

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

THE OLD CHAPEL,

MILCOMBE, OXFORDSHIRE

SP 4095 3460

On behalf of

Mr Payne

OCTOBER 2003

REPORT FOR

Mr R Payne
Arnsby Cottage
Milcombe
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX15 4RP

PREPARED BY

John Moore

FIELDWORK

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ENQUIRES TO

John Moore Heritage Services
Long White Cloud
Waterperry Road
Holton
Oxfordshire OX33 1PW

*Telephone/Fax 01865 876637
Email: jmhs99@hotmail.com*

Site Code;
JMHS Project No:

MCOG 03
1378

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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services on 20 October 2003 during the excavation of foundation trenches for an extension to the former chapel building during conversion to a dwelling. This trenching revealed a 19th century burial and foundations for a medieval building of the later 11th to 13th century period.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located at the Old Chapel, Milcombe, some 35m to the west of the St Laurence's Church, and on the south side of the road from the centre of Milcombe towards Wiggington Heath (NGR SP 4098 3459). The site is occupied by a former chapel.

1.2 Planning Background

Cherwell District Council granted planning permission for the conversion of the old chapel into a residential dwelling, which involves an extension to the rear of the building. 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.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site lies close to the medieval church and may have been occupied during the medieval period. The existing former chapel building is dated 1866 and replaced a temporary building. The last burial was in c. 1887 (information from P. Smith, County Archaeologist) although local information suggests that a burial took place near the south-west corner of the grounds c. 50 years ago.

2 STRATEGY

2.1 Research Design

There was no research design for this watching brief as the applicant only contacted the County Archaeological Services after most of the foundation trench had been excavated and when a burial was encountered. A site visit was carried out by JMHS and archaeological remains were recorded in the sides of the excavated foundation trenches. A length of c. 3m of trenching was monitored during excavation.

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

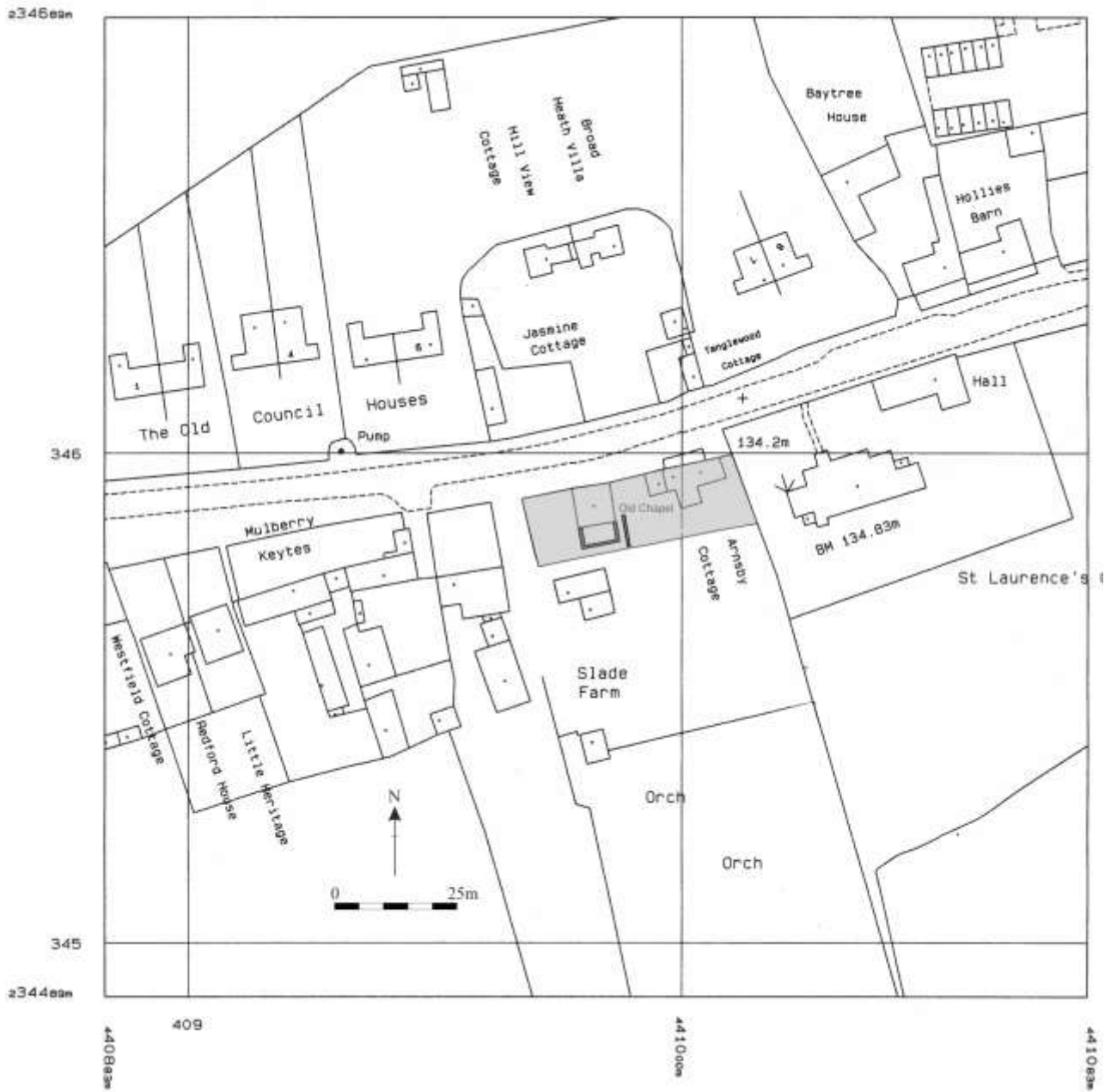


Figure 1. Site and new extension location.

Scale 1:1250

2.2 Methodology

Approximately 150mm of topsoil had been stripped from the area of the extension. Foundation trenches had been excavated to *c.* 1.5m depth and were 600-650mm wide. A shallow (*c.* 450mm) trench for a north/south orientated boundary wall had been excavated 1.5m to the east of the chapel building.

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.

3 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 recorded deposit comprised stiff grey brown clay (02). This constituted the natural of the site and was seen to be *c.* 600-650mm below the present ground level. Overlying this was a deposit of stiff pale grey brown silty clay with occasional to moderate amounts of ironstone and occasional flecks of charcoal and tile fragments (01). This was *c.* 500mm thick and overlaid the wall footings (see below).

The base of a grave cut [03] and burial was seen immediately south of the south-west corner of the former chapel building. The cut was *c.* 1700mm long north-south and 450mm wide. The cut respected the rear wall of the chapel and had been dug while the building was standing. Within the cut were the remains of a wooden coffin [04] formed from 20mm thick planks. The coffin was hexagonal in shape. Within the coffin were the remains of an adult [05] that had been disturbed during the excavation of the foundation trench. The remains were left in the bottom of the excavated trench.

Remains of four substantial wall footings were seen in the sides of the excavated trenches. In the north side of the south foundation trench was a footing [06], which is presumed to be orientated NW/SE. The footing was not present in the south side of the foundation trench. If the footing had continued this far it had been removed by a modern large shallow pit that had been excavated here. The footing was 1100mm wide and survived 450mm high and had been cut into the top of the natural clay. It was formed mostly from small pieces of ironstone (average size 150x150x50mm) with, as seen, one large piece of 360x?x130mm. The matrix of the footing was grey brown silty clay.

Three wall footings, on a NE/SW orientation, were seen in both sides of the east foundation trench, with two of them seen further east in the trench for the new boundary wall. The northern footing [08] was again 1100mm wide and survived 450mm high. The size of the ironstone was on average slightly larger (150x150x70 - 200x200x120mm). 600mm to the south was a further footing [07] that was only 750mm wide. Again it survived 450mm high. This footing was not present in the

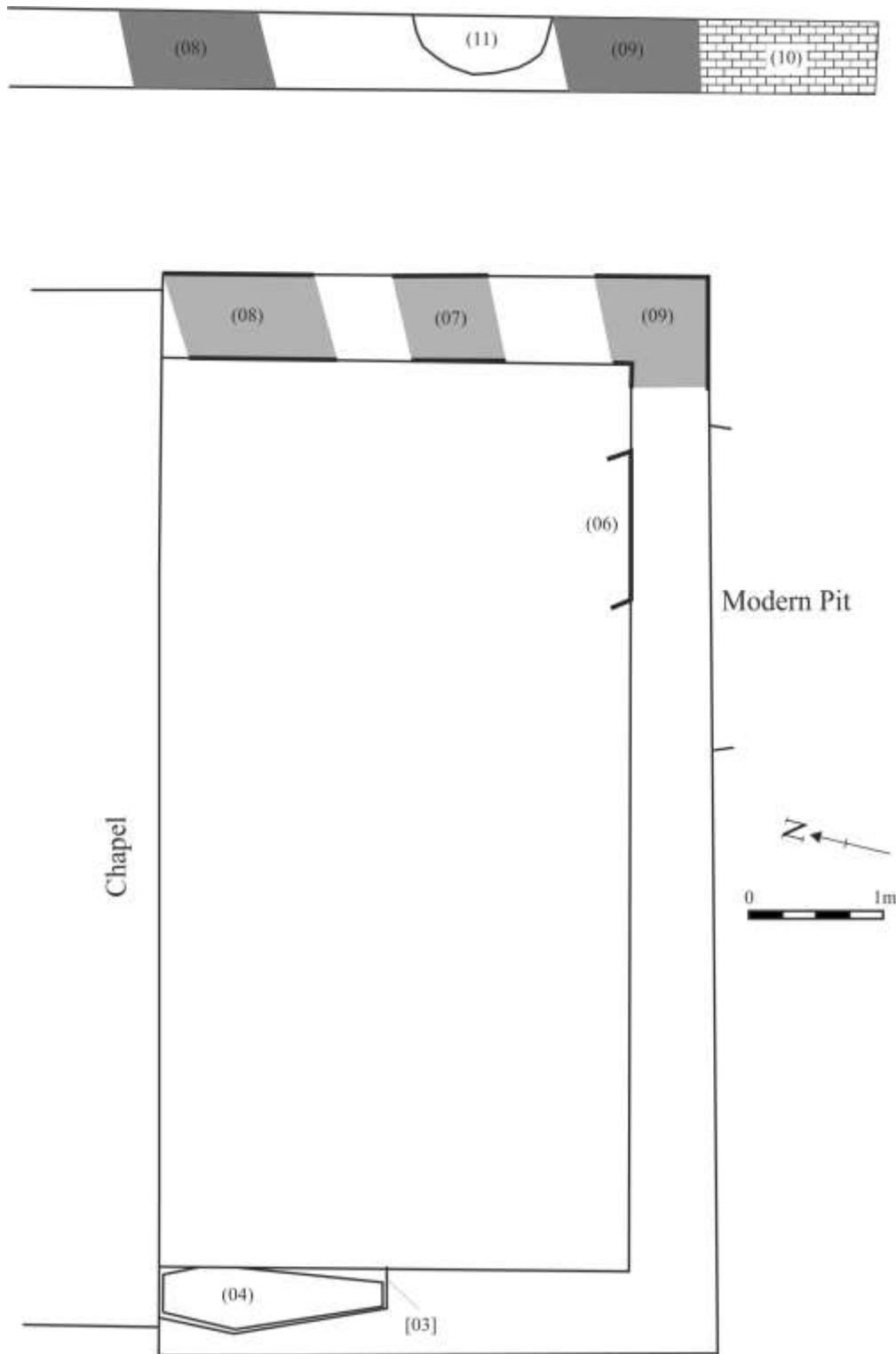


Figure 2. Plan of Features

foundation trench to the east. A further 750mm to the south was the third wall [09], which was at least 1000mm wide. In the boundary wall foundation trench a brick floor [10] obscured the southern edge while the south edge continued further south than the extent of the extension foundation excavations. No associated construction or floor levels survived.

The brick floor [10] was formed from bricks 230x108-110mm in plan and was from a former outhouse or similar.

The top of a circular small pit [11] was seen just to the north of wall [09]. This was only partly seen but was thought to be c. 1000mm in diameter. The pit was stone-lined with ironstone pieces of average size 200x120x60mm. The pit was filled by orange grey very slightly silty clay, which was not excavated.

4 FINDS

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 4 sherds with a total weight of 87g. All the pottery is medieval, and suggests that there was activity at the site during the later 11th – 13th century.

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

OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 1 sherd, 4g.
OX234: Banbury ware, L 11th - L14th century. 2 sherds, 71g.
OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 1 sherd, 12g.

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 sherds are all in good condition, and have been subject to very little disturbance since their original deposition.

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

Context	OXY		OX234		OXAM		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1			2	71	1	12	13thC
9	1	4					L11thC?
Total	1	4	2	71	1	12	

Some fragments of 19th century pottery were seen in the subsoil (01) but were not retained.

No other finds were seen.

5 DISCUSSION

The burial respected the present chapel building and must post-date 1866 and probably is prior to 1887.

When the outbuilding, represented by the brick floor, was standing is unknown.

The wall footings are part of a building. The gaps between the three parallel footings suggest that the walls were not as thick as the foundations. The NW/SE orientated wall formed the west side of the building. How far north and south the building extended is unknown. There was no obvious sign of any further wall north of footing [08] within the boundary wall foundation trench. However this trench was not dug down to the top of the natural clay and other remains associated with the building may have been present. The middle NE/SW orientated footing [07] is considered to be a foundation for a staircase. Presumably all three walls extend west as far as the west wall of the building.

The sherd of pottery from wall 09 dates the building from at least the later 11th century. The presence of the other pottery within the subsoil suggests that the site was occupied sometime during the period of the 12th to 14th centuries.

Whether the pit pre-dates or post-dates the building is unknown.

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