



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

VERNON HOUSE, ASCOTT,

SHIPSON-ON-STOUR,

WARWICKSHIRE

NGR SP 322 346

*On behalf of
Mr. & Mrs. Rigby*

AUGUST 2010

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services at Vernon House Farm, Ascott, Shipson-on-Stour, Warwickshire. Foundations of a 19th century building were recorded and was a contemporary limestone-built drain running along the southern wall of the main building.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The watching brief took place in the back garden of Vernon House Farm in Ascott, Shipson-on-Stour, Warwickshire. The site is centred on national grid reference SP 322 346, in the parish of Whichford. The underlying geology of the area is clay over an undifferentiated bedrock of Gault Formation and Upper Greensand.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission has been granted by Stratford on Avon District Council for the erection of single storey extensions and replacement of lay in rooflights with dormer windows to the rear elevation at Vernon House Farm, Ascott, Shipson-on-Stour (refs. 09/01604/FUL). Further trenches were opened up in front of the main building. The Warwickshire Museum's Planning Archaeologist has advised the local planning authority that an archaeological watching brief was necessary as part of the consideration of the application. The Planning Archaeologist prepared a Brief for the work.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The findspot of a Roman coin (MWA8981 SP 3230 3470) dating from the AD 4th C is the earliest HER record for the environs of the site. The medieval settlement of Ascott (M8981SP 32288 34731) is not well understood. It does not feature in Domesday, being part of the manor of Whichford, a dispersed parish comprising a number of settlements. It is mentioned in 1279 when John de Mohan had 18 bond tenants. The extent of the medieval settlement is not known as it has not plotted for ridge & furrow. This information has been extracted from Hawkes (2002/3). Archaeological work carried out at Vernon House, Ascott (EWA6889 SP 31326 34728) by N. Palmer (1999) revealed 18th or 19th century drains.

The earliest map, which is based on a copy of the map for the inclosure award of 1805, dates from 1806. The house at the present location of Vernon House Farm was tenanted by Richard Mathews and was at approximately 45° to Ascott Road. It comprised a long L-shaped block oriented northwest/southeast on the west side of the property and an opposing short L-shaped block to the east, which formed an enclosed yard. Access to the house, which was possibly a farmyard, was by a lane to the east of the current property. The house does not appear to be the same as that on the later maps. To the south the land was owned by John Sturch, comprising a field at the north end of the present field to the south of the house, and a large open field south of that, which extended to the east. The western edge of the present field boundary lies within

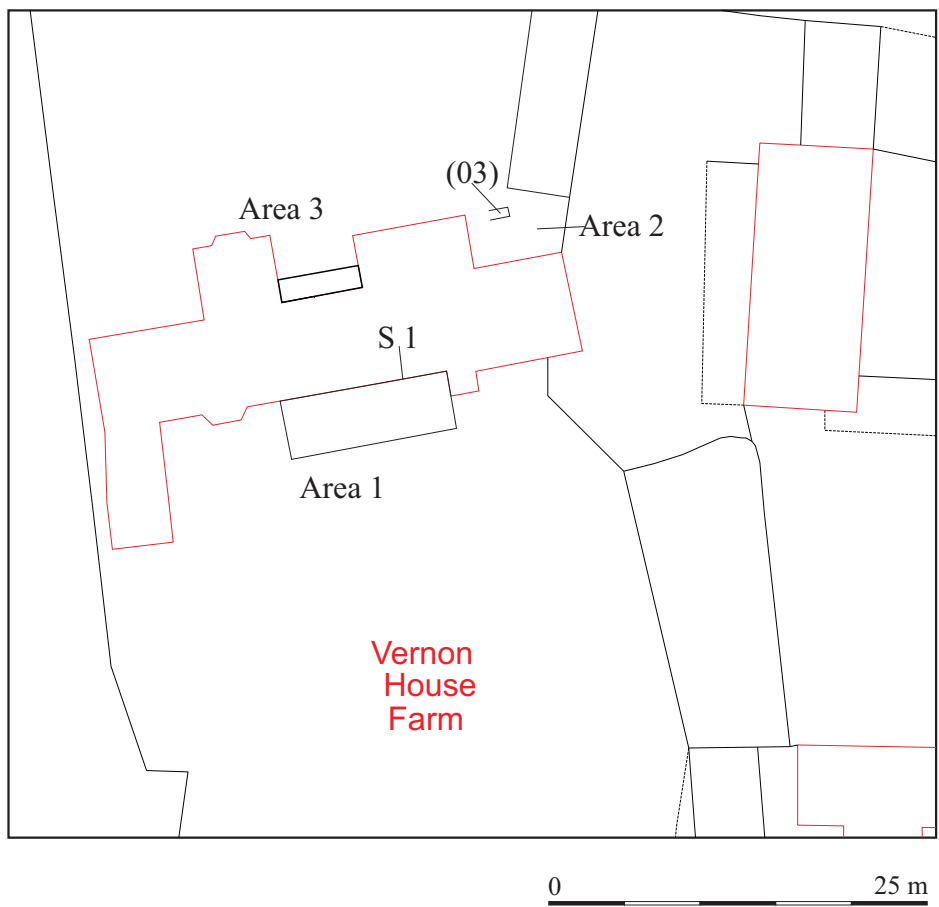
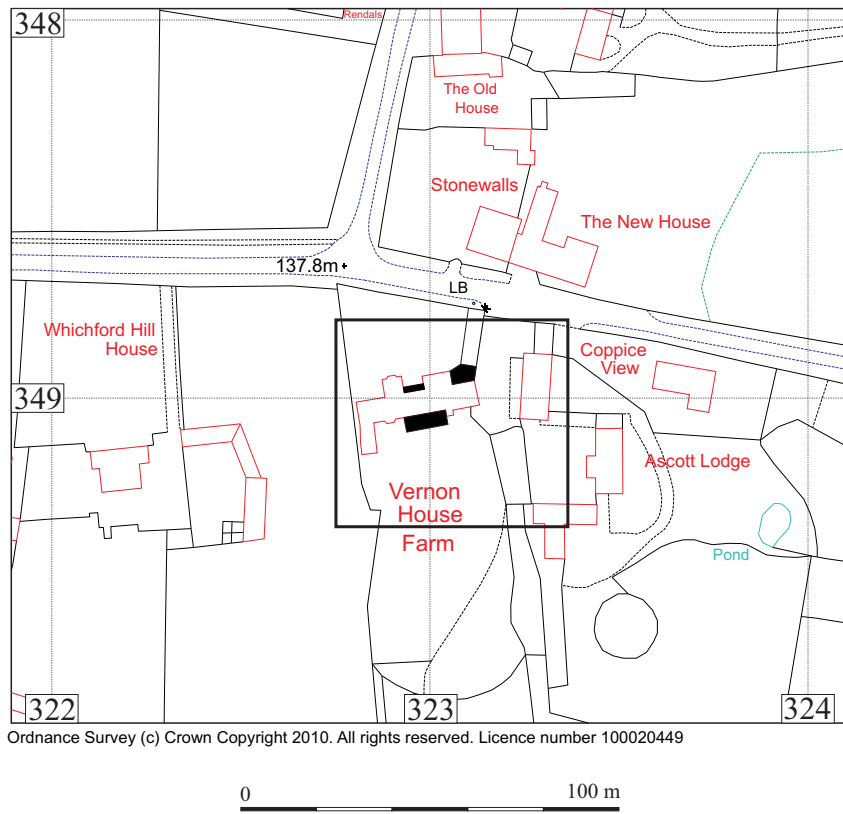


Figure 1. Site location

the former extent of land held by Richard Gibbs. The footpath that runs through the present field is clearly shown within the Gibbs' field. At this point, it appears the land was held by the Sheldons of Beoley (Salzman, 1949).

The land was sold to George Philips about 1820 who, in 1828, was created a baronet. A map and survey of his estate in that year indicates that the former house had been demolished and the present Vernon House had been erected; the western edge of the current property had also been moved westwards to its present position. The location of various outbuildings visible on later maps is the same. The property currently known as Coppice View is within a small close adjacent to a field identified as an orchard, while the northern part of the field to the south of the present field forming part of the property was called Big Orchard. The rest of the field to the south is called Arkhall, which may denote 'holy hill' from 'eorcan' (OE, holy) and 'hyll' (OE, hill) (Ekwall, 1960).

The property boundaries for Vernon House Farm remain the same on the OS 1st Ed and until 1923. No map evidence was seen to date when the northeast corner of the Big Orchard, south of the present Coppice View, ceased to form part of the property.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To record any archaeological remains in particular any relating to the medieval settlement.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a prepared Written Scheme of Investigations (WSI) agreed with Warwickshire Museum's Planning Archaeologist.

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

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present during all ground works that had a potential to impact on any archaeological remains present. These included surface stripping/levelling, using a toothless ditching bucket and the excavation of building foundation trenches and service trenches.

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. A photographic record was also produced.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material whilst the other numbers reflect features 'cut' into preceding layers or structures.

4.1 Field Results

Area 1

The lowest deposit encountered in Area 1 was the natural mottled yellow-blue silty clay (12). Overlying the natural was the 0.25-0.35 m thick yellow brown sandy clay subsoil (08).

Cut 9 into the subsoil was a drainage channel (fig. 2). Within this feature were roughly dressed limestone blocks found along the southern side of the main building. The preserved part of the drain was 3.6 m long, 1.6 m wide and had a height of 0.3 m. The stones in the drain walls were generally more round in shape and ca 0.2- 0.3 m large, whilst the drainage channel was covered by c.0.3-0.6 m large and fairly flat limestone slabs (10).

The drain had continued further to the east, but here the southern limestone wall of the drain, and the slabs that once covered the drainage channel, were gone and only the northern limestone wall remained. In the west the construction of a modern brickwall in the back garden had destroyed the drain and it was no longer possible to estimate its previous length. At the bottom of the drain channel was a 0.05 m thick deposit of dark brown silty clay (11) with pottery, window glass and a broken bottle dating to the 18th or 19th century. All features in Area 1 were sealed by the 0.3-0.37 m thick grey brown silty sandy garden soil (07).

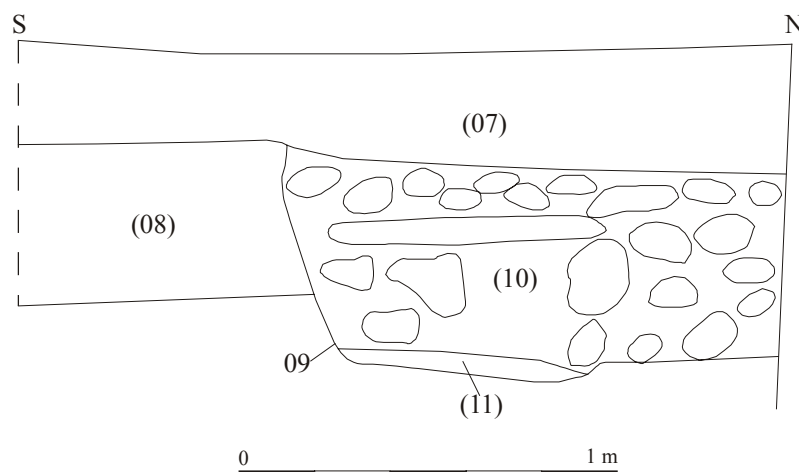


Figure 2. Section of Drain (10)

Area 2

The lowest deposit encountered in Area 2 was the mid grey natural with dark grey patches (02).

The foundations of a stone-built wall (03) were cut into the natural (02), stretching some 2.3 m out from the eastern wing of the building complex. It was 2.3 m long, 0.65 m wide and 0.62 m high. The stone material in the wall measured ca 0.25 x 0.25 x 0.62 m. The wall is probably not very old, but could be contemporary with the present main building from the beginning of the 19th century. Covering this wall was a 0.35-0.4 m thick surface of grey concrete (01).

To the north of the wall (03) the natural (02) was overlain by a 0.1-0.15 m thick layer of pale brown grey clay with 20-30 % stone rubble (06). The overlying layer was a 0.24 m thick layer of old topsoil consisting of dark grey brown clay silt (05) containing modern window glass. Above this was a deposit of mid-dark grey clay (04) with rubble up to 0.7m thick. It appeared that this material had been dumped against the wall (03).

Area 3

A 0.05m thick layer of gravel (13) lay directly on top of the natural (02), this formed the modern surface of a pathway.

4.2 Reliability of Results

The archaeological work was carried out in good conditions with excellent co-operation from the contractors carrying out the ground works. The results are therefore felt to be representative of the extant archaeology.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery (*By David Gilbert*)

A single sherd of tortoiseshell Whieldon Ware 1740-70 was recovered from context (11). It is a type not recorded in the Warwickshire Medieval and Post-Medieval Pottery Type-Series (Ratkai and Soden, in archive).

5.2 Glass

In context (11) were also a sherd from a wine bottle and a piece of window glass. These finds can be dated to the 18th-19th century.

5.3 Environmental Remains

No features were considered to warrant environmental sampling.

6 DISCUSSION

The drainage channel 9 that was found along the southern wall of the main building displays many similarities with a drain investigated at Vernon House Farm in 1999 (Palmer 1999) and is probably contemporary.

The wall foundations (03) in area 2 are not thought to belong to the former building on the site and appear to correspond to an outbuilding recorded on the 1886 1:2,500 OS map.

No deposits or finds from the medieval settlement were found during the watching brief.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

The project report

The primary site records

Physical Record

The Finds

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

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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