JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

09/01749/F – PARK FARM, HEYFORD ROAD, MIDDLETON STONEY, OXFORDSHIRE

SP 5179 2423

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

On behalf of

J. H. Norman & Son

JULY 2010

REPORT FOR	J. H. Norman & Son c/o Turney Group Middleton Stoney Bicester Oxfordshire OX25 4AB
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An archaeological watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services for the development of the erection of a Grain Store. Settlement activity of the very late Iron Age and the early Roman period was found. This consisted of an enclosure, other ditches and occasional pits.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site was located to the northwest of Middleton Stoney Park and south of the former Upper Heyford Airbase and Heyford Road (NGR SP 5179 2423). The underlying geology was Great Oolite Limestone and the site lies at approximately 125m OD. The site for the Grain Store lay north and west of existing farm buildings.

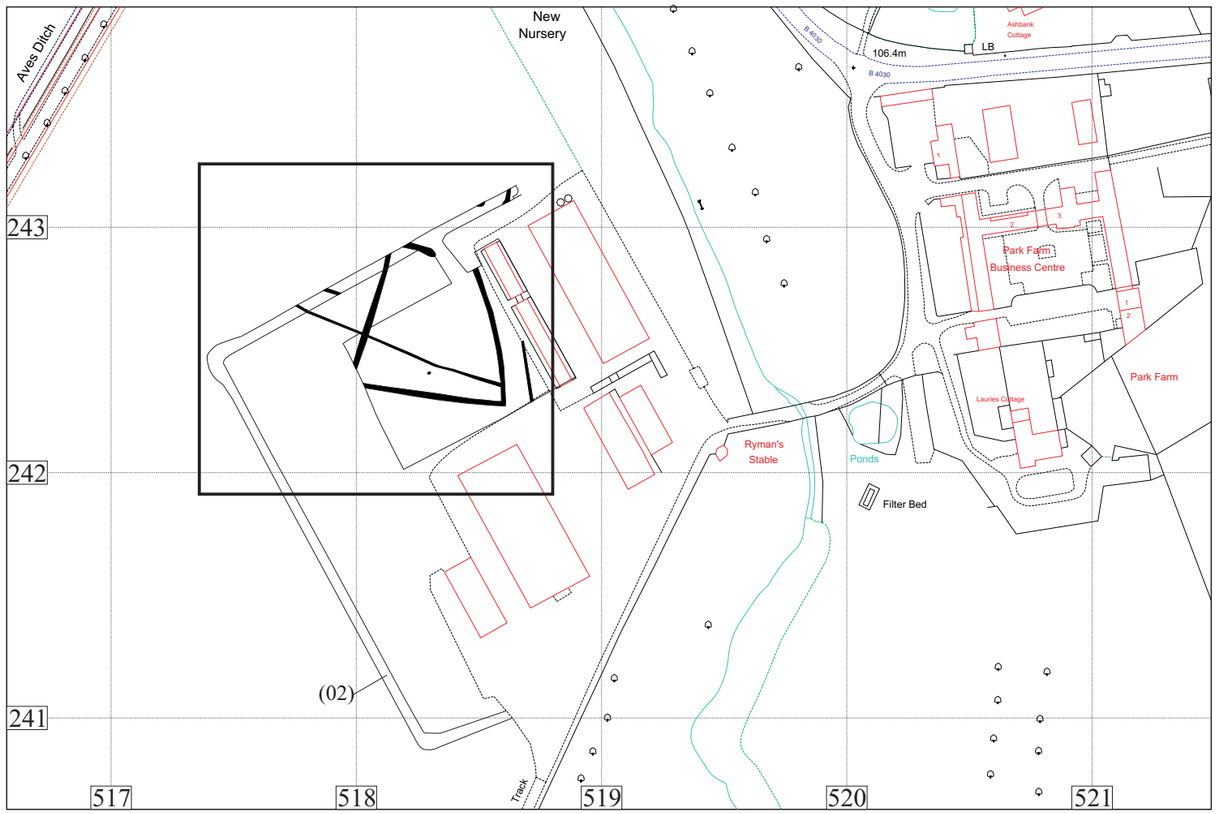
1.2 Planning Background

Cherwell District Council granted planning permission under 09/01749/F for the erection of a Pig Fattening shed to replace an existing building, and the erection of a Grain Store and Electrical Control Building. Due to the potential of the site to contain buried archaeological remains a condition was attached requiring that an archaeological watching brief be carried out during the period of groundworks. This was in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan policies. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a *Brief* for the work.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The area of the development lay within an area of some archaeological potential. It is located 100m east of the route of Aves Ditch which is thought to be an Iron Age tribal boundary (County Historic Environment Record PRN 8925; NGR SP 5175 2447). Within the development area a rectangular enclosure has been recorded (PRN 11551; SP 5180 2419) and further enclosures have been recorded 200m west of the site (PRN 11553; SP 5165 2440). These later enclosures were partly excavated during the construction of a pipeline which recorded them as Iron Age enclosures with pits, probably representing a small farmstead. 300m north of the proposal site further Iron Age enclosures, including a banjo enclosure, have been recorded (PRN 17442; SP 5188 2461). As part of the pipeline work, an excavation recorded a Mid to Late Iron Age settlement and associated burials (PRN 26106; SP 5194 2457). A number of finds from the Mesolithic to Bronze Age, Roman and Medieval periods have been recovered from the application site after ploughing, which included a considerable amount of Roman pottery (PRN 11552; SP 5185 2430).

Immediately south of the application area an archaeological evaluation was carried out ahead of the construction of a new farm building which recorded a small pit and posthole. While undated, the report concluded they were of probable modern date. The evaluation was south of the area of cropmarks which were located in the area of this investigation (Saunders 2000).



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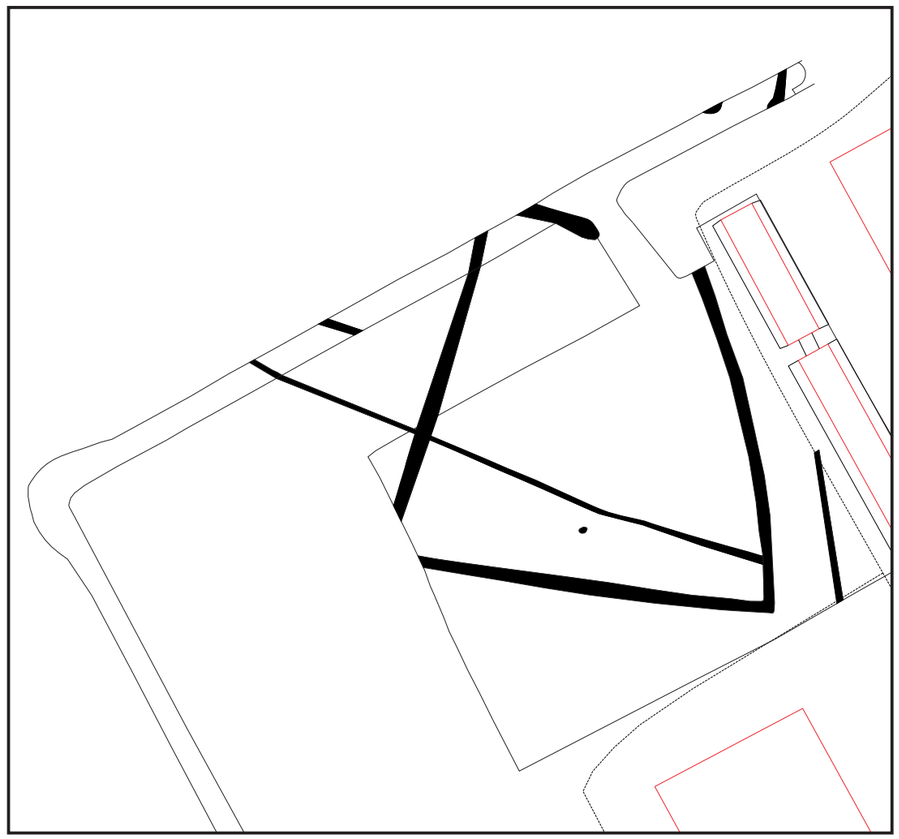

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Figure 1. Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

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

- In particular to record any evidence relating to the known cropmarks in the proposal area, and the finds of Iron Age remains and Roman pottery in the vicinity.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS). 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 for Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present on site as the overburden was reduced to the top of the Great Oolite Limestone. This occurred over the whole area to be reduced for the development. The excavation for the perimeter road to the north and west only removed the ploughsoil down to the top of the limestone and the archaeological remains were not to impacted on further. Five assistants undertook sample hand excavation of the features on one day. The area for the new Pig Fattening Shed to the east had previously been reduced for the existing building.

4 RESULTS Figures 2 and 3

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

Overlying the natural limestone (3) was a 20-50mm thick layer of mid grey-brown slightly clayey silt with 60-70% limestone content (2) that was the result of ploughing into the top of the limestone. The topsoil (1), former ploughsoil, was 130-150mm thick.

Cut into the natural were several features. An enclosure measuring 35-60m NW-SE by 56m internally was represented by ditch 20 and 25 on the SW side, ditch 9 and 34 on the NW side, ditch 36 on the NE side and ditch 48 on the SE side. An entrance in

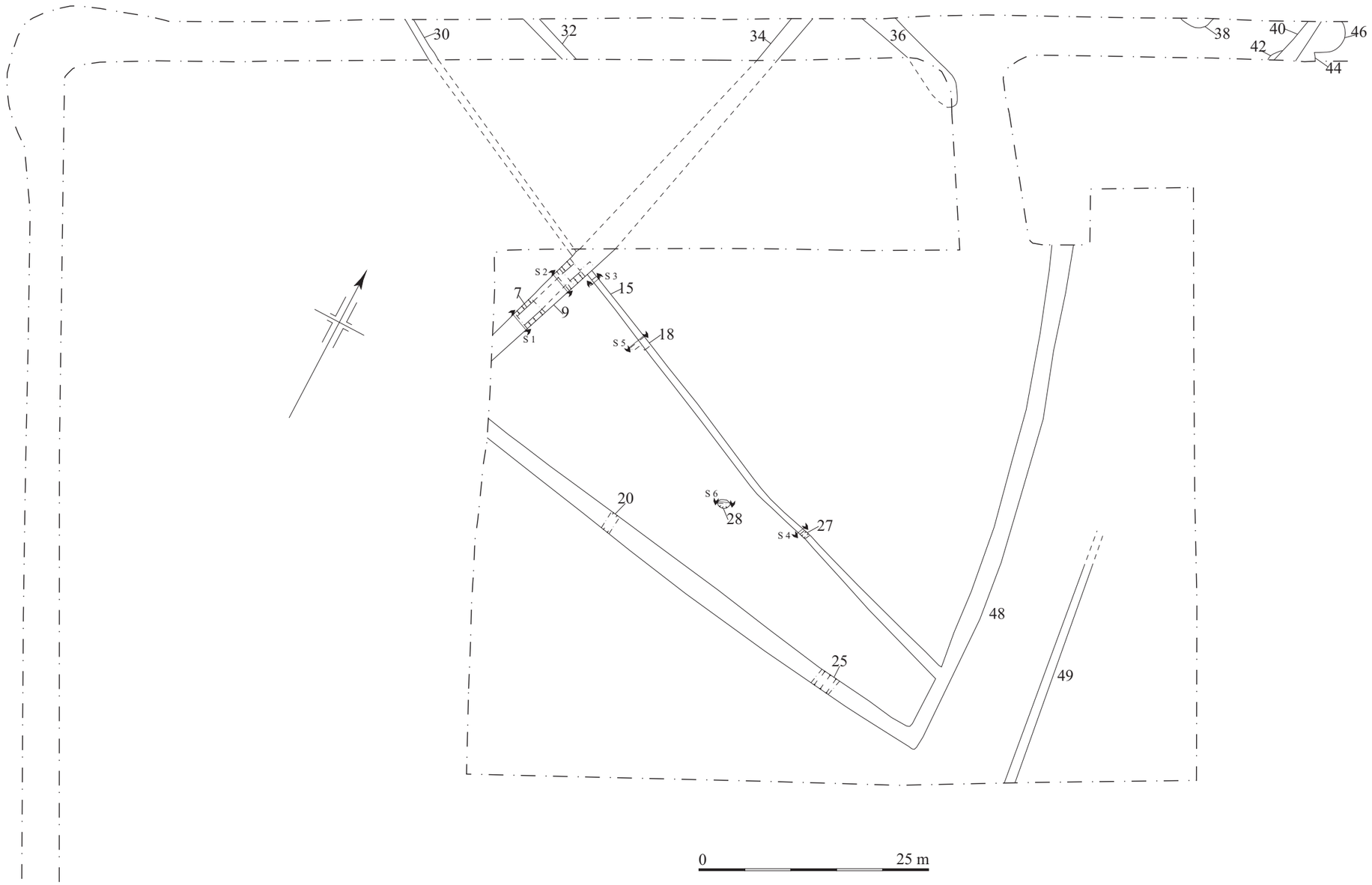


Figure 2. Plan of area

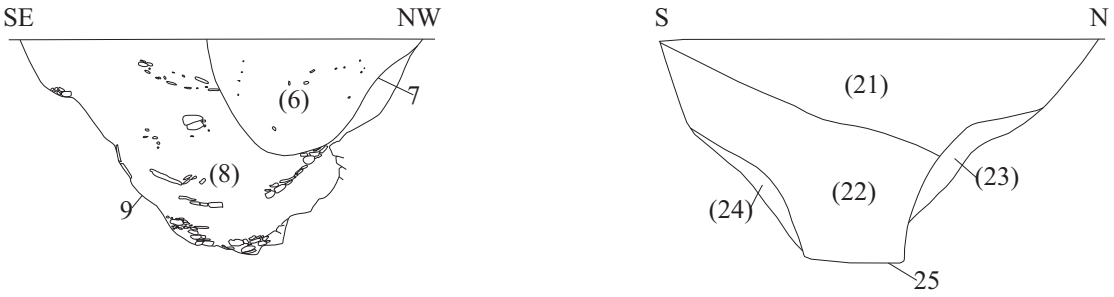
the NE side was indicated by the rounded terminal in ditch 36. Sections were dug and recorded through ditches 9 and 25. The section through ditch 20 was not fully excavated as time precluded this. The excavated ditches were similar being 2.10 – 2.35m wide and 1.12 – 1.18m deep. Sides were relatively steep and the base was generally flat. In ditch 25 the initial silting (24) on the outer side was mid brown-yellow degraded limestone covered by dark yellow-grey degraded limestone with 10% silt clay (22). This was bank material eroding in from the external side exhibiting tip lines. During this bank material filling the ditch, the top of the ditch on the other side eroded causing mid brown-yellow degraded limestone (23) to b edeposited. The final ditch fill was loose mid brown clay silt with 30% degraded limestone (21). Ditch 9 was filled with loose mid yellow-white degraded limestone blocks 20% mid brown silty clay (8). SE ditch 48 was 1.6m wide. The filling of ditch 25, and the recut of ditch 9 on the internal side, show that the bank for the enclosure was on the external side.

Ditch 36 forming the northern side, but see Discussion, was only 1.8m wide. It was filled with pale orange brown slightly silty clay with 15-20% stone (37). Pottery of similar type and date as excavated in the southern ditch was recovered from the surface.

Of interest 72% of all the pottery sherds from the site were recovered from fill (19) of ditch 20 (the SW side of the enclosure). The amount of pottery deposited here was noticeable on the surface and was the reason for the location of the section. No pottery was found further SE in section 25. One pit 28 was visible within the enclosure. This was 1.2m E/W by 0.90m and 0.20m deep. The sides were at 35^0 from the horizontal and the base was slightly rounded. It was filled by loose dark brown-black silty clay with small limestone pieces (29) and two sherds of pottery similar to that found in the enclosure ditch.

Enclosure ditch 9 was recut as 7 on the SE side of the silted up ditch. It was 1.14m wide and 640mm deep with sides at 45^0 and a rounded base (Fig. 3). The fill was compact dark brown-grey silty clay with 15% degraded limestone (6).

The earliest known ditch was 15, 18 and 27 that was cut by recut 9. The ditch was very small; 540mm wide and 110mm deep with a flat base and vertical sides in 15; 580mm wide and 190mm deep with 45^0 sides and a rounded base in 18; and 560mm wide and 110mm deep with a profile similar to that in 18 within 27. This ditch was seen further NW within the road as 30 where it survived wider at 750mm. Here it was filled by pale orange-brown silty clay with 5% small-medium limestone (31). This ditch probably extended further SE of the enclosure but was not visible either due to it being obscured by the plough material (2) or it had been ploughed away. It is possible that it ended at this point forming and entrance with ditch 49. Ditch 49 was parallel to the SE side of the enclosure. It was not traced further NE due to the plough material (2) but may be the same as ditch 40. Ditch 49 was approximately 10m SE of the enclosure and was 1.6m wide and at least 300mm deep. It was obscured in the NE part of the area by plough material (2). Ditch 40 was 1.65m wide and filled by dark grey-brown silty clay with 15-30% medium and small limestone (41). It cut pits 42, 44 and 46.



Section 1

Section 2

Section 3

Section 4

Section 5

Section 6

Figure 3. Sections

The last ditch seen was 32 which was 1.22m wide on a NW/SE alignment. It was filled with pale orange-brown slightly clayey silt and 5% small-medium limestone (33). This was more orange than the fill (31) of ditch 30 to the west.

Pits were seen at the east end of the road. Pit 38 was a large probably circular pit at least 2.4m wide filled at the top with mid orange-brown clayey silt with 5% small and medium sized limestone. An earlier fill of scorched material was seen as a band on the southern edge (39). Pit 42 was cut by ditch 40. The pit was filled with mid orange-brown-grey clayey silt with 5% small-medium limestone (43) and may be part of pit 44. This last was at least 900mm in diameter and was filled with mid brown-grey slightly clayey silt with 2% medium sized limestone (45). The relationship with pit 46 was not discernible from the top. This was a large circular pit of at least 3.3m in diameter cut by ditch 40. The fill (47) was mid orange-brown-grey very slightly clayey silt with 2% small limestone and some animal bone that was not retained.

The southern end of the road had plough material (2) left in place so the archaeological horizon was not visible (Fig. 1).

5 FINDS

5.1 **Pottery** by Paul Booth

Introduction

The excavation produced a small assemblage (168 sherds, 2278 g) of late Iron Age and Roman pottery from 11 context groups and a small collection of unstratified material. The pottery was in variable condition - the mean sherd weight was reasonable (13.6 g - 15 g is a good mean sherd weight for assemblages of this date in the region) but this is because the assemblage contained a number of fragments of unusually large vessels. Without this element, mean sherd size would have been quite small, and the surfaces of most pieces are quite poorly-preserved as a result of soil conditions.

The material was recorded using the standard codes in the Oxford Archaeology system for later prehistoric and Roman pottery (Booth 2007). Sherds were assigned to ware groups and to individual fabrics where appropriate. Quantification was by sherd count, weight and REs (rim equivalents). The quantities of fabrics recorded, with summary descriptions, are given in Table 1 below. Fine and specialist wares are listed first, followed by other coarse wares. Ware codes used in the national Roman pottery fabric reference collection (Tomber and Dore 1998) are given in bold where appropriate.

Ware code	Description	No. sh	% sh	Wt (g)	% wt	RE	% RE	Vessel types
S20	South Gaulish samian ware **(LGF SA)**	1	0.6	2	0.1	0.08	3.9	Cup (Drag 27)
W36	Fine sandy white ware	8	4.8	17	0.7			beakers (body sherds only)
E30	Medium-coarse sandy 'Belgic type' ware	2	1.2	204	9.0			
E80	Grog-tempered 'Belgic type' ware **(SOB GT)**	50	29.8	551	24.2	0.41	20.1	Jars
O20	Sand-tempered oxidised coarse ware	9	5.4	50	2.2	0.11	5.4	Butt beaker
O30	Fine sand-tempered oxidised coarse ware	1	0.6	1	+			
O80	Coarse grog-tempered oxidised ware	8	4.8	259	11.4	0.19	9.3	Large (storage) jars
O81	Pink grogged ware **(PNK GT)**	37	22.0	654	28.7	0.42	20.6	Large (storage) jar
R10	Fine reduced 'coarse' ware	1	0.6	15	0.7	0.15	7.4	Medium mouthed jar
R20	Coarse sandy reduced ware	2	1.2	15	0.7	0.02	1.0	Medium mouthed jar
C10	Coarse shell-tempered ware	49	29.2	510	22.4	0.66	32.4	Bead and everted rim jars
TOTAL		168		2278		2.04		

Fabrics

A single sherd of South Gaulish samian was the only imported piece in the assemblage. The remainder of the pottery will have derived from local or at most regional sources, although specific production sites cannot be identified for most of the pottery recorded here. W36 is one of a number of fine early Roman fabrics thought to have been produced in the Abingdon-Dorchester area, and sherds in fabrics O20, O30 and R20 (and less likely, the single sherd of fabric R10) might all have been early products of the Oxford industry, though this is not certain. The sources of two of the dominant pottery traditions in this assemblage, 'Belgic type' grog-tempered wares and shell-tempered wares, are not known although they seem certain to have been quite local. Both these traditions are likely to have spanned the conquest period. The third major component of the assemblage, pink grogged ware, was most probably entirely of post-conquest date, although its origins clearly lie in the late Iron Age grog-tempered tradition. There is a known production centre for this ware at Stowe, in Buckinghamshire (Booth 1999), but it is not certain that this was the only such site.

Vessel types

The assemblage, as is typical of this period, is dominated by jars and probable jars, which amount to 89.7% of REs. The only other types represented by rims were single examples of a butt beaker (in fabric O20), a cup (in samian ware) and a possible bowl (in fabric E80). Most of the jars could not be assigned to specific types, but very large jars, probably for storage, were well-represented by three rim sherds (in fabrics O80 and O81) which amounted to almost 30% of all vessels by RE measurements. The remaining jars were probably multi-purpose vessels, but because of the poor surface condition of the sherds evidence for functions such as cooking, in the form of surface deposits of soot etc, did not survive.

Discussion

The group of pottery from context 19, which accounted for 72% of all sherds from the site (77% by weight and 74% of REs) exemplifies all the main characteristics of the assemblage. All the 'fine ware' elements from the site are found here. They include not only the samian ware sherd and the butt beaker rim in fabric O20, but also combed body sherds in fabric O20 and all the sherds of fabric W36, which may be from additional but beakers not represented by rims. Amongst the coarse wares only two sherds in fabric R20 are in what would normally be considered 'Romanised' fabrics - and this ware is one of the earliest to appear in the region, perhaps as early as the middle of the 1st century AD. The question of the date of the group is important, and hinges both on the absence of reduced coarse wares other than R20 and also on the sherd of samian ware. The latter is not very closely dated, South Gaulish samian being produced up to the end of the 1st century, and the cup form Drag 27 right up to the middle of the 2nd century, the but the well-defined internal groove is an 'earlier' rather than a 'later' feature. On the overall balance of wares a pre-Flavian date might be preferred, but a date range of *c* AD 60-80 is perhaps most likely. A later date seems most improbable on the basis of negative evidence - even given the relatively small size of the assemblage overall it is still large enough for this aspect to be regarded with some confidence. What is less clear is that the likely date of the assemblage from context 19 dates the whole of the rest of the material. The range of fabrics and forms present, perhaps particularly some of the simple jars in the C10 ware group, might be earlier than this range. It is quite possible, therefore, that

activity on the site started before the conquest period and continued through it. At the other end of the chronological range, a single rim sherd in fabric R10 from context 12 is unlikely to have dated much before the end of the 1st century. It is notable, however, that the sherd was more worn than others in this context group, perhaps suggesting that it was intrusive. In this case it could suggest later (perhaps 2nd century?) activity in the vicinity but not immediately associated with any of the excavated features.

There are a number of excavated assemblages from the area with which the present group can be compared. That from the castle site at Middleton Stoney itself has some of the same early elements but extends into the 3rd century AD (Brown and Leggatt 1984). Other sites in the Bicester area have produced components such as the shell and grog-tempered forms which match the earliest parts of the present group, examples being found at Slade Farm (Woodward and Marley 2000) and Bicester Fields Farm (Brown 1999) but both these sites seem not to have been occupied after the conquest period. The closest parallel for the present group is seen in a site at Oxford Road, Bicester, which has a comparable late Iron-early Roman date range, although here it is likely that occupation continued as late as the early 2nd century AD (Booth 1996). None of the locally-comparable sites therefore shows exactly the same chronological profile as the current assemblage, but it is possible that this is a consequence of the relatively small size of the excavated sample.

Two further points can be made. First, the presence of a limited number of early fine ware components, albeit in small quantities, is paralleled at sites such as Oxford Road, where the overall representation of 'fine and specialist' wares, at 3.9%, places that site firmly with a group of lower status rural settlements in the region (Booth 2004). The comparable figure for the present site (5.4%, based on sherd count - incorporating fabrics S20 and W36), although less reliable because of the small assemblage size, suggests a very similar character. Secondly, the present assemblage is important as it has the best dating evidence for the early appearance of pink grogged ware in this area south-west of the likely source in Buckinghamshire. Pink grogged ware (Booth and Green 1989) becomes a major regional supplier by the middle of the Roman period, but the date of at which it started to reach the Oxford region has hitherto been unclear. The present evidence is therefore particularly important, and can now be set alongside that from the Milton Keynes area (Marney 1989; D Stansbie pers. comm.) and suggests that a recognisable form of the ware was being distributed into the upper Thames region well before the end of the 1st century AD.

5.2 Other ceramic material

Two pieces of large square or rectangular Roman floor tile were recovered from fill (19) of the SW ditch (20) of the enclosure. The tile was more than 100mm long and was 24-26mm thick. Traces of cement were present on part of the underside. Six further small pieces were found with it.

From the same deposit was a further piece of ceramic material that was broken. This survived 95mm x 43mm in plan and 30mm thick. The upper surface was flat although undulating while the underside was irregular. A hole partly survived through it, made at an angle of 20^0 from the vertical. The surfaces were blackened with soot. It is possible that it is a roof tile or came from a structure like a kiln or drying oven.

5.3 **Flint** by Dave Gilbert

A single soft hammer struck flint tertiary flake/blade measuring 38mm x 14mm x 1mm was recovered from the site, unfortunately it was unstratified. It has a pale grey-white patina and displays some damage to its edges that may have resulted during use a cutting implement. It is likely to be early Neolithic in date.

5.4 Animal bone

Eighteen fragments of animal bone were recovered from the fill (19) of the SW ditch 20 of the enclosure. Two fragments came from the upper fill (21) of the same ditch further SE. A bone fragment was recovered from the fill (12) of the NW ditch of the enclosure.

5.5 Environmental Remains

No environmental samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION

A single unstratified flint flake of probable early Neolithic date was found. This is part of the finds assemblage that has been recovered from the site during fieldwalking.

The dating of the pottery, and therefore activity, is considered to start before the conquest. This may indicate a change of location from the earlier occupation, although this does include late Iron Age, closer to Aves Ditch to the west and further north where ditches and pits were found 300m away from this site. Ditch 15, 18, 27 predated the enclosure and while no dating evidence was found within it, it may be from this pre-conquest period and not be any earlier.

The excavated enclosure, which is dated to *c.* AD 60 – 80, does not tally exactly with the cropmark evidence with the cropmark appearing to have been plotted 10m to the east of the excavated evidence. Given this discrepancy the southern part of the west boundary and most of the southern boundary are the same.

It is probable that the enclosure extends further north as seen on the aerial photograph with the 'northern' ditch 36 seen in the investigation being an internal division. The southern ditch 20 and 25 extends as far east as seen on the aerial photographs given the 10m discrepancy noted above. However the orientation of the eastern ditch 48 and the east side of the enclosure seen as a cropmark are totally different. The south east part of the site was not completely clean with lower plough material left in places and the eastern ditch not being seen as a continuous length. It would appear that there was a 15m wide entrance into the south part of the enclosure south of ditch 36.

The easternmost ditch 49 seen in the investigation may be the ditch that apparently is not associated with the enclosure as seen on the aerial photograph. This is plotted north-south while the enclosure is on a northnortheast-southsouthwest orientation.

The lack of features, apart form one pit, within the enclosure suggests either truncation of the area or that it was used for animals. The ditch, where excavated, was substantial in depth at 1.10-1.20m with an external bank suggesting stock control.

Ditch 40, which is a possible continuation of ditch 49, cuts several pits from which Roman pottery was recovered. The cropmarks suggest two phases with ditch 40, 49 on a different orientation from the enclosure. However this investigation found them more parallel and therefore possibly contemporary. If this was the case then the pits predated the enclosure and may be contemporary with earlier ditch 15, 18, 27.

Although very few sections though the enclosure ditched were excavated the amount of finds in south ditch, section 20, was very high. The amount of finds was visible in the surface and is the reason the section was positioned here. Although the ditch was not bottomed here; the amount of finds and the rubble nature of the fill prevented completion of the excavation. It is possible that this part of the ditch was deliberately filled in to create an entrance through the ditch and bank at this point. This would explain the amount of finds that extended from the top of, and well into, the ditch. The enclosure had mostly silted up before the northwest ditch was redug. Along what length of the original ditch is unknown as are what other features ditch 32 was contemporary with.

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