

**18-20 St Mary's Street, Wallingford,
Oxfordshire**

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mr. Eraldo Guarino

by Simon Cass and Jennifer Lowe
Thames Valley Archaeological
Services Ltd

Site Code SMSW08/08

May 2008

Summary

Site name: 18–20 St Mary’s Street, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 60730 89270

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 24th January–29th February 2008

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Simon Cass

Site code: SMSW 08/08

Area of site: c. 60 sq m.

Summary of results: Only late post-medieval deposits were encountered, and natural geology was not reached, suggesting the possibility that earlier (medieval or Saxon), deposits could survive at a lower, undisturbed depth.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

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Report 08/08

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at 18–20 St Mary’s Street, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (SU 6073 8927) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Neil McKay of Carroll and Partners, 2 St Mary’s Court, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 0EB on behalf of Mr. Eraldo Guarino, 1 Cottage Farm Way, Speen, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP27 0RQ.

A planning consent (P07/W0566) has been granted by South Oxfordshire District Council to demolish an existing extension to the rear of the property and erect a slightly larger, new two-storey one. This consent is subject to a condition requiring a programme of archaeological work, in the form of a watching brief to be undertaken during groundworks.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District Council’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Simon Cass and Jennifer Lowe between 24th January and 29th February 2008 and the site code is SMSW 08/08.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in central Wallingford on the east side of St Mary’s Street and slightly to the south of the church of St Mary (Figs 1 and 2). It lies within the Saxon *burh* which was enclosed by a defensive bank and ditch (Scheduled Ancient Monument Oxon 234) constructed during the 9th century as part of King Alfred’s defences against the Danes. St Mary’s Street is thought to be one of the original streets from this time (Airs *et al.* 1975). Earlier Saxon occupation has been located to the east on Wood Street, with various Saxon and medieval deposits and finds found in the vicinity. A larger excavation detailed medieval and later occupation immediately to the west on the opposite side of St Mary’s Street (Pine forthcoming)

The site lies at a height of approximately 47m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is mapped (BGS 1980) as first (flood plain) terrace deposits of the younger river gravels but this was not observed during the groundworks.

Archaeological background

The position of Wallingford within the Thames Valley has made it a meeting point of ancient routes and contributed to its development throughout history (Airs *et al.* 1975). Prehistoric finds have included flints, a Bronze Age burial and Bronze Age metalwork from the River Thames as well as Iron Age coins and two Iron Age occupation sites to the south of the town (Airs *et al.* 1975). The presence of some Roman finds was thought to indicate the presence of a precursor Roman settlement but despite numerous observations over the past 25 years, no evidence of a large Roman settlement has been revealed. The town is better recorded from the time of King Alfred, who was responsible for the construction of the *burh* in the late 9th century as part of the defensive systems against the Danes. The settlement survived burning by the Danes and industry flourished. Shortly after the Norman Conquest a castle and priory were constructed but the town began to decline by the 13th century, with this decline continuing into the later medieval periods (Airs *et al.* 1975).

Several archaeological investigations in the town have identified stratified Saxon and medieval deposits, with larger projects, such as that carried out just to the west of the site at 51–53 St Mary's Street identifying a complex stratigraphic sequence dating from the 11th century to the present day (Pine 2006). Excavations on the site of the proposed new Waitrose store on the High Street to the north-west of the site located the cemetery but not the church of St Martins (H. Fluck pers. comm.).

Worked carried out at 23 St Mary's Street (Croney 1997) and further south at 36 St Mary's Street (Lowe 2003) only recorded post-medieval deposits. However a watching brief at 21-22 St Mary's Street identified a medieval pit sealed below a deep post-medieval deposit (Croney 1998).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the new construction work. This was to involve examination of any areas of topsoil removal and ground reduction, the digging of trenches for foundations and for service runs and soakaways if required. Spoil was monitored for finds and all archaeological deposits were hand cleaned, recorded and investigated for finds.

Results (Fig. 3)

The initial phase of work on site comprised the monitoring of three test pits. Test pits 1 and 2 were excavated close to the southern boundary of the plot, with test pit 3 towards the centre of the site. The foundations for the new build were also observed.

Test pit 1

Test pit 1 was 0.80m deep and measured 1m by 0.70m. The stratigraphy observed comprised 0.20m of concrete, overlying 0.60m of dark grey brown silty clay. This layer contained fragments of late post-medieval pottery, brick and tile fragments; foundations for the neighbouring property were observed in section in this test pit.

Test pit 2

Test pit 2 was 1m deep and of a similar size to test pit 1. As with test pit 1, 0.20m of concrete was removed to reveal a dark grey brown silty clay. A flint and greensand wall foundation, 0.40m thick, was observed in the north-facing section, situated below the foundation of the present no. 21 St Mary's Street. It is unclear if the foundation relates to the current building or is a foundation of an earlier building which occupied the site.

Test pit 3

This test pit was excavated towards the centre of the site and was 1.8m by 0.25m and was excavated to a depth of 2.2m. A homogenous dark grey brown silty clay deposit was observed in this trench with fragments of post-medieval pottery, brick, tile and animal bone, none of which were retrieved due to the depth of the trench.

Foundations

Monitoring was carried out on the foundations of the new build to the rear of no. 20 St Mary's Street. The site had been reduced by between 0.20–0.40m with all hardcore and concrete removed. The footings observed had been excavated to a depth of 0.70m and were approximately 0.80m wide. The stratigraphy observed was similar to that recorded in the test pits with a homogenous mid to dark grey brown silty clay observed. Several fragments of late post-medieval pottery and ceramic building material were observed; these were not retained.

A well was recorded in the stretch of foundations closest to the rear of the plot. The well was constructed from chalk blocks with brick towards the top, possibly for capping. The structure cut through the homogenous post-medieval deposit.

No further archaeological finds or features were observed, and natural geology was not observed in any of the foundation trenches.

Finds

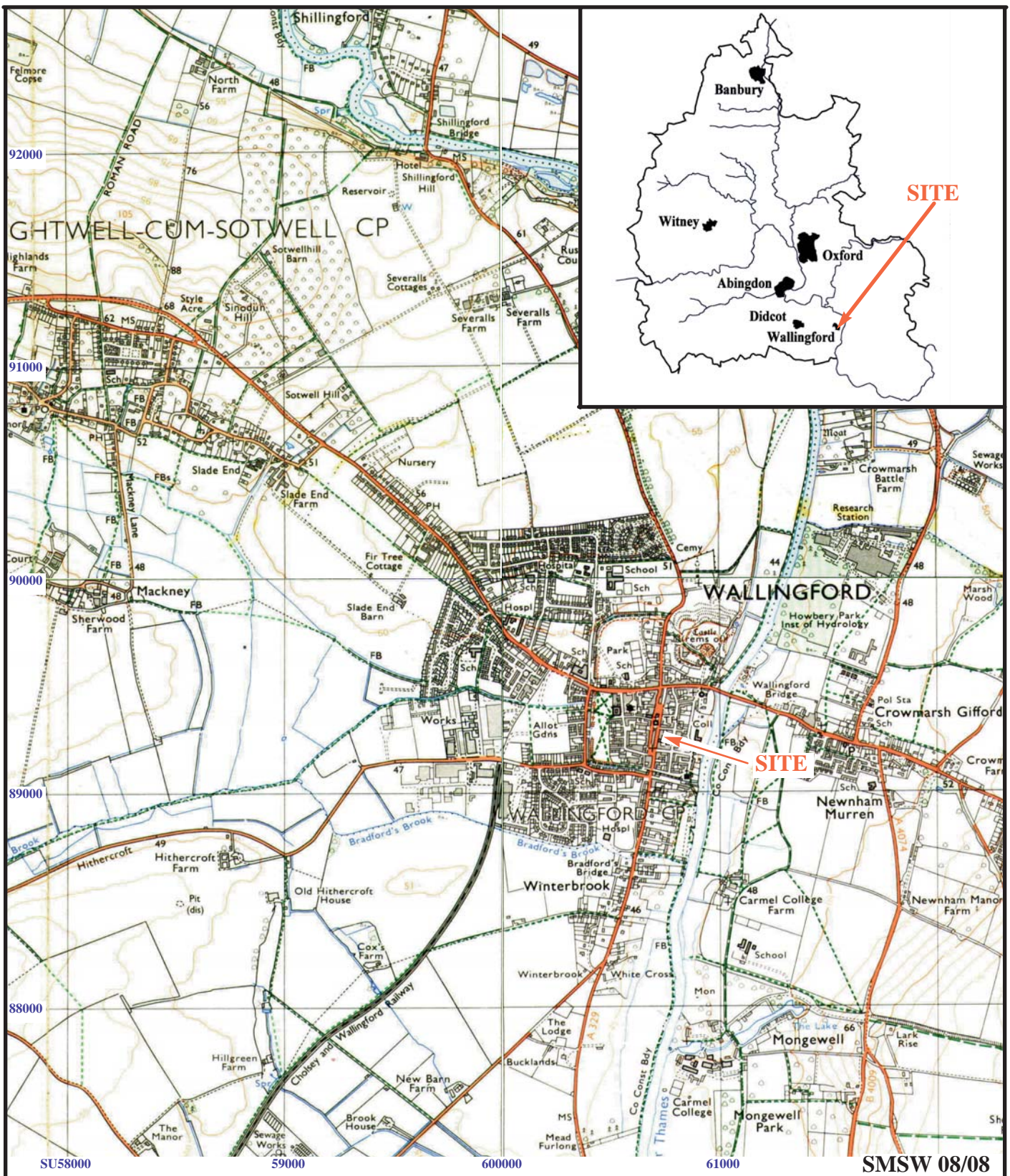
Late post-medieval pottery was observed in both the foundation plots and test pits; this was not retained.

Conclusion

The monitoring of both the test pits and foundation trenches revealed a thick late post-medieval deposit covering the site. No earlier deposits were identified during the course of the works but it is possible that medieval, and possibly Saxon, deposits, if originally present, could survive intact below this level.

References

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Figure 1. Location of site within Wallingford and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of the site within Wallingford

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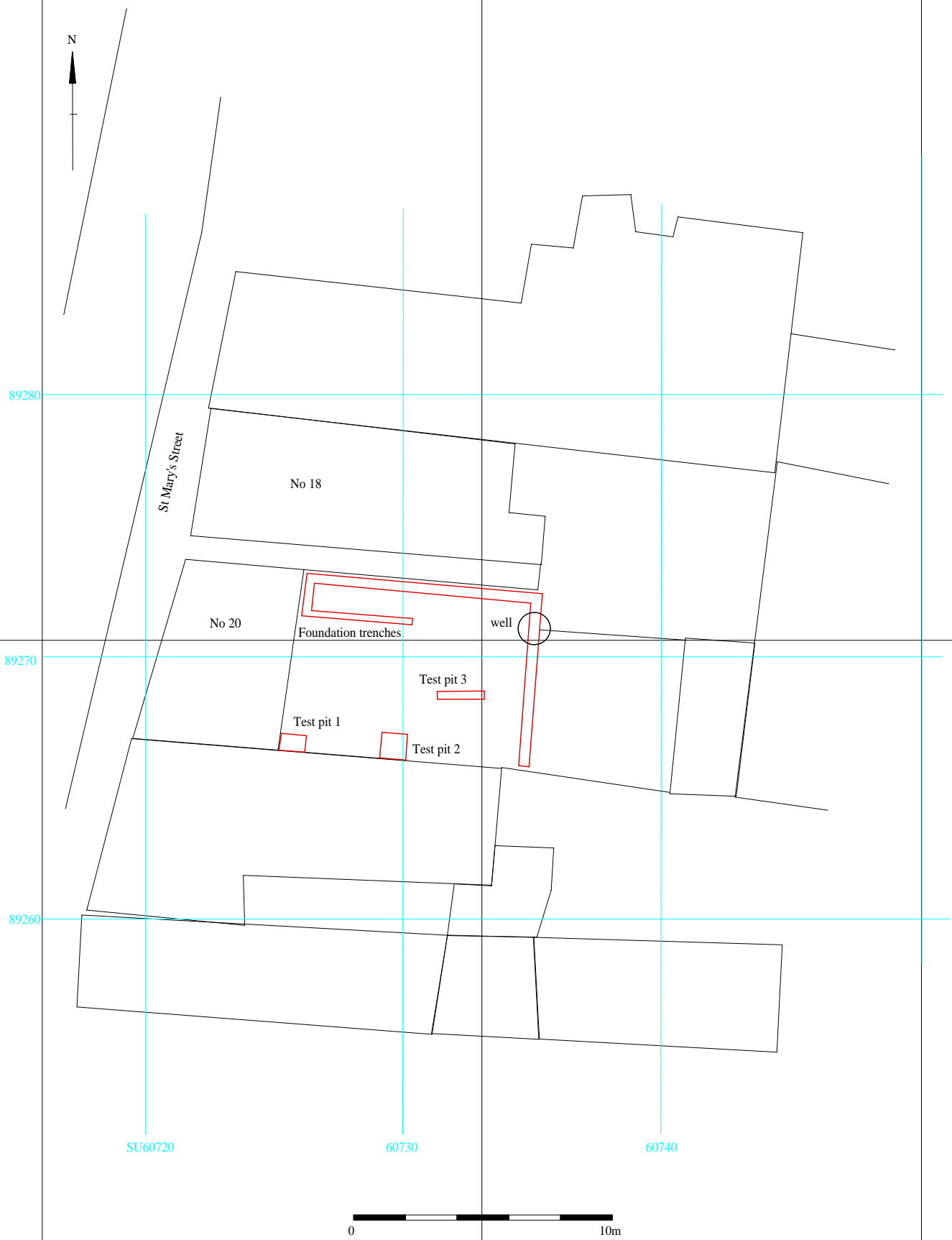


Figure 3. Plan showing location of foundation trenches and test pits.