

# **Didcot to Milton Heights Link Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief  
For Oxfordshire County Council**

by Clare Challis

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code MHD 01/98

**September 2002**

## Summary

**Site name:** Didcot to Milton Heights Link Road, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SU 5282 9040 to SU 5360 9010

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 14th January – 9th July 2002

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Clare Challis

**Site code:** MHD 01/98

**Area of site:** N/A

**Summary of results:** No archaeological finds or deposits were observed

**Monuments identified:** None

**Location and reference of archive:** The site archive is presently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR but will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, with accession code OXCMS2002:29.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford 30.09.02 Steve Preston 30.09.02
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# **Didcot to Milton Heights Link Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief**

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**Report 01/98**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out on the Didcot to Milton Heights Link Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire (SU 530 900) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Mike Collins, Senior Engineer, Oxfordshire County Council Environmental Services, Speedwell House, Speedwell Street, Oxford, OX1 1NE.

Planning permission (C.97.04) has been granted by Oxfordshire County Council to construct a new link road between Didcot and Milton Heights. As part of an input to the planning application, an environmental statement considered the implications for cultural heritage on the route and a condition (6) has been attached for an archaeological watching brief to take place during groundworks. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the County's policies on archaeology.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer at Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service. The fieldwork was undertaken by Clare Challis, Nick Croxson and Stephen Hammond on visits between January and July 2002 and the site code is MHD01/98. The site archive is presently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR but will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, with accession code OXCMS2002:29.

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site is located between Cow Lane Junction and Jubilee Way roundabout, Didcot, following the line of an existing railway embankment, on the northern fringes of the town centre. The underlying geology is mapped as Gault clay (BGS 1971) and the geology observed on site confirmed this. The site lies at elevations between 50m and 55m above Ordnance Datum. The road is c. 900m long and typically 15m across with wider sections for landscaping and roundabouts (Fig. 3).

## **Archaeological background**

Relatively few finds and sites of archaeological interest are recorded for the centre of Didcot, but there is a greater number known from areas now contained within the suburbs. A few prehistoric finds are known from surrounding areas, with a Middle Bronze Age occupation site having been excavated prior to the construction of a retail complex to the east of the town (Ruben and Ford 1992). Roman artefacts have been recovered from an area around All Saints parish church in Lydalls Road partly underneath which is thought to lie a Roman settlement (Lingham, 1978). A lead coffin believed to be of Roman in origin was found in the vicinity, along with sherds of pottery and fragments of a New Forest ware beaker in the 19th century. A silver coin of Plautilla Augusta, wife of Caracalla, was found near Didcot Railway Station which is close to the site of the new link road.

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the construction of the link road. This involved the examination of areas stripped of topsoil/overburden and excavation for drainage ditches and other associated works.

## **Results**

Visits were made to the link road construction periodically as and when necessary to monitor ground disturbing activities, mostly when areas were stripped of topsoil, trees and shrubs, revealing the underlying natural geology. The route of the road was subdivided into blocks for monitoring and where a watching brief was appropriate and practical, these blocks were numbered as shown on Figure 2. Typically the stratigraphy noted on the majority of the route consisted of topsoil overlying mottled grey brown clay.

Areas 1–5, 9 and 15 were stripped to the level of potential archaeological relevance, to a standard favourable for archaeological examination. However, no archaeological deposits or artefacts were present. These areas were subsequently levelled with gravel up to 0.40m deep in places to make up the road. Small parts of Areas 6 and 16 had already been levelled up with gravel prior to any archaeological observation.

Concrete drainage pipes were inserted into the ground at points 7, 12 and 14 and trenches for further drainage were observed at 8. No archaeological deposits were noted in the exposed sections.

Parts of an old railway embankment which formed part of the route of the site were also removed and levelled (Fig 3: 9, 11, 12, 13). It is not clear if any truncation beyond topsoil stripping of these areas had taken

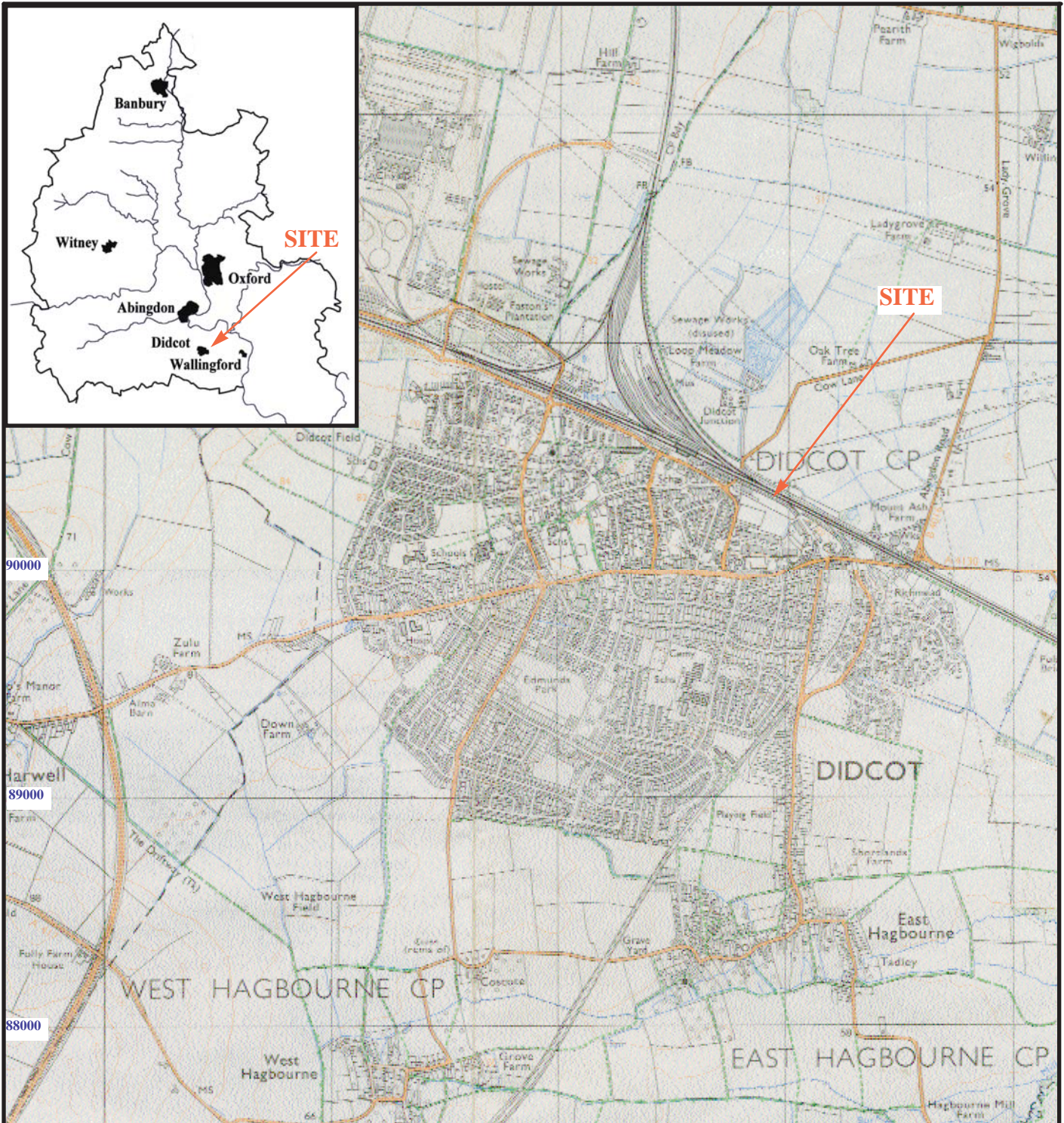
place during construction of the embankment, but this seems unlikely. Some disturbed patches of natural clay in Area 9 may reflect embankment construction work. In any event, no archaeological finds or deposits were observed on this part of the site.

## **Conclusion**

It has been possible to carry out this watching brief along most of the route of the new road. Several areas were stripped of overburden to a standard which facilitated archaeological examination and in other areas deep trenches were dug which allowed for examination of strata in section. However, this detailed monitoring did not reveal any finds or deposits of archaeological interest.

## **References**

- BGS, 1971, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50,000, Sheet 253, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Lingham, B F, 1978, *The Long Years of Obscurity*, privately printed, Didcot.
- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
- Ruben, I and Ford, S, 1992, 'Excavations at Wallingford Road, Didcot, South Oxfordshire 1991', *Oxoniensia* **57**, 1-28



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Figure 1. Location of site at Didcot and Oxfordshire.

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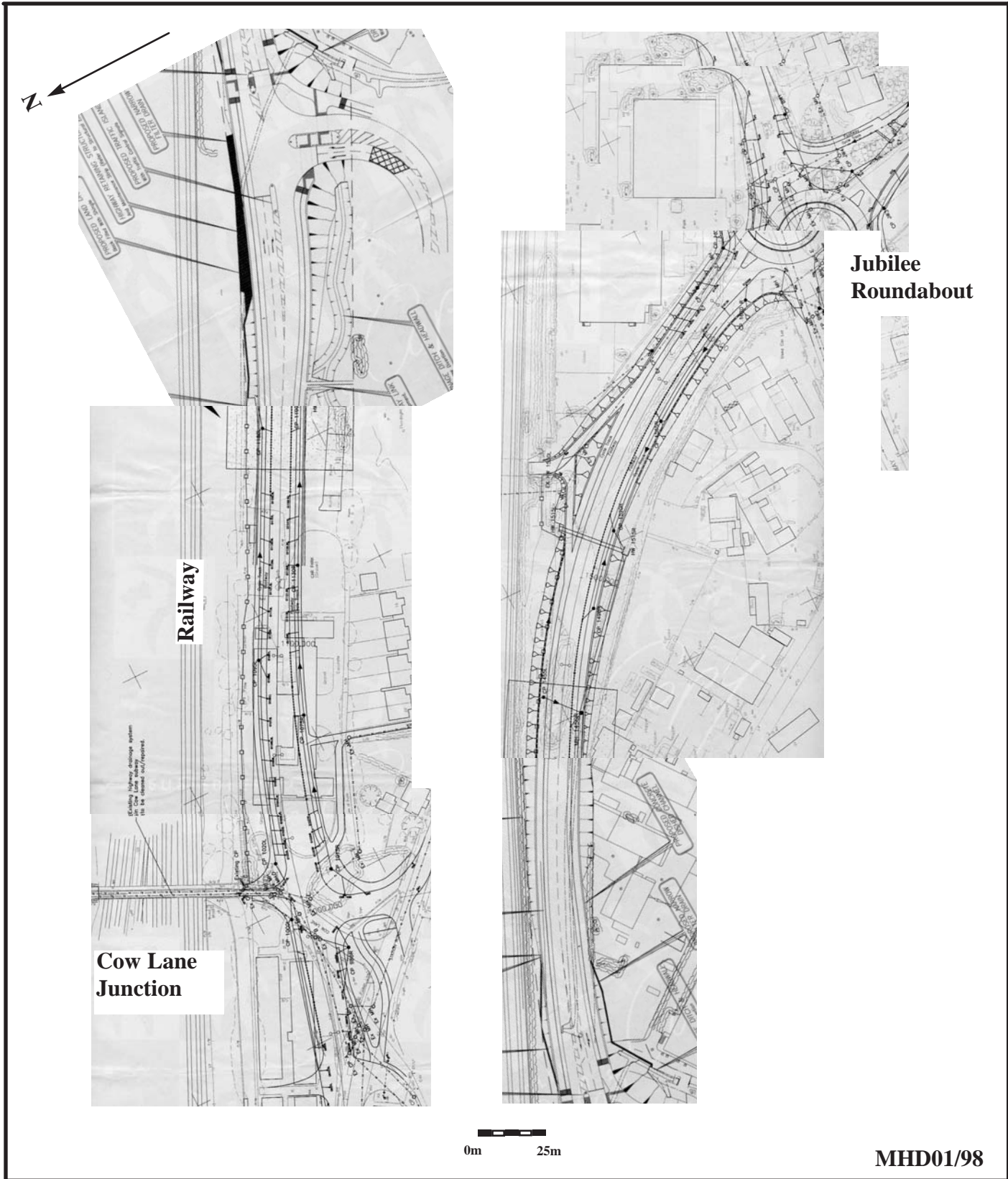


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Figure 2. Location of site showing watching brief areas.

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Figure 3. Detailed location of road layout.