

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION  
OF  
LAND ADJACENT TO 86 HIGH STREET,  
DORCHESTER, OXFORDSHIRE  
SU 5772 9461**

*On behalf of  
The Anderson Orr Partnership*

**JULY 2008**

**REPORT FOR** The Anderson Orr Partnership  
The Studio,  
70 Church Street,  
Wheatley,  
Oxford  
OX33 1LZ

**PREPARED BY** David Gilbert & Austin Ainsworth

**ILLUSTRATION BY** Milena Grzybowska & Eoin Fitzsimons

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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](mailto:info@jmheritageservices.co.uk)

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## **Summary**

*The evaluation recorded a mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman ditch and two pits also of possible Late Roman date. These were cut into the alluvium that displayed evidence for prehistoric activity in the form of a flint flake.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

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

The site of the proposed development is located on the east side of the High Street approximately 170m north of the junction with Watling Lane at Dorchester (NGR SU 5772 9461). The site lies at approximately 49m OD and the geology is First Terrace River Gravels. There is an existing house adjacent and the site forms part of its garden.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

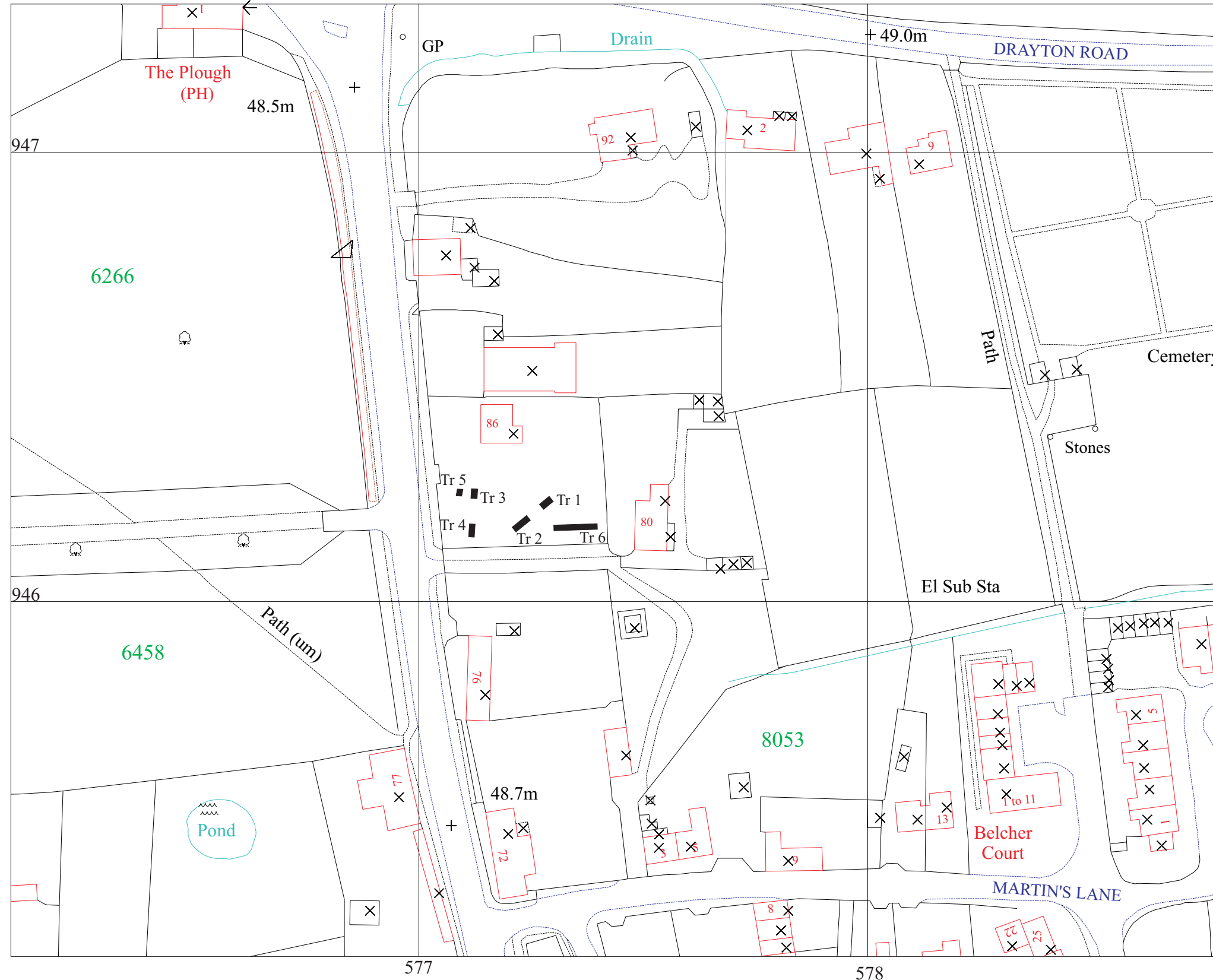
In January 2008 planning permission was sought from South Oxfordshire District Council to construct a single detached three bedroom dwelling (P08/W0002). Due to the potential presence of archaeological features, including Roman settlement evidence and human skeletal remains, a predetermination archaeological field evaluation has been required. This is in line with PPG16 and Local Plan Policies.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The site is located in an area of considerable archaeological potential 200m north of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Roman Town of Dorchester (SAM OX116). The Roman town consisted of roughly rectangular defences enclosing a civil settlement of about 13.5 hectares. It is generally thought to have been established in the Flavian period and the unusual increase in Late Roman (Theodosian) coinage implies a thriving occupation throughout the 4<sup>th</sup> century and possibly into the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Previous investigations have revealed that there was extensive Roman occupation and land use north of the Roman town and the location of this site is within the area of this settlement. This settlement would have consisted of dwellings and workshops and agricultural enclosures.

Settlement evidence in the form of boundary ditches have been recorded in archaeological investigations 90m to the south west of the site (PRN 12757; SU 5768 9454) and a stone building and burial dated to this period was uncovered 170m to the east of the site (PRN 13969; SU 5787 9455). Further Roman burials have been recorded 200m west of the site (PRN 5922; SU 5749 9460) along with undated burials (PRN 13539; SU 5751 9461) on the site of the medieval Bishops Palace (PRN 1912; SU 5751 9461). Findspots of Roman pottery and coins have been recorded across the surrounding area of the application including 70m north of the site (PRN 1957; SU 5771 9469).

Roman field systems have also been found in the area including a series of rectangular enclosures recorded from cropmarks 250m to the east of the site and a Roman field system and an undated ring ditch were recorded during excavations on Minchin Recreation Ground in 2007 (PRN 26079)(SU 5785 9475). Cropmarks recorded on this



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Figure 1. Site and trench locations.

site show extensive field systems and enclosures on the site. An Anglo Saxon burial was found along with associated grave goods within the recreation ground in the 1950s (PRN 1929)(SU 5778 9481). The early edition OS maps show that the application plot has not been heavily developed in the recent past and it is likely therefore that this development will encounter further evidence of the Roman occupation of the area immediately north of the Roman town.

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

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

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.

In particular:

- To establish whether there are any associated occupation deposits or burial activity of Roman date.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

It was originally envisaged that two trenches would be excavated, the first being 12m long placed diagonally across the proposed footprint of the new building and the second being 10m long and placed within the proposed driveway. Both trenches would have been 1.8m wide. A high water table and influx of water meant that the strategy was changed. Five test pits and one 7.8m long trench were excavated, (Figure 1). These specifications replaced those outlined in the OCAS brief after negotiations with Paul Smith, County Archaeologist.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

### **3.2 Methodology**

Excavation was by a 3 tonne excavator using a 1.5m wide ditching bucket. Mechanical excavation was taken down to the top of the highest significant

archaeological horizon, or natural undisturbed geology, whichever was the higher. See also Appendix 1. The test pits were recorded from the top of the pits as depth and flooding proved to be a health and safety issue. The archaeological horizon in Trench 6 was hand cleaned (as far as that is possible in a flooded trench) and selected features and deposits were sample excavated by hand in order to meet the aims as defined above. The integrity of any archaeological features or deposits that might better be excavated in conditions pertaining to full excavation, or might warrant preservation *in situ*, were not compromised.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced. The trenches were backfilled after recording.

## 4 RESULTS

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

### 4.1 Excavation Results

The “natural” in all five test pits (TPs 1-5) and the trench (Trench 6) (01/03), (02/03), (03/03), (04/03), (05/03) and (06/03) was the same; the material was loose orangey yellow sub-rounded river gravels with patches and lenses of sand within it.

#### Test Pits (TPs) 1 – 5 (Figure 2)

All five test-pits displayed the same sequence of deposits; as a result all five will be described together.

Test Pit 1 (TP1) was 2.80 m long, 1.80 m wide and 1.60 m deep, the height at the top of the test pit was 48.99 m O.D. Test Pit 2 (TP2) was 3.90 m long, 1.80 m wide and 1.80 m deep, the height at the top of the test pit was 48.98 m O.D. Test Pit 3 (TP3) was 2.40 m long, 1.80 m wide and 1.50 m deep, the height at the top of the test pit was 48.80 m O.D. Test Pit 4 (TP4) was 3.80 m long, 1.80 m wide and 1.20 m deep, the height at the top of the test pit was 48.89 m O.D. Test Pit 5 (TP5) was 1.70 m long, 1.50 m wide and 1.50 m deep, the height at the top of the test pit was 48.80 m O.D.

The “natural” was overlain by firm orangey brown silty clay with pockets and lenses of sand and gravels, (01/02), (02/02), (03/02), (04/02) and (05/02); the clay may have been an alluvial deposit. The clay was 0.40 m thick in TP1, in TP2 it was 0.70 m thick, in TP3 it was 0.40 m thick and in TP4 it was 0.35 m thick in the western side of the trench and 0.05 m thick in the eastern side suggesting an area of high ground for the gravel to the west of TP4. The clay was 0.55 m thick in TP5 and contained more gravel inclusions aligned as stripes within the clay possibly suggesting that the area of TP5 may have been a palaeo-channel with the gravel stripes being washed out to the channel’s edges.

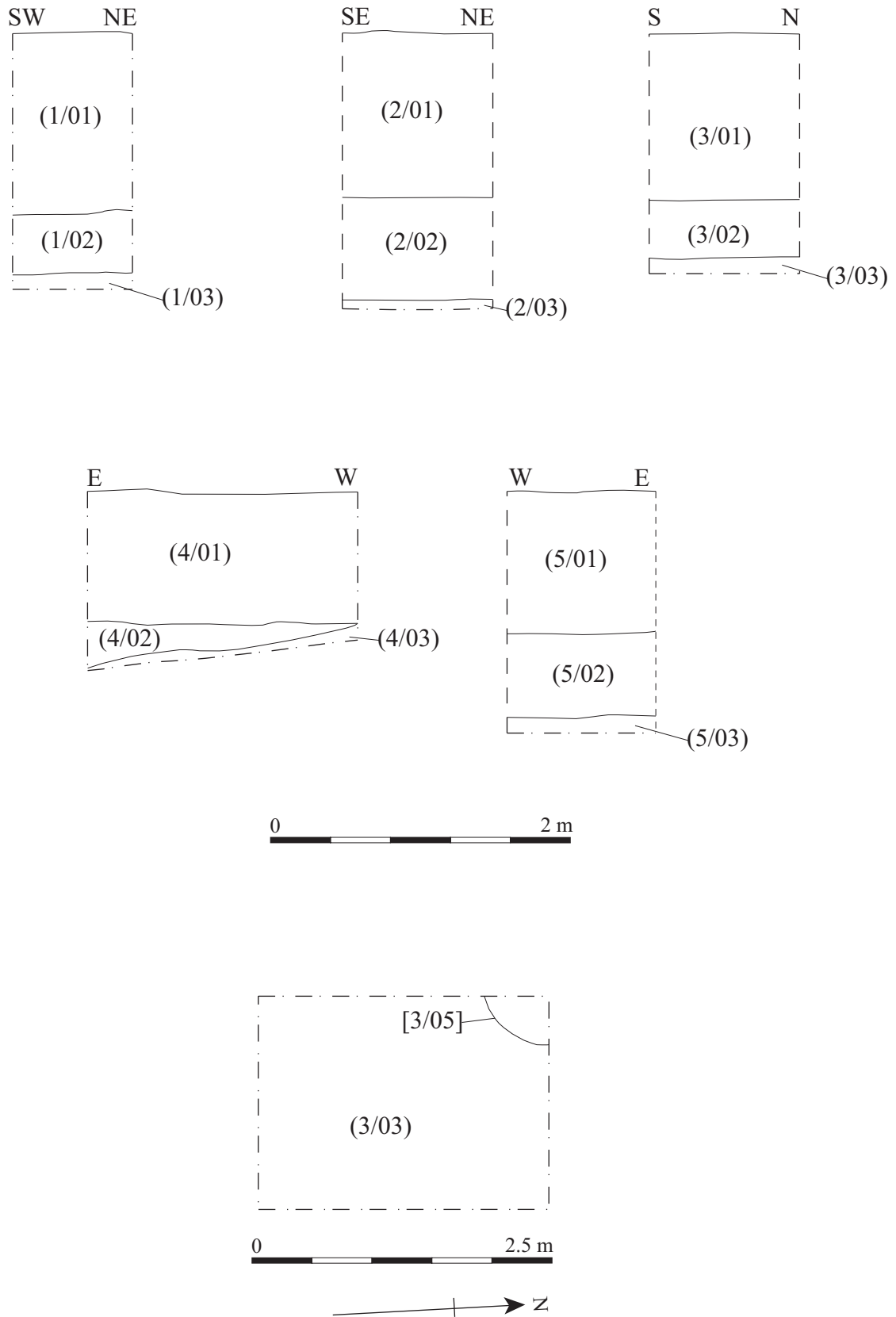


Figure 2. Sections of test pits and plan of TP 3



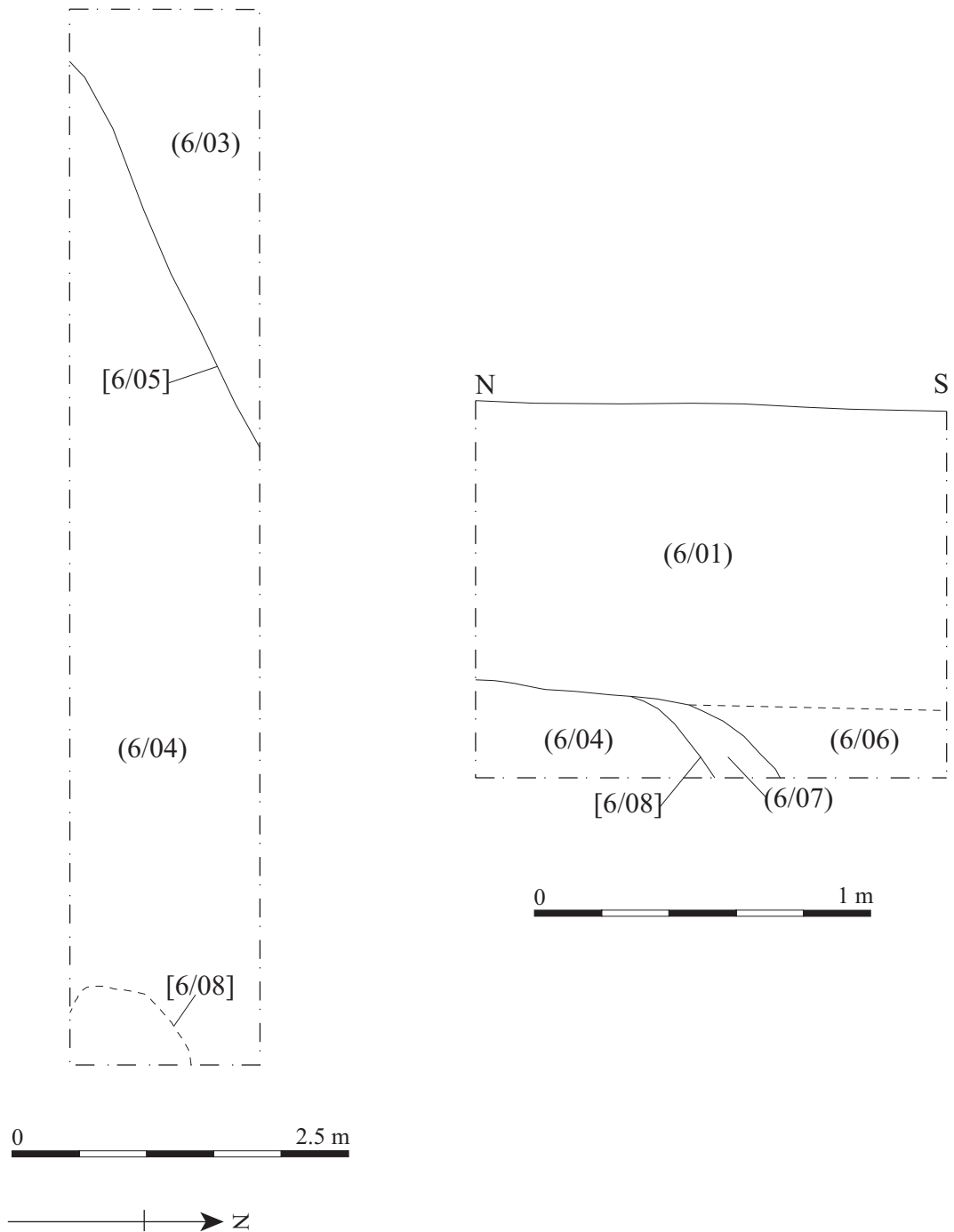


Figure 3. Trench 6

Test Pit 3 (TP3) contained a small possibly sub-circular pit [03/05]; the pit was not excavated due to flooding and health and safety concerns. A sample of the fill (03/04) from the pit was recovered and was a loose greyish brown silty clay with moderate gravel inclusions. The pit cut through (03/02) at a height of at least 47.50 m O.D.

A loose dark brown sandy loam sealed the clay, (01/01), (02/01), (03/01), (04/01) and (05/01), that formed a thick topsoil. In TP1 the topsoil was 1.20 m thick, in TP2 it was 1.10 m thick, in TP3 it was 1.10 m thick, in TP4 it was 0.85 m thick and in TP5 it was 0.95 m thick.

### Trench 6 (Figure 3)

The “natural” was recorded at a height of 47.77m O.D. Over lying this was a firm orange-brown silty clay (06/02) that was 0.3m thick. Cut into this layer was a probably linear feature [06/05] that was either aligned south-west to north-east or east to west and may be part of the terminal due to its width within the trench. This was filled with a compact dark brown sandy silt with frequent gravel (06/04).

A subcircular pit [06/08] was cut into this fill at the eastern end of the trench at a height of 48.05m O.D. The lowest fill was an orange-brown silty gravel (06/07) this was overlain by a loose dark brown sandy silt with frequent gravel and charcoal flecks (06/06).

A loose dark brown sandy loam sealed the clay, (06/01) that formed the topsoil and was 0.85m thick.

## **4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results**

The reliability of results is considered to be relatively good. The excavation of the trenches took place during a period of dry weather. The water table in the area was at approximately 1m below ground level, which unfortunately was also about the depth that first signs of archaeological deposits were seen. The depth and flooding of the trenches did cause some problems for recording features.

## **5 FINDS**

### **5.1 Pottery** (*by Paul Booth*)

A total of 9 sherds were recovered from the site, from three contexts:

Context (1/01) - 1 sherd F51 (Oxon CC) and 2 sherds post-med.

Context (6/04) - 2 sherds F51 (including a bowl/dish base), 1 sherd O80 and 1 sherd fabric M22 (Oxford white ware mortarium). The latter is the only rim from the site. It is a variant of Young's type M14, dated c 180-240. In any case the context date is after AD 240 because of the F51 sherds.

Context (6/07) - 1 tiny sherd F51 indented beaker should be after c AD 270. 1 other sherd, (15 g), oxidised, has tiny spots of glaze on it. I take this to be a Roman glazed

ware and it is therefore fabric F25 in the Oxford series. This should date to the early 2nd century.

## 5.2 Flint

A single hard-hammer struck waste flake was recovered from (06/02). It measured 22mm x 14mm x 4mm. Its dorsal surface displayed approximately 40% cortex as well as three flake scars.

## 5.3 Environmental Remains

Due to the nature of the deposits encountered no environmental samples were taken

## 6 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

It is possible that the deposit (6/02) could be associated with the Neolithic-Bronze Age flood plain of the river. A solitary flint flake of this date was recovered from it and all features cut into it were Roman or later.

The linear feature [6/05] is most likely a field ditch and appears to be Roman dating to the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century or slightly later. Extensive Roman field systems are known in the area and it would not be surprising to find fields close to the Roman road, just to the west.

There has been speculation that Dorchester was the industrial centre producing goods for agricultural use (Henig & Booth 2000), if this were the case the proximity of the fields to the northern wall would not be surprising. Indeed at Alchester the field systems appear to start directly outside the walls of the town.

Two relatively undated pits were located, however it is not unheard for contemporary pits to be associated with Roman field systems (JMHS 2008b). It is possible that pit [6/08] is late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, however the pottery could be residual in a much later feature.

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## APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
<b>Test Pit 1</b>			1.60m	1.80m	2.80m		
(01/01)	Layer	Dark brown sandy loam	1.60m	1.80m	2.80m		
(01/02)	Layer	Orange brown silty clay	1.60m	1.80m	2.80m		
(01/03)	Layer	Orange yellow sands and gravel	1.60m	1.80m	2.80m		Geological
<b>Test Pit 2</b>			1.80m	1.80m	3.90m		
(02/01)	Layer	Dark brown sandy loam	1.80m	1.80m	3.90m		
(02/02)	Layer	Orange brown silty clay	1.80m	1.80m	3.90m		
(02/03)	Layer	Orange yellow sands and gravel	1.80m	1.80m	3.90m		Geological
<b>Test Pit 3</b>			1.50m	1.80m	2.40m		
(03/01)	Layer	Dark brown sandy loam	1.50m	1.80m	2.40m		
(03/02)	Layer	Orange brown silty clay	1.50m	1.80m	2.40m		
(03/03)	Layer	Orange yellow sands and gravel	1.50m	1.80m	2.40m		Geological
(03/04)	Fill	Greyish brown silty clay	?	?	?		
(03/05)	Cut	Sub-circular small pit	?	?	?		
<b>Test Pit 4</b>			1.20m	1.80m	3.80m		
(04/01)	Layer	Dark brown sandy loam	1.20m	1.80m	3.80m		
(04/02)	Layer	Orange brown silty clay	1.20m	1.80m	3.80m		
(04/03)	Layer	Orange yellow sands and gravel	1.20m	1.80m	3.80m		Geological

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Findings	Date
<b>Test Pit 5</b>			1.50m	1.50m	1.70m		
(05/01)	Layer	Dark brown sandy loam	1.50m	1.50m	1.70m		
(05/02)	Layer	Orange brown silty clay	1.50m	1.50m	1.70m		
(05/03)	Layer	Orange yellow sands and gravel	1.50m	1.50m	1.70m		Geological
<b>Trench 6</b>			1.20m +	1.50m	7.80m		
6/01	Deposit	Dark brown sandy loam	0.85	Tr.	Tr.	-	Modern
6/02	layer	Orange brown clay	0.3	Tr.	1.2+		
6/03	Layer	Orange yellow sands and gravel	-	Tr.	1.2+	-	
6/04	Fill	Dark brown sandy silt	0.15	Tr.	5+	Pottery	Roman
6/05	Cut	Linear ditch	0.45+	Tr.	5+		
6/06	Fill	Dark brown sandy silt	0.4+	0.65	0.65	-	
6/07	Fill	Orange-brown silt with gravel	0.4+	0.65	0.65	Pottery	Roman?
6/08	Cut	Pit	0.4+	0.65	0.65		