

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**LAND AT POST OFFICE LANE,
WANTAGE, OXFORDSHIRE.**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

NGR SP 39935 87840

On behalf of

Magdalen Estate Ltd

FEBRUARY 2015

REPORT FOR Magdalen Estate Ltd
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CONTENTS

	Page
<i>SUMMARY</i>	1
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Site Location and Geology	1
1.2 Planning Background	1
1.3 Archaeological Background	1
2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION	1
3 STRATEGY	3
3.1 Research Design	3
3.2 Methodology	3
4 RESULTS	3
5 FINDS	4
6 DISCUSSION	6
7 ARCHIVE	6
8 BIBLIOGRAPHY	6
FIGURES	
Figure 1 Site Location	2
Figure 2 Plans and Sections	5
PLATES	
Plate 1 Section 1	7
Plate 2 Section 2	7
Plate 3 Section 3	8

Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief at Land at Post Office Lane Wantage, Oxfordshire. A linear ditch feature and four possible linear features were recorded. The former may have been 19th or 20th century in construction. The ditch was revealed in section and in some part in plan in the east of the site cut in a NNE-SSW direction. Its full length to the south was not revealed in plan but it probably terminated before the southern limit of the excavation. The latter features were identified during the excavation of the garage foundations and included one late post-medieval ditch and three others that were undated. The features were mostly identified in section and the full extent of their lengths from west to east was not revealed in plan. The eastern side of the site revealed a large number of modern service trenches cutting the site and no other archaeological features were identified.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located west of the north part of Post Office Lane, Wantage (NGR SU 39935 87840 centred). The underlying geology is Upper Greensand. Prior to the work the development site was vacant with hardstanding.

1.2 Planning Background

Vale of White Horse District Council granted planning permission for the erection of four dwellings with associated garages, parking and landscaping (P12/V2261/FUL). In line with NPPF a condition relating to an archaeological watching brief was attached. Oxfordshire Historic and Natural Environment Team (OHaNET) had advised of the need for such archaeological work.

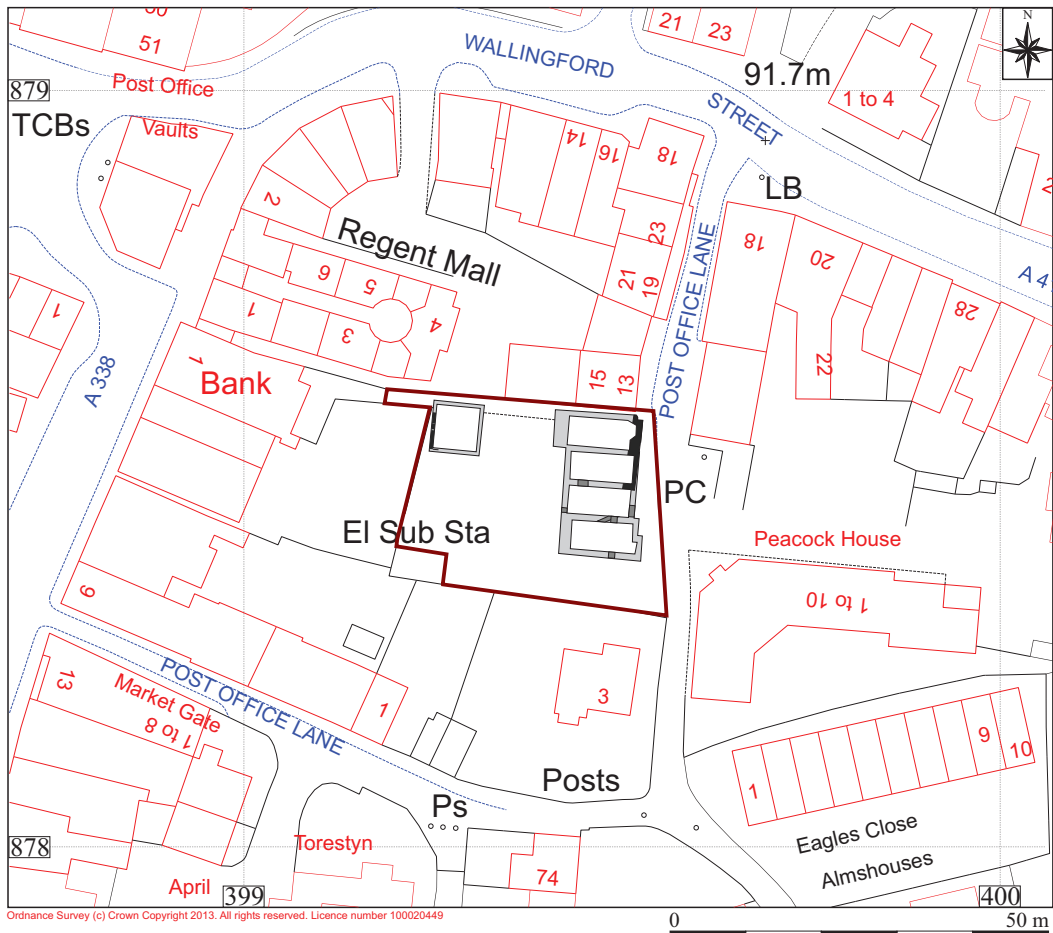
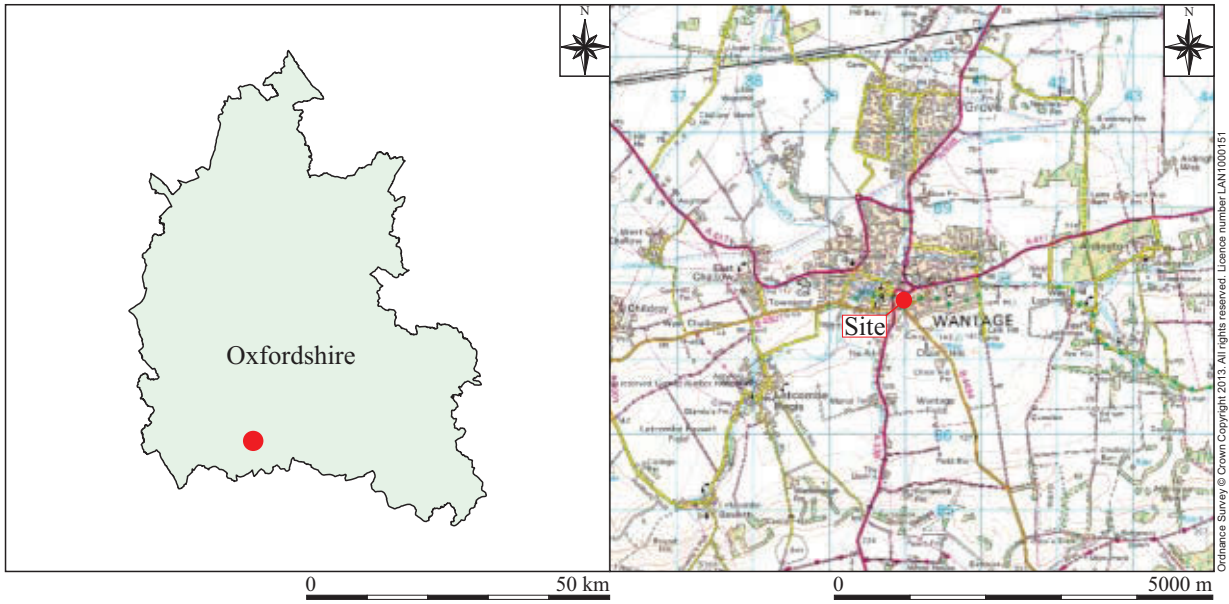
1.3 Archaeological Background

The site lies within the historic core of Wantage. Archaeological monitoring of a new pipeline around the eastern and southern boundaries of the application area revealed a series of pits that were essentially post-medieval but also contained a significant level of medieval material including pottery. Archaeological excavation to the south in the past has revealed evidence of later Anglo Saxon and early medieval settlement and activity. Aside the most recent use of the site as a car park the site has otherwise been vacant since at least 1870.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims as laid out in the Written Schemes of Investigation were:

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



Key Site boundary Limit of excavation
 Archaeological features Services and drainage

Figure 1: Site location

- In particular to record any evidence of remains relating to the medieval and post-medieval settlement.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with County Archaeological Services. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with photographs, 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 Archaeologists (2014).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist would be present on site during the course of groundworks associated with the development. This included any surface stripping, the excavation for new foundations and services, excavations for the access, and any other significant invasive works including landscaping.

Any archaeological features or other remains i.e. concentrations of artefacts, were to be recorded by written, drawn and photographic record. Any variation to this was to be agreed with OHaNET, on behalf of the local planning authority.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded by written, drawn and photographic record.

4 RESULTS

All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material. Context numbers without brackets refer to cuts.

The car park surface was removed prior to the attendance by the archaeologist. Following this, the first phase of work was the excavation of the foundations for the new build. The lowest layer observed (03) was a very solid layer of greenish grey clayey sand. This layer was identified as the natural (Fig. 2. Section 1. Plate 1). Deposited above this was 0.3m thick layer of light greenish grey clayey sand (04). It is possible that (04) may have been the same layer as (03) but it appeared lighter in colour, was more crumbly in texture and tended towards a more clayey texture, especially towards the south of the site. Cut into (04) was a linear ditch orientated NNE to SSW (06). The ditch was observed in several sections and partially in plan (Fig 2. Plan & section 2; plate 2). It was greater than 1.5m wide with a depth of 0.5m and was around 10m or greater in length with convex sides and a flattish base. The ditch had one fill (05). This was an homogenous dark blue grey, silty clay. There was some stone in the upper part of the fill and a number of finds. These few finds may have been from (05) although they were located on the surface and near to where the

fill had been cut by a high voltage cable trench. There was one 19th or 20th century brick fragment and two pieces of pottery, which were Victorian or later, none of these items were retained. A fragment of animal bone was also identified and may have come from (05). Deposited above (05) was a 0.3m thick layer of soft, wet, silty clay loam (02) and above this was (01). Layer (01) was a 0.3m thick loose layer of coarse yellow sand and gravel with brick and rubble inclusions (Fig. 2. Section 1). It was the uppermost extant layer and probably represented a mixture of material from recent surface removal and the original hardcore layer underneath the car park surface.

The next stage of excavation was for the foundation for the garages to the rear and west of the new build properties (Fig. 2 plan). The lowest layer was the natural (03). Cut into this layer, but only observed in the sections of the western foundation trench, were six negative features cut E-W (Fig. 2 plan & Section 3). Context 07 was identified as a linear cut, although it was not identified in the sections of the eastern foundation trench. It was 2.10m wide, greater than 0.9m deep with convex sides. The lowest fill was (08) a compact, dark grey, silty clay that was greater than 0.3m thick. There was a very rare inclusion of charcoal and small limestone within the fill and deposited above it was the upper fill (09). The upper fill was a loose silty clay with dominant rubble and limestone and was considered to be a rapid backfill; one brick was recovered from the fill. Also cut into the natural soil (03) was a context 12. Context 12 was also identified as a possible linear ditch. It was 0.5m wide and 0.5m deep, with steep, slightly concave sides and was filled by dark grey compact silty clay with very rare charcoal and limestone (13). Cut into this fill was the cut of another possible linear ditch, 11. Ditch 11 was 0.6m wide and 0.65m deep and concave sides and base. It was filled by a compact, greenish grey mix of silt and clay with rare small limestone and charcoal flecks (10). Animal bone was also noted in the fill but was not retained. Context (10) was cut by 15 a steep sided linear ditch with a concave base. Ditch 10 was 0.4m wide and 0.6m deep and was filled by a compact, light grey silty clay with an abundant inclusion of white angular limestone. None of the linear ditches were observed in the eastern foundation sections and are interpreted as terminating somewhere in the central area of the plot. All the ditch fills were overlaid by (16) a layer of loose, dark grey silty clay and rubble. This was deposited in an irregular shallow cut and was considered to be a levelling deposit and was the highest layer below the concrete car park surface.

5 FINDS

Two pieces of pottery were recovered from (05) the fill of ditch 06. They were small fragments of pottery and were identified as 19th Century or later. A small, undiagnostic brick fragment was also identified from the fill and a fragment of animal bone may also have originated from the same context. All the items were noted as originating from the upper part of the fill or the surface and may have infiltrated this layer due to later disturbance. None of these finds were removed from site.

An unfrosted brick of late post medieval date was recovered from context (09), the upper fill of linear ditch (07). The brick measured 226mm by 113mm by 50mm and was made from a very hard, light pinkish orange fabric. Animal bone was identified from context (10) the fill of linear ditch 11 but was not retained.

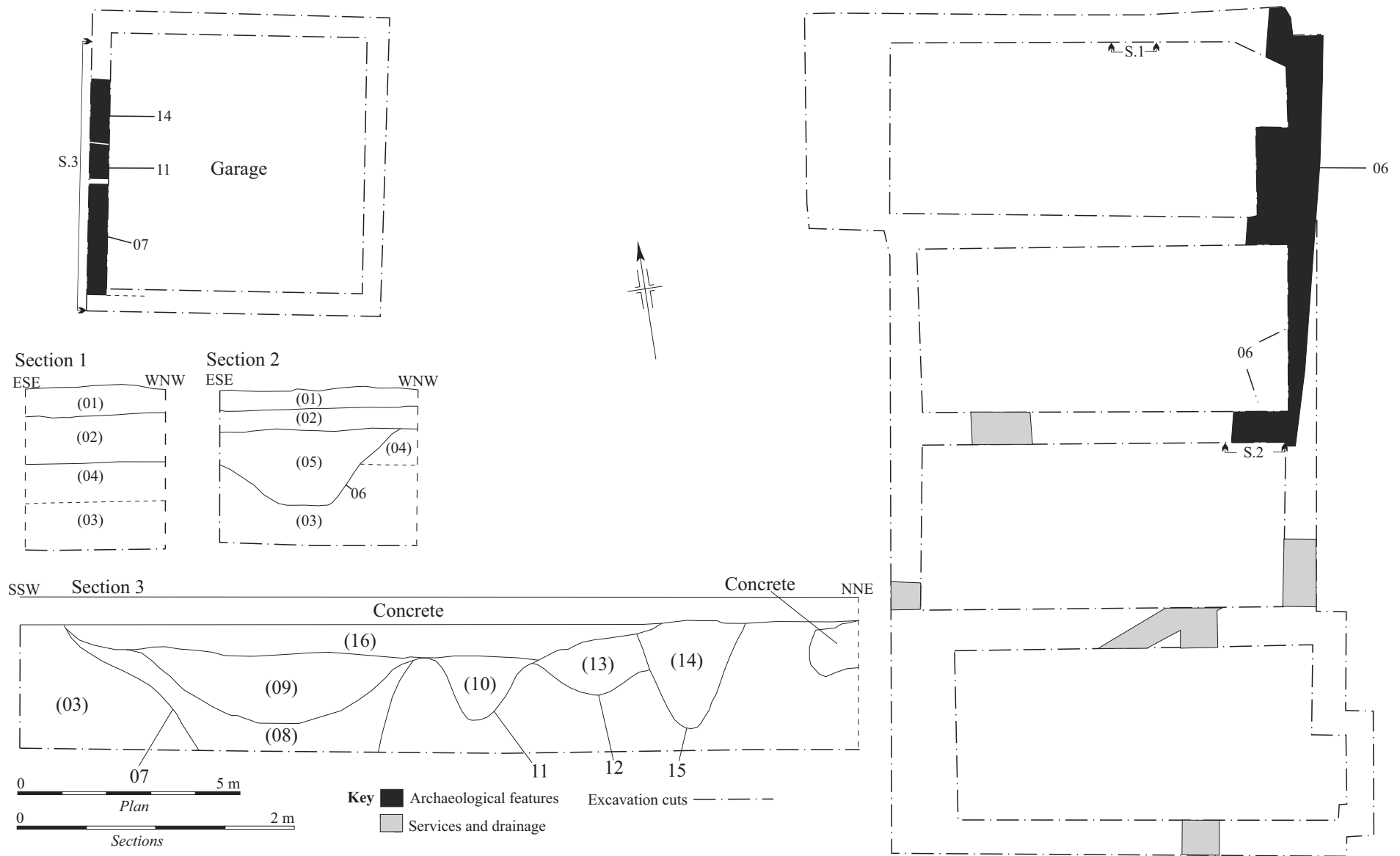


Figure 2: Plan and Sections.

6 DISCUSSION

The majority of negative features identified were five modern service trenches and drains that were cutting the SE area of the site. A number of possible linear ditches were noted in section on the far west of the site during the excavation of the garage plot. None of these ditches were identified in the sections of the more easterly foundations and this would suggest that they terminated before this point. Most of these ditches showed signs of rapid backfilling, and the upper fill of ditch 07 contained a brick of late post medieval date but no other dating evidence was discovered. On the eastern side of the site a linear ditch 06 was identified mostly in section. The ditch was longer than 10m but its full extent to the south was not identified. It was not identified in any of the sections south of section 2 and so it must have terminated some time after this section. Ditch 06 may be dated to the 19th or 20th century by its finds although evidence of disturbance and the location of the finds in the upper part of the fill may suggest that these finds had infiltrated the upper part of the ditch fill. No other archaeological features were identified.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

Written schemes of investigation

The project report

The primary site records

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to Oxfordshire Museum Service with the accession number OXCMS:2014.3

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief

John Moore Heritage Services, 2014. *P12/V2261/FUL-Land at Post Office Lane, Wantage, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Watching Brief. Written Scheme of Investigation.* Unpublished



Plate 1. Section 1



Plate 2. Section 2



Plate 3. Section 3