



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

MERIDEN COURT, WALLINGFORD,

OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SU 6028 8920

*On behalf of
Beres Developments*

DECEMBER 2012

REPORT FOR Beres Developments
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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) during the excavation of foundation trenches and other groundwork associated with the construction of new housing. The ground had been seriously disturbed in parts to a depth of c. 0.50m by previous compaction levelling associated with previous use of the site as a car park and garages.

Three ditches and two pits were present on the site. Two ditches were possibly dated to the early/middle Saxon periods, while one pit was post-medieval, all other features were undated.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site was located to the north of St John's Road and west of Croft Road. This is west of the historic centre of the town of Wallingford (NGR SU 6028 8920). The underlying geology is First (Floodplain) Terrace Deposits (Geological Survey of Great Britain. Henley-on-Thames Sheet 254. Solid and Drift Geology 1:50,000) and the site lies at approximately 47m OD. The site was previously in use as garages.

1.2 Planning Background

South Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission under planning application number P08/W0562 for the demolition of existing garages and development of 9 two-bedroom houses. This was after refusal of an earlier application (P07/W0868). Due to the potential of the site to contain archaeological remains a condition was attached requiring that an archaeological watching brief be carried out during the period of construction works. This was in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan policies. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a *Brief* for the archaeological work. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* was prepared by JMHS. This outlined the method by which the watching brief would be carried out in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains of significance.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site was located 1000m west of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of The Saxon Town Walls (OX182; NGR SU 6034 8925). The walls are believed to have been constructed around c. 900AD. While the site was located outside the enclosed area of the town an archaeological watching brief carried out 70m to the east of the site recorded a series of medieval and early post-medieval pits suggesting settlement outside of the walls in the medieval period (County Historic Environment Record PRN 16094, NGR SU 6034 8924). Further medieval settlement has been recorded 120m to the north-west of the site in the form of linear ditches and medieval pottery and tile (PRN 10595, SU 6020 8930). A Saxon inhumation cemetery was recorded 170m to the south-east of the site which was excavated as a number of sites (PRN 7791, SU 6043 8907). A recent watching brief at 2 Norman Way 120m west failed to find anything of significance.

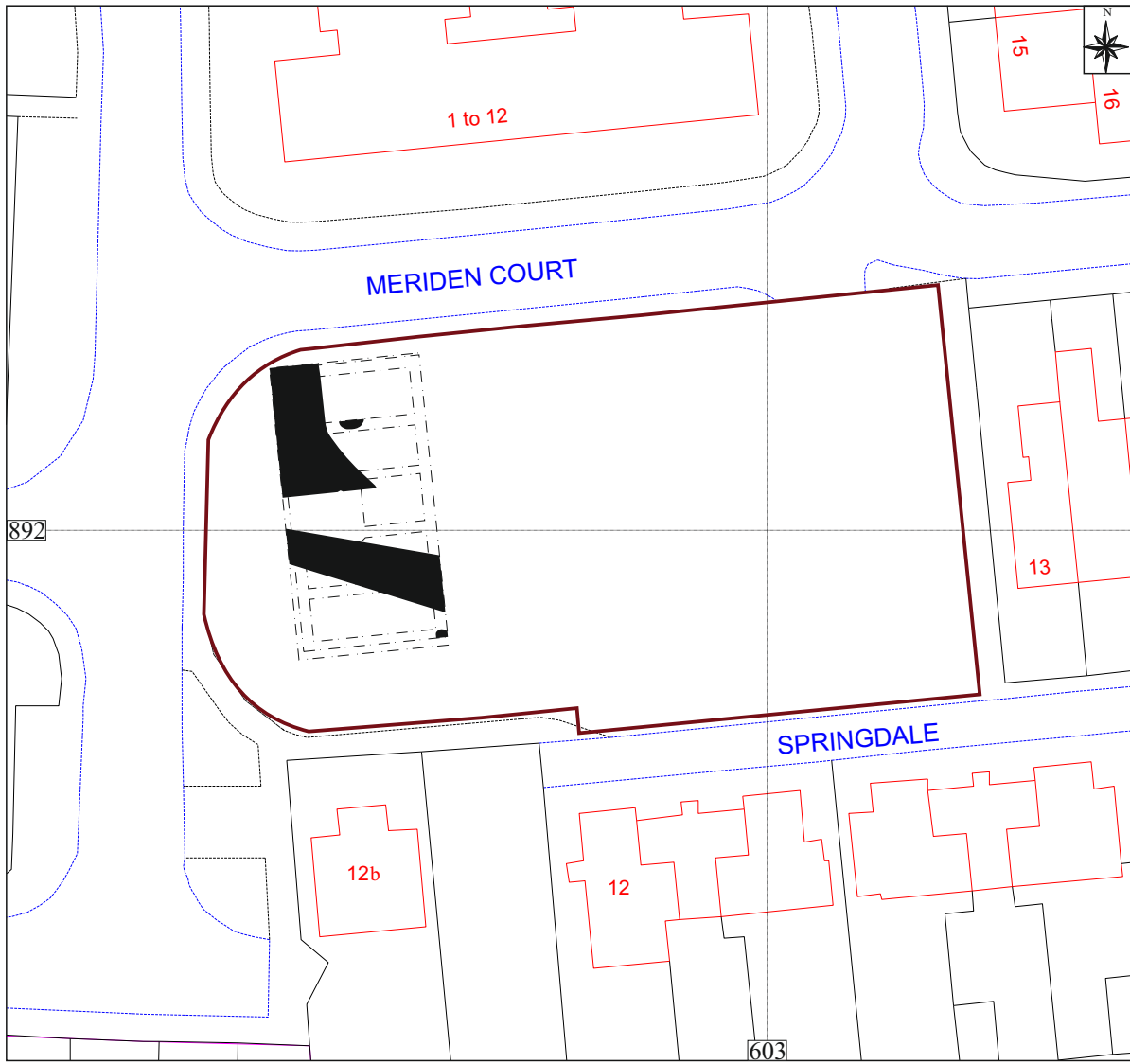
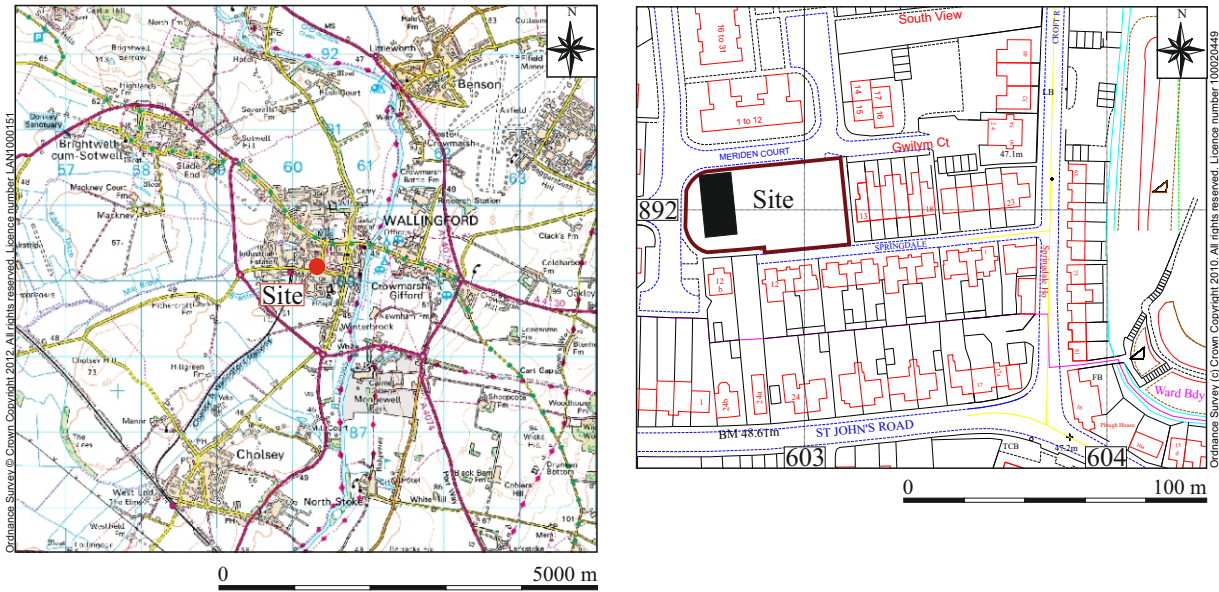


Figure 1. Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

In particular;

- To record any evidence of Saxon or medieval settlement known to exist in the area

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a *Brief* for the work which John Moore Heritage Services carried out to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with OCAS, on behalf of the local planning authority. The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (2008).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present on site during the excavation of foundation and service trenches and the stripping of overburden. Initial groundwork involved the clearing of the site to a level c. 0.20m below the current topsoil. A series of foundation trenches were then excavated.

Any archaeological features revealed were cleaned by hand and recorded in plan before being excavated. Any archaeological features were recorded by written, drawn and photographic record. All artefacts were collected and retained.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results

All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in () indicate feature fills or deposits of material.

The site was excavated to the natural underlying First (Floodplain) Terrace Deposits (027). These consisted of light brown angular gravels and coarse sand, with rare concentrations of white fine-grained sand. They extended throughout the site. The natural gravels were excavated to a thickness of 1.00m in the north, and 0.20m in the south.

Sealing the underlying gravels (027) was a layer of loose red brown silty sand buried soil layer (002). This varied widely in thickness across the site. In a band running north-south through the approximate centre of the site it was almost non-existent, it extended to a maximum depth of 0.50m in the north and was shallower in the south.

Cut into this layer (002) and the natural were at three substantial ditches. The first ditch was oriented north-northwest by south-southeast. The ditch was cut into the ploughsoil (002) at its northernmost extent, and into the natural (027) in the south. The monitored foundation trenches cut the ditch in three places. It was recorded as ditch cut 006, 018, and 024. This ditch was re-cut by a wider and deeper ditch of a similar shape which was recorded as ditch cut 004, 016 and 022. The ditches extended to a length of 8 metres and appeared to terminate around this point as they were not present beyond the cut caused by the removal of a modern brick sump. Ditch 006, 018 and 024 had a gradual break of top slope, inward sloping straight sides with a sharp break base, and were a 'U' shaped in profile. This ditch was 1m in depth and over 1m wide. This ditch was partially removed in the west by the re-cutting 004, 016 and 022. This later ditch had a similar profile and extended to a depth of 1.1m with a width of 3m. Ditch 006/018/024 contained a single fill (005), (017) and (023) respectively. This consisted of loosely compacted mid brown sandy silt with some clay content. Small angular and sub angular gravels occurred throughout the fill. The fills were slightly darker towards the base and 1m in thickness, suggestive of a primary fill but very difficult to full identify. Re-cut ditch 004/016/022 also contained a single fill, recorded as (003), (015) and (021) respectively. This was very similar to the original ditch fill, consisting of mid brown sandy silt with some clay content. A single highly abraded sherd of early/middle Saxon pottery was recovered from fill (021). It was often difficult to differentiate between the two fills, and the eastern part of re-cut ditch 004/ 016/022 was identified by ephemeral tip lines within the fill.

The third ditch was oriented northwest by southeast and was recorded as cut 012 and 026. The ditch was also visible in longitudinal section within the foundation trenches excavated during the monitored work. Ditch 012/026 consisted of a gradual break of top slope with inward sloping, straight sides to a sharp break of base slope with a concave base forming a rounded shallow 'V' shape. It was 10m in length, 2.5m in width and 0.9m in depth. It contained a single fill (011) and (025). This consisted of mid brown sandy silt with rare clayey concentrations. Small sub-angular and rounded stones occurred throughout the deposit that was 0.9m in thickness.

A pit 020 was located in the northwest of the site, cut into the natural gravels (027). This was observed in section only. Possible pit 020 had a sharp break of top slope with inward sloping concave sides with an imperceptible break of base slope and concave base, forming a semi-circular shape. It contained a single compacted fill, (019) 0.6m thick, consisting of dark brown silty sand with numerous rounded and sub-angular stones throughout. Some small concentrations of orange brown sand were also observed throughout the fill as sherds of post-medieval pottery recovered.

Pit 008 was located in the south of the site. This was only partially visible within the foundation trench, and the feature ran under the eastern and southern baulk. Feature 008 had a gradual break of top slope with slightly concave and inward sloping sides to a concave base. It contained a single fill (007) consisting of compact silty clay. This was red brown in colour and contained lots of charcoal, especially around the edges of the cut. Occasional angular and sub-angular stone was present throughout the fill. The fill was almost alluvial in consistency which suggests that it may be geological in origin, rather than a cut feature. The site is located approximately 400m from the Thames river and this could be the remnant of a flooding episode.

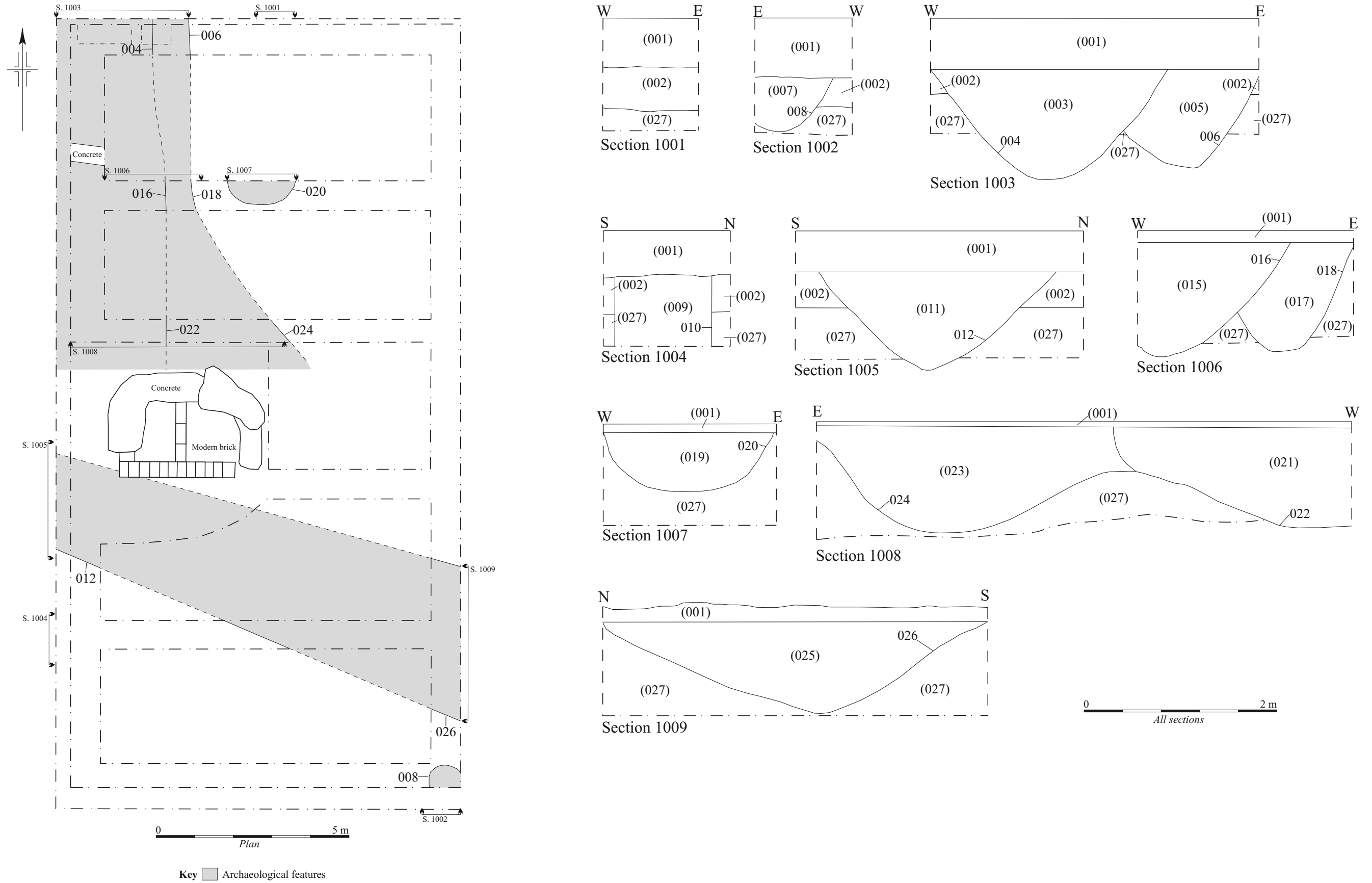


Figure 2. Site plan and sections

Due to the uneven thickness of the underlying natural, portions of the ditches appeared to have been cut into the natural gravels (027). The original landscape probably rose up towards the centre of the site. It is possible that the site was previously levelled, partially removing the original top and plough soils and the upper parts of the ditches in the approximate centre of the site. Both modern and Saxon features are in places sealed directly by the topsoil (001), which is further evidence that upper layers of the site have been removed previously.

Modern service trenches were also cut through layer (002) and into underlying natural first (floodplain) terrace deposits (027). One of these was partially recorded. Modern trench 010 had a sharp break of top slope with vertical straight sides. It was not excavated to its base. It contained a single fill (009) consisting of loosely compacted sandy silt, dark grey brown in colour with numerous charcoal pieces and flecking throughout c.2% and subangular stones. A similar trench containing concrete reinforcing for a pipe in its base was observed further to the north.

All of the features were sealed by a layer of made ground (001) consisting of highly compacted dark grey brown silt with some gravel and numerous sub-angular stones <2%. Numerous pieces of modern demolition/construction material were also present throughout the topsoil, including metal piping, plastic, glass, machine made brick and concrete pieces. The topsoil varied in thickness from <0.60m in the north to 0.50m in the south.

4.2 Reliability of Results

The watching brief was carried out in clement conditions with good co-operation from the contractor carrying out the groundworks and the results are felt to be representative.

5 FINDS

5.1 Saxon Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

A single sherd of pottery weighing 81g occurred in context (021). It is hand-built, and likely to be of early/middle Saxon (c AD450-850) date. The fabric is sandy, with moderate to dense fine angular quartz up to 0.1mm, with rare angular calcareous material up to 1mm, and sparse chaff voids up to 5mm long. It is typical of the tradition in the region, and can be paralleled at sites such as Eynsham Abbey (Blinkhorn 2003). The sherd is 18mm thick, which suggests that it comes from an exceptionally large vessel, as pots of the period usually have much thinner walls. The outer surface is somewhat abraded, but retains traces of burnishing, which is a not unusual occurrence of vessels of the period. The abrasion does suggest however that the sherd may be residual.

5.2 Post-Medieval Pottery

Three sherds of pottery were recovered from context (019), represented a single vessel and weighing 15g in total. 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*.

Two of the sherds conjoin and it is highly probable the third is also from the same flat ware vessel. The fabric consists of a well mixed red firing clay with sand inclusions. The interior of the vessel was finished with a brown slip, and the exterior was undecorated. The vessel survives to its full profile. It has an everted clubbed rim, with a flat base. This corresponds with fabric OXDR of the early post-medieval type series for Oxfordshire (Mellor 1994).

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

Cntxt	No	Wt	Oxfordshire early post-medieval pottery type series	Date
(019)	3	15	OXDR	c. 1550 +
Total	3	15		

5.3 Building materials

A single piece of tile was recovered from content (019), weighing 17g. This consists of a red firing clay body, with numerous sub-angular sand inclusions. The exterior is slightly reduced.

5.4 Animal Bone

Three pieces of animal bone were recovered from context (019), weighing 24g in total. No evidence of butchery was present.

5.5 Environmental Remains

No features were considered to warrant environmental sampling.

6 DISCUSSION

It was impossible to identify any relationship between ditch 004/016/022 and ditch 012/026 due to the modern disturbance caused by the construction of the brick sump near the centre of the site. This disturbance extended beyond the area of concrete and brick to the excavation area's edge.

Ditch 006/018/024 diverged away from ditch 004/016/022 and possibly even curved towards the southeast (Fig. 2). This ditch appears to have terminated before it reached the line of ditch 012/026.

The presence of early-middle Saxon pottery in one of the ditches does not conclusively date all of the ditches on the site, however, the ditches are similar in morphology and contain similar fills; therefore can be tentatively considered to be contemporary. Indeed the sherd is abraded and could be residual within a later ditch.

A possible Saxon pit was noted to the east of the site during a watching brief in 2011 (JMHS) for the installation of an electricity cable, indication further contemporary activity in the immediate area.

The site appears to have been levelled at some point, which partially or fully removed the underlying soil layer (002) in places where the underlying First (Floodplain) Terrace Deposits (027) were higher.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record

The project brief

Written Scheme of Investigation

The drawn records

The project report

The primary site records

The finds

The archive and finds are currently maintained by John Moore Heritage Services. The archive will be transferred to:

The Oxfordshire Museum Service under accession number 2010.35

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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