

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
ON LAND AT KINGSHILL SOUTH/CRICKLADE ROAD
CIRENCESTER, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

SP 0334 0010

On behalf of

Atkins

DECEMBER 2011

REPORT FOR	Atkins The Hub 500 Park Avenue Aztec West Almondsbury Bristol BS32 4RZ
PREPARED BY	Gwilym Williams
ILLUSTRATION BY	Eoin Fitzsimons & Gwilym Williams
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ENQUIRES TO	<i>John Moore Heritage Services Hill View Woodperry Road Beckley Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ Tel/Fax 01865 358300 Email info@jmheritageservices.co.uk</i>
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services was commissioned by Atkins Ltd on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council to carry out a watching brief on the northeast side of Cirencester, adjacent to the River Churn and Ermine Street. No cremations or negative archaeological features were present during the works. Residual Roman pottery and roof tile were recovered, as was a large sherd of early Saxon pottery. The topography of the immediate floodplain was plotted.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located just to the south of the roundabout of the A417, A419 and Cricklade Road (NGR SP 0334 0010), between the north-bound carriageway of the A419 and an access road serving the superstore to the south of the site. The site lies at approximately 103m OD and the surface geology is First Terrace River Gravels; the underlying solid geology of the area is mapped as Forest Marble Formation of the Great Oolitic Group, comprising mudstones and shell-detrital ooidal limestone, of the Middle Jurassic era. It comprises an open green space southwest of the A419.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission (10/0028/CWREG3) for the provision of a new pedestrian and cycle steel bridge to bridge the A419 was granted by Gloucestershire County Council (GCC). Condition 14 attached to the planning permission (based on model condition 55 from DoE Circular 11/95) required a programme of archaeological mitigation for the proposed development.

The Senior Archaeological Officer of GCC produced a brief specifying an archaeological watching brief (GCC 2011).

1.3 Archaeological Background

The proposed development site is located on the periphery of Cirencester's Roman town, along the east bank of the River Churn, adjacent to the major Roman road, Ermin Street, now the service road for the superstore. The margins of the road are thought to have been used for human burial during the Roman period. A glass cremation urn was apparently found in c. 1765 (Atkins 2009, table 1, ATK05) on the land between the A419 and Ermine Street. The precise location of the findspot is uncertain. An archaeological evaluation of the proposal area was undertaken (HER34323) but did not reveal any burials, although abraded pottery sherds of Iron Age and Roman date were recovered (CA 2009).

Archaeological evaluations undertaken previously at the site of the Tesco superstore, south of the proposal area, and close to the line of Ermin Street revealed a postulated Roman field boundary, two possible cremations and an associated putative cremation pyre which might indicate the presence of an extramural cemetery in the area of the superstore (ibid, table 1, ATK08). A more recent desk-based assessment and evaluation (ibid, table 1, ATK11) suggested that the whole area occupied by the

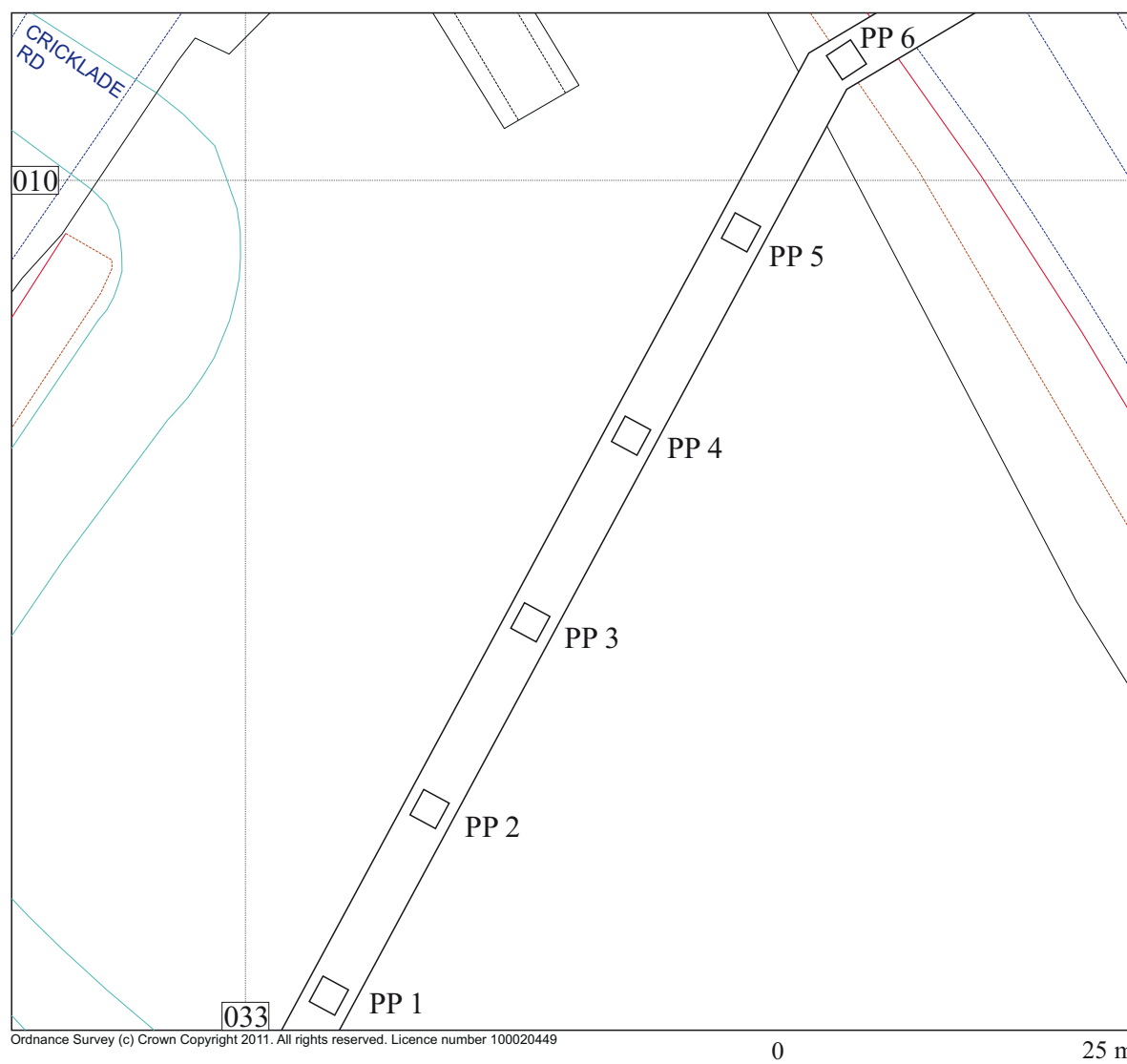
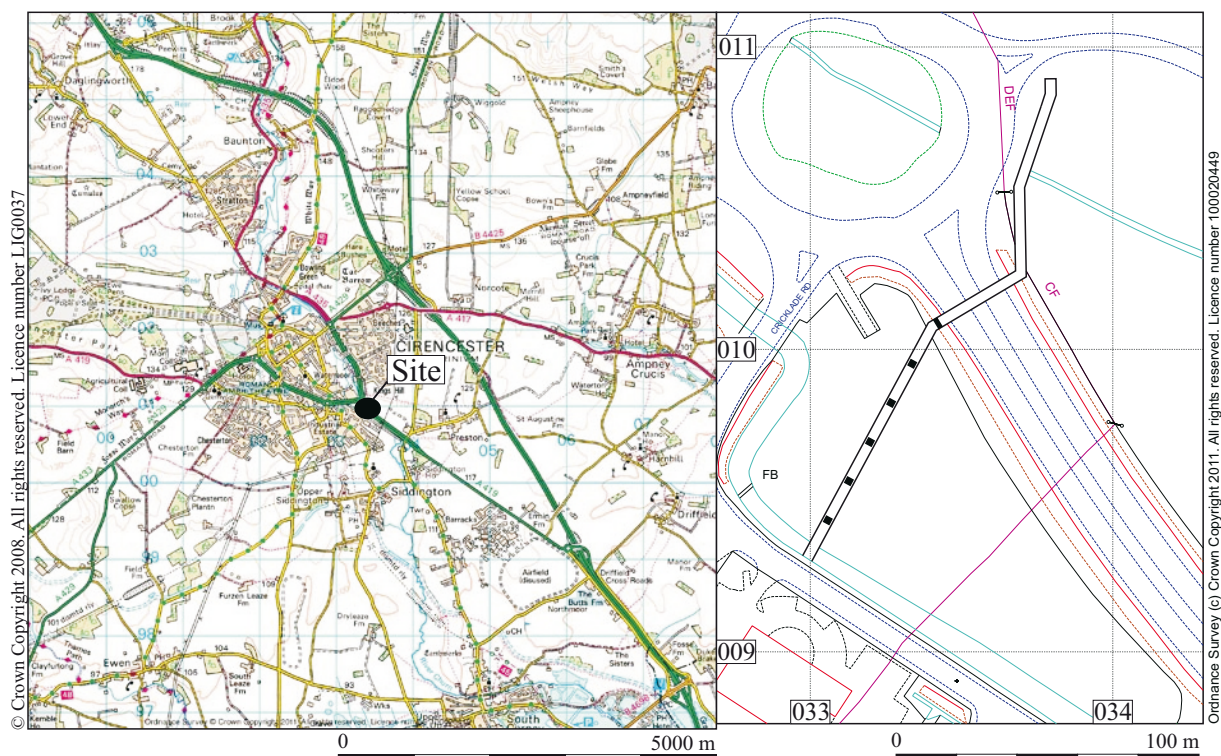


Figure 1. Site location

existing superstore and car park was cleared in the late prehistoric period and subjected to repeated ploughing and flooding events throughout the Roman period, with Roman levels subsequently sealed by a deep layer of alluvium.

The footprint of the proposed bridge also lies very close to features associated with 18th-century water meadows of the River Churn (Atkins 2009).

Some of this information has been taken from the brief issued by GCC.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To investigate and record any archaeological remains that will be impacted on by the development and in particular any Roman remains associated with roadside activity
- To take samples of any significant palaeo-environmental remains that may add to the understanding of the site and locality.
- To provide a report on the results of the watching brief.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A Written Scheme of Investigation outlining the methodology by which the watching brief would be carried out in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains of significance was prepared and agreed with the Senior Archaeologist for GCC.

3.2 Methodology

In order to satisfy the aims of the investigation, trenching for all pits south of the A419 was monitored; following inspection of trenching on the north side of the road, the Senior Archaeologist at GCC was consulted. It was agreed that due to the extensive impact of previous construction works, the subject of full archaeological investigation (Biddulph & Welsh 2011), further monitoring was not appropriate.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced.

4 RESULTS

All deposits were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in () indicate deposits of material.

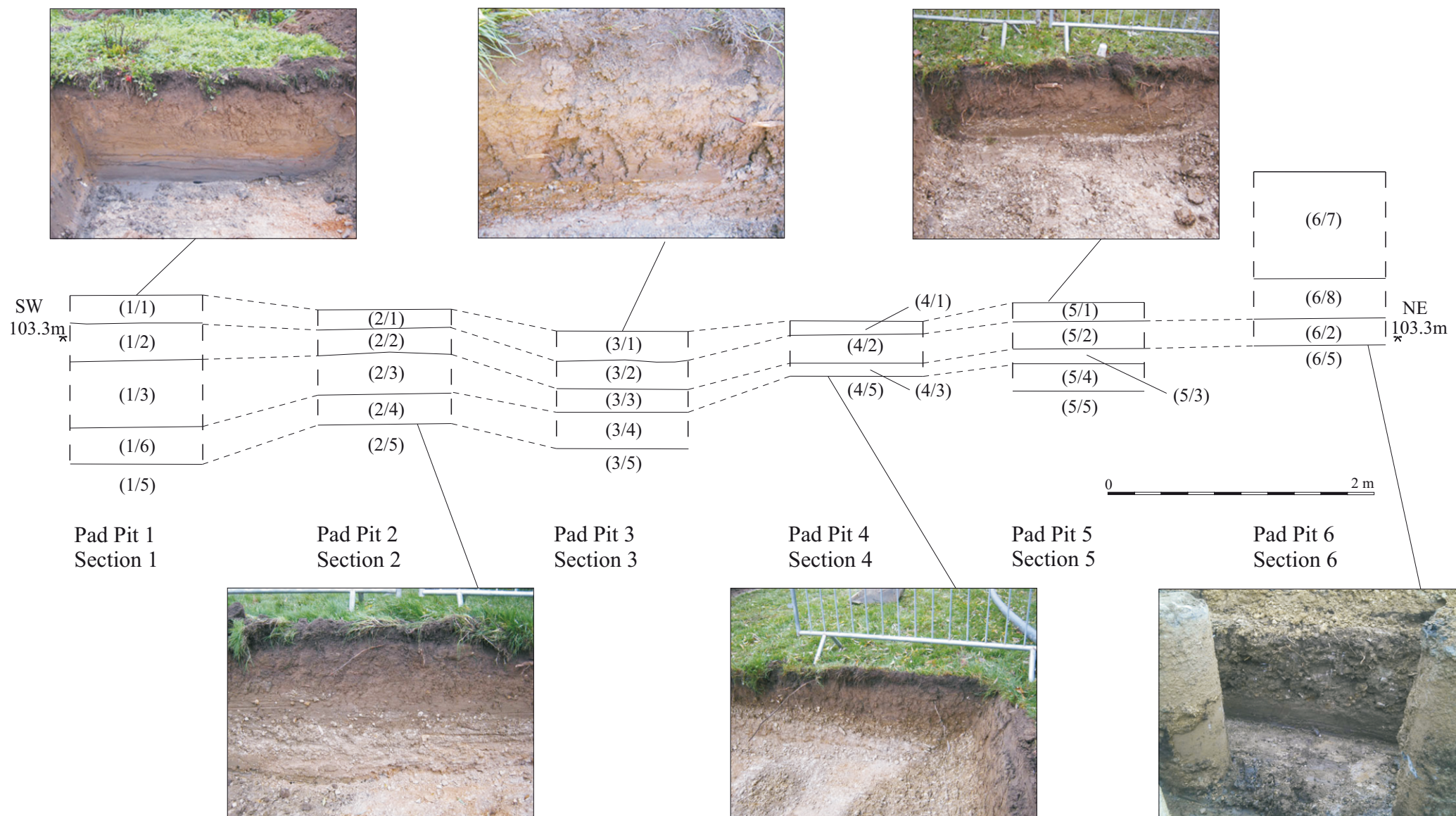


Figure 2. Pad pits: sections 1-6.

4.1 Watching Brief Results (Figure 1)

Monitoring of excavations on the north side of the A419 were initially carried out and all ground was disturbed to the contemporary top of the natural - a pale red clay silt (9) - which was c. 1m below modern ground level. Finds observed, but not retained, in this deposit included bathroom porcelains, blue and white wares, plastic water pipe and a range of construction debris. Due to the extensive ground reduction the rest of the pits were not intensively monitored, following consultation with the Senior Archaeologist at GCC; the same pattern was repeated on further visits.

South of the A419 excavation of each pit (Table 1) was carried out to the top of the gravel under archaeological guidance using a toothless bucket. Subsequently the pits were handed over to the main contractors for full excavation.

The same sequence of deposits was present in all trenches (Table 1), apart from pad pit 6, the upper deposits of which had been heavily modified in association with the construction of the A419. The lower deposits were, however, present. For the description the preceding pit number has generally not been used, as all deposits were the same across the site, with the exception of pit-specific deposits and for locating finds.

The section (Fig. 2) and Table 1 show that the gravel deposit (5) lying east of the River Churn was not a flat homogenous deposit, but appeared to undulate within the floodplain, with some rises in the gravel, forming perhaps small islands (ie pad pit 2). This is not untypical for floodplain deposits. On the southwest side of the development area the natural gravel was overlain by a soft dark grey clay silt deposit (6), which was located in what appeared to be an area of small pools. It was located close to the present River Churn and may well represent historic fluvial erosion.

Elsewhere, the natural gravel was overlain by soft yellow grey clay silt with significant amounts of gravel (4) distributed through it. This is interpreted as an early cultivation horizon. Pieces of Roman tile were recovered from this deposit – (2/4) and (4/4) – from two pad pits; a small quantity of four sherds (broken during machining) of early Saxon pottery, weighing 14g, was also recovered from deposit (4/4). This deposit did not appear to be present in pad pits 4 or 6; it may have been scoured away in antiquity in the former case and too high above the river in the latter.

Overlying the early cultivation horizon (4) was a deposit of dark alluvium (3) which extended as far north as pad pit 5. A single small sherd of abraded Samian was recovered from this deposit (1/3), which was undoubtedly residual. In pad pit 4, this deposit directly overlay the gravel (5).

Sealing the dark alluvium (3) was a similar but brighter clay silt (2), which was seen in all pad pits.

Sealing the bright alluvium (2) was the topsoil (1), with the exception of pad pit 6, in which a dump of consolidating brown clay (6/8) overlain by the bund material of humic loam (6/7) were present. Both these deposits were associated with the construction of the A419.

	Description	Depth	Finds	Interpretation	Date
Pad pit 1					
1/1	Crumbly, dark brown loamy humus	0.2	–	Topsoil	Modern
1/2	Stiff, bright brown clay silt	0.3	–	Subsoil; alluvially derived?	-
1/3	Stiff, dark brown clay silt	0.50	Pot	Subsoil; alluvially derived?	Roman/ post-Roman
1/6	Soft grey clay silt	0.2	–	Low-energy silt deposit	Roman/ post-Roman
1/5	Grey gravel	–	–	Natural gravels	-
Pad pit 2					
2/1	Crumbly, dark brown loamy humus	0.15	–	Topsoil	Modern
2/2	Stiff, bright brown clay silt	0.2	–	Subsoil; alluvially derived?	-
2/3	Stiff, dark brown clay silt	0.3	–	Subsoil; alluvially derived?	-
2/4	Soft, yellow grey clay silt with 20% gravel	0.2	CBM	Buried cultivation surface?	Roman/ post-Roman
2/5	Grey gravel	–	–	Natural gravels	-
Pad pit 3					
3/1	Crumbly, dark brown loamy humus	0.1	–	Topsoil	Modern
3/2	Stiff, bright brown clay silt	0.2	–	Subsoil; alluvially derived?	-
3/3	Stiff, dark brown clay silt	0.2	–	Subsoil; alluvially derived?	-
3/4	Soft, yellow grey clay silt with 20% gravel	0.3	–	Buried cultivation surface?	Roman/ post-Roman
3/5	Grey gravel	–	–	Natural gravels	-
Pad pit 4					
4/1	Crumbly, dark brown loamy humus	0.1	–	Topsoil	Modern
4/2	Stiff, bright brown clay silt	0.2	–	Subsoil; alluvially derived?	-
4/4	Stiff, dark brown clay silt	0.1	Pot; CBM	Subsoil; alluvially derived?	Saxon
4/5	Grey gravel	–	–	Natural gravels	-
Pad pit 5					
5/1	Crumbly, dark brown loamy humus	0.15	Pot	Topsoil	Modern
5/2	Stiff, bright brown clay silt	0.2	–	Subsoil; alluvially derived?	-
5/3	Stiff, dark brown clay silt	0.1	–	Subsoil	-
5/4	Soft, yellow grey clay silt with 20% gravel	0.2	–	Buried cultivation surface?	Roman/ post-Roman
5/5	Grey gravel	–	–	Natural gravels	-
Pad pit 6					
6/7	Dark brown loamy humus	0.8	–	Made ground	-
6/8	Stiff, grey clay silt	0.3	–	Made ground	-
6/4	Soft, yellow grey clay silt with 20% gravel	0.2	–	Buried cultivation surface?	Roman/ post-Roman
6/5	Grey gravel	–	–	Natural gravels	-

Table 1. Deposit description by pad pit (see Fig. 2)

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The archaeological monitoring of the strip took place in good meteorological conditions, with excellent co-operation from the contractors.

5 FINDS

5.1 The pottery by Jane Timby

Introduction

The archaeological watching brief resulted in the recovery of a small collection of six sherds of pottery weighing 19 g dating to the Roman and Saxon periods.

The sherds were recovered from the topsoil and an alluvial layer and were in quite fragmentary condition.

For the purposes of the assessment the sherds were scanned and quantified by count and weight. The pieces are catalogued below.

Summary and potential

This is a small collection of pottery. The Roman wares are entirely compatible with that to be expected in and around the Roman town of Cirencester. Early and late Roman pottery was recovered from the site at Kingshill North immediately adjacent (Biddulph and Welsh 2011).

The Saxon sherd is potentially of more interest and no pottery of this date was recovered from excavations at Kingshill North. A small number of sherds of this date have been found at Cirencester mainly outside the town walls, for example, from within the amphitheatre and during the construction of the Grove Lane ring-road on the east side (Vince 1984, 240). There is a small Saxon cemetery dug into the ruins of a Roman building at The Barton, again outside the defences, and dated to the mid 6th century (Brown 1976). The only sherd known to the author from within the walls is a single sherd from a medieval context within the area of the Saxon church.

No further work is recommended.

Catalogue

1. One very small body sherd of South Gaulish samian. Wt. 1 g. Context: 1/3. Date: 1st century AD.
2. One bodysherd from an Oxfordshire white-slipped mortarium. Wt. 5 g. Context: 5/1. Date: mid 3rd-4th century.
3. Four small sherds (broken from one piece) of handmade organic-tempered ware. Wt. 14 g. Context: 4/4. Date: early Saxon.

5.2 Ceramic tile by Gwilym Williams

Four fragments of Roman roof tile were recovered from the same deposit in two pit pads – (2/4) and (4/4) – during the watching brief. There were two conjoining fragments of *imbrex* and two bits of *tegula*. The deposit lay immediately above the natural gravel (2/5) and (4/5). The total weight of the assemblage was 258 g.

Context	Frag no	Wt (g)	Fabric	Type
(2/4)	1	62	Soft, orange clay with haematite; very abraded	tegula
(2/4)	2	152	Soft, beige clay with occ. haematite and voids; very abraded, conjoining sherds	imbrex
(4/4)	1	44	Soft, orange clay with haematite; very abraded	unk. tegula?

Table 2. Ceramic tile

The presence of the tile might indicate that a building was located in the vicinity, but given the limited view the works afforded, it is not possible to assert this with any strong conviction.

5.3 Environmental remains

No environmental samples warranted being taken.

6 CONCLUSIONS

No evidence was found during the watching brief for the presence of any archaeological remains associated with either the cremation found in the 18th century, or the field boundaries found during recent archaeological interventions.

The alluvial deposits observed indicate that the flooding episodes observed to the west of the River Churn were also present within the development area. Roman building materials, comprising both forms of roof tile – *imbrex* and *tegula*, were recovered during the watching brief. This is of interest, as the excavations to the north of the Kingshill Roundabout did not identify Roman activity after the late 1st century, although later Roman pottery was recovered. Roman pottery, however, was present in later layers of alluvium and is probably residual, as a large sherd of Saxon pottery was recovered from the same deposit as the roof tile.

The limited view afforded of the area precludes too conclusive an interpretation of the Roman and Saxon activities hinted at by the pottery.

No further information regarding the post-medieval management of the water-meadow was recovered during the watching brief.

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