JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

SOUTH LAWN FARM, SWINBROOK

OXFORDSHIRE

SP 2879 1460

On behalf of

Swinbrook Farms

November 2009

REPORT FOR	Swinbrook Farms The Estate Office South Lawn Farm Swinbrook Burford Oxfordshire OX18 4EN
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief as a condition of planning permission for a ménage at South Lawn Farm, Swinbrook, Oxfordshire. The watching brief revealed four gullies, two ditches, two possible further ditches and two postholes. All of the features containing pottery were dated to the 1st century AD from around the period of the Roman Conquest unlike previous fieldwalking of the area which produced an assemblage of finds including pottery dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. It is possible therefore that the site forms part of a broader settlement pattern. Two phases of activity were identified from the features excavated.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located approximately 1.4 km south of the junction of the B4437 with the lane leading south to Swinbrook (NGR SP 2879 1460). The underlying geology is White Limestone and the site lies at approximately 160m OD. The site is currently pasture.

1.2 Planning Background

West Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission under planning reference number 09/0797/P/FP for the construction of a ménage at South Lawn Farm, Swinbrook. Due to the potential of the site to contain archaeological remains a condition was attached requiring that an archaeological watching brief be carried out during the period of construction works. This is in line with PPG 16 and Policy HE11 of the Local Plan.

1.3 Archaeological Background

During fieldwalking Romano British pottery has been collected from the area of the development. The material includes grey wares and some mortarium and is dated to the third and fourth centuries. Some building material of the Romano British period also has been collected along with oyster shell and two struck flints. The Romano British assemblage suggests the presence of a settlement, probably a farmstead, in the vicinity.

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 archaeological remains.

Figure 1. Site location

In particular :

- to record any evidence of sub-surface remains relating to the finds of Romano British material

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the applicant and approved by Mr Hugh Coddington, the Deputy County Archaeological Officer to Oxfordshire County 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

An archaeologist was present on site during the stripping of topsoil and other material down to the depth of the limestone and for the excavation of the drainage trenches. Machining took place with a 13 ton tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket wherever possible. However, due to problems with the machine overheating, related to the hard nature of the ground, a toothed bucket was employed on occasion to remove overburden before a grading bucket was re-employed to clean the resulting surfaces. This was done in agreement with Mr Hugh Coddington.

Any archaeological features revealed were cleaned by hand and recorded in plan before being excavated or recorded in section as being excavated for the drainage trenches.

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

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Individual context numbers in ( ) indicate feature fills or deposits of material. Those without brackets refer to features themselves. The numbers in bold refer to an overall group number for individual features into which several sections had been excavated. For instance, ditch **60** refers to the ditch as a whole incorporating ditch slots 18, 22, 30, 38, 40 and 50.

The methodology adopted by the groundworkers to level the ground meant that whilst the NW end of the site was stripped down, the SE end was built up to attain a level surface. Because of this, only part of the site was dug deep enough to reveal the

underlying geology and as a consequence, archaeological features. This arbitrary level also meant that some of the features revealed became more difficult to see as the ground level rose from being on the cusp of the natural to just above this horizon.
Three drainage trenches were excavated through the length of the ménage (NW-SE) following stripping which allowed a further opportunity to record more features. Like the ménage itself however, these drainage trenches were also excavated to an arbitrary depth meaning that only part of the drainage was deep enough to reveal or cut through archaeological deposits.

4.1 Results (Figures 2 & 3)

Gully **61** was aligned N-S and was investigated in three locations (04, 06 and 08). This feature was found to be between 0.34m and 0.44m wide and 0.18m deep with typically slightly irregular curving sides and a curving base Section 1 – 3). It was filled with a dark grey-brown silty clay with moderate limestone inclusions ((05), (07) and (09) respectively) which became more frequent towards the terminus. The terminus itself was more irregular in both plan and section. Two sherds of pottery were recovered from fill (05), one sherd from fill (07) and eleven sherds from fill (09), dating the feature to the 1st century AD. In section 3, this gully was observed to have been re-cut as gully 11 (Section 3). Where this recut originated is unknown; the recut may have completely replaced the earlier cut further south-westwards.

Gully 11 was 0.46m wide and 0.18m deep with moderate curving sides and a curving base. It was filled with a mid brown silt with moderate medium to large limestone inclusions (10). No dating evidence was revealed from this feature.

On the same alignment as gully **61** was gully **62** separated by a small gap suggesting an entranceway. Gully **62** was investigated in two locations (14 and 16). This gully was c.0.60m wide and 0.26m deep with moderately steep slightly curving sides and a slightly curving base (Section 4). Like gully **61** it was filled with a dark grey-brown silty clay which contained frequent limestone inclusions ((15) and (17) respectively). The terminus for this gully however was much more regular. Eight sherds of pottery were recovered from fill (15) and four sherds from fill (17), dating the feature to the 1st century AD. Section 6 showed this gully to be cut by ditch **60**.

Further west but on the same alignment as both gully **61** and gully **62** was gully **63**. This gully was excavated in three places (28, 33 and 43) and measured between 0.65 and 0.75m wide with a maximum of 0.20m deep as seen. The gully had moderately steep, slightly irregular sides and a slightly curving base (Section 8). Its fill was typically composed of mid grey-brown silty clay with frequent limestone inclusions or varying sizes ((26), (34) and (44) respectively). Fill (34) contained three sherds of pottery and fill (44) contained one sherd of pottery giving the feature a 1st century AD date. It is possible that the perceived terminus of this gully is simply the result of the feature not being cut as deep, and the terminus is simply where the feature peters out rather than a deliberate action. Within sections 9 and 11 gully **63** was noted to be cut by ditch **60**.

Orientated E-W to the north of gully **63** was gully 12 which also terminated within the trench. It was 0.52m wide and 0.12m deep with shallow curving sides and a curving base (Section 5) and was filled with a mid grey-brown silty clay containing moderate

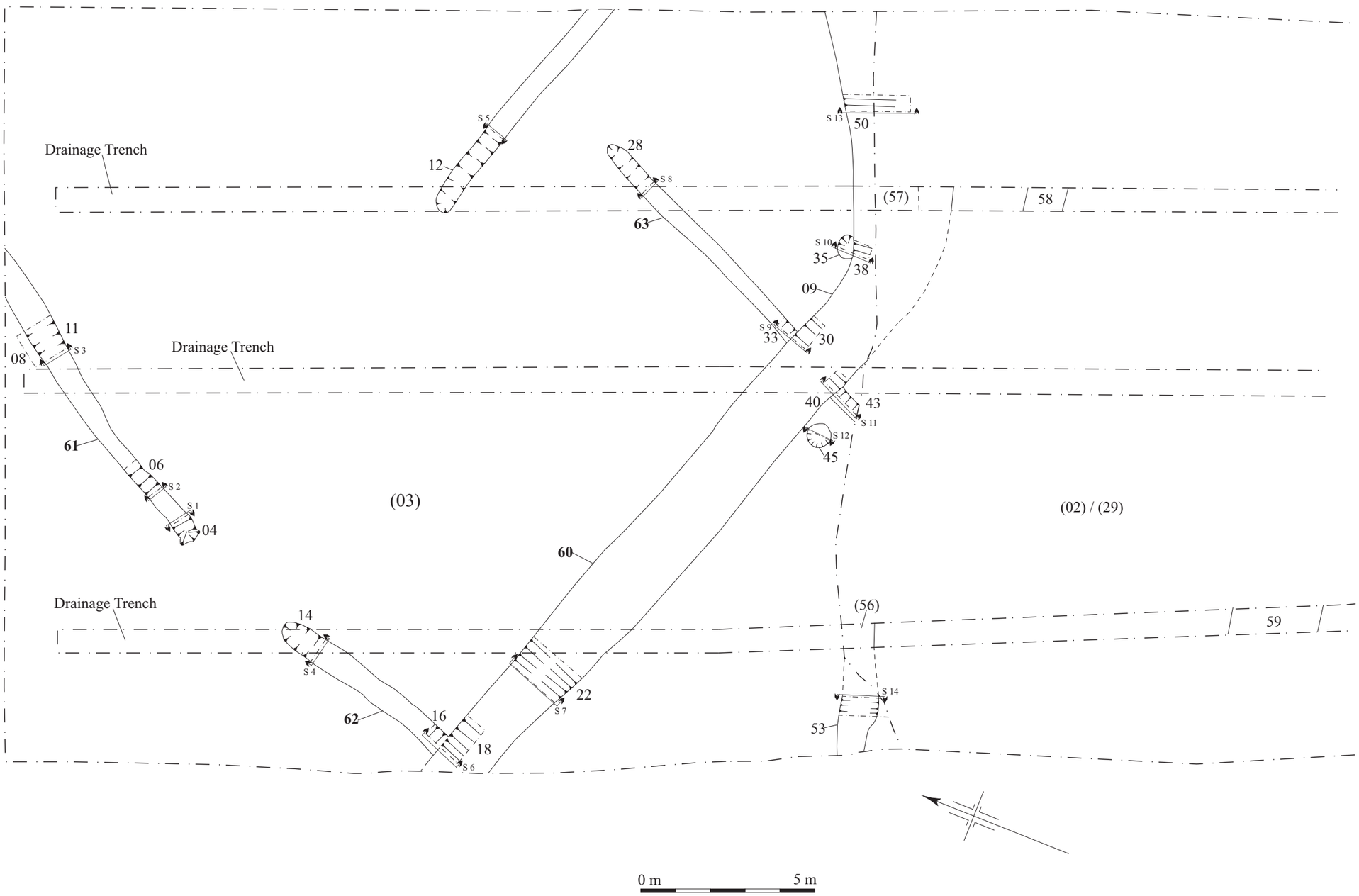

Figure 2. Plan of site

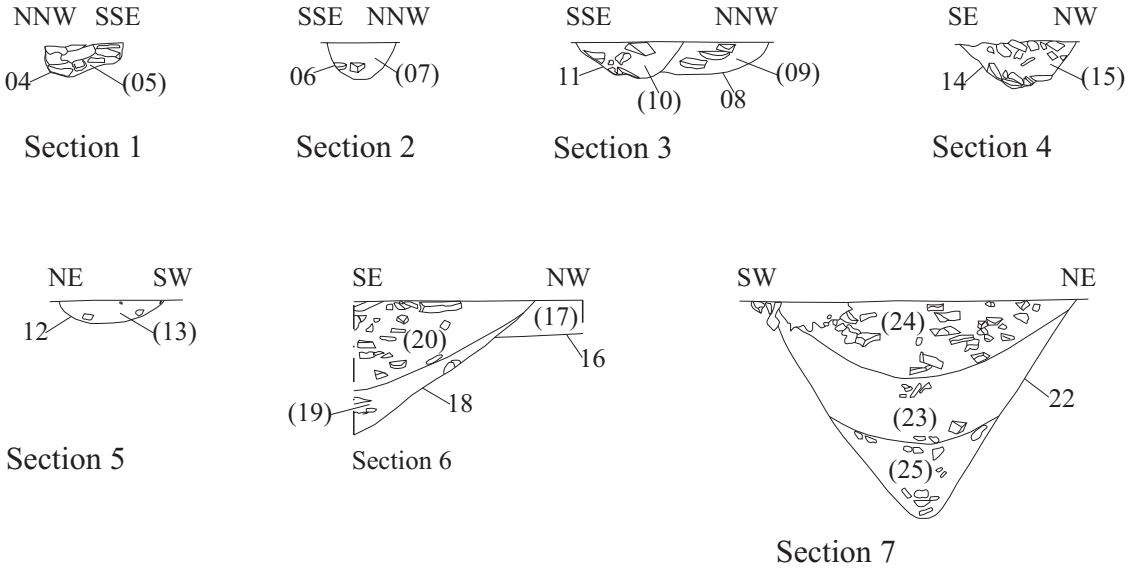

Figure 3. Sections

medium and large sized fragments of limestone (13). Seven sherds of pottery were recovered from this fill dating to the 1st century AD.

Cutting though both gully **62** and gully **63** was ditch **60**. Ditch **60** was investigated in six locations (18, 22, 30, 38, 40 and 50). This feature was orientated approximately E-W nearer to the SW baulk before curving to a more NE-SW axis where it also became much wider from 1.70m to approximately 2.85m. The depth of the ditch ranged from 1.15m towards the west to 1.60m closer to the east where it became significantly wider. The actual width however became much more difficult to determine where the ditch started to curve towards the NE as the arbitrary ground level stripped onto started to rise above the natural, obscuring part of the feature around this area. It is possible that this feature has been re-cut due to its increase in width although no evidence for this was observed in the sections excavated. Two sections across this ditch were dug to depth with one across its entire width to reveal a 'V' shaped profile (Section 7).

Ditch **60** was noted to have a maximum of five fills. The earliest fill (25)/(49) was a light yellow-brown silty clay containing occasional charcoal flecking and frequent fragments of limestone measuring between 0.38-0.39m in thickness. Fifty nine sherds of pottery were recovered in total from this fill dating from the 1st century AD. Above this was a fill composed of mid grey-brown clayey silt with occasional charcoal flecking and occasional to moderate limestone fragments (19)/(23)/(31)/(41)/(48). This fill contained a total of fifty four sherds of pottery dating to the 1st century AD and was noted to range in thickness from 0.36-0.40m where fully excavated. Sealing this was a dark grey-brown silty clay with occasional to moderate charcoal flecking and very frequent limestone fragments (20)/(24)/(32)/(42)/(47) up to 0.40m thick as seen, containing a total of sixty four sherds of pottery also dating to the 1st century AD.

Towards the eastern part of the site where the ditch began to curve towards the NE, a further two fills were observed. Here overlying fill (47) (the same as fill (20)/(24)/(32) and (42)) was fill (52), a dark brown silty clay, with frequent fragments of limestone and very occasional charcoal flecking (52) measuring 0.38m in thickness which in turn was sealed by a dark black-brown clayey silt with very frequent limestone inclusions and very occasional charcoal flecking (51) measuring 0.22m in thickness (Section 13). Twenty one sherds of pottery dating to the 1st century AD were recovered from fill (51).

It is thought that fill (52) could the remains of deposit (29), a deposit which sealed all of the features but was mostly removed during machining at the NW end of the site, either as the deposit collected in the depression left by the ditch following backfilling or because the ground level was beginning to rise in this area for the purpose maintaining the level for the ménage.

Small pit/posthole 35 on the north side and cut by ditch **60** measured 0.70m in diameter and 0.30m in depth and had steep, straight sides and a flat base (Section 10). Its lower fill was composed of a light yellow grey-brown silty clay with very frequent limestone fragments and occasional charcoal flecking 0.30m thick (36). This was sealed by a mid grey brown-green silty clay with frequent charcoal flecking 0.10m thick (37). No finds were recovered from this feature.

Small pit/posthole 45 on the southern side of ditch **60** and to the west of gully **63** had an irregular profile and was 0.80m wide, 0.70m long and 0.40m in deep (Section 12). Its fill was composed of mixed mid grey-brown silty clay and mid yellow-brown sand with very frequent limestone and inclusions and occasional charcoal flecking (46). A thin charcoal lense was also noted close to its surface. No finds were retrieved from this fill.

Small pit/posthole 35 and small pit/posthole 45 did not from part of any discernible structure although any potential related features to the SE were obscured as the arbitrary ground level rose above the natural.

Ditch 53, partially observed to the south of ditch **60** appeared to have an irregular shape in plan and was obscured as the arbitrary stripped level of the trench around this area and further SE was no longer deep enough to expose its full extent. It was aligned NE-SW. This feature was 1.10m wide and possibly 0.33m deep and had a moderately steep, curving profile and a slightly rounded base (section 14). Its lower fill was composed of a mid brown-orange slightly silty clay with extremely occasional charcoal flecking 0.23m thick. During excavation however, this fill was thought to perhaps be a pocket of natural rather than an actual fill and contained no finds. The upper, and possibly the only fill of this ditch consisted of a mid brown-grey silty clay with moderate limestone inclusions and occasional charcoal flecking 0.10m thick (54). Fourteen sherds of pottery were recovered from this fill dating to the 1st century AD. Further evidence of this ditch was revealed in the furthest SW drainage run recorded as deposit (56). This was not excavated but was similar in composition to fill (54) and contained two sherds of pottery also dating to the 1st century AD.

Apart from a continuation ditch 53 (recorded as deposit (56)) and the defining of part of the SE edge of ditch **60**, (recorded as deposit (57) and found to contain one further sherd of 1st century AD pottery), two other features were noted within the ménage drainage trenches. Possible linear feature 59 seen towards the SE of ditch 53 was 2.5m wide and at least 0.35m deep. Also, possible linear feature 58 seen close to the SE of ditch **60** was 1.10m wide and 0.25m deep with moderately steep sides and a slightly rounded base, being filled with a mid orange brown very clayey silt.

Sealing all of the features identified was a dark black-brown clayey silt with very frequent limestone inclusions (29) up to 0.35m thick. Twenty five sherds of pottery were recovered from this deposit typically of a 1st century AD date but with two sherds noted to be slightly later.

Overlying deposit (29) was ploughsoil (2), a fine mid black-brown clayey silt 0.17m thick containing very occasional small fragments of limestone but also noted to contain frequent sherds of pottery. A total of 325 sherds were recovered from this horizon of a 1st century AD date.

Overlying ploughsoil (2) and completing the stratigraphic sequence was topsoil/plousoil (01), a dark black-brown clayey silt with occasional small limestone inclusions 0.10m thick.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability is considered good although the arbitrary level stripped down onto during machining hindered recording. The watching brief was conducted during periods of sunshine and cloud and occasional heavy rain showers.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery *by Paul Booth*

Introduction

The evaluation produced 277 sherds (3108 g) of late Iron Age and Roman pottery from excavated contexts, plus a further 325 sherds (2445 g) from the ploughsoil (layer 2). The material was in moderate condition; the average sherd weight from the excavated contexts was a relatively modest 11.2 g (the pottery from the ploughsoil was, unsurprisingly, more fragmented) and preservation of surfaces was variable. The pottery was scanned rapidly. Quantification of each context group (excluding the ploughsoil material) used codes set out in the Oxford Archaeology Roman pottery recording system.

Fabrics

The fabrics represented are listed below. Those noted only in the ploughsoil material are indicated with an asterisk.

A30*. Coarse sandy oxidised amphora fabric (source uncertain).
M22*. Oxford white ware mortarium fabric.
E20. Fine sand-tempered `Belgic type' fabrics.
E80. Grog-tempered `Belgic type' fabrics.
O10*. Fine oxidised `coarse' wares, mostly Oxford products.
O30*. Fine sandy oxidised coarse wares.
O37 Fine sandy oxidised 'West Oxfordshire' coarse ware
O41. Organic tempered (early) Severn Valley ware.
O80. Coarse- (usually grog-) tempered oxidised wares.
O81. Pink grogged ware (Stowe, Buckinghamshire).
R10. Fine reduced `coarse' wares, mostly Oxford products.
R20. Sandy reduced coarse wares.
R37. Fine sandy reduced 'West Oxfordshire' coarse ware.
R38. As R37 with moderate grog inclusions
R90. Coarse- (usually grog-) tempered reduced wares.
R95. Savernake ware (north Wiltshire).
B11. Dorset black-burnished ware (BB1).
C10. Shell-tempered fabrics, undifferentiated.
C20. Limestone-tempered fabrics.
C22. Malvernian palaeozoic limestone-tempered fabric

The fabrics consist almost entirely of locally and regionally produced material. The only import was a single amphora sherd from the ploughsoil and the only certain extra-regional sherds of British origin were a handful of pieces of black-burnished

ware (BB1) from south-east Dorset. The principal fabrics represented were the 'Belgic type' grog-tempered ware (E80) and the unsourced but probably locally-produced reduced coarse ware fabric R37 (and the related fabrics R38 and O37). Fabrics in the limestone-tempered group (C20) and Savernake ware (R95) were fairly consistently present, but in smaller quantities. The occurrence of fabrics by context is shown in the table below.

Table: Total quantities of pottery by context

Context	No. sherds	Weight (g)	Fabrics	Comment
2	325	2445	Wide range	Ploughsoil
5	2	22	E80, C20	
7	1	5	E80	
9	11	49	E80, C20	
13	7	17	E80, C20, R37	
15	8	258	E80, R90, C20	
17	4	26	E80, O41, R37, R38	
19	6	59	E80, R37	
20	1	34	R90	
23	7	83	E80, R37, R90, C10, C20	
24	8	106	E80, O80, R37, R38	
25	16	111	E80, R38, C10, C20	
29	25	261	E20, E80, O81, R10, R20, R37, R90, B11, C20	Mostly 1st century, only O81 and B11 necessarily later
32	7	89	E80, R37, R90, R95	
34	3	4	C10?	Possibly late Iron Age?
42	14	121	E80, R95, B11, C10	B11 sherd intrusive?
44	1	4	E80	
47	34	305	E80, O37, R37, R90, R95, C20	
48	41	508	E80, O80, R37, R95, C20	
49	43	479	E20, E80, R95, C10, C20	
51	21	397	E80, O80, R38, R90, R95, C10	
54	14	149	E80, R90, R95, C20	
56	2	7	R90, C10?	
57	1	14	R38	

Character and chronology

Despite a relative absence of rim sherds (of which there were only 23 from the excavated contexts) the range of fabrics represented is very consistent throughout most of the excavated groups and gives a good impression of the character and chronological range of the assemblage. The majority of the material can be assigned to the 1st century AD. The dominant fabric group, E80, is characteristic of the region

at this time. Its production and use spans the period of the Roman conquest, so it is impossible to determine which side of this point many of the groups belong. In any case, in this region the Roman conquest has no immediate appreciable impact on ceramic assemblages from rural sites. The use of E80 may have continued into the later part of the 1st century AD at some sites, but for the most part is likely to have been at a low level after *c* AD 70. Fabric R37 had a much longer life from the early Roman period onwards. Well known from local sites such as Wilcote and Asthall, it seems to have been in production before the Flavian period, and its manufacture then continued at least to the end of the 3rd century AD. The limited evidence of the vessel types, present, however, and the combination of sherds of R37 with the other fabrics present, mean that there is no need for any of the context groups in which this fabric occurs to have been deposited later than the early 2nd century at the latest. Fabrics such as C20, the early Severn Valley ware (O41) and Savernake ware (R95) are all characteristic of the late Iron Age and/or early Roman periods in this region. Amongst the excavated material only three sherds are likely to have been later in date than this. These are single sherds of fabrics B11 and O81 from context 29, a deposit which in any case is not securely sealed, and another sherd of B11, of a later 2nd century type, from context 42, the upper fill of ditch 40. The other 13 sherds in this group are likely to have been of 1st century date and it is entirely likely that the single B11 sherd was intrusive. In this case it is quite possible that all the linear features have a distinctly short period of use, probably entirely confined within the 1st century AD and spanning the period of the Roman conquest.

A small number of sherds, including the black-burnished ware (of which a further two sherds were found in the ploughsoil material), a couple of fragments of pink grogged ware (fabric O81) and a single sherd of a Oxford white mortarium, probably of 3rd-century type, suggest the presence of Roman activity of the 2nd century and later in the vicinity, but not within the confines of the present site.

Judgements based on such a small group must be treated with caution, but the stratified material suggests that this is a relatively low-status assemblage. A total absence of fine and specialist wares amongst the feature groups is notable. The only slight caveat is raised by the single amphora sherd, unfortunately from the ploughsoil. The source and date of this piece are uncertain; it is clearly not from either Dressel 20 or one of the Gauloise types which dominate most amphora assemblages in the area. It may therefore be significant in an early Roman context, but it could also have derived from the later activity postulated above on the basis of a few of the sherds from the ploughsoil.

5.2 Bone

A total weight of 1352g of bone was recovered from 15 different contexts. The bone preservation is considered to be good.

Context	Number of fragments	Weight (g)
02	2	>1
05	1	1
10	10	68
13	3	2
15	19	530
18	6	22
19	29	257

Context	Number of fragments	Weight (g)
23	4	31
24	2	4
25	8	19
42	9	11
47	20	179
48	22	123
49	7	33
51	7	45
54	3	26

5.3 Worked stone

One heavily struck and damaged flint flake was recovered from deposit (13). This artefact is datable to any period from the late Neolithic to the Bronze Age.

One piece of smooth whetstone weighing 67g was recovered from deposit (23) a fill of ditch **60**.

5.4 Burnt stone

One piece of burnt limestone was recovered from deposit (18) weighing 84g and one piece of burnt limestone weighing 51g was recovered from deposit (19). Two pieces of burnt sandstone weighing 93g were also recovered from deposit (24).

5.5 Slag

Four pieces of slag weighing 58g were recovered from subsoil deposit (29). One piece of slag weighing 9g was revealed in ploughsoil deposit (02).

5.6 Miscellaneous

Part of a knife with a bone handle was recovered from deposit (02). The knife was constructed using the scale tang technique whilst the blade itself is made from iron (Fe). The blade itself is broken.

6 DISCUSSION

The watching brief was successful in recording a series of archaeological features that would have been destroyed without any intervention. Further work though would be needed to confirm the actual width of ditch **60** as the arbitrary levels onto which the site was stripped and the drainage trenches excavated prevented a proper inspection of its width and form in plan. Similarly a section across the full width of ditch **60** at its NE end was not deemed appropriate, because it could not be seen fully in plan. Evidence revealed in the drainage trenches, although limited, showed that further features are present in the south-eastern part of the ménage area which have been preserved *in-situ*.

The watching brief revealed two phases of activity, with ditches 12 and **61**-**63** forming part of a field system or series of rectangular enclosures with an entranceway to the west between gullies 61 and 62. Another probable entrance way is seen further east between gully 12 and gully **63,** although this was less clear as gully **63** had a less prominent terminus and appeared instead to peter out. It is likely that gully 12 extended further north-westwards towards gully 61 but has not survived later ploughing. Again a likely entrance way would have been between the two. This system appears to have been superseded by a possible 'D' shaped or trapezoidal enclosure as seen partly defined in ditch **60**. The form and function of features 53, 58 and 59 further south in relation to those features more fully uncovered however remains unclear but does point to an intensively used site over a short time period.

The fact that the site area site area appears to have only been used over a relatively short time period raises the question over the reasons for its abandonment especially considering the site appears to have been well established judging by the sheer quantity of pottery recovered. However, the site area is not big enough to give a true impression of the settlement as a whole. It is also possible that the activity revealed could be part of a much broader settlement pattern that shifted focus over time but continued within the vicinity.

Previous fieldwalking of the area produced an assemblage of finds including pottery dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries AD suggesting the likelihood of a settlement, probably a farmstead in the vicinity. The pottery recovered from the watching brief however was in the vast majority of cases from the 1st century AD with only a very few examples found to be slightly later including one sherd of back-burnished ware from the 2nd century AD. Although the sheer quantity of pottery recovered from the ploughsoil adds evidence of a significant 1st century AD site, it also points to the possibility of continuous settlement use of the area throughout much of the Roman period. The lack of fine wares with only one discernible example recovered from the ploughsoil points to a relatively low status site during the 1st century at least. The fieldwalking also produced Roman building material and though a constant archaeological presence was maintained during groundwork, no building material was recovered either from the ploughsoil or from any of the features themselves. This could be coincidental or be further evidence that the focus of a possible 3rd-4th century AD settlement or farmstead is slightly further away.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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