



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

AT

**LETCOMBE LABORATORIES,
LETCOMBE REGIS,
OXFORDSHIRE**

(SP 3797 8634)

On behalf of

Richmond Care Villages Limited

March 2008

REPORT FOR Richmond Care Villages Limited
c/o CgMs Consulting
Burlington house
Lypiatt Road
Cheltenham
GL50 2SY

PREPARED BY David Gilbert and Helen Noakes

ILLUSTRATION BY David Gilbert and Eoin Fitzsimons

EDITED BY John Moore

FIELDWORK 24th October - 11th November 2007

FIELDWORK BY Helen Noakes

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ENQUIRES TO John Moore Heritage Services
Hill View
Woodperry Road
Beckley
Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ
Tel/Fax 01865 358300
Email: info@jmheritageservices.co.uk

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Summary

An archaeological excavation was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services on part of the site of the former agricultural laboratories at Letcombe Regis. During the course of the excavation, a complex system of Roman ditches dating from the 2nd to 4th centuries was investigated. Limited prehistoric activity from the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages was seen mostly as residual artefacts. Sparse features indicated activity at later periods, including; Anglo-Saxon, 12th-13th century, and post-medieval.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located to the south of St Andrew's Church in Letcombe Regis (NGR SU 3797 8634). It is approximately 5ha in area. The land slopes up southwards from about 100m OD to 110m OD. The geology comprises Cretaceous Sand and Grit in the north with Lower Chalk in the south (BSG 1971). The laboratory buildings were being demolished at the time of the work.

1.2 Planning Background

The Vale of White Horse District Council granted planning permission to redevelop the site of the former Letcombe Laboratories as a continuing care retirement community, including the change of use of the Lodge to a village shop, with associated access, car parking, landscaping, re-grading and ancillary development (LRE/957/65x and LRE/957/66). A predetermination archaeological evaluation was carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service and significant remains of local interest were found. As a result a condition was attached to the planning permission requiring that a programme of archaeological recording be undertaken. This is in line with PPG 16 and Policy HE11 of the Local Plan.

1.3 Archaeological Background

A desk based assessment of the site was carried out (Wroe-Brown 2005). No prehistoric discoveries have been made within the boundaries of the site, although c. 2km to the south is Segsbury Camp (Oxon Scheduled Ancient monument 209), an Iron Age hillfort adjacent to the ancient route known as the Ridgeway. It was first occupied in the Early Iron Age and continued in use well into the Romano-British period. The area around Letcombe Regis in the Roman period is not well-known. The Ridgeway was still in use and there is evidence for a Roman road crossing the Segsbury Camp hillfort, which continued in occupation. There was a villa site at Cornhill Farm, 2km north of the site.



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Figure 1. Site Location

The Manor of Letcombe Regis was held by King Edward the Confessor in the mid 11th century. It is very probable that Letcombe Regis was an Anglo-Saxon settlement as it was a well-established village by the time of the Domesday census in 1086 possessing a church and five mills. At this time it was known as Ledecumbe or Ledencumbe.

The original Manor, close to the site to the southeast, continued its royal associations, possibly the origin of the suffix 'Regis'. William I owned it and it remained in royal overlordship for centuries, though being associated with different ecclesiastic owners.

The old Manor, now Manor Farm, a Grade II Listed Building, remained in the hands of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster and later the Ecclesiastical Commissioners until the 19th century. A fulling mill was in operation during the post-medieval period. Several other buildings in Letcombe Regis dating from the 16th-19th centuries are listed Grade II.

In 1801 an enclosure map drawn up to accompany the Inclosure Act passed in that year shows the site occupied mainly by fields. The 25 inch to 1 mile Ordnance Survey map of 1899 shows the site as occupied by the new Letcombe Manor, with an icehouse to the west of the building. The Lodge building was situated in a similar location as the present incarnation as were some of the outbuildings to the east. The lake to the west was already in its modern form, but still described as a fishpond. Most of the remainder of the land to the south of the manor house was open fields and to the north it was woodland or covered lightly by trees. By 1938 almost nothing had altered. When the agricultural sciences laboratories were constructed in the 1960s, the present Letcombe Manor was retained along with a few of the outbuildings, but the site underwent large-scale landscaping.

A predetermination archaeological evaluation (Mackinder 2006) was carried out. In Trenches 7 and 8 evidence of Romano British activity was revealed. This was in the form of ditches and pits that contained bone and pottery of Romano British origin. No other archaeological features were revealed in any other trench.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The primary aim was to make a record of the surviving Romano British remains that will be destroyed by the proposed development. In addition artefacts were to be collected to securely date the remains and for comparison with other local sites. This was intended to lead to a characterisation of the type of occupation activity present on the site.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) issued a Brief for the work, which John Moore Heritage Services carried out to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with OCAS, on behalf of the local planning authority. The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field

Archaeologists (1994). The archaeological consultants for the work were CgMs Consulting and the client was Richmond Care Villages Limited.

3.2 Methodology (*by H. Noakes*)

The area of investigation centred on the MoLAS evaluation Trenches 7 and 8 (Mackinder 2006) which was defined by the archaeological consultant CgMs Consulting and agreed with OCAS. Overburden (700-930mm thick) was mechanically excavated using a toothless bucket down to the uppermost archaeological horizon. Following the evaluation, and prior to the excavation, it was not clear whether the subsoils in both trenches were the same or were different deposits. In Trench 8 the ditches were cut into subsoil while in Trench 7 subsoil sealed a pit. It was proposed that if there were two horizons then the uppermost would be completely recorded before further stripping to a lower horizon. Within the area of Trench 7, topsoil was thicker, but not different in nature to that encountered further down the site.

Following the initial excavation OCAS required more extensive work to clarify further stratigraphic relationships, which was achieved in the form of a 10m² extension on the west side of Area 2. This was agreed with CgMs Consulting on behalf of the applicant.

The site was divided into two areas; to the north of the existing tennis court an area of 14m by 7m was stripped (Area 1), and to the north of this area, 20m by 5m was stripped under archaeological supervision (Area 2). The intervening area previously had been landscaped for the laboratories and had removed any potential archaeological deposits. A team of archaeologists carried out the excavation, and recording of the exposed features.

The archaeological horizon was hand cleaned and features were planned to the relevant scale. The recording and sampling strategy was agreed with OCAS and CgMs Consulting, as 50% or up to 10m of any linear feature, whichever was the least, being sampled and excavated; a minimum of 50% of all pits being sampled and excavated; and all postholes being sampled and excavated.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plan and section drawings being compiled where appropriate.

4. RESULTS (*Figures 2, 3 and 4*)

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 Excavation Results (*by D. Gilbert*)

The lowest deposit encountered was the natural geological make up of the site which was chalk (102). Above this was a loosely compacted, dark brownish-black, sandy silt

(101), which was littered with debris associated with the demolition of the laboratories. The highest deposit, (100) was topsoil, dark black, silty sand with a 30% gravel inclusion, which was only observed within Area 1 of the site (next to the tennis court, where the ground had been elevated.)

4.1.1 Area 1 (Figure 2)

In this area a deposit of grey-brown chalky clay-silt (170) overlay the natural (102). This varied between 0.1m and 0.4m thick. It contained chunks of limestone and brick.

Roman features

A large ditch [158] over 13.6m in length was recorded. It was flat based with 60° sides and orientated NW- SE. This ditch was 2.60m wide and 0.72m deep. It was filled with three separate fills, (155) (156) and (157) (Fig.4, section 8.) The primary fill, (157) was light grey, sandy clay, c. 0.18m thick and contained both 3rd-4th century Roman pottery and animal bone. This was not seen in all sections, and perhaps is explained by the narrowing of the ditch towards its south-eastern end, suggestive of a terminus. The secondary fill (156) was grey, sandy clay, c. 0.30m thick. From within this context was found animal bone, Roman pottery and an iron object, believed to be a steelyard. This deposit was seen in all sections. The upper fill, (155) also viewed within all sections, was a dark-grey, sandy clay, c.0.24m thick and contained pottery, animal bone and metal.

This ditch [158] was heavily truncated by modern day activity, including a steel tank which cut the ditch at its south-eastern end and by modern services.

A large pit circular in plan and 1.90m in diameter [153] was also excavated. This had previously been identified within the MOLAS evaluation. It was excavated to a depth of 0.08m, and was filled with a loosely compacted, grey sandy clay (154) which contained 3rd-4th century Roman pottery, an iron nail, and animal bone.

Medieval features

Two pits were located. The first was oval [144] 0.52m by 0.94m in plan and 0.05m deep. It was filled with a loosely compacted, dark grey, sandy clay (145), which contained 13th century pottery and animal bones. The second pit [141] was also oval, 0.54m by 0.85m in plan and 0.04m deep. It was filled with a loosely compacted, dark blackish-grey, sandy clay (142), which contained 13th century pottery and animal bone. (Fig. 4 section 6)

Post-medieval features

A single pit [167] containing 17th century pottery was recorded. It was 1.28m in diameter, filled with (168), a loosely compacted, dark grey, sandy clay. This pit was left unexcavated.

Modern features

Several modern features were seen in the area including a pit and service trenches.

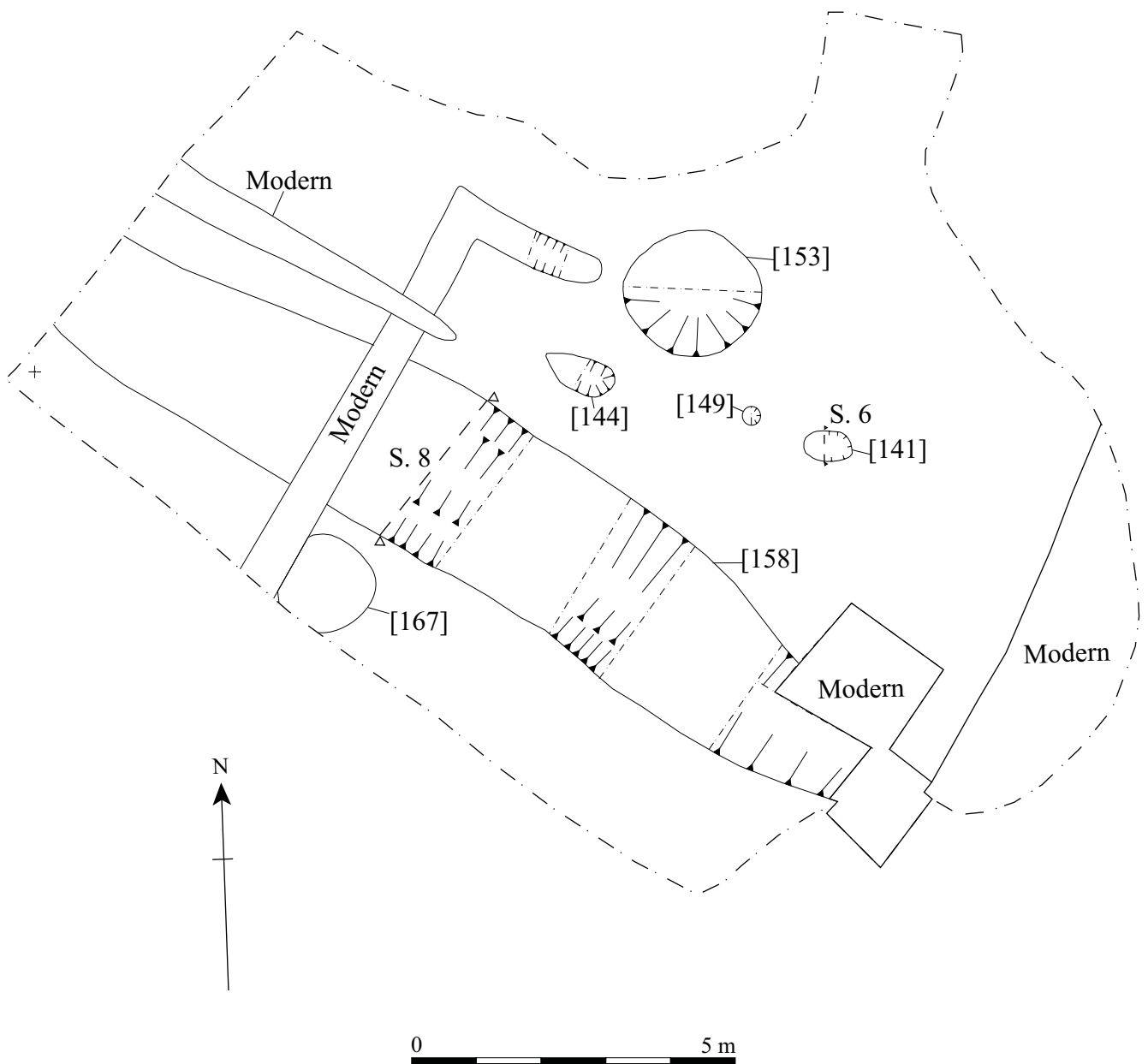


Figure 2. Plan of Area 1

Undated features

A small pit or posthole [149] was also located, it was 0.3m in diameter, and filled with a loosely compacted, brownish-grey, sandy clay (150), 0.06m thick.

4.1.2 Area 2 (Figure 3 & 4)

Phase 1: Prehistoric features

A small ditch or gully [198] was recorded aligned roughly E to W on the west side of the area. It was 0.7m wide and 0.3m deep with a U-shaped profile. It was filled with a grey-brown, silty clay (197) that contained Mid to Late Bronze Age pottery, flint and animal bone. It had been truncated by two Roman ditches [196] and [200] (Fig. 4, section 11).

Phase 2: Roman features (c. 2nd Century)

The majority of features associated with this phase are ditches or gullies with one pit also recorded.

The first ditch [217] is roughly aligned E-W on the west side of the site. It was at least 3.20m long, 0.54m wide and 0.26m deep with a flat based and steep sides at 60°. This was filled by a loosely compacted, grey, sandy clay deposit, (216), which contained both pottery and animal bone. It is cut by the later 3rd century ditch [276].

A second ditch [196] ran parallel to [217]. It is, 0.85m wide and 0.24m deep with a flat bottom. The primary fill was 0.1m thick, consisting of grey-brown, silty clay (236). This was overlain by a grey-brown, silty clay (195), which was 0.09m thick. It had a later 3rd century re-cutting [238] slightly to the south of the original line (Fig. 4, sections 10 & 11). It was also cut by another Roman ditch [255] aligned roughly N-S.

A third ditch [200] was also parallel and just to the north of [196], although it appeared to curve north-east at its eastern end. It was a 0.15m deep and 0.7m wide with a U-shaped profile. It was filled by light grey-brown, silty clay (199). Although no finds were associated with this feature it has been assigned a 2nd century date because it is cut by 3rd century ditches.

Ditch [186] was 1.34m wide, 0.56m deep, aligned NE-SW and has a flat base and steep sides at 60°. The fill is a light grey-brown clayey-silt (185). There are no finds associated with this feature but it has been assigned to this phase because it has been truncated by later 3rd and 4th century ditches. It is a possible extension of ditch [200] and lies to the north-east of it (Fig. 3).

Further to the west was a N-S aligned ditch [206] in the extreme north-east corner of the area. It was 0.15m deep, 0.46m wide, 3.3m long and filled by a loosely compacted, grey-brown, silty-clay (205) that contained a single 2nd century sherd of pottery. This feature had been heavily truncated by later activity.

Another ditch [110] roughly 1m wide and aligned roughly E-W lies to the north of ditches [200] and [196]. The primary fill (113) was a yellow, clayey-silt, 0.30m thick. Above this was a yellowish-cream clayey-silt (112), 0.25m thick, followed by an orange-mid brown silty clay (111) that was 0.24m thick and contained 2nd century pottery.

This ditch was cut by a later 4th century ditch [104], however a smaller gully (221) appears on the north-eastern side of this feature roughly continuing the line of ditch [110]. This gully may be contemporary with [110], it is approximately 0.4m wide and was not excavated, but contained a heavy dark grey clay.

Cutting ditch [110] was a shallow gully [220] aligned E-W. It was 0.11m deep, 0.40m wide, and ran for 1.35m before it disappeared under the baulk. It was filled with a dark grey sandy clay (219) that contained bone and 2nd century pottery. It itself was cut by two gullies.

These two N-S aligned gullies are also dated to this phase. Gully [223] was a shallow, 0.08m deep linear feature, which disappeared in to the north baulk, it contained a grey, sandy clay (222) with 2nd century pottery. Next to this was another [225] that was filled by a 0.22m thick grey, clay (224) deposit. It was 0.80m wide and cut both earlier features [110] and [220].

A third gully [176] on the same alignment was located just to the east. It is 0.06m deep and 0.48m wide. It is filled with a grey, sandy clay (175), which contained bone and 2nd century Roman pottery. It was cut by [178/229] before it terminates just before section.

Close to these gullies was an oval pit [133] that measured 0.7m by 0.45m in plan. It was 0.1m deep with a flat base and near vertical sides. It was filled with a dark grey-black sandy clay (132) that was 0.02m thick. This was overlain by a deposit 0.08m thick of brown-grey sandy clay (131) that contained 2nd century Roman pottery.

To the south-west of the site a ditch [274] was recorded aligned NE-SW. It had been cut by several later features, indeed ditch [278] may be a later re-cutting of this feature. Due to the fact that it had been so heavily truncated its full dimensions can not be given. It had a rounded base (Fig. 4, sections 13 and 14).

A gully [287] aligned roughly SE-NW was located to the north of the area, it was unexcavated. However, its alignment and position may suggest a Roman date possibly 2nd century.

Phase 3: Roman features (c. 3rd to 4th Centuries)

A later 3rd century re-cutting [238] of ditch [196] was slightly to the east of the original line (Fig. 4, Section 10). It was a 0.38m wide, 0.18m deep with a U-shaped profiled, containing a light grey-brown, silty clay (237).

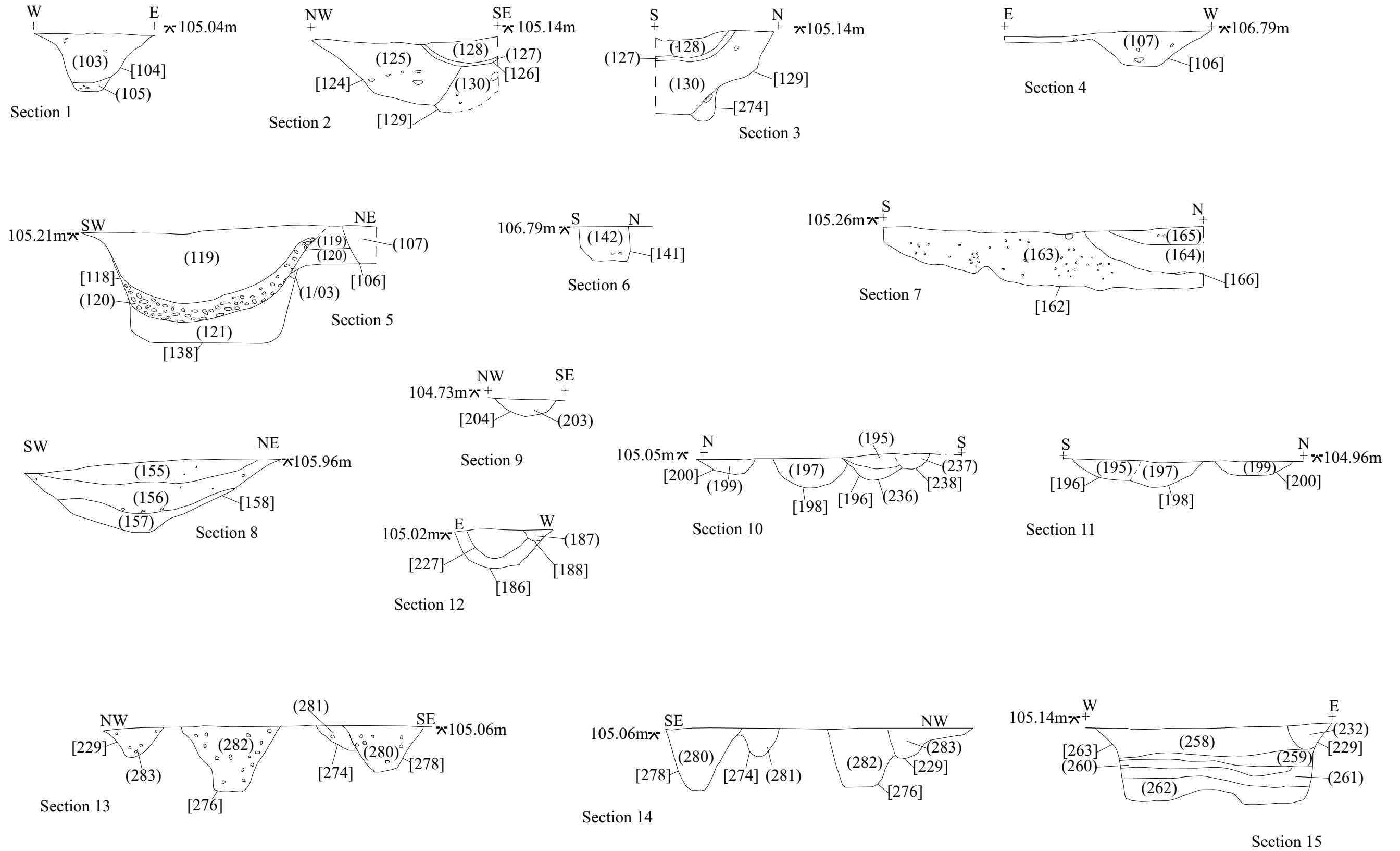


Figure 4.

A parallel ditch [202] lay just to the west. It was shallow 0.16m deep, 0.38m wide and U-shaped in profile. It was filled with a loosely compacted, grey, sandy clay (201) that contained 3rd century pottery and animal bone, as well as metal objects.

At right angles to these two ditches is a third ditch [235]. It is 0.16m deep, 1.10m wide with a U-shaped profile, and is filled with (234), greyish-brown, silty clay that contains 3rd century pottery. It cuts ditch [186] and ditch [255] (Fig 4, section 12).

Curvilinear ditch [255] is presumed to be of 3rd century date. This is by association as it cuts 2nd and 3rd century ditches [200], [196], [186] and [238], but is itself cut by a 3rd century feature [235]. It is 0.7m wide, 0.28m deep and filled with a loose brown clay-silt (254). It also cuts a short narrow ditch [243], this was 0.5m wide and 0.22m deep with a V-shaped profile. It was filled with a reddish-brown silt (242). It also cut the earlier ditches [196], [186] and [238].

Ditch [186] displays a later re-cutting [227] that was 0.76m wide and 0.32m deep. This ran down the centre of the earlier ditch and had a U-shaped profile. It was filled with a greyish brown silty-clay (226) that contained 3rd century Roman pottery. It was cut by ditch [104] and [235].

To the immediate south of these ditches were a further two curvilinear ditches that ran almost parallel. The first ditch [278] was over 8m long, its width varied between 0.6m and 1m. The depth was 0.36m and the profile was a flattened U-shape. The fill (277/279) was a medium grey sandy clay that contained some 2nd century or later Roman pottery. This may be residual as this ditch [278] cuts the earlier Roman ditch [274] along its entire length, it may be a re-cutting of this earlier ditch (Fig 4. Section 3).

The second of the parallel ditches [129/276] was 0.84m wide, 0.72m deep ditch, a flat based and steep sides at 60° (Fig 4. Section 2). It was filled with a grey-brown silty clay (130/275) that contained 3rd – 4th century pottery and animal bone. This ditch [129/276] cuts ditch [217] and is cut by ditch [104] and gully [178/215/229].

Phase 4: Roman features (c. 4th Century)

The main feature of this phase was a large curvilinear ditch [104/124/138] roughly orientated N-S, it had a flat base with steep sides, almost V-shaped in profile (Fig.4 section 1). The primary fill (105) was a loosely compacted greyish-brown silty clay 0.05m thick, which contained both 4th century Roman pottery and animal bone. Above this was a light brown-grey silty clay (103/121/125) 0.5m deep, containing pottery and animal bone. This ditch was truncated near its eastern terminal by a modern pit [118/146] (Fig 4. section 5)

A circular pit [115] 1.3m in diameter and 0.22m deep cut through the 2nd century ditch [110]. It was filled with a loosely compacted, brownish-grey silty clay (114) that contained 4th century pottery. It was in-turn truncated by a post-medieval pit [108].

A large 'figure of eight' pit [263] was recorded. It was 0.7m deep, 1.50m wide, and had a length of 2.20m. The north-eastern portion of the pit cut the 3rd century Roman ditch [235] and is itself cut by the Saxon gully [178]. The primary fill of the pit was a

loosely compacted dark beige-brown silty clay (262). It was 0.14m thick and included frequent deposits of flint flakes, nodules, animal bones, a polished stone axe and one sherd of 4th century Roman pottery. Above this was a light greyish-yellow chalky clay (261), 0.15m thick that contained animal bone. Overlying this was a layer of dark black-brown silty-clay (260) 0.15m thick. It included large chunks of charcoal, bone and flint. The excavator thought that the concentration of charcoal seemed to represent a layer of burning within the feature. However, no associated scorching of the pit edge was recorded. This layer was overlain by another of light yellow-brown silty-clay (259) 0.17m thick. It contained flint, pottery (lost) and animal bone. The upper layer consisted of compacted dark grey-brown silty clay (258). It was 0.26m thick and contained animal bone and residual 2nd century Roman pottery. The excavator described the “*fill from the lower layers seemed to undermine the natural, suggesting a ‘bell’ shaped profile*”, this is not seen on the drawn section (Fig 4, section 15).

Phase 5: Saxon features

The main feature of this phase was a 0.3m deep, 0.5m wide, 17m long gully [178/215/229] that ran N-S for 12m before turning west. It contained a grey-yellow, silty clay (177/228). It cut across several earlier Roman ditches. Early Anglo-Saxon pottery was found within the fill as well a residual Roman material.

A small pit or gully [257] cut into the earlier Roman ditch [276] in the extreme south-west corner of the area. It was shallow 0.28m deep, with a U-shaped profile, filled with a grey sandy-clay (256), which had Early Anglo-Saxon pottery and bones within it.

Phase 6: Medieval features

A large irregular pit [162] was located to the south of the site. It was 3.22m wide and 0.64m deep. It was filled with a dark blackish-brown clay-silt (163), which contained 12th-13th century pottery. This was cut on the east side by a later pit [166] (Fig 4, section 7)

To the east of this was a second irregular pit [116]. It measured 2.40m by 1.60m wide, was 0.35m deep and filled by a loosely compacted dark brownish-black silty-clay(117) which contained 12th-13th century pottery and bone.

Phase 7: Post-medieval features

A ditch [204] was located in the western part of the excavated area, it was aligned N-S. It is 0.14m deep, 0.63m wide, 4m long and U-shaped in profile. (Fig 4. section 9) It was filled by (203), a dark grey-brown, silty clay, containing pottery, bone and ceramic building material (CBM).

Roughly parallel and 13m to the east is a second post-medieval ditch [106]. This was curvilinear in plan, 0.36m deep, 2.10m width and over 8.50m long; 7.5m of which were located within the MOLAS evaluation trench. The ditch had a flat base and steep

sides at 60°. It was filled with a loosely compacted, mid-greyish brown, silty clay (107), 0.36m thick. This contained pottery, animal bone, and post medieval materials. It is cut near its southern terminal by a modern pit.

A large pit [108] to the east of the site was 2.20m in diameter, and 0.2m deep. It was filled with (109), a loosely compacted, dark, grey-black, silty clay and contained post-medieval pottery. This pit cut an earlier one.

Three other post-medieval pits were recorded. The first [161] was an oval shaped pit, 0.36m in depth, 1.78m in diameter. Its lowest fill was a loosely compacted, brownish-grey, silty clay (160) 0.25m thick. This contained pottery and animal bones. Above this was (159), a loose, black-brown, silty-clay, 0.1m in thickness, containing both pottery and bone.

A second pit [166] was 1.18m by 0.40m wide. It contained a light yellow mortar based layer (164), 0.44m thick. Above this was a brownish-grey, clay-silt (165), 0.18m deep. (Fig 4, section 7). This pit cut through an earlier medieval pit [162]. The third pit [134] was square with a shallow base, which contained a dark grey clay (135) 0.18m thick, with post-medieval pottery and glass.

Undated features

Several pits were noted in the excavated area. A large oval cut [184] truncated the terminal of the 2nd century ditch [176]. This cut was 0.1m deep, 0.6m wide, flat based and sub-circular in plan. Not recognised by the excavator was the fact that the fills at either end of the feature were different, probably indicating that it was in fact two inter-cutting pits. The northern end contained grey sandy clay (183) with the remains of a wooden post. The southern end had a reddish-brown, silty-clay (233) fill with no finds. It is probably modern in date due to the condition of the wooden post.

A second pit [126] was circular, 0.40m wide, 0.17m deep and filled with a loosely compacted black charcoal rich deposit (127), which was without finds. This pit cut through the top of ditches [104/124], [129/276] and [278] and was 4th century or later.

Another pit [174] near the north edge of the area was sub-circular, roughly 0.63m in diameter, 0.18m deep, filled with (173), a greyish-brown, sandy clay.

Pit [123], to the east of the above, was a shallow, circular feature that was 0.94m diameter, 0.21m deep and contained a mid-yellow-brown silty-clay (122) with flint inclusions.

A number of small circular features within the area have been interpreted by the excavator as either post holes, or tree/root action, due to the lack of any finds within them and their shallowness. The shallow depth of these features is likely due to the severe truncation of deposits caused by modern activity.

The first [209], in the north-west quadrant of the area, was a circular feature, 0.07m deep, 0.45m in diameter. It contained a grey sandy clay (208) and animal bone. Near to this was a second feature [213] this was 0.06m deep, 0.30m wide, filled with dark grey-brown silty clay (212), with no finds.

5m to the east was the third feature [182] filled with a brown-grey sandy clay (181) 0.06m deep, 0.30m diameter, with no finds. Another [251], 4m south of [213] was filled with a dark grey-brown silty clay (250) it was 0.2m deep and 0.3m wide, it contained no finds. It was cut into the Roman ditch [255].

Cut into ditch [186] was a possible posthole [190] 0.05m deep and 0.3m wide. It was filled with a grey-brown silty clay (189). Also cut into this ditch was a second small pit [188] that was oval in plan measuring 0.5m by 0.2m and 0.1m deep. It was filled with a dark blackish brown clay-silt (187). Another possible posthole [272] was cut into gully [178], it was 0.3m wide and 0.1m deep contained a greyish-brown silty clay (271).

Several presumed modern feature were unexcavated, these were all circular in plan. The first [194] was 0.2m in diameter, the second [284] 0.2m in diameter and the third [285] was 0.25m in diameter.

4.2 Reliability of Results and Techniques

4.2.1 Assessment *(by H. Noakes)*

During removal of topsoil the ambiguity over whether there were two distinct horizons of topsoil was resolved; it was found that the upper site had been terraced and so the topsoil was deeper than that of the lower area, and as such, the subsoil was a lot lower down than recorded during the evaluation. The ditch running through the upper area next to the tennis court was identified by the machinist stripping the area during excavation, but only became apparent again after heavy rain the night prior to excavation, due to the similarity in colour to the natural chalk. There were also slight discrepancies regarding the location of trenches which required resolving during the stripping of the overburden.

Weather conditions were mainly favourable for excavation, although work was halted for one day after a torrential downpour the previous night, which had left the site in a condition where any attempt at excavation would have adversely affected the archaeology. Light conditions were not always favourable, as the low sun during the morning and mid afternoon meant that only a small window existed for photographs to be taken.

4.2.2 Assessment of Results *(by D. Gilbert)*

The series of inter-cutting ditches and pits proved to be a complex sequence over multiple phases of activity. It would appear that the relationships were not always clear to the excavator on the site. This was compounded by the recording methodology that was employed on site leading to some confusion and contradiction within the incomplete records. Numerous problems had to be sorted out during post-excavation analysis. Fortunately excavation staff were available to be consulted for satisfactory results to be achieved.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery (*by P. Booth*)

Introduction

The excavation produced 543 sherds (5.16 kg) of pottery ranging in date from the middle Bronze Age to the post-medieval period, deriving from some 61 separate contexts, plus a little unstratified material. The majority of the pottery is of Roman date. All the pottery was scanned very rapidly for the purposes of providing dating information. It was quantified by sherd count and weight by major period within each context group, with notes made of significant fabrics and vessel forms. The pottery was in moderate condition. The sherds were not particularly abraded and surface preservation was reasonably good. Average sherd size (weight), however, was not particularly impressive, at 9.5 g. There was little variation in the average sherd weight of the material from different major periods.

Prehistoric

The small prehistoric assemblage includes sherds in flint-tempered, shell-tempered and sand-tempered fabrics, the first of these accounting for the majority of the material. The most diagnostic material comprised fairly thin walled, well finished flint-tempered sherds almost certainly from globular urns of middle Bronze Age date. Such sherds came from contexts 187, 226 and 228, but of these only 226 is likely to have been of Bronze Age date. Other flint-tempered sherds came from context 197, but were less diagnostic and can only be assigned a general middle-late Bronze Age date range. Single sand-tempered sherds of probable Iron Age date came from contexts 103 and 283, but were again residual. Despite its partly redeposited character, however, the middle Bronze Age pottery is quite significant and the globular urn fragments add to a growing body of evidence for material of this type in the region.

Roman

The Roman pottery comprised a little over 60% of the total assemblage by both sherd count and weight. Late Iron Age-early Roman material was conspicuous by its absence and it is clear that the pottery represents Roman activity only from the 2nd century onwards. Some 13 context groups, mostly small (producing a total of 39 sherds, 314 g), were dated 2nd century or later, while 116 sherds (1119 g) came from context groups dated most to the mid 3rd century or later. As would be expected in this region, this dating is based mostly on the presence of later Roman products of the Oxford industry.

The overall range of fabrics and forms was relatively limited. Six sherds of Central Gaulish samian ware were the only imports. Extra-regional material consisted of a few sherds of black-burnished ware (OA fabric B11), occasional pieces of late Roman shell-tempered ware (OA fabric C11) and a single sherd of probable New Forest colour-coated ware (OA fabric F53). The remainder of the pottery consisted largely of coarse wares from the Oxford potteries and/or more local (unknown) sources whose products are not clearly differentiated from the Oxford ones, with moderately sand-tempered reduced fabrics (OA fabric R30) the most common.

Letcombe Regis: pottery quantities (no. sherds/weight) by context and period

Context	Pre-historic	Roman	Medieval	Post-medieval	TOTAL	Context date	Comment
US		10/97	2/24	2/81	14/202		
101		5/19		2/20	7/39	17C+	
103	2/6?	9/70			11/76	240-400	pre sherds ?IA
105		7/54			7/54	240-400	
106		48/468		2/29	50/497	18C+	
107		95/922	5/30	1/2	101/954	19C	
109			1/18	2/28	3/46	17C+	
111		2/7			2/7	2C+	
114		1/3			1/3	3-4C?	
117		5/39	79/711		84/750	late 12-early 13C	
119		3/45	8/88	33/261	44/394	17-19C	
121		7/66	2/13	11/138	20/217	17-19C	
125		4/31			4/31	240-400	
130		2/37			2/37	240-400	
131		1/10			1/10	2C+	
134				1/16	1/16	17C+	
136			1/40		1/40	12-13C	
139				1/2	1/2	18C+	
142		1/17			1/17	270-400?	
143			11/97		11/97	12-13C	
145			1/6		1/6	12-13C	
148				1/7	1/7	17C+	
154		8/50			8/50	240-400	
156		12/126			12/126	240-400	
157		3/16			3/16	3-4C?	
159				1/4	1/4	17C+	
160		1/4	3/55	1/24	5/83	17C+	
163			3/25		3/25	12-13C	
168			1/5	1/24	2/29	17C+	
175		4/32			4/32	2C+	
177		17/102	1/2*		18/104	EAS	
187	2/34	1/9			3/42	3-4C?	pre sherds MBA, 1?Globular Urn
195		5/38			5/38	2C+	
197	7/98				7/98	M-LBA	
201		3/18			3/18	late 3-4C	
203		9/81			9/81	3-4C	
205		3/23			3/23	2C+	
210		1/3			1/3	3-4C	
214		10/80	4/14*		14/94	EAS?	Organic tempered
216		10/78			10/78	2C+	
219		3/57			3/57	2C+	
222		4/11			4/11	2C+	
224		1/6			1/6	2C+	
226	3/40	1/3			4/43	3-4C	pre rim sherd with pre-firing hole, poss Globular Urn.
228	5/21	6/98			11/119	240-400	pre incl flint- and shell-tempered
231		1/1			1/1	2C+?	
232		4/47			4/47	240-400	
234		13/176			13/176	240-400	
244		1/42			1/42	240-400	
248			2/20*		2/20	EAS	Organic tempered
253		1/3			1/3	240-400	
256			1/10*		1/10	EAS?	
258		2/35			2/35	2C+	
260		1/5			1/5	240-400	
262		1/32			1/32	4C?	
264		1/17			1/17	3-4C?	
273		2/7			2/7	mid 3-4C	
276		2/4			2/4	240-400	
277		1/2			1/2	2C+	
280		3/64			3/64	late 3-4C	
282		2/14			2/14	2C+	
283	1/14	2/5			3/19	240-400	pre sherd MIA?
Totals	20/213	339/3154	8/46* & 117/1112	59/636	543/5161		

Summary of pottery quantities by period

Period	No. sherds	Weight (g)
Prehistoric	20	213
Roman	339	3154
Anglo-Saxon	8	46
Medieval	117	1112
Post-medieval	59	636
TOTAL	543	5161

Oxford colour-coated wares (OA fabric F51) amounted to only 23 sherds (6.8% of the Roman total), many of them small, and other Oxford products (white wares and white ware and red colour-coated ware mortaria) were only represented by occasional sherds. Based on assessment of the fine and specialist ware component, therefore, the assemblage appears to be a relatively low status one, but it is quite small so this judgement needs to be treated with caution.

It is notable that a large proportion of the Roman material occurred in mixed deposits such as contexts 106 and 107. Both of these contained post-medieval pottery and 107 also produced a few medieval sherds. It is possible that the later material was intrusive in these contexts, in which case it is interesting that neither Roman group was particularly late in date (both might be assigned to the later 2nd or early 3rd century), but at present it has been assumed that the Roman material in these groups is residual.

Anglo-Saxon

Only eight sherds (46 g) of Anglo-Saxon pottery were identified. These came from four contexts (177, 214, 248 and 256). The tiny fragment from context 177 may have been intrusive in a late Roman context group, and the four small sherds in 214 were also associated with late Roman pottery. In the other two contexts the Anglo-Saxon pottery was not associated with other material. In all cases the fabrics were organic-tempered. The significance of organic-tempered vis-à-vis sand-tempered pottery in this period has been much debated, with the balance of opinion in favour of a later introduction for the organic-tempered material. On this basis it is unlikely that these sherds would date before the 6th century AD, but the present assemblage has no other diagnostic characteristics that allow further refinement of date. The association with late Roman pottery, potentially in two out of four cases, is interesting and reflects a common regional pattern. It is unclear, however, if this evidence can be taken to support a suggestion of any kind of continuity of activity from the late Roman period, particularly in view of the potential date of the Anglo-Saxon sherds already discussed.

Medieval

The medieval pottery contrasts with the Roman material in comprising for the most part a very restricted group of fabrics, forms and chronology. The fabrics are almost entirely local/regional coarse wares in sand- or flint and sand-tempered fabrics, and the few rims are mostly of cooking pots (7) with a single dish. A tiny Brill-Boarstall sherd is almost the only glazed piece. Over 67% of the sherds (64% by weight) came from a single context group, 117, which can be dated quite closely to the late 12th-13th century. The great majority of the remaining material is potentially quite consistent with this date range, though the individual groups are much smaller and some of the pottery is residual in post-medieval contexts.

Post-medieval

The post-medieval pottery comprises a typical range of material dominated by glazed red earthenwares, but was not examined in any detail. An overall date range from the 17th century onwards is indicated. The most notable individual piece was a base fragment from a scalloped tin-glazed earthenware bowl with a 'Nevers blue' glaze, dated to the late 17th-early 18th century, from context 119.

Overall comment

These assemblages, while small, provide useful information on the chronology and character of the development of this landscape. Despite their small size the middle Bronze Age and Anglo-Saxon groups may be particularly important in this regard. The prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval material would merit full recording and publication if possible.

5.2 Lithic Assemblage (by H. Lamdin-Whymark)

Introduction

This report was written before the exact nature and dating of the pit was known – editor.

Excavations at Letcombe Regis yielded a total of 66 struck flints, 1 fragmentary stone axe and 6 pieces (56 g) of burnt unworked flint (Table 1). Approximately half of the struck flint (37 pieces) and the stone axe were recovered from pit 263/229. The flint from pit 263/229 is in fresh condition and can be considered as contemporary with the feature; the flint has been dated to the Late Neolithic on the basis of technological attributes. The remaining 31 flints were recovered from 15 archaeological contexts, with a maximum of five flints recovered from any single context. These flints are broadly contemporary with the assemblage from pit 263/229, but a few blades may date from the Mesolithic or early Neolithic. These flints exhibit moderate to heavy post-depositional edge-damage indicating they represent residual finds in later archaeological features; these features mostly date from the Roman period.

Table 1: The flint assemblage from Letcombe Regis by feature and context.

CATEGORY TYPE	Other Contexts	Pit 263/229					Pit 263/229 Total	Grand Total
		228	258	260	261	262		
Flake	21	2				23	25	46
Blade	4			1		1	2	6
Bladelet	1							1
Blade-like	2			1			1	3
Irregular waste	2		1	1			2	4
End scraper	1							1
End and side scraper						3	3	3
Other scraper				1		2	3	3
Retouched flake						1	1	1
Axe (fragment)						1	1	1
Grand total	31	2	1	4		31	38	69
Burnt unworked flint No./Wt (g)	5/46 g	1/ 10 g					1/ 10 g	6/ 56 g
No. of burnt flints (%)	2 (6.5)	1 (25)					3 (9.7)	6 (8.7)
No. of broken flints (%)	5 (16.1)	1 (25)					9 (29)	15 (21.7)
No. of retouched flints (%)	1 (3)	1 (25)					7 (22.6)	9 (13)

Methodology

The artefacts were catalogued according to broad artefact/debitage type, general condition noted and dating attempted where possible. Retouched pieces were classified according to standard morphological descriptions (Bamford 1985, 72-77; Healy 1988, 48-49; Bradley 1999b, 211-227; Butler 2005). Additional information was recorded on condition (degree of edge-damage and cortication), and the state of the artefact (burnt, broken, or visibly utilised). Unworked burnt flint was quantified by weight and number. The assemblage was catalogued directly onto a Microsoft Access database and data manipulated in Microsoft Excel.

Raw material

The raw material included flint probably collected from at least two different sources. The most common flint was a mid to dark brown colour with grey cherty inclusions and a *c* 5 mm thick relatively unabraded white cortex. This flint was of reasonable flaking quality and free from thermal faults. This raw material originates directly from the chalk and is available to south of the excavation. The second raw material is similar in colour, but exhibits an abraded cortex and the flint contains thermal fractures. This flint can be collected from river gravels on, or close, to the chalk region to the south. The raw material for the stone axe is a hard, fine grained, greyish-green igneous rock with occasional larger opaque white crystals measuring 0.5-1.5 mm. This raw material is not local to the region and may be Group VII from the Graig Llwyd quarry area in North Wales. Thin-sectioning is required to confirm the implement's petrology.

The assemblage

A total of 68 struck flints and a polished stone axe was recovered from the excavations. The assemblage will be discussed below in relation to the assemblage from pit 263/229 and the other archaeological contexts.

Pit 263/229

Pit 263/229 yielded a total of 37 struck flints and a stone axe from four fills, but the majority of pieces (31 including the axe) were recovered from the primary fill (262). The artefact assemblage from the pit was probably larger than the number of pieces considered as only approximately three-quarters of the feature was excavated. Moreover, small flakes and micro-debitage are notably absent from the assemblage, but these pieces would only be recovered by sieving and this was not undertaken. *The feature is Roman in date and the flintwork is residual and as such small flakes and micro-debitage may not have been present – editor.* Unretouched flint flakes dominate the assemblage and suggest a flake-orientated industry. The flakes are of relatively broad and thick proportions, but have been struck with some degree of care. Several flakes exhibit platform-edge abrasion and the majority appear to have been detached using a soft-hammer percussor, such as antler. In addition to the flakes two blades were present; one of these blades may represent an accidental bi-product of the flake industry, but the other exhibits the scars of earlier blade removals on the dorsal surface indicating it was struck from a core aimed at blade production. Approximately half of the unretouched flakes exhibit edge damage consistent with

use. A refitting exercise was undertaken, but despite the presence of several flakes apparently from the same core, no refits could be made. The flake morphology and the reduction strategies employed are characteristic of later Neolithic industries (Pitts and Jacobi 1979; Ford 1987).

Retouched tools form a relatively high proportion of the assemblage at 21.1% of the total (eight tools). This total is dominated by scrapers including three end and side forms, a large scraper on thermally fractured blank measuring 89 mm by 72 mm and 25 mm thick and two burnt and broken scraper fragments of unidentifiable form. The scrapers generally exhibit heavy use-wear including clusters of step fractures along the working edge. An edge retouched flake exhibits abrupt backing retouch along the right-hand side and use-damage along the left-hand side. The proximal end is broken and exhibits slight retouch possibly forming a segmented flake tool.

The axe (also see 5.4.2 below) is neatly worked with gently tapering sides and a rounded butt. The tool is lenticular section and the blade end is broken. The form of the axe is relatively regular except for a large flake scar on one side of the artefact that represents a knapping error on the roughing out. Despite this irregularity, the tool was finished with a high polish, removing most of the minor scars; the larger scar was only slightly polished. The axe also exhibits slight pecking on the surface resulting from reuse, possibly as a processing tool. The blade end has been broken by a transverse blow and further flake was removed along the edge of the artefact. It is notable that the polished surface of the axe and original flake scars exhibits a dark glossy patina, whilst the break is much lighter in colour. This surface colouration may have resulted from burning prior to breakage and deposition. The burning of axes is a recurrent theme in late Neolithic, and particularly Grooved Ware contexts, and in one example at Clifton Quarry, Worcestershire, at least five flint and stone axes were burnt before deposition (R. Jackson pers. comm.).

Other contexts

A total of 31 flints were recovered from 15 archaeological contexts located across the excavation area. The flake debitage is of broadly similar technological characteristics to the material from pit 263/229 and may be of comparable date. It is notable that four blades and a bladelet were recovered, as this may indicate the presence of a few flints from an earlier blade-orientated industry of the Mesolithic or early Neolithic date. The only retouched tool was an end scraper that was manufactured by the application of minimal retouch to the distal end of a flake; this tool is not datable. The small numbers of redeposited flints indicate that there was not an extensive scatter of flint in the topsoil and subsoil.

Conclusions

The flint from Letcombe Regis prominently dates from the late Neolithic, but a few of the residual flints may date from the Mesolithic or early Neolithic. The flint assemblage in pit 263/229 is relatively typical of later Neolithic pit deposits as it contains a large proportion of retouched tools, particularly scrapers, among relatively fresh flake debitage, including numerous utilised flakes. The inclusion of an axe fragment is also characteristic of pit deposits, particularly those with Peterborough Ware or Grooved Ware associations (Garrow 2006; Lamdin-Whymark 2007). The residual flints in the Roman and later contexts represent a low density background scatter and suggest that the pit was not associated with extensive spread of flint in the

topsoil or subsoil. This may indicate that the material in the pit and scatter of flint results from a brief period activity, perhaps occupation, in the late Neolithic.

5.3 Animal Bone (*By C. Inghem*)

An assemblage of animal bone was recovered from the excavations. The majority of the material came from features dated to the Roman period (2nd to 4th centuries AD) and a small amount from a 17th century ditch.

Methods

The assemblage was assessed in February 2008. All bone fragments over 10mm were examined, with the number of potentially identifiable and unidentifiable bones being counted for each context, to provide a basic NISP (Number of Identified Specimens Present). The number of bones or teeth that could provide metrical, ageing or sexing information was recorded, and the presence of gnaw marks was noted.

Table 1. Condition of the bone (number of bags)

Condition	Roman	17th century	Total
2	15	1	16
3	1		1
Total	16	1	17

Condition of the bone

In order to estimate the potential of an assemblage to provide taphonomic information, the condition of the bone in each bag is graded on a scale of 1 to 5. That assigned to '1' is deemed to be in excellent condition, demonstrating little post-depositional damage whilst bone material classed as '5' has suffered severe surface erosion and can be identified only as 'bone'. The condition of the bone recovered from Letcombe Regis is given in Table 1 and shows that most of the assemblage is in good (Grade 2) condition.

Table 2. Taxa representation (NISP)

	Roman	17th century	Total
Cattle	62	3	65
Sheep/goat	29	8	37
Pig	46	3	49
Horse	1		1
Dog	1		1
Deer	2		2
Galliform	4		4
Indeterminate bird	1		1
Small mammal		1	1
Unidentifiable	251	33	284
Total	397	48	445
Total identifiable	146	14	160
% identifiable	37	29	36

Data

The assemblage recovered from Roman deposits comprises 146 identifiable specimens and is comprised almost entirely of domestic animals with cattle most numerous followed by pig and then caprines. Horse and dog are both represented by single specimens. Birds are represented by four bones belonging to Galliform (probably domestic fowl) and a single goose (*Anser anser*) radius.

Taxa representation varies according to feature type with ditch deposits made up almost entirely of cattle and caprine bones and the single pit dominated by pig (Table 3). The primary fill of the pit contains a relatively high frequency of major limb bones belonging to pig including eight scapulae, several red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) antler fragments that probably represent a single specimen and a roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) femur. Forty-eight specimens of animal bone came from a 17th century ditch but only fourteen are identifiable and almost all belong to domestic taxa with the exception of one fragment that belongs to a small mammal, probably hare (*Lepus europaeus*).

Table 3. Taxa representation in Roman features (NISP)

	Ditch	Gully	Pit	Total
Cattle	53	6	3	62
Sheep/goat	27	1	1	29
Pig	4		42	46
Horse	1			1
Dog	1			1
Galliform	4			4
<i>Anser anser</i>	1			1
Deer			2	2
Total	91	7	48	146

General information

A number of specimens from Roman deposits could provide metrical and ageing data (Table 4) with a total of thirteen measurable bones and seven mandible or loose teeth that offer ageing information. Four pig canines indicate the presence of at least two boars and two sows.

Table 3. General information (NISP)

	Roman	17th century	Total
<i>Measurable</i>			
Cattle	6		6
Sheep/goat	3	3	6
Pig	4		4
<i>Ageable</i>			
Cattle	2		2
Sheep/goat	3		3
Pig	2		2
<i>Sexable</i>			
Pig	4		4

During recording evidence for gnawing, probably by dogs, and burning was observed. In addition, a pig fibula from Context 214) appears to have been worked (Figure 1).

Seventeenth century deposits produced three sheep/goat bones which could provide metrical data.

Figure 1. Perforated pig fibula



Discussion

It is generally accepted that the relative frequency of the major domesticates (cattle, caprines and pig) vary according to settlement type and its degree of 'romanization' (King 1978, 1991). High frequencies of sheep/goat are commonly found on native rural sites whilst military and other more 'romanized' settlements tend to display higher frequencies of cattle and pig (*ibid*). More recently it has been suggested that differences in taxa ratio indicate not only changes in dietary choice but also reflect shifts in animal husbandry which occurred in response to wider economic intensification and social change (Hamshaw-Thomas, 2000: 168).

The assemblage from Letcombe Regis is relatively small compared to larger samples of animal bone that have been recovered from contemporary sites in southern Britain (Grant, 1978, Maltby, 1984; Ingreem, 2006; Sykes, 2007; Wilson, 1986) however the predominance of cattle and pig suggests a considerable degree of 'romanization'.

Taxa representation is also known to vary according to feature type as a result of differential disposal practices and taphonomic bias, with caprines and pig often better represented in pits than ditches (Maltby, 1985). This is clearly the case in respect of pig whose remains dominate the single pit excavated at Letcombe Regis whilst cattle display a high frequency in the ditches. Whether the pit deposit represents a single event or the remains of several meals is uncertain however the predominance of major meat bearing bones indicates the availability of good quality joints of pork whilst the virtual absence of caprine bones suggests that in some instances pig meat may have been preferentially selected. Wild animals are generally scarce at Roman site however there is evidence that deer were exploited on a small scale although the red deer antler may have been collected in a shed form.

Body-part representation can provide information concerning activity areas and disposal practices. The pit assemblage is almost certainly representative of food waste rather than primary butchery but in general the assemblage is of insufficient size to withstand detailed spatial analysis.

There is evidence for immature pig which suggests that breeding took place at or near the site but few specimens offer ageing and metrical data and therefore the

assemblage is unable to provide reliable data on which to base inferences concerning animal husbandry practices and animal size.

Recommendations

The assemblage from Letcombe Regis is relatively small and unable to provide reliable information concerning economic and cultural practices and therefore no further analysis is recommended.

5.4 Other Finds

5.4.1 Metal

A metal object was identified by Martin Henig as part of a steelyard balance. One beam end appears to be a pommel, it was recovered from the fill (156) of ditch [158].

5.4.2 Stone Axe (by R. Ixer)

Summary

The axe-head belongs to IPG Group VII. Microdiorite (Augite granophyre).

Method

The axe-head, as supplied, was cored and a polished thin section was prepared. The axe fragment and its cut surface were described macroscopically using a x20 hand lens. The colour of the natural surfaces was recorded and standardised using the Geological Society of America's rock-color chart.

The polished thin section was investigated in transmitted and reflected light using x8 x16 air and x40 oil objectives.

Macroscopical description

Hand specimen

The axe-head is made from a dense, homogeneous, fine-grained, micro-porphyrific rock that has taken a good polish. The polished surfaces are a medium grey (N5 on the Geological Society of America rock-color chart) but broken areas are medium light grey (N6). The rock breaks with a sub-conchoidal fracture. Small, 2 – 3mm long, white, euhedral, lath-shaped plagioclase and 1mm long, dark-coloured mafic microphenocrysts are present in the dark matrix.

Thin section. (The section is slightly thin)

The rock is a pale olive (10Y 6/2) and very fine-grained but carries 0.4mm long, green mafic micro-phenocrysts in a turbid matrix.

Microscopical description.

Small glomeroporphyritic clusters of clinopyroxene are present a very fine-grained to fine-grained groundmass dominated by stubby crystals of altered plagioclase; unaltered to altered clinopyroxene (augite); 20 -40µm diameter, euhedral magnetite now totally replaced by sphene; rarer, titanomagnetite now comprising thin, <1 to 1µm wide, relict, ilmenite lamellae in sphene; abundant, 20 x 1 to 60 x 30µm size, discrete ilmenite laths and quartz.

Some pyroxene has altered to green, highly pleochroic pumpellyite. A little brown lath-shaped amphibole also may be present. Elsewhere, pumpellyite forms radiating aggregates within the groundmass although prehnite is very rare.

Late-stage, quartz-rich segregations are widespread and comprise stubby, altered plagioclase growing into quartz mosaics. Locally, quartz-feldspar intergrowths are symplectite-like suggesting the presence of myrmekite.

Sulphides are rare but chalcopyrite occurs as 2 - 5µm diameter grains in patches up to 60µm in diameter and a single 5µm diameter grain of hexagonal pyrrhotite is present.

Discussion and Provenance

Comparing the total petrography of this axe-head with recent published and unpublished descriptions of IPG Group VII axe-heads, especially Ixer et al (2004) and those from Clifton Quarry, Worcestershire (Ixer in press) show that the source material for this axe-head is an augite granophyre and a classical example of that group.

The rock comes from the Penmaenmawr area of North Wales.

5.5 Environmental Remains

No samples were retained in agreement with OCAS.

6 DISCUSSION

A previous evaluation of the area had been undertaken by MoLAS (Mackinder 2006). One of their evaluation trenches was located within Area 2. It must be noted that Trench 8 was incorrectly located on the maps presented in the report. It had also been machine cut almost 0.4m deeper than the natural horizon in the area. This trench was re-excavated and re-examined the two large ditches it located [14] and [16] are equivalent to [106] and [104] respectively. The small gully [12] that MoLAS recorded as a later feature was on further investigation was actually earlier in date, this is recorded as (221). MoLAS Trench 7 had also been recorded erroneously, drawn with north and south inversed.

The earliest activity on the site is represented by the residual Neolithic material present within a number of features. It would appear that later activity has removed all traces of features associated with this period.

During the excavation, pit [263] was considered to be a single Neolithic feature. It would seem highly unlikely that the pit [263] was a figure of eight. It is more probable that it is in fact two pits inter-cutting. The north-eastern portion demonstrably cuts the 3rd century Roman ditch [235] and is itself cut by the Saxon gully [178].

Considering the amount of flint artefacts the south-western portion of [263] could be a Neolithic pit disturbed by the later activity. The condition of the flint indicates the artefacts are unlikely to have move far from their original place of deposition, and certainly did not lie around on the surface before re-deposition, whilst the composition of the assemblage is entirely consistent with a Late Neolithic pit deposit, i.e. a high

proportion of burning, retouched tools, a dominance of scrapers and the inclusion of a polished axe fragment. However, the figure of eight cut is unusual for a Neolithic pit (H. Lamdin-Whymark *Pers. Comm.*).

It is possible that a pit was dug in the 4th century that disturbed a Neolithic pit. This earlier pit was re-excavated completely, as it is far easier to re-dig a pit in chalk than excavate a new one. This re-use of an earlier pit would explain the odd shape and why the Neolithic deposit was incorporated into the Roman lower fills.

The Bronze Age is represented by a truncated ditch [198] and the odd residual sherd in other features. A few residual sherds of Iron Age pottery is also present on the site.

The excavation recorded no finds of a Late Iron Age to Early Roman date. However, sherds of this date are reported as being recovered during the evaluation (Mackinder 2006). Considering the large number of sherds recovered during the excavation it is possible that these earlier finds have been misidentified.

Roman activity on site is marked by at least three phases, and appears in both Area 1 and 2. These would appear to start in the 2nd century and continue through the 3rd century into the 4th century. The ditches with 2nd and 3rd century material within them would appear to be associated with agricultural practices. Ditches [276] and [278] may also represent a boundary. Agriculture may well have continued in the area into the 4th century, but is also marked with pits during this period. The sherds of pottery in the upper deposits may be residual from the manuring process of the area.

It is possible that these agricultural practices are represented by a 2nd century rectilinear field system which is remodelled in perhaps in the later 2nd century and again at times in the 3rd to early 4th centuries. Ditch [278] would appear to be a re-cut of ditch [274] and possibly ditch [276] shows another slight movement of this boundary.

Many ditches appear to be truncated by the 4th century ditch [104]. It would seem likely that this respected an earlier ditch and that the last phase of re-cutting has removed all traces of these previous ditches. It appears that the ditch and gully features are getting deeper over the course of the Roman period. This may be due to a general lowering of the water table in this period.

The size of ditch [104] may also mark the edge of cultivated land from that of a settlement further to the east. Certainly few of the linear ditches appear to enter this area. The 2nd century gully (221) may indicate that this area was at one time used for agriculture. It is possible that this could be a drain for any associated settlement. Ditch [158] may also be associated as a boundary ditch for a settlement.

The area would appear to have gone out of agricultural use in the 4th century, possible due to soil degradation over years of cultivation.

Alternatively a 2nd century small enclosure may be represented by east/west ditches [200] and [196] continuing as 186, and ditch [110] and [220]. The fact that [186] and [274] do not continue north of ditch [104] suggests that [104] is at least partly a re-cut of an earlier ditch. Ditch [217] to the south of the other roughly east/west ditches may continue further eastwards as part of [274] given the apparent slight change of

alignment of the one to the north. Ditches [196] and [200], and ditches [110] and [220] could suggest re-digging of these boundaries. A further phase of activity could be shown by north/south ditches/gullies [176], [223] and [225]. Only one pit [133] is dated to this period. The 3rd century ditches seem to indicate a re-modelling of this enclosure with perhaps an entrance way. As the entirety of the ditches was not excavated other butt ends may not have been found. Again the non-continuation of the ditches eastwards suggests that the later ditch [104] is a recut of an earlier boundary.

Direct evidence for Saxon occupation is limited, but the fact that Letcombe Regis was held by King Edward the Confessor in the mid 11th century and that it was a well-established village by the time of the Domesday census in 1086 may indicate that it was established much earlier.

The settlement possessed a church in 11th century, which probably stood near to or on the spot of the 13th century church of St. Andrews. The church is 100m to the north of the site. The alignment of the gully [178] might suggest that it curves around the church and perhaps forms some sort of boundary for the settlement. Similar gullies have been used to mark boundaries of occupation areas as at the hunting lodge at Cheddar, Somerset (Blair 1994).

Trenches 6 and 10 of the MoLAS evaluation would have been well placed to help confirm this theory. However as previously stated errors are present in their trench locations and one can not say for certain if these are accurately portrayed. There is a definite error on the drawings of the Trenches (Fig. 5 shows features associated with Trench 6 and Trench 10 being present within the same Trench). It is possible that a gully [4] within MoLAS' Trench 10 could be a continuation of the Saxon gully [178], as it cuts a 3rd to 4th century Roman pit (Mackinder 2006).

Pits of the 12th-13th century are present in the southern portion of Area 2 and in Area 1. These are presumably for waste disposal, however, no other activity of this date was recorded on the site.

If the afore mentioned gully [174] is a boundary marker for the settlement it is interesting to note that the pits lie on what would be the outside of the habitation area, where one would expect to see the placement of pits for waste.

The area is noted as being used for agriculture in 1801. It is possible that the two parallel ditches [106] and [204] are part of this activity. Although it is possible that the sherds of post-medieval pottery are intrusive in this feature [106] and it is in fact Roman.

The area also appears to have been heavily disturbed by pits in the later post-medieval period as well as more recently. This may be associated with the building of the new Letcombe Manor as seen on the 1899 OS map.

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