

**Earsden, Mustard Lane,  
Sonning, Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**For Mr and Mrs J Cahill**

by Simon Cass and Sean Wallis

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code EMS 06/56

**May 2006**

## Summary

**Site name:** Earsden, Mustard Lane, Sonning, Berkshire

**Grid reference:** SU 7630 7452

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 26th April – 5th May 2006

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Simon Cass

**Site code:** EMS 06/56

**Summary of results:** Two ditches, one of early Roman date and the other of early post-medieval date, along with relatively modern (19th/20th century) truncations.

**Monuments identified:** Ditches

**Location and reference of archive:** The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 24.05.06
	Steve Preston ✓ 24.05.06

# **Earsden, Mustard Lane, Sonning, Berkshire. An Archaeological Watching Brief**

by Simon Cass and Sean Wallis

**Report 06/56**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Earsden, Mustard Lane, Sonning, Berkshire (SU 7630 7452) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr John Challis, 72 Wargrave Road, Twyford, Berkshire, RG10 9PH on behalf of Mr and Mrs J Cahill of Earsden, Mustard Lane, Sonning, Berkshire.

A planning consent (F/2005/4573) has been granted by Wokingham District Council to construct a new house following demolition of the previous dwelling on the site, subject to a condition which requires the implementation of an archaeological watching brief to be carried out during intrusive groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr David Thomason, Archaeology Officer for Berkshire Archaeology, advisers to the District, and was undertaken by Sean Wallis, Simon Cass and Sarah Coles between 26th April and 5th May 2006 and the site code is EMS 06/56.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Reading Museum in due course.

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site is located to the south of the centre of Sonning, towards Woodley, between the railway line and the A4 (Bath Road) on the northern side of Mustard Lane (Fig. 2). The site previously contained a detached house and outbuilding, both demolished prior to the watching brief. The underlying geology is listed as Plateau Gravel (BGS 1946) and this was observed on site as orangey brown sandy gravel. The site lies at approximately 54m above Ordnance Datum.

## **Archaeological background**

The site is located in an area of the Thames Valley rich in archaeological finds and deposits (Ford 1987; Gates 1975). A number of sites of prehistoric and Roman dates have been identified from the air to the north of the site,

including a Neolithic cursus monument and mortuary enclosure (Gates 1975; Slade 1964). Several levelled round barrows of probable Bronze Age date and apparent enclosures and field boundaries likely to date from the Roman period are also recorded in this area, many of which are scheduled (under SAM 176). To the south of the site, less is known but investigations within the last ten years have recorded Bronze Age and other probable prehistoric occupation activity (Hardy 1999; Taylor 1997).

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the new construction work. This involved examination of all areas of topsoil stripping, landscaping, ground reduction and the digging of trenches for foundations and services for structures. Archaeological deposits were hand-cleaned and photographed but not excavated below the base of the foundation trench. However the two features observed both provided datable finds during hand-cleaning.

## **Results**

The foundation trenches were generally 0.85m wide and 1.10m deep. On occasion this was exceeded (for instance the removal of a cess pit (brick-lined pit) near the middle of the footings which went down to *c.*2.2m deep (Figs 3 and 4). A service trench and planting trench of similar dimensions were also observed.

The general stratigraphy of the trenches consisted of 0–0.25m variously of topsoil and demolition rubble which was significantly disturbed by root action in several places. Below this, from 0.25–0.70m, there was a mid orangey brown silty sand subsoil which overlay natural orange brown sand and gravel (0.7–2.2m at deepest point seen) (Plateau Gravel).

A ditch (1 and 7) was visible in the north-westernmost corner of the footings at two points and was approximately 2.3m wide and at least 0.45m deep. It appeared to be aligned NW–SE. It was filled with a grey sandy silt with some gravel, and finds including 130 sherds of early Roman pottery (AD70–100 ), two small tile fragments and an iron nail were recovered from it.

Another probable ditch (2, 4, 6) was recorded in three foundation trenches in the more southerly of the footings. It was aligned in an approximately NE–SW direction. It was approximately 0.90m wide and at least 0.25m deep and contained a small number of sherds of poorly glazed Brill/Boarstall ware of 16th/17th century date together with four poorly preserved fragments of animal bone.

## **Finds**

### *Pottery by Malcolm Lyne*

The fill of ditch 1 (context 50) yielded 130 sherds (1016g) of early Roman pottery, of which 128 sherds are from a handmade storage vessel in oxidized grog and sparse-shell tempered fabric. Such vessels can be broadly-dated c.AD50–150: the lack of diagnostic rim fragments makes more precise dating impossible.

There are, however, two fragments from handmade cooking-pots in black Highgate Wood B type grog-tempered ware, including a large sherd from an everted-rim vessel. Highgate Wood B ware has an overall date range of c.AD40–100 but cooking-pots with well-formed everted rims in the fabric are more likely to date to after AD70 and suggest a AD70–100 date for the feature.

### Fabrics

1. Handmade oxidized fabric with very-fine grog and very-sparse shell filler
2. Coarse grog tempered handmade fabric fired lumpy black. Highgate Wood B fabric variant of local origin.

## **Conclusion**

The watching brief during groundworks has revealed archaeological deposits of two periods. The more significant is an early Roman ditch from which a large volume of pottery was recovered. It seems most unlikely that such a quantity of domestic pottery, especially so much of a single vessel, would have been discarded at a location remote from an occupied area and it seems probable that further occupation deposits are likely to survive nearby. The second deposit found was also a ditch though this more likely to be a field boundary of early post-medieval or later date.

## **References**

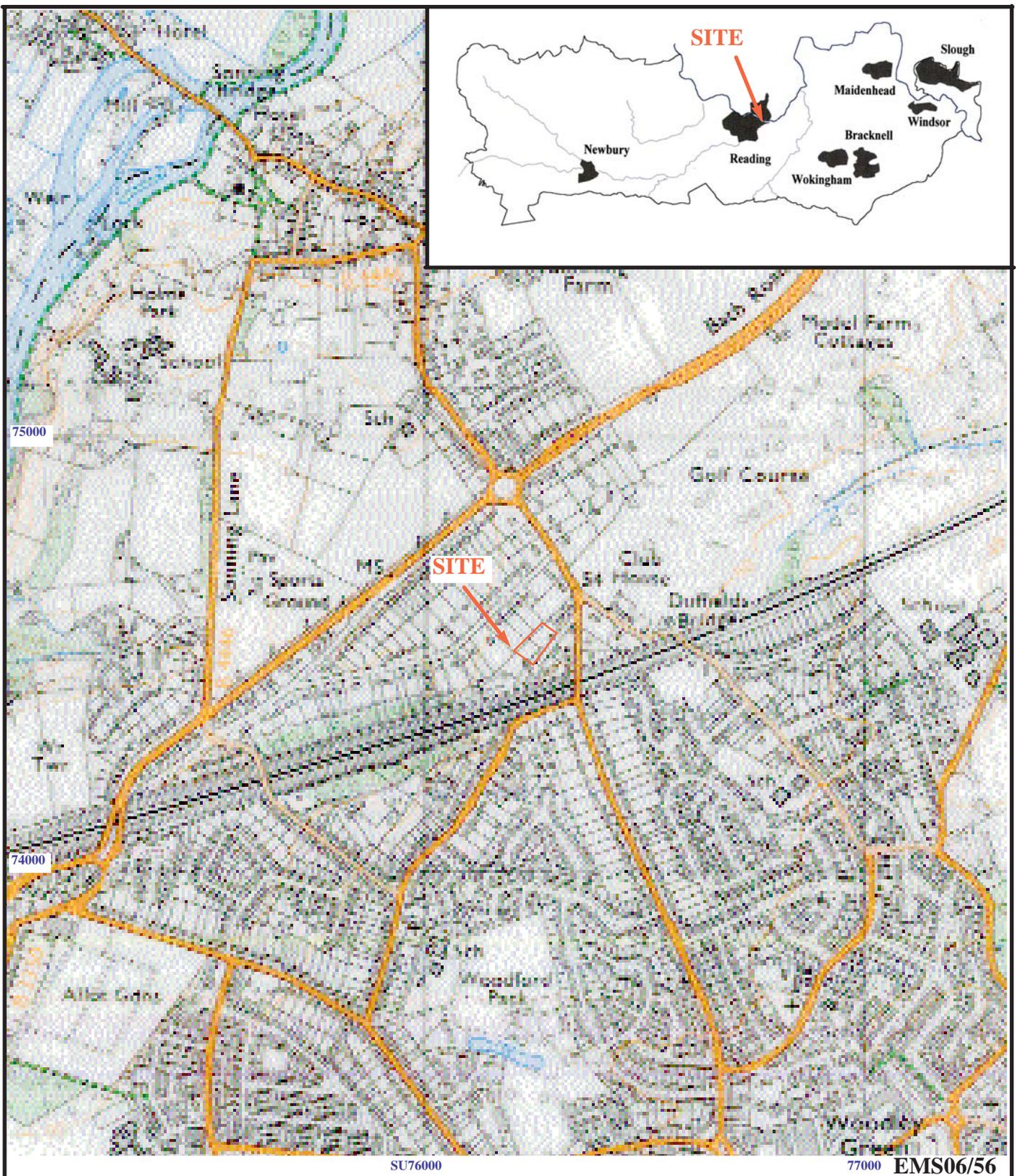
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## APPENDIX 1: Feature details

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	50	Ditch	Early Roman	Pottery
2	52	Ditch	16th century or later	=6?
4	53	Ditch	16th century or later	=6?
6	51	Ditch	16th century or later	Pottery
7	54	Ditch	Early Roman	=1

## APPENDIX 2: Pottery catalogue

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Date-rang (AD)e</i>	<i>No of sherds</i>	<i>Weight (g)</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	50	1	Storage-jar	c.50-150	128	979	One pot
		2	Ev.rim jar	c.40/70-100	2	37	
6		?Brill/Boarstall	Cistern	?16th-17th century	2	105	

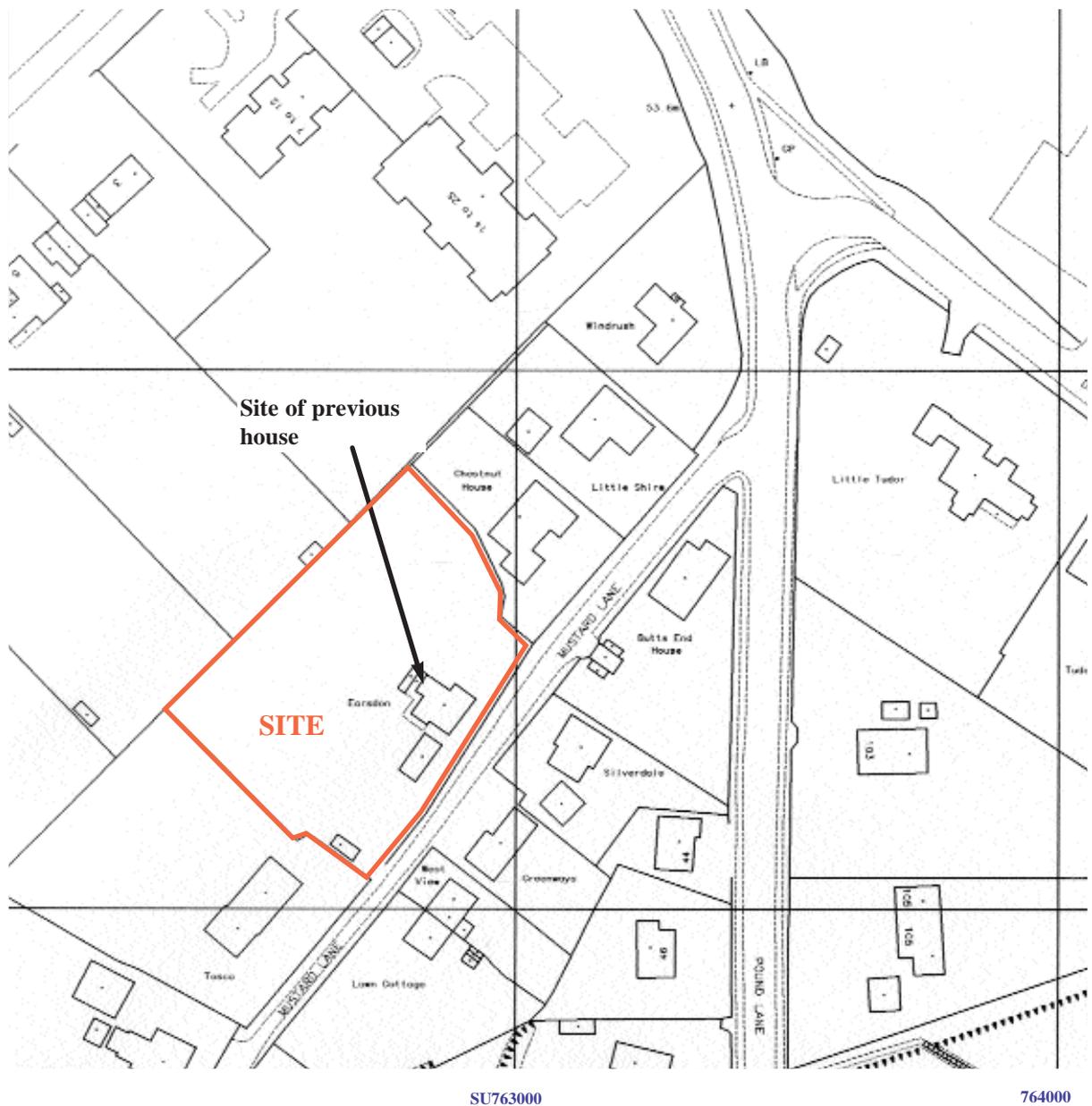


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Figure 1. Location of site within Sonning and Berkshire.

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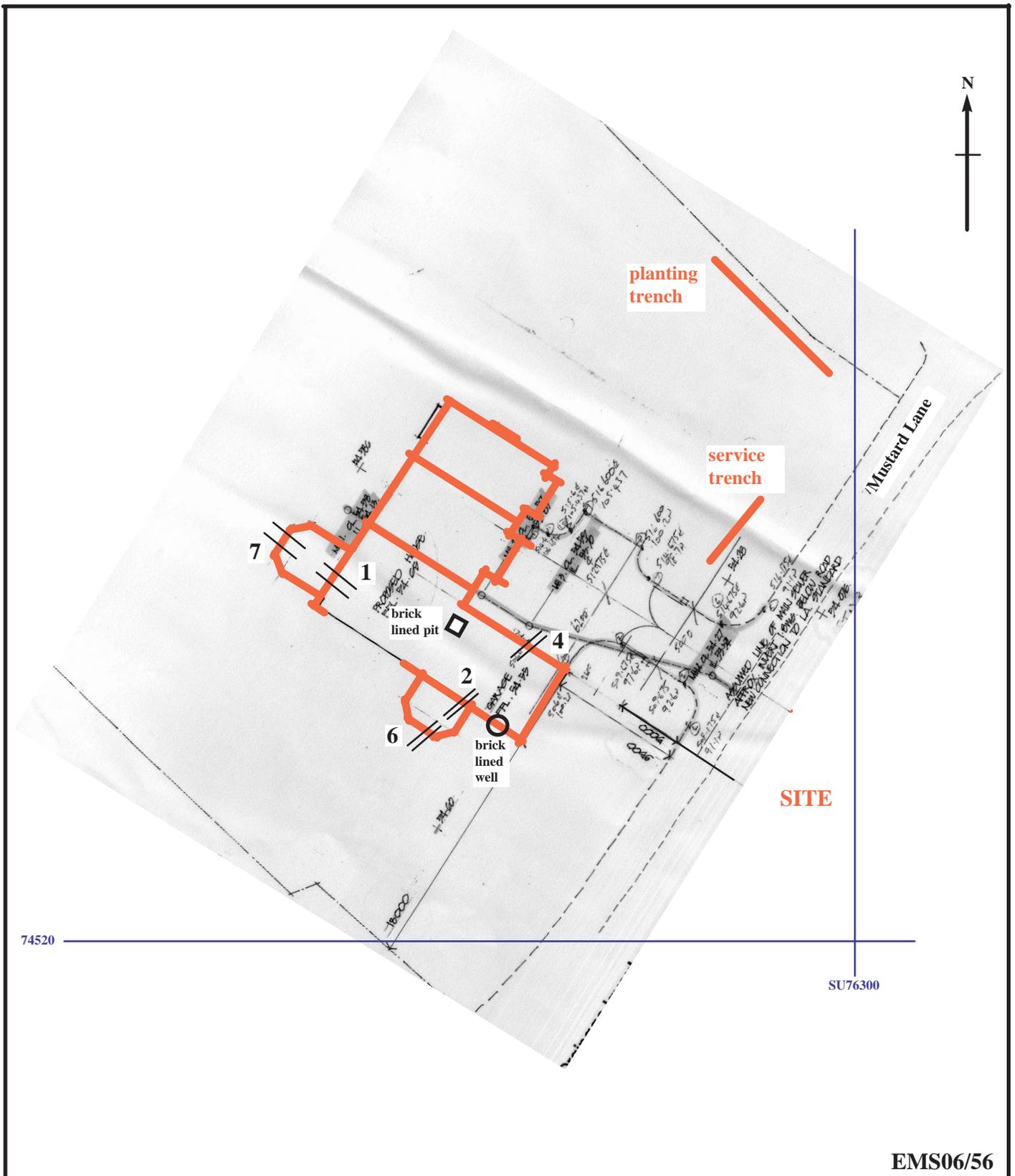


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site on Mustard Lane.  
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Scale: 1:1250.

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Figure 3. Detailed location of watching brief.

Scale: 1:400.

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# Earsden, Mustard Lane, Sonning, Berkshire 2006

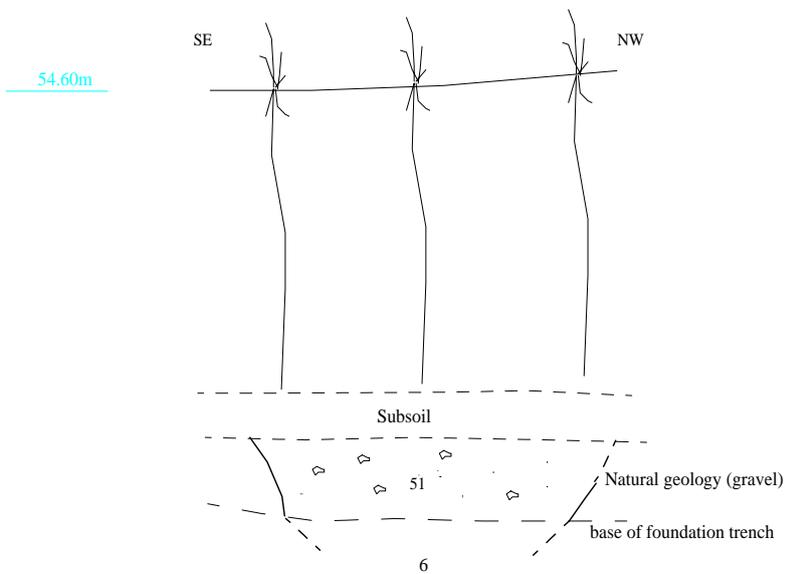
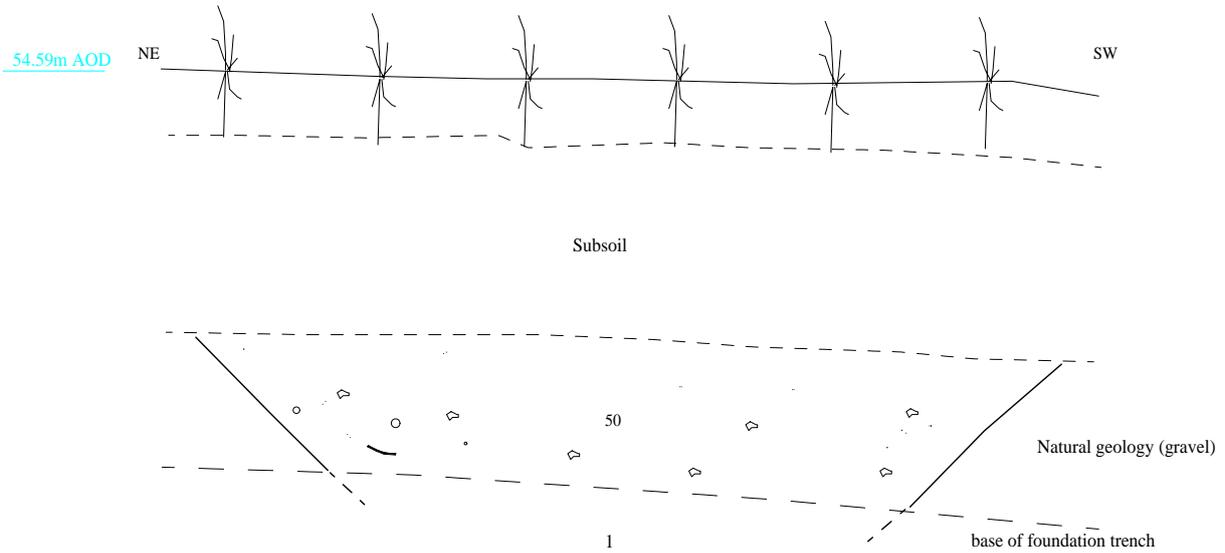


Figure 4. Sections of ditches