JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING ACTION

AT

TEMPLE CLOSE, BANBURY ROAD,

BLOXHAM, OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SP 4332 3653

On behalf of
Berkeley Homes (Oxford and Chiltern) Ltd

SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT FOR	Berkeley Homes (Oxford & Chiltern) Ltd Berkeley House Abingdon Science Park Barton Lane Abingdon OX14 3NB
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FIELDWORK	10th May – 30th June 2010
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REPORT ISSUED	10th September 2010
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Site Code	BMBR 09
JMHS Project No:	2206
Archive Location	The archive is currently held by JMHS and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service under accession number 2009.16.

CONTENTS

FIGURES

Summary

An archaeological recording action was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services at Temple Close, Bloxham, Oxfordshire. This followed on from a previous evaluation that recorded Iron Age activity in the area. A series of pits were recorded across the site, four of which also produced Iron Age pottery. Also noted was a ditch and contemporary postholes for one or more structures.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location *(Figure 1)*

The site is located to the north of Bloxham on the east side of Banbury Road (NGR SP 4332 3653). The site was formerly a dwelling surrounded by a garden. The underlying geology is Upper Lias Clay and the sites lie at *c.* 125m OD.

1.2 Planning Background

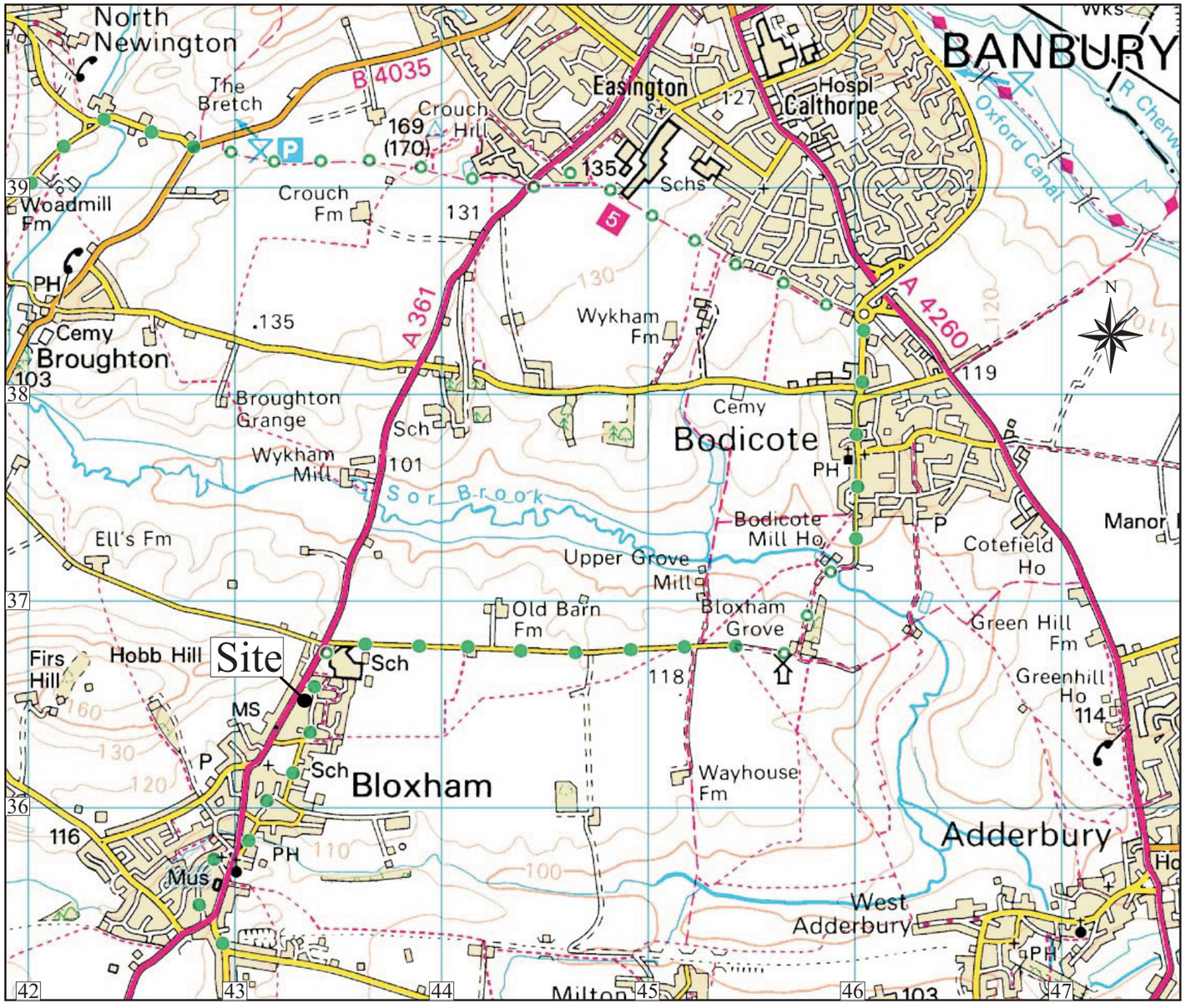
Cherwell District Council granted planning permission under 09/00321/F for demolition of a dwelling and former classrooms and the erection of five detached dwellings with car ports together with parking and access arrangements. Due to the known archaeological remains on the site a condition (no. 15) was attached requiring that a programme of archaeological work be carried out during the period of groundworks. This was in line with PPG 16 (current at time of permission) and the Local Plan.

1.3 Archaeological Background

An evaluation carried out in February 2009 recorded an Iron Age ditch, a pit, a possible Iron Age roundhouse and a buried soil layer (JMHS 2009). These are likely to be related to the Iron Age settlement recorded c. 100 m to the northwest of the site at Ells Lane. The report concluded that the remains were likely to be related field systems to this settlement or, as a possible roundhouse was identified, a continuation of the settlement into this area.

The Ells Lane investigation recorded a low status Middle Iron Age farmstead and isolated features dating to the Middle Bronze Age or Early Iron Age (PRN 16997; NGR SP 4330 3665). These features consisted of an Iron Age roundhouse and associated field ditches as well as a deposit of possible cremated human bone. The roundhouse was located against the southern edge of excavation with only half of the feature in the area of investigation. A fragment of a Neolithic polished stone axe was also recovered in the area of the excavation. Further to this a small amount of Roman material was recovered prior to 1933 from a field 200m to the west of the site in a clay pit (PRN 9948; SP 431 365). This comprised bone, pottery, a spindle-whorl and three millstones. These are suggestive of a settlement in the vicinity.

An evaluation on the opposite side of the road, at ‘Iley’, to this development site failed to find anything of significance. On the Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 map of 1885 the site is shown being within a rectangular field lined with trees.



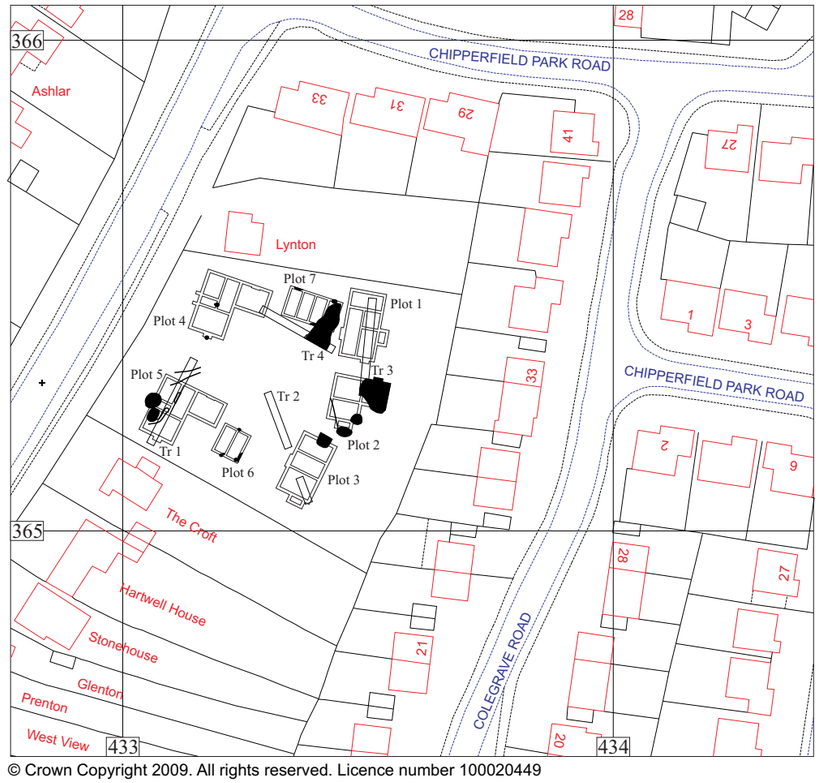


Figure 1. Site location

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 Iron Age settlement and field systems known in the area.

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).

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

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present on site during the course of any ground works that had the potential to reveal or disturb archaeological remains.

The new buildings are based on piled foundations. The only significant impacts were for trenches for the ground beams between the piles, excavation for service trenches and soak-aways. The ground beam trenches were excavated to about the top of Upper Lias Clay, which was generally the archaeological horizon, or slightly into it. Service trenches and soak-aways penetrated the Upper Lias Clay. Impact from the access did not reach the archaeological horizon.

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

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 features ‘cut’ into preceding layers or structures. The site was split into 7 individual building plots. The position of these plots and the location of the features are shown in Figure 2. Context numbers 3/04 etc. refer to evaluation features and deposits.

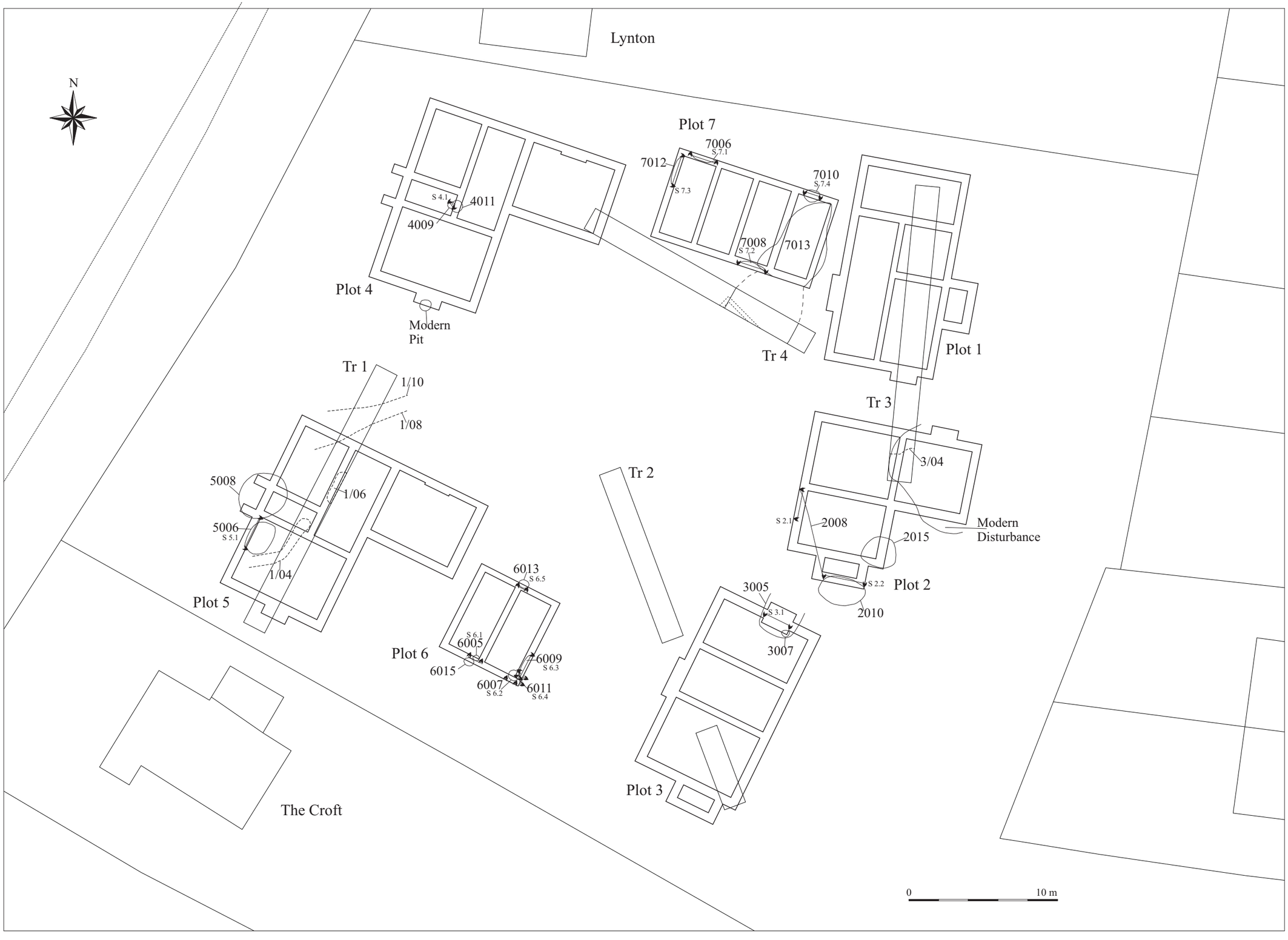


Figure 2. Site Plan

4.1 Field Results (Figures 2 & 3)

The lowest deposit across the entire site was the natural geological formation of soft light yellow-grey-brown clay mottled blue in patches (1003), (2003), (3003), (4003), (5003), (6003) and (7003). This was the Upper Lias Clay.

Plot 1

No features were seen within this plot area.

Plot 2

A linear ditch 2008 was noted running roughly northwest to southeast. Its full width was not seen but appears to be over 2m. This ditch was 0.3 m deep, with 45^{o} sloping sides and a relatively flat base (Fig. 3, Section 2.1). It was filled with a soft blue-brown clay loam (2007) that contained a small quantity of Iron Age pottery and animal bone.

This ditch had been cut by a later large pit 2/010 that was 2.6m wide and 0.38m deep. It had a shallow sloping side to the west, while the eastern side was steeper. The base was irregular possibly indicating more than one cut but this could not be positively determined (Fig. 3, Section 2.2). It contained the single fill (2009) of mid brown silty loam, with no associated finds. A possible posthole existed at the southern edge that cut a pond 2013. The pond was filled with dark black silty clay (2012) overlaid by mid blue silty clay (2011).

Pit 2015 was 2.25 m long, 2.6 m wide and 0.30 m deep and had sloping sides and a concave base. The single fill (2014) of the pit consisted of a mid brown silty loam with flecks of charcoal.

The southern end of Trench 3 from the previous evaluation (JMHS 2009) was located within Plot 2. However the area appeared to have been subject to disturbance possibly associated with the removal of an out-building during the demolition phase. This removed evidence of the irregular pit 3/04 that contained a piece of daub seen in the evaluation.

Plot 3

Cut into the natural clay (3003) was a large pit 3/005. It was 2.35m wide and 0.35 m deep and had shallow sides and an irregular concave base. This was filled with a soft blue-orange-grey silty clay (3004) with gravel (Fig. 3, Section 3.1).

A small pit 3007 was cut into the upper surface of the pit's fill (3004). This was c. 0.5m in diameter and 0.3m deep with a U-shaped profile. It was filled with a mid grey-blue silty clay (3006).

The southern end Trench 2 from the previous evaluation (JMHS 2009) was located within Plot 2. This trench located a thin buried soil layer (0.01-0.03mthick) that contained Iron Age pottery, this layer was not observed during the watching brief.

Plot 4

Cut into the natural clay (4003) were two small undated pits as well a modern planting pit.

The first pit 4009 was 0.60m in diameter, 0.12m deep and had shallow sloping sides and a concave base. The fill (4008) was soft mid brown-orange silty clay with charcoal flecks (Fig. 3, Section 4.1).

The second pit 4011 was close by and heavily truncated but appears to have been 1.8 m long, 1.5m wide and 0.5m deep. It seems to have had a flat base and its fill (4010) consisted of soft dark grey and orange-brown mottled silty clay.

It was difficult to identify any relationship between the two pits however they may have been inter-cutting.

Plot 5

Cut into the natural clay (5003) were two large pits. The first pit 5006 was approximately 2.5m wide and 0.9m deep with a roughly U-shaped profile. The lower fill (5005) was a soft blue-grey mottled clay 0.36m thick that contained a small quantity of Iron Age pottery and daub. The upper fill was a soft brown silty clay (5004) with c.10 % gravel 0.54m thick (Fig. 3, Section 5.1).

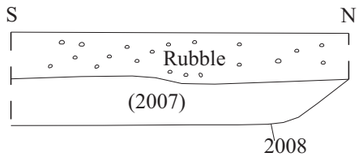
Pit 5008 was 3.5m long, 3.3m wide and 0.2m deep with sloping sides and a concave base. It contained soft dark blue-brown silty clay (5007) with c. 40 % gravel.

Trench 1 from the previous evaluation (JMHS 2009) was located within Plot 5. None of the features recorded during the evaluation could be positively identified during the watching brief. These were as follows.

At the northern end of the trench was an east-west aligned ditch 1/10. This was at least 1.5m wide and at least 0.3m deep with what appeared to be a flattened U-shaped profile. Its lowest fill recorded was a mid blue-grey silt-clay (1/12) 0.2m+ thick. Above this was a mid brown-grey silt-clay (1/11) 0.1m thick. This ditch appeared to either cut an earlier ditch 1/08 or be a re-cut on a similar alignment. Ditch 1/08 was at least 0.5m wide and at least 0.2m deep again with a U-shaped profile. It was filled with a mid blue-grey silt-clay (1/09) at least 0.2m thick. Neither ditch was fully excavated due to ground water.

To the south of these ditches was a large oval pit 1/06 that measured 2.3m by over 0.49m in plan. It had near vertical sides that began to curve inwards at approximately 0.2m down from the lip of the pit. It was filled with a mid blue-grey silt-clay (1/07) that was seen to be at least 0.22m thick It was not fully excavated due to flooding.

To the south of this was what appeared to be a penannular ditch 1/04. In plan it appeared to have an enlarged terminal with a narrower ditch that curved towards the west. It was not excavated due to flooding, but was filled with a mid blue-grey silt-clay (1/05) flecked with charcoal.



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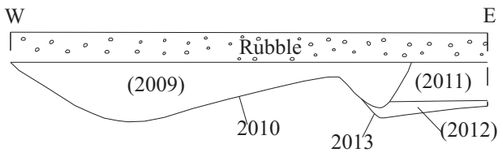

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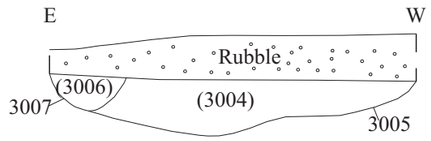
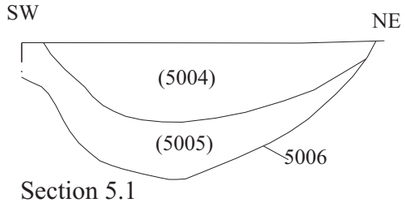


Section 3.1

Section 4.1



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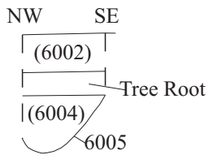
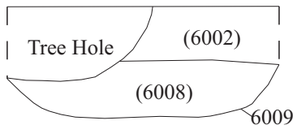


Section 6.1

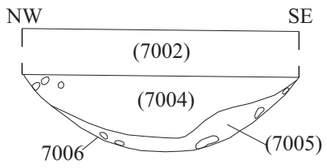
Section 6.2



Section 6.3

Section 6.4

Section 6.5



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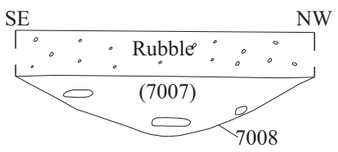

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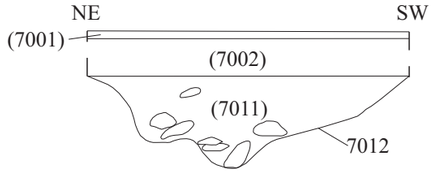
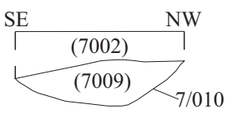


Section 7.3



Section 7.4

Figure 3. Sections

Plot 6

Cut into the natural (6003) were six features either postholes or pits. The first pit 6005 was 0.41m in diameter, 0.36m deep with a U-shaped profile. It was filled with blue-grey to orange-brown silt-clay (6004). A large modern tree root had truncated the upper portion of the pit.

The second pit 6007 was 0.46m in diameter, 0.32m deep with steep sides and a flat base. It was filled with blue-grey to orange-brown silt-clay (6006) flecked with charcoal. Pit 6009 had gently sloping sides at roughly 45^{o} and a flat base. It was 1.77m wide, 0.25 m deep and was filled with a soft blue-grey and orange mottled silty clay (6008) with 50 % gravel and flecks of charcoal. The fill contained small fragments of Iron Age pottery.

Posthole 6011 was 0.15m in diameter and at least 0.35m deep, unfortunately it had been truncated during machining. Its sides were vertical and it taped to a rounded pointed base as if a post had been driven into the ground. It was filled with a soft blue-grey and orange mottled silty clay (6010).

The fifth feature was a pit 6013 that was 0.65m in diameter, 0.17m deep with a flattened U-shaped profile. It was filled with blue-grey to orange-brown silt-clay (6012) flecked with charcoal. Pit 6015 had a gently sloping side on the west while the eastern side was near vertical. It was 0.62m wide, 0.27 m deep and was filled with a soft mid-brown silty clay (6014) with flecks of charcoal. The large quantity of plant roots may indicate that this is a modern planting pit.

All features were sealed by the 0.4m thick subsoil (6002).

Plot 7

Cut into the natural (7003) were the four pits 7006, 7008, 7010 and 7012.

Pit 7006 was 1.8m wide and 0.55m deep with a flattened U-shaped profile. It had two fills. The lower fill (7005) was a mottled grey-blue-orange clay up to 0.15m thick. Above this was a 0.4m thick deposit of brown-grey-blue silty clay (7004). Both contained fragments of Iron Age Pottery. The second pit 7010 was 1.1m wide and 0.3m deep. It had shallow sloping sides and concave base and contained a soft grey blue and orange mottled silty clay (7009) with 40 % gravel and lumps of charcoal.

Pit 7012 was 2m wide and 0.6m deep. It had relatively steep sides and an irregular base. It was filled with a mid dark brown orange silty clay with some large stones (7011). It also contained Iron Age pottery. Pit 7008 was 1.95m wide and 0.4m deep. It had shallow sloping sides and a concave base. It contained a soft mid blue-grey and orange-brown mottled silty clay (7007) with 40 % gravel. This pit had been exposed during the soil strip and was covered with rubble.

These features were sealed by the 0.3m thick subsoil (7002).

Also within the boundaries of Plot 7 was a large and ill-defined area of dark blue-grey silt-clay (7013). This feature appears to equate to (4/03) recorded in the initial evaluation (JMHS 2009). And may well represent variations within the natural clay.

Site

Across the site was a grey-brown clay subsoil (1002), (6002) and (7002) that was up to 0.4m thick but averaged at approximately 0.25m thick. Above this was a dark grey-brown clay loam (1001), (6001) and (7001) topsoil up to 0.2m thick.

The subsoil and topsoil had been stripped in places in the area of Plots 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 prior to construction work to be replaced by a layer of stone rubble. It is uncertain if any truncation of the archaeological features had occurred during this process.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results *(By David Gilbert)*

The area had been the subject of a soil strip prior to the archaeologist attending the site. It would seem likely that this strip had truncated archaeological remains as the subsoil had been completed removed in some areas. It became apparent that the area had been exposed and machinery driven across site prior to hardcore being lain over the area. The removal of foundations had also caused considerable disturbance. Due to the shallow depth of deposits above the archaeological horizon, the depth of the beam trenches for the piles caused the same impact or even more than traditional strip foundations.

It is felt that a watching brief was not the best technique to deal with the archaeological mitigation of this site. There is a high potential that small discrete features were not identified and that ephemeral features were removed during the site preparatory work. Indeed some large features previously identified were not visible during the work.

The archaeological site work itself was mainly carried out in good conditions with excellent co-operation from the contractors carrying out the ground works.

5 FINDS

5.1 The Prehistoric Pottery (*By Andrew Peachey)*

Excavations recovered a total of 24 sherds (38g) of prehistoric pottery contained in six contexts. The pottery was in a highly fragmented and moderately abraded condition. The range of fabrics present suggests the sherds originate in the Iron Age, probably the middle Iron Age; however the absence of any diagnostic sherds (rims or decorated sherds) limits the potential for any conclusions to be drawn.

Methodology
The pottery was examined at x 20 magnification to define fabric categories and quantified by sherd count and weight (g) with all diagnostic features and observations also recorded in accordance with the guidelines of the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group (PCRG 1995). All data was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that will be deposited as part of the site archive.

Fabrics
Three hand made fabrics were identified and are described in Table 1. Fabric Q1 is the most common accounting for a total of 16 sherds (29g), with Q2 limited to 3

sherds (39) and S1 to 5 sherds (6g). The fabric variants are consistent with those recorded in Iron Age assemblages from the region, and probably originate within the middle Iron Age. A comparable range of fabrics was recorded in the pottery assemblage recovered during evaluation excavations on this site.

Fabric Code	Fabric Description
Q1	Sparse coarse quartz (0.25-1mm), sparse grog/claypellets and limestone (0.25-2.5mm), sparse fine mica. Reduced dark grey/black with dark grey or oxidised red-brown exterior surfaces. Hard fired with a slightly lumpy, but soapy feel.
Q2	Common medium sand (0.1-0.5mm), occasional grog/clay pellets and limestone (0.25-2.5mm). Reduced dark grey/black with oxidised red-brown external surfaces. Medium hardness with a sandy feel.
S1	Common shell, or voids or degraded calcitic material (0.2-4mm) with occasional coarse quartz (<1mm). Reduced dark grey brown.

Table 1: Fabric Descriptions

BMBR09: Bloxham								
POT data			Fabric					
			Q1		Q2		S1	
F	L	Spot date	F	W	F	W	F	W
	2007	IA	2	13				
	5005	IA					4	5
	6008	IA	13	15				
	7004	IA			1	1	1	1
	7005	IA	1	1	1	1		
	7011	IA			1	1		
			16	29	3	3	5	6

Table 2: The distribution of pottery in different features.

Forms and Decoration

Context 5005 contained a total of 4 sherds (5g) of Fabric S1, including a single small sherd from a plain upright rim, probably from an ovoid or slight-shouldered jar of middle Iron Age date although similar types were manufactured in the early and late Iron Age. The S1 sherds are not cross-joining but probably derive from the same vessel. Body sherds of Fabric Q1 in contexts 2007 (2 sherds, 13g) and 6008 (13 sherds, 15g) do not exhibit any decoration or surface treatment and are too limited in size to assign to a vessel type. The remaining sherds in contexts 7004, 7005 and 7012 are very small (<1g) and also do not exhibit any decoration or surface treatment.

5.2 Fired Clay/Daub

Three pieces of daub or fired clay (56g) were recovered from contexts (5005), (6014) and (7005).

5.3 Animal Bone

Very fragmented animal bone was noted from contexts (2004), (2007) and (5005). It was too fragmentary to identify species, however a cattle-sized tooth was recovered from (5005).

5.4 Environmental Remains

Due to the nature of the deposits encountered no environmental samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION

The initial evaluation (JMHS 2009) postulated that features 1/08, 1/10 and 3/04 formed a linear ditch running east to west across the site, dating to the Iron Age. Much of this proposed route was outside of the mitigated area and unfortunately recent disturbance made any positive identification impossible.

It was not possible during the watching brief to identify the thin buried Iron Age soil layer (2/04) previously (JMHS 2009) recorded in the area. Although given its location within Trench 2 of the evaluation it is possible that it survived outside of the area investigated for the Plots. No further evidence was recorded for the possible penannular ditch 1/04 recorded in Trench 1.

This watching brief identified further Iron Age features as well as some undated features that may be contemporary. Pits were noted to spread across much of the site (Plots 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7), four of which produced Iron Age pottery.

The cluster of pits or postholes recorded with in Plot 6 may indicate one or more structures, feature 6008 again producing Iron Age pottery.

The excavation at Ells Lane (Ford 2009) 100m to the north indicated activity in the area from the Mesolithic, with cut features dating from the Middle Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age. Inter-cutting features on this site 2008 & 2010, 3005 & 3007, 4009 & 4011 as well as ditches 1/08 & 1/10 recorded during the evaluation as indicate at least two phases of activity on this site. The pottery would indicate that activity is contemporary on both sites.

The Iron Age occupation of the area would appear to be quite extensive, although interestingly no activity was recorded 30m to the west of the site during an evaluation at Iley and Avalon (JMHS 2007).

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 record

Context records of the plots are numbered 1/001, 2/001 etc. however within this report they have been noted as 1001, 2001 etc. to avoid confusion with the numbering system employed during the 2009 evaluation.

Physical record
The finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the County Museums' Store under accession number 2009.16.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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