

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

**THE OLD COURT HOUSE, BISHAM GRANGE,
BISHAM, BERKS.**

SU 8473 8483

On behalf of

Mr. & Mrs. R Noyen

AUGUST 2006

REPORT FOR

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Summary

A Watching Brief was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services at The Old Court House, Bisham on the excavation of footings for a house extension on a property located within the environs of Bisham Abbey (SAM 19021). Garden soils overlay natural clay. Evidence of the demolition of a 19th century building was observed from dumps within the garden soils. A large undated pit, possibly for quarrying was found.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located off Abbey Way at Bisham, immediately adjacent to the National Sports Centre at Bisham Abbey. The site is centred on NGR SU 8473 8483 and comprises a dwelling and its curtilage. The site is located on river terrace gravels at c. 48m OD.

1.2 Planning Background

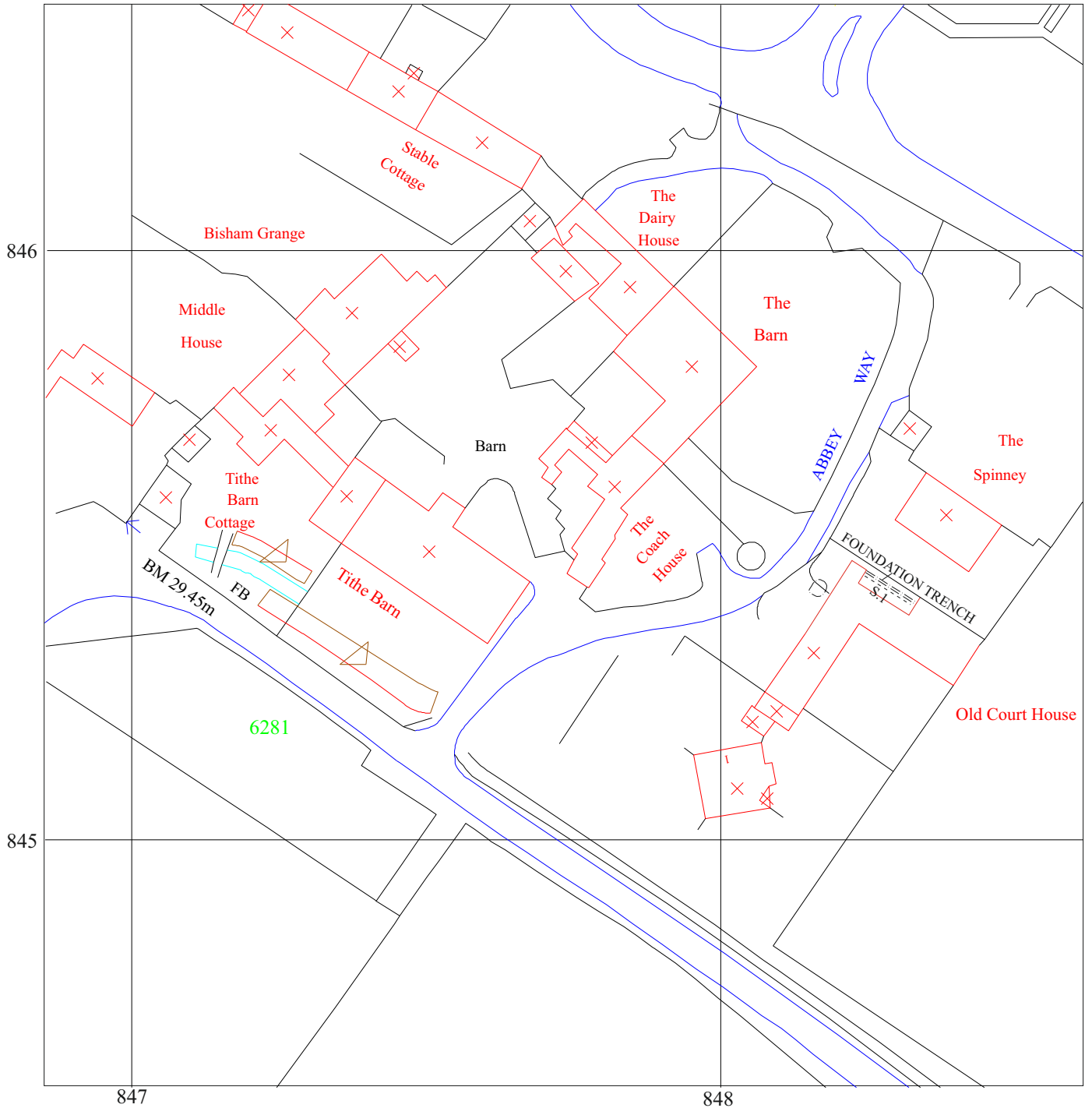
The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead granted planning consent for the construction of two single storey side extensions and a front entrance to The Old Court House, Bisham Grange, Temple Lane, Bisham, Marlow (05/02275). Due to the potential for the work to affect archaeological deposits a condition was attached requiring a programme of archaeological works to be carried out. The site lies within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 19021) and Scheduled Monument Consent was granted subject to conditions, including one that required the submission to English Heritage of a written scheme of investigation detailing a programme of archaeological works. The Archaeological Advisor for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (Berkshire Archaeology) prepared a *Brief* for such archaeological work. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* submitted by John Moore Heritage Services detailed how the requirements of the *Brief* would be met.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site lies within the scheduled site of Bisham Abbey (SAM 19021), a former monastic site, and is therefore identified as having archaeological potential. The site is noted in Domesday as Bitesham, and became a Templar preceptory in the early 12th century. In 1333 it was established as an Augustine priory and in 1537 was re-founded as a Benedictine abbey.

Large areas of the original site are now occupied by the National Sports Centre and a variety of other buildings, including private dwellings. However the complex contains buildings dating from the 14th century and substantial buried deposits are assumed to survive below ground in many areas. A number of small pieces of fieldwork have retrieved medieval material including pottery and other artefactual evidence from across the site.

Scheduled Monument Consent required that an adequately funded archaeological watching brief took place on the site during groundworks for the proposed development.



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Figure 1. Site and footing location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To determine the existence or absence of any archaeological remains; and should remains be found to be present to ensure their preservation by record to the highest possible standard.
- To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of the remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- To determine or confirm the approximate extent of the remains.
- To determine the condition and state of preservation of the remains.
- To determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present.
- To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.
- To determine the implications of the remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.
- To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.
- To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence and the forms in which such evidence may be present.
- To signal to the Inspector of Ancient Monuments and the County Archaeological Officer where archaeological remains are encountered that might not have been reasonably anticipated, in order that they may be adequately dealt with.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Berkshire Archaeology and English Heritage. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record throughout, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The stripping of the surface and the excavation of the foundation trenches and test pits were monitored. This work was undertaken by a mini-digger with a toothless 800mm grading bucket for the strip, and 300mm and 600mm buckets for the excavation of the test pits and the trenches, respectively.

4 RESULTS

All archaeological features were assigned individual context numbers. This number covered both the feature cut and fill, unless the feature was sample excavated by hand. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material. A general description of the feature fills is given. CBM is used as an abbreviation for ceramic building materials, such as tile and brick.

The construction area at the rear of the property was heavily truncated by the footings of the current building as well as a soakaway, located in the centre of the former patio. The groundworks revealed a sequence of post-medieval deposits overlying natural. The area to the front of the property where the porch extension is proposed has been heavily damaged by a tree root-plate. The proposed extension to the rear of the property was not carried out and therefore did not form a part of the watching brief.

The Patio (Figures 1 -3)

The trench which was excavated in advance of concrete footings being cast, ran across the patio area northwest/southeast, and measured 10.6m long by 0.8m wide. The base of the trench was 1.50m below the top of the post-medieval garden soils, at 28.90m OD.

The earliest deposits exposed were natural yellow sands, calcareous clay lenses and clay sands (7). This band of material was 0.40m thick, and appeared to continue below the bottom of the trench. This low energy deposit showed no evidence of human activity.

This layer was overlain by an orangey-yellow sandy clay (6), with very occasional gravel pieces in it. No evidence for human activity was observed from this layer either although it appeared to be quite well wormed, in which case small chalky lumps were mixed with the wormcasts. The layer was approximately 0.40m thick.

This natural deposit was cut by a large pit [5], measuring more than 1.6m northwest/southeast, which was itself overlain by the present house footings. This pit was filled with assorted sized lumps of chalk (4) - none of which had any indication of working or mortaring. The base of the pit extends below the bottom of the trench.

Sealing these two deposits was a spread of leached grey brown clay silt (3) with CBM, chalk lumps and charcoal through it. This deposit was spread across the excavation area. The CBM recovered from the deposit is post-medieval. It may represent some form of garden soil. A layer of dumped tile (2) overlay this clay silt at the northwest end of trench, directly above the pit of chalk rubble. At the southeast end of the patio, a thin (c. 010m) chalk layer (8) was sat on the possible garden soil. This was sealed by (1).

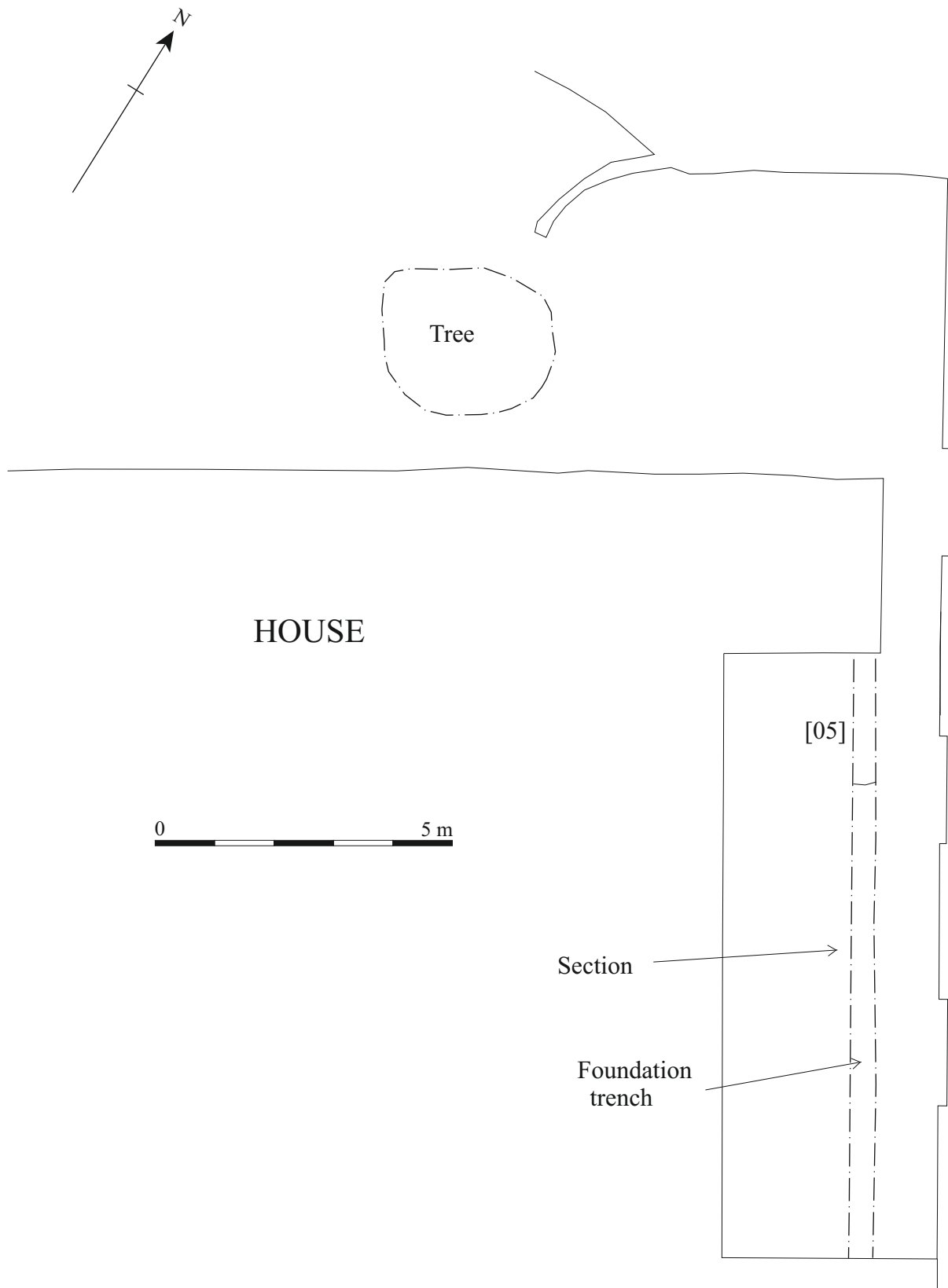


Figure 2. Plan of footings

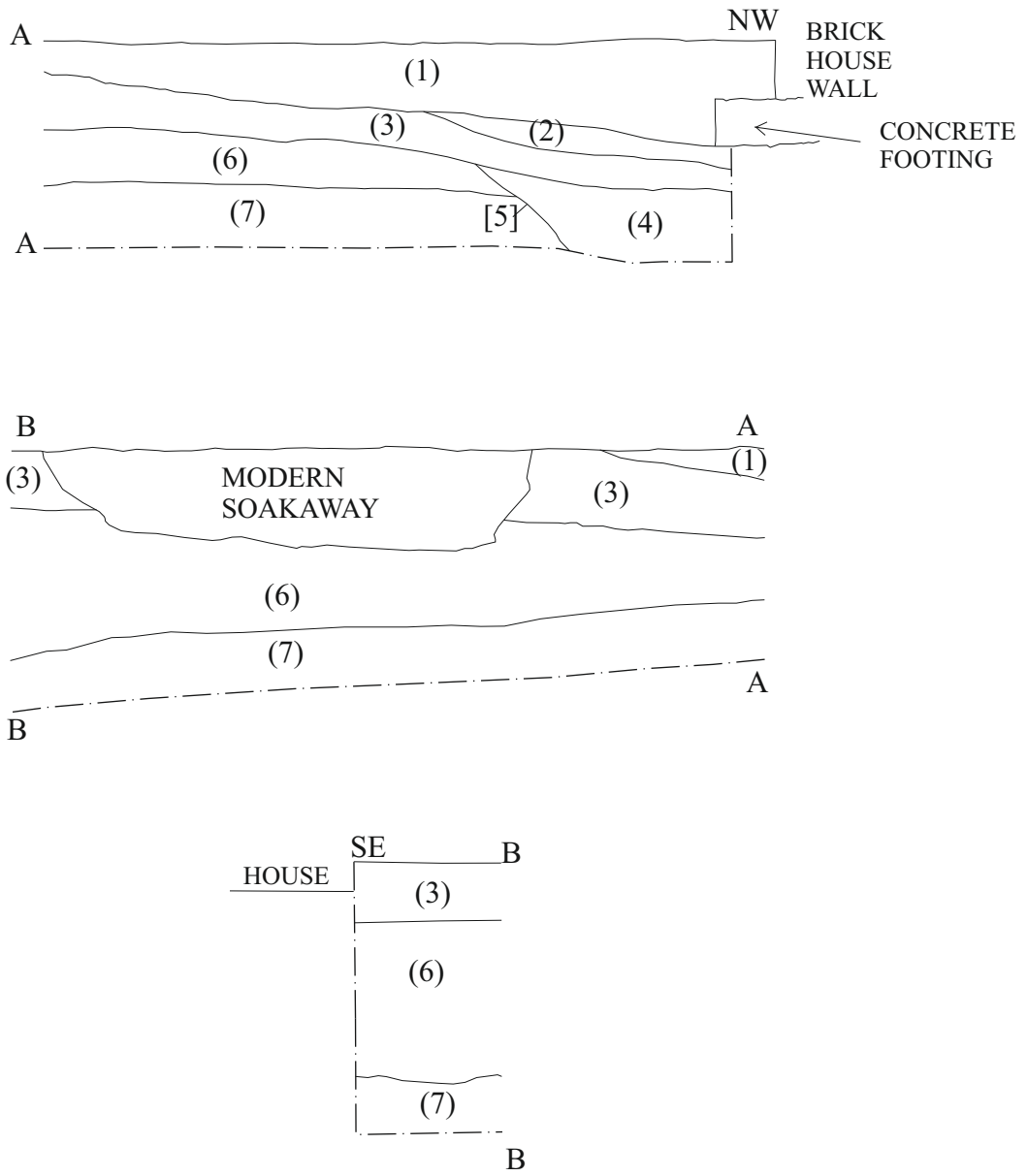


Figure 3. Section

Sealing all the other deposits was a 0.40m thick layer of garden soils (1), which evidences good microstratigraphy, all apparently dating to the latter half of the twentieth century. No finds were recovered from this deposit as it was felt sufficient to characterize the layer visually.

The Front Porch (Fig. 2)

A sub-circular hole was excavated immediately in front of the front door in the proposed location of the porch extension. This excavation revealed the stump of a recently cut down oak. The edges of the excavated pit revealed a modern, heavily rooted soft black loam, which still contained roots, CBM and 20th century detritus.

5 DISCUSSION

The site is located within the environs of Bisham Abbey, but it is apparent that no evidence for monastic structures can be said to have been conclusively identified. Those remains recovered would seem to relate to a later post-medieval phase of use of the property.

The single observed feature was an apparently large pit containing chalky rubble. No finds were recovered from this pit. The chalk rubble did not evidence mortar or any bonding material. It was sealed by a post-medieval layer of garden soil containing CBM. The pit may represent a soakaway in the gardens of the former abbey, possibly when it was in use as a private residence, or equally the backfilling of a quarry pit dug for clay or sand. No pot or other finds were recovered from the pit, so its precise identification and date remains elusive.

It is indeed surprising not to have encountered clay pipe or other typically post-medieval remains such as white wares or salt glazed pottery. Indeed the only ceramic remains, notwithstanding the CBM, were sherds of machine-cast flower pot, which came from the uppermost garden soils.

To conclude, the trench in the rear patio evidenced the river gravel deposits of the drift geology, but no archaeologically significant remains were encountered, neither as deposits, features nor artefacts. The trench dug beneath the proposed front porch was entirely archaeologically sterile having been heavily rooted by the former oak that stood there.

6 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record

The project brief

Written Scheme of Investigation

The project report

The primary site records

The archive has been given an accession number REDMG : 2006.90 by Reading Museum Service, where it will be deposited.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*

Institute of Field Archaeologists. 1994. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs.*