

# Land adjacent to the River Clyst and Clyst St Mary Bridge, Comming's Marsh, Clyst St Mary, Devon

NGR SX97169109

Scheduled Monument No. 33035

Results of an archaeological watching brief

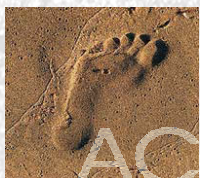
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Prepared by:  
Colin Wakeham

On behalf of:  
The Environment Agency

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archaeology

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# LAND ADJACENT TO THE RIVER CLYST AND CLYST ST MARY BRIDGE, COMMING'S MARSH, CLYST ST MARY, DEVON

NGR SX97169109

SCHEDULED MONUMENT NO. 33035

## RESULTS OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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## Summary

*An archaeological watching brief carried out during groundworks associated with flood embankment improvement works adjacent to the River Clyst and Clyst St Mary Bridge, at Comming's Marsh, Clyst St Mary (SX97169109), was undertaken by AC archaeology during January 2009. The bridge is a Scheduled Monument (no. 33035) and is first recorded in 1238.*

*The watching brief revealed largely negative results, although a modern pit was present adjacent to the bridge wall, on its south side. At the base of this pit natural alluvial gravels and clays were present, but no early finds or palaeoenvironmental remains were exposed.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological watching brief carried out during flood embankment improvement and repair works adjacent to the River Clyst and Clyst St Mary Bridge, at Comming's Marsh, Clyst St Mary, Devon, was undertaken by AC archaeology during January 2009. The work was commissioned by The Environment Agency and was required by English Heritage in support of scheduled monument consent and by East Devon District Council as a condition of planning permission (ref. 08/2375/FUL), as advised by Devon County Council Historic Environment Service (hereafter DCHES).
- 1.2 The parish of Clyst St Mary is situated to the south-east of Exeter. The River Clyst and a leat flow southwards between the village and the M5 motorway and are crossed by the historic Clyst St Mary causewayed bridge (now superseded by a modern road bridge to its south). The bridge crosses both water courses. The site lies at around 4m OD and the underlying natural layer sequence comprises alluvial sands, gravels and clays above Teignmouth Breccia.
- 1.3 By 2008, the flood embankments adjacent to the bridge had subsided by 0.5m and required improvement and repair. The works comprised stabilising the existing embankment sub-base and rebuilding using geotextile reinforced earth.

### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Clyst St Mary Bridge is a Scheduled Monument (no. 33035). It is first recorded in 1238 and originally carried the road between Sidmouth and Exeter across the River Clyst. It is considered to be the oldest surviving bridge in Devon outside Exeter and the surviving fabric contains at least four phases of construction and repair. The adjoining stone causeway across the floodplain is likely to be mid 14th-century in date.
- 2.2 Alongside the River Clyst a large number of prehistoric sites are recorded. These include scatters of worked flint from surface artefact collection (eg. DCHER refs. 14585, 14586, 10124 and 59851), as well as enclosures and ring ditches recorded from aerial photographs (eg. 28623, 28624, 38798 and 60789).

### **3. AIMS OF THE WORK**

**3.1** The aim of the watching brief was to record any archaeological deposits exposed during construction works, with particular reference to any new exposures of the bridge, evidence for any earlier crossings, prehistoric deposits and palaeoenvironmental remains.

### **4. METHODOLOGY**

**4.1** The watching brief was carried out in accordance with a method statement prepared by AC archaeology (Valentin 2008), which supplemented a Project Design previously prepared by the Environment Agency Archaeologist (Wilson 2008).

**4.2** The groundworks requiring monitored comprised:

- Excavation of the embankment adjacent to the bridge structure;
- excavations along the lower part of the existing floodbank; and,
- stripping of topsoil for the access ramp and compound area alongside the embankment.

**4.3** The site was recorded in accordance with the AC archaeology pro-forma recording system, comprising written, graphic and digital photographic records, and with reference to AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 1*. All plans and sections of excavated features were drawn at a scale of 1:20. An overall location plan has been prepared at a scale of 1:200.

### **5. RESULTS**

#### **5.1 Topsoil strip for new flood bank and compound area**

The area where monitoring was undertaken is annotated yellow on Fig. 2. The topsoil (context 1) was removed using a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket (Plate 1). The depth of the topsoil was generally 0.10m on the western side, increasing to 0.25m along the ridge itself and 0.35m on the eastern side. It consisted of light-mid brown soft friable silty clay.

Beneath the topsoil were loose-friable mottled yellowish-brown, grey and light orange-brown clays (context 2), as well as greyish-brown and light reddish-brown sand and gravel/angular stones (layer 3). These exposed layers are likely to be modern deposits associated with previous flood defence improvements, as fragments of wood and 20th-century concrete were present.

#### **5.2 Trench adjacent to Clyst St Mary Bridge**

A trench of approximately 2m x 2m was initially excavated to a depth of 2.58m from the top of the bridge parapet (2.07m OD) for a hand-placed clay brick wall to provide a seal between the bridge and flood defences. Most of the material removed was the layer 2 bank material, beneath which was a shallow layer (about 0.2-0.3m thickness) of mottled reddish-brown and greyish-brown silty clay (context 7). A shallow sub-circular pit was cut

through this layer (F4). This was 1.3m in diameter and 0.2m deep, with moderately sloping sides and a flat base. It was filled with a very dark greyish-brown soft sandy clay (context 5) and a small quantity of modern finds was recovered (see below).

What appeared to be alluvial gravels and clays (context 6) was exposed at the base of the pit. This consisted of friable to loose yellowish-brown sandy clay, containing river gravels with greyish brown clay patches. No further excavation was carried out through this deposit due to the exposure of a ceramic service pipe along the side of the bridge. The trench was partially backfilled to c. 2.26m OD to protect the pipe and no further excavation work was carried out.

### 5.3 Exposed facework of Clyst St Mary Bridge

The trench was excavated against the stone face of the bridge (Plate 2). This revealed further courses of Breccia stonework extending from road level to below 2.26m OD (position of the ceramic pipe).

## 6. THE FINDS

6.1 Only 20th century items such as steel wire, concrete paving, industrial whiteware pottery and brick were exposed during the topsoil stripping. These were not retained.

6.2 The finds from pit F4 are listed below in Table 1. These include one clear thin bevelled piece of glass (perhaps from a cabinet door) and a fragment of green bottle glass.

Table 1: Finds quantification (weight is in grams)

Context	Context description	Glass		Clinker		Fe nails		Oyster shell	
		No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.
5	Pit fill	2	4g	1	6g	3	27g	2	>1g
Totals		2	4g	1	6g	3	27g	2	>1g

## 7. COMMENTS

7.1 The ground reduction for the new floodbank and compound area was not of sufficient depth to expose any early features or deposits, with only modern (late 20th-century) layers exposed.

7.2 The pit revealed in the trench adjacent to the bridge wall (F4) also contained modern finds, although at the base of this (around 1.87m OD), the top of alluvial gravels and clays was present, but no early find or palaeoenvironmental remains were exposed. No further excavation into this deposit was undertaken.

7.3 The stonework of Clyst St Mary Bridge which was revealed by the trench was a continuation of courses which were already exposed either side of the bank. No evidence for phasing or repair was evident.

## **8. ARCHIVE AND OASIS**

- 8.1** The paper and digital archive and finds are currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, in 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, Nr Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. They will be deposited at Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, under the accession number 5/2009.
- 8.2** The OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS) reference for this project is 63256.

## **9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 9.1** The watching brief was commissioned by The Environment Agency. The fieldwork was carried out by Colin Wakeham and the illustrations for this report were prepared by Sarah Cottam.

## **10. SOURCES CONSULTED**

English Heritage Record of Scheduled Monuments: National Monument No. 33035.  
Valentin, J., 2008, *Land at Comming's Marsh, Clyst St Mary, Devon: Method statement for an archaeological watching brief*. AC archaeology document, ref. ACD36/1/0  
Wilson, E., 2008, *Project Design for archaeological observation at Clyst St Mary flood defence scheme, Devon*. Environment Agency document.

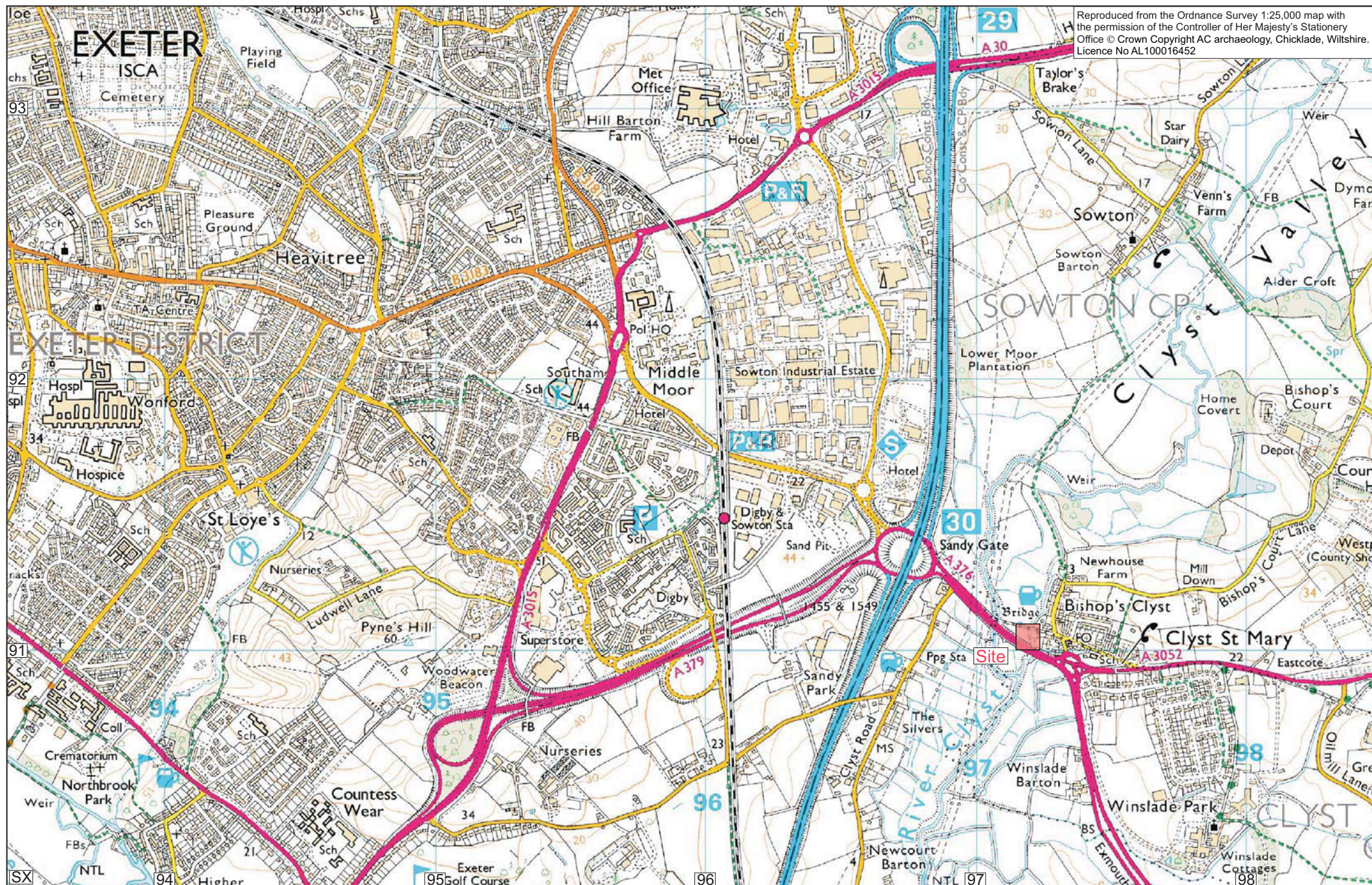


Fig. 1: Site location

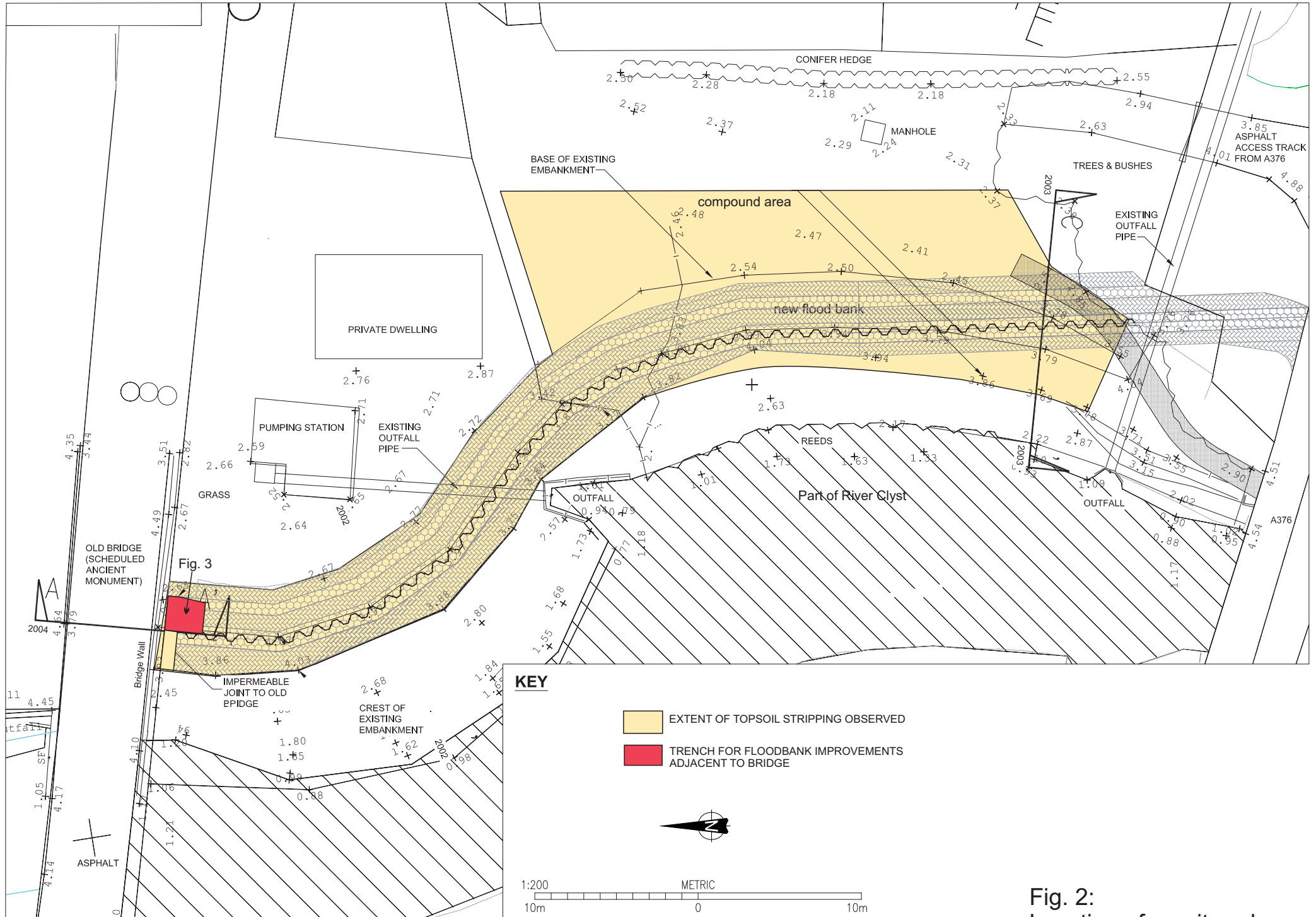


Fig. 2:  
Location of monitored areas



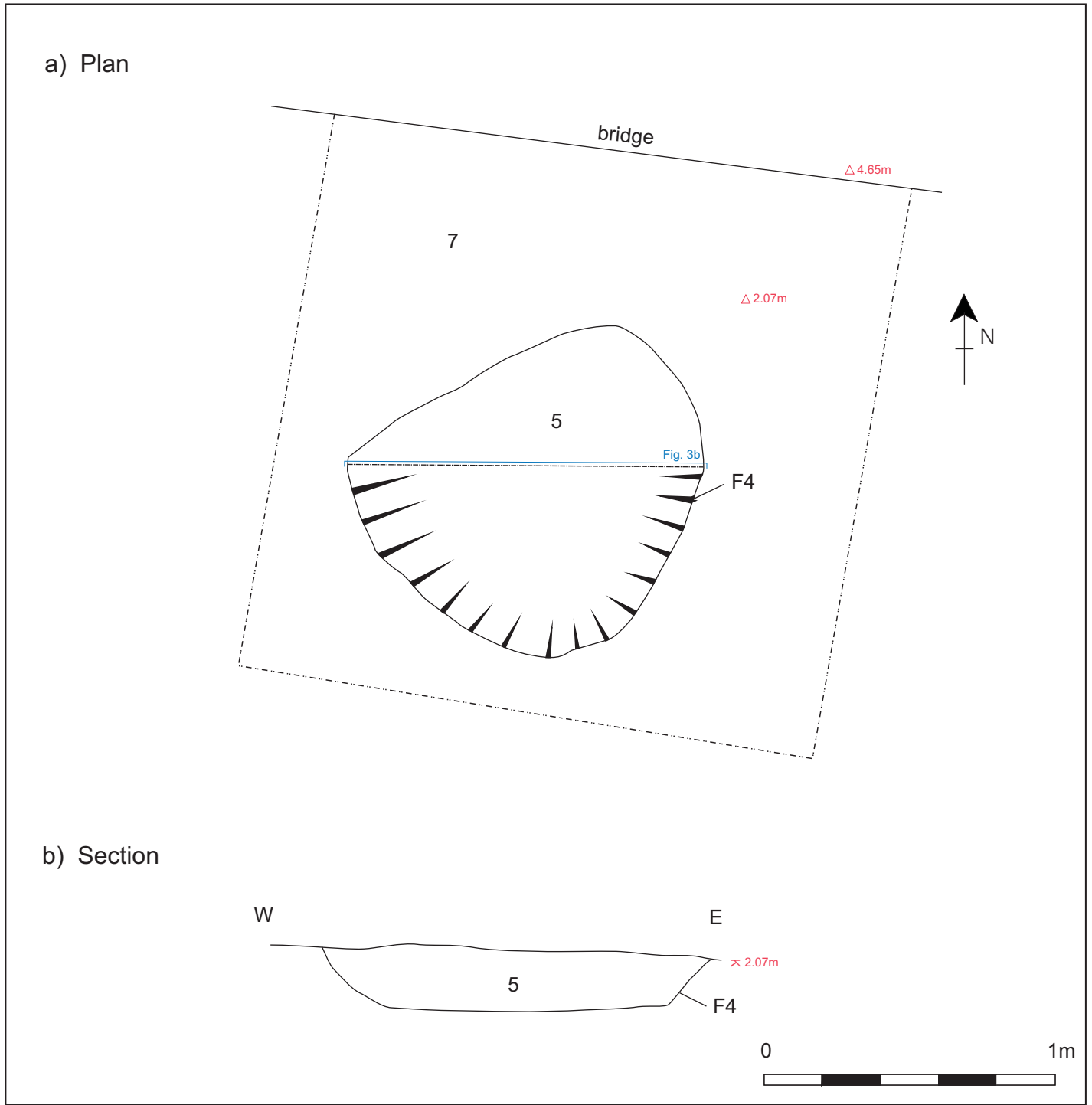


Fig. 3: Plan and section, Pit F4



Plate 1: Topsoil stripping of bank in progress. View to south



Plate 2: Trench adjacent to the bridge. View to north

### Wiltshire Office

AC archaeology Ltd  
Manor Farm Stables  
Chicklade  
Hindon  
Nr Salisbury  
Wiltshire  
SP3 5SU

Telephone: 01747 820581  
Fax: 01747 820440

### Devon Office

AC archaeology Ltd  
Unit 4, Halthaies Workshops  
Bradninch  
Nr Exeter  
Devon  
EX5 4LQ

Telephone/Fax: 01392 882410

[www.acarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.acarchaeology.co.uk)