



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

CHURCH FARMHOUSE, NORTHMOOR,

OXFORDSHIRE

SU 4207 0277

On behalf of

Mr. G. Ogilvie

AUGUST 2008

REPORT FOR Graeme Ogilvie
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Summary

A watching brief was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services at Church Farmhouse, Northmoor, Oxfordshire during the excavation of footings for an workshop and garages. In part topsoil overlying disturbed ground, elsewhere made ground was observed within the yard area; outside this area the topsoil overlay subsoil. A short length of limestone wall of unknown date was uncovered in the north eastern side of site. It ran southeast-east to northwest-west, and could either be part of old farmyard buildings associated with Church Farmhouse, or part of an even earlier structure or boundary wall.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located to the south of the church of St Denys and some eighty metres south of the road leading to Standlake (NGR SP 4207 0277). It is situated at about 64m OD and the underlying geology is First Terrace Gravel. The development was within a residential garden containing a number of sheds and outbuildings.

1.2 Planning Background

West Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission to demolish the existing stables and timber shed, and create a new service yard, with new garaging and a workshop. 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 was submitted by John Moore Heritage Services detailing how the requirements of the Brief would be met.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Church Farmhouse is a Grade II Listed Building dating to the later part of the seventeenth century. The adjacent Church of St Denys dates to the early thirteenth century and formed an integral part of the medieval settlement. Just to the east of it there is evidence for a small moated site. It has been suggested that this was a grange of Abingdon Abbey but there is a little to support this. There is documentary evidence of two buildings or houses west of the rectory in the vicinity of Church Farmhouse in 1381.

Directly to the south is an extensive spread of cropmarks that have been identified by aerial photography. This appears to represent later prehistoric and Romano British settlement and activity across an extensive tract of landscape. Archaeological investigation shows that features survive at a relatively shallow depth cut into the natural gravel. Post Roman activity within the village has effectively masked any cropmarks but there is no reason to doubt that the earlier features extend beneath the village footprint.

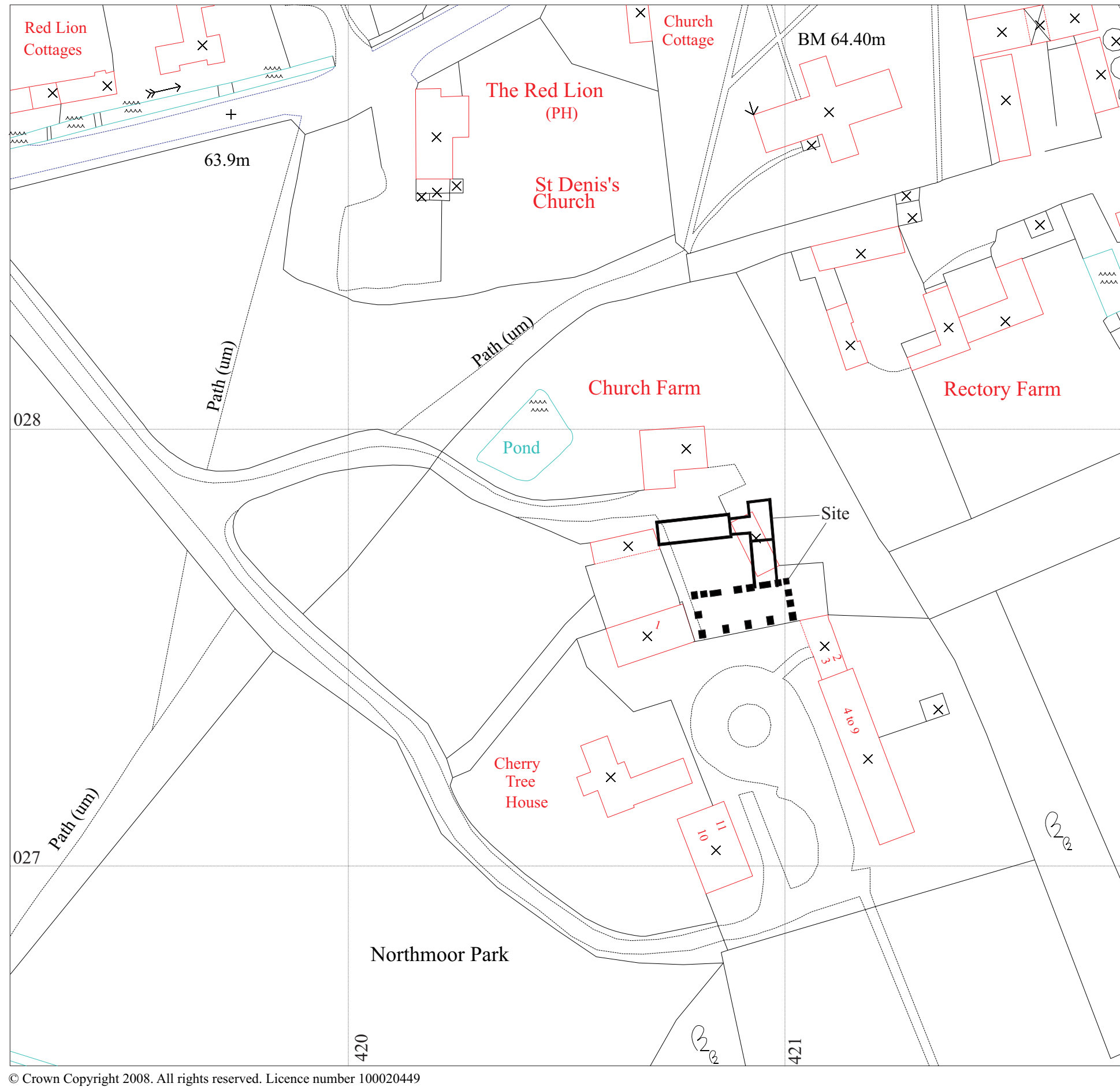


Figure 1. Site location.

The above information has been obtained from the County Archaeological Services' 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 development works

In particular:

- to record any remains relating to the known crop marks in the area
- to record any remains of the medieval buildings known from documentary sources

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

The excavation of the footings was monitored and the trench-sections cleaned and examined where necessary.

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.

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

4 RESULTS

All archaeological features were assigned individual context numbers. This number covered both the feature cut and fill, unless the feature was sample excavated by hand. Context numbers in () indicate deposits of material. A general description of the deposits is given.

The footings for the workshops running east-west on the southern boundary were excavated as pad foundations. These rectangular pads, measuring between approximately 1.6m x 1.7m, and 1.4m x 2.5m; were excavated to a depth of 1m, into the top of natural. The footings for the garages and storage sheds, running north-south away from the workshop, and east-west in front of the house; were excavated as foundation trenches along the line of the walls.

Undisturbed 'natural' ground (**05**) was orange/brown gravel, encountered at a depth of around 1m. This was overlain by (**04**), 0.1m of loose grey/black silty clay, possibly an older subsoil or cultivation soil. Above this lay (**03**), a 0.25m thick, friable orange/brown clay/gravel, possibly the old topsoil; this in turn was overlain by a 0.25m thick dark brown/black make-up layer (**02**), containing some stone and brick rubble. Above this, across the whole yard area, was (**01**) a layer of varying thickness (0.04m-0.4m) dark grey gravel hard-standing. Excavations situated closer to the house revealed much thicker layers of (**02**) and (**03**).

Within one of the foundation pads in the north-eastern corner of the new building, the foundations of a stone wall were uncovered (**06**) at about 0.5m below ground level. Made up of large, roughly shaped limestone blocks up to 0.5m deep, it ran in a roughly east-southeast to west-northwest direction (Fig. 2). It cut into the old subsoil layer, (**04**) and was overlain by made-up ground layer (**02**).

No finds were recovered other than modern material that was not retained.

5 DISCUSSION

The yard area to the south of Church Farmhouse has obviously been a focus for farming activities in the past. The construction of the original stables and timber sheds has disturbed these areas, and the courtyard area itself showed evidence of old brick rubble-laid surfaces and make-up layers that would have provided a better draining surface for the yard.

The wall seen running east-west in the north-eastern corner of the new workshops was only exposed for a length of around 2.5m, and its width is unknown, making it impossible to come to any conclusion as to its full extent. It was not seen in the foundation pad directly to the east; therefore must either have terminated, or turned direction before reaching this point. Furthermore, observations in the footings of the garages to the north of this area did not reveal anymore of this structure. It may have been the foundations of an older farm-building; or it could be an old boundary line for the back end of the known medieval properties to the west of the rectory stretching south from the old track-way seen running along the north-west and northern boundaries of the farmhouse, which could be part of the original route system .

6 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

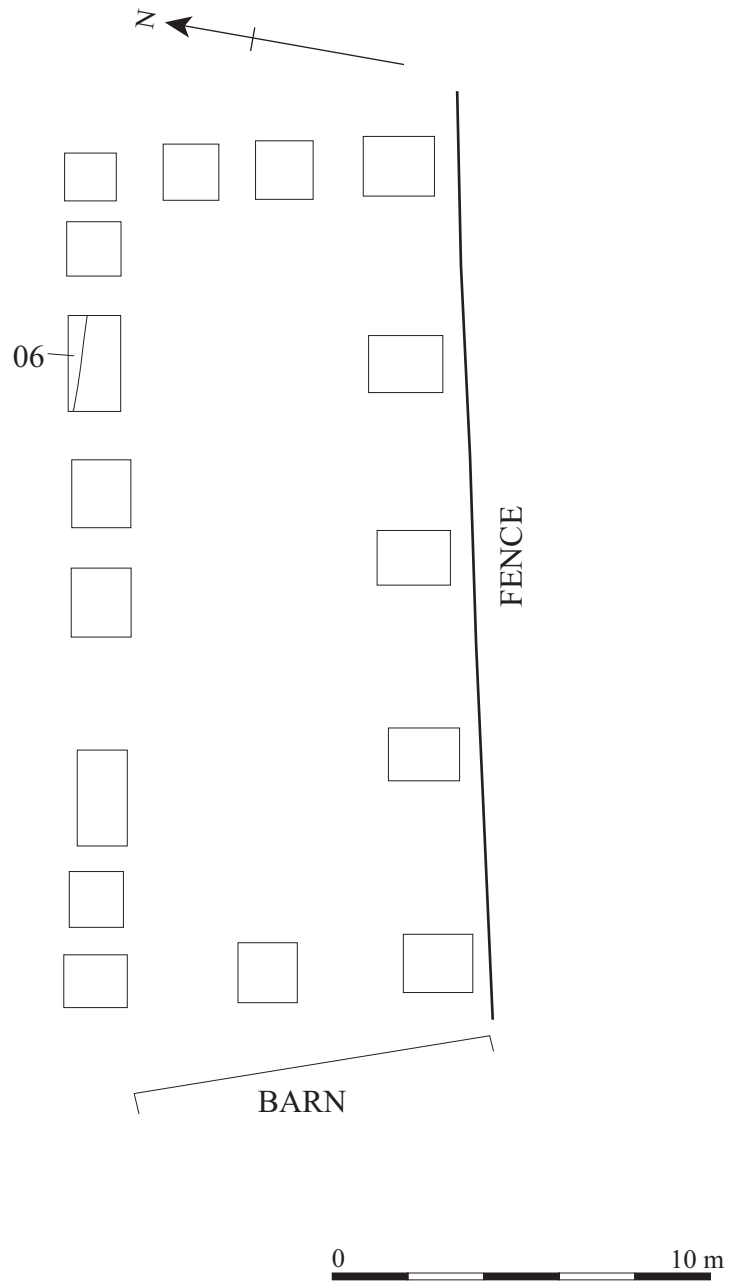


Figure 2. Workshop building

Paper Record

The project brief

Written Scheme of Investigation

The project report

The primary site records

The accession number for the archive is OXCMS : 2008 : 15