

INVESTIGATIONS AT WARREN WOOD, LITTLE MARLOW, 2012–2014

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ARCHAEOLOGY IN MARLOW (AIM)

From March 2012 to June 2014, AIM conducted a further intrusive investigation within the outer of the two enclosures at Warren Wood, Project WW12, in order to locate artefacts that might help to date this part of the site. These investigations suggest the outer enclosure dates from the medieval period or later, although artefacts from earlier periods were identified.

INTRODUCTION

From February 2010 to November 2011 AIM conducted intrusive investigations (Project WW10: *Records* 53, 79–91) to try to date the two enclosures at Warren Wood. As a result of these investigations, much of the site was dated to the medieval period. In addition, Neolithic and Bronze/Iron Age artefacts were unearthed. As no accurate dates had yet been established for either enclosure, it was decided to excavate a trench across the bank and ditch in the western part of the outer enclosure, to try to date this part of the earthwork. AIM also intended to give opportunities to as many members and visitors as possible to explore the areas of archaeology they were interested in, so training was given in all aspects of the work during the investigation.

Warren Wood lies within the parish of Little Marlow, off Winchbottom Lane, at NGR SU 8715 8972 (Fig. 1). The earthwork is visible from the public footpath behind the AIM information board. The enclosures are on private land and permission must be obtained from the landowners, A & R Mash, in order to visit them.

Situated on the chalk hills of the Chilterns, c.100m above sea level, the inner enclosure of the earthwork is c.50m in diameter and the outer enclosure measures c.75m in diameter. The earthwork (Fig. 2) is constructed on a plateau of glacial sand and gravel, which overlies the chalk bedrock. There is a good sprinkling of trees on the site. Beech, sessile oak, ash and holly predominate, along with a liberal covering of brambles, ferns and bluebells.

HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND *by Andy Ford*

This is covered in detail in the previous article. In summary, it is likely that the area of the site was wooded in the medieval period. Warren Wood is first named on the First Edition Ordnance Survey sheet published in 1870, and has appeared on all subsequent editions. Prior to AIM's 2010–11 investigations, work on the site was carried out in 1975 by David Wilson, a member of Maidenhead Archaeological & Historical Society, and Roger Carter, and by Arthur Boarder, a local amateur archaeologist, in 1978.

The work undertaken by AIM has expanded upon these early investigations, Pike's comprehensive study of earthwork enclosures in the Chilterns (Pike 1995), and subsequent investigations of a number of sites such as Bray's Wood, The Lee (Secker 2005). Pike's study identified a number of similar earthwork enclosures in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns. These enclosures are relatively high in the Chilterns, are of similar sizes and are characterised by the existence of a bank and ditch. Although documentary evidence was lacking in relation to these sites, the existence of small quantities of medieval pottery at a number of them led to the conclusion that they could be interpreted as centres of small woodland settlements, possibly associated with woodland management, hunting or small-scale industrial activity. Building upon this additional body of work and searching the relevant Historic Environment Records for those counties that fall within the Chilterns, it is possible to compile a

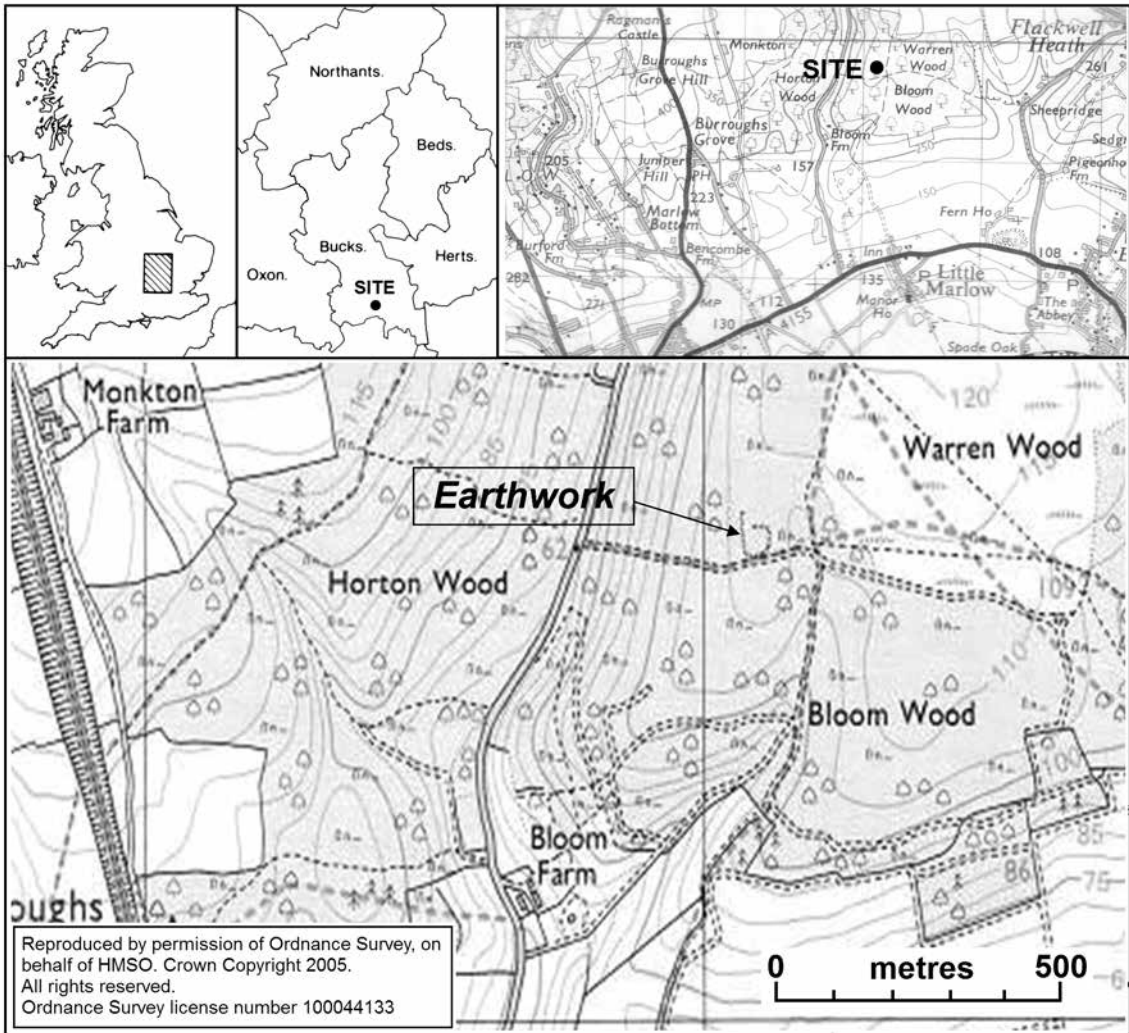


FIGURE 1 Warren Wood Enclosure, location and topography

list of sites that have all or most of the following common characteristics:

- Existence of complex earthwork enclosures with a bank and ditch
- Evidence of structural remains suggesting the existence of a farm or homestead
- Evidence of medieval activity or occupation at the site
- Existence of the site in ancient woodland
- Isolation of the site from primary medieval settlements.

The following sites, within or very close to the boundaries of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, meet all or most of these criteria:

<i>Site Name</i>	<i>Grid ref</i>
Warren Wood, Little Marlow	SU 8715 8972
Caversham Heath Golf Course	SU 695 757
Sadler's Wood, Lewknor	SU 734 962
Pomfrey Castle, Stokenchurch	SU 7350 9495
Warren Hill, Stokenchurch	SU 7355 9495
Highfield Shaw Wood, Stokenchurch	SU 7435 9535
Dell's Wood, Stokenchurch	SU 7877 9435

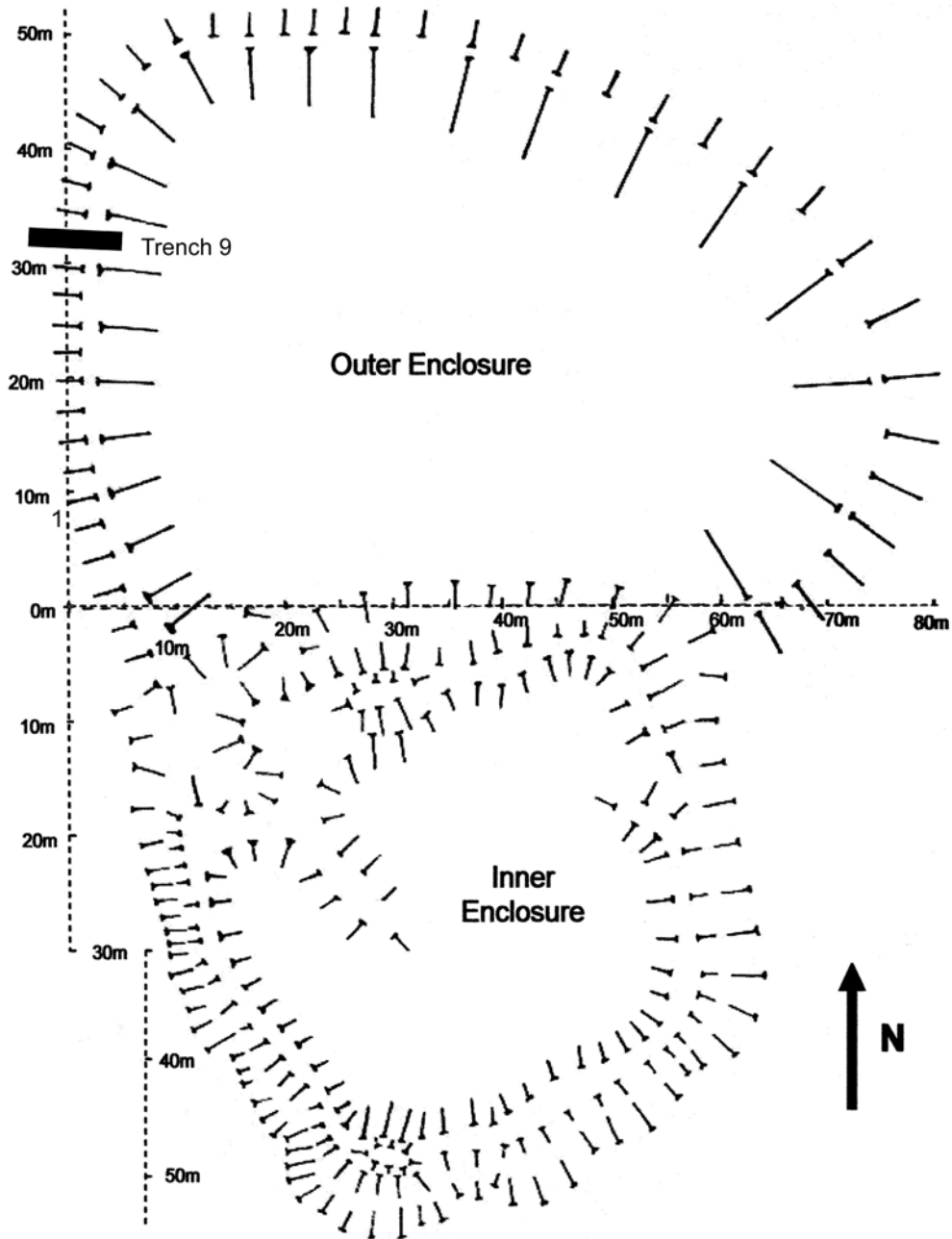


FIGURE 2 Warren Wood earthwork, showing location of trench

Fillington Wood, West Wycombe	SU 7985 9478
Park Wood, Bradenham	SU 8265 9815
Jenkin's Wood, Great Missenden	SP 9043 0221
Rook Wood, Great Missenden	SP 9087 0043
Bray's Wood, The Lee	SP 9152 0491
Redding Wick, Great Missenden	SP 9164 0206
Bray's Wood, Little Missenden	SP 9324 9971
Philipshill Wood, Chalfont St Peter	TQ 0118 9508
Marginia Wick, Sarratt, Herts	TL 035 005
Inions Farm, Caddington, S Beds	TL 071 202
Great Bramingham, Streatley, S Beds	TL 074 264
Great Revel End Farm, Redbourn, Herts	TL 085 113
Rectory Farm, Pirton, N Herts	TL 139 320

It is quite possible that this is an understatement of the number of sites in the Chilterns that meet these criteria. It is also unclear whether the proportionately larger number in Buckinghamshire represents the actual pattern of settlement or better recording of such sites in the relevant Historic Environment Record.

In addition to the relative complexity of the earthworks, the sites are either in ancient woodland or close to sites that have been identified as ancient woodland (Chilterns Conservation Board 2012). This suggests activity and occupation on the sites in the medieval period that is directly linked to management of the woodland.

Most of the evidence of medieval occupation is derived from the pottery finds at the sites. While it has not always been possible to date the pottery with accuracy, the evidence suggests a concentrated period of activity and occupation across a majority of these sites in the 13th century. A number of the sites are also connected by finds of 'M40 ware', pottery that was seemingly concentrated in the southern Chilterns (Hinton 1973).

Where there is archaeological evidence of structures, this suggests the existence of one or more medieval flint or flint and stone buildings, including farmsteads. While the evidence to date at Warren Wood indicates the presence of a modest structure, investigations elsewhere have suggested buildings of a higher status (Chambers 1973, Parker & Boarder 1991, Cookson 1979, Secker 2005).

The location of these settlements relative to the sites of the primary manor or village suggests they fall into the category of daughter hamlets or farms (Hepple & Doggett 1994). They are

therefore best interpreted as farms, deliberately established to help exploit the natural assets of the Chiltern woodland which, during the medieval period, would have been valuable economically in providing firewood as well as wood for kilns and hurdles. Pannage would also have been an occasionally valuable source of revenue for the local landowner as would the opportunities to sell timber from the estate (Hepple & Doggett 1994, Roden 1968, Cantor 1982, Preece 1990, Reed 1979, 89–103). It is also likely that a number of the sites were also associated with medieval deer parks that existed in the thirteenth century (Cookson 1979, Ford 2014).

This interpretation is also consistent with active use of these sites specifically in the thirteenth century. This was a period of significant population growth and economic expansion (Campbell 1990) and that, in turn, created unprecedented demand for wood, especially firewood. This demand was particularly pronounced from London, whose population grew to an estimated 80,000 by 1300 (Preece 1987, Keene 1989, Galloway, Keene & Murphy 1996). Estates in the Chilterns, particularly the south Chilterns, were ideally positioned to take advantage of this demand, given the existing quantities of the natural resource locally, their proximity to the capital and the ease of transport afforded by the river Thames. There are numerous contemporary documentary references that demonstrate the importance of this trade throughout the century. In 1218, for example, 14,000 bundles of firewood were sent from West Wycombe to Marlow and then by boat to Southwark (Hepple & Doggett 1994). In 1299, Edward III purchased 2,500 faggots for Westminster to be conveyed by water from Henley (Preece 1987). This exploitation of the natural assets of the woodland is consistent with more local analysis of the documentary records possibly linked to individual sites, where this has been possible (Chambers 1973, Parker & Boarder 1991, Secker 2005).

Where there is evidence of abandonment of these sites, this largely suggests occupation ceasing during the 14th century. Again, this is consistent with the broader socio-economic context for the country at large. For a variety of reasons, there was a significant retrenchment in the economy in the early part of the 14th century, and a series of poor harvests that left the population ill-equipped to cope with extreme events, the most significant

being the impact of the Black Death in 1348–49 (Campbell 1990). There was no longer any great demand for firewood from the Chilterns, and presumably fewer resources available to provide it. The preservation of these sites is therefore probably a reflection of the limited economic potential offered by the Chiltern woods until the emergence, much later, of the furniture industry.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the investigation (designated WW12) was to locate more accurate dating evidence for the outer enclosure of the earthwork at Warren Wood. With the approval of the County Archaeologist, an east-west trench measuring 7 × 1m was laid out across the west side of the bank and ditch of the outer enclosure to see if the bank was a naturally occurring feature or a man-made construction, and to accurately date it (Fig. 2, Trench 9). The

trench was surveyed into the overall site plan using AIM's Total Station, and subdivided into one-metre squares (A-G), which were excavated and recorded individually (Fig. 3). The trench was subsequently extended by two metres to the east (squares A1, A2). The whole operation was undertaken as a training event to give AIM members an insight into archaeological surveying and excavation techniques.

RESULTS

In general terms, the soils encountered in the excavation varied little throughout the length of the trench (Fig. 4). Context 1 consisted of rich dark loam 4-7cm thick, overlying Context 2, a yellow-orange sandy soil 15-39cm thick, containing varying amounts of small stones and pebbles up to 5cm in diameter. Beneath Context 2, natural geology was encountered. Context 2 was at its deepest beneath the bank, showing that the feature



FIGURE 3 General view of trench

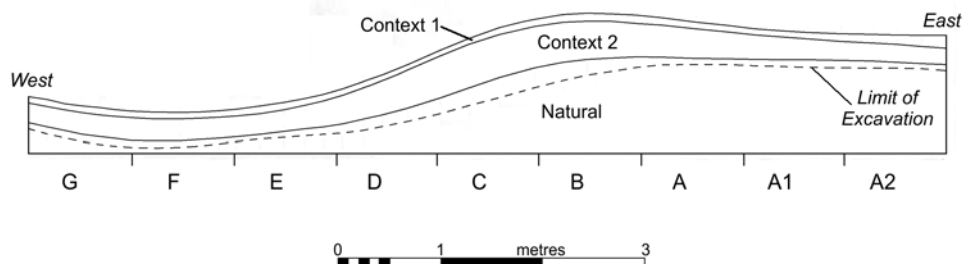


FIGURE 4 Section along trench

TABLE 1 Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Sq	Cntxt	F1		F2		F4		RBF1		RBF2		RBF3		MS3		Date
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
A2	2			4	17											LBA?
A	2			3	9									1	4	L11thC
B	2	7	27	1	2							3	8			RB?
C	2	3	30	1	3	4	12	1	6	2	9	1	1			RB?
D	2													4	20	12thC
F	1											1	2			RB??
G	1			1	5											LBA?
Total		10	57	10	36	4	12	1	6	2	9	3	11	5	24	

had most likely been created with upcast from the adjacent ditch. Layers in the ditch suggested natural silting, mostly with material washed down from the bank.

Finds from Context 1 were recovered principally from the enclosure ditch (Squares C, E, F, G) and were relatively few in number, comprising three metal fragments, probably nails (C), two pot boilers (E, G), a worked flint (G), and possible prehistoric and Roman pottery sherds (G and F respectively). In contrast, finds were more abundant in Context 2, being present throughout the trench, with the exception of Square A1. In this instance the highest concentration was in the makeup of the bank (Squares B and C). The pottery assemblage from Context 2 (48 sherds) comprised mainly sherds of probable Iron Age/Roman date, along with a few prehistoric and medieval fragments. Other finds included worked flints (9), pot boilers (25), charcoal fragments (8), roof tile fragments (7), metal items (2), probably nails, and a cattle femur.

In 2014, Phil Andrews of Wessex Archae-

ology visited the site to assess how the project was progressing. He advised that augering could resolve some uncertainty regarding identification of the natural geology, undertaking this work on a subsequent visit. The augering took place 30cms north of trench 9 opposite the junctions of Squares A and B, C and D, F and G and at 4 metres and 8 metres west of Square G.

On completion of the excavation, the trench was backfilled.

ARTEFACTS

During the excavation, as part of AIM's continuing programme of training events to increase volunteers' archaeological knowledge, flint specialist Hugo Anderson-Whymark visited the site. Following completion of the excavations, the pottery was reported on by Paul Blinkhorn, who prepared the pottery report for the 2010–11 excavation. Other artefacts were examined by staff at Wessex Archaeology.

The Pottery

by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprises 35 sherds with a total weight of 155g. It includes a mixture of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, Romano-British and medieval wares, all of which are heavily abraded and in most cases mixed together, indicating a high probability of residuality. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

Prehistoric

The following fabric types were noted:

F1: Sand and Flint. Moderate to dense sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5mm, most 0.2mm or less. Sparse angular white flint up to 1mm, some carbonized organic material. 10 sherds, 57g.

F2: Coarse flint. Moderate to dense angular white flint up to 2mm. Moderate to dense sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5mm, most 0.2mm or less, some carbonized organic material. 10 sherds, 36g.

F4: Shell. Sparse shell fragments up to 5mm, sparse sub-rounded quartz up to 0.5mm. Most of the calcareous inclusions had dissolved. 4 sherds, 12g.

The range of fabric types is typical of the Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age pottery of the region, and can be paralleled at a number of



FIGURE 5 Fragment of lug handle from prehistoric vessel

sites, such as George Street, Aylesbury (Allen & Dalwood 1983) and Oxford Road, Stone (Last 2001). The entire assemblage consisted of plain body sherds, other than a small fragment of a lug-handle from Sq. B context 2 (Fig. 19). A similar handle was noted at Stone (Last 2001, fig. 6.11), and while such features are well-known on middle Iron Age pottery in the region (*ibid.* 57), the fabric of the example from this site suggests it is earlier, and contemporary with the rest of the assemblage.

Romano-British

The Romano-British assemblage was recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (Marney 1989), as follows:

RBF1: Shelly Wares, 1st – 4th century. 1 sherd, 6g.

RBF2: Grog-tempered Wares, 1st – 4th century. 2 sherds, 9g.

RBF3: Sand-tempered Wares, 1st – 4th century. 3 sherds, 11g.

The entire Romano-British assemblage comprised plain bodysherds, and was all abraded to a greater or lesser degree. All the ware types are very common finds at sites of the period in the region.

Medieval

The medieval assemblage was recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (e.g. Mynard & Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat *et al.* 1994), as follows:

MS3: Medieval Grey Sandy Wares. Mid-11th to late 14th century. 5 sherds, 24g.

The MS3 fabric is very similar to that of the pottery from kiln-sites at Great Missenden (Ashworth 1983; Blinkhorn in press). One of the medieval sherds, from Sq. A context 2, is from the rim of a small jar: the others are joining fragments of a single handle from a glazed jug. Both are typical of the tradition, and also somewhat abraded.

Discussion

Perhaps the most striking feature of this pottery assemblage is that all the sherds are small and most are abraded, including the medieval wares, suggesting that all the pottery is probably residual.

The overall mean sherd weight for the whole group, c 4g, is very low.

These factors, coupled with the small assemblage size, makes any interpretation of the assemblage somewhat tentative, but the fact that the assemblage from the top of the bank, squares B and C, appears to be Romano-British, could suggest that the feature is of such a date. Given the extremely small and abraded nature of the prehistoric material, it seems most, if not all, is residual, although pottery of such a date was found in the inner enclosure; the possibility that some of the material is reliably stratified in an ancient ground-surface cannot be discounted, especially in the case of the material from squares A2 and G. The medieval material may suggest construction of the visible earth-work in this era, although it must be repeated that this interpretation should be regarded as very tentative, and further excavation is needed to clarify the chronology of the monument.

It may be worth noting that the 2010–11 excavations at Warren Wood recovered 188 sherds, weighing 1.662kg, of MS3 pottery (Medieval Grey Sandy Ware), compared with the 5 sherds weighing 24g unearthed during this investigation.

Bone

The only bone excavated was a large cattle femur. Wessex Archaeology suggested that, on the basis of its size, the bone was most likely to date from the medieval period.

Flint

The fact that 11 pieces of worked flint (69g) and 32 pieces of burnt flint (421g) were unearthed suggests human activity on the site in the Neolithic period, or before.

Metal

Apart from a relatively modern cartridge case, four small rusty items (18g) were located. They appear to be the remains of nails.

Charcoal

Only 8 pieces of charcoal (7g) were discovered: the quantity was not considered significant.

Tile

7 small pieces of roof tile were recovered: these were not considered significant.

DISCUSSION

Despite initial thoughts that the whole of the bank was man-made, it is obvious from the trench profile that a naturally occurring bank exists. However, it would appear that this bank was subsequently raised by around 1 metre by digging a shallow ditch or cutting into/scarping the slope and using the excavated material to enhance the bank. This material incorporated small quantities of finds from earlier periods, including pottery roof tile and worked flint. The fact that pottery sherds were worn, and also relatively small, indicates residuality. From the evidence gained, it may be that the natural bank was initially enhanced in prehistoric or Roman times, but it is considered more likely that raising took place in the medieval period.

ARCHIVE AND FUTURE WORK

All of the artefacts, the archives and records of the investigation are to be forwarded to Bucks Museum Resource Centre.

At least two test pits are to be opened in the inner enclosure in Warren Wood during 2014. This Project will be designated WW14. It is hoped that a building may be located and artefacts found that will more accurately date the inner enclosure. AIM's website may be consulted for details (www.archaeologyinmarlow.org.uk).

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