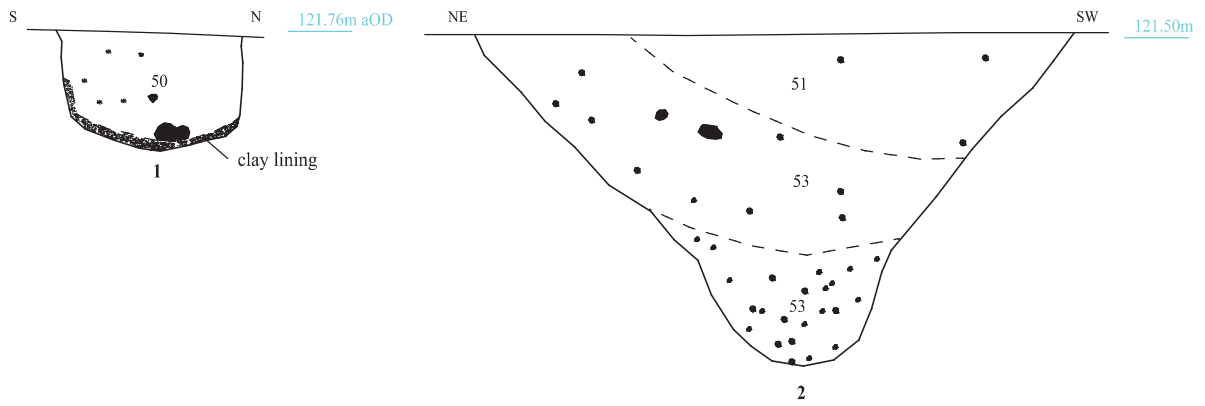
Trench 40 (continued)



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Figure 5. Plan of features





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Plate 1. Trench 11, looking east, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m.



Plate 2. Trench 38, looking north east, Scales: 2m, 1m and 0.5m.

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Plates 1 - 2.

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Plate 3. Trench 5, Clay-lined pit 1, looking west, Scales: 0.5m and 0.1m.



Plate 4. Trench 40, Ditch 2 looking south east,
Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 5. Trench 40, Ditch 2 looking north west,
Scales: 1m and 0.5m.

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Plates 3 - 5.**

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Plate 6. Trench 40 Ditch 3 looking south east, Scales: 1m and 0.5m.

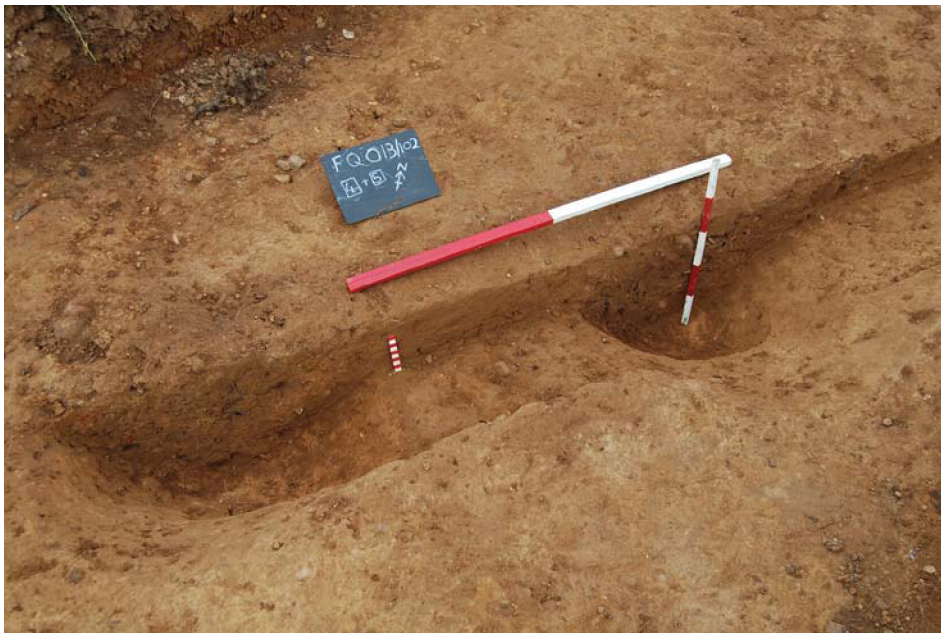


Plate 7. Trench 39, Pits 4 and 5 looking north, Scales: 1m, 0.5m and 0.1m.

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Plates 6 - 7.

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Plate 8. Trench 3, Pit 6 looking east, Scales: 1m, and 0.5m.



Plate 8. Trench 3 Gully 7 and pit 8 looking south west, Scales: 1m and 0.5m.

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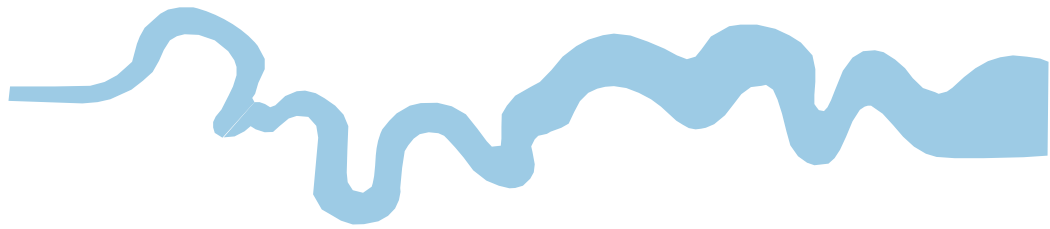
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Plates 8 - 9.

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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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