

T H A M E S V A L L E Y

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**South Oxfordshire Crematoria, Wantage Road,
Garford, Abingdon, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andy Muddin

Site Code: WRG20/194

(SU 4331 9514)

**New Memorial Park, South Oxfordshire Crematoria,
Wantage Road, Garford, Abingdon, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
for Memoria Ltd**

by Andrew Muddin

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code WRG 20/194

May 2021

Summary

Site name: South Oxfordshire Crematoria, Wantage Road, Garford, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 4331 9514

Site activity: Archaeological Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 6th to 22nd April 2021

Project coordinator: Tim Dawson

Site supervisor: Jamie Williams and Anne-Michelle Huvig

Site code: WRG 20/194

Area of site: c.0.6ha extension

Summary of results: An eastern extension to the crematorium complex involved the creation of a memorial park, a canopy walkway and car park extension. Most of the stripped areas did not expose the natural geology nor relevant archaeological horizon. A single undated possible small pit or posthole was uncovered.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

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	Steve Preston ✓ 27.05.21

South Oxfordshire Crematoria, Wantage Road, Garford, Abingdon, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Andrew Muddin

Report 20/194

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out on land adjacent to South Oxfordshire Crematoria, Wantage Road, nr Garford, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX13 5PA (SU 4331 9514) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Michael Hackney of Memoria Ltd, The Pool House, Stratton Audley, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX27 9BS.

Planning permission (20/V2002/FUL) has been granted by Vale of White Horse District Council for the construction of an eastern extension to the crematorium complex, that includes a memorial park with additional car parking, canopy walkway and associated landscaping. A new toilet block was also included in the proposals but was to lie within the area of the existing crematorium to the west. This area had already been subject to comprehensive archaeological investigation (Porter 2014). The consent is subject to two conditions (4 and 5) relating to archaeology requiring a programme of archaeological works, in accordance with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2019) and the District's Council's policies on archaeology. In this case the work involved monitoring topsoil removal in several areas that could impact the potential archaeological horizon on the site.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Clare King, formerly of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, and based on a brief provided by her (King 2020). The fieldwork was monitored remotely by Mr Richard Oram. The fieldwork was undertaken by Jamie Williams and Anne-Michelle Huvig between 6th and 22nd April 2021. The site code is HSC 21/21.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The crematorium is situated south of the village of Garford in the valley of the river Ock south-west of Abingdon in Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The site is located in the south-west portion of a large land parcel north of the Nor Brook. The Wantage Road (A338), bounds the site on its North West side. The crematorium was built in 2014, and this included landscaping which was previously subject to archaeological monitoring (see below). The

site lies at approximately 57m to 60m above Ordnance Datum (OD), with road elevated slightly in relation to the site with the crematoria building towards the south of the overall complex. The watching brief area was to the east of the main complex (Fig.2). The surroundings are agricultural fields. The underlying geology is on the boundary of Kimmeridge Clay with limestone of the Corallian Beds (BGS 1971). Areas of natural limestone were exposed directly under the topsoil during previous archaeological monitoring between 0.3-0.4m deep.

Archaeological background

A brief supplied by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (King 2020) highlighted the position of the site in an area of extensive crop marks visible from the air. One such large ditch was shown to be of Iron Age date, where targeted with an evaluation and subsequent excavation (Mundin 2011; Porter 2014). This cropmark extended further eastward from the area of previous works into the area of the proposed memorial park (Fig. 2) suggesting that further remains were liable to be encountered in this area. Unexpected finds on the adjacent site were an series of pits of Bronze Age and Iron Age date. Other slight linear features were related to Roman and Medieval landscape use. The Roman material may be associated with occupation deposits from a nearby villa complex, c.400m to the east (Henig and Booth 2000). The prehistoric material is also set within a wider landscape that includes a Bronze Age ring ditch complex and enclosures, just northeast of Chadwick Farm and c.500m west of the site. The A338 is thought to follow the line of the Roman road, between Marlborough and Bicester (Margary 1973, route 164), linking to a significant area of Roman villa estates close to the River Ock.

Objectives and methodology

The aim of the project was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the groundworks. This involved the continuous monitoring of intrusive excavation for the groundworks and observation of soil stripping ground reduction which would expose the top of the archaeological horizon or the natural geology, whichever was reached first. Observations were undertaken on all areas of topsoil stripping, with excavations directed to the top of the archaeological horizon before allowing further excavation beyond to proceed. All spoil was monitored for finds. Excavations were conducted with a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket .

Results

Three areas of soil stripping required archaeological monitoring (Fig. 2).

Compound Area

Firstly, the topsoil strip for the compound to the east, outside of the development area, did not impact on any archaeological horizons. Only 0.1-0.15m of topsoil was removed in this area to be able to lay a membrane and crushed stone to create temporary hardstanding (Pl.1 and 2). After these works, the topsoil was to be reinstated.

Car park area

An extension of the parking area south of the crematoria (Fig.2) involved removal of topsoil and subsoil to a maximum depth of 0.52m. The deepest part, along the eastern edge of the extension, reached the depth of the natural horizon. No archaeological deposits were uncovered. The remainder was stripped to a depth of 0.45m to remain above the natural horizon, so as not to uncover any possible archaeological horizon. Two modern topsoil features; one a hollow extending northwards, the other a linear depression heading south-east, were visible through the topsoil, but not visible beyond the subsoil.

Landscape area and memorial pond

The triangular area forming the eastern side of the site was to be minimally landscaped, with disturbance almost entirely limited to the topsoil level, with limited impact on subsoil. There were two areas where this was not the case, with the creation of a memorial pond in the south and central to the area (Fig. 2).

The pond

The pond was rectangular in plan with an area of c.16m x 10m (Pl. 4). The excavation of the pond revealed a stratigraphy of dark brown silt topsoil to a depth of 0.35m overlying a thin (0.05m) reddish brown silty clay subsoil, with frequent small pieces of limestone. The natural geology was reached at 0.4m which was limestone with patches of light reddish brown silty clay patches. Four of these patches were investigated, confirming that all but one were of non-archaeological origin.

The exception was an possible undated small pit or post-hole (1) on the west edge of the stripped area. This was circular, 0.38m in diameter and 0.07m deep, filled with a single fill of soft light brown-red sandy clay (52) with small-sized limestone inclusions (52) (Fig. 3; Pl.5). It contained no finds nor 'cultural' material such as charcoal or burnt flint, and there is some doubt that it is of archaeological origin. No other archaeological deposits were identified.

Finds

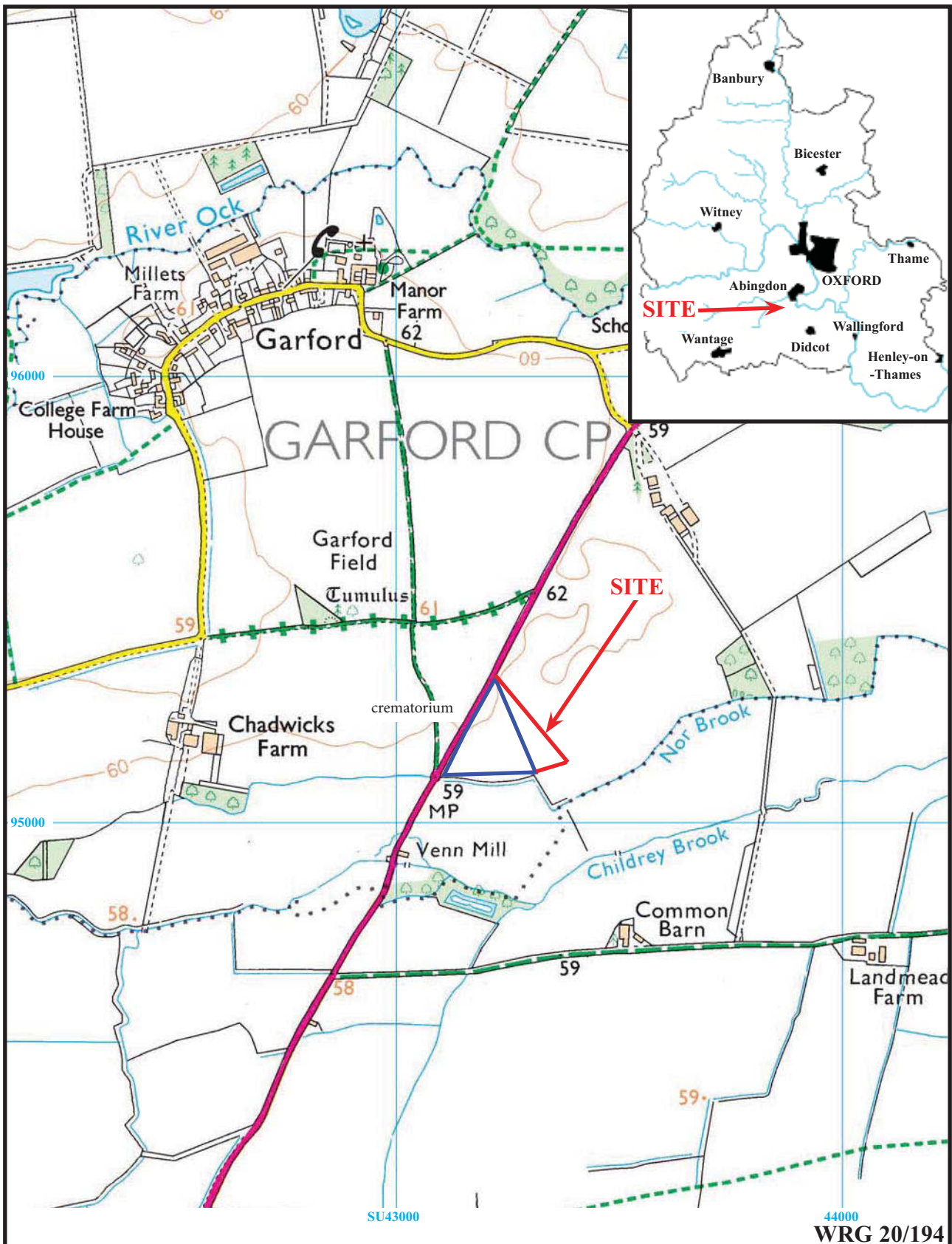
No artefacts of archaeological interest were recovered.

Conclusion

Most of the groundworks did not penetrate below topsoil and thus has no impact on any archaeological features that may have be present: in particular this applies to the area where the cropmark of an Iron Age ditch has been recorded. Assuming this does indeed continue across the site, it has been preserved *in -situ*. Only the area for the excavation of the memorial pond reached the archaeological horizon and here a single possible undated small pit or posthole was the only archaeological feature recorded.

References

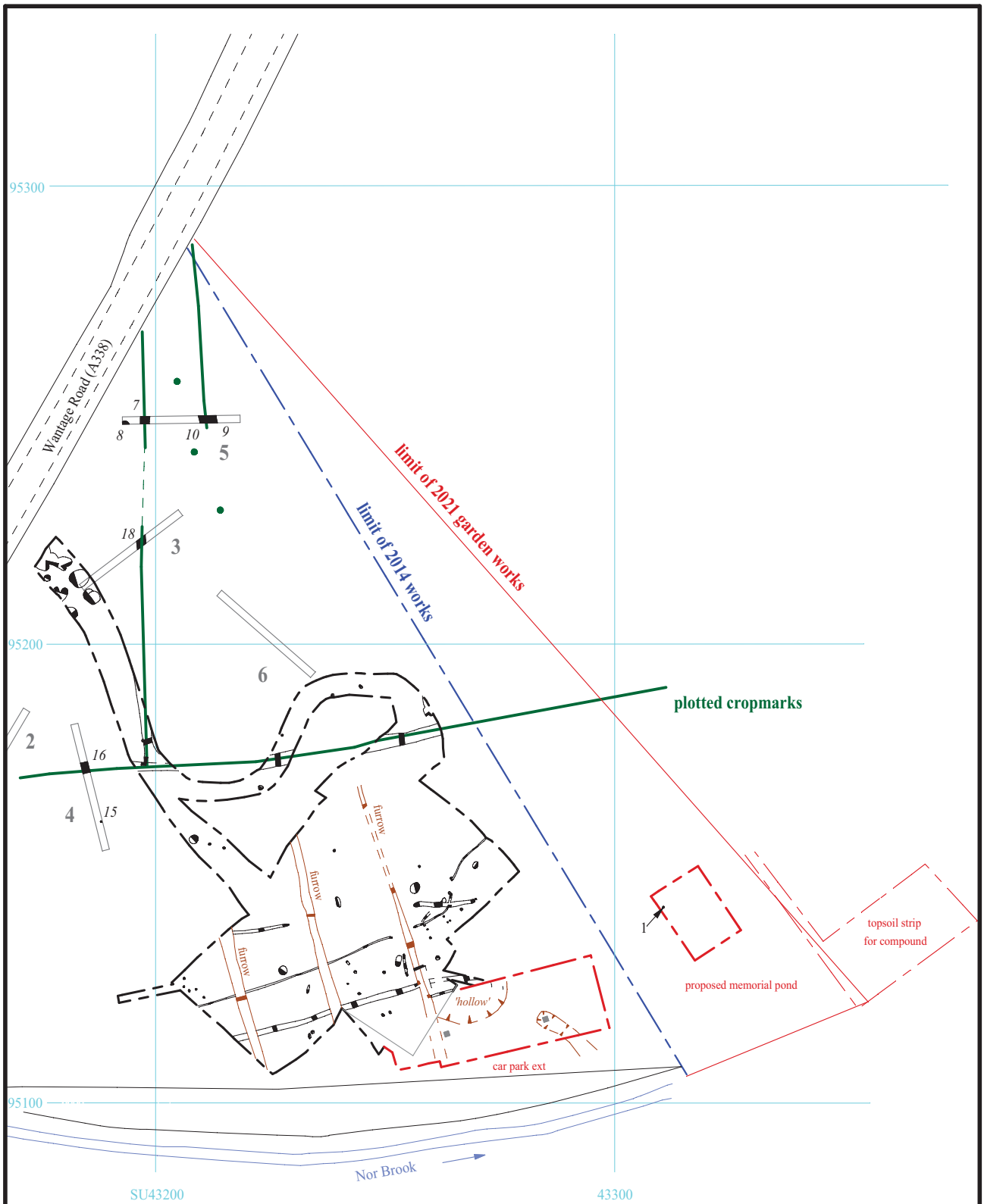
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Figure 1. Location of site in relation to Garford and within Oxfordshire.

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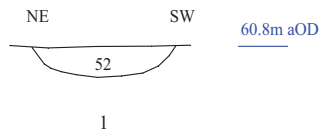
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Figure 2. Location of trenches and features.



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Figure 3. Sections.



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Plate 1. Progress of topsoil strip for compound, looking North, Scales: 2m and 0.5m.



Plate 2. Section for compound strip, looking South West, Scales: 0.5m and 0.1m.



Plate 3. Stripped east end of car park extension, looking North West, Scales: 1m x2.

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Plates 1 - 3.**

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Plate 4. Strip for memorial pond in progress, looking South, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 5. Strip for memorial pond, pit 1, looking South East, Scales:0.3m x2.

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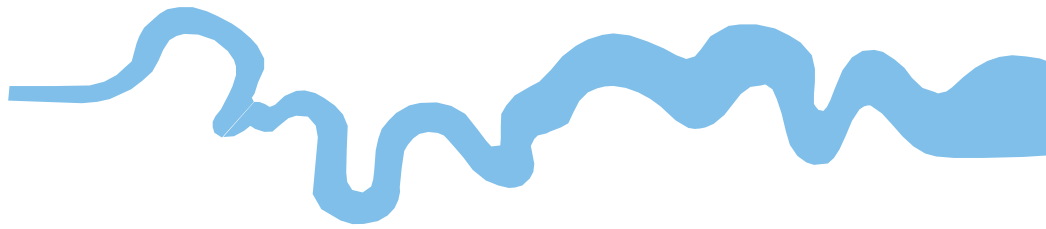
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Plates 4 and 5.

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TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43 AD 0 BC
Iron Age _____	750 BC
Bronze Age: Late _____	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle _____	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early _____	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower	2,000,000 BC





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