



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**AT**

**GREENACRE, 17A CASTLE STREET,**

**WALLINGFORD, OXFORDSHIRE**

**NGR SU 60677 89787**

*On behalf of*

*Mr N Woollacott*

**NOVEMBER 2008**

**REPORT FOR**

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## **Summary**

*A watching brief was carried out on the site by John Moore Heritage Services between March 2007 and October 2008. All ground disturbance work was monitored. Three phases of activity dating from the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century to the late 12<sup>th</sup> century were found. The site appears to have been abandoned by the 13<sup>th</sup> century.*

*Parts of three closes or plots were found separated by two ditches. Fragmentary evidence for possible buildings was present within two of them. The majority of remains were pits including some identified as cess pits.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

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

The site was located at 17a Castle St., Wallingford. It is to the rear of buildings fronting onto Castle St. and is centred on NGR SU 60677 89787. The site is bordered to the north by the Scheduled Monument 234 – the defences of the Saxon burh – to the west by playing fields and to the south and east by residential properties. The Scheduled Monument forms the northern limit to the property. The geology was Thames First Floodplain Terrace Deposits. The site lies between approximately 48m and 50m OD.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

South Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission for the demolition of the existing house and outbuildings, which was followed by the construction of a new house and garage/store (P06/W1013). In addition a new garden wall and an orangery was built on the northern boundary that coincides with the scheduled boundary of Scheduled Monument 234, the defences of the Saxon burh. Due to the potential of the site to contain archaeological remains a condition was attached to the planning permission requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological investigation and recording. This is in line with PPG16 and South Oxfordshire Local Plan policies. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) produced a Design Brief for such work. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* was subsequently prepared in response to this document, which outlined a methodology that would satisfy the requirements of the brief.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The application site was archaeologically sensitive, since it is located south of the northern burh defences of Wallingford, which is classified as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Therefore, any ground-works undertaken in connection with the above development were considered likely to adversely affect significant archaeological deposits and/or finds. The majority of the site lies just outside the scheduled area, although the orangery and new garden wall are on the boundary of the Scheduled Monument.

The proposed development site lies within the northern part of the Saxon burh with the defences of the town forming the northern boundary of the property. A previous

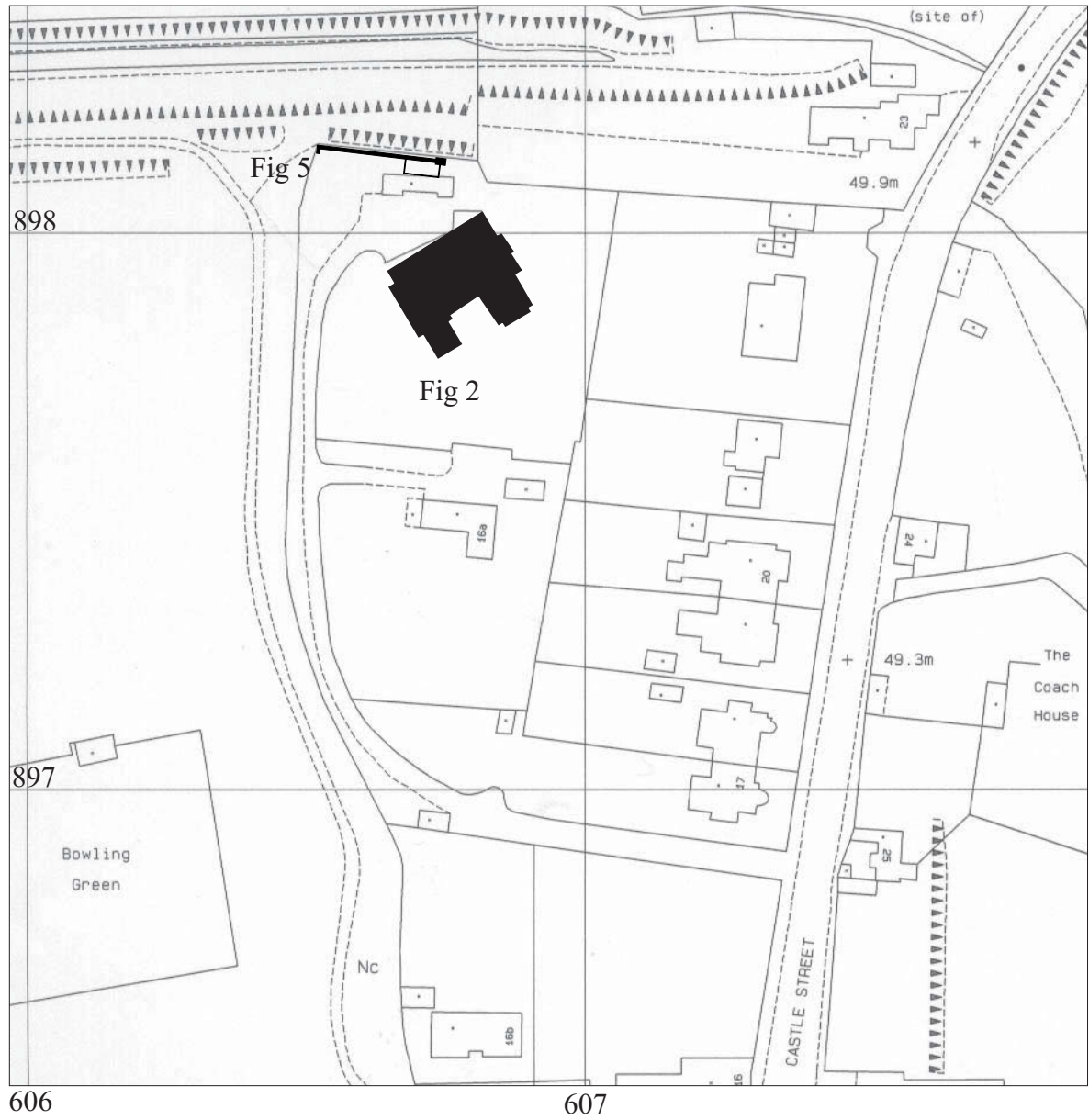


Figure 1. Site location

archaeological watching brief carried out on this site during the construction of a new carport/store (Oxford Archaeological Unit 2001) produced evidence of 11<sup>th</sup> century occupation deposits and probable borrow pits that contained 11<sup>th</sup> century pottery in the backfilling.

A further watching brief (John Moore Heritage Services 2002) carried out on the adjoining property, 16a Castle Street, immediately to the south revealed occupation evidence from the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the 13<sup>th</sup> century as well as post-medieval evidence from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and later. The earthworks of Wallingford Castle (SM 176) lie on the east side of Castle Street, while Bull Croft part of the Saxon town (SM 182) lies immediately adjacent to the west where its boundary is also partly contiguous with the western boundary of 17a Castle Street.

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

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

- To identify and record any archaeological remains exposed during the development works

Particular aims were:

- to record any deposits associated with the Saxon rampart
- record any remains associated with the known medieval occupation of the site

The results of the investigations will be made public

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

In response to a *Brief* issued by OCAS a scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with the County and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the monitoring of all groundwork on the site.

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 (1994).

### **3.2 Methodology**

All invasive groundworks were monitored by an archaeologist and all resulting surfaces were then inspected for any significant archaeological features. Geotechnical pits were monitored in March 2007, and the demolition of the house was monitored in September 2007. The excavation of the footings and service trenches for the new residential building were monitored during October and November of the same year. The excavation of the foundation trench a new wall along part of the north boundary

and the ground reduction for the slab for the conservatory/green house were monitored in October 2008. Groundwork for the new garage was not watched as it was built over the former footprint of a swimming pool.

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.

## 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 Saxon Defences

A new retaining wall was built on the north side of the site with an area reduced to the south of it for the new greenhouse (Fig 5). Within the 0.9m wide wall foundation trench, rampart material for the Saxon defences was seen. This deposit (179) comprised pale yellow-brown silty sand with 2% gravel content turning to pale yellow sand in places including chalk deposits. It became generally more gravelly (5-10%) at 15m from the west end on the foundation trench. The chalk was deposits were towards the east end of the trench. The top of the deposits was 0.9m below ground level in the north side of the trench and 1m below on the south side. The bottom of the material was not seen being more than 0.7m in depth. The top 0.35m of this deposit was excavated for the greenhouse slab. Above this was a buried ground surface of clean mid grey-brown silty sand topsoil (178) c. 0.2m thick to the west and up to 0.5m at the east end, thinning out to the south where it was cut by the construction of the former garage. The uppermost deposit over the western 10m of the foundation trench was a topsoil of mid grey-brown silty sand (177) containing a lot of brick, tile, stone, a garden roller, a 'Fanta' bottle top and a 'Shippams' meat paste bottle of ?1960's date.

Cut into the rampart material was a presumed wall foundation constructed of chalk blocks measuring 230x140x100mm – 130x100x40mm and flint nodules tightly laid together [180]. The top of the foundation survived 0.45m beneath the present ground surface under (178). It was 0.45m deep and the east side was not exposed.

### 4.2 Medieval remains (Figure 2)

The footings were excavated to a depth of c. 1.5m around the construction area of the house. The natural gravel (103) – Thames First Terrace – was observed towards the bottom of the footing trenches. Overlying the gravels was a natural loess deposit of red-brown sandy silt 0.3-0.6m thick (115, 121, 122, 138, 142, 145, & 146). Cut into this material were a number of pits and ditches.

On the west side of the site (Fig. 2) a ditch [109] was observed surviving cut into the drift geology. The line of the ditch was at c. 45° to the Saxon defences to the north. The ditch was more than 17.5m long, more 4m wide and greater than 0.4m deep; its depth in places exceeded the depth of the footing's trench. Its sides were rounded, though a more gradual slope was apparent on the west side (Fig. 3, S 1). It was filled

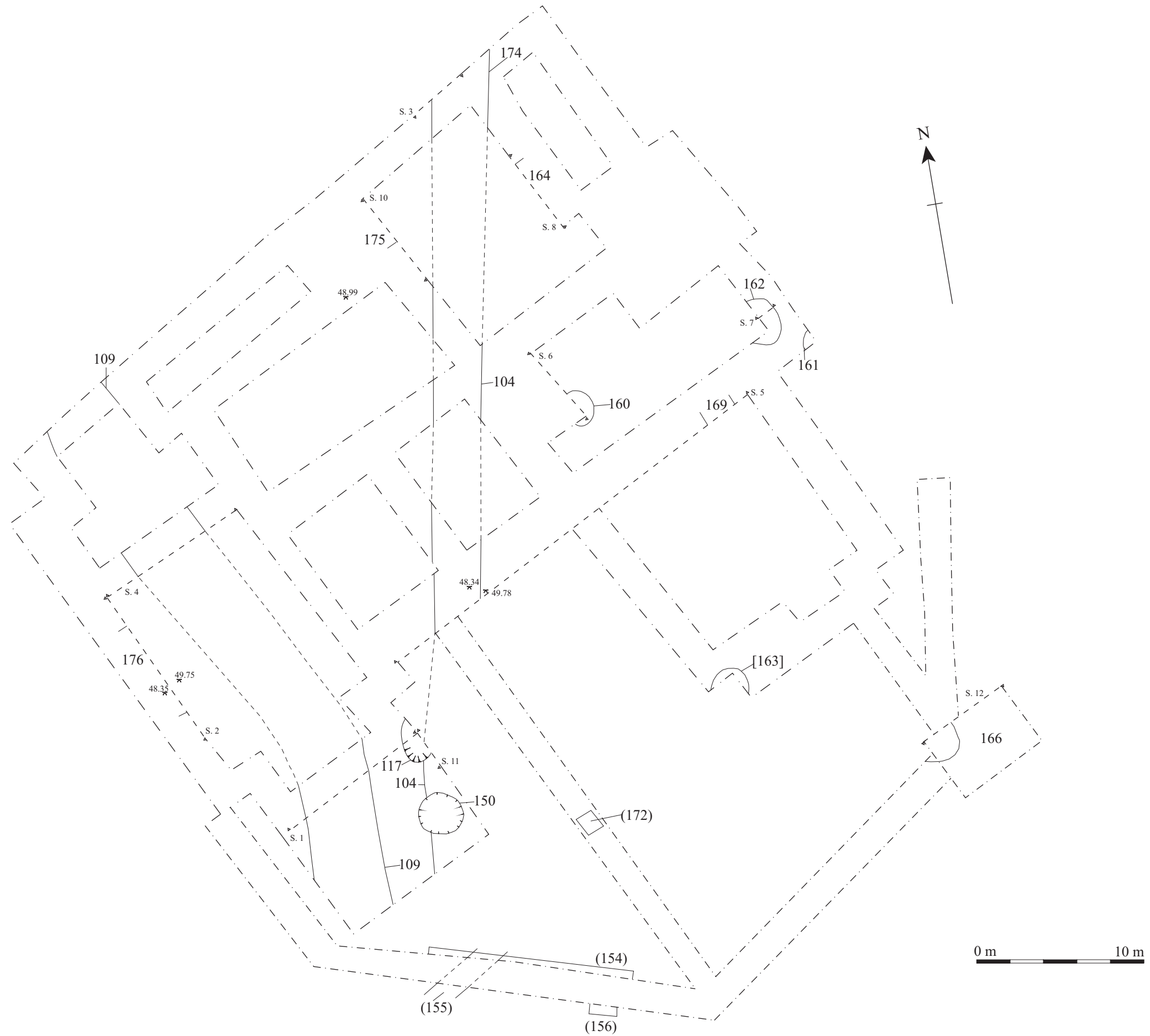


Figure 2. Plan of site



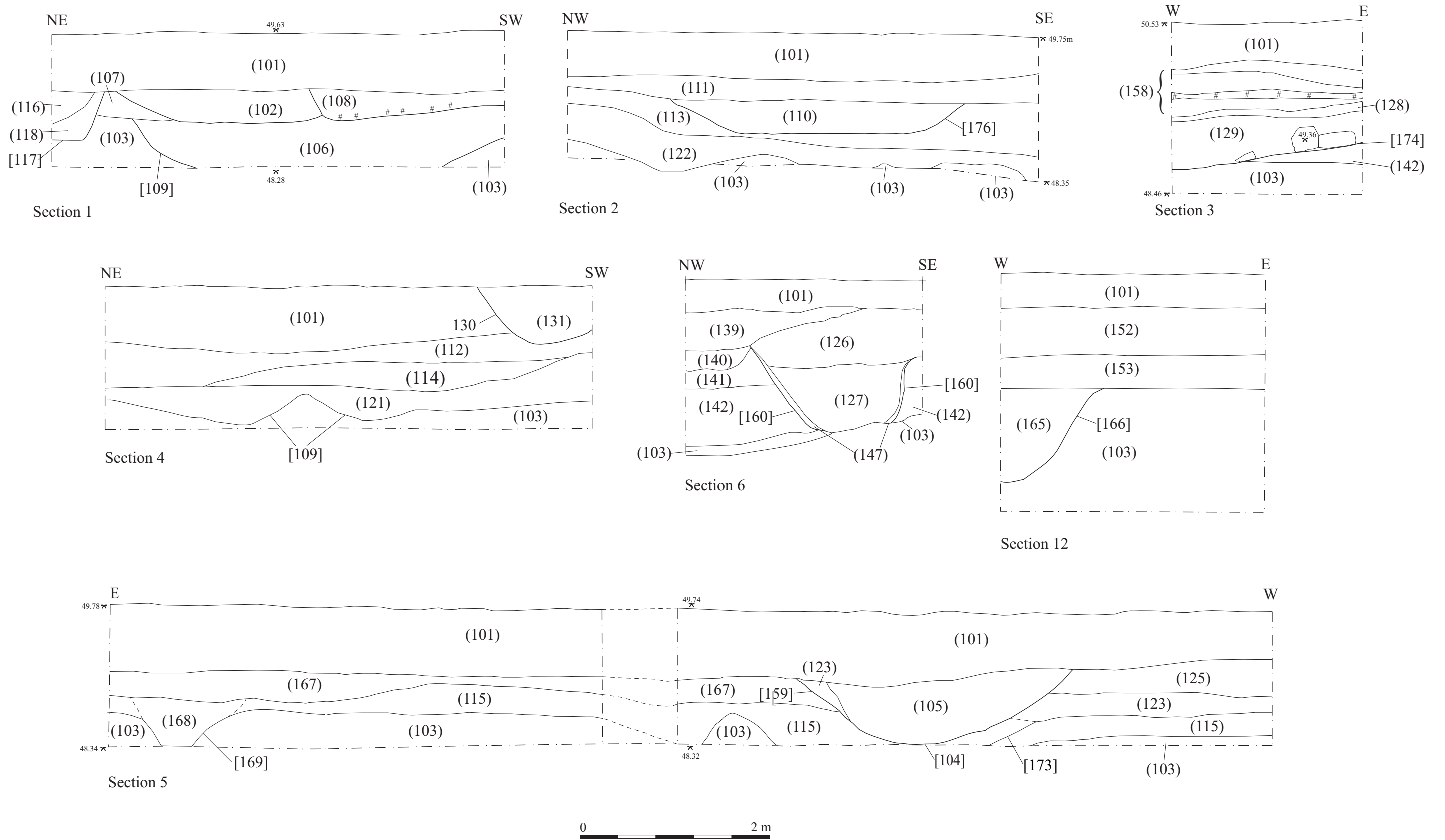


Figure 3. Sections 1-6 and 12

with red to orange brown clay silt (106, & 121) with some charcoal and gravel through it. Pottery recovered from fill (106) dates the feature to the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century.

On the east side of site were two pits cut into the natural that were recorded in section. [161] was at least 0.5m in diameter and was filled by loose dark brown-black silty clay (119), while [162] was *c.* 0.9m in diameter and survived 0.7m deep. This was filled by similar material (120). 10m to the south a further pit [163] also cut the natural. This was sub-circular with a diameter of 1m and again was filled with similar material (124) to the other two pits. Both fills (119 & 120) contained pottery dating from the mid 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Close to pits {[161 & 162] was pit [169] with a diameter of 1.5m and depth of 0.5m. This was filled with red-orange-brown clay silt with some small gravelly deposits (168). In the south corner of the service trenches pit [166] was at least 1.5m in diameter and 1m deep (Fig. 3, S 12). In the northern part of the footprint of the house were two pits. Pit [164] was at least 1.8m in diameter and survived 0.76m deep (Fig. 4, S 8). The primary fill was compact green-grey silty clay with a charcoal rich band (144). The secondary fill was a loose orange-yellow silty clay (143). The colour of the primary fill suggests that it was a cess pit. Pit [175], again recorded in section, was at least 1.6m in diameter and survived 0.38m deep Fig. 4, S 10). The primary fill was compact grey-green sandy clay (137) with a later fill of loose orange sandy gravel (132) containing pottery dated to mid 11<sup>th</sup> century. Again a cess pit function is possible.

Cut into the natural drift deposits (115) is a possible early cut of later ditch cut [104]. This cut [173] was seen on the west side of the later cut (Fig. 3, S 5).

Sealing part of the fill of ditch [109] was a layer of cultivation soil (107) (Fig. 3, S 1). This must be equated with other deposits across the site i.e. (167), (123/125) (Fig. 3, S 5); (141) (Fig. 3, S 6); (113) (Fig.3, S 2). The last (113) was a layer of orange brown sandy silt with gravel patches through it, up to 0.5m thick. This was not similar to the material east of ditch 109 and may be part bank material from the ditch and part cultivation soil. Again mid 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century pottery was retrieved from (113). Similarly dated material came from (123).

Following this apparent period of cultivation which must have been short-lived (see discussion) ditch [109] was recut on two occasions. Two cuts containing fills (102 & 108) were seen in section (Fig. 3, S 1). Further to the north (Fig. 3, S 4) there were two cuts [109]. At least one of these must be part of the later re-digging of this ditch. The pottery from fill (108) dates from the mid 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century.

To the east of the re-cut ditch another ditch converges on it running parallel to it at the south end of the investigation. As stated above cut [173] may be an earlier form of this ditch with ditch [104 & 174] being a recut. The latter is certainly contemporary with the re-cutting of earlier ditch [109], stratigraphically cutting through the cultivation horizon, and from the date of the pottery within fills (105, 123 & 129). The ditch is perpendicular to the Saxon defences to the north and parallel to Castle Street to the east. The profile was rounded with it being 2.9m wide and 0.62m deep. The main fill (105) was dark brown to black loamy sandy silt with charcoal, pottery and bone recovered from the deposit. On the west side a deposit of green-brown sandy

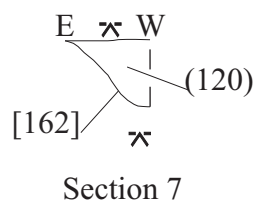
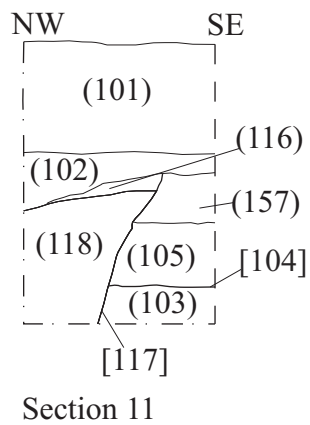
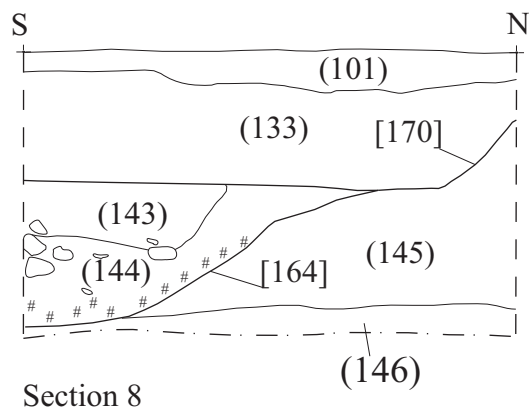
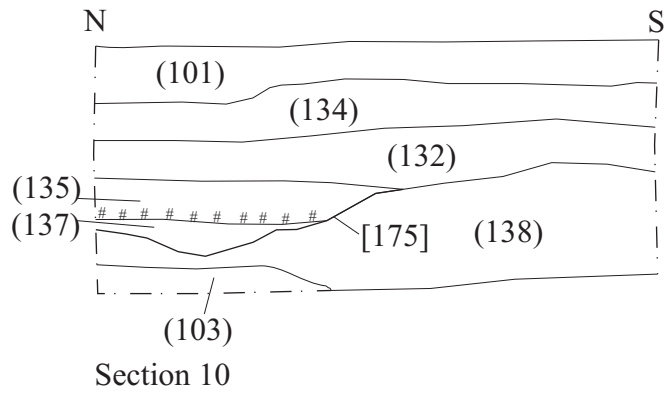


Figure 4. Sections 7, 8, 10 and 11

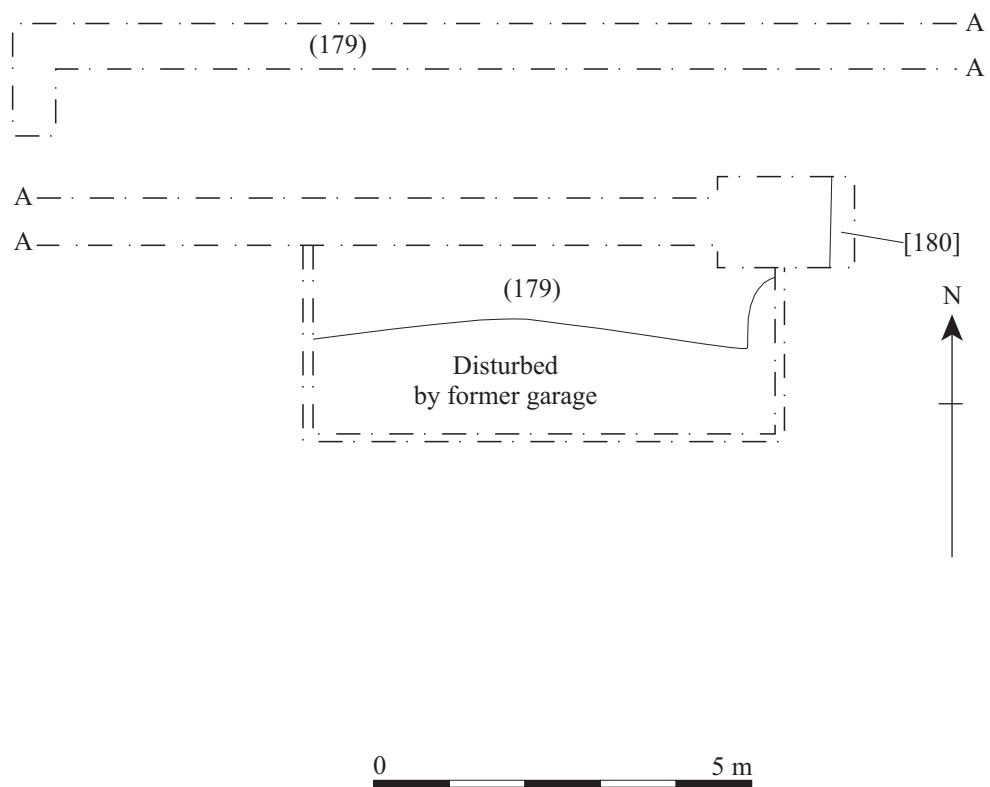


Figure 5. North retaining wall and greenhouse

silt (123) may be evidence that this later phase of the ditch was again recut (similar to the ditch to the west) given the angle of the west side of fill (105) (Fig. 3, S 5).

Pit [117] (Fig. 3, S 1 & Fig. 4, S 11) was located in the southwest corner of the footings, cutting the ditch [104]. It was a sub-rounded to oval pit measuring at least 0.7m by 0.5m and more than 0.65m deep. It was filled with two deposits. (118), the earlier, was a grey-brown loamy sandy silt with charcoal through it and pottery dated from the mid 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century. The later fill (116), was a darker but similar deposit. To the south of this pit was the rounded pit [150], which had a diameter of 0.7m. It was only seen in plan, after machining, and its depth is not known or from where it was cut. Its fill (151) yielded pottery of a similar date found elsewhere on the site.

Cut into the cultivation soil (113) was a flat-bottomed feature [176], filled with (110). The cut was observed in both walls of the footing trench and measured 1.8m wide at the base and c. 3.2m wide at the top. It was between 0.2m and 0.4m deep. The fill (110) was a brown orange sandy silt with a lens of charcoal through it.

Pit [160] cut the cultivation layer and is interpreted as a cess pit given the grey-green 'crunchy' material (147) on the sides of the pit (Fig. 3, S 6). The later fill (126) contained pottery of mid 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century date. The pit was 1.3m deep and 1.9m in diameter.

Remnants of a possible building were found at the south-west end of the investigation area. Stonework of a possible wall [155] was seen in a service trench. A fragment of a possible floor surface comprising gravelly clay with moderate amounts of charcoal (156) was seen 6m to the east. Above both was a spread of building rubble seen in section comprising mottled sandy clay with limestone rubble (154). The relationship of these contexts was not recorded in relation to the cultivation horizon. The rubble layer contained a single sherd of 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century pottery. 10m to the east was a post pad [172] on the line of possible wall footing [155].

Sealing the features were dumps (111, 112, 139 etc), which was interpreted as a layer of construction and/or demolition material associated with the former house demolished for this development, comprising greyish yellow silty clay with broken brick through it.

## 5 FINDS

### 5.1 Pottery By Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 104 sherds with a total weight of 2604g. It was all of early medieval (mid 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century) date, apart from a single sherd of 13<sup>th</sup> century Brill/Boarstall ware, which was unstratified.

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

OXZ: *Stamford ware*, 850-1150. 1 sherd, 3g.

OXBF: *North-East Wiltshire Ware*, AD1050 – 1400. 3 sherds, 50g.

WA38: *Wallingford ware*, AD1050 – 1250. 96 sherds, 1222g.

OXAG: *Abingdon ware*, mid/late 11<sup>th</sup> – mid 14<sup>th</sup> century. 3 sherds, 1,320g.

OXAM: *Brill/Boarstall ware*, AD1200 – 1600. 1 sherd, 11g.

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

The assemblage was in a very good condition, and the sherds generally large and well-preserved. It included a near-complete Abingdon ware glazed jug, decorated with lines and circles in a yellow strip, and rouletting all over the body. The rest of the sherds from the site are jars and jugs, with glazed sherds quite rare, as is typical of the early medieval period. The assemblage is dominated by Wallingford ware, as is typical of sites in the town in the early medieval period (ibid. fig.23).

All the stratified pottery appears to date from the mid 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century. Brill Boarstall ware (fabric OXAM) is entirely absent from the assemblage, apart from a single unstratified sherd. Such pottery is usually very common in medieval deposits of the 13<sup>th</sup> century or later at the site. The fact that none occurred in any of the stratified deposits suggests very strongly that the site was abandoned before the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, or was been severely truncated at that time or later.

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

| Tr | Cntxt | OXZ |    | OXBF |    | WA38 |      | OXAG |      | OXAM |    | Date   |
|----|-------|-----|----|------|----|------|------|------|------|------|----|--------|
|    |       | No  | Wt | No   | Wt | No   | Wt   | No   | Wt   | No   | Wt |        |
|    | U/S   |     |    |      |    | 1    | 13   |      |      | 1    | 11 | U/S    |
| 1  | 2     |     |    |      |    | 2    | 4    |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
| 2  | 2     |     |    |      |    | 13   | 210  |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
| 3  | 2     |     |    |      |    | 3    | 16   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
| 4  | 2     |     |    |      |    | 2    | 10   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
| 3  | 3     |     |    |      |    | 5    | 41   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 101   |     |    | 1    | 15 |      |      |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 102   |     |    |      |    | 2    | 53   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 105   |     |    |      |    | 12   | 136  |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 106   |     |    |      |    | 22   | 169  |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 112   |     |    |      |    | 1    | 5    |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 113   |     |    |      |    | 1    | 6    |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 114   |     |    |      |    | 2    | 36   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 118   |     |    |      |    | 1    | 32   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 119   |     |    |      |    | 1    | 18   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 120   |     |    |      |    | 2    | 46   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 123   |     |    |      |    | 2    | 13   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 126   |     |    |      |    | 4    | 25   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 128   |     |    |      |    | 4    | 210  |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 129   |     |    |      |    | 2    | 8    |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 132   |     |    |      |    | 2    | 60   | 1    | 7    |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 136   |     |    | 1    | 32 | 1    | 14   | 1    | 1254 |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 151   |     |    | 1    | 3  | 1    | 17   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 152   | 1   | 3  |      |    | 7    | 37   | 1    | 59   |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 154   |     |    |      |    | 1    | 16   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | 183   |     |    |      |    | 2    | 27   |      |      |      |    | M11thC |
|    | Total | 1   | 3  | 3    | 50 | 96   | 1222 | 3    | 1320 | 1    | 11 |        |

## 5.2 Other finds

Animal bone was retrieved from several contexts but in too little quantities for meaningful analysis.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The wall found adjacent to the Saxon defences is presumed to be associated with the 11<sup>th</sup> century occupation deposits previously found in the area. It may be the west wall of a building. These remains lie in the middle close (see below).

Elsewhere on the site there were three phases of activity within a very short time-frame from the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century to near the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the site being abandoned before the beginning of the 13 century.

The two ditches probably separate different properties perhaps with an entrance between them leading into a small close set against the defences. The occupation found during the previous watching brief for the carport/store and the wall found this time suggests that the activity within this close was focused at the north end. The recutting of the ditches shows that the ditches were in use in the first and third phases but to which phase the occupation within the small middle close belonged is unknown. The eastern ditch must have terminated within the investigation area as it was not seen in the south-western service trench.

Nothing of the first phase was found to the west of the western ditch although little of this area was within the investigation area. On the east side of the site were several pits; at least two of which probably functioned as cess pits. Rather strangely all three properties appeared to have undergone a phase of cultivation which appears to have continued across the two boundary ditches before they were re-established. In this third phase the ditches appear to have been recut perhaps because the second phase cultivation had destabilised the ground so that the ditches silted very quickly after their re-establishment.

The possible building in the south part of the site would have been in the eastern property partly set on the line of the property boundary with the ditch to the north terminating just before it.

All the remains date from the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Wallingford is believed to have begun to decline in prosperity and population from the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century (Rodwell 1975). The evidence from this site suggests that it may have begun earlier at around the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The 5% of the pottery from the adjacent site to the south (JMHS 2002) was of early 13<sup>th</sup> century date suggesting that occupation on that site continued slightly later than on this site.

A further difference between the two sites is that the pottery from this site was all jars and jugs while that to the south was jars and bowls.

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