



AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT HALLIDAYS

HIGH ST./QUEEN ST.,

DORCHESTER-ON THAMES

SU 57815 94265

On behalf of

Hallidays

MARCH 2007

REPORT FOR Hallidays
C/o The Anderson Orr Partnership
The Studio
70 Church Road
Wheatley
Oxon OX33 1LZ

PREPARED BY John Moore & Gwilym Williams

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ENQUIRES TO John Moore Heritage Services
Hill View
Woodperry Road
Beckley
Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ
Tel/Fax 01865 358300
Email info@jmheritageservices.co.uk

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Summary

A watching brief was undertaken during the conversion of the existing buildings into several residential units. This involved monitoring of the excavation for additional foundations, new services and new floors.

Late 1st and 2nd century Roman activity is shown by the presence of pits. At least part of the site was ploughed in c. mid to late 2nd century before non-agricultural activity was re-established. This appears to have continued through the 3rd and 4th centuries. There was then a further period of agricultural or horticultural activity before earlier medieval activity is shown by a pit group and a possible boundary ditch. Evidence for part of a medieval building was found in the structure of 'The Cottage' fronting High Street.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

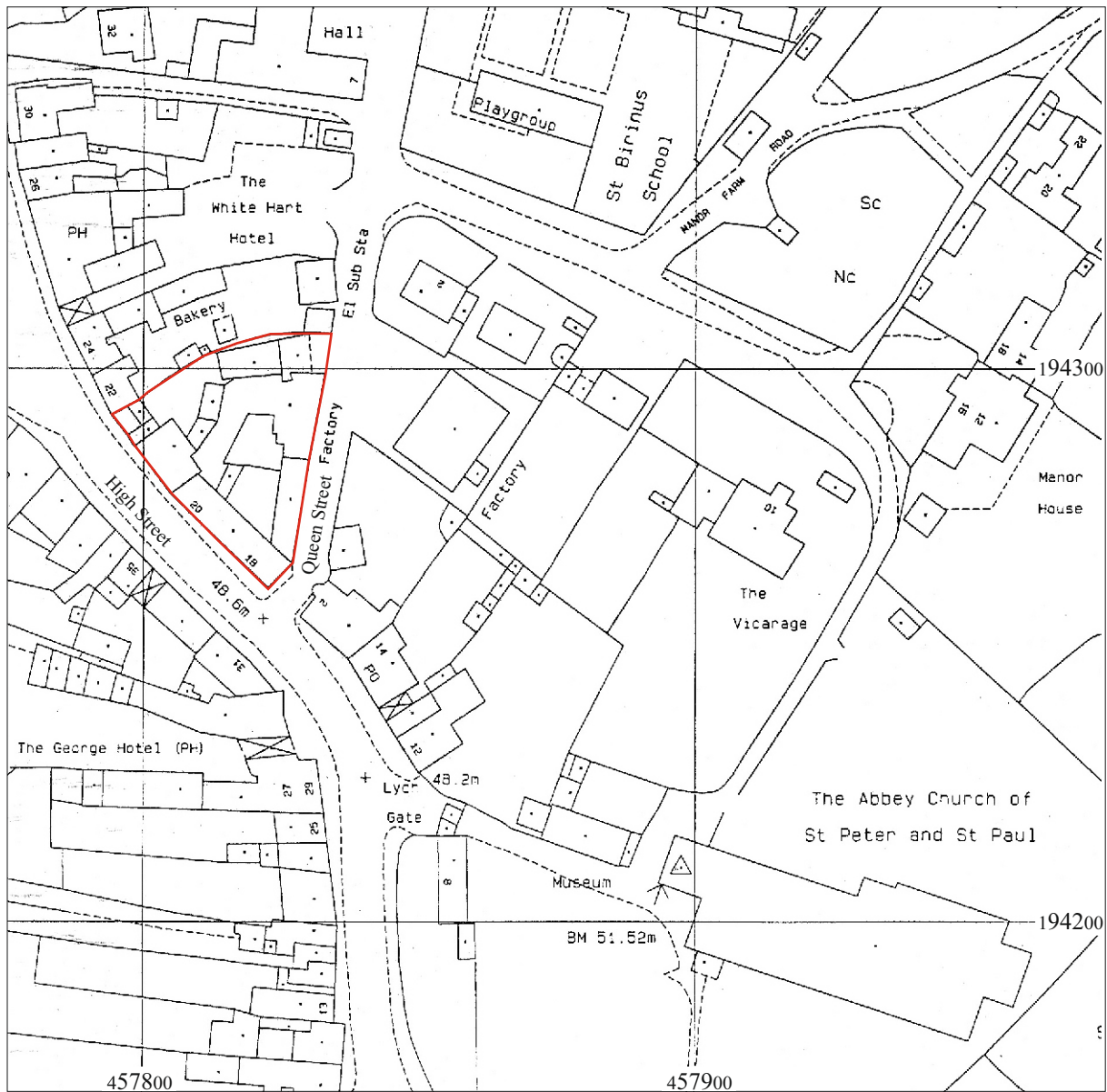
The site was located at the junction of High Street and Queen Street, Dorchester-on-Thames, at NGR SU 57815 94265. The geology is Thames Valley Gravels overlain by well-drained loamy soils. The site lies at approximately 48.6m OD and was occupied by buildings with two small yards. The buildings fronting High Street and Queen Street are Grade II-listed.


1.2 Planning Background

South Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission for the conversion and extension of the existing antiques showrooms to provide two three-bedroom houses, five two-bedroom houses and one one-bedroom flat as well as new office accommodation for Hallidays. Permission was also granted for the demolition of modern single storey additions and the conversion of existing workshop building to form new antiques showrooms. Due to the potential for archaeological remains to be present on the site a condition required that a programme of archaeological work be carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved by the local planning authority. John Moore Heritage Services, in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS), undertook the work.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Dorchester-on-Thames is situated over the site of a small Roman town, which consisted of roughly rectangular defences enclosing a civil settlement of about 5.5 ha (Henig & Booth 2000, 61). It is generally thought to have been established in the Flavian period and the unusual increase in Late Roman (Theodosian) coinage implies a thriving occupation throughout the 4th century and until the end of the 5th century (ibid, 189). Early theories about the line of the eastern defences of the Roman town suggested that it ran northwards between Bridge End and Rotten Row, crossing the High Street and the western approach to Dorchester Abbey Church, passing through the grounds of 12 High Street before turning west near the junction of Manor Farm Road with Queen Street.



 The Site

0 m 50 m

Figure 1. Site Location

Aston (1974) however suggested that the line of the eastern defences might have incorporated the area later covered by the Saxon Cathedral and Medieval Abbey with the River Thames forming the eastern boundary of the town (but see Henig & Booth *ibid*, 59-61). A watching brief carried out by JMHS at 12 High Street found a large Roman ditch, which is probably the eastern boundary of the town defences. The position of the Roman ditch at this location would dispense with the theory that the River Thames formed the eastern boundary to the town (JMHS 2002). Recent work in the garden of the Chequers Public House (JMHS 2006) is in agreement with Hogg & Stevens' (1937, 42) line of the southern defences and in particular the south-east corner where they observed the line of the rampart turning north under Albert Terrace. The defences therefore would have been 20-30m to the east of the Hallidays site. The north-east corner of the Roman town defences is considered to lie *c.* 40-45m to the north of the site near the junction of Queen Street and Chain Lane (*ibid*, 44). No public buildings of any kind have been found but a number of fairly modest domestic buildings have been excavated in various parts of the town. The 1st and 2nd century buildings so far excavated have all been of timber construction with clay floors. A 3rd century stone courtyard house was excavated in the north of the town and a small three-roomed rectangular building was constructed in the early 5th century in the southwest corner of the town. A Roman building lies beneath the abbey and a tessellated pavement was observed in a cellar on the west side of High Street in the 19th century (Rodwell 1975).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To preserve by record any archaeological remains that will be disturbed by the development
- In particular, to identify and record any Roman and later remains
- The final aim is to make the results of the recording action available to all interested parties through publication of the results.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with OCAS and the applicant.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*.

3.2 Methodology

The majority of the ground works were monitored mainly immediately after excavation. This methodology was agreed with the County Archaeologist, Paul

Smith, in light of the results of the first operations on site. Ground reduction and excavation for foundations in the new build in the extreme north-east corner of the site were not seen due to lack of notification by the main contractor.

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.

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

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

Due to the nature of the archaeological intervention features were assigned a single number for cut and fill(s). Detailed descriptions of features and deposits are given in Appendix 1, the main body of the text merely describes their distribution and interpretation. CBM refers to ceramic building material. Context numbers in [] brackets refer to features (i.e. pits, ditches etc.) while those in () are layers or deposits.

There were two courtyards within the Hallidays' premises, enclosed by the various buildings, with an open area located at the north end of the site next to the electricity sub-station. On the east side of the Hallidays' complex is the courtyard shared by Units 1, 2, 5 and 6. This is referred to in the text as the east courtyard; that to the west is referred to as Unit 3 courtyard.

The lowest recorded deposit (03) comprised the Thames Valley Gravels – sand and gravel within a slightly clay silt matrix, which was overlain in parts of the site by a supra-natural deposit of wind-blown loess, sometimes referred to as 'brickearth'.

Features and deposits have been assigned to the Roman, medieval and post-medieval periods by the latest artefacts contained within them and their stratigraphical relationships. However cut features (pits and ditches) either contained few artefacts or very few finds were able to be recovered from the remains seen in section after the excavation of the foundation trenches. Therefore some features assigned to the earlier periods may belong to later periods with the dateable finds being residual.

4.1 The Roman features

Six pits have been assigned to this period. The date-range of these features extends from the mid to late 1st century AD through to the end of the 4th century AD. The earlier dated pits tended to be located on the east side in the south of the redevelopment area, between the junction of High Street and Queen Street. Pit [34], the earliest dated pit was located in room G37, and contained pottery dating from the mid-late 1st century AD. Two slightly later pits were observed in trenches through nearby rooms. These yielded dates spanning the first to second centuries AD. Pit [32] was located north-west of pit [34] in the adjacent room G36, while pit [27] was located to the north of pits [32] and [34] in G33. A further foundation trench through room G33 also revealed pit [23], which contained 2nd century AD pottery. Pit [43], with 2nd century AD material, was observed in G9, approximately 15m to the west.

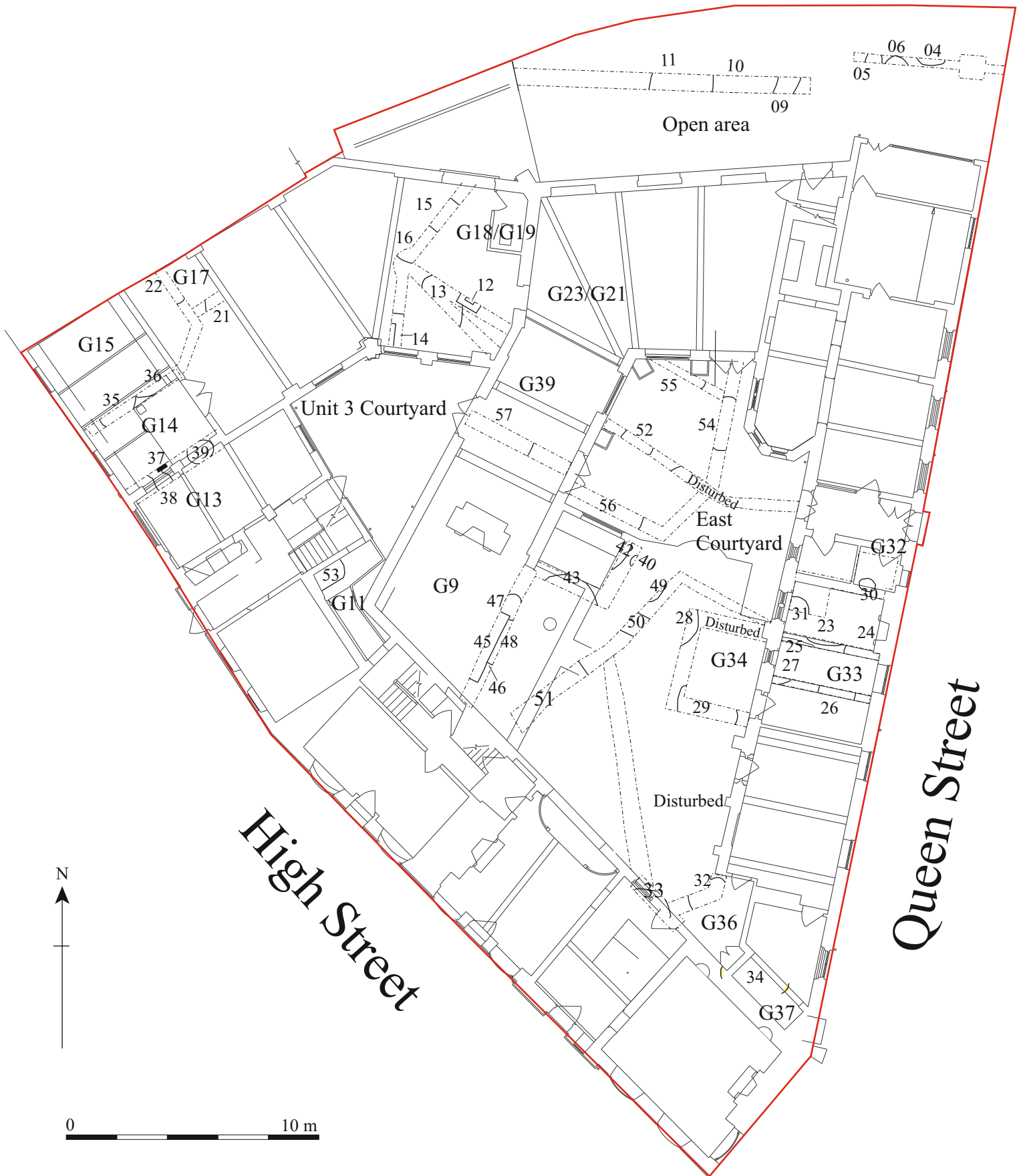


Figure 2. Site Location and plan of features

This latter feature was located just to the south of the horticultural layer (17) observed in G39 (see below).

The latest pit was observed along the line of a trench which was parallel to the northern limit of the property, and north of the agricultural/horticultural layer (18). Pit [05] was located in the north-east corner of the redevelopment site, just inside the entrance to the courtyard; it yielded pottery dating from between the 2nd and 4th centuries.

A Roman agricultural/horticultural layer (17 & 41) and possibly (18, 08, & 02) were observed in the northern part of the site. The deposit (17) was revealed in G39 continuing into the East Courtyard as (41) and (18) was in G23/G21 and G18/19 while (02) and (08) were in the north open area. The deposits were located at approximately 0.55m below the modern ground surface. The deposit (17) yielded pottery dating from the late 1st-2nd centuries AD and as (41) sealed pit [40]. This pit was a only 0.36m in diameter and survived 0.2m deep. The ploughsoil layer (41) was comprised basically of disturbed supra-natural with 1-2% gravel content and was 0.20m thick down to the top of the natural river gravel deposits. Where the supra-natural had been deeper (west and south of pit [43] and north of pit [47]) the top of the underlying supra-natural exhibited ploughmarks. These were 0.35-0.42m apart and 0.07-0.08m deep, aligned NW-SE. The ploughsoil was thought to have been cut by pit [43], which contained 2nd century or later pottery.

The adjacent agricultural/horticultural deposit (18) to the north yielded pottery of a later date of the late 3rd century. This deposit was comprised of different materials but no distinct edges to the materials were apparent. The impression gained was that small pits and the tops of deeper pits had been ploughed or dug over combining the fill materials with the ground surface. This deposit was about 0.50m thick. Deposit (02) sealed a pit [05] containing 2nd – 4th century pottery and both (02 & 08) were cut by an undated pit [04], medieval pits [09-11], and a post-medieval pit [06] that contained brick fragments. Whether this deposit is Roman or later is uncertain (see Discussion below).

4.2 The Medieval features

Few medieval features were observed on the site. Only two were dated by pottery, although a further two were stratigraphically medieval or later. Pit [09], in the open area at the north end of the site, contained Medieval Oxford ware, a style of pottery dating from the 11th century onwards. The pit was cut by pit [10], itself cut by pit [11], both of which contained residual Roman pottery. Moreover, pit [11] also contained a residual early Neolithic blade. To the south in the east courtyard, a ditch [50] was present containing sherds dating from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.

4.3 Post-medieval features

Ten post-medieval pits were observed during the watching brief. These were encountered across the site. Pit [06] was located in the open area at the north end of the site; pit [24] was in G33; pit [29] in the east courtyard; pit [33] was observed in G36 which was considered to be post-medieval from the level where it was cut from; pits [35] and [36] were in G15/G14; pits [51] and [54] (the latter was one or more intercutting pits) were in the east courtyard and pit [53] was located in G11. A large

shallow pit [13] within G18/19 was filled with abundant post-medieval roof-tile. This was probably dug during re-roofing of a nearby structure.

Post-medieval layers were encountered across the site. These included layer (07) located in the entrance yard at the north end of the site which sealed medieval pits [09-11] and post-medieval pit [06]; layer (20) observed in the courtyard of Unit 3, west of G39 and layer (44) in G9. These layers of gravel or gravelly loam appear to indicate that the area behind the street frontage was not heavily built up prior to the construction of the central range, which divides the east courtyard from Unit 3 courtyard.

The post-medieval masonry and other structures also occurred in places across the site. The corner of cellar-walls [14] was located on the north side of the site in G18/G19, well back from either High Street or Queen Street. This may have been a coal cellar pre-dating the modern range here.

A rectangular brick structure [15] was recorded in G18/G19. A pit (21) backfilled with brick and rubble was observed in G17. A cut [46] was seen in section to the east of G9. This was cut by pit [47] and both were cut by the short length of wall [45]. The cut [46] was probably associated with an arch to the basement within the building to the south. The basement wall extended 1.85m below the internal courtyard surface. Within this wall was a brick arch, top of which was 900mm below courtyard surface. The lowest part of the arch seen in the trench was 1.27m below ground surface. The arch had been bricked up from the inside of the basement.

The short length of wall foundation [45] seen in the side of a foundation trench was constructed from large limestone blocks. The wall was 2.9m long and at least 0.55m wide. It was of a strange construction with the top 0.55m of the NE and SW ends vertical and the lower part tapering in slightly. Whether the lower part of the SE length tapered as well is not known as it had been dismantled before being seen. The foundation stood 850mm high.

A brick pier [37] was recorded in G14/G13, the modern range of buildings. A soakaway [28] was seen in the east courtyard.

4.4 Undated features

Various features were undated; primarily because most features were observed after excavation of the trenches for the new foundations or services. Two pits, a rectangular stone-lined feature [12], and [16] were seen in G18/G19 on the northwest side of the site. The stone-lined feature [12] may have been a man-hole or the end of a drain. To the west of these a pit [22] was observed in G17.

To the south in G14/G13, which fronts onto High Street, three pits – [38, a pair of pits] and [39] – were recorded. The three pits were filled with similar backfill, and of a broadly similar character 0.7-0.9m in diameter. Two groups of intercutting pits [55] & [56] were located in the east courtyard.

On the east side of the Hallidays' site several pits could not be located within the phasing sequence. Two undated features, pit [25] and ditch [26], were located in G33, and just to the north in G32, a further two undated pits [30] and [31] were observed.

The former two features lacked any dating material; only ditch [26] contained any finds, which consisted of baked clay or poorly fired brick. The latter two are probably post-medieval, as although they lacked any material that might enable a close dating range to be ascertained, they did contain ceramic tile.

In the east courtyard, the work revealed four pits which contained no dating evidence. Pits [42], [48], [49] and [52] were only partially observed, due to later recutting or mostly being beyond the limits of investigation. Undated intercutting pits [57] were also observed in G39.

5 FINDS

5.1 Prehistoric flint by Dave Gilbert

A single flint artefact was recovered from pit [11]. It is a blade measuring 58mm by 14mm and 6mm at the centre. It has a mid grey patina. The dorsal surface has approximately 20% cortex and three flake scars. The proximal end appears to have been thinned by working on the dorsal surface to create an ergonomic cutting tool. It is somewhat triangular in section. So when held it has a flat upper surface with a lower cutting edge. Some micro-denticulate damage is visible along this edge. It is likely to date to the early Neolithic.

5.2 Roman Pottery by Paul Booth

The pottery ranges in date from the 1st to the late 3rd or 4th century, with the majority of the material of late 1st-2nd century date. Sherd sizes are quite variable but most are in very good, fresh condition with well-preserved surfaces. The majority of the material derives from the Oxfordshire industries, as would be expected. The assemblage is too small for reliable conclusions to be made about status. There is, however, a reasonable variety of both fabrics and vessel forms, the latter including an unusual bowl in fine white ware. The material is entirely consistent with other finds from Dorchester and in general character some of the pottery is reminiscent of material from the Abbey Well and other features (e.g. Frere 1984, 166-172).

Table 1: pottery occurrence by number of sherds per context by fabric

Context	Sherds	Date	Comments
2	1 (2 frags)	1-2C	O20
5	1 (2 frags)	2-4C	R30, prob lid
10	2	?late 2C-4C	R20; R10 dish, cf Y R53 etc
11	4 (5 frags)	240-400	S20; R30: B11 (CK); F51 Y C40
14	1	2-4C	R30
17	1 (2 frags)	late 1-2C	R11, jar/beaker
18	5 (8 frags)	240-300	R10; R20 (x2); F51/9 beaker base; M22 Y M17
20	19	mostly 2C + 1 PMed	E30; R (x11); R10 (x2) roughcast beaker; W/R; ?R39; M22 (x2) Y M2); plus 1 animal bone
23	1	2C	R10, lattice

27	1	?1-2C	R30
29	1	2-4C	R30; plus 1 frag CBM ?Roman
32	1	late 1C- (mid) 2C	O11, Y O42, white paint, burnt
33	1	??1C	??E30
34	3	?m-1 1C	R90; R20; ?E20
43	4 (5 frags)	2C (+)	R10; R20 (x2); R90
44	3	240-400	F51 x1; R20 x2
46	2	?2C	R90; W12 cf Drag 38, not in Young
50	3	11-13C	sandy & sand/shell fabrics

5.3 Medieval and Post-medieval Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The assemblage comprised 3 sherds with a total weight of 103g. One sherd was of medieval date, the other two post-medieval. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1989; 1994), as follows:

OXY: *Medieval Oxford ware*, AD1075 – 1350. 1 sherd, 9g.

OXDR: *Red Earthenware*, mid 16th - 19th century. 1 sherd, 86g.

WHEW: *Mass-produced White Earthenware*, 19th – 20th century. 1 sherd, 8g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 2. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

Table 2: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Context	OXY		OXDR		WHEW		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1			1	86			M16thC
9	1	9					L11thC
15					1	8	19thC
Total	1	9	1	86	1	8	

6 DISCUSSION

Prehistoric activity, albeit of a limited nature, is indicated by the early Neolithic flint blade found in a residual context.

The pits [27, 32 & 34] show activity on this site from the late 1st century AD. A ploughsoil (17 & 41) existed in the central area and probably extended to the north. This contained pottery dating to the late 1st – 2nd centuries and was cut by a pit [43] which contained pottery dating from the 2nd century onwards. A pit [40] is sealed by the ploughsoil. It would therefore appear that there was some activity in this area during the late 1st and 2nd centuries AD, with pit [40] also belonging to this phase. Following this was a period when the area was used for agricultural activity probably in the mid to late second century before settlement, or similar, was re-established. This re-establishment may have coincided with the erection of the defences thought to have been in the later 2nd century (Henig & Booth 200, 59). The only indication of activity after the agricultural phase is pits [43 & 05] and the later 3rd century pottery in agricultural or horticultural deposit (18) and residual late 2nd to 4th century pottery in later pits.

While the majority of the Roman pits are towards the south of the site this may be due to the two phases of agricultural/horticultural activity in the northern part which has destroyed shallow features. It is interesting to note that there is a marked scarcity of Roman material from this site in comparison to other sites in the area (Paul Smith, pers. com). It is possible that this area of the town close to the eastern defences was not ‘settled’ for any length of time.

The date of the later agricultural or horticultural activity (02, 08 & 18) is uncertain. It sealed pit [05] containing pottery of 2nd-4th century date and was cut by a pit [09] that is of earlier medieval date. It is possible that this activity is during the late Roman period or even up to the early medieval period.

Again the evidence for medieval activity is limited; possibly due to truncation by later activity. A pit group lies towards the northern edge of the site while ditch [50] may be a plot boundary. How this corner of High Street and Queen Street was divided in the medieval period is not apparent. The remains of a medieval building survive in ‘The Cottage’ on the High Street frontage (Rodwell 2007).

The post-medieval below ground remains add little to the picture of the development of the site shown by the standing buildings (JMHS 2004, Rodwell 2007).

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