

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**LAND AT BLENHEIM PARK, WOODSTOCK,
OXFORDSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

SP 4246 1821 to SP 4275 1820

*On behalf of
Blenheim Palace*

JULY 2011

REPORT FOR Blenheim Palace
Blenheim Park
Woodstock
Oxfordshire
OX20 1PX

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FIELDWORK 31st May 2011 to 6th June 2011

REPORT ISSUED 1st July 2011

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Site Code BHNL 11
JMHS Project No: 2412
Archive Location The archive is currently held by JMHS and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course under Accession number 2011.93

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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during ground reduction in advance of a new access track (11/0395/P/FP) on land south and south east of North Lodge in Blenheim Park (SP 4246 1821 to SP 4275 1820). The Roman Road Akeman Street was uncovered at the north western end of the new track and a wide ditch was seen orientated NE-SW towards the south eastern end. The ditch is considered to be associated with the nearby Grim's Ditch, which can still be seen as a visible earthwork in the unploughed field.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

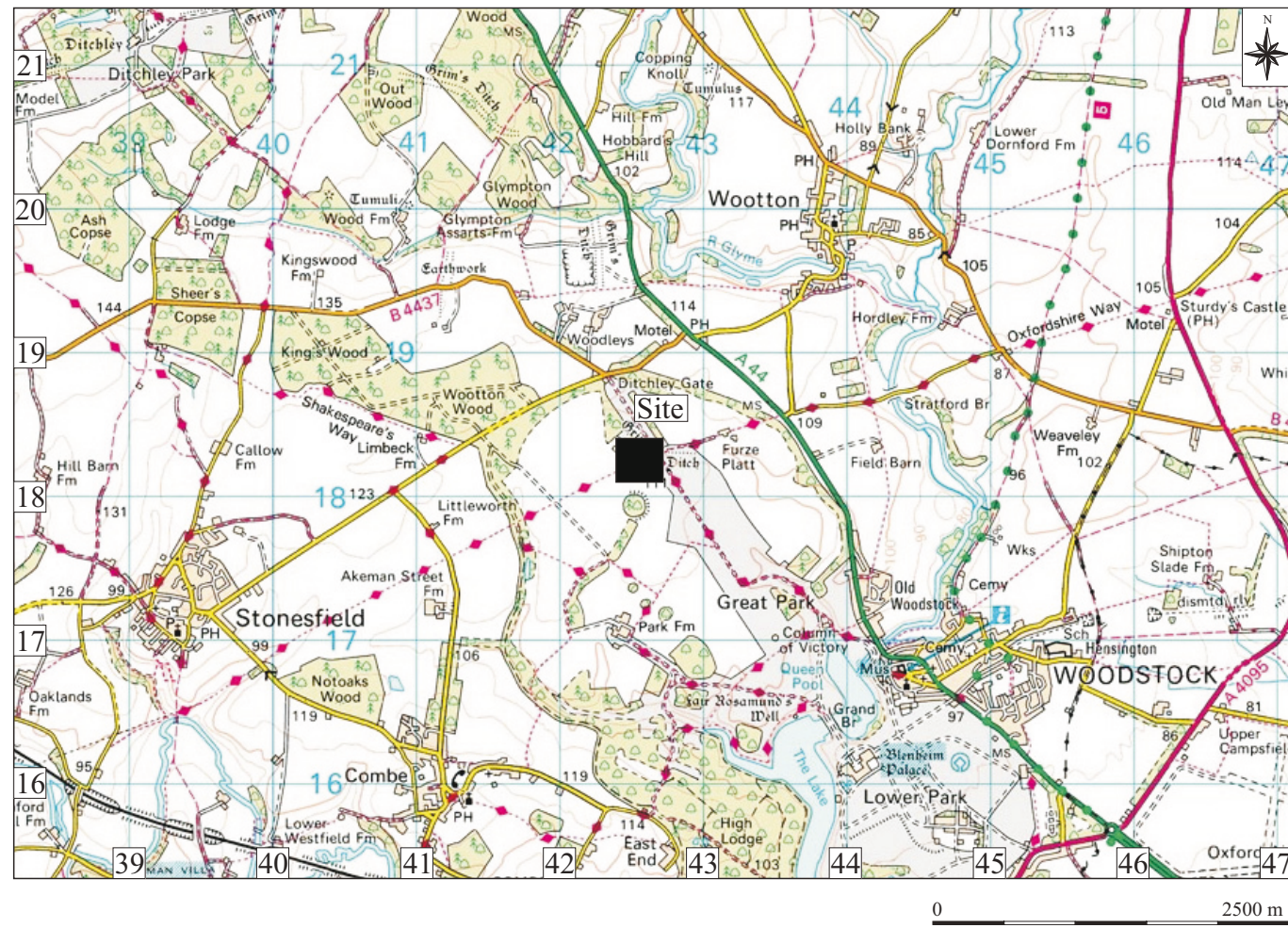
The site is located south and south east of North Lodge in Blenheim Park (NGR SP 4246 1821 to SP 4275 1820). The underlying geology is White Limestone.

1.2 Planning Background

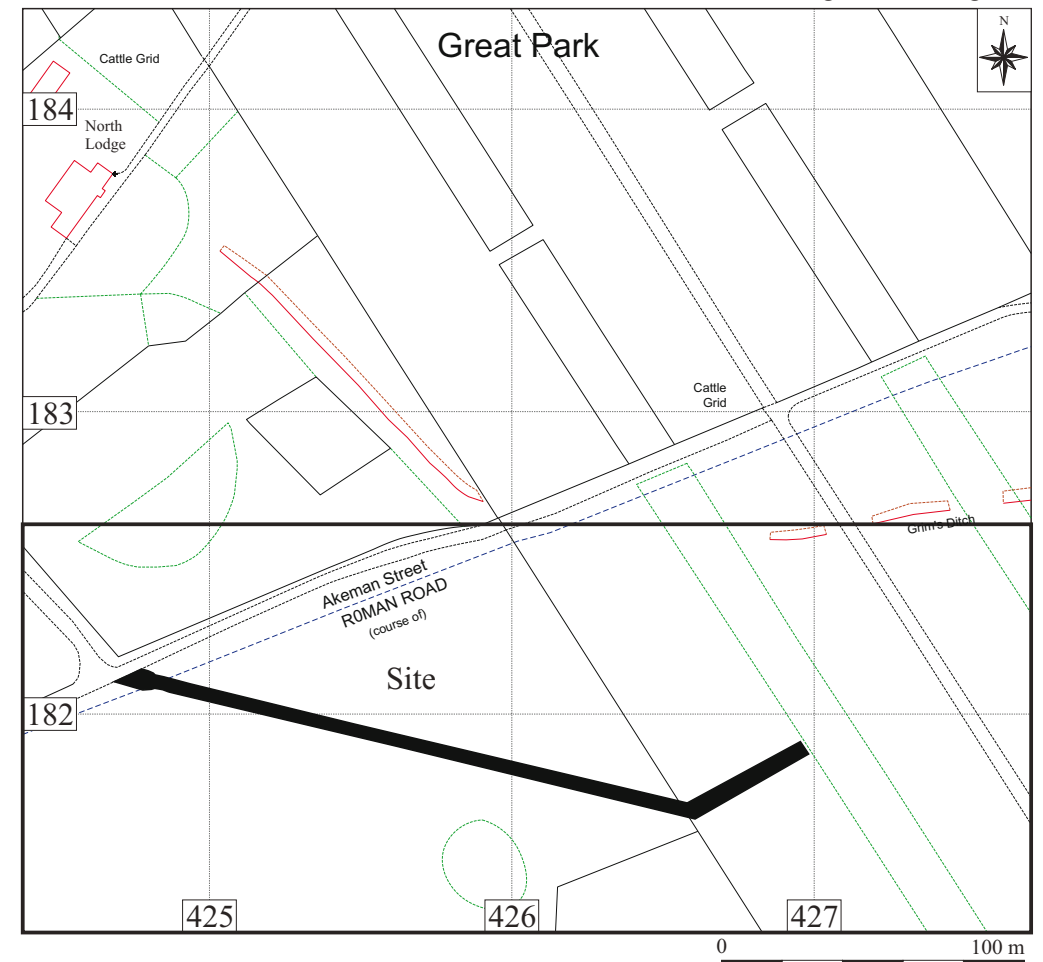
Planning permission was granted by West Oxfordshire District Council for the improvement of existing access track and partial course alteration (Planning Ref: 11/0395/P/FP). Due to the advice given to the West Oxfordshire District Council by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS), a condition of the permission states that an archaeological watching brief should be carried out during the work.

The applicant, or their agents or successors in title shall be responsible for organising and implementing an archaeological watching brief, to be maintained during the period of construction/during any groundworks taking place on the site. The watching brief shall be carried out by a professional archaeological organisation in accordance with a written scheme of investigation that has first been approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. REASON: To safeguard features of archaeological importance (Policy BE13 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 and Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning and the Historic Environment).

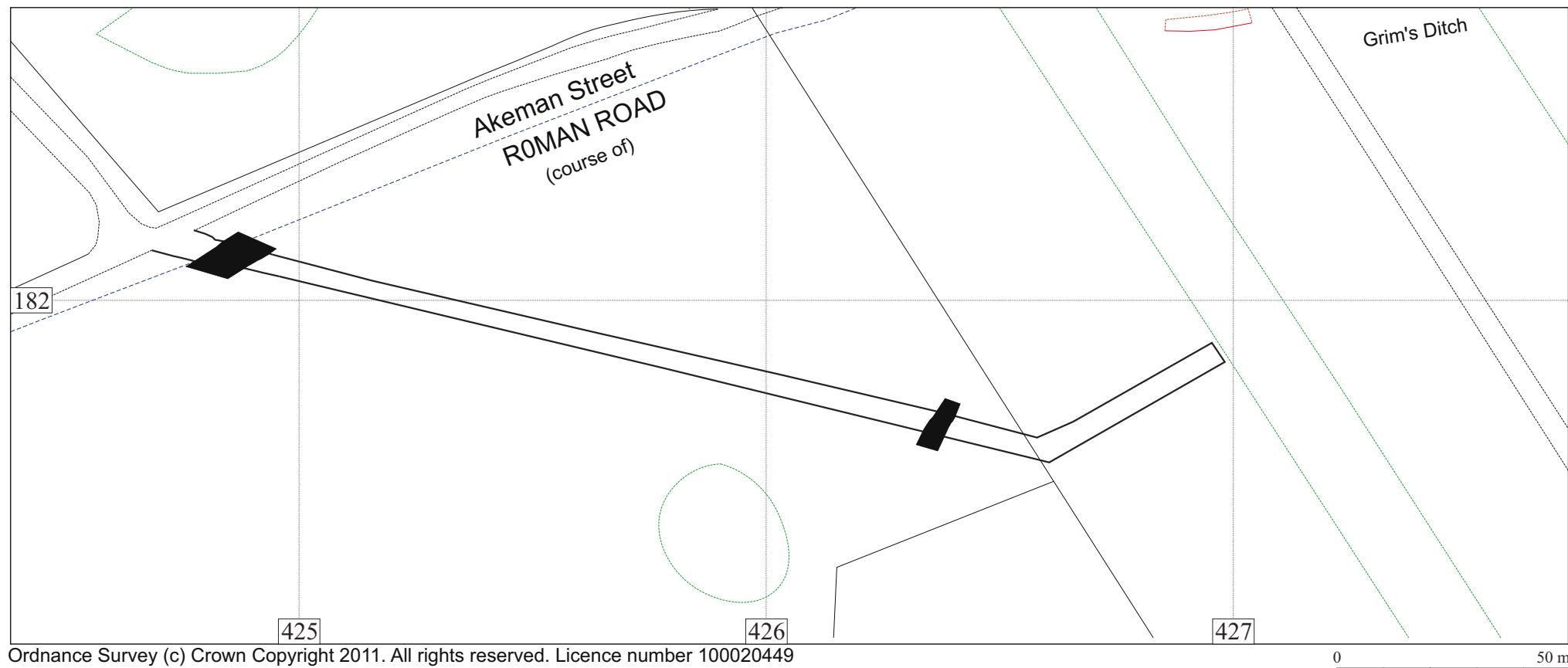
Following the approval of the written scheme of investigation referred to in condition 3 no development shall commence on site without the appointed archaeologist being present. Once the watching brief has been completed its findings shall be reported to the Local Planning Authority, as agreed in the Written Scheme of Investigation including all processing, research and analysis necessary to produce an accessible and useable archive and a full report for publication. REASON: In the interest of the safeguarding and recording of features of archaeological interest (Policy BE13 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 and Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment).



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Figure 1. Site location

1.3 Archaeological Background

The development site lies within an area of archaeological interest. It partly overlies the Roman road of Akeman Street, and is close to Grim's Ditch an important Iron Age linear feature. The depth of the impact had been reduced as much as possible although the possibility remained that archaeological remains might be affected.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The main aims of the investigation were outlined in the Written Scheme of Investigation (JMHS 2011).

- 2.1 To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.
- 2.2 In particular to record any evidence associated with the prehistoric landscape and/or Roman road

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1994), the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services prepared *Brief* and John Moore Heritage Services *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2010).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present on site during all ground reduction connected to the new trackway. All ground reduction was achieved using a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a ditching bucket.

The original methodology was to raise the ground level over the known alignment of Akeman Street to ensure no below ground deposits were disturbed. However, after an on site meeting with the Duke of Marlborough, Paul Orsi (Estates Office) and the architect, the position of the new track was changed which meant some slightly deeper ground reduction over the Roman Road surface was necessary. This ground reduction was kept to the level of the uppermost road surface which was not damaged.

A journal, recorded on specially designed record sheets, was maintained which detailed times and durations of site visits as well as notes on areas monitored by the archaeologist. Deposits (overburden) were recorded on context recording sheets. A general photographic record of the work was kept and will form of the part site archive to be submitted to the Oxfordshire County Museum.

4 RESULTS (Figures 1 & 2)

4.1 Field Results

Individual context numbers were assigned on site to deposits encountered during the ground reduction. Context numbers in () indicate deposits of material.

The lowest geological horizon attained was White Limestone with clay patches. The clay was light brownish orange mottled throughout with limestone (102). The depth at which this horizon was attained varied slightly across the site but was generally around *c.* 0.30m from the current ground surface.

Overlying the natural was a layer of orange-brown sandy loam subsoil with numerous limestone pieces of varying sizes (101). This deposit did not contain any significant archaeological material.

The topsoil (100) was *c.* 0.10- 0.20m in thickness and consisted of a dark grey-brown silty loam. This was highly compacted in places with very low quantities of general finds usually expected from topsoil. Two sherds of Samian pottery was recovered from this deposit.

Roman Road (Plate 1)

The known line of Akeman Street crosses the field partly beneath the line of the new trackway. The surface of the road was exposed but left *in situ*. Some notes were made on the construction of the road 103 which had a width of *c.* 8m. The earliest deposit seen was crushed white cream limestone fragments (<10-50mm) which was likely to have formed the bedding of the road surface (104). Overlying this were large 'flagstones' of limestone roughly finished and laid flat which probably formed the original road surface (105). No finds were recovered from the road surface but it was seen to be slightly curved on its eastern edge with well compacted stones. No roadside ditch was observed, but a defined area along the length of the road was apparent.

Ditch (Plate 2)

Ditch 108 was orientated on a NE-SW direction and was 2.90m wide with concave sides forming a gently rounded base. It was filled by two deposits the earliest being firm dark greyish brown clay silt (106) and the latest a friable dark blackish grey silty clay with some limestone fragments throughout (107). No finds were recovered from either fill.

4.3 Reliability of Results

The watching brief was carried out in summer conditions with good co-operation from the contractor carrying out the groundworks.

The methodology employed during groundworks was the 'best case scenario' which could be achieved from the time and resources available from the on site contractors.

All areas subject to archaeological monitoring were during a ground reduction of *c.* 300mm from the present ground level. This enabled the surface of the underlying natural geology to be inspected for archaeological remains before the crush was laid down and rolled in.

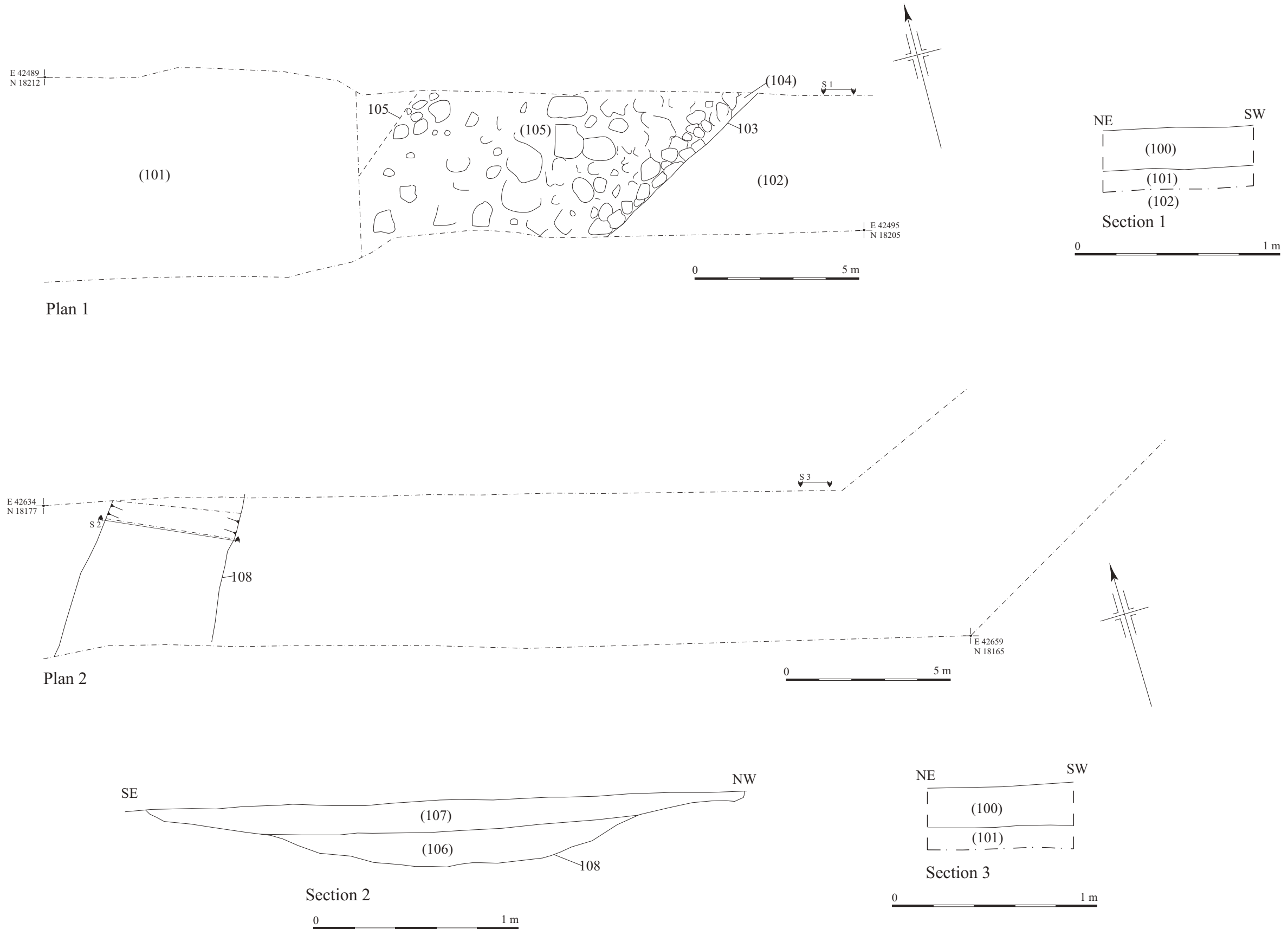


Figure 2. Plans and sections

5 FINDS by Paul Riccoboni

5.1 The Roman Pottery

Two sherds of Roman Samian pottery was recovered from the topsoil (100).

5.2 Environmental Remains

No features were considered to warrant environmental sampling.

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological watching brief at Blenheim Palace Park along the length of the 'New Track' was successful in establishing the alignment of the Roman Road and its excellent state of preservation.

The ditch 108 was probably related to the still visible Grim's Ditch (Plate 3). Other Iron Age and Roman settlements have been excavated adjacent to the line of Akeman Street and Aves Ditch (Hart *et al*, 2010), where ditch features of similar dimensions to Ditch 108 were discovered. It is possible that some topographical features (Plate 4) which still survive in the unploughed 'Avenue' field may be related to a settlement on the outside of Grim's Ditch.

To conclude the watching brief along the line of the New Track was useful in establishing the possibility of settlement outside the area defined by Grim's Ditch during the Late Iron Age period. The discovered Ditch 108 may have been part of a wider settlement and served as a boundary ditch. Further archaeological work would be necessary to clarify this theory and an archaeological topographical survey would be particularly useful in the unploughed 'Avenue' field.

The recording of Akeman Street helped establish the construction methods used by the Romans to make the 'agger' before the road's final surface was compacted. The significance of the junction where Akeman Street meets the prehistoric landscape features can only be postulated, but it is assumed that this crossing point would potentially been of symbolic significance during the Roman period.

A confidence rating is high that the best possible results were achieved.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record

The project brief	The project report
Written Scheme of Investigation	The primary site records
The drawn records	

The archive is currently maintained by John Moore Heritage Services.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*

English Heritage 2006 *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*

Institute for Archaeologists, 1999 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* Revised 2008

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Hart J, McSloy E.R, Warman S & Mudd, A 2010 'Later Iron Age Settlement and Burial near Aves's Ditch: Excavations on the Angelinos Pumping Station top Ardley Reservoir Mains Pipeline Reinforcement.' In *Oxoniensia* LXXV. Ashmolean Museum Publications.

HER Summary Sheet

Site Name: Blenheim Park	
Site Address: Land at Blenheim Park, Woodstock, Oxfordshire	
Summary: <i>A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during ground reduction in advance of a new access track (11/0395/P/FP) on Land south and south east of North Lodge in Blenheim Park (SP 4246 1821 to SP 4275 1820). The Roman Road Akeman Street was uncovered at the north western end of the new track and a wide ditch was seen orientated NE-SW towards the south eastern end. The ditch is considered to be associated with the nearby Grim's Ditch, which can still be seen as a visible earthwork in the un ploughed field.</i>	
District/Unitary: Oxford City	Parish:
Period(s): Roman	
NGR (centre of site: 8 figures): SP 4246 1821 to SP 4275 1820	
Type of archaeological work Watching Brief	
Date of Recording: 31 st May to 6 th June	
Unit undertaking recording: JMHS	
Geology: White Limestone	
Title and author of accompanying report: An Archaeological Watching Brief on Land at Blenheim Park, Woodstock, Oxfordshire Prepared by Paul Riccoboni BA (Hons) Arch AIFA	
Summary of fieldwork results (begin with earliest period first, add NGRs where appropriate) Ditch: Undated Roman Road:	
Location of archive/finds:	
Contact at Unit: : Paul Riccoboni info@jmheritageservices.co.uk	Date: 9 th June 2011

Plate 1; Roman Road showing uppermost surface (105) looking north



Plate 2; Showing Ditch 108 NW view



Plate 3; Still visible Grim's Ditch earthwork



Plate 4; Landscape features adjacent to Grim's Ditch showing work in progress on New Track in the distance. East View.

