

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

**LAND TO NE OF ROUNDABOUT, JUNCTION A423 AND
NORAL WAY, BANBURY**

SP 456429

On behalf of

Office Villages Limited

JULY 2006

REPORT FOR

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c/o Apex Project Consultants Limited
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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during groundworks for a new office development. Ditches for a small enclosure were found in the northeast corner of the development area.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located to the northeast of the roundabout with the A423 and Noral Way in the north of Banbury (NGR SP 456429). The underlying geology is Lias Clay and the site lies at approximately 98m OD. The site was pasture prior to development.

1.2 Planning Background

Cherwell District Council granted planning permission for three office buildings comprising seven office units with associated parking, new access to the highway and hard and soft landscaping (05/01034/F). Due to the archaeological potential of the area, a condition was attached to the planning consent that required the implementation of an archaeological watching brief during the course of groundworks in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains of significance.

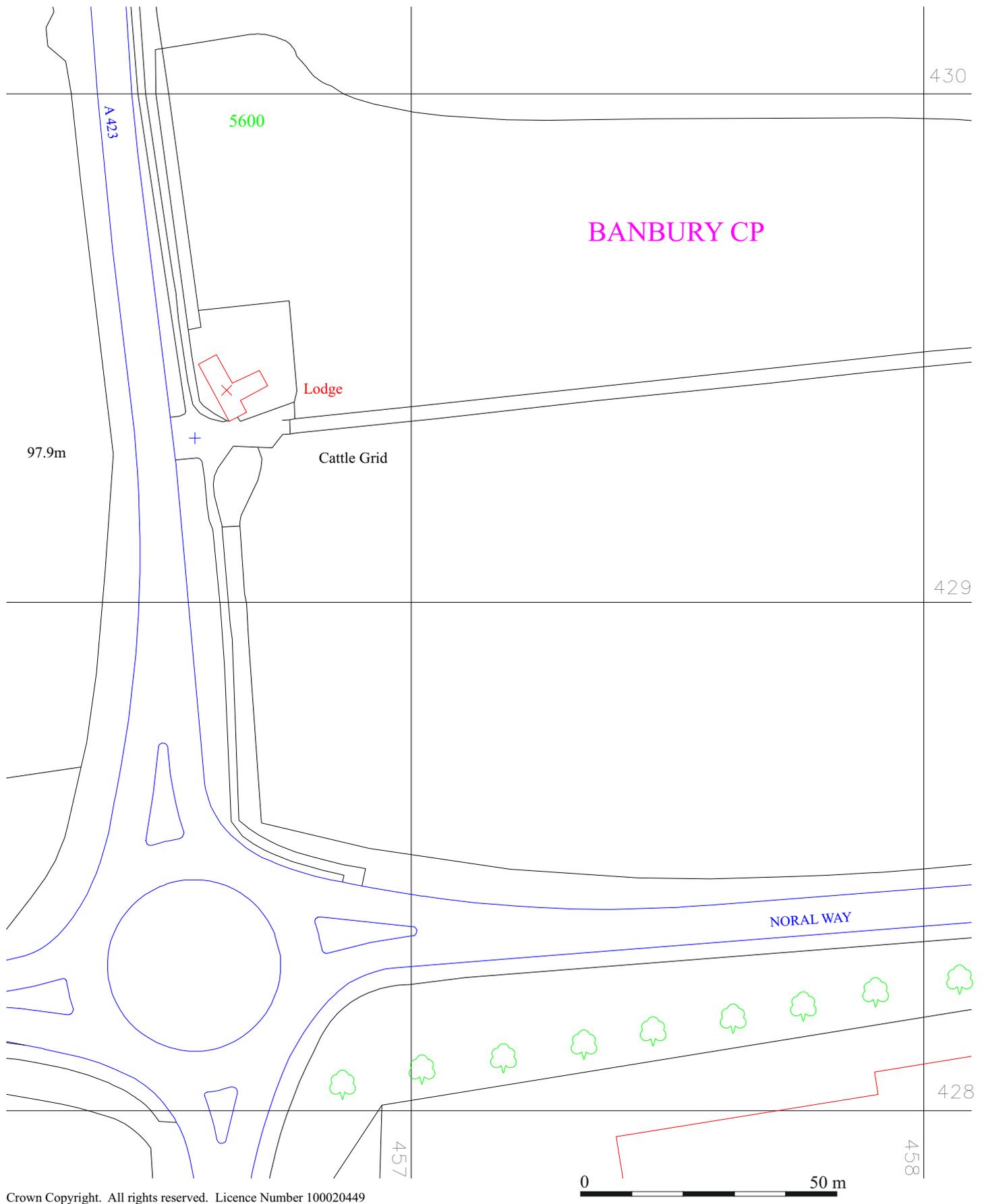
1.3 Archaeological Background

The proposed development lay within an area of archaeological interest in that it was close to an area of earthworks that date to the medieval period. The area has been subject to archaeological investigation through topographical survey, limited geophysical survey and some evaluative trenching (Cotswold Archaeological Trust 1992). The development area lay within an area of ridge and furrow outside of the core area of the earthworks.

The earliest archaeological remains at Hardwick Farm belong to the early medieval period and comprise a deserted medieval village, probable fishpond, regular open field system and possible post mill. The village was probably no more than a hamlet and there are at least two phases represented in the surrounding open field system. A depopulation of the hamlet occurred from the 16th century.

Evaluation at the extreme north edge of the development area found a major boundary, and clarified the relationship between the lynchet or terrace, estate driveway and the surviving ridge and furrow south of the drive (*ibid.* Trench 3). The major boundary was defined by a large ditch and associated bank lying on the north side of the ditch. This delimited two separate ploughed fields to the north and south. To the south of the ditch was a further smaller ditch on the same alignment.

On the western edge of the development site was a ditch or gully thought to pre-date the present alignment of cultivation (*ibid.* Trenches 4 and 6). Further to the east within Trench 4 was a further broader, shallow channel that was thought to be contemporary with the extant ridge and furrow or an element of an imposed, regular



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Figure 1. Site and feature location

drainage system. Within Trench 5 ridge and furrow cultivation was recorded in section but there were no deep furrows cutting into the natural Lias Clay.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.
- In particular
 - to record any evidence for the medieval settlement.
 - where possible, to record any changes to the field system e.g. any changes in the width and direction of the strips
- To make public the results of the investigations.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) issued a Brief for the work, which John Moore Heritage Services carried out to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with OCAS, on behalf of the local planning authority. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist monitored part of the topsoil strip and inspected the rest of the site after the topsoil strip. The northeast corner of the site and the access road along the east site boundary were inspected after ground reduction. Footings for the new building in the southwest area of the site were mostly monitored during excavation. Otherwise they were inspected after excavation and before filling with concrete. Small lengths of service trenches in the northern part of the site along with the sections of the trench dug for the large septic tank just west of the new site entrance from Noral Way were also examined.

Following this work and the general lack of finds and features, other than in the extreme northeast corner of the site, it was agreed with the County Archaeological services that no further monitoring of the ground works was necessary.

Ground conditions were either very wet or very dry.

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.

4 RESULTS (Figure 1)

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

The natural Lias Clay (context 03) comprised pale yellow and pale grey-blue clay (60:40). This was overlaid by a ploughsoil some 400mm thick of pale-mid brown-yellow friable silty clay (02). This in turn was overlaid by 100-150mm of grass and mid grey-brown slightly clayey silt topsoil (01).

The furrows of the ridge and furrow system of cultivation were not distinguishable in the ploughsoil after the site strip.

Part of the ploughsoil in the southwest part of the site had been removed and replaced by hardcore for a site compound presumably in use during the construction of Noral Way.

Along the north edge of the site where the topsoil had been stripped but the ground had not been reduced, the south edge of the major boundary found during the evaluation (CAT 1992, Trench 3, context 340) was exposed [04]. This was at least 1.90m wide (wider than in *ibid*). The edge of the associated earthwork bank sealed the north edge of the ditch. The uppermost fill of the ditch was the same as the topsoil (01). This ditch is still visible as a slight earthwork further to the east.

Two ditches run southwards from ditch [04]. The westernmost [05] was 2.10m wide and was *c.* 300mm deep cut into ploughsoil (02). The cut was very difficult to see in section and it may have been slightly deeper. The lower fill was a pale grey-orange-brown slightly silty clay that was similar to the ploughsoil (02) but more friable. The upper 100mm of ditch fill was the same as the topsoil (01).

The other north/south orientated ditch [06] was *c.* 1.15 – 1.60m wide. It was 13m long before turning westwards. Where seen this ditch was 225mm deep. The fills were the same as within ditch [05]. Again the feature was difficult to see in section. Presumably these ditches formed a rectangular enclosure attached to the south side of the major boundary ditch [04]. All the ditches, including [04], were cut into ploughsoil (02).

The parallel smaller ditch located in the evaluation (*ibid*, Trench 3, context 332) was not exposed during the site strip.

The ditches seen in evaluation trenches 4 and 6 (*ibid*) were not exposed.

No other features apart from field drains were seen.

5 FINDS

No finds other than modern finds associated with the compound used for the construction of Noral Way were seen.

6 DISCUSSION

The small enclosure appears to coincide with a shallow negative earthwork recorded as a dotted line by the RCHME (CAT 1992, Fig. 2). The north/south section of the earthwork may be the east side of the enclosure before the feature turns to the southwest. While the enclosure was not visible as an earthwork it is possible that the east side was not allowed to silt up and was maintained as a drainage feature that was extended to the southwest. Given that the ditches were cut into the ploughsoil the enclosure must post-date the ridge and furrow. The enclosure would have had shallow ditches and presumed relatively slight banks. A probable use would have been as a sheep pen (possibly during lambing) with a hurdle or hedge on top of the bank.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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