JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF

1. MOORSIGHTS, ODDINGTON

OXFRDSHIRE

SP 5526 1484

On behalf of

Port Meadow Developments Ltd.

AUGUST 2008

REPORT FOR   Port Meadow Developments Ltd
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Summary

An evaluation and a watching brief were carried out on this site by John Moore Heritage Services. Two trenches were excavated for the evaluation and the foundation trenches for the new buildings were observed for the watching brief. During the evaluation, the remains of three truncated pits were found in one trench; the area containing the pits had been reduced, most likely through use of the area as a garden over a long period of time. The pits contained animal bone and pottery of late 11th to 12th century date. One trench had no archaeological remains, although traces of a possible thinly cobbled surface were later observed in the section through this area.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located on the south-east side of the village, north east of St Andrews Church (NGR SP 5526 1484). The pre-existing use was as an overgrown garden. The site lies at approximately 64m OD and the geology is Oxford Clay and Kellaways Beds.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission was granted, under the reference number 06/01407/F for the erection of one dwelling with new access to the highway. At the time no archaeological investigation was requested as the medieval earthworks were not expected to extend as far as this side of the green. A later application for the erection of 2No. two storey terraced houses, accesses and off-street parking spaces under the reference number 08/01029/F was approved. Attached to the permission was a condition for a staged programme of archaeological work. As a first stage an archaeological evaluation of the site was required. This was carried out to a *Brief* prepared by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS). Due to the presence of archaeological remains a watching brief was then required during the excavation for foundations.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site is located to the west of a series of well preserved earthworks of the Deserted Medieval Village (PRN 5847)(SP 5540 1474) but at the time of the initial application (06/01407/F), it was not expected that the earthworks would extend as far as the limited area of the site and so no archaeological investigations were requested. Since then archaeological deposits were uncovered to the east of the site during a watching brief in June 2007; in the form of two ditches, one of which was thought to be Saxon in date.

This ditch is thought to be part of a Saxon enclosure ditch, which can be seen on the surface as a slight earthwork, running to the east of the site and turning to the south of the late 13th century church (PRN 5285; SP 5525 1480). It would appear that the development site was located within this enclosure. Given its location just 40m north of the Church of St Andrew (PRN 5285) there was a possibility that deposits related

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BM
64.55m

64.1m

Wirepool Cottage

Glebe Cottage

Drain

Pond

Pond

150

Balliol House

Pondoki

Beyond the Pond

Oriel House

Lincoln House

Shelter

64.1m

Glebe Barn

Keble House

Ruskin End

Crickhollow

Manor Farm

Brasenose Corner

Otters Hill

Milford House

Pond

College Farm

65.4m

Wyvering House

Tanglewigs

Homeside

149

LB

65.6m

Oddington

TCB
63.1m

Logg Cott

Mykonas

Dry Husk Barn

Kotmalee House

2   1

Locksmead

The Green

60.8m

58.9m

Site

Tr 1

Otteley

Former path

Tr 2

Medcraft Farmhouse

1

2

Moor Sights

Church Cottage

Cross (restored)

65.7m

St Andrew's Church

Barnside

BM 67.15m

64.8m

0 m   50 m

Rectory Farm

Figure 1. Site and trench location

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to the early medieval deserted medieval village and to the possible Saxon enclosure could be disturbed during this development.

In Edward the Confessor's time Oddington, assessed at 3 hides and half a virgate, was held freely by Alwi, but by a charter dated 1065 the Confessor granted this estate together with Islip to the Abbot of Westminster. The king died before the abbey had taken possession, and William the Conqueror appears to have granted Oddington manor to Hugh de Grantmesnil, Sheriff of Leicestershire, from whom it passed to his daughter Adeline, the wife of Roger d'Ivry. In 1086 she was holding it from the king, *in commendatione* as it was said, perhaps while the claims of Westminster Abbey were being investigated. These were eventually recognized, for on Adeline's death about IIII the manor did not descend either to her heirs or to those of Roger d'Ivry. The abbey remained overlord from the 12th century until the Dissolution: it administered the manor as a part of its liberty of Islip, and Oddington's lord therefore owed suit of court twice yearly at Islip. After the Reformation the manor was granted to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, and in the early 17th century was known as 'Westminsterside' (VCH 1959)

The history of the parish may well go back to the 6th century. The Saxon settlement there was manorialized by the time of the Domesday survey. The manor then had sufficient land for 3 ploughs, but in fact possessed 4; 2 belonged to the demesne which had 2 serfs, and 2 to the customary tenants, 10 villeins (*villani*) and 4 bordars. There were also 40 acres of meadow and a stretch of pasture, 3 by 2 furlongs. A papal bull of 1146, confirming the exemption of Thame Abbey from paying tithes on its lands, including those of its Oddington Grange, implies that there was a church at Oddington by the mid-12th century at least (ibid).

On the Ordnance Survey map of 1884 the site is shown as lying within an open area of land.

2   AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The initial aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation for the evaluation 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.
- In particular to establish whether there are any associated occupation deposits or activity of Saxon or medieval date.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

These were amended for the watching brief to:

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.
- In particular

      o   to determine the reason for the difference in levels across the site
      o   to record any further evidence relating to the Saxon and/or early medieval activity known on the site

3   STRATEGY

3.1   Research Design

In response to a *Brief* issued by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services a scheme of investigation for an evaluation was designed by JMHS and agreed with the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of two trenches across the site (Fig. 1). A further Written Scheme of Investigation was agreed with OCAS for the watching brief. This involved an archaeologist monitoring the excavation of the foundation trenches.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigations* . The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2   Methodology

The sample level was to be achieved by the excavation of 20m of trenching 1.5m wide. The presence of electric cables underground resulted in both trench positions being moved a metre to the west. Two trenches, each 10m long and 1.5m wide were excavated. (Figure 1)

The trenches were excavated by a JCB fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological deposits. The foundation trenches were 0.9m wide.

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. A photographic record was produced. Trench 1 was backfilled after recording, trench 2 was left open at the request of the owner, to mitigate any potential further work required.

4   RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [ ] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material. The trench number precedes the individual context number so (1/03) is deposit 03 within Trench 1.
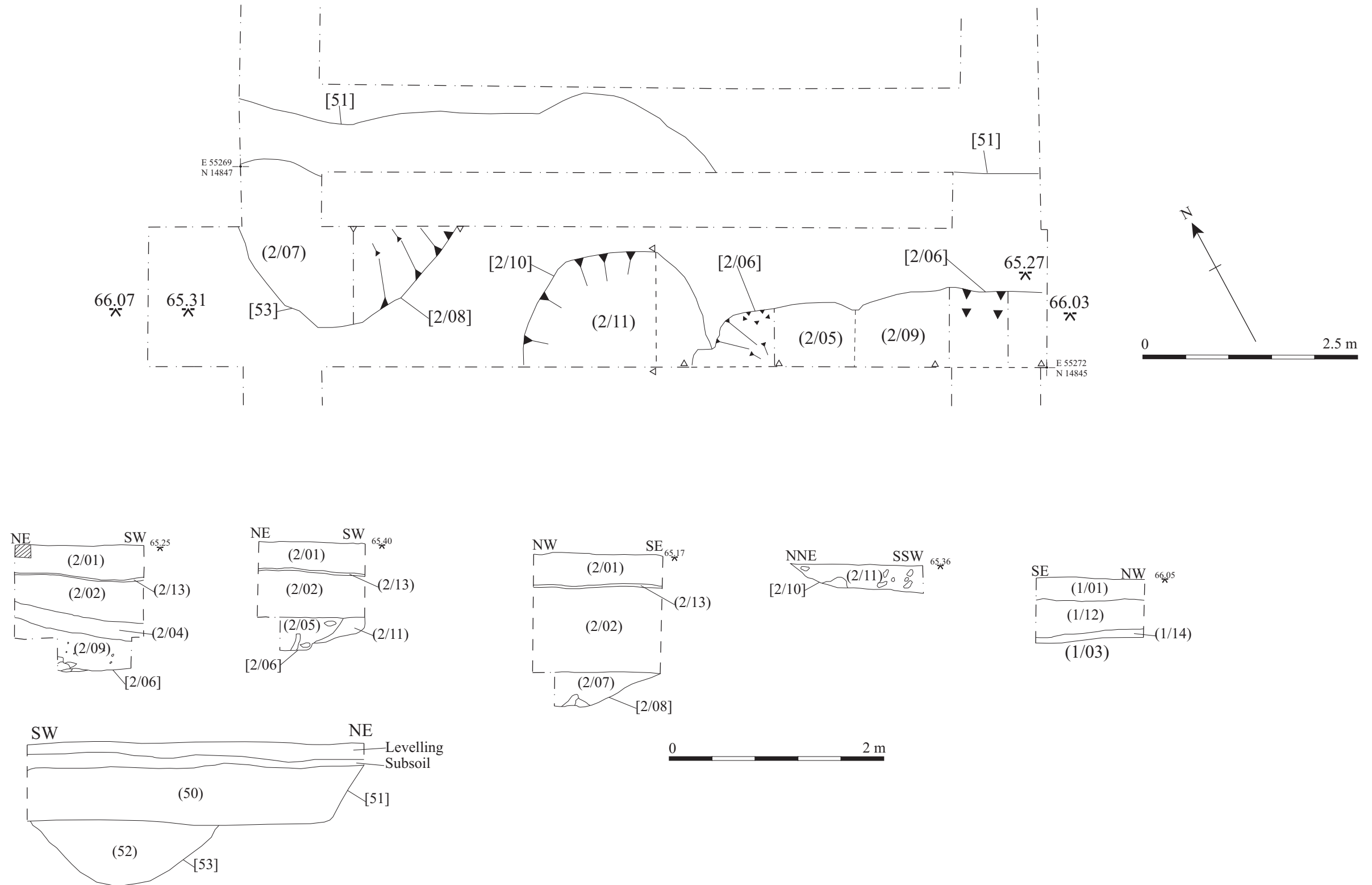
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Figure 2. Plan and sections of trench 2 and foundation trenhces

4.1 Trench 1

The topsoil (1/**12**) across the area had already been partially stripped off, and a levelling layer of hardcore (1/**01**) had been laid within the area of the new build. The topsoil then overlay a thin (0.15m) transition/subsoil layer of grey clayey material (1/**14**), which in turn overlay the natural, a yellow-orange clay matrix with limestone fragments (1/**03**) (Fig. 2). There was a slight slope to the natural, down towards the south east, where the top of natural was at 65.64m OD. A small feature (not numbered) was found in the far southern corner which had gradual sloping sides and an amorphous shape. During the watching brief this was identified as part of [51] – see below.

4.2 Trench 2 (Figure 2)

The natural in this trench was not encountered at the same level as in T1. The top of natural in this trench was at 65.27m OD. The hardcore levelling layer overlaid a truncated topsoil (2/**13**), the subsoil layer (2/**02**) was much thicker in this trench (0.45m), consisting of a dark grey-brown clay loam. It was slightly deeper towards the north-western end of the trench. The natural at this lower level consisted of a more solid limestone, coming apart in roughly bedded horizontal layers (2/**15**). This was cut by two sub-circular pits, [2/**08**] and [2/**10**]. Pit [2/**08**] was filled by (2/**07**), dark grey brown loamy clay with small rough inclusions of limestone, it contained finds of late 11th -12th pottery and animal bone. Pit [2/**10**] was filled by (2/**11**), a dark grey-brown loamy clay, this also contained similarly dated pottery and animal bone. This feature was cut by another pit, [2/**06**] which was possibly a much larger pit, at least 3.5m long or was two intercutting pits. Two sondages were excavated, one through the south-eastern corner, where it ran under the section; and one at the north-western end. Fill (2/**05**) was seen in the north-western section, and (2/**09**) was recorded at the same level in the south-eastern corner. They were very similar in appearance; however, (2/**09**) was overlain by a capping layer, (2/**04**). The capping layer consisted of friable orange-yellow degraded limestone fragments in a brown clay matrix, which had slumped into the pit at this end. The pottery from the primary fill (2/05 & 2/09) dated again to the late 11th-12th century.

4.3 The Watching Brief

The watching brief involved watching the excavation of the foundation trenches for the new buildings. These cut across the areas between the positions of the original evaluation trenches. The thick layer (**50**), originally recorded as sub-soil layer (2/**02**) seen in Trench 2; was seen to as the fill of a steep sided cut [**51**], leading to a flattish base, cut into the natural. The sub-circular pit [**53**], originally identified as [2/08], was seen further as an irregular feature 2.3m wide E/W and 2.5m N/S, with gradual sloping sides and rounded base. This was sealed by fill (52) of cut [**51**], which truncated it. The pit was filled with dark brown-black silty clay (**52**), with small limestone fragments and a few charcoal inclusions; it was 0.6m at its deepest. Traces of a layer of thin rounded limestone fragments (54) were seen in section on the north-eastern side of site. They underlay the subsoil (1/14) and overlay the natural.

5   FINDS

5.1   **The Pottery** *by Paul Blinkhorn*

The pottery assemblage comprised 36 sherds with a total weight of 298g. It comprised mainly groups dating to the later 11th or 12th century, although a single sherd of early/middle Saxon hand-built pottery was also noted.

The pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD975-1350. 16 sherds, 96g.
OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 19 sherds, 198g.

In addition, the following was noted:

EMS: Early/middle Saxon hand-built ware, c AD450 – 850. Sparse quartz up to 0.5mm, rare flecks of mica and calcareous material up to 1mm. 1 sherd, 4g.

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*. The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region, and suggests that there was short-lived activity at the site in the late 11th - 12th centuries. Certainly, Brill/Boarstall ware (Oxford fabric OXAM) is entirely absent, despite being extremely common at medieval sites of the 13th century or later in the county. This indicates very strongly that activity at the site had ceased before AD1200. The assemblage was generally in good condition, with little evidence of abrasion suggesting that there was medieval occupation in the immediate vicinity of these excavations.

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

		EMS		OXAC		OXY		
Tr	Cntxt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	Date
U/S				2	9	1	17	U/S
2	5					1	11	L11thC
2	7	1	4	9	57	11	123	L11thC
2	9			1	3	3	30	L11thC
2	11			3	18	2	15	L11thC
2	13			1	9	1	2	L11thC
	Total	1	4	16	96	19	198	

5.2   **Other finds**

Fifty-three fragments of animal bone were recovered, from six contexts (2/**05**), (2/**07**), (2/**09**), (2/**11**), (2/**13**) and unstratified. They were in a fragmentary condition, some with quite abraded surfaces. This included species such as sheep/goat, cow, and pig; some with signs of butchery; however, the assemblage is not large enough to warrant further work.

Two fragments of undiagnostic ceramic building material were recovered from (2/**07**); and two small abraded charcoal fragments were recovered from (2/**11**), not enough to warrant further work.

6   DISCUSSION

Local information has a track running along the south side of northern boundary of the site. Slight evidence for this was seen as rounded limestone fragments under the subsoil. It is unknown what width the road was but it seems that much of it had been removed, probably during the use of the area as a garden.

To the south of these was a series of pits. All these pits date to the late 11th to 12th century. They may have been dug as rubbish pits. Their location appears to respect the track suggesting that the track was in use from the late 11th century. It is therefore likely that the building they were associated with fronted the main road. The building is likely to be just to the south of this development site. The medieval pits found here confirm that the original medieval village was spread over a larger area than originally thought. It is possible that the later 17th century terrace of cottages constructed along the roadside destroyed what remained of the earlier buildings.

At a later date the pits were truncated by a large cut parallel to the track. It is possible that this was for quarrying stone although it did not appear to be particularly deep, only *c*. 0.4m although it may have been deeper further to the south. The limestone in the Oddington area is good for house building and roadmaking as old quarries to the south of the village attest (VCH 1959).

 The sherd of early/middle Saxon pottery is probably associated with the use of the Saxon enclosure known from the earthwork boundary to the east and south. This enclosure is probably associated with the 6th century Saxon cemetery found in the Rectory Garden in 1815 (ibid).

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