



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

GREENDOWN, PEARSON ROAD, SONNING,

BERKSHIRE

NGR SU 7594 7541

*On behalf of
Mr T. Gubba*

SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT FOR Mr T. Gubba
Greendown,
Pearson Road,
Sonning-on-Thames
Berkshire

PREPARED BY David Gilbert

ILLUSTRATION BY Eoin Fitzsimons

FIELDWORK 15th – 20th September 2010

REPORT ISSUED 30th September 2010

ENQUIRES TO John Moore Heritage Services
Hill View
Woodperry Road
Beckley
Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ

Tel/Fax 01865 358300
Email: info@jmheritageservices.co.uk

Site Code: SOPR 10
JMHS Project No: 2269
Accession number: Awaiting

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	2
3 STRATEGY	4
3.1 Research Design	4
3.2 Methodology	4
4 RESULTS	4
4.1 Excavation Results	4
4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results	7
5 FINDS	7
5.1 Pottery	7
5.2 Environmental Remains	8
6 DISCUSSION	9
7 ARCHIVE	9
8 BIBLIOGRAPHY	9
FIGURES	
Figure 1 Site Location	3
Figure 2 Site Plan and Sections	5

Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted an archaeological watching brief during the groundwork for a new garage. The majority of the site had been the subject of quarrying, probably for gravel extraction in the early to mid 19th century. Earlier activity was noted by an 11th-14th century pit and 17th century gully. The pottery assemblage is most notable for the base of a rare imported 'Hessian Ware' graphitic crucible.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located at Greendown, Pearson Road, Sonning (NGR SU 7594 7541). The underlying geology is Upper Chalk but very close to the boundary of Lambeth Group Clay and deposits of Head Gravel (BGS sheet 268).

1.2 Planning Background

Wokingham Borough Council granted planning permission for the erection of a detached double garage and new vehicular access and turning area at Greendown, Pearson Road, Sonning (F/2010/0417). Due to the potential for the work to disturb archaeological deposits and human remains, a planning condition was attached to the permission requiring that an archaeological watching brief be maintained. This is in line with PPS5 and Local Plan policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The earliest known archaeological artefacts from Sonning include a stone mace head dated loosely between the Palaeolithic and Neolithic (HER 00889.00.000-MWK8859) and a Roman coin (HER 02542.00.000-MWK11991). It has not been ascertained if these represent stray finds through loss or are part of larger settlements in the area.

The Church dominates the known history of Sonning as in a charter in Hicke's Thesaurus of AD 964 mentions *Osulf Sunnungnensis episcopus*, the bishop of Sonning (Gelling 1973, 132-133), while Florence of Worcester has a list of late Anglo-Saxon bishops which mentions *Sunningnensis ecclesiae*. That there was an Anglo-Saxon bishopric focused on Sonning may explain the church being a holding of Salisbury Cathedral in 1091 (VCH 1923, 220-5). It is feasible that a bishop was briefly based at Sonning, serving Berkshire and parts of Wiltshire, after Dorchester was annexed to the Mercia from Wessex, and before the bishopric moved to Ramsbury (Berkshire) and then Salisbury (Wiltshire), where the caput has been since the Norman period.

The Church at Sonning, from the reference to a bishop, is believed to have been a minster or cathedral church at some time in its history. That the church once served a larger territory is evident with its status as a mother church in 1222 when the chapels of Wokingham, Sandhurst, Hurst, Arbofield, and Ruscombe are all called chapels (VCH 1923, 220-5). This is an extensive *parochiae* (large Anglo-Saxon Parish) and it

is apparent from the place-name Sonning that the church was established over the *Sonninges* (a folk-name) usually interpreted as *Sunna's-ingas* or *Sunna's-people* (Gelling 1973, 132-3). The first name is identified as a personal name, but often they may also have a topographical association.

The church of Saint Andrew, so called from 1220 (VCH 1923, 220-5), is located some 400m from the development site. It is, however, known that many Anglo-Saxon minsters had far larger cemeteries than they do in the present day, and may even have had satellite cemeteries. The cemetery at Sonning is known to have been far larger in the past as finds have been made at the Bell Hotel on a regular basis (in 1881, 2001, 2003, 2007, and 2008) of early medieval burials normally dated to the 10th or 11th centuries (HER ERM736, ERM970, MRM15998, MRM16052), and other early medieval and high medieval (12th-14th centuries) ditches (HER MRM16236, MRM16237, MRM16238). Further ditches have been found at a site called the Old Walls (HER ERM535 SU 75632 75362).

An important group of names in Sonning include Borough Farm, Borough Bridge, Borough Lake and Borough Marsh. The name is first recorded as *Burwey* in 1577 and as a surname derived from the place-name in 1220 *de Burgeia* (Gelling 1973, 133). This is one of a group of 4 names which originate from *burh*-(ī)eg. The name is interpreted as an 'island meadow belonging to the borough', and has previously been interpreted as 'an island with a prehistoric camp'. In the Oxfordshire example near Bampton the settlement is a prehistoric fort built on the valley floor. The name may imply that there is a prehistoric fort at Sonning, such sites have been known in the past as good locations for the establishment of minsters as the rampart becomes the monastic vallum or precinct boundary (for example as at Kempsey and Fladbury both in Worcestershire), or that there was a borough or planned medieval town at Sonning. The *Victoria County History* does not mention a historically known Borough at Sonning, so we are left with the possibility that the former is more likely.

In 1086 the manor of Sonning is mentioned as having 24 hides, but previously in 1066 had 60 hides (Morgan 1979, 3.1). The manor had a fair sized population with 40 villagers, 16 smallholders, and 10 slaves. What is not made clear is how many of these are resident at the caput of the manor, and how many live at outlying hamlets. The priest at Sonning was called Roger, but the church he holds was at Wallingford. The early medieval accounts indicate that there was a church at Sonning at this date.

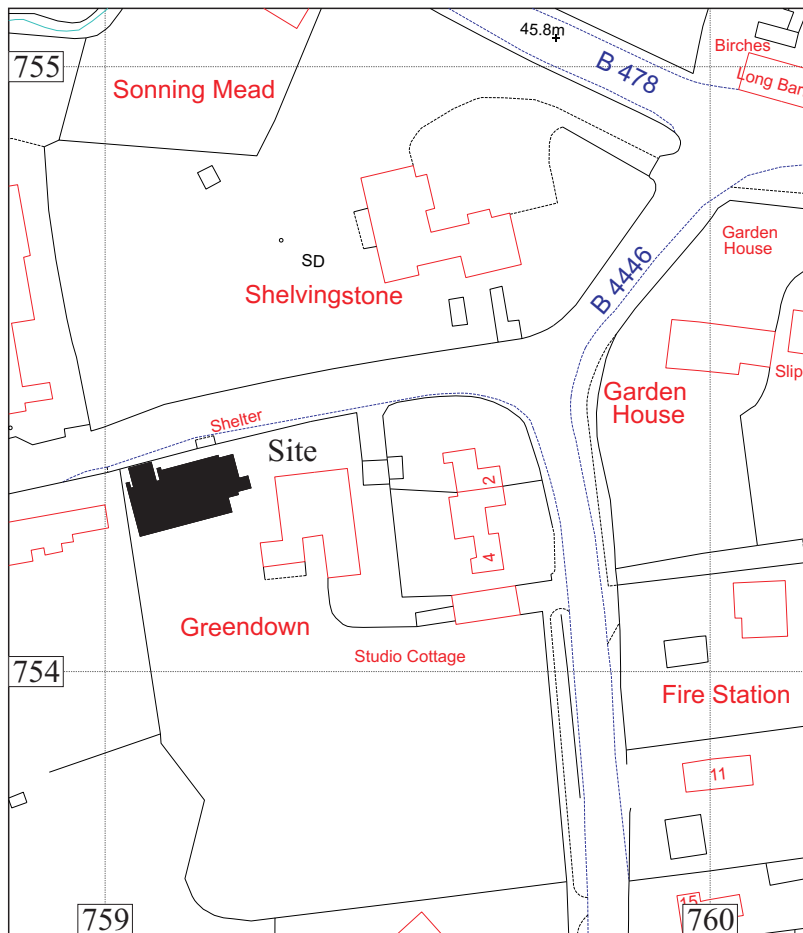
The village of Sonning today has some 25 listed buildings (besides the church) ranging in date from the 16th-19th centuries (see HER), most of these are Grade II listed buildings, although the Bell Hotel is a Grade II*. The OS 1:10,560 map of 1882 shows the area to be very similar to that at present.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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



© Crown Copyright 2008. All rights reserved. Licence number LIG0037



Ordnance Survey (c) Crown Copyright 2010. All rights reserved. Licence number 100020449

0 50 m

Figure 1. Site location

- To record any archaeological remains that will be impacted on by the development.
- In particular to record the potential for features relating to medieval settlement.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Berkshire Archaeology.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (2008).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist monitored the course of all invasive groundworks that had the potential to disturb or destroy archaeological 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 photographic record was also produced.

4 RESULTS

All features were assigned individual context numbers. Numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material. A general description of the contexts observed are given below.

4.1 Excavation Results

The lowest deposit encountered in the area was a bright pale yellow-orange clay sand with gravel (09) related to the natural geological head gravel deposits in the area.

Cut 13 into the natural (09) in the centre of the site was a gully aligned roughly north to south. It appeared to be at right-angles to the road. It was 0.5m wide and 0.2m deep with a U-shaped profile. It was filled with a brown-grey sandy clay (14) containing 17th century pottery and small fragments of coal.

The western portion of the site had been the subject of quarrying, presumably for gravel. One side of this quarry that was irregular in plan was recorded cut 10 into the natural (09). This quarrying had truncated the earlier gully 13.

The lowest deposit encountered within this quarry was a light brown-grey sandy clay (12) with c. 50% gravel. Charcoal, iron and brick fragments were visible on the surface. It was uncertain if this material had been pressed into this deposits and it marked the base of the quarry or if this was a lower fill.

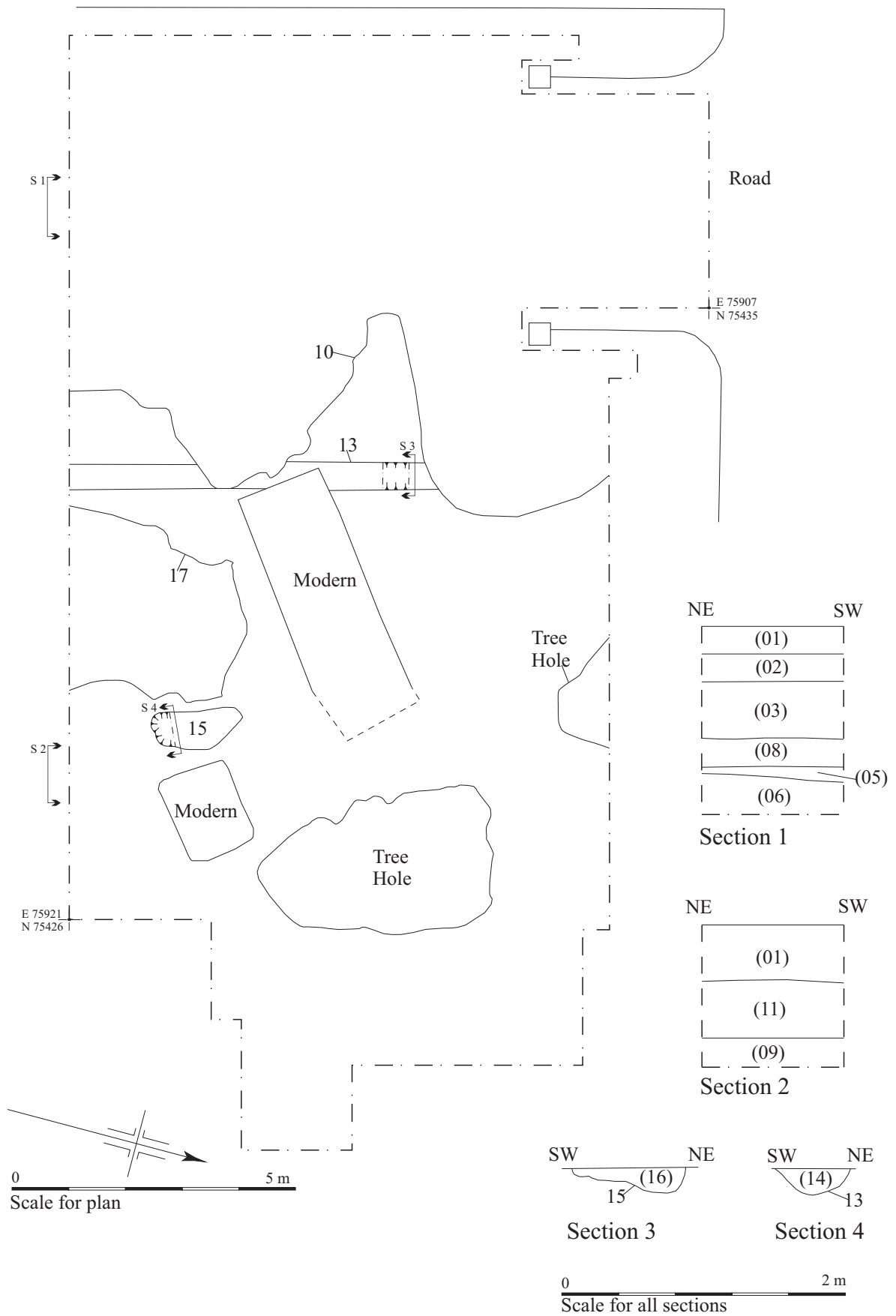


Figure 2. Plan and sections

Above this was a 0.25m thick layer of chalk fragments in a pale-mid grey clay matrix (07). This deposit was patchy and not uniform in thickness or present across the entire quarry area. Overlying this was a 0.15m –0.25m thick layer of mid grey gritty clay (06) with the rare fleck of charcoal. This layer also contained 17th century pottery and fragments of metal working slag.

Over this was a layer up to 0.15m thick of dark brown-grey sandy clay (05) that contained lenses of charcoal and ash with 19th century pottery as well as small pieces of coal, slag and brick fragments. Overlying these fills was a layer of orange sand fleck with small chalk fragments (08) and containing numerous pieces of 19th century pottery, tile and brick. This layer was up to 0.2m thick. Both layers (05) and (08) were seen to generally slope downwards to the west, displaying tip-lines.

The nearby large pit 17 was probably also part of the same quarry 10. This was also cut in to the natural (09). It was not fully excavated, but the lowest fill seen consisted of a mid brown-grey sandy clay flecked with charcoal and with a moderate quantity of gravel (18). It also contained coal, metal working slag, chalk and brick fragments.

Both fills (05) and (18) were covered by a compacted layer of pale orange-grey-brown sandy-clay flecked with charcoal (03). This layer was 0.4-0.5m thick and is thought to be one of the upper fills of the quarry.

Above this layer (03), and apparently dumped against the western garden wall was a deposit of orange brown clay-sand (04) that was up to 0.5m thick. It extended approximately 1.5m to the east of the garden wall, becoming thinner towards the east.

Overlying these deposits was a layer of light grey-brown clay-sand (02) with flint pebbles, charcoal flecks, chalk and brick fragments. It varied in thickness from 0.2m to 0.4m. It is unlikely to be the uppermost layer of the quarry fill, but more an attempt to create a subsoil and level up the uneven ground.

To the east of the site was a shallow pit 15, this was cut in to the natural (09) and was roughly D-shaped in plan measuring 1.5m long by 0.8m wide. It was 0.15m deep with an irregular profile and filled with a pale brown-grey sandy clay (16) flecked with charcoal containing 11th – 14th century pottery.

This pit was sealed by a subsoil, consisting of mid-dark brown sandy clay (11) with sparse flint inclusions, which was up to 0.4m thick. This layer was not present towards the west of the site having been removed by the quarry, however this layer merged with layer (02) towards the centre of the site and no discernable cut or junction could be seen.

Cut into layer (11) were two modern pits, likely for geo-technical investigations. The impressions of the toothed machine bucket could be clearly seen in both. Also two areas of heavy root penetration associated with trees were recorded in this area.

The uppermost layer was a dark brown-grey sandy loam topsoil up to 0.4m thick (01).

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The results are considered to be good. The archaeologist was alerted to all invasive groundworks being undertaken on site and was given full access to the site. The work took place on dry days with excellent co-operation from the ground workers.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery (By Paul Blinkhorn)

The pottery assemblage comprised 34 sherds with a total weight of 978g. It comprised mainly post-medieval or modern wares, although two medieval sherds, one of which is stratified, were also present. The assemblage is most notable for the base of a rare 'Hessian Ware' graphitic crucible.

The following fabrics were noted:

MS: Medieval Sandy ware, Late 11th-14th century? Dense sub-rounded white, grey and clear quartz up to 0.5 mm. Early medieval pottery types similar to this are found along a considerable length of the middle Thames Valley and its hinterland, and the problem of differentiating between the numerous different wares has been noted in the past (Mellor 1994, 84). 1 sherd, 17g.

M40: 'M40' type ware. ?Late 11th – 14th century (Hinton 1973). Hard, flint and limestone unglazed ware, with a possible kiln sources at Camley Gardens near Maidenhead (Pike, 1965) and Denham in Buckinghamshire (op. cit. Mellor 1994, 86). Known at numerous sites in south Oxfordshire and Berkshire. 1 sherd, 3g.

GRE: Red Earthenware, 16th – 19th century. Fine sandy earthenware, usually with a brown or green glaze, occurring in a range of utilitarian forms. Such 'country pottery' was first made in the 16th century, and in some areas continued in use until the 19th century. 10 sherds, 292g.

MET: Metropolitan-type Slipware: Uniform, brick-red fabric. Moderately sorted matrix, sparse red and milky quartz and red and black ironstone up to 0.5mm. Abundant grey quartz up to 0.2mm, occasional mica. Produced from c. 1615-1700. 1 sherd, 11g.

HW: 'Hessian Ware'. Dark grey, graphite-rich fabric used exclusively for industrial crucibles. Wheel-thrown, triangular-section bodies with flat bases, often with stamped merchant's marks on the base. First made in Germany, in the 15th century, earliest imports to England probably date to the mid-18th century, and no evidence for the manufacture of graphite crucibles in England before the 19th century (Cotter 1992, 268.). 1 sherd, 140g.

LES: Late English Stoneware. 1750+. Hard, grey fabric, often with a brown, iron-rich exterior wash. Range of utilitarian vessels. 2 sherds, 68g.

19th: Miscellaneous 19th and 20th century wares. Mass-produced white earthenwares, stonewares etc. 18 sherds, 447g.

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 presence of a 'Hessian Ware' graphitic crucible is certainly worthy of comment. Such vessels are rare finds in England, despite being imported in large numbers in their heyday. Examples are known from Canterbury and London (Cotter 1992, 259-60),

and, more locally, a fragment occurred amongst an assemblage of laboratory equipment excavated at the Oxford Science Museum, and probably dating to around 1780 (Blinkhorn in archive, *op. cit.* Bennett *et al.* 2000, 27).

The vessel from this site is a complete base, with two stamps to the underside of the base, one a merchant's mark and the other either an 'S' or a '5'. The merchant's mark, which appears to incorporate a 't' and a 'k', is very similar to an example from the base of a graphite crucible from Canterbury (Cotter 1992, Fig. 3 no. 10). Like the Canterbury example, this vessel also has very sparse calcitic inclusions, as do two other vessels from the city (*ibid.* 260). Cotter (*ibid.* 263) has suggested that graphitic crucibles with merchant's marks incorporating a 'k' may all have a common source in Bavaria or Austria. Such vessels were produced in Bavaria from around 1400. (*ibid.* 266), but are thought not to have arrived in Britain until around 1750, although the Fulham potter John Dwight refers to them in a letter dated 1697/8 (*op. cit. ibid.* 268). They are thought not to have been made in England before 1800 (*ibid.*). The vessels appear to have been particularly favoured by goldsmiths, but were used in other metallurgical processes, such as brass and copper manufacturing, and the assaying of tin and other metals. Apothecaries, physicians, glassworkers and even potters also utilized them in various processes (*ibid.* 265). This vessel has some black residue on the inner surface.

The dating of the vessel from this site is a little uncertain. The context also yielded two unremarkable sherds of GRE, which could date to any time within the life-span of the tradition, and so although given a *tpq* of the 17th century, the context could easily, and probably is, later.

The range of fabric types is otherwise generally typical of sites in the region, and is largely post-medieval in date. One of the two sherds of medieval pottery is stratified, in context [16], and is from the rim of a bowl.

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

Cntxt	M40		MS2		HW		GRE		MET		LES		19th		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
2							1	43					3	207	19thC
3							3	104					6	160	19thC
5							1	32					6	54	19thC
6					1	140	2	53							17thC?
8									1	11			3	26	19thC
12							1	22							17thC
14	1	3					1	33							17thC
16			1	17											L11thC
18							1	5			2	68			18thC
Total	1	3	1	17	1	140	10	292	1	11	2	68	18	447	

5.2 Environmental Remains

No environmental samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION

The majority of the site had been the subject of quarrying, probably for gravel extraction in the early to mid 19th century, certainly prior to the publication of the first edition OS map in 1882.

The earliest activity on site is an isolated pit 15 dating from the 11th –14th century. This activity may have been more widespread as a residual sherd dated to the 11th-14th century was recovered from the gully 13.

The pottery recovered from this gully 13 dates from the 16th-19th century. A date in the 17th century is likely as the gully is truncated by the later quarrying.

The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1882 shows a line of trees in the area, these trees may be related to the tree-holes seen in the eastern section of the site.

The present house is not present on the 1900 OS 1:2,500 map, but is depicted on the 1913 OS 1:2,500 map. The site is outside the grounds to the house (to the west) on these maps and on that of 1932. The western garden wall is not depicted on these maps, indicating that deposits (04) and (02) must post date 1932.

There were dumps of ash, charcoal and other burnt debris in thin lenses within layer (05) of the quarry fill. Metal working slag was noticed from contexts (05), (06) and (18). These could easily have been from the industrial process that the 'Hessian Ware' graphitic crucible was associated with. Unfortunately there is no other evidence for industrial process.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

The project brief
Written scheme of investigation
The project report
The primary site records

Physical Record

The finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to Reading Museum.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gelling, M 1973 *The Place-Names of Berkshire*, volume 1 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Institute for Archaeologists 1994 *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*. Revised 2008

Morgan, P 1979 Domesday Book: Berkshire, Chichester: Phillimore

VCH 1923 The History of the County of Berkshire, volume 3, London: Saint Catherine's Press