

Former Bowling Green, Bainton Road, Oxford

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for St John's College**

by Sean Wallis and James Earley
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code BRO09/31

April 2009

Summary

Site name: Former Bowling Green, Bainton Road, Oxford

Grid reference: SP 5057 0852

Site activity: Field Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 30th March 2009

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Sean Wallis

Site code: BRO09/31

Area of site: c. 1060 sq m

Summary of results: No archaeological finds or features were recorded during the evaluation. The site appears to have been substantially landscaped in the past, probably immediately prior to its use as a bowling green. This landscaping involved the removal of the original topsoil and its replacement, once a layer of clinker had been laid down to improve drainage. Although some truncation of the underlying subsoil seems to have occurred at this time, in order to create a level green surface, the natural geology does not appear to have been significantly disturbed.

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

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Report 09/31

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at the former Bowling Green, Bainton Road, Oxford (SP 5057 0852) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Nick Rees of Savills, Wytham Court, 11 West Way, Oxford, on behalf of St John's College, Oxford.

The site lies on the east side of Bainton Road, Oxford, approximately 1.2km north of the city centre (Fig. 2). Planning permission (09/00364/FUL) is being sought from Oxford City Council to construct two new dwellings on the site, along with associated car parking, cycle parking and bin store areas. The construction of the dwellings will potentially have an adverse impact upon any archaeological deposits located within the footprint of the building.

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief provided by Mr. David Radford, Oxford City Council Archaeologist. The site is located within a poorly understood area of the Oxford gravel terrace and within an area of sports grounds that is relatively lightly developed. The potential importance of any remains present has taken on added significance in the light of recent discoveries of prehistoric and Saxon archaeology, including a mass grave and henge monument, found at St John's College, Blackhall Road to the south. An archaeological evaluation has been requested for the site in order to provide information about the archaeological impacts of the proposed development to inform the planning process, as detailed in *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16, 1990) and the City Council's policies on archaeology.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr David Radford, City Archaeological and based on a brief provided by him. The fieldwork was undertaken by Sean Wallis and James Earley on the 30th March 2009 and the site code is BRO09/31. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the north of the city centre, and is the northernmost part of the St John's College sports ground. The site is bounded to the west by Bainton Road, and to the north and east by residential properties (Fig.

2). The site is located on a relatively flat piece of ground, at a height of approximately 62m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology consists of Second Terrace river gravels (BGS 1982.)

Archaeological background

The archaeological background to the site has been provided in a brief provided by Mr David Radford, Oxford City Council Archaeological Officer. In summary the site is located on the Oxford gravel terrace, on which numerous features dating from the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman periods have been identified, either through archaeological fieldwork or aerial photographs. However, the site lies within a (relatively) poorly understood area of the gravel terrace, although this paucity of information may merely be the result of a lack of archaeological fieldwork in this lightly developed area.

Recently completed fieldwork (August 2008) to the south of the proposal site has enhanced the perceived significance of the environs of this area of Oxford in earlier prehistoric times. In addition to medieval deposits a segment of a very large ceremonial monument (a henge) of late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date has been excavated along with a late Saxon mass grave on Blackhall Road, St Johns College (Wallis in prep). Nearer to the proposed site, cropmarks of likely prehistoric date have been recorded 370m to the north (HER 3576), whilst Bronze Age metalwork (HER 3816) and Neolithic pottery (HER 2815) have been found within a 500m radius.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the impact area of the proposed new building.

The specific research aims of this project are:

- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site;
- to determine if any archaeological deposits of any period have survived on site;
- to determine if any if any deposits relating to prehistoric activity are present; and
- to determine if any deposits relating to Roman activity are present.

This work was be carried out in a manner which will not compromise the integrity of archaeological features or deposits which warrant preservation *in situ*, or might better be excavated under conditions pertaining to full excavation.

Three 1.6m wide trenches were to be dug by a JCB-type machine, all 10m long, and located within the area of the site which would be most affected by the proposed development. Where archaeological features were

certainly or probably present, the stripped areas were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools. A sufficient number of the archaeological features and deposits exposed would be excavated by hand to satisfy the aims of the project. A programme of environmental sampling was to be implemented should sufficient well stratified subsurface deposits be located.

Results (Figs 3 and 4)

Three trenches were excavated within the area of the former bowling green, in the positions shown in Figure 3. Trench 3 was moved from its originally proposed location, due to the presence of trees. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths and description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Plate 1)

Trench 1 was aligned approximately W-E, and was 11.40m long. The stratigraphy observed within the trench (Fig. 4) consisted of 0.21m of turf and topsoil which lay above a deposit of clinker. This layer was approximately 0.15m thick, and was probably laid down to provide improved drainage to the bowling green. A deposit of brown silty clay with occasional gravel, up to 0.09m thick, was recorded immediately below the clinker layer, and appears to represent undisturbed subsoil. The natural geology was observed immediately below the subsoil, and consisted of yellow/brown sand and gravel at the western end of the trench, becoming more silty towards the east. No archaeological finds or features were recorded in the trench.

Trench 2 (Plate 2)

This trench was aligned approximately SE–NW, and was 8.70m long. The stratigraphy was very similar to that noted in trench 1, with up to 0.22m of turf and topsoil lying directly above a layer of clinker, which was approximately 0.12m thick. This lay directly above the subsoil, although a small band of possible buried topsoil was recorded at the southern end of the trench. The subsoil was about 0.15m thick, and lay directly above the natural geology, which consisted of yellow/brown sandy silt with moderate gravel inclusions. No archaeological finds or features were observed in this trench.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was aligned approximately NE–SW, and was 10.60m long. The stratigraphy followed the same pattern as that observed in the other trenches, consisting of 0.28m of turf and topsoil, onto clinker, up to 0.14m thick,

which lay above the subsoil. The subsoil in this trench was approximately 0.14m thick, and lay directly above the natural greyish/brown silty sand. No archaeological finds or features were recorded in this trench.

Finds

No archaeological finds were recovered during the evaluation.

Conclusion

No archaeological deposits were recorded during the evaluation, which provided a good coverage of the area which will be most affected by the proposed development. The site appears to have been substantially landscaped in this past to create a level bowling green, which involved the removal of the original topsoil, and its subsequent replacement once a layer of clinker had been laid down to improve drainage. However, the stratigraphy recorded in all three trenches suggests that this episode of landscaping did not have any significant impact on the underlying subsoil and natural geology. Nevertheless no archaeological deposits were revealed.

References

- BGS, 1982, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50,000 Sheet 236, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
PPG16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
Radford, D, 2009, 'Brief for an archaeological field evaluation (trial trenching) at St. John's College Sports Ground, Woodstock Road, Oxford', Oxford City Council, Oxford
Wallis, S, in prep., 'St John's College, Kendrew Quad, Blackhall Road, Oxford; an archaeological excavation', Thames Valley Archaeological Services rep 07/131, Reading

APPENDIX 1: Trench details

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	11.40	1.60	0.49	0-0.21m turf and topsoil onto 0.21-0.36m made ground (clinker) onto 0.36-0.45m mid brown silty sand subsoil onto natural geology (sand and gravel / silty sand). No archaeology. [Plate 1]
2	8.70	1.60	0.78	0-0.22m turf and topsoil onto 0.22-0.34m made ground (clinker) onto 0.34-0.57m mid brown silty sand subsoil onto natural geology (sandy silt). No archaeology. [Plate 2]
3	10.60	1.60	0.74	0-0.28m turf and topsoil onto 0.28-0.42m made ground (clinker) onto 0.42-0.56m mid brown silty sand subsoil onto natural geology (sandy silt). No archaeology.



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Figure 2. Location of site off Bainton Road.

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T H A M E S V A L L E Y

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Figure 3. Location of trenches.

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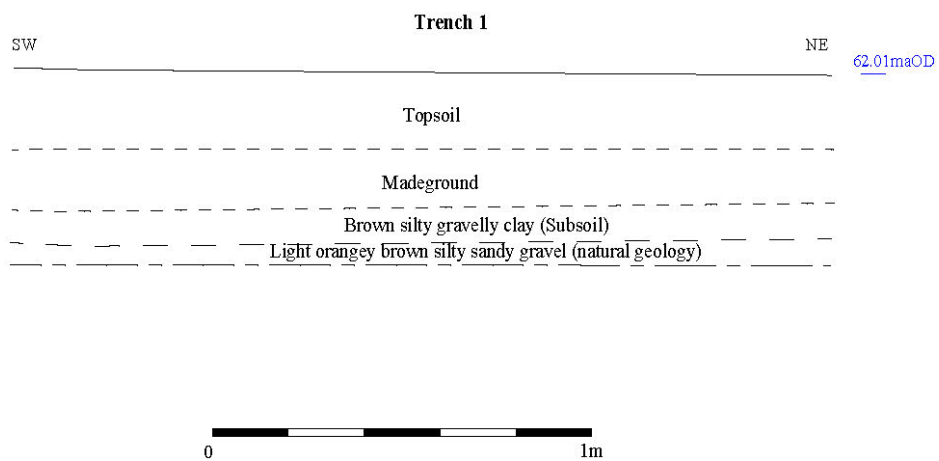


Figure 4. Representative trench section.



Plate 1. Trench 1 looking north-east, horizontal scales: 1m and 2m; vertical scale 0.5m



Plate 2. Trench 2 looking north, horizontal scales: 1m and 2m; vertical 0.5m.