

Swindon Gateway Blunsdon Hill Swindon

Archaeological Evaluation



for
Orion Heritage Ltd

on behalf of
Bloor Homes

CA Project: 6225
CA Report: 17203
Accession No: SWIMG:2017.016

April 2017



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SUMMARY

Project Name:	Swindon Gateway
Location:	Blunsdon Hill, Swindon
NGR:	SU1507 8959
Type:	Evaluation
Date:	5-7 April 2017
Planning Reference:	S/17/0211
Location of Archive:	To be deposited with Swindon Museum and Art Gallery
Accession No:	SWIMG:2017.016
Site Code:	SGB 17

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology in April 2017 at Swindon Gateway, Blunsdon Hill, Swindon. Six trenches were excavated.

The evaluation revealed evidence for widespread landscaping of the site during modern development that appears to have truncated any surviving archaeological remains associated with the known prehistoric and Roman occupation of Blunsdon Hill.

Two very shallow features, a linear deposit and a possible pit, were excavated. The features may have been the remnants of very truncated archaeological features, but may equally have had natural derivations.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In April 2017 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological evaluation for Orion Heritage Ltd on behalf of Bloor Homes at Swindon Gateway, Blunsdon Hill, Swindon (centred on NGR: SU 1507 8959; Fig. 1). The evaluation was undertaken to accompany a planning application to Swindon Borough Council (SBC; planning ref. S/17/0211) for the development of two office buildings (Class B1a), associated car parking, hard and soft landscaping and new vehicular access. A programme of pre-determination archaeological trial trenching was recommended by Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger, County Archaeologist, Wiltshire Council (WC), the archaeological advisor to SBC.
- 1.2 The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a detailed *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) produced by CA (2017) and approved by Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger. The fieldwork also followed *Standard and guidance: Archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014). It was monitored by Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger, including a site visit on 6 April 2017.

The site

- 1.3 The site is approximately 0.5ha in extent, and comprises an area of scrubland that forms part of the Swindon Gateway industrial estate on the northern outskirts of the town. It is bordered to the north-east by the B4534, to the north-west by an electricity substation, to the south-west by Latham Road and to the south-east by Swindon Harvester restaurant. The site lies at approximately 141m AOD at its southern end, with the land dropping away gently toward the north.
- 1.4 The underlying bedrock geology of the area is mapped on the border of Ampthill Clay Formation mudstone bedrock and Stanford Formation limestone bedrock of the Jurassic era with no overlying superficial deposits (BGS 2017). Yellow clay was identified as the natural substrate in the southern trenches (Trenches 3–6), with limestone present in the northern trenches (Trenches 1 and 2).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A Heritage Desk Based Assessment was produced by Orion Heritage (2016) which is summarised below, along with additional information.

Prehistoric

- 2.2 The area around Blunsdon Hill appears to have been occupied throughout much of the prehistoric period. An archaeological evaluation ahead of the A419 Blunsdon Bypass identified features containing Neolithic and Bronze Age worked flint approximately 1km to the north-west of the site (CA 2003) and subsequent fieldwalking recovered further worked flint dating from the Mesolithic to the Early Bronze Age. Worked flint of a similar date has also been found residually within later contexts at excavations at Abbeymeads, 300m west of the site (McSloy *et al.* 2009) and at Groundwell Farm, 750m south-east of the site (Gingell 1982).
- 2.3 An Iron Age enclosure with settlement activity (HER ref: MWI15987) was identified approximately 300m to the south-east of the site at Groundwell West during the initial development of the industrial estate (Walker *et al.* 2001), with further, possibly related, pits found at Abbeymeads (McSloy *et al.* 2009) and during the excavation stage of the works associated with the A419 Blunsdon Bypass (Brett and McSloy 2011), indicating extensive Iron Age occupation in the area surrounding the site.

Roman

- 2.4 Ermin Street (HER ref: MWI15998), the Roman road connecting *Corinium* (Cirencester) to *Cunetio* (Mildenhall) and then *Calleva* (Silchester), follows the former route of the A419 and passes within 100m of the eastern site boundary (OH 2016). Further Roman activity is observed within the area as find spots and isolated features approximately 300m to the south-west of the site at Groundwell Farm (HER ref: MWI15883 and MWI16020).
- 2.5 Excavations associated with the A419 Blunsdon Bypass identified an area of Roman activity immediately to the east of the site. A number of pits and ditches were excavated, dating from the mid 1st to 2nd century AD and which appeared to indicate small paddocks or fields potentially associated with a nearby settlement (Brett and McSloy 2011). Several of the ditches appeared to continue into the site.
- 2.6 A substantial Roman Villa has been identified at Groundwell Ridge approximately 900m to the south-west of Site B (OH 2016). The villa was a moderately prosperous villa with two major domestic buildings and a possible *nymphaeum*, perhaps representing a religious focus for the family or villa community (Brickstock *et al.* 2006). Pottery recovered from the villa excavations dated its occupation to the 2nd

to 4th centuries, possibly coinciding with the abandonment of the paddocks identified to the west of the development site.

Post-Roman

- 2.7 Two isolated Early medieval burials were excavated at Abbeymeads, but no associated settlement remains have yet been identified (McSloy *et al.* 2009). The excavation of a medieval hollow-way preserving the line of the Roman road 5km south-east of the site indicates that the route of Ermine Street was still used in the medieval period (Hart and Alexander 2009), and the settlement of Blunsdon St Andrew (then *Bluntesdone*) was recorded in the Domesday Book, although no medieval sites or findspots are known from the immediate vicinity of the site. The site is likely to have formed part of the agricultural hinterland of the settlement and abbey at Blunsdon St Andrew throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods.
- 2.8 Part of the site has previously been subject to archaeological field evaluation associated with development of the industrial estate (CA 2005). Trenches 10 and 13 were located within the site boundary and identified no archaeological features, which was attributed to the unsuitability of the Ampthill Clay for settlement compared with the nearby Coral Rag at Groundwell Ridge.

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 The objectives of the evaluation are 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 *Standard and guidance: Archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014). This information will enable SBC to identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset, 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).

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The fieldwork as originally devised comprised the excavation of 5 trenches (Trenches 1-5), each 20m long and 2m wide, in the locations shown on the attached plan (Fig. 2). Trench 6 (also 20m long and 2m wide) was added at the request of

Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger during her site visit on 6 April 2017. 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*.

- 4.2 All trenches were excavated by 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. In Trench 4 machine excavation was halted at a depth of 0.32m as potential features were identified, although these were determined to be modern in date. It was agreed with Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger that no further excavation was necessary in this trench. 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* and no deposits were identified that required sampling. All artefacts recovered were processed in accordance with 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 Kemble. Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner the artefacts will be deposited with Swindon Museum and Art Gallery under accession number SWIMG:2017.016, along with the site archive. A summary of information from this project, set out within Appendix C, will be entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain.

5. RESULTS (FIGS 2–4)

- 5.1 This section provides an overview of the evaluation results; detailed summaries of the recorded contexts and finds are to be found in Appendices A and B.
- 5.2 The natural geological substrate comprised limestone in the north of the site (Trenches 1 and 2) and yellow clay in the centre and south of the site (Trenches 3–6). In Trenches 1–5 the natural was overlain by a layer of grey clay, up to 0.42m thick, which appeared to be a make-up layer. This layer was overlain by a buried

topsoil in Trenches 1–3. In Trench 5 the clay was covered by a sheet of plastic membrane, upon which a thin layer of pink sand and gravel was lain; in Trench 6 there was no clay deposit and the membrane was lain directly onto the natural substrate. In all trenches the most recent deposit was a layer of modern made ground comprising mixed clay and stone with a thin covering of grass.

- 5.3 Trenches 1, 2 and 4 contained no archaeological features or deposits. Trench 6 contained a modern service trench and patches of disturbance, both probably related to the use of the site as a compound area during previous development of the industrial estate.

Trench 3 (Figs 2 & 3)

- 5.4 Deposit 304 (Fig. 3) was located near the south-east end of the trench and was roughly linear in plan, on a north-east/south-west alignment. The deposit was 3.6m wide and 0.06m deep and comprised a heavy clayey silt with frequent rounded stone inclusions. Due to the shallow nature of the deposit it was impossible to determine whether it was a cut feature or an accumulation of material within a naturally created depression. A small, heavily abraded sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from the surface of the depression.

Trench 5 (Figs 2 & 4)

- 5.5 Pit 505 (Fig. 4) was located near the north-eastern end of the trench. The pit was circular in plan and was 0.8m in diameter and 0.07m deep with shallow sides and a generally flat base. The pit was filled by brown silty clay 504, which contained frequent stone inclusions. No finds were recovered from the pit and it may have had a natural derivation.

6. THE FINDS

- 6.1 Artefactual material was hand-recovered from one deposit. The pottery has been recorded according to sherd count/ weight per fabric.

Pottery

- 6.2 A very small, unfeatured bodysherd (0.5g) of Minety ware (MIN, North Wiltshire oolitic limestone-tempered ware) was retrieved from deposit 304. This ware type is dateable to the mid 12th to late 15th centuries.

7. DISCUSSION

- 7.1 Despite the high potential for archaeological remains on the site (see Archaeological Background, above), it is clear from the results of both this and the preceding evaluation (CA 2005) that the site has been subjected to more than one episode of landscaping which has probably removed all archaeological remains associated with the known prehistoric and Roman occupation of Blunsdon Hill.
- 7.2 The shallow depth of deposit 304 meant that it could not be ascertained whether it was archaeological in nature. The deposit approximately aligned with the projected courses of Roman paddock ditches excavated during the A419 Blunsdon Bypass excavation (Brett and McSloy 2011; Site B, ditches H and S). The fragment of pottery recovered from the surface of the deposit may indicate that it is the vestigial remains of a heavily truncated archaeological feature; however the fragment was very abraded and was probably intrusive. Alternatively the deposit may have been caused by the modern truncation of the site, or was simply a deposit of material that had accumulated in a hollow in the natural substrate. Pit 505 was similarly shallow, and given the sterile fill, was probably not archaeological, although it is possible that it was the base of a heavily truncated pit.
- 7.3 The horizontal stratigraphy of the trenches suggests that the site has undergone at least two phases of landscaping. The initial phase would have involved the excavation of large areas of the natural clay from the site, which was subsequently partially levelled by the deposition of the grey clay recorded in Trenches 1–5 and a covering topsoil layer. This sequence of deposits best matches those recorded in the 2005 evaluation, so presumably the buried topsoil recorded in the current trenches was the 2005 ground surface. The truncation of the archaeological features therefore must have pre-dated 2005 and was possibly associated with the development of the area for the construction of the then Motorola factory in 1998. The second phase of landscaping occurred after 2005 and consisted of the raising of the ground level in the north of the site and the deposition of a temporary surface on top of a plastic membrane in the south of the site. This was likely associated with either the construction of the tennis centre to the west of the site or the A419 to the east. The modern service trench and disturbance recorded in Trench 6 also date to this phase of activity.

8. CA PROJECT TEAM

Fieldwork was undertaken by Christopher Leonard and Michael Joyce. The report was written by Christopher Leonard. The finds report was written by Jacky Sommerville. The illustrations were prepared by Esther Escudero. The archive has been compiled and prepared for deposition by Hazel O'Neill. The project was managed for CA by Richard Young.

9. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

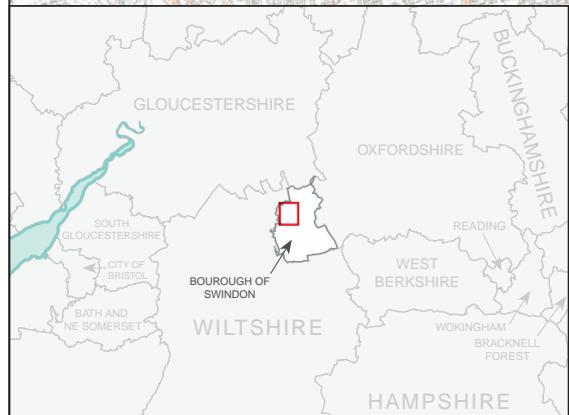
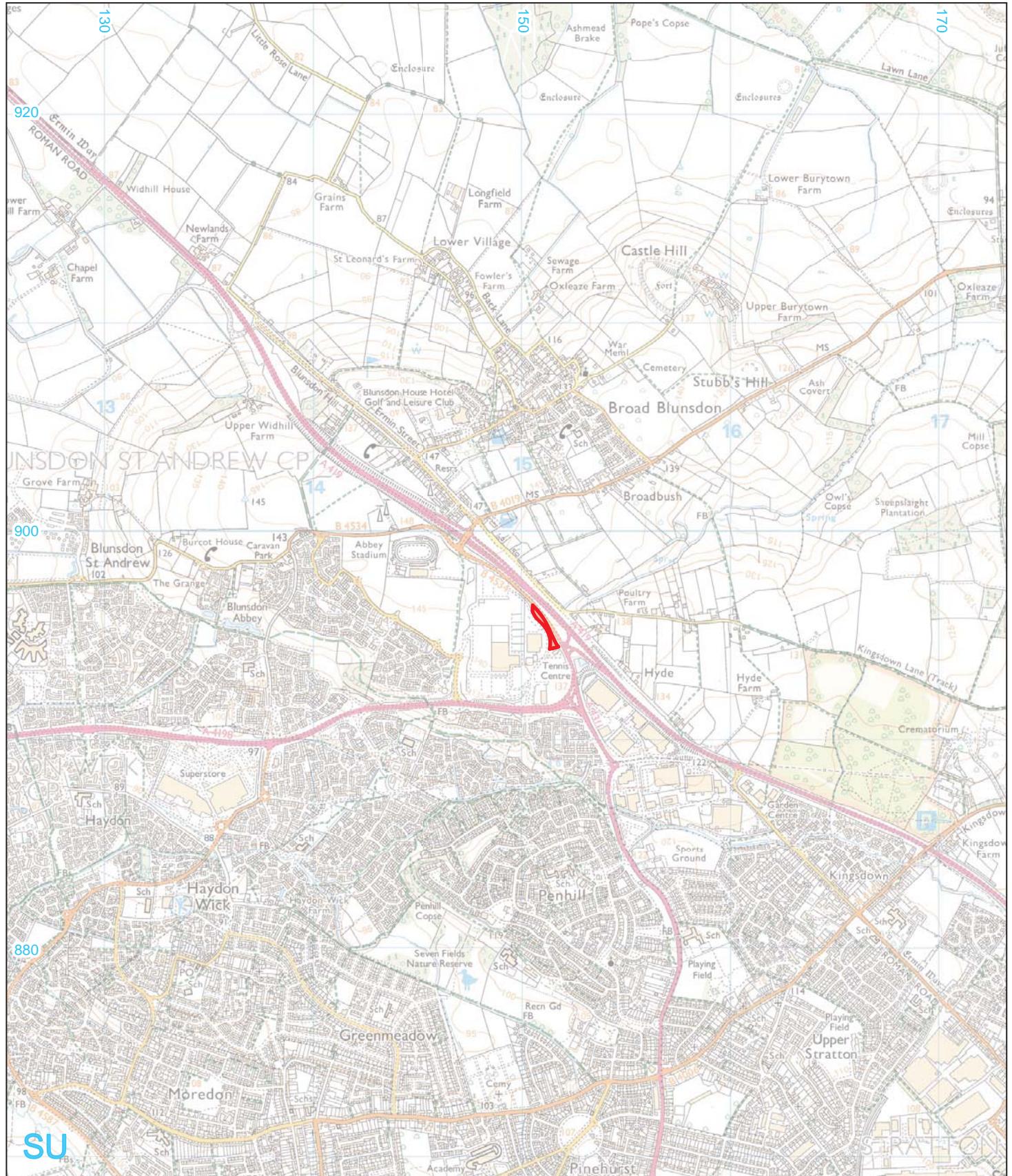
Trench No.	Context No.	Type	Context interpretation	Description	L (m)	W (m)	D (m)
1	100	Layer	Made ground	Clay and stone mixed made ground			0.32
1	101	Layer	Buried topsoil	Mid orange brown silty clay			0.3
1	102	Layer	Made ground	Mid yellow grey silty clay			0.2
1	103	Layer	Natural	Limestone and clay			
2	200	Layer	Made ground	Same as 100			0.4
2	201	Layer	Buried topsoil	Same as 101			0.32
2	202	Layer	Made ground	Same as 102			0.42
2	203	Layer	Natural	Same as 103			
3	300	Layer	Made Ground	Same as 100			0.54
3	301	Layer	Buried topsoil	Same as 101			0.15
3	302	Layer	Made ground	Same as 102			0.17
3	303	Layer	Natural	Yellow clay with patches of limestone gravel			
3	304	Deposit		Mid grey brown clay silt with frequent stones	>2.2	3.6	0.06
4	400	Layer	Made ground	Same as 100			0.32
5	500	Layer	Made ground	Same as 100			0.22
5	501	Layer	Made ground	Pink sand and gravel on plastic membrane			0.05
5	502	Layer	Made ground	Same as 102			0.36
5	503	Layer	Natural	Same as 303			
5	504	Fill	Pit fill	Mid grey brown silty clay with frequent stones	0.8	0.8	0.07
5	505	Cut	Pit	Circular in plan, shallow sides, flat base	0.8	0.8	0.07
6	600	Layer	Made ground	Same as 100			0.1
6	601	Layer	Made ground	Same as 501			00.5
6	602	Layer	Natural	Same as 303			

APPENDIX B: THE FINDS

Context	Category	Description	Fabric Code	Count	Weight (g)	Spot-date
304	Medieval pottery	Minety ware	MIN	1	0.5	MC12-LC15

APPENDIX C: OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project Name	Swindon Gateway, Blunsdon Hill, Swindon	
Short description	<p>An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology in April 2017 at Swindon Gateway, Blunsdon Hill, Swindon. Six trenches were excavated.</p> <p>The evaluation revealed evidence for widespread landscaping of the site during modern development that appears to have truncated any surviving archaeological remains associated with the known prehistoric and Roman occupation of Blunsdon Hill.</p> <p>Two very shallow features, a linear deposit and a possible pit, were excavated. The features may have been the remnants of very truncated archaeological features, but may equally have had natural derivations.</p>	
Project dates	5–7 April 2017	
Project type	Field Evaluation	
Previous work	<p>Field evaluation (CA 2005)</p> <p>Desk-based assessment (Orion 2016)</p>	
Future work	Unknown	
PROJECT LOCATION		
Site Location	Blunsdon Hill, Swindon	
Study area	0.5ha	
Site co-ordinates	SU 1507 8959	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Name of organisation	Cotswold Archaeology	
Project Brief originator	Wiltshire Council	
Project Design (WSI) originator	Cotswold Archaeology	
Project Manager	Richard Young	
Project Supervisor	Christopher Leonard	
MONUMENT TYPE		
SIGNIFICANT FINDS	None	
PROJECT ARCHIVES		
	Intended final location of archive/ Accession Number	Content
Physical	Swindon Museum and Art Gallery SWIMG:2017.016	Ceramics
Paper	Swindon Museum and Art Gallery SWIMG:2017.016	Trench recording forms, site drawing
Digital	Swindon Museum and Art Gallery SWIMG:2017.016	Database, digital photos
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2017 <i>Swindon Gateway, Blunsdon Hill, Swindon: Archaeological Evaluation</i> . CA typescript report 17203		



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PROJECT TITLE

Swindon Gateway, Blunsdon Hill, Swindon

FIGURE TITLE

Site location plan

DRAWN BY	EE	PROJECT NO.	6225	FIGURE NO.
CHECKED BY	DJB	DATE	10/04/2017	1
APPROVED BY	LC	SCALE	@A4	1:25,000





Deposit 304, looking north-west (2m scale)



Pit 505, looking north-west (0.5m scale)



PROJECT TITLE

Swindon Gateway, Blunsdon Hill, Swindon

FIGURE TITLE

Photographs

DRAWN BY	EE	PROJECT NO.	6225	FIGURE NO.
CHECKED BY	DJB	DATE	10/04/2017	
APPROVED BY	LC	SCALE	@A4	NA

3 & 4



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