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EXCAVATION OF ROMAN FEATURES AT PLOT 1, MIDDLEMORE FARM, DAVENTRY, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE FEBRUARY-MARCH 2003

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SCHEDULE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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Abstract

An archaeological watching brief and excavation was carried out at Plot 1, Middlemore Farm, Daventry, Northamptonshire, on behalf of Persimmon Homes in advance of the construction of a new housing development.

The only archaeological features lay at the western end of Plot 1, to the north of the modern farm buildings. These comprised two linear ditch systems that contained a small assemblage of Romano-British pottery and ceramic building tile spanning the late 1st to 4th centuries. These features, together with the results of previous excavation, indicate the former presence of a small Roman settlement occupying an area of at least 1ha lying under and around the present farm buildings

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief and excavation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology between February and March 2003 on land at Middlemore Farm, Daventry, Northamptonshire (NGR SP 56 65; Fig 1).

Northamptonshire Archaeology were commissioned by Persimmon Homes to undertake the archaeological watching brief and recording during groundworks in advance of the construction of a housing development. The work was carried out in accordance with a specification agreed by Northamptonshire County Council Historic Environment Team.

The objective was to record the nature, date, extent and character of any archaeological remains revealed during the groundworks.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location and topography

The site lies to the north of the modern town of Daventry (Fig 1), on land sloping down towards the south. The eastern half of the site is relatively flat, whilst the western half undulates as a result of pronounced ridge and furrow earthworks. Although the British Geological Survey has mapped the site as Boulder Clay, further work by Northamptonshire County Council Environment Services

Laboratory refined the identification to Middle Lias Silts and Clays (ESL 1987, 1999). North of Middlemore Farm lies a cap of the Marlstone Rock Bed. The overlying material throughout is a heavy clay soil with chalk and flints.

2.2 Archaeological Background

The development site lies 3km north-west of the major hillfort of Borough Hill and 5km west of the Roman Small Town of Bannaventa at Whilton Lodge. Large areas of medieval field systems survived as ridge and furrow earthworks on aerial photographs of 1947. Small areas still survive around Middlemore Farm, but these are not considered significant enough to warrant any further archaeological work. Archaeological fieldwalking on and around the site in 1973 identified two small concentrations of Roman pottery (at NGR SP 564 649 and SP 566 651) as well as recovering small quantities of prehistoric worked flint (Soden 1999). Additional fieldwalking carried out as part of the evaluation, and centred on these two grid references recovered further Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery but no distinct concentrations indicative of buried 'sites' could be identified. Geophysical survey in areas of current grassland (where fieldwalking was impossible) did not identify any significant anomalies within the areas surveyed (Atkins and Hindmarch 2000).

A watching brief conducted in 2002 located a small area of archaeological features to the immediate south of the Middlemore Farm buildings (SP 5654 6510) comprising a number of pits and an L-shaped gully (Fig 2 and Leigh 2002). These produced a range of early Roman domestic debris including pottery and some ceramic roof tile of the late first to early second century AD.

The previous evidence therefore demonstrated that the development area was actively exploited in the early Roman period, with settlement remains in the area to the south of the farm house at Middlemore Farm, while during the medieval and post-medieval periods the area had been farmland.

3 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

3.1 Methodology

The development area, plot 1, lay to the east of the farm buildings extending 255m east-west and by between 40-80m north-south, a total area of 1.4ha. The area was stripped using a tracked 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.7m wide toothless ditching bucket and a tracked bulldozer fitted with a toothed blade.

Stripping was carried out in two phases. First the topsoil was stripped and removed off site, this comprised a grey-black, humus rich layer, varying from 0.58m thick at the eastern end of the site to a maximum of 0.98m thick towards the western end of the site in the area of ridge and furrow earthworks. The stripped area was scanned with a metal detector and inspected for the presence of any features cut from this level. The subsoil was then removed. The subsoil comprised a mid brown sandy loam, 0.23m thick across most of the site, but with a maximum depth of 0.83m in the area of ridge and furrow. The underlying natural varied from a grey/brown clay to an orange sand and gravel.

Across most of the development area no archaeological features were present. However, a group of features were located at the western end of the site. An area measuring 33m by 33m was reserved from stripping to permit further investigation. The features were cleaned by hand and a base plan produced at a scale of 1:100 (Fig 3). All archaeological features were sectioned, and a photographic record was kept in colour transparency and black and white negative.

3.2 The Roman linear ditch systems and associated features

Two linear ditch systems ran into the site from the west (Fig 3) and both terminated towards the eastern limit of excavation. Ditch [202] was V-shaped, typically 1.48m wide by up to 0.70m deep (Fig 4, Section 1). It was filled with a mid-brown sandy loam with irregular stones (203), and had been re-cut along its full length by a shallower ditch [211]. This was U-shaped, 0.98m at its widest by 0.28m deep. It was filled with a mid-brown sandy loam with irregular stones (210). It is dated by a small quantity of pottery, largely greywares, to the late 1st – 2nd century AD.

The other ditch system lay 11m to the north (Fig 3). It had been re-cut several times (Fig 4, Section 2). An early phase of activity comprised the deposition of an orange/brown clayey loam (220)

within a broad hollow at least 2.27m wide but only 0.11m deep. This predated all the major ditch cuts although the relationship to ditch [204] could not be established. Ditch [204] was U-shaped, 1.20m wide by 0.69m deep. It was filled with a grey/black sandy loam with irregular stones (205). It was cut by ditch [219] which was typically U-shaped, 1.30m wide by 0.70m deep, and was filled with a grey/black sandy loam with irregular stones (218). This was re-cut at its eastern end by ditch [222], which was U-shaped and 7.0m long by 1.45m wide and 0.32m deep. It was filled with a grey/black sandy loam with irregular stones (221). Ditch [222] was cut by ditch [215], which was typically U-shaped. It was 0.38m wide by 0.27m deep at its eastern end but wider and deeper to the west at 2.0m wide by 0.60m deep. It was filled with a grey/brown sandy loam with concentrations of irregular stones at the eastern end (214).

The eastern end of ditch [215] was cut by pit [217]. This was circular with steep sides and a flattened base. It measured 1.10m in diameter by 0.30m deep and was filled with mid-grey silty clay with irregular stones (216).

The latest ditch lay to the south [213]. It was U-shaped, 0.70m wide by 0.50m deep, increasing to 1.20m wide by 0.50m deep towards the east. The fill comprised a grey/black sandy loam with irregular stones (212).

The ditches produced a broad range of pottery and some ceramic tile dated early mid 1st to 4th century AD. As a 4th century coin came from one of the earlier ditches, this system was clearly a late creation that collected both contemporary and residual pottery.

Running into the excavation area from the north, gully [206] was cut by ditch [215] (Fig 3). It was U-shaped and 0.66m wide by 0.22m deep. The fill comprised a mid-grey sandy loam with rounded stones (207).

Gully [208] entered the excavation area from the south and butt-ended just short of ditch [211] (Fig 2). It was U-shaped, 0.70m wide by 0.21m deep and was filled with mid-brown sandy loam with rounded stones (209).

4 THE FINDS

4.1 The Roman Pottery

A total of 434 individual sherds (weighing 5.53kg) of Roman pottery was recovered, with a date range of late 1st century to 4th century. It includes a small number of grog-tempered sherds, which stylistically reflect Gallo-Belgic influences, which may extend the date range to the early-middle 1st century AD. The condition of the pottery is good, although a small number of sherds display signs of abrasion. The analysis included sherd count and weight by fabric type.

The largest quantity of material was recovered from the northern ditch complex, which produced early-mid 1st to 4th century material. There appears to be little distinction in the date of the material from the individual features. Small quantities of pottery were recovered from the ditch to the south (202 and re-cut 211) and this appears to be of late 1st to 2nd century date.
The assemblage includes kitchen and tablewares in locally and regionally manufactured coarseware and fineware fabrics. Greywares, grog-tempered wares and shell-gritted wares predominate. In addition, there are smaller quantities of colour coated wares, both from the Nene Valley and Oxfordshire. Imported wares are represented by a few undiagnostic sherds of Samian, some with vestiges of moulded decoration.

Chronologically, the earliest sherds appear to be undiagnostic, cordoned body sherds in soft-fired grog-tempered wares, which may represent early/mid 1st century wares. The majority of diagnostic pottery falls within the late 1st and 2nd century date range. The diagnostically early forms and fabrics are channel rim jars in hard and soft-fired grog-tempered and shell-gritted fabrics, which date from the late 1st to early 2nd century. There are also fragments of imported Samian which also span the 1st and 2nd century. Only one sherd is diagnostic, a rim sherd from a Dragendorf Type 31 plate (Webster 1996, 32), dating to the mid-2nd century.

Other forms include necked and neckless jars with bead rims and a deep dish with an everted rim in greyware. Decorative techniques present include grog-tempered wares with exterior rilling, grooving and burnished linear motifs; greywares with stamped/rouletted motifs, grooving on the body, and incised linear decoration (lattice, and diagonal lines).

Pottery of the 3rd – 4th centuries is represented by fragments of Lower Nene Valley Colour Coat, these include a bowl (Howe et al, fig 7, 87) and a jar (Howe et al, fig 7, 76).
There are six rim sherds in Oxford Colour Coat, each representing Youngs Type C51 (1977), which

is a copy of a Samian flanged bowl form (Dragendorf 38).

4.2 The Ceramic tile

A total of 22 individual fragments of ceramic tile weighing 1.29kg were retrieved. Much of the assemblage is made up of worn and abraded fragments and this is reflected in the number of undiagnostic fragments (12). Only two pieces of tegulae were recovered from stratified deposits (220), the remainder coming from the topsoil. Where possible the tiles have been quantified by identifying features unique to specific tile types. The forms identified can be divided into two types of roofing tile, tegula (6) and imbrex (4). Two abraded imbrices are decorated and still retain vestiges of a combed wavy line motif on the exterior surface.

Five different fabric types were noted:

1. Hard fired sandy fabric with oxidised surfaces, blue core
2. Sandy fabric, soft to touch, buff/pink surfaces and grey core
3. Same as fabric 2 but hard fired
4. Shell gritted, buff/orange colour and grey core
5. Sandy fabric, orange surfaces and core, hard to touch

Fabrics 1, 2 and 5 have been used for tegulae and fabrics 3 and 5 for imbrices.

4.3 Other finds

Other finds include a copper alloy coin, a fragment from a quern and a small collection of iron objects.

The coin is:

> Ae3 House of Constantine
> Kneeling captive, probably FEL TEMP REPREATIO (issue)
> Very poor condition, possibly a contemporary copy, Third quarter 4th century
> fill (203), ditch [204]

A quern, manufactured from fine grained Millstone Grit, was recovered from ditch fill (220). It is part of an upper stone measuring *c* 600-700mm in diameter. The grinding surface still retains partially worn deeply incised concentric grooves.

The iron objects comprise two T-clamps (ditch [202], pit [217]), four structural nails (ditches [202] and [211]), seven hobnails (ditch [202], pit [217]) and some miscellaneous fragments. T-clamps are

among the commonest pieces of structural ironwork (Manning 1985, 131), the two from Middlemore Farm have anchor-shaped heads and resemble examples from Hod Hill, Dorset and Borough Hill, Daventry (Manning 1985, plate 62, 70 and 72). Clamps of this type were used to hold pieces of curved wood in place. There are four structural nails, representing Mannings Type 1a and 1b (1985, 134ff), these are extremely common on all Roman sites and they would have been used with wood.

5 THE FAUNAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

5.1 The animal bone

A total of 307g of animal bone was hand collected from five contexts, this was identified, where possible, to species and any ageable or measurable bone was noted.

Preservation was poor with high fragmentation and bone surface exfoliation. Two instances of dog gnawing were noted, only ten bone and tooth fragments could be identified. These were seven bos (cattle) fragments and three ovicaprid (sheep/goat) fragments. Age data would only be available from four elements and only two measurements could be taken.

5.2 Environmental evidence

The ditch fills were intractable clays containing little evident charcoal or distinctive dumps of occupation debris. The finds also indicate that the fills contain much residual material and bone preservation was poor. As a result, no environmental samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION

The watching brief and contingency excavation carried out during the stripping for the new housing development to the north of the Middlemore Farm buildings has provided some further evidence for the nature and extent of activity of Roman date in the area.

The southern east-west linear ditch system has been dated to the late 1st – 2nd century AD. The linear ditch system to the north produced a broader range of material, beginning perhaps as early as the mid-1st century AD, but much of this was residual and the ditch system was only in use in the 3rd to 4th centuries.

When combined with the evidence from the watching brief of 2002, it would appear that these ditch systems may mark the northern limit of an area of Roman settlement that included some timber buildings with ceramic tiled roofs.

The focus for this activity would appear to be in and around the locality of the modern farm buildings, occupying an area of at least 1ha. The range of pottery recovered indicates a presence spanning most of the Roman period.

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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF CONTEXTS

Context	Type	Description
200	Topsoil	Grey/black humus layer, with rounded stones
201	Subsoil	Mid brown with irregular stones
202	Cut	Cut for east-west linear ditch
203	Fill	Mid brown with irregular stones
204	Cut	U-shaped cut for east-west linear ditch
205	Fill	Grey/black with irregular stones
206	Cut	Cut for north-south linear gully
207	Fill	Mid grey with rounded stones
208	Cut	Cut for north-south linear gully
209	Fill	Mid brown with occasional rounded stones
210	Fill	Mid brown with irregular stones
211	Cut	U-shaped cut for east-west linear ditch
212	Fill	Grey/black with occasional regular stones
213	Cut	Cut for east-west linear ditch
214	Fill	Grey/brown with irregular stones
215	Cut	U-shaped cut for east-west linear ditch
216	Fill	Mid grey with irregular stones
217	Cut	Circular cut of pit with vertical sides and a flattened base
218	Fill	Grey/black with irregular stones
219	Cut	U-shaped cut for east-west linear ditch
220	Fill	Spread of material orange brown with irregular stones
221	Fill	Grey/black with irregular stones
222	Cut	Cut for east-west linear ditch

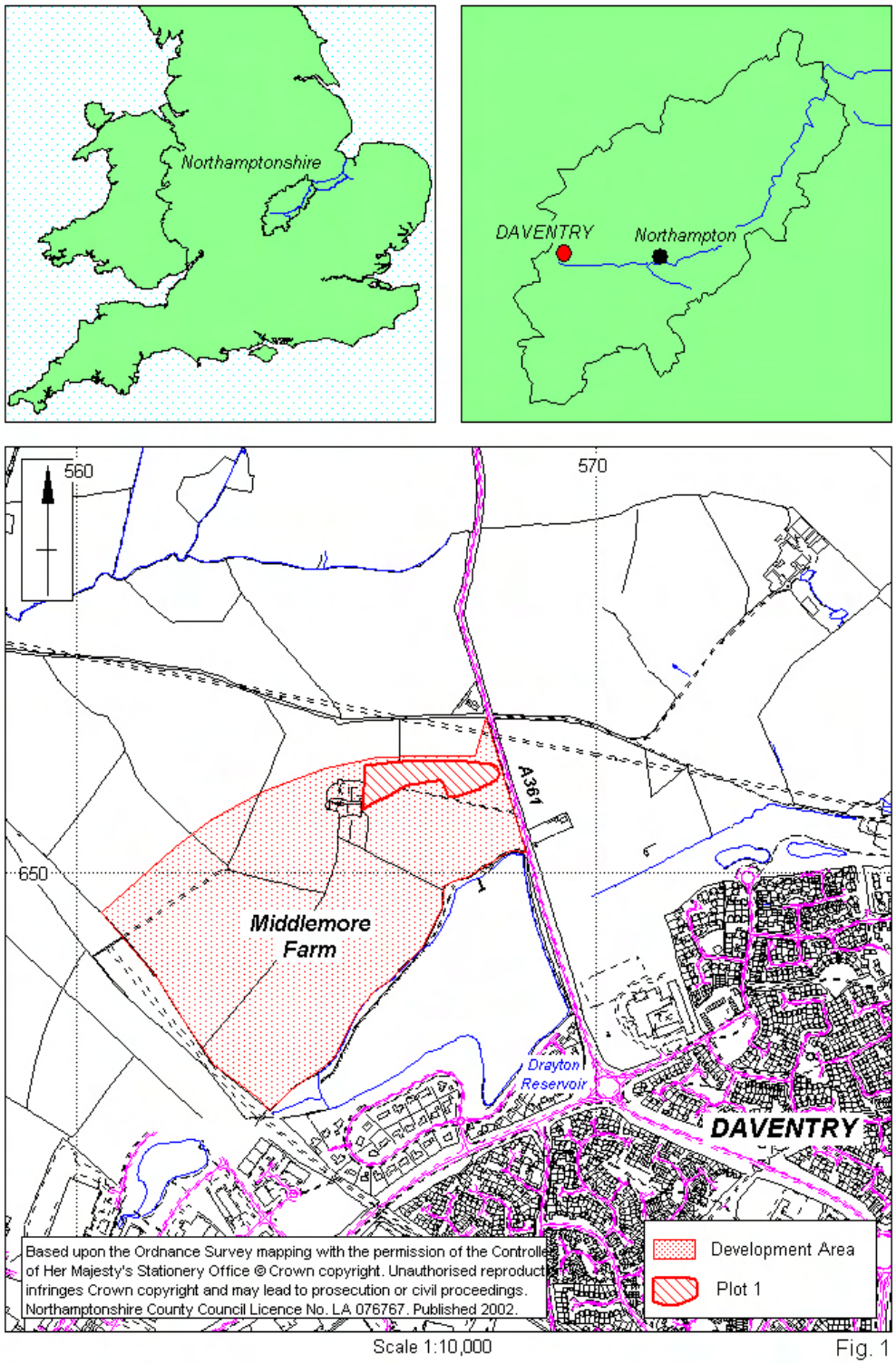
APPENDIX 2: THE POTTERY QUANTIFICATION

FABRIC TYPE	CONTEXT [FEATURE]											
	203/[202]		205/[204]		207/[206]		209/[208]		210/[211]		212/[213]	
	No/Wg		No/Wg		No/Wg		No/Wg		No/Wg		No/Wg	
Greyware	43	428	16	364	92	924	11	68	1	4		
Grog-tempered ware	17	388	12	168			5	7			3	42
Mortaria												
Nene Valley CC	1	1										
Oxford ware CC	1	30										
Oxidised Ware	3	6									3	17
Samian	10	22										
Shell-gritted	4	38	38	584								
Total	**79**	**913**	**66**	**1116**	**92**	**924**	**16**	**75**	**1**	**4**	**3**	**59**

FABRIC TYPE	CONTEXT [FEATURE]											
	214/[215]		216/[217]		218/[219]		220		221/[222]		U/S	
	No/Wg		No/Wg		No/Wg		No/Wg		No/Wg		No/Wg	
Greyware	12	122	2	16	2	11	52	597			43	685
Grog-tempered ware			3	34			11	112	1	20	8	333
Mortaria											1	11
Nene Valley CC			5	58			4	49			1	7
Oxidised Ware											2	7
Oxford ware CC							3	33			7	52
Samian							3	20			3	22
Shell-gritted	1	3			2	9	7	141			1	44
Total	13	125	10	108	4	20	80	1005	1	20	66	1160

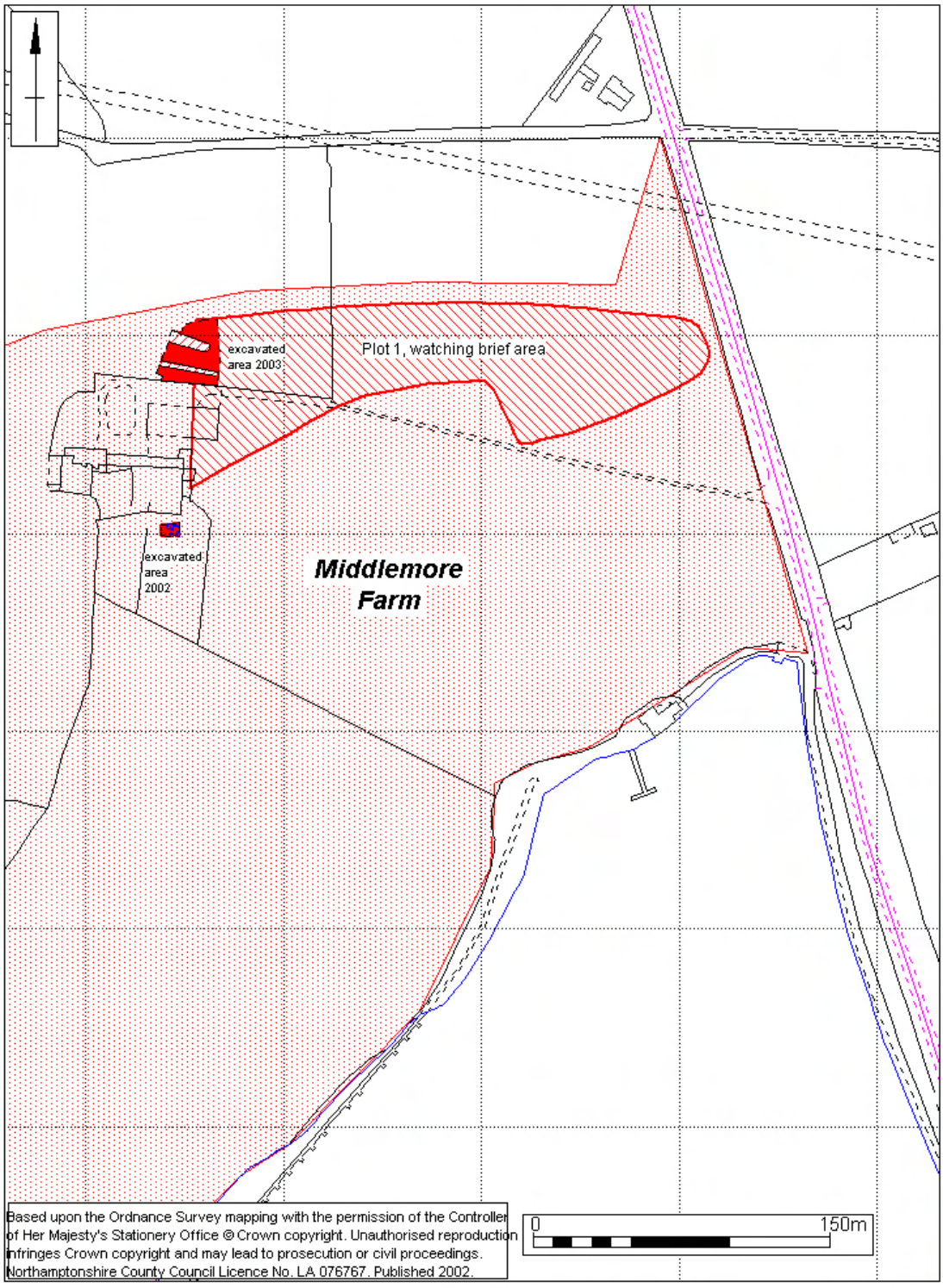
APPENDIX 3: ANIMAL BONE QUANTIFICATION

CONTEXT/ [FEATURE]	*BOS (cattle)*	*OVICAPRID (sheep/goat)*	INDETERMINATE
203/[202]	3	--	--
205/[204]	2	3	5
212/[213]	1	--	2
216/[217]	--	--	1
221/[222]	1	--	1
Totals	**7**	**3**	**9**



Scale 1:10,000

Fig. 1



Scale 1:2500

Fig. 2

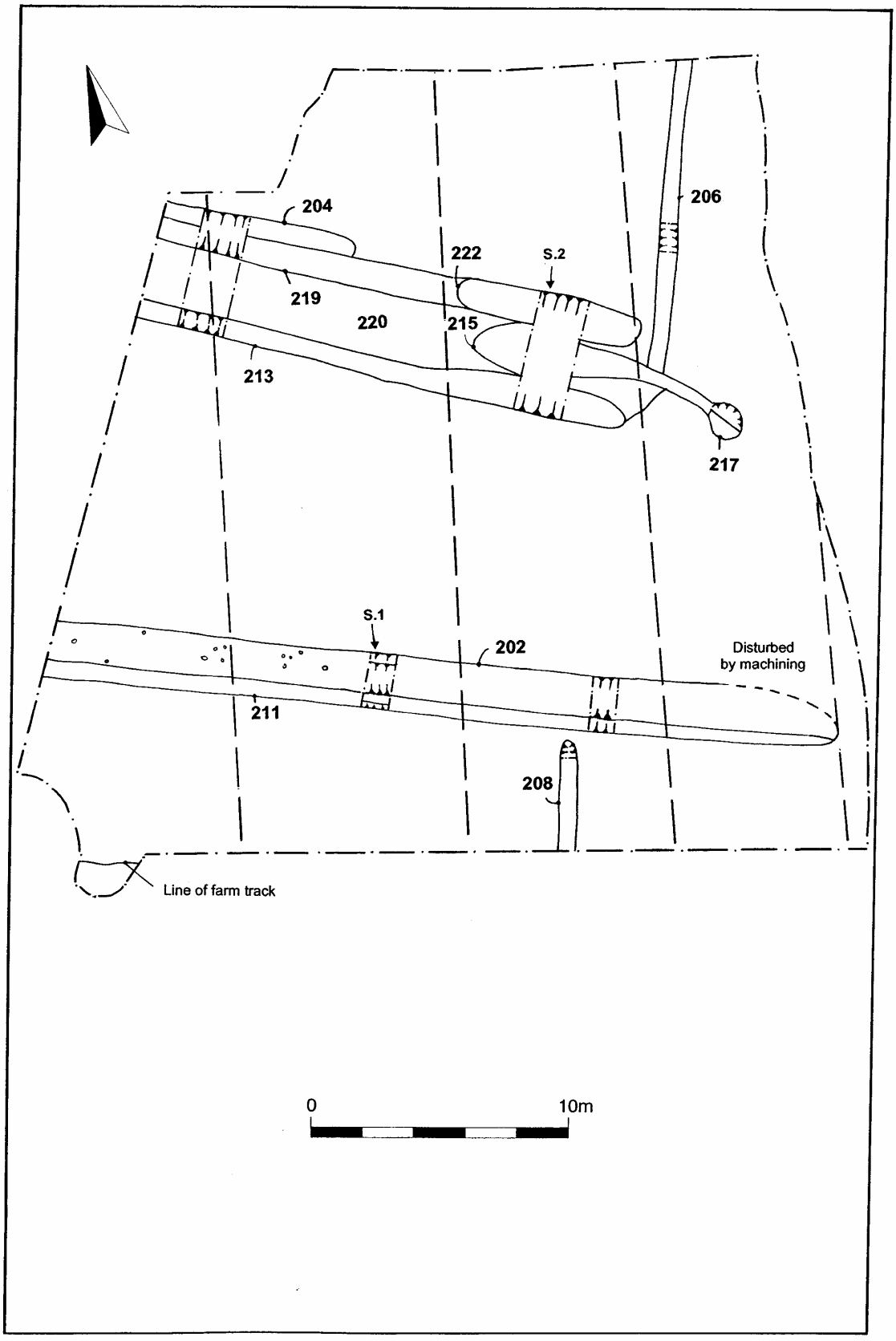

204
206
222
S.2
219
220
215
213
217
S.1
202
Disturbed
by machining
211
208
Line of farm track
0
10m

Fig. 3

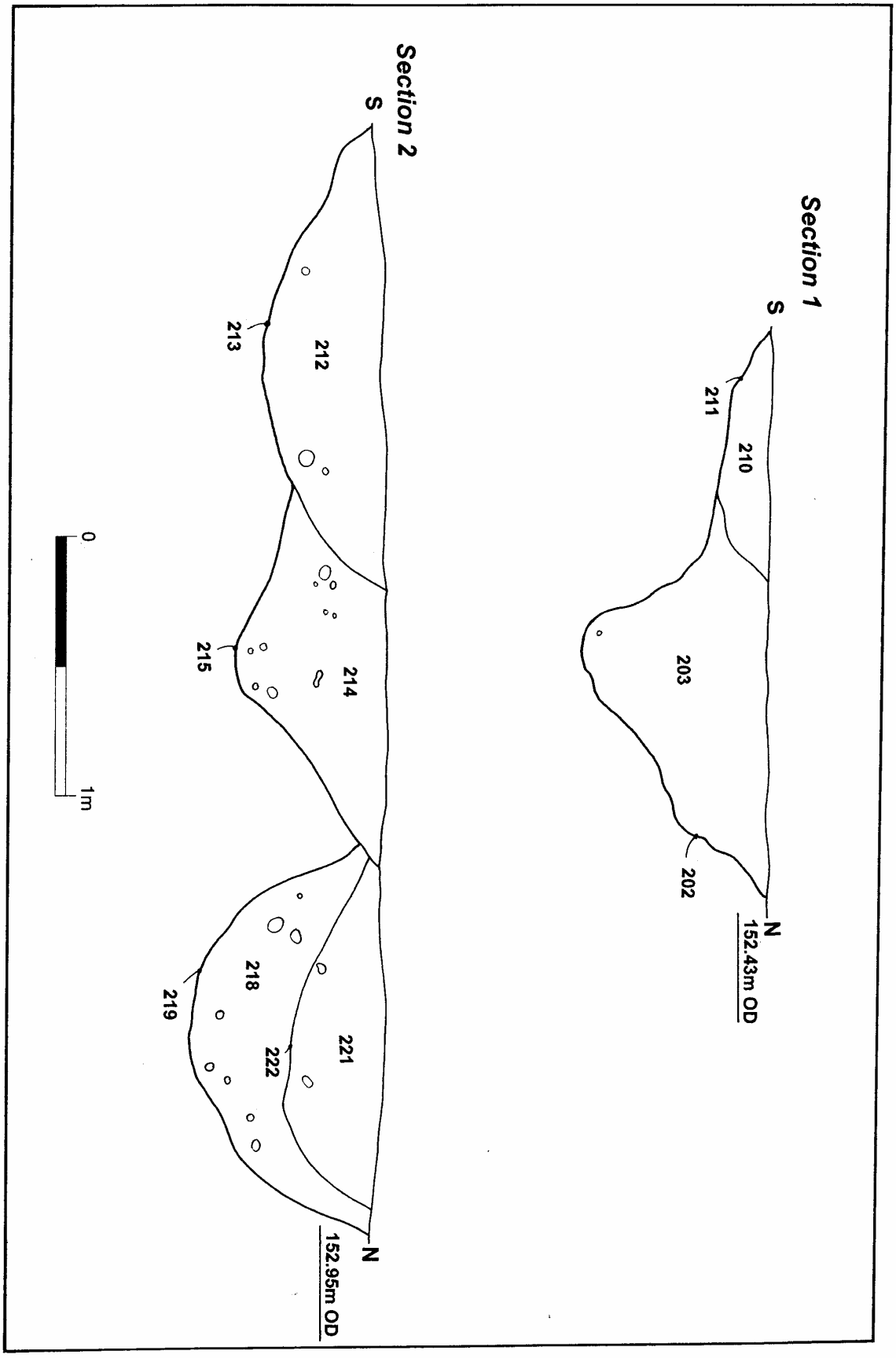

Section 1
S
N
152.43m OD
202
203
210
211
Section 2
S
N
152.95m OD
213
212
215
214
219
218
222
221
0
1m

Fig. 4

Plate 1: Site prior to excavation

Plate 2: Site during excavation