

# Archaeological Discoveries on the Banbury East-West Link Road

By T.G. ALLEN

## SUMMARY

*A small excavation and watching brief were carried out in February 1985 during construction of the new link road, at SP 4641 (Fig. 1). Prehistoric occupation consisting of parallel ditches and a penannular enclosure, together with a small quantity of flintwork, was found on the slight elevation occupied by Grimsbury House. Slight evidence of Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon activity was also present. Ditches of late Anglo-Saxon and medieval date occurred over a wider area; these presumably belong to the settlement of Grimberie mentioned in Domesday Book. This occupation lasted until the early 13th century, when it was overlaid by ridge and furrow.*

## INTRODUCTION

Finance for a watching-brief was provided in the hope that the new road, linking the A43 to the Daventry road (B4036) over a distance of c. 1.25 km., would uncover traces of the settlement of *Grimberie* recorded in Domesday Book,<sup>1</sup> and also of the earthwork, presumably Anglo-Saxon or prehistoric, from which Grimsbury gained its name.<sup>2</sup> In the absence of cropmarks, three machine-trenches were dug across the route in the garden of Grimsbury House, which occupies a slight elevation and seemed the most promising site (Fig. 2). Ditches were encountered in two of these, and a small area opened up adjacent to Trench 3. A wide ditch intersection in Trench 1 was not recognised due to the author's unfamiliarity with local soil conditions; this was, however, recorded when the road-corridor was stripped. The whole of the road-corridor E. of the railway was watched during stripping and planned when possible. The time-gap between stripping and covering with hardcore was unfortunately extremely short, and the gradient of the road cut meant that some areas were dug deep while others were not stripped deep enough to reveal features. Drainage trenches were also observed all along the road-line; these revealed the late Saxon ditches in the field between the railway and Grimsbury Green (Fig. 2), but no archaeological features were seen W. of the railway line.

<sup>1</sup> *V.C.H. Northants* i (1902), 348 and 368.

<sup>2</sup> M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, ii (English Place-Name Soc. 24, 1954), 413.

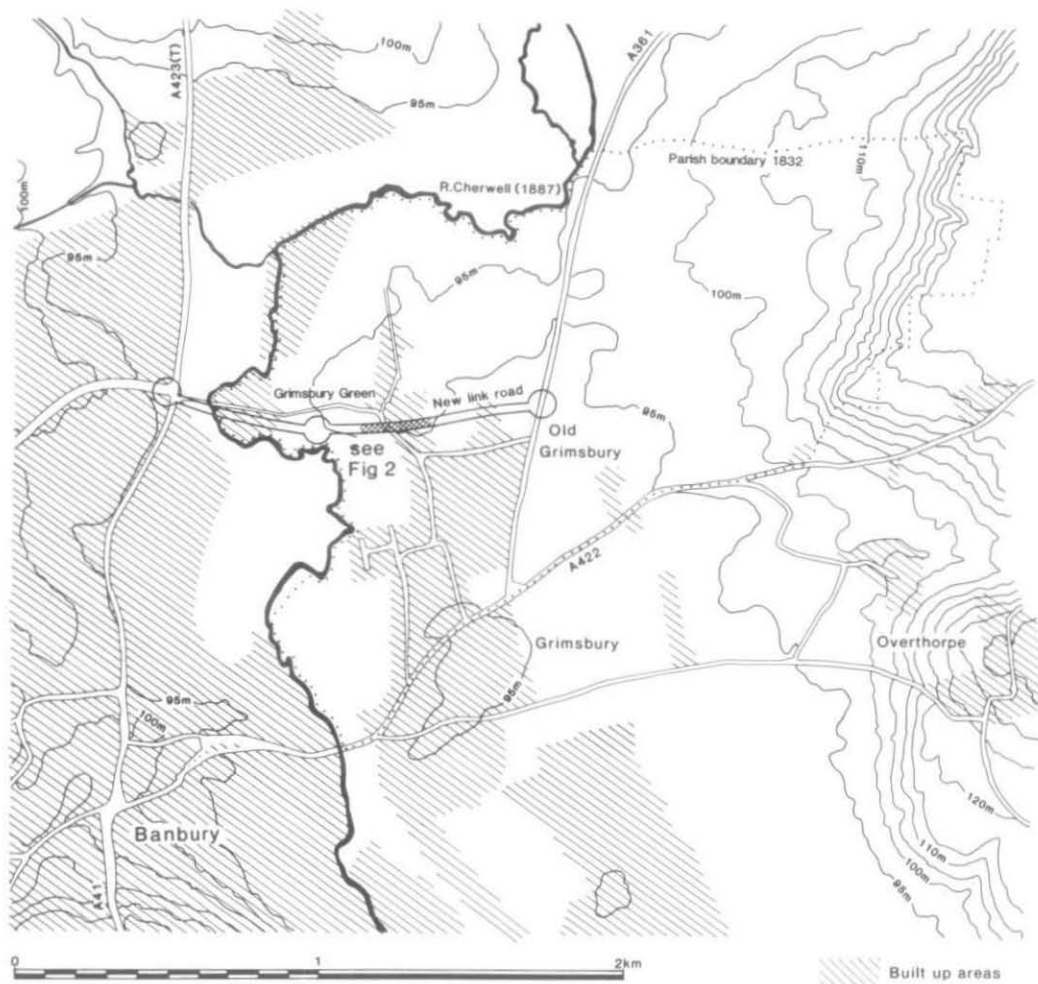


Fig. 1. Site location plan.

## GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Geologically the area within a 7-km. radius of Banbury is not varied, consisting of clays broken only by outcrops of marlstone, and cut through by the floodplain of the River Cherwell. Small pockets of sand and of Oolitic Limestone occur within this radius to the E. and W.

The line of the link road passes across the floodplain and then rises onto Liassic Clay. The top 1 m. of the clay is generally oxidised; below that it is gleyed. It contains ironstone lumps and much iron staining, giving a stiff consistency, and drains poorly, though there are sandier and drier patches. Flint pebbles are common on the surface, but these provide a very poor-quality flint, and none of the carefully-worked tools was made from them.

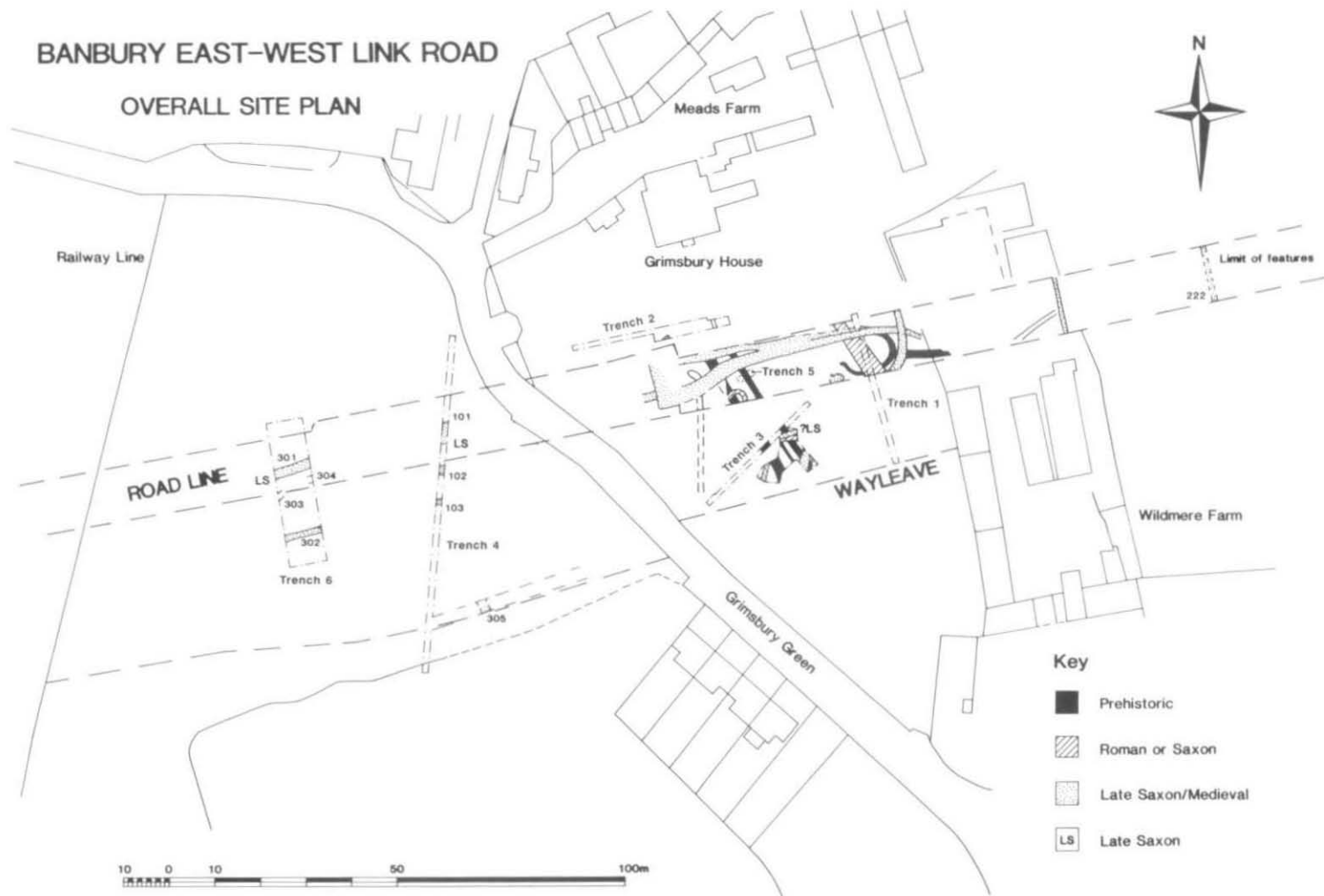


Fig. 2. Phased plan of all recorded features.

The site sits upon an E.-W. promontory of ground over 95 m. O.D., surrounded N. and S. by low-lying ground that is liable to flooding and has historically always been meadowland. The slope on the W. is quite steep, as the Cherwell formerly skirted this promontory (Fig. 1), making it both a natural route across the floodplain and excellently sited to command good views in three directions. For early settlement the river would have provided some degree of protection on three sides, and the high ground also narrows and falls off on the E., so that the site lies on a slight eminence. No archaeological features were found on the floodplain; both prehistoric and late Anglo-Saxon to medieval occupation was concentrated on the higher ground, fading out down the slope to the E.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding was provided by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission. I would also like to thank Mr. R.E. Malthouse, the resident engineer, and the foreman directing the machines for his co-operation at critical moments. Mr. Jim Wright of Banbury Plant Hire very kindly provided us with free machinery on several occasions. The excavation would not have been possible without the help of the three stalwarts of the MSC team, Messrs. Bob Bailey, Hugh Cameron and Ashley Coombes, who worked in difficult conditions for long hours without ill-humour or complaint.

I am very grateful to all the contributors to the report. Alison Gledhill drew the finds, Leigh Turner drew Fig. 1 and Paul Hughes Fig. 3. The report was typed by Jackie Carvell and amended by Georgina Griffiths. I would also like to thank Dr. John Blair for his comments upon the discussion section.

#### DESCRIPTION

##### *The Prehistoric Features*

Cut into the yellow clay subsoil were F1 and F4, both deep V-profiled ditches running N.W. some 3.5 m. apart. In ditch 1 gleyed primary silting was overlaid by mottled clay; neither layer contained many finds. These fills were sealed by a thin clay layer containing pebbles (L13), which directly overlay subsoil outside the feature (Fig. 4). The pebbles were concentrated on the interface between L13 and the subsoil, suggesting that the soil had been thoroughly worm-sorted; there were, however, no pebbles where L13 overlay the ditch. There was also a spread of charcoal on the surface of L13 to the W. of ditch F1. L13 was cut by a shallower recut of F1, whose fill was a darker grey clay.

In the main excavated area only the recut of ditch F1 was evident. This contained charcoal in its upper fill. The recut was cut through L7, blue-grey clay and pebbles, on its W. side. This layer was probably the same as L13.

Ditch F4 had two similar phases (Fig. 4); the recut cut L7, the earlier cut was sealed by it. Charcoal on the recut's E. edge extended over the surface of L13, and was probably more of the same spread seen upon L13 to the W. of F1. A continuation of F4 was seen during stripping.

Ditch F4 was cut by a circular gully (F220) and by F217, and both F1 and F4 further N. by medieval ditch F211. Beyond F211 both ditches reappeared briefly, but were then cut by ditch F201. Ditches F1 and F4 contained a small number of worked flints, scraps of daub, bone and pottery. The pottery fabrics suggest a date earlier than the Iron Age, with the exception of one Romano-British and one medieval sherd which are believed to be intrusive.

Between F1 and F4 was a parallel gully (F5) which also cut L7 (Fig. 3). This had no finds, but is assumed to have been contemporary with their recuts.

E. of these ditches a penannular enclosure (F205/208) was uncovered. This was cut across by a wide ditch (F210/213), but one out-turned terminal survived on the S.W. Internally the enclosure was approximately 10

TABLE 1: CATALOGUE OF FEATURES

<i>Context No.</i>	<i>Context Type</i>	<i>Breadth/ Diameter</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Profile</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Ditch	1.90	1.17	V	Prehistoric
2	Gully	1.10	0.33	U	C11th
3	Ditch	1.25	0.80	Sloping U	C12th
4	Ditch	2.20	1.35	V	Prehistoric
5	Gully	0.35	0.10	U	Prehistoric
6	Ditch	0.65	0.30	Sloping U	C12th
7 (=13)	Layer	—	0.15	—	Prehistoric
8 (=12)	Gully	1.20	0.28	Saucer	?Anglo-Saxon
9	Ditch	0.48	0.18	V	C12th
11	Layer	—	0.25	—	C14th/15th
51	Ditch	0.70	0.35	V	
52	Ditch	—	0.17	Sloping U	C12th
53	Pit/Ditch	0.45	0.07	Saucer	
54	Layer	—	0.03	—	C18th
55	Layer	—	0.10	—	C18th
56 (=57-59)	Layer	—	0.24	—	C14th/15th
60	Layer	—	0.15	—	C13th/14th
101	Ditch	4.00	1.65	Sloping U	C10th/11th
102	Ditch	2.10	1.28	V	C12th/13th
103	Ditch	0.80	0.45	V	
201	Ditch	1.90	—	Not dug	C12th/13th
203	Furrow	1.20	—	Not dug	C14th+
204	Ditch	2.10	—	Not dug	
205	Penannular Gully = 208	0.75	0.48	V	Prehistoric
206	? Gully	2.00	—	Not dug	
207	? Gully	1.50	—	Not dug	
209	Ditch	0.75	0.50	V	Prehistoric
210	Ditch	1.60	0.70	V	? Roman
211 (on E.)	Ditch	2.05	—	Not dug	C12th/13th
211 (on W.)	Ditch	0.85	—	Not dug	C12th/13th
213 (E. cut)	Ditch	2.20	0.40	U	? Roman
213 (centre cut)	Ditch	—	0.68	V	? Roman
213 (W. cut)	Ditch	—	0.55	V	? Roman
214 (=7)	Layer	—	0.15	—	Prehistoric
215	Ditch	?1.30	—	Not dug	
216-219	Furrow	1.20	—	Not dug	C14th+
220	Gully	0.65	0.48	V	
222	Ditch	1.20	0.45	U	
223	Ditch	0.80	0.38	V	C13th
224	Ditch	0.45	0.30	Sloping U	
225	? Furrow	1.30	0.20	Sloping U	C14th+
230	Ditch	—	—	Not dug	
232	Posthole	0.27	0.25	U	
235	? Furrows	1.20	—	Not dug	C14th+
301 (=101)	Ditch	1.80+	1.35	V	C10th/11th
302 (=103)	Ditch	1.30	0.85	V	
303	Ditch	1.50	0.70	V	
304	Ditch	1.45	1.15	V	
305	Ditch	1.80	1.40	Sloping U	C11th/12th

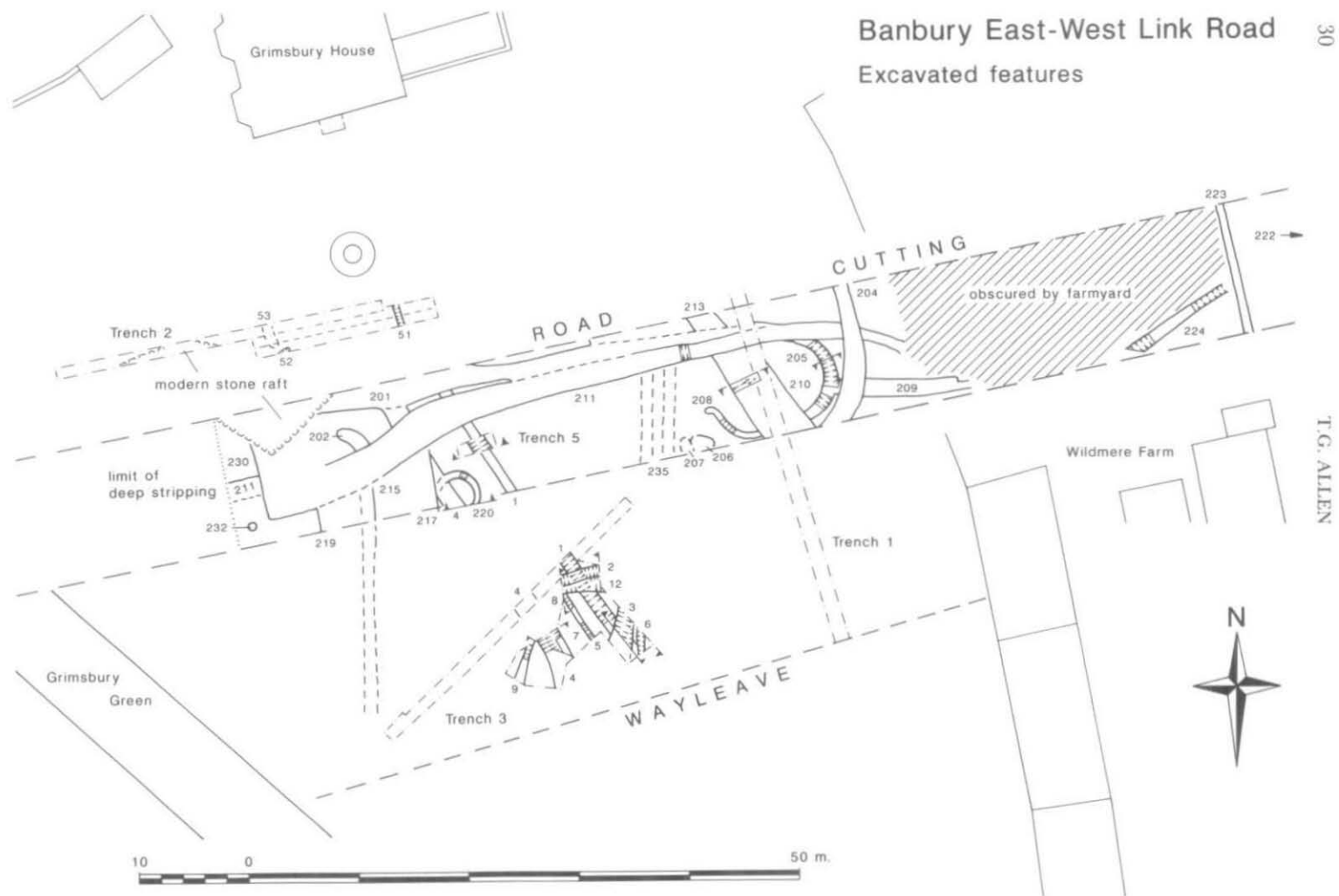


Fig. 3. Excavated features E. of the Grimsbury Green road.

m. x 8 m. across, but no features survived within it. A flint flake and several sherds of prehistoric pottery were found in the gully, whose upper fill also contained charcoal and fired clay (Fig. 4).

Ditch F209 ran off eastwards from this enclosure. This was apparently of two phases, one of which terminated after 11 m. It too had two fills, the upper of which contained charcoal. F209 was cut by ditch F204 and F205/208 by medieval ditch F211.

### *Roman and early Anglo-Saxon Features*

Cutting across enclosure F205/208 was F210/213, made up of a series of ditch cuts on a N.W. alignment (Fig. 4). Yellow clay lumps show where upcast has slipped back into the ditches, and the last ditch cut appears to have been deliberately backfilled. Only one scrap of pottery, of early Roman date, was found in F210/213. It was cut by medieval ditch F211 and ditch F204.

Across the N. end of the excavated area ran a broad, shallow feature (F8/12). This cut ditch F1, but was cut by E.-W. gully F2, and alongside it was overlaid by yellow clay lumps, probably upcast dug out of the bottom of F2. The feature contained two small scraps of Anglo-Saxon pottery. Since F2 contained a sherd of 11th- or 12th-century pottery, F8/12 may possibly be of Anglo-Saxon date. On the W. F8/12 intersected with gully F5, but no clear relationship could be established.

Further W., overlying ditch F4, was an apparently circular enclosure (F220). Its W. side was cut by medieval feature F217, but traces of its gully-bottom survived in places; the internal diameter was c. 4 m. F220 cut through a layer of grey clay overlying both L13 and F4. This was undated, but is unlikely to be the medieval ploughsoil that overlay the 12th to 13th-century occupation, as 217 which overlay 220 is probably a furrow relating to this. This enclosure is reminiscent of those found on early Romano-British sites at Smithfield, Hardwick (Oxon.) and Claydon Pike, Fairford (Glos.).<sup>3</sup>

### *Late Anglo-Saxon and Post-Conquest Occupation*

This consisted of ditches, the earliest of which lay beneath ridge and furrow W. of Grimsbury Green Road (Fig. 2). Here features were observed in narrow drainage trenches and in excavation for a pedestrian subway. This field lay under pasture, but ridge and furrow was visible running N.-S. across it. Three ditches underlying it were sectioned by Trench 4. F101 ran N.W. and consisted of two cuts, the earlier filled with dark-grey loamy clay, the later with mottled yellow and grey-brown clay overlaid by a lighter grey clay. The bottom of the later and deeper cut was c. 1.1 m. below ploughsoil. From the earlier cut came late Saxon sherds. S. of F101, ditch F102 ran N.N.E. This had a dark-grey loamy clay fill containing pottery of the late 12th or early 13th century. Further S. again, ditch F103 ran S.W. to N.E. It was shallow, with a single fill like that of F102, and there were no finds.

On the southern edge of the field, E. of Trench 4, F305 was exposed during drainage digging. Here it had a slot in the bottom filled with clean gleyed clays, but the upper fill was dark-grey loamy clay containing charcoal, which produced late 11th- or 12th-century pottery.

Several ditches were revealed in the cut for the pedestrian subway, Trench 6. Ditch F301 was probably a continuation of ditch F101; it was filled with dark blue-grey clay and charcoal, and produced sherds of late Saxon St. Neots ware. F101 and F301 may have bounded the edge of a ploughed field, as the level of clay subsoil N. of this ditch was lower than that to the S. Just S. of F301 was an ill-defined patch of dark-grey clay and charcoal.

Further S., F303 and F304 were visible in the W. and E. sections of the cut respectively. Both contained light blue-grey and yellow clay, neither produced any finds, and both faded out within 2 m. of the section.

Ditch F302 was probably a continuation of F103. Here its dark-grey fill contained much charcoal and burnt clay fragments, but again no pottery.

E. of Grimsbury Green Road, ditch F2 was one of the earliest features. (Fig. 3). It was filled with a dark gleyed loamy clay containing 11th-century pottery, and was overlaid by L11 (Fig. 4), which also overlay F12 and F1.

South of F2, ditch F1 was cut by ditch F3 (Fig. 4). All the fills of F3 were dark and rich in occupation debris. A layer of mottled yellow and grey clay down the N. side may indicate upcast spilling in, perhaps from a bank on that side. Much charcoal, and fired and unfired clay, suggests that ovens or hearths were in use close

<sup>3</sup> T. Allen, *Roman Settlement and Later Land-use on the Windrush Floodplain at Smithfield, Hardwick, Oxon.* in prep.; D. Miles and S. Palmer, 'Fairford/Lechlade: Claydon Pike', *South Midlands Archaeology*, xiii (1983), 108-9.

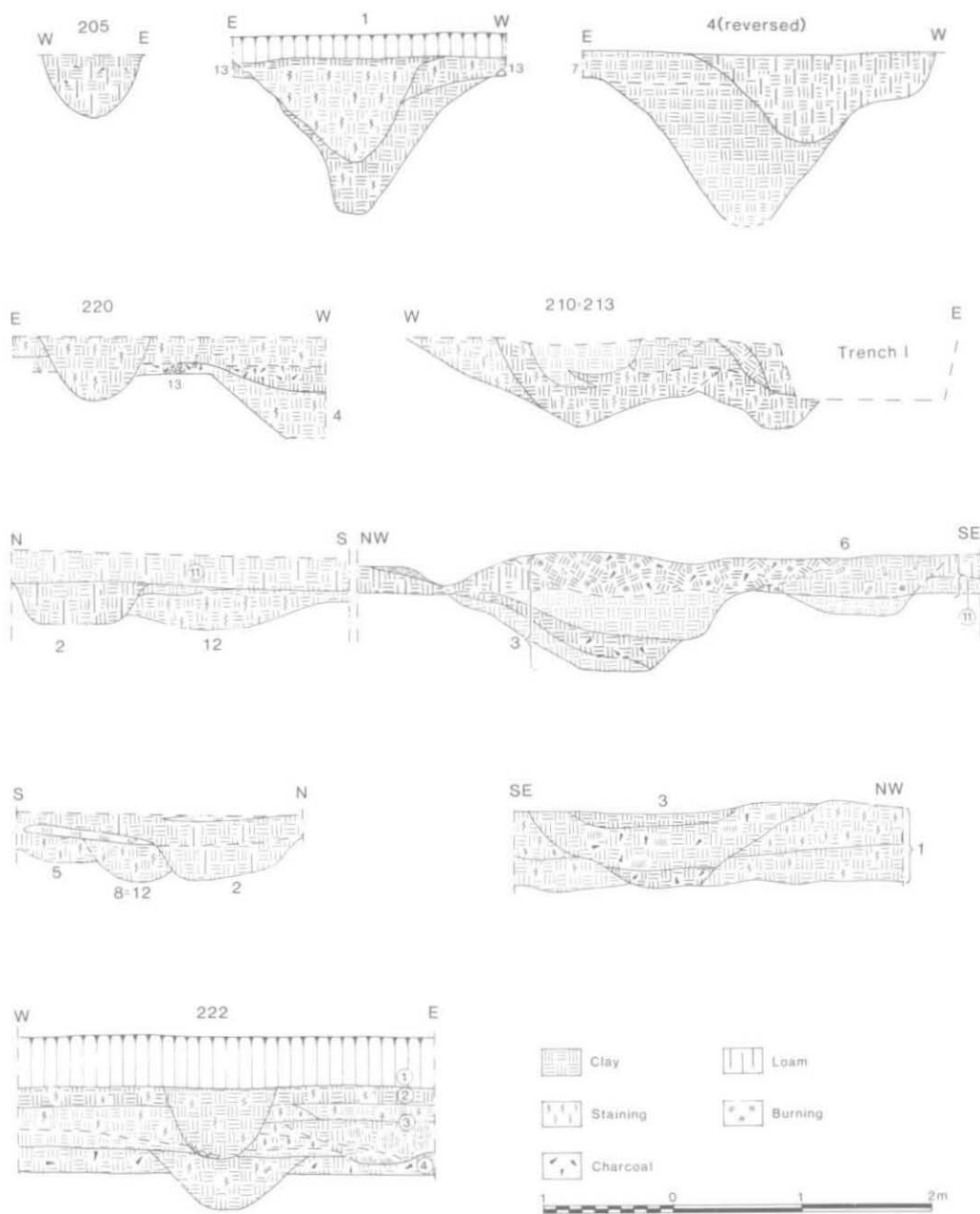


Fig. 4. Illustrated sections.



by. Further very dark soil containing much pottery accumulated in the ditch top. This occupation debris dates from the late 11th or 12th century, and probably indicates a dwelling adjacent. Above this the stratigraphy was truncated by post-medieval topsoil.

On the S. side, ditch F3 cut a shallower ditch on a very similar alignment, F6 (Fig. 4), which also cut ditch F1. It was largely filled with dark-grey clay-loam, with occupation debris of much the same period as that in ditch F3; the two were probably successive cuts of the same boundary.

Adjacent to ditches F3 and F6 L11 was dark, and their relationship to it was difficult to determine. However, L11 contained one or two sherds of 14th- or 15th-century pottery, so was most probably a ploughsoil sealing F3 and F6, but incorporating much dark soil, charcoal and pottery derived from them. Both F3 and F6 may have become ditch F235 further N. Alternatively, F6 may have run into the butt-end of a gully F207, and F3 into ditch F206, both c. 1 m. E. of F235. F206 produced a sherd of late 11th- or 12th-century pottery like those in ditch F3.

West of F3 and F6, F9 was a narrow V-profiled gully, which ran into a wider U-profiled feature in the N. section. The fills of both features contained late 11th- and 12th-century pottery.

Running E.-W. down the road-corridor was ditch F211, which displayed at least three adjacent cuts. It was filled with dark blue-grey clay, and the pottery from it was generally late 12th- and early 13th-century. On the E., F211 appeared to be curving southwest, and was lost where muck from Wildmere Farm had stained the clay subsoil; at the W. end it met F217-219. One cut continued W., running out of the stripped area. The northernmost cut, numbered F201, disappeared beneath a stone raft containing post-medieval brick, probably a structure in the garden of the 18th-century house.

Another cut may have ended or turned N. just W. of F219, becoming ditch F230, as the westward continuation of F211 was much narrower than the ditch further E. F230 appeared to form a right-angled corner. This area was only shallowly scraped, but the soilmark perhaps represents the corner of an enclosure masked further E. by F219. The relationship with F211 was not established. F217 and F219 did not continue N. of F211, and may have been ditches running into it or shallow furrows. Just W. of the corner was a stone-packed posthole (F232).

E. of Trench 1, ditch F211 was apparently cut across by ditch F204. This feature was not excavated, and its relationship to both F209 and F211 is uncertain. F204 was, however, presumably earlier than the ridge and furrow, which showed as a series of broad shallow soilmarks filled with blue-grey clay and running N.-S. across the road-corridor. These often occurred in pairs; the spacing between each pair and the next was generally between 8 m. and 12 m.

In the excavated area this ploughing was represented by L11, and in Trench 5 it was also visible (Figs. 3 and 4). Trench 2 illustrates the full soil sequence. Here clay subsoil was overlaid by a stiff clay with pebbles some 0.18 m. deep, equivalent to L7 and L13. This was cut by gully F51, a ditch terminal or pit (F52) and a hollow or pit (F53). Both F51 and F53 were undated; F52 contained pottery of the late 11th to early 13th centuries. Sealing these features was a thin layer of grey loamy clay similar to L11, which was numbered variously L57, L58, L59 and L60 along the trench. It contained residual Anglo-Saxon and 12th- to 13th-century sherds mixed with late medieval Potterspury and other wares. At the E. end of the trench this ploughsoil was overlaid by a more humic layer, L55, which contained 18th-century pottery, and on the surface of this was a spread of coal, charcoal and odd tiles which may relate to the construction of Grimsbury House. This was overlaid by a mixed clay-loam layer with yellow clay lumps in it, perhaps derived from excavation of the ponds and other features in the garden of the house. Above this was modern topsoil.

E. of the staining caused by Wildmere Farm more ditches were seen (Figs. 2 and 3). F223 was filled with dark blue-grey clay and contained a lump of quern. Just W. of F223 was ditch F224 on a W.S.W. alignment. F224 contained no finds, but was probably earlier than the ridge-and-furrow.

The eastern limit of occupation was represented by ditch F222, only seen in section (Fig. 4). Two superimposed ditches, the first undated but stratigraphically similar to the medieval ditches further W., were separated by a thick soil build-up, L2 and L3 a-d. Just E. of the ditches the stratified layers within L3 were replaced by a mixed soil with clay lumps. This mixed deposit did not lie within a clearly-defined cut, but could represent a grubbed-out hedge against which L3 had accumulated. No boundary contemporary with L2 was visible in section. The only dating evidence from the ditches and from the soils adjacent was a sherd of mid or late 13th-century pottery from the upper part of L3.

## POTTERY

*Prehistoric Pottery* by T.G. ALLEN

Twenty-nine sherds of pottery were found, weighing 160 grams:

*Fabric 1:* Highly micaceous clay with abundant red and black ferrous lumps and specks and large lumps of white fired clay. There were also occasional organic inclusions or voids. Sherds of this fabric tended to be thin-walled (5–7 mm.) and oxidised, at least on the outside.

*Fabric 2:* Abundant voids, mostly plate-like but some rounded, with many ferrous lumps and streaks throughout. Most voids appear to result from burnt-out organic inclusions; some may be leached calcareous matter. The clay matrix has common fine quartz inclusions and occasional flint fragments. This fabric occurs in thick-walled vessels (8–12 mm.) with oxidised exteriors and reduced interiors.

*Fabric 2c:* Common organic inclusions and ferrous lumps and specks, with occasional calcareous inclusions. The clay matrix has common fine quartz particles. The texture of the clay is soapy. This fabric is represented by one rim-sherd of a thin-walled vessel with reduced surfaces. This is an upright, simple rounded rim, which is undiagnostic and is not illustrated.

*Fabric 3:* A fine clay with sparse charcoal, grog and calcareous inclusions. There was only a single sherd of this fabric, thick-walled with oxidised exterior and interior and a reduced core.

The breakdown of sherds by context and fabric is shown in Table 2 (weight in grams given in brackets):

TABLE 2

Context	Fabric 1	Fabric 2	Fabric 2c	Fabric 3
1	7 (20)	14 (85)	—	1 (5)
13	3 (20)	—	—	—
204	4 (15)	1 (8)	1 (8)	—
Totals	14 (55)	15 (93)	1 (8)	1 (5)

Fabrics 1 and 2 are common to both ditch F1 and enclosure F204, strongly suggesting that these two features share one ceramic tradition. There is no comparable material to speak of from the Banbury area, but the fabrics and the evidence of the flints suggest a Middle–Late Bronze Age date for this assemblage.

*Medieval Pottery* by MAUREEN MELLOR

A total of 10 Anglo-Saxon, 576 medieval and 4 post-medieval sherds were recovered from site. The medieval and later sherds were compared with the Banbury and Oxford fabric type-series.<sup>4</sup>

Of particular interest was the presence of St. Neots types including cooking-pots and dishes, both deep and shallow (Fig. 5 No. 1); in Oxford this pottery type is not known after the middle of the 11th century.<sup>5</sup> Two features (F101 and F301) which contained only St. Neots-type pottery are thus possibly late Saxon. Residual sherds of St. Neots have been found at the two excavations at Banbury Castle, but no certain 10th- or 11th-century features have been located in Banbury.

<sup>4</sup> Banbury fabric type-series, housed in the O.D.M.S. store, and published in A.M. Robinson, 'The Pottery', in P.J. Fasham, 'Excavations in Banbury 1972: Second and Final Report', *Oxoniensia*, xlviii (1983), Fig. 17, Table 2, 965; Oxford fabric type-series housed by the Oxford Archaeological Unit, published in R. Haldon and M. Mellor, 'The Pottery' in B.G. Durham, 'Archaeological Investigations in St. Aldates, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xlii (1977), 111–112.

<sup>5</sup> T.G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford Castle, 1965–73', *Oxoniensia*, xli (1976), 257.

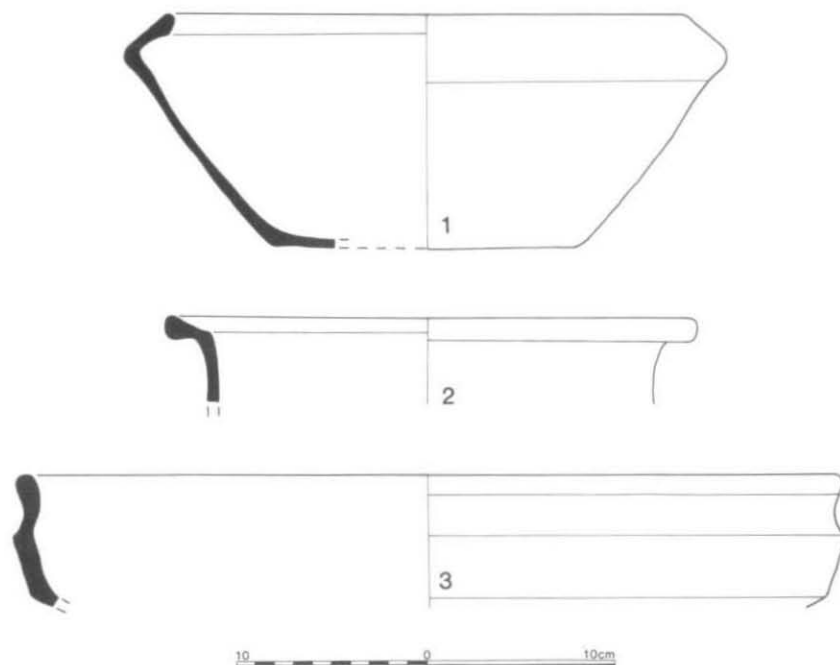


Fig. 5. Late Saxon and medieval pottery.

Other assemblages, containing some St. Neots but predominantly Banbury Early Medieval Ware (Banbury fabric type 1, Group 1B),<sup>6</sup> (F2/1, F3, F6, F9 and F305), probably date from the late 11th or early 12th century. One vessel in Banbury Early Medieval Ware (Fig. 5 No. 2) was very reminiscent of flared rims of the St. Neots tradition. Flared rims typical of E. Gloucestershire may pre-date the 11th century.

A few features and layers (F52, L57, F201, F202=218=219) contained a wider range of fabric types, including Potterspury types known at Banbury which were dated to the later 13th century.<sup>7</sup> F201 included a shallow dish (Fig. 5 No. 3) paralleled at Brackley (Banbury type series 24). Other assemblages, from L59A, L60 and F222, can be dated to the later 13th to 15th centuries by the presence of Brill-type pitchers and jugs.<sup>8</sup>

The post-medieval coarsewares continued to include Potterspury types.<sup>9</sup>

## OTHER FINDS

### *The Flints* based upon information from Dr. ROBIN HOLGATE

Thirty-six struck pieces of flint and 27 possible others were recovered from prehistoric and later contexts. Table 3 shows their contexts and types.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson op. cit. note 4, Fig. 17, Table 2, 96.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Fabric 16, 99.

<sup>8</sup> M. Mellor, 'Correlation of Medieval Pottery from Brackley, Northamptonshire with Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Type Series'; typescript with *Northants Archaeological Unit*.

<sup>9</sup> P. Mayes, 'A 17th Century kiln site at Potterspury, Northamptonshire', *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, ii (1968), 55-82.

TABLE 3: FLINTS

Context	Mesolithic	Early Neolithic	Late Neolithic or Later					
	Trapezoidal Blade	Leaf-shaped Arrowhead	Discoidal Scraper	Blade	Flake	?Flake	Workshop Waste	?Workshop Waste
Prehistoric								
1	1	1	1		3		2	2
4					8		3	
7					4	9		3
13						1		
208					1			
Later								
2				1	1	1	1	
204						4		
210					1			
211							1	1
Unstratified				1	4	2	2	4
Totals	1	1	1	2	22	17	9	10

A selection of the retouched implements is illustrated. Apart from the trapezoidal blade (Fig. 6 No. 3) and the leaf-shaped arrowhead (Fig. 6 No. 1), all the struck flint belonged to one late manufacturing tradition. This was characterised by crude knapping techniques, for instance repeated fractures on the striking platform in attempting to produce flakes and coarse flake-scarring (Fig. 6 No. 5).

Attempts had been made to use the local orange-brown pebble flint, but this was frequently flawed, and none of the five tools had been made from it. The leaf-shaped arrowhead was made from a light-grey mottled flint of unknown origin, the others from a brown-black or grey-black flint with white cortex, probably a chalk flint from the S. This type of flint was also common among the flakes and workshop waste.

One characteristic of the debitage was the very small size to which pieces had been worked. This was probably due to the shortages of decent flint, and may also explain the possible utilisation of other badly fractured chips. The same explanation was offered for a similar assemblage from Rollright.<sup>10</sup>

The date of the late flintwork is uncertain, but the scraps of pottery would suggest a Bronze Age rather than a Neolithic date.

### *Fired Clay* by T.G. ALLEN

A total of 452 grams of fired clay were found, 169 grams from prehistoric features, 4 from a possibly Roman ditch F213, and 279 grams from late Saxon or medieval contexts. There were four fabrics (see Table 4).

Only one fragment, from ploughsoil L10, was identifiable as daub; fragments with a smoothed flat surface of Fabrics 1 and 3 were also found in both the prehistoric and medieval assemblages, but there were no recognisable objects.

<sup>10</sup> G. Lambrick, *The Rollright Stones* (1983), 44.

TABLE 4: WEIGHT IN GRAMS OF FIRED CLAY BY CONTEXT AND PERIOD

<i>Context No.</i>	<i>Fabrics</i>				<i>Total Weight</i>
	F1 (Quartz)	F2 (Voids- ?Calcareous)	F3 (Mixed clays + fine quartz)	F4 (Iron)	
<i>Prehistoric</i>					
1	2	6	3	—	11
4	6	22	60	55	143
205/208	—	14	1	—	15
Total	8	42	64	55	169
<i>Roman</i>					
213	2	—	2	—	4
<i>Late Saxon or Medieval</i>					
3	110	50	20	—	180
6	—	5	—	—	5
9	12	20	—	—	32
10	—	—	5	—	5
302	30	—	—	—	30
305	25	—	2	—	27
Total	177	75	27	—	279
Total of fired clay from all periods in grams					452

### Slag with identifications by Dr. CHRIS SALTER

There were 220 grams of slag, 25 grams from prehistoric enclosure F205/208 and 195 grams from medieval feature F203. One of the fragments from F205/208 might be part of a crucible; the others came from the furnace lining of a smithing hearth. The medieval slag consisted of a single lump of slagged furnace lining of low density, and indicates large-scale forging or casting. It was recovered from one of the medieval furrows, and need not have been manufactured on site. There were, however, fragments of good-quality iron ore which had been heated in some of the medieval ditches, so smelting may have occurred on site.

### Stone Finds with source identifications by Dr. PHILIP POWELL

*Prehistoric and Roman:* Lumps of quartzite and of fine-grained sandstone, all probably derived from the Glacial Drifts, were found in ditches F1 and F4. Two sandstone lumps, c. 80×60×50 mm., had one smoothed surface, and might possibly have been fragments of quernstone. One is illustrated (Fig. 6 No. 6). Other fragments had been burnt. Earthy iron ore was found in enclosure ditch F208, but there was no sign that this had been burnt or used. Similar lumps were found in ditch F213, possibly of Roman date.

*Late Saxon and Medieval:* Local limestone and earthy iron ore came from several ditches. Some of the iron lumps had been burnt, possibly in an attempt to extract the ore. From late medieval L59 came part of a whetstone of Millstone Grit, with a rectangular cross-section and a tapering wedge-shaped end (Fig. 6 No. 7). One fragment of quernstone of Millstone Grit was found in ditch F223. This ditch is undated, but its alignment suggests that it was also late medieval. The fragment, which appears to include the outer edge of the quern, had a flat grinding surface which was little worn. The opposite side was roughly pecked, and the fragment had been burnt after breakage. The surviving dimensions are 120×100 mm., and the thickness tapered from 35 mm. at the outside to 20 mm. on the inside.

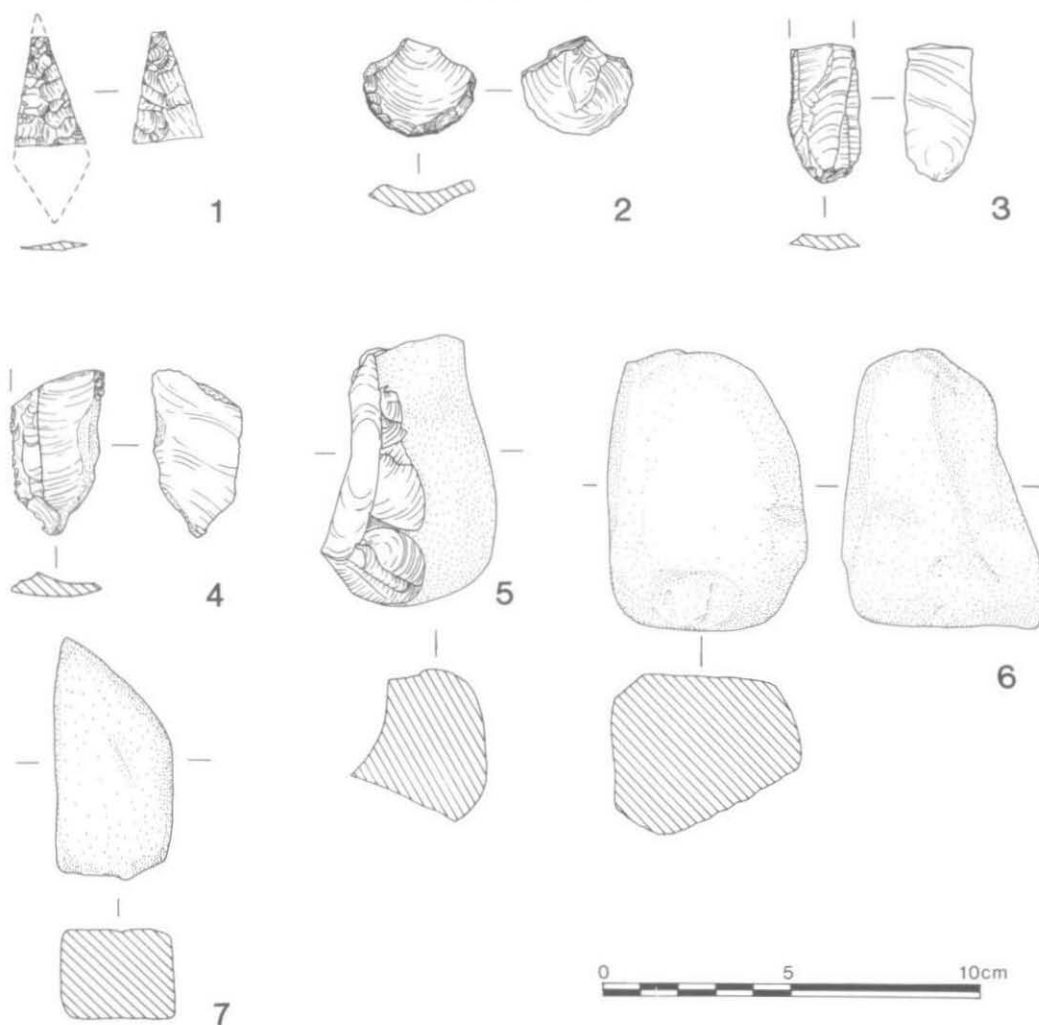


Fig. 6. Flintwork and other stone finds.

*Carbonised Plant Remains* by Dr. MARK ROBINSON

Three samples, of 10 litres each, were floated onto a 0.5 mm. mesh to recover carbonised plant remains. Charred remains were absent from the sample from F1, a Bronze Age ditch, but F3 and F305, late 11th-century ditches, contained much carbonised material. The results are given in Table 5.

The charred plant assemblages from F3/1 and F305 are typical in composition of those which occur on rural medieval occupation sites. Grain, particularly *Triticum aestivumcompactum*, predominated, but there was a significant presence of arable weed seeds. It is likely that the charred remains resulted from the later states of crop clearing or domestic use of impure grain and it is possible that the assemblages resulted from many separate episodes of burning.

TABLE 5: CARBONISED PLANT REMAINS

		<i>Number of Items</i>	
		<i>F3/I</i>	<i>F305</i>
Weed Seeds			
<i>Atriplex</i> sp.	Orache	2	—
<i>Vicia</i> or <i>Lathyrus</i> sp.	Vetch or Tare	5	—
<i>Polygonum aviculare</i> agg.	Knotgrass	1	—
<i>Rumex</i> sp.	Dock	5	2
cf. <i>Anagallis</i> sp.	Scarlet Pimpernel	—	1
<i>Anthemis cotula</i>	Stinking Mayweed	5	4
<i>Eleocharis</i> S. <i>Palustres</i> sp.		1	—
<i>Carex</i> sp.	Sedge	1	—
<i>Bromus</i> sp.		2	—
Gramineae gen. et sp. indet.	Grass	1	1
Ignota		11	5
Total weed seeds		34	13
Grain			
<i>Triticum aestivocompactum</i>	Bread/Club Wheat	42	32
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	Wheat	30	29
<i>Secale cereale</i>	Rye	1	—
<i>Hordeum</i> sp.	Barley	2	6
<i>Avena</i> sp.	Oats	18	16
Cereal gen. et sp. indet.		37	66
Total cereals		130	149
Chaff			
<i>Triticum</i> sp. rachis fragment	Wheat	1	—

*The Vertebrate Remains* by BRUCE LEVITAN

The excavation and watching-brief produced 83 bones from phased contexts. Only 32 of these were identified to species level. The species represented are cattle (*Bos taurus*), 15 bones; Sheep/goat (*Ovis aries*), 10 bones; horse (*Equus caballus*), 6 bones; and domestic fowl (*Gallus gallus*), 1 bone. A full species list by context will be found in the Site Archive. The bones are divided according to phase into seven groups (see Table 6 below).

TABLE 6: SUMMARY OF VERTEBRATE SPECIES REPRESENTED

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Anatomy</i>	<i>No. of Bones</i>
Prehistoric	cattle	lower 3rd molar	2
	horse	lower molar	2
	unidentified	fragment	9
			total 13
Romano-British	cattle	lower molar	1
	horse	mandible	1
	unidentified	vertebra	1
			total 3
Anglo-Saxon	cattle	horncore	1

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Anatomy</i>	<i>No. of Bones</i>
Late Saxon	cattle	scapula	1
		mandible	1
	sheep/goat	lower 1st molar	1
	horse	radius	1
	domestic fowl	rib	1
	unidentified	fragment	28
			total 33
11th-13th C.	cattle	mandible	2
		upper molar	1
		humerus	1
		metatarsal	2
	sheep/goat	upper molar	1
		tibia	2
		metatarsal	1
	horse	upper molar	1
		tibia	1
	unidentified	rib	1
		femur	1
		fragment	2
			total 16
Late/Post Med.	cattle	sacrum	1
		humerus	1
		femur	1
		tibia	1
	sheep	humerus	1
	sheep/goat	lower molar	1
		metacarpal	1
		tibia	1
	unidentified	humerus	1
		rib	3
		fragment	5
			total 17

This group of bones is too small for any conclusions about site economy to be drawn from it. There is nothing unusual, except perhaps that pig is not definitely represented (though one rib and one femur may be pig). Dog is evidenced by the amount of chewed bones: nine bones from most phases. One or two bones have butchery markings, but the fragments are generally too small and too weathered to show such evidence.

## DISCUSSION

### *Prehistoric Occupation*

Mesolithic and Neolithic activity is shown by stray flints, but the finds need only be losses by occasional hunting parties, especially the leaf-shaped arrowhead.<sup>11</sup>

The first evidence of occupation is the parallel ditches and oval enclosure associated with a crude flint-working tradition, probably of Bronze Age date. The few sherds of pottery from both the ditches and the enclosure are of very similar fabrics, and strongly suggest that all these features belong to one occupation.

There seems little doubt that parallel ditches F1 and F4 were contemporary, from

<sup>11</sup> L.R. Binford, *In Pursuit of the Past* (1983), 42.



the evidence of charcoal in the tops of both and on the ground-surface in between. Pairs of ditches this distance apart are well-known from Middle to late Bronze Age sites like Fengate,<sup>12</sup> and around Dorchester-on-Thames at Mount Farm, Queensford Farm and possibly Northfield Farm.<sup>13</sup> Pryor believes that these parallel ditches define trackways between fields, but Lambrick prefers to see them as boundaries with a bank or hedge in between. The evidence from this site does not conclusively favour either interpretation. Charcoal upon the contemporary ground surface (L7=L13) between the ditches, as well as in their tops, would suggest that there was no intervening bank, but there might have been a hedge; the presence of parallel gully F5 between the ditches would also have interfered with use as a trackway.

The original cuts of F1 and F4 were dug from the surface of the yellow clay subsoil, and were overlaid by L7=L13, into which their recuts were cut. It was at first suspected that these 'original cuts' were caused by worm-action mixing the ditch fills with the surrounding subsoil and creating ghost features, but some fills of these early cuts were distinct from the subsoil, and their lower fills contained bones too large to have been carried down by worms. Besides this no mixing was observed in the much darker medieval features.

It is suggested that L7=L13, which has a level interface with the subsoil beneath, represents a phase of ploughing across the largely infilled ditches. Later recutting of the ditches may have been facilitated by the fact that the ditches were still appreciable hollows; this is particularly clear in the section across F1 (Fig. 4). It is also possible that there was a hedge or bank alongside one or other ditch; no substantial area outside either F1 or F4 was exposed to investigate this. The accumulation of pebbles at the bottom of L7=L13 shows that this soil had been thoroughly worm-sorted, implying that the area reverted to pasture when the ditches were recut.

The charcoal which was spread over the surface of L7=L13 between the recuts, and also occurred in their upper fills, might have derived from any of a number of activities, but in view of the presence of F5, a narrow shallow slot between F1 and F4, it possibly indicates a hedge, for which F5 was a planting trench like that found at Mount Farm,<sup>14</sup> which was burnt down when the ditches had largely silted up.

Very few Bronze Age settlements have been found in the Upper Thames region, and with the possible exception of Northfield Farm, Long Wittenham<sup>15</sup> there are no comparable enclosure ditches to F205/208, though these are common locally in the Iron Age. Similar enclosures are, however, known from Bronze Age sites in the Fens and the Lower Thames.<sup>16</sup> The internal dimensions of the enclosure are similar to those of contemporary house-sites elsewhere and to Iron Age house-enclosures. There were no features in the interior, but postholes and other shallow features are unlikely to have survived medieval ploughing and deep machine-stripping. The ditch contained a little bronze-working slag, pottery, quern fragments and charcoal; the N. terminal was

<sup>12</sup> F. Pryor, *Excavations at Fengate, Peterborough, England: the Third Report* (Northants. Archaeol. Monograph 1, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> G. Lambrick, 'Berinsfield, Mount Farm', *CBA Group 9 Newsletter*, ix (1979), 113-15; R. Chambers, 'Dorchester: the By-Pass', *South Midlands Archaeology*, xiii (1983), 126; M. Gray, 'Northfield Farm, Long Wittenham', *Oxoniensia*, xlii, (1977), 1-7; R. Thomas, 'A Bronze Age Field System at Northfield Farm?', *Oxoniensia*, xlv (1980), 310-11.

<sup>14</sup> G. Lambrick in prep.

<sup>15</sup> M. Gray op. cit. note 13, 3-12 and Figs. 3, 5 and 6. However, she interprets Enclosure A as a henge barrow.

<sup>16</sup> Op. cit. note 12.

destroyed by later features and only the bottom of the S. one survived, which makes interpretation difficult as in most domestic enclosures refuse is concentrated at the entrance.<sup>17</sup> Fired clay fragments were small and did not include obvious structural remains. However, the range of finds suggests domestic occupation in the vicinity, if not in the enclosure itself.

This settlement lies in an area for which there is very little evidence of Neolithic or Bronze Age activity,<sup>18</sup> and the continuing scarcity of sites in the Iron Age, despite the development of alluviation in the Upper Thames Valley, suggests that these clay soils generally remained wooded until the second half of the 1st millennium BC.<sup>19</sup> Pairs of ditches such as F1 and F4 are elsewhere usually associated with field-systems, but insufficient of this site was examined to see if extensive clearance took place, and the carbonised remains were poorly preserved and do not shed light on the economy. The occupation is likely to have been connected with use of the River Cherwell, perhaps controlling a crossing-point. The features may have been part of a defended Later Bronze Age settlement on the rise overlooking the river, the original Grim's Bury,<sup>20</sup> but no trace of defensive ditches was found. Whatever the form of settlement, these features are important evidence of occupation of the claylands, and this area is clearly worth further investigation should the opportunity arise.

#### *Romano-British*

Late Roman occupation is known from the vicinity of Banbury,<sup>21</sup> but locally evidence is sparse. No features on the site can certainly be attributed to this period, but the long-lived ditch F213 may be of this date, and the small circular enclosure F220 is certainly reminiscent of features interpreted as haystack-sites on several Early Roman settlements in the Upper Thames Valley.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Early Anglo-Saxon*

The origin of the modern names of both Banbury and Grimsbury is held to be early Anglo-Saxon, implying settlement of this date. One or two sherds and a single gully may suggest that an occupation site lies nearby.

#### *Late Anglo-Saxon and Post-Conquest*

The earliest feature was a large ditch dating from the 10th or early 11th century, running E.W. across the area W. of the Grimsbury Green Road. Its size suggests that it was an

<sup>17</sup> B. Cunliffe and D. Miles, *The Iron Age in Central Southern Britain* (1984), 94, Fig. 6.3.

<sup>18</sup> G. Briggs, J. Cook and T. Rowley (eds.), *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region* (1986), 175-7, Maps 4-6; D. Knight, *Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Settlement in the Nene and Great Ouse Basins*, ii (B.A.R. Brit. Ser. 130, 1984), Maps 8-11.

<sup>19</sup> M. Robinson and R. Wilson, 'A Survey of Environmental Archaeology in the South Midlands', in H. Keeley (ed.), *Environmental Archaeology: A Regional Review*, ii (1987), 47.

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit. note 2.

<sup>21</sup> Briggs et al. op. cit. note 18, 181, Map 10.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit. note 3.

enclosure boundary rather than simply a field drainage ditch; possibly it divided cultivated ground on the uphill side from pasture lower down the slope. There was no sign of this ditch in the stripped area further E., so it must have returned beneath the road. Late Saxon pottery was also found in later contexts E. of the road, but significantly these were in Trench 2, closest to the ditch (Fig. 2). It therefore seems that the pre-Conquest settlement lay on the W. side of the higher ground close to the river, and subsequently spread eastwards.

By the late 11th or early 12th century there was a focus of occupation close to Trench 3, within an area of ditches extending over 100 m. E. to W. and spreading down the S.-facing slope. On the E., however, the limits of the settlement were topographically determined, the features ending where the ground fell away. The extent of the medieval features in the late 12th and early 13th centuries was no greater than this.

No structural features were found apart from an isolated posthole, nor did the small quantity of fired clay include obvious daub. The pottery, however, indicates domestic occupation close by, though the assemblage was too small to shed further light on the status or economy of the settlement. Both charred cereals and a quernstone show that cereals were processed, and a small bone assemblage indicates domestic fowl and mixed animal husbandry typical of rural settlements of these periods. Burnt ironstones and a single lump of slag may derive from ironworking on the site, but this is not proven.

After the early 13th century there is little pottery, and it was probably in the mid 13th century that the settlement here was abandoned and the ditches overlaid by ridge-and-furrow. Later medieval sherds are probably the result of manuring.

From air-photography a dense pattern of strip-fields is visible to the N., E. and S.E. of the site. Some ridge and furrow also occurs to the N.W. and due S., but the low-lying ground to the W. was part of the floodplain of the Cherwell, and was traditionally meadowland and pasture. This evidence is mostly later than the excavated settlement, but shows the potential for land-use for any pre-industrial period. The Late Saxon settlement was thus established on the boundary between arable and pastureland, like so many others of this period.

In 1066 *Grimberie*, held by Levenot, was valued at £4; at the time of the Domesday survey, when it was held by Gunfred de Cioches, it was valued at £6 and assessed at 2½ hides. There were six ploughlands, two in demesne and four others held by 15 villeins and 3 bordars, four slaves, 30 acres of meadow and a mill. The whole manor was later held as one knight's fee.<sup>23</sup> By the early 13th century Thomas de Parco held half of the manor, and granted the remainder to Thomas de Breante, who thereafter appears to have held his half of the manor as one knight's fee. His property passed in the reign of Henry III to Bicester Priory by gift of Sir Philip Bassett. Thereafter Bicester Priory and members of the Boteler family, to whom the Park estate passed by marriage, were co-lords of Grimsbury. An early 13th-century charter records the names of some of the tenants and the position of their messuages, but is insufficient to reconstruct the layout of the manor.<sup>24</sup> Rentals from 1301 onwards include regular receipts from Grimsbury, which seem to have fluctuated between £12 and £18 per annum, settling by 1397 at £13 6s. 8d.<sup>25</sup> In 1425 the Priory's yearly rent from their part of the manor was still £13. 6s. 8d., and the estate was valued at the same at the dissolution of the monastery.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Domesday Book f. 227; J. Bridges, *History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire*, i (1791), 219.

<sup>24</sup> *Sir Christopher Hatton's Book of Seals*, eds. L.C. Loyd and D.M. Stenton (Northants. Record Soc. xv, 1950), No. 131.

<sup>25</sup> Rentals in the British Library and at Trinity College, Oxford (ex inf. B. Holden).

<sup>26</sup> J.C. Blomfield, *The History of Bicester* (1884), 140, 151, 156, 172, 184; G. Baker, *History of Northamptonshire*, i (1822-41), 246-7.

It is possible that the uprating of the manor at Domesday indicates that the manor was growing. There is no indication that the settlement suffered any diminution or desertion in the later 13th century, when occupation in the excavated area ceased, so this must be assumed to reflect settlement shift.

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