

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
AT
80 HIGH STREET, DORCHESTER-ON-THAMES
OXFORDSHIRE

On behalf of

Mr R Anderson

AUGUST 2010

REPORT FOR	Mr R Anderson 51 Watling Lane Dorchester-on-Thames Oxfordshire OX10 7JH
PREPARED BY	Christer Carlsson
ILLUSTRATION BY	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
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CONTENTS

	Page
<i>SUMMARY</i>	1
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Site Location	1
1.2 Planning Background	1
1.3 Archaeological Background	1
2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION	3
3 STRATEGY	3
3.1 Research Design	3
3.2 Methodology	4
4 RESULTS	4
4.1 Results	4
5 FINDS	7
5.1 Pottery	7
5.2 Animal Bone	7
5.3 Metal	7
6 DISCUSSION	8
7 BIBLIOGRAPHY	9
 FIGURES	
Figure 1 Site Location	2
Figure 2 Plan and sections	5

Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted an archaeological evaluation at 80 High Street in Dorchester-on Thames, Oxfordshire (NGR 5775 9462) in August 2010. It is the intention to submit a planning application for the demolition of the existing building and the erection of a replacement dwelling. The archaeological field evaluation described in this report was carried out as a step in the application process. Two trenches were opened up in the garden belonging to the property. A number of ditches and pits were found in the trenches and the pottery in the fills suggests they can be dated to both the Roman period and the early medieval. Residual sherds of Anglo Saxon pottery indicate occupation in the area in the 5th and 6th centuries. The amount of alluvium above the archaeological horizon will allow both a raft foundation and the excavation for services, leaving the archaeology preserved in situ.

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 5775 9462). The site lies at approximately 49m OD and the geology is First Terrace River Gravels. There is an existing house and garden.

1.2 Planning Background

It is the intention to submit a planning application for the demolition of the existing building and the erection of a replacement dwelling. As part of the application this archaeological field evaluation was carried out.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The proposal site lies in an area of some 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 4th century and possibly into the 5th 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 120m to the south west of the site (PRN 12757)(SU 5768 9454) and a stone building and burial dated to this period was uncovered 140m to the east of the site (PRN 13969)(SU 5787 9455). Further Roman burials have been recorded 230m 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

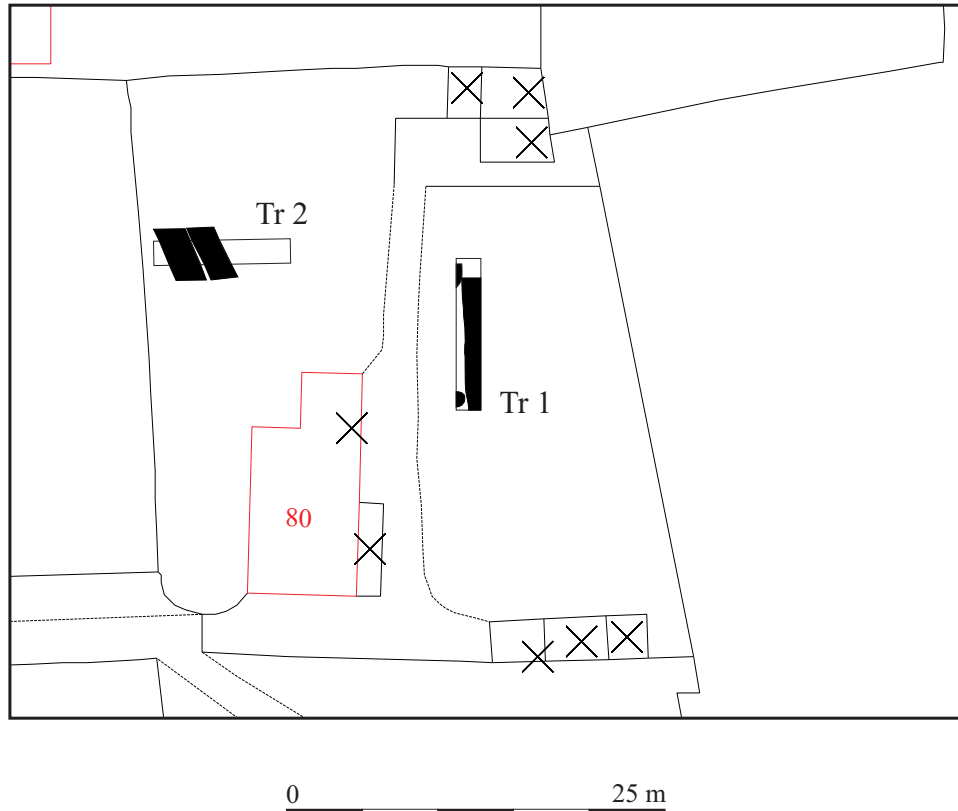
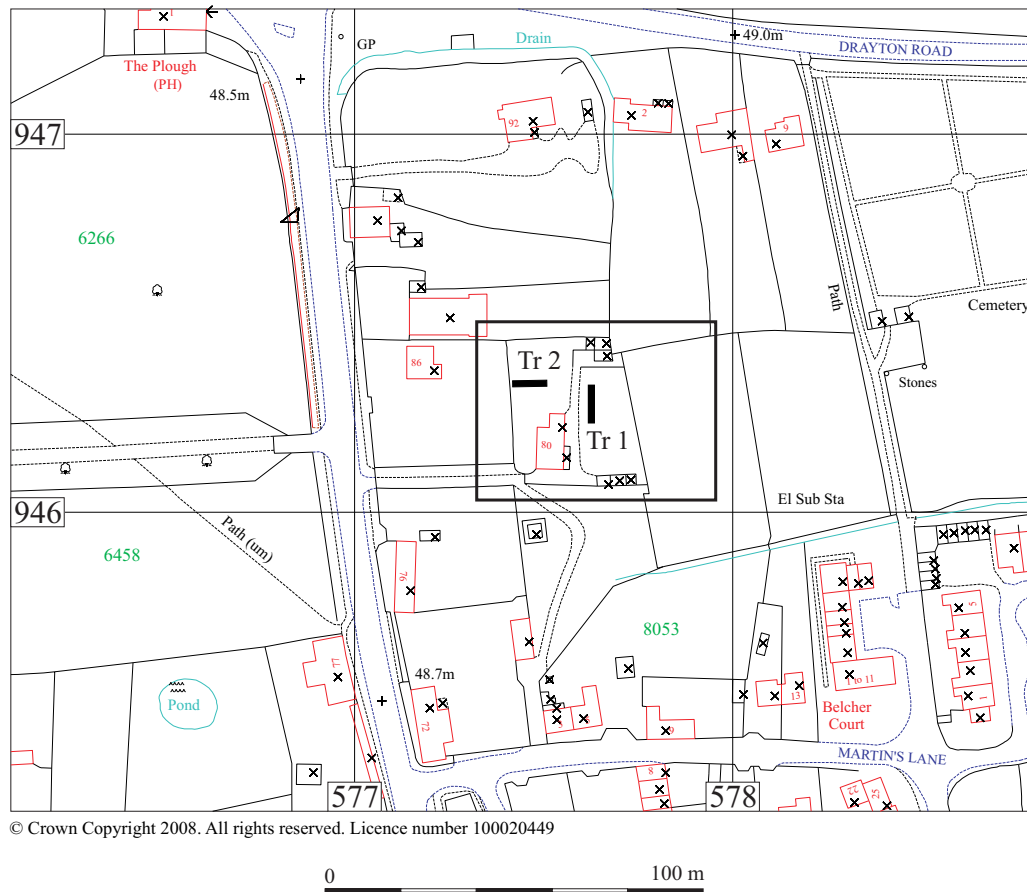


Figure 1. Site location

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 220m 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 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). Little development has taken place in the area since the Ordnance Survey map of 1877 was produced.

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on the adjacent site to the west (JMHS 2008). The gravels were under alluvial deposits that sloped up to the east. The lower alluvial deposits were below the water table and were examined by the excavation of test pits. A ditch terminal of late 3rd century date, orientated NE-SW or E-W along with a pit of late Roman date were found close to the east side of the adjacent site cut into the top of the alluvium. An undated pit was found within the alluvium towards the west side of the site.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To determine the extent to which human remains survive in the affected area.
- 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

Site procedure 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 for Archaeologists (1999).

3.2 Methodology

The field evaluation comprised of mechanical excavation of two trenches, one 9m long and the other 10m long. Each trench was 1.6m wide (Figure 1).

The two trenches were excavated by a 360° type tracked excavator fitted with a 1.2 m wide toothless ditching bucket. Mechanical excavation was taken down to the top of the alluvium. The resulting surface was hand cleaned and selected features and deposits were sampled excavated by hand in order to meet the aims as defined above.

The integrity of archaeological features or deposits that might better be excavated in conditions pertaining to full excavation, or might warrant preservation in situ, were not compromised. Sondages were machine excavated through the alluvium where visible features were not present in order to determine the presence/absence of earlier remains.

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. A context sheet was also produced for every archaeological feature and deposit. A full photographic record of the trenches was completed using 35mm format black and white film, colour film and digital cameras.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1999).

4 RESULTS

A number of features of archaeological interest were found during the archaeological recording action. All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material whilst the other numbers reflect structures or features cut into layers. The position of the trenches and the location of the features are shown on the plan below (Figure 2).

4.1 Field Results

Trench 1

The lowest deposit in Trench 1 was the firm mid white-grey natural consisting of gravel with sand inclusions (113). Cut into the natural were the two pits 107 and 109 and the ditch 111. Pit 107 was 0.5m long, 0.4m wide and 0.15m deep. It had a moderately compact fill of mid orange-brown sandy silt (108). The fill contained some Roman pottery dated to the late 3rd – 4th century.

Pit 109 was 1.5m long, 0.4m wide and 0.25m deep. It had a fill of loose light yellow-grey sandy silt with some gravel inclusions (110). The fill contained some Roman pottery dated to the 2nd century.

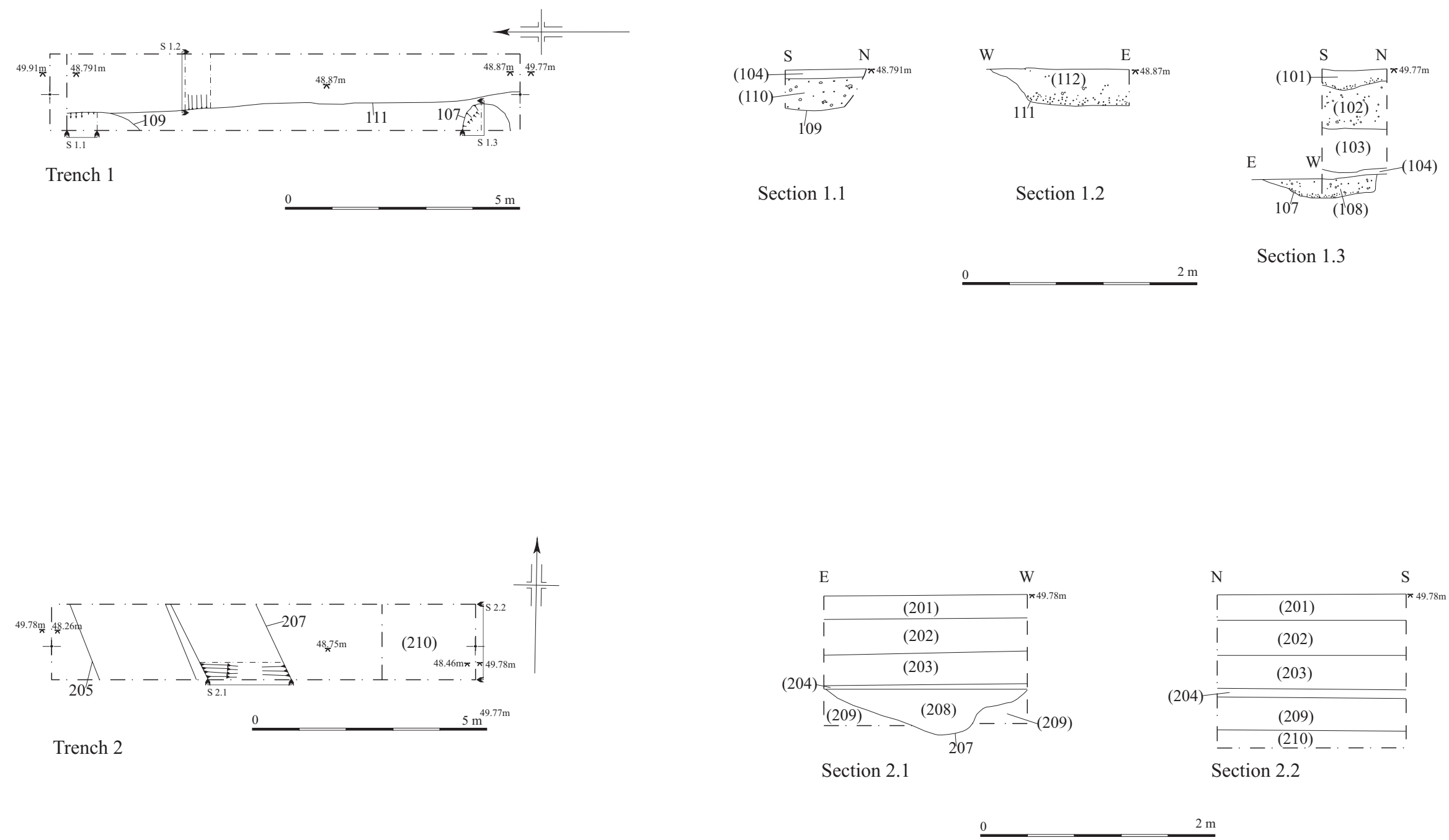


Figure 2. Trenches 1 and 2 Plans and sections

Ditch 111 was running N-S along the whole length of the trench and had a moderately irregular slope from the west and a flat base. The eastern side of the ditch was not visible in the trench since it went into the eastern section of the trench. The exposed part of the ditch was 1.2m wide and 0.3m deep. Ditch 111 had a moderately compact fill of mid black-grey sandy silt with frequent gravel and flint inclusions (112). The pottery from the ditch indicates an early medieval date.

These features in Trench 1 were all sealed by the 0.07m thick layer (104). This layer consisted of dark grey-brown and highly compact clay with rare limestone inclusions. The layer contained some early Saxon pottery (see Discussion).

Overlying layer (104) was a 0.35m thick layer of highly compact mid grey-brown silty clay with rare limestone inclusions (103). Layer (103) was overlaid by the 0.4m thick layer (102) consisting of highly compact mid grey-brown silty clay with common limestone inclusions. All layers and archaeological features in Trench 1 were sealed by the 0.15m thick topsoil of loose grey-brown silty clay (101). Further Roman and Anglo Saxon pottery was found in the topsoil.

Trench 2

The lowest deposit in Trench 2 was the firm mid yellow-orange natural consisting of gravel with sand and flint inclusions (210). The natural was overlaid by a 0.3 m thick alluvium layer consisting of semi-compact grey-yellow clay with gravel inclusions (209). Cut through the alluvium layer and down into the natural were the two ditches 205 and 207.

Ditch 205 was running N-S in Trench 2. The ditch was not excavated and was 2m wide in plan. The ditch contained a fill of loose mid brown silty-clay with inclusions of pottery, gravel and charcoal (206).

Ditch 207 was almost parallel to ditch 205 and was therefore also running N-S in Trench 2. The ditch was 1.8 m wide and 0.2m deep. The ditch had a gradual slope from the west and a rounded base. The ditch contained a fill of loose mid brown silty-clay with inclusions of gravel and charcoal (208). The pottery from the fill suggests an early Roman date.

Sealing the two ditches in Trench 2 was a 0.07m thick and highly compact dark-grey-brown layer of clay (204). In the layer was found some animal bone. Layer (204) was overlaid by a 0.3m thick and highly compact mid brown-grey layer of silty clay (203). In this layer was also found some animal bone.

Layer (203) was overlaid by a 0.3m thick and highly compact mid grey-brown layer of silty clay (202). In layer (202) was found some medieval and Roman pottery, animal bones and ceramic building material. All layers and archaeological features in Trench 2 were sealed by the 0.2m thick topsoil of loose mid grey-brown silty clay with inclusions of gravel and flint (201).

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery (by Paul Booth)

Introduction

The evaluation produced some 42 sherds of pottery, mostly of Roman date but including four early Saxon and three medieval sherds. The pottery was scanned quite briefly and the material was recorded using codes in the Oxford Archaeological Unit pottery recording system. A spot date was assigned to each context group. The pottery was generally in quite good condition. Sherd size varied considerably but few sherds were abraded as a result of frequent redeposition and surfaces were mostly well-preserved.

Pottery by context by period (no. sherds/weight g)

CONTEXT	ROMAN	ANGLO-SAXON	MEDIEVAL	FABRICS/FORMS	CONTEXT DATE
101	4/94	1/15		R10 (flanged bowl), R30, [Z10]	5th-6th century or later
104	9/91	3/55		S30 (?Drag 31), A11, R10 (jar/bowl), R20, R30, [Z10]	late 5th-6th century
108	2/4			F51, R10	late 3rd-4th century
110	4/27			M22, O10, R20, R30 (jar)	2nd century
112	3/11		2/14	F51, R10, [OXAG, OXAQ]	1150-1350
202	6/140		1/14	W11, R10, R20, R30, B30 (flanged bowl), [OXAQ]	1150-1350
208	7/117			S30, R10, R20, R30	120-200
TOTAL	35/484	4/70	3/28		

Fabrics, forms and chronology

The majority of the Roman pottery derived from the Oxford industry, of which the southernmost production centres lie in the immediate vicinity of Dorchester. The red colour-coated ware (fabric F51), mortarium (M22), white ware (fabric W11) and fine and moderately sand-tempered oxidised and reduced coarse wares (fabrics O10, R10, R20 and R30) can all be assigned to this industry. Non-local fabrics include the wheel-thrown black-burnished type fabric B30. The latter was not the typical Dorset black-burnished ware fabric; its source is unknown. Imported pottery is represented by two sherds of samian ware, probably Central Gaulish (fabric S30), and a single south Spanish amphora fragment (fabric A11). Identifiable vessel forms range from the 2nd-4th century in date. Fabrics F51 and W11 are dateable to the period 240-400, but most of the other fabrics (except samian ware) have broad date ranges within the Roman period.

Four of the seven contexts contain post-Roman pottery. The Anglo-Saxon sherds in Trench 1, all in sand-tempered fabrics, are important as two of the three sherds in

context 104 are from the shoulder of a decorated vessel which can be dated to the late 5th-6th century with some confidence. The medieval sherds from Trench 2 are in fabrics (OXAG, OXAQ) characteristic of the region, both with a date range of *c* 1150-1350. The presence of early Saxon pottery is the most significant aspect of this assemblage.

5.2 Animal bone

In layers (202), (203) and (204) in Trench 2 pieces of animal bone were found. It is mostly bones from domesticated cattle. Some bones had butchering marks or had been split for cooking. Layer (204) also contained some burned animal bone.

5.3 Metal

A small nail of copper was found in layer (204).

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological evaluation at 80 High Street, Dorchester-on-Thames showed that archaeological features with a good potential are present on the site. A number of pits and ditches were found in two trenches about 0.8m - 1m below the present ground surface.

The amount of Roman pottery could indicate a settlement of intense occupation but see below. The two pits in Trench 1 contained pottery dating one to the 2nd century and the other to the late 3rd to 4th century. Ditch 207 in Trench 2 was dated to 120-200 AD. The two ditches in Trench 2 were cut through a layer of alluvium similar to that on the site to the west. Later Roman features were found on the site immediately to the west (JMHS 2008).

The Roman ditches could be field ditches. 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. However the amount of Roman pottery and the pits suggest settlement and not just agricultural use of the area.

The Anglo Saxon pottery is all residual but shows that occupation of the period was carried out in the area. This must be a settlement associated with the burial found in the recreation ground. It is possible that Roman pottery was collected by Saxons as seen on other sites. This should be taken into account with respect to the possible Roman settlement discussed above.

Ditch 111 was dated to the early medieval period by two sherds of pottery. A further sherd was present in later alluvium. The presence of such pottery suggests occupation in the area. This may have been a farmstead outside of the town.

The majority of the flooding causing the laying down on the alluvium appears to be after the early medieval period as the medieval ditch is sealed by such material.

The level of the archaeological features allows a raft foundation for the proposed house similar to that immediately to the west. There is also sufficient depth of material for services. This will allow the archaeology to be preserved *in situ*.

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