

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Land west of Heath Close,
Milcombe, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Jamie Williams

Site Code: HCM22/100

(SP 4069 3458)

Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe, Oxfordshire

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Abbeymill Homes**

by Jamie Williams

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code HCM 22/100

February 2023

Summary

Site name: Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SP 4069 3458

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 30th January – 3rd February 2023

Project coordinator: David Sanchez

Site supervisor: Jamie Williams

Site code: HCM 22/100

Area of site: c. 2.23ha

Summary of results: All 22 trenches were opened more or less as intended, with only trench 20 having to be moved due to the presence of trees. Trench 2 confirmed the presence of possible underground surfaces associated with the visible earthworks in the north-east of site, identified as varying layers of stone. No obvious cuts or floor layers belonging to these stone layers were observed, and no dating evidence was retrieved from the cleaning except for some Victorian glass from the surface of stone layer (66). Four gullies and two pits were also identified, gullies 5 and 6 being left unexcavated due to water ingress, with a shallow pit or scoop (pit 2) yielding a worked flint flake and five pieces of Middle to Late Iron Age pottery.

On the basis of these results, there is some archaeological potential for the site, especially in regards to the earthworks around trench 2 and possibly for pit 2 in trench 12, but the absence of dating evidence for the majority of the site makes it hard to conclude if the other features encountered are of archaeological interest

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 16.02.23
	Steve Preston ✓ 16.02.23

Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Jamie Williams

Report 22/100c

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out on land west of Heath Close, Milcombe, Oxfordshire (SP 4069 3458) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Tim Northey, on behalf of Abbey Mill Homes, Market House, Silver End, Olney, MK46 4AL.

Planning permission has been sought from Cherwell District Council for a residential development on a c. 2.2ha parcel of land west of Heath Close, Milcombe, Oxfordshire (SP 4069 3458) (Fig.1). As a consequence of the possibility of archaeological deposits on the site which may be damaged or destroyed by groundworks, evaluation trenching has been requested, with the potential for subsequent mitigation depending on the results of the evaluation. This is in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2021) and the District Council's Local Plan policies.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Victoria Green, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services, the archaeological adviser to the District. The fieldwork was undertaken by Jamie Williams and John Conley between 30th January – 3rd February 2023 and the site code is HCM 22/100. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service the Archaeology Data Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the west of the village of Milcombe, to the south-west of Banbury, in north Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The site comprises an irregular parcel of land bounded by the Rye Hi and a dismantled railway to the north and Main Road to the south with residential properties and their adjacent gardens forming the eastern boundary and a woodland forming a boundary to the west (Fig. 2). The site is located on Whitby Mudstone, with no superficial deposits recorded (BGS 1968) and is relatively level at a height of approximately 137m above Ordnance Datum. The land rises sharply beyond the site to the north, south and west.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a desk-based assessment for the project (Procter and Elliott 2022). In summary, the site lies to the west of the historic core of Milcombe. Milcombe has late Saxon origins and is documented in Domesday Book of 1086 (Williams and Martin 2002). The site lies adjacent to Oak Farm, which has been subject to excavation (Platt and Tabor 2014). The fieldwork revealed deposits of late Saxon, Medieval and post-medieval date including a dovecote. A few finds of Bronze Age and Roman date are recorded within the general area but most entries in the Historic Environment Record for the vicinity are of Post-Medieval date. A possible deserted Medieval village is recorded north of the site (Procter and Elliott 2022).

A geophysical survey on the site (Cicu 2022) recorded a few magnetic anomalies but little that could be considered of archaeological interest. However the edges of the site produced dense disturbance which might have been masking more significant features (Fig. 5).

Objectives and methodology

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. This work was to be carried out in a manner which would not compromise the integrity of archaeological features or deposits which might warrant preservation *in situ*, or might better be excavated under conditions pertaining to full excavation. The specific research aims of this project were:

- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;
- to determine if any geophysical anomalies are of archaeological origin;
- to determine if any late Saxon or Medieval deposits are present beyond the known extent of the village; and
- to provide information to allow the preparation of a mitigation strategy if necessary.

The potential and significance of any such deposits located were to be assessed according to research priorities such as those set out in Historic England's *Research Agenda* (HE 2016) or any more local or thematic research priorities as necessary such as the Solent Thames Research Agenda (Hey and Hind 2014). The appropriate CiFA guidelines (CiFA 2020) were to be followed.

Twenty-two trenches, each measuring 25m long and between 1.8-2m wide were intended to be dug using a 360°-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket to expose archaeologically sensitive levels under constant archaeological supervision. Where archaeological features are certainly or probably present, the

stripped areas were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools. Sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed would then be excavated or sampled by hand to satisfy the aims of outlined above, without compromising the integrity of archaeological features or deposits which warrant preservation *in situ*.

Results

All twenty-two trenches were dug as close to their intended locations as possible, with a few minor adjustments being made to avoid on-site obstacles. Despite its location targeting a geophysical anomaly, trench 20 had to be reoriented due to the presence of several tall trees in the way of the trench location, and was positioned to avoid digging under the canopy of the trees. The trenches were all 1.8m wide and ranged in length from 24.5-28.2m and in depth from 0.32-0.58m, with natural geology being observed in all of them.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. The excavated features, with dating evidence, are summarized in Appendix 2. Except in trench 2, the stratigraphy of all trenches was essentially the same: topsoil typically 0.1–0.2m deep, but sometimes deeper, above subsoil of broadly similar depth, above natural geology of light yellow-grey clay. The trenches which contained potential archaeological features are described in detail below.

Trench 2 (Figs 2, 3, 4 and 5; Pls 1 and 2)

Trench 2 was aligned S - N and was 24.7m long and 0.49m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.17m of topsoil, 0.08m soft dark orange-grey silty-clay alluvium(?) (52) and 0.24m subsoil overlying a light yellow-grey clay natural geology. At 15.4m from the south end of the trench, pit 4 was recorded but not excavated, measuring 0.8m wide and >0.34m long and filled with a light orange-grey sandy clay (56). A single piece of slate was found from the cleaning of the feature's surface but it is uncertain if it relates to the feature.

From 9.5m from the south end of the trench until the end of the trench, several differing layers of stone deposits (59-66) were uncovered, which presumably relate to the visible earthworks surrounding this trench. Most of the layers seem to be only one stone thick, with the stones comprising limestone with occasional shell and/or ironstone inclusions. No obvious cuts for these stone layers were identified, differences in the matrix between the stones have been denoted on Fig. 3 with a dashed line. Three test pits were dug against the differing stone layers upon the request of Ms Victoria Green, which confirmed that these stone layers mostly comprise one layer resting onto the natural geology and are not faced. The first two test pits just showed the stratigraphy of the trench with the absence of any floor layers, with test pit 3 (Fig. 4) showing remnants of stone rubble layer (63) in between alluvial(?) layer (52) and the subsoil (51).

No floor layers between the stones were identified, and several of the stone layers were at differing heights making it very hard in an evaluation setting to determine any sort of chronology or relationship. Stone layers 62 and 64 seemed to be the most placed of the layers, with layer 64 appearing to be semi-circular in plan, but a wider area would need to be opened in order to examine these differing layers in more detail and to see if they relate to the deserted medieval village to the north of the site.

Trench 5 (Figs 2, 3, 4 and 5; Pls 3 and 6)

Trench 5 was aligned SW - NE and was 25.8m long and 0.32m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.09m of topsoil and 0.17m of brown-grey silty-clay subsoil overlying light yellow-grey clay natural geology. At 20.8m from the south-west end of the trench, gully 3 was recorded on a NW-SE alignment. It was 0.69m wide and 0.16m deep and filled with a firm orange-grey silty clay (55) (Pl. 6). No finds were recovered.

Trench 12 (Figs 2, 3, 4 and 5; Pls 4 and 7)

Trench 12 was aligned W - E and was 25.4m long and 0.38m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.12m of topsoil and 0.26m of yellow-grey silty clay subsoil overlying light orange-grey clay natural geology. At 8m from the west end of the trench, pit 2 (perhaps better described as a scoop) was recorded, measuring 1.05m wide but only 0.03m deep and filled with a firm orange-grey silty-clay (54). A single flint flake and a few pieces of Iron Age pottery were recovered from its fill, dating this feature to the Middle to Late Iron Age. A sieved soil sample produce no charred plant remains.

Trench 15 (Figs 2, 3 and 5)

Trench 15 was aligned S - N and was 25.1m long and 0.39m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.1m of topsoil and 0.29m of brown-grey silty clay subsoil overlying light orange-grey clay natural geology. At 13.8-15.4m from the south end of the trench two possible gullies (5 and 6) were recorded but were not excavated due to flooding of the trench which could not be bailed out. The possible gullies measured 0.64m and 0.8m wide respectively, and were observed to meet each other in the eastern side of the trench. Both possible gullies were filled with a firm light blue-grey clay fill (57 and 58 respectively) with no finds being recovered from the surface of either.

Trench 16 (Figs 2, 3, 4 and 5; Pl. 5)

Trench 16 was aligned SSE - NNW and was 27.6m long and 0.36m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.1m of topsoil and 0.26m of brown-grey clay subsoil overlying light orange-grey clay natural geology. At 22.8m from

the south-south-east end of the trench, gully 1 (Pl. 5) was recorded measuring 0.45m wide and 0.12m deep and filled with a firm light brown-grey clay (53) which produced no finds.

Trench 19 (Figs 2 and 5)

Trench 19 was aligned SE - NW and was 28.2m long and 0.46m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.18m of topsoil and 0.28m of brown-grey silty clay subsoil overlying light orange-grey clay natural geology. For 3.8m from the south-east end of the trench, a thin spread of stones and a levelling deposit was observed in between the topsoil and the subsoil corresponding with where a geophysical anomaly was identified. Despite the limited nature of the evaluation trench, this direction of this layer along with the geophysical data might suggest an old trackway between the two paddock gates.

Finds

Pottery by Cristina Mateos Leal

The prehistoric pottery assemblage comprised a total of 5 sherds, all from pit 2, weighing 12g. Based on the principal inclusions present in the clay, the frequency and grade of the inclusions and the firing colour, only one fabric has been recorded as recommended in PCRG (1997). One small fragment of rim from is possibly from a bowl.

Fabric SA: Hard sandy soapy ware containing common well sorted white mica (1mm), sparse well sorted quartzite (0.5mm) with elongated and round voids indicating presence of organic material such as chaff, grass or straw, and possible limestone. Fired to dark interior with reddish brown outer surfaces.

The rim recorded belong to a vessel, possible a bowl, with near vertical sides which curve inwards slightly towards the top ending with a simple rim. A similar vessel was found at Segsbury Camp (Brown 2005, 5)

The characteristics of the assemblage do not allow a precise chronology, but the sand-tempered fabric and the same type of vessel found in the later prehistoric assemblage at Segsbury Camp (Brown 2005, 5) suggest a chronology between Middle and Late Iron Age.

Struck Flint by Steve Ford

One single piece of struck flint was recovered from pit 2. It is an unpatinated broken flint which is not closely datable but probably Neolithic or Bronze Age.

Environmental sampling by Joanna Pine

One bulk soil sample was processed from pit 2. The sample was floated and wet sieved to 0.25mm and the resultant flint air dried. No charred plant macrofossils or charcoal were present.

Conclusion

All 22 trenches were opened and observed topsoil above subsoil above natural geology, with only trench 2 having an additional deposit of silty clay similar to alluvium between the topsoil and the subsoil. The visible earthworks targeted with trench 2 confirmed the presence of possible surfaces, identified as varying layers of stone. No obvious cuts or floor layers belonging to these stone layers were observed, and no dating evidence was retrieved from the cleaning except for some Victorian glass from the surface of stone layer 66. The width of the trench did not allow for detailed analysis of what these stone layers relate to and only confirmed the presence of possible structural remains.

Four gullies and two pits spread around the site were identified, gullies 5 and 6 being unexcavated due to water ingress. Pit 2 was the only datable feature, as a worked flint flake and five pieces of Middle to Late Iron Age pottery were found from within its fill (54).

On the basis of these results, there is some archaeological potential for the site, especially in regards to the earthworks around trench 2 and possibly for the pit in trench 12, but the absence of dating evidence for the majority of the site makes it hard to conclude if the other features encountered are of archaeological origin.

References

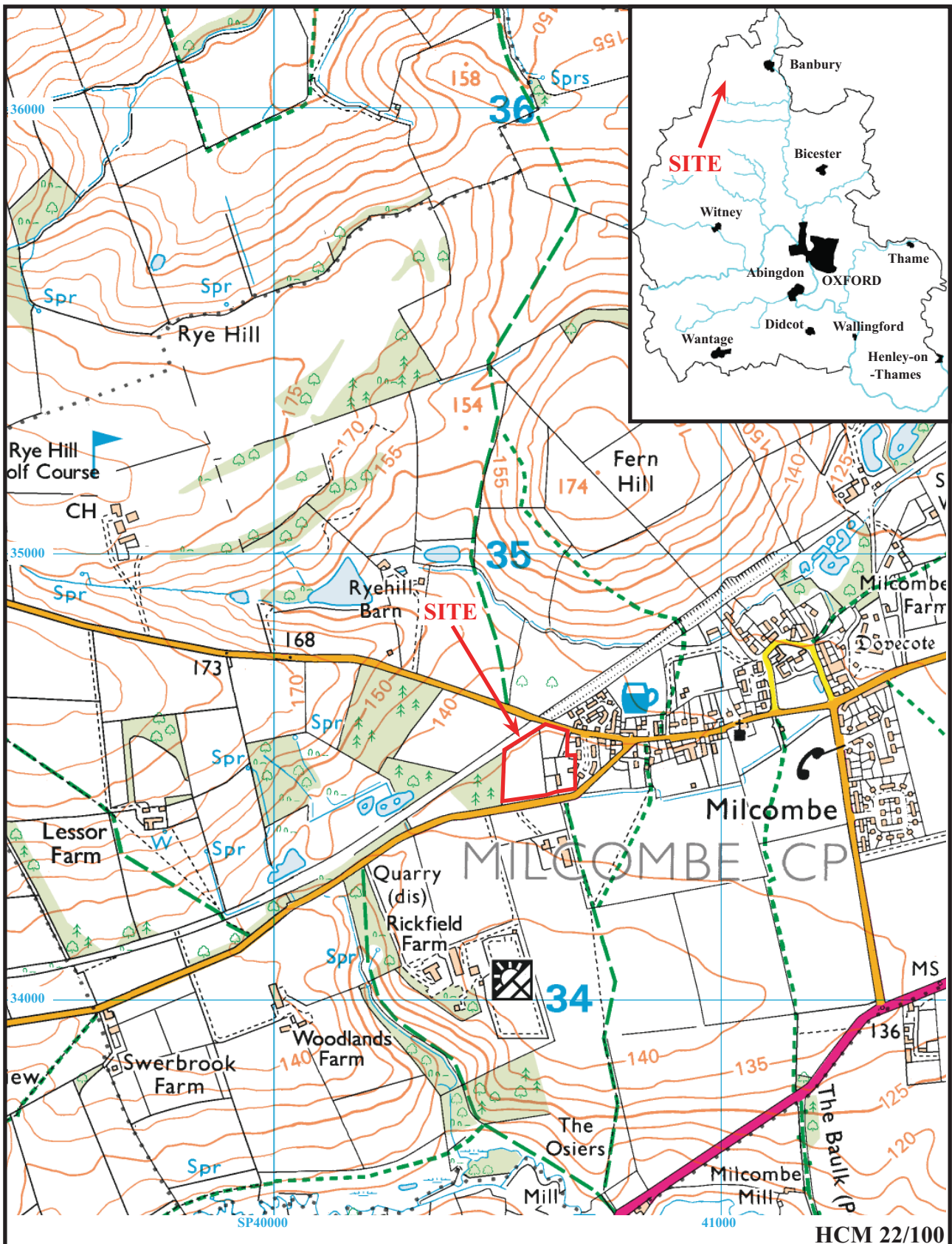
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	25.6	1.8	0.32	0-0.12m topsoil; 0.12-0.32m subsoil; 0.32m+ light yellow-grey clay natural geology.
2	24.7	1.8	0.49	0-0.17m topsoil; 0.17-0.25m clayey silt layer? 52; 0.25-0.49m subsoil; 0.49m+ light yellow-grey clay natural geology. Pit 4. Stone layers (59-66) [Pls. 1 and 2].
3	24.8	1.8	0.39	0-0.11m topsoil; 0.11-0.26m subsoil; 0.26m + light yellow-grey clay natural geology.
4	25.5	1.8	0.4	0-0.1m topsoil; 0.1-0.31m subsoil; 0.31m+ light yellow-grey clay natural geology.
5	25.8	1.8	0.32	0-0.09m topsoil; 0.09-0.26m subsoil; 0.26m+ light yellow-grey clay natural geology. Gully 3 [Pl. 3 and 6].
6	25.8	1.8	0.41	0-0.11m topsoil; 0.11-0.37m subsoil; 0.37m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
7	25.3	1.8	0.46	0-0.35m topsoil; 0.35-0.46m subsoil; 0.46m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
8	27	1.8	0.43	0-0.21m topsoil; 0.21-0.4m subsoil; 0.4m+light orange-grey clay natural geology.
9	26.1	1.8	0.48	0-0.35m topsoil; 0.35-0.48m subsoil; 0.48m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
10	24.5	1.8	0.38	0-0.13m topsoil; 0.13-0.33m subsoil; 0.33m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
11	25.6	1.8	0.42	0-0.2m topsoil; 0.2-0.39m subsoil; 0.39m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
12	25.4	1.8	0.38	0-0.12m topsoil; 0.12-0.38m subsoil; 0.38m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology. Pit 2. [Pls 4 and 7]
13	25	1.8	0.41	0-0.13m topsoil; 0.13-0.41m subsoil; 0.41m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
14	27	1.8	0.41	0-0.14m topsoil; 0.14-0.41m subsoil; 0.41m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
15	25.1	1.8	0.39	0-0.1m topsoil; 0.1-0.39m subsoil; 0.39m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology. Possible gully 5 and 6.
16	27.6	1.8	0.36	0-0.1m topsoil; 0.1-0.36m subsoil; 0.36m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology. Gully 1 [Pl. 5].
17	25.8	1.8	0.41	0-0.14m topsoil; 0.14-0.41m subsoil; 0.41m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
18	24.7	1.8	0.4	0-0.12m topsoil; 0.12-0.4m subsoil; 0.4m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
19	28.2	1.8	0.46	0.018m topsoil; 0.18-0.46m subsoil; 0.46m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
20	26	1.8	0.39	0-0.15m topsoil; 0.15-0.36m subsoil; 0.36m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
21	24.6	1.8	0.4	0-0.14m topsoil; 0.14-0.37m subsoil; 0.37m+ light orange-grey clay natural geology.
22	25.7	1.8	0.58	0-0.14m topsoil; 0.14-0.56m subsoil; 0.56m+ light orange-grey natural geology.

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1-22		50	Topsoil		
1-22		51	Subsoil		
2		52	Alluvium?		
16	1	53	Gully		
12	2	54	Pit	Middle-Late Iron Age	Pottery, Flint
5	3	55	Gully		
2	4	56	Pit		
15	5	57	Possible Gully		
15	6	58	Possible Gully		
2		59	Stone Layer		
2		60	Stone Layer		
2		61	Stone Layer		
2		62	Stone Layer		
2		63	Stone (Rubble?) Layer		
2		64	Stone Layer		
2		65	Stone Layer		
2		66	Stone Layer	Victorian?	Glass (from surface)



**Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe,
Oxfordshire, 2023**

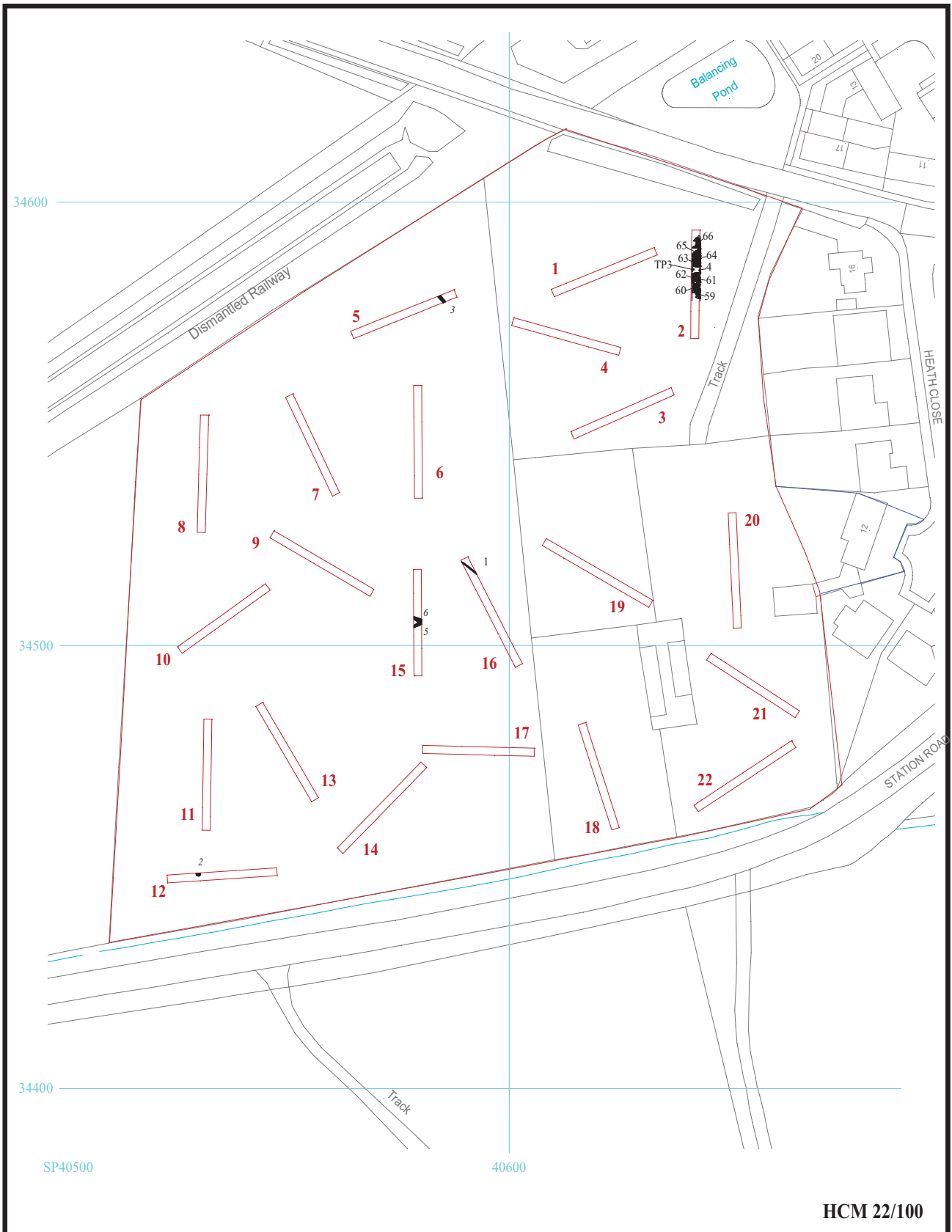
Archaeological Evaluation

Figure 1. Location of site within Milcombe and Oxfordshire.

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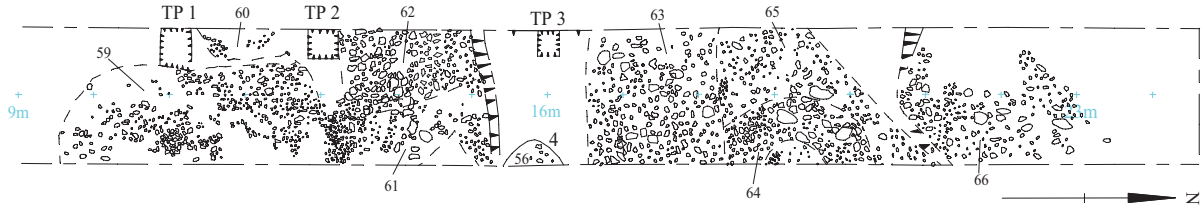
**Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe,
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Figure 2. Location of trenches and features.

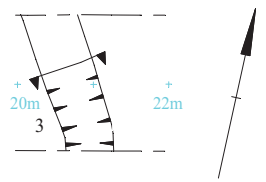


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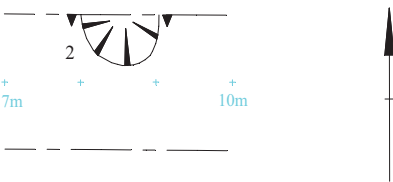
Trench 2



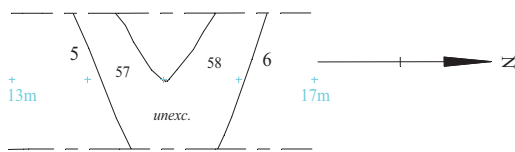
Trench 5



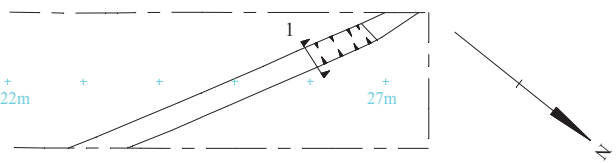
Trench 12



Trench 15



Trench 16



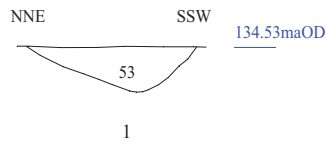
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Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe,
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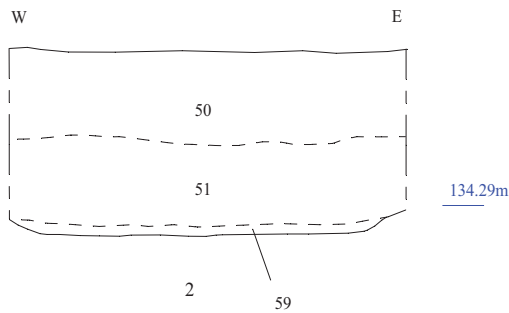
Figure 3. Detail of trenches.



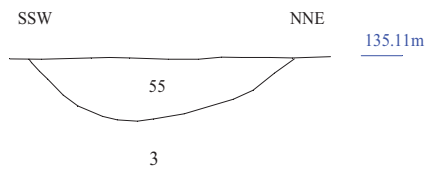
Trench 16



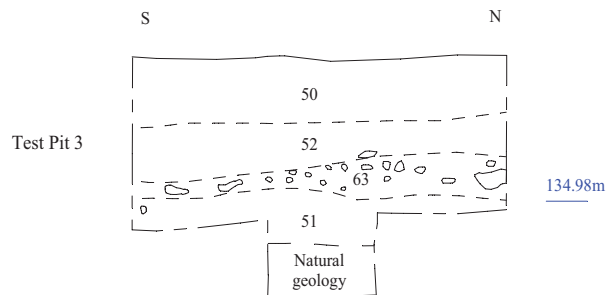
Trench 12



Trench 5



Trench 2



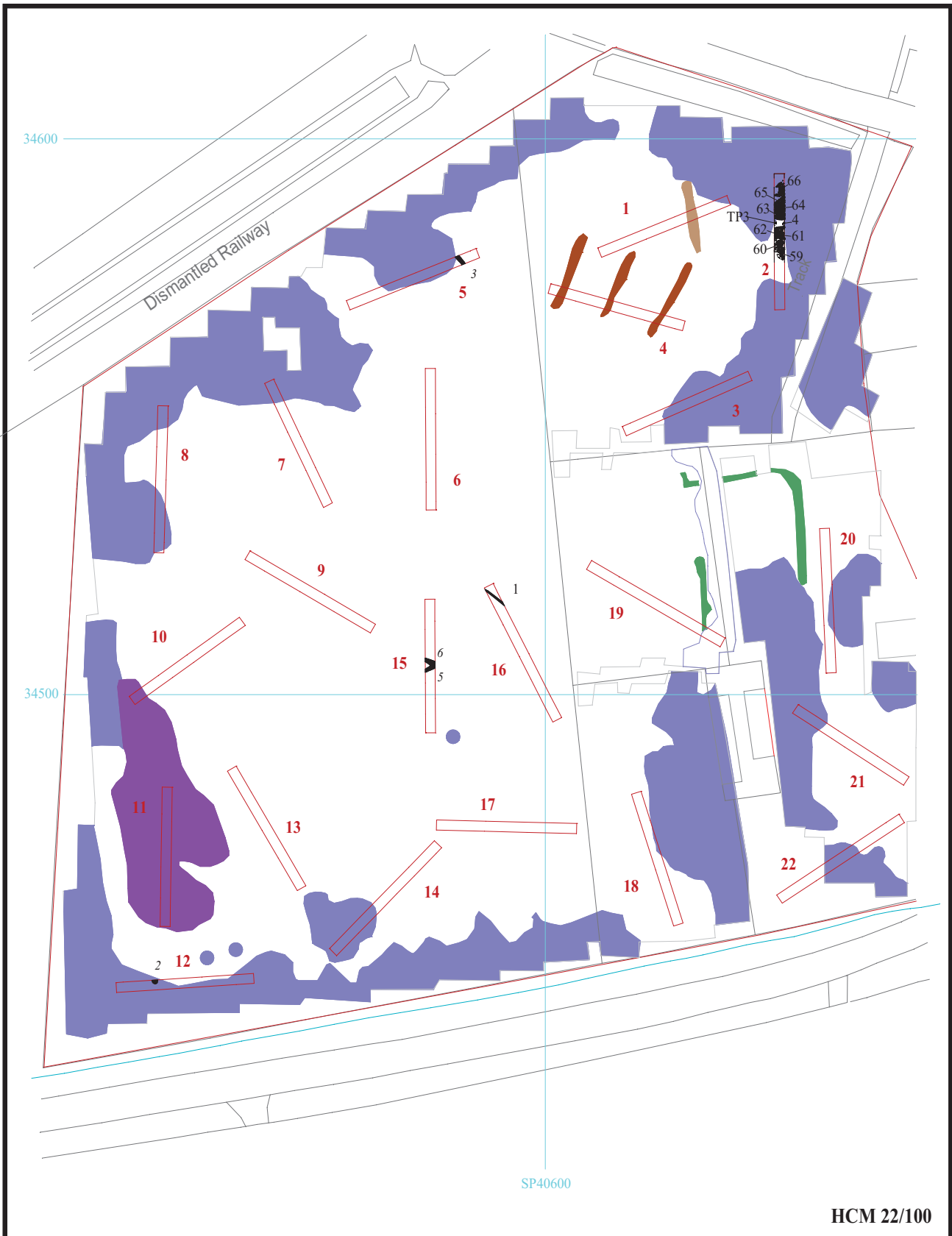
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Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe,
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Figure 4. Sections.



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**Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe,
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Figure 5. Location of features, compared to the geophysical survey
(Beaverstock 2022).



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Plate 1. Trench 2, looking South, Scales, horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.3m.



Plate 2. Trench 2, stone surfaces, looking South East, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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**Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe,
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Plates 1 and 2.**

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Plate 3. Trench 5, looking East, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.3m.



Plate 4. Trench 12, looking East, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.

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**Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe,
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Plates 3 and 4.**

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Plate 5. Trench 16, gully 1, looking South East, Scales: 0.3m and 0.1m.



Plate 6. Trench 5, gully 3, looking North West, Scales: horizontal 0.5m, vertical 0.3m.

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**Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe,
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Plates 5 and 6.**

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Plate 7. Trench 15, pit 2, looking North, Scales: 1m and 0.5m.

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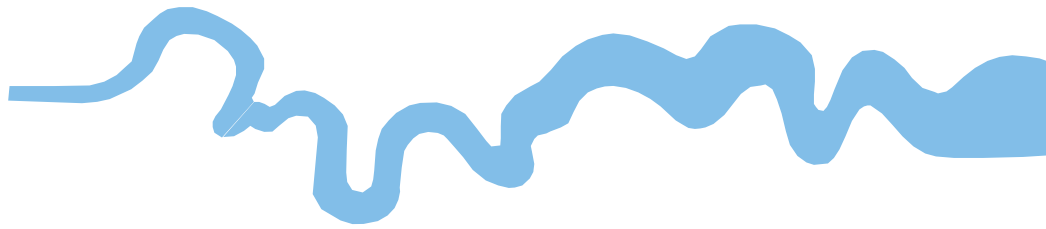
**Land west of Heath Close, Milcombe,
Oxfordshire, 2023
Archaeological Evaluation
Plate 7.**

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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 AD 0 BC
Iron Age _____	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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