

Alison Stenning

**IVY COTTAGE, MEADLE  
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

NGR SP 795 065

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

Planning Ref. 00/07201/FUL

Oxford Archaeological Unit  
July 2001

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

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Date: July 2001

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Date: 13th July

Approved by:

*R. Hillier*

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Date:

*16/7/2001*

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*Summary*

*In June 2001, Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a watching brief at Ivy Cottage, Meadle, Buckinghamshire (SP795065) during groundwork associated with the construction of a new menage. Two undated south-east - north-west aligned ditches were revealed, that may represent the line of a former trackway. Two possible post holes were also undated. A post-medieval land drain was also discovered in the course of the work.*

**1 Introduction**

- 1.1 Planning permission has been granted to Mrs Alison Stenning for the construction of a riding arena (menage) at the property of Ivy Cottage, Stockwell Lane, Meadle (Planning Reference: 00/07201/FUL; Fig.1).
- 1.2 The site is located within the boundary of Owlswick, which was probably a medieval hamlet, and was subject to an archaeological watching brief in accordance with PPG16 and local plan policy.

**2 Background**

- 2.1 The site lies on the gault formation to the north of the Chiltern Hills (British Geological Survey, Sheet 237). This comprises grey mudstone with sporadic layers of phosphatic nodules and pebbles.
- 2.2 The Icknield Way lies c 1.5 km to the south-east of the site. Whilst utilised in the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, the Icknield Way almost certainly has prehistoric origins (Crawford, 1953).
- 2.3 The development site lies within the medieval hamlet of Owlswick, whose name is of Scandinavian origin. The hamlet lies at the centre of an extensive system of ridge and furrow which has been identified from air photos from the 1940-50s. The medieval origins of the village are also apparent in the traces of eroded earthworks in rectilinear patterns on both sides of Stockwell Lane.
- 2.4 A chapel existed in Owlswick in the 14th century under the dependency of the church of Monks Risborough. The chapel was destroyed during the Civil War and was not replaced until 1866 by the construction of a school chapel in the hamlet.

2.5 While the site is currently utilised as a domestic garden, air photographs from 1946 show a series of widely spaced trees which may represent the orchard shown on the OS 1st edition 6" map of 1885. The trees had been felled by the time of the aerial survey of 1975.

### 3 Aims

3.1 The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

### 4 Methodology

4.1 The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits; with the exception of the archaeological features observed, all digging was undertaken by mechanical excavator.

4.2 Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets.

### 5 Results (Figs 2 and 3)

5.1 The development involved the removal of turf over an area of approximately 20 m x 40 m. The subsequent excavation of the topsoil varied in depth as the topography of the site comprised a gentle slope from south to north.

5.2 The maximum depth of the excavation to the south of the site was 0.74 m and involved a minimal incursion into the natural clay (Section 2, Fig. 3). To the north of the site the topsoil was covered with made ground - consisting of the excavated topsoil - in order to provide a level surface for the riding arena and no impact was made below the base of the removed turf (Section 4, Fig. 3).

5.3 Over the majority of the site there was no impact below the interface between the topsoil and the underlying natural geology (Section 3, Fig. 3). The site was subsequently covered by a surfacing material, mainly comprised of sand. Consequently, the archaeological horizon was only exposed in the southern corner of the development area revealing two south-east - north-west aligned ditches and two potential post-holes. Additionally, a roughly east-west aligned field drain was recorded in plan.

5.4 The only additional impact below the topsoil was made during the excavation of three parallel drainage trenches running south-west - north-east across the site and a connecting east-west aligned drainage trench to the north of the site (Fig. 2). These trenches were excavated to 0.20 m below the reduced ground level (Section 2, Fig. 3) and did not reveal any further archaeological features.

## 5.5 *The Ditches*

5.5.1 The two parallel ditches (features 3 and 5) were approximately 0.70 m in width and 5 m apart and were both filled by a dark grey silty clay deposit with 5-10% flint inclusions (4 and 11 respectively). A slot was excavated through the northernmost ditch to establish the profile and to attempt to recover some dating evidence (Section 1, Fig. 3). The sides of the ditch sloped at approximately 80° to a flat base and the depth was 0.30 m. No secure stratified dating evidence was recovered (see Finds below) and no further excavation was considered necessary as no further impact would be made.

### 5.5.2 *The Post Holes*

Two possible post-holes or small pits were recorded (Fig. 2, features 6 and 7). The northernmost of these (6) was located approximately 0.5 m to the north of ditch 3 and was 0.75 m in diameter. The southernmost post-hole was 0.50 m in diameter and 1 m to the south of ditch 5. Both features were filled by a mid-light grey clay silt (10 and 12 respectively). The post-holes were not excavated as no further impact would be made - consequently, no dating evidence was recovered.

### 5.5.3 *The Land Drain*

A roughly east-west aligned land drain (8) was also recorded. The fill (9) comprised chalk fragments (avg. 0.10 m x 0.08 m x 0.06 m) in a matrix of re-deposited clay natural and flint. A sherd of post-medieval pottery and occasional fragments of post-medieval ceramic building material were observed within the fill.

5.6 No further archaeological features were observed although two probable tree throw pits were recorded in plan (Fig. 2).

## 6 **Finds**

6.1 The slot excavated through ditch 3 produced a fragment of burnt flint and two small fragments of animal bone but nothing to suggest a date for the feature.

6.2 The fill of the land drain produced a sherd of post-medieval pottery and several fragments of CBM. The CBM was not retained.

6.3 One unstratified late Bronze Age pottery sherd was recovered from the topsoil overlying the two ditches. Whilst this is far from conclusive in dating the ditches, it does suggest that there has been some Bronze Age activity in the vicinity of the site.

## 7 **Environmental results**

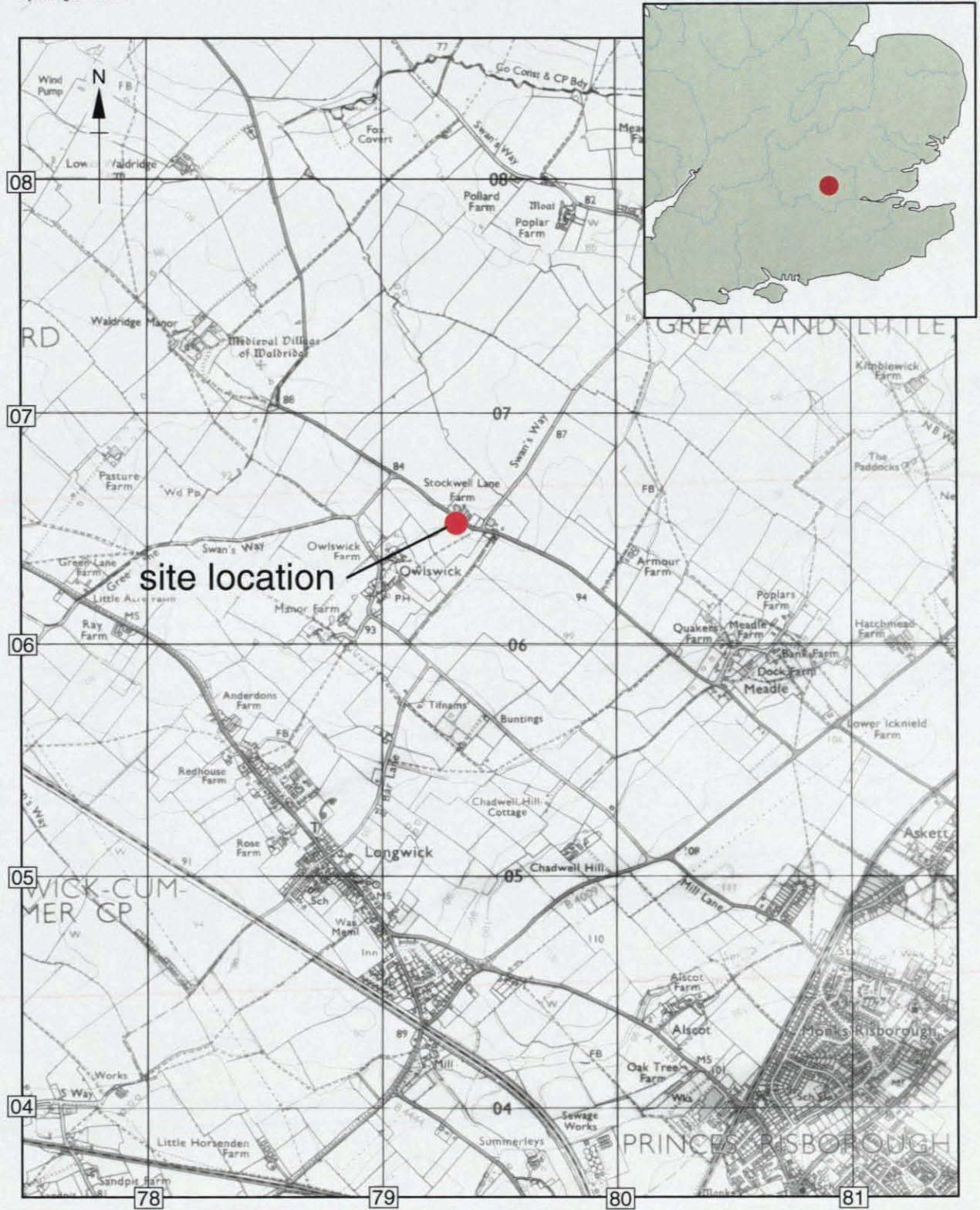
7.1 None of the archaeological deposits revealed were considered to have potential for environmental analysis.

## 8 Discussion

- 8.1 Whilst no definitive conclusions could be drawn as to the date or function of the features observed during the watching brief, it is possible that the ditches may define a trackway of uncertain date. This hypothesis is strengthened by the lack of evidence for further ditches to the north which would have been revealed by the drainage trenches.
- 8.2 It is possible that the 'trackway' dates to the late Bronze Age although this is based purely on the single unstratified pottery sherd recovered from the overlying topsoil, and is extremely tenuous.
- 8.3 The function of the possible post holes adjacent to each ditch is uncertain although their location in relation to the ditches may be significant.

## References

- Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).
- Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire, Vol. II, 1969, London.
- Sheahan, JJ, History and Topography of Buckinghamshire, 1971 (Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts)



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location.



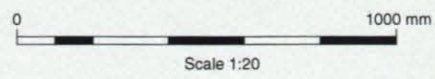
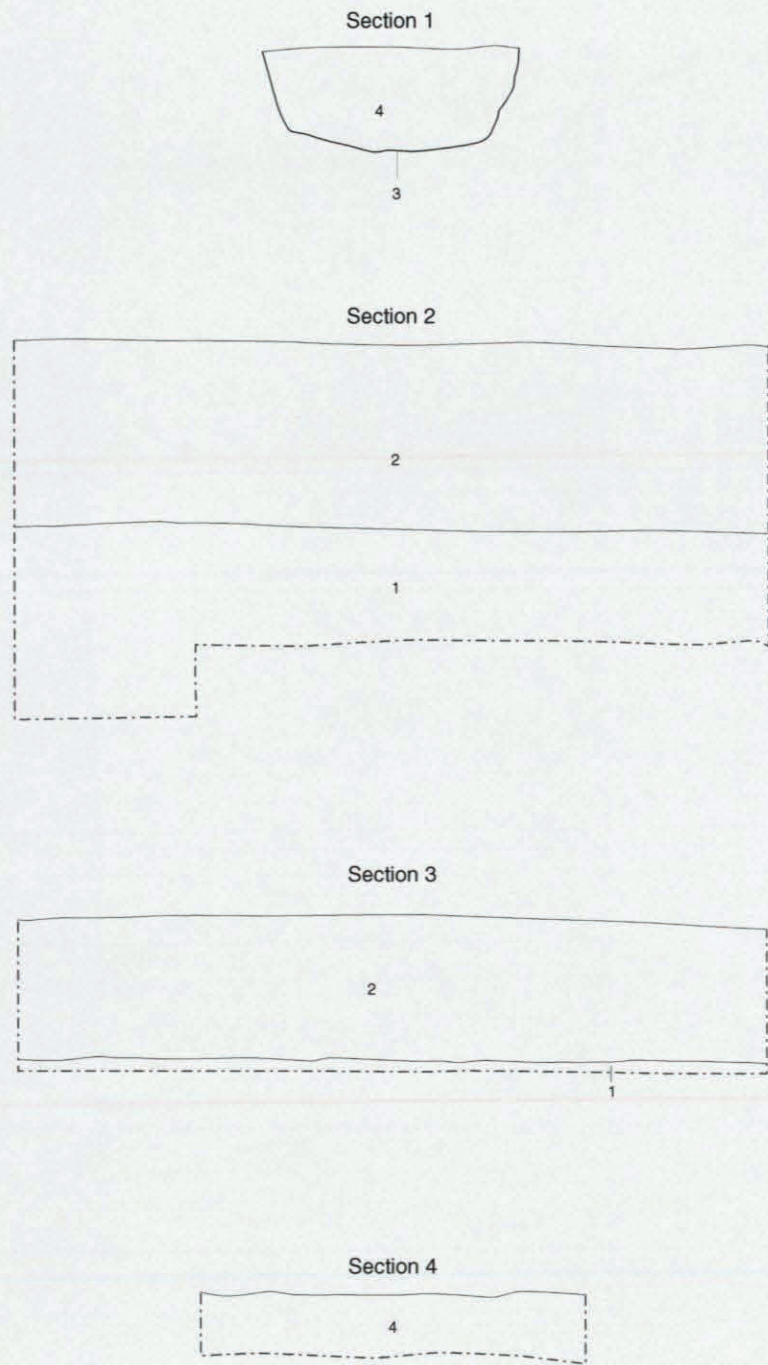


Figure 3 : Sections



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