



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**AT**

**ROMAN PARK, BERRYFIELDS,  
AYLESBURY, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

**NGR: SP 789 152 centred**

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**REPORT PREPARED BY** Gavin Davis

**ILLUSTRATION BY** Autumn Robson

**EDITED BY** John Moore

**AUTHORISED BY** John Moore

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**ENQUIRES TO** John Moore Heritage Services  
Pasture Farmhouse  
Boarstall  
Aylesbury  
HP18 9UR

Tel: 01865 358300  
Email: [info@jmheritageservices.co.uk](mailto:info@jmheritageservices.co.uk)

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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief during a test pitting exercise at Roman Park, Berryfields, Aylesbury. The excavations identified the archaeological horizon above two Roman ditches at 0.62m below the current ground level in the west of the site. The natural clay geology was identified in the north-west of the site at between 0.4m and 0.5m below the current ground level and in the south-east and north east at 0.65m below the current ground level. Made ground was encountered across the site which was deposited above a probable buried ploughsoil horizon.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location** (Figure 1)

The site is located at Berryfields adjacent to the Aylesbury Vale Parkway Station, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 789152 centred).

### **1.2 Project Background**

It is intended to plant trees on Roman Park, Berryfields. Since initial consultations it has been considered that the ploughsoil may have been previously removed and that spoil had been dumped on the site. It was decided that test pitting should be carried out in order to establish whether dumping had taken place and if the ploughsoil remained *in situ*. This was to establish the depth of material that is above the archaeological horizon.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

An evaluation of the site was carried out by AC Archaeology in 1997 (Cox *et al* 1997). This established that there had been a long period of occupation in the Roman British period, possibly a Roman town.

## **2 STRATEGY**

### **2.1 Research Design**

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Officer.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014).

### **2.2 Methodology**

The work involved the excavation of 4no. test pits. The site archaeologist examined the previous evaluation report for the site to establish the nature and depth of deposits overlying the archaeological horizon in the area of the test pits. The first test pit was to be excavated to the archaeological horizon to confirm whether ploughsoil still

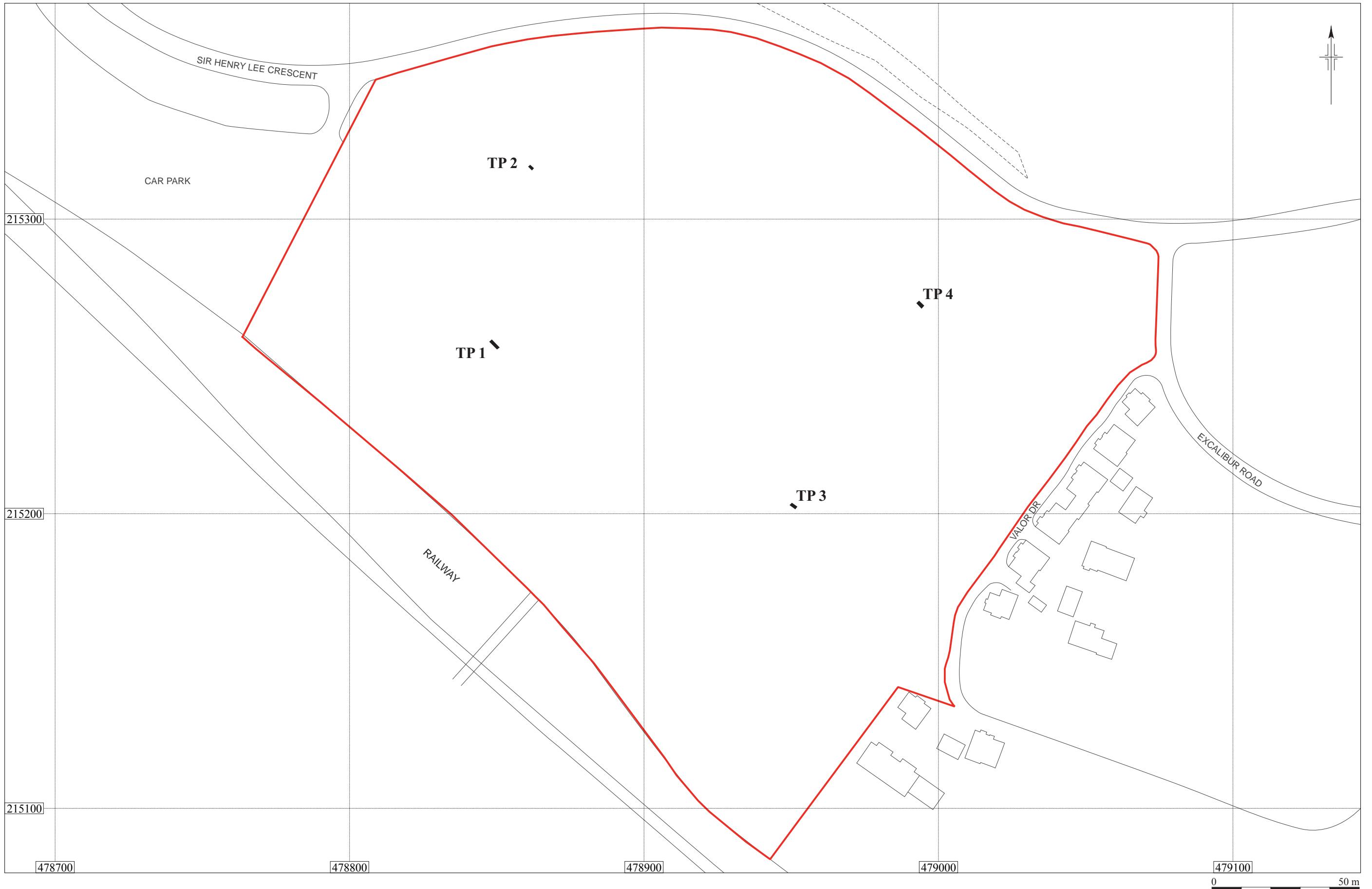


Figure 1: Test Pit Locations

existed on the site under any dumped material and to confirm whether the original depth of the ploughsoil was similar. Thereafter it should have been possible to only excavate the remaining test pits to the surface of the ploughsoil. The evaluation report (Cox *et al* 1997) however did not provide detailed information on the colour, composition and thickness of the original ploughsoil and so it was decided that excavation must proceed to the top of the archaeological horizon or to the top of the natural, whichever was encountered first.

An archaeologist was present on site to control the test pitting and record any deposits of dumping to establish whether ploughsoil remains under them and to record the depth of the natural geology and archaeological horizon.

The nature of the deposits and their thickness was recorded by written and photographic means.

### 3 RESULTS (Table 1)

All features and deposits were assigned with individual context numbers. Within the text context numbers with no brackets indicate feature cuts, numbers in the round brackets ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material. Table 1 details each context by test pit and by stratigraphic sequence from the highest deposit encountered to the lowest.

Table 1: Test pit context inventory

Context	Type	Relationships		Description	Thickness (m)	Interpretation
		Below	Above			
<b>Test Pit 1</b>						
01	Deposit	-	02	Light orange brown sandy loam	0.19 - 0.31	Made ground
02	Deposit	01	03	Mid to dark grey clay-clay	0.09 - 0.18	Buried ploughsoil?
03	Deposit	02	18	Mid to dark grey brown/yellowish brown mixed clay loam - clay	0.25 to 0.3	Remnant ploughsoil
18	Deposit	03	06 08	Dark grey brown clay loam. Containing Roman pottery rim and fragment of oyster shell	0.05 - 0.07	Buried soil horizon
06	Deposit	18	07	Mid to dark grey sandy clay loam with fragment of Roman mortaria and animal bone fragment	> 0.2m	Fill of Roman ditch
07	Cut	06	04	Linear cut orientated NE-SW and possibly continuing ESE to WNW. May cut or be cut by 09	> 0.2m	Cut of Roman ditch

08	Deposit	18	09	Mid to dark grey sandy clay loam with fragment of Roman pottery and iron nail	> 0.2m	Fill of Roman Ditch
09	Cut	08	05	Linear cut orientated ESE to WNW. May cut or be cut by 07	> 0.2m	Cut of Roman ditch
04	Deposit	07 09	05	Mid-grey brown and yellow clay with red mottling	0.07 – 0.2	Disturbed upper horizon of natural clay geology or B/C horizon
05	Deposit	04	-	Mid-yellow and grey clay with rare red mottling and occasional gravel patches	>0.06	Natural clay geology
<b>Test Pit 2</b>						
11	Deposit	-	02	Mid-orange brown sandy loam	0.2 - 0.25	Made ground
12	Deposit	11	13	Dark grey brown clay loam with occasional red sand patches	0.2 - 0.25	Buried ploughsoil?
13	Deposit	12	14	Mid-yellow brown clay	0.02 – 0.08	Disturbed upper horizon of natural clay geology or B/C horizon
14	Deposit	13	-	Mid-orange brown and grey clay	> 0.08	Natural clay geology
<b>Test Pit 3</b>						
15	Deposit	-	16	Light orange brown sandy loam	0.35 - 0.4	Made ground
16	Deposit	15	17	Mid to dark grey clay loam	0.25	Buried ploughsoil?
17	Deposit	16	-	Mid to dark bluish grey clay	> 0.35	Natural clay geology
<b>Test Pit 4</b>						
22	Deposit	-	19	Mid-grey loamy sand –sandy loam with rare red patches	0.3	Made ground
19	Deposit	22	20	Light orange and mid-grey clay loam	0.15	Made ground
20	Deposit	19	21	Mid to dark grey clay - clay loam with rare red patches	0.2	Made ground or buried ploughsoil?
21	Deposit	20	-	Mid grey and orange brown clay	> 0.16	Natural clay geology

Test pits 1 and 2 were located in the west and north-west of the site (Fig. 1) The results of the excavation of Test Pit 2 identified the natural clay geology which was recorded at between 0.4m and 0.58m below the current ground level under a simple sequence of two or three deposits (Table 1; Plate 1). In Test Pit 1 archaeology was encountered at between 0.62m and 0.7m below the current ground level (Table 1). This was identified as thin buried soil horizon (18) which overlay two Roman ditches

07 and 09 (Plate 2). These ditches survived cut into deposit (04) which was identified as the remains of the original B/C horizon which sat above the natural clay geology (05).



Plate 1. Section.02, Test Pit 2. NE view.

In test pits 1 and 2 a possible surviving ploughsoil horizon was identified at between 0.19m and 0.31m below the top of the made ground in the north-west and west of the site (Table 1). However, due to the lack of colour and textural description in the original evaluation report, it was not possible to identify with certainty whether this was definitely the original ploughsoil or if it was made-ground. It is possible that the deposits (02) and (12) are earlier deposits of made ground below made ground deposits (01) and (11).



Plate 2. Test Pit 1. SE view.

Test Pit 3 was located in the south-east of the site (Fig. 1) and revealed a natural dark bluish grey clay (17) at between 0.6m and 0.65m below the current ground level. Lying above this was mid to dark grey clay loam (16) which may have been a buried ploughsoil. Above (16) was a 0.3m to 0.4m thick deposit of made ground (15) which was similar to the made ground identified in the west and north-west of the site in Test Pits 1 and 2 (Plate 3).





Plate 3. Section 03, Test pit 3. SW View

Test Pit 4 was located in the north-east of the site (Fig 1) and revealed the natural clay geology (21) at a depth of 0.65m below the present ground level (Table 1; Plate 4). Above this was what may have been a buried ploughsoil but could also have been made ground (20) and above this two deposits of made ground (19) and (22). These latter two made ground deposits were different in compaction and appearance to the made ground found in the other three test pits and it was very hard to dig through with the machine.



Plate 4. Section 04, Test Pit 4. SW view.

#### 4 DISCUSSION

The results of the excavation of the test pits identified natural geology at between 0.4m and 0.5m below the current ground level in the north-west of the site and at 0.65m below the current ground level in the north-east and south-east of the site. The variations in colour of the natural appeared to conform to those discussed in the original evaluation report (Cox *et al* 1997, 9). The excavations identified the archaeological horizon above two Roman ditches at 0.62m below the current ground level in the west of the site. The archaeological features appeared to survive cut into what was the disturbed upper horizon of the natural or a B/C horizon rather than the natural. Overlying the features was a deposit identified as a buried soil horizon which was less than 0.1m thick and was also considered to be archaeological. No true

subsoil was identified on the site, which might be expected for an area that has been under the plough for long periods of time and subject to deep subsoil ploughing in recent history. This was though in contradiction to the original evaluation report (Cox *et al* 1997) which identified subsoil in many of the trenches excavated. Nonetheless many section drawings in the original evaluation report illustrate an arbitrary horizon between the topsoil and subsoil and thus the arbitrary nature of the subsoil presence might be considered. Indeed the report had stated that the subsoil across the site might be a remnant ploughsoil rather than a true B horizon subsoil (Cox *et al* 1997, 8). A lower remnant ploughsoil was identified in the west of the site which was identified below the possible buried plough soil; elsewhere similar deposits may not have been perceptible. A possible buried ploughsoil was identified across the site that ranged in thickness between 0.09m and 0.25m but it was not certain in all occurrences if this was actually a buried ploughsoil or in fact made ground. All of the test pits showed definite evidence for made ground which was between 0.2m and 0.3m thick in the west of the site and between 0.35m and 0.4m thick in the east.

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