



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

WOOLGATE CENTRE AND WITAN WAY CAR PARK,

WITNEY, OXFORDSHIRE

SP 3571 0974

On behalf of

CgMs Consulting

JULY 2009

REPORT FOR CgMs Consulting
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted an archaeological evaluation by two trenches on land associated with Units 1 and 2 of the Woolgate Shopping Centre, Witney, Oxfordshire between the 7th- 9th July 2009. The evaluation revealed a 19th century building as well as a late post-medieval pit and several services. No earlier features were identified.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located between the High Street and Witan Way in Witney (NGR SP 3571 0974). It is adjacent to the Waitrose Supermarket. The development area includes Units 1 and 2 of the Woolgate Shopping Centre and part of the hard landscaped car park to the north and east. The underlying geology is White Limestone close to the junction with Forest Marble clays with limestone (Geological Survey of Great Britain. Witney Sheet 236. Solid and Drift Geology 1:50,000).

1.2 Planning Background

In 2007 planning permission was sought from West Oxfordshire District Council to demolish Units 1 and 2 of the Woolgate Shopping Centre and to erect a larger replacement building on the site and incorporating part of the existing car park (06/1681/P/FP). It was thought impractical to evaluate the site for potential archaeological remains prior to determination of the application. Accordingly a condition requiring a staged programme of archaeological investigation was attached to the permission.

The Archaeological Evaluation was designed to establish the presence/absence and condition of any archaeological deposits thought to be present within the site in order to help formulate any future mitigation strategies, if necessary. This is in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan Policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site is located on the east side of the medieval core of Witney that is centred on the Market Square and the 16th century Buttercross (SAM 6). Medieval activity with burgrave plots radiating from the High Street has been revealed in previous archaeological investigations. The development site was thought to have been subject to some truncation when levelling for the car park took place. However archaeological investigation just to the north revealed medieval features surviving below the car park surface.

CgMs Consulting considered that the site has been used as part of a gas works with historic maps showing the positions of two gas holders on the proposed development site. However Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) in his superimposing of the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map over the

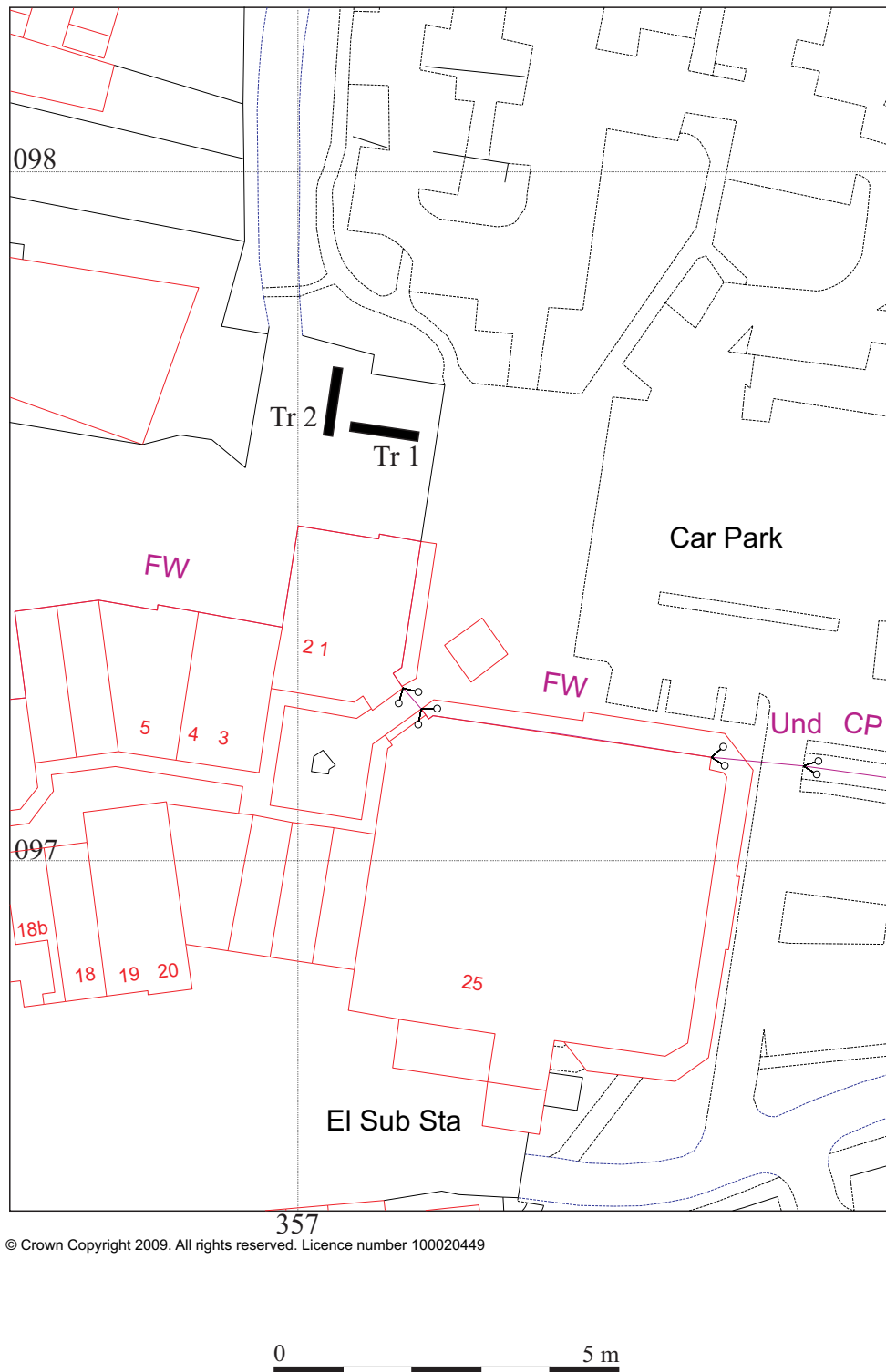


Figure 1. Trench location

modern mapping shows that the area evaluated lies outside the Gas Works and that the gas holders are further south and immediately north of the Waitrose supermarket.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation 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 were any surviving remains associated with the medieval town and to determine their level of survival and significance in relation to the proposed development.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A scheme of investigation was designed by CgMs Consulting as was carried out by JMHS to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with CgMs Consulting and OCAS. The work involved the excavation of two trial trenches (Fig. 1) as a first phase of evaluation. There is contingency for a second phase of evaluation following demolition of the present building should OCAS require it.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1999) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The first phase of the evaluation was the excavation two trenches each 1.5m wide and 10m across part of the service yard to the rear (north of the building). The second stage contingency is for a further two 20m x 1.5m trenches within the footprints of Units 1 and 2 of the Woolgate Centre after demolition has been completed.

Excavation took place with a 5 tonne excavator using a ditching bucket following the breaking out and removal of concrete hard standing. Mechanical excavation took place down to the top of the highest significant archaeological horizon, or natural undisturbed geology, whichever was the higher. The resulting surfaces were hand cleaned and potential archaeological features and deposits were sampled excavated by hand in order to meet the aims as defined above.

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. The trenches were backfilled after recording.

Mr Hugh Coddington, Deputy County Archaeological Officer to Oxford County Council monitored the work.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in () indicate fills or deposits of material whilst numbers referring to features themselves are shown without brackets.

4.1 Excavation Results (Figure 2)

The trenches were located as close as possible to those indicated on the Written Scheme of Investigation. Trench 2 however was moved c.2m further northwards to avoid damaging a water borehole and a possible storm water service. The trenches were issued with a set of context numbers which, as per normal JMHS recording procedures, had the trench number preceding each context number issued. Context numbers in () indicate feature fills or deposits of material. Those without brackets refer to features themselves. The natural observed as deposit (04) in trench 1 for example was recorded as (1/04).

Trench 1 (Figure 2)

This trench was aligned approximately E-W and was 10m long. A possible feature identified towards the middle of the trench and apparently cutting through the mid orange-brown clay natural (1/04) was investigated and found to be the result of root action.

Overlying deposit (1/04) was a slightly darker orange-brown very slightly silty clay (1/10) measuring 0.30m in thickness. Although very similar in both colour and composition to deposit (1/04), deposit (1/10) was found to contain occasional fragments of bone and two sherds of pottery dating from after the early 12th century.

In the S facing section, deposit (1/10) was noted to be overlain by a mid brown-grey silty clay containing occasional to moderate limestone fragments (1/09) measuring 0.26m in thickness. Close to the W end of the trench this was cut by pit 1/16 (Fig. 2, Section 1.4) with a moderately steep eastern edge and a relatively flat base that was 0.72m deep and at least 1.86m wide. Pit 1/16 contained two fills. The earliest fill

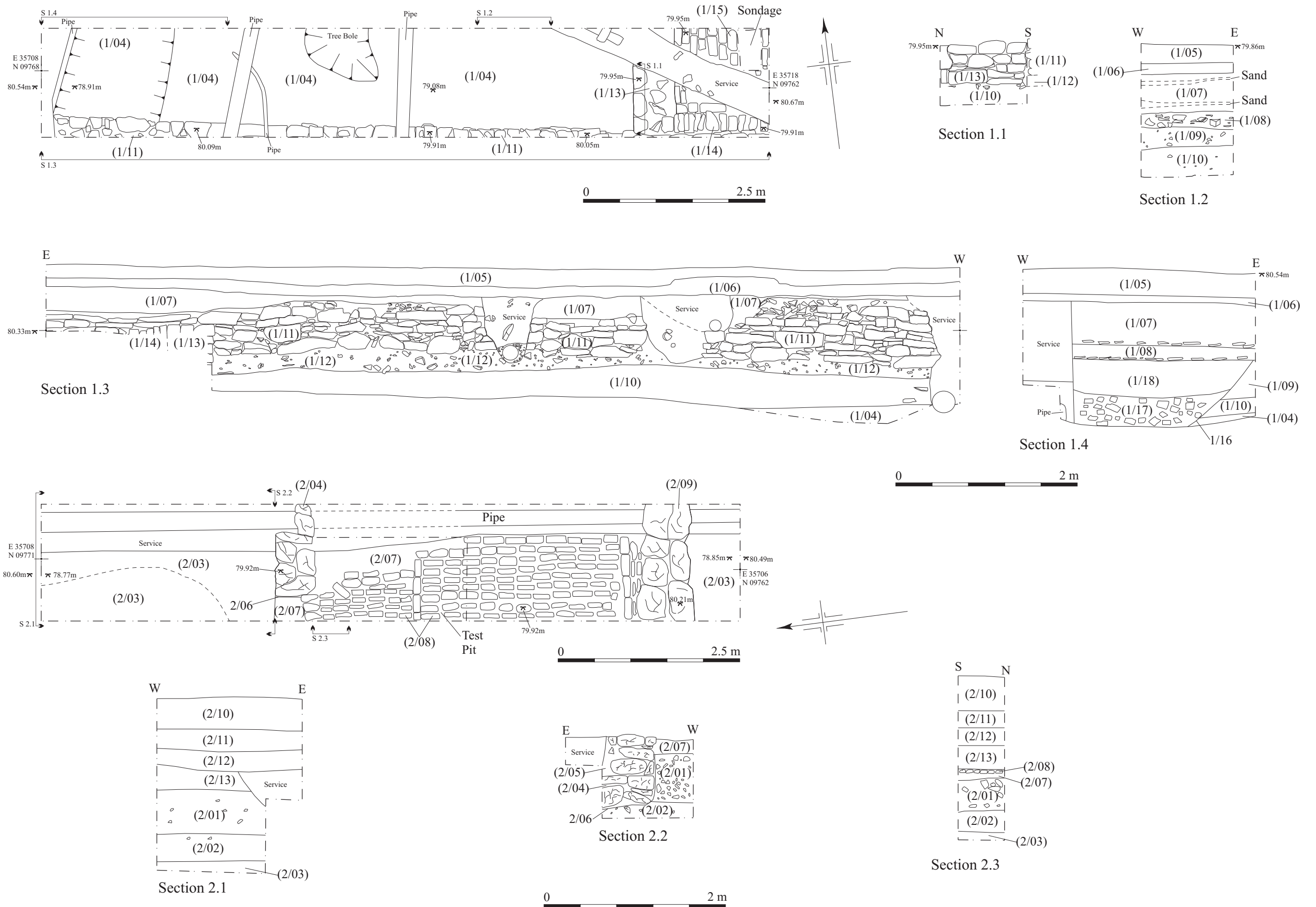


Figure 2. Trench 1 and 2 plans and sections

(1/17) was composed of limestone rubble with occasional brick fragments 0.32m thick that was overlain by a mixed mid grey-brown silty clay fill (1/18) 0.40m thick. Pit 1/16 was sealed by deposit (1/08), a pale creamy-white compacted limestone layer 0.18m thick containing occasional pieces of slate and fragments of brick.

In the N facing section, physically cutting deposit (1/10) was construction cut 1/19. This contained wall 1/11 which continued the entire length of the trench made up of roughly hewn and randomly coursed limestone blocks on an approximate E-W alignment. The lower courses of wall were bonded with dark grey clay whilst the upper courses were bonded with a sandy pale yellow mortar. A maximum of nine courses were observed. Wall 1/11 was built on a foundation composed of a firm mid grey-brown sandy clay with very frequent small and medium sized fragments of limestone (1/12). Four small sherds of pottery recovered from the edge of this deposit dating to the 12th to early 14th century could well have come from deposit (1/10) instead. Due to the positioning of the trench, it was difficult to see if the deposits noted above deposit (1/10) up to and including deposit (1/08) in the S facing section were cut by the construction cut 1/19 or if they simply built up beside the wall following its creation. Evidence from Trench 2 suggests the former to be more likely. However, no obvious cuts were noted during the excavation of the trench.

Towards the E end of the trench wall 1/11 was abutted by later wall 1/13. This wall was also constructed using roughly hewn and randomly coursed limestone blocks with a light yellow sandy mortar.

On the eastern side of wall 1/13 and respecting both this wall and wall 1/11, a limestone block flooring had been laid in neat tight rows (1/14) / (1/15). A sondage placed through this flooring showed the blocks to have been laid on their sides with no bonding material, resting on a bedding layer of mid orange-yellow gravelly sand (1/01) 0.10m thick. Below this was a mid grey/brown silty clay 0.25m thick with the occasional fragment of machine cut brick and frequent fragments of limestone (1/02) noted to be very similar to and likely to be the same as deposit (1/09). Two sherds of pottery dating from the 19th century were recovered from this deposit. This in turn overlay a mid orangey grey-brown slightly silty clay (1/03) thought to be the same as deposit (1/10) measuring 0.35m in thickness which sealed natural (1/04). This sondage did not reveal evidence for a continuation of deposit (1/08), as could reasonably be expected, which overlay deposit (1/09) elsewhere. This could be either that this deposit did not continue as far as the sondage, was deposited after the wall 1/13 was built and simply butted up against it or had been removed to allow the gravelly sand bedding layer (1/01) to be deposited for the construction of the floor. The presence of a later service cutting through wall 1/13 trench hindered an interpretation.

Sealing both deposit (1/08) and flooring layer (1/14) / (1/15) was a black compacted layer of clinker with very occasional fragments of brick (1/07) measuring 0.40m in thickness. A single sherd of pottery dating from the 19th century was recovered from this deposit.

Cutting through this layer were four service trenches. Three of these contained a cast iron pipe and were on an approximate N-S alignment whilst the example furthest E on an approximate SE-NW alignment contained a ceramic foul water pipe. All of these were backfilled with the clinker.

Overlaying these service trenches was deposit (1/06), a compacted mid orange-yellow sandy gravel make up layer measuring 0.10m in thickness which was sealed by 0.25m of reinforced concrete (1/05) that in turn completed the stratigraphic sequence.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 10m long and was aligned approximately N-S. Overlying a mid red-orange clay natural with evidence of natural banding towards the northern end (2/03) was a mid orange-brown sandy clay with occasional to moderate gravel inclusions (2/02) measuring 0.30m in thickness. This in turn was overlain by a 0.50m of mid brown-grey clayey silt containing occasional to moderate fragments of brick and unidentifiable ceramic building material (2/01) and six sherds of pottery dating from the 19th century.

A construction cut 2/06 for wall 2/04 was observed cutting through (2/01). It is also likely that a construction cut for wall 2/09 also cuts through this horizon but such a cut was not apparent during machining. The two walls ran parallel to each other and were constructed in a similar fashion, both made from roughly hewn and randomly coursed limestone blocks with a pale yellow sandy mortar. Wall (2/06) however was observed to finish within the trench unlike wall (2/09) which continued either side. A loose dark red-brown sandy silt mixed with a creamy mortar (2/05) was used to fill the gap between wall (2/04) and construction cut 2/06 following its construction.

Of note, wall 2/09, thought initially to be a continuation of wall (1/11) within Trench 1, was set slightly further northwards. This could mean that either they are two separate walls rather than a continuation of the same example or, possibly, the wall either dog legs slightly. Also, walls 2/04, 2/09 and by implication, wall (1/11), are likely to have originally been associated with the older part of an upstanding wall incorporated into the service yard boundary for the Woolgate Centre observed to the west of the trenches. The fact that wall (2/04) finishes within the trench suggests an opening at this point somewhere between itself and the remains of the above ground wall opposite.

Between wall 2/09 and wall 2/04 was flooring layer (2/08) constructed using limestone blocks laid on their sides in neat tight rows with no bonding material similar to the flooring layer (1/14)/(1/15). These were set on a bedding layer of mottled mid yellow-orange mixed with mid grey-brown slightly silty sand (2/07). This flooring was noted to continue around the western end of wall (2/06).

A 2m test pit dug through flooring layer (2/08) up against the southern side of wall (2/06) showed a similar stratigraphy to that observed elsewhere in the trench. Below bedding layer (2/07) was further evidence of deposit (2/01) sealing deposit (2/02) which in turn sealed natural (2/03). No earlier features were identified.

Stratigraphically above flooring layer (2/08) was a compacted layer of limestone fragments (2/13) measuring 0.22m in thickness. Cutting through this layer along the eastern edge of the trench on a N-S alignment was a service trench containing a cast iron pipe. This service was also noted to physically cut through walls 2/07 and 2/09 as well as flooring layer (2/08). Sealing the service trench was a layer of compacted black clinker (2/12) 0.18m thick similar to deposit (1/07) seen in Trench 1.

This underlay another layer of compacted limestone fragments (2/11) measuring 0.20m in thickness which in turn was sealed by a layer of reinforced concrete (2/10) typically 0.30m thick.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The excavation of the trenches took place during periods of sunshine and cloud and occasional heavy showers.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 15 sherds with a total weight of 196g. It comprised a mixture of medieval and 19th century wares. It 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. 4 sherds, 6g.

OXBB: Minety-type ware. Early 12th – 16th century. 2 sherds, 111g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 1 sherd, 9g.

WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, 19th - 20th C. 8 sherds, 70g.

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. The sherds of OXBB from context [10], trench 1 are both from the rimsherd of a large Minety ware jar. All the sherds of medieval material are in good condition, indicating that they were well-stratified, and not subject to much transportation before deposition.

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

Tr	Cntxt	OXAC		OXBB		OXDR		WHEW		Date
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1	2							2	26	19thC
1	7							1	4	19thC
1	10			2	111					E12thC
1	12	4	6							12thC?
2	1					1	9	5	40	19thC
	Total	4	6	2	111	1	9	8	70	

5.2 Bone

A total of fourteen fragments of bone from two contexts were recovered from the evaluation weighing a total of 173g. Four fragments were recovered from context (1/03) and ten fragments from context (1/10).

5.3 Ceramic building material

A total of sixteen fragments of CBM were retained from context (1/01) including two machine cut brick fragments.

5.4 Shell

Two pieces of oyster shell weighing 21g were recovered from context (2/01)

5.5 Glass

Two small fragments of glass weighing 14g were recovered from context (2/01).

5.6 Clay pipe

One small piece of clay pipe stem including a small fraction of bowl weighing 3g was recovered from context (2/01). No identifying marks were present.

6 DISCUSSION

The walls and flooring discovered are thought to form part of a 19th century yard or building possibly associated with the former gas works or a plot to the north. The flooring is thick and well made suggesting a heavy duty use.

The medieval pottery recovered from deposit (1/10) and those small sherds recorded as coming from deposit (1/12), but which are more likely to have come from deposit (1/10) instead, suggest that the ground level has subsequently been built up rather than being completely truncated during the post-medieval period, giving the possibility of undisturbed archaeological features within the site. Nevertheless, no archaeological features associated with the medieval town were revealed. A late post-medieval pit and a late post-medieval/modern service trench at the western end of Trench 1 were noted to cut through this horizon suggesting further disturbance is possible.

No evidence for the two gas holders expected within the development site was observed. However, these could simply be located further south than expected and if so could have had a detrimental effect on or have destroyed any potential archaeology where they are actually positioned.

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APPENDIX ARCAHEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

ID	Type	Description	Depth	Width	Length	Findings	Interpretation	Date
Trench 1								
1/01	Deposit	Mid orange-yellow gravelly sand. Occ limestone pieces.	0.10m	1.6m	1.5m		Bedding layer for cobbled flooring surface.	
1/02	Deposit	Firm, mid grey-brown silty clay. Freq. fragments of limestone.	0.25m	0.30m+	0.50m+	Pot & CBM	Deposit below bedding layer 01/01. Same as (1/09).	19 th century
1/03	Deposit	Firm, mid orangey grey-brown silty clay. Occ charcoal flecking.	0.35m	Tr.	0.50m+	Bone	Layer above natural. Same as (1/10).	
1/04	Deposit	Mid orange / brown clay.	-	Tr.	Tr.		Natural	
1/05	Deposit	Reinforced concrete	0.25m	Tr.	Tr.		Concrete	Modern
1/06	Deposit	Compact, mid orange-yellow sandy gravel.	0.10m	Tr.	Tr.		Make-up layer for concrete 01/05.	Modern
1/07	Deposit	Firm, black made ground, compacted layer of clink type material	0.40m	Tr.	Tr.	Pot & CBM	Levelling layer, possibly made from waste from gasworks.	19 th century
1/08	Deposit	Firm, pale orange-white compacted crushed limestone, occ slate and CBM. More slate at W. end.	0.18m	Tr.	8.1m+	Slate & CBM	Crushed limestone layer.	
1/09	Deposit	Firm / friable, mid brown -grey silty clay. Occ to moderate limestone fragments. Occ charcoal flecking.	0.26m	Tr.	Tr.	CBM	Possible buried topsoil or evidence of further dumping.	
1/10	Deposit	Compact, mid orange brown clay, V. occ small sub-rounded stones and charcoal.	0.30 m	Tr.	6.3m+	Pot & Bone	Clay deposit overlying natural 01/04.	Early 12 th century
1/11	Wall	Limestone blocks, smooth surface on North side. Lower courses bonded with dark grey clay, upper courses bonded with sandy yellow mortar. 9 courses max, 4 courses min.	0.63 m	0.25m+	Tr.		N facing E/W aligned boundary wall.	
1/12	Deposit	Firm, mid grey-brown sandy clay. V. freq. small and medium angular and sub-angular fragments of limestone	0.16m	0.25m+	Tr.	Pottery	Bedding layer for wall 01/11.	12 th century (?)
1/13	Wall	Limestone blocks with rounded corners, yellow sandy mortar. 5 courses.	0.45m	0.45m	Tr.		W facing N/S aligned wall.	
1/14	Floor	Squared off limestone blocks. 1 course.	0.08m	0.70m	1.5m+		Cobbled surface. Same as 01/15.	
1/15	Floor	Squared off limestone blocks with slightly rounded corners. Smooth on top surface. 1 course.	0.08m	0.70m	1.5m+		Cobbled surface. Same as 01/14.	
1/16	Cut	Probable sub circular pit with moderately steep slightly curving sides and a flat base.	0.72m	1.86m+	1.5m+		Pit.	

ID	Type	Description	Depth	Width	Length	Finds	Interpretation	Date
1/17	Fill	Limestone rubble fill with occasional pieces of CBM.	0.32	-	-		Primary fill of pit 1/16.	
1/18	Fill	Mid grey-brown mixed silty clay fill. Occ limestone fragments.	0.40	-	-		Secondary fill of pit 1/16.	
1/19	Cut	Construction cut for wall (1/11)	-	0.25m+	Tr.		Construction cut for wall (1/11)	
Trench 2								
ID	Type	Description	Depth	Width	Length	Finds	Interpretation	Date
2/01	Deposit	Medium, dark brown-grey clayey silt. 20% small angular stones.	0.50m	Tr.	Tr.	Glass, CBM & Clay Pipe	Made ground.	19 th century
2/02	Deposit	Medium, mid orange-brown sandy clay.	0.30m	Tr.	Tr.		Layer above natural.	
2/03	Deposit	Reasonably compact, medium red orange clay with natural banding.	0.10m	Tr.	Tr.		Natural	
2/04	Wall	Limestone blocks, well finished. 5 courses. Sandy mortar.	0.50m	0.79m	1.3m+		E / W aligned wall.	
2/05	Fill	Loose, dark red-brown sandy silt mixed with a white mortar. 10% small limestone fragments.	0.79m	-	1.3m+		Infill between wall 2/04 and construction cut 2/06.	
2/06	Cut	Linear in plan, 90° break of slope top, straight sides, 80° break of slope bottom, flat base.	0.79m	0.50m	1.3m+		Foundation cut for E/W aligned wall. (2/04).	
2/07	Deposit	Loose, medium grey-brown and mottled yellow-orange sandy clay. 25% small gravel, 5% small rounded stones.	0.10m	1.10m+	5.0m		Sandy bedding layer for cobbled flooring 2/08.	
2/08	Floor	Limestone cobbles, well finished. No bonding material. 1 course.	0.08m	1.10m+	5.0m		Cobbled flooring surface.	
2/09	Wall	Limestone blocks, well finished, 7 courses. Bonded with pale yellow sandy mortar.	0.70m	0.80m	1.6m		E/W aligned wall. Repaired following excavation of service containing cast iron pipe.	
2/10	Deposit	Reinforced concrete layer	0.30m	Tr.	Tr.		Concrete yard surface	Modern
2/11	Deposit	Compacted layer of limestone fragments.	0.20m	Tr.	Tr.		Made ground metting layer.	
2/12	Deposit	Firm, black made ground, compacted layer of clink type material	0.18m	Tr.	Tr.		Made ground layer, possibly made from waste from gasworks.	
2/13	Deposit	Compacted layer of limestone fragments.	0.22m	Tr.	Tr.		Made ground metting layer.	