

Land adjacent to Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester, Oxfordshire

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Kimberley Developments Plc**

by Jo Pine
Thames Valley Archaeological Services

Site Code SLB00/14

March 2000

Summary

Site name: Land adjacent to Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester

Grid reference: SP 591 242

Area of site: 2.77 ha

Summary of results: A 22 trench evaluation was carried out. Five trenches (3, 8, 10, 12 and 13) contained archaeological features in the form of pits, postholes, gullies and ditches. The two ditches in Trench 10 (11 and 12) date to the Roman period, whilst a gully (13) in Trench 12 also has a Roman date. The remaining features are undated but there is a strong possibility that the other features in Trenches 12 and 13 also have a Roman date.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5 NR. It is anticipated that the archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

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Report 00/14

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at land adjacent to Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester (SP 591 242) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr D Clark of Donald Clark Architect, Bell House, Church Lane, nr Skipton, N. Yorks, BD23 3PF on behalf of Kimberley Developments Plc. A planning application has been submitted to Cherwell District Council to construct a foodstore, two non-food retail unit, four neighbourhood shops and associated car parking. In accordance with the Department of the Environment's Policy and Planning Guidance Note, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16 1990) and the District Council's policies on archaeology, a field evaluation was requested and the specification approved by Mr Steven Weaver, Conservation Archaeologist of Oxfordshire County Council, who advise the District on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Jo Pine who was assisted by Steve Hammond between the 16th and 20th of March 2000 and the site code is SLB 00/14.

Location, Topography and Geology

The site is located on land at the junction of Buckingham Road and Skimmingdish Lane on the northern margins of Bicester. The area of the site is approximately 2.77 ha and at the time of the fieldwork the proposal site was farmland, an area of a former sewage works and a balancing pond. The site lies on landscaped ground at between c. 76m -79 m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology encountered in the trenches was cornbrash and a light yellow/orange sandy clay with frequent stone inclusions.

Archaeological Background

The projected line of the Alchester to Towcester Roman Road (road 160a, Margary 1955, 148) lies close to or within the western part of the site. A Roman villa lies c. 400 m to the west of the proposal site and in 1813 human inhumation burials (probably Roman) were recovered c. 150m to the north of the site. Recent fieldwork recorded in the County Sites and Monuments Record in the vicinity has located areas of Mesolithic, Bronze Age and early Iron Age activity.

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 to be achieved by excavating 20 trenches, 20 m long and at least 1.5 m wide. The majority of the trenches were targeted towards the eastern part of the site with the remainder to examine the extent of truncation on the western portion of the site occupied by the area of the balancing pond. In the event 22 trenches between 3.80 and 21.70 m were excavated, their positions altered slightly from the specification due to the presence of live services, upstanding trees and the presence of made-ground (Fig. 2).

The topsoil and overburden was removed using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The natural was truncated slightly to clarify it and define the archaeological features. The machining was conducted under direct and continuous archaeological supervision and the spoilheaps were monitored for finds. Archaeological and potential archaeological deposits were hand cleaned and a full written, drawn and photographic record of the trenches and archaeological deposits was made.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Results

Twenty two trenches were excavated. Of these, seventeen contained no archaeological deposits. Trenches 16, 17, 18, 19 and 21 were excavated through the balancing pond in an area of the site that had already been severely truncated relatively to surrounding ground. This showed topsoil directly over cornbrash/ sandy clay with frequently angular stone fragments. Trenches 9, 14, 15 and 22 were excavated in the area of the former sewage works and the sections indicated a thin layer of topsoil directly over layers of made-ground onto natural which had been truncated by modern pits and services. The sections of Trench 11 showed topsoil directly over a thick layer of redeposited cornbrash over a layer of buried topsoil (74) onto yellow sandy clay.

Trench 3 (Fig 3)

The sections of this trench showed topsoil 0.28 m deep lying directly over a light yellow sandy clay with frequent small stone inclusions. A small gully (9) was recorded aligned east-west. It was 0.70 m wide and 0.19 m deep and contained two fills (60 and 61), but no finds were retrieved from this feature (Fig 6).

Trench 8 (Fig. 3)

The sections of this trench (Fig. 6) showed topsoil 0.18 m - 0.25 m deep directly over a light yellow sandy clay. A gully (10) was recorded aligned approximately north-east - south-west. This was observed for over 12.00 m was up to 0.45 m wide and up to 0.10 m deep. It contained a very humic clayey silt which was similar to the present topsoil but contained no dateable finds. A small posthole 6 was recorded within one of the sections placed through this gully. It was 0.40 m wide and 0.15 m deep and its relationship with the gully 10. A gully 8 was recorded aligned north-west - south-east. This was 0.40 m wide and 0.25 m deep. It contained a light grey sandy clay fill (58) but no finds were retrieved.

Trench 10 (Fig. 3)

The sections revealed topsoil, 0.12 m deep, overlay a layer of sterile redeposited cornbrash up to 0.80 m deep (Fig. 5). This overlay a layer of dark greyish brown clayey silt (buried topsoil 72) which was up to 0.25 m deep. This in turn overlay a yellow sandy clay with frequent angular stone fragments and sealed two ditches, 11 and 12. Ditch 11 aligned approximately east-west, was 0.70 m wide and 0.22 m deep. It contained two fills (62 and 63). Layer 62 was extremely humic clayey silt with wood fragments and contained fifty one fragments of 1st century AD Roman pottery. Fill 64 was a more silty clay with occasional charcoal flecks.

Ditch 12 was aligned approximately east-west, was 1.10 m wide and 0.40 m deep. It contained four fills, two of which (67 and 64) were very humic and contained wood fragments. Fill 64 also contained two sherds of Roman pottery.

Trench 12 (Fig 4)

The sections illustrated topsoil 0.17 m deep overlay redeposited cornbrash 0.70 m deep (Fig. 5). This in turn overlay a buried topsoil (71) which was 0.21 m deep which sealed the natural sandy clay and archaeological deposits. Gully 13 was aligned north-west - south-east was 0.50 m wide and 0.30m deep. From its surface two sherds of Roman pottery were recovered. Two undated pits were also recorded, 14 and 15 (Figs). Pit 14 was 1.60 m x 0.70 m and 0.20 m deep. It cut another possible gully (21) which was not excavated. Pit 15 was 1.20 m x 0.75 m and 0.30 m deep. Six dubious stakeholes were also observed and four excavated (17 - 20). These were between 0.10 m and 0.12 m in diameter and between 0.08 m and 0.10 m deep. There is a high probability these

were tree roots rather than archaeological features. One possible feature was observed at the southern end of the trench and another which was truncated by pit 15, neither of which were excavated. A single sherd of Roman pottery was retrieved from the buried topsoil (71).

Trench 13 (Fig 4)

The stratigraphy of this trench was similar to Trenches 10, 11 and 12. Topsoil 0.18 m deep overlay a layer of redeposited stones with occasional red brick inclusions (Figs. 5 and 6). This sealed a buried topsoil layer (53) which was 0.20 m deep. This layer sealed the natural sandy clay and archaeological deposits. A ditch (1) was 0.95 m wide, 0.34 m deep and aligned approximately north-south. Although fully excavated no finds were recovered. Another possible feature a gully (2) and its return (3) were recorded but these were very ephemeral and ambiguous and may have been geological in origin. Gully 2 was 0.87 m wide and 0.31 m deep and gully 3 was 0.35 m wide and 0.08 m deep. They both contained a light grey clayey sand fill with frequent snail shell inclusions (52 and 54) and gully 2 also contained an upper brown silty clay fill (73).

Finds

Pottery By Jane Timby

The evaluation resulted in the recovery of 57 sherds of Roman pottery, 501 gms in weight. Pottery was associated with Trenches 7, 10 and 12. The material from the features was generally well-preserved with fresh edges, that from the surface was more abraded. The pottery data is summarised in Table 1.

Although 57 sherds were recovered, 51 of these (390 gms) came from a single necked bowl from Trench 10 (11, 62). thus considerably reducing the range of material.

The necked bowl from Trench 10 (11, 62) is a wheelmade vessel in an organic tempered fabric characteristic of the early Roman period (1st century AD). The remaining sherds, also wheelmade, are in non-distinctive sandy wares which are difficult to date closely but would not be out of place in an earlier Roman context.

Table 1

Trench	Feature	Context	Form	No	Wt	Date
7		20m surface		1	11	Roman
10	11	62	necked bowl	51	390	early Roman
10	12	65		2	79	Roman
12	13	surface		2	4	Roman
12		10m buried soil		1	17	Roman
TOTAL				57	501	

Conclusion

The evaluation has indicated that the majority of the site has little or no archaeological potential. The area of the balancing pond had been severely truncated as had the area of the former sewage works, thus destroying any archaeological deposits had they existed.

However, an area of archaeological potential has been highlighted centred around trenches 10, 11, 12 and 13 at the eastern end of the site. Here the original ground surface has been protected by a dump of made-ground/cornbrash which might have been extracted from the area of the balancing pond. This sealed a layer of buried topsoil (53, 71, 72, 74) which in turn sealed a number of archaeological deposits. In Trench 10, two well defined ditches (11 and 12) were recorded which contained Roman pottery and had very organic fills with preservation of small fragments of wood occurring. In Trench 12 a gully (13), two pits (14, 15) possible stakeholes (17-20) and two other possible features were recorded. Gully 13 dates to the Roman period and there is a high probability that the other features in this trench also date to this period although no datable finds were recovered. In Trench 13, a ditch and a gully (2) and its return (3) were recorded and although undated may also be of Roman date.

The gullies (8, 9, 10) in Trenches 3 and 8 are more difficult to place in an archaeological time scale, however gully 10 contained a fill which was extremely similar to the topsoil and is probably of modern origin.

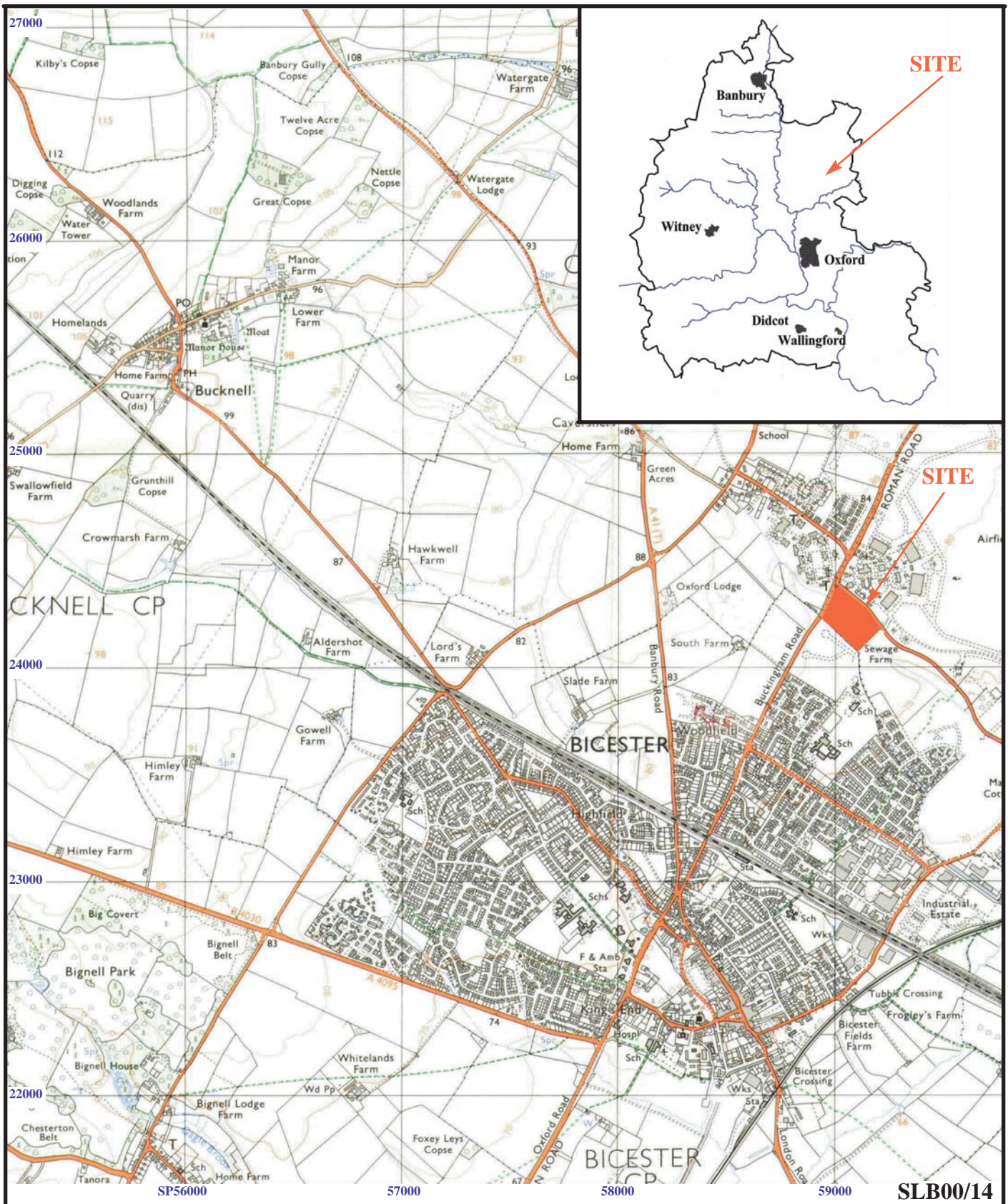
The evaluation has thus highlighted an area of archaeological potential around Trenches 10, 11, 12 and 13 with the possibility of early 1st century AD occupation being present in this area of the site, whilst the remainder of the site was in the main, archaeologically sterile.

References

Margary, I.D, 1955, *Roman roads in Britain*, I, Phoenix House, London
PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, HMSO

APPENDIX 1: Trench Details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	21.70	1.55	0.42 (max)	Topsoil 0.18 m deep onto redeposited cornbrash 0.17 m deep onto silty clay 0.12 m deep onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments.
2	7.60	1.55	0.70 (max)	Topsoil 0.15 m deep onto made ground 0.15 m deep onto silty clay 0.12 m deep onto stone rubble 0.16 m deep onto yellow sandy clay.
3	20.20	1.55	0.40 (max)	Topsoil 0.28 deep onto sandy clay with frequent stone fragments Gully 9.
4	21.00	1.55	0.0.50	Made ground 0.16 m deep onto topsoil 0.16 m deep onto onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments.
5	20.00	1.55	0.0.30.50	0.25 m of made ground onto 0.10 m of topsoil onto onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments. Modern disturbance.
6	20.50	1.55	0.35-0.40	Topsoil 0.30 m deep onto onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments.
7	20.00	1.55	0.40	Topsoil 0.12 m deep onto onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments and areas of leached grey sand. Field drain and modern disturbances. A sherd of Roman pottery from the spoilheap.
8	21.20	1.55	0.40(max)	Topsoil 0.25 m deep onto onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments . Gullies 10 and 8.
9	3.80	1.55	0.88	Topsoil 0.18 m deep on to made ground with buried concrete over 0.70 m deep. Trench abandoned.
10	20.70	1.55	1.10	Topsoil 0.12 m deep onto redeposited cornbrash 0.80 m deep onto brown clayey silt (72) 0.25 m onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments. Ditches 11 and 12.
11	20.20	1.55	1.10-1.20	Topsoil 0.17 m deep onto redeposited cornbrash 0.80 m deep onto brown clayey silt (74) 0.25 m onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments.
12	20.60	1.55	1.15	Topsoil 0.17 m deep onto redeposited cornbrash/rubble 0.70 m deep onto brown clayey silt (71) 0.21 m onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments. Features 13, 14, 15, 17-21.
13	20.10	1.55	1.30	Topsoil 0.24 m deep onto stone rubble with occasional red brick 0.60- 0.80 m deep. This overlay a silty clay (53) which overlay onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments.
14	20.00	1.55	0.65	Topsoil 0.18 m deep onto made ground 0.30 m deep onto onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments. Modern features.
15	12.30	.55	1.10	Topsoil 0.18 m deep onto made ground 0.92 m deep onto large modern features containing services and rubble.
16	21.00	1.55	0.25-0.35	Topsoil 0.20 m deep onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments.
17	20.20	1.55	0.24	Topsoil 0.24 m deep onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments.
18	21	1.55	0.15-0.20	Topsoil 0.10 m deep onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments.
19	7.80	1.55	0.40	Topsoil 0.33 m onto black plastic sheeting onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments.
20	20.20	1.55	0.25-0.30	Topsoil 0.24 m deep onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments. Modern feature filled with orange brown clayey silt and clinker.
21	7.50	1.55	0.40	Topsoil 0.24 m deep onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments.
22	20.10	1.55	0.88	Topsoil 0.24 m deep onto yellow sandy clay with frequent stone fragments. Modern features.



**Land Adjacent to Skimmingdish Lane,
Bicester, Oxfordshire, 2000**

Figure 1. Location of site within Bicester and Oxfordshire.

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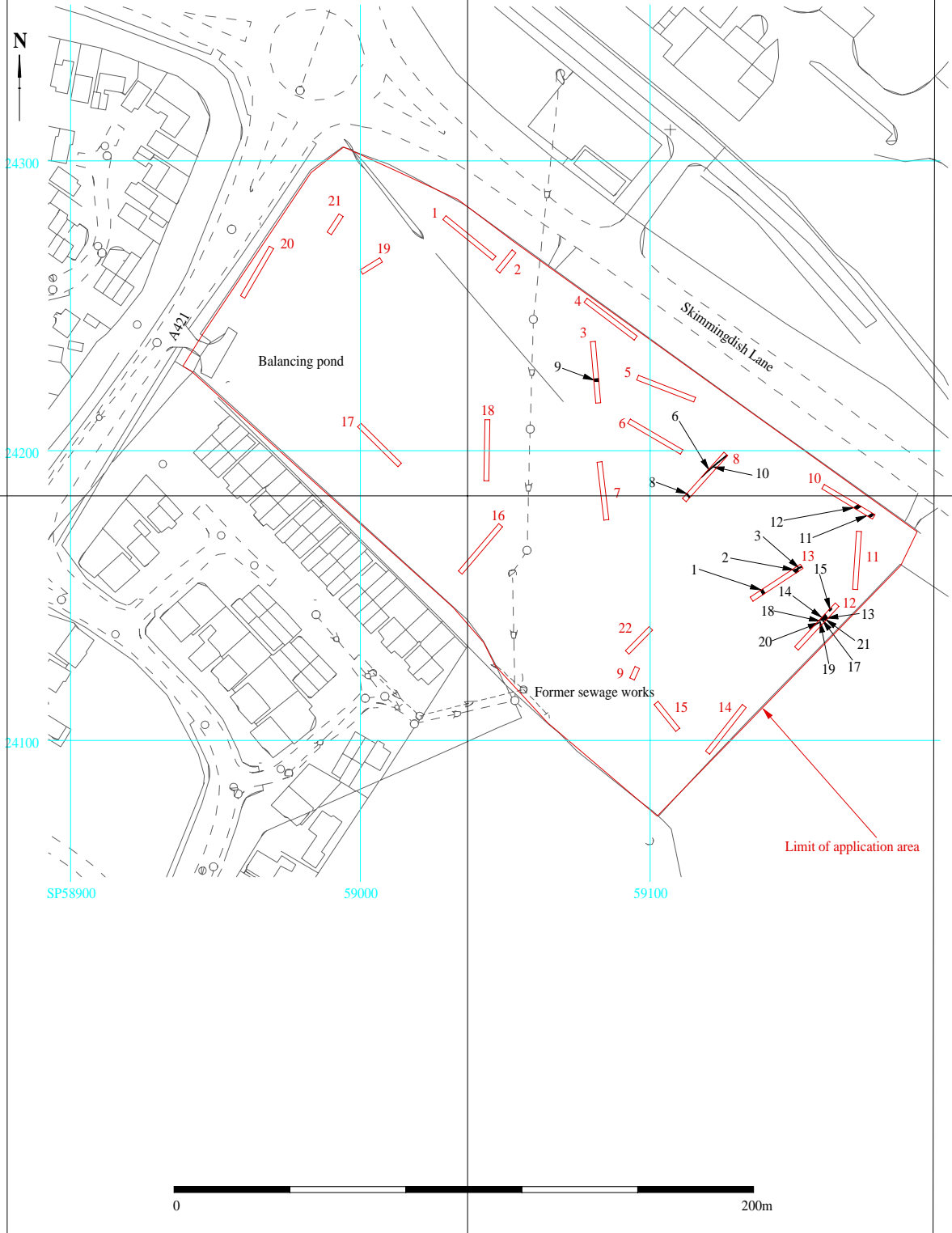


Figure 2. Trench location plan showing all archaeological features.

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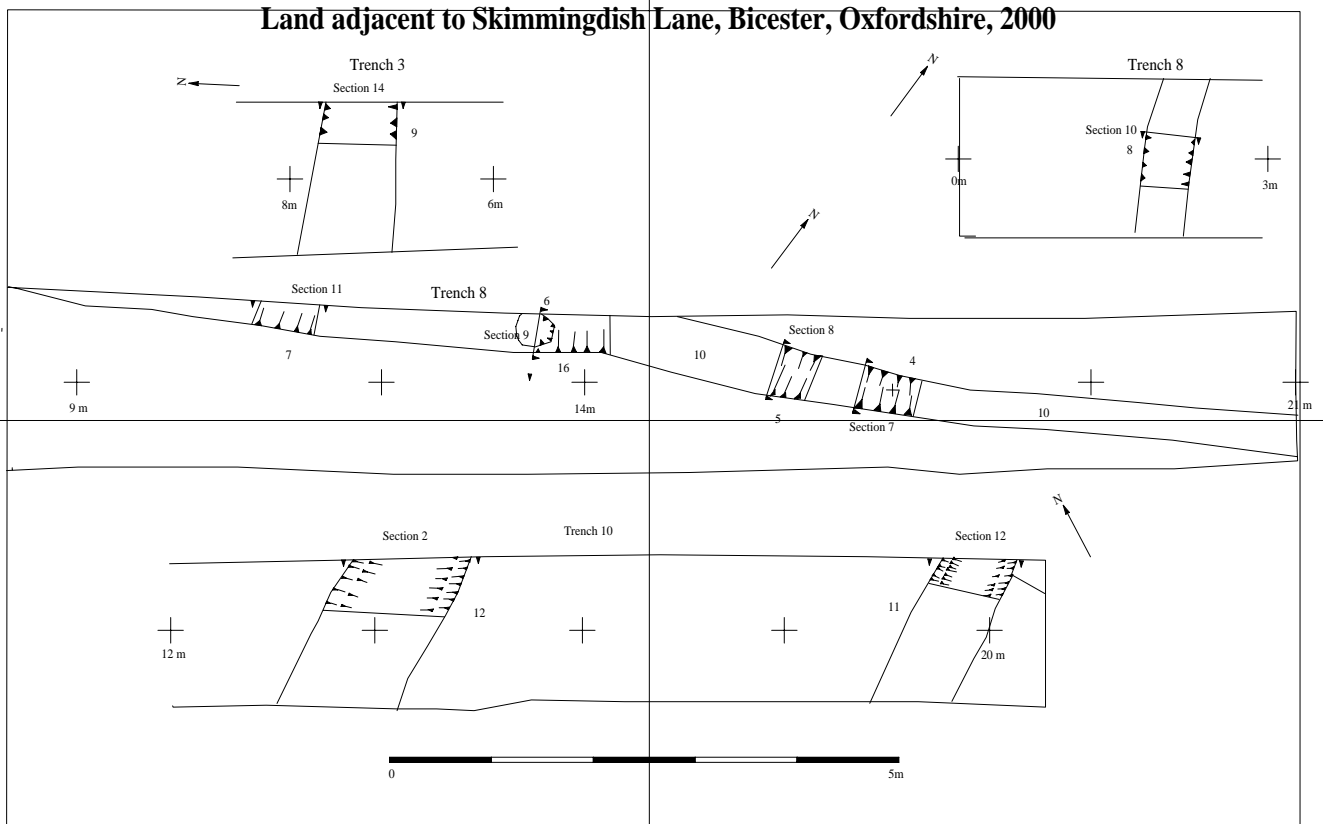


Figure 3. Plan of Trenches 3, 8 and 10

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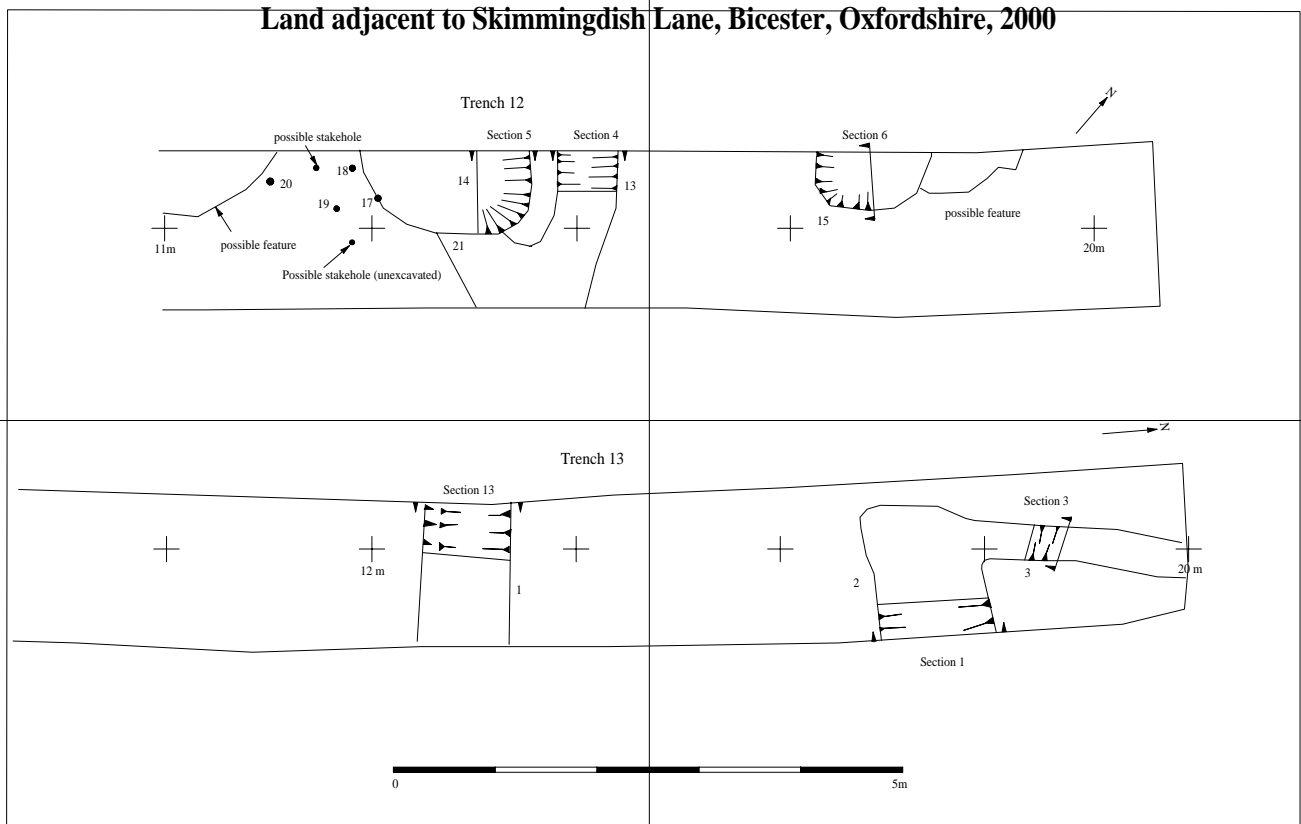


Figure 4. Plan of Trenches 12 and 13

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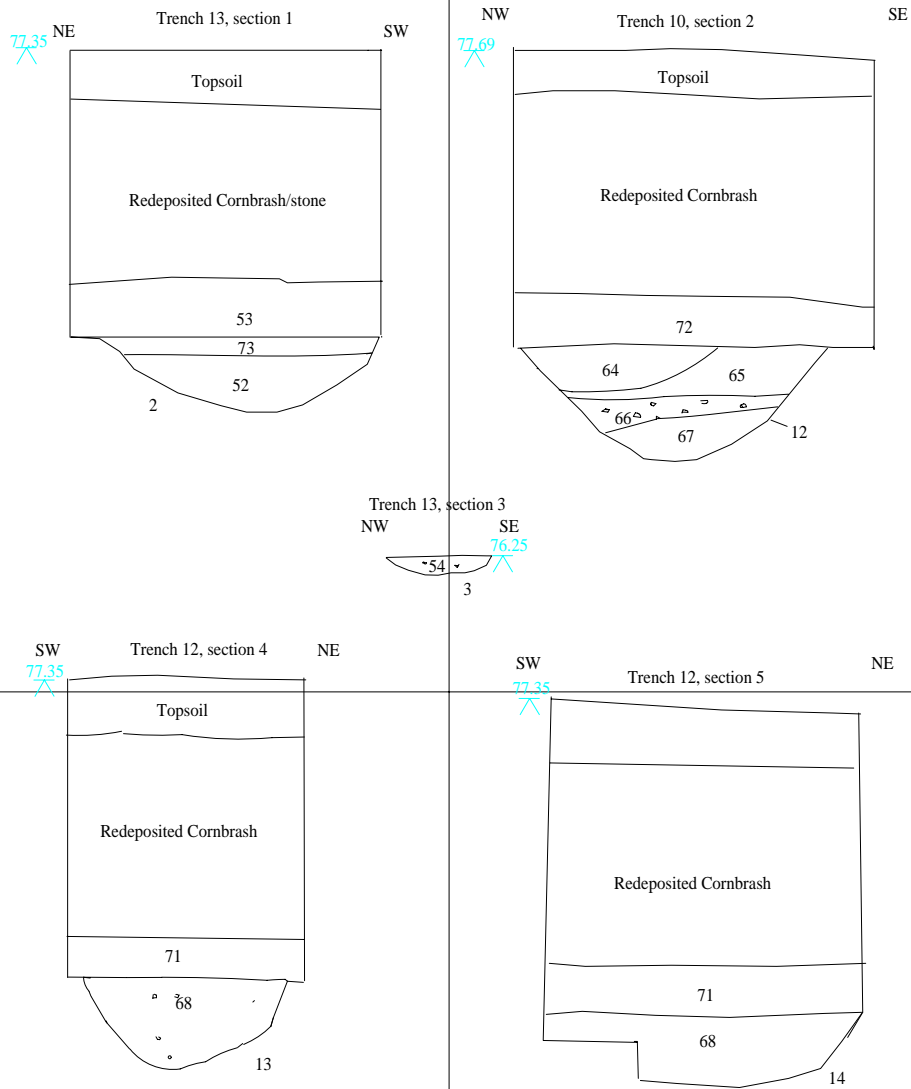


Figure 5. Sections

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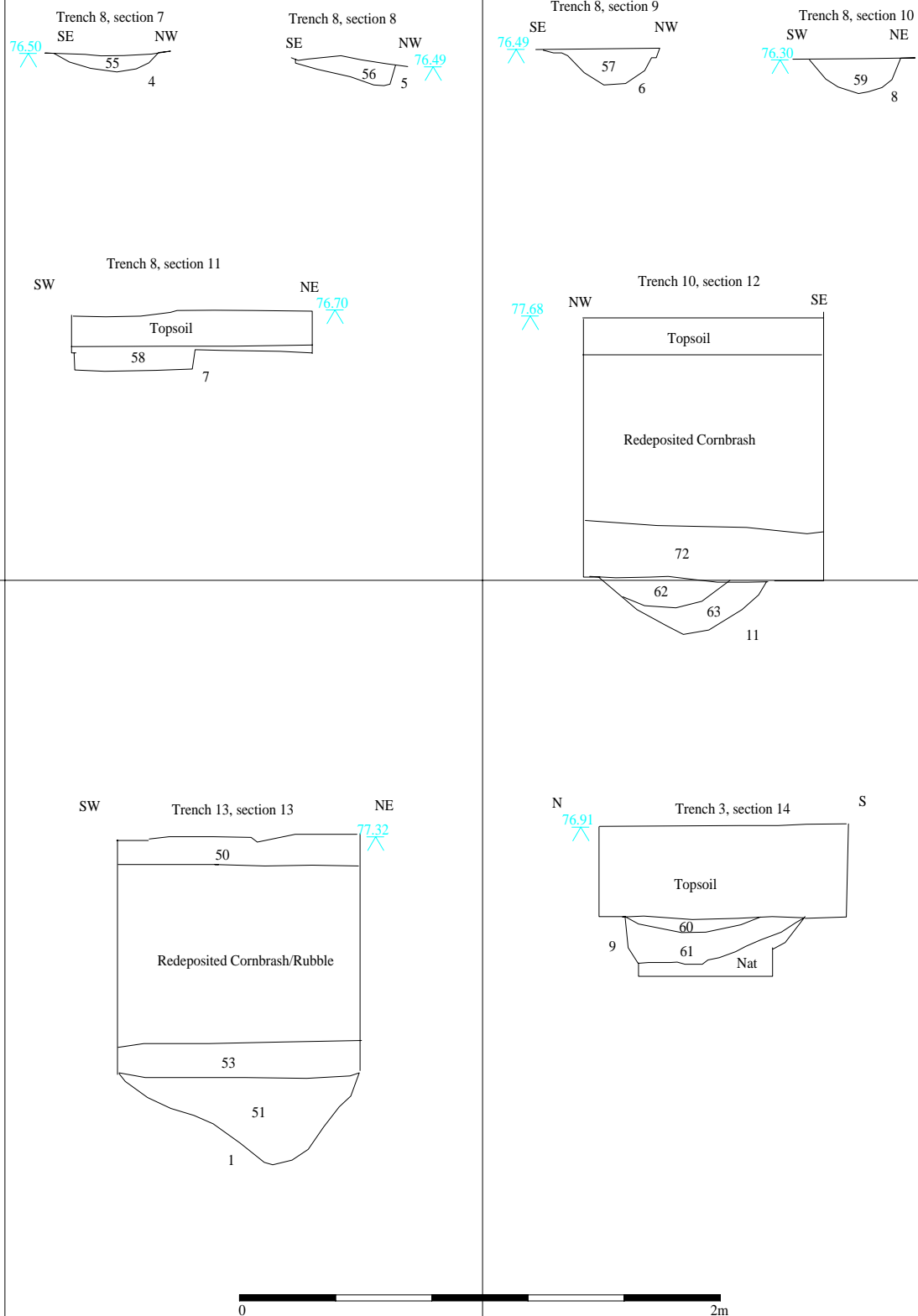


Figure 6. Sections