

# OXFORDSHIRE

## BECKLEY

### The Walled Garden, High Street

#### Archaeological Evaluation



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT



## BECKLEY, HIGH STREET, THE WALLED GARDEN

On 8 June 1992 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a small-scale investigation at the Walled Garden, High Street, Beckley, Oxon (SP 56331124) (Fig. 1). The site is 0.067 hectares in area. The archaeological work was undertaken during the earlier stages of construction of a private dwelling. The walled garden is situated on an E-W slope; the modern ground level at Trench 1 being 1.88 m below that of the high ground at the E end of the site.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The walled garden is situated W of the site of 'Beckley Palace', the site of the Capital Message of Richard of Cornwall, (PRN 5290). The moated house was begun in 1227 and destroyed as a reprisal by Richard Siward in 1233. Traces of moat and building foundations have been observed here in the past. There is no documentary evidence for the rebuilding of the original house. When Richard of Cornwall was recompensed by the King, later building seems to have been at a hunting lodge situated on the site of the modern Lower Park Farm (VCH Oxfordshire Vol V p57). The brevity of 'Beckley Palace' makes this a potentially important stratigraphic deposit spanning six years of the first half of the 13th century.

### STRATEGY

The lie of the land to the NE of the walled garden suggested the possibility of a moat having existed on the west side of the 'Palace' site. Accordingly a trench (Trench 1) was excavated by JCB parallel to the NNE boundary wall. The features exposed in Trench 1 were hand dug and recorded at a scale of 1:20.

Trench 2 were the N and W building foundations of the new house which were observed as they were excavated and recorded in plan.

The site was visited on completed of the digging of the foundation trenches when the extent of the pits was noted.

### RESULTS

The investigation began after the site had been levelled and the topsoil removed. There were no noticeable features on the ground except for a dry open well with limestone steening down to a depth of 5.10 m. In the far E of the site small patches of undisturbed subsoil were exposed.

#### Trench 1 (Fig. 2)

Trench 1 (6 m x 1 m) was dug parallel to the northern boundary wall at the bottom of the slope. Under a silty loam topsoil (100) was a fairly compact dark build up (101), containing medieval, post medieval pottery and clay pipe stems. Layer 101 was excavated by the machine. Layer 101 was observed over the whole site but was deepest in the NW corner of the site (0.85 m). 101 overlay a pit cluster (102) which was 0.60 m

in depth and filled with layers (102 and 104). This was hand dug and contained 15th century pottery.

The pit cluster (102) cut a layer 105, 0.25 m in depth, which when excavated produced no finds and rarely any charcoal flecking.

Layer 105 overlaid an undated shallow pit 106 which had a fill very similar to the undisturbed subsoil (115). It was not clear whether 106 represented an archaeological feature or an anomaly in the geological deposits. A similar feature (110) was also recorded.

At the E end of the trench a pit (111), filled by 113 contained clay pipe stem and pottery. 111 cut a pit (112) with a fill 114 which contained residual late 12th century - early 13th century pottery in addition to Brill-Boarstall types.

The undisturbed subsoil (115) was a mottled orange sand with light green silt patches spread evenly throughout. Occasional thin horizontal bands of limestone were observed within this matrix. In Trench 1 the undisturbed subsoil was 1m below the present ground surface.

A sondage excavated 10 m E of the E end of Trench 1 contained no archaeological features.

## **Trench 2 (Fig. 2)**

Trench 2 refers to the northern and western foundation trenches dug for the house to a depth of approx 1m. This was observed as a watching brief and the features were recorded in plan and finds were recovered from the deposits.

The features revealed were just S of Trench 1 being mainly confined to the northern foundation trench. They were similar in character to that of Trench 1. A large feature (200) probably a pit had a fill 201. The bottom of the pit was 2.10 m below the modern ground surface. A pit 203, with a silty ash fill 204, cut 200.

An ill defined feature (208) with a fill similar to 203 was also cut by 203. Another ill defined feature (206) contained a mixed fill of silty loam and redeposited natural silt and was also cut by 203. A pit cluster (209), filled by 207, was cut by 206.

Trench 2 showed no features in the foundation trench dug for the W side of the building and none in the E-W foundations directly E of the well. Later observations showed more pits in the area SE of the well. The foundation trench for the south wall of the garage revealed several large deep pits.

The 0.50 m wide foundation trenches were not suited to a full interpretation of the archaeological features within them. They mainly served to locate the concentration of features and to recover finds.

## **POTTERY Catherine Underwood-Keevill**

A total of 52 sherds weighting 0.9 kg was recovered from the trenches at The Walled Garden, Beckley. The material has been assigned to fabric groups by comparison with the Oxford Archaeological Unit's medieval and post-medieval pottery reference series (Haldon and Mellor 1977), and counted and weighed by context group.

The pottery ranges in date from the Saxo-Norman period, C11-C12, to the post-medieval period C17-C18. The majority appears to be highly decorated jug types dated to the C13-early C14 from the Brill/Boarstall kilns in Buckinghamshire. Plain and partially glazed jugs from the same kilns dated to the fifteenth century and C15 Surrey white ware types are also present (contexts 104 and 114).

Two possible imported sherds are of interest in the assemblage from contexts 114 and 201. The first sherd is a blue-grey hard sandy ware with square rouletted detail on the rim edge and within the rim and has been attributed to a Northern French source and dates to the late C12-mid C13. A bodysherd with black mica dusted surfaces and fine sandy fabric type from context 201 has affinities with Northern French Blackwares dated to the C12.

The assemblage although small indicates high status, highly decorated jug types and imports from the C12- C13/C14.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Haldon R and Mellor M The Pottery in B Durham 'Archaeological Investigations in St Aldates, Oxford Oxoniensia 42 111-39.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The later deposits contain medieval and post medieval pottery suggesting considerable mixing and reworking of the soil.

The features mostly interpreted as pits suggest domestic activity nearby. Although the pits contain pottery of a date range from the Saxo-Norman to 15th century it does suggest occupation prior to and after the 1227-1233 'Beckley Palace' occupation. Accurate dating of the features is problematic because of the high probability of redeposited sherds.

The site archive is to be deposited with the County Museum Services.

A Parkinson  
OAU  
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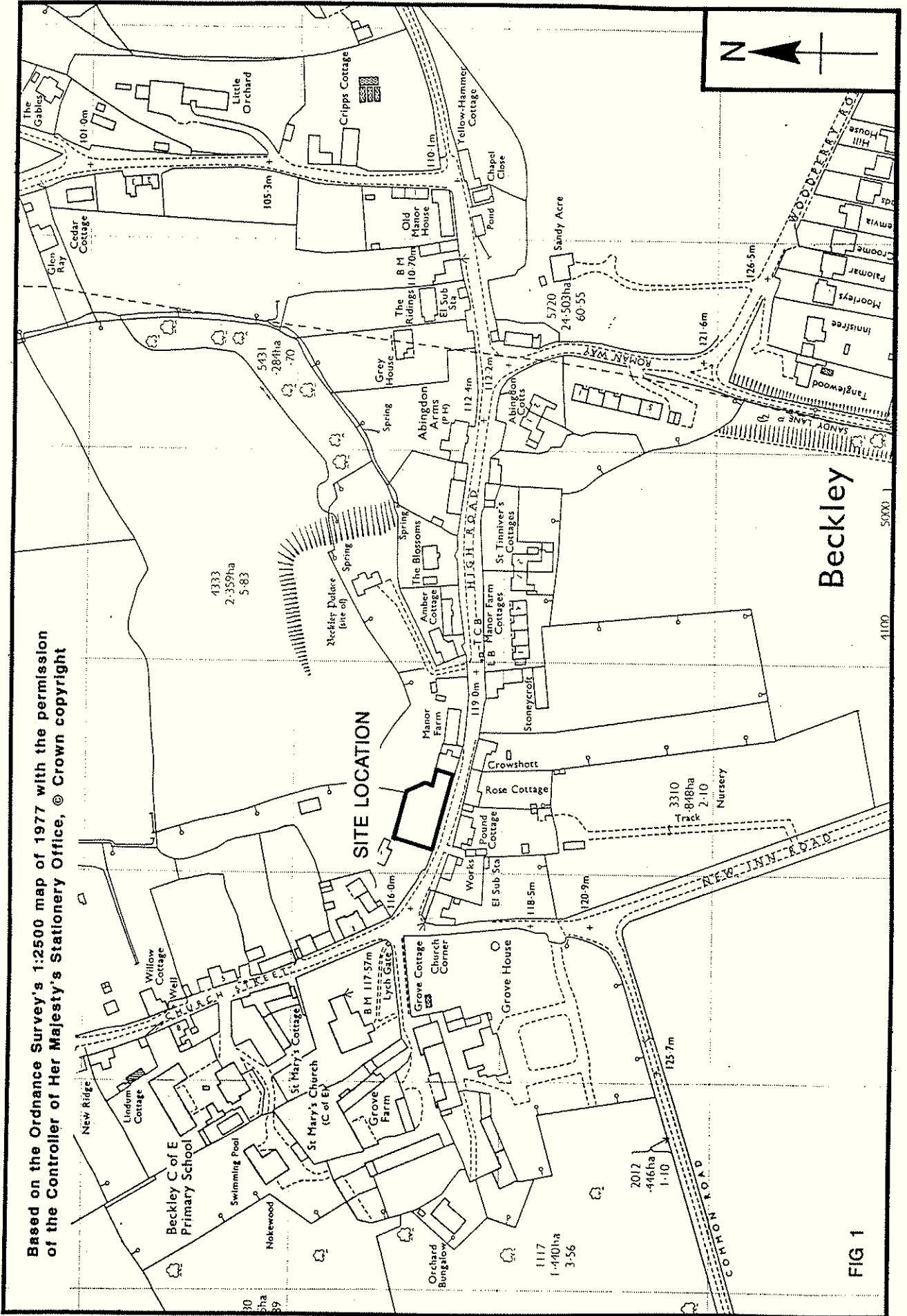
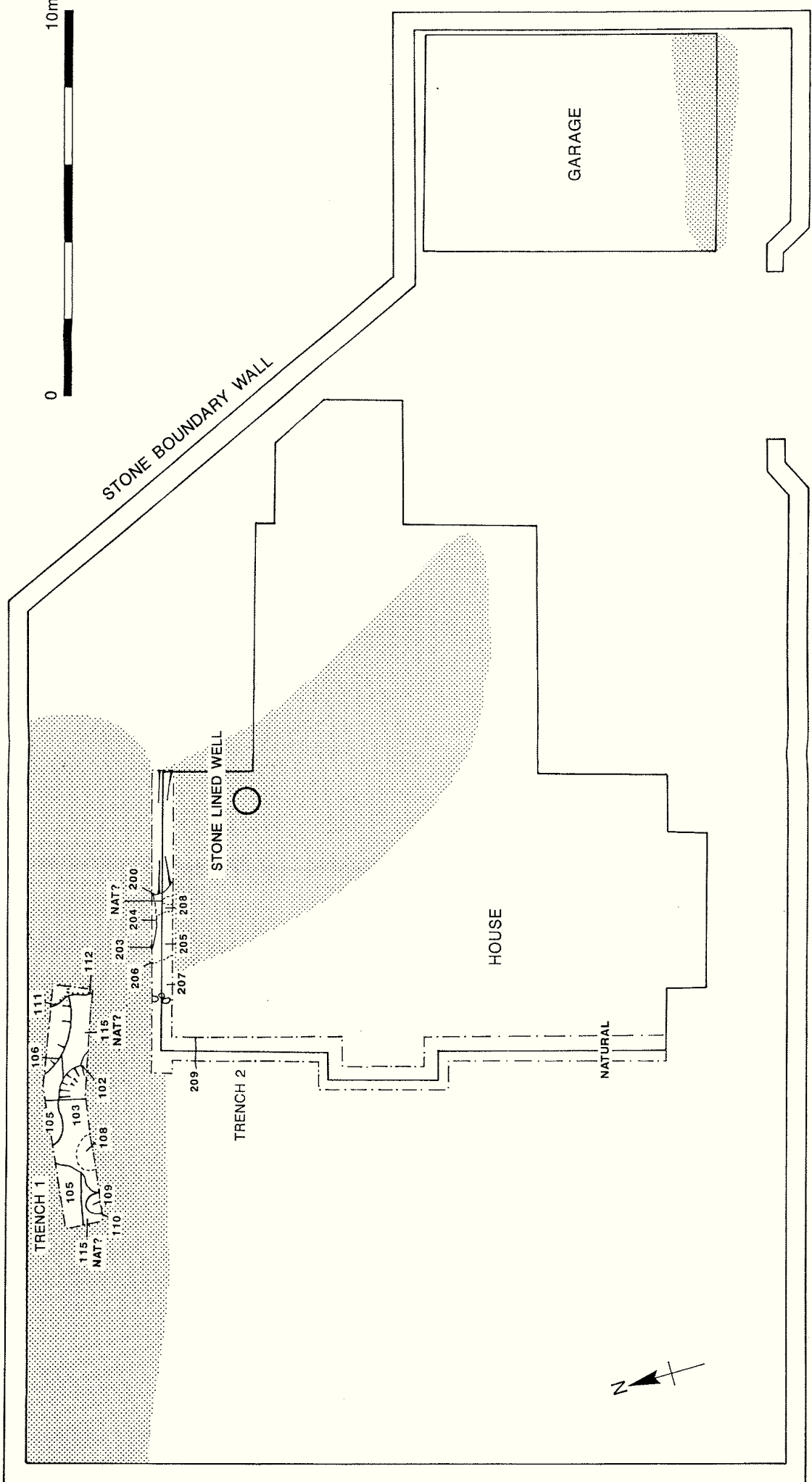


FIG 1

Concentration of Archaeological Features



HIGH STREET

FIG 2



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