



Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Watching Brief at
Home Wood Medieval Fishery and Warren
(SM29423), Northill
Bedfordshire
February 2009



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April 2009

Report 09/44

Northamptonshire Archaeology

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OAS/S REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	An archaeological watching brief at Home Wood medieval Fishery and Warren (SM29423) at Northill, Bedfordshire.	
Short description	<p>An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology during February 2009 during remedial and public access works at Home Wood Medieval Fishery and Warren at Northill, Bedfordshire. The works comprised the dredging of the western arm of the moat, repair and consolidation of the dam and improvement of the existing access across the northern arm of the moat. The watching brief ensured that dredging works did not disturb any primary or secondary deposits of medieval date and was confined to the removal of and reinstatement of topsoil and did not provide any original date for this feature.</p> <p>The form and construction of the dam was recorded. This appeared to be a recent brick and concrete structure and no elements of any earlier dams were identified.</p>	
Project type	Watching Brief: Site Code BEDFM. 2009.22	
Site status	Scheduled Monument (SM 29423) set within woodland	
Previous work	Earthwork Survey	
Current Land use	Woodland	
Future work	Unknown	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Bedfordshire	
Site address	Home Wood, Northill, Bedfordshire.	
OS Easting & Northing	TL 1439 4631	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator		
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Anthony Maull	
Project Manager	Adam Yates	
Sponsor or funding body	Forestry Commission	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	February 2009	
End date	March 2009	
ARCHIVES	Location/accession number BEDFM.2009.22	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Paper	Northamptonshire Archaeology	Watching brief forms (8) Context sheets (10) Colour slides (36) black and white contact prints (36) Digital photographs (49)
Digital	Northamptonshire Archaeology	Report text and figures

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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT
HOME WOOD MEDIEVAL FISHERY AND WARREN (SAM29423),
NORTHILL, BEDFORDSHIRE**

BEDFM.2009.22

Abstract

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology during February 2009 during remedial and public access works at Home Wood Medieval Fishery and Warren at Northill, Bedfordshire. The works comprised the dredging of the western arm of the moat, repair and consolidation of the dam and improvement of the existing access across the northern arm of the moat. The watching brief ensured that dredging works did not disturb any primary or secondary deposits of medieval date and was confined to the removal of and reinstatement of topsoil and did not provide any original date for this feature.

The form and construction of the dam was recorded. This appeared to be a recent brick and concrete structure and no elements of any earlier dams were identified.

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology during remedial and public access works on a Medieval Fishery and associated Warren Scheduled Ancient Monument Site (SAM 29423) at Home Wood, Northill, Bedfordshire (NGR: TL 1439 4631: Fig 1). The work was carried out during February 2009, on behalf of the Forestry Commission.

The principal works comprised tree and shrub removal allied to the removal of tertiary accumulations of silt in the western arm/outer moat to improve water levels, the relaying of an existing culvert in the northern moat arm and repairs to an existing dam located towards the southern part of the site (Fig 4).

The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA 2009) based on a Management Plan produced by the Forestry Commission in 2005, in order to fulfil Scheduled Monument

Consent granted in February 2009. English Heritage delegated some curatorial aspects of the project to Martin Oake, Bedfordshire County Council County Archaeological Officer.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, topography and geology

The site is situated within a small valley to the west of the village of Northill, approximately 550m southwest of St Mary's Church, to the northwest of Ickwell Green and more generally 8km southeast of Bedford and 4km west of Sandy. The site is currently a scheduled ancient monument and sits within woodland at approximately 33m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The site is located upon gently undulating land close to the Greensand Ridge with the underlying geology mapped by the British Geological Survey of Great Britain as situated upon the border between the Oxford Clay and Kellarways Beds and the Ampthill Clay, Kimmeridge and Corallian Clay (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/index.htm>).

Local geology

The site is situated adjacent to a hill top remnant of glacial sands and gravel overlying Upper Jurassic Oxford Clay and glacial tills. These gravels formed during a stasis in the retreat of the Anglian ice sheets in the middle Pleistocene and form a linear band running north south on the west side of the Ivel valley between Sandy and Shefford.

The fishponds and warren cut into the underlying Oxford Clays and so are relatively watertight and are fed by the minor perched aquifer contained in the overlying gravels to the east of the site. Because of the storage capacity of the aquifer is limited they will only benefit from base flow input during the autumn and winter. However because of the make up of the gravels they will have a high infiltration rate for any summer rainfall and coupled with good transmissivity this will quickly find it way into the ponds (British Geological Survey 2001, Biggleswade England and Wales Sheet 204 Solid and Drift Geology1:50000).

2.2 Historical background

A study of sites listed in the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) was undertaken centred on a distance of approximately 1km (Fig 2). A number of known sites in the vicinity date from the prehistoric to modern periods. Several cropmarks have been mapped from aerial photographs, in areas to the north-west (HER 16773) and east (HER 1499, 15373, 15378 and 16855) and south (HER 15126) of the fishpond complex. The cropmarks relate to a variety of enclosures and ditched features probably dating to the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and post medieval periods.

The Roman period is also attested by the recovery of 3 inhumation burials, which were discovered in association with Roman glass vessels (HER 425) circa 300m south of Home Wood, Roman pottery fragments (HER 430) immediately east of the site and a number of coins (HER 15993) to the north-east.

The site of the Medieval Fishery and Warren at Home Wood (HER 429) lies approximately 0.5km to the west of the medieval core of the village of Northill (HER 17121), with further medieval settlements known at Ickwell to the south (HER 17122) and Thorncote Green and Hatch (HER 17126 and 17127) to the north-east. Northill, is first recorded as Nortgiuele and Nortgible in the Domesday book, the name indicating north level rather than north hill. Northill lay in the hundred of Wixamtree with the principal landowner in 1086 stated as William Speke, who held six and half hides as a manor, including woodland. During the same period, Eudo, the son of Hubert was also an important landowner holding three hides in the parish.

William Speke's manor eventually became known as Northill manor, which remained in his family until the death of Walter Speke in 1183, when it passed to his sister Albreda, the wife of Nicholas de Trailly, with the manor forming part of the barony of Warden. The de Trailly family held the manor until 1401, when it first passed to Sir Gerard Braybrooke, before quickly passing to John de Meppershall and in 1428 to Henry Godfrey. The Godfrey family held the manor until the death of Richard Godfrey when it was divided amongst his daughters as co-heirs, until eventually passing to the Robinson family in the eighteenth century and lastly to the Harvey family in 1802, before its complete demolition sometime prior to 1881/2.

As regards the fishpond and warren complex, there are very limited historical references to the site. The principal source is a map of 1781 (Fig 3) indicating that the fishpond complex belonged to Northill Manor, which stood on the crest of a slope immediately to the west of the Northill Church. The map shows a building or buildings

with an attached compartmentalised garden of standard quartered design, possibly a Parterre in the hands of John Robinson. However, the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map published in 1884 only shows an empty plot where the manor once stood, indicating that complete demolition had occurred by this time. To date, no earlier documentation has been recovered referring to the fishponds and their use.

Documentary sources describe a second manor house in the village of Northill, the Manor of Northill College which was cited with the church, the earliest reference being Roger de Lamelye, rector from 1330-1346. The sources relate that the manor held lands within the parish including woodland and another fishpond complex called College fishponds (HER 15372), approximately 800m east of the church.

Further evidence for the medieval and post-medieval periods is represented by a series of possible moated sites (HER 438, 456, 3371 and 16772) and another fishpond (HER 15371) in Northill and Ickwell attesting to the water permeable quality of the local clay geology. A number of post-medieval and 19th century buildings and other sites are also listed in the area.

The following table shows the sites and monuments listed in the HER and plotted on Fig 2.

Table 1: Historic Environment record Details

HER NO	NGR (TL)	DESCRIPTION
425	1480 4650	Find spot Roman inhumation burials 3 in association with Roman glass vessels discovered in Church field circa 300m south of Home Wood and immediately north of Ickwell Bury. Ref No 112 in A Simco, Survey of Bedfordshire, Roman Period 1984
429	144 463	Site of rectangular series of medieval fishponds and associated linear Warren at Home Wood, Northill. Historic map evidence is very sparse. An extension to the north was probably constructed sometime between 1781 and 1881. Site situated on a deposit of Oxford clay, with a ridge to the east situated on porous glacial gravel, with possible springs feeding fishponds. Michael Aston describes site as similar to a series of fishponds at Benet at Holme in Norfolk.
430	1454 4627	Find spot of 4 Roman pottery fragments and animal bone found in 1949 by JW Daykin. Ref No 182 in A Simco, Survey of Bedfordshire, Roman Period 1984
438	146 456	Site of Ickwell Bury, built 1683 in grounds of former older buildings dating to at least 1543, with moat surrounding it. Burnt down in 1937, with new house constructed in 1940. Former 1683 stables, out buildings and wall of kitchen garden survive
455	1530 4532	Site of Ickwell House, called 'the old house' surrounded by moat.

HOME WOOD MEDIEVAL FISHERY AND WARREN, NORTHILL, BEDFORDSHIRE

HER NO	NGR (TL)	DESCRIPTION
456	1530 4532	Site of moat around Ickwell House, now only partially traceable and water filled. Probably not a homestead moat, more likely a moat constructed around a possible C18th house.
1499	163 472	Cropmarks (undated, possible prehistoric) block of rectilinear and sub rectangular enclosures at Vinegar Hill
2122	146 456	Site of C17th dovecote, octagonal brick construction Ref VCH 3, 1912
3371	142 453	Site of possible moat or fishponds at Calver's Pightile, Triangular in shape with other earthworks on western and northeastern sides.
6995	146 456	Ickwell Bury Park, Northill. Circa 140ha site situated on the western edge of the medieval hamlet of Ickwell and Northill, Mix of agricultural land with interspersed woodland situated upon gently undulating land on the Greensand Ridge
9701	137 474	Site of landscaped grounds at Beeston Leasowes. Park improved by Humphrey Repton during 1790.
11900	146 456	Site of Mulberry Cottage, Ickwell Bury. Early 1680's stable block converted into accommodation in 1938-40
11901	146 456	Site of Mulberry Cottage, Ickwell Bury. C18-C19 out buildings.
13204	142 470	Listed as ancient woodland, site of College Wood, Northill, Forestry Commission woodland occupied by John Hand of Ickwell in 1793. Ref CRO BS 2013
13205	0330 5235	Site of Home Wood; Forestry Commission woodland occupied by John Hand of Ickwell in 1793 and mentioned in marriage settlement in 1796 as belonging to Northill Manor. Ref CRO BS 2013, CRO HY 85-6 and CRO SL 1/122
15126	142 449	Cropmarks defining parallel linear cropmarks extending to TL 138 446 and 144 455. May relate to field boundaries shown on 1781 estate map which has appearance of ancient road
15371	153 465	Site of post medieval fish pond
15372	155 468	Small area of woodland called 'College ponds' denoting site of medieval fishponds probably owned by a college of priests based at Northill Church.
15373	155 470	Cropmark location of (undated) straight double ditched trackway
15378	1620 4675	Series of cropmarks enclosures located approximately 100m apart approximately 1km to east of Northill village. Northern square enclosure contains possible central pit, described as square barrow.
15993	148 471	Find spot of late Roman coins, including issue of House of Constantine c348-350 AD
16772	140 471	Site of moat situated to the west of College Wood. Sub-rectangular with attached linear features which link to surviving filed boundaries. Close named Hall Orchard on 1781 estate map.

HER NO	NGR (TL)	DESCRIPTION
16773	137 468	Faint cropmarks (undated, possible prehistoric) curvilinear enclosure with rectangular features to the north all situated upon a narrow NE-SW aligned ridge of higher ground.
16885	159 471	Cropmarks (undated, possible prehistoric) double ditches and sub-rectangular enclosure abutting linear feature, which continues to east into HER 1499. Archaeological Evaluation during construction works for 2 new ponds uncovered 2 Iron age pits and postholes, Ref South Midlands Arch 37, 2007
17121	149 465	Area of medieval settlement core of Northill (Area of archaeological sensitivity).
17122	150 455	Area of medieval settlement, core of Ickwell (Area of archaeological sensitivity).
17126	150 455	Area of medieval settlement, core of Thorncote Green (Area of archaeological sensitivity).
17127	150 455	Area of medieval settlement, core of Hatch (Area of archaeological sensitivity).

2.3 General background

Angela Simco described the fishpond and Warren at Northill in some detail during a site visit in 1988, (Simco 1989) and this was subsequently incorporated in the Management Plan (Forestry Commission 2005) and summarised in the Specification for Archaeological Works (NA 2009). In brief, Fishponds are a well attested phenomenon in the medieval period, and were utilised for the purpose of breeding, farming and storing fish in order to provide a constant and sustainable food source and were seen as a good source of protein especially during the winter period when obtaining fresh meat was difficult.

They were largely built by the wealthy sectors of society and were often attached to manors, monastic institutions and royal residences. The tradition of constructing and utilising fishponds starting in the medieval period prior to reaching a peak in the 12th century. They subsequently declined, especially after the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century, although some have been recorded as continuing in some areas well into the 17th century. Most fell out of use in the post-medieval period, although some survived as ornamental landscape features.

The Northill scheduled complex consists of a wide broad ditch surrounding a rectangular island, aligned parallel to the valley floor on a north north-west to south south-east axis. The western arm of the ditch is currently water filled, measuring 170m long by 10-12m wide, with a slight external bank, probably deriving from the periodic dredging operations. The eastern arm is currently dry and has a more V-

shaped profile, cut into rising ground to the east with a depth of 3m. Aligned to this was a substantial inner bank, probably constructed from the upcast, with a pronounced wide, splayed knoll at the southern end. The western parts of the northern and southern ditches are water filled or waterlogged for much of the year, and are generally no more than 6m wide, although the northern arm has been widened some time prior to 1781. Between 1781 and 1884 a linear pond was added to the northwest corner and subsequently enlarged, but was not included in the scheduled area.

The island is divided lengthways by a broad central ditch, and further subdivided to its west into three similar sized rectangular compartments, each surrounded by interconnecting ditches and containing between 3 and 4 narrow rectangular fishponds (Fig 4). These are generally 0.5-1m in depth and are partially silted and filled with leaf mold. Water flowed via narrow gaps in the inner face of the perimeter ditch and junctions with the central channel.

The area located immediately east of the central ditch formed a level island, which may have originally contained a keeper's dwelling or other structures. It has been suggested that this was used a rabbit warren, with the internal bank and southern knoll acting as nesting areas. The perimeter ditch when flooded would have contained the population, the only point of access being a narrow causeway across the northern arm, which may be a later addition.

A further sixty seven fishponds of various size and plan have been identified in the county, with half recorded as surviving in a reasonable condition (Edgeworth, 2007). He also states that the fishpond complex at Home Wood should perhaps best be described as a 'fish farm', with another good example noted at Hill, Old Warden.

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The specific aims of the watching brief were to:

- Ensure that the works were carried out without undue disturbance or damage to archaeological remains including upstanding earthworks, moats and fishponds
- To record any archaeological deposits encountered and retrieve artefactual and dating evidence

- Provide detailed information regarding the extent, distribution and character of archaeological remains and palaeoenvironmental deposits encountered
- Place the archaeology of the site within its local, regional and national archaeological context.
- To define any potential constraints for further archaeological fieldwork

The national framework for research is set out by English Heritage (EH 1997). The broad research frameworks for the eastern counties of England are set out Brown and Glazebrook (2000). The research framework for Bedfordshire is set out in Oake *et al* (2007). The research aims set out in these documents were addressed by the project.

The fieldwork comprised visits during any groundwork's in those areas identified as having archaeological potential. Three principal areas were subject to archaeological observation (Fig 4) these comprised in order of the works:

- The western moat arm (part of) situated close to the western margin of the scheduled area (Cover and Plates 1 and 2), the area of observation extending approximately north to south to the intersection with the southern moat and dam, ceasing circa 40m short of the intersection with the northern moat arm due the presence of standing trees, where lack of funds excluded their removal.
- Repairs to a crossing access point into the warren interior via causeway within the northern moat arm and replacement/insertion of a culvert (Plates 3 and 4).
- Repairs to an existing dam in the south west corner of the monument, where a temporary cofferdam was inserted to allow for drainage operations and recording of the dam prior to its repair and consolidation (Plates 5-10).

The ground works were carried out using tracked 360° excavators fitted with a variety of toothless ditching buckets, (Plates 1 and 2). A photographic record in both black and white negative and colour slide was kept, with supplementary photographs in digital format. The written record comprised Northamptonshire Archaeology pro-forma sheets. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the *Standards and guidance for archaeological watching brief* (1994, revised 2001 and 2008) and the *Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists* (1985, revised 2006). Additionally, all works complied with the guidelines detailed in *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003).

4 THE RECORDED EVIDENCE

4.1 The western moat arm

Machine excavation by a 360° excavator fitted with a long reach toothless ditching blade was undertaken working north to south for approximately 110m to the intersection with the southern moat arm and the outlet adjacent to the dam (Fig 4, Cover, Plates 1 and 2). The dredged material was stacked adjacent to the moat arm where it was scanned for any archaeological ecofacts and or remains.

Two tertiary layers were recovered during the observation works, however as the moat was water filled at the time of their removal only an approximate description of their depth can be given. The two layers (1 and 2) seemed to extend across the entire c10-12m width of the moat [3] and were similar in composition, comprising waterlogged dark brown to black silts. The earliest layer (2) was c0.2m thick at the northern end and up to 0.3m thick at the southern end and contained decayed tree litter, fragmentary brush wood and a single residual floor tile fragment, possibly of Roman date. This was overlain by (1) which was c0.2m thick at the northern end and up to 0.6m thick at the southern end at the junction with the southern moat arm. It contained a large number of logs, (either felled, wind blown or decayed), frequent brush wood, leaf matter, occasional plastic sheeting and a number of spent gun shot cartridges, which were recovered by metal detecting, but not retained.

4.2 Vehicular access into Warren area and insertion of new culvert via the northern moat arm

Machine excavation in this area was minimal (Plates 3 and 4), with only limited impact upon the northern moat arm [5] and access causeway, which at this point measured circa 6m wide. A mixed topsoil/subsoil deposit (4) comprising a mid grey brown silt clay, containing metal sheeting was removed to a depth of 0.15m to allow for insertion of two 6m long plastic culvert pipes to facilitate water flow. These were then sealed by a 0.6m thick deposit of hogging material prior to levelling and covering with the removed topsoil. Apart from two fragments of medieval/post medieval tile, no other finds or features of archaeological significance were found.

4.3 The Dam

The construction of a temporary coffer dam and subsequent drainage allowed safe access to the recording of the Victorian dam [8], prior to repair works (Fig 5, Plates 5 and 6). The dam was linear in plan, aligned NNW-SSE across the entire width of the outlet/stream [9] (Figs 4 and 5). It measured 6.70m long by 0.7-0.86m wide, by 0.6m high with a 0.4m wide overflow outlet positioned off-centre. It comprised a 0.55m wide coping of concrete/cement overlying a single tile/brick course, cement chamfer and at least 6 courses of brick with a small projecting wall on its NNW face. The 6 identifiable courses of brick were 'English Bond', laid in alternative courses of 'headers' and 'stretchers' in an orange brown mortar, with the lowest course representing a stepped off-set (Fig 5, Section 2, Plates 7 and 8). Individual bricks measured 22cm by 11cm by 7cm. Apart from a single medieval/post medieval tile fragment of layer (6) and brick debris deriving from dam collapse or possible construction layer (7), no contemporary finds or evidence for a dam predating the current Victorian dam was retrieved during the mitigation works. The concrete sand bags (10), (Fig 5) placed to the rear of the dam, probably for consolidation purposes, were not removed and were subsequently overlain by a clay bund during the remedial works (Plates 9 and 10).

5 FINDS

There are three roof tile fragments and one piece from a probable floor tile. The floor tile from context (2) is 35mm thick and weighs 577g with one rough, one smooth surface, made in a hard dense pink, slightly coarse vesicular fabric with occasional large flint inclusions up to 20mm long, and grog.

The roof tile sherds are small and worn, only weighing 90g together. One comes from context (6) and two from context (4). They are 10-12mm thick and made from fine sandy clay, one fired to a pale brown with a pink core, a corner sherd is red brown with grog and flint inclusions and the thinnest sherd has a reduced core.

The floor tile could be considered Roman in date because of its fabric and size. The roof tile fragments could be 13th to 18th century in date.

6 THE SITE ARCHIVE

The project has generated a small archive comprising:

RECORD	NUMBER
Watching brief forms	8
Context sheets	10
Colour slides	36
Black and white contacts and negatives	36
Digital photographs	49
Plan sheet and sections	1

7 DISCUSSION

Due to the limited works undertaken on the site, the watching brief was successful in that very little disturbance was caused to the scheduled ancient monument and little if no impact was made on any surviving deeper medieval deposits. The original extent and profile of the outer western moat arm could not be determined within the parameters of the watching brief due to the current high water table and apart from a single floor tile of possible Roman date which probably relates to the known Roman activity in the area to the east (HER 430) and south of the site (HER 425) and the three medieval to post medieval tile fragments, all recovered from tertiary deposits they do not help ascertain the fishpond complex original construction date.

The northern moat was only minimally investigated, with limited disturbance to the underlying deposits and no evidence was found to either support or refute the suggestion that the causeway within the northern moat arm was a later insertion (Simco 1998). Similarly, as no ground work was conducted within the area adjacent to the possible warren mound we cannot say with any certainty if there were any associated medieval buildings such as a Warrener's lodge in order to answer a potential research aim of how the warren and fish pond complex was managed.

The repair and consolidation to the dam was successful and the area to the rear of and south of the dam has now been made watertight by a clay bund, with a new overflow outlet pipe (Plates 9 and 10). Apart from the present Victorian brick built

dam no evidence was found for an earlier dam, which was to be expected to control water flow from the fishpond complex at the time of its use.

Due to the limited ground works and the recovery of only recent waterlogged silts containing fallen timber and leaf mould, no programme of soil sampling for suitable 'datable' waterlogged deposit was undertaken. However, if further works are instigated on the remainder of the site, either through further tree clearance or dredging, especially if excavating to deeper levels, then this should be seen as a principal research aim.

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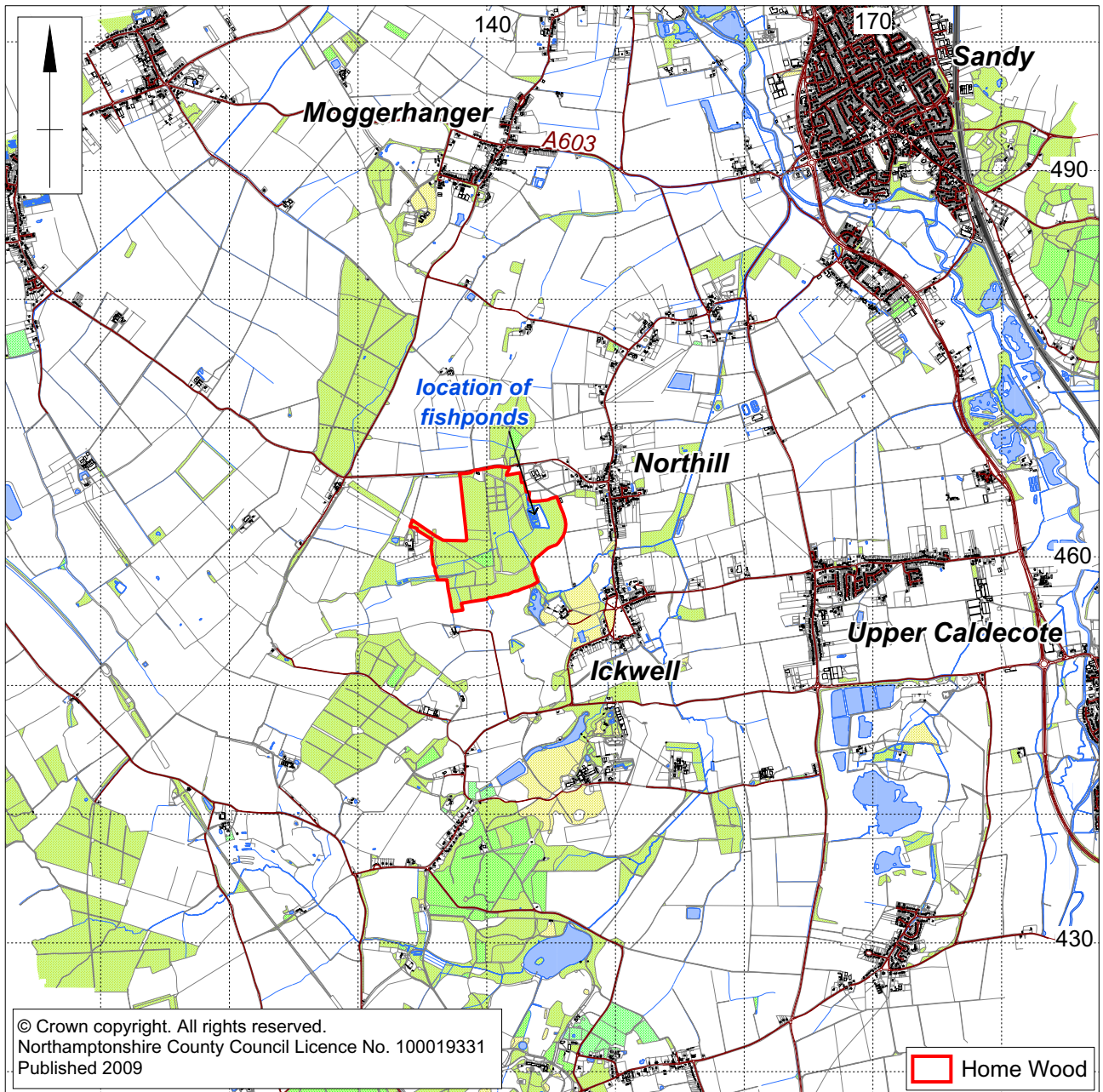
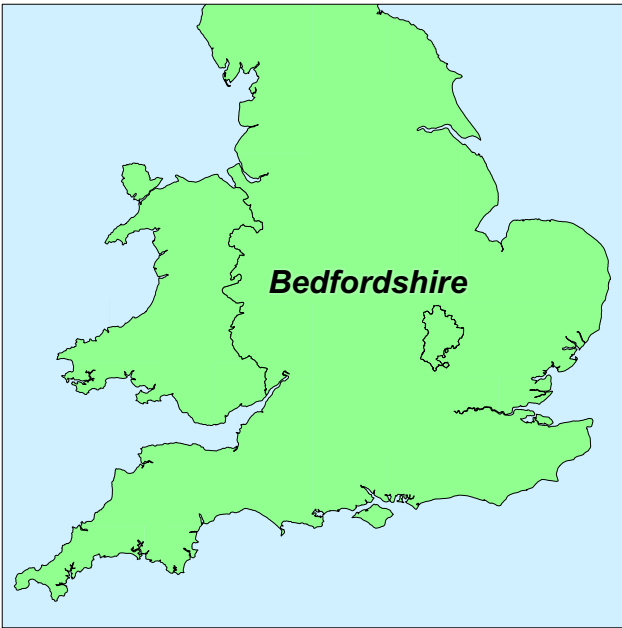
Web Pages

<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/index.htm>

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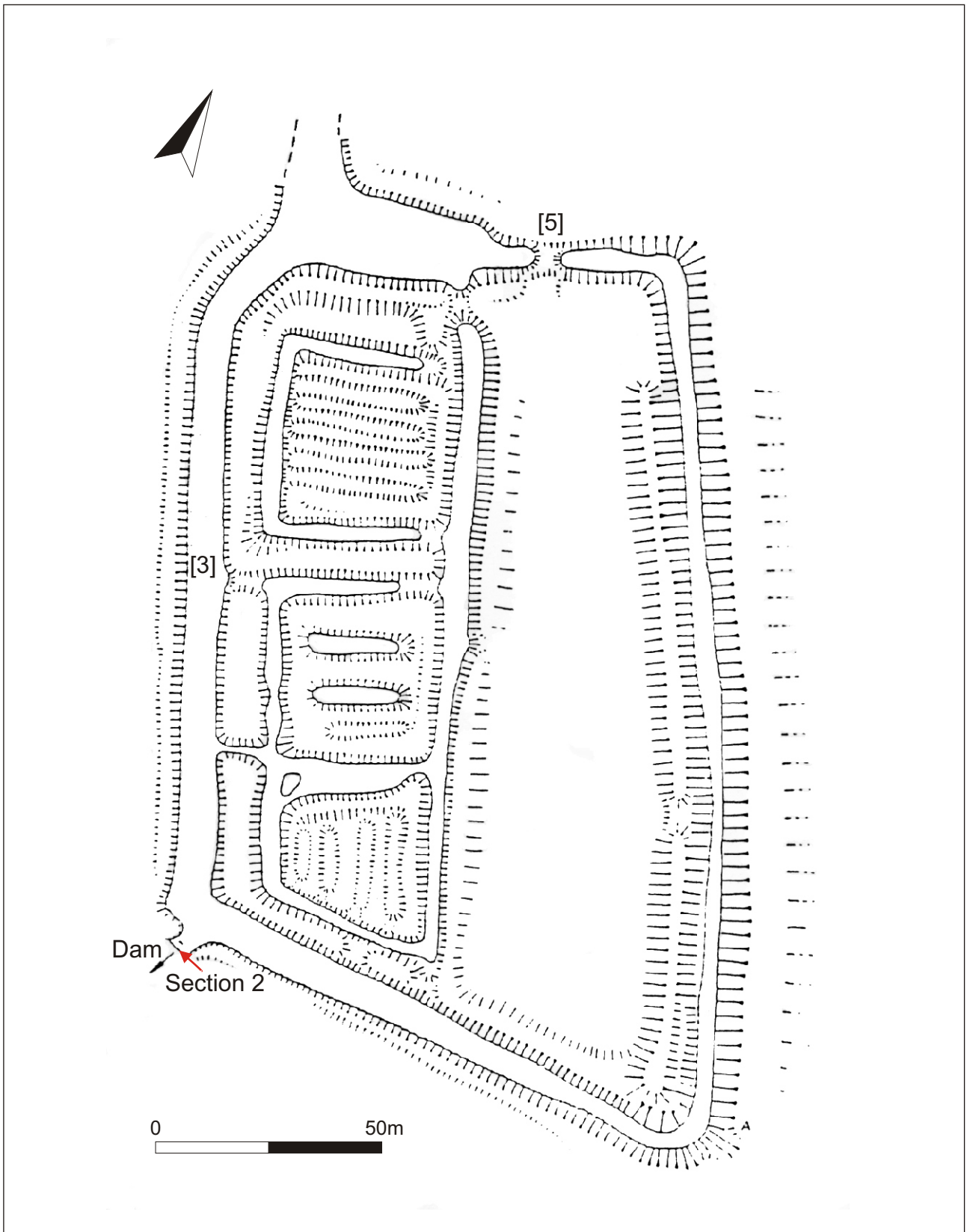


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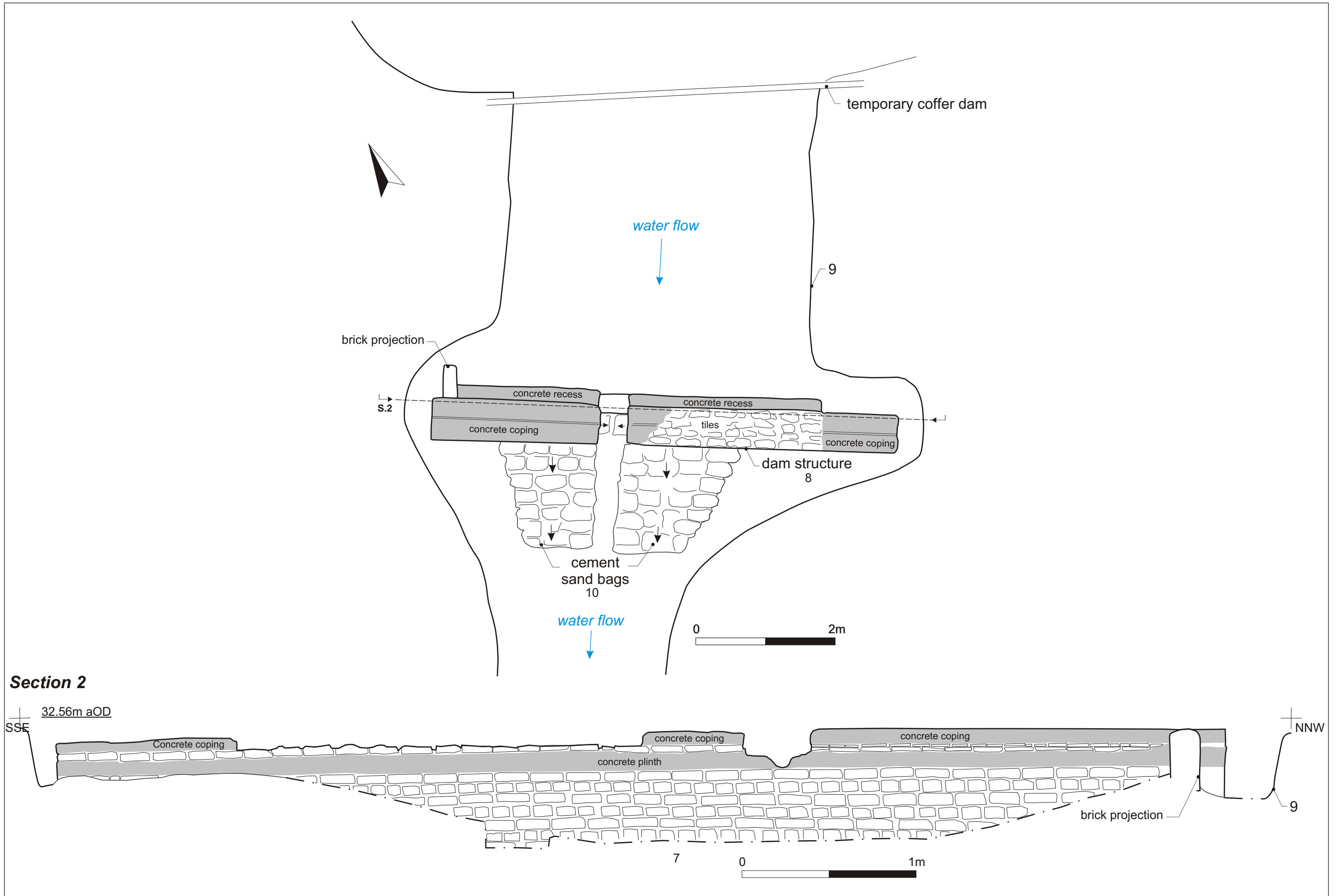
Location of Home Wood Fig 1



Northhill Enclosure map, 1781 (transcript) Fig 3



Earthwork plan of Home Wood Fishery and Warren (after Simco 1988) Fig 4



Dam structure [8] plan and section Fig 5



Plate 1: West moat arm [3], looking south



Plate 2: West moat arm [3], looking south



Plate 3: North moat arm/culvert [5], looking north pre-excitation



Plate 4: North moat arm/culvert [5], looking north after soil removal



Plate 5: The dam [8] pre-works, looking north



Plate 6: The dam [8] pre-works, looking south-east



Plate 7: The dam[8] during remedial works, looking south-east



Plate 8: The dam [8] during remedial works, looking south-west



Plate 9: The dam [8] after remedial works, looking north-east



Plate 10: The dam [8] after remedial works, looking south-east