

**T H A M E S      V A L L E Y**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

**S E R V I C E S**

**Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road,  
Harwell, Oxfordshire**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**by Will Attard**

**Site Code: GYH20/108**

**(SU 5029 8949)**

# **Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road, Harwell, Oxfordshire**

## **An Archaeological Watching Brief for County Construction (Oxon)**

by Will Attard

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code GYH 20/108

**August 2021**

## Summary

**Site name:** Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road, Harwell, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SU 5029 8949

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 12th July 2021

**Project coordinator:** Tim Dawson

**Site supervisor:** Will Attard

**Site code:** GYH 20/108

**Area of site:** c.750 sqm

**Summary of results:** Trenches for eight stanchion bases were excavated as intended. Natural geology was observed in all eight trenches, but no finds, features or deposits of any archaeological significance were encountered.

**Monuments identified:** None

**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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[www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp](http://www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp).*

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 31.08.21
	Steve Preston✓ 31.08.21

# **Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road, Harwell, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief**

by Will Attard

**Report 20/108b**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out on land at Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road, Harwell, Oxfordshire (SU 5029 8960) (Fig 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Alan Hunt, of County Construction (Oxon), based at the above address.

Planning permission (App P19/v0104/FUL) has been gained from Vale of White Horse District Council for the construction of a new builder's yard, storage, fabrication workshop and demolition of an existing structure at the site. The consent is subject to conditions (4 and 5) relating to archaeology. This is in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2019) and the District's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram, Lead Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Council, advisers to the District on matters relating to archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Will Attard on the 12th July 2021 and the site code is GYH 20/108.

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

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site is located east of the village of Harwell, close to the western margins of Didcot (Fig. 1) and just east of the A34, to the south of Didcot Road. It is surrounded by agricultural land to the west and south, and a residential property to the east; an office, storage yard and associated warehouse occupy much of the rest of the site (Fig. 2). The underlying geology is recorded as Upper Greensand (BGS 1971), which is consistent with the geology observed during this watching brief and the site lies at a height of approximately 80m above Ordnance Datum, with a gentle slope from the north and west down towards the south and east.

## **Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the site had been highlighted in a brief for this project prepared by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Oram 2020). To summarise, the potential stems from the site's location within an archaeologically rich landscape, with a wide range of finds and sites nearby recorded in the county Historic

Environment Record. Notably, recent fieldwork had revealed a substantial Iron Age settlement and enclosure to the east, with unenclosed settlement to the south, linked by a trackway. Fieldwork at Blenheim Hill, west of the site on the outskirts of Harwell has also revealed Roman settlement and a small Saxon cemetery (Taylor 2017; Taylor and Preston 2017). Evaluation trenching on the site itself, however, revealed no archaeological material, features or deposits (Sanchez 2020).

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of this watching brief was to record any archaeological deposits exposed by groundworks associated with the development, and to monitor an area not previously assessed by the earlier evaluation trenching. Archaeological deposits affected by groundworks were to be excavated and recorded as appropriate, with all finds retained.

## **Results**

Eight trenches for stanchion bases were excavated in the intended locations and to their intended depths (Fig. 3; Pls 1–3). Each trench measured 1m by 1m (apart from trench 3, which measured 1.5m in width) and depths ranged from 0.63m to 1.08m. Stratigraphy was uniform in all of the trenches, consisting of topsoil above subsoil above natural green-grey silty clay (Greensand) (Fig. 4). Natural geology was visible at the base of each trench, and all spoil heaps were monitored for stray finds. No archaeological horizons, features, deposits or finds were encountered. A complete list of trenches giving length, breadth, depth and details is given in Appendix 1. The western portion of the site was observed to be higher than the east, raised and levelled by the deposition of modern made ground including brick, concrete posts, gravel & plastic prior to the construction of the former building that occupied it.

## **Finds**

No finds of an archaeological nature were recovered.

## **Conclusion**

All eight stanchion base trenches were opened successfully in the intended locations, with natural geology exposed in each. No archaeological material or finds were encountered during these works, nor was any residual material present as either surface finds or residual top or subsoil finds.

## References

- BGS, 1971, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet **253**, Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Oram, R, 2020, Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road, Harwell: Design Brief for Evaluation and Staged Mitigation, Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services, Oxford
- Sanchez, D, 2020, 'Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road, Harwell, Oxfordshire, An Archaeological Evaluation', Thames Valley Archaeological Services unpubl rep **20/108**, Reading
- Taylor, A, 2017, 'More Roman enclosures, and Saxon burials, at Kilnwood, Blenheim Hill, Harwell, Oxfordshire', in J Pine, S Preston, and A Taylor, *Archaeological Excavations on Roman, Saxon and Medieval Sites in Harwell and Longcot, Oxfordshire*, TVAS Occas Pap **26**, Reading, 61–85
- Taylor, A and Preston, S 2017, 'Roman enclosures at Blenheim Hill, Harwell, Oxfordshire, in J Pine, S Preston, and A Taylor, *Archaeological Excavations on Roman, Saxon and Medieval Sites in Harwell and Longcot, Oxfordshire*, TVAS Occas Pap **26**, Reading, 1–60

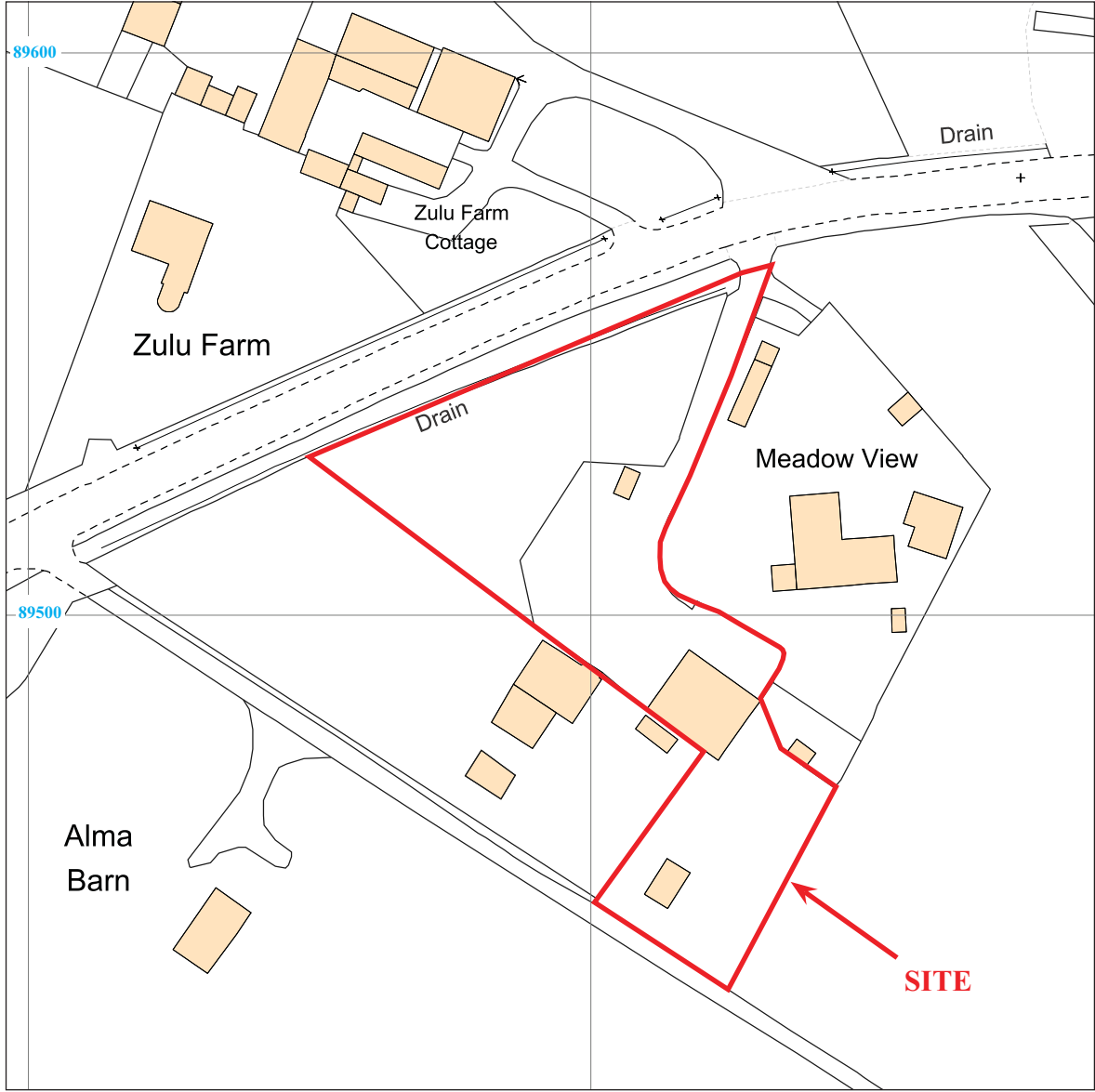
**APPENDIX 1: Trench details**

<i>Stanchion Base</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	1	1	0.76	0-0.27m topsoil; 0.27-0.70m made ground/disturbed subsoil; 0.70m+ mid green-grey silty clay with sandstone chunks natural geology.
2	1	1	0.86	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.74 made ground/disturbed subsoil; 0.74m + mid green-grey silty clay natural geology.
3	1	1.5	1.10	0-0.22m topsoil; 0.22m - 0.90m made ground/disturbed subsoil; 0.90m+ mid green-grey silty clay natural geology.
4	1	1	0.65	0-0.15m topsoil; 0.15-0.55m subsoil; 0.55m+ mid green-grey natural geology
5	1	1	1.08	0-0.40m topsoil; 0.40-0.90m made ground/disturbed subsoil; 0.90m + mid green-grey silty clay natural geology. <b>Pl. 1</b>
6	1	1	0.63	0-0.20m topsoil; 0.20-0.50m subsoil; 0.50m+ mid green-grey silty clay natural geology. <b>Pl. 2</b>
7	1	1	0.83	0-0.25m topsoil; 0.25-0.63m subsoil; 0.63m+ mid green-grey silty clay natural geology.
8	1	1	1.02	0-0.30m topsoil; 0.30-0.96m made ground/disturbed subsoil; 0.96m+ mid green-grey silty clay natural geology.









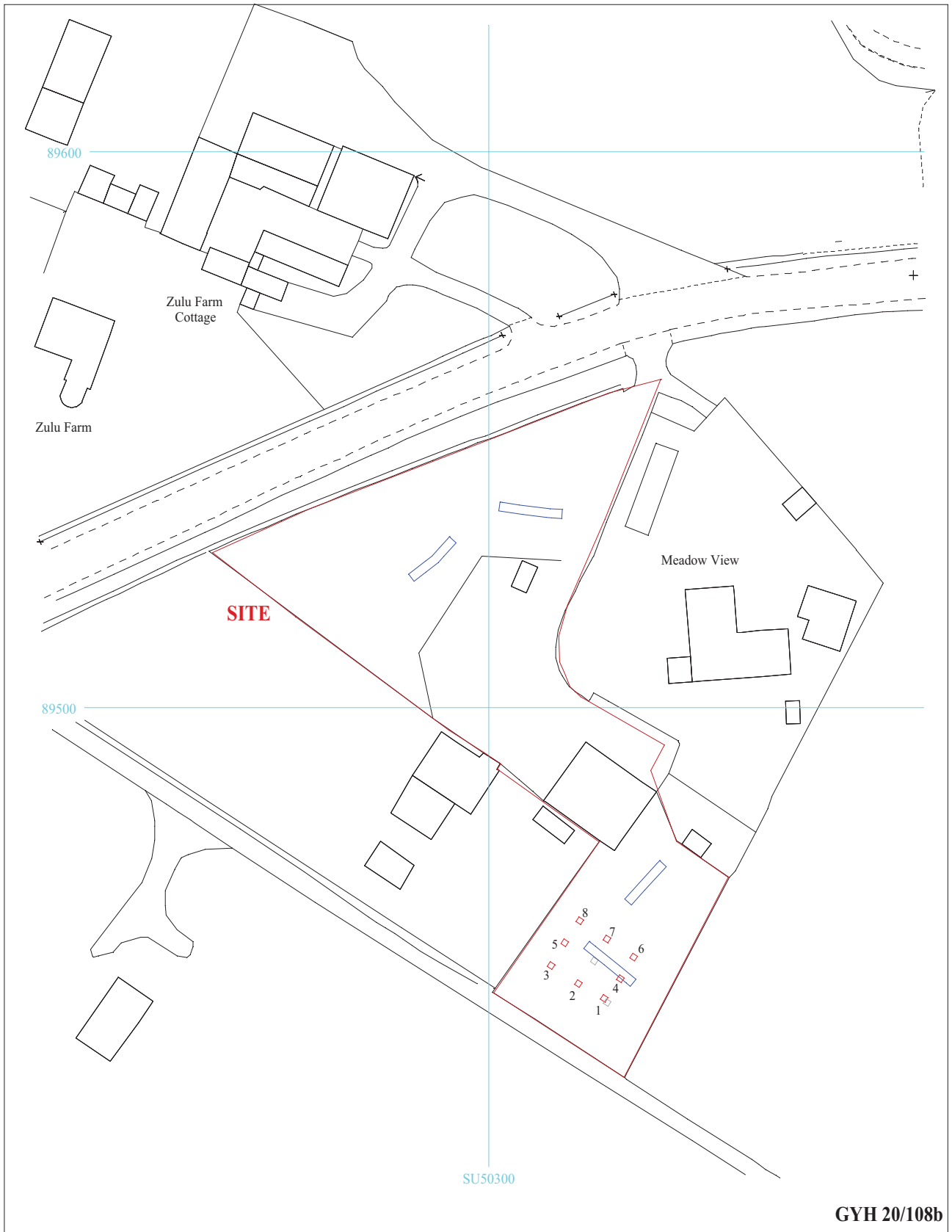
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**Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road  
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Didcot Road.

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**Land at Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road,  
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Figure 3. Location of pad foundations in south of site



*Pad 7*

NE

SW

78.35maOD

Topsoil

Subsoil

Light green grey sandy clay (natural geology)

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Figure 4. Representation of pad sections.



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Plate 1. Pad 5. looking South East,  
Scales: Horizontal 1m, Vertical 1m.



Plate 2. Pad 6, looking South East,  
Scales: Horizontal 1m, Vertical 0.5m.



Plate 3. Site Shot, looking South West,  
Scales: Horizontal 1m, Vertical 1m.

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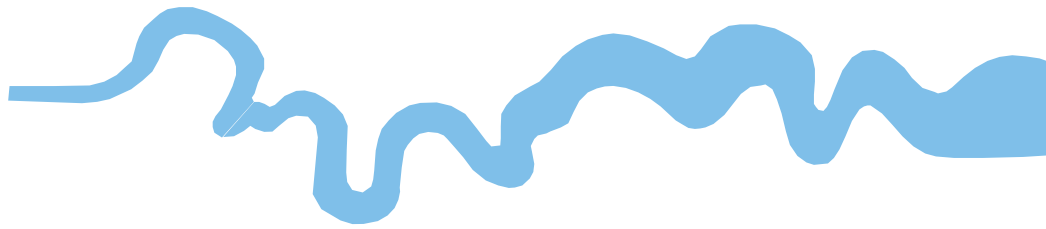
**Gibbs Yard, Didcot Road,  
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Plates 1 - 3.**

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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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