

Excavation of Part of a 3rd-century Roman Settlement and Later Roman Road at Stowford Road, Barton, Oxford

By JO PINE

with contributions by PAUL CANNON, STEVE FORD, SHEILA HAMILTON-DYER, NICOLA POWELL, MARK ROBINSON, JANE TIMBY, CHRIS SALTER and DAVID WILLIAMS

SUMMARY

A field evaluation and follow-up excavation took place on a site adjacent to the course of the Roman road from Alchester to Dorchester (thought to be defined by the contemporary Bayswater Road) and close to a point where the Bayswater Brook was crossed. The fieldwork revealed 3rd-century occupation deposits, which were later abandoned and overlain by a 4th-century road that was subsequently metalled. The road surface became heavily rutted and was repaired on several occasions. It is thought that this was a local diversion caused by the need to avoid excessive erosion of the main Roman road as it sloped steeply down to the Bayswater Brook.

The excavation took place between December 1998 and March 1999 at the corner of Stowford Road and Bayswater Road, Barton, Oxford (SP 55825 07962) (Fig. 1). It followed an earlier evaluation,¹ which had revealed evidence for Roman occupation in the form of postholes, a ditch, a gully, and a 'dark earth' layer (Fig. 2). The excavated area comprised 504 sq. m. of grassland, sloping from 74 m. to 77 m. above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology comprises fine grained sandstones, sands and siltstones (Temple Cowley Member) and a silty mudstone (West Walton Formation).² The excavation and subsequent watching brief were required as part of a programme of archaeological investigation, approved by Mr. B. Durham of Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service. The site code is SRO98/66 and it is anticipated that the complete site archive will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service (accession no. OXCMS 1998.177).

A number of Roman deposits in the vicinity of Stowford Road are recorded in the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record (Fig. 1). Roman pottery, coins and skeletons were discovered during the main development of the Bayswater Hill area in the 1940s (SMR nos. 3664–6, 3668). In addition, three Roman cremation burials were found 150 m. to the north-west of the site in 1949 (3667). A watching brief at 102 Bayswater Road, approximately 100 m. to the north-east, uncovered human and animal bones and pottery dating to the 3rd to 4th century AD, although these were apparently not *in situ*.³

¹ J. Pine, 'Stowford Road, Barton, Oxfordshire, an archaeological evaluation' (Thames Valley Archaeological Services report, 1998).

² *British Geological Survey*, Sheet 237, Solid and Drift Edition (1994).

³ M. Roberts, '102 Bayswater Road, Barton, archaeological watching brief' (Oxford Archaeological Unit Report, 1991).

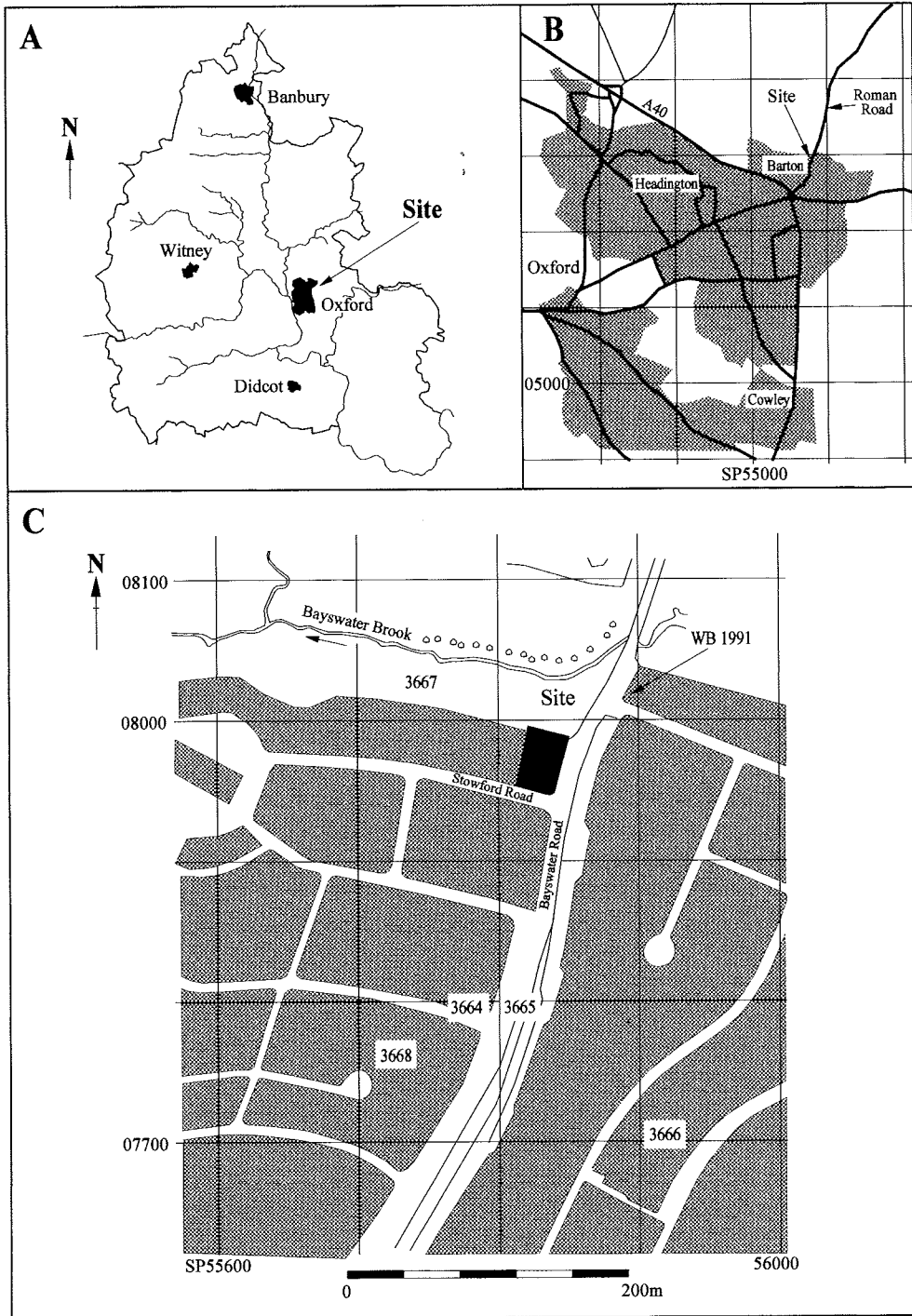


Fig. 1. Location of site within A) Oxfordshire, B) Oxford District and C) Barton.

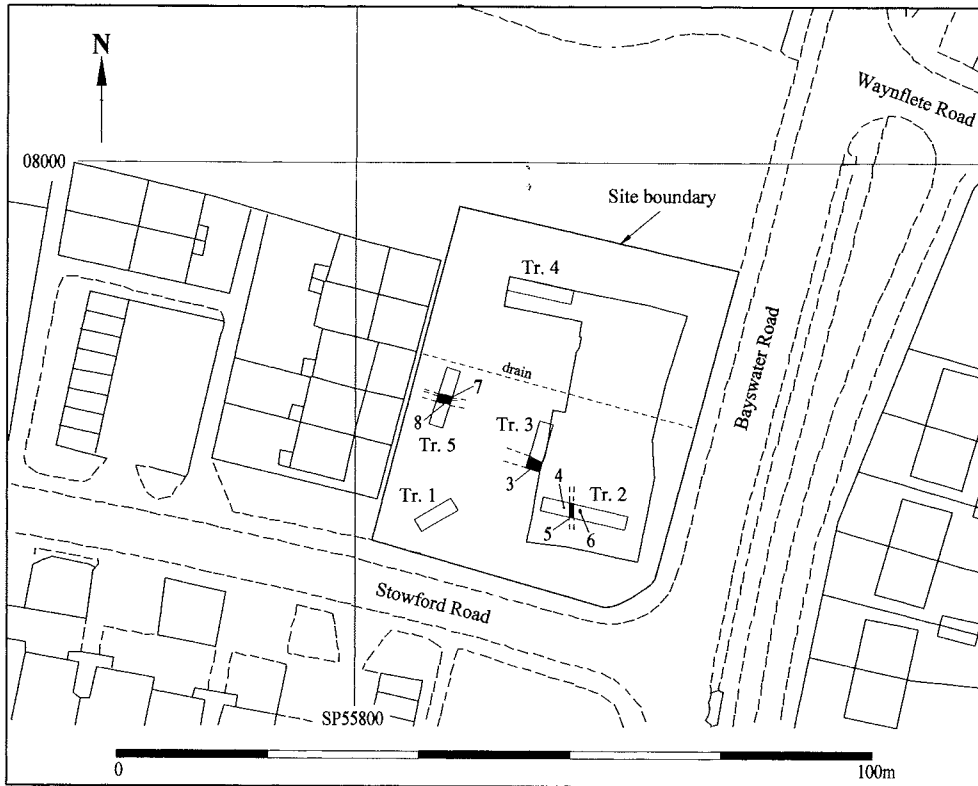


Fig. 2. Location of evaluation trenches and features and excavated area.

Margary⁴ indicates that the projected line of the Roman road from Alchester to Dorchester-on-Thames (route 106b) converges here on the modern Bayswater Road. The projected line of the Roman road on Ordnance Survey maps lies to the west of Bayswater Road, which forms the eastern boundary of the excavated area.

DESCRIPTION OF FIELDWORK

Evaluation

Five evaluation trenches (Fig. 2) revealed a pit (6), a posthole (4), a gully (5), a stretch of drystone wall (7) and two ditches (3 and 8), all dated to the Roman period. A layer interpreted as a buried topsoil or occupation layer of 3rd- to 4th-century date sealed a number of these features.

Excavation and watching brief

A single area was opened, encompassing three of the evaluation trenches in which archaeological deposits had been identified (Fig. 2). The area was stripped of topsoil, subsoil and colluvium using a 360° machine fitted with a toothless bucket. A watching brief took place during work on service runs and less invasive groundwork beyond the excavated area. This revealed that the trackway and soil horizon (120) continued into the far NE. of the site (see below). The archaeological deposits represented five phases, of which Phases 2-4 cover the main activity on the site in the 3rd-4th centuries AD.

⁴ I.D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, i (1955), 149.

Phase 1: Prehistoric and early Roman

The earliest activity on the site is represented by a single undiagnostic struck flint of Neolithic or Bronze Age date, an Iron Age pot sherd, and several sherds of early Roman pottery. These are all stray finds or residual in later deposits.

Phase 2: Roman, 3rd century AD (Fig. 3)

The earliest archaeological features revealed are those sealed beneath the soil horizon (120), broadly dated to the 3rd century AD. The quantity of closely datable pottery is generally low but a small assemblage of Oxfordshire Colour Coated ware from ditch 102 and gully 103 suggests a date in the second half of the 3rd century for these features; this may also apply to other features at the same stratigraphic level.

The features that contained 3rd-century pottery and are assigned to Phase 2 comprise: ditches 102 and 106; gullies 103, 108, 111 and 114–15; pits 327 and 347; seven postholes and a possible beam slot (105). Other features assigned to this phase contained pottery only broadly dated to the Roman period: a possible beam slot (104); pits 238–9, 243, 321, 326 and 424; seven postholes and gullies 107 and 116. A number of gullies, pits and postholes also assigned to this phase contained no dating evidence: gullies 109–10 and 112; 26 postholes; and nine pits. Lastly, the features found in the evaluation trenches outside the excavated area were located below the buried soil and most probably also belong to Phase 2.

If all the features above do indeed belong to Phase 2, it suggests that occupation began some time in the 3rd century AD, possibly in the second half of the century. The ditches and gullies are boundary features, either defining individual holdings or for the control of stock, and the spread of pits and postholes are the remnants of some sort of settlement activity. The postholes and beam slots, if this is the correct interpretation of the latter, do not define ground plans of any particular building type and better structural evidence is the drystone wall (7) in evaluation trench 5, beyond the main excavation area.

Phase 3: Roman, late 3rd to late 4th century AD

This phase comprised an accumulation of soils (120) that sealed the Phase 2 occupation deposits. This soil deposit was not homogenous but was made up of numerous layers of silt with sand lenses and humic silty clays, probably the result of hillwash and ploughwash. The pottery within this material was probably derived from the manuring of farmland and has a wide chronological spread from the 1st/2nd century through to the late 4th century AD. The processes that caused the soil accumulation could explain the presence of early Roman pottery in layers overlying 3rd-century Roman deposits. Stratigraphic evidence suggests that deposition of these soil layers began sometime during the late 3rd century/early 4th and continued into the late 4th century.

Phase 4: Roman, late 4th century AD (Fig. 4)

This phase is defined by activity that took place subsequent to the deposition of the soil layer, i.e. the digging of a ditch and a gully, and the creation of a roadway. The sequence of road use and ditch infill can be subdivided into two (Phases 4a and b) but use of the gully (117) cannot be directly related to the sub phases.

Phase 4a: Late 4th century onwards

The earliest phase of the road (100) dates to the late 4th century as it truncates the soil horizon (120). The road in its earliest form was more of a track and consisted of an unmetalled surface over 46 m. long and aligned N.-S., at least 8 m. wide (the eastern edge was not exposed in the excavation). Within the trench the track curved slightly to the east as it went south. Numerous intercutting wheel ruts were observed (Fig. 5). A ditch (101) and its recut (118), both of which contained late 3rd- to 4th-century pottery, also cut the soil horizon (120). These were aligned N.-S. parallel to the road (100). It is probable that the original ditch (101) was contemporary with the first phase of the road (100).

Phase 4b: Late 4th century onwards

The evidence suggests that the first phase of the road (100) became unusable and over-rutted in its unmetalled form and this necessitated its repair or modification. Box sections A, B and C (Figs. 4 and 5) show that the wheel ruts were filled with sand, stones, small inclusions of flint and possibly lime, to create a compact surface; whilst other small areas of metalling were also laid down. The stratigraphy indicates that repairs and maintenance occurred on a number of occasions. Apart from the stratigraphic evidence, which shows that this phase post-dates late Roman activity on the site, more specific dating is difficult as the small assemblage of pottery recovered from the repair material is either residual 3rd- to 4th-century or can only be dated broadly to the Roman period. However, no Saxon or medieval pottery was recovered from repair contexts and only two sherds of post-medieval pottery came from cleaning layers overlying the trackway. This suggests that this phase of the road was also late Roman (late 4th or early 5th century).

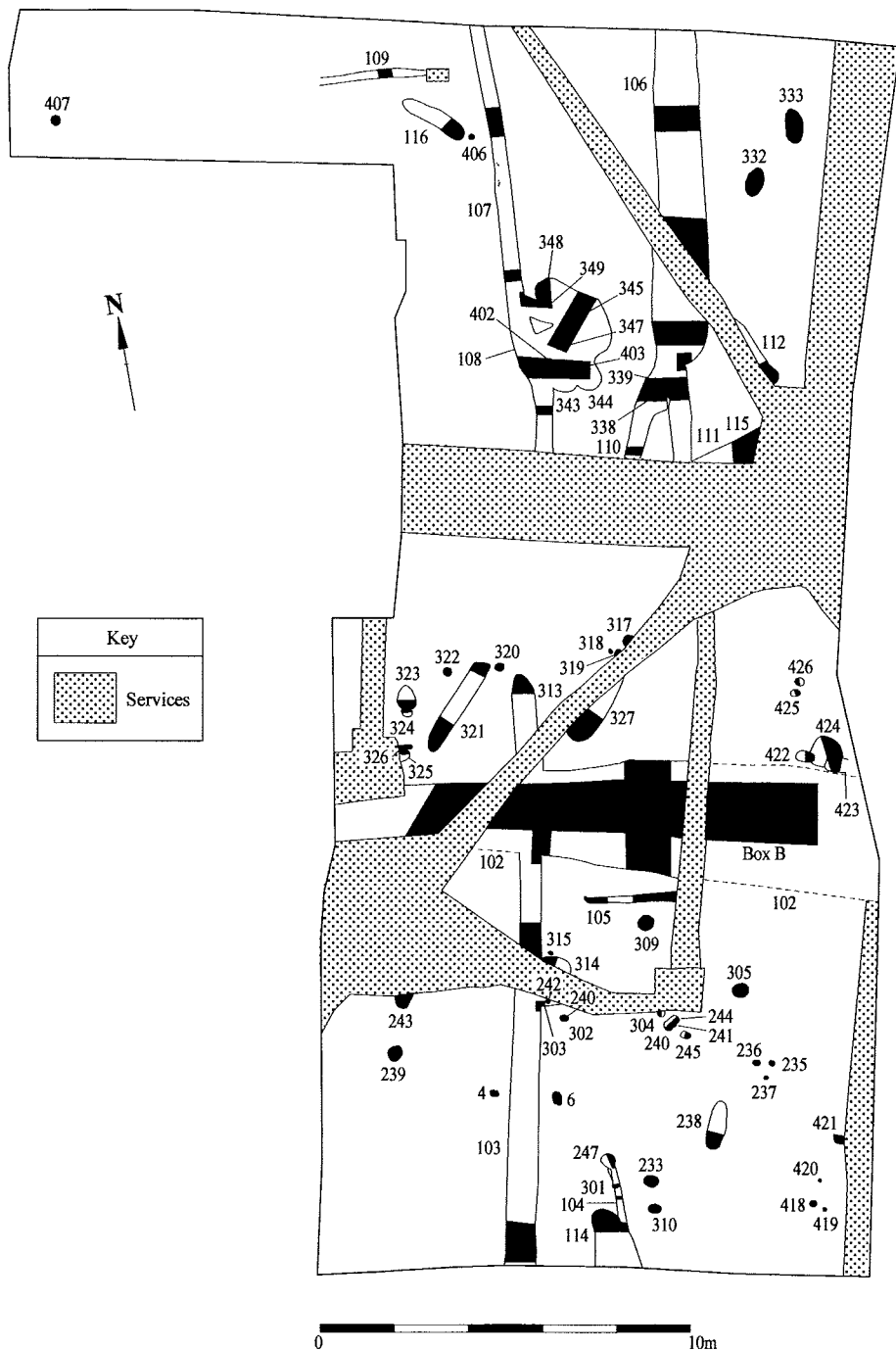


Fig. 3. Plan of Phase 2 features.

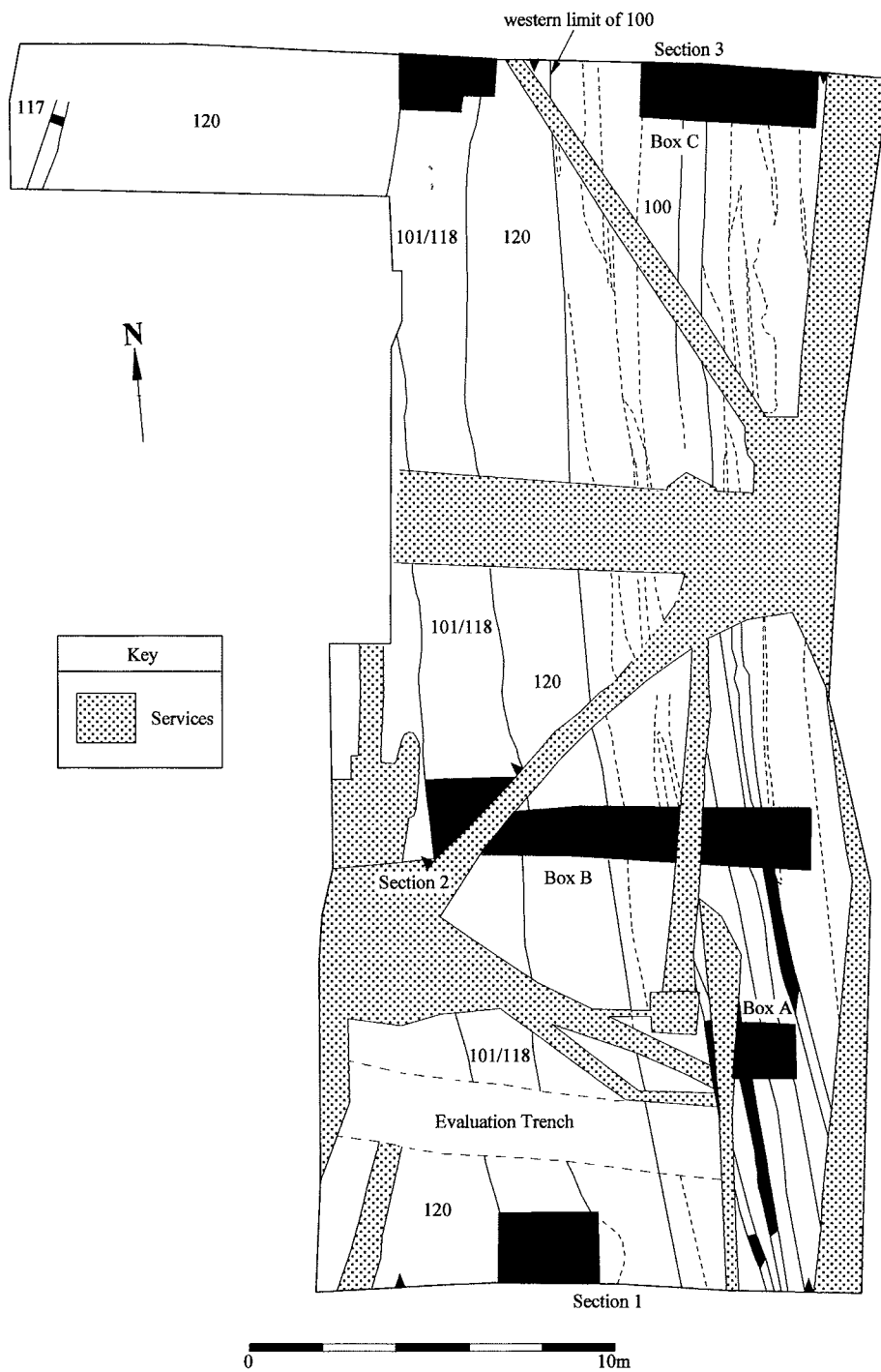


Fig. 4. Plan of Phase 4 features.

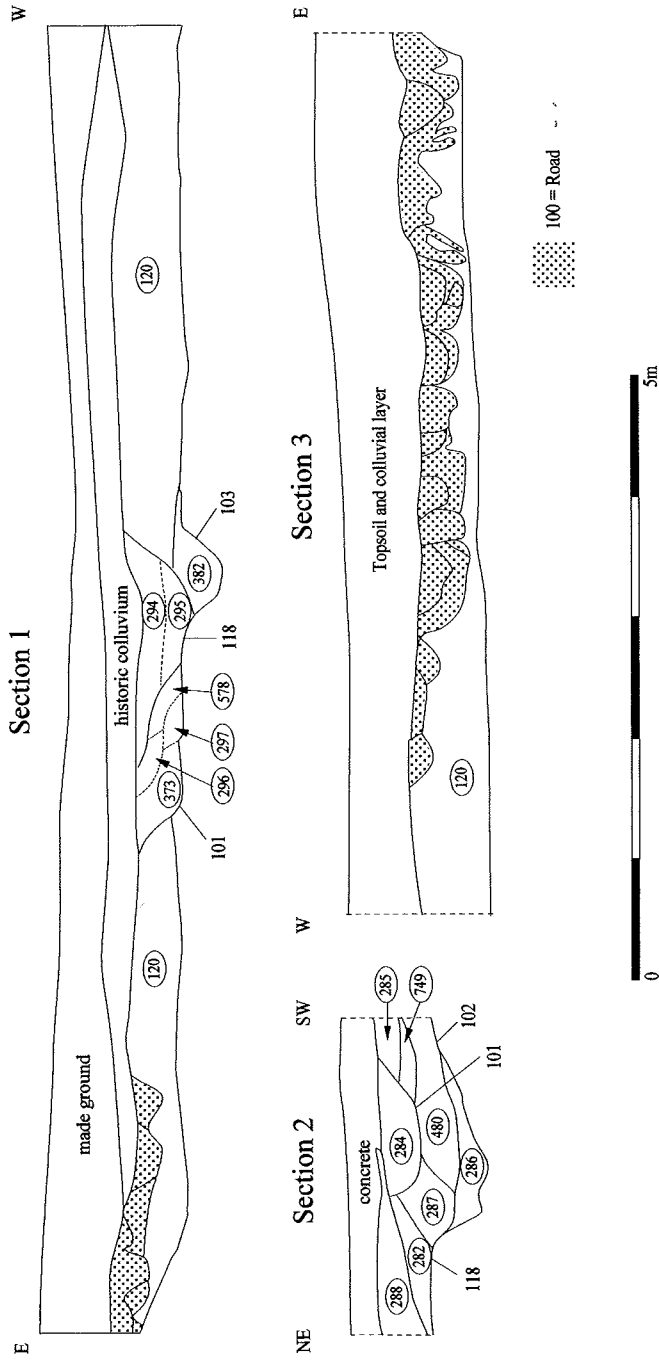


Fig. 5. Selected sections.

The recut (118) of ditch 101 may have been made during this phase, although again, no closely-dated pottery was recovered from the fill.

Phase 5: Post-Roman

There is no evidence for the date when the road surface went out of use. The only finds recovered were a few post-medieval sherds from the overlying colluvial deposits. The steepness of the slope and the ease with which the natural deposits eroded may have caused the track and metalled surface to become rutted easily, necessitating frequent repairs within a relatively short timespan at the end of the 4th century. If this scenario is correct, then it seems most unlikely that continued use well into the 5th century could have taken place without similar refurbishments and it seems plausible to assume that this part of the road (perhaps only a local detour) fell out of use in the late 4th or early 5th centuries AD.

THE POTTERY by JANE TIMBY

The archaeological work produced 971 sherds of pottery, weighing 10.613 kg. Most of the assemblage is Roman, accompanied by a single handmade sherd of probable later prehistoric date and three post-Medieval sherds.

The material is poor to average in condition with fairly well-broken sherds and in many cases poor surface preservation. Most of the colour-coated wares have lost their surfaces making distinction from the plain oxidized wares difficult in some cases. Despite the fact that there are a large number of storage jars present, which generally tend to have more robust sherds, the overall average sherd size is quite low for Roman material at 11 gms. This might be the result of prolonged exposure of material, for example, midden material which has been redistributed, post-depositional disturbance, or slightly hostile ground conditions. Individual groups are also quite small. This, combined with the longevity of some of the local wares, makes precise dating difficult in some cases.

The pottery was sorted into fabrics on the basis of the macroscopically visible inclusions and texture for each recorded context. Well-known regional or traded wares were coded using the system established for the National Roman reference collection (NRFC).⁵ More locally based wares from the same industries were coded using the same type of pre-fixes but these are specific to this report. In particular this includes various oxidized (OX) and reduced grey (RE) wares (see Table 1).

The material was quantified by sherd count, weight and estimated vessel equivalents (EVEs) (Table 2). Forms were noted by individual codes, or where relevant with reference to established typologies for the Oxfordshire pottery⁶ (Table 1). As most of the recognisable types can be identified with reference to Young⁷ and the site lacked any particularly good coherent sequences, no sherds have been selected for illustration.

Fabrics

Brief descriptions of the fabrics used in this report can be found in Table 1. Where relevant these are referenced to the NRFC or Young⁸ and are not discussed further. Other types are described briefly below.

?Later Prehistoric

HM1: a black, fairly hard, ware containing a moderate to common frequency of ill-sorted, rounded to sub-angular, quartz sand and white limestone up to 3 mm. across in size. Handmade, possibly Iron Age in origin.

Roman

GROG: Handmade, dark brown, grog-tempered ware typical of the later Iron Age-early Roman period. WHGROG: A white sandy ware similar to Young⁹ fabric 2 but containing a sparse scatter of dark red sub-angular grog fragments up to 2-2.5 mm. in size. Represented by a single base sherd from a beaker or small jar [328].

⁵ R. Tomber and J. Dore, *The National Roman Fabric Reference Collection: A Handbook* (MoLAS/English Heritage/British Museum, 1998).

⁶ C.J. Young, *Oxfordshire Roman Pottery* (BAR Brit. Ser. 143, 1977).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.* 93.

TABLE 1. POTTERY FABRICS BY PHASE (WEIGHTS IN GRAMS)

	Phase Fabric	2		3		TAQ 3		4		4a		4b		US	
		no	wt	no	wt	no	wt	no	wt	no	wt	no	wt	no	wt
<i>Import</i>	BATAM	15	740	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	SAM	1	6	25	63	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	10	0	0
	MOSBS	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Regional</i>	DORBB1	1	19	12	66	2	27	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	3
	ROBSH	12	80	24	278	3	69	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
	?ALHRE	0	0	1	72	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	SVWOX	0	0	3	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Local</i>	OXFRE1	50	222	150	983	20	210	6	23	0	0	10	87	4	105
	OXFRE2	29	284	53	260	15	250	1	3	1	20	2	10	0	0
	OXFRE3	4	35	1	2	2	21	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	90
	OXFGROG	54	1223	59	1207	2	20	3	38	0	0	2	70	7	124
	OXFOX1	17	58	101	462	2	12	16	62	2	12	1	2	4	10
	OXFOX2	1	2	1	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	OXFWH	14	64	22	79	2	36	2	6	1	3	1	9	1	17
	OXFWH1	0	0	15	77	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	OXFWH2	4	14	14	227	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	OXFWHM	6	251	39	1317	0	0	7	95	1	58	6	91	1	90
	OXFWHB	0	0	2	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	OXFPA	0	0	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	OXFRC	11	55	56	225	0	0	1	7	2	5	8	61	2	3
	OXFRCM	0	0	2	43	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	OXFWSM	0	0	1	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	WHGROG	1	41	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GROG	1	17	1	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	GROGSAND	2	25	1	10	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	SLIME	2	91	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	OXID	0	0	1	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	MISC	1	4	4	43	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	?Iron Age	HM1	0	0	1	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Post-Med	POSTMED	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	18	1	3
<i>Total</i>		226	3231	590	5581	50	654	40	242	7	98	33	358	25	446

TAQ 3: no later than phase 3

US: unstratified

TABLE 2. POTTERY FABRICS BY SHERD COUNT, WEIGHT AND ESTIMATED VESSEL EQUIVALENT

	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>wt</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>eve</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Import</i>	BAT AM	Baetican Dressel 20 amphora ¹	15	1.5	740	7	0	0
	CG/EG SAM	Central and East Gaulish samian	28	3	80	*	29	4
	MOS BS	Moselle black-slipped ware ²	1	*	1	*	0	0
<i>Regional</i>	DOR BB1	Dorset black burnished ware ³	17	2	118	1	16	2
	ROB SH	Midlands shelly ware ⁴	40	4	430	4	39	5.5
	ALH RE	Alice Holt reduced grey ware ⁵	1	*	72	*	0	0
	SVW OX2	Severn Valley ware ⁶	3	*	30	*	0	0
<i>Local</i>	OXF RE1	Oxfordshire fine grey ware ⁷	240	24.5	1587	15	222	31.5
	OXF RE2	Oxfordshire medium sandy grey ware ⁸	101	10	872	8	27	4
	OXF RE3	Oxfordshire black sandy with red core ⁹	10	1	148	1	11	1.5
	OXF GROG	Oxfordshire grog-tempered storage jar ¹⁰	127	13	2682	25	56	8
	OXF OX1	Oxfordshire fine oxidized ware ¹¹	143	14.5	618	6	71	10
	OXF OX2	Oxfordshire medium sandy oxidized ware ¹²	3	*	48	*	7	1
	OXF WH	Oxfordshire medium sandy white ware ¹³	43	4.5	214	2	49	7
	OXF WH1	Oxfordshire fine white ware ¹⁴	15	1.5	77	*	0	0
	OXF WH2	Oxfordshire coarse sandy white ware ¹⁵	18	2	241	2	0	0
	OXF WHM	Oxfordshire white mortaria ¹⁶	60	6	1902	*	99	14
	OXF WHB	Oxfordshire burnt white ware ¹⁷	2	*	30	*	10	0
	OXF PA	Oxfordshire parchment ware ¹⁸	1	*	7	*	0	1.5
	OXF RC	Oxfordshire colour-coated ware ¹⁹	80	*	356	3	55	0
	OXF RCM	Oxfordshire colour-coated mortaria ²⁰	2	8	43	*	9	8
	OXF WSM	Oxfordshire white-slipped mortaria ²¹	1	*	17	*	0	1
	WHGROG	Grogged whiteware (see text)	1	*	41	*	0	0
	GROG	Handmade grog-tempered ware (see text)	2	*	32	*	0	0
	GROGSAND	Grog and sand-tempered storage jar (variant of OXFGROG)	4	*	43	*	0	0
	SLIME	Limestone and sand-tempered storage jar (variant of OXFGROG)	2	*	91	*	0	0
	OXID	Miscellaneous other oxidized ware	1	*	10	*	0	0
	MISC	Other wares	6	*	48	*	1	*
HM1	Handmade later Prehistoric (see text)	1	*	13	*	0	0	
<i>Post-Med</i>	POSTMED	Post-Medieval/modern wares	3	*	21	*	5	*
<i>Total</i>			971	100	10612	100	706	100

* = less than 1%

Table 2 footnotes: ¹ R. Tomber and J. Dore, *The National Roman Fabric Collection*, 84.² Ibid. 60.³ Ibid. 127.⁴ Ibid. 212.⁵ Ibid. 138.⁶ Ibid. 149.⁷ C.J. Young, *Oxfordshire Roman Pottery*, 203, fabric 4.⁸ Ibid. 203, fabric 3.⁹ Ibid. 203, fabric 5.¹⁰ Ibid. 203, fabric 1.¹¹ Ibid. 185, fabric 1.¹² Ibid. 185, fabric 2.¹³ Tomber and Dore, op. cit. 174; Young, op. cit. 93.¹⁴ Young, op. cit. 93, fabric 1.¹⁵ Ibid. 93, fabric 2.¹⁶ Ibid. 56.¹⁷ Ibid. 113.¹⁸ Tomber and Dore, op. cit. 173; Young, op. cit. 80.¹⁹ Tomber and Dore, op. cit. 174; Young, op. cit. 123.²⁰ Young, op. cit. 123.²¹ Ibid. 117.

Discussion of fabrics

Most of the fabrics defined are well-known local types belonging to the Oxfordshire industries. Imports are limited to 15 sherds from a Spanish (Baetican) olive-oil amphora of Dressel 20 form from pit 347, 28 sherds of Central and Eastern Gaulish samian and a single sherd from a Moselle black-slipped beaker.

Regional imported wares are also relatively poorly represented. The two main wares are Dorset black-burnished ware and Midlands shelly ware, with a single grey storage jar sherd from the Alice Holt kilns on the Surrey-Hampshire border.

The local wares, ranging in date from the 2nd to 4th centuries, are mainly plain grey or oxidized wares. The former account for some 35% by sherd count of the total assemblage, with oxidized wares accounting for 14.5% and grog-tempered storage jars for 13%. Colour-coated wares, more typical of the later phases of the industry, are not quite as prolific at around 8%, with whitewares accounting for 9%.

Vessel types

The vessel repertoire is generally quite limited being dominated by coarseware jar forms. Jars overall account for 51% of the forms by eve and storage jars for about 11% of this. Tablewares are relatively sparse with examples of bowls and dishes in samian, a single Moselle beaker sherd and various bowls and beakers in Oxfordshire colour-coated wares. The identifiable samian forms are all later products of the industry dating to the later 2nd-3rd centuries and include Dragendorff forms 31, 33 and 37, and a bowl Curle type 11. Bowls/dishes overall account for 21% of the assemblage. Amongst the rarer types is a Young¹⁰ P24 type bowl in a colour-coated ware and a grey ware dish Young type R48, dating to the 3rd-4th centuries. Other Oxfordshire bowls include Young types O42, R43, R56, C51, C84, W54 and W57. Mortaria are surprisingly well represented making up 15.5% of the eve total. Most of these are Oxfordshire whitewares Young forms M8, M17, M18 and M22, with a small number of colour-coated (C100), a white-slipped example and a single samian vessel (Drag 45). Beakers (8.5%) and jugs/flagons (4%) account for the remaining eves.

General discussion

Three phases of Roman activity have been ascribed to the site on the basis of the stratigraphic and pottery evidence. Phase 2, broadly dating to the 3rd century, yielded a total 226 sherds of pottery, weighing 3.231 kg. Most of these wares came from ditches 102 and 103 with lesser quantities from ditches 106, 111, 114 and 115. Most of the wares suggest a 3rd-century date range although overall the number of featured sherds is remarkably low. Eleven sherds of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware are present, which can only date to the second half of the 3rd century or later. A small number of sherds of Midlands shelly ware of later 4th-century date (after *c.* AD 360/70) were recovered from ditches 102 and 106, although these ditches have been assigned by stratigraphy to Phase 2. The sherds would appear to be intrusive, as the ditches lay directly below the track (100) and the weight of this will have compacted the soil horizon (120) into their upper fills.

The Phase 3 soils sealing the Phase 2 features produced a larger group of material comprising some 590 sherds (5.595 kg). This pottery is noticeably less well preserved with a slightly lower average sherd size compared to the Phase 2 material, but largely reflecting the same repertoire of fabrics. The group also contains a much higher incidence of identifiable forms and an apparently wider chronological spread with a higher proportion of later wares dating to the 4th century. Several sherds more typical of the 1st to 2nd century are present in these layers, for example, bowl forms Young O42 and R56, some samian and a handmade grog-tempered ware indicating the likelihood of earlier Roman activity in the vicinity. Amongst the later wares, Oxfordshire colour-coated wares account for 9% by count of the Phase 3 assemblage compared to 5% in Phase 2. Several mortaria are present including Young forms C100, M17, M18 and M22. The Phase 2 layers also contain a higher proportion of Dorset black-burnished wares (DOR BB1). These appear to be largely 3rd-century types and a general absence of 4th-century flanged bowls and late jars could imply that supplies of DOR BB1 to this particular site ceased in the 4th century. A colour-coated bowl comparable to the parchment form Young P24 dating to the 4th century came from layer 251.

The trackway 100 (Phase 4) produced a small group of 11 sherds including a 3rd-century white ware mortaria Young type M17 and a burnt colour-coated bowl, possible Young C51, of late 3rd- to 4th-century date. The associated ditches 101, 118 yielded small groups of later 3rd- to 4th-century material. Gully 117 contained just six sherds including one late 4th-century shelly ware.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

The pottery represents a relatively small sample of wares largely dating to the later Roman period. The general paucity of imports on the site, both continental and regional, is suggestive of an essentially rural, lower status site. The preponderance of storage jar sherds is also more typical of a rural site and is perhaps reflective of the agricultural nature of the settlement. Contemporary late Roman rural settlements from other parts of Oxfordshire similarly show a low proportion of fine and specialist traded wares, the norm ranging around 11-16% of the total assemblage by sherd count.¹¹ The Stowford Road assemblage at around 12% is entirely consistent with the patterns beginning to emerge elsewhere.

ANIMAL BONE by SHEILA HAMILTON-DYER

Species identifications were made using the author's modern comparative collections. Some bones were identified only to the level of cattle/horse-sized and sheep/pig-sized. Fragments, which could not be assigned even to this level, have been recorded as mammalian only. Sheep and goat were separated using the methods of Boessneck¹² and Payne.¹³ Recently broken bones were joined where possible and have been counted as single fragments. Withers heights are based on factors recommended by von den Driesch and Boessneck.¹⁴ The archive includes metrical and other data not presented in the text.

In total 226 individual bones were recovered. Many could be identified to species and anatomy. Horse, cattle, sheep and pig were identified. All of the ovicaprid bones that could be distinguished to species were of sheep. A summary of the distribution of taxa is given in Table 3. The bones of sheep are numerically the most frequent at 67 bones, but this is largely due to the presence of dumps of sheep bones in ditch 115 and pit 421. Excluding these the number of sheep bones is reduced to 17. Cattle are frequent at 26 bones and are present in the same number of contexts as bones of sheep. As cattle bones represent much larger carcasses, beef would have contributed a greater proportion of meat than the more numerous sheep.

TABLE 3. DISTRIBUTION OF ANIMAL BONE TAXA BY PHASE AND CONTEXT TYPE

Phase	Type		Horse	Cattle	Sheep /goat	Pig	Cattle- size	Sheep- size	Mammal	Total
2	pits	5 contexts	-	-	12	-	-	24	1	37
2	ditches	14 contexts	4	8	43	3	14	26	-	26
2	beam slot	1 context	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
2?	ditches	2 contexts	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	3
3	layers	13 contexts	2	17	12	1	29	11	15	87
4a	ditches	3 contexts	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	3
		Total	7	26	67	4	45	61	16	226
		Percent	3.1	11.5	29.6	1.8	19.9	27	7.1	
		<i>% cattle, sheep, pig</i>		26.8	69.1	4.1				

The bones from pit 421 represent two animals, an adult sheep and a lamb no more than a few weeks old. The lamb is represented by the left foreleg and part of the thorax, while the adult consists of most of the right foreleg and chest together with isolated fragments of jaw and skull. The radius of this animal was recovered complete and an estimate of withers height is calculated as 0.58 m., a small animal typical of the period. It is not clear whether both skeletons were partial burials, or complete but not recovered.

The slot through ditch 115 also produced partial skeletons of at least four sheep. The youngest of these was a neonate, two were fully mature adults, and one was full grown but with some bones not yet fused. None of the skeletons was complete but all parts of the body are represented. Unfortunately, none of the fused bones was recovered complete and few measurements were available. A pair of jaws was recovered. The tooth

¹¹ P.M. Booth, *Asthall, Oxfordshire: Excavations in a Roman Small Town* (1997).

¹² J. Boessneck, 'Osteological Differences between Sheep (*Ovis aries* Linné) and Goat (*Capra hircus* Linné)', in D. Brothwell and E.S. Higgs, *Science in Archaeology* (1969), 331-58.

¹³ S. Payne, 'Morphological Distinctions between the Mandibular Teeth of young sheep, *Ovis*, and goats, *Capra*', *Jnl. of Archaeol. Sci.* 12 (1985), 139-47.

¹⁴ A. von den Driesch and J. Boessneck, *Kritische Anmerkungen zur Widerristhöhenberechnung aus Längenmaßen vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Tierknochen* (Säugetierkundliche Mitteilungen 22, 1974), 325-48.

wear indicates that this particular animal was fully adult, though not aged, with all the molar teeth in wear and was probably about three to four years old. None of the bones showed butchery evidence and, with the presence of the neonate, these remains and those in the pit could represent lambing casualties.

Although most of the cattle bones could not be measured they gave the appearance of substantial beasts. Cattle bones from Roman sites in southern England are often of larger animals than the preceding Iron Age. Some of the cattle bones exhibit butchery marks. These were clean chops made with a heavy bladed implement. Such marks are often found on Roman material but are rare at native settlements.

One of the seven horse bones was a complete radius. This gives an estimated withers height of 1.458 m. This is a good size for the period, prehistoric and early historic horses are frequently of small pony size.

Several large faunal assemblages of Roman date have been published from the Abingdon area¹⁵ but there is no information for the rural area on the north-east of Oxford itself. This is not a large collection of bone but, unlike the excavation at 102 Bayswater Road,¹⁶ the remains are undisturbed and have been well preserved by later hillwash. Animal bone discovered during building works in the 1940s¹⁷ was not systematically recorded. This sample, though small, gives an indication of animal exploitation at this roadside settlement. Meat was probably mostly supplied by beef from good-sized animals. Sheep are much in evidence and there is evidence of local breeding. Horses, one of relatively large size, are present and there is a little evidence of pig. Gnawing on some bones gives indirect evidence of dog.

CARBONISED PLANT REMAINS by MARK ROBINSON

Twenty samples averaging 10 litres were taken from 20 contexts. Charred plant remains are almost entirely absent from the flots. The only seeds observed were single grains of *Triticum* sp. (wheat), *Hordeum* sp. (barley) and indeterminate cereal from context 260 and a fragment of possible *Pomoideae* (hawthorn etc.) charcoal from context 258. Both these contexts are within soil horizon 120.

COIN by PAUL CANNON

A single coin was recovered from the topsoil of Trench 1 during the evaluation. This is an AE 4, Constantius II or Constans. Rev: (VICTORIAE DD AVGG Q NN). Mint mark = Arles. It is dated to AD 341-346.

METALWORK by NICOLA POWELL

Twenty-three pieces of metalwork were recovered, of which 22 are of iron. All are in very poor condition and show severe corrosion, making identification difficult. Iron nails numerically dominate the assemblage. Fragments from ditch 101 may be the remains of an iron dish or disc. What may be pieces of iron strapping or binding were recovered from layer 120 (252). One item, from layer 120 (260), appears from its X-ray to be the remains of a lift key.¹⁸ It is L-shaped with a rectangular section and appears to have a rolled terminal but with a broken ward.

A piece of lead dross or spill was recovered from layer 120 (258). It has striations on the uppermost surface, suggesting another object or material was pressed against it as the spill hardened.

IRON SLAG by CHRIS SALTER

The majority of the material by weight was either hearth bottoms (0.48 kg) or fragments of hearth bottoms (0.39 kg) (Table 4). The five more-or-less complete hearth bottoms present were small; the largest weighed 0.17 kg and the smallest 0.05 kg. In addition to the dense smithing slag, there was a small amount (0.09 kg) of less dense material produced by reaction of smithing slag and the fusion products of the hearth lining.

The material is consistent with simple black-smithing activity. This is typical of the background spread of material that is found around many Iron Age and Roman rural settlements in Lowland Britain.

¹⁵ B. Wilson, J. Hamilton, D. Bramwell and P. Armitage, 'The Animal Bones', in M. Parrington, *The Excavation of an Iron Age Settlement, Bronze Age Ring-ditches and Roman Features at Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon, Oxfordshire 1974-1976* (CBA Res. Rep. 28, 1978), 110-39.

¹⁶ Roberts, op. cit. note 3.

¹⁷ Anon, *Oxoniensia*, xiii (1948), 67, note 5; Anon, *Oxoniensia*, xiv (1949), 76, note 9; Anon, *Oxoniensia*, xvii (1952-3), 222.

¹⁸ Cf. C. Skinner, 'Iron Objects', in R.J. Williams, *Bancroft: A Late Bronze Age/Iron Age Settlement, Roman Villa and Temple/Mausoleum* (1994), 322-47: fig. 157, no. 194.

TABLE 4. WEIGHT OF METAL-WORKING DEBRIS BY CONTEXT

<i>Context</i>	<i>Hearth bottom</i>	<i>Hearth bottom fragments</i>	<i>Slag-lining reaction product</i>
251		40.5	
260	229.0		79.6
276		66.0	
482		25.5	
489	84.8	92.2	10.2
498	168.0		
583		162.0	

STONE by DAVID WILLIAMS

A fairly large slab (1.261 kg) of Corallian ragstone from pit 347 (498) is probably from a local source around Oxford. It is smooth on one surface and may well have been used as a building stone, perhaps as rubble walling.¹⁹

FLINT by STEVE FORD

A single struck flint was recovered from gully 103. This broken flake can only be broadly dated 'prehistoric'.

OTHER FINDS by JO PINE

Twenty-four fragments of brick and tile were recovered from four contexts; gully 103 (61), ditch 5 (63), and layers 59 and 260 (both part of 120). They are too small and fragmented to identify to type. Three small fragments of fired clay came from layer 260 and pit 333. These are featureless fragments and do not bear wattle marks. A single fragment of oyster shell weighing 4 g. was recovered from pit 243 and a fragment of Roman yellow/green glass came from ditch 101.

DISCUSSION

This excavation has produced evidence of Roman activity that began sometime in the 3rd century AD and continued, with a possible agricultural episode, until at least the late 4th and possibly early 5th century. Pottery of Iron Age and early Roman (1st- to 2nd-century) date was also recovered and probably indicates settlement of this period somewhere in the near vicinity.

The earliest deposits (Phase 2) belong to the 3rd century and, apparently, mostly the later 3rd century (Fig. 3). Several features are less well dated but, as the majority were sealed beneath a buried soil (120), there appears to be a strong argument that all of the Phase 2 deposits are of this date. The features uncovered are those expected of an occupation site.

The extent of the occupation has not been determined. The evaluation trenches beyond the excavated area revealed additional deposits, including a probable stone-footed building (Fig. 2), that are likely to belong to this phase of occupation. The numerous entries for this area in the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record (Fig. 1) show that the Stowford Road site is only a small part of a much wider area of activity in the region of Bayswater Hill. What is rather less clear, especially with regard to detailed chronology, is if this wide spread of evidence is indicative of a large, sprawling, 3rd-century settlement, or is a product of

¹⁹ W.J. Arkell, *Oxford Stone* (1947).

settlement shift over several centuries. The detailed evidence afforded by this excavation has shown that the occupation here lasted a relatively short time in the 3rd century and was abandoned and ploughed-over in the 4th century. The persistent presence of 1st-/2nd- and 4th-century pottery points to further occupation activity of these periods somewhere nearby, and this might sway the argument towards the notion of settlement shift.

The location of the excavated site adjacent to the projected line of the Roman Road may give some clue to its origins. It may originally have been founded as a posting station, *mutatio*, deliberately placed by the Roman administration in order to police the routeway, or it could be the product of the exploitation of travellers on the main road. The nature of the finds retrieved from features of this phase, mainly pottery, does, however, suggest an essentially rural low status site.

At some time in the late 3rd or early 4th century the Phase 2 settlement was abandoned and was overlain by an accumulation of soil, the deposition of which took place in the 4th century. These soils probably accumulated due to the combination of hillwash and ploughwash, with manuring being responsible for the pottery finds recovered.

Remodelling of the site took place in the later 4th century (Phase 4) when a road (100) crossed the site parallel to the Bayswater Road (Fig. 4), which is taken to be on or close to the course of the main Roman road. In its earliest form the road was no more than an unmetalled track, which became heavily rutted but was subsequently repaired and refurbished with gravel. A ditch (101) that was later recut (118) flanked the road.

The late date of this roadway (4th century) means it is inconceivable that it is part of the original Roman road between Alchester and Dorchester as both of these towns had early Roman origins.²⁰ A more plausible explanation is that it represents a local diversion due to the severe erosion that the steep slope and soft substrate caused. The erosive effects of heavy winter rain on the bare subsoil in this location were amply demonstrated in the short space of time that the excavation trench was open.

The excavation at Stowford Road has added to our knowledge of Roman settlement in the environs of Oxford and located an area of high archaeological potential. Further excavations in the Bayswater Hill area may enable the Stowford Road site to be placed in a wider archaeological landscape.

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²⁰ K. Rodwell, 'Alchester', in K. Rodwell (ed.), *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire* (1975); E. Sauer, 'Merton/Wendlebury, the Roman Army at Alchester', *S. Midlands Archaeol.* 29 (1999), 62; J. Munby and K. Rodwell, 'Dorchester', in Rodwell, *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire*.