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**EXCAVATIONS IN 2000 ON THE
LINE OF THE THAMES WATER
NORTH-WEST OXFORDSHIRE
SUPPLY IMPROVEMENT
PIPELINE**

For

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EXCAVATIONS IN 2000 ON THE LINE OF THE THAMES WATER NORTH-WEST OXFORDSHIRE SUPPLY IMPROVEMENT PIPELINE

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Author:	Alistair Barber, Ed McSloy and Neil Holbrook	
Approved:	Neil Holbrook	
Signed:	
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Headquarters Building, Kemble Business Park, Cirencester, Gloucestershire, GL7 6BQ
Tel. 01285 771022 Fax. 01285 771033 E-mail:
info@cotswoldarch.org.uk

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NORTH-WEST OXFORDSHIRE SUPPLY IMPROVEMENT PIPELINE**

Alistair Barber, Ed McSloy and Neil Holbrook
Cotswold Archaeology

With Contributions By

*A. Bartlett, H.E.M Cool, Nina Crummy, Brenda Dickinson, Peter Guest, Ellen
Hambleton, Emma Harrison, J.M. Mills, Louise Loe, Ruth Pelling, Jane Timby,
Richard Reece, Fiona Roe, T.P. Young*

BACKGROUND

A programme of archaeological recording was commissioned by Thames Water Utilities Ltd. prior to construction of a new supply improvement pipeline in North-West Oxfordshire. The approximately 17km long pipeline route runs between Swinford water treatment works, North Leigh reservoir and Charlbury in Oxfordshire.

A desk-based archaeological assessment of the pipeline route was undertaken by Lang Hall Archaeology in May 2000. Although the proposed water main did not pass directly through any statutorily protected (scheduled) archaeological sites a consultation of the Oxfordshire County Sites and Monuments Record indicated the archaeological potential of the area and, in particular, highlighted three known sites directly affected by the proposed works which would require archaeological recording. These sites included the Romano-British roadside settlement at Wilcote.

Roman occupation at Wilcote has been identified from archaeological findspots and discoveries over many years but principally by fieldwork undertaken since 1990 by Dr. Anthony Hands, whose continuing investigations immediately south of Akeman Street are gradually elucidating the character of the roadside occupation (*Wilcote I; Wilcote II*).

In the vicinity of Wilcote the proposed pipeline passed through predominantly arable land. Within field OS 3949 the water main was to run approximately 70m west of excavations undertaken by Dr. Hands between 1990-96 in neighbouring field OS 5651 (approximately 0.8km to the west of Wilcote Manor, House and Grange) (fig. 1). More recently, archaeological investigations had also been undertaken approximately 250m west of the proposed route by Dr. Hands, but the area of the pipeline itself had not previously been examined.

In order to assess the likely extent and density of archaeological features crossed by the pipeline within field OS 3949 a geophysical survey was undertaken by the Bartlett-Clark Consultancy in 2000 (see below). The 50m by 200m survey area revealed numerous geophysical anomalies, suggesting the presence of pits and ditches, and linked with an earlier geophysical survey commissioned by Dr. Hands in 1999 which identified the position of Akeman Street from two flanking ditches 24m apart (fig. 2).

With the identification of areas of archaeological potential along the pipeline route a programme of archaeological recording was proposed by Thames Water which was designed to ensure that adequate measures were in place to mitigate any adverse impact that pipeline-laying might have upon important buried archaeology. This mitigation strategy, which was approved by Oxfordshire County Council Archaeology Service, comprised two elements. First a watching brief was undertaken during topsoil stripping and pipe-laying along the pipeline route. The (largely negative) results of the watching brief have been reported upon separately (CAT 2001). In addition it was agreed that Dr. Hands would examine the area of a large geophysical anomaly, which lay immediately outside of the zone of impact of the pipeline, while Cotswold Archaeological Trust (CAT; now Cotswold Archaeology) would excavate the remainder of the stripped area. Dr Hands will report on the results of his excavation elsewhere.

Second, in the light of the geophysical survey results at Wilcote, an excavation was programmed to take place prior to construction. This was designed to examine the

area of impact where the pipeline passed through the known Roman settlement and crossed the projected line of Akeman Street (site centred on NGR: SP 365 155). The excavation strategy entailed the examination of an area 140m long by 15m wide, wider than is usually examined with pipelines. This was above and beyond the requirements laid down in the Code of Practice contained within the Water Act 1989, and was designed to ensure that the results obtained could be better understood than if only the pipeline trench itself had been examined. The objectives of the excavation were to identify, sample and record all features within the stripped area. All pits, postholes and ditches were as a minimum sectioned once by hand. Priority was attached to features yielding sealed assemblages that could be related to the site sequence, and those which might yield deposits of palaeo-environmental or palaeo-economic potential. A full written, drawn and photographic record was made.

The CAT excavation was undertaken between August and October 2000. A mechanical excavator, utilising a toothless grading bucket, first removed ploughsoil under archaeological supervision to the top of archaeological levels or otherwise to the solid geology (mapped as Forest Marble clays with limestone, Cornbrash and Kellaway Clay deposits of the Middle Jurassic period). Selected areas were then hand-cleaned and detailed investigation and recording of individual features undertaken, concentrating upon those features that would be destroyed by pipe-laying works.

Removal of the ploughsoil quickly revealed that the Romano-British occupation was more extensive than anticipated. Thames Water consequently decided that further archaeologically-supervised removal of ploughsoil should be undertaken along the 2m width of the pipe-trench immediately north and south of the main excavation area (coded as Site A) to try to define the limits of the Romano-British settlement. Sites B to G represent this extension of the excavation area.

Following completion of the excavation an assessment was made of the main findings and a programme of analysis and research proposed. This strategy was approved by Oxfordshire County Council Archaeology Service and analysis was completed between April-December 2002. This report presents the results of the excavation and post-excavation phases.

THE ARCHAEOGEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

A. Bartlett

Survey Procedure

The main technique as specified for this investigation was magnetometer surveying. This is the most efficient and generally effective technique for detecting a range of archaeological features, and for providing an overall indication of the archaeological potential of the majority of sites. Magnetometer readings were collected at 0.25m intervals along transects 1m apart using Geoscan fluxgate gradiometers, and were presented as graphical and grey scale plots in the archive report. Processing operations applied to the data include correction for variations in line spacing caused by changes in the instrument zero setting, and slight numerical smoothing by averaging with neighbouring values. The survey area was located by means of a sub-1m accuracy GPS system, which was used to place grid markers at coordinates extracted from 1:10000 OS digital maps. Local discrepancies between OS and GPS coordinates were corrected for by means of trial readings taken at field corners and other identifiable fixed points.

Results

The survey was positioned in the field to the west of the pipeline at its intersection with Akeman Street. This area was thought likely to be archaeologically productive, and lies within an extensive roadside settlement and industrial site which is the subject of a continuing investigation by Dr A. Hands. An extract from a previous magnetometer survey commissioned by Dr Hands in 1999 and undertaken on the line of Akeman Street adjacent to the present survey is included (with permission) on fig. 2. The Jurassic geology of this site, which lies on Forest Marble and Cornbrash, provides favourable conditions for magnetometer surveying, and numerous features are visible in the survey plots. These include the approximately east-west roadside

ditches alongside Akeman Street, which are visible particularly in the western half of the 1999 survey, and which become intermittent towards the east of the field.

The survey also detected other features, probably including numerous silted pits. The presence of burnt debris from these activities would account for the strong magnetic response from the fill of some of the detected features. The recent survey has additionally detected a number of linear magnetic anomalies which suggest the presence of ditches and ditched enclosures, particularly towards the south east corner of the field.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Preservation

The preservation of archaeological remains across Sites A to G was relatively good, with both negative features and horizontal deposits having survived. Within Site A extensive plough scarring was noted, however, and a degree of truncation of archaeological features had occurred. Differential preservation of features was apparent across Site A. A series of hearths survived only as areas of heat-affected ground but the remains of Akeman Street, an associated trackway and the structural remains of a timber building survived because they had been set into the natural clays below the level of subsequent ploughing. Ground level varied from approximately 141m O.D. at the northern end of the excavations to approximately 124m O.D. at their southern limit.

Phasing

Although many of the excavated features (fig. 2) produced some datable non-ceramic artefacts, the primary means of establishing chronology/phasing was through the pottery. The pottery assemblage is for the most part dominated by local wares which are conservative in terms of range of forms and frequently only broadly datable. It was

also clear from analysis of the ceramics, particularly from those features which produced large groups of material, that significant quantities of residual, re-deposited, material was present.

The problems outlined above, combined with the paucity of evidence for relative chronology in terms of clear and significant stratigraphic relationships, have dictated that the site sequence described below be presented as five broad phases of activity. Refinement to this sequence, based on analysis of the larger pottery groups and defined as 'ceramic phases' is detailed within the dating evidence sections.

SITE A

PERIOD 0: PREHISTORIC

No prehistoric features were recognisable within Sites A to G. Prehistoric activity is suggested in the locality however, by a small and undiagnostic artefact assemblage recovered from Sites A, B and E. These residual and unstratified finds consist of a single handmade, flint-tempered, prehistoric pot sherd, two flint scrapers and two broken flint flakes.

PERIOD 1: ROMANO-BRITISH (First Century A.D.)

Two pits of first-century date are ascribed to this period within Site A. Period 1 activity in the site vicinity is otherwise solely indicated by the recovery of first-century pottery, two coins and metalwork as residual finds within later features.

Pits

Two scattered rubbish pits, 1212 to the south of the Period 2 timber building, and 1259 within the Period 2 area of hearths and ovens, both contained small quantities of domestic refuse within charcoal-flecked fills (fig. 2). No other pits could be firmly

assigned to Period 1. Several pits yielded pottery only broadly datable to the first to second centuries A.D., however, and it is conceivable that some further pits within Site A might also date from Period 1.

Akeman Street

The 1999 geophysical survey recorded two east-west aligned, parallel, flanking ditches marking the line of Akeman Street within the northern half of field OS 3949. The two ditches could not, however, be clearly discerned immediately west of the excavation area, and were not encountered during Dr. Hands 1993-6 excavations within adjacent field OS 5651 (fig. 1). No Period 1 road foundations, metalling or associated drainage ditches survived within Site A. A series of clay quarries were noted immediately south of the projected road line although where datable none are likely to be associated with the initial construction of the road.

Dating Evidence, by Jane Timby, Ed McSloy and Jo Mills

In this section the evidence for the date of Period 1 is discussed, primarily by reference to the pottery, but incorporating information from other artefacts classes, followed by a summary of 'key groups' listing pottery types and other datable artefacts. The key groups have been selected on the basis either of the presence of individual diagnostic pottery types, or the overall composition of the group. Coarse pottery type series codes used throughout the dating evidence sections are elucidated in Table 8.

Dating evidence for Period 1 features is restricted to quantities of pottery, consisting almost entirely of local reduced wares of likely Flavian date. Period 1 material derives entirely from two pits 1212 and 1259. Additional residual first-century material was present in other features within Site A. Some 44 sherds of South Gaulish samian were recovered from Period 2 and 3 features, including pre-Flavian and early Flavian types. Forms comprise mainly Dr. 29 and Dr. 37 bowls, Dr. 27 cups, together with small numbers of Dr. 15/17 and Dr. 18 platters.

Pottery from pit 1259 comprises mainly sherds of Oxford fabric R37 (OXF RE1). Sherds are very small and fragmented and close dating is not feasible. At Asthall fabric R37 only occurred from Period 2 onwards suggesting it may have been in production from the early Flavian period (Booth 1997, 117). The material from pit 1212 was also dominated by local wares, amongst which were necked jars, lids and a flanged bowl. The sherds were slightly better preserved compared to 1259 but were again well fragmented (average sherd 7.5g). Other wares include four sherds of organic-tempered Severn Valley ware and five sherds of South Gaulish samian which if taken at face value suggest a Flavian *terminus post quem* for this particular feature. The coarsewares on their own might intimate a later first-century date.

Key Groups

Pit 1212: Pottery (70sh./606g). Samian: SG forms Ritt. 12, Dr. 27, 29, 29 or 37. Other: OXFRE 1,3,4, 9, OXFOX 1,2, OXFGR, SVW17.

Pit 1259: Pottery (35sh./118g). Other: OXFRE 1,3,6, OXFOX 1, OXFGR, SVW17.

PERIOD 2 (Second to mid/late Third Century A.D.)

Clay quarries

Intensive clay-quarrying occurred across an area of ground 5-30m south of the projected line of Akeman Street. No roadside quarries were present within Sites D and E immediately to the north of Akeman Street.

The 24 quarry features varied considerably in form (Table 1; fig. 2). Small, shallow, sub-circular and oval pits, which included 1209 and 1049, as well as narrow, irregularly-shaped, scoops such as 1157 and 1215 were present. Two larger oval quarries 1065 and 1115 were also investigated, the latter pit being 7.7m in length, 3.9m in width and 1.6m in depth.

Although some of the smallest scoops may have been excavated as trial holes for larger quarries, most pits appeared to have been deliberately dug to extract small quantities of clay. The homogenous single fills of these features suggest that they were

open for only a small period of time and soon backfilled. No evidence was encountered for the reopening of quarry pits.

Most quarries contained only single fills but five pits, including the three largest, contained more complex sequences of deposition. Pits 1065, 1115 (Sections fig. 3) and 1165 all contained basal fills of relatively clean orange-brown clay, which appeared to derive from initial weathering of pit edges. Secondary fills generally consisted of grey-brown silty-clays incorporating varying quantities of domestic rubbish. Two thin spreads of fragmentary limestone were noted in pit 1115. The first stone deposit 1124 had consolidated the soft basal fill, perhaps affording easier access for the subsequent dumping of waste, whilst a second stone layer 1142 partially capped the later dump deposits. Several pits contained final loam fills of late Period 2 date which sealed earlier, settled, fills.

An assemblage of miniature, repaired, reworked and deliberately-damaged copper-alloy and iron objects, with probable votive associations, was recovered from Period 2 quarry pits within the northern part of Site A. The finds included damaged copper-alloy hairpins from pits 1019, 1075 and 1115 (Sections fig. 3), a copper-alloy model spear from 1025 (Section fig. 3), an iron model knife and possible rudimentary model spear from 1238; a possibly reworked finger ring from 1021 (Section fig. 3) and a T-shaped brooch from 1003 (section fig. 3). The artefacts are similar to others found on temple sites and might indicate that an as yet unlocated temple lay in the vicinity of the 2000 excavations.

Table 1 summarises the dimensions, fill characteristics and sequences of deposition within the quarry features sampled.

Timber building

Some 130m to the south-east of Akeman Street seven flat limestone pads and postholes, up to 0.6m by 0.7m in size, marked the position of a square post-built timber building (fig. 4). Two further post-pads or postholes were recorded within an adjoining area to the west under investigation by Dr. Hands. The structure appears to

have been at least 7m by 8m in size and was associated with an external metalling 1245, only partially exposed but at least 3.75m by 4.25m in extent, immediately to the north-east. This compact, level, surface, 0.10-0.25m in thickness, was formed from small pebbles set in loam within a shallow cut 1443.

Although the post pads and postholes identify the presence of a timber building, one of only a few structures so far recorded from Wilcote (see *Wilcote II, 23*), no internal features or floor remains were present and the function of the building is uncertain. Surface 1245 appears to have formed an external hard-standing associated with, and abutting, the post-built structure. It had been kept clean with no debris present to suggest the nature of activity that had occurred upon it. An uncompacted loam accumulation 1185 which sealed metalling 1245 did not appear to be a later surface but rather an artefact-rich dump deposit associated with disuse of the structure.

Several large waste pits immediately north and south of the building contained heavily charcoal-flecked fills. Abundant domestic refuse was recovered from pits 1071 and 1073 (section fig. 3) whilst a set of long-jawed metal-working tongs was recovered from a pit 1009 beside surface 1245. To the south of the building a series of dispersed postholes 1344, 1350 and 1355, varying from 0.3-0.6m in diameter and 0.05-0.20m in depth, may have formed an associated fence-line.

Activity to the north of the timber building

Lying between the building and the area of quarrying further north was a series of shallow sub-circular pits together with dispersed and truncated postholes and areas of scorched natural clay. The pits had heavily charcoal-flecked loam fills which contained fragments of burnt limestone together with domestic refuse.

A small assemblage of metallurgical residues from Site A, together with the metal-working tongs recovered from pit 1009 next to the timber building, suggest iron and copper-alloy working in the general site vicinity. The slag and hearth lining fragments recovered were re-deposited pieces, however, and no deposits or features firmly

indicative of *in-situ* metal-working were encountered within Site A. The remains of two stone-built oven bases 1426 and 1427, set into the upper fills of an earlier quarry pit 1065, instead suggested that the adjacent, ephemeral, scorched clay patches marked the position of further domestic ovens or hearths rather than identifying areas of industrial activity.

A NE-SW aligned ditch 1167 and gully 1069 ran broadly parallel with the projected line of Akeman Street, and the timber building, and may represent elements of an associated enclosure.

Akeman Street and Associated Trackway

No foundation material, metalling or associated drainage ditches were encountered to identify the Period 2 road. This suggests that rather than having had substantial stone foundations Akeman Street might have consisted of only a thin metalling which with repeated wear developed into a hollow-way by Period 3.

The absence of flanking ditches alongside Akeman Street within Site A correlated with the presence of a previously unknown junction. A 3.5m-wide trackway 1014, well-built from sub-rounded cobbles and fragmentary limestone, with a drainage ditch 1005 on its north-eastern side ran on a NW-SE alignment from Akeman Street for 35m before turning eastward to avoid the area of quarry pits. It is not known where the track headed. Track 1014 survived later ploughing because it had been constructed within a shallow cut 1013 on sloping ground and was subsequently covered by a Period 3 dump of artefact-rich loam (fig. 5, Section 2). Three narrow ditches 1203, 1206 and 1240 ran alongside the eastward turn of track 1014.

Three stone-built culverts 1220, 1224 and 1229 with internal widths of 0.10m, were sealed by, but may have been integral with, the construction of track 1014 (fig. 5). These culverts had been constructed within narrow trenches averaging 0.35m in width and 0.30m in depth, without slab bases but with sides built up from two courses of unmortared limestone. These side walls supported a series of irregularly-shaped

limestone covering slabs which were in turn sealed by a 0.10m thick capping layer of clay (fig. 5, Section 3). The culverts ran on varying alignments downslope to converge beneath the track, with 1224 and 1229 then continuing to the north-east beyond the excavation area. It is unclear whether they were designed to direct surface water under track 1014 from the hillside above, or perhaps acted to channel water under pressure to an as yet unlocated feature or activity further downslope.

Dating Evidence, by Ed McSloy and Jane Timby

The bulk of the site pottery assemblage comes from features assigned to Period 2, a total of some 10,442 sherds weighing 116,422g. In order to try and refine the chronology the more sizeable assemblages were divided up on the basis of a presence, or absence, of particularly diagnostic forms or fabrics, which can be taken as chronological markers. It is clear from the larger assemblages that a considerable amount of redeposited material is present and that the *terminus post quem* for a group is provided by a very small number of sherds, in some cases just a single sherd. It is also clear that a number of the quarries span quite a time period with earlier material in the lower horizons suggesting a specific or ongoing dumping or levelling up of the ground. One problem is caused by the dominance of the Oxfordshire grey ware fabrics. Although the development and typologies of the later Oxfordshire industry has been well documented the earlier components are less well known.

The chronological markers selected for discriminating pottery groups included samian ware, Dorset black burnished ware, Midlands pink grog-tempered ware, as well as a variety of distinct forms or form attributes among the local reduced and oxidised wares. The bulk of the samian consisted of Central Gaulish products of Hadrianic/earlier Antonine and mid/late Antonine date. Also present were appreciable quantities of South Gaulish samian including possible pre-Flavian and early Flavian pieces. The earlier South Gaulish products are presumed for the most part to represent survivals in use, or, more likely, residual material. A small quantity of East Gaulish samian extends the date range for this class of material into the early years of the third century.

Using the chronological markers, outlined above, Period 2 was divided up into three ceramic phases (2i-iii), which are set out below and in tables 10-15. It must be appreciated that there could be some overlap between the ceramic phases and it is clear that some of the larger quarries probably spanned all three.

Ceramic phase 2i (early second century) (Tables 10-11)

Ditch 1091 produced 24 sherds (163g) including South and Central Gaulish samian. The coarsewares present are consistent with an earlier to mid second-century date and the samian provides a Hadrianic-Antonine *terminus post quem*.

Quarry 1115 was one of the most prolific in terms of pottery and other artefacts recovered. A corroded *As* of Vespasian, (coin no. 201), datable to 72-79 A.D. is likely to be residual in its context (fill 1124). A bronze hairpin no. 154 (fig. 6.145), of Cool's second-century dated Group 13, also from 1124, may be contemporaneous. The average sherd size for the pottery from this feature, 14g, is intermediate between the poorer and better preserved groups. Fills 1214, 1161, 1148, 1138, 1137 and 1124 appear largely to comprise wares of later first to mid second-century currency (fig. 9.4030-7). The latest samian from this group is a sherd of form Dr. 37 from 1124 dated A.D. 135-70 (fig. 12.698). Vessels of note include a OXF RE1 copy of a samian Dr. 33 cup (fig. 9.4036), a flanged dish with a barbotine decorated flange (fig. 9.4030), the substantial part of an everted rim, necked jar (fig. 9.4034), shallow dishes, beakers with barbotine dot decoration and lids. The presence of a sherds of Midlands grog-tempered ware (PNK GT) and an Oxfordshire mortarium sherd from uppermost fill 1117 suggest that the quarry was still accumulating material after the mid third century although there is a considerable amount of residual material present in the upper fills.

Similarly the lowerer fills of quarry 1065, suggests that this quarry was opened up around this time as the pottery implies an early second-century *terminus post quem*. (see Period 3 below).

Quarry 1015 could potentially be earlier than 1115 and 1065 as it produced four sherds of *Verulamium* white ware mortarium. The mortarium form is typical of the Flavian period but the vessel has clearly seen heavy use. The sherds from 1015 are better preserved compared to 1033 (see key groups) with an average sherd size of 21.5g compared to 13.5g. The lower fills of quarry 1165 contained a larger group of material, but in considerably more fragmented condition with an average sherd size of just 5.5g. This group is again heavily dominated by Oxfordshire grey wares, and grog-tempered grey wares, with a small amount of Dorset black-burnished ware, shelly ware and samian. The latter gives Hadrianic/Antonine *terminus post quem*. Amongst the grey ware is a flanged hemispherical bowl, Young form R48, noted as being quite rare (Young 1977, 222).

Three pits from Site A can be singled out as being earlier in the Period 2 sequence: 1071, 1233 and 1405. Pit 1071 contained exclusively local wares, all in reduced fabrics. Amongst the vessels present were two grog-tempered storage jars and two grey ware beakers, one with rouletted decoration. The sherds were quite well-preserved with an average sherd size of 20g. Pit 1233 with similarly fragmented material, including two sherds of Central Gaulish samian, has a Hadrianic *terminus post quem*. Pit 1405 with 69 sherds contained one of the two sherds of British glazed ware from the site alongside Central Gaulish samian of mid-late Antonine date.

Oven 1427 produced a moderately large assemblage characterised by fairly large, well preserved sherds. The group was again dominated by OXF RE1 which accounts for 79% by sherd count. Forms include an unusual decorated flask (fig. 10.4046), a flanged dish (Young 1977, R70), rusticated ware, a Dorset black-burnished ware flat-rim bowl and a deliberately holed base in fabric OXF RE1. Oven 1427 cut into quarry 1065, a feature which produced some later third-century sherds from its upper fills (see Period 3). The two feature groups are difficult to reconcile, given that the material from the oven appears to be securely second-century and in good condition. It should be noted that the lower fills of 1065 produced a relatively large and discrete second-century group (see below), including Hadrianic/Antonine samian. The apparent contradiction would seem to lend weight to the suggestion that much of the late

Roman pottery and other artefacts from the upper feature fills is associated with the latest receipt of material into essentially relict features.

It may be noted that a large number of other features are also likely to belong to this group but have either produced exclusively grey Oxfordshire wares, less than 10-15 sherds or no featured sherds. If the absence of any later sherds can be regarded as a basis for dating these smaller groups then it would appear that all the features from the southern end of Site A (i.e. south of quarry 1065) belong to the earliest phase of activity. To the north of quarry 1065 there is a range of features dating from the later first through to the later third century.

Key Groups

Quarry Pit 1033: Pottery (12sh./162g). Samian: CG, SG; *forms* Dr. 46, 18/31r or 31r, 37; *motif* Frontinus. Other: DOR BB1, OXFGR 2, OXFRE 1,2.

Quarry Pit 1015: Pottery (35sh./944g). Samian: na. Other: OXFGR 2,3, OXFOX 1, OXFRE 1,3, SAVGT, SVWOX, VERWHM.

Quarry Pit 1065, lower fills: Pottery (113sh./901g). Samian: CG, SG; *forms* Dr. 27; Other: DOR BB, OXFGR 1,2,3, OXFOX 1,3 OXFRE 1,3,4,6, OXFWH, OXFWS, PNKGT, SAVGT, SHELL.

Pit 1071: Pottery (25sh./615g). Samian: na. Other: OXFGR2, OXFRE1,3, SAVGT.

Ditch 1091: Pottery (24sh./163g). Samian: SG, CG; *forms* Dr. 29. Other: OXFRE 1,3,4,6v; OXFOX 1,2, OXFGR 1,2,3, SVW 17.

Quarry Pit 1115: Coins: Vespasian, A.D. 72-79 (coin no. 201). Small finds: hairpin Cool type 13 (no. 154). Pottery (1150sh./16.3kg): Samian: CG, SG, EG; *forms* Dr. 18, 29 or 37, 18/31, 15/17, 30, 27, 37; Other: OXFGR 1,2,3, OXFOX 1,2, OXFRE 1,2,3,4,6,10, BAT AM, OXFWH, OXFWH 1, PNKGT, SAVGT, SHELL, SVWOX, VERWHM.

Quarry Pit 1165: Pottery (190sh./1171g). Samian: CG; *forms* Dr. 18/31 or 31, 37. Other: OXFGR3, OXFOX1 OXFRE1,3,4.

Pit 1233: Pottery (95sh./698g). Samian: CG; *forms* Dr. 27, 35. Other: OXFGR1,2, OXFOX1,2, OXFRE1,3,4, SAVGT.

Pit 1405: Pottery (69sh./440g). Samian: CG, SG; *forms* Dr. 31, 38, 27, 37. Other: BATAM, GLAZE, OXFGR1,2, OXFOX1,2, OXFRE1,3,4,10, SAVGT.

Oven 1427: Pottery (174sh./4880g). Samian: na. Other: OXFGR1,3, OXFOX2, OXFRE1,3,4, SAVGT, SHELL.

Ceramic Phase 2ii (mid-late second century)

Quarry pit 1157 produced a sizeable assemblage which included two sherds of roughcast decorated Cologne colour-coated beaker probably of second-century date

along with a flat-rimmed Dorset black-burnished ware bowl and an Oxfordshire white ware bowl (Young 1977, form W54). Also of note is a OXF RE1 tankard and an OXF GR2 bifid rim jug. Two small sherds of abraded Oxfordshire colour-coated ware from this group are clearly intrusive.

Pit 1294 also produced a reasonably large assemblage, comprising mainly local wares but also including a Dorset black-burnished ware jar and lid. Also present is an OXF OX1 reeded rim dish. Also represented are eight sherds of samian, predominantly Central Gaulish varieties and including a Dr.37 bowl of Casurius, dating to *c.* A.D. 160-190.

Key Groups

Quarry Pit 1157: Pottery (258sh./2176g). Samian: CG; *forms* Dr. 33. Other: BATAM, COLCC, OXFGR2, OXFOX1,2, OXFRE1,3,4, OXFWH2, SAVGT, SHELL.

Pit 1294: Pottery (205sh./2456g). Samian: CG, SG; *forms* Dr. 18/31r, 18/31r or 31r, 31r, 37; *motif* Casurius. Other: DORBB, OXFGR1,2, OXFOX1,2, OXFRE1,3,4,6, SAVGT.

Ceramic phase 2iii (late second-mid third century) (Table 13)

The presence of Midlands grog-tempered ware and/or Dorset black-burnished ware grooved rim bowls combined with an absence of Oxfordshire late colour-coated ware has been used to define the features grouped here. All of the pottery groups assigned to Ceramic phase 2iii are small, ranging between just three and twenty-five sherds. Samian is rarely represented and dating presented as a *terminus post quem* is most often provided by one or more sherds of PNKGT. A single datable small find derives from a context assigned to Ceramic phase 2iii: pennanular copper alloy finger ring no. 157 (fig. 6.157), from context 1022, the sole fill of quarry pit 1021, appears to have been made from a cut-down armlet of a type datable to the late Roman period, *c.* A.D. 250-400.

Key Groups

Quarry Pit 1021: Small find: finger ring (no. 157). Pottery (20sh./127g). Samian: CG. Other: BATAM, DORBB, OXFGR2,3, OXFOX1, OXFRE1,3, PNKGT.

Pit 1059: Pottery (5sh./160g). Samian: na. Other: OXFOX1, OXFRE9, PNKGT.

Ditch 1240: Pottery (14sh./78g). Samian: CG. Other: DORBB, OXFOX1, OXFRE1, PNKGT, SAVGT.

Ditch 1203: Pottery (25sh./204g). Samian: na. Other: OXFGR2, OXFOX1, OXFRE1,3, PNKGT, SAVGT, SOWWS.

Quarry Pit 1215: Pottery (20sh./149g). Samian: na. Other: OXFGR2, OXFRE1, OXID, PNKGT, SAVGT.

Ditch 1217: Pottery (11sh./66g). Samian: na. Other: OXFGR2, OXFOX1, OXFRE1, PNKGT.

Posthole 1242: Pottery (11sh./46g). Samian: na. Other: OXFGR2, OXFOX2, OXFRE1, OXFWH.

Pit 1308: Pottery (19sh./1368g). Samian: na. Other: BATAM, DORBB, OXFGR1,2, OXFOX2, OXFRE1,4, PNKGT, SHELL.

Ditch 1316: Pottery (3sh./42g). Samian: na. Other: OXFOX2, OXFRE1, PNKGT.

Pit 1422: Pottery (7sh./84g). Samian: na. Other: OXFOX2, OXFRE1, 4, PNKGT.

General Period 2 dated features

Small quantities of pottery were recovered from padstone settings 1411, 1265 and 1278 associated with the timber building. This material, considered together with a group of 12 sherds from adjacent posthole 1242 (above, Ceramic phase 2iii), which included an Oxfordshire white ware ring-necked flagon (Young 1977, type W3), suggests a mid to later second or early third-century date for the construction of the building. Metalling 1245, associated with this structure was sealed by a loam horizon 1185. The later deposit produced a discrete group of pottery, including Central Gaulish samian, all of which likely dates to the late second century. Postholes to the south of post-built structure produced small quantities of first to second-century pottery. Posthole fill 1306 included Oxfordshire grey or whitewares and a scrap of South Gaulish samian; 1332 produced a single sherd of Hadrianic or early Antonine samian.

Track 1014 produced a number of datable artefacts in addition to pottery mainly of the second to third centuries. Coin (coin no. 203), a *sestertius* of Antoninus Pius, datable to 140-4 A.D. and 'T-shaped' brooch no. 73 (fig. 6.73), datable to the late first to mid second century A.D., are complimentary to the proposed dating. Coiled finger ring no. 156 (fig. 6.156), which is of likely later third to fourth-century date is however at variance with the date suggested for the phase. The small size of this object makes it entirely possible that this item represents a later intrusion.

Pit 1089 produced only a single sherd of local greyware (OXF RE3). A *denarius* of Severus Alexander (coin no. 205), datable to 222-35 A.D. may indicate a date for this pit in ceramic phase 2iii.

Evidence for Period 2 construction or use of trackway 1014 is provided by small but discrete groups of later second to mid third-century pottery. Samian from this feature and from parallel ditch 1005 is of (probably late) Antonine date. It is also considered to be significant that ditches respecting this feature both to the east, 1005, and southwest, 1206, 1203, are free from later Roman material. Drains seemingly associated with the trackway provide some further evidence for an earlier Roman date for this feature. Clay capping 1226-8 over drain 1224 produced small quantities of earlier type (probably second century) local greywares. It should be noted that drain 1229 was cut by pit 1025 of seemingly early fourth-century date, and by pit 1017 which produced a mix of second century and third/fourth-century dated material.

FEATURE	FILL	DESCRIPTION	FILL TYPE	DATE	LENGTH (m)	WIDTH (m)	DEPTH (m)
1003	1004	Dark grey-brown silty-clay	Primary	L C3+	3.28	1.35	0.40
1015/1047	1016/1048	Dark grey-brown silty-clay with pebbles	Primary	-	4.10	1.5-2.20	0.20
1017	1094/1095/1078	Orange-brown sandy-silt	Primary	MC3+	4.30	1.00-1.40	0.16
1019	1077	Orange-yellow sandy-silt	Primary	C2	3.40	1.40	0.30
1021	1020	Dark grey-brown silt with pebbles	Secondary	MC3+			
1023	1022	Grey-brown sandy-clay with pebbles	Primary	C4	2.20	0.40-1.40	0.16
1025	1024	Grey-brown silty-clay with pebbles	Uncertain	C4	1.15	0.85	-
1033	1173	Dark brown clay	Primary	E C2	3.10	2.46	0.17
1043	1026	Dark brown silty-clay	Secondary	E C4			
1045/1186	1034	Brown silty-clay	Primary	C2+	0.80	0.80	0.15
1049/1209	1044	Brown silty-clay	Not excavated	-	1.50+	0.40+	-
1057/1159	1046/1187	Mid brown silty-clay with stone and pebbles	Primary	Roman	5.50	0.51	0.22
1065	1050/1210	Dark grey-brown silty-clay	Not excavated	-	4.40	1.40-2.40	-
	1058	Dark brown to black silty-clay	Primary	-	4.40	1.60	0.20
	1177	Orange-brown clay	Primary	-	6.40	3.30+	0.70+
	1171/1172/1176	Dark grey-brown silt with limestone	Secondary	C2+			
	1164/1162	Grey-brown silty-clay with pebbles	Final	L C2-3			
1075	1066	Dark grey-brown to black silt-loam with stone	Primary	M-L C3			
1081	1076	Mid-brown silty-clay with pebbles	Primary	-	3.10	1.50	0.19
	1082	Light grey-brown sandy-clay	Primary	C2+	1.35	0.70	0.06

1083/1215	1084/1216	Dark grey-brown silt with pebbles	Primary	-	7.50	1.00	0.14
1085	1086	Grey-brown sandy-clay with pebbles	Primary	M C3+	1.20+	0.60+	0.20
1096	1097	Dark grey-brown silty-clay with pebbles	Not excavated	-			
1115	1137/1138	Mid brown clay	Primary	C2	7.70	3.90	1.60
	1148	Stone layer	Secondary	-			
	1179/1161	Yellow-brown silty-clay		-			
	1124	Mid grey silty-clay		E C2+			
	1143	Yellow-orange clay with pebbles		-			
	1116	Charcoal-rich black clay-loam		L C1-2			
	1142	Pebble/stone layer.	Partial capping-	-			
	1117	Mid grey silty-clay soil	Final infill	M C3+			
1149/1151/1153	1150/1152/1154	Grey-brown clay-silt	Primary	C1-3	4.20	0.80-2.80	0.12
1157/1155/1146	1147/1156/1158	Dark brown clay-silt	Primary	C2	7.00	0.70-1.50	0.37
1165	1178	Light blue-orange clay	Primary	C2+	3.45	2.50	0.70
	1175	Mid brown sandy clay with stone	Secondary	Roman			
	1174	Light yellow-grey clay with stone		C2+			
	1166	Dark grey-brown silty-clay with stone	Final infill	C2			
1190	1191	Mid-brown silty-clay with pebbles	Primary	-	1.40	1.20	0.17
1192	1193	Mid grey-brown silty-clay	Primary	M C3-4	5.10+	2.10+	0.30

Table 1. Summary of archaeological deposits: Site A quarry pits, Periods 2-3.

PERIOD 3 (late Third-Fourth Century A.D.)

Limited late Roman activity was identified within Site A. This consisted of deposits associated with disuse of trackway 1014, the infilling of a hollow-way 1007 on the line of Akeman Street, small-scale quarrying and the deposition of material into the upper levels of several Period 2 quarry pits and ditches.

Akeman Street

A plough-damaged deposit 1008, formed from sub-rounded cobbles, limestone fragments, loam and fragmentary roof tile was noted at the northern end of Site A within a shallow, irregular, linear depression 1007 some 4.7m in width and 0.12m in depth (figs. 2, 5). This stone spread correlated with the projected line of Akeman Street as defined by the 1999 geophysical survey (fig. 1). No flanking ditches were present here, however, nor had any road foundations or roadside ditches been encountered within the area of Hands 1990-6 excavations to the east (*Wilcote II*, 37-9).

The absence of roadside ditches, substantial road foundations or any surviving sequence of road resurfacing at Site A is noteworthy. Previous cuttings through Akeman Street in the Wychwood locality have revealed considerable variation in the quality of its construction, with some sections of the road having been built using only a sandy-clay foundation overlain by a top-dressing of small pebbles or a single course of thin limestone slabs (Copeland 2002, 79-81). It is conceivable that the surface of Akeman Street at Wilcote was also thinly metalled and susceptible to erosion during use, and that a worn and slightly sunken route might eventually have developed. Such an eroded, muddy, route is likely to have required the periodic dumping of stone within it for consolidation, perhaps accounting for the presence of residual first-century finds within 1008. The shallow, slightly irregular, linear depression 1007, up to 0.12m deep with its fill of rough stone, tile and soil, might thus represent the highly truncated remains of a hollow-way, one that was present during Period 2 but which accumulated material during Period 3 (fig. 5, Section 1). Such neglect of a major

arterial route would be surprising, and raises questions as to the condition of Akeman Street immediately beyond the settlement during the later Roman period.

The Trackway

A Period 2 origin for trackway 1014 has been suggested both by the recovery of second to third-century pottery from its construction material and, indirectly, by the absence of fourth-century pottery from associated drainage ditch 1005 and from ditches 1203, 1206 and 1240 which flanked this feature as it turned south-eastward. A small quantity of late Roman sherds was recovered, however, from within the surface of 1014 but these may be intrusive, perhaps finds trampled into the upper levels of the track. Disuse of the trackway within the fourth-century is reflected in a series of patchy loam deposits 1127, 1134 and 1144, averaging 0.15m in thickness, within unrepaired, worn areas of track and by loam dump 1111, up to 0.20m thick, sealing 1014 (fig. 5, Section 2).

Other Late Roman Activity

Two quarry scoops 1017 and 1025 were cut into a clay capping-deposit 1231 of the Period 2 culvert 1229 and indicated some continued, though small-scale, clay-extraction on the site into Period 3. A possible oven base 1388 also yielded late Roman pottery and suggests that limited activity within the area of fire-scorched ground north of the timber building may have continued into the fourth century.

Period 2 quarry pits 1017, 1019, 1065, 1085, 1115, pit 1063, posthole 1061 and ditch 1167 all contained pottery of late Roman date within their latest fills, suggesting that infilling and levelling activity continued into Period 3.

Dating Evidence, by Ed McSloy and Jane Timby

As with Ceramic Phase 2iii, context groups attributed to Period 3 were in the main dominated by Oxfordshire grey ware pottery with smaller quantities of more diagnostic types. Later third to fourth-century dating of contexts was indicated by the

presence of certain forms of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware, including mortaria and Dorset black-burnished ware forms including flanged conical bowls. The absence of any stamp decorated Oxfordshire colour-coated ware, parchment ware, and stratified late Roman shelly ware strongly suggests activity has ceased in this area by the early fourth century.

Features producing late Roman pottery are discussed below. A proportion of the late Roman pottery derives from upper (or single) fills of quarries, ditches and other features, the 'construction' of which was almost certainly earlier in the Roman period.

Quarry 1003 (fig. 3, section) produced 396 sherds of which 64% were OXF RE1 and 26% OXF GR2. The latest samian from this feature dates to the late second-early third century, however the presence of a single sherd from an Oxfordshire colour-coated mortarium Young 1977, type 97, if taken at face value and not considered an intrusion, pushes the group into the second half of the third century. This vessel features rouletted decoration on the exterior face (fig. 11.4074). The pottery is well fragmented suggesting much it could be residual.

Quarry 1019 produced 29 sherds (216g) from its upper fill (1020), once again as fairly small sherds. A mid third to fourth-century date is suggested by a single sherd of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware. Quarry 1017 produced just 21 sherds, the bulk of which appears to be second century in date, but amongst which was an Oxfordshire colour-coated flanged bowl (Young 1977, type C51) and a white ware mortarium sherd. Additionally this context yielded a 'T-shaped' brooch no. 71 (fig. 6.71), datable to the late first or first half of the second century.

Quarry 1065 produced one of the larger assemblages, much of which derived from the uppermost fill. The average sherd size of 8.5g shows this to be quite fragmented. The 34 sherds of Central Gaulish and one sherd of East Gaulish samian give a *terminus post quem* in the later second-early third-century. Lower fill 1177 produced material commensurate with an early second-century date (see period 2i above) with a carinated sherd of British glazed ware (fig. 10.4072), the only mica-slipped sherd in the assemblage, as well as a ring-necked oxidised flagon and various grey wares. The