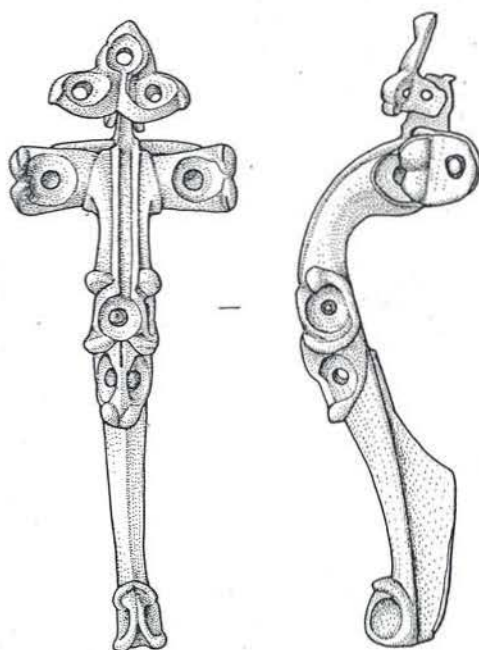


Archaeological evaluation at  
119 Tiddington Road,  
Stratford-upon-Avon,  
Warwickshire



Report 0539

October 2005

# Archaeological evaluation at 119 Tiddington Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire

## Contents

	Summary
1	Introduction
2	Location
3	Archaeological and historical background
4	Methods
5	Excavation of trenches
6	Finds
7	Discussion
	Acknowledgements
	Bibliography

## List of Figures

Cover: Romano-British brooch from Tiddington

Fig 1: Tiddington Roman settlement and location of site

Fig 2: 119 Tiddington Road showing evaluation trenches and previous excavations  
on adjacent properties

Fig 3: Detailed plan of Trench 1 and sections A-C

Fig 4: Trench 1 from the south during excavation

Fig 5: Inhumation **111** from the west

Fig 6: Grave pit **105** from the east

Fig 7: Trench 2 from the north

Fig 8: Trench 2 from the east

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Warwickshire Museum Field Services  
The Butts  
Warwick  
CV34 4SS

## **Summary**

Archaeological evaluation at 119 Tiddington Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, revealed a number of Romano-British pits and two inhumation burials on the south side of the existing house whilst the trench on the north side was archaeologically sterile. A small assemblage of pottery dated from the mid/late 1st to the 4th century and included large parts of a large 4th-century storage jar from one pit. Evidence from adjacent sites suggests that the area was densely settled in the later 1st and 2nd centuries, and that the present site lies on the north side of an early Anglo-Saxon enclosure and may therefore contain evidence for the end of the Roman settlement.

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 A planning application has been submitted to Stratford-upon-Avon District Council (05/01876/FUL) for the construction of a replacement house at 119 Tiddington Road, Stratford-upon-Avon. The re-development site lies within a Romano-British settlement, parts of which are protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Warwickshire 184) under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979. It has therefore been recommended that an archaeological field evaluation be carried out before any decision on the planning application be reached in order to supply the planning authority with further information.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of the excavation of two evaluation trenches was commissioned from the Warwickshire Museum Field Archaeology Projects Group and carried out in September 2005. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon under the site code TG05.

## **2. Location**

2.1 The re-development site is located at national grid reference SP 2173 5572 in the parish of Stratford-upon-Avon. It lies on the crest of the north facing slope on the south side of the Avon floodplain, on the edge of the Second River Gravel Terrace (British Geological Survey 1974). The site is currently a private residence with mature gardens to the front and rear.

## **3. Archaeological and historical background**

3.1 The earliest evidence for human activity in the general area is a Palaeolithic hand axe found in about 1930 during the construction of 80 Tiddington Road (Sites and Monuments Record Ref WA 893). This is almost certainly a redeposited find in the gravel terrace and does not indicate a site of this period.

3.2 The most important remains in the vicinity are those of a Romano-British settlement (SMR WA 4469), covering an estimated 22ha on the south bank of the River Avon (Fig 1). It appears to have grown up where a road along the south side of the river, following the line of the modern Tiddington Road, met another running south-east to north-west down to a ford. The ford was probably at the place where Roman coins and brooches were dredged out of the river in 1982.

3.3 It seems likely that the village came into existence at the very end of the Iron Age, about AD 30-50, just before the arrival of the Roman army, but it is possible that it began a little later around a Roman fort set to dominate the river crossing.

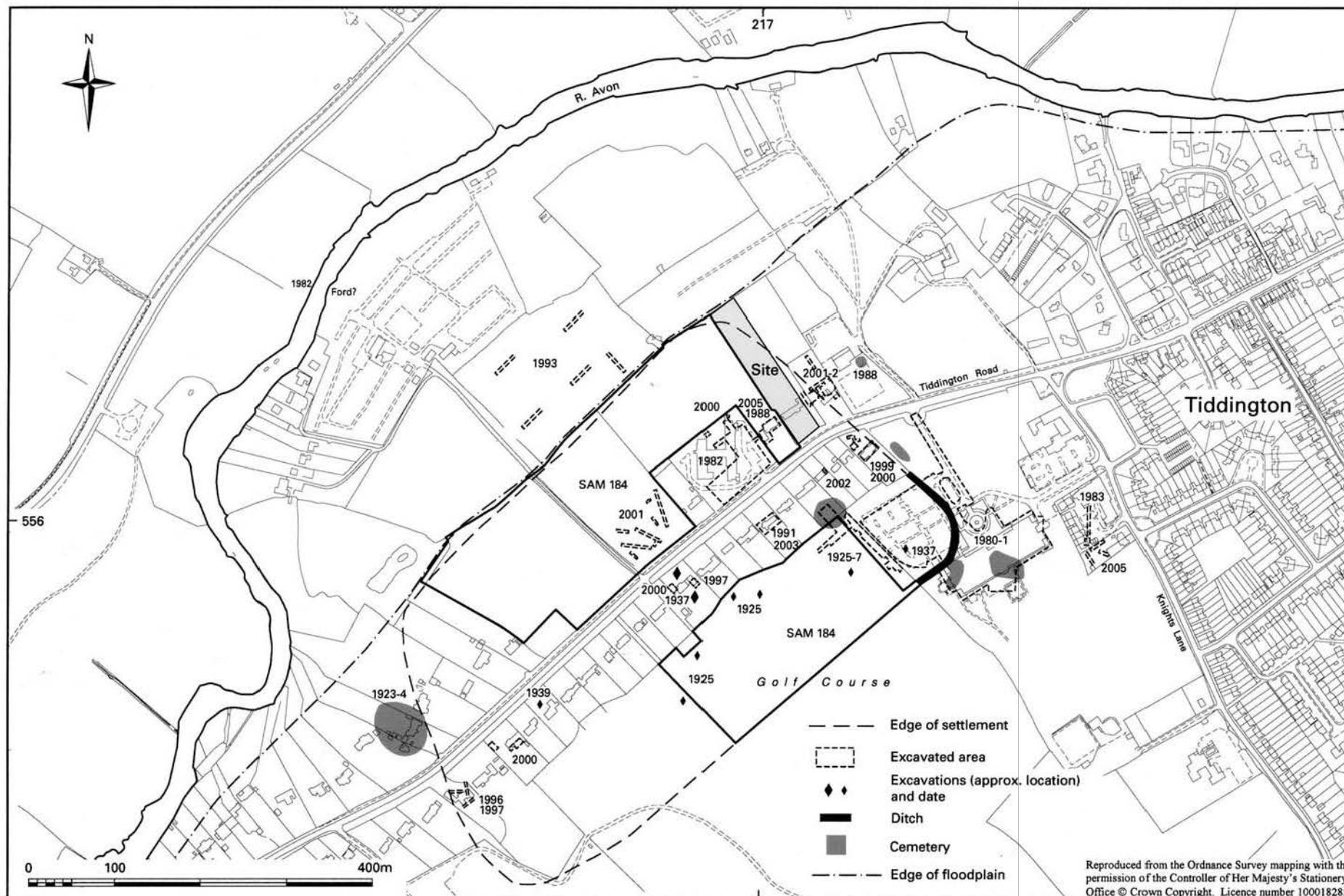


Fig 1: Tiddington Roman settlement and location of site

Whatever its origin it grew rapidly through the late 1st and 2nd centuries, serving as a market for the farms in the vicinity, clustered on the easily worked soils of the gravel terraces alongside the river. The village was itself linked by Roman roads to the main Roman towns in the area at Alcester and Chesterton-on-Fosse. The main road from the Fosse to Alcester by-passed Tiddington using another ford downstream by Clopton Bridge; and it seems to have been the rise in importance of this, the 'Straet-ford', which led to the abandonment of the Tiddington site at the end of the Roman period and the development of modern Stratford in its current position.

3.4 The first modern indications of the existence of the settlement came in the 18th and 19th centuries when large numbers of Roman coins were collected from the fields at Tiddington. Systematic investigation began in the 1920s when housing development spreading along the Tiddington Road uncovered Roman remains. In 1923 a cemetery of 220 burials was encountered under 77 Tiddington Road (SMR WA 1014). These excavations also produced some Iron Age pottery (SMR WA 1064) [but the suggestion that there were also Anglo Saxon finds (SMR WA 6268) is unsubstantiated]. In 1925-7 the construction of the golf course revealed more Romano-British burials and the remains of buildings. Further excavation work was carried out in 1937-8 at 102 Tiddington Road and in 1939 at 84 (SMR WA 1072).

3.5 In 1980-1 a large scale excavation was carried out in advance of the construction of new offices for the NFU Mutual and Avon Insurance on a 4ha site on the east side of the settlement. This revealed dense Roman occupation from the 1st century AD to the 4th century when a large defensive ditch was dug round the settlement. The houses of the settlement were mostly of timber with thatched roofs, although one large stone house was also found. The plots also contained outbuildings, corn drying ovens, wells and rubbish pits, and there were streets paved with gravel. Outside the settlement, areas of cemetery, rubbish pits and field system were located. In 1983 a small excavation in advance of the construction of Tiddington Court on Knights Lane, adjacent to the NFUMAI site, traced further rubbish pits and a corndrying oven/malting kiln alongside a trackway running eastwards from the settlement.

3.6 In 1982 another large area, within the settlement to the north of the Tiddington Road, was excavated in advance of the building of the Reading Court sheltered housing. Here also dense Roman occupation dating from the 1st century AD to the mid-3rd century was found. The earliest buildings were timber roundhouses surrounded by animal enclosures. In the 2nd century paved roads were laid out accompanied by more timber buildings, now rectangular, of a more Romanised form. Two pottery kilns, one late 1st-century, the other early 2nd-century were also found. After the early 3rd century no further buildings were constructed, but the roads continued in use and some late (4th-century) burials were deposited alongside them.

3.7 As a result of the 1980-1983 excavations the importance of the site, both to the history of Stratford and Warwickshire, and as a well-preserved example of a little understood type of Romano-British settlement, was recognised and the undeveloped parts of the settlement were given legal protection as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Warwickshire No. 184). Since 1990 a number of observations and small excavations have been carried out on the settlement, mainly in advance of building work, and these have tended largely to confirm the conclusions of the earlier work.

3.8 In 1988 in advance of the building of 117 Tiddington Road, immediately to the west of the present site, more extensively recut late 1st- and 2nd-century enclosures were identified along with two more late (presumably 4th-century) burials (Warwickshire Museum 1988). The excavation also revealed two large ditches set at right angles containing early Anglo-Saxon pottery (late 5th-/6th-century). Further work to the north of this site conducted in 2005 revealed a few sporadic features (Palmer forthcoming). To the east of the present site at 121 Tiddington Road, an

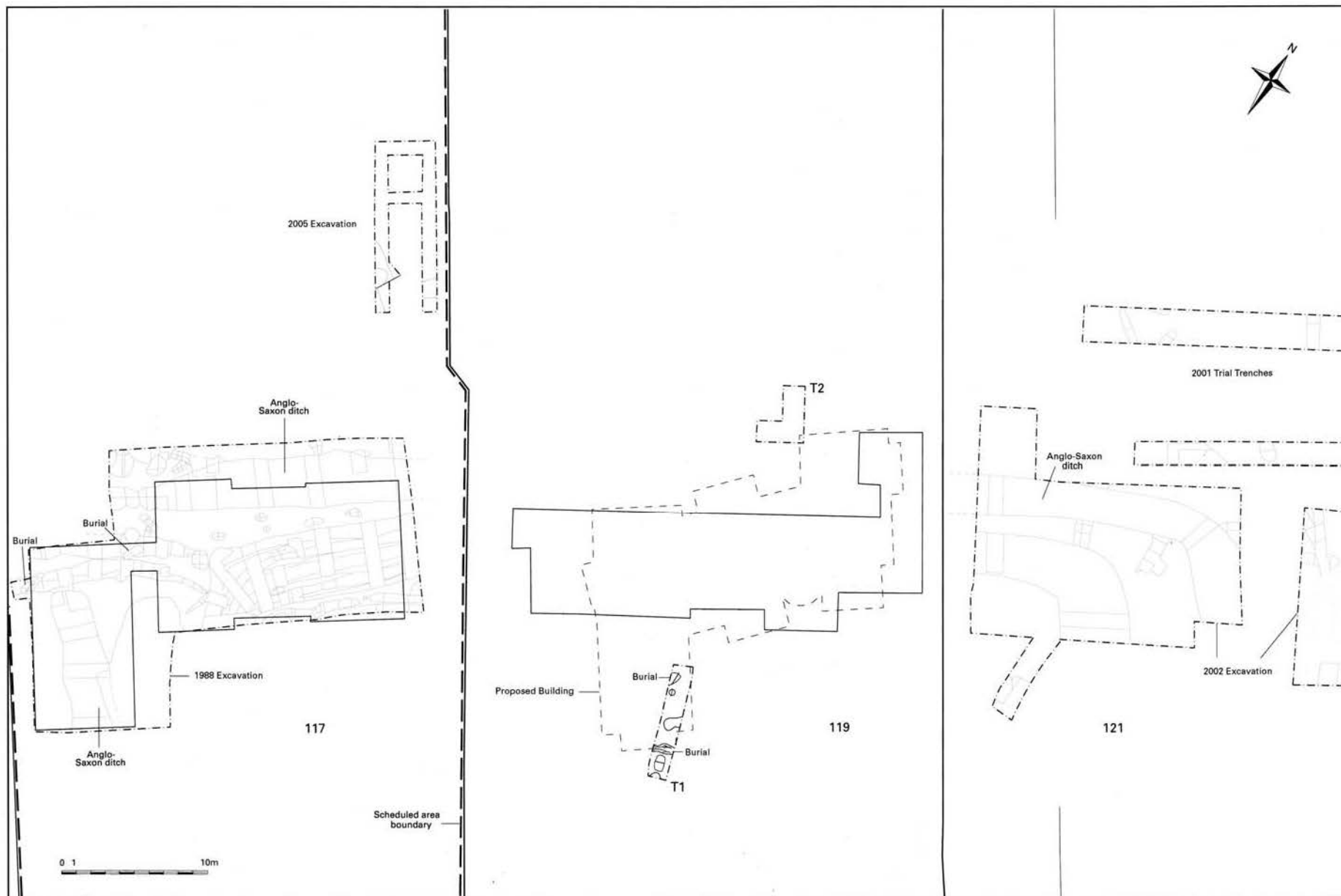


Fig 2: 119 Tiddington Road showing evaluation trenches and previous excavations on adjacent properties

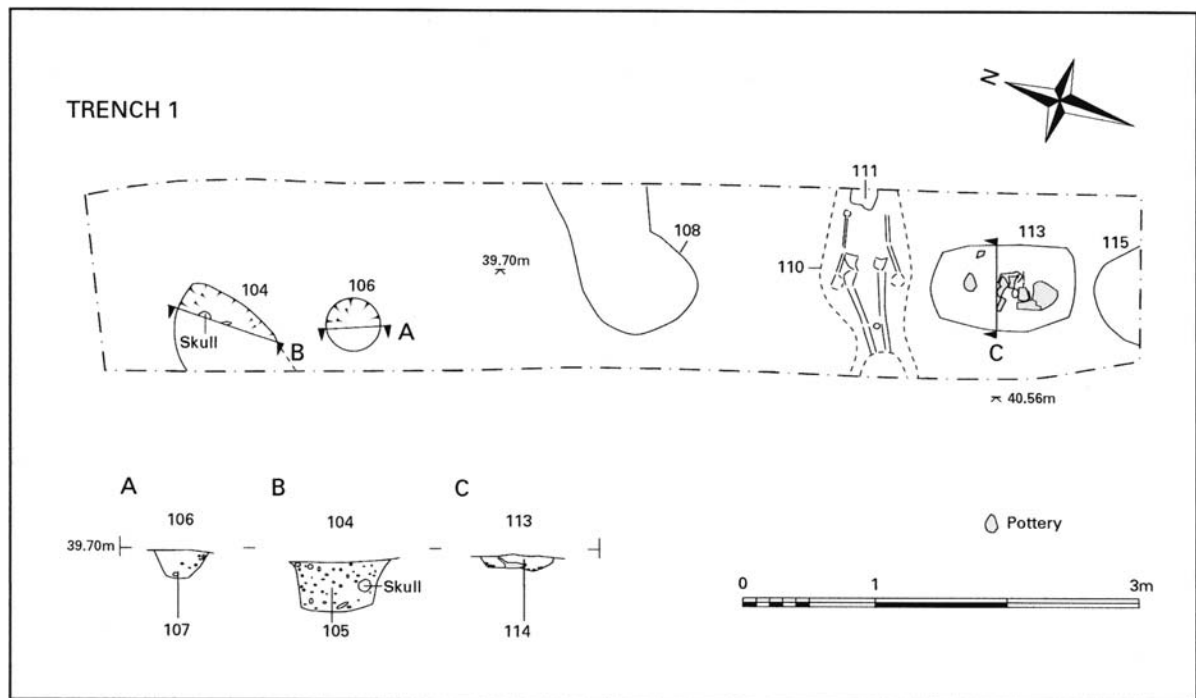


Fig 3: Detailed plan of Trench 1 and sections A-C

evaluation in 2001 followed by the excavation of two new house plots in 2002 revealed further 1st- and 2nd-century enclosure gullies and other features and the corner of a large ditch containing Anglo-Saxon pottery, probably the continuation of one found in 1988 (Oxford Archaeology 2003).

## 4. Methods

4.1 The two evaluation trenches were machine cut using a 0.8 ton micro-excavator using a 0.5m wide ditching bucket. Topsoil and plough soils were removed in this manner and the resultant surfaces cleaned by hand. Archaeological features were identified and a selection chosen for hand excavation.

4.2 The archaeological content of the topsoil and ploughsoils was assessed by examining the spoil heaps on the side of the trenches.

## 5. Excavation of trenches

### Trench 1

5.1 Trench 1 (Fig 3) was 8m long by 1.5m wide and aligned north-east to south-west on the south side of the existing building (Figs 3-4). Geological natural gravel was reached at c.0.60m below current ground level at 39.70m above ordnance datum (aod). It was cut by a number of archaeological features. At the northern end of the trench grave pit **104** was aligned north-east to south-west, its south-western extent lying outside the area of the trench (Fig 6). It measured at least 0.70m wide by 0.40m deep with steep sloping sides and a flat base (Fig 3, Section B). A small part of its fill of dark yellowish-brown sandy loam (**105**) was removed by section revealing an *in situ* human skull and part of an upper arm bone (**117**) in the base of the pit.



Fig 4: Trench 1 from the south during excavation



Fig 5: Inhumation **111** from the west



Fig 6: Grave pit **105** from the east



Fig 7: Trench 2 from the north



Fig 8: Trench 2 from the east

Two Romano-British sherds came from **105**. Further excavation was deemed unnecessary and the burial was left intact. A second inhumation was identified at the southern end of the trench. Grave cut **110** was aligned ENE to WSW; it was a maximum of 0.70m wide but both ends lay outside the trench (Fig 5). The burial (**111**) was laid supine with its head to the east and the grave was back-filled with brown sandy loam (**112**).

5.2 Two further pits were excavated. Pit **106** at the northern end of the trench was sub-circular 0.45m in diameter with steep sloping sides and a flat base (Fig 3, Section A). It was filled with dark yellowish-brown sandy loam with occasional small pebbles (**107**). Sub-rectangular pit **113** at the southern end of the trench was 1.10m long by 0.74m wide with steep sloping sides and an irregular base (Fig 3, Section C). It contained a large portion of a late Roman pottery storage jar along with a few heat-cracked pebbles in a matrix of dark brown sandy loam (**114**). A further two pits remained unexcavated. Pit **108** in the centre of the trench was at least 0.90m wide and over 1.4m long. A fill of dark brown sandy loam (**109**) was visible at surface level and produced a single sherd of Romano-British pottery. Pit **115** at the southern end of the trench was at least 0.72m wide and contained dark brown sandy loam (**116**) at surface level.

5.3 All the pits were sealed by a layer of brown/dark brown sandy loam ploughsoil (**103**) averaging 0.30m deep, which in turn was sealed by a later ploughsoil (**102**) on average 0.32m deep composed of dark greyish-brown sandy loam. At the northern end of the trench a layer of tarmac had been laid over a rubble foundation layer in total 0.23m thick whilst the remainder of the trench was sealed by garden soil (**118**) topped with turf.

## Trench 2

5.4 Trench 2 was reverse L-shaped and excavated in the corner of the lawn immediately to the rear of the present house. It measured 3.25m east-west by 4m north-south and 1.5m wide. Geological natural gravel was achieved at between 0.40m and 0.56m from the present surface level at 39.90m aod. A 0.30m deep layer of brown sandy clay loam (**201**) spread across the entire trench and was sealed by a layer of dark yellowish-brown sandy loam garden soil topped with turf (**200**). No archaeological finds or deposits were recorded in this trench.

## 6. Finds

6.1 A total of 62 Romano-British pottery sherds were recovered from five contexts in Trench 1. A total of 13 sherds came from the two ploughsoil layers **102** (10 sherds) and **103** (three sherds). A single Romano-British sherd came from pit fill **109** and two sherds were found in grave fill **105** with the remaining 46 sherds deriving from pit fill **114**. The majority of these (34 sherds) came from a single vessel, probably a 4th-century storage jar in a shell-gritted ware (Warwickshire Fab C11) most likely from Harrold, Bedfordshire. Its presence in a pit adjacent to the burials could imply that it was a complete vessel used in funerary rites although this is far from certain. The only other find was a fragment of animal bone from **114**.

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Context type</i>	<i>Sherd nos</i>	<i>Dating/description of pottery</i>
1	<b>102</b>	Plough soil	10	Various, but mostly 1st- and 2nd-century
1	<b>103</b>	Plough soil	3	1st- and 2nd-century
1	<b>105</b>	Grave fill	2	2nd/4th-century
1	<b>109</b>	Pit fill	1	2nd/4th-century
1	<b>114</b>	Pit fill	34	4th-century shell-gritted ware (Fab C11) storage jar
			1	1st-century (Belgic) rim (Fab E00)
			11	Various, but mostly 2nd- to 4th-century

## 7. Discussion

7.1 The evidence from Trench 1 shows that significant Romano-British deposits survive to the south of the present building. In this location the deposits are sealed beneath at least 0.60m of plough and garden soils.

7.2 The evidence from excavations on the neighbouring properties, Nos 117 and 121, suggests that this part of the settlement was densely settled in the 1st and 2nd centuries, with round houses and enclosures surrounded by gullies that were regularly recut. A relative abandonment in later centuries may explain a scatter of human burials, two of which were recorded at No 117, with two more on the present site. These sporadic burials are distinct from the more formal cemeteries further east which date from the 2nd century, and some of the burials, found further west, can be dated to the 4th century; it is perhaps significant that a pit containing large parts of a 4th-century storage jar lay adjacent to one of the present burials.

7.3 The absence of deposits in Trench 2 probably reflects a reduction in settlement activity as one moves further away from the main east-west road through the settlement.

7.4 Although the evaluation produced no Anglo-Saxon material the evidence from the adjacent excavations suggests that the site may lie in the centre of the northern edge of an early Anglo-Saxon enclosure, measuring perhaps 75m across. This is the only known area of Anglo-Saxon activity within the area of the Roman settlement and it may well contain evidence for the final days of the settlement at the end of the Roman period, a time of upheaval and transition that is little understood either locally or nationally.

## Acknowledgements

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