

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

**AT**

**CHAMPION HOUSE, WOOTTON ROAD,**

**ABINGDON, OXFORDSHIRE**

**SU 4934 9770**

*On behalf of*

*Mouchel Parkman*

**AUGUST 2007**

**REPORT FOR** Mouchel Parkman  
Stratton Court  
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## **Summary**

*A pre-application evaluation was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services at Champion House, Wootton Road, Abingdon on behalf of Mouchel Parkman. The evaluation revealed that the site has been extensively truncated by late post-medieval gravel quarrying.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

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

The site is situated on the west side of Wootton Road approximately 50m south of the junction with Boxhill Walk. The site is centred on NGR SU 4934 9770 and lies at approximately 59m OD on Second Terrace Gravels overlying Kimmeridge Clay.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

Champion House and its grounds are being considered for potential redevelopment for residential purposes. As part of the consideration of this an archaeological evaluation of the site was carried out. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a *Brief* for this 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**

To the west of the proposed development site aerial photography has identified the presence of two circular features that would appear to be ring ditches. Whether there are any associated features is unclear. Evidence of Romano-British activity has also been found in the form of burials and pottery.

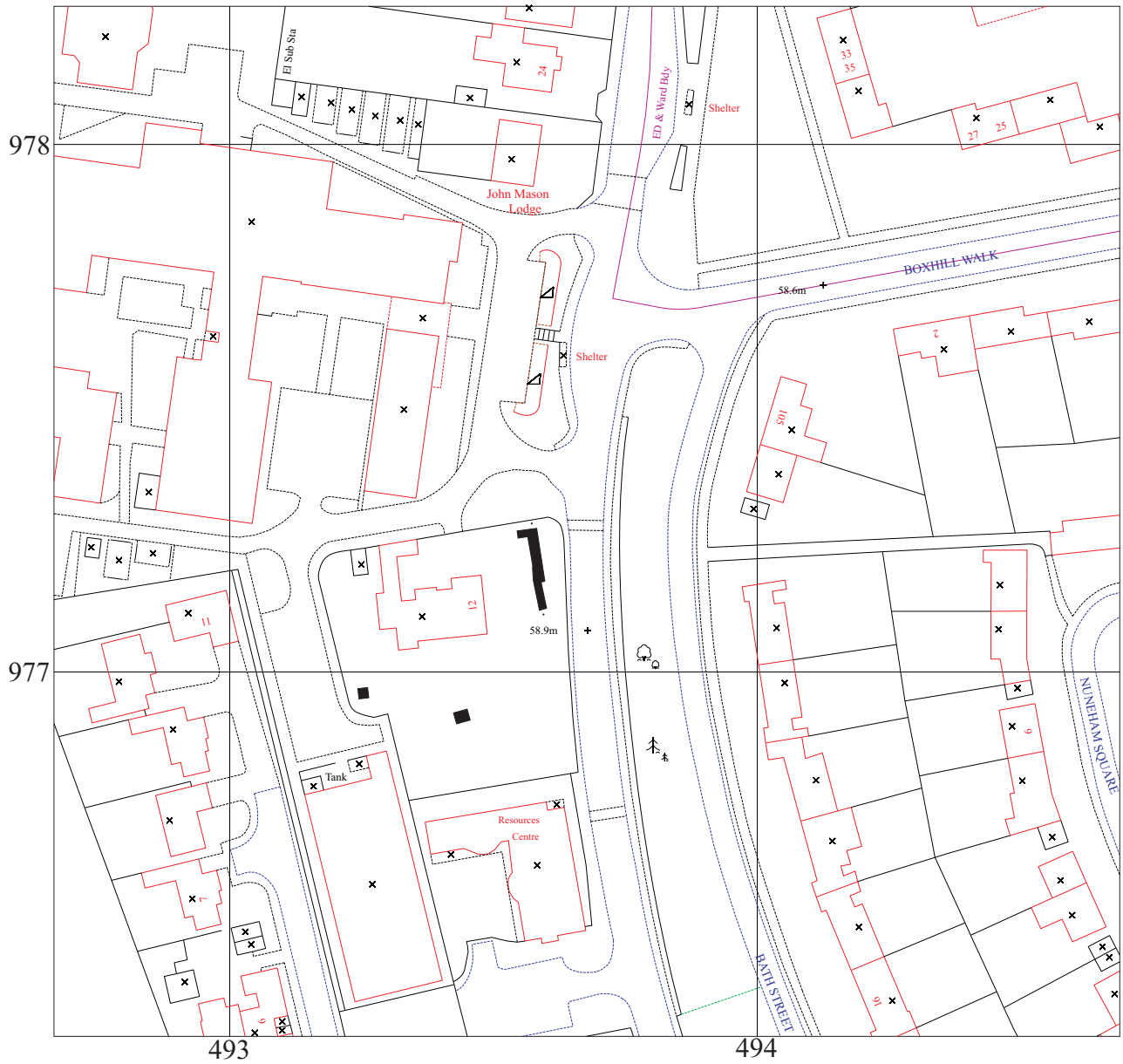
The 1883 Ordnance Survey map shows the site within an orchard or similar area of trees; no evidence for quarrying is shown on the map. Later maps from 1899 and 1900 show a similar picture, although by 1914 Champion House had been built, and a number of enclosures are shown to the south of the house.

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 establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.



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Figure 1. Site and Trench Location

In particular

- To determine whether any Roman remains or burials are present
- To establish whether any prehistoric activity extends onto the site
- To confirm that the garden is within a former quarry

### **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**

A trench 18m long and 1.5m wide, parallel to Wootton Road was excavated with a 3-ton machine, using a toothless bucket. Two further test-pits were excavated on the south-west side of the property to establish the degree of truncation by gravel-quarrying.

Hugh Coddington of OCAS monitored the work with a site visit.

### **4 RESULTS**

#### **4.1 Field 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. CBM refers to ceramic building material; tile and brick.

##### **Trench 1 (Figure 2)**

The Second Terrace gravel (07) was observed at a height of c. 56.85m OD (1.75m below modern ground level) in a sondage in the middle of the trench, although it was clear that it was rising on the east side of the trench towards Wootton Road, and becoming deeper on the west, towards Champion House. This was overlain by a dump of mixed material (06) comprising mid brown clay silt and yellow sandy clay and gravel, which extended from the southern service to beyond the south end of the trench, and measured c. 0.65m thick. The top of this deposit was at 57.40m at the south end of the trench. Initially it was believed that this was the top of the archaeology, but investigation here, and particularly to the north where the deposit section was drawn, subsequently showed it to have been quarry back-fill. It was not excavated to full depth.

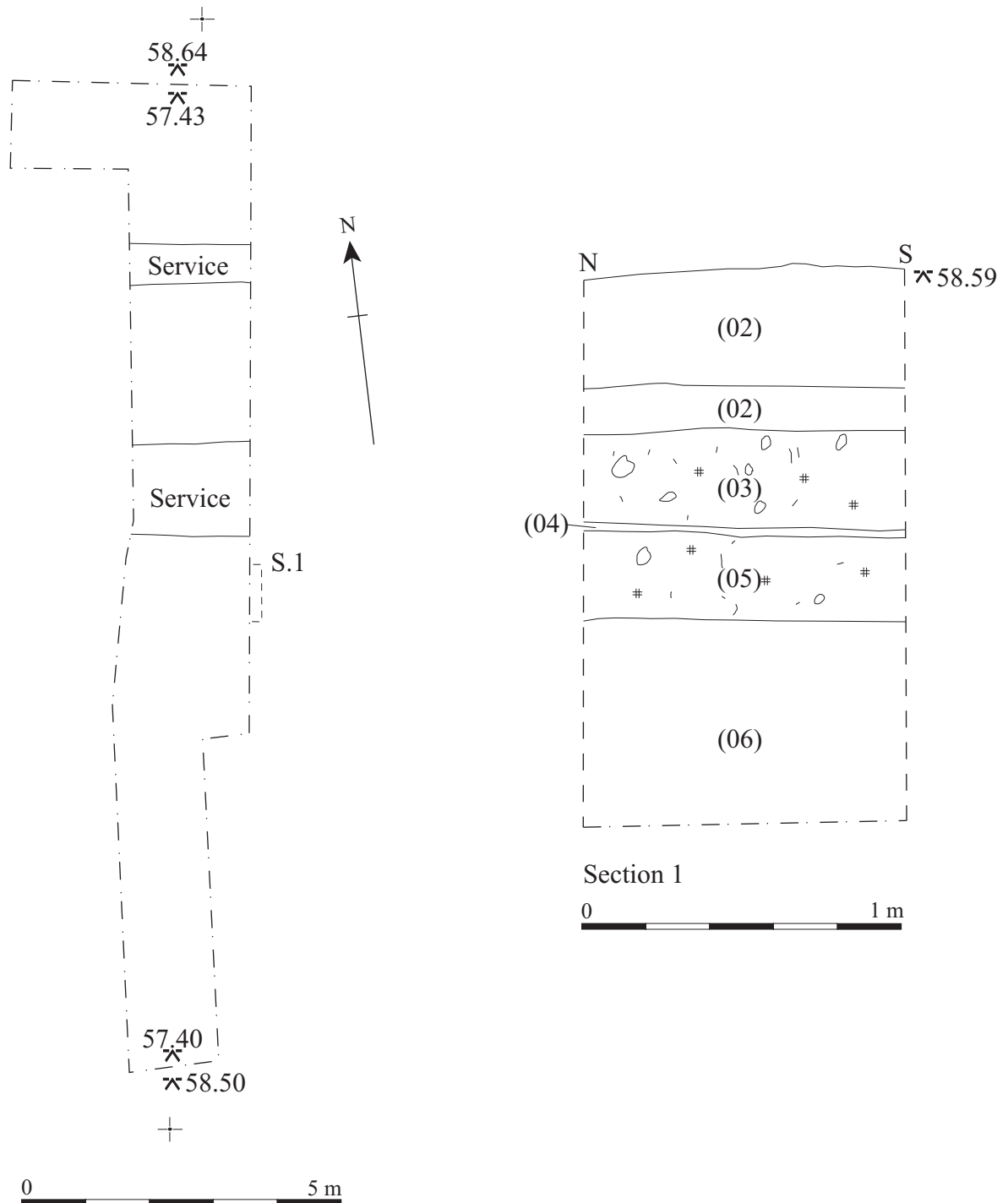


Figure 2. Trench Plan and Sample Section

This quarry back-fill (06) was sealed by a garden soil (05), a light brown sandy silty clay with c. 5% mixed gravel and 2% charcoal, which extended across the whole trench, and was c. 0.3m thick. From the southern service to the narrowing of the southern part of the trench, a thin band of yellow clay and gravel (04) was observed. This measured c. 2.5m north-south, more than 2m east-west and c. 0.05m thick. This may well be a path or similar hard-surface in the garden.

Overlying the gravel (04) was a later deposit of garden soil (03), a mid to light brown sandy silty clay containing c. 15% mixed gravel, measuring 0.3m thick. Sealing this was a dump of CBM and bottles measuring c. 0.2m thick, and which extended through the whole trench – crisp and cigarette packets from the 1970s or 1980s were also observed in this make-up. This was sealed by the current car-parking surface of gravel, sand and small rubble, which measured c. 0.35m thick.

### **Test-pit 1**

Test pit 1 was excavated to the south of the house, in the southwest corner of the garden. The garden is some 0.7m – 1m lower than the level of Wootton Road, the area around the house and the area to the west.

The test-pit measured 2m by 2.5m and was dug to a depth of c. 1.3m, to the natural Second Terrace gravel (TP1/03) at 56.92m OD. Overlying the gravel was a metre thick deposit of reddish brown slightly loamy silty sand (TP1/02). This deposit was seen in all sections, although a north-south pipe-trench was dug through the deposit on the west side of the test-pit. Some CBM and late post-medieval stoneware and earthenware were recovered from the deposit. The topsoil (TP1/01), which overlay (TP1/02), was a dark reddish brown sandy silt loam measuring c. 0.3m thick.

### **Test-pit 2**

A second test-pit was excavated in the centre of the garden area due south of the house. The test-pit measured 1.75m by 1.6m and was c. 0.45m deep. The Second Terrace gravel (TP2/03) was encountered at a height of 57.10m OD. This was overlain by reddish brown silty sand (TP2/02) c. 0.15m thick, sealed by the topsoil (TP2/01), a dark brown sandy loam, c. 0.3m thick.

## **4.2 Reliability of results and methodologies**

Although the weather-conditions were not ideal – heavy squalls throughout the day – the evaluation was carried out successfully.

## **5 FINDS**

### **5.1 Finds**

Finds consisted of CBM, which was not retained, one sherd of late post-medieval stoneware and a sherd of similarly dated glazed red earthenware.

### **5.2 Environmental Remains**

No environmental samples were taken.



## 6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation carried out at Champion House demonstrated that the site had been heavily truncated by up to 1.75m below the surrounding current ground level and subsequently been infilled to differing degrees. The height of Second Terrace gravel found in the trench and the two test pits is within 250mm of each. The current height of the garden is 700-1000mm deeper than the land to the west, Wootton Road and the area around the house. This lower level is consistent southwards to Abingdon Road and back to Godwyn Close and includes the site of The Clinic, Abingdon Road where geotechnical investigations indicated the presence of quarrying.

From the results of the evaluation it appears that the area under Champion House and the car parks was also part of the quarry. The level of the gravel terrace seen in Trench 1 was sloping down to the west indicating that the edge of the quarrying is close to, if not, the current site boundary. The deep deposit (06) in the trench is partial backfilling perhaps along with garden material (05). The material (TP1/02 and TP2/02) is rejected material from the quarrying operations left in the bottom of the quarry. The quarrying appears to date to some time in the late post-medieval period prior to 1881 when the area was used as an orchard.

When Champion House was built the area to the east of the house originally may have been a slightly sunken garden, at one time partly or wholly gravelled (04). At a later date the garden appears to have raised by the import of material (03). Subsequently the area was turned into a car park in c. 1970 or 1980s .

The evaluation at Champion House demonstrates that severe truncation has removed any putative archaeology on the site, dating from before the beginning of the twentieth century.

## 7 ARCHIVE

### **Archive Contents**

The archive consists of the following:

#### Paper Record

The project brief

The project report

Written Scheme of Investigation

The primary site records

The archive has been given an accession number OXCMS : 2007.93 by Oxfordshire Museums Service (Oxfordshire County Council), where it will be deposited.

## 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*

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

**APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

| <b>Context</b> | <b>Type</b> | <b>Description</b>   | <b>Depth (m)</b> | <b>Width/length (m)</b> | <b>Interpretation</b>          |
|----------------|-------------|--|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Trench         |             |  |                  |                         |                                |
| 01             | Layer       | Small rubble (CBM), sand & gravel                            | c. 0.35m         | >1.6m.x<br>>18m         | Modern carparking hardstanding |
| 02             | Layer       | CBM rubble   | c. 0.2m          | >1.6m x<br>>18m         | Hardsanding                    |
| 03             | Layer       | Mid/light brown sandy silty clay; c. 15% gravel              | c. 0.3m          | >1.6m x<br>>18m         | Garden soil                    |
| 04             | Layer       | Yellow clay and gravel                                       | c. 0.05m         | >1.6m x<br>c. 2.5m      | Gravel surface?                |
| 05             | Layer       | Light brown sandy silty clay; c. 5% gravel, 2% charcoal      | c. 0.3m          | >1.6m x<br>>18m         | Garden soil                    |
| 06             | Layer       | Mixed dump of yellow sandy clay gravel & mid brown clay silt | c. 0.65m         | >1.6m x<br>>7.5m        | Quarry fill                    |
| 07             | Layer       | Yellowish brown clay sand and gravel                         | -                | >1.6m x<br>>18m         | Second Terrace Gravels         |
| TP1/01         | Layer       | Dark reddish brown sandy silt loam                           | 0.27m            | >2m x<br>2.5m           | Topsoil                        |
| TP1/02         | Layer       | Reddish brown slightly loamy silty sand                      | c. 1m            | >2m x<br>2.5m           | Quarry reject material         |
| TP1/03         | Layer       | Yellowish brown clay sand and gravel                         | -                | >2m x<br>2.5m           | Second Terrace Gravels         |
| TP2/01         | Layer       | Dark brown sandy loam  | c. 0.3m          | 1.6m x<br>1.75m         | Topsoil                        |
| TP2/02         | Layer       | Reddish brown silty sand                                     | c. 0.15m         | 1.6m x<br>1.75m         | Quarry reject material         |
| TP2/03         | Layer       | Yellowish brown clay sand and gravel                         | -                | 1.6m x<br>1.75m         | Second Terrace Gravels         |