

The Old Vicarage, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 3124 2733

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

JANUARY 1998

THE OLD VICARAGE
CHIPPING NORTON, OXFORDSHIRE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT
NGR SP 3120 2740

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Summary.

In July 1997 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief during ground reduction works in advance of the construction of a conservatory at the Old Vicarage, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 3120 2740). Natural subsoil was seen across the building footprint, containing one cut feature which produced finds from the 17th century and the Victorian period. The cut contained a plastic water pipe, supplying the house. No other cut features were seen, and no further finds were retrieved.

1. Introduction

The watching brief was commissioned by David Hicks Quantity Surveying of Chipping Norton on behalf of the owners Captain and Mrs Ross, and was required in accordance with the planning consent granted under PPG 16.

The site is located at the western end of Church Street and to the east of the Church of St Mary. It lies at approximately 175 m OD and the current land use is as a garage and domestic garden. The geology is fine loam overlying clay.

2. Background

The development site lies within the historic core of Chipping Norton, adjacent both to the early medieval church and to the surviving earthworks of the castle. The castle site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 21808). It was constructed in the early part of the 12th century by the Fitzalan family. There is evidence for an earlier motte and bailey castle and presumably the earliest phases consisted of a series of earthworks and a wooden stockade. This was subsequently replaced by a stone structure. By the Elizabethan period only the earthworks survived.

Chipping Norton is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 AD. It is therefore probable that the original settlement dated at least to the late Anglo-Saxon period, probably being located in the immediate vicinity of the parish church. It is likely that the medieval settlement grew in the same location before extending eastwards up the hill to the area of the modern market place.

3. Aims

To record any archaeology exposed on site in the course of the proposed groundworks to previously established standards (Wilkinson, 1992); the ultimate goal being the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

4. Methodology

The ground level within the building footprint was reduced by a Kubota mini-digger under close archaeological supervision. Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations the deposits and features exposed in section and plan were

cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and black and white print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets.

5. Results

The removed material over the majority of the building footprint comprised topsoil (1) and subsoil (2), although this material tapers out as the ground level decreases northwards.

Ground reduction within the building footprint revealed the natural subsoil (4), a mottled yellow/gray clay with 2% silt. This was sealed by (3), which appeared to be patchy remnants of mortar floor only in the location of the demolished garage; this material contained fragments of brick and concrete. (3) was not seen in section. This was sealed by (6), a deposit of brick, tile and concrete. This in turn was sealed by (5), a concrete surface. This was abutted to the south and partially overlain by (2), a tenacious dark gray clay loam with 2% silt and occasional charcoal inclusions, plus random mortar pieces. It measured 0.34 m to the base of the excavation. This was sealed by (1), a friable mid gray silty clay loam with 2% small gravel and modern brick, tile and concrete inclusions. It measured 0.67 m thick.

One feature was seen cut into the natural subsoil. A north-south linear feature [7], crossed through the building footprint, approximately 2 m out from the east elevation of the vicarage. The fill of this feature was redeposited natural (4); in section it had a regular, rectangular profile and was 0.11 m deep. It produced finds from the 17th century and the Victorian period.

6. Discussion

Topsoil (1) was considerably built up around the location of the demolished garage and produced only post-medieval finds. It is likely that this, together with the subsoil (2) and mortared surface (3) are probably contemporary with the construction of the garage. It may have been necessary to lay some kind of surface here to provide adequate bedding for the garage floor, as the natural clay is extremely wet and unstable. It is not thought likely that the mortar floor relates to any other structure as it matches the outline of the demolished garage exactly. Context (5) is the remnant of the garage floor itself underlain by its makeup layer (6).

Linear feature [7] was filled by redeposited natural (4) and proved to contain, at its base, a plastic water pipe supplying the kitchen from the rising main in Church Street. It is therefore probable that the finds contained within this feature have been disturbed and redeposited. No further features were seen cut into the natural. If they were present, they have been removed by the excavation of the pipe trench. The exact provenance of the finds retrieved from this feature remains unknown.

All of the deposits and single feature recorded relate to activities concerning the Old Vicarage itself. No features relating to the castle were seen. Based on the negative evidence obtained during the watching brief it is possible that the castle's outer defensive works lie further to the north.

References

Wilkinson, D. (ed) 1992 fieldwork manual, First Edition (OAU).

John Dalton
OAU
January 1998.



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scale 1:2500

Figure 1

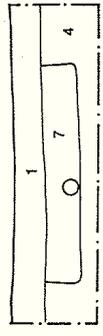
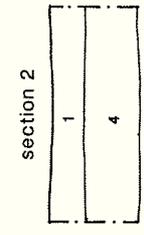
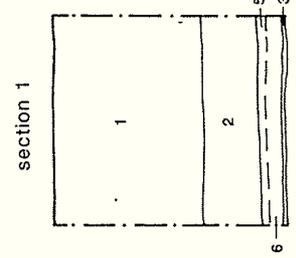
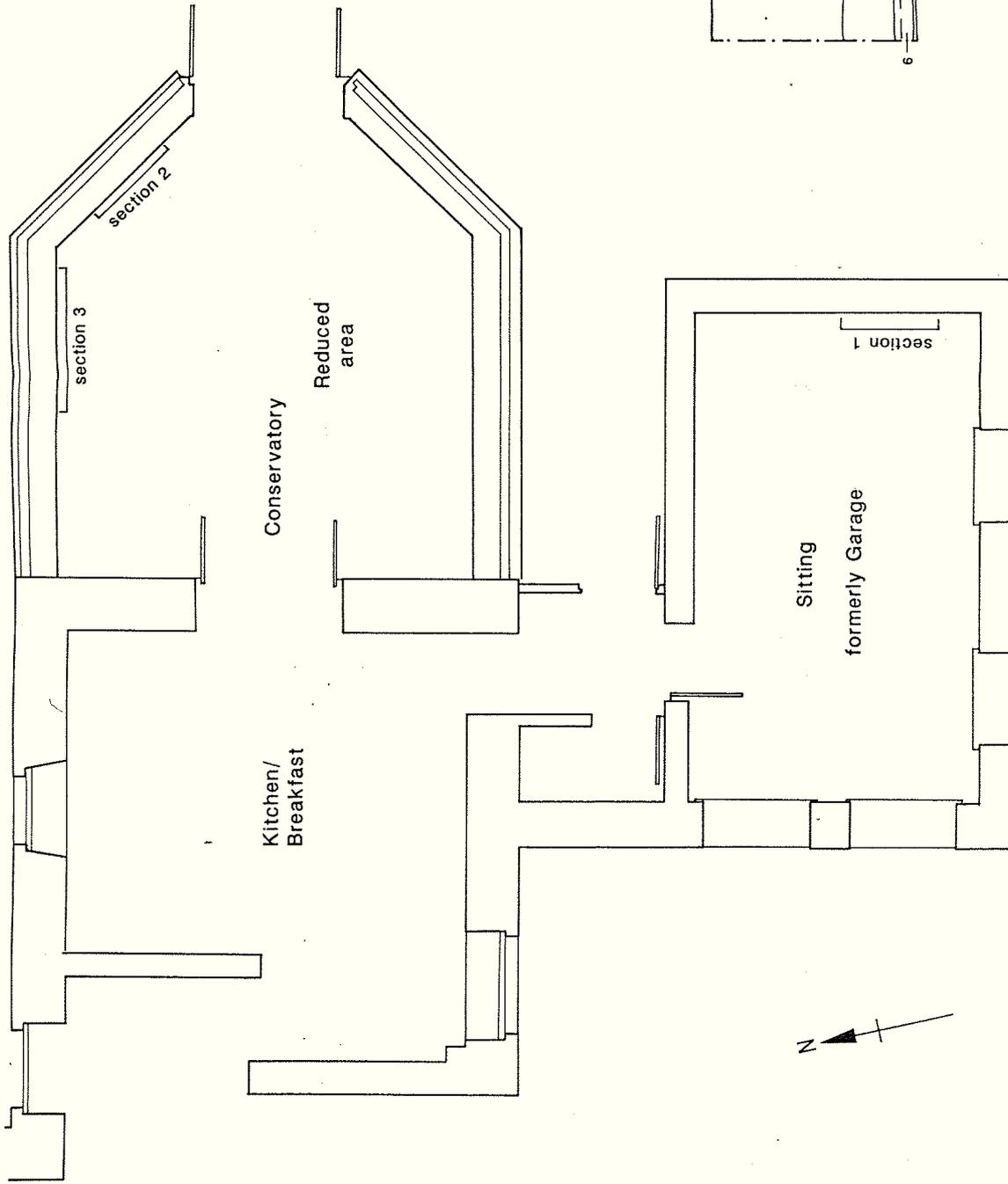


Figure 2

