Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

for Prime Park Limited

by Andy Taylor
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code MFW 06/17

March 2006
Summary

Site name: Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SP 5780 1920

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 27th February to 3rd March 2006

Project manager: Jo Pine

Site supervisor: Andy Taylor

Site code: MFW 06/17

Area of site: c.2 hectares

Summary of results: Five ditches, a gully, gully terminus and a pit or ditch terminus were identified, the majority of which were undated. One ditch was dated to the Roman period.

Monuments identified: Ditches (one Roman) and gullies.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 13.03.06
Steve Preston✓ 13.03.06
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire (SP 5780 1920) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr K Clarke of Simmons and Sons, 32 Bell Street, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, RG9 2BH on behalf of Prime Park Ltd.

Planning permission (05/01157/F) has been gained from Cherwell District Council for the creation of a two-hectare reservoir. This consent was subject to a condition requiring an archaeological monitoring and recording action.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District Council’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Hannah Fluck, formerly Planning Archaeologist with Oxfordshire County Council, advising the District. The monitoring of the site was carried out by Mr Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer. A brief for the site (Fluck 2004) outlined the archaeological potential. The fieldwork was undertaken by Andy Taylor, Danielle Colls and Richard Oram between 27th February and 3rd March 2006 and the site code is MFW 06/17. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located 1.2km to the north of the village of Merton and 1.5km to the east of Wendlebury, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The site is currently arable farmland and the underlying geology is Oxford Clay with Kellway Beds and occasional Cornbrash (BGS 1979), which was observed in all trenches. The site lies at a height of approximately 61m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The site lies c.600m to the south-east of the Roman fortress and later civilian town of Alchester. This is a site of national importance with a Roman military presence from the early years of the conquest (SMR 1583) and settlement through to the 5th century when the town was abandoned (Munby *et al.* 1975). A possible parade
ground associated with the settlement lies 350m to the to the north of the site. A Roman Road, 160b Dorchester-Alchester (Margary 1955), is located 500m to the west of the site (SMR 8923). Roman field systems are laid out to the east of the road (SMR 12751). Less than 200m to the north are the remains of a Roman building with possible hypocaust and late 3rd-4th century pottery (SMR 15987). An evaluation carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services (Oram 2003) to the east of the farm did not identify any deposits of archaeological significance.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. Specific aims of the project were;

a) To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site.
b) To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.
c) To determine if archaeological deposits representing Roman occupation are present.

A total of 23 trenches were excavated (Fig 2) using a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket and were dug under constant archaeological supervision. These measured between 18.20m and 21.90m and were located as close as possible to their intended positions. All spoilheaps were monitored for finds.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Results

All trenches consisted of topsoil overlying subsoil overlying natural geology, which consisted of Oxford clay and cornbrash.

Trench 1 (Figs. 3 and 5)
This trench contained a gully terminus at 9m. A slot (1) measuring 0.83m in length, 0.42m wide and 0.13m deep was excavated through it. No finds were recovered. A ditch was also found in this trench between 14m and 18m. A slot (2) was excavated through it measuring 0.90m in length, 1.22m wide and 0.45m deep. Its mottled light grey brown fill (53) did not contain any dating evidence.
Trench 4 (Figs. 3 and 5)
This trench contained a ditch aligned approximately north–south. A slot (3) was dug through it measuring 0.65m in length, 1.65 wide and 0.52m deep. It contained two fills (55 and 56) neither of which provided any dating evidence.

Trench 5 (Fig. 3)
This trench contained a continuation of the ditch identified in trench four. No further slots were dug through the ditch in this trench.

Trench 14 (Figs. 3 and 5)
Another ditch, aligned approximately NW–SE, was identified in this trench between 4.10m and 7.50m. A slot (9) was dug through it measuring 0.90m in length, 1.15m wide and 0.28m deep. No datable finds were retrieved from either of its fills (63 and 64) but four fragments of animal bone came from fill 63.

Trench 15 (Plate 1, Figs. 3 and 5)
A gully aligned approximately east–west was located between 14.50m and 17.30m. A slot (10) was excavated through it measuring 1.00m in length, 0.66m wide and 0.18m deep. Its mottled grey yellow silty clay fill (65) did not produce any finds.

Trench 18 (Figures 4 and 5)
A ditch aligned approximately north–south was observed between 2.50m and 3.80m. A machine slot (6) was dug through this ditch, due to a change in the natural geology. This measured 1.50m wide and was 0.43m deep. A single sherd of Roman pottery was retrieved from the bottom of this ditch.

Trench 19 (Figures 4 and 5)
A further ditch was identified in this trench between 11.40m and 14.30m. A slot (7) was dug through it measuring 0.95m in length, 1.25m wide and 0.44m deep. No finds were retrieved from its mottled light grey brown silty clay fill (60).

Trench 20 (Figures 4 and 5)
Between 3.70m and 5.20m was what was either a pit or a ditch terminus. It was fully excavated within the trench (8) measuring 1.45m across and 0.48m deep. Again no finds were retrieved.
Trench 23 (Plate 2, Figures 4 and 5)

A continuation of the ditch identified in Trench 18 was observed in this trench between 10.30 and 11.50m. It was aligned approximately north-south. A slot (6) was dug through it measuring 0.82m in length, 1.13m wide and 0.37m deep. It was found to contain two fills (58 and 59). 58 was a light grey silty clay and 59 was a mid orangey brown. Neither of these contained any dating evidence.

Finds

Pottery by Andy Taylor

A single sherd of pottery from a flagon neck was retrieved from ditch 5. This most likely comes from a Nene Valley flagon, possibly from the 2nd century

Animal Bone by Ceri Falys

A total of four animal bone pieces were recovered from a single context, (fill 63, ditch 9, Trench 14) weighing 234g. Three of the fragments, which were well preserved although demonstrating some minor damage through root activity, could re-fit into a single cattle metatarsal. The fourth fragment remains unidentifiable due to its poor preservation.

Conclusion

A moderate number of archaeological deposits were encountered during the evaluation. However, due to the paucity of the finds retrieved it is difficult to securely date these features. They most likely represent parts of Roman field systems probably associated with the nearby town of Alchester. Further work would be required to ascertain the full extent of these deposits, provide more secure dating evidence and achieve a full plan of their layout.

References

Margary, I D, 1955, Roman Roads in Britain, London
**APPENDIX 1: Trench details**

0m at S or W end

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trench No.</th>
<th>Length (m)</th>
<th>Breadth (m)</th>
<th>Depth (m)</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.00m-0.26m topsoil; 0.26m-0.31m subsoil; 0.31m-0.35m clay and cornbrash natural. Gully Terminus 1; Ditch 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.20</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.00m-0.26m topsoil; 0.26m-0.46m subsoil; 0.46m+ clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.50</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.34m subsoil; 0.34m+ clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.90</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.00m-0.29m topsoil; 0.29m-0.39m subsoil; 0.39m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.10</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.00m-0.28m subsoil; 0.28m-0.32m subsoil; 0.32m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.20</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.00m-0.32m topsoil; 0.32m-0.48m subsoil; 0.48m-0.52m clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>19.80</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.00m-0.29m topsoil; 0.29m-0.39m subsoil; 0.39m-0.41m clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.10</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.00m-0.28m topsoil; 0.28m-0.35m subsoil; 0.35m+ clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>19.30</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.00m-0.36m topsoil; 0.32m-0.40m subsoil; 0.40m-0.42m clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.80</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.00m-0.33m topsoil; 0.33m-0.40m subsoil; 0.40m+ clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.10</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.00m-0.36m topsoil; 0.36m-0.49m subsoil; 0.49m-0.50m+ clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>19.70</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.40</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>20.50</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.00m-0.28m topsoil; 0.28m-0.46m subsoil; 0.46m-0.48m+ clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>21.10</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.00m-0.15m topsoil; 0.15m-0.20m subsoil; 0.20m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 9.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.40</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.35m subsoil; 0.35m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Gully 10. [Plate 1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>20.50</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.40m subsoil; 0.40m+ clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>19.40</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.60m subsoil; 0.60m+ clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>20.10</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.40m subsoil; 0.40m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>21.90</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.00m-0.36m topsoil; 0.36m-0.51m subsoil; 0.51m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>20.70</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.00m-0.31m topsoil; 0.31m-0.65m subsoil; 0.65m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Pit/Ditch Terminus 8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>21.30</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.00m-0.30m topsoil; 0.30m-0.36m subsoil; 0.36m-0.40m+ clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.00m-0.38m topsoil; 0.38m+ clay and cornbrash natural.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.00m-0.46m topsoil; 0.46m-0.48m subsoil; 0.48m+ clay and cornbrash natural. Ditch 6. [Plate 2]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trench</th>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Fill(s)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Dating evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Gully Terminus</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Ditch</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>55, 56</td>
<td>Ditch</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ditch</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>63, 64</td>
<td>Ditch</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Gully</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Ditch</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>Pottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Ditch</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>Same as [5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61, 62</td>
<td>Ditch</td>
<td>Pit/Ditch Terminus</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>58, 59</td>
<td>Ditch</td>
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<td>None</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire, 2006
An Archaeological Evaluation

Figure 1. Location of site at Merton Grounds Farm and Oxfordshire.
Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Pathfinder SP 41/51 at 1:12500
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Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire, 2006

Figure 2: Trench Locations MFW 06/17
Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire, 2006

Figure 3: Trench Plans
Figure 4: Trench Plans

Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire, 2006
Merton Grounds Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire, 2006

Figure 5: Sections
Plate 1. Trench 15 looking north west, scales: 2m and 1m.

Plate 2. Trench 23, Ditch 6, looking SE, horizontal scales: 1m and vertical scale: 0.5m.