

**JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES**

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**AT**

**72 & 74 OLD ROAD,  
HEADINGTON, OXFORD.**

**SP 5450 0630**

*On behalf of*

*Rydon Construction Ltd*

**JULY 2004**

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John Moore HERITAGE SERVICES

72 & 74 Old Road, Headington. OXOR 04.64  
*Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

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**REPORT FOR**

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief took place as a condition of planning permission for redevelopment of the site of 72 & 74 Old Road, Headington, Oxford. The only significant remains located on the site were a series of post-medieval ditches.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)**

The site of the proposed development is located on the south side of Old Road, Headington, Oxford (NGR SP 5450 0630). The former buildings had recently been demolished with foundations having been dug out. Part of the western side of the site and the rear of the site were gardens. A line of trees had existed approximately two-thirds of the way into the site and across the area of the watching brief and had been felled prior to the watching brief. The underlying geology is Calcareous Grit of the Corallian Beds and the site lies at c. 99.8m OD.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

Oxford City Council granted planning permission (03/0010/FUL) for redevelopment of the site with 91 residential units. The overall footprint of the proposed development was substantially larger than its predecessor, meaning that new areas would be disturbed. Disturbance would be total for Block 4 at the rear, which was to be sunk into the ground to a depth that would destroy any known structures related to the local Roman ceramic industry. A condition for a programme of archaeological work was attached to the planning permission. As a first stage, Oxford City Council (OCC, 2004) prepared a brief for an assessment including field evaluation. The evaluation found a ditch that was considered to be of Roman-British date. Subsequently it was agreed with the developer and Oxford City Council that a watching brief would be maintained during the ground reduction for Block 4.

John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS), in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (JMHS, 2004b) approved by OCC, carried out the works.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The site fronts the oldest known line of the medieval London road at Oxford, and is almost equidistant between the areas of Roman pottery production at Mary Marlborough Lodge to NE and the Churchill Hospital to SW.

The earliest known activity in the area was a probable flint knapping site situated c. 2.4km to the east, on the western brow of Shotover Hill. A number of flint implements were found here by labourers digging sand in c. 1895 and these included flint flakes, chips, cores and a number of flint scrappers, possibly Neolithic (Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record PRN 1780 at SP 5594 0637). A Bronze Age round barrow (PRN D3645 at SP 5535 0632) c. 600m to the east of the site was destroyed during construction of a housing estate. Sherds of Roman pottery were found c. 950m to the ESE ((PRN 3811, SP 5562 0607) while a Roman settlement site



(PRN 3812, SP 5572 0636) is recorded as having been observed on the west slope of Shotover, immediately east of the Roman road (PRN 8923) and 1km east of the development site.

Sherds of late Romano-British pottery indicating a possible kiln site producing Sandford ware have been found 300m to the north of the site at the Nuffield Orthopedic Hospital (PRN 3670 and 4015, SP 5480 0660). 400m SE of the site another pottery kiln(s) was found in Harry Bear's pit when workman discovered several hollows with burnt flues filled with broken pottery (PRN D3620, SP 5498 0610). 200m due south of the site remains of a further possible pottery kiln have been found (National Monuments Record 338399, SP 5481 0599). The pottery was chiefly mortaria, cullenda of pale grey ware, and Samian ware. Coins of Antoninus Pius and Tetricus the younger were also recovered. Slightly further to the south, and probably part of the previous site, excavation found a substantial Roman pottery production and occupation site (PRN 3615, SP 5460 0570 and SP 5470 0580). Large quantities of mostly Romano-British pottery and at least two kilns were reported from the grounds of the Churchill Hospital and the Regional Blood Transfusion Unit. Subsequent excavations slightly to the east uncovered ten kilns and a large quantity of pottery. Associated with these was a circular stone building, a square stone structure and possibly a well. A series of 2<sup>nd</sup> century ditches appeared to belong to the pre-industrial use of the site, perhaps forming part of a field system. A 1<sup>st</sup> century occupation site was also discovered.

Several quarries for Coral Rag and Wheatley Limestone occur in the vicinity. These include Vicarage Quarry (PRN 1009, SP 5530 0660), Windmill stone quarry known as Harry Bear's pit (PRN 5421, SP 5500 0620), and one at the junction of Windmill Road and Old Road (PRN 1008, SP 5500 0650).

Early maps of the area do not show the site in any detail. The first building in the area is Wingfield House on the north side of Old Road at the junction with Windmill Road. This is shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map of 1876. On the same map the site is shown as part of a small enclosure, which on the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1899) is to the east of Highfield House. The first house on the site appears on the 1921 edition.

The only remains of significance found in the evaluation was a ditch located towards the south of the site (JMHS 2004a). This ditch was orientated north south and contained a sherd of Romano-British Grey Ware and a nail.

## **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 recover evidence for further occupation in the area and to attempt to determine whether it is part of the settlement and pottery production site known some 200m to the south.

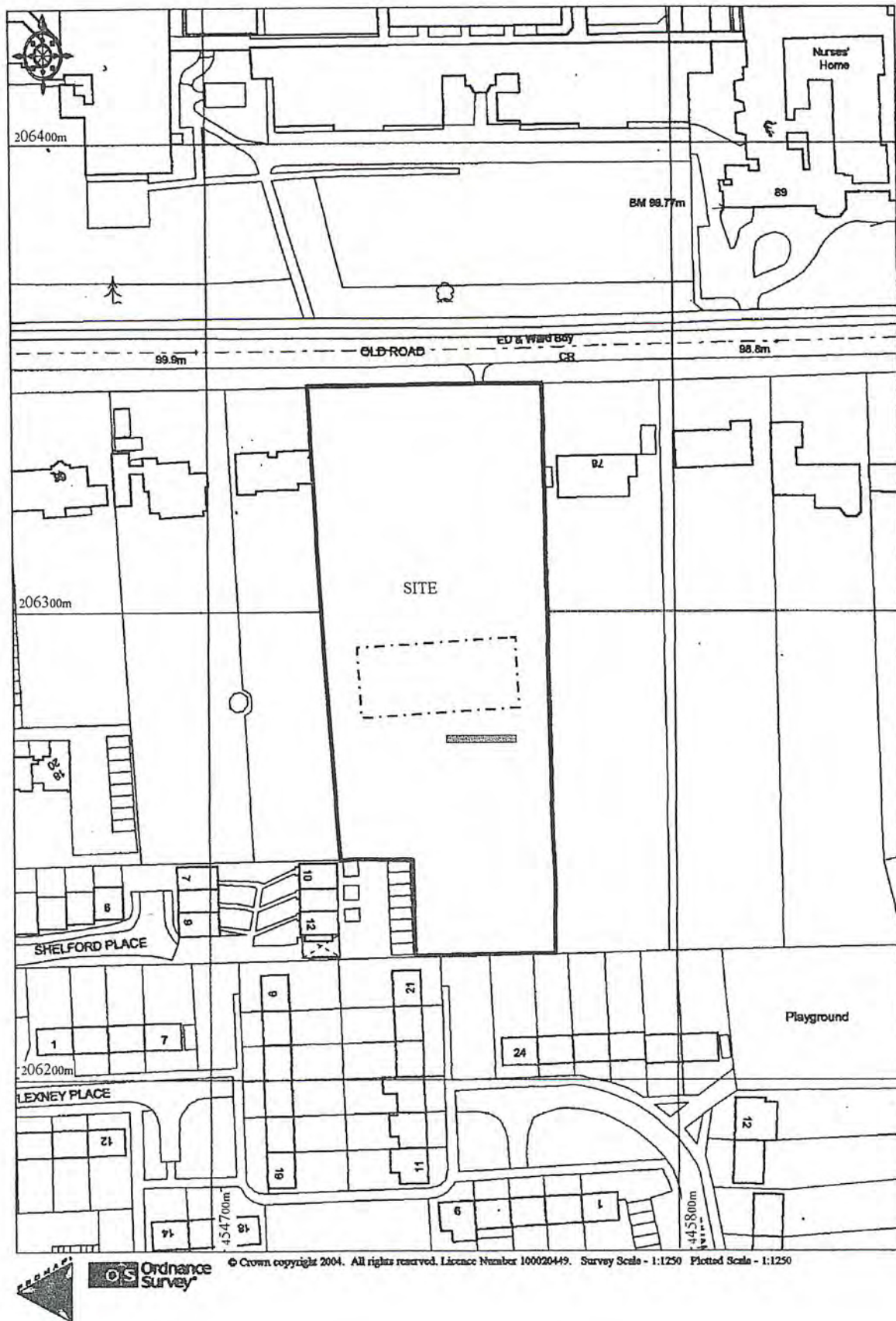


Figure 1. Site Location Plan



- The results of the investigations will be made public.

### 3 STRATEGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

A scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and subsequently agreed with OCC and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved a watching brief during ground reduction for the new build Block 4 at towards the rear of the site (Figure 1).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999).

#### 3.2 Methodology

The grubbing out of the tree boles was monitored by an archaeologist. The ground was reduced to the level of the top of the Calcareous Grit by a large 360° excavator equipped by a toothless bucket. This was undertaken under direct archaeological control.

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

Deposits and fills are referred to in the text and figures in brackets: (07), cut features are numbered in square brackets: [08].

The top of the Calcareous Grit was reached over all the area. This took the form of pale-mid yellow sand with occasional pieces of rock in the surface with the sand becoming increasingly more orange and containing up to 40-60% medium pieces of rock towards the west end of the area. In places towards the north edge of the area the natural was mainly fractured rock with areas of light orange brown sandy silt and pockets of pale-mid yellow sand (context numbers 4/03, 5/02). A 60-80mm thick deposit of subsoil (4/02) overlaid the majority of the natural. The subsoil was a pale brown-grey sandy silt with 30% fine rock particles.

A 250-280mm thick layer of topsoil and grass (4/01, 5/01) overlaid the subsoil and directly overlaid the natural in the north-east corner of the area.

During the evaluation a ditch was encountered within Trench 4 (JMHS 2004a). This feature [4/05] was orientated north south across the width of the trench. It was 530-580mm wide and 420mm dep. The west side was vertical while the east side was at an angle of 80° to the horizontal. The base of the ditch was flat and the breaks of slope at the top and bottom of the sides were sharp. The ditch was filled by a single

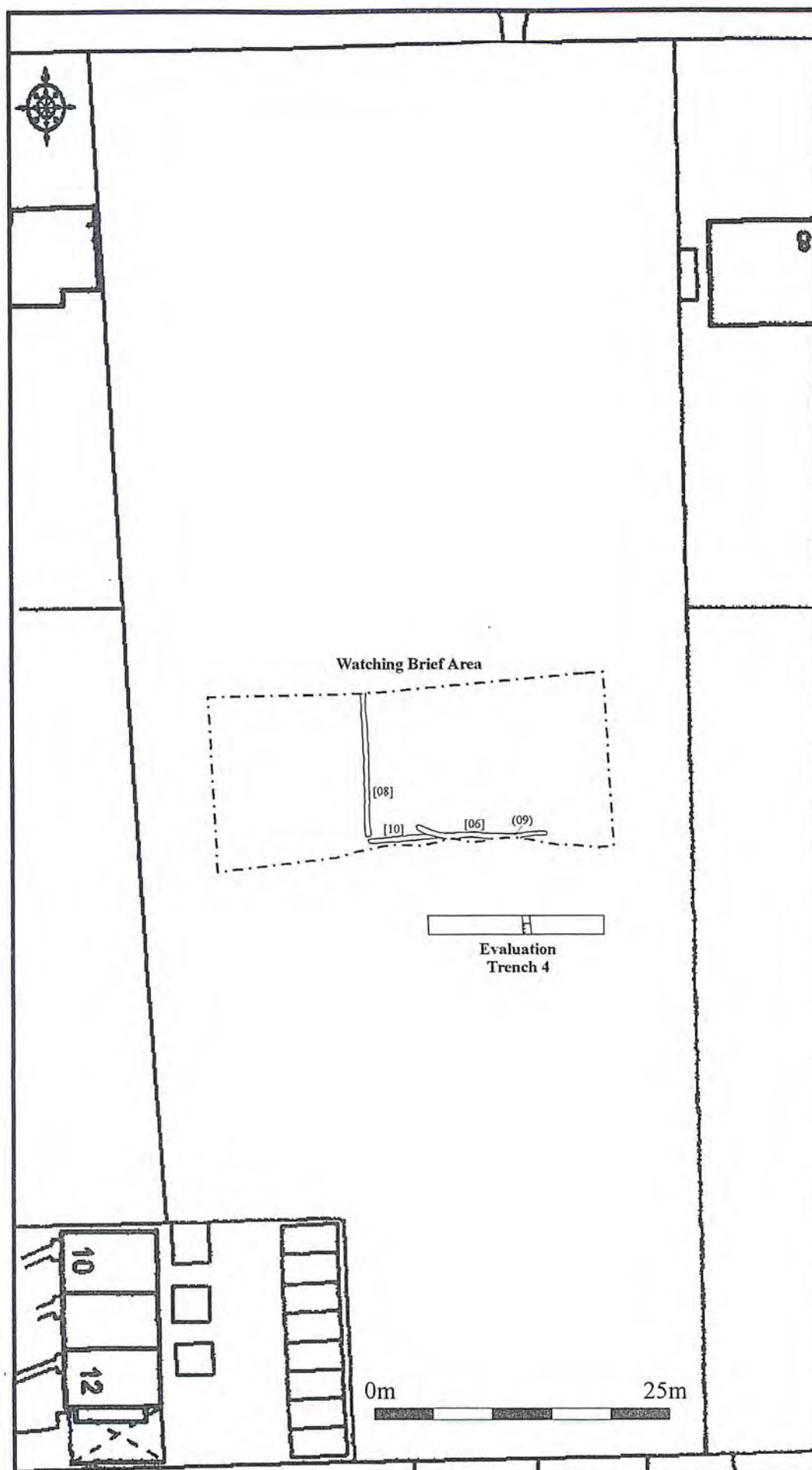


Figure 2. Area plan



Deposit of moderately compact pale-mid brown sandy silt with 5%, by volume, rock fragments and occasional, but noticeable, charcoal fragments and flecks (4/04). From the appearance of the profile of the ditch, which did not exhibit signs of weathering of the sides, it would seem that the ditch was not open for very long. The single fill suggests that the feature had been deliberately backfilled. This backfilling contained a nail and an abraded sherd of Roman Grey Ware. The ditch was sealed by subsoil 4/02.

This ditch was not found within the footprint of the new build Block 4. However in line with the previously found ditch a further ditch commenced. This one [06] was orientated east west and had been re-dug at some stage. The later length [06] was irregular with its east end tapering to an end in line with evaluation ditch [4/05]. The width surviving at the top was 560mm while the base was 380mm wide. The ditch had sides at 45° and the depth was 120-160mm. The base was flat. The west end curved slightly to the north. The ditch was filled by compact pale brown silty sand with occasional to moderate amounts of small lumps of rock and occasional charcoal flecks (07).

This length had replaced an earlier straighter ditch [10]. This ditch was 400-500mm wide at the top and had a rounded west end, which stopped in line with a north south orientated ditch [08]. There was a small gap between [08] and [10] at the level of the natural. It is probable that it was as one feature higher up. Ditch [08] was 80mm deep cut into the natural and 400-480mm wide. The ditch was straight with sides at an angle of 45° and a flat base. The fill of this ditch and of [10] was moderately compact mid brown silty sand with moderate amounts of small stone and very occasional charcoal flecks (09).

A particular dump of rubbish was evident within ditch fill (11).

In the western part of the area plough marks were visible in the top of the natural. These were orientated east west parallel to Old Road.

## 5 FINDS

The ditch fills (7, 9 and 11) contained 20<sup>th</sup> century tile fragments and earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century pottery and glass. Nothing earlier was found. None of the finds were retained.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The ditches are dated to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and must be garden features presumably from the period when the first house was built. The features were modified and predate the planting of the tree belt. The filling of the ditches suggests a deliberate backfilling with dumps of rubbish being deposited in them during the backfilling. Evidence for agricultural use of site prior to residential development was present in the form of plough marks.

The sherd of Romano-British pottery found in the ditch within evaluation Trench 4 must have been residual. The watching brief and evaluation has established that the settlement and pottery production know further south at the Churchill Hospital does not extend this far north. The sherd of pottery may just be a stray find or may indicate manuring of fields during agricultural use of the area. However with only one sherd being found, it suggests that the area of investigation lies either on the extreme edge of cultivation in the Romano-British period or even further to the north.

## **7 CONFIDENCE RATING**

The work was carried out in dry, sunny conditions after demolition works had been carried out. Cut features were easily observed truncating the natural geology.

## **8 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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