

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

51 WATLING LANE,

DORCHESTER-ON-THAMES, OXFORDSHIRE

SU 57677 94106

On behalf of

Mr. R. Anderson

MARCH 2006

-

REPORT FOR

Mr R Anderson
51 Watling Lane
Dorchester-on-Thames
Oxfordshire
OX10 7JH

PREPARED BY

John Moore

FIELDWORK

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ENQUIRES TO

John Moore Heritage Services
Hill View
Woodperry Road
Beckley
Oxfordshire
OX3 9UZ

Telephone/Fax: 01865 358300

Email: info@jmheritageservices.co.uk

Site Code;

DOWL 06

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CONTENTS

	Page
<i>SUMMARY</i>	1
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Site Location	
1.2 Planning Background	
1.3 Archaeological Background	
2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION	1
3 STRATEGY	3
3.1 Research Design	
3.2 Methodology	
4 RESULTS	3
5 FINDS	5
5.1 Pottery	
6 DISCUSSION	5
7 BIBLIOGRAPHY	6
 FIGURES	
Figure 1 Site Location	2
Figure 2 Site Plan and Section	4

Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during the excavation of foundations for a new studio. Deposits relating to the rampart of the Roman walled town were encountered. These had been cut into by post-medieval pits.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site lies approximately 50m east of Watling Lane and the development was within the garden of No. 51 Watling Lane (NGR SU 57677 94106). The property is accessed from a track leading off Watling Lane to the south. To the east and south is an extensive area of allotments. The geology is Thames River Terrace Gravels.

1.2 Planning Background

South Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission to construct a detached gym studio to the north of the house. The building has a footprint of about 20 square metres, and new services were installed. Due to the archaeological sensitivity of the area, a condition was attached to the planning consent that required the implementation of an archaeological watching brief during the course of groundworks in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains of significance.

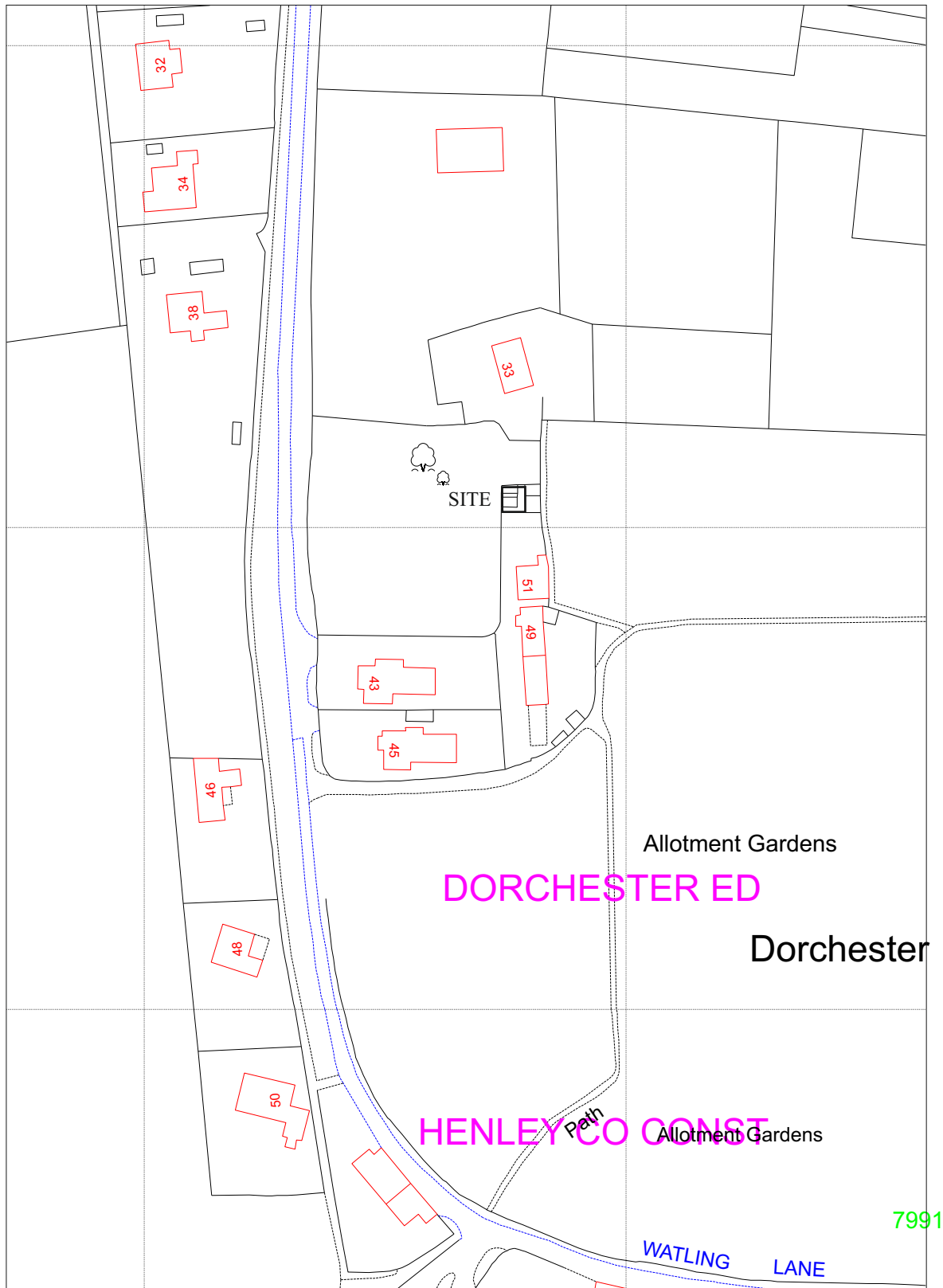
1.3 Archaeological Background

Dorchester-on-Thames is situated within the site of a small Roman town, which consisted of roughly rectangular defences enclosing a civil settlement of about 13.5ha. It is generally thought to have been established in the Flavian period and the unusual increase in late Roman (Theodosian) coinage implies a thriving occupation throughout the 4th century and possibly into the 5th century. Parts of the Roman town are a scheduled ancient monument (Ancient Monument Oxon 116), including areas immediately to the east and west of the development site.

The present Watling Lane runs to the west of, and approximately parallel with, the outer ditch of the Roman town defences. The existing access track runs across the line of the infilled outer and inner ditches, and across the line of the destroyed town wall and rampart behind it. The development work took place over the line of the destroyed rampart as defined by Hogg and Stevens (1937) in their 1935-6 excavations carried out around the environs of the current proposal area. Hogg and Stevens interpreted a light gravelly/clay layer as the vestiges of the destroyed bank material.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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



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Figure 2. Site Location

Scale 1:1250 at A4

- 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 evidence relating to the Roman defences and the slighting of the rampart
- The results of the investigations will be made public.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) issued a Brief for the work, which John Moore Heritage Services carried out to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with OCAS, on behalf of the local planning authority. 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.

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

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist monitored the excavation of the trenches for the new foundations. Excavation for connections to services was not deep enough to reveal significant deposits.

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.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2 & 3)

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

The lowest material reached was a compact dull orange-brown sand with 10% grey-brown silt and 30% very fine gravel (06). This was redeposited River Terrace Gravels. It extended 3.70m into the footprint of the new build from the east side. Overlying this in the east part of the excavation was a deposit of firm slightly orange-brown very slightly sandy, slightly clayey silt (13) up to 280mm thick. This is probably the same as the lower part of deposit (03) but here deposit (13) was damper as it was further from a tree. Overlying (13) was a lens of coarse yellow sand with 10-15% fine and small gravel (12). This only extended 450mm into the trench from the east side and was up to 200mm thick. Above the last was a pale brown, orange-brown (30:70) slightly clayey, slightly sandy silt some 260mm thick (05). Again this may be equivalent to the upper part of deposit (03). Deposit (03) was much dryer

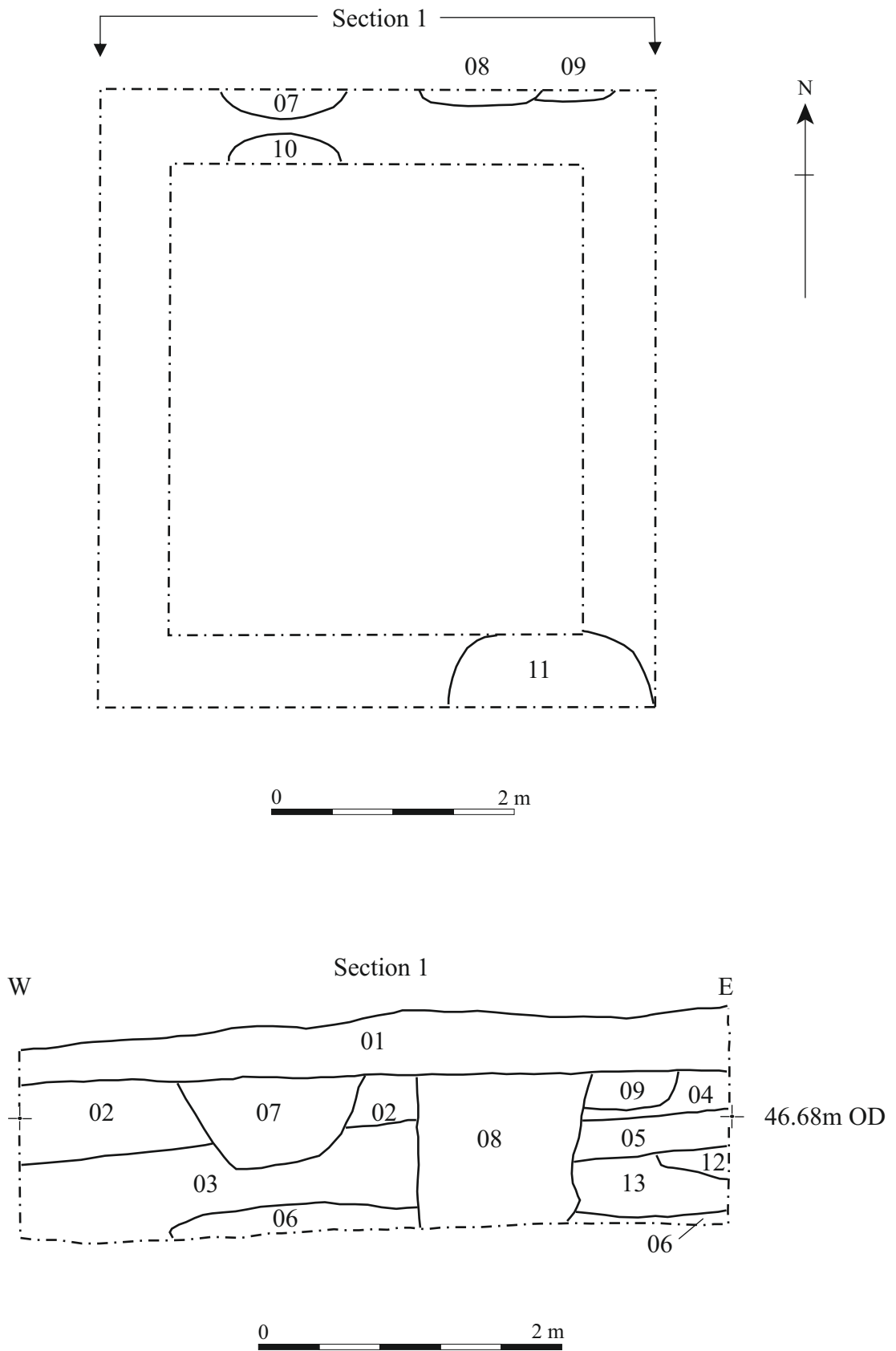


Figure 2. Site Plan and Section

than other deposits due to the proximity of a tree. This deposit appeared as a pale brown, pale orange-brown (40:60) very sandy silt with 2% small gravel. The top of this deposit merged with the overlying material (02). Deposit (03) contained occasional lumps of limestone of average size 150x150x100mm although one piece in section measured at least 200x200mm. The limestone only appeared in the western limits of the excavation area and towards the base of the excavation. Overlying the last deposit was a pale grey-brown and orange-brown (60:40) slightly sandy silt with 1% fine gravel (02). This was 380-400mm. To the east of pits [08] and [09] and at the equivalent level was a deposit of pale brown, slightly orange, slightly sandy and slightly clayey silt (04). This was up to 300mm thick. The difference in composition of this material with its clay content suggest that this deposit overlay (05) and the upper part of (03) and lay under (02) but the relationships with (02) and (03) were obscured by pits.

Cut into deposits (02) and (04) were a number of pits. Pit [09] was at least 620mm in diameter and 250mm deep with sides of 70° from the horizontal and a flat base. It was filled with topsoil material that contained small pieces of roof tile and late 19th-20th century finds. This pit was cut by a large pit [08], which was 1100mm in diameter and at least 1040mm deep. This pit had near vertical sides. It was filled mainly with ash and 19th-20th century broken bottles sealed by old topsoil. Pit [07] was sub-circular c. 1200mm in diameter and 600mm deep with sides at 50-55° and a sloping base. Again it was filled by ash and old topsoil with some 19th-20th century rubbish. Pit [10] again appeared sub-circular 900mm in diameter and at least 1000mm deep with sides at 80°. Again the fill was ash, topsoil and a lot of 19th-20th century rubbish in the form of shoes, bottles and ceramics. Pit [11] again appeared sub-circular, 1600mm in diameter and 1000mm deep. Its' east side was near vertical while the west side was at 45° and it had a slightly rounded base. The fill was a pale grey-brown slightly mottled orange-brown slightly clayey silt with 1% small gravel.

Sealing the sequence of deposits was the topsoil (01), which comprised dark grey-brown sandy silt with 5% small gravel. This was 360-460mm thick.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery

A sherd of Roman grey ware from a bowl and a colour-coat bowl sherd were recovered from deposit (03). Deposit (02) contained three sherds of late post-medieval pottery and a piece of roof tile.

Late 19th-20th century finds from the pits described above were not retained.

6 DISCUSSION

The layer of gravel (06) may be the same layer as seen by Hogg and Stevens (1937) with it lying at approximately the same depth below modern ground level. Whether the gravel was lying on top of 'natural loam' is not known (ibid, Section C). If this is the same layer then the deeper depth of deposit (03) to the west of the gravel may be within the trench for the defensive wall. This deeper part of the deposit lies close to

the present edge of the earthwork ditch. The limestone seen may relate to robbing of the wall. The lack of depth of the trench for the new foundations prevented clarification of this. Layers (02, 04, 05, 12, and 13) must all relate to the rampart.

The pits must relate to the early use of the buildings in this area.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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