

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

WOLVERCOTE PRIMARY SCHOOL,

FIRST TURN, WOLVERCOTE, OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SP 4975 0977

On behalf of

Carillion Building

SEPTEMBER 2013

REPORT FOR Carillion Building

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SUMMARY

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an evaluation at Wolvercote Primary School. Four trenches targeting cropmarks were excavated that revealed two Iron Age ditches and a large pit along with several undated features. Ditches associated with the late medieval and post-medieval agricultural field of Churchcroft (Horslow) were located, as were two discrete 18th century features.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

The area of proposed development is located off First Turn, Wolvercote on the west side of the railway line (NGR SP 4975 0977). The area lies at approximately 66m OD and the geology is alluvium with sand and gravel overlying mudstone. The current land use is as a playing field.

1.2 Planning Background

Oxfordshire County Council is assessing the possibility of extending the school facilities at Wolvercote Primary School. The presence of cropmarks that are visible on the school playing fields suggest the potential presence of archaeological features. An archaeological field evaluation has been requested to investigate these features in order that a suitable mitigation strategy can be formulated. This is in line with NPPF. Oxfordshire County Archaeology Services prepared a Brief for a field evaluation. A *Written Scheme of Investigation*, agreed with the county planning archaeologist, proposed a method to satisfy the requirements of the Brief.

1.3 Archaeological Background

To the south of the school buildings on the playing fields is a single line of pits. These may form part of an Iron Age pit alignment. However they do lie parallel to the railway line and may therefore be associated with that. Also in the playing field is a circular feature or enclosure. This is partly enclosed on three sides by another feature. This could be a double ditched enclosure or possibly a barrow.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* were as follows:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.

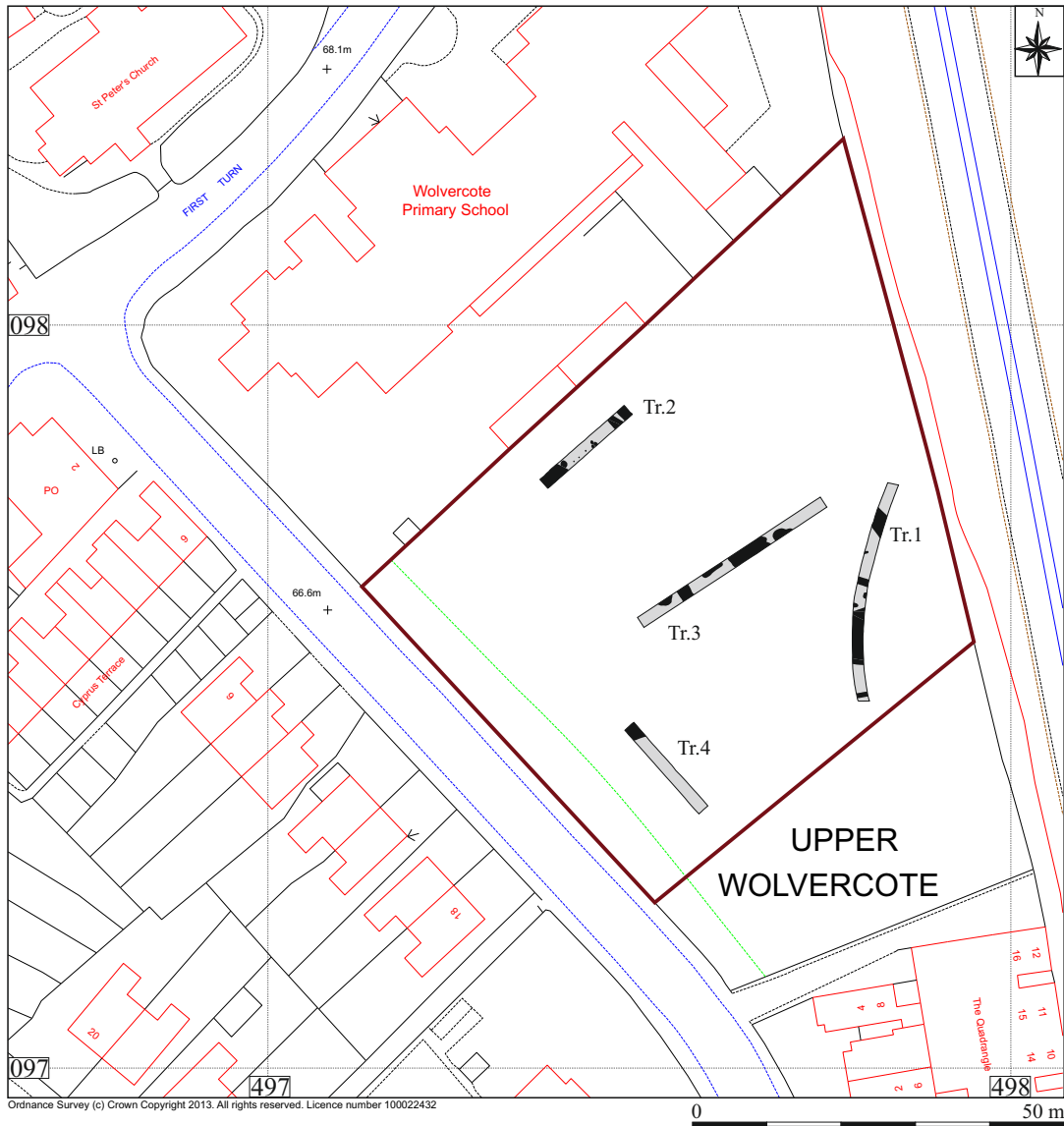
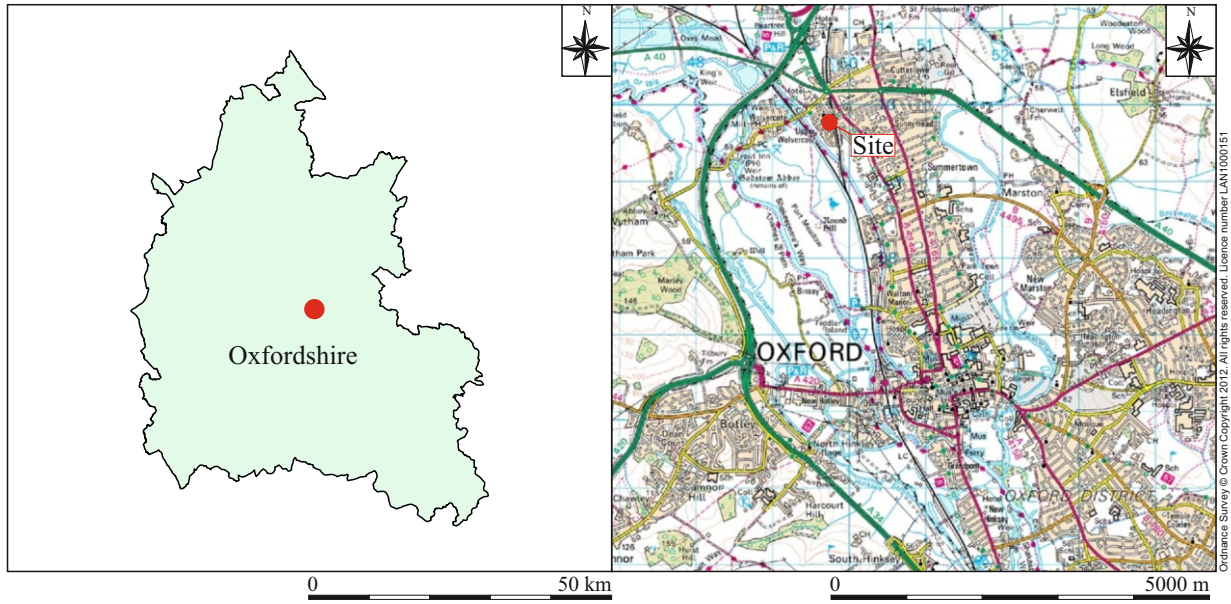


Figure 1: Site location

- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present.

In particular:

- To identify and characterise any Late Iron Age, Roman or medieval deposits

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In accordance with the *Written Scheme of Investigation* designed by JMHS and agreed with Oxfordshire County Archaeology Services, JMHS carried out the work, which comprised the excavation of four trenches (Fig. 1) across the site. Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (2008).

3.2 Methodology

The investigation involved the mechanical excavation of a four trenches; two 30m long and two 15m long each 1.6m wide across the site by a 5-tonne excavator equipped with a ditching bucket, supplemented by limited hand investigation of archaeological deposits. Trench 1 was moved from the proposed position due to the presence of a play area and trees.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

Trench 1 (Figure 2)

The lowest deposit revealed was a natural light orange –brown sand with gravel (1/02). Cut into this was at least seven ditches and three pits.

To the north of the trench was a ditch 1/15 that was aligned north-northwest to south-southeast. It was 2.5m wide, up to 0.3m deep with a flat base and filled with a mid brown sand-clay with 20% gravel (1/16) flecked with charcoal that contained a sherd of prehistoric pottery. This ditch may have been disturbed by a later small pit but it was difficult to identify with certainty.

South of ditch 1/15 was ditch 1/13 that was aligned northwest to southeast. It was 1m wide, 0.2m deep with shallow sides and an uneven base. It was filled with a pale brown-orange silt-sand (1/14) with sparse gravel. This feature may represent a hedge line or some other form of planting due to the uneven bioturbated base.

Further to the south of the trench was an area roughly 6.5m wide containing a series of intercutting ditches, at least four were positively identified.

The earliest was ditch 1/10 that was aligned roughly east to west. Section 1.4 would appear to confirm it is less than 1.5m wide. It was filled with a pale yellow-orange to brown sand-clay with 15% gravel (1/11). This was cut by a later ditch 1/08 that was aligned roughly east to west; again Section 1.4 indicates that this ditch is likely to be less than 1m wide. It was filled with a pale yellow- brown sand-clay with 10% gravel (1/09).

Cutting ditch 1/08 is a later ditch 1/07 aligned roughly northwest to southeast. It was at least 2m wide, 0.2m deep and filled with a pale grey sand-clay with 10% gravel (1/12).

To the south of the area and cut into deposit (1/12) was ditch 1/06 that was aligned east-northeast to west-southwest. It was 0.8m wide, 0.12m deep and filled with a dark grey-brown silt-clay with 60% gravel (1/23) which contained a sherd of 19th century white earthenware.

Ditch 1/04 was located at the southernmost end of the trench this 0.7m wide, 0.12m deep and filled with a compact deposit of brown-grey silt-sand (1/03) with frequent gravel that also contained oyster shell glass and brick fragments. It was aligned east to west.

Three small pits were also recorded within the trench. The first 1/17 was circular roughly 1m in diameter and filled with a pale orange-brown sand-clay (1/18) flecked with charcoal. The second 1/20 was irregular in plan measuring 0.5m by 0.9m and filled with a mid brown sand-clay (1/19) sparsely flecked with charcoal. The third was a short linear cut 1/21 that could possibly represent a gully terminal. It was 0.5m long and 0.25m wide and filled with a mid grey-brown sand-clay with 5% gravel (1/22) flecked with charcoal. None of these pit features was sample excavated.

Trench 2 (Figure 2)

Cut into the natural yellow sand banded with compact yellow-orange sand and gravel (2/03) were at least four ditches and a shallow pit.

Ditch 2/04 was at least 0.8m wide and 0.4m deep with sides at roughly 45° and a flat base. It was aligned north-northwest to south-southeast and filled with a pale brown sand-clay with 20% gravel (2/05) flecked with charcoal that contained a sherd of prehistoric pottery.

A second ditch 2/08 appeared to be parallel to ditch 2/04 and roughly 1m to the east. The full width of this ditch was not seen but it was over 1m wide and 0.5m deep with sides at roughly 60° and a flat base. It was filled with a dark brown sand-clay with 20% gravel (2/09) flecked with charcoal.

The apparent parallel nature of the two ditches may mark them as contemporary, although the differences in fills may suggest otherwise. Both were cut by a later ditch 2/06 that was aligned northwest to southeast. This was 0.8m wide with sides roughly 70° and a flat base. It was filled with a pale brown sand-clay with sparse gravel (2/07).

To the west of Trench 2 was an area 3.5m wide that represented at least one further ditch 2/12, but probably was the result of two or more intercutting features. Ditch 2/12 was aligned northwest to southeast and appeared roughly parallel to ditch 2/06. The sample excavation

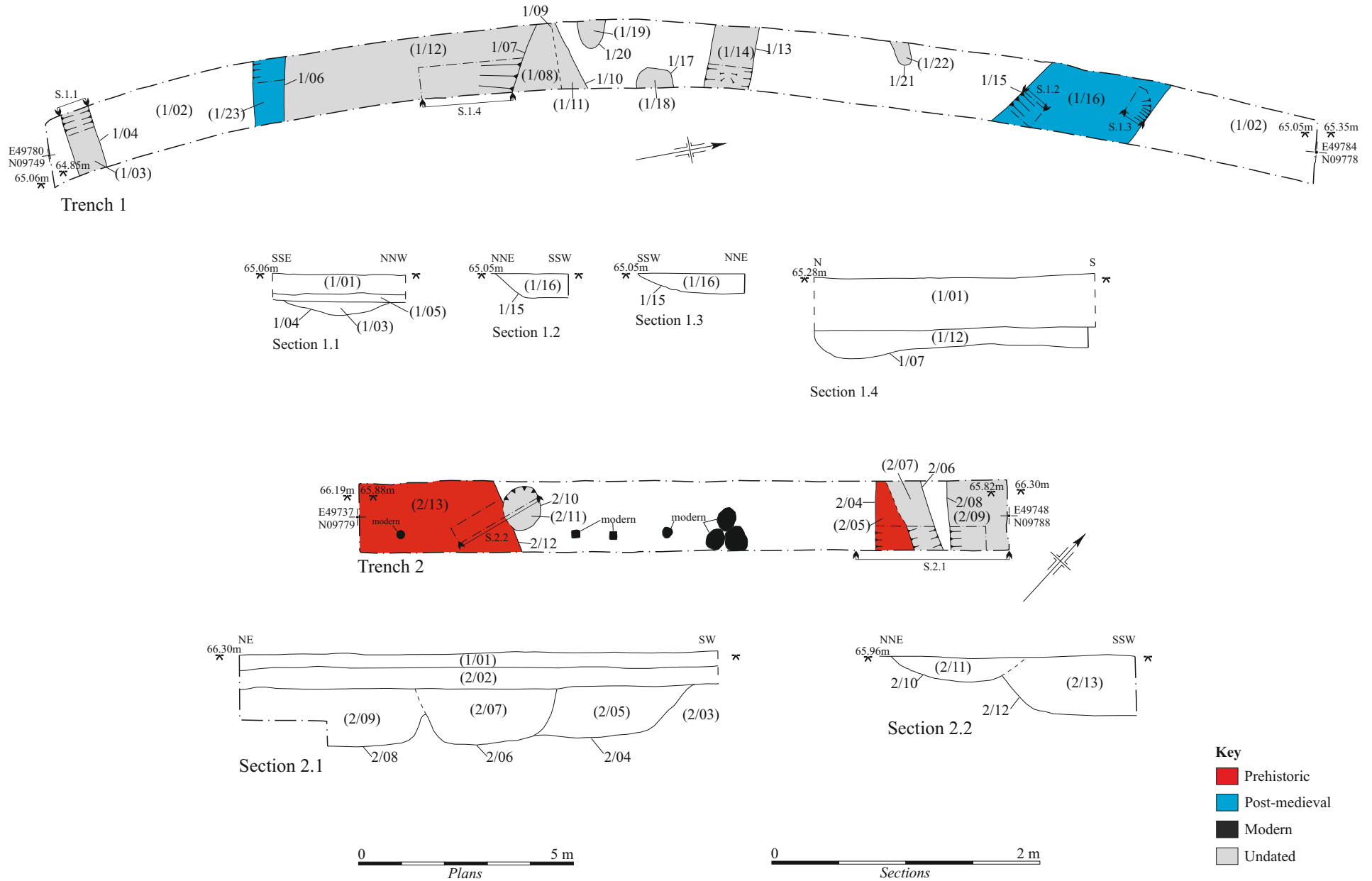


Figure 2: Trenches 1 and 2 - plans and sections

confirmed it to be at least 1m wide, 0.5m deep with sides at roughly 60° and a flat base. It was filled with a dark brown sand-clay with 25% gravel (2/13) flecked with charcoal that contained a sherd of prehistoric pottery.

Cutting the eastern side of ditch 2/12 was a shallow circular pit 2/10, this was 0.9m in diameter and 0.2m deep with a concave base. It was filled with a mid grey-brown sand-clay with 30% gravel (2/11).

These features were overlain by a 0.15m thick layer of brown sand-clay with 10% gravel (2/02). Cut into this layer were five circular (three large and close together) and two square postholes associated with a modern fence. In places the lower part of the wood post was evident. The uppermost layer was 0.1m of mid grey-brown sand-loam (2/01) topsoil.

Trench 3 (Figure 3)

The natural in this area consisted of compact grey to red-brown sand and gravel (3/03). At least three ditches and three pits were cut into it.

Ditch 3/06 was aligned northwest to southeast. It was 1.86m wide, 0.25m deep with steep sides and a flat base. The primary fill was a compact mid grey sand-clay with frequent gravels (3/08) up to 0.2m thick in places. Above this the secondary fill consisted of a red-brown sand-clay (3/07) with occasional gravel and was up to 0.15m thick.

Close to the centre of the trench was an area (3/18) approximately 6m wide that appears to represent a series of intercutting ditches, recorded as a single feature 3/17, but not excavated. The eastern edge is aligned northeast to southwest while the western edge is aligned northwest to southeast. The general fill of this area was a light grey sand-clay (3/18). The eastern edge had been truncated by the terminal of a gully or narrow ditch 3/11. This was aligned northwest to southeast, 0.8m wide and 0.18m deep with a rounded shallow profile. It was filled with a mid brown sand-clay containing 5% gravel (3/12). This ditch or gully would appear to be the latest in a sequence of intercutting features.

Three pits were recorded although the full extent of each was not seen and they could feasibly be ditch terminals. The first 3/15 was sub-circular/oval measuring 2.5m by 1.15m in plan and was 0.31m deep filled with a mid grey sand-clay with 50% gravel (3/16). It also contained 19th century glass, pottery and roof tile.

Pit 3/13 was sub-rectangular in plan measuring 3m by at least 0.7m. It was 0.23m deep, with steep sides and a flat base, and filled with a mid brown sand-clay with 20% gravel (3/14) that contained a sherd of prehistoric pottery. Sub-circular pit 3/09 was 2.7m wide, 0.2m deep with gradual sloping sides and filled with very compact grey silt with 75% gravel (3/10).

These features were sealed by a layer of mid brown sand-loam with frequent gravel (3/02). Cut into this layer and directly over pit 3/09 was another smaller pit 3/04. It was sub-circular in plan measuring 1.4m wide with steep sides and a flat base. It was 0.2m deep and filled with a compact orange-brown clay with 65% gravel (3/05).

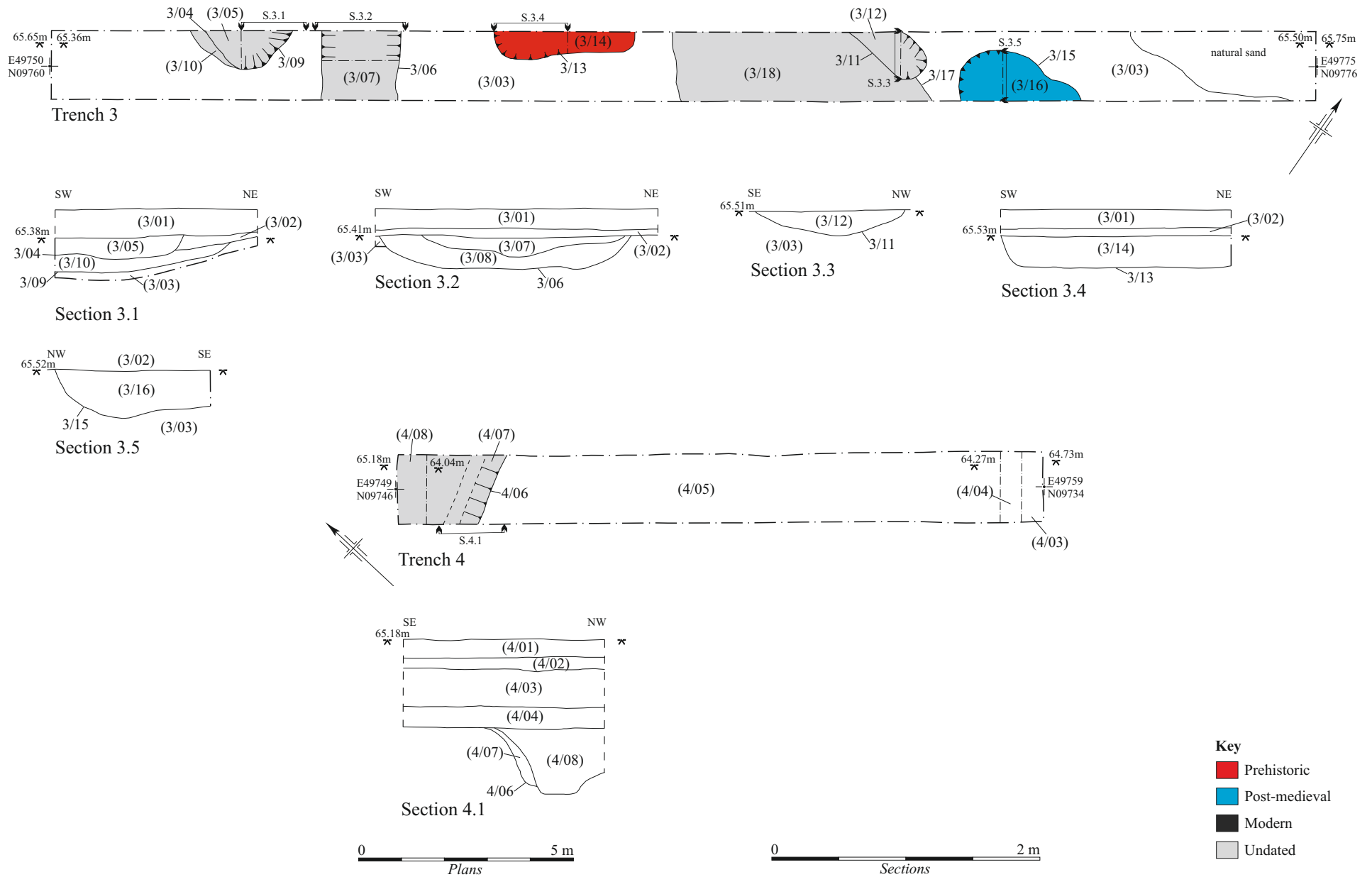


Figure 3: Trenches 3 and 4 - plans and sections

Trench 4 (Figure 3)

The lowest deposit revealed was a natural orange–brown clay (4/05). Cut into this deposit was a ditch 4/06 aligned roughly east to west. The full width of the ditch was not fully exposed within the trench, but was at least 2m. The northern ditch edge was not seen but the southern one was steep c.70°. The base was flat but appeared to have a 0.1m deep slot 0.3m wide cut into it.

Against the southern side was a deposit of mottled orange-grey sand-silt (4/07) that may represent an edge collapse, overlying this and forming the bulk of the ditch fill was a 0.5m thick deposit of dark brown-grey sand-clay with sparse gravel (4/08). It is possible that deposit (4/07) represents the fill of an earlier ditch and this had been re-cut and later filled by deposit (4/08).

Overlying this was a 0.15m thick layer of dark orange-brown sand-clay (4/04) containing sparse gravel. Over this was a 0.3m thick layer of grey-brown clay-sand with 20% gravel (4/03) containing sherds of post-medieval red earthenware and English stoneware. This was sealed by a compact layer of grey-brown sand-clay with 40% gravel and brick fragments (4/02) that also contained sherds of 19th white earthenware. The uppermost layer was 0.15m of mid grey-brown sand-loam (4/01) topsoil.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The archaeological evaluation took place during good weather conditions. The percentage size of the sample was considered sufficient for the development area.

5 FINDS

5.1 Prehistoric Pottery (by Frances Raymond)

The assemblage is composed of five sherds of later prehistoric pottery (Table 1) none of which provide any evidence of vessel form. One of the fragments in a very fine ware is decorated with a single shallow tooled line and has a burnished interior indicating its derivation from a bowl (Table 1: 2/05). A notably thin oxidised layer on the exterior might be a red surface coating, although this is not absolutely certain. One of the other fragments in a fine fabric with unoxidised burnished surfaces is also likely to be from a bowl (Table 1: 3/14). The two shell tempered sherds have smoothed surfaces and oxidised exteriors.

Table 1: Catalogue

Context	Shd No	Shd Wt (g)	Shd Type	Fabric	Abrasion
1/16	1	2	Split wall	LS/1	Heavy
2/05	1	2	Decorated wall	Ssh/1	Light
2/13	1	5	Wall	sh/1	Fresh
3/02	1	32	Base	sh/1	Fresh
3/14	1	3	Wall	CL/1	Fresh
TOTAL	5	44			

The four fabrics are relatively hard with evenly distributed inclusions and all are calcareous. The two very fine wares (inclusions <1mm) include one with a mixture of moderate amounts of partly leached limestone and common well-rounded quartz sand (LS/1); and one with

moderate quantities of both sand and shell (Ssh/1). The fine fabric (inclusions up to 2mm) is characterised by a mixture of very common limestone and sparry calcite (CL/1), while the coarse ware incorporates very common, ill-sorted shell (up to 5mm; sh/1).

The dating of an assemblage of this type is necessarily tenuous. The fabrics are types that were most prominent between the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, but which continued in production into the middle Iron Age. The oxidised exteriors and the overall character of the sherds tips the balance in favour of the earlier time bracket and if the one decorated sherd is red coated this would indicate an earliest to early Iron Age date.

5.2 Medieval and Post-medieval Pottery (by Paul Blinkhorn)

The pottery assemblage comprised 3 sherds with a total weight of 11g. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall Ware, AD1200 – 1600. 1 sherd, 3g.

OXBEW: Staffordshire Manganese Glazed Ware, 18th century. 1 sherd, 6g.

WHEW: Mass-produced White Earthenwares, 19th - 20th C. 1 sherd, 2g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 2. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region.

Table 2: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Tr	Cntxt	OXAM		OXBEW		WHEW		Date
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1	23					1	2	19thC
3	16	1	3	1	6			L17thC
	Total	1	3	1	6	1	2	

5.3 Environmental Remains

No environmental samples were taken as the potential of the deposits was not felt to be sufficient to warrant sampling.

6 DISCUSSION

The recorded features although tentatively dated by a single sherd in each feature revealed two main phases of activity; late prehistoric and post-medieval. The late prehistoric material is tenuously dated by fabric type to an earliest to early Iron Age date, while the post-medieval pottery ranges from the late 17th century to 19th century.

Trench 1 was relocated from its proposed position due to the presence of a Play Area, it could not be positioned across the line of the more easterly cropmarks due to the presence of mature trees.

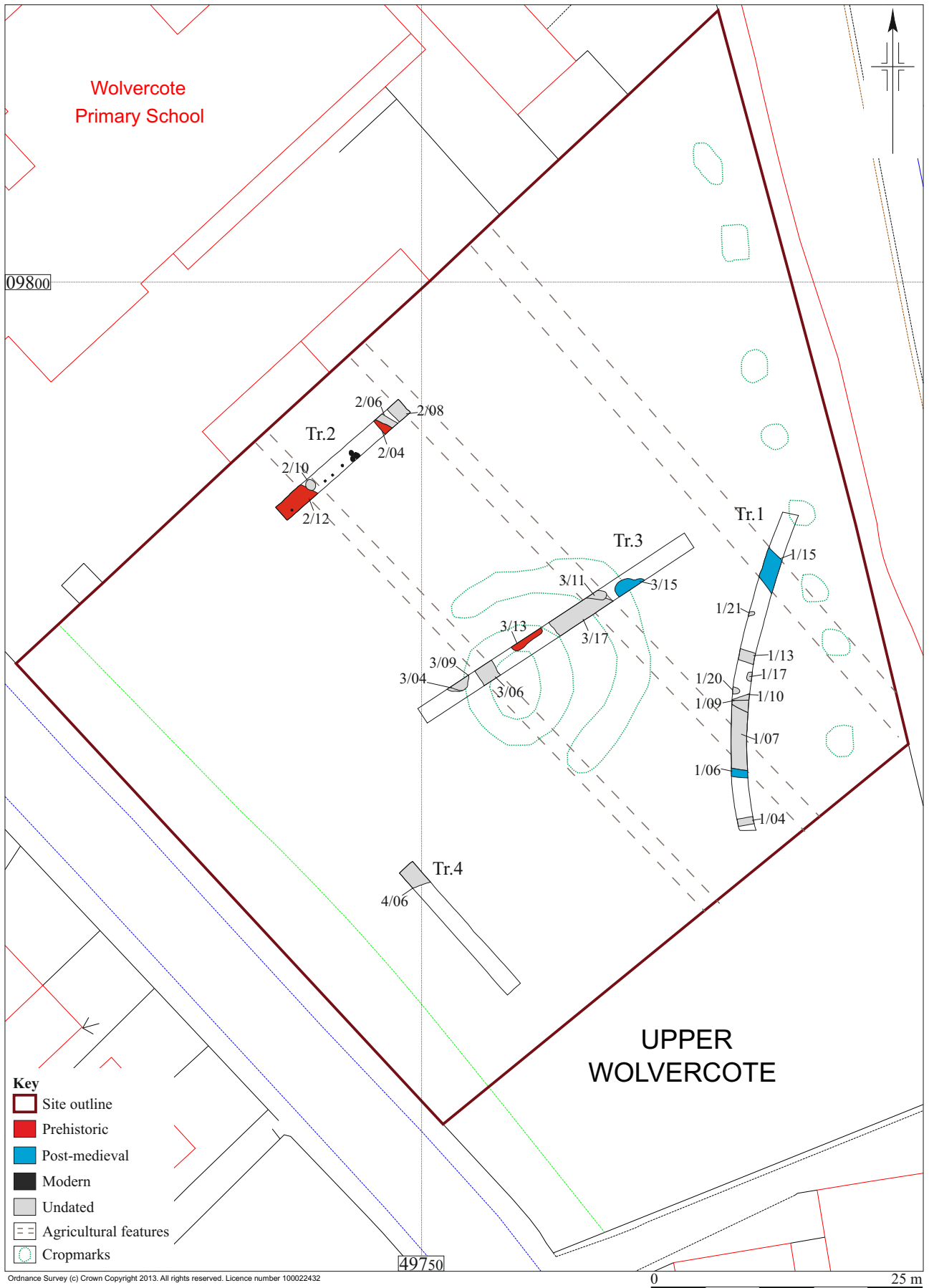


Figure 4: Site plan

The northern end of Trench 1 was placed across a cropmark but only recorded banding within the natural geological deposits in the area. It is possible the line of circular cropmarks could be geological in origin, they differ from the alignment of the recorded prehistoric ditches and are more likely a line of trees lining the railway although no such line is depicted on any of the early maps consulted.

Ditch 2/12 tentatively dated to the Iron Age may correspond with feature 3/17 and ditch 1/13. Similarly ditch 2/04 may correspond with feature 3/17. If so the differing alignments would indicate two phases of prehistoric activity in the area.

Trench 3 was placed across the circular cropmarks, but failed to identify them unequivocally (Fig. 4). Although features were identified in the area they did not match the plotted cropmarks, although this could be due to a transcription error.

The cropmarks could be the result of intercutting features of different periods as well as localised geological deposits. The evaluation results show that more features are present than those showing on aerial photographs. The large feature 3/17 just east of centre in Trench 3 could be part of the semi-circular cropmark feature while the second ditch from the west 3/06 in the same trench could be part of the small circular feature.



Figure 5. Aerial photograph c. 1945

A row of three circular features is noted to the north of the field in the aerial photograph of 1945 (Fig.5). Trench 2 cuts across the middle one of these and it is possible that ditch 2/04 and 2/12 are in fact part of this circular feature.

Ditch 1/16 is in the correct location with the right alignment and is of significant width to correspond to a field depicted on a map of Wolvercote and extra parochial areas of Godstow and Pixey Mead of 1765 (*cf* VCH 1990). The single heavily abraded Iron Age sherd is considered to be residual. This boundary marked the edge of an agglomerated area of fields known as Horslow Field that had changed little since 1636 when it was known as Churchcroft. Records of tenant farmers indicate that furlongs within Churchcroft were sown with wheat and barley in 1592 although the area had a mixed agricultural economy (*ibid.*).

Ditches 2/08, part of 3/17 and part of 1/7 may correspond to each other, these are also on the same alignment as 1/16, while in the same vicinity it is less likely that they could be the boundary marked on the 1765 map due to their narrower nature. It is more likely they represent the furlong (or furrow) of the strip-fields.

The alignment of ditches 1/16 and 2/08 would suggest that they are contemporary. Ditch 3/06 is on a similar alignment and would be evenly spaced with ditch 2/08 and 1/16 suggesting it is associated with these agricultural features (Fig. 4). Historic mapping shows this is the common alignment of field boundaries in the area (*ibid.*). These show as faint lines on the aerial photograph of 1945.

By the 19th century many of the smaller field boundaries had been removed. The 1:2,500 OS map of 1876 shows the entire area south of the road as a single large field, it is not until the 1:2,500 OS map of 1899 that the area of the present school has been enclosed and a building erected.

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