

# Flood Alleviation Scheme Ascott-under- Wychwood Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



December 2009

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Issue No:1

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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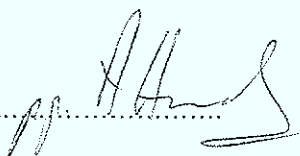
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**Flood Alleviation Scheme  
Rear of 36 Shipton Road,  
Ascott-under-Wychwood,  
Oxfordshire**

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT***

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Front cover: Excavation of the swale

## SUMMARY

*Between October and December 2009, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on land to the rear of 36 Shipton Road, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire (centred at NGR: SP 2965 1853). The work was commissioned by the Environment Agency in advance of the construction of a swale and two associated bunds. The watching brief revealed thick deposits of modern made ground directly overlying natural clay throughout the length of the route of the swale and a 19th-century trackway on the site of the southern bund. No other significant archaeology was observed.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between October and December 2009, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on land to the rear of 36 Shipton Road, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire (centred at NGR SP 2965 1853). The work was commissioned by the Environment Agency in respect of a proposed flood alleviation scheme consisting of the construction of a new swale (high level water channel) and two associated bunds (Planning reference 08/1511/P/FP).
- 1.1.2 Due to the potential presence of archaeological features a condition requiring that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the period of the groundworks was set by Hugh Coddington, the Deputy County Archaeological Officer of the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (OCAS). OCAS produced a design brief for the works (OCAS, 2009). This is in line with PPG16 and Policy BE13 of the local plan.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA, 2009).

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The village of Ascott-under-Wychwood is located 7 km south of the town of Chipping Norton (Fig. 1). The site is situated in fields on the southern bank of the River Evenlode at the south-western corner of the village. The northern edge of the site is bounded by the river with the southern and eastern edges bounded by gardens and paddocks backing onto properties running along Shipton Road. The western edge of the site is bounded by Gypsy Lane. The course of the proposed swale runs over undulating ground at a level of approximately 94 m above OD. The underlying geology within the river valley is alluvium over boulder clay changing to alluvium over first terrace gravel and lower lias clay as the ground rises towards the village (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no. 236).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was presented in the Design Brief for the project (OCAS, 2009) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 There is a small motte-and-bailey castle adjacent to the works. This is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 21806). The motte is largely built over but still survives as a pronounced mound 3.5 m high with a diameter of approximately 56 m. It has a flat summit and would have had a rampart round its edge. The bailey survives relatively intact and appears to be relatively well preserved. It is crescent shaped with its interior measuring approximately 70 m by 30 m. It is bounded by a rampart bank that is between 3 and 4.5 m in width and up to 1.7 m high. This is enclosed by a largely infilled ditch.
- 1.3.3 Limited excavation in 1956 revealed that the mound is built of lias clay with debris relating to the occupation including pottery, animal bones and burnt daub. Little further information was found. The site is known as Ascott Earl motte-and-bailey castle and is contemporary with the Ascott Earl castle at the north-east end of the village. The castle appears to date to the civil war between King Stephen and Mathilda (1138-1153).
- 1.3.4 Medieval pottery has also been found consistently around the area of the development. The 1956 excavations also revealed limited evidence of Iron Age and possible Anglo-Saxon activity and settlement.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the groundworks.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a series of site visits during those works likely to impinge upon archaeological deposits. These works included the topsoil strip of the two sites for the two bunds and the topsoil strip and excavation of a 1.3 m deep channel from a bend in the River Evenlode, east of Gypsy Lane, to a bend leading under a bridge carrying the Worcester to Oxford railway line.

- 2.2.2 The work was undertaken by a tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket.
- 2.2.3 A plan showing the extent of the excavations and the location of any sections was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations, recorded sections and features were photographed using digital photography and black-and-white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (OAU, 1992).

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Description of deposits

##### *Excavation for the swale*

- 3.1.1 This work involved the stripping of the topsoil over a 16 m wide strip for a length of approximately 100 m (Fig. 2) and the excavation of a gently sloping ditch, measuring up to 1.3 m in depth and spanning the full width of the stripped area.
- 3.1.2 The topsoil strip exposed a sequence of layers of modern made ground directly overlying the natural clay.
- 3.1.3 The underlying lias clay (5) was encountered at a depth of between 1 m and 1.1 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Sections 1 and 2). This was overlain by a layer of light grey-brown silt clay up to 0.3 m in depth (4). This deposit produced fragments of brick, concrete, tarmac and various modern iron objects including the flattened remains of an Austin A30 car. Overlying this was a 0.25 m – 0.3 m deep layer of grey-brown silt clay (3). This deposit contained quantities of concrete, angular brick fragments and lengths of iron piping suggesting that it also was of recent origin.
- 3.1.4 This was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of light brown silt clay (2). This deposit also contained concrete and brick fragments as well as broken salt-glazed sewer pipe, plastic sheeting and lengths of angle iron. Sealing this deposit was a 0.25 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay loam (1), a landscaping layer of redeposited topsoil.
- 3.1.5 At the southern end of the swale excavation the depth of made ground increased and the underlying natural clay was not exposed within the base of the cut (Fig. 3, Section 3).

##### *The northern bund*

- 3.1.6 This was sited between the north-eastern edge of the swale and the railway embankment (Fig. 2). The area measured approximately 25 m by 10 m and was stripped to a maximum depth of 0.25 m.



- 3.1.7 A continuation of the layer of made ground, (2), was exposed throughout the stripped area. This had been overlain with the modern landscaping layer of redeposited topsoil (1). No other features or deposits were observed.

### *The southern bund*

- 3.1.8 This was sited abutting the garden of The Barn House, adjacent to Gypsy Lane and measured approximately 30 m x 20 m (Fig. 2). The area was stripped to a maximum depth of 0.3 m.
- 3.1.9 A light grey-brown silt clay (8) was exposed within the base of the majority of the area. This deposit contained many small sub-angular fragments of oolitic limestone and probably represents a layer of colluvium.
- 3.1.10 A 3.8 m wide parallel sided band of small to medium sized angular oolitic limestone fragments (7) was observed running north-west to south-east parallel to Gypsy Lane (Fig. 2). Fragments of glazed earthenware and transfer printed pottery were recovered from within the make up of this feature suggesting a 19th- or early 20th-century date. Two large fragments of glazed bricks whose dimensions suggest an 18th-century date were also recovered but it is probable that these were residual bricks reused as hardcore. Overlying the track and the colluvium was a 0.25 m deep layer of dark brown clay loam (6), the present day topsoil and turf.

## 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Fragments of brick, concrete and plastic were observed within layers 2, 3 and 4. These were all dated to the 20th century and were evaluated on site, but were not retained. Creamware, glazed earthenware and transfer printed pottery were recovered from the trackway (7), together with glazed bricks. This material seems to be 19th century in date. Aside from the 18th-century glazed bricks noted within surface 7, no earlier dating evidence was recovered.

## 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for paleo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The stratigraphy observed during the course of the watching brief of the length of the swale showed that the area had been subject to a topsoil and probably a subsoil strip of unknown depth, prior to the deposition of the layers of made ground (Layers 1, 2, 3 and 4). The evidence for this conclusion is the lack of any buried topsoil or other worked soil horizons, between the layers of modern made ground and the underlying natural clay.

- 4.1.2 The depth of deposition of the modern made ground increased towards the south-west and the natural clay was only visible within the base of the swale cut for approximately 70 m of the 100 m total length. No truncated features were observed within the natural clay exposed. The stripping of the topsoil and the underlying subsoil is normal practise within the construction industry prior to the deposition of made ground, for example during the implementation of mitigation areas.
- 4.1.3 The trackway, (7), observed during the stripping for the southern bund is aligned north-west to south-east and if projected would align with the gap between The Barn House and Ascott Earl House to the south-east. It is probable that these two dwellings were originally part of a rectangular range of farm buildings around an enclosed farmyard and that this trackway originally led from the farm to the bridge over the River Evenlode to the north-west.
- 4.1.4 It is probable that neither the area of the swale or the area of the southern bund have been subject to ploughing because of the risk of flooding and have thus been pastoral in nature.
- 4.1.5 No features or deposits associated with the motte-and-bailey castle were observed, although the depth of excavation within the area of the southern bund was limited so that these would probably have been obscured by the subsoil (8), if present.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.25 m	-	Present day topsoil and turf	Brick, plastic	C20th
2	Layer	0.3 m	-	Modern made ground	Brick, concrete, plastic, iron	C20th
3	Layer	0.25 m	-	Modern made ground	Brick, concrete, iron	C20th
4	Layer	0.25 m	-	Modern made ground	Brick, concrete, tarmac	C20th
5	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
6	Layer	0.25 m	-	Present day topsoil and turf	Brick, pottery, bone	C19th/ C20th
7	Layer	0.25 m	3.8 m	Farm trackway	Brick, pottery	C19th
8	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Subsoil, possible colluvium	-	-

## APPENDIX 2 REFERENCES

OA, 2009 *Land to the rear of 36 Shipton Road, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)

BCAS, 2009 *Land to the rear of 36 Shipton Road, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire: Design Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Land to the rear of 36 Shipton Road, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** ASCUWW 09

**Grid reference:** Centred on SP 2965 1853

**Type of watching brief:** Machine excavation of a new high level water channel (swale) and the construction of two new bunds.

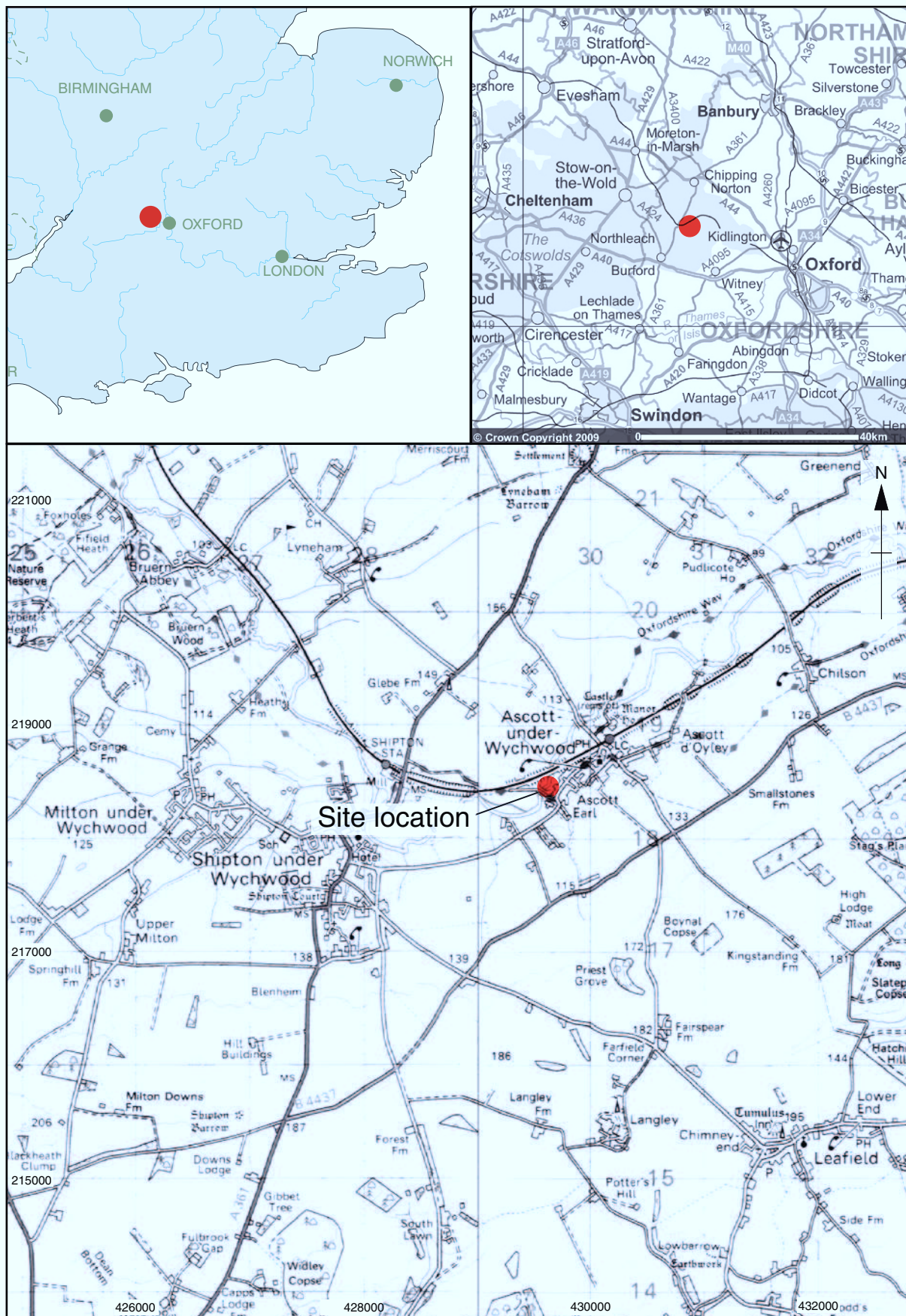
**Date and duration of project:** 9th October to 13th December 2009

**Area of site:** 6,000 m<sup>2</sup>

**Summary of results:** The watching brief observed thick deposits of modern made ground directly overlying the natural clay within the area of the swale and a C19th farm track at the south-western edge of the site. No earlier archaeology was observed.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2009.81





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Figure 1: Site location



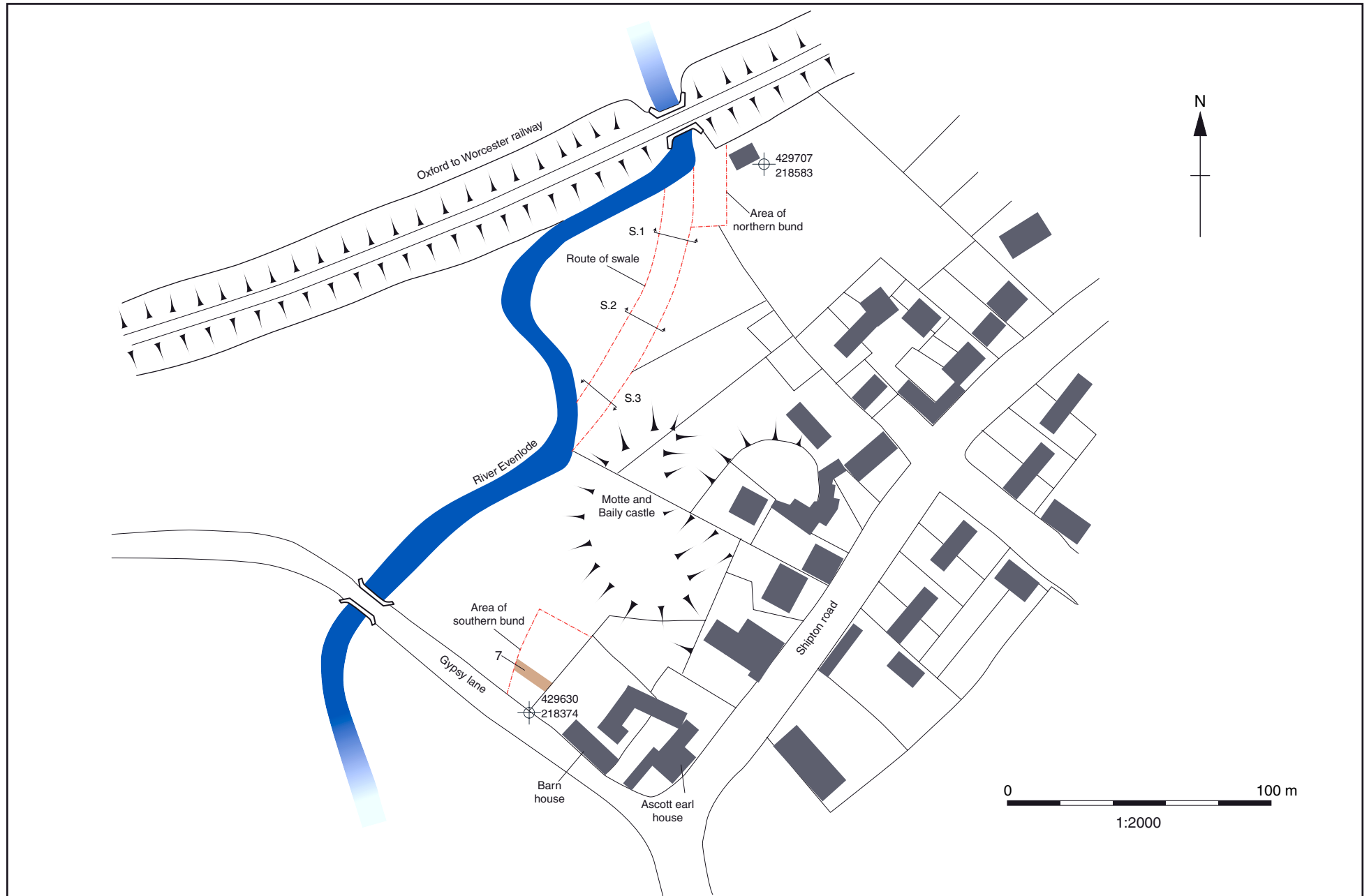


Figure 2: Site plan





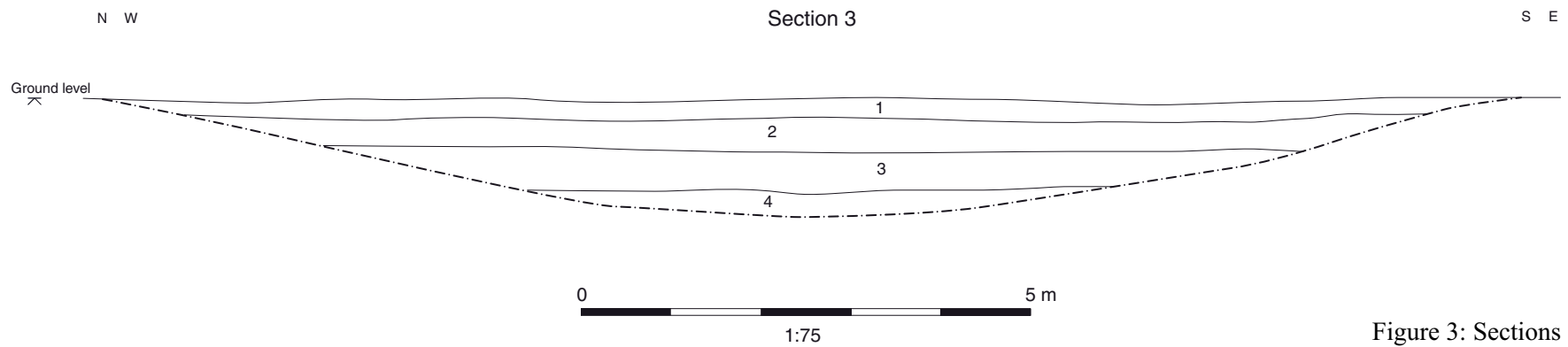
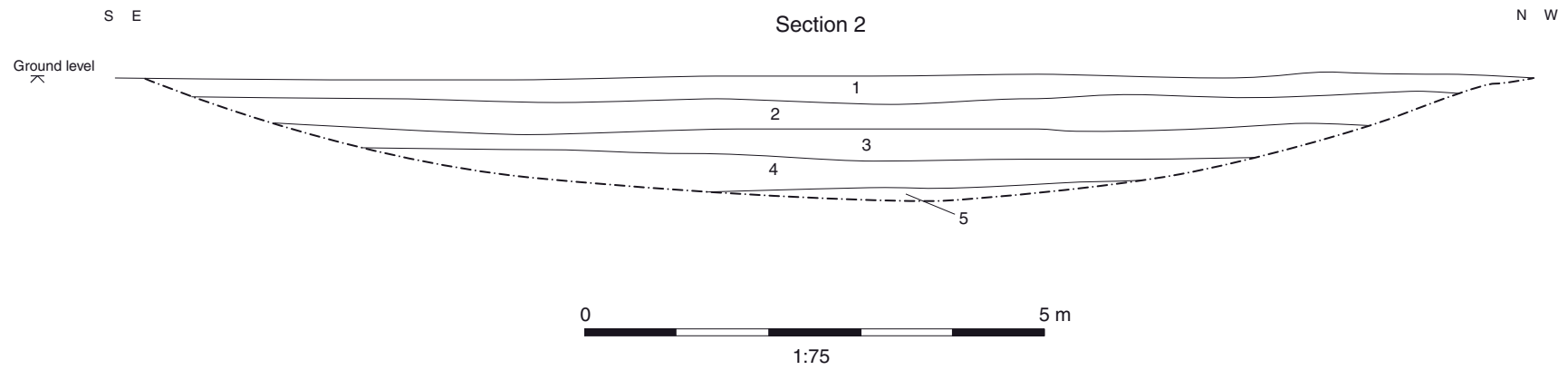
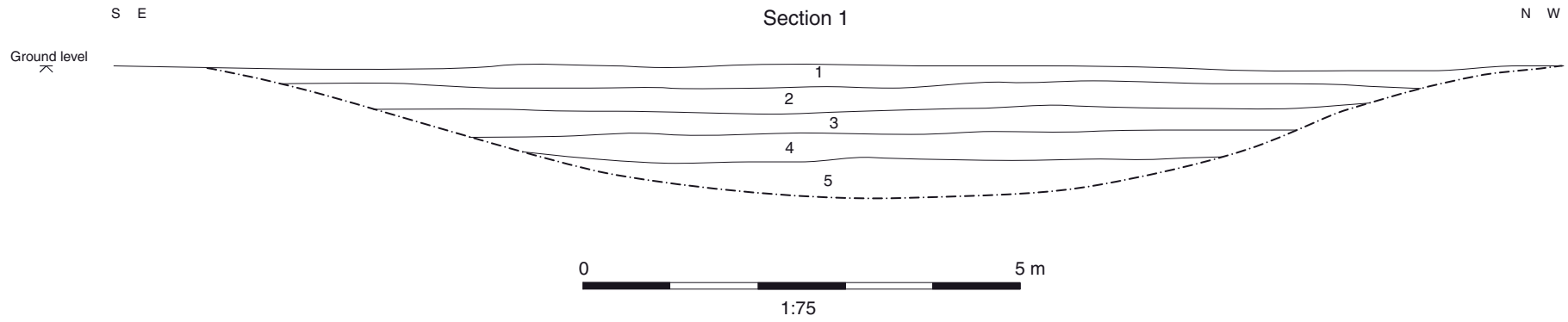


Figure 3: Sections 1, 2 and 3





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