

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

ARMSTRONG ROAD,

LITTLEMORE, OXFORD

SP 5372 0215

*On behalf of
John Philips Planning Consultancy
for
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust*

NOVEMBER 2006

REPORT FOR Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust
C/o John Philips Planning Consultancy
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Summary

An evaluation was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services on behalf of John Philips Planning Consultancy for the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust on land at Armstrong Road, Littlemore. No archaeological features were observed. No remains apart from land drains and the early twentieth century terracing of the hill slope for the creation of sports fields were observed. Limited artefacts of the late Iron Age to early Roman period are probably associated with agricultural practises. A prehistoric flint flake may be a casual loss.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located to the south-east of Oxford, in the parish of Littlemore. It is centred on NGR SP 5372 0215 at a height of c. 62m OD, and comprises the former sports grounds of the Littlemore Hospital. The geology comprises Beckley Sands Member overlying Coral Rag.

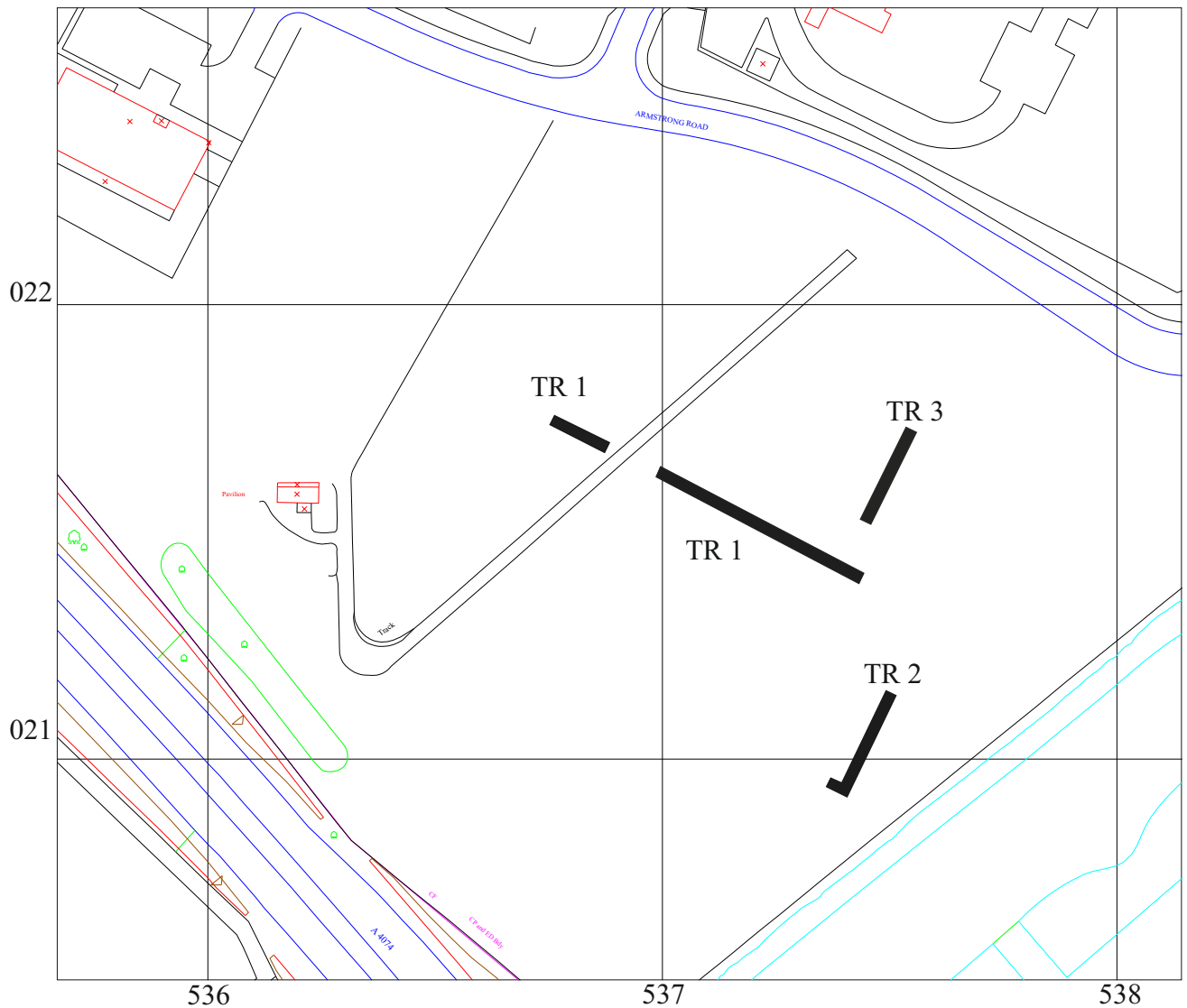
1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission has been granted for the development of the site for a health care centre. Due to the site's potential to contain archaeological remains a condition has been attached to the permission requiring an archaeological watching brief to be carried out during groundworks. The applicant decided to carry out an archaeological evaluation in order to determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains on the site. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* detailing the methodology for such was agreed with Oxford City Council's Archaeologist.

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The proposed development site lies within an area of considerable archaeological potential. To the east are located the excavations of the Saxon settlement beneath the Science Park (Moore, 2001), and the remains of the Benedictine priory at Minchery Farm (Pantin, 1970; Williams, 2006). To the north, west and east Roman remains have been observed since the nineteenth century. To this end the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) at Westgate House was consulted prior to the evaluation for entries within 500m of the proposed area. The Primary Record Number (PRN) is the SMR's reference number for each record of archaeological activity.

Residual prehistoric sherds and flint were recorded at Oxford Science Park (PRN 16299). A limited number of features as well as residual flints and pottery were recovered during the evaluation carried out at Kassam Stadium (PRN 16787). An arrowhead found during the construction of the Eastern By-Pass (PRN 3658) and finds of Romano-British pottery and coins (PRN 1435, 1436 and 1437) were also found in close vicinity to the proposed development area. In 1954 a Roman kiln was uncovered at Littlemore Hospital (PRN 8017). More recently kilns have been excavated at Ashurst Clinic on the west side of Sandford Road (PRNs 3656 and 6191).



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Figure 2. Site and trench location

The heights east and south of Oxford have since the 19th century yielded a wealth of data concerning the Roman pottery kilns located between Littlemore and Cowley. These comprise the physical remains of kilns found in 1879 east of the current site (PRN 3845) and in 1893 at Rose Hill, Iffley (PRN 3656). During the late 1950s when the Eastern By-Pass was constructed David Sturdy observed evidence for possible kilns, also (PRN 3845).

As the Blackbird Leys site was under construction at the same time, there too evidence for Roman kilns was recorded by EH Leggatt (PRN 6143). Paul Booth supervised excavations for Oxford Archaeological Unit in the 1990s at Blackbird Leys Zone 'C' which also evidenced Roman kiln activity (PRN 15954). The land overlooking the Northfield Brook has yielded much stray finds of Roman pottery (PRN 16787, 2151, 1426, 16951).

Post-Roman and medieval remains have been found in the environs of the proposed development. These include the Saxon excavations under the current Oxford Science Park (PRN 16299), (Moore, 2001) comprising a number of sunken featured buildings and associated occupation evidence. A possibly medieval farmstead was also recorded here, which concurs with a wide spread of medieval pottery from sites in the vicinity (e.g. PRN 15837, 16966, 16965). Moreover to the east was the Benedictine Priory at Minchery Farm (PRN L/1434) – the trial excavation of which has recently (Williams, 2006) disclosed a far larger complex than envisaged by Pantin (1970), to the west existed the Templar Preceptory at Temple Farm (L/1453), and to the north Corpus Christi Farmhouse (PRN 16493).

Despite this, there is little evidence for intensive medieval activity at Littlemore. It is not mentioned in Domesday, though four hides of land at Sandford, may be a reference to the relatively new settlement – in 1086 – at Littlemore. An evaluation in 1995 (Anon. 1995) and a watching brief in 1996 (Hiller, 1996) both carried out by Oxford Archaeological Unit on land in the immediate vicinity of Littlemore Hospital revealed some medieval activity, but no features.

Post-medieval archaeology includes the tollhouse (PRN L/10353) at Sandford, the lock and turnpike, also at Sandford (PRN 1233), the watermill/papermill (PRN L/2) and of course the hospital (PRN L/6749). Map evidence is limited but indicates open fields – much of the land being owned by Oxford colleges – with a nucleated settlement at Littlemore both on Davis' map of 1794 and on the 1819 Inclosure Award map.

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/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- 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.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with Oxford City Council's Archaeologist (OAAS) and the consultant, John Philips Planning Consultancy. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of three trenches across the site (Fig. 1), along the line of the foundations of the proposed development.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in a *Written Scheme of Investigation* agreed with the OAAS. 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).

3.2 Methodology

Three trenches were excavated across the site. These measured 1.6m wide and varied in length between 15m and 42m; they were excavated by a JCB with a ditching bucket. Trench 1, which was originally laid out to cut across the north/south track, was broken into two trenches, but was dealt with as a single trench.

The trenches were excavated to the top of the archaeology or the natural, whichever occurred first. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand, where necessary, prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological features.

Following a site visit by Brian Durham, Oxford City Council's Archaeologist, it was agreed to further investigate certain areas within or adjacent to two of the trenches to better understand certain sequences.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in square brackets - [] - indicate features i.e. cuts; while numbers in parentheses - () - show feature fills or deposits of material. Land drains and some features were

assigned a joint cut and fill number, which is indicated with square brackets. All measurements are given in metres. A general description of the feature fills is given. CBM refers to ceramic building material.

Trench 1 (Figure 2)

Trench 1 was an northwest/southeast oriented trench, which was originally laid out to be 42m long. It cut across the north/south track and so as not to impede access to the site the trench was excavated in two parts. A shorter length was excavated to the west of the track, measuring 8.5m long, and the rest of the trench was excavated to the east of the track, and measured 33.5m long.

The top of the trench at the west end of the western portion of Trench 1 was 62.38m OD, and 61.62m OD at the east end. The top of the trench at the west end of the eastern portion of Trench 1 was 60.64m OD, the base was at 60.19m OD. At the east end of this portion of the trench the top was at 59.35m OD, the base was at 58.75m OD. A spot height taken halfway along the base of the trench was at 59.54m OD.

The western portion of Trench 1 was investigated first. The lowest layer observed here was natural (1/04), a dark bluish grey sandy gley soil. This was at least 0.44m thick and extended beyond the edges of the trench. Overlying this was a further natural deposit (1/03) of brownish yellow clay silt sand (10:20:70), c. 0.32m thick. This was sealed by subsoil (1/02), a light greyish brown silty loam, from which came a sherd of Late Iron Age or early Roman pottery, flint and CBM, measuring 0.2m thick. At the top of the sequence was topsoil (1/01), a dark greyish brown silty loam containing c. 5% gravel, c. 0.2m thick. Throughout the sequence from (1/01) to (1/03) significant root action was observed. No features were observed in this section of the trench.

In the eastern portion of Trench 1 the lowest layer (1/07) observed was the same as (1/03) in the western portion, although some blue mottling was recorded coming through from the underlying sandy gley soil. This deposit measured 0.4m thick and was observed throughout the trench. Overlying this was a buried subsoil (1/14), a friable pale grey silty sand, c. 0.15m thick. This deposit was only patchily represented in the middle and eastern end of the trench, where it was heavily truncated in places straight down to (1/07). In places this deposit was overlain by a buried topsoil (1/15), which was even more poorly evidenced. This was a friable mid brown loamy sand with occasional gravel through it, measuring c. 0.1m thick. The buried topsoil (1/15) was sealed by a dump of redeposited natural (1/16). This was a very mixed deposit comprising dirty brownish yellow clay silt sand (c.f. (1/03)), mixed with the blue gley soil and brown topsoil. It was up to 0.4m thick, towards the eastern end of the trench, although thinner to the west.

Cut into the deposit (1/16) were a number of modern features, associated with the terracing of the hill slope for the sports grounds. Many of these were machined off and only a paper record was created, following the identification of the buried cultivation (1/15) and subsoil (1/14) layers beneath (1/16). At the west end of the trench, in the southwest corner was a manhole (1/13), measuring 0.7m by 0.7m.

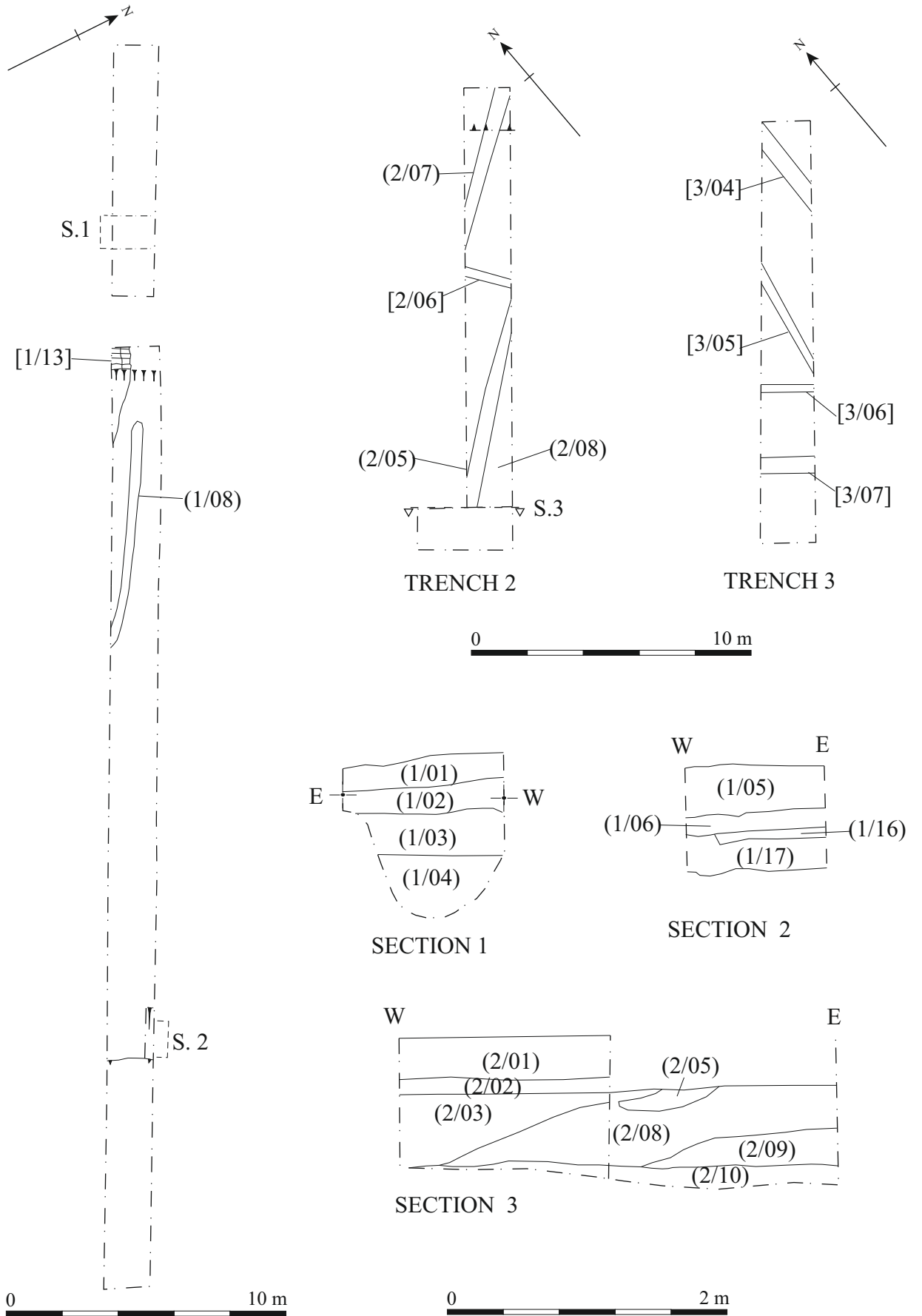


Figure 2. Trenches and sections

Located 1.5m to the east of this an east/west-aligned linear feature [1/08], 8.5m long extending from the northern edge of the trench was observed. It was c. 0.7m wide and c. 0.2m deep filled with dark greyish brown silty loam (1/09), containing small stones and c. 2% gravel. East of this feature by 2.75m, though removed during machining to the level of the buried topsoil (1/15), was a small oval pit (1/10), measuring 3.5m long and 0.5m wide. This was filled dark greyish brown silty loam containing a sherd of late 19th – 20th century pottery..

At the east end of the trench were two parallel linear features [1/11] and [1/12], measuring 3.5m and 2.2m, respectively, and c. 0.2m wide. These were also backfilled with dark greyish brown silty loam. These modern features were not drains. It was not clear what their purpose was. They may well be wheel ruts or similar related to the terracing of the sports grounds. Sealing these was the subsoil (1/06), which was the same as (1/02) and the topsoil (1/05), which was the same as (1/01).

Trench 2 (Figure 2)

Trench 2 was a northeast/southwest oriented trench measuring 16.5m long and 1.6m wide to the south of Trench 1. A box extending 1.5m west was subsequently machined out in order to gain a better view of the terracing. The top of the trench at the north end was 58.83m OD, the base was 58.54m OD. The top at the south end of the trench was 58.42m OD, the base was 57.47m OD.

The lowest deposit encountered was the bluish grey gley soil (2/10), seen also in Trench 1 as (1/04), which measured more than 3m east/west and 0.15m thick. This deposit was observed in the extension to the trench machined at the southwest end. It was overlain by the yellow sand (2/09) – also recorded as (2/04) – which was seen in Trench 1 as (1/03), which measured more than 1.5m east/west and 0.35m thick. The yellow sand was truncated to the west, and overlain by a deposit (2/08) of natural yellow sand mixed with the bluish grey gley soil and topsoil. A linear pocket of bluish grey sandy clay (2/05) extended north/south, measuring more than 7m long, c. 0.2m deep and c. 0.5m wide. This in turn was overlain by a deposit of very clean redeposited natural (2/03), which was 0.45m thick and extended more than 2m east/west.

Cutting the levelling layer of redeposited sand (2/03) was an east/west land drain (2/06), measuring more than 1.6m long, and 0.4m wide. North of this feature was a further north/south drain (2/07), which measured 0.5m wide and more than 5m long. All the features were sealed by the subsoil (2/02) and the topsoil (2/01), both of which were recorded across the site.

Trench 3 (Figure 2)

Trench 3 was a northeast/southwest oriented trench measuring 15m long and 1.6m wide to the north of Trench 1. The top of the trench at the north end was 59.91m OD, the base was 59.59m OD; at the south end the top was 59.86m OD and the base 59.55m OD.

The lowest deposit encountered was natural sand (3/03), a pale yellowish brown slightly clay sand (20:80). Cut into this were a number of land drains. From south to north these were an east/west French drain [3/07], filled with clinker, and measuring more than 1.6m long and 0.5m wide. North of this drain was an east/west ceramic main land-drain [3/06], measuring at least 1.6m and 0.4m wide.

A feeder pipe [3/05] lay to the north and was oriented northwest/southeast; it measured c. 3.5m long and 0.4m wide. At the north end of the trench was a northwest/southeast drain [3/04], which measured 1.6m, as seen, and 0.8m wide. Late 19th-century and early twentieth century pottery was recovered from the drain. It was filled with mid brown sandy loam and clinker.

Overlying the features was dark grey brown sandy loam subsoil (3/02), sealed by topsoil (3/01).

5 FINDS

5.1 The Late Iron Age Pottery by Frances Raymond

A single moderately abraded wall fragment of late Iron Age to early Roman pottery (weighing five grams) came from context 1/02. Although the sherd is featureless, the fabric is a typical black to dark grey grog tempered ware with 'Belgic' affinities, containing common amounts of grog (up to 3.0mm.) and fine rounded quartz sand (0.125 to 0.25 mm.). This falls into the OAU general fabric category E80, which Booth has suggested may have appeared in the Upper Thames region shortly before the Roman Conquest, notionally around AD 20/30 and continued in use until the later part of the first century AD (Booth 1996).

5.2 Other finds

A single sherd of mortaria was recovered from context (1/02) along with an undiagnostic flint flake, part of a brick and a sherd of WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenware (19th-20th century). Further brick fragments were found in context (1/03), while sherds of WHEW came from pit fill (1/10) and context (3/04). The last included part of a plate with a transfer print reading 'County Asylum Littlemore'.

6 DISCUSSION

Although the western part of Trench 1 evidenced a sherd of residual Late Iron Age or early Roman pottery, a flint flake, and a mortarium sherd in the subsoil, no features pre-dating the laying out of the sports field were revealed there, or anywhere else on site. The Late Iron Age/ early Roman pottery may result from manuring practises associated with agricultural use of the area. The flint flake may be a casual loss.

Terracing was particularly well evidenced at the east end of Trench 1 and in Trench 2. In both these trenches it was clear that the underlying yellow Beckley Sand Member was truncated with subsequent levelling and redeposition of the sand, frequently mixed with the underlying bluish grey gley soil and topsoil. This mixed material was often thicker down slope; however, it is clear that in cases the Beckley Sand Member has been slightly overcut – as was observed in Trench 2.

All the potential features recorded on site post-dated the creation of the terraces for the sports grounds. Despite the residual finds no archaeological remains of significance were recorded.

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APPENDIX 1 – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

| Context | Type | Description | Depth (m) | Width (m) | Length (m) | Findings | Date |
|-----------------|----------|--|-----------|-----------|------------|----------|--|
| Trench 1 | | | | | | | |
| 1/01 | Layer | Top Soil | 0.20m | >1.6m. | >8.5m | - | Modern |
| 1/02 | Layer | Sub Soil | 0.20m | >1.6m | >8.5m | - | Modern |
| 1/03 | Layer | Medium brownish yellow silty sandy clay | 0.32m | >1.6m | >8.5m | - | Natural |
| 1/04 | Layer | Dark Blueish Grey silty sandy clay | >0.44m | >1.6m | >8.5m | - | Natural |
| 1/05 | Layer | Topsoil (same as 1/01) | 0.35m | >1.6m | >33.5m | - | Modern |
| 1/06 | Layer | Subsoil (same as 1/02) | 0.18m | >1.6m | >33.5m | Pottery | Modern |
| 1/07 | Layer | Natural (same as 1/03) | 0.4m | >1.6m | >33.5m | | Natural |
| 1/08 | Cut | Linear | 0.1m | 0.7m | >8.5m | - | Modern; machined away in second stage of machining |
| 1/09 | Fill | Dark greyish brown silty loam | 0.1m | 1.7 | >8.3m | - | Fill of modern linear feature machined away |
| 1/10 | Fill/cut | Dark greyish brown silty clay; E/W linear; not excavated | unknown | 0.5m | 3.5m | pottery | Fill and cut of late linear feature machined away in second stage of machining |
| 1/11 | Fill/cut | Dark greyish brown silty clay; E/W linear; not excavated | unknown | 0.2m | 3.5m | - | Fill and cut of late linear feature machined away in second stage of machining |
| 1/12 | Fill/cut | Dark greyish brown silty sand; E/W linear; not excavated | unknown | 0.18m | 2.2m | - | Modern feature |
| 1/13 | Manhole | Brick and concrete slab | unknown | 0.12m | 0.22m | - | Modern feature |
| 1/14 | Layer | Pale grey silty sand | c. 0.15m | | | - | Buried subsoil ; observed in places through out trench |

| Context | Type | Description | Depth (m) | Width (m) | Length (m) | Finds | Date |
|-----------------|------------|--|-------------|-----------|------------|-------|---|
| 1/15 | Layer | Mid brown loamy sand | 0.1m | | | - | Buried cultivation soil |
| 1/16 | Layer | Dirty brownish yellow clay silt sand (10:20:70) with bluish gley and topsoil | 0.4m (max.) | >1.6m | >33.5m | - | Mixed material used for terracing works associated with sports ground |
| Trench 2 | | | | | | | |
| 2/01 | Layer | Topsoil | 0.2 | >1.6m | >16.5m | - | Modern |
| 2/02 | Layer | Subsoil Dark brown, sandy clay loam | unknown | >1.6m | >16.5m | - | Modern |
| 2/03 | Layer | Redeposited natural, mixed sandy clay; bluish grey gley | 0.55m | >1.6m | >16.5 | - | Modern |
| 2/04 | Layer | Pale yellow grey clay sand | unknown | >1.6m | >16.5m | - | Natural |
| 2/05 | Layer | Redeposited natural; bluish grey gley | c. 0.5m | >3.1 | >16.5m ? | - | Modern |
| 2/06 | Land drain | | unknown | 0.4m | >1.6m | - | Modern |
| 2/07 | Drain | Linear cut, NE/SW; mid brown sandy clay | unknown | 0.5m | >1.6m | - | Modern |
| 2/08 | Layer | Compact dirty brownish yellow silty sand, bluish gley and topsoil | 0.5m | >3.1m | >16.5m | - | Modern |
| 2/09 | Layer | Yellowish brown sand | unknown | >3.1m | >16.5m | - | Natural |
| 2/10 | Layer | Bluish grey gley | unknown | >3.1m | >16.5m | - | Natural |
| Trench 3 | | | | | | | |
| 3/01 | Layer | Top Soil | 0.1m | >1.6m | >15m | - | Modern |
| 3/02 | Layer | Sub Soil; dark grey brown sandy loam | 0.20 | >1.6m | >15m | - | Modern |
| 3/03 | Layer | Pale yellow/brown clay sand | unknown | >1.6m | >15m | - | Natural |

| Context | Type | Description | Depth (m) | Width (m) | Length (m) | Findings | Date |
|----------------|-------------|---|------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 3/04 | Land drain | Linear, not excavated; mid brown sandy loam & clinker | unknown | 0.8m | >1.6m | Pottery | Modern land drain |
| 3/05 | Land drain | Linear cut, filled with ceramic land drain | unknown | 0.4m | >3.5m | - | Modern land drain |
| 3/06 | Land drain | Linear cut filled with ceramic land drain | unknown | 0.4m | >1.6m | - | Modern land drain |
| 3/07 | Land drain | Linear cut filled with ash and clinker | unknown | 0.5m | >1.6m | - | Modern land drain |