

ARICAB Chartered Architects

Land to the rear of Romney House, Faringdon, Oxfordshire

*NGR SU 2871 9552*

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

Oxford Archaeological Unit

February 1999

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Date: *8/2/99*

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Date: *19/2/99*

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Date: *26/2/1999*

Oxford Archaeological Unit

February 1999

## **Summary**

*In August 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at land to the rear of Romney House, Faringdon, Oxfordshire. No archaeological features were seen and no finds were retrieved.*

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

The development proposal comprised the construction of a new single dwelling with associated services, garaging and access on land to the rear of, and belonging to, Romney House, 17 Gloucester Street, Faringdon. The Vale of White Horse District Council, acting on the advice of Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Service, required that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during groundworks as a condition on the planning consent, in accordance with PPG 16, due to the presence of known sites of archaeological interest in the immediate vicinity.

The watching brief was commissioned by Aricab Chartered Architects on their own behalf. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the Deputy County Archaeological Officer.

### **2 Background**

There appears to have been an Anglo-Saxon settlement at Faringdon, which is thought to have been a Royal residence since Edward the Elder died there in 924. It was not of sufficient importance to be fortified as a part of the Wessex defences against the Danes. A church is mentioned in the 1086 Domesday Survey and the present church, previously a Minster, has some surviving Norman work. Faringdon House, the medieval and post-medieval manor, which was destroyed by fire during the Civil War, stood to the north of the church and now lies in the grounds of the present house. It is thought to be the most likely location for any Saxon Royal residence.

During the conflict between King Stephen and Empress Matilda Robert Earl of Gloucester built a castle on the site of Faringdon Clumps, with some of its buildings possibly surviving into the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the site was given to the Cistercians. The site of the castle was excavated in 1935, revealing a rampart and ditches surrounding a central keep.

In 1203 the manor, and by implication the town, was granted to Beaulieu Abbey. A market is known from 1218, although the grant is so worded as to imply that it was in existence before that date. A fair was granted in 1227. The medieval street plan and many of the town's plot boundaries have survived unaltered.

The development area lies to the west of the Westbrook, which in the medieval period divided the borough from the manorial settlement. In 1551, 51 burgage plots were recorded to the east of it and only 6 to the west. By c. 1700 settlement had expanded to the west to include plots on either side of Gloucester Street. The development site therefore lies within the historic core of Faringdon, but may lie outside the medieval town (Munby *et al* 1975, 122).

The development site is located on the south side of Gloucester Street (A4095) at c. 102 m OD (centred); the geology is a sandy loam overlying chalk. Immediately prior to development the site was a disused paddock.

### **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 these using established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure the preservation by record of any archaeological remains or deposits.

### **4 Methodology**

The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits at the start and during the course of groundworks. All excavation was undertaken by a JCB fitted with a toothless ditching bucket; generally soft ground conditions meant that although a toothed bucket was supplied it was not required. Excavated spoil was regularly removed to a landfill site, due to limited working space, after being hand sorted for stray finds.

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 proforma sheets. Soil description utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

### **5 Results (Fig. 2)**

Foundation trenches were excavated to a depth of c. 1 m. Generally the soil sections exposed a sequence of sandy loams overlying a chalky natural, the sequence being identical across the area monitored. The similarity of deposits allows for a general description across the site rather than describing areas individually.

The earliest deposit seen was the undisturbed natural (3); approximately 0.45 m of this material was removed to reach the base of dig. Overlying this was a mid brown sandy loam with 5% fine subangular sand and 2% fine-coarse subangular gravel, on average 0.29 m thick, numbered as (2). This was sealed by a mid gray/brown sandy clay loam with 5% fine subangular gravel, on average 0.26 m thick, numbered as (1). None of the deposits seen produced any finds.

### **6 Environmental results**

Due to the absence of significant archaeological deposits, no environmental soil samples were taken.

### **7 Discussion**

No evidence of domestic or craft industrial activity was seen during the watching brief, neither was there evidence for either medieval or post-medieval settlement; no plot boundaries were seen. Nothing was seen to indicate use of the site as anything

other than a paddock and pasture to the rear of properties fronting Gloucester Street and/or Marlborough Street, Pulling Close being a modern cul-de-sac.

**References.**

Munby J, Rodwell K, Turner H 1975 'Faringdon' in Rodwell K, (ed.), *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire*, 117-124

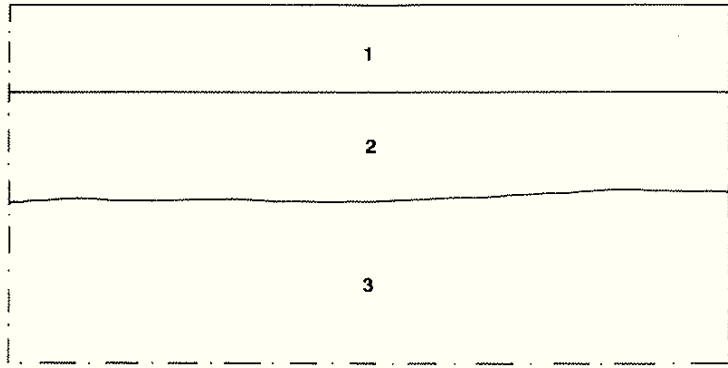
Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).



site plan

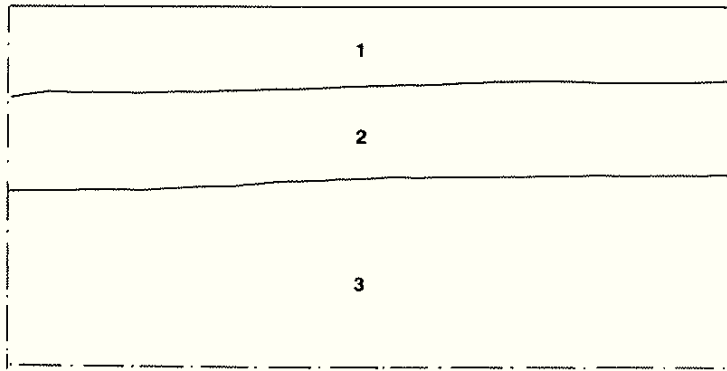
Figure 1

FAROM 98  
101.85m OD



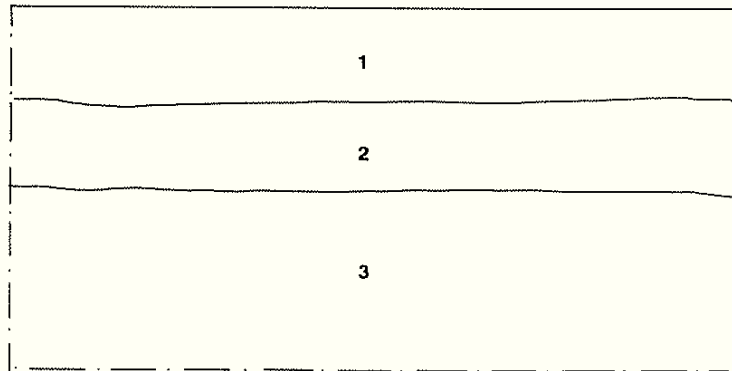
section 1

101.85m OD



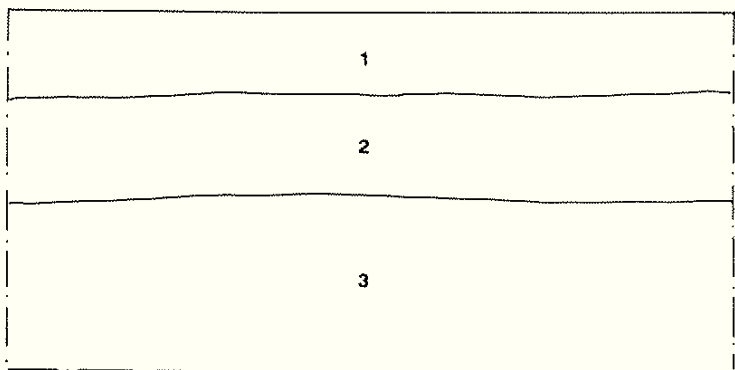
section 2

101.87m OD

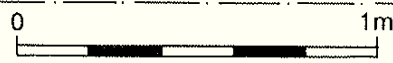


section 3

101.87m OD



section 4



scale 1:20

Figure 2: Sample Sections



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