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Wessex
Archaeology

MILL STREET, WANTAGE, OXFORDSHIRE

Archaeological site investigations

Prepared for

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SUMMARY

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Countryside Planning & Management, acting on behalf of Bovis Homes Ltd, to undertake an archaeological site investigation (evaluation) of an area within Wantage, Oxfordshire, proposed for redevelopment. The work was commissioned in line with government guidelines which recommend that information on the nature of the known or potential archaeological resource should be provided by the applicant prior to determination (DoE, *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16*, 1990). The proposal site, covering some 0.66 ha, was formerly a garage fronting on to Mill Street, Wantage, and partially overlooks the valley of the Letcombe Brook, on the western periphery of Wantage town centre (NGR SU 39588814).

PRN 7213

The investigation comprised the machine-excavation and hand excavation of seven trenches across the site; all trenches revealed well-preserved, extensive and significant archaeological deposits primarily of Romano-British and early-mid Saxon date (*c.* AD 100-700), with smaller quantities of Iron Age material (later 1st millennium BC). Features included ditches up to 2 m wide, gullies, probable sunken-floored buildings, mortar floors and robbed wall footings. A broad waterlogged area skirted the south-eastern periphery of the site.

Large quantities of artefacts were recovered, including pottery of Iron Age, Romano-British and early-mid Saxon date, a probable Saxon bronze pin, and Romano-British building material. In addition seven annular clay loom weights of Saxon type (5th-8th century AD) were found *in situ* near to the surface of the postulated sunken-floored building. Quantities of animal bone and shell were also found, along with carbonised plant remains and areas of phosphate-rich cess deposits, both in ditches and midden-like layers extending on to the waterlogged area.

The findings indicate fairly intensive occupation of the site in the Roman period, possibly settlement within or on the periphery of a small town or a villa, with the majority of artefacts of earlier Roman date (2nd century) and a scatter of later, 3rd and 4th century, material; followed by occupation in the earlier Saxon period, *c.* 5th to 8th centuries AD. Whether this activity is continuous, or whether there was a gap between Roman and Saxon exploitation of the area is uncertain. The nature of the preceding Iron Age activity is not clear.

The archive of materials and accompanying records, currently held at Wessex Archaeology's Old Sarum offices, will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum (Acc. No. 1993:45).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work was commissioned by Bovis Homes Ltd, via Countryside Planning and Management (CPM), and Wessex Archaeology are particularly grateful for the assistance and co-operation of the Mr Royston Clarke, Senior Archaeologist at CPM.

Valuable background information, and assistance with site security, was provided by Mr Hugh Coddington, Deputy County Archaeological Officer, the case officer for the site.

Fieldwork was carried out by Dominic Barker and Ken Browell under the supervision of Michael Heaton, with plant hire provided by Malcolm Cox Contractors of East Challow. This report was compiled by Michael Heaton, Rachel Seager Smith and Michael J. Allen, with illustrations by Linda Coleman. The section dealing with the archaeological and historical setting is compiled from information collated by Dr Rosamund Cleal. The project was managed by Michael Heaton and monitored within Wessex Archaeology by Susan M. Davies.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

1.1.1 Bovis Homes Ltd intend to apply for outline planning permission to erect residential dwellings on a plot of vacant land (hereinafter referred to as the site) fronting onto Mill Street in the town of Wantage in Oxfordshire, and have instructed Countryside Planning and Management Ltd (CPM) to act as agents on their behalf.

1.1.2 As the site is within an area of archaeological potential (see below) as defined by the office of the County Archaeological Officer (CAO), the Local Planning Authority, Vale of White Horse District Council, have requested that the archaeological potential of the site be investigated and evaluated prior to the determination of outline permission, in line with current government guidelines (DoE, *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16*, 1990). A Brief for a programme of archaeological site investigations was prepared by the CAO, which formed the basis of a detailed Specification for a scheme of investigations drawn up by CPM's Senior Archaeologist.

1.1.3 Following approval of that Specification document (CPM 928H.1 05/93/dw) CPM sought tenders for the work, and in June 1993 commissioned Wessex Archaeology to undertake the preliminary archaeological site investigations. Work began on 21st June 1993 and this report was submitted in draft form to CPM on 1st July 1993.

1.2 Site situation, topography and geology

The site encompasses approximately 0.66 ha of vacant land fronting onto Mill Street on the western periphery of the built-up area of Wantage town centre at SU 39588814 (Figure 1). It is divided into two portions by a row of mature *Leylandii*. The Mill Street frontage is level at approximately 83 m OD, having until recently been the site of a garage; to the north-east of the trees the ground rises moderately to approximately 86 m OD to a mature but overgrown orchard. As such, the site occupied part of the floor and western slopes of the valley of the Letcombe Brook which flows north-south around the western periphery of the town some 100 m or so to the east of the site. The Geological Survey records the site as occupying alluvial deposits cut into the broad band of Upper Greensand and Gault that runs SW-NE across the south of England from Dorset to Norfolk.

1.3 Archaeological and historical setting

The archaeological and historical setting of the site is presented in summary form in the CPM Specification and has been documented in earlier works by Wessex Archaeology (WA 1992, 35661). Wantage is a historic small market town, most notable as the putative birthplace of King Alfred. The archaeology of the town has, however, been poorly recorded, with only 'sporadic

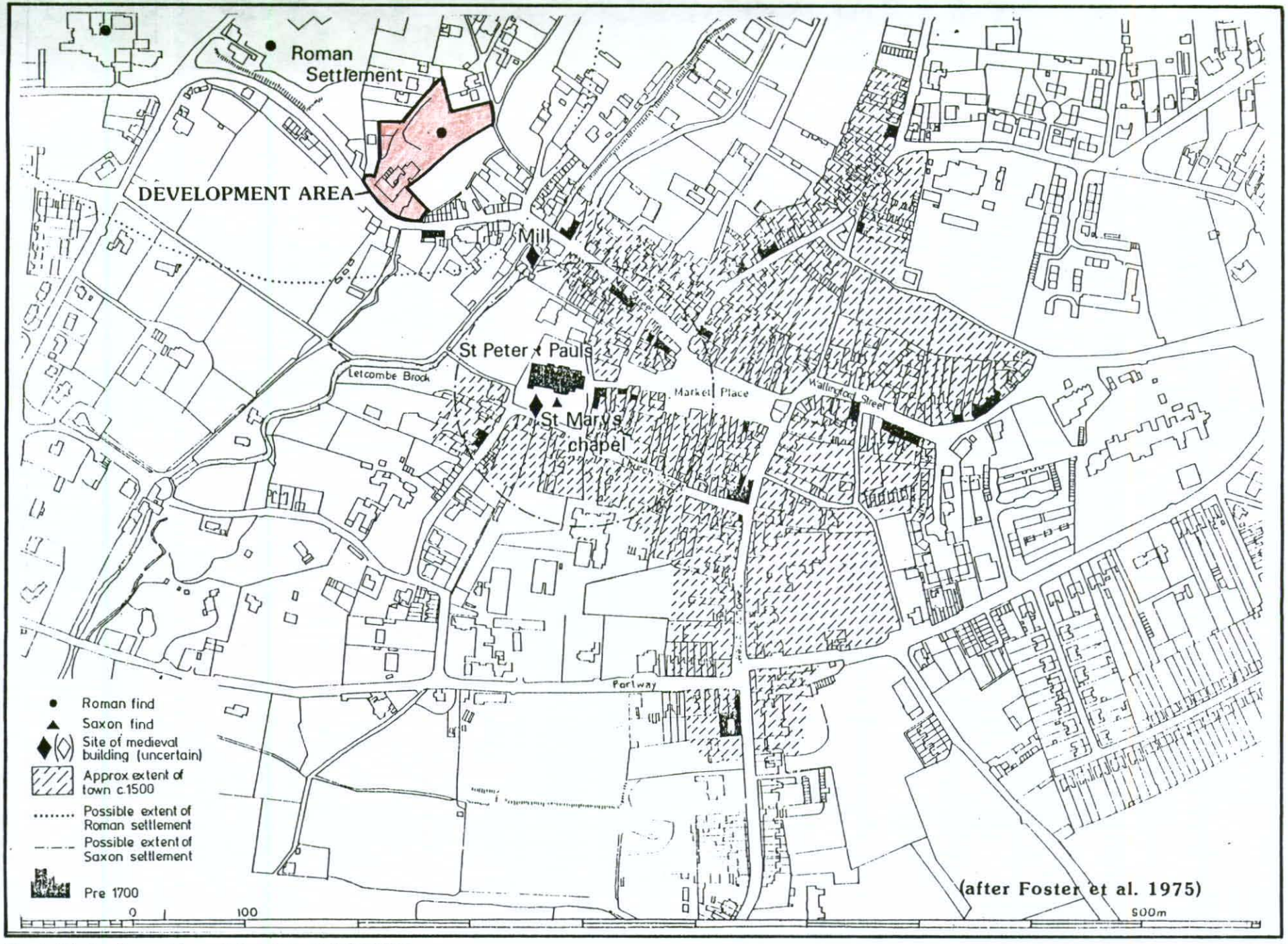

Fig. 1. Site location and immediate archaeological setting

observation and small scale excavation on local initiative' taking place during years in which large areas of the town and its environs, including the probable site of a Roman small town and possible Saxon palace, were developed (Foster *et al.* 1975, 163).

1.3.1 *Place name evidence*

Wantage is recorded as *Waneting* in *c.*880 and 955 (*Cartularium saxonicum*), *Uuanating* in *c.* 894 (*Asser's Life of King Alfred*), and *Wanetinz* in 1086 (*Domesday Book*). A stream there is referred to as *Wanotingc broc* in 956, and as *Wanetincg* and *Waneting* in 958 (*Cartularium saxonicum*), probably derived from the Old English *wanian* , 'to decrease', and meaning 'intermittent stream' (Ekwall 1960, 496). Letcombe brook has not been in recent times a winterbourne, and it has been suggested that the Brook referred to was the former Bryan's Brook, which even before it was culverted was a smaller watercourse than the Letcombe Brook (Philip 1969, 19-20), but the evidence is inconclusive.

1.3.2 *Prehistoric*

Although sporadic Bronze Age and Iron Age finds are recorded from the town no substantial remains predating the Roman period have been found in the area.

1.3.3 *Romano-British*

Wantage is situated at a crossroad where routes along the chalk scarp intersect the Roman road to Alchester. There have been a number of Romano-British finds in the north-western to western part of Wantage over many years, and the evidence points to the existence of a small Roman town, probably centred on the Belmont area a few hundred metres to the west of the site. Finds include a well with pottery and animal bones (SMR 4240, at SU 39448822), and a chalk-cut grave and skeleton at the same location (SMR 4241); two more inhumations and Roman pottery found near Belmont Farm (SMR 11513, SU 39688848); and Roman coins at SU 39608812 (SMR 7213). Even at the beginning of this century it could be said that Roman coins had been 'constantly dug up there [ie the brow and slopes of the hill at Belmont] during the last 150 years' (Gibbons and Davey 1901). To the south of the Belmont area, on Emerald Hill, traces of an extensive scatter of Romano-British pottery were observed, as well as a few sherds of medieval pottery (SMR 4952, centred on SU 39448805). Most of the material found in these locations dates to the 2nd to 4th centuries (Foster *et al* . 1975, 163).

1.3.4 *Anglo-Saxon*

Wantage is considered the probable birthplace of King Alfred, as it is recorded as such by his biographer Bishop Asser: 'Anno Domini DCCCXLIX, natus est Ælfred Angulsaxonum rex in villa Regia quae dicitur Wanating' (*De rebus gestis Ælfred*, quoted in Gibbons and Davey 1901, 12). As with all early historical sources there is room for an element of doubt as to the veracity of the report, but it must be regarded as a strong possibility that Alfred was born at a royal residence in Wantage in or around AD 849. Such a palace would probably have comprised a complex of timber buildings,

including a large hall, possibly aisled, within an enclosure. The palace at Cheddar, Somerset, for instance, in its 10th century phase, was set within a ditched stockade and included a hall approximately 10m X 17m, while the pre-AD 930 hall was longer but narrower, at approximately 23m X 6m (Rahtz 1976, 65-68, figure 2.8). There is no evidence from Wantage of the location of the palace, but this is not unusual, as indicated by Astill: 'there is frequently no archaeological evidence to locate precisely many of the early monastic and royal centres which we have identified from documentary sources, and often few clues can be gained from place-names or cartographic material' (Astill 1984, 66). The fact that Wantage also gave its name to a hundred is indicative of its importance as a collecting and administrative centre, and it also appears to have had a minster church (Astill 1984, 57). There were two churches standing in the churchyard until 1850, the smaller of which had a Norman door; on its demolition an ornamented cross-shaft of 9th or 10th century type was recovered from the rubble (Foster *et al.* 1975, 163; Astill 1984, 67).

The likely location of the Saxon palace has been the subject of considerable speculation, much of it based on the observation of an enclosure by an 18th century cleric, Dr. Francis Wise. As this is the basis of differing interpretations it is necessary to quote the relevant passage in full:

> *'However, to an antiquary I believe, it will appear, that all footsteps of the Roman majesty are not quite lost: the Castrum or fortification discovering itself to me pretty plainly on the south side of the brook, enclosing a place called High Garden. The hollow way into the town from Faringdon, with Grove Street (which was within memory of persons now living a hollow way too) and a little running water, now a morass, dividing the High garden from the lower, make three sides of an oblong square, and the river a fourth. The ground enclosed may contain 6 acres: and here stood the Saxon palace where Alfred was born '*(Wise 1738, 51-51).

The supposition that the Roman settlement and the Saxon palace occupied the same site has been taken as an indication by later writers that the palace lay on the western side of the Letcombe Brook, as that is certainly the area of the town with the greatest density of Roman finds (Gibbons and Davey 1901, 17). The site marked by the Ordnance Survey as the palace site is based on the observation that the enclosure seen by Wise was in 'High Garden', and this is equated with the place known as High Garden by the time of the first edition of the Ordnance Survey, situated to the east of the present site between Mill Street and Grove Street. This is slightly to the east of the area designated as the likely site of Wise's observation in the Sites and Monuments Record. None of these, however, quite accord with the description given by Dr. Wise.

There is clearly considerable room for speculation as to the site of the Saxon palace, but there seems to be little reason to doubt that there was one, and some evidence, albeit slender, to suggest that it lay close to the present site. Although the observations of Dr. Wise are ambiguous to some degree, and the

enclosure he saw may not have been that of the palace, both the size and location of the area he describes are not entirely inconsistent with those of other suspected palace sites, such as Chippenham, Calne or Wilton, Wiltshire, although in those cases the palace enclosure is likely to have been slightly closer to the church than would be the case with the Garnish interpretation of the Wise enclosure (Haslam 1984, 134-135, figure 57).

The importance of the Anglo-Saxon settlement at Wantage is highlighted by the occurrence there of a council summoned by Ethelred in 990, and of the Witan in 997. The latter started in Calne but moved after a few days to Wantage, the move being recorded in the charter signed by the king on that occasion (Gibbons and Davey 1901, 31-32). Shortly after this, however, it is likely that the royal residence and settlement were destroyed during the major Danish raid on Berkshire in 1006 (Gibbons and Davey 1901, 34-35).

1.3.5 *Medieval*

Wantage is recorded as 'Wanetinz' at Domesday (Morgan 1979), and appears to have been reasonably prosperous (Philip 1969, 33). The town mill (known as Lord's or Clarke's Mill - SMR 2882; SU 39658803) was in existence by Domesday, as was a minster church (Foster *et al.* , 1975, 163). The present church, however, is essentially of 13th century date (Pevsner 1966, 252).

The course of the development of Wantage as an urban centre is unclear. It is likely to have had an early market, as it appears to have been a prosperous community in the 12th century, although no grant of market rights has been found (Foster *et al.* 1975, 163). The probable extent of the medieval town, as demonstrated by known early buildings, includes both Mill Street and Grove Street (Figure 1). Two of the earliest buildings surviving in the town until the 1970s were in those streets: 42, Mill Street (now demolished) and 57, Grove Street (Foster *et al.* 1975, 165). Both of these were cruck-built structures and as such likely to date to the 16th century or earlier. Using mainly the evidence of buildings Foster *et al.* suggest a likely limit for the town at 1500 which would exclude the site from the medieval built-up area.

1.3.6 *Post-Medieval*

Enclosure maps of the early 18th century (Garnish 1988) show the site to be still outside the main urban area. Not until 1883 (First Edition OS 6") are buildings recorded for the site, and these only on the Mill Street frontage with extensive gardens and orchards to the rear. Mill Street was Turnpiked in 1752, and in 1810 a terminal of the Wiltshire-Berkshire canal (now backfilled) was opened adjacent to the north-eastern boundary of the site. The site became a garage and forecourt in modern times, recently demolished prior to acquisition by the present applicants.

2 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGIES

2.1 The CPM Specification

2.1.1 Document CPM 928H.1 05/93/dw, as approved by the CAO, specified that archaeological site investigations were to be carried out by way of 7 machine-excavated trenches of the lengths and in the positions shown on Figure 2 of that document. The total area of trenching comprises 240 m^2 or approximately 3% of the site area.

2.1.2 The defined objectives (p.6) were to:

- determine the thickness, depth and depositional history of the archaeological deposits
- characterise the nature of the main stratigraphic units encountered in terms of their physical composition . . . and their archaeological formation . . .
- assess the overall presence and survival of structural remains relating to the main periods of occupation revealed, and the potential for the recovery of additional structural information given the nature of the deposits encountered (eg extent of later disturbance)
- assess the overall presence and survival of the main kinds of artefactual evidence . . . , its condition and potential given the nature of the deposits encountered
- assess the overall presence and survival of the main kinds of ecofactual and environmental evidence . . . , its condition and potential given the nature of the deposits encountered
- appraise the relative value of the main stratigraphic units revealed in terms of their importance for preservation and conservation

2.1.3 In addition to specifying the requirements of recording systems (Section 7) and finds retrieval and sampling strategies, investigative techniques were specified which have a particular relevance to the nature of the archaeological deposits encountered and the level of detail recorded. Amongst others, the following points are emphasised in Section 6 of that document, 'Techniques':

- *"The machine should not be used to cut arbitrary trenches down to machine levels without regard to the archaeological stratification"* (Section 6.1).
- *"There is no requirement to fully excavate each evaluation trench to natural levels"* (Section 6.3)

- *"Particular care should be taken not to damage any areas containing significant remains"* (Section 6.5)

- *"It should not be assumed that the most recent levels are the least important.."* (Section 6.7).

2.2 Wessex Archaeology field methodologies

2.2.1 Seven trenches of the lengths and locations specified on Drawing CPM 928/02 of the Specification were located by taped measurement from existing permanent boundaries and features (Figure 2). The positions of Trenches 1, 3 and 4 were varied slightly to avoid undue disturbance to mature trees and telegraph poles. Exact positions are illustrated on Figure 2, and tie-in data is available in archive. Overburden was removed by mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket, under constant archaeological supervision. Machine excavation was halted at the upper surface of the first apparently significant interpretable archaeological deposits reached, and all further investigation was by hand excavation of selected deposits.

2.2.2 All deposits were recorded in detail using Wessex Archaeology's standard recording system of written, drawn and photographic records. The surfaces revealed by machine clearance were photographed and planned at 1:50 prior to hand excavation. All plans were trench-specific and related to an overall OS based 1:500 trench layout plan, and all display heights relative to OS datum, traversed from the OS bench mark at 6b Grove Street recorded as 90.50 m OD on current OS 1:2500 sheets.

2.2.3 A sample of archaeological deposits in each trench were investigated in hand excavated segments or sondages all nominally 0.5 m wide. Investigation was kept to a minimum to ensure minimal disturbance and damage to potentially valuable deposits, whilst allowing sufficient data collection to elucidate the nature, extent, function and likely date of the range of deposits on the site. Investigated deposits were recorded further, with plans and sections at 1:50 or 1:20 as appropriate.

2.2.4 All artefacts and ecofacts, other than those of obvious modern origin, were retained. The positions of typologically significant objects were recorded in three dimensions.

2.2.5 Bulk soil samples, for the purposes of assessing the survival of palaeo-environmental materials, were taken form suitable securely sealed and independently dated contexts.

2.2.6 All trenches were backfilled upon completion but not otherwise consolidated.

2.3 Wessex Archaeology post-field methodologies

2.3.1 Upon completion of fieldwork, all records were compiled into a fully indexed and cross referenced archive in accordance with Appendix 6 of *The Management of Archaeological Projects*(English Heritage 1992). All records display the Wessex Archaeology site code **W603**. All files and other record containers display that information and the Oxfordshire County Museum Accession Number **1993:45**.

2.3.2 Processing, cataloguing and curating of finds was undertaken off-site at Old Sarum in accordance with current UKIC and Museum's Association guidelines, as encompassed in Wessex Archaeology finds processing guidelines (available on request). Individual artefacts are marked with Wessex Archaeology's site code **W603** and context number. All bags and boxes display that information and the Oxfordshire County Museum Accession Number **1993:45**. There were no materials requiring conservation. All artefacts were catalogued by material and context, and scanned by Wessex Archaeology finds staff for the purposes of assessment and spot dating. Ecofacts were dealt with similarly by Wessex Archaeology environmental staff but have not been individually marked. No materials were discarded.

2.3.3 All palaeo-environmental samples were processed at Old Sarum under laboratory conditions, and the residues catalogued and curated in accordance with current best practice as outlined in Wessex Archaeology environmental sample processing guidelines (available on request). Samples were dis-aggregated in warm water and flots passed through a column of sieves. Residues were scanned by Wessex Archaeology environmental staff for the purposed of cataloguing and assessment. Residues have been stored dry in an archival state and will be deposited with the rest of the archive.

3 RESULTS

3.1 The recorded deposits

Detailed descriptions of all deposits are presented in Appendix 1 at the end of this report and in archive. The following is a summary only, with non-specific references to artefact and palaeo-environmental assemblages, both of which are dealt with in more detail in the appropriate sections of this report. Trench locations and the positions of the principal archaeological deposits are illustrated on Figure 2.

3.1.1 *Overburden and modern disturbance*

Parts of the site supported an abnormally deep cover of dark grey-brown (10YR 3/2) very fine silt loam in depths varying between upto 1.30 m in Trenches 1, 2 and 3, and as little as 0.20 m in Trench 6 at the western edge of the site. The deposit was virtually stone free and entirely homogenous, there being no variations of horizons within it visible to the naked eye. All trenches within the higher areas of the site around the orchard (Trenches 1-5) revealed this consistently thick layer of topsoil; those outside the orchard (Trenches 6 and 7) had substantially less topsoil. As both these latter trenches were positioned within areas of modern rubble and tarmac surface, it is possible that some of the topsoil has already been removed. No artefacts other than modern materials were observed from this deposit. There was no evidence of any substantial modern disturbance, other than tree root holes such as feature **102** in Trench 1.

3.1.2 *Archaeological deposits*

Archaeological deposits were revealed in all trenches and comprised artefact-rich subsoil horizons, linear features, waterlogged areas, amorphous sunken features, postholes, robbed wall footings and mortar surfaces.

Artefact-rich subsoils. Localised spreads of artefact-rich silt loam subsoil were revealed in Trenches 1, 4 and 5. The nature of the deposits became evident during initial machine clearance which, as a result, was halted at this level. The surface, distinguished from the topsoil in being slightly less dark and containing moderately more clay with small pockets of redeposited 'natural', contained the five loom weights and the copper alloy pin revealed in Trench 1 (layers 108 and 109) and was in all trenches strewn with large pieces of Romano-British and Saxon (grass-tempered) pottery and varying frequencies of oyster and terrestrial mollusca shells. Examination in hand excavated sondages revealed it to seal possible sunken floored buildings in Trench 1, linear features in Trench 5, and the mortar surface and possible robbed wall footing in Trench 4, and to vary in depth from less than 0.10m to *c* 0.40 m. In Trench 5, as layer (505) it occupied a shallow terrace set into the natural contours on the site, extending 7 m from the north end of the trench. The extent of this deposit effectively prevented further examination of the greater area of each of the trenches in which it was revealed. Notwithstanding the large number of features revealed in Trenches 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 (see below) it remains highly probable that a similar density of features remains unrecorded beneath this subsoil.

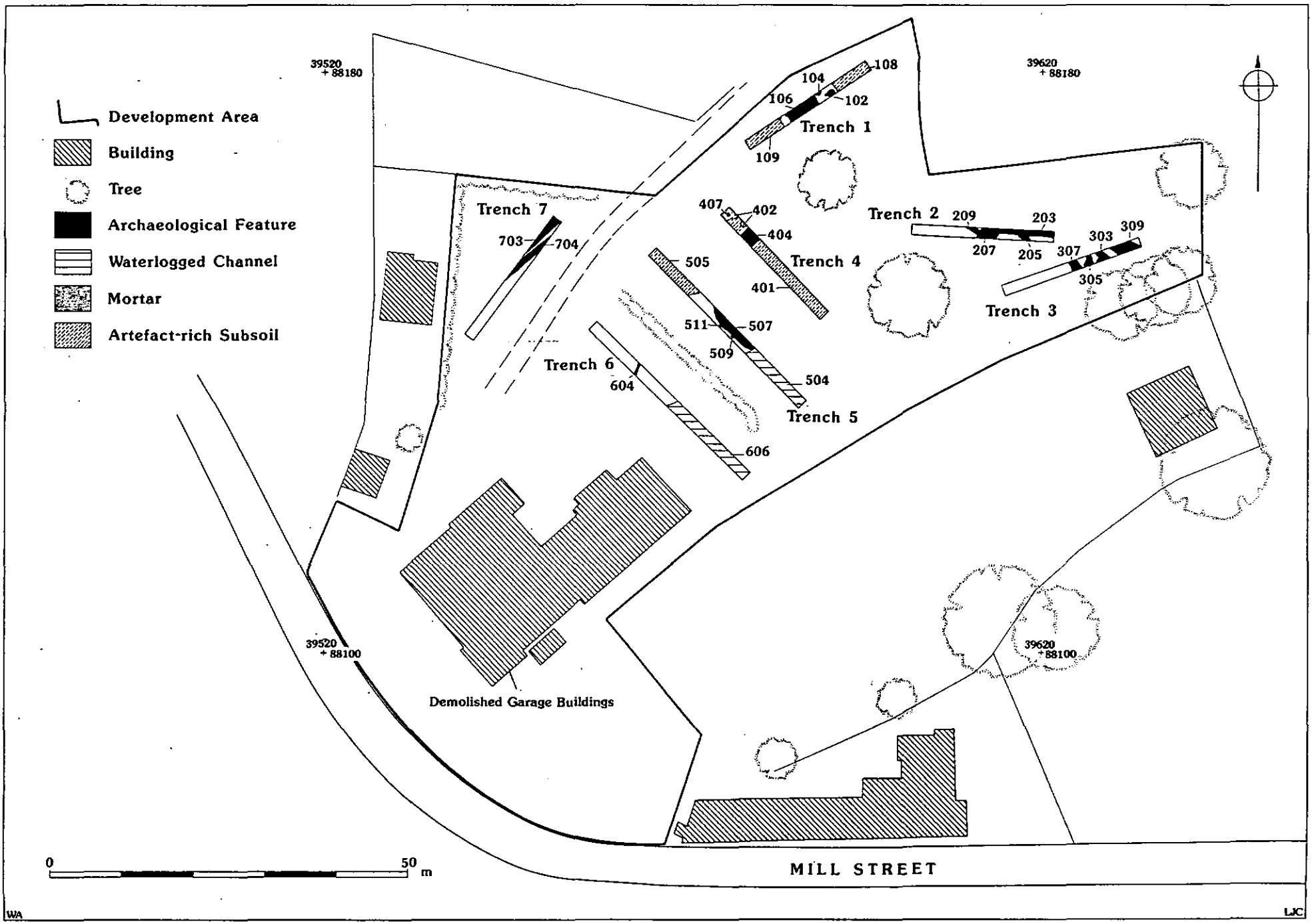

Fig. 2. Trench location and principal archaeological deposits

Linear features. Trenches 2, 3, 4 and 7 revealed linear features of varying proportions, orientations and likely function which for the purposes of this report can be described in three groups. The more common were less than 1 m wide and between 0.30-0.50 m deep, with profiles varying between steep 'v'-shapes (**703** and **706** in Trench 7) and less well defined flat-based or rounded forms (**205** and **209** in Trench 2). In all cases, the fills reflected the nature of the immediate natural deposits in to which they were cut, with the exception of features in Trenches 2 and 3 which displayed a consistently damper and more organically-rich texture than the gravelly clays thereabouts. No structural associations between features were immediately apparent, other than the parallel arrangement of the two ditches in Trench 7. The broader type of linear feature were revealed only in Trenches 2 and 3, and the two segments investigated may in fact be part of a single feature. Here, segments of a broad 'v'-shaped linear feature were investigated in both trenches (**207** and **309**), and shown to exceed 2 m in width in both cases, although the necessity of maintaining safe working conditions restricted investigation to the upper 0.40 m of both segments. Nevertheless, both displayed broad regular profiles filled with damp, artefact rich, organic gravelly clays from which soil samples have been analysed. In plan, at least, these two broader features appear to be associated, forming as they do a right angle.

Waterlogged areas. The lower (southern) ends of Trenches 5 and 6 were dominated by broad deposits of dark grey waterlogged silty clays (**504** and **605**) containing a wide range of non-modern artefact types including two complementary pieces of a gritstone rotary quern (objs 1007-8) of Roman type in channel fill 504. Machine sondaging revealed them to be relatively shallow with bases typically at between 0.50 m and 1.00 m below the base of the topsoil, but the full extent of the features and whether they have deeper components outside the boundaries of the individual trenches was not established. Both were cut from below the base of the topsoil deposits although clear edges were established in neither case. In plan, the two deposits appear to share a northern boundary skirting the base of the higher orchard area of the site, but this did not extend as far east as Trench 4.

Amorphous sunken features. Trenches 1 and 5 revealed broad shallow depressions, the boundaries of which lay outside the edges of the individual trenches. They were filled with silt loam very similar to the topsoil/subsoil horizons and contained a wide variety of artefact types including clay loom weights. In Trench 1, at least one discrete feature was identified (**106**) in two sondages excavated to investigate the artefact-rich subsoil. It was approximately 0.45 m deep and 5.50 m long with a width exceeding the width of the trench, with weathered and irregular sides and a level base. Its fill, a dark greyish brown silt loam distinguishable from the overlying topsoil deposit only by its much higher density of artefacts, contained seven annular clay loom weights (objs. 1000, 1002-6) arranged leaning on each other in a line, apparently *in situ*. Excavation of this feature was halted at this level to avoid damaging potentially significant deposits.

A more clearly defined example of a sunken feature was revealed in Trench 5. Here, feature **507** comprised what appeared to be the west end of a broad sub-rectangular feature, at least 7 m wide N-S, projecting out from under the east edge of the trench, filled with two layers of silt loam (503 and 508) the uppermost (508) being dominated by large quantities of degraded mortar. 503 contained large quantities of Romano-British pottery, animal bone and oyster shells. Within the area examined, two postholes (**509** and **511**) were observed cutting into the western edge of the feature, though in both cases the lack of any clear relationship between the fills of **507** and the postholes suggests contemporaneity between the features. The existence of similar features existing elsewhere within this area of the site, masked by the artefact-rich subsoil, was not established.

Mortar surfaces. One instance of a degraded yellow mortar surface (**402**) was revealed at the north end of Trench 4. It occupied the full width of the trench for at least 1 m and probably extended a further 3 m to the south beneath the artefact rich-subsoil (401), although its full extent was not established. It was not investigated further, to avoid damaging potentially valuable archaeological deposits. At its northern exposure, the surface displayed a number of small round hollows filled with greyish brown silt loam. One of these, (**407**) was examined to reveal a well-defined round-profiled cut into the mortar surface, 0.30 m in diameter x 0.10 m deep. Large quantities of mortar lumps were recovered from features in all adjacent trenches.

Robbed wall footings. To the south of mortar surface (402), Trench 4 revealed a square-profiled linear feature **404**, at least 1.50 m wide running SW-NE across the trench. Investigation was halted at a depth of 0.40 m to maintain safe working conditions, but within that depth the character of the feature was clarified. It displayed a near-vertical edge on its southern (downslope) edge cut into the 'natural', but its northern (upslope) edge remained sealed by a series of interleaving tips of ash, mortar, foreign stone, cess, redeposited 'natural' and loam, referred to generically as (403). Because of the potentially high archaeological value of these deposits, sondaging was halted at this level and bulk soil samples taken. Neither its extension east or west, or the existence of associated features were established.

3.1.3 *Natural base*

The lowest deposits revealed in the base of all trenches varied considerably from waterlogged gravelly clays in Trenches 2 and 3, to fine - almost ashy - eluviated pale brown silts in Trenches 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7. Examination in the sides of the deeper excavated features in each trench demonstrated that the deposits visible on the base of each trench extended to depths of at least 0.50 m. The eluviated silts are a curious deposit, reminiscent of loess, and in places (feature **404,** Trench 4) almost indistinguishable from ash. In the foregoing texts, the term 'natural' has been parenthesised to emphasise the uncertainty of the diagnosis.

The surface of the 'natural' base was at depths between 1.5 and 0.4 m below present ground level, reflecting in less exaggerated form the modern surface contours.

3.2 The artefacts

All artefacts recovered have been quantified by number and weight for each context and a summary of this information is presented in Appendix 2. Full details can be found in the archive. A brief scan of the whole collection was undertaken to establish the nature and, where possible, the date range of the artefacts recovered. The results of this scan is presented by material type below.

3.2.1 *Metalwork*

Two copper alloy and two iron objects were recovered. The iron objects comprise a hand-made, round-headed nail from the waterlogged channel **504** and a flat, slightly curving, strip of sheet metal broken at both ends, found in the filling of ditch **706.** By association with Roman pottery, both the iron objects are probably of Roman date.

The copper alloy objects consist of a pin and a possible finger ring. The ring is complete; it is D-shaped in cross-section, 2 mm wide and 1 mm thick with an internal diameter of 14 mm. It was recovered during machine clearance over the waterlogged channel **504**, and though likely therefore to be of Roman date, its provenance in that context is not secure.

The pin is 142 mm long with a faceted, cuboid head and a round, or just possibly faceted, collar on the shank *c.* 15 mm below the head. The shank is circular in cross-section, tapering gently to a point. The pin appears to be an uncommon type; no exact parallels have been found although it does share broad similarities with an Anglo-Saxon pin from Leagrave, Bedfordshire (Jessup 1974, pl. 1, 1) although this example is far more elaborate. It was found on the artefact-rich subsoil in Trench 4. The presence of the collar on the pin is suggestive of Saxon rather than Roman date (J. Davies *pers comm*) and associated finds from this feature also confirm the likelihood of an early - mid Saxon date.

3.2.2 *Pottery*

A total of 260 sherds (5364g) of pottery was recovered. The assemblage ranges in date from the Iron Age to the early - middle Saxon period, although the majority of sherds are of Roman date. In general the condition of the collection is good, with very few sherds showing surface abrasion. For the collection as a whole, the mean sherd weight is high (20.6g) and, especially among the Roman material, refitting sherds were noted.

Iron Age

Five Iron Age sherds, comprising two shell-tempered wares and three sherds in a coarse gritty fabric, were recognised. Three of these sherds were found, together with larger quantities of Roman pottery, in the possible robbed wall footing **404** (two sherds) and in ditch **703** (one sherd), and are presumably

residual in these contexts. The two remaining sherds are from ditch **303**, and, as the only finds recovered from this feature, may indicate a date for this feature. More precise dating of the Iron Age sherds is, however, problematic. Calcareous-gritted and coarse quartz-gritted fabrics are known throughout the Iron Age in this area (DeRoche 1978, 41; Lambrick 1979, 35) and although the sherds are from comparatively thick-walled, hand-made forms, probably jars, no specific details of vessel shape survive. The external surface of the coarse gritty sherds are highly burnished.

Roman

The Roman pottery recovered comprises 260 sherds, representing coarse and fine wares of predominantly local manufacture with small quantities of imported fine wares and amphorae.

The imported finewares (19 sherds) are dominated by fragments of Southern and Central Gaulish samian dating from the late 1st to early 2nd century AD. Plain forms are represented by sherds from Dr. 18 and 18/31 platters, a Dr. 36 bowl, cup forms Dr. 27, 33 and 35 and a mortaria rim probably of Dr. 43 type. Two decorated sherds, both from Dr. 37 bowls, one with a repair hole, were also present. Only one other imported fine ware sherds was present, a small fragment from a roughcast ?beaker form from an uncertain source, which was found in ditch **207**. This is probably of later 1st or 2nd century AD date. A fragment of a Dressel 20 amphora, used to carry olive oil from southern Spain and imported from the mid-1st to late 3rd century AD (Peacock and Williams 1986, 136-140), was also found in this feature. A small chip, probably from an unprovenanced amphora, was recovered from ditch **205**.

The coarseware assemblage is dominated by a wide variety of sandy and micaceous greyware fabrics with coarse grog tempered wares used for exclusively for storage jar forms. The majority of these wares are encompassed by the range of reduced wares produced in the Oxford region (Young 1977, 202-203) and many of the vessel forms present have parallels amongst the products of the Oxford kilns. Everted rim jar forms similar to Oxford types R15, R21, R24 and R38 (Young 1977, figs. 75, 77, 78 and 80 respectively), flat-flanged bowls/dishes similar to types R43 or R46 (Young 1977, fig. 81), and storage jar forms paralleled by types R19 and R20 (Young 1977, fig. 76) were recognised. Many of these forms (ie. types R15, R19, R20, R24 and R38) continued to be produced throughout the life of the Oxfordshire industry, although types R21 and R43/46 are of exclusively of 2nd to early 3rd century AD date (Young 1977) Burnished line acute-angled lattice was the only decoration noted among the coarseware collection, a feature copied from the Black Burnished ware industry where it is characteristic of the 1st - early 3rd century AD (Farrar 1973, 77; Gillam 1976, 63).

Fragments of poppy-head and rouletted beakers occurring in a very fine-grained micaceous sandy greyware fabric were probably also made in the Oxford region and can be dated to the 2nd century AD (Young 1977, 217, type R34, fig. 79). Other Oxfordshire products include small sherds from

unspecified closed and bowl forms, some with rouletted decoration, in the red and brown colour coated fine ware fabrics (Young 1977, 123). Two body sherds tentatively identified as burnt white ware (Young 1977, 113) and a flange fragment possibly belonging to the white colour coated ware of the Oxfordshire kilns (Young 1977, 117) were also noted. Both these fabrics are dated *c.* AD 240 - 400. The colour coated wares too, the most prolific products of the Oxfordshire kilns in the late Roman period, are generally assigned to this date bracket although the precise date of their introduction into the repertoire of the industry remains uncertain (Young 1977, 123-124).

Three Black Burnished ware sherds from the Wareham/Poole Harbour region of Dorset were recognised. These include a base sherd from a straight-sided bowl/dish form, probably of mid 2nd century AD or later date, the type not being widely distributed until after the expansion of the industry in *c.* AD 120 (Gillam 1976, 67-68). Glauconitic sandy wares probably derived from the Greensand areas in the immediate vicinity of Wantage were also recognised. These include a body sherd with ring-and-dot impressed decoration and sherds from two imitation Gallo-Belgic platters, types paralleled at Wanborough in north Wiltshire from the mid 1st - late 2nd century AD (Seager Smith forthcoming). A very unusual sherd, also in a glauconitic sandy fabric with large calcareous inclusions, has impressions of vegetable material on the internal surface. The edge is abraded and it is uncertain whether this is a lid or from the base of a large jar. Ceramic discs, also in dark grey fabrics with limestone inclusions, have been found at Ashville, Abingdon (Miles 1978, fig. 57, 32) and Farmoor, Oxfordshire (Sanders, 1979, fig. 28, 124-127). It is suggested that the Abingdon example, which is ridged with a central boss, is the lid of a cheese-press (Miles 1978, 78). In addition, a typical range of unprovenanced white-slipped red ware, orange and buff coarseware sherds, mostly from flagon forms, including one with a pulley-wheel rim, are also present. These are derived from a variety of sources and are likely to be of 2nd century AD date.

The collection of Roman pottery recovered represents a typical domestic-type assemblage comprising the standard range of coarse and fine wares, food preparation, storage and serving vessels. The only notable absence is the lack of mortaria but this may simply be the result of assemblage size. The collection is predominantly of 2nd century AD date, and although later Roman wares, especially from the Oxfordshire kilns, do occur in small quantities, their importance is eclipsed by the greater quantities of datable earlier fabric and form types, especially the other finewares such as the samian and poppy-head beakers. Vessels forms could not be recognised among these later fabrics, and the Oxford red colour coated ware sherds especially, were significantly smaller and more abraded than the assemblage as a whole, possibly indicative of their intrusive nature. However, it is just possible that these sherds represent the distinctive, easily recognised elements of an assemblage indicative of later Roman activity occurring within the general area of the present site, which is invisible among the coarsewares which remain largely unchanged during the entire Roman period.

Saxon

A total of 12 sherds of early to middle Saxon (5th - 7th centuries AD) pottery was recovered. These occurred in heavily organic tempered, fine sand and organic tempered and fine sand fabrics; the external surfaces of all fabrics were carefully burnished. A rim sherd, slightly internally bevelled, from a weakly-shouldered vessel and a body sherd, both in a fine sand and organic tempered fabric, were the only finds from the subsoil (502) in Trench 5. The remaining sherds were all found in Trench 1, two within the filling of the sunken feature **106**, the others from the overlying subsoil horizon.

3.2.3 *Building Materials*

One Roman ceramic roof-tile fragment, part of an *imbrex*, was found in the filling of ditch **706** while a large number of featureless lumps of mortar were noted, but not recovered, from most features, including the possible robbed wall footing **404**. Two small, flat fragments of medium-grained sandstone from the subsoil in Trench 1, and a piece of fossiliferous limestone from context **503** might possibly be derived from stone roof-tiles although no conclusive proof survives. The paucity of building materials encountered in these excavations might argue against the possibility of substantial structures built in durable materials in the immediate vicinity of the present site during the Roman period.

3.2.4 *Fired Clay*

Nine objects and one featureless fragment of fired clay were recovered. The featureless fragment was found in the filling of ditch **307**. One fragment from a loom weight and seven complete loom weights were found in the filling of the sunken feature **106**. Two of the loom weights are in poor condition but all are annular in shape, slightly flattened, ranging from 110 - 130 mm in diameter and 50 - 60 mm high. The central perforation is from 40 - 60 mm in diameter. The fabric of all the loom weights is variably fired and contains fine sand, mica and organic material as temper. Annular loom weights are common finds on early to middle Saxon sites and date from the 5th to early 8th century AD. They are often found in association with sunken featured structures, as at Shakenoak (Brodribb et al. 1972, fig. 21), Portchester (Cunliffe 1976, fig. 141, 79) and at West Stow (West 1985, 138) for example.

The remaining fired clay object was recovered from the fill of ditch **703** and is likely to be of Roman date. It comprises five fragments in the same oxidised, fine sand, mica and organic tempered fabric with both smoothed and roughly finished surfaces. The nature of this object is uncertain but it is possible that it represents part of an oven-cover or similar fired clay structure.

3.2.5 *Worked Stone*

Two fragments of probable Roman rotary quernstones, representing both upper and lower stones, were found in the waterlogged channel **504**. Both are of a pink, pebbly sandstone conglomerate not typical of the Mesozoic rocks of the Wantage area. The lower stone is most complete, approximately 40% of

the original diameter of 0.40 m surviving. It measures from 70 mm thick around the circumference to 120 mm thick in the centre, the central pivot hole is of hour-glass shape and 40 mm in diameter. The upper stone is less complete but is up to 65 mm thick. The stones may well have been used together although the upper stone shows a greater degree of wear than the lower one.

3.2.6 *Worked Flints*

Two struck flints were recovered, a flake from the filling of feature **507**, and broken flake, possibly part of a scraper, from the subsoil in Trench 1. Both are likely to be of prehistoric date but cannot be dated more closely (J. Gardiner, *pers. comm.*) and represent the "background noise" of earlier activity in the area.

3.2.7 *Worked bone*

Two worked bone objects were recovered, both ovicaprid metacarpals. One, No 1010, displayed a slight burnished waisting towards the lower end, the other No 1010, bears a perforation also towards the lower end.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental material

In addition to animal bone fragments recovered during hand excavation, three samples from visibly organic-rich and potentially waterlogged deposits were taken, and processed for palaeo-environmental assessment. The small spot samples were processed and assessed primarily for waterlogged plant remains due to the wet and silty conditions of the contexts from which they were sampled. Sample specific questions were addressed of the material and are dealt with individually below. The samples were processed by standard laboratory flotation techniques and all flots retained on a 250/300µm sieve and the residues fractionated into 5.6mm, 2mm, 1mm and 0.5mm. The coarse residue (5.6mm) was sorted, weighed and discarded, the remaining residues and flots are stored in water.

Sample	Quantity	context	Feature/details	Period
2000	1 litre	504	waterlogged deposit **504**	R-B
2001	1 litre	306	ditch **307**	R-B
2002	1 litre	403	cess layer in **404**	R-B

Although the samples were waterlogged, none contained preserved waterlogged material, but they did contain both carbonised plant macrofossils and Mollusca; these were assessed.

3.3.1 *Waterlogged plant remains*

No samples contained waterlogged plant remains or preserved organic material.

3.3.2 *Carbonised plant remains*

Despite the small sample size (*c.*10% of that normally recovered for the purposes of assessing carbonised plant survival), all samples did contain relatively high quantities of carbonised material, summarised below.

Sample	flot size (ml)	grain	chaff	seeds	charcoal >5.6mm
2001	75	A	-	C	A
2000	80	C	-	C	C
2002	30	-	-	C	-

Key: A >10 fragments
B 5-9 fragments
C <5 fragments

Sample 2000 from the surface of the putative waterlogged deposit **504** contained charred elements, both carbonised grain and non-cereal seeds. Charcoal was also present. Sample 2001 from the base of ditch **307** contained relatively large quantities of identifiable charcoal and more than 10 cereal grains and few non-cereal seeds. Sample 2002 from a cess deposit within the putative robbed footing **404** contained only a few non-cereal seeds and no mineralised seeds, common in cess, were noted. However, although the samples were relatively small for the purposes of non-waterlogged material, the coarse (>2mm) fraction from 2002 did contain calcium-phosphatic conglomerations typical of cess deposits.

3.3.3 *Land and freshwater Mollusca*

All samples contained a reasonable well preserved shells. The assemblage recorded for residues and flots is summarised below (X signifies presence).

Mollusca	2000	2001	2002
Open country species			
Vallonia spp.	X	X	X
Helicella itala	X	X	-
Pupilla muscorum	X	X	X
Intermediate species			
Trichia cf. *hispida*	X	-	-
Cochlicopa spp.	-	-X	-
Shade/damp species			
Carychium spp.	-	-	X
Fresh/brackish-water species			
Planorbids	-	-	X
Lymnaea spp.	-	-	X
Succinaea spp.	-	-	X

The shells show the presence of open dry habitats, and interestingly the putative waterlogged deposit contain no species of damp or wet conditions. Sample 2002, however, did contain a number of fresh-brackish water species as well as open dry country species, indicating the presence of standing

(possibly flowing) water in this feature. The number of shells is high and the number of species preferring damp/wet conditions suggest the long term existence of such conditions locally.

3.3.4 *Animal bone*

The excavated animal bone was rapidly scanned and species/basic faunal member were recorded (archive). A total of *c.* 153 fragments (excluding modern breaks) from 12 contexts were scanned (Appendix 3). Bone preservation was good, but the assemblages were relatively small.

The species represented were mainly cow and sheep/goat but two possible horse teeth and a single chicken/ fowl rib was recorded. The bones were predominantly mandibular and long bone fragments. Few phalanges, lower limbs and pelvic fragments were recovered. The few species represented and the restricted range of faunal elements may suggest that primary butchery was undertaken elsewhere and (apart from the mandibular fragments and teeth) most the faunal assemblage represent meat joints. The numerical variation between trenches and features is largely due to the differing volumes of soil excavated, and no conclusions on spatial or faunal element variation between trenches, layers or features should be drawn from this limited data set.

A few butchery marks were noted, mainly chops with a metal blade. Two bones had been drilled or cut and thus recorded as bone objects (See above).

3.3.5 *Summary*

The lack of waterlogged material indicates that none of the deposits are, or have been, permanently waterlogged. However, despite the relatively small sample sizes, the quantity and range of carbonised material and faunal remains indicate that good palaeo-environmental information is preserved on the site. The shells indicate open country with locally wet conditions and the calcium-phosphate concretions indicate possible cess/phosphatic input.

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Demonstrated archaeological content of the site

4.1.1 Archaeological site investigations at Mill Street, Wantage conducted by way of seven machine-excavated trenches, have demonstrated clearly that the site contains a broad range of artefactual and palaeo-environmental material existing in a remarkably good state of survival both within cut features and preserved soil horizons. Preliminary dating suggest that the site has been utilised principally during the mid Romano-British and the early-mid Saxon periods, although there is residual evidence for an Iron Age presence either on or adjacent to the site.

4.1.2 The range of artefacts includes Iron Age pottery, Romano-British finewares, including samian, and coarsewares and ceramic building material, mid Saxon grass-tempered pottery, Saxon annular clay loom weights *in situ*, a copper alloy pin of probable 'collared' Saxon type and miscellaneous iron objects, a Roman or post-Roman gritstone quern and fragments of burnt stone, mortar and building stone. These objects were recovered from broad 'v'-shaped ditches, narrower 'v'- and flat-bottomed ditches, gullies and possible robbed wall footings adjacent to *in situ* mortar surfaces, postholes, sunken structures, buried soil horizons and an extensive waterlogged area of uncertain function or origin. Other 'waterlogged' deposits in the lower portions of some of the ditches and gullies, contained palaeo-environmental data: terrestrial mollusca, carbonised cereal grains and other vegetable matter. These features and deposits were sealed by a fine grained silt loam topsoil in depths of between 0.50 m and 1.50 m, typically 1 m across the greater part of the site, and rested upon or were cut into a very fine eluviated silt, reminiscent of loess, resting upon gravelly alluvial clays .

4.1.3 Analysis of small soil samples taken from the visually most promising contexts has demonstrated that these deposits contain a wide variety of palaeo-environmental materials in extremely good condition and in relatively large numbers, including evidence of cess deposits within what are potentially robbed-out structural features.

4.1.4 Dating evidence is provided principally by the varied pottery assemblage. Apart from small quantities of Iron Age material, late 1st century AD samian and a single sherd of a late 1st century black burnished ware, the bulk of the Romano-British pottery seems to relate to occupation predominantly during the 2nd century although there was later 3rd and 4th century material present. Most of the Romano-British pottery was procured locally. The Saxon grass tempered pottery, annular loom weights and the single (probable) Saxon copper alloy pin indicate a further occupation of the site during the early to middle Saxon periods (5th-8th century).

4.1.4 Together, the body of evidence suggests that the site supported moderately intensive settlement during the Roman period, including at least one mortar-floored building set within a range of ditched enclosures. The exact nature of

the settlement - whether part of the town which as has been postulated for the Belmont area to the north-west of the site or perhaps a farmstead/villa on the periphery of a larger settlement - is presently unclear. However, drawing on local production centres and established import networks, the site amassed an assemblage of local and foreign pottery types, quern stones and - probably - other artefact types, and utilised and prepared a wide range of animal and vegetable food sources, remains of which became preserved in a number of repositories down slope of the main occupation area, some waterlogged. Occupation of the site was continued or re-established during the early-middle Saxon period. A number of sunken-floored buildings were constructed immediately adjacent to the presumably still standing Roman buildings, the latter systematically robbed for buildings materials, set within a number of ditches enclosures. The steadily denuded Roman buildings and features became, in places, sealed by an extensive midden-like horizon which, accelerated by the high fertility of the underlying loess, developed to eventually seal the whole occupation area beneath an artefact-rich subsoil horizon. The large waterlogged area at the base of the site remains enigmatic, although definitely not of modern origin as it is entirely sealed by topsoil and Roman or post-Roman midden layers, the absence of waterlogged material *per se* within the feature indicated that inundation has been relatively recent. Even if non-structural, perhaps the result of locally high water tables, the possibility still exists that extensive waterlogged palaeo-environmental material pertaining to some period of occupation survives within it.

4.2 The likely extent of archaeological deposits on the site

4.2.1 The survival of archaeological deposits within the south-western third of the development area, principally the Mill Street frontage, remains uninvestigated and unclear. But, as the site of the previous garage, forecourt and fuel tanks, this area is likely to have been already disturbed (Figure 2); only the extent of disturbance is undefined. Deposits revealed in Trench 6 suggest that the considerable depths of protective loam overburden prevalent over the northern and eastern parts of the site (Trenches 1-5 and 7), have not developed in this southern/south-western area. It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that the area of the former garage (i.e. south of the *Leylandii* hedge) may not contain interpretable archaeological deposits of the quality recorded elsewhere on the site. Some archaeological deposits, however, are still possible in this southern disturbed area.

4.2.2 The waterlogged areas revealed in Trenches 5 and 6 can reasonably be assumed to be part of the same deposit (Figure 2). It does not extend as far north-east as the bottom of Trench 4, and must therefore lie south of that trench, probably with eastern and northern boundaries falling west and south of Trenches 2 and 3. Its western boundary may have extended as far as, or beyond, the demolished garage buildings. Within the area thus defined, at least 50m x 20m, the local water table lies within 0.40 m of the present ground surface (*c.* 84.00 m OD), and waterlogged deposits lie in thicknesses of approximately 0.50 m. Given the site's proximity to the known terminus of the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal it would be tempting to attribute the waterlogged deposits to that feature. However, as there is no evidence of any

modern construction associated with the deposits, it seems more likely that a localised water table is responsible. There is, however, no reason to conclude that the formation of at least part of these waterlogged deposits necessarily post-dates the Roman or Saxon occupation of the site.

4.2.3 The remaining areas of the site, i.e. an area of approximately 45m x 90m, contains rich and interpretable archaeological deposits beneath protective loam overburden varying in depth between 0.50 m and 1.30 m, and penetrating the natural loess base of the site by as much as 2-3 m in places. Except for the immediate vicinity of mature trees (Figure 2), there are no areas that can be dismissed as definitely blank, and any proposed level reduction in excess of 0.50 m is likely to impinge on archaeological deposits.

4.3 Group value and significance of the site

4.3.1 *Iron Age*

The Iron Age of the Oxfordshire region is well researched, and represented by a wealth of competently excavated and published extensive sites (Miles 1986). The quantity of Iron Age material from the present investigations is small compared to the later assemblages, is poorly-dated and is probably residual. However, it complements the small body of isolated data already recorded for an Iron Age presence at Wantage (CPM 1993, 3), and its inclusion within the material here could reasonably be concluded to represent an earlier episode to the Roman settlement at Belmont. As such it may be significant, but its value is not demonstrated by the current site investigations.

4.3.2 *Romano-British*

The range and quantity of materials recovered from features indicating mortar floored buildings and land enclosures, clearly points to a Romano-British occupation of the site during the 2nd centuries AD, and later, supporting the circumstantial evidence of stray finds already recorded for the site and the Belmont area (CPM 1993, WA 1992). Without further investigations it is not possible to adduce the relationship between the two areas, but it is at least likely that the buildings and features recorded here at Mill Street represent the eastern fringes of a more substantial and long lived settlement. The apparent termination of the Frilford/Oxford/Alchester Roman Road at Wantage (Steane 1986, Map 9), suggests the settlement to be of regional importance. That the Roman0-British period of the Oxfordshire region is almost as well researched as the preceding Iron Age, does not diminish the importance of definite evidence for a substantial settlement at Wantage possibly in continuation of an Iron Age presence.

4.3.3 *Saxon*

The principal significance of the present site, however, lies in its unequivocal evidence of early-mid Saxon occupation. Anglo-Saxon settlement sites in the Oxford region, as with elsewhere, are rare. Completely and methodically excavated examples form a minority even of that small total. Although observations and limited excavations have recorded sunken-floored buildings and associated features at Bishops Court, Abingdon; Stanton Harcourt; Sutton

Courtney and Purwell Farm, Cassington and evidence of squatter occupation within the villa at Shakenoak; and aerial photographic evidence suggests further sites at Drayton and Long Wittenham (Chadwick-Hawkes 1986), and further evidence is expected from the results of earlier excavations at Barrow Hills, Radley, only at New Wintles near Eynsham has Saxon settlement archaeology been recorded under controlled conditions to an acceptable modern standard. This lack of comparative material makes the evidence from the present investigations both difficult to assess and, at the same time, potentially highly significant.

The importance of Wantage to the development of the early medieval kingdoms of England in the centuries between the decline of Roman imperial administration and the Norman Conquest is attested in documentary records (Section 1 above; and WA 1992), in the presence of a Minster Church and the postulated *Villa Regalis* (Steane 1986, Map 12) and in folklore associated with the birth of Alfred. The present investigations constitute the first substantive material evidence of Saxon occupation. Given the ambiguity of antiquarian references to, and descriptions of, the postulated 'Palace' of Alfred, the larger enclosure ditches revealed in Trenches 2 and 3 and the associated Saxon deposits assume an importance considerably greater than would normally be inferred from their humble form.

4.4 Consideration of effectiveness of the investigation strategy

4.4.1 Machine-trenching is a standard technique applied to potential development sites of this sort, designed to recover the widest possible range of archaeological data in a minimally-intrusive manner. In this case, a broad corpus of interpretable archaeological data has been collected whilst disturbance has been restricted to little more than the topsoil horizons of *c.* 3% of the site's area.

4.4.2 Two aspects of the site's archaeological potential remain un-investigated:

- The area of the demolished garage
- Deposits below the level at which investigation was halted.

The former can reasonably be assumed to have been somewhat disturbed primarily through the construction and removal of underground fuel storage facilities. Results of the investigations indicate a considerable tail-off in archaeological deposits towards the garage area and a reduction in the protective soil cover that has covered the rest of the site. It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that the garage area of the site does not contain the same density and quality of archaeological deposits as revealed elsewhere.

Partial investigation of the presence and nature of archaeological deposits below the level at which investigation was halted is explicit in the approved investigation strategy, and essentially unavoidable. Adoption of such a strategy is an implicit acceptance of the boundary between **investigation** and **excavation**. Under the circumstances which prevail during most preliminary

site investigations (time scale, economy of scale considerations, 'key hole' views etc.) destruction of overlying deposits for the sake of investigating putative lower deposits cannot be justified, especially in a case such as this where the highest levels reached were of obvious importance. The small number of sondages hand-excavated though the artefact-rich subsoils did, however, reveal the nature of that particular horizon and that earlier features and deposits are indeed sealed beneath it. Excavating more, in what would have been a random and unstructured sampling strategy within each trench, could not have been guaranteed the production statistically more significant results and would definitely have created more disturbance and de-stratification of deposits and artefacts. In any case, the artefact-rich subsoil - the level at which machining was stopped - constitutes a significant archaeological deposit in its own right.

4.4.3 Even with the benefit of hindsight, an alternative strategy cannot realistically be envisaged. Gridded test-pitting, though potentially useful in providing high resolution artefact distributions, cannot be used to record and plot features and cannot be effectively undertaken in soil depths greater than 0.50m. As soil depths in excess of 1m had been previously recorded by geotechnic investigations, adoption of such a strategy would have been ill advised. Geophysical surveying would have faltered for the same reasons and, even if successful, would still have required subsequent verification through machine trenching. Accepting that machine-trench investigations were the only realistic option available, the physical restraints inherent to the site restricted any flexibility there might have been in designing trench dispositions.

4.4.4 In summary, therefore, the approved archaeological site investigation strategy has been demonstrated to have been effective, *minimally* intrusive, and the only approach feasible.

5 THE ARCHIVE

The archive comprises the following:

File 1: *CPM Specification, report, site records*
File 2: *Photographic materials*
File 3: *Finds records*
File 4: *Administrative material*

Box 1: *Pottery*
Box 2: *Fired clay*
Box 3: *Animal bone*
Box 4: *Fired clay*
Box 5: *Shell, stone, cbm and flint*
Box 6: *Fe and Cu alloy*
Box 7: *Flotation residues*

This will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum following approval of this report and the granting of the landowner's permission. Oxfordshire County Accession Number is **1993:45**. Prior to that deposition, the archive will remain with Wessex Archaeology.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Catalogue of trench descriptions.

Trench and principal deposit/feature positions are illustrated on Figures 1 and 2. NGR's and ground levels relative to OS datum are given for each end, The latter were traversed to the site from the OS bench mark at 6B Grove Street recorded as 90.50mOD on the current OS 1:2500 sheet. All depths are in metres below ground level; where there is significant variation, maxima and minima are given.

Trench No. 1	**NGR 1:** SU 39578 88170 **NGR 2:** SU 39596 88181	**Ground level 1:** 88.21mOD **Ground level 2:** 88.05mOD
Depth	**Description**	**Context**
0-1.10	very dark greyish brown (10YR3/2) silt loam topsoil, virtually stone-free.	100
1.10-1.13	light brownish grey (10YR5-6/2) silt loam subsoil horizon with pockets of very pale brown (10YR8/-) 'elluviated' silt, contained animal bone, mixed ceramics and a single Cu Alloy pin (obj. 1001) immediately below the machine cleared surface.	101, 108, 109
Features	**102**: sub-rectangular pit 1.25m x 1.50m x 0.30m deep with near vertical sides filled with degraded tree root and loam (103). **104**: sub-rectangular depression, not defined within trench but at least 1.05m wide x 0.25m deep, filled with light brownish grey (10YR5/2) silt loam (105). **106**: broad depression not defined within trench but at least 5m wide x 0.45m deep, filled with light brownish grey (10YR5/2) silt loam (107) containing animal bone, mixed ceramics and 5 *in situ* fired-clay 'doughnut' loomweights (objs. 1000, 1002-6) immediately below the machine cleared surface.	
1.13->1.50	very pale brown (10YR8/-), soft, elluviated silt loam	110

Trench No. 2	**NGR 1:** SU 39602 88159 **NGR 2:** SU 39662 88157	**Ground level 1:** 86.62mOD **Ground level 2:** 85.29mOD
Depth	**Description**	**Context**
0-1.30	very dark greyish brown (10YR3/2) silt loam topsoil, virtually stone free.	201
Features	**203**: probable linear feature partly under north section of trench, filled with grey (10YR5/1) gravelly clay (202); not examined. **205**: flat-base linear ditch 0.70m wide x 0.30m deep running SE-NW across trench, filled with waterlogged dark grey (10YR3/1) gravelly clay (204) containing mixed ceramics, animal bone, shell and charcoal. **207**: broad linear ditch *c* 2m wide x > 0.50m deep , displaying broad 'v'-shaped profile, running SSW-NNE acros s trench. filled with dark grey (10YR3/1) gravelly clay (206) containing mixed ceramics, animal bone and shell. not investigated below 0.50m for safety reasons. **209**: flat-based linear ditch 0.57m wide x 0.30m deep running SE-NW across trench and cuttting top fill (206) of feature 207, filled with dark grey (10YR3/1) gravelly clay (208) containing mixed ceramics.	

>1.30	mixed orange gravel and green clay, 'natural'.	210

appendix 1 cont.

Trench No. 3	**NGR 1:** SU 39614 88150 **NGR 2:** SU 39634 88157	**Ground level 1:** 84.89mOD **Ground level 2:** 84.95mOD
Depth	**Description**	**Context**
0-0.70	very dark grey (10YR3/1) silt loam topsoil	301
Features	**303**: round-profiled linear ditch 1.25m wide x 0.33m deep running NNW-SSE across trench, filled with grey (10YR5/1) gravelly clay (302) containing pottery. **305**: irregular profiled linear feature 1.50m wide x 0.13m deep, running NNE-SSW across trench immediately west of 303, filled with dark greyish brown (10YR3/2) clay loam (304) containing pottery. **307**: broad 'v'-shaped ditch 1.05m wide x 0.40m deep running N-S across trench, filled with waterlogged dark greyish brown (10YR3/2) gravelly clay (306) containing animal bone, mixed ceramics, shells and charcoal. Sample taken. **309**: broad linear ditch *c* 3.00m wide and > 0.40m deep running NW-SE across eastern end of trench , filled with grey (10YR5/1) waterlogged gravelly clay (308). Feature not examined below 0.40m or safety reasons.	
>0.70m	mottled and intermixed lenses of pale brown sand and grey gravelly clay overlying grey clay (visible in excavated features); 'natural'.	310

appendix 1 cont.

Trench No.4	**NGR 1:** SU 39576 88161 **NGR 2:** SU 39590 88147	**Ground level 1:** 87.06mOD **Ground level 2:** 86.31mOD

Depth	**Description**	**Context**
0- 0.50/1.00	dark grey brown (10YR4/2) silt loam topsoil, deepens considerably to south east	400
0.50/1.00- 1.00/1.50	greyish brown (10YR5/2) artefact rich silt loam subsoil in localised patches across NW half of trench, and entirely over southern half of trench. Large quantities of coarse pottery, animal bone and shell visible in surface, not examined further,	401
Features	**402**: very pale brown-yellow (10YR8/3-6) degraded mortar appearing in patches beneath subsoil 401 and totally exposed along northern most 1.50m of trench. southern limit not established. cut by possible posthole 407. appears to be degraded mortar surface. **404**: square-profiles linear feature running E-W across trench beyond postulated southern edge of mortar surface 402. examined to depth of 0.40m. southern edge is well defined and near vertical, northern edge not established but appears to be sealed by a series of tip lines of alternating degraded mortar, stone, ash, cess and loam left *in situ* and numbered generically (403). Sample taken. possible robbed wall footing. **407**: possible small posthole cut into mortar surface (402), 0.40m diameter x 0.10m deep, filled with dark yellowish brown (10YR4/4) silt loam (406) containing lumps of mortar.	
>1.00/1.50	very pale brown (10YR7/3) 'elluviated' silt loam 'natural', very fine with an almost ashy feel about it in places.	405

appendix 1 cont.

Trench No. 5	**NGR 1:** SU 39566 88156 **NGR 2:** SU 39580 88141	**Ground level 1:** 87.09mOD **Ground level 2:** 84.87mOD

Depth	**Description**	**Context**
0-0.20	yellow, loose hoggin and mortary rubble, extends over entire length and breadth of trench	500
0.20-0.50	dark greyish brown (10YR3/2) silt loam topsoil containing modern ceramics and other materials	501
0.50-1.00/1.50	greyish brown (10YR5/2) silt loam subsoil, virtually stone free and becoming deeper at southern end of trench.	502
Features	**507**: broad depression under east baulk of trench , >7m long (N-S) x >1.5m wide x > 0.40m deep, clean steep sides cut into 'natural' though base not reached for safety reasons; upper 0.40m filled with two layers; a steeply tipping band of light brownish grey (10YR6/2) gritty silt containing frequent large pieces of degraded mortar, above a dark yellowish brown (10YR3/6) silt loam containing oyster shells, animal bone and mixed ceramics. **509**: small posthole on the western edge of 507, partially 'cut' by or opening into 507, clean cut bucket-shaped profile 0.40m x 0.40m deep filled with dark yellowish brown (10YR3/6) silt loam. **511**: small posthole on western edge of 507 , similar to and 1.75m north of 509. Not examined. **504**: waterlogged channel occupying southern 10m of trench, machine sondaging revealed base to be *c* 2.00m below present ground level, surface covered by thin layer of 'greasy' very dark grey-brown silty clay containing frequent terrestrial and marine mollusca shells, pottery and animal bone. Soil sample taken. **505**: localised patch of artefact rich silt loam subsoil at north end of trench, >7.2m long x >1.5m wide x 0.20m deep, containing shell, animal bone and mixed ceramics. Seals 'natural' and one other linear feature (not examined) and appears to be filling a level terrace cut into the natural slope.	
>1.00/1.50	mottled, yellow-brownish yellow silt loam 'natural' , looks like very degraded 'coombe rock'	506

appendix 1 cont.

Trench No. 6	**NGR 1:** SU 39557 88146 **NGR 2:** SU 39579 88124	**Ground level 1:** 86.64mOD **Ground level 2:** 84.46mOD

Depth	**Description**	**Context**
0-0.10	yellow, loose sandy rubble, extends entire length and breadth of trench, forms base of tarmac surface at southern end	600
0.10-0.20	greyish brown (10YR5/2) silt loam topsoil	601
0.20-0.30	dark yellowish brown (10YR3/4) localised silt loam subsoil	602
Features	**604**: shallow irregular disturbance running approximately E-W across trench, 0.40m wide x 0.05m deep, has involuted base with many small hollows and depressions; animal disturbance filled with dark yellowish brown (10YR3/4) silt loam. **606**: broad waterlogged channel occupying southern 10m of trench; machine sondaging revealed a shallow 'v'-shaped profile with base at *c* 1.50m below present ground surface. Filled with very dark grey-black (10YR3/1-2/1) malodorous silty clay (605) containing shell, mixed ceramics and charcoal	
>0.30	mottled, very pale brown (10YR7/3) silt loam 'natural', very soft.	

Trench No. 7	**NGR 1:** SU 39552 88160 **NGR 2:** SU 39540 88144	**Ground level 1:** 87.76mOD **Ground level 2:** 87.05mOD

Depth	**Description**	**Context**
0-0.32	very dark grey (10YR3/2) silt loam disturbed by modern rubble hard standing	700
0.32-0.85	dark greyish brown (10YR4/2) silt loam subsoil	701
Features	**703**: 'v'-shaped linear ditch running SSW-NNE along length of trench, 1m wide x 0.6m deep x >6m long, filled with dark greyish brown mottled silt loams (704) and (705) containing animal bone and mixed ceramics. **706**: 'v'-shaped linear ditch running SSW-NNE along length of trench parallel to 703, 0.98m wide x 0.45m deep x > 6m long, filled with dark greyish brown silt loam (707) containing animal bone and mixed ceramics.	
>0.85m	pale brown-light brownish grey silt loam 'natural' (10YR8/3-6/2)	702/708

Appendix 2: Catalogue of all materials recovered

Context	Animal bone	C.B.M.	Fired clay	Pottery I.A	Pottery RB	Pottery Saxon	Shell	Stone	Flint	Cu alloy	Fe	Comment/ SF. no.
Trench 1												
107	18/324g		7/3265g		27/480	2/66						Fired clay - SF. nos. 1000, 1002 - 1006; worked bone SF no. 1010
108	15/440g				3/34	7/262				1		Cu alloy - SF. no 1001
109	5/66g				7/1g	1/7		2/138g	1/2g			
Total	**38/1430g**		**7/3265g**		**47/880g**			**2/138g**	**1/2g**	**1**		
Trench 2												
204	26/321g				43/819g		3/21g					Worked bone SF no. 1011
206	2/41				29/318g							
Total	**28/362g**				**72/1137g**		**3/21g**					
Trench 3												
302				2/28g								
304					1/56g							
306	55/816g		1/8g		36/512g		7/121g					
Total	**55/816g**		**1/8g**		**39/596g**		**7/121g**					
Trench 4												
403	14/48g	1/530		2/84	26/518g		1/24g	9/1456				CBM=mortar
Total	**14/48g**	**1/530**			**28/602g**		**1/24g**	**9/1456**				
Trench 5												
502						2/31						
503	10/222g				17/284g		1/76g	1/43g	1/3g			
504	1/3g				27/572g			2/9100			1	S.F 1008 1007 Stone.
506	1/8g				6/88g		1/25g					
Total	**12/233g**				**53/975g**		**2/101g**	**3/9143**	**1/3g**		**1**	

Appendix 2 cont.

Trench 6										
605				1/3g						
Total				1/3g						
Trench 7										
704	5/484g			1/26 35/834g						
705				6/162g						
707	6/116g	1/280g		12/126g					1	S.F 1009
Total	**11/600g**	**1/280g**		**54/1148g**					**1**	
Ustratified										
u/s				1/23						
TOTAL										
	82/3489	**2/810**	**8/3273**	**295/5364**	**13/267**	**14/10737**	**2/5**	**1**	**2**	

Appendix 3: Animal bone, basic quantifications.

Context	cow	cf. horse	sheep/goat	unid. mam.	chicken	Total
107	3		2	12		17
108	4		4	7		15
109	1		2	2		5
204	1	1	4	20		26
206			1	2		3
306	16	1	19	18		54
403	3		1	6		10
503	9				1	10
504				1		1
506				1		1
704	5					5
707	3		3			6
Total	**45**	**2**	**36**	**67**	**1**	**153**

Appendix 3 cont.: **Animal bone, basic identifications**

Context	cow	cf. horse	sheep/goat	unid. mam.	chicken	Total
107	tibia 1 tooth 1 horn 1 **3**		tooth 1 long bone 1* **2**	**12**		17
108	tibia 1 mand frag 1 rib 2 **4**		mand. frag 1 unid 3 **4**	**7**		15
109	tibia 1 **1**		mand. frag 1 other 1 **2**	1 **2**		5
204	tooth 1 **1**	tooth 1 **1**	long bone 3 tooth 1 **4**	20* **20**		26
206			tooth 1 **1**	2 **2**		3
306	tooth 2 horn 1 long bone 6 scap 1 rib 1 other 5 **16**	tooth 1 **1**	tooth 3 mand frag 2 long bone 6 phalange 1 rib 1 other 6 **19**	18 **18**		54
403	mand frag 1 other2 **3**		tooth 1 **1**	6 **6**		10
503	mand frg 1 tooth 1 long bone 1 other 6 **9**				1 **1**	10
504				1 **1**		1
506				1 **1**		1 **1**
704	long bone 1 rib 1© other 3 **5**					5
707	long bone 3 **3**		long bone 2 mand frag 1 **3**			3

© = cut/butchered * = worked

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