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356/98

**M C Building Contractors**

**99a Ock Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire**

*NGR SU 4926 9701*

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

**Oxford Archaeological Unit**

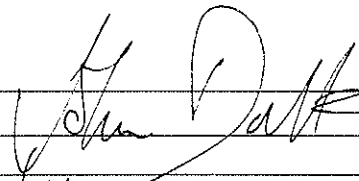
**February 1999**

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Prepared by: 

Date: 22/2/99

Checked by: 

Date: 26/2/99

Approved by:  HEAD OF FIELDWORK

Date: 5/3/1999

Oxford Archaeological Unit

February 1999

## *Summary*

*In September 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at 99a Ock Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 4926 9701). No archaeological features were seen and no finds were retrieved.*

### **1 Introduction (Fig. 1)**

The development proposal comprised the construction of five flats with associated services, storage and car parking, subsequent to the demolition of the buildings comprising the builder's yard which previously occupied the site. Construction was confined to the rear of the site, as the street frontage is currently occupied by modern commercial and residential properties. An archaeological watching brief was required under the planning permission granted in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Act, and under PPG 16.

The watching brief was commissioned by M C Building Contractors on their own behalf. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the County Archaeological Officer.

### **2 Background**

The site lies at approximately 50 m OD on first terrace gravel overlying Kimmeridge clay to the north of the River Ock on the east-west axis leading from the gates of Abingdon Abbey to the Ock Bridge. Although Ock Street was not completely built up as far as the Ock Bridge before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it is clear that there was settlement along most of its line at an earlier date. A number of entries in the Cartulary of Abingdon Abbey record messuages and rents of houses on Ock Street from as early as the first quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and tenements and rents in Ock Street are also recorded in the 15<sup>th</sup> century accounts of the Abbey obedientars. Amyce's 'Survey of Abingdon' of 1554 lists 44 holdings along the north side of Ock Street, consisting of gardens and tenements with gardens, orchards, barns, a bakehouse with stable, and a dovecote, with only one holding described as 'an empty piece of land' paying a reduced rent.

The OAU undertook a small excavation at 83-88 Ock Street in 1994. It revealed new evidence for the development of medieval Abingdon during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. A probable ditched property boundary, later replaced by a stone-paved alley, had medieval buildings dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries built on either side of it. One building had floors set into large scoops, while the other contained a sequence of hearths and floors (Roberts 1996).

In October 1998 the OAU undertook an archaeological field evaluation at Enock's Yard, 75 Ock Street, Abingdon (OAU 1998) c. 150 m to the east of the development site. This identified medieval occupation deposits and both cut and structural features. Archaeological deposits were found throughout the site, but were concentrated towards the southern half of the site, fronting Ock Street. All of the archaeological features were sealed by a thick homogenous layer, thought to represent a late medieval and post-medieval accumulation of garden soil suggesting a period of inactivity here in the post-medieval period.

### 3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record them to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

### 4 Methodology

Separate inspection visits were made to the site, subsequent to demolition works, in order to monitor the excavation of foundation and service trenches. All excavation was by a mechanical excavator (JCB), fitted with a narrow toothless bucket.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits and features exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by photography using colour slide and monochrome print. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil descriptions use standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

### 5 Results (Fig. 2)

The site had been cleared of its previous buildings and levelled, and the ground surface had a general spread of crushed modern housebrick, concrete etc. which provided a stable working platform for plant.

Generally the soil type was a sequence of silty clays, the sequence being identical across the area monitored with the exception of the south-west corner. The similarity of deposits allows a general description across the site rather than describing areas individually.

The earliest deposit seen was a deposit of very dark brown slightly silty clay (4), varying between 0.64 m and 0.68 m in thickness to the base of excavation. Overlying this was a dark gray silty clay (3), varying between 0.38 m and 0.41 m in thickness. This was sealed by a deposit of light buff silty clay (2), varying between 0.17 m and 0.20 m in thickness. Overlying this was 0.33 m of mid gray silty clay topsoil (1).

The only variation to this sequence occurred in the south-west corner of the site, where a large cut [5] was seen to cut both (3), and (4). Cut [5] contained a fill (6) consisting of bottle glass and brick and tile fragments.

### 6 Finds

A representative sample of tile fragments from cut [5] proved to be identical to tiles lying *in situ* on the roof of the Carswell School, immediately to the north of, and adjoining, the development site.

Finds retrieved from deposits (1) -- (3) comprised fragments of white china, transfer-printed willow pattern and brick and tile fragments, all of which were dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## 7 Discussion

It is thought likely that dark brown silty clay deposit (4) represents a natural subsoil; no finds were seen within it while various pieces were seen in random distributions throughout layers (3), (2) and (1). These finds would appear to be confined to a date bracket spanning the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is thought likely that (3) and possibly also (2) represent heavily disturbed late medieval and post-medieval cultivation deposits: the presence of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century finds within them is thought to be the result of disturbance related to construction/demolition works in and around the development site.

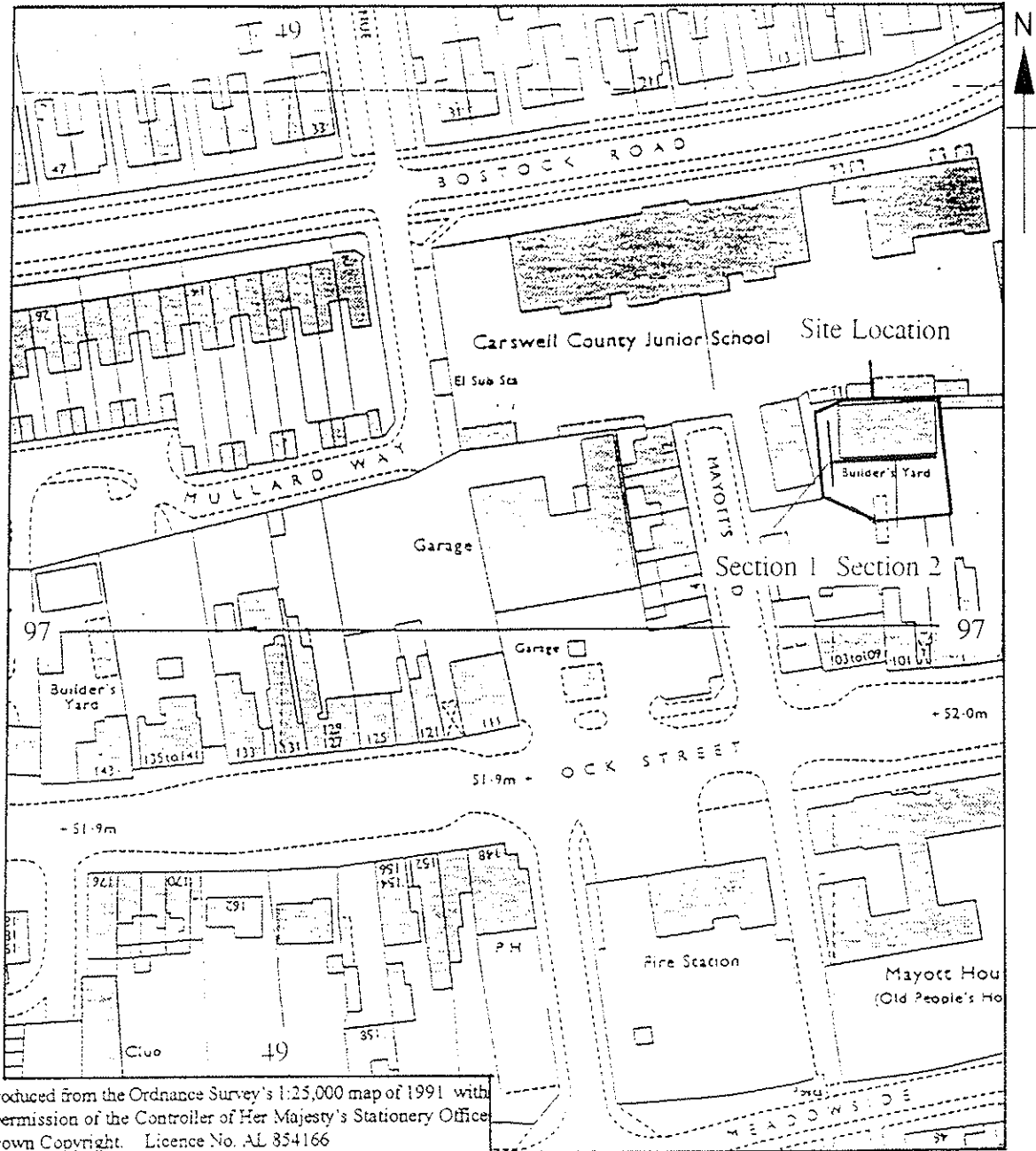
It is possible that both the finds present generally in the subsoils, and the intentional dump of material in cut [5], have resulted from the construction of the Carswell School in Bostock Road, the rear of which adjoins the development site to the north and north-west. However, disturbance has also occurred during use of the site as a builder's yard. The fact that no structural remains were seen confirms what has been observed on adjacent sites, where the evidence for medieval occupation of Ock Street has been seen to be confined to the frontage of Ock Street (Roberts 1996, OAU 1998). The front of this site is currently occupied by modern commercial and residential properties.

## References.

OAU 1998 An Archaeological Evaluation at Enock's Yard, 75 Ock Street, Abingdon.

Roberts M R, 1996 Excavations at Mr Warrick's Arms Hotel and the Crown Public House, 83-88 Ock Street, Abingdon *Oxoniensia* 62 (for 1997), 163-178.

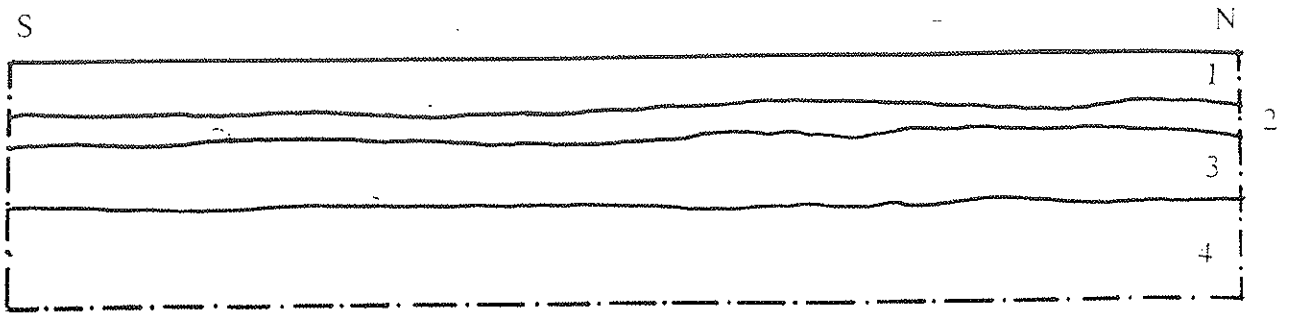
Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).



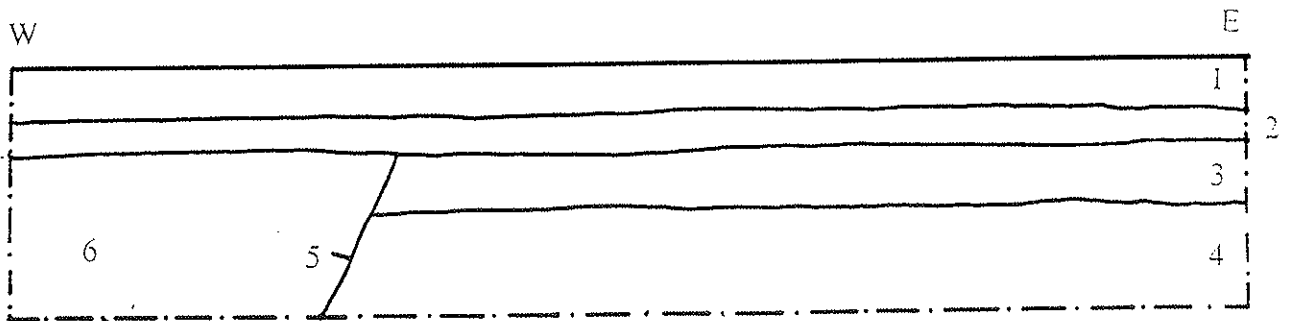
Location of site

Scale 1:250,000

Figure 1



Section 1



Section 2

Figure 2

Sections at 1:50



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