



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

REGENT HOUSE, ALEXANDRA HOUSE, AND LAND

TO THE REAR OF THE MOORS. 2A, 2B AND

CHEQUERS COURT, STATION ROAD, THATCHAM,

NGR SU 51863 67266

FEBRUARY 2020

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CONTENTS

	Page
SUMMARY	1
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Site Location	1
1.2 Planning Background	1
1.3 Archaeological Background	1
2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION	4
3 STRATEGY	4
3.1 Research Design	4
3.2 Methodology	4
4 RESULTS	5
5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS	9
5.1 Pottery	9
5.2 Environmental Remains	11
6 DISCUSSION	12
7 ARCHIVE	12
8 BIBLIOGRAPHY	13

FIGURES AND PLATES

Figure 1. Site Location	2
Figure 2. Plan of Watched Area, and Representative Sections 03, 04, 05, and 06	6
Figure 3. Feature Sections: S.01: Ditch 04 and Pit 06; S.07: Pit 08; S.08: Pit 10; and S.09: Pit 13	7
Plate 1. Representative section of made ground (01), covering natural geology	8
Plate 2. Prehistoric pit 13, containing Middle Bronze Age pottery sherds	8
Plate 3. Ditch 04, cutting pit 06, representative of the undated features	9

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. OASIS Report Form	15
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SUMMARY

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief on the development site encompassing plots of Regent House; Alexandra House; 2A, 2B, and Chequers Court, Station Road; and the land to the rear of The Moors, in Thatcham, West Berkshire (NGR SU 51863 67266). One prehistoric pit was encountered, containing a large quantity of Middle Bronze Age pottery sherds, representing six distinct vessels. A ditch and three other pits of potential archaeological interest were uncovered but these were undated. All other observed deposits and features were modern.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located in Thatcham, and encompasses Regent House; Alexandra House; 2A, 2B, and Chequers Court, Station Road; and land to the rear of The Moors (NGR SU 51863 67266).

The site lies at approximately 77m AOD. The geology of the area comprises clay, silt and sand of the Lambeth Group, which is overlain by superficial Devensian gravel sandy and clayey deposits of the Thatcham Gravels (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

1.2 Planning Background

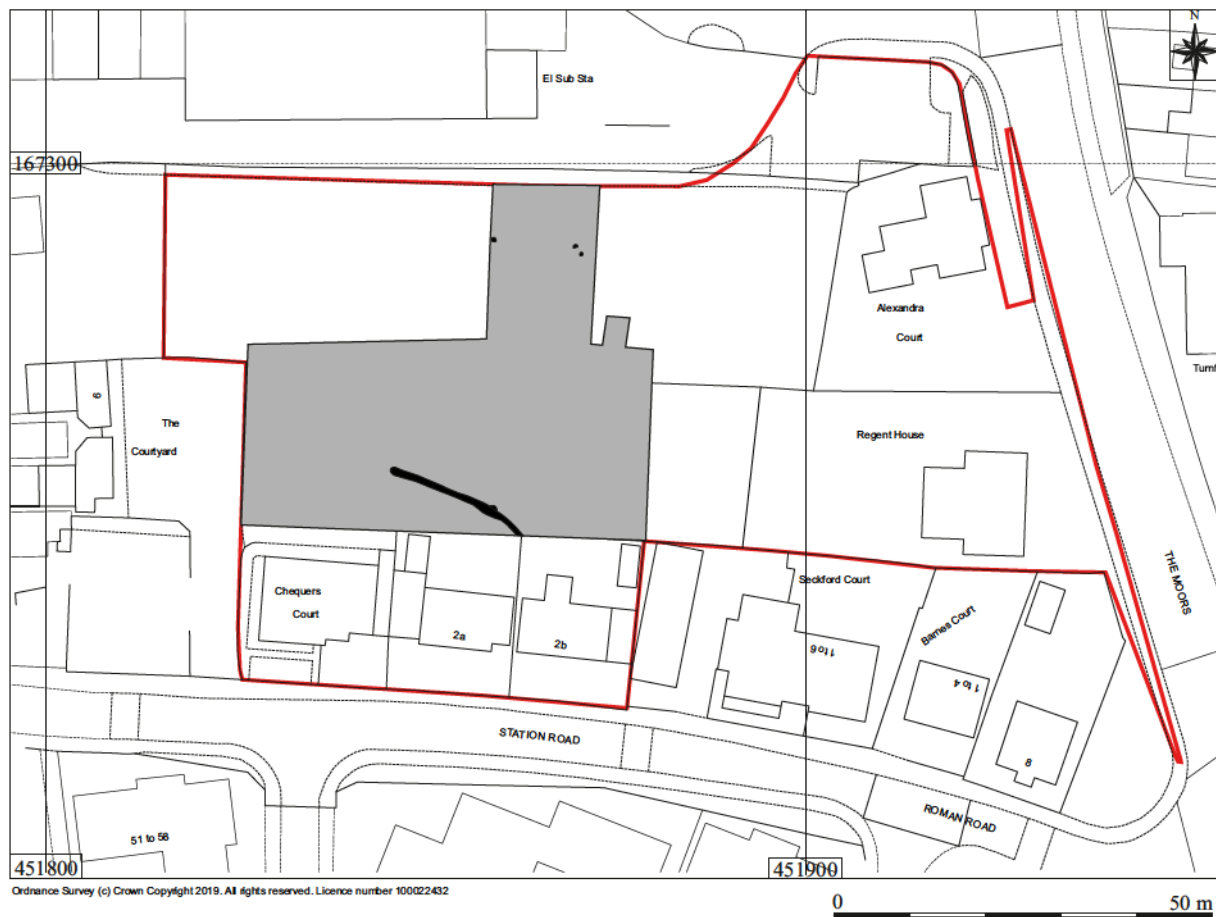
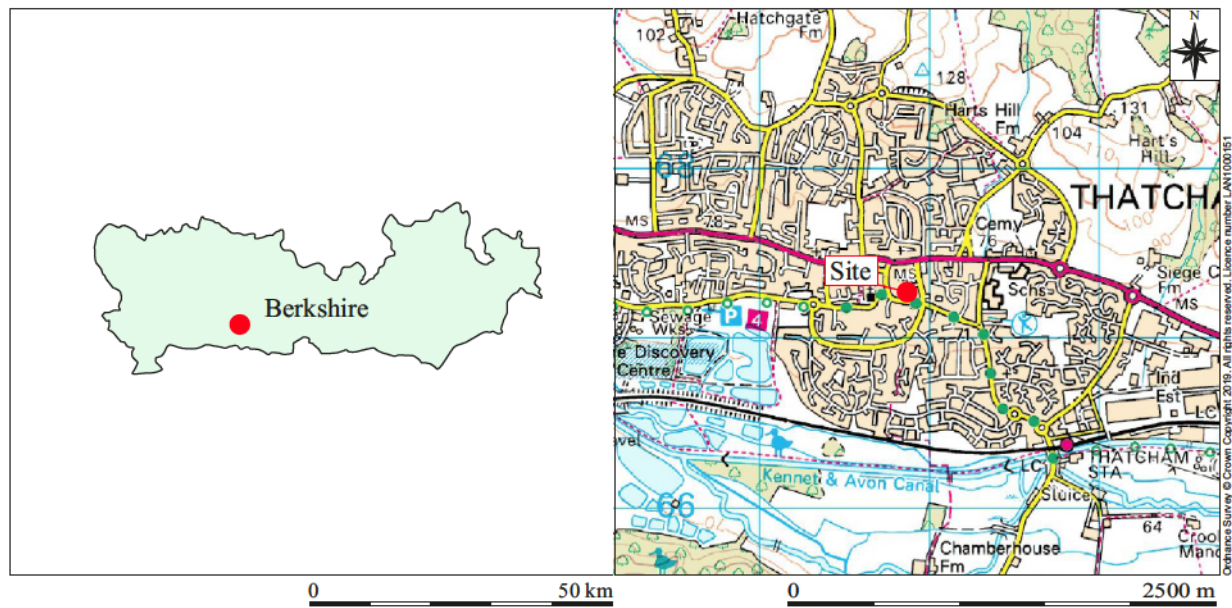
West Berkshire Council granted planning permission for the erection of 40 retirement living apartments (C3 use), and 52 retirement living plus accommodation (C2 use – assisted living/extra care), all with communal facilities and car parking.

Due to the archaeological and historical interest of the surrounding area a condition was attached to the permission requiring a watching brief to be maintained during the course of building operations or construction works on the site. This was in line with NPPF and Policy CS19 of the West Berkshire Local Plan Core Strategy (2006-2026) 2012.

1.3 Archaeological Background

A Desk-Based Assessment of the site was undertaken by CgMs in 2016. The study summarised that due to the location of the site, there was a moderate to high potential for buried remains relating to the Roman, Saxon, and Medieval periods. The potential of the site was considered to have been impacted by former gravel extraction and development, which may have resulted in truncation of any archaeological remains.

The following information has been taken from the West Berkshire Historic Environment Record (HER) and comprises known archaeological remains within 300m of the site. The results of the search are discussed in chronological order. The HER reference and OS national grid reference are also provided.



Key Site boundary Watched Area
 Archaeological features

Figure 1: Site location

Prehistoric

The southern side of the site is located within an area that has medium potential for Late Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic archaeological and environmental remains, as predicted by the Kennet Valley Predictive Mapping Project. The area of potential extends beyond the site to the southeast, while an additional area is located immediately west of the site.

There is relatively little evidence for later prehistoric remains within the area of the site; residual sherds of Bronze Age pottery were found during excavations approximately 250m southwest of the site (EWB951, MWB17730: SU 51627 67152), while possible sherds of Iron Age pottery were found 200m south during fieldwalking (MWB9409: SU 51930 67050).

Roman

The projected route of Ermin Street, the Roman road from Speen to Silchester, runs through the area from east to west, approximately 20m south of the site (SU 51849 67230). Furthermore, Roman pottery was found 'near Thatcham church', approximately 180m southwest of the site (MWB10016: SU 51649 67230), and during a fieldwalking survey 200m south (MWB9409: SU 51930 67050).

Early Medieval

Documentary evidence indicates that Thatcham may have been the location of a Saxon manor, royal estate, and minster (MWB3537, 3538: SU 51699 67250); this is considered likely to have been focused in the area of St Mary's Church, which itself may be aligned on the former Roman road. However, excavations in this area have revealed no evidence for Saxon settlement, leading to suggestions that the settlement was instead located to the east along the proposed line of the Roman road, nearer to the site (MWB3539: SU 51849 67230). Two possible Saxon ditches were recorded during excavation 220m southwest of the development site (MWB17720: SU 51646 67132); high status pottery was found in one ditch, lending support to the documentary evidence for the royal site.

Medieval

The medieval town of Thatcham was laid out in the 13th century following the creation of a borough (MWB3541: SU 51750 67400); the site is located within an area of burgrave plots to the rear of properties on The Broadway. Evidence of the medieval town includes some extant buildings, now listed, in addition to archaeological evidence recorded during excavation. Archaeological remains located near to the site include a stone lined well, a small pit, and medieval pottery 50m northwest at 48/53 The Broadway (MWB16757: SU 51778 67322); occupation layers, burnt material, and medieval pottery at 6 The Broadway (MWB3550: SU 51750 67430); features and pottery 175m west of the site (MWB16068: SU 51648 67315); and a small pit and associated pottery sherds 230m southwest (MWB17730, EWB951: SU 51627 67152).

Post-medieval

Post-medieval activity is well represented through extant buildings, many of which are listed, and documentary sources. The recorded archaeological evidence for activity is less substantial. Historic mapping indicates that immediately adjacent to the site was the location of a gas works during the 19th century (MWB21714: SU 51869 67248). Activity near to the site includes the site of a smithy, located 50m west of the

site (MWB21625: SU 51781 67259); and a row of 16th century almshouses located on The Broadway, approximately 50m northwest of the site (MWB3552: SU 51771 67311). Post-medieval pottery has also been discovered in this area during excavations (MWB16757: SU 51778 67322).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To record any archaeological remains revealed by the groundworks.

In particular:

- To identify any remains relating to the development of the historic core of Thatcham, on the fringes of which this site lies.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with West Berkshire Council Archaeological Service (WBCAS), the archaeological advisors to the West Berkshire Council.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014).

3.2 Methodology

The groundworks involved in this project included the excavation of an access ramp, and three test trenches (CBR4, CBR5, and CBR7) to facilitate the engineer's "California Bearing Ratio" evaluation of the underlying geology and its ability to support the proposed road (<https://cbrtesting.com/category/cbr-testing>). The remainder of the groundworks comprised of ground reduction, to ready the areas of the proposed road and the footings of the building. Shallow ground reduction was also necessary prior to the installation of the cement silos, though this did not exceed the depth of the made ground.

Where archaeological horizons were encountered they were cleaned by hand and excavated appropriately. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was also produced.

All spoil from these works was visually scanned, especially for finds relating to the prehistoric, Roman, and medieval periods.

4 RESULTS (Figures 2 and 3)

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts, numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material, while numbers in bold indicate structural features.

Across all of the development area, the lowest deposit encountered was a friable mid brownish orange natural silty sand layer, with very frequent small pebble inclusions (02) (Fig. 2, Sections 03 - 06; Plate 1).

Cut into the natural layer (02) was prehistoric pit 13, which was 0.68m long, approximately 0.61m wide, and 0.27m deep (Fig. 2; Fig. 3 Section 09; Plate 2). The precise original morphology of this pit was masked by a modern intrusion which cut its western edge. Pit 13 contained a large quantity of prehistoric pottery and was therefore fully excavated to maximise finds recovery; the sherds collected represented six distinct vessels (P1 to P6) from the Middle Bronze Age period (see section 5.1 Pottery). A loose to friable sandy loam (12) was present with the pottery fragments, and sample <1> was recovered for environmental analysis (see section 5.2 Environmental Remains). This fill (12) was mostly dark brown in colour, with patches of dark orange. The pottery and associated soil had the appearance of a deposit within a container (possibly a leather bag). Stratified around and above that deposit (12) was a mid greyish brown silty loam (11), which was more friable and formed the rest of the fill of pit 13.

Several other features of potential archaeological interest were observed: ditch 04, 0.43m deep, 1.18m wide, and over 20m in length, was filled by mid brown silty sand and frequent pebbles (03); pit 06, 1.14m long, over 0.62m wide, and 0.19m deep, was filled with mid orangey brown silty sand and very frequent pebbles (05); pit 08, measuring 0.47m x 0.42m, and 0.21m deep (Fig. 3, Section 07), contained a friable mid brown sandy silt loam with occasional small stones (07); and pit 10, 0.56m long, approximately 0.50m wide, and 0.16m deep (Fig. 3, Section 08), was filled by a friable mid to dark brown silty loam with frequent small stones (09). These features all appear to have silted up naturally, and no dating evidence was discernible, so these features are undated. Despite this, it is possible to conclude that ditch 04 is later than pit 06, as the former cuts the latter (Fig. 3, Section 01; Plate 3). It could not be determined whether any of these undated features relate to prehistoric pit 13.

All other observed deposits and features were modern, including plant root activity as well as numerous pits, drainage ditches, and irregular intrusions, evinced by dark fills containing abundant brick and tile fragments.

The uppermost layer across a large proportion of the site was a modern concreted black sandy silt loam made ground (01), also containing large quantities of brick and tile fragments. In the western half of the watching brief area, other modern layers were occasionally encountered, relating to recent phases of demolition and levelling.

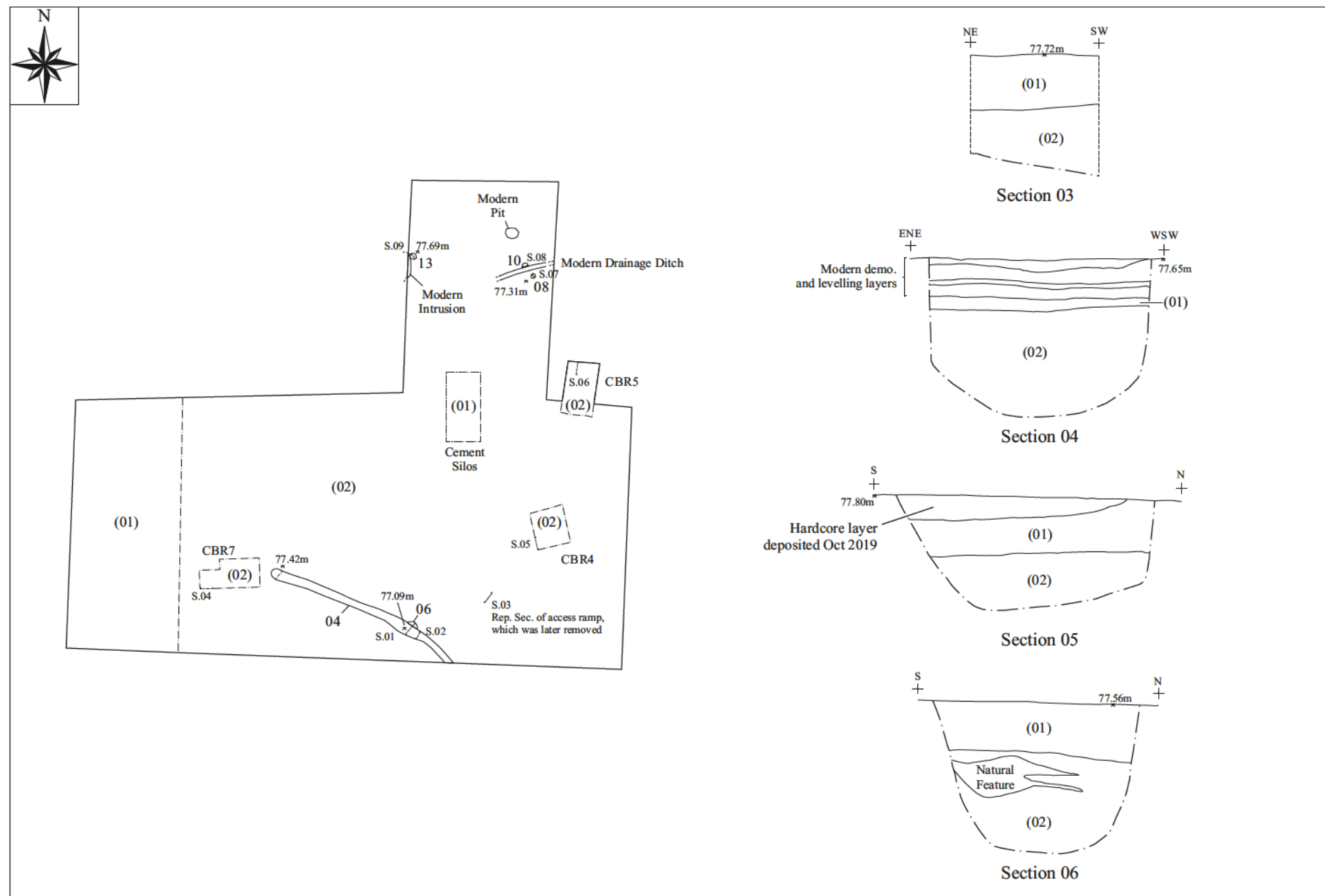
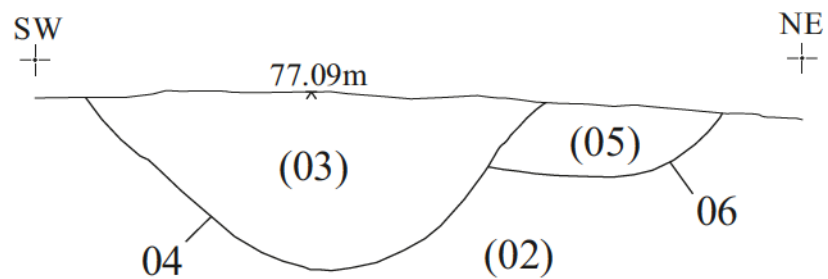
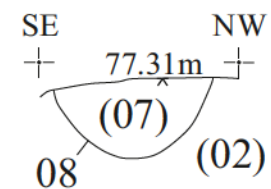


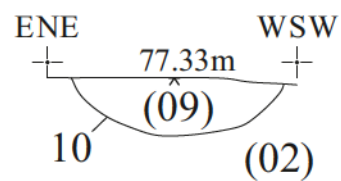
Figure 2: Plan of Watched Area,
and Representative Sections 03, 04, 05, and 06.



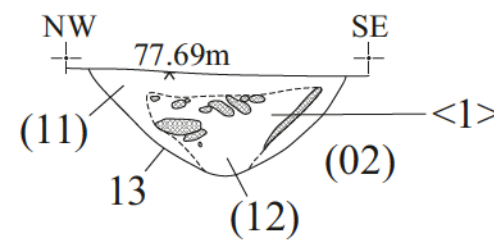
Section 01



Section 07



Section 08



● = Prehistoric Pottery

Section 09

Figure 3: Feature Sections: S.01: Ditch 04 and Pit 06; S.07: Pit 08; S.08: Pit 10; and S.09: Pit 13



Plate 1. Representative section of made ground (01), covering natural geology (02)



Plate 2. Prehistoric pit 13, containing Middle Bronze Age pottery sherds



Plate 3. Ditch 04, cutting pit 06, representative of the undated features

Reliability of Results

Weather conditions were often very wet, and this impeded the quality of the photographic record at times. Despite this, the monitored work was undertaken with excellent cooperation from site staff, ensuring that the archaeological investigation could be undertaken without any further impediment.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Pottery by Dr David Mullin

Fragments from a total of six vessels (P1 to P6), all in flint fabrics, were recovered from pit 13. They are all incomplete Deverell-Rimbury vessels, of Middle Bronze Age date.

The Pottery

P1: a total of 15 sherds (1005g) representing the upper portion of the vessel were present. Although four rim sherds survived, it was not possible to calculate the diameter of the vessel. The rim was flat-topped and angled slightly outwards. Two of the rim sherds conjoined. A possible applied boss was present on one sherd.

Fabric F1: frequent crushed flint up to 5mm. Oxidised fabric with some darker patches from bonfire firing. Wall thickness 14mm. Internal surfaces wiped, outer rough with much protruding flint.

P2: a total of 14 sherds (1173g), including several conjoining rim sherds. Upper part of the vessel present, but it was not possible to calculate the diameter. The rim is similar to that of P1, is flat-topped and slightly out-turned.

Fabric F2: frequent crushed flint up to 3mm. Oxidised surfaces with patchy reduction in the core. Wall thickness 12mm. Outer surfaces heavily wiped, inner surfaces less so.

P3: was represented by 18 wall sherds (636g), one of which had an applied boss.

Fabric F3: frequent crushed flint up to 2mm. Well fired to an orange-terracotta colour. Occasional, patchy reduction to the core. Wall thickness 10mm. Outer and inner surfaces much wiped.

P4: a total of 21 wall sherds (1917g) were present from from this vessel, none of which were decorated.

Fabric F4: moderate crushed flint up to 2mm. Oxidised inner and outer surfaces. Wall thickness 12mm. External surfaces wiped, internal surfaces rough with protruding flint and occasional smoke marks from firing.

P5: a total of 12 wall sherds (1556g), two of which also have rims present. Four conjoin to form probably two-thirds of the profile of the vessel, measuring 27cm. Three also conjoin horizontally. Four sherds carry a horizontal cordon which has been decorated with fingertip impressions. The direction of these impressions change from horizontal to vertical across the cordon. The rim is flat topped and also decorated with fingertip impressions. Between the cordon and rim on one sherd is an angled, pre-firing perforation.

Fabric F5: frequent crushed flint up to 4mm. Oxidised inner and outer surfaces with black patches on interior. Wall thickness 13mm. External surfaces smoothed, interior rough with protruding flint.

P6: A total of 50 sherds (1602g) from all parts of the vessel were present, but no complete profile could be reconstructed. The rim was flattened and decorated by fingertip impressions and a cordon 43mm below the rim was also decorated in this manner.

Fabric F6: moderate crushed flint up to 5mm. Oxidised inner and outer surfaces with some patchy reduction. Wall thickness 14mm, base thickness 18mm. Inner and outer surfaces wiped.

A further 266 crumbs and unidentifiable fragments (266g) were also present. These ultimately would have belonged to any of the six vessels described above, but it is not possible to assign them with any certainty due to their small size.

Discussion

Deverell-Rimbury vessels are a common Middle Bronze Age ceramic in southern England and are used in both burial and domestic contexts. Material of this date is

well known from the Kennet Valley from sites in Newbury, Aldermaston, Reading and elsewhere.

The sherds represent parts of vessels, but no complete profiles were present and it was not possible to calculate the proportion of the vessel represented. The only base sherds were from P6, but rims were present for P1, P2 and P5. All of the vessels had slightly different fabrics, but all were dominated by flint and were probably locally made.

At least some of the sherds appear to have been deliberately stacked in Pit 13, a practise which has been noted elsewhere, and is particularly associated with the decommissioning of round houses. This has previously been discussed by Webley (2007), who notes significant concentrations of burnt pottery located within the porch postholes at Longbridge Deverill House 3. Burnt flint and pottery were also concentrated on the south side and porch of roundhouse 1128 at Dunston Park, Thatcham, Berkshire, where up to 1.5kg of pottery was recovered from individual postholes, although much of this was of small sherd size, abraded and did not conjoin (Fitzpatrick et al 1995). Pottery, daub and burnt flint were recovered from the porch and south side of a building at Houghton Down, Hampshire (Cunliffe and Poole 2000), whilst at Broom, Bedfordshire, two pits cut into Structure 5 were filled with sherds of at least 15 vessels, much of which was freshly broken (Mortimer and McFadyen 1999). The author has also reported on material stacked within the posthole of a round house porch at Reading Girl's School (Mullin 2016).

The material from Thatcham is a significant assemblage and its treatment suggests that, although the context may be domestic, a degree of care was taken in the deposition of these sherds.

5.2 Environmental Remains *by Luke Parker and Dr Simona Denis*

A single sample of 5 litres was collected during the archaeological works, in order to further investigate the nature of deposit (12), a fill of Bronze Age pit 13.

The sample was processed through flotation and then manually sorted to recover materials. The heavy fraction of sample <1> contained two fragments of bone, weighing less than 1g, and 34 fragments of charcoal, of a combined weight of 1g. The charred material was very fragmentary, with the largest examples preserved to a maximum length of 10mm, and probably originating from twigs or small branches.

Methods

The flots were weighed and scanned using a low-power binocular microscope (x40) in order to separate out charcoal and archaeobotanical macrofossils.

Botanical macrofossil identification was undertaken using a low-power binocular microscope (x40). Botanical macrofossil identification utilised plates and guides from Martin and Barkley (2000) and Cappers et al. (2006), as well as comparison with a modern reference collection. Plant nomenclature follows Stace (1997). Cereal identification utilised the guide by Jacomet (2006). The presence of uncharred organic material was noted and the quantity estimated as a proportion of the processed flot. As no evidence for waterlogging was present any non-charred organic remains are viewed as being modern intrusions.

Results

The flot was composed of roughly 60% uncharred rootlets, alongside small quantities of modern ivy-leaved speedwell (*Veronica hederifolia*) seeds. Charred cereal grains were recovered; of the nine which were identified, six were barley (*Hordeum* sp.). Although naked barley is a cereal which can occasionally be encountered in Bronze Age contexts (Lister and Jones, 2013), it cannot here be confidently distinguished here from the hulled variety.

The remaining flot was composed of small (<2mm) fragments of charcoal. Two of these fragments could be identified as oak (*Quercus* sp.), however due to the fragmentation no further anatomical details could be discerned.

6 DISCUSSION

The earliest indication of dated activity within the watching brief area is represented by pit 13; the large quantity of pottery recovered from within the pit indicates a Middle Bronze Age date. The six vessels represented (P1 to P6) appear to have been interred deliberately perhaps in a leather bag or other container. The pit would then have been dug specifically to receive this offering or deposit of broken pottery sherds and ?token carbonised grain.

If the pit was associated with decommissioning of a round house (see Discussion in The Pottery above) then one or more must have existed in the immediate vicinity. The archaeological features nearby contained no finds and may not be contemporary, so do not provide additional insight. If the above hypothesis is acceptable a settlement of some sort existed in this area and the other features may have been part of this. However, no clear evidence for such was identified during the watching brief and it is likely to have been removed, if present, by the site's later development.

The other activity is evidenced by the undated ditch and pits. These features appear to be earlier than the modern intrusions because they have dissimilar fills, which do not contain the brick and tile fragments which are so frequent in the modern pits and drainage ditches. Pit 10 is cut by a modern drainage ditch, so is definitely earlier. The absence of dating material from these features prevents the possibility of more precise understanding of the activity at this stage.

The most recent evidence of anthropogenic activity comprises the large number of modern pits, ditches, intrusions, and deposits which were encountered during the groundworks. The most ubiquitous layer of made ground was recorded as (01); all other modern deposits and features were photographed, and recorded in plan and section where necessary.

Finally, no medieval finds or features were observed, despite the town of Thatcham's 13th century origin, and the site's relative proximity to St Mary's Church.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

Written scheme of investigation
The project report
The primary site record

Physical record

Finds
Environmental remains

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the West Berkshire Museum (Newbury).

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APPENDIX 1: OASIS REPORT FORM

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

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OASIS ID: johnmoor1-382051

Project details

Project name	Land to the Rear of The Moors, Thatcham
Short description of the project	John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief on the development site encompassing plots of Regent House; Alexandra House; 2A, 2B, and Chequers Court, Station Road; and the land to the rear of The Moors, in Thatcham, West Berkshire (NGR SU 51863 67266). One prehistoric pit was encountered, containing a large quantity of Middle Bronze Age pottery sherds, representing six distinct vessels. A ditch and three other pits of potential archaeological significance were uncovered but these were undated. All other observed deposits and features were modern.
Project dates	Start: 07-10-2019 End: 17-01-2020
Previous/future work	Yes / No
Any associated project reference codes	4123 - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	THTM 19 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	NEBYM:2019.51 - Museum accession ID
Any associated project reference codes	18/01111/FULEXT - Planning Application No.
Type of project	Research project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Residential 1 - General Residential
Monument type	PIT Middle Bronze Age
Monument type	PIT Modern
Monument type	DITCH Modern
Monument type	PIT Uncertain
Monument type	DITCH Uncertain
Significant Finds	POTTERY Middle Bronze Age
Investigation type	""Watching Brief""
Prompt	National Planning Policy Framework - NPPF

Project location

Country	England
Site location	BERKSHIRE WEST BERKSHIRE THATCHAM Regent House, Alexandra House, and Land to the Rear of the Moors. 2A, 2B and Chequers Court, Station Road, Thatcham
Postcode	RG19 4JD
Study area	1600 Square metres
Site coordinates	SU 51863 67266 51.401555455178 -1.254360594525 51 24 05 N 001 15 15 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 76.37m Max: 77.67m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	John Moore Heritage Services
Project brief originator	West Berkshire Council Archaeology Service
Project design originator	JMHS
Project director/manager	John Moore
Project supervisor	Scott Gordon
Type of sponsor/funding body	client

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	West Berkshire Museum
Physical Archive ID	2019.51
Physical Contents	"Ceramics","Environmental"
Digital Archive recipient	Archaeology Data Service
Digital Contents	"Ceramics","Environmental","Stratigraphic","other"
Digital Media available	"GIS","Images raster / digital photography","Images vector","Spreadsheets","Text"
Digital Archive notes	a digital archive is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be made available upon request (ID 4123)
Paper Archive recipient	West Berkshire Museum
Paper Archive ID	2019.51
Paper Contents	"Ceramics","Environmental","Stratigraphic","other"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Drawing","Miscellaneous Material","Photograph","Plan","Report","Section","Unpublished Text"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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