

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

70 SILVER BIRCHES, PRESTON CROWMARSH, OXFORDSHIRE OX10 6SL

NGR SU 61574 90758

MARCH 2021

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SUMMARY

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief at 70 Silver Birches, Preston Crowmarsh, Oxfordshire between the 18th and 25th February 2021 (NGR SU 61574 90758). The purpose of the watching brief was for the demolition and replacement of the existing dwelling, as well as the erection of a 4-bay garage. During the course of the watching brief, a series of foundation footings were excavated. This particular area had potential for Roman and medieval remains. Over the course of the watching brief excavations, two undated linear ditches and a single, undated pit were uncovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located at 70 Silver Birches, Preston Crowmarsh, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 61574 90758). The site lies at approximately 45m OD. The underlying geology is First (Floodplain) River Terrace Deposits.

1.2 Planning Background

South Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission for the demolition and replacement of existing dwelling and the erection of a 4-bay garage. Due to the archaeological and historical importance of the surrounding area a condition was attached to the permission requiring a watching brief to be maintained during the course of building operations or construction works on the site.

The applicant, or their agents or successors in title, shall be responsible for organising and implementing an archaeological watching brief, to be maintained during the period of construction/during any groundworks taking place on the site. The watching brief shall be carried out by a professional archaeological organisation in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation that has first been approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason – To safeguard the recording and inspection of matters of archaeological importance on the site in accordance with the NPPF (2019).

Following the approval of the Written Scheme of Investigation referred to in condition 1, no development shall commence on site without the appointed archaeologist being present. Once the watching brief has been completed, its findings shall be reported to the Local Planning Authority, as agreed in the Written Scheme of Investigation, including all processing, research and analysis necessary to produce an accessible and useable archive and a full report for publication which shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority within two years of the completion of the archaeological fieldwork.

Reason – To safeguard the recording and inspection of matters of archaeological importance on the site in accordance with the NPPF (2019).

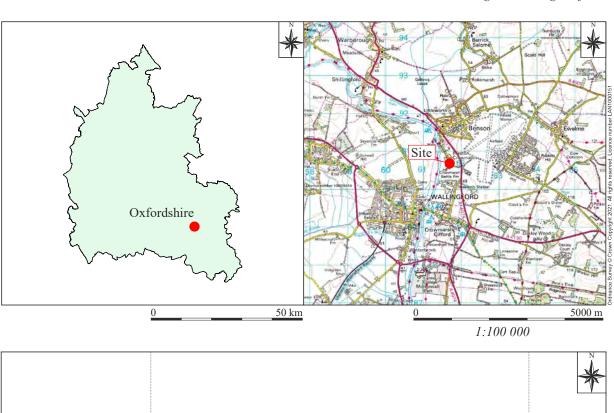




Figure 1: Site location

1.3 Archaeological Background

The proposed development lies in an area of considerable archaeological interest. Four skeletons of probable Roman date were identified immediately north-west of the site during gravel extraction. A Roman brooch was found to the south of the site. To the south-west of the site there are remains of a large and deep moat of medieval date and medieval pottery has been found to the north. A hollow way to the east of the site adds further evidence of medieval occupation in this area, and there are further earthworks, possibly medieval in date, visible on LIDAR mapping; however these have not been investigated. Due to the proximity top these sites and findspots, it is possible that related archaeological deposits may be present in this application site.

The above archaeological background information has been taken from the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service's advice notice.

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 archaeological remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

In particular:

• To record any evidence of archaeological remains relating to the known Roman and medieval remains in the vicinity.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, the archaeological advisors to the South Oxfordshire District Council.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014).

3.2 Methodology

The groundworks consisted of the excavation of a series of foundation footing trenches for the replacement dwelling. The new garage build is no longer part of current planning application. The foundation excavations covered an area measuring 25.50m by 20.20m. The foundation trenches had a maximum width of 0.90m and had a maximum depth of 1.10m. Before the foundation excavations took place, part of the topsoil layer was stripped and removed, and a layer of crushed concrete and stones were laid down, in order to keep the site dry and clean.

Where archaeological horizons were encountered they were cleaned by hand and excavated appropriately. 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. A photographic record was also produced.

The resultant spoil from the works was visually scanned, especially for finds relating to the Roman and medieval periods.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts, numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material, while numbers in bold indicate structural features. A series of foundation trenches were excavated which covered an area measuring 25.50m by 20.20m.

The earliest recorded deposit was a firm, mid brownish-red sandy-gravels (04) (Figure 2; Sections 1, 2 and 4; GPS Plan; Plates 1 and 3). It measured greater than 23.60m in length and greater than 13.10m in width. It had a thickness of greater than 0.24m. This deposit was observed in the west, north-west and northern areas of the site. It was identified as the underlying gravel geology.

Overlying deposit (04) was a friable to firm, light to mid grey sandy-gravels (05) (Figure 2; Sections 1-7; GPS Plan; Plates 1-5). It contained patches of light orangey-brown sand. Deposit (05) measured greater than 20.20m in length and greater than 18.90m in width. It had a thickness of greater than 0.31m. Deposit (05) was identified as a layer of natural geology, very similar to deposit (04) below, but not as densely packed with gravels.



Plate 1: Section 1. Looking west.

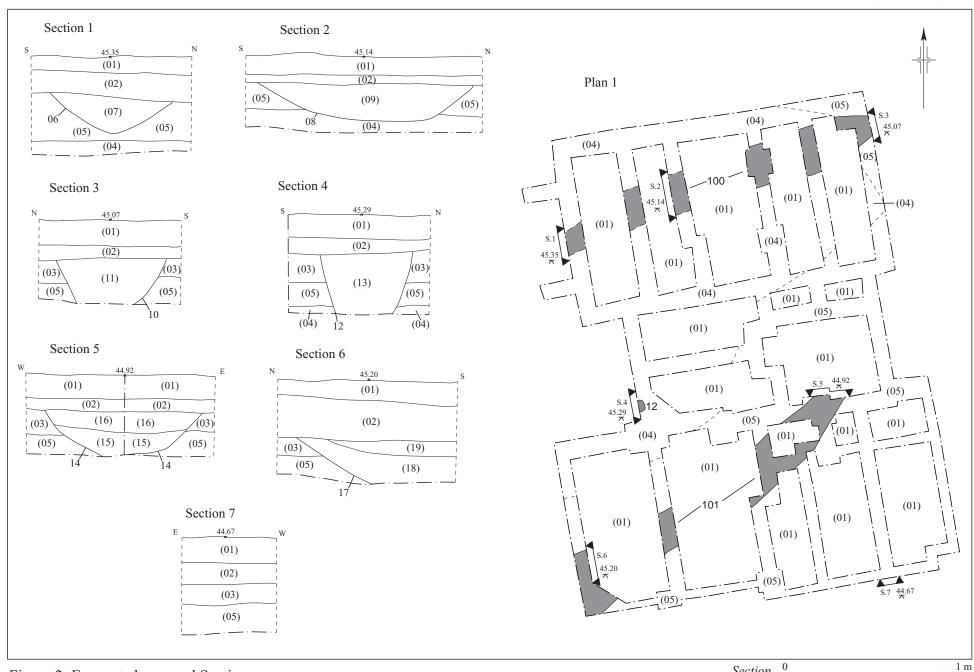


Figure 2: Excavated area and Sections.

Stratified above the natural deposit (05) was a friable, mid brownish-grey silty-sand (03) (Figure 2; Sections 3-7; GPS Plan; Plates 2-5). It contained inclusions of infrequent chalk flecks and small rounded stones. Deposit (03) measured greater than 25.50m in length, greater than 20.20m in width, and had a maximum thickness of 0.35m (Section 4). This deposit was not observed in the north-western corner of the site. It has been identified as a subsoil layer, underlying the later topsoil deposit (02).

Cut into the subsoil deposit (03) was an undated linear ditch (Contexts 06, 08 and 10) in the northern part of the site which has been assigned the group number 100 (Figure 2; Sections 1, 2 and 3; GPS Plan; Plates 1 and 2). This ditch was orientated east/northeast to west/south-west, and was recorded at three separate interventions (Sections 1, 2 and 3). The full length of this ditch measured greater than 17.30m; the maximum width measured 2.55m and the maximum depth of the ditch exceeded 0.48m. The shape of this ditch in plan was linear and was fairly uniform throughout, however, both the east/north-eastern and south/south-western extents began to taper in and narrow as they extended beyond the limit of excavation.



Plate 2: Section 3. Looking east.

At the west/south-western extent of ditch 100, the break-of-slope at the top and at the base was gradual to moderate, with gradual and regular sides (Sections 1 and 2). The base was concave and tapered at the western extent, but became flat and regular where the ditch was at its widest (Section 2). These characteristics changed slightly at the east/north-eastern extent where the break-of-slope at the top was moderate, with more moderate to steep sides (Section 3). Additionally, the break-of-slope at the base and the base itself was not observed as it extended beyond the limit of excavation.

Linear ditch 100 contained a single fill deposit of friable, dark grey clayey-silt (Contexts (07), (09) and (11)) (Figure 2; Sections 1, 2 and 3; GPS Plan; Plates 1 and 2). This deposit contained inclusions of infrequent small-sized stones as well as flecks of yellowy-brown sand. These inclusions were observed throughout the full extent of

the ditch. Additionally, the colour, composition and compaction of the deposit were uniform throughout. There were no finds recovered from this deposit so it remains undated. Linear ditch 100 has been identified as a previous boundary or hedgerow ditch, due to the lack of finds and the uniformity throughout the deposit. Additionally, it has the same orientation as the existing garden boundary line.

Truncating subsoil deposit (03) at the western edge of the excavations was a circular undated pit 12 (Figure 2; Section 4; GPS Plan; Plate 3). It measured greater than 0.24m in length, 0.98m in width and exceeded 0.65m in depth. It was circular in plan with rounded edges, with a moderate to sharp break-of-slope at the top. The sides of the pit were steep and regular, however, the break-of-slope at the bases and the base itself was not observed, as it extended beyond the limit of excavation. Only a small amount of the pit was caught in plan, so the excavations likely caught the pit's northeastern edge.



Plate 3: Section 4. Looking west.

Pit 12 contained a single fill deposit of friable, dark-grey clayey-silt (13) (Figure 2; Section 4; GPS Plan; Plate 3). It contained inclusions of infrequent small patches of orangey-brown sand, but there were no finds. It measured greater than 0.24m in length and 0.98m in width. The thickness measured greater than 0.65m. This fill deposit is very similar to the deposit observed within linear ditch 100 (Contexts (07), (09) and (11)). Pit 12 may have been contemporary with ditch 100, associated with a pre-existing garden plot.

Cut into the subsoil deposit (03) in the southern extent of the site was a second undated linear (slightly curving) ditch (Contexts 14 and 17) which was assigned the group number 101 (Figure 2; Sections 5 and 6; GPS Plan; Plates 4 and 5). Ditch 101 was orientated north-east by south-west, it measured greater than 17m in length and had a maximum width of 3.30m. The depth of the ditch exceeded 0.46m (Section 6).

The north-eastern extent of the ditch terminated just beyond the intervention for Section 5, as it was not observed on the opposing side. This is also the point where the ditch is at its narrowest, the ditch widens and deepens as it travels south-west and extends beyond the limit of excavation at the south-western extent.

At the north-eastern extent (Section 5) of the ditch, the break-of-slope at the top and at the base were both moderate, with moderate and slightly irregular sides. The base appears to be flat but it is not clear. These features differ slightly at the south-western extent, whereby the break-of-slope at the top was more gradual, and the sides were more gradual and regular also. However, the break-of-slope at the base and the base itself were not observed as it extended beyond the limit of excavation at the base.



Plate 4: Section 5. Looking north/north-west.

Linear ditch 101 contained two fill deposits, the lower-most fill was a soft, light-grey clay (Contexts (15) and (18)) (Figure 2; Sections 5 and 6; GPS Plan; Plates 4 and 5). It was a sterile, uniform deposit with no inclusions or finds. It measured greater than 17m in length, greater than 3.30m in width and had a thickness measuring greater than 0.44m. This deposit was uniform throughout the full extent of the ditch, it has been identified as a continuous deposition of sediment as a result of flowing water. At the south-western extent of the ditch, observed within Section 6, there appears to be a slumping of sediment falling into the ditch from the northern edge.

The upper-most fill of ditch 101 was a soft, light to mid grey silty-clay (Contexts (16) and (19)) (Figure 2; Sections 5 and 6; GPS Plan; Plates 4 and 5). The uniform deposit contained patches of grey-brown sandy-silt as well as infrequent small rounded stones. There were no finds within this fill. The deposit measured greater than 17m in length, 3.30m in width and had a thickness of 0.24m. This deposit likely represents a second phase of use within this linear ditch, following the initial sediment deposition of deposit (15)/(18) below. Linear ditch 101 has been identified as a drainage or water

channel, as it travels south-west downhill towards the nearby stretch of the river Thames.



Plate 5: Section 6. Looking east/north-east.

Overlying the two linear ditches and the pit was a friable, dark grey-brown clayey-silt (02) (Figure 2; Sections 1-7; GPS Plan; Plates 1-5). It measured greater than 25.50m in length, greater than 20.20m in width and had a maximum thickness of 0.43m. It contained infrequent rooting. This deposit was observed throughout the full extent of the site, and was identified as the topsoil layer.

The latest deposit was a compact, mid-grey (mixed with mid reddish-brown) silty-sand, also comprised of crushed concrete and rubble (01) (Figure 2; Sections 1-7; GPS Plan; Plates 1-5). It measured greater than 25.50m in length, greater than 20.20m in width and had a maximum thickness of 0.27m. It was observed throughout the full extent of the site, and was identified as the modern levelling layer that was put in place prior to the excavation of the foundation footings, part of topsoil layer (02) was removed, and a layer of fabric was set down before deposit (01) was laid.

Reliability of Results

The reliability of the results was considered to be good. Weather conditions were clear and consistent throughout, and the horizon clarity of archaeological features and deposits where present were also good.

5 FINDS

Over the course of the watching brief excavations, no archaeological finds or artefacts relating to the Roman, medieval or any other period were recovered.

6 DISCUSSION

The watching brief aimed to identify the existence of significant archaeological remains, with a particular focus on Roman and medieval periods. However, during the course of the groundworks, the only features uncovered were two undated linear ditches and an undated pit.

7 ARCHIVE

A digital archive is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services (ID 4388) and will be made available upon request (to admin@jmheritageservices.co.uk). Digitised copies of all the primary records will be made publicly available as appendix to the final report submitted to OASIS (ID johnmoor1_417259)

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs

John Moore Heritage Services, 2020, P20/S3924/FUL-3 – Silver Birches, 70 Preston Crowmarsh, Oxfordshire, OX10 6SL. Archaeological Watching Brief. Written Scheme of Investigation. Unpublished.

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Printable version

OASIS ID: johnmoor1-417259

Project details

Project name 70 Silver Birches, Preston Crowmarsh, Oxfordshire.

Short description of

the project

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief at 70 Silber Birches, Preston Crowmarsh. During the course of the watching brief, a series of foundation footings were excavated; two undated linear ditches and a single,

undated pit were uncovered.

Project dates Start: 18-02-2021 End: 25-02-2021

Previous/future work No / No

reference codes

Any associated project 4388 - Contracting Unit No.

Any associated project BEPC 21 - Sitecode

reference codes

reference codes

Any associated project P20/S3924/FUL-3 - Planning Application No.

reference codes

Any associated project johnmoor1_417259 - OASIS form ID

Type of project Recording project

Site status None

Residential 1 - General Residential Current Land use

DITCH Uncertain Monument type PIT Uncertain Monument type Significant Finds **NONE None** "Watching Brief"

Investigation type

Prompt Research

Project location

Country England

Site location OXFORDSHIRE SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE CROWMARSH 70 Silver Birches, Preston

Crowmarsh

OX10 6SL Postcode

Study area 500 Square metres

Site coordinates SU 61574 90758 51.611810172486 -1.110658192465 51 36 42 N 001 06 38 W Point

1 of 3 29/03/2021, 10:01 Height OD / Depth Min: 44.67m Max: 45.35m

Project creators

Name of Organisation John Moore Heritage Services

Project brief originator South Oxfordshire District Council

Project design originator John Moore

Project

John Moore

director/manager

Project supervisor Christopher Whitehead

Type of

sponsor/funding body

client

Project archives

Physical Archive

No

Exists?

Digital Archive recipient

John Moore Heritage Services

Digital Archive ID 4388

Digital Contents "Stratigraphic", "other"

Digital Media available "GIS","Images raster / digital photography","Images vector","Text"

Digital Archive notes Digital files related to the project are maintained by John Moore Heritage Services (ID

4388) and will be made available upon request (to amind@jmheritageservices.co.uk).

Paper Archive Exists? No

Project bibliography

1

Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

Publication type

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Author(s)/Editor(s) Whitehead, C.

Author(s)/Editor(s) Moore, J.

Other bibliographic details

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Date 2021

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Entered on 29 March 2021

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