



Land at HR Wallingford Howbery Park Wallingford Oxfordshire

Archaeological Excavation



for: HR Wallingford Ltd

CA Project: AN0420 CA Report: AN0420_2

November 2021



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SUMMARY

Project name: Land at HR Wallingford, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

Location: Howbery Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

NGR: 461658 189814

Type: Excavation

Date: 18–21 October 2021

Planning reference: P21/S1550/FUL

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

Archaeology Data Service (ADS)

Accession Number: OXCMS: 2021.81

Site Code: HRWA21

In October 2021, Cotswold Archaeology carried out an archaeological excavation on land at HR Wallingford at Howbery Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire. Two areas were excavated within the site.

Area 1 contained two pits, both containing small quantities of broadly dated Middle Bronze Age-Early Iron Age pottery, and two undated postholes. **Area 2** was archaeologically sterile.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. In October 2021, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological excavation on land at HR Wallingford, Howbery Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 461658 189814 (see Figure 1). This excavation was undertaken for HR Wallingford Ltd.
- 1.2. South Oxfordshire District Council has granted planning permission for the erection of a single storey visitor centre and training centre building (planning ref: P21/S1550/FUL). Condition 6 of this planning permission requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with an approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI).
- 1.3. The scope of this excavation was defined by Steven Weaver, the archaeological advisor to South Oxfordshire District Council in a design brief provided on 14 September 2021. The excavation was carried out in accordance with a WSI prepared by CA (2021) and approved by Steven Weaver.
- 1.4. The excavation was also in line with Standard and guidance for archaeological excavation (ClfA 2014; updated October 2020), Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) PPN 3: Archaeological Excavation (Historic England 2015) and Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide (Historic England 2015).

The site

- 1.5. The proposed development site is approximately 0.125ha (1,250m²) in extent. It lies within Howbery Park, Benson Lane, to the north of Crowmarsh Gifford, Oxfordshire. The footprint of the proposed new building encloses 218m².
- 1.6. The site currently comprises a rectangular, undeveloped, grass field, bounded to the north by a stand of trees and the Froude Modelling Hall, to the east by the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, and to the south and west by a solar farm. The site lies level at approximately 48m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).
- 1.7. The underlying bedrock geology of the site is mapped as sandstone of the Glauconitic Marl Member, having formed 94 to 101 million years ago in warm sea environments of the Cretaceous Period (BGS 2021). Superficial sand and gravel of the Northmoor Sand and Gravel Member Upper Facet is recorded atop the

bedrock geology, having formed up to three million years ago in association with the River Thames. The Thames itself flows from north to south approximately 370m to the west of the site.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. The following section outlines the archaeological character of the surrounding landscape to inform the potential character of the site itself. Information has been drawn from freely available online sources and both grey and published literature from relevant previous investigations.

Previous investigations

- 2.2. No archaeological investigations have previously been undertaken within the site. Archaeological works were undertaken within Howbery Park by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in 2002 and 2003. More targeted excavation was undertaken in 2006 (Ford *et al.*), comprising:
 - Area A, c. 110m north from the site (c. 1,100m²);
 - Area B, c. 165m north from the site (c. 1,100m²); and
 - An area of archaeological monitoring between the two areas.
- 2.3. Slightly further afield, a phase of geophysical survey was undertaken within a 23.44ha field c. 130m to the east of the site (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2008). Within Crowmarsh Gifford, a five-trench evaluation was undertaken to the north and south of The Street, c. 660m to the south-west of the site (John Moore Heritage Services 2015).
- 2.4. The results of previous investigations are discussed below, chronologically by period.

Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age & Iron Age)

- 2.5. The section of the Thames Valley containing the site has produced Neolithic and Late Bronze Age remains at Benson, c. 1.6km to the north of the site, Neolithic remains at Mongewell, c. 2.2km to the south, and a Late Bronze Age riverside settlement at Wallingford. Findspots of Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery and an Early Bronze Age axe are recorded to the north of Howbery Park.
- 2.6. Excavation to the north of the site within Howbery Park revealed part of an east/west aligned droveway. This lay stratigraphically below Roman remains,

proving a prehistoric date, although the sparse associated assemblage of six pottery sherds could only be broadly attributed to the Early Bronze Age by two of their number. Several further pottery sherds recovered from elsewhere during the investigations date to the Early Bronze Age and Late Iron Age. The flint assemblage of 21 pieces was largely undiagnostic and broadly attributed to the Mesolithic-Bronze Age periods.

2.7. Geophysical survey identified two broadly circular forms, c. 280m to the north-east of the site, provisionally interpreted as levelled Bronze Age burial mounds. A small number of east/west aligned linear forms were also identified, possibly relating to a prehistoric field system or other forms of land division.

Roman

- 2.8. Archaeological remains along the western fringe of Wallingford are suggestive of a sizeable Roman settlement within the vicinity, although evidence within the town itself is more elusive and inconclusive. Roman settlement has been identified at Benson and cemetery remains to the south-east of the town. More widely, this section of the Upper Thames is characterised by extensive Late Iron Age and Roman field systems, trackways and rural settlement.
- 2.9. Evidence of such activity was encountered within Howbery Park, identified as two distinct phases of Roman land division, characterised by sections of enclosure ditches. The artefactual assemblage attributed these phases to the late 2nd-3rd and late 3rd-4th centuries AD. One enclosure ditch suggested a possible southward continuation, although this was not able to be proven and the alignment would suggest that it would be unlikely to reappear within the present site.

Early medieval & medieval

- 2.10. The early medieval archaeology of the surrounding landscape is dominated by the Anglo-Saxon burh at Wallingford. A Saxon and medieval defensive bridgehead ran along the eastern bank of the River Thames, between Crowmarsh Gifford and the river, as mentioned in a 10th century document. Early Saxon evidence has been recorded at Benson, which was later documented as a royal settlement.
- 2.11. The importance of Wallingford increased during the Saxo-Norman transition, with the establishment of the early castle to the north of the town, c. 680m to the west of the site. Crowmarsh Gifford is recorded in the 1086 Domesday Survey as comprising 27 households and two mills. The castle was the scene of several

- sieges during the Anarchy of the 12th century, which also witnessed the construction of satellite siege castles.
- 2.12. Evidence for medieval land division was encountered during excavations at Howbery Park, comprising a length of north/south aligned ditch, turning to the east within the southern excavation area. A small assemblage of just four sherds of pottery was used to date this feature. A pit within the northern excavation area was found to contain 53 sherds of pottery, 45 of which are dateable to the 12th or 13th centuries.
- 2.13. Archaeological evaluation undertaken alongside The Street in 2015 anticipated encountering the line of the east bank defensive bridgehead, although no medieval remains were identified.

Post-medieval & modern

- 2.14. Wallingford Castle fell into dilapidation during the late Tudor period and was slighted following a siege during the English Civil War in the mid-17th century. Little detail of the settlement at Crowmarsh Gifford is available for the early post-medieval period. Several Listed Buildings are situated alongside The Street, illustrating a period of wealth during the 18th and early 19th centuries.
- 2.15. Howbery Park was laid out in the mid-1850s by William Seymour Blackstone MP and the manor house was constructed c. 270m north-west from the site. The site itself lay within the surrounding parkland. The estate changed hands several times before passing into government ownership during the 1930s, housing US and Canadian servicemen and Central European refugees during the Second World War.
- 2.16. Following the Second World War, the Hydraulics Research Station was established at Howbery Park, later being privatised in 1982 as HR Wallingford. Several research facilities have since been established within Howbery Park, focusing on developments in hydraulics, hydrology and ecology.

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1. The general objectives of the archaeological excavation were to:
 - identify, investigate and record any significant buried archaeological deposits/features at the site prior to their destruction by the proposed development;
 - recover and analyse any artefactual evidence;
 - sample and analyse environmental remains to create a better understanding of past land use and economy;
 - report on and publish the archaeological results at a level appropriate to their significance; and
 - compile a stable, ordered, accessible project archive.
- 3.2. The specific objective of the excavation were to investigate for the potential for further Early Bronze Age, Roman and/or medieval features, as encountered near to the north within Howbery Park.
- 3.3. The results of any encountered archaeological remains will be discussed, where possible, in line with relevant objectives of the Solent-Thames Research Framework (Hey and Hind (Eds.) 2014).

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1. Two excavation areas were opened within the site (Figures. 2, 3 & 5). These have been placed within the footprints of the proposed new building, drainage infiltration basin and associated water tanks:
 - Area 1 (c. 308m²): placed within the footprint of the proposed new building and adjacent water tanks; and
 - Area 2 (c. 16m²): placed within the basal footprint of the proposed new drainage infiltration basin.
- 4.2. The excavation areas were set out on OS National Grid co-ordinates using Leica GPS. Overburden was stripped from the excavation areas by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. All machining was conducted under archaeological supervision to the top of the natural substrate, which was the level at which archaeological features were first encountered.

- 4.3. Archaeological features/deposits were investigated, planned and recorded in accordance with *CA Technical Manual 1: Fieldwork Recording Manual*.
- 4.4. No deposits were identified that required sampling.
- 4.5. Artefacts were processed in accordance with *CA Technical Manual 3: Treatment of Finds Immediately after Excavation*.
- 4.6. CA has arranged with Oxfordshire County Museum Service for the deposition of the project archive and artefact collection (OXCMS: 2021.81), following agreement with the client (also the legal landowner). A digital archive will also be prepared and deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS). The archives (museum and digital) will be prepared and deposited in accordance with Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives (CIfA 2014; updated October 2020).
- 4.7. A summary of information from this project, as set out in 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 excavation results. Detailed summaries of the recorded contexts are given in Appendix A. Details of the artefactual material recovered from the site are given in Section 6 and Appendix B.

Area 1 (Figures 2-5)

- 5.2. **Area 1** was located within the footings of the proposed building.
- 5.3. The underlying natural geology of mid-brown clay/chalk was recorded at a depth greater than 0.75m below present ground level (bpgl), sealed by a superficial deposit of sandy silts and gravels. Overlying the superficial deposit, mid yellow brown sandy clay subsoil was recorded to a depth 0.5m bpgl, finally sealed by dark grey/brown sand/silt topsoil measuring a maximum depth of 0.3m bpgl.
- 5.4. Across **Area 1**, three modern features were recorded in plan and relate to a recent geotechnical borehole survey undertaken on site prior to the commencement of archaeological works. All modern features cut the topsoil **1000**.

5.5. In total, four archaeological features were recorded: pits 1004 and 1011, and postholes 1007 and 1009. Two tree throw hollows 1013 and 1016 were also excavated. All excavated features (natural and archaeological) cut the superficial deposit 1002 and were sealed by the subsoil 1001.

Pits 1004 and 1011 and tree throw 1016 (Figures 2 and 3)

- 5.6. At the south-east corner of **Area 1**, three adjacent features were encountered: pits **1004** and **1011** and a later tree throw hollow **1016**. All three features continued beneath the baulk of the excavated area.
- 5.7. Pit **1004** measured greater than 1.3m in length, greater than 0.4m in width and 0.31m in depth and was constructed with steep sides and an irregular base. Two fills were present: upper fill **1006** and basal fill **1005**, with fill **1005** containing a single fragment each of worked and burnt flint, and pottery dating to the Middle Bronze Age to Early Iron Age The feature was interpreted as a pit possibly relating to peripheral settlement activity recorded to the north.
- 5.8. Directly north-east of pit **1004**, pit **1011** measured greater than 0.67m in length, 0.48m in width and 0.35m in depth and was constructed with steep to moderate sides and a flat base. As with pit **1004**, pit **1011** contained two fills: upper fill **1015** and basal fill **1012**, with fill **1012** containing pottery dating to the Middle Bronze Age to Early Iron Age. There was no surviving physical relationship between the two pits due to the intervention and truncation by the later tree throw **1016**.
- 5.9. Tree throw **1016** measured greater than 0.45m in length, 0.31m in width and 0.46m in depth, exhibiting uneven sides and base with a single fill **1017** present.

Postholes 1007 and 1009 (Figures 2 and 4)

- 5.10. Towards the centre of **Area 1** two intercutting postholes were excavated.
- 5.11. Posthole 1007 measured than 0.4m in length, 0.36m in width and 0.1m in depth. The feature was sub-circular in plan and was constructed with concave sides and base. A single fill 1008 was present. Posthole 1007 was tentatively interpreted as being cut by later posthole 1009, which was circular in plan, measuring 0.46m in diameter and 0.15m in depth. The feature had similar profiles to that of posthole 1007, with a singular fill 1010 present. Neither feature contained datable material.

Tree throw 1013 (Figures 2 and 4)

5.12. Towards the north of **Area 1**, tree throw **1013** measured 0.56m in length, 0.48m in width and 0.13m in depth. The feature exhibited steep irregular sides and irregular base, with a single fill present in plan.

Area 2 (Figures 2 and 5)

- 5.13. **Area 2** was located within the footings of the proposed run off basin.
- 5.14. The underlying natural geology of mid-brown clay/chalk with patches of gravel, was recorded at a depth of 0.51 bpgl, sealed by mid-yellow/brown sand/clay subsoil. The area was capped by a dark grey/brown sand/silt topsoil with a maximum depth of 0.31 bpgl.
- 5.15. The area was archaeologically sterile with no archaeological features present.

6. THE FINDS by Alejandra Gutierrez

Pottery

- 6.1. Pottery amounting to just ten sherds (28g) was recovered from two different deposits: fills **1005** and **1012** of pits **1003** and **1011**, respectively. The assemblage was recorded in November 2021 direct to a Microsoft Access database and following the standards for archaeological material (Barclay *et al.* 2016). The pottery was sorted into fabrics with the aid of a binocular microscope (x10), and it was then quantified by number of sherds and weight. All the sherds were plain and unfeatured and rim/estimated vessel equivalent (EVEs) could not be established.
- 6.2. Most of the pottery was found in the basal fill **1005** of pit **1004**, with two further fragments from the basal fill **1012** of pit **1011**. All the pottery recovered is very similar in fabric, texture and colour, and it is likely to represent a single vessel (see Appendix B, Table 1). The condition of the pottery was poor and very fragmented. The fabric (FL1) is black with a brown exterior surface and it contains moderate coarse inclusions of calcined flint (<8mm), poorly sorted, together with sparse rounded quartz (<0.5mm). The thickness of the wall, where it survives, is 9mm.
- 6.3. The sherds are all body fragments, with no featured elements and without any decoration. Without being able to identify the form of the vessel, the dating of this very small and limited group is necessarily broad, in the Middle Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age range (c. 1500–500/400 BC).

Lithics

- 6.4. A single worked flint (3g) was retrieved from the hand-excavation, together with an (unworked) burnt flint (13g). The artefacts were recorded directly onto a Microsoft Access database according to artefact type. A basic level of recording was undertaken, due to the very small size of the assemblage. Once recorded, the burnt flint was discarded.
- 6.5. The worked flint is an unretouched flake, chronologically undiagnostic and of a broad prehistoric date. Both pieces of flint were recovered from the basal fill **1005** of pit **1004**, which also produced late prehistoric pottery (see Appendix 2 and above). Its presence confirms some degree of prehistoric activity at the site.

7. DISCUSSION

- 7.1. The geological horizons were encountered at the expected depths, as suggested by the prior geotechnical survey. Apart from the modern disturbance caused by the survey, no other modern disturbance was noted. This absence of evidence supports the conclusion that the site had not been previously developed and had only been subjected to superficial impacts associated with agricultural use.
- 7.2. No obvious relationship was identifiable between pits 1004 and 1011. The respective fills were of similar consistency and dimensions, suggestive of a single feature. The recovery of similar prehistoric pottery within each feature, tentatively dated to the Middle Bronze Age to Early Iron Age range, further supports the theory of a single feature, disturbed by later bioturbation represented by tree throw 1016. The continuation of pits 1004 and 1011 beneath the baulk of the excavation area, along with the limited extent of the area, prevents further definitive interpretation of these features. It is plausible that these represent an element of peripheral prehistoric activity, associated with the more concentrated activity recorded slightly to the north within Howbery Park.
- 7.3. Postholes 1007 and 1009 are of unknown purpose with no other supporting evidence to suggest their use or date. It is plausible that these relate to nearby prehistoric activity, although their occurrence in isolation prevents definitive identification.
- 7.4. The excavations directly north of the area contained numerous archaeological features associated with prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval activity, although

there is little evidence of any such activity within the site. What features were present would suggest the site is on the periphery of at least prehistoric activity. While this report constitutes a record, the paucity of evidence and limited knowledge gleaned from this excavation does not appear to contribute to any of the research agendas laid out within the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age section of the Solent-Thames Research Framework (Lambrick 2010).

8. CA PROJECT TEAM

8.1. Fieldwork was undertaken by Steven Bush and Majbritt Trim, assisted by Tim Street. This report was written by Steven Bush. The finds report was written by Alejandra Gutierrez. The report illustrations were prepared by Krissy Moore. The project archive has been compiled by Zoe Emery and prepared for deposition by Richard Paxford. The project was managed for CA by Tony Brown.

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APPENDIX A: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Context No.	Туре	Fill of	Interpretation	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth/ thickness (m)	Spot-date
1000	1		Topsoil	Dark grey brown, sandy silt, friable.	29.23	14.8	0-0.30 (0.30)	
1001	1		Subsoil	Mid yellow brown, sandy clay, friable, <2%<50mm flint pebble <5% <10mm chalk flecks.	29.23	14.8	0.30-0.50 (0.20)	
1002	1		Natural	Mid yellow brown, sandy silt, friable, <2%<50mm flint pebble <10% <10mm chalk flecks.	29.23	14.8	0.5-0.75 (0.25)	
1003	1		Natural	Mid brown white, chalky clay, friable. Patches of flint pebble gravel throughout.	29.23	14.8	>0.75	
1004	1		Cut of Pit	Sub rounded/Oval in plan. Concave moderate angle sides. Rounded flat base.	>1.3	>0.4	0.31	MBA-EIA
1005	1	1004	Lower fill	Dark brown grey, sandy silt, friable with occasional sub angular flint <50mm. Flecks of limestone.	>1.3	>0.4	0.25	MBA-EIA
1006	1	1004	Upper fill	Dark brown grey, silt, friable with very common sub angular flint <70mm and flecks of limestone.	1.13	>0.4	0.13	MBA-EIA
1007	1		Cut of Posthole	Circular in plan with concave gentle slope sides and concave/flat base.	0.4	0.36	0.1	
1008	1	1007	Fill	Dark brown grey, silt, friable with rare sub angular flint <50mm. Flecks of limestone.	0.4	0.36	0.1	
1009	1		Cut of Posthole	Circular in plan with concave gentle slope sides and concave/flat base.	0.46	0.45	0.15	
1010	1	1009	Fill	Dark brown sandy silt, friable, infrequent gravel inclusions.	0.46	0.45	0.15	
1011	1		Cut of Pit	Sub circular, Concave profile.	>0.67	>0.48	0.35	MBA-EIA
1012	1	1011	Lower fill	Dark brown grey, sandy silt, Friable, Rooting present.	>0.67	>0.48	0.35	MBA-EIA
1013	1		Cut of tree throw	Sub circular, irregular but continues out of excavation area, uneven base.	0.56	0.48	0.13	
1014	1	1013	Fill	Dark brown grey, sandy silt, friable, rooting present.	0.56	0.48	0.13	
1015	1	1012	Upper fill	Irregular in plan and base, rooting present.	0.67	>0.48	0.24	MBA-EIA
1016	1		Cut of tree throw	Irregular in plan and base, rooting present.	0.45	0.31	0.46	
1017	1	1016	Fill	Pale grey white silt, friable, rooting present.	0.45	0.31	0.45	
2000	2		Topsoil	Dark grey brown, sandy silt, friable.	5.74	3.3	0-0.31 (0.31)	
2001	2		Subsoil	Mid yellow brown, sandy clay, friable, <2%<50mm flint pebble <5% <10mm chalk flecks. CBM in subsoil.	5.74	3.3	0.31-0.51 (0.2)	
2002	2		Natural	Mid brown white, chalky clay, friable. Patches of flint pebble gravel throughout.	5.74	3.3	>0.51	

APPENDIX B: THE FINDS

Table 1: Overall quantification of the pottery

Pottery date	fabric code	Context	Sherds	Weight (g)
Prehistoric	FL1	1005	8	26
Prehistoric	FL1	1012	2	2
Total			10	28

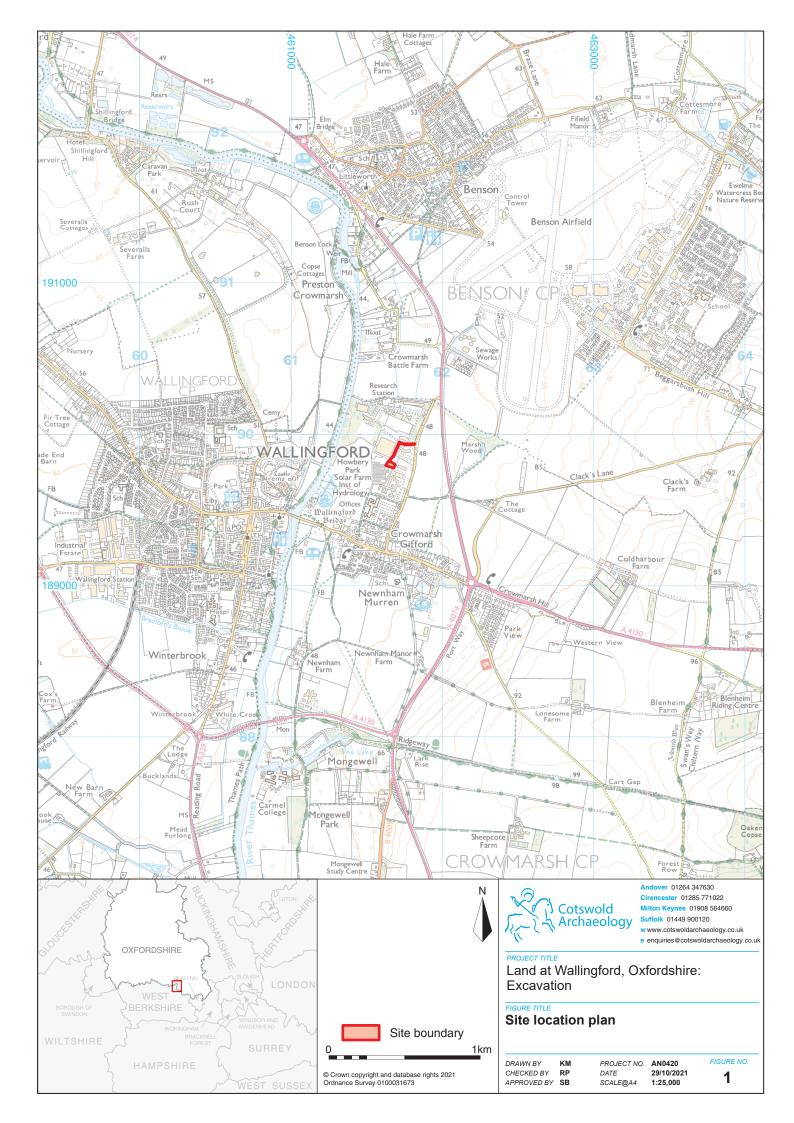
Table 2: Overall quantification of the lithics

Material	Context	Sherds	Weight (g)
Flint	1005	1	2
Burnt flint	1005	1	13
Total		2	15

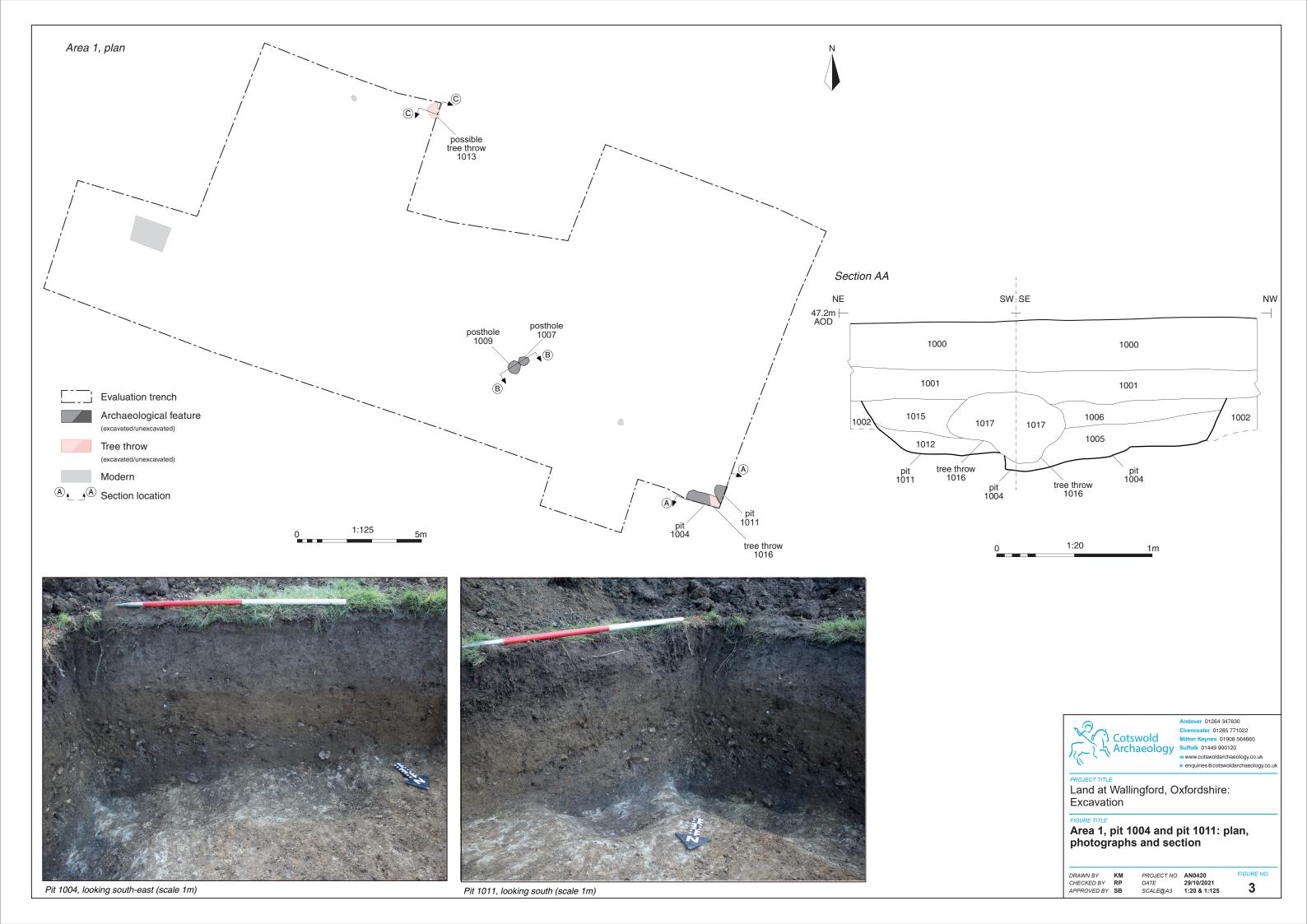
APPENDIX C: OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS					
Project name	Land at HR Wallingford, Howbery Park,	Wallingford, Oxfordshire			
Short description	archaeological excavation on land at Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire. Two a the site.	In October 2021, Cotswold Archaeology carried out an archaeological excavation on land at HR Wallingford at Howbery Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire. Two areas were excavated within the site. Area 1 contained two pits, both containing small quantities of			
	broadly dated Middle Bronze Age-Earl undated postholes. Area 2 was archaed	y Iron Age pottery, and two			
Project dates	18–21 October 2021				
Project type	Archaeological Excavation				
Previous work	None				
Future work	Unknown				
PROJECT LOCATION	-				
Site location	Land at HR Wallingford, Howbery Park,	Wallingford, Oxfordshire			
Study area (m²/ha)	0.125ha				
Site co-ordinates	NGR 461658 189814				
PROJECT CREATORS					
Name of organisation	Cotswold Archaeology				
Project brief originator	Northampton County Council	Northampton County Council			
Project design (WSI) originator	Cotswold Archaeology				
Project Manager	Tony Brown				
Project Supervisor	Steven Bush and Majbritt Trim				
MONUMENT TYPE	Pit, posthole.				
SIGNIFICANT FINDS	Pottery, flint.				
PROJECT ARCHIVES	Intended final location of archive (museum/Accession no.)	Content			
Physical	Oxfordshire County Museum Service (OXCMS: 2021.81)	Ceramics, worked flint			
Paper	Oxfordshire County Museum Service (OXCMS: 2021.81)	Context sheets, matrices, permatrace			
Digital	Oxfordshire County Museum Service (OXCMS: 2021.81)	Database, digital photos			
BIBLIOGRAPHY					
	HR Wallingford, Howbery Park, Wallingford, Ox	kfordshire: Archaeological			
Excavation. CA typescript report AN04	20_1				

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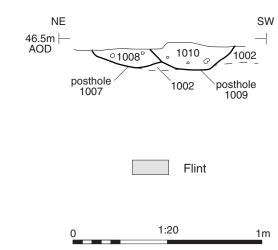


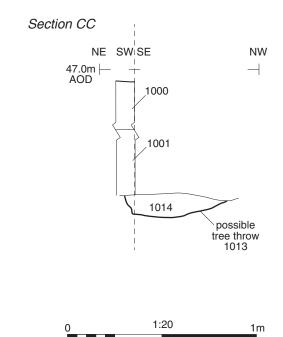
Postholes 1007 and 1009, looking south-east (scale 0.4m)



Possible tree throw 1013, looking south-east (scale 0.4m)

Section BB







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PROJECT TITLE
Land at Wallingford, Oxfordshire:
Excavation

Postholes 1007 and 1009, and possible tree throw 1013: photographs and sections

DRAWN BY KM
CHECKED BY RP
APPROVED BY SB

 PROJECT NO.
 AN0420

 DATE
 29/10/2021

 SCALE@A3
 1:20



Area 2, looking south-east (scales 1m)



Areas 1 and 2, pre-excavation, looking south-east



Area 1, general view, looking north-east



Area 1, general view, looking south-west



Land at Wallingford, Oxfordshire: Excavation

FIGURE TITLE

Area 2 and site: photographs

DRAWN BY KM CHECKED BY RP APPROVED BY SB

 PROJECT NO.
 AN0420

 DATE
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 SCALE@A3
 NA

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