

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

THE VALE AND DOWNLAND MUSEUM,

19 CHURCH STREET,

WANTAGE, OXFORDSHIRE

(NGR SP 3970 8784)

On behalf of

The Vale and Downland Museum

November 2011

REPORT FOR The Vale and Downland Museum
19 Church Street
Wantage
Oxfordshire
OX12 8BL

PREPARED BY David Gilbert

ILLUSTRATION BY Eoin Fitzsimons

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ENQUIRES TO John Moore Heritage Services
Hill View
Woodperry Road
Beckley
Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ

Tel/Fax 01865 358300
Email: info@jmheritageservices.co.uk

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted a watching brief during the ground-work at The Vale and Downland Museum, Wantage. An undated ditch was located that appeared to run roughly parallel to Church Street.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located on the southern side of Church Street to the rear of the museum, in the centre of the historic settlement. The underlying geology is Upper Greensand.

1.2 Planning Background

The Vale of White Horse District Council has granted planning permission for a two storey rear extension of the museum, including some demolition and alterations (09/02312/FUL). A new application was submitted for similar (11/00203/FUL). Due to the potential presence of archaeological remains an archaeological watching brief was to be maintained during the groundworks. This was in line with PPS5 and Local Plan policies. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a *Brief* for such archaeological work. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* was prepared by John Moore Heritage Services. 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 exact location of the Anglo Saxon settlement is unclear but there is reason to believe that it was located in the area of the current Market Place and the Church of St Peter and Paul. It has been suggested that the church occupied the site of an earlier Minster Church. There was a royal residence at Wantage by the 9th century as the Anglo Saxon Chronicle records that it was the Alfred's birthplace (849) and in his will he bequeathed the town to his wife. Fitzwarren's manor house, on the west side of the Letcombe Brook, reputedly stood on the site of the Saxon palace. The manor remained in royal ownership until 1199 and in 1213 a fair was granted, although no written grant of market rights has been found, but a market may have been the reason for the town's prosperity in the twelfth century (Rodwell 1975).

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;

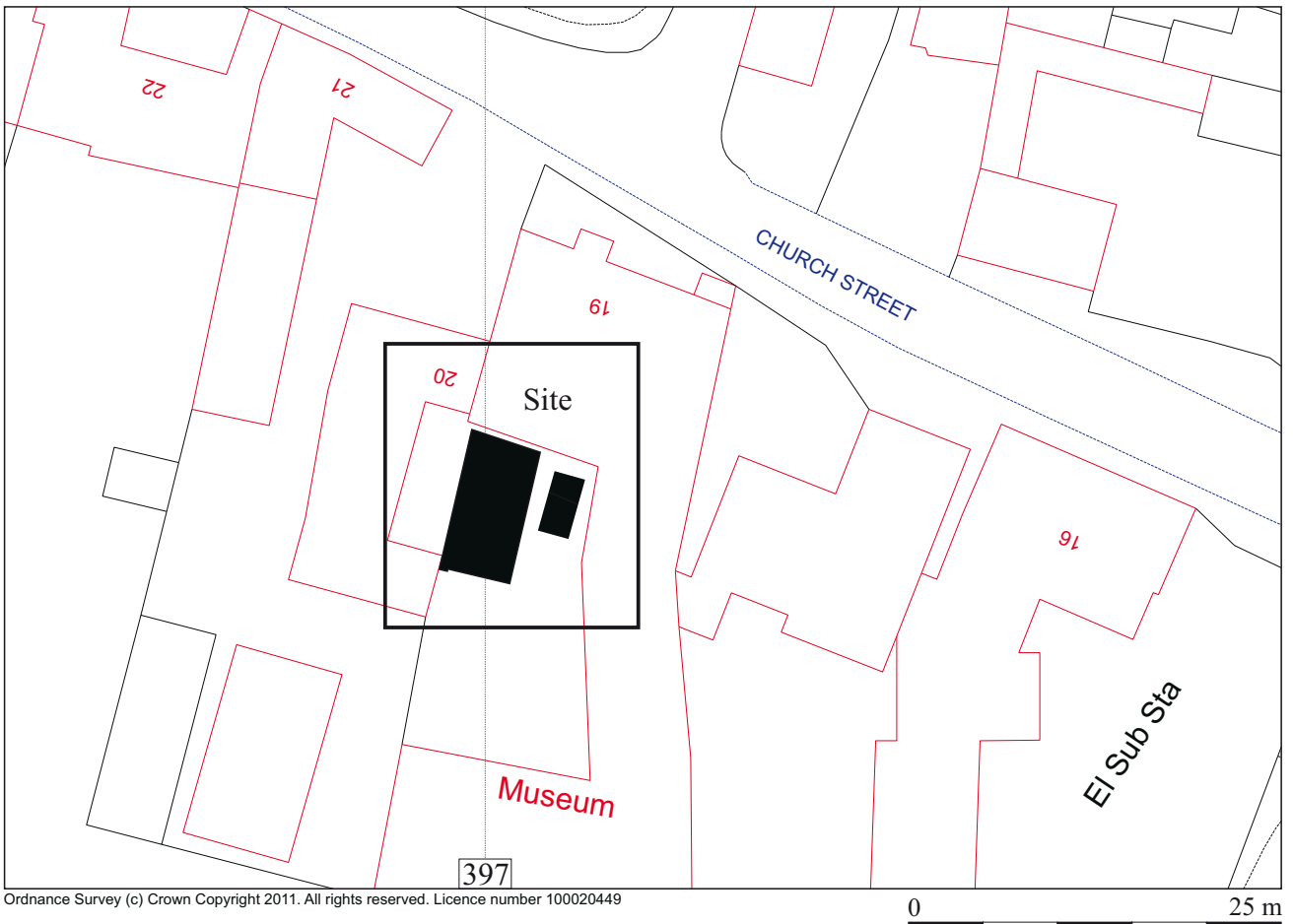
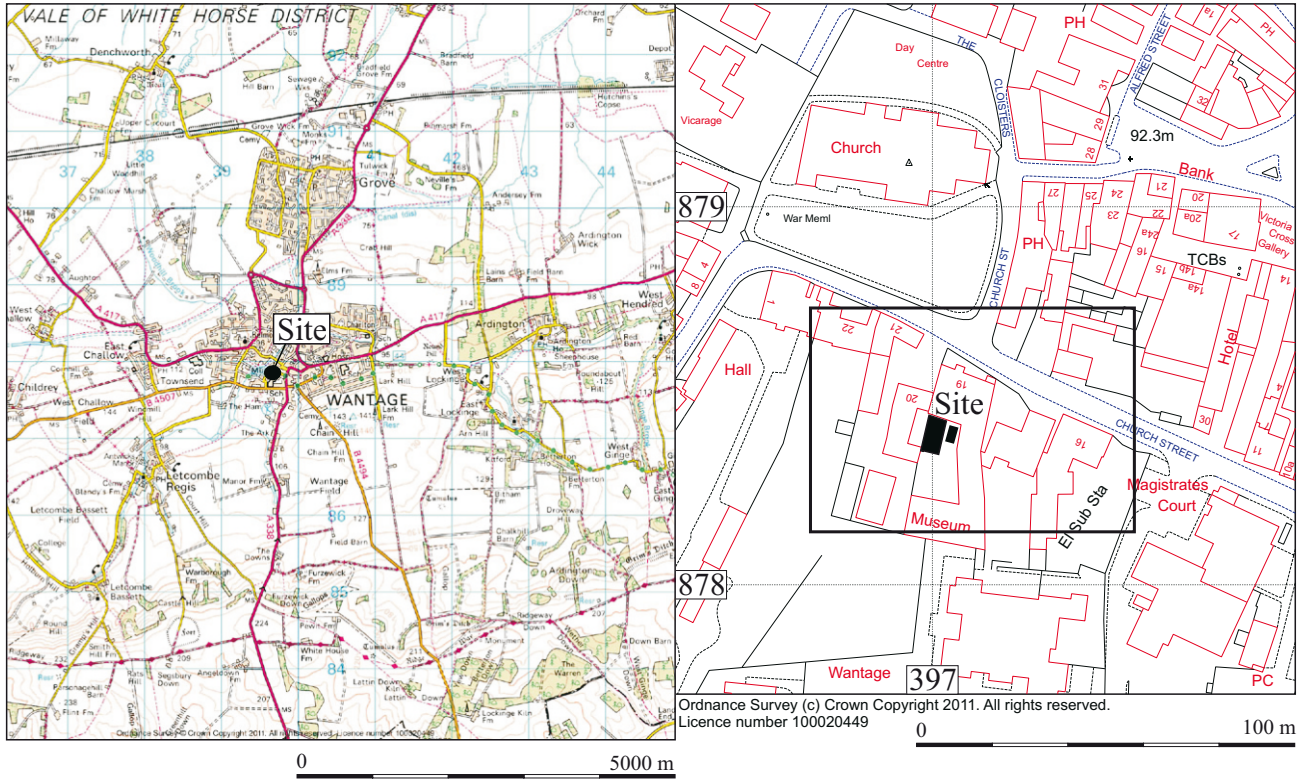


Figure 1. Site location

- To record any evidence of Roman and medieval settlement occupation of the town.

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. 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 below hard landscaping.

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.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results

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

The lowest geological horizon attained was the underlying natural Upper Greensand (3). This was seen towards the south of the area. Cut into this was a ditch 5 that was at least 1.6m wide and over 0.2m deep. This full extent was not seen and a large proportion of the feature was left *in situ*. The fill was a mid green-grey silt-clay (4) with sparse charcoal flecks and small animal bone fragments.

Sealing this was a layer of dark grey sandy-clay mottled with Greensand (2) containing numerous brick fragments and 19th century pottery sherds. This varied from 0.15m to 0.25m in thickness and was thicker towards the north. This deposit was far more noticeable and thicker towards the north closest to the building and is likely to be associated with recent building work. The area was criss-crossed with services, some cutting into this layer.

The uppermost layer was the modern paved surface and sand bedding for the slabs (1)

4.2 Reliability of Results

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

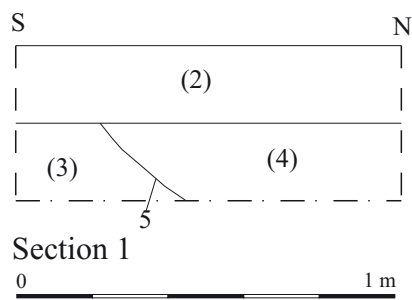
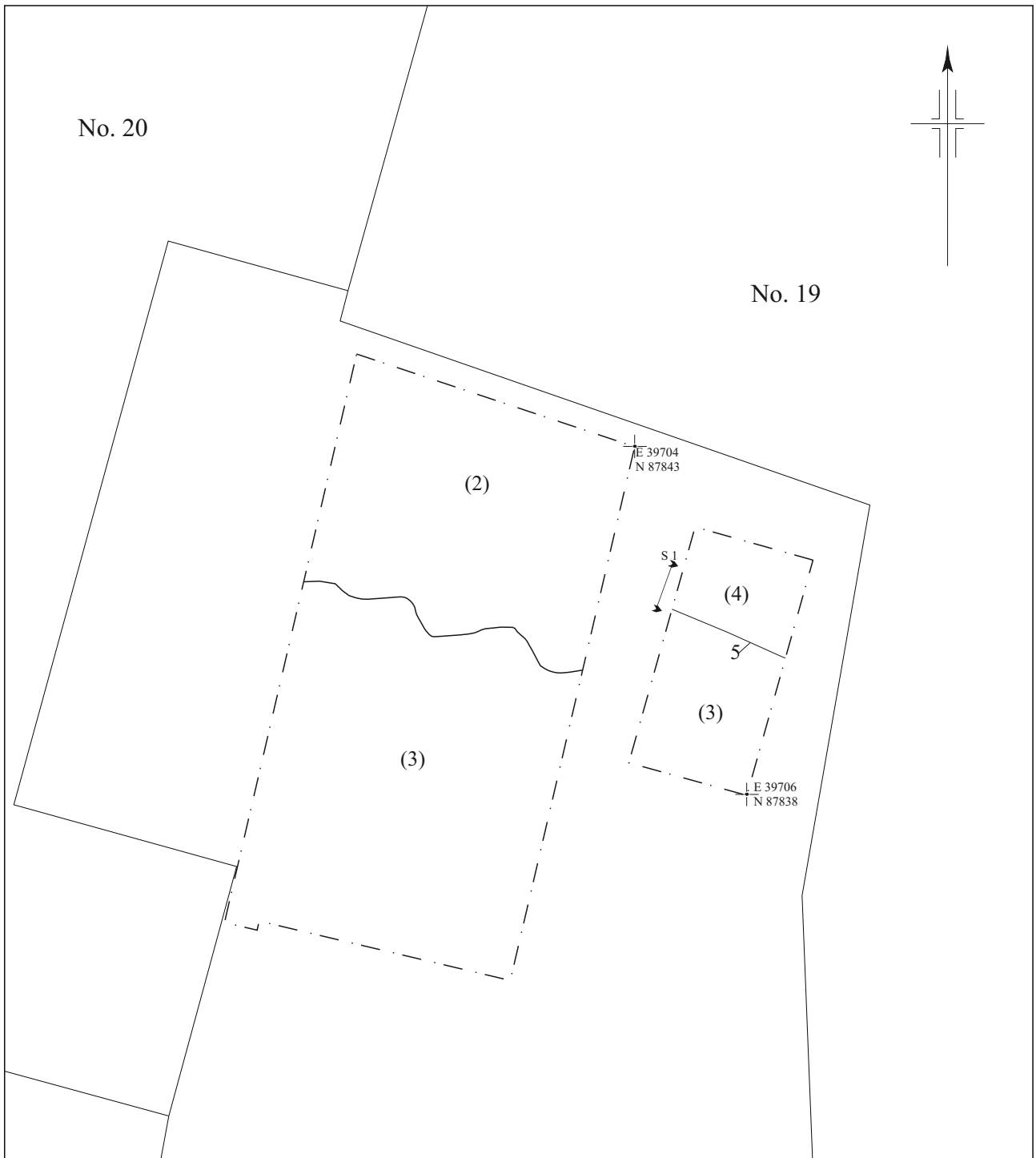


Figure 2. Site plan and section

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery

Sherds of 19th – 20th century Mass-produced White Earthenwares (WHEW: Mellor 1984; 1994) were noted from layer (2). These were not retained.

5.2 Environmental Remains

No features were considered to warrant environmental sampling.

6 DISCUSSION

The area of the soak-away was deeper than the impact level of the extension, thus revealing the ditch 5, whereas in the other area the excavation did not fully penetrate deposit (2).

The ditch although undated would appear to be parallel to Church Street. The lack of material finds within its fill may point to an early date. Rodwell (1975) notes that the Wantage street plan is based on early primitive patterns. Church Street is likely to be one of the earliest streets. The proximity of the ditch to the street and its size would seem to preclude it from being the rear of a burgage plot and one might speculate that considering its location it could be part of the Minster boundary ditch.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

The project brief	The project report
Written Scheme of Investigation	The primary site records
The drawn records	

The archive is currently maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to Oxfordshire Museums Service under accession number 2010.79.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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