

9 Watling Lane Dorchester upon Thames Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

9th May 2003

Client Name: Mr M Richmond

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9 Watling Lane, Dorchester-upon-Thames, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Front Cover Plate: Demolition of old Bungalow from south-west.

SUMMARY

In April 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 9 Watling Lane, Dorchester-upon-Thames, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 5764 9420). The work was commissioned by Mr M Richmond in advance of the construction of a new dwelling. The watching brief revealed soil deposits from the post-Roman backfill of the Roman town ditches.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In April 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 9 Watling Lane, Dorchester-upon-Thames, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr M Richmond in respect of a planning application for the construction of a new dwelling (Planning Application No. PO3/W0015).
- 1.1.2 No written brief for the work was produced, but requirements for the watching brief were outlined by Paul Smith of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (OCAS) during discussions with Oxford Archaeology (OA).
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet the requirements of OCAS.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on the Thames Valley terrace gravels. Brickearth has been recorded overlying the gravels to the east around Dorchester Abbey Church. Gault and greensand deposits are located beyond the gravel terraces (British Geological Survey, Sheet 254). The site lies at c. 49 m OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA 2003) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The site lies in an area of known archaeological potential. However, there has been no previous archaeological work on the site of the development and no archaeological finds or deposits from the site have been recorded. Investigations close to the site have revealed significant archaeological activity. Excavations at the nearby Beech House Hotel in 1972 site revealed occupation horizons dating to between the 1st century and the 10th century AD (Rowley, T and Brown, L 1981). In 1994 a watching brief carried out during excavation of foundation trenches at 14 Watling Lane revealed part of a probable Roman inhumation cemetery.
- 1.3.3 The area of Dorchester-on-Thames has settlement origins dating back to the Neolithic period and has been known as one of the classic Neolithic sites in England. The area contains prehistoric features and monuments such as a cursus, which could only be identified through crop marks, and various enclosures and barrows.

- 1.3.4 The earthwork monument known as the Big Rings was actually a large henge monument and with a wood henge located c 600m to the east. Other monuments in the locale include Castle Hill, Wittenham Clumps hillfort and Dyke Hills associated Iron Age Opidum.
- 1.3.5 The area of proposed development lies at the edge of the northern defences of the Roman town of Dorchester (Fig. 2), whose name is of Roman origin. Bede first mentions the place name of Dorcic or Doriccaestrae in the 8th century. Crop marks associated with a fort and wooden buildings are believed to be related to the 1st century AD Roman fortifications.
- 1.3.6 Bridge End, situated to the south of the Roman settlement, was historically the site of the river crossing of the main road through Dorchester. This road, linking Oxford and South Wales, provided much of the town's commerce. The earliest reference to a bridge is in 1146. The tithe map of 1845 records Bridge Edge Common as lying west of the River Thames.
- 1.3.7 Two inhumations of Roman date were discovered nearby at 1 Orchard Haven in 1965 during the construction of new dwellings. Belgic and Roman pottery and slag were also found during the excavation of the foundation trenches of this development.
- 1.3.8 In 1982, a single inhumation was found nearby in the grounds of Green Acre, Bridge End (PRN 13029), which was thought to have been late Roman in date as the grave had cut through an earlier Romano-British feature.
- 1.3.9 In 1874 two burials accompanied by early Anglo-Saxon grave goods, were excavated at Dyke Hills, which lies approximately 500 m south of Watling Lane.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The old bungalow was demolished and its foundations lifted. The site was then cleared and levelled. The site was then marked out and excavated with a mini excavator. This was monitored during 6 site visits between 4th April and 15th April 2003.
- 2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 The foundation trenches were 0.70 m wide and excavated to a depth of 0.9 m to 1.1 m in depth (Fig. 3). These cut into a compact yellowish brown sand and gravel mixture of redeposit natural (2 and 5). This was overlain by a compact dark reddish brown silty sand loam (3 and 6), a cultivated soil. Cutting into these two layers were a number of tree root holes (7), which were filled by a dark grey brown silty sand loam (8). Sealing all these was a 0.5 m thick layer of dark grey brown silty sand loam topsoil (1), which contained demolition material from the old bungalow (Fig. 4, section 1 and 2).

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The watching brief did not reveal any archaeological features, but a series of deposits of largely dumped or imported material. Previous work suggests that the site lies at the north-west corner of the Roman town defences (A.H.A. Hogg and C.E. Stevens, 1937) (Fig. 2). The foundations for the new building were therefore cutting into post-Roman backfill layers over the site of the wide double ditches of the town's defences. However, it appears that the foundations were not cut deep enough to impact on the primary ditch or bank deposits, if they survive at all.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Height</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1	Layer	0.5 m			Topsoil	
2	Layer				Redeposit natural	
3	Layer				Cultivated soil	
4	Void	Void	Void	Void	Void	Void
5	Layer				Redeposit natural	
6	Layer				Cultivated soil	
7	Cut				Root Holes	
8	Fill				Fill of Root Holes	

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

A.H.A. Hogg and C.E. Stevens, 1937 Defences of Roman Dorchester, *Oxoniensia* Vol II

Rowley, T and Brown, L 1981 'Excavations at Beech House Hotel, Dorchester-upon-Thames 1972', *Oxoniensia* Vol XLVI

Kirsty Rodwell, 1975 Historic towns in Oxfordshire, A survey of the new county

OA 1992 Fieldwork Manual, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA 2003 9 Watling Lane, Dorchester upon Thames Written Scheme of Investigation

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: 9 Watling Lane, Dorchester upon Thames, Oxfordshire

Site code: DORWA 03

Grid reference: NGR SP 5764 9420

Type of watching brief: Excavation of foundations for new dwelling.

Date and duration of project: Six site visits from the 4.4.03 to the 15.4.03.

Area of site: 10 m x 16 m

Summary of results: The watching brief revealed undated soil deposits over the site of the location of the Roman town ditches.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS 2003.48



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Figure 1: Site location

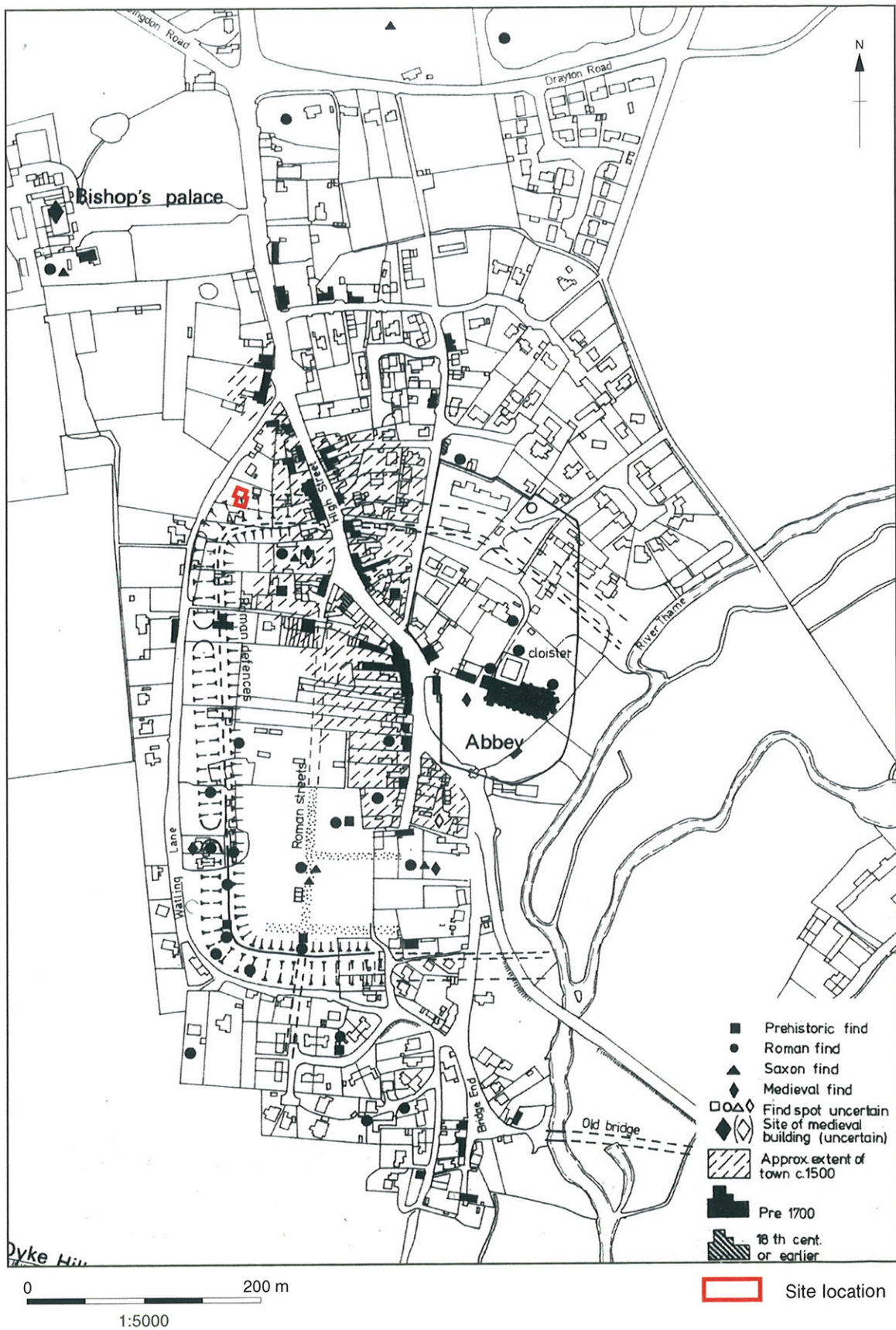


Figure 2: Site location and location of Roman defences of the town (after Mumford, 1963)

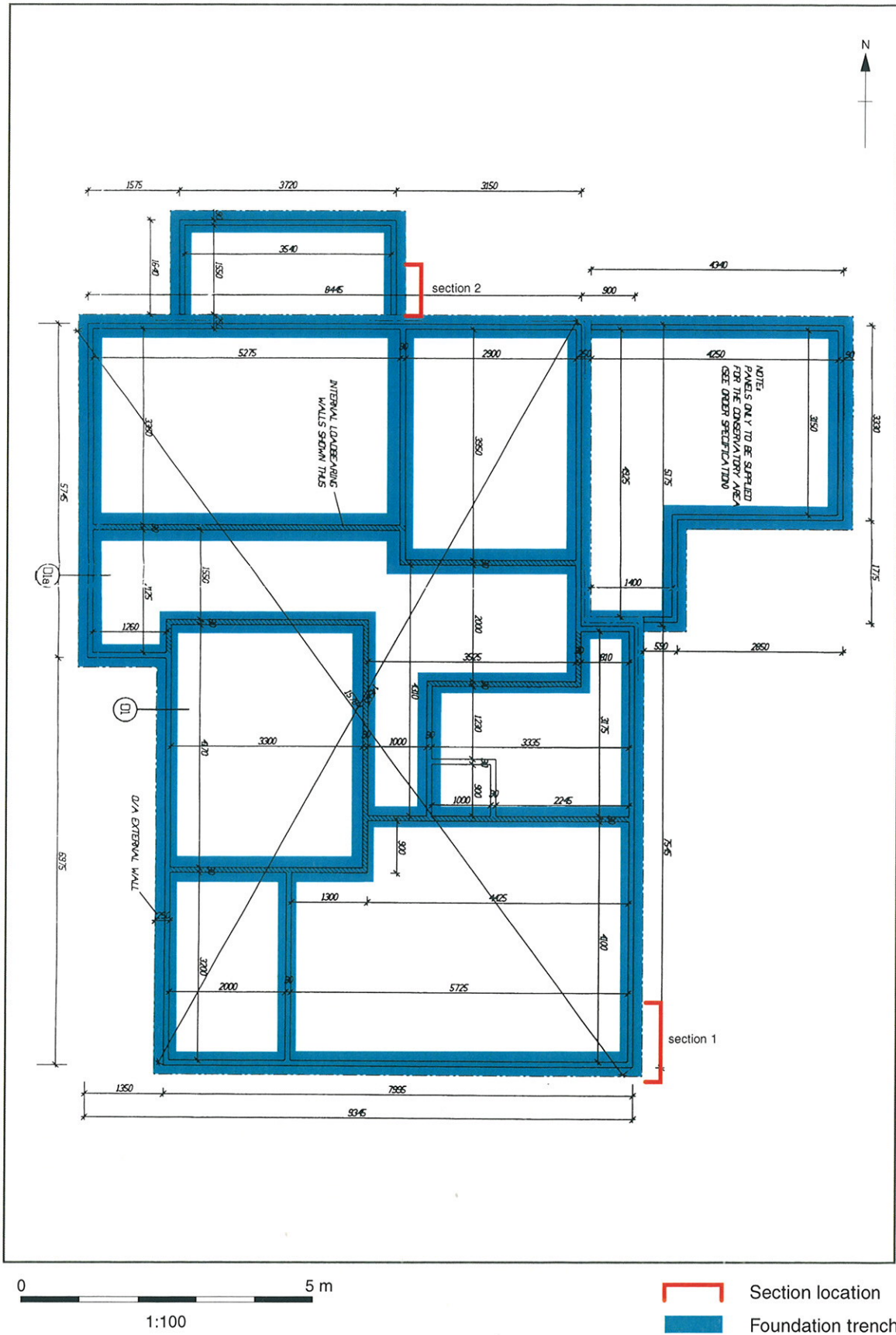
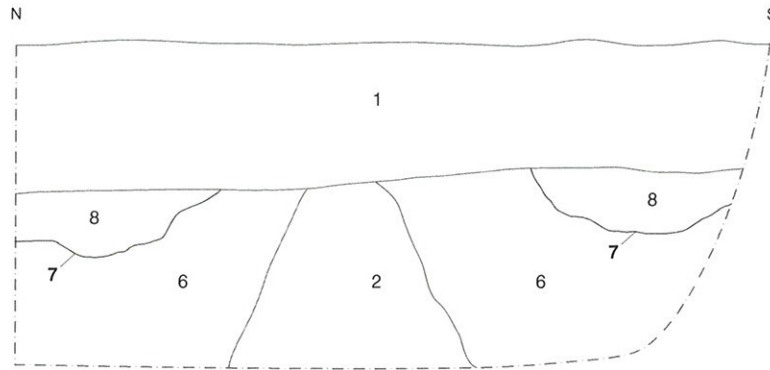


Figure 3: Plan of new foundations and location of recorded sections

Section 1



Section 2

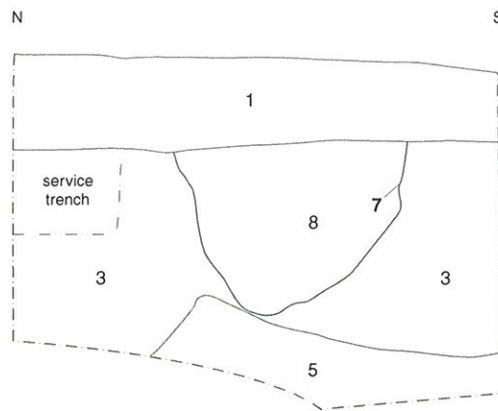


Figure 4: Sections



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