

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

**DERWENT HOUSE, HIGH STREET, COLNBROOK,
SLOUGH, BERKSHIRE**

TQ 0251 7715

On behalf of

Cape Corporation Ltd.

MAY 2006

REPORT FOR Cape Corporation Ltd.
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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during the ground work for new buildings in the area previously occupied by Derwent House, Colnbrook. The investigation revealed a substantial ditch and remnant of bank roughly parallel to the modern road as well as foundations and pits associated with a nineteenth century building.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site lies on the north side of the High Street, Colnbrook (TQ 0251 7715). The previous use of the site was a house, demolished prior to ground work, and garden that is situated at about 20m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is terrace and river gravel.

1.2 Planning Background

Slough Borough Council granted planning permission to demolish the extant dwelling and to construct a two-storey block of flats along the street frontage with a detached block of flats to the rear - planning application P/13095/002 refers. The planning permission had a condition attached requiring the implementation of an archaeological monitoring and recording action (watching brief) to be maintained during the period of construction. This is in line with PPG 16 and Local Planning policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site's proximity to the Coln Brook emphasises the potential for encountering archaeological remains as the general area was well utilised through the prehistoric period. The Coln Valley in general was an area of concentrated activity, particularly from the Neolithic. Evaluation trenches at Berkyn Manor Farm, situated to the south of the Derwent House site, identified inhabitation activity dated to the Iron Age and Roman periods. The majority of activity was limited to the upper gravel terrace.

During the medieval period, several mills were situated about the watercourse, creating leat channels and pockets of industry. The site is located within 200 m of the location of the 14th century Chantry Chapel of St Mary's, which was later relocated to Horton Parish following the demolition of the medieval building in the 1700s. The Listed Building of King John's Palace is located c. 330 m to the east and dates to c. 1600, appearing as a complex of structures designed around a quadrangle courtyard in the centre.

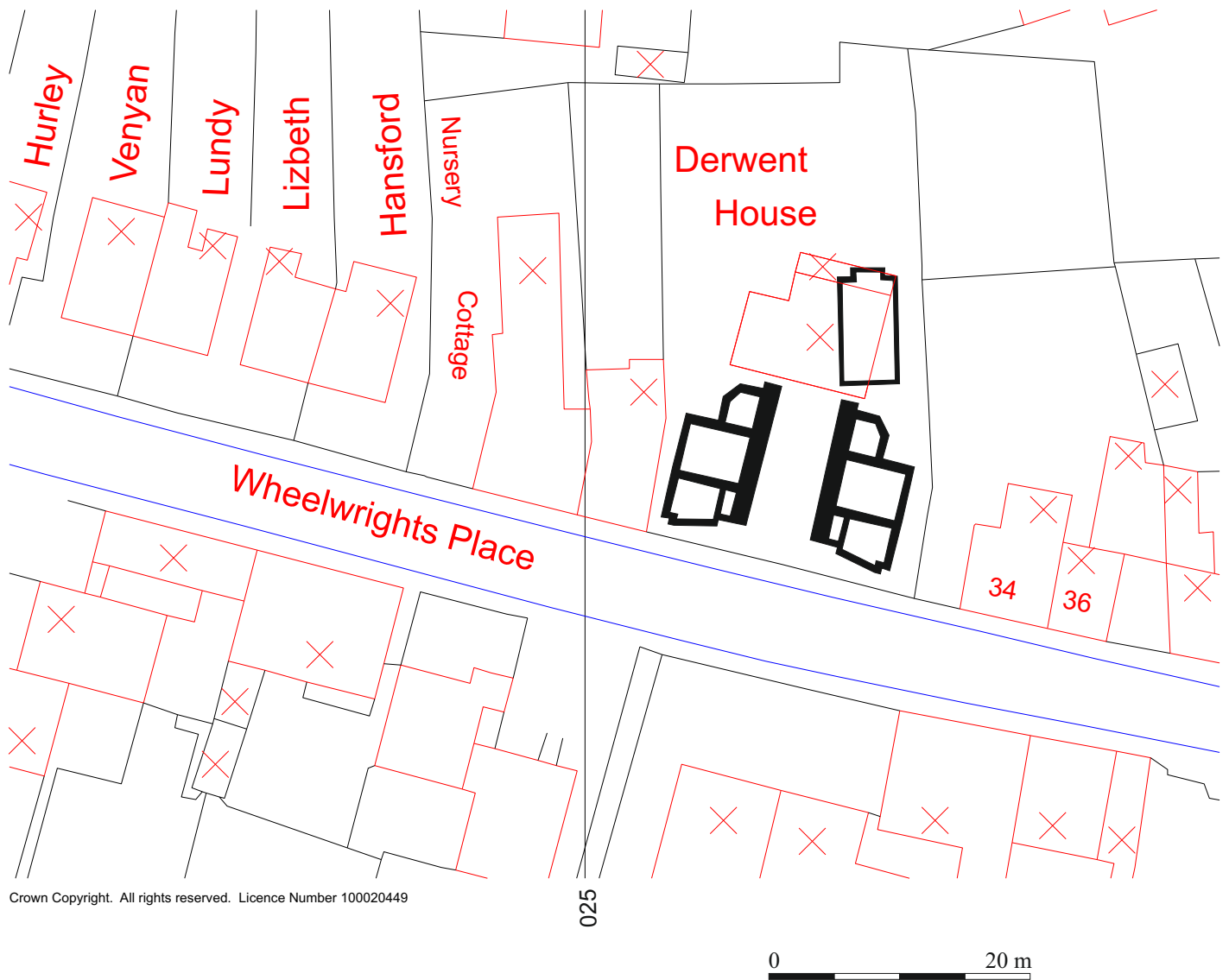


Figure 2. Plan and section

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 remains associated with Iron Age, Roman or medieval settlement.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Berkshire Archaeology. 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 and possible.

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

3.2 Methodology

The excavation of the foundation trenches was monitored. This work was conducted using a 5 ton 360° excavator employing both a toothless 1.5m ditching bucket for topsoil stripping and both the former and a toothed 0.7m bucket to dig the footings.

4 RESULTS (*Figure 2*)

All features were assigned individual context numbers. This number covered both the feature cut and the fill for pits, 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.

The uppermost deposit across the entire site was a dark brown to black sandy loam (1), which varied in thickness between 0.1 to 0.65m. Below this, in the centre of the site was a compact deposit that was mottled light orange-brown to dark yellow-brown in colour (2). It contained a high percentage of sand, mortar and brick fragments. Under this was a mid brown clay-sand (3) with very few inclusions. It was up to 0.6m thick in places. This lay directly above the natural, a yellowish grey-brown sandy clay with 10-20% flint inclusions (4). The interface between the two was often marked with a thin band of flint pebbles. This natural layer was 0.5m thick and rested on a compact layer of cream coloured gravel in a mid grey sandy clay matrix (12). In

places a compact orange clay sand layer with gravel (13) up to 0.6m thick lay between (4) and (12).

The earliest feature recorded was a linear ditch [17] aligned east to west and roughly parallel to the modern road. It was 1.7 m wide at the top and over 0.8m deep. It was recorded to a depth of 1.5m below the modern ground surface, where the bottom had still not been reached and it was 0.6m wide. The ditch was cut through (3). It was filled with homogenous pale grey-brown clay (16) with the very occasional small gravel pebble. Within the upper portion of (16) a discrete tipping deposit (15) was recorded. It comprised between 0.05 to 0.12m thick of coarse gravel with brown sandy clay.

Immediately to the south of this ditch was a 0.06m layer of gravel pebbles with grey-brown sandy clay (14) that is interpreted as the remnants of a bank. This lay directly on top of (3) and was covered by a thick layer of topsoil (1).

A small sub-circular pit [9] of indeterminate date was recorded to the west of the site. It was roughly 0.6m in diameter and 0.7m deep with vertical sides and a rounded base. It was filled with a dark loam that contained substantial quantities of ash and cinders with charcoal flecks and a few small brick fragments. This pit was cut into (3).

Several red brick walls were also recorded across the site. All were constructed with English bond and had a yellow sandy mortar. Wall (5) was aligned east-west 0.35m wide, at least 1m long, and survived to 0.3m high. Its associated foundation cut was 0.5m wide and 0.6m deep. Wall (6) was also aligned east-west, but had a north-south spur bonded into it. This wall was 0.36m wide at least 2.5m long and survived to a height of 0.3m. Its foundation cut was also 0.5m wide and 0.6m deep.

Wall (7) was L-shaped, but had been cut through by a modern service trench. It was at least 3m in length both north-south and east-west, and 0.43m wide. Wall (8) was aligned east-west 0.35m wide and at least 2m in length, although no signs of a foundation trench could be seen.

In the northwest of the site a large rectangular pit [10] was recorded. It was at least 1.5m wide and up to 1.5m deep. It was filled with a grey orange-brown sandy clay deposit with large brick fragments, pottery, metal and several glass bottles. Three pipes appeared to run into the pit: one from the northwest, one from the northeast and one from the southeast. These pipes were ceramic and approximately 0.1m in diameter.

Close to [10] was a large sub-circular pit [18] approximately 2.3m in diameter and 1.5m deep with vertical sides. It was filled with dark brown-grey sandy clay and numerous finds of 19th to early 20th rubbish in the form of ceramics, metal, and glass. A similar pit [19] was located on the southeast of the site. This pit was approximately 2m in diameter, 1.5m deep and filled with a similar material.

To the northeast of the site a circular domed structure (11) was recorded. It was constructed from a single row of bricks (23x11.5x5 cm), and was 1.5m in diameter and 1.8m deep. The structure had been in-filled with 19th-20th rubbish, mainly bricks and pieces of metal, but also some ceramics including broken flower pots.

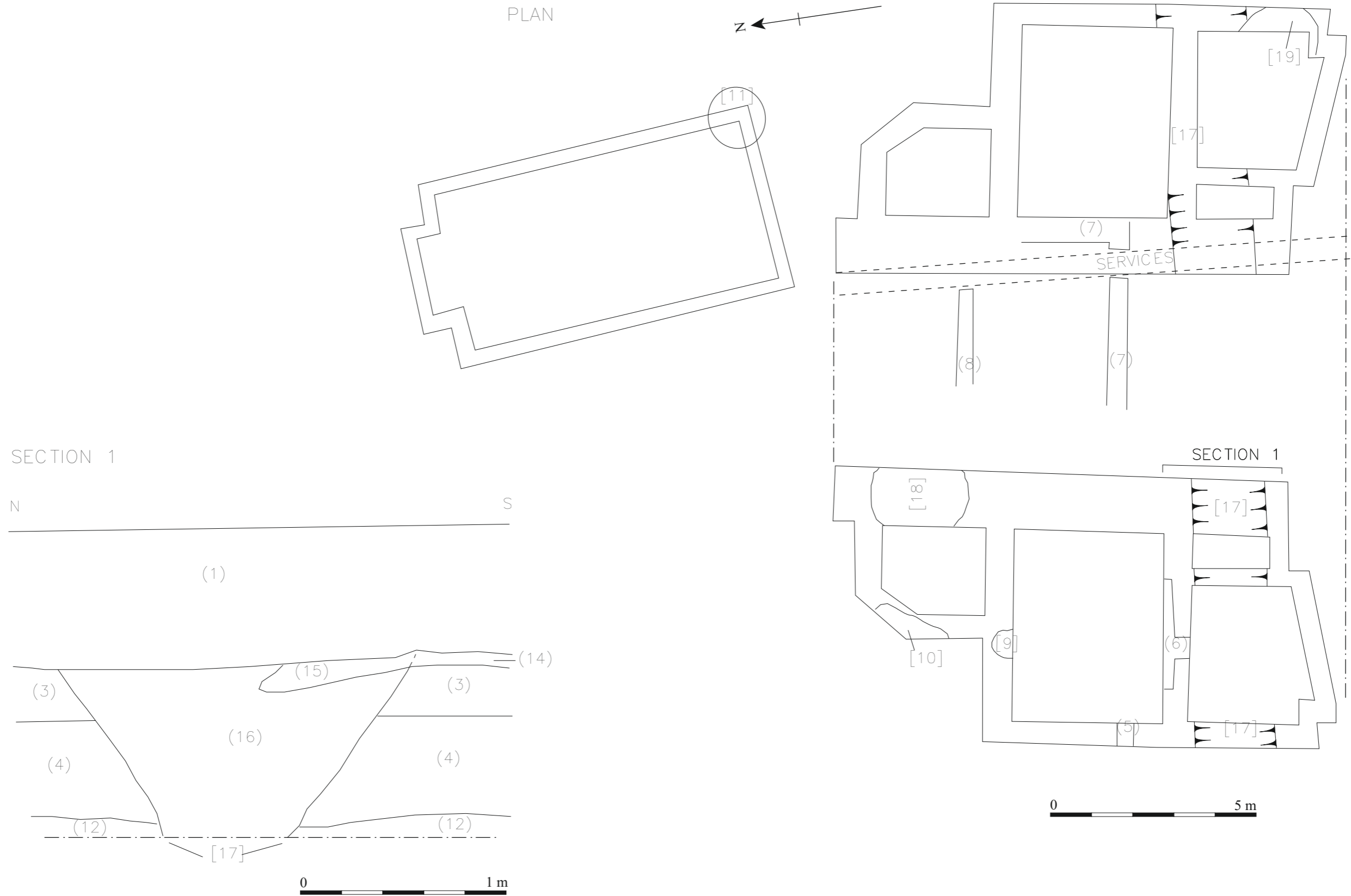


Figure 2 Plan and section

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery (*By Paul Blinkhorn*)

A single sherd from the base of a mug of Rhenish Stone Ware dated from AD 1450 – 1700 was recovered from the fill (16) of ditch [17].

5.2 Other Finds

A large number of complete glass *Codd* type bottles marked “Nevile Reid and Co. of Windsor” on the front and “Coods Bottle, W.M. Barnard and Son of London” on the rear were recorded in the fill of pit [10]. These date between 1875 until about 1940 (Hedges 1975).

6 DISCUSSION

The ditch [17] is of a substantial size, at least 1.7m wide. It is possible that deposit (14) represents a relic of the original bank. It runs parallel to the modern road and may well have bounded an earlier one. The bank would have been next to the road and the ditch away from it.

The tip line (15) identified in the upper fill of the ditch would suggest that it had been deliberately back filled at some point after the mid 15th century. It is possible that this was during a period of expansion in the village, filling in the ditch that edged the road to allow the building of new houses.

The red brick walls (5), (6), (7) and (8) all displayed the same bonding technique and had very similar mortar. It is likely that these represent the remains of a single building. The deposit (2) could be associated with either the construction or demolition of this building. The first edition OS map of 1881 shows buildings lining the road at this time.

The pipes leading to the rectangular pit [10] probably mark it as a soak-away associated with this building and the now demolished Derwent House. While pits [18] and [19] are likely to be simple refuse pits of a similar date to the early building.

The brick built circular structure (11) could possibly be another soak-away although no pipes running into it were seen. However, the land owner of the adjacent land (to the east) reported that he had come across similar structures on his property; these he described as containing ash or burnt material.

7 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 finds report

The Finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to Reading Museum.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hedges, A.A.C. 1975 *Bottles and Bottle Collecting*. Shire Publications.

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994 *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*. Revised Sept 1999