



# Land at Charity Farm Stonesfield West Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation



for Empire Homes Limited

CA Project: 5410 CA Report: 15264

May 2015



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## Archaeological Evaluation

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Fig. 5

Fig. 6

#### **SUMMARY**

**Project Name:** Land at Charity Farm

**Location:** Stonesfield, West Oxfordshire

**NGR:** SP 3978 1720

**Type:** Evaluation

**Date:** 11 to 14 May 2015

Planning Reference: 14/02130/OUT

**Location of Archive:** To be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service

Site Code: CHAF 15

In May 2015, Cotswold Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at Charity Farm, Stonesfield, Oxfordshire. The evaluation comprised the excavation of 12 evaluation trenches.

The Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record records no known heritage assets within the proposed development site, but the site lies adjacent to the northern edge of the Scheduled Monument of Stonesfield Roman villa (SAM No. 336649). A previous geophysical survey identified a number of potential ditches and pits.

The evaluation recorded a curvilinear ditch in the north-western part of the site (Trench 1). This feature contained a possible human cremation buried within a pottery vessel dating to the Middle to Late Iron Age. An undated pit was located to the east of the ditch.

Slight evidence of previous farming activity was shown by the presence of plough scars within the southernmost part of the site.

Despite the presence of Stonesfield Roman villa in the fields directly to the south, no evidence of Romano-British occupation or activity was found. The evaluation results displayed a minimal correlation with the geophysical survey results, although the identified curvilinear anomaly was found to correspond to below-ground archaeological remains.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In May 2015 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological evaluation for Empire Homes Limited of land at Charity Farm, Stonesfield, West Oxfordshire (centred on NGR: SP 3978 1720; Fig. 1). The evaluation was undertaken to inform a planning application (planning ref: 14/02130/OUT) made to West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC; the local planning authority) for the erection of 37 dwellings with associated access and landscaping.
- 1.2 The scope of the evaluation, which comprised the excavation of 12 trial trenches, was detailed within the *Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation: Land at Charity Farm, Stonesfield* (OCC 2015) prepared by Mr Hugh Coddington, Archaeology Team Leader, Oxfordshire County Council (ATLOCC), the archaeological advisor to WODC. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a detailed written scheme of investigation (WSI) produced by CA (2015) and approved by Hugh Coddington. The fieldwork also followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (CIfA 2014), the English Heritage procedural documents *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (EH 1991) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE): Project Manager's Guide* (EH 2006). It was monitored by Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist, Oxfordshire County Council, including a site visit on 13 May 2015.

#### The site

1.3 The evaluation site is approximately 2.5ha in area, and is located on agricultural land on the south-eastern edge of the village of Stonesfield. The site consists of an arable field (Figs 5 and 6), on the northern edge of a dry stream valley called Bagg's Bottom. This lies on the southern tail of the dipslope of the Cotswold Hills and on the southern edge of the interfluve between the Rivers Glyme and Evenlode. The valley of the River Evenlode lies approximately 500m to the south of the site. The site is bounded to the north-west by properties and associated gardens fronting onto Woodstock Road, to the north-east and south-east by agricultural fields and to the south-west by rear gardens of properties fronting onto Coombe Road. The agricultural fields to the south-east of the site contain the Scheduled Monument of Stonesfield Roman villa (see Archaeological Background, below). The site lies between 110m and 120m AOD, on a south-facing slope.

1.4 The underlying bedrock geology of the area is mapped as White Limestone Formation limestone of the Jurassic period (BGS 2015). No superficial geological deposits are recorded within the site. The uppermost weathered surface of the limestone bedrock, within a silty clay matrix was encountered during the evaluation.

#### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site has been the previous subject of a heritage desk-based assessment (CA 2014) and a geophysical survey (PCG 2015). The following section is summarised from these sources.
- 2.2 There are no World Heritage Sites or sites included on the Tentative List of Future Nominations for World Heritage Sites situated within the site. There are no Scheduled Monuments within the site, but the site lies adjacent to the north-western edge of the Scheduled Monument of Stonesfield Roman villa (SAM No. 336649). There are no Listed Buildings, Registered Parks and Gardens, or Registered Battlefields within the site (CA 2014).
- 2.3 There are no non-designated heritage assets recorded within the site, although two stone workings lie adjacent to the western edge of the site and a number of buried features associated with Iron Age pottery were identified just outside of the site's south-western corner (ibid).

#### Roman period (AD 43 – AD 410)

- 2.4 Akeman Street runs on a north-east to south-west axis *c*. 250m to the south-east of the site. This was one of the principal roads of the Roman province of Britannia and linked the important towns of Cirencester (Corinium) and St Albans (Verulamium).
- 2.5 The site of Stonesfield villa to the immediate south-east of site. This villa was established soon after the Roman conquest and continued to be occupied until at least the 4th century AD. Villas are also noted at Ditchley Park (c. 2 km to the north), North Leigh (c. 1.5 km to the south), Oaklands (c. 1.5 km to the west), Fawler (c. 2 km to the west) and Callow Hill (c. 2 km to the north-east).

- 2.6 Stonesfield Villa was first identified in the early 18th century when elaborate mosaics and a hypocaust were recorded (Salzman 1939). Recent fieldwalking and a geophysical survey have indicated that buried evidence associated with the villa extends beyond the north-western and the north-eastern boundaries of the scheduled area (EH 2013).
- 2.7 A total of three isolated find spots, dating to the Roman period are recorded within the wider landscape. These include part of a gypsum statue found c. 200m to the north of the site, a Late Iron Age/Roman coin recovered from the field adjacent to the east of the site and a Roman coin from the centre of Stonesfield c. 300m to the west of the site (CA 2014).

Medieval period to modern (1066 – present)

- 2.8 Numerous stone workings have been identified in the valley sides around the village These are visible as open quarries and adits with associated spoil tips and chipping banks. A number of previously unidentified stone workings have also been noted just to the south of the site, within the western section of the Scheduled Monument (EH 2013). Quarrying at Stonesfield declined from the early 20th century onwards and has now been entirely abandoned.
- 2.9 The earliest clear mapping of the area available is the Davis Map of Oxfordshire (1794), this shows the site as lying within the agricultural hinterland to the east of the village of Stonesfield. At this time a routeway is depicted following the line of the Roman Akeman Street to the south of the site. The 1st Edition 6" Ordnance Survey map (1880) shows that Woodstock Road was established in preference to the route following Akeman Street in Bagg's Bottom. During the 1960s and 1970s new housing was constructed on the eastern edge of Stonesfield along Combe Road and Woodstock Road. The present farmhouse and outbuildings at Charity Farm were constructed in the 1980s (CA 2014).
- 2.10 The geophysical survey of the site (PCG 2015) identified a limited number of potential ditches and pits as well as some probable natural features (PCG 2015).

#### 3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 The objectives of the evaluation were to provide information about the archaeological resource within the site, including its presence/absence, character, extent, date, integrity, state of preservation and quality, in accordance with *Standard and Guidance: Archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014). The information gathered will enable WODC to identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset within the site, consider the impact of the proposed development upon it, and to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the development proposal, in line with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012).
- 3.2 The specific research aims of the project, based on those outlined for the Roman period in *Solent Thames Research Agenda: The Roman Period* (Fulford and Allen 2010) were to:
  - seek to identify evidence for any buildings or other structures that may relate to Roman habitation and activity, including any industrial or agricultural processes that may have been undertaken within the site;
  - identify, through a programme of environmental sampling and the collection of ecofacts, any activities that may have been carried out in the vicinity of the site in order to determine their function and the general nature of the environment immediately surrounding the site;
  - seek to investigate any evidence of widespread settlement desertion after the early fifth century AD with relation to the decline of 'villas' and the associated reorganisation of the rural landscape.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 The evaluation comprised the excavation of 12 trenches in the locations shown (Fig. 2). All trenches were 30m long and 1.8m wide, equivalent to 2% of the area of the site. The trenches were located to test potential archaeological anomalies detected by the geophysical survey (PCG 2015), as well as to provide a sample of the remainder of the site.

- 4.2 Trenches were set out on OS National Grid (NGR) co-ordinates using Leica GPS and surveyed in accordance with *CA Technical Manual 4: Survey Manual*. All trenches were excavated by a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket. All machine excavation was undertaken under constant archaeological supervision to the top of the first significant archaeological horizon or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. Where archaeological deposits were encountered, they were excavated by hand in accordance with *CA Technical Manual 1: Fieldwork Recording Manual*.
- 4.3 Deposits were assessed for their palaeoenvironmental potential in accordance with CA Technical Manual 2: The Taking and Processing of Environmental and Other Samples from Archaeological Sites. However, no deposits were identified that required sampling. All artefacts recovered were processed in accordance with CA Technical Manual 3: Treatment of Finds Immediately after Excavation.
- 4.4 The archive and artefacts from the evaluation are currently held by CA at their offices in Milton Keynes. Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner the artefacts will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service, along with the site archive.
- 4.5 A summary of information from this project, as set out within Appendix C, will be entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain.

#### 5. RESULTS

- 5.1 This section provides an overview of the evaluation results. Detailed summaries of the recorded contexts and finds can be found in Appendices A and B respectively. Figure 2 shows the excavated trenches and recorded archaeological features overlain on the geophysical survey results.
- 5.2 With the exceptions of cultivation marks, archaeological features were exposed in one trench only (Trench 1). Plough scars on a north-east to south-west alignment were identified within Trenches 4, 12 and 11, broadly correlating with geophysical anomalies interpreted as cultivation marks. The remainder of the trenches were blank. Of the blank trenches, Trenches 7, 8 and 9 were targeted on geophysical anomalies identified in the geophysical survey report as being possibly

archaeological in nature (PCG 2015). The absence of archaeological features in these three trenches suggests that these geophysical anomalies were caused by natural variations in the ground composition.

#### General stratigraphy

A broadly similar stratigraphic sequence was identified within all of the trenches. The natural geological substrate, which comprised loose limestone rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix, was identified at an average depth of 0.32m below present ground level (Fig. 4). This was overlain by intermittent subsoil, identified within Trench 4 only, which comprised firm orange sandy clay. Directly overlying the natural, or subsoil where present, was sandy clay topsoil, averaging 0.32m in thickness.

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

- 5.4 Located at the western end of the trench was curvilinear ditch terminus 105 (Fig. 3). This was exposed for a length of 0.66m on a broadly north to south orientation and measured 0.44m in width. Initial hand cleaning revealed the top of an apparently intact vessel deliberately placed within the terminus. The vessel contained possible human cremated remains. A sample of pottery recovered from this vessel was dated to the Early to Middle Iron Age. Following recording, the feature was designated for preservation *in situ*, with the agreement of the County Archaeologist, precluding any further investigation.
- 5.5 Ditch 105 correlated broadly with a curvilinear anomaly depicted on the geophysical survey, identified extending beyond the north-western limits of the site. This anomaly was interpreted as a possible eaves drip gully for a roundhouse, which, based on the geophysical survey results, would have a projected internal diameter of *c*.15m.
- 5.6 Located at the eastern end of the trench, approximately 20m from ditch terminus 105, was sub-circular posthole 103 (Fig. 3, section AA). It was steep sided with a concave base and measured approximately 0.85m in length, 0.66m in width and was 0.32m in depth. No finds were recovered from the single silty clay fill 104, which contained large quantities of limestone fragments, with a stone-less void located centrally within the feature, which may indicate the former presence of a post.

#### 6. THE FINDS

6.1 Artefactual material from evaluation was hand-recovered from one deposit (a ditch fill). The recovered material dates to the Early prehistoric period. Quantities of the artefact types recovered are given in Appendix B. The pottery has been recorded according to sherd count/weight per fabric.

#### 6.2 Pottery: prehistoric

Three sherds in a handmade fabric tempered with oolitic limestone and fossil shell were recorded in fill 106 of gully 105. This pottery constitutes a sample taken from a potentially complete vessel which was left *in situ*. Included is a rimsherd from a slack-shouldered vessel with an upright, slightly flattened rim. The fabric and form are consistent with Early to Middle Iron Age dating across the Upper Thames region (Allen 1990, 38; Booth 2011, 353; 362). Interpretation as a cremation vessel is highly unlikely, given the date and form of the pottery. The condition is moderate to good.

#### 7. DISCUSSION

- 7.1 The evaluation recorded limited evidence for archaeological features within the proposed development site. Where archaeological features were encountered, there was partial correlation with the preceding geophysical survey, which had suggested the presence of a ring gully in the north-western part of the site (PCG 2015). However, the discrete features and feint linear anomalies predicted by the geophysical survey were not found to correspond to below-ground archaeological remains. Despite the presence of Stonesfield Roman villa in the fields directly to the south-east of the site, no evidence of Romano-British occupation or activity was found.
- 7.2 The archaeological features encountered during the evaluation comprised a curvilinear ditch, which contained a possible human cremation, buried in an Early to Middle Iron Age vessel. The on-site interpretation as a cremation burial is highly unlikely, given the date and form of the pottery.

#### Later prehistoric

7.3 The geophysical survey identified a partial penannular anomaly within the north-western part of the site (PCG 2015; Fig. 3, 2), which was interpreted as a ring-ditch

or more likely a roundhouse gully. Based on the geophysical survey results, it had a projected internal diameter of *c*. 15m with a 3.5m gap noted within the eastern circuit of the anomaly possibly indicating an entranceway. There is a slight discrepancy between the entranceway depicted on geophysical plot and that encountered within the field.

- 7.4 This anomaly was investigated within Trench 1. Although no definitive structural or settlement evidence was revealed within the area delineated by the ditch, its size, and morphology is suggestive of an eaves drip gully associated with a roundhouse.
- No similar settlement features attributable to the Iron Age are recorded in the immediate vicinity of the site. Shallow pits and ditches associated with surface collections of pottery were recorded during stripping and trenching on a housing site (SP 390 81736) c. 730m to the north-west (HER 334630, Benson and Brown 1966), further Iron Age pottery was recovered during an evaluation at Combe Road in 2004, c. 230m to the south-west (HER 16822, JMHS 2004) and the isolated find spot of an Iron Age Stater (HER 17386) was found in an adjacent field, c. 300m to the east.

#### Undated

3.23 An undated pit/posthole was revealed within Trench 1. The exact function of which remains uncertain, however, it possibly relates to the identified Iron Age activity or it may relate to medieval or later activity associated with the settlement of Stonesfield or its associated farming activity.

#### 8. CA PROJECT TEAM

The fieldwork was undertaken by Jeremy Mordue, assisted by Ronan Mooney and Jonathan Whitmore. This report was written by Jeremy Mordue. The finds report was written by Jacky Sommerville and the illustrations were prepared by Dan Bashford. The archive has been compiled by Emily Evans and prepared for deposition by Hazel O'Neill. The project was managed for CA by Stuart Joyce.

#### 9. REFERENCES

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- JMHS (John Moore Heritage Services) 2004 An archaeological evaluation of Land off Combe Road, Stonesfield, Oxfordshire

OCC (Oxfordshire County Council) 2015 Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation:

Land at Charity Farm, Stonesfield

PCG (Pre-Construct Geophysics) 2015 Land at Charity Farm, Stonesfield, West Oxfordshire: Archaeological Geophysical Survey

Salzman L (ed) 1939 The Victoria History of the County of Oxfordshire Vol 1

#### Cartographic sources

A Map of the County of Oxfordshire 1794 (Davis)
Ordnance Survey First Edition 6" Map Sheet XXVI 1880
Ordnance Survey Second Edition 6" Map Sheet XXVI 1899

#### **APPENDIX A: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS**

Context	Trench	Context Interpretation	Context Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth/ thickness (m)	Spot- date
101	1	Topsoil	Dark greyish brown silt-clay, friable, frequent small-medium limestone chunks.			0.23	
102	1	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix.				
103	1	Pit	Cut of sub-circular pit. Steep sides to concave base.	>0.85	0.65	0.42	
104	1	Fill of 103	Mid-dark greyish brown silt clay, friable-firm, moderate small- medium sub-angular chalk chunks; moderate charcoal flecks and lumps.			0.42	
105	1	Gully	Cut of curvilinear gulley terminus. Oriented north-east to south-west. Not excavated to full depth.	>0.66	0.44		
106	1	Fill of 105	Mid-dark greyish brown silt-clay, friable, moderate small-medium sub-angular chalk chunks, occasional charcoal flecks.				
200	2	Topsoil	Mid-dark grey-brown sandy clay, frequent small-medium sub- angular chalk chunks, friable.			0.32	
201	2	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix.				
300	3	Topsoil	Mid-dark grey-brown sandy clay, frequent small-medium sub- angular chalk chunks, friable.			0.32	
301	3	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix.				
400	4	Topsoil	Mid-dark grey-brown sandy clay, frequent small-medium sub- angular chalk chunks, friable.			0.32	
401	4	Subsoil	Intermittent orange-brown sandy clay, slightly gritty, frequent small angular pebbles, friable.			0.10	
402	4	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix.				
500	5	Topsoil	Mid-dark grey-brown sandy clay, frequent small-medium sub- angular chalk chunks, friable.			0.32	
501	5	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix. Some buff silt-clay patches.				
600	6	Topsoil	Mid-dark grey-brown sandy clay, frequent small-medium sub- angular chalk chunks, friable.			0.32	
601	6	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix.				
700	7	Topsoil	Mid-dark grey-brown sandy clay, frequent small-medium sub- angular chalk chunks, friable.			0.30	

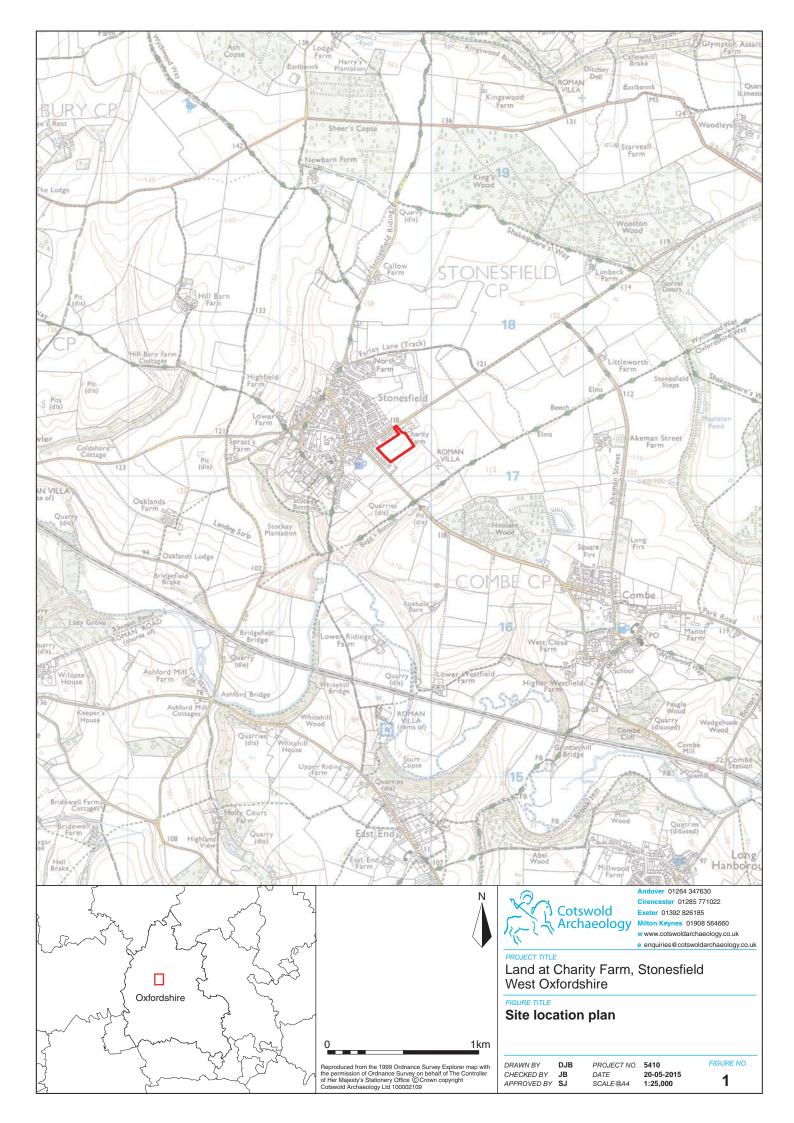
Context	Trench	Context Interpretation	Context Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth/ thickness (m)	Spot- date
701	7	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix. Some buff silt-clay patches, and orange sandy clay patches without stones.			()	
800	8	Topsoil	Mid-dark grey-brown sandy clay, frequent small-medium sub- angular chalk chunks, friable.			0.32	
801	8	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix. Some buff silt-clay patches, and orange sandy clay patches without stones.				
900	9	Topsoil	Mid-dark grey-brown sandy clay, frequent small-medium sub- angular chalk chunks, friable.			0.28	
901	9	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix.				
1000	10	Topsoil	Mid-dark grey-brown sandy clay, frequent small-medium sub- angular chalk chunks, friable.			0.32	
1001	10	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix.				
1100	11	Topsoil	Mid-dark grey-brown sandy clay, frequent small-medium sub- angular chalk chunks, friable.			0.30	
1101	11	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix.				
1200	12	Topsoil	Mid-dark grey-brown sandy clay, frequent small-medium sub-angular chalk chunks, friable. More unstable than other trenches.			0.32	
1201	12	Geology	Limestone bedrock comprising loose medium-sized sub-angular chalk rubble in an orange-brown sandy clay matrix. Some buff-brown silt-clay patches. Slightly degraded chalk patches. Upper surface of chalk more disturbed here than other trenches.				

#### **APPENDIX B: THE FINDS**

Context	Category	Description	Count	Weight (g)	Spot-date
106	Late prehistoric pottery	Oolitic limestone-and-fossil shell	3	62	EIA-MIA
		tempered fabric			

#### APPENDIX C: OASIS REPORT FORM

dshire				
In May 2015, Cotswold Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at Charity Farm, Stonesfield, Oxfordshire. The evaluation comprised the excavation of 12 evaluation trenches.				
The Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record records no known heritage assets within the proposed development site, but the site lies adjacent to the northern edge of the Scheduled Monument of Stonesfield Roman villa (SAM No. 336649). A previous geophysical survey identified a number of potential ditches and pits.				
The evaluation recorded a curvilinear ditch in the north-western part of the site (Trench 1). This feature contained a possible human cremation buried within a pottery vessel dating to the Middle to Late Iron Age. An undated pit was located to the east of the ditch.				
was shown by the lost part of the site.				
Despite the presence of Stonesfield Roman villa in the fields directly to the south, no evidence of Romano-British occupation or activity was found. The evaluation results displayed a minimal correlation with the geophysical survey results, although the identified curvilinear anomaly was found to correspond to below-ground archaeological remains.				
11-14 May 2015				
Field evaluation				
Geophysical survey (Pre-Construct Geophysics 2015) Heritage Desk-Based Assessment (Cotswold Archaeology 2014)				
2.5ha				
Oxfordshire County Council Cotswold Archaeology				
Stuart Joyce				
Jeremy Mordue				
None None				
<del> </del>				
tent				
ery				
text sheets, trench ets, etc.				
abase, digital photos,				
gical Evaluation CA				

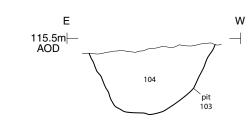






1:100

Section AA



1:20



Ditch terminus 105, looking south-east (scale 0.3m)



Trench 1, looking west (scales 1m)



Land at Charity Farm, Stonesfield
West Oxfordshire

Trench 1, plan, section and photographs

DRAWN BY DJB
CHECKED BY JB
APPROVED BY SJ 
 PROJECT NO.
 5410

 DATE
 20-05-2015

 SCALE@A3
 1:100 1:20

3







- 4 Trench 11, looking south-east (scales 1m)
- 5 Site, looking east



Andover 01264 347630 Cirencester 01285 771022 Exeter 01392 826185 Milton Keynes 01908 564660

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Land at Charity Farm, Stonesfield

West Oxfordshire

FIGURE TITLE

#### **Photographs**

DRAWN BY DJB
CHECKED BY JB
APPROVED BY SJ

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 DATE
 20-05-2015

 SCALE@A4
 NA

FIGURE NO.

4 & 5





Site, looking south-west 6



Andover 01264 347630 Cirencester 01285 771022 Exeter 01392 826185 Milton Keynes 01908 564660 w www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk
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Land at Charity Farm, Stonesfield West Oxfordshire

# FIGURE TITLE Photograph

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 PROJECT NO.
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 DATE
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 SCALE@A4
 NA

FIGURE NO. 6



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