



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT MOONRAKER LANE,

BAMPTON,

OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SP 3149 0311

On behalf of

John George Pimm & Sons Ltd

MARCH 2013

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Summary

A watching brief undertaken by John Moore Heritage Services during the excavation of footings trenches revealed an Early/Middle Iron Age enclosure ditch, two post-medieval pits and modern truncation. The broad Early/Middle Iron Age enclosure ditch may well be associated with settlement activity to the west of the present site.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site was located on the south side of Market Square off Moonraker Lane in Bampton (NGR SP 3149 0311). The underlying geology is Second Terrace Gravels (Summertown-Radley series) overlying Oxford Clay and the site lies at c. 70m OD. A former garage/shed had been demolished prior to groundworks starting.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission was granted by West Oxfordshire District Council for the erection of one dwelling with associated parking and bin/cycle storage off Moonraker Lane, Bampton (12/1714/P/FP). Due to the potential presence of and disturbance to archaeological remains a condition required an archaeological watching brief be maintained during groundworks. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services prepared a Brief for the work.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Bampton was a large and wealthy market town, which had achieved considerable importance by the time of the Domesday survey of 1086, though there is no earlier documentary evidence to suggest how it achieved its wealth. It may have been as a result of a saltworks in the town, mentioned for the first and last time in the Domesday survey. Prior to this date the town is known in documents only for a battle that took place in AD614. Its prosperity increased in the 14th century with the growth of the wool trade, but suffered a decline, probably as a result of the Black Death and its repercussions on agriculture.

The original layout of the settlement is centred on two points. The parish church of St Mary appears to stand on the site of an earlier Minster church and associated ecclesiastical complex, and the later triangular Market Place that was laid out in 1241 with three converging streets fronting a network of lanes to the rear.

The properties fronting the south side of the Market Place still appear to respect the medieval tenement/burage boundaries. To the south of the development, archaeological evaluation revealed an Anglo Saxon sunken feature building dating to the sixth or seventh centuries. Recent archaeological investigation by John Moore Heritage Services (2005) on an immediately adjacent plot has revealed evidence of an eleventh century building in the form of wall footings, postholes with *in situ* post pads and pottery specifically from that century. There was no activity on the site after the eleventh century until the fifteenth century, after which it was in use until the present day.

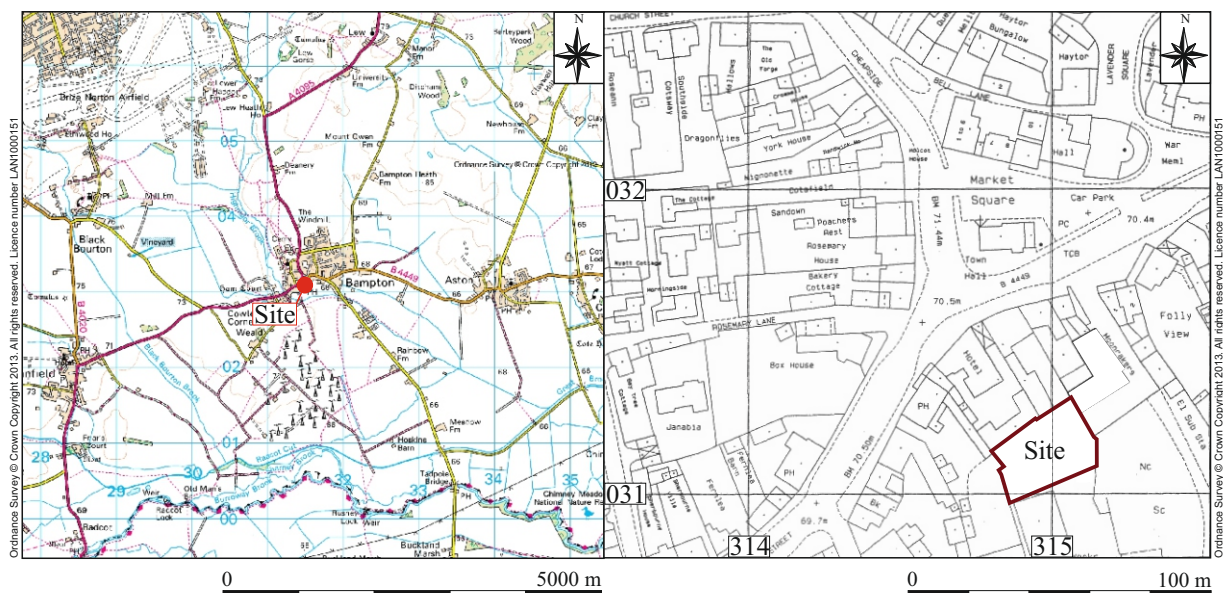


Figure 1. Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- 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 evidence relating to medieval activity

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

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

3.2 Methodology

The excavations for the new foundations were monitored. These were excavated using a JCB.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

All features were assigned individual context numbers. A general description of the feature fills is given.

4.1 Prehistoric

The natural gravel (103) was exposed in all the footing trenches. The ditch 105, which cut through the natural gravel (103), was located on the west side of the investigation area. The ditch, which was not bottomed, measured more than 0.3m deep and approximately 2m wide. It was observed over a distance of more than 18m and was oriented northeast/southwest. At the southwest end it appeared to turn to the west, although this could equally have represented a T-junction. The ditch was filled with moderately compact red brown gravelly clay silt (104) which yielded a single sherd of Early/Middle Iron Age pot.

4.2 Post-medieval

In the centre of the investigation area, towards the north side of the new build, was the sub-rounded pit 107, measuring 1.5m across by more than 0.6m and *c.* 1.6m deep, which was filled with sticky dark brown black gravelly silty clay humus (106). The pit 107 yielded a single rim-sherd of red earthenware bowl, dating from the middle of the 16th century onwards. To the east side of the pit 107 was a large sub-rectangular pit 109, measuring 4.25m by at least 1.25m and 1.6m deep. Due to collapse it was not

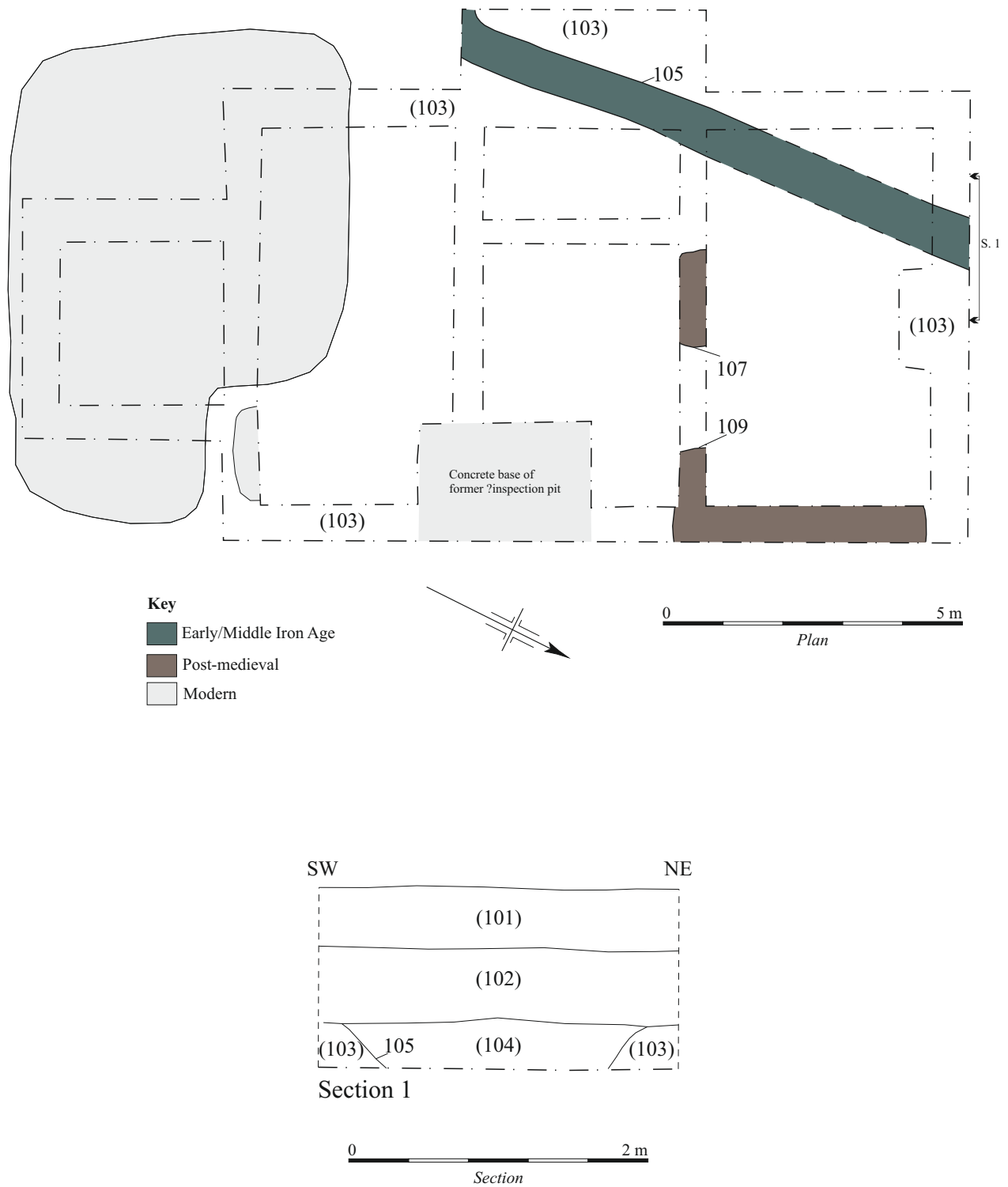


Figure 2. Plan and section

possible to investigate the pit in detail; it might possibly have comprised several features. The fill was similar to pit 107 consisting of sticky dark brown black gravelly silty clay humus with moderate stone through it (108). A sherd of Westerwald ware, dating from the late 16th to early 19th centuries was recovered from the fill. This pottery was imported from the eastern part of the present Rhineland-Palatinate in western Germany.

4.3 Modern

To the south of the post-medieval features was the concrete base and walls of what was probably an inspection pit for the garage; the walls were lined with wooden sleepers which were pulled out during the excavation of the footings. To the south of this were a small sub-rounded modern pit and a large area of disturbance, which were both cut through the gravel (103).

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 3 sherds with a total weight of 126g. One of the sherds is of Iron Age date, the other two, post-medieval. The post-medieval pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994).

EMIA: Fine Shelly Ware, early – middle Iron Age. Soft, slightly sandy fabric moderate fine pounded shell fragments up to 1mm. 1 sherd, 9g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 1 sherd, 102g.

OXST: Westerwald stoneware, 1590-1800. 1 sherd, 15g.

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*. The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region. The Iron Age sherd is from the body of a vessel, and is slightly abraded. The sherd of OXDR was from the rim of a large bowl, whilst that of OXST was from the body of a highly-decorated jug with cobalt and manganese painted decoration. Both are typical of the respective traditions, and is very good condition.

Cntxt	EMIA		OXDR		OXST		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
104	1	9					E/MIA
106			1	102			M16th
108					1	15	C 17thC
Total	1	9	1	102	1	15	

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

6 DISCUSSION

The Early/Middle Iron Age ditch 105 was an unexpected find, which nevertheless is unsurprising in this part of the Upper Thames Valley. Although extensive prehistoric landscapes have been investigated to the east Yarnton/Cassington (Hey 2011a & 20011b), Watkins Farm, Northmoor (Allen 1990), Stanton Harcourt (Lambrick & Allen 2004), Mingies Ditch, Hardwick (Allen and Robinson 1993), and Old Shifford Farm, Standlake (Hey 1995), and to the west in the vicinity of Fairford at Roughground Farm (Allen *et al.* 1993), Thornhill Farm (Jennings *et al.* 2004) and Claydon Pike (Miles *et al.* 2007), comparatively little work has been carried out in the stretch upstream of the Windrush and downstream of the Leach, at Lechlade.

To the north of Bampton at Deer Park Road, Witney (Walker 1995) some small evidence of Middle Iron Age activity has been excavated, in addition to the possibly seasonal middle Iron Age activity at Gill Mill, Ducklington (Booth & Simmonds 2011); and approximately 2.5km south of Bampton overlooking the Thames is the ?Iron Age earthwork of Burroway, 'A roughly circular enclosure of about 5 acres [2 ha]..on an island in the Thames (Sutton 1966, 37).

There has been little work undertaken between the two *foci* of activity east of the Windrush and west of the Leach. In the immediate vicinity of Bampton there two significant cropmarks: a multi-ditched enclosure to the 550m west of the village and a second enclosure with an east-facing entrance 300m south-east of the development site (Benson & Miles 1974, Map 10).

An excavation carried out by Oxford Archaeological Unit at Church View *c.* 150m to the west of the present site revealed the traces of some poorly-defined activity (Mayes *et al.* 2000, 287-8), comprising a gully with a return and a small pit, which yielded sherds of four Early Iron Age vessels. It was suggested that any further activity might be to the south. During a watching brief carried out by JMHS (Edwards & Williams 2010) to the south of the OAU site, also at Church View, no prehistoric features were positively identified, although a single ?pit, feature 58, sealed by a relict soil horizon was present.

The ditch 105 is, in and of itself, of little significance, largely due to there having been little observed of it, except for 18m extent, yielding a single pot-sherd. Nevertheless, this reveals that further, potentially extensive, prehistoric landscapes are present in this stretch of the Upper Thames Valley. The ditch, which was approximately 2m wide, was excavated to a depth of 0.3m yielding an upper profile that indicated a potentially deep ditch. Insufficient was exposed to be certain of the form, although the square enclosure at Gill Mill, Ducklington (Lambrick 1992, Fig. 33) is a potential parallel, as might B3 or B6 at Gravelly Guy (Lambrick & Allen 2004, Fig. 3.8). Equally, the undated cropmark enclosures in the vicinity provide potential parallels. The presence of the large enclosure ditch at Moonraker Lane and further Early Iron Age activity to the west (Mayes *et al.* 2000) may well be indicative of a settlement located under Rosemary Lane and Bridge Street. Previous work at Bampton has focussed on the Saxon and medieval activity, rather than the prehistoric.

In contrast with the adjacent site, which was subject to a watching brief in 2005 (Moore 2005), no medieval activity was present on the current site. Several 16th-century or later features were present at the previously investigated site. The

disposition of features at the site to the rear of Londis Stores (now Budgens) provides no clear patterning of post-medieval activities; the same can be said of the post-medieval activity at Moonraker Lane. The two pits from the present site were probably rubbish pits, perhaps associated with The Talbot Hotel fronting the High Street. The presence of Westerwald pottery, frequently highly decorated drinking jugs, in the context of a pub or hostelry is unsurprising.

The 1st Edition OS map of 1876 (Fig. 3) shows the site as a garden with trees, although the precise relationship between the hotel and the garden is not clear and can only be surmised as comprising the same plot. The garden was still extant in 1921. Between 1921 and 1972, the recently demolished workshop and the engineering works to the south of the present site were erected. The modern features comprised an inspection pit, a non-diagnostic rubbish pit and a large area of disturbed ground, which might represent either a further inspection pit or perhaps a soakaway.

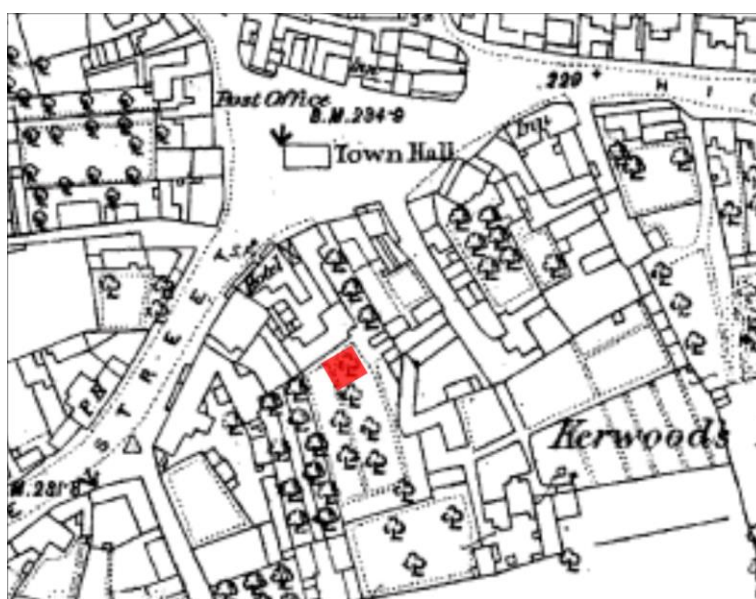


Figure 3. Bampton OS (1:2500) 1876 (approximate location of site shown by red square)

The watching brief failed to reveal any new data concerning the Saxon or medieval town, but has added the possibility of the presence of a typically Upper Thames Valley prehistoric landscape, of which an enclosure was revealed, underlying the town.

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