

Archaeological Watching Brief

for

Rose & Hill Cottages,
The Hill,
Burford
(SP25047 12027)

Polyolbion Site Ref. BURA 14

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For

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Fig. 1 Postcard from the early 1960s looking down the High Street to the north

Contents

	Page
1. Summary	3
2. Background	3
3. Methodology	6
4. Results	7
5. Conclusions	9
6. Archive	10
7. Acknowledgements	10
Appendix 1 Contexts	13
Appendix 2 Finds	14
Bibliography	15

Figures

	Page
Fig. 1 Postcard from the early 1960s looking down the High Street to the north	1
Fig. 2 Rose and Hill Cottages, area for monitoring	3
Fig. 3 Burford topography, settlement patterns after Rodwell 1974	5
Fig. 4 Grading underway, west end of site looking south east	6
Fig. 5 Surface of 001 south west corner looking west	7
Fig. 6 Pit 004/005 Oblique view looking north east	8
Fig. 7 Pit 006/007 Vertical view	8
Fig. 8 View from upstairs window looking west. Something of the difference in height between adjacent plots can be seen	10
Fig. 9 Plan showing contexts in area investigated	11
Fig. 10 Section 1, north side of east end: drawing and photograph	12

1.0 Summary.

1.1 A watching brief was undertaken during the construction of a base for double car-port and garden store. The area dug out was no more than 30 cm deep and the deposits consisted of modern stone chippings and topsoil from the garden. Two pits cut in the subsoil were identified, probably dating from the 19th. century, one was possibly for planting a small tree or shrub and the other for depositing ash and charcoal from a fire or oven. No earlier remains were observed.

2.0 Background.

2.1 Work was undertaken as part of a development comprising of the construction of a single storey double car port and garden store with W.C. Further disturbance was caused by a service trench. The removal of topsoil from the area was completed under archaeological supervision on Wednesday December 3rd. 2014.

2.2 The study area was a plot of land at SP25047 12027 of approximately 60 square metres against the southern boundary of the property about 20 metres to the west of the house (Fig.2).

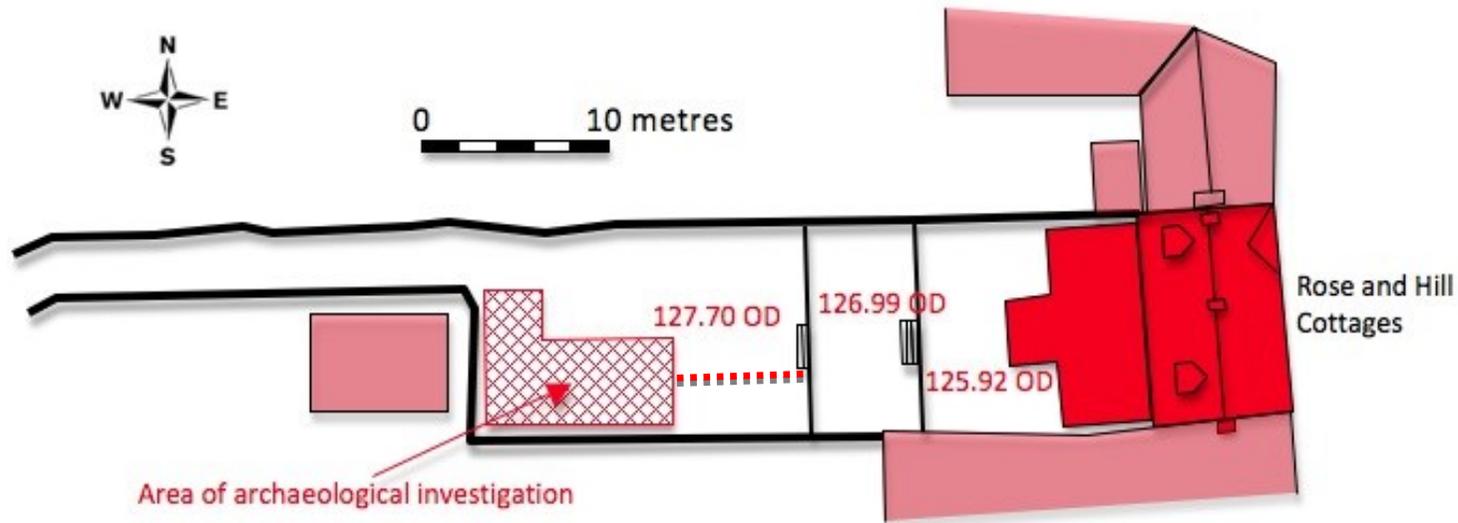


Fig.2 Rose and Hill Cottages, area for monitoring

2.3 Topography and geology. The site lies close to the 125 m contour on the south side of a valley cut by the River Windrush which flows in an eastward direction 450 metres to the north (Fig.3). The underlying geology is dominated by Great Oolitic Limestone rocks whilst the Inferior Oolite group including siltstones and mudstones appears at a lower elevation, with alluvial deposits in the base of the valley (BGS 2011). The hard geology is overlain by freestone 'brash' and clays. Burford High Street which lies to the east of the property runs in a holloway which becomes increasingly marked as it climbs the hill (Fig.1).

2.4 Early History. There are several reports of prehistoric and Roman finds particularly clustered around a potential fording place across the River Windrush (Wessex Archaeology 2010). However, large scale settlement has been thought to have begun in the Middle Saxon period and have focussed on an area to the west of the parish church. Rodwell et. al. (1974) working on the basis of observable architectural detail suggested that the later medieval settlement extended up from the valley bottom as far as the east-west line of Swan Lane and that the area including the Hill and Rose Cottages was part of an early modern expansion of the town.

However more recent finds, especially those by John Moore Heritage indicate earlier occupation being present in this area. This is bourn out by the findings of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record Team outlined below.

2.5 The Houses are Grade II listed:

2 cottages, just possibly based on a former hall-house. Late C17 appearance. No 168 (Hill Cottage) and No 166 (Rose Cottage)... Coursed colour washed rubble, large and steep-pitched Cotswold stone roof. 2 chimneys rebuilt in C20. 2 storeys. 3 bays, irregular fenestration. Rebuilt Cotswold gable to right; 2- and 3-light casement windows, on ground floor with moulded wooden lintels. 2 mid-C19 4-panel doors to left and right of centre with timber lintels (Oxfordshire HER PRN 25774)

A detailed investigation and programme of recording was carried out in June 2014 by members of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record at a point when most of the interior had been stripped of modern fittings and finishings. Samples of were taken from a number of structural timbers for dendrochronology. They concluded that

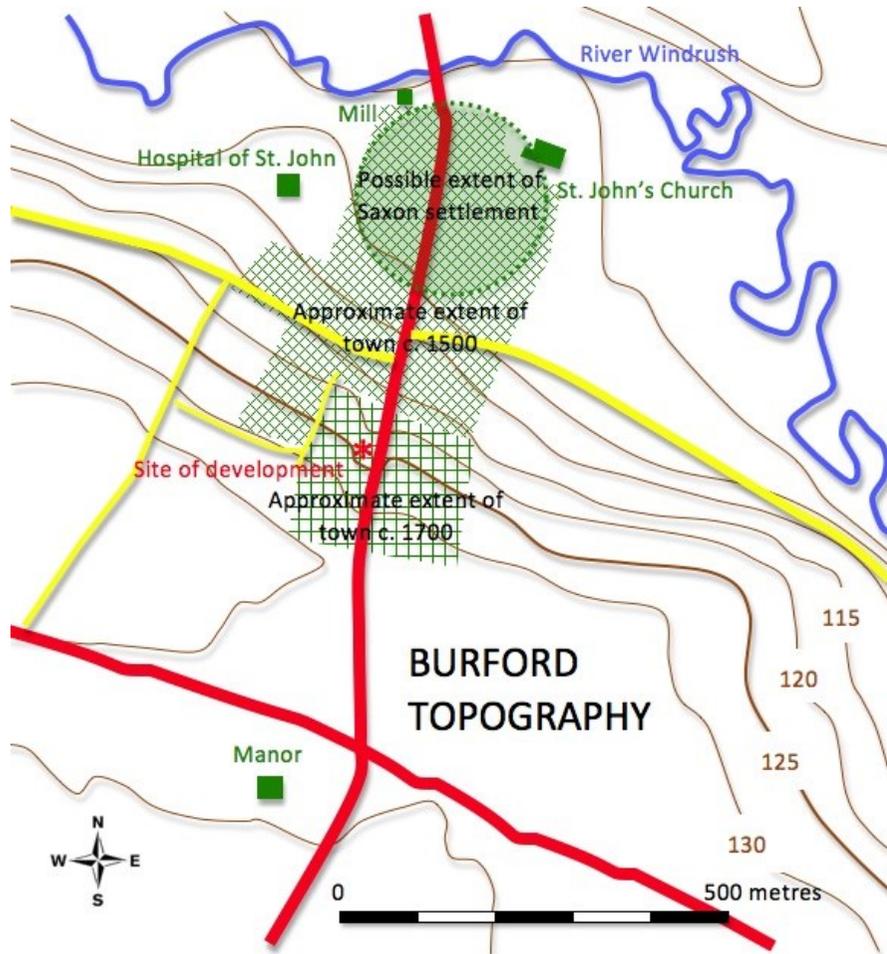


Fig. 3 Burford topography, settlement patterns after Rodwell 1974

there was no obvious medieval fabric in situ and that the primary phase of construction could be fixed at around 1548 on the basis of the dating of the roof structure. They suggested that this building may not have been domestic in nature but could have been a warehouse or smoke house. The building was converted to domestic use in the 1550s. There are some 18th. century window fittings and the house was subdivided into two cottages some time before 1841 (Clarke 2014) .

2.6 Recent Archaeological Work. Excavations close to church confirmed details of early medieval settlement and revealed some evidence of Roman occupation:

A small archaeological excavation carried out on land at the rear of 47–53 High Street, Burford, Oxfordshire, by Thames Valley Archaeological Services has revealed late Roman occupation and eleventh- to thirteenth-century activity, including what appears to be stone quarrying. (Coles, S., Lowe, J. and Preston, S. 2007)

In March 2012 John Moore Heritage Services undertook an evaluation trench at 163 High Street some 160 metres to the south east. They reported:

One 30m long machine-dug trench was excavated. Two pits or postholes of probable early modern date were recorded, along with a ditch infilled with early modern or modern material, and a possible early modern pit or tree throw/grubbing out feature. (Chadwick, A. 2012)

However, earlier excavations just a few metres to the south of Rose and Hill Cottages revealed:

The ceramic evidence... suggests occupation from the 12th. and 13th. centuries onwards. A single sherd of Iron Age pottery indicates activity of this period in the vicinity of the site but not on the site. (Moore, J. 2002)

3.0 Methodology

3.1 the machining was carried out under direct archaeological control, using a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket (Fig. 4). Work commenced at the west end of the site furthest away from the house and soil was removed to a depth of a maximum of 30 cm, however, because of the fall of the land the amount dug out diminished so by the time the east end of the area was reached no more was done than smooth out the existing surface.



Fig. 4 Grading underway, west end of site looking south east

3.2 During the machining a sample of the pottery seen in the topsoil (002) was recovered amounting to a estimated 10% of the total amount present.

3.3 Once machining was complete the western part of the area where the subsoil (003) had been exposed was cleaned by hand – the remainder of the site consisted of undisturbed modern hard standing and garden soil and was not subject to further study.

3.4 Two features were identified in the western area (004/005 and 006/007) and these were further cleaned and recorded. The upper 5 cm of the fill of these features was investigated but as they were not going to be subject to further disturbance full excavation was not attempted. The only section selected for detailed recording was along the south side and this was cleaned and drawn (Fig. 10).

3.5 Finds bagged according to context were removed from the site and washed in cold water. As these were virtually all 19th or 20th century ceramics no specialist conservation was required nor were any environmental samples taken.

3.6 Towards the house a service trench had been cut previously to a depth of approximately 50 cm. this was inspected but no archaeological features were identified.

4.0 Results (Figs. 9 and 10)

4.1 the exposed uppermost deposit (001) was a series of spreads of stone chippings with some broken concrete and sand and was primarily the product of construction activities that had been going on in and around the house in previous months (Fig. 5).



Fig.5 Surface of 001 south west corner looking west

4.2 The hard standing (001) had been laid directly onto garden soil (002). This was a very dark grayish brown fine loam with some charcoal flecks but very few stones (<1%) and a depth of 25 cm.

4.3 Underlying 002 was a subsoil (003) consisting of small to medium size angular fragments of lias (typically 5 to 10 cm) in a matrix of grey clayey loam. Finds from the surface of this context including a number of clay pipe stems and one damaged pipe bowl.

4.4 Cut into the sub soil were two features. Towards the north west corner was an irregular but roughly oblong pit (004) around 160 cm (N-S) by 100 cm (E-W). The loose dark brown sandy loam fill contained large quantities of charcoal (around 10%) and some lenses of ash (Fig.6). The upper 5cm of this fill was examined and some further fragments of clay pipe stems and 19th. century pottery were recovered.

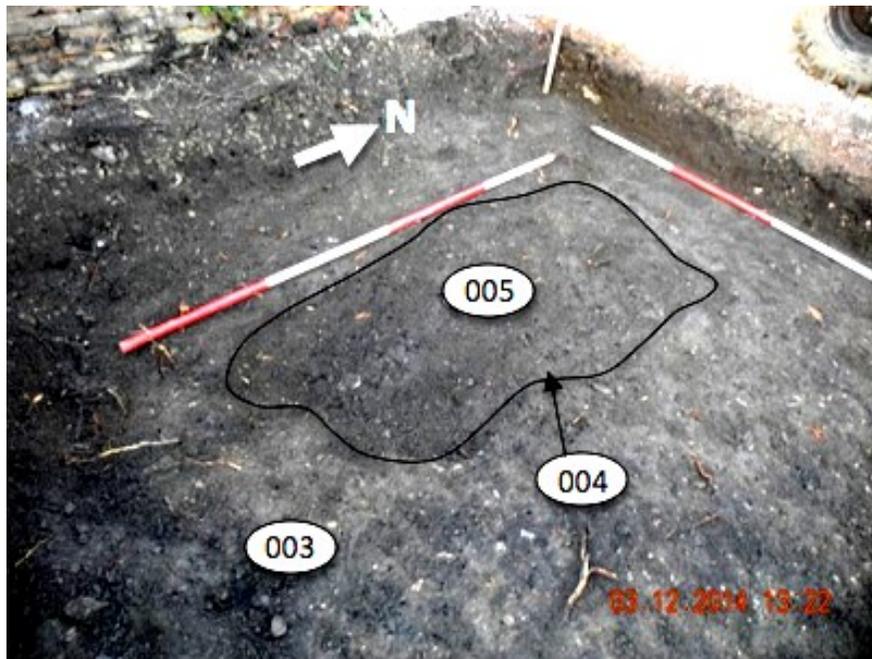


Fig. 6 Pit 004/005 Oblique view looking north east

Close to the south west corner was a cut for a small oval pit (006) roughly 50 cm in diameter and with a loose fill of loam and lias fragments (Fig. 7). Again the upper portion of this fill was examined and further 19th. century pottery identified.

4.5 The service trench to the east was also cut through a subsoil that was very similar to 003.

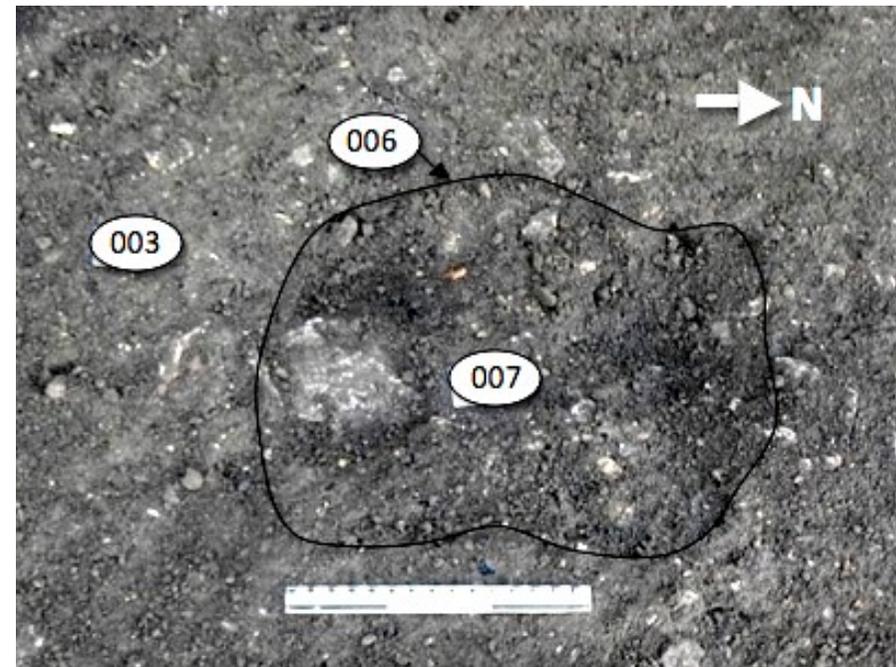


Fig. 7 Pit 006/007 Vertical view

4.6 Examination of section 1 revealed a further cut within the topsoil 002. This took the form of a shallow scoop (008) roughly 120 cm across and 30 cm deep. The fill was differentiated into a lower slightly gravelly portion (009) and an upper cleaner layer (010), both essentially similar to 002. This feature probably reflects recent cultivation of the garden.

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 Architectural evidence indicates occupation since at least the early 16th. century and possibly earlier. The presence and nature of the associated burgage plot have recently been thoroughly analysed (Worledge 2014). Other studies suggest the plot here not only existed but was subdivided during the middle ages (Catchpole et. al. 2008). Normally one would expect a series of outbuildings to occupy space along the length of the plot especially close to the boundary walls. The situation is complicated in this instance by the fact that terracing has taken place to effectively level each plot against the fall of the valley to the north (Fig. 8). This means that there is a difference in height of around 1.5 metres between adjacent properties. No dating had been advanced for this terracing but it seemed likely that its cutting truncated levels to the south.

5.2 The archaeological evidence from this investigation suggests that the terracing as it is currently expressed was probably undertaken early in the 19th. century and that this involved digging away earlier deposits along the south side of the plot. The topsoil (002) has a very clear boundary with the subsoil (003) and the lack of stones within 002 indicates the possibility of quantities of carefully selected loam being brought in to create suitable conditions for a garden. Planting was undertaken and the garden also used to deposit ash and charcoal from domestic heating and cooking.

5.3 Finds. No finds were recovered from the hard standing (001). The garden soil (002) contained fairly large quantities of domestic pottery predominantly of the 19th. and possibly early 20th. centuries. Perhaps significantly there was very little glass, few pipe stems and no animal bone in the sample and no recent material, possibly the area was taken out of cultivation and grassed over early in the 20th. century. Given that the top soil may have been brought in from elsewhere it is unwise to relate the assemblage too closely to occupation of the house, however, the material recovered from the surface of the subsoil (003) is quite different in

character containing predominantly coarse red earthenwares in a variety of glazed finishes ranging from light orange to deep brown. These are typically associated with large vessels known as pancheons used for a variety of tasks in the kitchen and dairy. Also of interest was the number of clay pipe stems (5) of diameters varying from 4 to 7mm. The fragment of bowl (003/1) appears quite early, probably the first half of the 18th. century (Atkinson and Oswald 1969 – Type20). This material is probably residual but may be associated with the terracing which could put the operation back into the previous century. The fact that no earlier finds or building materials were seen, even in a residual context, indicates how thorough the earlier clearance for landscaping may have been.

6.0 Archive

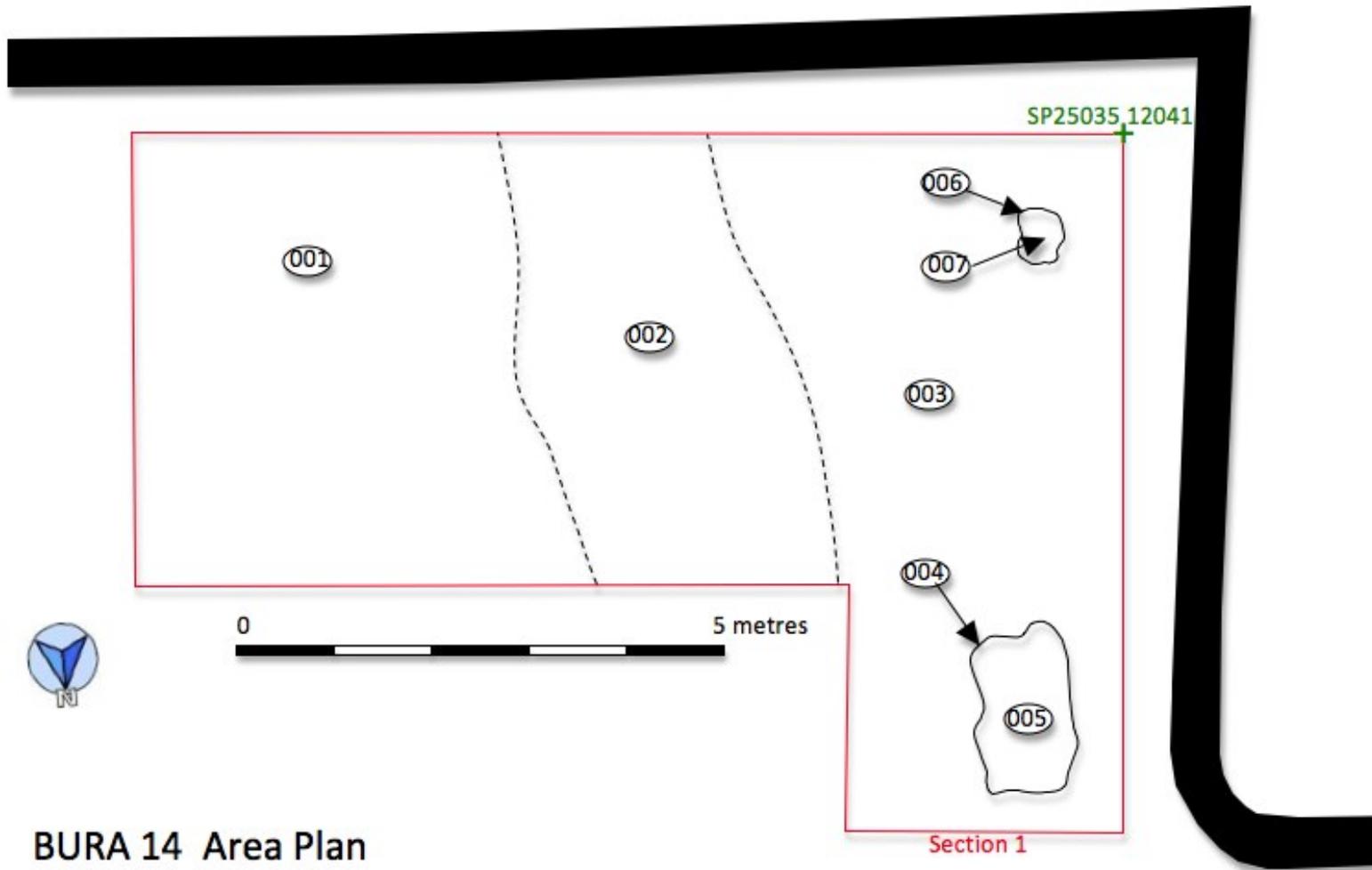
6.1 Apart from this report the archive consists of the field notes and context cards, two drawings, a CD with 29 photographs and four bags of largely post-medieval pottery amounting to around 1.3 kg. The archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Council whilst the finds will be returned to the property owner.

7.0 Acknowledgements.

Polyolbion Archaeology acknowledges the curatorial role played by Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services in this project. Thanks also to the contractor Matt Stevens and to his team for their co-operation and endless cups of tea.



Fig. 8 View from upstairs window looking west. Something of the difference in height between adjacent plots can be seen.



BURA 14 Area Plan

Fig. 9 Plan showing contexts in area investigated

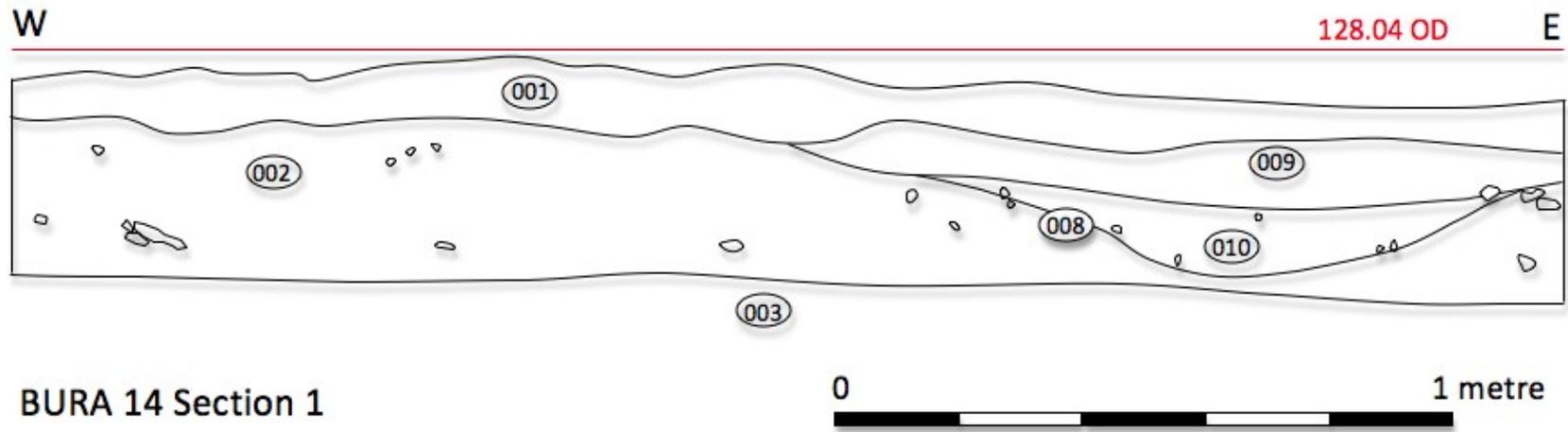


Fig. 10 Section 1, north side of east end: drawing and photograph

Appendix 1 Summary of Contexts

No.	Location	Extent (m)	Depth (m)	Colour	Composition	Texture	Structure	Description/Discussion	Horizons	Below	Above	Within	Contains	Equals
001	Overall	c. 55 m ²	0.10	Yellowish red 5YR 4/6	Stone chippings in sandy loam	Loose	Crumb	Spread of stone chippings, some concrete fragments, sand	Sharp 002		002			
002	Overall	c. 55 m ² ?	0.25	Very dark grayish brown 2.5Y 3/2	Loam	Loose	Fine crumb	Very dark 'topsoil', some charcoal flecks, v. few stones <1%	Sharp 001 Fairly sharp 003, 005, 009, 010 merges 007	001	003, 004,005, 006,007,		008, 009,010	
003	Overall	c.55 m ² ?	Unknown but > 40cm in trench to east	Light brownish grey 10YR 6/2	Clayey loam	Firm	Small clod	Gray clayey loam with many angular fragments of lias (5 – 10 cm). Subsoil natural?	Fairly sharp 002, Sharp 004,005, 007,007	002, 004, 005, 006, 007				
004 Cut	NW corner	1 x 1.60	?					Cut for irregular oblong pit	Sharp 003, 005	002	003		005	
005	NW corner	1 x 1.60	?	Dark grayish brown 10 YR 4/2	Sandy loam	Loose	Fine crumb	Loose dark sandy loam with charcoal (10%) and occasional spreads of ash	Fairly Sharp 002, sharp 003	002	003	004		
006 Cut	SW corner	0.60 x 0.40	?					Cut for small irregular oval pit	Sharp 003, 007	002	003		007	
007	SW corner	0.60 x 0.40	?	Dark Brown 7.5 YR 3/2	Loam	Loose	Medium crumb	Loose loam with lias	Merges 002, sharp 003	002	003	006		
008 Cut	Section 1	1.20	0.30					Shallow cut, seen in section				002	009, 010	
009	Section 1	1.20	0.15	Dark grey 2.5Y 4/1	Loam	Loose	Fine crumb	Topsoil as 002 but more gravel	Merges 002, fairly sharp 010	002	010	008		
010	Section 1	0.80	0.15		Loam	Loose	Fine crumb	Topsoil as 002 but looser, more stone/gravel	fairly sharp 008, 009	009		008		

Appendix 2 Summary of Finds

Context	Blue and White Transfer Ware	White glazed earthenware	Coarse red earthenware	Porcelain/Bone China	Clay Pipe	Miscellaneous
002	X22, 204g	X 18, 75g	X6, 163g	X5, 37g	X1 stem 38mm x 3mm, 2g	1x Pale green window glass, 12g
003	X1, 13g		X8, 140g		003/1 Clay pipe bowl ,4g X5 stems 14g	2x Dark green bottle glass. 32g
005	X1, 6g	X1, 5g	X2, 73g	X4, 16g	X2, 6g	
007			X3, 403g			1x Fine red earthenware, 4g

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