



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

**AT**

**TEMPLE CLOSE, BANBURY ROAD,**

**BLOXHAM,**

**OXFORDSHIRE**

**SP 4332 3653**

*On behalf of*

*Palladium Partnership*

**FEBRUARY 2009**

**REPORT FOR** Palladium Partnership  
Beggars Barn  
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**FIELDWORK** 10<sup>th</sup> February 2009

**REPORT ISSUED** 27<sup>th</sup> February 2009

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**Site Code** BMBR 09  
**JMHS Project No:** 2042  
**Archive Location** Oxfordshire Museums Resource Centre  
**Accession Number** OXCMS: 2009.16

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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services conducted an archaeological evaluation of the proposed development site on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2009. Four trenches, totalling approximately 80 metres in length, were excavated to reveal the underlying natural geology.*

*An Iron Age ditch possibly over 40m in length and showing signs of having been re-cut at different phases was located running east to west across the site. Contemporary with this ditch was a pit, a possible round house and a buried soil layer perhaps relating to Iron Age agriculture.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

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

The site is located to the north of Bloxham on the east side of Banbury Road (NGR SP 4332 3653). The site is a residential dwelling surrounded by a garden. The underlying geology is Upper Lias Clay and the sites lie at c. 125m OD.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

A planning application (08/02403/F) for the demolition of the existing dwelling and the erection of five detached dwellings with car ports and parking and access has been submitted to Cherwell District Council. Due to the presence of known archaeological remains Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) has advised that a predetermination field evaluation is required. This is in line with PPG16 and Local Plan Policy.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The proposal sites lies in an area of some archaeological potential. A recent excavation carried out at Ells Lane Bloxham, c. 100m to the northwest of the site, has recorded a low status Middle Iron Age farmstead and isolated features dating to the Middle Bronze Age or Early Iron Age (PRN 16997; NGR SP 4330 3665). These features consisted of an Iron Age round house and associated field ditches as well as a deposit of possible cremated human bone. The round house was located against the southern edge of excavation with only half of the feature in the area of investigation. A fragment of a Neolithic polished stone axe was also recovered in the area of the excavation. Further to this a small amount of Roman material was recovered prior to 1933 from a field 200m to the west of the site in a clay pit (PRN 9948; SP 431 365). This comprised bone, pottery, a spindle-whorl and three millstones. These are suggestive of a settlement in the vicinity.

An evaluation on the opposite side of the road failed to find anything of significance (JMHS 2007). On the Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 map of 1885 the site is shown being within a rectangular field lined with trees.

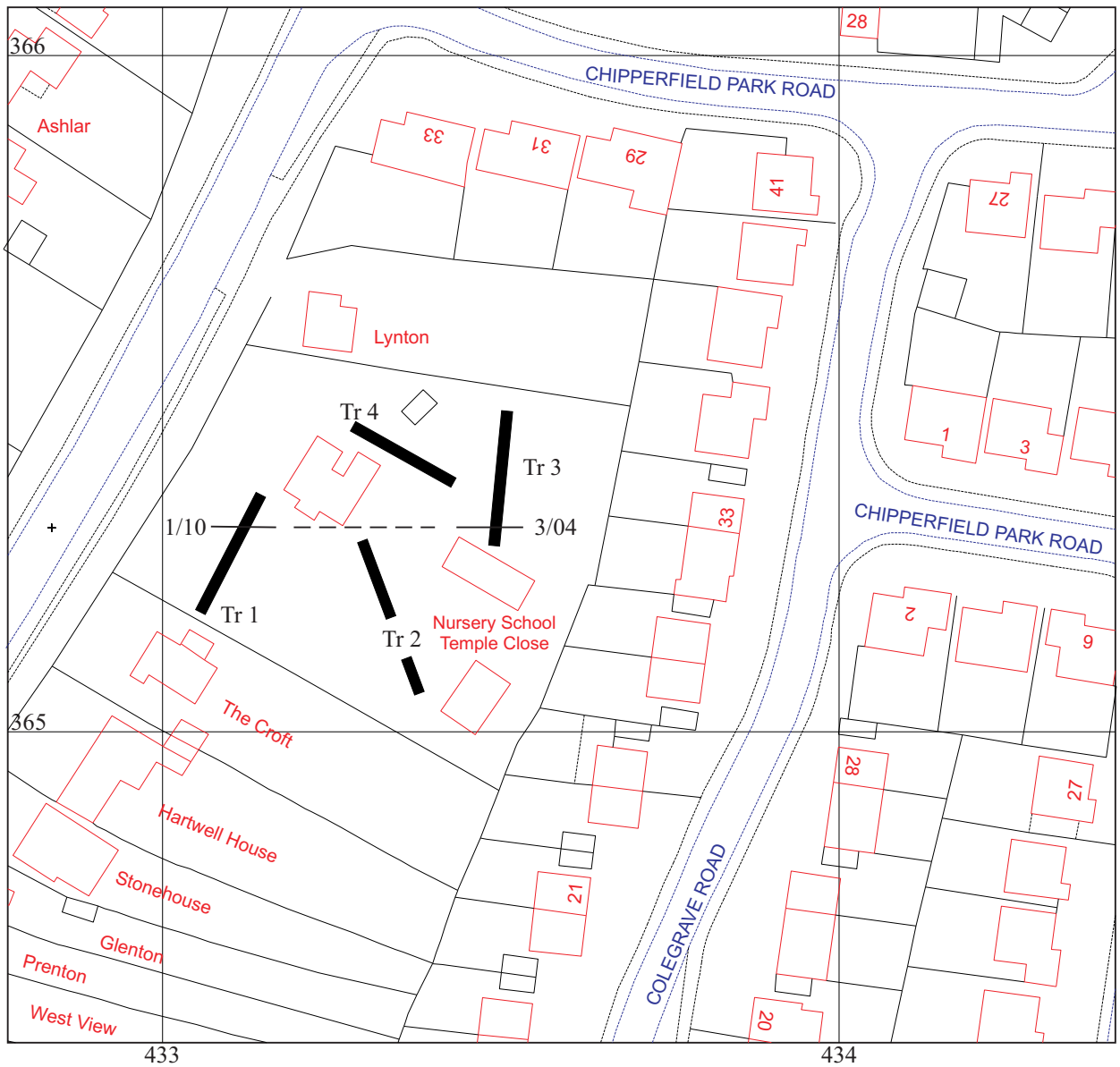


Figure 1. Site location

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

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

- To determine as far as reasonably practicable, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains.
- To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features encountered.

In particular:

- To establish whether there are any associated occupation deposits or activity of Iron Age or Roman date.

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

In response to the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services' (OCAS) Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation, a scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with OCAS and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of trial trenches across the site (Fig. 1).

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**

The trenching sample required was achieved through the excavation of four trenches: each 20m in length.

All trenches were 1.5 m wide and were excavated by a 5T 360° excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological deposits.

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.

Mr Richard Oram of OCAS monitored the work.

## 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 lowest deposit recorded was a mottled yellow-grey-brown clay associated with the Upper Lias Clay deposits (1/03), (2/03), (3/03) and (4/02).

#### Trench 1 (Figure 2)

At the northern end of the trench was an east-west aligned ditch 1/10. This was at least 1.5m wide and at least 0.3m deep with what appeared to be a flattened U-shaped profile. Its lowest fill recorded was a mid blue-grey silt-clay (1/12) 0.2m+ thick. Above this was a mid brown-grey silt-clay (1/11) 0.1m thick.

This ditch appeared to either cut an earlier ditch 1/08 or be a re-cut on a similar alignment. Ditch 1/08 was at least 0.5m wide and at least 0.2m deep again with a U-shaped profile. It was filled with a mid blue-grey silt-clay (1/09) at least 0.2m thick.

Neither ditch was fully excavated due to ground water.

To the south of these ditches was a large oval pit 1/06 that measured 2.3m by over 0.49m in plan. It had near vertical sides that began to curve inwards at approximately 0.2m down from the lip of the pit. It was filled with a mid blue-grey silt-clay (1/07) that was seen to be at least 0.22m thick. It was not fully excavated due to flooding.

To the south of this was what appeared to be a penannular ditch 1/04. In plan it appeared to have an enlarged terminal with a narrower ditch that curved towards the west. It was not excavated due to flooding, but was filled with a mid blue-grey silt-clay (1/05) flecked with charcoal.

All features were cut into the natural (1/03) and sealed by the grey-brown clay subsoil (1/02) that was 0.26m thick. The uppermost layer was a dark grey-brown clay loam (1/01) topsoil 0.25m thick.

#### Trench 2 (Figure 2)

This trench was split into two sections due to previously unknown presence of a large pond in the area. No cut features were seen within the trench, however there was a thin sporadic layer of mid to dark grey-brown clay flecked with charcoal that was between 0.01m and 0.03m thick. It contained small pottery fragments and was recorded in both sections as (2/04) and (2/05). It would appear to be a buried soil layer.

It was sealed by the grey-brown clay subsoil (2/02) that was up to 0.20m thick. The uppermost layer was a dark grey-brown clay loam (2/01) topsoil 0.20m thick.

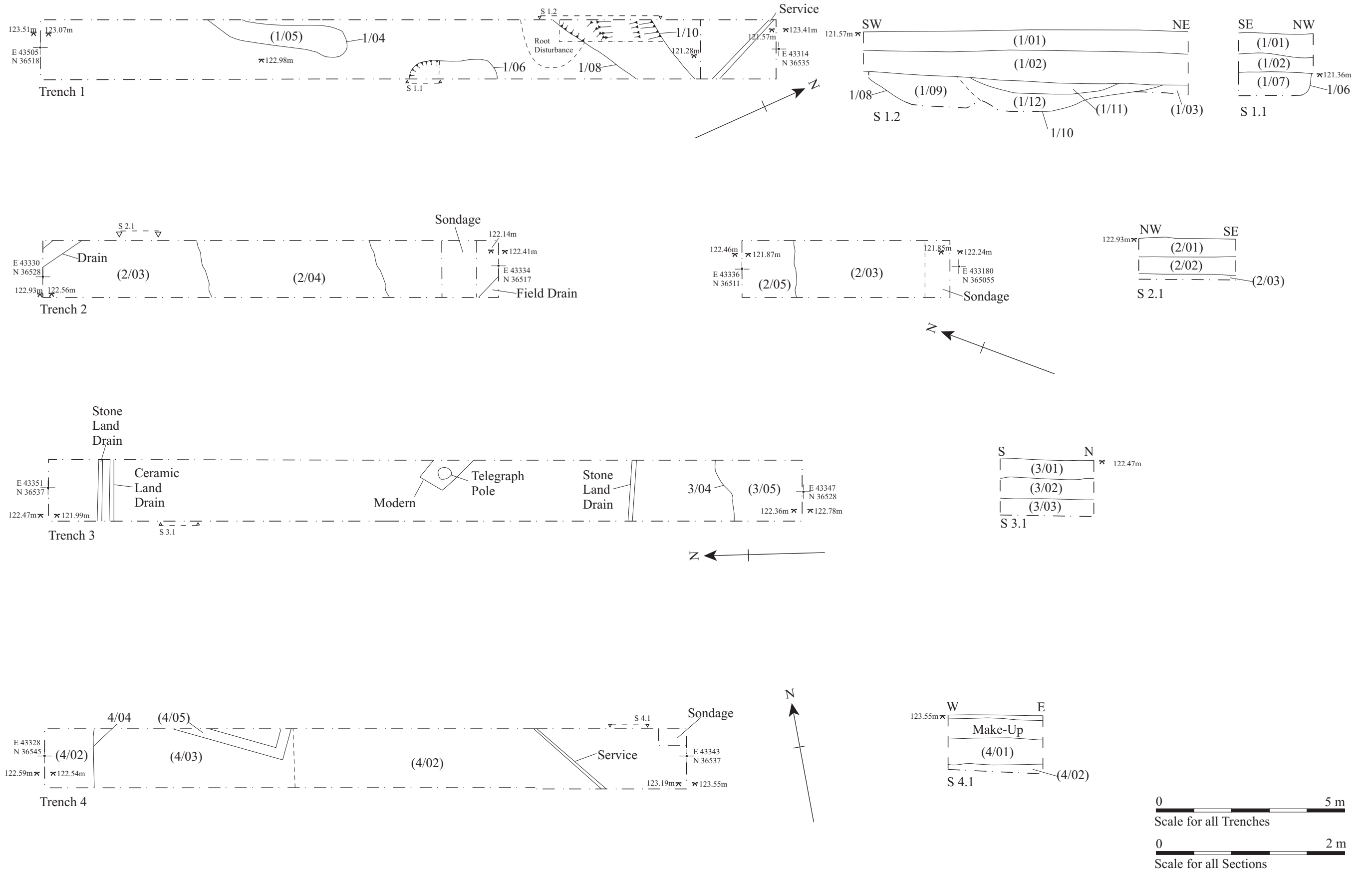


Figure 2. Plans and sections of the trenches



### **Trench 3** (Figure 2)

At the southern end of this trench was a large irregular pit 3/04 cut into the natural 3/03. This pit was only partially revealed by the trench and measured over 1.6m wide by 2m long. It was filled with a mid blue-grey silt-clay (3/05) flecked with charcoal. It was not excavated due to rising ground water. However, a piece of daub was recovered from the fill.

It was sealed by the grey-brown clay subsoil (3/02) that was up to 0.22m thick. The uppermost layer was a dark grey-brown clay loam (3/01) topsoil 0.20m thick.

### **Trench 4** (Figure 2)

Cut into the natural (4/02) was what appeared to be a large pit or linear feature 4/04. This was possibly aligned north to south and filled with a dark blue-grey silt-clay (4/03) that contained some decaying organics. Except for a small trial hole it remained unexcavated due to flooding of the trench and its western edge was difficult to ascertain. It is possible that this could be a periglacial palaeochannel rather than an archaeological feature.

It was sealed by the grey-brown clay (4/01) that contained some quantities of building sand and brick fragments. This was up to 0.28m thick. It possibly represents the subsoil of the area disturbed by modern building or demolition work. Cut into this was a modern wall (4/05) constructed out of red brick. These bricks had frogs and were stamped "Marston". This wall had been demolished at an earlier date and razed to ground level. The entire area was capped by a layer of tarmac and its associated hardcore makeup, which was up to 0.28m thick.

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

The reliability of results is considered to be good, despite the fact that the excavation of the trenches took place during periods of poor weather and very wet conditions underfoot.

Lying snow was present on site before the trenches were excavated and the morning saw additional snow flurries. However, by mid morning the snow was beginning to melt and the trenches rapidly began to fill with run off and ground water. Excavated feature became completely submerged and Trench 2 was entirely filled with water by mid afternoon.

## **5 FINDS**

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

The evaluation produced a small assemblage of 39 sherds (145 g) of prehistoric pottery, from four contexts in Trench 1. The pottery was scanned rapidly to establish the general characteristics and date of each group. Notes were made using the codes set out in the Oxford Archaeology recording system for later prehistoric and Roman

pottery. The material was in moderate to poor condition, many of the sherds being small and difficult to characterise.

The occurrence of pottery by context was as follows:

Context	No. sherds	Weight (g)	Comments	Date
1/5	1	4		Uncertain ?Iron Age
1/7	6	68	1 jar (2 rim sherds)	?middle Iron Age
1/9	6	34		?middle Iron Age
1/12	26	39	2 ?jar rims, probably different vessels	?middle Iron Age

The pottery fabrics were not examined in detail, but the principal inclusion type was noted for each sherd. A variety of fabrics was clearly present, and included sand-tempered and shell-tempered fabrics, the latter indicated mainly by sherds with voids from which the shell had leached out. A group of sherds in context 1/12 may have been tempered principally with clay pellets, but many of these sherds were very fragmentary and it was difficult to be certain about this.

The fabrics are consistent with a date in the Iron Age. There was almost no evidence for decoration or surface treatment, which can be chronologically diagnostic, but three joining sherds in a sand-tempered fabric in context 1/9 had burnished internal surfaces, typical of bowl forms of the later middle Iron Age. The Iron Age date is underlined by the limited evidence of vessel forms. At least two and probably three vessels were represented by rim sherds. These were simple upright rims from jars with slightly rounded shoulders. The type is not closely dateable, and examples can be found in the early Iron Age, but the appearance of these sherds suggested a middle Iron Age date. It is likely that most if not all of the assemblage can be assigned to the middle Iron Age (*c* mid 4th-1st centuries BC).

## 5.2 Fired Clay (*By Paul Booth*)

Fired clay was noted in four contexts, 1/5 (1 fragment, 4 g), 1/12 (3 fragments, 6 g), 2/4 (2 fragments, 5 g) and 3/5 (2 fragments, 44 g). None of the material was diagnostic, but although some of it occurred in contexts unassociated with other finds it could all have been broadly contemporary with the prehistoric pottery.

## 5.3 Environmental Remains

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

## 6 DISCUSSION

Both ditches 1/08 and 1/10 produced Iron Age pottery. It is possible that the material within 1/10 is present due to its disturbance of 1/08, but more likely this represents a second phase re-digging of the ditch in the Iron Age.

The pit 3/04 recorded in Trench 3 produced fired clay that is probably of Iron Age date. Only one edge was seen of the feature and it is possible that it actually represents

a linear ditch. Given its location and projected alignment it would actually appear to line up with ditch 1/10 in Trench 1.

These ditches may represent field boundaries as seen at Ells Lane, but the close proximity to the contemporary pit 1/06 and possible round house represented by the penannular ditch 1/04, may indicate that it is an enclosure ditch to a domestic settlement.

The round house could be an earlier phase of occupation in the Early Iron Age that had later moved to the northwest and the area reused for agriculture, in the Middle Iron Age, and defined by ditches. This activity may have extended west as well but modern activity in this area has removed any trace of earlier features (JMHS 2007).

The presence of fired clay in (2/04) that was similar to material associated with Iron Age pottery may indicate a contemporary date for this deposit. Sample excavation showed it only survived as a thin layer, but could represent a buried soil layer of Iron Age date.

This soil layer may represent an agricultural soil if the ditch turns out to be a field boundary, however it could be an occupation layer within a settlement enclosure.

## 7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*

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JMHS 2007 *An Archaeological Evaluation at Iley and Avalon, Banbury Road, Bloxham, Oxfordshire* Unpublished Client Report

**APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
<b>Trench 1</b>			0.51	1.5	20		
1/01	Layer	Topsoil	0.25	Tr	Tr	Pottery	Modern
1/02	Layer	Grey-brown clay	0.26	Tr	Tr		
1/03	Natural	Yellow-brown clay	-	Tr	Tr	-	
1/04	Cut	Curvi-linear ditch	-	0.7	3.4		
1/05	Fill	Blue-grey silt-clay	-	0.7	3.4	Pottery	
1/06	Cut	Oval pit	0.22+	0.49	2.3		
1/07	Fill	Blue-grey silt-clay	0.22+	0.49	2.3	Pottery	
1/08	Cut	Linear Ditch	0.2+	0.5	0.6+		
1/09	Fill	Blue-grey silt-clay	0.2+	0.5	0.6+	Pottery	
1/10	Cut	Linear Ditch	0.3+	1.5	1.5+		
1/11	Fill	Brown-grey silt-clay	0.1+	1.5	1.5+		
1/12	Fill	Blue-grey silt-clay	0.2	1.5	1.5+	Pottery	
Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
<b>Trench 2</b>			0.4	1.5	12 + 5.5		
2/01	Layer	Topsoil	0.2	Tr	Tr	CBM	Modern
2/02	Layer	Grey-brown clay	0.15 - 0.2	Tr	Tr		
2/03	Natural	Yellow-brown clay	-	Tr	Tr	-	
2/04	Deposit	Mid grey-brown clay	0.01-0.03	1.5	4.5	Pottery	
2/05	Deposit	Mid grey-brown clay	0.01-0.03	1.5	1.5+	Pottery	

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
<b>Trench 3</b>			0.5	1.5	20		
3/01	Layer	Topsoil	0.2	Tr	Tr		
3/02	Layer	Grey-brown clay	0.22	Tr	Tr		
3/03	Natural	Yellow-brown clay	-	Tr	Tr	-	
3/04	Cut	Irregular Pit	-	2.0+	0.4+		
3/05	Fill	Blue-grey silt-clay	-	2.0+	0.4+	Daub	
Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
<b>Trench 4</b>			0.5+	1.5	17		
4/01	Layer	Grey-brown clay	0.28	Tr	Tr		
4/02	Natural	Yellow-brown clay	-	Tr	Tr	-	
4/03	Fill	Blue-grey silt-clay	-	1.6	5.3		
4/04	Cut	Linear feature?	-	1.6	5.3		
4/05	Masonry	Wall	-	0.25	4.0+		Modern