

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

FOR

SUNNINGWELL ROAD, ABINGDON, OXON

FLOOD ALLEVIATION – 2P5D

SU 488993 CENTRED

On behalf of

Thames Water Utilities Ltd

MARCH 2003

REPORT FOR Thames Water Utilities Ltd
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Summary

An archaeological watching brief took place during the excavation for a new pipe trench for flood alleviation. No archaeological deposits or features were disturbed. The recovery of three prehistoric flints could represent casual discard or losses over several centuries, or alternatively indicate a nearby occupation spot. Evidence for manuring of agricultural fields during the Romano British, late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods was found.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The new pipe trench run diagonally across a field west of Wootton Road from the north-east corner (by the junction of White Cross and Sunningwell Road) south-westwards to a point near the junction of Tyne Road and Severn Road, Abingdon. The field lies in the parish of St Helen Without and is centred on NGR SU 488993. The geology is Coral Rag of the Corallian Beds. The field was in agricultural use. A short section of replaced sewers in the existing trenches in Sunningwell Road was not the subject of the watching brief.

The main feature of the project was a 470m length of off-line sewer beside the existing sewer across the field between Sunningwell Road and Tyne Road. However, part of the new sewer replaced the existing sewer in its original trench over the north-eastern 165m length within the field.

1.2 Planning Background

Thames Water undertook to enlarge an existing sewer and add a new larger sewer as part of a flood alleviation project near Sunningwell, Abingdon. The Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (CAS) advised that an archaeological watching brief should be maintained during the stripping of the easement and where necessary the excavation of the pipe trench. The CAS produced a *Brief* for the work and John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS), in accordance with a *Written Scheme of Investigation* agreed with the CAS, carried out such a watching brief.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Several archaeological sites are recorded on the Oxfordshire County Sites and Monuments Record

About 300m east of the field a prehistoric cremation pit has been identified (Sites and Monuments Record: PRN 15681). Approximately 100m to the north-west of the north-west corner of the field several short linear cropmark features of at least two phases are known (PRN 15286). 400m east of the south-east corner of the field Romano British, medieval and post-medieval pottery have been collected (PRN

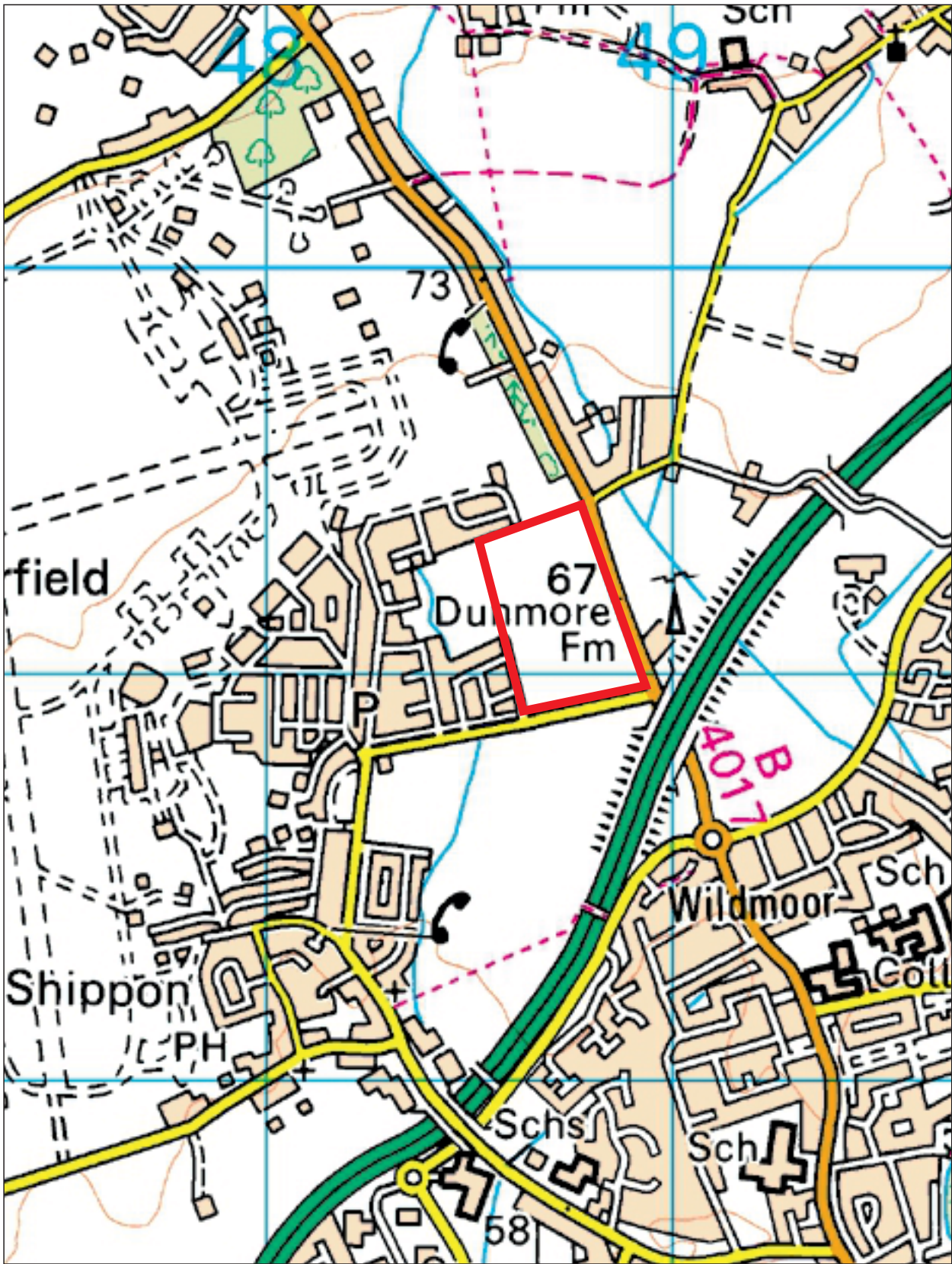


Figure 1: Site location

15680), while 400m north-east of the field further Romano British sherds have been found (PRN 15682).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

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

any features associated with the prehistoric cremation pit
any cropmark features that are exposed
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the County Archaeology Service. 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), and was monitored by the CAS.

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist first inspected the site after *c.* two-thirds of the 20m wide easement had been stripped. Unfortunately this part of the easement had been heavily tracked by plant prior to the inspection. This part of the easement was carefully examined and the spoil heap was inspected in order to recover artefacts. The south-western third of the easement was monitored during the stripping.

Although no features were seen, it was not possible to demonstrate the total absence of potential archaeological remains. Therefore lengths of the pipe trench excavation were inspected. Five lengths each of *c.* 15m were inspected over the south-western 300m.

4 RESULTS

The Coral Rag was overlaid by an old ploughsoil (context number 02) surviving in patches along the easement up to 70mm thick. This consisted of a light – mid orange brown sandy clay with 15% Coral Rag fragments. This was covered by the modern ploughsoil (01), which was formed by light – mid grey orange brown sandy clay with 10% small fragments of Coral Rag. The modern ploughsoil was c. 220mm thick.

No archaeological features were seen.

5 FINDS

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 24 sherds with a total weight of 214g. The assemblages were both early modern in date, but residual Roman, late Saxon and medieval pottery was all present. All the medieval and earlier pottery was very abraded, and had been subject to considerable attrition before final deposition.

The pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXR: St. Neots Ware type T1(1), AD850-1100. 1 sherd, 1 g.
 OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 3 sherds, 24g.
 OXBF: North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050 – 1400. 1 sherd, 2g.
 OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 5 sherds, 42g.
 OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 9 sherds, 111g.
 OXFI: Chinese Porcelain, c1650+. 1 sherd, 27g.
 CRM: Creamware, mid 18th - early 19th C. 3 sherds, 6g.
 WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, mid 19th - 20th C. 1 sherd, 1g.

In addition, two sherds (13g) of Romano-British pottery were also noted.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Cntxt	RB		OXR		OXY		OXBF		OXAM		OXDR		OXFI		CRM		WHEW		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1									3	28					1	2	1	1	19thC
2	2	13	1	1	3	24	1	2	2	14	9	111	1	27	2	4			M18thC
Total	2	13	1	1	3	24	1	2	5	42	9	111	1	27	3	6	1	1	

Other finds

Five fragments of roofing tile were recovered from context 01 while nine pieces were found in context 02 along with one fragment of brick. Three lumps of iron slag were found in 02. In addition a piece of clay tobacco pipe stem was recovered from the modern topsoil (01).

Three flints were found in the old ploughsoil (02). The assemblage comprises two flakes and a piece of irregular waste. One of the flakes exhibits post-depositional edge damage. The other flake has been retouched. The technology employed is most common in the Neolithic and Bronze Age.

6 DISCUSSION

While no archaeological features were found, the artefacts recovered during the course of the watching brief show the intensity of land use of the area from the prehistoric period onwards. The prehistoric flints may have been casual discards or losses over several centuries, or alternatively relate to a nearby occupation spot.

The density of pottery, brick and tile, is such that would be related to manuring of fields in the Romano British, late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods. As such the old ploughsoil (02) probably originated in the Romano British period and was periodically ploughed through to the 18th century. Changes in agricultural practises in the 19th and 20th centuries have resulted in the development of the modern ploughsoil (01).

7 CONCLUSIONS

The excavation for the new tank sewer did not appear to disturb any archaeological deposits or features. While the whole area of disturbance could not be examined, the lack of features seen in those parts observed, and the density of artefacts recovered, suggests that no archaeological features are likely to have been missed.

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