

New Composting Centre, Ashgrove Farm, Ardley, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Agrivert Limited

by Andrew Weale
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code AFA 09/20

August 2009

Summary

Site name: New Composting Centre, Ashgrove Farm, Ardley, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SP 5344 2555

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 21st–31st July 2009

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Andrew Weale

Site code: AFA 09/20

Area of site: c. 0.7ha hectare

Summary of results: A continuation of the ditch, previously noted, and dated to the Iron Age or Saxon period, and an undated posthole were identified.

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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Report 09/20

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Ashgrove Farm, Ardley, Oxfordshire (SP 5344 2555) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Gemma Kay of Agrivert Limited, The Stables, Radford, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, OX7 4EB.

Planning consent (08/02113/CM) has been gained from Oxfordshire County Council to replace and extend the existing composting centre on the site. The consent was subject to a condition relating to archaeology which required a watching brief to take place during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the County Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Hugh Coddington, Deputy County Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew Weale between the 23rd and 31st July 2009 and the site code is AFA 09/20. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the east of the B430 at Ashgrove Farm, Ardley, Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1), with Ardley 2km to the north, Upper Heyford 1.5km to the west and Middleton Stoney 1.5km to the south. The town of Bicester lies some 5km the south-east. The site lay under arable land and soil store bunds from the construction of the present composting centre before works began. It is a relatively flat area with a gentle slope down to the south and lies at a height of approximately 114m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology comprises the Ardley member of the White Limestone Formation (BGS 2002), which was observed across the site.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief prepared by Mr Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service drawing on information contained within the Oxfordshire Sites and

Monuments Record (Coddington 2009). The site of the existing composting centre was subject to a watching brief during construction which revealed a possible enclosure ditch and three undated post holes (Taylor 2007). Two small sherds of pottery from this ditch could be of either Iron Age or Saxon date. The projected line of the enclosure ditch was expected to enter the new area in the north-west and south-east of the site. The site lies close to a Roman cemetery, parts of which were found to the north of the site during digging of a pipe trench. It was possible that further archaeological deposits may be encountered during the groundworks comprising deposits or human burials or both. In general the site lies within an area where relatively few archaeological sites and finds are recorded though Iron Age occupation is recorded to the west and a small number of Roman finds to the north (Briggs *et al.* 1986).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the groundworks. This was to involve examination of all areas of intrusive groundworks but principally topsoil and overburden removal from an area about 0.7ha prior to the laying of a concrete slab (Fig. 2).

The area was stripped of topsoil and overburden with a 360° type fitted with a toothless grading bucket under constant archaeological supervision (Pl. 1).

Results

The topsoil stripping revealed a single ditch and a posthole (Figs 3 and 4). The ditch entered the site from the south-east corner, aligned SE–NW, for 35m before passing on into the area of the existing composting centre, as previously recorded. Two slots (2, and 4) were dug along the length of the ditch, each 1.50m in length, between 0.52m and 0.55m wide and between 0.29m and 0.36m deep. Slot 2 cut through a possible feature 3 which on excavation was revealed to be a naturally occurring solution hollow within the limestone (Pl. 2).

Posthole 1 was roughly pear-shaped and measured 0.30 north-east to south-west and 0.46 north-west to south-east and was 0.25m deep. The posthole charcoal-rich, but did not produce any finds.

Finds

No artefacts were recovered during this watching brief.

Conclusion

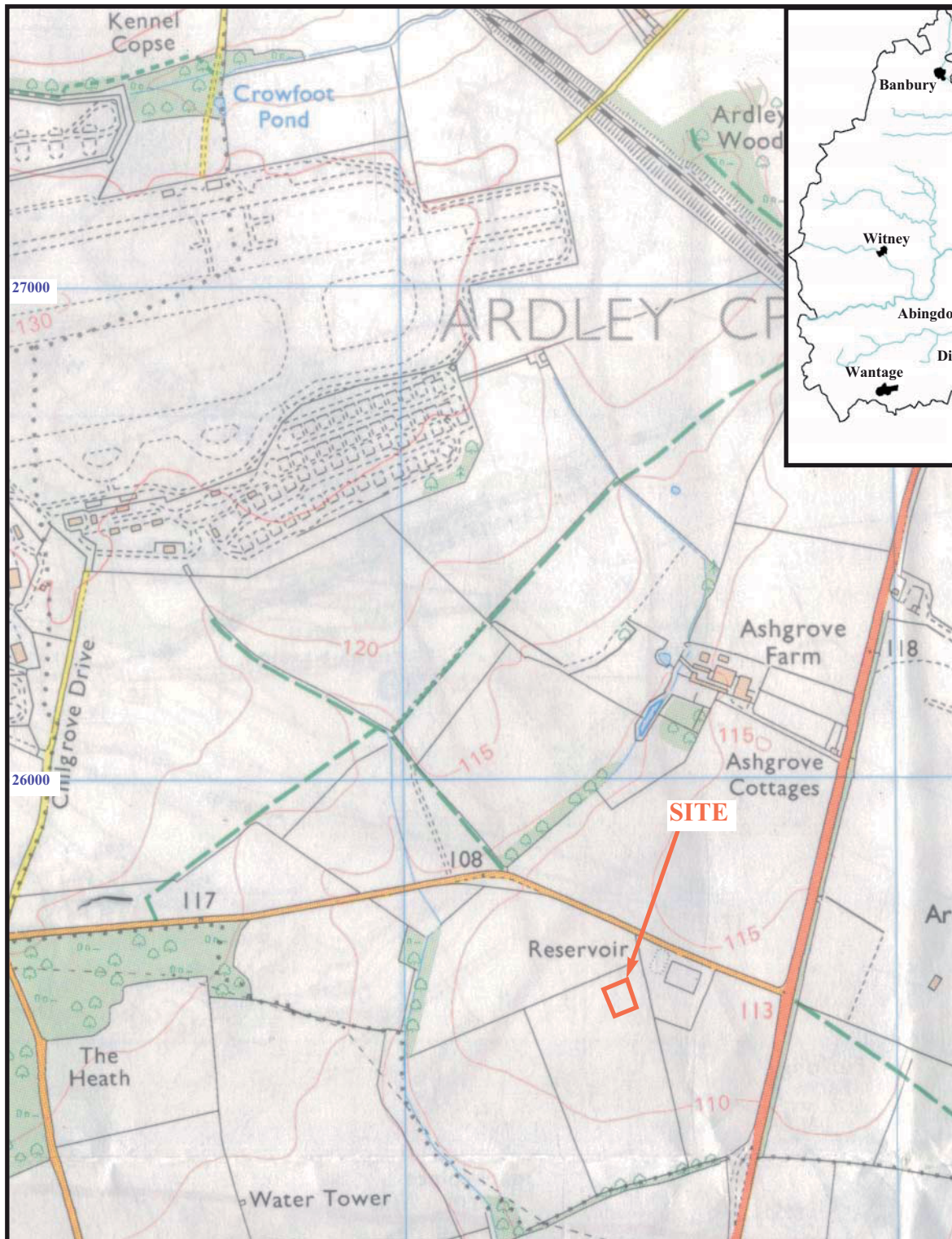
The watching brief identified the same ditch that was revealed during the previous watching brief (Taylor 2007). The ditch continued south from the edge of the current concrete base of the composting centre for some 36m before exiting the site to the south. The ditch did not enter the northern section of the site from the previous watching brief area. This may suggest that the ditch terminated at or near the edge of the concrete slab for the existing composting centre. The new portions of ditch excavated contained no datable artefacts and so its dating relies on the two small sherds of pottery previously tentatively dated to the Iron Age or possibly Saxon period. The earlier suggestion was that the ditch formed an enclosure interpreted as being used for animal management due to the absence of evidence such as quantities of pottery, animal bone or charcoal was noted as would be expected adjacent to occupation areas. This interpretation is still valid though with the absence of a continuation of the ditch in the northern portion of the site, it now requires parts of its circuit to have been defined only by, say, a hedge, with little or no penetration below the subsoil. The isolated post hole is also undated. Despite the proximity to a Roman cemetery no further burials were identified during the course of the works.

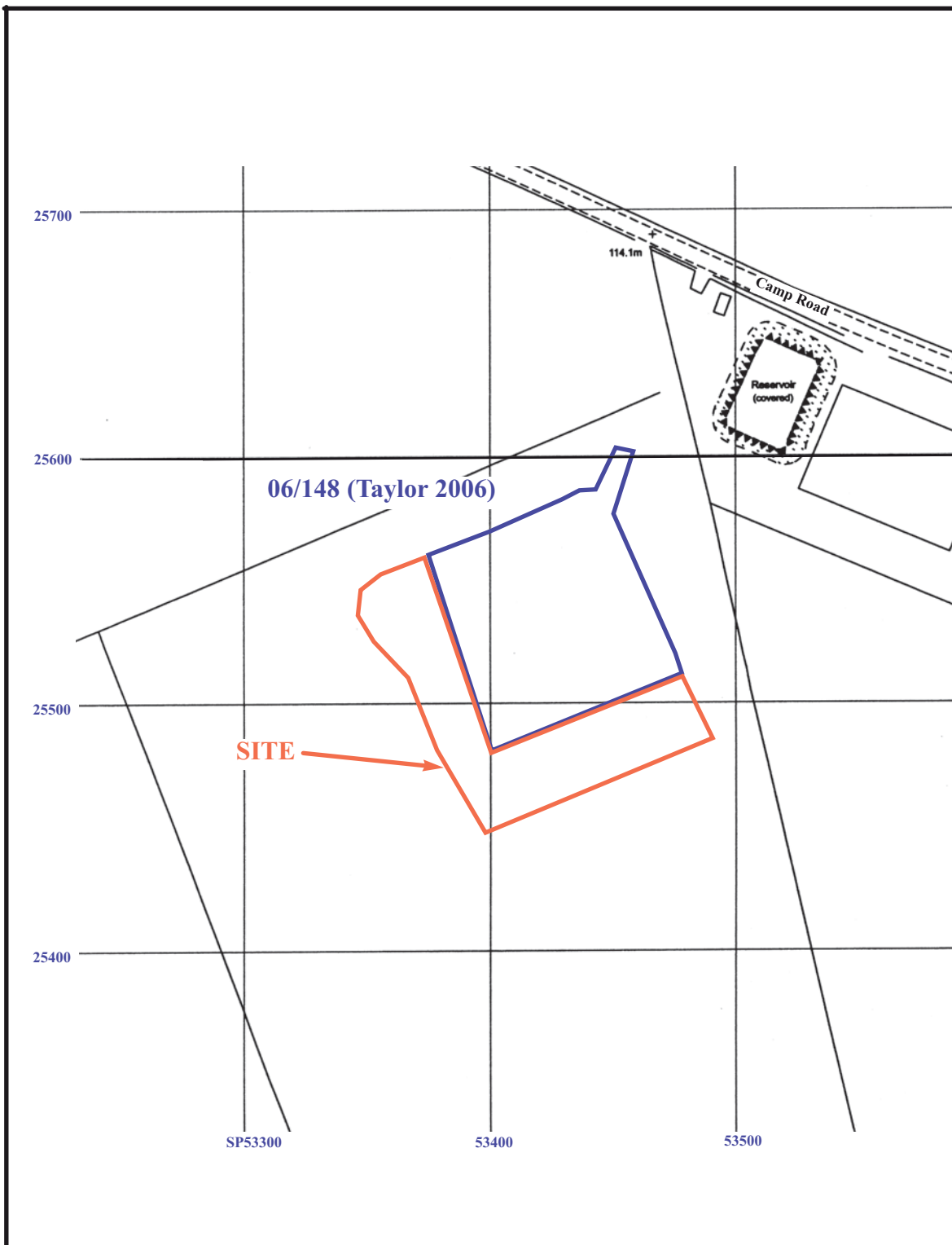
References

- BGS, 2002, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 219, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Briggs, G, Cook, J and Rowley, T (eds), 1986, *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region*, Oxford Univ Dept External Stud
- Coddington, H, 2009, 'Ashgrove Farm, Ardley, Oxfordshire, specification for archaeological watching brief', Oxford
- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
- Taylor, A, 2007, 'Ashgrove Farm, Ardley, Oxfordshire, an Archaeological Watching Brief', Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 06/148, Reading

APPENDIX 1: Feature details

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	52	Post hole	Undated	None
2	53	Ditch	Iron Age/Saxon	pottery
3	54	Solution Hollow	Pre-Iron Age/Saxon	Stratigraphy
4	55	Ditch	Iron Age/Saxon	same as 2





Ashgrove Farm, Ardley, Oxfordshire, 2009

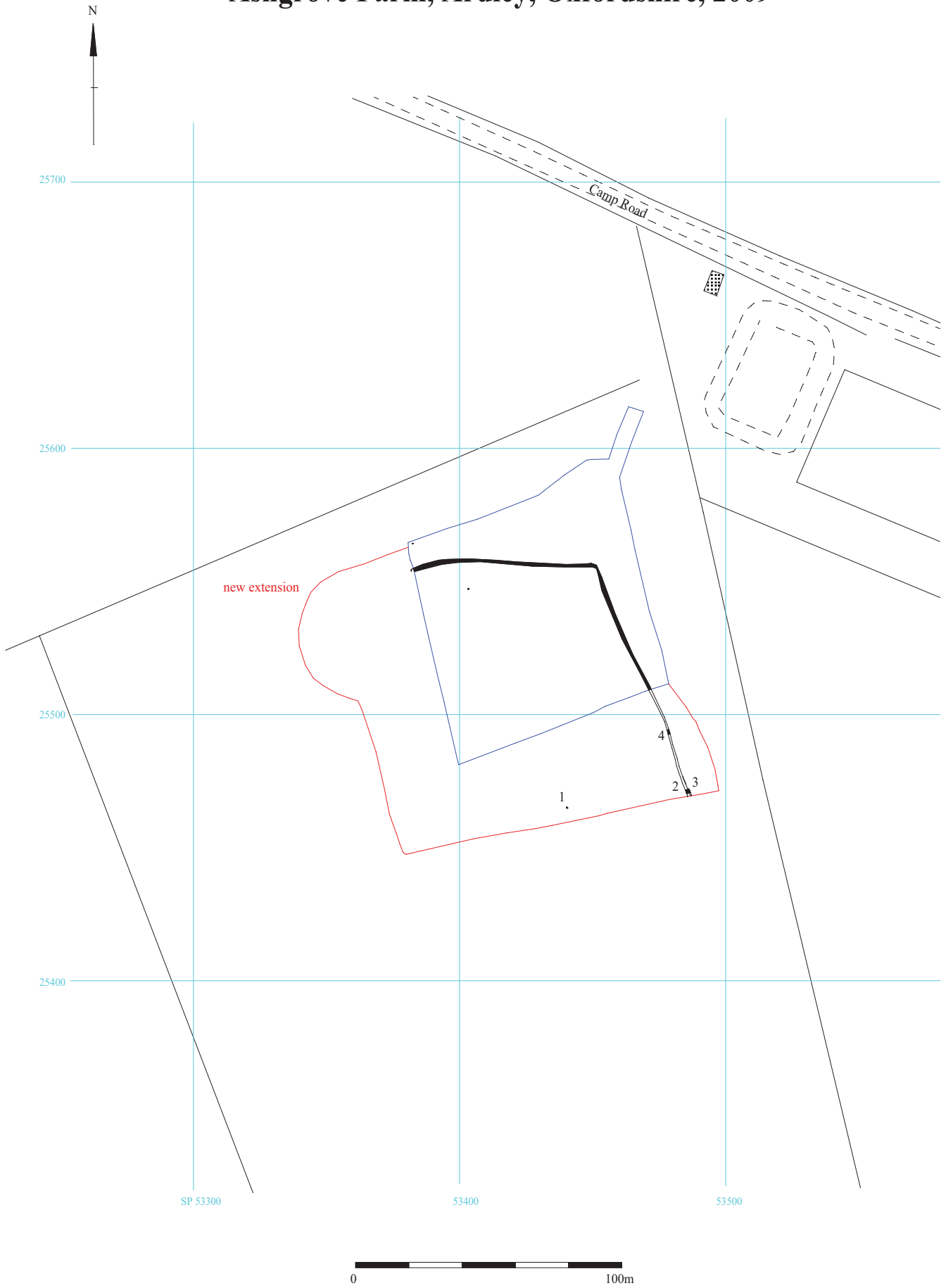


Figure 3. Stripped area, and relation to ditch seen in previous work.

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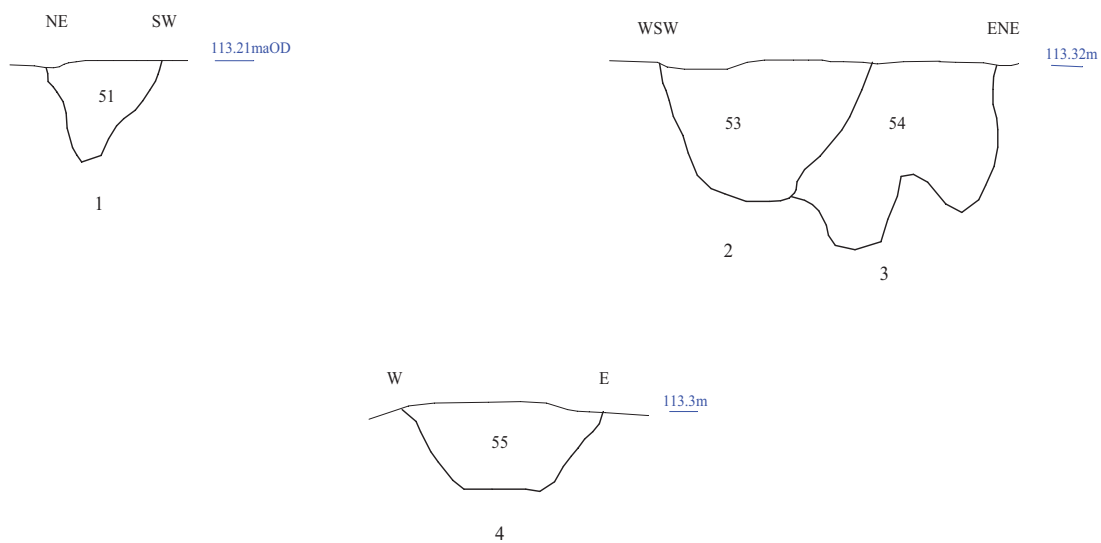


Figure 4. Sections.



Plate 1. General view of site, looking east towards previous area with new strip in the foreground.

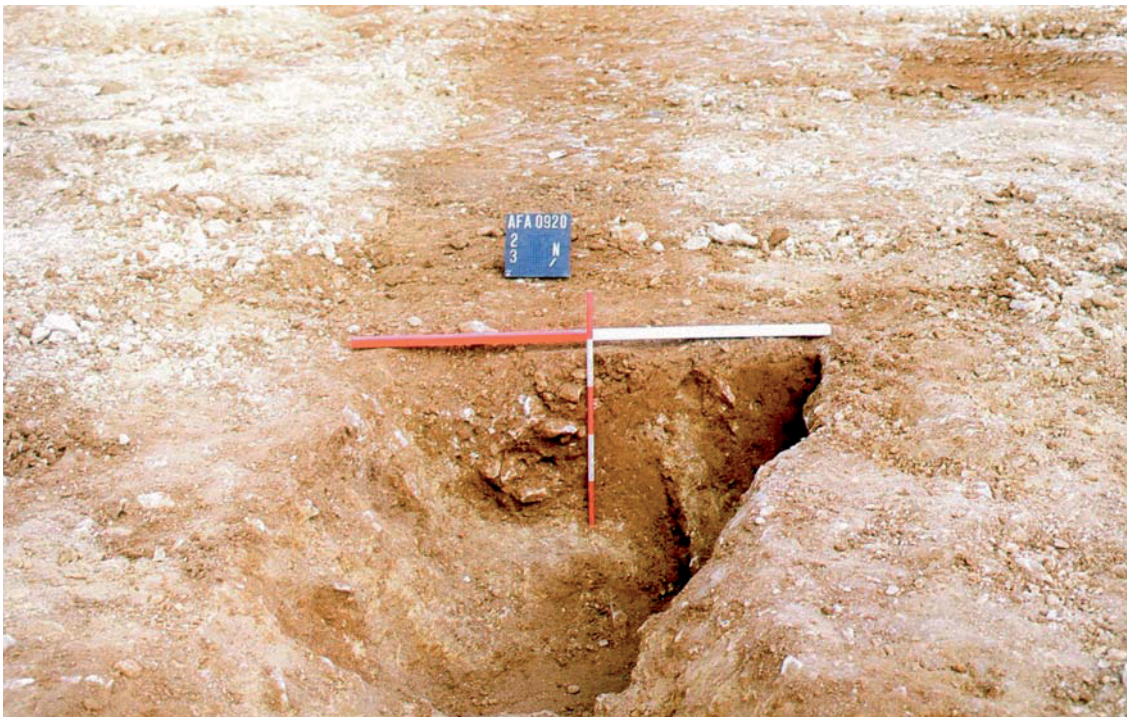


Plate 2. Ditch 2, looking south east: Scales 1m and 0.5m.