



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF AT 34A HONEY LANE, CHOLSEY,
OXFORDSHIRE**

NGR: 458822 186280

On behalf of

SOHA Housing Ltd

March 2012

REPORT FOR SOHA Housing Ltd
Royal Scot House
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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during ground reduction in advance of demolition of seven bedsits and the erection of four dwellings and vehicular accesses (P11/W0519) at 34 Honey Lane, Cholsey, Oxfordshire (NGR 458822 186280). The principal north-south Roman road through the county from Dorchester to Silchester was uncovered beneath the former house during the removal of concrete footings. The road surface was initially uncovered towards the centre of the site and limited hand excavation took place across the uppermost surface of the road. During the removal of the concrete footings of the previous building a chalky bedding deposit was encountered which supported the road agger. During ground work for beam trenches between newly installed concrete piles, the road surface was again impacted upon and sections showing the 'agger' and road surface metalling along with a probable Roman road side ditch were recorded. Other possible ditches either side of Roman Road 108 may indicate the shifting alignment of the road over a long period of time perhaps as part of general road maintenance and/or resurfacing. This watching brief enabled a rare glimpse into the construction techniques used for the Roman road at Cholsey.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located at 34A Honey Lane, Cholsey, Oxfordshire, OX10 9NL (NGR 45882 18628). To the north the site is bounded by Brookside and to the east by Honey Lane and all other areas adjoining property boundaries. The site lies on relatively flat ground, which gently slopes away to the north.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission was granted by South Oxfordshire District Council for the demolition of seven bed sits and the erection of four dwellings and vehicular accesses (P11/W0519). Due to the possible presence of archaeological features, including skeletal remains a condition was requested requiring that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the period of ground works. This is in line with PPS 5 and Local Plan policies. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a *Brief* for such archaeological work. This was followed by a *Written Scheme of Investigation* which outlined the method by which the watching brief would be carried out in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains of significance.

Prior to any demolition and the commencement of the development a professional archaeological organisation shall prepare an Archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation, relating to the application site area, which shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Reason: To safeguard the recording and inspection of matters of archaeological importance on the site in accordance with PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment.

Prior to any demolition on the site and the commencement of the development and following the approval of the Written Scheme of Investigation referred to in condition 1, a staged programme of archaeological evaluation and mitigation shall be carried out by the commissioned archaeological organisation in accordance with the approved Written Scheme of Investigation. The programme of work shall include all processing, research and analysis necessary to produce an accessible and useable archive and a full report for publication which shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority. Reason: To safeguard the identification, recording, analysis and archiving of heritage

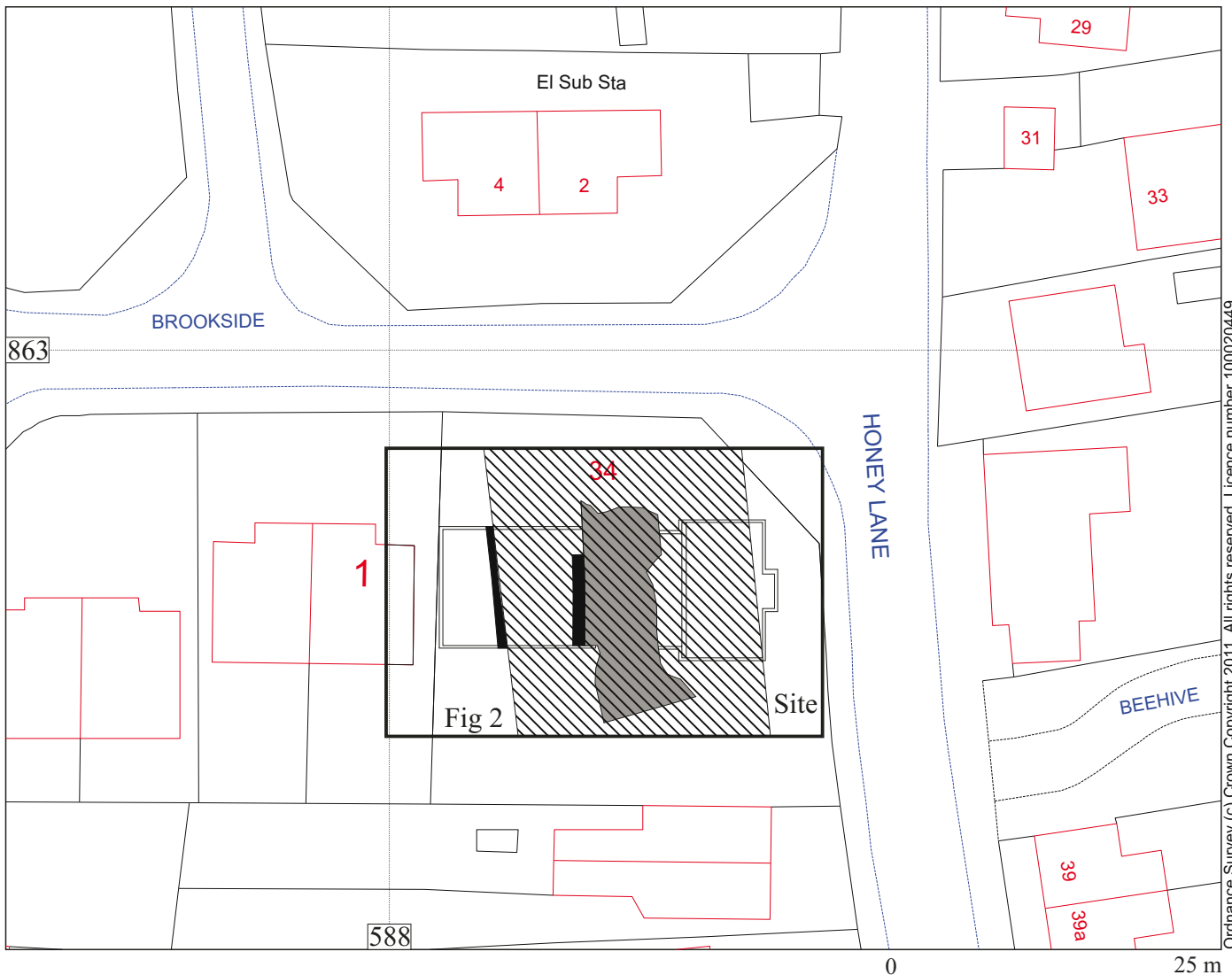
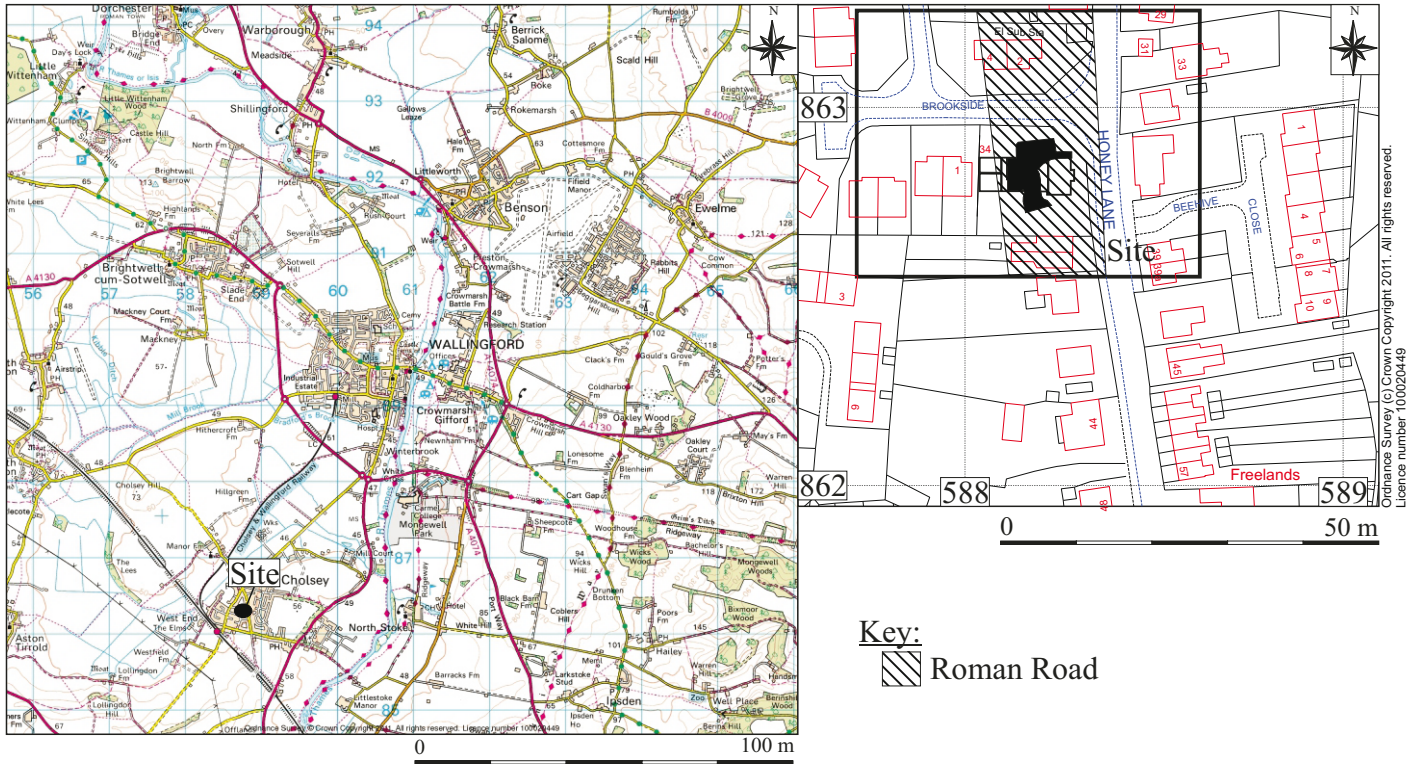


Figure 1. Site location

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assets before they are lost and to advance understanding of the heritage assets in their wider context through publication and dissemination of the evidence in accordance with PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment

1.3 Archaeological Background

The area concerned lies within an area of some archaeological interest located within the historic core of the settlement.

The route of the Roman road from Dorchester and Silchester passes through the middle of the site (PRN 8924). Roman features have been recorded in an evaluation 150m NW of the site (PRN 26469) and a number of Roman coins have been found in the area.

Medieval and early post-medieval features have been recorded 190m to the NE and a medieval enclosure has been recorded 127m NE (PRN 16485).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- 2.1 To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.
- 2.2 In particular to record any evidence relating to Roman and medieval settlement in the area.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1994), the Oxfordshire County Archaeology Officer prepared *Brief* and John Moore Heritage Services *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2010).

3.2 Methodology

Four site visits were made intermittently between the 30th January – 23rd February 2012. Archaeologist Paul Riccoboni AIFA was present on site during removal of all concrete footings and excavation of beam trenches between pile caps. All ground reduction was achieved using a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a toothed ditching bucket.

The methodology for the new build was to sit on concrete piles (*c.* 50cm diameter). Originally it was thought the beam slots between the piles would not impact on the archaeology recorded at a depth of 48.05m AOD. However, this was only true for the eastern half of the new building. Over the western end of the new building the beam trenches reached a depth of 1.2m impacting *c.* 0.30m into the uppermost surface of the

road and archaeological monitoring of the trenches over this location was undertaken to appropriate standards.

A journal, recorded on specially designed record sheets, was maintained which detailed times and durations of site visits as well as notes on areas monitored by the archaeologist. Deposits (overburden) were recorded on context recording sheets. A general photographic record of the work was kept and will form of the part site archive to be submitted to the Oxfordshire County Museum.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results (Figures 2-3)

Individual context numbers were assigned on site to deposits encountered during the ground reduction. Context numbers in () indicate deposits of material.

General Overburden

The overburden consisted of the following deposits. The earliest deposit was mid orange brown clay silt (115), a geological Head deposit overlying a bedrock of Marly Chalk. At the western end of the site this was overlain by topsoil deposit (114) (Figure 3; Section 5). Over the Roman Road surface (104) towards the centre of the site (Figure 3; Section 1) was 0.08m thick loose dark grey silty clay (103) with chalk flecks. Directly overlying this was 0.30m thick firm dark grey silt (102). Overlying this was 0.08m of firm to medium loose light creamy chalky silt (101) and finally 0.30m thick dark brownish grey silty clay topsoil with concrete footings of the previous Victorian building (100).

The removal of concrete footings

During the removal of concrete footings from the previous Victorian house, the Dorchester to Silchester Roman Road was discovered. The surface of the road was exposed but initially left *in situ*. Some notes were made on the construction of the road 108, which near the centre of the site had a definite width of *c.* 6m. The earliest deposit observed was composed of crushed white cream limestone fragments (<10-50mm), which was likely to have formed the bedding of the road surface (110). Overlying this was a layer of 'metalling' consisting of densely compacted rounded pebbles of various sizes no greater than <80mm alongside burnt flint nodules (107). A broken blade of Mesolithic date was found within this surface considered to be residual. Overlying the metallated surface was a thin layer of dark grey silty clay with chalk flecks (104) and *c.* 0.30m thick accumulation of dark brownish grey silty clay with grit and chalk flecks with occasional stone (106).

Another area of metallating was apparent to the east of 108. Cut 111 was immediately adjacent to cut 108 and was either a narrow ditch or a separate cut for further road deposits. East of Cut 111 the earliest deposit was degraded crushed limestone with chalk almost identical to (110), overlain by a cobbled surface (109) very similar to (107). This was sealed by (102), which in turn was sealed by the overburden described above.

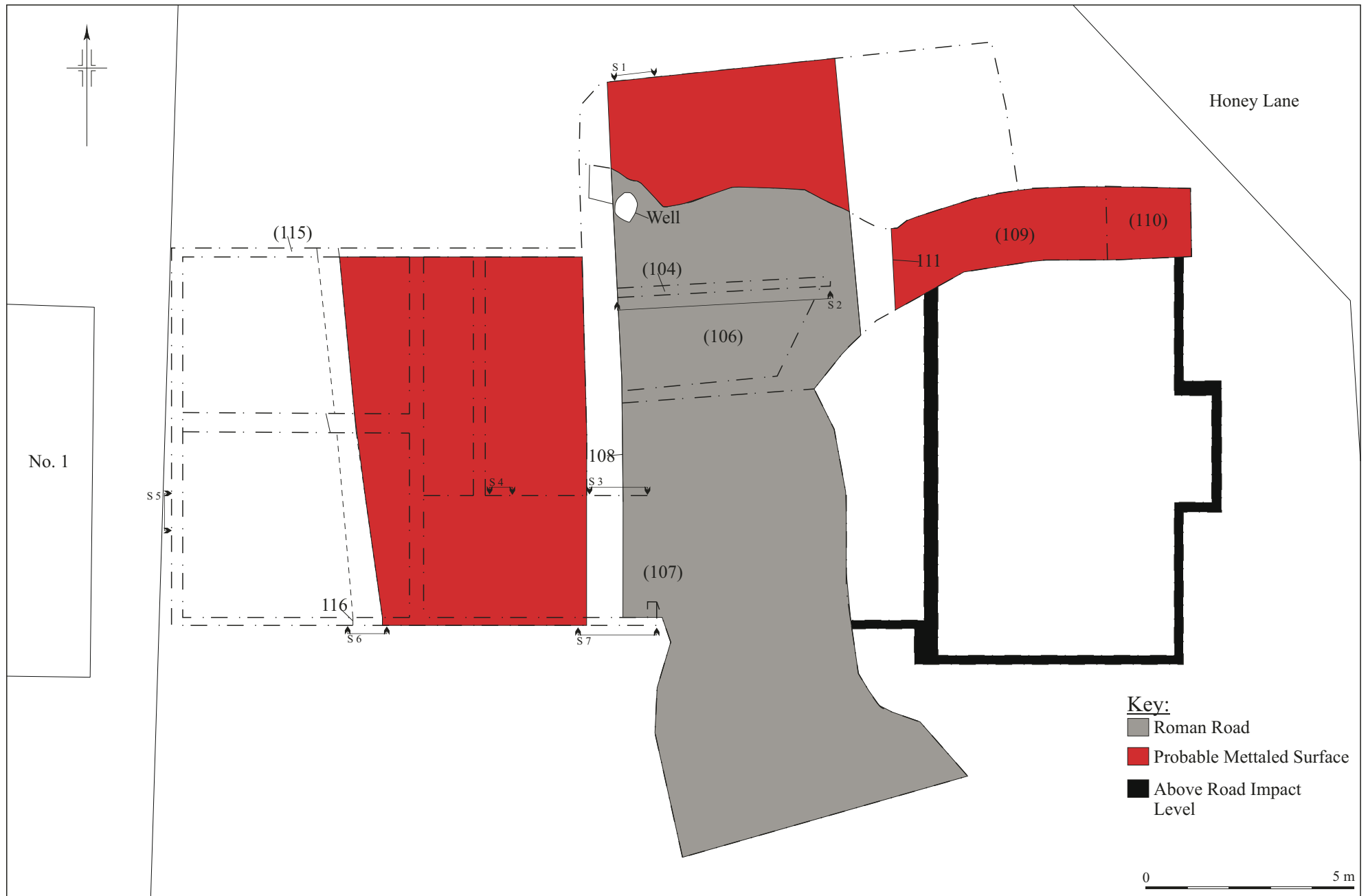


Figure 2. Site plan

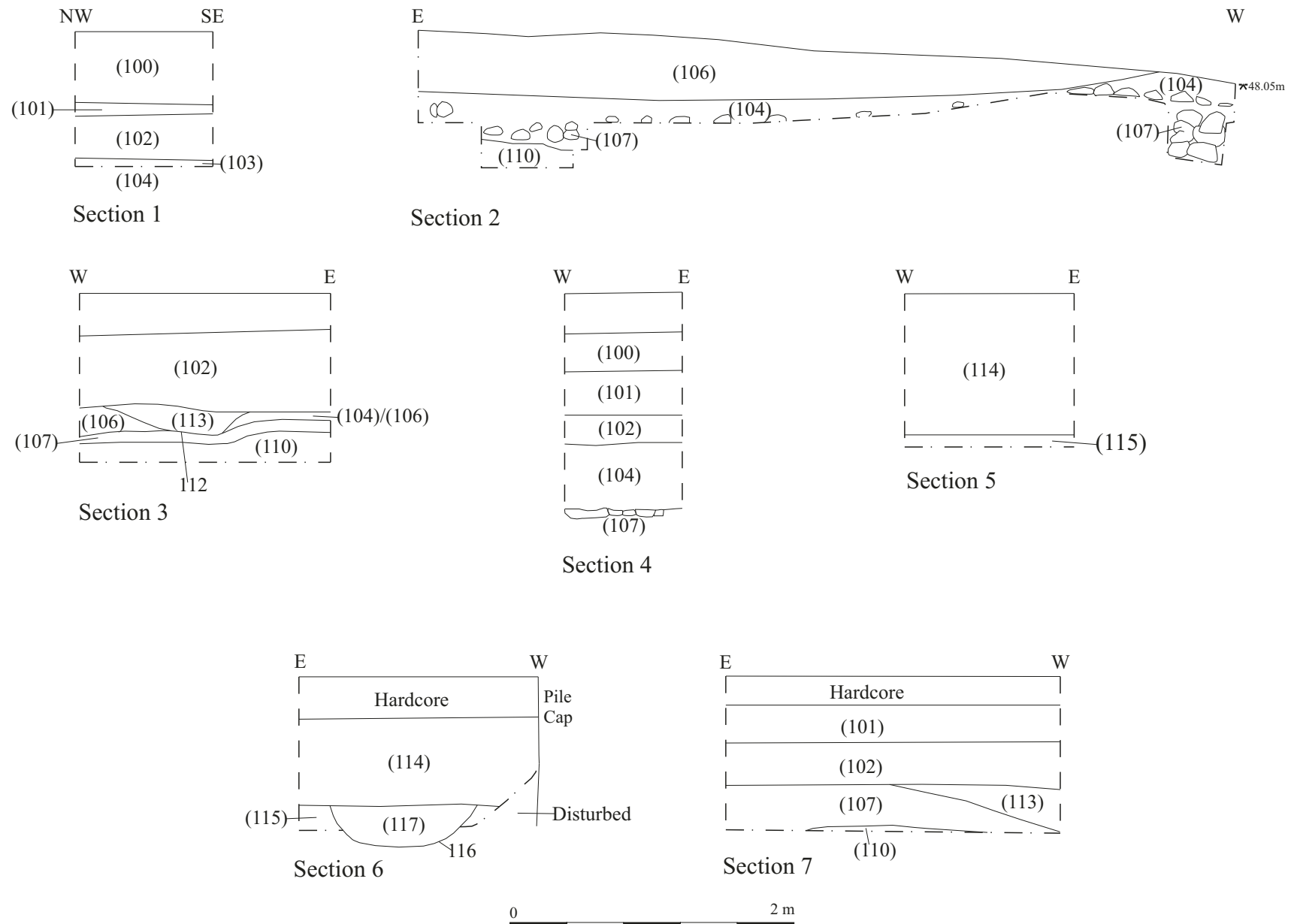


Figure 3. Sections

The Beam Trenches between piles

After the insertion of the concrete piles, trenches were excavated between the pile caps for the insertion of metal beams onto which the new building can rest.

The beam trenches were *c.* 0.60m deep at the eastern end of the site and did not impact on the Roman Road surface. Towards the centre and western end of the site the beam trenches often reached a depth of 1.2m from the existing ground surface. Across this area the uppermost surface of the road was impacted upon.

The sections were recorded in locations where the road surface could be clearly seen. Section 3 shows the chalky white cream coloured limestone bedding (110) overlaid by (107) and (104)/(106) with a distinctive hump characteristic of a Roman road agger.

Ditches

Recorded in section (Figure 3; Section 3 & 7) was feature 112 which was 0.80m wide and 0.20m deep with concave sides and a gently rounded base. It was filled by light brownish yellow silty clay with no inclusions (113). This feature was considered to be a ditch, as it was also partially seen in section 7.

On the western side of 112 was another ditch 116 orientated approximately north south. It had a width of over 1m and depth of *c.* 0.20m (Figure 3; Section 6). It was filled by dark greyish brown silty clay with no finds (117). This ditch was probably the Roman roadside ditch, a common feature of Roman roads. On the western side of this ditch only natural clay (115) was encountered which provides further evidence this was the roadside ditch marking the edge of the road and was used as a drain.

4.3 Reliability of Results

The watching brief was carried out in wintry conditions with excellent co-operation from the contractor carrying out the groundworks.

The methodology employed during groundworks was the 'best case scenario' which could be achieved from the time and resources available from the on-site contractors.

All areas subject to archaeological monitoring were during a ground reduction using a 360° machine fitted with a large toothed bucket. This meant very careful machine work to reveal the archaeology and stop above it in order to make sure damage was not done to the Roman road during removal of concrete footings (Figure 4). With the assistance of the on-site contractors a small area was opened up in order to inspect the road surface more carefully. This was done over an area not in the way of the demolition contractors moving concrete rubble. Subsequent beam trenches did impact on the road surface enabling some sections of the uppermost surface of the road to be recorded. The site would have benefited from an evaluation trench under strict archaeological supervision with a subsequent excavation over the western area of the site where the impact of the new build was greatest to be able to understand more fully how the road was constructed and obtain more dating evidence.

5 FINDS by Paul Riccoboni

5.1 The Flint

One broken bladelet of Late Neolithic/early Mesolithic date was recovered from the surface of (107), alongside some small burnt flint nodules.

5.2 Environmental Remains

No features were considered to warrant environmental sampling within the time and resources available.

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological watching brief at 34a Honey Lane, Cholsey, Oxfordshire during removal of concrete footings was successful in establishing the alignment of the Roman road and its good state of preservation. The Roman road was constructed using the traditional Roman techniques where the 'agger' was the main feature causing a distinctive hump across the road, consisting of gravels and burnt flints. It was common for Roman Roads to have an agger and were commonly up to 12m wide, but could range up to in excess of 25m wide. The metalled surface of compacted flints, gravels and stones would be laid onto the agger. A ditch was dug either side for drainage. Road construction varies from road to road, in some instances they will change on the same road. Materials used on the road depended on what raw materials were locally available. For instance, the roads in the North Downs were made from flint and pebbles, in the Weald iron slag was principally used, and on the South Downs flint was mainly used (Wallace R; Margary 1965, p153).

This watching brief had enabled a more detailed investigation of the road's construction techniques at Cholsey. The earliest road deposit seen was a firm base of chalky cement lime (110), however the depth of this deposit was not ascertained. It was standard practice for Roman roads to use cement or a sand mix with stones or pebbles for a firm base onto which the agger was constructed. A layer of large flat stones may also be present beneath this chalky cement layer but excavations were not deep enough to ascertain this. The agger was recorded in section and consisted of crushed flints, pebbles, burnt flints and occasional gravels. A 'metalled' surface consisting of compacted flints was apparent on the uppermost surface of the road (107), but a layer of flat paving stones was not present, probably robbed during antiquity. The archaeological record suggests that paving roads in Britain was not normal amounting to only c. 4% (Davis 2004 p60). Above the metalled surface was a layer of accumulated detritus and soils which built up once the Roman was no longer maintained for regular use (104) & (106).

There was evidence of Roman resurfacing and realignments seen immediately adjacent to the main agger with ditches establishing the limits of potentially three lanes. These road surfaces may represent a second and third phase of works of the road through this area. The roadside ditch was established towards the western end of the excavations, beyond which only natural clay was observed, indicating this ditch was used for drainage and marked the edge of the road zone. Near the centre of the site two other ditches were tentatively seen during the groundworks perhaps indicating later phases of additional roadside ditches. Three phases of side ditch were

also recorded at Ditchford Pit, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire (Keevil & Williams 1995) making the road 17m wide, which provides comparison to the Cholsey road where resurfacing has made the road appear up to c. 18m wide. Due to the lack of dating evidence another explanation could be the ditches were simply later medieval field boundary ditches.

It was common for Roman roads to be resurfaced and well maintained during their use. Roman roads were constructed in layers, and were regularly repaired or resurfaced throughout the Roman period. In some instances new surfaces would be laid over the old ones, creating a layered effect. During the groundwork for the M40 motorway Akeman Street was subject to limited excavations and was sectioned beneath Chesterton Lane. The road was seen to be patched and a new surface was laid over 0.2m of accumulated subsoil and stoney detritus (Wallace R; Chambers 1992). The evidence recovered from this watching brief suggests that the road was re-established up to 3 times through this area. This was the principal north-south road through the county forming a route which linked Silchester in the south with Watling Street in Northamptonshire (Henig & Booth 2000), and it would be expected for this road to be wide and well maintained throughout the long occupation of Roman Britain.

Conclusion

To conclude the watching brief proved the alignment of the Roman Road and its survival at this location. Roman Roads are known to have been very wide in places and this road may have had a width of up to 18m due to resurfacing works over a long time period.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record

The project brief

Written Scheme of Investigation

The drawn records

The finds

The project report

The primary site records

The archive is currently maintained by John Moore Heritage Services.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Figure 4; Showing Roman Road surface facing – S (1m scales)



Figure 5; Showing detail of metallised surface



Figure 6; Showing Roman Agger and chalk bedding deposits at the base of the trench (Section 3)

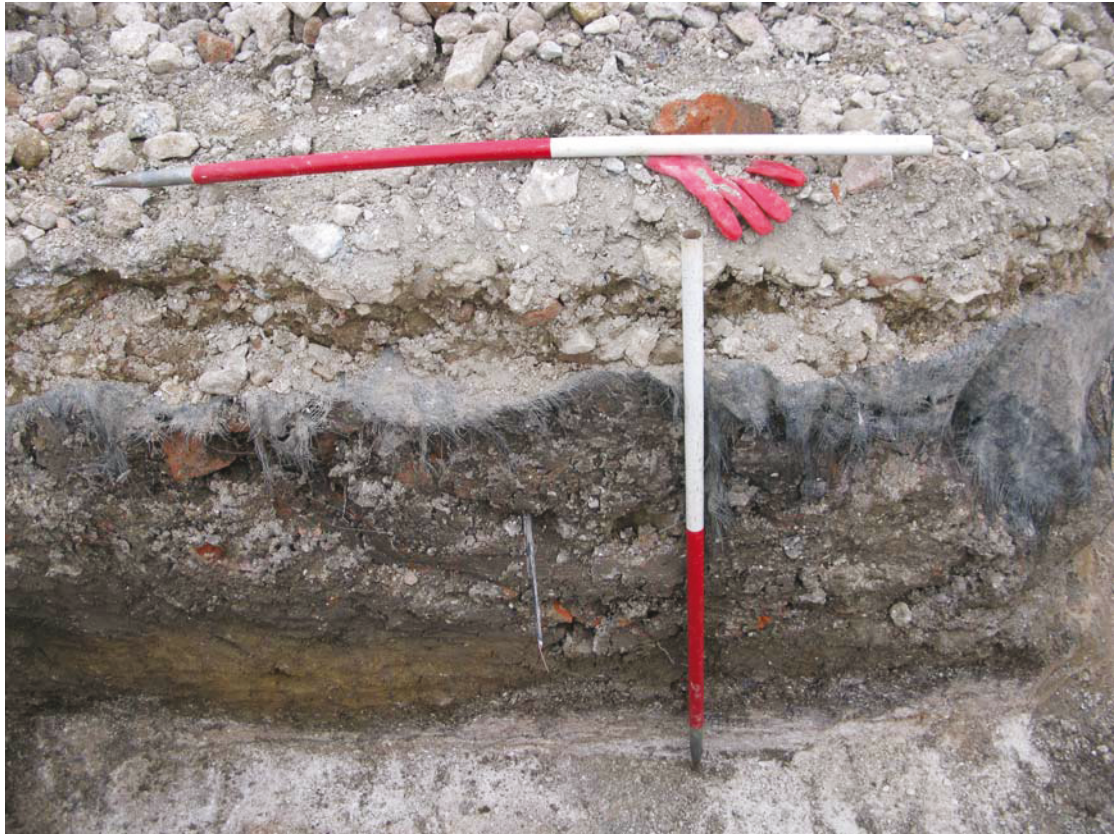


Figure 7; Showing North facing section Roman Agger (Section 7)



HER Summary Sheet

Site Name: 34 Honey lane, Cholsey, Oxfordshire	
Site Address: 34 Honey lane, Cholsey, Oxfordshire	
Summary: <i>A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during ground reduction in advance of demolition of seven bedsits and the erection of four dwellings and vehicular accesses (P11/W0519) at 34 Honey Lane, Cholsey, Oxfordshire (NGR 458822 186280). The principal north-south Roman road through the county from Dorchester to Silchester was uncovered beneath the former house during the removal of concrete footings. The road surface was initially uncovered towards the centre of the site and limited hand excavation took place across the uppermost surface of the road. During the removal of the concrete footings of the previous building a chalky bedding deposit was encountered which supported the road agger. During ground work for beam trenches between newly installed concrete piles, the road surface was again impacted upon and sections showing the 'agger' and road surface metalling along with a probable Roman road side ditch were recorded. Other possible ditches either side of Roman Road 108 may indicate the shifting alignment of the road over a long period of time perhaps as part of general road maintenance and/or resurfacing. This watching brief enabled a rare glimpse into the construction techniques used for the Roman road at Cholsey.</i>	
District/Unitary: Oxford City	Parish:
Period(s): Roman	
NGR (centre of site: 8 figures): 458817 186279	
Type of archaeological work Watching Brief	
Date of Recording: 30/01/2012	
Unit undertaking recording: JMHS	
Geology: Clay	
Title and author of accompanying report: An Archaeological Watching Brief at 34 Honey Lane, Cholsey, Oxfordshire Prepared by Paul Riccoboni BA (Hons) Arch AIFA	
Summary of fieldwork results (begin with earliest period first, add NGRs where appropriate) Roman Road:	
Location of archive/finds: Oxfordshire County Museums Service. Accession number 2011.135	
Contact at JMHS: Paul Riccoboni info@jmheritageservices.co.uk	Date: 2/03/2012