

**Land at Old Place Yard
Bicester
Oxfordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

Summary Report

for
Cherwell District Council


CA Project: 660397
CA Report: 15008

January 2015

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INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In December 2014, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of geotechnical test pits at Old Place Yard, Bicester, Oxfordshire (centred on NGR: SP 5840 2220) on behalf of Cherwell District Council.
- 1.2 An archaeologist monitored the machine excavation of five geotechnical test pits at the site (TP1–3 and 5–6 on the attached plan).

Archaeological background

- 1.3 The site was the previous subject of a trial-trench evaluation by Thames Valley Archaeological Services (TVAS 2013) and a watching brief by John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS 2014).
- 1.4 The site is situated entirely within the former footprint of St. Edburga's Priory (founded 1182–1185 and demolished soon after the Dissolution). The priory included a cloister, church, graveyard, refectory, kitchens and lodgings. The TVAS evaluation revealed the priory's wall foundations, floor bedding surfaces and other associated features, including two ovens. The JMHS watching brief identified the remains of the priory church walls and associated floor surfaces.

2. RESULTS

Test Pit 1

- 2.1 TP1 was excavated to a maximum depth of 2m below the present ground level (BGL) of 70.38m AOD. The earliest-encountered layer 102 comprised grey-brown silty sand with frequent limestone inclusions, and was revealed at a depth of 1.34m BGL. Layer 102 was overlain by a deposit of orange-brown sandy silt with frequent limestone inclusions 101, averaging c. 0.7m in thickness, which was sealed in turn by 0.64m of dark grey-brown clayey silt 100.

Test Pit 2

- 2.2 TP2 was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.4m BGL of 70.27m AOD. The earliest layer 204 encountered comprised grey-brown silty clay and was revealed from 1.8m

BGL. Layer 204 was overlain by 0.7m of dark grey-brown silty clay 203, which was sealed in turn by 0.7m of grey-brown clayey silt with frequent small stone and rubble inclusions 202. Deposit 202 was overlain by 0.6m of hardcore 201, and the sequence was sealed by 0.3m of grey-brown silty sand with frequent limestone rubble inclusions 200.

Test Pit 3

2.3 TP3 was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.8m BGL of 68.35m AOD. Natural substrate 306 was exposed at this depth, and comprised orange-brown silty clay. Cut into and flush with the surface of the natural were two parallel limestone-built wall footings running north-south. Wall 305 was 1.26m wide; wall 303 was not fully exposed, but was over 0.9m in width. Two undecorated pieces of narrow limestone column shaft were recovered from 303. They were of different diameters (c. 100mm and 110mm) and so were probably originally from separate free-standing small columns of likely late 12th/early 13th century date. These walls were separated by 0.66m, and the space between them was filled by a deposit of grey-brown clayey silt 304 which contained a small piece of decorated medieval floor tile and a fragment of a late medieval/early post-medieval clay peghole roof tile.

2.4 The limestone walls and deposit 304 were sealed by 0.19m of orange-brown silty sand with frequent limestone inclusions 302 containing post-medieval tile and pottery, which was overlain in turn by 0.23m of grey-brown clayey silt 301. The sequence was sealed by 0.44m of grey-brown silty clay, with brick and concrete inclusions 300.

Test Pit 5

2.5 TP5 was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.6m BGL. The only deposit exposed was dark grey-brown silty clay 500.

Test Pit 6

2.6 TP6 was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.3m BGL of 68.35m AOD. The earliest-encountered layer 602 comprised grey-brown sandy silt with frequent limestone inclusions and was exposed 1.1m BGL. Layer 602 was overlain by 0.75m of mid orange-brown clayey silt with frequent limestone inclusions 601, which was sealed in turn by 0.35m of grey-brown sandy silt with frequent small stone and rubble inclusions 600.

3. DISCUSSION

- 3.1 Limestone wall foundations were exposed in TP3 at a depth of 0.8m BGL. These walls had been demolished down to the level of the natural substrate. Although the small area in which they were exposed makes detailed interpretation of the walls difficult, it is probable that they are part of the former St. Edburga's Priory and part of the eastern claustral range.
- 3.2 The natural substrate was revealed in TP3 only. The remainder of the test pits contained only made ground deposits, indicating that the site has been subject to extensive ground disturbance. The limestone rubble present in some of the made ground layers is likely to have originated from the demolition of the priory.

4. REFERENCES

- JMHS (John Moore Heritage Services) 2014 *An Archaeological Watching Brief at St. Edburga's House, Old Place Yard, Bicester, Oxfordshire: Summary Report*
- TVAS (Thames Valley Archaeological Services) 2013 *Land off Old Place Yard, Bicester. Archaeological Evaluation*