



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

**ST HELEN & ST KATHARINE,
FARINGDON ROAD, ABINGDON,
OXFORDSHIRE OX14 1BE,**

NGR SU4881197719

*On behalf of
St Helen & St Katharine School*

SEPTEMBER 2016

REPORT FOR St Helen & St Katharine School
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FIELDWORK 29th July – 4th August 2016

REPORT ISSUED 20th September 2016

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Helen & St Katharine, Faringdon Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1be. The watching brief was conducted during the removal of tarmac, hardcore and concrete footings of the car park. This was relatively shallow, only around 0.5m below the current ground level in places. The excavation revealed the extent of a tarmac surface on top of a rubble hard core above a disturbed layer of sandy clay rich natural and silty subsoil. No archaeological features were identified.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located on the east side of Abingdon, on Faringdon Road within the grounds of St Helen & St Katharine School (NGR SU4881197719). The site lies at approximately 60m OD. The underlying geology is 2nd terrace river gravels.

1.2 Planning Background

The Vale of White Horse District Council granted planning permission for erection of single storey extension to existing estates building (P15/V0380/FUL). Due to the archaeological and historical importance of the surrounding area a condition was 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 NPPF and Local Planning policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The development lies in an area of considerable archaeological potential. A large number of burials have been recorded to the south and south-east, including later prehistoric, Anglo-Saxon and medieval inhumations. Some undated remains have also been recorded.

Four probable Bronze Age barrows are also recorded to the south-east, and are visible as cropmarks. Barrows are characteristic monuments of the prehistoric periods, and have a ritual significance; they usually contained human remains as well as other artefacts.

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 archaeological remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.
- In particular to record any evidence relating to the prehistoric and medieval landscapes in the area.

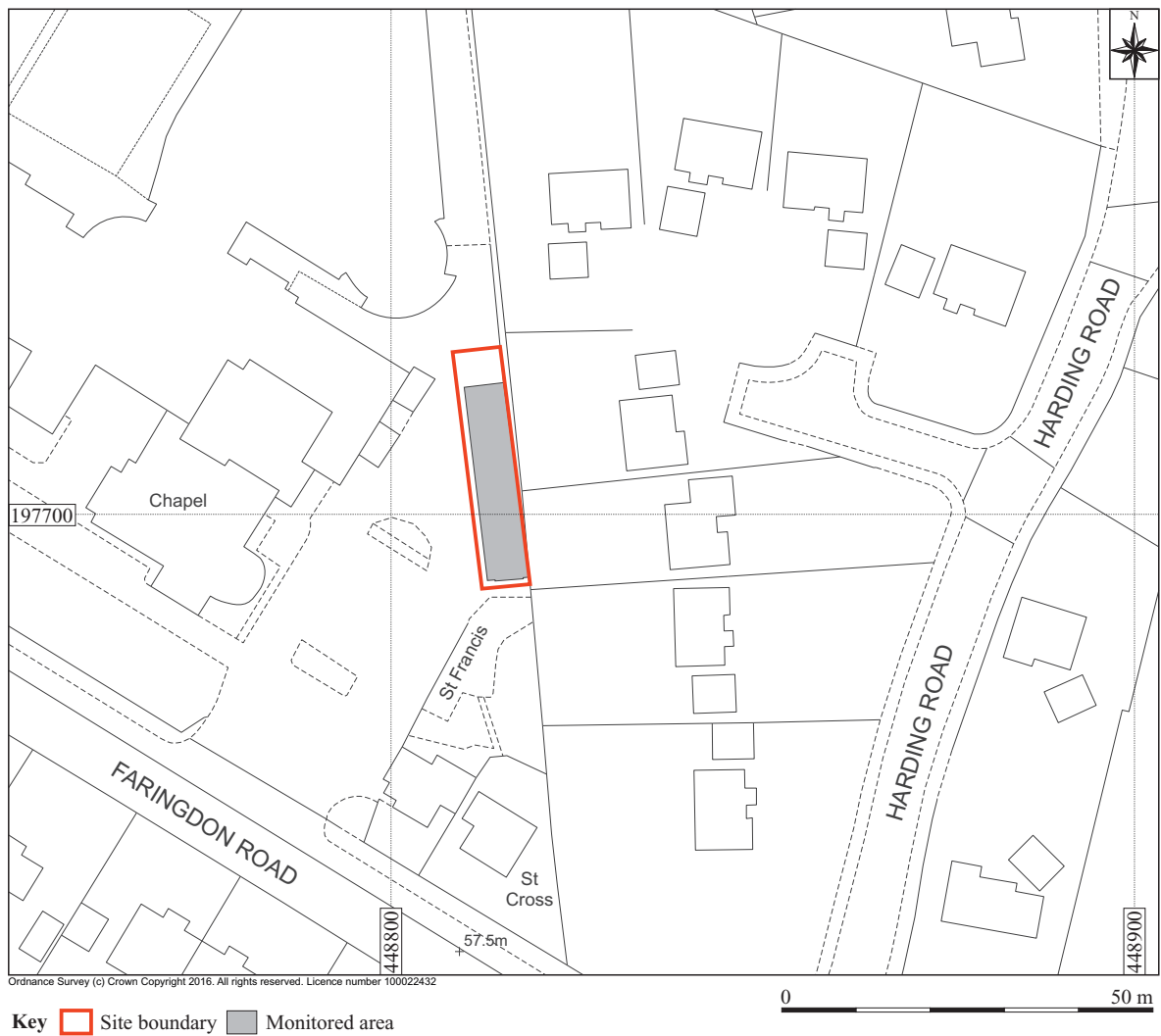
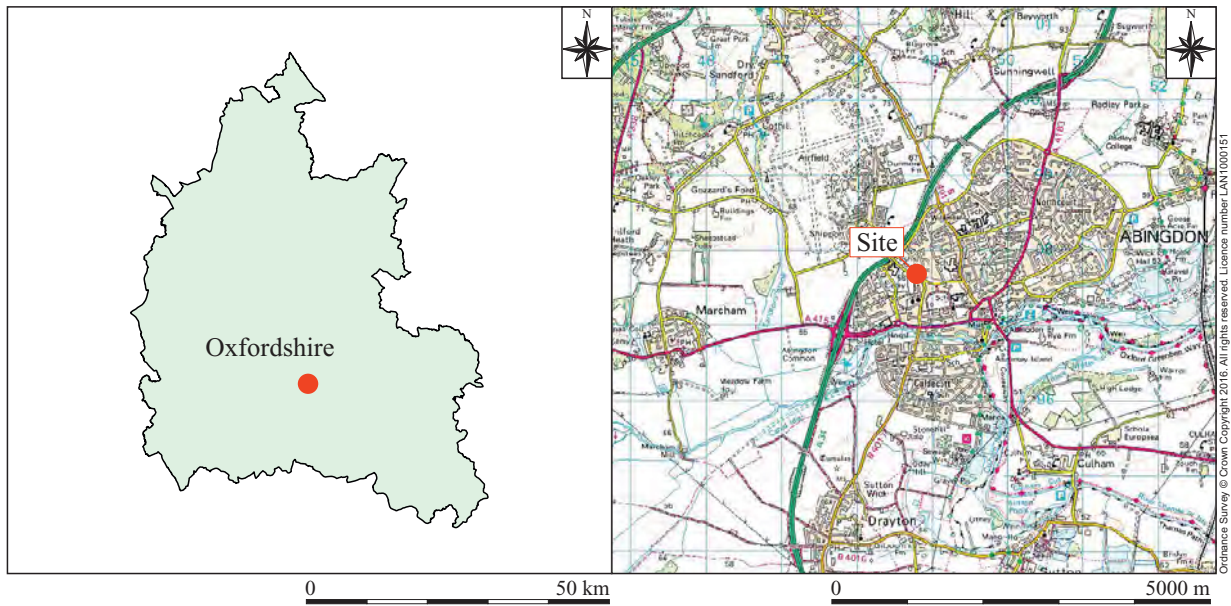


Figure 1: Site location

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, the archaeological advisors to the Vale of White Horse District Council.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014).

3.2 Methodology

Following the removal of the tarmac car park and associated rubble, the concrete platform to the NE edge of the car park was broken out by machine. This was followed by cleaning out the backfill from the excavated trench in order to observe any underlying archaeology which may have been there. Any rubble, hardcore or aggregate below tarmac surface was also removed by machine and the area was reduced down with a ditching bucket to the top of the natural geology. This was all conducted under the observation of the archaeological supervisor. The spoil was also scanned for possible artefacts.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered. A photographic record was also produced.

4 RESULTS

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.

The removal of the tarmac surface and concrete footings revealed three layers of stratigraphy. The lowest layer was the underlying natural geology. This was a light brown yellowish layer of very loose clay rich sand, displaying more of very light beige in some places (2). This layer was disturbed in certain places by the removal of modern services to c.0.5m. Deposited above this natural layer was a 0.25m layer of dark disturbed natural and subsoil mix comprising patches differing from clay rich to clay rich silt (1). Situated above this was a hardcore gravel for the construction on the car park. This was overlain by a tarmac surface. No archaeological features were identified and a modern brick manhole shaft, drainage pipes and service cables were removed during the excavation process.



Plate 1 SE view of the open trench during groundworks



Plate 2 NE facing representative section of the excavation area

5 FINDS

No finds were recorded.

6 DISCUSSION

The footings to the buildings were not very deep, only around 0.55m from the current ground level. However, despite cleaning the area with a toothless ditching bucket, no features were identified. Removed soil was checked for archaeological material but no such material found. The construction of the school and former car park area likely disturbed significant portions of the natural geology and potentially any preserved *in situ* archaeology.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*