

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT**

**ON LAND AT MONKS MEDE,**

**BURTON LANE, MONKS RISBOROUGH,**

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

**NGR SP 8122 0430**

*On behalf of*

*Mr. & Mrs. A. Sparkes*

**AUGUST 2012**

**REPORT FOR** Mr & Mrs A. Sparkes  
Monks Mede  
Burton Lane  
Monks Risborough  
HP27 9JF

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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services carried out a two-trench evaluation in the garden of Monks Mede, Burton Lane, Monks Risborough. A quarry pit, dating from after the Roman period, and a late medieval or early post-medieval wall base, in addition to undated postholes, possibly forming part of a building, and a ditch, were investigated. The ditch may well be part of the same enclosure observed in 2004. Unstratified Roman building materials and medieval pottery indicate that some of these undated features probably date from these periods. An early prehistoric bladelet was also recovered.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site location (Figure 1)**

The site is located in the garden of Monks Mede, Burton Lane, Monks Risborough (NGR SP 8122 0430). The underlying geology is Chalk Marl (BGS 237). The site is currently in domestic use.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

The erection to rear of Monks Mede, Burton Lane, Monks Risborough of a detached 3-bed dwelling and detached garage with double carport, and access via original driveway to Monks Mede is proposed. Due to the potential for archaeological remains to be present on the site Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (BCAS) has recommended that an archaeological evaluation of the site is carried out as part of the consideration of a planning application.. This is in line with the National Planning Policy Framework. Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (BCAS) provided a generic brief for the work. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* proposed a method to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains on the site as Stage 1, which was agreed with the client and BCAS.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The manor of Monks Risborough was granted to the monastery of Christchurch, Canterbury, at an early date. In 995 Ethelred II confirmed a grant of the manor made by Archbishop Sigeric to Bishop Æscwige of Dorchester for 90 'librae' of pure silver and 200 'mancusae.' In the next year, however, Æscwige restored the manor, which apparently was only granted as security for the loan of money. It was confirmed to Christchurch by King Ethelred in 1006, and by Edward the Confessor. During the reign of the latter it was held by Asgar the Staller, with the condition that he could not alienate it from the Church (Page 1908).

At Domesday (Williams & Martin 1992) Monks Risborough was held by the 'Archbishop himself' as the lands of the prior had not been separated from those of the archbishop. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century the manor was held by the Prior of Canterbury.

The monastery held the manor without interruption until it was seized by the Crown at the Dissolution. It was not restored by him to the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral Church, but was granted in 1541 to Sir Francis Bryan and Thomas Lawe. In the same

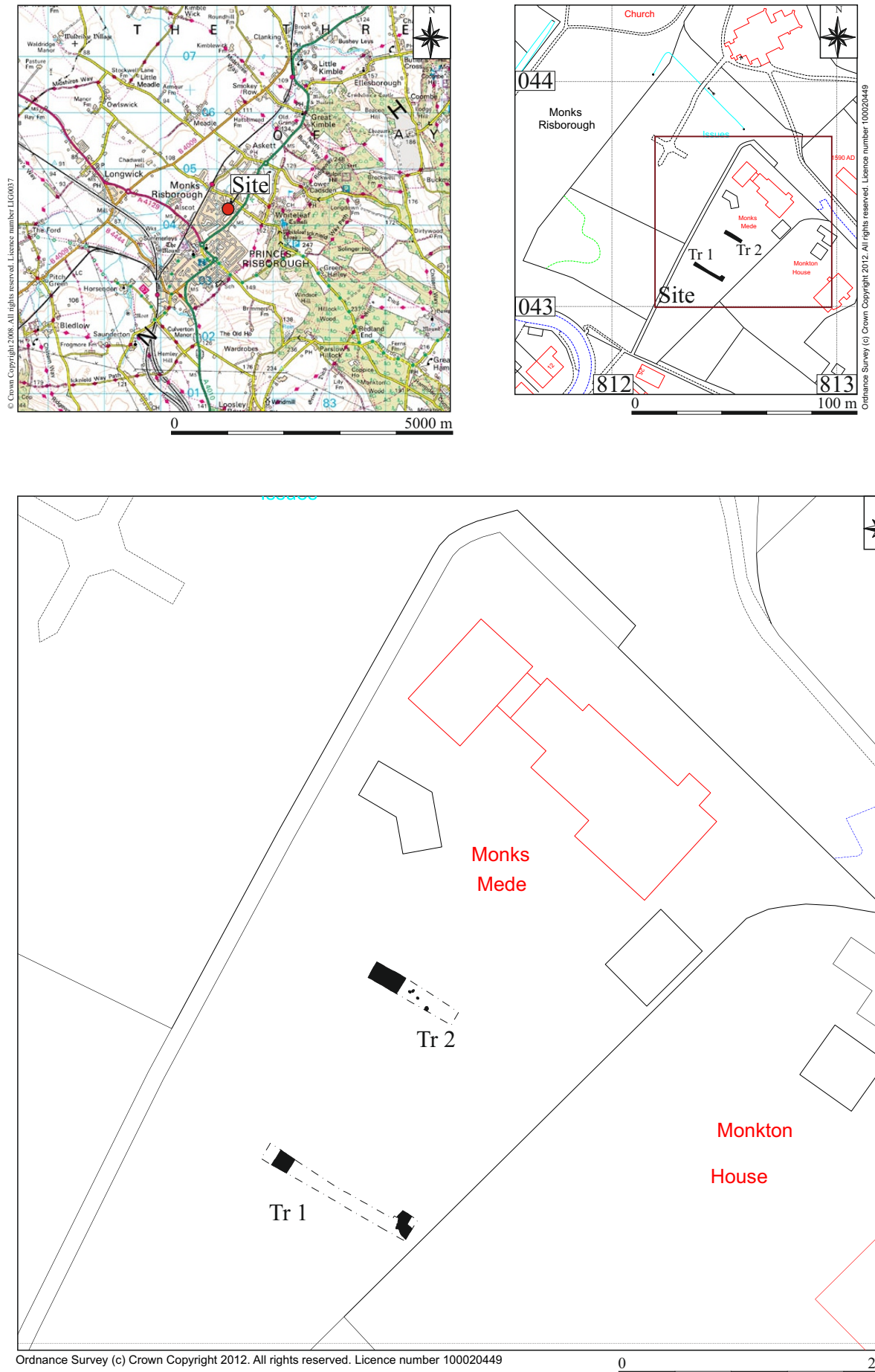


Figure 1. Site location

year, however, these grantees obtained licence to alienate the manor to Edward Restwold and his wife Agnes (Page 1908).

The earliest map of the area consulted is a Parish map of 1831 (CRO IR/M8/8) this shows the area as field. The Inclosure award of 1839 (CRO IR/94Q) describes the field as “farm, homestead and garden”. In 1908 (Page) there were 1,128¾ acres of arable land and 830½ of permanent pasture, with extensive watercress beds near the village.

Limited prehistoric activity is noted in the area; a barbed and tanged arrowhead (MBC 21133) was found c. 500m to the southwest. The Neolithic barrow at Whiteleaf Hill is approximately 1km to the southeast.

Just to the south of the A4010 a cropmark (MBC6261) was recognised that could represent a Roman enclosure. The field directly to the north was the subject of an evaluation (EBC 16507) prior to a proposed cemetery extension. This located artefacts associated with a Roman building (MBC 26642) which previously occupied the site. Roman tile (MBC 21680) was also discovered just to the west of this during earlier building works.

Late Saxon boundary ditches (MBC 26643) were also located during the evaluation to the west (EBC 16507) (Mumford 2004). The site is presumed to be located close to the centre of the historic village (MBC 24642). The Grade I listed Church of St Dunstan (MBC 12112) lies just to the northeast and its churchyard (MBC 12114) borders the development site to the north.

The Benedictine monastery (MBC 950) was located to the north of St Dunstons Church and is marked on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS map. Associated earthworks (MBC 951 & 952) were recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these are not visible today.

A 14<sup>th</sup>-century watermill (MBC 950) was recorded c. 500m to the north of the development site. Also in the vicinity are undated fishponds (MBC 21939), which are medieval or later. A 16<sup>th</sup>-century pottery kiln is also recorded in the area (MBC 7553).

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

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

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- In particular:
  - o To identify and characterise any evidence for Roman and medieval occupation and identify the potential for deposits to contribute to our understanding of how Monks Risborough developed.
  - o To establish whether there is any evidence for understanding Roman and medieval settlement morphology

- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.
- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present.

### **3 STRATEGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

In response to a generic brief issued by BCAS, JMHS carried out the work, which comprised the excavation of two trenches of 15m and 10m within the proposal area (Fig. 1). A further 20m of trenching was allowed for as a contingency to assist in characterising any archaeological deposits encountered: approximately 2m × 1m of this was used.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in JMHS's *WSI* agreed with the City Archaeological Officer.

#### **3.2 Methodology**

The investigation involved the mechanical excavation of two trenches measuring 15 × 1.6m and 10 × 1.6m by a 1.5-tonne excavator equipped with a ditching bucket, supplemented by hand investigation of the revealed deposits.

Site procedures carried out followed IfA guidelines. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

### **4 RESULTS**

#### **4.1 Field Results (Figs. 1-3)**

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material. All context numbers are preceded by trench number and /. Details of individual context numbers are in Appendix 1 – the context inventory – at the rear of report.

Trench 1 was oriented northwest/southeast and measured 14.8m long and 1.6m wide (Figs. 1 & 2). Its depth was between *c.* 0.4m at the northwest end and *c.* 0.25m at the southeast end. The trench was excavated to the top of the chalk marl natural (1/03).

The undated ditch 1/05, which was oriented northeast/southwest, and parallel with the property boundary to the west, was filled with (1/04) which only yielded a small fragment of bone. The fill (1/04) and the natural (1/03) were overlain by a layer of subsoil (1/02). There were 10 sherds of pottery: one of which was Romano-British,

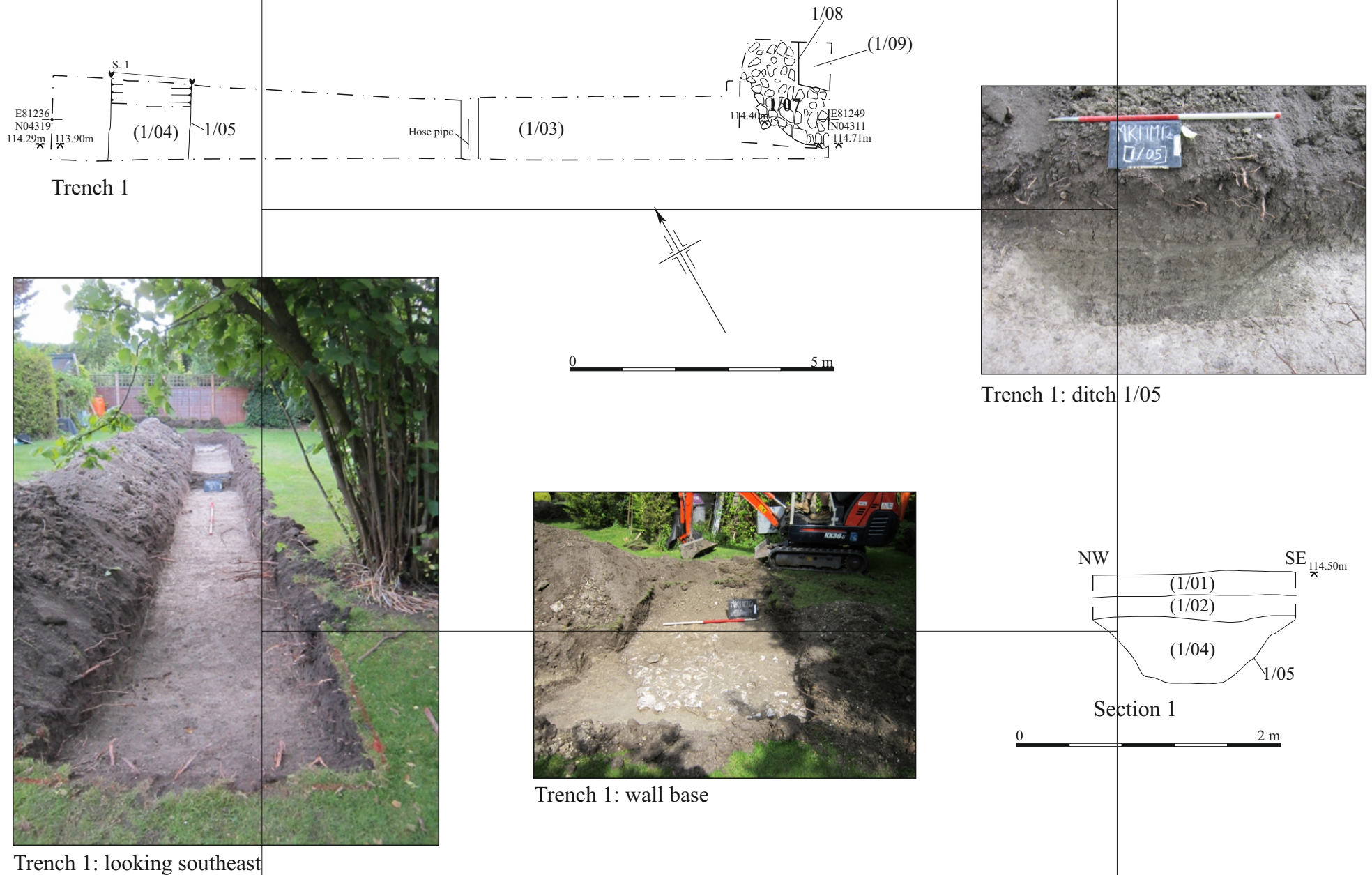


Figure 2. Trench 1 plans, sections and photographs.



five were medieval (c 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> C) – including one sherd weighing 57g – three dating from after the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and a modern sherd of whiteware. The subsoil (1/02) was cut by 1/08 for the lumps of chalk wall footings 1/07, which also appeared to cut the layer (1/09), that may well have been the same as layer (1/02), in the northeast corner of Trench 1. The precise nature of layer (1/09) could not be determined within the limited context of the evaluation, but represented either an occupation deposit or subsoil (1/02). An early prehistoric flint bladelet was recovered from within the wall base 1/07. Two small sherds of red earthenware and three fragments of tile were recovered from the layer (1/09), indicating a date after the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Trench 2 was located 18m to the north of, and parallel with Trench 1; it measured 8.5m long and 1.6m wide (Figs. 1 & 3). Its depth was between c. 0.9m at the northwest end and c. 0.5m at the southeast end. The northwest end, where the quarry pit 2/06 was located, was not fully bottomed as the depth exceeded 1.25m.

The trench was excavated to the natural chalk marl (2/03). Cut into the natural (2/03) were four postholes – 2/08, 2/10, 2/12 and 2/14 – all of which were filled with similar pale grey chalky silt loam. No finds were recovered from any of the postholes. The postholes did not appear to form a structure, within the confines of the trench. The postholes appeared to be overlain by the subsoil deposit (2/02), which was also seen in Trench 1. The quarry pit 2/06, which cut the subsoil (2/02) at the northwest end of the trench, extended beyond the edges of the trench and its full size is not known; a fragment of Roman tile and two animal bones were recovered from the fill (2/05). The quarry pit was sealed by a spread of marly loam (2/04), which yielded a sherd of medieval grey sandy ware. Topsoil (2/01) sealed the trench.

#### **4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results**

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The archaeological evaluation took place in clement conditions. Sandy Kidd, Buckinghamshire County Archaeologist, monitored the work.

## **5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS**

### **5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn**

The pottery assemblage comprised 15 sherds with a total weight of 152g. It comprised a mixture of Romano-British medieval and later material. It was recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (e.g. Mynard and Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat et al. 1994), as follows:

**MC1: Shelly Coarseware**, AD1100-1400. 1 sherd, 5g.

**MS3: Medieval Grey Sandy Wares**, mid 11<sup>th</sup> – late 14<sup>th</sup> century. 3 sherds, 22g.

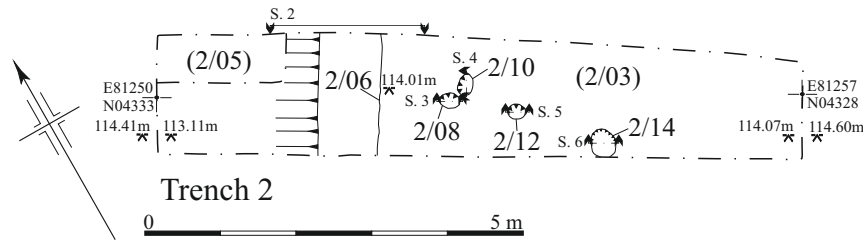
**MS9: Brill/Boarstall Ware**, 1200-?1600. 1 sherd, 57g.

**MSC1: Sandy and Shelly ware**, late 11<sup>th</sup> – mid 13<sup>th</sup> century. 3 sherds, 11g.

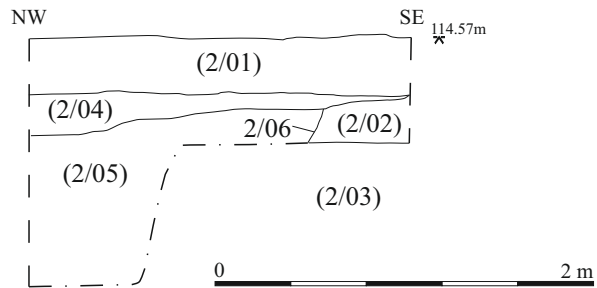
**PM8: Red Earthenware**, 16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century. 5 sherds, 40g.

**PM25: White Earthenware**, Late 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century. 1 sherd, 6g.

In addition, a single Romano-British sherd (11g) was also present. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.



Trench 2 looking southeast



Section 2



Trench 2 looking northwest at quarry pit



Trench 2 looking southeast;  
postholes marked

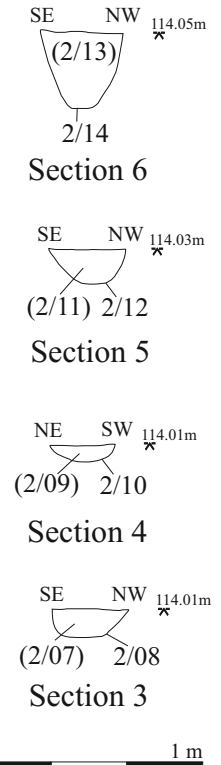


Figure 3. Trench 2 plans, sections and photographs.

Tr	Cntxt	RB		MC1		MS3		MSC1		MS9		PM8		PM25		Date
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1	2	1	11			2	12	2	6	1	57	3	34	1	6	19thC
1	9											2	6			M16thC
2	2			1	5			1	5							12thC
2	4					1	10									M11thC
	<b>Total</b>	1	11	1	5	3	22	3	11	1	57	5	40	1	6	

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type.

All the fabric types are well-known in the region. It seems likely that the main period of activity at the site was from the mid 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century, and then it was abandoned until the post-medieval period.

## 5.2 Ceramic building materials by Gwilym Williams

There were 15 pieces of tile, weighing 855g, recovered during the evaluation, of which 14 fragments, weighing 546g, were recovered from Trench 1. Eight fragments, weighing 688g, were dated as being Roman or possibly later, and seven fragments, weighing 167g, were dated as being medieval or later (Table 2). Many of the tile fragments were broken into quite small sized pieces and were moderately abraded; this means that no more an accurate date than medieval or later can be attributed to that proportion of the assemblage.

The tile was examined at ×10 magnification and the results were entered onto an Excel spreadsheet.

context	frags	wt (g)	fabric	dims	comments
(1/02)	3	90	3	15mm thick	Med?
(1/02)	2	58	4	12mm thick	Med?
(1/02)	3	184	1	25mm thick	Roman?
(1/02)	3	174	5	22mm thick	Roman?
(1/09)	1	21	1	22mm thick	Roman?
(1/09)	1	12	2	12mm thick	Med?
(1/09)	1	7	3	12mm thick	Med?
(2/05)	1	309	1	22mm thick	Roman?
<b>total</b>	15	855			

Table 2. Tile by context and fragment count and weight

The majority, 11 pieces weighing 506g, from Trench 1 was recovered from the subsoil deposit (1/02), with a further three, weighing 40g, recovered from in and about the stone wall footing 1/09. The fragments from the subsoil (1/02) comprise six pieces, weighing 368g, of Roman tile and five pieces, weighing 148g, of medieval or later tile. The tile from the stone wall footing 1/09 comprises one fragment, weighing 21g, of Roman tile and two pieces, weighing 19g, of medieval tile.

A single fragment, weighing 309g, of Roman tile was recovered from the fill (2/05) of the quarry pit 2/06.

There were two potentially Roman fabrics (1 and 5), in comparison to three medieval or later (2, 3 and 4) (Table 3).

<b>fabric</b>	<b>description</b>
1	fine pinky orange clay with occasional chalky and sand inclusions; reduced core sometimes observed
2	orange sandy fabric; reduced core
3	red brown sandy clay
4	red brown corky clay; occasional marl
5	red sandy clay with lamination

**Table 3. Tile fabrics**

Although the Roman tile included a number of fragments which were relatively small, the Roman assemblage was nevertheless significantly greater than the medieval in weight, despite only consisting of a single fragment more.

The medieval or later fragments were all very small and it is not possible to comment further on them. No pegholes were present.

It is not proposed to retain these pieces of tile.

### **5.3 Flint by David Gilbert**

A single uncorticated blade segment was recovered from context (1/07). It measured 20mm long by 12mm wide by 5mm thick, both proximal and distal ends were missing. While possibly of late Mesolithic to early Neolithic origins it is impossible to accurately date such an object.

### **5.4 Animal Bone**

A total of eight fragments of bone were recovered during the evaluation (Table 4). The results were entered onto an Excel spreadsheet. No species identification has been made.

<b>context</b>	<b>frags</b>	<b>wt (g)</b>	<b>comments</b>
(1/02)	4	48	two teeth
(1/04)	1	2	butchered
1/09	1	3	butchered
(2/05)	2	57	butchered; marrow removed
<b>total</b>	8	110	

**Table 4. Animal bone by context and fragment count and weight**

Four fragments, weighing 48g, were recovered from the subsoil (1/02). A single fragment, weighing 2g, came from the fill (1/04) of the ditch 1/05, with a further fragment weighing 3g, from the stone wall footing 1/09. Two long bones, both of which were immature, as well as having been scraped clean of marrow, were recovered from the fill of the quarry pit 2/06.

### **5.5 Environmental Remains**

No environmental samples were taken as the potential of the deposits was not felt to be sufficient to warrant sampling.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation at Monks Mede revealed evidence of activity from early prehistory in the form of part of a flint bladelet – other flints have been found in the vicinity, and the Neolithic barrow at Whiteleaf Hill (Hey et al 2007) is approximately 1km from the investigation site. The presence of such is unsurprising.

The subsoil in Trenches 1 and 2 yielded pottery – most of which clustered around the 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. There were sherds of later pottery also, these may have been introduced by taphonomic processes or indeed accidentally during the evaluation. The pottery is later than that recovered during the evaluation in the adjacent field to the west (Blinkhorn 2004, 6), which was Saxo-Norman dating to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, bar some residual Roman sherds; the only similarly dated pottery from Monks Mede came from the levelling deposit which sealed the quarry pit. A single Roman sherd was also recovered at Monk Mede from the subsoil in Trench 1.

The quarry pit is undated, but yielded a large fragment of Roman roof tile, in addition to a good spread of Roman roof tile recovered from the topsoil in Trench 1 as well as the subsoil or possible occupation horizon (1/09) cut by the later wall base 1/07. Roman tile exceeded medieval tile in weight and number of fragments; the evaluation in the field adjacent yielded some similar-sized fragments, comprising *tegulae*, *imbrex* and *tubuli* – that is flat roof tile, ridge tile and box or flue tile, the latter for a hypocaust – indicative of the presence of a moderately important Roman building in the vicinity (Allen 2004, 7; Mumford 2004, 8). The quarry pit cut the subsoil, and although there was a sherd of 11<sup>th</sup>-century medieval grey sandy ware in the uppermost backfill of the quarry pit, the quarry pit dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century or later.

The corner of the wall base observed during the evaluation is suggestive of a large structure – the base was approximately 1m across – which can be presumed to have extended to the northeast of the investigation area, although it is always a possibility that there be a return to the west. The pottery associated with this structure indicated a date from the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, although it was not wholly clear whether the dated context was cut by the wall base trench, or conversely, was an occupation deposit butting up against the wall base. In the context of the evaluation it was not possible or appropriate to investigate the deposit further without the possibility of impacting negatively upon the archaeology. There was no evidence for a structure in this location on any of OS maps from the 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. (1877) onwards. Earlier maps such as the 1822 OS First Survey and either Bryant's 1820 or Jeffrey's 1760 maps of Buckinghamshire are of insufficient detail to identify the presence of any structure here. The early OS maps identify the site as a close or an orchard.

There was an undated ditch, measuring 1.5m across, to the northwest of the wall base, which within the confines of the evaluation trench appeared to be parallel with the wall base, and which might therefore indicate a relationship, however this cannot be demonstrated conclusively. As such this might indicate a possible property boundary, although the absence of pottery in the fill is intriguing, given the relative frequency in the subsoil horizon, which sealed the ditch. A second possibility is that it is part of the same enclosure observed in the adjacent field to the west (Mumford 2004, 8); the ditch found during the previous evaluation was marginally narrower at 1.3m, but projecting both observed sections of the ditches to the east and south, they meet at roughly right angles to one another. Clearly within the context of an

evaluation, slight deviations in the line of a ditch, due, for example, to topographic considerations cannot be overlooked; the area evaluated by James Mumford (2004) lies approximately 1m below the present evaluation site. The ditch is undated, and the absence of pottery from the current evaluation means that this relationship is potential rather than actual. The ditch was not present in Trench 2, which raises the possibility of there either being a break in the line of the ditch, or that it returns to the northwest, or potentially to the southeast, were it the same ditch seen during the previous evaluation.

There were furthermore an additional four undated features – postholes – in Trench 2, which could not assuredly be said to form a structure. However, it is possible that if further exist beyond the limits of the investigation trenches, they could well form a structure. Whether these might form the corner, part of the gable-end or indeed the long-side of a post-fast building is not clear within the limited extent of an evaluation. It is most likely that any associated structure extends to the southwest, rather than the northeast, as were it to extend there, one might expect to have recovered postholes on the northeast side of the trench.

The evidence from the evaluation indicates a moderately high background presence of Roman and medieval activity. Although few of the features investigated were dated, the presence of large sherds such the sherd of Brill/Boarstall ware from the subsoil might be indicative of activity more than manuring; the wall base may also be late medieval in origin.

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**Appendix 1: Archaeological Context Inventory**

Ctxt	Type	Description	L (m)	B (m)	D(m)	Finds	Date	Interpretation
<b>Trench 1</b>								
(1/01)	Layer	Friable dark grey brown silty loam with chalk fragments	>15	>1.6	0.2	No	Modern	Topsoil
(1/02)	Layer	Firm light grey chalky silty loam with chalk fragments	>15	>1.6	0.3	Yes	19 <sup>th</sup> C	Former cultivation soil
(1/03)	Layer	Solid light grey chalk marl	>15	>1.6	Unk.	No	Natural	Natural
(1/04)	Fill	Firm mid grey chalky silty loam with flint nodules	>1.6	1.3	0.5	Bone	Unk.	Fill of undated ditch
1/05	Cut	Linear; sharp BoS @top & NW base, more gradual @ SE base; flat base	>1.6	1.3	0.5	–	Unk.	Undated ditch; possibly related to wall base
(1/06)	Layer	Stiff creamy grey green chalky marl with orange sand & chalk	>2	>1	c. 0.1	No	Unk.	Levelling layer?
1/07	Wall base	Chalk lumps 1-200mm × 1-200mm, roughly squared off, and roughly laid; single course	>2	>1	c. 0.2	Flint bladelet	Unk.	Wall base
1/08	Cut	Linear with right angle; sharp BoS @top & base; flat base	>2	>1	c. 0.2	–	Unk.	Wall base cut
(1/09)	Layer	Firm light grey chalky silty loam with angular chalk fragments	>0.9	>0.6	Unk.	Pot, tile	M 16 <sup>th</sup> C	Subsoil or occupation
<b>Trench 2</b>								
(2/01)	Layer	Friable dark grey brown silty loam with chalk fragments	>10	>1.6	0.2	No	Modern	Topsoil
(2/02)	Layer	Firm light grey chalky silty loam with chalk fragments	>10	>1.6	0.3	Yes	19 <sup>th</sup> C	Former cultivation soil
(2/03)	Layer	Solid light grey chalk marl	>10	>1.6	Unk.	No	Natural	Natural
(2/04)	Layer	Stiff pale brown loam w/ white marling	>3.5	>1.6	0.05-0.3	Yes	11 <sup>th</sup> C	Levelling deposit
(2/05)	Fill	Firm mid grey chalky silty loam	>3	>1.6	>0.8.	Yes	Post-Roman	Fill of quarry pit
2/06	Layer	Unk. shape; sharp BoS @ top; not bottomed	>10	>1.6	Unk.	No	Natural	Natural
(2/07)	Fill	Moderate mid grey chalky silty loam	0.25	0.2	0.08	No	Unk.	Fill of posthole
2/08	Cut	Subcircular; sharp BoS @ top; concave sides,; flat base	0.25	0.2	0.08	No	Unk.	Posthole
(2/09)	Fill	Moderate mid grey chalky silty loam	0.17	0.12	0.05	No	Unk.	Fill of posthole
2/10	Cut	Subcircular; sharp BoS @ top; concave sides,; flat base	0.17	0.12	0.05	No	Unk.	Posthole
(2/11)	Fill	Moderate mid grey chalky silty loam	0.20	0.20	0.10	No	Unk.	Fill of posthole
2/12	Cut	Circular; sharp BoS @ top; concave sides,; flat base	0.20	0.20	0.10	No	Unk.	Posthole
(2/13)	Fill	Moderate mid grey chalky silty loam	0.30	0.22	0.20	No	Unk.	Fill of posthole
2/14	Cut	Subcircular; sharp BoS @ top; concave sides,; flat base	0.30	0.22	0.20	No	Unk.	Posthole