

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

7 UPPER HIGH STREET,

THAME,

OXFORDSHIRE:

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

SP 470 205

On behalf of

Messrs A. H. & M. V. Choudhury

AUGUST 2003

REPORT FOR A. H. & M. V. Choudhury
7 Upper High Street
Thame
Oxfordshire

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief took place during ground the excavation of foundations for a rear extension to number 7, Upper High Street, Thame. No archaeological features or deposits were observed within the excavated area.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located at 7 Upper High Street, Thame (NGR SP 470 205). The geology is Portland Beds and Kimmeridge Clay.

The property occupies a site on the northern side of Upper High Street, opposite the market place. The building is Grade II Listed and is thought to be 18th century in date.

The property is currently the House of Spice Restaurant.

1.2 Planning Background

South Oxfordshire County Council has granted planning permission for the extension to kitchen and living accommodation and provision of a new food store (P99/NO168/LB) at 7 Upper High Street, Thame.

Due to the location of the site within the historic core of the town, a condition for an archaeological watching brief has been attached to the permission in accordance with PPG16 and South Oxfordshire Local Plan Policies. This consent (P99/NO186) was granted subject to conditions:

Paragraph 5. “No works shall take place until a professionally competent archaeological organisation as approved in writing by the local planning authority, has been commissioned to carry out a full watching brief during the period of construction works”.

John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) in accordance with a *Written Scheme of Investigation* in agreement with the County Archaeological Service carried out such a watching brief.

1.3 Historical Background

Thame fell within the diocese of Dorchester, until after the Norman Conquest when the see was transferred to Lincoln. Thame until the 19th C, was known as a ‘peculiar’ as it fell outside the area of the diocese proper.

The original town developed around the church (Old Thame), dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, which dates in present form from c.1240 as it was rebuilt by Bishop Grossteste of Lincoln.

New Thame was a planned extension ‘planted’ by the Bishop of Lincoln in the 13th Century on land previously under the plough. The market town retains its medieval street pattern with very clearly defined long narrow burgage plots and lanes. The plots have a reverse S-shape, characteristic of medieval ridge and furrow, which suggests they were laid directly upon open fields. This reflects the agricultural origins of the town (Munby and Rodwell 1975).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- 2.1 To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.
- 2.2 In particular to seek evidence associated with the medieval market town.
- 2.3 The results of the investigations will be made 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 work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

By the time of the watching brief, many of the groundworks to the rear of the property had already been carried out. This included demolition of existing modern building extensions and the laying of a concrete raft for the construction of the new kitchen. The works carried out under observation included the excavation of the foundation footprint for the building extension between the restaurant and the new kitchen, and excavation of a test-pit adjacent to the property boundary wall of number 8 Upper High Street.

The footprint of the building extension was excavated to an average depth of 0.8 m. The trench was 0.8 m wide, 3.0 m length orientated north-south abutting the property boundary wall and terminating at the new kitchen. The return foundation trench was 1.5 m south of the new kitchen and 3.4 m east-west where it turned to the south for a further 1.1 m.

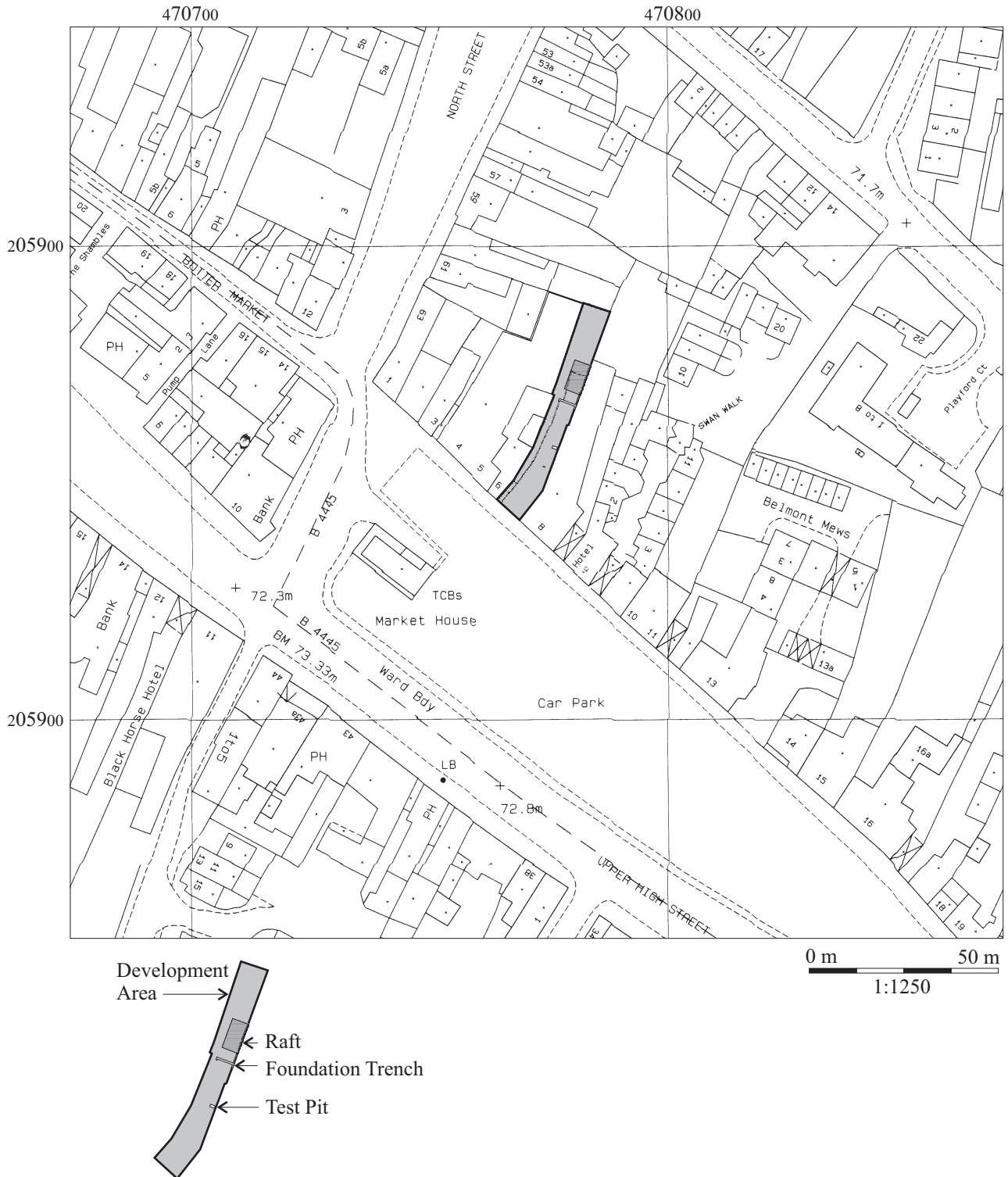


Figure 1: Site and Excavations Location Plan

In addition to this, a test pit 1.0 m x 0.50 m was excavated in order to examine the depths of the foundations of the wall separating number 7 from the adjoining property 8 Upper High Street. The test pit was excavated to a depth of 0.80 m.

Deposits and fills are referred to in the text and figures in brackets: (02), cut features are numbers in square brackets: [04].

4 RESULTS

TEST PIT

Concrete (01) to depth of 0.15 m overlain by thin floor tiles was the first deposit encountered. The concrete rested on a sandy levelling layer (02), 0.15 m deep. Below deposit (02) was a thick layer of blackish brown sandy garden soil (03) containing fragments of animal bone, charcoal flecks and occasional fragments of ceramic building material (CBM). Deposit (03) was excavated to a depth of 0.50 m. Visible within the test pit and adjacent to the boundary wall, was a cut feature [04], 0.35 m wide by c. 0.46 m deep. The cut had a sharp break of slope at the top onto an almost vertical side and a flattish base. Within the cut was a deposit (05) of yellow brown medium sand with a lense of grey clay (0.25 m wide x 0.08 m thick). The clay was at the base of the deposit and may have been redeposited natural. There were no finds within the sandy fill (05).

FOUNDATION TRENCHES

The foundation trenches contained a single deposit (06): a grey, blackish brown sandy clay containing frequent charcoal flecks, brick fragments and pot sherds. There were also lenses of a glossy black mineral (manganese?). The deposit extended throughout the foundation trench and was excavated to a depth of 0.80 m. Within the trench, modern services could be observed in the east-west orientated arm of the foundation trench. No features of archaeological significance were disturbed during the groundworks.

5 FINDS

Within deposit (06) in the foundation trenches several sherds of pottery were found. All the sherds were post-medieval in origin, several of which were modern white glazed sherds and three of which appear to be 18th century sherds; an orangey green glaze visible on the outer and inner faces.

6 DISCUSSION

The cut feature [04] visible within the geotechnical pit was probably the construction cut for the adjoining property wall. The foundations extended 0.75 m below the modern ground surface and were within the confines of the cut feature. The sharp break of slope visible at the top of the feature was probably a result of truncation during the laying of the sandy levelling deposit and concrete floor. These layers (01) and (02) were clearly modern and sealed the construction cut [04]. The single deposit (06) within the foundation trench was a rich dark garden soil. It was unlikely that the

concrete raft for the new kitchen would have disturbed any archaeological deposits as the depth of garden soil encountered within the development area was a minimum of 0.8 m, and the groundworks for the construction of the raft would not have exceeded that depth.

7 CONCLUSIONS

No archaeological features associated with the medieval period were revealed or affected by the alterations.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Test Pit			0.80	0.50	1.00		
01	Deposit	Concrete	0.15	-	-	None	Modern
02	Deposit	Levelling Layer	0.15	-	-	None	Modern
03	Deposit	Garden Soil	>0.50	-	-	Bone, cbm	Modern
04	Cut	Construction cut	0.46	0.35	-	-	-
05	Fill	Fill of 04	0.46	0.35	-	None	-
Foundation Trench			0.80	0.80	Varied		
06	Deposit	Garden Soil	>0.80	-	-	Pot, cbm	Modern