



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

AT

29 CRESSINGHAM ROAD, READING

BERKSHIRE.

NGR SU 7268 7089

On behalf of

Mr S. S. Ahluwalia

OCTOBER 2010

REPORT FOR Mr S. S. Ahluwalia
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted a watching brief and an archaeological excavation following an evaluation at 29-31 Cressingham Road in Reading, Berkshire (NGR SU 7268 7089) in August and September 2010. The purpose of the watching brief was to monitor the removal of foundations from earlier buildings on the site while the purpose of the excavation was to record all archaeological features present on the site in the area of the new build. The area contained until recently a residential dwelling with a drive at the front and a garden to the rear. This building was demolished prior to the excavation, but its footings had partly destroyed the archaeology on the site. The preserved features indicate that a number of ditches and pits from the late Iron Age and the Roman period are present in the area. The excavation has therefore contributed to a much better understanding of the site.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site of the development was located at 29 Cressingham Road in Reading, Berkshire (NGR SU 7268 7089). The site lies at approximately 81m OD and the underlying geology according to the British Geological Survey (Sheet 268; 1:50 000) is 6th Terrace gravel and sand over London Clay. An archaeological evaluation in May 2010 showed that the geology varied in different areas of the site (JMHS 2010) with gravel in the front of the site nearer the road and bright yellow clay to the rear.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning application number 07/01661 submitted to Reading Borough Council proposed the demolition of 29 Cressingham Road and construction of new stand alone development for a new dementia home. In addition, an extension to the rear of 31 Cressingham Road will be carried out subsequently. The first step of the archaeological work was carried out on the site by JMHS in May 2010 (JMHS 2010). The Archaeological Officer for Berkshire Archaeology later prepared a Brief for Stage 2 of the archaeological work on the site based on the results from the evaluation.

Stage 2 of archaeological work included both a watching brief and an archaeological excavation, within the grounds of 31 Cressingham Road. John Moore Heritage Services prepared a *Written Scheme of Investigation (JMHS 2010a)* which proposed a method to satisfy the requirements of the Brief, and was agreed before site work was commenced with the Archaeological Officer for Berkshire Archaeology.

The WSI stated that a watching brief was to be carried out during the removal of the foundations from the demolished buildings at 29 Cressingham Road. The watching brief was directly followed by a zoned excavation of an area approximately 28m by 20m.

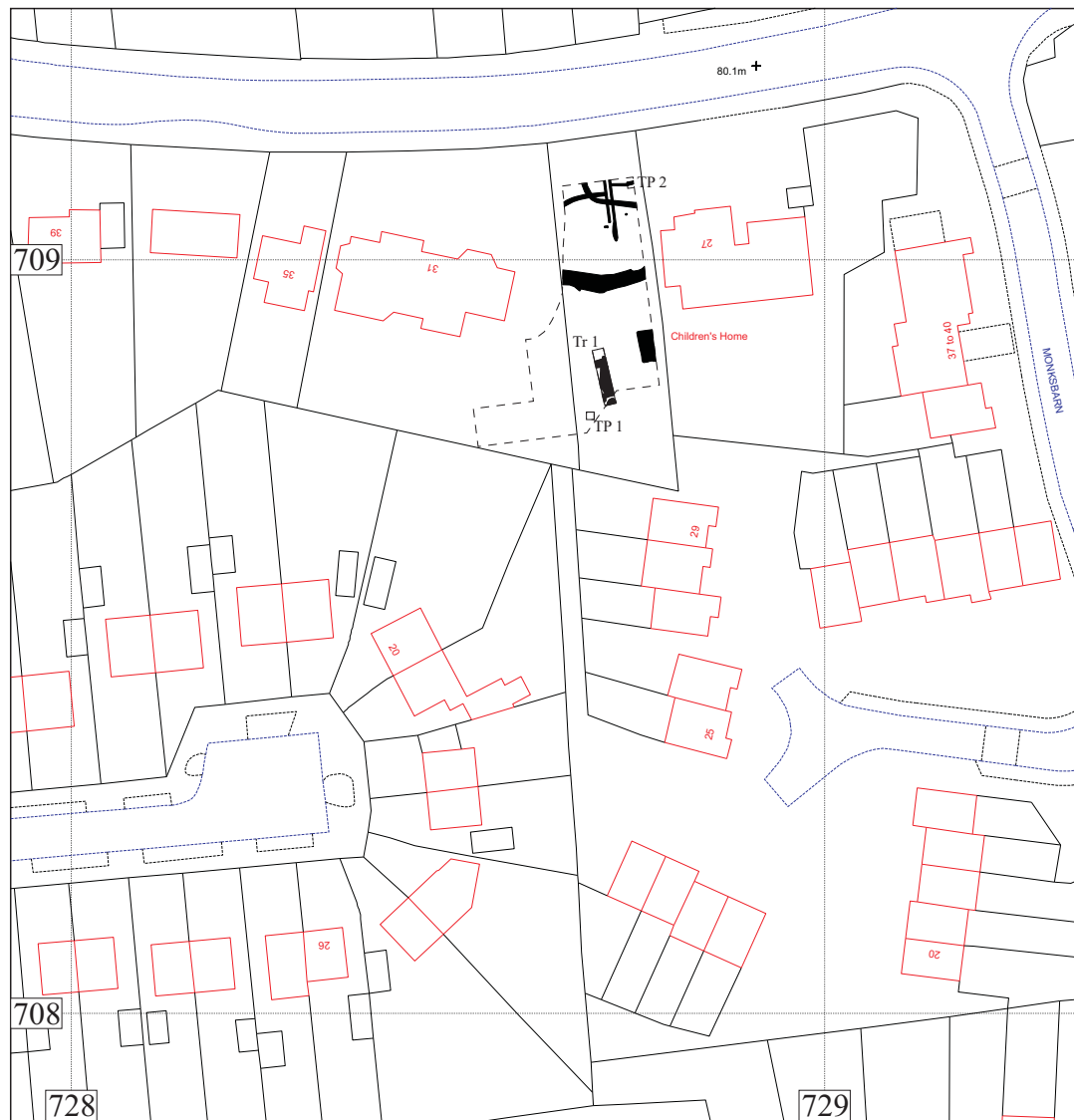


Figure 1. Site Location

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site was identified as being of archaeological potential, due to a number of sites noted on the Berkshire Historic Environment Records for this area. The development site lies within 150m of a disc barrow, which was located to the west of Cressingham Road (formerly Grosvenor Road) and levelled in 1909 for housing. The site has since been reinterpreted and may have been a high status enclosure, such as a small hillfort. A Bronze Age spearhead and a Roman funerary urn were recovered from the immediate vicinity during housing development.

Land to the rear of 74 Northcourt Avenue, approximately 200m to the northeast of the site, was subject to archaeological trenching by TVAS in 2008 during which ditches, pits and postholes were encountered dating to the medieval period. Some Roman finds were also recovered. An evaluation trench and zoned archaeological evaluation at 68-72 Northcourt Avenue revealed Roman activity including a field system and possible habitation close by.

The site is shown as within open fields on first edition 1:2500 OS map (1878) of the area. Development in the area of the proposed development was started by 1913 and later with residential houses on the north side of the road by 1936.

The evaluation to the rear of the house found seven features comprised of two pits, two gullies, a ditch and one posthole; all were sealed by the subsoil and topsoil. Only one pit contained a piece of post-medieval handmade brick while the other features were undated. A single undated gully was present in a test pit to the front of the property.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were:

- To record any archaeological remains that will be impacted on by the development.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present.
- To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.
- To determine the implications of the remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.
- To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits. The forms in which such evidence may be present will be determined in accordance with the guidelines set out in English Heritage's *Environmental Archaeology: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Methods, from Sampling and Recovery to Post-excavation* and *Geoarchaeology: Using earth sciences to understand the archaeological record*.

- To inform a decision as to the requirements of further archaeological mitigation for 31 Cressingham Road and to address some of the research questions of the Solent Thames Research Framework.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

Site procedures for the watching brief and the excavation were defined in the Written Scheme of Investigation (JMHS 2010a). The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1999) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

Watching Brief

An archaeologist was present on the site during the course of all demolition work that had a potential to disturb or destroy archaeological remains. Since no archaeological features or other remains, i.e. concentrations of artefacts, were visible during the watching brief the documentation from that part of archaeological work is limited. The removal of the foundations was however documented photographically, using black and white, colour and digital cameras. A basic written record was also produced. All visible artefacts were collected and retained except for concentrations of building material, where only a representative sample was retained.

Excavation

The zoned excavation took place within an area that is an irregular polygon in plan. It was approximately 28m in length and 20m at its widest point. The hard-standing area to the front of the property remains intact and therefore required no excavation. The site was stripped by a 360° type tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket.

Due to site constraints the area was excavated in two stages. The first stage comprised the excavation of half the area with the spoil stored on the unexcavated half. After excavation of all archaeological features the soil was reinstated and the second half excavated with the spoil being stored over the area of the previous excavation.

The top of the archaeological horizon was hand cleaned and planned. A minimum 50% in total and volume of pits and 20% of linear features were sampled excavated. All other features were sampled by a minimum of 50% of their volume. No soil samples were however recovered from the site since suitable features for sampling were not encountered.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate. All archaeological features or other remains were recorded by written, drawn and photographic record, using 35mm black and white and colour films. A number of overview shots and working photos were also produced. The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1994).

An experienced Project Officer undertook the site monitoring with three Assistants under the overall direction of David Gilbert, MifA.

4 RESULTS

A number of features of archaeological interest were found during the archaeological excavation. All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material whilst the other numbers reflect features 'cut' into preceding layers or structures. The context numbers used during the excavation are a continuation of the numbers used during the evaluation. The position of the trenches, the test pits and the location of the features are all shown on Figures 1 & 2.

4.1 Field Results

The lowest deposit encountered was the natural ground consisting of firm light yellow-orange clay silt (03). Above the natural clay was the *c.* 0.2m thick subsoil consisting of firm mid brown-grey silty clay with inclusions of gravel (02). The topsoil was about 0.2m thick and consisted of firm dark grey-brown silty clay with inclusions of stones, gravel and brick fragments (01). The topsoil covered all archaeological features and earlier deposits on the site.

4.2 Iron Age and Roman Features

Ditches

Cut into the natural was ditch 21 and 47, a 1m - 1.2m wide and 0.33m deep ditch (seen over 9m in the trench) which was orientated E-W, but turned into the northern section of the trench (Fig. 2, S1 & 4). Ditch 021 had fairly flat sides, a rounded base and contained the two fills (22) and (23). The primary fill of ditch 21 consisted of compacted light grey silty clay with inclusions of stones (<0.02m) (22). The secondary fill consisted of lightly compacted dark-brown silty loam with occasional smaller stones throughout (23). Both fills contained Roman pottery from the 1st -2nd century AD and ditch 21 is likely to date from that period. Ditch 47 contained at its western end as 1m wide and with 0.19m thick fill consisting of loose sandy gravel with inclusions of stones, but this fill had no visible finds (26). The primary fill was 0.03m thick compact grey silty clay (48).

The main feature on the site was the 1m wide and 0.5m deep ditch 27, which was visible in the trench over a total length of 11 metres. The ditch was orientated E-W, contained four fills including the recut. Cut 27 had formed the original ditch, which had sloping sides and a fairly flat base (Fig. 2, S8). The shape of the original ditch was however hard to reconstruct because of recut 38.

The fill (35) in the original ditch consisted of a 0.5m thick layer of compact orange-grey clay with inclusions of flint. Above this was 2.5m wide 0.32m deep recut 38 with 0.22m thick primary fill (28) consisting of firm grey clay with inclusions of flint and pottery deriving from the south side of the ditch. Overlying fill (28) were finally the two fills (33) and (34). Fill (33) was 0.22m thick and consisted of compact grey-brown silty clay with inclusions of smaller stones and pottery. The uppermost fill was

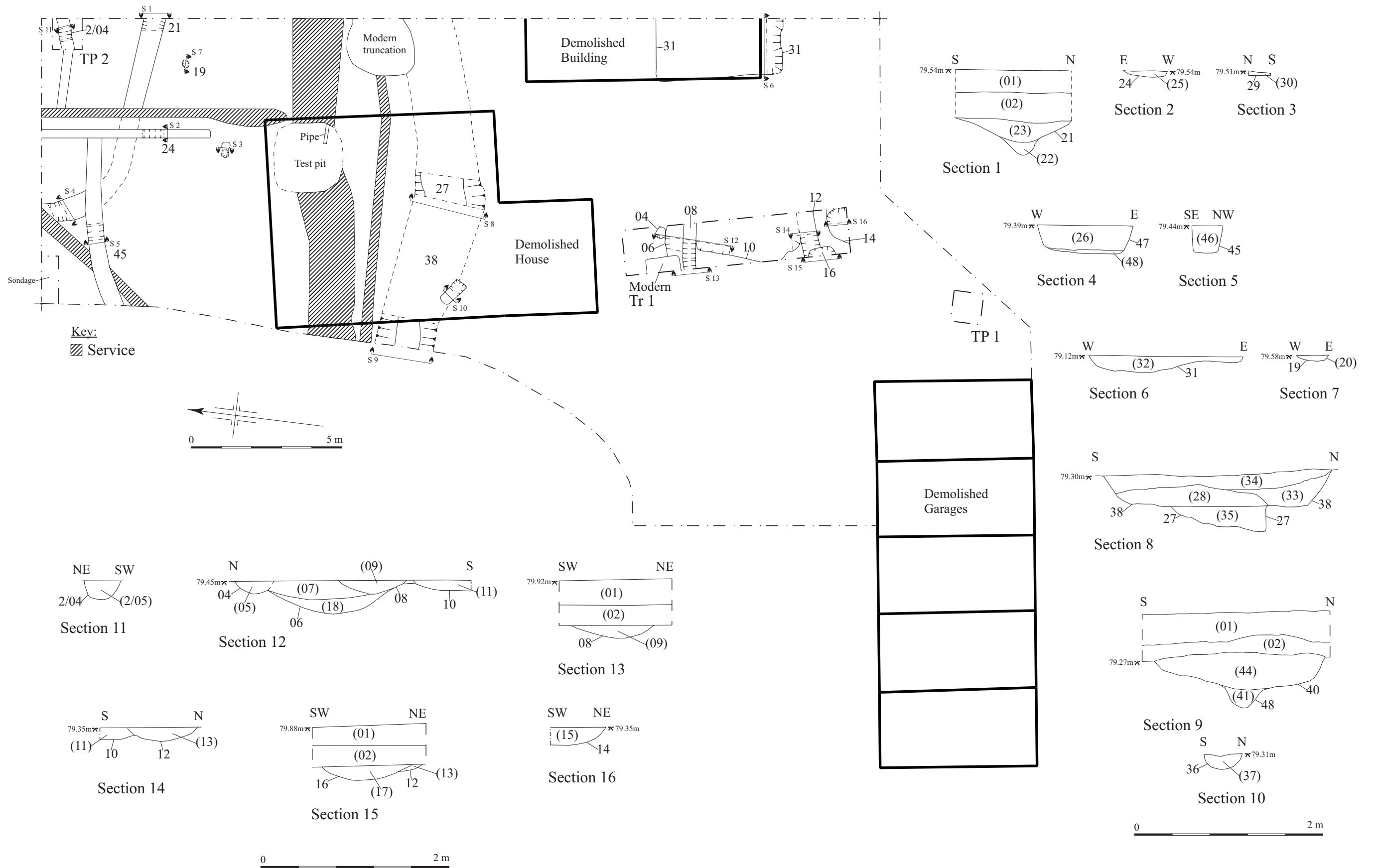


Figure 2. Plans and Sections

0.16m thick and consisted of firm dark-brown silty clay with inclusions of pottery (34).

The pottery from the three fills of the recut consists entirely of residual Iron Age and early Roman pottery with 3rd century AD Roman pottery from the primary fill. The uppermost fill (34) might also have been disturbed by later activity since it contained two fragments of post-medieval brick or tile.

Further to the west the original cut of ditch 27 was numbered 48. The main fill in the ditch was here called (41) and was interpreted as being the same fill as (35). The fill (41) contained some pottery from the late 1st-early 2nd century AD suggesting it was in use at this time.

Gully 45 cut ditch 21 and was 0.40m wide and 0.29m deep (Fig. 2, S5). It was flat bottomed with steep sides filled with orange-brown gravel (46). It was not seen east of modern feature 24. Evaluation gully TP2/04 was 0.4m wide and 0.20m deep Fig. 2, S11 and not seen west of a nearby service trench. It was filled with brown loam (TP2/05).

One possible ditch 06 and two shallow gullies, 08 and 12 were seen cutting into the natural clay on an approximate east-west axis in the evaluation trench. These were not seen in the stripping of the area. Ditch 06 (79.54m AOD) was the furthest north of these (Fig. 2; S12). This was noted to be 1.10m wide and 0.35m deep, containing a mid brown-grey loam fill (07) with no finds.

Cut into the south edge and parallel with ditch 06 was gully 08 (79.54m AOD) measuring 0.60m wide and 0.15m deep (Fig. 2, S12 & S13). It contained a light brown loam fill (09); no finds were recovered from the fill. After initial recording, both of these features were almost fully excavated within the trench but no dating evidence for either was recovered.

Towards the southern end of the trench was gully 12 (79.51m AOD) (Fig. 2; S14 & S15), which was also parallel with 1/08. It was a similar width to 08, 0.60m wide, and was 0.10m deep and contained mid grey-brown silty clay (13). No finds were recovered from the fill of this feature.

Pits

Cut into the natural was also the 0.34m large and 0.6m deep circular pit 19. The pit had sloping sides and a concave base (Fig. 2, S7) and a fill consisting of firm dark brown-black sandy clay with inclusions of large stones (<0.2-0.3m) (20).

A large shallow pit (79.54m AOD) was seen in the centre of the evaluation trench 10 (Fig. 2; S12), which had very shallow concave sides and a flat base. This feature was 0.05m in depth and had a minimum width of 1.5m with a dark grey-brown silty clay loam fill which contained an intrusive fragment of brick which was post-medieval in date. Gully 12 was seen to probably cut this pit but a relationship was hard to define as the fills of the two features were almost identical.

Feature 16 (79.53m AOD) was seen near the southern end of the trench and was only partially exposed (Fig. 2, S15). It had a width of almost 1m and a total depth of 0.12m, filled by a mid brown-grey silty clay loam (17) with gravel inclusions

throughout but no dating evidence. It was not clear whether this was a pit or the terminal of a ditch. It cut gully 12.

Feature 14 (79.60m AOD) was seen protruding from the southern end of the trench measuring 1.2m by 0.65m, concave curving sides and a gently rounded base (Fig. 2, S. 16). It was filled by (15), a 0.18m thick dark greyish brown loam with no dating evidence.

Other features and deposits

Feature 04 (79.54m AOD) was a sub circular posthole which had concave sides and a gently rounded base (Fig. 2, S12) measuring 0.30m diameter and 0.10m deep. It was filled by (05) dark brown-grey silty clay loam with compacted gravels seen throughout but no dating evidence was recovered. It cut ditch 06.

Some of the features that were seen during the evaluation in May 2010 could not be identified during the final excavation. This is the case with the two ditches 12 and 08 and the pit 14. These features were however shallow and the site was stripped in heavy rain. It is however likely that the two ditches from the evaluation are contemporary with the ditches found during the final excavation. They are all orientated E-W and have roughly the same sizes. All ditches on the site could therefore belong to the same Iron Age/Roman enclosure or field system.

4.3 Post-medieval and Modern Features

Cut into the natural was ditch 24, associated with the demolished building on 29 Cressingham Road. The ditch was 6m long, 0.45m wide, 0.5m deep and had mildly sloping sides and an irregular base. It contained a fill of firm dark-brown gravelly sandy-clay with modern glass and building material (25).

In the same area as pit 19 was also the 0.25m wide and 0.4m deep sub circular pit 29. This pit had straight sides and a flat base with a fill of firm black silty clay with inclusions of charcoal (030). The pit was probably post-medieval or modern in date.

In the southeast corner of the site was also found the 4m long, 1.6m wide and 0.15m deep rectangular pit 31. This pit had a fill of lightly compacted silty loam with inclusions of small stones throughout (32). The pit was interpreted as connected to the footprint of the previous modern garden building.

Cut into the upper fill of ditch 38 was the 0.8m long, 0.4m wide and 0.15m deep pit 36 with fairly vertical sides and a rounded base. The pit had a fill of compacted dark grey-brown loam with inclusions of gravel and charcoal (37). Pit 36 could be a posthole at the edge of ditch 038, but is probably modern and related to gardening activity in the former garden behind the demolished building.

An up to 0.08m thick ballast layer consisting of beige-brown gravel was seen in the northern part of site (042). This layer was sampled in a test-pit in the northwest corner of the trench and was interpreted as a modern fill belonging to the demolished building.

4.2 Reliability of Results

The archaeological work was mainly carried out in good conditions and the results are felt to be representative of the extant archaeology. The site was however stripped in heavy rain and some of the shallow features from the evaluation could not be identified during the final excavation.

5 FINDS

Pottery and Fired Clay *(By Paul Booth with contributions by David Gilbert)*

Pottery

The assemblage comprised 49 sherds from 6 contexts weighing a total of 788g. The majority of the assemblage is mid 1st to 2nd century with a small number of late Iron Age sherds.

Context (22) – 6 Late 1st century sherds.

Context (23) – 2 Mid/late 1st – 2nd century course ware sherds.

Context (28) – 4 Late Iron Age – mid 1st century sherds. 20 sherds of Mid/late 1st – 2nd century mixed fabric ceramics. 8 sherds of a BB1 cooking pot, these are possibly all from the same vessel, of which two have a burnished lattice decoration of a type that would normally be considered at least mid 3rd century in date.

Context (33) – 1 Late Iron Age – mid 1st century sherd.

Context (34) – 2 sherds of mid/late 1st – 2nd century date.

Context (41) – 4 sherds of a late 1st – early 2nd century grey ware jar. Three sherds conjoin. 3 sherds of late 1st – early 2nd century course ware. Two sherds conjoin.

Context	No. Sherds	Weight	Notes
22	6	77g	Late 1st Century
23	2	32g	mid/late 1st -2nd Century
28	32	512g	3rd Century
33	1	39g	Late Iron Age - mid 1st Century
34	2	26g	mid/late 1st -2nd Century
41	6	102g	Late 1st – early 2nd Century
Totals	49	788g	

The material assigned to context (28) may include sherds from the earlier disturbed context (35) due to difficulties of interpretation during excavation. It is likely that the ditch 27 and 48 associated with context (41) is late 1st century in date while the late cut 38 and 40 associated with (28) is 3rd century.

Fired Clay

A single piece of fired clay or daub, weighing 89g, was recovered from context (28) fill of ditch 38.

Flint

Two pieces of flint were found; one each in fill (22) in ditch 21 and in fill (28) in recut ditch 38. Both pieces are worked and it is likely that they have been used to make up fire. Both pieces could be dated to the Iron Age/Roman period since the pottery from the ditches suggests such a date.

Burnt bones

A piece of burnt bone was found in the fill (28) in ditch 38. The fragment is too small to be specified, but it is most likely an animal bone that has been dumped in the ditch after cooking. The bone fragment is likely to be from the Iron Age/Roman period since it was found in a context together with pottery from that period.

6 DISCUSSION

Some further archaeological features were excavated during the watching brief and the subsequent archaeological excavation. The investigated features are partly post-medieval/modern and partly from the Iron Age and/or the Roman period. The two parallel ditches 21 and 27/38 are of interest to the archaeological discussion. Both ditches contained residual Iron Age pottery and Roman pottery from the 1st-3rd century AD, which proves that the site was being used in that period. It is likely that ditch 27 was originally dug in the late 1st century AD and later recut 38 in the 3rd century AD.

The ditches can be boundary ditches and could belong to a field system at the outskirts of a larger late Iron Age and Roman settlement. The discrete features suggest that settlement activity was present and that this was not part of a field system. The width of ditch 27/38, *c.* 2.5m, could also indicate that this particular ditch filled a different purpose. It has been suggested that the area, which is situated on the top of a natural hill in the landscape, could have contained an Iron Age hillfort. The ditch could therefore have formed part of a later larger enclosure. The pottery from the fills and the recut of the ditch indicate that it was maintained for at least two centuries. No other archaeological features or artefacts from the area can however so far support the theory of a hillfort.

No features of Iron Age date or early Roman date were found suggesting that the settlement of these periods was further away.

It is clear that the area where 29-31 Cressingham Road is located is of great archaeological interest and of importance to the discussion about Reading in the Iron Age and the Roman period. Any future development in the area should therefore be closely monitored.

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