Land off the A5/A428 Junction 18 of the M1 Crick Northamptonshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Issue No: 1
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Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Land off the A5/A428, Junction 18 of the M1, Crick, Northamptonshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Written by Gerry Thacker

with contributions from John Cotter, Cynthia Poole and Julia Meen and illustrated by Markus Dylewski

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Summary

In April 2012 Oxford Archaeology carried out a trial trench evaluation at Land off the A5/A428, Junction 18 of the M1, Crick, Northamptonshire. The only archaeological feature of note was a pit containing charcoal and fired clay hearth or oven furniture of probable Iron Age or Romano British date. Undated features included a narrow ditch, a truncated posthole, and a burnt out tree root. Land drains of post medieval date were present in the majority of trenches, including one that had been inserted into a post medieval ditch.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) were commissioned by Stratus Environmental Ltd to undertake a trial trench evaluation on the site of a proposed lorry refuelling and sales unit.

1.1.2 The site is 1.625 hectares in area and consists of a triangle of land bordered to the north east by the modern line of the A5, to the south east by the A428 and to the south west by the historic line of the Roman Watling Street. The site is approximately 400 metres to the West of Junction 18 of the M1 and is centred on SP 5706 7304 (Fig. 1).

1.1.3 Daventry District Council has granted planning permission (09/0736/FUL) for a new commercial vehicle maintenance unit, offices, trailer parking for sale of trucks and trailers, access from the A5 with exit onto the A428 and sales office at Land off A5/A428, Junction 18 of M1, Crick, Northamptonshire.

1.1.4 A condition of the planning permission required a programme of archaeological work to be undertaken. The County Archaeological Advisor for Northamptonshire County Council issued a brief for the work (NCC 2012), and a geophysical survey followed by a targeted trial trench evaluation were requested.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The development is located within a Greenfield site. Topographically the site lies at around 105 m aOD, with the ground sloping down gently from the west to the east.

1.2.2 The underlying geology consists of alluvial clays and gravels with occasional outcrops of the underlying Charmouth Mudstone Formation.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The development site lies within an area of archaeological and historic significance, and a number of archaeological investigations have taken place within the vicinity, ranging from watching briefs through to full scale excavation. Investigations have taken place in DIRFT East at Covert Farm, the “Crick Hotel”, Long Dole to the north and The Lodge to the south. The investigations have been undertaken by the former Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, Northamptonshire Archaeology, Cotswold Archaeology and Foundations Archaeology.

1.3.2 A number of articles and reports have been produced covering the works within the area and these are held within the Northamptonshire HER. A number of the investigations, including the more recent ones, have not as yet been published. In summary the activity within the landscape is multi period ranging from possible Mesolithic, Neolithic and early Bronze Age, through to early, middle and late Iron Age.

1.3.3 The western boundary of the development lies directly adjacent to a particularly well preserved stretch of Watling Street, a major Roman Road. This part of Watling Street is of considerable importance as it is not overlain by the current line of the A5. Intact archaeological stratigraphy and upstanding Roman “agger” earthworks are preserved within this stretch.

1.3.4 A Saxon cemetery is recorded on the western edge of the development area.

1.3.5 A geophysical survey of the site (Stratascan, 2012) was commissioned by OA on behalf of Stratus Environmental Ltd and identified a low level of anomalies of possible archaeological origin (see Fig. 2).

1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 OA would like to thank David Baker of Stratus Environmental Ltd who commissioned the work, and Liz Mordue of Northamptonshire County Council who monitored the evaluation. The project was managed for OA by David Score and the field work was undertaken by Gerry Thacker assisted by Jane Smallridge and Ian Cook.

2 Evaluation Aims and Methodology

2.1 Aims

2.2 General

(i) To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive.

(ii) To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains

(iii) To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means.

(iv) To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains.

(v) To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy.

(vi) To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.

(vii) To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive.

(viii) To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.

(ix) To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

(x) To inform any requirements for further archaeological work.

(xi) To produce a report on the results.

2.3 Specific aims and objectives

2.3.1 The specific aims and objectives of the evaluation were:

(i) To target geophysical anomalies in order to test the results of the geophysical survey.

2.4 Methodology

2.4.1 Trench locations were agreed with Lesley-Ann Mather, the Northamptonshire County Archaeological Advisor. The trenches were laid out both to target the anomalies identified by the geophysical survey, and also provide a good general coverage of the site area.

2.4.2 The evaluation consisted of eight trenches, six of which measured 30 m by 1.6 m, one 10 m by 1.6 m and a further trench 25 m by 3.2 m (Fig. 2). This equated to slightly over a 2% sample of the development area.

2.4.3 The trenches were excavated in spits under close archaeological supervision by a JCB fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket. Potential archaeological features were then cleaned and excavated by hand, and recorded in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation for the evaluation (OA 2012).

2.4.4 Trenches 1 and 7 were moved slightly from their original locations to avoid ground water observation wells (see Appendix A for details).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 Individual trench details including sizes, orientations and depths of deposits are shown in the tables that form Appendix A. General stratigraphic data, ground conditions, the distribution of archaeological features and the descriptions of these are contained within the section below.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 All trenches were excavated through up to 0.25 m of topsoil which overlay a mid brown sandy clay subsoil of a similar depth, and which may have formed through the ploughing flat of ridge and furrow, although no extant remains of this were noted. Most trenches contained land drains, either of the 'horseshoe' shaped ceramic variety, or thin channels filled with dark angular gravels.

3.2.2 The subsoil overlay the natural geology which generally consisted of bright orange brown gravel rich clays with outcrops of blue-brown mudstone.

3.2.3 The trenches remained dry throughout the course of the evaluation.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits (Fig. 2)

3.3.1 Only Trenches 1, 5 and 7 contained archaeological features of potential antiquity: a small ditch within Trench 1, a possible posthole within Trench 7, both undated, and a pit of probable Iron Age or Roman date within Trench 5. All of these features were revealed on removal of the overlying subsoil. A burnt root bole within Trench 8 contained no cultural material, but was also sealed by subsoil.

3.3.2 Trench 1 also contained a drainage ditch which had a land drain inserted into the base prior to backfilling, and a shallow modern trench, probably dug by machine, both of which truncated the subsoil.

3.4 Trench 1

3.4.1 A small ditch (103, Fig. 2, section 100) ran in a NE-SW direction towards the NW end of the trench. The ditch had a steep sided profile with a slightly concave base, and a single fragment of iron nail shaft was recovered from the fill, although this was in poor condition and not datable (Ian Scott pers. com.). Immediately to the north a further ditch (106, Fig 2, section 101) on a similar alignment appeared to cut the subsoil (101), and had been backfilled with rubble after the insertion of a ceramic land drain into the base of the feature. A single pot sherd was recovered from the top of fill 107 and dated within the range 1780 to 1900 (see Appendix B1 below).

3.4.2 A further feature (105) to the south also truncated the subsoil, and was orientated ENE-WSW and rectangular in plan with a flat base and a width of 1.5 m. The feature was very shallow, and seems likely to have been excavated by a machine bucket.

3.5 Trench 5

3.5.1 A pit (506, Fig. 2, section 500) was only partially present within the confines of the trench, and may have been sub-square in plan with steep sides and a flat base that sloped up slightly to the south-west. The pit was sealed by subsoil layer 501 which contained fragments of probable ceramic land drain (see Appendix B2 below). The pit's lower fill (505) was a light yellowish grey sandy clay, and appeared to have slumped in

from the feature sides. The upper fill 504, was more charcoal rich, and contained a large number of both burnt and unburnt rounded stones of 20 mm to 150 mm diameter. After recording, an environmental sample was taken from the section (sample 1, Appendix C1 below), and fired clay from a piece of potential hearth or oven furniture recovered. This is likely to be of Iron Age or Romano British date (see Appendix B3 below).

3.6 Trench 7

3.6.1 A single possible posthole (703, Fig. 2, section 700) was present towards the centre of the trench, but was very shallow. The single fill (704), a dark brown sandy clay, was sealed by the subsoil (701), and contained no finds.

3.7 Trench 8

3.7.1 Trench 8 contained a single burnt root which is likely to have caused the geophysical response that the trench was targeted on. The root hole contained a charcoal rich fill, and was sealed by subsoil layer 801. The feature was fully hand excavated but no artefacts were present, and the feature not further recorded.

3.8 Finds summary

3.8.1 Finds were recovered from Trenches 1 and 5. Those from Trench 1 were a single sherd of post medieval pottery and a fragment of iron nail shaft, both from ditch fills. Within Trench 5 two fragments of ceramic building material from the subsoil are likely to derive from a land drain, and several fragments of fired clay from a pit fill are probably from hearth or oven furniture and may be of Iron Age or Romano British date. The finds reports form Appendix B below.

3.9 Environmental summary

3.9.1 A single environmental sample (sample 1) was taken from fill 504 (within pit 506, Trench 5). Charcoal was well preserved, but abraded, and a single non charred small seed is likely to be intrusive. Small fragments of fired clay recovered derive from the hearth or oven furniture already noted.

3.9.2 The sample demonstrates that charred plant material does have the potential to survive within the development area. The sample report forms Appendix C below.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 Ground conditions were good, and archaeological features were, where present, easy to identify with edge definition clear on excavation.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The evaluation identified the presence of archaeological remains within the footprints of the trenches, and determined the potential date range of these features, within the constraints of the stratigraphy and limited artefactual recovery. The degree of complexity of the stratigraphy was noted and the potential for the recovery of environmental evidence assessed.

4.2.2 The gradiometer geophysical survey identified positive anomalies which were interpreted as possible cut features of archaeological origin; probable ferrous objects; scattered magnetic debris and general magnetic disturbance associated with nearby metal objects, services or field boundaries.

4.2.3 There was a broad correlation between linear positive anomalies and land drains, although these did not always coincide. The circular anomaly within Trench 8 was shown to be a burnt out root, but similar anomalies plotted within the footprints of Trenches 3 and 4 were not present on the ground.

4.2.4 Of the two semi-circular areas of positive anomaly shown at the NE end of Trench 6, the easternmost coincided with a ceramic land drain. The magnetic disturbance at the southern end of Trench 1 generally coincided with a rubble farm track of modern date, that sat at the base of the topsoil.

4.2.5 Pit 506, within Trench 5 coincided with an area of scattered magnetic debris, but this may have been derived from material within the topsoil, rather than reflecting the burnt stone and charcoal within the pit.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 Given the proximity of the Roman road which bounds the site to the west, there was little evidence of activity during this period. Pit 506, with Trench 5 could date to the Roman period, or precede it, and ditch 103 (Trench 1) and posthole 704 (Trench 7) were undated, although the nail recovered from the ditch precludes an early prehistoric date. The other features uncovered, with the exception of the burnt root within Trench 8 (also sealed by subsoil), were associated with drainage and are of post medieval date.

Appendix A. Trench Descriptions and Context Inventory

Trench 1						
General description					**Orientation**	NW-SE
Trench contained two ditches and a modern machined intrusion. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of bright orange gravel and manganese rich clay. Trench moved *c.* 2m to the NE to avoid a ground water inspection well.					**Avg. depth (m)**	0.4
					Width (m)	3.2
					Length (m)	25
Contexts						
context no	**type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**comment**	**finds**	**date**
100	Layer	-	0.24	Topsoil	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.25	Subsoil	-	-
102	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
103	Cut	0.28	0.24	Ditch	-	-
104	Fill	0.28	0.24	Fill of 103	Iron nail	-
105	Cut	1.5	0.04	Machine dug feature	-	Modern
106	Cut	1.36	0.7	Ditch	-	1780-1900
107	Fill	1.36	0.7	Fill of 106	Pottery	1780-1900

Trench 2						
General description					**Orientation**	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of bright orange gravel, manganese rich clay and patches of mudstone.					**Avg. depth (m)**	0.45
					Width (m)	1.6
					Length (m)	30
Contexts						
context no	**type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**comment**	**finds**	**date**
200	Layer	-	0.25	Topsoil	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil	-	-
202	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					**Orientation**	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of mid orange brown clay with patches of gravels and mudstone.					**Avg. depth (m)**	0.46
					Width (m)	1.6
					Length (m)	30
Contexts						
context no	**type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**comment**	**finds**	**date**
300	Layer	-	0.24	Topsoil	-	-

301	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil	-	-
302	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 4						
General description					**Orientation**	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of orange brown gravels and manganese rich clay. Two potential linear features were investigated, but proved to be localised variations within the underlying geology.					**Avg. depth (m)**	0.48
					Width (m)	1.6
					Length (m)	30
Contexts						
context no	**type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**comment**	**finds**	**date**
400	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
401	Layer	-	0.28	Subsoil	-	-
402	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 5						
General description					**Orientation**	NE-SW
Trench contained a single pit of probable Iron Age or Roman date. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of orange brown gravel rich clay to the NE and mudstone to the SW.					**Avg. depth (m)**	0.42
					Width (m)	1.6
					Length (m)	30
Contexts						
context no	**type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**comment**	**finds**	**date**
500	Layer	-	0.22	Topsoil	-	-
501	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil	CBM	18th-20th century
502	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
503	Fill	0.68	0.24	Fill of 505	Fired clay	Iron Age or Roman
504	Fill	0.2	0.25	Fill of 505	-	-
505	Cut	0.75	0.25	Cut of pit	-	Iron Age or Roman

Trench 6						
General description					**Orientation**	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of root disturbed mid brown gravel rich clay.					**Avg. depth (m)**	0.51
					Width (m)	1.6
					Length (m)	30
Contexts						
context no	**type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**comment**	**finds**	**date**
601	Layer	-	0.23	Topsoil	-	-
602	Layer	-	0.28	Subsoil	-	-

603	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 7						
General description					**Orientation**	NE-SW
Trench contained a single possible posthole. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of mid brown gravel rich clay. Trench moved *c.* 7m to the SW to avoid a ground water inspection well.					**Avg. depth (m)**	0.45
					Width (m)	1.6
					Length (m)	30
Contexts						
context no	**type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**comment**	**finds**	**date**
700	Layer	-	0.23	Topsoil	-	-
701	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil	-	-
702	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
703	Cut	0.3	0.04	Cut of posthole	-	-
704	Fill	0.3	0.04	Fill of 703	-	-

Trench 8						
General description					**Orientation**	NE-SW
Trench contained a single undated burnt root bole. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of mid brown gravel and manganese rich clay.					**Avg. depth (m)**	0.47
					Width (m)	1.6
					Length (m)	10
Contexts						
context no	**type**	**Width (m)**	**Depth (m)**	**comment**	**finds**	**date**
800	Layer	-	0.23	Topsoil	-	-
801	Layer	-	0.24	Subsoil	-	-
802	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

APPENDIX B. FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

By John Cotter

B.1.1 A single sherd of pottery weighing 36 g was recovered from context 107, the fill of a ditch. The sherd is of post-medieval date, and given the small size of the assemblage a separate catalogue has not been constructed and instead the pottery is simply described and spot-dated below.

B.1.2 A plain rim sherd from a wide bowl or baking dish in Yellow ware. This mass-produced ware was manufactured at several locations in the Midlands including Staffordshire, Derbyshire and also Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire. Spot-date *c*. 1780-1900.

B.2 Ceramic building material

By John Cotter

B.2.1 Two pieces of ceramic building material weighing 55 g were recovered from a single context 501, a layer of subsoil. These have not been separately catalogued but are described below.

B.2.2 The two joining pieces are from a tightly curved tile or more likely a field drain in an off-cream or very pale brown fabric with red clay swirls. It is probably a Coal Measures clay. The piece has no original edges and exhibits wear on the broken ones. Spot-date late 18th to 20th century.

B.3 Fired clay

By Cynthia Poole

B.3.1 A small amount of fired clay amounting to ten fragments weighing 57 g was recovered from the upper fill of a small pit (pit 506, fill 504). Some of the pieces have been refitted and all appear to derive from a single object. It was made in a shelly clay fabric with sparse sand, though all the shell has been leached leaving only voids in the clay. The pieces form a flat plate or disc with flat even moulded surfaces, and fired to a light yellowish brown on one side and a dark greyish brown on the opposite face and core. One piece has a vertical curving edge in the order of 90mm diameter, though the plate may be oval rather than circular. It is 12-20mm thick, thinning to the edge, where it has been moulded into an acute lip with finger marks around the inner edge. This object probably served as a piece of oven or hearth furniture.

B.3.2 Fired clay can rarely be dated, though the general character of this piece would be consistent with an Iron Age - Roman date. Similar plates have been found on Middle-Late Iron Age and Roman sites at Great Barford in Bedfordshire (Poole 2007) and at Great Wittenham, Oxfordshire (Poole 2010). Small circular plates sometimes with lips are a typical element of assemblages in the east Midlands at this period.

APPENDIX C. ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS

C.1 Environmental samples

By Julia Meen

Introduction

C.1.1 A single environmental sample (Sample 1) was taken from context 504, the fill of an Iron Age or Romano British pit which was noted to contain burnt stone and to be rich in charcoal. The sample was taken for the recovery of charred plant remains (CPR) and any small artefacts. The sediment was was a yellowish brown (10YR 5/4) silty clay with some sand. Sub-rounded stones greater than 10mm in their longest dimension made up approximately 10% of the sediment, while a further 25% was comprised of sub-rounded ironstone fragments of a similar size.

Methodology

C.1.2 10 litres was processed for the recovery of CPR by water flotation using a modified Siraf style flotation machine. The flot was collected on a 250µm mesh and the heavy residues sieved to 500µm and dried in a heated room, after which the residues were sorted by eye for artefacts and ecofactual remains. The CPR flot was scanned for plant remains using a binocular microscope at approximately x15 magnification. Nomenclature for the plant remains follows Stace (2010).

Results

Charred Plant Remains

C.1.3 The sample produced a flot of approximately 60ml in volume. Charred plant remains were limited to charcoal, which was present in moderate quantity and with many fragments greater than 2 mm across their longest dimension and hence potentially identifiable. The charcoal was abraded and was encrusted with iron due to the iron stone-rich character of the sediment. A single, very small seed was found, although there is a possibility that this is a modern intrusion. Modern roots were common in this sample.

Finds

C.1.4 A small quantity of fired clay was recovered from sample 1. This, and much of the fine residue, was found to be slightly magnetic, although no evidence for metalworking was recovered and this magnetism is likely to be the result of the iron-rich soil.

Discussion and Recommendations

C.1.5 Although charred material was limited to charcoal in the single feature sampled, its presence demonstrates that charred plant remains do survive at this site, and it may be the case that further, richer deposits of charred material may be encountered with the excavation of any potential additional features.

C.1.6 If further excavation is undertaken at this site in the future, standard 40 L bulk samples should be taken from a range of potentially datable features across the site and should be in accordance with the most recent sampling guidelines (eg. Oxford Archaeology, 2005 and English Heritage, 2011).

APPENDIX D. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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APPENDIX E. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Land off A5/A428 Junction 18 of M1, Crick, Northamptonshire.

Site code: CRDI 12

Grid reference: SP 5706 7304.

Type: Evaluation

Date and duration: 10th to 12th April 2012

Area of site: 1.625 hectares

Summary of results: A pit which contained burnt stone and fired clay from hearth or oven furniture is likely to be of Iron Age or Roman date. A ditch, posthole and tree bole were undated. A ditch containing an inserted land drain contained a pot sherd of post medieval date.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the appropriate Northamptonshire Museum in due course, under an accession number to be confirmed.

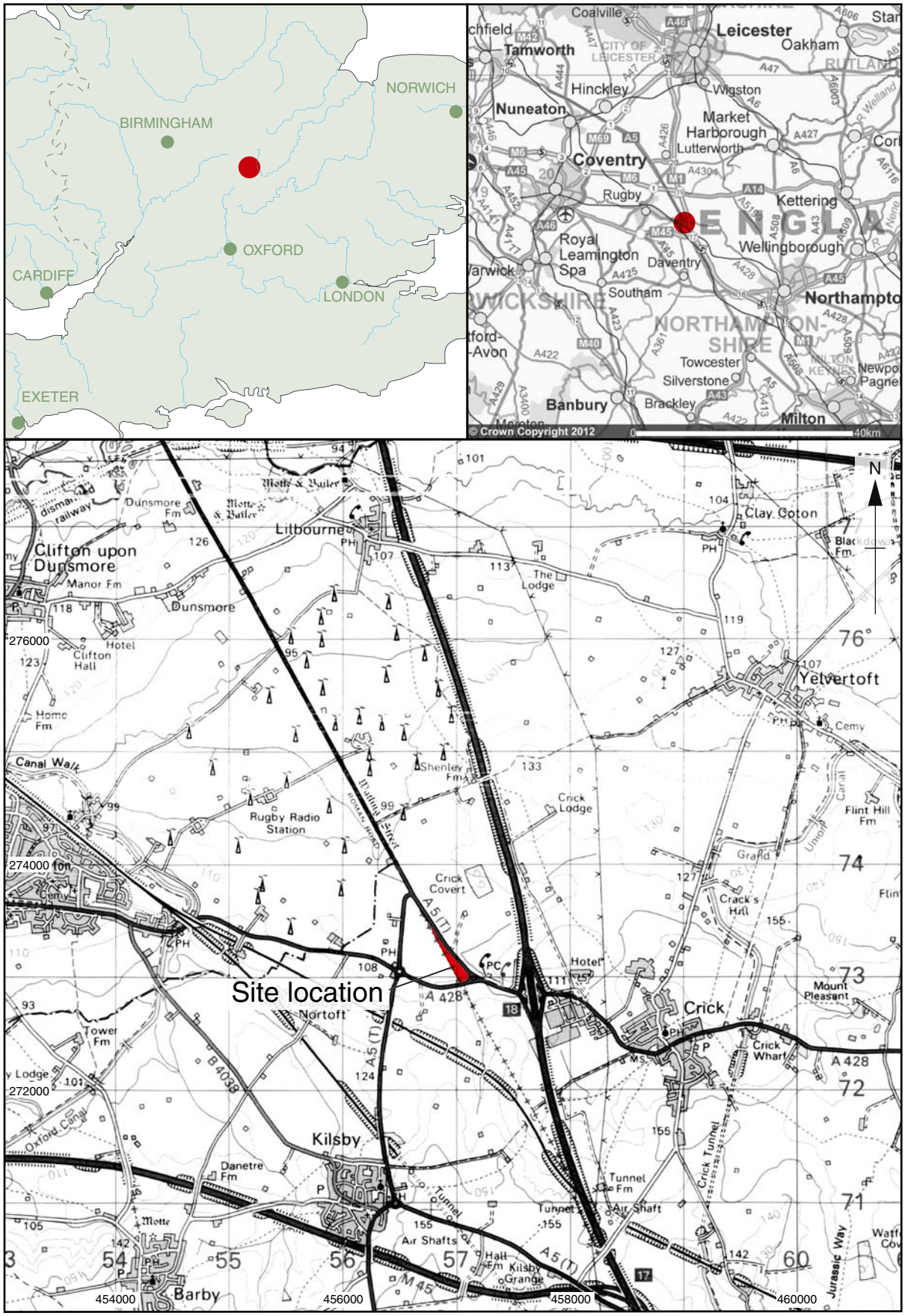
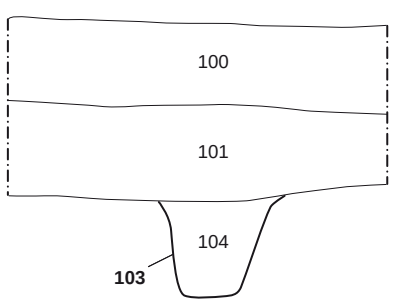


Figure 1: Site location

Section 100



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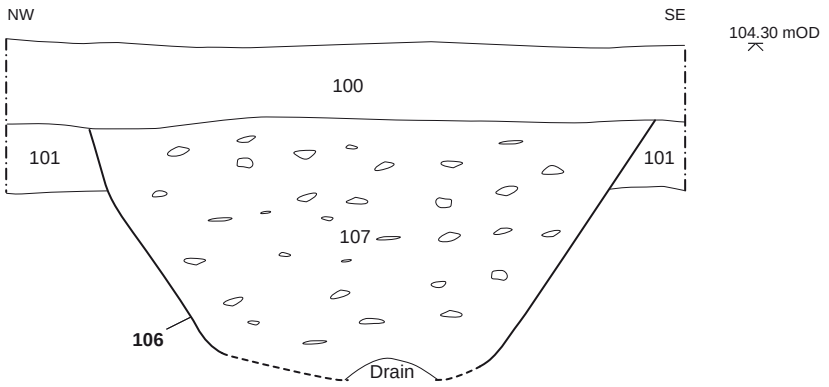

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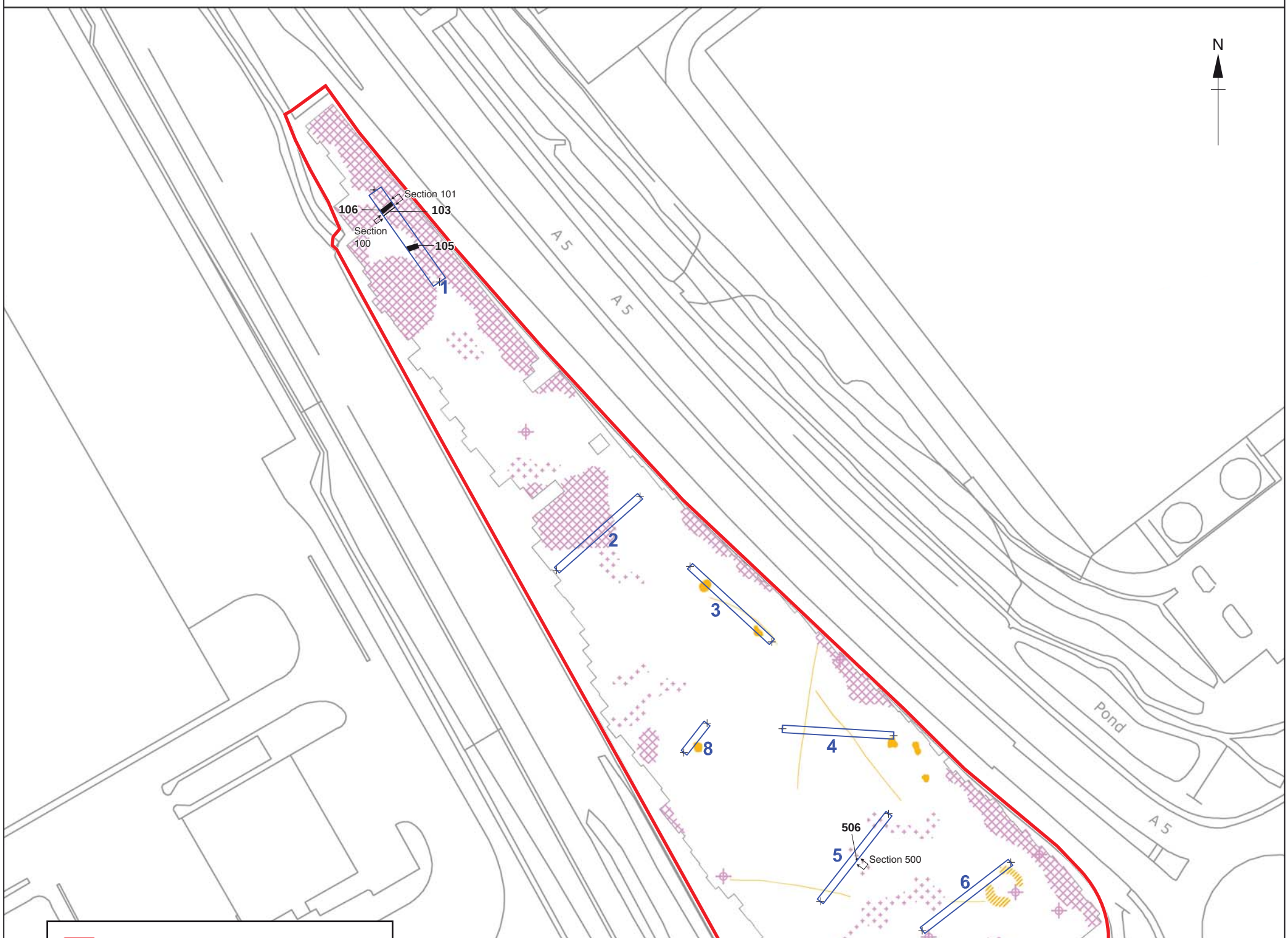

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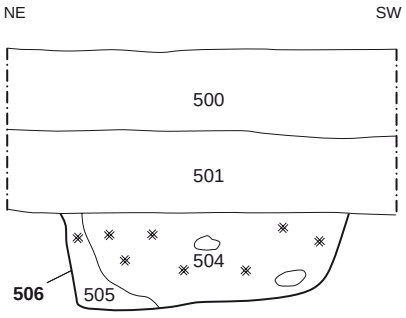

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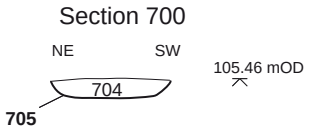

Figure 2: Trench locations, geophysical survey, archaeological features and sections

Plate 1: General view of site to south

Plate 2: Section 500, pit 506. View to south-east

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