

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION ON LAND NORTH OF GLOUCESTER
STREET, FARINGDON, OXFORDSHIRE**

NGR 428660 195690

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On behalf of

Waitrose & Trustees of Faringdon House Estate

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted an archaeological evaluation in advance of the proposed construction of a new development (Planning Ref: GFA/21479) on land north of Gloucester Street, Faringdon, Oxfordshire (428660 195690). Four trenches, totalling approximately 110 metres in length were excavated to the underlying natural geology. The earliest feature was a ditch containing early-mid 11th century date pottery in its upper fill in Trench 2 orientated on approximate north-east south-west alignment sealed beneath subsoil and topsoil deposits. A shallow curvilinear gully on the same alignment in Trench 2 was undated but was possibly of similar date. A further ditch in the same trench on a more northerly alignment was later and of probable mid 16th – 17th century date. Six undated ditches within Trench 1 were all orientated on north-east south west alignments, considered to be either associated with medieval burgrave plots or drainage ditches of a medieval or post-medieval date. Two further undated shallow gullies were within Trench 3 on similar alignments. The latest features were a large pond of 17th or 18th century date and very modern features connected to a large water duct within Trench 4.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location and Geology (Figure 1)

The site is located on land north of Gloucester Street, Faringdon, Oxfordshire within a small Valley with a bowl-like depression in the centre (NGR: Site centre: 428660 195690), currently occupied by trees and dense vegetation. The site lies at *c.* 100m AOD and the underlying geology according to the British Geological Survey (253 1971) is Hazelbury Bryan Formation, comprising of sandstone, siltstone and mudstone. As a result of this trench evaluation the geology was seen to be yellow-orange clay silt with occasional gravels.

1.2 Planning Background

The site is proposed for the development of a supermarket (Planning Ref: GFA/21479). An archaeological desk based assessment of the site was prepared by CgMs Consulting Ltd (CgMs) in January 2011, which established that no designated or undesignated heritage assets of high significance were present within or adjacent to the site which would affect the proposed development. Due to site's location close to the historic core of Faringdon, the local planning authorities archaeological advisor, Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) advised that a programme of archaeological evaluation should be carried out (Design Brief 8th March 2011), in order to establish the presence/absence, extent, condition, character and date of any archaeological deposits within the area affected by invasive development.

Prior to any site works CgMs Consulting Ltd prepared a *Written Scheme of Investigation* for an archaeological evaluation (CgMs 2011) which proposed a method to satisfy the requirements of the Brief (OCC 2011), and was approved with the counties archaeological advisor Hugh Coddington.

1.3 Archaeological Background

For a full and detailed archaeological background to the site the desk based assessment (DBA) (CgMs 2011) should be consulted. The following is a summary of the archaeological

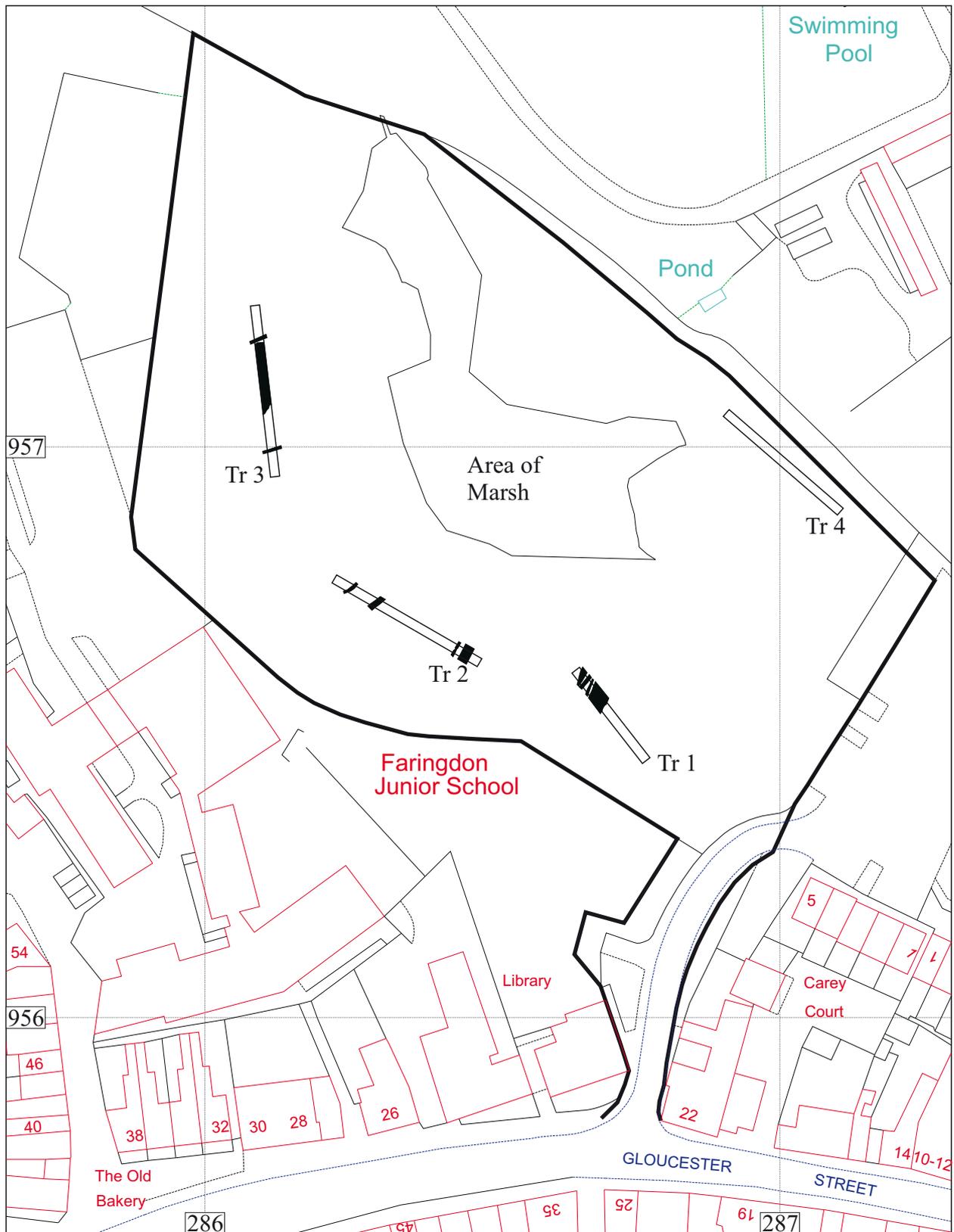


Figure 1. Site location

background extracted from the DBA and is gratefully acknowledged.

Archaeological find spots from the prehistoric period have been made within the local landscape but none close to the study site. The closest Roman occupation is at Coxwell Road 1km south of the site, but no settlement evidence has yet been found in Faringdon.

Faringdon has its origins in the Saxon period the place-name deriving from 'Feara's Dun' (Phillips n.d) or Far + ingdon, meaning 'fern-covered hill' and was built on an ancient road from Wantage which crossed the Thames at Radcote (VCH 1924, 389-499). The focus of the settlement would have been the Saxon church, understood to have been on the site of the current medieval All Saints Church, 150m west of the study site. Phillips (n.d) states that Faringdon became a place of some strategic value during the late 9th century and was fortified by King Alfred as a borough. Tradition claims that Alfred built a palace or royal residence at Faringdon which Phillips suggests was sited at the former Salutation Inn, south of Church Lane.

During the medieval period Faringdon becomes established as a small market town, built on irregular ground surrounding the Market Place. Faringdon was divided into two tithings at the end of the twelfth century (Phillips n.d, 12), the boundary being the brook that ran between Corn Market and Market Place, the route of which now forms the north eastern site boundary. The medieval burgages (a plot of narrow land running at right angles from a street frontage) appear to have been situated entirely on the east of the brook, in Port tithing (VCH 1924). In 1551 there were 51 and a half burgages in Port and six burgages in Westbrook.

During the English civil war, many of the houses in Faringdon may have perished during the siege of Faringdon House (NMR 225795, HER MOX9793) in 1646. Much of the old town was rebuilt during the later half of the 17th and early part of the 18th centuries.

The properties along Gloucester Street were developed during the 18th and 19th century. Roque's 1761 map of Berkshire (Figure 2) shows Gloucester Street frontage lined with properties. The map shows the study site situated within an enclosed area of grassland to the rear of the buildings along Gloucester Street.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims and objectives of the archaeological evaluation were

- To determine, as far as reasonably practicable, the presence/absence, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains.
- Make available the results of the evaluation

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the specification and Written Scheme of Investigation (CgMs Ltd

2011). The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1999) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The trenching sample required was achieved through the excavation of four trenches measuring three 30m long and one 20m long (1.6m wide), locations shown on Figure 1.

The trenches were excavated by a 360° type tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand where necessary prior to hand excavation of the potential archaeological deposits and features.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced using colour transparency, black and white and digital cameras. The trenches were backfilled after recording.

The work was monitored by the archaeological advisor to the Local Planning Authority Richard Oram and CgMs Consulting archaeologist Hannah Smalley AIFA.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 Excavation Results (Figure 2)

The trenches were set out across the general area of the proposed new development. The lowest deposit noted within the trenches consisted of natural clays and sands, which was reached between varying heights of 96.60m to 98.32m AOD.

4.2 Trench 1 (Figure 2)

Trench 1 was excavated to a length of 20m (1.6m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.60m (97.66m AOD) at the south eastern end and 0.73m (98.20m AOD) at the north western end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay. Six ditches were seen aligned approximately north-east south-west towards the north-eastern end of the trench.

Table 1: Summary of contexts within Trench 1

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Trench 1							
1/01	Deposit	Dark topsoil	0.20-0.30	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
1/02	Deposit	Orange brown subsoil	0.20-0.30m	Tr.	Tr.	None	/

1/03	Deposit	Light brown orange clay silt natural	/	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
1/04	Cut	Cut of Ditch	0.60	1.20	Tr.	/	/
1/05	Fill	Fill of 1/04	0.60	1.20	Tr.	None	/
1/06	Cut	Cut of Ditch	0.50	0.20	Tr.	/	/
1/07	Fill	Fill of 1/06	0.50	0.20	Tr.	None	/
1/08	Cut	Cut of Ditch	0.45m	0.25	Tr.	/	/
1/09	Fill	Fill of 1/08	0.45	0.25	Tr.	None	/
1/10	Cut	Cut of Ditch	1.30	0.20	Tr.	/	/
1/11	Fill	Fill of 1/10	1.30	0.20	Tr.	None	/
1/12	Cut	Cut of Ditch	1.50	0.70	Tr.	/	/
1/13	Fill	Fill of 1/12	1.50	0.70	Tr.	None	/
1/14	Cut	Cut of Ditch	1.40	0.70	Tr.	/	/
1/15	Fill	Fill of 1/14	1.40	0.70	Tr.	None	/

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest) (Fig 2; S: 1.1). The natural soft brown-orange clay silt with was seen at the base of the trench (1/03). Overlying this was *c.* 0.20m thick mid orange-brown clay silt subsoil (1/02) overlain by *c.* 0.20m thick dark black-brown silty clay topsoil (1/01).

Linear Features (all cut into (1/03) and sealed by (1/02))

Ditch 1/04 was north-east south-west aligned with concave sides and a rounded base (Fig. 2; S. 1.3) filled by soft mid grey-brown sandy silt (1/05) with no finds.

Ditch 1/14 was north-east south-west aligned with sharp concave sides and a rounded base. It was filled by light grey-brown clay silt (1/15) with no finds (Fig. 2; S. 1.3).

Ditch 1/12 was north-east south-west aligned across the trench and was probably cut on both sides by 1/04 & 1/14. It was filled by mid grey-brown clay silt with occasional limestone fragments (1/15) (Fig. 2; 1.3).

Ditch 1/08 was north-east south-west aligned *c.* 0.45m wide with concave sides filled by a soft mid brown sandy silt (1/09) with no finds (Fig. 2; S. 1.1)

Ditch 1/10 was parallel with 1/08 with gradual concave sides and a flat base, filled by soft mid grey-brown clay silt (1/11) with no finds (Fig. 2; S. 1.1).

Ditch 1/06 was *c.* 0.50m wide and orientated on a north-east south-west alignment with concave sides and a flat base. It was filled by soft mid brown sandy clay with charcoal fleck inclusions (1/07) (Fig. 2; S. 1.2).

Other features

A French drain was noted crossing the trench on an approximate north-east south-west orientation and a large tree hole was seen at the far eastern end of the trench.

4.3 Trench 2 (Figure 2)

Trench 2 was excavated to a length of 30m and to varying depths of between 0.52m (98.32m AOD) at the north western end and 0.41m (98.60m AOD) at the south eastern end of the trench. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural clay. Four ditches were orientated approximately north-east south-west. The general stratigraphic sequence of the trench consisted of the following (earliest to latest). The light brown-orange natural clay was seen at the base of the trench (2/03). Overlying this was *c.* 0.15m thick soft mid brown silt (2/02) subsoil and finally dark black-brown silty clay topsoil (1/01).

Table 2: Summary of contexts within Trench 2

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Findings	Date
Trench 2							
2/01	Deposit	Dark black brown silty clay	0.20	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
2/02	Deposit	Mid brown silty clay	0.20	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
2/03	Deposit	Light brownish orange clay silt	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
2/04	Cut	Cut of Ditch	1.0	1.80	Tr.		
2/05	Fill	Fill of 2/04	1.0	1.80	Tr.	Pot	Medieval
2/06	Cut	Cut of tree hole	/	/	/	/	/
2/07	Fill	Fill of tree hole	/	/	/	/	/
2/08	Cut	Cut of Ditch	0.12	0.52	Tr.	/	/
2/09	Fill	Fill of 2/08	0.12	0.52	Tr.	None	/
2/10	Cut	Cut of tree hole	/	/	/	/	/
2/11	Fill	Fill of tree hole	/	/	/	/	/
2/12	Cut	Cut of Ditch	0.20	1.0	Tr.	/	/
2/13	Fill	Fill of 2/12	0.20	1.0	Tr.	Pot	Medieval
2/14	Cut	Cut of curvilinear ditch	0.20	0.60	Tr.	/	/
2/15	Fill	Fill of 2/14	0.20	0.60	Tr.	None	/
2/16	Cut	Cut of Posthole	0.20	0.30	/	/	/
2/17	Fill	Fill of 2/16	0.20	0.30	/	None	/

Linear features

Ditch 2/04 was 1.80m wide and 1.0m deep with sharp concave sides and a roughly flat base (Fig. 2; S. 2.4). It was filled by dark grey-black silty clay (2/05) with a high frequency of charcoal flecks, one fragment of burnt clay/daub, 13 animal bones, occasional oyster shells, four iron nails and one sherd of probable mid 16th – 17th century pottery.

Close to the western edge of Ditch 2/04 was another linear feature 2/08 which had concave sides and flat base which more shallow near the centre of the trench and may therefore have been two separate ditch terminals (Fig. 2; S. 2.3).

Ditch 2/12 was orientated approximately north-east south-west, 1.60m wide and 0.20m deep with shallow concave sides and an almost flat base. It was filled by light grey-brown clay silt (2/13) with a high concentration of pottery sherds near its uppermost level dated to the early-mid 11th century medieval period (Fig. 2; S. 2.2).

Ditch 2/14 was curvilinear in shape and had gradually curving concave sides forming a gently rounded base. It was filled by light grey-brown clay silt (2/15) with occasional limestone fragments (Fig. 2; S. 2.1).

Other features

A posthole was seen at the base of Ditch 2/12 which had sub circular shape 0.30m in diameter and 0.20m deep with sharp concave sides. It was filled by mid grey silty clay with two limestone fragments thought to have been post packing.

4.4 Trench 3 (Figure 2)

This trench was excavated to a length of 30m (1.6m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.66m (98.16m AOD) at the south-eastern end and 0.55m (97.55m AOD) at the north western end. The general stratigraphic sequence consisted of the following (earliest to latest). The natural clay was observed at the base of the trench (3/03). This was overlain by soft mid grey-brown clay silt (3/02) subsoil and 0.20m thick black-brown silty clay topsoil (3/01).

Table 3: Summary of contexts within Trench 3

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Findings	Date
Trench 3							
3/01	Deposit	Dark blackish brown silty clay topsoil	0.20	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
3/02	Deposit	Mid grey brown clay silt subsoil	0.20	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
3/03	Deposit	Mid brown orange clay silt natural	/	Tr.	Tr.	None	/
3/04	Cut	Cut of Ditch	0.20	0.50	Tr.		/
3/05	Fill	Fill of 3/04	0.20	0.50	Tr.	None	/
3/06	Cut	Cut of Pond	0.30 (min)	Tr.	13.0	/	/
3/07	Fill	Fill of 3/06	0.30m (min)	Tr.	13.0	None retained	/
3/08	Cut	Cut of Ditch	0.10	0.40	Tr.	/	/
3/09	Fill	Fill of 3/08	0.10	0.40	Tr.	None	/

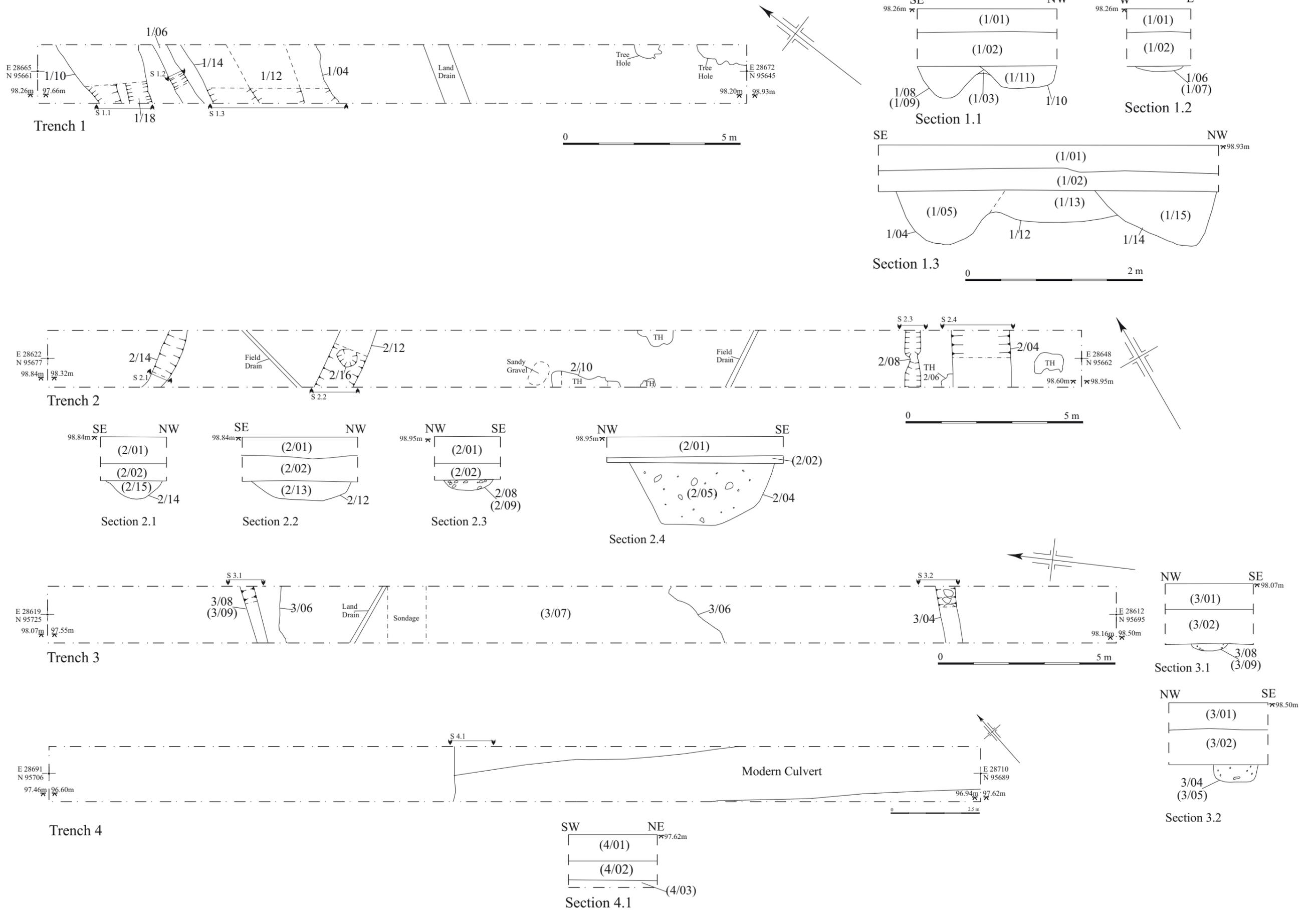


Figure 2. Trenches 1-4 plans and sections

Linear features

A ditch was seen at the southern end of the trench cutting natural clay and sealed by layer (3/02). This ditch 3/04 was 0.50m in width and 0.20m deep with concave sides and irregular base. It was filled by light grey brown clay silt (3/05) with no finds (Fig 2; S. 3.2).

At the northern end of the trench orientated on an approximate north-east south-west alignment was Ditch 3/08 which had shallow concave sides and was filled by light grey brown clay silt (3/09) with no finds (Fig. 2; S. 3.1).

Other features

A large pond or infilled water based garden feature 3/06 was seen near the centre of the trench, 13m in length and 0.30m minimum depth. It was filled by soft mid blue clay silt (3/07) which was mottled with patches of gravels and lighter coloured clays. Two sherds of 17th / 18th century pottery were seen within the fill of this feature (not retained).

4.5 Trench 4 (Figure 3)

This trench was excavated to a length of 30m (1.6m wide) and to varying depths of between 0.68m (96.94m AOD) at the south-eastern end and 0.86m (96.60m AOD) at the north western end. The general stratigraphic sequence consisted of the following (earliest to latest). The natural sterile grey sand was observed at the base of the trench (4/03). This was overlain by soft light grey silty clay (4/02) subsoil and 0.50m thick blackish brown silty clay topsoil (4/01) with many modern finds throughout.

Table 4: Summary of contexts within Trench 4

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Trench 4							
4/01	Deposit	Soft dark black topsoil	0.50	Tr.	Tr.	None retained	Modern
4/02	Deposit	Soft light grey silty clay	0.25	Tr.	Tr.	None retained	Modern
4/03	Deposit	Soft light cream grey sand natural	/	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
4/04	Cut	Cut of water culvert	/	1m	Tr.	/	/
4/05	Fill	Fill of 4/04	/	1m	Tr.	/	/

Linear Features

The cut for a modern water duct was seen running the length of the trench, which connected to a manhole located adjacent to south-eastern end of the trench. This feature was clearly modern and not archaeological.

4.6 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The excavation of the trenches took place in mainly favourable weather conditions.

5 FINDS

5.1 The Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 33 sherds with a total weight of 672g. Just two contexts produced pottery. One is of Saxo-Norman date, the other post-medieval. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD975-1350. 31 sherds, 616g.
OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 2 sherd, 56g.

All the Cotswolds-type Ware came from a single context, 2/13, suggesting a date of the early-mid 11th century. Rimsherds from four vessels were present, three of which were bowls and the other a jar. This is a somewhat unusual vessel occurrence pattern, as bowls in this fabric usually comprise only a small proportion, c 5-10%, of contemporary assemblages. It is possible therefore that this is evidence of a specialised industrial or domestic activity at the site, although with such a small assemblage, the vagaries of archaeological sampling can never be entirely discounted. The context also produced a small, very abraded sherd of OXDR. Given that the Saxo-Norman material from the context is all in very good condition (mean sherd weight = c 20g), with a number of cross-fitting and/or large sherds present, the OXDR is almost certainly intrusive.

The only other context to produce pottery was 2/05. Just a single sherd was present, a base-sherd from an internally-glazed OXDR vessel, probably of mid 16th – 17th century date.

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological evaluation confirmed the presence of archaeological features and finds dated to the medieval and post-medieval period. The aims and objectives set out at the start of the project were fulfilled and a confidence rating is high that the best possible results were achieved.

The depth of the overburden was as expected approximately 0.50m from the surface to the natural clay, except in Trench 4 where modern disturbance of the underground culvert had created deeper deposits containing modern waste.

The below ground archaeology in Trench 2 were the earliest dateable features identified at the site. Ditch 2/04 contained the most organic fill and Ditch 2/12 the most pottery sherds. However the former was dated to the post-medieval period while the latter was of early-mid 11th century. Although the presence of tree holes and root disturbance was fairly extensive across this general area of the site the archaeological features were well preserved.

The DBA (CgMs 2011) concluded that the study site lies beyond the medieval settlement of Faringdon and was likely to have remained an area of agricultural land, possibly meadow or pasture, as the area may have been subject to partial flooding from the adjacent brook. Although a low potential was projected for the study site, this evaluation has proved medieval activity was preserved across the southern area of the site.

Most of the features were mainly shallow in character with little or no finds. Ditch 2/12 contained a high percentage of pottery sherds, which was useful dating evidence not apparent within many other features across the site.

The similar alignment of the ditches, especially within Trench 1 showed evidence of re-cutting over a short period of time and may be the first evidence of medieval burgages at this location. Alternatively the ditches may have been drainage ditches associated with general agricultural activity during the medieval or post-medieval period. The close presence of a spring means the soil is poorly drained and ditches would have been necessary if this area had been intensively used for agriculture. The large ditch 2/04 was deep and contained an organic fill likely created from damp or waterlogged conditions.

The DBA (CgMs 2011) states that it is unclear whether part of the study site had formed part of the formal landscape grounds of the old Faringdon House (NMR 225795, HER MOX9793) during the post-medieval period. The large pond feature seen within Trench 3 may have been a garden feature associated with this property. It was common for garden landscapers to change the location of ponds and other garden features during the 18th and 19th centuries AD, which may be a reason for its backfilling. As the water feature is not seen recorded on any of the historic maps it must have been lost by 1761AD.

Conclusion

The medieval discoveries have potential importance at this site due to the lack of other medieval features or finds discovered during archaeological intrusion over the last 10 years (Cook et al. 2004; CA 2003; OA 1999; OA 2002 & OA 2005) close to the study site. However, at present positively identified medieval deposits are limited to the upper fill of a ditch feature. The site will be better understood with more archaeological fieldwork across areas of impact.

Soil stripping and excavation associated with the construction of the new retail store and related infrastructure will remove or damage archaeological deposits proved to exist across the southern half of the development site at shallow depths.

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Plate 1; Trench 1 – looking SE



Plate 2; Trench 2 looking NW



Plate 3; Trench 2- Feature 2/12



Plate 4; Trench 3 looking NE

