

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**P09/W0347 – WILLOW COTTAGE, 2 ROTTEN ROW,
DORCHESTER-ON-THAMES**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

JUNE 2010

REPORT FOR Mr J L Fisher
Willow Tree Cottage
2 Rotten Row
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FIELDWORK 20th May 2010

REPORT ISSUED 24th June 2010

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Site Code DORR 10
JMHS Project No: 2105
Archive Location The archive is currently held by JMHS and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

CONTENTS

	Page
<i>SUMMARY</i>	1
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Site Location	1
1.2 Planning Background	1
1.3 Archaeological Background	1
2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION	3
3 STRATEGY	3
3.1 Research Design	3
3.2 Methodology	3
4 RESULTS	3
5 FINDS	7
5.1 Pottery	7
5.2 Slag	7
6 DISCUSSION	7
7 ARCHIVE	7
8 BIBLIOGRAPHY	8
 FIGURES	
Figure 1 Site location	2
Figure 2 Plan	4
Figure 3 Sections	6

Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during ground works for a new dining room and ground floor toilet at Willow Tree Cottage, 2 Rotten Row, Dorchester. The development area was in proximity to several previous find spots of human remains.

One feature of possible medieval date was seen. The sherds of Romano British pottery confirm occupation of that date in the area.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located on the east side of Rotten Row approximately 25m south of the junction with High Street (NGR SU 57850 94125). The underlying geology is First (Flood Plain) Terrace Deposits and the site lies at approximately 48m OD. The site is within a garden to the rear of the house.

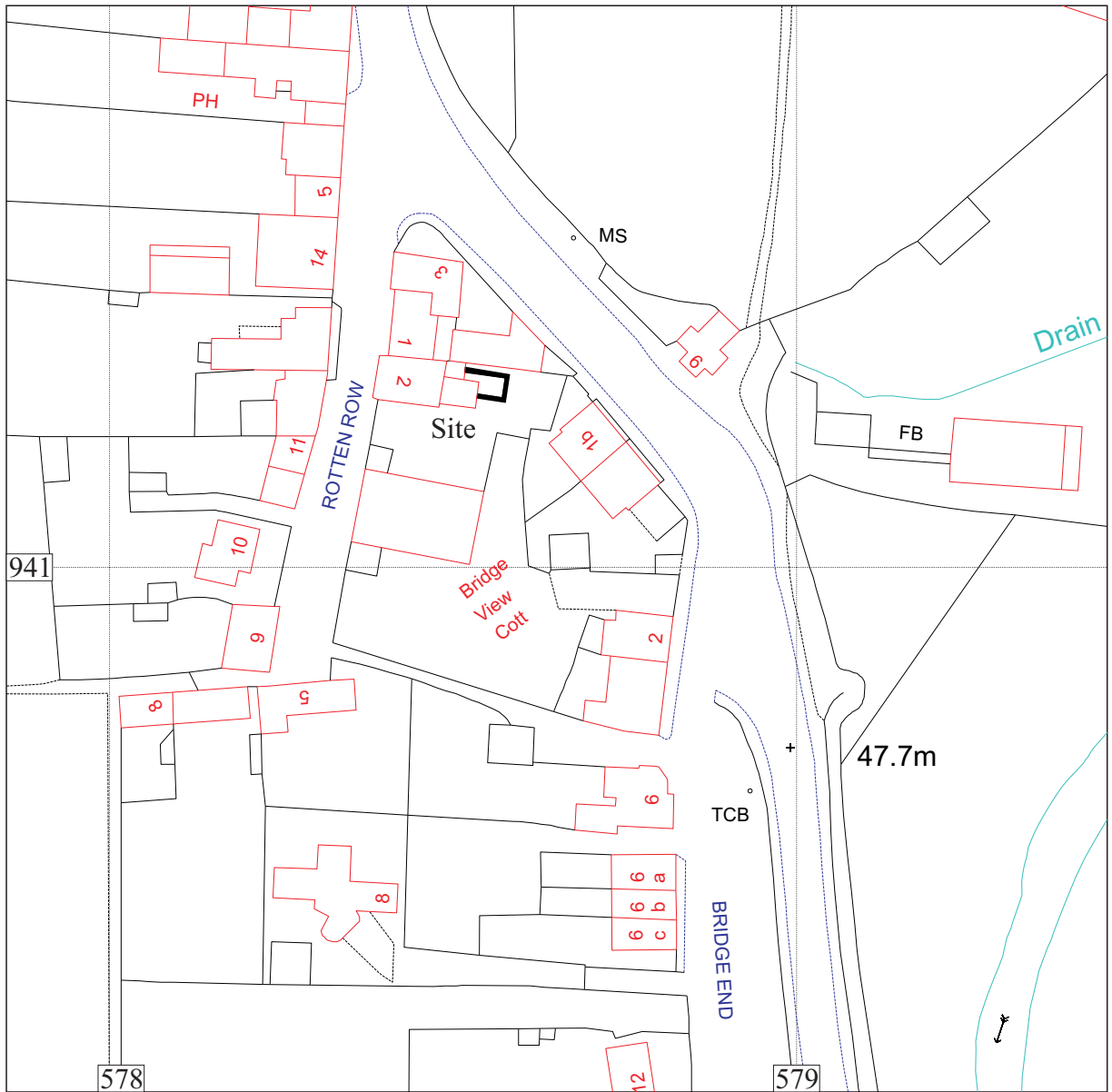
1.2 Planning Background

South Oxfordshire District Council had granted planning permission under P09/W0347 for the erection of a new dining room and ground floor toilet. Due to the potential of the site to contain buried archaeological remains a condition was attached requiring that an archaeological watching brief be carried out during the period of ground works. This is in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan policies. Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) has prepared a *Brief* for such archaeological work. This *Written Scheme of Investigation* outlines the method by which the watching brief would be carried out in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains of significance.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The area of the proposed development lies within an area of considerable archaeological potential. It is close to the boundary of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Dorchester Roman Town (SAM OX116) and within the area of the Roman town. Elsewhere within the town well-preserved remains associated with the Roman occupation are known to survive beneath an often shallow deposit of topsoil.

There have been several finds of human remains in the immediate area of Rotten Row. At No 9 Rotten Row a number of skeletons were observed during ground works (County Historic Environment Record PRN 13586; NGR SU 5781 9411). On the site of a garage to the east of the site three inhumations were excavated in the 1950s (PRN 5783; SU 5788 9410). Further burials have been discovered 35m to the south of the proposal site (PRN 1982; SU 5785 9409) and 70m SW (PRN 13190; 5780 9409) and 50m NW (PRN 12528; SU 5782 9416). These are thought to be part of a Roman or medieval cemetery located in the area. The extent of the burial ground is unknown but it is believed to continue under the site of the proposed development although ground works for an earlier extension to the house did not reveal any inhumations (pers. com. Mr T R Fisher).



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Figure 1. Site location

The above information has been taken from the OCAS's Brief.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.
- In particular to record any evidence relating to the Roman occupation of the town and the known cemetery 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 for Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present on site during the course of the groundwork which had the potential to reveal or disturb archaeological remains. In this instance the excavation of a foundation trench by a mini-digger required for the new building undertaken was monitored..

4 RESULTS

All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

Excavation of the foundation trenches for the house extension up to a depth of 1m revealed several discreet layers which reflected the changes in practice associated with the occupation and utilisation of the building over time.

The natural geological deposit in this area consisted of First (Floodplain) Terrace Deposits represented by a compact, light brown-orangey clay which displayed a heavily oxidised red-orange mottling (15). However, this was only partially revealed

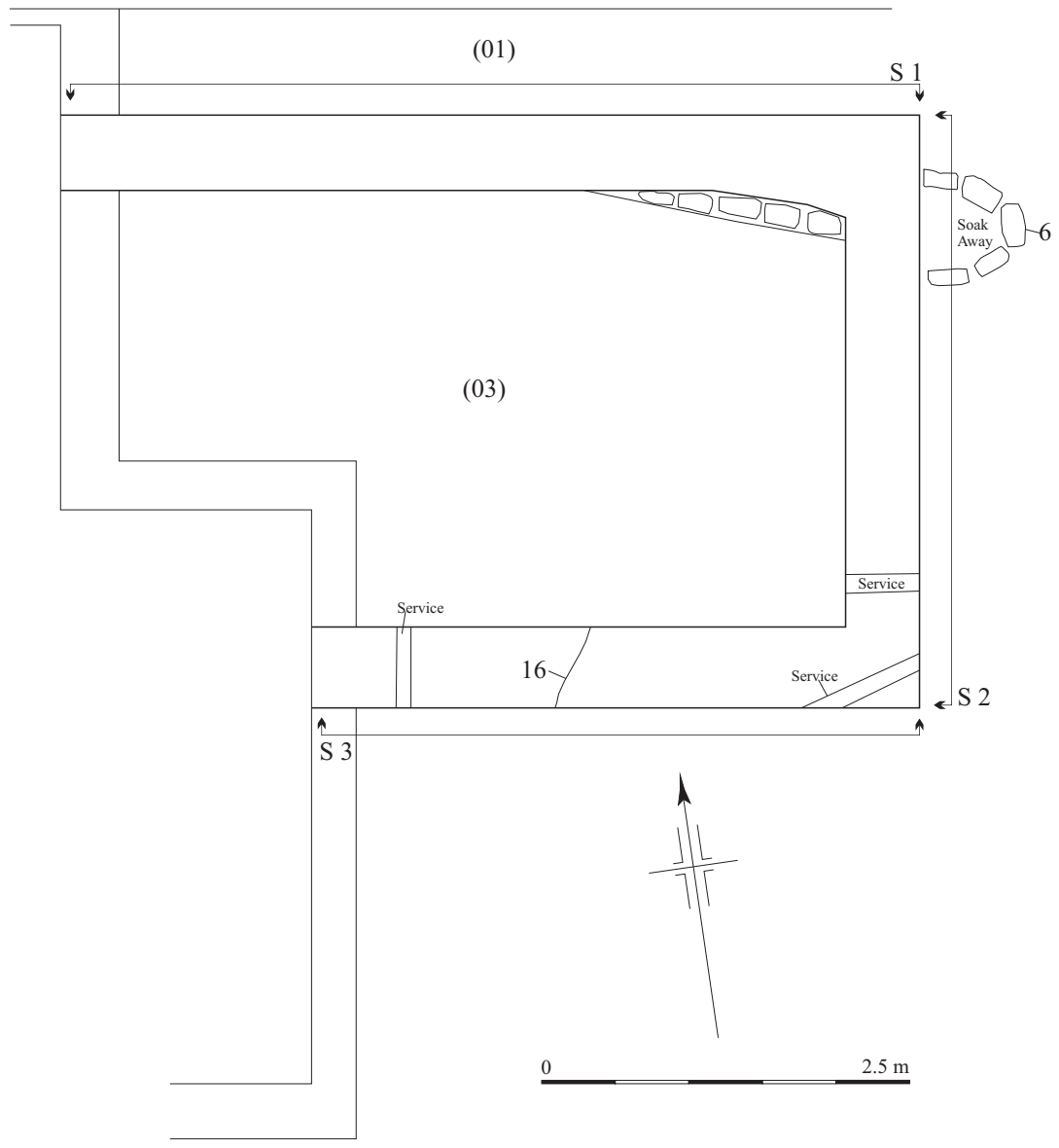


Figure 2. Plan

in the western corner of the trench footing next to the house. Here it is apparent that the natural ground level falls away towards the southeast. This meant that any other features cut into the natural geology would have been deeper than the impact depth of the foundation trench and therefore beyond the scope of the investigation. However, there was one exception in that this deposit was cut by feature 16 – which may be a pit or a ditch - but whose complete form was obscured within the narrow confines of the foundation trench (Fig. 2). Its fill, (14), had a noticeably heavier clay element and was considerably more compacted than the later layers above it. Several sherds of pottery, a tiny fragment of brick and a lump of slag were recovered from this deposit. The pottery indicates a possible medieval date for this feature.

Both this feature and the natural were overlain by a layer (04) which was up to 0.60m in depth and which seemed to reflect the buildings tenure as a butchers and abattoir. Its composition of a mid-brown clay-silt contained a high proportion of fragmented animal bone. Although it possessed a higher clay content than the later layers it could still be best described as a ‘buried garden soil’ due to its high organic content. It was heavily mottled with charcoal specks and minute fragments of ceramic building materials.

In the northeast corner of the foundation trench a brick built soakaway 6 was discovered consisting of a small, triangular shaped cistern constructed of red brick capped by a flat slab of limestone. The construction was fairly rudimentary and unmortared. The current owner had been warned of the existence this structure by the previous proprietor and it was duly located by following a brick-built conduit which led to it from the house. Bricks recovered from the conduit were frogged bricks bearing the ‘LBC’ logo measuring 67mm x 106mm x 222mm. The bricks of the soak away cistern were of a similar size but it was impossible to examine them closely as to remove one would have undermined the structure leading to a trench wall collapse. However, it was considered to be part of the same structure that had reutilised old materials.

Cut into layer 4 was pit 12 that was only seen in section up to 0.71m wide and 0.23m deep. This was ‘filled’ by brick and tile in a matrix of silt (11) (Fig. 3, Section 2).

Above this layer and under the current turf lawn a deep layer of ‘made ground’ existed (3) which was composed of silt (or garden soil) mixed with 19th - 20th century domestic refuse. This appeared to relate to the occupation of the building as a more modern domestic dwelling and contained a large percentage of not only charcoal and ash but also glass vessels, rusted iron and assorted building rubble (brick, tile, etc). This was more clearly a series of pits, dumped deposits and interleaving layers with lenses of charcoal which represent, when taken together, a combined series of episodes or period of the building’s use where domestic refuse was deposited in this area close to the original house.

Identifiable pits included deposit (7) of mid grey-brown silt and pit 10. The latter was a small fire pit that may have had successive firings evidenced by the depth and consistency of the ash. It was 1.3m wide and 0.4m deep and contained cinders and ash (9) 0.09m deep overlaid by black charcoal and burnt material (8) (Fig. 3, Section 1).

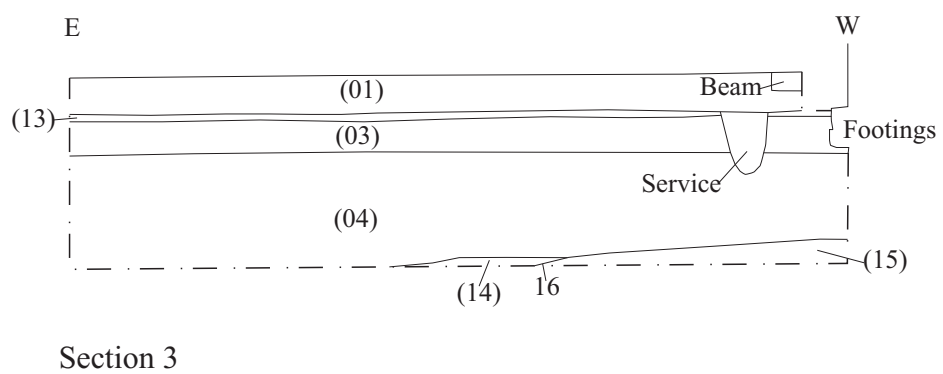
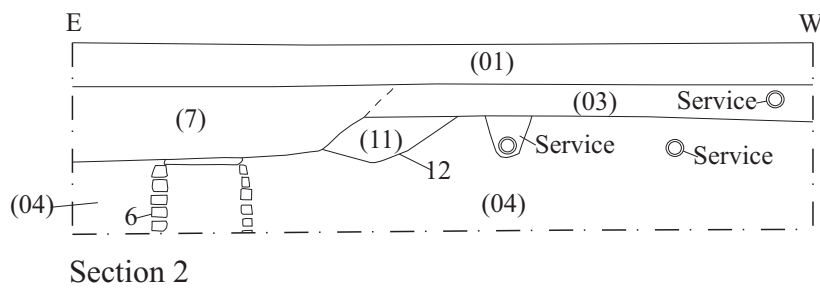
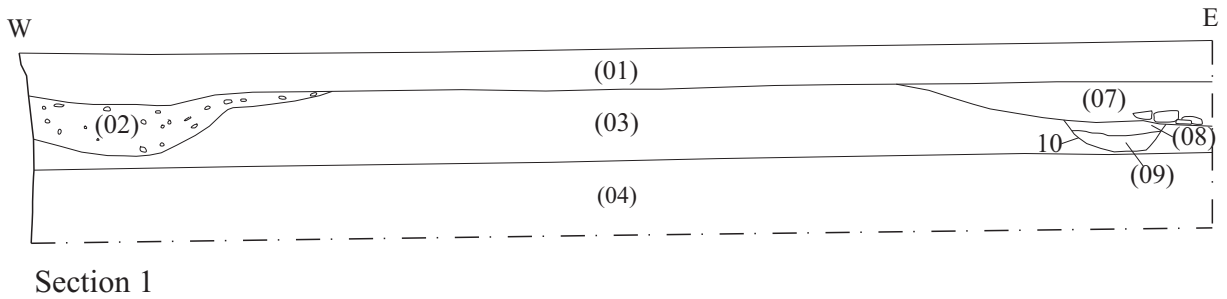


Figure 3. Sections

A layer of fragmentary brick, tile and mortar (2) probably associated with the previous house extension was against the house. Above all deposits was garden turf (1).

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The assemblage comprised 5 sherds of Romano-British and medieval pottery with a total weight of 21g, all from a single context, [14].

The following Romano-British Wares were noted:

Black-burnished ware, 2nd – 4th century. 1 sherd, 2g.

Grey ware, 1st – 4th century. 1 sherd, 3g

Oxfordshire Colour-coated ware, mid 3rd – 4th century. 1 sherd, 6g.

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

OXAG: Abingdon ware, mid/late 11th – mid 14th century. 2 sherds, 8g,

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 1 sherd, 2g.

The fabrics are all well-known in the region.

5.2 Slag

One lump of slag measuring approximately 45mm x 36mm was also recovered from fill (14).

6 DISCUSSION

The excavation of the foundation trenches revealed only one feature which could be seen to cut the natural geology (15). The pit (or ditch) 16 was seen to contain one fill (14) from which a number of pottery sherds were recovered and may indicate a medieval date for the feature.

The brick built cistern soak-away and brick-lined conduit was built within the living memory of the house proprietors.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

The project brief

Written scheme of investigation

The project report
The primary site record

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

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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