

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

ST BIRINUS SCHOOL

QUEENS STREET

DORCHESTER UPON THAMES

SU 57889439

On behalf of

ATKINS

August 2004

REPORT FOR

PREPARED BY

FIELDWORK 9-10 August 2004

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the course of the excavation of a pipe trench for the supply of gas to a Horsa classroom block within the school grounds. No archaeological evidence was found relating the site to the scheduled monument (Oxon 116) part of the northern suburbs of the Roman town.

1. Introduction

1.1 Site Location (figure 1)

The site is located on the eastern side of Queen Street, Dorchester upon Thames, Oxfordshire at grid reference SU 5788 9439.

1.2 Planning Background

An application was submitted to South Oxfordshire District Council for the excavation of a pipe trench to provide a gas supply. Due to the potential presence of below ground archaeological deposits a condition was attached that during the period of groundworks the applicant would be responsible for the undertaking of an archaeological watching brief. John Moore Heritage Services undertook the work in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Atkins and South Oxfordshire District Council.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Dorchester-on-Thames is situated within the site of a small Roman town, which consisted of roughly rectangular defences enclosing a civil settlement of about 13.5 ha. 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 school site lies just outside the postulated line of the northeastern town defences. Considerable evidence for extramural occupation dating from the 1st to the 4th centuries AD was recorded during archaeological work in the school grounds in 1994. A complex sequence of layers with intercutting relationships was recorded, including a large ditch and several pits and postholes. A significant number of finds were recovered, mainly comprising pottery, brick and tile of Roman and medieval date. In some areas the overburden was only 200mm deep, with archaeologically sensitive deposits beneath.

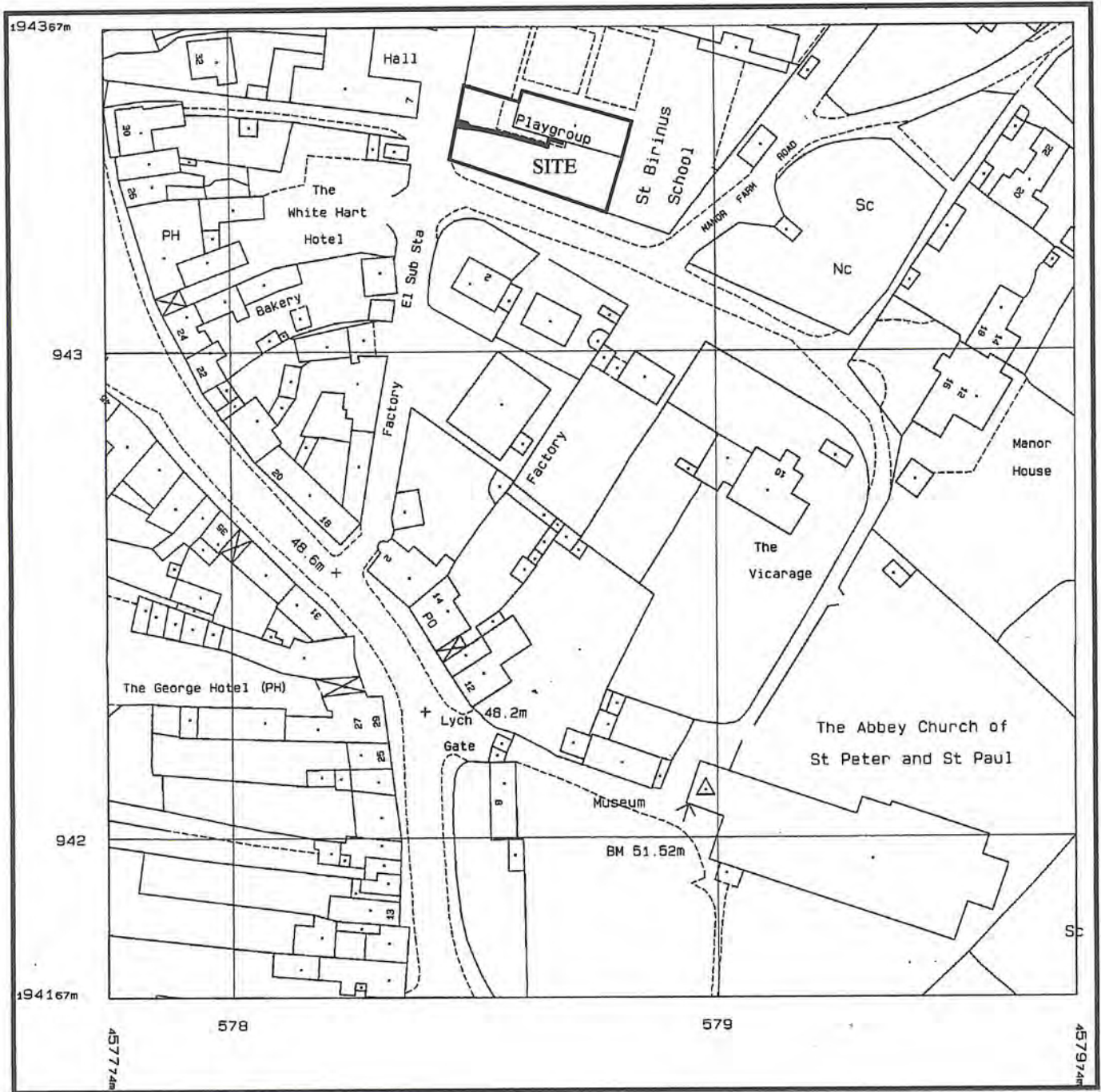


Figure 1. Site and Trench Location

2. Aims of the Investigation

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

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

3. Strategy

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Atkins on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council. 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.

The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

The watching brief was carried out during the excavation of the service trench. A 1 ton, mini excavator with a 300mm wide ditching bucket was employed to dig to a depth of 600mm. A small section of concrete was broken out where the trench crossed the path. An archaeologist observed all excavation.

4. Results

A topsoil (context 01) consisting of a loose blackish brown silt, containing 5% fine gravel 1% small subangular stones and occasional ceramic building material, (CBM), overlain with turf was removed to a depth of 250mm. To the northwest of the trench the topsoil overlay a 300mm thick layer (02) comprised of moderately compact sandy silt containing 5% fine gravel and occasional lenses of sand with 20th century pottery, bone, glass and CBM. This layer contained large quantities of CBM. Underlying (02) was a layer (03) comprised of moderately compact mid yellowish brown sandy silt containing 5% fine gravel with occasional subrounded stones and moderately frequent coal and charcoal flecks with 20th century pottery, glass and CBM. This layer was seen to be up to 350mm in depth to the limit of excavation.

To the south west of the trench a layer (04) was directly underlying the topsoil (01) comprising of a moderately loose dark brown sandy silt with 2% fine gravel and occasional small subround stones with 20th century pottery, glass and CBM.

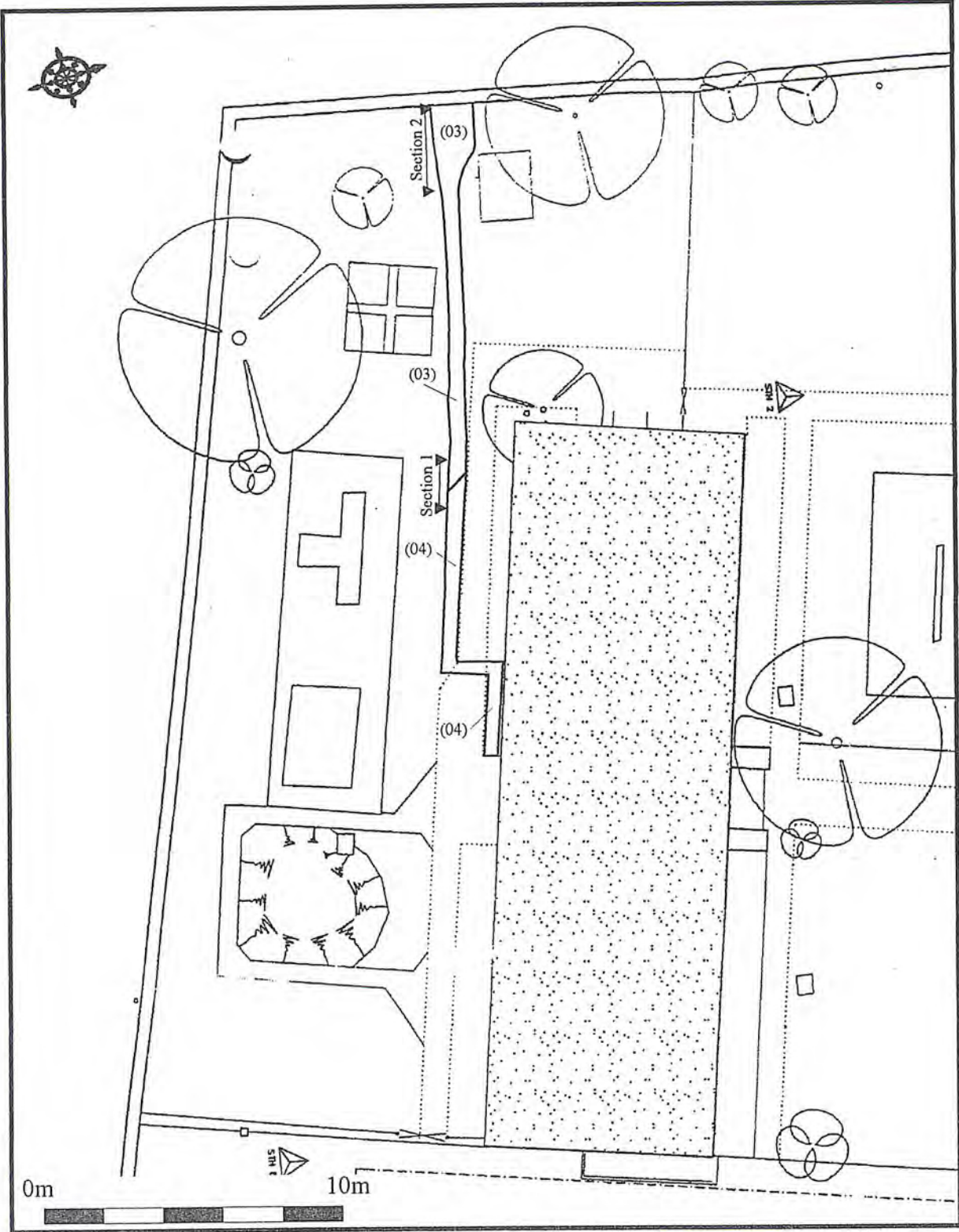


Figure 2. Trench detail

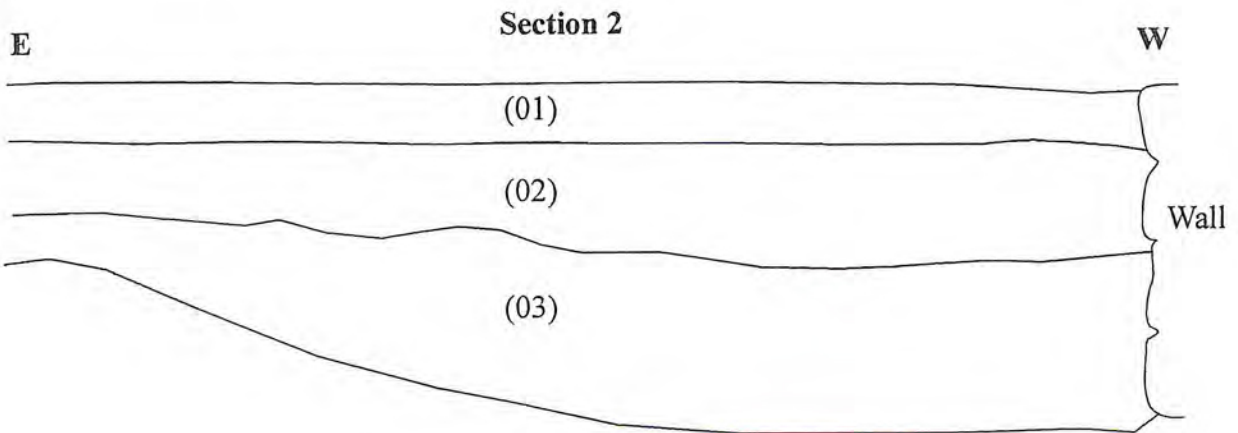
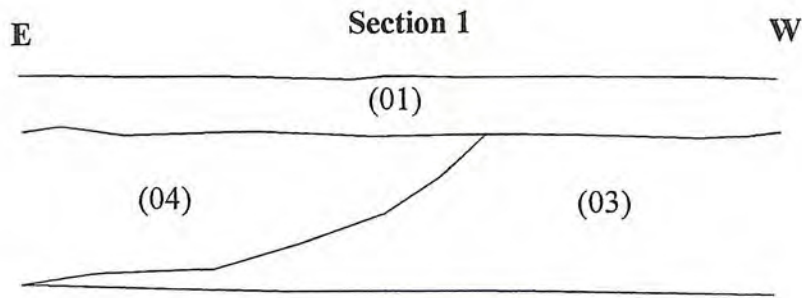


Figure 3. Sections

This layer was seen to be 350mm in depth to the limit of excavation and appears to be cut into layer (03).

5. Finds

There were no features observed during the excavation of the site. Pottery found during the excavation was all seen to be post medieval, mostly comprising of 20th century sherds with some from the late 19th century.

6. Conclusion

The land to the northwest of the excavation appears to comprise of made up ground. With a layer (02) mainly consisting of fragments of building material overlying a layer containing 20th century finds. To the southeast layer (04) was seen to be similar in composition as the topsoil (02). This layer also contained 20th century finds.

There was no archaeological evidence linking the site to either the scheduled monument (Oxon 116) part of the northern suburbs of the Roman town or previous archaeological evidence found within the school grounds.

This evidence suggests that the site has been landscaped at various periods during the last century.

7. Bibliography

IFA 1994, *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*, Institute of Field Archaeologists.