



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

**4 LAUNTON ROAD, BICESTER
OXON.**

SP 5868 2228

On behalf of

Cherwell Homes Ltd

MAY 2007

REPORT FOR Cherwell Homes Ltd.
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Summary

A watching brief was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services at 4 Launton Road, Bicester on behalf of Cherwell Homes Ltd during the excavation of footings for a new house and ground reduction for the renovation of a standing building. Excavation of the new-build footings revealed only heavily disturbed and diesel-contaminated cultivation soils.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site, which measures 0.09ha, is situated on the south side of Launton Road east of the junction with London Road. The site is centred on NGR SP 5868 2228 and is occupied by a former garage, a builder's yard with storage buildings and a dwelling. It lies at approximately 70m OD at the interface of the Oxford Clay and Cornbrash.

1.2 Planning Background

Cherwell District Council granted planning permission for the demolition of an existing outer building and the conversion of a motor vehicle repair/service building to form one house and the erection of one dwelling (04/01348/F). Due to the potential of the site to contain archaeological remains a condition was attached to the planning permission requiring the implementation of a watching brief during groundworks. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a *Brief* for the work. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* submitted by John Moore Heritage Services detailed how the requirements of the *Brief* would be met.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site of the proposed development lies within an area of considerable archaeological potential. A considerable quantity of medieval pottery has been recovered from archaeological excavations by OAU in 1986 at nos. 8-16 London Road, (SMR 11500; NGR SP 5863 2224).

The west side of London Road at the junction with Launton Road was subject to an archaeological evaluation in December 1997 and subsequent excavation in 1999-2000 by Wessex Archaeology. A series of features were revealed dating from the early Anglo-Saxon period to the 18th century (SMR 16137; NGR SP 5855 2224). The Anglo-Saxon deposits contained a series of structures covering the whole of the period. The remains of three sunken feature buildings dating to the 6th-7th century were revealed, possibly representing the earliest occupation in Bicester. A group of five late Anglo-Saxon timber halls was also revealed. From the 12th century the site seems to have become 'backlands' behind burgage plots of the medieval new town.

A 14th building was recorded during excavation 70m south east of the site at 17-19 London Road in 2005 by John Moore Heritage Services along with earlier ditches and gullies related to agricultural practices (SMR 17337; NGR SP 5872 2223).

A recent reappraisal of medieval Bicester by Paul Smith, County Archaeologist, has concluded that the early town was further south than previously thought, centred on the area of Market Square and areas to the south.



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Figure 1. Site location

It would appear that the town in the medieval period did not extend very far along Sheep Street.

Throughout the centre of Bicester archaeological investigations have turned up sherds of Roman fineware and more recently just outside of the centre of Bicester, to the east, a fragment of a wooden writing tablet was recovered from the bottom of a Roman well. All this suggests the likely presence of a high status Roman settlement in the Bicester area although none has been found as yet.

The majority of the above information has been obtained from the OCAS' *Brief*.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To identify and record any archaeological remains exposed during the groundworks

In particular

- To record and characterise any medieval remains

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with OCAS. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record throughout, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present on site during the course of all operations which potentially may have disturbed or destroyed any archaeological remains. All surface stripping and excavation of foundation and service trenches, as well as other invasive works were monitored. No archaeological remains were revealed. Machine-excavation was carried out by a 13-ton machine on the area of the new-build (House 1); due to the unstable nature of the footings, no section was capable of being recorded safely. Work within the standing building (House 2) did not impact upon the archaeology and consequently there are no results to report.

4 RESULTS

All archaeological features were assigned individual context numbers. Context

numbers in () show deposits of material. A general description of the observed layers is given.

The lowest deposit encountered during machining on House 1 was the Cornbrash (1/4) which was observed in the base of the entire foundation trench. This was overlain by a natural layer of greenish/brownish grey clay (1/3), which measured approximately 0.6m thick and is considered to be Oxford Clay. This was sealed by an interface (1/2) between the clay and the topsoil (1/1), which consisted of a band of reddish brown silty clay c. 0.25m thick with occasional charcoal flecking through the upper part of it. All deposits were overlain by the topsoil (1/1), which measured 0.45m thick, a loamy silty clay.

5 DISCUSSION

Despite the extensive remains recovered from archaeological work in the immediate area, the watching brief carried out at 4 Launton Road evidenced no archaeological traces of activity. The topsoil, which contained a quantity of modern pottery that was not retained, was contaminated in places with diesel, a result of its former use as a garage; otherwise, no archaeology was present.

6 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record

The project brief

Written Scheme of Investigation

The project report

The primary site records

The archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service when an accession number has been obtained.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*

Institute of Field Archaeologists. 1994. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*.

APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Interpretation
1/01	Layer	Stiff mid reddish brown loamy silty clay; charcoal c. 3%, fine gravel c. 3%, CBM and limestone rubble	c. 0.450m	>1.6m.	Modern topsoil
1/02	Layer	Stiff dark orangey brown slightly silty clay; occ. charcoal	0.25m	>1.6m	Subsoil
1/03	Layer	Stiff brownish/green clay	0.6m	>1.6m	Oxford Clay
1/04	Layer	Compact yellow clay and limestone	Unknown	>1.6m	Cornbrash