

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

LAND TO THE REAR OF 45 HIGH STREET,

WITNEY, OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SP 3563 0996

On behalf of

SIAD Ltd

MAY 2015

REPORT FOR SIAD Ltd
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief on behalf of SIAD Ltd within the former back garden of 45 High Street, Witney, Oxfordshire. Groundworks consisted of substantial ground reduction across the whole site, and a series of features and deposits relating to the medieval and post-medieval occupation of Witney were recorded.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

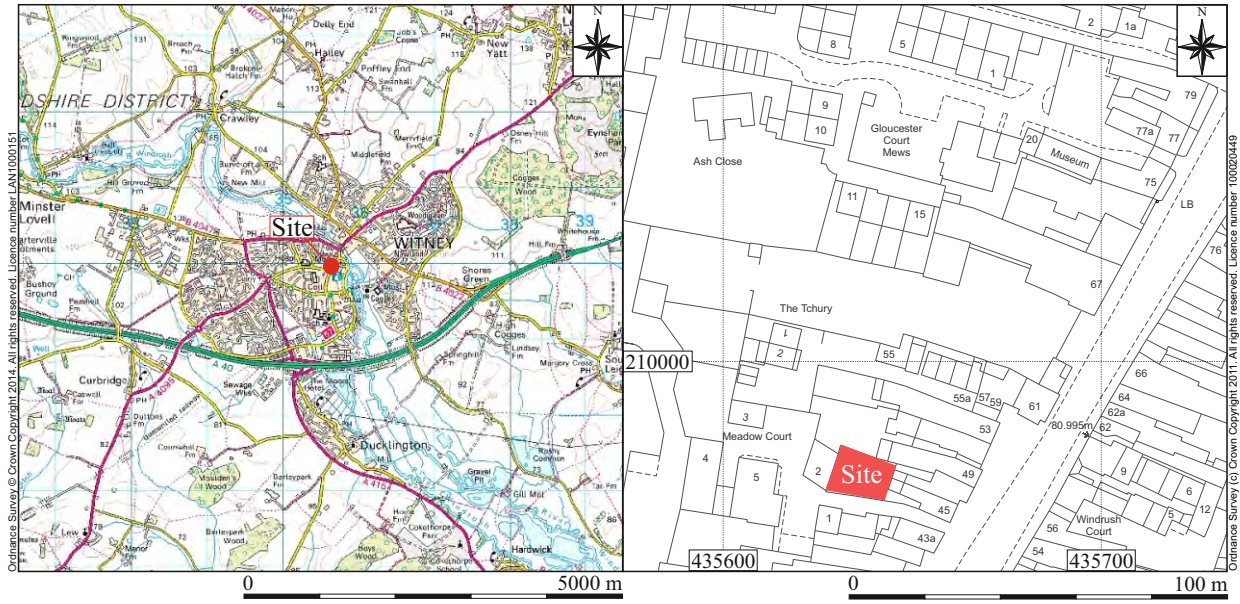
The development site is located on the west side of the High Street in Witney approximately equidistant between the junctions with Welch Way and Witan Way (NGR SP 3563 0996). The underlying geology is Forest Marble overlain by alluvium and the site lies at approximately 81m OD. The development site is a former back garden.

1.2 Planning Background

West Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission for the construction of two dwellings with access (13/0033/P/FP). Due to the archaeological and historical importance of the surrounding area two conditions were attached to the permission requiring a watching brief to be maintained during the course of building operations or construction works on the site. This was in line with The NPPF and other Local Planning policies. Oxfordshire Historic and Natural Environment Team (OHaNET) prepared a *Design Brief* for the required archaeological work. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* prepared by John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) outlined the method by which the watching brief would be carried out in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains of significance.

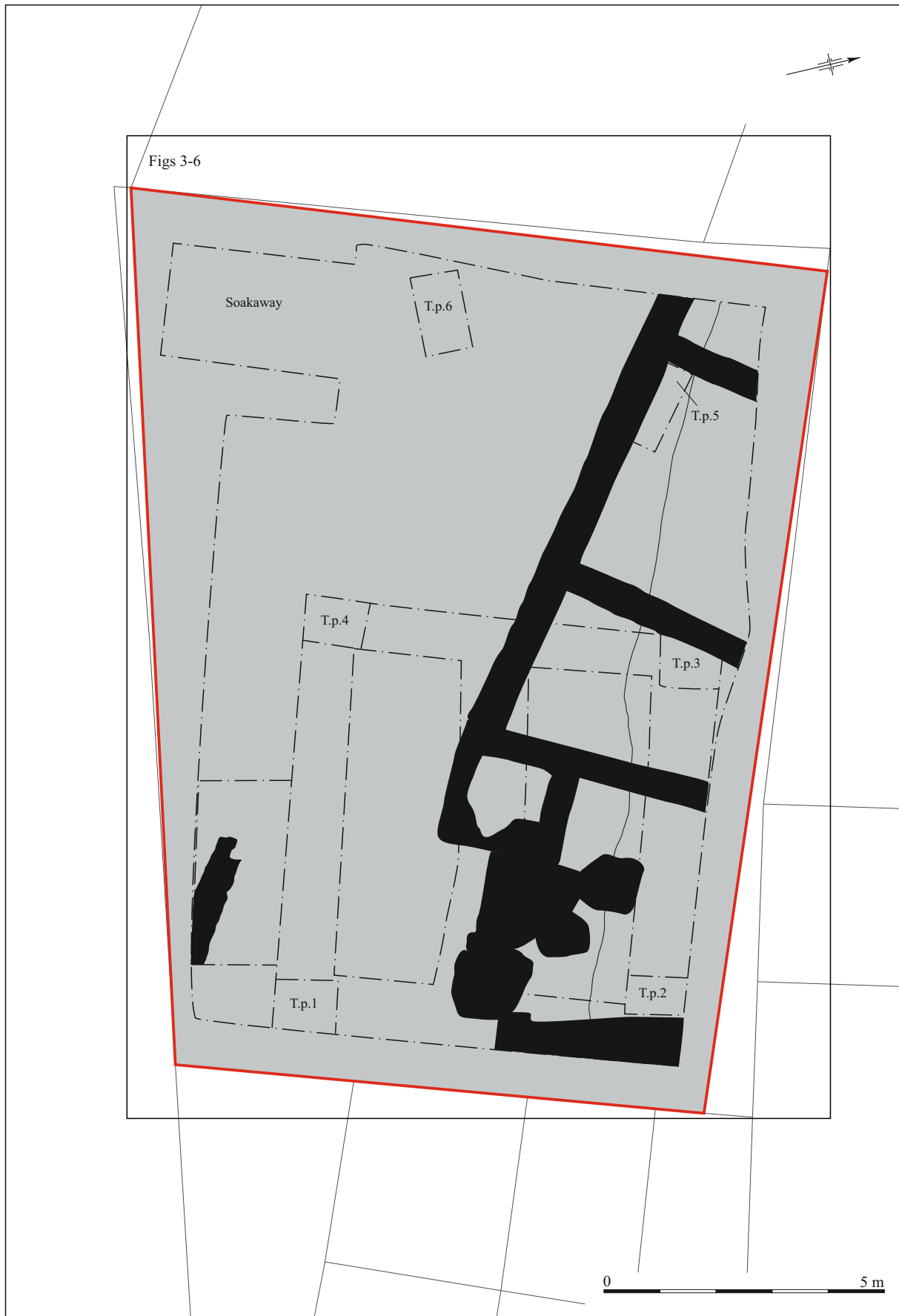
1.3 Archaeological Background

The site lies within the extent of the later medieval township of Witney. An archaeological watching brief undertaken during the redevelopment of 63 – 69 High Street, Witney (JMHS 2012) revealed the presence of a field system dating from the Bronze Age to the early medieval period. Evidence of structures fronting onto the High Street was revealed; these appear to date to the eleventh century and form part of the original borough. They are related to a series of substantial stone walls. To the rear is evidence of the town ditch that is recorded in the 16th century but appears to be earlier. These features and buildings appear to have survived into the 16th century when they were replaced. An archaeological investigation of a site adjacent to this watching brief revealed pits containing 13th and 14th century pottery. The cartographic evidence suggests that this area was divided into burgage plots during the medieval period. The open garden space to the rear of number 45 was therefore thought to contain similar features.



Key Site boundary Monitored area Archaeological features

Figure 1: Site location



Key Site boundary Monitored area Archaeological features Limit of excavation

Figure 2: Plans and test pit area

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- 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 medieval and post-medieval settlement of Witney.

3 STRATEGY

An archaeologist was to be present on site during the course of all groundworks associated with the development that could potentially impact archaeological remains: including surface stripping, excavation for new foundations and services and test pits.

3.1 Methodology

Ground reduction of the development footprint was carried out with a 3.5 T tracked excavator.

An archaeologist was present on site during the course of any groundwork that had the potential to reveal or disturb archaeological remains. Archaeological deposits and features revealed were cleaned by hand and recorded in plan before being excavated and recorded at an appropriate level.

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 Chartered Institute for Field Archaeologists (CIfA, 2014).

4 RESULTS (*Figures 3-6*)

Initial groundwork consisted of a topsoil strip and moderate reduction in ground level, followed by the excavation of footings trenches; however, during the course of works it was deemed necessary to reduce the ground level substantially across the site in order to produce a stable foundation.

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts, numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material, while numbers in bold indicate structural features.

4.1 Phase 1: Geological layers

The geological horizon, an alluvial deposit of compact mid grey sandy silt with 80% mixed gravels, was encountered at 79.2m OD. The geological horizon was overlain by subsoil (32), a friable mid brown silt with 50% gravel and a thickness of 0.1m. In test pit 1 the subsoil was overlain by (31), a tenacious mid brown silt containing 5% fine gravel and 5% manganese staining with a thickness of 0.1m. This deposit was not present in the other 5 test pits that were excavated to the geological horizon.

4.2 Phase 2: Cultivation soils

The subsoil was overlain by cultivation soil (30) a friable mid to dark grey brown sandy silt with 10% angular limestone fragments and 5% fine gravel. The deposit varied in thickness between 0.3m to 0.45m and was present across the whole site, extending below the limit of excavation (l.o.e.) in the SW half of the site. In the NW corner of the site (30) was overlain by (25), a moderately compact dark grey clayey silt, containing 8% small stone and 0.35m in thickness. Four sherds of Cotswold-type ware and one sherd of Minety-type ware were recovered from this layer, providing a *terminus post quem* of the early 12th century.

4.3 Phase 3: 12th - 16th century

Soil layer (25) was truncated by wall 9; a limestone wall aligned NW - SE, 8.6m in length by 0.7m in width (Fig. 3, Plates 3, 4). Built from roughly hewn limestone blocks with average dimensions of 200mm x 150mm x 100mm; these were randomly coursed, with approximately six courses surviving, and earth bonded with a rubble core. The wall extended beyond the l.o.e. to the NW, on the same alignment as the wall of the building forming the northern boundary of the site. The wall was built within construction cut 26, which survived to a depth of 0.1m.

Butting the NE face of wall 9 was layer (24), a friable mid brown sandy silt containing 5% stone and <1% mortar flecks, 0.2m in thickness (Fig. 3, S.2). This layer was bounded by walls 9, 7 and 11, and extended beyond the l.o.e. to the NE. One sherd of Midland Blackware was recovered from this layer, providing a late 16th century date.

In the E corner of the site a small fragment of wall truncated soil layer (30): 29, a limestone wall, aligned NE – SW, 3.5m in length by 0.6m in width (Fig. 4, Plate 6). Built from roughly hewn limestone blocks with average dimensions of 300mm x 150mm x 100mm. This wall extended beyond the l.o.e. to the NE, and was overlain by garden soil (13).

4.4 Phase 4: 16th – mid 18th century

A thick layer of garden soil was present across site to the south of wall 9 (13). This deposit was a friable dark greyish brown clayey silt, containing 15% stone and varying in thickness between 0.4 - 0.6m. Four sherds of Red Earthenware and two sherds of Creamware were recovered from this layer, providing a *terminus post quem* of mid 18th century date. This deposit appeared to butt wall 9, suggesting it had accumulated after the construction of the wall.

4.5 Phase 5: Mid 18th – 19th century

The SE end of wall **9** was truncated by wall **7** (Plate 3); a limestone wall aligned NNE - SSW, at least 2.4m in length by 0.4m in width (Fig. 3). The wall was built from unfinished limestone blocks with average dimensions of 150mm x 150mm x 100mm; these were randomly coursed, and bonded with a yellow sandy mortar. It is assumed that the wall was built within a construction cut, and the truncation of **9** seems to support this; however a cut was not clearly visible during excavation.

Built into this wall was a square, stone lined cess pit **5** (Plates 2, 3). This structure had dimensions of 2.3m x 2.3m and was built from roughly hewn limestone blocks with average dimensions of 200mm x 150mm x 100mm. These were randomly coursed and earth bonded. The cess pit was backfilled with (6), a tenacious mid grey brown clayey silt with 15% small stone. One sherd of mass-produced white earthenware was recovered from this fill, providing a 19th century date.

An area of pitched stone surface **3**, 2.5m by 1.3m in size, was present immediately to the SE of cess pit **5** (Plates 1, 3). The surface was constructed from unfinished limestone blocks with average dimensions of 250mm x 100mm x 60mm. The blocks were set at an angle of approximately 50°, and were earth bonded. This surface was laid into garden soil (13) and appeared to respect the edges of the cess pit, suggesting contemporaneous construction.

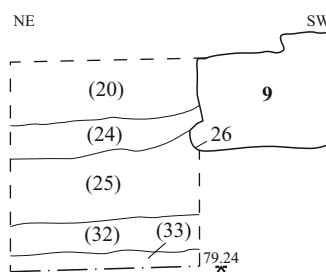
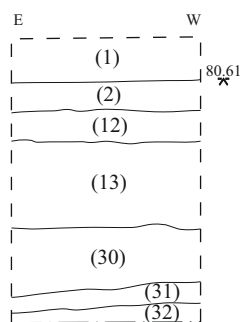
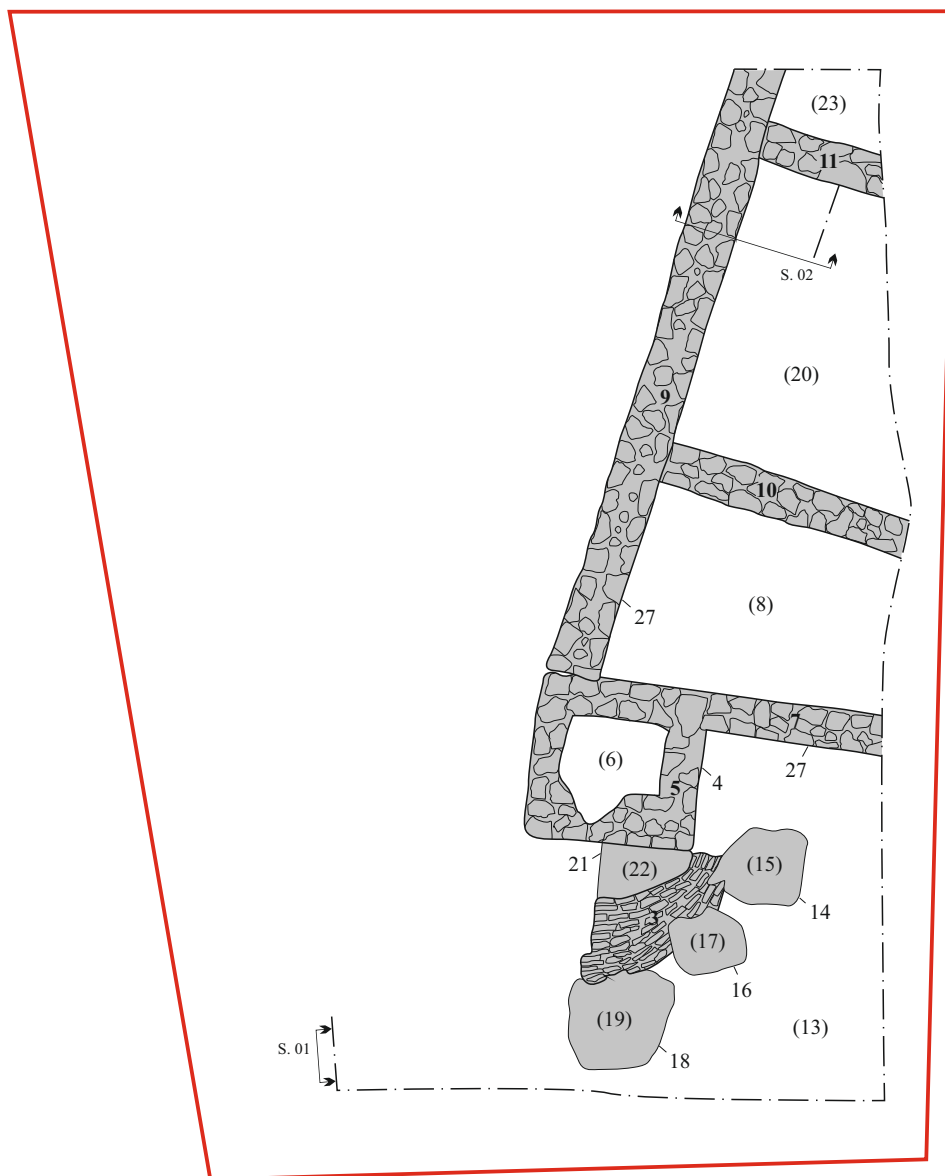
In the SE corner of the site a small fragment of stone wall **37** was cut into (13). This wall was 2.5m in length by 0.4m in width, and aligned NW – SE (Fig. 4). The wall was constructed from roughly hewn limestone blocks with average dimensions of 300mm x 200mm x 80mm; these were randomly coursed and earth bonded. The wall terminated within the trench and extended beyond the l.o.e. to the SE.

4.6 Phase 6: 19th century; walls **10** and **11**.

Two further stone walls, aligned SW – NE, were constructed within the area bounded by walls **9** and **7** (Fig. 3). These walls were butted against **9**, and truncated layer (24). Wall **10**, was of limestone at least 3.3m in length by 0.5m in width built from roughly hewn limestone blocks with an average dimension of 200mm x 140mm x 80mm; randomly coursed, and bonded with a mid yellowish brown sandy mortar. Wall **11**, of limestone was aligned SW – NE, 1.7m in length by 0.5m in width. It was built from roughly hewn limestone blocks; set in random courses and bonded with a mid yellow sandy mortar. Both of these walls extended beyond the l.o.e. to the SW. The construction of these walls can be dated to 1840 – 1887 on the basis of historic mapping (Plates 7 and 8).

To the west of wall **9** two thick rubble deposits were present, located stratigraphically between soils (2) and (30): (34) a loose mid grey sandy silt with 60% mixed rubble, 0.5m in thickness and (35) a loose mid grey sandy silt with 40% mixed rubble, 0.6m in thickness. It is possible that these layers are associated with the construction of walls **10** and **11**.

Plan 1



Section 2

Section 1

Key
 Site boundary
 Archaeological features
 Limit of excavation

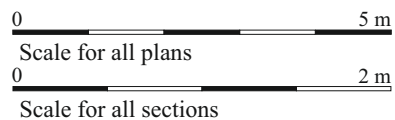
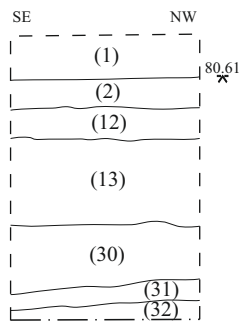
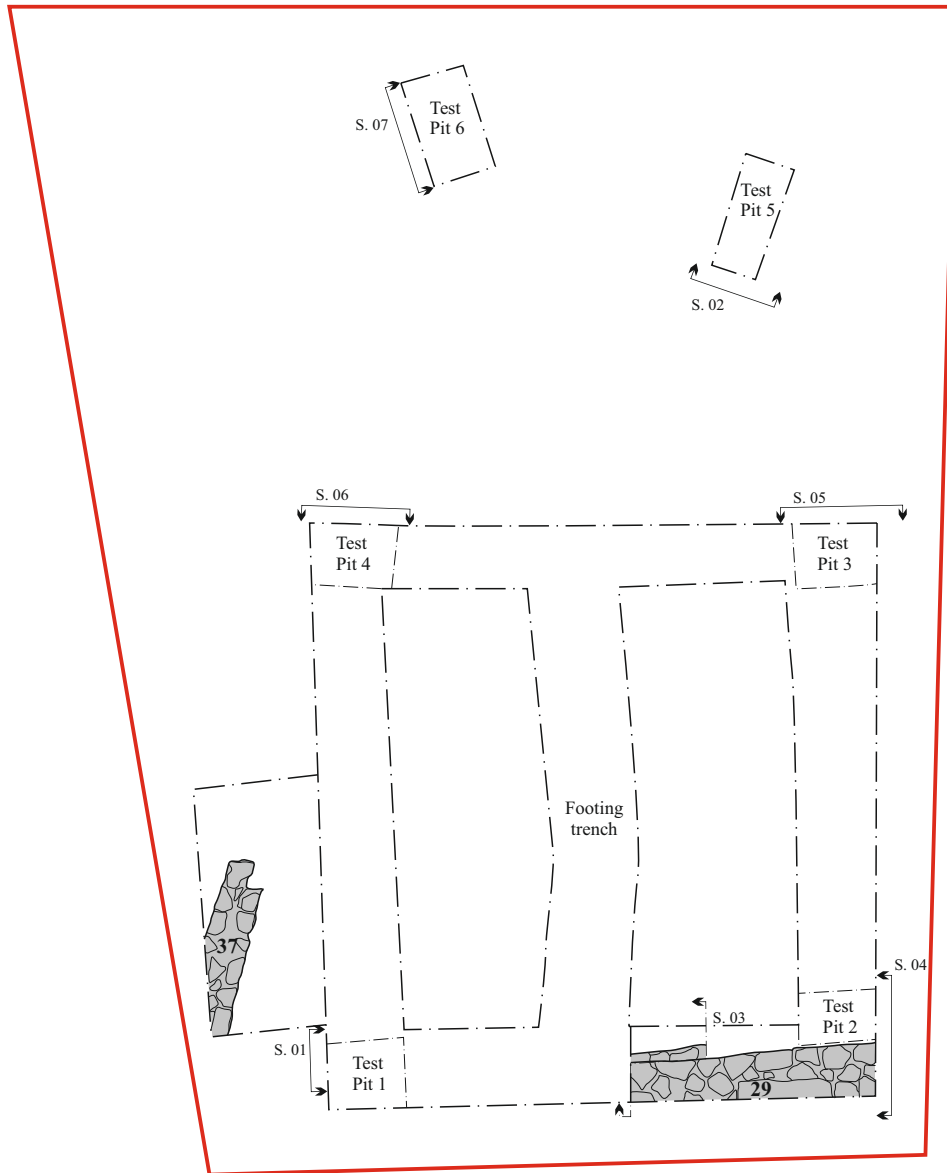
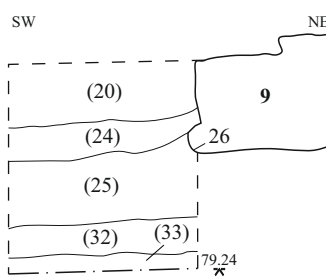


Figure 3: Sections of plan 1

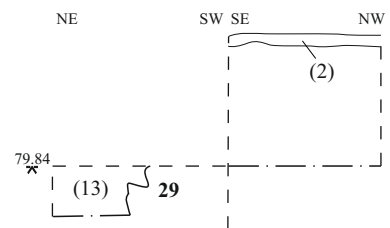
Plan 2



Section 1



Section 2



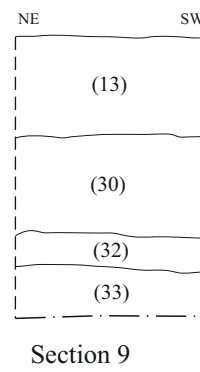
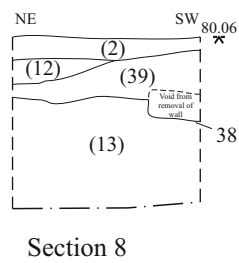
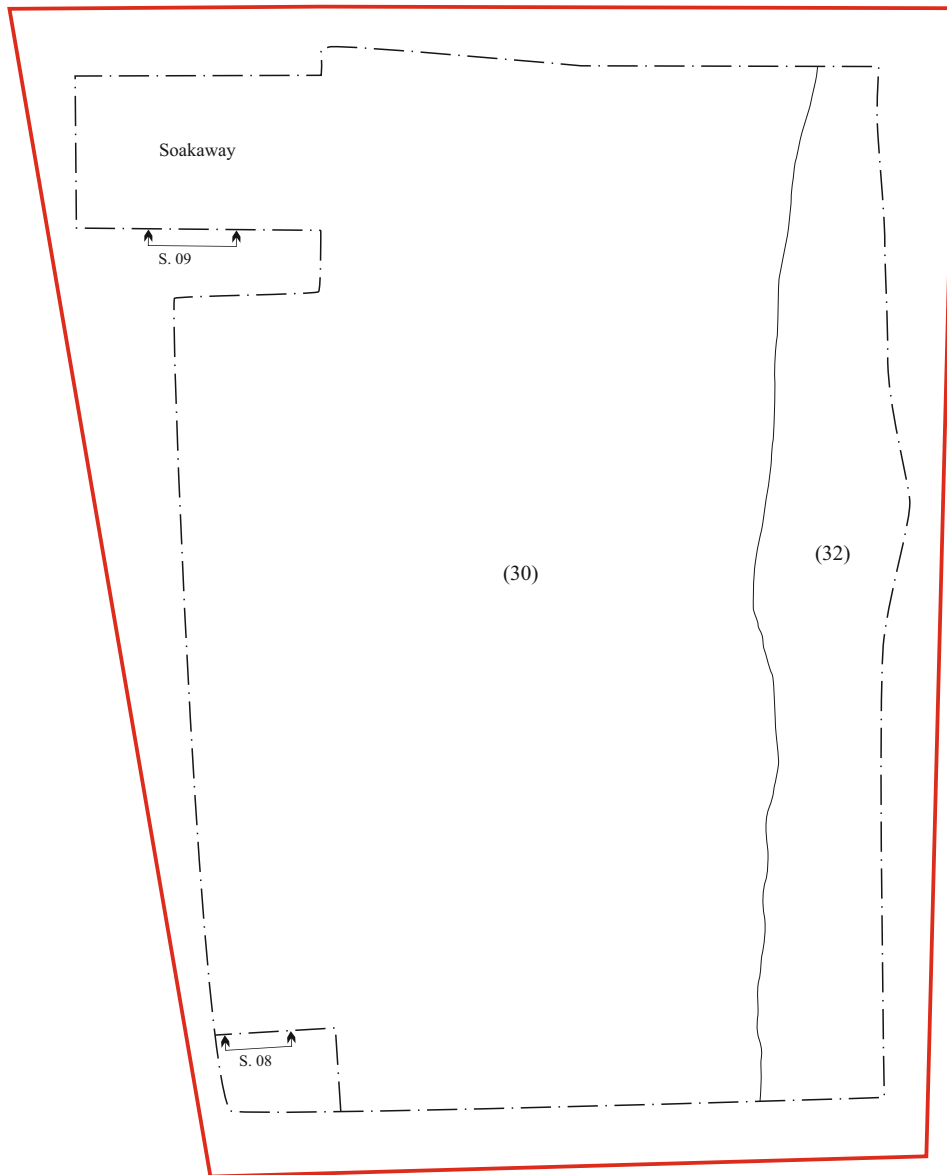
Section 3

Key
 Site boundary
 Archaeological features
 Limit of excavation

0 5 m
 Scale for all plans
 0 2 m
 Scale for all sections

Figure 4: Sections of plan 2

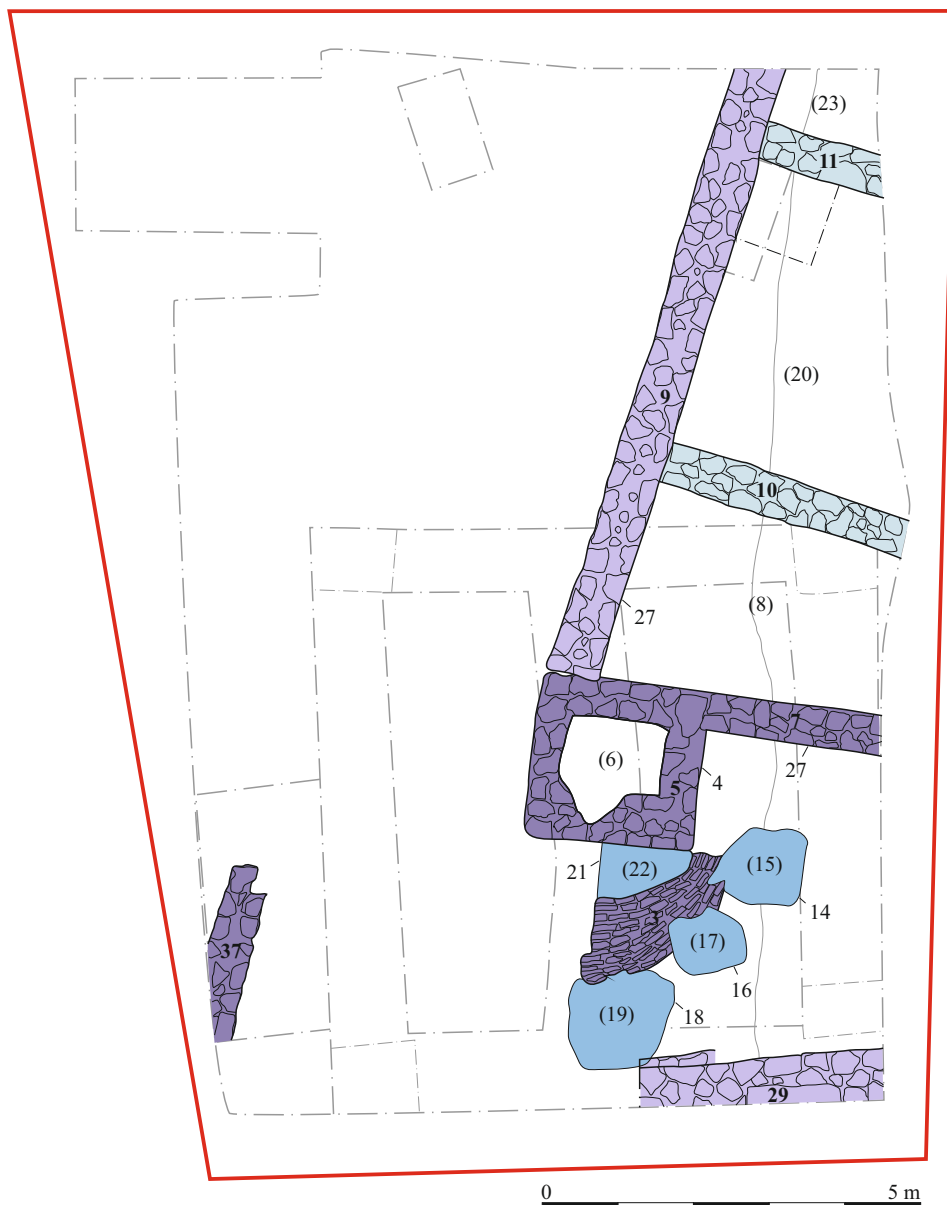
Plan 3



Key
 Site boundary Limit of excavation

0 5 m
 Scale for all plans
 0 2 m
 Scale for all sections

Figure 5: Sections of plan 3



Key






-  Phase 1: Late 12th - early 16th century
-  Phase 2: Mid 18th - 19th century
-  Phase 3: Mid 19th century
-  Phase 4: Late 19th century
-  Site boundary

Figure 6: Plan of site phases

4.7 Phase 7: Late 19th century

A layer of soil was deposited within the area bounded by walls 9 and 7; (8), also recorded as (20) and 23), a tenacious mid brown sandy silt with 10% stone, 0.34m thick (Fig. 3, S.2). Six sherds of mass-produced white earthenware were recovered from this deposit, providing a 19th century date. This deposit may represent a phase of levelling after the demolition of walls 9, 7, 10 and 11 in the late 19th century.

Four irregularly shaped pits were present in the SE area of the site, truncating pitched stone surface 3 (Fig. 3). 14 a sub rounded pit with a diameter of 1.5m and filled by (15), a loose dark grey sandy silt with 15% charcoal flecks, 5% stone and 5% ash lenses. 16 a sub rounded pit with a diameter of 1.1m and filled by (17), a loose dark grey sandy silt with 10% charcoal flecks, 5% small stones and 5% ash lenses. One sherd of mass-produced white earthenware was recovered from this fill, providing a 19th century date. 18 a sub rounded cut, 1.2m in diameter and filled by (19), a loose dark grey sandy silt with 10% charcoal flecks, 5% stone and 5% ashy lenses. Two sherds of mass-produced white earthenware were recovered from this fill, providing a 19th century date. 21 a sub ovoid cut 1.3m in length by 0.7m in width, and truncated at its SW edge by an area of modern disturbance; filled by (22), a loose mid grey brown clayey silt containing 10% stone and 5% whitish mortar fragments.

4.8 Phase 7: Topsoil

The uppermost deposit was topsoil (1), a soft loose mid grey brown loam with a thickness of 0.2m, presumed to have been present across the whole site; this deposit was largely removed unmonitored.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 25 sherds with a total weight of 506g. It was recorded using the conventions of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAC:	Cotswold-type ware , AD975 - 1350. 4 sherds, 23g.
OXBB:	Minety-type ware , early 12 th – 16 th century. 1 sherd, 24g.
OXDR:	Red Earthenware , 1550+. 5 sherds, 290g.
OXEAH:	Midland Blackware , late 16 th – 17 th century. 1 sherd, 3g.
CRM:	Creamware , mid 18 th - early 19 th century. 3 sherds, 25g.
WHEW:	Mass-produced white earthenwares , 19 th - 20 th century. 11 sherds, 141g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region. The assemblage is generally in good condition, including the medieval material, and appears reliably stratified.

The sherd of WHEW from context 2 has the mark of “E&G Phillips, Longport”, dating it to 1822-34.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Cntxt	OXAC		OXBB		OXDR		OXEAH		CRM		WHEW		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
2											1	28	E19thC
6											1	4	19thC
8									1	5	1	3	19thC
13					4	230			2	20			M18thC
17											1	8	19thC
19											2	23	19thC
20					1	60					5	75	19thC
24							1	3					L16thC
25	4	23	1	24									E12thC
Total	4	23	1	24	5	290	1	3	3	25	11	141	

5.2 Animal Bone *by Simona Denis*

A single fragment of animal bone weighting 26 gr was recovered from rubble layer (13). It was identified as a left III-IV metacarpal belonging to an ovine. The distal epiphysis, which is usually considered as an indicator for the distinction between sheep and goat (even if not completely reliable, Zedler 2010), is not preserved, therefore preventing the identification of the individual as sheep or goat. The bone shows a long, shallow slice mark along the shaft, with a series of smaller, fine slice marks produced by a fine blade (Seetah 2006).

5.3 Glass *by Simona Denis*

The example found in context (20) is a curved, very thick (max 12 mm) fragment of glass. The original colour is not visible due to the advanced degradation of the surface, resulting in extensive flaking. The sherd, possibly a shoulder fragment, presents several imperfections (uneven thickness, one large bubble and 'orange-peel' inner surface) typical of free-blown bottle bodies (<http://www.sha.org/bottle/body.htm>), produced in England between the mid-17th and the late 18th C. The fragmentary nature of the find prevents from more accurate dating.

5.4 Clay Pipe *by Simona Denis*

One fragment of clay tobacco pipe was recovered from deposit (20). The stem piece measures 37 mm in length and 9 mm in diameter, and has a 2 mm wide, off-centre bore hole. The incomplete state of the item and the lack of any decoration or distinctive mark preclude any attempt to reconstruct the original shape, determine the overall length or date the fragment (Ayto 1994).

5.5 Lead *by Simona Denis*

A single lead object of unknown function was collected from context (20). It is a small (24mm in diameter), thin disc, slightly domed and irregularly shaped, with

crudely worked faces. The object has a slightly off-centre, less than 1 mm in diameter, possibly unintentional hole.

6 DISCUSSION

Archaeological investigation at 45 High Street revealed activity relating to the medieval and post-medieval occupation of Witney, from the 12th through to the 19th century.

The earliest activity on site consisted of cultivation soils (25) and (30); dated to the early 12th century. The site is located within the medieval borough of Witney, and as such these soil layers are likely to represent cultivation within plots associated with dwellings built along the High Street; no evidence for any early land boundaries related to these plots was found on the site. The borough is traditionally thought to have been established between the late 12th to early 13th centuries; however a watching brief conducted at 63 – 69 High Street revealed evidence for buildings dating to the 11th century (JMHS 2012). This suggests that a system of plots associated with the borough may have been well developed by the 12th century.

The next phase of activity on site was represented by the construction of wall 9. The wall was cut into soil layer (25), and overlain by (24), the first layer to be deposited after construction. These layers give a *terminus post quem* of the early 12th century and a *terminus ante quem* of the late 16th century, thus providing a rather broad date for the construction. This wall is likely to be a boundary wall associated with further development of town plots to the rear of the High Street during the medieval or post-medieval periods. The erection of wall 9 appears to have split the site into two separate plots and land use began to vary between the divided areas; to the north a layer of mixed stony material was deposited (24), which may suggest that the area was used as a yard; meanwhile to the south a thick layer of garden soil (13) accumulated. Pottery from this deposit indicates that the soil was in cultivation until the mid 18th century.

The next phase of activity on site consisted of the modification of wall 9 through the addition of wall 7 and cess pit 5. Wall 7 and cess pit 5 truncated the SW end of wall 9. This cess pit is bordered by surface 3, which is considered to be contemporary. On the basis of stratigraphy, construction occurred between the mid 18th to mid 19th century. This phase of building may also have included the construction of wall 37, a stone wall that is cut into garden soil (13). This wall is located on the SW edge of the site and seems to share the same alignment as wall 9; it is crudely built and sits within a shallow cut, suggesting it may be part of a low wall that formed an internal division within the plot.

The site is seen in this form in the 1840 tithe map of Witney (Plate 7). Walls 9 and 7 are clearly shown, as is cess pit 5. The area of the site is part of a larger plot of land, numbered 476, that extends to the NE of the existing site boundary along the line of wall 7, before turning 90° and running toward the High Street. In addition to the cess pit, two small outbuildings are present along the northern wall of the plot. Walls 9 and 7 appear therefore to form part of a boundary wall, dividing plots numbered 476, 477 and 478

The site is recorded again in the 1887 OS first series map of Witney, and a number of changes appear to have taken place (Plate 8); walls **10** and **11** have been erected and appear to form a small building, while walls **9** and **7** form the boundary of a small open enclosure. This therefore provides a construction date for walls **10** and **11** of 1840 – 1878. Cess pit **5** does not appear on the map, suggesting it had fallen out of use by this date; this is supported by pottery recovered from the backfill (6), which was dated to the 19th century.

During the 19th century four rubbish pits were excavated and backfilled, truncating surface **3**. Due to their location it is likely that they were dug in the latter half of the 19th century, after cess pit **5** had fallen out of use.

The demolition of walls **9**, **7**, **10** and **11** is associated with the deposition of soil layer (8); it seems likely that this deposit was intended to provide a level ground surface after the removal of the walls. Pottery recovered from this layer provides a 19th century date; therefore demolition must have taken place in the late 19th century, after 1878. The 1899 OS County Series map of Witney shows the site boundary in the same position as the current boundary, and walls **7**, **9**, **10** and **11** are no longer present.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The initial aims of the investigation were met; excavation at 45 High Street has revealed a series of features and deposits associated with the medieval and post-medieval occupation of Witney. Despite the small size of the site the development of the area can be established; revealing the sub-division of plots to the rear of the High Street as the size and population density of the town grew between the 12th to 19th centuries.

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PLATES



Plate 1: Pitched stone surface **3**, looking NW.



Plate 2: Stone lined cess pit **5**, looking NW.



Plate 3: Walls 9, 7, 10, 11; cess pit 5, surface 3. Looking NW



Plate 4: Wall 9, elevation. Looking SW.



Plate 5: Wall 37. Looking SW.



Plate 6: Wall 29. Looking NE.

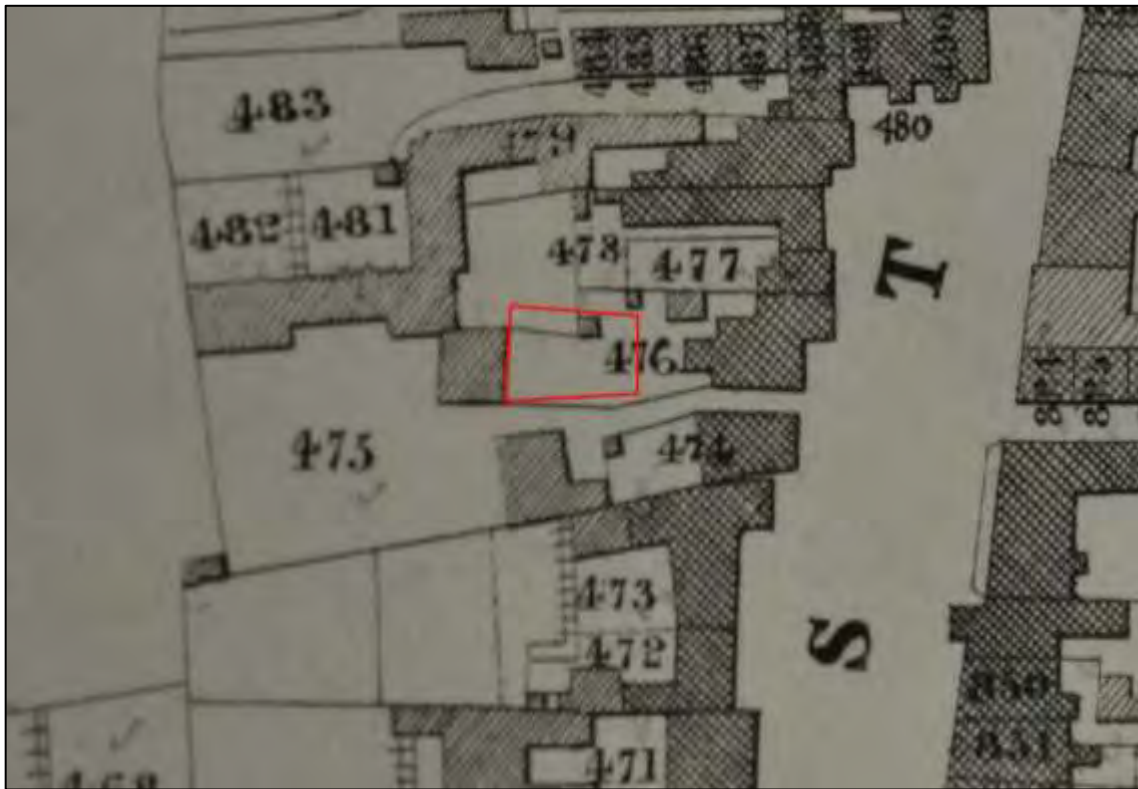


Plate 7: 1840 tithe map of Witney, showing approximate site boundary.



Plate 8: 1878 First Series Ordnance Survey map, showing approximate site boundary