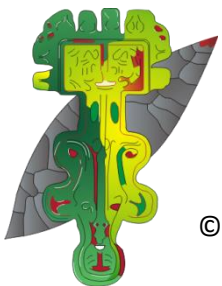


**Absolute  
Archaeology LLP  
2015**

Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief at  
56 Watling Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, OX10 7JQ



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Absolute Archaeology LLP  
On Behalf of  
Mr & Mrs Jennings

Client/Agent Name: Mr & Mrs Jennings / AKT I Planning + Architecture

Document Title: Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief at 56 Watling Lane,  
Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, OX10 7JQ

Grid Reference: NGR SU 57646 93910

Document Type: Archaeological Report

Issue Number: 1.1

Date of Preparation: 17<sup>th</sup> April 2015

Local Planning Authority: South Oxfordshire District Council

Planning Reference: P13/S3574/FUL


Oasis Ref: absolute1-176552 (1)

Site Code: AARC151

Museum Repository: Oxfordshire County Museum Service

Museum Accession Number: OXCMS: 2014.246

OS Licence: 100048201

Issue Number	Prepared By	Checked By	Signed
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## **Summary**

This document sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief during groundwork associated with the demolition of an existing dwelling and the erection of a three bedroom detached dwelling, detached double garage and associated works on land belonging to 56 Watling Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, OX10 7JQ (hereafter referred to as the Project Site). The work has been commissioned by Mr & Mrs Jennings (the developers) and carried out on the 4th – 5th November 2014.

The results of the monitoring revealed the presence of occupation in this area in the form of two features [3] and [7] interpreted as potential storage pits, backfilled in the early Romano-British period. The depth of topsoil / alluvium identified sealing the archaeological horizon made it impossible to reveal the features in plan once groundwork had commenced. However, evidence of unabraded ceramics dating to the early Roman / Pre –Flavian period, in association with animal bone suggest that the features relate to settlement of a contemporary date located close by. The results add to the mounting evidence of occupation in this area of the town, with late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD finds identified to the south of the Project Site, just 30m from the new dwelling.

Further investigation of the features was prohibited by the nature of the watching brief, carried out during the excavation of the footings of the new dwellings, which exceeded 2m in depth. However, it is clear that the features relate to ongoing activity in the vicinity of the Project Site, which was demonstrated by evidence of unabraded ceramics recovered from the small sample of the archaeological features that was accessible.

Whilst it was not possible to investigate this site further, the results suggest that associated activity is likely to be well preserved close to the Project Site and therefore the potential for further work in this area to reveal significant remains is high.

## **Acknowledgements**

Absolute Archaeology LLP would like to thank Mr & Mrs Jennings (the developers) and Mr P King, AKT Planning and Architecture Ltd (the agent), for their assistance during the project. We would also like to thank Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services for his help and expertise.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief during groundwork associated with the demolition of an existing dwelling and the erection of a three bedroom detached dwelling, detached double garage and associated works on land belonging to 56 Watling Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, OX10 7JQ (hereafter referred to as the Project Site). The work was commissioned by Mr & Mrs Jennings (the developers) and carried out on the 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

The watching brief was required under Condition 7 of the Planning Permission (P13/S3574/FUL) which states that *'No development shall take place until an archaeological watching brief has been organised. The watching brief shall be carried out in accordance with a written specification prepared by a competent archaeologist and shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved watching brief shall be maintained for the duration of all ground works on the site.'*

*Reason: To enable the inspection and recording of any items of archaeological importance (Policy HE11 of the adopted Local Plan).'*

The programme of work comprised an archaeological watching brief, with provision for the recording of surviving below ground archaeology, revealed during ground disturbance associated with the approved development.

## 2. THE PROJECT SITE

The Project Site is located in the village of Dorchester-on-Thames, South Oxfordshire, adjacent to the SW extent of the Dorchester Roman Town of *Dorocium* or *Dorocina* (Rivet and Smith 1981). Associated artefacts have been recovered from the vicinity of the development area, including late Iron Age (IA) and early Romano-British finds recovered from allotments located 100m to the NE. The finds include evidence of late IA settlement and painted Roman wall plaster, indicating a villa site (HER 2390). Roman ceramics and a potential ditch / quarry has been identified 50m to the NE (HER 27443). Finds including 1<sup>st</sup> century Samian pottery, white and grey wares and the handle of a bronze spoon have been recovered from a garden 60m east (HER1983) and 1<sup>st</sup> century finds have been recovered from a possible Roman rubbish pit in the grounds of the Project Site, just 30m from the development area (Monument Number 238094).



The Project Site lies approximately c. 50m aOD and is defined by Quaternary Northmoor Sand and Gravel terraces overlying Gault Formation mudstone (BGS Sheet 254).

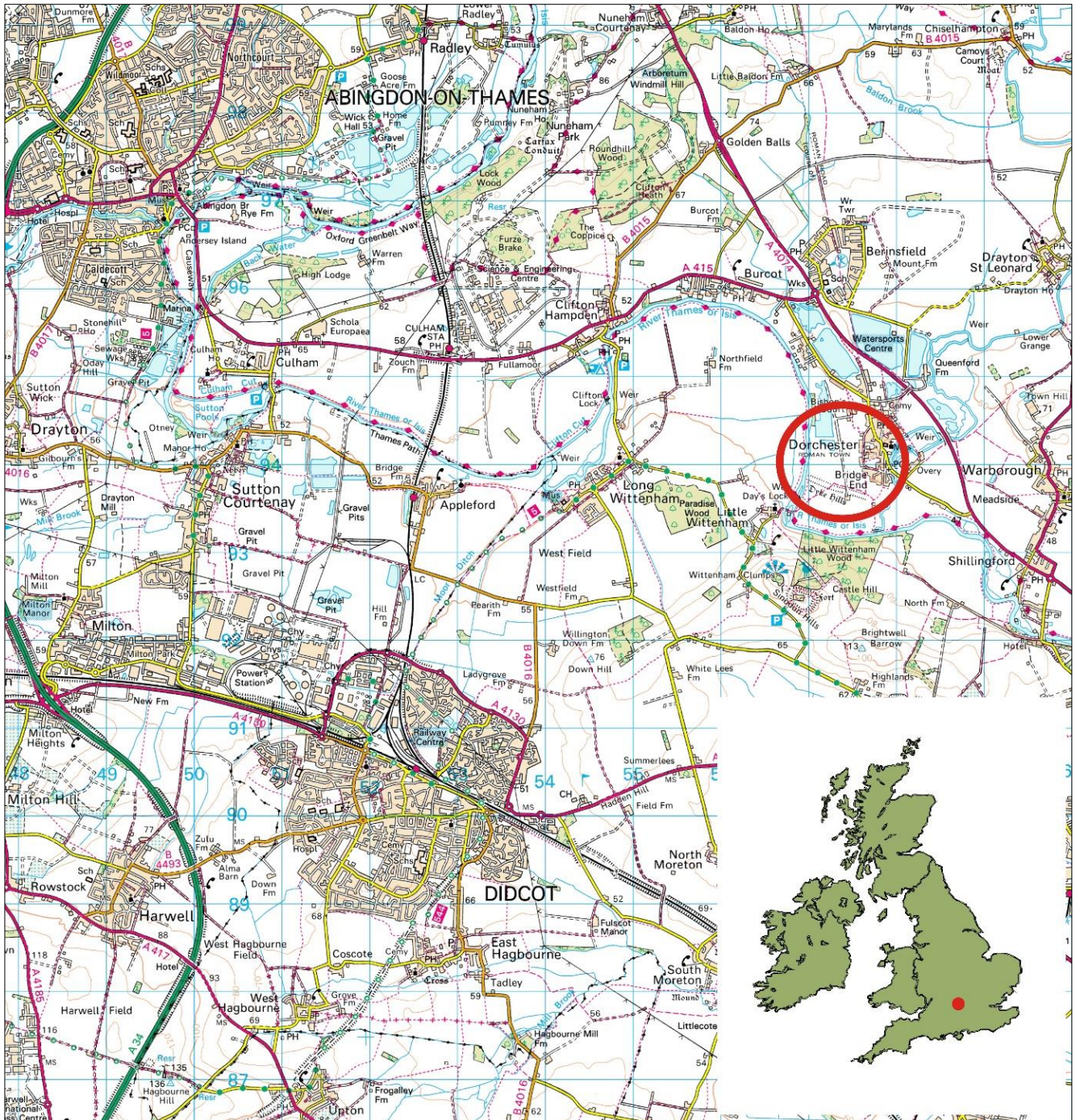


Figure 1 General Project Site Location



### **3. APPROACH TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

The broad aim of the watching brief was to identify and record features of archaeological interest discovered during groundwork associated with the development, in order to mitigate the impact of the works on the archaeological resource and enable discharge of the planning condition.

All work was undertaken in accordance with the IFA *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (revised 2008).

Primary aims-

- Seek to assess the potential for archaeological activity associated with the project site;
- Record and identify archaeological features and deposits to a level appropriate to their extent and significance;
- Undertake sufficient post-excavation assessment to interpret archaeological features and phasing identified during site works, and to place these within their local and regional context;
- Create a site archive for deposition in a suitable repository.

### **4. RESULTS**

The mechanical reduction of the foundation trenches revealed between 500mm and 850mm of topsoil / alluvium sealing two cut features, located to the ESE and WNW of the Project Site. Cut [3] was identified to the ESE of the project site and measured >1.5m in depth (location NGR SU 57654 93918). The feature was only partially visible in the foundation trench and the shape in plan, extent and nature could not be properly ascertained due to the depth of the archaeological horizon prohibiting the further reduction of the topsoil. However the feature was recorded to extend >3m as seen in section, but this may not be an accurate indication of actual size, as it may represent an oblique truncation. The shape of the feature represents that of a storage pit with shallow sloping sides, leading to a sharp break of slope and steep sided base. Furthermore, the profile as seen in section suggests that the feature has not been significantly truncated by past agricultural / development activity on the Project Site.

The fill (2) comprised a soft silty clay with occasion flecks of charcoal throughout. Finds retrieved from the fill comprised animal bone and unabraded ceramic sherds, dated to the early Roman-British period. Further investigation of the base of the feature was not possible, due to the depth of the foundation trench and the friable nature of the stratigraphy, which collapsed shortly after excavation.



**Photo 1 ESE facing section showing Cut [3] (Scale 1 x 1m)**



**Photo 2 North facing view of foundation trench with Cut [3] (Scale 1 x 1m)**



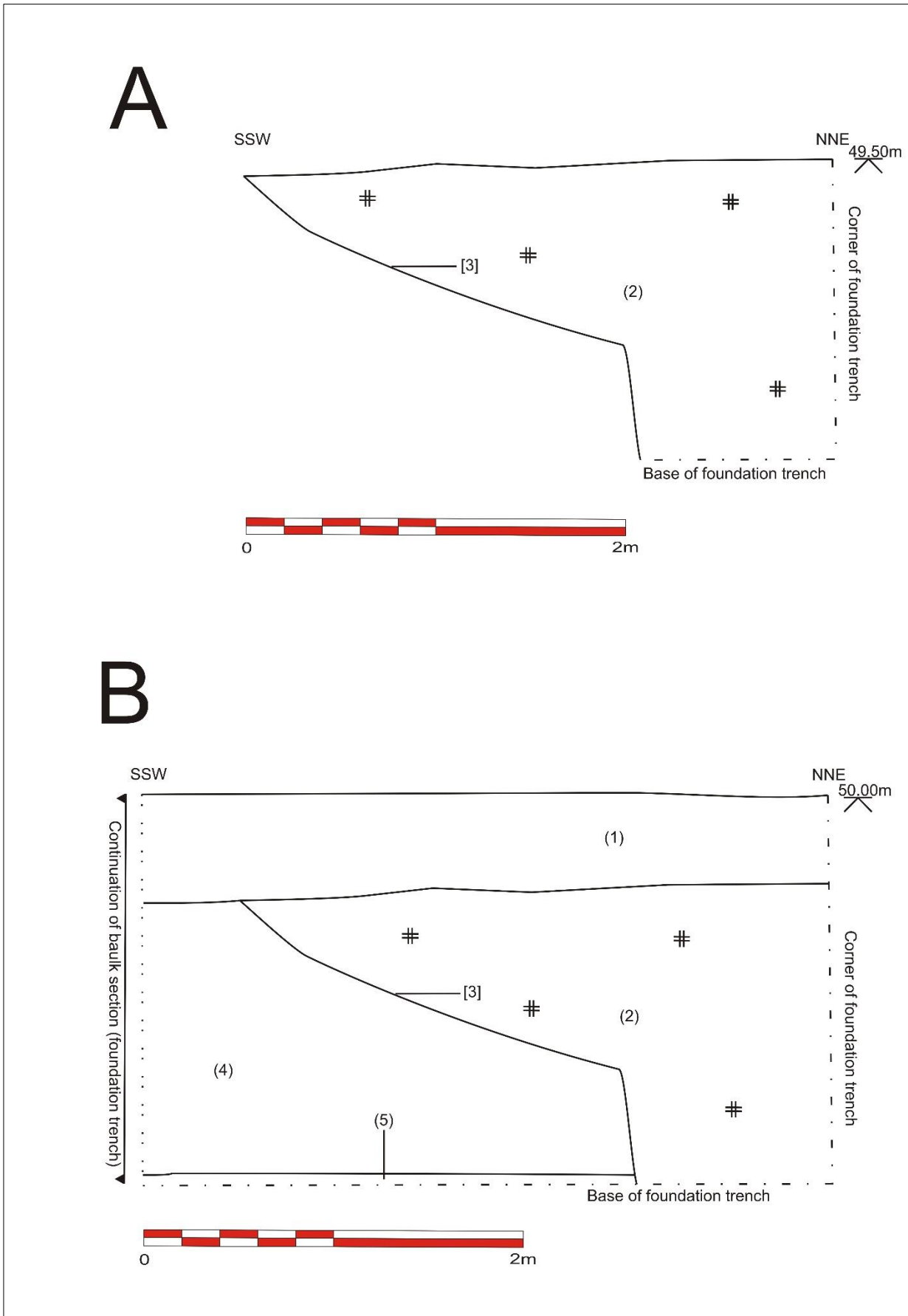


Figure 2 Section 1 A ESE facing section of Cut [3] / B Sample section of foundation trench with Cut [3]

A second feature was revealed to the WNW of the Project Site. Mechanical excavation revealed a deep layer of topsoil / alluvium (1) sealing cut [7], which had a recorded depth of >750mm (location NGR SU 57642 93920). The feature had a recorded width/diameter of 1.6m.

Fill (6) comprised a soft silty clay with occasion flecks of charcoal throughout. Finds retrieved from the fill comprised animal bone and unabraded ceramic sherds dated to the early Romano-British period. Once again, investigation of the base of the feature was not possible, due to the depth of the foundation trench and the friable nature of the stratigraphy, which collapsed shortly after excavation.



**Photo 3 NNE facing view of the base of Cut [7] (Scales 1 x 1m & 1 x 500mm)**





Photo 4 ESE facing section of foundation trench with Cut [7] (Scale 1 x 1m)

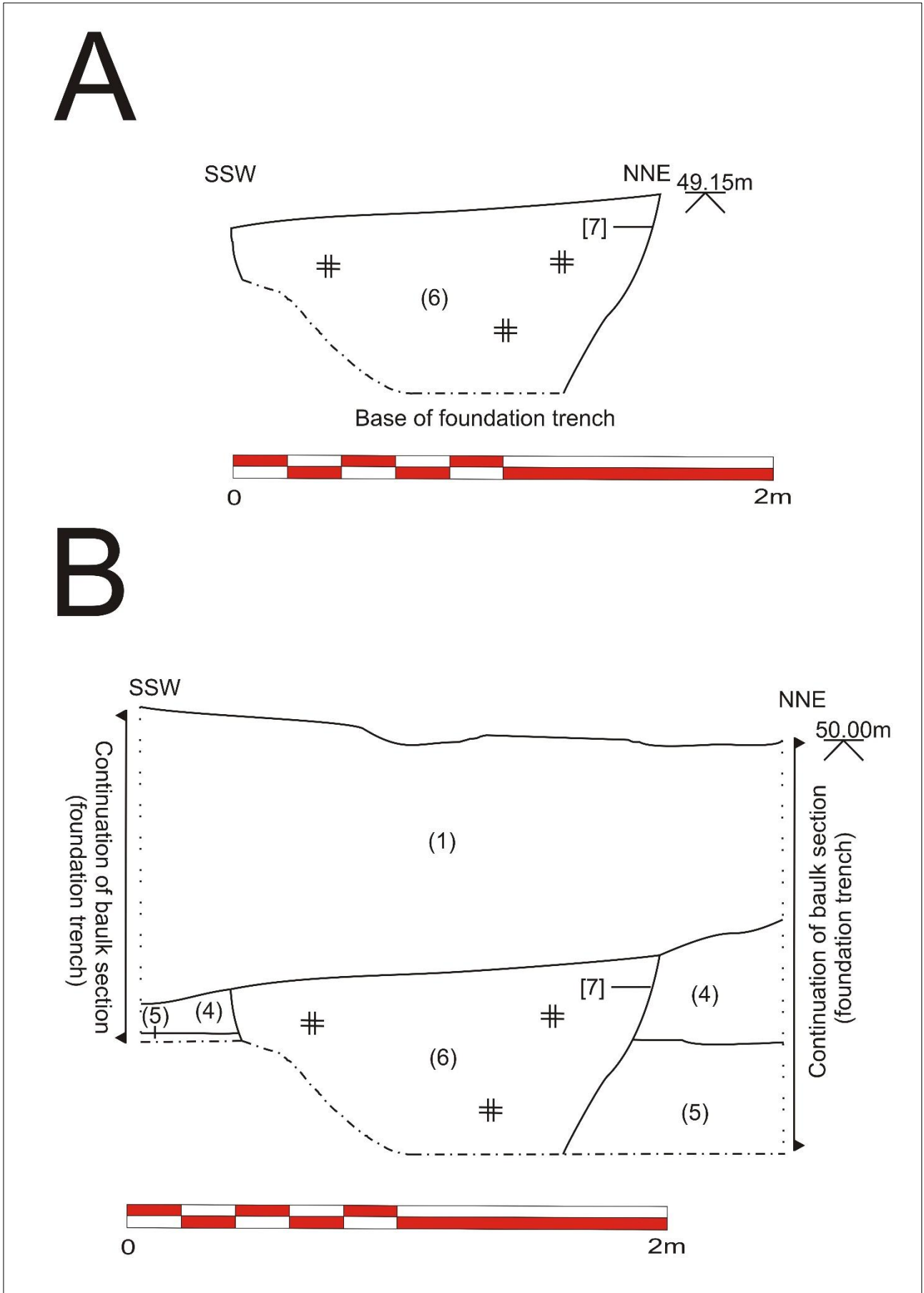


Figure 3 Section 2 A, ESE facing section of Cut [7] / B, Sample section of foundation trench with Cut [7]

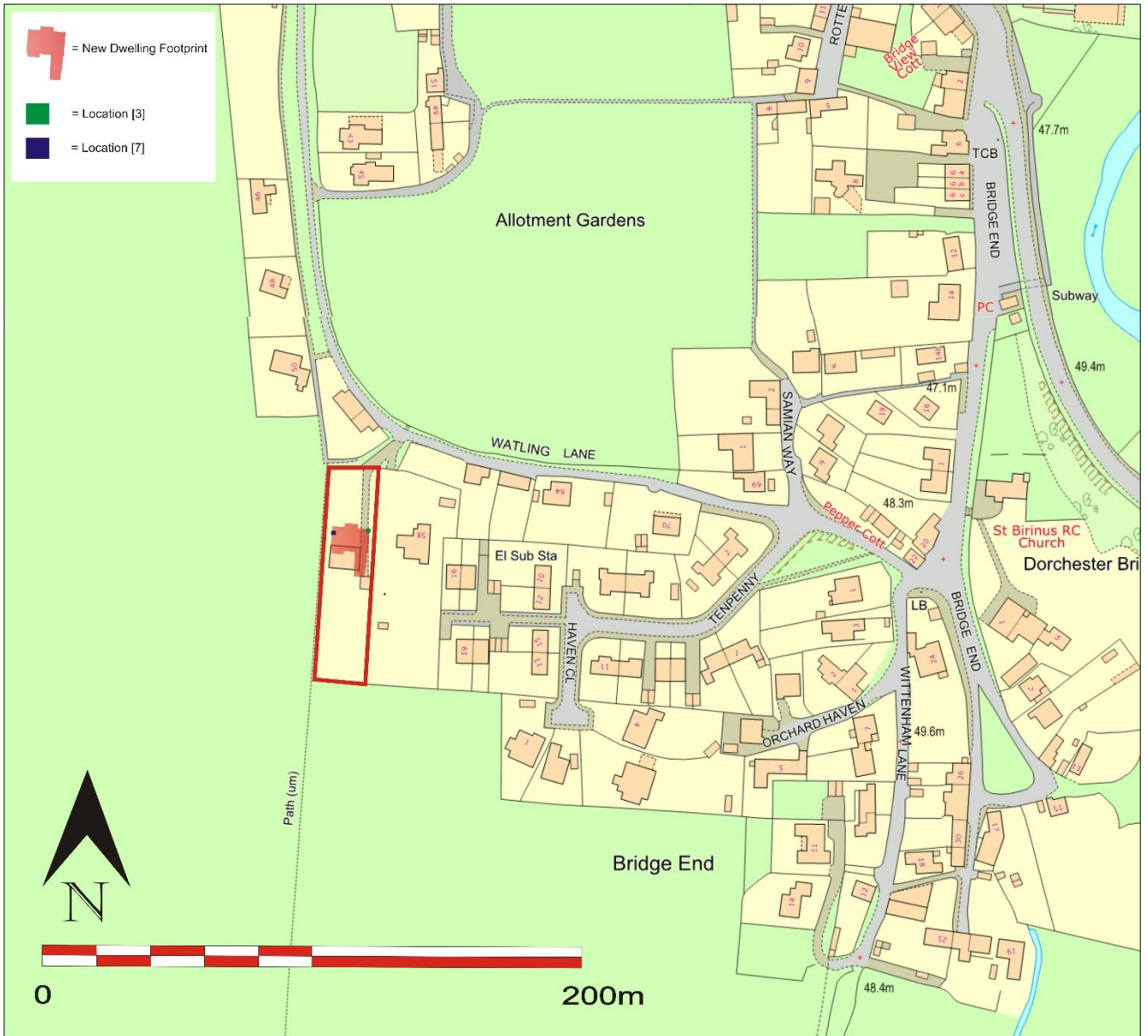


Figure 4 Project Site location



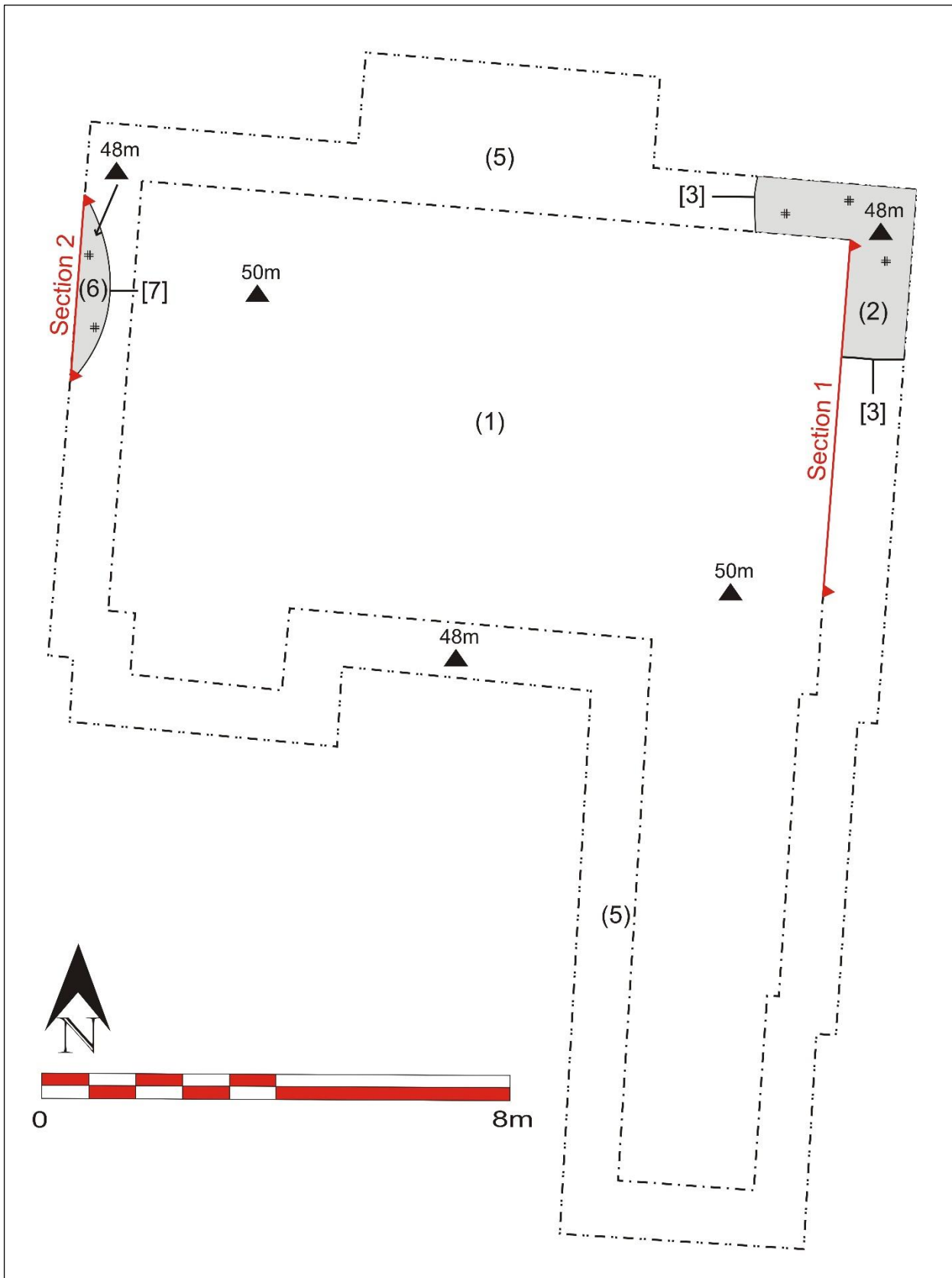
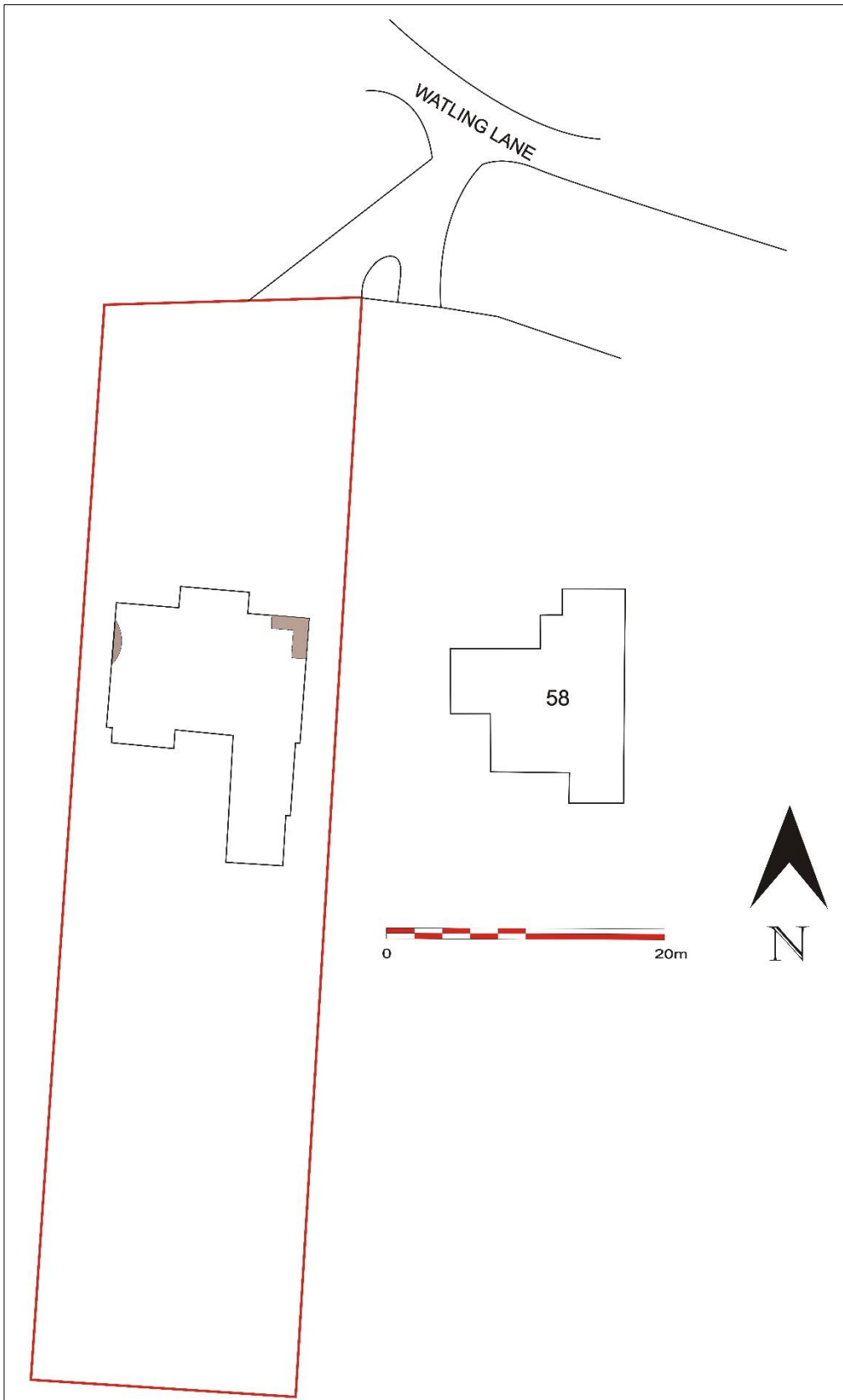


Figure 5 Plan showing location of [3] & [7] in relation to foundation trench



**Figure 6 Plan showing the Project Site location with foundation trench and relative location of features [3] & [7]**

## **5. ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLING**

Environmental samples were not taken due to the lack of clarity with regards to stratigraphy caused by the method of excavation. The mechanical removal of fills from deep narrow foundations trenches resulted in unacceptably contaminated deposits, prohibiting the concise excavation of the features that would be required in order to identify interpretable and datable archaeological deposits.

As a result of the above, the contexts (2) and (6) are likely to signify a generalisation and may represent multiple phases of backfill and sedimentation, as the features could not be accurately investigated due to constraints on site and health and safety concerns.

## **6. FINDS**

### **6.1. Ceramics by Jane Timby**

#### **Introduction**

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of 61 sherds of pottery weighing 2287 g dating to the Roman, Saxon medieval and post-medieval periods.

The sherds are in a very good state of preservation with large fresh unabraded pieces giving an overall average sherd weight of 37.5 g. Several sherds belong to the same vessels.

The pottery was recovered from two defined contexts (2) and (6) with an additional 10 sherds from unstratified collection. For the purposes of the spot date / assessment the sherds were sorted into fabrics based on the size, type and density of the inclusions and coded accordingly. Table 1 provides an archive list of the assemblage along with the dates.

#### **Roman**

The stratified pottery belongs to a single phase of use dating to the early Roman period, more specifically the pre-Flavian period. The wares are all local and comprise a mixture of handmade wares of pre-Roman tradition alongside wheel-made vessels.

The handmade wares are grog-tempered with examples of large storage jar, beaded rim jar and expanded rim necked jars. These wares account for 81.4% of the Roman pottery.

The remaining 11 Roman sherds comprise five pieces of Abingdon-Dorchester type sandy ware with an example of a butt beaker and a bowl; one sherd of black sandy ware and one basesherd in a black sandy ware with sparse limestone. The Abingdon-Dorchester ware is an early industry based somewhere in this area producing good quality wheel-made copies of imported forms immediately after the conquest. A number of similar beakers were found at Site C in the 1962 excavations (Frere 1964, fig. 12).

Joining sherds from the same vessel, a large beaded rim grey grog-tempered jar, are present in both context (2) and (6) suggesting contemporaneity of deposits.

### **Post-Roman**

The unstratified finds include one bodysherd of quartz-tempered ware probably of Saxon date and one sherd from a glazed jug of Brill Boarstall type dating to the medieval period.

## **6.2. Animal Bone**

A total of 15 animal bones were recovered from stratified deposits (2) and (6). All were in good condition and represented ovicaprid ribs and bovine lower limb bones. The collection is too small to be diagnostic, however it does add to evidence of domestic activity associated with the Project Site.

## **6.3. Potential and further work**

This is a very small assemblage and entirely consistent with that to be expected from Dorchester-on-Thames with known occupation spanning the Roman, Saxon and later periods (*cf* for example, Frere 1964; 1984).

No further work is recommended unless additional work is carried out at the locality in which case it should be taken into account.

## **7. PROJECT ARCHIVE**

The site archive will contain all documentary data generated as a result of the watching brief. The archive will be prepared to the standards outlined in MoRPHE PPN 3 - Archaeological Excavation (English Heritage 2008), and in accordance with the guidelines published in

*Guidelines for the preparation of Excavation Archives for long-term storage* (United Kingdom Institute for Conservation, 1990) and *Standards in the Museum care of archaeological collections* (Museum and Galleries Commission, 1994) and MoRPHE (2006). Deposition shall take place as soon as practicable after the site works, and in any case within 12 months of the completion of the project.

The legal owners have resolved to retain all of the finds (listed in Appendices 2 and 3), and as such are now responsible for the future preservation and maintenance of the material archive. That part of the site archive in question has been transferred to the legal owners following all necessary processing, research, analysis and investigative/stabilising conservation and correct packing necessary to prepare the archive for preservation and storage in a usable, accessible form, and to produce a full report for publication, had been completed.

The owners shall ensure that all necessary provision is made for the long-term preservation of the archive in a satisfactory environment, and that it is accessible for future research. Absolute Archaeology LLP will ensure that a proper record of material kept by the landowner shall be included in the written archive.

The material archive is currently being stored at 56 Watling Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, under the care of Mr & Mrs Jennings.

## **8. DISCUSSION**

The Project Site is located adjacent to the SW corner of Dorchester walled Roman Town; outside of the boundary, which is today marked by Watling Lane. The results of the monitoring revealed the presence of occupation in this area, with features [3] and [7] interpreted as potential storage pits, backfilled in the early Romano-British period. The depth of topsoil identified sealing the archaeological horizon made it impossible to reveal the features in plan once groundwork had commenced.

Evidence of unabraded ceramics dating to the early Roman / Pre –Flavian period, in association with animal bone suggest that the features relate to settlement of a contemporary date located close by. The results add to the mounting evidence of occupation in this area of the town, with late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD finds identified to the south of the Project Site, just 30m from the new dwelling. Further activity was noted 40m to the NE, in which an evaluation trench revealed sherds of greyware ceramics (MOX23952). In addition, 1<sup>st</sup> AD century ceramics, including greywares and Samian ware were reported to have been recovered from a garden

60m to the ESE (MOX2756). All were recovered from cut features, ranging from rubbish pits to a potential quarry/ditch feature, and suggest the continuation of occupation in this region in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

Unstratified fabrics of probable Saxon and medieval date were recovered from the spoil, confirming the presence of associated activity in the vicinity. However, the low quantity and abraded nature of these fabrics suggests that they represent residual finds deposited perhaps in association with agricultural activity.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

Further investigation of the features was prohibited by the nature of the watching brief, carried out during the excavation of the footings of the new dwellings, which exceeded 2m in depth. In order to properly assess the nature, extent and significance of the archaeological activity it would have been necessary to remove an extensive depth of topsoil from the site, in order to reveal the archaeological horizon. However, it is clear that the features relate to ongoing activity in the vicinity of the Project Site, which was demonstrated by evidence of unabraded ceramics recovered from the small sample of the archaeological features that was accessible.

Whilst it was not possible to investigate this site further, the results suggest that associated activity is likely to be well preserved close to the Project Site and therefore the potential for further work in this area to reveal significant remains is high. The possibility of evaluation should be considered in conjunction with future work in this area, in order to ensure that archaeology can be suitably investigated.

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## 11. APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 Context Description

Phase One							
<b>Description:</b> Machine excavated linear trenches- foundation trenches					<b>Orientation</b>	ESE-WNW	
					<b>Depth</b>	2m	
					<b>Width</b>	500mm	
					<b>Length</b>	10m x 7m	
Contexts 1-7							
Context Number	Type	Depth/ Height	Width	Length /Diameter	Colour	Findings	Recorded Date
1	Topsoil/Turfline	500mm	>7m	>10m	Dark greyish brown	-	4/11/2014
2	Fill of Cut [3]	>1.5m	-	-	Dark reddish brown	E. Roman / Pre-Flavia Ceramics	4/11/2014
3	Cut filled by (2)	>1.5m	-	-	-	-	4/11/2014
4	Subsoil	-	-	-	Mid yellowish brown	-	4/11/2014
5	Natural	-	-	-	Light yellowish brown	-	4/11/2014
6	Fill of Cut [7]	>700mm	1.6m	-	Mid reddish brown	E. Roman / Pre-Flavian Ceramics	5/11/2014
7	Cut filled by (6)	>700mm	1.6m	-	-	-	5/11/2014

## Appendix 2 Finds Ceramic

Context Number	Fabric	Name	Form	Weight	No	Rim	Date
2	ABNOX	Abingdon-type ware	bowl	34	2	1	early Roman
2	ABNOX	Abingdon-type ware	butt beaker	7	0	2	early Roman
2	BWLI	black ware with sparse limestone	base	12	2	0	early Roman
2	GR	grog-tempered	body	46	7	0	early Roman
2	GRSJ	handmade grog-tempered storage jar	jar	443	6	2	early Roman
2	GYGR	grey grog-tempered	bead rim jar	258	6	2	early Roman
6	ABNOX	Abingdon-type ware	body	5	2	0	early Roman
6	GR	grog-tempered	necked jar	319	9	2	early Roman
6	GYGR	grey grog-tempered	bead rim jar	1029	5	3	early Roman
us	BRILL	Brill-Boarstall-type	jug	8	1	0	Med 13-15th
us	BW	black sandy ware	jar	10	0	1	early Roman
us	BWFSY	fine black sandy ware	body	19	1	0	early Roman
us	GR	grog-tempered	body	54	3	0	early Roman
us	GYGR	grey grog-tempered	expanded rim jar	11	1	1	early Roman
us	GYGR	grey grog-tempered	body	16	1	0	early Roman
us	SXQTZ	quartz-tempered	body	16	1	0	Saxon
<b>Total</b>				<b>2287</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>14</b>	

**Appendix 3 Finds Animal Bone & Shell**

<b>Context Number</b>	<b>Context Description</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Weight (g)</b>
us	Spoil Heap	Animal Bone	3	67
us	Spoil Heap	Oyster Shell	1	17
(2)	Fill of truncated pit feature	Animal Bone Cattle	3	515
(2)	Fill of truncated pit feature	Animal Bone Cattle/Sheep ribs	7	53
(6)	Fill of truncated pit feature	Animal Bone Cattle Bone	2	66
<b>Total</b>			<b>16</b>	<b>718</b>

**Appendix 4 Chronological Table**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Information</b>
Prehistoric	800000 – 43 AD	Generalised period from the earliest human activity in Britain (Happisburgh) to the conquest of Britain by Claudius.
Palaeolithic	800000 - 10000 BC	Mobile groups, ephemeral habitation evidence, stone tool technology. Material evidence found predominantly in caves. Earliest evidence for hominins in Britain is at Happisburgh and Pakefield in Norfolk dating to the Early Pleistocene c.800,000 BP.
Mesolithic	10000 – 4000 BC	Period of major transformation in the European environment and landscape after the end of the last Ice Age. Mobile hunter-gatherer communities, sophisticated tool technology and some semi-permanent settlement, particularly along the east coast of England and in Ireland.
Neolithic	4000 – 2350 BC	Emergence of monumental architecture, such as long barrows and causewayed enclosures. Movement towards more complex society and sedentary lifestyles.
Bronze Age	2350 – 800 BC	Introduction of Bronze, construction of barrows/tumuli for the dead in the early stages replaced by a lack of monuments and the preponderance toward hoard deposition.
Iron Age	800 BC– 43 AD	Introduction of Iron and the return of monumental architecture in the form of hillforts, tribal boundaries and the introduction of coinage.
Romano-British	43-410 AD	Romano-British period including the emergence of villas and Roman infrastructure.
Anglo-Saxon	410 –1066 AD	Post-Roman period including Saxon invasions and the arrival of Christianity.
Medieval	1066 – 1540 AD	Medieval period in Britain including Tudor activity, with the dissolution of the monasteries as the closing of the period.
Post-Medieval	1540 – 1900 AD	Period of rapid industrial development and changes to the English landscape.
Modern	1900 – 1950 AD	Including WWI, WWII and Cold War archaeology.