

Saxon, Medieval and Post-medieval Deposits at Waterperry House, Waterperry, near Wheatley, Oxfordshire

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SUMMARY

An area to the rear of Waterperry House was excavated in advance of the construction of new accommodation. The main focus of activity occurred within the Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods. It is possible that there is a degree of settlement continuity from Saxon to medieval times. There are indications that there was a move towards more nucleated settlement in the 11th to 12th centuries. Evidence for desertion was not apparent during the 14th and 15th centuries and the manor house was rebuilt in the early 18th century when formal gardens were also laid out.

INTRODUCTION

The settlement at Waterperry lies some 250 m. to the SW. of the River Thames close to the county boundary with Buckinghamshire (SP 6298 0629) (Fig. 1). The site slopes gently from W. to E. and lies at a height of 63 m. above Ordnance Datum. The historic core of the settlement at Waterperry is now dominated by Waterperry House and grounds, and the church of St. Mary's. A substantial settlement belonging to Robert D'Oyley is recorded at Waterperry in Domesday Book (1086). The church fabric has Saxon elements and Saxon pottery has been found within it. The settlement flourished in the 13th to 14th centuries but had declined by the 17th century. The manor house was rebuilt in 1713 but incorporated an earlier 17th-century wing and was presumably sited on or close to the location of the original medieval manor house.¹

The Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record contains entries relating to late Mesolithic flintwork and scatters of Iron Age and Roman pottery in the general vicinity of Waterperry.

In July 1998 an evaluation² was carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services as a result of the proposal to construct a new accommodation block to the rear of the existing Waterperry House, which is now occupied by The School of Economic Science. Five machine-excavated trenches identified ditches, pits, postholes, layered deposits, and

¹ *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 295-309; T.G. Hassall, 'Excavation at the Saxon Church at Waterperry, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, xxxvii (1972), 245.

² S.D.G. Weaver, 'Waterperry House, Waterperry, near Wheatley, Oxfordshire, an archaeological evaluation' (Thames Valley Archaeol. Services report, 1998).

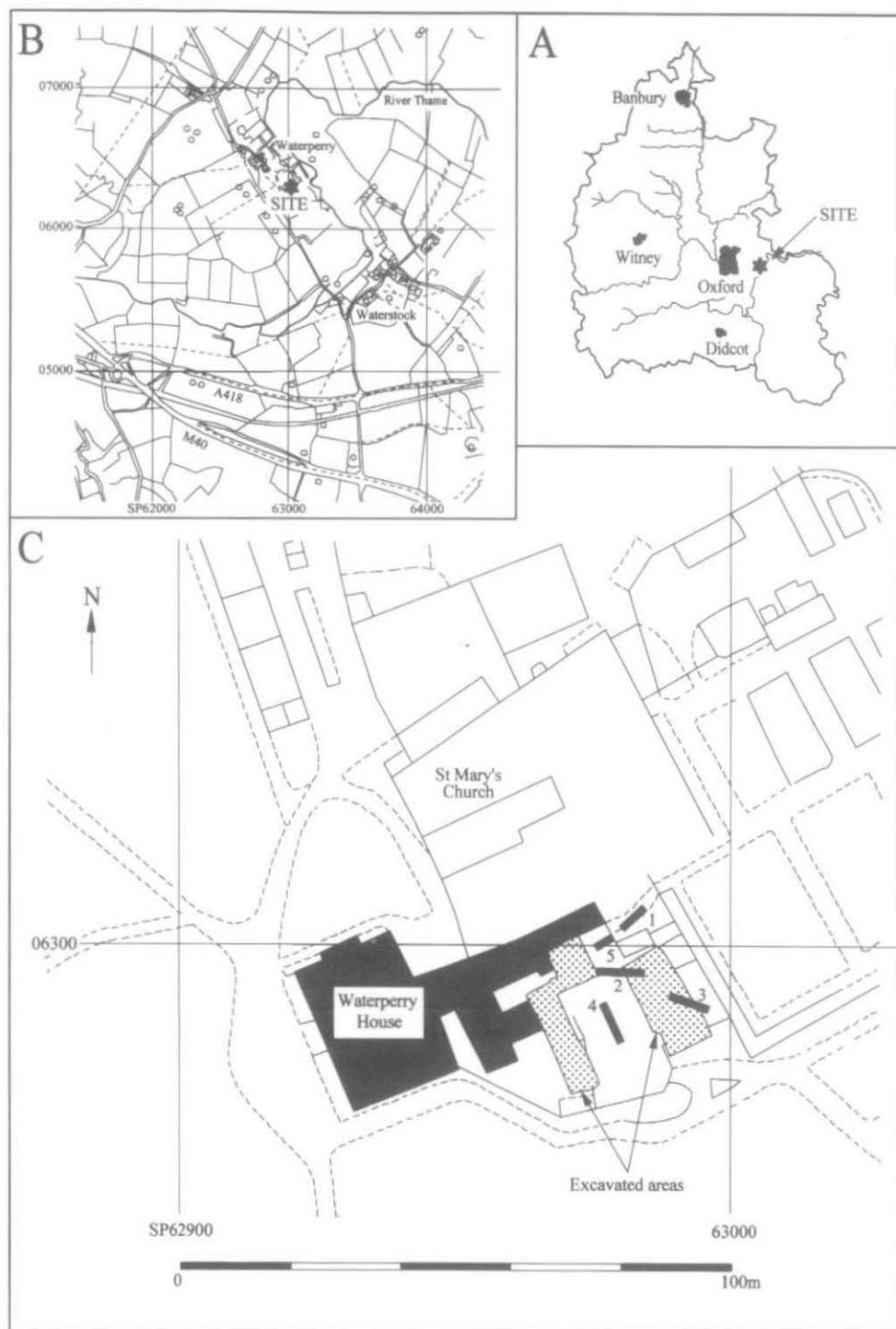


Fig. 1. A) Location of the site within Oxfordshire; B) location of the site within Waterperry; C) plan showing evaluation trenches and excavated areas.

associated walls, indicating that activity took place here from the early Saxon to the post-medieval period. The subsequent excavation of two small areas took place and a small out-building belonging to the house was recorded prior to its demolition.³

The project code is WHO98/48 and the finds and archive will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service (Acc. No. OXCMS 1998.156).

THE EXCAVATION

Methodology

The two excavated areas correspond to the footprints of the proposed new buildings (Fig. 2) and were excavated by machine down to the first archaeologically sensitive layers. The archaeological deposits revealed include walls, metalised surfaces, garden features, ditches, pits and postholes. All archaeological deposits were hand cleaned and excavated. All features were half-sectioned and some were fully excavated.

Results (Figs. 2-4)

Four phases of activity from the late Iron Age/Roman to the post-medieval period were evident, based upon the artefactual assemblage and the stratigraphy.

Phase I: Possible late Iron Age/Roman. Evidence for late Iron Age activity took the form of 26 pottery sherds. Most of this material was residual in later features and only in the small pit 324 was late Iron Age pottery found without later material: even this feature contained only one sherd. Similarly, of the 29 Roman sherds found only two, in postholes 236 and 325, were found without later material. Ditch 315 contained three sherds of Roman pottery and no later material. Four residual sherds of Prehistoric pottery and a flint flake indicate pre-Iron Age activity in the area.

Phase IIa: Early to middle Saxon. Features of this phase include three pits (207, 218 and 232) and a ditch (1004) which was orientated NW-SE. The pottery for this phase consists of just 23 sherds and, consequently, the phasing should be treated with caution. Two of the pits were discrete features but pit 232 stratigraphically post-dated ditch 1004.

Phase IIb: Middle to late Saxon. Two ditches (1002 and 1003), a pit or ditch terminal (125), a pit or gully (1007), and two postholes (228 and 230) belong to this phase. Just 10 pottery sherds provide dating evidence and, as with the preceding phase, the dating of these features must be treated with caution.

Ditch 1002 crossed from SW. to NE. and clearly post-dated ditch 1004. Only two sherds of possible 9th-century pottery, as well as some residual earlier pottery, were recovered from its fill. It is difficult to speculate with such insecure dating evidence but it does seem that ditch 1002 and the apparently earlier, though equally poorly-dated ditch, 315, are at right-angles to each other and, if contemporary, they could form part of an enclosure. Ditch 1003 cut ditch 1002; two sherds of 9th- to 10th-century pottery from 1003 provide further support for the stratigraphic evidence. The pit or ditch terminal 125 contained just a few sherds of pottery suggesting a 10th- to 11th-century date. The long pit or gully 1007 contained a single sherd of Phase IIa pottery but stratigraphically post-dates ditch 1003. The postholes (228 and 230) did not contain dating material but stratigraphically predate pit or gully 1007.

Phase III: Medieval, 12th to 14th century. This phase was characterised by two ditches (1005 and 1008), five pits (208, 305, 319-20 and 1009), two layers (199/272 and 376), and 13 pits (242-8, 300-2, 313, 338-9) sealed by layer 376. The quantity of pottery used to date features is significantly higher than that for earlier phases.

Ditch 1005 was roughly curvilinear, running approximately SW. to NE. The ditch was substantial and most likely reflects a redefinition of the settlement boundary in this period. It is most probable that the settlement lay to the NW. of the ditch, encompassing the house and church. Part of a further substantial E.-W. ditch, 1008, was observed at the S. end of the site. No clear relationship between this and ditch 1005 could be established but it probably represents further boundary redefinition.

Four of the pits (208, 305, 319 and 320) can be relatively confidently dated to this phase. However, the much larger pit, 1009, is not as securely dated as it contained only a small quantity of pottery and some bone fragments. Silting at the base of the feature was evident but the samples from these deposits contained no

³ S.D.G. Weaver, 'Waterperry House, Waterperry, near Wheatley, Oxfordshire, a post-excavation assessment' (Thames Valley Archaeol. Services report, 1999).

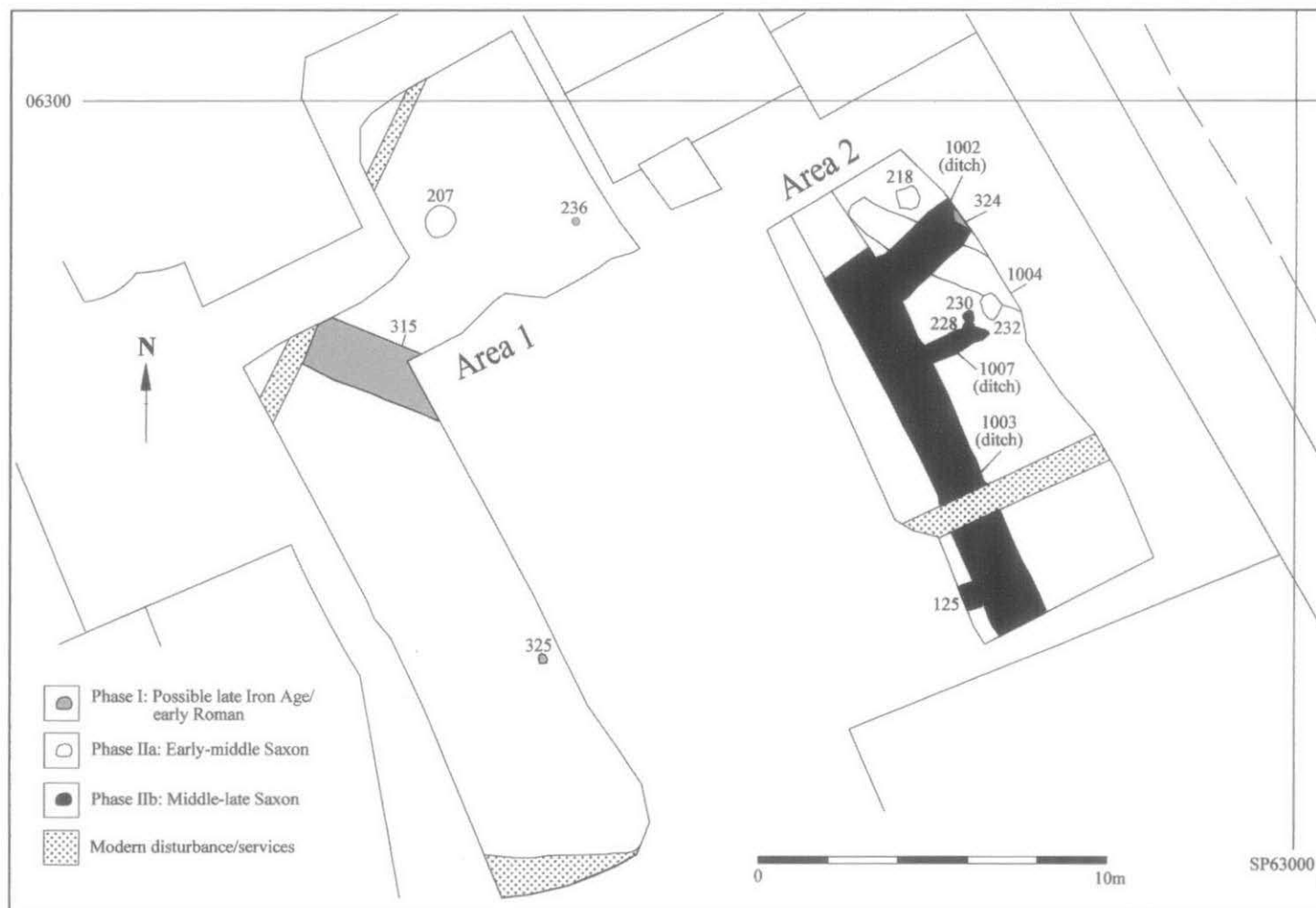


Fig. 2. Plan of phases I – IIb, late Iron Age to middle/late Saxon features.

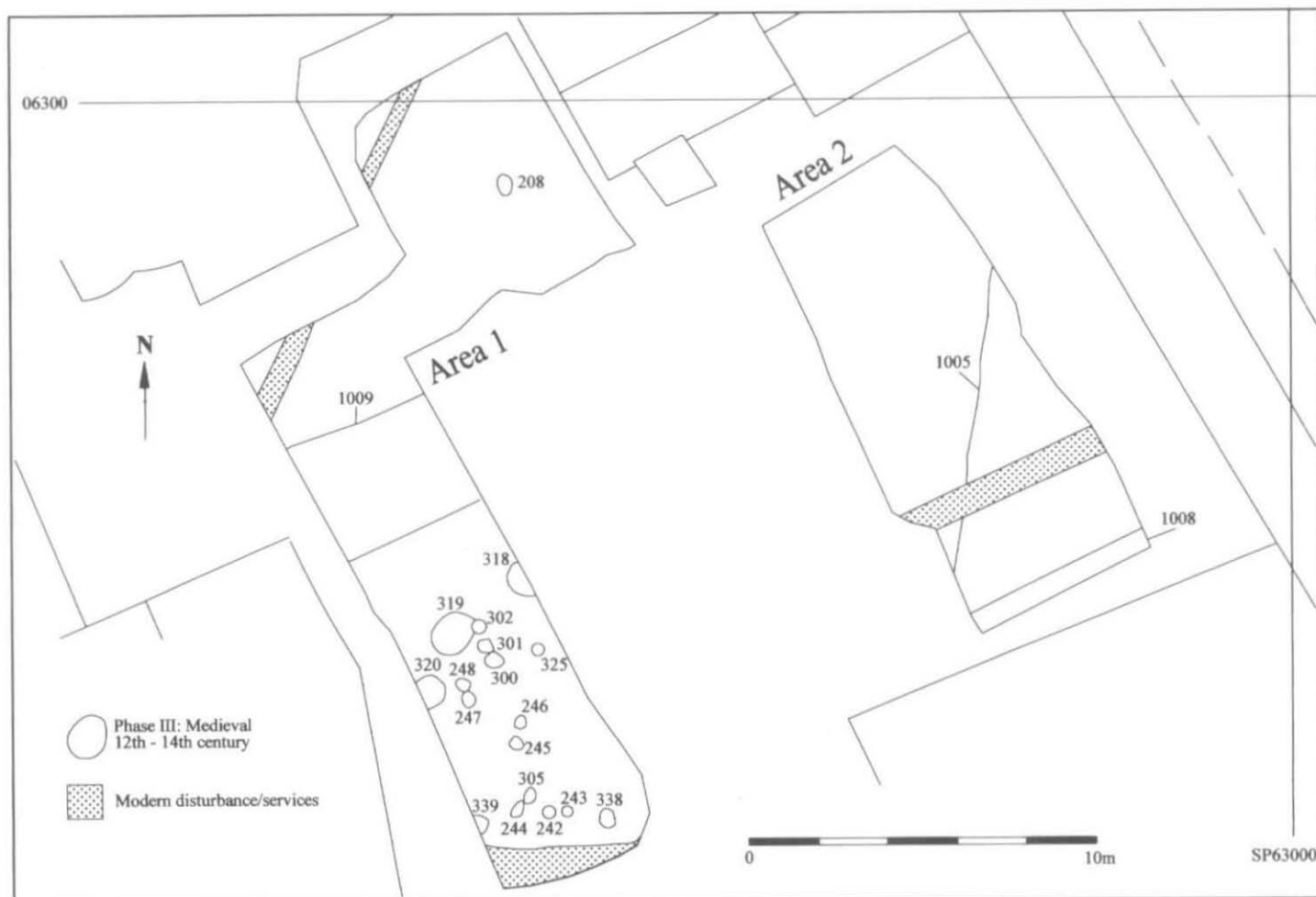


Fig. 3. Plan of phase III, 12th- to 14th-century features.

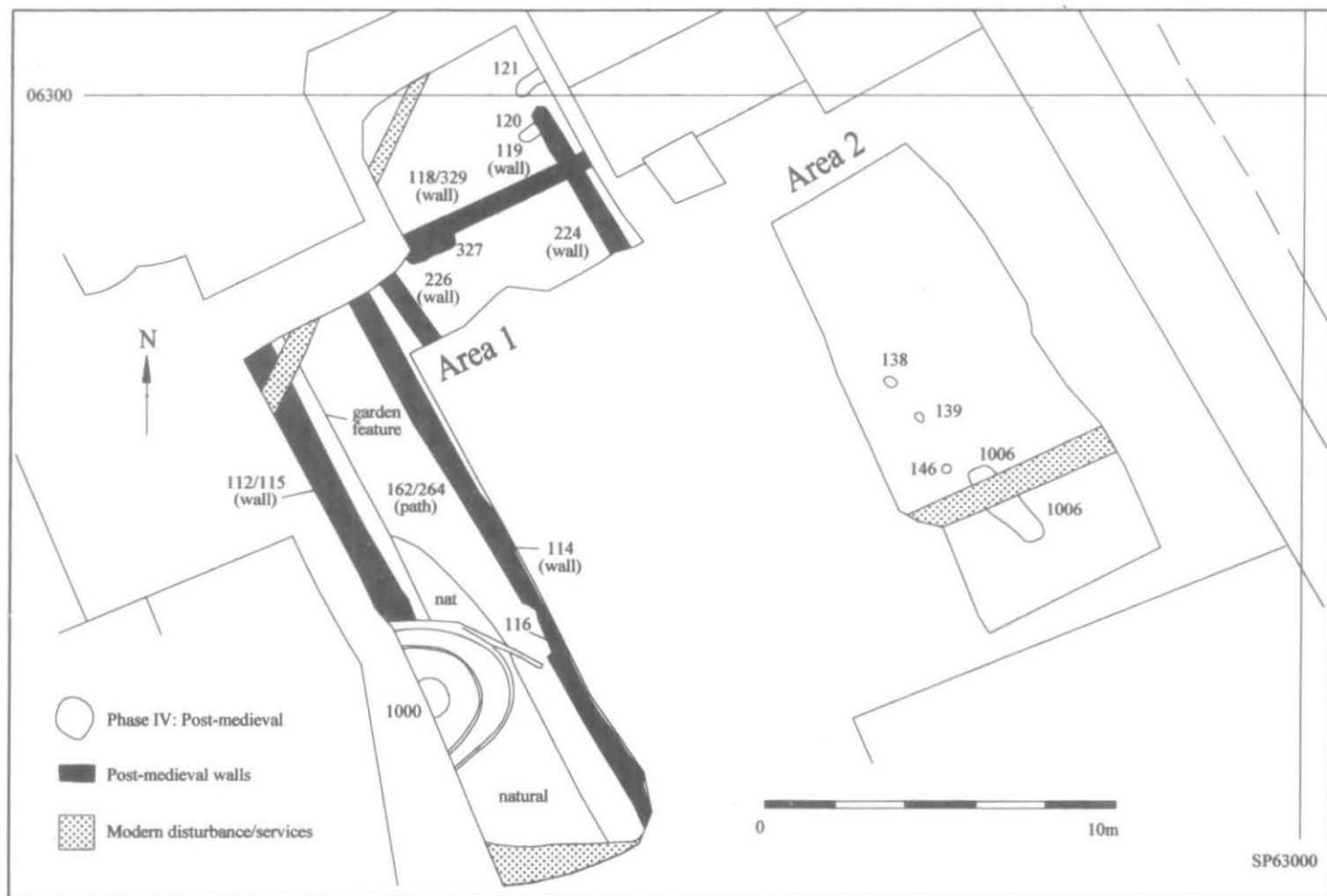


Fig. 4. Plan of phase IV, post-medieval features and walls.

botanical remains. The precise nature of this deposit is uncertain. The small quantity of pottery found would seem to indicate that this was not a rubbish pit, although organic refuse may not have survived. It may have been a quarry pit to obtain clay for construction purposes.

A brown-grey clay layer (199/272) overlay much of Area 2. The material was deeper to the E., following a slight slope in the ground surface from E. to W. Much of the layer was removed during stripping, with a baulk retained for sampling. The layer had been examined during the evaluation and pottery has indicated that it is of 13th- to 14th-century date; the excavation showed that it also sealed earlier deposits.

A further shallow layer at the S. end of Area 1, 376, masked a group of small pits (242 – 248, 300 – 2, 318 and 338 – 339). Excavation of the pits produced very little dating evidence, with the exception of pit 242, which is probably of 13th- to 14th-century date. All the pits were very shallow and it is suggested that they have been truncated by later activity.

Phase IV: Post-medieval. The majority of the post-medieval pottery assemblage is of 18th-century or later date but a quantity of earlier post-medieval material is present as residual finds. A few contexts with pottery of 16th- and 17th-century date appear to be securely stratified. For example, pit or foundation cut 327 (for wall 329) contained 16th-century pottery. Other walls and a stone drain have been stratigraphically dated to this period.

Later post-medieval activity was characterised by buried soil layers, walls, paths and garden features that probably reflect the landscaped gardens following the rebuilding of the house in the 18th century. The most notable garden feature was a circular kerbed and metalled pathway with a stone pillar at its centre, possibly for an ornamental bird bath or sundial.

PREHISTORIC, ROMAN AND SAXON POTTERY by PAUL BLINKHORN

Ninety-nine sherds from the evaluation and excavation were examined (weight 903 gm.).

Iron Age

Thirty Iron Age sherds were recovered, with fabrics and forms typical of the region. Parallels can be made with pottery recovered from the Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon.⁴ All the sherds were in one of the two fabrics noted at that site.⁵ Only three form-diagnostic sherds were noted: two rimsherds and a carination from shallow angular bowls similar to examples that occurred in Period I deposits at Ashville where they were dated to the mid 6th to early 3rd centuries BC.⁶ A small sherd with faint vertical scoring/wiping was also noted. A few vessels with this surface treatment were found in Period II deposits at Ashville and dated to the 3rd to 1st centuries BC.⁷

F1: Moderate to dense shell fragments up to 5 mm.

F2: Sparse shell fragments up to 2 mm. in a fine sandy matrix.

Early/Middle Saxon

F1: Fine sand. Fine and slightly soft, with sparse sub-angular quartz c. 0.1 mm., rare sub-rounded grains up to 1 mm.

F2: Fine sand and limestone. Moderate to dense subangular quartz up to 0.5 mm., sparse to moderate angular calcareous material up to 2 mm.

F3: Limestone. Sparse to moderate sub-rounded calcareous material up to 2 mm., sparse fine flecks of silver mica.

F4: Chaff-temper. Moderate chaff voids up to 4 mm., sparse sub-rounded quartz, ironstone and calcareous material up to 0.5 mm.

Such fabrics are typical of the handmade pottery of the period and are similar to wares from Eynsham Abbey and Yarnton.⁸

⁴ M. Parrington, *The Excavation of an Iron Age Settlement, Bronze Age Ring-Ditches and Roman Features at Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon* (Oxfordshire) 1974 – 76 (CBA Res. Rep. 28, 1978).

⁵ C. De Roche, 'Iron Age Pottery', in Parrington, op. cit. note 4, p. 41.

⁶ Ibid. 72-3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ P.W. Blinkhorn, 'The Post-Roman Pottery', in *Excavations at Eynsham Abbey* (Oxf. Archaeol. Unit, Thames Valley Monograph, in press); P.W. Blinkhorn, 'The Post-Roman Pottery', in G. Hey, *Excavations at Yarnton, Oxfordshire* (Oxf. Archaeol. Unit, Thames Valley Monograph, in press).

Late Saxon

The coding system of the Oxfordshire County type-series⁹ has been used, as follows:

OXR: St. Neots Ware c. AD 900–1200.

AXB: Late Saxon Oxford Ware ('Oxford Shelly Ware') late 8th – early 11th century.

Chronology

Early/Middle Saxon. Generally, pottery of this type cannot be dated other than to within the broad period, unless decorated. Two such sherds were present in this assemblage. One from 316 (486) appears to be a fragment of a vessel with vertical pressed bosses, indicating an early Saxon date, probably in the earlier 6th century. The other had fragments of two annular stamp impressions and an incised line, suggesting a similar or slightly later date. The rest of the assemblage must be regarded as being of early to middle Saxon date.

Late Saxon. The range of late Saxon pottery types was limited, comprising only St. Neots ware and late Saxon Oxford ware. This suggests a short-lived period of activity during the later 9th or 10th century. Other late Saxon and Saxo-Norman wares, such as Cotswolds-type ware (OXAC), were absent. The earliest finds of St. Neots ware from the *burgh* of Oxford date to the early to mid 10th century, where it was found in association with Oxford shelly ware.¹⁰ By the first half of the 11th century, Oxford shelly ware had generally fallen from use,¹¹ and Cotswolds ware was becoming present in significant quantities.¹²

MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL POTTERY

by CATHERINE UNDERWOOD-KEEVILL

A small assemblage of 282 sherds from both evaluation and excavation was examined. The assemblage is important due to the scarcity of material from east Oxfordshire and the limited amount of material from market towns in the later medieval period.¹³ All the pottery was divided into fabric types according to the Oxfordshire fabric series¹⁴ and the MoLAS post-medieval coding and dating system. All material was counted and weighed by fabric type for each context and details of diagnostic sherds and surface treatment and decoration are in the archive.

Phase III: 12th to 14th century

This ceramic period includes Oxford medieval ware, fabric OXY, dated from the mid to late 11th century to the mid 13th century. Although there is only a limited amount of material, a range of vessel types, from combed decorated pitcher sherds to cooking pots and glazed jugs, was apparent. Oxford medieval ware was present. Brill/Boarstall fabrics OXAM and OXAW are dated to the 13th to 14th century. These fabrics comprise speckled green-glazed jugs, red slip line decorated jugs, applied diagonal lines with lip painting, red slip line and dot decoration, and highly decorated jug sherds with applied pads with lattice decoration. Most of the types were present by the mid 13th century and associated with triple-decker or baluster jugs.¹⁵ An odd angular sherd with rouletted decoration indicates a double-shelled lamp (267). Splash-glazed and partially-glazed examples in fabrics OXAW and OXAM were present in context 376, feature 319 (477, 478) and feature 320 (480).

Phase IV: Post-medieval

A few contexts contained a restricted range of fabric types that indicate an early post-medieval date. It must be emphasised that a large proportion of the early post-medieval types were from later contexts and occur as residual material. The early post-medieval types include Tudor Green ware (TUDG), Tudor Brown (TUDB),

⁹ M. Mellor, 'A Synthesis of Middle and Late Saxon, Medieval and early Post-medieval Pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, lix (1994), 17–217.

¹⁰ Ibid. 57.

¹¹ Ibid. 41.

¹² Ibid. 51.

¹³ Ibid. 148.

¹⁴ R. Haldon with M. Mellor, 'Late Saxon and Medieval Pottery', in B. Durham, 'Archaeological Excavations at St. Aldates, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xlii (1977), 11–39; Mellor, *op. cit.* note 9.

¹⁵ Mellor, *op. cit.* note 9, p. 127.

Lower Rhineland wares such as Raeren ware and Frechen ware (RAER and FREC), and Hants/Surrey Border wares (BORD).

A small quantity of 16th-century material occurred in evaluation Trenches 2 and 4 (TUDG), and 16th- to 17th-century Rhenish wares also came from Trench 4 (67). Seventeenth-century Border wares and red earthenwares were present in context 155, 16th-century Tudor Green wares came from context 169, and a 16th-century lobed cup sherd came from context 327. Tudor Green types are particularly rare in Oxford¹⁶ and the small quantities at Waterperry confirm the limited presence. It is interesting that these types should occur at all in a small village. Tin-glazed wares dating from the 17th century occur as residual sherds in later contexts.

The majority of the assemblage was assigned to the 18th to 20th century with an increasing amount of moulded factory-produced wares such as creamware (1760+), English stoneware (1700–1900), English stoneware black-leading bottle (1800–1900), transfer-printed ware (1800–1900), black-basalt ware (1700–1900 Wedgwood 1768+), English porcelain (1700–1900) and Staffordshire types such as Staffordshire red ware (1600–1800) and Staffordshire brown stoneware (1690–1730). The remainder of the material consists of local glazed and non-glazed red earthenwares, possibly from the south Oxfordshire kilns at Nettlebed,¹⁷ and post-medieval Brill types.

There appears to be 17th- to 18th-century material in certain features and contexts, such as context 155. These are 17th-century yellow-glazed Surrey Border ware and an 18th-century clubbed rim hollow ware in glazed red earthenware and 18th-century coarse red earthenware flatwares. Context 158 contained a Border ware tripod pipkin from the mid to late 17th century,¹⁸ a Staffordshire red ware tankard dating to the early 18th century, and a tin-glazed drug jar base dating to the 17th century, similar to an example found in Oxford.¹⁹ Ditch 1 (152) contained a 17th-century glazed red earthenware tripod pipkin and a late 18th-century creamware bowl rim.

English stoneware tankards are dated from the late 17th century in Oxford²⁰ but most of these occur in later contexts with 18th- to 19th-century products. This is exemplified by the assemblage from the pillar footing 103 (154), which contained English stoneware and late 18th-century creamware, which is dated from the 1760s in Oxford.²¹ Other mid to late 18th-century wares, such as Staffordshire white saltglaze wares, occur in demolition layer 170. This context contained the largest range of material, from medieval Brill/Boarstall wares (fabric OXAM) and Coarse Border ware (CBW) dating from the mid 14th century to the late 15th century²² to 17th-century Surrey Border ware, Tudor Brown ware and late 17th-century decorated tin-glazed ware. Eighteenth-century black basalt ware, English stoneware and English porcelain were also present. The most notable pottery types were a few sherds of Dutch-type slipware with slip lines and notched rouletting design, which are part of a jug and dated to the early 17th century.²³

Conclusion

This assemblage represents one of the few medieval and early post-medieval ceramic assemblages from the east Oxfordshire area. There are no comparative assemblages available from neighbouring villages.²⁴ The only other excavation of note in the area was at the church at Waterperry,²⁵ which suggested late Saxon activity. This is corroborated to a limited extent with the presence of late Saxon fabrics, late Saxon Oxford ware (OXB) and St. Neots ware (OXR), and late Saxon and early SW Oxfordshire ware (OXBF) at Waterperry House.

¹⁶ M. Mellor and G. Oakley, 'A Summary of the Key Assemblages: a study of the pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from 14 pits, dating from the 16th to the mid 19th century', in T.G. Hassall, C.E. Halpin and M. Mellor 'Excavations in St. Ebbe's, Oxford 1967–76: part II: post-medieval domestic tenements and the post-dissolution site of the Greyfriars', *Oxoniensia*, xlix (1984), 181–219.

¹⁷ N. Stebbing, J. Rhodes and M. Mellor, *The Clay Industries of Oxfordshire: Oxfordshire Potters* (Oxfordshire Museums Service Publ. No. 13, 1980).

¹⁸ J. Pearce and A. Vince, *A Dated Type-Series of London Medieval Pottery Part 4: Surrey Whitewares* (Lon. and Middx Archaeol. Soc. 1988).

¹⁹ Mellor and Oakley, op. cit. note 16, p. 214.

²⁰ Ibid. 215.

²¹ Ibid. 217.

²² J. Pearce, *Post-Medieval Pottery in London, 1500–1700, Vol. 1: Border Wares* (HMSO, 1992).

²³ J.G. Hurst, D.S. Neal and H.J.E. Van Beuningen, 'Pottery Produced and Traded in North-west Europe 1350–1650', *Rotterdam Papers VI* (1986).

²⁴ Mellor, op. cit. note 9, p. 212.

²⁵ Hassall, op. cit. note 1, p. 245.

The medieval pottery assemblage is dominated by Brill/Boarstall ware with only a small amount of Coarse Border ware, which implies that the marketing of the Buckinghamshire pottery was still prevalent and this continued into the early post-medieval period with the Brill post-medieval products. This is in contrast with sites in the SE. and nearer the river Thame, which have increased supplies of Hants-Surrey Border wares. It has been suggested that the marketing of medieval pottery, for example Brill pottery, in the late 13th century, would have been channelled through small markets such as Thame and then on to subsidiary markets.²⁶

The post-medieval pottery indicates regional imports with the presence of fine wares such as Tudor Green and foreign imports with drinking jugs from the Rhineland and Dutch-type slipwares. Brill types and possible South Oxfordshire red wares form the majority of the late post-medieval sequence.

ANIMAL BONES by SHEILA HAMILTON-DYER

A total of 285 bones were recovered, of which 56% could be identified to taxon. The condition of the material is variable, some bones are very well preserved while others are slightly eroded. A few bones are very poorly preserved and there are also a few burnt bones. The bulk of the remains are of cattle, sheep/goat, pig and fragments of these sizes. The few other bones are of horse, roe deer, fox, dog and domestic fowl.

The identified taxa are of the main domestic ungulates, cattle, sheep and pig. The presence of dog is indicated by gnawing and by the bone of a large individual in the later layers. Birds are represented by a few bones of domestic fowl. Wild animals are uncommon; a single fragment of roe from a Saxon context and three bones of fox from the later layers.

The large size of the cattle bones from the later material is consistent with the improvements in husbandry and breeding and the butchery style evident is also to be expected in material of post-medieval and early modern date.

It is clear that there has been considerable activity on this site over a long period of time. The remains probably represent disposal of slaughter and domestic waste and some non-food remains such as the dog and fox.

CARBONISED PLANT REMAINS by MARK ROBINSON

Flotation of eleven samples was undertaken. A sub-sample of 10 litres was floated onto a 0.5 mm. mesh. The dried flots were then scanned under a binocular microscope for charcoal and other carbonised plant remains.

Most of the samples contain fewer than 20 items. They represent a background scatter of cereal grains, particularly short, free-threshing grains of *Triticum* sp. (bread or rivet wheat). However, sample 4 from the medieval pit 319 (478) contains around 1500 items, mostly free-threshing grains of wheat. Grains of *Hordeum* sp. (hulled barley) and *Avena* sp. (oats) are present but in very much smaller quantities. No chaff was observed but there is a significant presence of seeds of arable weeds, for example *Vicia* or *Lathyrus* sp. (vetch or tare), *Medicago lupulina* (black medick) and *Rumex* sp. (dock). This assemblage probably resulted from the accidental burning of either stored grain or grain that was being parched to harden it prior to milling. The charred remains appear typical for medieval settlements in the region.

DISCUSSION

Prehistoric activity in the locality had been indicated by Mesolithic flintwork and Iron Age pottery recorded on the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). Further evidence of a Prehistoric presence at Waterperry is suggested by the recovery of residual material in later contexts during the excavation.

Roman activity in the vicinity of Waterperry is suggested by the presence of Roman pottery. The excavation has produced deposits that might indicate 2nd- to 4th-century AD activity but these deposits are not securely dated.

²⁶ R.J. Ivens, 'Patterns of Medieval Activity in the Southern Midlands of England: archaeological and historical evidence' (Univ. of Belfast unpubl. PhD thesis, 1981).

Saxon occupation at Waterperry had been suggested by the presence of Saxon elements in St. Mary's church and the substantial settlement belonging to Robert D'Oyley recorded in Domesday Book. Earlier restoration work carried out on the church produced a late Saxon St. Neots ware handle.²⁷ It is thought that the church was a focal point for rural settlement during the Saxon period²⁸ and it would seem likely, given the evidence at St. Mary's, that there is a pre-Conquest settlement at Waterperry. Bond²⁹ has suggested that in Oxfordshire the move towards more nucleated 'village' settlement was a late Saxon, and in some cases a post-Conquest, phenomenon. An expansion of settlement, characterised by the archaeological deposits examined in this excavation, appears to have occurred later, in the 11th to 12th centuries.

The excavation produced limited evidence of early to mid Saxon occupation, between the 5th and 8th centuries. Continuity of settlement to the late Saxon/early medieval period may be implied by the redefinition of boundary ditches in Area 2. The paucity of pottery dating evidence should, however, temper this proposition.

The 13th- to 17th-century deposits at Waterperry House appear to show continued activity in the vicinity. The present manor house at Waterperry was begun by Sir John Curson in around 1713³⁰ and it seems that the excavated areas are located within an area of formal gardens, with walls, paths and ornamental features.

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²⁷ Hassall, *op. cit.* note 1.

²⁸ J. Chapelot and R. Fossier, *The Village and House in the Middle Ages* (1985).

²⁹ G. Briggs, J. Cook and T. Rowley (eds.), *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region* (1986), 140.

³⁰ *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 296.