

102 BAYSWATER ROAD, BARTON, ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

NGR SP 58880 08025

10 June 1994

SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a watching brief at 102 Bayswater Road, Barton on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council. The occupant, Mr Saunders, had discovered two bones while excavating his drive and had alerted the police. The bones were a human tibia and fibula which were identified by the police as more than 300 years old. The Oxford Archaeological Unit was notified by the County Archaeologist and a site visit was made. Fragments of two further human leg bones were recovered with more modern material from an old ploughsoil: there were no archaeological features. During further excavation Mr Saunders recovered more bone (animal). The County Archaeologist authorised the OAU to excavate the rest of the drive. Roman pottery was found but there were no further bones of any sort.

Topography

The site lies immediately to the S of the Baywater Brook on a flat terrace which lies to the S of the stream.

The natural subsoil (which was not observed) may have been sand as the overlying soils were sandy and these are likely to have derived from the subsoil.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Bayswater Road is a Roman road (OCC PRN 8923) which runs from the Roman town of Alchester to Dorchester-on-Thames. The Roman road lies 10 m to the E of the drive of 102, Bayswater Road now crosses the Bayswater Brook to the W of the Roman alignment. Roman settlements are commonly found where Roman roads cross streams (for example Akeman Street in Warwickshire). There are several known sites around the watching brief area which may indicate that a settlement is present in Barton:

- i) 150 m to the W of the site three Roman cremation pots were found in the S bank of the Bayswater Brook (OCC PRN 3667)
- ii) Roman inhumations and a settlement were found in 1946-9 centred 200 m to the S of the site (OCC PRN 3664-7)
- iii) 200 m to the E is a find spot of two rims of Romano-British storage jars (OCC PRN 302)
- iv) Work carried out for the Department of Transport for a proposed road to the N of the site identified 2nd- to 4th-century Roman occupation on either side of the Bayswater Road. Aerial Photographs held by the OCC SMR show undated cropmarks slightly further to the N

Method

Three site visits were made. During the first a drain was re-excavated (the police had told Mr Saunders to backfill the place where the bones were found). The second visit was to collect finds discovered by Mr Saunders. The third visit was to excavate the remainder of the drive. The pottery was identified by P Booth (OAU) and the human bone was identified by Dr P Hacking (OAU).

RESULTS

Soils

The drive was excavated to a size of 9.5 m by 2.3 m and an average depth of around 0.3 m. The subsoil (which was not seen) was apparently overlain by a dark brown sand loam 0.21 m deep with a darker top portion which may represent a turf line. This was capped by a dark grey sand loam with concrete, tarmac and bricks up to 0.27 m deep.

The lower clean sand loam is most likely to have been an old ploughsoil as the finds of all dates showed abrasion which is commonly caused by ploughing. This soil must have been a gardensoil more recently and contained 20th-century pottery and metalwork. The upper layer had been dumped recently to form a parking place for a caravan.

Pottery (by P Booth)

Twelve sherds of Roman pottery weighing 377 gm were recovered. Three were in oxidised coarse wares, three in reduced coarse wares, three were mortaria (two white wares and one colour-coated), two (other) white wares and one amphora fragment.

Most of the sherds are likely to have been locally manufactured. Distinctive pieces such as the mortaria were all Oxford products. The only non-local pieces were an oxidised storage jar base, of a type probably originating in Buckinghamshire/Northamptonshire, and the amphora sherd, from a South Spanish Dressel 20 (olive oil) amphora. This is the most common amphora type imported into Roman Britain and its occurrence in a roadside settlement context need occasion no surprise. Such finds are, however, very rare on rural sites within the region.

The majority of the datable pieces can be assigned to the 3rd and 4th centuries. Their condition is very variable, some of the pieces being heavily abraded whereas others are relatively large unworn pieces. The material clearly derives from immediately adjacent settlement.

The Roman sherds were associated with a mixture of more recent material, including one very small sherd possibly of medieval date and 14 pieces assignable to the 19th-20th centuries. Post-medieval tile, clay pipe and asbestos fragments were also present.

Bone (identified by Dr P Hacking and A Boyle)

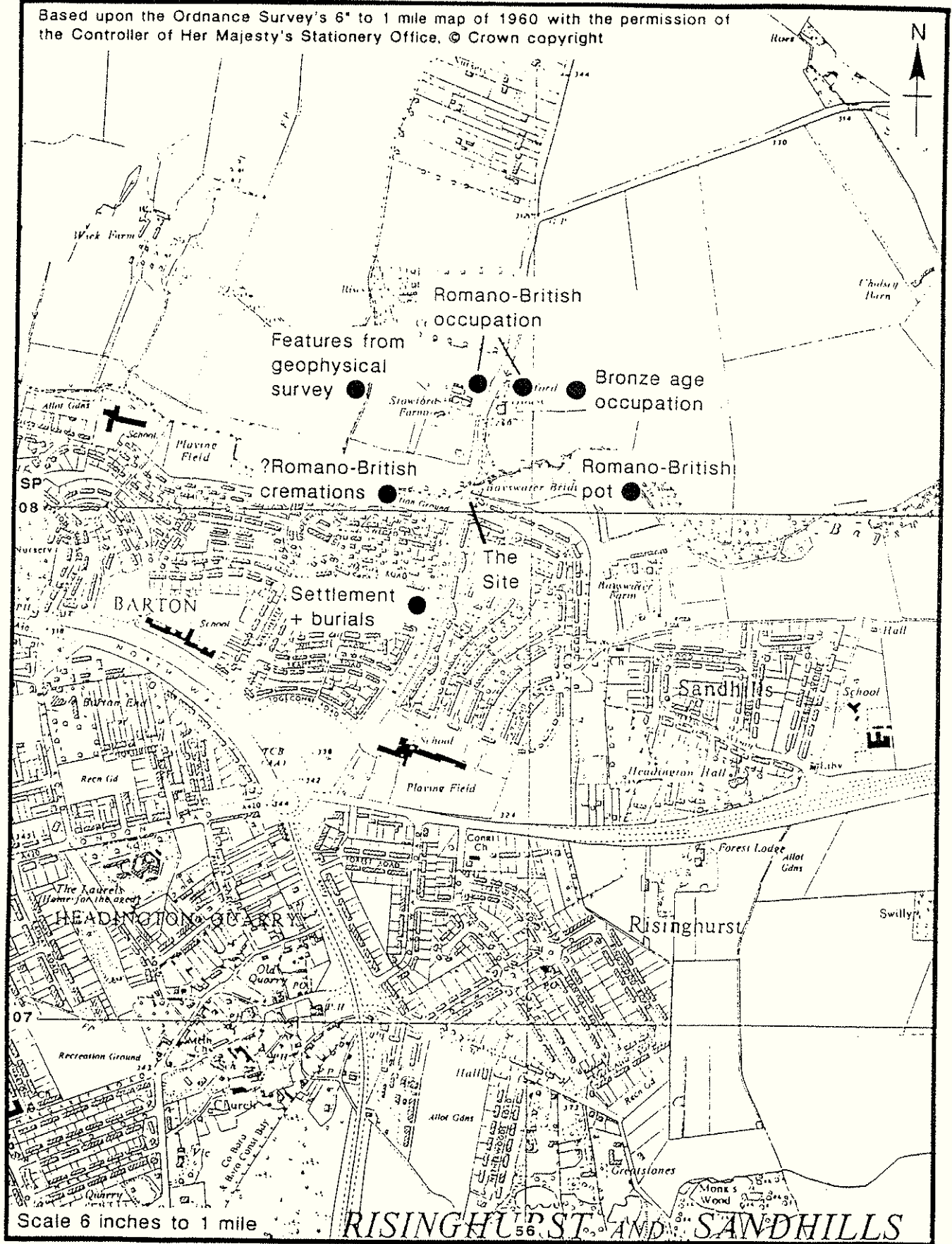
One right tibia shaft and two fibula (one almost complete and one fragment) were recovered. One occipital skull fragment was recovered. There were pieces of ox and other unidentifiable animal bone.

Interpretation

There were no features observed; the human bones did not appear to have been in a grave. The broken state of the bones and the abraded pottery suggest that the lower soil is an old ploughsoil. The turf line is a recent lawn. The tarmac and concrete are also recent.

Mark Roberts MIFA
10 June 1994

Based upon the Ordnance Survey's 6" to 1 mile map of 1960 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright



Site Location and Archaeological Background

Figure 1