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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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University Parks, Oxford
Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by Estates Service, University of Oxford to undertake a watching brief during the construction of new gate piers, pathway and planting beds at University Parks, Oxford. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered, the only layers exposed being a 19th/20th century made ground layer beneath the modern topsoil. A 16th century jeton was recovered from this layer.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank University of Oxford Estates Services for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to David Radford who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council for his advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Carl Champness. The fieldwork was carried out by Michael McLean. Thanks are also extended to the team of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen and prepared the archive under the management of Nicky Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Estates Services, University of Oxford, to undertake a watching brief during the construction of new gate piers, a pathway and planting beds at University Parks, Oxford (Fig 1).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: 16/00597/FUL). The Local Planning Authority prepared a brief for the work and discussions with David Radford, Planning Archaeologist for Oxford City Council (OCC), established the scope of the work required.
- 1.1.3 The site is located in the vicinity of numerous cropmarks. A number of these are of significance, including a possible Neolithic cursus and a late Neolithic/early Bronze Age round barrow cemetery. Other cropmarks appear to represent Iron Age and Roman field systems and settlement enclosures. The site therefore had the potential to help further understand the character and development of prehistoric Oxford.
- 1.1.4 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' 'Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation' (CIFA 2014) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site was situated in Oxford University Parks, a designated Grade II Registered Park in the City of Oxford that consists primarily of grass playing fields, as well as paths and planting beds.
- 1.2.2 The superficial geology of the western part of the site is Summertown-Radley (second) Gravel Terrace. The eastern part of the site is Northmoor (first) Gravel Terrace. This overlies Oxford Clay Formation. The site lies at c 63m aOD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Archaeological information about University Parks derives from cropmark evidence, excavations and map regression. The cropmarks have been plotted by Hassall (1986) and as part of English Heritage's National Mapping Programme. Excavations have also recently taken place at the south of University Parks (OA 2011; Thompson 2015).
- 1.3.2 The archaeological and historical background of the site is briefly summarised below:

Prehistoric

- 1.3.3 No Palaeolithic or Mesolithic finds or features have been discovered within University Parks. A large number of cropmarks have been recorded, including three complete ring ditches, 40-45m in diameter, and two incomplete ring ditches, 23m and 55m in diameter. A possible ring ditch was excavated within the Parks, but it did not contain any datable material (OA 2011, 14). The ring ditches within University Parks form part of a linear E-W barrow cemetery that also comprises four barrows excavated 350m to the west at Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (Beckley and Radford 2011, 14-5).

- 1.3.4 A number of other barrows have also been excavated in the vicinity, primarily to the south and south-west of University Parks (Beckley and Radford 2011; Boston *et al.* 2003; Parkinson *et al.* 1996; Poore and Wilkinson 2001; Radcliffe 1961/2). Along with a middle Neolithic enclosure at Radcliffe Observatory (Beckley and Radford 2011, 3) and a late Neolithic/early Bronze Age henge at St Johns College (Wallis 2014). It appears that a significant ritual landscape existed within this area of Oxford during the Neolithic period and early Bronze Age. It is possible that parallel linear cropmarks within University Parks might be the remains of a cursus and related to the monument complex (WA 2011, 4-5).
- 1.3.5 Excavations at the south of University Parks during the extension of an electricity sub-station and laying of service cables uncovered a pit containing nine worked flints and a Neolithic scraper. This was interpreted as a deliberately placed deposit (OA 2011). A barbed-and-tanged arrowhead of probable early Bronze Age date has been found in the north-eastern part of the Parks (WA 2011, 2). Neolithic or Bronze Age pits have also been excavated c 270m to the south of the site (Booth and Hayden 2000).
- 1.3.6 Other cropmarks within University Parks do not appear to be related to the Neolithic and Bronze Age monument complex. These include rectilinear enclosures and linear features and probably date to the Iron Age and/or Roman period. Excavations at the south of University Parks uncovered a number of intercutting ditches dating to the middle and late Iron Age, including a relatively substantial enclosure ditch 3.2m wide and 0.7m deep. These appear to form a multi-phased system of landscape enclosures and fields. Iron Age finds were relatively numerous given the limited size of excavation and included 176 sherds of pottery, a fragment of a Greensand rotary quern, a fragmentary stone loom weight, and human bone from one or two foetal or neonatal individuals (Thompson 2015).

Roman

- 1.3.7 A number of ditches as well as two pits dating to the Roman period have been excavated at the south of University Parks (OA 2011). Pottery recovered was from the early and late Roman periods. Cropmarks within University Parks are likely to include features dating from the Roman period and it is probable that the site continued to be utilised as fields with possible settlement activity. Roman ditches and a skeleton have been found immediately to the south of University Parks (Bradley *et al.* 2005, 195) and further finds of Roman pottery and animal bone are known c 40m to the south of the site.

Medieval

- 1.3.8 Excavations at the south of University Parks revealed ditches and plough furrows dating to the medieval period (OA 2011; Thompson 2015). Documentary and map sources suggest the area was fields with ridge and furrow in the medieval period, supporting the excavated evidence that the site was under cultivation during this period.

Post-medieval

- 1.3.9 It is likely the site continued to be used for cultivation in the post-medieval period and lay just to the east of the outer civil war defenses (Bradley *et al.* 2005, fig. 14). The site

is depicted as a park on the 1876 1st Edition OS map. A small number of post-medieval pits and ditches have been excavated at the south of the site (OA 2011; Thompson 2015, 103).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The general aims of the watching brief were:

- to determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive;
- to determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means;
- to determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains;
- to determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy;
- to assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape;
- to determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive.

2.1.2 The specific aims and objectives of the watching brief were:

- to identify and record any significant archaeological remains, paying particular regard to the potential for prehistoric and Roman features, especially features related to the late Neolithic-early Bronze Age linear barrow cemetery which runs across this location.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The watching brief comprised monitoring of ground reduction for a new gate pier base and a new path base (Fig 2). Ground reduction was carried out by a mini-digger to a depth of 0.5m. New gate post pits were dug by hand. New planting beds were also created but were raised and had no archaeological impact.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 The earliest deposit exposed was a layer of made ground that contained 19th and 20th century pottery (not retained) and a 16th century jeton. The layer was at least 0.2m thick but the bottom was not reached. This was overlain by topsoil 0.2m thick and mulch 0.1m thick.

3.2 Finds by Ian Scott

3.2.1 **Jeton**, Rose and Orb type, probably first half 16th century, very worn. Probable three annulated crowns alternating with lys around a rosette. Legend worn and illegible // reichsapfel (orb) within a trilobe, legend again illegible. D: 25mm.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The groundworks exposed only a 19th/20th century made ground layer beneath the modern topsoil. The only archaeological find was a 16th century jeton from this layer.

APPENDIX A BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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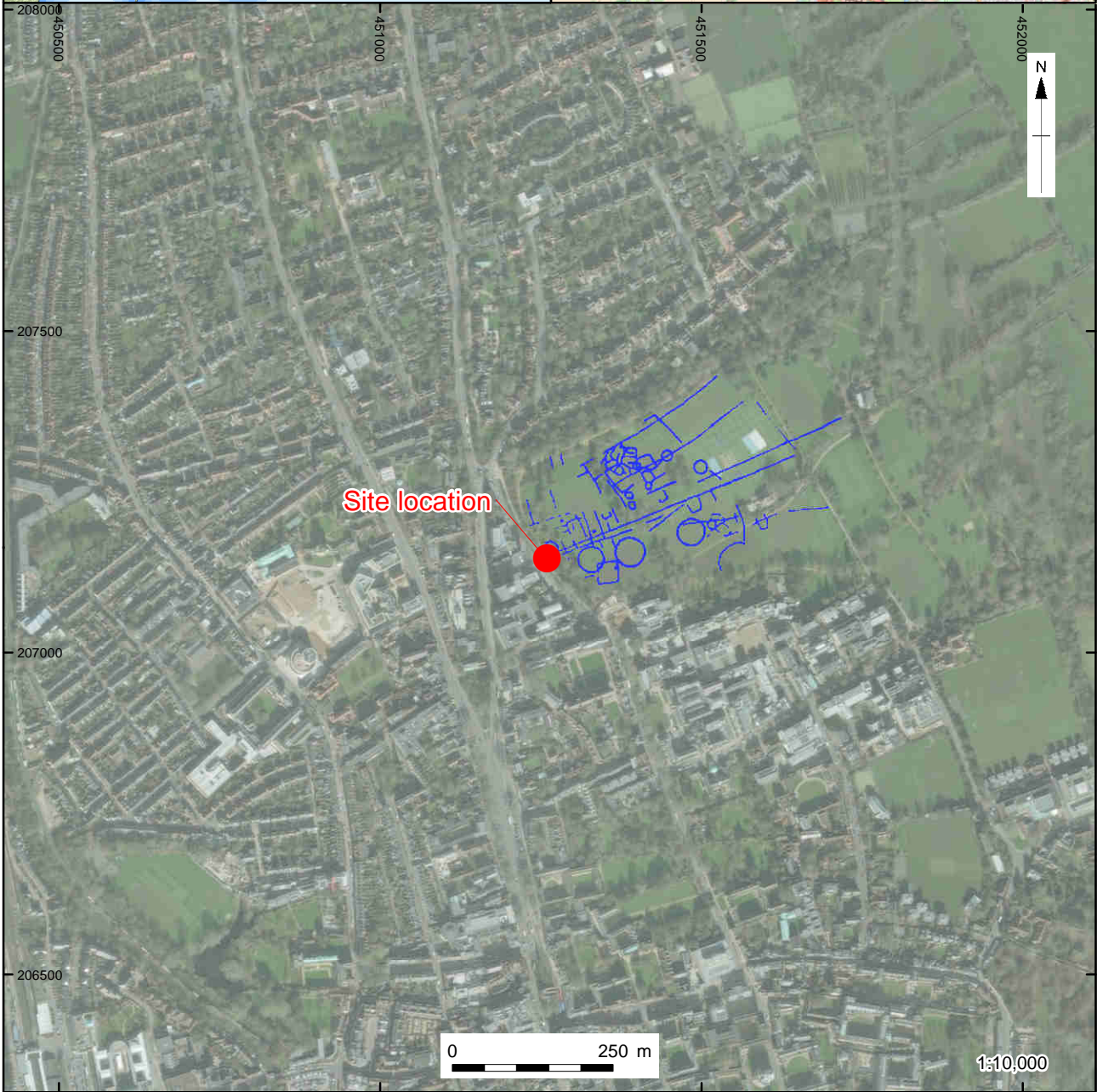
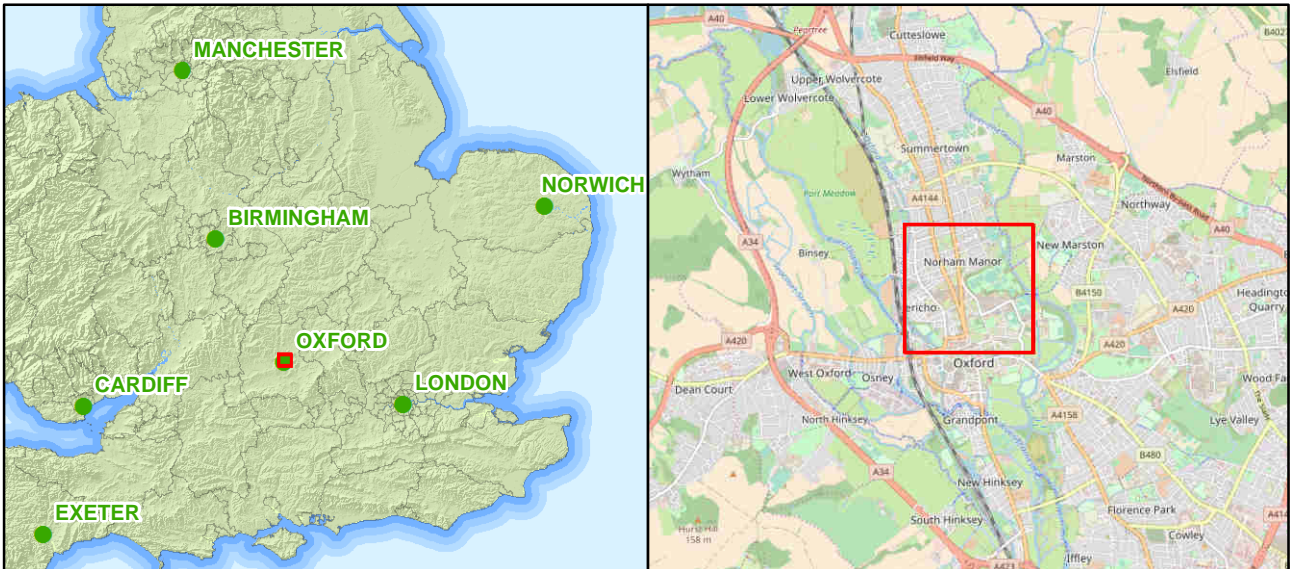
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APPENDIX B SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	University Parks, Oxford
Site code:	OXPARO17
Grid Reference	SP 516 073
Type of watching brief:	Intermittent
Date and duration:	2nd-21st November 2017
Area of Site	0.05ha
Summary of Results:	No archaeological deposits were exposed. A 16th century jeton was recovered from a modern made ground layer.
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXMS: 2017.88



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(c) OpenStreetMap and contributors, Creative Commons-Share Alike License (CC-BY-SA)
 Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Figure 1: Site location and cropmarks

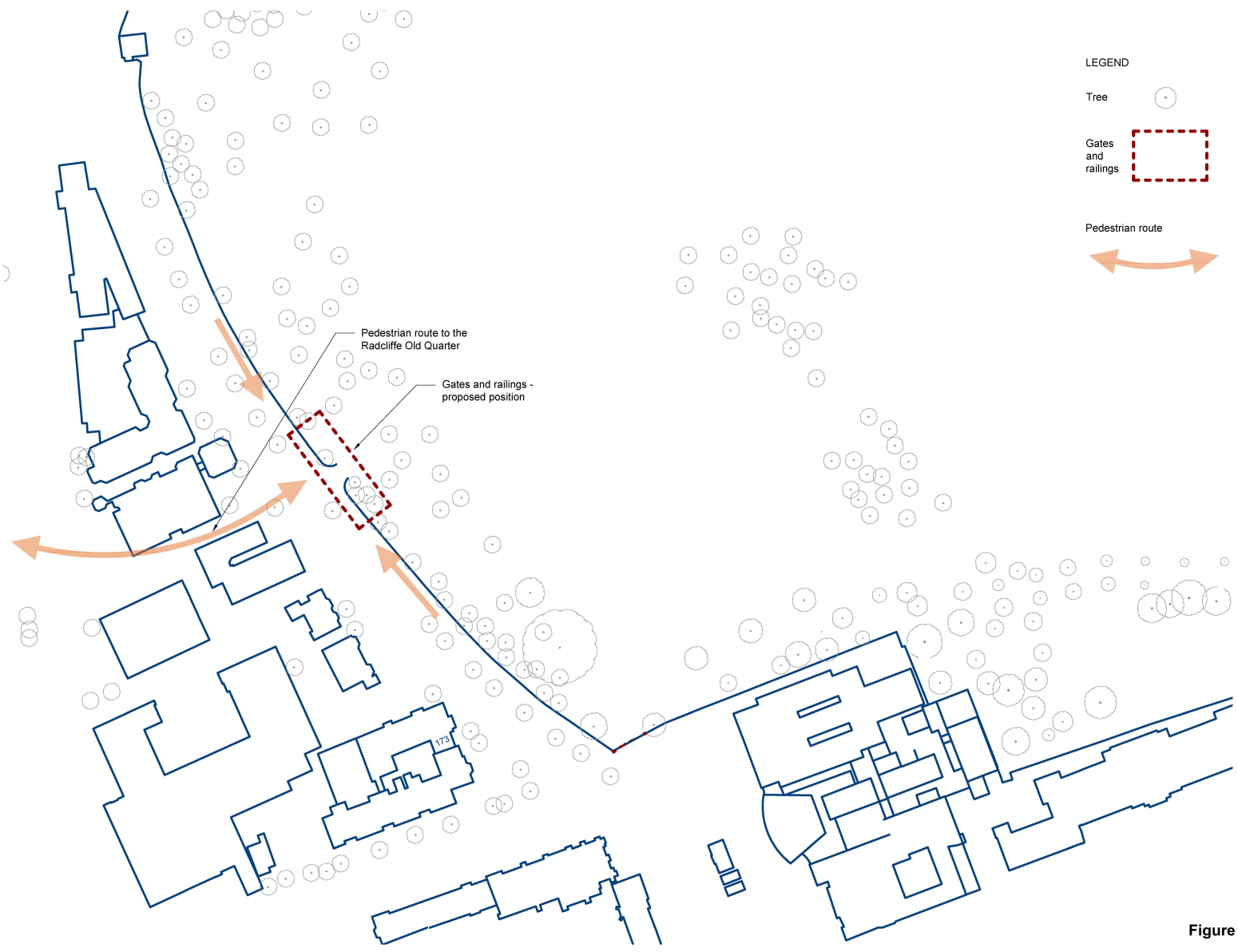


Figure 2: Plan of the works



Plate 1: Ground reduction in progress, looking south-west

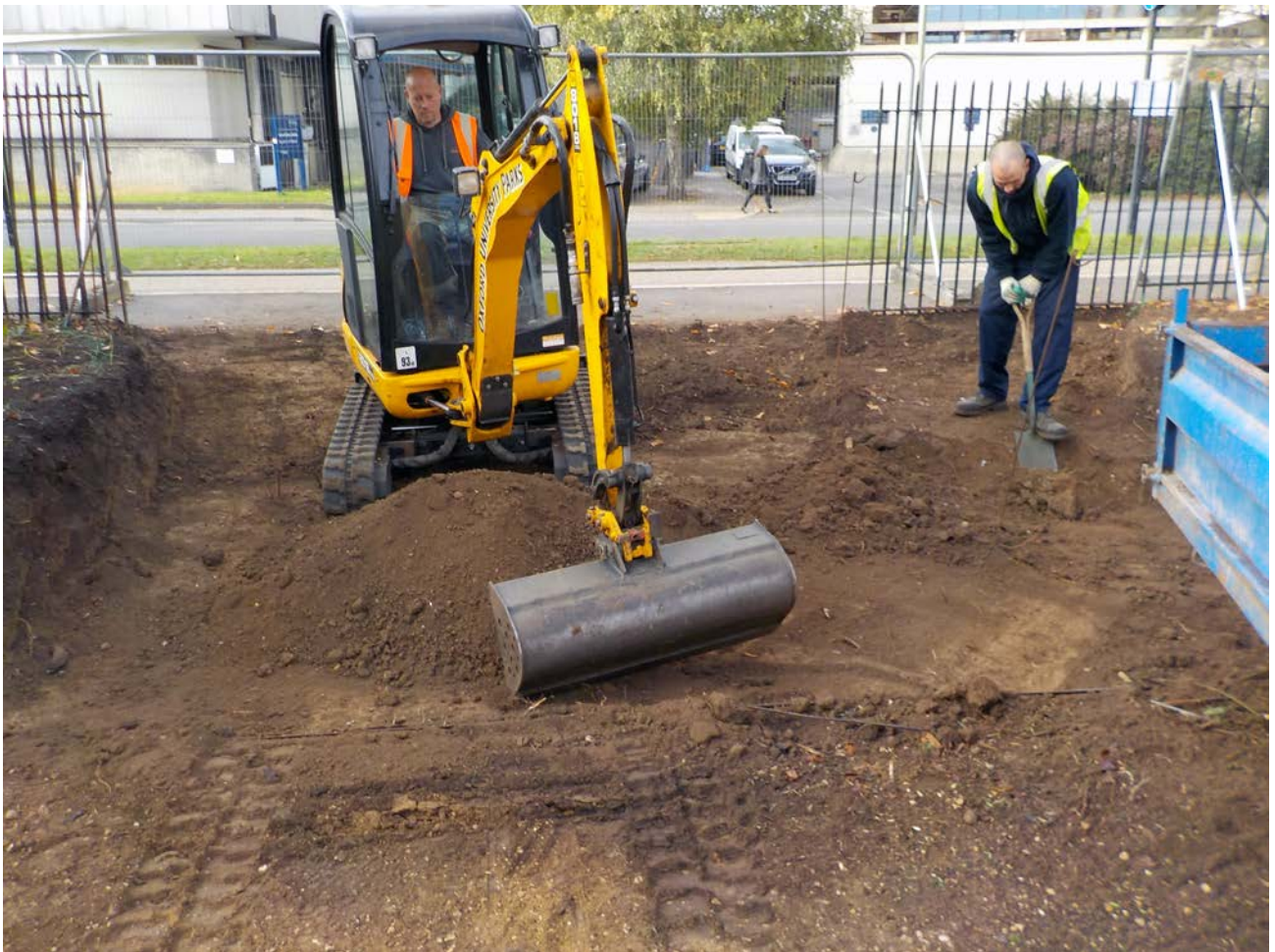


Plate 2: Ground reduction in progress, looking east



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