



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

14 OCK STREET, ABINGDON

OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SU 49555 97040

On behalf of

Mr B Atkinson

SEPTEMBER 2014

REPORT FOR Mr B Atkinson
14 Ock Street
Abingdon
Oxfordshire
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief at 14 Ock Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire. One hand excavated foundation trench for an extension to the rear of existing property was monitored. Six successive layers and one construction cut of the standing boundary wall were recorded. The two lowest layers which contained early post-medieval ceramic building material (CBM), possibly represents fills of pit. The following four layers represent buried topsoil, make up ground and modern garden soil. The majority of finds recovered from those layers were fragments of 18th - 19th centuries CBM and clay tobacco pipes. Three pottery sherds of Red and White Earthenware and one residual fragment of Roman roof tile were recovered as well. No other archaeological feature or finds related to the Roman and/or mediaeval period were revealed during the watching brief.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located on the south side of Ock Street in Abingdon between the Square and the junction with Stratton Way (NGR SU 49555 97040). The site lies at approximately 55m above OD and underlying geology is First Terrace river gravels. The site is currently in residential use.

1.2 Planning Background

The Vale of White Horse District Council granted planning permission for a single storey extension to the rear of the property (P12/V2153/HH).

Due to the potential for the work to disturb archaeological deposits an archaeological watching brief was required as a condition during the groundwork. This was in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Oxfordshire Historic and Natural Environment Team (OHaNET) prepared a Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief (OHaNET 2014).

John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) were commissioned to undertake this work, and a Written Scheme of Investigation (JMHS 2014) was prepared to satisfy the requirements of the Brief. The Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) proposed the methodology by which the archaeological watching brief was to be carried out.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The following section is based on information presented in the WSI (JMHS 2014) and Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief (OHaNET 2014).

The site is within an area of considerable archaeological potential although lying outside of the extent of the late prehistoric settlement. It does lie within the later expanded Roman town. Archaeological investigations off Ock Street have revealed evidence of light industrial (e.g. tanning) and domestic activity to the rear of properties fronting Ock Street in the medieval period.

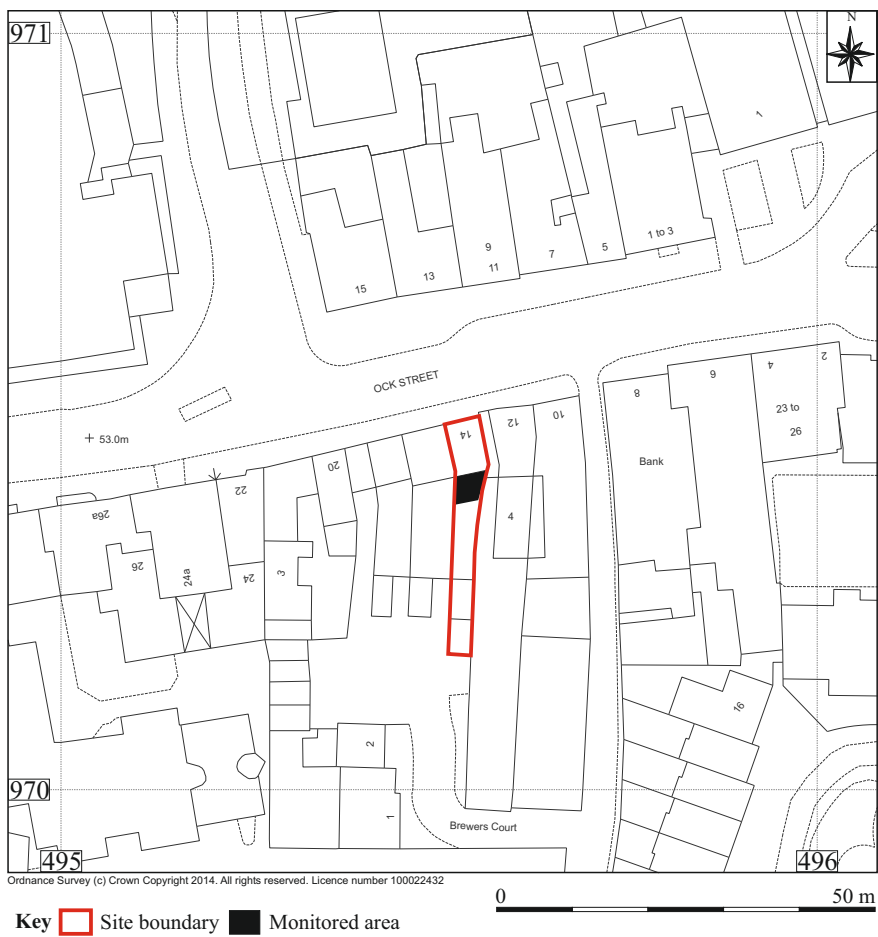
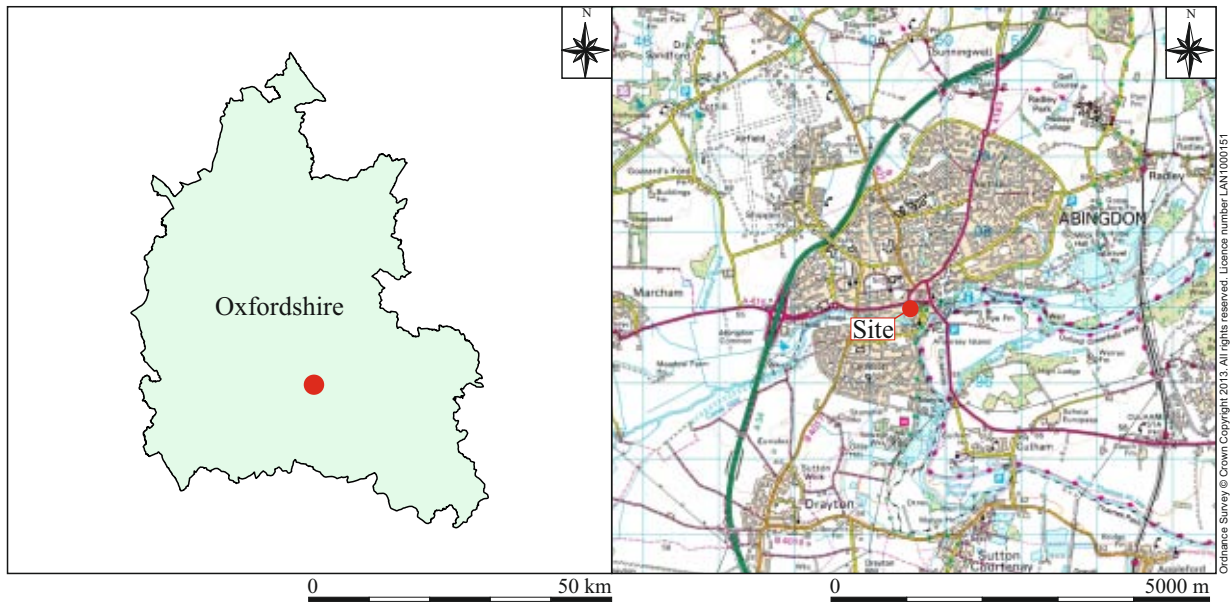


Figure 1: Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the WSI were:

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

In particular:

- To record any evidence of remains relating to the Roman, medieval and post-medieval settlement.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In accordance with the Brief issued by OHaNET (2014) and WSI (JMHS 2014), JMHS carried out monitoring of the groundwork, which comprised excavation of the foundation trench. Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the WSI (sections 3.1 – 3.11).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present on site during the excavation of the foundation trench for extension to the existing house. All ground reduction was achieved by hand excavation.

Archaeological deposits and features revealed were then cleaned by hand and recorded at an appropriate level. Archaeological features had written, drawn and photographic records made of them, and all deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers.

All artefacts recovered from archaeological features and deposits were collected, apart of ceramic building material where only sample was taken, for identification and were not retained.

Only a fragment of Roman roof tile (tegula), fragments of clay tobacco pipes and one sherd of Red Earthenware were retained and returned to landowner.

The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (2008) and the principles of MoRPHE (English Heritage 2006).

4 RESULTS

All features were assigned with individual context number. Context numbers with no brackets indicate feature cuts, numbers in the round brackets show feature fills or deposits of material and numbers in bold indicate any form of masonry.

4.1 Field Results (Figure 2)

Foundation trench (FT 1) was excavated in total length of 4.25m, it was 0.60m wide and reached a maximum depth 1.30m from the present ground surface in sondage 1 (Fig. 2a, b; Pl. 1). Due to the fact that natural ground was not reached in FT 1, two side trenches were not excavated as was originally proposed. Instead, a decision was made for a reinforced concrete slab to be constructed as a base for the new extension. The construction of the concrete slab did not have a direct impact on any archaeological feature.



Plate 1: General overview of FT 1, looking northeast

The lowest deposit recorded in the sondage 1 was 0.14m thick (as excavated) dark grey sandy loam (109), with approximately 30% ash inclusion (Fig. 2b). Overlaying deposit (109) was 0.40m thick deposit of mid brown sandy silt with *c.* 10% of gravel (105) (Fig. 2b). From both deposits fragments of dark red roof tiles with traces of burning were recovered. Deposit (105) contained small fragments of brownish red bricks from which was it possible to establish only the thickness of the brick (42mm), which suggests that brick was early post-medieval in date. Also occasional fragmentary of yeanning (young of a goat or sheep) bones were recovered from this deposit. Due to the fact that these two deposits were exposed only in a narrow sondage, it was difficult to establish if they represented layers or fills of a pit.

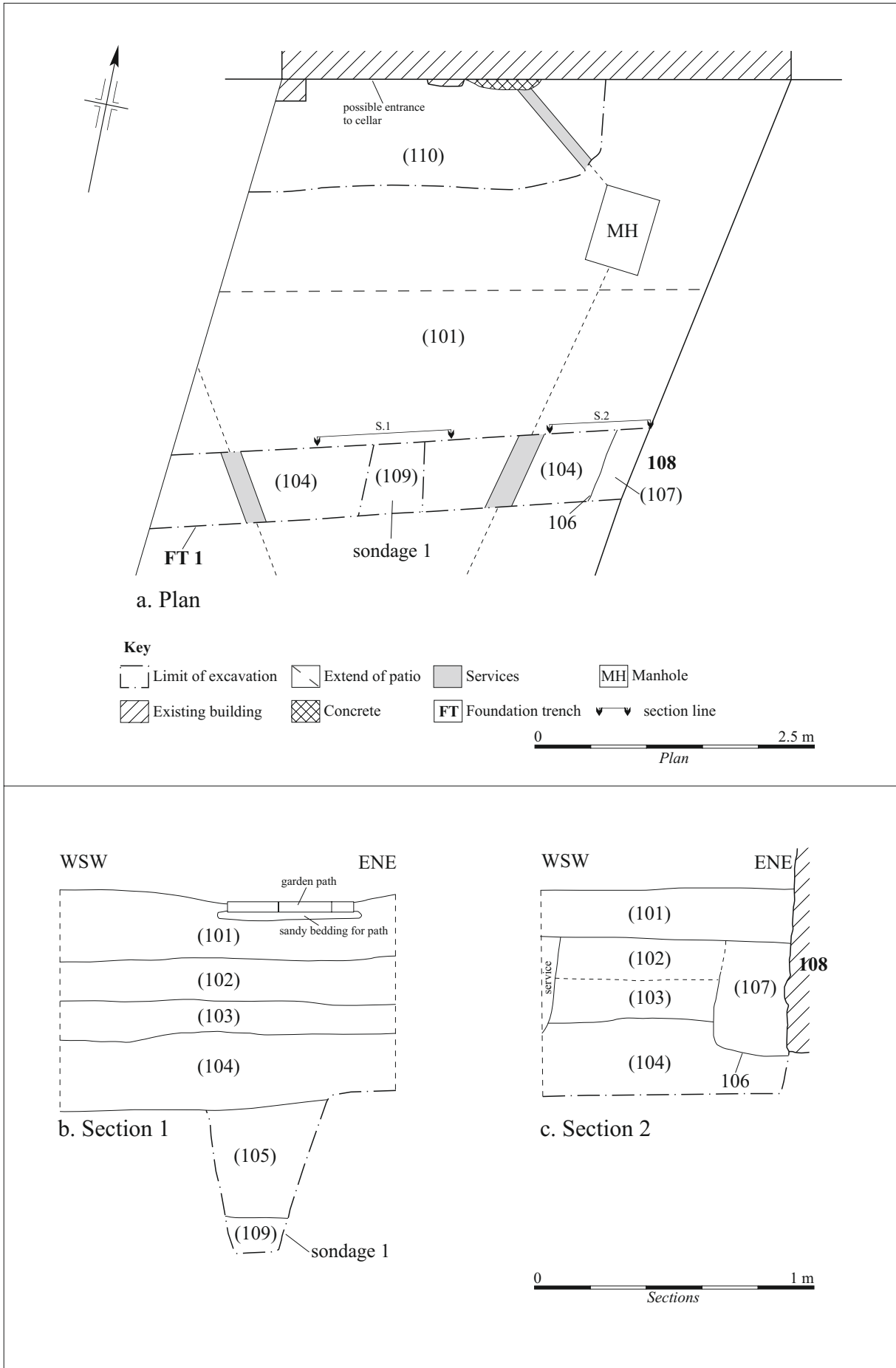


Figure 2: Plan and sections of monitored area

Overlying deposit (105) was 0.24m thick and 4.25m long (excavated in FT 1) firm dark grey sandy loam (104), containing occasional fragments of bricks and roof tiles and one post-medieval pottery sherd (see 5.1). The composition of this deposit suggests that it might represent a buried topsoil (Fig. 2b, c).

Layer (104) was overlaid by 0.13m thick layer (103) of reddish light brown clayey sand with approximately 25% of gravel inclusion. This deposit was clearly visible in west-southwest half of the FT 1 (Fig. 2b), in the east-northeast interfacing between this layer and layer (102) it was less distinguishable (Fig. 2c). Layer (102) was 0.14m thick formed of light brown clayey sand with up to 40% gravel inclusion. Finds from both layers were initially associated with upper layer (102). The major group of finds was represented by an assemblage of late post-medieval brick and roof tiles, and one residual fragment of Roman roof tile (tegula) was recovered from this deposit as well (see 5.2). Also one 60mm long iron nail and fragments of 19th century clay tobacco pipes were recovered from this deposit (see 5.3). The composition of both deposits was very similar and they represent make up layers.

Cut into deposit (102) was linear construction cut 106 of boundary wall **108** located on the east side of plot (Fig. 2a). It was 0.30m wide (as excavated), 0.49m deep (Fig. 2c) and it was aligned north to south. Set in the construction cut was wall **108**, built of roughly worked sandstone of maximum dimensions 450×140×300mm, bonded with light grey sandy lime mortar. Construction cut 106 was backfilled with mid grey sandy loam (107) containing frequent small fragments of late post-medieval ceramic building material and sub-angular stones (Fig. 2c). Deposit (102) was also cut by two modern drain pipes, located at the west and east end of FT 1 (Fig. 2a, c; Pl. 1).

The uppermost layer was 0.26m thick dark grey sandy loam (101), which represents topsoil (Fig. 2b, c). Cut into the topsoil was a narrow garden path (Fig. 2b).

Originally the north part of monitored area was covered by a patio built of concrete slabs. After removal of concrete slabs in the northwest corner there was exposed a deposit of loose sandy loam (110), which represented the backfill of a possible entrance to a cellar. The possibility of the existence of a cellar under the property was also supported by the fact, that there was 1.10m wide gap in wall foundations and hollow space under the staircase (Fig. 2a).

4.2 Reliability of Results

The reliability of results is considered to be very good. The archaeological watching brief took place in changeable weather conditions with average light and visibility. Excellent cooperation from the ground workers and landowner ensured that sufficient time was allowed to investigate and record the archaeological deposits to the appropriate standards.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Pottery by David Gilbert

Samples of post-medieval pottery were taken from two contexts (101) and (104) for identification and not retained. This was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

Context (101)

WHEW: Mass-produced White Earthenware, 19th - 20th C.

REW: Red Earthenware, dated 1550+

Context (104)

REW: Red Earthenware, dated 1550+

5.2 Roman roof tile – tegula

A residual fragment of Roman roof tile (tegula) was recovered from context (102). The fragment represents a very abraded irregular part of right-angled rim and central section. The ceramic fabric is reddish brown clay tempered with sand and occasional small stones. Dimensions: 85mm (length), 74mm (width), 35mm (maximum thickness), 179g (weight).

A numerous of similar fragments were recovered during the archaeological excavation at The Old Gaol in 2010, generally dated to the Roman period (43-410 CE) (Williams 2012, 123-124).

5.3 Clay tobacco pipes

An assemblage of six clay tobacco pipe fragments (16g) was recovered from deposit (102). Three fragments from the same pipe represent the bowl with molded fluted design, stem and flat-based spur with maker mark W/M. Typologically this clay tobacco pipe is dated to the 19th century. The maker's mark is not related to any known maker in Berkshire or Oxfordshire from 19th century (Oswald 1975, 98, 189).

Rest of the assemblage are none diagnostic stem fragments, generally dated to the post-medieval period.

5.4 Environmental Remains

No deposits suitable for environmental analysis were identified, and no samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological watching brief at 14 Ock Street, Abingdon was successful in proving that no archaeological remains related to the Roman and medieval settlement were observed in the excavated foundation trench for the extension.

The lowest deposits (105) and (109) exposed only in the sondage 1 seem to represent fills of an early post-medieval pit, rather than layers of material, because the density of finds was higher than in the rest of the deposits.

The following deposit (104), which contained occasional ceramic building material and one sherd of Red Earthenware, possibly represents a buried topsoil and could be dated to the early post-medieval period as well.

Deposits (102) and (103), which contained finds dated in to the 18th – 19th centuries, represent levelling layers before the development of Ock Street in the same period. A similar situation was recorded during the archaeological evaluation at Mayott House (Riccoboni 2013) located approximately 350m to the west along Ock Street.

The boundary wall **108** is clearly visible on 1:500 Town Plan of Abingdon dated in 1874 (Old Maps), however it could be slightly earlier in date.

The residual fragment of Roman tegula recovered from deposit (102) dated to the 19th century, confirmed Roman activities within wider zone of central Abingdon.

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