

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

PLAYING FIELDS, STATION ROAD,

CHINNOR, OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SP 7538 0117

On behalf of

Chinnor Parish Council

MAY 2013

REPORT FOR Chinnor Parish Council
c/o Upfield Developments
School House Lane
Morton
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FIELD WORK 28th-29th November 2011

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services undertook an archaeological watching brief on the Playing Field in Station Road, Chinnor (NGR SP 7538 0117), Oxfordshire, during the excavation of bases to install lighting facilities and also some of the trenches heading into the Club House. A number of undated ditches were noted along with more modern rubble scatters.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located at the Playing Field in Station Road, Chinnor (NGR SP 7538 0117). The present parish was created in 1932 with the amalgamation of Chinnor and Emington (VCH 1964, 55-80), however, the site lies in the area of Chinnor that formed part of that historic parish, which was located in the historic county of Oxfordshire and the ancient Hundred of Lewknor. The parish is located today in South Oxfordshire District.

The site is bounded on the northwest by residential properties fronting onto Lower Road, which forms part of the Roman Ickneild Way. On the north east it is bounded by residential properties along Benton Drive and Grafton Orchard, while to the south is Chinnor Library and Saint Andrew's School grounds. On the southwest the site opens onto Station Road.

Topographically the site lies between approximately 110-116m OD, on a gentle northwest slope at the base of the Chiltern Escarpment.

The underlying geology is the West Melbury Chalk Formation; a chalk sedimentary bedrock formed 94-99 million years ago in the Cretaceous Period.

1.2 Planning Background

South Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission for the erection of flood lighting for the tennis courts and first team football pitch (ref. P10/E0915). Permission was also given at that time for the demolition and rebuilding of the social club, but it is not included as JMHS was not appointed for this stage of development. 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 work. This was in line with PPS 5 (the planning policy current at the time) and other Local Planning policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

A number of archaeological sites have been recognised in the area dating from the Roman period and early medieval period. To the north is the site of the Lower Ickneild Way, the course of a Roman road (PRN 8930). A further Roman site has been located to the south of the site (PRN 15833). In 1933 on the western side of the playing field the remains of early medieval burials were discovered (PRN 2814).

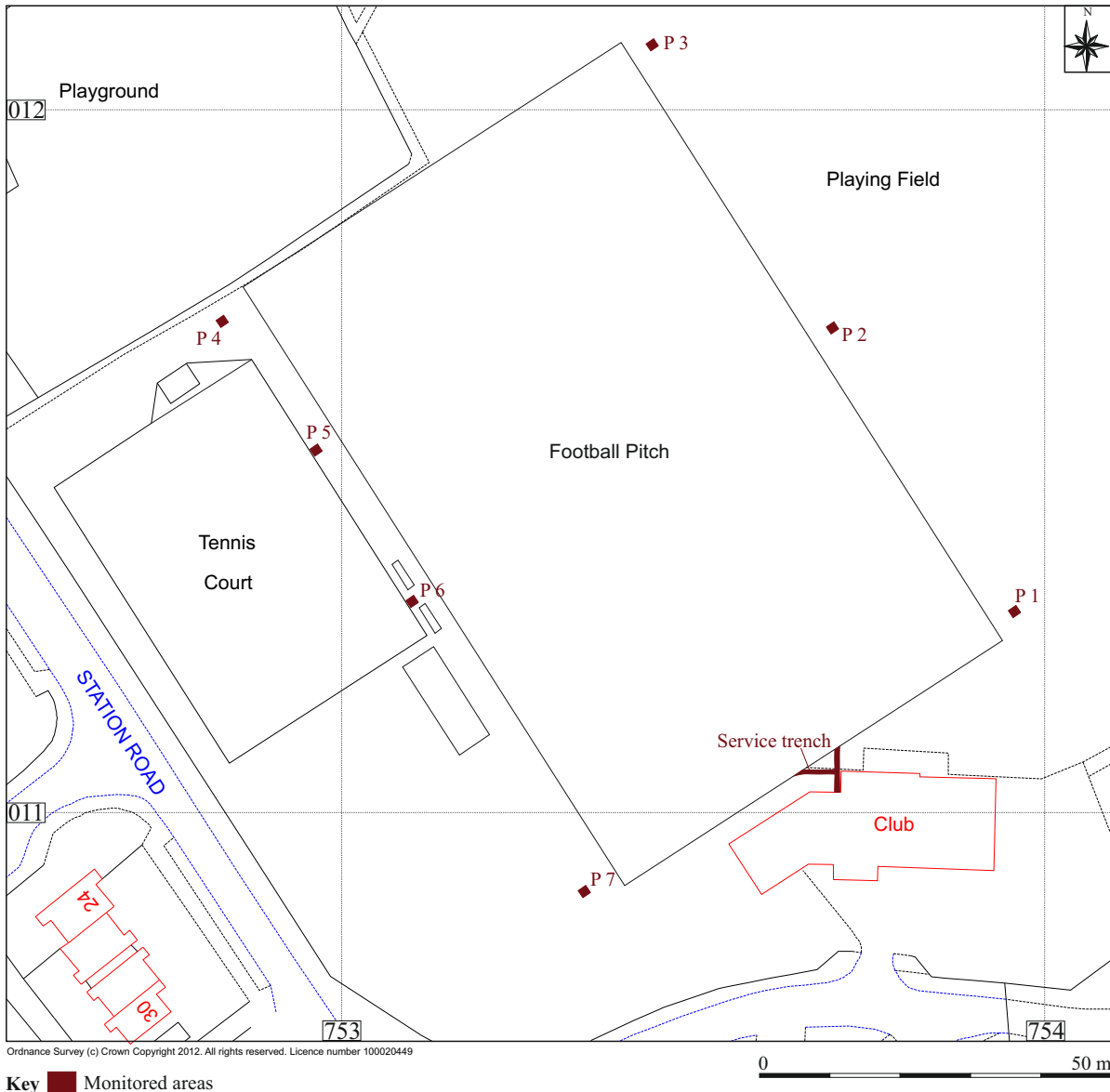
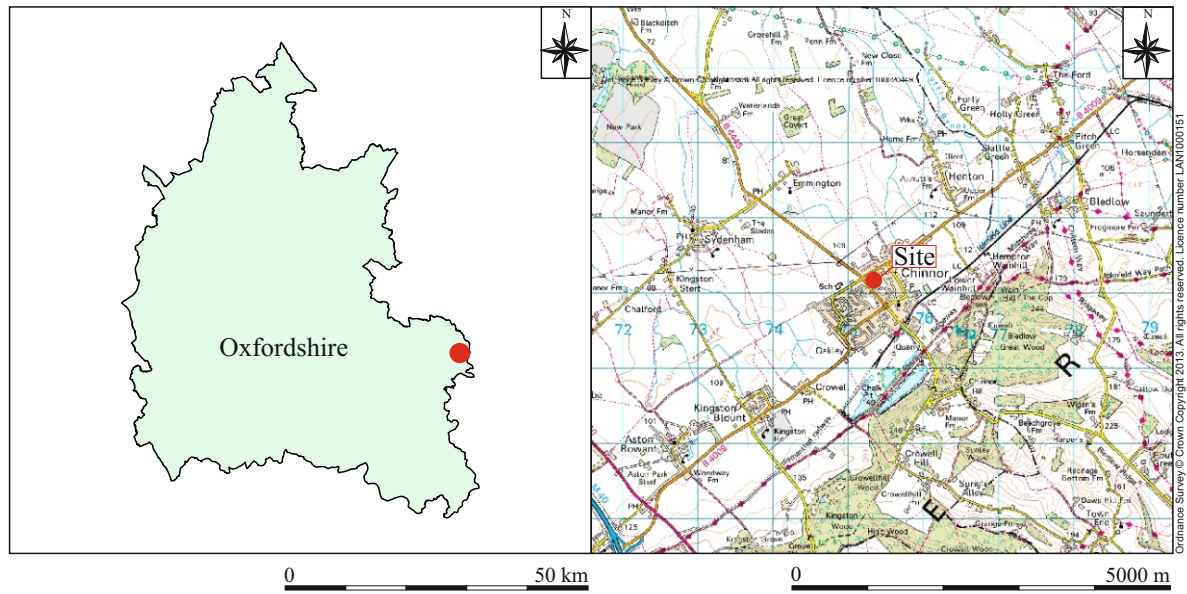


Figure 1. Site location

Further undated burials have been uncovered to the southeast (PRN 17287) and to the southwest (PRN 17286).

The earliest historical references to Chinnor are to be found in the Domesday Book of 1086, when the name is recorded in the following format *Chennore*. The suggested etymology of the name is **Cēonna*, a suggested short form of *Cēolnōþ*, and *ōra*, a slope (Gelling 1953, 106-7).

In 1086 the Book of Winchester records that Leofwin one of the king's officials held 13 hides of land (Morris 1978, 58.24). The accounts records that there are 26 villagers, 2 smallholders and 2 slaves. This would imply that Chinnor at this time was a larger village.

Soon after 1086 the manor was granted to Hugh de Vernon (VCH 1964, 55-80). He was succeeded by his son Richard de Vernon by 1130. In 1155 a hide of land at Sydenham, which formed part of Chinnor Manor, was given to Thame Abbey. By 1155 the manor was held by Walter de Vernon, who forfeited the manor from 1194-8. In 1203 Chinnor manor and its member Sydenham was granted to the powerful Saer de Quincy. In 1216 Hugh de la Mare also known as Hugh Sans Aver recovered Isabel de Vernon's land, who was the daughter of Walter. By 1229-30 the manor was in the possession of Roger de Quincy, Sear's son and heir, who was also recorded as the holder of the manor in 1235 and 1255. At some time before 1264 he had given the sub-manor of Sydenham to Thame Abbey. In 1267 the manor went to the heirs of Roger, his three daughters, and by 1279 the manor was divided between the descendents into thirds. The descent of the three manors of Chinnor from this point in time becomes more complex. The manor of Chinnor descended under the overlordship of the Ferrers of Chartley. The manor by 1316 had come to Robert de Sapey as resident. The manor continued to be associated with Ferrers family on and off to 1517. One of the other thirds of the manor in 1279 became associated with the la Zouche family, and was later called Bulkley's or Popham's fee.

The mother church of Chinnor had a chapel of Saint James at Henton by the 13th century (VCH 1964, 55-80). The early manorial association of Chinnor and Sydenham, the hide of Chinnor manor in Sydenham, the descent of the advowson of Chinnor with the manor, and the fact that Sydenham was a chapel of Thame Abbey all points to a probable origin of Chinnor being created at sometime out of the larger parochial arrangement of Thame Minster.

The earliest maps of Chinnor show the village built around four sides of a rectangle (VCH 1964, 55-80).

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 of activity relating to the medieval village in the area.

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 (OCAS) the archaeological advisors to South Oxfordshire District Council. 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 for Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present on site during the groundwork for the bases for the lighting (referred to as pits) and a service trench into the Club House.

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. A photographic record was also produced.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

The natural geology (5) was a highly compact chalk bedrock, part of the West Melbury Chalk Formation of the Cretaceous Period.

4.1 Phase 1: Undated below subsoil features

The small pits and trenching made it difficult to determine that nature of some cuts and deposits. However, it would appear that cuts 4 and 21 truncated the natural and that deposit 12 lay above this, probably in a cut but none could be properly defined. Ditch cut 4 (Pit 1) was a linear feature over 0.5m wide and 0.4m deep. Fill (3) was a compact light brown silt clay with charcoal and ceramic building material fragments. The line of this cut and fill were ambiguous and it is possible that it was cut from somewhere in deposit (2). Cut 21 (Pits 5 and 6) is a large irregular cut of unknown dimensions, but probably about 0.74m deep. The fill (11) was a compact light yellow brown silt clay with ceramic building material and chalk inclusions. Deposit (12) was a mixed chalk deposit with iron staining (white, brown and yellow streaks), which could have been a makeup layer but was just as likely an area of disturbance of the natural. This was only seen in Pit 7. Sealing these fills and deposits was layer (2).

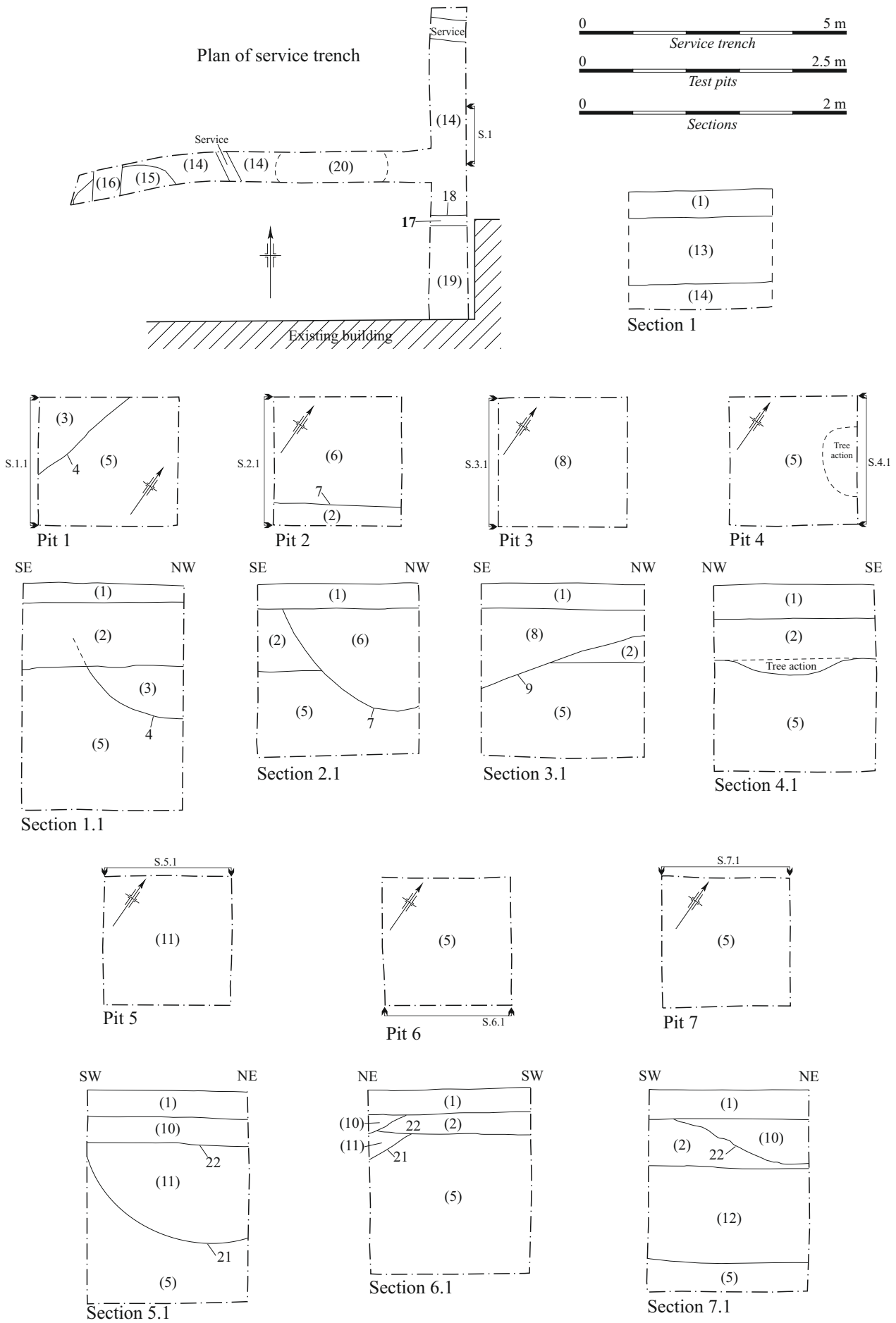


Figure 2. Plans and sections

deposits of what is termed head in the area, but none is specifically located on the site. Head is interpreted as a clay, silt, sand and gravel mix, which is a superficial deposit formed some 2 million years ago in the Quaternary. The deposits are formed by down slope movement, debris flow, solifluction and soil creep. It is possible that these deposits may be part of an undefined area of this activity.

Either lying on top of deposit (14), or lying in undefined fills cut into it, were deposits (20) and (15). The reason these remained undefined was that these deposits or features were only revealed at the interface at the base of the new service trench. Deposit (15) was a moderately compact black silt clay over 1.8m across in a roughly circular shape. Overlying deposit (15) was deposit (16) which was some chalk debris lying roughly in line with the end of the Club House, but not associated with it. Deposit (20) was a moderately compact black brown silt clay about 2m across in what was probably a roughly circular shape. It is possible that these could be pits, scoops or the end of ditches or simply just relatively shallow deposits. Sealing these deposits was layer (13).

4.2 Phase 2: Undated cut into subsoil features

Layer (2) was a compact light brown silt clay 0.4-0.45m deep. Ditch cut 7 (Pit 2) was over 1m wide and 0.74m deep with moderately steep sides and a rounded base. The fill (6) was a moderately compact black brown silt clay. Cut 9 (Pit 3) was probably a linear feature over 1m wide and over 0.6m deep with rather gently sloping sides but an unseen base. The fill (8) was a moderately compact light brown silt clay with a minimal amount of natural flint inclusions. This feature could be part of a large boundary ditch, however, it is probably more likely that it could be the remains of ridge and furrow. Cut 22 (Pits 5-7) was also a large cut but was shallow in nature being some 0.32m deep. The fill (10) was a compact white chalk deposit, a redeposited layer of chalk, a previous makeup layer. The purpose and extent of this deposit was unknown.

Within the service trench, sealing both of deposits (20) and (16) was deposit (13) a moderately compact green brown clay 0.5m deep that was probably part of a variation in the subsoil (2) near the Club House.

Sealing all the fills (2), (8) and (10) in the pits and the deposit (13) was layer (1) a moderately compact rich mid brown silt clay 0.15-0.2m deep. This was the topsoil.

4.3 Phase 3: Modern

Foundation cut 18 was for the Club House walls. Filling the foundation cut was context (17) the remains of a fragmentary brick wall not substantial enough to be recorded as a masonry structure. Sealing deposit (17) was makeup layer (19), a loose to moderately compact dark brown silt clay containing brick fragments.

5 FINDS

5.1 Building material

Though some ceramic building material was noted, all was fragmentary and un-diagnostic and so no finds were collected or retained.

6 DISCUSSION

The limited excavations at the Playing Fields on Station Road in Chinnor did identify the remains of archaeological features in the area. There were a number of ditches of two phases, and perhaps indications of ridge and furrow activity. In the vicinity of the Club House there were two features overlying or cut into yellow brash material, which were circular and about 2m in diameter. Due to the limited nature of the cuts, though one could identify the features it was difficult to date these features and recover any material from them. It is likely also that the ditches may be road side ditches or field boundaries and as such would be unlikely to accumulate much occupation debris unless they were adjacent or in close proximity to an occupation site.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

The project brief

Written scheme of investigation

The project report

The primary site record

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the County Museums' Store under accession number 2011.198.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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