

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**AT**

**1 CHURCH STREET, SOMERTON, OXFORDSHIRE**

**NGR SP 4975 2861**

*On behalf of*

*Ms Linda Radcot*

**JANUARY 2013**

**REPORT FOR** Linda Radcot  
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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services maintained an archaeological watching brief during groundworks of the construction of a new extension (Planning Ref: 12/00526/F-1) at 1 Church Street, Somerton, Oxfordshire (SP 4975 2861). The ground works involved the removal of a 'mound' proved to be natural ground and the excavation of one wall footing trench and the reduction of the area beneath the previous kitchen. The side extension was not monitored as the footing trenches were over an area which had already been reduced in the recent years to clear the garden (see plates 1 & 2). Church Street itself seems to have been a deeply set hollow way leading to the church. One pit dated by just a single pottery sherd to the early post-medieval period, was probably an organic waste pit instated by the early inhabitants of the cottage. No other archaeological features or finds were apparent and a confidence rating is high that the best possible results were achieved.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location and Geology (Fig. 1)**

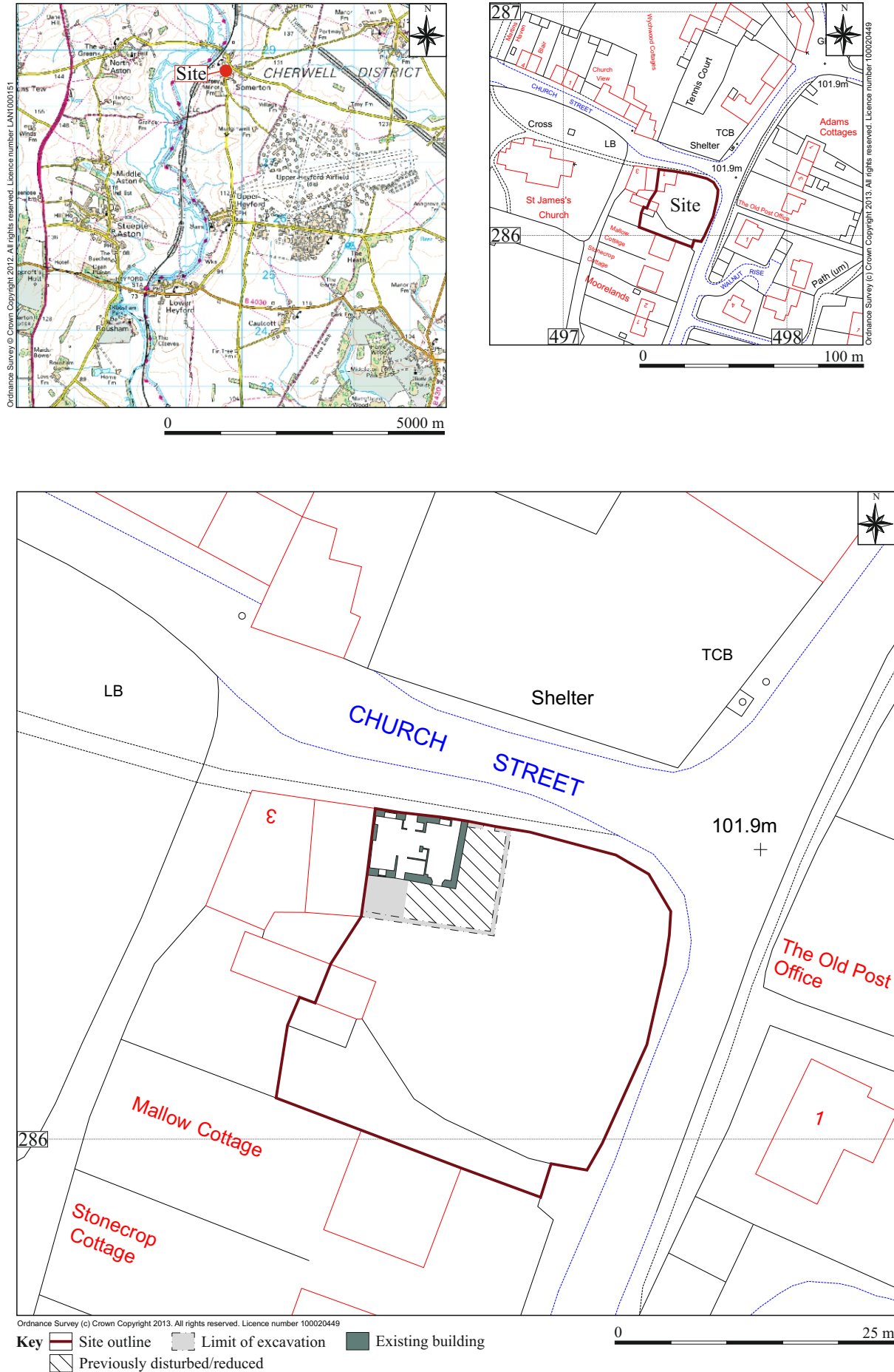
The application area is located in the centre of Somerton, on the eastern side of St James' Church (NGR SP 4975 2861). The site lies at about 101m OD and the underlying geology is Upper Lias Clay. The site is currently in residential use.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

Cherwell District Council had granted planning permission for a two storey side extension, single storey rear extension and renovation of existing outbuilding (12/00526/F). Due to the potential disturbance of archaeological remains a condition had been attached requiring archaeological monitoring and recording during groundworks. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) issued a *Design Brief*. This was followed by a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2012) which 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 old English name *Sumortun* means 'farm used in summer' and it is possible that it was originally used by the Saxon settlers for a part of the year only by the upland settlement at Fritwell and later permanently settled from there. Saxon burials are known from the grounds of the Old School House, Water Lane (JMHS 2011), most of which had a slab placed across the skull which was a later Saxon tradition. By 1086 at all events the community at Somerton was unusually large for this neighbourhood. On the principal manor of 9 plough-lands there were 2 plough-teams and 1 serf in demesne, while 17 villeins (*villani*) and 9 bordars shared 7 plough-teams. *Villani* were peasant farmers legally tied to the Lord of the Manor and could not leave the land without the permission from the Lord. The survey records a large extent of meadow (40 a.) and, what is more unusual in this part of the country, 156 acres of pasture (Lobel 1959).



The site is located in an area of archaeological potential within the core of the historic settlement. The development area is 62m east of the 12th century church of St James (JMHS 2009) (Historic Environment Record number PRN 5081) and the proposal site itself is a 17th century listed building (PRN 17162). The site is located between two Scheduled Ancient Monuments; the earthworks of the deserted medieval village 130m to the west (SM 261) and the remains of Somerton Manor House to the east (SM 152).

Medieval pottery has been recorded from the deserted medieval village dating to between the 11th and 13th centuries. The development site itself fronts onto Church Street which can be seen to continue into the Scheduled Monument as a hollow-way. It is likely that this road was in use during the medieval period and probably continued to the Manor House to the east. Medieval houses were likely to have existed along this route.

A watching brief during the laying of a pipe in 1973/4 recorded stone foundations beneath the bank of the hollow-way (SMR 4476). This showed that the hollow-way which runs approximately south-west was banked up on the village side in the later medieval period at least in the area seen at its southern end. The fishponds resemble old pits and hollows. The north ditch could probably be associated with the castle nearby. During the laying of a new sewer pipe along Church Street (JMHS 2005) layers suspected to be the original medieval trackway were discovered, recorded as layer of cobbles and smaller stones at the east end of the modern farm track. This was noted running west for a length of 15m before being truncated by more recent activity. No finds were associated with these layers, and both lay on natural deposits (JMHS 2005).

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

It was stated within the Written Scheme of Investigation (JMHS 2012) that the aims of the archaeological evaluation were to:

To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains and in particular to record any evidence for the development of the medieval settlement.

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

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 for Archaeologists (1994) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

## **3.2 Methodology**

Some areas of the new extension had previously been reduced to clear the site of vegetation and make an access road (See Plates 1 & 2). As the ground had been already been significantly reduced it was decided not important to monitor any foundation trenches for the new extension as they were excavated, across the eastern side of the site, but an inspection was made of the open trenches during a site visit.

The wall footing trench and small area to the north was excavated across the garden in an area not previously reduced during the preparation works. The trench was excavated by a tracked excavator fitted with a toothed ditching bucket. The depths of the trenches were usually at 1m beneath the present ground level.

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 general photographic record was produced, which will form part of the site archive.

## **4 RESULTS**

### **4.1 Excavation Results (Fig. 1; Fig. 2)**

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [ ] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material.

### **4.2 The 'Mound' Excavations (Fig. 1)**

Ground reduction across part of 'the mound' was observed which revealed the natural clays and sands (02) overlain by 0.30m thick dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil (01). The 'mound' was clearly natural ground and no archaeological features were observed cut into its uppermost surface.

### **4.3 The Wall Footing Trench (Fig. 2)**

A new footing trench associated with the rear extension was excavated to the underlying natural. One pit 04 was recorded in section which had concave sides and a gently rounded base. It was filled by dark blackish grey silty clay (03) with one sherd of post-medieval pottery. The area to the north of this trench (Fig. 2) was reduced and monitored, but no further features or finds were discovered.

### **4.4 Reliability of Techniques and Results**

The excavation of the trenches took place in wintry weather conditions with excellent co-operation from the site owner Ms Linda Radcot and the onsite contractors.

A confidence rating is high that the best possible results were achieved.

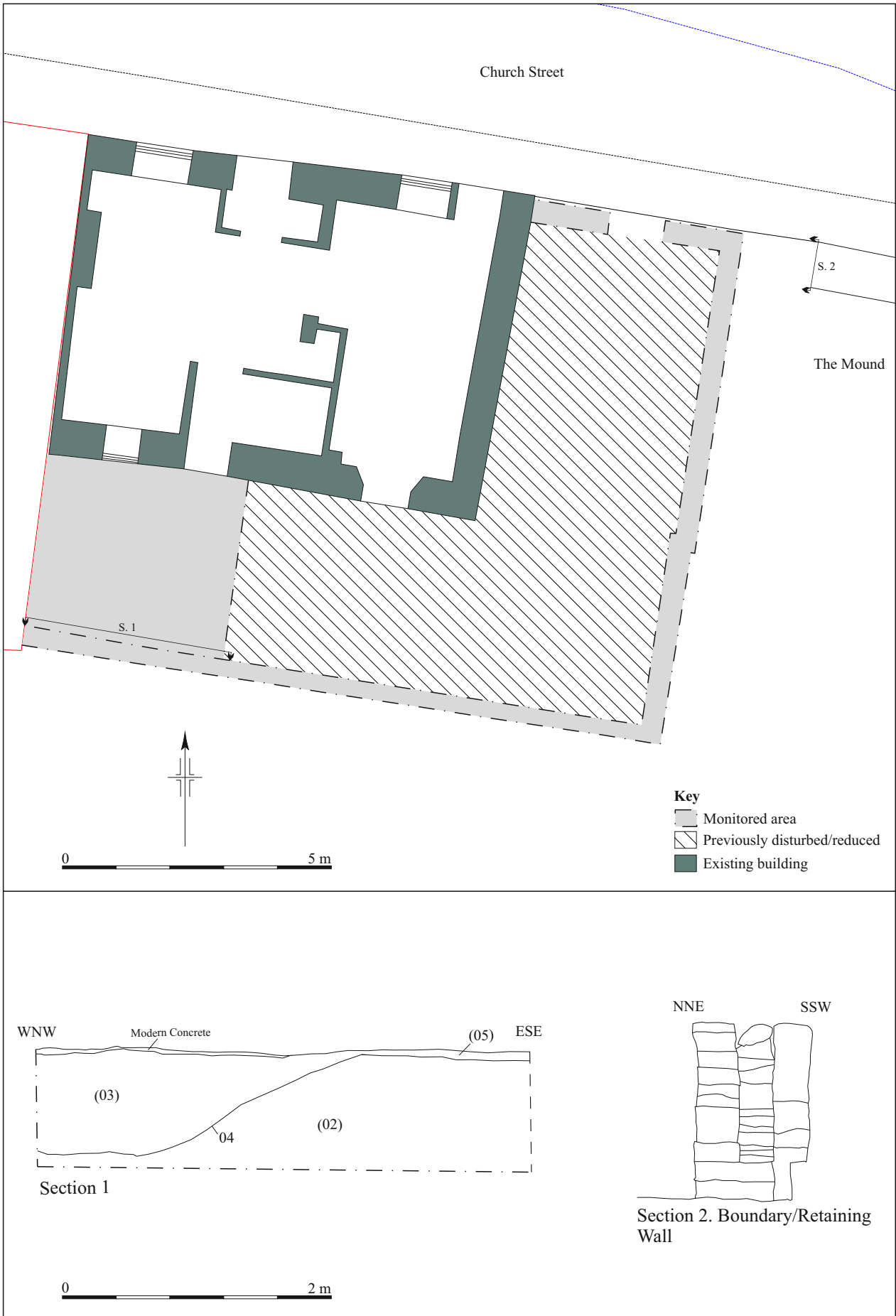


Figure 2. Plan and sections



## 5 FINDS

### 5.1 The Pottery by Dave Gilbert

A single sherd of post medieval pottery weighing 6g was recovered from pit fill (103). The pottery was recorded utilising the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1989, 1994) and was not retained. The fabric was: OXDR: *Red Earthenwares*. AD 1550+.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological watching brief at 1 Church Street, Somerton, Oxfordshire provided a useful examination of the potential archaeological deposits across the area of the new extension. The 'mound' was investigated for the first time as it was ambiguous as to whether this was a natural or man-made feature. As a result of the side extension excavation that the 'mound' was cut into it was shown that it was entirely natural ground (Plates 3 & 4). It would seem probable therefore that Church Street was a deeply set hollow-way during the medieval period, leaving the original ground level on either side of the street higher, looking like a mound. The cottage was also terraced in this 'mound', leaving the impression that earth was slumped against the property.

A watching brief during the laying of a pipe in 1973/4 recorded stone foundations beneath the bank of the hollow-way (SMR 4476). This showed that the hollow-way which runs approximately south-west was banked up on the village side in the later medieval period at least in the area seen at its southern end (JMHS 2009). There was no evidence of a bank adjacent to the hollow-way seen during the course of these investigations.

The one large pit which was recorded in the footing trench was of possible early post-medieval date and probably associated with the early inhabitants of the cottage. The feature was most likely an organic waste pit located to the immediate rear of the property. There has been much ground reduction in the past over the general area around the cottage (Plates 1 & 2) which may have truncated any archaeological remains had they been present.

A confidence rating is high that the best possible results were achieved.

## 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

### Pottery

The archive is currently maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service under accession number: 2012.132.

## **8 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Plate 1; Showing corner of 1 Church Street previous ground reduction



Plate 2; Showing extent of some of the previous groundworks in the garden



Plate 3; Showing an exposed section of 'the mound'



Plate 4; Ground reduction across the top of 'the mound' showing natural sands