



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
AND RECORDING ACTION**

AT

LAND AT MILCOMBE HALL, HORTON LANE,

MILCOMBE, OXFORDSHIRE

(NGR SU 4126 3477)

On behalf of

SB Developments (Warks) LLP

June 2009

REPORT FOR SB Developments (Warks) LLP
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Summary

A watching brief and recording action was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services after and during the ground works at Land at Milcombe Hall, Milcombe, Oxfordshire. The remains of at least two buildings were located, at least one of which is depicted on the OS map of 1885. Two earlier walls were also recorded, one with an associated floor surface. These may indicate the presence of further earlier buildings.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located on the north side of the village, north of Bloxham Lane and east of Horton Lane (NGR SP 4126 3477). The site was formerly used as a pig farm and is currently in domestic use. The site lies at approximately 130m OD and the geology is shown as Upper Lias Clay.

The site had already been the subject of ground reduction by mechanical excavation. This had reduced the ground level by approximately 0.3m on the east side of the site increasing to 1m at the rear (west).

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission was originally sought in September 2007 for the construction of two new dwellings and access under the planning reference 07/01366/OUT. This was refused in October 2008. Due to the possibility of below ground archaeological deposits being disturbed during the development a predetermination archaeological field evaluation was requested but this was not asked for as the application was going to be refused. The decision was taken to appeal in January 2008 under the reference 08/00008/REFAPP and was overturned in May 2008. Contrary to Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services' (OCAS) advice the planning inspector attached a planning condition requiring that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during the development. This was in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The application was considered to be in an area of archaeological potential. The site is located on the western edge of the medieval core of the village. It is also located 70m to the north east of the shrunken medieval remains of the village (PRN 14000; SP 4117 3469). The remains consist of the earthworks of house platforms, holloways, ditches and a pond in two fields between the church and Manor Farmhouse, a C17th Manor House (PRN 13999; SP 4117 3476). Along with the standing earthworks there is likely to be a number of medieval deposits surviving below ground. It was thought possible that further aspects of this settlement could survive within the application area and be disturbed by this application.



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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.

In particular:

- to record any remains relating to the medieval activity known in the area

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 site to clean and record the exposed sections in the area of the recent ground disturbance. The exposed new level of the area was also cleaned and the archaeological remains recorded.

At a site meeting with Richard Oram (Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services) further work in the form of limited hand excavation of the area of buildings was requested. This was carried out along with a watching brief on the excavation for foundations in areas of archaeological potential. The area for the soakaway was also excavated down to the top of the natural.

4 RESULTS (Figures 2 and 3)

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 () show feature fills or deposits of material.

The natural geological deposit in the area was not the expected Upper Lias was Marlstone Rock Bed that consisted of c. 80% stone in a matrix of orange-brown clay matrix (03).

Above this was a subsoil of mid orange-brown silt-clay (02) containing frequent stone fragments. This layer varied in thickness from 0.1m to 0.2m in a few places. To the south-west of the site this subsoil was sealed by a 0.2m thick layer of dark grey silty

loam (05). It was in turn sealed by a layer up to 0.2m thick of pale orange-brown sandy clay (04) that contained brick fragments.

The uppermost layer was a dark brown-grey-black sandy loam topsoil (01) that was between 0.1 and 0.2m thick.

Due to the nature of the site the archaeological remains had already been exposed and thus it was impossible to relate these stratigraphically to the soil sequence seen in section. The remains of two walls and two buildings were noted:

Wall 1

The earliest wall (16) noted was cut 23 into the natural (03), approximately 6m long aligned roughly northeast to southwest and was 0.4m wide. It survived as 4 courses, 0.48m high, and was constructed of roughly dressed limestone. Whether it forms part of a building is unclear, it was far too damaged during the excavation of the area to be sure.

Abutted to the east side of this wall (16) and overlying the foundation cut 23 was a stone floor surface (24) constructed of large flagstones (plate 2). These may represent either an external yard surface or perhaps an internal floor of a building. This floor appeared to continue under the wall (13) of Building 1.

Wall (16) had been cut by a later wall (15) and by a later rectangular pit 28 that was filled with a dark brown silty clay (26) containing small angular stones.

Wall 2

This wall (15) was aligned roughly east to west and was traced for at least 2.8m. It was 0.4m wide. It appears to have cut through wall (16) and not to bond with it as originally thought. In turn it is itself apparently cut by wall (13) of Building 1, although modern disturbance (20) at the junction of the two prohibited an exact relationship.

Building 1

This building was only partially uncovered, the rest appears to be buried and presumed preserved to the east of the site. Remains of three walls survived. The first wall (13) was at least 6m long, 0.8m wide and aligned roughly north-west to south-east. It survived 3 courses high to a height of 0.4m and was constructed from rough limestone blocks and was cut 25 into the natural (03).

At its southern most extent it formed a right-angled corner with wall (12) that ran in a rough south-easterly direction for at least 2.5m before continuing under the section. This wall was also 0.8m wide and again survived 3 courses high to a height of 0.4m (plate 1).

At the northern end of wall (13) it formed another right-angled corner with wall (14) that ran in a rough south-easterly direction for at least 1.5m before petering out. This wall was 0.4m wide and may represent an internal division as it was unclear if wall (13) continued to the north-west.

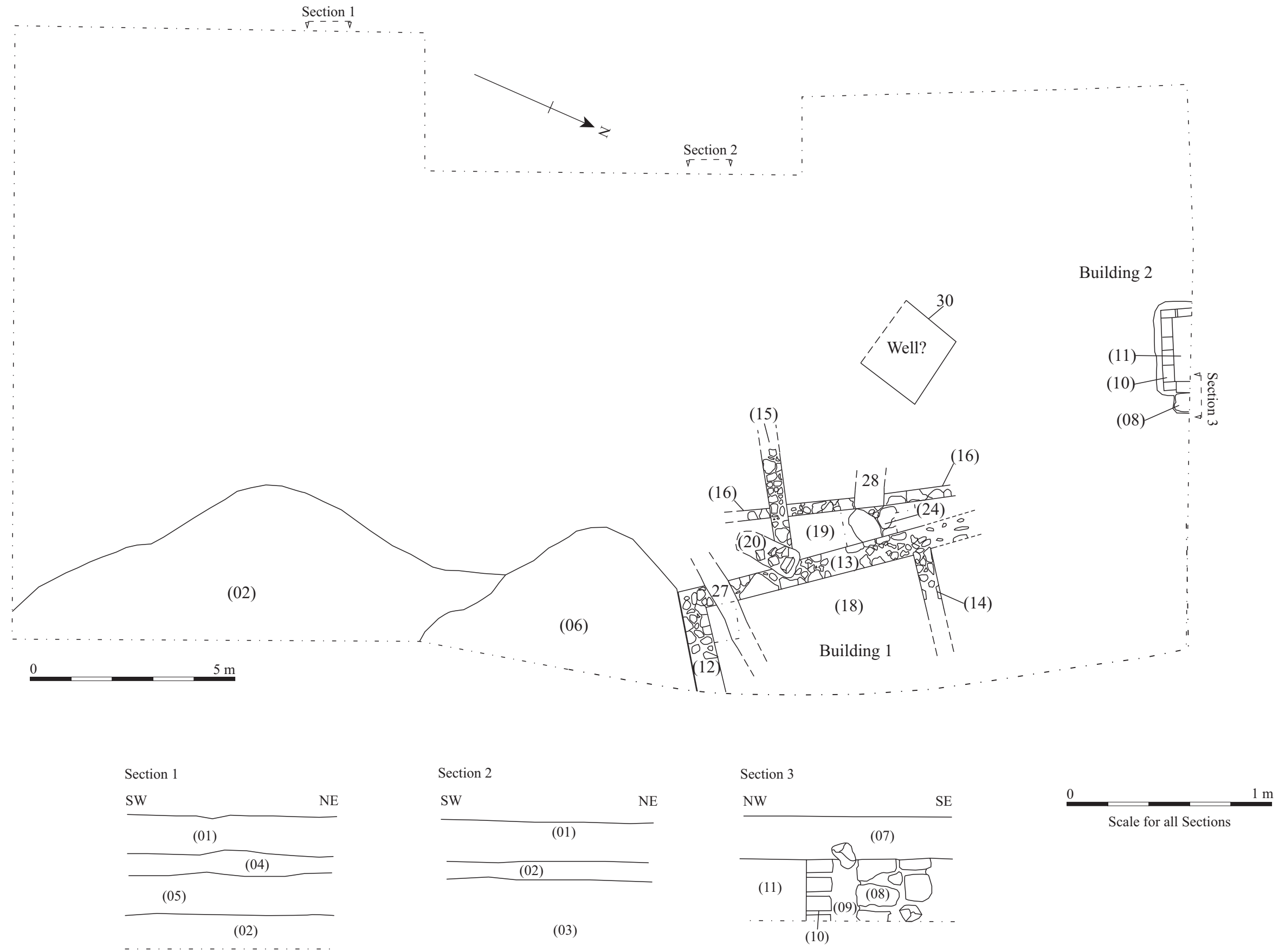


Figure 2. Site Plan and Sections

The area enclosed by these walls consisted of a 0.3m layer of grey-brown sandy clay (18) with flecks of charcoal and lime mortar. There appeared to be the remnants of cobbles in places, but the area had been heavily disturbed possibly during demolition or by later activity.

This later activity included a linear cut 27 aligned roughly northeast to southwest that was at least 3m long and 0.8m wide. It was filled with a grey silt (22) with a large quantity of stone and slate. Close by was a rectangular area (20) of stone and concrete blocks. Both of these features cut through wall (13) and may relate to drainage associated with the recently demolished pig farming facility.

A large irregular pit (06) was cut into the subsoil (02) to the south of and up against wall (12). It measured over 3m by 5m and was not excavated, but contained on its surface a dark grey sandy clay with ash and small stones.

Building 2

All that was seen of this building was the remains of a rectangular fireplace or pit. This feature appeared to have been cut into the natural (03) and was built of red brick (10) that survived up to 5 courses, 0.35m high. The southern and western sides were two bricks thick while the eastern wall was only a single one. Here it had been constructed against a 0.4m wide rough dressed limestone wall (08). This survived to a height of 0.3m, its full length remains unknown. The 0.15m wide gap between the wall (08) and the fireplace (10) was filled with a deposit of blue-grey clay (09) that displayed signs of heat scorching in places (section 3).

The interior of the fireplace (10) was filled with a 0.05m thick layer of charcoal and ash covered by a dark grey sandy clay (11) containing brick rubble that was 0.35m thick. No relationship could be made between this fireplace and the other structures could be identified. Sealing the fireplace was a 0.2m thick layer of modern hardcore, the subsoil and topsoil having been previously removed.

Well

To the northwest of wall (16) was a square cut 30 into the bedrock. It measured 2m by 2m and was filled with loose stone in a grey silty clay matrix that displayed several voids. Upon sample investigation this cut had vertical edges. It was thought to be a possible well, although it could be a further drainage pit as seen to the south cutting wall (13).

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery

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

Sherds of mid 19th – 20th century Mass-produced White Earthenwares (WHEW) were noted from the topsoil (01). These were not retained.

A single sherd of Red Earthenware (OXDR), dated 1550+ and a single sherd of Creamware (CRM), dated late 18th – early 19th century, were recovered from the surface of pit (06).

5.2 Environmental Remains

No environmental samples were taken due to the nature of the deposits encountered.

6 DISCUSSION

Building 1 appears to be depicted on the 1st edition OS map of 1885. A further building exists to the north and the structure identified as Building 2 may be part of this.

The buildings shown on the 1885 map are also present on the 1900 map. These depict boundary walls linking three individual buildings in the area. It is possible that wall (15) is one of these linking walls. These buildings are also present on the 1923 and 1951 OS maps. No wells are noted on any of these maps.

Although the remains of the shrunken medieval village (PRN 14000) lie just to the north no material of this date was recovered during the watching brief, and it is likely that all features recorded relate to buildings possibly associated with the Hall and are 17th century or later.

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 2001

Mellor, M, 1984 A summary of the key assemblages. A study of pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from fourteen pits, dating from the 16th to the 19th century in TG Hassall, CE Halpin and M Mellor, Excavations at St Ebbe's *Oxoniensia* **49**, 181-219.

Mellor, M, 1994 Oxford Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region *Oxoniensia* **59**, 17-217



Plate 1. Corner of Walls (12) and (13)

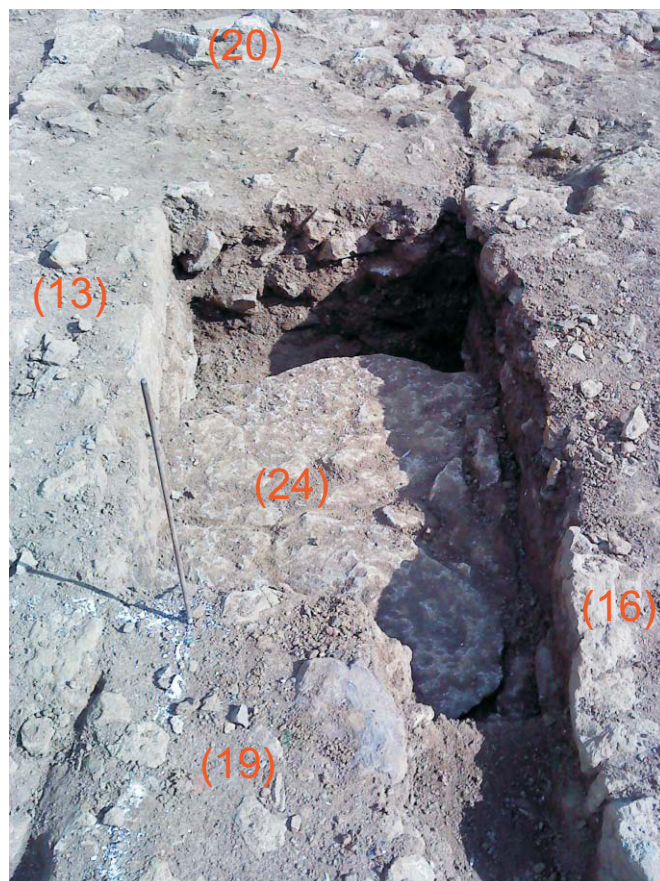


Plate 2. Flooring (24)