

Former H&L Site, Limborough Rd Wantage, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report



Ref: 117280.01 January 2018



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Document Information

Document title Former H&L Site, Limborough Rd, Wantage, Oxfordshire

Document subtitle Archaeological Evaluation and Mitigation

Document reference 117280.01

Client name Kings Park Leisure Ltd

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1 Limborough Rd

Wantage Oxfordshire OX12 9AJ

Site location Former H&L Site, Limborough Rd, Wantage, OX12 9AJ

County Oxfordshire

National grid reference (NGR) 439855 188210 (SU 3988 8521)

Planning authority Oxfordshire County Council

Planning reference P15/V2490/FUL

Museum name Oxfordshire Museums Service

Museum accession code OXCMS: 2017.166

WA project code 117820

Date of fieldwork 16/11 to 21/11/2017
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Quality Assurance

Issue	e number & date	Status	Author	Approved by
1	19/1/2018	For client approval	PAO	A.S. Croslett
2	29/01/2018	For issue	PAO	A.S. Coolet



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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Kings Park Leisure Ltd, to undertake an archaeological evaluation of an approximate 0.14 ha parcel of land located at the former H&L Site, Limborough Road, Wantage, Oxfordshire, OX12 9AJ, centred on National Grid Reference 439855 188210. The proposed development comprises the demolition of the existing commercial building on site and erection of a new retail unit, two office spaces, fourteen dwellings and car parking facilities. A planning application (P15/V2490/FUL) submitted to the Vale of White Horse District Council (VoWHDC), was granted, subject to conditions, requiring production of an approved Written Scheme of Investigation (Condition 15) in advance of a staged programme of archaeological evaluation and mitigation (Condition 16).

A Written Scheme of Investigation, prepared by Wessex Archaeology, was approved by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) on 4th May 2017, and the archaeological investigation, carried out in accordance with the approved Written Scheme of Investigation, signed off following site monitoring by OCC. Notwithstanding the archaeological aims and objectives (see below), this report should provide sufficient detail to allow an informed consideration by OCC, and thus recommend to VoWHDC that Conditions 15 and 16 can be discharged.

The evaluation comprised two trial trenches and two test pits (the latter originally proposed as one single trial trench), and was undertaken from the 15th to the 17th November 2017. Following on-site consultation with Hugh Coddington (County Archaeologist for Oxfordshire), excavation of an additional mitigation trench was undertaken from the 17th to the 21st November 2017.

The investigations have revealed archaeological remains of predominantly Late Roman date, including both ditches and a possible large pit. This evidence correlates well with the results of a previous evaluation adjacent to the site, and indeed it is very likely that at least one ditch can be traced across both evaluation areas. Although stratigraphic phasing for the remains was observed during both evaluations, both reports conclude that such activity was still likely to be broadly contemporaneous, with no differentiation observable in the artefact assemblages recovered.

Made ground deposits covered the entire site, and particularly to the northwest adjacent to Letcombe Brook to a substantial depth (up to 3m below ground level where investigated). It is unclear whether these deposits were infilling significant truncation in this area, or perhaps more likely were being used to raise the ground surface and extend the available footprint for previous development. As a result of these deposits, Trench 1 was abandoned and excavated as two test-pits instead, and the northern 4m+ of Trench 4 also abandoned.

A background of low-level prehistoric activity is evidenced by the struck flint, while there is sufficient chronological evidence from the pottery and metalwork to suggest that the other artefacts are predominantly of late Roman (4th century AD) date. The recovery of the two Saxon sherds highlights the potential for the continuation of this activity into the immediate post-Roman period. The metalworking debris (slag) provides evidence for small-scale iron-smithing in the vicinity, while the charred plant assemblages evidence the existence of well-preserved domestic deposits on site, with a good representation of crop-processing activities which must have been carried out in the immediate vicinity.

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Kings Park Leisure Ltd, for commissioning the archaeological evaluation, and in particular Mark Wyatt. Wessex Archaeology is also grateful for the advice of Hugh Coddington, Oxford County Archaeologist, who monitored the project for Oxfordshire County Council, and to Lawson Group for their cooperation and help on site.

The fieldwork was directed by Tom Blencowe, with the assistance of Dave Murdie and Andy Sole. This report was written by Phoebe Olsen and edited by Andy Crockett. The project was managed by Andy Crockett on behalf of Wessex Archaeology.



Former H&L Site, Limborough Road Wantage, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project and planning background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Kings Park Leisure Ltd, to undertake an archaeological evaluation of an approximate 0.14 ha parcel of land located at the former H&L Site, Limborough Road, Wantage, Oxfordshire, OX12 9AJ, centred on NGR 439855 188210 (**Fig. 1**).
- 1.1.2 The proposed development comprises the demolition of the existing commercial building on site and erection of a new retail unit, two office spaces, fourteen dwellings and car parking facilities. A planning application (P15/V2490/FUL) submitted to the Vale of White Horse District Council, was granted, subject to conditions, some of which relate to archaeological investigation.
- 1.1.3 The planning permission included the following archaeological conditions:
 - 15. Prior to any demolition and the commencement of the development a professional archaeological organisation acceptable to the Local Planning Authority shall prepare an Archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation, relating to the application site area, which shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the feature of archaeological importance (Policy HE10 of the adopted Local Plan).

16. Following the approval of the Written Scheme of Investigation referred to above and prior to any demolition on the site and the commencement of the development (other than in accordance with the agreed Written Scheme of Investigation), a staged programme of archaeological evaluation and mitigation shall be carried out by the commissioned archaeological organisation in accordance with the approved Written Scheme of Investigation. The programme of work shall include all processing, research and analysis necessary to produce an accessible and useable archive and a full report for publication which shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority.

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

- 1.1.4 All works were undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) which detailed the aims, methodologies and standards to be employed in order to undertake the evaluation (Wessex Archaeology 2017). The Oxford County Archaeologist approved the WSI, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority (LPA), prior to fieldwork commencing.
- 1.1.5 The evaluation comprised two trial trenches and two test pits (the latter originally proposed as one single trial trench), and was undertaken from the 15th to the 17th November 2017. Following on-site consultation with Hugh Coddington (County Archaeologist for



Oxfordshire), excavation of an additional mitigation trench was undertaken from 17th to the 21st November 2017.

1.2 Scope of the report

- 1.2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed description of the results of the evaluation and mitigation, to interpret the results within a local, regional or wider archaeological context and assess whether the aims of the fieldwork have been met.
- 1.2.2 The presented results will provide further information on the archaeological resource that may be impacted by the proposed development and facilitate an informed decision with regard to the requirement for, and methods of, any further archaeological mitigation.

1.3 Location, topography and geology

- 1.3.1 The evaluation area is located in the town of Wantage, Oxfordshire, which lies approximately 21.5 km south-west of Oxford and approximately 23.9 km east of Swindon. The site comprises a plot of land measuring approximately 0.14 ha, and is situated on the north-west side of Limborough Road. It is bounded by car parks to the north-east and south-west and the Letcombe Brook to the north-west.
- 1.3.2 The commercial building that occupied the south-west portion of the site was demolished prior to the archaeological evaluation.
- 1.3.3 Bedrock geology on site comprises Upper Greensand Formation calcareous sandstone and siltstone. There are also superficial deposits of Head clay, silt, sand and gravel (British Geological Survey online viewer). The topology on site slopes down to the north towards the river bank. It varies from approximately 85.9 m aOD at the north corner of the site to 87.1 m aOD at the south corner.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 A summary of the archaeological and historical background to the site is discussed below, informed by the Wantage Town Centre desk-based study (WA 1992), the previous Limborough Road evaluation report (WA 1997), and the Historic England National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE) Excavation Index.

2.2 Previous investigations

- 2.2.1 The land adjacent to the site was the subject of an archaeological evaluation by WA, carried out in May 1997, in advance of proposed redevelopment (WA 1997). The 1997 evaluation comprised twenty-three trenches located within an irregular plot of land, measuring approximately two hectares, to the north of Mill Street and between Grove Street and Letcombe Brook.
- 2.2.2 Nine of the twenty-three trenches contained archaeological features or deposits ranging from the Late Romano-British to the post-medieval period. Another two trenches contained 19th century features, probably related to the Wantage tramway.
- 2.2.3 Trenches 11 and 12 (**Figure 1**) were located close to the south-west boundary of the site, within a former John Lewis of Hungerford site, now a car park. Due to their location, the results from these trenches are of particular relevance to the current archaeological investigations.



- 2.2.4 Trench 11 contained two ditches (1102 and 1103) with artefacts of Late Romano-British date. Ditch 1102 was 0.56 m wide at its break of slope and 0.42 m deep. It cut through ditch 1103, but did not appear significantly later based on an assessment of the artefactual evidence from both features.
- 2.2.5 Ditch 1103 was also recorded within Trench 12 as ditch 1200. It was 3.7 m in width by 1 m in depth and contained three silt deposits (1201, 1202 and 1205). Another ditch (1203) within Trench 12 was 0.75 m wide by 0.9m deep and cut by ditch 1200.
- 2.2.6 In both Trenches 11 and 12, the ditch features were sealed by a soil layer containing Romano-British pottery and other artefacts including seven coins of 3rd or 4th century date.
- 2.2.7 The bulk of the 1997 evaluation's pottery assemblage was Romano-British and the majority derived from Trenches 11 and 12. Both finewares and coursewares were present. The finewares, with the exception of a single sherd of Samian ware, were colour-coated wares from the Oxfordshire production centre including bottles, beakers, bowls and mortaria vessel forms. The coursewares consisted mainly of greywares, with a small number of Black Burnished ware (BB1) and included jars and bowls/dishes vessel forms. Most of the assemblage appears to be of late Roman, 3rd-4th century, date although a few jar rims and the Samian ware suggest an early Roman presence as well.
- 2.2.8 Other artefacts within Trenches 11 and 12 include a Saxon pottery sherd (5th-8th century) within ditch 1102, sherds of post-medieval glazed earthenwares as well as two stone fragments interpreted to be either part of a small rotary quern or possibly architectural.
- 2.2.9 The ditches have been interpreted as possible agricultural enclosures. However, the pottery assemblage and coin loss in these trenches also suggest nearby domestic activity, so the ditches may represent the edge of a settlement.

2.3 Archaeological and historical context

- 2.3.1 A Romano-British settlement is known to have existed to the west of the site on the opposite bank of the Letcombe Brook. Excavations conducted in 1993-4 by Cotswold Archaeology (formerly Cotswold Archaeological Unit) just to the west of Letcombe Brook and north of Mill Street (centred on 439580 188140) revealed three buildings and a number of ditches interpreted as 'agricultural backlands' of a small town extending along a reputed Roman Road between Frilford and either terminating at the settlement or possibly continuing over the downs to *Cunetio* (Mildenhall), Wiltshire (Holbrook and Thomas 1997, 171-2). The excavated evidence suggests this settlement began in the Flavian period (69-96 AD) and continued through to the 4th century and in some form into the Early Saxon period (ibid 174).
- 2.3.2 Further evidence of Roman activity, consisting of a pit and ditch, has been found during a 2007 archaeological evaluation by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd. at 61 Mill Street, on the west side of the Letcombe Brook (*NHRE 1458518; Wallis 2007*).
- 2.3.3 Wantage was a settlement of some significance in the Anglo-Saxon period and is regarded as the probable birthplace of King Alfred (Oxford HER 11040). Enclosure earthworks were recorded by Mr Wise in 1738, possibly within the footprint of 1997 WA evaluation site (439800 188200), may represent the site of the Saxon palace. However, this is not conclusive as there are at least six conflicting possible palace locations identified (Oxford HER 11040).



- 2.3.4 The site lies in close proximity to the marketplace and approximately 340 m to the north of the medieval St Peter and St Paul's Church (Oxford HER 7228) built on the site of a Saxon church, probably a minster. Therefore, it is a potential candidate for Anglo-Saxon settlement. However, the 1997 evaluation (WA) Saxon evidence was limited and suggestive of agricultural activity on the Letcombe floodplain in this period.
- 2.3.5 Mill Street and Grove Street, to the south and east of the site respectively, are likely to have formed the core of medieval and post-medieval Wantage. There are a number of listed buildings along these roads including several of late 16th/17th century date.
- 2.3.6 Cartographic evidence suggests that the site, and the area of the adjacent 1997 evaluation, comprised fields, orchard and gardens until the later 19th century. The 1878 Ordnance Survey (OS) map shows the site formed part of a field at this time, with a gas works located to the south (approximately 175 m from the site).
- 2.3.7 In the 1960s the site was developed as part of an extensive industrial estate; most likely the origin for the substantial deposits of made ground at the site (see below). The 1968-9 OS map shows that an engineering works then occupied the site. It seems likely that the recently demolished buildings are those depicted on the 1968-9 map and so date to the 1960s. Surrounding the site, the 1968-9 OS map also shows a clothing factory adjacent to the south-west, motor engineering works to the north-east and a transport depot to the south of the site.
- 2.3.8 The 1997 redevelopment of the land around the site means it is now surrounded by late 20th century retail buildings and associated car parking facilities.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 General aims

- 3.1.1 The general aims of the evaluation, as stated in the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2017) and in compliance with the ClfA' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014a), were:
 - To provide information about the archaeological potential of the site; and
 - To inform either the scope and nature of any further archaeological work that may be required; or the formation of a mitigation strategy (to offset the impact of the development on the archaeological resource); or a management strategy.

3.2 General objectives

- 3.2.1 In order to achieve the above aims, the general objectives of the evaluation were:
 - To locate, identify and to investigate and record the presence/absence of archaeological features or deposits;
 - To confirm, where possible, the extent, date, character, relationship, condition and significance of archaeological features, artefacts and deposits within the proposed development area;
 - To inform the scope and nature of any requirements for any potential further fieldwork, whether additional watching brief, excavation or post-excavation work;
 - To enable the preservation by record of any archaeological features or deposits uncovered; and



To place any identified archaeological remains within their historical context.

3.3 Site-specific objectives

- 3.3.1 The area immediately surrounding the site was subject to an archaeological evaluation in 1997 (WA 1997). Specifically, Trenches 11 and 12 were located close to the south-west corner of the current site found two ditches of Late Romano-British date that may represent agricultural enclosures (*ibid*, 15). Therefore, a specific aim of this evaluation was to:
 - To confirm the presence/absence and extent of the archaeological features identified in Trenches 11 and 12 of the 1997 evaluation, within the existing site.

4 METHODS

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with the detailed methods set out within the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2017) and in general compliance with the standards outlined in CIfA quidance (CIfA 2014a). The methods employed are summarised below.
- 4.1.2 A mitigation trench (Trench 4) was requested by the Oxford County Archaeologist following a site visit on 16 November 2017. The additional trench was located between the existing Trenches 2 and 3 and was proposed to be 15 m in length.

4.2 Fieldwork methods

Setting-out

4.2.1 The trench locations were set out using GPS, in the approximate positions as those proposed in the WSI.

Variations

4.2.2 Trench 1 was machined as two test pits, each measuring 3 m x 2 m, and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.5 m into the substantial made ground deposits alongside Letcombe Brook. Trench 2 was shifted slightly from its proposed location in order to allow room for the demolition contractor's welfare unit, and was subsequently shortened at the western end to a length of 10.6 m following the discovering of asbestos-containing materials within the made ground. Trench 4, originally proposed to be 15 m in length, was shortened to 10.5 m due to the significant made ground deposits to the north west (**Fig. 1**).

Machine excavation

- 4.2.3 The trial trenches were excavated in level spits using a 360° excavator equipped with a toothless bucket, under the constant supervision and instruction of the monitoring archaeologist. Machine excavation proceeded until either the archaeological horizon or the natural geology was exposed.
- 4.2.4 Where necessary, the base of the trench/surface of archaeological deposits were cleaned by hand. A sample of archaeological features and deposits identified was hand-excavated, sufficient to address the aims of the evaluation.
- 4.2.5 Spoil derived from both machine stripping and hand-excavated archaeological deposits was visually scanned for the purposes of finds retrieval. Where found, artefacts were collected and bagged by context. All artefacts from excavated contexts were retained, although those from features of modern date (19th century or later) were recorded on site and not retained.



Recording

- 4.2.6 All exposed archaeological deposits and features were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's pro forma recording system. A complete drawn record of excavated features and deposits was made including both plans and sections drawn to appropriate scales (generally 1:20 or 1:50 for plans and 1:10 for sections), and tied to the Ordnance Survey (OS) National Grid. The Ordnance Datum (OD: Newlyn) heights of all principal features were calculated, and levels added to plans and section drawings.
- 4.2.7 A Leica GNSS connected to Leica's SmartNet service surveyed the location of archaeological features. All survey data is recorded in OS National Grid coordinates and heights above OD (Newlyn), as defined by OSGM15 and OSTN15, with a three-dimensional accuracy of at least 50 mm.
- 4.2.8 A full photographic record was made using digital cameras equipped with an image sensor of not less than 10 megapixels. Digital images have been subject to managed quality control and curation processes, which has embedded appropriate metadata within the image and will ensure long term accessibility of the image set.

Reinstatement

4.2.9 Trenches and test pits completed to the satisfaction of the client and the Oxford County Archaeologist were backfilled using excavated materials in the order in which they were excavated, and left level on completion. No other reinstatement or surface treatment was undertaken.

4.3 Artefactual and environmental strategies

4.3.1 Appropriate strategies for the recovery, processing and assessment of artefacts and environmental samples were in line with those detailed in the WSI (Wessex Archaeology 2017). The treatment of artefacts and environmental remains was in general accordance with: Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (CIfA 2014b) and Environmental Archaeology: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Methods, from Sampling and Recovery to Post-excavation (English Heritage 2011).

4.4 Monitoring

4.4.1 Hugh Coddington (Oxford County Archaeologist, acting on behalf of the LPA) monitored the fieldwork. Any variations to the WSI, if required to better address the project aims, were agreed in advance with both the client and the Oxford County Archaeologist.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 All three of the excavated trial trenches (but neither of the test pits) exposed archaeological features and deposits, confirming that archaeological remains are present at the site (**Fig. 1**).
- 5.1.2 The features, comprising ditches and a probable pit, represent Roman activity. There is also some evidence for a background of low-level prehistoric activity in the vicinity, as indicated by small quantities of worked flint found residually in later features. The only evidence of activity post-dating the Roman period is represented by two Saxon sherds, highlighting the potential for the continuation of this activity into the immediate post-Roman period.



5.1.3 The following section presents the results of the evaluation with archaeological features and deposits discussed by period. Detailed descriptions of individual contexts are provided in the trench summary tables (**Appendix 1**). **Figure 1** shows all archaeological features recorded within the trenches, together with the evaluation Trenches 11 and 12 from the 1997 evaluation (Wessex Archaeology 1997).

5.2 Soil sequence and natural deposits

- 5.2.1 Made ground deposits of various types were recorded in all the trenches and test pits excavated. Made ground, comprising demolition material and other refuse, was recorded to a depth of at least 1.5 m in the test pits 1A and 1B, and Trench 4 was shortened by 4.4 m as made ground deposits deeper than 3 m bgl were discovered at the north-west end. The made ground is almost certainly imported material to raise the ground level adjacent to Letcombe Brook, and increase the available footprint for development in the 1960s.
- 5.2.2 Buried topsoil was preserved under these made ground deposits in Trenches 2 and 3, recorded as dark grey silty clay loam and measuring between 0.25 and 0.34 m thick.
- 5.2.3 Subsoil is preserved in Trenches 2 and 3 below the buried topsoil and in Trench 4 directly under the made ground layer. It is recorded as mid to dark grey brown silty clay with sparse chalk inclusions and ranges from a 0.1 m thick deposit in Trench 2 to a more substantial 0.5 to 0.6 m thick layer in Trenches 3 and 4 in the south of the site.
- 5.2.4 There is evidence for a layer of alluvial origin in all three trenches, present as light to dark grey and yellow grey sandy clay mottled with white clay, and measuring between 0.15 and 0.4 m thickness. In Trenches 3 and 4 this layer mentioned above overlays a thin 0.1 m thick deposit of dark brown and grey brown fine grained silty clay (**Plate 3**). This layer is present as an even spread overlying the natural. Due to the nature of the material and the location of the deposit so close to the Letcombe Brook it may be the remains of a decayed reed and sedge bed that has subsequently been covered by the alluvial deposit described above.
- 5.2.5 Some discussion regarding this deposit was carried out on site during the site monitoring meeting. Despite the apparent alluvial nature of the deposit, the current Letcombe Brook flows some 3m+ below this deposit, and it is incongruous to consider this could therefore be lain down through overbank flood events. This would therefore suggest that if the deposit is associated with Letcombe Brook, that the brook must have flowed at a significantly higher level during the later prehistoric/ Romano-British period, and has subsequently eroded the much deeper channel visible today. A single piece of prehistoric pottery was recovered from this layer in Trench 4 (404) which may be Iron Age in date.
- 5.2.6 The underlying natural was recorded at a depth of between 1.04 and 1.3 m bgl. In Trench 3 the natural is present as heavily degraded chalk while in Trenches 2 and 4 it was light grey fine silty clay with green hue.

5.3 Archaeological deposits

- 5.3.1 A total of four ditches and one probable pit (though also potentially a ditch) were revealed in the evaluation trenches, all of which have been dated to the late Roman period by the artefactual evidence.
- 5.3.2 Trench 2 revealed a single Roman ditch, **206**, which contained a single secondary fill derived from gradual silting. This evidence, in conjunction with its south-west/north-east alignment perpendicular to the Letcombe Brook some 23 m to the north-west, suggests that



- it performed some form of property boundary and/or water management function. It was dated to the Roman period by fragments of samian ware.
- 5.3.3 Trench 3 contained two intercutting ditches, **304** and **311**, with the latter cutting the former. Ditch **304** is the more substantial of the two, reaching a depth of 1.2 m below the base of the trench (**Plates 1 and 2**). Pottery retrieved form the secondary fill gives it a Roman date, from which a smithing hearth bottom was also recovered. Much like ditch **208** it is aligned perpendicular to the Letcombe Brook, and may have performed some form of property boundary and/or water management function.
- 5.3.4 Ditch **311** cuts across **304** at an oblique angle aligned approximately north/south, was also dated to the Roman period by pottery recovered, and had domestic fowl represented in the animal bone assemblage from its secondary fill. It is very likely that this equates to Ditch 1200/ Ditch 1103 from Trenches 12 and 11 respectively in the 1997 evaluation, but was not observed within the additional mitigation Trench 4 to the north east.
- 5.3.5 Trench 4 clipped what appears to be a pit (406) in the south-east end of the trench and part of the length of a large ditch (408). The pit was not fully exposed in plan but was 0.9 m in depth, cutting through the alluvial layer 403 and the underlying decayed reed bed layer 404 (Plate 3). The pit is dated to the late Roman period but also contained a single sherd of Saxon pottery which, as discussed below (Section 6.4.7) may indicate this feature is of an overall later date despite the presence of Roman pottery. The pit also contained half a copper alloy bracelet likely dating to the Late Roman period.
- 5.3.6 Ditch **408** initially appeared as a narrow curving gully but following excavation it was discovered that what had been interpreted as the ditch edge in plan was in fact a layer of redeposited natural in the centre of a very large ditch (**Plate 4**). Due to the substantial depth of the ditch, it was not possible to expose the full depth of the feature, and as with pit 406, this ditch cuts the alluvial layer **404**.
- 5.3.7 The alluvial layer in Trench 4, immediately to the north-east of pit **406**, appears to have a feature cut into the top of it (**Plate 3**). It is not clear whether this is in fact a feature or if it is a natural undulation in the alluvial layer as the 'fill' of the dip does not present as different from the layer above (**407**).

6 ARTEFACTUAL EVIDENCE

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 Artefacts, totalling approximately 5 kg, were recovered from three of the excavated trenches. The greatest quantities came from Trenches 3 and 4, with a much smaller amount from Trench 2. The assemblage is predominantly of Late Roman date (in this instance, probably 4th century AD), although very small quantities of residual prehistoric finds and two sherds of Saxon pottery were also found.
- 6.1.2 All the finds have been cleaned and quantified (number of pieces/weight in grammes), by material type within each context. The assemblage has also been scanned to establish the range of types present, their condition and date range. This information is summarised in **Table 1**.
- 6.1.3 Although a relatively wide range of material types were recovered, only the pottery and animal bone occur in any quantity (**Table 1**). Overall, the assemblage survives in variable condition. The animal bone, for example, is highly fragmented, with both fresh and highly eroded pieces present, often within the same context. The Roman pottery sherds are large



(mean weight 14.6g), with almost no edge damage or surface erosion, but the two prehistoric pieces and the fired clay are rolled and very abraded.

Table 1 Finds by material type (number of pieces/weight in grammes)

	Animal bone	Pottery	Metals	Other Materials	Total	
Context	No/Wt	No/Wt	No/Wt	No/Wt	No/Wt	
207	16/230	5/18 Roman		1/ 4 burnt flint	22/252	
306	140/1241	1/ 4 prehistoric 46/383 Roman	1/6 iron 1/162 slag	1/20 burnt flint 3/21 flint 1/ 1 marine shell 1/ 5 shale	195/1843	
310	70/47	13/67 Roman	13/67 Roman 4/3 iron 2/2 burnt flint 7/1 fired clay 2/1 flint			
312	1/13				1/13	
Trench 3 unstratified	4/76	12/204 Roman 1/ 2 Saxon	1/9 slag		18/291	
402	3/85	4/60 Roman			7/145	
404		1/1 prehistoric			1/1	
407	37/1265	23/778 Roman		1/35 marine shell	61/2078	
409			1/6 copper alloy		1/6	
410	10/94	18/231 Roman 1/ 6 Saxon		1/21 stone	30/352	
Unstratified		2/58 Roman			2/58	
Total	281/3051	2/5 prehistoric 123/1799 Roman 2/8 Saxon	1/6 copper alloy 5/9 iron 8/173 slag	4/26 burnt flint 7/1 fired clay 5/22 flint 1/ 5 shale 2/36 marine shell 1/21 stone	442/5162	

6.2 Flint

6.2.1 The five flint flakes (**Table 1**) are made from a good quality, dark grey/black material and they survive in relatively fresh condition. One of the pieces (layer **306** in ditch **304**) has some suggestion of retouch but it is unfortunately damaged in the crucial area. All are likely to be of prehistoric date, but they are not sufficiently diagnostic to be dated any more accurately, and all are likely to be residual in the contexts in which they were found.

6.3 Burnt Flint

6.3.1 This material is commonly interpreted as indicative of prehistoric activity. It could, however, be of any date, as its burning was probably an accidental consequence of some other form of agricultural, industrial or domestic burning or heating process, and it need not be contemporary with the features from which it was recovered. Only small quantities were found on this site (**Table 1**).

6.4 Pottery

6.4.1 Pottery was the most common material type (**Table 1**) and has provided the primary dating evidence for the site. As part of this assessment, the pottery from each context was subdivided into broad fabric types and quantified by the number and weight of the pieces present (**Table 2**). Vessel forms were described with reference to published corpora (e.g. Young 1977; Seager Smith and Davis 1993) where appropriate, and quantified by the number of examples. Spot-dates used to inform the stratigraphic phasing, were assigned



to each fabric group and, in combination with evidence from other material types, to the context as a whole.

Table 2 Pottery totals by ware type (number of pieces/weight in grammes)

Ware	No.	Wt.
Prehistoric:		
Shell-tempered ware	2	5
Romano-British:		
Central Gaulish samian	3	3
Greyware	60	1001
Oxon red slipped ware	38	322
Grog-tempered ware	8	248
South-east Dorset Black Burnished ware	6	64
Oxon red slipped ware mortaria	4	130
Shell-tempered ware	2	11
Oxon white-slipped red ware mortaria	1	15
Overwey/Tilford type ware	1	5
subtotal:	123	1799
Saxon:		
Fine sand & organics tempered	2	8

Prehistoric

6.4.2 The two scraps of prehistoric pottery (layer **306** in ditch **304** and layer **404**) are both made in shell-tempered fabrics. Both are tiny, abraded body sherds and neither can be more closely dated, although they would not be out of place in an Iron Age assemblage from this area (e.g. DeRoche 1978, 41; Lambrick 1979, 35).

Romano-British

- 6.4.3 Among the Roman sherds, imported wares are limited to the three scraps of samian, all from ditch **206** and too small to be assigned to particular forms. The paucity of these wares and absence of other imports such as amphora and mortaria need not be of any significance in an assemblage of this size.
- Other fabrics brought in from outside the local area include the Black Burnished wares, made in the Wareham/Poole Harbour region of Dorset and the single Overwey/Tilford type sherd from the Alice Holt industry on the Surrey/Hampshire borders. This piece, from the shoulder of a rilled jar (layer 306 in ditch 304), is likely to be of 4th century AD date, while three bead and flanged bowl/dish rim fragments (Trench 3 unstratified, layer 306 in ditch 304 and 410 in ditch 408; Seager Smith and Davies 1993, 233, type 25) indicate that these wares are also of late Roman date. The two Roman shell-tempered sherds, also from these two features, fall within the East Midlands shell-tempered tradition, made at sites such as Harrold, Bedfordshire (Brown 1994) and perhaps by itinerant potters. These wares are also unlikely to have reached the area much before the middle of the 4th century AD (Keeley 1986, 163).
- 6.4.5 The remainder of the assemblage consists of fabrics and forms produced by the Oxfordshire industry. These include 'tablewares' made in the red slipped (bowls) and brown colour-coated (beaker and jug forms) ware fabrics, as well as more utilitarian vessels in the highly variable reduced sandy fabrics made by this industry, grog-tempered storage jars and



mortaria in both the red and white slipped ware fabrics. Most of the rims in the reduced sandy fabrics are broken at or above the neck shoulder junction, hampering more precise identification of form (and thus date), but most derive from jar or jar/bowl forms. Single rims from a narrow-mouthed jar, bottle or flagon (Young 1977, 209, types R12-15) and a carinated bowl (*ibid*, 224, type R56 or 57) came from layer **306** in ditch **304** and **410** in ditch **408** respectively. The only other form, a shallow plain rimmed dish with convex walls (ditch **311**; variant of Young 1977, 222, type R53), can be paralleled at Porchester Castle in groups post-dating AD 345 (Fulford 1975, 344, fig.187) and it is possible that it continued into the 5th century AD (M. Lyne pers. comm.).

The more diagnostic and some unusual pieces present among the Oxfordshire mortaria and tablewares provide further evidence that this is assemblage is predominantly of later 4th century AD date. These include a mortaria (Young 1977, 174, type C100) from **410** in ditch **408** as well as a rouletted red-slipped bowl rim (*ibid*, 152, type R75; AD 325-400) and a brown colour-coated ware jug rim from pit **406**. This latter form is unparalleled in Young's type series, but has a straight neck with a flattened, out-turned rim and a small strap handle attached underneath. Stamped decoration, including a rosette stamp at the base of handle, indicates that this vessel is of post mid-4th century date (*ibid*, 132).

Saxon

6.4.7 These two sherds are of early to middle Saxon date and are both unoxidised, plain but carefully burnished, bodies in fine, handmade, sand and organic-tempered fabrics. Similar fabrics are already known from the immediate vicinity (e.g. Timby 1996, 136; Wessex Archaeology 1993, 18; 1997, 11) and more widely in the area, although from sites such as Dorchester-on-Thames (Frere 1962) and Shakenoak (Berisfield 1972, 57), it seems that organic-tempered fabrics did not appear until the 6th century AD. Timby (1996, 137) suggests that the 5th century 'gap' might have been filled by the continued use of the later Roman wares. The presence of one our sherds in layer 410 in ditch 408, among others of late Roman date, could therefore be of considerable significance; the second sherd was found unstratified in Trench 3 (Table 1).

6.5 Animal bone

6.5.1 The animal bone assemblage was highly fragmented with few complete bones surviving. However, the vast majority are well-preserved with comparatively little surface erosion, although a few weathered and/or gnawed pieces are present, often occurring alongside others in good condition in the same context. Associated pottery indicates that the majority are likely to be of Roman date. Although the assemblage has not yet been recorded in detail, it is apparent that, as at other nearly sites (Wessex Archaeology 1993, 21; Maltby 1996), it is dominated by cattle with small quantities of sheep/goat and a few pig bones; one bird vertebrae, probably from a domestic fowl, was also recovered (ditch 311).

6.6 Metalwork

- Metal finds occurred in only very small numbers (**Table 1**). Approximately half a copper alloy bracelet was found in layer **409** in ditch **408**. This was made from a strip of metal with a D-shaped cross-section, tapering slightly towards a hooked terminal. It has traces of gilding and the outer face is decorated, but object is currently too dirty and corroded to specify exactly how and which motifs used. It is likely to belong within the 4th century AD, when the fashion for wearing bracelets was at its height (Cool 2010, 297). An internal diameter of 55 mm suggests that it was worn by a woman or girl.
- 6.6.2 The iron objects consist of four dome-headed hobnails (ditch **311**) and part of a flat strip or blade 20 mm wide from layer **306** in ditch **304**. This was broken at both ends during



excavation and cannot now be identified. The metalworking debris (slag) came from Trench 3 (**Table 1**) and provides evidence for small-scale iron smithing in the vicinity, the piece from layer **306** in ditch **304** being a complete, if unusually small (60 x 50 x 35 mm), smithing hearth bottom.

6.7 Other finds

- 6.7.1 All the other material types occurred in very small amounts (**Table 1**). The earliest items are the five prehistoric struck flint flakes although none are sufficiently diagnostic to be more closely dated. Burnt flint too is commonly interpreted as indicative of prehistoric activity, but as this material is intrinsically undatable and its burning was probably an accidental consequence of some other form of agricultural, industrial or domestic burning or heating process, it could belong to any period.
- 6.7.2 The remaining items are likely to be of Roman date. The shale (layer **306** in ditch **304**) is from a bracelet (internal diameter 80 mm) with a plain, oval cross-section. Shale objects were commonly traded from their source area on the south Dorset coast, perhaps travelling together with Black Burnished ware pottery. The oyster shell fragments (layer **306** in ditch **304** pit **406**) probably represent food remains and indicate trade with coastal zones, probably via the river Thames, while the stone (Old Red Sandstone; layer **410** in ditch **408**) is likely to be from a polygonal roof tile. The fired clay fragments (ditch **311**) are too small to be diagnostic but are also likely to be of structural origin (e.g. wall daub or oven/hearth lining).

6.8 Conservation

6.8.1 No immediate conservation requirements were noted in the field. During assessment, the shale bracelet fragment, the iron and copper alloy objects were identified as being of unstable material types potentially in need of conservation treatment. All these items are stored with supportive packaging and their condition is frequently monitored. Prior to recovery, the shale had dried out and reached a state of natural equilibrium; the metalwork is stored with a desiccant (silica gel) to ensure a dry environment below 35% relative humidity. X-radiography of these items, to provide a basic record and as an aid to identification has not yet been undertaken.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Three bulk samples were processed and assessed for the presence of environmental evidence.

7.2 Aims and Methods

- 7.2.1 The purpose of this assessment is the evaluation of the quality of environmental remains preserved at the site and the potential for further analysis to address specific site archaeological issues and to provide archaeobotanical data valuable for wider research frameworks.
- 7.2.2 The size of the samples varied between 35 and 15 litres. The bulk samples were pro-cessed by standard flotation methods; the flot retained on a 0.25 mm mesh, residues fractionated into 5.6 mm and 1 mm fractions and dried. The coarse fractions (>5.6 mm) were sorted, weighed and discarded. The flots were scanned using a stereo incident light microscopy at magnifications of up to x40 using a Leica MS5 microscope. Different bioturbation indicators were considered, including the percentage of roots, the abundance of modern seeds and



the presence of mycorrhizal fungi sclerotia (e.g. Cenococcum geophilum) and animal remains, such as earthworm eggs and insects, which would not be preserved unless anoxic conditions prevailed on site. The preservation and nature of the charred plant and wood charcoal remains, as well as the presence/absence of other environmental re-mains such as molluscs and animal bone is recorded in **Appendix 2**.

7.2.3 Preliminary identifications of dominant or important taxa are noted below, following the nomenclature of Stace (1997) for wild plants, and traditional nomenclature, as provided by Zohary and Hopf (2000, Tables 3, page 28 and 5, page 65), for cereals. Abundance of remains is qualitatively quantified (A*** = exceptional, A** = 100+, A* = 30-99, A = >10, B = 9-5, C = <5) as an estimation of the minimum number of individuals and not the number of remains per taxa.

7.3 Results

7.3.1 The flots were generally small but there were very low numbers of roots and modern seeds that may be indicative of very little stratigraphic movement and the possibility of contamination by later intrusive elements. Charred plant remains were relatively well preserved and abundant in the samples from the ditches, but rarer and poorly preserved in the sample from the layer. The assemblages included the remains of cereal grains and wild plant seeds, being dominated by hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare* var. *vulgare*) and comprised other minor taxa such as wheat (*Triticum* sp.), possibly field madder (*Sherardia arvensis*?), grasses (Poaceae, including *Lolium/Festuca*, *Poa/Phleum*, *Avena* sp.), vetches (Vicieae), clover/medick (Trifolieae), plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), goosefoot (Chenopodiaceae), composites (Asteraceae) and bedstraw (*Galium* sp.).

8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Summary

- 8.1.1 The investigations have revealed archaeological remains of predominantly Late Roman date, including both ditches and a possible large pit. This evidence correlates well with the results of a previous evaluation adjacent to the site, and indeed it is very likely that at least one ditch can be traced across both evaluation areas. Although stratigraphic phasing for the remains was observed during both evaluations, both reports conclude that such was still likely to be broadly contemporaneous activity, with no differentiation observable in the artefact assemblages recovered.
- 8.1.2 No items of particular intrinsic interest were found and only pottery and animal bone occur in any quantity. The very small amounts of the other material types severely restricts their potential for further analysis, but all the artefacts survive in relatively good condition with comparatively little surface erosion or edge damage, highlighting the existence of reasonable preservation conditions across the site.
- 8.1.3 The pottery has already been recorded to a fairly detailed level conforming to minimum standards (e.g. PCRG, SGRP, and MPRG 2016) and no further analysis is proposed at this stage. Should publication be required, the animal bone will require additional specialist recording and reporting to provide more detailed identification of species, anatomical elements, pathology etc. while the copper alloy bracelet should be further cleaned by a conservator to determine the precise nature and affinities of its decoration, and its description should then be augmented. No additional recording or analysis is proposed for any of the other material types at this stage, and given the nature and fragmentary state of the iron and shale objects, no additional conservation treatment is recommended.



- 8.1.4 The analysis of the charred plant assemblages has little potential per se, but they evidence the existence of well-preserved domestic deposits on site, with a good representation of crop-processing activities which must have been carried out in the immediate vicinity.
- 8.1.5 A background of low-level prehistoric activity is evidenced by the struck flint, while there is sufficient chronological evidence from the pottery and metalwork to suggest that the other artefacts are predominantly of late Roman (4th century AD) date. The recovery of the two Saxon sherds highlights the potential for the continuation of this activity into the immediate post-Roman period. This transition is generally very difficult to recognise archaeologically (Fulford 2014, 177-8) as diagnostic artefacts of 5th century date are extremely scarce and pieces from the two periods rarely occur in the same contexts.
- 8.1.6 The basal deposit of potential alluvial origin is of note, as it may suggest that the Letcombe Brook formerly flowed at a much higher level, and has since cut down a much deeper (3m+) channel to form its present-day course. The substantial deposits of made ground encountered, particularly adjacent to Letcombe Brook, almost certainly originate from the 1960s, and represent deliberate levelling to increase the development footprint for the recently demolished engineering works. It is understood that because of the significant depth of this material, it will likely be left *in situ* prior to capping and redevelopment.

9 ARCHIVE STORAGE AND CURATION

9.1 Museum

9.1.1 The archive resulting from the evaluation is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Salisbury. Oxfordshire Museums Service has agreed in principle to accept the archive on completion of the project, under the accession code **OXCMS: 2017.166**. Deposition of any finds with the museum will only be carried out with the full written agreement of the landowner to transfer title of all finds to the museum.

9.2 Preparation of the archive

- 9.2.1 The archive, which includes paper records, graphics, artefacts, ecofacts and digital data, will be prepared following the standard conditions for the acceptance of excavated archaeological material by Oxfordshire Museums Service, and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1995; CIfA 2014c; Brown 2011; ADS 2013).
- 9.2.2 All archive elements are marked with the **site/accession code**, and a full index will be prepared. The physical archive currently comprises the following:
 - 01 cardboard boxes or airtight plastic boxes of artefacts and ecofacts, ordered by material type;
 - 01 files/document cases of paper records and A3/A4 graphics;

9.3 Selection policy

9.3.1 Wessex Archaeology follows national guidelines on selection and retention (SMA 1993; Brown 2011, section 4). In accordance with these, and any specific guidance prepared by the museum, a process of selection and retention will be followed so that only those artefacts or ecofacts that are considered to have potential for future study will be retained. The selection policy will be agreed with the museum, and is fully documented in the project archive.



9.3.2 In the case of this assemblage, the items currently considered to be of low research value and thus recommended for dispersal once this report has been accepted comprise the burnt flint, marine shell, fired clay and stone.

9.4 Security copy

9.4.1 In line with current best practice (eg, Brown 2011), on completion of the project a security copy of the written records will be prepared, in the form of a digital PDF/A file. PDF/A is an ISO-standardised version of the Portable Document Format (PDF) designed for the digital preservation of electronic documents through omission of features ill-suited to long-term archiving.

9.5 OASIS

9.5.1 An OASIS online record (http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main) has been initiated, with key fields and a .pdf version of the final report submitted. Subject to any contractual requirements on confidentiality, copies of the OASIS record will be integrated into the relevant local and national records and published through the Archaeology Data Service ArchSearch catalogue.

10 COPYRIGHT

10.1 Archive and report copyright

- 10.1.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative/digital archive relating to the project will be retained by Wessex Archaeology under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act* 1988 with all rights reserved. The client will be licenced to use each report for the purposes that it was produced in relation to the project as described in the specification. The museum, however, will be granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such use conforms to the *Copyright and Related Rights Regulations* 2003. In some instances, certain regional museums may require absolute transfer of copyright, rather than a licence; this should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
- 10.1.2 Information relating to the project will be deposited with the Historic Environment Record (HER) where it can be freely copied without reference to Wessex Archaeology for the purposes of archaeological research or development control within the planning process.

10.2 Third party data copyright

10.2.1 This document and the project archive may contain material that is non-Wessex Archaeology copyright (eg, Ordnance Survey, British Geological Survey, Crown Copyright), or the intellectual property of third parties, which Wessex Archaeology are able to provide for limited reproduction under the terms of our own copyright licences, but for which copyright itself is non-transferable by Wessex Archaeology. Users remain bound by the conditions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with regard to multiple copying and electronic dissemination of such material.



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11 APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix 1:Trench summaries

NGR coordinates and OD heights taken at centre of each trench; depth bgl = below ground level

7	Trench 1	3 m x 2 m	3 m x 2 m NGR 1. 439843.72 188215.91			
		(x 2)		NGR 2. 439851.35 188219.65	85.52 m OD	
		Interpretation Fill of				
(Context	Interpretation	Fill of	Description	Depth bgl (m)	

Trench 2	10.6 m x 2 m		NGR 439862.32 188211.5	1.3 m OD	
Context	Interpretation Fill of		Description	Depth bgl (m)	
201	Made Ground		Red brick, concrete, CBM, glass, plastic, iron etc. Demolition material	0.00-0.8	
202	Buried topsoil		Dark grey silty clay loam.	0.8-1.05	
203	Buried subsoil		Dark grey silty clay with rare subangular/flat sandstone flagstones	1.05-1.15	
204	Alluvial fill		Dark grey sandy clay mottled with white clay	1.15-1.3	
205	Natural		Light grey/white sandy clay, marbled.	1.3+	
206	Ditch		Aligned SW-NE. Linear ditch with concave base and gently sloping irregular sides. 2m+ long, 1.2 m wide, 0.46 m deep		
207	Secondary fill	206	Dark grey silty clay		

Trench 3	15 m x 2 m		NGR 439850.57	85.36 m OD	
Context	Interpretation	Fill of	Description	Depth bgl (m)	
301	Made Ground		Rubble debris deposit	0.00-0.2	
302	Buried soil		Grey brown silty clay with rare charcoal flecking, very rare burnt clay/CBM	0.2-0.54	
303	Natural		Very degraded chalk to stoney chalk	1.04+	
304	Ditch		Aligned nnw-sse. Linear with flat base and straight, moderately sloping sides. 15m+ long, 2m wide, 1.2m deep.		
305	Primary fill	304	White chalk (dirty) with Fe staining from water		
306	Secondary fill	304	Grey brown silty clay		
307	Layer		Grey brown silty clay with sparse chalk inclusions	0.54-1.04	
308	Layer		Light grey fine sandy marl clay. Potentially a flood deposit	1.10-1.5	
309	Buried soil		Dark brown fine grained silty clay. Possible an ancient land surface or decayed sedge and reed bed.		
310	Primary fill	311	Dark grey brown silty clay		
311	Ditch		Aligned n-s. Linear round base with steep regular sides. 1.14m long, 0.48 wide and 0.46 deep. Cuts 312		
312	Secondary fill	313	Mid grey brown silty clay.		
313	Ditch		Aligned n-s. Linear round base with steep regular sides. 0.5m long, 0.34 wide and 0.26 deep. Cuts 308. [same as 304]		



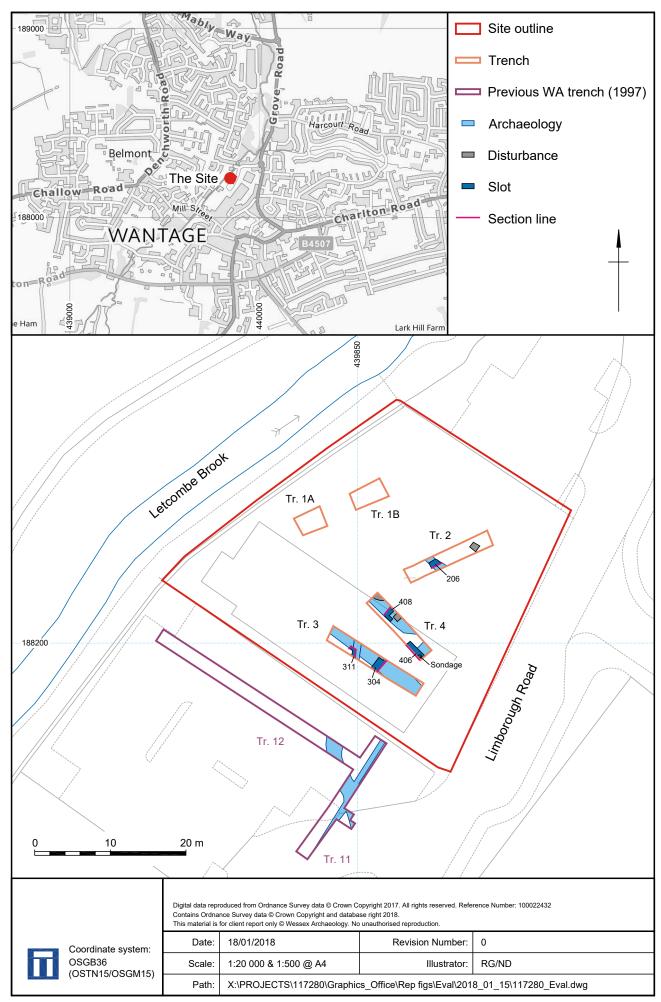
Trench 4	10.5 m x 2 m		NGR 439854.67 188203.36	85.23 m OD	
Context	Interpretation	Fill of	Description	Depth bgl (m)	
401	Made Ground		Red brick, concrete, CBM, glass, plastic, iron etc. Demolition material	0.00-0.3	
402	Buried soil		Dark grey brown silty clay loam. Possibly likely derived from former top/subsoil	0.3-0.9	
403	Redeposited natural		Re deposited weathered natural. Light yellow grey friable coarse sandy clay	0.9-1.2	
404	Layer		Overspill/Cess. Very dark brown compact clay, charcoal flecking	1.2-1.3	
405	Natural		Light grey fine silty clay with green hue	1.3+	
406	Pit				
407	Secondary fill	406	Dark grey brown silty clay		
408	Ditch		Aligned NW-SE. moderately sloping sides.		
409	Backfill	408	Ditch backfill, similar to 403. Mottled black and white silty clay and chalk		
410	Secondary fill	408	Grey brown silty clay		



11.2 Appendix 2: Environmental Data

Feature	Context	Sample	Vol (L)	Flot (ml)	Bioturbation proxies	Grain	Chaff	Cereal Notes	Charred Other	Charred Other Notes	Charcoal >4/2mm	Charcoal	Other	Comments (preservation)
311	310	1	35	20	5%, A	A	-	Hordeum vulgare var. vulgare, Triticum sp., Triticeae	С	Sherardia arvensis?, indet. seeds	0.5ml	Mature	Moll-t (A***)	Fair
304	306	2	36	25	1%, A	A*	-	Hordeum vulgare var. vulgare, Triticum sp., Triticeae	A*	Poaceae (Lolium/Festuca, Poa/Phleum, Avena sp.), Vicieae, Chenopodiaceae, Asteraceae, Trifolieae, Plantago lanceolata, Galium sp., indet seed	1ml	Mature	Moll-t (A***), Moll-f	Good
-	404	3	16	15	<1%	С		Triticum sp., Triticeae	-	-	Trace	Mature	Moll-t (A***)	Poor

Key: A^{***} = exceptional, A^{**} = 100+, A^{*} = 30-99, A = >10, B = 9-5, C = <5; Bioturbation proxies: Roots (%), Uncharred seeds (scale of abundance), Moll-t = terrestrial molluscs



Site and trench locations Figure 1



Plate 1: Trench 03 from the south-west



Plate 2: North-west facing section of pit 406 and layers 403 and 404

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Plate 3: Ditch 408 and layer 404 view from the north-east



Plate 4: Plan of pit 408 viewed form the south-east

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