



Land to the Rear of Bracegirdle Road, Headington, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Land to the Rear of Bracegirdle Road, Headington, Oxford Archaeological Evaluation Report

Written by Victoria Green

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by Orion Heritage to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of 'Land to the rear of Bracegirdle Road, Headington, Oxford' on which the construction of new vehicular access to the site and the erection of three single storey buildings to create residential retirement dwelling houses is proposed.

The evaluation comprised four one metre wide trenches (two x 10 m, one x 20m, one x 22 m). The trenches were located to investigate the areas impacted by the proposed development. The work was carried out over three working days between the 4th and 6th of February 2019.

The results showed that the only features present were the remains of ridge and furrow cultivation, running east to west across the site. No other archaeological remains were found within the site.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Orion Heritage for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to David Radford, who monitored the works on behalf of Oxford City Council, for his advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Richard Brown. The fieldwork was directed by Jim Mumford. Survey and digitising was carried out by Diana Chard.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Orion Heritage Ltd to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of the proposed construction of new vehicular access and the erection of three single storey buildings to create residential retirement dwelling houses on Land to the Rear of Bracegirdle Road, Headington, Oxford. This work was required to discharge a planning condition for archaeological works attached to planning consent granted for development at the site. The relevant condition is condition 7 of planning consent 18/00408/CT3:

“No development shall proceed until the developer has:

1. carried out an archaeological evaluation of the site in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved in writing by the planning authority and ;

2. secured the implementation of a scheme of mitigation of any significant archaeological impact, which may be achieved by redesign, or by archaeological recording action in accordance with a supplementary written scheme of investigation, to be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All works shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the approved scheme, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: Because the development may have a damaging effect on known or suspected elements of the historic environment of the people of Oxford and their visitors, including Roman remains (Local Plan Policy HE2)”.

1.1.2 A brief outlining the level of works required to discharge this condition was supplied by David Radford, Archaeological Advisor to Oxford City Council (OCC). The brief outlines two stages of work. Stage 1 is archaeological trial trenching and Stage 2 is further mitigation, if required. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) formalising this strategy, was prepared by Helen MacQuarrie of Orion Heritage (OH 2018).

1.1.3 Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by Orion Heritage to carry out the fieldwork as specified in the WSI. This document is the required archaeological evaluation report on the findings of the investigation.

1.1.4 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists’ ‘Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation’ (ClfA 2014) and local and national planning policies.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site is located to the north and east of Bracegirdle Road, west south-west of Nuffield Road, with Chillingworth Crescent lying to the north-east of the site in Headington, Oxford (SP 55521 06077). The area of the proposed development is currently a grass and tarmac playground and lies at c. 104m above OD (Fig 1).

1.2.2 The underlying bedrock geology of the site is Kimmeridge Clay Formation Mudstone, a sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 152 to 157 million years ago in the

Jurassic Period. No superficial deposits are recorded for the site (British Geological Survey 2018).

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Previous Works , general background and potential

- 2.1.1 No previous archaeological works have occurred within the site limits.
- 2.1.2 The Oxford Historic Environment Register (OHER) records the site of a possible Bronze Age Barrow (OHER D3645) to the east of the site. The site was identified by aerial photography and subsequently investigated in the 1940s. The archaeological investigations were not conclusive in establishing the date or function of the artificial mound.
- 2.1.3 The site is located immediately adjacent to a Roman Area of known interest as recorded in the 2012 Urban Archaeological Research Agenda (OCC 2012). The area is of potential interest due to the proximity of the Roman Dorchester to Alchester road (OHER 6156), the line of which lies 60m east of the site. Other Roman finds in the vicinity of the study site include Roman pottery kilns (OHER D3620). At the Victorian stone quarry, Harry Bear's Pit, Headington. Four kilns were found in the late 19th century.
- 2.1.4 As outlined in the OCC brief the area, 'The extent of roadside and hinterland settlement in this vicinity is not well understood, however a spread of Roman pottery was located 76m to the east of the development site during the construction of the ring road. The finds were of sufficient interest to warrant a note in *Archaeologia* in 1920-21 and may indicate the presence of road site settlement' (Radford, 2018).
- 2.1.5 The site formed part of an area of enclosed agricultural land east of Wood Farm and north of Open Magdalen woods in the late 19th century (OS 1878-1881 1:2,500). The study site and surrounds remained rural in character until the construction of the existing post-WWII housing estate.

3 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 General

3.1.1 The general aims of this project were, where possible:

- To establish the presence/absence, extent and character of any archaeological features on the site and to consider the archaeological interest of these in the context of the regional archaeological framework.
- To establish, where possible, the location, form, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains, irrespective of period, liable to be destroyed by the proposed development;
- The evaluation should also seek to clarify the nature and extent of existing disturbance and intrusions and hence assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits and any surviving structures of archaeological significance;
- To generate an archive which will allow future research of the evidence to be undertaken if appropriate.
- To disseminate the results of the work in a format and manner proportionate to the significance of the findings.

3.1.2 The site specific aims of this project were to establish, where possible:

- Sufficient information to construct a strategy for further archaeological mitigation if necessary;
- Evidence for Romano-British industrial, domestic or agricultural occupation within the study site;
- Evidence for earlier prehistoric activity on the site?

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Site specific methodologies for the trial trench evaluation were as follows:

- The trenches were laid out as shown in Fig. 2 using a GPS with sub-25mm accuracy; some adjustments to the trench array contained in the WSI (Orion Heritage 2018) were required due to access to the site and site obstructions;
- The trenches were excavated, under the direct supervision of an archaeologist, with a 1.5-ton mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. The trenches measured 1m wide by 10-20 m long. Spoil was stored adjacent to, but at a safe distance from, trench edges. Trenches and the upcast spoil were scanned with a metal detector on completion of machining;
- Machining continued in spits down to the top of the undisturbed natural geology or the first archaeological horizon, depending upon which was encountered first. Once archaeological deposits were exposed, further excavation proceeded by hand;
- The exposed surfaces were cleaned sufficiently to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains. A sample of each feature or deposit type (for example

furrows) was excavated and recorded. Excavation work carried out was sufficient to resolve the principal aims of the evaluation;

- Upon agreement with David Radford, Archaeologist at Oxford City Council, the trenches were backfilled.

3.2.2 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established best practice and the OA field manual. No finds were present and no deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered.

3.2.3 Digital photos were taken of any archaeological features, deposits, areas and of the trenches and works in general.

3.2.4 Plans were produced at an appropriate scale (normally 1:50 or 1:100) with larger scale plans of features as necessary. Section drawings of features were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and 1m-wide sample sections of stratigraphy were drawn at a scale of 1:10. All section drawings were located on the appropriate plan/s. The absolute height (m OD) of all principal strata and features, and the section datum lines, have been calculated and indicated on the drawings.

3.2.5 All features, trench location and sample sections were located using either a GPS unit or total station. Co-ordinates relative to Ordnance Survey and Ordnance Datum were obtained for each sampling location.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 4.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, and include a summary stratigraphic description of the trenches. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A.
- 4.1.2 Context numbers reflect the trench numbers unless otherwise stated. For example, 1 is a layer within Trench 1, while Furrow 34 is a feature within Trench 3.

4.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 4.2.1 The soil sequence within all trenches was fairly uniform. The natural geology of light yellowish brown silty clay was overlain by a reddish brown silty clay subsoil horizon, which in turn was overlain by topsoil moved from the surrounding area during the construction of surrounding housing, by 1960. This was finally buried by a dark grey brown silty clay topsoil. The sequence represents a typical rural accumulation (c 400 mm) with additional material (c 400 mm) likely to relate to redeposition of topsoil and subsoil during the construction of the housing estate.
- 4.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally reasonable, given the winter conditions, and the trenches remained mostly dry throughout. Archaeological features were easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

4.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

- 4.3.1 Archaeological features were present in all trenches and these consisted solely of agricultural furrows (Fig. 2). No other non-furrow features were uncovered during the evaluation. Most of the furrows were unexcavated, though Cut 44 was sample excavated in Trench 4, which is described below.
- 4.3.2 Trench 4 was located in the south east of the site. It contained four east west running furrows, one of which was excavated (cut 44) - Plate 5. Furrow 44 was 1.5m wide and 0.2m deep with a concave base and shallow sides. The furrow was filled by Deposit 42, a reddish brown silty clay with 1% charcoal flecks, and otherwise very clean and sterile. No finds were present in this deposit.

4.4 Finds summary

- 4.4.1 No finds were present in the evaluation trenches.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Reliability of field investigation

5.1.1 The trenches were excavated in reasonable conditions with good visibility. It is therefore felt that the recorded density and distribution of archaeological features provide a generally accurate representation of the evaluation area as a whole.

5.2 Evaluation objectives and results

5.2.1 The evaluation determined that the ridges and furrows which were visible in 1945 still exist as deeper furrows, below a made ground deposit resulting from the building of housing in the area before 1960 (Figures 2 and 3).

5.3 Interpretation

5.3.1 Evidence was found only for agricultural activity of likely medieval date across the site.

5.4 Significance

5.4.1 The evaluation demonstrates that evidence of ridge and furrow still exists below the made ground deposits dating from before 1960, and that the geological sequence would have been much shallower prior to this building work. No other archaeological remains were present on the site.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	N-S
The trench contained a faint trace of E-W ridge and furrow (noted only on trench sheet). The deposits consisted of topsoil, a made ground or levelling deposit and subsoil overlying the natural geology of silty clay.					Length (m)	10
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.7
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil: dark grey brown silty clay	-	-
2	Layer	-	0.36	Made ground / levelling deposit: light yellowish brown clay with patches of dark brown silty clay loam	-	-
3	Layer	-	0.16	Subsoil: reddish brown silty clay loam	-	-
4	Natural	-	-	Light yellowish brown silty clay	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
The trench contained two E-W aligned furrows. One furrow was recorded as a representative sample. The deposits consisted of topsoil, a made ground deposit and subsoil overlying the natural geology of silty clay.					Length (m)	20
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.8
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
20	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil: dark grey brown silty clay	-	-
21	Layer	-	0.2-0.4	Made ground: dark brown silty clay with patches of yellowish brown clay and reddish brown silty clay	-	-
22	Layer	-	0.2-0.15	Subsoil: dark reddish brown silty clay loam	-	-
23	Natural	-	-	Light yellowish brown clay with patches of reddish brown silty clay	-	-
24	Furrow	0.8-1.2	-	Furrows filled by 22	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
The trench contained One E-W aligned furrow disturbed by a later land drain. This was sample recorded. The deposits consisted of					Length (m)	10
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.6

topsoil, made ground and subsoil overlying the natural geology of silty clay.						
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
30	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil: dark greyish brown silty clay	-	-
31	Layer	-	0.3	Made ground: dark brown silty clay with patches of yellowish brown clay and reddish brown silty clay	-	-
32	Layer	-	0.1	Subsoil: dark reddish brown silty clay loam	-	-
33	Natural	-	-	Light yellowish brown silty clay	-	-
34	Furrow	1.4	0.12	Filled by 32	-	-

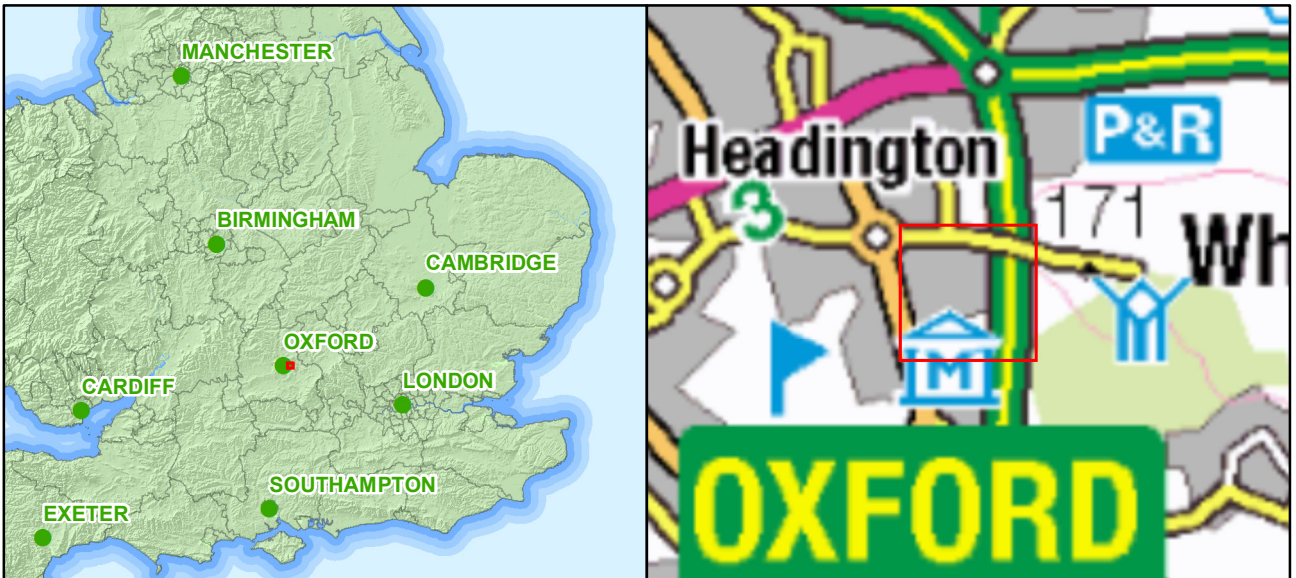
Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	N-S
The trench contained four E-W aligned furrows. One furrow was sample excavated. The deposits consisted of topsoil and subsoil overlying the natural geology of silty clay.					Length (m)	20
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.75
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
40	Layer	-	0.22	Topsoil: dark grey brown silty clay	-	-
41	Layer	-	0.52	Made ground / levelling deposit: light yellowish brown clay with patches of dark brown silty clay loam	-	-
42	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil: reddish brown silty clay loam	-	-
43	Natural	-	-	Light yellowish brown silty clay	-	-
44	Furrow	1.5	0.2+	Filled by 42	-	-

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

- | | | |
|--------------------|------|---|
| BGS | 2018 | Geology of Britain viewer
Http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html |
| CifA | 2014 | <i>Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation</i> ,
Chartered Institute for Archaeologists |
| Orion Heritage Ltd | 2018 | Land to the rear of Bracegirdle Road, Headington, Oxford
Archaeological Written Scheme of investigation |
| OCC | 2012 | Oxford City Council Urban Archaeological Research Agenda |
| Radford | 2018 | Oxford City Council Design and Heritage Team
Brief for Historic Building Recording and Archaeological Excavation.
Project: Playground Rear of 22-28 Bracegirdle Road, Oxford OX3 8RJ
Brief |

APPENDIX C SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	Land to the rear of Bracegirdle Road, Headington, Oxford
Site code:	OXBGID19
Grid Reference	455540/206043
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	Three days 4/02/19- 6/02/19
Area of Site	c 1091 m ²
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.
Summary of Results:	<p>The evaluation comprised four trenches (two x 10 m, one x 20m, one x 22 m). The trenches were located to investigate the areas impacted by a proposed residential development. The work was carried out over three working days between the 4th and 6th of February 2019.</p> <p>The results showed that the only features present were the remains of ridge and furrow cultivation, running east to west across the site. No other archaeological remains were found within the site.</p>



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Figure 1: Site location

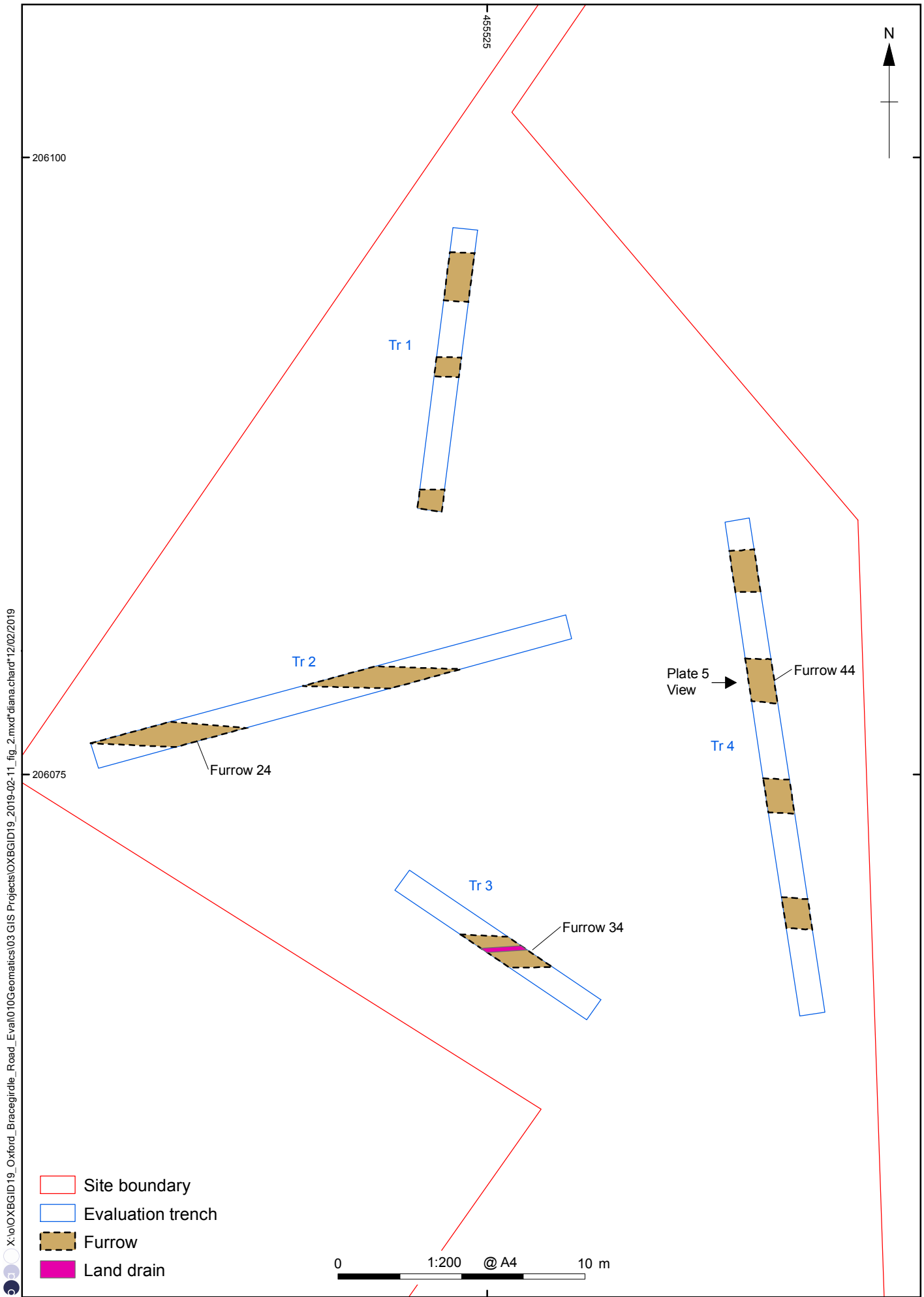


Figure 2: Trench locations

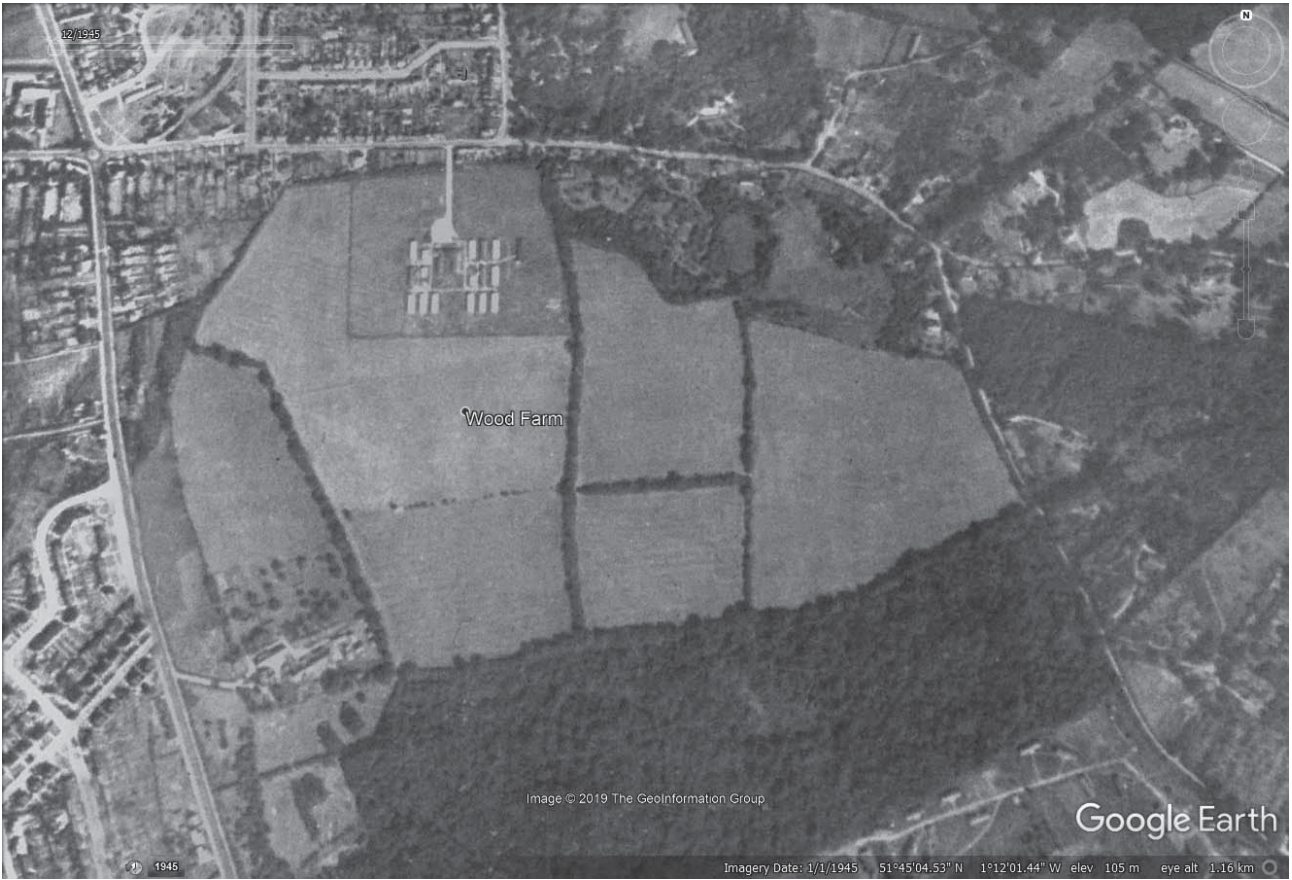


Figure 3: 1945 aerial photo showing east-west ridge and furrow



Plate 1: Trench 1 plan view



Plate 2: Trench 2 plan view



Plate 3: Trench 3 plan view



Plate 4: Trench 4 plan view



Plate 5: Trench 4 section 4



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