

Amonite Cottage Cirencester Gloucestershire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



December 2005

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Amonite Cottage, Cirencester, Gloucestershire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

On December 8th 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to Amonite Cottage, Cirencester, Gloucestershire (NGR: SP 01335 01375). The work was commissioned by Thames Water in advance of a proposal to install a new valve and associated pipework. The watching brief revealed that the area had been completely truncated during the previous installation of pipework.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 On 8th December 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to Amonite Cottage, Cirencester, Gloucestershire (NGR: SP 01335 01375). The work was commissioned by Thames Water in respect of a proposal to install a new valve and associated pipework.
- 1.1.2 Following consultation with Charles Parry, the Senior Archaeological Officer, representing Gloucestershire County Council, it was agreed that due to the site's proximity to the Roman Fosse Way, and with the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological features and the possibility of human inhumations, that a condition be attached requiring that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during the period of groundworks.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet these requirements (OA, 2005).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The development site is located on the western edge of the town of Cirencester approximately 50 m north-west of the new junction of the A419 and the A429 (Fosse Way) (Fig. 1). The site lies immediately to the north of the old course of the A429, now used as a cycle and foot path. The site lies on level ground, at a height of approximately 129 m OD and occupies an area of 75 m².
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology is Oxford clay and cornbrash over Forest Marble of the Middle Jurassic period (Geological Survey of Great Britain sheet 235).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background for the area had already been prepared for work on the Cattle Market site approximately 350 m north-east of Amonite Cottage (OA, 2004) and the following is an abridged summary.

Prehistoric

- 1.3.2 There have been few finds dating to the prehistoric period from Cirencester and there is no recorded evidence of prehistoric activity within the immediate vicinity of the proposed development site. A surviving mound to the east of the site has previously been identified as a Neolithic long barrow, however, doubts about this identification have recently been expressed as it seems more likely that this feature is related to Roman quarrying in the area rather than prehistoric activity.

Romano-British

- 1.3.3 The Romano-British occupation at Cirencester spans four centuries and can be divided into two broad phases: the early Roman period of military occupation (c. AD 45/50-AD 75), and the Roman town of *Corinium* (c. AD 75/80-AD 400). The Site lies on the western side of the later town, external to the defensive circuit. It is also suggested that the line of the former Tetbury Road was in use in the earlier Roman period.

Early military occupation and the Fosse Way

- 1.3.4 The focus of early activity in Cirencester lay some distance to the east of the Site, between Victoria Road and Watermoor Road, south of Lewis Lane. A fort was established in the Leaholme area in approximately AD 45 and was probably occupied until the mid 70s AD. It is thought that the civilian settlement, or *vicus* associated with this fort lay immediately to the north-west of the fort itself. It is argued that the original course of the Fosse Way Roman road, the line of which is preserved by Old Tetbury Road, was probably laid out at this early period. If so it would have passed to the north of the early fort some distance to the east of the Site. When the later street grid was laid out this road would appear to have been re-directed to the south of the site, entering the town along the line of Querns Lane, through the second-century Bath Gate. No firm excavated evidence has yet been recovered for an early road along the northern alignment, and although several sections of road have been uncovered and attributed to the later southern route, its exact course remains to be established.

The Roman town defences

- 1.3.5 In the last quarter of the first century AD the timber buildings of the *vicus* were cleared away and the town of *Corinium Dobunnorum* was established. A rectangular street plan was laid out, aligned with the pre-existing course of Ermin Street. Much of the stone used in the construction of the town, and of public buildings in particular was quarried at The Querns, a short distance to the west of the site, in the vicinity of the later Roman amphitheatre. During the second century AD the town was enclosed within a defensive circuit, initially consisting of an earthen rampart, but later reinforced with a stone wall along the external face of the rampart, as well as defensive towers.

- 1.3.6 A large Roman cemetery is known to exist within the area of the old Cattle Market to the north-west of the site, however the distance is such that the possibility of it extending within the bounds of the site are low, however the sites proximity to the Fosse Way may suggest the possibility of roadside inhumations.

Anglo-Saxon and medieval

- 1.3.7 No Anglo-Saxon finds or deposits have been identified within the Site area. This reflects a general paucity of material from this period from within Cirencester. It is likely that the activity within the town was reduced in area, and had its focus in the vicinity of the current Market Place and Church.
- 1.3.8 The extent of the later medieval town is defined by the borough boundary recorded in 1571. This passes along Sheep Street leaving the Site outside the western boundary of the town. The place-name 'Athelmede' survives from 1535 for the area immediately to the west of Sheep Street, suggesting that the area was occupied by meadows and grazing at that period.

Post-medieval

- 1.3.9 The site is located on the edge of the post-medieval expansion of Cirencester, spurred by the construction of the Cirencester branch of the Thames and Severn canal (1789), the construction of a branch of the Great Western Railway from Kemble (1841) and the establishment of the Cattle Market (1867).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological remains that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the work.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a continuous archaeological presence during the initial stage of the groundwork. These works were carried out using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.2 m wide toothless grading bucket.
- 2.2.2 A plan of the excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:75 (Fig. 2, Plan 1) and any sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The excavations and sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 A layer of friable pale yellow-brown clay silt (2) was encountered 0.12 m below the current ground level (Fig. 2, Section 1). This layer contained many voids, and produced examples of tarmac and plastic suggesting a modern deposit. This layer could be seen to extend in excess of 0.5 m in depth within the section and was encountered throughout the excavated area.
- 3.1.2 This was overlain by a 0.12 m thick layer of dark brown clay loam (1), a modern landscaping layer.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 The only artifacts encountered were the fragments of tarmac and plastic from within Layer 2. These were evaluated on site but were not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The presence of nine inspection covers visible before the commencement of work (Fig. 2, Plan 1) and the presence of an overall layer of modern material within the excavation suggests that this area has been completely truncated below the archaeological horizon by previous work. The difference in composition from Layer 2 and the indicated local geology suggests that this material had been brought in, probably as backfilling material for previous excavations. There is little probability that any archaeological deposits or features have survived in this area.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.15 m	Landscaping layer of topsoil	-	C20th
2	Layer	> 0.45 m	Imported material forming the backfill of previous excavations	Tarmac, plastic	C20th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson)

OA, 2004 *Cirencester Cattle Market, New Build Leisure Centre, Cirencester, Gloucestershire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation*

OA, 2005 *Amonite Cottage, Cirencester, Gloucestershire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological watching Brief*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Amonite Cottage, Cirencester, Gloucestershire

Site code: CIAMCO 05

Grid reference: SP 01335 01375

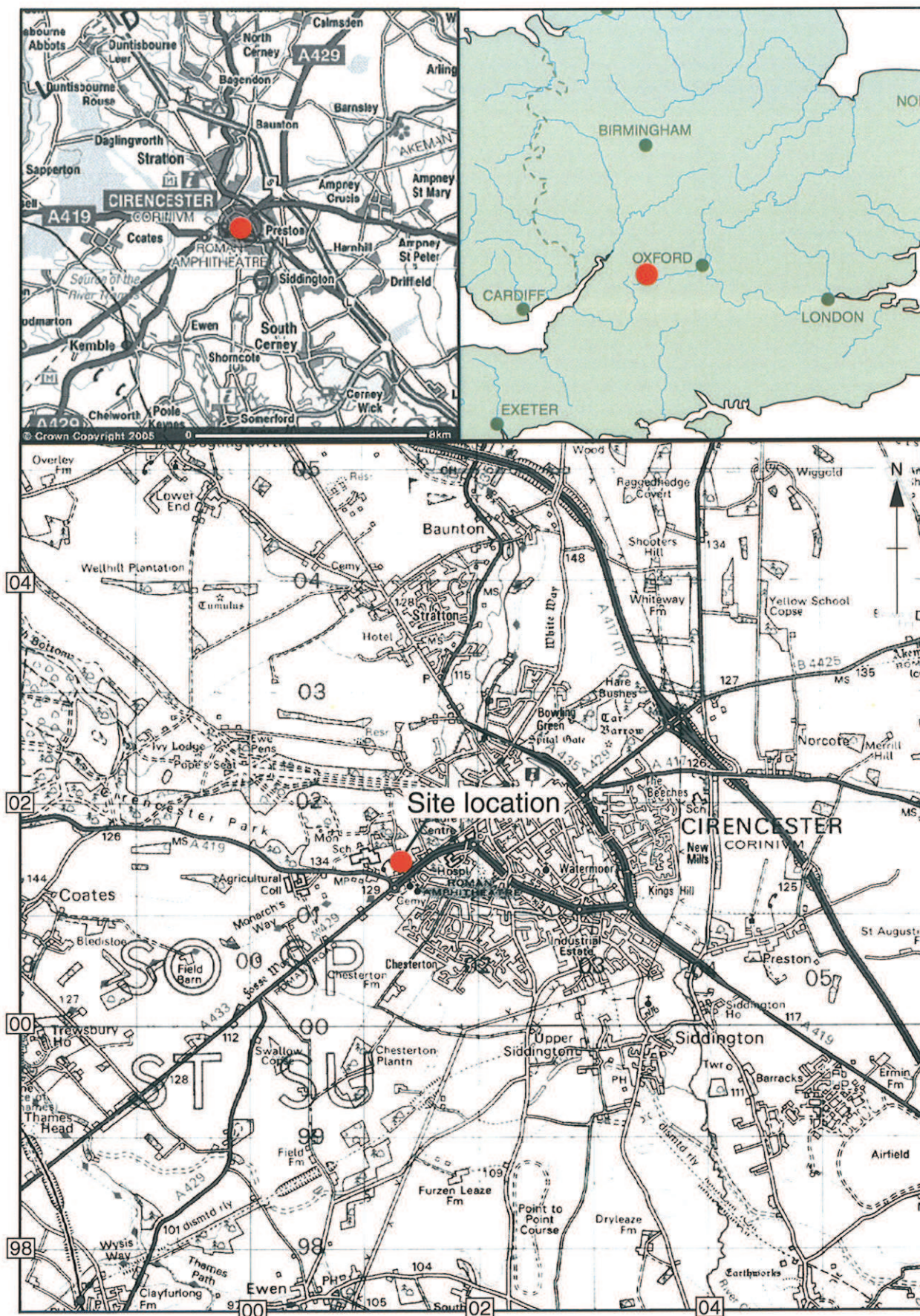
Type of watching brief: Monitoring of machine excavation

Date and duration of project: 8th December 2005, 4 hrs

Area of site: 75 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief revealed that the area had been completely truncated by previous work

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Corinium Museum, Cirencester in due course.



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

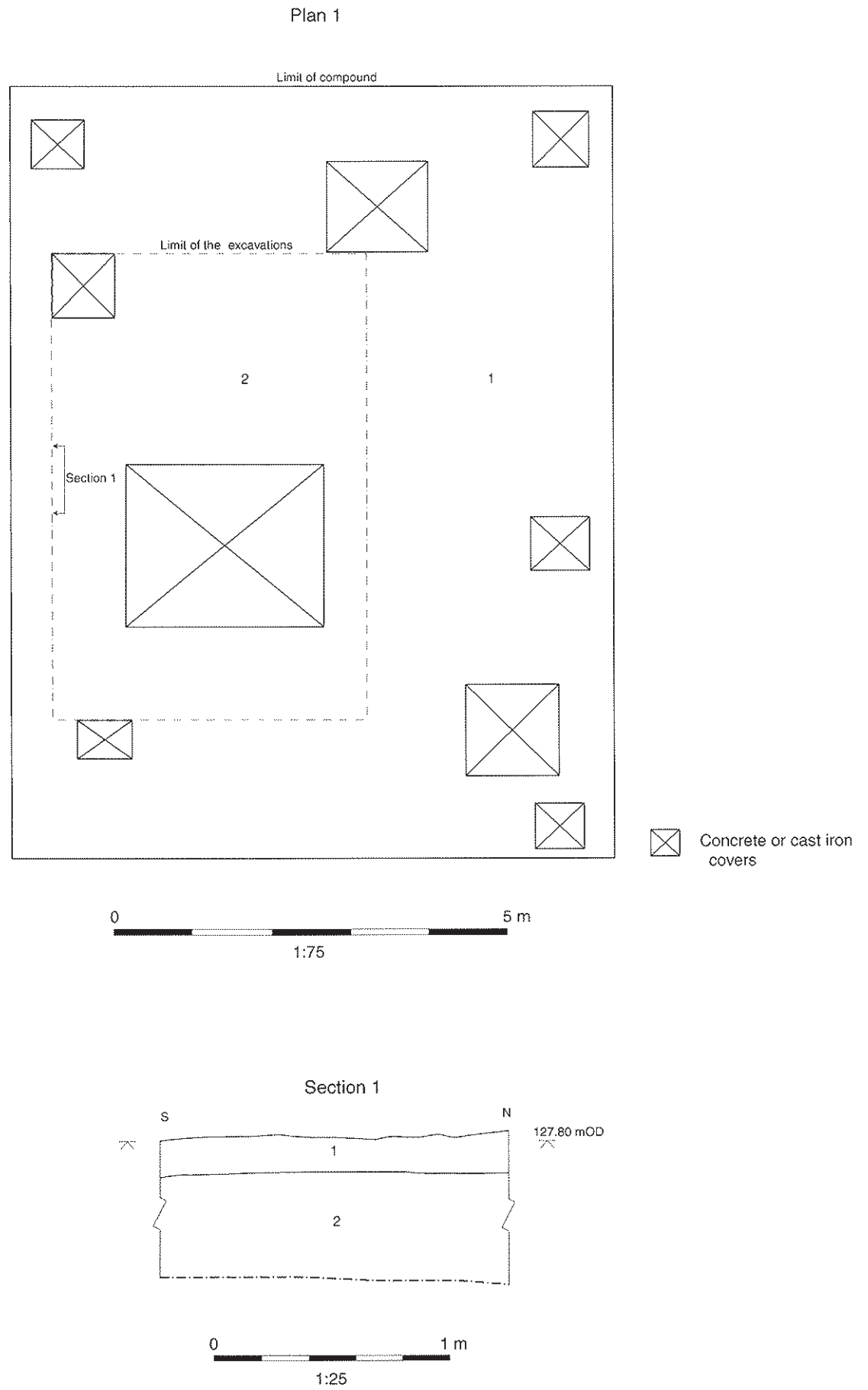


Figure 2: Plan 1 and Section 1.



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