

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT MAYOTT HOUSE, OCK STREET, ABINGDON, OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SP 49229692

On behalf of BPHA

MARCH 2013

REPORT FOR Bpha

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services undertook an archaeological evaluation in advance of new planning proposals on land at Mayott House, Ock Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (centred SP49229692). Two trenches were excavated to the underlying natural geology or surface of medieval archaeology. The archaeological evaluation revealed a series of medieval rubbish pits and ditches cut into the natural clay and in some instances cut into a subsoil, within both trenches. The pits and possible ditches contained medieval refuse dated to the 13th century with some earlier residual pottery sherds from the 10th and 11th centuries AD. The site has proved early medieval habitation towards the western end of Ock Street which did not continue after the early 14th century AD. Following the medieval occupation, a thick post-medieval soil accumulation indicates the site being used as a garden or orchard. The site was then re-occupied in the 19th century with a Victorian street, the remains of one building was recorded in Trench 1, which is not on the 2nd edition OS map, but is assumed to be associated with the re-development of Ock Street and was probably a small workshop or outbuilding. The site was then redeveloped again during the 1970's with the construction of the present care home.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location and Geology (Fig. 1)

Mayott House is located on the south side of Ock Street in Abingdon immediately east of the Fire Station and north of Meadowside (NGR SU49229692). The northern part of the site is occupied by the existing care home whilst the southern part is a car park and garden. It lies at approximately 52m OD and the geology is first terrace gravel.

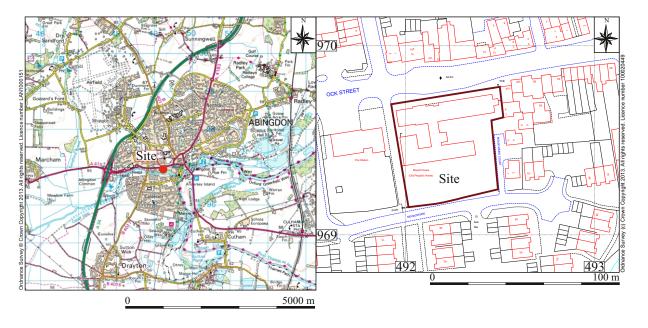
1.2 Planning Background

The site is being considered for re-development and is located in an area of archaeological potential. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) has been consulted and recommended that a field evaluation be carried out as part of the consideration of a proposed planning application. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* which outlined the method by which the work would be carried out in order to achieve the aims of the evaluation was prepared and approved before site work commenced. This archaeological report will need to be submitted with any future planning application as set out in the NPPF.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Ock Street was one of the original routes into Abingdon. The Brewery site, an area running south from the Ock Street frontage (38-52 Ock Street) contained a number of medieval pits and two buildings (Anthony *et al* 2006). One building was dated to the earlier 13th century while the other appears to have been in use, in a series of phases, from the 13th century to the 18th century. An area near the river contained a concentration of 15th and 16th century pits that appear to have formed part of an extensive tanning site.

The western reaches of Ock Street are an area into which settlement was thought to have expanded gradually between the earlier phases of the town (c.1200) and its later phases (c.1500). An excavation towards the western end of Ock Street at (No.'s 83-88 almost directly opposite Mayott House) located the ground plan of 13^{th} - 14^{th} century buildings (Roberts 1997).



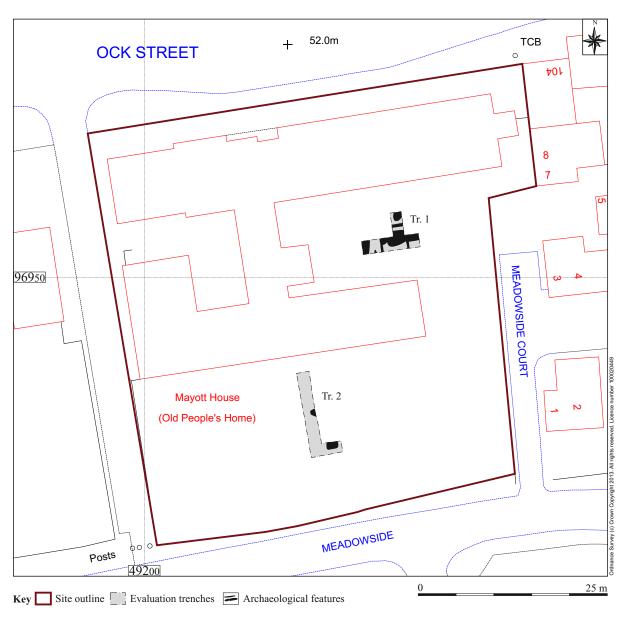


Figure 1. Site location

The excavations have proved that there was a developed street frontage this far west along Ock Street as early as the first quarter of the 13th century.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To establish the presence/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.
- In particular to establish if features related to the nearby medieval settlement are present in this area.

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* (2008) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The trenching sample required was achieved through the excavation of two trenches measuring 15m long, locations shown on Figure 1.

The trenches were excavated by a 360° type tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand (where necessary) prior to hand excavation of the archaeological deposits and features.

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 photographic record was produced using colour transparency, black and white and digital cameras. The trenches were backfilled after recording.

No deposits were considered suitable for environmental sampling.

The work was monitored by the archaeological advisor to the Local Planning Authority Hugh Coddington.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts or walls; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 Excavation Results

The trenches were set out across the general area of the proposed new development designed to cover the area of the new development.

4.1.1 Trench 1 (Figs. 1 - 2, Plate 1)

Trench 1 was excavated to a length of 15m (1.8m wide), designed in a T-shape to avoid live foul drains and to varying depths of between 1.21m at the northern end (50.98m AOD), 1.3m at the western end (50.93m AOD) and 1.08m (51.09m AOD) at the eastern end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the natural.

General Stratigraphy

The stratigraphy within the trench (Fig. 2; S. 1.2, 1.3 & 1.6) consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest). The natural light yellow chalky clay (1/31) was seen at base of the medieval pit 1/06. Overlying (1/31) was brownish yellow clay (1/04) seen at the base of the trench, which may have been the same as the subsoil seen in Trench 2 (2/05). Overlying (1/04) was c. 0.80m thick friable dark brown silty clay post-medieval soil (1/03)=(1/25)=(1/34)=(1/13). Deposit (1/02)=(1/24)=(1/23)=(1/10) was c. 0.20m thick friable mid brown yellow sandy silt with frequent gravel, ceramic building material and limestone inclusions. Between the last two deposits was a layer of stone (1/33) at the east end of the trench. The latest deposit was c. 0.30m thick loose greyish black humic topsoil (1/01)=(1/09)=(1/23)=(1/32).

Features; cut into medieval subsoil (1/04)

Feature 1/06 (Fig. 2; S. 1.6, Plate 3) was interpreted as a possible large pit, but had a possible linear shape and may have therefore been a ditch, perhaps a tenement boundary. The ditch was 0.80m wide and 0.60m deep and had a sharp concave western side forming a rounded base. The eastern side of the ditch was convex in shape with an indent perhaps caused by a rodent. This feature had two fills, the primary fill was 0.05m thick firm mottled yellow, orange and grey sandy loam (1/28) with 4 sherds of medieval pottery dated to the 13th century AD, plus animal bones. The latest fill was firm dark brown black silty clay loam with occasional limestone blocks (1/05) with 28 sherds of 13th century AD pottery. A cess like green staining was noted within this deposit and therefore it is more likely to be a pit.

In the corner of the trench was another cut 1/22 which was only just visible in section. It was filled by loose grey black silty loam (1/37), sealed by (1/03).

To the immediate east of 1/06 was an irregular shaped feature interpreted as a small pit 1/30, 0.50m wide and 0.14m deep with gradually sloping concave sides and a sharply rounded base (Fig. 2; S. 1.5). The feature was filled by firm light grey silty clay with a notable cess mottling (1/29) which contained some animal bones.

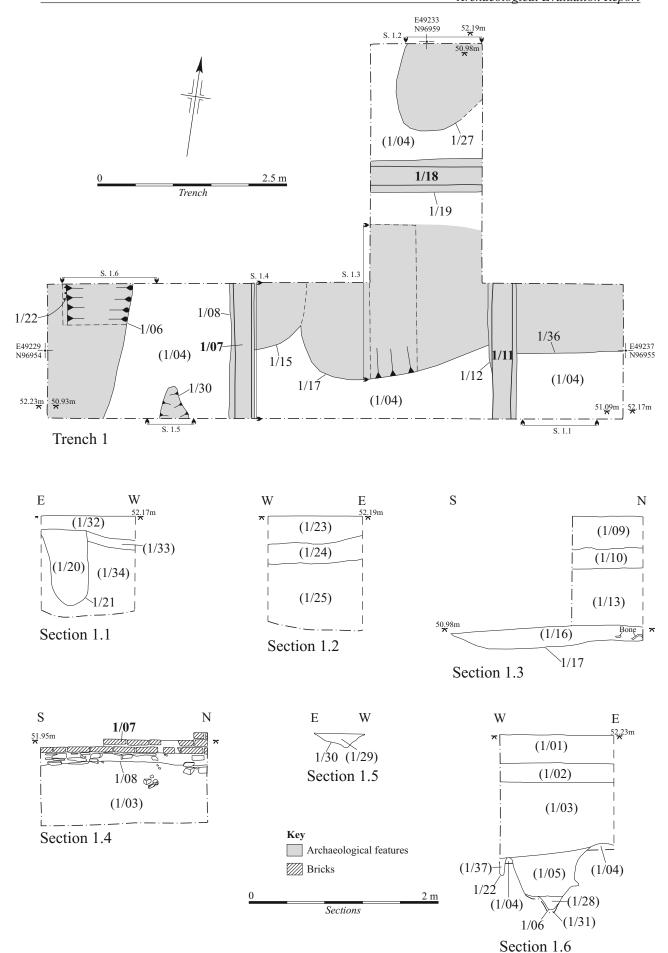


Figure 2. Trench 1 - plan and sections

Pit 1/15 was not excavated, but could be seen in plan to cut pit 1/17. It was a minimum of 0.70m x 0.80m in dimensions and was continuing beyond the limits of the trench to the north. The pit was filled by (1/14) of a dark greyish brown colour and silty clay texture with three sherds of 13th century AD pottery and animal bones.

Within the centre of the trench excavation was pit 1/17, 2.4m long and 0.22m deep with gradual sides and a flattish base (Fig. 2; S. 1.3). It was filled by dark grey silty clay with some patches of yellow clay with limestone fragments (1/16) alongside 21 pottery sherds dated to the 13th century AD and animal bones. The possible skeleton of a large mammal, perhaps a horse or pony was exposed in the corner of the trench, within fill (1/16).

At the northern end of the trench was pit 1/27, sub circular in shape with firm grey black silty clay fill (1/26) (not excavated). The feature was sealed by post-medieval soil (1/25).

At the eastern end of the trench was another pit 1/36 which was of undetermined shape, but the edges seemed to be more straight in plan than rounded which may indicate that it was a ditch rather than pit. The feature was filled by firm grey black sandy clay loam (1/35) (not excavated). It was filled by subsoil (1/34).

Pit; cut through post-medieval deposits (1/33) & (1/34)

Pit 1/21 was 0.40m wide and 0.80m deep seen in section only cut through the latest subsoil deposit (1/33) meaning this feature was modern was date. It was filled by loose dark brown black silty clay loam (1/20). It was sealed by topsoil (1/32).

Walls; cut into (1/03)

Wall (1/07) was orientated on a north-south direction, constructed of two courses of roughly dressed limestone blocks (Fig. 2; S. 1.4). The stone blocks were used as foundation for the wall. Directly above the limestone blocks were red bricks (<220x120x60mm) laid in stretcher style, with three courses surviving. The wall was set into construction cut 1/08 and was covered by (1/02).

Wall (1/18) was constructed in the same style as wall (1/07) with two courses of limestone blocks used as a foundation and red bricks (220x120x60mm) used in the construction of the wall. The wall was set into construction cut 1/19.

The third wall (1/11) (construction cut 1/12) which formed part of this structure was in a very poor state of preservation but seemed to be of a similar construction as the other walls and formed part of the rectangular structure.

4.1.2 Trench **2** (Figs. 1 & 3, Plate 2)

Trench 2 was excavated to a length of 15m (1.8m wide), designed in a L-shape and to varying depths of between 1.41m at the northern end (50.74m AOD), 1.71m at the southern end which was a sondage designed to reach the natural clay (50.51m AOD) and 1.04m (50.91m AOD) at the eastern end. Machine excavation ceased at the top of archaeology or the subsoil deposit (2/05) as safe working depths had been reached within the trench excavations. The subsoil deposit contained medieval finds.

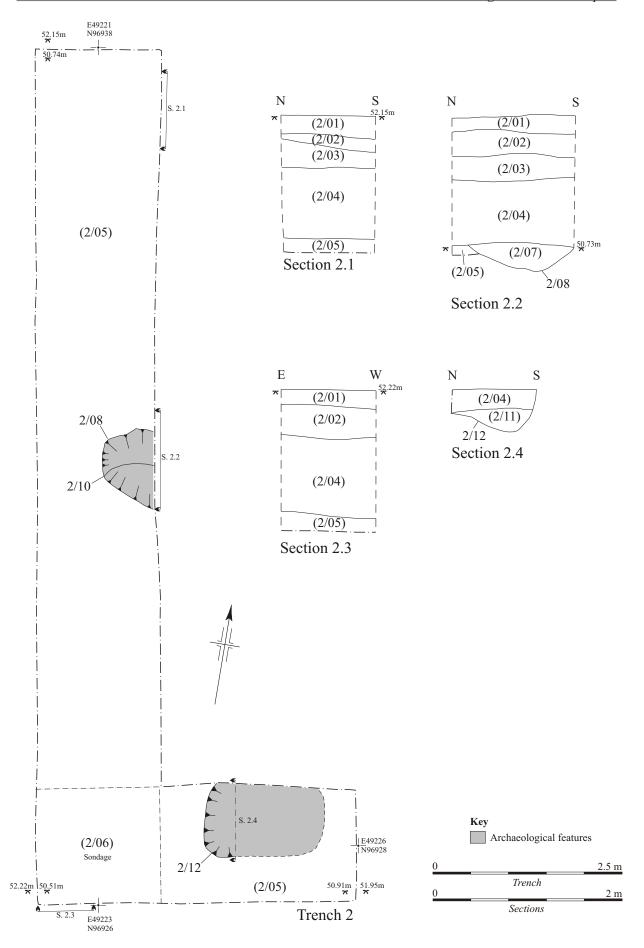


Figure 3. Trench 2 - plan and sections

General Stratigraphy

The stratigraphy within the trench consisted of the following layers (earliest to latest) (Fig. 3; S. 2.1 & 2.3). The bright orange yellow natural clay was the earliest deposit recorded within the trench (2/06).

Overlying this was 0.20m thick mid greyish brown silty clay subsoil (2/05) with occasional medieval pottery fragments dated to the 13^{th} century. Overlying (2/05) was c. 0.75m thick friable dark brownish black silty loam post-medieval soil (2/04) with one sherd of 16^{th} century pottery and animal bones. This was covered by 0.22m thick buried dark greyish black loamy topsoil (2/03) with one sherd of late 11^{th} century AD pottery.

Following this was 0.10m thick mottled brownish yellow clay silt with gravels (2/02). Grass covered topsoil was the latest deposit (2/01).

Pits; cut into subsoil (2/05)

Pit 2/08 (Fig. 3; S. 2.2, Plate 4) was 1m wide and 0.30m deep with gradually curving concave sides and a rounded base. It was filled by mid greyish brown silty clay with gravel inclusions and one sherd of Saxo-Norman pottery (2/07), which must be residual as the pit cut a 13th century layer.

Pit 2/12 (Fig. 3; S. 2.4) was sub circular in shape with rounded sides 0.45m deep and 0.90m wide (minimum) with sharp concave sides and a rounded base. The pit was filled by soft dark greyish black silty clay (2/11) with one sherd of mid 11th century medieval pottery.

Pit; possibly cut into natural clay (2/06)

Pit 2/10 was not excavated but was revealed when the fill of pit 2/08 was removed. Only the northern edge of the pit was seen in plan cut into natural clay (2/06). However from what level this was cut from is unknown. The fill was soft and sticky dark blue grey clay silt (2/09) with 4 sherds of late 11th century medieval pottery.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The excavation of the trenches took place during late winter, but in generally favourable weather conditions. A confidence rating is high that the best possible results were achieved.

5. THE FINDS

5.1 The Pottery *by Paul Blinkhorn*

The pottery assemblage comprised 76 sherds with a total weight of 1,970g. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXR: St. Neots Ware, c AD850-1200. 1 sherd, 2g.

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD975-1350. 4 sherds, 45g.

OXBF: North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050 – 1400. 6 sherds, 97g.

OXAG: Abingdon Ware, late $11^{th} - 14^{th}$ C. 17 sherds, 446g.

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 45 sherds, 1305g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 2 sherds, 72g.

WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, 19th - 20th C. 1 sherds, 3g.

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 range of pottery types is typical of sites in Abingdon (e.g. Blinkhorn 2006, 62), although it suggests that the medieval activity was ended by the 14th century at the latest. The sherds are mostly large, and in very good condition, other than the single sherd of St Neots Ware, which is very abraded and may be residual. The absence of Surrey Whiteware (Oxford fabric OXBG), a reasonably common find at sites in the town (e.g. ibid) suggests that the medieval features are no later than the mid-late 13th century. The sherd of modern pottery from Trench 1 context 5 appears very likely to be intrusive, given the fact that the assemblage otherwise comprises large, well-preserved sherds of earlier medieval wares.

The range of vessel types is typical of the earlier medieval period, consisting of mainly highly-decorated glazed jugs, along with fragments of unglazed jars and a single bowl rims. One large fragment from the rim and upper body of an OXAG jug is unglazed.

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

		OX	KR	OX	AC	OX	BF	OX	AG	ΟΣ	KAM	OX	DR	WH	EW	71
Tr	Cntxt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	Date
1	3									2	11					13thC
1	5			3	39	1	35	2	9	22	1066			1*	3	13thC
1	10											1	48			16thC
1	14							2	20	1	5					13thC
1	16			1	6			2	22	18	212					13thC
1	28					1	13	2	163	1	6					13thC
2	3							1	10							L11thC
2	4											1	24			16thC
2	5					1	9	6	206	1	5					13thC
2	7	1	2													10thC?
2	9					2	37	2	16							L11thC
2	11					1	3									M11thC
	Total	1	2	4	45	6	97	17	446	45	1305	2	72	1	3	

^{*}intrusive

5.2 The Animal Bone by Paul Riccoboni

A small assemblage of animal bone was collected from the excavations (Table 2) which was

Context	Number of	Weight (g)
Number	fragments	
1/03	1	11
1/05	2	238
1/14	1	22
1/16	26	663
1/28	2	117
1/29	1	22
2/03	1	35
2/04	1	23
2/09	1	70

Table 2; Quantification of retrieved animal bone

consistent with the types identified from previously excavated examples across the town (Wilson *et al* 1975 & Roberts 1997). The most common identified animals were sheep/goat with some possible cow. The bones were in a good state of preservation and there were no obvious butchery marks, except from contexts (1/28) & (1/29). The bones represent typical medieval table refuse. All animal bones have been retained at this stage for possible inclusion in the final site archive.

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological evaluation was successful in determining the archaeological potential of the site and the character of below ground features and deposits. The excavations enabled an assessment of the depth, quality and nature of the features encountered.

The archaeological evidence was in the form of pits and possible ditches generally dated to the 13th century, when the street was first occupied with domestic dwellings fronting onto Ock Street.

Within Trenches 1 and 2 was a layer of dark brown subsoil which contained pottery of 13th century date. This 'subsoil' layer does not seem similar to the deposit seen on the north side of Ock Street (Roberts 1997), described as natural red-brown *loess* (1156), which was disturbed but contained a range of medieval pottery sherds dated from the 11th to mid 14th century. On the Mayott House site this subsoil deposit may have been a cultivation soil. There were archaeological features cut through this deposit.

The high number of tripod pitchers and jug sherds from 83-88 Ock Street has a parallel at Mayott House where also there was a high proportion of decorated jug sherds from the mid 13th-early 14th century. The pottery tells us that the features are no later than the early 14th century at the latest, probably mid-late 13th century AD.

In Trench 2, beneath the 0.20m thick deposit of subsoil was the bright yellow clay natural. There was a pit seen cut into the natural clay within Trench 2. This means that there are possibly two levels of archaeology, the earliest pit 2/10 possibly being cut into the natural clay and the latest pits 2/08 & 2/12 being cut into the surface of the subsoil. However pit 2/10 may have been cut from the surface of the subsoil before being truncated by the later pit where seen. These latest pits contained early medieval pottery of 10th or late 11th century date, which must be residual as the subsoil layer (2/05) contained 13th century pottery sherds.

The excavations were not close enough to the street frontage to encounter any medieval structures. The medieval evidence comprises of mainly rubbish pits and possible tenement boundaries which would have been associated with the medieval properties fronting onto Ock Street. It was common for medieval rubbish pits to be located to the immediate rear of the properties which they served, as seen at the Old Gaol (Riccoboni 2012) and St. Thomas's Street, Oxford (Hardy 1996). A number of entries in the Cartulary of Abingdon Abbey records messuages and rents of houses on Ock Street from the first quarter of the 13th century. The medieval pits are unlikely to be associated with tanning which has been identified further east towards the town centre during the redevelopment of the Moorlands Brewery (Anthony *et al* 2006), as it seems that the pits contain only domestic waste. This discovery is the first medieval habitation site this far west along Ock Street.

Development proposals

The site is being considered for redevelopment but construction methods have not yet been decided. The medieval archaeology is well sealed beneath deep post-medieval made ground of 0.80m depth, overlain by another 0.40m deep topsoil of recent origin, covering the archaeology. The significant archaeological horizon is therefore protected by 1.2m of soil. This should be enough protection to allow the developers to form a strategy where the bulk of the archaeology can be preserved *in situ*. Any new deep footing trenches may still impact on the surface of the archaeology and will encounter medieval finds.

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

Physical record

The pottery

The animal bone

The archive is currently maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service under accession number 2013.13



Plate 1; Trench 1 in progress looking east



Plate 3; Pit 1/06 looking north



Plate 4; Pits 2/08 & 2/10 looking east

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APPENDIX 1; Evaluation Trench Results Summary.

Гrench	Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
	1/01	Deposit	Mid greyish black silt loam topsoil	0.35	Tr.	Tr.		
1	1/02	Deposit	Friable mid brown yellow sandy gravel	0.30	Tr.	Tr.		
1	1/03	Deposit	Friable dark brown silty loam	0.75	Tr.	Tr.	Pot; Animal bone	13 th C
1	1/04	Deposit	Light brown yellow clay silt subsoil	n/a	Tr.	Tr.		
1	1/05	Deposit	Fill of 1/06	0.44	1.1(min)	Tr.	Pot; Animal bone	13 th C
	1/06	Cut	Pit/ditch	0.60	1.1 (min)	Tr.		
	1/07	Masonry	Wall (N-S)	0.55	0.30	Tr.		
[1/08	Cut	Construction cut for wall	0.55	0.30	Tr.		
I	1/09	Deposit	Friable dark brown black sandy loam topsoil	0.35	Tr.	Tr.		
	1/10	Deposit	Friable mid brown yellow sandy clay with gravel	0.30	Tr.	Tr.	Pot	16 th C
	1/11	Masonry	Wall (E-W)	0.40	0.30	Tr.		
	1/12	Cut	Construction cut for wall	0.40	0.30	Tr.		
	1/13	Deposit	Friable dark brown silty loam	0.75	Tr.	Tr.		
	1/14	Deposit	fill of pit 1/15	0.10 (min)	0.60	0.80	Pot; Animal bone	13 th C
l	1/15	Cut	Pit	0.10 (min)	0.60	0.80		
	1/16	Deposit	Fill of Ditch 1/17	0.20	2.4	2.0	Pot; Animal bone	13 th C
	1/17	Cut	Ditch	0.20	2.4	2.0		
	1/18	Masonry	Wall (N-S)	0.40	0.30	Tr.		
	1/19	Cut	Construction cut	0.40	0.30	Tr.		

Trench	Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
1	1/20	—	E.H. 6 : 1/01	0.00	0.40	1		1
1	1/20	Deposit	Fill of pit 1/21	0.80	0.40	/		modern
1	1/21	Cut	Cut of pit	0.80	0.40	/		
1	1/22	Cut	Ditch?	0.14 (min)	0.20 (min)	/		
1	1/23	Deposit	Mid greyish black silt loam topsoil	0.35	Tr.	Tr.		
1	1/24	Deposit	Mid brown yellow sandy silt with CBM	0.30	Tr.	Tr.		
	1/25	Deposit	Firm dark greyish brown silty clay	0.70	Tr.	Tr.		
1	1/26	Deposit	Fill of 1/27	/	1.15	1.15		
1	1/27	Cut	Pit	/	1.15	1.15		
1	1/28	Deposit	Fill of 1/06	0.14	0.40	Tr.	Pot; Animal bone	13 th C
1	1/29	Deposit	Fill of 1/30	0.14	0.50	Tr.	Animal bone	
1	1/30	Cut	Pit	0.14	0.50	Tr.		
1	1/31	Deposit	Firm bright yellow clay natural	/	Tr.	Tr.		
1	1/32	Deposit	Mid greyish black silty clay	0.35	Tr.	Tr.		
1	1/33	Deposit	Mid brown sandy stone layer	0.30	Tr.	Tr.		
1	1/34	Deposit	Firm dark brown silty clay	0.70	Tr.	Tr.		
1	1/35	Deposit	Fill of pit 1/36	/	0.90	1.40		
1	1/36	Cut	Pit (unexcavated)	/	0.90	1.40		
1	1/37	Deposit	Fill of 1/22	0.14	0.22 (min)	/		
2	2/01	Deposit	Friable dark greyish black silty clay	0.25	Tr.	Tr.		
2	2/02	Deposit	Friable mottled brownish yellow clay silt	0.10	Tr.	2.0		
2	2/03	Deposit	Dark grey black silty clay	0.22	Tr.	Tr.	Pot; Animal bone	L11th C
2	2/04	Deposit	Mid-dark brownish grey silty clay	0.80	Tr.	Tr.	Pot; Animal bone	16 th C
2	2/05	Deposit	Mid yellowish grey clay silt	0.20	Tr.	Tr.	Pot	13 th C
2	2/06	Deposit	Bright orange yellow clay silt	/	Tr.	Tr.		
2	2/07	Deposit	Fill of 2/08	0.30	1.0	/	Pot	10 th C
2	2/08	Cut	Pit	0.30	1.0	/		

Trench	Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
2	2/09	Deposit	Fill of 2/10	/	/	/	Pot; Animal bone	L11th C
2	2/10	Deposit	Pit (unexcavated)	/	/	/		
2	2/11	Deposit	Dark greyish black silty clay	0.45	0.90	0.90	Pot	M11thC
2	2/12	Cut	Pit	0.45	0.90	0.90		