

Archaeological Watching Brief at Tewkesbury Nature Reserve, Priors Park, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire

Worcestershire Archaeology
for the Environment Agency

December 2019



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TEWKESBURY NATURE RESERVE, PRIORS PARK, TEWKESBURY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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SITE INFORMATION

Site name: Tewkesbury Nature Reserve
Local planning authority: Tewkesbury Borough Council
Planning reference: n/a
Central NGR: SO 89900 32190
Commissioning client: Environment Agency
Client project reference: -
WA project number: P5671
WA report number: 2735
HER reference: -
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Museum accession number: -

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Version	Date	Author	Details	Approved by
1	04/12/2019	Graham Arnold	Draft for comment	Tom Vaughan

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An archaeological watching brief at Tewkesbury Nature Reserve, Priors Park, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire

By **Graham Arnold**

With contributions by Rob Hedge

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Tewkesbury Nature Reserve, Priors Park, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire (NGR SO 89900 32190). It was commissioned by the Environment Agency on behalf of the Tewkesbury Naturalists Club, in association with proposed wet grassland enhancement, which involved intrusive groundworks.

The archaeological advisor to Tewkesbury Borough Council considered that the development had the potential to impact upon specific heritage assets, particularly related to the Registered Battlefield of Tewkesbury. An archaeological watching brief was carried out as best practice as requested by the advisor.

Previous archaeological work within the nature reserve has identified evidence of prehistoric and Roman activity, as well as evidence of medieval agriculture. In the last phase of investigations, the main find was an iron axe-head, thought to be associated with the Battle of Tewkesbury in 1471. The axe-head has been identified as a 'type 4b' bearded axe common to the later medieval period. Primarily a utilitarian tool, the example recovered showed some evidence of expedient adaption, possibly for combat.

The present works involved monitoring a series of swales and shallow ponds to create a wetland environment and improve the habitat for wildlife diversity. A tractor towing a rotary ditcher created shallow linear scrapes up to 3m wide and 0.50m deep

The topsoil, subsoil and natural substrate deposits were observed within all of the observed areas. No archaeological features or deposits were revealed. A collection of metalwork and some Roman pottery was recovered from the topsoil spoil. The Roman pottery is considered to be associated with nearby settlement to the south-east of the site and is consistent with material incorporated into agricultural soils through processes such as manuring. Iron debris is considered to be of later post-medieval and modern date. The lead seal and post-medieval coins are considered to be chance losses. None of the finds from this phase of works are considered likely to relate to the 1471 Battle of Tewkesbury.

Report

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) in August 2019 at Tewkesbury Nature Reserve, Priors Park, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire (NGR SO 89900 32190). This comprised observation of intrusive groundworks for a number of swales across the area. The project was commissioned by the Environment Agency on behalf of the Tewkesbury Naturalists Club, in advance of proposed wet grassland enhancement.

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken on the recommendation of the Archaeologist for Gloucestershire County Council, the archaeological advisor to Tewkesbury Borough Council, who considered that the development had the potential to impact upon specific heritage assets, particularly related to the Registered Battlefield of Tewkesbury (1471; NHLE 1000039; HER 5529; English Heritage 1995).

No brief was provided but the project conforms to the generality of briefs issued in the area. A written scheme of investigation (WSI) was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2019) and approved by the advisor. The watching brief also conforms to the industry guidelines and standards set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in the *Standard and guidance: for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014a).

1.2 Site location, topography and geology

The site was located approximately 500m south-east of the historic core of Tewkesbury, and due west of the A38 eastern relief road. It comprised two fields of open grassland, approximately 7.5ha in area, on the flood plain of the River Swilgate, which lies 60m to the west. The River Swilgate is a tributary of the River Avon and flows south around the town. The River Avon joins the River Severn at Tewkesbury and so the site sits within a wider landscape dominated by watercourses.

The site is bounded to the north and south by hedgerows, whilst the A38 makes up the eastern boundary. The field is generally flat, at between 11m and 13m above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The site is a pasture field, although in recent years it has been the focus of landscaping works associated with the formation of the nature reserve, of which this project is the latest phase. Previous groundworks have included landscaping in the field to the south and the instalment of a reed-bed.

The underlying geology comprises bedrock of Saltford Shale member, a mudstone formed in the Triassic and Jurassic periods. No superficial deposits are recorded to overlay the site itself, though this changes to the west towards the River Swilgate where superficial deposits comprising alluvial clays are recorded (BGS 2019).

2 Archaeological and historical background

2.1 Introduction

This stage of works was preceded by a watching brief undertaken by WA of groundworks in the field to the south in October 2018. The background below is based on that presented in the previous report (Wilkins 2019).

An archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) of the site was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology, on behalf of the Environment Agency (CA 2013). The study site for the DBA covered all areas of the nature reserve, comprising 20 parcels of land flanking a c 1.7km stretch of the River Swilgate. The summary of the findings, presented below, will focus on the areas directly associated with the study site of this particular phase.

2.2 Prehistoric

Excavations associated with the eastern relief road (A38) identified an early to middle Bronze Age settlement c 40m east of site. The site comprised a 'D' shaped enclosure and associated pit groups. Further excavations, c 220m east, revealed a possible middle Bronze Age 'casting' or metal-working site, with finds including mould fragments consistent with those used for forging channel-bladed spearheads (Walker *et al* 2004).

Within the field immediately south, lithics dating to the Neolithic and Bronze Age, including a leaf-shaped arrowhead, were recovered c 60m south-east of the 2018 investigation area (*ibid* 2004; Wilkins 2019).

2.3 Roman

Two comprehensive Romano-British settlement sites have been identified within the vicinity of the site. The sites were also excavated in preparation for works associated with the eastern relief road. The larger settlement was located c 130m south of this phase in the adjoining field. This comprised a complex series of enclosures which appeared to span from the 1st to 4th centuries AD. Domestic features included roundhouses and pit clusters.

Approximately 40m east of site, an additional Romano-British settlement was excavated as part of the same works. The settlement comprised a 'D' shaped enclosure, a trackway, a roundhouse and pit clusters, occupied primarily in the 2nd century AD and abandoned in the early 3rd century AD.

2.4 Medieval

Medieval activity is largely confined to the west of the site, across the River Swilgate, and closer to the historic core of Tewkesbury to the north-west. The site is considered to have been part of the agricultural hinterland surrounding the town at this period, as indicated by the presence of water meadow ditches identified east of the site, across the A38.

The site lies just outside the Registered site of the Battle of Tewkesbury (NHLE 1000039; HER 5529; English Heritage 1995), the eastern boundary of which comprises the River Swilgate. The battle took place on the 4 May 1471 and represented a significant victory for the Yorkist army over the Lancastrians in the War of the Roses, leading to 14 years of peace.

There is some uncertainty over the battlefield site itself, although the most likely area of the pitched battle is considered to be the Gastons and the fields immediately south and west of there. Archaeological evidence of the battle within the registered area is expected to comprise weaponry, ammunition, and personal effects, although these may also be present in surrounding fields as they would have been discarded during the rout. There is also the potential for mass graves, dug in the aftermath of the battle, within both the registered battlefield and surrounding areas.

2.5 Previous archaeological work on the site

This project represents the latest of a series of works associated with the enhancement of the nature reserve along the River Swilgate. Most recently, in October 2018, an archaeological watching brief was carried out on groundworks to the south of the present project. No significant archaeological features or deposits were identified within the groundworks monitored, although a residual sherd of Severn Valley Ware pottery reflects the background Roman activity recorded within the wider landscape and may be associated with the settlement to the south-east.

The character of the site is defined by one significant find comprising an iron axe-head, thought to be associated with the Battle of Tewkesbury. The axe-head has been identified as a 'type 4b' bearded axe common to the later medieval period. Primarily a utilitarian tool, the example recovered in this project show some evidence of expedient adaption, possibly for combat.

The location of the axe, within the south of the site and c 50m east of the Registered Battlefield, appears to correlate with the rout of the Lancastrian forces. The eastern flank of the Lancastrians was

protected by the River Swilgate, and it is documented that much of the army fled the battlefield across the river.

If the axe-head is indeed an artefact directly associated with the Battle of Tewkesbury, then it represents an interesting find of local significance. It also appears to be a find of some rarity, and further highlights the archaeological potential of those areas immediately surrounding, but outside the boundaries of the Registered Battlefield.

Earlier archaeological investigations associated with this project comprised test pitting, trial trenching and watching briefs (CA 2017). Despite the archaeological potential, highlighted above, those investigations did not identify any significant archaeological deposits or features. Additionally, the metal detecting methodology did not recover any metal artefacts earlier than modern in date.

3 Project aims

The aims of the watching brief are to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible within the constraints of the Client's groundworks.

4 Project methodology

A WSI was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2019). Fieldwork was undertaken between 26 and 30 August 2019.

A series of eight drainage swales and shallow ponds were excavated across the site, to create a wetland environment and to improve the habitat for wildlife. The site covered an area of 7.5 hectares. The swales were individually numbered and the location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed under constant archaeological supervision using a tractor pulling a rotary ditcher (RSPB 2019). The rotary ditcher is a specialist machine used widely for the creation and restoration of wetland habitats. The ditcher is typically used to create foot drains – shallow linear scrapes up to 3m wide and 0.50m deep. This removes the turf and topsoil with a blade and deposits the spoil to the side as it moves along.

Observation of excavated areas was undertaken during and after machine excavation. The exposed surfaces were generally sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits.

Topsoil and subsoil spoil removed during the works was scanned with a metal detector, set to all-metal mode. The excavated areas were also scanned once the maximum depth was reached.

Any artefacts of archaeological importance were individually bagged and 3D located. Any modern or 'junk' finds from the same context were bagged together and used to provide an indicator of the background noise associated with the specific deposits.

Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012) and small finds, trench and feature locations were surveyed using a differential GPS with an accuracy limit set at <0.04m.

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was undertaken through a combination of structural and artefactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology. Subject to the agreement of the landowner it is anticipated that it will be deposited at Tewkesbury Museum.

5 Archaeological results

5.1 Trench descriptions

No archaeological features were identified within the groundworks monitored. Only topsoil, subsoil and natural deposits were observed. The excavation areas are shown in Figure 2 and Plates 1-7. Finds were recovered from the spoil removed during the works. Find spots and specific finds recovered are shown in Figure 3 and Plate 8.

Context	Brief description	Max depth (m)	Depth from ground surface (m)	Comments
100	Topsoil	0.24	0.00	Friable, dark grey brown clayey silt with turf and moderate metalworks, clay pipe and porcelain and brick fragments. From 19 th Century manure spreading on site. Ceramic finds not retained. rubble and sub-round stones.
101	Subsoil	0.12+	0.18	Firm mid brownish yellow silty clay
102	Natural substrate	0.20+	0.30	Firm orangey yellow clay with moderate angular limestone and siltstone inclusions. Some variation with areas of blue and yellow clay mottling. Gleying of natural in marshy areas.

Table 1: Summary of context descriptions for all swales

6 Artefactual evidence by Rob Hedge

The artefact report conforms to standards and guidance issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014b), as well as further guidance on pottery analysis, archive creation and museum deposition created by various pottery study groups (PCRG/SGRP/MPRG 2016), the Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF 2011), and the Society of Museum Archaeologists (SMA 1993)

Recovery of artefacts was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). All of the recorded small finds and 'junk' metalwork were recovered from the topsoil spoil to the side of the swales rather than recorded from the alluvial or natural substrates.

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. Archaeologically significant finds were identified, quantified and dated to period.

The pottery was examined under x20 magnification and referenced according to the fabric reference series maintained by Worcestershire Archaeology (Hurst and Rees 1992; WAAS 2017).

Artefacts from topsoil and subsoil and unstratified contexts will normally be noted but not retained, unless they are of intrinsic interest (e.g. worked flint or flint debitage, featured pottery sherds, and other potential 'registered artefacts'). Large assemblages of post-medieval or modern material, unless there is some special reason to retain (such as local production), may be noted and not retained, or, if appropriate, a representative sample will be retained. Discard of finds from post-medieval and earlier deposits will only be instituted with reference to museum collection policy and/or with agreement of the local museum.

6.1 Metalwork and retained pottery

A quantity of metalwork was recovered from topsoil deposits using a metal detector. This largely comprised iron fragments of post-medieval or modern date, including: cut nails; machine-made nails; screws; chain links; nuts and bolts; washers; barbed wire; and fragments of agricultural machinery. Several later post-medieval button fragments and a piece of scrap lead were also present. This material was examined but has not been quantified.

Finds of note included:

- **SF1** A copper alloy 1799 George III halfpenny, in poor condition;
- **SF2** A copper alloy 1889 Victoria penny, worn but in fair condition;
- **SF3** A badly-corroded lead disc, 16.5mm in diameter and 7.3g in weight. Faint remnants of a cross-like design are visible on one surface, and on one side there is a scar, possibly marking a missing connecting strip. It is considered likely to be part of a post-medieval seal, possibly a cloth seal.
- Three sherds of Roman pottery: two (3.6g) small body sherds of mid-1st to 4th century oxidised Severn Valley Ware (fabric 12), and one larger (32.7g) but abraded body sherd of oxidised organic-tempered Severn Valley Ware (fabric 12.2). The latter is most commonly found within assemblages of mid-1st to 2nd century date.

7 Environmental evidence

Environmental sampling was approached following standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event, no deposits were identified which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

8 Discussion and conclusions

The topsoil, subsoil and natural substrate deposits were observed within all of the excavated areas. No significant archaeological features, layers, structures, horizons or deposits were revealed. An assemblage of metalwork and some Roman pottery was recovered from the topsoil spoil. The Roman pottery is considered to be associated with the nearby settlement to the south and east of the site and is consistent with material incorporated into agricultural soils through processes such as manuring. Iron debris is considered to be of later post-medieval and modern date. The lead seal and post-medieval coins are considered to be chance losses. None of the finds from this phase of works are considered likely to relate to the 1471 Battle of Tewkesbury.

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Conditions were suitable in all of the areas to identify the presence or absence of archaeological features. It is considered that the nature, density and distribution of archaeological features provides an accurate characterisation of the development site as a whole. This is due to the limited impact depth of the intrusive groundworks in this project.

9 Project personnel

The fieldwork was led by Jamie Wilkins, assisted by Graham Arnold, PCIfA.

The project was managed by Tom Vaughan, MCIfA. The report was produced and collated by Graham Arnold, with assistance from Jamie Wilkins. Specialist contributions and individual sections of the report are attributed to the relevant authors throughout the text.

10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for the successful conclusion of the project: Cathy Beeching, (Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology, Environment Agency), Chris Baker and Dan Doyley (RC Baker Ltd Agricultural Contractors) and Charles Parry (Archaeologist, Gloucestershire County Council).

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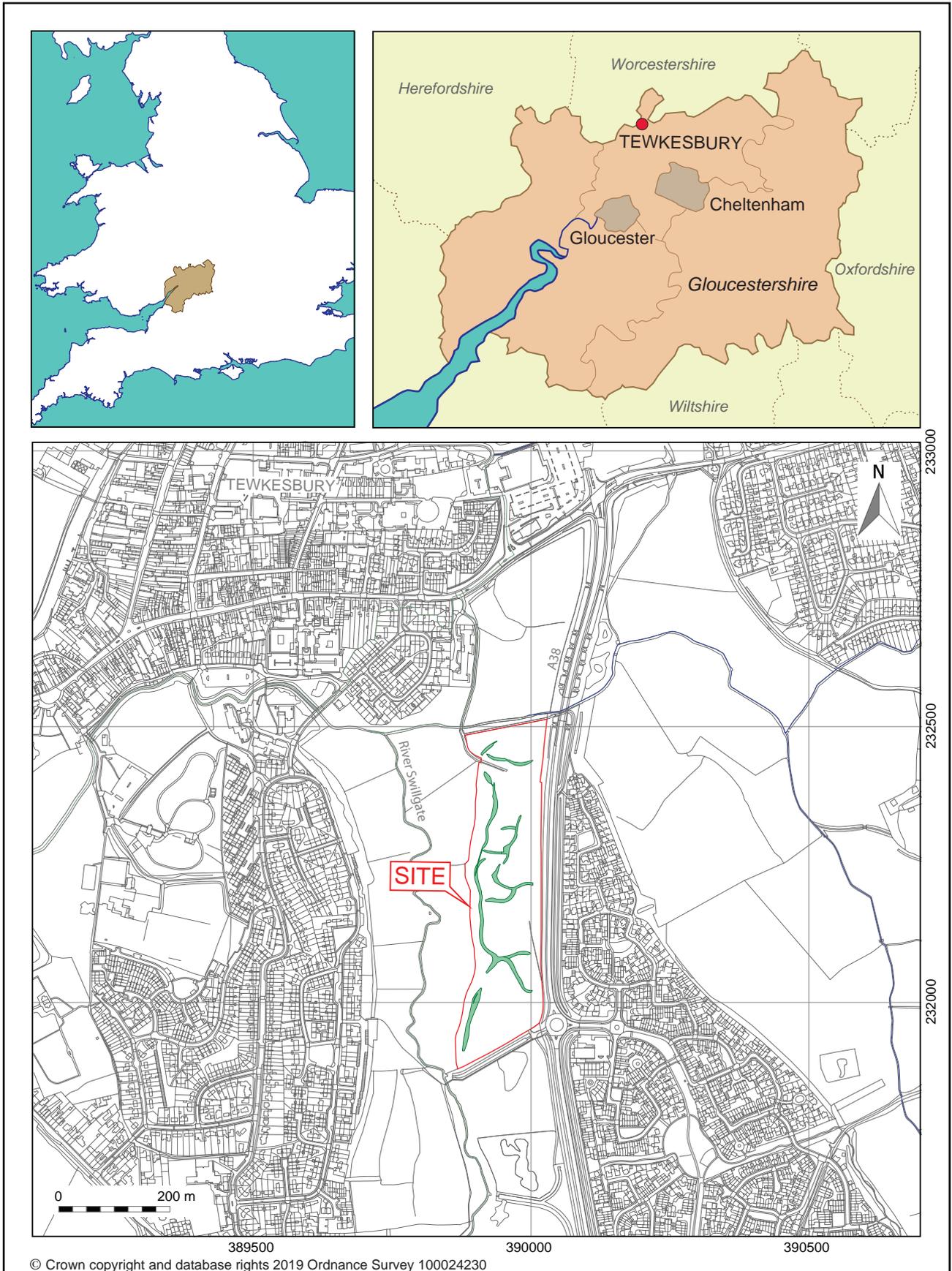
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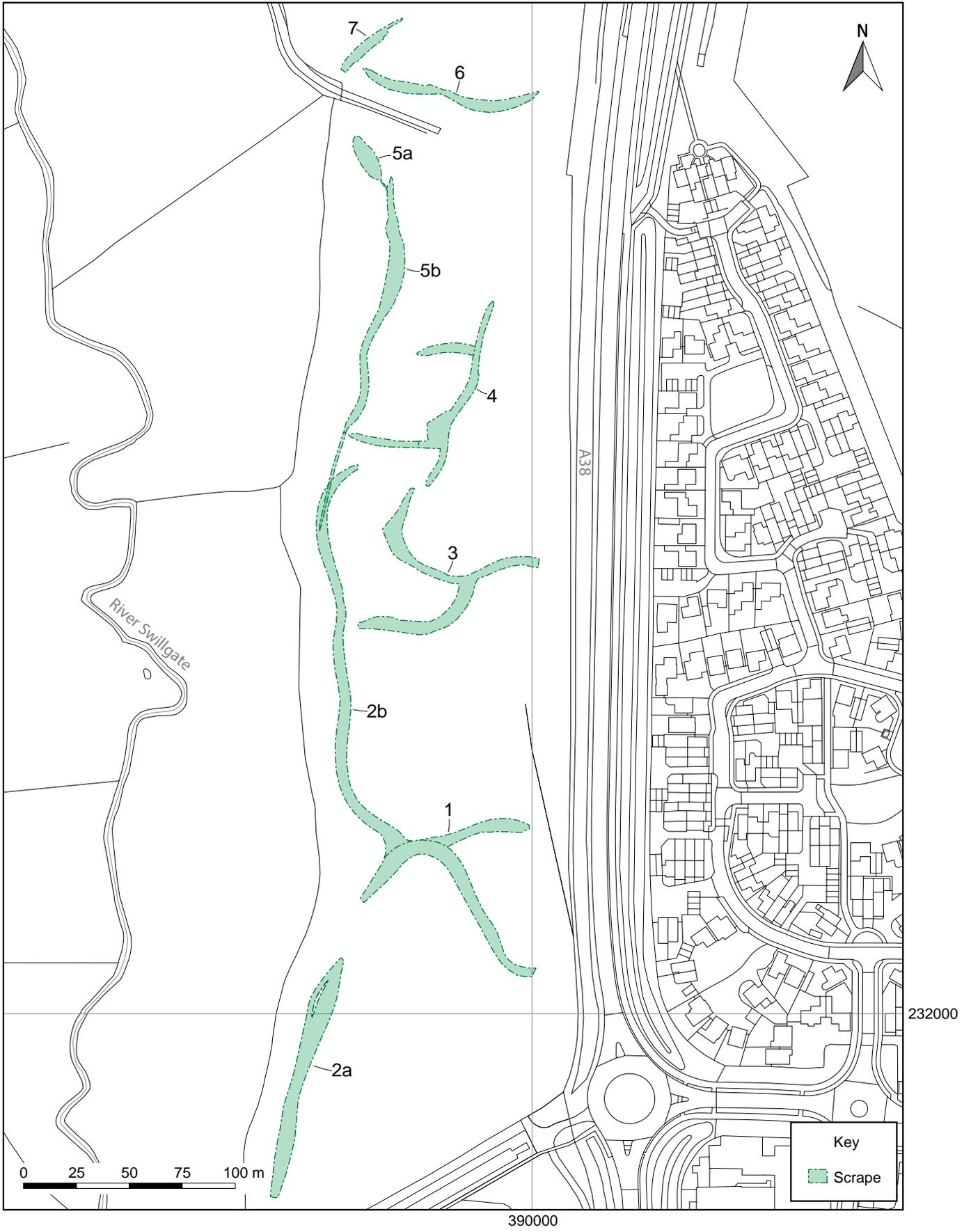
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Figures



Location of the site

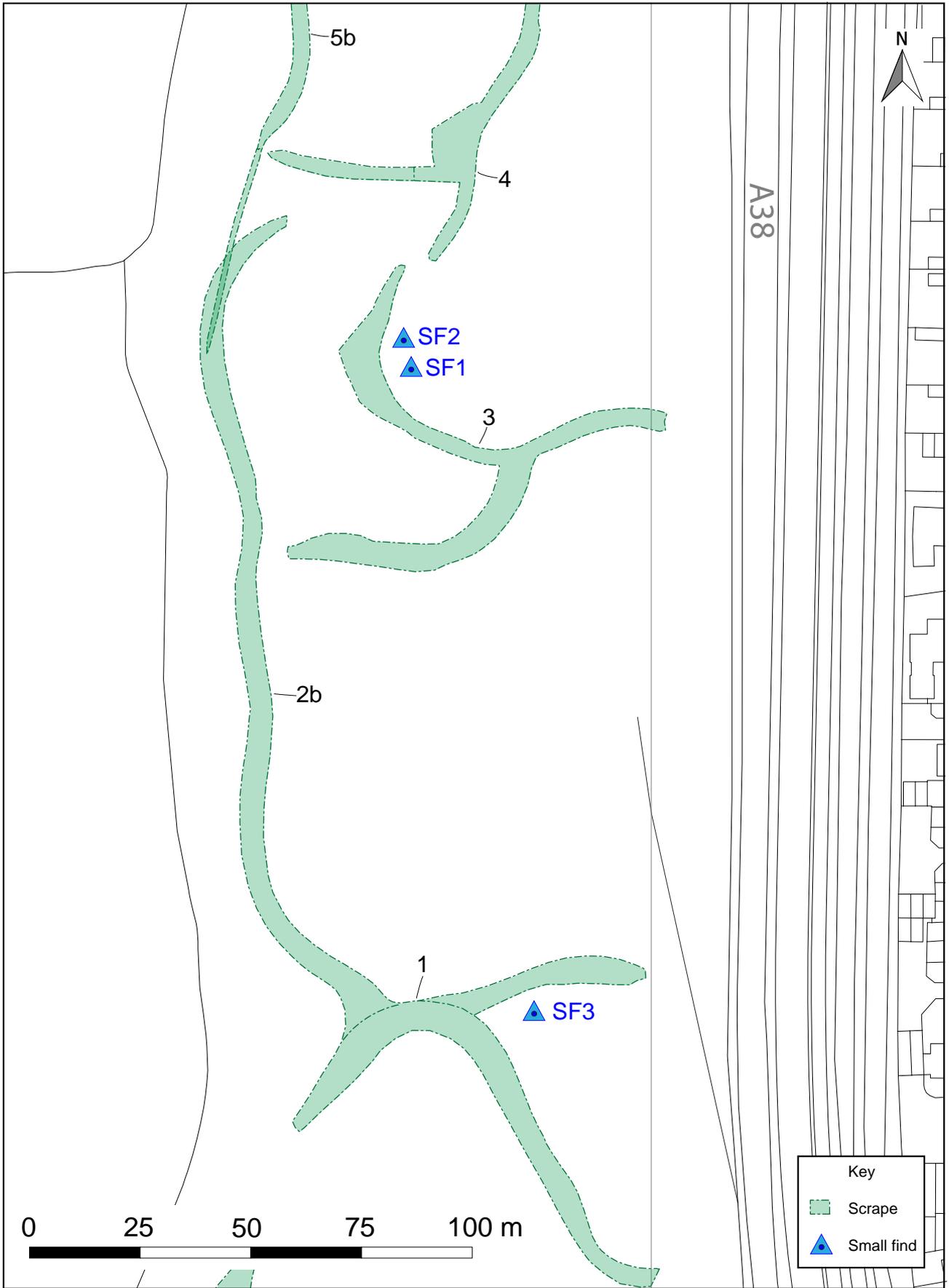
Figure 1



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Location of scrapes

Figure 2



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Location of small finds

Figure 3

Plates



Plate 1: General view north-west of site before excavation, no scales



Plate 2: General view of the tractor and rotary ditcher excavating a swale, view south-east, no scales



Plate 3: Swale 5b after completion, view north towards hide, 2x 1m scales



Plate 4: Swale 4 on east of the site, view north, no scales



Plate 5: Swale 2a along western edge of field, view north, 2x 1m scales



Plate 6: Swale 2b along western edge of field, view north, 2x 1m scales



Plate 7: Swale 6 in the northern field, view south-east, 2x 1m scales



Plate 8: Finds; left to right: two coins (SF1 and SF2), lead seal (SF3), and Roman pottery, 0.08m scale

Appendix 1: Summary of project archive

TYPE	DETAILS*
Artefacts and Environmental	Metal
Paper	Context sheet, Correspondence, Diary (Field progress form), Plan, Report,
Digital	GIS, Images raster/digital photography, Survey, Text

*OASIS terminology