JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

A SECOND STAGE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION AT SPEEDWELL FIRST SCHOOL SITE SANDFORD ROAD, LITTLEMORE, OXFORD

SP 5365 0255

On behalf of

Westbury Homes (Holding) Ltd

April 2005

REPORT FOR	Westbury Homes (Holding) Ltd Central Region Sabre Close Quedgeley Glos GL2 4NZ
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Site Code:	LESS 05
JMHS Project No:	1535

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Summary

A second stage archaeological field evaluation was carried out as a condition of planning permission granted for residential development. A pair of gullies dating to the post-medieval period was found. A further sherd of Roman pottery confirms the use of the site as agricultural during the Roman period.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Fig. 1)

The proposal site is located off Sandford Lane, Littlemore (SP 5365 0255), about 4km to the south-east of Oxford City Centre. The site is adjacent to, and partly within, the Littlemore Conservation Area. The site lies at approximately 70-72m OD, on the west side of a valley of a stream, which must have, at one time, flowed into the Littlemore Brook. The underlying geology is Beckley Sand Member.

The site comprises the existing Victorian (1904) school building, which is being retained, on the Sandford Road frontage. Other school buildings have been demolished.

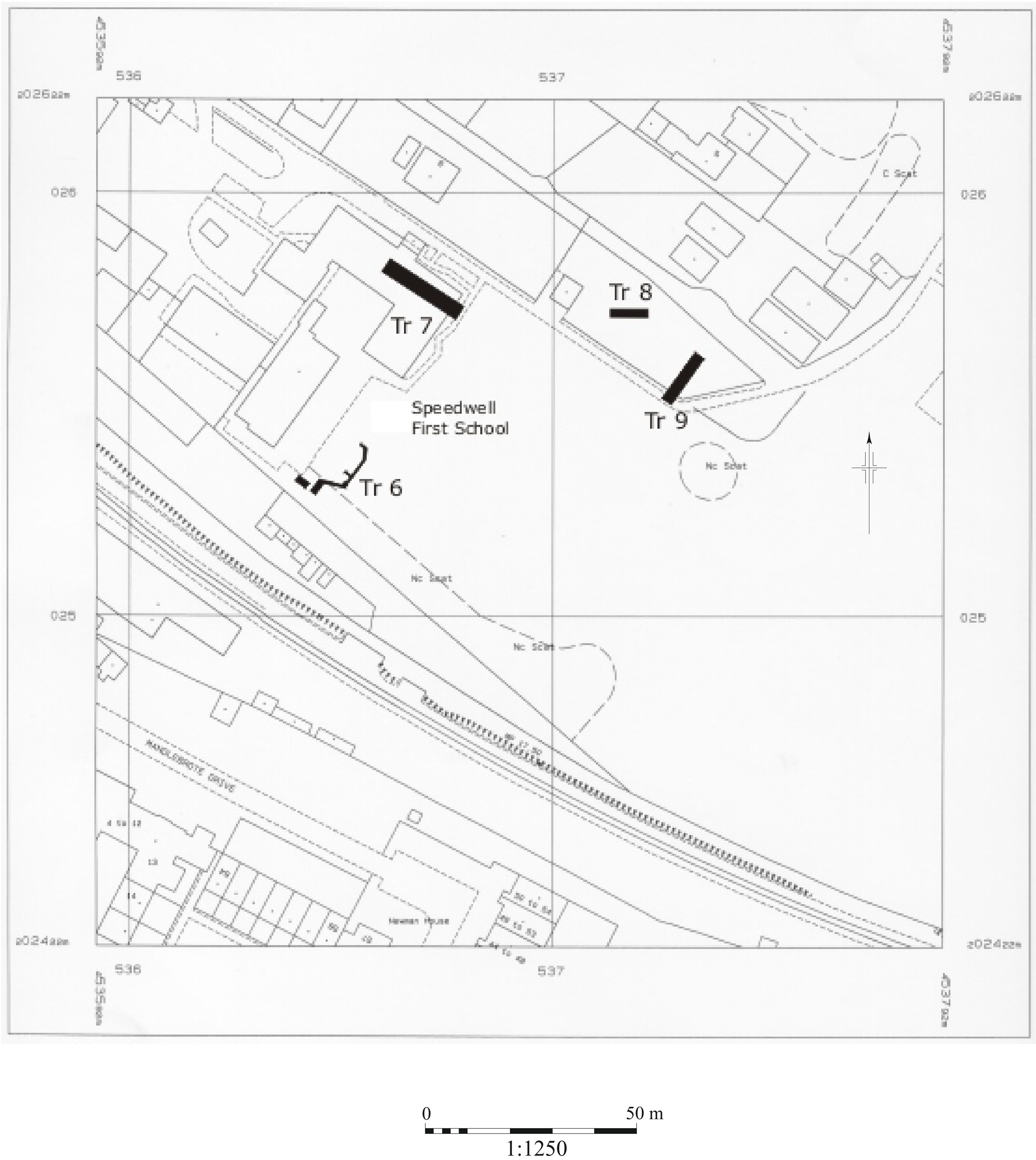
1.2 Planning Background

As part of the consideration for the redevelopment of several surplus school sites Oxfordshire County Council commissioned an archaeological desk-based assessment of the site (JMHS 2002a). Due to the archaeological potential of the site an archaeological field evaluation of the playing fields was carried out (JMHS 2002b).

A condition requiring the implementation of a scheme of mitigation for any areas of significant impact on potential archaeological remains was attached to the planning permission for residential development (05/00046/RES). This involved the excavation of further evaluation trenches. The scope of this was agreed on site with Oxford City Council's Archaeologist and carried out by JMHS in April 2005.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The development site was the subject of an archaeological assessment (JMHS 2002a) which concluded that there was medium potential for the site to contain remains of Roman date. There is considerable evidence of Roman activity within a 500m radius of the site, much of it relating to pottery production in the area. The closest finds, Roman coins and pottery, are recorded at SP 5367 0254 (County Sites and Monuments Record SMR 1435), less than 100m south of the site, suggesting a high potential within the proposal area.


536
537
026
025
Tr 7
Tr 8
Tr 9
Tr 6
Speedwell
First School
MANDLEBROTE DRIVE
Newman House
0
50 m
1:1250

A first stage of evaluation established that the area of the playing fields had been in agricultural use during the Roman period. This was established by the finding of a number of sherds of that period that must have been deposited as part of manuring practices. Similarly sherds of the medieval period indicated a similar use in the medieval period.

2. AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aim of the second stage of evaluation was to confirm that the previously found agricultural activity in the Roman and medieval periods continued further westwards under the area of the former school buildings.

3. STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A trench layout was agreed with Oxford City Council's Archaeologist (Brian Durham) and Westbury Homes.

The work was carried out by JMHS in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

The field evaluation comprised the excavation of three additional trenches (Tr. 7-9), totalling *c.* 42m in length. Trench 7 was 3.5m wide, Trench 8 1.8m wide and Trench 9 was 2.5m wide. In addition the excavations of two lengths of trenches for drainage were monitored (Tr. 6). Trenches 7-9 were excavated using a mini-excavator fitted with a 700mm wide toothless bucket, down to the natural geology and under direct archaeological control. Archaeological features present were sampled by hand excavation. Trench 6 was excavated using a 450mm wide toothed bucket.

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

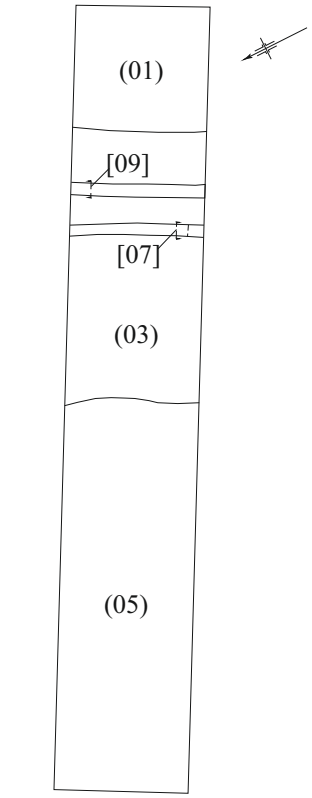
The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

Mr Brian Durham of Oxford City Council monitored the works.

4 RESULTS

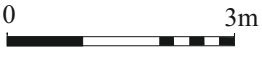
All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers
Figure 2. Areas of Investigation

PLAN TRENCH 7



SECTION 1
NE Facing section

SECTION 2
NE Facing section



in [ ] indicate features i.e. walls, pit cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material.

The natural Beckley Sand Member comprised limestone and sand. The western half of Trench 7 was limestone (05), which was seen to outcrop in places in Trenches 8 and 9. The groundworkers reported that that limestone was present in the north-west part of the site. Within Trench 6 the Beckley Sand Member was orange-yellow sand (04). Lying above the sand and the limestone was deposit (03) varying from mid orange-brown (20:80) very slightly silty sand in Trenches 6 and 7, to slightly clayey silty sand (10) in Trenches 8 and 9. It was 250mm thick in Trench 6. This deposit appeared to have suffered from bioturbation with the inclusion of occasional medium pebbles and very occasional charcoal flecks. Due to the clay fraction within the deposit it is thought to be a wind-blown (loess) deposit similar to that seen covering the Thames gravels elsewhere in the region.

Above the natural was a ploughsoil deposit of dark brown slightly orange silty clay (02) in Trench 6, which was sandier in Trench 7, with less than 1% of pebbles and moderate charcoal flecks. This deposit was 400mm thick on the south edge of the site in Trench 6 and in Trench 9. Elsewhere it had been disturbed by the demolition of the school buildings and recent construction work (01). This last deposit was *c*. 300mm thick with remnants of the topsoil mixed in it in Trenches 6 and 7.

Two truncated parallel 'gullies' were present within Trench 7 (Figure 2) on a northeast-southwest orientation and represented by cuts [07] and [09]. They were 1050mm apart centre-to-centre, with 520mm between them. The first survived up to 480mm wide and 60 mm deep. It had sides of 20-25^0 from the horizontal and a very slightly rounded base. It was filled by mid dark brown silty sand (06) containing occasional pebbles and limestone fragments. The second gully [09] was similar in profile and fill as [07]. It survived up to 520mm wide and 60mm deep and the side varied from 30 – 35^0.

5 FINDS

A piece of post-medieval tile was recovered from fill (06) of gully [07], while a very small abraded sherd of probable Roman sandy oxidised ware and a fragment of animal bone came from (08), the fill of gully [09].

6. CONCLUSION

Deposit (02) appears to be a ploughsoil, which was more easily recognised in this second stage of evaluation. In the previous evaluation, which was carried out after a dry spell, this deposit was described as a disturbed (bioturbated) top of the natural.
The natural was the equivalent of deposit (03) in this stage of evaluation. The reason for the ploughsoil showing more clearly this time is presumably due to the removal of the topsoil from the site allowing rain to soak into the underlying material.
The two parallel linear features could be connected with agricultural practices or could be the remnants of a track marked by cart wheel ruts crossing the area several times. Although the topsoil had been stripped off this area and the ploughsoil (02)

had been disturbed by construction work it is likely that the ploughsoil would not have been so deep in this part of the site due to the proximity of the limestone which was relatively high in Trench 7.

This stage of evaluation confirmed the finding of the previous work in that the area appears to have been used for agriculture in Roman and medieval times with the finds of those dates deriving from manuring practices.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

IFA 1994, *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs,* Institute of Field Archaeologists.

JMHS 2002a, *An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment of Speedwell First School Site, Littlemore, Oxford.*

JMHS 2002b, *An Archaeological Evaluation of Speedwell First School Site, Sandford Road, Littlemore, Oxford*.

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (mm)	Width (mm)	Length (mm)	Finds	Date
Trench 6: total 23m x 0.45 – 1.40m							
01	Deposit	Demolition/construction	300	Trench	Trench	-	Modern
02	Deposit	Ploughsoil	400	Trench	Trench	-	-
03	Deposit	Natural	250	Trench	Trench	-	-
04	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	S end of trench	-	-
Trench 7: 20.5m x 3.5m							
01	Deposit	Demolition/construction	200	Trench	Trench	-	Modern
02	Deposit	Ploughsoil	170	Trench	Patchy along trench	-	-
03	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	1000	-	-
05	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	1050	-	-
06	Fill	Fill of 07	60	480	3500	Roman pot, bone	Post-med
07	Cut	?Gully	60	480	3500	-	Post-med
08	Fill	Fill of 09	60	520	3500	Tile	Post-med
09	Cut	?Gully	60	520	3500	-	-
Trench 8: 8.5m x 1.8m							
01	Deposit	Construction	100	Trench	Trench	-	Modern
10	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	Trench	-	-
Trench 9: 13.5m x 2.5m							
02	Deposit	Ploughsoil	400	Trench	Trench	-	-
10	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	Trench	-	-