

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON  
LAND ADJACENT TO THE FORMER FITZHARRIS  
ARMS PUBLIC HOUSE, THORNHILL WALK,  
ABINGDON, OXFORDSHIRE**

**NGR: SU 4927 9803**

*On behalf of*

**NRS Contractors**

**AUGUST 2012**

**REPORT FOR** NRS Contractors

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**CONTENTS**

	<b>Page</b>
<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Site Location	1
1.2 Planning Background	3
1.3 Archaeological Background	3
<b>2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3 STRATEGY</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1 Research Design	4
3.2 Methodology	4
<b>4 RESULTS</b>	<b>4</b>
4.1 Excavation Results	5
4.2 Reliability of Results and Techniques	10
<b>5 FINDS</b>	<b>10</b>
5.1 The Roman pottery <i>by Jane Timby</i>	10
5.2 The Ceramic Building Material <i>by Gwilym Williams</i>	12
5.3 The Animal Bone <i>by Gavin Davis</i>	12
5.4 The Bead/Toggle <i>by Paul Riccoboni</i>	13
<b>6 DISCUSSION</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7 ARCHIVE</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>8 BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Appendix 1; Quantification of all recovered pottery</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>FIGURES</b>	
Figure 1: Site location	2
Figure 2: Site Plan	7
Figure 3: Sections	8
Plate 1: Photo of layers (1003) & (1006)	18
Plate 2: Photo of wall 1011 showing curve	18
Plate 3: Photo of demolition layer (1034) looking west	18

## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services conducted an archaeological watching brief as a condition of planning permission (11/01443/FUL) for redevelopment at Thornhill Walk, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (SU 4927 9803). A variety of features and finds were discovered which indicate the site was occupied during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Layers (1003) & (1006) contained a mix of prehistoric and Roman pottery sherds. The layers did not extend beyond posthole 1005 and pit 1026 and are perhaps related to a shallow Roman quarry pit. Posthole 1005 and pit 1026 have been identified as Roman as they cut through deposits (1003) and (1006). Other gullies and postholes across the site are either Roman or undated. None are proved to be from an earlier prehistoric settlement at the site. The high percentage of prehistoric sherds (36% of the entire assemblage), were found with Roman sherds or in features cut through Roman deposits. The whole prehistoric assemblage is therefore considered as residual.*

*Three parallel Roman walls orientated on a north-west south-east direction were uncovered across the site. Two walls **1023** and **1008** probably formed the side walls of a small Roman building, which may have had a wooden front and back walls. An area of modern disturbance makes this interpretation difficult to prove. Between the two walls was rubble spread (1017) which may have formed a floor surface as it was not overlying wall **1008**, but probably extended up against it. On the surface of (1017) were iron nails and slag indicating this building may have been used as a workshop. Overlying wall **1023** and extending to the south of the site was an area of demolition rubble (1034), distinguished from (1017) by its depth, consistency and looser compaction of limestone rubble.*

*A larger wall **1011** was to the north of the possible small Roman building. The wall was not straight and was therefore perhaps a property boundary wall. However, usually a boundary wall would be expected to fully enclose the property. Perhaps the remainder of the boundary wall was constructed of timber, leaving little archaeological trace. A loose pea grit deposit (1007) was only seen on the north side of wall **1011** and although not contiguous with the length of wall, it may have been the remains of a make-up layer for a yard surface. The layer covered posthole 1005 and ended where it met possible wall **1020** in the north-eastern corner of the development plot. The site was seemingly abandoned during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and not reoccupied until the modern era.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location**

The site is located to the west of Wootton Road on Thornhill Walk in Abingdon, immediately south of the former Fitzharris Arms Public House and north of the old Ambulance Station (NGR SU 4927 9803), now a residential building. The site lies at approximately 60m OD and the underlying geology is Second Terrace Gravel.

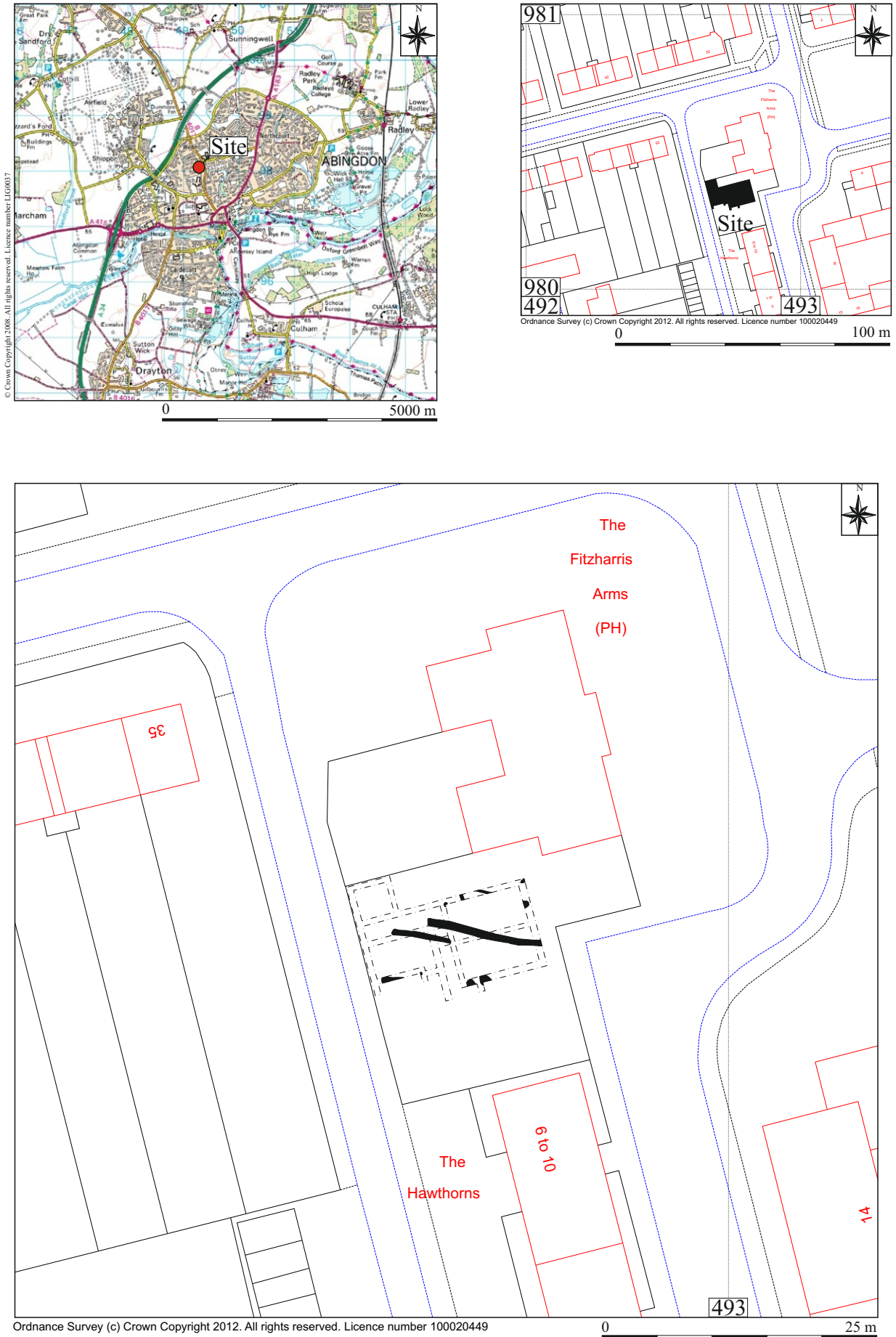


Figure 1. Site location

## 1.2 Planning Background

The Vale of White Horse District Council granted planning permission for the erection of four flats in the garden of the former Fitzharris Arms Public House (11/01443/FUL). Due to the known presence of archaeological remains a condition was attached requiring that a programme of archaeological excavation and recording be undertaken as part of the development. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS), on behalf on the local planning authority produced a Brief for the work (OCAS 2012). This was followed by a *Written Scheme of Investigation* which outlined the method by which the archaeological work would be carried out in order to preserve by record archaeological remains of significance (JMHS 2012).

## 1.3 Archaeological Background

The historic town of Abingdon is an area of significant archaeological interest. It is known from previous archaeological investigations that the centre of Abingdon was densely occupied during the Iron Age and later became an important Romano-British settlement (Henig and Booth 2000) with continuous occupation through the medieval period until the present day.

Excavations at the Old Gaol (Riccoboni 2012) recorded a sequence of well preserved stratigraphy (across the north-western area in particular) which covered features dating to the early and middle Iron Age. Gravel deposits covered the prehistoric settlement layers and features. Roman settlement was also apparent with features such as a deep quarry pit cut by a stone walled building. In addition to the Roman evidence were medieval and post-medieval cess and general waste pits, which were spread across the development site within tenement plots marked by ditches and walls. Later post-medieval cellars of properties, which used to front Turn Again Lane were also discovered.

A large excavation at the Vineyard in the early 1990's uncovered evidence of early Iron Age settlement with over a dozen round houses of middle to late Iron Age date (Allen 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996 & 1998). A stone walled Roman building and later medieval pits were also discovered.

The development area lies on the northern side of the later prehistoric and Romano-British settlement of Abingdon. Burials dating to the Romano-British period have been found to the east of the proposed development site. Cropmarks have been identified across the area. These include a Bronze Age ring ditch to the east and a series of linear features and rectangular enclosures to the north and to the south of the proposal site (JMHS 2012). The evidence suggests that these features were originally contiguous across the development site.

An archaeological evaluation of the development site revealed a series of well-preserved archaeological deposits including a stone surface and a large cut feature (Foundations Archaeology 2011). The pottery suggested a second century AD date. Residual Iron Age pottery was found along with nails, ceramic building material and industrial slag. These are suggestive of Romano British settlement.

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

In particular:

- to record any remains relating to prehistoric or Roman activity on the site; and
- to record evidence of remains relating to the medieval and post-medieval settlement

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1994), the Oxford City Council (OCC) prepared *Brief* (OCAS 2012) and John Moore Heritage Services *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2012).

### **3.2 Methodology**

After initial topsoil stripping and basic site preparations, a team of four professional archaeologists were present on site during all excavations for the new wall footing trenches. This enabled the archaeology to be efficiently recorded while the excavations for the new build were taking place. All ground reduction was achieved using a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a narrow ditching bucket.

The archaeology was excavated and recorded according to accepted professional standards and the Institute for Archaeologists *Standards and Guidance* (IFA 1994). All features were fully excavated within the confines of the footing trenches and where practicable walls were uncovered between the trenches to establish the terminal ends (where possible). All features and deposits 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 Service.

All artefacts were collected and retained. Finds ranging from pottery, tile, daub, bone, brick, jet bead and clay pipe were recovered.

## **4 RESULTS**

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in ( ) indicate feature fills or deposits of material. Those without brackets refer to features themselves. Numbers in bold refer to masonry, i.e. walls. A suspected Roman quarry pit was found, but does not have a cut number, as its edges could not be seen for definite in section or plan. An archaeologist was present during the excavation of all ground reduction and foundation trenches associated with the new extension.

## 4.1 Excavation Results (Figs. 2 & 3)

### 4.1.1 Roman (43-450AD); Period 1

The archaeological watching brief uncovered a series of features including walls, demolition layers, pits, postholes and gullies. The type of features uncovered suggest the site was occupied during 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD (Roman period), before being abandoned during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

#### *General overburden across the north-western part of the site*

The natural gravels (1002) were seen across the site, which were overlain in places by natural mid orange clay silt (1001). The latest layer was 0.10-0.20m thick dark brownish grey silty clay topsoil (1000) which covered the entire site and contained 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman pottery sherds, with oyster shells.

#### *Layers considered fill of a Roman quarry pit (Figure 3; Section 1; Plate 1)*

The earliest layer which was directly above natural gravels (1002) was 0.28m thick compact dark brown grey silty clay (1003) with 10 sherds of early Iron Age pottery and 14 sherds of Roman pottery (Fig. 3; Sections 1 & 2), animal bone and a pierced jet bead/toggle (SF1). Overlying this layer was 0.24m thick mottled orange grey silty clay (1006) (Fig. 3; Sections 1 & 2) with 4 sherds of Iron Age and 18 sherds of 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD Roman pottery alongside five fragments of animal bone. Two fragments of post-medieval clay pipe are considered to be intrusive or mislabelled during post-excavation processing. Due to the limits of the excavation within the footing trenches, the cut edges of the possible Roman quarry pit could not be ascertained in plan.

#### *Other layers*

Overlying (1006) was 0.15m thick mottled pea grit layer (1007) considered to be a levelling deposit for a 'yard' surface (Fig. 3; Sections 1 & 2). This deposit was only present between wall **1011** and suspected wall **1020**. This was directly covered by topsoil (1000).

#### *Walls (Fig. 2)*

The largest wall seen across the site was **1011** (construction cut 1012) which cut through possible quarry layers (1003) & (1006) (Fig. 3; Section 1 & 2; Plate 2). The wall was 0.50-0.70m wide and 0.20m deep with almost vertical sides and a flattish base. Wall **1011** was constructed of roughly hewn limestone blocks and was a minimum of 10.5m in length continuing beyond the eastern limits of the excavation. The wall was not absolutely straight and had no return on its western end. This indicates the wall was not part of a structure, but was perhaps a boundary wall. Within the wall were six sherds of residual Iron Age pottery, but also Roman pottery of a 2<sup>nd</sup> century date, providing a construction date for the wall. The wall was sealed by topsoil (1000).

A short stretch of wall **1008** (construction cut 1009) was parallel to wall **1011** with only a 0.40m gap between them. The wall was also the same length as, and parallel with, wall **1023**. Wall **1008** was 0.42m wide and 0.39m deep, constructed of irregular shaped limestone blocks, which had almost vertical sides and a flat base. The wall had a total length of 5.40m and was associated with rubble spread (1017), which may have been an internal floor as it extended up to the wall in section (Fig 3; Section 3). The



wall contained just one sherd of Iron Age and one sherd of Roman pottery. The wall was sealed by topsoil (1000).

A third wall **1023** (construction cut 1024) was recorded at the south-western end of the excavation area also orientated on a north-east south-west direction, considered to be approximately the same length as wall **1008** and probably formed part of a small building. This wall was constructed of limestone blocks bonded with yellow silty clay mortar (1027). The wall was *c.* 0.70m wide and of a minimum length 2m. It was covered by a layer of demolition rubble (1034) (Fig 3; Section 4). The wall contained five sherds of Iron Age and 20 sherds of Roman pottery dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. One sherd of pottery was imported Baetican amphora used for transporting olive oil.

In the north-east corner of the site was a stone which may have been a fourth wall **1020**, but mostly lay outside of the development area. There was some modern disturbance near this location, which truncated the level of the archaeology and further hindered investigation over this area. Layer (1007) extended up to **1020**, indicating the layer and possible wall may have been contemporary. The possible wall was sealed by topsoil (1000).

#### *Floor layers*

Deposit (1017) (Fig. 2; Fig. 3; Section 3) was densely compact rubble spread, potentially a floor surface. It is probable the rubble layer (1017) extended up to the wall **1008**, which would be consistent with it being a floor surface. The true extent of the rubble layer was unknown, as it was truncated by a small modern building, but it covered an area of 3.10m x 2.90m. The rubble floor was no deeper than 0.10m. It contained one sherd of Iron Age pottery and six sherds of 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD Roman pottery, plus one fragment of box tile from a Roman heating system, but this was not in its original location. Three iron nails in poor condition were also found on the surface of this layer, along with metalworking slag found during the evaluation stage of works. The floor layer was sealed by topsoil (1000).

Cut into the surface of possible quarry fill (1006), on the south side of wall **1011** was a small patch of light greenish grey clay silt (1022) (Fig. 2) with a burnt patch on its southern side. This patch of clay was perhaps the surviving remnants of a clay floor, but too small an area survived to be certain.

#### *Demolition rubble*

To the south of (1017) was demolition rubble (1034)=(1029), which was firm light grey brown sandy silt with dense limestone blocks (<50-150mm). It overlay wall **1023** (Fig. 3; Section 4; Plate 3). This rubble deposit covered an area 2.5m x 2m and had a thickness of *c.* 0.38m. Contained within the stone were 28 sherds of 2<sup>nd</sup> century Roman pottery. Within the topsoil (1000) overlying this deposit was a fragment of folded lead, perhaps once part of a roof, but of unknown date.

#### *Posthole; cut through layer (1006)*

Posthole 1005 (Fig. 3; Section 7) was 0.40m wide and 0.50m deep, of sub circular shape with sharp concave sides and a roughly flat base. It was filled by mid grey brown silty clay with gravels, with large stones presumably used for post packing (1004) and two sherds of early to mid Iron Age pottery.

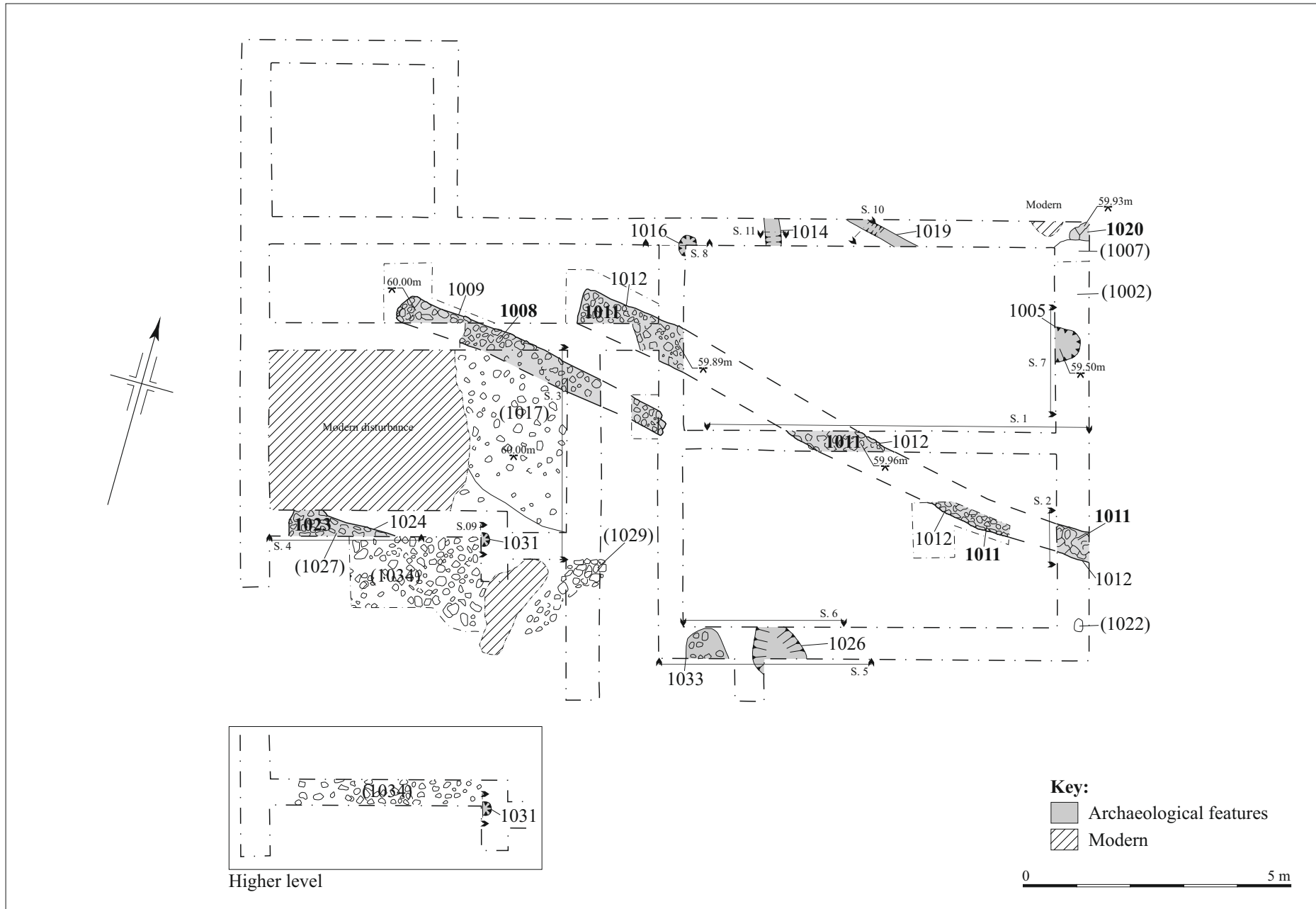


Figure 2. Plan

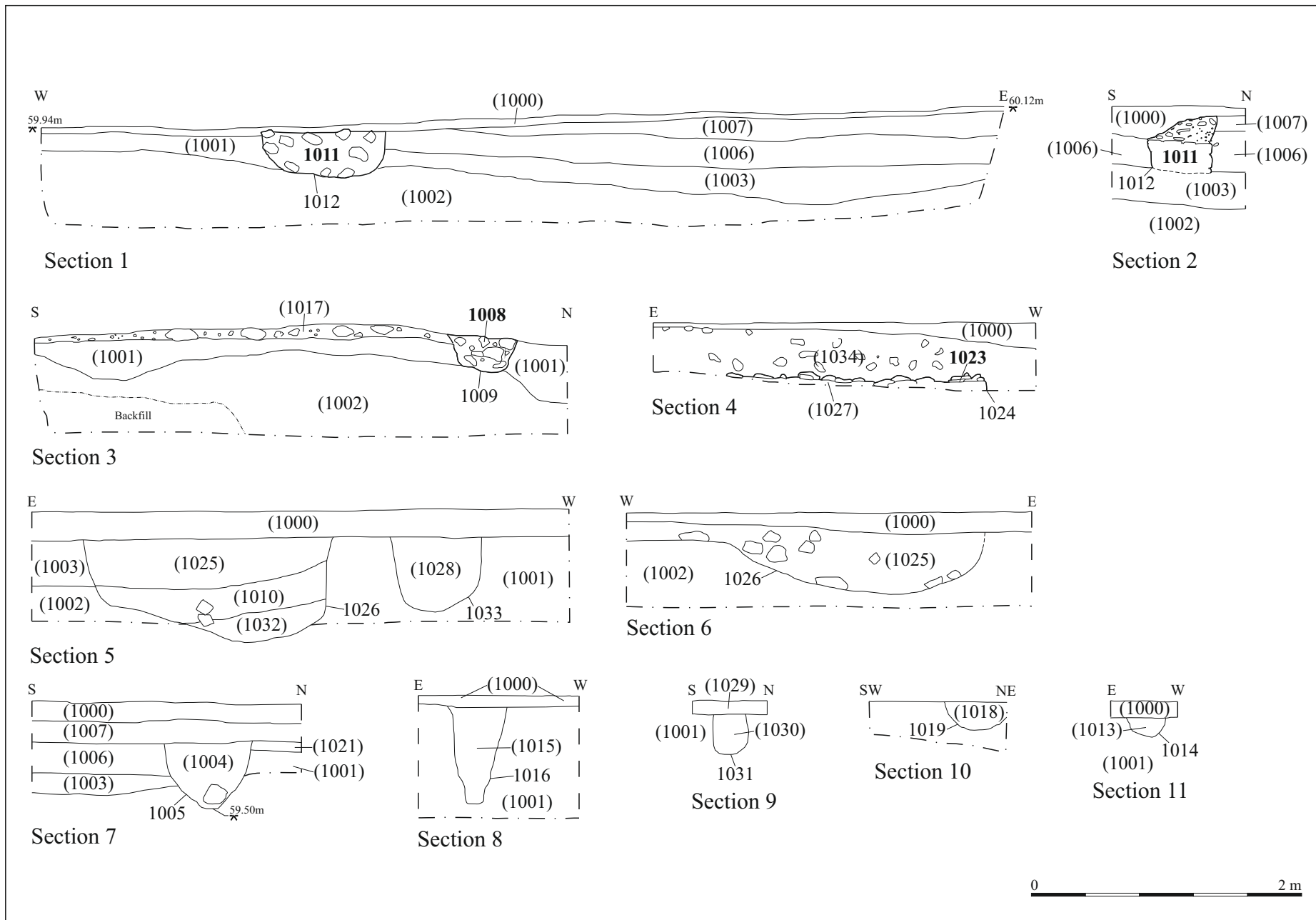


Figure 3. Sections

The stratigraphy on the southern side of the posthole was different to northern side and may therefore perhaps mark the edge of the backfilled Roman quarry pit. The posthole was sealed by grit layer (1007), which contained only Roman finds and was not thought to be associated with the quarry pit.

*Postholes; cut through natural (1001)*

Posthole 1016 (Fig. 3; Section 8) was circular in shape, 0.33m in diameter and 0.37m deep with steep concave sides and tapered blunt point. It was filled by friable dark brown grey sandy silt with occasional gravels (1015) and no finds.

Posthole 1031 (Fig. 3; Section 9) was 0.24m wide and 0.20m deep of circular shape with sharp almost vertical sides and rounded base. The posthole was sealed by a layer of demolition rubble (1029)=(1034) associated with wall **1023**. It was filled by friable dark greyish black silty clay with charcoal flecks and one sherd of Iron Age and one sherd of Roman pottery (1030). This may have been a scaffolding post used in the erection of the small structure.

*Pits*

A large pit 1026 (Fig. 3; Section 5) was excavated within the southernmost foundation trench of the site. The pit was at least 1.8m wide x 0.80m deep with steep concave sides and a gently rounded base. The pit was filled by three distinct fills. The primary fill was 0.25m thick firm light brown yellow sandy silt with gravels (1032). This was followed by 0.25m thick firm dark brown grey sandy silt (1010) and finally 0.38m thick dark greyish sandy silt with a high frequency of limestone rubble (1025). There were no dateable finds from this pit. The pit marked the extent of possible Roman quarry pit which was filled by (1003) & (1006).

Feature 1033 (Fig. 3; Section 5) was located on the west side of pit 1026 and cut through natural gravels (1002). It was 0.58m deep x 0.60m wide and had steep concave sides and a gently rounded base. It was filled by mottled grey yellow sandy gravel with a high frequency of limestone inclusions (1028) and no finds. The mottled consistency of the fill would indicate that this was rapidly backfilled and was probably the hand excavated section undertaken during the evaluation stage of works near the centre of the trench.

*Gullies; cut through natural (1001)*

Gully 1014 (Fig. 3; Section 11) was a narrow linear feature 0.26m wide with shallow concave sides and a rounded base within the northern most wall footing trench. It was filled by 0.06m friable grey brown sandy silt (1013) with no finds.

Gully 1019 (Fig. 3; Section 10) was 0.24m wide and 0.12m deep with steep concave sides and rounded base. The gully was filled with friable dark brown grey sandy silt (1018) with gravels inclusions and three sherds of 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD Roman pottery.

*Other layer*

On the north side of posthole 1005 was a thin layer of 0.10m thick dark blackish brown silty clay (1021) (Fig. 3; Section 7) beneath layer (1007). It directly overlay the natural (1001).

## 4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The excavations took place in favourable weather conditions with excellent co-operation from the developer carrying out the ground works. The archaeological horizon was present just beneath the existing topsoil. Where it was deemed necessary, walls could be followed between the footing trenches in an attempt to find terminal ends and establish returns. This technique enabled us to maximise the information that could be recovered within the confines of a watching brief scenario. The technique worked well as it was able to fully trace walls and demolition layers without any deep excavations between the new wall footing trenches. The work was carried out within the agreed timescale and without too much delay to the developer carrying out the new build.

## 5 FINDS

### 5.1 The Roman Pottery *by Jane Timby*

#### 5.1.1 Introduction

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of 201 sherds pottery weighing 2011 grams dating to the Later Bronze Age/early Iron Age, Roman and post Roman periods.

Pottery was recovered from 14 individual contexts. Although five contexts produced in excess of 20 sherds; the incidence of sherds for the remaining deposits is low. It is also clear there is a very high level of redeposited material indicating considerable disturbance of underlying levels. This combined with few featured sherds means that dating can only be approximate.

The material is of mixed preservation; the sherds are fragmented but with relatively fresh edges. The overall average sherd size is typical of rubbish material at 10 g.

For the purposes of the assessment the assemblage was scanned to assess the likely chronology and quantified by sherd count and weight for each recorded context. The resulting data is summarised in Appendix 1.

#### 5.1.2 Iron Age

A total 72 sherds are present dating to the early Iron Age, 36% of the recovered assemblage.

The fabrics can be broadly split into those with a fossil shell or limestone temper (33%) and those with a predominantly sandy fabric (67%). Further subdivisions can be made in terms of the coarseness and nature of the inclusions. The sandy wares include at least one sherd with a glauconitic sand temper and can be divided into a coarse ware and a finer ware component.

Featured sherds include two carinated coarseware vessels with finger-tipping on the carination (1003; 1023) and in one case a flaring rim and one finer sandy ware with at

least two rows of impressed dots (1034). There are four rims present at least two of which are likely to come from tripartite bowls.

One small sherd from (1030) has preserved internal blackened residue from use.

The later prehistoric finds are distributed across 12 of the 14 contexts with pottery with the highest incidence, 20 sherds, from (1003). All the horizons also contained later material suggesting that the entire Iron Age assemblage is residual.

The later prehistoric pottery is directly comparable with the later Bronze Age/ early Iron Age material recovered from Spring Road municipal cemetery (Timby 2008); Ashville Trading estate (De Roche 1978) and Wyndyke Furlong (Timby 1999). A large early-middle Iron Age settlement lay beneath the current town centre (Riccoboni 2010) and to the south of Audlett Drive (Allen and Kamash 2008, 4).

### 5.1.3 Roman

A total 127 sherds of Roman date were recorded, 63% of the assemblage by count. Most of the sherds comprise wares of the local Oxfordshire industry, particularly fine or sandy grey wares. Non-local wares include two worn pieces of Baetican amphora from Southern Spain used to transport olive oil (1017; 1023); one sherd of *terra nigra* plate imported from Gallia-Belgic (1000); two sherds of Central Gaulish samian (1017; 1034) and single sherds of Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware (1001) and Dorset black-burnished ware (1001).

The Oxfordshire products include grey wares, white wares and oxidised sandy wares (cf Young 2000). There are also four sherds of grog-tempered storage jar, shelly ware and some black sandy micaceous wares which are also probably local.

Where it could be determined most of the local sherds came from jars which are not chronologically very diagnostic.

Most of the assemblage would appear to date to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. The complete absence of any Oxfordshire colour-coated wares suggests that there is no late Roman activity present (i.e. after *c* AD 240). The *terra nigra* is likely to be a pre-conquest import and the samian dates to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

### 5.1.4 Post-Roman and other finds

Two sherds from the uppermost surface of the natural (1001), adjacent to wall **1008** are probably of later medieval date. Two fragments from a ceramic utility pipe of post-medieval / modern date came from (1006), assumed to be intrusive. The only other ceramic finds were two pieces of roofing tile (ceramic building material) also from the surface of natural (1001) which may be of Roman origin.

### 5.1.5 Further work

The assemblage is exceptionally mixed up. Its main significance is the documenting of later Bronze Age-early Iron Age material at this location contributing to the overall

mapping of activity of this date within Abingdon which appears to be currently quite piecemeal.

In general terms the assemblage is too small to warrant further work on the basis of the apparent archaeology as it is clearly very mixed.

## 5.2 Ceramic building materials by Gwilym Williams

There were 2 pieces of ceramic building material, weighing 186g, recovered during the watching brief. One fragment, weighing 119g, was a fragment of *tubulus* or box tile dated as Roman, and one fragment, weighing 67g, a piece of brick was dated as post-medieval (Table 1).

The ceramic building material was examined at  $\times 10$  magnification and the results were entered onto an Excel spreadsheet.

context	frags	wt (g)	fabric	dims	comments
1017	1	119	1	–	Roman
1025	1	67	2	–	Post-medieval
<b>total</b>	2	186			

Table 1. Tile by context and fragment count and weight

fabric	description
1	fine red orange clay
2	red coarse clay

Table 2. Tile fabrics

The fragment of box tile is small and quite rounded. It is likely to have been in circulation before arriving at its find spot.

The brick, which has wipe-marks on its only surviving face has reasonably recent sharp break marks.

In addition to the Roman box tile fragment and the post-medieval brick, approximately 10 fragments, weighing 97g, of daub were recovered from (1000). These were made of a pale grey fabric with calcined flint; some pieces having obvious wipe marks present.

A small lump of sandy mortar, weighing 74g, was recovered from (1027) part of wall **1023**. It is not proposed to retain these pieces.

## 5.3 The Animal Bone by Gavin Davis

5.3.1 A small assemblage of animal bone was collected from the excavation which was consistent with the types identified from previously excavated examples across the town (Wilson & *al* 1975). The most common identified animals were horse and sheep. All animal bones were not retained as they are not considered important enough for future study.

Context Number	Number of fragments	Weight (g)
1000	9	41
1003	13	172
1006	5	55
1023	11	71
1017	2	128
1034	23	395

Table 3; Quantification of retrieved animal bone

#### 5.4 Bead/toggle by Paul Riccoboni

A single jet bead (SF1) or toggle, sub-circular in section, 30mm long x 9mm wide, drilled through the latitudinal axis. Hole 3mm wide x 2mm long. The object was recovered from layer (1003) and the faceted treatment and shape may be compared with a jet pin-head from York (McGregor 1976), except the hole was longitudinal.

The British jet-working industry was centred at York close to its major source at Whitby and the material became fashionable in the 3rd and 4th centuries. This bead would have formed part of a necklace or bracelet or was a toggle on a Roman garment.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to Thornhill Walk, Abingdon followed an archaeological evaluation which produced interesting results. A cut feature associated with a large expanse of fill, a possible stone surface/bedding layer or rubble spread and numerous other soil and stone deposits were identified. Limited investigation of the features within the trench indicated multiple phases of activity and a moderate to high degree of complexity (Foundations Archaeology 2011).

Open area topsoil stripping of the development site enabled further investigation of the deposits and features first identified during the evaluation. Across the eastern side of the site, bounded by pit 1026 and posthole 1005, were two distinct layers (1003) & (1006) containing a mixture of finds from the early Iron Age and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The layers are typical of the gradual infilling of a shallow Roman quarry pit, which often also contain residual prehistoric pottery sherds. Some residual Iron Age pottery sherds were found within a large Roman quarry pit at the Old Gaol, Abingdon (Riccoboni 2012). Natural layer (1001) was not present over the area of the quarry pit, filled by deposits (1003) & (1006). This is clearly illustrated on Fig. 3; Sections 1 & 7 and further proves this area of the site was reduced for gravel extraction before gradually infilling. As the prehistoric evidence was nearly all early Iron Age in date it may be prudent to suggest that the residual sherds probably come from the area of the Spring Road Municipal Cemetery (Allen & Kamash 2008) or another, as yet unknown, early Iron Age farmstead sited in the nearby vicinity. A more mixed assemblage would be expected if the prehistoric finds had come from the large early Iron Age settlement beneath the Abingdon town centre.

The layers within the suspected quarry pit were cut by a large Roman wall **1011**, which had a distinct curve (photo; Plate 2). Wall **1011** may represent another phase of



Roman building activity, and could have been constructed before or after the small structure was erected. The similar alignment of the walls would indicate the structure was at least visible when wall **1011** was erected or *vice versa*. It may have been a boundary wall, perhaps forming an avenue leading up to the structure from a main road located somewhere to the east. The wall did not fully enclose the small Roman building. Perhaps the remainder of the boundary wall was constructed in timber, leaving little archaeological trace. In the corner of the development site another wall **1020** may have been present, but investigation was hindered as it mostly lay outside of the development area.

The rubble spread first identified during the evaluation was further examined and was seen to extend up to wall **1008**, indicating that this was once the floor surface of the building. The southern extent of the floor was less clear but did not seem to extend as far as wall **1023**. Overlying wall **1023** was another rubble layer thought to be wall collapse from the building when it was demolished. This layer (1034) was thicker and less compact than the adjacent floor surface (1017). The building was small, measuring 3.8m wide x 5.5m long, indicating it was not used as a domestic living space. Seven nails and three fragments of slag from industrial waste were discovered within the building on the surface of floor (1017). The finds suggest the structure was used by a 'smith' or even by a trader as a small workshop. The building was seemingly open at both ends, but perhaps had wooden sides, which did not leave any archaeological trace. At the western end of the building there was modern disturbance meaning this theory could not be proved. Wattle and daub was found across the site within the topsoil indicating the building had walls constructed of wattle-and-daub. Stone walls **1008** & **1023** may only represent the foundations for short walls with the upper half of the building constructed of stud timber or wattle-and-daub. Another possible Roman building with incomplete wattle-and-daub walls was found at Asthall, Oxfordshire (Cook 1955):

*...No trace of any return or of any wall running parallel was found in the trenches expressly dug for the purpose, nor in the man trenches made by builders to the north-east and south-west. It had survived for only 1 ft. in height, and the absence of wall-debris and roof tiles, and the presence of fragments of wattle-and daub suggest that it represented the foundation of a wattle-and-daub wall. Since it seemed to stand isolated, it is suggested that it formed the back of an open shelter facing the rising slope of the hill to the east. But no postholes to support even a pent roof were found, though posts might have rested on stylobates or stone 'cheeses' which would leave no trace behind (Cook 1955).*

Cook believed the wall and the floors may represent a shelter for traffic or the outbuildings connected with a house or *mansio* yet to be found. A similar scenario could also apply to the Thornhill Walk site, which perhaps lies adjacent to the suspected Roman Road leading out from Abingdon, on a similar alignment to present day Bath Street. The locations of the burials east of Stratton Way at Bath Street/Broad Street, and the ones at Abingdon School are of interest. They lie in a rough line and could indicate cemeteries lying alongside a Roman road. This road may have continued northwards past the Thornhill Walk site. The presence of a small early Saxon cemetery found at the former Horse and Jockey (JMHS 2004) could indicate the continued use of this route from Abingdon in the early Saxon period.

Other discrete features such as postholes, narrow gullies and a large pit are further evidence of Roman settlement with the posts used to form structures or lean-to roofs and the gullies used to drain away the rain water. The pit may represent low scale industrial activity at the site, perhaps connected to the small structure. Pit 1026 was large with steep sides and contained three distinct fills, the latest of which included a high percentage of limestone rubble, which perhaps infilled when the building was demolished and the site was abandoned.

### *Conclusion*

A confidence rating is high that the best possible results were achieved given the restrictions of working within narrow footing trenches. Where it was deemed necessary the walls were uncovered between the footing trenches to establish the terminal ends. This site has been difficult to interpret due to the curious nature of the walls, none of which have returns.

The archaeological discoveries are important as they add significantly to our understanding of Roman Abingdon. Previously Roman buildings have been discovered beneath the town centre, where the Roman settlement was focused (see background). Over the last 20 years Roman settlement has been established to the north-west of the town. Excavations at 64 (Ainslie 1995) & 66/68 Bath Street (Smith 1994) prove prehistoric and Roman occupation along Bath Street. Further north at Abingdon School, a probable Romano-British inhumation, Roman stone-lined cist, a wall and finds of Romano-British date have been located and excavated (NGR SU 4945 9747, SU 4950 9740, SMR 16072 & 16068), proving occupation north of the town centre.

The Roman occupation of the site ended during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century as only a few scarce pottery sherds were recovered from this century within topsoil. The site was not re-occupied until the modern era. The excavations took place in favourable conditions with excellent co-operation from the developer.

## **7 ARCHIVE**

### **Archive Contents**

The archive consists of the following:

#### Paper Record

The project brief	The project report
Written Scheme of Investigation	The primary site records
The drawn records	The Finds

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*Appendix 1; Quantification of all recovered pottery*

Context	IA		Roman					Tot No	Tot Wt	other finds	Date
	shell/lime	sandy	Oxford	BB1	import	Other	Med				
1000	0	3	49	0	1	0	0	53	455		C2/C3
1001	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	4	19	cbm x2; stone	C3+
1001 /1008\	0	1	10	1	0	2	2	16	122		late Med?
1003	10	10	4	0	0	0	0	24	304		EIA/Ro
1004	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	60		E-MIA
1006	4	14	4	0	0	2	0	24	288	Pm cbm/pipe	IA/Ro/Pm
1007	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	26		Roman
1008	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	28		IA/Ro
1011	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	6	30		C2
1017	1	1	3	0	2	0	0	7	163		C2
1018	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	8		C2?
1020	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	9		Roman
1023	5	15	5	0	1	0	0	26	139		C2?
1030	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	13		IA/Ro
1034	0	1	26	0	1	0	0	28	296		C2?
us	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	51	asbestos	Ro/mod
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>2011</b>		

Plate 1; Layers (1003) & (1006)



Plate 2; Wall 1011 showing curve



Plate 3; demolition layer (1034) looking west

