

# **Corner Farm, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**For Empire Homes Ltd**

by Sian Anthony

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code CFAW03/02

**April 2003**

## Summary

**Site name:** Corner Farm, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SP 3030 1874

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 19th March – 3rd April 2003

**Project manager:** Erlend Hindmarch

**Site supervisor:** Erlend Hindmarch

**Site code:** CFAW 03/02

**Area of site:** c. 0.3 ha

**Summary of results:** Pits and gullies of a range of dates were recorded which add to the features discovered during the evaluation stage of the project. Six pits were revealed, two of which were of 11th century date, two probably of 16th/17th century date and two undated. A ditch of 11th century date and two gullies, one of which was also of 11th century date, with the other being undated were recorded. An undated broad shallow ditch, just possibly a furrow, a charcoal patch and soil deposit were also noted. The previous evaluation revealed two ditches (one recut) of 13th-15th century date and two undated gullies one of which was cut by a medieval ditch. An undated stake hole and undated post hole were also recorded. A sample taken from a 13th century ditch during the evaluation stage of the project was processed and a quantity of charred cereal and weed seeds identified.

Two prehistoric flint flakes and two sherds of Roman pottery indicate a low level of activity in the area at these times.

**Monuments identified:** Medieval and post-Medieval pits and boundary ditches with stratified finds of pottery, animal bone and burnt clay.

**Location and reference of archive:** The site archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, RG1 5NR and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

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	Steve Preston ✓ 29.04.03

# Corner Farm, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Sian Anthony

Report 03/02b

## Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out on land at Corner Farm, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire (SP 3030 1874) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Brendan O'Brien, Empire Homes Ltd, The Long Barn, Oxford Road, Old Chalford, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, OX7 5QR.

Planning permission has been granted (02/110) by West Oxfordshire District Council to demolish the existing structures and redevelop the site for nine houses and a shop. The consent was subject to a condition that required the implementation of a further programme of archaeological work in the form of a watching brief. The archaeological potential of the site was revealed in a field evaluation (Hammond 2003) that located several medieval field boundaries and some possible prehistoric activity.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Hugh Coddington, Deputy County Archaeological Officer for Oxfordshire County Council.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Erlend Hindmarch and Jo Pine between the 19th March and 3rd April 2003 and the site code is CFAW 03/02.

The site archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, RG1 5NR and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

## Location, topography and geology

The site is located on a rectangular plot of land of *c.* 0.3 ha on the north side of the High Street, Ascott-under-Wychwood, approximately 50m east to the junction with London Lane (SP 3030 1874). The site is at an elevation of *c.* 95m above Ordnance Datum and was previously a redundant farmyard. Natural geology is mapped as second terrace gravel overlying Lower Lias Clay with outcrops of limestone (BGS 1982) which was confirmed during the previous evaluation and current fieldwork.

## **Archaeological background**

Ascott-under-Wychwood is first mentioned in Domesday Book (1086) and the site lies within the historic core of the village. During the medieval period the settlement encompassed two distinct areas: Ascott d'Oyley in the east and Ascott Earl in the west. The castle of Ascott d'Oyley, approximately 150m to the north of the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 21700). It survives as a series of earthworks with some residual stone works. Archaeological deposits include a series of ditch features aligned south-east from the railway to the High Street, including the present site, that may be boundary markers relating to the settlement, rather than the castle. Medieval pottery kilns and waste dumps are also noted from the area, while some early post-medieval building foundations were recovered in an archaeological watching brief to the east of the site (H. Coddington, pers. comm.)

The field evaluation undertaken in February 2003 (Hammond 2003) located a number of features including boundary gullies and ditches with some possible structural features like postholes, dated to the Medieval period notably between the 13th and 15th centuries. Carbonized grain indicated the potential for the recovery of evidence of agricultural/subsistence activities in the settlement.

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the new construction work, including the topsoil stripping and foundation trenches and services pipe lines. A further aim was to integrate the findings of the previous evaluation with the finds from the watching brief to fully interpret the site's archaeological use.

The methodology employed was to observe and record the foundation trenches and areas of topsoil stripping (Fig. 3), monitor all spoilheaps for finds and excavate and record any possible archaeological deposits by hand.

## **Results (Figs 3 and 4)**

Eleven features were observed and recorded during this phase of fieldwork. They comprised six pits, four gullies or ditches and one modern robber trench.

### 11th century

Two pits, a gully, a ditch and two deposit layers were dated to this period. Pit 12 was circular with near vertical sides and a flat base, it was 0.27m deep and 1m in diameter, the fill contained gravel, burnt clay and charcoal

inclusions. Pit 13 was 0.77m in diameter and 0.18m deep with a rounded base and a fill that contained large limestone pieces and charcoal flecks.

Gully 14 was observed in section only, as a narrow cut 0.5m wide and 0.23m deep. The fill was dark greyish brown. Above this gully lay two deposits/layers: 64 was a lens of loose charcoal in the subsoil, 65 lay underneath the subsoil but covering the fill of gully 14 and contained many animal bone fragments and pottery sherds. It was dark grey silty clay with large limestone chunks.

Linear feature 21 had a variable width between 1.5m at the east end and 1.2m at the west end, rounded sides and a flat base. The secondary fill was a mid grey brown silty clay with occasional rounded pebbles and some charcoal, the primary fill was a light brown clay also with occasional pebbles

#### Early post-Medieval

Two pits were dated to this period. Pit (18) was seen in two sections and had a wide, U-shaped base, it was up to 1.5m in diameter and 0.37m deep. The fill was loose black clayey silt with limestone inclusions; pottery of early post-medieval date, bone and a clay pipe were retrieved from the fill, dating it to the mid 16th century or later. Feature (20) was a large shallow feature 4m wide and 0.7m deep with steep sides and a flat base. The fill was compact dark grey clay. It is possibly a shallow pit and is likely to be of post-medieval date.

#### Modern

Linear feature (15) was observed in a stripped area north-west of the site. It was aligned NE–SW and then turned a right angle to run NW–SE. It was not excavated as finds from the surface contained modern pottery and animal bone, it was judged to be a Victorian robber trench that was almost parallel to gully (14).

#### Undated

Two pits, a ditch and an feature of unknown type had no dating evidence. Ditch (11) was visible only in the section of the foundation trench. This was a shallow linear ditch, 3.70m wide and 0.11m deep, with a flat base. The fill contained small limestone inclusions. Its nature is very unclear; it could have been a furrow or a hollow way, or just a natural hollow. Feature (16) was 1.41m wide and only observed in section, it had a rounded base with two fills; the secondary fill was compact orange brown silty clay, the primary fill (69) was a loose black clay silt, half full of limestone blocks. It may have been a pit or the terminal of a gully.

Ditch (17) was not seen fully in plan, it had a rounded base and sides and was 2.4m wide and 0.85m deep, the fill was loose black clayey silt with large limestone chunks. It was probably cut through at an angle and thus may have been a continuation of the gully found in Trench 3 in the evaluation. This too was undated, containing only a worked flint flake. Pit (19) was only seen in section and was a rounded shape over 2.1m in diameter and 0.5m deep. The fill was mid brown grey silty clay.

## **Finds**

### *Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn*

The pottery assemblage examined comprised 37 sherds with a total weight of 395g. This comprised 29 sherds from the watching brief and 8 sherds from an environmental sample taken during the evaluation. The entire assemblage was early medieval or later, with the exception of two abraded and redeposited sherds of Roman material, with most of the group dating to the early part of the medieval period.

The pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD975-1350. 18 sherds, 237g.

OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 1 sherd, 5g.

OXCX: Medieval Wychwood-type ware, , mid 13th – 15th century. 2 sherds, 13g.

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 1 sherd, 2g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 6 sherds, 69g.

WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, mid 19th - 20th century. 4 sherds, 28g

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Appendix 2. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

The majority of the medieval assemblage comprises sherds of OXAC, and generally indicates that there was a short-lived period of activity from around the time of the Norman conquest and extending into the early part of the 13th century, and then little until around the middle of the 16th century or later.

The dating of OXAC is somewhat problematic, and has been discussed in detail by Mellor (1994, 51–2). It has been found in contexts in Gloucestershire which date to as early as the late 9th century, and in Oxford from the early 10th century, but does not appear to have been used in quantity until the early to mid 11th century in either place. As the material from this site does not have any other medieval wares in association, it has been given a tentative date of the 11th century, with the *caveat* that it could be a century or more earlier.

It is curious that OXAC was entirely absent from the assemblages retrieved by the evaluation, which all appear to be later than the material from this phase of the project, where the 13th century is only represented by a single context.

The medieval assemblage comprises mainly plain bodysherds, although two jar rimsherds, two bodysherds with applied strips and a single base sherd were noted. Many of the sherds are scorched and /or sooted, suggesting that they are all the result of domestic activity.

### *Animal bone* by Sian Anthony

Fifty pieces of animal bone were recovered from six contexts weighing in total 1067g (Appendix 3). All were very well preserved with little sign of abrasion or weathering indicating immediate burial after disposal. All but two pieces were from 11th century contexts indicating the close vicinity of an early medieval settlement, as much of the bone is domestic refuse. This is confirmed by the clear signs of butchery on seven pieces of bone that are exclusive to cattle bones. The species represented are all domestic animals, with two cat bones and four dog bones from gully slot (14). The dog bones indicate a fully adult animal of a small to medium size. The majority are cow or cow size fragments (66%) this may be because conditions favour the preservation and recovery of larger and more recognisable fragments. However the preservation conditions are excellent and although no samples were taken for sieving, some small fragments were recognized and retrieved. Small amounts of sheep/goat and pig were also recovered with a small amount of unidentified bone (Appendix 3) A small fragment of shell (under 1g) was recovered from pit 13.

Although no bones were found unfused, a number of jaws with *in situ* teeth were available for ageing. Two sheep/ goat mandibles were both aged to over eight years old although one was from a mid 16th century context. A pig maxilla is classed as immature as the second molar was only partially erupted giving a possible age of between 8 and 12 months. Two cow teeth were aged as adult only. The cat mandible is also from an adult, all the teeth are erupted yet there is no wear on any, indicating a young adult age.

### *Flint* by Steve Ford

A narrow flake (26mm long) of possible Mesolithic or earlier date was recovered from pit 13 which is dated to the 11th century from the pottery from the same context, it is likely to be residual.

### *Environmental remains* by Mark Robinson

A sample was taken during the initial evaluation of ditch 9 (60), which contained a small amount of carbonised grain and seeds, 16 pieces of animal bone, 13 of burnt clay, 1 of brick or tile and nine pieces of pottery of mid 13th-15th century. A 30 Litre sample of the fill was floated to recover charred plant remains and which also produced a quantity of molluscs. The results for charred seeds are given in Appendix 6. A little *Corylus avellana* (hazel) and *Quercus* (oak) charcoal was also present. The cereal crops were all typical of the region during the medieval period, although the record of fodder vetch is of interest. Their occurrence suggests crop processing was occurring nearby.

The most numerous mollusc shells were of *Cochlicopa* sp and *Trichia hispida* gp., which occur in a wide range of terrestrial habitats. However, *Vallonia costata*, which is characteristic of open conditions, is also present.

### *Other finds* by Sian Anthony

#### Metal

Two corroded iron nails were retrieved from layer 65 and ditch 21. The first is 43mm long and the head is 19mm wide. The second is more corroded and less recognizable as a nail shaft. It is 77mm long.

#### Clay Pipe

Six pieces of clay pipes were recovered from pit 18, five stems and a partial bowl, all have narrow boreholes. The bowl has decorative moulding of foliage along the anterior and base, with a very narrow foot, the makers initials are on the foot but are eroded, the first may be 'S'. The shape is reminiscent of bowls produced from the 1660s onwards with a thin flat spur (Ayto 1994).

#### Burnt clay

Nineteen pieces of burnt clay weighing a total of 216g were recovered from three contexts (12, 13 and 21). None has any distinguishing characteristics.

### **Conclusion**

The features observed in this watching brief confirm the presence of further archaeological deposits on this site as indicated in the earlier evaluation (Hammond 2003). The evaluation uncovered a small range of gullies and ditches that mostly dated to between the 13th and 15th century. However, a further eleven features were recorded in this phase of work, of which five can be dated to the eleventh century (or possibly earlier), and this therefore



extends the date range of known early deposits in the village. The features located in both phases of fieldwork indicate a spread of activity from the early medieval period onwards. The presence of residual items comprising two Roman sherds and two prehistoric worked flints (one from the evaluation) indicate a low level of activity in these earlier periods also.

The pits probably reflect the presence of nearby occupation, though no building remains have been found. Post holes found in the evaluation (4, 5 and 10) are more likely to have been fence lines or other structures rather than buildings.

The medieval ditches and gullies (6, 7 and 21) are probably boundary ditches (and their recuts), which indicate property divisions along the line of the High Street. Gullies 8, 9 and 14 may be a smaller division either within a property or between neighbouring plots. Gullies 2 and 17 may also be connected but are, unfortunately, both undated. They may represent regular village plots of land on the margins of the village of Ascott d'Oyley.

## References

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- BGS, 1982, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50 000, Sheet 236, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
- Hammond, S, 2003, Corner Farm, Ascott under Wychwood, Oxfordshire, An archaeological evaluation, Thames Valley Archaeological Services report 03/02a, Reading
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- Mellor, M, 1994, 'Oxford Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia* **59**, 17-217
- PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO

### APPENDIX 1A: Watching brief feature details

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
11	61	Furrow?	Undated	
12	62	Pit	11th century	Pottery
13	63	Pit	11th century	Pottery
14	66	Gully	11th century	Pottery
15	67	Robber trench	Modern	Pottery
16	68, 69	Pit	Undated	
17	70	Gully	Undated	
18	71	Pit	Late/Post Medieval	Pottery
19	72	Pit	Undated	
20	73	Pit?	Late Medieval?	
21	74	Ditch	11th century	Pottery
-	64	Charcoal layer	Undated	
-	65	Medieval soil layer	11th century	Pottery

### APPENDIX 1B: Evaluation feature details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
3	1	52	Scoop	Post-medieval 16th–18th century	pottery
3	2	53	gully- same as 3	undated	
3	3	54	gully- same as 2	undated	
3	4	55	Stakehole	undated	
2	5	56	Posthole	undated	
2	6	57	Ditch recut of 7	Medieval 13th–15th century	pottery
2	7	58	Ditch	Medieval	cut by 6
1	8	59	Gully	Medieval	cut by 9
1	9	60	Ditch	Medieval 13th–15th century	pottery
2	10	-	posthole?- unexcavated	undated	cuts 7

**APPENDIX 2: Pottery catalogue. Watching brief and evaluation environmental sample**

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabrics</i>													
		<i>Roman</i>		<i>OXAC</i>		<i>OXY</i>		<i>OXCX</i>		<i>OXAM</i>		<i>OXDR</i>		<i>WHEW</i>	
		<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>
9	60	1	1	3	13	1	5	2	13	1	2				
12	62			3	27										
13	63			2	29										
-	65	1	27	6	113										
14	66			5	20										
15	67											4	17	4	28
18	71											2	52		
21	74			2	48										
	Total	2	28	21	250	1	5	2	13	1	2	6	69	4	28

**APPENDIX 3: Animal Bone catalogue**

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill</i>	<i>Cow</i>	<i>Cow size</i>	<i>Sheep/ goat</i>	<i>Pig</i>	<i>Cat</i>	<i>Dog</i>	<i>Unid</i>	<i>Total</i>
12	62		2	3					5
14	66	3	4			2	4	4	17
17	70	1							1
18	71			1					1
21	74	1							1
	65	1	21		2			1	25
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>50</b>

**APPENDIX 4: Other finds (weight in g)**

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Flint</i>	<i>Metal</i>	<i>Clay pipe</i>	<i>Burnt Clay</i>	<i>Date</i>
11	61					Undated
12	62				7	11th century
13	63	1			6	11th century
14	66					11th century
15	67					Modern
16	68, 69					Undated
17	70					Undated
18	71			6		Late Medieval
19	72					Undated
20	73					Late Medieval?
21	74		1		6	11th century
-	64					Undated
-	65		1			11th century
Total		1	2 (14)	6 (16)	19 (216)	

**APPENDIX 5:** Finds recovered from sample taken in evaluation

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Weight (g)</i>
9	60	Pottery	9	36
		Animal bone	16	18
		Burnt Clay	13	128
		Brick and tile	1	8

**APPENDIX 6: Charred Seeds from ditch 9 (60)**

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CROPS		
<i>Triticum</i> sp. - free-threshing grain	rivet or bread wheat	11
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	wheat	1
<i>Hordeum</i> sp. - hulled	hulled barley	5
<i>Avena</i> sp.	oats	1
cereal indet.		9
<i>Vicia sativa</i> ssp. <i>sativa</i>	fodder vetch	1
WEEDS		
<i>Atriplex</i> sp.	orache	1
<i>Vicia</i> or <i>Lathyrus</i> sp.	vetch or tare	1
weed seed indet.		2

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