



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
AT
CLOSES FIELD, BECKLEY, OXFORDSHIRE

SP 5650 1275

On behalf of

The Royal Society for the Protection of birds

SEPTEMBER 2006

REPORT FOR The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
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Summary

An evaluation of this site was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services. Boundary ditches formerly dividing the present single field were found. The only evidence associated with the known Roman activity to the west was a single piece of Roman tile and four sherds of pottery found in ploughsoil in the west end of the field. The Roman activity did not extend into this field.

The multi-division of this field shown on the edition OS map is based on an 11m wide unit (perhaps a double strip) apparently laid out in the late or century.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located to the north of Beckley on the southern edge of Ot Moor, in a field known as Closes Field immediately to the north of Lower Farm and to the northeast of Noke Wood (NGR SP 5650 1275). The field is c. 700m long by 380m wide and is currently under cereal crop. Only an area of 2.67ha was to be disturbed. The geology is Alluvium overlying Kimmeridge Clay and the flat site lies at approximately 58m OD.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission was being sought from South Oxfordshire District Council to create further scrapes and water features as part of the ongoing nature reserve. The RSPB commissioned an archaeological field evaluation prior to consideration of the application. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) issued a Brief for the work.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The proposal site lay within an area of considerable archaeological potential although fieldwalking had failed to locate any areas of possible potential.

The field immediately to the west had been subject to a field evaluation, which located, firstly through fieldwalking and then trenching, a number of possible Roman pottery kiln sites. An area of high potential for another kiln site was recorded in the northwest corner of that field, immediately adjacent to Closes Field. Evaluation failed to locate any features associated with the large spread of pottery recovered from the topsoil and therefore it was considered possible that this could be located in Closes Field. A single gully was found in the northeast corner of the field containing century pottery, which was observed in four trenches running roughly north/south. Evaluation in the south of the field revealed virtually no archaeological finds or features. The archaeology found in the adjacent field appears to be confined to a band that heads towards the area of proposed scrapes.

In addition two Bronze Age axe heads had been found from the middle area of Ashgrove Field (SMR 16782 & 16279). It is again considered possible that features or deposits relating to prehistoric activity may have been present.

To the west of the site, although outside of the proposed development area, is a rectangular moated site, believed to be of medieval date (SMR 14078). There was a slight possibility that features relating to this could have been present within Closes Field.

Given the topography and geology of the area it was considered possible that significant deposits of organic/palaeo-environmental remains may have been present within any features encountered.

The Roman road running to Alchester from Barton and beyond to the south passes just to the east of the evaluation site.

Most of the above information has been obtained from the OCAS' *Brief*.

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.
- In particular to determine whether any Roman activity associated with the known remains to the west extend this far east.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a *Brief* issued by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services a scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of a total of 35 trenches across the site (Fig. 1).

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

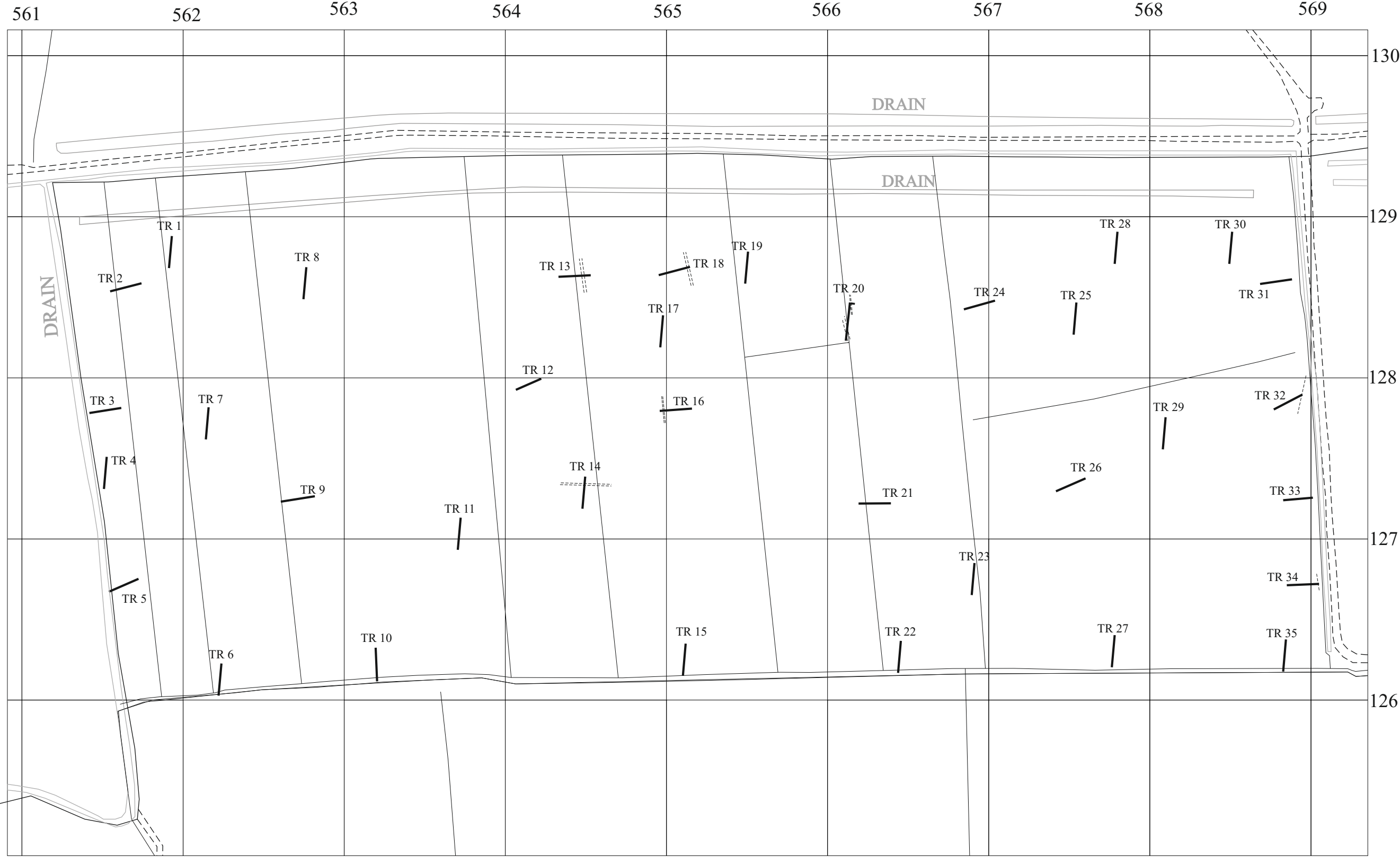


Figure 1. Site and trench location

0 m 100 m

3.2 Methodology

The sample level was achieved by the excavation of 35 trenches each 20m long and 1.6m wide (Fig. 1). The trenches were excavated by a JCB fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand, where necessary, prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological features.

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. The trenches were backfilled after recording.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material. The trench number precedes the individual context number so (1/03) is deposit 03 within Trench 1. 'Tr.' is used as an abbreviation for 'Trench' hereafter.

In all trenches Kimmeridge Clay was exposed across the base of the trenches. The clay was mainly a very compact, light to mid orange brown clay with greyish blue mottling throughout. Along the extreme southern boundary of the field the clay was heavier and was pale yellow and pale grey in colour (e.g. 35/02). In places ploughing had ripped out lumps of the clay, which had then filled with the overlying ploughsoil. In other area the top of the natural had been disturbed by roots but to no real depth.

Along the east side of the site remnants of alluvial deposits were present. Within Tr. 34 was a 130mm thick deposit of compact mid grey-blue-brown clay (34/03) overlying the Kimmeridge Clay. This extended into Tr. 33 (33/03- 150mm thick), and Tr 32 (32/02, 100mm) where it was only found in the eastern 5m of the trench. Overlying this alluvial deposit was a further deposit of alluvium in Tr. 34. This was a mid orange-yellow-brown clay c. 150mm thick (34/02) at the east end of the trench, petering out to almost nothing at the west end. The same deposit was found in the extreme 1.2m of Tr. 33 (33/02) where it was up to 200mm thick.

Along the eastern side of the field ploughsoil overlaid the alluvium. Here it was a medium brown-grey, mottled medium orange, clayey loam containing some small stone (e.g. 34/01). Elsewhere the Kimmeridge Clay was directly overlaid by a ploughsoil comprising dark brown-grey clay loam (e.g. 35/01). The ploughsoil varied in thickness from 200-320mm.

Several ditches were found across the site. In the extreme east of the site and found in the extreme east ends of Trenches 34 and 32 was a ditch (Fig. 2). This is presumably a precursor to the present ditch along this side of the field, which is straight replacing an apparently more meandering feature. The edge of the ditch [32/05 & 34/07] was at an angle of c. and where excavated at up to 900mm deep. Within [34/07] the lower fill was a medium-dark grey, mottled orange, clay with some small stone (34/06), which was overlaid by medium brown-grey, mottled orange, clay again with some small stone. Within [32/05] the single fill was a dark grey-brown silty clay with

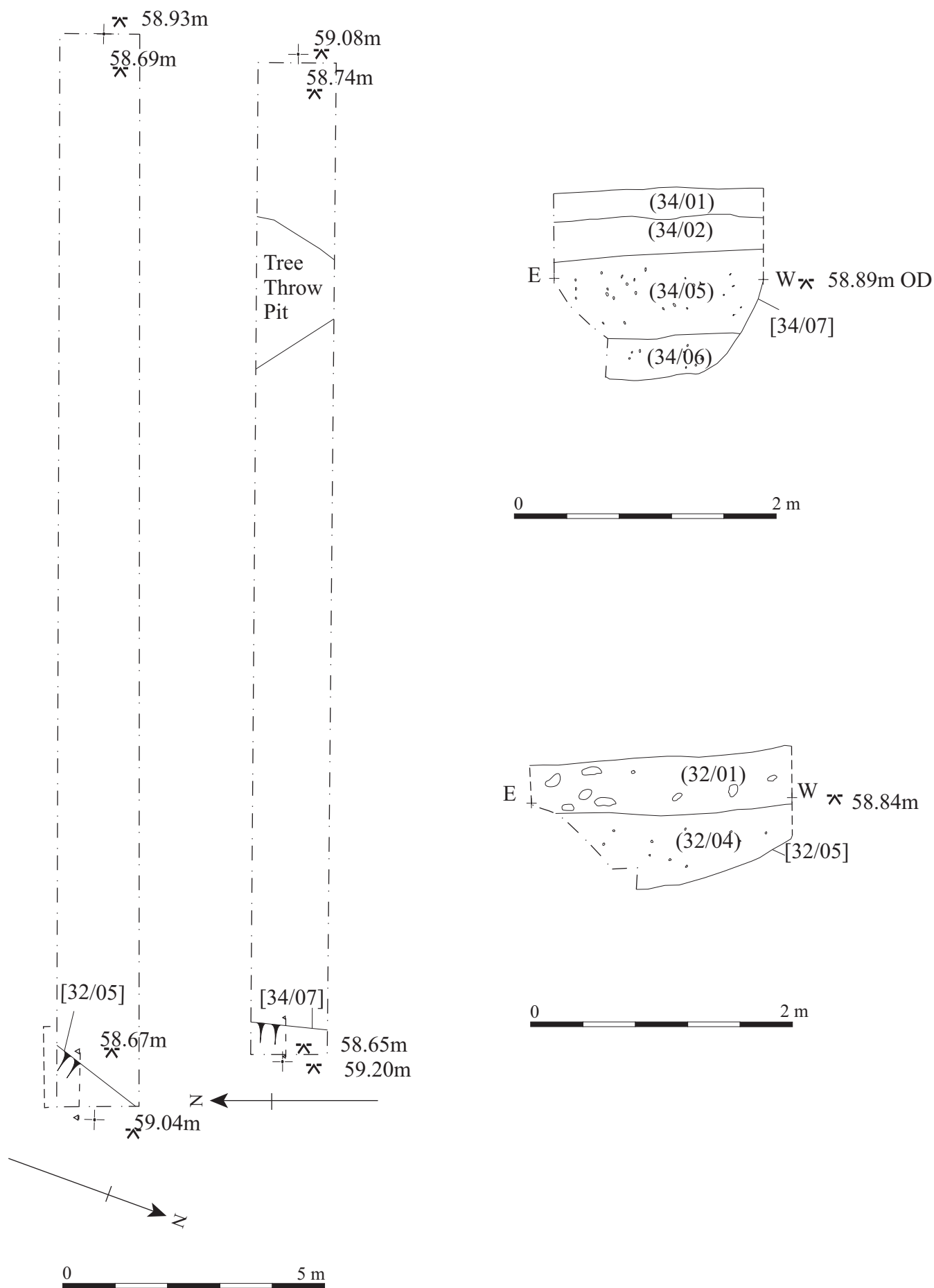


Figure 2. Trenches 32 & 34. Plans and sections

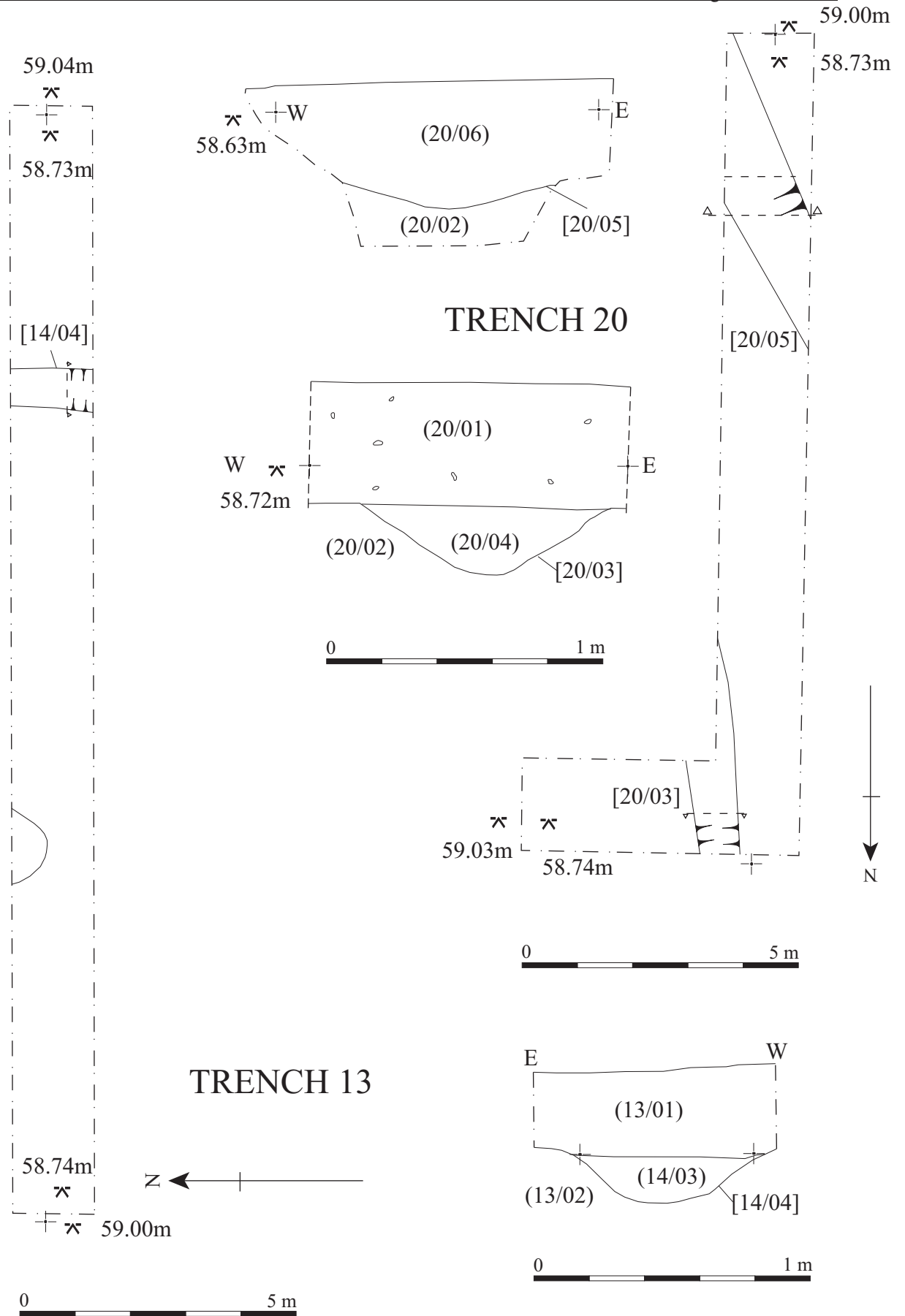


Figure 3. Trenches 18 & 20 Plans and sections

small stone (32/04). A very small fragment of brick or tile was recovered from the last fill.

In the centre of the field several ditches were discovered. All these ditches were cut into the Kimmeridge Clay and were sealed by the modern ploughsoil. Trench 20 contained two near-parallel ditches orientated NNW-SSE (Fig. 3). The eastern one [20/03] was U-shaped with sides at 30° and a depth of 260mm. It was 1.02m wide and filled with mid grey-blue, mottled light-mid orange, silty clay with some small stone. A small abraded piece of post-medieval tile was recovered from the fill. The western ditch [20/05] had a rounded base with sides of *c.* from the horizontal. It was 450mm deep and *c.* 1.3m wide and filled by mid orange, mottled grey-blue, clay (20/06).

Further west, Trench 18 (Fig. 4) contained a single ditch [18/03]. This ditch was very shallow at 250mm deep and was irregular in profile, possibly recut. It was 1m wide overall and filled by light greyish-blue, mottled medium-dark orange, silty clay (18/04). To the south within Trench 16 (Fig. 4) was a similar ditch [16/04]. This was more regular in profile with a rounded base, sides at (W) and (E). At 800mm wide and 310mm deep it was filled with a similar material (16/03) to that in the previous ditch. Seven metres to the east of the ditch in Trench 16 was a possible 2.5m wide furrow orientated N/S. No artefacts were recovered from these two features.

Trench 13 contained another N/S orientated ditch (Fig. 3). This ditch [14/04] was U-shaped, 700mm wide and 250mm deep. It was filled with dark grey-blue, mottled mid orange, silty clay similar to the fills of the ditches in Trenches 16 & 18. Again no artefacts were recovered from the excavated fill.

A further possible 3.7m wide furrow was visible in Trench 9, again orientated N/S. Tree throw pits were apparent in Trenches 11, 12, 13, 21, 22 and 34. The roots of the one in Tr. 22 had been burnt out. The broken nature of the top of the Kimmeridge Clay in other trenches suggested the former presence of trees or large shrubs although no clear features could be distinguished.

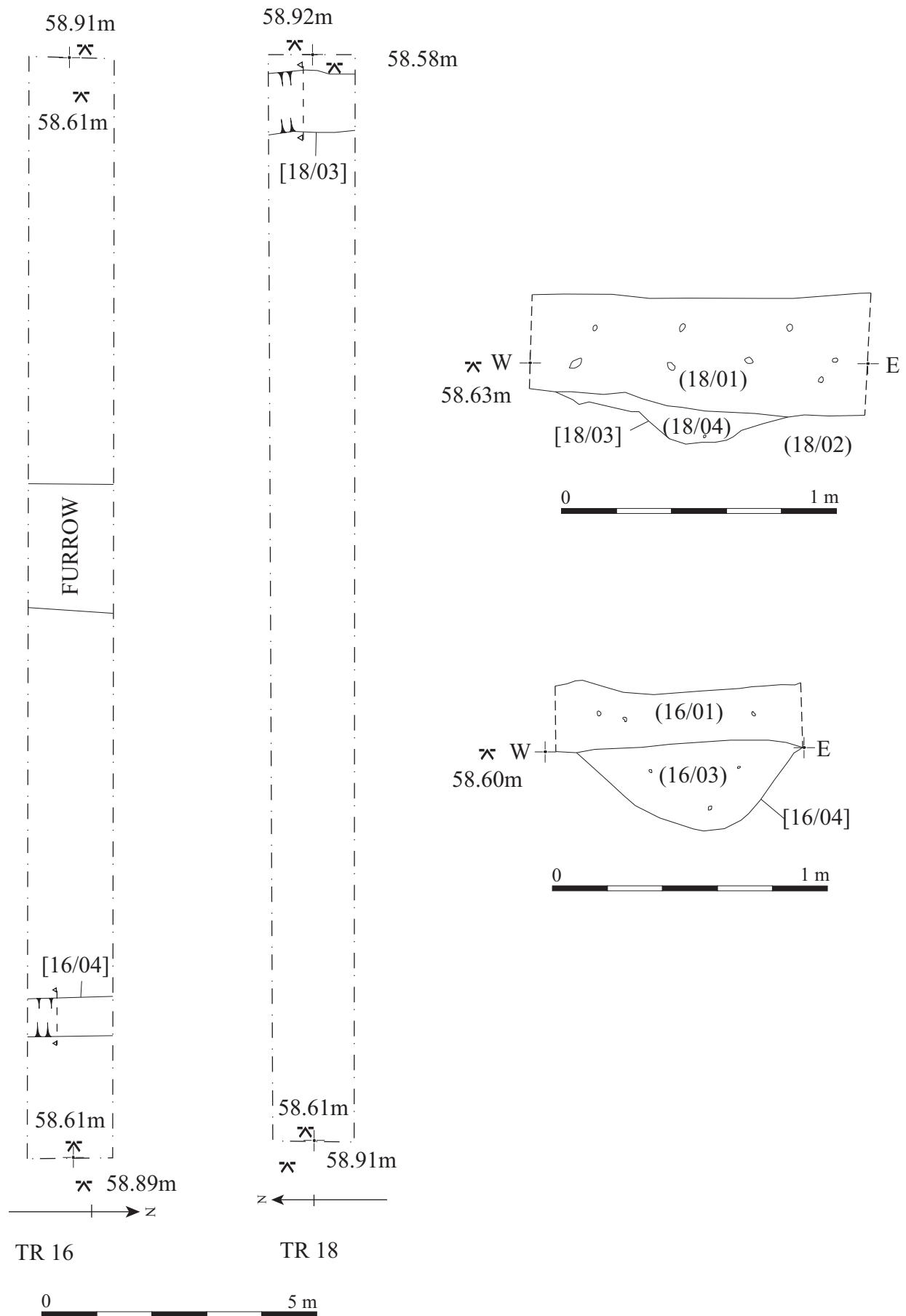


Figure 4. Trenches 16 & 18 Plans and sections 8

5 FINDS

5.1 The Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 12 sherds with a total weight of 110g. All the post-Roman pottery was late- or post-medieval, with the bulk of the assemblage dating to the – centuries.

The pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1989; 1994), as follows:

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 3 sherds, 17g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 4 sherds, 64g.

WHEW: Miscellaneous mass-produced white earthenwares. 1 sherd, 1g.

The range of pottery types is typical of sites of the period in the region. In addition, four sherds (28g) of abraded Romano-British pottery, all from the same vessel, were also noted.

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*.

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

Tr	Cntxt	RB		OXAM		OXDR		WHEW		Date
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
6	1			2	13	1	10			M16thC
7	1	4	28							RB??
21	1					1	30			M16thC
22	1					1	13	1	1	19thC
26	1			1	4					15thC
34	1					1	11			M16thC
	Total	4	28	3	17	4	64	1	1	

5.2 Other finds

One fragment of Roman roof tile was recovered from the ploughsoil within Trench 2.

Post-medieval tile was recovered from the ploughsoils in Trenches 7, 23, and 29. Other fragments of ceramic building material were seen in the ploughsoil of other trenches but were not retained. Small pieces of post-medieval brick and tile were found within ditch fills (20/04) [ditch 20/05] and fill (32/04) [ditch 32/07].

The only fragment of animal bone seen came from the ploughsoil in Trench 21.

6 DISCUSSION

The finding of the Roman pottery in Trench 7 and the piece of tile in Trench 2 is of no surprise given the findings in the field to the west. However the lack of features and scarce number of finds shows that the activity did not extend into this area.

The ditches found are considered to be associated with former divisions within this field. The first edition Ordnance Survey (1884-86) map shows several divisions (superimposed on the present OS mapping – Fig. 1). The divisions appear to be based on an 11m wide unit – perhaps a double furrow. One is a double unit, while the others going east to west are 3x, 5x, 12x, 6x, 9x, 6x, 6x, and 19x units. These divisions are represented in the archaeological record by the two ditches in Trench 20 (presumably a re-laid boundary), and those in Trenches 16 and 18. Some of the N/S fields have been sub-divided as shown on the first edition OS as seen in Trench 14.

The majority of the pottery that presumably derives from manuring dates to after the mid 19th century. Only one sherd could be earlier dating from after the beginning of the 19th century but possibly deriving from the 18th century. Therefore there is no evidence for manuring or other activity in the medieval period. This is surprising given the moated ditch in the field to the west, which is considered to be of medieval date. It is therefore possible that the feature is of later date.

7 CONCLUSIONS

There is little of significance within the field. The lack of Roman features and the scarce number of artefacts of this date is important in giving negative results; with the Roman activity confined to the field to the west.

The earlier arrangement of fields shown on the first edition OS map appears to be based on a strip system that probably started in the late 18th or 19th century.

Whilst any decision regarding further work on the site must rest with Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services, it is the opinion of John Moore Heritage Services that no further archaeological work needs to be conducted regarding the development of the site.

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