



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

LAND OFF ORCHAERD WAY, HARWELL

OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SU 4880 8915

On behalf of

Mr R Womersley-Smith

DECEMBER 2014

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological field evaluation at land off Orchard Way, Harwell, Oxfordshire. Two machine-dug trenches each 30 m long each were excavated across the site. Field evaluation confirmed that the extent of the large Iron Age and Romano British settlement investigated to the north of the site on the south side of Grove Lane (JMHS 2014, OHaNET 2014) extended this far south. In both trenches a major boundary/drainage ditch was recorded containing Romano British pottery dated to 2nd to 4th centuries. A small pit in trench 1 contained Romano British pottery dated to the same as well. Additional undated features (rectilinear ditch, gully and a second ditch), however could be of the same date. Two possible furrows, presumably medieval or post-medieval in date, were identified in Trench 2. These features might be related to the wider ridge and furrow field system within the area.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located to the west of Orchard Way, Harwell (NGR SU 4880 8915). The site is currently pasture with shrubs and measures 0.3 hectares in area. It lies at approximately 83m OD and the geology is Head Deposits overlying Upper Greensand.

1.2 Planning Background

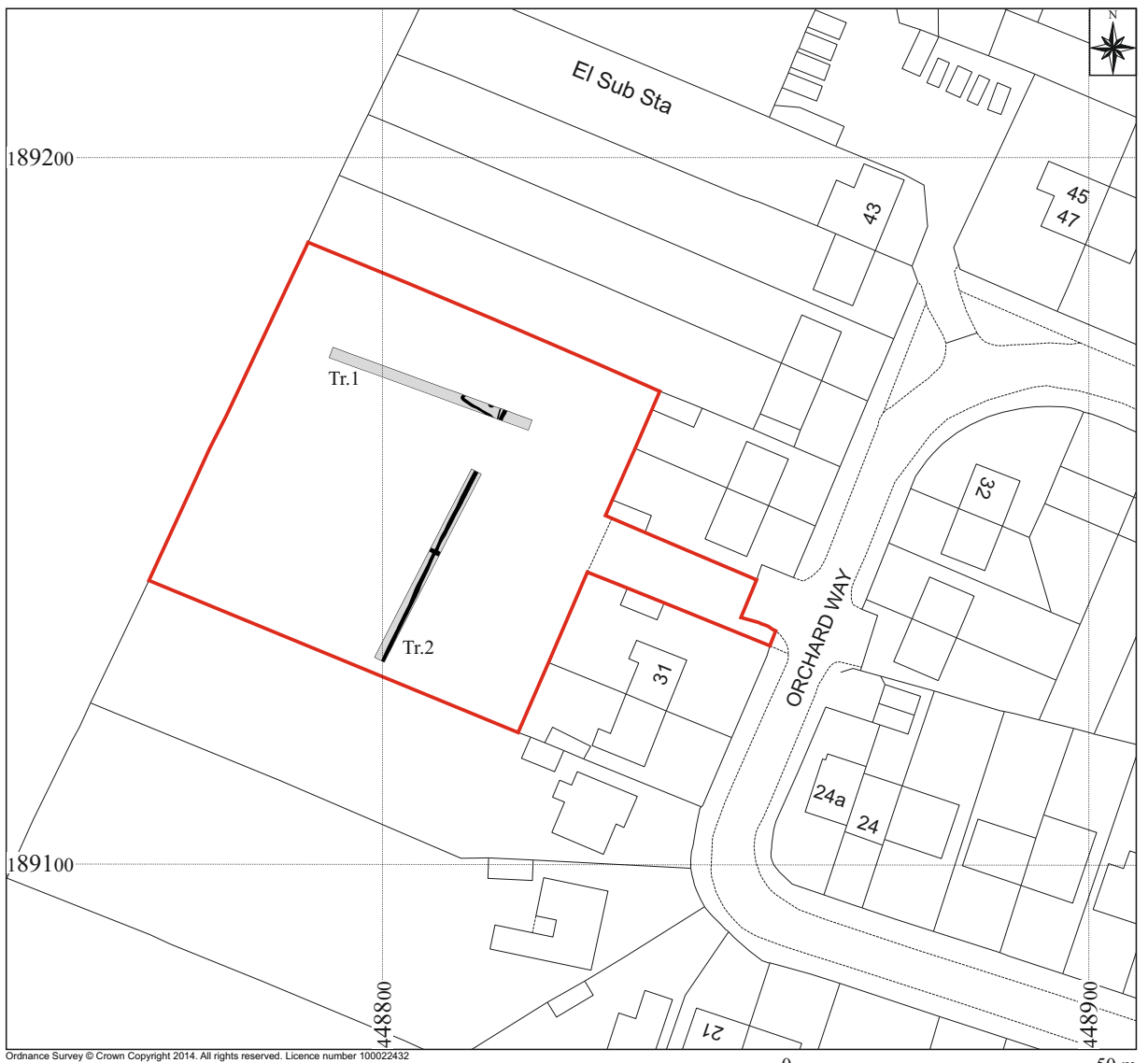
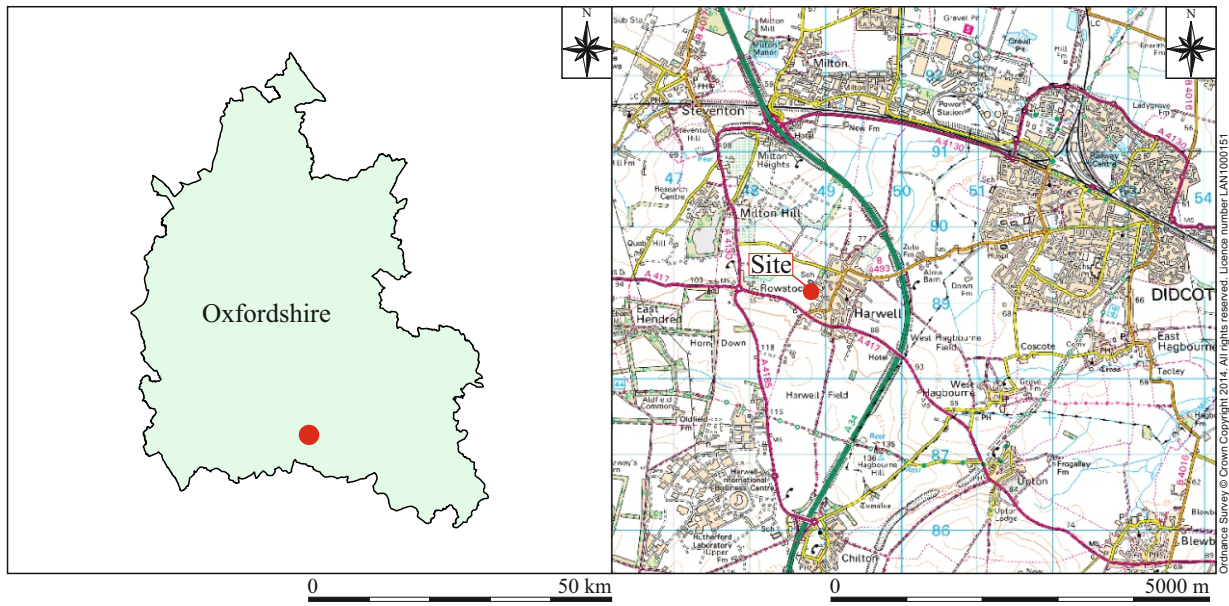
Planning permission is to be sought to develop an area for residential use (P14/V2286/O).

Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological features, the Oxfordshire Historic and Natural Environment Team (OHaNET) required that an archaeological field evaluation should be undertaken as part of the determination of the application. OHaNET prepared a *Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (OHaNET 2014).

John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) were commissioned to undertake this work, and a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2014) was prepared to satisfy the requirements of the *Brief*. This *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) proposed the methodology by which the archaeological field evaluation was to be carried out.

1.3 Archaeological Background

A staged programme of archaeological investigation has been undertaken to the north on the south side of Grove Lane. The geophysical survey and subsequent investigations revealed evidence of a very large Iron Age and Romano British settlement. This appears to have been occupied during the early and middle Iron Age with a hiatus until the third century AD. The occupation appears dense and the extent of the site has not been established in any direction. Given the density of occupation to the north it was quite possible that elements of the settlement extended into the application area (JMHS 2014, OHaNET 2014).



Key Site boundary Evaluation trenches Archaeological features

Figure 1: Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the WSI were:

- 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.

And in particular:

- To establish if features related to the nearby Prehistoric and Roman activity are present in this area.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In accordance with the Brief issued by OHaNET (2014) and WSI by JMHS (2014), JMHS carried out the work, which comprised a scheme for the mechanical excavation of two trial trenches across the site. Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the WSI (Sections 3.1 – 3.21).

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (2008) and the principles of MoRPHE (English Heritage 2006).

3.2 Methodology

Due to the fact that the site was heavily overgrown, the trenches were slightly relocated from their proposed locations.

A five tonne excavator fitted with a toothless 1.5m wide ditching bucket was used to excavate the two 30m long trenches across the site. The ground was reduced down to the archaeological horizon and the top of upper natural deposit, apart for a sondage opened in each trench where a lower natural deposit was encountered.

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.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results

All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers with no brackets indicate feature cuts, numbers in round brackets () show feature fills or deposits of material and numbers in bold indicate any form of masonry.

The lowest deposit encountered in both trenches was a layer of limestone in a matrix of light grey clayey sand (1/04) and (2/04), interpreted as a lower natural deposit. It was overlaid by up to 0.15m thick layer of light green-brown clayey sand (1/03) and (2/03), which represents the upper natural deposit. Overlaying the upper natural deposit was a 0.30-0.40m thick layer of subsoil (1/02) and (2/02) composed of mid grey sandy silt. From context (2/02) was recovered a fragment of Roman mortarium dated to 4th century (See 5.1) and animal bone (See 5.2). The uppermost deposit represents topsoil (1/01) and (1/02), described as 0.20-0.30m thick soft dark grey sandy loam (S.1.1, 1.2, 1.4 & 2.1; Pl. 1).



Plate 1: Section 2.1 showing general overburden and ditch 2/05, looking southwest

4.2 Trench 1 (Figure 2)

Trench 1 was 30m long and 1.5m wide, aligned northwest to southeast, and located approximately 11 m to the southwest from the northeast site boundary (Fig. 1).

In Trench 1, two ditches, one gully and one pit were investigated. All the features were concentrated in the southeast part of the trench, and stratigraphically cut into upper natural deposit (1/03) and were overlaid by subsoil (1/02). Further to the northwest the trench was blank, apart of tree roots activity.

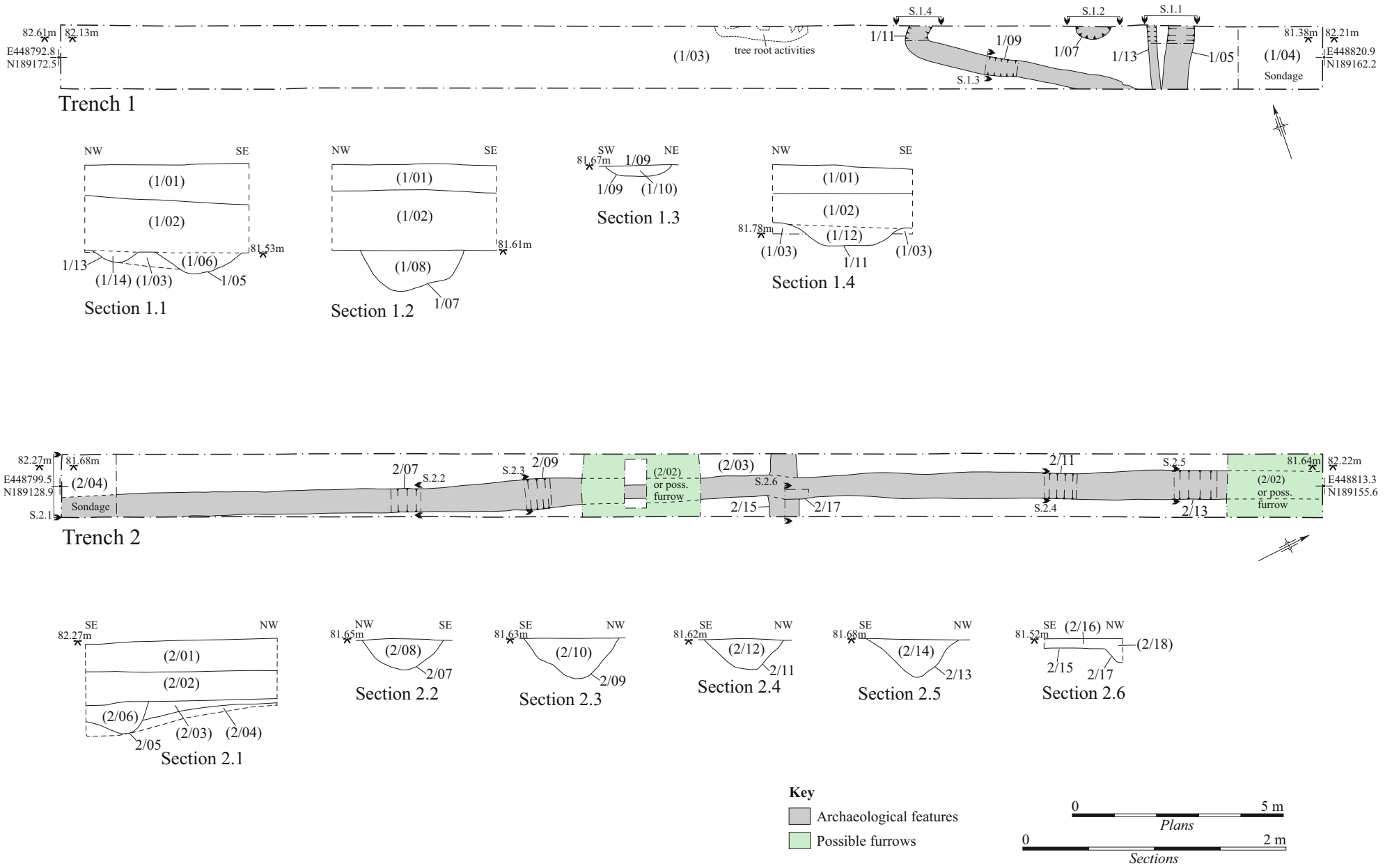


Figure 2: Trenches 1 and 2 -plans and sections



Plate 2: Trench 1, looking northwest

Ditch 1/05 was located at the southeast end of the trench and was aligned approximately north-northeast to south-southwest (Fig 2). It was 0.60 m wide and up to 0.20 m deep with a shallow concave sides and concave base. The single fill of the ditch (1/06) was described as firm mid grey silt clay. No finds were recovered from this fill. The interface between subsoil (1/02) and fill (1/06) was not relatively distinct (S.1.1; Pl. 3). This ditch is the same as the major ditch in Trench 2.

Gully 1/13, located immediately to the northwest from ditch 1/05 (Fig. 2), was 0.28 m wide, 0.08 m deep aligned approximately north-northeast to south-southwest as well as ditch 1/05, although orientated slightly more to the north and south direction. It was filled with mid grey sandy clay (1/14) (S.1.1; Pl. 3). No dating evidence was obtained from the excavated section. The stratigraphic relationship between gully 1/13 and ditch 1/05 was not present within the trench.



Plate 3: Gully 1/13 and ditch 1/05, looking northeast (S.1.1)

Cuts 1/09 and 1/11 represent a rectilinear ditch (Fig. 2, Plate 4). Its longer part (5.30 m) was orientated northwest to southeast and the shorter part was aligned northeast to southwest (0.62 m). The southeast and northeast ends of the ditch were defined by the limit of excavation with the northwest end representing an c. 90° turning of the ditch. It was 0.48 m to 0.62 wide, and 0.12 deep with moderate concave sides and a flattish concave base. Fills (1/10) and (1/12) represent a single fill of the ditch, described a mid grey silty clay (S.1.3 & 1.4; Pl. 4). No find were recovered from this fill. The stratigraphic relationship with gully 1/13 and ditch 1/05 seems to lie just outside of southwest edge of trench.



Plate 4: Ditch 1/09, looking northwest (S.1.3)

Cut 1/07, which likely represents a small sub-circular pit, was located immediately to the northeast edge of trench and enclosed by the linear features (Fig. 2, Plate 5). It was 0.75 m long, 0.36 m wide (as excavated), and 0.35 m deep. The fill of the pit was firm mid grey silty clay (1/08) with <1% small rounded stones (S.1.2). It contained two fragments of Roman pottery dated the period from 2nd to 4th century (See 5.1).



Plate 5: Pit 1/07, looking northeast (S.1.2)

4.3 Trench 2 (Figure 2)

Trench 2 was 30m long and 1.5m wide, aligned northeast to southwest, and located approximately 20 m to the northwest from the southeast site boundary (Fig. 1).



Plate 6: Trench 2, looking northeast

The major feature in Trench 2 was a linear ditch running along the entire length of trench. Six sections and one sondage were opened to investigate the ditch, which accounts for approximately 15% of its length, and individual cut numbers were assigned to every section: 2/05, 2/07, 2/09, 2/11, 2/13, and 2/17 (Fig. 2; Pl. 6). The profile of the ditch varied from wide-open U-shape with moderate concave sides and concave base to V-shaped with relatively steep straight sides and narrow concave base (S. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6; Pl. 1 & 7). The ditch was from 0.37 m to 0.65 m wide and 0.20 m to 0.30 m deep. The fill of the ditch (2/06), (2/08), (2/10), (2/12), (2/14), and (2/18) was described as mid grey silty clay, with <1% charcoal. Three Romano British pottery sherds 2nd to 4th century in date were recovered from individual sections (See 5.1).

A second linear ditch 2/15 aligned northwest to southeast, located approximately in the middle of trench 2, was 1.50 m long, 0.70 m wide and 0.12m deep (Fig 2, S. 2.6). It had shallow concave sides and a flattish concave base. The single fill of the ditch was described as firm mid grey silty clay (2/16). From this fill was recovered a fragment of an animal bone (See 5.2). Ditch 2/15 was clearly in superposition with ditch 2/05, 2/07, 2/09, 2/11, 2/13, and 2/17. In order to establish the stratigraphic relationship between those two ditches an L-shaped section was excavated. Due to the same composition of fills (2/16) and (2/18), the relationship was not visible (Pl. 8).



Plate 7: Ditch 2/13, looking southwest (S.2.5)



Plate 8: Ditches 2/15 and 2/17, looking southwest (S.2.6)

Two strips of overburden located in the middle and northeast end of trench, originally interpreted as subsoil (2/02), possibly represent medieval or post-medieval furrows (Fig 2).

4.4 Reliability 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 Pottery by Jane Timby

The archaeological evaluation produced a small group of six sherds of pottery weighing 44 g dating to the Romano British period. Pottery was recovered from six individual contexts, thus the incidence of Roman sherds is particularly low. The assemblage was scanned to assess the likely chronology and quantified by sherd count and weight for each recorded context. Named, known traded wares were coded using the National Roman fabric reference series (Tomber and Dore 1998). The resulting data is summarised in Table 1.

The assemblage comprises six wares of local Oxfordshire origin and one piece from an imported Central Gaulish samian (LEZ SA) dish. Apart from one sherd from a later Roman mortarium (OXF WS) from the subsoil the sherds cannot be closely dated other than potentially spanning the 2nd-4th century.

In general terms the group is too small to warrant any further work but does serve to show the likely presence of Roman occupation in the immediate area.

Tr	Cxt	Type	Fabric	Name	No	Wt	Date
1	1/08	pit	OXID	fine sandy oxidised	1	7	Roman
1	1/08	pit	OXFFR	Oxon fine grey ware	1	5	C2-C4
2	2/02	subsoil	OXF WSM	Oxon white slipped mortarium	1	14	mid C3-C4
2	2/10	ditch	LEZSA	Central Gaulish samian	1	17	C2
2	2/12	ditch	OXFWH	Oxon white ware	1	0.5	C2-C4
2	2/14	ditch	OXFRE	Oxon grey sandy ware	1	0.5	C2-C4
TOT					6	44	

Table 1

5.2 Osteological material

Two fragments of animal bones recovered during the evaluation were identified as possible cattle ribs. The fragment recovered from fill of the ditch (2/16) was 60 mm long and weight 15 g, and second fragment recovered from subsoil (2/02) was 90 mm long and weighed 18 g.

5.3 Palaeo-environmental Remains

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

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological field evaluation was successful and meets the aims, which were laid out in the WSI.

Dated features revealed that the earliest activities on the site were in the Romano British period. Ditch 1/05 investigated in Trench 1 was the continuation of the ditch 2/05, 2/07, 2/09, 2/11, 2/13, and 2/17 investigated in Trench 2, which seems to represent a major boundary/drainage ditch. Pit 1/07 that is dated to the same period as well shows further Roman settlement activities within the site.

Related to the same general settlement activities seem to be rectilinear ditch 1/09=1/11, which represents a smaller enclosure along with linear features gully 1/13 and shallow ditch 2/15.

The above described features are highly likely related to the very large Iron Age and Romano British settlement investigated to the north of evaluated site on the south side of Grove Lane (JMHS 2014, OHaNET 2014).

Two medieval or post-medieval possible furrows identified in the trench 2, seems to be related to the wider ridge and furrow field system within the general area. The closest ridge and furrows are located c. 50 m to the south from the site (PastScape, Monument No. 1302180).

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Tomber, R. and Dore, J. (1998). *The National Roman fabric reference collection: a handbook*. London: Museum of London – English Heritage – British Museum.

Appendix 1: Trench Context Inventory

ID	Type	Description	Depth	Length	Width	Finds	Interpretation	Date
Trench 1								
1/01	Deposit	Soft dark grey sandy loam	0.20 – 0.30 m	30 m	1.50 m	-	Topsoil	modern
1/02	Deposit	Mid grey sandy silt, moderate compaction	0.30 – 0.40 m	30 m	1.50 m	-	Subsoil	Early medieval to post-medieval (?)
1/03	Deposit	Firm light green-brown clayey sand	0.10 – 0.15m	30 m	1.50 m	-	Upper natural	-
1/04	Deposit	Firm grey-white layer of chalk in a matrix similar to 1/03	N/A	2 m	1.50 m	-	Lower natural	-
1/05	Cut	Linear cut with shallow concave sides and concave base. Orientation: NNE-SSW	0.20m	1.50 m	0.60 m	N/A	Ditch (same as ditch in TR. 2)	Roman
1/06	Fill	Firm mid grey sandy clay	0.20 m	1.50 m	0.60 m	-	Fill of ditch 1/05	Roman
1/07	Cut	Sub-circular cut with steep concave to straight sides and concave base. Orientation: NW-SE	0.35 m	0.75 m	0.36 m	N/A	Pit	Roman
1/08	Fill	Firm mid grey silty clay with c. 1% small rounded stones < 50 mm	0.35 m	0.75 m	0.36 m	Pottery	Fill of pit 1/07	Roman
1/09	Cut	Linear cut with moderate concave side and flat base. Orientation: NW-SE Same as 1/11	0.10 m	5.12 m	0.48 m	N/A	Shallow ditch	Undated, possible Roman
1/10	Fill	Mid grey silty clay, moderate compaction Same as 1/12	0.10 m	5.12 m	0.48 m	-	Fill of ditch 1/09	Undated, possible Roman
1/11	Cut	Linear cut with moderate concave side and flat base. Orientation: NE-SW Same as 1/09	c. 0.14 m	0.62 m	0.61 m	N/A	Shallow ditch	Undated, possible Roman
1/12	Fill	Mid grey silty clay, moderate compaction Same as 1/10	c. 0.14m	0.62 m	0.61 m	-	Fill of ditch 1/11	Undated, possible Roman
1/13	Cut	Linear cut with shallow concave sides and concave base. Orientation: NNE-SSW	0.08 m	1.50 m	0.28 m	N/A	Shallow gully	Undated, possible Roman
1/14	Fill	Firm mid grey sandy clay	0.08 m	1.50 m	0.28 m	-	Fill of gully	Undated, possible Roman
Trench 2								
2/01	Deposit	Soft dark grey sandy loam	0.30 m	30 m	1.50 m	-	Topsoil	modern
2/02	Deposit	Mid grey sandy silt, moderate compaction	0.30 m	30 m	1.50 m	Pottery, animal bone	Subsoil	Early medieval to post-medieval (?)
2/03	Deposit	Firm light green-brown clayey sand	c. 0.12 m	30 m	1.50 m	-	Upper natural	-
2/04	Deposit	Firm grey-white layer of chalk in a matrix similar to 2/03	0.08 m as exca.	1.25 m	1.50 m	-	Lower natural	-
2/05	Cut	Linear cut with steep sides and concave base. Orientation: NE-SW.	0.20 m	1.25 m as exca.	0.37 m	N/A	Ditch	Roman

		Same as 2/07, 2/09, 2/11, 2/13, 2/17 & 1/05						
2/06	Fill	Mid grey silty clay, moderate compaction Same as 2/08, 2/10, 2/12, 2/14, 2/18 & 1/06	0.20 m	1.25 m	0.37 m	-	Fill of ditch 2/05	Roman
2/07	Cut	Linear cut with steep concave sides and concave base. Orientation: NE-SW Same as 2/05, 2/09, 2/11, 2/13, 2/17 & 1/05	0.22 m	0.70m as exca.	0.60 m	N/A	Ditch	Roman
2/08	Fill	Firm mid grey silty clay with charcoal flecks (< 1%) Same as 2/06, 2/10, 2/12, 2/14, 2/18 & 1/06	0.22 m	0.70 m	0.60 m	-	Fill of ditch 2/07	Roman
2/09	Cut	Linear cut with steep straight a stepped straight and concave sides and concave base. Orientation: NE-SW. Same as 2/05, 2/07, 2/11, 2/13, 2/17 & 1/05	0.30 m	0.60 m as exca.	0.70 m	N/A	Ditch	Roman
2/10	Fill	Firm mid grey silty clay Same as 2/08, 2/08, 2/12, 2/14, 2/18 & 1/06	0.30 m	0.60 m	0.70m	Pottery	Fill of ditch 2/09	Roman
2/11	Cut	Linear cut with moderate concave sides and flat base. Orientation: NE-SW Same as 2/05, 2/07, 2/09, 2/13, 2/17 & 1/05	0.22 m	0.80 m as exca.	0.62 m	N/A	Ditch	Roman
2/12	Fill	Mid grey silty clay with occasional charcoal (<1%), moderate compaction Same as 2/06, 2/08, 2/10, 2/14, 2/18 & 1/06	0.22 m	0.80 m	0.62 m	Pottery	Fill of ditch 2/11	Roman
2/13	Cut	Linear cut with steep straight sides and concave base. Orientation: NE-SW Same as 2/05, 2/07, 2/09, 2/11, 2/17 & 1/05	0.28 m	1 m as exca.	0.65 m	N/A	Ditch	Roman
2/14	Fill	Mid grey silty clay with occasional charcoal (<1%), moderate compaction Same as 2/06, 2/08, 2/10, 2/12, 2/18 & 1/06	0.28 m	1 m	0.65 m	Pottery	Ditch	Roman
2/15	Cut	Linear cut with shallow concave sides and flattish concave base. Orientation: NW-SE	0.08 m	1.50 m	0.70 m	N/A	Ditch	Undated
2/16	Fill	Firm mid grey silty clay	0.08 m	1.50 m	0.70 m	-	Fill of ditch 2/15	Undated
2/17	Cut	Linear cut with steep straight sides and concave base. Orientation: NE-SW Same as 2/05, 2/07, 2/09, 2/11, 2/13 & 1/05	0.12 m	0.60 m as exca.	0.25 m as exca.	N/A	Ditch	Roman
2/18	Fill	Firm mid grey silty clay Same as 2/06, 2/08, 2/10, 2/12, 2/14 & 1/06	0.12 m	0.60 m	0.25 m	-	Fill of ditch 2/17	Roman