

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

PHYLLIS COURT,

PHYLLIS COURT DRIVE,

HENLEY-ON-THAMES, OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SU 7624 8323

On behalf of

Phyllis Court Club

SEPTEMBER 2013

REPORT FOR Phyllis Court Club
c/o CBRE Ltd
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted an archaeological evaluation at land in the north part of Phyllis Court, Phyllis Court Drive, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 7624 8323). The evaluation was on the whole negative for three trenches, with only fragments of tile being recovered from the subsoil. This could have occurred with field manuring in fields that essentially lie outside the medieval and post-medieval defences of Henley. Only in Trench 4 was the remains of a drainage ditch identified, which from a find in its fill was undoubtedly a late drainage ditch. It was probably a field ditch possibly originating at the time of Inclosure, but which had subsequently been re-excavated and cleaned out.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located on land in the north part of Phyllis Court on Phyllis Court Drive on the north side of Henley-on-Thames (NGR SU 7624 8323). Henley became a medieval parish, but is known to have been an attached chapelry of the church and parish of Benson. The parish was located in the Hundred of Binfield, which was part of the historic county of Oxford.

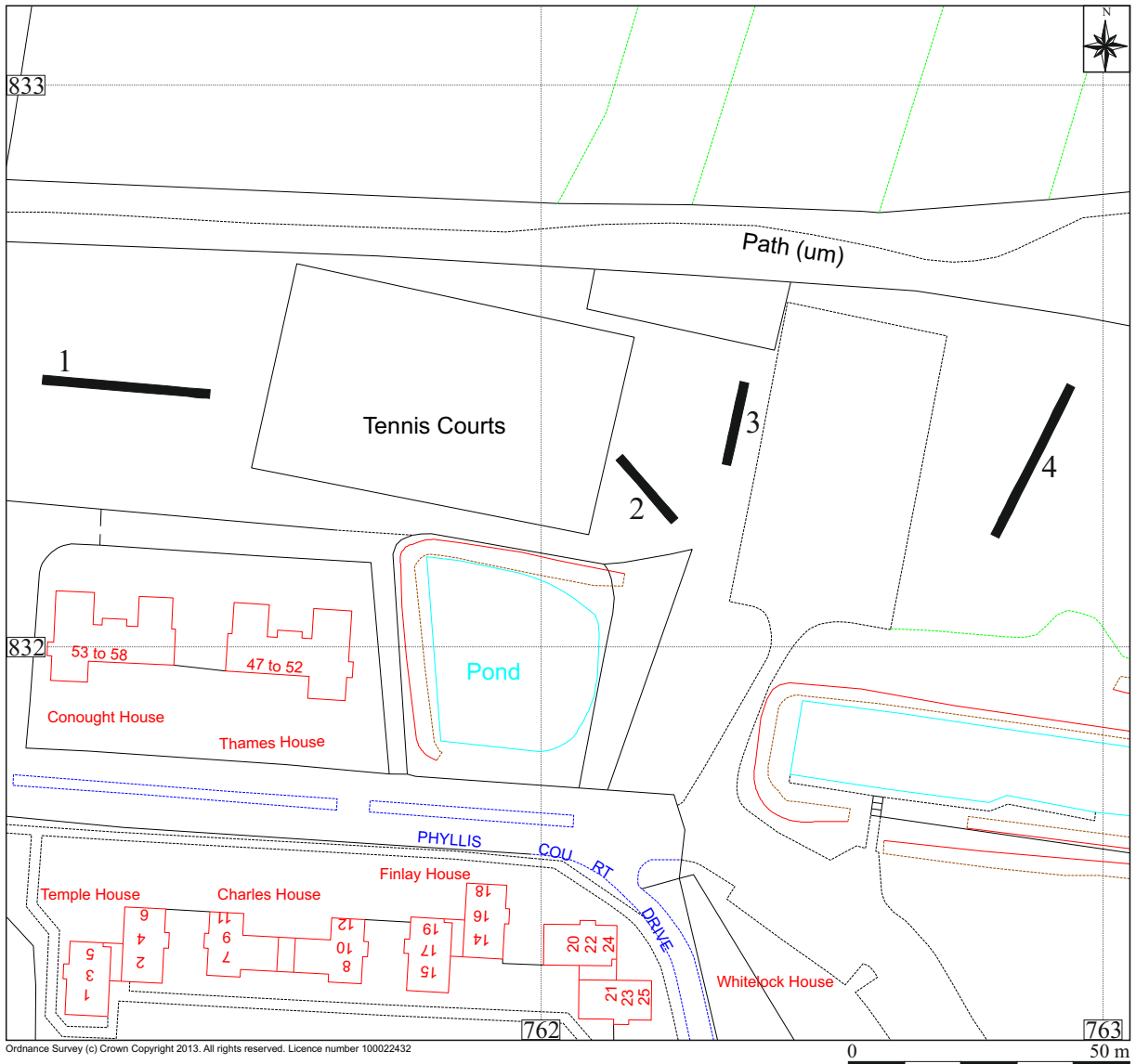
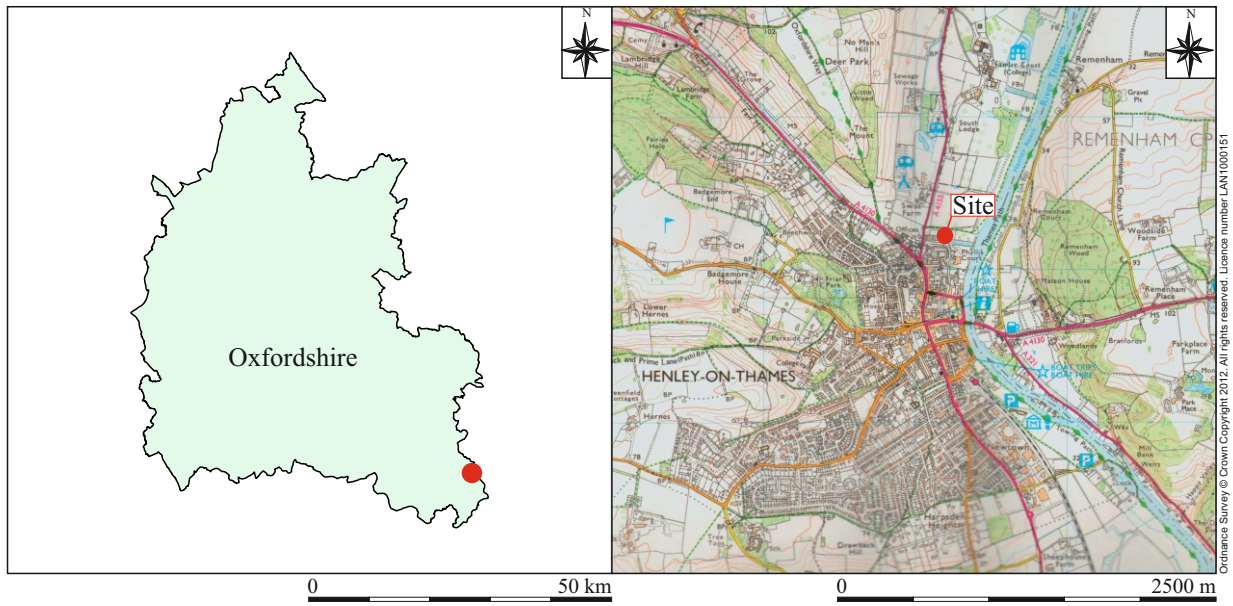
The site is an open area of land with tennis courts, with the house that replaced the old court located on the east part of the south side of the site beyond a moat and a pond, which from their physical shape may be part of the Civil War defences. Residential buildings and garages are located on the west part of the south side of the site. To the west the site is bounded by the A4155, and to the north there are playing fields with an avenue of trees extending down to Fawley Court. On the east side the land extends down to the River Thames.

Topographically the land is flat on the west side and some two thirds along its length (east-west) the land falls away towards the Thames. The site lies between 35m and 32m OD.

The underlying geology is according to the British Geological Survey made up of the Holywell Nodular Chalk Formation and the New Pit Chalk Formation, which is a chalk formed 89 to 99 million years ago in the Cretaceous period. A superficial deposit claimed to overlie the chalk deposits in this area is Head 1, a clay, silt, sand and gravel mix, which was deposited 2 million years ago.

1.2 Planning Background

A planning application is to be submitted for the construction of a new health club on the site. In line with Para 128 of the NPPF and Policy HE9 of the Local Plan Oxfordshire Historical and Natural Environment Team (OHaNET) recommended that an archaeological field evaluation should be undertaken to determine the presence, importance and extent of any archaeological features. This was due to archaeological and historical importance that lie to the south of the proposal site



Key ■ Evaluation trenches

Figure 1: Site location

1.3 Archaeological Background

A Roman building has been identified in Henley-on-Thames to the west of Bell Street which has produced 2nd century AD material (VCH 2011, 31). The nature of any Roman site under the town of Henley-on-Thames is not known. It has been proposed that a Roman road reputedly runs from the Chilterns towards Phyllis Court where an earlier crossing of the Thames is claimed, this road is believed to run from Dorchester to Silchester.

In the 8th century it is generally assumed but not confirmed that Henley was part of a Royal Estate centred on Benson. Isolated pottery sherds of the 7th and 8th centuries and the 11th and 12th centuries have been recovered from near the modern town. The name Henley is first documented in 1136-45 as *Henleiam* or *Henle(g)a* for example (Gelling 1953, 74-5), which has an etymology of hēan lē(a)ge, at the high wood in a reference to the Chiltern woodland.

Phyllis Court is considered to be the location of a royal lodge or homestead (VCH 2011, 31-2). The manorial enclosure at this time is considered to incorporate Countess Garden and Phyllis Court. The manor is considered to be attached to that of Bensington from the 7th to the early 14th century (VCH 2011, 73), although the earliest date for this association is speculative. Support for this is given through the absence of Henley in the Domesday Book (Morris 1978, 1.1), where Benson has 12 hides and 32 villagers and 29 smallholders, some of which could be located at Henley-on-Thames. The name is first recorded as Filettes in 1341, and has been interpreted as having an Old English etymology filiþe, hay (Gelling 1953, 75). This would imply that the area was located in an area of meadow land from which hay was taken.

The manor was farmed out from 1189-96 (VCH 2011, 73), and was granted by King John to Robert de Harcourt. These events mark Henley out as a distinct manorial entity. In c. 1244 Henry III gave the manor of Benson, to which Henley formed a distinct part, to his brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall, and by 1272 this had passed to Edmund, the son of Richard. By 1340 the manor of Benson had passed to the Black Prince. Henley Manor became held directly from the crown 1337 (VCH 2011, 74).

It is considered that early in the 7th century Henley was in the parochia of Benson or Bensington Church (VCH 2011, 159), but this is problematic for various reasons and some evidence exists for the King trading attached estates or sub-estates between his manor of Benson with another important centre at Pyrton. There is also speculation that the church at Henley may have predated the town's foundation.

The medieval town was laid out in the southeast corner of an ancient parish; the street plan is believed to have been established by 1260-70 (VCH 2011, 21, 31).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To gather sufficient information to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains on the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.

In particular:

- To establish if features related to the nearby Roman activity are present in this area.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxfordshire Historical and Natural Environment Team (OHaNET) the archaeological advisors to South Oxfordshire District Council. 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 for Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

The evaluation consisted of the cutting of four trenches of which two were 30m x 1.6m trenches and the other two 15m x 1.6m trenches. The locations of trenches were agreed with OHaNET. The trenches were pulled by a 7 tonne excavator with a ditching bucket down to the natural, as only one archaeological feature was located. This feature was sampled and sectioned and excavated by hand.

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. A photographic record was also produced.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

4.1 Natural: 2 million years old

The natural detected across the site was a mixture of sand and gravel. Two distinct components were evident.

Trench 1 (Fig. 2) contained a natural deposit (104) that was a compact light brown red clay sand with frequent flint inclusions.

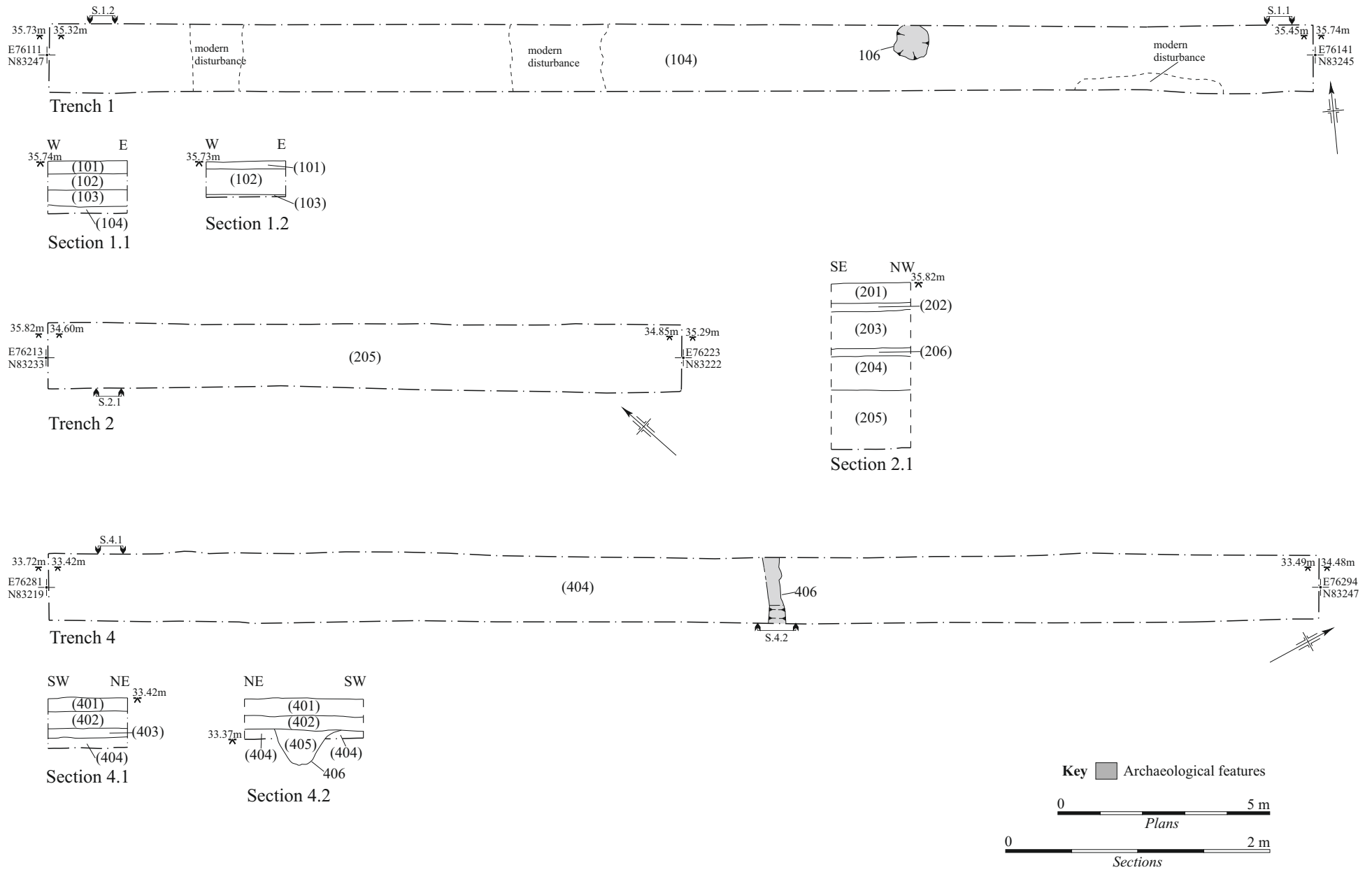


Figure 2: Trenches 1, 2 and 4 - plans and sections

In Trench 2 (Fig. 2) the natural layers could be defined in three layers. Context (207) was a compact mid red brown clay sand with a high flint inclusion forming a gravel layer. Deposit (205) was a compact orange brown clay sand with minimal flint inclusions, which was 0.45m deep before a harder more compact flint gravel deposit was reached. Overlying layer (205) was deposit (204) a compact red brown clay sand which was 0.24m deep with some flint inclusions. This layer was a band of gravel material which was less densely packed with flint than some of the other deposits of gravel detected.

The natural in Trench 3 (Fig. 2) was layer (304) a compact mid red brown clay sand with frequent flint inclusions, which was over 2m deep and had what appeared to be the remains of ice wedges.

The natural (404) in Trench 4 (Fig. 2) was a compact mid-red brown clay sand with some flint inclusions.

In these trenches the natural chalk formations suggested as underlying the superficial deposits here were not reached. The head deposit here could be described as part of the gravel terrace, and within the natural deposits in Trench 2 it is possible to suggest that the variation in the sand and gravels could be the result of an earlier palaeochannel or some form of natural disturbance.

4.2 Phase 1: medieval and post-medieval

Possibly cut into the top of the natural in Trench 1 (Fig. 2) was feature 106, an oval cut with gradual sides and a rounded base measuring 1m x 0.82m and 0.05m deep. The fill (105) was a compact mid brown grey sand silt with some flint and tile inclusions. The shallow depth of the feature made it difficult to be certain about the origins of this feature.

Over the natural deposits in Trench 2 (Fig. 2) was layer (206) a compact dark grey clay with charcoal inclusions 0.1m deep. The deposit is probably some type of alluvial deposit either an inundation from the river, which is not apparent elsewhere or a spread of material dredged from the river or moat. Tile was recovered from the top of this layer, and below layer (203).

In Trench 3 (Fig. 2) the top of the gravels was disturbed creating an interface layer or subsoil (303), which was a compact mid red brown clay sand with flint and charcoal inclusions 0.11m deep. There was evidence of bioturbation in this horizon, with large root runs from a large tree which had once stood in the park.

Truncating the natural in Trench 4 (Fig. 2) was cut 406 a linear feature with steeply sloping sides and a rounded base; on the one side there is a break of slope with a more gently sloping upper part. The dimensions are 0.46m across at the top and 0.38m across from the break of slope, with the depth being 0.28m. The fill (405) is a loose mid brown grey silt sand. A 19th century piece of pottery was recovered from the fill. Sealing the natural (404) in parts of Trench 4 was layer (403) a compact mid red brown clay sand 0.08m deep.

There were two features of an anthropogenic origin detected; one of them was a possible pit 106, which to a large extent had been significantly truncated, while the other was a linear feature 406 of probably a relatively recent date.

4.3 Soil deposits and made-up surfaces: modern

Sealing deposit (105) in Trench 1 (Fig. 2) was subsoil layer (103) a compact mid brown sand clay 0.11m deep. This deposit contained tile deposits. Sealing this layer was deposit (102) a compact black silt with cinder and gravel inclusions 0.1m deep. The topsoil layer (101) was a loose mid-red brown silt 0.09m deep.

In Trench 2 (Fig. 2) covering deposit (206) was layer (203) a compact black charcoal and flint layer 0.27m deep, which was a modern surface either for tennis courts, roadway or parking area. This was sealed by layer (202) a loose mid red brown silt with sub angular stones 0.08m deep. Overlying this was the topsoil (201) a loose mid brown red silt 0.15m deep which contained inclusions of pot of a variable date.

Sealing context (303) in Trench 3 (Fig. 2) was layer (302) a highly compact gravel with silt and cinders some 0.12m in depth. This was part of a modern surface or make-up layer equivalent to layer (203). Sealing layer (302) was context (301) a loose mid red brown silt 0.06m deep, which formed the topsoil.

Overlying deposits (405) and (403) was layer (402) a compact black silt with cinders and gravel 0.14m deep, which formed the remains of an earlier made surface (Fig. 2). Sealing deposit (402) was layer (401) a loose mid red brown silt 0.9m deep, which formed the topsoil.

In the 20th century the area was probably extensively landscaped with areas being laid for parking, tennis courts and other areas of hard standing. This may have been preceded by a stripping and levelling process which largely destroyed any features across the area.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery (By David Gilbert)

A single sherd of post-medieval pottery weighing 9g was recovered from context (405), identified and not retained. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994):

Mass-produced White Earthenware (WHEW), mid 19th – 20th century

5.2 Ceramic Building Material

The ceramic building materials produced a wide range of fabrics from four contexts, which were in a variety of conditions.

Deposit (105) had 10 tile fragments weighing 168g. All were of a mid orange to pale orange fabric with moderate to small sand inclusions. Four of the fragments had a uniform firing, where as the others had differential colouring, three with a pale orange

centre and a pale yellow orange exterior, and three with a pale grey interior and an orange exterior.

Deposit (201) produced 3 fragments of tile weighing 100g. The tile fragments were either a mid orange red with moderate or small sand inclusions and the other tile was a pale orange fabric.

Deposit (303) again contained a series of fabric types in 9 fragments weighing 341g. One fragment is from a brick which is a dark orange red fabric with large inclusions and much abraded. The other fragments are all tile which ranges in colour from a darker red orange to a pale orange. These fabrics have moderate to small sand inclusions. The palest orange fabric is the only fabric to show differential colouring (a darker red interior) resulting from the firing. One of the fragments contained part of a dowel hole.

Deposit (403) produced 14 fragments of tile weighing 600g. There were some 9 fabric types ranging in colour from a dark red, to a pale orange, most of it had fired all the way through producing a consistent colour, where as two pieces contained grey banding where it was not fully oxidised. All fabrics had moderate sized sand inclusions. Dating was probably from the later medieval to the post-medieval period.

Though the tile selection is diverse, possibly being derived locally from Nettlebed and Stonor or the south Buckinghamshire production sites, its reason for being deposited is probably due to agricultural manuring of outlying fields. The collection is not worthy of retention.

5.3 Glass

One glass bottle (201) measuring 137mm high and with a 59mm and weighing 146g. The glass is green and has the writing NO DEPOSIT NO RETURN, the bottle is of a 20th century origin so the bottle has not been retained.

6 DISCUSSION

Though the site at Phyllis Court Drive appeared to offer much potential archaeologically, this was not realised in the evaluation of the site. The natural chalk formations suggested by the British Geological Survey were not encountered. Gravel beds were noted as extending at least 2m below the ground surface. In Trench 2 it was noted that there was considerable variation in the banding of the natural in part of the trench, which could have been indicative of a former palaeochannel existed which sanded up, or some other unexplained natural process.

Anthropogenic action at the site was noted definitely in Trench 4 where there was a linear ditch of probably a relatively recent date and in Trench 1 where there was possibly a truncated pit.

In all trenches it was apparent that stripping of the surfaces had taken place and that hard standing make-up layers had been deposited across the site. This process of landscaping had probably compromised and truncated any earlier archaeology. If this was not the case, then we have to consider that the area was a meadow land which was kept clear to the north of the medieval manorial centre and town, and also north

of the Civil War defences. That the name of Phyllis Court refers to hay is indicative of a combination of these factors occurring.

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 record

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the County Museums' Store under accession number OXCMS 2013.127.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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ID	Type	Description	Depth	Width	Length	Finds	Interpretation	Date
Trench 1								
101	Deposit	Loose mid red brown silt	0.09m				Topsoil	
102	Deposit	Compact black silt with cinders and gravels	0.1m				Made ground	
103	Deposit	Compact mid brown sand clay	0.11m			Tile fragments		
104	Deposit	Highly compact light red brown clay sand with frequent flint inclusions					Natural gravels	
105	Deposit	Compact mid grey brown sand silt with flint inclusions	0.05m	0.82m	1m		Fill of pit	Post-medieval
106	Cut	Oval cut with gradually sloping sides and a flat base	0.05m	0.82m	1m		Probable base of truncated pit	Post-medieval

Trench 2								
201	Deposit	Loose mid red brown silt	0.15m				Topsoil	
202	Deposit	Loose mid red brown silt with sub angular stones	0.08m					
203	Deposit	Compact black charcoal and flint	0.27m				Made ground	
204	Deposit	Highly compact mid red brown clay sand with flint inclusions	0.24m				Natural	
205	Deposit	Compact mid orange brown clay sand with flint inclusions	0.45m				Natural	
206	Deposit	Compact dark grey clay with charcoal inclusions	0.1m				Alluvial deposit, clay spread	
207	Deposit	Compact mid red brown clay sand with flint inclusions					Natural	

Trench 3								
301	Deposit	Loose mid red brown silt	0.06m				Topsoil	
302	Deposit	Highly compact black gravel and cinder silt	0.12m				Made ground	
303	Deposit	Compact mid red brown clay sand with flint inclusions and some charcoal	0.11m				Subsoil with significant large tree root action	
304	Deposit	Highly compact mid red brown clay sand with frequent flint inclusions	Over 2m				Natural gravels	

Trench 4							
401	Deposit	Loose mid red brown silt	0.09m				Topsoil
402	Deposit	Compact black silt with cinder and gravel inclusions	0.14m				Made ground
403	Deposit	Compact mid red brown clay sand	0.08m			Tile inclusions	Subsoil
404	Deposit	Compact mid red brown clay sand with flint inclusions					Natural gravels and sand
405	Deposit	Friable mid grey brown silt sand	0.26m	0.38m		Pot sherd	19 th century
406	Cut	Linear gully with steep sides and a concave base	0.26	0.38m			19 th century