

Mrs C Brown

**Fyfield Manor, Benson, Oxfordshire
NGR SP 6308 9214**

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Planning Ref: P99/WO789/LB

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Prepared by: J Dalton/J Hiller Date: May 2001
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Summary

In April and May 2000 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Fyfield Manor, Benson, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 6308 9214). No archaeological features were observed in the course of the watching brief; pieces of 19th century tile were examined on site but were not retained for further analysis.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In April and May 2000 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Fyfield Manor, Benson, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 6308 9214).
- 1.2 The development proposal (Planning application no. P99/WO789/1,13) comprised the excavation of foundation trenches prior to the construction of a new single storey conservatory with associated services.
- 1.3 An archaeological watching brief was required in accordance with the planning consent granted under PPG 16, as the site lies within an area of archaeological potential. Listed Building consent was also required for the works which involved alterations to the standing building. Fyfield Manor is a Grade II listed building. Policy CON 18 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan also applied to the development proposals.
- 1.4 Mrs C Brown of Fyfield Manor commissioned the watching brief. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the County Archaeological Officer.

2 Background

- 2.1 Fyfield Manor (Figs 1 and 2) dates from the 12th-14th centuries. Alterations and additions date to the 19th and 20th centuries.
- 2.2 The development proposal comprised the construction of a single storey conservatory, together with the enlargement of an existing building in order to provide two bedrooms and a shower room within the loft space, and a new games and television room on the ground floor. The conservatory was constructed within the footprint of a previous outbuilding and formed a timber-built structure founded on a brick-built dwarf wall.

- 2.3 The roof of the existing but derelict annexe was raised, necessitating the construction of an extension on the western side of the building running into the herb garden; on the eastern side a cloistered walled garden elevation was constructed, using another brick-built dwarf wall with piers, also of brick, forming the cloister itself.
- 2.4 The underlying geology comprises the junction of the river terrace gravels of the Thames together with chalky drift and chalk.

3 Aims

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

4 Methodology

- 4.1 The watching brief was maintained by means of separate inspection visits; all excavation was undertaken by JCB mechanical excavator supplemented by occasional hand digging.
- 4.2 Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on pro-forma sheets. Soil description utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results

- 5.1 Footings for the new conservatory were dug to an average depth of 1 m and a width of 0.8 m. The whole area was crossed by modern gas pipes and water mains.
- 5.2 The earliest deposit seen was a grey sandy clay natural (3) at a depth of 0.4 m. This was sealed by a grey/brown clay loam subsoil (2), that was 0.2 m thick and contained whole and broken tiles, all of which were removed and retained for re-use by the builders. Layer 2 was sealed beneath a grey silty clay loam topsoil (1) with gravel and occasional fragments of tile.
- 5.3 This sequence of deposits was consistent across all trenches examined, and their horizons remained unbroken except for intrusion by modern services; at the south-west corner of the footings for the new conservatory was a large, brick-built manhole with associated pipes. All of these structures were removed with a consequent widening and deepening of the trench, to 1.10 m depth, in this area.
- 5.4 This activity revealed a further two deposits, A mottled yellow/white natural gravel (5) with large pebbles, which was exposed at the base of the trench to a thickness of 0.1 m. This was sealed by a thin deposit of stony gravel (4), also natural that was 0.05 m thick; neither deposit produced any features or finds.
- 5.5 Trenches for the new extension were dug to the same depth and dimensions as those for the conservatory, and modern services were also exposed. Occasional tile

fragments were retrieved from the topsoil; there is a large build-up of garden soil in this area, but the lower horizon of (1) remained consistent as did the upper and lower horizons of layers 2 and 3.

6 Finds

- 6.1 Finds were limited to a quantity of whole and fragmented 19th century tiles, some of which are still in-situ as a path leading to the back door of Fyfield Manor. These were examined on site but not retained, with the complete tiles re-used in the new scheme.

7 Environmental

- 7.1 Full consideration was given to various sampling strategies however, due to the absence of any significant archaeology, no environmental soil samples were taken.

8 Discussion

- 8.1 It was apparent that the site had seen a great deal of modern disturbance, however the horizons of both the natural and the deposits sealing it were seen across the majority of the trenches exposed in sufficient quantity to give a high degree of confidence that no ancient cut features and/or deposits were present.
- 8.2 The current property owner indicated to the attending archaeologist that the site had been comprehensively "landscaped" some 20 years previously and this may account for the uniformity of deposits seen and the general paucity of finds, excepting the tile, which presumably derived from a programme of re-roofing in the 19th century.

Reference

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

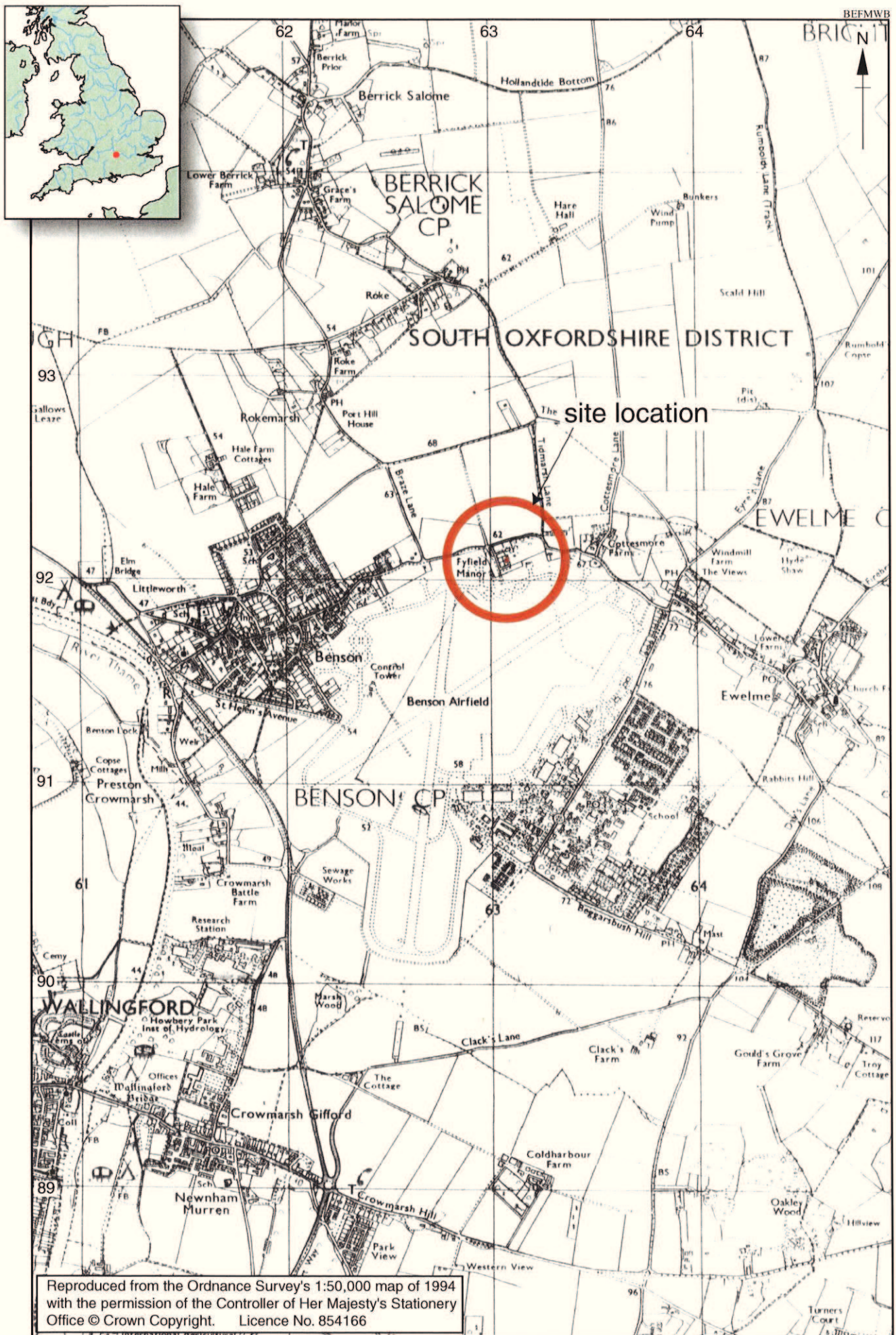


Figure 1: location of site.



Figure 2: Site location plan.



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