JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

FOR

THE MÉNAGE, THE WILLOWS, MILL ROAD,

SHABBINGTON, BUCKS

SP 66552 06843

On behalf of

Susan Nash

APRIL 2008

REPORT FOR	Susan Nash The Willows Mill Road Shabbington Buckinghamshire HP18 9HQ
PREPARED BY	Daniel Sausins
EDITED BY	John Moore
FIELDWORK	21-24 January 2008
REPORT ISSUED	25 April 2008
ENQUIRES TO	John Moore Heritage Servies Hillview Woodperry Road Beckley Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ Telephone/Fax 01865 358300 Email: jm@jmheritageservice.co.uk
Site Code:	SHTW 08
JMHS Project No:	1841
Archive Location	Buckinghamshire County Museum Service
Accession Number	Accession number 2008.18

CONTENTS

FIGURES

Summary

A watching brief was carried out during the reduced dig to create a level surface for a ménage. Late Iron Age to early Roman and 2nd to 4th century activity in the form of drainage and boundary ditches with some pits was present. Medieval drainage and boundary ditches were also present dating to 11th to 13th centuries.

Environmental remains show evidence of a Roman settlement with a very similar agricultural economy to the farming settlements of the gravel terraces of the Upper Thames Valley.

INTRDUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located within a paddock to the east of The Willows, Mill Road, Shabbington (NGR SP 66552 06843). The site is positioned on the south-west bank of the river Thame. The geology is Kimmeridge Clay.

1.2 Planning Background

Aylesbury Vale District Council granted planning permission for the erection of a ménage at The Willows, Mill Road, Shabbington (07/02374/APP). Due to the potential for archaeological remains to be present on the site a condition was attached to the permission requiring the carrying out of an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the new construction. Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (BCAS) prepared a Brief for such work. The work was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services to a Written Scheme of Investigation approved by BCAS.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Before the Norman Conquest Shabbington was held by Wigold of Wallingford and at Domesday the settlement was held by Miles Crispin and comprised 12 villagers, 7 smallholders and 6 slaves, a fishery with 100 eels and a mill from the manor of Sobintane. After the Conquest it was incorporated into the forest of Bernwood. From 1299 it was held by the Knights Hospitallers, who lost control of it in the 14th century (VCH, 1969, 102). The site lies close to the line of a Roman road (CAS2035).

Extensive village earthworks survive south and east of the church and a street and four house platforms north-east of the church were surveyed prior to being developed in the 1960's. From this development a number of Roman, 13th century and post-medieval pottery sherds were recovered (CAS565). The medieval manor is thought to have been located on the south side of the churchyard where three fishponds are located and where stone and tile have been noted (also CAS565).

An archaeological desk-based assessment, evaluation and excavation have been undertaken at The Bungalow, Ickford Road, Shabbington in 2004. The evaluation produced evidence for significant 11-13th century activity including a rectangular

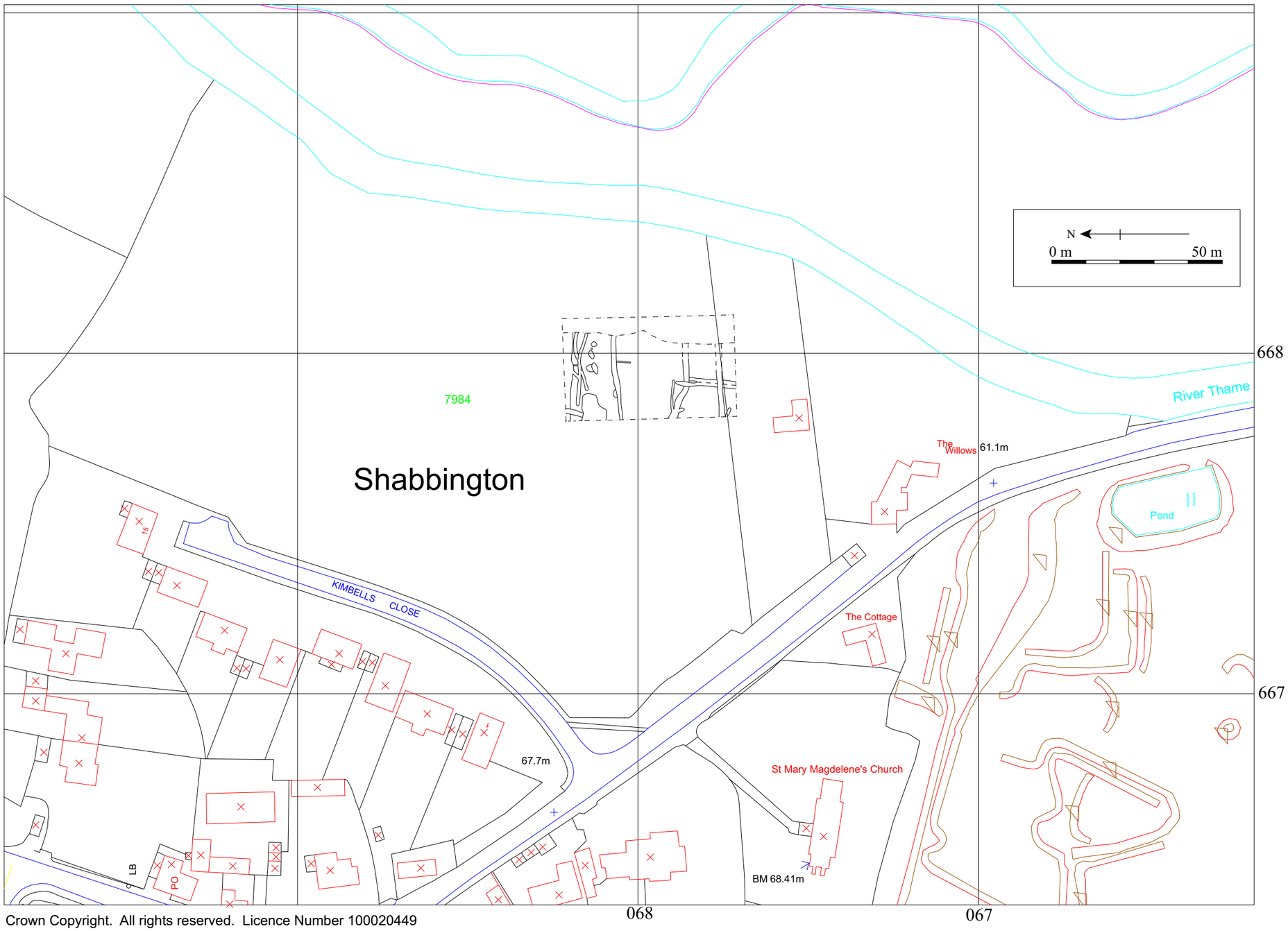

Figure 1. Site location

enclosure ditch, substantial amounts of 11-13th century pottery, traces of iron working and well-preserved charcoal plant remains including cereal grain and wood charcoal. (Oxford Archaeology 2004, Oxford Archaeology 2004a). The results suggest that the boundary ditch enclosed an area of early settlement within the village. The subsequent excavation revealed further curvilinear ditches and large pits of medieval date along with quantities of slag and animal bone (TVAS 2006).

The initial assessment of the village morphology at Shabbington suggests a loosely nucleated single row plan stretching northwards from the church. There is probably a more complex sequence of development. Two straight (early/roman?) roads would also intersect at Shabbington Church and there are hints of a 'lost' lane to the west of the main street. The line of one of the Roman roads (CAS 2035) crosses the north-west side of the field surveyed. An earthwork survey held by the SMR and carried out before the construction of Kimbells Close shows a slight holloway.

The excavation area abuts well preserved village earthworks, including eel ponds, a probable fish pond, hollow way and earthwork terrace. These lie within the historic core of Shabbington (CAS5650), which has been identified as an Archaeological Notification Area. An earthwork survey on the site has been carried out by John Moore Heritage Services (2006).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the watching brief were to identify and record any archaeological remains revealed by the groundworks paying particular attention to potential deposits relating to the medieval settlement and water management (including waterlogged deposits).

3 STRATEGY

An archaeologist was present on site during the course of all excavations that had the potential to disturb or destroy archaeological remains. This involved the observation of all ground reduction and the excavation for drainage.

An area 50m long and 30m wide was mechanically excavated to a general depth of 1.13m in the western side increasing to 1.8m to in the south-west corner. The eastern side of the area was reduced approximately 0.52m down onto the natural clay (103).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2007). Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced. The work was carried out with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999).

4 RESULTS (Figures 2 & 3)

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Contexts within [000] indicate features, i.e. pit cuts; whilst numbers within (000) show feature fills or

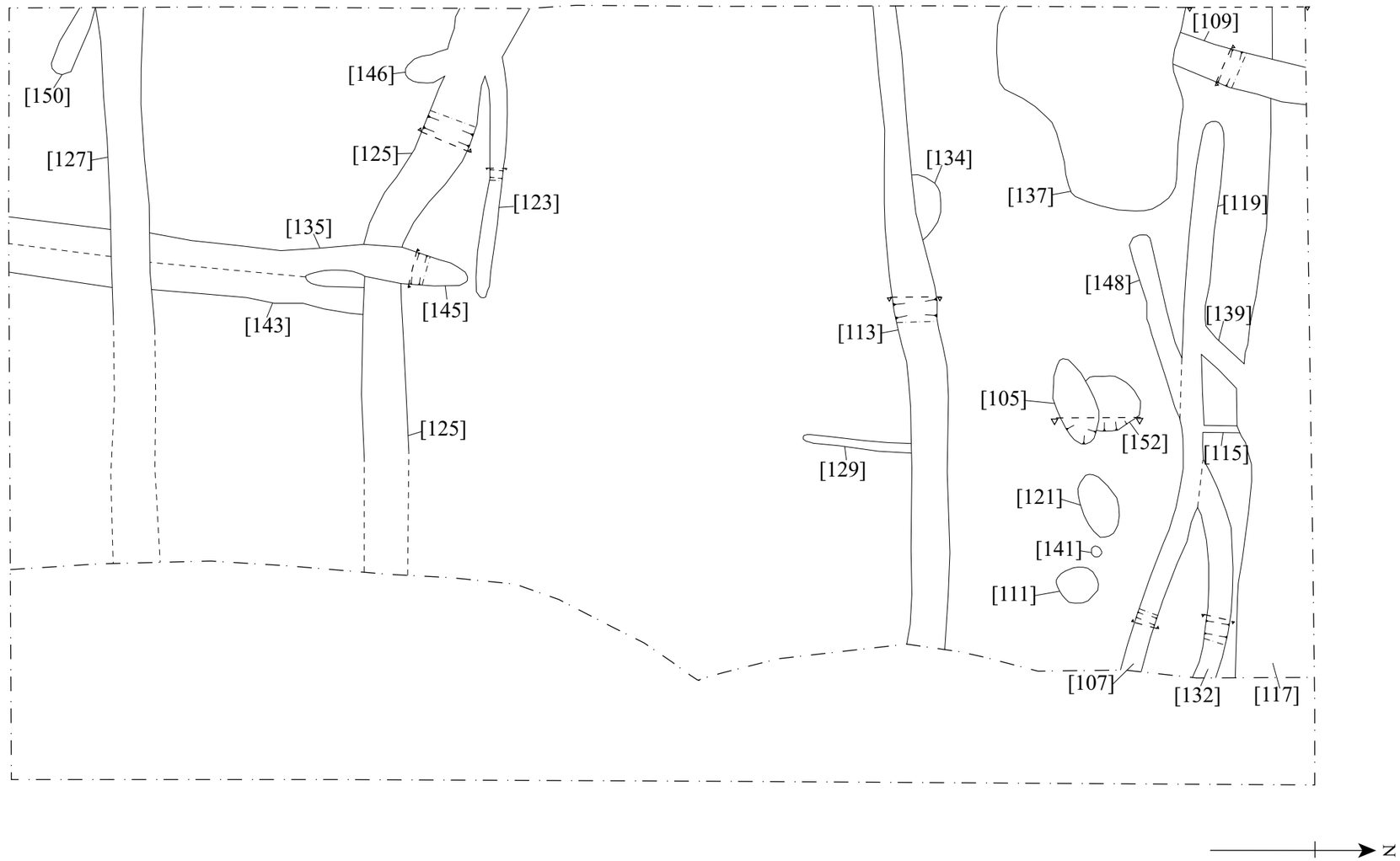

Figure 2. Plan of site

deposits of materials. CBM refers to ceramic building material (brick and tile).

All features were uncovered after removal of topsoil (101) and subsoil 102) to reveal the natural Kimmeridge Clay (103).

The phasing given below is suggestive rather than definitive as too few sherds of pottery were recovered form individual contexts to be absolutely sure of dating. Some sherds may have been residual with a later date being possible for the phasing of features.

4.1 Roman

4.1.1 First Century AD

One of the earliest features may be the small gully [129] that was aligned east-west extending 4.1m south of [113]. The width was 0.2m and it was filled by a loose, dark grey-brown silty clay (128). No finds were recovered from the top of the unexcavated feature. The gully [129] was cut by an early Roman ditch [113] and may be a continuation of gully [115] further to the north but see Discussion

[134] was a unexcavated pit with a diameter of 2.5m. Filled with single context of loose, dark grey-brown silty clay (133), a single Roman pottery sherd was recovered from the surface dating to the 1st century AD. [134] had 50% of the feature truncated by ditch [113] on the south-eastern side.

Ditch [113] was on an east-west alignment that headed towards the river. The ditch had a depth of 0.55m and width of 1.4m and was 26.0m long as seen (Fig. 3). The singular fill of [113] was loosely compacted dark black silty clay (112) with frequent charcoal flecking. Animal bone and pottery dating to probably the 1st century AD were recovered. [113] cuts pit [134] and small gully [129] suggesting they were earlier.

Ditch [143] was on a north-south alignment for a length of 14.1m. This was not excavated and no finds were seen in the top of the feature. The upper (or possibly only) fill seen in this ditch was a hard, dark brown-grey silty clay (142). The terminus was cut by ditch [125] which contained probable 1st century AD pottery. [143] had been re-cut by [135] at a later date.

Ditch [125] was on an east-west alignment at right angles to the river had a singular fill (124). This was mid brown blue-grey silty clay with sand inclusions. The ditch was 1.21m wide with a depth of 0.3m (Fig. 3). The upper sides of the ditch were at an angle of 35° from the horizontal before becoming shallow on a lightly curved bottom. One sherd of pottery was recovered probably dating to the 1st century AD.

[125] had several relationships with other features. It was cut by medieval ditch [123] and probable Roman ditch [135]. [125] cut the early Roman ditch [143] while a relationship with [146] was unclear.

4.1.2 Second to Fourth Century AD

Pit [105] was a sub circular feature 3.0m long north-south, 1.6m wide with a depth of 0.25m (Fig 3). It was filled with a single loose dark black silt clay deposit (104) that

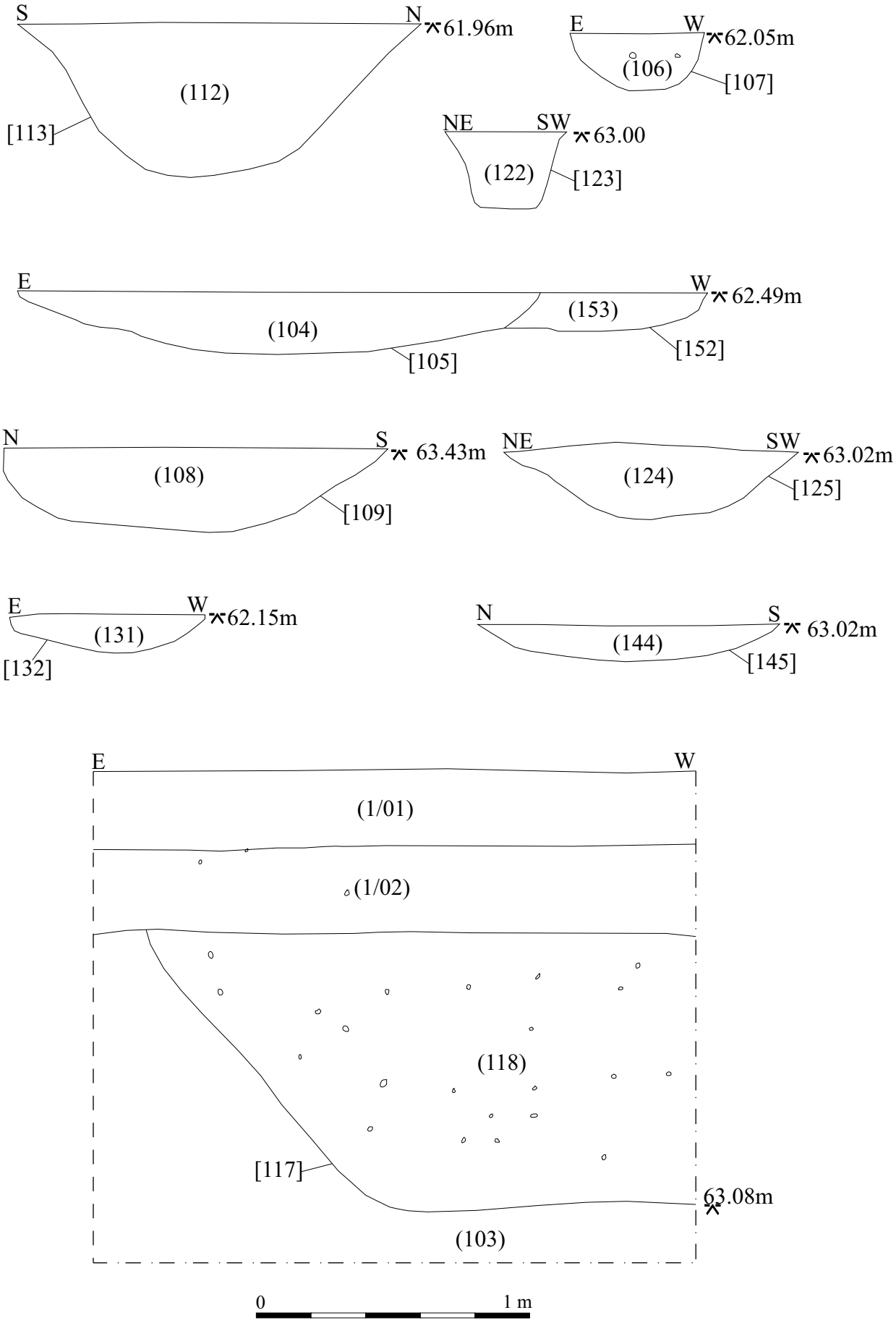

Figure 3. Sections of features

was very rich in charcoal. From this context pottery from the Roman period was recovered dating to AD 240-400. The pit cut an earlier pit [152] that was *c.* 1.1m in diameter and 0.13m deep.

Ditch [107] was in a north-south alignment that proceeded towards the River Thame. The ditch was 0.5m wide with a depth of 0.2m (Fig. 3). The fill consisted of a singular dark brown-grey silty clay context (106) with 2 % gravel. The sides of the ditch were at an angle of 25° from the horizontal leading into a flat bottom. The ditch contained Roman pottery possibly dating to AD 240-400. Ditch [119] was most likely a continuation of [107]. The unexcavated ditch was 0.6m wide with a hard, mid brown-grey silty clay (118) was the only context present. A fragment of Romano-British pottery was recovered from it.

Small gully [115] was unexcavated. It had a length of 0.8m and width of 0.2m. The fill (114) was hard, dark brownish grey silty clay. A single sherd of Roman pottery was recovered from the surface dating to AD 240- 400.

Dating evidence from ditch [117] suggests that this feature was cutting [115] on the northern end. It is unclear on the southern end of gully if ditch [119] cut or was being cut by [115].

A large ditch [117] on an east-west alignment at right angles to the river lay on the northern edge of the area. It was 1.1m deep and up to 1.5m wide. The sides of the ditch were at 45^0 and it had a flat base (Fig. 3). The fill was a hard, dark blue-grey silty clay with 3% sandy gravel (116). Two sherds of pottery were recovered, dating to 2nd century or later. The relationships between [117] and other features showed it being cut by medieval ditch [109], cutting small Roman gully [115] and an unclear relationship with gully [139].

Slightly curving ditch [132]/[148] on a northeast - southwest alignment was 0.7m wide and 0.18m deep. The singular fill was a hard, mid brown-grey silty clay (131). The upper sides of the ditch were at an angle of 30° from the horizontal sloping to 20° at the lower sides before a flat bottom (Fig. 3). No dating evidence was recovered.

The linear ditch [135]/[145] was aligned north-south.. The fill was a friable yellow blue-grey silty clay (130) towards the south changing colour to dark grey brown (144) towards the terminus. No dating evidence was recovered although animal bone was found. The ditch was 1.1m wide and it was 0.12m deep near the terminus (Fig. 3). This ditch cut ditch [125] that contained 1st century AD pottery.

A short section of ditch [139] was on a north-south alignment lay between ditches [119] and [117]. The relationships with these ditches were not determined. The fill (138) was a hard, mid brown-grey silty clay.

4.2 Medieval

Ditch [109] was on a north-south alignment with a depth of 0.3m and a width of 1.0m. This had been recut (Fig. 3) The fills of both recuts (108) was compacted dark greyish black silty clay from which medieval pottery was recovered roughly dated to 11-13th centuries. [109] was cut to the south by possible intercutting medieval/post-medieval pits [137].

A small medieval gully [123] on the east-west alignment had a width of 0.4m, a depth of 0.25m (Fig. 3) and was 15.0m in length within the investigation area. The singular fill was compacted light grey-brown clay with 20% silty clay (122). Pottery recovered dated the feature to 11-13th centuries.

Linear ditch [127] was at right angles to the river. The fill of the ditch was loose-friable, dark brown-grey silty clay (126). Charcoal pieces and flecking were present along with corroded sandstone pieces. The feature was 0.8m wide and 0.29m deep. The upper sides of the cut were at an angle of 45° from the horizontal before sloping off to 35° at the lower sides to form a U shaped base. A residual piece of Roman pottery was recovered along with 15 sherds of medieval pottery from 11-13th centuries.

4.3 Medieval/Post-Medieval

A large unexcavated irregular feature [137] was most likely two inter cutting medieval or post-medieval pits that were not easily defined. The overall fill (136) was a compact yellow-green grey clay. No dating evidence was recovered, however [137] did cut medieval ditch [109] suggesting a medieval or later date.

4.4 Undated Features

The following features were not sample excavated and no finds were visible in the top of the features,

Circular pit [111] had a diameter of 1.1m. The fill as seen was a dark black silty clay (110). Oval pit [121] had a length of 2.4m and a width of 1.4m. The fill was dark brown silty clay (120). Small posthole [141] had a diameter of 0.2m and was filled with a dark blackish silty clay.

The probable terminus of a ditch [146] was 0.75m long and 0.55m wide. The fill consisted of hard, dark brownish grey silty clay (146). The terminus intercut with ditch [125]; no relationship was established.

Small gully [150] terminated after 1.2m in length. The fill consisted of hard, dark blue-grey silty clay with a width of 0.3m.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery *by Paul Booth*

Some 41 sherds (644 g) of pottery were recovered. The material was rapidly scanned and quantified by broad ware group and period by context, summarised in Table 1 below.

In terms of weight the assemblage was dominated by Roman material, but much of this derived from a single reduced coarse ware vessel (Young (1977) type R38) in context 104. Although this type has a wide date range the rim form of this particular example suggests a later Roman (mid 3rd-4th century) date. Possible (and in one case certain - a dish of Young type C45) sherds of Oxford colour-coated ware support this dating for some of the other groups. A few small fragments of grog-tempered ‘Belgic

Table 1: Quantities of pottery by period (no. sherds/weight (g))

	Ceramic period				
Context	Late Iron Age/Roman	Medieval	Post-medieval	Uncertain	Date/comment
100			1/3	2/6	uncertain sherds poss RB
104	7/363				AD 240-400 (R38)
106	4/29				poss AD 240-400
108		2/8			?11-13C
112	2/88				?1C
114	1/27				240-400 (C45)
116	2/6				2C or later
118				1/<1	oxidised fragment, RB or post-med?
122		1/2			?11-13C
124	1/<1				?1C
126	1/13	15/92			?11-13C
133	1/5				1C
TOTAL	19/532	18/102	1/3	3/7	

type' pottery indicate the presence of an earlier, late Iron Age to early Roman, component in the assemblage. Single tiny fragments of samian ware and black-burnished ware were the only certain non-local elements amongst the Roman material.

Medieval sherds came from three contexts. All of these sherds were in sand and sand-and-calcareous-tempered coarse ware fabrics, and no diagnostic pieces were present to allow close dating. Although relatively small, the sherds in context 126, in particular, were quite fresh and indicate a ?11th-13th century date for this context.

5.2 Carbonised Plant Remains *by Mark Robinson*

The watching brief at Willow Cottage, Shabbington, Bucks adjacent to the bank of the River Thame recorded pits and ditches, some of Roman date. Soil samples were taken from five contexts and floated to recover carbonised plant remains. The results for those samples to contain remains other than charcoal are listed in Table 2. In addition, Samples 17-18 from medieval Context 126 contained some charcoal of *Quercus* sp. (oak) and a fragment of charcoal of *Corylus avellana* (hazel). Remains were absent from Sample 22 from Context 124.

The remains from Contexts 112 (fill of ?1st century ditch [113]) and 104 (mid 3rd-4th century pit [105]) had high concentrations of cereal grain and seeds from weeds of cultivation. The proportion of cereal chaff was very low. Such assemblages are characteristic of crop-processing waste burnt under relatively well-oxygenated conditions such that most of the chaff burns away but some of the more dense seeds become carbonised. In both cases the crop appears to have been *Triticum spelta* (spelt wheat), the main wheat of Roman Britain. The few grains of *Hordeum vulgare* (six-row hulled barley) could have been from plants growing as volunteers in the spelt crop. The

most numerous weed seeds in both samples were of grasses, including *Bromus* cf. *secalinus* (brome grass or chess) and the mayweeds *Tripleurospermum inodorum* (scentless mayweed) and *Anthemis cotula* (stinking mayweed). All these weeds were common amongst Roman cereal crops, *A. cotula* being characteristic of rather heavy calcareous soils.

In contrast, the only closely identified cereal grain in the rather sparse assemblage of grain from Context 126 was free-threshing *Triticum* sp. (bread or rivet wheat). While free-threshing wheat was a very minor crop in Roman Britain, it was the main wheat from the Saxon period onwards and is as expected within an 11-13th century context.

Table 2: **Carbonised Plant Remains (excluding charcoal) from SHWC08**

	Context	112	104	108	126
	Sample	1-4	5-8	9-12	17-18
CEREAL GRAIN					
Triticum spelta	spelt wheat	9	16	-	-
T. dicoccum or *spelta*	emmer or spelt	15	36	-	-
Triticum sp. - short free-threshing	bread or rivet wheat	-	-	-	8
Triticum sp.	Wheat	6	9	-	3
Hordeum vulgare - hulled lateral	six-row hulled barley	1	-	-	-
Hordeum sp. - hulled	hulled barley	-	4	1	-
cereal indet.		57	43	-	1
Total cereal grain		88	108	1	12
CEREAL CHAFF					
Triticum spelta - glume	spelt wheat	1	1	-	-
T. dicoccum or *spelta* - glume	emmer or spelt	2	-	-	-
Avena sp. - awn	Oats	1	-	-	-
Total cereal chaff		4	1	0	0
WEED SEEDS					
Raphanus raphanistrum	wild radish	1	-	-	-
Cruciferae indet.		-	1	-	-
Chenopodiaceae indet.	fat hen, orache etc	-	1	-	1
Polygonum aviculare agg.	Knotgrass	-	1	-	-
Rumex sp.	Dock	3	2	-	-
Odontites verna	red bartsia	1	-	-	-
Anthemis cotula	stinking mayweed	19	20	-	-
Tripleurospermum inodorum	scentless mayweed	18	16	-	-
Eleocharis S. *Palustres* sp.	spike rush	-	1	-	-
Bromus cf. *secalinus*	brome grass	13	17	-	-
cf. *B. secalinus*	brome grass	8	12	-	1
Gramineae indet.	Grass	57	31	-	-
Weed seed indet.		5	9	-	-
Total weed seeds		125	111	0	2

The results from Willow Cottage are archaeologically useful because they show evidence of a Roman settlement with a very similar agricultural economy to the farming

settlements of the gravel terraces of the Upper Thames Valley. They help to confirm that cereal cultivation was also an important activity in the vale below the Chilterns.

6 DISCUSSION

The presence of a few small fragments of grog-tempered 'Belgic type' pottery indicates the presence of a late Iron Age to early Roman phase of activity. This is dominated by the two ditches [125 & 113] dated to this period and a further one [148] that is earlier than the later phase. These are all at right angles to the river. At least one pit belongs to this phase. Ditch cut [143] at right angles to the others predates ditch [125] or at least predates a final version of [145]. It is possible that ditch [125] was recut being the northern boundary to two paddocks or enclosures separated by ditch [143]. Cut [135/145] is probably a recut of this ditch with a possible entrance into the western paddock/enclosure between the terminus of [145] and a possible terminus within [125] further west where the ditch kinks. The small ditch [129] parallel to the river again appears to be dividing paddocks or enclosures in the earlier period. Its apparent width is probably deceptive as it has probably been truncated by later activity and it may be a continuation of ditch [115] further north; the pottery within this last therefore would be intrusive.

Later activity from the second century onwards is shown by the larger ditch [117] again heading towards the river with a later mid 3rd or 4th century boundary [119] just to the south of it. The end of [119] suggests an entrance through this boundary with a probable continuation of the boundary just outside of the investigation area. Pit [105] appears to be contemporary with this later boundary and the adjacent discrete features again may be of the same period.

The abundance of ditches, mainly flowing down the slope towards the river, was probably more for drainage and water management than as boundaries although paddocks or enclosures are indicated by the boundaries parallel to the river. The 2nd century or later ditch [117] is significantly larger than the others and must have been an important boundary.

The carbonised plant remains from both the earlier and later phases of the Roman activity give the same results showing that crop processing was being carried out adjacent to the river. This land was probably wet in the winter and used perhaps for grazing but in the dryer period was utilised for other activities. Winnowing, for instance, would be carried out in the summer; the wheat harvest being brought from the fields to the riverside location for processing before the grains was taken to the settlement for storage. This suggests that the settlement is relatively close, perhaps on the higher ground some 30-50m further away from the investigation area. The carbonised remains show that a similar agricultural economy to the farming settlements of the gravel terraces of the Upper Thames Valley is being carried out on the heavier clay here. The presence of the crop-processing waste in a pit and a ditch shows that the material was being burnt and then disposed of. The large shallow pit [105] may have been

The area was used in the 11-13th centuries as shown by the drainage/boundary ditch [127] flowing down towards the river along with a more minor parallel ditch [123]. Ditch [109], approximately at right angles, shows a division of land between the edge of the higher land and the lower land more liable to flooding.

The pit group [137] is probably of medieval date showing that activities other than grazing and agricultural practices were taking place here. It should be noted that two eel ponds are present just to the south of this investigation area and these coupled with the remains found here show that this part of the river bank was being well utilised in the medieval and later periods.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999, *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

John Moore Heritage Services, 2006 *An Earthwork Survey at The Willows, Shabbington, Buckinghamshire*

John Moore Heritage Services, 2007 The Willows, Mill Road, Shabbingdon. *Archaeological Watching Brief. Written Scheme of Investigation*. Dated 31 December 2007.

Oxford Archaeology 2004, *The Bungalow, Ickford Road, Shabbington: Desk Based Assessment.*

Oxford Archaeology 2004a, *The Bungalow, Ickford Road, Shabbington: Archaeological Evaluation.*

Thames Valley Archaeological Services 2006, *Excavation at The Bungalow, Ickford Road, Shabbington*

VCH, 1969, *Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire*