

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT COGGES MANOR FARM,

WITNEY,

OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SP 3606 0957

On behalf of

Cogges Heritage Trust

OCTOBER 2013

REPORT FOR	Cogges Heritage Trust Cogges Manor Farm Church Lane Witney OX28 3LA
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Summary

A watching brief conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during the excavation of footings for playground equipment and a bridge at the site failed to reveal any archaeological deposits of significance, with the exception of a stub of wall, which was not impacted upon.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The proposal area was located on the west side of the farm complex and of St Mary's churchyard (NGR SP 3606 0957 centred). The underlying geology is limestone gravel and the site lies at approximately 79m AOD.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission was granted by West Oxfordshire District Council for change of use of moated site for children's play area including erection of new play equipment (12/1489/P/FP). The site is also part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument: the remains of a medieval moated manor, priory, settlement and associated features, Cogges, Witney, Oxfordshire. Scheduled Monument No. SM 28177, HA 1016269). A condition of the permission states that an archaeological watching brief should be carried out during the work. The Oxford County Archaeological Service issued a brief for the work. English Heritage granted Scheduled Monument Consent for the work.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site comprised a moated site, consisting of the moat c. 6m wide and 3m deep, and the enclosed areas. The moat encloses two islands: the north island approximately 30m×20m, which was occupied by a stone-built manor constructed in the 12th century, and the south island, which measures approximately 50m×30m, thought to have been added later to increase the available space for separating domestic and ancillary buildings.

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 any significant archaeological remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains

In particular:

- to record any evidence of the medieval moated site and earlier Saxon settlement known in this location

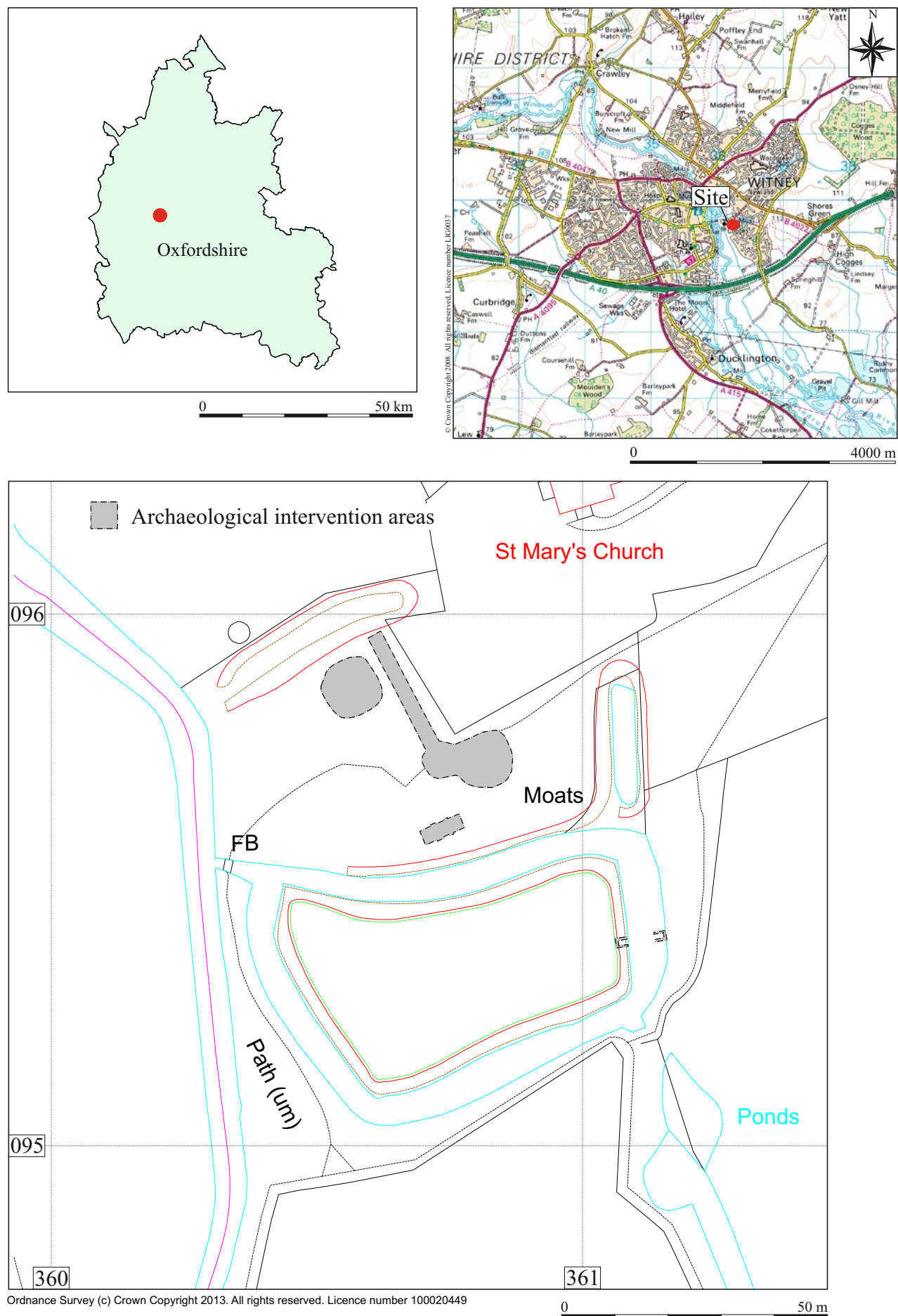


Figure 1: Site location

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service and English Heritage. 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 (1999).

3.2 Methodology

The excavations for the playground equipment foundations were monitored. These were excavated using a small excavator, as well as by hand-excavation.

Five areas were monitored in the course of three visits.

4 RESULTS (Figures 2-4)

All features were assigned individual context numbers. A general description of the feature fills is given.

4.1 Playground areas 1-4

During the first phase of the watching brief, which focussed on the play area, there were four discrete areas monitored. Area 1, in which the Congo climbing frame was located (Fig. 2), was in the northwest part of the site on a slightly elevated platform. Following ground reduction of *c.* 150mm, 13 post pits were dug for the climbing frame; seven of these were excavated to a depth of 600mm and the rest to a depth of 400mm.

All the post-pits were cut into a layer of mixed pale grey brown sandy humus with 30-60% limestone fragments (103), which was present all over the impact Areas 1-4. The deposit was at least 500mm thick. No finds were recovered from the deposit. Overlying the pale stony deposit was a dark grey brown clay humus and limestone fragment layer (102) between *c.* 150mm and *c.* 100mm thick. This deposit formed an interface between the stony layer (103) and the overlying dark brown clay humus (101) topsoil, 100mm thick. No finds were recovered from either layer.

To the east, Area 2 (Plate 1), where the ground level of the area of the zipwire was reduced by *c.* 150mm to the layer (102), with six pits, *c.* 600mm deep, excavated through this deposit. No features were present and no finds were recovered.

To the south in the area of the climbing barn, Area 3, following limited ground-reduction of *c.* 150mm, 12 pits were excavated to a depth of *c.* 400mm. No features were present and no finds were recovered.

To the southwest in the area of the basket swing, Area 4, following limited ground-reduction of *c.* 150mm, revealing layer (102), four pits were excavated to a depth of *c.* 400mm. No features were present in three of the pits and no finds were recovered. In

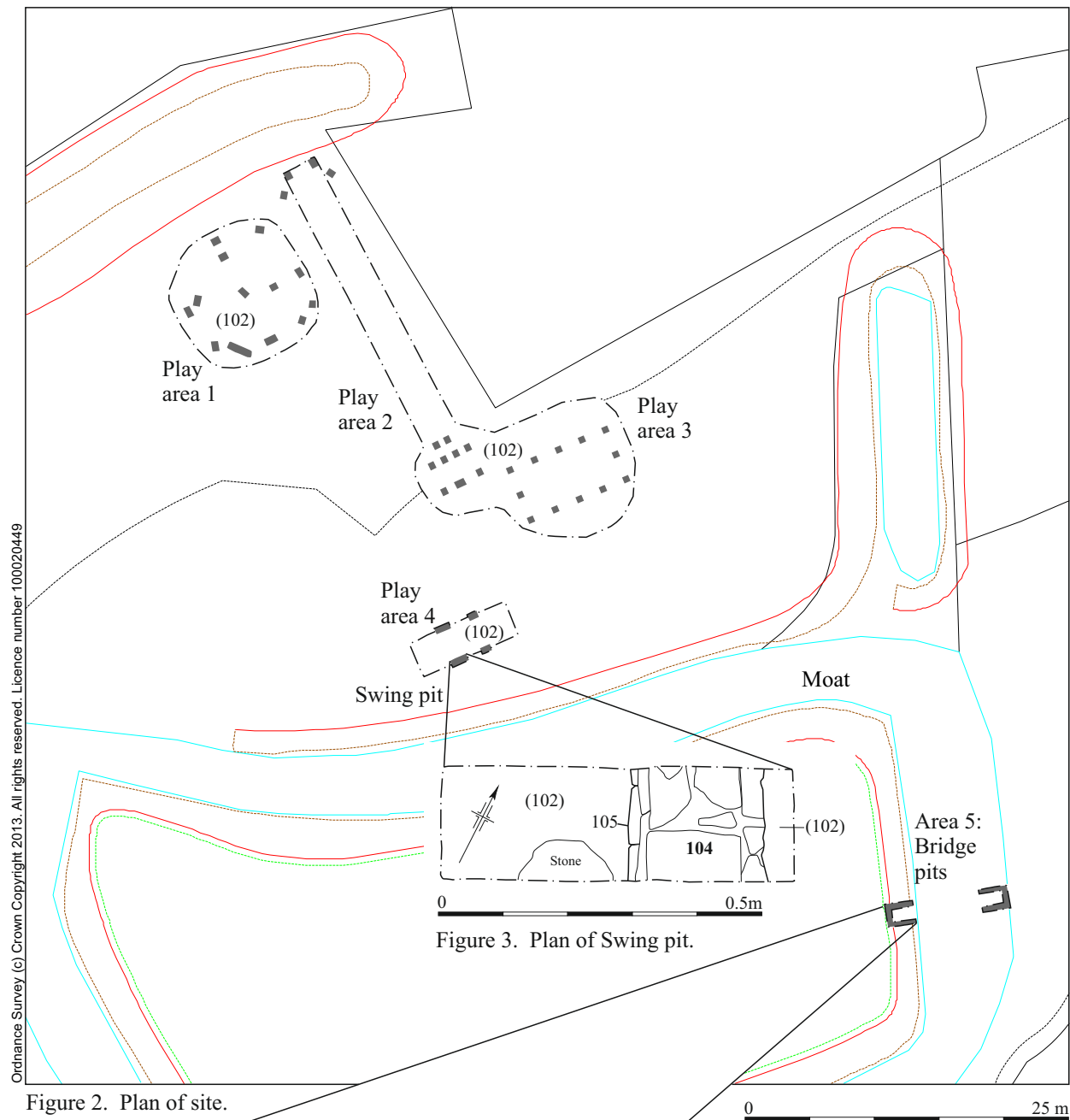


Figure 2. Plan of site.

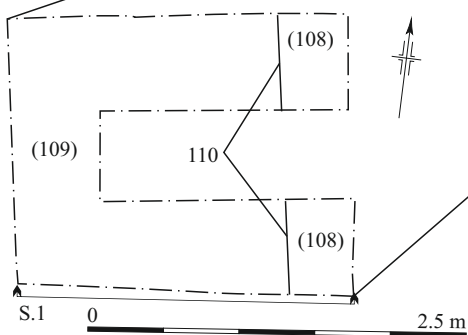


Figure 4. Plan of western bridge pit.

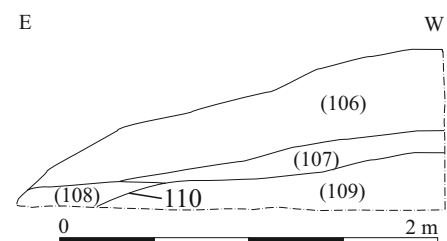


Figure 4. Section 1



Plate 1. Areas 4 (foreground), 3 (centre-right) & 2 (centre-left).

a single southwest pit (Fig. 3) was a roughly northwest/southeast oriented ?wall **104**, comprising rough, unworked limestone fragments, not greater than 200mm×100mm×?40mm, which were insofar as could be observed not laid in courses and not bonded by mortar. The cut 105 for the wall is inferred. The wall was not disturbed and following laying of geotextile, the four pits were moved to the southwest to accommodate the wall.



Plate 2. Wall 104

4.2 Area 5: Bridge pits

On the east side of the moat two squared U-shape pits were dug into the banks of the moat. Both pits were excavated to the natural gravel (109), which was cut by the moat 110, although only the western pit was excavated into the moist black humic clay backfill (108) of the moat. Overlying the edge of the moat fill (108) was a layer

of stony mid brown sandy silt (107). The subsoil (107) was sealed by topsoil (106) on both sides (Fig. 4 and Section 1).

4.3 Reliability of results and methodology

The watching brief was carried out in clement conditions on March 4th & 5th and again June 13th 2013 with good co-operation from the developer's on-site team and the results are felt to be representative.

5 FINDS

5.1 Finds

No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

5.2 Environmental Remains

No environmental samples were taken as the remains encountered did not warrant sampling.

6 DISCUSSION

The watching brief undertaken at Cogges Manor Farm was successful in identifying a thick deposit of stony material at least 500mm thick in the north part of the investigation area, which was potentially similar to the deposit previously seen in the churchyard, where it was 1.6m deep (Chambers 1991, 109).

The deposit observed latterly was entirely archaeologically sterile and remains undated; nevertheless it did not appear to be a natural geological soil, which is the reason for suggesting that it is the same as the stony construction deposit seen adjacent in St Mary's churchyard. The observation that it is not a natural geological soil is inferred from the presence of natural bright yellow gravel under the moated enclosure, which is markedly lower than the surrounding land between the moat and the wall of St Mary's church. If the stony layer were excavated to full depth it is more than likely that the yellow gravel would be attained.

The only archaeological remains present comprised a northwest/southeast oriented wall, the precise nature of which could not be established, and which objective in any case lay outside the remit of the intervention. In any event, further deposits of stony material appeared to be cut by the wall or potentially abut it.

The bridge pits only revealed moat fill, the subsoil and topsoil.

The impact of the works was extremely limited and only revealed the top of a probable wall.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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