

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

ON LAND ADJACENT TO

REDROBE HOUSE,
CHURCH ST, CHIPPING NORTON

SP 3125 2726

On behalf of

Mrs Heather Leonard

DECEMBER 2006

REPORT FOR Mrs Heather Leonard
Redrobe House
Church Street
Chipping Norton
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Summary

A watching brief was undertaken during the excavation for foundations for a new dwelling. Remains of a building constructed some time after 1550 were found.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site was located on the south side of Church Street in the grounds of Red Robe House (NGR SP 3125 2726). Church Street is accessed from either Spring Street or Market Street. The underlying geology is Lower Lias Clay and the site lies at *c.* 176m OD.

1.2 Planning Background

West Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission for the demolition of the existing garages at Red Robe House and the construction of a new dwelling. Due to the potential for archaeological deposits to exist on the site, a condition requiring the undertaking of an archaeological watching brief during the course of groundworks was attached. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) prepared a *Brief* for such a watching brief. John Moore Heritage Services, in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with OCAS undertook the work.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The development site was located within an area of considerable archaeological potential. Chipping Norton Castle lies *c.* 200m to the north-west and dates to the early 12th century. It was a motte and bailey castle and seems to have survived until the later medieval period. Documentary evidence states that it was in a ruinous state by the reign of Elizabeth I. The 12th century Parish Church of St Mary lies 80m to the north-west of the development site. However Chipping Norton is listed in the Domesday Survey of 1087 suggesting that a settlement existed at that time if not earlier and that there was an earlier church. It is possible that the graveyard was previously more extensive than its current definition. Medieval and earlier churches historically formed a focal point for settlement and there is documentary evidence of a school being established at the western end of Church Street in 1450. At some point one of the masters was called Edward Redrobe.

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 record and date any evidence for medieval or earlier occupation



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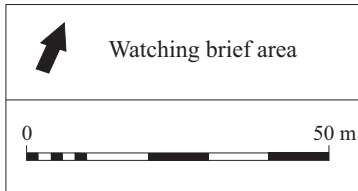


Figure 1. Site Location

- The results of the investigations will be made public.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a *Brief* issued by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services a scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with OCAS and the applicant.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*.

3.2 Methodology

The watching brief was carried out during the excavation of the foundation trenches for the new dwelling. All trenches were generally 800 mm wide and *c.*1.5 m deep. The foundation trenches for a new potting shed/garden store were inspected after they had been excavated. These were 500mm wide and 850mm deep on the east side of the building and 700mm deep on the west side. Natural was not exposed in these footing trenches. The groundworks for the car port and new stone wall to the west of it were not monitored as the archaeologists were not informed of when this work was taking place.

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.

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

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

The lowest recorded deposit comprised a dark-grey clay (10). This constituted the natural geology (Lower Lias Clay) of the site and was seen to slope down slightly from the north (N of 15) at 1.4m below modern ground surface (mgs) to 1.70m at the south end of the new building.

Above the natural it was difficult to distinguish layers with much certainty as they were generally mid grey clay with some Cornbrash pieces.

Lying above the natural clay was a 400-450 mm thick deposit of mid grey clay (11) with 1% of small brash pieces. This was not seen north of wall [15]. Cut into this deposit was a drain [16]. This was only seen in the west side of the foundation trench just south of the later wall [15]. The drain was 300mm wide and 200mm high internally formed by Cornbrash stones laid on their sides and capped by further Cornbrash.

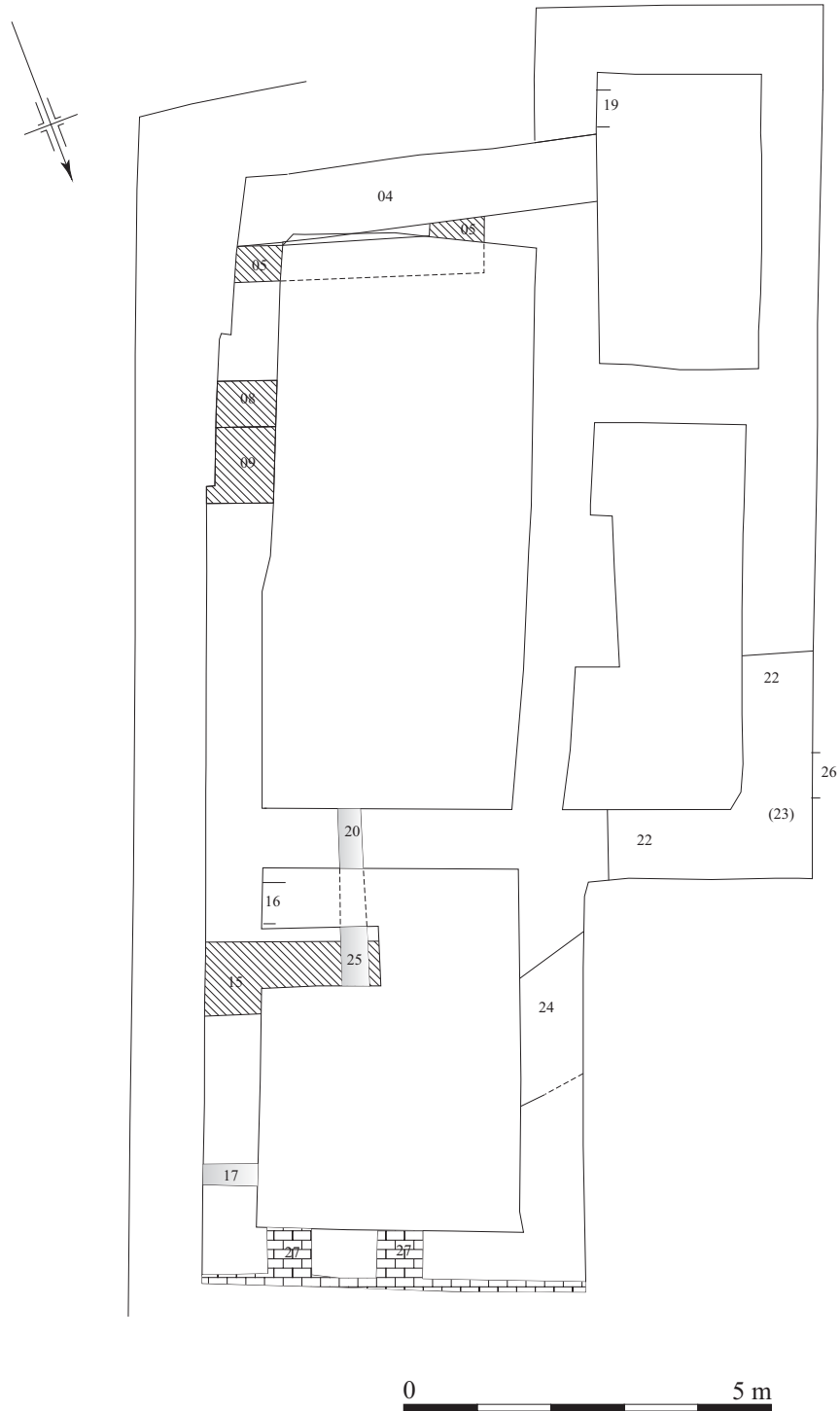


Figure 2. Site Location

Built on deposit (11) was a wall [15]. This was constructed of Cornbrash, 600x350x130mm-300x100x60mm in size, set in mid orange yellow slightly sandy clay. The wall survived c.900mm high and was 1m wide. 5.9m to the south was a further wall founded on deposit (11). This wall [09] again was constructed from Cornbrash, 600x400x150mm - 400x200x80mm in size. The south face was built of more substantial blocks and survived 6 courses high at c. 1m. The stones were set in a matrix of mid orange yellow slightly sandy clay. Two sherds of red earthenware were retrieved from the wall matrix indicating that the wall was constructed after 1550.

Between the two walls and lying on deposit (11) was a stone floor (13) constructed from Cornbrash c. 400x300x15mm. Sealing the floor was a 750mm thick deposit of Cornbrash rubble and mid orange-brown and mid grey sandy clay (12). The red earthenware pottery found in this deposit was lying directly on the stone floor (13). Overlying deposit (12) was a further layer of rubble and soil some 200mm thick (14) that did not extend south of wall [08]. This deposit may have been the same as the possible cultivation soil (06 – see below) but containing rubble from the demolished walls [09 and 15]. This was sealed by the modern topsoil (01).

Built against the south face of wall [09] was a further wall [08]. This was only 450-500mm wide and constructed of Cornbrash 200x150x100mm-150x100x80mm in size. It survived three courses high at 400mm. 1.3m to the south was a further wall parallel to [08]. The foundation course was of large Cornbrash 400x350x250-300mm with higher courses in smaller stones (200x200x80-100mm) set in mid grey clay and silty clay. This survived 900mm high in 5-6 courses with the top 700mm below mgs. It was 900mm wide. Further to the west the wall turned southwards where it was 750mm wide. A sherd of red earthenware dating to after 1550 was found incorporated into the wall. From memory, and a note in the records, the wall then turned westwards in the approximate position shown on Fig. 2. Unfortunately this was not fully recorded.

To the south of wall [05] was a stone-lined drain [04] orientated east-west. The drain had a stone base. The north and south sides were c. 200-300mm wide and built of Cornbrash in the size range of 300x200x100-150mm to 100x100x150mm. The drain was capped by large flat Cornbrash slabs c. 50mm thick and c. 700mm wide. Internally the drain was 500mm high and 400mm wide. The drain cut through wall [05]. Below the drain and lying over the natural (10) was a deposit of mid-dark grey clay with 2% small brash c. 400mm thick (18). This contained red earthenware dating to after 1550.

The walls [05] and [08] and the drain [04] were overlaid by a deposit of pale yellow, slightly coarse sand and 5% clayey silt (07). This was thought to have derived from the matrix of wall [09] when it was pulled down. It was 80-180mm thick sloping down towards the south. It was also seen to the west of the north-south length of wall [05]. Above this was a cultivation soil of mid grey-brown clayey silt with 1-2% fine brash pieces (06). This was thicker at the south end of the foundation trenches where it was 350mm while it was only 100mm thick in the area of wall (08). Above this was the modern topsoil (01).

To the north of the building was an east/west orientated stone-lined drain [17] formed from small stones 80x80x300mm laid lengthways four stones high with large

limestone slabs over the top and a stone base. Internally it was 350mm high and 300mm wide. A further drain [20, 25] was orientated north/south. It was 300mm wide and 250mm high internally formed by stones and capped by a large stone slabs c.50mm thick. It was built over the top of wall foundation [15]. Whether this was a later feature or connected with the use of the building is unknown.

A late post-medieval septic tank [22] was found with presumably an iron pipe in a large trench [24] connected to this. It was filled with rubbish (23}. A further stone-lined drain [26] was cut by the septic tank. A sherd of Nottingham stoneware shows that the drain was in use during the 18th century.

The concrete foundations from the previous garage [27] were found in the extreme north edge of the foundations for the new house.

In the garden to the rear where foundations for a potting shed was excavated the lowest deposit seen was a pale grey slightly silty clay loam with 20-25% Cornbrash pieces (03). This was not fully excavated and was at least 350mm thick and contained pottery dating to after 1550. Overlying this was a 200-220mm of pale mid grey brown slightly sandy loam with moderate charcoal flecks and 1% small brash pieces (02). Sealing this was the topsoil composed of mid dark brown grey silty loam with 5% fine and small brash fragments (01). The depth of the last varied from 250-350mm.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 13 sherds with a total weight of 1670g. It was predominantly post-medieval in date, although three sherds of redeposited medieval material were present.

The pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1989; 1994), as follows:

OXAM:	Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 3 sherds, 74g.
OXDR:	Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 10 sherds, 1,469g.
OXNOTTS:	Nottingham stonewares. c. 1690-1800. 1 sherd, 32g.
WHEW:	Mass-produced white earthenwares, mid 19 th - 20 th C. 4 sherds, 95g.

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*. All the fabric types are well-known from other sites in the region.

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

Context	OXAM		OXDR		OXNOTTS		WHEW		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
Drain E side of site					1	32			U/S
3	3	74	2	19					M16thC
4							4	95	19thC
8			1	27					M16thC
9			2	112					M16thC
12			3	253					M16thC
18			2	1058					M16thC
Total	3	74	10	1469	1	32	4	95	

6 DISCUSSION

The original building appears to have been a single room deep with walls [15] to the front and [09] to the rear. This was floored with stone slabs. An extension was built to the rear with walls [08], [05] and [19]. Surprisingly the west side of the building was not found. The building was built after 1550 but no dating evidence was forthcoming for a more precise date for its construction or when it was no longer in use.

A drain [16] pre-dated this building. At least one drain post-dated the building as shown by drain [04] cutting through the foundations of the rear extension. Drain [20, 25] may have been contemporary with the building. The east/west drains would have been for drainage of ground water down slope from east to west.

Following the demolition of the building the land was cultivated or in use as a garden.

A drain [26] in use in the 18th century was found on the west side of the site cut by a septic tank.

Whether an earlier building had existed at the frontage of the plot is unknown as this part of the development was not seen by the archaeologists.

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