

DORCHESTER (OX)
ON
THAMES

DOWATWB

Michael Vaughton Associates

**14 WATLING LANE, DORCHESTER-ON-THAMES
OXFORDSHIRE**

NGR SU 5760 9429

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit
July 2001

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ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

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14 Watling Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames Oxfordshire

NGR SU 5760 9429

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Summary

In June 2001, Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at 14 Watling Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 5760 9429). Natural sand was observed at the base of foundation trenches for a new building. An undated soil horizon was observed in the trench sections, sealed beneath modern make-up layers associated with previous construction work. No significant archaeological features or deposits were observed in the course of the watching brief.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In June 2001, Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at 14 Watling Lane, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 5760 9429 - Fig. 1).
- 1.2 Planning permission for a new development at the site has been granted by South Oxfordshire District Council. An archaeological brief was required in as part of the planning condition, as the development is within an area of archaeological potential in this historic town. The development comprises the conversion of an integral garage to utility and study, with the erection of a detached double garage. OAU were commissioned to undertake the watching brief by Michael Vaughton Associates, Oxford, on behalf of their clients, Mr and Mrs Bowler.
- 1.3 The development site is situated to the west of the town of Dorchester and overlies over the Thames Valley Gravels at about 50 m OD.

2 Background

- 2.1 The development site is located at the north-west corner of the Roman town of Dorchester, west of the road that extended to Alchester. The plot of land of No. 14 Watling Lane lies just to the west of the line of the defensive ditch that once surrounded the town. Previous excavations in the vicinity have located pottery kilns and miscellaneous finds, though the precise line of the town's west wall in this period remains conjectural.
- 2.2 By the Saxon period the settlement had contracted such that this development lies outside the known limit of the Saxon occupation. Excavations in the 1960s recovered evidence for sunken-featured buildings dating from the 5th/6th

century to the 9th century to the east of this site. The town/settlement appears to have prospered, on the basis of the few good quality finds recovered across the town, possibly in part due to the cathedral erected here by Bishop Birinus in the mid-7th century.

- 2.3 The town was in decline by the late Saxon period and its resurgence probably coincided with the re-founding of the church as an abbey of Augustinian Canons in 1140 by Alexander of Lincoln. The town appears little changed today in terms of outline plan from the layout in the medieval period; 14 Watling Lane lies away from the centre of known medieval activity that was centred on the Market Place and the abbey precinct (based on Cook and Rowley, ed., 1985).

3 Aims and Methodology

- 3.1 The watching brief was undertaken after demolition and initial groundwork, to fulfil the basic objective of retrieval of archaeological data affected by the building works, specifically the foundation trenches for the new building. Particular attention was paid to the possibility of encountering features and deposits associated with the Roman defences, and any occupation deposits associated with intra-mural or extra-mural settlement.
- 3.2 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers. A colour transparency and black-and-white photographic record was made of the work. A site plan was drawn at an appropriate scale and samples of the trench sections were drawn and recorded. Full-length trench sections were not drawn. Otherwise recording followed procedures laid down in the OAU fieldwork manual (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992)
- 3.3 The watching brief was undertaken on June 27th/28th, 2001.

4 Results

- 4.1 The watching brief monitored the excavation of foundation trenches for a new garage that were 0.7 m wide and 1 m deep below the present ground level (Figs 2 and 3).
- 4.2 The general stratigraphic sequence in each foundation trench was as follows: at the base of the trenches was a layer of sand (4) that was interpreted as the natural. A mixed deposit of sand and gravel (3) overlay it, in turn sealed beneath a layer of reddish-brown sandy loam with clay inclusions (2). This was in turn overlain by an apparently dumped deposit of sandy loam with brick fragments (1) probably derived from the excavations the foundation trenches for the present house.
- 4.3 No significant archaeological features or deposits were observed.

5 Finds

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- 5.1 A total of three finds were recovered from the excavated spoil from the trenches:
- 5.2 A single sherd of pottery of Victorian or later date and a fragment of ironwork were found together with a single animal bone. None of these finds warrant any further comment.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 Despite the archaeological potential of the site (given its proximity to the historic core of Dorchester), no significant archaeological deposits or features were recorded during the watching brief. The soil layer seen in section was undated.
- 6.2 While the limited impact of the groundwork negated a comprehensive study of the site any linear features and pits would clearly have shown in the sand at the base of the trench.

7 Archive

- 7.1 The archive will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.

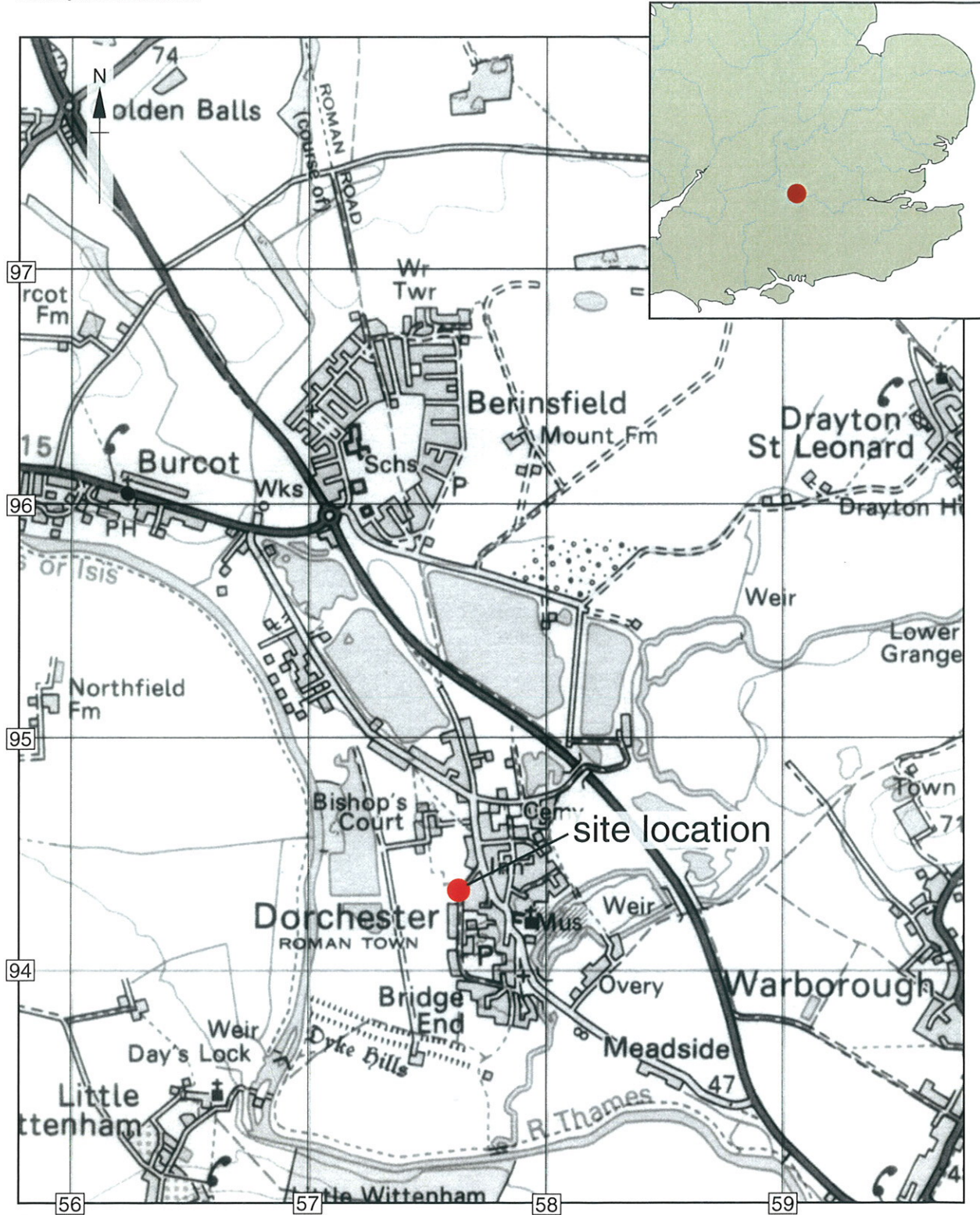
References:

Cook, J and Rowley, T 1985 *Dorchester through the Ages*, OUDE. Oxford

Wilkinson, D 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).

Table of Contexts

Ctx	Type	Depth	Comments
1	Layer	0.58 m	Modern make-up
2	Layer	0.3 m	Soil layer
3	Layer	0.04 m	Sandy gravel
4	Layer	-	Natural sand



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location.

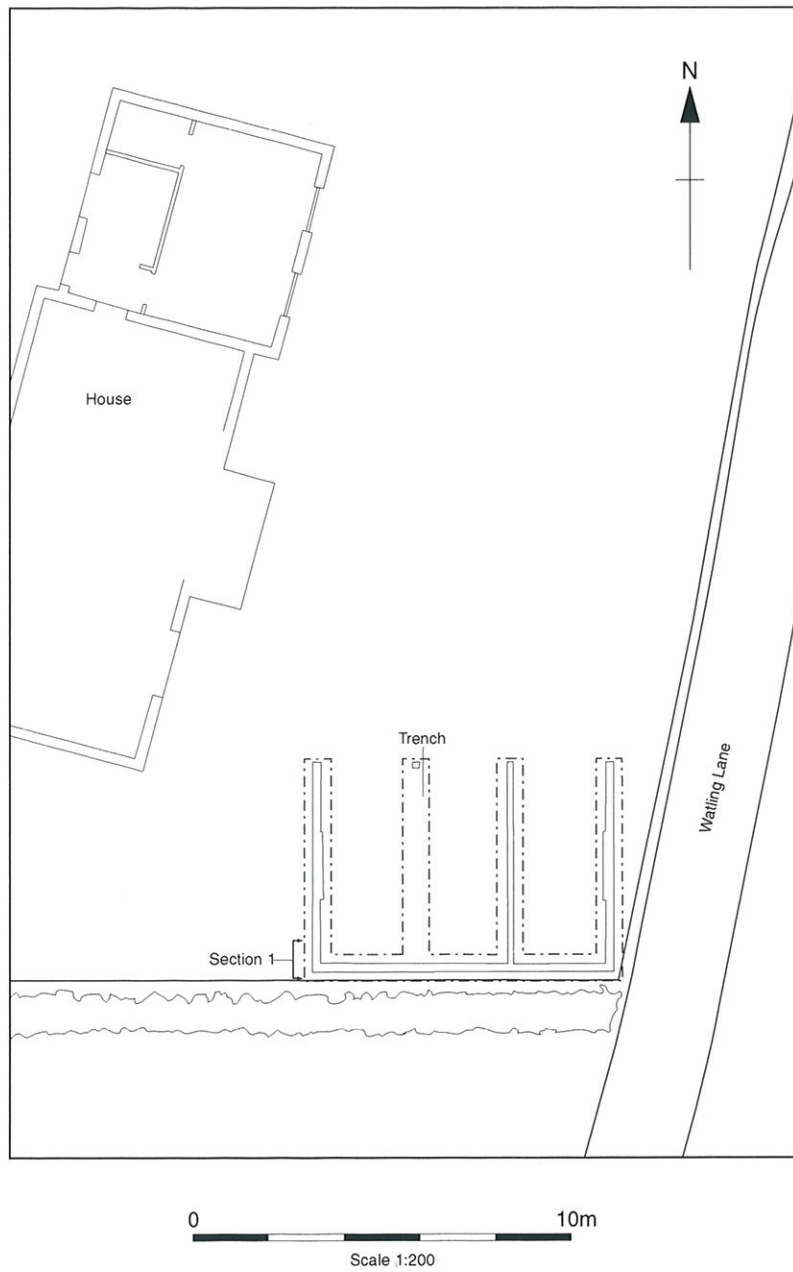


Figure 2 : Location of trench.

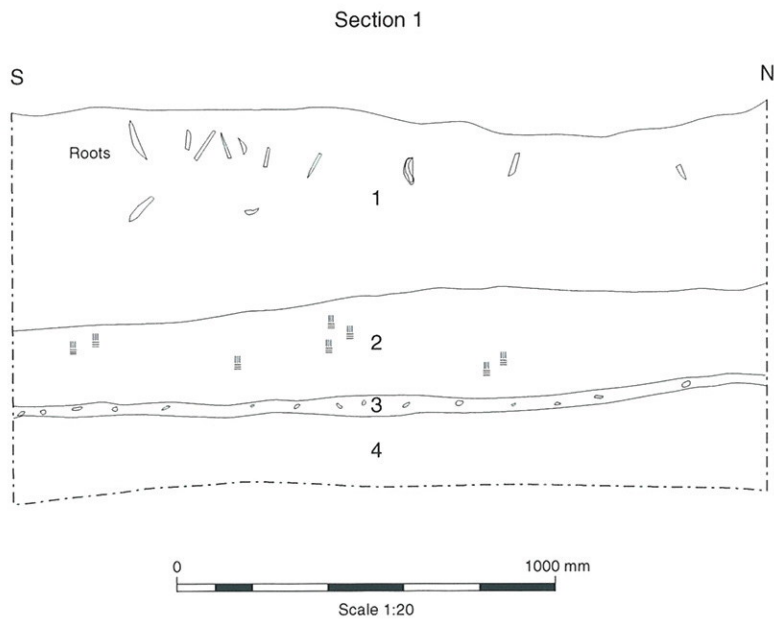


Figure 3 : Section 1.



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