

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

9 WITTENHAM LANE, DORCHESTER-ON-THAMES,

OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SU 5782 9381

On behalf of

The Anderson Orr Partnership Ltd

OCTOBER 2013

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at 9 Wittenham Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. One machine-dug 15m long trench was excavated across the proposed footprint of new-build. Archaeological features (two pits, one ditch, three postholes and an occupation layer) associated with early Roman extra-mural settlement and seven late Roman burials were identified in trench.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site of the proposed development is located on the southern side of Dorchester-on-Thames, on the western side of Wittenham Lane (NGR SU 5782 9381). The site lies at approximately 50m above OD. The underlying geology is First Terrace River Gravels. The development area is approximately 0.03ha in size and is currently in residential use.

1.2 Planning Background

An application has been submitted to South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) for the demolition of an existing garage and erection of new two bedroomed dwelling (P13/S2725/FUL).

Due to the high potential for archaeological deposits to be present, including human remains, the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) required that an archaeological field evaluation should be undertaken as part of the determination of the application. OCAS prepared a *Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (OCAS 2013).

John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) was commissioned to undertake this work, and a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2013) was prepared to satisfy the requirements of the *Brief*. The *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) proposed the methodology by which the archaeological evaluation was to be carried out.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The following section is largely based on information presented in the WSI (JMHS 2013) and Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation (OCAS 2013).

The proposal site lies in an area of some archaeological potential, 140m south of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Roman Town of Dorchester (SAM OX116) and 190m northeast of the Scheduled Monument of the Dyke Hills Iron Age Oppida or settlement site (SAM OX17). The Roman town consisted of roughly rectangular defences enclosing a civil settlement of about 13.5 hectares. 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. The area to the south of the town is known to have

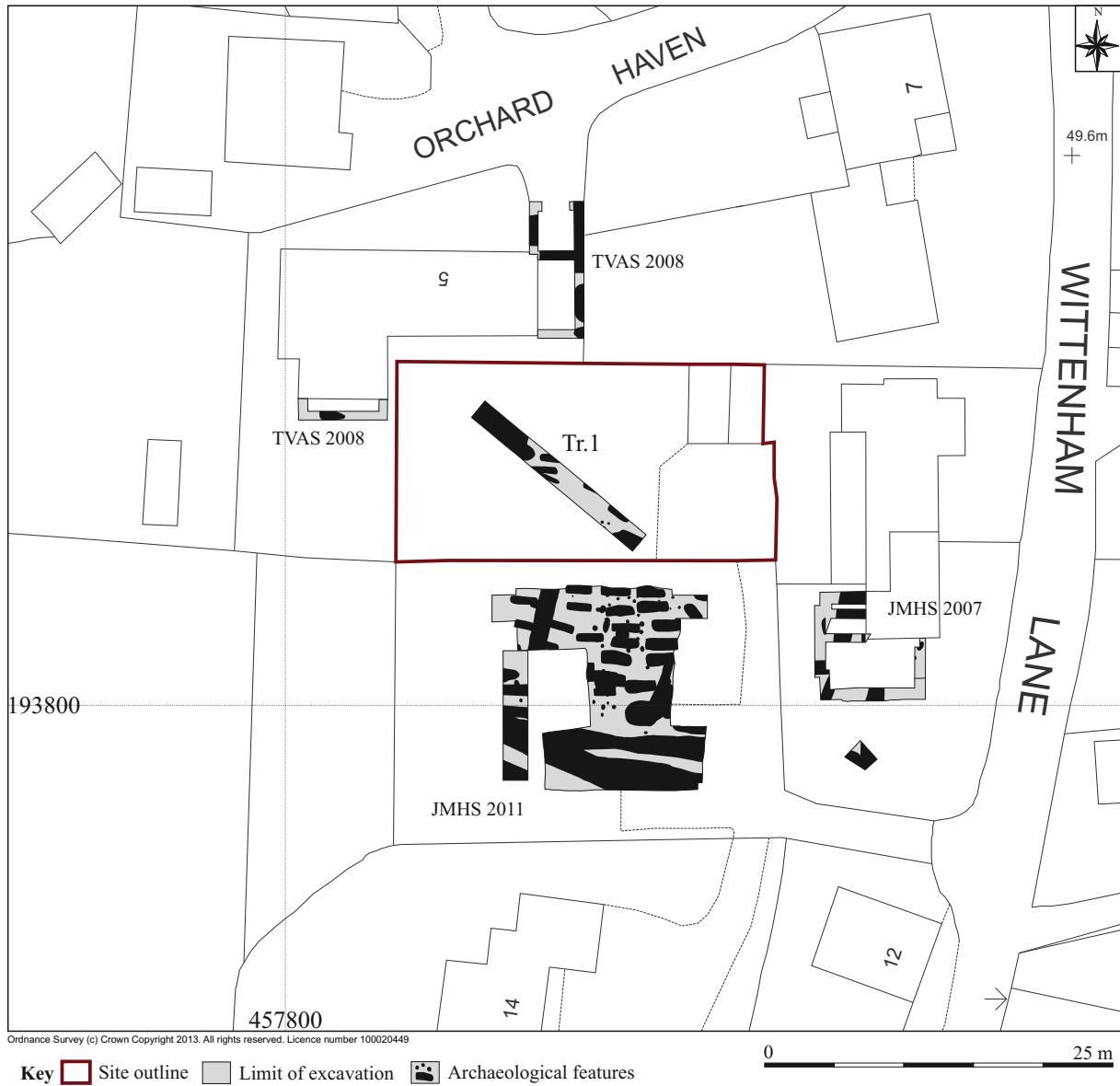
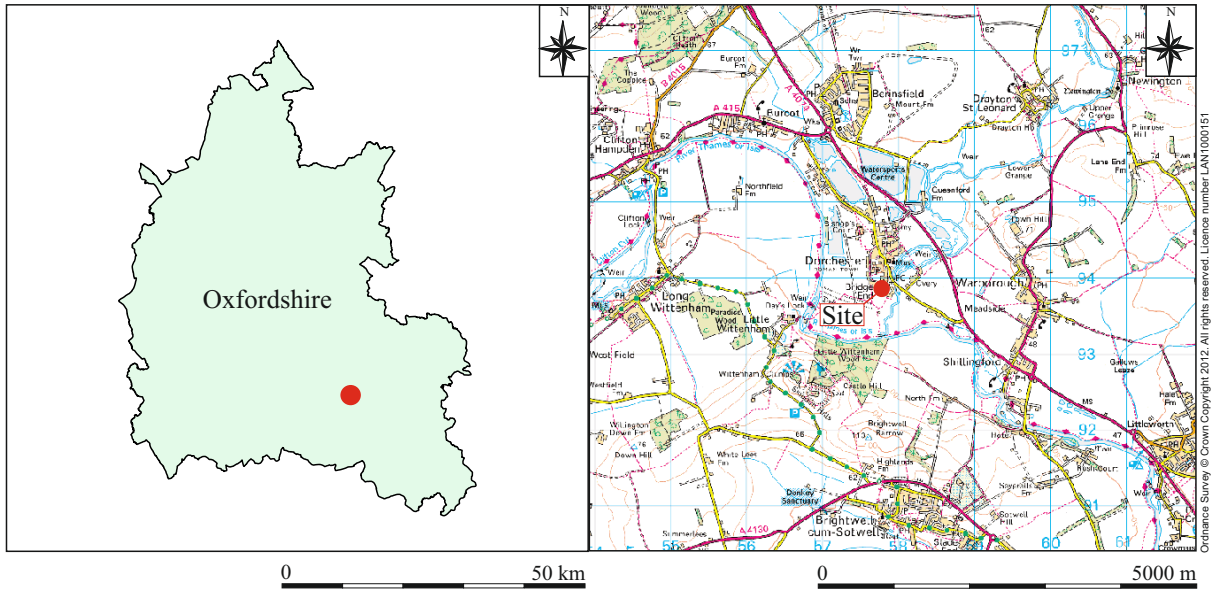


Figure 1: Site location

surviving aspects of an extra mural settlement and settlement evidence has been recorded 100m to the north (County Historic Environment Record PRN 2954) and 160m to the north west of the site (PRN 1983). Roman pottery and features were recorded on these sites during small excavations for footings and garden features. The proposal site is also located within the confines of a probable Roman cemetery to the south of the Roman town.

A recent watching brief carried out during an extension 25m southeast of the proposal site recorded a series of several Roman ditches and two human burials (PRN 26104) (Sausins – Williams 2007). A separate watching brief 20m NW of the site recorded another burial and Roman settlement evidence in the form of a complex series of intercutting pits (PRN 26191) (Mundin 2008).

Further finds of unrelated human bones in the fills of these burials suggest that they are part of a larger cemetery. Another two Roman burials were recorded during sewer and foundation trenches for new dwellings 60m to the north of the site (PRN 5530) along with Roman pottery and slag. A further burial was discovered at the bottom of a posthole dug during the erection of a shed 60m to the south east of the site (PRN 13029). The grave had cut into the edge of an earlier Romano British pit or ditch suggesting that Roman occupation extended this far south of the town prior to the area being used as a cemetery. It is likely therefore that this development will encounter further Roman settlement evidence and burials, although a watching brief carried out during the construction of an extension to 8 Wittenham Lane, c. 40m to the north failed to find any archaeological remains.

For the development of a new replacement dwelling immediately to the south an archaeological evaluation and subsequent excavation were carried out in the footprint of the dwelling. The excavation indicated occupation from the Late Iron Age through to mid 2nd century AD, forming part of the Roman town's extra-mural settlement, and comprising rubbish pits and postholes as well as a number of ditches. It is suggested that this settlement was located on a road exiting the town leading to the Iron Age oppidum at Dyke Hills. By the late 2nd or early 3rd century, it appears that the postulated roadside activity had been abandoned and replaced by an organised cemetery, comprising at least 24 east/west oriented inhumations, and potentially 30 individuals, bounded on the south side by a boundary ditch, which may well be associated with an internal bank. Similar cemetery enclosures have been recorded elsewhere at Dorchester-on-Thames. A single radiocarbon date was obtained for a burial, which indicated a late 3rd to 4th century date. The majority appear to have been interred in coffins, indicated by the presence of iron nails; some evidence of familial grouping may also have been present (Williams 2013).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
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- 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.

And in particular:

- To establish whether there are further remains of the known Roman settlement present and the density of burials in this part of the cemetery and to assess their survival.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In accordance with the *Brief* issued by OCAS (2013) and WSI by JMHS (2013), JMHS carried out the work, which comprised a scheme for the mechanical excavation of one trial trench across the site. Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the WSI.

3.2 Methodology

An eight tonne excavator fitted with a toothless 1.5m wide ditching bucket was used to excavate one trench 15m long and 1.5m wide, which was placed across the proposed footprint of new-build.

Archaeological deposits and features revealed were then cleaned by hand and recorded at an appropriate level. Archaeological features had written, drawn and photographic records made of them, and all deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers.

All artefacts were collected and retained, and analysed by specialists. Human remains were recorded, labelled and left in situ. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (2008) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in brackets () show feature fills or deposits of material.

4.2 Trench 1 (Figure 2)

Trench 1 was 15m long and 1.5m wide, and orientated northwest to southeast. The lowest deposit was natural yellowish light brown silty sand (1/03). Overlying the natural was subsoil 0.35m thick, dark yellowish brown sandy silt (1/02). The

uppermost layer was 0.34m thick loose dark grey-brown silt (1/01), topsoil (Section 1.1).

Archaeological features

Across the trench were recorded twelve cut features and one occupation layer. All features were cutting into the nature (1/03), apart from cut 1/21, which cut into layer (1/20) and cut 1/18 whose stratigraphic relationship with layer (1/20) was unclear.

At the northwest end of the trench, c. 0.30m from present ground surface, was occupation layer (1/20), seen as dark grey-brown loose sandy silt. From this layer were recovered Roman pottery sherds and disarticulated human bones. Stratigraphically, layer (1/20) was overlying nature (1/03) and was overlaid by topsoil (1/01). Relationship between subsoil (1/02) and this layer was unclear.

Cut into the layer (1/20) was sub-rectangular grave cut 1/21, c. 1.10m long and 0.40m wide. It was filled with loose dark reddish brown sandy loamy silt (1/22) and contained fragile juvenile skeleton SK 6.

At the southeast edge of layer (1/20) was possible sub-circular pit 1/18. It was 1.10m long, 0.85m wide (as seen) and 0.70m deep and filled with dark grayish brown sandy loam (1/19) which contained charcoal, Roman pottery sherds, animal bones and one copper alloy object (Section 1.3).



Plate 1: Grave 1/12 and ditch 1/14, view west

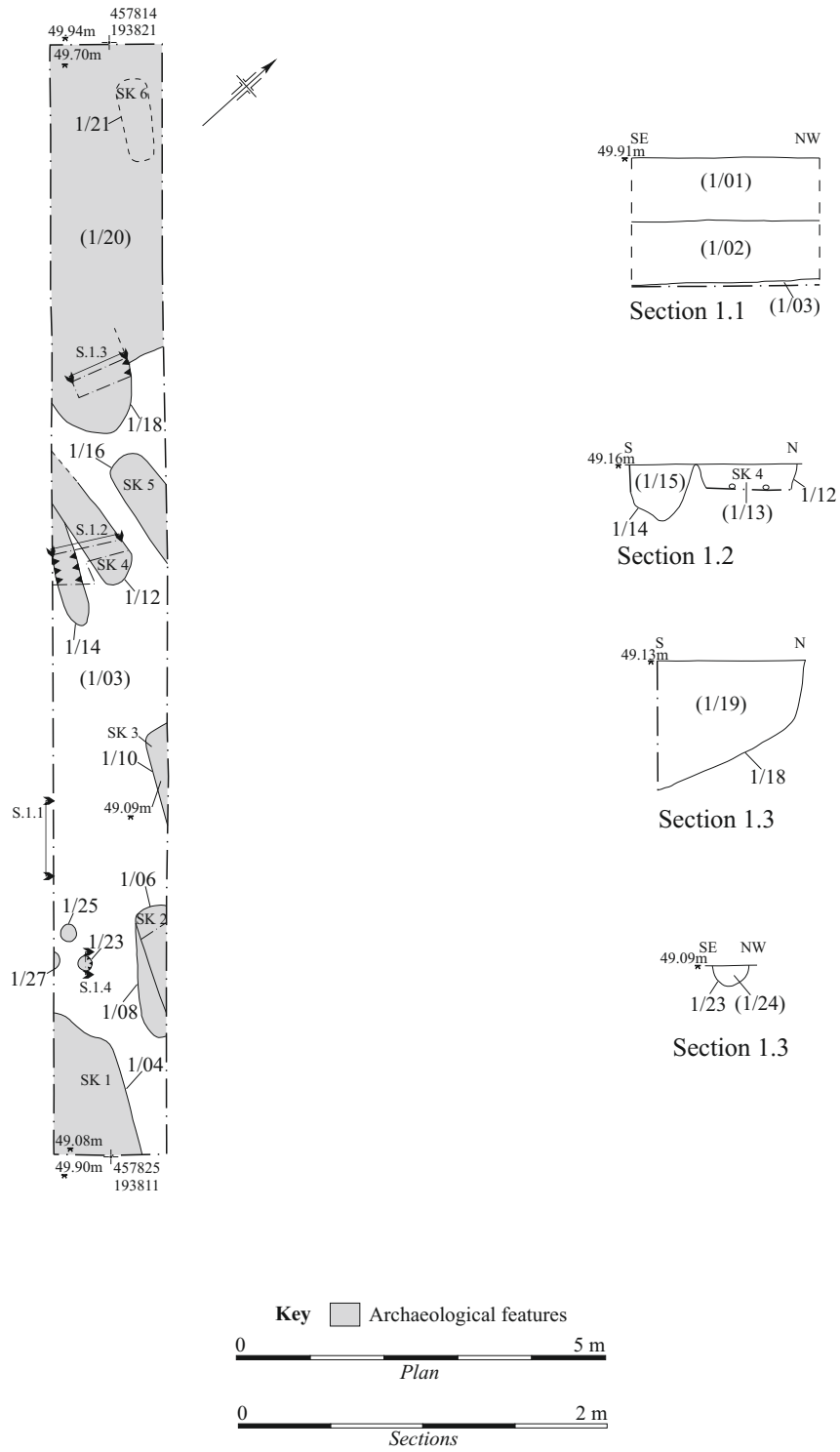


Figure 2: Trench 1 - plan and sections

Located 0.30m to the east of pit 1/18 was sub-rectangular grave cut 1/16. It was 1.50m long and 0.58m wide. The east end of the grave was outside of the trench. It was filled by dark reddish brown sandy loamy silt (1/17); a skull, which was marked as SK 5, was exposed to confirm that it was a grave.

Half of metre to the southwest from the grave 1/16 was another sub-rectangular grave cut 1/12, 1.95m long, 0.50m wide and 0.14m deep as excavated (Plate 1; Section 1.2). The test slot was excavated in order to establish, if the fill (1/13), which was loose mid reddish brown sandy silt, contained human remains. Two articulated femurs were uncovered in the slot and marked as SK 4.

Next to the grave 1/12 was linear cut 1/14 that was aligned west-northwest to east-southeast. It was 0.34m wide, 0.31m deep with steep sides and concave base. It was filled with a mid reddish brown sandy loam (1/15). This feature represents a small ditch or gully and it was possibly cut by grave 1/14.

Grave cut 1/10 was 1.42m long and 0.30m wide, filled by loose dark yellowish brown sandy silt (1/11) and contained skull SK 3. It was located approximately 5.5m from the southeast end of trench.

Located approximately 1.5m from the southeast end of trench was oval cut 1/08, 1.50m long and 0.36m wide, filled with loose mid orange brown sandy silt (1/09). It was a possible pit associated with settlement activities in the area.



Plate 2: Grave 1/06 and pit 1/08, view northwest

Cut into 1/08 was sub-rectangular grave cut 1/06. It was 1.40m long, 0.38m wide and 0.15m deep as excavated. In the fill (1/07) was uncovered a human skull, which was marked as SK 2 (Plate 2).

On the opposite side of the trench was a group of three postholes 1/23, 1/25 and 1/27. The diameter of postholes in average was in between 0.20m to 0.25m. The depth of investigated posthole 1/23 was 0.11m (Section 1.4). No dating evidence was recovered from the fill.

At the southeast end of the trench was a larger irregular grave cut 1/04. It was 1.90m long and 1.20m wide. Fill (1/05), loose dark reddish brown sandy silt, contained a human skull SK 1. Based on the shape of feature, seem that it represent two intercutting graves.

All graves recorded within trench were approximately aligned west to east.

4.3 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The archaeological evaluation took place in generally clement conditions with average light and visibility.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Roman Pottery by Jane Timby

Introduction and methodology

The archaeological work resulted in a small assemblage of 121 sherds of pottery, weighing *c* 2.9 kg, accompanied by two pieces (12 g) of probably post-medieval ceramic building material (CBM) from (1/02).

Most of the pottery dates to the Roman period but there are nine sherds of post-medieval date present and a one possible late medieval or early post-medieval glazed ware.

Context	Roman					Lmed?	Pmed	Tot No	Tot	Date
	samian	Grog	OXFRE	OXFREF	Other				Wt	
1/02	0	2	7	8	5	1	6	29	864	Pmed/Roman
1/19	2	19	8	6	9	0	0	44	638	C1
1/20	1	5	6	13	20	0	3	48	1402	Pmed/C2-C4
TOTAL	3	26	21	27	34	1	9	121	2904	

In general terms the sherds are well preserved with quite sharp edges. The group has an overall average sherd weight of 24 g reflecting this moderately fresh state.

Pottery was recovered from just three individual contexts, subsoil (1/02); ditch fill (1/19) and an occupation layer (1/20).

For the purposes of this assessment the material was scanned macroscopically and sorted into fabrics based on firing colour and inclusions (type, size and frequency) in the clay. The sorted fabrics were quantified by sherd count and weight and a note made of the forms present from the rim sherds. Known named traded Roman wares were coded using the National Roman fabric reference collection codes (codes in brackets) (Tomber and Dore 1998). Table 1 summarises the data for each context with a provisional spot date for the group.

Description of Roman wares

Most of the assemblage comprises wares from local sources. Continental imports are limited to three sherds of South and Central Gaulish samian (Drag. 15/17, ?30 and 36). A white ware flagon with a reeded rim (as Camulodunum form 163) may also be an import from North Gaul. Regional imports are limited to a sherd from a large Verulamium-type flagon.

The remaining assemblage comprises products of the well-known Oxfordshire industries with grey sandy wares and finer grey wares dominating accounting for 39.6% by count of the total recovered assemblage. Handmade grog-tempered wares, largely storage or large jar account for a further 21.5%.

The fine grey wares include barbotine dot decorated, globular beaker and everted rim jars.

The few sherds of fine ware are also probably local products. These include two sherds from an Abingdon-style butt beaker and two dishes in an oxidised mica-slipped ware which are likely to date to the pre-Flavian and early 2nd century respectively. Also likely to be of pre-Flavian date is a small fragment of a fine grey platter or dish from (1/19) with an incomplete, probably illiterate, potter's stamp.

Of later Roman date is a red-painted base from an Oxfordshire parchment ware bowl; probably Young (1977) form P24.

Post-Roman

A total nine sherds of post-medieval date are present including glazed and unglazed red earthenware, amongst which are 20th century flower-pot fragments and English stoneware. There is one pale oxidised ware with a glaze (?Brill-Boarstall-type) from the subsoil which may be later medieval.

Site chronology

The pottery suggests that the focus of activity in the area started in the pre-Flavian period and continuing into the 2nd century. There are very few obviously later Roman sherds present.

Both contexts 1/02 (subsoil) and 1/20 (occupation later) contained small quantities of post-medieval/ modern pottery alongside the Roman wares. This either suggests some level of contamination of the deposits or that all the Roman is redeposited despite its moderately well-preserved condition. The Roman wares from both (1/02) and (1/20)

largely date to the 2nd century but there is also a sherd of late Roman parchment ware present from the latter.

The group of 44 sherds from ditch fill 1/19) includes the earlier pre-Flavian – early Flavian sherds with two pieces of South Gaulish samian, Abingdon-style butt beaker and stamped fine ware dish alongside grog-tempered wares and grey sandy wares.

Potential and further work

The Roman assemblage broadly conforms to the range recovered in the excavations to the north within the defences in the 1960's (Frere 1964; 1984) where the pottery also dates from the 1st century and includes a range of imports and local wares. The difference lies towards the end of the Roman period where the Wittenham Lane site, as the adjacent site at no. 11 (JMHS 2013), has produced little late Roman and no Saxon pottery. A general lack of post-Roman finds might suggest the Roman levels have been subjected to little on-going disturbance.

The assemblage is small and does not warrant further work unless additional work is undertaken at the location at which point the material should be included in any published overview.

5.2 Human remains

All human remains were recorded, labelled and left *in situ*. Disarticulated human bones recovered from layer (1/20) were wrapped in geotextile and reburied in northwest end of trench.

5.3 Palaeo-environmental Remains

No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental analysis were identified, and no samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION

Archaeological evaluation was successful and meets the aims, which were set up in the WSI.

In the trench were uncovered features, which confirmed the presence of early Roman extra-mural settlement known in the area which from the pottery on this site started in the pre-Flavian period and continued into the 2nd century.

Occupation layer (1/20) with pit 1/18, might represent a series of intercutting pits, as a similar situation was recorded during the watching brief at 5 Orchard Haven (Mundin 2008). Based on stratigraphic relationships, small ditch 1/14 and the pit 1/08 are associated with settlement activities to. A group of postholes (1/23, 1/25 and 1/27), located close to the southeast end of trench suggests a similar situation as was recorded during the excavation at 11 Wittenham Lane (Williams 2013).

The presence of the expected late Roman cemetery was also confirmed. During the evaluation were recorded six graves containing articulated skeletons, one possible grave, which was part of irregular grave cut 1/04, and disarticulated human bones were recovered from layer (1/20). The high density of graves suggest a similar situation as was recorded during the excavation at 11 Wittenham Lane (Williams 2013). All graves were approximately aligned west to east.

Stratigraphically more complicated situation was at the northwest end of the trench. Grave 1/21 was only 0.24m below modern ground surface, its cut within layer (1/20), and was not clearly visible. Also an unclear relationship was between layer (1/20) and pit 1/18. As was mentioned above layer (1/20), might be series of intercutting pits.

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Appendix 1: Trench Context Inventory

ID	Type	Description	Depth	Width	Length	Finds	Interpretation	Date
Trench 1								
1/01	Deposit	Loose dark grey-brown silt	0.34m	1.50m	15m	-	Topsoil	Modern
1/02	Deposit	Loose dark yellowish brown sandy silt	0.35m	1.50m	15m	Pottery	Subsoil	-
1/03	Deposit	Friable yellowish light brown silty sand	-	1.50m	15m	-	Natural	-
1/04	Cut	Irregular cut, orientation E-W	-	1.20m	1.90m	-	Grave	Late Roman
1/05	Fill	Loose dark reddish brown sandy silt	-	1.20m	1.90m	Human bones SK 1	Fill of grave 1/04	Late Roman
1/06	Cut	Sub-rectangular, orientation E-W	0.15m	1.40m	0.38m	-	Grave	Late Roman
1/07	Fill	Loose dark reddish brown sandy loamy silt	0.15m	1.40m	0.38m	Human bones SK 2	Fill of grave 1/06	Late Roman
1/08	Cut	Sub-circular, orientation NW-SE	-	0.36m	1.50m	-	Pit	Early Roman (?)
1/09	Fill	Loose orange mid brown sandy silt	-	0.36m	1.50m	-	Fill of pit 1/08	Early Roman (?)
1/10	Cut	Sub-rectangular, orientation E-W	-	0.30m	1.42m	-	Grave	Late Roman
1/11	Fill	Loose dark yellowish brown sandy silt	-	0.30m	1.42m	Human bones SK 3	Fill of grave 1/10	Late Roman
1/12	Cut	Sub-rectangular, orientation E-W	0.14m	0.50m	1.95m	-	Grave	Late Roman
1/13	Fill	Loose reddish brown sandy silt	0.14m	0.50m	1.95m	Human bones SK 4	Fill of grave 1/12	Late Roman
1/14	Cut	Linear, orientation WNW-ESE	0.34m	0.31m	1.70m	-	Small ditch / gully	Early Roman (?)
1/15	Fill	Loose mid reddish brown sandy loam	0.34m	0.31m	1.70m	-	Fill of small ditch / gully 1/14	Early Roman (?)
1/16	Cut	Sub-rectangular, orientation E-W	-	0.58m	1.50m	-	Grave	Late Roman
1/17	Fill	Loose dark yellowish brown sandy loamy silt	-	0.58m	1.50m	Human bones SK 5	Fill of grave 1/16	Late Roman
1/18	Cut	Sub-circular, orientation n/a	0.70m	0.85m	1.10m	-	Pit	Early Roman (?)
1/19	Fill	Loose dark greyish brown sandy loamy silt with 2% charcoal	0.70	0.85m	1.10m	Pottery, animal bone, cu-alloy object	Fill of pit 1/18	Early Roman (?)
1/20	Deposit	Loose dark grey-brown sandy silt	-	1.50m	4.20m	Pottery, disarticulated human bones	Occupation layer or series of intercutting pits	Early Roman (?)
1/21	Cut	Sub-rectangular, orientation E-W	-	0.40m	1.10m	-	Grave	Late Roman
1/22	Fill	Loose dark reddish brown sandy loamy silt	-	0.40m	1.10m	Human bones SK 6	Fill of grave 1/21	Late Roman
1/23	Cut	Circular	0.11m	0.20m	0.20m	-	Posthole	Early Roman (?)

1/24	Fill	Loose mid yellowish brown Loamy sandy silt	0.11m	0.20m	0.20m	-	Fill of posthole 1/23	Early Roman (?)
1/25	Cut	Circular	-	0.25m	0.25m	-	Posthole	Early Roman (?)
1/26	Fill	Loose mid yellowish brown Loamy sandy silt	-	0.25m	0.25m	-	Fill of posthole 1/25	Early Roman (?)
1/27	Cut	Circular	-	0.20m	0.20m	-	Posthole	Early Roman (?)
1/28	Fill	Loose mid yellowish brown Loamy sandy silt	-	0.20m	0.20m	-	Fill of posthole 1/27	Early Roman (?)