

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

THE SHRUBBERY, 26 HIGH STREET,

EYNHAM, OXFORDSHIRE

SP 4342 0923

On behalf of

Dr. & Mrs. Peterson

JULY 2004

REPORT FOR

Dr. & Mrs. Peterson
The Shrubby
26 High Street
Eynsham
Oxfordshire
OX8

PREPARED BY

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FIELDWORK

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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during the excavation of foundation and drainage trenches for the conversion of a barn to a single dwelling. At least one pit found is presumed to be associated with the Anglo-Saxon occupation known in the immediate area. The medieval ploughsoil is dated to before the 13th century suggesting that this site was in agricultural use up to some time in the later 12th century and then was developed into burgage plots with settlement adjacent to the High Street. A ditch cutting the ploughsoil is considered to be a burgage plot boundary. Further pits may date to the 15th century and clay-lined pits indicate a specialist use.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site was located on the south side of High Street, Eynsham in the grounds of The Shrubby, 26 High Street (NGR SP 4342 0923). The geology is limestone gravel overlying Oxford Clay and the site lies at approximately 65m OD. The development area was within the domestic garden of The Shrubby (Fig. 1).

1.2 Planning Background

West Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission for the conversion of the existing barn to a single dwelling with a small extension and demolition of an existing double garage and replacement with a new double garage (W2004/0181, 0182/P/FP). Due to the potential presence of below ground archaeological deposits a condition was attached to the planning consent that required the implementation of an archaeological watching brief during the course of the groundworks in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains of significance.

The replacement double garage is to be constructed at a later date and the results would be presented in a separate report.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The development site lies adjacent to the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 118) of the Benedictine Abbey of Eynsham, which was founded in 1005 towards the end of the period of late Saxon monastic reform. King Aethelred granted authority to Aethelmaer, one of his elder statesmen, for the establishment of a Benedictine House. The new foundation replaced an existing Minster Church. The uncertainty of the Norman Conquest affected Eynsham Abbey and it was deserted for about fifty years. In 1109, Henry I confirmed a Charter of Foundation, which led to a complete rebuilding of the Abbey. Thereafter Eynsham Abbey prospered becoming the third richest religious house in Oxfordshire.

After the Dissolution, the Abbey and all its lands passed into private hands. No trace of the Abbey complex survives above ground. Archaeological excavations by the Oxford Archaeological Unit in the area of St Peters Church and the adjacent

graveyard have established that well preserved archaeological features relating to the Abbey survive below ground (Keevil, 1995).

An archaeological field evaluation was undertaken in the grounds of 'The Shrubbery' by Oxford Archaeology in 1992. A prehistoric subsoil was cut by several early Anglo Saxon features, which included ditches and postholes. The subsoil was overlaid by a thick medieval ploughsoil sealing the Anglo Saxon features at depths of 650 and 800mm. This suggests that The Shrubbery grounds are located within a field system providing produce for the Abbey.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a watching brief in 1975, close by the latter evaluation trench, during the construction of a swimming pool. Stake and postholes and a possible sunken feature building were located. These features contained early Anglo Saxon pottery.

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 relating to the known Anglo Saxon occupation in the area.
 - to record any evidence associated with the Abbey.
- To make the results of the investigations public.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services, on behalf of the local planning authority. 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.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).



Figure 1. Site location.

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist monitored the excavation of the foundation trenches for the new extension and a new service trench leading from a point southeast of the barn across to and along the drive west of the barn to the High Street. The foundation trenches for new internal walls within the barn had been excavated prior to the arrival of the archaeologist. The foundation trenches were 800-900mm wide and generally 1000-1100mm deep. The service trench was 800mm wide and c. 850mm deep along the northern 500mm of the east-west length and 450mm on the southern 300mm.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. walls, pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

The lowest deposit encountered in the service trench comprised compact mid orange gravel (22). This constituted the natural of the site and was seen to be c. 850mm below the present ground level immediately southwest and west of the barn. The gravel sloped downwards to the east and was not seen in the rest of the trench. Above the gravel was a natural subsoil deposit of moderately compact mid orange brown silt with occasional fine gravel 170-200+mm thick (14). Overlying the subsoil was an old ploughsoil comprising mid grey brown sandy silt with 5% fine gravel (13). This ploughsoil was 300-350mm thick and was covered by topsoil of mid grey brown silty sand with 15% small rounded gravel (12) in the garden and gravel over hardcore (21) along the drive. Adjacent to the barn the ploughsoil was more mixed and contained 10-30% gravel, abundant (in places) roofing tile, large lenses of gravel and limestone rubble (04). Here it was at least 890mm thick.

Within the barn the lowest deposit seen was a compact red brown sandy silt with 5% small rounded gravel and moderate amounts of charcoal flecks (02). This is interpreted as the natural subsoil with the charcoal flecks deriving from worm action. This deposit was covered by material (01) used for successive flooring of the barn and included a make-up layer of gravely sandy silt overlaid by gravel and then covered in paving stones, which in turn were overlaid by limestone rubble and the modern concrete floor. All this material was 1050mm thick and the concrete floor was 200mm higher than the external surface.

Several features were located.

Barn structure

The footing for the front wall of the barn was observed. The foundation [03] was constructed of limestone blocks set in a yellow orange mortar. The 480mm wide

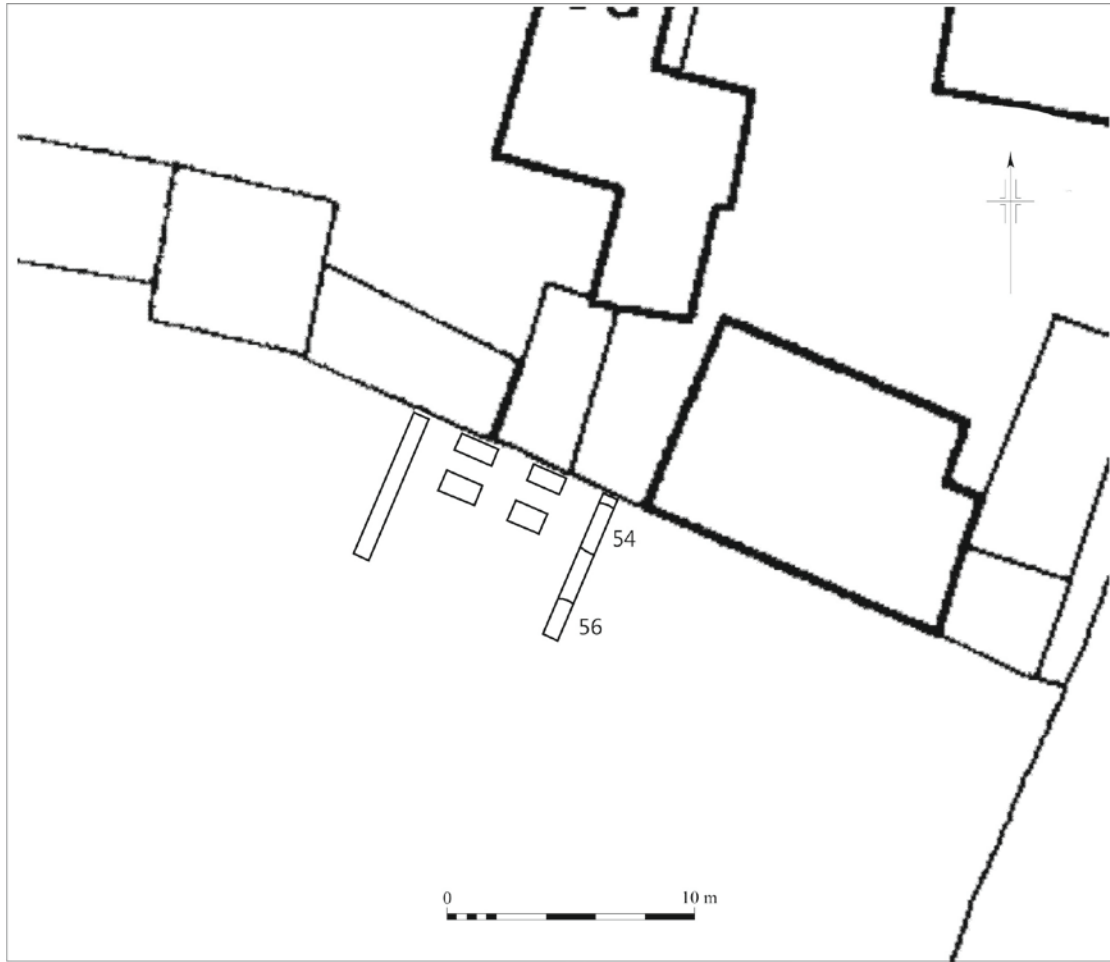


Figure 2. Plan of features

footing was 1000mm deep, from the external surface, and was 200mm deeper than the footing for the east wall of the structure. Bonded to the south wall of the barn was a further footing [09] extending southwards from the barn. This was formed from small limestone blocks (average 140x150x70mm). Although bonded with the barn wall this 450mm wide footing was not consolidated with mortar. The footing survived 3 courses high and had been heavily truncated. Two further walls footings were seen. East-west footing [10] mostly had been machined out by the time of the arrival of the archaeologist. From the stones lying around it would appear that this was constructed from small (like in 09) and larger (300x300x120mm) limestone blocks. At least five courses survived (it continued below the level of excavation) mostly set in grey brown sandy silt but with a little mortar. It was 450mm wide and it is presumed that it was bonded with footing [09]. At the west end of [10] the footing bonded with a north-south footing [11], which extended 1700mm south of the barn. Nine courses survived below ground with a further two courses seen above ground level adjacent to the barn and bonding with the barn wall [03]. Some blocks were mortared together.

Internal to Barn

Cut into the lowest deposit (02) seen in the barn, was a small circular pit [05], 400mm in diameter and 200mm deep. The pit had sides at an angle of 60° from the horizontal and a slightly rounded base. It was filled by dark grey-brown sandy silt containing 30%, by volume, fine and small gravel (06). To the south was a sub-circular pit [07], which was only partly exposed within the foundation trench. The pit was at least 1400mm north-south. Only the top 200mm was excavated and from it the sides appeared to be relatively steep. It was filled by mid grey-brown slightly red sandy silt with 10% small and large gravel and occasional charcoal flecks (08). The pit pre-dated the barn as it was cut away by the foundation [03] for the south wall.

Service trench

Towards the east end of the service trench was a ditch [20] orientated NNE-SSW. This was c. 1250mm wide; the east side was difficult to determine. The ditch was filled by mid/dark orange-brown very slightly sandy silt with 2% small rounded gravel (18) overlying mid brown-orange silt with 1% medium sized gravel (19) similar to (13). Only the top 100mm of the ditch was excavated and (19) was seen either side of the lower part of (18). The ditch was cut into the old ploughsoil (13).

A sub-rectangular pit was partly exposed within the service trench. The feature [17] had a straight southern edge 1700mm long with rounded corners. The southwest corner appeared to be at a shallow angle while the southeast corner was a rounded right-angle. Only the top 100mm of the fill was excavated. This consisted of pale orange brown slightly sandy silt with 1-2% fine and small rounded gravel (16). There were no artefacts. The pit was cut into the natural subsoil (14).

A stone built soak-away [15] of c. 1150mm diameter was cut through by the service trench. Further to the west part of a sub-circular pit was exposed. This pit [24] was at least 500mm in diameter and possibly was dug from the top of the ploughsoil (13). The fill was a mid/dark grey-brown sandy silt with 2% fine gravel, similar to (13). It contained a fragment of post-medieval bottle glass.

A rectangular pit [26] was present. The feature was at least 1500mm by at least 1200mm. The sides had been lined with pale yellow-grey clay 10mm thick and the pit was filled by pale yellow brown sandy silt with 5% gravel (25). The fill contained two fragments of post-medieval tile. Close-by was a further rectangular pit [28] again that was at 1500mm wide. This was filled by mid/dark grey brown sandy silt with 2% small gravel and the occasional medium sized limestone block (27). Again the pit was lined with pale yellow-grey clay 120-140mm thick. Both pits had been cut through the old ploughsoil (13). A sherd of 15th century Tudor Green Ware was recovered from the fill (27) of pit [28].

West of the barn was a well [29]. The top was 650mm below the modern ground surface and it had been capped with a large 60mm thick stone slab. The cut for the construction of the limestone built side had been backfilled with sand and gravel. The area between the well and the high Street had been heavily disturbed by services.

5 FINDS

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery from the old ploughsoil (13) and the garden topsoil (12) were collected together as it was impossible to separate them during the machining.

The pottery assemblage comprised 17 sherds with a total weight of 160g. The entire assemblage, three Romano-British sherds aside, is medieval in date. The pottery from the ploughsoil horizon is all early medieval, and dates to before the 13th century. A later pit contained a 15th century sherd.

The pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD975-1350. 10 sherds, 117g.

OXBF: North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050 – 1400. 1 sherd, 1g.

OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 2 sherds, 16g.

OXBN: Tudor Green Ware, 15th century. 1 sherd, 11g.

In addition, 3 sherds (15g) of Romano-British pottery were noted in the ploughsoil horizon.

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*.

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

	RB		OXAC		OXBF		OXY		OXBN		
Context	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	Date
12	3	15	10	117	1	1	2	16			U/S
27									1	11	15thC
Total	3	15	10	117	1	1	2	16	1	11	

In addition there were two 18th century sherds from 04, the disturbed ploughsoil external to the barn.

Other finds

Two fragments of roof tile were seen in the fill (25) of the clay-lined pit [26].

A large sherd of post-medieval bottle glass came from the lowest deposit (02) seen in the barn.

6 DISCUSSION

The west edge of the extension to the barn [09-11] coincides with the line of the west edge of a larger (east-west) extension shown on the OS map (Figure 1). However it is not as long and may have been an original entrance 'porch' to the barn.

The pottery from the old ploughsoil is consistent with the medieval dating given to the same deposit in the 1992 evaluation. However it is of note that the assemblage from this watching brief is dated to before the 13th century. This suggests that this site was in agricultural use up to some time in the later 12th century and then was developed into burgage plots with settlement adjacent to the High Street. Eynsham was evidently prosperous and expanding at the time of the later 12th and earlier 13th centuries as Newland was laid out by the abbot in 1215 ((Rodwell, 1975, 109).

One pit pre-dated the ploughsoil and presumably is associated with the Anglo-Saxon occupation known on the site.

The ploughsoil is cut by a ditch and two clay-lined pits. One of the pits may be dated to the 15th century if the sherd of pottery is not residual. A further rectangular clay-lined pit was found 70m to the south-west at Willow Bank (JMHS, 2004). The ditch is perpendicular to the road and would pass just to the west of No. 28 High Street and therefore may be a burgage plot boundary.

The two pits in the barn could either predate the agricultural use of the site and be Anglo-Saxon in date or be associated with later activity within the burgage plot.

The Romano-British sherds that were found indicate some sort of activity of that period (possibly agricultural) in the vicinity of the site (see also JMHS, 2004). Further pottery of the period has been found north of Newlands, and on the abbey site (Rodwell, 1975), and just to the east (JMHS, 2004).

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