

# Excavations at Mr. Warrick's Arms Hotel and the Crown Public House, 83-88 Ock Street, Abingdon

By MARK R. ROBERTS

with contributions by LEIGH ALLEN, ANGELA BOYLE, PHILIPPA BRADLEY, NICOLA SCOTT and LUCY WHITTINGHAM

## SUMMARY

*A small excavation on the northern road frontage of Ock Street carried out by Oxford Archaeological Unit in 1994 has revealed new evidence for the development of medieval Abingdon during the 13th and 14th centuries. A probable ditched property boundary, later replaced by a stone-paved alley, had medieval buildings dating to the 13th and 14th centuries built on either side of it. One building had floors set into large scoops while the other had a sequence of hearths and floors.*

## INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

The site (NGR SU 4926 9701) was located on the north side of Ock Street, 40 m. west of the junction with Conduit Road and immediately west of the 18th-century Tomkins Almshouses. In 1991, Builders Ede submitted a planning application to the Vale of White Horse District Council for development of the 0.22 ha. site, comprising internal alterations to two Listed Buildings, Mr. Warrick's Arms Hotel and The Crown Public House, the demolition of various outbuildings and the erection of new residential accommodation. The application was allowed following appeal, subject to a phased programme of archaeological works. The Cotswold Archaeological Trust (CAT) was subsequently commissioned to carry out an archaeological evaluation of the site, and this work, which took place in September 1994, identified significant medieval deposits.<sup>1</sup> Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was then commissioned to carry out an archaeological excavation the following month.

The site lies at a level of approximately 52 m. OD on first terrace gravel overlying Kimmeridge clay, to the north of the River Ock, and within the bounds of the medieval town, on the east-west axis leading from the Abbey gates to the Ock bridge. Although Ock Street was not completely built up as far as the Ock bridge before the 17th century,<sup>2</sup> it is apparent that there

<sup>1</sup> "Mr. Warwick (*sic*) Arms" and "The Crown" 83-88 Ock Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire: archaeological evaluation report, compiled by Roy King (Cotswold Archaeological Trust unpubl. client report, September 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Munby, K. Rodwell and H. Turner, 'Abingdon', in K. Rodwell (ed.), *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire* (1974), 33-40.

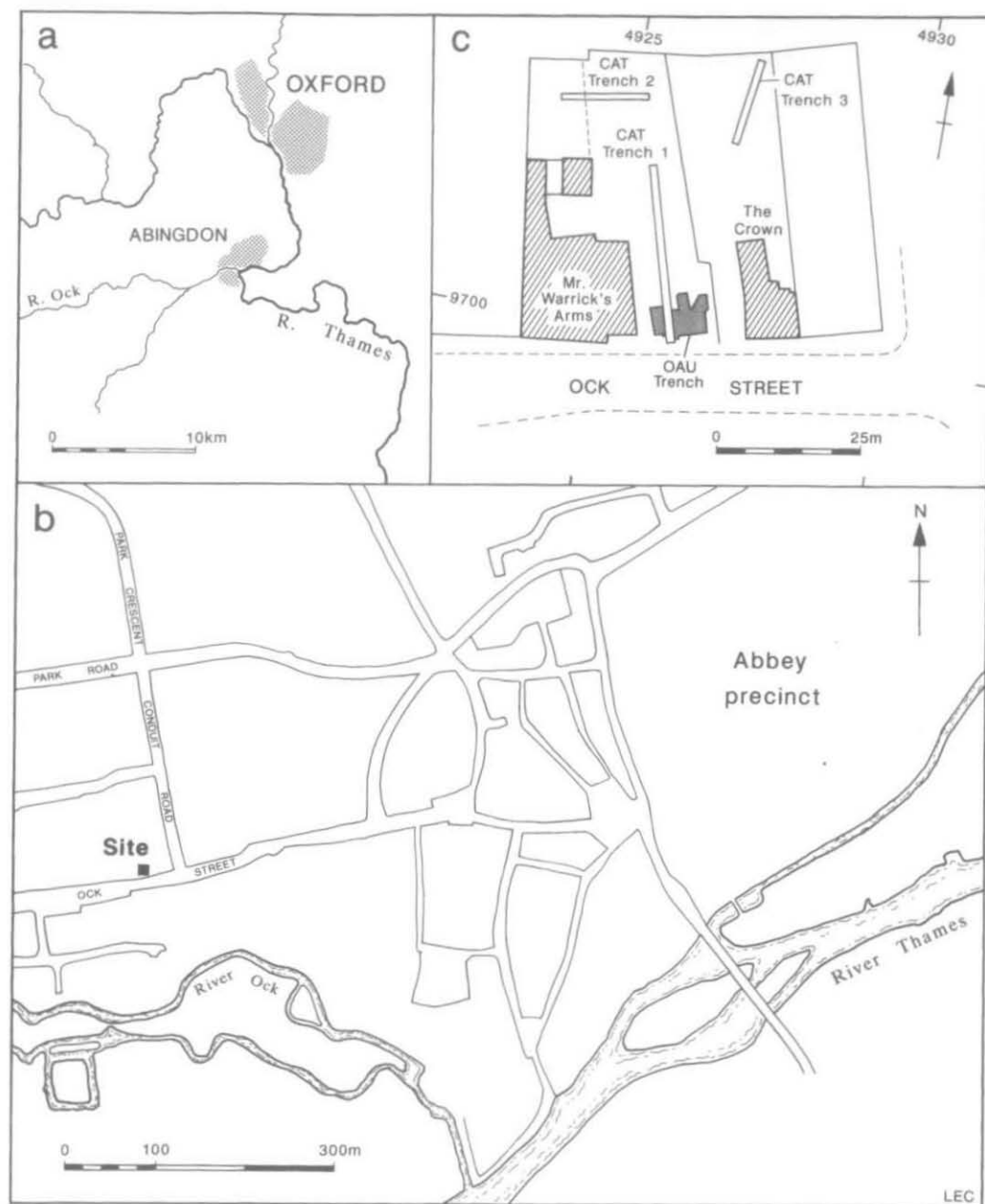


Fig. 1. Abingdon Ock Street: site and trench locations.

was settlement along most of its line at a much earlier date. A number of entries in the Cartulary of Abingdon Abbey record messuages and rents of houses on Ock Street from as early as the first quarter of the 13th century,<sup>3</sup> and tenements and rents in Ock Street are also recorded in the 15th-century accounts of the Abbey obedientiars.<sup>4</sup> Amyce's 'Survey of Abingdon' of 1554<sup>5</sup> lists 44 holdings along the north side of Ock Street, consisting of gardens and tenements with gardens, orchards, barns, a bakehouse with stable, and a dovecote, with only one holding described as 'an empty piece of land' paying a reduced rent. Following the discovery of medieval deposits during the archaeological evaluation of the site, therefore, the excavation was targeted to expose and record the medieval remains, which appeared to be of 13th- and 14th-century date, and to investigate any underlying earlier medieval activity. Evidence for pre-medieval activity, particularly of Iron Age date, was also to be sought in order to support current research into the Iron Age enclosure identified during excavations at the Vineyard;<sup>6</sup> in the event, although a small flint assemblage was recovered, no features predating the medieval period were seen.

## THE EXCAVATIONS

### *Methodology* (Fig. 1)

The evaluation by Cotswold Archaeological Trust had identified medieval structures by the road frontage, at the south end of evaluation Trench 1, with a zone of pits behind. The excavation was therefore concentrated on the building footprints of two proposed new houses in this area. A trench measuring 9 × 7.6 m. was laid out and excavated by machinery under direct archaeological supervision to the top of the 14th-century horizon identified in the evaluation report. Thereafter excavation was by hand. The vestigial remains of a post-medieval cottage overlay the east half of the site, but were removed in machining down to the medieval deposits.

The excavations were restricted by the presence of a run of service pipes across the eastern part of the trench, and by rain and bad light during the course of the site work. Modern activity had truncated archaeological features above a plane sloping down from the present street frontage, and this significantly restricted the interpretation of the northern part of the medieval and post-medieval structures. In addition, evidence for the sequence of walls and paths between the excavated buildings had been disturbed and removed by evaluation Trench 1, and it has not always proved possible to correlate features observed in the excavation with those recorded in the evaluation.

### *Pre-building Features* (Figs. 2 and 4)

The natural gravel was overlain by a red-brown loess, which commonly occurs above the gravel terraces in the Upper Thames. The upper layer of loess, 1156, was slightly disturbed and contained pottery ranging in date from the late 11th to the mid 14th century. Further to the north a section through a similar material 1157 contained finds of modern date, indicating the truncation and mixing of the medieval deposits.

<sup>3</sup> C.F. Slade and the late G. Lambrick (eds.), *Two Cartularies of Abingdon Abbey* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. new ser. xxxii, 1990), i (the Lyell Cartulary), esp. nos. L331, L378-9.

<sup>4</sup> R.E.G. Kirk (ed.), *Accounts of the Obedientiars of Abingdon Abbey* (Camden Soc. 1892), esp. the Chapel-Wardens' Accounts passim and the Trinity Warden's Accounts of 1436-7.

<sup>5</sup> MS. in Abingdon Borough Archives.

<sup>6</sup> T. Allen, 'An "oppidum" at Abingdon, Oxfordshire', *South Midlands Archaeology*, 21 (1991), 97-8; T. Allen, 'Abingdon, Abingdon Vineyard 1992: Areas 2 and 3, the Early Defences', *South Midlands Archaeology*, 23 (1993), 64-6.



Fig. 2. Abingdon Ock Street: plan of early pre-building features.

A number of features were observed cut into the loess. A shallow slot, 1122, 0.7 m. wide and 0.25 m. deep, ran east-west across the trench. This feature narrowed at its east end, where it was cut by posthole 1153 (see below). Some 2.5 m. west of this feature and in line with it was a second slight depression, 0.15 m. deep, 1135=1133, which may have been the terminal of this slot, or the remains of another feature. A third shallow scoop, 1075, lay directly to the north. These features did not contain any dating evidence, and all had been cut by a substantial north-south ditch, 1117. A trench was dug across this in the middle of the excavation area; here 1117 survived 1 m. deep, and had been recut at least twice on the east side (recuts 1124 and 1139). The fills of ditch 1117 contained pottery suggesting a late 12th-century date. The soilmark of the ditch was traced southwards almost to the edge of the excavation. At the very south end of their evaluation trench, CAT had excavated a slot in which a deep feature, CAT 124, containing late 12th-century pottery had been found. This was interpreted as a pit, but was probably the continuation of ditch 1117 (see Fig. 4). The ditch complex was directly overlain by the construction trenches associated with the stone-paved alley 1018, and wall 1017 of medieval Building A.

One further unnumbered feature was observed at the east of the trench, but was not excavated owing to pressure of time (Fig. 2).

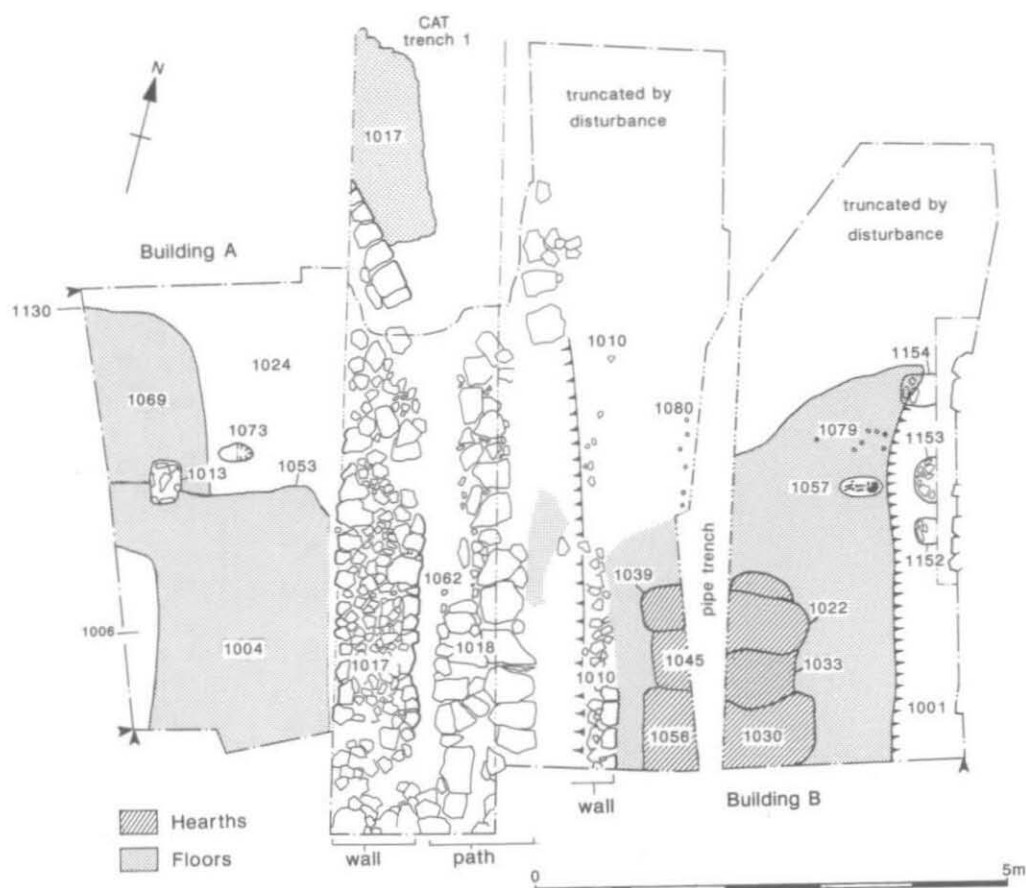


Fig. 3. Abingdon Ock Street: plan showing excavated features of the medieval buildings.

### Structures (Figs. 3 and 4)

Two buildings were subsequently constructed on the site, Building A to the west of the line of ditch 1117, and Building B to the east. Between the buildings a stone path 1.5 m. wide, 1018, overlay ditch 1117. Both buildings extended beyond the edges of the trench, and were therefore only partially revealed. The excavated area of Building A comprised a stone wall or wall footing, feature 1017, representing the east wall of the building, together with the eastern part of a sequence of make-up layers and floors set within two successive shallow scoops. The excavated area of Building B comprised the insubstantial remains of a second stone wall or wall footing, 1010, representing the west wall of the structure, and a posthole alignment (1152-4) overlain by a substantial robber trench, 1001, which may represent the east wall. In between was a succession of floor layers cut by a number of hearths. It has been assumed that some of these hearths were contemporary with the surviving floors, but it should be noted that continual rebuilding of the hearths, which lay in shallow cuts, had removed all stratigraphic relationships.

*Building A.* No loess was observed within the area of Building A, and it may have been deliberately removed in preparation for the construction of the building. A layer of dumped silty sand, 1131, overlay the natural gravel and

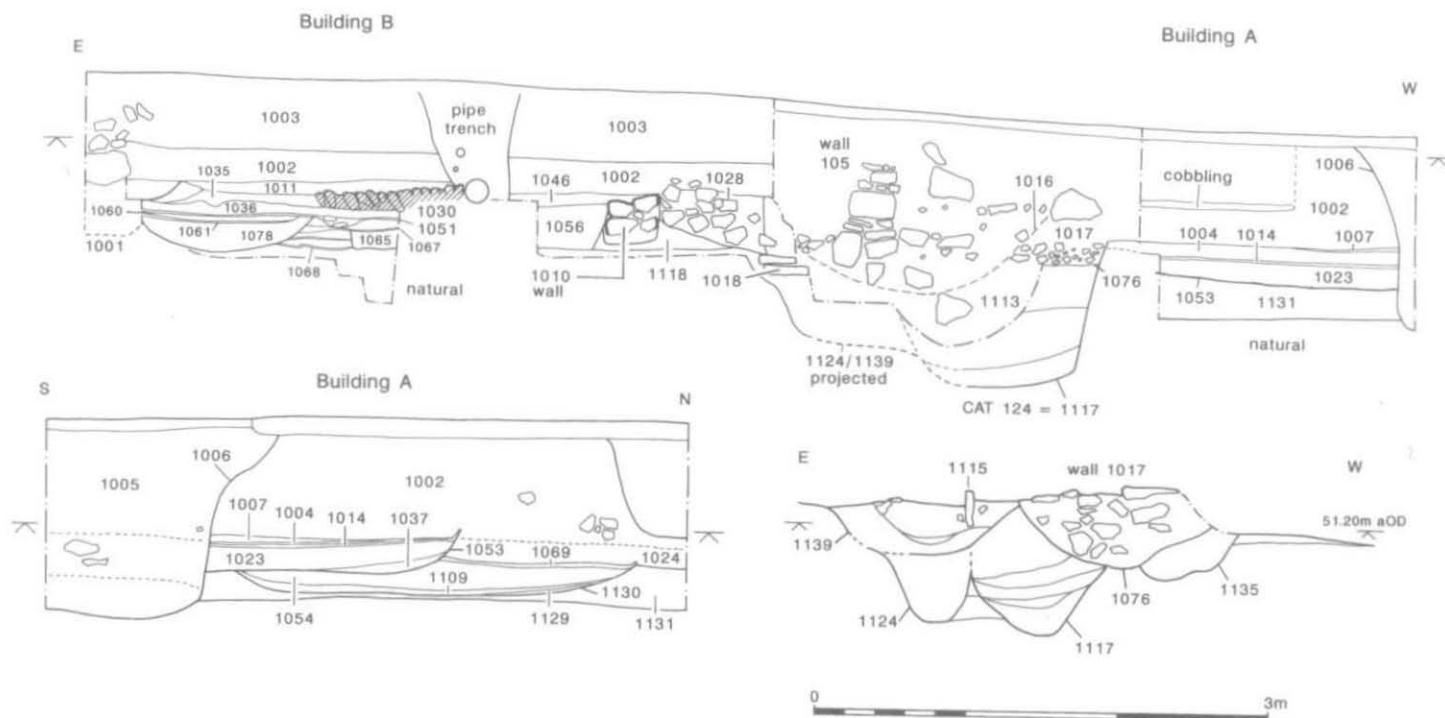


Fig. 4. Abingdon Ock Street: sections.

the shallow feature 1135=1133. The dump contained no pottery, but it did provide a small assemblage of bone including a red deer metacarpal. A flat-bottomed and vertical-sided foundation trench, 1076, 1.2 m. wide and 0.4 m. deep, had been dug into the dumped material, and into the upper fill of ditch 1117, and was completely filled by wall 1017. The wall was 1.2 m. wide and except at the south end three or four courses survived, of rubble construction, comprising limestone blocks 0.1 m. across in the fill of the wall and up to  $0.3 \times 0.2$  m. in the faces. At the south end the wall shallowed (see Fig. 4). On the east side there was a gap 0.25 m. wide between wall 1017 and stone path 1018, and there was no direct relationship between them. Within the excavation area the wall was clearly visible for a length of only 4 m., north of which it survived only in patches, but a further 2 m. of wall was recorded north of this in the CAT evaluation trench, and the total length of the wall was in excess of 8.5 m. No clear north end of the wall, or evidence of a return, was found. Wall 1017 had been robbed out in the 15th century (robber trench 1016), and this had removed any further stratigraphic links to the deposits east or west. Dump 1131 was also cut by a shallow posthole, 1073, 0.35 m. in diameter and 0.06 m. deep. This had no trace of a post-pipe, and had presumably been backfilled after the post had been removed.

Some 1.5 m. west of wall 1017, dumped layer 1131 was cut by a broad, shallow scoop, 1130. This was 2.5 m. long, 0.6 m. wide and 0.28 m. deep, and was filled by a sequence of floor layers (see Fig. 4). The earliest deposit was a sandy layer 1129, and this was overlain by a dark sandy silt and charcoal layer, 1109, which contained late 11th- to mid 13th-century pottery, and an iron bar 0.3 m. long of unknown function (SF 1008). This was presumably a floor surface. The floor was overlain by another sandy make-up layer, 1054, beneath a charcoal-stained patchy occupation deposit, 1069. A grey sandy silt, 1024, containing a lead weight (SF 1001) and mid 13th- to early 15th-century pottery, overlay 1069 and posthole 1073, and extended north to the limits of the excavation west of the line of wall 1017.

The southern half of feature 1130, and layer 1024 overlying it, were cut by a second very broad and shallow scoop, 1053, 2.1 m. long, 1.8 m. wide and 0.3 m. deep. On the east side the scoop stopped c. 0.10 m. short of wall 1017, but ran parallel to it (see Fig. 4). This scoop was filled by a sandy stony dump 1023 and clay dump 1037, which contained late 11th- to late 14th-century pottery, overlain by yellow mortar floor 1014. A white chalk floor 1004 overlay the yellow floor. Both these floors ran up the side of scoop 1053 adjacent to wall 1017. A patch of charcoal-stained silt, 1007, lay on 1004 but was cut away by a modern pit, 1006, which lay in the south-west corner of the trench. Stone-packed posthole 1013, containing a possible late Saxon sherd of pottery, was visible in the north edge of chalk floor 1004. There was no trace of a post-pipe and packing in the posthole, and the fill was presumably backfill.

*Building B.* The eastern structure, Building B, was much less clearly defined. The west wall of the building was represented by wall 1010, which was 0.35 m. wide, and was clearly visible for a length of 2.4 m. Faint traces of a continuation of the foundation trench were seen to the north (Fig. 3) but were not clearly identified owing to modern truncation of the site. The wall was built within a narrow foundation trench cut into loess, and was constructed of rough limestone blocks, set in a matrix of mid-brown sandy silt with charcoal flecks and limestone fragments. Only 2 courses of the wall remained; the east side had a straight face but the west side was ragged. The relationship of wall 1010 to the earlier floors of Building B (see below) was not clear, as the floors had been cut away up to the side of the wall by shallow pits used as hearth settings.

To the west there was a gap 0.7 m. wide between wall 1010 and path 1018. In the south section of the trench the loess west of the wall sloped down from the wall to the path, and this slight slope was also recorded running north for 7 m. alongside the traces of wall 1010, strengthening the possibility that the wall also continued this far north (see Fig. 3). At the south end of the trench the gap between 1010 and 1018 was filled with rubble in a matrix of dark silty clay and charcoal; further north the rubble petered out, but a group of stones were present at the north end of the excavation area along this line (Fig. 3). Two alternative explanations for this material are offered. Possibly the slope in the underlying loess simply reflects its protection from wear up against the wall, and the overlying rubble is tumble from the wall. In this case the collapse of 1010 clearly postdated path 1018, as the rubble overlay the edge of the path. Alternatively the rubble lay within a robber trench (as feature 1028 in the south section drawing suggests), and wall 1010 was at some stage considerably wider, but was subsequently robbed. This is considered further in the discussion.

At the very east of the trench, a line of three postholes and a robber trench may have defined the east wall of Building B. The three postholes, 1152-4, had an average diameter of 0.3 m. and were packed with stones. Posthole 1153 contained pottery with a date range of late 12th to 15th century. The relationship of the postholes to other features had been destroyed by robber trench 1001, which extended beyond the east edge of excavation, and was at least 0.80 m. wide, and 0.28 m. deep.

*Floors:* A series of floors and packing layers overlay the upper fill of early slot 1122 and extended up to 3.5 m. from the southern section. The lowest layer, dump 1068, contained pottery dating to the early 13th century or earlier.

A pattern of stakeholes was observed when the surface of 1068 was cleaned. Whether these stakeholes were present in the layers above and had been missed in the rain and bad light prevalent during the excavation or were a coherent

pattern indicating an internal structure is open to doubt. The stakeholes were grouped into clusters; 1079 was a structure formed of seven stakes, and 1080 was a north-south alignment of stakes parallel to wall 1010.

Dump 1068 was overlain by floor 1078, of black ashy beaten earth, beneath a second dump, 1077, of silty clay and gravel. This was overlain by a second black ashy beaten earth floor, 1067, which contained a pottery assemblage with a date range from the late 11th to the late 14th century. One sherd cross-joined with a sherd from dump 1068. A small pit was cut into floor 1078 but was sealed by 1067. The fill (1065) of this pit contained roe deer and fish bone, and pottery dating from the late 11th to the late 14th century. Two dumped layers, 1063 and 1064, overlay floor 1067, and consisted of yellowish silty clay with charcoal fragments and scorched patches. A patch of black ashy silt loam floor, 1061, which contained pottery with a date range from the late 11th to the 14th century, was observed in the south-east corner of the trench, at the same level as floor 1067. The relationship of floor 1061 to floor 1067 was obscured by the large pit-like feature observed in the south-east corner of the trench (see Fig. 2). Constraints of time prevented the excavation of this feature, and its extent was not properly understood. It is possible that floor 1061 represents a continuation of floor 1067, which had slumped into the feature beneath.

Floor 1061 was overlain by make-up layer 1060, of yellowish clay with charcoal fragments, which contained pottery with a date range from the late 11th to the 15th century, and it was probably equivalent to dumps 1063 and 1064, which overlay floor 1067 to the west. A black ash floor, 1051, overlay dumps 1060 and 1064. A yellow clay make-up layer 1036, containing pottery ranging from the late 11th to the late 14th century in date, overlay 1051. The body of a baby, 1057, a week or two old, had been placed in a shallow pit 1059, no more than 0.46 by 0.21 m. and 0.08 m. deep, cut into 1036. The pit fill 1058 contained pottery dating to the mid 13th to early 14th century. The burial was sealed by black ash floor 1035=1021. This floor contained pottery dating to the 14th or 15th century.

*Hearths:* A sequence of hearths had been cut into these floors. It is highly probable that some of the hearths were contemporary with the floors but because the later hearth scoops cut away the earlier, any stratigraphic link has been removed. A surface of stones set on edge, 1030, 0.9 by 0.8 m. across, overlay floor 1035 at the south of the trench. This was sealed by a yellow mortar floor, 1011, and cut by a scoop, 1034, 0.49 m. in diameter, filled by hearth debris 1033. This was in turn overlain on the north side by hearth 1050, 0.3 by 0.29 m. across and 0.12 m. deep, and hearth 1050 was cut through and was overlain by hearth 1052, 0.5 by 0.4 m. across and 0.1 m. deep. Hearth 1052 overlay a scoop 1150, 0.7 m. across and 0.5 m. deep, filled by hearth debris 1059, which lay in the top of a vertical-sided and flat-bottomed pit, 1049. The pit cut floor layers 1063 and 1064, and was at least 0.75 m. deep, but it is unclear whether it was sealed by hearths 1034 and 1050 or was cut through them, since the profile of hearth 1150 corresponded exactly to that of the pit below. Possibly layer 1150 represents debris from hearth 1050, and was deliberately filled in at the top to form hearth 1150, which then slumped and was remade as hearth 1022. Hearth 1022 contained pottery dating from the late 13th to the 14th or 15th century.

A similar sequence of hearths/scoops was excavated at the west of the building but the presence of the service pipes meant that they could not be securely correlated with the hearths to the east. Floor 1051=1048 was overlain by yellow clay make-up 1047=1036, which contained early to mid 13th-century pottery and a roe deer phalanx. Make-up layer 1047 was cut by a hearth scoop 1045, 0.55 m. across and 0.45 m. deep, the fills of which were cut by another hearth scoop 1039, 0.13 m. deep. These two cut scoop 1056 but its relationship to the floors was not visible. A layer of hearth ash 1046 containing a whetstone (SF 1003) overlay these scoops.

*Path:* Between walls 1017 and 1010 was feature 1018, an area of large flat limestone flags 1.5 m. wide, which had been set into the upper fills of ditch 1117. The layers around and immediately under the stones provided pottery of 13th- to early 15th-century date although mid 13th-century sherds predominated. Fish bones were also recovered.

#### *The area north of the excavation* (with acknowledgements to ROY KING and Cotswold Archaeological Trust)

Approximately 1.5 m. beyond the surviving north end of wall 1017 and 10–15 m. from the south edge of the excavation, a zone of at least six intercutting pits was found in the CAT evaluation, cut into the loess. Two of these were sectioned and proved to be medieval, the later dating to the 14th century. On the north these pits lay adjacent to an east-west limestone wall 0.7 m. wide built without foundations upon the loess, and surviving two courses high. This was abutted on the south side by a laid rubble hardstanding. A layer of gravel in the top of one of the earlier pits may have been associated with the hardstanding, but was cut by several of the later pits, implying that the wall and the pits were contemporary.

Only 2 m. north of the wall were two further medieval pits extending the pit zone for a further 3 m. northwards. The later of these two pits was cut by the base of a hearth, which was also associated with medieval pottery. North of this towards the rear of the site there was sparse evidence of medieval activity



in the form of a layer of clay associated with 13th- to 14th-century pottery (CAT Trench 2) and a post-setting of 13th-century date (CAT Trench 3).

### Demolition

The entire set of structures was demolished at the end of the medieval period and was covered by soil 1002 which contained a plate from a copper alloy strap end (SF 1014) and an assemblage of pottery ranging from the 11th to the 18th century in date. A cottage was built on layer 1002, whose west wall 105 followed approximately the same line as wall 1017 beneath for 4.5 m. before returning east across the middle of the excavation trench and continuing east beyond the limits of the excavation. An associated layer of cobbling west of the building is visible in the south section of the excavation, and the demolition of this cottage by layer 1003.

### POTTERY by LUCY WHITTINGHAM (Figs. 5 and 6)

Four hundred and sixty-two sherds were recovered from forty-two contexts. The pottery has been classified with reference to the Abingdon Broad Street Type Series<sup>7</sup> and Abingdon Vineyard.<sup>8</sup> The pottery has been fully quantified and a minimum vessel count calculated using the number of rim fragments present.

The majority of the pottery at Ock Street was of local origin, with two major traditions dominating the assemblage: Abingdon Type A Ware (42%) and Abingdon Type C (24%) (South Oxfordshire/Wiltshire tradition OXAQ). A further 26% of the assemblage consists of regionally imported wares OXY (Oxford Medieval Ware) and OXAM/OXAW (Brill/Boarstall products), the remaining 8% being single occurrences of various wares such as local Roman Greyware, St. Neot's-type Ware, imported wares from Oxford such as OXAC (Oxford Early Medieval Ware) and OXBF, and early post-medieval wares including OXAX, OXDG (Brill/Boarstall), Surrey Hampshire-type Borderware, post-medieval Red Earthenware and Stoneware.

### Fabrics

*Roman Greyware:* A single sherd with lattice decoration is a local Greyware dating from the 2nd century AD or later; it occurred as residual material in context 1036.

*St. Neot's-type Ware:* A single undiagnostic sherd occurred in context 1062 where it was residual.

*OXBF:* Oxford Fabric BF is a quartz tempered fabric characterised by large inclusions of flint which here could be a coarser version of Abingdon Type C but in Oxford is classified as a separate fabric type. At Ock Street four undiagnostic sherds are noted for their coarse flint content.

*OXAC Oxford Early Medieval Ware:* This oolitic limestone tempered ware was a common type in Oxford from the mid 11th to the late 12th century. At Ock Street fourteen sherds from three early 12th-century bowls are of note (Fig. 5 nos. 1-3).

*OXY Oxford Medieval Ware:* Fabric Y is an early medieval ware found in Oxford predominantly from the late 11th to the mid 13th century. Of the sixty-three sherds present in the Ock Street assemblage, six cooking pots and one bowl are represented by rims; of particular note are thirteen 12th-century tripod pitchers represented mainly by decorated or glazed sherds.

*Abingdon Type C (South Oxfordshire/Wiltshire tradition OXAQ):* This is a limestone and quartz tempered fabric which

<sup>7</sup> R. Haldon and M. Parrington, 'The Medieval Pottery', in M. Parrington and C. Balkwill, 'Excavations at Broad Street, Abingdon', *Oxoniensia*, xl (1975), 30-44.

<sup>8</sup> T.G. Allen, in prep.

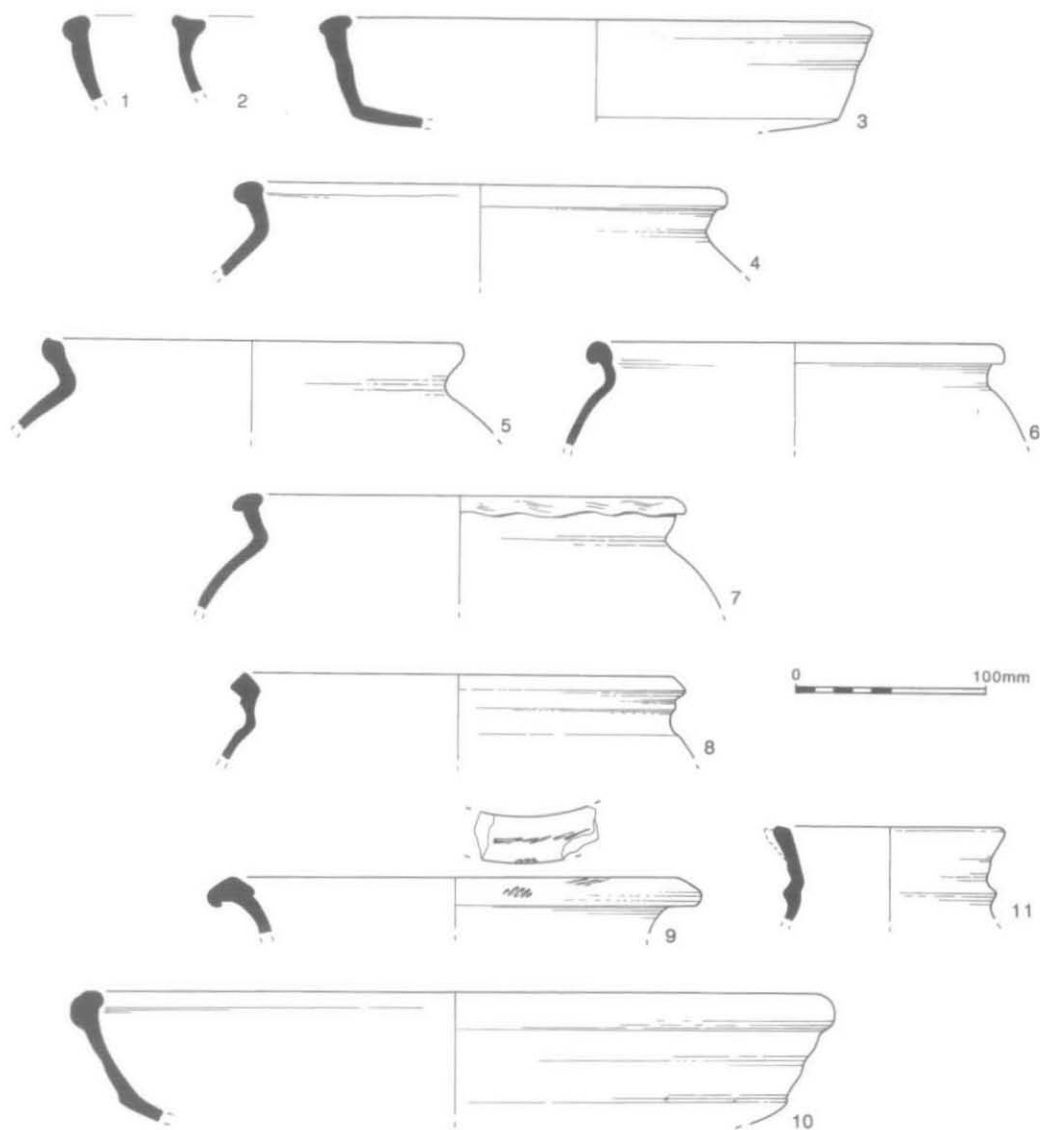


Fig. 5. Abingdon Ock Street: medieval pottery. Nos. 1-3 OXAC bowl; Nos. 4-9 ABC cooking pots; No. 10 ABC bowl; No. 11 ABC pitcher.

belongs to a tradition lasting from the 12th to 15th centuries. It has a widespread distribution throughout south Oxfordshire and Wiltshire and is thought to have been produced in the Kennet Valley. The twelve cooking pots, three bowls and one jug represented at Ock Street suggest that this ware had replaced OXY in the supply of cooking pots by the late 12th century (Fig. 5 nos. 4-11).

*Abingdon Type A:* This was a local source of pottery supplying Abingdon between the 12th and early 15th century. At Ock Street eight cooking pots, six pitchers and two bowls are represented by rims (Fig. 6 nos. 12-20) but the

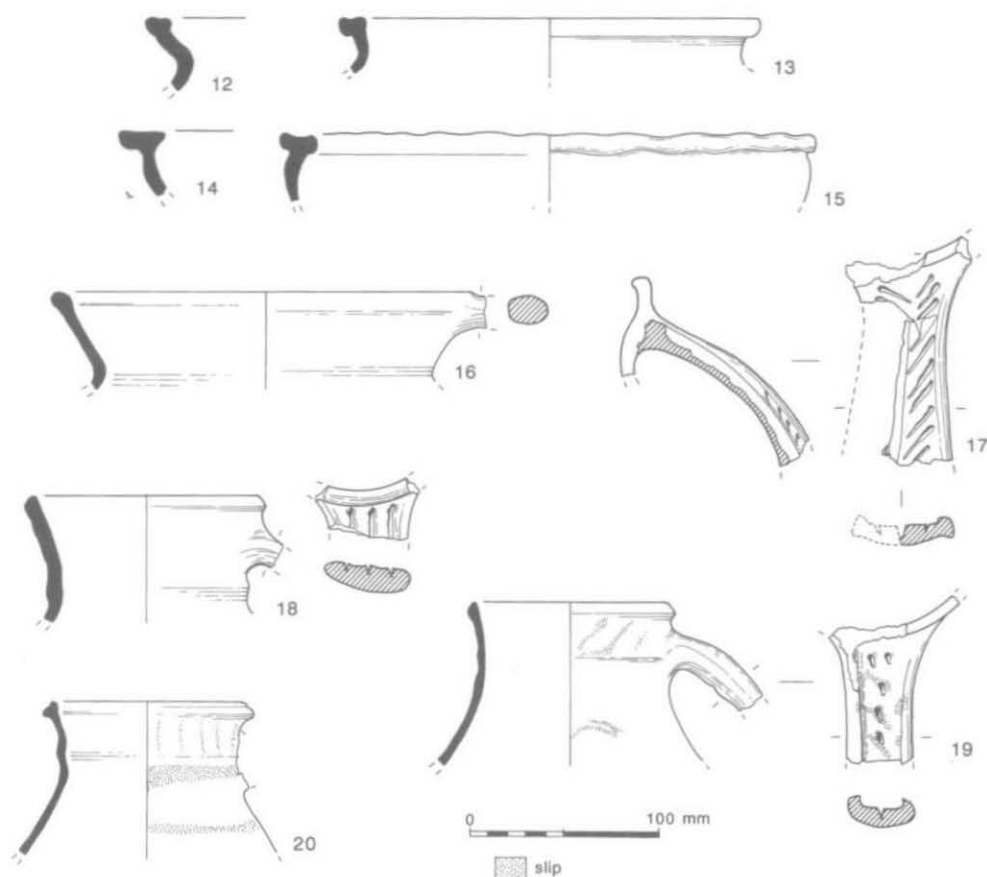


Fig. 6. Abingdon Ock Street: medieval pottery. Nos. 12-13 ABA cooking pots; Nos. 14-15 ABA bowls; Nos. 16-20 ABA pitchers.

majority of sherds are from highly decorated pitchers. These have elaborate designs usually created with applied or painted white slip contrasting with the red body of the vessel, or continuous slip giving a yellow body colour with brown iron-stained pellets used for contrasting decoration. Both slashed strap and stabbed rod handles are found on these pitchers. Several pitchers have incised line decoration on the body – a type of decoration rarely associated with Abingdon Type A Ware.

*OXAM and OXAW Brill/Boarstall:* These two 13th- to 15th-century fabrics belonging to the Brill/Boarstall pottery industry were found in small numbers at Ock Street. In Fabric OXAM there are two cooking pots, represented by rim sherds, and a variety of jug types represented by copper glazed sherds, highly decorated sherds with applied and rouletted strips, and bases from a baluster jug and small globular jug. In Fabric OXAW two jugs are represented by rims, but the majority of sherds are from cooking pots. Cooking pots are the more common form in this fabric after the mid 13th century.

*OXAX:* Three sherds from this 15th-century earthenware were found in context 1035.

*OXDG and other post-medieval:* Four undiagnostic sherds are post-medieval Brill/Boarstall products of the 16th to 17th centuries (OXDG). In addition, there are various other post-medieval wares, represented by single sherds. These

include undiagnostic sherds of post-medieval Red Earthenware, Surrey Hampshire-type Borderware and English Stoneware.

### Discussion

Previous excavations in Abingdon, at Broad Street<sup>9</sup> and Stert Street,<sup>10</sup> have been able to define only a broad date range for the two major fabric types Abingdon A and C; Type A is suggested as 12th- to early 15th-century, and Type C as early 12th- to late 14th-century. The pottery assemblage from Ock Street confirms that Abingdon Type C appears in the stratigraphic sequence before Abingdon Type A and that both continue into the 14th century.

The pre-building ditch at Ock Street, ditch 1117, produced an assemblage of OXY bowls, cooking pots, 12th-century tripod pitchers and Abingdon Type C cooking pots. Abingdon A wares were not present in this feature, and first occurred in the lower floor levels of Building B, where sherds of 12th-century OXY tripod pitcher were also present. This might suggest that there was not much difference in date between the beginning of the two industries, and that both began within the 12th century.

The large number of regionally imported OXY tripod pitchers present at Ock Street suggests that there was no alternative local supply in the early part of the 12th century. It is possible that the Abingdon Type A industry, associated primarily with the production of highly decorated jugs, was not in full production at this date, but became established later in the 12th century.

Within Building B, the sequence of floors showed a change in pottery types from the earliest to the latest occupation levels. In the earlier floors, the pottery assemblage consisted of Abingdon Types A and C, and OXY, whereas the later levels contain Abingdon Types A and C with Brill/Boarstall highly decorated jug sherds. As OXY is known not to have continued into the mid 13th century, and Brill/Boarstall highly decorated jugs are common in contexts of the mid 13th to early 14th centuries, the earliest occupation at Ock Street could, on the basis of the pottery evidence, be 12th- to early 13th-century in date, and the later levels mid 13th- to 14th-century.

The latest levels of occupation were truncated by demolition cuts and robber trenches. As Abingdon Types A and C continued into the late 14th and 15th century, and were present in later levels at Ock Street, it seems likely that the buildings survived to this date, but not much thereafter, judging from the absence of any early post-medieval imports such as Tudor Green-type Ware.

The small number of highly decorated Brill/Boarstall jugs at Ock Street were presumably bought for their novelty.

### OTHER FINDS

*Small Finds:* Leigh Allen comments that, of the twelve objects recovered from the excavations, the only metal objects of note were a fragment of copper alloy plate from a strap end, and a lead weight. The remainder, which are all iron, comprise a large rectangular bar, two nails and six indeterminate fragments of strip/sheet. Three contexts provided 2491 g. of iron slag. A fragment of whetstone was also recovered. Fiona Roe comments that it is of Coal Measures Sandstone; a medium-grained micaceous grey sandstone from the Midlands or from north of Nottingham which appears to have been in widespread use for this purpose during the medieval period. Whetstones of this stone have been recovered from Oxford, Worcester, Gloucester and Lincoln. The Ock Street example is of a common type, rectangular in shape and worn smooth on two surfaces.

*Worked Flint:* Philippa Bradley comments that, of the five small pieces of worked flint recovered from the excavations, four are small hard-hammer struck flakes, one from context 1062 (fill of recut 1139 of ditch 1117), and three from context 1118 (loess). The fifth piece, a possible knife fragment, was also from context 1118. The flint is brown or red in colour with a brown cortex and it is lightly corticated; it may have been available locally within the river gravels. The flint is not particularly diagnostic, but a knife of this type could be either Neolithic or Early Bronze Age in date.

### HUMAN BONE by ANGELA BOYLE (Table 1)

The skeleton of a single individual was recovered from a shallow scoop 1057 in the floors in Building B. The remains were those of a virtually complete and very well preserved neonate. Only the bones of the left arm were missing.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Haldon and Parrington, *op. cit.* note 7.

<sup>10</sup> M. Parrington, 'Excavations at Stert Street, Abingdon', *Oxoniensia*, liv (1979), 1-25.

TABLE 1. HUMAN BONE

Category of measurement	Measurement (mm.)
Pars basilaris max. length	13
Pars basilaris width	14
Tibia length	66
Humerus length	67

The age estimate has been based on evidence derived from dental development,<sup>11</sup> ilium widths, long bone lengths and morphological features.<sup>12</sup> It is likely that the infant died in the first week or two of life.

#### ANIMAL BONE by NICOLA SCOTT (Table 2)

A total of 179 bone fragments were recovered of which 49 were identified to species and anatomical part (see Table 2). In addition two bird bones were recovered from context 1062 and two fish bones from context 1065. All bones were examined, but vertebrae and rib bones were not identified and account for a high percentage of the unidentified fragments. Bones of sheep/goat formed the largest single category of identified bone in the assemblage, with a slightly smaller group of cow bones. The identification of red deer bones is tentative due to the fragmentary nature of the pieces.

The bones were in a fair state of preservation, and there were no obvious butchery marks. The bones from contexts 1038, 1046 and 1051 were burnt, which would support the assertion that these contexts were part of a small hearth area. In general the bones represent typical medieval table refuse.

TABLE 2. ANIMAL BONE IDENTIFIED TO SPECIES AND ANATOMICAL PART

	Cow	Sheep/goat	Pig	Red deer	Roe deer
Mandible	2	7	1		
Phalanx	1			1	
Metatarsal	6	3			
Metacarpal	1	6	1	1	
Astragalus	1				
Skull	1				
Loose Tooth	3	2	1		
Tibia		2			
Scapula	1				1
Humerus	1		1		
Calcaneum		1	1		
Femur		1			
Radius		1			1
Total	17	23	5	2	2

<sup>11</sup> G. Van Beek, *Dental Morphology: An Illustrated Guide* (2nd edn. 1983).

<sup>12</sup> I. Gy Fazekas and F. Kosa, *Forensic Foetal Osteology* (Budapest, Akademiai Kiado, 1978); J.L. Scheur, J.H. Musgrave and S.P. Evans, 'The Estimation of Late Fetal and Perinatal Age from Limb Bone Length by Linear and Logarithmic Regression', *Annals of Human Biology*, 7 no. 3 (1980), 257-65.

## DISCUSSION

*Dating*

The presence of a small flint assemblage at Ock Street is consistent with the known prehistoric activity in the area, on the edge of the first gravel terrace overlooking the confluence of the rivers Ock and Thames.<sup>13</sup> The single sherd of Roman pottery may have been spread by manuring, from one of the known foci of Roman settlement in Bath Street or in the town centre, around the Vineyard and West St. Helen Street. It is possible that the undated features below the medieval buildings were also of Roman or earlier date.

The earliest datable feature was the north-south ditch, 1117, which was recut on two occasions. This ditch could have marked out the plots for the subsequent buildings, or it may have derived from an earlier phase of land-use, perhaps as a field boundary. The fact that it had completely silted up by the time wall 1017 was built suggests that the latter is perhaps more likely. The ditch fills contained a pottery assemblage that suggests a 12th-century date, comprising Abingdon Type C vessels and a range of vessels in Fabric OXY, including tripod pitchers characteristic of that period.

The pottery assemblage is also the principal means of dating the buildings that occupied the site subsequently. The earlier floors in Building B contained pottery of Abingdon Types A and C, together with pottery in Fabric OXY. The presence of Fabric OXY, which had gone out of use by the mid 13th century (Whittingham, above), and the absence of the later Brill/Boarstall wares, suggests a 12th- to earlier 13th-century date for the first occupation of Building B. The wide date ranges currently attributed to Abingdon Fabrics A and C (12th to late 14th/early 15th century) do not help with the close dating of other floors or dump layers, but the presence of Brill/Boarstall wares, common in the mid 13th to early 14th centuries, suggests that occupation continued throughout this period. These decorated wares represent regional imports of distinctive and unusual vessels for the table.

The absence of later medieval wares and early post-medieval imported wares would be consistent with a change of use, and it is possible that during the later 15th and 16th centuries the site was in use as one of the many gardens and orchards recorded by Amyce along the north side of Ock Street in 1554. Other finds from the excavation do not help with either the dating or the characterisation of the site, although the presence of a small quantity of iron slag is of some interest, as it would not normally be expected in a medieval domestic context. The bone assemblage from the excavations is typical of medieval domestic refuse. Scott (see above) suggests that deer bone may be present in the assemblage among the more usual cow, sheep/goat, pig and fish remains, and might suggest the consumption of venison.

*The structures*

Building A was apparently more substantial than Building B. Its floors had been dug out and relaid on dumps resting on the natural gravel, the loess having been apparently deliberately removed. As the gravel was then overlain by a construction dump, the reason for this is unclear, unless the loess was used in some manner in the construction of the building. The size of wall 1017, which was 1.2 m. wide, suggests that the building had stone walls to roof level. As only the east side of the building was recovered by the excavations, it is impossible

<sup>13</sup> M. Parrington, *The Excavation of an Iron Age Settlement, Bronze Age Ring-ditches and Roman Features at Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon (Oxfordshire) 1974-6* (OAU Rep. 1, CBA Res. Rep. 28, 1978).

to define its size. Since, however, wall 1017 ran for at least 8.5 m. north-south, it is probable that the building was aligned with its long axis at right-angles to the street; if not, this was a very substantial building indeed.

The scoops within Building A are difficult to interpret. One local site with some similarities is at Jowett Walk, Oxford, where sequences of floors were found in rectangular pits described as cellars.<sup>14</sup> These were, however, considerably deeper than the scoops on this site. It is possible that the scoops were the result of wear upon the floor area of individual rooms within the building; posthole 1073 might conceivably have been part of a partition associated with scoop 1130, and posthole 1013 with scoop 1053. A similar effect was observed at Hinxey Hall, Oxford, and was argued to have resulted either from continual sweeping to keep the floor clean, or possibly from deliberate lowering of the interior to increase headroom.<sup>15</sup> If this interpretation is correct, this would indicate that the front room of Building A at one stage ran at least 4 m. back from the street.

Building B did not initially have substantial foundations. The postholes 1152-4 suggest that the building may have been of wood in the first phase, and the slight stone foundation 1010 may also indicate a wooden structure as the stones may only have served as a rest for a sill beam. The contrast with the massive stone wall of Building A is very strong, but robber trench 1001 suggests that Building B was at some point rebuilt with stone walls. If 1010 and the line of posts represent the full width of the building, it would have been only 3.5 m. wide, and since both the posthole line and the faint traces of wall 1010 suggest that the walls extended for at least 4.5 m. north-south, this building was probably also oriented with its long axis at right-angles to the street.

Internally, the presence of a succession of small hearths suggests domestic occupation, and the use of the fires for heating and cooking. If wall 1010 was indeed simply a sleeper wall for a timber superstructure it is perhaps surprising that hearths were placed right up against the inner face of the wall, and this may lend support to the suggestion that the west wall too was rebuilt in stone, presumably when the wall robbed by 1001 was built, and was later robbed by trench 1028. It is however alternatively possible that a clay fireback was used to protect the walls.

If wall 1010 was not later strengthened by a wider stone wall, the replacement of the east wall in stone would appear to be difficult to explain, unless Building B was not free-standing, but was joined to Building A, wall 1017 supporting the rafters of both buildings, so that wall 1010 was only an internal partition wall. Such wall-sharing is attested in medieval documents, though there is no evidence in this case, but it might help to explain the very substantial width of wall 1017. It would clearly imply joint ownership and development of the two properties.

The path 1018 between the walls of the buildings suggests an alley giving access to the rear of the properties. The stone paving might have been required as the alley was on the line of the earlier ditch 1117, and rather than free-draining gravel, its surface would have been water-retaining ditch silts. If wall 1017 was common to both buildings, the alley would have been covered. The position of the pits almost immediately to the rear of the buildings is a feature shared with other tenements both in Abingdon and Oxford, for instance those excavated in the Vineyard, Abingdon, and at St. Thomas's Street, Oxford.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> M.R. Roberts et al., 'Excavations at Jowett Walk, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, ix (1995), 225-46.

<sup>15</sup> C. Halpin, 'Late Saxon Evidence and Excavation of Hinxey Hall, Queen Street, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xlviii (1983), 41-69.

<sup>16</sup> T. Allen, 'Abingdon Vineyard Area 6', *South Midlands Archaeology*, 26 (1996), 51-5; A. Hardy, 'Archaeological Excavations at 54-55 St. Thomas's Street, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, lxi (1996), 225-73.

The later cottage, although it was not archaeologically excavated, had its wall 105 on the same alignment as wall 1017. A further wall seen in section only (not illustrated), on the east side of the trench, was on the alignment of the present rear walls of The Crown and Mr. Warrick's Arms. Thus the later cottage may have been of the same size as these public houses.

### *Conclusions*

The excavations reported above have demonstrated that there was medieval settlement at least this far along Ock Street, probably from as early as the first quarter of the 13th century. Unfortunately, the restricted area available for excavation has not allowed a full understanding of the plan, orientation and structural characteristics of the medieval buildings, but was sufficient to show that they incorporated both stone wall foundations for a timber superstructure, and, in the case of Building A, stone walls. This would imply houses of some pretension and value, and this is supported by the presence of highly decorated Brill/Boarstall table wares of later 13th- and earlier 14th-century date.

The presence of a stone-paved alley between the buildings, to allow access to the rear of the properties, is of some interest since it implies that the houses were not set in open semi-rural plots, but is, rather, reminiscent of the fully-developed street frontages known from much larger medieval towns; it suggests, as does the axis of the buildings at right-angles to the street, that development along the Ock Street frontage may already have been quite extensive by this date.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was funded by the developers, Builders Ede, and commissioned by the Oxon Planning Partnership. Mr. H. Coddington, Deputy County Archaeologist, monitored the project on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council. The report was edited by Anne Dodd, who would like to acknowledge the help given by Tim Allen (OAU), who kindly read and commented on the report at draft stage.