

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT HEADINGTON HOUSE,

HEADINGTON

OXFORD

NGR SP 5447 0740

On behalf of

Mr & Mrs S Laidlaw

JULY 2012

REPORT FOR Mr and Mrs S Laidlaw
Headington House,
Old High Street,
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out a watching brief in 2007 and again in 2012 at Headington House. No archaeological features were present in 2006, and only features potentially associated with the construction of the lodge were identified in 2012.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

Headington House lies on the west side Old High Street, Headington, Oxford (NGR SP 5447 0740). The site of development is currently a garden and yard. The site is at c. 105m OD. The underlying geology is Beckley Sand Member an early Upper Jurassic deposit, approximately 155 million years old. The site is currently in domestic use.

1.2 Planning Background

Oxford City Council granted planning permission (06/00754/FUL) for a proposed garage. In addition to the erection of the garage a swimming pool was to be excavated. The agents for the application asked that the pool be included as a contingency in the Oxford City Council's Brief, to be implemented at the applicant's discretion dependant on other considerations. Due to the potential for archaeological remains on the site to be disturbed, a condition requiring the implementation of a scheme of archaeological mitigation was attached to the planning permission. Oxford City Council issued a *Brief* detailing the requirements of the archaeological work. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* proposed a method to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains on the site as Stage 1, which was agreed with the client and the Archaeological Officer.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The core of Old Headington has the appearance of a tight nucleated village, assumed in this case, to have grown around or alongside an important royal residence inferred from a charter of 1004. The village stands a mile back from the Dorchester-Alchester Roman road, and there is recent information suggesting Roman agriculture at the former Manor Football Ground to the southwest, and a Saxon burial from Stephen Road to the south. The presumed late Saxon manorial centre is possibly at Court Place, perhaps the best placed site within the village nucleus to overlook the valley of the Bayswater Brook, the Cherwell valley and potentially the site of Oxford

The is no evidence of the medieval village extending southwards onto the proposed development site, but properties fronting Old High Street, backed by the north/south arm of a lane called 'The Croft', exist on Davis' map of 1793-4 and may be older. Headington House (1775-1783) is established to the rear of these properties, in the angle of two arms of 'The Croft', perhaps implying that the 2 ha space had been a unit of land in the pre-enclosure village.

The above information has been obtained from the City Archaeological Officer's *Brief*.

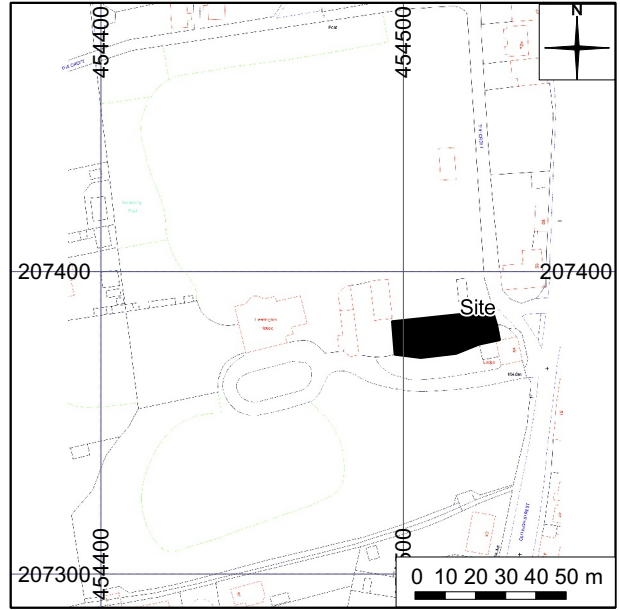
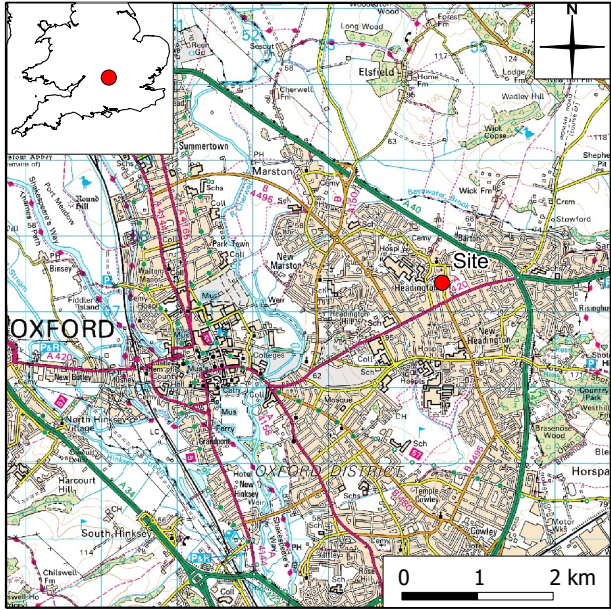


Figure 1. Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The primary aim was to preserve by record any archaeological remains on this site where the development work would disturb or damage them; particular aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To identify and record any deposits relating the Roman and Anglo-Saxon activity known from the area
- To identify and record any deposits relating to the late Saxon and medieval village of Old Headington

The final aim was to make the results of the recording action available to all interested parties through publication of the results.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a Brief issued by the Oxford City Archaeologist, JMHS carried out the work, which comprised the monitoring of staged works between 2007 and 2012 (Fig. 1).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in JMHS's *WSI* agreed with the City Archaeological Officer. These follow below.

Footprint of proposed garage

The area of the engineering impact was to be stripped to bearing subsoil as required by the construction method. This was to be carried out using a machine equipped with a toothless ditching bucket under archaeological control. Artefacts were to be recovered from deposits and bagged by context. All features were to be investigated and recorded, prior to hand-back for construction.

Should the ground reduction have proved to be too shallow to expose either the archaeological level or clean subsoil, then where there was a risk that archaeological deposits may survive at a greater depth, an archaeologist was to monitor the excavation of the garage footings; investigating and recording any archaeological features.

Contingency, footprint of proposed swimming pool

The proposed methodology was for the footprint of the pool to be stripped down to the archaeological horizon by a machine equipped with a ditching bucket and under archaeological control. Any features or deposits were then to be investigated and recorded before hand-back for full excavation of the pool.

The carrying out of a watching brief in this area was at the client's discretion. The client declined to undertake any monitoring of the strip of the topsoil or excavation of the underlying deposits. As a consequence, this part of the archaeological condition of the brief is not reported upon.

3.2 Methodology

The investigation of the garage area in 2012 involved the mechanical excavation of the footing trenches by a 5-tonne excavator equipped with a toothless bucket, supplemented by hand investigation of the revealed deposits. Previously in 2007 when the site was visited by David Gilbert, the area to the east of the garage (Fig. 1) was stripped by a JCB with a ditching bucket.

Site procedures carried out followed IfA guidelines. 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).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results (Figs. 1 & 2)

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.

In 2007 an area at the entrance to the proposal area for the garage was monitored by David Gilbert during excavation (Fig 1). A deposit of pale yellow to silver grey sand with limestone fragments (2) was observed at a depth of 0.7m at the east end of the area by the entrance. This deposit was the Beckley Sand Member.

At the west end of the garden a deposit of mid grey brown sandy loam with some small stone (3) was observed. This was at least 0.4m thick; mass-produced white wares were recovered from what was a probable garden soil. Overlying both of these deposits was dark grey brown to black sandy loam (1), which was between 0.15m and 0.6m thick.

The swimming pool and seven test-pits were also excavated at about this time in 2007, although none of these were either monitored or investigated.

To the south of the Walled Garden (Figs 1 and 2), footings were excavated to the depth of 1.2m, 0.3m into the natural yellow Beckley Sand Member (101) which extended across the investigation area; this deposit corresponds with deposit (2) seen in 2007. On the west side of the investigation area the natural was overlain by mixed dark yellow brown sand and humic material (102), which was c. 0.5m thick, and which extended beyond the edges of investigation. This deposit undoubtedly represents a buried cultivation horizon within the garden area, which corresponds with deposit (3) seen in 2007.

To the east, a large pit 106, measuring more than 4m (north/south) by 10m (east/west), and c. 0.6m deep cut through the garden soil (102); the full extent of this pit is not known. In the pit 106 was a dumped layer of compacted building materials, largely pale grey white mortar and some stone (105).

The shallow pit 106 and the dumped fill of building materials (105), the natural sand (101), and the garden soil (102) were cut by pit 103, which measuring at least 2m

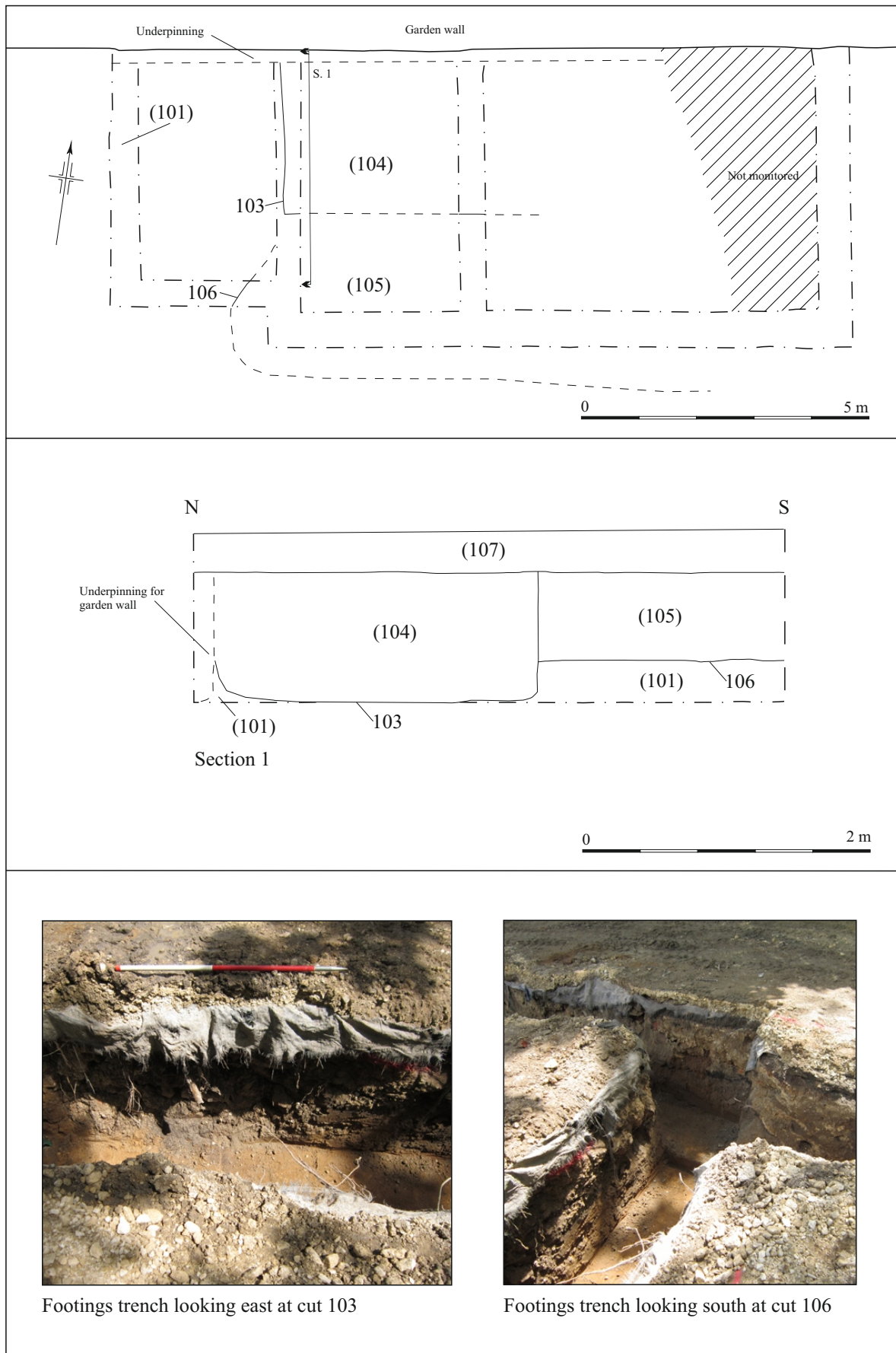


Figure 2. Plan, section and photos

north/south and more than 4m east/west, was c. 1m deep. The east edge of the pit was cut by previous underpinning of the adjacent garden wall and as a consequence the full extent of the pit 103 is not known. The pit 103 was filled with loose dark brown black humic material (104) with stones (measuring 300mm × 250mm × 150mm), brick, slate, occasional pottery and glass. The fill (104) was in part a rubbish dump undoubtedly associated with the house.

Sealing the pit 103 was a layer of mixed materials forming a hardcore onto which was laid a gravel surface (107). This layer replaces the deposit (1) observed in 2007.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results for the garage area they are considered to be good. The archaeological watching brief took place in clement conditions. David Radford, Oxford City Archaeological Officer, was contacted on the afternoon of the excavation to discuss the results and was content with the preliminary fieldwork results.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Pottery by Gwilym Williams

During the excavation of the footings several pieces of late 19th-century earthenware and a small cylindrical stoneware flask were revealed.

The pottery comprised two fragments of mass-produced whiteware: a small ointment jar and the broken base of a similar vessel; the broken lid of a 'Yixing Zisha'-style teapot with attached corroded iron fragment; a large fragment of yellow chamberpot with leaf motif in black; a cylindrical stoneware flask; and two fragments of flowerpot.

The finds were not removed from the site.

5.2 Environmental Remains

No environmental samples were taken as the potential of the deposits was not felt to be sufficient to warrant sampling.

6 DISCUSSION

It is not possible to make any inference on the archaeological activity in the swimming pool area or the test pits which were carried out in 2007. The work was not carried out under archaeological supervision as stated in the brief issued by the Oxford City Archaeologist, which accompanied the planning permission, as any work carried out on the swimming pool was at the client's discretion.

The strip carried out in 2007 was not particularly informative, indicating a build up of humic soils over the Beckley Sand Member, which corresponds with observations made during the more recent work carried out in 2012. Although the regional significance of the remains is low, the remains of probable construction evidence associated with the property is of moderate significance in relation to the property itself.

The presence of the pit 106 containing building materials, probably related to the construction of the lodge, built between 1880 and 1899 – as evidenced by the OS 1st and 2nd Editions (1: 2500) – forms part of the historical sequence of works at the site. No finds were recovered from the fill (105) to ascertain the date of the feature, although the date of the lodge's construction is undoubtedly recorded within the estate archive.

The later rubbish pit 103 appeared to contain some of the rubbish from the earlier dump; however, it remains a possibility that the building materials derive from other construction projects at the site. The finds from the later pit indicate a late 19th or early 20th century date, and the rubbish pit may well be associated with the lodge, rather than the main house.

No determination of the archaeological potential within the Walled Garden area can be made due to the work not having been monitored or inspected. The proposal area for the garage was significantly disturbed by later activity. The absence of any earlier material from any of the features or from the area monitored cannot be said to be indicative of a general absence of prehistoric, Roman, Saxon or medieval remains at the site, which formed the aims of the exercise within the brief.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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