



Foxlow Farm, Buxton

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SUMMARY

At the request of CgMs Ltd, acting on behalf of Hallam Land Management, Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) were contracted to produce a suitable methodology and undertake the fieldwork for the initial phase of evaluation of an area of land at Foxlow Farm, Buxton (Fig 1). The area was subject to an outline planning application (HPK/2013/0603) and is intended for new housing. In order to meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF; DCLG 2012; para 128), a programme of archaeological evaluation was required, to establish the significance of any below-ground archaeological remains, with a specific concern with evaluating prehistoric activity and the survival of a Roman road thought to pass through the study area.

The evaluation, comprised a shovel pit survey of 744 shovel pits, distributed evenly over the site, on a 10m grid. This is a useful technique for determining the relative distribution of struck-lithic finds over a large survey area. In addition, four mechanically-excavated trenches tested for the presence/absence of the Roman road between Carsington/Derby, or any other evidence for this along its putative line, where this passed through the site.

The shovel pit survey did not find any significant concentrations of worked lithic material, indicative of prehistoric activity foci, and there was no evidence for the Roman road or any other archaeology in the evaluation trenches.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluation trenching and test pit survey was undertaken by Aidan Parker, Paul Dunn, Al Zochowski and Jon Onraet. The report was written by Aidan Parker. Mark Tidmarsh produced the drawings. Rob Bourn, of CgMs Consulting Ltd managed the project, and Fraser Brown edited the report and managed the project on behalf of OA North.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) produced an archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), at the request of CgMs Ltd, who were acting on behalf of Hallam Land Management. It detailed the intended methodology to be employed for the initial phase of evaluation of an area of land at Foxlow Farm, Buxton (Fig 1), which is subject to an outline planning application (HPK/2013/0603) for new housing. The advice provided by Steve Baker (Development Control Archaeologist for High Peak Borough Council) in relation to Application HPK/2013/0603, dated 28th November 2013, was that, in order to meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF; DCLG 2012; para 128), a programme of archaeological evaluation was required, to establish the significance of any below-ground archaeological remains. Specific concerns that the programme of work proposed sought to address were whether any prehistoric activity foci were present at the site and whether the Roman road between Carsington and Derby ran through it. The results from this exercise, presented herein, will inform the decision-making process on the need for further evaluation/mitigation and the timing of this, in terms of the planning process.

1.2 Location, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

1.2.1 **Location:** the application site comprised four fields, covering some 7 ha, centred on NGR SK 0681 7136, on the southern edge of Buxton (Fig 1). The A515 borders the east of the site, Harpur Hill Road lies to its west, a residential development lies to the north and an industrial estate to the east.

1.2.2 **Topography and Geology:** the underlying geology comprises the Bee Low Limestone Formation. The site lies at an altitude of *c* 340m OD.

1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

1.3.1 CgMs Consulting has undertaken a desk-based assessment (DBA) for this site, and the surrounding fields (Fig 1), as part of a Heritage Assessment clarifying the archaeological potential of the area (Bourn 2013). This details the archaeological background for the site, and, as such, this will not be repeated here in full. The key areas of potential for the site are as follows:

- Low to moderate potential for Mesolithic period and later prehistoric remains. This was on the basis of a Mesolithic flint scatter, found on Harpur Hill, and several other stone and metalwork find spots, as well as a small number of Bronze Age barrows, known from the vicinity of the site;
- Low to moderate potential for activity at the site during the Roman period. This is on the basis of the putative line of the Roman road from Buxton to Carsington/Derby, which crosses north-west to south-east through the eastern

part of the site, running parallel to Ashbourne Road. Earthworks, recorded in several places, may trace the line of the road, but may actually relate to a post-medieval track, with the Roman road lying along the line of Ashbourne Road, that forms the eastern boundary of the site;

- A geophysical survey, undertaken by Stratascan (Richardson 2013), identified several anomalies, interpreted as lime kilns, in the fields surrounding the site, as well as some possible evidence for limestone quarrying. There is, as such, low potential for post-medieval archaeology.

2 RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1.1 As presented in the WSI (OA North 2013), the evaluation (Fig 1) aimed to establish the presence and significance of any archaeological remains within the site that the development had the potential to impact on. The evaluation comprised two elements, firstly a shovel pitting exercise (*Section 3.2.1*), to retrieve any artefacts present within the topsoil or subsoil, and record their relative frequency and spatial distribution. This sought to establish the presence, absence, extent, character, date and significance of any archaeological artefact scatters within the site, and to determine their broad stratigraphic provenance and whether they are associated with any apparent features. The second element of the evaluation comprised four trenches (*Section 3.3.1*) targeted in order to test for the presence/absence of the Roman road.

2.2 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 All aspects of the evaluation were conducted in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' Code of Conduct, *Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation. Evaluation* (IfA 2008). Techniques were selected to cause the minimum amount of destruction and complied with all relevant health and safety regulations. All of those working on site were made aware of the significance and history of the site

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 The evaluation, proposed by the WSI, comprised a shovel pit survey over the four illustrated fields (Fig 1). Provision was made to excavate *c* 700 shovel pits, distributed evenly over the site on a 10m grid. Shovel pit testing is a useful technique for determining the relative distribution of struck-lithic finds over a large survey area. It is particularly useful when the ground is covered in short vegetation, as is typical for pasture land, and when there are no soil-exposures that might reveal artefacts in the topsoil. In addition, four mechanically-excavated trenches tested for the presence/absence of the Roman road, or any other evidence for this, along its putative line.

3.2 SHOVEL PIT SURVEY

3.2.1 A grid was established over the site by means of DGPS instrument survey. At 10m intervals across the grid (all the land within the red-line boundaries; Fig 2), small shovel pits (0.25m by 0.25m in size) were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.30m, typically representing the size of a sod of earth lifted by a shovel/spade blade. The sod was then broken up and examined by eye for lithics and other artefacts and passed through a coarse hand sieve. Those shovel pits that produced artefacts were then located using a survey-grade DGPS, and the artefacts bagged and labelled by pit number and retained for subsequent analysis. Post-medieval ceramics are typically dispersed across plough soil as a process of night soiling and their presence is not an indicator of an archaeological site; consequently, these were not retained and shovel pits containing them were not surveyed unless there were also earlier artefacts. The reinstatement of each pit involved backfilling the excavated soil, replacing the sod and trampling it down. If any archaeological features were encountered, they were to be recorded, to the extent that it was possible within the confines of the shovel pit, and the shovel pit was three-dimensionally located.

3.3 EVALUATION TRENCHES

3.3.1 Four 20m by 2m trenches were excavated, slightly offset from the putative line of Roman road (Fig 1); it was not possible to locate the trenches directly on this line, due to the presence of extant stone walls. The trenches were set out accurately by instrument survey, in accordance with the agreed scheme. The initial topsoil removal proceeded, by machine, to the level of the first significant archaeological resource or undisturbed natural deposit, the trenches were subsequently cleaned and investigated by hand. A wide, toothless ditching bucket was employed, and the work was supervised by a suitably experienced archaeologist. Spoil was stored adjacent to the trenches; topsoil on one side, subsoil on the other. Trenches were backfilled in the same order that they were excavated, and the soil compressed by

tracking over the backfilled trench. All information identified in the course of the site works was recorded stratigraphically, using a system adapted from that used by the former Centre for Archaeology of English Heritage, with an accompanying pictorial record (plans, sections, and monochrome contacts/digital photographs). Primary records were available for inspection at all times. Results of all field investigations were recorded on *pro forma* context sheets. The site archive includes a photographic record.

3.4 FINDS

- 3.4.1 Recovery and sampling programmes were in accordance with current best practice (following IfA and other specialist guidelines). All artefacts were treated in accordance with OA North standard practice, which is cognisant of IfA and UKIC Guidelines. The finds were washed, dried, marked, bagged and packed in stable conditions; no conservation was required.

3.5 ARCHIVE

- 3.5.1 An archive, including the small number of finds, has been prepared in accordance with the recommendations in Brown (2007). Arrangements have been made for its long term storage and deposition with Buxton Museum and Art Gallery (Accession Number: DERSB 2014.3); it is intended to deposit this before April 1st 2014. A single bound copy of this report has been submitted to the Derbyshire HER along with a pdf copy on CD.
- 3.5.2 An online OASIS form at <http://www.oasis.ac.uk/> has been, completed on the understanding that this information will be made available through the above website.

4 FIELDWORK RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

- 4.1.1 In total, 744 pits were excavated, to a 10m grid, across the four fields at Foxlow Farm (Fig 2; Plate 1). The fields were designated **A**, **B**, **C** and **D** (Fig 2). It was not possible to excavate 23 pits due to their location falling on the tarmac access road traversing the site or an area of hard-standing to the west of the investigation area. The four trenches were all excavated as set out in the WSI, each orientated north-east/south-west. Field **A** contained trenches **1** and **2** and field **D** contained trenches **3** and **4** (Fig 2). In addition to the trenches, two small test pits, approximately 1m², were excavated west of the western ends of trenches **1** and **2** as a means of further testing the nature of the suspected earthwork at this location (Fig 3).
- 4.1.2 **Shovel Pits:** all of the pits excavated were uniform in both size and the deposits encountered within them. On average, the maximum depth of 0.3m was adequate to remove the topsoil and expose the subsoil beneath. In those pits with shallower topsoil deposits (concentrated up slope, in the southern and western parts of the investigation area), on average, 0.1m of subsoil was also excavated, in order to fulfil the depth requirement set out by the WSI.
- 4.1.3 Of the 744 pits excavated, only eight contained lithic material, totalling 12 pieces. After an on-site assessment, only three of these pieces were found to be true examples of worked flint (*Appendix 1*). The rest comprised natural, unworked pieces, frost-shattered (or plough-struck) material or other non-worked, non-flint material. These latter pieces were not retained due to their non-archaeological nature and will not be considered any further in this report.
- 4.1.4 The three worked lithics are unrelated in terms of both their spatial distribution (Fig 2) and typological identity. Fields **A** and **C** produced no lithic finds at all. Field **B** (pit **B65**) contained a single undiagnostic flake. Field **D** produced the remaining two lithics. Pit **D187** contained a single narrow blade, probably of late Mesolithic or early Neolithic date. Pit **D280** contained a significant portion of a plough-damaged post-medieval gun flint. All of these objects were recovered from the sieving of topsoil deposits from their respective pits and none can be linked to any underlying archaeological features.
- 4.1.5 **Trenches:** the four evaluation trenches were uniform in size, each measuring 20m by 2m and orientated south-west/north-east (Fig 3). In each, a dark, greyish-brown, silty-clay topsoil deposit between 0.2-0.3m deep was removed to expose a medium orangey-brown, silty-clay subsoil (Plate 2). In trenches **1** and **4**, a sondage was excavated at the end of the trench, to a maximum depth of 0.8m, to test the substrate and ensure that it was indeed of natural origin and that no potential archaeological horizons were sealed beneath it.
- 4.1.6 The trenches contained no evidence for a Roman road (*Section 1.3.1*) or any other significant archaeology. Trenches **2**, **3** and **4** were completely sterile containing nothing of note. Trench **1** contained a 4m wide band of lime marl deposit at the

western end (Fig 3; Plate 3), a small slot was excavated through this, demonstrating that it had a maximum depth of 0.15m. Its presence seems likely to be a result of fairly recent agricultural activity. There were no other notable features in this trench. No finds were recovered from any of the trenches.

- 4.1.7 The hand-excavated test pits, west of trenches **1** and **2** (Fig 3), were positioned to investigate a suspected earthwork in the area, where it was most apparent, and determine whether this earthwork was indeed the remnant of the Roman road or a later track. The deposits excavated were identical to those removed elsewhere on site, in both the trenches and shovel pits. It was concluded that the 'bank' was not related to a Roman road or any kind of trackway and was instead probably simply a build up of material along the extant boundary (Plate 4).

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 DISCUSSION

- 5.1.1 The exiguous amount of lithic material recovered in the shovel pit survey is far too small to evidence any intensive prehistoric activity in the low-lying study area. Conversely, prehistoric remains and monuments have been identified on the higher ground surrounding the site (*Section 1.3.1*), which seems to have been the main focus for activity at this time.
- 5.1.2 As the evaluation trenches failed to expose any remains of the Buxton to Carsington/Derby Roman road, they raise the possibility that this may have conformed to the line of the modern A515, Ashbourne Road, which runs along the eastern boundary of the site.

5.2 POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

- 5.2.1 The evaluation has provided no evidence that the proposed development will impact on any significant archaeological remains in the surveyed areas.

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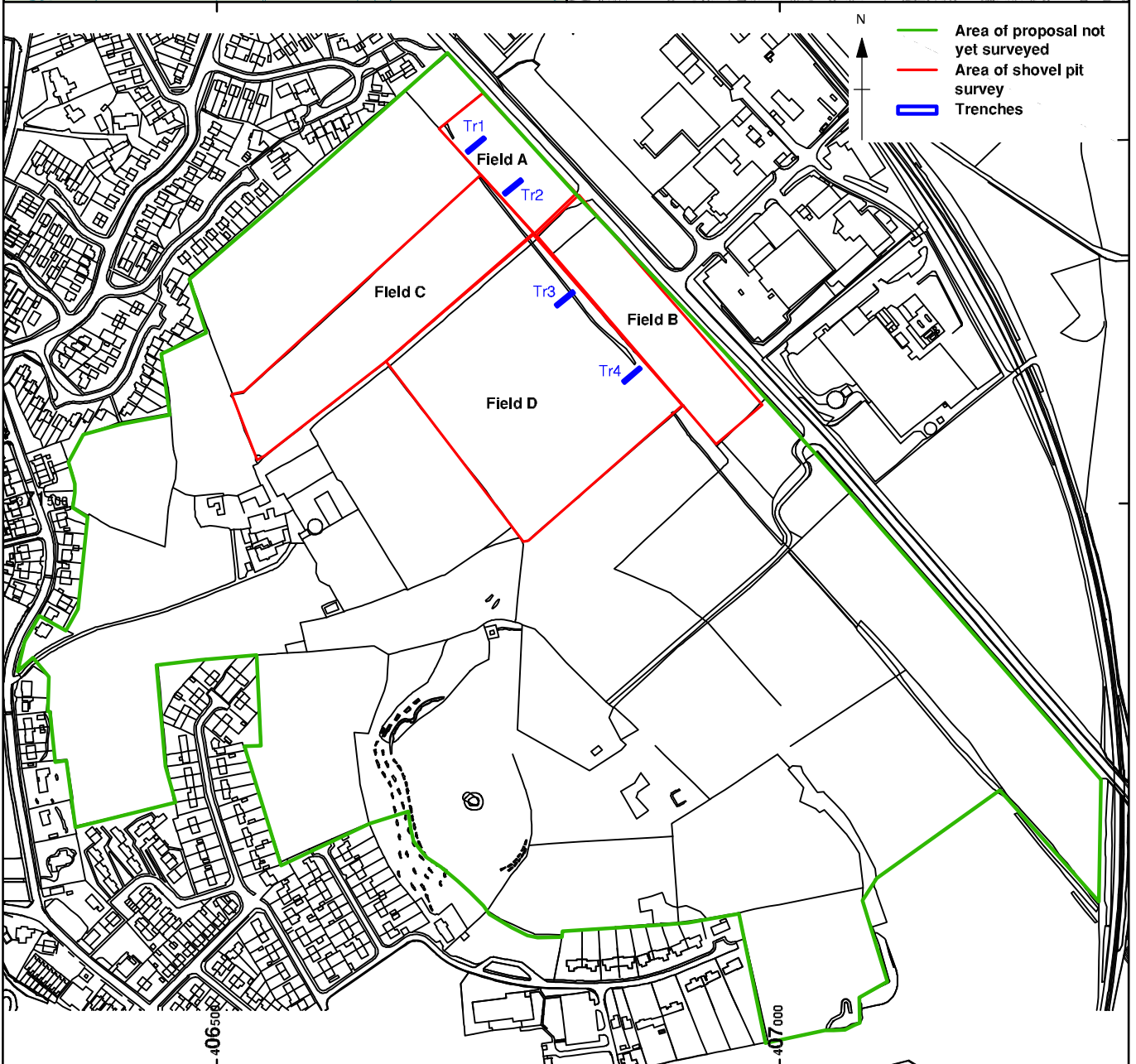
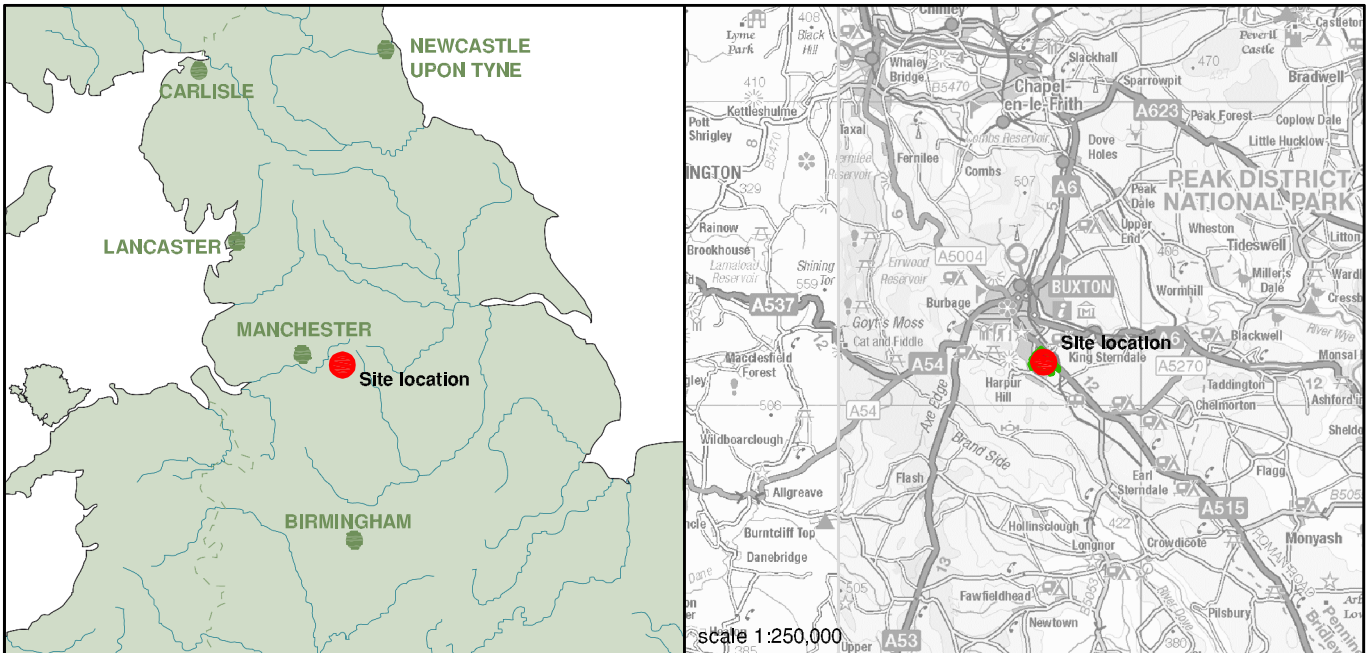
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Not to scale
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Figure 1: Site location

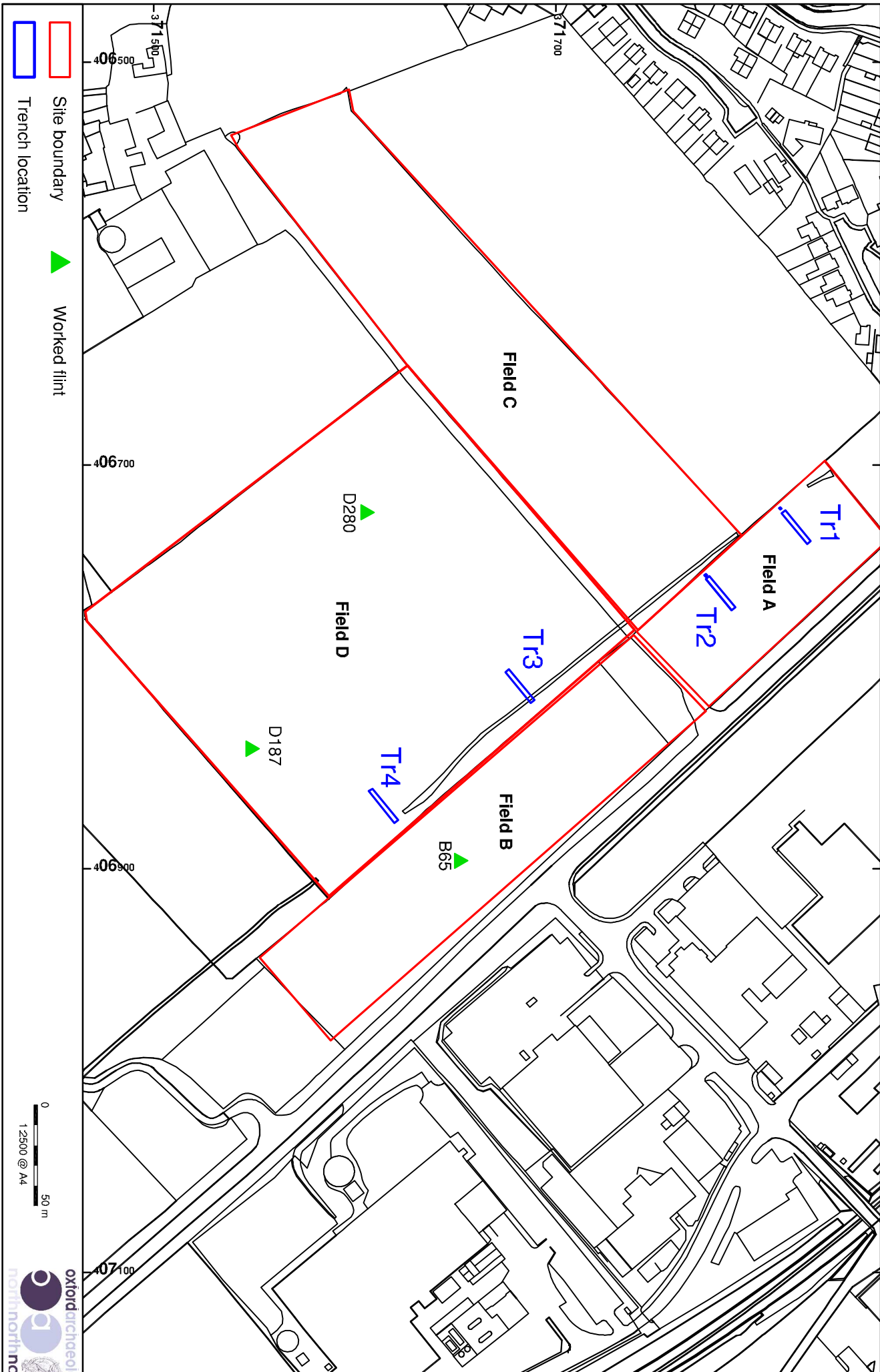
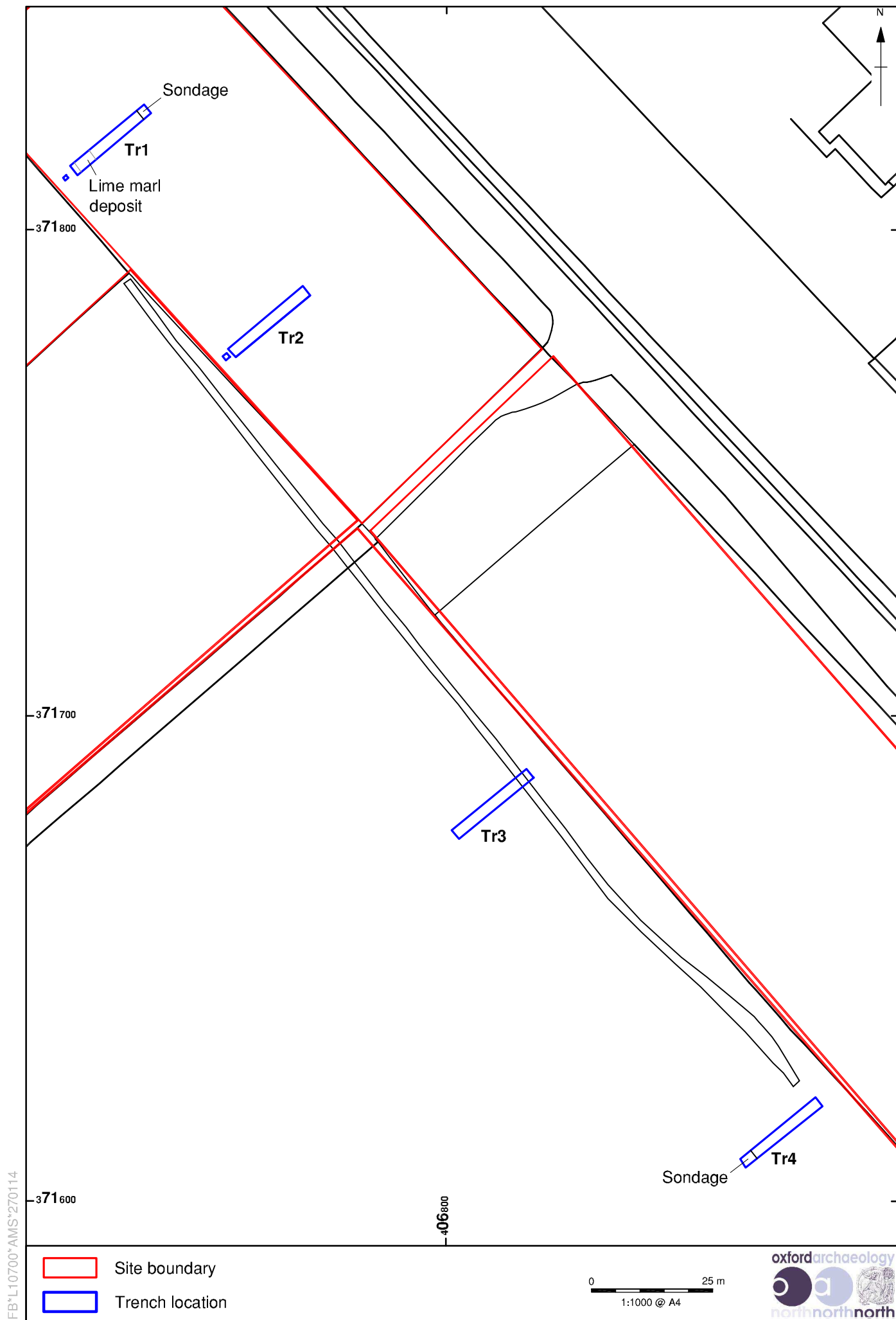


Figure 2: Plan of flint bearing test pits



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Figure 3: Trench plans



Plate 1: Working shot of shovel pit survey



Plate 2: South facing section of Trench 4, typical for the site



Plate 3: Shot of Trench 1, the band of lime marl can be seen in the foreground



Plate 4: Test pit excavated in the bank to the west of Trench 2

APPENDIX 1 – FINDS

INTRODUCTION

744 shovel test pits were excavated across four arable fields at Foxlow Farm, Buxton, Derbyshire. Of these, only eight contained lithic material, totalling 12 pieces. An assessment of the material found that only three of the 12 pieces were actually worked, the remainder being either frost-shattered or plough-struck or other non-worked, non-flint material. These latter were subsequently discarded and are discussed no further in this report.

RESULTS

The three worked lithics are unrelated in terms of both spatial distribution and typological identity, they can be categorised as follows:

- a single narrow blade, complete apart from a small portion of the distal end missing, dating to the late Mesolithic or early Neolithic periods;
- a single distal end of a flake that is undiagnostic for dating purposes;
- three quarters of a post-medieval gun flint, with one corner broken and missing due to a probable plough strike.

All of the above lithics were recovered from the sieving of topsoil deposits within the respective pits and none can be linked to any underlying archaeological features. The test pits were distributed over two of the four fields investigated, with no clustering evident in their distribution.

CONCLUSION

The recovered assemblage is very poor, given the extent of the survey, suggesting that prehistoric activity was probably of very low intensity in this part of the landscape.