JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

EBEES COTTAGE, BELL LANE,

BRIGHTWELL-CUM-SOTWELL,

OXFORDSHIRE

SU 5841 9094

On behalf of

Mr Michael Brown

JULY 2009

REPORT FOR	Mr Michael Brown Ebees Cotttage Bell Lane Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Oxfordshire OX10 0QD
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CONTENTS

FIGURES

Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief in June 2009 as part of a condition of planning permission for redevelopment of this site.

Significant medieval remains in the form of pits were present to either side of a probable plot boundary. Evidence from kiln drying of cereals and legumes was found in pits in the western plot.

An earlier ditch that does not respect the post-medieval or later road layout was also present. A residual Roman sherd was found in the fill of the probable plot boundary.

A pit containing a late Neolithic retouched flint flake along with a chisel arrowhead was also present.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

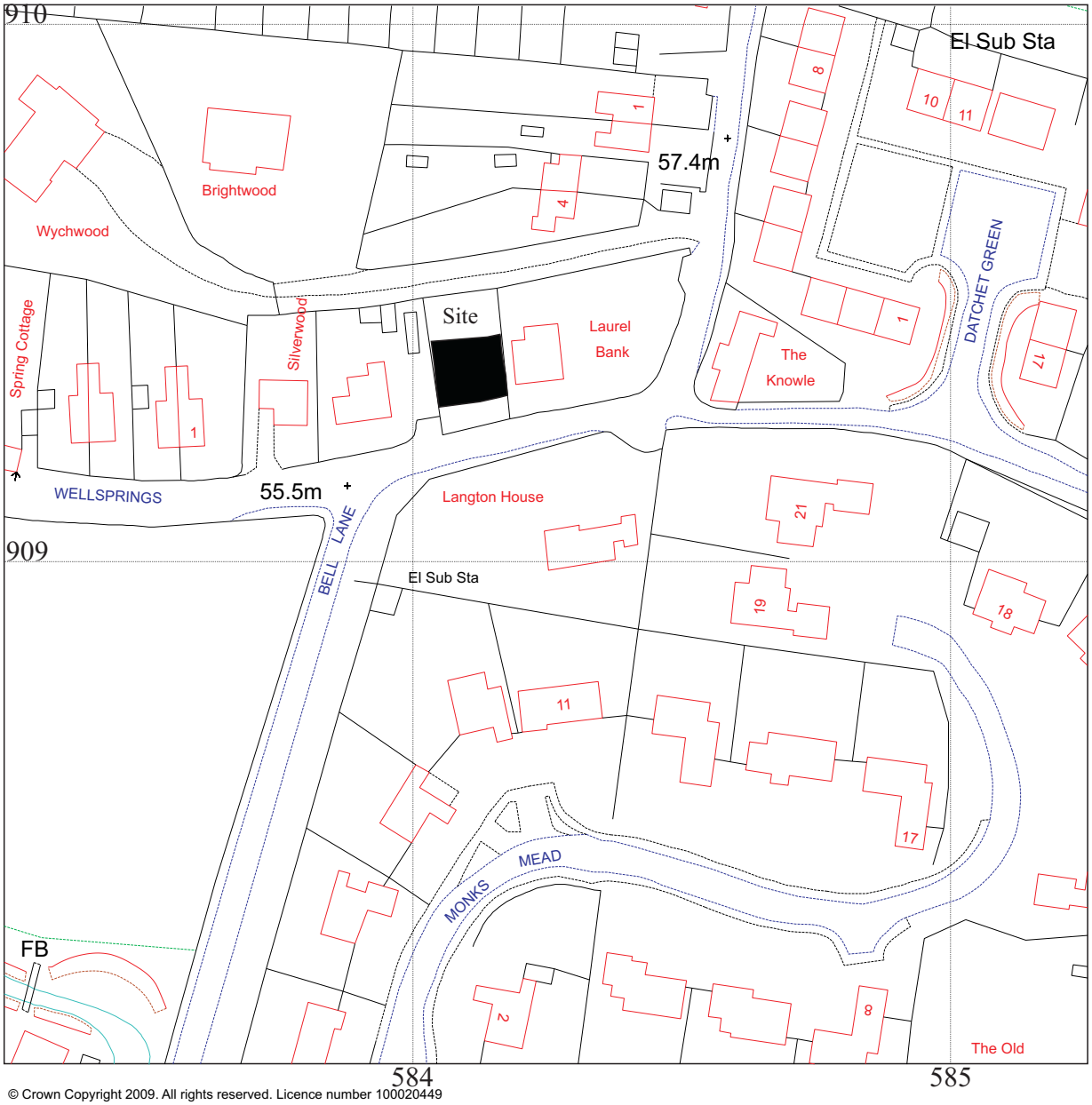
The development site is located in the centre of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, on the north side of Bell Lane, just east of the junction with Wellsprings (NGR SU 5841 9093). The underlying geology is Upper Greensand and the site lies at approximately 60m OD.

1.2 Planning Background

South Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission under planning application number P09/W0040 for the demolition of the previous property and the erection of a new one and a half storey dwelling including access and hard standing alterations. Due to the potential of the site to contain archaeological remains a condition was attached requiring that a full archaeological watching brief be carried out during the period of construction works. This was in line with PPG 16 and Policies CON11 and CON13 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a *Brief* for such archaeological work.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site is located in an area of some archaeological interest within the historic core of the village. It is situated adjacent and to the east of two 17th century houses (PRN 21689; SU 5831 9092) and (PRN 21690; SU 5827 9094). The site is also 160m north-east of the site of another 17th century house (PRN 21677; SU 5832 9079). The site is located 200m north-east of a possible medieval or post-medieval moated site (PRN 2941; SU 5828 9074). The Roque map of 1761 shows a slightly different arrangement of roads than the modern village with two houses shown in the area of this application. It was considered possible that further medieval or post-medieval houses existed in this area. The site is also 160m east of the line of the Roman road from Dorchester to Silchester and multi-period settlement has been recorded adjacent to this road to the south of the village.



0 m 50 m

Figure 1. Site Location

The 1877 1st Edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map shows the site lying within an enclosed area of trees or an orchard.

Some of the above information was taken from the OCAS's Brief.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the client and Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services, on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

Ground reduction down to the base of impact for the construction of the floors was carried mechanically out in two stages. The work was undertaken using a toothless ditching bucket. The first stage was down to the top of the Upper Greensand or slightly into it, with the second stage down into the Upper Greensand. An archaeologist was present during these two stages of ground reduction. Following the first stage features were planned and sample hand excavated. Finds were recovered from the unexcavated parts of the features, where possible, during the second stage ground reduction work. The ground reduction continued south of the house footprint for 3-4m down to the top of the Upper Greensand.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. 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

4.1 **Results** (Figures 2 and 3)

All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in ( ) indicate feature fills or deposits of material.

The natural Upper Greensand (2) was exposed across the area at a depth of approximately 580mm. Cut into this material were several features. Sealing the features and natural material was a 580mm thick cultivation soil (1) composed of dark brown-grey silty clay with 2% pebble content. The cultivation deposit contained some brick and tile from demolition of the previous building.

Cut in to the natural was a large ditch curving slightly from the NW corner of the area to the centre of the area before straightening and running SE. At the SE end two cuts of the ditch were apparent (Fig. 3, S1). The earlier cut 45 was at least 600mm wide and 360mm deep with the north side at 60^0 from the horizontal and a rounded base. The ditch fill (46) comprised pale grey-brown and pale yellow-brown silty clay with the occasional small pebble. This was cut on the south side by later ditch cut 43 that was almost V-shaped in profile with a north side at 60^0 and a south side at 40^0. The ditch survived 1m wide at the top and was 520mm deep. The fill (44) of this ditch cut was composed of pale-mid grey-brown and pale yellow-brown silty clay with the occasional pebble. It was slightly more crumbly than the fill (46) of the earlier ditch cut 45. At the base of fill 44 was a large patch of charcoal measuring 450x500mm and 40mm thick.

At the NW end of this ditch the earlier cut was at least 600mm wide and was possibly of two phases. The possible north cut of these possible two phases was at least 520mm wide and 90mm deep with the possible south cut being at least 450mm wide and 300mm deep. No difference in fill was discernible. The last was cut on the south side by the later cut seen across the site and equivalent to ditch cut 43 described above.

The evidence points to there being three phases of this ditch. The western 3.5m of the overall ditch was wider appearing to have a butt end. This probably indicates that there was an entrance through the first phase of ditch. This may be associated with gully 14 to the east. The second and third phases appear to have dispensed with an entrance at this point. No dateable finds were recovered from any of the ditch fills despite intensive monitoring of the mechanical excavation of the ditch. Animal bone was recovered from the fills (48) of the two earlier cuts at the west end, from the fill (47) of the latest cut towards the west end at an approximate 200mm depth, and from the fill (46) of the earlier cut 45 at the SE end. Further animal bone was recovered from the top fill (40) of the overall ditch on exposure.

3m to the east of the butt end of the presumed earliest phase of the aforementioned ditch was curving gully 14. This only survived over a length of 4m. The rounded west end was 500mm wide and 140mm deep with sides at 30^0. The surviving SE end was 140-270mm deep and 500mm wide. It was cut by pit 12 (Fig. 3, S4). The fill (13) of the gully was mid grey-brown clay silt with 5-30% pale white silty clay (Upper Greensand origin). The latter increased in percentage terms with depth.

Cutting the aforementioned gully 14, and the recut ditch 45 and 43, was a N/S ditch 30 and 31 interpreted either as a plot boundary or a sub-division of a plot. At the northern limit of the area the ditch 30 was 880mm wide at the base of the cultivation soil (1) and 340mm deep. The sides were at 30^0 and the base was slightly rounded Fig. 3, S2). The fill (29) was dark brown-grey slightly silty clay with the occasional

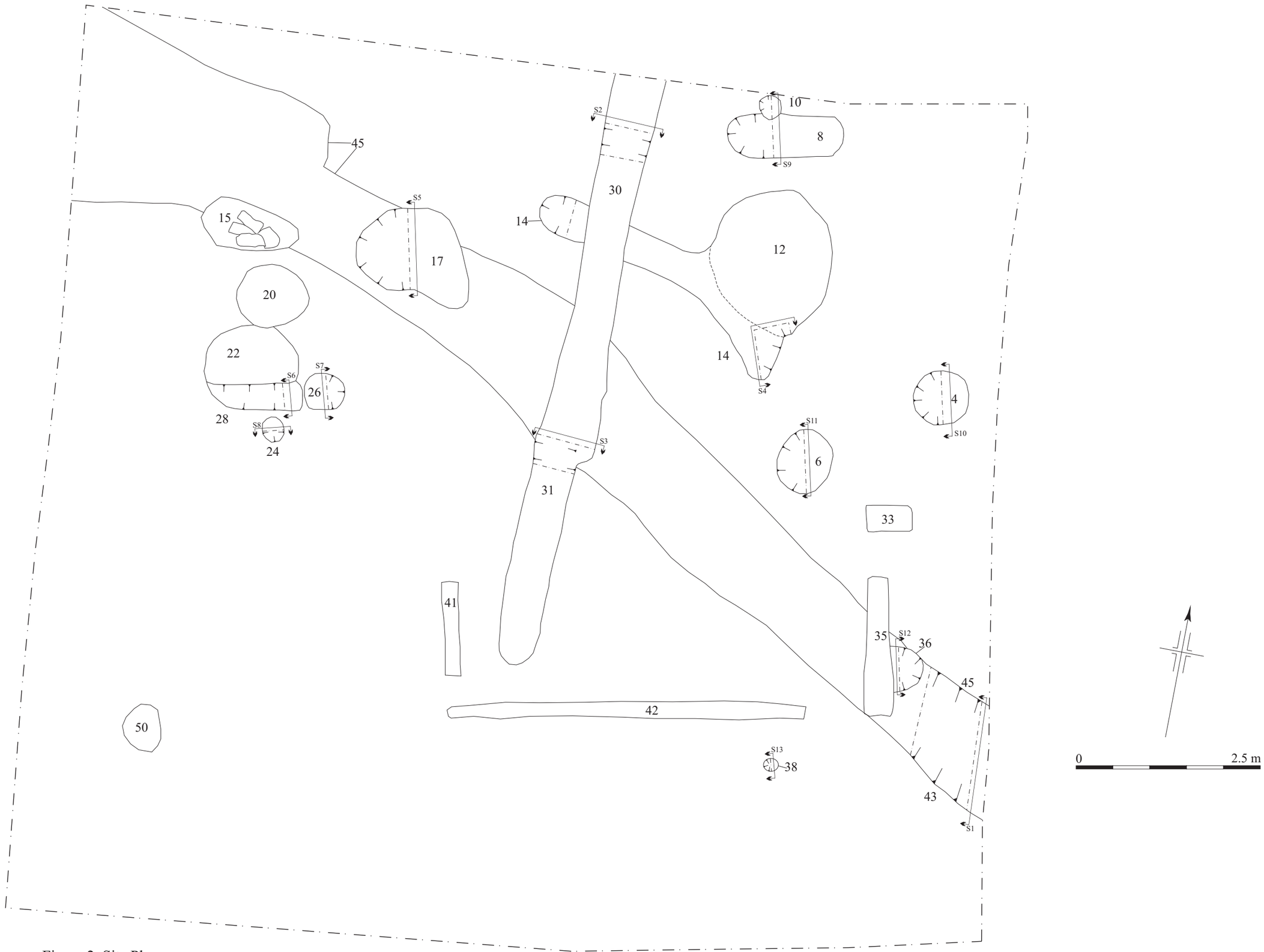


Figure 2. Site Plan

pebble. 30-40% of the fill was scorched earth and charcoal. A sherd of mid 11th -12th century pottery was recovered from the fill along with a residual sherd of Romano-British date.

Further south a section was excavated to determine the relationship of this ditch 31 with the large early ditch 46. Here the section exhibited two cuts of this ditch (Fig. 3, S3). The earlier cut butt ended with a rounded end where it was 140mm deep and estimated to be 370mm wide. It had a flat base and an east side at 45^0. The later cut to the west was *c*. 530mm wide and 200mm deep with the sides at 45% and a flat base. The fill (32) of both cuts was a compact mid brown-grey clayey silt with occasional charcoal flecks. The fill of the earlier cut was not as compact as that of the later one. A piece of animal bone was recovered from the fill.

To the west of boundary ditch 30 and 31 were several pits filled with burnt material. Pit 17 was irregular in plan: 1.4m E/W by 1m – 1.3m N/S. It was 70-150mm deep with the flat base sloping down from south to north. The sides of the pit were at 45% (Fig. 3, S5). The fill (18) comprised dark grey-brown silty clay with red and orange scorched earth and clay. This material contained corn drying kiln lining. The pit appeared to have been dug to dispose of the burnt material and it was cut into the top of the earlier recut ditch.

To the west was pit 15, again an irregular cut. It was 1.25m long E/W and 40-70mm wide with sides at 45^0. The pit was 120mm deep and was filled by scorched earth (16). The lowest fill was 60mm of scorched overlaid by a single layer of roof peg tile laid to create a base. Above the roof tile was further scorched earth. The sides of pit exhibited *in situ* burning with a black ring and an internal red ring of scorched material around the sides.

Pit 20 just to the south was oval; 980mm E/W and 800mm N/S. It survived 15mm deep with a flat base and was filled by (19) a pale-mid brown-grey slightly clayey silt. This pit cut pit 22 which again was shallow at a depth of 15-60mm. The depth was dictated by more solid Upper Greensand. The pit was 1.10m E/W and 790mm N/S. The pit contained black-brown well scorched silt (21). It contained three small splinters of roof tile that were not retained.

Cut into the south side of pit 22 was a linear feature 28 which was 990mm long E/W, 310mm wide and 70mm deep. The ends and sides were at 30^0 and it had a slightly rounded base (Fig. 3, S6). The fill (27) of the feature was pale-mid brown-grey silty clay with the occasional charcoal fleck. There was evidence of *in situ* burning on the base and south side in the form of a thin line of burnt material. Immediately to the east and in line with the long axis was an oval pit or posthole 26, 340-590mm in diameter and 110mm deep with a bowl-shaped profile across the width (Fig. 3, S7). Its fill (25) was black scorched earth with pale grey clay silt.

Immediately south of linear pit 28 was a small pit 24. At the surviving top it was 300mm in diameter, but had an oval base 260mm NE/SW by 190mm NW/SE. Its maximum depth was 110mm although it was only 50mm deep in the SE part (Fig. 3, S8). Its fill (23) was pale-mid brown-grey clay silt. Further south was the flat base of a sub-circular pit 50, 500-600mm in diameter and 200mm deep. The top 180mm was machined off prior to excavation. It was filled with mid brown-grey, slightly purple, slightly silty clay (49).

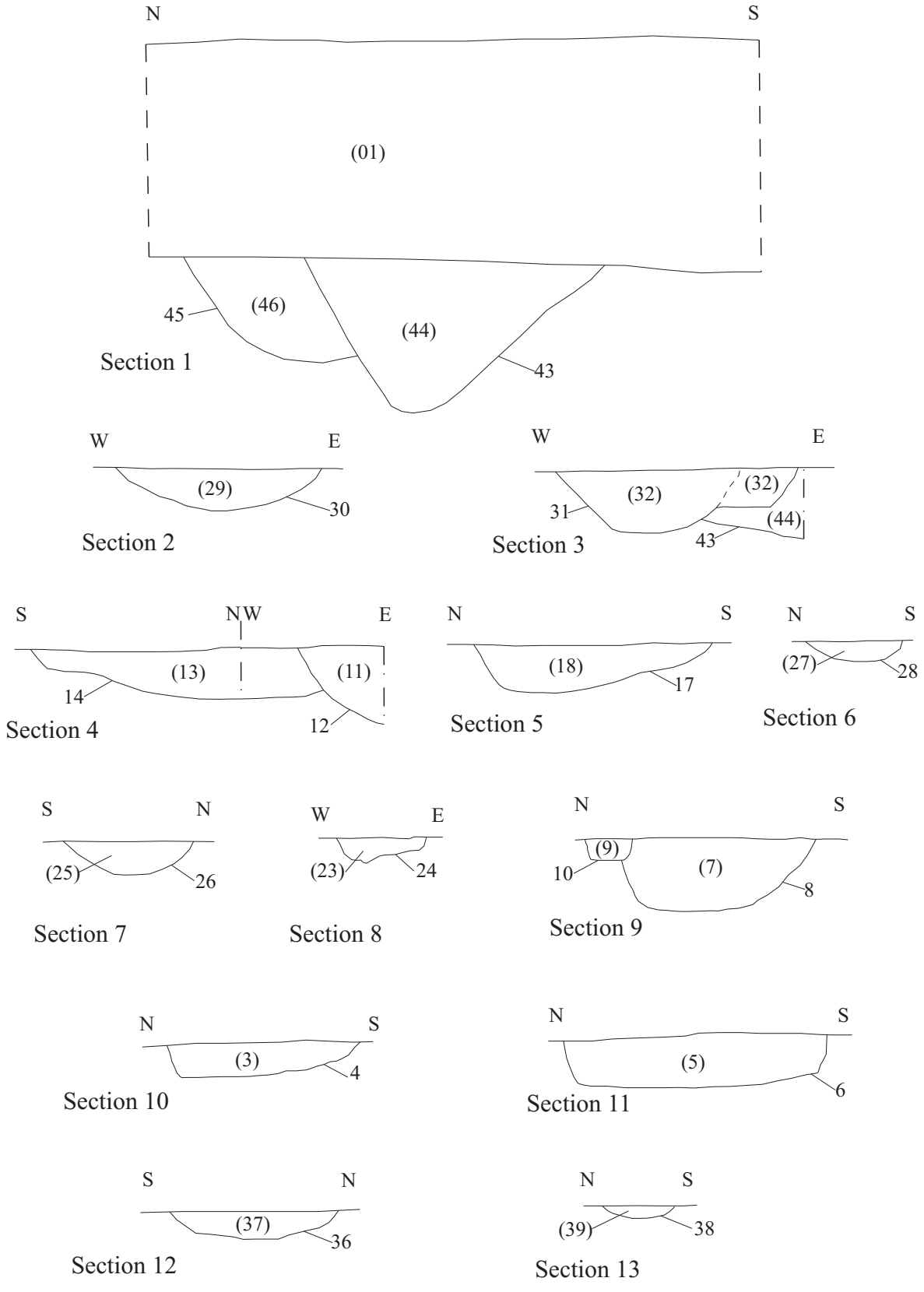


Figure 3. Sections

To the east of boundary ditch 30 and 31 were several other pits. Pit 8 is potentially of late Neolithic date. It was a 260mm deep sub-rectangular cut 1.50m E/W and 750mm wide. The sides were at a 70-75^0 angle and it had a slightly rounded base. Its fill (7) was relatively compact pale grey-brown silty clay with occasional charcoal flecks and the occasional pebble. Within the fill were a flint flake and a chisel arrowhead. It was cut (Fig. 3, S9) to the north by a small oval posthole 10, 140mm N/S and 180mm E/W with 80mm depth. The sides of the posthole were at 60^0 and it had a rounded base. The fill (9) was loose pale grey-brown silty clay.

Pit 12 turned out to be two intercutting pits during the second stage ground reduction. The pit(s) cut gully 14. Where hand investigated the top of side of the pit was at 60-70^0. The pits were 400mm deep. The fill (11) was mid grey-brown clay silt with the occasional pebble and occasional charcoal flecks.

Pit 4 was a small circular pit 630mm in diameter 110mm deep. The north and west sides were near vertical while the south side was at 45^0. The base sloped up slightly to the south (Fig. 3, S10). The fill (3) was composed of dark grey-brown clayey silt with the occasional pebble and frequent charcoal flecks. To the south west was a slightly larger oval pit 6; 900mm N/S and 740mm E/W with a depth of 180mm (Fig. 3, S11). It had near vertical sides and a flat base and was filled by mid brown-grey very slightly clayey silt with occasional pebbles and the very occasional charcoal fleck (5).

Further south pit 36 was circular, 600mm in diameter and 120mm deep with sides at 45^0 and a relatively flat base (Fig. 3, S12). It fill (37) comprised of mid dark brown-grey silty clay with the occasional charcoal fleck. This pit was truncated on its west side by feature 35.

Features 33, 35, 41 and 42 are interpreted as being associated with an earlier building. Foundation cut feature 35 was 300mm wide with slightly curving ends. It contained dark brown-grey clay with modern tile and was not excavated. Features 41 and 42 were similar. To the north of foundation cut feature 35 was a rectangular cut 33, 550mm E/W by 300mm N/S and 20mm deep. It was filled with dark brown-grey clay with some modern roof tile (34). To the south was a 250mm diameter, 60mm deep posthole 38. It had sides at 60^0 and had a flat base and was filled by mid dark brown-grey and mid brown-grey silty clay (Fig. 3, S13). It may have been associated with the earlier building.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The watching brief was conducted under ideal conditions with the ground reduction carried out in two phases that allowed sufficient time to sample hand excavate and record features.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery *by Paul Blinkhorn*

The pottery assemblage comprised 7 sherds with a total weight of 197g. It all dated to the earlier part of the medieval period, apart from a single sherd of residual Romano-British material.

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

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD975-1350. 2 sherds, 8g.
WA38: Wallingford ware, AD1050 – 1250. 3 sherds, 140g.
OXBF: North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050 – 1400. 1 sherd, 47g.

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 range of fabric types present suggests that post-Roman activity was limited to the mid 11th – 12th centuries, with common later types entirely absent.

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

	RB		OXAC		OXBF		WA38		
Cntxt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	Date
U/S			1	4			1	47	U/S
11			1	4	2	137			M11thC
29	1	2			1	3			M11thC
Total	1	2	2	8	3	140	1	47	

5.2 Flint by Dave Gilbert

A retouched tertiary flake was recovered from fill (7) of pit 8. Its length is 30mm, its width is 15mm and it is 4 mm thick. It displayed trimming at the proximal end to reduce the dorsal surface opposite the bulb of percussion. The proximal end also displayed some abrupt retouch and pressure flaking was employed to thin the piece along its length. This made it far more ergonomic and was probably utilised as a small knife. Although difficult to date it is probably Late Neolithic.

The excavator noted a chisel arrowhead also from the same context which is in the possession of the landowner.

5.3 Animal bone

Animal bone was recovered from the fill (13) the early multi-phase curving ditch 14. This included a horn core from fill 46 of the earlier cut 45 at the SW end.

The only animal remains from the small curving gully was a horn core from the fill (13).

Animal bone was also recovered from fill (7) of possible Neolithic pit 8, fill (23) of posthole 24, fills (29) and (32) of boundary ditch 30/31, and fill (37) of pit 36.

5.4 Tile and kiln material

Almost complete roof peg tiles were present in fill (16) of pit 15. However no full lengths or widths of the tiles survived.

Fragments of fired greensand clay were recovered from fill (18) of pit 17. Most have a flat surface. The opposing side was irregular as if lining a cut. The thickest pieces were 25-27mm. These are interpreted as kiln/oven lining.

5.5 Palaeo-environmental remains

A 10 litre sample from fill (18) of pit 17 was sieved and subjected to floatation. Charcoal and seeds were identified by Professor Mark Robinson.

Seeds included:

Triticum sp.	(wheat)	2
cereal indet		3
cf Pisum sativum	(pea)	3
cf Vicia faba	(bean)	3
large legume	(pea, bean etc)	2

Charcoal:

Prunus sp.	(sloe, plum etc.)	moderate amounts

6 DISCUSSION

The earliest remains found were the late Neolithic lithics which are probably within a pit of that date. Residual Neolithic material has been found 1.6km to the WNW.

The large recut ditch was undated. The fact that the later recut(s) were to the south suggests that a bank would have been on the north (?outer side). As such it would appear that the probable late Neolithic pit is not associated with this ditch. It is possible that it is a Roman date given the residual sherd of that date found in the medieval ditch. The site is only 160m from the Roman road from Dorchester to Silchester. The curving nature of the recut ditch suggests that it was an enclosure boundary. The possible recut of the earlier phase towards the NW of the site suggests that originally there was an entrance through this side that was closed during the later phase(s). The gully 14 may have been part of this early entrance arrangement. The distribution of the animal bone within the ditch fills indicates that material was not being deliberately placed in the ditch but more likely was being thrown into it.

The medieval occupation appears to have been limited to the late 11th and 12th centuries. Whether ditch 30/31 is a division between two landholdings or a division within a single landholding is not known. Certainly to the west of it drying of cereals and legumes was being carried out. This is necessary when weather conditions are damp and such have to be dried before being milled or stored for use as seed for the following spring. If grain and legumes have not been dried they tend to clog up the grooves on the grinding surfaces of millstones. Seed has to be dried prior to storage to avoid fungal infection (Johnson *et al* 2009).

How the kiln(s) on this site worked is unknown as the only fragments of lining were flat on one face. It is possible that a rectangular structure was formed and lined with the natural Upper Greensand clay. A flue would have lead to the drying kiln. As the heat needed does not have to be intense small wood is used; probable brushwood or gathered from hedgerows. In this case *prunus* (sloe and plum) was being used.

It is possible that pit 15 was the firepit for a kiln contained within pit shallow pit 20. *In situ* burning was being carried out in pit 15 which was later given a base of disused roof tiles.

Irregular shaped pit 17 was certainly dug to dispose of a disused kiln. Pit 22 is also associated with this drying activity and again may have contained a kiln. The *in situ* burning within the linear feature 28 again suggests that is connected to this activity. The posthole 26 must be contemporary with the last feature.

The scorched material in the northern part of the N/S ditch suggests that some of the material cleaned out from the firepits were being disposed of in the ditch.

The pits to the east of the N/S ditch certainly had a different function but the apparent scarcity of artefacts prohibits identifying their purpose.

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