

**T H A M E S      V A L L E Y**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

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

**Wendlebury Road, Bicester,  
Oxfordshire**

**Phase 2**

**Archaeological Evaluation**

**by Jamie Lewis**

**Site Code: WRB10/97**

**(SP 5730 2094)**

# **Wendlebury Road, Phase 2, Bicester, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation  
for Oxfordshire County Council**

by Jamie Lewis  
Thames Valley Archaeological Services  
Ltd

Site Code WRB10/97

**December 2010**

## Summary

**Site name:** Wendlebury Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire phase 2

**Grid reference:** SP 5730 2094

**Site activity:** Evaluation

**Date and duration of project:** 8<sup>th</sup> November 2010

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** James Lewis

**Site code:** WRB 10/97

**Summary of results:** A single trench was excavated and within it was found the remains of a Roman Road and a moderate amount of 3rd to 4th century Roman pottery.

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 03.12.10 Steve Preston✓ 03.12.10
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# Wendlebury Road, , Bicester, Oxfordshire, Phase 2 An Archaeological Evaluation

by Jamie Lewis

Report 10/97

## Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Wendlebury Road, Phase 2, Bicester, Oxfordshire (SP 5730 2094) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr David Deriaz, of Oxfordshire County Council Environment and Economy, Speedwell House, Speedwell Street, Oxford, OX1 1NE. A proposal has been made by Oxfordshire County Highways to widen a section of Wendlebury Road for a new roundabout and link road off the A41, to serve a new residential development. This would involve widening a 300m stretch of the road by 3m on the east side and 1m on the west, and on each side would have an impact up to 1m outside the proposed new road surface. The carriageway surface and foundation are to be broken out and a new road surface constructed, with excavation of associated drainage ditches.

This report details the second phase of evaluation, an earlier trench having been excavated to the north of the current site (Milbank 2010).

The modern road is believed to follow the line of a Roman road. Due to the potential for archaeological deposits to exist along the proposed development and to be damaged or destroyed during the road widening, a second phase of archaeological field evaluation has been requested by Mr Richard Oram Smith, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council. The results of the evaluation are to be used to inform proposals for appropriate mitigation measures to limit the damage to significant archaeological deposits. This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Planning Policy Statement, *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5 2010), and the County Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram and based on a brief supplied by him (Oram 2010). The fieldwork was undertaken by Jamie Lewis and the site code is WRB 10/97. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

## Location, topography and geology

The site is located on Wendlebury Road, to the south-west of Bicester in Oxfordshire, and to the east of the A41 (Fig. 1). Wendlebury Road is here aligned NE-SW, and the section relevant to this evaluation lies between the

junction with Chesterton Lane to the south and the exit from Bicester Avenue retail centre. The road is 4.25m wide and is flanked by two drainage ditches. The land is relatively flat and lies at a height of 67m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is described as First Terrace deposits of sandy clay, sand and gravel (BGS 2002).

## **Archaeological background**

The potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief prepared by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Oram 2010). In summary, the road traverses an area of intense archaeological activity with Iron Age, Roman and Saxon occupation and burial revealed at a number of locations in the vicinity, including the Roman town of Alchester to the south. The Roman road from Alchester to *Lactodorum*, modern Towcester (Margary (1955) route 160a) had its junction with the east-west aligned Akeman Street just to the north of Alchester, and this part of Wendlebury Road is thought to follow the path of the Alchester to *Lactodorum* Roman road. Various archaeological investigations and observations have taken place on Wendlebury Road itself, and to the immediate east and west, but none have conclusively identified the position of the Roman road (Oram 2010), although it was (in 1955) clearly visible as an agger (raised causeway) within the site of Alchester itself, and Akeman Street was examined at the junction at Chesterton Lane in 1937 (Margary 1955, 144; 148). The first phase of evaluation on the line of Wendlebury Road, 300m to the north, failed to locate any Roman deposits (Milbank 2010).

## **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.

The specific research aims of the project were:

- to determine the course of the Roman road;
- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels relating to the Roman road are present on the site; and
- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

A single trench was proposed, 1.6m wide and up to 15m long, across the road from the east flanking ditch to the west ditch. This was to be excavated by JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under continuous archaeological supervision, and any deposits of possible archaeological nature were to be hand-

cleaned, and excavated or sampled to achieve the research aims. The spoilheap was to be monitored for finds, and a metal detector to be used to aid retrieval of metal finds. Trench details are summarized in Appendix 1.

## **Results**

### Trench 1 (Figs 2 and 3; Pls 1 and 2)

The upper level of the modern road surface was removed using a toothed bucket with a toothless ditching bucket used for all subsequent digging. The trench was shorter than proposed due to the location of services and cramped working space for the machine. A 3.5m long trench was excavated. The trench was excavated in the position intended, and was aligned WNW–ESE. The western end of the trench was 1.13m deep.

The stratigraphy revealed consisted of asphalt road surface (50), 0.1m thick overlying made ground comprising angular limestone fragments and concrete (51), 0.5m thick. Beneath this was 0.28m of compact light brown sandy clay (52) which contained occasional limestone inclusions, above compact brown sandy clay (53) with occasional charcoal and limestone inclusions, 0.2m thick. Roman pottery, animal bone, corroded iron objects and glass were found in this layer. This overlay a compact irregular surface of limestone (54) approximately 0.05m thick. The stones measured between 0.1m by 0.1m and 0.03m thick to 0.2m by 0.2m and 0.05m thick. The limestone surface extended beyond the edges of the excavated area to north and south. Within the joins of the stones Roman pottery and iron objects were recorded. A small area of the road surface was removed to show that the limestone surface was overlying compact brown sandy layer (55) with occasional charcoal inclusions. This layer was not excavated and so its thickness could not be established. Natural geology was not observed within the trench.

## **Finds**

### *Pottery* by Malcolm Lyne

The evaluation produced a total of 50 sherds of pottery weighing 488g, a single piece of tile (42g) and one piece of fired clay (8g) (Appendix 2). The pottery dated from the 3rd to 4th centuries. Although a single sherd from a samian bowl (R1) has a 2nd-century origin and could be residual.

### *Animal Bone* by Ceri Falys

A small amount of animal bone was recovered from context 53. A total of 16 fragments of bone were recovered for analysis, weighing 236g. The preservation of the remains was generally poor, with frequent cortical

exfoliation and many pieces were small and non-descript. Only cattle bones could be identified: three fragments were vertebral in origin, three were foot bones, including a left talus and proximal phalanx, and a single tooth portion. Cut marks were identified on two of the three vertebral fragments, suggesting butchery practices. No further information was retrieved from these animal remains

### *Iron Objects* by Jamie Lewis

Four iron objects were recovered from context 53; an undiagnostic piece of slag which weighed 38g and three corroded iron nails which weighed 4, 6 and 12g respectively.

### *Ceramic Building Material* by Danielle Milbank

The evaluation produced four pieces of ceramic building material weighing 353g in total, all from deposit 53. These were examined at x10 magnification.

These comprised one fragment of tile 19mm thick, which is a slightly soft, evenly fired fabric with frequent small, subangular quartz sand inclusions, and occasional larger (1mm) inclusions. The colour is a light orange, and the base is rough and sandy, indicating a sanded mould was used.

A second piece is also slightly soft, but less evenly fired, with an orange main body and a brown upper surface. The upper surface is rough and uneven, and the bottom surface is fairly smooth. The fabric is fine, with small, subangular quartz sand inclusions. A third piece (42g) is similar.

The fourth of the fragments may be a *tegula* fragment. It is up to 26mm thick, with a gentle, undulating curve to the upper and lower surface, and striations in the fabric which indicate that the broken part at one end may originally have been bent upwards to form the flange which is present on two sides of a complete *tegula*. (Brodribb 1987). The fabric is a hard, well fired clay with fine subangular quartz sand (possibly also mica) inclusions and fine angular grog inclusions.

### *Glass* by Jamie Lewis

A single sherd of green-blue glass handle weighing 1g was recovered from context 53.

## **Conclusion**

The evaluation succeeded in finding archaeological deposits dating from the Roman period. The finds included pottery, iron, glass and animal bone which all came from a soil build up above a cobbled limestone surface. This surface was located along the presumed route of a Roman road and almost certainly represents its remains. The

surface did not appear to be lying on the natural geology but on another potential archaeological deposit (55) which may be an original bedding layer, although the existence of a number of resurfacing episodes cannot be ruled out. The pottery has been dated to the 3rd–4th centuries AD but is nearly all abraded and may have been old when deposited; it need not mean the road had already gone out of use by that date. The surprising quantity of finds is no doubt related to the close proximity of the Roman town, rubbish from which would have been spread widely across a zone within its hinterland.

The absence of any trace of the road from the previous evaluation trench may suggest either that its line took a course slightly west of Wendlebury road further north (closer to the modern A41), or that it had been removed by the construction of the modern Wendlebury Road at that location.

## References

- BGS, 2002, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 219, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Brodribb, G, 1987, *Roman Brick and Tile*, Gloucester
- Margary, I D, 1955, *Roman Roads in Britain*, London
- Milbank, D, 2010, 'Wendlebury Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire: an archaeological evaluation', Thames Valley Archaeological Services unpubl rep 10/53, Reading
- Oram, R, 2010, 'Wendlebury Road, Wendlebury, Nr Bicester, Design Brief for Archaeological Field Investigation', Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services, Oxford
- PPS5, 2010, *Planning for the Historic Environment*, The Stationery Office, Norwich



## APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at WSW end

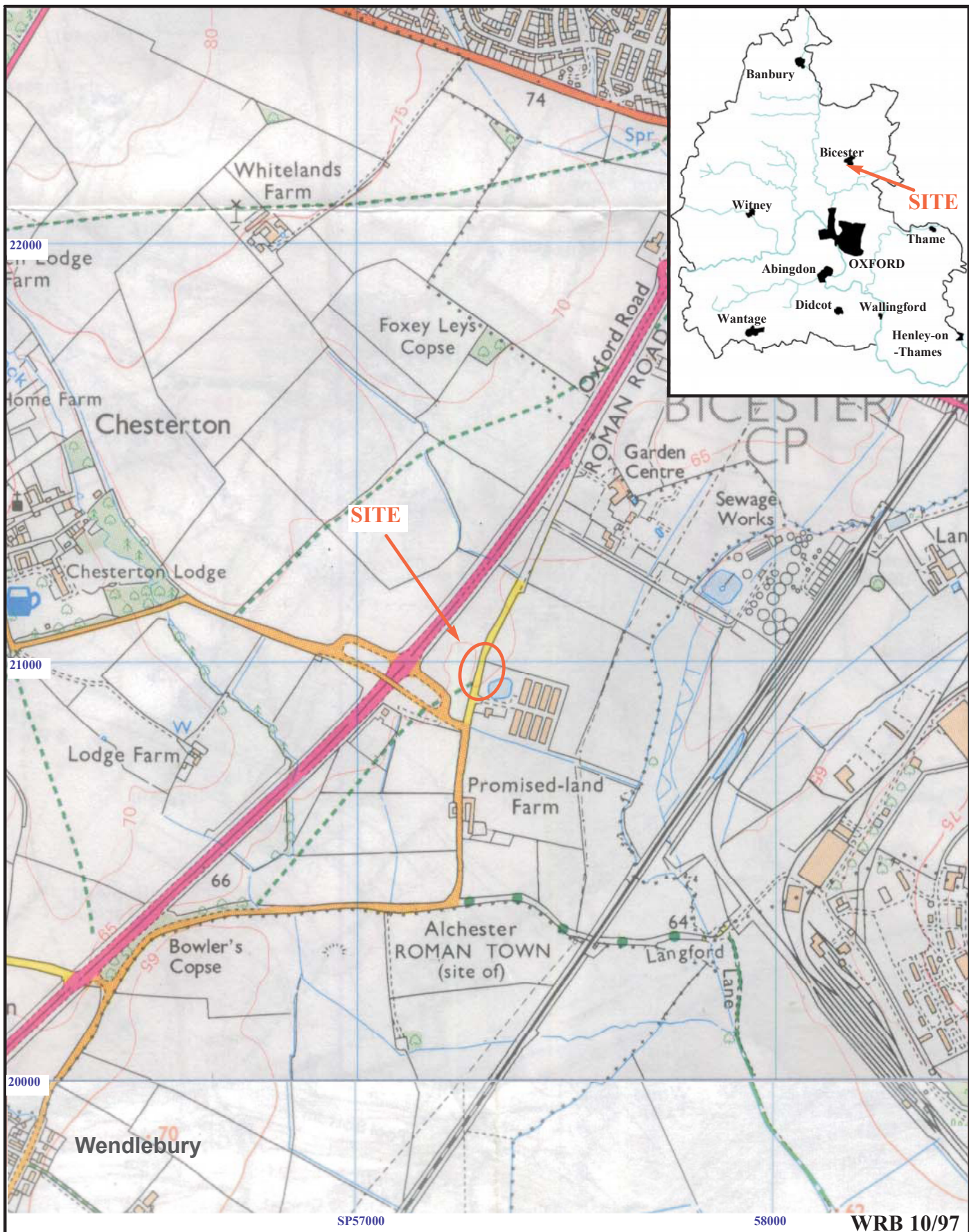
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	3.5	1.6	1.1	0–0.1m Tarmac (50), 0.01–0.60m pale yellow limestone (51), 0.60–0.88m light brown subsoil (52), 0.88m–1.08m compact brown sandy clay (53), 1.08–1.13m limestone surface (54), 1.13m+ brown sandy clay (55).

## APPENDIX 2: Pottery Catalogue

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Date-range</i>	<i>No sherds</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>	<i>Comments</i>
53	R1	Bowl	c.120-200	1	6	Abraded
	R2A	C97 mort base	c.240-400+			Abraded
		Bowl	c.240-400+			Abraded
		Misc	c.240-400+	17	89	Abraded
	R2B	R16 jar	c.300-400+			Fresh
		Misc		11	71	Abraded
	R3	Jar	c.300-400+	5	43	Fresh and abraded
	R4	Storage-jar	c.250-400+	7	251	Abraded
	MISC	Beaker				
misc				9	28	

### Fabrics

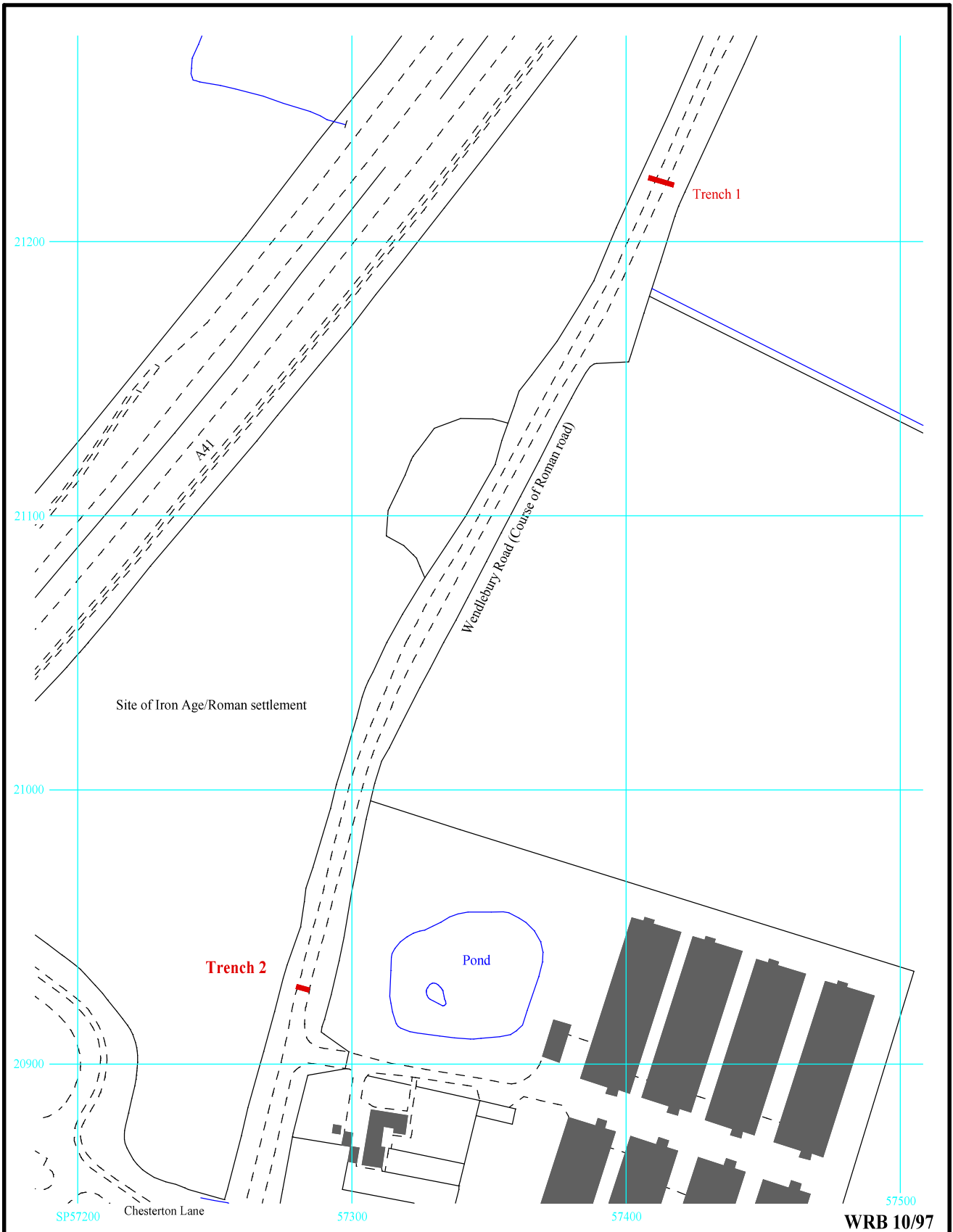
- R1. Central Gaulish samian
- R2A. Oxfordshire Red Colour-coat
- R2B. Oxfordshire Greyware
- R3. Harrold Shell-tempered Ware
- R4. Pink-Grog-Tempered Ware
- RX. Miscellaneous wares



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Figure 1. Location of site in relation to the Roman town at Alchester, Wendlebury and within Oxfordshire.

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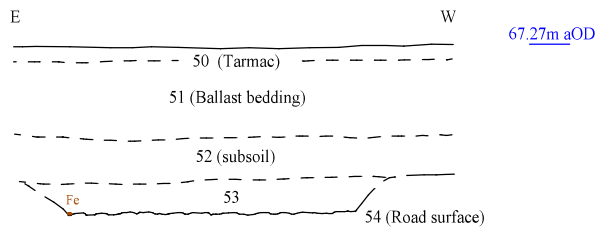
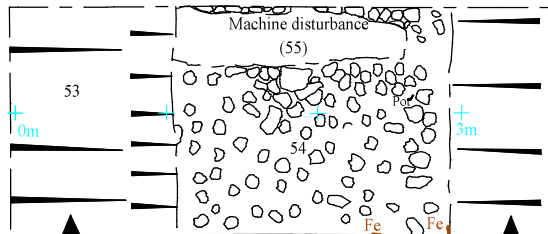


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Archaeological Evaluation - Phase 2**

Figure 2. Location of trenches 1 and 2.



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Archaeological Evaluation - Phase 2**

Figure 3. Plan and section.





Plate 1. Trench 2, looking east south east. scales 2m and 1m.

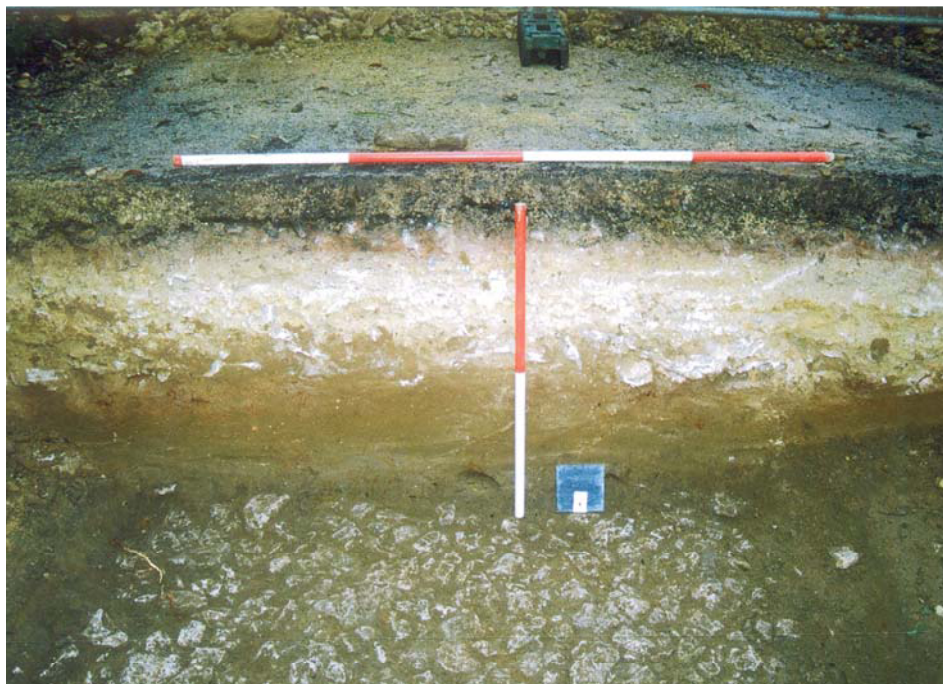


Plate 2. Trench 2, Road section, north facing section, scales 2m and 1m.

WRB 10/97

**Wendlebury Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire, 2010  
Archaeological Evaluation - Phase 2**

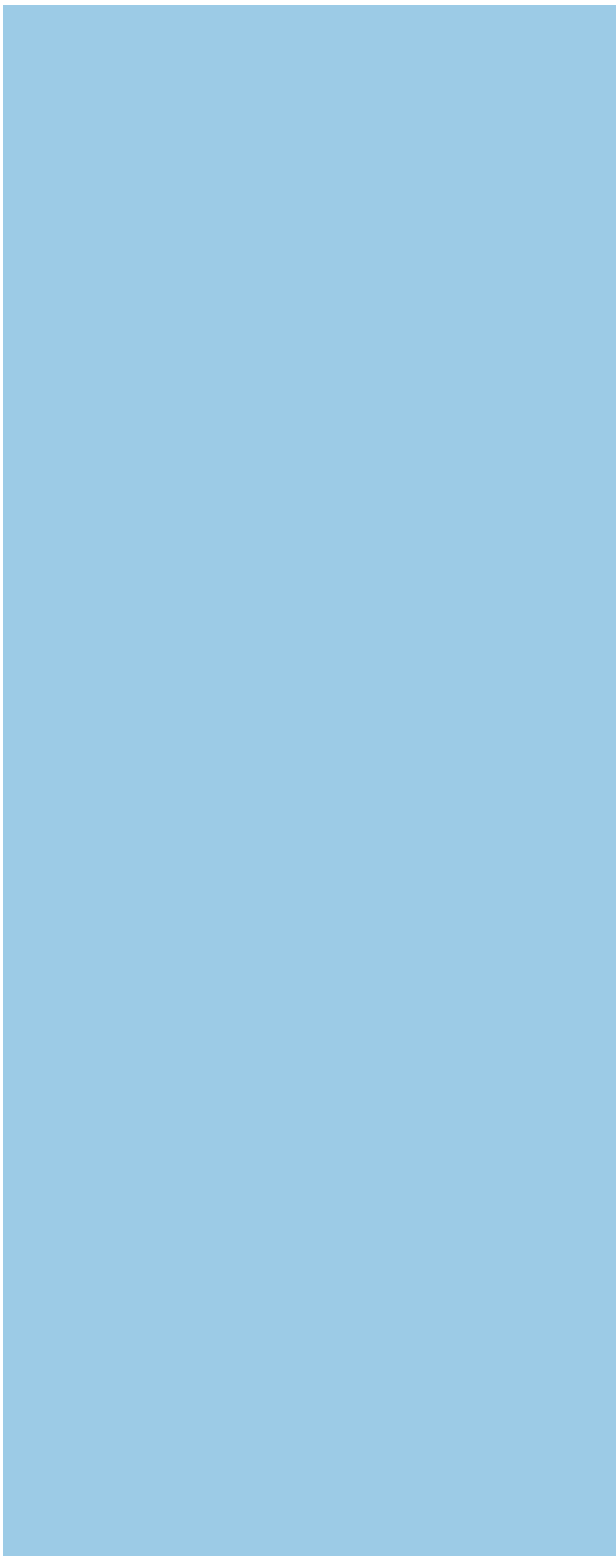
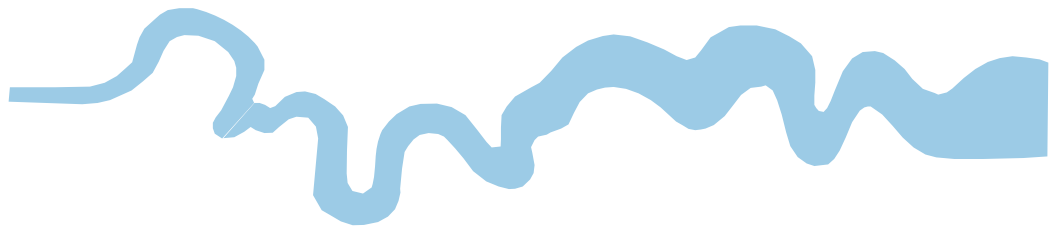
Plates 1 and 2.

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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
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 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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