

Goodhart Building, University College, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief on engineering test pits (May 2013)

Oxford Archaeology (OA) were commissioned by Dr Roland Harris to undertake an Archaeological Watching Brief during the hand-excavation, by other parties, of two engineering test pits (Test Pits 1 and 2) that were required to investigate the nature of the foundations of the extant Goodhart Building (1961-2), University College, Oxford.

The following presents a brief description and interpretation of the stratigraphic sequence revealed during this Watching Brief - Figure 1 shows the location of the Test Pits, and Plates 1 and 2 show the nature of the deposits and structures revealed.

Test Pit 1 (Fig. 1 and Plate 1)

TP1 was excavated against a pillar in the south wall of the south-east corner of the Goodhart Building (Fig. 1). The Test Pit extended 1.5m to the south of the wall and was a maximum of 0.9m wide. The southern edge of the exposed pillar base was not parallel with the wall of the Goodhart Building, being offset by 0.6m at the western edge of the trench and 0.45m at the eastern edge.

The southern half of the pit was excavated to 1.25m below the existing flagstone paving (bgl) to facilitate the deeper excavation of the northern half of the pit to expose the depth of the concrete base of the pillar. The southern edge of the deeper excavation was battered to a general depth of 1.65m bgl, and a c 0.2m² sondage excavated up against the foundation to a maximum depth of 1.9m bgl.

The remnant of the timber shuttering against which the concrete had been poured was evident, and had presumably been placed against the edge of a trench for the foundation which had been excavated through the material to the south. This material comprised 0.9m⁺ of predominantly mid brown clayey silt which had modern finds throughout - although infrequent - and was in turn overlain by 0.8m of mixed construction debris (concrete fragments/stone/brick rubble/aggregate etc). The latter was overlain by a 0.2m re-enforced concrete slab, which was in turn overlain by the 0.08m thick flagstone paving.

Test Pit 2 (Fig. 1 and Plate 2)

TP2 was excavated on the north-west corner of an ancillary building to the north-west of the Goodhart Building (Fig. 1). The trench measured a maximum of 1.9m from north to south and extended 1m from the western wall of the building. The earliest deposit encountered was a 0.2m-0.55m⁺ thick deposit of mid brownish grey clay silt, which was overlain by up to 0.9m of mixed construction debris (brick/concrete fragments/tarmac/sand etc). The interface between these deposits corresponded to the base of the concrete footing for the standing building (at 1.4m bgl) and the base of a brick, concrete capped structure on the same alignment (at 1.05m bgl). The mixed deposit; concrete foundation and concrete cap of the brick structure were overlain by c 0.5m of bedding deposits for the existing 0.08m thick flagstone paving.

Discussion

No geological gravels, original overlying sub-soils, stratified horizontal archaeology, archaeological features or structures were encountered. The earliest deposits revealed within each Test Pit comprised a thick (up to 0.9m) deposit of homogeneous mid brown clayey silt extending down from a depth of c 1.0m bgl. These deposits were in turn overlain by deposits containing modern building material debris,

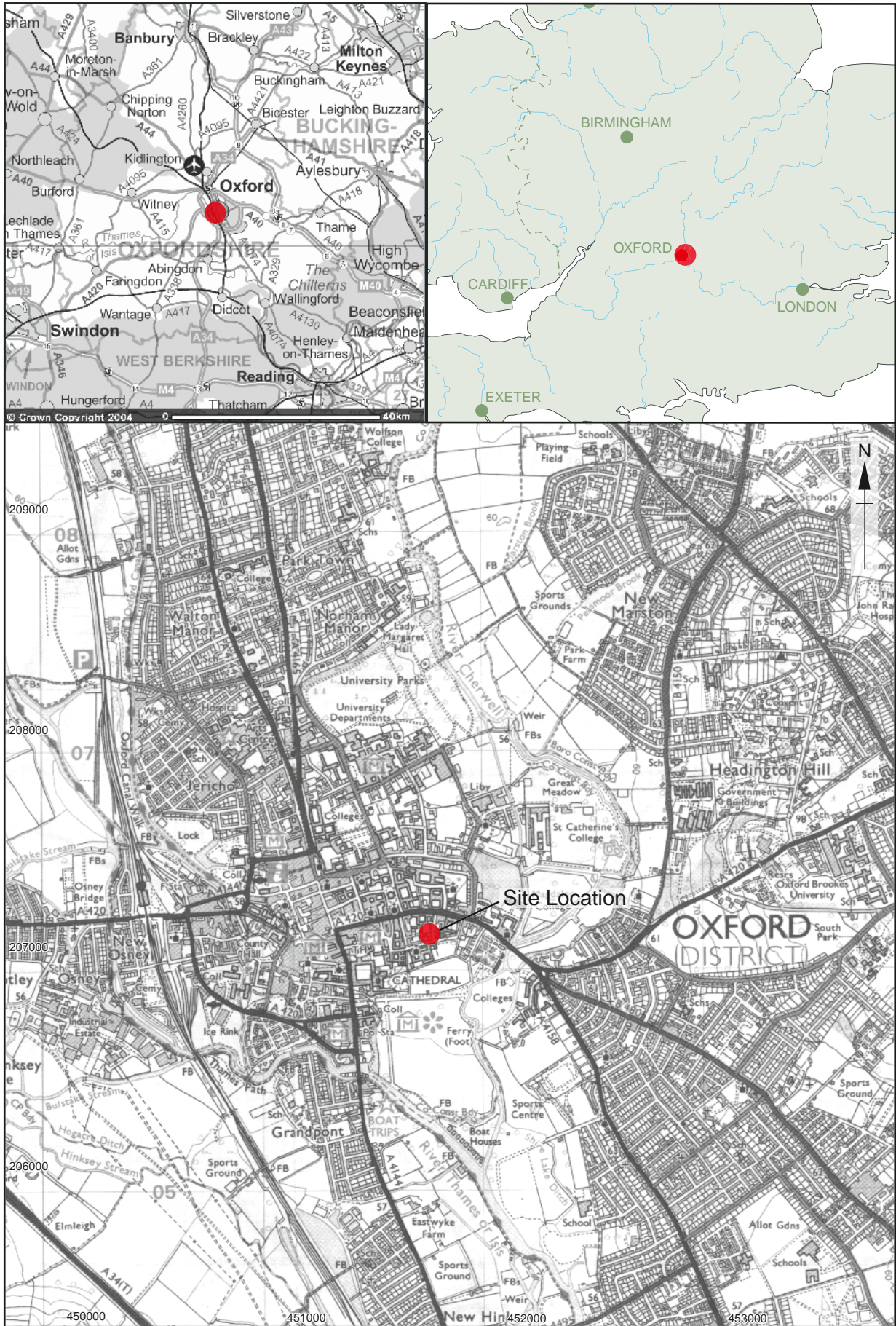
almost certainly, originating from the construction of the Goodhart Building in 1961-2.

Characterisation of the clayey silt deposit was problematic given the restricted confines of the Test Pits. In Test Pit 2 it contained post-medieval finds (sherds of a late 19th century marmalade jar and some glass fragments – not retained), and in Test Pit 1 it yielded modern finds including fragments of concrete and broken ceramic service pipe. This would suggest that even if it does represent an archaeological horizon – it had been disturbed during the construction of the Goodhart Building (or that it is a re-deposition of material excavated from elsewhere).

The remnants of timber shuttering used to form the foundations during construction was revealed against the face of the concrete foundation in TP1, and was present from immediately below the existing concrete slab (c 0.25m bgl). This could be the result of a number of different scenarios;

1. The shuttering lined a construction trench cut through pre-existing deposits of rubble and silty clay - implying modern truncation to at least 1.9m bgl prior to the construction of the foundations.
2. The shuttering was constructed and propped to the edge of a wider construction trench (extending beyond the limits of the TP), which was then backfilled with construction rubble and debris - implying the deeper truncation is limited to the area immediately adjacent to the concrete foundation.
3. The shuttering lined the edge of a construction trench through cut through the silty clay – the top of which formed the construction horizon for the new building.

The latter scenario would suggest that the interface between the upper deposit of construction debris and the underlying clayey silt material represents the base of the construction cut or even the construction horizon for the Goodhart Building. The clayey silt deposit albeit probably truncated - and at least at this proximity to the extant buildings disturbed - may represent an horizon of a pre-existing garden soils. These types of deposits are often encountered to the rear of tenement plots, and where observed in other parts of central Oxford have been up to 1m thick and seen to seal earlier archaeological deposits and features. Such a situation was recorded during archaeological works to the west of the present site, prior to the construction of the new Kitchens at the College in 2009.



Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's 1:50,000 map of 1994 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright. Licence No. 854166

Figure 1: Site location

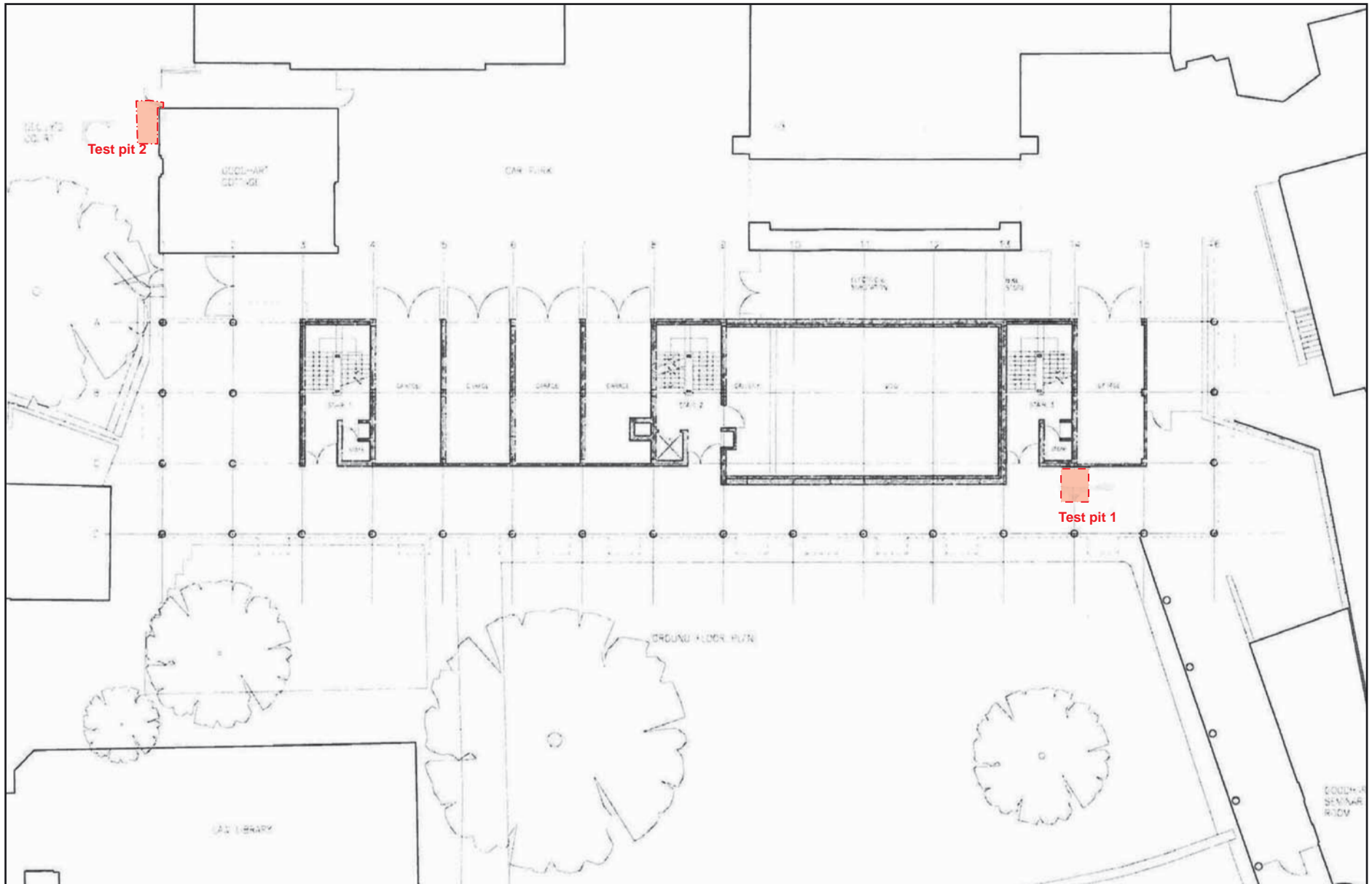


Figure 2: Location of Test pits TP1 and TP2



Plate 1: Test Pit 1 looking north



Plate 2: Test Pit 2 looking north (subsequently extended north)