

# Early Bronze Age, Roman and Medieval Boundaries and Trackways at Howbery Park, Crowmarsh Gifford, Oxfordshire

By STEVE FORD, JENNIFER LOWE and JOANNA PINE  
with contributions by LUCY CRAMP, CLAIRE INGREM, MARK ROBINSON and  
JANE TIMBY

## SUMMARY

*An excavation within the grounds of Howbery Park, Crowmarsh Gifford, uncovered a droveway which may date to the Early Bronze Age. Elements of two phases of a Roman field system and medieval ditches were also recorded. The majority of features can be only tentatively dated to 2nd or 3rd centuries AD, with the two larger ditches probably towards the later end of this range. The apparent coincidence of the reuse of the same location in all three periods reflects the topography of the site at a boundary between grazing on the lower land prone to flooding and arable farming on higher, drier areas.*

Howbery Park hydrological research station is on the northern fringe of Crowmarsh, and is bounded on the east by Benson Lane and on the west by the River Thames (Fig. 1). Directly across the river is Wallingford Castle. The excavated area lies in the south-eastern corner of the site (Fig. 2), which is flat at 45 m. above Ordnance Datum; the chalk scarp of the Chilterns begins to rise around 600 m. to the east. The underlying geology is mapped as First (floodplain) terrace deposits<sup>1</sup> and this was present on the eastern half of the site, but a light yellow brown clay was encountered towards the west.

DISCUSSION by STEVE FORD and JOANNA PINE

## Prehistoric

The presence of early Bronze Age pottery, including Beaker sherds, and struck flints indicates prehistoric activity on the site. If the droveway which contained the majority of these finds is really of this date, this would be of particular interest. In comparison to the early Neolithic, it is very uncommon for occupation sites of late Neolithic or early Bronze Age date to amount to more than scatters of artefacts, and much of the evidence for these periods is derived from monumental and burial sites.

The physical organization of the landscape using enclosures, field systems and trackways at both large and small scales is increasingly recognized for the later Bronze Age in the Thames Valley, and now also in many areas beyond.<sup>2</sup> However, such evidence for the Middle Bronze Age and earlier periods is rare.<sup>3</sup> Field systems have been recorded for Neolithic

<sup>1</sup> British Geological Survey, 1:50,000, Sheet 254, *Solid and Drift Edition* (1980).

<sup>2</sup> D.T. Yates, 'Bronze Age field systems in the Thames Valley', *Oxf. Jnl. Archaeol.* 18 (1999), 157-70; F. Pryor, 'Sheep, stockyards and field systems; Bronze Age livestock populations in the Fenlands of Eastern England', *Antiquity*, lxx (1996), 313-24.

<sup>3</sup> G. Hull, 'A middle Bronze Age field ditch? Excavations at Bankside Close, Isleworth', *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* xlix (1999), 1-14.

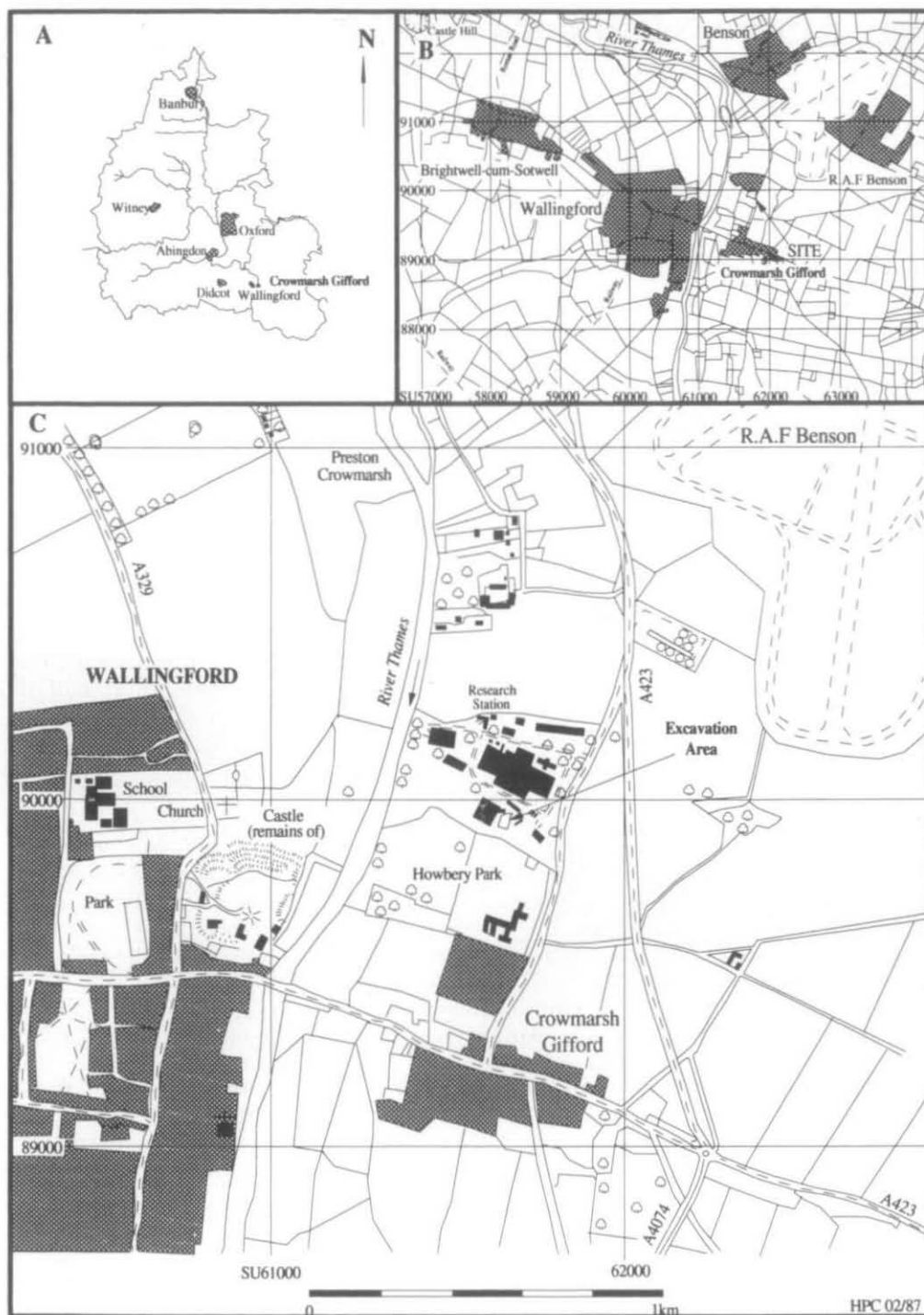


Fig. 1. Location of site in relation to (A) the county, (B) the local area, (C) Crowmarsh Gifford.

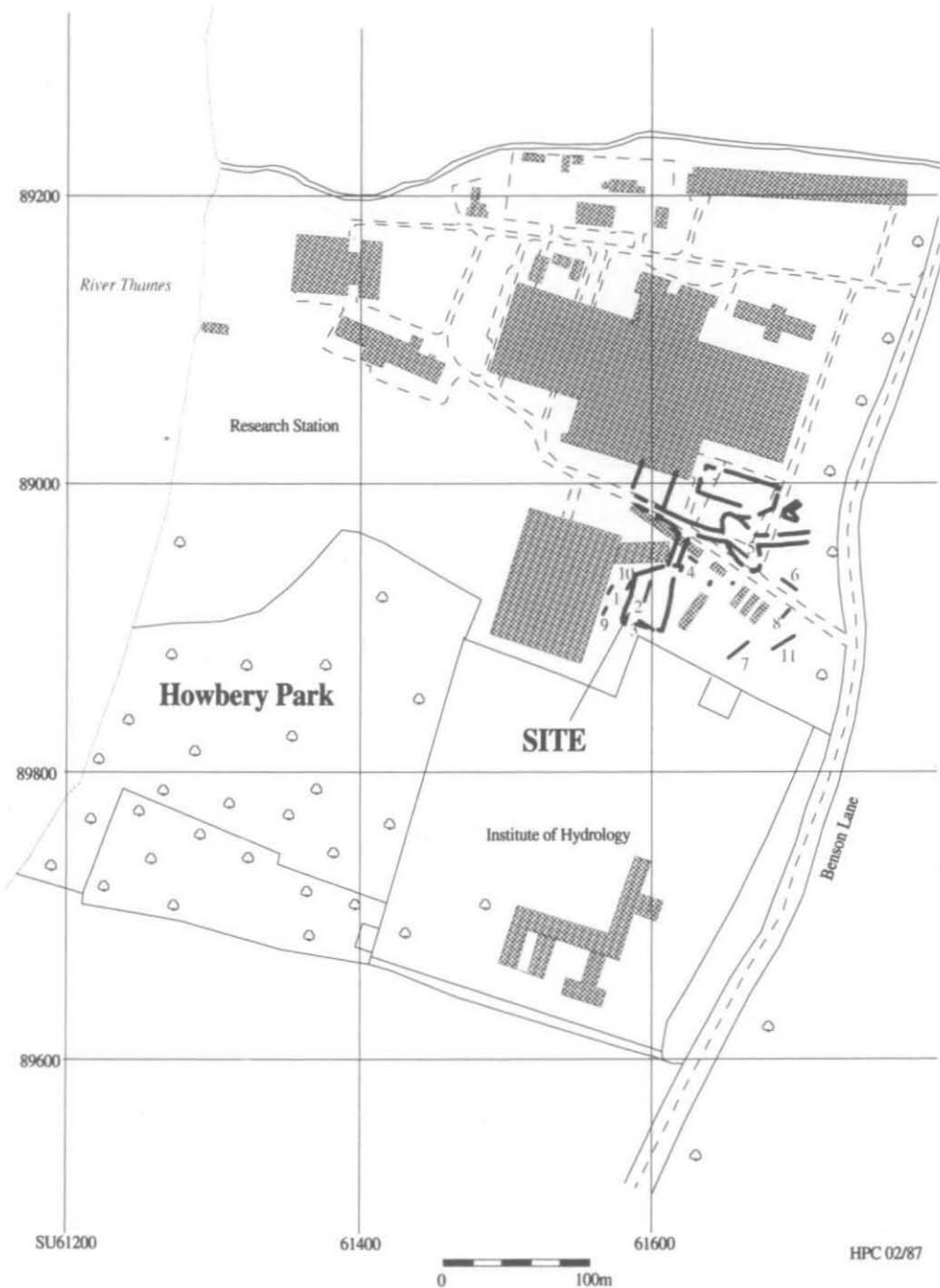


Fig. 2. Location of areas investigated within the site.

Ireland,<sup>4</sup> early Bronze Age Dorset<sup>5</sup> and middle Bronze Age Kent.<sup>6</sup> Closer to the site, early/middle Bronze Age occupation and traces of a field system were recorded at Didcot.<sup>7</sup>

It seems reasonable to assume that the narrow droveway was used to control stock and this may indicate that areas of open pasture lay to the west on the lower-lying ground close to the Thames. Whether the droveway was to keep stock away from arable fields on either side, or for some other function, is unclear. There does not appear to be any means of preventing stock from doubling back on the sides of the droveway, although later ditch digging may have obliterated any such traces, and boundaries defined only by hedges would be archaeologically invisible in any event. The droveway is so narrow that it may have served as a 'drafting race' to isolate animals for inspection, rather than merely channel their movement,<sup>8</sup> although one would expect this to lead into a stock pen. The most pertinent, but unanswerable, questions at present are: where did the droveway lead to/from and what was the significance of that location?

### *Roman*

In contrast to earlier prehistory, much of the landscape by late Iron Age and Roman times is defined by field systems, trackways and road networks. Large swathes of the gravel terraces of the Upper Thames, adjacent areas such as the Berkshire Downs and other regions such as East Anglia all have extensive evidence for later Iron Age and Roman land division often organized over large areas and often repeatedly redefined.<sup>9</sup> At the local, detailed scale, the evidence from Howbery Park reflects a pattern of land division and its refurbishment during Roman times. One aspect of note is that the Roman boundaries appear to reflect the same needs as the prehistoric droveway and that this is also respected in the Medieval period. It seems that the site occupied a junction between two different areas of land use determined by topography. Lower, wetter areas to the west are probably more suited for cattle pasture while higher, drier land to the east would be used for both arable and sheep grazing.

Refurbishment and development of field system components within the Roman period are also frequently encountered, especially close to occupied areas where there is greater intensity of use. In the northern area here, although two phases of ditches are apparent, they seem to involve no more than redefinition of the same layout. The limited change in layout in the southern portion of the site, from the field defined by ditches 109 and 112 to that defined by gullies 104 and 105 cannot be dated within the Roman period, and although this does suggest this area may be closer to occupation, the paucity of finds suggests this need

<sup>4</sup> S. Caulfield, 'Neolithic settlement of North Connaught', in T. Reeves-Smith and F. Hammond (eds.), *Landscape Archaeology in Ireland* (BAR 116, 1983), 195–216.

<sup>5</sup> P.W. Cox and C.M. Hearne, *Redeemed from the heath: The Archaeology of the Wyth Farm Oilfield (1987–90)*, (Dorset Natural History Archaeol. Soc. Monograph 9, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> S. Coles, J. Pine and S. Preston, 2003, 'Bronze Age and Saxon landscapes on the Isle of Sheppey: Excavations at Shrubsoles Hill, Brambledown, 1999–2001', in S. Coles, S. Hammond, J. Pine, S. Preston, and A. Taylor, *Bronze Age, Roman and Saxon sites on Shrubsoles Hill, Sheppey and at Wises Lane, Borden, Kent* (TVAS Monogr. 4), 2–55.

<sup>7</sup> I. Ruben and S. Ford, 'Archaeological excavations at Wallingford Road, Didcot, South Oxfordshire, 1991', *Oxoniensia*, lvii (1992), 1–28.

<sup>8</sup> cf. Pryor, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> M. Bowden, S. Ford and G. Mees, 'The date of the ancient fields on the Berkshire Downs', *Berkshire Archaeol. Jnl.* lxxiv (1991–3), 109–133; R. Hingley 'Towards social analysis in archaeology: Celtic society in the Iron Age of the Upper Thames Valley', in B. Cunliffe and D. Miles (eds.) *Aspects of the Iron Age in Southern Britain* (OUCA Monograph 2, 1984), 72–88; T. Williamson, 'Early Co-axial field systems on the East Anglian boulder clays', *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.* liii (1987), 419–32.

not be particularly close. Although defining different areas, both systems seem to have been laid out on the same line (later marked as ditch 106), apparently a significant landscape division across all three periods, broadly parallel to the Thames.

### Medieval

Medieval land use does not seem to have differed markedly from the Roman pattern, although there is no suggestion of direct continuity. Just two ditches from this period probably defined large fields to the east, leaving the area to the west apparently open, as in the earlier periods.

### BACKGROUND

Archaeological investigation at Howbery Park, Crowmarsh Gifford (SU 617 899) was undertaken in stages by Thames Valley Archaeological Services during November 2002, February 2003, and July–August 2003, in response to a condition on planning permission granted by South Oxfordshire District Council for new office buildings. The work was carried out to written schemes of investigation based on design briefs produced by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Advisory Service (OCAAS).

### Archaeological Background

Howbery Park lies in a region of the Thames Valley well known for its rich archaeological deposits.<sup>10</sup> Neolithic and Late Bronze Age occupation is recorded at Benson to the north,<sup>11</sup> and to the south, Neolithic evidence at Mongewell<sup>12</sup> and a rich late Bronze Age riverside site at Wallingford.<sup>13</sup> Several monumental sites are nearby, including those at Dorchester on Thames, North Stoke, and RAF Benson just to the north-east. Findspots recorded in the county Sites and Monuments Record just to the north of Howbery Park include Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery and an early Bronze Age bronze axe.

Stray finds on the western margins of Wallingford suggest the presence of a large Roman settlement,<sup>14</sup> although recent investigations within the town itself have so far generally proved inconclusive. Roman deposits have been recorded at Benson<sup>15</sup> and a Roman cemetery lies to the south-east.<sup>16</sup>

Early Saxon occupation deposits were recorded at Benson, which is known from documentary sources as a royal settlement<sup>17</sup> and the town of Wallingford was founded as a *burh* during the reign of Alfred. The town flourished in Medieval times and was besieged during the civil war between Stephen and Matilda, when a siege castle was built on the bank of the Thames at Crowmarsh opposite Wallingford Castle.<sup>18</sup> Medieval occupation has also

<sup>10</sup> G. Briggs, J. Cook and T. Rowley (eds.), *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region* (1986).

<sup>11</sup> J. Pine and S. Ford, 'Excavation of Neolithic, late Bronze Age, early Iron Age and early Saxon features at St Helen's Avenue, Benson, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, lxxviii (2003), 132–78.

<sup>12</sup> OAU, 'Wallingford Rowing Club, Mongewell, Oxfordshire; archaeological evaluation report - phase 2' (Oxford Archaeol. Unit, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> R. Thomas, M. Robinson, J. Barrett and R. Wilson, 'A Late Bronze Age riverside settlement at Wallingford, Oxon', *Archaeol. Jnl.* cxxxix (1986), 174–200.

<sup>14</sup> M. Airs, K. Rodwell and H. Turner, 'Wallingford', in K. Rodwell (ed.), *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire*, (Oxford Archaeol. Unit, 1975), 155–62.

<sup>15</sup> J. Pine and S. Ford, op. cit. note 11; J. Pine, 'Early Roman occupation at Jubilee Villa, 21 The Moorlands, Benson, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, lxx (2005), 115–28.

<sup>16</sup> A.S. Esmonde-Cleary, 'Roman Britain in 1994: England', *Britannia*, xxvii (1995), 342–79.

<sup>17</sup> J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (1994); Pine and Ford, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Airs et al. op. cit. note 14; Blair, op. cit.

been recorded at Crowmarsh to the south<sup>19</sup> and a moated site is known at Crowmarsh Battle Farm to the north. Crowmarsh Gifford is listed in Domesday Book as *Crowmares* meaning 'marsh frequented by crows' and belonged to Walter Giffard.<sup>20</sup> At this time (1086) it was a modest settlement of 12 villeins and 11 bordars which possessed two mills, 6 acres of meadow and a substantial woodland. By 1316 the settlement is recorded as *Croumershe Giffard*.

### *The evaluation*

Evaluation trenching was carried out in November 2002. Four trenches (2, 3, 4 and 5) out of eleven contained archaeological features. Excavation followed in areas where the trenches with archaeology corresponded with the footprints of the new buildings, with a watching brief over other areas (Fig. 2). All the evaluation features were within areas subsequently investigated, or are shown on Fig. 3, and are discussed below.

## THE EXCAVATION

Two roughly rectangular areas of about 1100 sq. m. each, as shown on Fig. 3, were stripped of topsoil and overburden by a machine fitted with a toothless bucket to expose the uppermost levels of archaeological interest. All archaeological deposits in the southern area (Area A) were buried by a subsoil horizon of light silty clay alluvium (51). This had been disturbed and penetrated by numerous tree holes. This deposit was not present to the north (Area B). All archaeological and many non-archaeological deposits (the latter mainly tree-holes) were investigated by hand. A minimum 20% sample of all linear features was excavated in addition to termini and intersections. A watching brief was also carried out on the access road, located to the south of the new building, and on areas to the east and west of Area B. Modern and natural features have been removed from the plans.

## PHASE SUMMARY

Three broad phases of activity were identified, namely early Bronze Age, Roman and Medieval. None of the features of any period is particularly well dated, although for Area A, the relative sequence can be securely established as all (bar ditch 112) had at least one stratigraphic relationship with other features. The features to the north showed no stratigraphic sequence.

### *Early Bronze Age*

A probable droveway was defined by two narrow gullies (108 and 113) aligned approximately east-west with a hollowed area (110) between them. These features are poorly dated even though respectively 40% and 65% of their lengths were hand excavated and 385 litres of their fills were sieved for environmental remains and finds. They are clearly stratigraphically earlier than the Roman features. Of the six sherds of pottery from gully 108, only two could with any certainty be dated, to the early Bronze Age. Three flint flakes and a spall were also recovered from gully 108.

Gully 108 entered the site from the eastern edge of the excavation and terminated after 18 m. Five slots through it showed the gully was between 0.70 m. and 1.10 m. wide and uniformly 0.45 m. deep. Gully 113 consisted of a shorter stretch, 10 m. long, with two terminals. It was located 2 m. to the south of 108, the gap narrowing to 1.5 m. near the western terminal. Four slots revealed that it was 0.44–0.55 m. wide and between 0.14 m. and 0.25 m. deep. The hollowed area (110) between the two gullies was no more than 0.16 m. deep and was probably formed by erosion by traffic use; in places this had eroded away the sides of the gullies themselves. The presence of this clear, if slight, hollow makes it less likely that these features could be a double-ditched hedge/bank.

<sup>19</sup> S. Ford, 'Walter Wilder Foundry, Crowmarsh, near Wallingford, Oxfordshire, An archaeological evaluation' (TVAS. rep. 93/7, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> A.D. Mills, *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (1998); A. Williams and G.H. Martin, *Domesday Book, A Complete Translation* (2002).

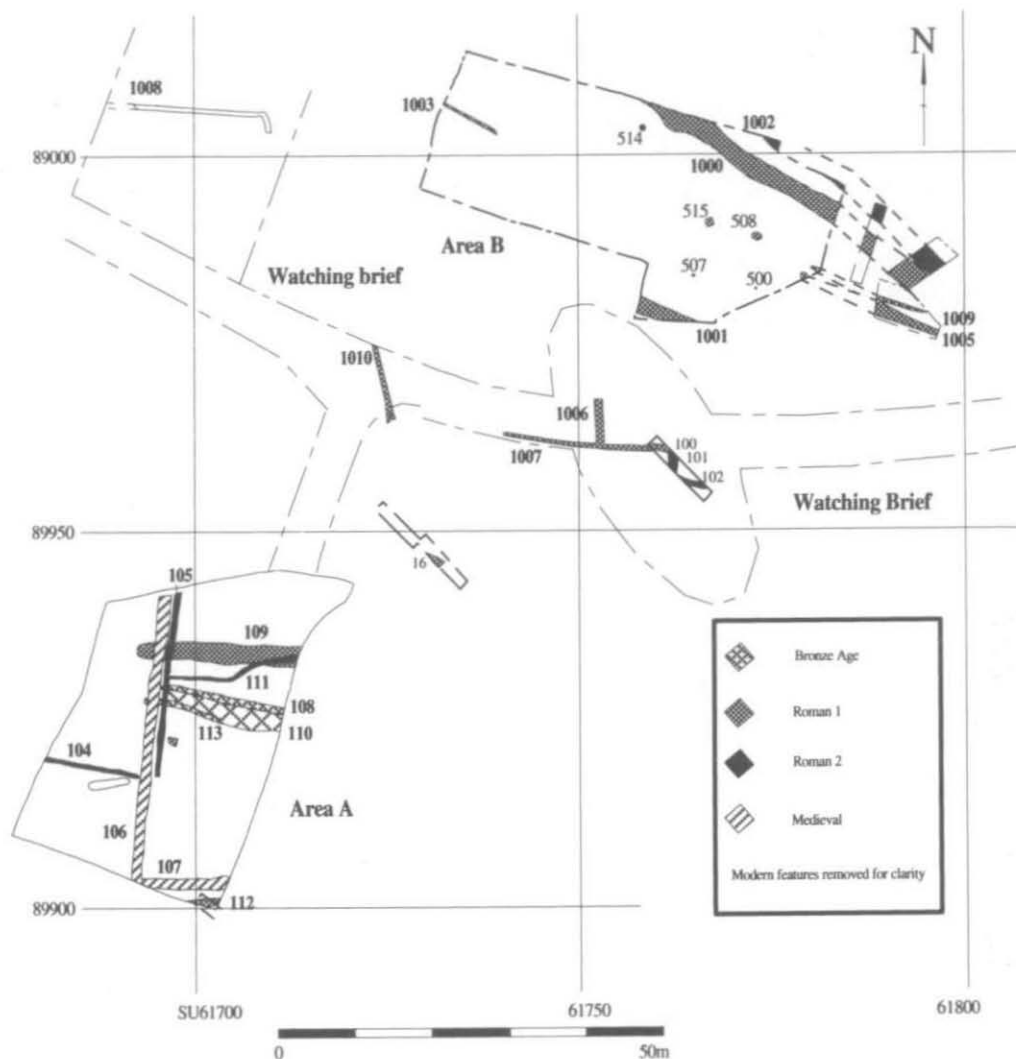


Fig. 3. Phased plan. (Modern and natural features removed for clarity).

Ten other prehistoric sherds and a handful of struck flints were recovered, residual in later features. Two probable early Bronze Age sherds came from a large tree throw which lay below subsoil layer 51 and which had disturbed or been disturbed by gully 113. A sherd from the surface of Roman gully 105 was also probably from a Beaker. A single sherd of Late Iron Age pottery was retrieved from Roman ditch 1000 along with a single struck flint. Roman ditch 1001 also yielded three struck flints, Roman gully 1003 produced a single intact flake as did Roman ditch 1006, while medieval pit 508 produced one broken and one intact flake. Several of the flint flakes are suggestive of Mesolithic activity, however the majority were only broadly datable to the Mesolithic–Bronze Age periods.

There is clearly some room for doubt over the dating of the driveway, as all of the small amount of pottery could be residual, perhaps dragged out of Bronze Age tree holes, especially with demonstrable Roman activity present. However, no later finds were recovered from these features despite the large sample excavated, and they were stratigraphically the earliest activity on the site. The majority of the



other clearly residual material in the later ditches came from segments very near gullies 108 and 113 and could be derived from disturbance of these. There is therefore circumstantial evidence that the droveway can really be assigned a prehistoric date.

### *Roman*

Two Roman phases of development are evident, all in the form of ditches or gullies. The earlier of the phases can probably be dated to the later 2nd or 3rd century, although it is perhaps safer to say only that it predates the later phase, which must be later 3rd or 4th century.

The earliest Roman feature was ditch 109. It was aligned east-west with a terminal at the west end. It was up to 3.2 m. wide but no more than 0.2 m. deep. It was sampled in five slots and its single fill produced five sherds of Roman pottery and one of Early Bronze Age date.

Ditch 112 was only partially exposed, but was roughly parallel to 109. It was 1.0 m. wide and only 0.08 m. deep with a very irregular base; perhaps it was a hedgeline rather than a ditch. It was undated, although when encountered in the evaluation, three fragments of tile were recovered from its surface, but could have formed the southern boundary of a field defined by 109 to the north, giving a width of some 31 m.

Two large ditches (1000 and 1002) were encountered at the north-east corner of the site, orientated NW-SE. Six slots were excavated along ditch 1000. The majority of the slots revealed a wide U-shaped profile for this feature. In general the ditch was recorded as roughly 2 m. wide and approximately 0.75 m. deep, except for a machined slot observed in section only during the watching brief phase (708) where it was 3.5 m. wide and 1 m. deep. Roman pottery was recovered from all the excavated slots, 23 sherds in total. A single sherd of medieval pottery recorded as from slot 708, should be treated with some caution as it came from the segment not hand-excavated.

Ditch 1001 was partially exposed at the south-east corner of Area B, orientated roughly east-west. Two slots revealed it to be 2 m. wide and 0.5 m. deep. Five sherds of 2nd- or 3rd-century pottery were recovered from slot 505. This ditch is on a similar alignment to both 1000 and 1002, which lie 20 m. to the north, and it is possible that these represent the flanking ditches of a broad droveway. Two further ditches, 1005 and 1009, were recorded during the watching brief, to the east of the main excavation area, with terminals 501 and 512 within the excavation area. No dating evidence was recovered from either. These, again, align reasonably closely on ditch 1001, and could possibly be related to it.

Gully 1003, in the north-west of the site, was between 0.45 m. and 0.64 m. wide and just 0.19 m. deep. The only finds recovered from this feature were two sherds of pottery, including a single sherd of samian, and an intact flint flake. The terminus of gully 1003 had been truncated by a modern service trench.

The later Roman phase is established by stratigraphic relationships. Ditch 1002, parallel to ditch 1000, was only partially exposed during the excavation, but its full width was observed during the watching brief, where it was revealed to cut ditch 1000, and was in turn cut by a modern feature. Ditch 1002 was of a similar size and profile to ditch 1000; approximately 1.5 m. wide, 0.75 m. deep and with a wide u-shaped profile. The four slots produced a small assemblage of pottery, six sherds of Roman pottery, and a single sherd of medieval pottery from a slot which had been disturbed by a modern electricity cable: the pottery from this slot is also to be treated with some caution. It is feasible that ditch 1002 is much later than 1000 as it clearly cut the former, and it is also possible that both features are medieval boundary ditches. The pottery does suggest that these features are, however, broadly contemporary with the other Roman features on site, albeit a single sherd of Oxfordshire *mortarium* suggests a date at the later end of this range.

Two narrow gullies (104 and 105) were orientated at right angles to one another with a gap of 2 m. at the corner, although a modern pit truncated the terminal of 105. The arrangement of these two gullies suggests they were part of a rectilinear enclosure system on the lower ground, towards the river. Gully 105, aligned north-south overlay ditch 109 and provides a relative development sequence within the Roman phase as it cut every other feature it encountered. Eight excavated slots showed it was between 0.60 m. and 1.60 m. wide and between 0.21 m. and 0.55 m. deep. Twelve sherds of Roman pottery and five sherds of early prehistoric pottery were recovered. Gully 104 was sampled by five slots and it varied from 0.53 m. to 0.70 m. wide and from 0.05 m. to 0.30 m. deep. It contained only a single sherd of probable Roman pottery.



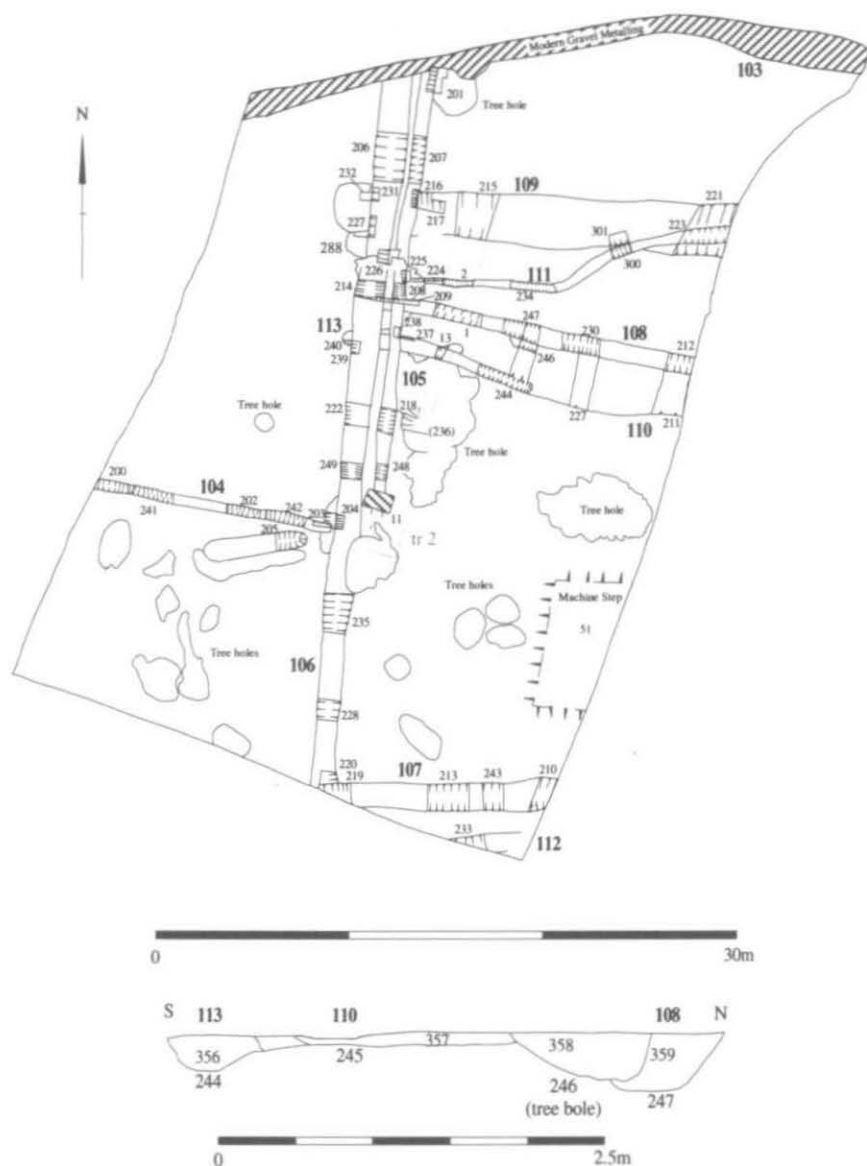


Fig. 4. Detailed plan of Area A; with section across gullies 108 and 113 and hollow 110.

A sinuous gully (111) was also excavated, in five slots, but no datable finds were recovered. It did, however, clearly cut Roman feature 109 and was sealed by soil horizon 51. Thus this gully is of Roman or later date. As it terminated precisely on the line of 105, these two are likely to have been contemporary.

Several further Roman features were encountered during the watching brief phase. Ditch 1006 was aligned due north-south, and ditch 1007 east-west. Pottery from both gullies indicates that they are 2nd or 3rd century: they may have been contemporary which may explain why no stratigraphic relationship could be determined. Ditch 1007 was broadly parallel to 109 and 112 further south, at

roughly the same spacing, so it is likely these formed part of a single system. Only a single sherd of Roman pottery was recovered from ditch 1006, which was 1.15 m. wide and 0.40 m. deep. A wider area was stripped to the north and south of ditch 1006 however the ditch did not continue. Gully 1007 produced five sherds of pottery and its westward terminus produced only a single undiagnostic brick fragment.

### *Medieval*

The final phase of activity on the site prior to the development of the research facility belongs to Medieval times. Ditch 106 was aligned north-south. It truncated all the features it crossed. Twelve slots revealed that it was between 0.83 m. and 1.60 m. wide and between 0.26 m. and 0.59 m. deep. It contained just four sherds of medieval pottery (from three separate slots), along with residual Roman and early prehistoric pottery.

This ditch was cut by ditch 107 where the two formed a right-angled junction. Four slots showed 107 varied between 1.20 m. and 1.90 m. in width and between 0.38 m. and 0.48 m. in depth. The only datable find was one sherd of Roman pottery. However, its stratigraphic relationship with 106 indicates that it is medieval or later, and it must surely be contemporary with 106. Its burial by the blanket covering of alluvium (51) like the other features on the southern portion of the site, suggests that the latter is mostly likely of later medieval date and developed over an abandoned site.

In the north of the site, Pit 508 was 1.40 m. in length, 0.96 m. wide and 0.24 m. deep and produced 53 sherds of pottery, 45 of which date from the 12th or 13th century. This feature also produced two residual struck flints, animal bone, seven metal objects and a fragment of slag. A second pit (515) of similar dimensions, 1.20 m. in diameter and 0.12 m. deep, may be of a similar date but revealed no dating evidence.

### *Undated*

Ditch 1010 seems likely to be Roman, but only three fragments of undiagnostic tile were recovered from its fill. To the west of Area B, gully 1008 was orientated roughly east-west. At its east end the gully was truncated by a large pit 803. Neither of these features produced dating evidence however it is conceivable that they are also Roman in date.

## **FINDS**

### **POTTERY** by JANE TIMBY

The various archaeological investigations have resulted in the recovery of 169 sherds of pottery (1436 g.) dating to the earlier prehistoric, Roman and medieval periods. The sherds were small and fragmentary with eroded edges and in some cases a surface patination making clear identification and dating difficult. This was compounded by the fact that several sherds appear to be redeposited and that featured sherds were sparse.

The assemblage was sorted as far as possible into fabrics defined principally by the occurrence and frequency of inclusion types. A wide spectrum of wares were present which are noted in the following summary.

*Earlier Prehistoric.* In total some seventeen sherds of early prehistoric date were recovered. Gully 108 (slot 1 in evaluation Trench 2) produced a moderately well-preserved rim and small bodysherd from a decorated beaker. The decoration is in the form of short vertical lines of cord-impressions below the rim. The dark brown, finely micaceous fabric has some grog and sparse fine flint. A single bodysherd from Roman gully 105 (slot 208, where it cut 108) also in a dark brown, finely micaceous ware with sparse fine flint (less than 2 mm.) and grog and with a hard, laminar fracture, is decorated with spaced horizontal lines of finger-nail impressions. This sherd is probably also from a domestic coarseware Beaker. Tree bole 236 produced three prehistoric sherds, one larger sherd and two very small crumbs one of which shows possible diagonal incised line decoration. The larger bodysherd shows an angle which may be the edge of a collar from an early Bronze Age collared urn. The paste is dark brown with a lumpy texture and contains dark sub-angular fragments of grog. The fabric would not be out of place with this tradition.

Other sherds assigned to this period include a sandy sherd with sparse flint and large fragments of ironstone from gully 108 and a small sherd from 106 with rare large chalk inclusions in a sandy matrix. A thin walled fine flint tempered sherd redeposited in ditch 1000 (slot 503) may be contemporary or later prehistoric.

*Roman.* Approximately 97 sherds of Roman currency were recovered. In particular these were associated with gully groups 104 and 105, ditch groups 107, 109 and 1000. The sherds were in poor condition and showed few or no distinctive features. All the sherds appear to be of relatively local origin with examples of grey sandy wares, and grog and sand-tempered storage jar-type sherds. At best guess most of the material can be dated to the 2nd or 3rd century and is probably derived from manuring material, or similar, which has accumulated in field ditches. Although the assemblage mainly comprises local wares, four small sherds of Central Gaulish samian (Dragendorff forms 31 and 37) and four sherds of Dorset black burnished ware are present. Slightly later occupation in the second half of the 3rd century, or later, is indicated by a single worn sherd of Oxfordshire colour-coated mortarium from ditch 1000 (slot 504). The low density of finds suggests that the focus of settlement is some way from the boundary ditches producing the finds.

*Medieval.* Fifty-four sherds of medieval date were recovered with the largest group from pit 508 with some 45 sherds. A smaller assemblage of five sherds came from ditch 106 alongside odd sherds of Roman date. Several of the sherds from 508 appear to come from one vessel. The sherds all came from undecorated, unglazed jars with sagged bases. At least four fabrics are present, all local, three typical of the Kennet Valley (flint tempered ware and a flint and calcareous-tempered ware) and a sandy ware probably from the Abingdon area. The only rimsherd came from an everted rim jar with intermittent thumbing on the upper surface. These sherds would be typical of the 12th to 13th centuries.

The most distinctive piece from ditch 106 is a sherd from a Brill-Boarstall type glazed jug with impressed ring decoration. One sandy ware unglazed sherd showed traces of red slip stripes suggesting another jug or pitcher. The Brill-Boarstall sherd might indicate a date from the 13th century for the ditch.

## LITHICS by STEVE FORD

The twenty-one struck flints include three narrow flakes, six flakes, two broken flakes, a blade, three possible broken blades, one of which had been burnt, and six spalls (pieces less than 20 mm. across). Three narrow flakes, one with several blade scars on the dorsal surface, are certainly or probably of Mesolithic date, whereas the remaining items are less closely datable within the broad Mesolithic to Bronze Age period, although it is most likely that they belong to the later part of this long time span. In addition to eight fragments of unworked burnt flint (21 g.) from features 105, 106 and 107, a single irregular fragment of quartz (60 g.) was found from tree bole 10 in the evaluation. The piece was not obviously worked or burnt. Although this material is ultimately derived from hard rock areas of upland Britain, it is probable that this piece occurred locally either as a glacial erratic or from the Thames gravels, where it is a rare inclusion.<sup>21</sup> The potential ritual significance of white quartz pebbles in prehistory is worth more attention<sup>22</sup> although this piece, from a tree hole, hardly advances the subject.

## METALWORK

Ten metal objects were recovered during the excavation. Nine of the objects were iron with one tiny sliver of copper alloy retrieved from pit 508. Two nails were recovered from the surface of Roman ditch 1000 and a nail stem was recovered from ditch 1001. The remainder of the objects were retrieved from medieval pit 508: a fragment of knife blade, a small hinge, a small bracket, two nails and two strips of iron and one small fragment of slag.

<sup>21</sup> H. Dewey and C.E.N. Bromehead, *The geology of the country around Windsor and Chertsey* (Mem. Geol. Surv. GB, 26, 1915).

<sup>22</sup> F.M.C. Baker, 'White quartz pebbles in ritual contexts in Scotland' unpublished BA dissertation, Univ. Durham (1998). The authors are grateful to Steve Preston for this reference and for drawing to their attention a number of instances in Ireland and England.

## ANIMAL BONE by CLAIRE INGREM

A small assemblage of 181 fragments of animal bone was recovered from the excavation of Area B, of which 68% are identifiable (including those assigned to animal size categories). Just 15 fragments came from the earlier work on the site; a probable cat humerus from medieval ditch 106 is the only item of note among these (details in archive). The majority of fragments derive from Roman features (Table 1) especially if the unphased features are considered Roman. Medieval pit 508 also contained bones. The animal bones were identified in the Laboratory for Zooarchaeological Research at the University of Southampton using the CAAA standard methodology.<sup>23</sup>

TABLE 1: ANIMAL BONE: SPECIES REPRESENTATION BY PHASE (NISP)

	Roman	Medieval	Unphased	Total
Horse	7	14	1	22
Cattle	6		5	11
Sheep/goat	5	2	2	9
Pig		2		2
Dog	1			1
Large mammal	63	4	8	75
Medium mammal	3			3
Unidentifiable	34	8	16	58
Total	119	30	32	181
Total identifiable	85	22	16	123
% identifiable	71	73	50	68

The samples from both the Roman and medieval phases are of insufficient size to provide reliable information on which to base interpretations concerning animal husbandry practices and human cultural activities. Consequently, it is only possible to ascertain the species/taxa of animals present at the site and in some cases, the ages at which they died. Metrical data were obtained on just five bones and all fall within the ranges seen at contemporary sites (details in archive).

Of interest are the thirty fragments of bone from medieval pit 508, which include articulating 1st, 2nd and 3rd phalanges with fused proximal epiphyses, as well as a fused distal metacarpal that conceivably belong to one horse. The presence of matching left and right carpals suggest that lower forelimbs from both sides of the body may have originally been deposited.

Despite the small size of the samples, there is clear evidence that a variety of domestic animals was present at Howbery Park during both the Roman and Medieval periods. In addition to cattle and sheep/goat, animals generally kept to provide meat, milk, wool and manure, horse and dog were present in the Roman period. There is no evidence for pigs in this phase but their absence may well be a reflection of the small sample size combined with the effects of taphonomic processes.<sup>24</sup> Left and right horse pelves recovered from a single Roman ditch fill may be all that remain of an animal that died of natural causes or had reached the end of its useful life. Horses would have been primarily valued for traction and transport and there is evidence from Europe to suggest that the consumption of horse

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.arch.soton.ac.uk/Research/CAAAtest/Facilities/Methodology.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> R.L. Lyman, *Vertebrate Taphonomy* (1994).

flesh was generally considered taboo during the Roman period.<sup>25</sup> Certainly the horse remains from Howbery Park demonstrated no butchery evidence to indicate the processing or consumption of their flesh.

The assemblage is characterized by a predominance of cranial and lower limb bones – parts of the body generally associated with primary butchery waste, belonging to large sized mammals.<sup>26</sup> At sites that have produced larger assemblages of animal bone, this pattern has been interpreted as the result of size related differences in butchery and disposal practices.<sup>27</sup> Density mediated preservation bias may also have played a role, pits affording better protection than ditches for smaller, less dense bones. The presence of bones from the head and feet suggests that horses, cattle and caprines probably arrived at the site on the hoof and may have been raised in the locality.

In contrast with the Roman assemblage, pig is present in the smaller medieval assemblage whilst dog is absent although again, taxa representation is likely to reflect sample size. A canine tooth belonging to an immature animal provides an indication that pigs were bred at or near the site.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS by LUCY CRAMP

The majority of samples were taken from Roman ditch or gully fills which largely date to the 2nd or 3rd century AD, with just one sample derived from a medieval pit. Forty-nine samples were floated over a 0.25 mm. mesh and examined under a low-power binocular microscope for preserved plant material. All samples contained few or no preserved plant remains or charcoal and therefore only the six samples with any macrobotanical evidence are discussed (details in archive). The majority of samples contained abundant molluscan evidence, although the deposits were not specifically sampled for this.

Only a low number of isolated free-threshing bread or rivet wheat grains (*Triticum* sp. *aestivum* or *turgidum*) were present. These cereals tend to be more common by the late Saxon and Medieval periods; however, their background presence in deposits may simply represent reworking of material from elsewhere. No chaff or weed seeds were present. Charcoal was infrequent and fragmentary; however, oak (*Quercus* sp.) was very abundant in medieval pit 508 and would have been specifically selected as fuel.

#### MOLLUSCS by MARK ROBINSON

The mollusc assemblages in samples from all periods were dominated by *Trichia hispida* gp. and *Vallonia excentrica*. *Vallonia costata*, *V. pulchella*, *Cochlicopa* sp., *Pupilla muscorum* and *Vertigo pygmaea* were also present. This suggests that open, probably grassy, habitats prevailed on the site during all the periods represented. However, Bronze Age gully 108 and Roman ditch 1001 also contained shells of shade-loving molluscs including *Discus rotundatus*, *Aegopinella nitidula* and *Carychium* sp. Perhaps there was some scrub in the vicinity of these ditches but such results could have been due to coarse herbaceous vegetation growing in the gully. Four other samples from gully 108 and two samples from Roman ditches 109 and 111 contained a few shells of stagnant water aquatic molluscs, particularly *Lymnaea truncatula*, in addition to the terrestrial molluscs. It is likely that standing water was seasonally present in these features.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work was commissioned by Mr Michael McLoughlin of Scott, Brownrigg and Turner and funded throughout by the HR Wallingford Group. The excavation team consisted of Simon Cass, Clare Challis, Sarah Coles, Danielle Colls, Stephen Hammond, Pamela Jenkins,

<sup>25</sup> R.C.G.M. Lauwerier, 'Eating horsemeat: the evidence from the Roman Netherlands', *Archaeofauna*, 8 (1999), 101–13.

<sup>26</sup> M. Maltby 'The Animal Bones', in P.J. Fasham, *The Prehistoric Settlement at Winnall Down, Winchester*, (1985), 97–138.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Richard Oram and Andy Taylor with subsequent watching briefs carried out by Steve Ford and Steve Hammond. Mr Paul Smith of OCAAS monitored the work on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council. Steve Preston prepared the text for publication. The archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course. The site code is HPC02/87 and the museum accession code is OXCMS:2003.19