

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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Little Sparrows, Blounts Court Road,
Sonning Common, Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by Andy Taylor

Site Code: BCR19/131

(SU 7132 8047)

**Little Sparrows, Blounts Court Road,
Sonning Common, Oxfordshire**

An Archaeological Evaluation

for Senior Living (Sonning Common) Ltd and Investfront Ltd

by Andy Taylor

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code BCR 19/131

March 2020

Summary

Site name: Little Sparrows, Blounts Court Road, Sonning Common, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 7132 8047

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 2nd-4th March 2020

Project coordinator: Tim Dawson

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: BCR 19/131

Area of site: c.4.1 hectares

Summary of results: A single pit of likely late medieval date was identified in the evaluation. A few sherds of Roman pottery were also noted. Geophysical anomalies were investigated but none were shown to be of archaeological interest. Apart from the location around the single pit, the remainder of the site is considered to have very low archaeological potential.

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 03.04.20
	Steve Preston ✓ 03.04.20

Little Sparrows, Blounts Court Road, Sonning Common, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Andy Taylor

Report 19/131b

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Little Sparrows, Blounts Court Road, Sonning Common, Oxfordshire (SU 7132 8047) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Phil Docherty, of Senior Living (Sonning Common) Ltd and Investfront Ltd, Units 3 and 4, Cedars Office Park, Butt Lane, Normanton on Soar, Leicestershire, LE12 5EE.

Planning consent (P19/S4576/O) has been sought from South Oxfordshire District Council for the development of the site as a new Continuing Care Retirement Community. As a consequence of the possibility of archaeological deposits on the site which may be damaged or destroyed by groundworks, a field evaluation has been requested, in order to inform the planning process with regard to potential archaeological implications and permit the formulation of a mitigation strategy as appropriate. This is in accordance with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2019), and the District Council's policies on archaeology.

A geophysical survey of the site (Beaverstock and Dawson 2019) was to be followed by field evaluation by means of machine trenching. This report details the trenching exercise. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Council, adviser to the District on matters relating to archaeology, and based on a brief supplied by him (Oram 2019). The fieldwork was undertaken by Andy Taylor and Cosmo Bacon between 2nd and 4th March 2020. The archive is currently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services in Reading, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the north-eastern edge of Sonning Common, which lies *c.*9km north of Reading in south Oxfordshire. The site is bounded by Blounts Court Road to the north, by fields to the east and south with residential properties to the west. The underlying geology is mapped as Winter Hill Gravel (BGS 2000), which consisted of gravel, sands and silts and was observed across the trenches and the site lies at a height of *c.*95m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) on a small plateau.

Archaeological background

The archaeology of the Chiltern Hills area of South Oxfordshire is relatively poorly understood with a modest range of sites and finds recorded in the county Historic Environment Record. This, perhaps, is due to a lack of opportunity for survey rather than a genuine absence. A modest number of finds is recorded in the area, such as Neolithic flints and Bronze Age bronze tools, Roman pottery and an enclosure visible from the air of presumed Iron Age to Roman date. The site also lies close to Blounts Court with the surviving farmhouse retaining some 16th-century components and the settlement having medieval origins. Recent evaluation immediately to the west of Blounts Court (Beaverstock 2019) recorded a probable Roman pottery kiln, possibly related to the large volume of pottery previously recovered from the surface of the field.

A geophysical survey was undertaken of the site in 2019 (Beaverstock and Dawson 2019) which identified a small number of magnetic anomalies which may represent buried archaeological remains. These are most likely to be quarry pits. Other observations were considered more likely to be natural variations in the geology.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development.

Specific aims of the project were:

- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present;
- to determine if any late prehistoric or Roman deposits are present on the site as suggested by the nearby excavation evidence and surface finds;
- to determine whether there is evidence on the site for quarrying as suggested by the geophysical survey;
- and
- to provide information to allow the preparation of a mitigation strategy if necessary.

Some 21 trenches were proposed to be dug, each measuring 25m long and 1.80m wide. These were dug using a small 360° type machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket. This was done under constant archaeological supervision and all spoilheaps were monitored for finds.

Where archaeological features were certainly or probably present, the stripped areas were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools. Sufficient of the archaeological features and deposits exposed would then be excavated or sampled by hand to satisfy the aims of the brief, without compromising the integrity of any features which might warrant preservation *in situ* or might better be investigated under the conditions pertaining to full excavation.

Results

The intended 21 trenches were dug as planned, measuring 2m wide and between 25.50m and 29.60m long and between 0.31m and 0.70m deep. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1. Only one trench contained an archaeological feature (Appendix 2).

Trench 1

This trench was aligned approximately NW-SE and measured 28m long and 0.40m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.10m of topsoil overlying 0.28m of subsoil overlying silty gravel natural geology.

Trench 2

This trench was aligned approximately NNE-SSW and measured 28.70m long and 0.40m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.10m of topsoil overlying 0.28m of subsoil overlying silty gravel natural geology.

Trench 3

This trench was aligned approximately NNW-SSE and measured 27m long and 0.41m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.08m of topsoil overlying 0.21m of subsoil overlying gravel and sand natural geology.

Trench 4

This trench was aligned approximately ESE-WNW and measured 29.60m long and 0.31m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil directly overlying gravel natural geology.

Trench 5 (Pl. 1)

This trench was aligned approximately ENE-WSW and measured 27.80m long and 0.34m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.31 directly overlying gravel natural geology.

Trench 6

This trench was aligned NW-SE and measured 25.50m long and 0.50m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil overlying 0.20m of subsoil overlying silty gravel natural geology.

Trench 7

This trench was aligned NE-SW and measured 27m long and 0.60m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil overlying 0.25m of subsoil overlying silty gravel natural geology.

Trench 8 (Pl. 2)

This trench was aligned NW-SE and measured 26.70m long and 0.40m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.35m of topsoil directly overlying silty gravel natural geology.

Trench 9

This trench was aligned approximately E-W and measured 27m long and 0.60m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of topsoil directly overlying 0.30m of subsoil overlying silty gravel natural geology.

Trench 10

This trench was aligned approximately NNE-SSW and measured 28m long and 0.40m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.36m of topsoil directly overlying silty gravel natural geology.

Trench 11

This trench was aligned approximately NW-SE and measured 27.50m long and 0.32m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil directly overlying sandy silt and gravel natural geology.

Trench 12 (Pl. 3)

This trench was aligned roughly E-W and measured 26.60m long and between 0.40m and 0.75m deep. At its west end the stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil overlying 0.40m of subsoil overlying sandy silt natural geology. At its east end the stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil overlying 0.08m of subsoil overlying sandy silt natural geology.

Trench 13

This trench was aligned NW-SE and measured 26.50m long and 0.31m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.28m of topsoil directly overlying silty gravel natural geology.

Trench 14

This trench was aligned approximately NNE-SSW and measured 27.70m long and 0.35m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.33m of topsoil directly overlying sandy gravel natural geology.

Trench 15

This trench was aligned approximately NW-SE and measured 26.80m long and 0.37m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.33m of topsoil directly overlying sandy gravel natural geology.

Trench 16 (Fig. 3; Pls. 4 and 6)

This trench was aligned NE-SW and measured 27.70m long and 0.32m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil directly overlying gravel natural geology. Pit 1 was noted at 12.50m from the SW end of the trench, and the trench was expanded slightly to allow it to be fully exposed. The pit was 1.50m wide and 0.37m deep and had two fills (52 and 53). Filling most of the pit, deposit 52 was a light yellow grey sandy silt and contained 10 sherds of pottery (9 Roman and one medieval), 15 pieces of ceramic building material, including medieval peg tile and glazed tile, two nails and an unidentified iron object, and a single piece of glass. Basal fill 53 was a dark grey brown sandy silt but it did not contain any finds.

Trench 17

This trench was aligned N-S and measured 26.70m long and 0.40m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.38m of topsoil directly overlying gravel natural geology. Four sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from the topsoil of this trench.

Trench 18

This trench was aligned NW-SE and measured 26m long and 0.40m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.38m of topsoil directly overlying clayey silt with gravel patches natural geology.

Trench 19 (Pl. 5)

This trench was aligned NE-SW and measured 26.30m long and 0.37m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.35m of topsoil directly overlying clayey silt with gravel patches natural geology.

Trench 20

This trench was aligned approximately NE-SW and measured 26m long and 0.41m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.38m of topsoil directly overlying gravel natural geology.

Trench 21

This trench was aligned approximately NE-SW and measured 26.60m long and 0.41m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.38m of topsoil directly overlying gravel natural geology.

Finds

Pottery by Alice Lyons

A total of 14 sherds, weighing 251g, were recovered during the evaluation. The majority of the pottery comprised locally produced Early Roman utilitarian coarse wares, although a single medieval fragment (identified by Sue Anderson) was also found (Appendix 3). The pottery was recovered in two adjacent trenches in the south-eastern part of the site. In Trench 16 a single pit contained both Early Roman and an intrusive piece of medieval pottery. The pottery has survived in good, but fragmentary, condition with an average sherd size of 18g. The pottery was analysed following national guidelines (Barclay *et al.* 2016).

Roman Fabric Descriptions

GY1: a coarse, sandy, reduced ware with a common to abundant frequency of well-sorted, largely rounded, quartz sand >0.8mm and rare black iron.

BSGY1: a coarse, sandy, brownish grey ware with blackened surfaces.

Medieval Fabric Descriptions

Brill/Boarstall: a coarse, sandy, oxidized ware with common to abundant well-sorted, largely rounded, quartz sand >0.5mm. The external surface has a pale mint green glaze (Blinkhorn and Saunders 2003).

Summary

This is a small assemblage of primarily locally produced utilitarian coarse ware material that includes a diagnostically Early Roman carinated jar, also not closely datable undecorated jar body and base sherds retrieved from a single pit and the topsoil within two trenches in the south-eastern part of the site. A single medieval pottery sherd was also found. This pottery is similar in character to that found previously during an adjacent archaeological intervention (Timby 2019) and therefore makes a valuable contribution to the sparse corpus of ceramic data in this region.

Ceramic Building Material by Danielle Milbank

A total of 15 fragments of ceramic building material weighing 726g was recovered during the evaluation, hand-collected from pit 1 (52) in trench 16, and examined under x10 magnification. The material comprised tile fragments, with two brick pieces present, and comprised a limited range of fabrics.

The majority of the fragments are in a medium-hard, evenly-fired clay with sparse sandy inclusions and a mid red colour. The typical thickness of these pieces is 14mm, they are slightly uneven, and none have peg holes. One piece has a fairly thick dark green glaze on part of the upper surface. Two pieces in a similar fabric with a pale yellowish lensing were recovered, and are 14mm thick, and two further pieces were recovered which are thin (11mm) with thickened edges, an uneven finish, and on one piece, a peg hole. The tile fragments can be broadly dated to the late medieval or early post-medieval period.

The brick pieces are a soft to medium fine clay with frequent fine and medium groggy inclusions and sparse sand. The pieces have slightly rounded arrises and an uneven finish, and although the full thickness is not present, they appear to be of medieval rather than post medieval date.

The tiles recovered during the evaluation are likely to be peg tiles, where the pierced part is not present, and no other tile types (ridge or floor tiles) were identified. The material is all of late medieval or post-medieval date. Overall, the assemblage of ceramic building material comprises a limited range of forms, and can be characterized as domestic.

Glass by Danielle Milbank

One glass fragment weighing 1g was recovered from pit 1 (52). It comprised a light green glass 3mm thick, with frequent small bubbles, and although it is not closely datable is likely to be broadly late medieval or early post-medieval.

Metalwork by Danielle Milbank

Three metal items were recovered from one context (pit 1, 52). Two of these are nails, and are both small and badly-corroded, and the shape of the heads cannot be determined. They appear to be handmade and are of broadly medieval or early post-medieval date. A third metal object has a spatulate shape, 54mm long and 23mm wide, rounded at one end and tapering to a thin broken end at the other, and its function and date are unclear.

Conclusion

The evaluation has revealed just a single deposit of archaeological interest, a pit of probable late medieval date, dated by one sherd of pottery, glazed tile, peg tile and glass, and although it also contained Roman pottery, outnumbering the medieval material, the simplest interpretation is that it is a medieval feature with redeposited Roman finds. None of the geophysical anomalies were shown to be of archaeological interest and no other features, undated or otherwise were discovered on the site. Apart from a small area around pit 1, the site is considered to have low archaeological potential.

References

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at S or W end

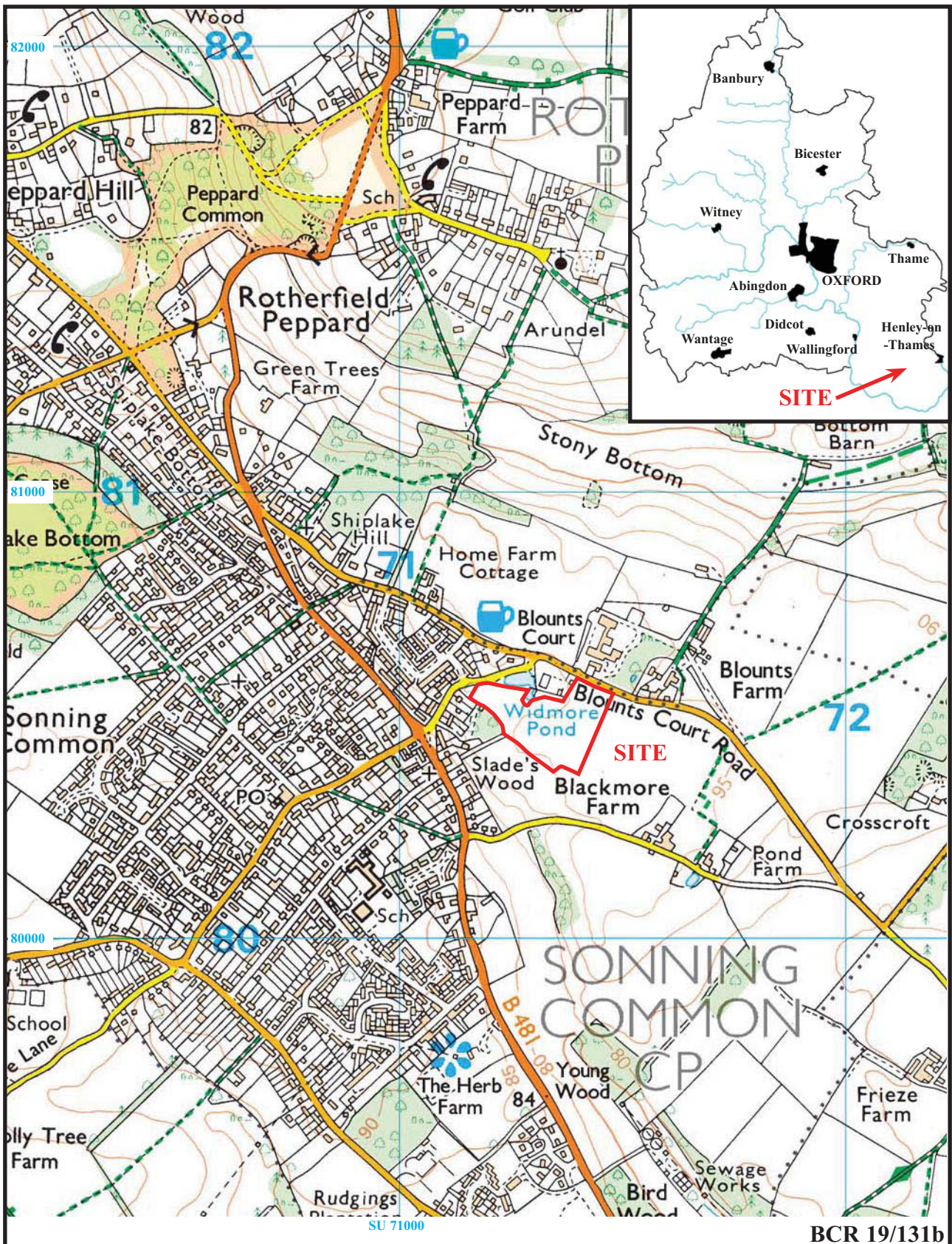
Trench	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	28.00	2.00	0.40	0-0.10m topsoil; 0.10m-0.38m subsoil; 0.38m-0.40m+ silty gravel natural geology.
2	28.70	2.00	0.40	0-0.10m topsoil; 0.10m-0.38m subsoil; 0.38m-0.40m+ silty gravel natural geology.
3	27.00	2.00	0.41	0-0.08m topsoil; 0.08m-0.39m subsoil; 0.39m-0.41m+ gravel natural geology.
4	29.60	2.00	0.31	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.31m+ gravel natural geology.
5	27.80	2.00	0.34	0-0.31m topsoil; 0.31m-0.34m+ gravel natural geology. [Pl. 1]
6	25.50	2.00	0.50	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.50m subsoil; 0.50m+ silty gravel natural geology.
7	27.00	2.00	0.60	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.55m subsoil; 0.55m-0.60m+ silty gravel natural geology.
8	26.70	2.00	0.40	0-0.35m topsoil; 0.35m-0.40m silty gravel natural geology. [Pl. 2]
9	27.00	2.00	0.60	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.60m subsoil; 0.60m+ silty gravel natural geology.
10	28.00	2.00	0.40	0-0.36m topsoil; 0.36m-0.40m+ silty gravel natural geology.
11	27.50	2.00	0.32	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.32m+ sandy silt and gravel natural geology.
12	26.60	2.00	0.75 (W) 0.40 (E)	W- 0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.70m subsoil; 0.70m+ sandy silt natural geology. E- 0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.38m subsoil; 0.38m+sandy silt natural geology. [Pl. 3]
13	26.50	2.00	0.31	0-0.28m topsoil; 0.28m+ silty gravel natural geology.
14	27.70	2.00	0.33	0-0.33m topsoil; 0.33m+ silty gravel natural geology.
15	26.80	2.00	0.37	0-0.33m topsoil; 0.33m-0.37m+ sandy gravel natural geology.
16	27.70	2.00	0.32	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.32m+ silty gravel natural geology. Pit 1 [Pls 4 and 6]
17	26.70	2.00	0.40	0-0.38m topsoil; 0.38m-0.40m+ silty gravel natural geology.
18	26.00	2.00	0.42	0-0.38m topsoil; 0.38m-0.42m+ clayey silt with gravel patches natural geology.
19	26.30	2.00	0.37	0-0.35m topsoil; 0.35m-0.37m+ clayey silt with gravel patches natural geology. [Pl. 5]
20	26.00	2.00	0.41	0-0.38m topsoil; 0.38m-0.41m+ silty gravel natural geology.
21	26.60	2.00	0.41	0-0.38m topsoil; 0.38m-0.41m+ sandy gravel natural geology.

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
16	1	52, 53	Pit	Medieval	Pottery, CBM, glass; residual Roman pottery

APPENDIX 3: Catalogue of Pottery

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>	<i>Spot Date</i>
16	1	52	GY1	Carinated bowl; miniature (140mm diameter)	1	10	Mid-1st century AD
			GY1	Jar; undecorated body and base sherds	6	162	Mid-1 st to 4th century AD
			BSGY1	Jar; undecorated body sherds	2	3	Mid-1st to 4th century AD
			Brill/ Boarstall	Jar; glazed body sherd	1	9	14th-15th century
17		Topsoil	GY1	Jar; undecorated body and base sherds	2	61	Mid-1st to 4th century AD
			BSGY1	Jar; undecorated body sherds	2	6	Mid-1st to 4th century AD



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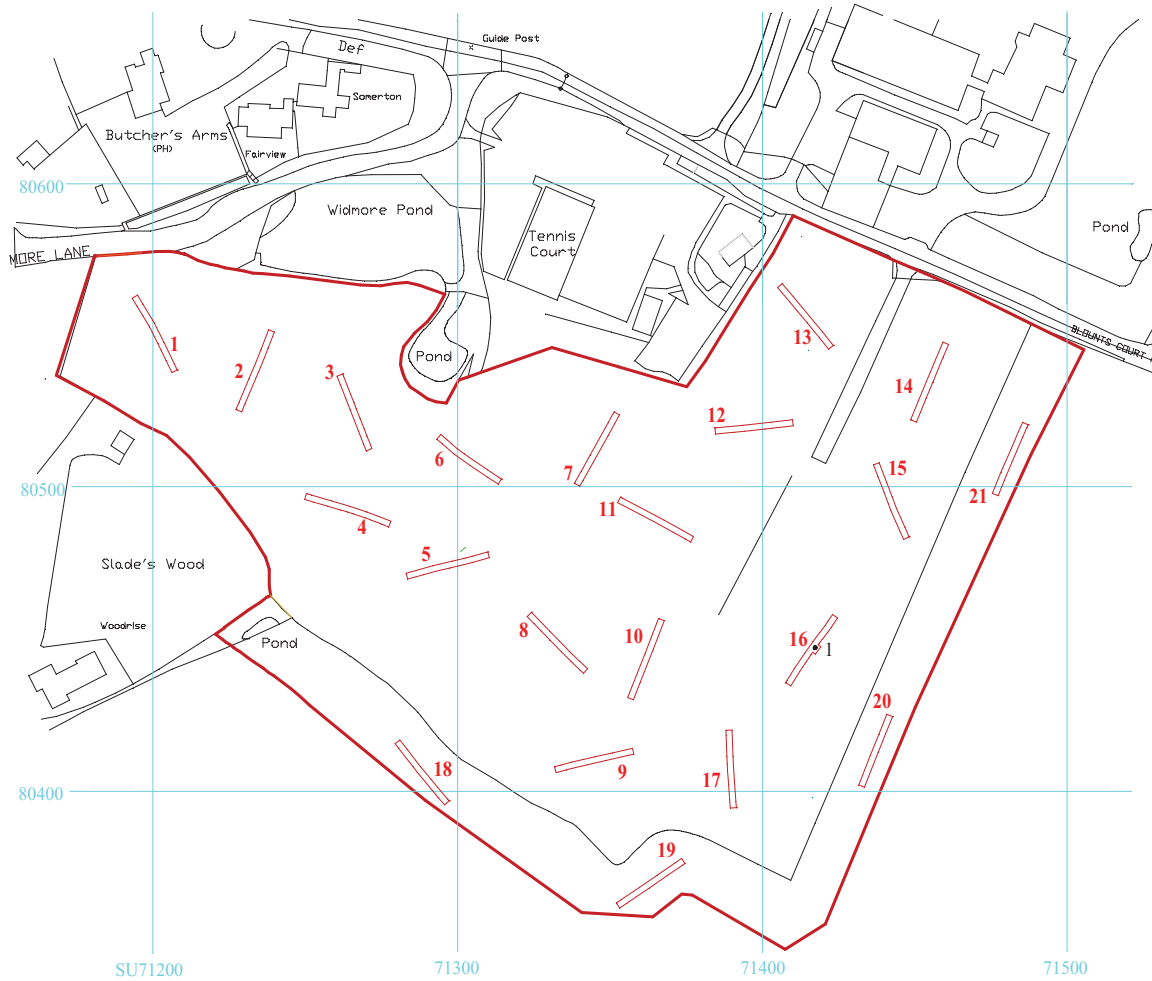
Figure 1. Location of site within Sonning Common and Oxfordshire.

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Evaluated land
(Beaverstock 2019)



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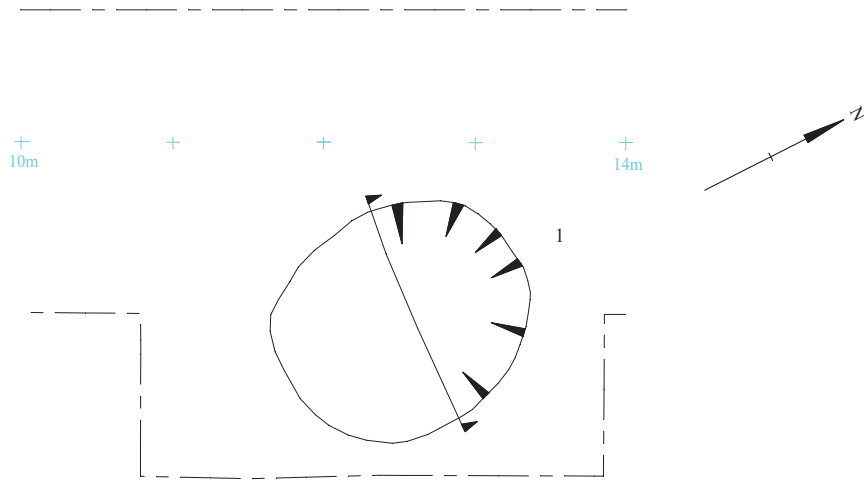
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Figure 2. Location of trenches and feature 1.

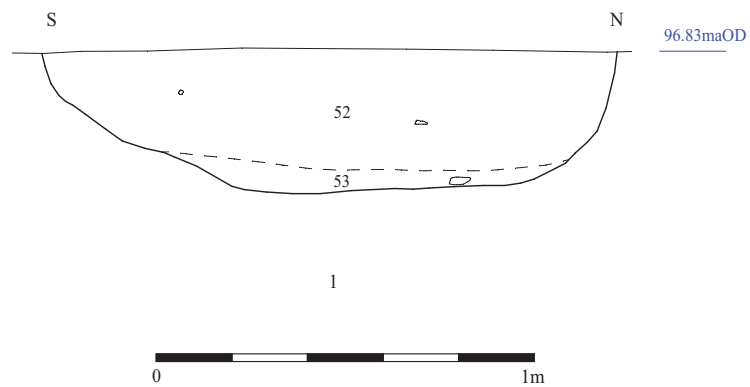


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Trench 16



Trench 16

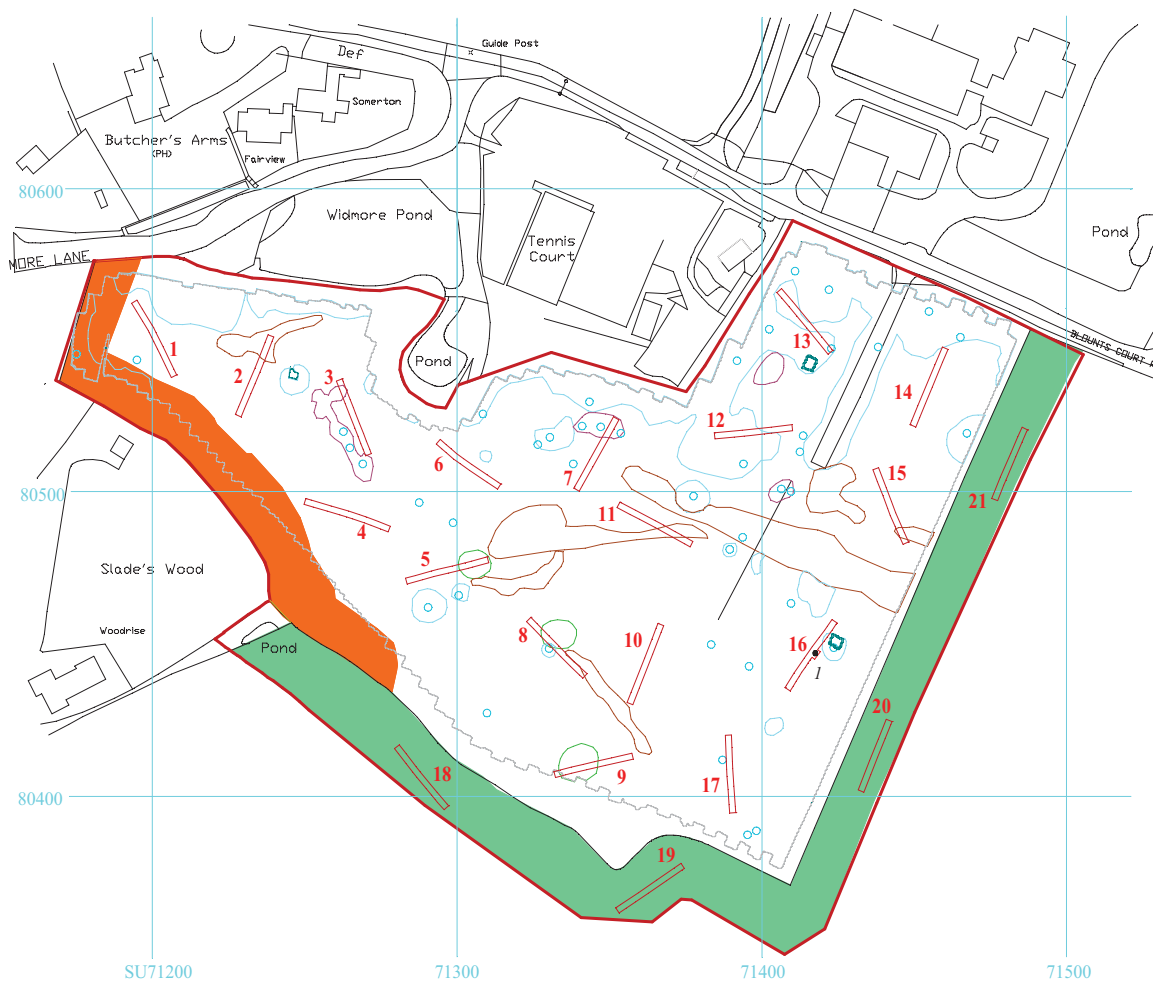


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Figure 3. Detail of Trench 16.



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Figure 4. Location of features, with geophysical anomalies, exclusion (orange) and planting (light green) zones.



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Plate 1. Trench 5, looking east, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.



Plate 2. Trench 8, looking south east, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.

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**Little Sparrows, Blounts Court Lane,
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Plates 1 and 2.**

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Plate 3. Trench 12, looking east, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.



Plate 4. Trench 16, looking south west, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.

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Plates 3 and 4.

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Plate 5. Trench 19, looking south east, Scales: horizontal 2m and 1m, vertical 0.5m.



Plate 6. Trench 16, pit 1, looking west, Scales: 1m and 0.3m.

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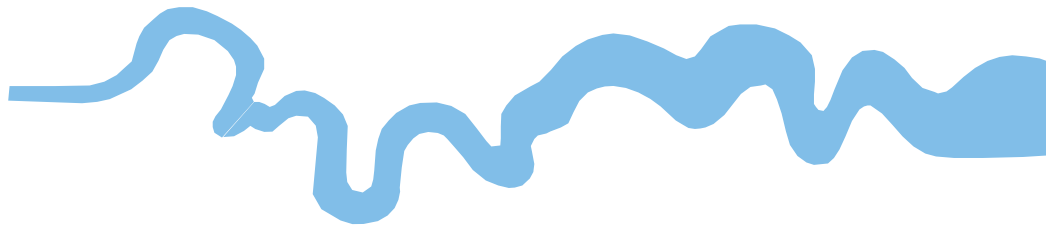
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Plates 5 and 6.

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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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