

An Archaeological Evaluation of Land at the corner of Lavendon Road and Warrington Road, Olney, Milton Keynes



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Contents

Summary

1

Report

1 Background.....	2
1.1 Reasons for the project	2
2 Aims.....	2
3 Methods.....	2
3.1 Personnel.....	2
3.2 Documentary research	2
3.3 Fieldwork strategy	2
3.4 Structural analysis	3
3.5 Artefact methodology by Rob Hedge	3
3.5.1 Artefact recovery policy.....	3
3.5.2 Method of analysis.....	3
3.5.3 Discard policy	3
3.6 Environmental archaeology methodology	3
3.6.1 Sampling policy.....	3
3.7 Statement of confidence in the methods and results	3
4 The application site	3
4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context.....	3
4.2 Current land-use	4
5 Structural analysis.....	4
5.1.1 Phase 1: natural deposits.....	4
5.1.2 Phase 2: Roman deposits	4
5.1.3 Phase 3: undated deposits.....	5
5.1.4 Phase 4: medieval and/or post-medieval deposits	5
5.1.5 Phase 5: modern deposits	5
5.2 Artefact analysis, by Rob Hedge	5
6 Synthesis	7
6.1 Research frameworks	7
7 Significance	8
7.1 Nature of the archaeological interest in the site	8
7.2 Relative importance and physical extent of the archaeological interest in the site.....	8
8 The impact of the development	8
8.1 Impacts during construction.....	8
8.2 Impacts on sustainability	8
9 Recommendations.....	9
10 Publication summary.....	9
11 Acknowledgements	9
12 Bibliography	9

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Andrew Walsh

With a contribution by Rob Hedge

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Land at the corner of Lavendon Road and Warrington Road, Olney, Milton Keynes (NGR SP 8909 5235). It was commissioned by David Janney of Riley Consulting, in advance of the construction of a proposed supermarket for which a planning application has been submitted. The proposed development site is located next to the scheduled Roman settlement site of Ashfurlong.

An earlier evaluation, undertaken on the western part of the proposed development site in 2010, had established that this area was heavily disturbed by 19th century quarrying and did not identify any surviving archaeological remains. The present evaluation was located on the eastern part of the site and identified two Roman linear features and two undated potential archaeological features. These features almost certainly relate to the scheduled Roman settlement site to the north although whether they represent a continuation of occupation features or agricultural features in the wider landscape is uncertain. No evidence of modern truncation or features was exposed in the eastern part of the site, indicating that this part of the site was not disturbed by 19th century quarrying.

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Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Land at the corner of Lavendon Road and Warrington Road, Olney, Milton Keynes (NGR SP 8909 5235). It was commissioned by David Janney of Riley Consulting, in advance of the construction of a new supermarket for which a planning application has been submitted to Milton Keynes Council (ref 14/0221/FUL). The proposed development site is located next to the scheduled Roman settlement site of Ashfurlong which may be affected by the development.

The scope of the project conforms to an email from Nick Crank, Senior Archaeological Officer for Milton Keynes Council (Crank 2015) and for which a written scheme of investigation was produced (WA 2015). The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008). The event reference for this project, given by the HER is EMK1252.

2 Aims

The aims of this evaluation are:

- to describe and assess the significance of the heritage asset with archaeological interest;
- to establish the nature, importance and extent of the archaeological site;
- to assess the impact of the application on the archaeological site.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The fieldwork was led by Andrew Walsh BSc MSc FSA Scot ACIfA who joined WA in 2013 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004. He was assisted in the field by Mike Nicholson BSc. The report preparation was led by Andrew Walsh and finds report was produced by Rob Hedge MA (Cantab). The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers BA MSc. Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt BSc MCIfA.

3.2 Documentary research

An archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) was undertaken in April 2014 by WA on behalf of the client (WA 2014). The DBA identified a limited potential for early prehistoric remains and a high potential for the later prehistoric or Roman settlement and/or other activity to extend into the eastern part of the proposed development area.

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

A written scheme of investigation was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2015). The western area of the site had been evaluated in 2010, so the current works focused on the eastern part of the site. Four trenches, amounting to 180m² in area, were excavated over the eastern part of the proposed site. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2. Trench 6 was moved c 11m eastwards after it became apparent that Trench 5 (which part of the 2010 evaluation but still open) was located further east than originally recorded.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 21st and 23rd January 2015. The site reference number and site code is EMK1252.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 180° mechanical excavator, employing a toothless bucket and under archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). A

the northern end of Trench 6 a deep subsoil like deposit was machine excavated with agreement with Nick Crank. On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

3.4 Structural analysis

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

3.5 Artefact methodology by Rob Hedge

3.5.1 Artefact recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012; appendix 2).

3.5.2 Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A terminus post quem date was produced for each stratified context. The date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site. All information was recorded on pro forma sheets.

The pottery was examined under x20 magnification and referenced as appropriate by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series published in Roman and Belgic pottery from excavations in Milton Keynes 1972-82 (Marney 1989).

3.5.3 Discard policy

The following categories/types of material will be discarded after a period of 6 months following the submission of this report, unless there is a specific request to retain them (and subject to the collection policy of the relevant depository):

- where unstratified
- post-medieval pottery, and;
- generally where material has been assessed as having no obvious grounds for retention.

3.6 Environmental archaeology methodology

3.6.1 Sampling policy

The sampling strategy was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event no deposits were identified which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

3.7 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

4 The application site

4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context

The proposed development site (centred on NGR SP 8909 5235) is located on the northern edge of the town of Olney, which lies approximately 13km north of Milton Keynes. The proposed site covers an area of approximately 1.6ha, and is bounded by a small stream to the north, the B565 Lavendon Road to the east and south, and the A509 Warrington Road to the west.

The site lies on agricultural land gently sloping from a height of approximately 52m AOD to the west, down to approximately 49m AOD to the north-east. The underlying geology is mapped as argillaceous rocks with subordinate sandstone and limestone of the Rutland Formation overlain by superficial deposits of sand and gravel of the Felmersham Member (BGS 2015). The soils are mapped as typical brown calcareous earths of the Moreton association (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

Immediately north of the proposed site is the Scheduled Roman site at Olney which is also known as Ashfurlong (NHL1006918). The origin and extent of this site is not fully understood (Green and Beckley 2010, 32) although it does extend to the west beyond the scheduled area and Roman finds have also been found to the east of the proposed development site at Lavendon Road Farm. Cropmarks visible on aerial photographs indicate the presence of extensive remains including sub-circular features suggesting the site may be Iron Age or earlier in origin. An archaeological watching brief undertaken in 1975 during the construction of pipe trenches alongside the stream forming the northern edge of the proposed site identified four Romano-British ditches, a gully, two pits and two inhumations.

A 1947 aerial photograph of the site depicts a quarry pit within the western part of the site. It is thought that quarrying would have destroyed archaeological remains within this area. The remainder of the western part of the site was subject to archaeological evaluation in 2010. It identified a large number of features interpreted as the remains of quarrying activity but no archaeologically significant features.

The desk-based assessment (WA 2014) found that the eastern part of the site appeared to have been less disturbed by quarrying and other modern activity. It identified a limited potential for early prehistoric remains and a high potential for the later prehistoric or Roman settlement and/or other activity to extend into the eastern part of the proposed development area.

4.2 Current land-use

The proposed development site is currently an uncultivated field containing rough grassland on which there has been some dumping of earth and other materials. A trench has been excavated along the southern and western boundaries, and five archaeological trenches excavated in 2010 remain open and overgrown.

5 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figure 3. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: natural deposits

The underlying natural deposit in all the trenches was a light yellowy brown sandy gravel at a depth of 0.52-0.76m (Plate 1). This was consistent with the superficial deposits of sand and gravel of the Felmersham Member recorded by the BGS (BGS 2015).

5.1.2 Phase 2: Roman deposits

Near the southern end of Trench 8 was a small linear feature (806) orientated roughly east to west (Figures 3 and 4; Plate 2). It was filled by two deposits (804 and 805) and measured 1.04m in width and 0.48m in depth. No finds were recovered from the primary fill (805), although the secondary fill (804) yielded over 100 sherds of 1st or 2nd century AD Roman pottery, as well as a small amount of animal bone and a flint flake.

In Trench 9 a recut (904) ditch (907) was identified orientated roughly north to south (Figures 3 and 4; Plate 3). No finds were recovered from the deposits (905 and 906) in the primary ditch, although two sherds of 1st to 2nd century AD Roman pottery and a small amount of animal bone and shell was recovered from the fill (903) of the ditch recut (904).

5.1.3 Phase 3: undated deposits

In Trench 6 a linear feature (606) orientated roughly east to west and measuring 1.03m in width and 0.31m in depth was identified (Plate 4). It was filled by a mid brown sandy silt (605) with did not yield any finds. Although it was orientated on the same alignment as the furrows in this filed its profile was too deep to be a furrow. This feature was also identified during the 2010 evaluation in Trench 5 (recorded as modern land drain) although it was not excavated.

In Trench 7 a pit or scoop feature (707) was identified. It measured roughly 1m in diameter and 0.11m in depth (Plate 5). It was filled by a dark brownish grey silty loam (706), which yielded one sherd of abraded Iron Age pottery, an Iron nail and some animal bone. The abraded nature of the pottery sherd indicates it was redeposited in a later feature.

Pit 707 was cut by a linear feature (705/709). It was orientated roughly east to west with a fairly shallow profile (Figure 4) and may be the remains of a furrow or a truncated ditch. Elsewhere on site the furrows were only visible as faint stains in the gravel (see below).

At the northern end of Trench 6 and the western end of Trench 7 the natural strata was overlaid by a soft dark brown sandy silt measuring 0.1m in depth in Trench 7 (Plate 1) and up to 0.6m in Trench 6 (Plate 6). No archaeological finds were observed in deposit. The relationship between this deposit and pit 707 was uncertain.

5.1.4 Phase 4: medieval and/or post-medieval deposits

Although some evidence of extant ridge and furrow orientated roughly east to west was visible in the field, only faint stains in the gravel were visible after machine excavating the trenches.

5.1.5 Phase 5: modern deposits

In all the trenches the features and deposits were sealed by a mid brown sandy silt subsoil, overlaid by a dark brown loamy topsoil.

5.2 Artefact analysis, by Rob Hedge

The artefactual assemblage recovered is summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

The assemblage came from three stratified contexts and could be tentatively dated from the Iron Age period onwards (see Table 1). Using pottery as an index of artefact condition, this was generally average with the majority of sherds displaying moderate levels of abrasion, and the average sherd size being slightly below average.

period	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)
Iron Age	ceramic		pot	1	18
prehistoric	stone	flint	flake	1	1
Roman	ceramic		pot	111	898
undated	bone	animal bone		17	425
undated	bone	horn		1	24
undated	metal	iron	nail	1	8
undated	organic	shell		1	1
TOTALS				133	1375

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

period	fabric code	fabric common name	count	weight(g)
Roman	1a	Shell-gritted ware Fabric 1a	104	866
Iron Age		Unidentified prehistoric	1	18
Roman	9a	Local sand-tempered ware Fabric 9a	7	32
TOTALS			112	916

Table 2: Quantification of the pottery by fabric

Summary artefactual evidence

For the finds from individual features, including specific types of pottery, consult Tables 3 and 2 in that order and in combination.

Iron Age

A single sherd of pottery from pit fill (706) is tentatively identified as Iron Age in date, the sherd being highly abraded, and with the outer surface missing. The fabric was handmade and dark grey to black with a burnished inner surface. It was highly micaceous, and contained abundant subangular quartz inclusions (0.1–1mm) and occasional red-brown ferrous inclusions up to 1.5mm. The abraded nature of the sherd suggests that it is very likely to be residual.

A corroded iron nail was recovered from pit fill (706), and animal bone.

Roman

Pottery

Ditch fill (804) contained a large concentration of Roman pottery, mostly from a single vessel: viz body sherds from a large 1st/2nd century storage jar in local shell-gritted ware (fabric 1a). The vessel was heavily and evenly decorated with horizontal rilling. Although the outer surface was well-preserved, the inner surface was abraded and vesicular: this may have been caused by storage of acidic materials within the vessel during its use-life (D Hurst, pers. comm.). Seven sherds of a late 1st/2nd century fine-walled, high-shouldered black jar with a slightly everted rim in a local sand-tempered ware (Fabric 9a) were associated with the same context.

Ditch fill (903) contained two plain body sherds which were also shell-gritted ware (fabric 1a).

Animal bone

Contexts (804) and (903) contained a number of pieces of animal bone and horn, many of which exhibited cut-marks and signs of modification. This may partly reflect butchery practices, but the presence of a long-bone fragment with signs of use-wear and a drilled hole suggests that the assemblage may reflect bone-working activity or residue. The presence of the horn core may be a further indication of processing or working activity beyond ordinary domestic butchery.

Other finds

Ditch fill (804) contained a single very small residual flake of white flint, and two small undiagnostic shell fragments were found within ditch fill (903).

context	material class	material subtype	object specific type	count	weight(g)	start date	end date	tpq date range
706	bone	animal bone	worked bone	1	22			700 B.C. - 43 A.D.
	ceramic		pot	1	18	-700	43	
	metal	iron	nail	1	8			
	bone	animal bone	small mammal	1	1			
	bone	animal bone	large mammal	4	262			
	bone	horn	sheep/goat	1	24			
804	ceramic		pot	7	32	75	200	75 - 200 A.D.
	bone	animal bone	mammal bone splinters	4	2			
	stone	flint	flake	1	1	- 10,000	43	
	ceramic		pot	102	854	43	200	
	ceramic		pot	2	12	43	200	
903	bone	animal bone	mammal bone	7	138			43 - 200 A.D.
	organic	shell		1	1			

Table 3: Summary of context dating based on artefacts

6 Synthesis

The evaluation has demonstrated that Roman activity associated with the Scheduled Monument of Ashfurlong continues into the proposed development site. The features included ditches and a possible pit, although no other discrete or structural features were identified. It is unclear whether these features represent the remains of enclosure ditches which formed part of the core settlement area, or field system boundary ditches located on the periphery of the occupation area or in the surrounding agricultural landscape.

The artefact assemblage reflects occupation activity within the environs of the site in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, the pottery being typical of Roman rural settlements of this date. The presence of modified animal bone may indicate boneworking activity in the vicinity. The sherd of Iron Age pottery in a later feature suggests the presence of Iron Age activity in the wider landscape.

6.1 Research frameworks

The Roman remains at the site have the potential to address some key questions about the scheduled settlement at Ashfurlong. The site is not well understood and a resource assessment of Roman Buckinghamshire suggested the site could be a large settlement, posting station or a more elaborate villa-like complex (Zeepvat and Radford 2007, 9). Further work at the site may also contribute towards answering some of the questions outlined in the Solent Thames Research Framework Research Agenda (Fulford and Allen 2010).

7 Significance

7.1 Nature of the archaeological interest in the site

The archaeological features identified at the proposed development site comprise of the remains of ditches and possibly pits surviving beneath the plough soil, cut into the natural substrate. Artefacts recovered during the evaluation are typical of a lower order rural settlement but have the potential to reveal significant data about trade links during this period as well as further define the dating of the settlement. Animal bone preservation is good and demonstrates the potential to recover assemblages of sufficient size for interpretation of livestock economy and butchery practices of the site. The sherd of Iron Age pottery, redeposited in a later feature, indicates that there may be evidence for pre-Roman activity on the site.

7.2 Relative importance and physical extent of the archaeological interest in the site

The evaluation undertaken in 2010 failed to identify any significant archaeological features in the western part of the proposed development site, although it did reveal extensive post-medieval quarrying activity in that area. The only trench not disturbed by quarrying was Trench 5, and it appears likely that the boundary between the quarrying activity and undisturbed ground lies somewhere between Trench 4 and Trench 5.

Archaeological features and potential archaeological features were identified in all the trenches opened by the 2015 evaluation (Trenches 6-9) and it is possible that Roman activity extends across the whole of the undisturbed eastern part of the proposed site. Roman activity has been previously identified to the north (at Ashfurlong) and east (at Lavendon Road Farm) of the site.

The depth at which archaeological deposits exist varies across the site. In Trench 7 top and sub-soils extend to a depth of 1.0m or more, whereas in Trench 6 the soil depths are approximately 0.5m.

8 The impact of the development

8.1 Impacts during construction

Archaeological deposits within the site comprise of negative features cut into the natural substrate. These features are therefore vulnerable to damage or destruction from groundworks related to development. In the eastern part of the development site this includes a proposed petrol station and a swale, and therefore the groundworks in these areas are likely to be extensive. To the east of the swale there is no significant proposed development and it may be possible to preserve features *in situ* in this area. However archaeological features are also vulnerable to the movement of heavy machinery and if left *in situ* as part of the development, areas of archaeological significance should be clearly marked out and fenced off.

8.2 Impacts on sustainability

The NPPF emphasises the importance of sustainability (DCLG 2012, section 131) and notes:

- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation.
- The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality.
- The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

The historic environment is a non-renewable resource and therefore cannot be directly replaced. However mitigation through recording and investigation also produces an important research dividend that can be used for the better understanding of the area's history and contribute to local and regional research agendas (cf DCLG 2012, section 141).

9 Recommendations

The archaeological evaluation has established the survival of Roman archaeological features in the eastern half of the proposed development site and a programme of excavation in this area would be appropriate mitigation. This could be undertaken as a condition of planning permission.

10 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Land at the corner of Lavendon Road and Warrington Road, Olney, Milton Keynes (NGR SP 8909 5235). It was commissioned by David Janney of Riley Consulting, in advance of the construction of a proposed supermarket for which a planning application has been submitted. The proposed development site is located next to the scheduled Roman settlement site of Ashfurlong.

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11 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project; David Janney of Riley Consulting for commissioning the project and Nick Crank (Senior Archaeological Officer for Milton Keynes Council) for monitoring the project and his help and advice.

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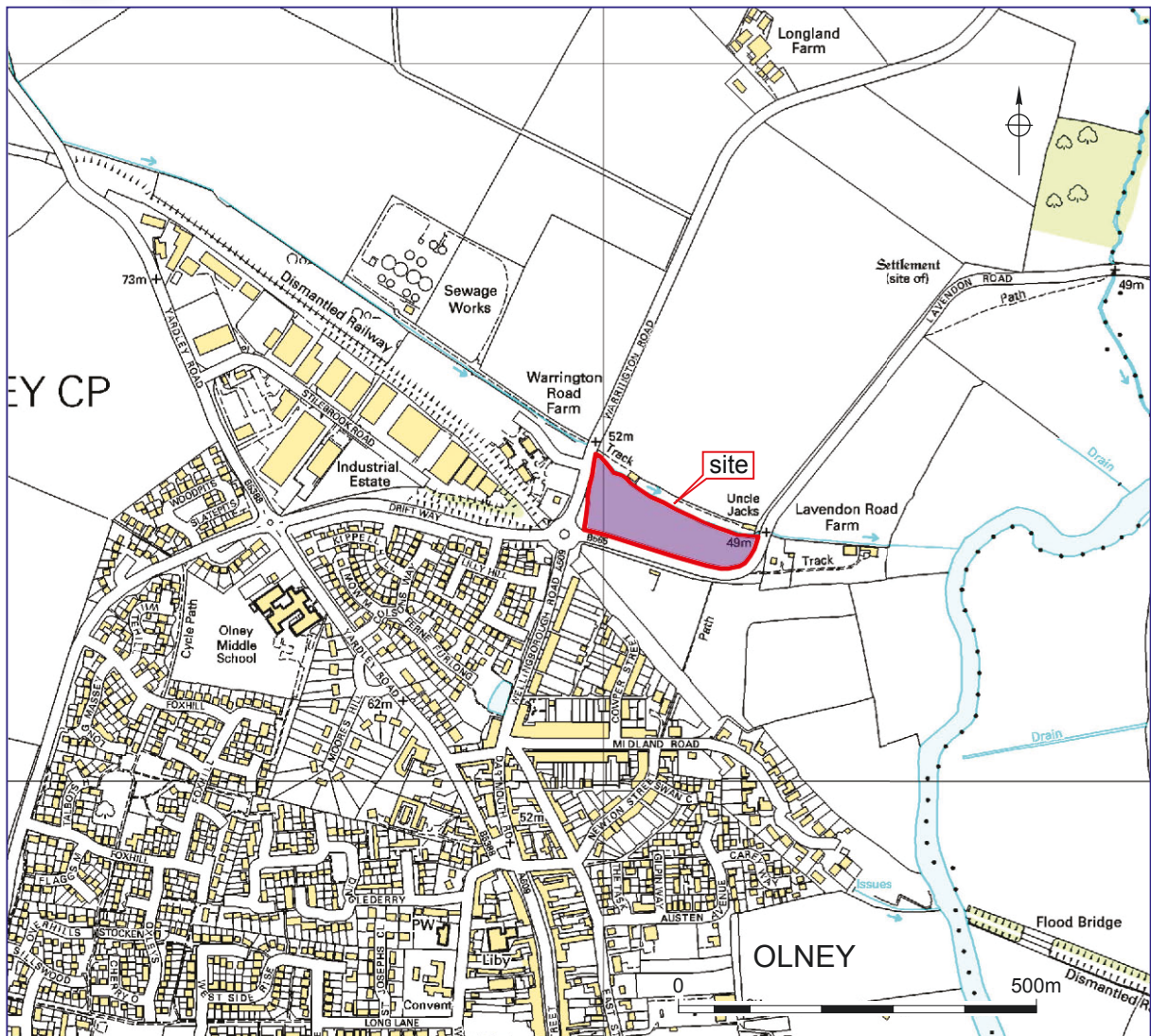
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Figures



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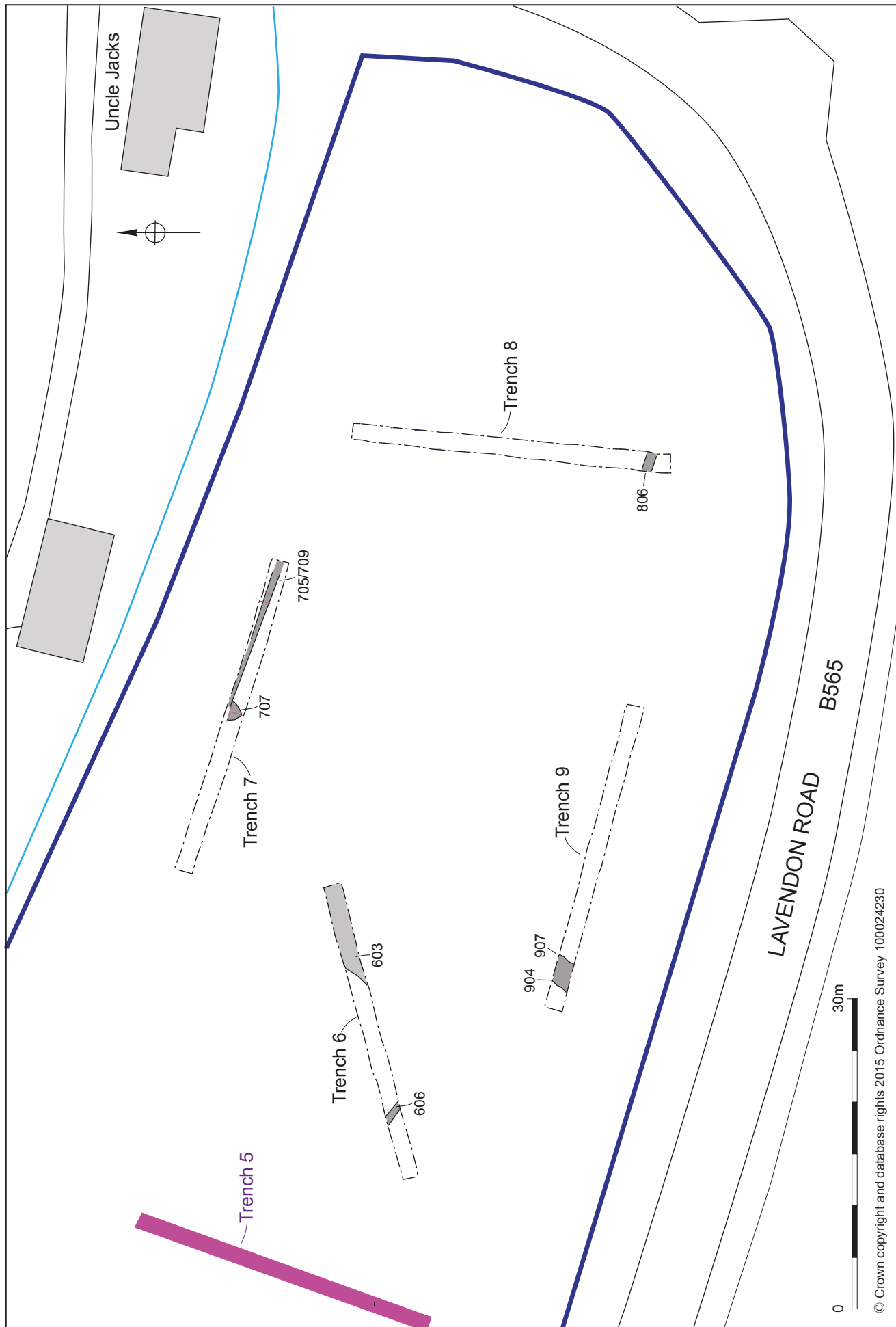
Location of the site

Figure 1



Trench location plan

Figure 2

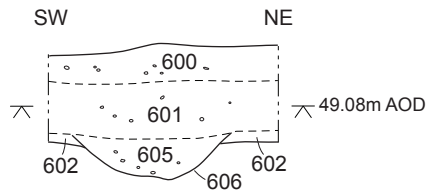


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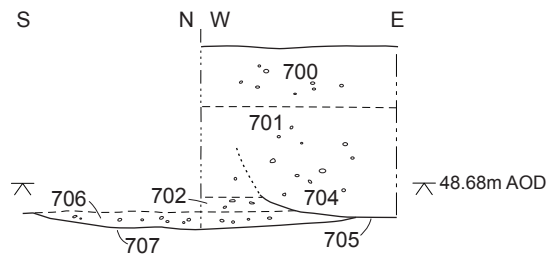
Trench plans

Figure 3

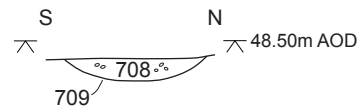
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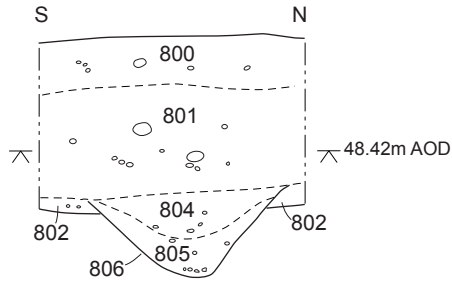
SECTION OF 705 and 707



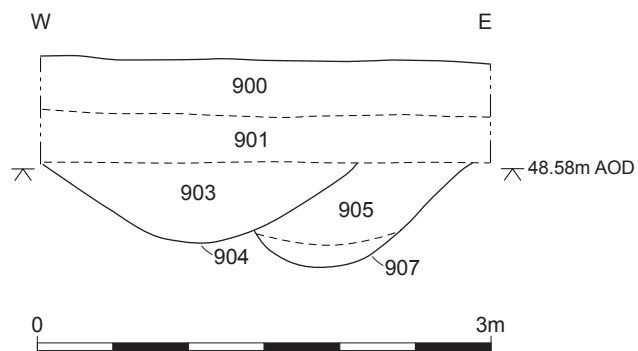
EAST-FACING SECTION OF 709



EAST-FACING SECTION OF 806



NORTH-FACING SECTION OF 904 and 907



Sections

Figure 4

Plates



Plate 1: An undated dark silty deposit was visible in Trench 7 below the subsoil. Photo looking north



Plate 2: Ditch 806. On the extreme right is a geotechnical test pit. Photo looking west



Plate 3: Ditch 907 (to the right) and recut 904 (left). Photo looking north



Plate 4: Linear 606. This undated feature was on the same orientation as the furrows. Photo looking north-west



Plate 5: Pit 707. It was cut by linear 705 which is just visible to the right of shot. Photo looking north



Plate 6: The undated dark silty deposit overlying the natural was also visible in the northern end of Trench 6. Photo looking south-east

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 6

Length: 30m

Width: 1.5m

Orientation: North-east to south-west

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
600	Topsoil	Layer	dark brown loam	0.28	Topsoil
601	Subsoil	Layer	mid brown silt loam	0.36	Subsoil
602	Subsoil	Layer			Subsoil - natural interface
603	Layer	Layer	dark brown silt loam	0.6	Buried soil? Only at NE end of trench. No finds or evidence of human activity visible in deposit. May be natural silting in a depression in the natural gravel.
604	Natural	Layer	Firm yellow gravel		Natural
605	Linear	Fill	Soft mid brown silt loam	0.31	Fill of linear 606 - No finds. Undated homogenous throughout. Very similar to sub-soil 601, naturally deposited
606	Linear	Cut		0.31	Cut of E-W linear. Steep sides and tapered base - Although relatively shallow, possibly continuation of linear 806. Possibly drainage ditch of field boundary. Date unknown.

Trench 7

Length: 30m

Width: 1.5m

Orientation: East to west

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
700	Layer	Layer	dark brown loam	0.40	Topsoil
701	Layer	Layer	mid brown silt loam	0.61	Subsoil
702	Layer	Layer		0.10	Buried soil? Only visible at west end of trench same as 603
703	Natural	Layer	Firm yellow gravel		Natural
704	Linear	Fill		0.14+	Fill of 705
705	Linear	Cut		0.14+	Cut of linear. Furrow?
706	Pit	Fill	Soft dark greyish brown silt loam	0.11	Fill of pit 707
707	Pit	Cut		0.11	Cut of shallow pit or scoop
708	Linear	Fill	Soft mid brown silt loam	0.12	Fill of 709. Same as 704
709	Linear	Cut		0.12	Cut of linear. Furrow? Cuts pit 707

Trench 8

Length: 30m Width: 1.5 Orientation: North to south

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
800	Layer	Layer	dark brown loam	0.30	Topsoil
801	Layer	Layer	mid brown silt loam	0.52	Subsoil
802	Layer	Layer	mid yellowish brown gravel	0.13	Subsoil
803	Layer	Layer	Firm yellow gravel		Natural
804	Ditch	Fill	Soft mid brown silt loam	0.26	Upper fill of ditch 806
805	Ditch	Fill	Soft mid brown silt loam	0.44	Primary fill of ditch 806
806	Ditch	Cut		0.48	Cut of small ditch

Trench 9

Length: 30m Width: 1.5m Orientation: East to west

Context	Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
900	Layer	Layer	dark brown loam	0.38	Topsoil
901	Layer	Layer	mid brown silt loam	0.38	Subsoil
902	Layer	Layer	Firm yellow gravel		Natural
903	Ditch	Fill	Firm dark purpleish brown sandy silt	0.53	Fill of ditch recut 904
904	Ditch	Cut		0.53	Recut of 907
905	Ditch	Fill	Firm greyish brown sandy	0.54	Upper fill of ditch 907
906	Ditch	Fill	Compact grey sandy silt	0.15	Primary fill of ditch 907
907	Ditch	Cut		0.66	Cut of ditch

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive (Accession Number: AYBCM:2015.27)

The archive consists of:

16	Context records AS1
1	Photographic records AS3
66	Digital photographs
1	Drawing number catalogues AS4
5	Permatrace drawings AS34
4	Trench record sheets AS41
1	Box of finds
1	CD-Rom/DVD
1	Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Buckinghamshire County Museum
Resource Centre
Tring Road
Halton
Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire
HP22 5PJ
(01296) 624519