

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**AT**

**9 FYFIELD ROAD,**

**OXFORD.**

**NGR SP 51465 07735**

*On behalf of*

*Mr & Mrs M Semier West*

**DECEMBER 2014**

**REPORT FOR** Mr & Mrs M Semier West

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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief at 9 Fyfield Road, Oxford (NGR SP 51454 07715). The site is part of the Norham Gardens development that lies on the North Oxford sand terraces. Parts of a palaeochannel, a ditch and a pit were located.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

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

The development site is located at 9 Fyfield Road, Oxford (NGR SP 51454 07715). The site is part of the Norham Gardens development, which was located in the historical parish of Saint Giles'.

Topographically the site lies on the North Oxford river terraces, on the crest of a slope to the east, with the flat top of the terrace to the west. The site lies at just over 60m Ordnance Datum.

The underlying geology is the Oxford Clay Formation and West Walton Formation which are undifferentiated mudstones. This is capped by the Summertown-Radley Sand and Gravel Member a superficial sand and gravel member. The site lies very close to the boundary between this deposit and the Northmoor Sand and Gravel Member found to the southeast.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

Oxford City Council has granted planning permission for the erection of single storey extension to rear elevation with basement below and two lightwells, erection of four storey extension to side elevation including insertion of new dormer window to side roof slope and one Velux window, provision of new cast iron railings to site frontage. Due to the archaeological and historical importance of the surrounding area a condition of the permission stated that a programme of archaeological work should be carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the planning authority. This was in line with NPPF (the planning policy current at the time) and other Local Planning policies.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

Evidence from aerial photographs and archaeological excavations indicates the presence of an extensive prehistoric ritual and agricultural landscape across this part of the Oxford gravel terrace, involving Middle Neolithic – Early Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments, Iron Age /Roman agricultural field systems and subsequent Saxon rural settlement. An extensive cropmark complex recorded in the University Parks to the south incorporates a possible Neolithic/Bronze Age linear barrow cemetery and later Iron Age/Roman agricultural enclosures. A Neolithic/Bronze Age henge monument and three Bronze Age ring ditches belonging to this complex have recently been excavated at Queen Elizabeth House, St Giles and at the Radcliffe Infirmary site.

Fyfield Road lies in a poorly understood part of the gravel terrace located between the known find clusters of Bronze Age and Saxon material south of Park Town and an extensive landscape of monuments and field systems recorded in University Parks. An undated, but probable prehistoric, gully was recorded during an evaluation in 2007 at Lady Margaret Hall located 180m to the north-east (Oxford Archaeology, 2007; UAD No 1708). A watching brief undertaken at 11 Fyfield Road did not find any archaeological remains.

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

As laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation the aims were to:

- 2.1 To record any archaeological remains that will be impacted on by the development.
- 2.2 In particular to determine whether any Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman or Saxon activity is present.

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxford City 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 (2008).

### **3.2 Methodology**

An archaeologist maintained a continuous presence on site during the course of all work that would potentially disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

## **4 RESULTS**

Work was observed on site in two distinct stages. Stage one was the machine excavation of the foundation trenches for the extension along with the ground reduction for the basement in this area. Stage two was the machine excavation of service trenches for the new extension. The results for both stages are detailed below.

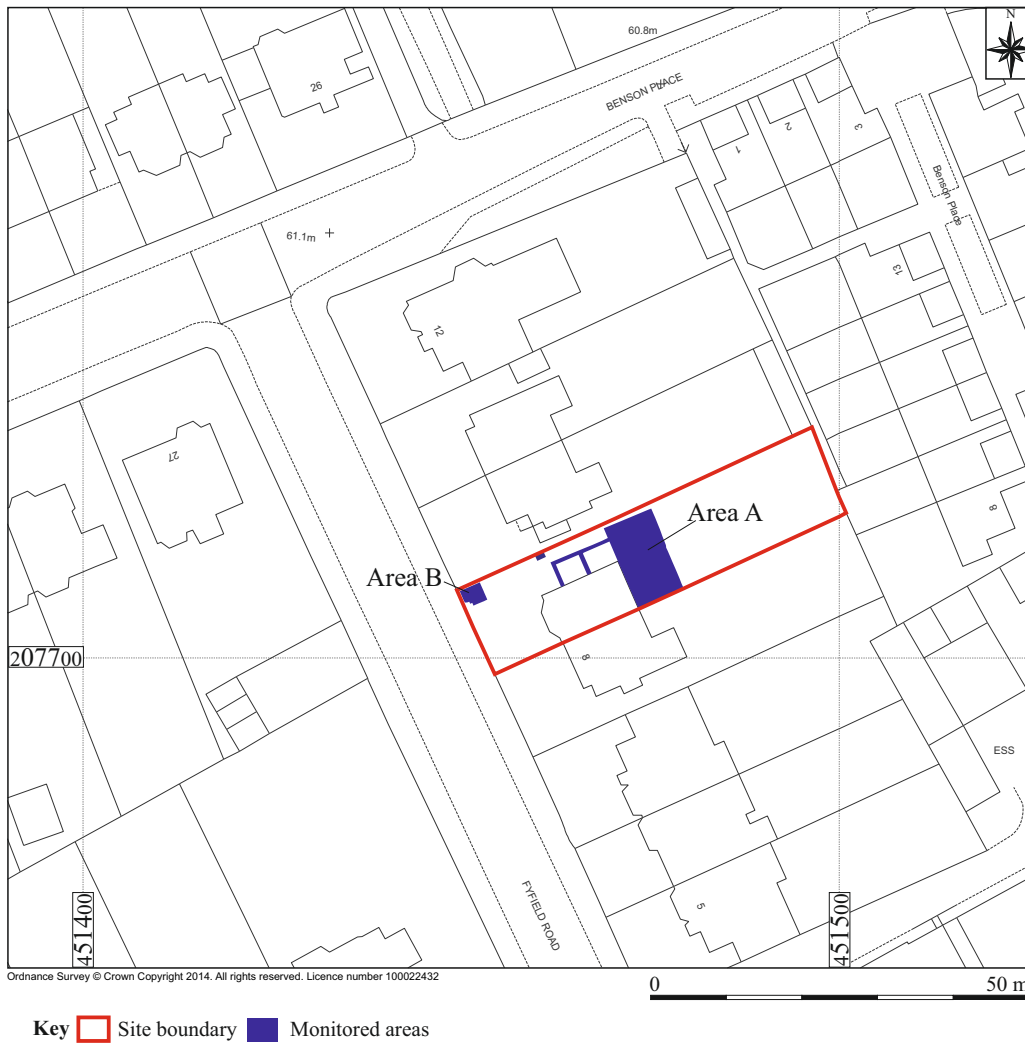
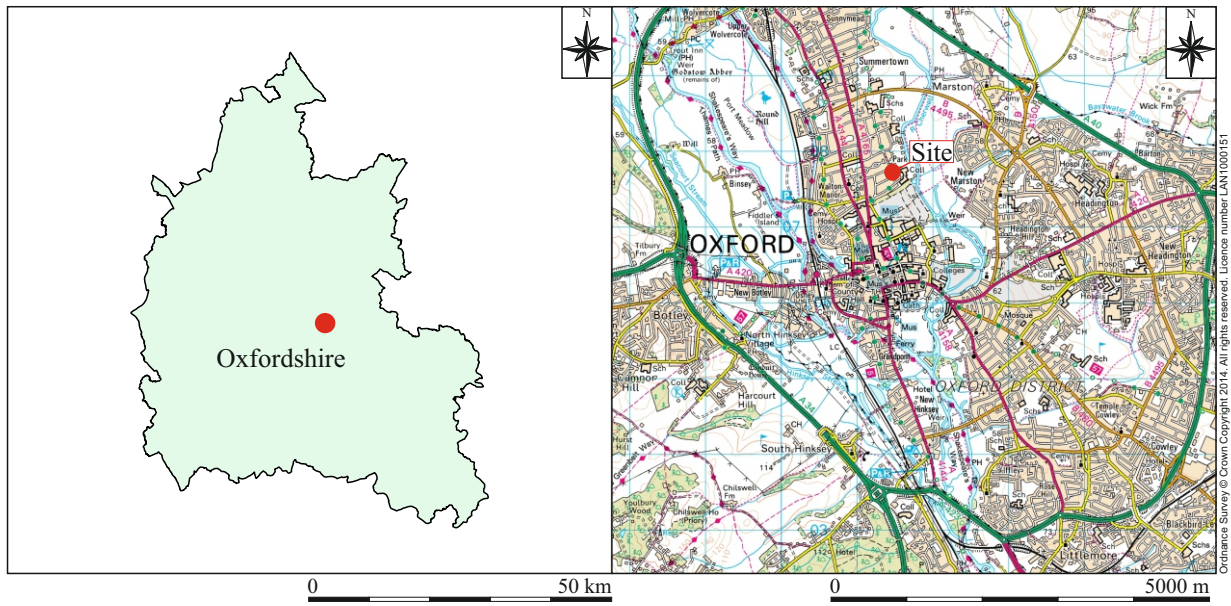


Figure 1: Site location

**Stage 1 (Figure 2)**

This stage of work was observed by Dr Steven Yates.

Layer (26) was a hard or dense blue clay that is of an unknown depth but starts at approximately 1.9m below ground level. This clay band is known as the Oxford Clay Formation. Layer (25) was a hard or dense white green clay that has a thickness of 0.5m and starts approximately 1.4m below ground level. This clay band is known as the Walton Clay Formation. These clay formations are considered to be mudstones laid down in the Jurassic some 156 to 165 million years ago.

Cut 22 was a linear feature that was 1.7m across and up to 0.4m deep. The sides had a sharp break of an upper slope with steep sides, there was a rounded break of slope with a flat to slightly rounded base. The feature was orientated roughly east to west. Fill deposit (23) was a moderately compact yellow sand with small angular stone inclusions and about 0.15m maximum depth. This feature is considered to be the remains of a palaeo-channel, which was apparently short lived. The reason that it is considered to have had a short period of time is that the stones in the sand are angular and where not worn by a long time in flowing water.

Layer (24) was a compact to moderately compact red sand with occasional lumps of clay from the clay beds below. This deposit was evidently part of the Summertown and Radley Sand and Gravel Member. This sand and gravel member is considered to have been laid down in the Quaternary some 3 million years ago.

**4.1 Phase 1:**

There were two features that were evidently cut into the top of the Quaternary sands, and these must represent two different phases as there is a relationship between them. Here they have been placed together as phase 1. The earliest feature was a ditch. Cut 20 was a linear feature that had a depth of 0.5m but only a half or less of the ditch width was exposed and therefore the ditch was at least 0.3m across. The sides were steep and the base rounded. The fill (21) was a compact grey red clay sand with charcoal inclusions. Truncating the top of this ditch was the base of a probable pit. Cut 18 was a circular or oval feature that was 0.5m across and 0.1m deep. The sides were steep with a flat base with rounded break of slope. The fill (19) was a compact red grey silt sand with charcoal inclusions.

No dating evidence was recovered from these features but it is likely that these could date from any time from the later prehistoric period to the early medieval period. There is an assumption that the area was covered in ridge and furrow from some date in the early medieval period to the post-medieval period.

**4.2 Phase 2:**

Layer (4) is a compact brown red sand with gravel inclusions that is approximately 0.15m in depth. There were two features that were cut into the top of this deposit or were laid on top of it. How these features developed was not overly apparent but it could be the case that these were formed in the base of possible ridge and furrow systems that were evident on maps of the 18<sup>th</sup> century across the regions. These features were cut 16 and deposit (15). Cut 16 was either a linear or elongated oval

which was 0.65m across and about 0.9m long, but was only shallow being some 0.05m deep. The fill (17) was a compact to moderately compact grey silt sand. This feature produced a piece of brick, which contained a depth of 40mm. This depth of brick would imply that this is probably of a 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century date. There is perhaps a chance that this could be a fragment of Roman brick, but this is perhaps not confirmable especially with the width. Deposit (15) was a moderately compact red grey sand with frequent gravel inclusions that was 0.06m deep. This feature appears to be a laid surface within the two lower soil levels.

### **4.3 Phase 3:**

Layer (3) was a compact red brown silt sand, but with no gravel inclusions, some 0.35m in depth. There were a number of features that were cut into this deposit. These included cuts 11, 8, 13 and 5. These features were all cut in a probable short period of time, but even so it is possible to determine that there is an order in which these features were created. The earliest of these has to be the foundation of the main house. Cut 11 is a series of linear cuts that form a large rectangular shape with each of the cuts being some 0.35m across and 0.7m deep. The sides of the cuts are vertical and the bases flat. Masonry 12 was for the structure of the main house, which was made of yellow brick and contained dressed ashlar limestone blocks. The wall was bonded with a white grey mortar. The base of the foundation contained a concrete ballast with imbedded brick. It is apparent that the drainage and sewer system was put in next. Cut 8 is an irregular shaped feature with a central square box with three attached linear cuts. The square cut was some 1.2m across and up to 0.7m deep. The linear cuts were up to 0.35m across. The sides of these cuts were vertical and the bases flat. Masonry 9 was of red brick forming a roughly square man-hole on the sewer and drainage system. The bricks were bonded by a white grey mortar. The base of the feature was of a concrete ballast with additional brick bats. Deposit (10) was the backfill of the sewer and drainage system and was made up of a moderately compact blue and yellow mix clay sand. This is evidently the next phase of the development due to the apparent relationship between the man-hole brick walls and those of the single storey extension. Sewerage systems are known to have been inserted in Oxford from the mid to later 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cut 13 was for a series of linear foundations covering part of a structure some 4.5m by 3.7m and some 0.7m deep. The cuts had vertical sides and a flat base and were some 0.3m across. Masonry 14 was constructed of a mixture pale red and yellow bricks with a standard form bonded with mortar. The base of the foundation was a concrete ballast with brick inclusions which were some 0.05-0.1m deep. The corner of the brick wall appeared to be joined onto the corner of the man-hole.

The final cut in this phase was the construction of a well. There was no direct relationship between this feature and the other houses; however, it is apparent that a well would only be created when there was already a house. That the house was inserted before piped water was a feature of Norham Gardens. Cut 5 was a circular shape 0.9-1m across and which is over 1.4m deep. The sides of the cut were vertical. Masonry 6 was a red brick structure with an external diameter of 0.9-1m and an internal diameter of 0.65m.



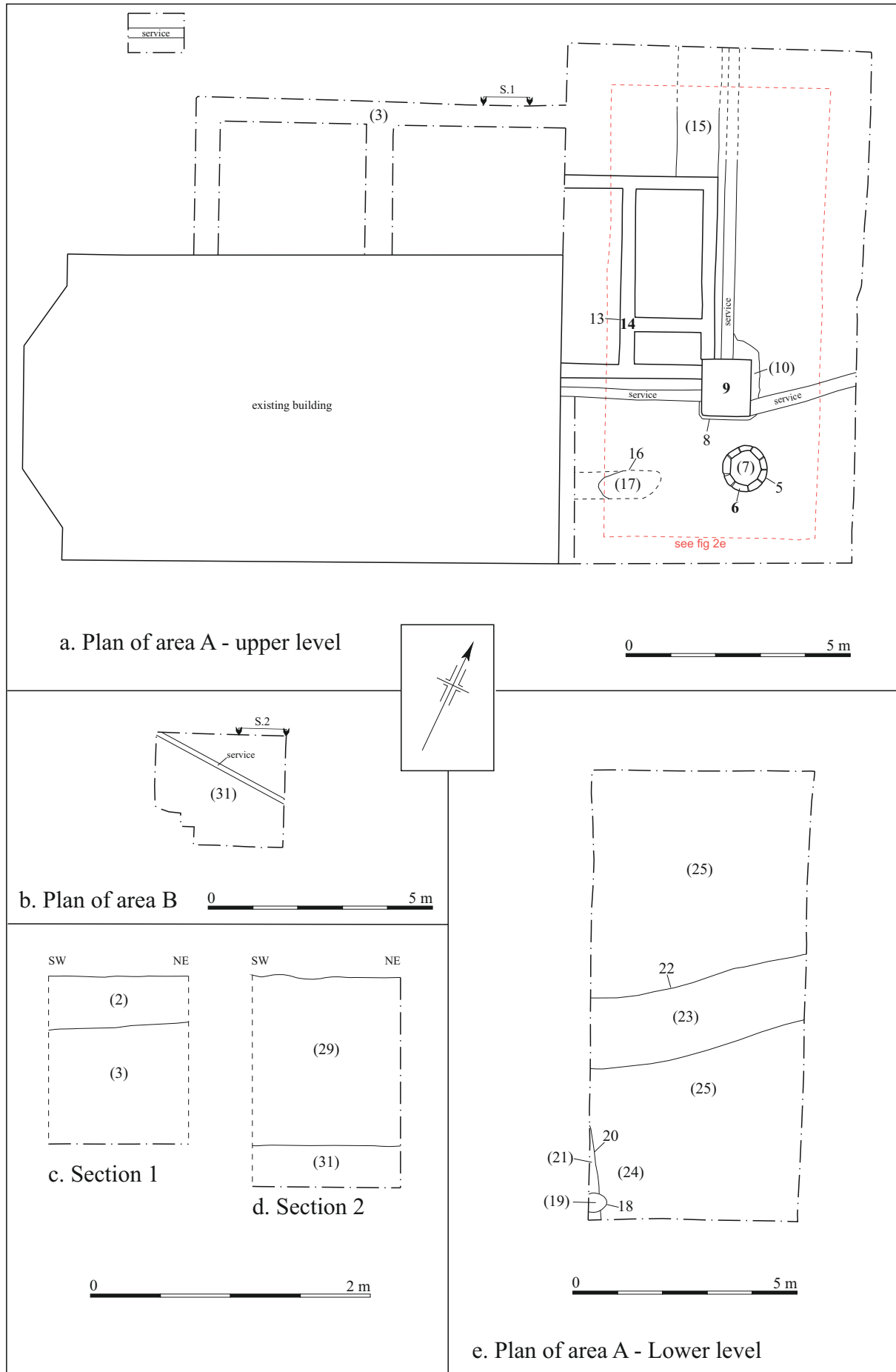


Figure 2: Plans and sections of monitored areas

#### **4.4 Phase 4:**

Fill (7) was a loose grey brown ash sand with inclusions of brick bat and other modern building debris. The fill is that of the well and probably dates to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century or when drinking water supplies were established in Oxford.

Layer (2) was a moderately compact grey brown clay sand some 0.15m deep.

Layer (1) was a mixed mortar and gravel spread with inclusions of blue clay and red sand up to 0.1m deep. This is a made layer that was created from the creation of bore holes for the foundations of the cellar.

#### **Stage 2 (Figure 2, B)**

Two trenches were dug during this stage of work in exploration of existing services trenches. The first trench was located in the northwest corner of the development area. It measured 3m x 3m and was dug to a depth of 1.5m. The geological horizon in this first trench was encountered at 1.2m below ground level and consisted of sand and gravel (31). No archaeological features were noted within this trench. The geological horizon was overlain by dark brown-grey silt-clay, disturbed garden soils 1.2m thick (29).

The second trench was dug to a depth of 1.2m. Disturbed garden soils and re-deposited natural sand and gravels were seen to a depth of 1.2m, this material being the backfill for the original service run (30). Excavation of this trench was stopped when the service pipe was encountered at this depth. No archaeological features were seen within this trench.

## **5 FINDS**

### **5.1 Building material (Stephen Yeates)**

A partial brick fragment was recovered from context (17) the fill of an elongated oval cut. The brick measured approximately (?) x 80mm x 48mm, weighing 587g. The fabric of the brick contained large and medium inclusions, some of which were clearly earlier ceramic fragments used as tempering. The external part of the brick had oxidised to a pale pink colour, while the internal part of the brick was reduced to a black grey colour. The depth of the brick would indicate that the brick was probably of a later medieval to post-medieval date 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century. The source could be manuring in Saint Giles' field, but could also be from an unrecognised building in the near vicinity, perhaps near Lady Margaret Hall at the southern end of Fyfield Road. As the brick looks early it could be retained as a sample.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

The area of ground excavated out for the cellar did identify some features, although some of these were fragmentary in nature. The earliest evidence of activity was that of a palaeochannel that extended across the site beneath the deposits of sand. This was presumably short lived due to the angular stones in the base.

Above the sand layers there were fragmentary features of human activity detected. The earliest features appeared to be a ditch and a pit of an unknown date, this was interpreted as Phase 1. Phase 2 saw the cutting of a possible furrow that contained a brick probably datable to the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century. This may be from manuring, but may also indicate the proximity of a building. Phase 3 was represented by the rear structures of the current building which were probably of a late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century date. The last phase 4 was made up of modern features.

## **7 ARCHIVE**

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the County Museums' Store under accession number OXCMS: 2014.193.

## **8 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 2008 Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs