

Grim's Ditch

RAF High Wycombe

Buckinghamshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



July 2008

Client: Costain Ltd

Issue No:1

OA Job No: 4041

NGR: SU 829 988

Grim's Ditch, RAF High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In June 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an Archaeological Watching Brief on Grim's Ditch, RAF High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire (SAM No.35332) (NGR SU 829 988), on behalf of Costain Ltd in advance of the excavation of two new service trenches for a fire main and an electric cable. The Watching Brief exposed a section across Grim's Ditch confirming its known dimensions and also identifying a possible earlier feature on its northern edge, but no dating evidence was recovered. Elsewhere the watching brief encountered natural deposits and areas of modern intrusion. No other significant archaeology was encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 In June 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an Archaeological Watching Brief on Grim's Ditch, RAF High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SU 829 988) on behalf of Costain Ltd in advance of the excavation of two new service trenches for a fire main and an electric cable. As part of the Scheduled Monument Consent from English Heritage, a condition requiring an archaeological watching brief during their excavation was attached to the content.

1.1.2 OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) showing how it would meet the requirements of this condition (OA, 2008).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 RAF High Wycombe is located approximately 6 km north-west of the town of High Wycombe on the western edge of the village of Walters Ash (Fig. 1). The site is bounded to the north-east by a public highway and elsewhere by MOD property. The area of the works is located south-west of the main entrance on level ground at roughly 190 m above OD.

1.2.2 The site of the proposed works was a mixture of tarmac roadways and grassed areas. The underlying geology is clay with flints overlying soft chalk and flints (British Geological Survey, sheet no. 255).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 This part of the monument known as the Buckinghamshire Grim's Ditch runs roughly north west - south east, west of and parallel to New Road. The monument survives as a 300 m long, clearly visible bank and ditch along most of this length. The bank is 9 m wide and up to 1.2 m high. To the east of the bank lies a parallel ditch some 8.8 m wide and 0.7 m in depth. Excavations carried out in 1973 and in 1991 identified a berm between the bank and ditch, and also identified a palisade trench along the outer edge of the monument.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological remains, that the development may remove or damage within the impacted area.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

3 WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork, methods and recording

- 3.1.1 The watching brief was conducted as a continuous site presence during those activities likely to impinge or disturb potential archaeological deposits within the Scheduled Monument Area. These works consisted of approximately 80 m length of trenching in total and consisted of a 30 m length of trenching measuring 0.45 m wide and 1.2 m deep, running from NGR: SU 82987 98805 to NGR: SU 82974 98789, spanning the monument known as Grim's Ditch and a 50 m length of 0.6 m wide by 1.4 m deep trenching running parallel to Grim's Ditch from NGR: SU 82969 98793 to NGR: SU 82949 98817.
- 3.1.2 A plan showing the location and extent of the excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) while any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The excavations and any recorded sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).
- 3.1.3 No levelling data was supplied prior to the watching brief and measurements were taken relative to the current ground level.
- 3.1.4 The ground conditions were good during the investigative works and the weather conditions were fine and dry.

4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

4.1 Description of deposits

Section 1

- 4.1.1 This was located across the monument known as Grim's Ditch.
- 4.1.2 A layer of red-brown silt clay (4) containing medium to large flint nodules was encountered at a depth of 0.6 m below the current road level (Fig. 3, Section 1). This was a very clean deposit and probably represents a layer of natural clay. It was overlaid by a 0.5 m deep layer of yellow-brown sandy clay silt (3). This was a very clean deposit and may represent a layer of colluvium.

- 4.1.3 Cutting this deposit at the north-eastern edge of the section was a 2 m wide by 0.2 m deep feature (12) filled by a yellow-brown silt clay (11). Because of the limited area exposed within the width of the trench it was impossible to determine if this was a linear feature such as a ditch, or a discrete feature such as a tree-throw-hole.
- 4.1.4 Cutting the southern edge of this feature was a 7 m wide ditch with shallow sloping sides (10). This was observed to be in excess of 0.8 m deep in the section of the trench. (Because of the width and depth of the trench it was considered unfeasible to fully excavate the base of the ditch).
- 4.1.5 Filling the base of the ditch and exposed within the base of the service trench was a 0.15 m deep layer of dark red-brown silt clay (9). This was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of red-brown clay silt (8). Both these deposits represent silting deposits.
- 4.1.6 Overlying Layer 8 at the southern edge of the section was a 0.3 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt with lenses of yellow-brown clay silt (7). Sealing the remainder of layer 8 and overlying the northern edge of Layer 7 was a 0.35 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay loam containing numerous machine-made brick fragments (6). These two contexts were probably deposited during the levelling of the ditch prior to construction of the road. A lens of poor quality concrete (5) had been laid over Layers 6, 7, 8 and 9 at the southern edge of the ditch fill.
- 4.1.7 The section shows that there had been a degree of truncation within the footprint of the road with the top of the fills being levelled and no evidence of any topsoil being visible on either side of the ditch. This was probably done during the construction of the roadway and before deposition of the 0.2 m deep concrete road base (2). A 0.15 m deep sequence of layers of tarmac (1) had been laid over this base.

Section 2

- 4.1.8 This was located within the projected alignment of the bank associated with Grim's Ditch.
- 4.1.9 A continuation of the layer of red-brown clay (4) was encountered at a depth of 0.8 m below the current road level (Fig. 3, Section 2). This was overlaid by a 0.4 m deep layer of yellow-brown clay silt, a continuation of Layer 3. Sealing this layer was the concrete base for the roadway (2) overlaid by the tarmac road surface (1). The absence of any evidence for the bank's construction within the section may be explained by the construction cut for the road which in this area is up to 0.4 m deep.

Section 3

- 4.1.10 This was located on the grass verge bounding the eastern edge of the roadway.
- 4.1.11 The natural clay 4 was encountered at a depth of 0.6 m below the road level (Fig. 3, Section 3). Overlying this was a 0.4 m deep layer of the yellow-brown colluvium 3. This was sealed by a 0.18 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (13), a layer of topsoil and turf.

Section 4

- 4.1.12 This was located at the north-western end of the trench running parallel to Grim's ditch.
- 4.1.13 The red-brown natural clay (4) was encountered at a depth of 0.65 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 4). This was overlaid by a 0.5 m deep continuation of the colluvium 3. Overlying this was a 0.12 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay loam (14). This deposit contained modern detritus such as plastic and wire off-cuts and probably represents a modern landscaping layer.
- 4.1.14 At the south-eastern end of this trench the stratigraphy had been severely truncated by later service trenching with the upper 1 m depth of the trench being disturbed.

5 DISCUSSION

- 5.1.1 The location of the trenching within the footprint of the roadway as it crossed Grim's Ditch showed that the upper archaeological deposits had been truncated by the construction cut for the road, which in places measured up to 0.6 m in depth. This truncation meant that no information regarding the construction of the bank on the southern edge of Grim's Ditch could be recovered.
- 5.1.2 Within this limitation the section across the ditch provided additional information about the width and depth of the ditch and its subsequent silting. The observation of the earlier feature 12, possibly a ditch, on its northern edge may indicate a palisade trench, although because of the limited width exposed it may also represent a tree-throw-hole. No dating evidence for Grim's Ditch or for this feature was recovered during the course of the watching brief.
- 5.1.3 The trench within the grassed area north of Grim's Ditch (Section 3) appears to be representative of undisturbed stratigraphy, however it was outside the area of archaeological interest.
- 5.1.4 The trench running parallel and south to the bank (Section 4) showed that this area had been heavily disturbed by recent construction adjacent to it, with the section showing that a degree of truncation had taken place (probably indicating topsoil stripping and ground reduction) and modern reinstatement of the topsoil and turf.

APPENDICES

6 APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context No.</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	-	0.18 m	Sequence of tarmac road surfaces	-	C20th
2	Layer	-	0.2 m	Concrete base for road surface	-	C20th
3	Layer	-	0.3 m- 0.5 m	Colluvium	-	-
4	Layer	-	> 0.7 m	Natural clay	-	-
5	Fill	3 m	0.2 m	Modern levelling deposit	-	C20th
6	Fill	2.5 m	0.35 m	Modern levelling deposit	-	C20th
7	Fill	2.7 m	0.3 m	Modern levelling deposit, redeposited topsoil ?	-	C20th
8	Fill	5.2 m	0.3 m	Silting deposit	-	-
9	Fill	7 m	> 0.2 m	Silting deposit	-	-
10	Cut	7m	> 0.8 m	Cut for Grim's Ditch	-	-
11	Fill	2 m	0.2 m	Silting deposit	-	-
12	Cut	2 m	0.2 m	Unclear feature on northern edge of Grim's ditch	-	-
13	Layer	0.18 m	-	Topsoil and turf	-	-
14	Layer	0.15 m	-	Landscaping layer	Plastic, copper wire	C20th

7 APPENDIX 2 REFERENCES

IFA 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 2008 *Grim's Ditch, RAF High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OAU, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D.Wilkinson)

8 APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Grim's Ditch, RAF High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

Site code: BRGDHW 08

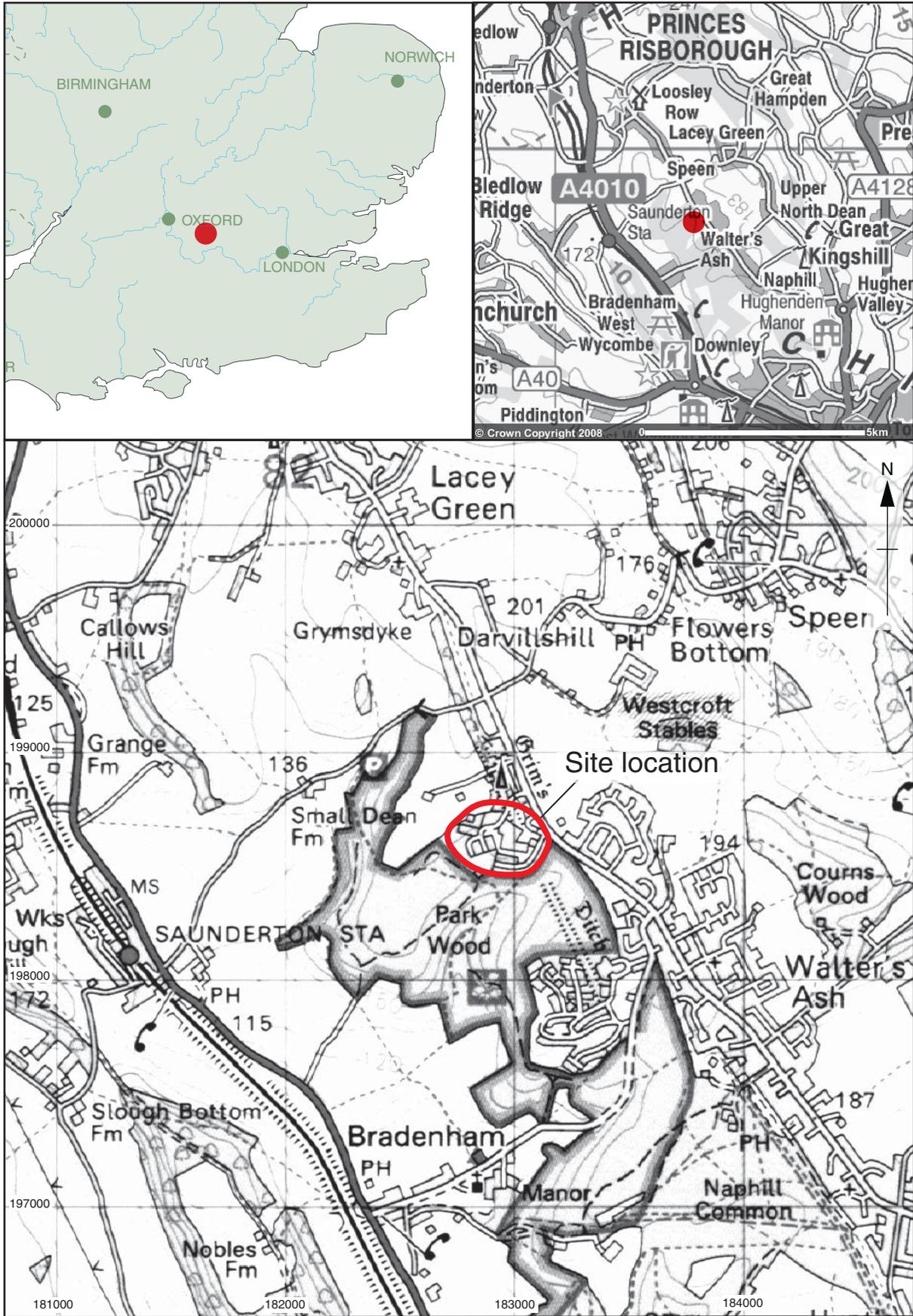
Grid reference: Centred at SU 829 988

Type of Mitigation: Archaeological Watching Brief on machine excavation of service trenching

Date and duration of project: 16th and 17th June 2008, 2 days on site

Summary of results: A section across Grim's Ditch was recorded confirming its known dimensions and the presence of an earlier feature on its northern edge was observed. Due to modern truncation and disturbances no evidence for the intermediate berm or definitive evidence for the palisade trench was encountered.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Buckinghamshire County Museum under the Accession No. AYBCM:2008.69



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Figure 1: Site location

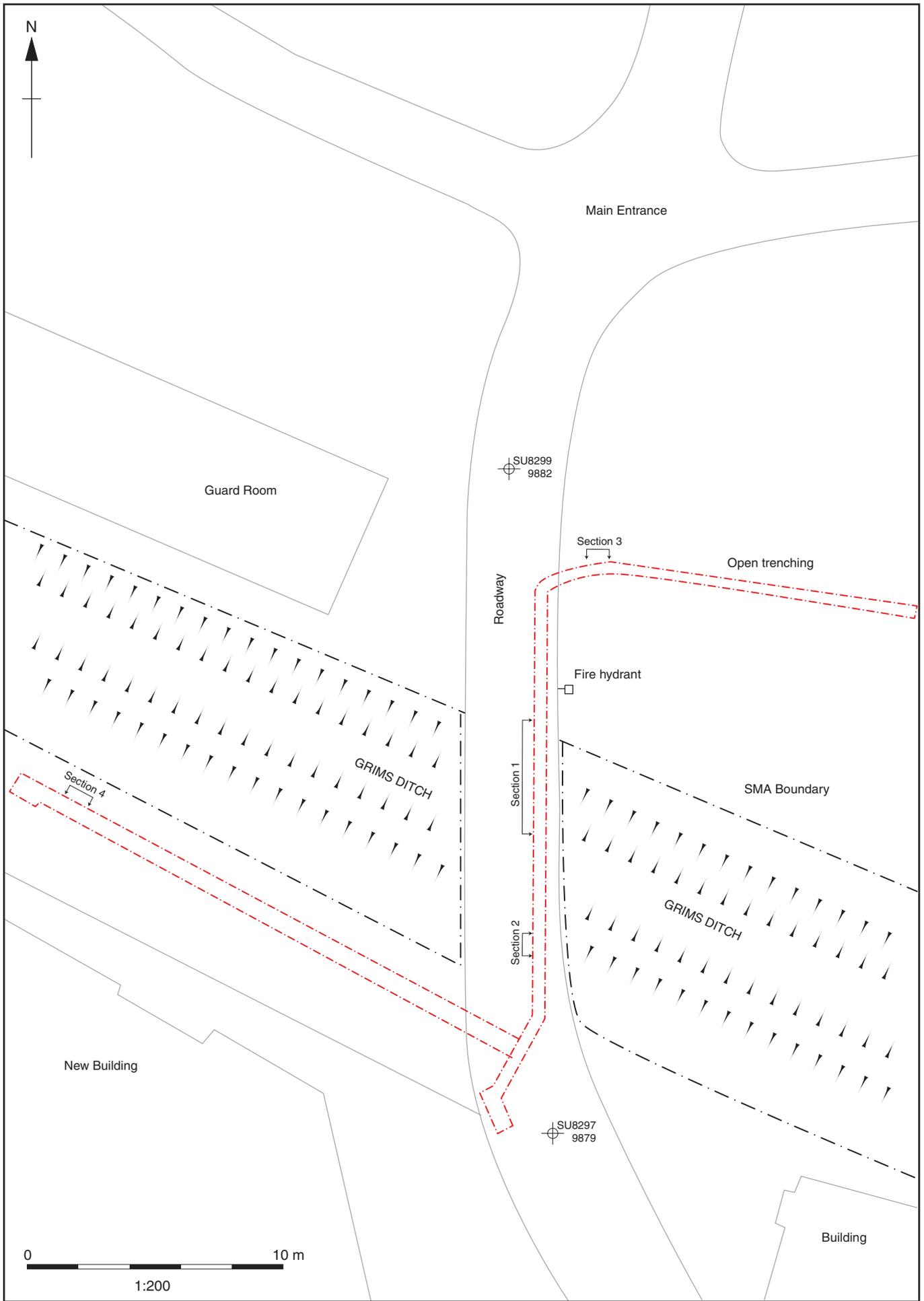


Figure 2: Site plan

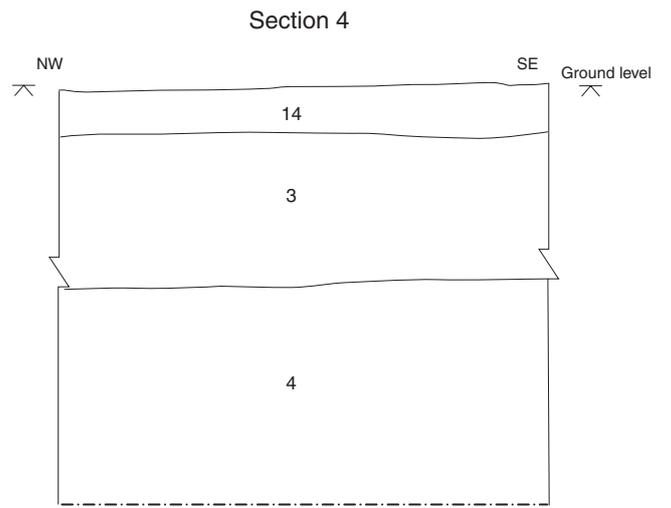
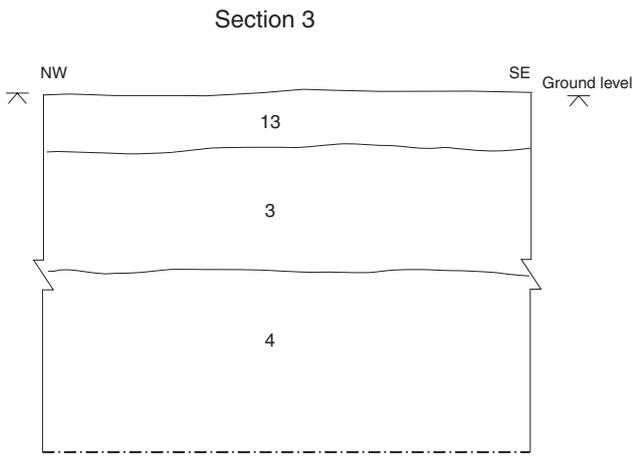
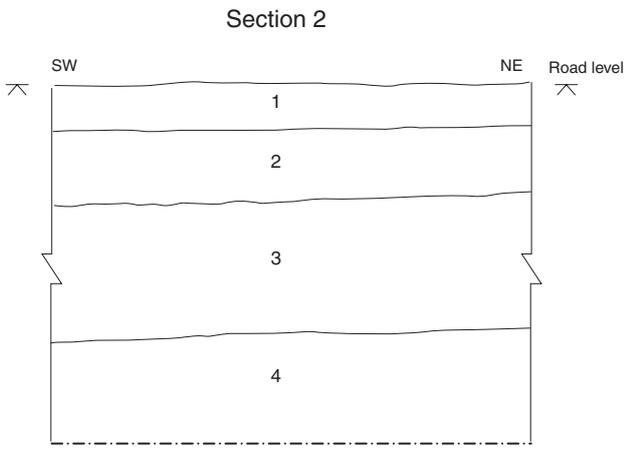
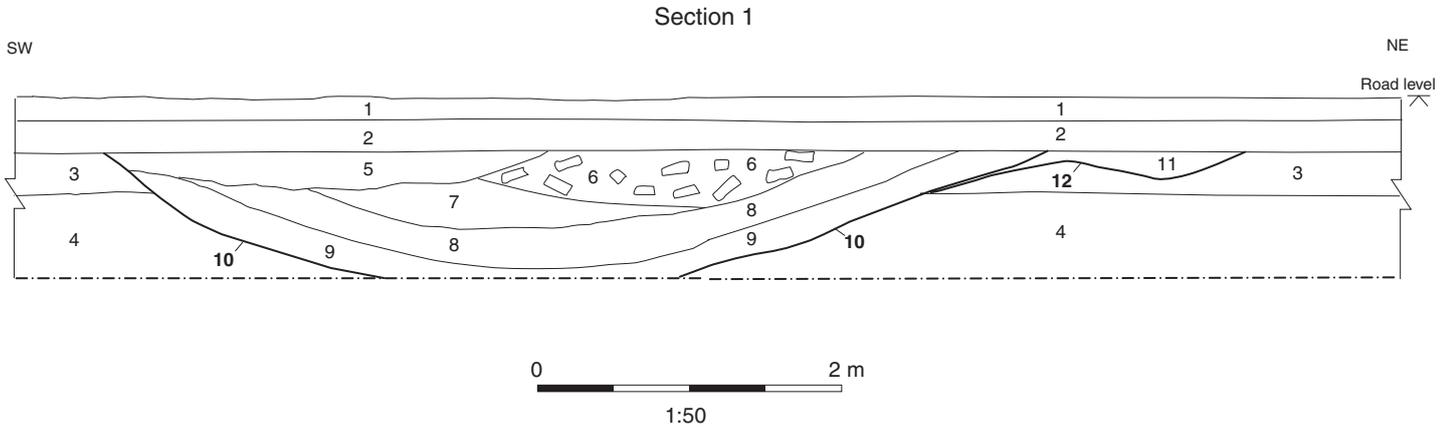


Figure 3: Sections



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