



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

A FOURTH WATCHING BRIEF

AT

**THE SHRUBBERY, HIGH STREET, EYNSHAM,
OXFORDSHIRE**

NGR SP 4342 0923

On behalf of

Dr D J M Petersen

NOVEMBER 2013

REPORT FOR Dr D J M Petersen
The Shrubbery
26 High Street
Eynsham
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried an archaeological watching brief over four days between the 2nd and 11th October 2013. A number of small-scale landscaping projects were undertaken including the removal and reinstatement of a yew hedge, the creation of a new access drive and the backfilling of an old swimming pool. Deeper excavations were required for the new garage, however, and were considered to be much more likely to impact upon buried archaeological remains.

During the superficial landscaping operations no archaeological deposits were observed. In the centre of the land plot, an area of red sand natural geology was located at around 0.76m when a trench, designed to receive the reinstated yew hedge, was excavated by mechanical digger.

At 8m further to the south, an archaeological occupation layer (or spread) was located during the mechanical excavation of the garage footings which contained pottery, animal bone and metalworking slag.

This layer in turn sealed the underlying sand and gravel geology - which illustrated the variations inherent in the sand and gravel beds over a relatively small area, varying from red sand with pebbles to a mid-yellow sand and gravel mix.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

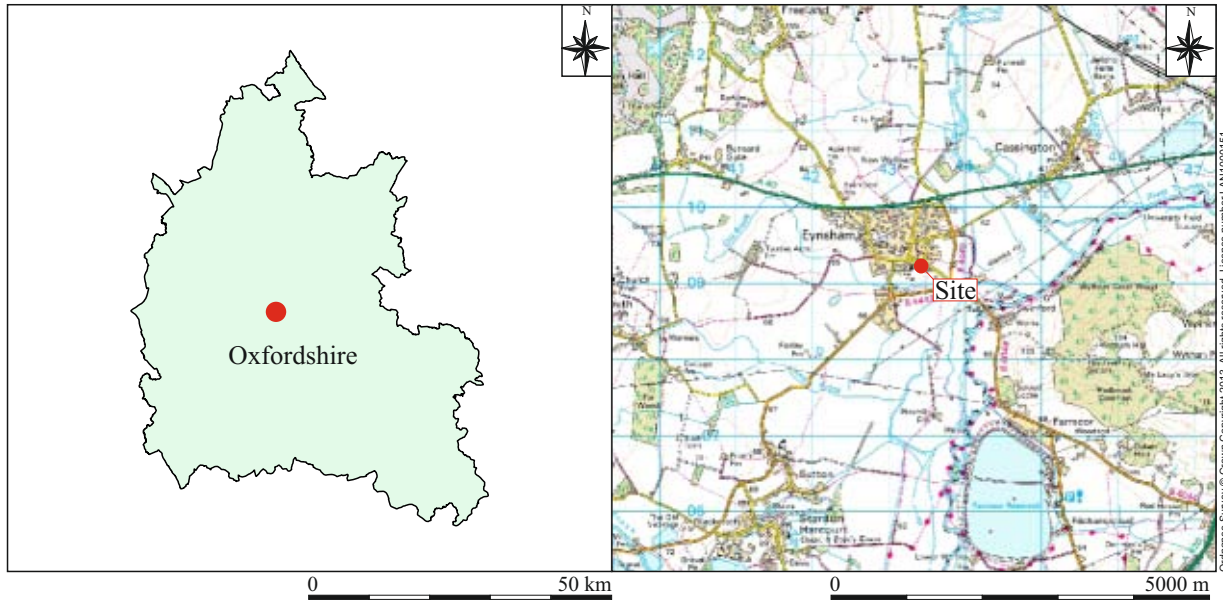
The site is located on the south side of High Street, Eynsham in the grounds of The Shrubbery, 26 High Street (NGR SP 4342 0923). The site lies at about 65m OD and the underlying geology is limestone gravel overlying Oxford Clay.

1.2 Planning Background

West Oxfordshire District Council had granted planning permission for the erection of a double garage (13/0760/P/FP). Due to the potential disturbance of archaeological remains two conditions had been attached, requiring archaeological monitoring and recording. Condition 6 required a written scheme of investigation to be approved by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council. Condition 7 required that an archaeologist was present on site during the development and that a report of the findings would have to be provided. The proposed development lies within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Eynsham Abbey (site of), Scheduled Monument No. SM OX 118, HA 1006332. Scheduled Monument Consent for the work has been granted: ref S00061443.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The development site lies partly in the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Benedictine Abbey of Eynsham (SM OX 118), which was founded in 1005 towards the end of the period of late Saxon monastic reform. King Aethelred granted authority to Aethelmaer, one of his elder statesmen, for the establishment of a Benedictine House. The new foundation replaced an existing Minster Church. The uncertainty of



Key Site boundary Monitored areas

Figure 1: Site location

the Norman Conquest affected Eynsham Abbey and it was deserted for about fifty years. In 1109, Henry I confirmed a Charter of Foundation, which led to a complete rebuilding of the Abbey. Thereafter Eynsham Abbey prospered becoming the third richest religious house in Oxfordshire.

After the Dissolution, the Abbey and all its lands passed into private hands. No trace of the Abbey complex survives above ground. Archaeological excavations by the Oxford Archaeological Unit in the area of St Peters Church and the adjacent graveyard have established that well preserved archaeological features relating to the Abbey survive below ground (Keevill 1995).

An archaeological field evaluation was undertaken in the grounds of 'The Shrubbery' by the Oxford Archaeological Unit in 1992. A prehistoric subsoil was cut by several early Anglo Saxon features, which included ditches and postholes. The subsoil was overlaid by a thick medieval ploughsoil sealing the Anglo Saxon features at depths of 650 and 800mm. This suggests that The Shrubbery grounds are located within a field system providing produce for the Abbey.

Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a watching brief in 1975 during the construction of the swimming pool. Stake and postholes and a possible sunken-featured building were located. These features contained early Anglo Saxon pottery.

A watching brief was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services (2004) during the conversion of old outbuildings into a dwelling. At least one pit found was presumed to be associated with the Anglo Saxon occupation known in the immediate area. The medieval ploughsoil was dated to before the 13th century suggesting that this site was in agricultural use up to sometime in the later 12th century and earlier 13th century as Newland was laid out by the abbot in 1215 (Rodwell 1975, 109). A ditch cutting the ploughsoil was considered to be a burgage plot boundary. Further pits may have dated to the 15th century and clay-lined pits indicated a specialist use. A watching brief in 2005 found two undated pits during the construction of a replacement garage (JMHS 2005)

2 AIMS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

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

- o To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may have had the potential to disturb or destroy archaeological remains.
- o In particular to record any further evidence of the Anglo Saxon occupation.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a brief given by OCAS.

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 (2008).

3.2 Methodology

The first phase included the removal and reinstatement of the yew hedge, the re-planting of which required a trench to be excavated by mechanical digger. This phase was carried out under the supervision of the archaeologist. The layers were excavated incrementally allowing the archaeologist to record soil changes and/or the presence of archaeological features.

The second phase was the removal of several trees and the existing garden path of crazy paving around the old fishpond.

Finally, the third phase was the backfilling of the swimming pool with the excavation of a foundation trench around three of its edges in preparation for the new garage. A concrete raft could thus be set upon the vestiges of the back-filled swimming pool.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

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

The excavation of the trench to receive the reinstated yew hedge was dug to a depth of around 0.3m. A small area was subsequently reduced by hand to reveal the natural geology which was observed and recorded at 0.76m below modern ground level. This was found to be predominantly red-orange sand with pebbles. No archaeology was observed and the area cleared was minimal, its sole intention was to observe the depth of the natural. The shallow nature of the hedge roots did not necessitate a deeper excavation by the mechanical digger.

The removal of the existing paving around the old fishpond and the removal of several trees did not impact beyond a depth of 0.40m. A small section below the modern path was cleaned to illustrate the successive layers but, as with the trench for the hedge, the excavations were no deeper than the surface disturbances created at the time of the original construction of these garden features.

The work around the swimming pool was different in that it included ground works outside of the original 'imprint' of the pool superstructure (and therefore untouched during its construction) and the trenches were to be deeper than the previously detailed ground-works undertaken previously.

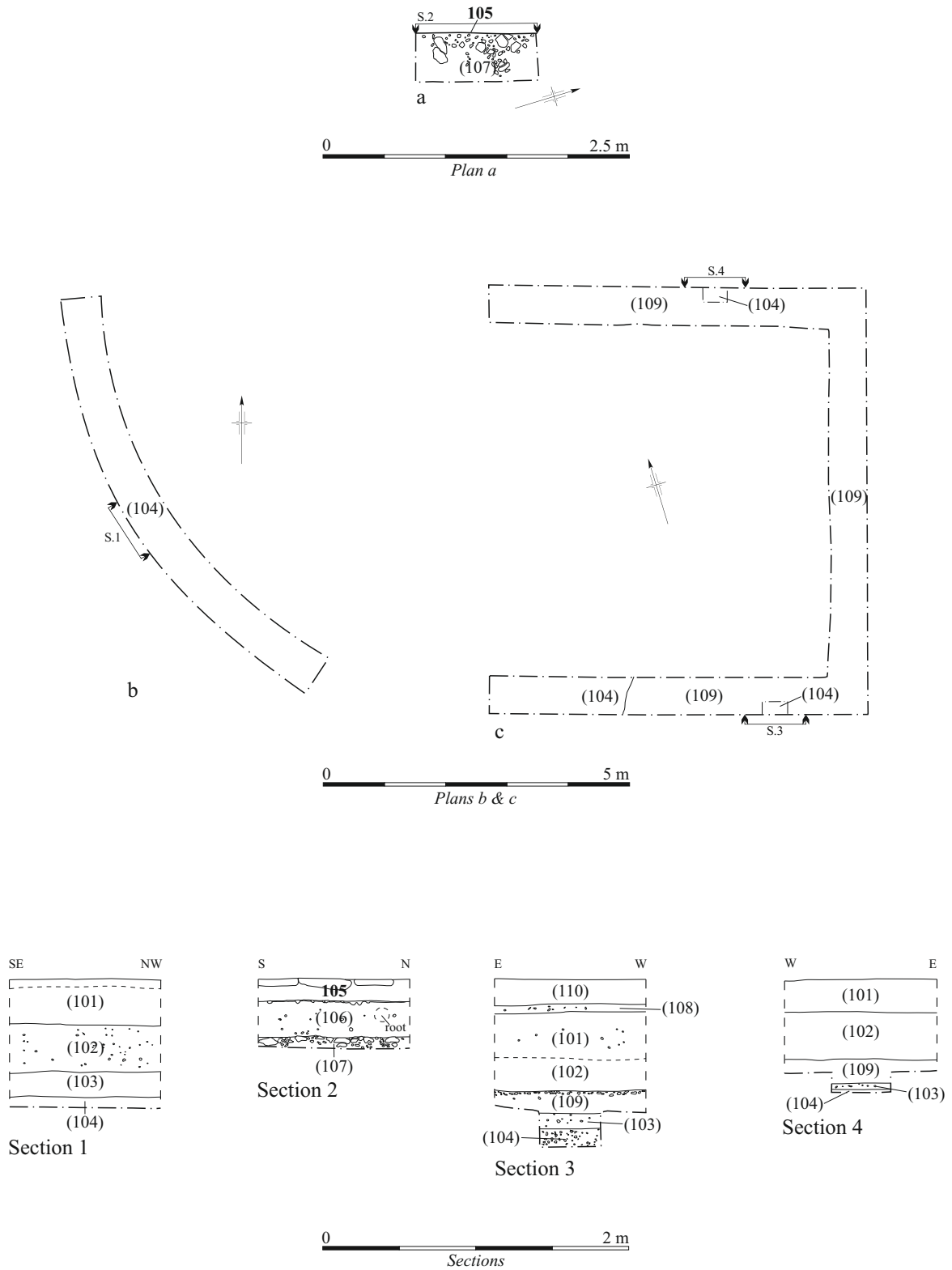


Figure 2: Plans and sections

4.2 The Archaeological Layers

Across most of the site a generous layer of mid-grey brownish topsoil was encountered (101) which averaged around 0.30m deep on the south side of the site. There were no finds or archaeological material in this layer. However, around the swimming pool area to the south the situation was somewhat different. Two layers of modern material, layer (108) of sand and gravel ballast and a secondary layer of dumped topsoil (110) were encountered until the original topsoil horizon (101) and subsoil (102) were exposed.

Layer (102) was revealed to be a mid-brown greyish subsoil and began to show signs of human habitation by the occurrence of pottery sherds and animal bone within – most in a fragmentary state and the pottery displayed rounded edges consistent with ‘rolling’ (i.e. the soil had been turned over, ploughed or otherwise mixed in some way). This may be the plough-soil identified in the previous watching briefs in 2004 and 2005.

In contrast, layer (103) appeared to be an interface between (102) and the natural geology (104) or perhaps it could be identified as the sealed soil horizon as had been suggested by the 1991-93 excavations (Keevill 1995:31). Only a 0.20-0.30m sondage was dug through it which was too small to make any substantial observations. To the north of the site (103) was found directly under (102) but to the south it was observed under layer (109).

4.3 The Occupation Layer

The most interesting layer was (109), a light brown, powdery silt (with almost no clay content) containing pottery fragments, lumps of metalwork slag and animal bone in a matrix which was rich in charcoal. Two, small hand dug sondages made below the impact depth of the development illustrated that it varied between 0.14-0.16m in depth.

As the impact depth of the foundation trenches halted directly on the top of this deposit it was hoed and cleaned to look for distinct features but none were found; its heterogeneous nature showed only pockets of silt or a higher density of charcoal in a random patchwork pattern. As the impact depth had been attained, surface finds were recovered and the deposit was left to be sealed under the concrete of the new garage footings. The sherd of post-medieval date is probably intrusive and the layer is of medieval date.

5 FINDS

No finds were retained from the archaeological layers (101), (108) or (110) as they all represent ‘modern’ layers of landscaping, made ground and ‘mixed’ garden soil as detailed earlier in the report.

5.1 The Pottery by Jane Timby

5.1.1 Introduction

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of 17 sherds of pottery weighing 113g dating to the Roman, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods.

The pottery was recovered from two defined contexts (102, 109), the latter identified as an occupation or dark earth layer.

The material is quite poorly preserved with an overall average sherd weight of 6.6 g which is low. It is clear however from the mixed chronology, that much of the material is residual.

For the purposes of the assessment the assemblage was scanned to assess the likely chronology and quantified by sherd count and weight for each recorded context. The resulting data is summarised in Table 1. Codes for the medieval pottery are drawn from the Oxfordshire County fabric type series (Mellor 1994) and for the Saxon pottery from Eynsham Abbey (Blinkhorn 2003).

Context	Fabric	Form	Wt	No	Date
102	OXAC	body	6	1	AD 975-1350
102	OXBF	body	8	1	AD 1050-1400
102	OXY?	base	4	1	AD 1075-1350
102	OXBB	body	7	1	AD 1150-1540
102	F1	body	4	1	Saxon
102	F3	body	16	2	Saxon
109	OXAC	body	25	3	AD 975-1350
109	PMREW	body	5	1	post-med
109	NEW A	jar	20	1	AD 1000-1100
109	F5?	body	2	1	Saxon/Med
109	F4	jar	14	3	Saxon
109	F5	rim	2	1	Saxon
109	GY	body/base	14	3	Roman
TOTAL			113	17	

Table 1 The Pottery

5.1.2 Roman

Three sherds from reduced Roman sandy wares were present, two body and one basesherd. All are likely to be local Oxfordshire wares. Closer dating is not possible.

5.1.3 Saxon

Seven, possibly eight sherds of Saxon date were present. All the sherds are small and from handmade vessels. At least four fabrics could be discerned: a limestone-tempered ware which probably equates with Eynsham Abbey fabric F3 (Blinkhorn

2003, 163); a coarse quartz/ quartzite-tempered ware with sparse chaff (F4); a sandy ware with frequent organic matter (F1) and a finer sandy ware (F5).

Two of the sherds come from simple everted rim jars. The two limestone-tempered sherds from (102) were roughly burnished. The two rims (fabric F4) from (109) have burnished internal surfaces.

5.1.4 Medieval

There were eight sherds of medieval date covering a diverse range of fabrics including Minety ware (OXBB), Cotswold-type ware (OXAC), East Wiltshire ware (OXBF), Newbury fabric A (Vince 1997) and a sandy ware probably OXY.

The only featured sherds were a jar rim of Newbury A with a thumbled top from (109) and a small base fragment from (102).

5.1.5 Post-medieval

A single sherd of unglazed red ware of post-medieval date came from (109).

5.1.6 Potential and further work

This was a very small assemblage of diverse date and clearly from disturbed levels. Small quantities of Roman pottery were noted from previous archaeological work at The Shrubbery (Chambers 1976; Blinkhorn 2004). The Saxon and medieval pottery are also not unexpected finds given the location and relate well to material previously recorded from excavations at Eynsham Abbey (Blinkhorn 2003) and other archaeological interventions in the area.

No further work is recommended.

5.2 Other finds

A lump of slag and animal bones were retrieved from layer (102) the probable ploughsoil.

Fragmentary animal bone and a lump of metalworking slag were recovered form layer (109) the occupation deposit.

6 DISCUSSION

In nearly all cases where ground works in this area have been monitored, archaeological deposits from different periods, but mainly appertaining to the early medieval, have been discovered. Previous excavations have been characterised by the temporal breadth of the ceramic assemblages. Some have contained examples that cover periods from the prehistoric, Roman and Saxon to the Saxo-Norman (transitional) periods (Gray, M & Clayton, N 1972) which occurred again in the 1990's work (Keevill, G D (1995).

It is possible that layer (109) relates to the 'dark earth' layer referred to by Keevill. Further, this proposed 'dark earth' layer was said to have included 'intrusive' medieval pottery which accords with the variety of wares found in this watching brief (Keevill 1995, 33). Layer (109) is also likely to be the one which, in the 1976 excavation, was seen to have filled, '...a depression 0.80m from the surface, consisting of a 'loamy burnt debris and ash' from which Romano-British pottery, animal bone and grass tempered pottery were recovered (Chambers, R 1976, 356). A clay loom weight was also recovered in this instance which hints at settlement debris (Chambers, R 1976, 356).

Only one possible later medieval pottery sherd was found during this exercise, more had been found during excavations in the north of the land plot, although a 'background' of Romano-British pottery sherds were still noted when work took place for the drainage trenches to the north (Moore 2004, 7).

Metalworking slag had been previously recovered from a pit during a watching brief in 2005 (Moore, J 2005, 4) which may have some relevance to the slag found during these works. However, due to lack of other metalworking components or hearths these may be best described as more residual finds in secondary contexts.

7 CONCLUSIONS

Finds of Romano-British pottery during the watching brief of 2004 attest to activity in the area (Moore, J 2004), even if these sherds were found in secondary contexts. The Roman sherds that make up part of this present assemblage are not dateable other than to the Roman period.

The Saxon pottery sherds only underline the density of Saxon occupation in the area illustrated by the discovery of several sunken-floored buildings during the excavations at the abbey (Hardy, A, Dodd, A & Keevill, G 2003). However, direct evidence for actual habitations was absent in this case and the layer (109) is dated to the medieval period, It is possible that Saxon features were sealed below this layer.

The assemblage recovered accords well with the earlier assertion that this area east of the Abbey may have been in agricultural use prior to the division of the land into Burgage plots (Moore, J 2004, 8).

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