

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

WHITE OAKS, 163 HIGH STREET, BURFORD,

OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SP 2511 1188

On behalf of

CgMs Consulting Ltd

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REPORT FOR CgMs Consulting Ltd
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at White Oaks, 163 High Street, Burford, Oxfordshire. One 30m long machine-dug trench was excavated. Two pits or postholes of probable early modern date were recorded, along with a ditch infilled with early modern or modern material, and a possible early modern pit or tree throw/grubbing out feature. Only relatively recent finds were identified, none of which were retained.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development area (hereafter referred to as ‘the Site’) consists of 0.40 hectares of residential land located at 163 High Street, in the southern part of Burford, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 2511 1188) (Figure 1). It fronts onto and is bordered to the west by The Hill, to the north and east by other residential properties and gardens, and to the south by the grounds of the St John Fisher and St John More church and school. The underlying hard geology is Jurassic ooidal limestone of the Tayton Limestone formation, overlying White Limestone and Hampden Limestone formations (Gloucestershire Geology Trust 2005). The hard geology is overlain by freestone ‘brash’ and clays.

The Site occupies the crest of a hill at *circa*. 135 metres above Ordnance Datum, and is gently terraced towards the front, western side of the property with flat lawn at the rear or eastern side, and with bordering walls, hedges and lines of conifers. The current house built in the 1960s but in a *faux* post-medieval style currently occupies part of the Site, along with a separate garage.

1.2 Planning Background

McCarthy and Stone Retirement Lifestyles Ltd are considering the potential of redeveloping the Site at 163 High Street, Burford as a retirement complex, involving the demolition of the existing house of apartments and associated parking. Following a desk-based assessment of the Site prepared by CgMs Consulting (Pugh and Smalley 2011), the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) requested that an archaeological field evaluation should take place in order to provide further information about the Site. OCAS (2001) also prepared a Design Brief for the archaeological work programme.

CgMs Consulting commissioned John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) to undertake this work, and a *Written Scheme of Investigation* was prepared by John Moore Heritage Services to satisfy the requirements of the Brief (JMHS 2508/01). This *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) proposed the methodology by which the archaeological evaluation was to be carried out. The WSI was accepted by the Oxfordshire County Archaeologist, and the fieldwork for the archaeological evaluation took place on 13th March 2012. Mr Hugh Coddington, County Archaeologist for Oxfordshire, made a site visit in order to monitor the fieldwork and confirm its findings.

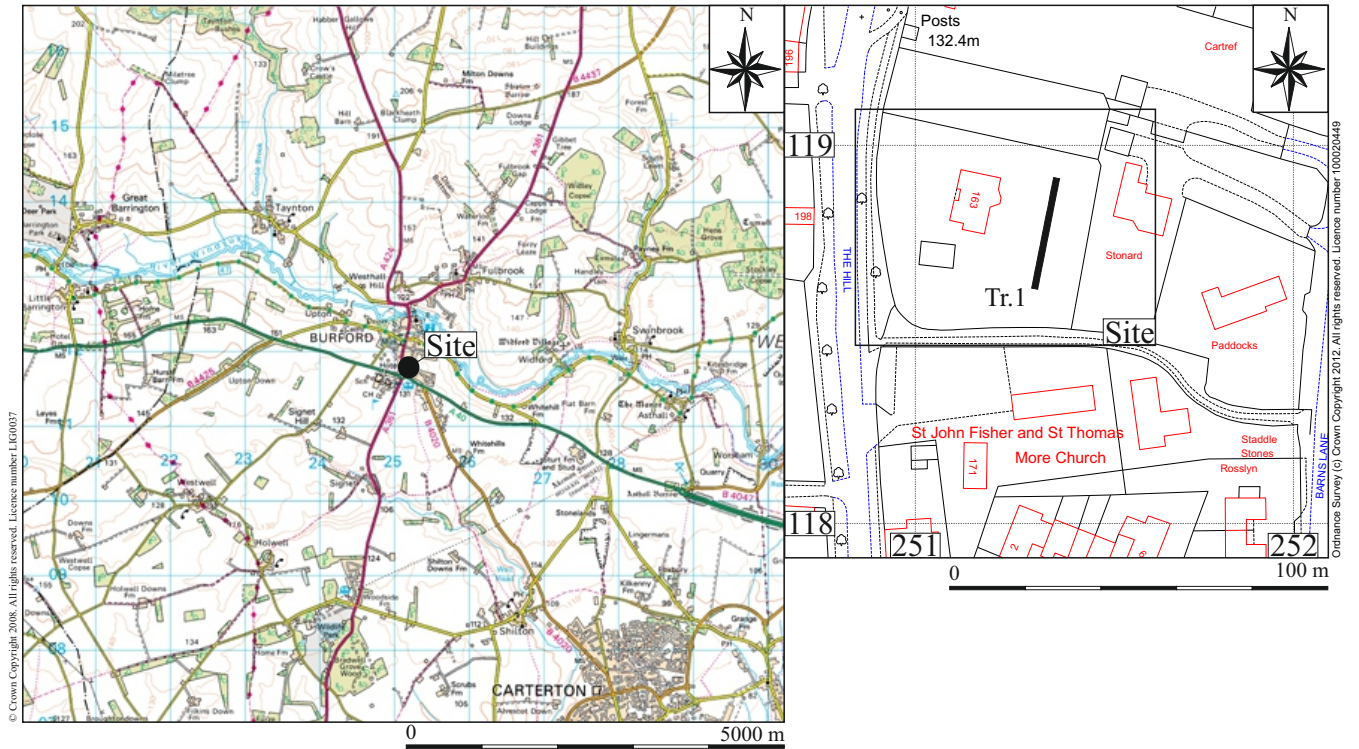


Figure 1. Site location

1.3 Archaeological Background

The Site was identified as being of archaeological potential by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services, as it was possible that the medieval settlement of Burford had once extended south into this area.

The desk-based assessment (Pugh and Smalley 2011, 10-11) did not identify any HER or NMR listed heritage assets within or immediately adjacent to the Site. There is little evidence for prehistoric occupation within the general area. Romano-British features and artefacts were recorded closer to the centre of Burford at 47-53 High Street (Coles and Lowe 2007), but this was *c.* 400m to the north of the Site. Early medieval evidence is also notably absent.

The medieval settlement of Burford is documented from at least the 11th century AD (Rodwell 1975, 69-76), and was focused around the church of St John the Baptist and the Priory, formerly the Hospital of St John, well to the north of the Site near the core of the modern settlement (NMR 332416; HER 1473/NMR 332441). Hill House, located *c.* 115m to the north of the Site, is also thought to be medieval in origin (NMR 765388). The Site appears to have been situated outside of the southern edge of the medieval and post-medieval settlement, however.

Although buildings are depicted on the eastern side of The Hill/High Street between Swan Lane and the line of the modern A40 on the Davis map of Oxfordshire from 1794 (Pugh and Smalley 2011, fig. 2), this may have been a stylised cartographic convention. On the First Series Ordnance Survey map of 1828 and the 25" 1: 2500 Ordnance Survey map of 1881, the Site lies within agricultural fields, but on the 1881 map with a pound depicted immediately to the south-west of the Site, presumably for livestock. The Site was still depicted thus on the 1921 Ordnance Survey map, and as the present house was not built until the 1960s, it seems likely that the Site had no buildings erected on it until this comparatively late date.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the Site;
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered;
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.

And in particular:

- To establish whether features related to the medieval settlement of Burford are present in the area.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to the Brief issued by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS), JMHS carried out the work, which comprised the mechanical excavation of one trial trench 30m in length (Trench 1).

3.2 Methodology

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the WSI and agreed with OCAS.

A 3-tonne tracked Hitachi 360-degree excavator fitted with a toothless 1.6m wide ditching bucket was used to excavate the trench. Any archaeological deposits and features revealed were then cleaned by hand and recorded in plan before being excavated and recorded at an appropriate level. Archaeological features had written, drawn and photographic records made of them, and all deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in brackets () show feature fills or deposits of material. All context numbers are preceded by trench number and /. Details of individual contexts are presented in Appendix 1 – the context inventory – at the rear of this report. All artefacts were collected, but due to their relatively recent date none were retained after analysis. Record photographs were also taken of the overall trench and a representative section of it. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (2008) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

4 RESULTS

4.1 The Archaeological Results

There was a large number of roots present in the topsoil of Trench 1 from the line of conifers forming part of the eastern boundary of the Site, and these had sometimes penetrated deeply into the underlying subsoil and features causing considerable localised disturbance. The undisturbed natural subsoil (1/106) was highly variable, and consisted of bands of limestone fragments or ‘brash’ in a grey-brown sandy clay matrix, interspersed with orange brown and bluish-grey sandy clay deposits.

4.2 Trench 1 (Figs. 1 & 2)

Trench 1 was 30m long and 1.6m wide, and orientated north to south. The topsoil (1/100) consisted of friable mid-greyish brown sandy silty loam up to 0.14m thick. This was above a series of levelling or make up deposits with a total depth of 0.90m, which were greater in thickness towards the northern end of Trench 1 where the level of the natural subsoil appeared to fall off at the start of the slope of the hill northwards down to Burford. These redeposited layers consisted of reddish brown sandy silty loam (1/101), bluish-black clinker (1/102), and mid-grey sandy silt (1/103), redeposited light yellow brown limestone or chalk fragments (1/104) and mid-greyish

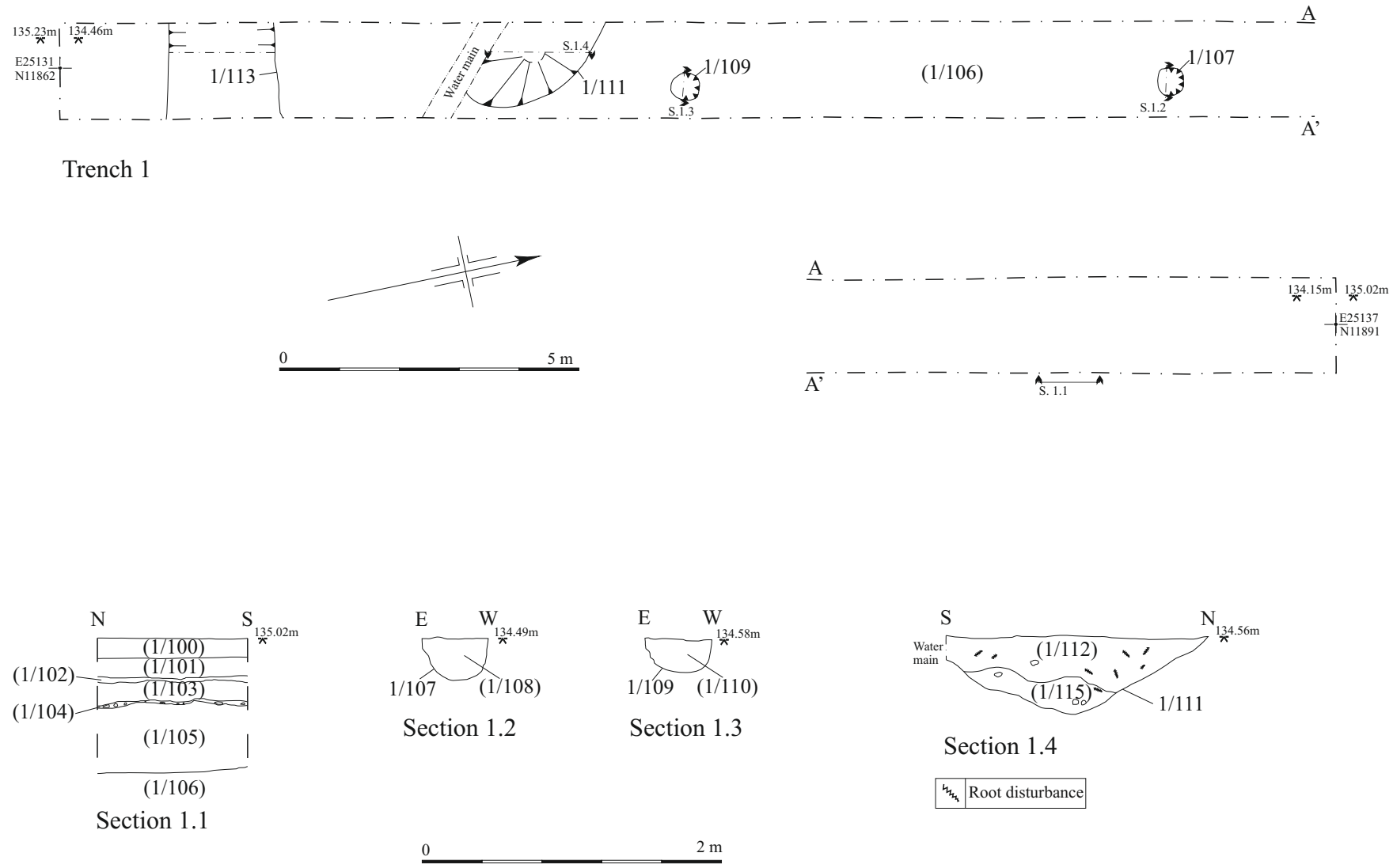


Figure 2. Plan and sections

brown sandy silt (1/105). The northern third of Trench 1 was devoid of features.

Cut 1/107 was subcircular in plan, and 0.45m across and a maximum of 0.28m deep. It was a possible posthole (Fig. 2, S1.2). It had steep, near vertical sides with a sharp break of slope at the top, but with a more gradual break of slope at the bottom, where the base was gently concave and rounded in plan. It contained a single fill (1/108) of light greyish brown sandy silt with occasional small angular limestone fragments, two fragments of brick or tile, one small piece of corroded iron and one small sherd of 18th or 19th century pottery.



Figure 3. Cut 1/107, looking south

Eight metres to the south, another subcircular cut 1/109 was identified (Fig. 2, S1.3 & Fig. 3). This was again 0.45m across, and was 0.23m deep with quite a sharp break of slope at the top of its sides, which sloped quite steeply to a gently concave base. It too contained a single fill (1/110), mid-grey sandy silt with occasional small subangular limestone fragments, but this did not produce any finds.

In the southernmost third of Trench 1 two features were identified. Cut 1/111 appeared to be subrounded in plan and was initially thought to be a pit or perhaps a rounded ditch terminal, with 1.6m of its length exposed in the trench (Fig. 2, S1.4 & Fig. 4). It was at least 1.70m wide, but was truncated on its southern side by the cut of a modern water pipe trench. The feature proved to be somewhat asymmetrical, with quite steep edges and sharper breaks of slope on the northern and north-western sides of the feature, but slightly more gentle sides and breaks of slope to the south-east and south. The base was gently concave. The upper fill (1/112) was light to mid-grey brown clayey sandy silt up to 0.30m thick with occasional small subangular

limestone fragments, and lots of intrusive tree roots and root disturbance. The lower fill (1/115) was light yellowish brown clayey sand up to 0.22m thick with moderate quantities of angular and subangular limestone fragments, and one small piece of clinker. The fill had a notably convex profile in section. This, coupled with the asymmetry of the sides and the lack of any artefacts or charcoal, suggests that the feature was probably a natural tree throw hole, or possibly a pit dug to 'grub out' a tree root bole.



Figure 4. Feature 1/111, a probable tree throw

Near the southern end of Trench 1 there was a broadly subrectangular feature 1/113 extending across the full 1.6m width of the trench, and up to 1.95m wide. The fill (1/114) was mid-grey silty clay containing subangular limestone fragments, modern or early modern brick and tile fragments, iron nails and pieces of wood and clinker, and it was clearly of relatively recent date. The feature was consequently not fully sectioned and not bottomed, but it was at least 0.25m deep and may have been the truncated base of a boundary ditch.

4.3 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The archaeological evaluation took place in clement, dry conditions with good light and visibility.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 The Pottery and Ceramic Building Material *by Adrian M. Chadwick*

Early modern (19th century) and 20th century porcelain and fragments of brick and tile were recovered from many of the redeposited makeup layers, including the lowest deposit in the sequence (1/105).

Two fragments of early modern or modern brick or tile were recovered from (1/108), the fill of posthole 1/107, along with one small sherd of 18th or 19th century pottery 3g in weight, featuring a fine-grained orange-brown fabric and an orange glaze on its internal surface. One small piece of corroded iron 6mm long and 5mm wide was also recovered from this context. None of these finds were retained.

5.2 Palaeo-environmental Remains

No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental analysis were identified, and no samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The only features identified in Trench 1 were early modern or modern in date. No significant archaeological deposits or features were recorded. Postholes 1/107 and 1/109 were likely to have been the same date, as they were similar in size and shape. These features may therefore represent a fence line or garden-related posts erected during the 19th or 20th centuries.

Although cut 1/113 may have been a boundary ditch, no boundary is shown extending across the southern part of the Site on the early edition Ordnance Survey maps. Along the southern edge of the Site, however, there is a linear bank forming a garden feature. It is possible that the earth for this feature was extracted just to the north, prior to the whole area being levelled with makeup deposits.

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Appendix 1: Trench and Archaeological Context Inventory

CBM = Ceramic Building Material (brick or tile)

	Context	Type	Description and finds	L (m)	B (m)	D(m)	Levels	Date	Interpretation
Trench 1									
	(1/100)	Layer	Friable mud-greyish brown sandy silty loam with occasional limestone fragments & root disturbance.	Across trench	Across trench	0.14m	135.02-135.23m OD	Modern	Topsoil
	(1/101)	Layer	Reddish brown sandy silty loam.	Across trench	Across trench	0.11m	-	Modern	Redeposited makeup layer
	(1/102)	Layer	Bluish black clinker.	Across trench	Across trench	0.04-0.08m	-	Modern	Redeposited makeup layer
	(1/103)	Layer	Mid-grey sandy silt.	Across trench	Across trench	0.10-0.12m	-	Modern	Redeposited makeup layer
	(1/104)	Layer	Angular & subangular limestone and chalk frags.	Across trench	Across trench	0.04-0.10m	-	Modern	Redeposited makeup layer
	(1/105)	Fill	Mid-greyish brown sandy silt.	Across trench	Across trench	0.42-0.55m	-	Modern	Redeposited makeup layer
	(1/106)	Layer	Mixed limestone, brash & orange brown sandy clay.	Across trench	Across trench	-	134.15-134.46m OD	-	Natural subsoil
	1/107	Cut	Subcircular cut with steep sides & gently concave base.	0.45m	0.45m	0.28m	134.27m OD	Early mdn.	Cut of posthole
	(1/108)	Fill	Light greyish brown sandy clayey silt with occ. subangular limestone frags., CBM frags., 1 sherd of pot and 1 Fe frag.	0.45m	0.45m	0.28m	134.49m OD	Early mdn.	Fill of posthole
	1/109	Cut	Subcircular cut with steep sides & gently concave base.	0.45m	0.45m	0.23m	134.33m OD	Early mdn.	Cut of posthole
	(1/110)	Fill	Mid grey sandy silt with occasional subangular limestone frags.	0.45m	0.45m	0.23m	134.58m OD	Early mdn.	Fill of posthole
	1/111	Cut	Subcircular cut with steep sides & gently concave base.	1.60m	1.70m	0.54m	134.02m OD	?	Pit/tree throw
	(1/112)	Fill	Friable light to mid-grey brown clayey sandy silt with occasional subangular limestone frags.	1.60m	1.70m	0.30m	134.56m OD	?	Upper fill of pit/tree throw
	1/113	Cut	Shallow cut with quite gentle sides and a gently concave base.	1.95m	1.60m	0.25m	-	Modern/early mdn.	Boundary ditch? Not bottomed.
	(1/114)	Fill	Mid grey clayey silt with subangular limestone frags., wood, iron nails and modern/early mdn. CBM.	1.95m	1.60m	0.25m	134.46m OD	Modern	Fill of cut 1/113
	(1/115)	Fill	Compact light yellowish brown clayey sand with moderate angular & subangular limestone frags.	1.50m	1.55m	0.22m	-	?	Lower fill of pit/tree throw