

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

LAND TO THE EAST OF COGGES HILL ROAD,
WITNEY

OXFORDSHIRE

On behalf of

Witney Town Council

MAY 2000

REPORT FOR

Witney Town Council
Town Hall
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CONTENTS

	Page
SUMMARY	1
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Site Location	
1.2 Planning Background	
1.3 Archaeological Background	
2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION	2
3 STRATEGY	2
3.1 Research Design	2
3.2 Methodology	2
4 RESULTS	4
4.1 Features of Probable Roman Date	4
4.2 Features of Medieval Date	7
4.3 Features of Other Periods	7
4.4 Undated Features	7
5 FINDS	
5.1 The Pottery	9
5.2 Other Finds	11
6 DISCUSSION	12
7 CONCLUSIONS	12
8 BIBLIOGRAPHY	13
APPENDIX 1	
Context lists	14

FIGURES

		Page
Figure 1	Trench Location	3
Figure 2	Plan of Trenches 3-6	5
Figure 3	Plan of Trenches 7-10	6
Figure 4	Selected Sections	8

Summary

An evaluation of an area proposed for development as a cemetery was undertaken to determine the presence/absence of significant archaeological remains. This was achieved by the excavation of a 2% sample of the proposal area. The evaluation established that there were significant archaeological remains present within the area of the proposed cemetery.

Evidence for settlement during the Roman period was found to be focused on the glacial gravels present in the north-east corner of the site. It is probable that the settlement extends to the north-east along the ridge of gravel. An earthwork consisting of a ditch probably forming two sides of an enclosure may define a plot for a medieval building. Ridge and furrow cultivation survives as earthworks. Post-medieval pottery was recovered from one of the furrows.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Fig. 1)

The site of the proposed cemetery (NGR SP 3690 / 0970) lies on the south side of Oxford Hill, and directly to the east of Cogges Hill Road, to the eastern side of Witney. The area covers approximately 3.2 hectares, and lies at c. 50m OD. The current usage of the field is grassland. The geology is Oxford Clay, with areas of glacial gravels and sand towards the north east, where the land rises.

1.2 Planning Background

Witney Town Council has identified a need for a new cemetery. The area east of Cogges Hill Road was deemed suitable for such a purpose, although no formal planning application was made. Due to the presence of remains of archaeological interest within the vicinity of the development the County Archaeological Services (CAS) has advised that an archaeological evaluation of the site be undertaken prior to the determination of any future application. Such an evaluation was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) in accordance with a *Written Scheme of Investigation* agreed with the CAS.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The area in which the proposed cemetery is located has yielded archaeological material prior to this evaluation. A Medieval seal matrix dated to c. 1300 AD, was unearthed to the west side of the area. A linear feature of uncertain alignment, and of a possible Iron Age date contained animal bone, pottery and burnt daub. This was also located to the western side of the area. There are the remains of a known Iron Age settlement c. 3 km to the west at Deer Park Road.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.
- To determine the true nature of the feature of possible Iron Age date

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to the brief issued by the CAS, a scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with the CAS and Witney Town Council. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of ten trenches. The position of some trenches as proposed in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* were altered because of the topography of the field. Excavation was carried out using a 180⁰ mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless bucket to expose potential archaeological horizons and natural ground. Archaeological horizons and features were investigated by hand to determine their date, character and extent.

Site procedures 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 of Field Archaeologists (1994), and was monitored by Hugh Coddington of the CAS.

3.2 Methodology

Ten trenches were situated within the area of the proposed cemetery (Fig. 1). All were c. 30m long and 1.8 - 2.0m wide. Excavation was undertaken using a 180⁰ mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m toothless ditching bucket. Material was removed in spits to the level of archaeological deposits or natural ground.

Standard JMHS 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 produced. Trenches were backfilled after recording.



Figure 1. Trench Location

Scale 1:2500

4 RESULTS

The geology in the lower western and southern areas of the site is Oxford Clay. The north-east part of the site occupies higher ground and here the geology is glacially derived gravels and sand. These gravels are part of a small spur, which runs in a north-east/south-west direction for c. 525m, the south-western tip situated within the site. Trenches 2, 3 and 9 were wholly or partially situated on gravel, the remainder located on clay. A dry valley flowing to the south-west is immediately to the south of Trench 5. The land falls west between Trench 2 and Trench 1 and west of Trench 8 & 7. It also falls significantly to the south from Trenches 6 and 5.

A modern ploughsoil existed across the site and varied in depth between 150 - 260mm. This consisted of a loam with a slight clay component. This ploughsoil generally overlay a layer of more mixed deposits, combining topsoil with the underlying natural (either clay or gravel), except for trench 1, where this was absent. This mixed deposit was interpreted as a buried ploughsoil, although its nature varied slightly across the site. The depth of this deposit varied from 80 -400mm, depending on the topography of the field. Clear evidence of ridge and furrow was present on the field's surface, and could be seen cutting through the natural in places (i.e. Trenches 2 and 9). This evidence of apparent medieval agricultural activity on the site would have obscured any crop or soil marks generated by earlier activity.

All of the trenches, with the exception of trench 1, contained archaeological features. These features will be discussed, where possible, by their chronology and fall into two main categories: those belonging to the Roman period and those of a medieval date. These chronologies are based on the analysis of datable finds from individual features or archaeological deposits. Dimensions of features are given in Appendix 1.

4.1 Features of Probable Roman Date

Trenches 3, 4 and 10 contained considerable evidence for Roman activity on the site, whilst Trenches 5, 6, 7 and 8 contained some material dating to this period. Trench 3 contained two features, both linear ditches (Fig. 2). Ditch 3/7 ran approximately north south and had a dark fill with patches of burnt material and charcoal in the fill (3/6). The southern end was not very clear but appeared to bend slightly to the west. This trench was cut by another linear feature (3/5) which ran east west, and had been cut from a higher level (Fig.4). Both of these features contained material datable to the Roman period (see section 5) but 3/5 could be of a later period (see section 6). Feature 3/5 was clearly visible in both the east and west sections, and feature 3/7 was sampled by excavating a 500mm slot through it, to obtain both its profile and dating material (Fig. 4).

The archaeology within Trench 4 was fairly dense, and at times it was difficult to assess the number and extent of individual features within the confines of the trench (Fig. 2). Two linear features both running approximately north-south (4/6 and 4/10), two probable pits (4/7 and 4/11) and two large conglomerations of features (4/4 and 4/5, and 4/8 and 4/9) were present. It was decided that excavation of these features would reveal little information given the confines of the trench, and may well compromise any future, larger scale excavation of the site. In the light of this dating

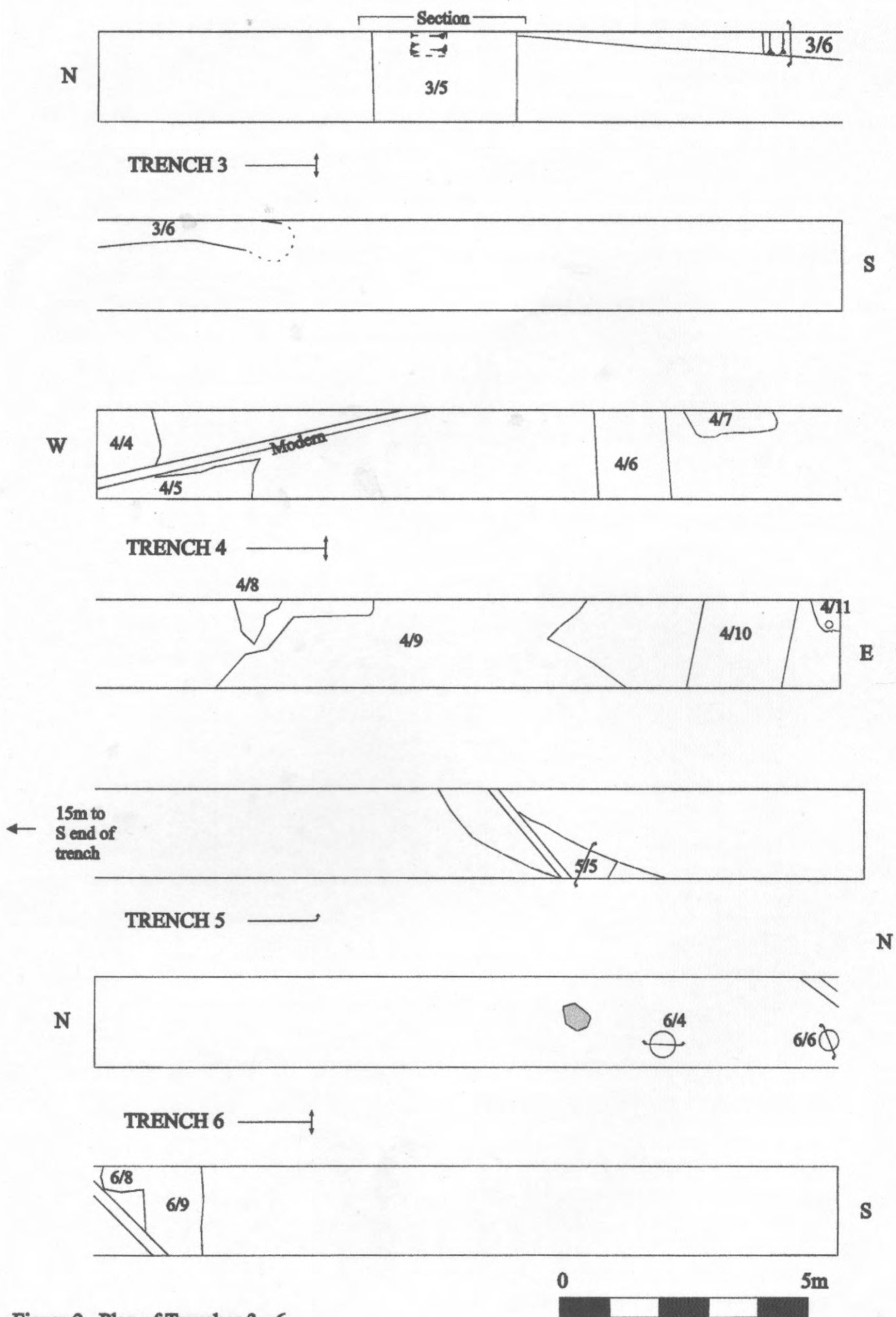


Figure 2. Plan of Trenches 3 - 6.

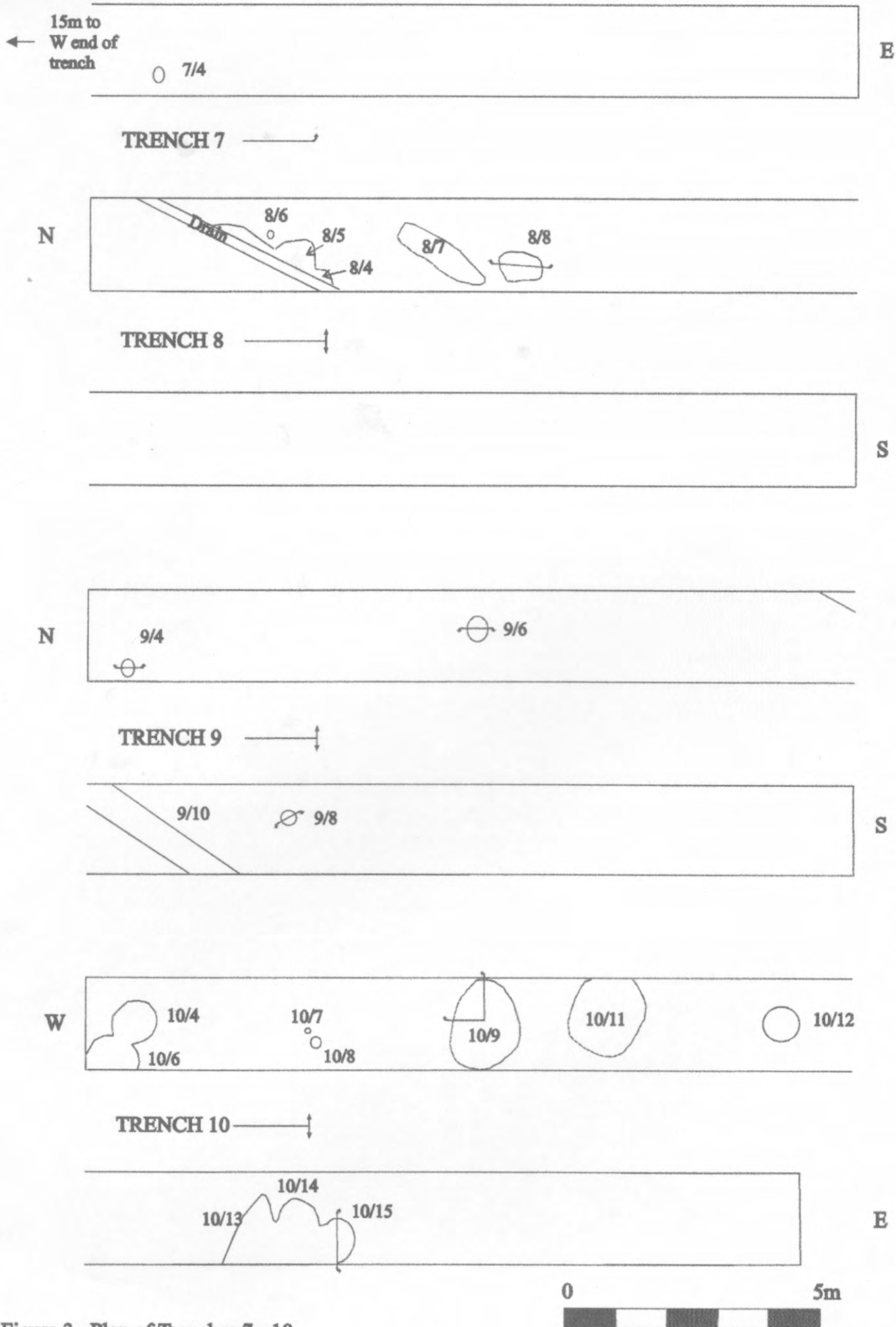


Figure 3. Plan of Trenches 7 - 10.

evidence was collected by the excavation of small slots, or by the collection of visible material from the upper fills. All of the material collected (from features 4/6, 4/7, 4/8 & 4/9) dated to the early Roman period (see section 5).

A posthole (6/6) in Trench 6 (Figs. 2 & 4) and a stake hole (7/4) in Trench 7 contained material dated to the Roman period. An elongated feature (8/7) within Trench 8 contained ?1st-2nd century material (Fig. 2).

Trench 10 also contained a large number of features, 10/7 a stakehole, 10/8 a post hole and a series of pits 10/4, 10/6, 10/9, 10/11, 10/12, 10/13, 10/14, and 10/15 (Fig. 4), the latter three intercutting (Fig. 3). Again only a representative sample of these features was excavated. All the material collected from these features (10/7, 10/8, 10/9, 10/13, 10/14, 10/16) dated to the early Roman period.

Trenches 5 and 6 also yielded some Roman material from 5/2 and 6/2 which both represent the buried ploughsoil and as such material from these contexts can not be seen as being *in situ*, but redeposited by later agricultural activity.

4.2 Features of Medieval Date

Trenches 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 produced material datable to the medieval period. The majority of finds were associated with the buried ploughsoil (3/3, 5/2, 6/2, 7/2 and 8/2). Two pits located within Trench 6 (6/4 and 6/8) (Figs. 2 & 4) contained small amounts of medieval pottery; 6/8 probably being cut by a linear feature (6/9) and as such the latter probably being of medieval date. A further possible feature was present just to the north of 6/4. A possible elongated feature within Trench 8 (8/4) yielded a sherd of medieval pot, however this feature was heavily truncated by a modern land drain (a feature of several trenches). 8/4 cuts an adjacent irregular feature 8/5; again the land drain truncates 8/5. It is possible that other features (pits, postholes or small linear shaped features) may also belong to this phase of activity on the site, but as no datable material from these features was recovered during the recording process this can not be shown.

4.3 Features of Other Periods

The only other feature datable was a furrow (9/10 filled by 9/11) running north-east by south-west across Trench 9 (Fig. 3). Three sherds of post-Medieval pottery were recovered from this feature. One potsherd recovered from the buried ploughsoil within trench 6 (6/2) has been tentatively dated to the Iron Age, but as this was redeposited it merely hints at some activity at this time within the general vicinity.

4.4 Undated Features

A number of features were undated, either through no finds being recovered from excavation or due to them not being excavated.

Trench 4 (Fig. 2) while containing four features or groups of features dated to the Roman period also contained several undated features. These were a ditch (4/10),

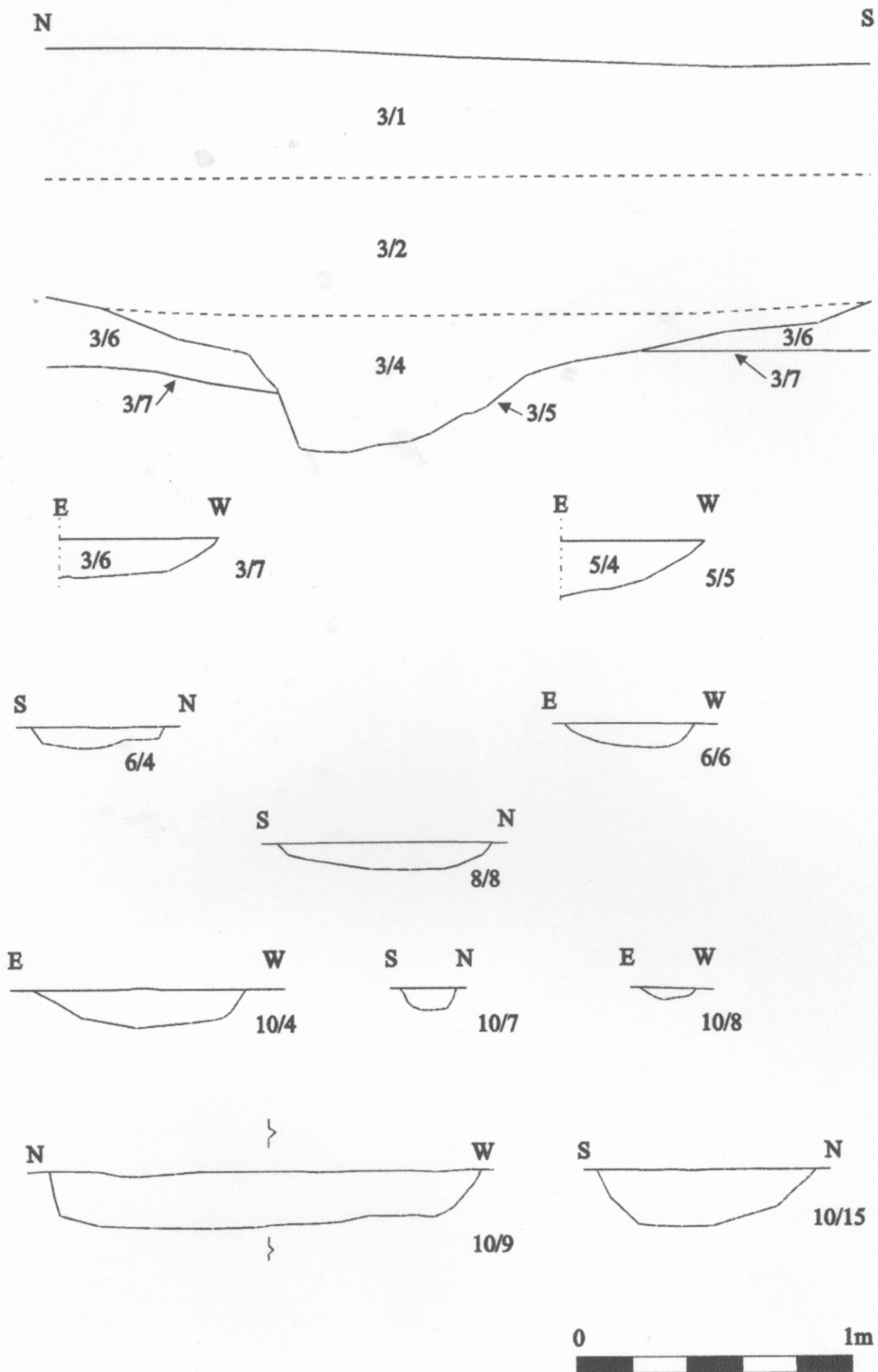


Figure 4. Selected Sections

two pits (4/4 & 4/11) although a fired clay fragment suggests that the latter is of Roman date, and indistinct feature (4/5). Due to the density of features dated to the Roman period in this trench and the absence of medieval pottery in the ploughsoils it is probable that the majority of the undated features belong to the Roman period.

A curving gully c. 900mm wide was found in Trench 5 (Figs. 2 & 4). A land drain had cut this. Within Trench 8 a circular feature 8/5 was cut by a feature of medieval date. A stakehole (8/6) and post hole (8/8) were also undated (Figs. 3 & 4). The three small postholes in Trench 9 (9/4, 9/5, 9/6) were all undated (Fig. 3).

Trench 10 contained six features dated to the Roman period while a further 5 (pits 10/4, 10/6, 10/11, & 10/12 and a post hole 10/8) were undated (Figs. 3 & 4). Similarly to Trench 4 it is presumed that the majority of these features are of the Roman period especially given their proximity to Trench 4.

5 FINDS

The finds consisted of 57 sherds of pot of various periods (see below), and 1 fragment of bone. The lack of bone in other contexts sampled, and the generally poor condition of the pottery seem to indicate acidic soil conditions, poorly suited to artefact preservation.

5.1 The Pottery

Introduction

The evaluation produced some 40 sherds of Iron Age and Roman pottery and 17 sherds of medieval and post-medieval material. The pottery was scanned quite briefly and the Iron Age and Roman 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 moderate to poor condition. Average sherd weights were mostly quite low and many sherds were quite abraded, though it is not certain if this reflects the working of processes of redeposition or is a factor of slightly acidic soil conditions.

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

CONTEXT	PREHISTORIC	ROMAN	MEDIEVAL	POST-MEDIEVAL	CONTEXT DATE
3/3		3/35	2/6		Medieval
3/4		3/6			?2nd century
3/6		4/25			?2nd century
4/2		1/2			?1st-3rd century
4/6		2/17			?2nd-3rd century
4/7		1/24			1st-2nd century

4/8		1/6			?1st-2nd century
4/9		5/101			1st-2nd century
5/2		2/20	2/6		Medieval
6/2	?1/10	1/2	3/14		Medieval
6/5			2/19		Medieval
6/7		1/6			?1st-2nd century
6/8		2/4	2/9		Medieval
7/2			1/5		Medieval
7/5		1/4			1st-3rd century
8/2			1/4		Medieval
8/4			1/4		Medieval
8/7		2/33			?1st-2nd century
9/11				3/183	?18th-19th century
10/7		1/11			?late 1st-2nd century
10/10		2/13			?2nd-3rd century
10/13		1/12			1st-2nd century
10/14		1/1			?1st-3rd century
10/15		5/15			?mid-late 1st century
TOTAL	1/10	39/337	14/67	3/183	

Fabrics, forms and chronology: Prehistoric and Roman

A single possible prehistoric sherd was in a fabric with inclusions of clay pellets (possibly grog), ?organic voids and quartz sand. A middle to late Iron Age date seems most likely for this sherd. The 'Roman' pottery included four sherds in 'E' wares, a fabric grouping which spans the late Iron Age to early Roman transition but need not necessarily indicate activity of pre-conquest date. The remaining Roman material consisted almost entirely of locally derived reduced and (to a lesser extent) oxidised fabrics, dominated by R37, a grey ware with abundant fine sand tempering. The source of this and related fabrics such as R38 (also present in this group) is unknown

but is likely to lie in the area between the present site and the Akeman Street settlements of Asthall and Wilcote to the north. The industry seems to have been quite long lived, with origins in the 1st century AD, but may not have lasted into the 4th century. Sources beyond the immediate area represented in the assemblage were Savernake (North Wiltshire) and Dorset - a single fragment of black-burnished ware being found in context 3/4.

Seven rim sherds were present, but none was sufficiently large to be diagnostic of form at more than a very generalised level (jar, bowl, dish etc). Close dating was therefore not possible. The general character of the rims is, however, consistent with the evidence of the fabrics suggesting an emphasis on the 1st-2nd centuries AD. Some pieces could have been of the 3rd century, but there were no characteristics allowing such specific dating.

Fabrics, forms and chronology: Medieval and Post-medieval

The medieval assemblage included a tiny glazed fragment of ?Brill/Boarstall ware but otherwise consisted entirely of dark grey-brown coarse ware sherds characterised by voids indicating the presence of oolitic limestone temper. These are in a west Oxfordshire tradition, either OXAC or OXCX - Wychwood ware (Mellor 1995, 44, 106-8), but close dating is not possible. The only diagnostic sherds were sagging bases from one or more cooking pots.

The fresh condition of the post-medieval sherds from context 9/11 contrasted with that of most of the rest of the pottery. Two were of glazed red earthenware and the third was a stoneware.

General discussion

The pottery indicates settlement of 1st-2nd century date in the vicinity of the site, but the assemblage is small and for the most part in fairly poor condition. The worn character of a number of these sherds may indicate that they are residual. This is clearly the case where they are associated with medieval material, but may also apply to some other context groups from which medieval sherds are absent. The medieval material, consisting entirely of small sherds, may derive solely from ploughsoils of that date.

5.2 Other Finds

A fragment of fired clay was recovered from pit 4/11. This may be part of a loom weight. Only one fragment of bone was recovered from the evaluation. This was not well preserved and it is considered that the soil conditions are too acidic for good preservation of bone.

6 DISCUSSION

It seems likely that a Romano-British settlement occupied at least some of the area of this proposal site. The large number of features attributable to this period, especially in Trenches 3, 4, and 10 may suggest that activity was focused on the area of glacial gravels. As such further evidence may be located further to the north-east, beyond the area investigated for this evaluation. The linear ditches assigned to this phase of activity may represent field boundaries, or delineate an area of settlement in itself. Further and larger scale archaeological investigation would be required to elucidate this. The undated curved gully in Trench 5 may represent an eaves drip gully outside a circular building. A posthole within Trench 6 contained a sherd of roman pottery but this may be residual with the feature dating to the medieval period.

The evidence for the medieval period is less robust, and consists of postholes or small pits and one ditch in Trenches 6 and 8. The ditch 3/5 orientated E/W contained pottery of the Roman period. However it is cut from a higher level than the earlier ditch in this trench and is visible as an earthwork on either side of the trench. This earthwork is visible turning northwards c. 10m to the west of Trench 3. The ridge and furrow was not visible within the area enclosed by the earthwork. It is possible that this earthwork defines a plot for a building of the medieval period.

Of interest was the post-medieval pottery from a furrow in Trench 9 suggesting that the ridge and furrow cultivation is of a late date.

No evidence was forthcoming in relation to any Iron Age activity. It is possible that some unexcavated features date to this period, or that no feature happened to be present within the 2% area covered by the evaluation. From examination of the reports on the finding of the Iron Age material to the west it is considered that the western part of the ditch seen during development of the housing estate on the west side of Cogges Hill Road may have been under Cogges Hill Road. This suggests that the occupation in this period was further west than the area covered by this evaluation. This negative evidence may in itself prove valuable in determining the extent of Iron Age activity on the east side of Witney.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation shows that the site under consideration for the new cemetery does contain remains of archaeological significance.

Although the expected evidence for Iron Age activity in the vicinity was not forthcoming, evidence of Romano-British settlement on the site is strong, as was that for medieval and post-medieval arable land use and possible medieval settlement.

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(for 1994), 17-217

APPENDIX 1: Context Lists

Trench 1

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
1 / 1	Topsoil	Trench	Trench	190-200mm	Modern
1 / 2	Natural	Trench	Trench	--	--

Trench 2

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
2 / 1	Topsoil	Trench	Trench	210mm	Modern
2 / 2	Subsoil	Trench	Trench	260mm	Medieval
2 / 3	Natural	27.5m	Trench	--	Gravels
2 / 4	Natural	2.5m	Trench	--	Clay

Trench 3

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
3 / 1	Topsoil	Trench	Trench	240mm	Modern
3 / 2	Subsoil	Trench	Trench	400mm	Medieval
3 / 3	Natural	Trench	Trench	--	pottery mixed
3 / 4	Fill of 3 / 5	1.8m exposed	3m	400mm	?C2 nd pottery, flint flake
3 / 5	Ditch cut	1.8m exposed	3m	400mm	?C2 nd
3 / 6	Fill of 3 / 7	14m exposed	700mm exposed	180mm	?C2 nd (pre- C3 / 5) pottery
3 / 7	Ditch cut	14m exposed	700mm exposed	180mm	?C2 nd (pre- 3 / 5)

Trench 4

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
4 / 1	Topsoil	Trench	Trench	150mm	Modern
4 / 2	Subsoil	Trench	Trench	140mm	Medieval pottery
4 / 3	Natural	Trench	Trench	--	--
4 / 4	Feature	1.5m exposed	1m exposed	unexcavated	--
4 / 5	Feature	3m exposed	1m exposed	120mm	--
4 / 6	Linear feature	1.8m exposed	1.6m	30mm	?C2 nd -3 rd pottery
4 / 7	Feature	1.95m exposed	650mm exposed	50-80mm	C1 st -2 nd pottery
4 / 8	Feature	1.8m exposed	850mm exposed	not fully excavated	?C1 st -2 nd pottery, nail
4 / 9	Feature group	8.15m exposed	1.9m exposed	not fully excavated	?C1 st -2 nd pottery, CBM
4 / 10	Linear feature	Trench	1.85m	unexcavated	--
4 / 11	Feature	600mm exposed	550mm exposed	unexcavated	?loomweight

Trench 5

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
5 / 1	Topsoil	Trench	Trench	260mm	Modern
5 / 2	Subsoil	Trench	Trench	80mm	Medieval pottery
5 / 3	Natural	Trench	Trench	--	--
5 / 4	Fill of 5 / 5	4m exposed	c. 1m	190mm	--
5 / 5	Linear cut	4m exposed	c. 1m	190mm	Possibly curved

Trench 6

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
6 / 1	Topsoil	Trench	Trench	200-240mm	Modern
6 / 2	Subsoil	Trench	Trench	50-180mm	Medieval pottery
6 / 3	Natural	Trench	Trench	--	--
6 / 4	Post-hole cut	460mm	420mm	80mm	Medieval
6 / 5	Fill of 6 / 4	460mm	420mm	80mm	Medieval pottery
6 / 6	Post-hole cut	600mm	500mm	80mm	?C1 st -2 nd
6 / 7	Fill of 6 / 6	600mm	500mm	80mm	?C1 st -2 nd pottery
6 / 8	Feature - pit	900mm exposed	600mm exposed	not fully excavated	Medieval pottery
6 / 9	Linear feature	1.9m exposed	1.2m	unexcavated	--

Trench 7

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
7 / 1	Topsoil	Trench	Trench	240mm	Modern
7 / 2	Subsoil	Trench	Trench	100mm	Medieval pottery
7 / 3	Natural	Trench	Trench	--	--
7 / 4	Post-hole cut	350mm	350mm	45mm	C1 st -3 rd
7 / 5	Fill of 7 / 4	350mm	350mm	45mm	C1 st -3 rd pottery

Trench 8

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
8 / 1	Topsoil	Trench	Trench	240mm	Modern
8 / 2	Subsoil	Trench	Trench	100mm	Medieval pottery
8 / 3	Natural	Trench	Trench	--	--
8 / 4	Feature	2.3m	300mm	not fully excavated	Medieval, cuts 8 / 5, pottery
8 / 5	Feature	400mm	250mm	unexcavated	--
8 / 6	Post-hole	170mm	130mm	unexcavated	--
8 / 7	Linear feature	2m	480mm	not fully excavated	?C1 st -2 nd , pottery
8 / 8	Pit cut	980mm	800mm	80mm	--
8 / 9	Fill of 8 / 8	980mm	800mm	80mm	--

Trench 9

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
9 / 1	Topsoil	Trench	Trench	200mm	Modern
9 / 2	Subsoil	Trench	Trench	130mm	Medieval
9 / 3	Natural	Trench	Trench	--	--
9 / 4	Post-hole cut	270mm	190mm	130mm	--
9 / 5	Fill of 9 / 4	270mm	190mm	130mm	--
9 / 6	Post-hole cut	340mm	280mm	60mm	--
9 / 7	Fill of 9 / 6	340mm	280mm	60mm	--
9 / 8	Post-hole cut	250mm	170mm	50mm	--
9 / 9	Fill of 9 / 8	250mm	170mm	50mm	--
9 / 10	Linear (furrow)	c.3m exposed	800mm	not fully excavated	?C18 th -19 th
9 / 11	Fill of 9 / 10	c. 3m exposed	800mm	not fully excavated	?C18 th -19 th pottery

Trench 10

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
10 / 1	Topsoil	Trench	Trench	220mm	Modern
10 / 2	Subsoil	Trench	Trench	160mm	Medieval
10 / 3	Natural	Trench	Trench	--	--
10 / 4	Pit cut	1m	900mm	130mm	--
10 / 5	Fill of 10 / 4	1m	900mm	130mm	--
10 / 6	Pit	800mm	500mm	unexcavated	--
10 / 7	Stake-hole	170mm	120mm	50mm	?late C1 st -2 nd pottery
10 / 8	Post-hole	200mm	200mm	30mm	--
10 / 9	Pit cut	1.9m	1.6m	220mm	?late C2 nd -3 rd
10 / 10	Fill of 10 / 9	1.9m	1.6m	220mm	?late C2 nd -3 rd pottery
10 / 11	Pit	1.45m	1.4m	unexcavated	--
10 / 12	Pit	950mm	900mm	unexcavated	--
10 / 13	Pit	1.5m	700mm	unexcavated	C1 st -2 nd pottery
10 / 14	Pit	1m exposed	c.900mm	unexcavated	? C1 st -2 nd pottery, CBM
10 / 15	Fill of 10/16	800mm	800mm	200mm	?mid-late C1 st pottery
10 / 16	Pit cut	800mm	800mm	200mm	?mid-late C1 st