

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

**AT**

**SWANWOOD,**

**HIGHMOOR, OXFORDSHIRE**

**NGR SU 69594 85604**

*On behalf of*

*Mrs J Park*

**MAY 2014**

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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services conducted an evaluation as part of planning consent for a demolition and new build on the site of Swan Wood House, Highmoor, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 69594 85604). The current house is of whitewashed brick and was constructed in the 1940s and is of little architectural merit. The brief called for the opening up of 3 trenches 20m long, but the location of the third trench due to concrete paving meant that it was necessary to move this and divide it into a 12m and 8m long sections. Only in Trench 2 was any archaeology detected and this was a pit with burning of a probable 1940s+ date. There was no evidence for the Roman pottery kilns that were suspected in the area, but to show that John Moore Heritage Services carried this out with due diligence the finds of the modern pit were noted.*

*Due to the paucity and age of the finds and contexts no context inventory was produced and the descriptions are included in the text.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)**

The development site is located at the site of Swanwood, Highmoor, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 69594 85604). The parish of Highmoor is a recent creation that was mainly created from the old parish of Rotherfield Greys.

The site is located on the southwest facing slopes of a plateau and lies between 160m and 165m OD. The underlying geology is undifferentiated Lewes Nodular Chalk Formation, Seaford Chalk Formation, and Newhaven Chalk Formation that were formed in the Cretaceous 71 to 94 million years ago ([mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html](http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html)). At Swanwood this material is capped with Clay with Flint Formation, a clay, silt, sand and gravel deposit formed some 5 million years ago in the Quaternary or Neogene Periods. It is the result of weathered chalk.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

South Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission for the demolition of the house at Swanwood and the erection of a replacement dwelling with detached garage/annex, swimming pool and leisure building (ref. P13/S2741/FUL). Due to the known existence of Roman archaeology in the surrounding area a condition was attached to the permission requiring an evaluation prior to any construction. This was in line with *NPPF* and other Local Planning policies.

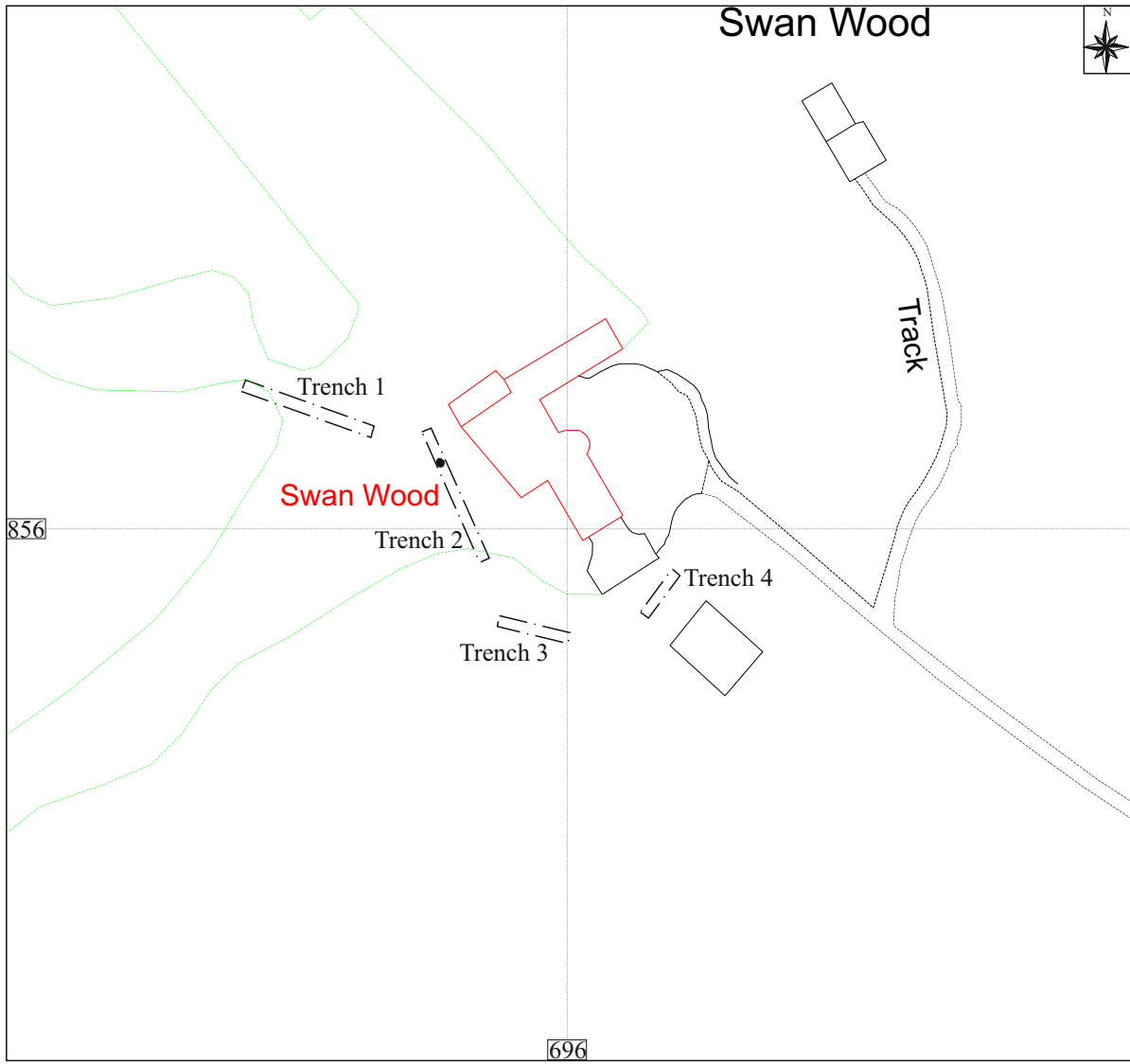
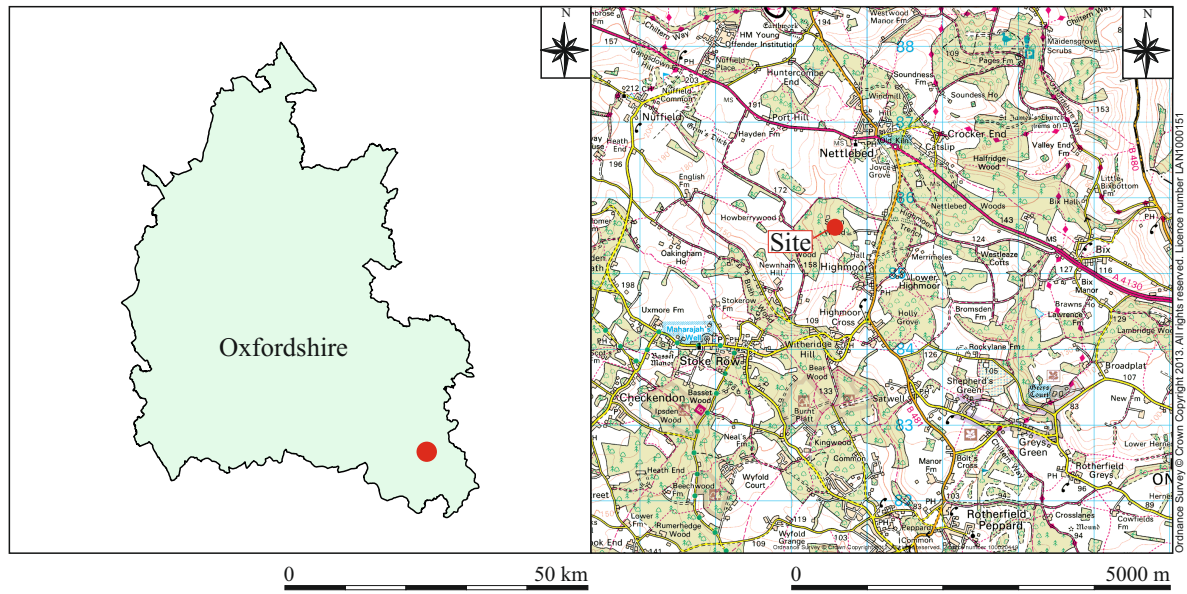
### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

Iron Age and Roman remains have been noted in land adjacent to the house. A propose continuation of the Grim's Ditch, an Iron Age boundary bank, has been suggested 350m to the north of the site (PRN 8901). The remains of a rectangular enclosure and a scatter of Roman pottery (PRN 2025) were identified some 150m to the north of the present house.

The manor of Rotherfield Greys lay in the east part of the parish. Historically a manor of Highmoor is known to exist in the west of the parish, but it is uncertain if the latter manor was carved out of Rotherfield Greys Manor or the hunting land in the Chiltern territory. From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century the manor of Rotherfield Greys was held variously by the Greys, Knollyses and Stapletons (VCH 2011, 275). The manor was located at Greys Court, with the former part of the name being obtained from the Greys family.

The church of Rotherfield Greys was fully independent by the 13<sup>th</sup> century and there are no indications of its existence before c. 1200 (VCH 2011, 295). Excavations have identified late 12<sup>th</sup> century activity under the church.

The early indications of settlement and occupancy at Highmoor are sparse, but there are indications that freehold existed at Highmoor in the middle ages (VCH 2011, 280). In 1284 land was given to Rewley Abbey by Edmund, Earl of Cornwall. This is an early indication that the Highmoor part of Rotherfield Greys was held of the Honour of Wallingford, which is known to be the case in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This may



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Key Archaeological features

Figure 1. Site location

mean that Highmoor was part of the Chiltern lands attached to the Manor of Benson. One of the tenants of the Honour was William Stonor, who is known to have rented for 5s 200a of land and 100a of woodland. He died 1494.

Settlements at Highmoor and Highmoor Cross are known to have developed in the 18th century on the edge of Highmoor Common (VCH 2011, 273).

## **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 deposits.
- To establish the extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeology.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.

In particular:

- To establish if remains relating to a Roman period probable pottery kiln in the area are present.

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxfordshire Historic 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 and a photographic record where necessary.

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

### **3.2 Methodology**

Two trenches were opened that measured 20m (Trenches 1 & 2), while the final 20m stretch was divided into two trenches: one 12m long (Trench 3) and the other 8m long (Trench 4).

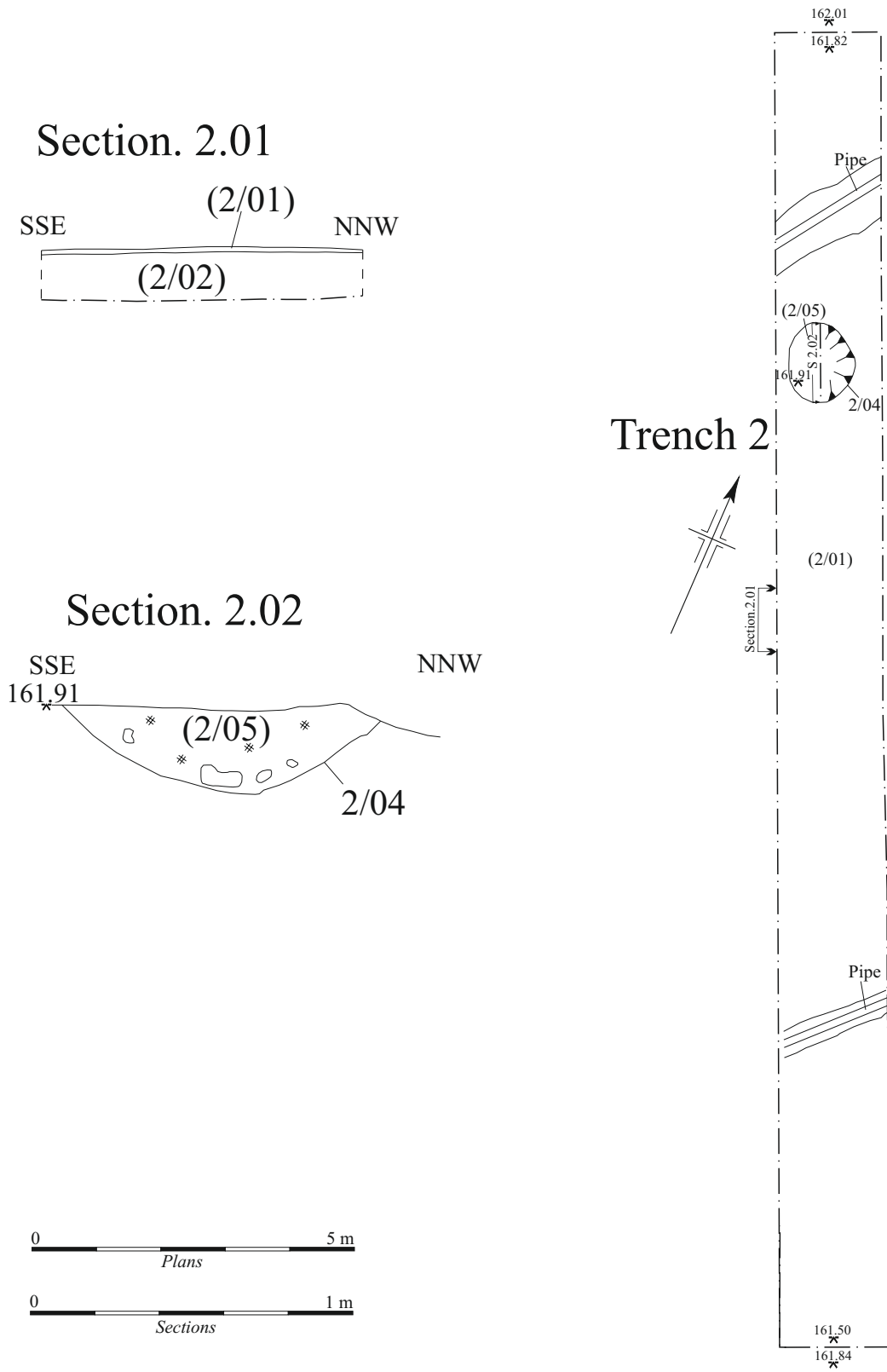


Figure 2. Trench 2 Plan and sections



## 4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

The natural (1/03, 2/03, 3/02, 4/02) was a soft light brown red clay, with frequent inclusions of flint. This deposit is the Flint and Clay Formation. This is covered by a layer (1/02, 2/02) of soft mid brown sand clay with flint inclusions some 0.15m deep. This is probably part of the flint and clay that has been disturbed by tree roots over millennia.

### 4.1 Phase 1: Modern

Cut into the disturbed natural was a recent sub-circular pit 2/05 that measured 1m x 1.2m across by 0.25m deep. The fill (2/04) was a dark grey black clay silt with signs of burning in the form of charcoal, burnt flint and coal. No other features were found.

The topsoil (1/01, 2/01, 3/01, 4/01) is a soft mid to dark brown sand clay with minimal flint inclusions.

## 5 FINDS

The objects recovered were modern in origin and probably relate to the building and use of the present house. None of them are worth retaining.

### 5.1 Pottery (*By David Gilbert*)

The pottery assemblage comprised four sherds with a total weight of 20g can from the fill (2/04) of a single pit 2/05. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984), as follows:

**REW: Red Earthenware**, 1550+ 3 sherds, 18g

**WHEW: Mass-produced White Earthenware**, 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> Century, 1 sherd, 2g

### 5.2 Building material

Four fragments of ceramic building material, probably tile, were recovered from topsoil context (2/01) weighing 89g. The fabric is orange and sandy and micaceous. One fragment of slate came from context (2/01) weighing 32g. Three fragments of slate came from pit fill context (2/05) weighing 171g. Mortar was attached to one piece.

### 5.3 Bone

Two fragments of long bone were recovered from (2/05) weighing 78g.

### 5.4 Metal objects

Two iron nails were recovered from context (2/05) weighing 50g. There was also a lead oil paint tube weighing 3g from context (2/05).

## 5.5 Glass

Fragment of modern glass from context (2/05) weighing 2g.

## 6 DISCUSSION

Stylistically it can be suggested that Swanwood was constructed in the 1940s or a decade either side of it. Despite there being archaeological features recognised to the north which were of an Iron Age or a Roman date, no significant archaeological deposits were noted in any of the trenches. The only feature recognised was in Trench 2 where a pit with evidence of burning was noted. This pit was either contemporary with the construction of the house or at sometime after.

## 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.

## 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1999 Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs

Mellor, M, 1984 A summary of the key assemblages. A study of pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from fourteen pits, dating from the 16th to the 19th century in TG Hassall et al, Excavations at St Ebbe's *Oxoniensia* **49**, 181-219.

VCH 2011 A History of the County of Oxford, volume XVI: Henley on Thames and Environs, London: University of London Institute of Historic Research / Boydell and Brewer