

**LAND AT THE FORMER FITZHARRIS ARMS PUBLIC HOUSE,
THORNHILL WALK,
ABINGDON,
OXFORDSHIRE.**

NGR: SU 4927 9803

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Quality Assurance

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**Land at the former Fitzharris Arms Public House, Thornhill Walk, Abingdon, Oxfordshire:
Archaeological Evaluation**

SUMMARY

On the 6th May 2011 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological evaluation on land at the former Fitzharris Arms Public House, Thornhill Walk, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 4927 9803). The project was commissioned by Caldecotte Consultants.

The project comprised the excavation and recording of a single evaluation trench within the footprint of a proposed new development (**Planning Reference Number: ABG/16284/3**).

The archaeological works revealed relatively well preserved and significant archaeological deposits, which included a cut feature associated with a large expanse of fill, a possible stone surface/bedding layer or rubble spread and numerous other soil and stone deposits. Limited investigation of the features within the trench indicated multiple phases of activity and a moderate to high degree of complexity.

The recovered pottery assemblage suggested that the archaeological deposits were likely to derive from the 2nd century AD (Roman), although the features also contained residual early Iron Age pottery sherds. Other recovered artefacts included bone fragments, oyster shell, iron nails, CBM and industrial waste (slag).

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Archaeology

For the purpose of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

Medieval

The period between the Norman Conquest (AD 1066) and *circa* AD 1500.

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level. (AOD Above Ordnance Datum)

OS

Ordnance Survey

Post-medieval

The period between *circa* AD 1500 and AD 1900.

Prehistoric

The period prior to the Roman invasion of AD 43. Traditionally sub divided into; *Palaeolithic* – *c.* 500,000 BC to *c.* 12,000 BC; *Mesolithic* – *c.* 12,000 BC to *c.* 4,500 BC; *Neolithic* – *c.* 4,500 BC to *c.* 2,000 BC; *Bronze Age* – *c.* 2,000 BC to *c.* 800 BC; *Iron Age* – *c.* 800 BC to AD 43.

Roman

The period between AD 43 and AD 410.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Foundations Archaeology on the 6th May 2011 on land at the former Fitzharris Arms Public House, Thornhill Walk, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 4927 9803). The project was commissioned by Caldecotte Consultants.
- 1.2 The archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (2011), based upon a brief issued by Oxfordshire County Council (2011), and the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2008).

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Oxfordshire Planning Archaeologist required a programme of archaeological evaluation in advance of the determination of a planning application to construct four flats on land at the former Fitzharris Arms Public House, Thornhill Walk, Abingdon (**Planning Reference Number: ABG/16284/3**).
- 2.2 The study area was situated to the west of Wootton Road on Thornhill Walk, within the garden of the former public house. The site was located at approximately 60m OD and the underlying geology consists of sand and gravel overlying clay.
- 2.3 The site was located on the northern side of the late Prehistoric and Romano-British settlement in Abingdon. Burials dating to the Roman period have been found to the east of the application area. Cropmarks have been identified across the area. These include a Bronze Age ring-ditch to the east and a series of linear features and rectangular enclosures to the north and to the south. The evidence suggests that these features were originally contiguous across the application area.
- 2.4 The main potential of the site was, therefore, for the recovery of later Prehistoric and Romano-British finds or features; this did not prejudice the evaluation against recovery of data related to other periods.

3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits, in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving archaeological remains. In turn this would allow reasonable planning decisions to be taken regarding the archaeological provision for the areas affected by the proposed development.
- 3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:

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- i) To define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible;
- ii) To attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site;
- iii) To recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The Written Scheme of Investigation required the excavation of a single trench, measuring 15m by 1.5m, however due to on-site constraints; it was only possible to excavate a 13m long trench. All amendments to the trenching methodology were agreed, on-site, with the Oxfordshire Planning Archaeologist. The final trench location is shown in Figure 2.
- 4.2 Topsoil and non-significant overburden was removed to the top of the archaeological deposits or natural, whichever was encountered first. This was achieved by the use of a 360° mechanical excavator, equipped with a toothless grading bucket, whilst under constant archaeological direction. Thereafter all additional investigation was conducted manually by archaeologists.
- 4.3 All excavation and recording work was undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- 5.1 A full stratigraphic description of all the contexts identified in the course of the project is presented in Appendix 1, along with a report on the recovered pottery in Appendix 2 and a list of the miscellaneous finds in Appendix 3. A summary discussion is given below.
- 5.2 The natural sand and gravel was present, at the southeast end of the trench, at a depth of 0.46m (59.84m) below the modern ground surface. The natural was overlaid by subsoil (102), up to 0.23m thick, which was, in turn, sealed by topsoil (101), up to 0.23m thick. Numerous features and deposits were present sealed beneath subsoil (102).
- 5.3 Deposit (103) was not excavated, however, in plan it appeared to be earlier than feature [104].
- 5.4 Cut [104] was only partially investigated and, as such, interpretation remained limited. However, the feature contained fill (105), which extended for approximately 6.5m across the southern part of the trench. A sondage

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excavated into fill (105) indicated that it overlaid soil and stone deposits (106), (107), (108) and (109).

- 5.5 Soil deposits (111) and (112) were only partially revealed, however, they were stratigraphically earlier than feature (113)/(114).
- 5.6 Feature (113)/(114) was very compacted and was associated with a possible pea-grit mortar. It was unclear if this feature represented part of a stone-built structure, such as a surface or bedding layer, or a rubble spread.
- 5.7 Deposit (115) occurred to the north of feature (113)/(114) and indicated that archaeological activity extended beyond the north of the trench.
- 5.8 The recovered pottery assemblage suggested that the archaeological deposits within the trench were likely to be 2nd century AD in date, although a number of features contained residual early Iron Age pottery sherds. Other recovered artefacts included bone fragments, oyster shell, iron nails, CBM and industrial waste (slag).
- 5.9 Limited Modern disturbance was present in the form of a single service trench.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The evaluation has revealed the presence of relatively well preserved and significant Roman archaeological deposits, which included a cut feature associated with a large expanse of fill, a possible stone surface/bedding layer or rubble spread and numerous other soil and stone deposits. Limited investigation of the features within the trench indicated multiple phases of activity and a moderate to high degree of complexity.
- 6.2 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology, but will be deposited within 12 months with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service. A short note will be submitted for publication in the relevant local archaeological journal and an OASIS form will also be submitted to ADS.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX 1: Stratigraphic Data

CXT	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	CUTS/LATER THAN	CUT BY/EARLIER THAN
				TRENCH 1; 13m long by 1.5m wide. Natural = light beige sand and gravel.		
101	n/a	n/a	0.23	Dark brown garden topsoil.	102	n/a
102	n/a	n/a	0.23	Heterogeneous subsoil; orange to brown clay silt sand, which contained occasional limestone fragments and gravel lenses.	natural	101
103	1.4	0.6	?	Deposit of orange brown clay sand, which contained occasional small stones.	natural	[104]
[104]	1.55	?	0.28+	Cut feature with a sloping profile. Only partially investigated. Contained fill 105.	103	105
105	1.55	6.5	0.4	Substantial expanse of mixed dark brown clay sand, which contained frequent limestone fragments, patches of beige pea-grit and frequent charcoal flecks and lumps.	[104], 106 - 109	102
106	0.65	0.48	?	Deposit of dark brown black clay sand, which contained occasional small stones, frequent charcoal flecks and occasional patches of red (heated?) soil. Visible at the base of the sondage.	?	105
107	0.45	0.33	?	Part of a large limestone fragment. There was no evidence that the stone had been shaped or faced. Visible at the base of the sondage.	?	105
108	0.45	0.35	?	Deposit of orange beige pea-grit with frequent patches of light brown soil. Visible at the base of the sondage.	?	105
109	0.3	0.25	?	Cluster of limestone fragments. There was no evidence that the stones had been shaped or faced. Visible at the base of the sondage.	?	105
110				Void.		
111	1.6	1.4	?	Deposit of compact orange brown clay sand.	?	112
112	1.8	0.6	0.2+	Deposit of brown clay sand.	111	113
113	3.1	0.6	0.15+	Compact deposit of irregular limestone fragments and pea-grit (mortar?). Subjected to trowel clean.	112	102
114	4.4	1	?	Continuation of 113, subjected to shovel clean.	112	102
115	1.6	1.2	?	Deposit of brown clay sand, which occurred to the north of feature 113/114.	?	102

APPENDIX 2: The Pottery

By Dr. Jane Timby

- 1 Introduction
 - 1.1 The evaluation resulted in the recovery of 22 sherds of pottery weighing 282 g dating to the prehistoric and Roman periods. In addition there is a single abraded fragment of ceramic building material (CBM).
 - 1.2 Pottery was recovered from just six contexts ranging from single pieces to a maximum of 11 fragments from context (110).
 - 1.3 The assemblage was of variable condition with the Roman sherds being the better preserved. Most of the prehistoric material was in abraded condition and appears to be residual.
 - 1.4 For the purposes of the assessment the assemblage was sorted macroscopically into fabrics in order to ascertain date and quantified by sherd count and weight. The resulting data is summarised in Table 1.
- 2 Prehistoric
 - 2.1 Twelve sherds of prehistoric date are present from three contexts (105), (110) and (114).
 - 2.2 The two sherds from fill (105) and deposit (114) are clearly of Iron Age date. The piece from (105) is a sandy ware with an external red haematite slip and a burnished interior. Such material is typical of the early Iron Age. The second sherd is a sandy ware with rare flint inclusions.
 - 2.3 The 10 fragments from (110) are less easy to place. They are all reduced handmade fragments in a sandy, poorly consolidated, fabric. Not all have a surviving surface and it is possible some are fired clay rather than pottery. At best a prehistoric date can only be hazarded at. They appear to be redeposited in a Roman context.
- 3 Roman
 - 3.1 Ten sherds of Roman date were recorded with sherds from each of the six contexts with pottery.
 - 3.2 Most of the pieces are locally made products of the Oxfordshire industry with various grey sandy wares and grog-tempered storage jar. Context (110) produced the only rim, a flat-rim bowl, typical of the 2nd century.
 - 3.3 The only imported ware is the base of a Central Gaulish mortarium from context (113) likely to date to the mid-later 2nd or early 3rd centuries.
 - 3.4 A fragment of abraded CBM from (105) is also likely to be of Roman date.

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- 4 Potential and further work
- 4.1 The assemblage, although small, is completely typical of that to be expected from Abingdon, a major regional centre in the later prehistoric and Roman periods.
- 4.2 The group suggests early Iron Age activity in the general locality but most of the deposits excavated appear to belong to the 2nd century, although it should be noted that the amount of material is extremely low for accurate dating.
- 4.3 No further work is recommended on the assemblage.

Context	IA/Preh	Roman samian	coarseware	CBM	Tot No	Tot Wt	Date
102	0	0	3	0	3	15	C1-C2
105	1	0	2	1	4	117	EIA/C2
110	10	0	1	0	11	57	Preh/C2
113	0	1	0	0	1	62	late C2
114	1	0	2	0	3	37	IA/Roman
115	0	0	1	0	1	26	Roman
TOTAL	12	1	9	1	23	314	

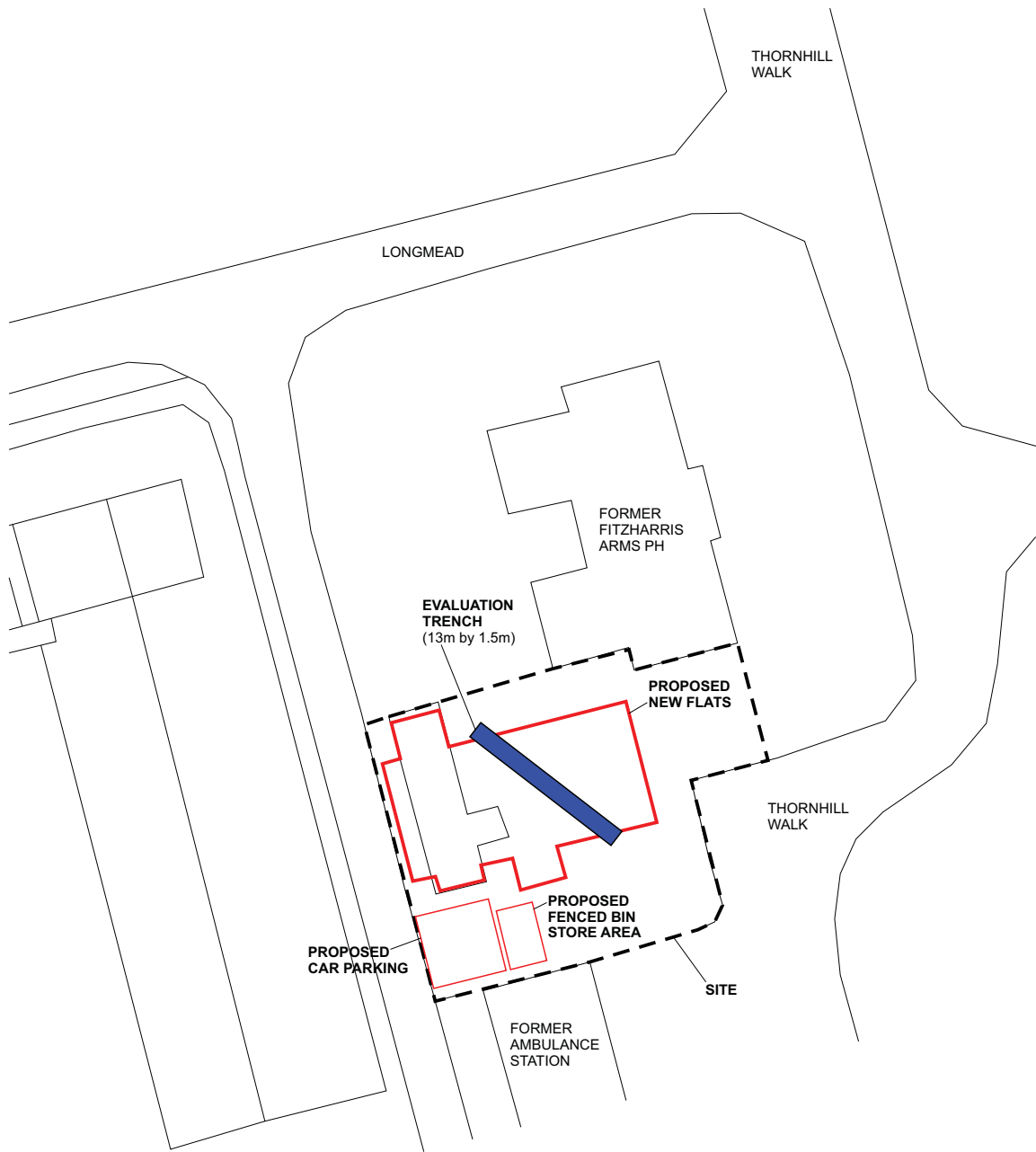
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APPENDIX 3: Miscellaneous Finds

CXT	DESCRIPTION
102	BONE X 1 FRAG
102	IRON NAIL X 2
105	BONE X 6 FRAG
105	IRON NAIL X 4 FRAG
114	OYSTER SHELL X 1 FRAGMENT
114	INDUSTRIAL WASTE (SLAG) X 3 FRAG
114	CBM X 1 FRAG



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FIGURE 1: Site Location



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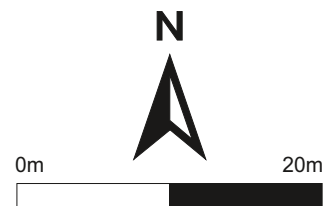
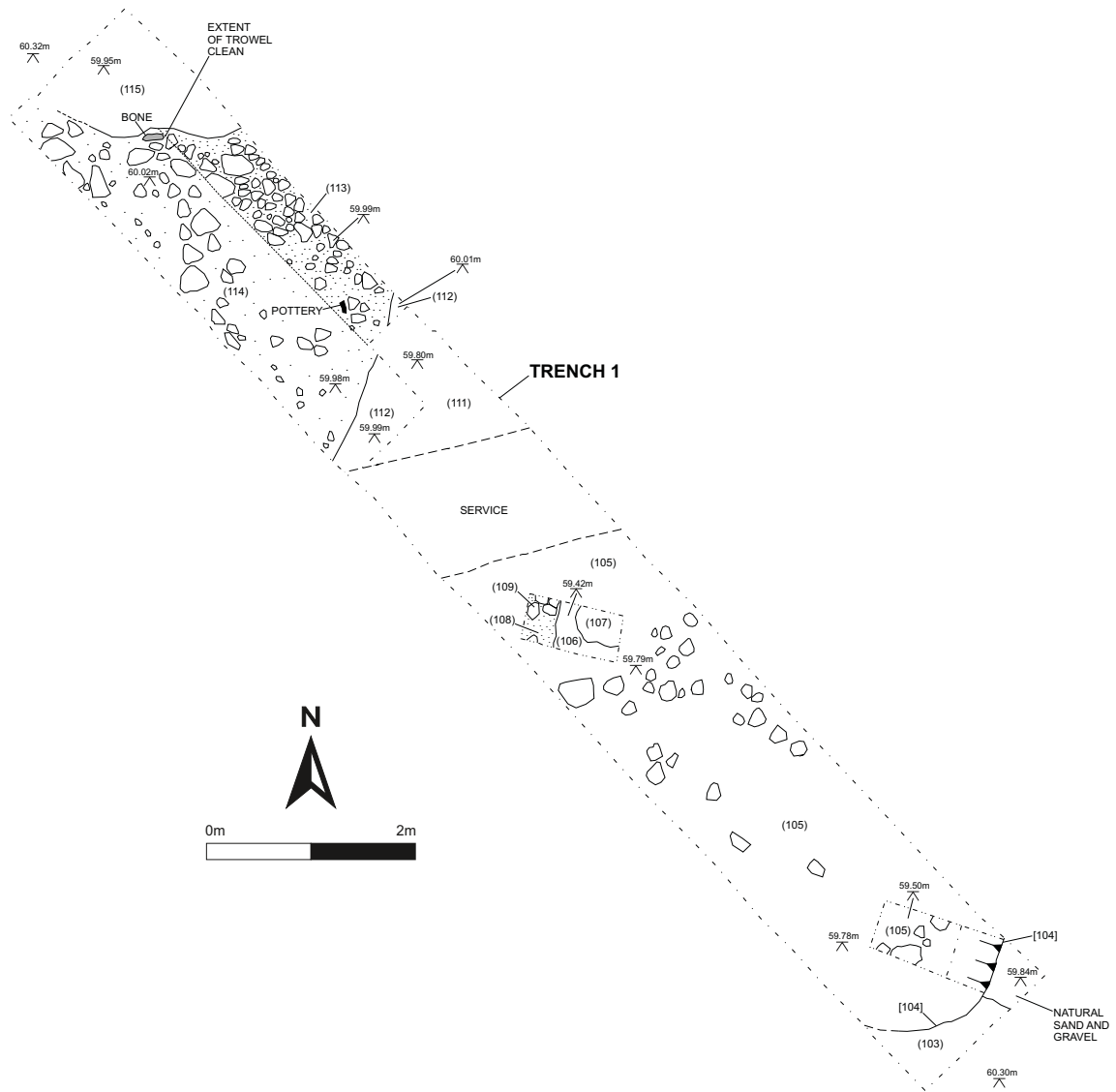


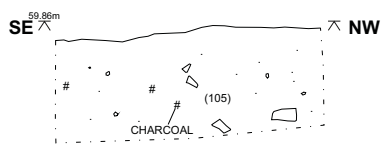
FIGURE 2: Trench Location



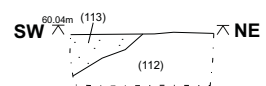
NORTHEAST FACING SECTION [104]



NORTHEAST FACING SECTION (105)



SOUTHEAST FACING SECTION (112) and (113)



Site Code: FAA11
Accession Code:
FIGURE 3: Trench 1 Plan and Sections