



**Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation on land at  
Akeman Spinney  
Heyford Road, Kirtlington  
Oxfordshire  
September 2017**

Report No.17/124

Author: Alex Shipley

Illustrator: Joanne Clawley



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**OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		<b>Oasis No. molanort1-298147</b>	
Project title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Akeman Spinney, Heyford Road, Kirtlington, Oxfordshire.		
Short description	<i>MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) carried out a trial trench evaluation on land at Akeman Spinney, Heyford Road, Kirtlington, Oxfordshire. Two trenches were excavated. Archaeological features were present and included Iron Age and early medieval postholes and medieval ditches.</i>		
Project type	Trial trench evaluation		
Previous work	-		
Current land use	Garden		
Future work	Unknown		
Monument type and period	Medieval ditches and Iron Age and early medieval postholes.		
Significant finds	None		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>			
County	Oxfordshire		
Site address	Akeman Spinney, Heyford Road, Kirtlington		
Easting and northing	NGR SP 50040 20387		
Area (sq m/ha)	c 0.60ha		
Height aOD	c 102m aOD		
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>			
Organisation	MOLA Northampton		
Project brief originator	Richard Oram, Oxfordshire County Council		
Project Design originator	MOLA		
Director/Supervisor	Alex Shipley, MOLA		
Project Managers	Mo Muldowney, MOLA		
Sponsor or funding body	Derek Sambrook (owner)		
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>			
Start date	20 September 2017		
End date	21 September 2017		
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Contents</b>	
Physical	OXCMS:2017.138	Medieval pottery, shell, animal bone	
Paper		Site records	
Digital		Survey data, report, photographs	
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (MOLA report)		
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Akeman Spinney, Heyford Road, Kirtlington, Oxfordshire.		
Serial title & volume	MOLA Northampton report 17/124		
Author(s)	Alex Shipley		
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Date	2017		

## Contents

1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
2	<b>LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY</b>
3	<b>AIMS AND OBJECTIVES</b>
4	<b>HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND</b>
5	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>
6	<b>THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE</b>
	6.1 <b>General stratigraphy</b>
	6.2 <b>The archaeological evidence</b>
7	<b>FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS</b>
	7.1 <b>All finds</b> by Jules Agnew
	7.2 <b>Animal bone</b> by Sander Aerts and Alex Shipley
	7.3 <b>Pottery</b> by Paul Blinkhorn
8	<b>DISCUSSION</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>
	<b>APPENDIX: CONTEXT INVENTORY</b>

### Figures

Cover: Land at Akeman Spinney, Kirtlington

Fig 1: Site location and excavated trenches

Fig 2: Trench 1, section and plans

Fig 3: Trench 1: Oblique photo of two parallel ditches [117] and [119] looking south-east

Fig 4: Trench 1, photo of pit [108] looking south-east

Fig 5: Trench 1: Looking north-east

Fig 5: Trench 2: looking north-west

### Tables

Table 1: Finds quantification

Table 2: Fragment count and weight of animal bone

Table 3: Pottery occurrence by number and weight

# Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation on land at Akeman Spinney, Heyford Road, Kirtlington, Oxfordshire September 2017

## *Abstract*

*MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) carried out a trial trench evaluation on land at Akeman Spinney, Heyford Road, Kirtlington, Oxfordshire. Two trenches were excavated. Archaeological features were present and included Iron Age and early medieval postholes and medieval ditches.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) was commissioned by Mr Derek Sambrook to carry out a programme of archaeological trial trenching at Akeman Spinney, Heywood Road, Kirtlington (NGR SP 50040 20387) ahead of a proposed development site.

Oxfordshire County Council required that a programme of archaeological evaluation should be undertaken in accordance with a brief (Oram 2017) and with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG 2012) Work was undertaken in September 2017 and conformed to an approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (MOLA 2017).

## **2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

Kirtlington is a small village in central Oxfordshire, situated 10.5km west of Bicester (SP 5005 2038, Fig 1). The development site is located on the north edge of the settlement, to the west of Heyford Road and covers an area of just under c0.60ha. The site is currently in residential use, with one dwelling occupying the east of the site, whilst the remainder is a garden bordered by a wooded area to the north, agricultural pasture to the west and further residential properties to the south.

The site lies at approximately 102m aOD and there are a variety of underlying geology types, with Cornbrash indicated to the north west of the site and two possibilities of either the Kellaways formation or Oxford Clay to the south east (BGS 2017). Upon excavation the underlying geology in both trenches (see Fig 1) was revealed to be of the Oxford Clay formation.

## **3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The main aim of the investigation was to obtain information concerning the presence, character, date and level of preservation of surviving archaeological remains across the site.

The specific objectives of the project were to:

- Investigate the location, extent, nature, and date of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present at the proposed development site;

- Investigate the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present at the proposed development site;
- To produce a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Oxfordshire HER.

### **Research agendas**

The project has low potential to address the research aims outlined in the *Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment* (Hey and Hind 2014). The small number of archaeological features identified reduces the utility of the site for addressing research questions for the Iron Age (Lambrick 2014) or medieval (Dodd and Crawford 2014) periods. However, the site data adds the general body of knowledge for the region and further research aims may be addressed by any further works on the site.

## **4 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

The village of Kirtlington is of late Saxon origin. However there is evidence of activity in the vicinity of the current village dating back to the Iron Age. This section will look at the key archaeological and historical discoveries in the area in order to provide an overview of archaeological potential of the site in question.

### ***Iron Age***

Excavation of a water pipe trench c80m to the north of the site, parallel to Akeman Street, revealed evidence of an Iron Age settlement as well as a kiln and several inhumations, dated to the 5th century BC (Benson and Harding 1966). All archaeological remains were reported to be in poor condition.

Recent reinforcement of a water main by Thames Water, approximately 5.6km north-west of the site, enabled Cotswold Archaeology to investigate the presumed Iron Age tribal boundary ditch of 'Aves Ditch' when the pipeline corridor crossed the road B4030 (Hart *et al* 2017). Beneath the current road surface the remains of a 5m wide north to south oriented ditch was recorded, but no finds were recovered. For a short distance after this intervention the pipeline ran parallel to this feature and it was noted the earthworks of the aforementioned ditch and bank had survived *in situ* (Cullen and Hancocks 2007).

### ***Roman***

The Port Way Roman road runs both parallel to the River Cherwell and directly through the village of Kirtlington. The present day A4095 which emerges to the north of the village, partly follows the line of the Roman road just 90m northeast of the site.

The course of the Roman road of Akeman Street runs east to west from St Albans (*Verulamium*) to Cirencester (*Corinium Dobunorum*) and one of the villages it passes through is Kirtlington (Copeland 2009). It was originally a link between the major Roman routes of Watling Street, oriented north-west to south-east, connecting Uttoxeter to Canterbury, and the Fosse Way, a route running north-west to south-east between Lincoln and Exeter. The current development site is located approximately 90m southwest of the junction of Akeman Street and the above-mentioned Port Way Roman road.

Two adult burials, along with several Roman coins and sherds of Roman pottery, were discovered on allotments in 1963 (OHER 1762). The location of these burials, immediately west of Crowcastle Lane, was only 144m southwest of the site.

An evaluation of the moated site, thought to be the residence of John of Gaunt, located 0.35km southeast of the site, yielded nine late Roman copper-alloy coins, all found during a metal detecting survey. It was posited that there may have been seasonal markets in this area or that they were the remnants of a hoard (Sauer 1998).

Approximately 1.1km south, in the centre of the village on land adjacent to Gossway Fields, evidence of a Roman settlement was uncovered during a trial trench evaluation conducted by John Moore Heritage Services. During this investigation evidence of multiple Roman field systems, dated to the 2nd-4th century and most likely associated with the Roman road of Akeman Street was identified (Gilbert 2005). In a later excavation by the same team, the focus area was extended eastwards and the partial remains of a late Roman villa, with an associated well, was discovered (Gilbert 2008).

### **Saxon**

There have been several discoveries of Saxon skeletal remains within the study area. One partial skeleton, discovered in 1873, was reportedly found with two Saxon brooches (OHER: 9274; VCH 1969). Two other burials were found in 1931, though neither have detailed records but the approximate location is in the immediate vicinity of the site, just 80m to the north (OHER: 1763).

During the course of the evaluation at Gossway Fields, there was also evidence of an early Saxon settlement. Two sunken-featured buildings (*Grubenhaus*) dated to the 6th century AD were discovered, and seemed to represent the western limit of a settlement (Gilbert 2005). A later excavation revealed three more sunken feature buildings, with an associated well (Gilbert 2008).

### **Medieval**

Evidence of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation were identified just 160m north of the site, during the geophysical survey conducted by Cotswold Archaeology in advance of the infrastructure work by Thames Water (Hart *et al* 2017).

Just 0.35km southeast of the site exist the surviving earthworks of a moated medieval manor which is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument, 1006314 (OHER: 5358). Dating to the 14th Century, it was believed to be a former residence of John of Gaunt though no clear evidence of his manor has survived.

The church of St Mary the Virgin, 900m south of the site, dates to the 12th century (OHER: 5230) and during the excavation of a pipe trench through the graveyard, a watching brief uncovered 37 inhumations and some associated coffin fittings (Gibson 2008; OHER: 2634).

Several medieval boundary ditches denoting several east-west oriented burbage plots were discovered at Manor Farm, just over 1km south of the site. Additionally several possible quarry pits, refuse pits and possible post holes were also found, most of which dated to the 11th-13th century (Barber and Webster 2012). Similarly during an earlier watching brief the remains of a wall, tentatively dated to the early medieval period, were found approximately 300m northwest of Manor Farm. Associated with the wall were several later refuse pits (Jenkins and Pine 2004). Both investigations provide insight into the early development of Kirtlington village.

### ***Post-medieval***

The main focus of this period was the construction and development of Kirtlington Hall, located 940m southwest of the site. The focal era of activity was in the 18th Century, when the Palladian style house was constructed for Sir James Dashwood (OHER: 715). Additionally the multiple designs for the pleasure grounds and landscaped park associated with the hall, were also executed during this period.

Historic mapping indicates that development site itself was agricultural land associated with Foxtowns End Farm until the latter half of the 20th century when the current residential development was built upon the farmland.

## **5 METHODOLOGY**

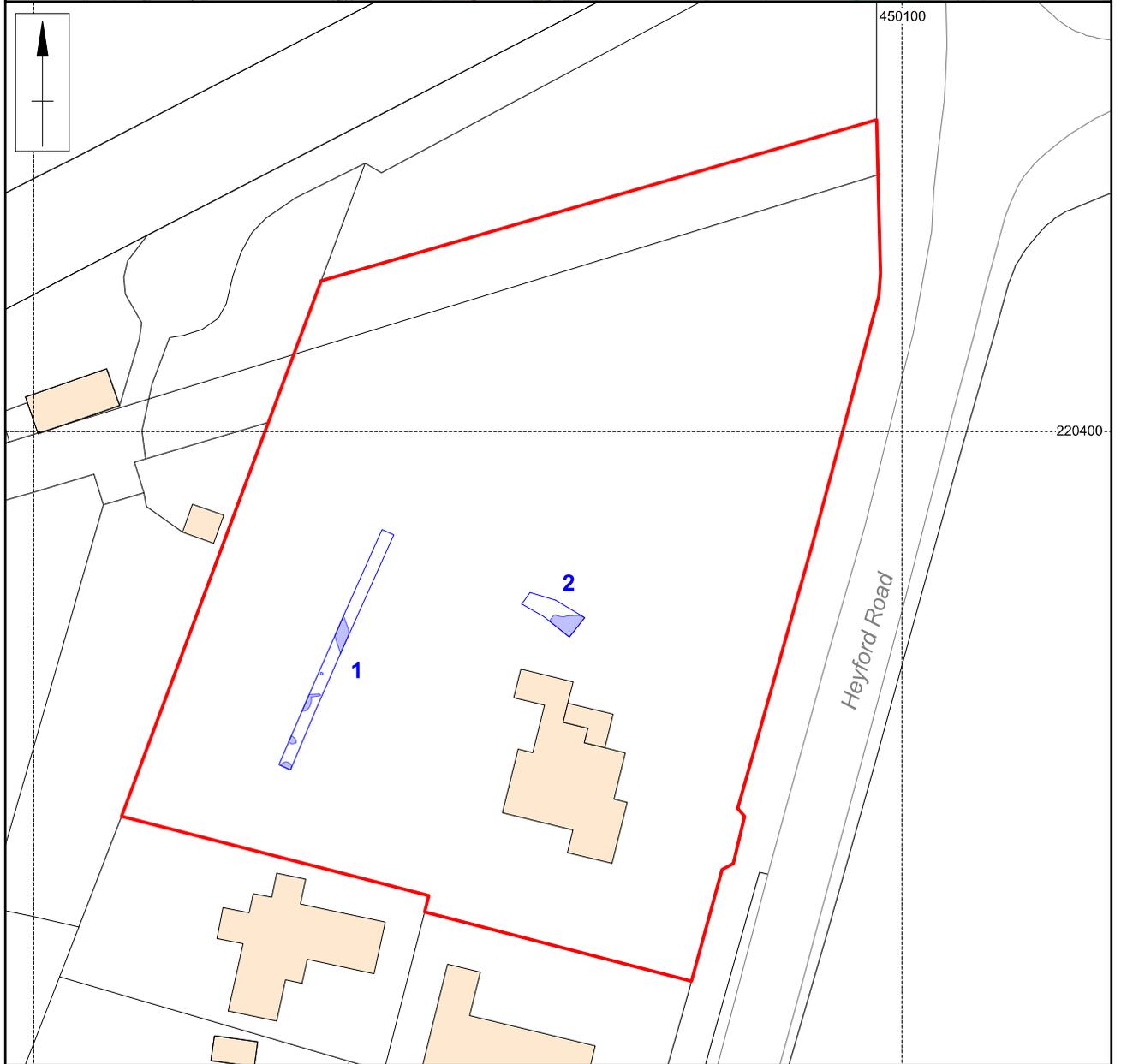
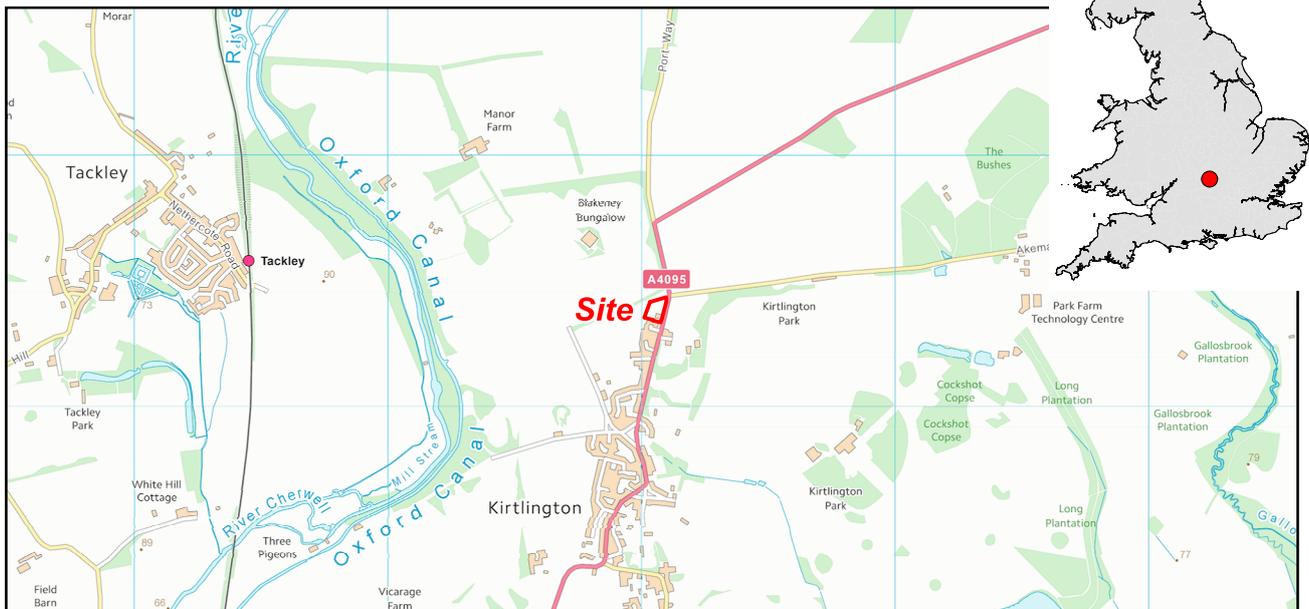
Two evaluation trenches were excavated. Trench 1 was 30m long, aligned parallel to the western edge of the site and Trench 2 was 7.50m long in the centre of the site (Fig 1). The locations of the trenches were outlined in the WSI and approved by Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Advisor. The trenches were located using a Leica Survey Grade RTK GPS operating to an accuracy of +/-0.05m to Ordnance Survey National Grid and Datum and were positioned to examine a representative sample across the development area..

A JCB 3CX fitted with a 1.60m wide toothless ditching bucket was used to remove overburden to archaeological levels or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. The trenches were cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification and definition of archaeological features. Archaeological deposits were examined by hand excavation to determine their nature. Recording followed standard MOLA Northampton procedures as described in the *Fieldwork Manual* (MOLA 2014). Deposits were described on *pro-forma* sheets to include measured and descriptive details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds. A photographic record was compiled using digital images.

In the WSI for the project (MOLA 2017) the original proposal was for the excavation of three trial trenches targeting the development area. Trench 1 was to be 30m long by 1.60m wide with Trenches 2 and 3 to be 15m long by 1.60m wide.

However, due to the nature of the current land use, Trench 3 was impossible to excavate owing to an existing wall separating the garden from a small spinney adjacent to the property. Trench 2 was found to traverse across a concrete path surrounding the property, a fence dividing the garden and a shed. To compensate for these obstacles, it was decided that Trench 2 was to be halved in length and, where possible, to double the width to make up for the lost length (see Fig 1).

All works were conducted in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2014a) and *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (CIfA 2014b) and the Historic England procedural document, *Management of Field Projects in the Historic Environment* (HE 2015).



Scale 1:1000

Site location and excavated trenches Fig 1

## 6 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

### 6.1 General stratigraphy

The geological substrate across the site was consistent light orange-yellow brown clay sands of Oxford Clay formation. Within Trenches 1 and 2 this was overlain by friable, mid brown sandy clay subsoil varying in thickness from 0.10m to 0.13m. The topsoil across the site was friable, dark greyish-brown loam varying in depth from 0.10m to 0.30m.

### 6.2 The archaeological evidence

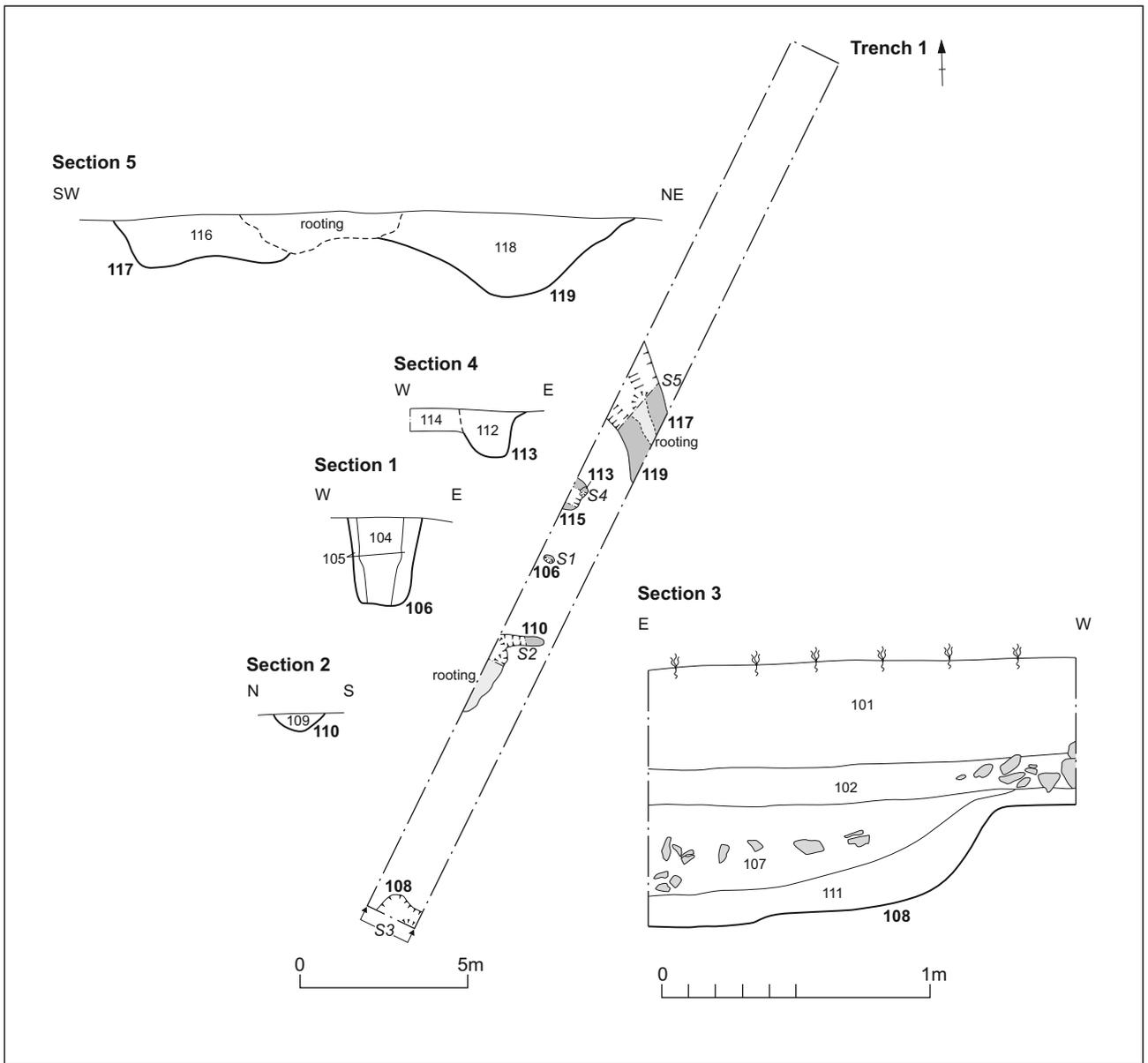
#### *Trench 1*

Trench 1 was located to the east of the site on a north-east to south-west alignment. The south-west part (0-19m) of the trench contained several archaeological features, which yielded some dating evidence, as well as rooting disturbances with evidence of land clearance (Fig 2).



Trench 1: Oblique photo of two parallel ditches [117] and [119] looking south-east Fig 3

Two parallel ditches, [117] and [119], were present in Trench 1, aligned north-west to south-east (Fig 3). Ditch [117] was shallow with moderate irregular sides and a wide U-shaped base (Fig 2: section 5). The fill was comprised of mid-grey brown with red mottling sandy silty clay (116). The mandible from a small cow was recovered from the fill; the small size of the jaw suggests a pre-medieval origin and likely to be Iron Age or Roman. Ditch [119] was a wide deep ditch with steep edges and a U-shaped base (Fig 2: section 5). The fill comprised a light grey brown sandy silty clay with red mottling (118). No dateable evidence was recovered. The relationship between the two ditches could not be established owing to rooting disturbance running along the boundary between them. The close alignment of the ditches suggests that one is probably a replacement of the other and may indicate there was an extended period of use of the ditch.



Scale 1:200 (plan) 1:25 (sections)

Trench 1 plan and sections Fig 2

To the south-west of ditch [117] was a small sub-oval disturbance, which when excavated was revealed to be natural disturbance caused by rooting [115]. The fill of [115] was fairly heterogeneous and heavily mottled indicating backfill (114). This area of rooting had been later cut by a posthole [113]. The circumference of [113] was 0.69m by 0.16m deep with near vertical edges and a flat base (Fig 2: section 4). The fill (112) comprised mid-brown grey sandy clay and contained several sherds of pottery, three of which dated to the 11th century AD. One sherd was dated to the mid-late Iron Age and may have been residual within the rooting disturbance [115]. Two meters to the south-west was another posthole [106], with a circumference of 0.94m, near vertical edges and a flat base (Fig 2: section 1). The posthole was filled by (105), a yellow brown sandy clay; a packing deposit for the post. The postpipe (104) comprised a firm dark yellow brown, and yielded a piece of early medieval pottery. From the near vertical edges of (104) it is likely that the post decayed *in situ* rather than being dug out.

A narrow, shallow gully was present in the south-western part of the trench [110]. It was 0.18m wide by 0.07m deep with moderate concave edges and U-shaped base (Fig 2: section 2). The gully fill (109) comprised dark grey brown silty clays which contained a small sherd of early medieval pottery.



Trench 1: Oblique photo of pit/ditch terminus [108], looking south-west Fig 4

At the south-western end of the trench was sub-circular feature [108], only partially visible. This could be either a pit or the terminus of a ditch; not enough is visible to make a concrete interpretation. Owing to the shape in plan it is likely that [108] is the terminus of a ditch running east to west. The ditch was approximately 1.25m wide and 0.43m deep. Ditch [108] had a steeply sloping edge with a gentle break of slope, stepping gently down to its final depth. The primary fill (111) comprised dark yellow brown sandy clay, and extended up beyond the western edge of the feature indicating that there may have been a bank or mound next to the feature. The upper fill (107) comprised of dark yellow brown sandy clay loam and contained a sherd of medieval pottery.

**Trench 2**

Trench 2 was aligned north-west to south-east and was located in the center of the site (Fig 1). No archaeological evidence was encountered owing to modern disturbances from the current residential building.

**7 THE FINDS**

**7.1 All finds** by Jules Agnew

The finds recovered from Akeman Spinney comprised pottery sherds (92g), animal bone (163g) and a small piece of shell (2g).

*Table 1: Finds summary from Akeman Spinney*

Material	Context	Sherd Count	No of Bags	Weight (g)
Animal Bone	107		1	2.6
Animal Bone	116		1	160
			2	162.6
Pot	U/S	3	1	37.2
Pot	104	1	1	3.5
Pot	107	3	1	28.8
Pot	109	1	1	13.4
Pot	112	4	1	9
		12	5	91.9
Shell	107	1	1	2

**7.2 Animal bone** by Alex Shipley and Sander Aerts

A total of 162.6g of animal bone from fills (107) and (116). The bones recovered from (107) were fragments and were not identified and totalled 2.6g. From (116) the bone recovered was a cattle mandible and totalled 160g.

*Table 2: Bag count and weight of animal bone from Akeman Spinney*

Fill/ cut/ type	No of Bags	Weight (g)
(107)/ [108]/ ditch	1	2.6
(116)/ [117]/ ditch	1	160
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>162.6</b>

The mandible lifted from (116) came from a fully developed adult with signs of wear on the third molar. This indicates the cattle was at least five years or older before dying, suggesting that the cattle may have been used for dairy production; however the sex of the cow is unidentified.

### 7.3 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region. A single rimsherd of a jar occurred in context (109). It is somewhat abraded, and the calcareous inclusions have been leached out. The rest of the assemblage comprised fragments of unglazed jars, other than the fragment of OXBB, which is from an internally glazed bowl, and the sherds of OXAM, which are from glazed jugs. This is a fairly typical pattern for assemblages in the region.

**OXBF:** North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050–1400.

**OXY:** Medieval Oxford Ware, AD1075–1350.

**OXAM:** Brill/Boarstall Ware, AD1200 – 1600.

**OXBB:** Minety-type Ware, early 13<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century.

Table 3: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type.

Context	IA		C10		OXBF		OXY		OXBB		OXAM		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
U/S	-	-	1	4	-	-	-	-	1	16	1	14	U/S
104	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	IA
107	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	5	-	-	1	21	13thC
109	-	-	-	-	1	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	m11thC
112	2	5	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	m11thC
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>35</b>	-

## 8 DISCUSSION

The site excavated in Kirtlington is in an area of extensive archaeological and historical interest with evidence spanning from the Iron Age to the modern period. Situated in the northernmost point in Kirtlington the site is close to 'Aves Ditch' a proposed later Iron Age tribal boundary ditch running north-east from Kirtlington (Hart *et al* 2017). To the north and to the east are Roman roads the Portway and Akeman Street respectively. Despite this, and contrary to expectations, no evidence for activity of the Roman period was observed on site.

A number of archaeological features were encountered in Trench 1, dating from the mid to late Iron Age and the medieval period. A posthole in this trench, dated to the mid to late Iron Age, indicates that possible structural activity took place in the site in this period. Two wide ditches suggest the potential of a boundary or enclosure running north-east to south-west across the site. Whilst these ditches did not produce any dating evidence, the alignment could correlate with the evidence of an Iron Age settlement c80m north of the site (Benson and Harding 1966). This could provide potential for questions regarding land use for social organisation and land divisions in the Iron Age research agenda to be addressed (Lambrick 2014).

A posthole and two ditches were identified which dated to the medieval period. A gully could possibly be associated with the ridge and furrow field systems found c160m to the north of the excavation area by Cotswold Archaeology (Hart *et al* 2017). The pottery coming from these two features show overlapping dates, suggesting that the features could be contemporary or in use at the same time.

The majority of the archaeological remains found dated to the medieval period. Within this period the Domesday Book records that this area had a population of 71 households with a large amount of ploughland.

The survival of postholes and shallow gullies on the site suggests that the potential for other archaeological features to have survived is good. The presence of medieval pottery, whilst in small numbers, and the close proximity of the site to the main road highlights the potential for further features such as medieval burbage plots to exist within the area. Burbage plots, refuse pits and possible postholes dated to the 11-13th century have previously been identified approximately 1km south of the site at Manor Farm (Barber and Webster 2012). This would be contemporary with the medieval remains at Akeman Spinney and may suggest that the present extent of Kirtlington village covers but a part of the landscape that it had prior to the 13th century. Like many rural villages the impact of the plague and other factors may have resulted in the size of the earlier medieval villages and population to shrink dramatically, leaving remains of the earlier larger settlement as archaeological features (Jones and Page 2006).

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MOLA

12 October 2017

**APPENDIX: CONTEXT INVENTORY**

<b>Trench No</b>	<b>Length, width &amp; alignment</b>	<b>NGR</b>	<b>Surface height (aOD)</b>	<b>Depth &amp; height of natural</b>
1	30m x 1.60m NE-SW	450040, 220388	102.70m aOD	0.53m deep 102.17m aOD
<b>Context</b>	<b>Context type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Artefacts/ Samples</b>
101	Topsoil	Friable dark greyish brown loam with occasional small stones	0.40m deep	-
102	Subsoil	Firm yellow orange/brown sandy clay loam with occasional small stones	0.13m deep	-
103	Natural	Firmly compact yellow/orange brown clay sands with frequent stones and manganese staining	-	-
104	Fill of post-pipe	Relatively firm, dark yellow brown sandy clay with a few small stones	0.16m wide 0.033m deep	Pottery
105	Fill of post-hole	Friable yellow brown sandy loam Occasional small stone inclusions	0.06m wide 0.33m deep	-
106	Cut of post-hole	Circular feature, with near vertical sides and flat bottomed.	0.94m circ 0.27m wide 0.33m deep	-
107	Fill of ditch	Firm, dark yellow brown sandy clay loam, small to medium limestone inclusions	1.17m wide 0.34m deep	Pottery Shell
108	Cut of ditch	NE-SW irregular sub-oval, with a stepped SW side with an irregular flat base	1.25m wide 0.43m deep	-
109	Fill of gully	Firm dark grey brown silty clays.	0.18m wide 0.07m deep	Pottery
110	Cut of gully	NE-SW Narrow gully with moderate concave edges and a U-shape base	0.18m wide 0.07m deep	-
111	Fill of ditch	Firm dark yellow brown sandy clay loam with moderate small limestone inclusions.	1.00m wide 0.22m deep	-
112	Fill of post-hole	Firm mid brown grey, sandy clay loam with occasional small sub angular stones	0.22m wide 0.16m deep	Pottery
113	Cut of post-hole	Steep sided with a flat base	0.22m wide 0.16m deep	-
114	Fill of rooting	Firm dark yellow brown, heterogeneous fill with occasional small stones	1.00m wide 0.08m deep	-

115	Cut of rooting	Irregular oval with shallow irregular edges and undulating pitted base	1.00m wide 0.08m deep	-
116	Fill of ditch	Firm mid grey brown with red mottling sandy silty clays with small-med sub angular stones	>1.60m long >0.60m wide 0.18m deep	Animal bone
117	Cut of ditch	NW-SE wide shallow ditch with moderate irregular sides and a wide U-shape	>1.06m long >0.60m wide 0.18m deep	-
118	Fill of ditch	Firm light grey brown with red mottling, sandy silty clays with moderate small to medium sub angular stones	>1.60m long >0.86m wide 0.31m deep	-
119	Cut of ditch	NW-SE wide deep ditch with steep edges and a U-shape base	>1.60m long >0.86m wide 0.31m deep	-



Trench 1: Looking north-east Fig 5

Trench No	Length, width & alignment	NGR	Surface height (aOD)	Depth & height of natural
2	7.5m x 3.20m W-S	450057, 220381	102.59m aOD	0.50m deep 102.09m aOD
<i>Context</i>	<i>Context type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Artefacts/Samples</i>
201	Topsoil	Friable dark greyish brown loam with occasional small stones	0.15m deep	-
202	Subsoil	Firm yellow orange/brown sandy clay loam with occasional small stones	0.35m deep	-
203	Natural	Firmly compact yellow/orange brown clay sands with frequent stones and manganese staining	-	-



Trench 2: looking north-west Fig 6