



P/17/01110

Land off Tatenhill Lane, Branston

Archaeological Evaluation Report

March 2017

Client: Lioncourt Homes

Issue No: 1

OA Reference No: 6639

NGR: SK 21735 21133

oxfordarchaeology



southsouth

Client Name: Lioncourt Home
Client Ref No.:
Document Title: Land off Tatenhill Lane, Branston
Document Type: Evaluation Report
Report No.:
Grid Reference: SK 21735 2113
Planning Reference: P/2013/01160
Site Code: BTTL17
Invoice Code: BTTEV
Receiving Body: Staffordshire County Museum Service
Accession No.: 2017.LH.7

OA Document File Location: X:\b\Branston Tatenhill Lane\002Reports
OA Graphics File Location: X:\b\Branston Tatenhill Lane\010Geomatics

Issue No: 1
Date: 3rd March 2017
Prepared by: Paul Murray (Project Officer)
Checked by: John Boothroyd (Project Officer)
Edited by: Andrew Simmonds (Senior Project Manager)
Approved for Issue by: David Score (Head of Fieldwork)
Signature:

David Score

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OA South

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford
OX2 0ES

t. +44 (0)1865 263 800

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridge
CB23 8SG

t. +44 (0)1223 850 500

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane Mills
Moor Lane
Lancaster
LA1 1QD

t. +44 (0)1524 880 250

e. info@oxfordarch.co.uk

w. oxfordarchaeology.com

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Land off Tatenhill Lane, Branston

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Written by Paul Murray

With illustrations by Charles Rousseaux

Contents

List of Figures	iv
List of Plates	iv
Summary	v
Acknowledgements	vi
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Scope of work	1
1.2 Location, topography and geology	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background	1
2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY.....	3
2.1 Aims.....	3
2.2 Specific aims and objectives.....	3
2.3 Methodology	3
3 RESULTS.....	5
3.1 Introduction and presentation of results.....	5
3.2 General soils and ground conditions	5
3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits.....	5
3.4 Trench 11 (Fig. 3)	5
3.5 Finds summary.....	5
4 DISCUSSION	6
4.1 Reliability of field investigation.....	6
4.2 Evaluation objectives and results	6
4.3 Interpretation	6
4.4 Significance.....	6
APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY.....	7
APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	10
APPENDIX C SITE SUMMARY DETAILS.....	11

List of Figures

- Fig. 1 Site location
Fig. 2 Trench location plan
Fig. 3 Trench 11 plan and sections 1100 and 1101

List of Plates

- Plate 1 Ditch 1103
Plate 2 Ditch 1106

Summary

Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by Lioncourt Homes to undertake an archaeological evaluation, comprising eleven trenches, on Land off Tatenhill Lane, Branston (NGR SK 21735 21135) as a condition of planning permission for a housing development.

The evaluation was carried out between the 20th-22nd February 2017.

A geophysical survey was conducted in advance of the evaluation, which identified several anomalies. All but one of the trenches targeted these anomalies. The evaluation revealed that the geophysical anomalies represented geological variations, surface disturbance and land drains.

The only archaeological features were two shallow ditches which, although undated, were of modern character and probably represented a garden plot. No other archaeological features were revealed during the course of the evaluation.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Lioncourt Homes for commissioning this project.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by John Boothroyd. The fieldwork was directed by Paul Murray, who was supported by Sophie Bojadzieva and Raul Gonzalez. Survey and digitizing was carried out by Conan Parsons. Thanks is also extended to Nicola Scott who prepared the archive.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Lioncourt Homes to undertake a trial trench evaluation at Land off Tatenhill Lane, Branston.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of planning permission (Planning Ref. P/2013/01160). The evaluation was conducted in accordance to a brief set by Stephen Dean, Principal Archaeologist for Staffordshire County Council, detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition (SCC 2017) and a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by Oxford Archaeology (OA 2017).

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site lies within the valley of the River Trent and is located to the west of the village of Branston (Fig. 1). It is bordered to the north-east by Tatenhill Lane. The Trent and Mersey canal runs along the north-west edge of the site and Branston Water Park is to the south-west.

1.2.2 The area of the proposed development consists of c 2.7ha of arable land, which is relatively flat and has been left fallow. The site lies at c 48m aOD and is centred on NGR SK 21735 21133 (Fig 1).

1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Mercia Mudstone Group, sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 200 to 251 million years ago in the Triassic Period. Superficial deposits of Holme Pierrepont Sand and Gravel member, which formed 3 million years ago in the Quaternary period, have also been recorded (BGS online viewer)

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background is reproduced here from the brief issued by Staffordshire County Council (SCC 2017).

1.3.2 The valley of the River Trent is known to have significant late prehistoric archaeological remains. Recent work at Branston Quarry has recovered evidence for a rare scatter of Upper Palaeolithic flintwork, associated with a palaeochannel whose lowest fills were dated to the early Mesolithic period (c 8-9,000 BC).

1.3.3 Recent work at Branston High School, c 750m to the north-west, recovered evidence for Mesolithic and potentially Palaeolithic activity, along with evidence for Neolithic and Bronze Age activity possibly associated with a shallow lake close to the site. Work at the site also recovered infrequent evidence for Iron Age activity and what is considered to be part of a Romano-British farmstead. A metalled surface (possibly a Roman trackway) extended north-east along the gravel terrace and may at some point have linked with the nearby Ryknild Street Roman road (PRN 01144). While not yet recorded on the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record, the HER does record the presence of enclosures and pits to the east of Tatenhill (PRN 01406) and a broader cropmark complex west of Branston (PRN 01407). The morphology of these currently undated features suggests a late prehistoric date and may relate to the aforementioned Iron Age/Romano-British activity.

1.3.4 Elsewhere within the Trent Valley extensive late prehistoric ceremonial monuments (cursus, henges, causewayed enclosures and a 'star-burst' enclosure) have been recorded, along with a variety of cemeteries.

1.3.5 During the Iron Age and Roman period the agricultural character of the valley appears to have developed, with farmsteads, drove roads and field systems (often surviving as long linear ditches or pit alignments) extending across the landscape. This rural character continued throughout much of the early medieval, medieval and post-medieval periods. Work at Catholme in the 1980s recovered evidence for an extensive rural settlement; similar activity is being discovered on quarry sites within the valley, such as at Branston Quarry, where excavations this year have identified a further three grubenhaus.

1.3.6 Branston is recorded in the Domesday Book as having land for four and a half ploughs and a value of £2-0-0 (PRN 2391). The placename is first recorded in 942AD as Brontiston, although in the Domesday Book it is recorded as Brantestone – the settlement was renamed 'Branston' in 1958. It has been suggested that the 'Brant' element references a personal name, although it has been suggested that this is a reference to 'burnt' (Horovitz 2005, 145). The historic core of Branston is recorded on historic mapping as lying to the east, along Tatenhill Lane. This would place the settlement close to the line of the Roman road. However, there does remain the potential for early settlement development to have lain further to the west along the lane and closer to the current scheme, which may explain the dog-leg in the lane immediately to the west of Branston Bridge.

1.3.7 The historic transport network along the valley survives in good condition, with the Trent and Mersey Canal (and its Conservation Area) lying to the west of the site (PRN 02212). The Burton-upon-Trent turnpike (PRN 59462) extends to the south-east of the site, with the Ryknild Street further still to the south-east. To the north lies the route of a more minor hollow-way/packhorse road (PRN 02033), which linked Branston with Tatenhill and which today (in part) is fossilised in the line of Tatenhill Lane.

1.3.8 In February 2017 OA commissioned Magnitude Surveys to undertake a geophysical survey of the site. The initial results did not identify any significant archaeological features. Several very weak linear anomalies of undetermined origin were recorded crossing the site. It is likely these features are the result of geological, pedological or agricultural processes, although an archaeological origin cannot entirely be ruled out. Ferrous anomalies were also identified and were mainly concentrated along the northern edges of the site, associated with the properties along the edge of Tatenhill Lane, and along the edge of the Trent and Mersey Canal. Within the centre of the site several weak amorphous anomalies were also identified and are suspected to be natural in origin (MS 2017).

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive.
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains.
- iii. To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means.
- iv. To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains.
- v. To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy.
- vi. To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.
- vii. To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive
- viii. To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.
- ix. To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

2.2 Specific aims and objectives

- x. To ground truth the results of the geophysical survey.
- xi. To understand the impacts of agriculture and the construction of the nearby canal upon archaeological remains within the site.
- xii. To inform discussions regarding the need for, and scope of, any subsequent archaeological mitigation across the site.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 All trenches were laid out as shown in Figure 2 with a GPS with a sub-50mm accuracy.

2.3.2 Each trench was excavated using a 13T 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, under the direct supervision of an archaeologist. Machine excavation was carried out in spits onto undisturbed geology. Exposed archaeological deposits were excavated by hand. Following agreement with Stephen Dean, Principal Archaeologist for Staffordshire County Council, the trenches were backfilled in the reverse order of excavation.

2.3.5 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established best practice and the OA Field Manual (Wilkinson 1992).

2.3.6 Digital photos were taken of archaeological features, deposits, trenches and evaluation work in general.

2.3.7 Plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50. Sections of features were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All section drawings were located on the appropriate plan. The absolute height

of all principal strata and features, and the section datum lines were calculated and indicated on the drawings.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below and include a stratigraphic description of the trenches which contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits form the content of Appendix A.

3.1.2 Context numbers reflect the trench numbers, e.g. pit 102 is a feature within Trench 1, while ditch 304 is a feature within Trench 3.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence in all trenches was very uniform. The natural geology varied from relatively compact yellow sand to having a high percentage of rounded pebbles. Areas of manganese-rich patches were frequently noted. The surface of the geological horizon contained occasional amorphous patches of grey silt, indicative of root disturbance. Further amorphous features were evident, although filled with a compact dark blue grey clay that appeared to represent slight undulations in the topography filled with an alluvial deposit. A number of the amorphous features were tested during the course of the evaluation and confirmed to be naturally derived. The geology was overlain by the topsoil.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good and the trenches remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 All trenches were devoid of archaeological remains except Trench 11.

3.4 Trench 11 (Fig. 3)

3.4.1 The geological horizon (1102) was identified at a depth of 0.4m (46.4m aOD) and was cut by two linear features (1103, 1106), both aligned NE-SW.

3.4.2 Close to the centre of the trench a linear feature (1103) was identified (Fig. 3 and Plate 1). It was 0.6m wide and 0.25m deep with 45° sides breaking gently to a rounded base. The feature contained two fills (1104, 1105). The lowest fill (1104) comprised a compact, dark blue grey clay 0.18m thick. This was overlain by a thin layer (1105) of compact, grey brown clay 0.07m thick. The feature was overlain by the topsoil. No finds were recovered.

3.4.3 Approximately 4m to the south-east of 1103, a further linear feature was identified (1106, Fig. 3 and Plate 2). It was 0.72m wide and 0.32m deep with 40° side with a sharpish break to a rounded base. The feature contained a single fill (1101), which comprised compact, dark blue grey clay that did not produce any finds.

3.5 Finds summary

3.5.1 No finds were retained during the course of the evaluation. Finds clearly dating to the 19th-20th century were noted within the topsoil, although quite sparse.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The features were clearly identifiable in contrast to the geology and the evaluation was conducted in relatively fine weather; as such, the results of the evaluation can be considered reliable.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The specific aims of the evaluation were:

- xiii. To ground truth the results of the geophysical survey.
- xiv. To understand the impacts of agriculture and the construction of the nearby canal upon archaeological remains within the Site.
- xv. To inform discussions regarding the need for, and scope of, any subsequent archaeological mitigation across the site.

4.2.2 The evaluation revealed that the geophysical anomalies represented geological variations, surface disturbance and land drains. A broad linear anomaly that extended NNW-SSE across the field corresponded to a slight, but clear, dip in the topography. The features identified in Trench 11 did not correspond with the results of the geophysical survey.

4.2.3 The site had clearly been subject to modern ploughing, since it was overlain in all trenches by a ploughsoil 0.28-0.35m thick, but there was no evidence for earlier agriculture, such as medieval furrows. The closest trench to the canal was Trench 10, which lay 18m from the channel edge and produced no evidence for disturbance associated with the canal's construction.

4.2.4 The evaluation would appear to indicate little need for any further archaeological mitigation of the site.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 The similar character and proximity of the ditches identified in Trench 11 suggests that they may be related. They were clearly not extensive features, since they did not extend into Trenches 8 and 9, which lay further south on their projected alignments. It is probable that they represent drainage gullies or a small enclosure, such as a garden plot. Although undated, the character of their fills suggests they were of a relatively modern date.

4.4 Significance

4.4.1 The results of the evaluation indicate there is limited evidence of archaeological activity on the site. The two ditches appear to represent a small enclosure, perhaps a garden plot.

4.4.2 The archaeological remains can be considered to be of low significance.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

A.1.1

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of mixed sandy gravels.					Length (m)	49.2
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.35
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.35	Topsoil	-	-
101	Layer	2.2	0.15	Layer	-	-
102	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of mixed sandy gravels.					Length (m)	46.6
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.4
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.38	Topsoil	-	-
201	Layer	-	-	geology	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of mixed sandy gravels.					Length (m)	48
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.35
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.32	Topsoil	-	-
301	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-

Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of mixed sandy gravels.					Length (m)	47.5
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.35
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.35	Topsoil	-	-
401	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-

Trench 5						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of mixed sandy gravels.					Length (m)	49
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.35
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
500	Layer	-	0.35	Topsoil	-	-
501	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-

Trench 6						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of mixed sandy gravels.					Length (m)	48.4
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.28
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
600	Layer	-	0.28	Topsoil	-	-
601	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-

Trench 7						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of mixed sandy gravels.					Length (m)	48.6
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.3
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
700	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
701	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-

Trench 8						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of mixed sandy gravels.					Length (m)	48.6
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.3
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
800	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
801	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-

Trench 9						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of mixed sandy gravels.					Length (m)	47.5
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.3
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
900	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
901	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-

Trench 10						
General description					Orientation	NNW-SSE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of mixed sandy gravels.					Length (m)	47.5
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.3
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1000	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
1001	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-

Trench 11						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench contained two ditches, both aligned NW-SE. Soil sequence consists of topsoil overlying natural geology of mixed sandy gravels.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.4
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1100	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
1101	Fill	-	0.32	Fill of 1106	-	-
1102	Layer	-	-	Geology	-	-
1103	Cut	0.6	0.25	Ditch filled by 1104 and 1105	-	-
1104	Fill	0.54	0.18	Fill of 1103	-	-
1105	Fill	0.6	0.07	Fill of 103	-	-
1106	Cut	0.72	0.32	Ditch filled by 1101	-	-

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

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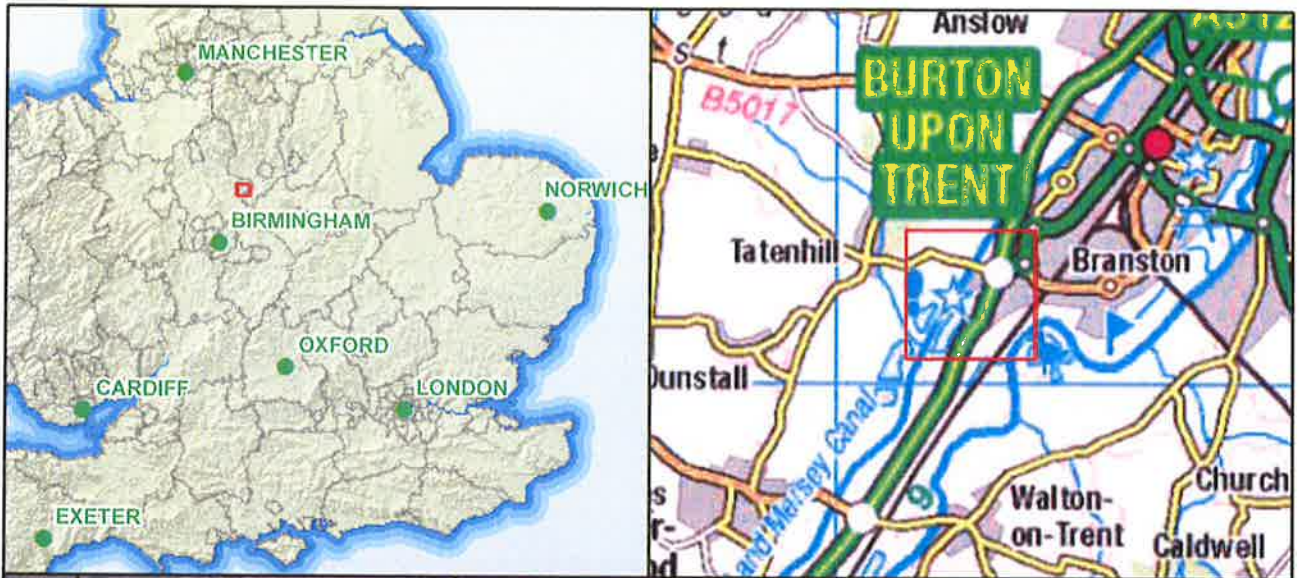
OA, 2017 Land off Tatenhill Lane, Branston: written scheme of investigation for an archaeological evaluation

SCC, 2017 Brief for a staged archaeological evaluation, Land off Tatenhill Lane, Branston, Staffordshire County Council

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

APPENDIX C SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	Land off Tatenhill Lane, Branston.
Site code:	BTTL 17
Grid Reference	SK 21735 2113
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	20/2/17-22/2/17
Summary of Results:	Two undated ditches
Area of Site	2.7ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery in due course, under the following accession number: 2017.LH.7.

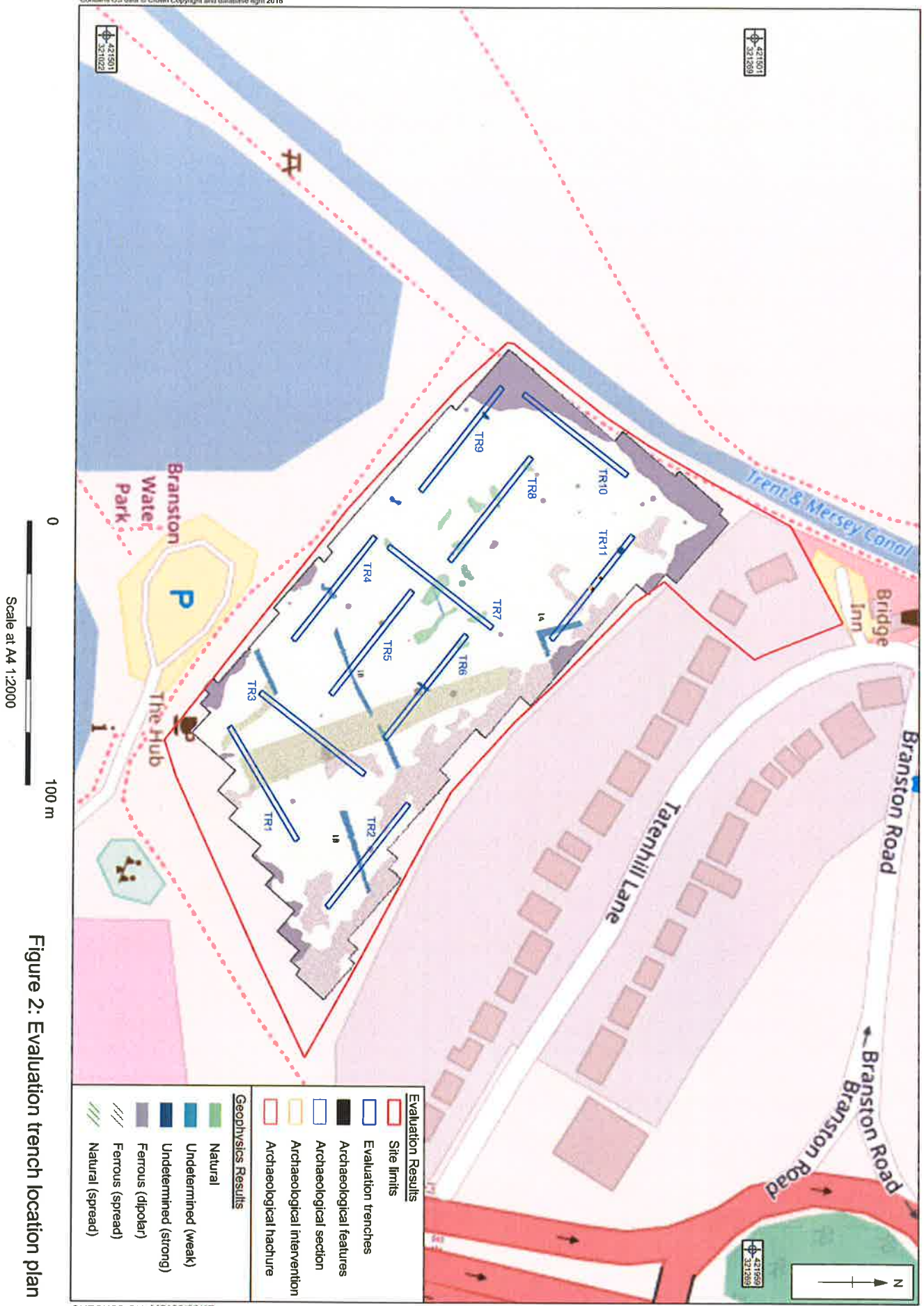


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Figure 1: Site location

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Figure 2: Evaluation trench location plan

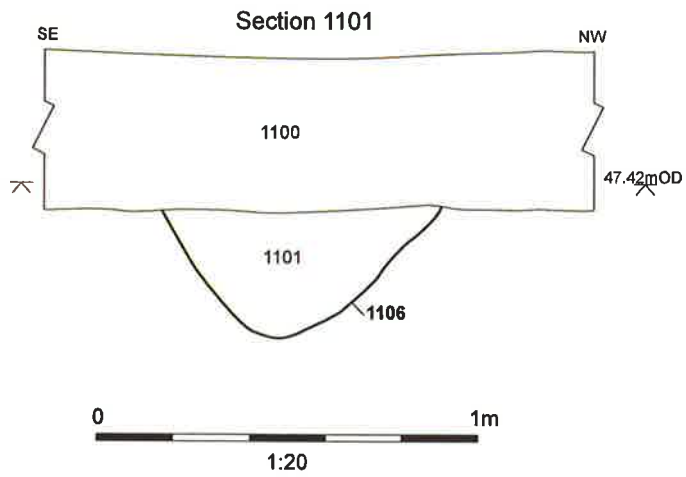
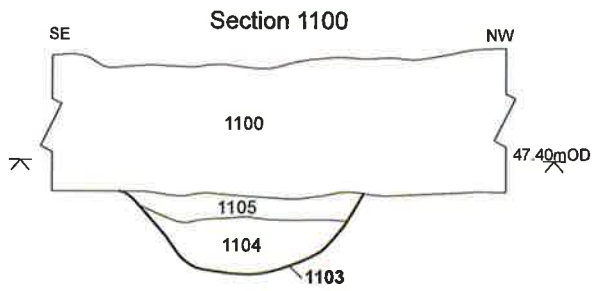
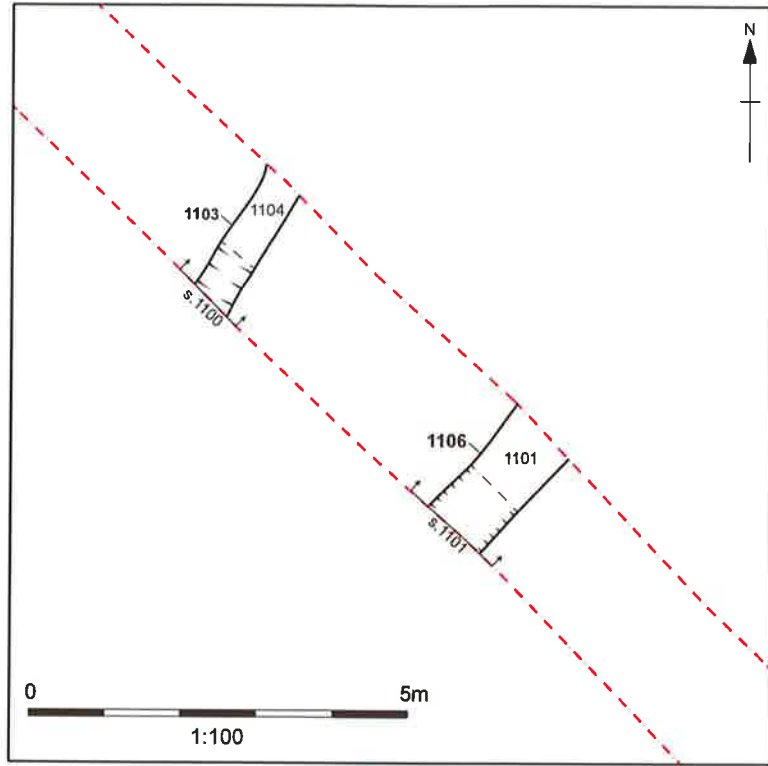


Figure 3: Trench 11 and sections 1100 and 1101



Plate 1: Ditch 1103, view to SW



Plate 2: Ditch 1106, view to SW



**Head Office/Registered Office/
OA South**

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1QD

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: canorth@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
e: caeast@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



Director: Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MCIFA
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