



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

39 BARWELL, WANTAGE

OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SU 3972 8833

*On behalf of
Mr & Mrs Walker*

FEBRUARY 2016

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief at 39 Barwell in Wantage, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 3972 8833). The aims of investigation in particular were to record any evidence relating to prehistoric, Roman and Saxon activity known in the area. The fieldwork comprised monitoring of the mechanical and limited hand excavation of foundation trenches for an extension to the existing dwelling with a total length of 18.40 m.

The archaeological features, three pits and two ditches, recorded during the watching brief revealed dense occupation of the site during the Roman period, from early 2nd to 4th century. No features related to medieval or post-medieval period were encountered during the watching brief. The rest of the features, drainage, water main, garden feature and foundations of existing building, were 20th century in date.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located at 39 Barwell in Wantage, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 3972 8833) and lies at an approximate height of 87 m above Ordnance Datum (OD). The underlying geology is Upper Greensand Formation - Calcareous Sandstone and Siltstone, but close to the boundaries of the Gault Formation. The site is in residential use.

1.2 Planning Background

The Vale of White Horse District Council granted planning permission for a single storey extension P15/V0305/HH. Due to the potential of the site to contain buried archaeological remains Oxfordshire Historic and Natural Environment Team (OHaNET) recommended, in line with NPPF 2012, the implementation of an archaeological watching brief during groundworks.

John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) was commissioned to undertake this work, and a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2015) was prepared to satisfy the requirements of such archaeological work. The *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) proposed the methodology by which the archaeological watching brief was to be carried out.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The proposed development, whilst relatively small, lies in an area of considerable archaeological potential; Roman burials are recorded to both the north and south of the site. A Romano-British cemetery is recorded to the north, and findspots of Roman artefacts are recorded between the cemetery and the development site. Human remains of Romano-British date are recorded to the south-west, as well as a Roman settlement site to the south. The significant features of this settlement site include a stone building and tower granary and the site shows evidence for continued use into the Anglo-Saxon period. Some smaller quantities of Iron Age material was also recorded during evaluation excavation at the site. The remains are described as substantial and in a well-preserved condition. The full extent and exact nature of both the cemetery and the settlement is not yet fully understood, and as the proposed development is situated between these two important sites, it is possible that it may disturb buried associated archaeological deposits, particularly human burials (JMHS 2015).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the WSI (JMHS 2015) were:

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

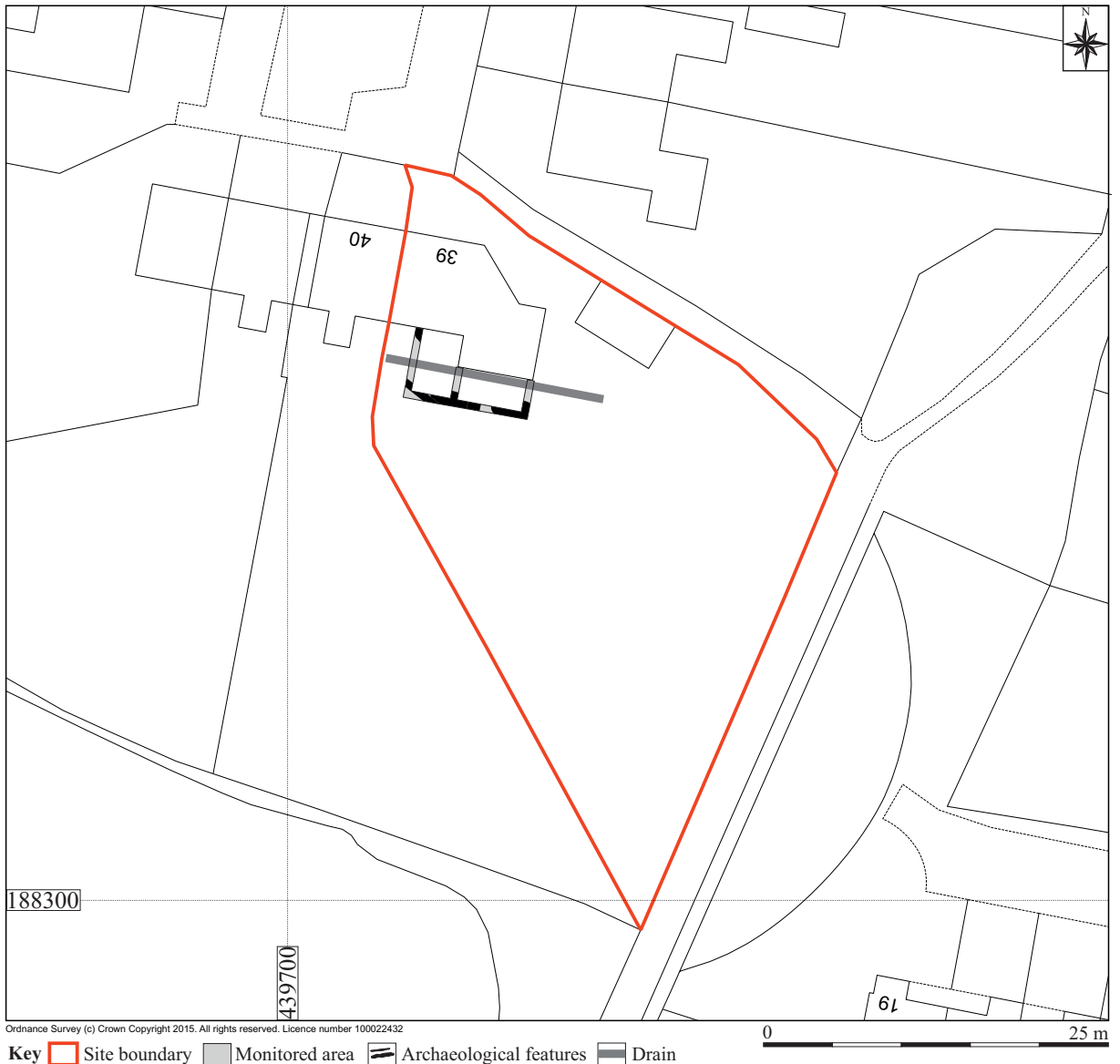
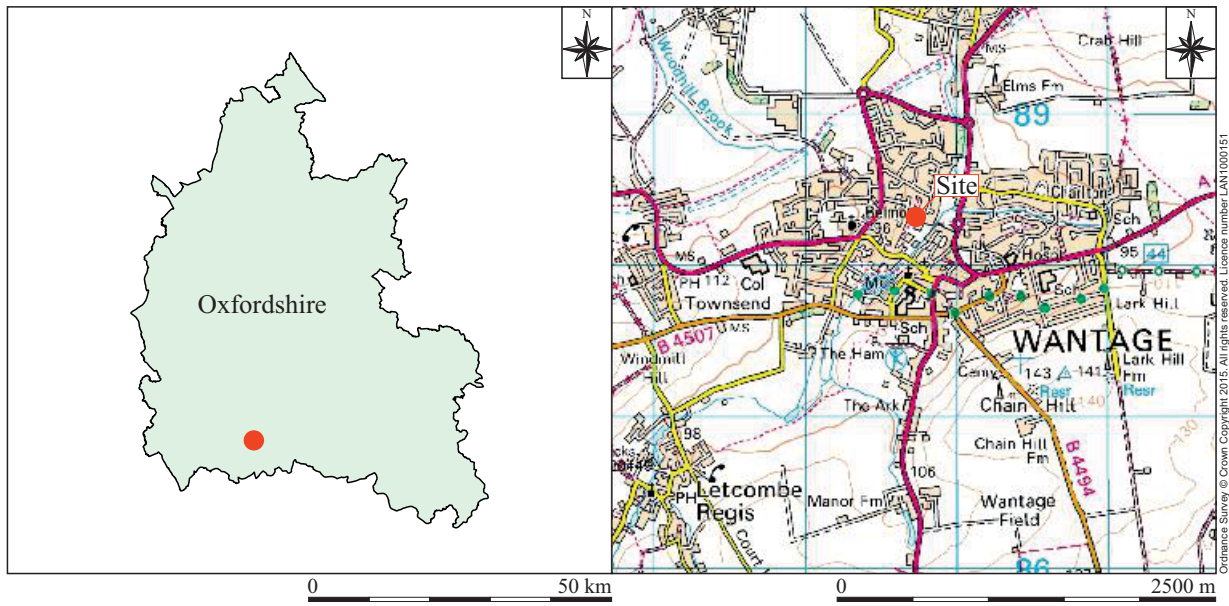


Figure 1: Site location

In particular:

- To record any evidence relating to prehistoric, Roman and Saxon activity known in the area.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

JMHS carried out an archaeological watching brief in accordance with the WSI (JMHS 2015). Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the WSI (Sections 3.1 – 3.7).

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014) and the principles of MoRPHE (Historic England 2015).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present on site during excavation of a foundation trench for an extension to the existing dwelling. A 3t excavator fitted with a toothless 0.45 m wide bucket was used to excavate the foundation trench.

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. A photographic record was also produced.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results (Figure 2)

All features and deposits were assigned with individual context numbers, except of modern features. 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 foundation trenches totalling 18.40 m were excavated. They were 0.50 m wide and reached a maximum depth 2.30 m from the present ground surface (Fig. 2a; Pl. 1).

The lowest deposit recorded within the foundation trenches was >0.42 m thick mid greyish brown clay (106), interpreted as a lower natural deposit (Fig. 2a). Deposit (106) was overlaid by 1.20 m thick upper natural deposit (103) described as light grey chalky clayey silt (Fig. 2a, b, c; Pl. 2).

The fill of features in relation to the natural was unclear in plan, but more apparent in section (Fig. 2a).



Plate 1: General overview of foundation trenches, looking NE



Plate 2: Section 2, looking ENE

Deposit (103) was cut by five archaeological features. Stratigraphically the earliest feature was a large, presumably oval, pit (109) located in the central area of the foundation trenches (Fig. 2a). It was >2.80 m long, >1.08 m wide and >0.58 m deep, and had moderate concave sides (Fig. 2c, Pl. 2). The fill of the pit, assigned with context number (110), was described as dark grey sandy silt, and contained Roman pottery dated to early 2nd century (5.1), and fragments of animal bone (5.1).

The east end of pit 109 was cut by ditch 111. It was 0.90 m wide, >0.50 m long and >0.60 m deep; aligned north-northeast to south-southwest (Fig. 2a, c; Pl. 3). Ditch 111 was fill with very dark grey sandy silt (112). From the fill were recovered fragments of Roman pottery dated from 1st to 3rd century (5.1).

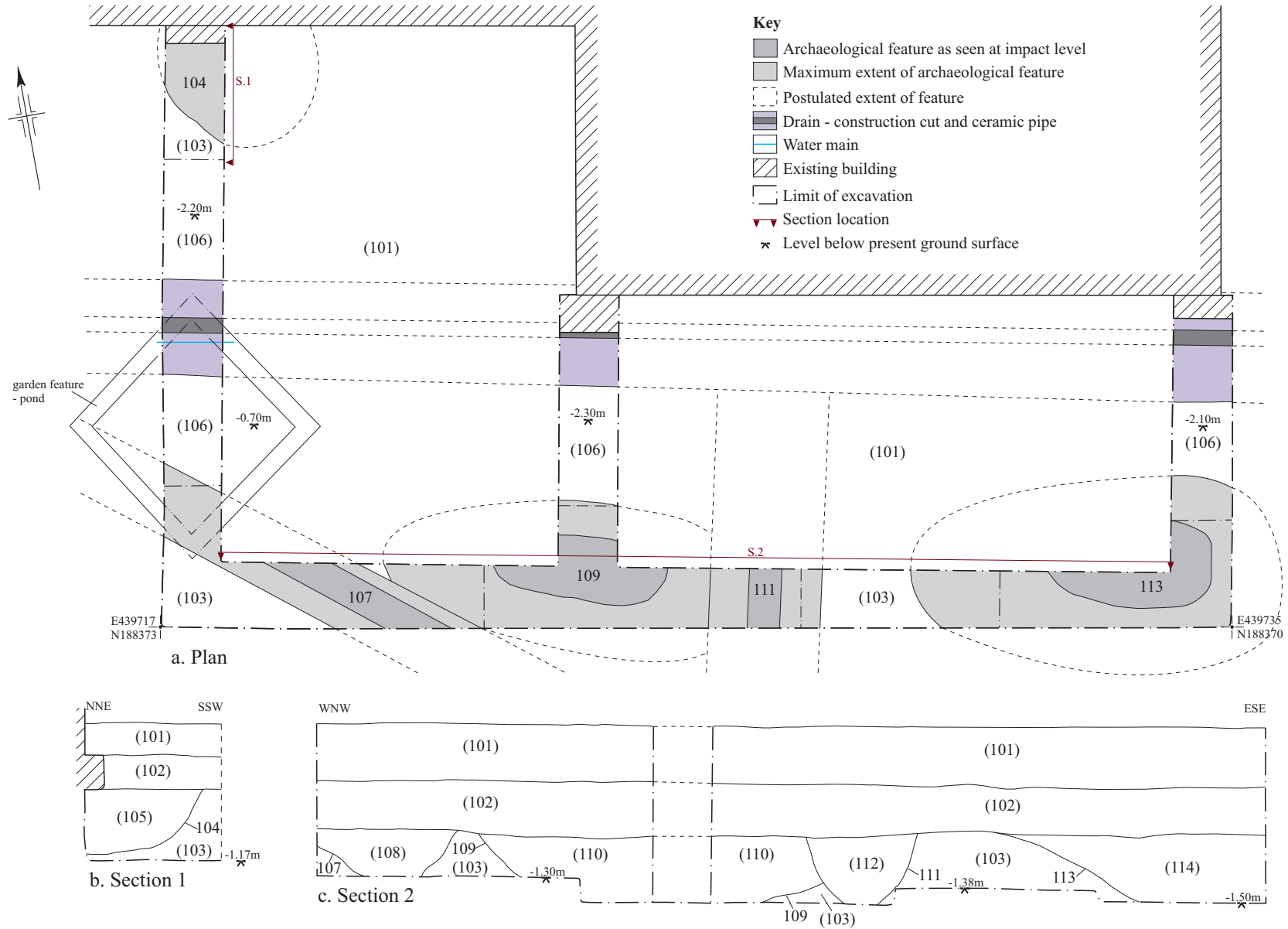


Figure 2: Monitored foundation trenches - plan and sections

At the southeast end of foundation trench was recorded a second pit 113. The pit was sub-oval in plan, measuring >2.72 m in length, >1.30 m in width and >0.58 m in depth (Fig. 2a, c; Pl. 4). Its fill (113) was dark grey sandy silt and produced fragments of Roman pottery dated from 1st to 3rd century (5.1).



Plate 3: Ditch 111, looking NNE



Plate 4: Pit 113, looking NE

Cut 104 was recorded at the northwest end of the foundation trench immediately next to the existing building (Fig 2a). It presumably represents the remains of a sub-circular pit. Cut 104 was >1 m long, >0.60 m wide and 0.55 m deep with steep concave sides and concave base (Fig. 2b; Pl. 5). It was filled with dark grey clayey silt (105). Fragments of Roman pottery dated from 3rd to 4th century (5.1), and one animal bone (5.2) were recovered from the fill.

In the southwest part of foundation trench was located ditch 107 (Fig 2a). It was >3.10 m long, 0.58 m wide and >0.41 m deep; orientated northwest to southeast. No finds were recovered from its fill (108); dark grey sandy silt (Fig 2c; Pl. 6). However

based on the stratigraphic relationship, ditch 107 was earlier than pit 109 (Fig. 2a). The northwest end of the ditch was partially truncated by a 20th century garden feature.



Plate 5: Pit 104, looking ESE



Plate 6: Ditch 107, looking NNE

All the above features were overlaid by a layer of dark grey loamy silt (102) very similar in composition and colour to the fill of the majority investigated features. The thickness of layer (102) gradually increased from 0.28 m at north end to 0.49 m at south end of the monitored area (Fig 2b, c; Pl. 2). No finds were recovered from this deposit, however it may possibly represent a buried topsoil, presumably of medieval and/or post-medieval date. The uppermost deposit (101) was a 0.29 m to 0.50 m thick layer of dark grey-brown salty loam, which represents the modern topsoil.

The large portion of the monitored area was disturbed by large, >2.30 m deep and 0.85 m wide, construction cut for 20th century drainage aligned east to west. As well as the drainage feature, concrete foundations of the existing building, a water main

and remains of a 20th century garden feature were observed within the foundation trenches (Fig. 2a).

4.2 Reliability of Results

The reliability of results is considered to be very good. The archaeological watching brief took place in good weather conditions with excellent light and visibility. Excellent co-operation from the ground workers and landowner ensured sufficient time to investigate and record the archaeological deposits to the appropriate standards.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery by Jane Timby

Introduction

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of 20 sherds pottery weighing 750 g, accompanied by a single piece (125 g) of ceramic building material (CBM). All the pottery dates to the Roman period.

Pottery was recovered from just four contexts. Overall the assemblage is very well preserved with quite large sherds showing fresh edges. Surface finishes such as burnish or colour-coat have been preserved. The overall average sherd size is 35.7 g which is quite high. This is partly a reflection of the presence of some large storage jar sherds.

For the purposes of the assessment the assemblage was scanned to assess the likely chronology and quantified by sherd count and weight for each recorded context. Known, named Roman traded wares were coded using the National Roman fabric reference series (Tomber and Dore 1998) [codes in square brackets]. Other wares were coded following a similar format but more generically according to firing colour and principal inclusions in the fabric (codes in round brackets). The resulting data can be found in Table 1. Freshly broken sherds were counted as single pieces.

Description of fabrics and forms

The assemblage is mainly composed of wares from local sources accompanied by a single sherd of imported Central Gaulish samian probably from Les Martres-de-Veyre (LMV SA) and three sherds from a single plain-walled dish in Dorset black burnished ware [DOR BB1].

Amongst the local wares are three handmade grog-tempered sherds (105, 112, 114) from large storage jars which account for nearly one third of total weight.

Products from the local Oxfordshire industry include one sherd of colour-coated mortarium [OXF RS]; one sherd of Oxfordshire grey reduced ware [OXF RE] and five sherds from the lower part of a single carinated jar in a fine grey ware [OXF FR]. This latter vessel from (110), although missing a rim, can be classified as Young (1977) type R26 dated to the 1st-2nd centuries.

Also present are two sherds of Oxfordshire oxidised ware (OXF OX) one possibly from a bowl Young (1977) type O45 of 2nd-century date. The only other wares are a coarse sandy fabric used to make handmade vessels and represented by just two sherds and one grey ware in the form of a flat-rimmed dish or bowl.

Chronology

The latest dateable piece in the group is the Oxfordshire colour-coated mortarium from (105) which suggests a date after the mid-3rd century. The same context produced the DOR BB1 dish which could also be later Roman in date.

The assemblage from (110) probably dates to the early 2nd century. Similarly the pottery from (112) and (114) although represented by single sherds is likely to date from the early 2nd century onwards. In both cases these are storage jar sherds which could have quite a longer lifespan.

Ceramic building material (CBM)

One fragment of CBM was recovered from (105). This is a piece of curved roofing tile (imbrex) dating to the Roman period.

Potential and further work

This is a very small group of material which limits its potential. The condition is good suggesting the presence of well-preserved deposits dating to the Roman period at the location.

No further work is recommended on this particular assemblage although it should be taken into consideration if further work is undertaken at the site.

Context	samian	BB1	OXFRE	OXFOX	OXFRS	Grog	Other	Tot No	Tot Wt	CBM no	CBM wt	Date
105	0	4	1	0	1	1	3	10	285	1	125	mid C3-C4
110	1	0	5	2	0	0	0	8	330	0	0	e C2
112	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	99	0	0	C1-C3
114	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	36	0	0	C1-C3
TOTAL	1	4	6	2	1	3	3	21	750	1	125	

Table 1: Roman pottery

5.2 Animal bones *by Simona Denis*

A small assemblage of 21 fragments of animal bone, with a combined weight of 495 gr, were recovered from two contexts. The vast majority (20 items) was collected from context (110), while the remaining item came from context (105).

The finds are in a generally good state of preservation; however, the very small size of most of the fragments allowed only limited observations.

The largest part of the collection (13 items, or 61%) did not preserve any diagnostic or genus-specific features and was therefore only identified as belonging to mammals.

Seven of the remaining items were attributed to sheep/goat, while the only fragment find in context (105) was tentatively identified as cow.

Butchering marks were observed on three of the items from context (110): a point insertion mark on one innominate fragment, a shallow scoop mark on an identified long bone shaft, and one deep chop mark on an unidentified fragment.

Context	Identification	Type	No. of Items	Weight (gr)	Comments
105	?Cow	?Distal radius	1	50	
110	Sheep/Goat	Innominate	2	188	Point insertion mark. Same young individual
		Scapula	2	28	Young individual
			1	66	
	Unidentified mammal	Mandibula	1	15	
		Scapula	3	39	
		Mandibula with molar	1	23	
		Unidentified long bone shaft	5	48	
			1	15	Shallow scoop mark
		Unidentified	3	16	
	1	7	Deep chop mark		

Table 2: Animal bones

Non-diagnostic, unmarked fragments and small items were not retained due to their very limited potential for further analysis.

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological watching brief was successful and meets the aims of the investigations, which were laid out in the WSI.

The archaeological features recorded during the watching brief revealed dense occupation of the site during the Roman period, from early 2nd to 4th century.

The earliest dated feature was pit 109 that contained the pottery dated to early 2nd century. Ditch 111 and pit 113 seems to be contemporary, and were dated to 3rd century. The remains of pit 104 perhaps represents the final stage of Roman activity within the site in the 4th century. Ditch 107 did not contained any datable finds. Based on stratigraphic relationships it may possibly be of the same date as pit 104. The fragment of imbrex indicates a Roman building in the vicinity. This site adds to that known of the Roman landscape in the area.

No medieval or post-medieval features were encountered during the investigations. However, deposit (102) interpreted as a buried topsoil may possibly be of this date. Rest of the features, drainage, water main, garden feature and foundations of existing building, were 20th century in date.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

Written scheme of investigation

The project report

The primary site record

Physical record

Finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to Oxfordshire Museums Resource Centre under accession number: 2015.132

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