

**SHENLEY ROAD  
BLETCHLEY  
MILTON KEYNES**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF**

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Compiled by	Checked by	Approved by
Christiane Meckseper	Gary Edmondson	Drew Shotliff

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## Preface

*Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete a summary as possible within the terms of the method statement. All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.*

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Albion Archaeology  
 St Mary's Church  
 St Mary's Street  
 Bedford.  
 MK42 0AS  
 ☎: 0300 300 8141  
 Fax: 0300 300 8209  
 E-mail: [cf.meckseper@albion-arch.com](mailto:cf.meckseper@albion-arch.com)  
 Website: [www.albion-arch.com](http://www.albion-arch.com)

## Structure of the Report

After the introductory Section 1, there is a summary of the results of the fieldwork in Section 2, followed by a synthesis (Section 3). Section 4 is a bibliography, and the appendix contains detailed information on the artefacts.

## Key Terms

Throughout this report the following terms or abbreviations are used:

MKSAO	Milton Keynes Senior Archaeological Officer
Client	Kaby Developments Ltd.
IFA	Institute for Archaeologists
LPA	Local Planning Authority

## Acknowledgements

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*The fieldwork was undertaken by Ben Barker (Project Officer), Richard Gregson, Ian Turner (Archaeological Supervisors) and Wiebke Starke (Assistant Supervisor). The report was written by Christiane Meckseper (Project Officer) and edited by Gary Edmondson, with contributions by Joan Lightning (illustrations) and Jackie Wells (artefacts).*





## **Non-Technical Summary**

*Planning permission was granted by Milton Keynes Council for the construction of six dwellings and associated access and parking areas at Shenley Road, Bletchley. Because of the archaeological potential of the site, which is within the original core of the settlement of Bletchley, the Local Planning Authority (LPA) attached a condition to the planning permission requiring the development to be subject to a programme of archaeological monitoring works.*

*The archaeological works were undertaken between November 2010 and April 2011. During this period, all groundworks which required monitoring were completed. The groundworks consisted of the excavation of foundation trenches and the reduction of the ground within the internal area of the new building footprint.*

*A small number of very small, abraded sherds of late Iron Age pottery define the earliest activity on the site, although these are not considered to provide reliable dating for the ditches from which they were recovered. They may indicate late prehistoric activity in the vicinity. The earliest features on the site are a series of ditches, probably dating to the post-medieval period. Two were perpendicular to each other and probably defined elements of the same field system. The third ditch had a contrasting alignment and appeared to define a separate phase of land division.*

*It is likely that the boundaries north of the Three Trees crossroads, which defines the focus of the original settlement, changed several times during the post-medieval period due to the changing nature of the crossroads and adjoining roads. The alignments of the boundary ditches correspond to the pattern of land divisions shown on maps of the area, dating from 1813 onwards.*

*A number of brick structures and brick and lime mortar post-pads were also revealed. These are part of the foundations of a complex of farm buildings, including a possible Dutch Barn, which would appear to correspond to buildings first shown on the first edition 25-inch OS map of 1895.*

*An undated post-pad constructed of limestone and lime mortar may be part of a feature pre-dating the farm complex. A lump of lime mortar, found near the base of the feature had a small piece of sackcloth adhering to it, probably the remains of sacking used to transport lime onto the site.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 *Background*

Planning permission was granted by Milton Keynes Council for the construction of six dwellings and associated access and parking areas at Shenley Road, Bletchley (planning application 10/00707/FUL).

Because of the archaeological potential of the site, the Local Planning Authority (LPA) attached a condition to the planning permission requiring the development to be subject to a programme of archaeological works. This was in accordance with advice received from the Milton Keynes Council Senior Archaeological Officer (MKS AO).

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Kaby Developments Ltd to carry out this work in accordance with a method statement approved by the MKS AO (Albion Archaeology 2010).

### 1.2 *Site Location and Description*

The Development Area (DA) lies at the junction of Shenley Road and Ludlow Close in the southern part of Bletchley. In plan it has an irregular form, extending approximately 50m east-west by 20m wide. The northern and eastern limits are defined by old boundaries consisting of trees and hedges. To the south is the Three Trees public house, with modern housing to the west. Prior to the commencement of construction works the site was open grassland.

The site is situated in the original core of the settlement of Bletchley, at the north-west corner of the crossroads on which the settlement was centred. Subsequently the settlement mainly expanded to the east due to the influence of the railway, so the site is now towards the western part of the town.

The geology of the area mainly comprises boulder clay with a thin band of the underlying Oxford Clay extending northwards to the vicinity of the site. The site is situated on a south-east facing slope at *c.* 105m OD.

### 1.3 *Archaeological Background*

In the mid 19th century, Bletchley was a small settlement, with two foci. The main area was to the west, centred on a crossroads, from which the Buckingham road continued eastwards to Fenny Stratford, which was the main settlement in the area at that time. A series of land parcels, some of which contained buildings, extended along each of the roads which formed the crossroads. The site is within the area of enclosures fronting the road, although it is not clear if any buildings were present at the time. In the 20th century, the western expansion of the town encroached on the margins of the site.



## 2. RESULTS OF WATCHING BRIEF

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### 2.1 Introduction

The archaeological works were undertaken between November 2010 and April 2011. During this period, all groundworks which required monitoring were completed. The groundworks consisted of the excavation of foundation trenches and the reduction of the ground within the internal area of the new building footprint.

### 2.2 Methodology

The archaeological works adhered to the standards and field methods set out in the method statement (Albion Archaeology 2010) and comprised the following:

- 1 Ground disturbance extending 0.3m or more below the present ground level was monitored to identify *in situ* archaeological deposits.
- 2 The excavation of wall foundation and service trenches was monitored.
- 3 All disturbed soil was scanned for artefacts.
- 4 Exposed archaeological deposits were fully recorded in accordance with Albion's *Procedures Manual*.
- 5 All archaeological observations were drawn at a suitable scale on base plans that were tied in to the OS national grid.
- 6 A photographic record was kept.

Throughout the project, the standards set out in the Institute of Field Archaeologists Codes of Conduct and Standards and Guidance documents (specifically *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*, September 1999), in English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991) and in Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual* were adhered to.

### 2.3 Extent and Nature of Groundworks

Due to the sloping nature of the DA, the ground within the footprint of the building was reduced up to a maximum of 1.3m in the north, but only 0.10m in the south, in order to create a level surface.

After ground levelling, the foundation trenches for the footprint of the new building were excavated and concrete poured. After the concrete had set the areas within the foundation trenches were reduced by a further 0.3m in order to be 0.1m above the level of concrete within the footings.

At the extreme northern end of the DA the site was stripped of topsoil so that a new footpath could be established. The ground was then landscaped to slope gently from the new footpath to the ground level of the new building, which involved ground reduction by a further *c.* 0.2m.



## 2.4 Results

The archaeological monitoring of the groundworks revealed a variety of features, with evidence of activity in the late Iron Age, post-medieval and modern periods though dating of the activity is often poor. The results are discussed chronologically, from earliest to latest where possible, integrating artefact information. Additional information on the artefacts can be found in Appendix 1. The remains included evidence of three boundary ditches, possibly dating to the post-medieval period, and a number of later post-medieval buildings.

### 2.4.1 Overburden and geological strata

Overburden consisted of a dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil with frequent small stones and brick rubble. Due to the changing ground level it was up to 0.3m thick in the north, but only the upper 0.1m was exposed in the south. This would appear to be an old cultivation soil, though heavily disturbed by later activity associated with the farm buildings.

The undisturbed geological strata across the DA consisted of mid greyish brown clay with frequent small fragments of limestone.

### 2.4.2 Boundary ditches

Three ditches were revealed in the area reduced for the footprint of the proposed building (Figure 2 – blue features).

Perpendicular ditches [14] and [31]/[38] appear, on the basis of their alignments, to be associated. Ditch [14] was aligned NNW-SSE; it was at least 19.5m long and continued beyond both limits of excavation. It was 0.6–1.2m wide and up to 0.27m deep. A section of the ditch in the centre of the site revealed an undulating, concave profile (Figure 3: section 5) which suggests that a recut was present, although the fill was undifferentiated. The mid orange brown silty clay fill appears to have accumulated naturally from a stable soil profile. A very small fragment of abraded Iron Age pottery and a tiny fragment of animal bone each weighing 1g (Table 1) were recovered from ecofact sample <2>. These were the only artefacts recovered from the fill. Occasional charred seed and charcoal flecks were also recovered — too few to have any analytical potential. The small sherd of pottery does not provide reliable dating for the ditch, whilst the lack of artefacts suggests that the ditch was located some distance from human activity.

Perpendicular ditch [31]/[38] was aligned ENE-WSW close to the limit of investigation. It was exposed for a length of *c.* 4m and was at least 0.8m wide, with a concave profile 0.45m deep (Figure 3: section 4). The asymmetric lower fill was relatively dark, with the section exposing brick fragments derived from the area to the east. The upper fill was lighter in colour, comprising light orange grey silty clay.

Ditch [19]/[10] in the centre of the site was on a N-S alignment, at least 13m long, continuing beyond the limits of investigation in both directions (Figure 2). To the south the ditch was truncated by a later building (see 2.4.3 below).





It was up to 1.04m wide and 0.35m deep, with a concave profile (Figure 3: section 3 and Figure 6).

The excavated segment [10] of this ditch contained a sequence of three fills, which ranged in colour from light grey to brown grey silty clay. The upper fill, contained a variety of artefacts, predominantly fragments of animal bone, as well as an iron nail and a very small sherd of abraded late Iron Age pottery. The finds were retrieved from the upper fill in the southern 4m of the exposed ditch length. A sample from this area contained small quantities of charcoal flecks and charred seed, although the assemblages are too small for any useful analysis. Further north the sole fill of the ditch was light brown and contained no finds. This contrast in finds distribution could indicate that the southern part of the ditch was closer to human activity.

The projected intersection between the ditches is beyond the limit of investigation, so the relationships could not be established. However, there does appear to be a contrast between ditch [19] and the other ditches, as the southern extent of [19] contained a reasonable artefact assemblage, suggesting human activity to the south, whilst the other ditches contained few artefacts.

### 2.4.3 Buildings – Post-medieval - modern

The remains of elements of at least five buildings were revealed, dating from the post-medieval period. These comprised fragments of brick walling which define four of the buildings, with a series of post-pads in the north defining the basal supports for a timber structure (Figure 2 – red features).

#### **Buildings 1 and 2**

Angled wall footings [29] and [16] define the corners of two brick buildings with a common E-W alignment. Only the NW corner of the eastern building [29] was revealed, extending at least 4.5m E-W and exposed to the south for at least 0.5m. Approximately 1.4m to the west was the NE corner of a second building [16] on a similar E-W alignment. This was exposed for a length of at least 3.5m and a width of *c.* 1m. It truncated earlier ditch [19]. The walls of both foundations were *c.* 0.4m wide and constructed of bricks laid end to end. The area to the south comprised an area of disturbed cobbles (33), which masked the full extent of the buildings.

#### **Building 3**

The NE corner of a third building [8] was traced for *c.* 2m to the NNW before turning to the ENE for *c.* 1m (Figure 2). The walls of this foundation were also *c.* 0.4m wide, but used a mixture of stone and brick which contrasted with the exclusively brick foundations of buildings [16] and [29].

#### **Building 4**

Situated at the eastern margin of the site, the NE corner of another brick building was defined by substantial wall footings over 1m wide [6]. The building extended at least 4.5m to the SSE, continuing beyond the limit of investigation, with a short section of the ENE-WSW wall in the north



### **Building 5**

In the northern part of the site were the remains of five small areas of brick and stone [4], [21], [23], [25] and [27]. These defined the post-pads for a rectilinear building aligned E-W; it was at least 13m long by *c.* 5m wide. The pads were 0.6–0.9m across and 0.3–0.4m deep, with vertical sides (Figure 2, Figure 3: sections 1 and 2, Figure 7). They would have supported a timber superstructure. The post-pads were spaced *c.* 1.5m apart, centre to centre, although it is not clear if the walls were continuous or if it was an open-sided structure. However, the spacing is too close to have allowed access for carts or other agricultural equipment. It is more likely that it was a Dutch Barn type building for the storage of hay or straw.

#### **2.4.4 Undated feature**

A possible post-pad [36] consisting of limestone and mortar was revealed in the section of the service trench near the northern limit of excavation (Figure 2 – green feature). It was 1.90m wide and up to 0.26m deep (Figure 3: section 6). A small amount of animal bone was retrieved from its fill. Near the base of the feature a lump of lime mortar, *c.* 27mm x 16mm had a patch of coarsely woven material with a tabby weave, most likely sackcloth, adhering to it (Figure 8). Given the relatively free draining nature of the soils, the potential for preservation of this material for an extended period of time is not considered likely. It probably represents the remains of sacking used to transport lime onto the site.



### 3. SYNTHESIS

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#### 3.1 Conclusions

The groundworks revealed a number of archaeological features within the area of the development. The three ditches probably represent boundaries dating to the post-medieval period. The very small and abraded Iron Age pottery sherds retrieved from two of the ditches are likely to be residual.

An early map of Bletchley dating to 1813 (Figure 4) shows a number of large fields and smaller fields, still reminiscent of the medieval strip fields lining the major roads through the settlement. Most field boundaries are perpendicular to the major roads, including Shenley Road and the Buckingham Road.

The land parcel immediately to the north-west of the Three Trees crossroads, which accommodates the DA, looks slightly more “squashed” than any of the other fields, mainly due to the effect of the very distinctive kink in what is now Ludlow Close to the north of the DA. This may have resulted in the boundaries in this area having an alignment which is at odds with the neighbouring boundaries.

The purpose of ditch [14] is more difficult to define. It may be part of an earlier and contrasting boundary alignment; however its date is unclear. It is likely that the boundaries north of the Three Trees crossroads changed several times during the post-medieval period, due to the changing nature of the crossroads and adjoining roads. The investigation suggests that the focus of activity contemporary with the ditch was to the south of the current site, near the junction of the roads

The linear brick foundations are most likely associated with the buildings of Manor Farm, which is first shown on the first edition OS 25-inch map of 1885. Figure 5 shows the buildings (red features) plotted against the second edition OS 25-inch map of 1925. The walls of Buildings 1 and 2 — [16] and [29] — do not precisely match with the farm building shown on the map and it is possible that they are earlier structures. Alternatively, they could be part of the building, with the perpendicular walls to the south defining a relatively narrow porch.

Although Buildings 3 and 4 roughly correspond to buildings shown on the 1925 map (Figure 5), it is not clear if the discrepancies are correlation errors rather than indicating earlier buildings in the same area. However, the absence of sequential footings in the vicinity would suggest that a correlation error is more likely.

The mixture of materials used in the footings of Building 3 may indicate it has earlier origins, rather than indicating the utilisation of whatever construction materials were available.



The post-pads of Building 5 are most likely part of an open-sided, timber structure, or a building of more lightweight construction, such as a barn. They appear to correspond to the building shown on the 1925 OS map with a discontinuous (pecked) wall line (Figure 5). This open sided construction could indicate a Dutch Barn type building for the storage of hay or straw.

The function of the undated post-pad feature with the possible sackcloth imprint is unclear. It does not match with any of the buildings shown on the 1885 or 1925 OS maps and could therefore be earlier in date. The construction of the pad which contrasts with those of Building 5, could support this theory.

It is possible that the sackcloth is a remnant of a sack used to transport lime or lime mortar onto the site. The map of 1813 (Figure 4) seems to show a building in the north-eastern corner of the land parcel, but the map is not clear enough to ascertain the nature of the building or to associate the post-pad with it.

### **3.2 Statement of Significance**

The watching brief has revealed a number of brick buildings that can be matched with farm buildings shown on the first large-scale OS maps of Bletchley dating from 1885 and 1925.

The significant findings of the investigation are the earlier boundary ditches that dissect the site. The two perpendicular ditches may be matched to the alignment of field boundaries shown on the 1813 map, before some of the routes, particularly Ludlow Close were revised and boundaries changed. The parcel of land at the corner of Ludlow Close and Shenley Road always seems to have had slightly 'skewed' boundaries and the differing alignments of ditches may represent the changing history of its boundaries.



#### 4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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King, J., 1813, *A reduced Plan of the Parish of Bletchley in the County of Buckingham.* (Copy held by Milton Keynes Local Studies Library).

Marney, P. T., 1989, 'Roman and Belgic Pottery from excavations in Milton Keynes 1972-82', Bucks. Arch. Soc. Monograph No. 2.



## 5. APPENDIX 1 - ARTEFACT SUMMARY

### 5.1 Introduction

The watching brief produced a small finds assemblage comprising mainly animal bone and brick fragments. Small quantities of pottery, mortar and an iron nail were also recovered (Table 1). The material was scanned to ascertain its nature, condition and, where possible, date range.

Feature	Description	Context	Spot date*	Finds Summary
8	Building footing	9	Post-medieval / modern	Brick fragment (1,048g)
10	Boundary ditch	13	Late Iron Age	Pottery (1g); animal bone (443g)
14	Boundary ditch	15	Late Iron Age	Pottery (1g); animal bone (1g)
16	Building footing	17	Post-medieval / modern	Brick (2,00g)
19	Boundary ditch	20	Undated	Iron nail x 1; animal bone (430g)
36	Pit	37	Undated	Mortar (613g); animal bone (307g)

\* - spot date based on date of latest artefact in context

Table 1: Artefact summary by trench and feature

### 5.2 Ceramics

Two pottery body sherds, weighing 2g were recovered from the fills of boundary ditches [19]/[10] and [14]. Both are in predominantly grog-tempered fabric type 46a<sup>1</sup>, and one has cordoned decoration, characteristic of the late ‘Belgic’ Iron Age. Both are highly abraded, and their small size suggests they may not be used to accurately date the features from which they were recovered.

Building footings [8] and [16] each yielded a sand-tempered, machine-made ‘extruded’ brick fragment. The example from [8] was 110mm wide and 65mm deep. The complete brick from [16] was 240mm long, 110mm wide and 70mm deep. Both are likely to be of early-mid 19th century date.

### 5.3 Non-Ceramics

An incomplete iron timber nail with a narrow faceted rectangular head and rectangular sectioned shank, derived from undated boundary ditch [19]. Mortar fragments weighing 613g were recovered from the fill of undated pit [36]. The mortar is of a very chalky consistency, and contains occasional large inclusions of grey clay/grog. One piece has patch of woven material adhering to it — tabby weave visible — measuring *c.* 27mm long and 16mm wide.

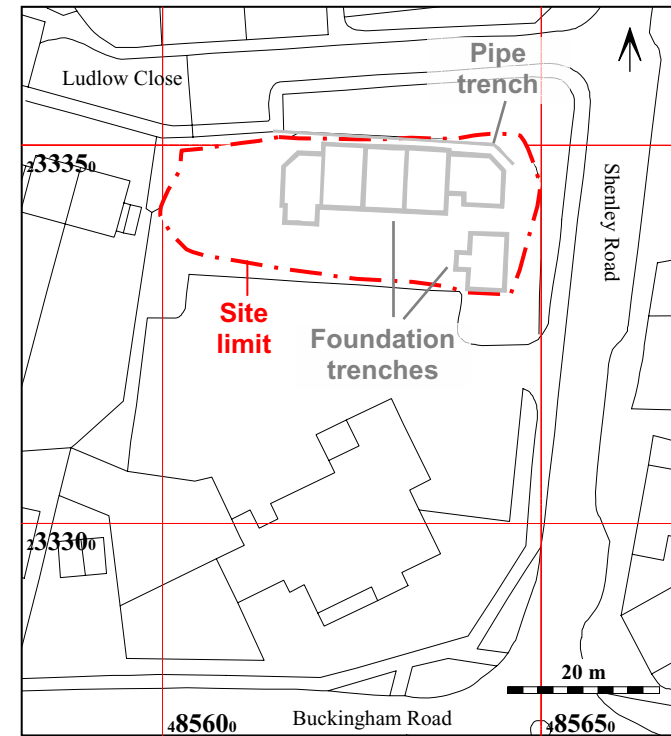
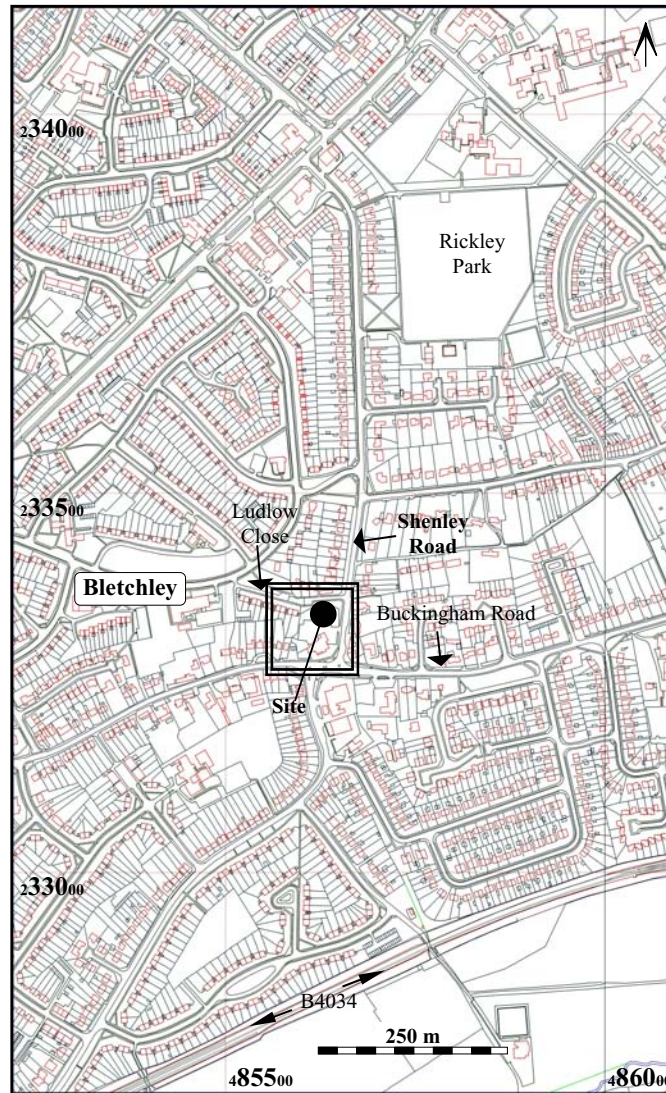
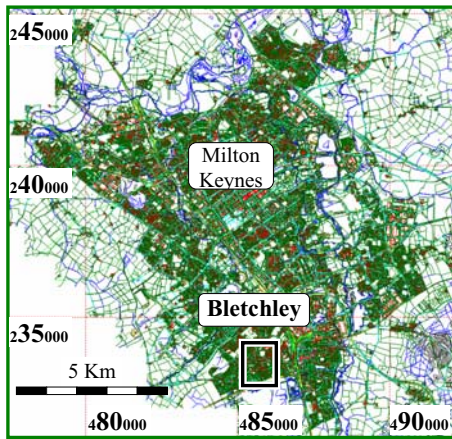
### 5.4 Animal Bone

Thirteen animal bone fragments, weighing 1.6kg, were collected from boundary ditches [10], [14], [19] and pit [36]. Individual pieces are sizeable, with an average weight of 125g. Most are well preserved, displaying only moderate surface erosion. Diagnostic bone elements are mainly limb bones from large mammals, including a complete cattle metacarpal. Single pieces of mandible and scapula from a large mammal also occurred. Cut marks were

<sup>1</sup> Fabric types defined in accordance with the Milton Keynes Pottery Type Series (Marney 1989).



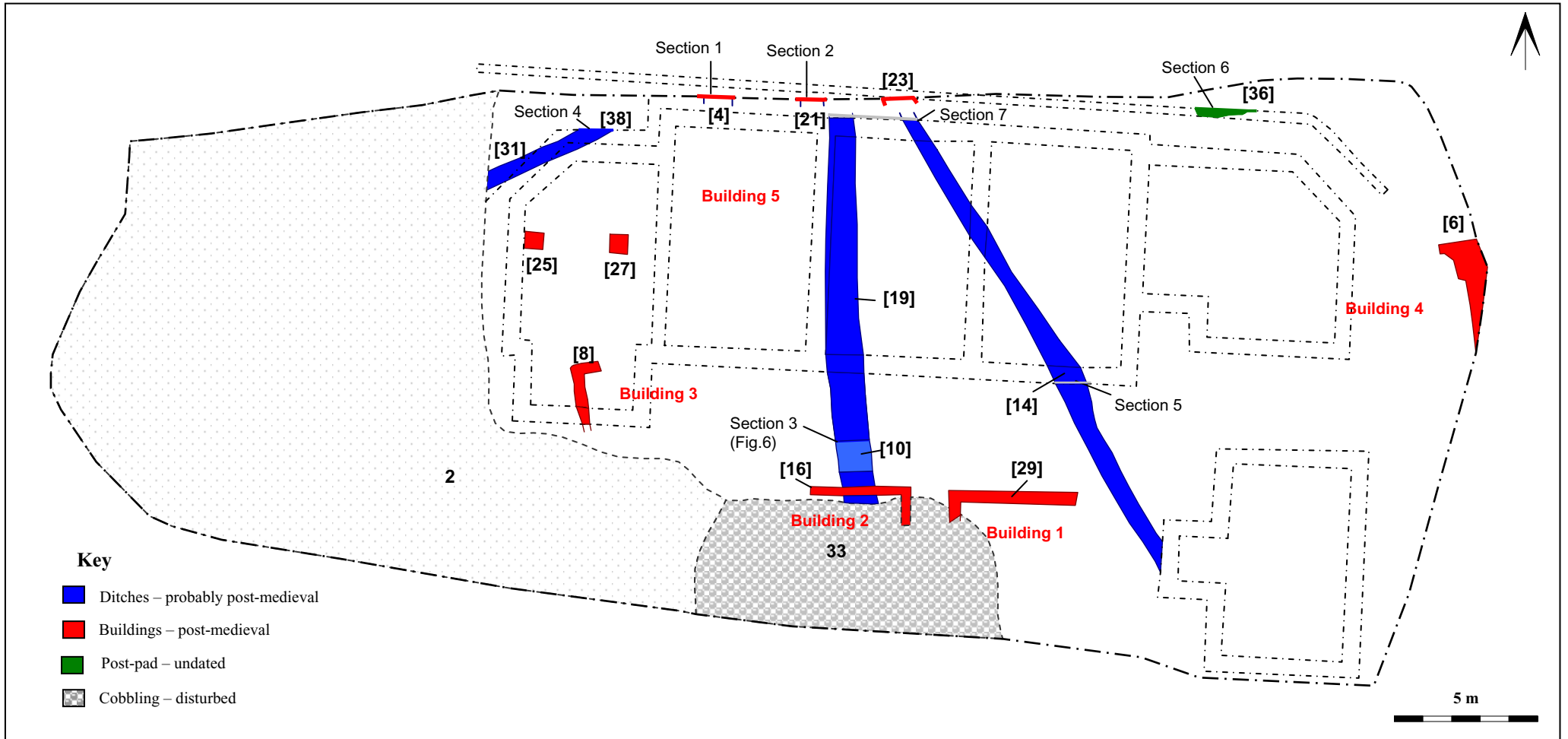
noted on the scapula fragment, although there is no evidence for splitting the long bones for marrow extraction. None of the bones appear to have been gnawed.



**Figure 1: Site location map**

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**Figure 2: All features plan**

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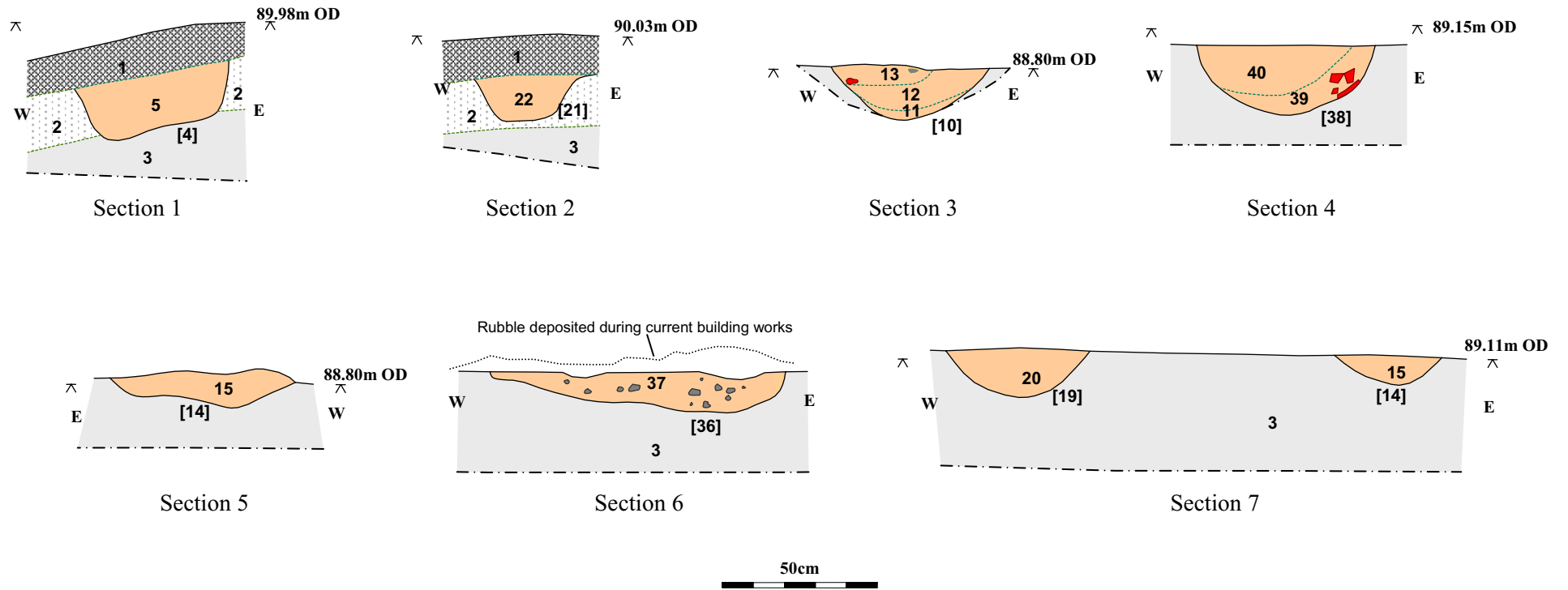
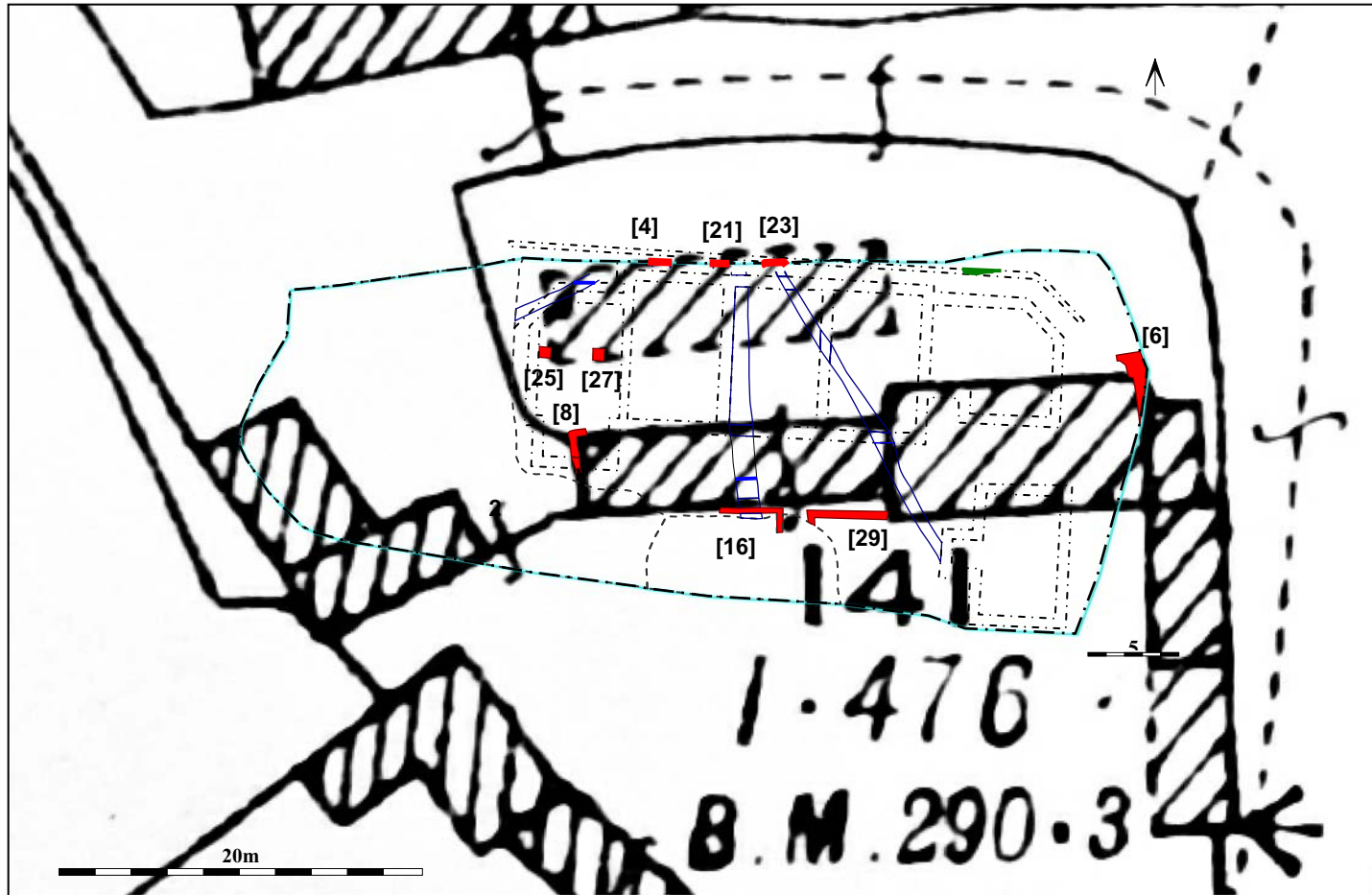


Figure 3: Sections



**Figure 4:** 1813 Inclosure map (surveyor: J. King) with contemporary road names  
Location of development area (DA) and scale are approximate



**Figure 5:** Post-medieval features (red) overlaid onto 1925 OS map. Position and scale are approximate.

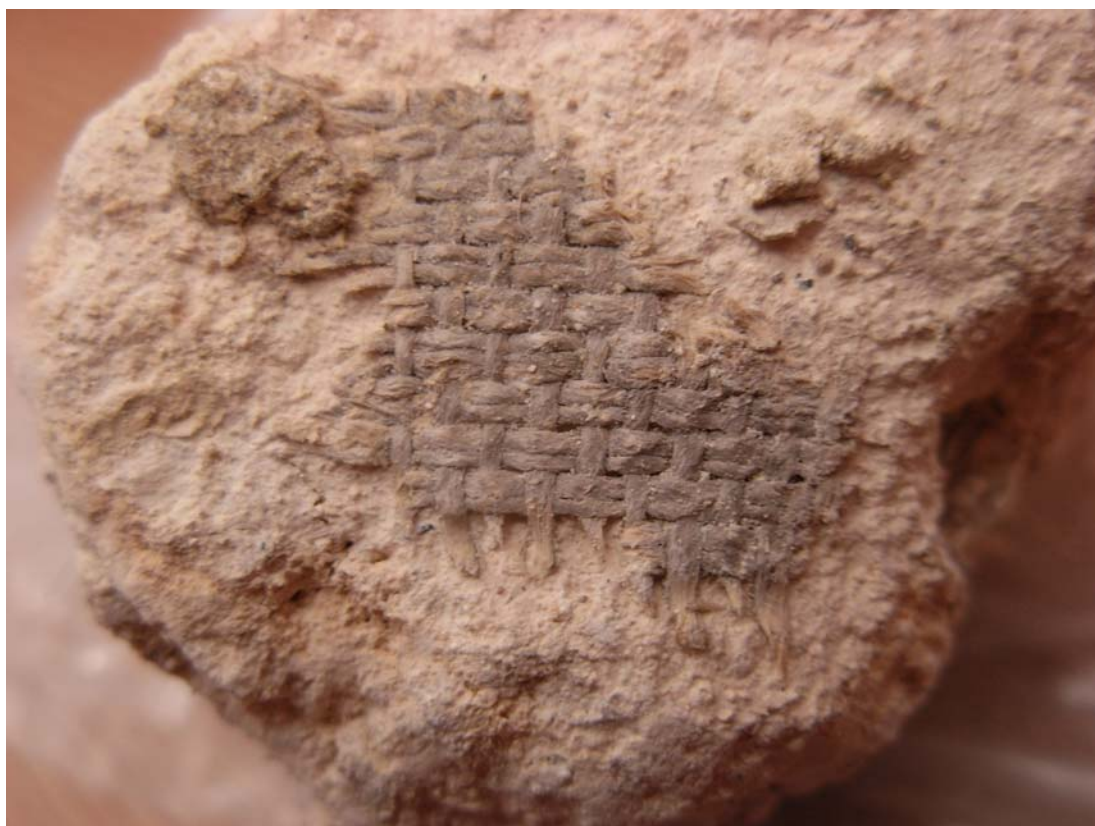


**Figure 6:** Boundary ditch segment [10]  
Looking north towards Ludlow Close  
Scale 1m in 0.5m divisions





**Figure 7:** Brick pads [4] and [21] in section



**Figure 8:** Lump of lime mortar with adhering fabric from feature [36]. (Fabric is 2cm wide)