

**Land at St Mary's Church,
Bloxham, Banbury,
Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for The United Benefice of Bloxham
with Milcombe and South Newington**

by Graham Hull
Thames Valley Archaeological Services

Site Code SMB99/70

November 1999

Summary

Site Name: Land at St Mary's Church, Bloxham, Banbury, Oxfordshire

Grid Reference: SP 4319 3566

Site Activity: Evaluation Trenching and Topographical Survey

Date and Duration of Project: 26th, 27th, 28th October 1999

Site Code: SMB99/70

Area of Site: 0.28ha

Summary of Results: Undated trackway or boundary revealed by survey

Monuments Identified: Trackway or boundary

Location and Reference of Archive: At present with Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR, but will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Land at St Mary's Church, Bloxham, Banbury, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Graham Hull

Report 99/70

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out on land at St Mary's Church, Bloxham, Banbury, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 4319 3566) (Fig 1). The work was commissioned by The Reverend John Stroyan, Vicar of the United Benefice of Bloxham with Milcombe and South Newington, St Mary's Vicarage, Church Street, Bloxham, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX 15 4ET.

A planning application was submitted to Cherwell District Council in June 1999 for permission to extend the existing churchyard into the proposal area. In accordance with the Department of the Environment's Policy and Planning Guidance Note *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16 1990) and policies within the Local Plan, a programme of archaeological work was requested by Mr Steven Weaver, Planning Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services (OCCAS), who are archaeological advisors to Cherwell District Council. The programme of work had two aspects; a topographical survey and intrusive trenching. Both parts of the field investigation were carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services. They were supervised by Graham Hull, assisted by Luis Huscroft and Kate Taylor, on 26th to 28th October 1999. The site code is SMB99/70.

Location, Topography and Geology

The site is located immediately east of St Mary's churchyard in the core of the village of Bloxham (Figs 1 and 2). The site is currently rough grassland with a small number of mature trees on the northern side. The land parcel is rectangular and occupies an area of c. 0.28 hectares at a height of c. 120m above Ordnance Datum. The British Geological Survey (BGS 1968) shows the underlying geology to be Cornbrash. This was confirmed by the evaluation.

Archaeological Background

The proposal site lies within the historic core of Bloxham, first mentioned in Domesday Book in 1086. Place name evidence suggests that the village has late Anglo-Saxon origins. The name 'Blochesham' is interpreted as meaning 'the village or estate belonging to Blocc'. St Mary's Church is first mentioned in a charter of 1067 when William I granted it to Westminster Abbey. The church is thought to have been a Minster and would have formed the nucleus of a Minster settlement. Blair (1994) suggests that the Minster settlement was defined by King Street and Little Street to the west, Merrivales Lane to the north, and extended as far as the Old School House along Church Street to the south. The eastern boundary is less clear and it is suggested (ibid., fig 70) that this may have been a continuation south of Merrivales Lane that ran to the west of St Amands Manor, which is now occupied by the large house known as Godswell. The earthworks on the site may relate to a trackway running north-south and be associated with the Medieval St Amands Manor, which lies to the immediate north of the proposal site.

Objectives and Methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. This was achieved by the preparation of a topographical survey using a total station and the excavation of seven trial trenches, each 1.5m wide. The trenches were stripped of topsoil and subsoil by a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket. The machining was conducted under direct and continuous archaeological supervision and the spoil was monitored for finds. All certain or potential archaeological features were hand cleaned and examined and a full written, drawn and photographic record was made.

Results - Earthwork Survey and Evaluation Trenches

The earthwork survey revealed the presence of a slight linear depression running across the centre of the site from north to south, and apparently broadening towards the northern boundary. The right-hand slope faded out towards the southern part of the site. This earthwork has been plotted on Figure 3 and a profile is shown on Figure 4. Following the survey, the evaluation trenches were located to target the earthwork as well as other parts of the site (Fig 3).

All the trenches revealed a topsoil from 0.25m to 0.30m deep over a subsoil of between 0.15m and 0.35m deep, unless otherwise stated. Beneath this was a brownish-orange limestone brash with occasional pieces of ironstone. See also Appendix 1.

Trench 1

This was 11m long and orientated north-south. The northern end of the trench was positioned across the earthwork. Apart from a single sub-circular feature at the northern end of the trench no archaeological features were observed. This feature contained a few small pieces of animal bone and is interpreted as an animal burrow. No artefacts were recovered from the spoil.

Trench 2

The trench was 12.5m long and orientated east-west. Beneath the topsoil, the subsoil was between 0.25 and 0.55m deep. No archaeological features were observed and no artefacts were recovered from the spoil. A test pit was excavated at the east end of the trench through the natural geology to a depth of 1.6m.

Trench 3

This trench was positioned across the earthwork. It was 13m long and orientated east-west. No archaeological features were observed and no artefacts were recovered from the spoil.

Trench 4

This trench was 11m long and orientated north-south. No archaeological features were observed and no artefacts were recovered from the spoil.

Trench 5

The trench was 12m long and orientated east-west. Below the topsoil was a subsoil between 0.05m and 0.15m deep. No archaeological features were observed and no artefacts were recovered from the spoil.

Trench 6

This was 9.5m long and orientated east-west. No archaeological features were observed and two sherds of 19th or 20th century pottery were recovered from the spoil.

Trench 7

The trench was 11m long and orientated north-south. No archaeological features were observed and no artefacts were recovered from the spoil.

Conclusion

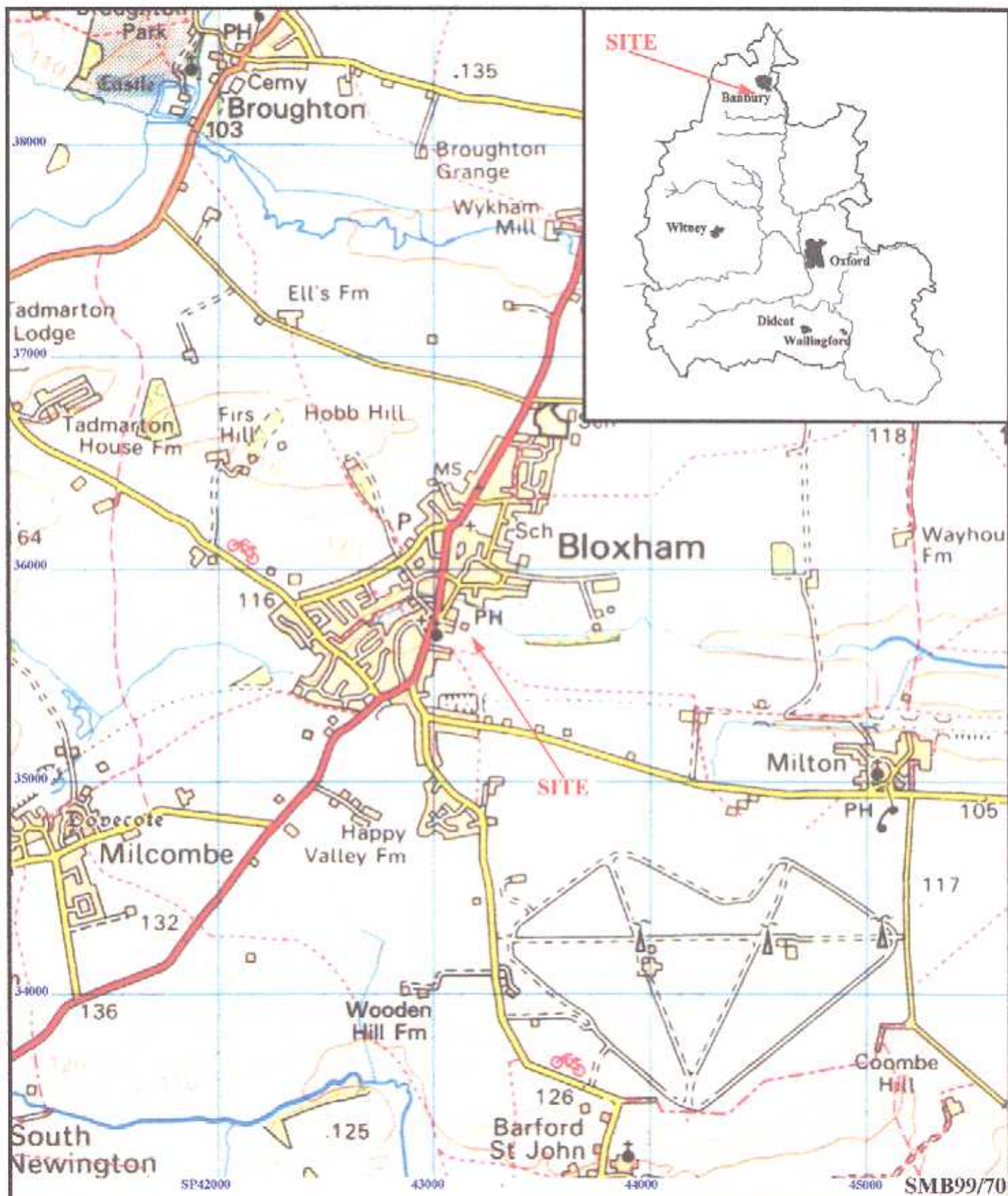
The topographical survey and trenching on the land to the east of St Mary's Church, Bloxham, has established that, other than the slight linear depression running from north to south, no archaeological finds or remains were present. The relatively undisturbed nature of the brash might indicate that ploughing has not occurred on the site. The slight earthwork may represent a boundary or trackway. However, clearly the hollow is not a ditched feature and there is no evidence of wheel ruts which might be expected if the hollow was created by the passage of traffic. It may be associated with the Medieval St Amands Manor, which lies immediately to the north of the proposal site.

References

- BGS, 1968, *British Geological Survey*, 1:63660, Sheet 218, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
Blair, J, 1994, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, Oxford Books
PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, HMSO

Appendix 1: Trench details

<i>Trench no</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	11.00	1.5	0.60	0.3m of topsoil over 0.3m of subsoil onto brownish-orange limestone brash with occasional pieces of ironstone. Probable animal burrow at N. end.
2	12.50	1.5	0.50-0.80	0.25m of topsoil over 0.25-0.55m of subsoil onto brownish-orange limestone brash with occasional pieces of ironstone.
3	13.00	1.5	0.55-0.65	0.3m of topsoil over 0.25-0.35m of subsoil onto brownish-orange limestone brash with occasional pieces of ironstone.
4	11.00	1.5	0.50	0.25m of topsoil over 0.25m of subsoil onto brownish-orange limestone brash with occasional pieces of ironstone.
5	12.00	1.5	0.30-0.40	0.25m of topsoil over 0.05-0.15m of subsoil onto brownish-orange limestone brash with occasional pieces of ironstone.
6	9.50	1.5	0.40	0.25m of topsoil over 0.15m of subsoil onto brownish-orange limestone brash with occasional pieces of limestone.
7	11.00	1.5	0.50	0.25m of topsoil over 0.25m of subsoil onto brownish-orange limestone brash with occasional pieces of ironstone.



St. Mary's Church, Bloxham, Banbury,
Oxfordshire, 1999

Figure 1. Location of site within Bloxham and
Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Location of site.

Sequoia



N



35650

SP43130

0

20m

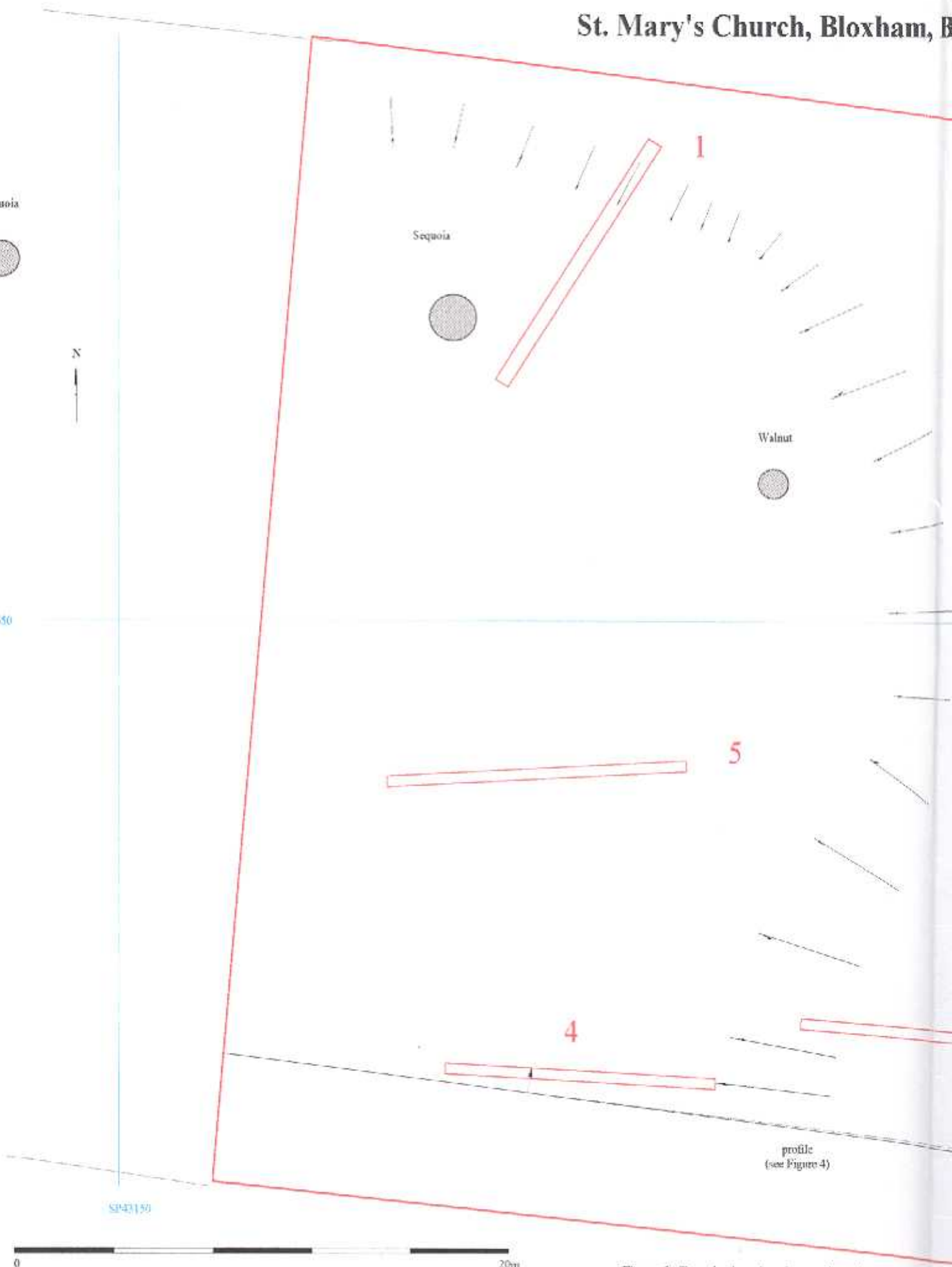
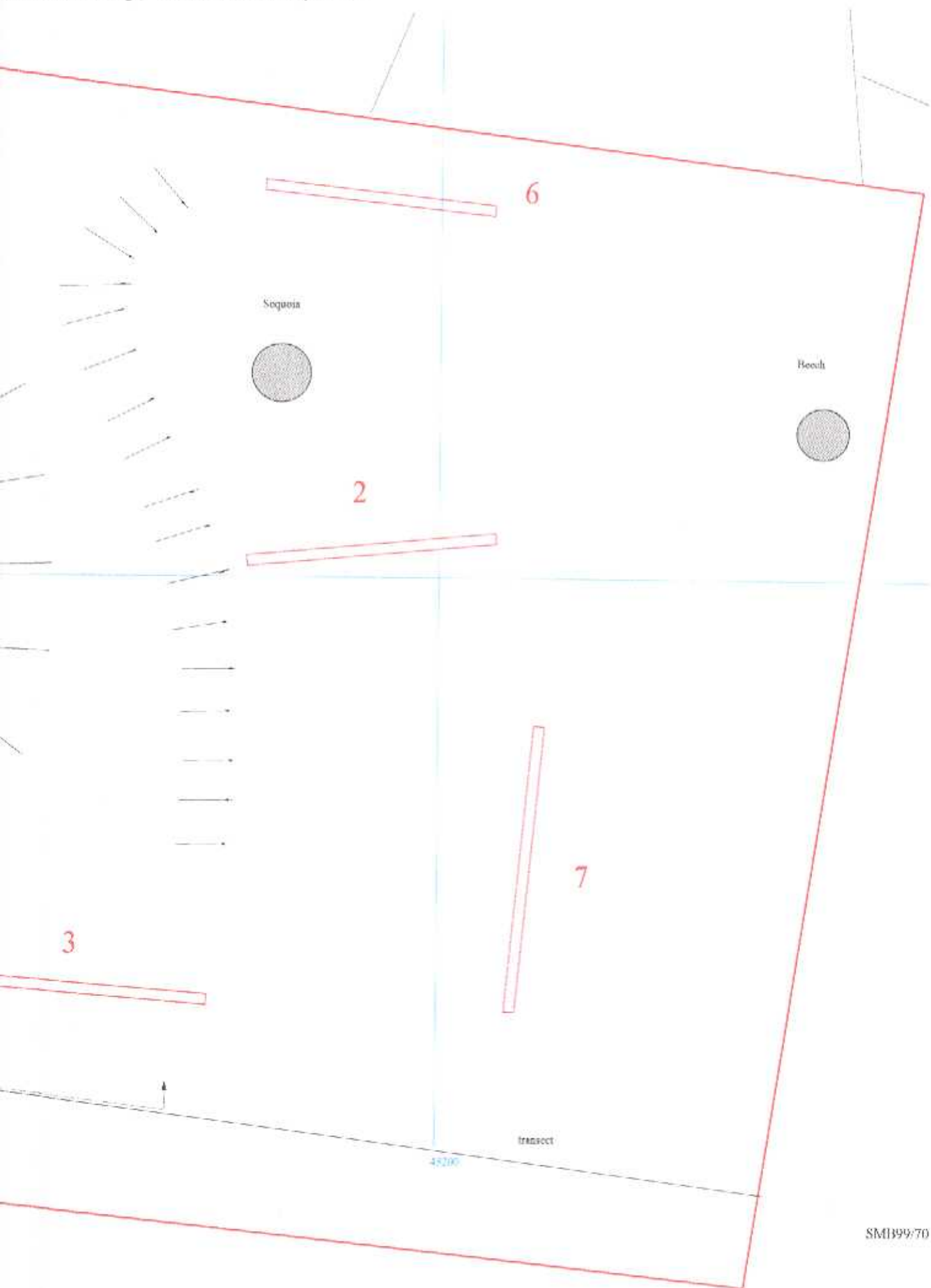


Figure 3. Trench plan showing earthwork.



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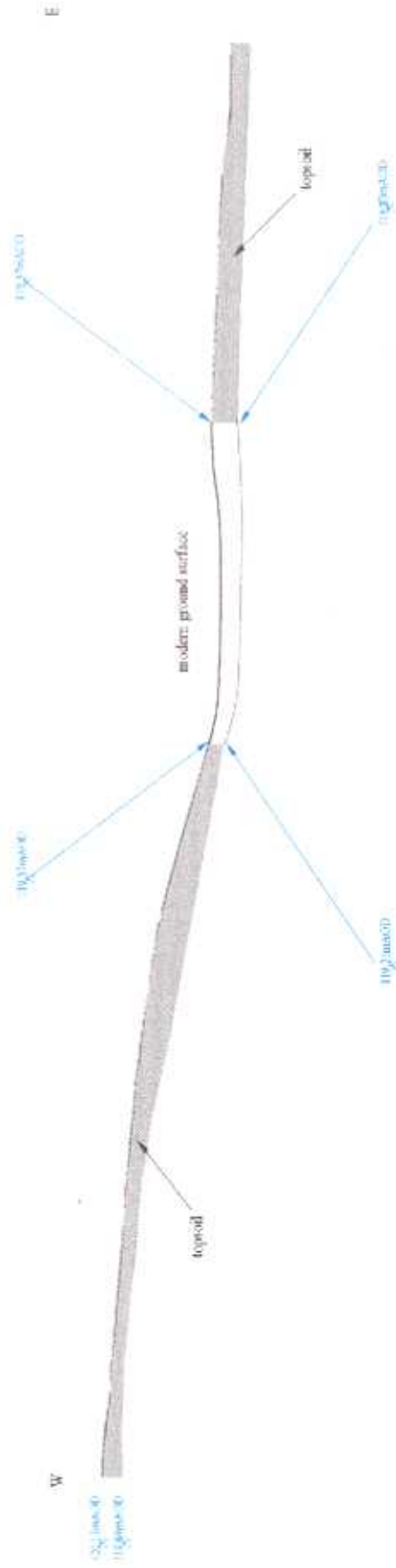


Figure 4. Profile across earthworks.