



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

WHITELANDS FARM, BICESTER,

OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SP 5768 2173

On behalf of

Thames Water Utilities Ltd

JANUARY 2011

REPORT FOR Ecology and Heritage Team
External Affairs
Thames Water Utilities Ltd
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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during the stripping of topsoil and excavation of pipe trenches associated with the construction of a new sewer pipeline at Whiteland's Farm, Bicester.

Numerous post-medieval features were found during the topsoil stripping including wall foundations and associated demolition material from two post-medieval farm buildings, and two boundary ditches. During the excavation of the pipe trench several small burnt deposits were found sealed by the post-medieval soil but lacking associated datable material.

Modern land drains and service trenches were also present throughout the site.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The new pipeline joins the existing sewer network approximately 100m north of Bicester STW and runs generally northwards passing the east side of a group of buildings by the A41 at NGR SP 5768 2173. The underlying geology in the southern part is alluvium before an area of Kellaways Clay Member, then a narrow band of Cornbrash before a strip of alluvium close to the A41 with Cornbrash at the edge of the road.

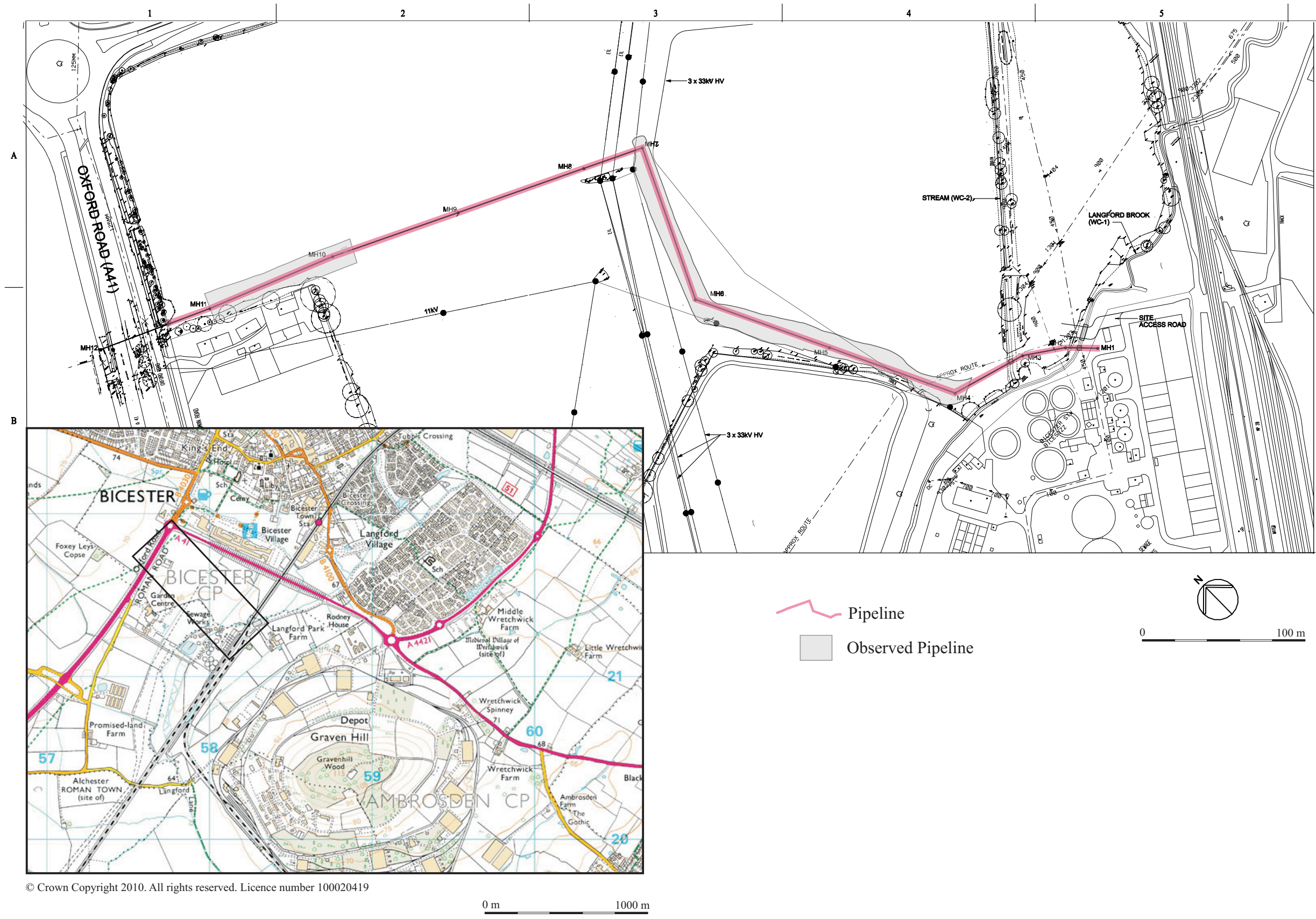
1.2 Planning Background

Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services recommended that a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording be undertaken during stripping of the easement and the excavation of the pipe trench. John Moore Heritage Services was appointed by Thames Water Utilities Ltd to undertake the work.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site was the subject of a recent archaeological evaluation (Network Archaeology 2007). This recorded a number of linear features, postholes and two possible ring gullies that are suggestive of late prehistoric or Roman settlement (PRN 26128). Also recovered during this evaluation was an assemblage of Mesolithic flint in such condition that it was speculated that a contemporary palaeosoil is present in the area. However, it must be noted that all of this material was recovered as residual material in later features, many containing Romano-British pottery. It is likely that agricultural activities of this date have previously truncated or destroyed any Mesolithic deposits.

Further prehistoric remains are known from the area. A fragment of a Neolithic polished stone axe head (PRN 7505; NGR SP 5836 2137) was recovered from the east of the site. A fragment of a Bronze Age sword, probably from a hoard, was recovered 300m to the north (PRN 15846; SP 579 219). Aerial photography (FAS 6125.12.111) has revealed the presence of two possible round barrows, 400m to the northwest (PRN 5633; SP 5748 2178).



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Figure 1. Site Location

An evaluation on land to the east of the site revealed a Romano-British settlement that dated to c.20-120 AD (PRN 15867; SP 5840 2171). A Roman road (PRN 8922) borders the north-western edge of the site; this runs south to the Roman town of Alchester (SAM 18), where it joins the east-west Roman road of Akeman street (PRN 8920, 8921), some 500m to the south.

Within 100m to the west of the site, along the line of the Roman Road a watching brief recovered Roman pottery that was considered to mark the presence of a nearby settlement (PRN 15846; SP 5763 2190). Aerial photography (NMR SP4422/1/111) has revealed the presence of track ways and a possible Roman farmstead 200m to the east along the Roman road. This has been confirmed by geophysical survey (PRN 11214; SP 577 221). This occupation would appear to extend southwards following the line of the road (PRN 16541; SP 5780 2220).

Antiquarian drawings place a medieval fishpond associated with Bicester Priory 500m to the north of the site (PRN 13746; SP 583 220), and medieval inhumations have been recorded in this area (PRN 15868). Late medieval or post-medieval ridge and furrow is noted 500m to the south of the site (PRN 16310; SP 5776 2099). The grade II listed building of Langford Park Farmhouse (PRN 18093; SP 58380 21258) lies 200m to the east and a floated water meadow (PRN 11224; SP 578 212) is 100m to the south. Some post-medieval pottery scatters are known in the area (PRN 15846; SP 5763 2190).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To identify and record any archaeological remains exposed during the groundworks
- To record features belonging to the late prehistoric and/or Roman settlement that the pipeline will pass through.
- To recover any artefacts exposed relating to the known settlement or to earlier activity i.e. Mesolithic flints

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a *Brief* for the work which John Moore Heritage Services carried out to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with OCAS, on behalf of Thames Water Utilities Ltd. The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist monitored the stripping of the easement. Monitoring of the excavation of the pipe trench was also carried out where surface finds indicated this to be appropriate.

All archaeological features or other remains i.e. concentrations of artefacts, were recorded by written, drawn and photographic record. All artefacts were collected and retained except for concentrations of building material where only a representative sample was retained.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results

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

The lowest deposit encountered was a dark grey blue plastic clay (011) probably related to the Kellaways Clay Member, this was highly compacted with no inclusions and was over 1.5m thick. This was only seen within the cut for the pipe trench.

Above this was a firm red brown clay (003) with no inclusions. This was thought to be a natural geological deposit. It varied between 0.20m and 0.45m in thickness.

In the vicinity of manhole 5 appeared to be a natural dip or hollow in the natural, this was up to approximately 1m deep (Figure 2). The lowest deposit within this hollow was a loose, mid to light brown silty sand (014) with frequent small angular stones and occasional charcoal flecks. It was up to 0.05m thick in places and was visible in section for 30m.

Four loose dark brown-black silt deposits with frequent charcoal flecks were visible in section, (015), (016), (017) and (018). These appeared to be either pressed into the surface of layer (014) or contained in shallow scoops, and may represent fires or hearths.

Deposit (015) was 0.40m wide, with a depth of 0.05m. Deposit (016) was 0.30m wide with a depth of 0.05m. Deposit (017) was a larger deposit reaching 1.20m wide, but with a depth of 0.05m. Feature (018) was a mix of loose, dark brown-black silt and a brick-red deposit with moderate charcoal flecks. Due to stepping in of the side for the cut of the manhole, feature (018) was wholly visible and was an ovoid deposit measuring 0.40m x 0.30m x 0.06m deep. There were no finds associated with any of these features.

All four deposits were sealed by a friable white-beige clay-loam (002), which was 0.30m thick and stretched 42m along the strip (Figure 2). This was the upper fill of the hollow.

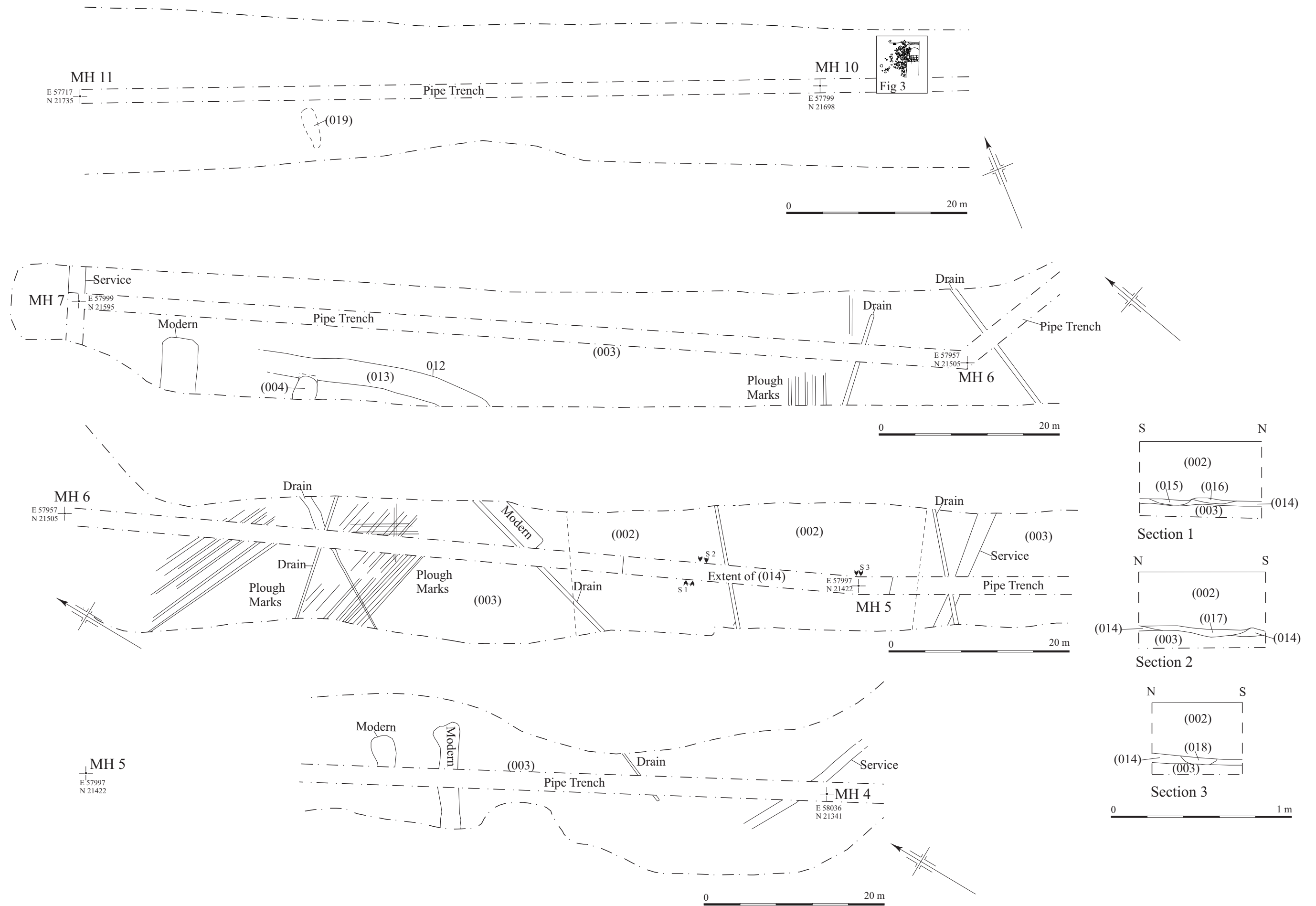


Figure 2. Plan of the Easement between Mh4 and MH7

Pressed into the natural clay (003) to the south east of manhole 7 (Figure 2) was a layer of small to medium sized rounded and sub angular stones highly compacted with red brown clay (004). This layer was approximately 0.15m in thickness and covered an area 2.5 in length and 2.4m wide. Pressed into the clay and stone layer was a large amount of oyster shell and animal bone as well as 18th century pottery sherds, glass, brick and tile fragments and the occasional piece of highly corroded iron and decomposing wood. This was thought to be the remains of a cobbled surface.

Alongside this possible surface (004) was a linear feature 012. This feature was oriented north-west by south-east and was over 24m long, 2.3m wide and 1.30m deep. It contained a single fill (013) consisting of a compacted dark brown silty loam with the occasional gravel inclusion. Cobbled surface (004) appeared to run slightly down the slope created by the south-west edge of feature 012 suggesting that the two are roughly contemporary, with the cobbled surface constructed right up to the edge of the ditch.

In the vicinity of manhole 10 were a wall (005) and a ditch 008 (Figures 2 and 3) cut into the natural clay (003).

Wall (005) was constructed within foundation cut 006. It had gently inward sloping sides with a gradual break of base slope. It had a length of greater than 0.60m, a width of more than 0.30m and was 0.09m in depth, containing a single fill (007) as well as remnant wall foundations (005). Fill (007) consisted of an orange-brown compacted silty clay, homogenous in composition and colour. Inclusions included rare brick, tile and charcoal flecking. Fill (007) appeared to be a weathered natural that had partially filled the wall cut prior to the laying of foundation stones (005), possibly for levelling or a natural silting event.

Wall (005) consisted of a series of flat irregular limestone blocks, approximately 0.20m in length and 0.15m wide, forming a lower foundation. The best preserved section of the wall foundation was oriented south-east by north-west and extended to a length of 1.23m, with a width of 0.72m. Wall (005) appeared to be L-shaped as there was a probable return at a right angle to the south-west, extending to a length of 2.0m. This foundation was far more disturbed and many stones had been removed. The wall foundations only existed to a single course and no bond was identified.

A wide scatter of demolition material (010) from wall (005) was seen to the north-west. This scatter included flat limestone pieces, numerous fragments of degraded iron objects (such as nails, strapping, tacks and a staple), charcoal, rare slag fragments, brick pieces and brick/tile fragments throughout. This deposit also contained numerous objects more domestic in function including partial pottery vessels represented by several sherds, glass from alcohol and medicine/poison bottles and a single bone button.

Wall cut 006 and its fill (007) were not visible on the south-west side of wall 005, suggesting that either the wall foundations were pressed up against the internal south-west side of 006, or that fill (007) represents a natural build up of material against the north-east surface of wall (005). The foundation trench 006 had been partially truncated in the south by the later south-western edge of ditch 008.

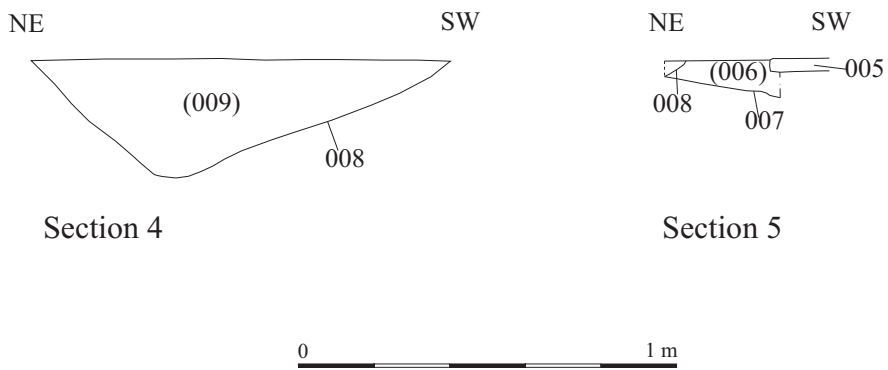
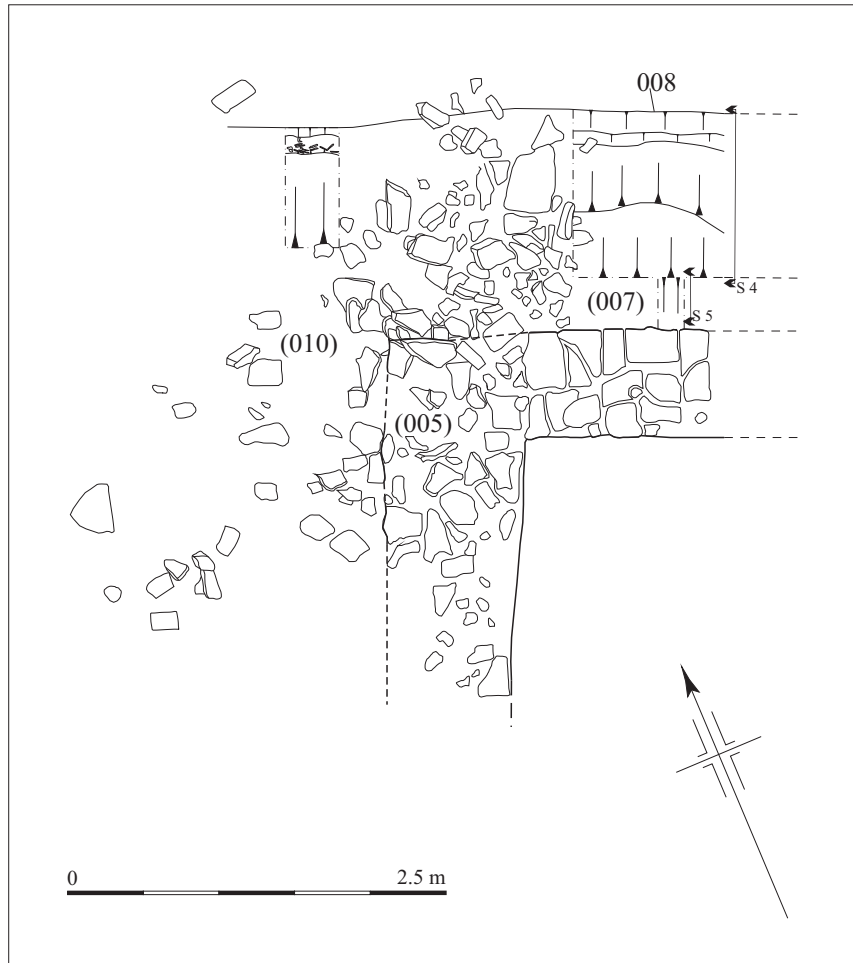


Figure 3. Building close to Manhole 10 plans and sections

Ditch 008 was somewhat obscured in plan by a demolition layer (010) and was oriented approximately south-east by north-west. The ditch had a gradual break of top and base slopes, with gently sloping sides forming a wide 'V' shaped base. Ditch 008 was 1.00m in width and <0.62m in length, with a depth of 0.28m. It contained a single fill (009) consisting of a dark brown, lightly compacted, silty loam homogenous in composition and colour. Fill (009) had a thickness of 0.28m and contained occasional brick and tile fragments and charcoal flecking. Other inclusions included rare pieces of flat limestone, similar to those in wall (005) and demolition layer (010). Pottery recovered from deposits (009) and (010) has been dated to the 19th century.

Deposit (019), to the southeast of manhole 11, was a concentrated deposit of loose mid-brown silt with very frequent sub-angular limestone blocks measuring up to 0.20m x 0.10m x 0.10m. In plan it was rectilinear and measured 5m x 1.5m and was only as deep as the limestone pieces. The feature appeared to have been material pressed into the natural clay.

All features were sealed by the topsoil (001), which consisted of loosely compacted dark brown silty loam, with a thickness of less than 0.19m. Fine gravels, occasional charcoal flecking and fragments of brick and tile were also present. It extended across the entire site.

4.2 Reliability of Results

The watching brief was carried out in both clement and wet conditions. There was good co-operation from the contractor carrying out the groundworks and the results are felt to be representative.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery (by Paul Blinkhorn)

The pottery assemblage comprised 72 sherds with a total weight of 751g. It consisted of almost entirely post-medieval wares of 18th – 19th century date, although a single, extremely abraded sherd of residual medieval pottery was present. The group was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAM:	Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 1 sherd, 3g.
OXDR:	Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 19 sherds, 219g.
OXRESWL:	Polychrome Slipware, 17 th C. 3 sherds, 34g.
OXBESWL:	Staffordshire slip-trailed earthenware, 1650 – 1750. 2 sherds, 18g.
OXBEW:	Staffordshire manganese wares. c. 1700-1800. 1 sherd, 4g.
OXFM:	Staffordshire White-glazed English Stoneware, 1730 – 1800. 10 sherds, 47g.
WHEW:	Mass-produced white earthenwares, 19th - 20th C. 36 sherds, 426g.

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 range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region. Cross-fits were made between contexts (009) and (010), indicating that the fills of the features are likely to be contemporary. Context (010) also produced a base-sherd from a chamber pot stamped 'Butterfly

B&B'. This is likely to be a 'batch-stamp' which relates to the owner rather than the maker of the pottery, and so reference to the historical record for the area may enable a more accurate date for the deposit to be obtained.

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

Cntxt	OXAM		OXDR		OXREWSL		OXBEWSL		OXBEW		OXFM		WHEW		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
004	1	3	19	219	3	34	2	18	1	4	10	47			E18thC
009													3	28	19thC
010													33	398	19thC
Total	1	3	19	219	3	34	2	18	1	4	10	47	36	426	

5.2 Clay Tobacco Pipes *(by John Moore)*

During the watching brief four fragments of clay tobacco pipe were found and retained. None suggest a date.

The fragmentary bowl fragment from context (009) has a maker's mark with P visible on one side of the pedestal base, the letter on the other side is illegible. The three pieces of stem came from context (010).

5.3 Environmental Remains

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

6 DISCUSSION

Although no datable evidence was recovered from the deposits found during the pipe trench excavation, the white loam (002) and lower mid-light brown silt-sand (014) seem to tie in with deposits uncovered during the earlier evaluation (Network Archaeology, 2007) in which the white deposit (002) sealed features of a Romano-British date, which in turn had disturbed Mesolithic activity.

The three charcoal rich deposits (015), (016) and (017) are in close proximity to one another and are likely small patches of burning. Feature (018), whilst slightly further from the group is also a small burnt area, possibly indicating the base of a hearth. None of these features had a distinctive cut, possibly indicating that layer (014) is a buried land surface.

The lack of any other activity in this area may indicate the line of the pipe trench is on the outer edge of the Roman settlement recorded in the earlier evaluation, or that the 1.5m trench slot was too narrow to give an accurate idea of the intensity of activity on site.

Ditch 012 running northeast to southwest is most likely a large boundary ditch, running parallel to the natural boundary of a nearby small stream. The stony area (004) is very rough with irregularly sized limestone blocks following the break of slope of ditch 012. It is probably too irregular for a track or floor surface these are

likely to have been laid to consolidate an area of wet, boggy ground at the edge of the ditch, perhaps to prevent the side caving in. Pottery recovered from it indicates that this was carried out in the early 18th century.

The remnant wall foundation (005), demolition debris (010) and scattered corrugated iron roofing form the only visible remains of what was probably a small farm building, similar in size and construction to those still standing to the Northwest of the site. The demolition debris (010) produced a large quantity of 19th century pottery.

Deposit (019) appears to be the remains of the demolition of another small farm building. Although no datable finds were recovered from this deposit it is likely to be contemporary with the other demolition deposits on site. Two buildings appear in the area on the first edition OS map of 1885. One building is demolished on the OS map of 1900 and the second gone by the publication of the OS 1922 map.

Previous pipes being laid and other work at the sewage treatment works had heavily disturbed the ground between manhole 1 and manhole 4 and there was no archaeology in this area.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record

The project brief	The project report
Written Scheme of Investigation	The primary site records
The drawn records	

Physical Record

The finds

The archive and finds are currently maintained by John Moore Heritage Services. The archive will be transferred to: The Oxfordshire Museum Service under accession number 2009.7

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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