



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

ON

**LAND AT OXFORD DOWNS CRICKET CLUB,
ABINGDON ROAD, STANDLAKE**

SP 3881 0326

On behalf of

Cranbourne Homes

AUGUST 2006

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Summary

Following an evaluation of the site an archaeological watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during selected groundworks associated with the development. Excavation of parts of the two roads and a house plot and garage plot towards the north of the site were examined.

Features were recorded across the site with a concentration on the north edge of the site. No dateable artefacts were forthcoming from the features and without dating of features it is very difficult to discuss what has been found. However, two different alignments were present and it is argued that along with medieval and/or post-medieval plots associated with Abingdon Road, earlier activity is also present on two different alignments.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located on the north east side of the A415 Abingdon Road north of the junction with Croft Lane (NGR SP 3881 0326). The 0.46ha site was previously part of a cricket ground. The underlying geology is First Terrace Gravel and the site lies at approximately 66m OD.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission was granted to construct eleven dwellings with access on part of Oxford Downs Cricket Ground (03/1871/P/OP & 05/0985/P/RM). Due to the potential for remains of archaeological significance to be present on the site a condition was attached requiring that a watching brief was undertaken. However, the applicant agreed that an archaeological field evaluation would be a more appropriate method to determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains. The evaluation found limited archaeological features (JMHS 2006). As these were undated it was agreed with the applicant that a limited watching brief should be carried out during groundworks associated with the development.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The Davis map of 1797 shows the areas fronting onto Abingdon Road as being divided into a series of separate property holdings. Nearby archaeological investigation has revealed that these properties and their boundaries date to the medieval period and contain structures and evidence of domestic and light industrial activities. Directly to the south is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 140). This is a cropmark site containing enclosures, roads, hut circles and pits. Its full extent northwards is unclear and may be masked by later overburden on either side of Abingdon Road. It was considered that associated features therefore may extend into this development site.

Bronze Age remains have recently been found at 94 Abingdon Road.

The evaluation of the site in February 2006 (*ibid*) found five undated ditches along with two possible small pits. A very small quantity of medieval pottery was

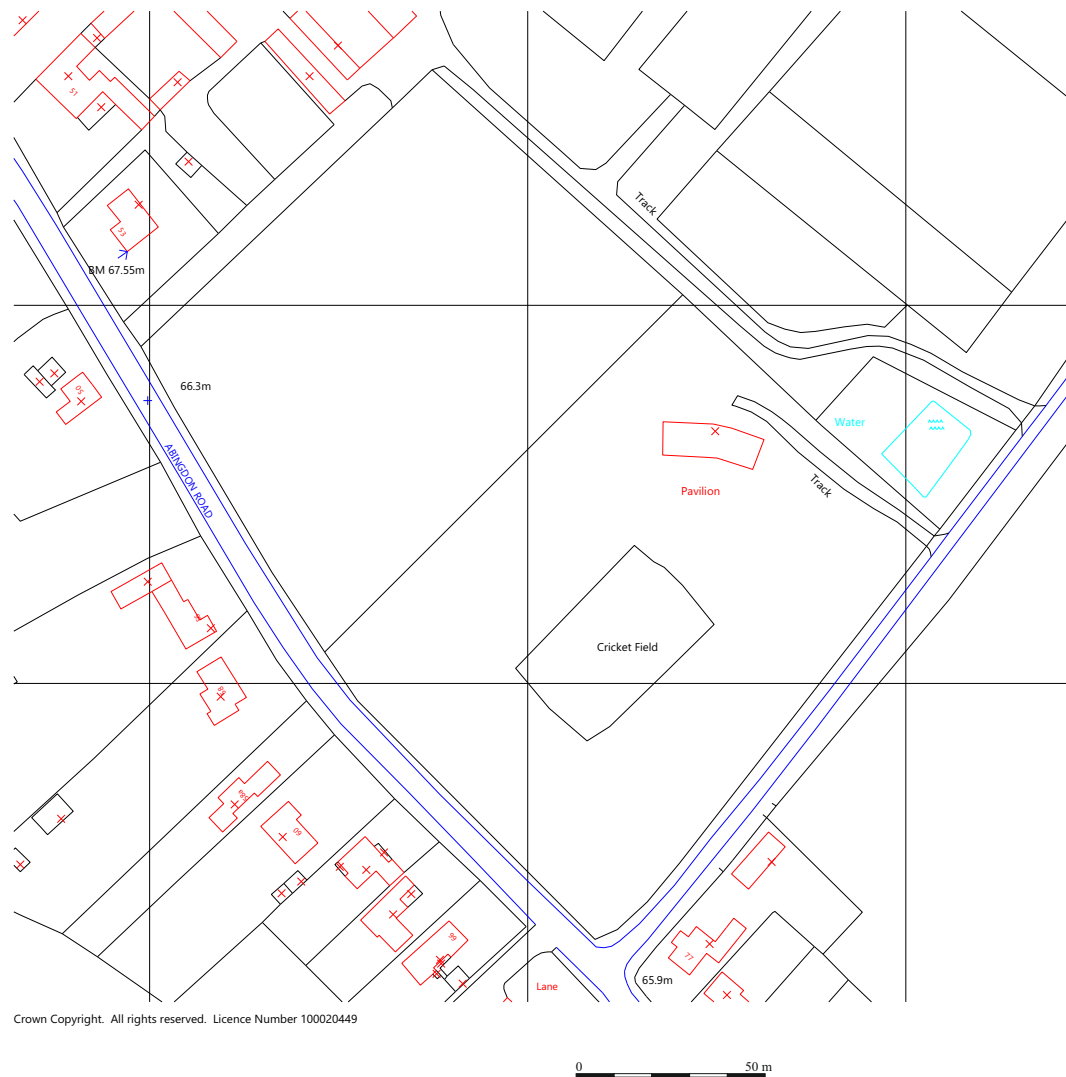


Figure 1: Site location

recovered; however it was not associated with any of the man-made features. Two ditches within Trench 3 were at right angles to Abingdon Road and therefore may represent medieval or later boundary features (Fig. 1). It was argued that the closeness to the road of a pair of ditches and another ditch that had a similar type of fill may relate to the cropmark site to the south. *NB The trench positions given on Figure 1 (JMHS 2006) are incorrect; the correct locations are given in Figure 1 of this report.*

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 select operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

In particular

- to record any evidence relating to the cropmark site to the south
- to record any evidence relating to medieval and later use of the site
- to attempt to date the phase(s) of activity

The results of the investigations will be made public.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

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 was to involve the monitoring of the excavation for the two roads (Fig. 1).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* that was approved by OCAS on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council. 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

The lines of the two roads were stripped of overburden without an archaeologist present. Lengths of the road line along the north side of the site were relatively clean and recording of features was carried out (Area 4). The western end of the road line was partly too dirty to record, and closer to Abingdon Road the extent of the stripping remained above the level of the archaeological horizon. Part of the road parallel to Abingdon Road (Area 5) was mechanically cleaned. Over most of the length the stripping was not deep enough to reach the archaeological horizon. Features along the road lines were not excavated. Given the number of features exposed during the stripping of the northern road it was agreed with Cranbourne Homes that the

excavation of foundations for a house plot and a pair of garages would be monitored (Area 4).

In addition footings for the new houses at the extreme southeast side of the site were inspected where no archaeological features were present.

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

All features were assigned individual context numbers. The individual feature numbers refer to both the cut and the fill.

Topsoil had already been removed from the site. A ploughsoil (27) up to 350mm thick overlay the natural terrace gravel (28).

Soil descriptions given below are based on dry soil conditions when the general colour appeared grey-brown. After rain the colour appeared more yellow-brown.

The area of the road along the north side of the site (Area 4, Figs. 1 & 2) contained various ditches and pit clusters. At the western extent was at least two ditches (10). This area was mostly obscured by loose gravel. However, where visible, the two sides were not parallel and further south two distinct ditches (26 & 29) were apparent. The top 200mm of the east side of (10) were at 45° and the general fill was a mid brown slightly sandy silt. Ditch (26) was orientated northeast/southwest and was at least 900mm wide and 650mm deep. The southeast side was at 45° and the ditch had a slightly rounded base. This feature appears to be the continuation of the east side of feature (10). It was filled by mid grey-brown sandy clay with 10% by volume of gravel. Just to the east of ditch (26) was a further ditch (29) orientated northnortheast/southsouthwest. This had sides at 45° and a rounded base and was 400-500mm wide and 280mm deep. The ditch was earlier than ditch (26) and it was thought that it was about to terminate just to the south of where it was seen. It was filled with pale grey-brown slightly clayey silt with 30-35% gravel. This ditch may have been the same as the west side of feature (10).

Within the footprint of the house to the south of ditches (26 & 29) was another feature that appeared to be part of a ditch (30). This was orientated east/west but was not seen further east and west. This ditch was 650mm wide and 250mm deep with sides of 60° and a slightly rounded base. It was filled by pale grey-brown slightly clayey sandy silt with 30-35% gravel.

Part of a ditch (11) was seen on the south side of a modern service trench. This was 1m wide and filled by slightly orange, mid grey-brown clayey silt with 5% gravel. To the south within the garage footprint, ditch (31) was a recut ditch with the original cut more than 500mm wide and 400mm deep with sides at 40° from the horizontal and a slightly rounded base. This was filled with pale-mid grey-brown very slightly clayey, slightly sandy silt with 20% gravel. The later recut was 350-400mm wide and 200mm deep with sides at 30° and a flat base. This was filled by pale-mid grey-brown very slightly clayey sandy silt with 15% gravel. Ditch 31 appears to be a

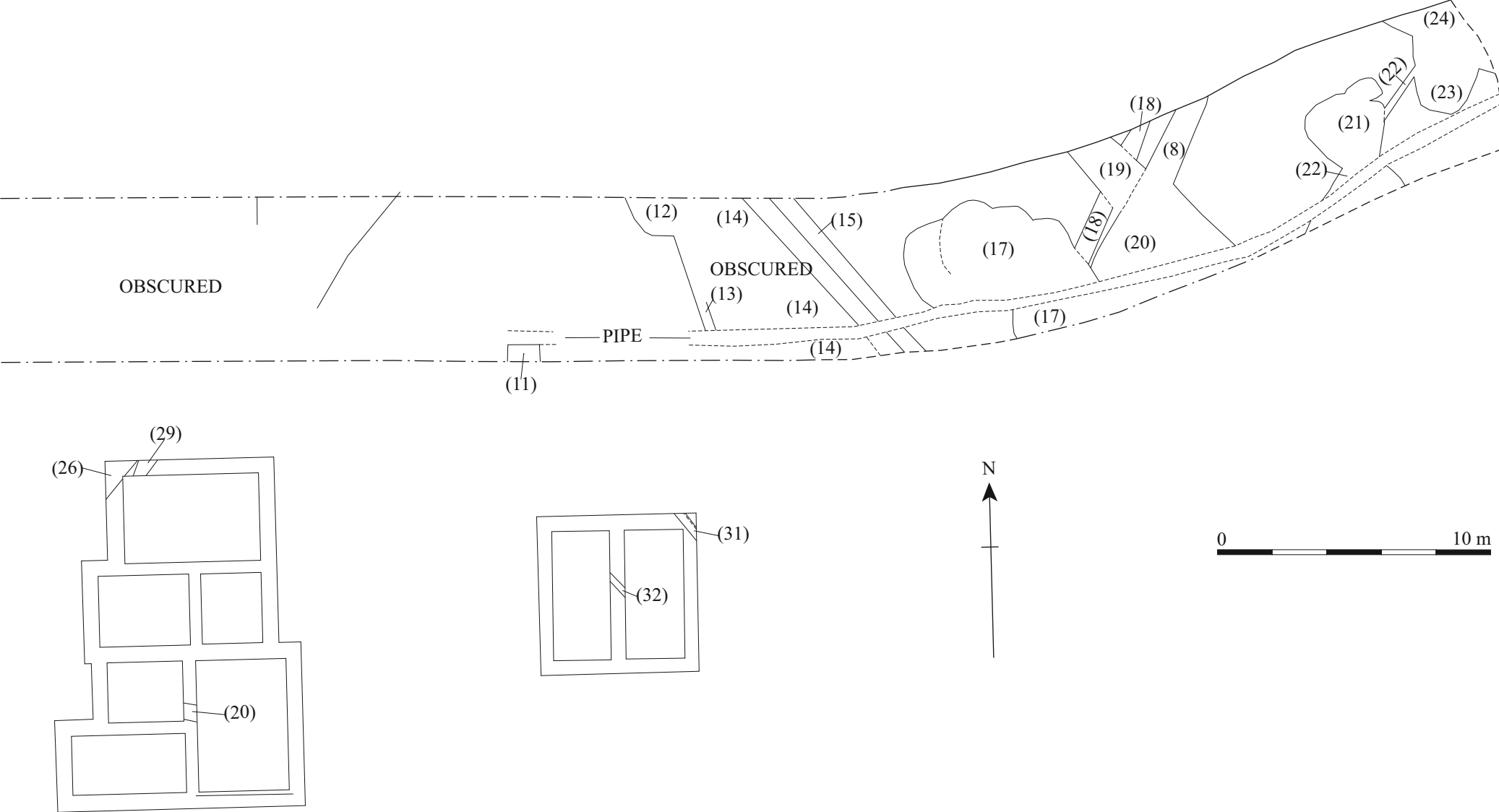


Figure 2. Plan of Area 4

continuation of ditch 1/11 (Figure 1). Further to the southwest was another parallel ditch (32) c. 300mm wide and 230mm deep with sides at 60° and a slightly rounded base, filled with mid grey-brown slightly clayey sandy silt with 5% gravel.

Further along the road line was an intercutting ditch (14), a gully (13) and a pit/ditch terminal (12). The pit or, more likely, ditch terminal was at least 1.2m wide with a rounded southern end and a straight west side. This was filled by mid grey-brown slightly sandy silt with 30% gravel. No relationship with (13 or 14) was established. The gully (13) was 400mm wide and projected from the large ditch (14). Its fill was the same as within (12). The large ditch (14) was 3m wide and orientated northwest/southeast. The fill was mid grey-brown slightly sandy, slightly clayey silt with 30% gravel. Most of the west side of this ditch along with most of gully (13) was obscured by loose gravel.

Parallel to ditch (14) and east of it was a further gully or small ditch (15). This was 650mm wide with near vertical sides at the top and was filled with mid grey-brown slightly sandy very slightly clayey silt with 5% gravel. This gully or ditch cut a small feature (16) seen between this feature and ditch (14). This feature did not extend north of the modern service trench.

To the east of ditch (15) was a cluster of at least five pits (17), one of which cut ditches (18 and 20).

Ditch (18) was orientated northeast/southwest and was 600-650mm wide. It was filled with mid grey-brown sandy slightly silty clay with 30% gravel. Almost parallel to it was a further ditch (20) that was at right angles to ditch (14) and together may have formed two sides of an enclosure. Ditch (20) was 950-1000mm wide and filled by mid grey-brown slightly sandy clayey silt with 5% gravel. Ditch (20) was later than ditch (19), which in turn was later than ditch (18). Ditches (15 and 18) may also have been part of the same enclosure; an earlier arrangement to that possibly formed by ditches (14 and 20).

Ditch (19) was orientated northnorthwest/southsoutheast and was c. 1.5m wide. This was filled by mid grey-brown very slightly clayey silt with 1% gravel.

A further cluster of pits (21) was found further east. The pit group consisted of at least 2 large pits and one small pit with others to the south. The relationship with the gully (22) was indeterminable. The gully was 200-360mm wide and very shallow as it was almost disappearing in places. Its fill was a mid grey-brown sandy silt with 30-40% gravel. It was virtually parallel to the ditches further to the west. The relationship of this feature could not be established with the further pit group to the east.

The feature (23) was at least one pit and probably several intercutting pits. The relationship between this feature and the ditch (24) was not apparent. Ditch (24) was orientated northwest/southeast and was at least 800mm wide. It was filled with mid grey-brown sandy silt with 25-30% gravel.

Within the road line parallel to Abingdon Road (Area 5, Fig. 1) a ditch (25) was seen over a length of 9.5m running parallel to Abingdon Road. Further north and south stripping was not enough to reveal it continuing. The ditch was 750mm wide and

filled with mid grey-brown slightly sandy, slightly silty clay loam with 10-15% gravel.

5 FINDS

No finds were recovered from the watching brief. Only three sherds of Saxo-Norman or medieval date were recovered from the evaluation (JMHS 2006).

6 DISCUSSION

Without dating of features it is very difficult to discuss what has been found. However, two different alignments were present and it is argued that along with medieval and/or post-medieval plots associated with Abingdon Road, earlier activity is also present on two alignments.

A number of ditches were parallel, or at right angles to, Abingdon Road. Given the evidence seen elsewhere along the Abingdon Road it may be appropriate to consider them to be of medieval or later in date. Two apparently running back from the Abingdon Road, i.e. (3/07) in Trench 3, and ditch (26) and part of ditch (10) may be plot boundaries approximately 30m apart. Several ditches are parallel to the Abingdon Road. However ditch (25) in Area 5 and the pair of ditches in Trench 2 appear to close to the road to be property plot divisions or sub-divisions. The latter are 4.5m apart and may have defined a trackway or drove. Further away from the road ditches (31 and continuation 1/11, 14, 15, 19, and 24) appear parallel to Abingdon Road. These give four different possible rear boundaries to the plots or sub-divisions within plots. This is highly unlikely.

Therefore some of the boundaries discussed above are likely to be of earlier date. It has been postulated in Results (above) that ditches (14 and 20) may be two sides of an enclosure, a later arrangement to an enclosure partly formed by ditches (15 and 18). Further northeast, ditch (24) and to the southwest, ditch (31) continuing as (1/11) may have been part of the same rectangular arrangement of enclosures or paddocks. The distance between the northwest/southeast orientated features is c. 9m. Gully (22) and the east side of (10) continuing as ditch, along with (28) could easily be part of this same arrangement.

Other ditches are on a different alignment; notably the west side of ditch (10) continuing as (28), ditches (30), (13) and one ditch in both Trenches 1 and 3.

While a limited number of features may belong to the medieval/early post-medieval period it seems likely that the majority of the features are earlier, possibly Roman and/or prehistoric. Rectangular enclosures are common features in both the Roman and prehistoric from the middle Bronze Age onwards. Pit clusters again would not be out of place in the later prehistoric period.

The location of the pit clusters and the more numerous features found towards the northern part of the site suggests that this area is the edge of a focus of occupation or activity with some enclosures or fields extending southwards across the majority of the development site.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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