

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**AT**

**HANWELL CASTLE, HANWELL,**

**OXFORDSHIRE**

**SP 4363 4360**

*On behalf of*

*Mr & Mrs Beechcroft*

**JULY 2008**

**REPORT FOR** Mr & Mrs Beechcroft  
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**FIELDWORK** 22<sup>nd</sup> April - 14<sup>th</sup> May 2008

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## ***Summary***

*A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during the ground work at Hanwell Castle during the restoration of the western boundary wall. The foundations of the original boundary wall were located as was a pentice leading to the church.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

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

Hanwell Castle is located to the south-east of Main Street and north-east of St Peter's Church, Hanwell (NGR SP 4363 4360). The underlying geology is Jurassic Marlstone Rock Bed. The wall forms the western boundary of the garden; it forms a south-western corner of the garden with a second wall that borders the Church. The land on the exterior is significantly higher than the level of the garden.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

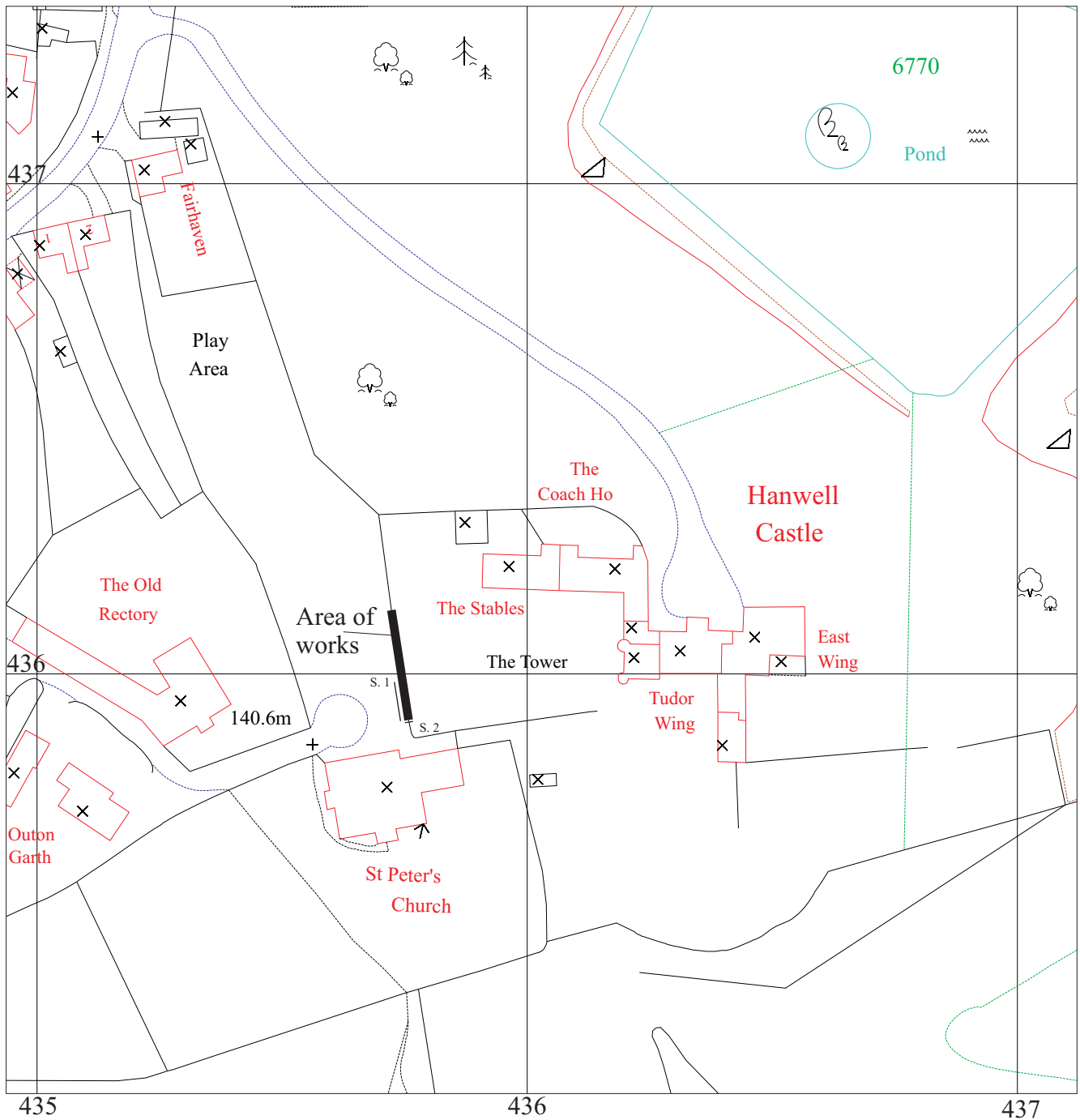
Cherwell District Council granted planning permission for the rebuilding of part of the west boundary wall along the line of the original wall. Due to archaeological and historical importance of the site a condition was attached to the permission requiring a watching brief to be maintained during the course of building operations or construction works on the site. This was in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan policies.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

Hanwell Castle is a former great house of which only the south-west tower and south range remain of a 2-storey house built round a courtyard with the main entrance on the west. It was begun *c.* 1489 for William Cope, cofferer to Henry VII. It was mostly demolished in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (<http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk>).

The part of the wall to be rebuilt is to the south of the 17<sup>th</sup> century gate piers. The land slopes down to the west. A watercolour by George Clark of Scaldwell (1835-1845) shows that the slope to the west was clear of vegetation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The wall apparently stepped up to the gatepiers and continued in a straight line out towards the church. A drawing of 1905 by E. L. Giggs shows the gatepiers with some kind of blocking between them and the wall on either side is stepped down.

An undated, but apparently 19<sup>th</sup> century, plan in the Bodleian library (G A Oxon b 91(2)) entitled 'Enlarged plan of the village of Hanwell' shows a straight line below a scarped bank to the west of the Castle between the Castle and the Rectory. There is also a rectangular building on the corner and along the same straight boundary to the north of the church. This is internal to the Castle boundary. The same is shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey 25 inches to the mile, 1882 along with the gatepiers (Steane undated).



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Figure 1. Site Location

There are remains of steps between the piers and the house, which suggest that there was not a drive to the house from this side. The wall to the north of the gatepiers seems to be coeval with it and has a well fashioned plinth course with a chamfered offset, also an ashlar wall with limestone coping intact. The wall to the south of the gatepiers, along with the building mentioned above, collapsed or was taken down in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lumps of stone were littered on the surface of the bank and more worked stone was piled behind the shrubbery prior to work commencing. The wall footing and the foundations of the rectangular building were considered likely to remain buried beneath the superimposed bank (*ibid*).

## **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 and historic remains exposed during the course of building operations or construction works on the site.

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS). 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 and possible.

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

### **3.2 Methodology**

An archaeologist visited the work on appropriate occasions during the course of the groundwork, which involved the hand and machine excavation of the area for the clearance of the wall footing.

## **4 RESULTS (Figure 2)**

All features were assigned individual context numbers. This number covered both the feature cut and the fill for pits, unless the feature was sample excavated by hand. Context numbers in [ ] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material. A general description of the feature fills is given.

The natural geological deposit in the area was a yellowish grey marlstone rock bed (18). Cut into this were the foundations for the main north-south garden wall (05), which was of ashlar blocks. These foundations also provided the foundations for the upstanding wall (01) at the south-western corner of the garden. The distinction was made between the walls because of the rebuilt nature of wall (01). Wall (05) survived at varying heights from wall (01) in the south to the upstanding gatepier in the north. Wall (05) survived to a height of approximately 1m in places, with blocks up to 0.5m x 0.7m x 0.2m in size. The level of the base was approximately equal to the level of the garden area.

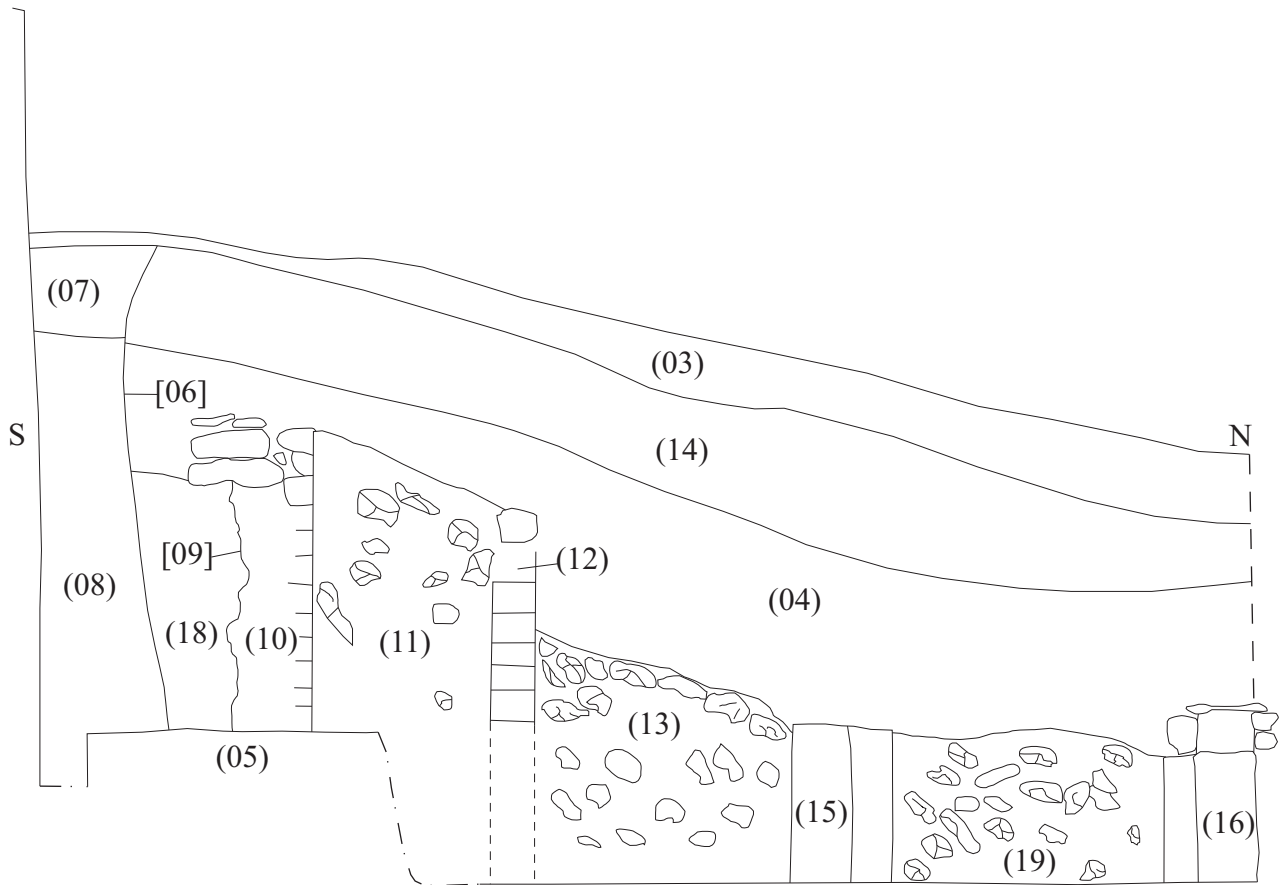


Plate 1. Wall (05) with Wall (01) in the background

Bonded into the lowest layers of wall (05) were a series of five east-west aligned walls on the exterior of the present garden. The southern-most wall (10) was built to retain the natural that was cut [09] back in this area. It was stone built and 0.5m wide, surviving to a height of at least 2m. To the north of this wall at a distance of 1.15m was a second wall (12), this was 0.3m wide and also stone built.



Plate 2. Wall (12) bonded to Wall (05)



Section 1

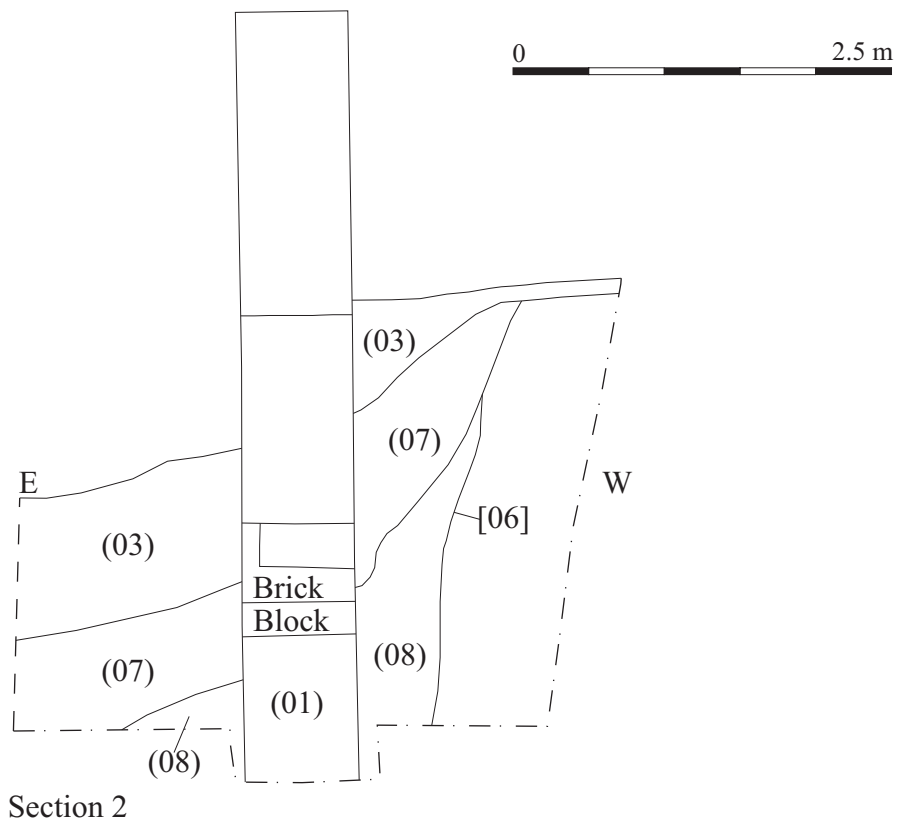


Figure 2. Sections



The area between these walls had been in-filled with a loose mid brown clay (11) flecked with mortar and charcoal, with some stone rubble. Voids within this deposit revealed that wall (10) extended into the section at least 1m.

To the north of wall (12) at a distance of 1.7m was a third wall (15). This was 0.7m wide of ashlar sandstone blocks and survived to a height of at least 1m. It formed an entrance 1.8m wide with a fourth wall (16). This wall was also 0.7m wide and 0.8m in height. Both were chamfered inwards on the interior of the gateway (Plate 3).

A later stone drain had been built on the surviving top of wall (16). Its internal dimensions were 0.4m wide by 0.25m high. It followed the line of the wall into the section for a distance of at least 2.5m at which point it appeared to curve south.

Between walls (12) and (15) was a deposits of stone rubble (13) at least 1.3m thick. This appeared to be deliberate infilling of the space. The area between walls (15) and (16) was also filled with a loose stone rubble (19) at least 1m thick, again this appeared to be deliberate infilling.



Plate 3. Walls (15) and (16)

Wall (17) was situated to the north of wall (16) and 11m south of the upstanding southerly gatepost. It was stone built, 0.46m wide and survived to a height of 1.3m. Between walls (16) and (17) was a deposit of loose mid brown-grey clay (20) flecked with mortar and charcoal, with some stone rubble at least 0.6m thick.

Overlying these features was an orange-brown silty-clay (04), up to 1m thick in places that contained stone and brick fragments.

Above this was a loose mid brown sandy-clay (14) with some stone and brick fragments. It contained modern materials including plastic bottles and car tyres. This deposit varied

in thickness being thicker in the south up to 0.75m, while it disappears towards the north of the area.

At the southern end of the site a pit [06] was cut into this layer (14). It extended approximately 1m on the exterior of the garden, and at least 2m in to the garden. It was over 3m deep. Its function appears to have been to facilitate the rebuilding of the upstanding wall (01) at this point. While the lowest levels of the wall appear to be original, it has been rebuilt and strengthened. Modern “breeze-blocks” are present at a level 2.2m below the external ground surface. Above these blocks are four distinct styles of rebuild in various materials: red brick over lain by stone block, over this rough uncoursed stone and on top reclaimed ashlar blocks. .

The lowest fill of this pit [06] was packed against both sides of the wall (01). It was a light yellow-grey clay (08) with some stone and cement fragments that was up to 1.5m thick. Above this the upper fill was a red-brown sandy-clay (07) with cement fragments that was up to 1m thick. The uppermost layer was a dark brown silty-clay (03) that varied in thick from 0.05m to 0.6m in some places. It contained small stones, brick fragments and 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery sherds.

Wall (01) formed the south-western corner of the garden with wall (02). This was an ashlar block wall with brick buttresses and presumed to be original. However, it would appear that wall (02) is butted against wall (01), although this relationship was difficult to see due to ivy growing over both walls. The relatively modern nature of the rebuild to wall (01) must call into question the age of wall (02). Certainly wall (02) has more than one phase of work apparent.

## **5 FINDS**

### **5.1 Pottery**

Sherds of 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century Mass-produced White Earthenwares were noted from the made ground (14) and the topsoil (03). These were not retained.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

It was originally speculated that the main garden wall had simply collapsed over the years and its stones work was buried in the area where it fell. Upon investigation this was clearly not the case. It would appear to have been dismantled and in some cases the blocks reused for other walls in the vicinity, notably the lower garden in front of the main wall.

The wall was razed below ground level, it may well have been considered to obscure the view from the main house. The garden boundary changed to that of the low wall and a landscaped slope beyond rising towards the west.

Part of the wall was retained where it was closest to the church, probably to provide stability to the east-west garden wall and partly for safety, as the drop in ground level here is considerable. This section of the wall had undergone substantial rebuilding.

No evidence was seen of the building depicted on the first edition OS map of 1882 in the south western corner of the grounds. It is possible that the modern cut to allow work on the wall destroyed the majority of the remains of this building. The rest may have been destroyed when the bank was landscaped and the low garden wall was constructed.

The two walls (15) and (16) clearly form a gateway. This would have originally been set back to the west from the line of the wall. The curve of the drain indicates that the more northerly wall (16) bends towards the church. It would seem logical that the other would follow a similar route, probably forming a pathway between the two.

To allow for the rise in height to the church the old ground surfaced was terraced and retained by two walls (10) and (12) to the south of the putative pathway. A single retaining wall (17) was built to the north where the ground was lower.

Because the gate way is recessed compared to the wall it is possible that it may have formed an entrance to a *pentice* or covered way leading to the church. The bonded foundations with the main wall would indicate that it would have been an original feature presumably dating to the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.

## 7 ARCHIVE

### Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

<u>Paper record</u>	The primary site record
The project brief	
Written scheme of investigation	<u>Physical record</u>
The project report	Finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the County Museums' Store.

## 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994 *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*. Revised Sept 1999

Steane, J, undated *Hanwell Castle*. Unpublished client report.