



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
AT
LAND ADJACENT TO FARWAYS, YARNTON ROAD,
CASSINGTON, OXFORDSHIRE
NGR SP 4553 1122

On behalf of
Blenheim Palace

OCTOBER 2013

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological evaluation at land adjacent to Farways, Yarnton Road, Cassington, Oxfordshire. Four machine-dug trenches were excavated, of which two (Trenches 1 and 2) were placed across known cropmarks within application area. Archaeological features (part of one ring ditch, two linear ditches, one cremation burial) and pottery mainly of prehistoric date were identified in Trenches 1, 3 and 4, and one shallow gully of post-medieval or modern date was identified in Trench 2.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site of the planning application is located on the west side of Yarnton Road in Cassington (SP 4553 1122). The site is approximately 0.35 hectares in area and lies at approximately 65m above OD. The underlying geology is the Summertown Radley sands and gravels overlying Oxford Clay. The site is currently in agricultural use.

1.2 Planning Background

A planning application was submitted for the erection of ten dwellings on a plot of land north of Farways, Cassington. In line with Para 128 of the NPPF and Policy BE13 of the Local Plan, Oxfordshire Historic and Natural Environment Team (OHaNET) recommended that an archaeological field evaluation should be undertaken to determine the presence, importance and extent of any archaeological features. OHaNET prepared a *Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (OHaNET 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*. This *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) proposed the methodology by which the archaeological evaluation was to be carried out.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The application area contains a number of cropmark features (EH Monument No. 336749) including a circular feature (EH Monument No. 1201101) and linear features. The circular feature, with a diameter of approximately 24m, appears to form part of a wider barrow cemetery. Whilst some linear features seem to respect the barrow one appears to cut across it (JMHS 2013; Past Scape).

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.

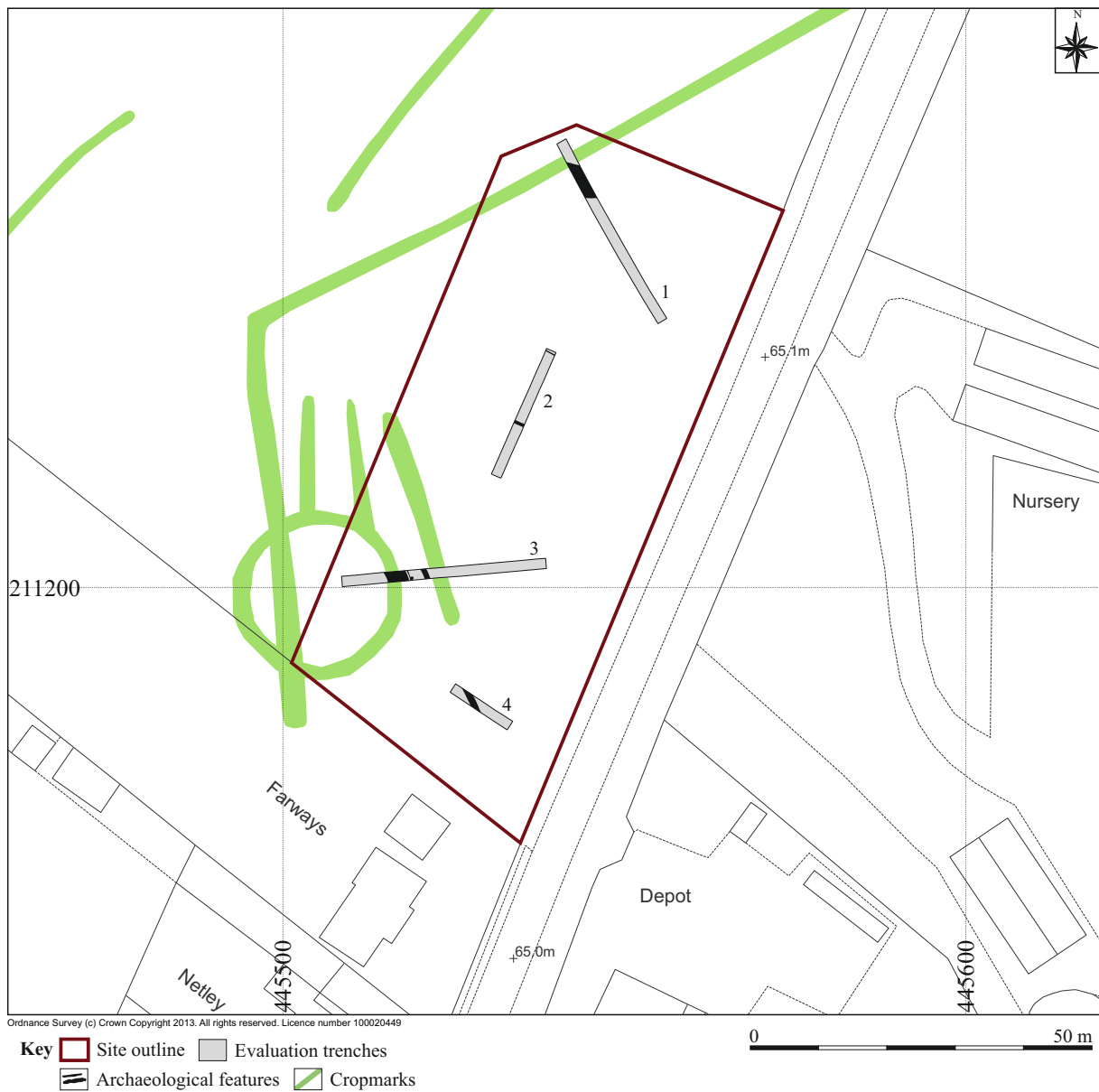
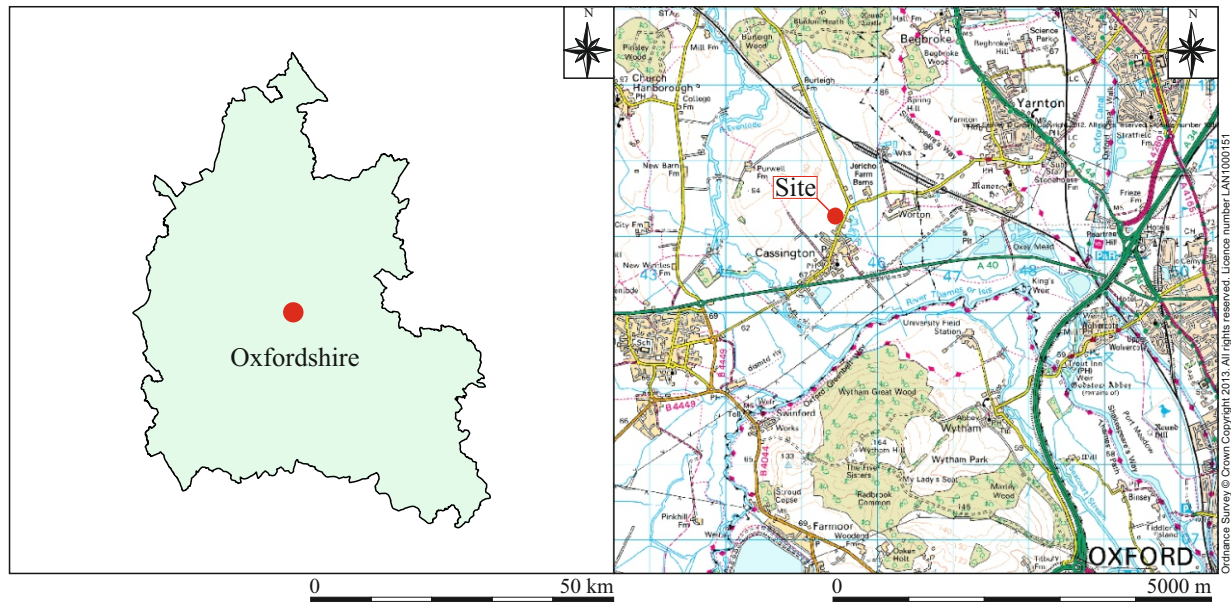


Figure 1: Site location

- 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 the date of the cropmark features and whether there are also discrete features present.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

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

3.2 Methodology

A JCB Site Master excavator fitted with a toothless 1.5m wide ditching bucket was used to excavate four trenches; two each 30m long (Trenches 1 & 3) which were placed across the cropmarks, one 20m long (Trench 2) and one 10m long (Trench 4). All trenches were 1.5m wide.

Any 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. 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. All context numbers are preceded by trench number and /.

4.2 Trench 1 (Figure 2)

Trench 1 was 30m long and 1.5m wide, and orientated north-northwest to south-southeast.

The lowest deposit revealed was natural light brown sandy gravel with a band of light brown sandy clay (1/03). Across the trench cutting into natural two modern plough marks were visible along with ditch 1/04.

Ditch 1/04 was located at the north-northwest end of the trench and was aligned roughly east to west. It was 5.5m wide and up to 0.55m deep with a concave base and filled with two successive fills (Plate 1, Section 1.2). The primary fill (1/06) was 0.15m thick light yellowish white sandy gravel. The secondary fill (1/05) was very compact 0.40m thick mid orange loamy sand. Due to the dimensions of the ditch and nature of the fill deposits, investigation of ditch employed hand and machine excavation. Excavated soil was checked on site in order to obtain dating evidence. However dating evidence was not been obtained.



Plate 1: Ditch 1/04, view northeast

Overlying the natural (1/03) and ditch 1/04 was 0.31m thick layer of mid reddish brown sandy loam with 50% gravel (1/02), subsoil. Over the subsoil was 0.30m thick ploughsoil, formed of mid grey sandy loam with up to 30% gravel (Sections 1.1 and 1.2).

4.3 Trench 2 (Figure 2)

Trench 2 was 20m long and 1.5m wide and orientated northeast to southwest.

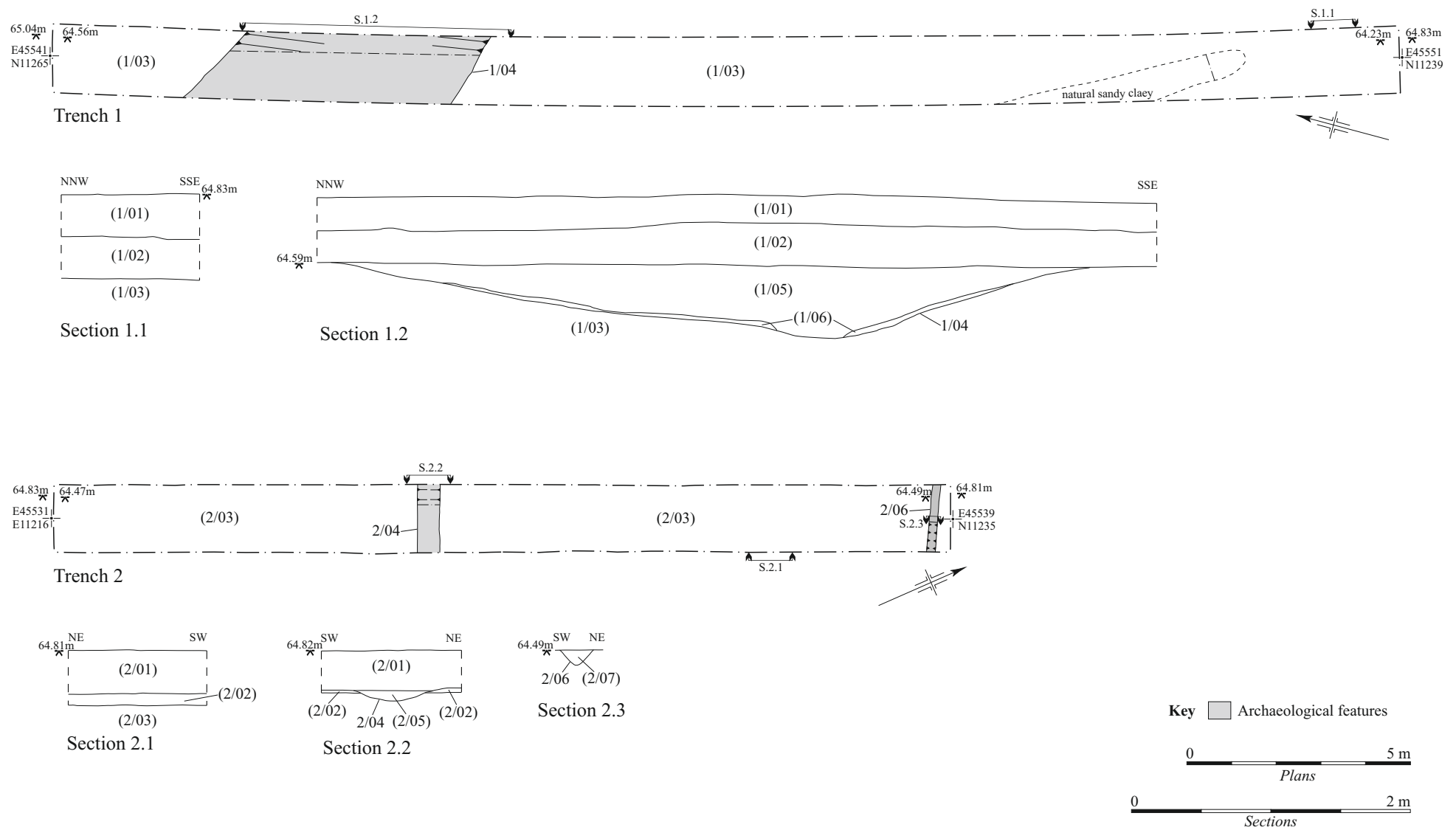


Figure 2: Trenches 1 and 2 - plans and sections

The natural deposit (2/03) was light brown sandy gravel. Deposit (2/03) was overlain by 0.03 to 0.08m thick layer of compact reddish brown sandy loam with up to 50% gravel (2/02), which was interpreted as subsoil.

Located approximately in the middle of trench, cut through the subsoil (2/02) into natural (2/03) was linear feature / gully 2/04. It was 0.51m wide and 0.07m deep with concave base (Section 2.2) and filled by 0.07m thick light grey-brown sandy loam with 20% gravel (2/05). One iron nail was recovered from fill (2/05), possible post-medieval or modern in date.

Second linear feature 2/06 was located at the northeast end of the trench. It was 0.22m wide and 0.11m deep with steep sides and concave base (Section 2.3). Fill (2/07) was mid grey loam with occasional small well rounded stones. Dimensions and orientation of this feature suggest, that it might be one of the modern plough furrows, which were observed along the trench.

The uppermost layer was 0.31m of mid grey sandy loam (2/01) topsoil.

4.4 Trench 3 (Figure 3)

Trench 3 was 30m long and 1.5m wide, and orientated approximately east to west. General overburden in Trench 3 was similar to rest of the site. The lowest deposit was natural yellow sandy gravel (3/03). Overlaying the natural was reddish brown subsoil (3/02), of maximum thickness 0.20m at east end of the trench. For next c.10m to the centre of trench the thickness of subsoil gradually decreased and then gave way to ploughsoil overlying the natural profile (Sections 3.1 and 3.5). The uppermost layer was 0.30m of mid grey brown sandy loam (3/01) ploughsoil.

To the west of the trench was a curvilinear ditch 3/14. It was 3.20m wide, up to 0.78m deep (Plate 2; Sections 3.1 and 3.2). The west side of ditch was gradually sloping towards the centre, the east side was stepped and the base was virtually flat. It was filled with six fills. The primary fill (3/13) was 0.15m thick friable whitish mid yellow sandy gravel, which seem to be eroded material of the west side. The following fill (3/12) was 0.26m thick compact reddish mid brown sandy silt contained prehistoric pottery sherds, animal bones and worked flint (Section 3.1). In the opposite section (Section 3.2) this fill appeared to be completely different fill (3/15); 0.17m thick compact brownish mid yellow sandy gravel with 20% silt with no finds. Overlaying both (3/12) and (3/15) was 0.16m thick compact reddish mid brown sand with 2% gravel (3/11). All above described fills were sealed by main fill (3/10), which was 0.55m thick brownish mid yellow mixture of sand, gravel and silt. From the fill (3/10) were recovered Mid to Late Bronze Age pottery sherds, animal bone, worked flint and fire cracked pebbles. The uppermost fill was 0.11m, reddish mid brown sandy silt (3/09).

East of ditch 3/14 was sub-circular cremation pit 3/08, 0.60m long, 0.58m wide and 0.16m deep (Plate 3; Section 3.3). It was filled by two fills. The primary fill (3/07) was 0.04m thick light grey-brown sand with 10% small angular limestone and 1% flint. Upper fill (3/06) was 0.12m thick dark brown to black sand with 10% fine gravel and burnt bones. The entire content of cremation pit was collected for further processing and analysis.

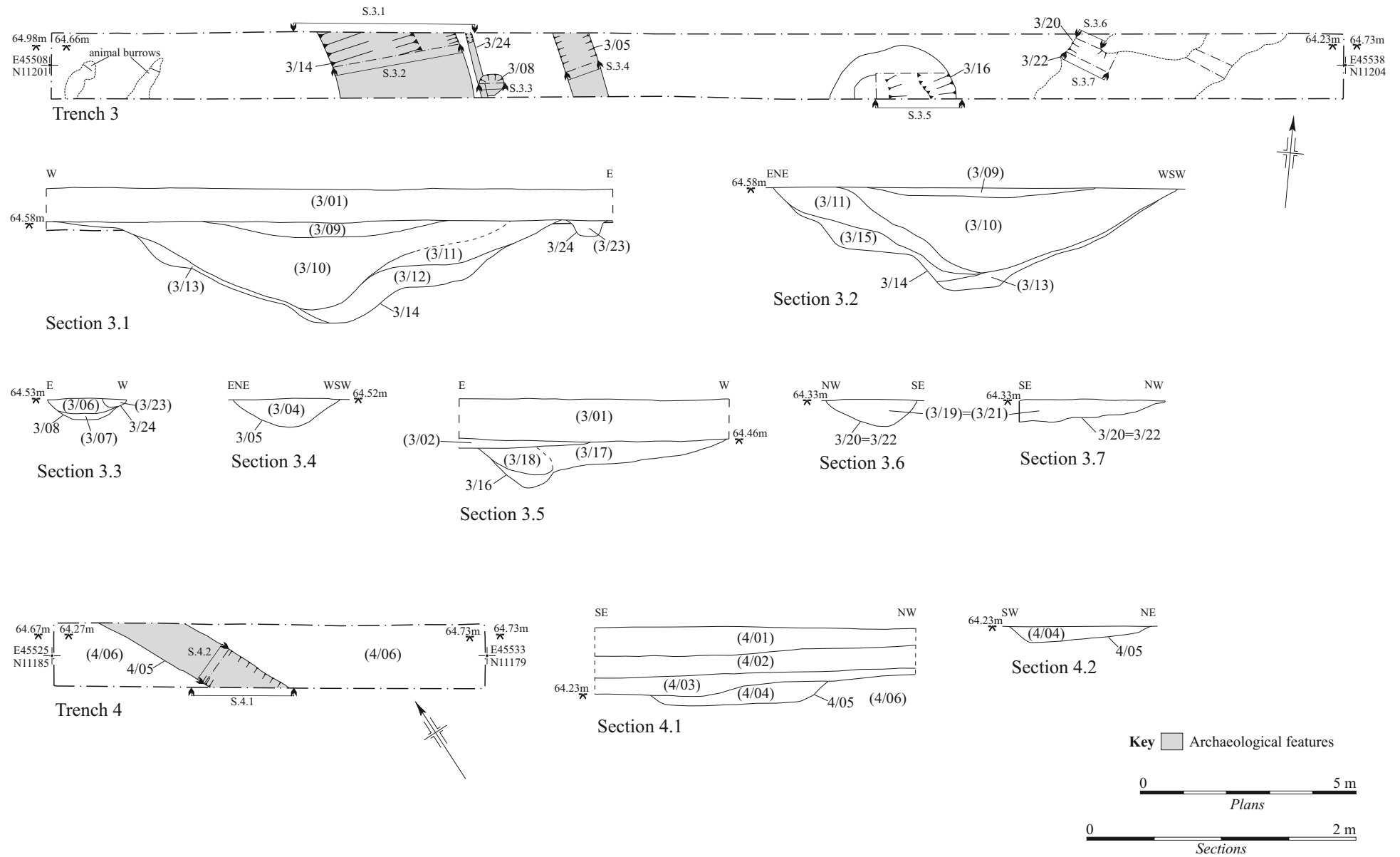


Figure 3: Trenches 3 and 4 - plans and sections



Plate 2: Ditch 3/14, view south-southeast

Cut into cremation pit 3/08 was a later linear cut 3/24 (Plate 3; Sections 3.1 and 3.3) aligned roughly northwest to southeast. It was 0.22m wide, 0.14m deep and filled with a reddish mid brown sandy silt with 1% gravel (3/23). On site interpretation of cut 3/24 suggest that it might be a narrow gully following the outer edge of the ditch 3/14. Based on closer examination of photographs, cut 3/24 seems to be one of the modern plough furrows which were observed in the trench.

Ditch 3/05 was located approximately in the middle of the trench. It was 0.80m wide, 0.18m deep and filled with a firm fill of mid brown silty sand (3/04) with 10% gravel and 1% flint (Section 3.4). The ditch was aligned northwest to southeast. It contained three sherds of Late Bronze Age to Late Iron Age pottery.

Five metres east of the ditch 3/05 was sub-circular cut 3/16; 3.10 long, 1.35 wide (as exposed in the trench) and 0.36m deep. Filled with a compact mid brown sandy silt (3/17), red-brown sandy silt (3/18) and redeposited natural sandy gravel, this feature represents a classic example of a tree throw hole (Section 3.5).

Close to the east end of the trench was a irregular cut 3/20=3/22 approximately 4m wide and 0.11m deep (Sections 3.6 and 3.7), filled with compact mid orange brown loamy clay (3/19)=(3/21); it appears to be natural, probably a periglacial feature.

At the west end of the trench two irregular features were tested; these appears to be an animal burrow.



Plate 3: Cremation pit 3/08, view south

4.5 Trench 4 (Figure 3)

Trench 4 was 10m long and 1.5m wide, and orientated northwest to southeast.

The natural deposit (4/06) was mid brown orangey clayey sand with 1% pebbles. Cut into the natural was shallow ditch 4/05, 1m wide, 2.90m long and 0.16m deep with concave sides and a flat base (Sections 4.1 and 4.2). It was orientated north-northwest to south-southeast. Ditch 4/05 was filled by 0.16m thick greyish mid brown silty sand contained 15% gravel and 5% clay (4/04). From the fill (4/04) were recovered possible residual prehistoric pottery sherds along with a small abraded sherd of Roman date. The last may have been intrusive. This ditch is a continuation of ditch 3/05.

The natural (4/06) and ditch 4/05 were sealed by 0.15m thick layer of reddish light brown sandy loam with 20% clay (4/03).

Overlaying layer (4/03) was a 0.16m thick layer of reddish mid brown loamy sand (4/02) subsoil, containing residual pottery sherds presumably of prehistoric. Over this was 0.20m layer of dark brown sandy silt (4/01) topsoil.

4.6 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 The Prehistoric and Roman Pottery *by Frances Raymond*

The assemblage has been the subject of a rapid appraisal to provide an indication of its date and character. The pottery has been quantified by context and the results are presented in Table 1, which also gives a brief description.

Context	Shd No	Shd Wt. (g.)	EVE	Date	Description
3/04	1	2	1	LBA to IA	Lightly abraded shell tempered wall fragment
3/04	2	6	2	LIA	Lightly abraded 'Belgic' grog tempered wall sherds
3/10	29	93	3	MBA to LBA	Fresh to lightly abraded shell tempered sherds including two rim fragments
3/10	7	18	1	MBA to LBA	Fresh to lightly abraded flint tempered sherds including one rim fragment
3/10	1	8	1	MBA to LBA	Fresh quartzite tempered rim sherd
3/12	1	13	1	LN to EBA	Fresh grog tempered wall fragment
3/12	1	12	1	LBA to EIA	Fresh hard shell tempered wall fragment
4/02	2	7	2	LBA to IA	Moderately abraded shell tempered wall fragments
4/02	1	11	1	LIA	Moderately abraded 'Belgic' grog tempered wall sherd
4/04	1	2	1	LBA to IA	Moderately abraded shell tempered wall fragments
4/04	1	2	1	LIA	Moderately abraded 'Belgic' grog tempered wall sherd
4/04	1	1	1	Roman	Heavily abraded wall fragment
TOTALS	48	175	16		

Table 1: Catalogue of Prehistoric and Roman Pottery

The assemblage is dominated by wall sherds and there is only limited evidence of the form of vessels provided by four small rim fragments from Context 3/10. The dating relies principally on fabric characteristics and as some of the wares had a long history of production, it is only possible to provide a broad indication of date.

The earliest sherd from Context 3/12 is in a soft grog tempered ware of a type used in the area for Late Neolithic Durrington Walls Grooved Ware and for vessels of the ensuing early Bronze Age. It is likely to be residual as it is associated with a wall fragment in a hard shelly fabric typical of the wares used during the late Bronze Age and into the early Iron Age.

The bulk of the pottery from Context 3/10 is in heavily tempered fabrics, largely shelly wares with a few flint tempered and one quartzite tempered example. The four rim fragments are all simple and are either upright or slightly inverted. The evidence of form is limited to the area around the vessel mouths and there is no indication of the vessel types. The evidence is consistent with pottery of middle Bronze Age date and with the earliest Plain Ware repertoire of the late Bronze Age, as exemplified by the assemblage from Eynsham with its early radiocarbon dates spanning a phase between 1270 and 1040 cal BC (Barclay et al 2001, 158-159).

The remaining contexts (3/04; 4/02 and 4/04) each produced 'Belgic' grog tempered wares of the late first century BC to first century AD. The shell tempered fragments from the same contexts could be contemporary, but this is by no means certain. The

few sherds of this type from Context 4/04 are associated with a Roman sherd and are residual.

5.2 Lithics (by David Gilbert)

A total of two struck flints were recovered from two separate contexts (Table 2). Flake dorsal cortex was recorded utilizing the terminology employed by Andrevsky (1998, 104).

Artefact	Context	L (mm)	W (mm)	B (mm)	Notes
Secondary Flake	3/10	32	35	14	Some later damage
Tertiary Flake	3/14	35	19	5	Some later damage

Table 2. Worked Flint

Both pieces displayed a mid to light grey patina. The hard hammer techniques displayed on this material would suggest a late Neolithic - Bronze Age date.

Also recovered from context (3/10) was a pebble (233g) displaying thermal fractures as well as crushing damage to one end perhaps indicating it had been employed as a hammerstone; a function it was ergonomically suited to.

5.3 Osteological material

Possible human burnt bones recovered from context (3/06) and animal bones from contexts (3/10) and (3/12).

5.4 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 WSI.

Trench 1 was placed across a linear cropmark orientated northeast to southwest. During the evaluation this cropmark was identified as linear ditch 1/04. The dimensions of ditch suggest, that it might be part of larger enclosure or field system. Lack of dating evidence does not allow exact date of the ditch. That is cuts across the ring ditch, as seen on aerial photographs, suggests an Iron Age or Roman date.

Trench 2 was located approximately in the middle of site. Apart from a shallow gully 2/04, post-medieval or modern in date, no other archaeological feature of significance were discovered during the investigation.

Trench 3 was placed across the circular and liner cropmarks. Circular cropmark was identified as ring ditch 3/14 of a possible Bronze Age barrow. Depositions of eroded material (3/11) (3/12) and (3/15) within ditch, suggest possible existence of an outer bank. Finds recovered from the fill (3/12) might be contemporary with the excavation

of the ring ditch and finds from the fill (3/10) presumably are associated with later activities on the site.

A secondary, perhaps Bronze Age, cremation burial 3/08, located next to the ring ditches confirmed the presence of the burial ground in the area.

Ditch 3/05 presumably of prehistoric date, visible on aerial photographs as a liner cropmark, could be part of a field system or enclosure boundary. This ditch continued into Trench 4. The highly abraded nature of the small Roman pottery sherd suggests that it is residual. Other pottery suggests an Iron Age date for this feature. If this is the case then the large boundary ditch apparently cutting the ring ditch and seen in Trench 1 also may be of this date.

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Past Scape

http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=336749&sort=2&rational=m&recordsperpage=10&maplat=51.79760000&maplong=-1.34150000&mapisa=1000&mapist=ll&mapilo=-1.3415&mapila=51.7976&mapiloe=w&mapilan=n&mapios=SP (15/10/2013)