

# **Land adjacent to Exeter Farm and north of Cassington Road, Yarnton, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief  
for Berkeley Homes (Oxford & Chiltern) Ltd**

by Andrew Muddin  
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code CRY09/59

**September 2009**

## Summary

**Site name:** Land adjacent to Exeter Farm and north of Cassington Road, Yarnton, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SP 4796 1203

**Site activity:** Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 30th July – 1st September 2009

**Project manager:** Sean Wallis

**Site supervisor:** Andrew Munding, James McNicoll-Norbury

**Site code:** CRY 09/59

**Area of site:** 13.4ha

**Summary of results:** Twenty-seven trenches were excavated after the removal of topsoil by bulldozer and a watching brief was maintained on a cable trench. Seven, shallow linear features were identified beneath subsoil, none of which contained any dating evidence. Several sherds of medieval and post-medieval pottery were recovered from topsoil and subsoil contexts.

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

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# Land adjacent to Exeter Farm and north of Cassington Road, Yarnton, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief

by Andrew Muddin

**Report 09/59**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological evaluation and watching brief carried out on land adjacent to Exeter Farm and north of Cassington Road, Yarnton, Oxfordshire (SP 4796 1203) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Richard Eyre of Berkeley Homes (Oxford & Chiltern) Ltd, Abingdon Science Park, Barton Lane, Abingdon, OX14 3NB.

Planning permission (08/02541/F) had been gained from Cherwell District Council for the erection of 168 dwellings with access roads, footpaths, cycle-ways and public open space. Due to the possibility of below ground archaeological deposits being disturbed during the development a condition (26) required monitoring of groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services on behalf of the District Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by James McNicoll-Norbury, Andrew Muddin, with assistance from Aiden Colyer from 3rd August to 1st September 2009. The site code is CRY 09/59. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course.

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site is located on the north side of Cassington Road (Fig. 2) to the south of Yarnton village, c. 6km north-west of Oxford. The site has, prior to the development, been rough pasture in the form of meadows, with use as arable land in the recent past, mostly associated with Exeter Farm. The underlying geology is floodplain gravel (BGS 1982). The fields that these works encompass, surrounding Exeter Farm and north of Cassington Road, are mostly flat at between 58 and 60m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

## **Archaeological background**

A summary of the potential archaeology in the area was prepared in a brief by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (Oram 2009). The current site is located *c.*1km north and east of a major multi-period complex excavated prior to mineral working between Cassington and Yarnton. This excavation identified early Neolithic to medieval and post-medieval activity, with a density of settlement of Iron Age, Roman and Saxon dates (Hey 2004). Funerary enclosures and ring gullies were identified, as well as Beaker burials and burnt mounds of Bronze Age date. Iron Age causeways traversing palaeochannels were also identified. This substantial site was only a sample of an entire landscape identified as cropmarks by aerial photography and geophysical survey close to Cassington and Worton on the gravel terrace and flood plain north of the Thames (Benson and Miles, 1974).

Closer to the site, a prehistoric (Neolithic/Bronze Age?) flint scatter has been identified to the west of the site on the south and west edge of the village. It has also been considered that the nearby farm may have late Saxon, or more likely, Medieval origins contemporary remains surviving in adjacent areas.

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the archaeological work, initially, was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits that were to be affected by groundworks as the latter were anticipated to involve extensive overburden stripping. However, it was established after an initial visit that the depth of overburden stripping was restricted to topsoil horizons and was not sufficient to expose the archaeologically relevant levels, which lay beneath subsoil. In consultation with the client and county archaeological service, it was decided that the project objectives would be better served by an initial trial trench evaluation to assess the potential for archaeological remains surviving below the subsoil deposits on the site.

In total, it was proposed that 28 trenches were to be excavated, 20m long and 1.6m wide, giving an approximate 2% sample of available ground. These trenches were to target areas of construction and the footprints of ancillary features such as attenuation ponds. The work was to be carried out in such a way that would not compromise the integrity of archaeological features which might better be examined under the conditions of full excavation. Specifically, the aims were to determine if archaeologically relevant levels survive on the site, and determine if archaeological deposits of any date were present. The highest potential was felt to be for Medieval remains, but due to the proximity of a multi-phased site nearby, Prehistoric (Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age), Roman and Saxon remains could also be present.



## Results

Twenty-seven trenches were eventually excavated, 1.8m wide and between 17.5m and 21.5m long. All were excavated with a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Where archaeological features were present, all features were hand defined, using hand tools and a portion of the deposit examined to satisfy the aims of the project. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. A list of excavated features forms Appendix 2.

A watching brief also took place on the digging of a cable trench. The area of proposed trenching on the footprints of two attenuation ponds directly to the north of the farm buildings (Fig 3) in the centre of the site, was not accessible at this time due to presence of preserved trees and other nature conservation constraints.

### *Watching brief*

Prior to the evaluation trenching, a length of trenching for a power cable, redirecting an overhead electricity line, was viewed to the east of the temporary compound (Fig. 3). The trench was c.0.6m wide and 0.75m deep. This trench identified a ditch (1), aligned due east to west. This ditch was 0.92m wide and was a minimum of 0.22m deep. It was filled with a light brown/grey clayey silt with rooty inclusions (52) (Pl. 1). This feature seem to cut the subsoil, and though undated, is probably of recent origin. The gravel here was overlain by a thin grey clay lens.

### *Evaluation*

#### Trench 1 (Pl. 2; Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was 20.6m long and 0.62m deep. Natural geology was encountered at 0.6m deep at a height of c.59.1m above OD. This trench identified a substantial layer of subsoil (51) throughout the trench measuring 0.48m thick, which covered an original (3) and recut or secondary (4) linear feature, both aligned east to west. The fills of these features were similar in character, both filled with moderately firm, light grey/yellow sandy clay (54 and 55). The recut or secondary ditch (4) was 1.25m and 0.18m deep. The original ditch (3) was c.1.4m wide and was 0.18m deep. No datable finds were recovered.

#### Trenches 2, 3 and 4

These trenches were between 20.7m and 21.5m long and between 0.44m and 0.57m deep. No features were identified in these trenches. A layer of subsoil overlying the natural gravel was identified throughout these trenches, c.0.2-0.4m thick.

#### Trench 5 (Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was 18.8m long and 0.51m in depth. Natural geology was encountered at 0.47m deep at a height of 59.3m above OD. In the north-west end of this trench a NW–SE aligned gully (2) was identified. This feature was 0.45m wide and 0.11m deep. It was filled with a single fill of a loose brown/grey clayey sand (53). No dating evidence was recovered from it.

#### Trenches 6, 7 and 8

These trenches were between 20.3m and 21.3m long and between 0.53m and 0.68m deep. A layer of subsoil overlying the natural gravel was identified throughout these trenches, 0.3–0.4m thick. No features were identified in these trenches. Some patchy humic sands were identified through the subsoil in Trench 8, lensing through the subsoil and at its base. No finds were recovered associated with this material. Two sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the topsoil of Trench 6.

#### Trench 9 (Pl. 3; Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was 21.4m in length and was dug to a depth of 0.6m deep. A NW–SE aligned gully (5) was identified in this trench beneath the subsoil. This feature was 0.95m wide and 0.11m deep, and at a height of 58.9m above OD. Two fills were identified in this feature. The secondary fill was a firm blueish/grey clay with occasional rounded flint gravel inclusions (56). The primary fill was a firm grey/orange clayey sand with occasional rounded flint gravel (57). No datable finds were recovered.

#### Trenches 10–20

These trenches were between 19.5m and 21.7m long and between 0.45m and 0.69m deep. No features were identified in these trenches. Though no features were identified in these trenches subsoil, again 0.3–0.4m thick overlying the natural gravel was found throughout these trenches mostly covering Area 1 (Fig. 3). One sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from the topsoil of Trench 19. A modern borehole was noted in Trench 13. This was seen to cut the subsoil.

#### Trench 21 (Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was 20.5m long and 0.39m deep. Beneath *c.* 0.2m of subsoil, a shallow gully (6), aligned north-south, was noted towards the south-east end of the trench. This gully was 0.44m wide and 0.19m deep at a height of 59.6m above OD. The single fill (58) was a plastic grey/blue clay with some panning. A sherd of medieval

pottery was recovered from the interface between the subsoil (51) and the top of this feature. A modern linear truncation was also noted to cut the base of trench and the subsoil in the north west end of this trench, aligned west – east. This seems likely to be a geotechnical test pit.

#### Trench 22

This trench was 20.1m long and 0.49m in depth. The natural geology was overlain by 0.24m of subsoil. No archaeological finds nor deposits were identified in this trench.

#### Trench 23 (Pl. 4; Figs 2 and 3)

This trench was 19.2m long and 0.46m deep. A linear gully was noted aligned WNW–ESE. The gully was 0.52m wide and 0.23m deep at a height of 58.9m above OD. This feature was filled with a plastic grey clay with very occasional rounded flint gravel inclusions (59). No dating evidence was recovered from this feature. Two sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the topsoil and a further medieval sherd from the subsoil of this trench.

#### Trenches 24–27

These trenches were between 17.5m and 19.5m long and between 0.46m and 0.55m deep. Subsoil overlay the natural geology and was 0.25–0.3m thick. No archaeological deposits were identified in these trenches but four sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered from the topsoil of Trench 25.

## **Finds**

### *Pottery* by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 36 sherds with a total weight of 502g. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire county type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD975–1350. 1 sherd, 17g.  
OXBF: North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050–1400. 1 sherd, 15g.  
OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075–1350. 2 sherds, 17g.  
OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200–1600. 8 sherds, 133g.  
OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550 onwards. 13 sherds, 229g.  
OXRESWL: Polychrome Slipware, 17th century. 5 sherds, 41g.  
OXEST: London stoneware. c. 1680 onwards. 1 sherd, 26g.  
WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, 19th/20th century. 3 sherds, 14g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 3. The range of fabric types is typical of this area of Oxfordshire, and indicates that the bulk of medieval activity took place in the 13th and 14th centuries, with little evidence of late medieval activity. The single sherd of possible

11th century pottery from the topsoil of Trench 25 is somewhat abraded, with all the calcareous inclusions leached out.

The post-medieval pottery was all from topsoil contexts.

### *Other finds* by Andrew Muddin

Four other finds were recovered from the site, all during the walkover after the bulldozing. One partial bowl and stem of clay pipe were of 18th to 19th century date. One sherd of green bottle glass was recovered and two ferrous objects, one a nail and the other a piece of rod.

## **Conclusion**

The evaluation has revealed little material of possible archaeological interest. A number of cut features comprising ditches and gullies were identified, none of which were datable. The only dated activity on the site is evidenced by the presence of a few sherds of medieval and later pottery from topsoil and subsoil contexts. This material is most likely to have been derived from household waste spread onto fields as manure. The linear features presumably represent boundary or drainage features. Their stratigraphic position beneath the subsoil on the site suggests that they could be of medieval or earlier date, though dating of the subsoil itself is tenuous (with only two medieval sherds recovered from it), and it may well have formed late in the site's history, such as following the overploughing of medieval ridge and furrow in post-medieval times. On the basis of these findings the site appears to have very low archaeological potential.

## **References**

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## APPENDIX 1: Trench details

Trench	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	20.6	1.8	0.63	0–0.22m remnant of topsoil (50); 0.22–0.61m brown yellow clayey silty sand subsoil (51); 0.61m+ pale grey yellow clayey/sandy gravel natural geology. Ditch 3 and recut(?) [4] <b>[Pls 1, 2]</b>
2	20.7	1.8	0.44	0–0.17m topsoil; 0.17–0.4m subsoil; 0.4m+ natural geology.
3	21.5	1.8	0.59	0–0.18m topsoil; 0.18–0.44m subsoil; 0.44–0.55 grey/dark brown clayey silty humic sand; 0.55m+ natural geology
4	21.5	1.8	0.57	0–0.11m topsoil; 0.11–0.52m subsoil; 0.52m+ natural geology
5	18.8	1.8	0.51	0–0.1m topsoil; 0.1–0.47m subsoil; 0.47m+ natural geology. Gully 2.
6	21.3	1.8	0.57	0–0.17m topsoil; 0.17–0.55m subsoil; 0.55m+ natural geology
7	20.3	1.8	0.53	0–0.07m disturbed topsoil; 0.07–0.47m dark brown humic layer mixed with clayey grey humic sand; 0.47m natural geology.
8	21.1	1.8	0.68	0–0.2m topsoil; 0.2–0.59m subsoil; 0.59m+ natural geology.
9	21.4	1.8	0.6	0–0.14m topsoil; 0.14–0.59m subsoil; 0.59m+ natural geology. Gully 5 <b>[Pl. 3]</b>
10	21.7	1.8	0.49	0–0.19m topsoil; 0.19–0.48m subsoil; 0.48m+ natural geology.
11	20.2	1.8	0.69	0–0.28m topsoil; 0.28–0.58m subsoil; 0.58m+ natural geology
12	20.0	1.8	0.62	0–0.22m topsoil; 0.22–0.59m subsoil; 0.59m+ natural geology
13	21.9	1.8	0.59	0–0.2m topsoil, 0.2–0.56m subsoil, 0.56m+ natural geology
14	21.2	1.8	0.45	0–0.1m topsoil, 0.1–0.42m subsoil, 0.42m+ natural geology
15	20.0	1.8	0.46	0–0.08m topsoil, 0.08–0.42m subsoil, 0.42m+ natural geology
16	20.4	1.8	0.55	0–0.19m topsoil, 0.19–0.51m subsoil, 0.51m+ natural geology
17	21.6	1.8	0.45	0–0.06m topsoil, 0.06–0.42m subsoil, 0.42m+ natural geology
18	19.9	1.8	0.62	0–0.18m topsoil, 0.18–0.58m subsoil, 0.58m+ natural geology
19	19.5	1.8	0.48	0–0.14m topsoil, 0.14–0.45m subsoil, 0.45m natural geology
20	21.0	1.8	0.55	0–0.2m topsoil, 0.2–0.54m subsoil, 0.54m+ natural geology
21	20.5	1.8	0.39	0–0.18m topsoil, 0.18–0.38m subsoil, 0.38m+ natural geology. Gully 6 and modern test pit.
22	20.1	1.8	0.49	0–0.25m topsoil, 0.25–0.49m subsoil, 0.49m+ natural geology.
23	19.2	1.8	0.52	0–0.26m topsoil; 0.26–0.52m subsoil; 0.52m+ natural geology. Gully 7 <b>[Pl. 4]</b>
24	17.5	1.8	0.46	0–0.17m topsoil; 0.17–0.46m subsoil; 0.46m+ natural geology
25	18.6	1.8	0.55	0–0.21m topsoil; 0.21–0.52m subsoil; 0.52m+ natural geology
26	19.5	1.8	0.52	0–0.23m topsoil; 0.23–0.5m subsoil; 0.5m+ natural geology
27	18.6	1.8	0.53	0–0.22m topsoil; 0.22–0.53m subsoil; 0.53m+ natural geology

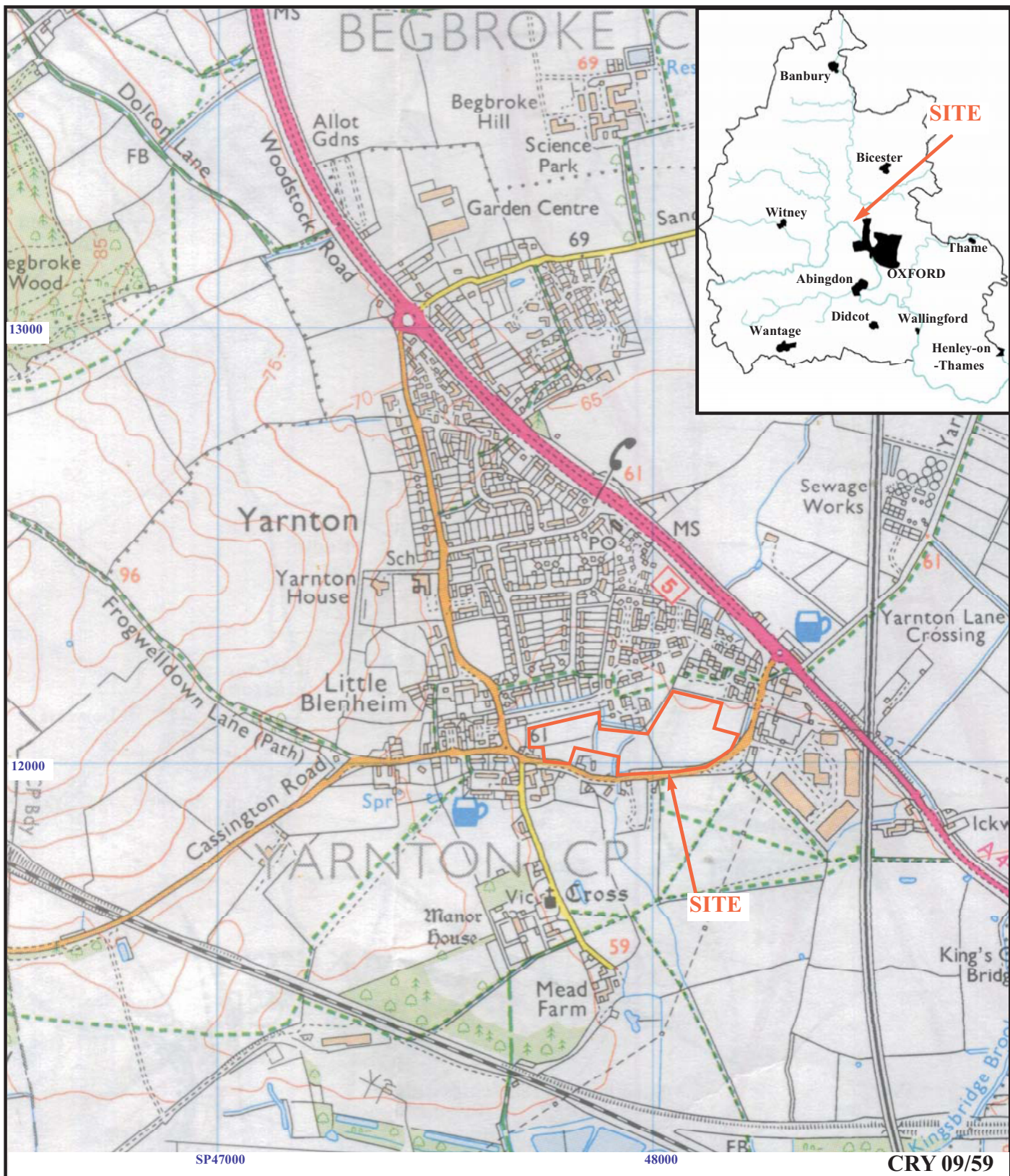
## APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
WB	1	52	Ditch	Undated	-
5	2	53	Gully	Undated	-
1	3	54	Ditch	Undated	-
1	4	55	Ditch	Undated	-
9	5	56, 57	Gully	Undated	-
21	6	58	Gully	Medieval?	pottery (not securely associated)
23	7	59	Gully	Undated	-

**APPENDIX 3: Pottery catalogue by fabric, number of sherds and weight (in g).**

<i>Tr</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>OXAC</i>		<i>OXBF</i>		<i>OXY</i>		<i>OXAM</i>		<i>OXDR</i>		<i>OXREWSL</i>		<i>OXEST</i>		<i>WHEW</i>	
			<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>
WB		50			1	15	1	10	3	92	9	150	5	41	1	26	3	14
6		50					1	7	1	3								
19		50							1	8								
21	6	58/51							1	14								
23		50							2	16								
23		51	1	17														
25		50									4	79						
		Total	1	17	1	15	2	17	8	133	13	229	5	41	1	26	3	14





**Land adjacent to Exeter Farm and north of Cassington Road, Yarnton, Oxfordshire, 2009  
Archaeological recording action**

Figure 1. Location of site within Yarnton and Oxfordshire.

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# Land adjacent to Exeter Farm and north of Cassington Road, Yarnton, Oxfordshire, 2009

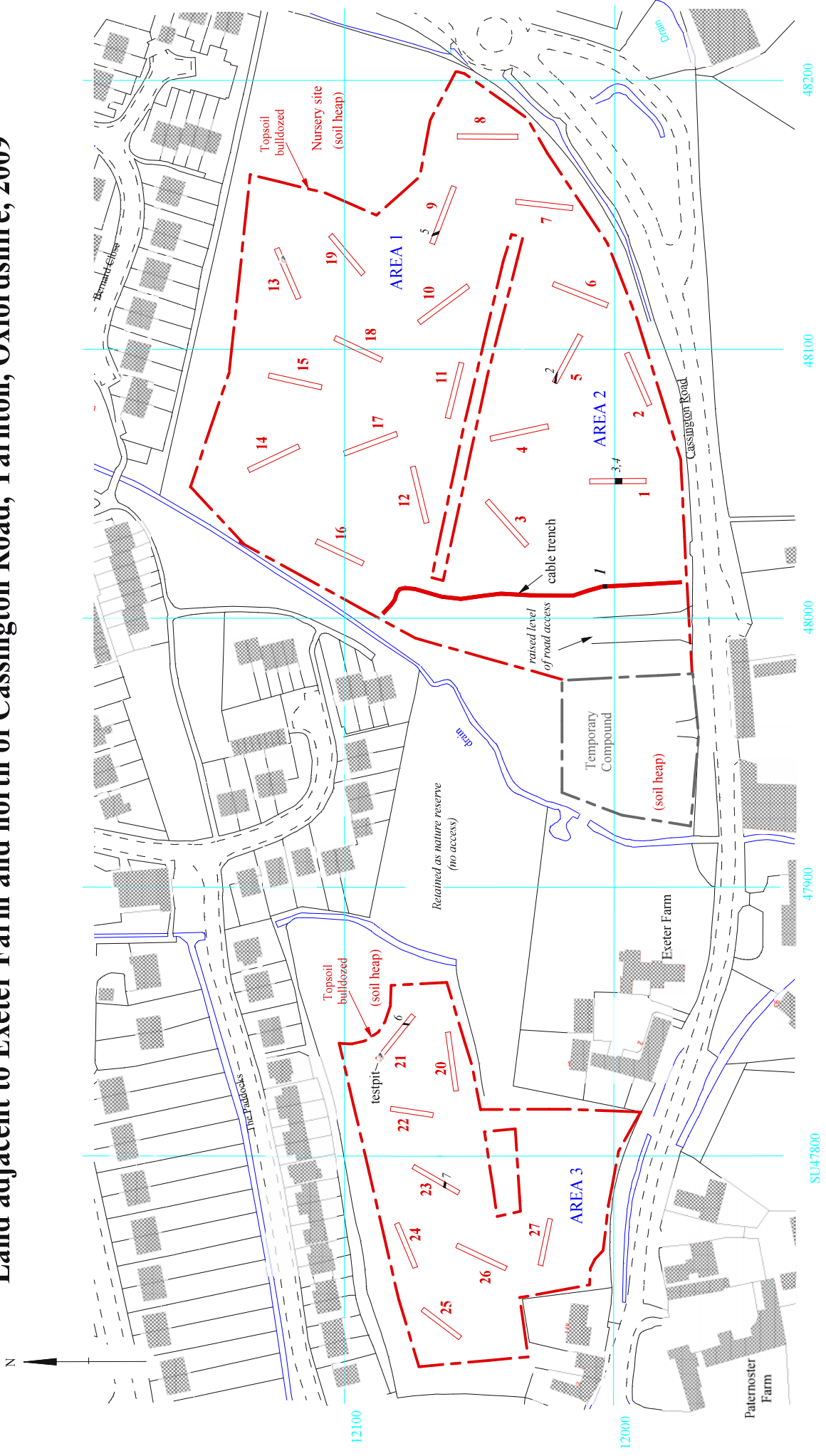


Figure 2. Trench plan and location of features.

# Land adjacent to Exeter Farm and north of Cassington Road, Yarnton, Oxfordshire, 2009

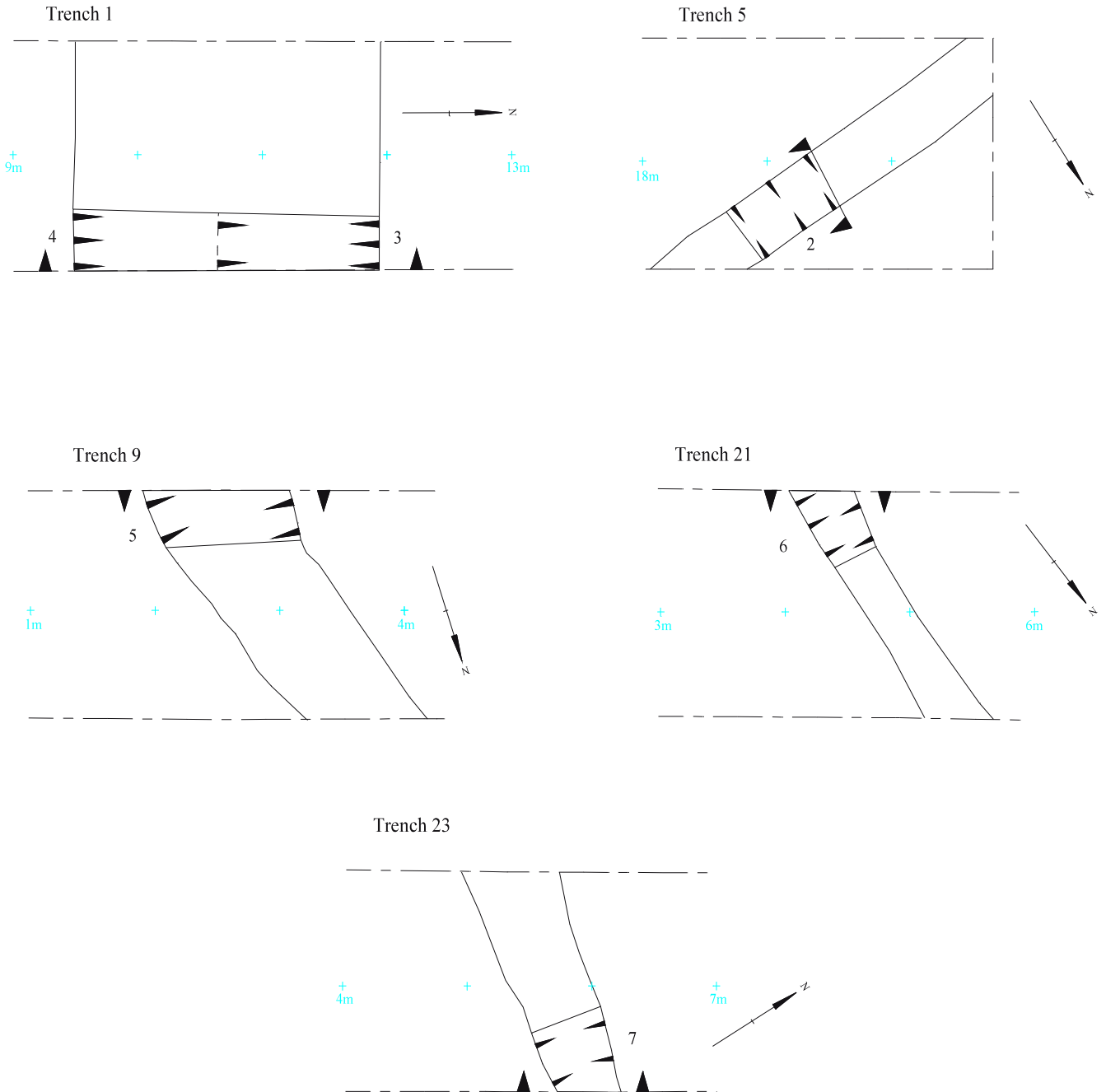


Figure 3. Detail of trenches.

# Land adjacent to Exeter Farm and north of Cassington Road, Yarnton, Oxfordshire, 2009

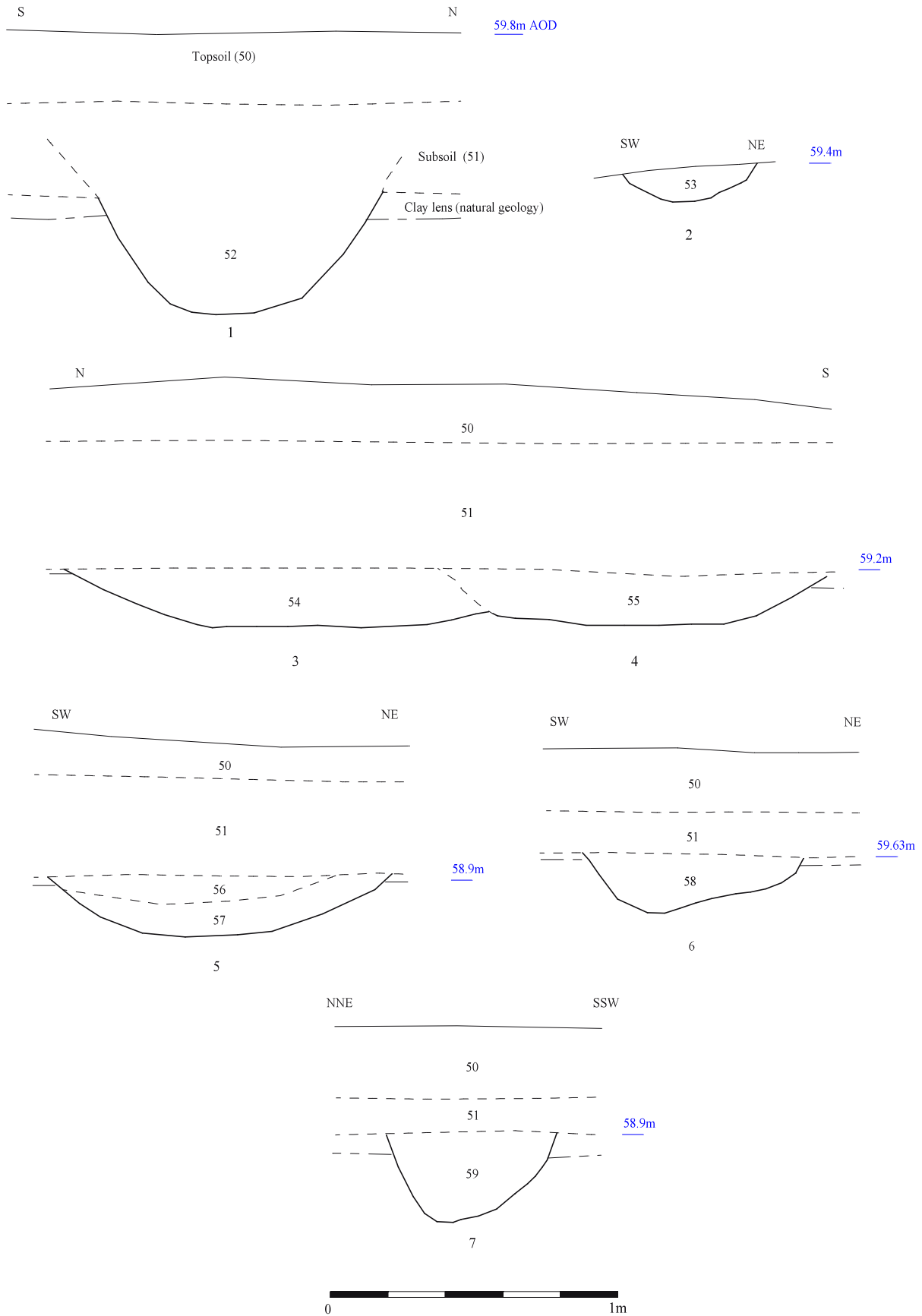


Figure 4. Sections.



Plate 1. Ditch 1 in watching brief on cable trench, looking east, scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 2. Trench 1, looking south, scales: 2m and 1m.





Plate 3. Trench 9, gully 5, looking north east, scales 1m and 0.5m

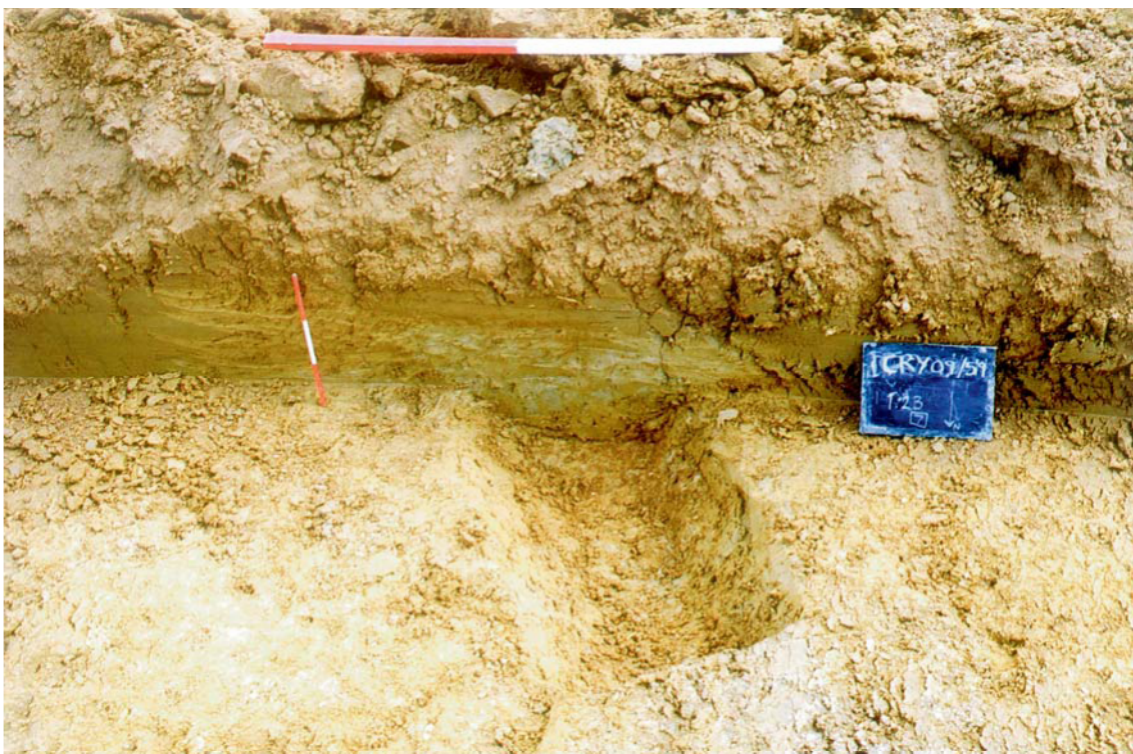


Plate 4. Trench 23, linear gully 7, looking west, scales 1m and 0.3m.