

An archaeological evaluation at
Cold Harbour, Merc Lane,
Finmere, near Bicester,
Oxfordshire

for
Utility Systems Design and Construction

An archaeological evaluation at Cold Harbour, Mere Lane, Finmere,
near Bicester, Oxfordshire.

Project 96/55

by Jo Pine and Andy Smith

Introduction

This report documents an archaeological evaluation carried out on a 0.115 hectare area fronting onto Mere Lane, Finmere, Oxfordshire. The work was commissioned by Mr. M. Direkze of Utility Systems Design and Construction to satisfy a condition on the granting of planning permission to redevelop the site for housing. The investigation was carried out to provide information on the archaeological potential of the site prior to the commencing of building work in accordance with guidelines set out in *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16, 1990).

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by P. Smith, County Archaeological Officer for Oxfordshire County Council.

The field work was carried out by Jo Pine and Andy Smith on the 12th September 1996. The site code is CHF96.

Archaeological Background

The site lies on the course of the Alchester-Towcester Roman road (now followed by Mere Lane) which also forms the county boundary between Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Roman finds consisting of coins, pottery and other remains were discovered close to the site at SP 6401 3270 in 1927. Unfortunately no detailed information is available for the context in which these finds were made but there is a possibility of a Roman roadside settlement in the vicinity.

Topography and Geology

The site lies on the east side of the village of Finmere (Figs. 1 and 2). The area contains a detached house (Cold Harbour) with overgrown gardens containing mature shrubs and trees. The land slopes gently to the west and north with the centre of the

site lying at a height of about 116 m. above OD.

The site lies on the junction of superficial deposits of chalky till and plateau drift overlying oolitic limestone of the Cherwell Uplands.

Methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to record the presence/absence, extent, date and nature of any archaeological deposits within the area. To achieve this it was proposed to dig three trenches, 10 m. long and 1.6 m. wide, which was 4.2% of the site area. These were, within the constraints of the existing land use, to be placed on the footprints of the proposed new structures. The trenches were to be dug by a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, the topsoil and overburden removal being under continuous archaeological supervision, and the spoilheaps were to be monitored for finds.

Results

Three trenches were excavated, two directly on the footprints of the proposed new buildings (Fig. 3). The third trench, (Trench 3), due to the existing upstanding building and the presence of live services, was placed only partly on the footprint of a new house. In all of the trenches the topsoil consisted of brown sandy silt with small stones. In the cases of Trenches 1 and 2 (Plates 1 and 2) this sealed a thin layer of yellow/brown sandy silt subsoil; its absence in Trench 3 maybe due to tree root activity as this trench was placed through a hedge line consisting of mature trees. The natural geology in all three of the trenches consisted of a dark yellow/brown sand with flints at a depth of 0.40-0.45 m. No archaeological features were observed in any of the trenches and all three had been disturbed by root action, especially Trench 3. Examination of the spoilheaps resulted in 2 sherds of Medieval pottery being recovered from Trench 1, and Post-Medieval pottery, brick and tile from the others.

The pottery by Jane Timby

The evaluation yielded just two sherds of pottery both of which date to the Medieval period:

Trench 1 (spoilheap)

a) Plain hand made body sherd in a reddish-brown ware with a brown core. Tempered with irregular shaped fragments of limestone which appear as voids on the surface.

Date: Medieval 11-12th century.

b) Upper part of a strap handle from a jug/pitcher. Thumb-pressed edges with a single vertical line down one side and a line of zig-zag slashes down the other. No trace of glaze. It has an orange brown sandy fabric with a dark grey core. The paste also contains sparse fragments of angular flint. **Date:** Medieval 12-13th century.

Conclusions

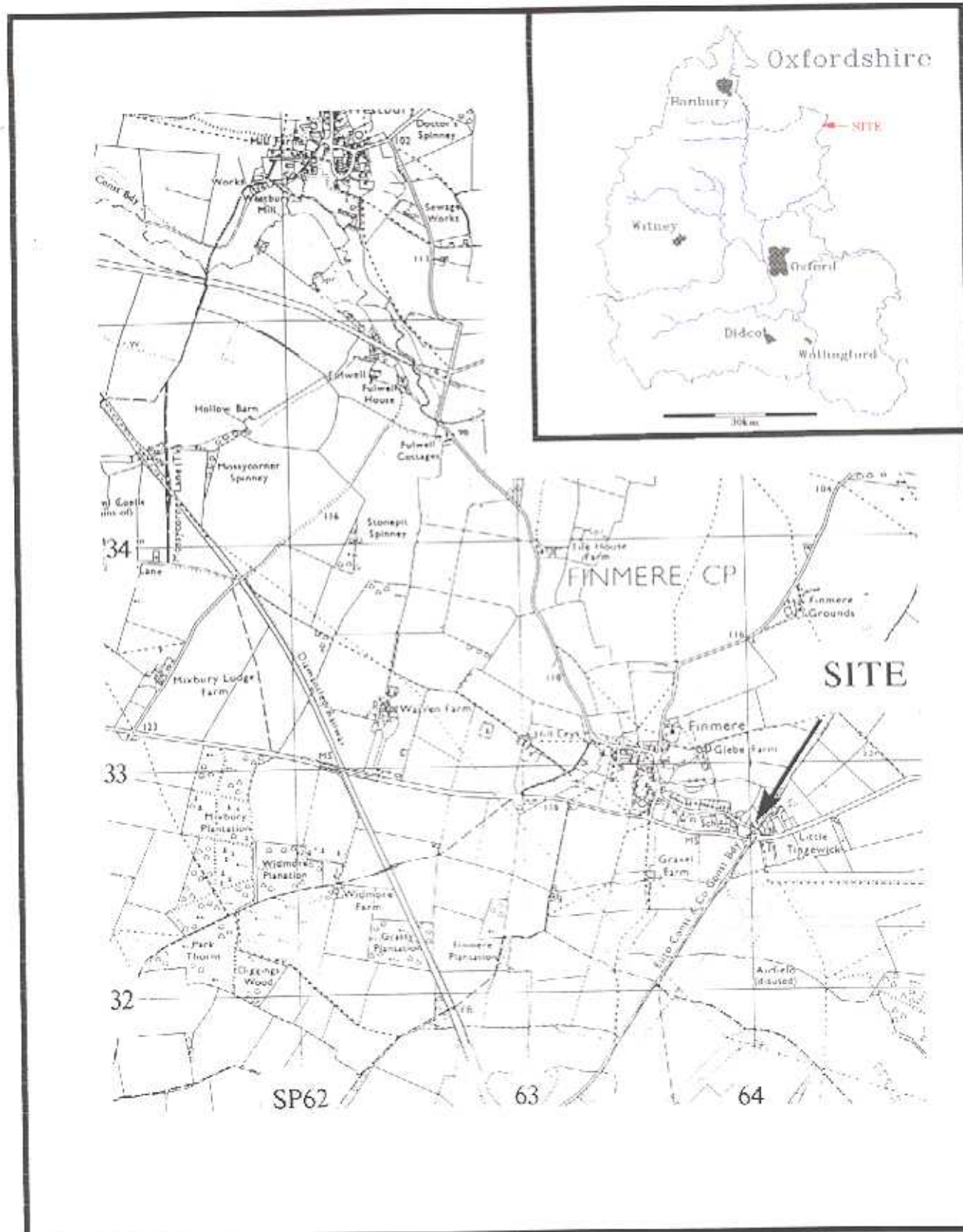
No archaeological deposits were observed in any of the trenches. The spoilheaps were monitored for finds but only sherds of Medieval or later date were recovered. On the basis of these results the site has no archaeological potential.

Bibliography

PPG16, 1990: **Archaeology and Planning**. Department of the Environment
Planning Policy Guidance Note 16.(HMSO)

Appendix 1 Trench details

Trench	Length	Depth	Comment
1	10m.	0.45m.	Top- and subsoil above sand with flints. 2 sherds of Medieval pottery recovered from the spoil heap. [Plate 1]
2	10m.	0.35-0.45m.	Top- and subsoil onto sand with flints. Trench through concrete garden path. [Plate 2]
3	10m.	0.45m.	Topsoil onto sand with flints. Trench through tree hedge line. Extensive root disturbance.

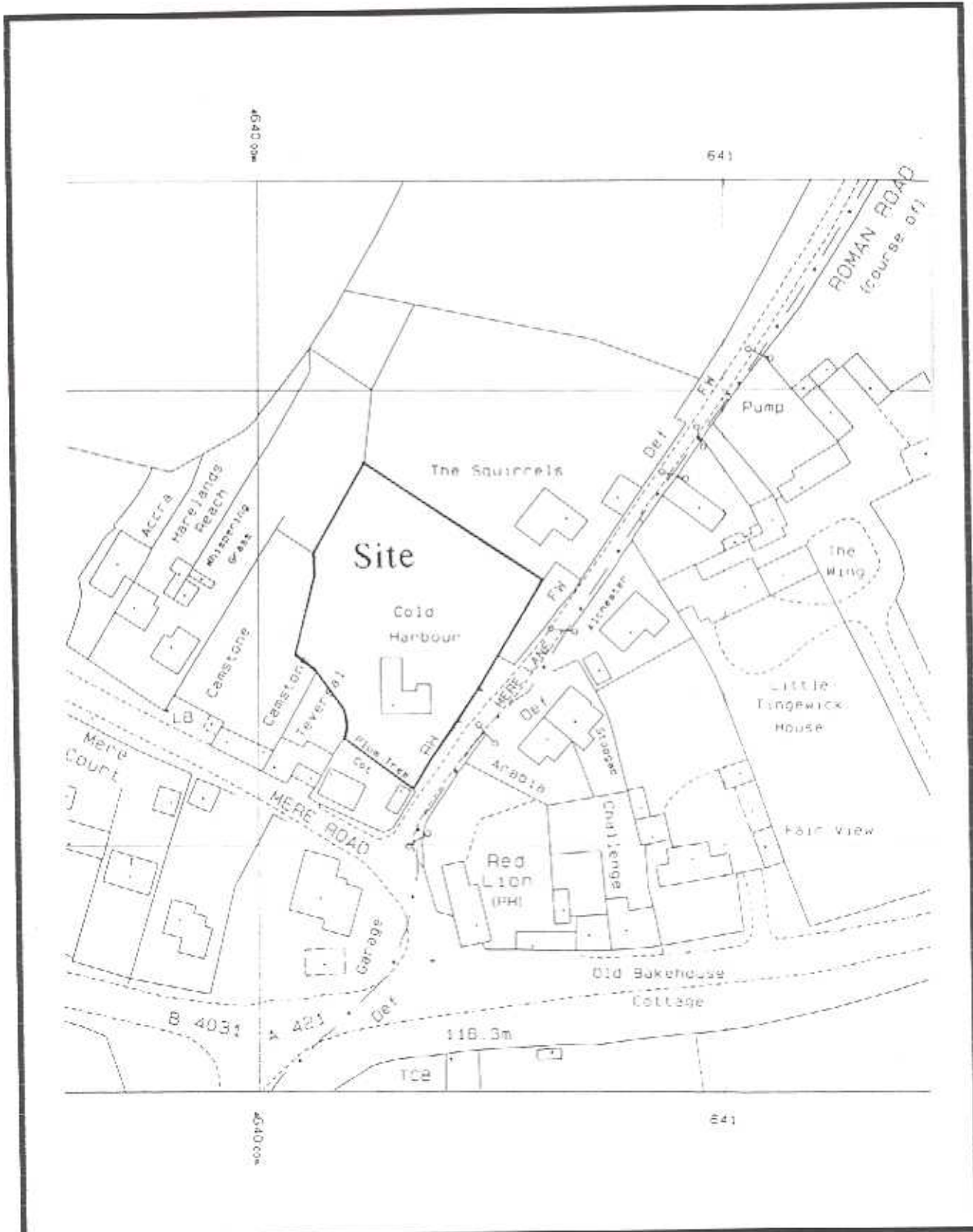


Cold Harbour, Finmere, Oxon.

Figure 1. Location of site in county.

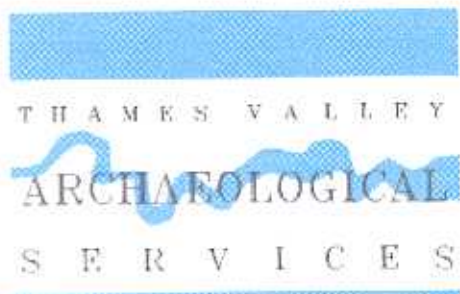


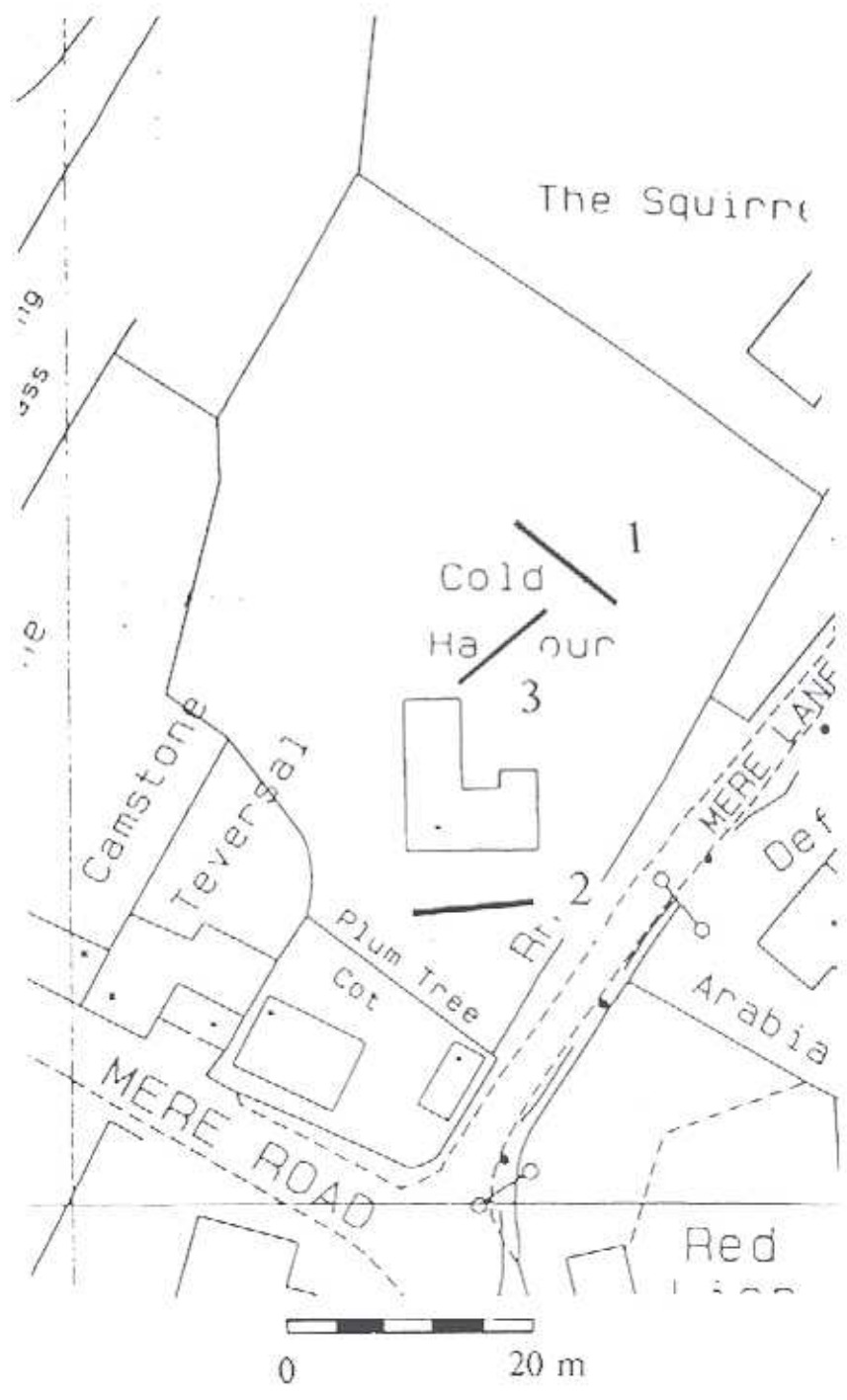
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Cold Harbour, Finmere, Oxon.

Figure 2. Location of site in Finmere.





Cold Harbour, Finmere, Oxon.

Figure 3. Location of trenches.

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Plate 1. Cold Harbour, Finmere. Trench 1 looking north. Scale: 1 m.



Plate 2. Cold Harbour, Finmere. Trench 2 looking west. Scale: 1 m.