

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**ON LAND AT 4 MILL LANE,**

**OLD MARSTON**

**OXFORD**

**NGR SP 5261 0886**

*On behalf of*

*T. R. Morgan Contracts*

**NOVEMBER 2011**

**REPORT FOR** T. R. Morgan Contracts  
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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services carried out a watching brief on land at 4 Mill Lane, Old Marston. The watching brief identified two ditches and a possible pit in the footings trench of the extension as well as a further feature of uncertain nature in the soakaway, which may represent remnants of a building.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site location (Figure 1)**

The site is located at 4 Mill Lane, Marston, Oxford, NGR SP 5261 0886. The underlying geology is 2<sup>nd</sup> (Summertown-Radley) Terrace Deposits.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

Planning permission (11/02317/FUL) for the erection of the part single and part two storey side and rear extensions at 4 Mill Lane, Marston, Oxford has been granted by Oxford City Council. A condition of the permission required an archaeological watching brief to be carried out during the work. The Oxford City Archaeologist was consulted and prepared a Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief. A *Written Scheme of Investigation*, which proposed a suitable methodology to satisfy the requirements of the Brief, was submitted to and accepted by the City Archaeologist.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The proposed development site lies on the edge of the historic core of the medieval village hamlet of Marston. The first documentary evidence for a settlement at Marston is from AD 1122 when the church is mentioned. Subsequently the hundred role of 1279 lists 46 unfree tenants, a vicar and 2 freeholders (VCH 1957, 216). During the later medieval period Marston was a hamlet of Headington. The settlement has not been the subject of extensive archaeological study although an excavation is currently underway by Thames Valley Archaeological Services behind the Bricklayers Arms, Butts Lane, where provisional results suggest the contraction of the settlement in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Old Marston appears to be a planned medieval village built along a main street (Oxford Road), however the evolution of the hamlet is currently poorly understood.

No 4 Mill Lane is located 40m south of two Grade II listed buildings of 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century date (No's 15 and 17 Mill Lane). No 15 is known as the 'Manor House' whilst No 17 is known as 'Cromwell's House'. The buildings have traditionally been associated with 1645 headquarters of Sir Thomas Fairfax who commanded the Parliamentarian siege of Oxford during the Civil War. The listing description notes that the Treaty for the Surrender of Oxford was signed here in 1646.

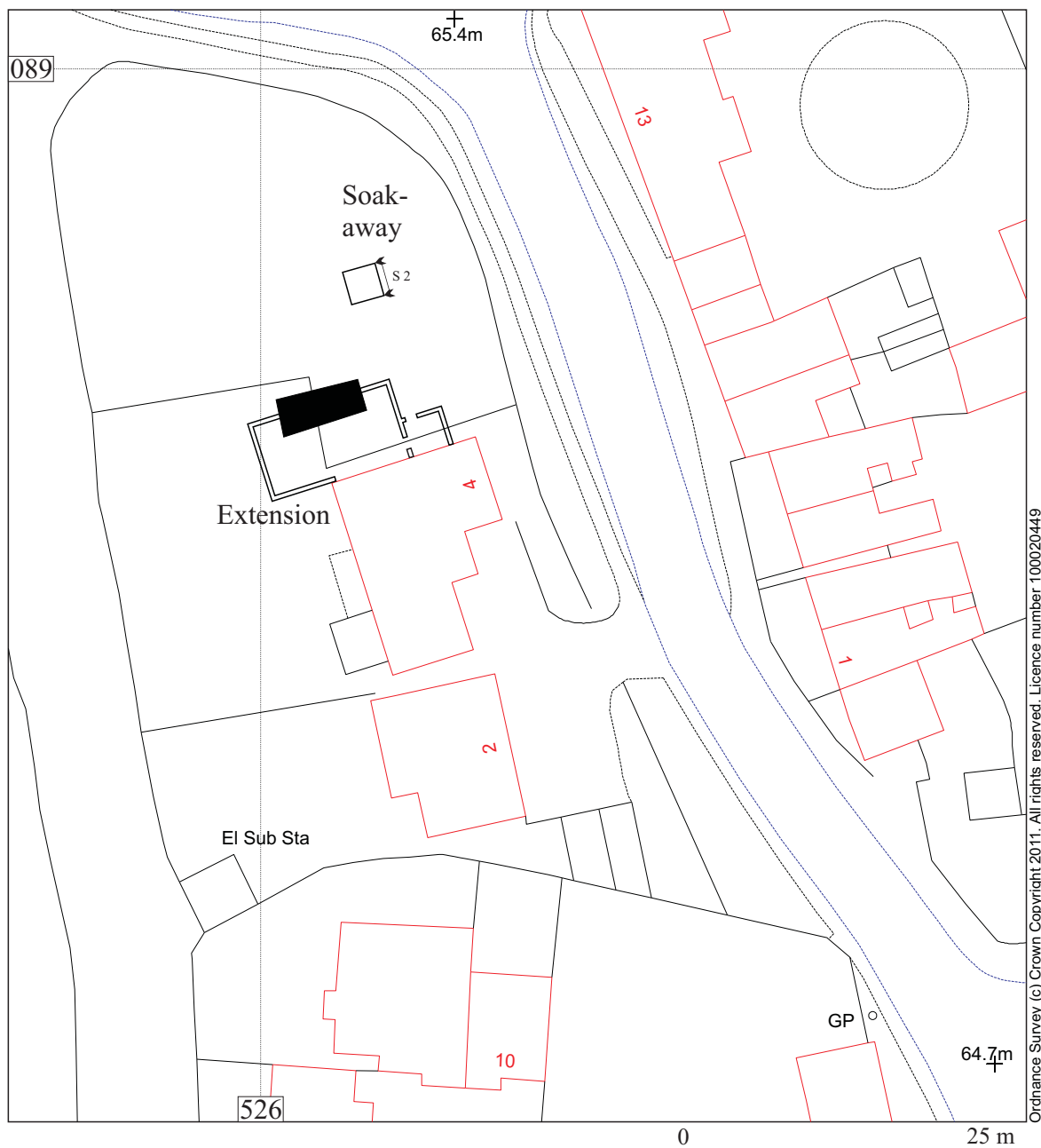
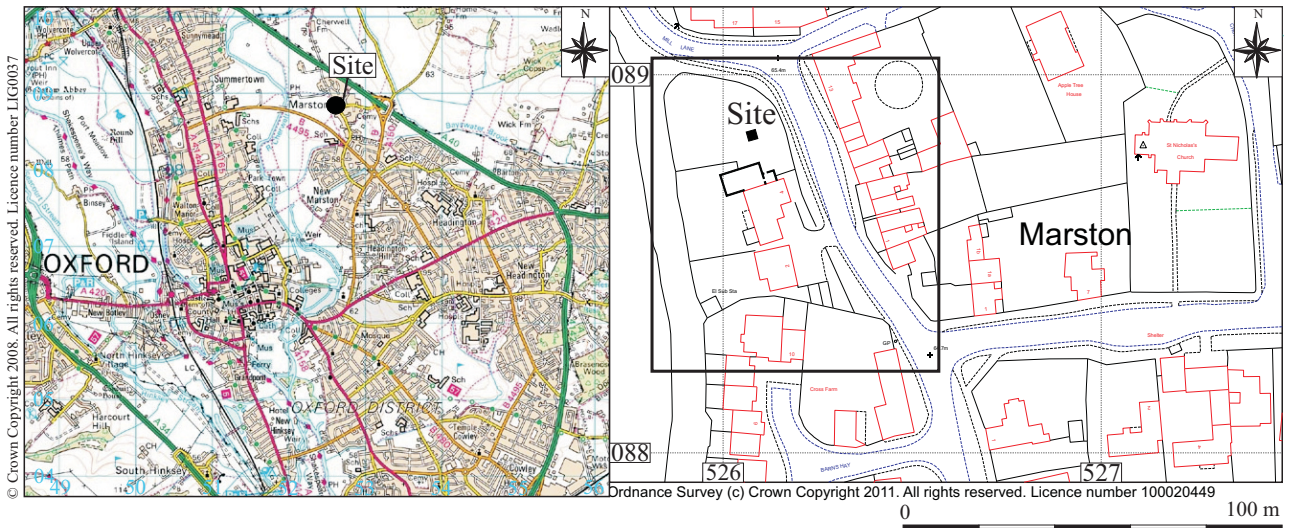


Figure 1. Site location

## 2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To record any archaeological remains that will be impacted on by the development.

In particular

- To determine whether any medieval or Civil War activity is present

## 3 STRATEGY

### 3.1 Research Design

In response to a *Brief* from the Oxford City Archaeologist a Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by John Moore Heritage Services and agreed with Oxford City Archaeologist.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

### 3.2 Methodology

Excavation of the footings was carried out with a 7.5-tonne excavator by the contractor. Excavation of the footings was carried out to a depth of *c.*1000mm; they were 600mm wide (Fig. 1). As a consequence of the narrow trench width, only a limited view of the archaeology was available. Furthermore, desiccation of the clay meant that it was largely impossible to clean the trench face.

## 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. CBM refers to undifferentiated ceramic building material, which could be brick, tile or daub.

### 4.1 Fieldwork

#### **Extension Footings (Figure 2)**

The area of the proposed extension was stripped of topsoil, and the footings were excavated to a depth of *c.* 1m to the 2<sup>nd</sup> terrace gravel (13) or alluvial clay deposits (3). Overlying these natural deposits was a layer of stiff orange silty clay (2), which probably represents an earlier cultivation soil.

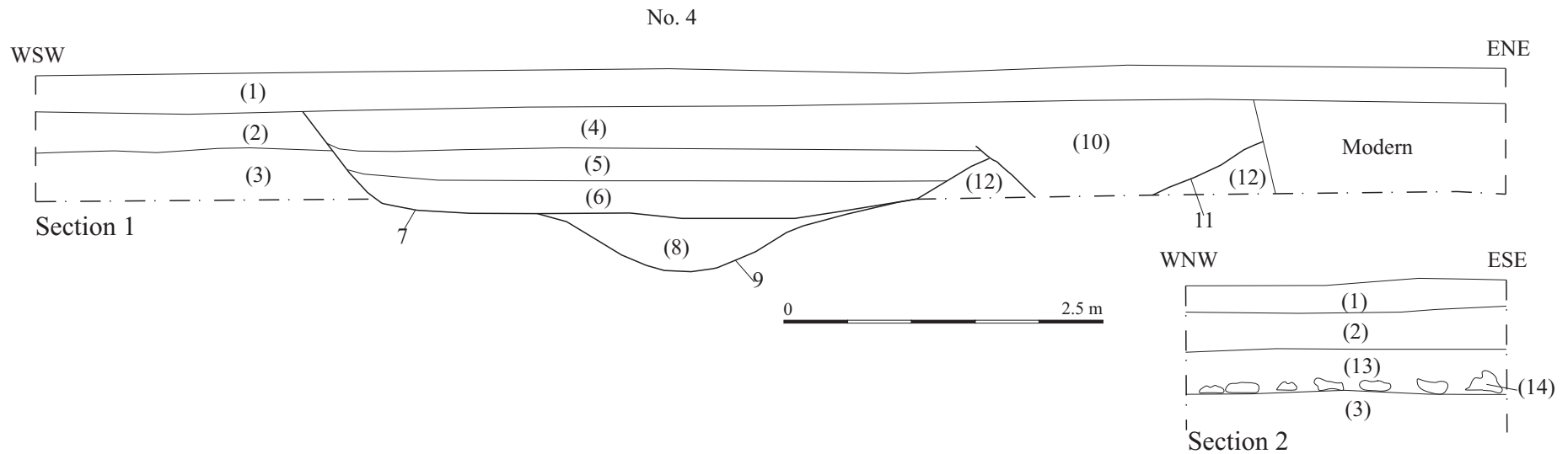
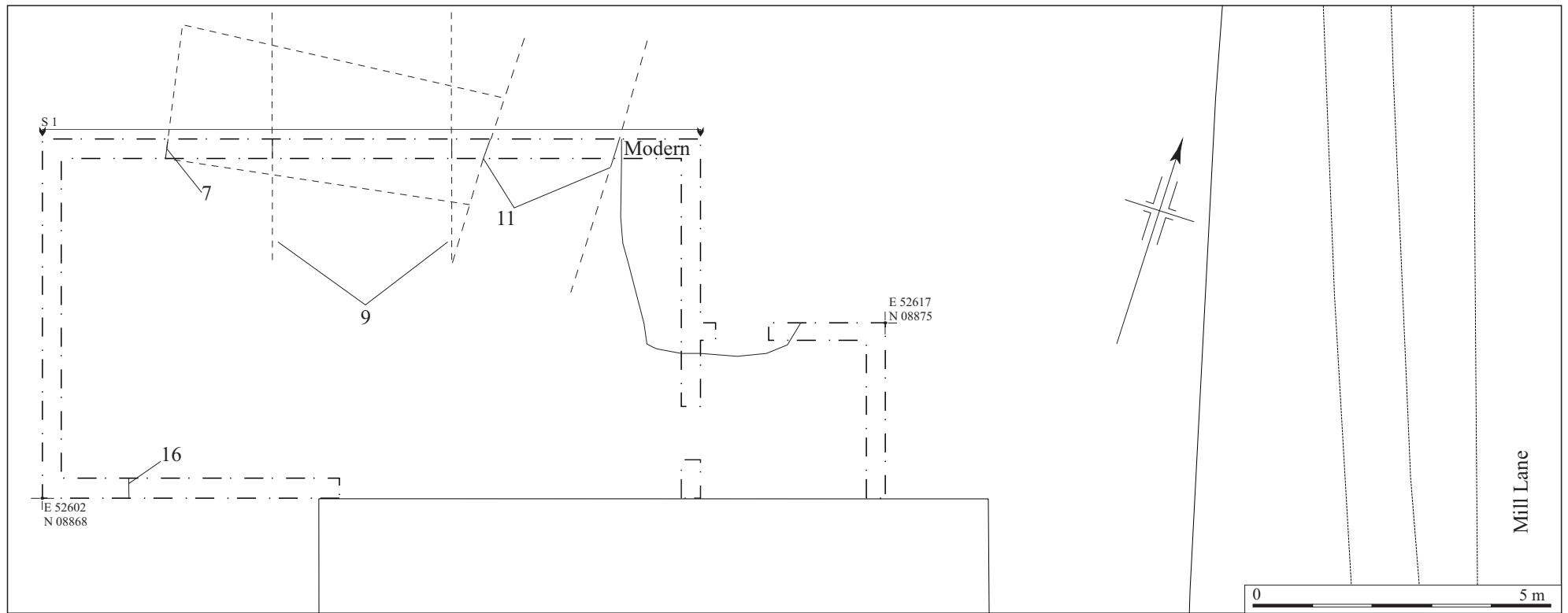


Figure 2. Plan and section of footings; section of soakaway

The north footing trench revealed a broad area of archaeological activity, which comprised a number of ditches. A large pit was seen in the south footing trench on the west side of the present building.

The earliest feature was ditch 9, measuring 2.9m wide and 0.4m deep cut through the natural gravel (13). The ditch was oriented north by northwest/east by southeast. It was filled with soft, green brown clay silt (8) which yielded pottery dating from the middle 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. No relationship could be established between the ditch 9 and the cultivation soil (2).

The ditch 9 was cut by a large, probably linear, feature 7, which extended from the western side of the northern footing trench. The cut, which appears to represent a ditch excavated along the longitudinal axis, measured almost 5m long in section and was more than 0.6m in width, which was the width of the footings trench. The possible ditch was approximately 0.7m deep and contained three fills. The earliest fill (6) was hard dark green brown silty clay, approximately 0.25m thick, which contained pottery dating from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This ditch fill was overlain by a similar deposit (5), of dark green brown silty clay with flint pebbles and limestone fragments – measuring 10×10×10mm to 100×150×20mm – which was also approximately 0.25m thick. Pottery recovered from the fill dated from after the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, including a small fragment of Potterspury ware from Northamptonshire, which while not unusual, is relatively uncommon. The ditch seems to have been either cured or abandoned for some time as the latest fill of hard dark green brown silty clay (4), which strongly resembled fill (6), yielded pottery dating from after the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The ditch 7 was apparently cut at the eastern end of the footings trench by a north/south ditch 11, although given the constraints on site, it was not entirely clear. The ditch 11 was filled with hard dark green brown silty clay (10), which strongly resembled fill (4). The clay fills of the ditches on site were extremely indurated and cleaning in the limited space of the footings trench did not clarify relationships. It is possible, therefore, that (10) was indeed the same as (4). The eastern edge of ditch 11 was cut by modern disturbance.

Pottery recovered from the topsoil (1) at the southwest end of the footings trench yielded a late 17<sup>th</sup> century date. At the northeast end it was cut by the modern feature, although the edge of the cut was not easily distinguishable.

The soakaway, which measured 2.5m × 2.5m in plan, was located approximately 6m to the north of the footings trench and revealed natural clay (13) overlain by a deposit of limestone blocks – measuring *c.* 250 × 250 × 150mm – (14), which were seen in each of the four faces of the soakaway (Fig. 5). The stones did not appear to form a floor surface as they were at a little distance from one another. It is possible that they represent the destruction of pre-existing structure. They were sealed by a deposit of mid green grey silty clay with some charcoal (13). The unstratified sherd of Brill/Boarstall probably came from this layer, although it was recovered from the skip of the dumper. Sealing the deposit of clay (13) was the orange cultivation horizon (2), which was in turn sealed by the topsoil (1).





Figure 3. Photograph of footings trench looking northeast



Figure 4. Photograph of footings trench looking northwest

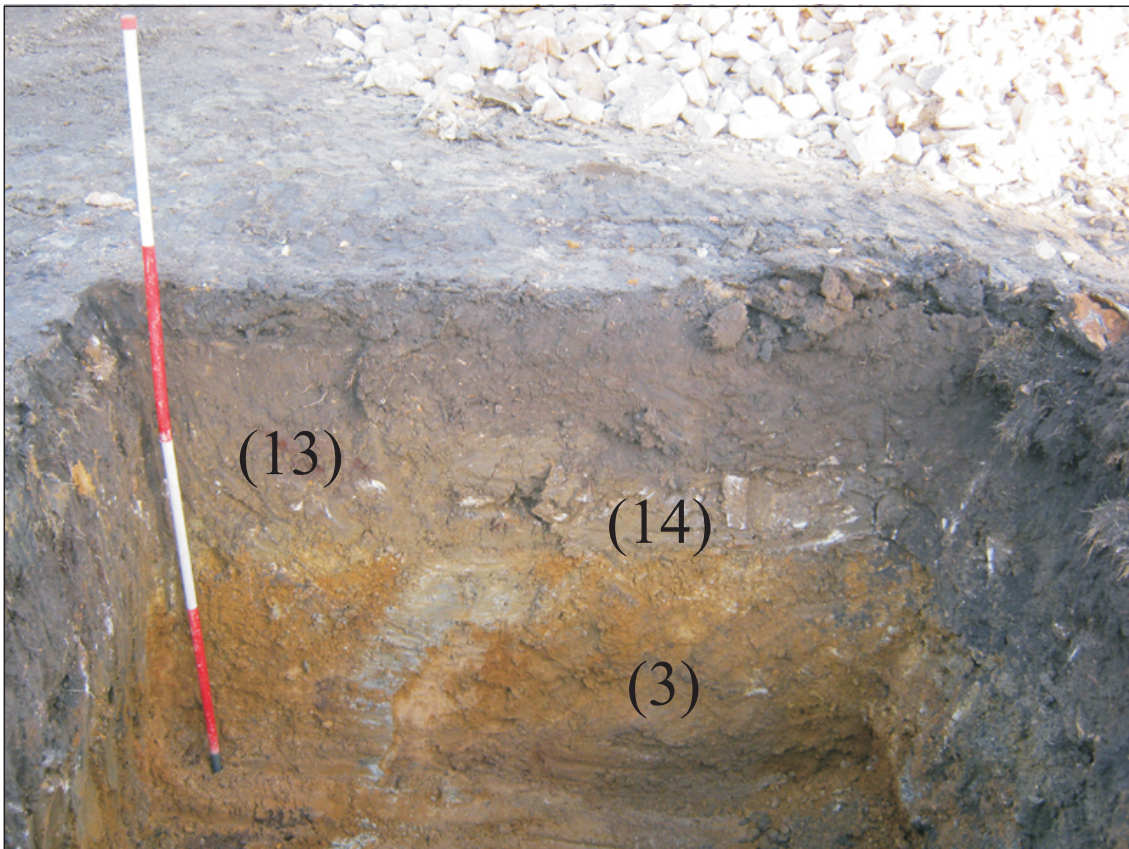


Figure 5. Photograph of soakaway, showing (14) overlying (3); looking northwest

The large pit 16 – measuring more than 3.25m east/west – filled with soft grey green clay silt (15), was located in the southern footing trench west of the present house. No finds were recovered were recovered from fill (15).

## 4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The watching brief took place during clement conditions on November 17<sup>th</sup>, with excellent cooperation from the on-site contractors.

## 5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

### 5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 23 sherds with a total weight of 378g. It comprised ware types which indicate that there was activity at the site from the mid/late 11<sup>th</sup> – mid/late 13<sup>th</sup> century, after which time it was abandoned until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAC:	<b>Cotswold-type ware</b> , AD975-1350. 6 sherds, 30g.
OXY:	<b>Medieval Oxford ware</b> , AD1075 – 1350. 1 sherd, 6g.
OXAM:	<b>Brill/Boarstall ware</b> , AD1200 – 1600. 8 sherds, 246g.
OX68:	<b>Potterspury ware</b> , Late 13th - 17th century. 1 sherd, 1g.
OXDR:	<b>Red Earthenwares</b> , 1550+. 3 sherds, 24g.
OXFH:	<b>Border wares</b> , 1550 - 1700. 1 sherd, 3g.
OXCE:	<b>Tin-glazed Earthenware</b> , 1613 – 1800. 1 sherd, 5g.
OXFI:	<b>Chinese Porcelain</b> , c. 1650+. 1 sherd, 2g.
OXEST:	<b>London stoneware</b> . c. 1680 +. 1 sherd, 61g.

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*. The fabric types are all well-known in the region. The medieval material comprises bodysherds from jars and bowls, which is typical of the period. The post-medieval group includes good-quality tablewares such as OXCE and OXFI, as well as a base from a tankard in OXEST. It may indicate the presence of a fairly-well-to-do household at that time.

Cntxt	OXAC		OXY		OXAM		OX68		OXDR		OXFH		OXCE		OXFI		OXEST		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
Soakaway					1	175													U/S
1									1	10	1	3	1	5	1	2	1	61	L17thC
4									2	14									M16thC
5	1	4			7	71	1	1											L13 <sup>th</sup> C
6	3	21	1	6															L11 <sup>th</sup> C
8	2	5																	M11 <sup>th</sup> C
Total	6	30	1	6	8	246	1	1	3	24	1	3	1	5	1	2	1	61	

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

## **Environmental Remains**

No palaeoenvironmental samples were taken.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

The watching brief carried out at 4 Mill Lane, Old Marston revealed evidence of activity from the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in the form of the north by northwest/south by southeast ditch 9. Due to the limited view of the ditch and surrounding contemporary land-surface, it is not possible to ascertain whether this relates to a property or field boundary. The ditch 9 was parallel with Mill Lane to the east and the green way immediately to the west of the site, though the significance of this observation within the constraints of the watching brief is not easily assessed.

The mid-11<sup>th</sup> century ditch 9 was cut by the slightly later southeast/northwest-oriented ditch 7, which was roughly perpendicular to Mill Lane and the greenway. The ditch 7 yielded pottery from after the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, which may indicate post-Conquest changes in the internal layout of Marston, but again within the constraints of a watching brief cannot be easily assessed. It was, nevertheless, clear that ditch 9 had no formal relationship with ditch 7 within the footings trench. Nevertheless, it is possible that to the north or south, they may well form part of a group ditches forming small enclosures.

The lower fill of ditch 7, which was characterised by late 11<sup>th</sup>- to 12<sup>th</sup>-century pottery was sealed by a deposit which was relatively limestone and flint rubble-rich with 13<sup>th</sup> pottery, including a number of sherds of Brill/Boarstall ware, dating from the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. To the north, the soakaway yielded a single large Brill/Boarstall base-herd also of the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, which although recovered from the skip of the dumper, probably came from the deposit sealing the limestone fragments. It is tempting to identify this as part of a structure, but given the limited view it might equally be rubble or hardstanding. Nevertheless, this indicates that there is a very high probability that a croft was laid out here during the post-Conquest period; the 14<sup>th</sup>-century shrinkage observed at Bricklayers Arms site *c.* 100m to the east corresponds very well with the absence of medieval activity post-dating the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century at 4 Mill Lane.

Whether the ditch was cured is not clear, but the final fill of ditch 7, which was impossible to differentiate from the fill of ditch 11, leading to the interpretation of them perhaps being part of the same system of enclosures, yielded two small sherds of red earthenware pottery dating from after the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Ordnance Survey mapping from 1877 (1<sup>st</sup> Edition; 1:2500) and 1899 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition; 1:2500) indicate that the site was part of a small enclosure – bounded as today by the greenway to the west and Mill Lane to the east. To the south of the present house was a smithy, fronting onto Mill Lane, which appears to appertain to the enclosed croft. The northern part of the croft appears to have been an orchard in 1877. It appears that these enclosures follow the line of the historic ditches, although the scale of mapping makes it difficult to be absolutely sure.

In conclusion, the watching brief accords with the emerging picture of medieval Marston, and indicates that there to be a high potential for similar post-Conquest expansion and later post-14<sup>th</sup> century contraction to be evidenced in and around the historic core of the settlement.

## **7 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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