

Archaeological Evaluation



Oxford Archaeological Unit

May 1993

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit was commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation in the grounds of Church End House, Blewbury, Oxon (SU453186), on the site of a proposed indoor swimming pool. The evaluation took place on May 5th, 1993.

The site is in the old heart of the village, just N of the early Norman church of St Michael, and S of the original medieval manor site. A mention of a church at Blewbury in the Domesday Book implies the existence of a Saxon church, of which no trace remains. It was considered possible that the site could produce evidence of an earlier churchyard or burial site. The identification of medieval pottery and inhumations during the construction of the new vicarage implied that the proposed development site was of high archaeological potential.

METHODOLOGY

Using a 1½ ton tracked excavator, equipped with a 1.2m toothless bucket, a 5m x 1.6m trench was machined to a depth of approximately 0.75m, just above the water table. A further small sondage was machined at the NE end of the trench to briefly examine the deposits under the water table and reach the natural subsoil. A 1:50 scale plan was made of the uncovered archaeology and a 1:20 section was drawn of the SW face of the trench.

RESULTS Plan 2. Section 1.

A 0.10m deep turf layer (1) overlay a 0.20m deep layer of dark brown silty clay (2), containing crushed rubble, stone, gravel, tile fragments, and a few sherds of 19th century pottery and bottle glass. This overlay (11), a layer of dark grey-brown compact silty clay/loam, with up to 20% gravel and small stone inclusions. At the S end of the trench this layer was cut by a small pit (4), recorded in section, and containing a loose mortary fill (3).

Layer (11) overlay (5), a dark grey-brown silty clay with 20% stone/gravel inclusions. This extended below the water table, its overall depth of 0.90m being recorded in the sondage. (5) was cut by (10), a shallow 'U' shaped cut, seen in section only, approximately 1.50m wide x 0.20m deep, and containing two fills (8) and (9), both grey-brown silty clay with a high percentage of gravel.

At the top of the water table the two features (6) and (7) were partially revealed, comprising lines of chalk block rubble, oriented SW-NE across the trench. Only a few blocks were rendered visible, but it was possible to ascertain their approximate extent by auguring. (6) was 0.50m wide, extending beyond the trench in both directions. (7) was 0.30m wide, and apparently terminating within the trench. No discernible cut could be seen

in plan for either feature.

As briefly seen in the sondage, layer (5) overlay a 0.10m deep layer of organic debris/peat (12), which overlay a pale grey-brown clay, apparently the natural subsoil, at a total depth of 1.65m below present ground level. Samples were taken, for environmental analysis, of layers (5) and (12).

INTERPRETATION

The existing house, which until 1980 served as the rectory, was built in the second half of the 19th century, superceding an earlier rectory on the same site. Layer (2) and the small pit (4) probably represent the demolition/construction layer associated with this event.

Layer (11) is characteristic of a pre-19th century topsoil, producing a few sherds of post medieval pottery.

Although the relationship of (6) and (7) with layer (5) is not clear, the fact that (6) is directly under the cut (10) with its gravelly fill, suggest that the two features (6) and (10) are one construction, possibly some form of soakaway. (7) may well have had a similar function. Although these 'soakaways' are sealed by layer (11), a fragment of clay pipe from the fill of (10) indicates a post medieval date.

The depth and homogeneity of layer (5), and the recovery of a sherd of early 12th century pottery from near the bottom of the layer, suggests that it is the accumulation of flood deposits over a considerable period.

Layer (12) could represent a natural accumulation of waterborne organic debris, or possibly the deliberate clearance of a wooded area. No dating evidence was recovered from this layer, and not enough of it was revealed to enable a clearer judgement to be made.

CONCLUSION

No trace of pre-Medieval activity was found, and, although any conclusions based on such a small trench must be tentative, it would appear that the area has only ever been used as open, wet pasture or garden.

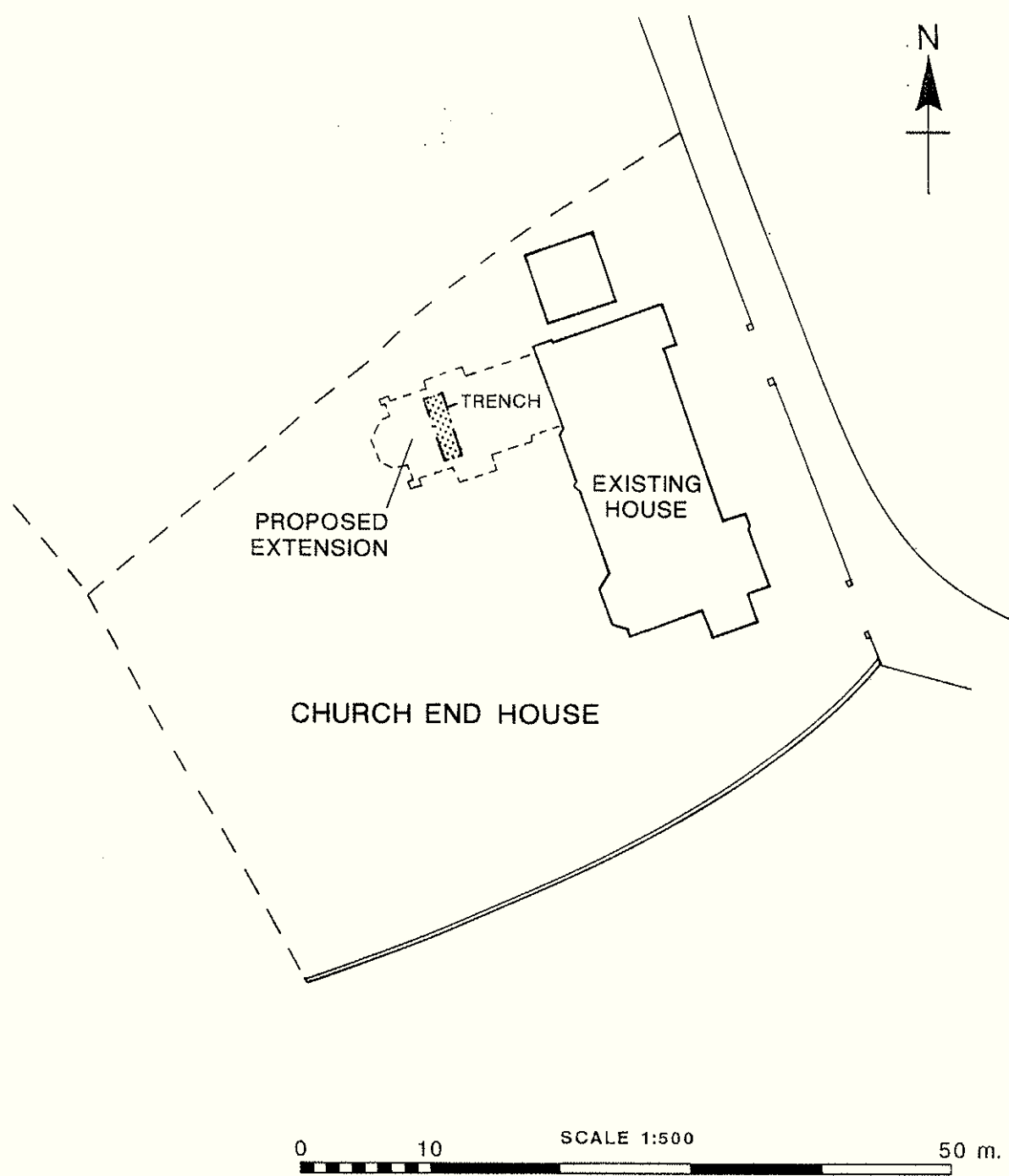
A. Hardy
O.A.U.
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BLEWBURY. CHURCH END HOUSE. BLCE93

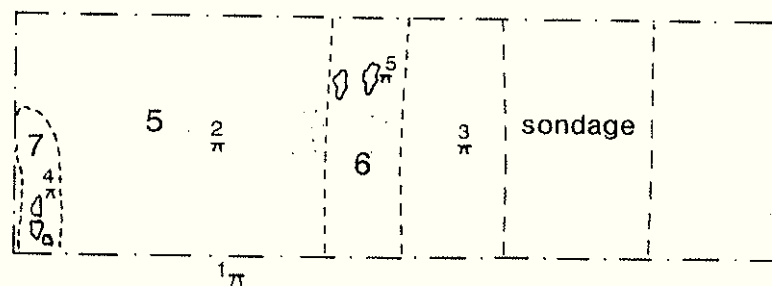
LIST OF CONTEXTS

<u>CXT</u>	TYPE	LENGTH	WIDTH	DEPTH	COMMENTS
1	LAYER	-	-	0.10	TOPSOIL
2	LAYER	-	-	0.20	DEMOLITION/CONSTR.
3	FILL	0.40	-	0.20	OF 4
4	PIT	0.40	-	0.20	MOD.
5	LAYER	-	-	0.90	MED/POSTMED
6	SOAKAWAY	1.60+	0.50	-	POSTMED?
7	SOAKAWAY	1.20+	0.30	-	POSTMED?
8	FILL	0.95	-	0.12	OF 10 POSTMED
9	FILL	1.45	-	0.22+	OF 10 POSTMED
10	CUT	1.50	-	0.22+	POSTMED
11	LAYER	-	-	0.38	POSTMED
12	LAYER	-	-	0.10	PRE-MED?
13	LAYER	-	-	-	NATURAL SUBSOIL

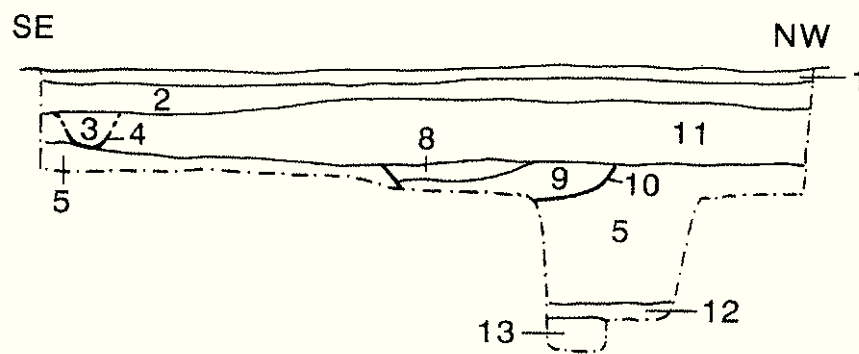
Location Plan 1



Trench
Plan 2



Section 1





The Oxford Archaeological Unit

46 Hythe Bridge Street

Oxford OX1 2EP

tel. (0865) 243888 fax. (0865) 793496