

**New Post House Hotel, Peartree Service Area,
A34, Oxford**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
for Fitzsimons**

by Sarah Coles

Thames Valley Archaeological Services

Site Code PHH00/22

July 2000

Summary

Site name: New Post House Hotel, Peartree Service Area, A34, Oxford

Grid reference : SP 4945 1095

Site activity: Watching brief

Date of project: During May, June and July 2000

Site code: PHH00/22

Area of site: 1.41 hectares

Monuments identified: None

Summary of results: The watching brief did not reveal any finds or deposits of archaeological interest. Areas stripped of topsoil and the digging of foundation and service trenches were observed and revealed made ground overlying the natural geology (clay).

Location and reference of archive: The archive is at present held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47–49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR and will be deposited with Oxford Museum Service in due course.

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Report 00/22

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at the Peartree roundabout complex on the north-west fringes of Oxford (SP 4945 1095) (Fig 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Paul Caesar on behalf of Fitzsimons, 26 Carnaby Street, London W1V 1PL.

Planning Permission (99/0229/NF) has been granted by Oxford City Council, subject to a condition (13) for an archaeological watching brief, for the construction of a new hotel building. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Policy and Planning Guidance Note *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990) and the City policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Brian Durham of Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS), who advise the City Council on archaeological matters. The fieldwork was undertaken by Sarah Coles and Stephen Hammond on the 30th and 31st of May, 29th of June and 10th, 19th and 20th of July 2000. The site code is PHH00/22.

Location, Topography and Geology

The site is a trapezoidal parcel of land 1.41 ha. extent, located to the east of Peartree roundabout between the north bound section of the A34 and the Woodstock Road (A44) (Figs 1 and 2). It lies at a height of 70m above Ordnance Datum. According to the British Geological Survey (BGS 1982) the site lies on Oxford Clay and the natural geology observed on site confirmed this. The site lies on a gentle slope running from west to east. However, this topography was caused by the dumping of made ground arising from the construction of the A34 flyover nearby and the original topography was more level.

Desk-Based Assessment

Cartographic evidence

Nine maps were consulted at the Centre for Oxfordshire studies (Appendix 1). The earliest, a map of Oxfordshire by Davis dating to 1793, shows the adjacent villages of Water Eaton and Wolvercote (Fig. 2). It also has the Oxford canal to the north-west of the site but does not show the site in great detail. A preliminary edition

Ordnance Survey map (1832) shows that the site was enclosed on all sides by trackways and roads. It also has 'Water Eaton Frice' marked just to the north (Fig. 3).

The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1876 shows the area in some detail and the site can be more accurately located relative to Red Barn Farm, Frize Farm and the Woodstock Road (Fig. 4). The proposed development area was within a smaller field and the trackway to the south had become a road. The railway had now been built to the north-east and to the north-west were the Peartree Hill brickworks. The Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1899 (not illustrated), the edition of 1937 (Fig. 5) and the edition of 1957 (Fig. 6) show no change to the site.

By 1965/8 the Peartree roundabout had been built, linking the Woodstock Road and the A34 (Fig. 7). The site had undergone a major transformation with the appearance of the service area, which consisted of several motels and a swimming pool, located in the centre of the new development area (Fig. 7).

Archaeological background

The area around the site is rich in monuments dating from a wide range of periods. Two major events have influenced the site: the Wolvercote channel, dating from the last ice age, is present to the south-east; and the A34 now runs along the old Medieval route linking the south of the country to the north. It is possible that the boundary between the two parishes of Water Eaton and Wolvercote is defined by a boundary bank and ditch, possibly of Saxon origins.

The Oxfordshire County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) was consulted in June 2000 in order to obtain any archaeological and historical information relating to the vicinity of the development area. A search was made for approximately a 1.5km radius around the site. The entries are shown on Figure 1 and have been summarised in Appendix 2.

There are no entries for the development area itself but there are 16 in close proximity. Six Palaeolithic hand axes were found to the east of the site [Fig. 1, 13] and to the south-east 75 hand axes, 10 retouched flakes, 84 flakes and 16 miscellaneous fragments were found in the prehistoric channel of the Thames at Wolvercote [12]. The tusks and teeth of a mammoth were found in a pit during the 1959–61 construction of the Upper Wolvercote by-pass [2]. To the east, fragments of Neolithic flaked flints were found together with an adze blade [16]. A pair of Bronze Age round barrows located to the north-east of the site are thought to be the '*twam lytlan beorgan of the bounds of Eatun*' [15].

Roman pottery sherds have been found to the south of the development area [5] and to the north-west several pieces of Roman mortaria were located in the area of the 'brick fields' [6].

North of the site is a Medieval chapel bridge, which divides Yarnton from Kidlington. On each side of the bridge are farms known from Medieval times (Frice and Frize farm) [10].

Signs of post-Medieval activity are present to the north, south and west of the site, including a milestone for the Oxford canal [4] and a tollhouse [14]. The only development that had a direct influence on the site's archaeological potential is the construction of the A34 and Peartree roundabout service area built in the 1960s. To the west of the site is a single-chambered narrow lock, which was opened for use in 1790 [3]. A 17th century farmhouse to the south of the site has evidence of earlier use in the form of a 15th century head-corbel of a king in the north gable [9].

Just outside the development area were two brick pits [7 and 8] both in use until the beginning of the 20th century. In 1972 some earthworks were investigated to the south of the site, which transpired to be a post-Medieval brick-lined well and rectangular building [11].

There is one cropmark visible from the air to the west of the site but this is of unknown date and function [1].

Watching Brief

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the construction of the new hotel and its car parking area. Areas stripped of topsoil were examined for potential archaeological features, as were trenches for foundations and service runs. The majority of the area designated for the watching brief was examined after the removal of topsoil.

Results

The initial stripping revealed made ground, typically *c.* 0.3m thick, across the whole site. This lay above clean natural clay and there was no evidence for the latter having been truncated other than for topsoil removal. Several modern field drains were observed traversing the site from west to east and occasional areas of modern disturbance and tree roots were located.

The foundation trenches were examined during or immediately after excavation and five service trenches were also examined (Fig. 8). The footing trenches were 1.60m wide and those observed varied in depth from

0.40m to 1.50m, cutting through made ground and into the natural clay. The service runs examined ranged from 0.62m to 2.0m wide and varied in depth from 0.30m to 2.30m, cutting the natural at a depth of 0.20m. In addition spoil heaps were monitored for finds. No artefacts were recovered and no archaeological features were observed.

Conclusion

The watching brief did not locate any archaeological deposits on the site and no finds pre-dating the modern period were observed.

References

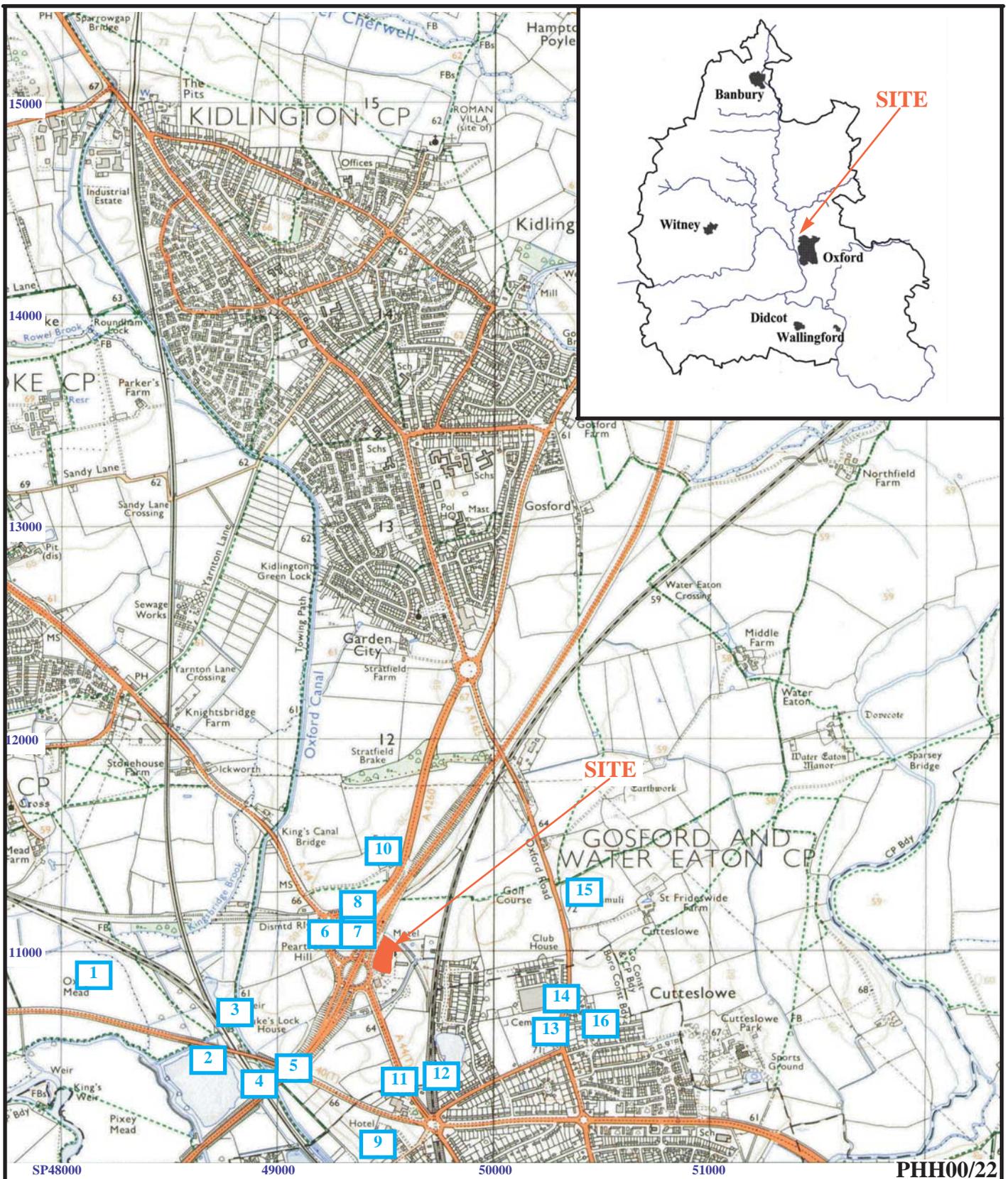
BGS, 1982, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 236, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, HMSO

APPENDIX 1: Cartographic sources

- 1793 Davis, Oxfordshire 1 inch to 2 miles (Fig. 2)
- 1832 Ordnance Survey Preliminary Edition 1 inch to 1 mile (Fig. 3)
- 1876 Ordnance Survey First Edition (Oxon XXXIII. 6) 25 inches to 1 mile (Fig. 4)
- 1899 Ordnance Survey Second Edition (Oxon XXXIII. 6) 25 inches to 1 mile (1 sheet)
- 1937 Ordnance Survey Third Edition (Oxon XXXIII. 6) 25 inches to 1 mile (Fig. 5)
- 1957 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1 sheet (Fig. 6)
- 1965 Ordnance Survey (SP 4910NW) 1:1250 (Fig. 7)
- 1968 Ordnance Survey (SP 4910NE) 1:1250 (Fig. 7)
- 1990 Ordnance Survey (SP 4910NW) 1:1250 (1 sheet)

APPENDIX 2: Summary of Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record entries for a 1.5km radius of the site.

<i>No</i>	<i>SMR No</i>	<i>NGR (SP)</i>	<i>Brief description</i>
1	15097	4815 1090	Linear system, cropmarks. Unknown date
2	6253	487 105	Mammoth tusks and teeth. Palaeolithic
3	12649	4881 1071	Single chamber narrow lock. Post-Medieval (1790)
4	4655	4895 1042	Oxford canal milestone. Post-Medieval
5	4645	4905 1045	Pottery sherd. Roman
6	1381	4929 1109	Pottery sherds. Roman
7	5146	494 111	Old brick pit. Post-Medieval
8	41	494 112	Brick works. Post-Medieval
9	1380	495 101	17th century farmhouse with 15th century head-corbels of a king. Post-Medieval
10	980	495 115	Chapel bridge. Medieval
11	288	4957 1038	Well and earthworks. Post-Medieval
12	1379	4977 1043	75 hand axes, 10 retouched flakes, 84 flakes and 16 implements – Wolvercote channel. Palaeolithic
13	12912	503 106	6 hand axes. Palaeolithic
14	10185	5033 1078	Toll house. Post-Medieval (1800–05)
15	1324	5043 1128	Two round barrows ‘twam lytlan beorgan’. Bronze Age
16	6163	505 107	Flint flakes and adze blade. Neolithic

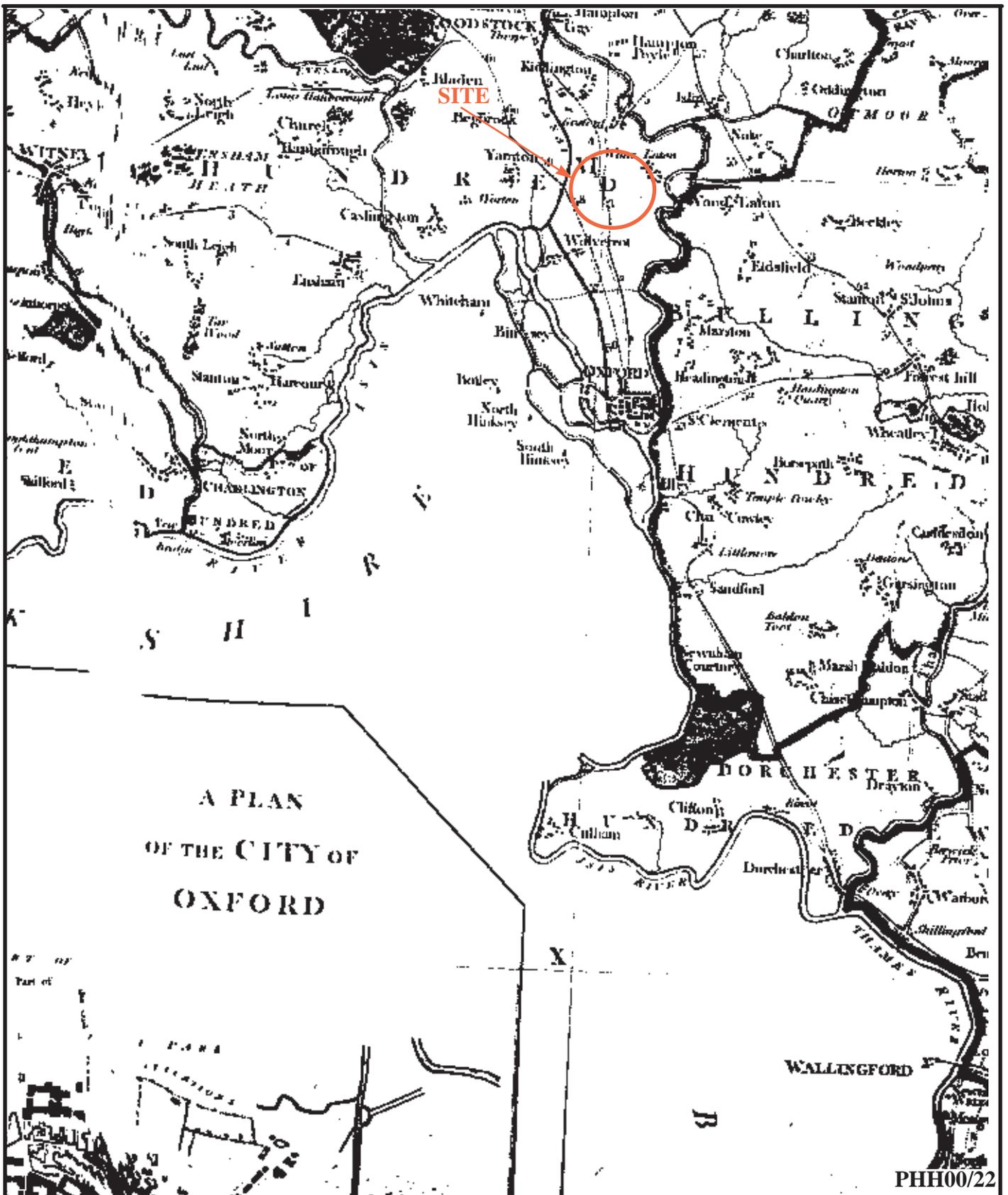


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Figure 1. Location of site within Oxford and Oxfordshire showing SMR entries in a 1.5km radius.

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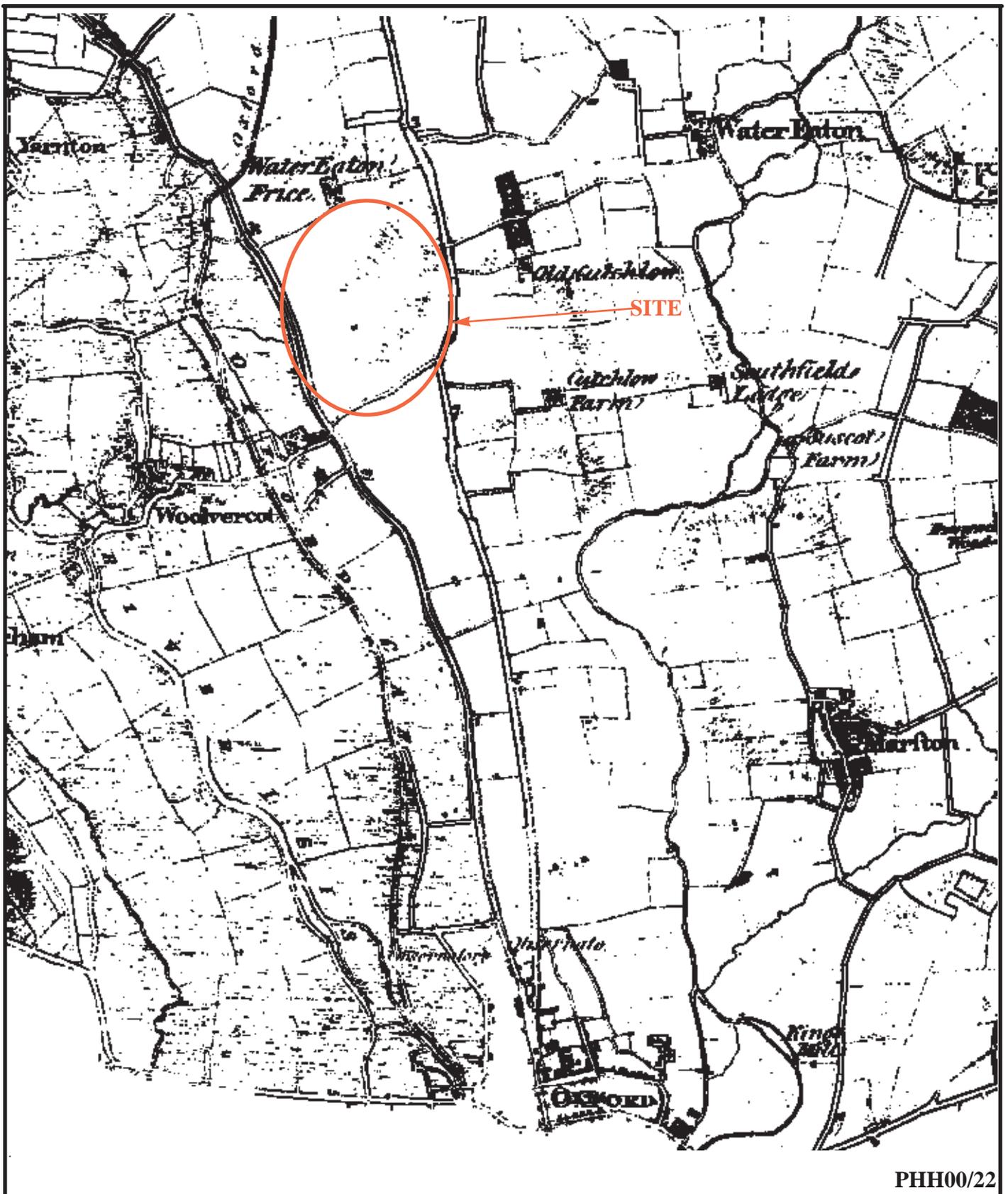


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Figure 2. Davis, 1793.

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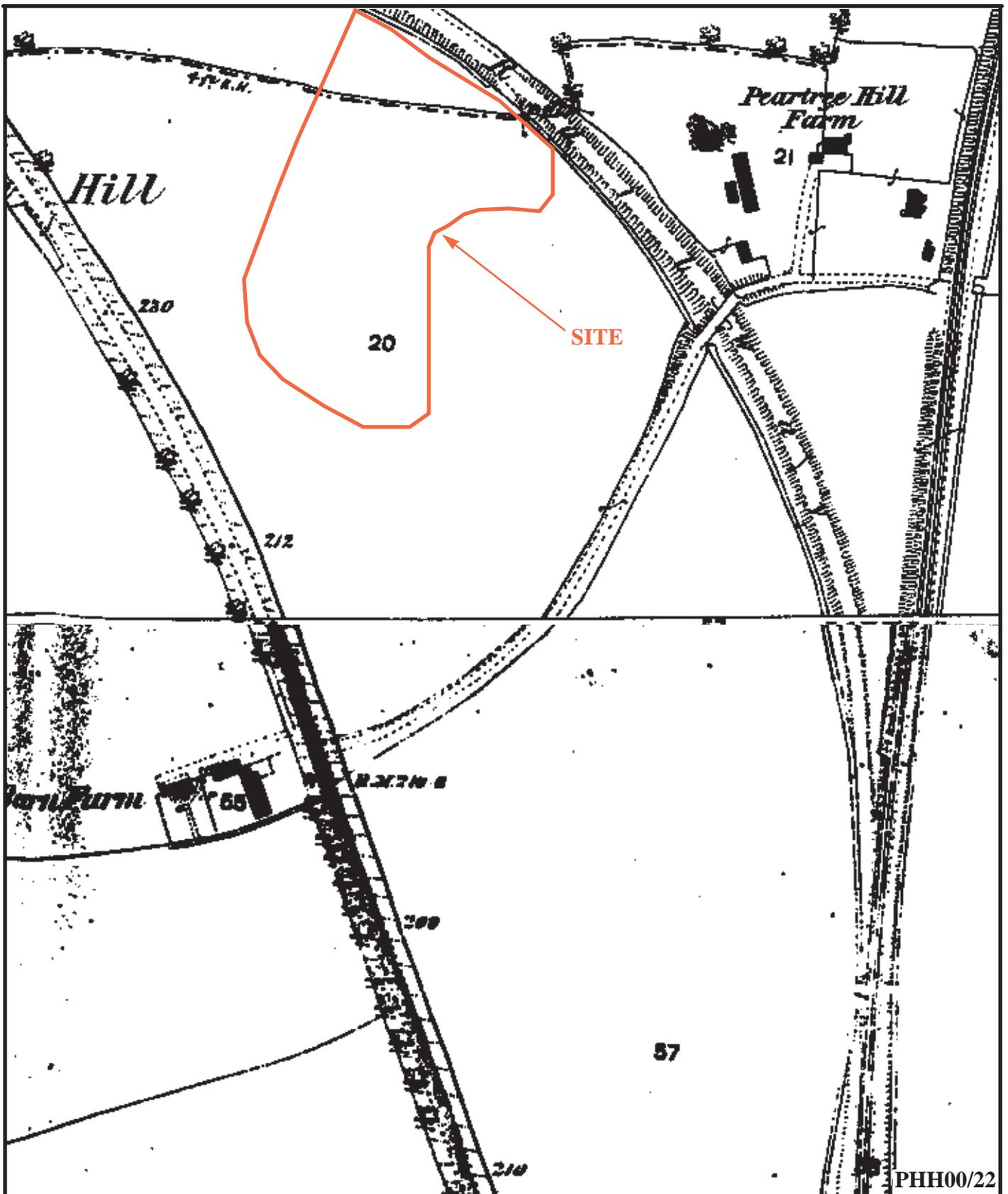


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Figure 3. Pre- Ordnance Survey, 1832.

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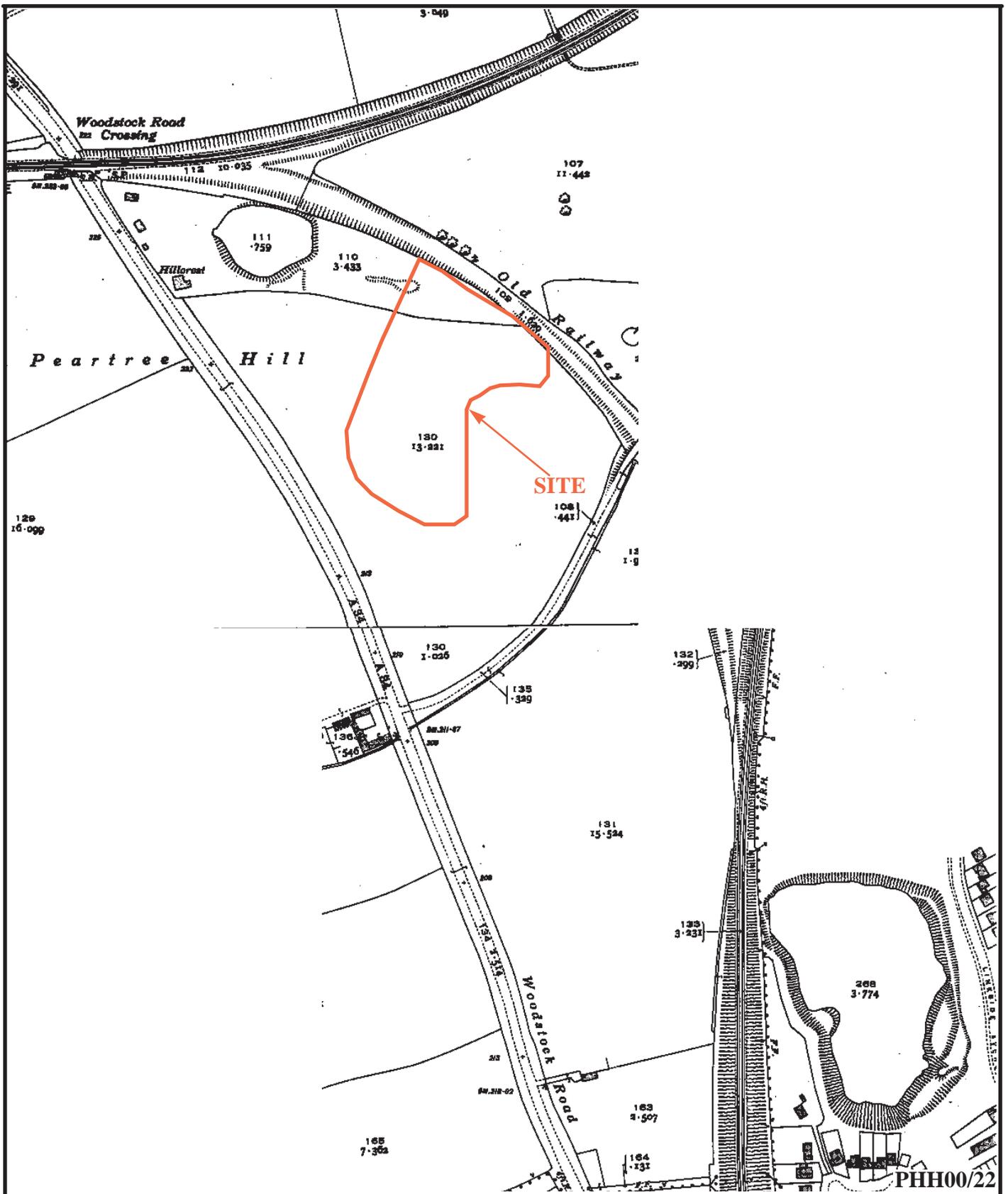


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Figure 4. 1st. Edition Ordnance Survey, 1876.

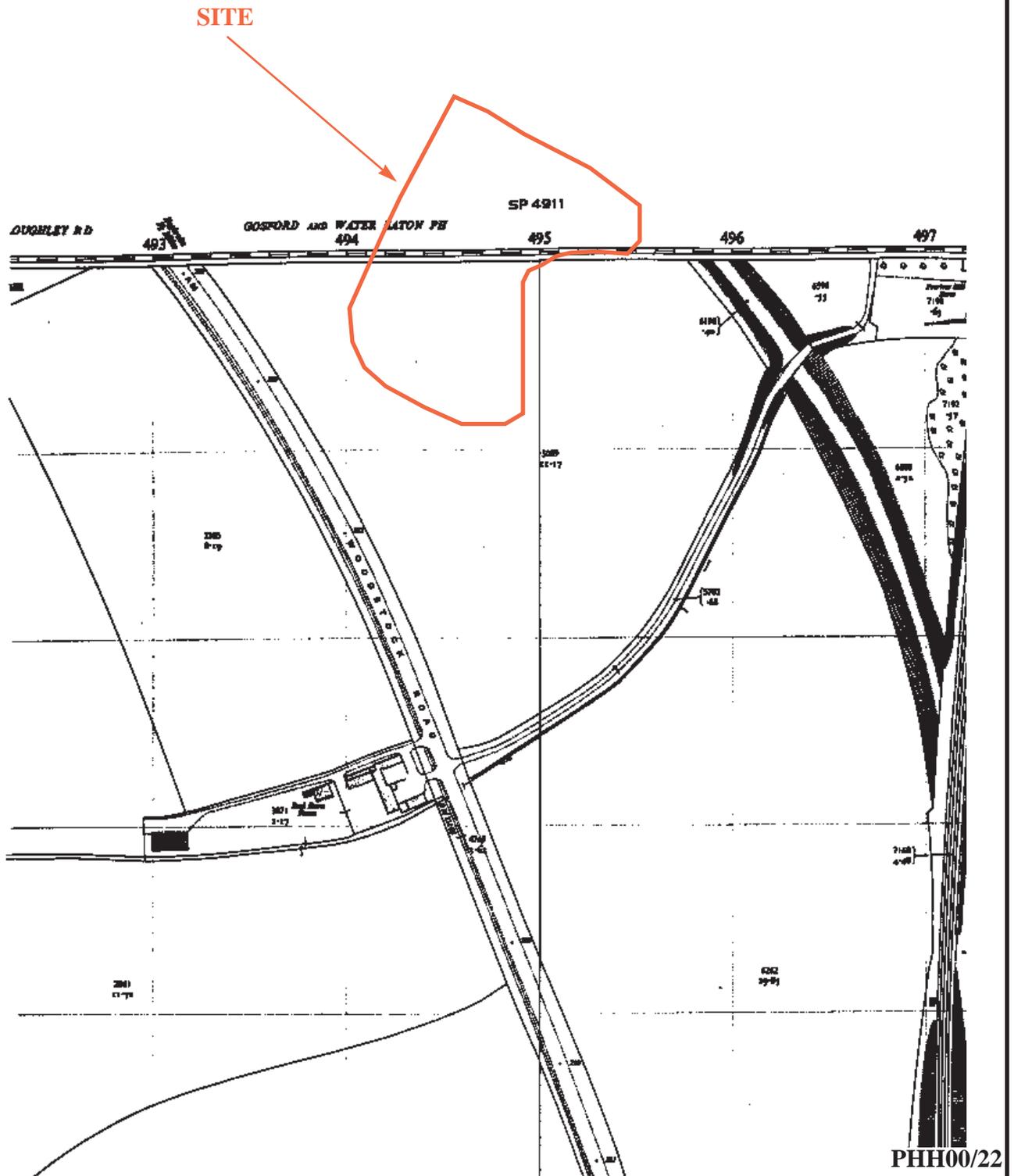
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Figure 5. 3rd. Edition Ordnance Survey, 1937.

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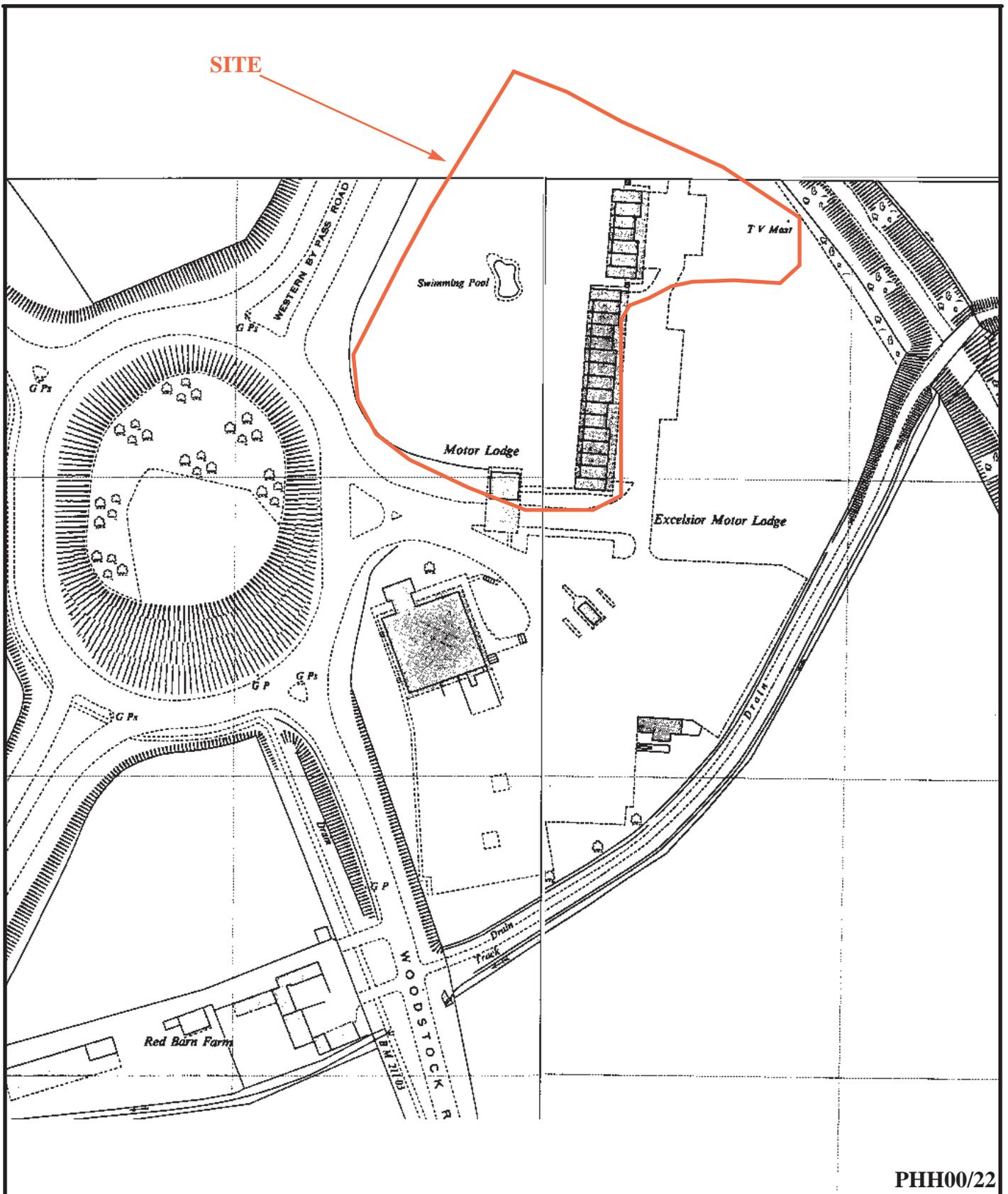


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Figure 6. Ordnance Survey, 1957.

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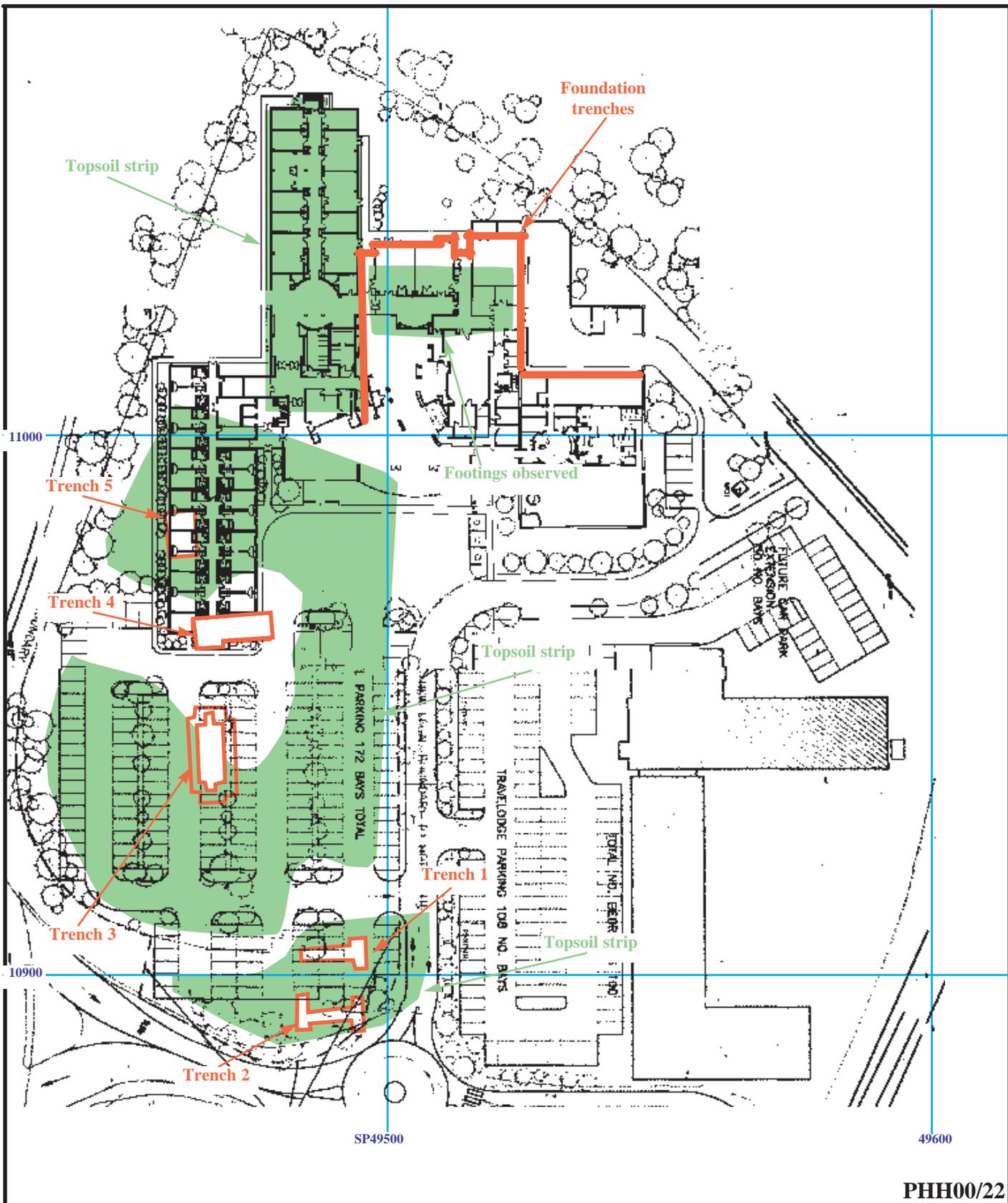


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Figure 7. Ordnance Survey, 1965(W) and 1968(E).

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Figure 8. Plan of site showing areas monitored during watching brief.

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