

Holywell House
Osney Mead
Oxford



Archaeological Evaluation Report



November 2007

Client: Knowles and Son

Issue N^o: 1
OA Job N^o: 3826
Planning Ref N^o: 02/01800/FUL
NGR: SP 502 055

Client Name: Knowles and Son

Client Ref No:

Document Title: Holywell house, Osney Mead, Oxford

Document Type: Evaluation

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: SP 502 055
Planning Reference: 02/01800/FUL

OA Job Number: 3826
Site Code: OXHOOM 07
Invoice Code: OXHOOOMEV
Receiving Museum: Oxford County Museum Service
Museum Accession No: OXCMS:2007.131

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Document File Location H:\PROJECTS\Oxfordshire OX\Oxford City OC\7802
Holywell House\evREP.doc

Graphics File Location Servergo:/oaupubs
1_RtoZ*OXHOOM07*OXHOOMEV*Holywell House,
Osney mead, Oxford*jm*20.11.07

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Holywell House, Osney Mead, Oxford

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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SUMMARY

In October 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Holywell House, Osney Mead, Oxford (NGR: SP 502 055), on behalf of Knowles and Son. The evaluation revealed modern made ground overlying alluvial deposits and river gravel. No significant archaeology was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In October 2007, OA carried out a field evaluation at Holywell House, Osney Mead, Oxford (NGR: SP 502 055) on behalf of Knowles and Son. This was undertaken in respect of a planning application for new office accommodation (Planning Application No. 02/01800/FUL).
- 1.1.2 As part of the planning application, Brian Durham, the Oxford City Archaeologist, requested that a 2% sample of the impact area be evaluated prior to development, in order to sample the archaeological potential of the site.
- 1.1.3 OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) showing how it meet the requirements of this condition (OA, 2007).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The development site is situated in the south-east part of Osney Mead industrial estate, and is 0.9 hectares in area (Fig. 1). The site lies at approximately 56 m above OD, within the ancient parish of St Thomas and is bounded to the south by the Bulstake stream, a tributary of the river Isis.
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology is River Thames Alluvium overlying river terrace gravels. The current use of the site is a tarmac carpark.

1.3 Archaeological [and historical] background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background of this area has been subject to Archaeological Desk Based Assessment (OAU, 2000). The proposed development site is situated to the west of the medieval town of Oxford, adjacent to one of the tributaries of the river Isis/Thames. The site itself has produced very limited archaeological evidence. The more general vicinity of Osney Mead has also produced limited archaeological evidence, although some finds from various periods have been noted.
- 1.3.2 In March 2000, an evaluation was carried out by the former Oxford Archaeological Unit (now OA) on land immediately to the north-east of the current development site. Three trenches were excavated. No archaeological features were identified, although a series of alluvial deposits, a palaeochannel and possible gravel island were observed.

- 1.3.3 In April 2002, OA carried out a three trench evaluation of land to the east of the proposed development site. Again a series of alluvial layers were identified, as well as palaeochannels and a possible ford of rammed stone embankment for the Bulstake stream.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence or absence, extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of archaeological remains within the proposal area. In particular, to establish the date range and phasing of remains within the trenches.
- 2.1.2 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the investigation. To place the results of the evaluation in a wider local and regional context.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The locations of the trenches were agreed with Brian Durham prior to the commencement of the evaluation (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.2 The evaluation consisted of 2 trenches each measuring 7 m in length by 1.6 m wide. The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a wheeled mechanical excavator (JCB) fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Excavation proceeded in spits down to undisturbed natural, or to the first significant archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand and any revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve dating evidence. Both the trenches and any potential archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where recorded their sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The trenches and any recorded sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 Finds

- 3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context. These included numerous examples of modern rubber, plastic, bottle glass and demolition debris. The presence of these finds was recorded but they were not retained.

3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

3.4.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the evaluation.

3.5 Presentation of results

3.5.1 The results of the evaluation will be detailed on a trench by trench basis followed by an overall discussion and interpretation.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 The site was located on the fringes of floodlands and the underlying deposits were heavily saturated resulting in very sticky working conditions.

4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

4.2.1 No significant archaeological deposits were encountered in either trench.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

Trench 1

5.1.1 This trench was located on the western edge of the development area, measured 7 m long by 1.6 m wide and was aligned south-east to north-west.

5.1.2 The underlying natural, the top of the orange-brown river gravel deposits (1), was encountered at a depth of 2 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 1). This was overlaid by a 0.4 m deep layer of blue-grey alluvial clay (2). Sealing this was a 0.8 m deep layer of very dark grey clay silt (3). This deposit contained numerous examples of 20th century detritus such as rubber, bottle glass and demolition rubble suggesting that it was a layer of modern made ground. Overlying this was a 0.3 m deep layer of mid brown silt loam (4). This represents a landscaping layer, probably the original topsoil reinstated after the made ground 3 was deposited. This was overlaid by a 0.25 m deep layer of crushed stone (5), the hardcore base for the present day 0.13 m deep concrete car park surface (6).

Trench 2

5.1.3 This trench was located in the centre of the development area, also measured 7 m long by 1.6 m wide and was aligned north-west to south-east.

5.1.4 The underlying natural, the top of the river gravel deposits (7), was encountered at a depth of 2.1 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 2). Overlying this was a 0.4 m deep layer of pale orange-brown silt clay (8), a probable alluvial deposit.

5.1.5 This was overlaid by a 0.54 m deep layer of very dark grey/ black clay silt (9). This deposit smelt of hydrocarbons and produced numerous examples of 20th century rubbish suggest that it is an continuation of the modern made ground, 3. Sealing this was a 0.7 m deep layer of clean yellow-brown mixed coarse sand and fine gravel (10). This probably represents a layer of modern made ground associated with the construction of the existing units. Overlying this was a 0.4 m deep layer of crushed stone (11) forming the foundations for the concrete car park surface.

5.2 Finds

5.2.1 All the artefacts recovered dated the mid to late 20th century. The presence of this material was recorded, however they were not retained.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

6.1.1 Both the trenches exposed the underlying undisturbed geology. The stratigraphy observed was consistent in both trenches, which combined with their distribution and percentage sampling, suggests that the results may be applied throughout the site.

6.2 Overall interpretation

6.2.1 Both the trenches came down onto the top of the undisturbed river gravel showing that there was no potential archaeology sealed below the alluvial deposits.

6.2.2 Both trenches showed that the area had been truncated down to the level of the underlying alluvial deposits in the recent past. That was probably done as part of the work to raise the land above the level of the surrounding flood plains prior to construction of the original industrial estate. While no archaeological evidence was observed either in the form of truncated features or as residual finds, other work within the area suggests that the archaeological potential was limited to begin with.

6.2.3 The difference in the made ground deposits between the trenches may reflect the nature in which this part of Osney Island was raised above flood level. Brian Durham has pointed out that different construction groups were responsible for different plots (pers. comm), and the differing layer (3) and (10) may reflect this.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1						
	1	Layer	> 0.1 m	River Gravel	-	-
	2	Layer	0.4 m	Alluvial clay	-	-
	3	Layer	0.8 m	Modern made ground	Rubber, plastic, bottle glass, brick, concrete	C20th
	4	Layer	0.3 m	Redeposited topsoil	-	C20th
	5	Layer	0.25 m	Crushed stone	-	C20th
	6	Layer	0.13 m	Concrete car park surface	-	C20th
2						
	7	Layer	> 0.1 m	River Gravel	-	-
	8	Layer	0.4 m	Alluvial clay	-	-
	9	Layer	0.54 m	Modern made ground	Rubber, plastic, bottle glass, brick, concrete	C20th
	10	Layer	0.7 m	Modern made ground	-	C20th
	11	Layer	0.4 m	Crushed stone	-	C20th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations*

OA, 2000 *Land at Osney Mead Industrial Estate, Oxford: Archaeological Evaluation Report*

OA, 2000 *Environmental Sampling Guidelines*

OA, 2002 *New Warehouse, Osney Mead, Oxford: Archaeological Evaluation*

OA, 2007 *Holywell House, Osney Mead, Oxford: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation*

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual (ed D Wilkinson)*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**Site name:** Holywell House**Site code:** OXHOOM 07**Grid reference:** SP 502 055**Type of evaluation:** 2 machine dug trenches, total length of 14 m trenching**Date and duration of project:** 15th October 2007, 1 day on site**Area of site:** 0.9 hectares**Summary of results:** The evaluation exposed modern made ground overlying undisturbed deposits of alluvium and river gravel. No significant archaeology was observed.**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2007.131



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Figure 1: Site location

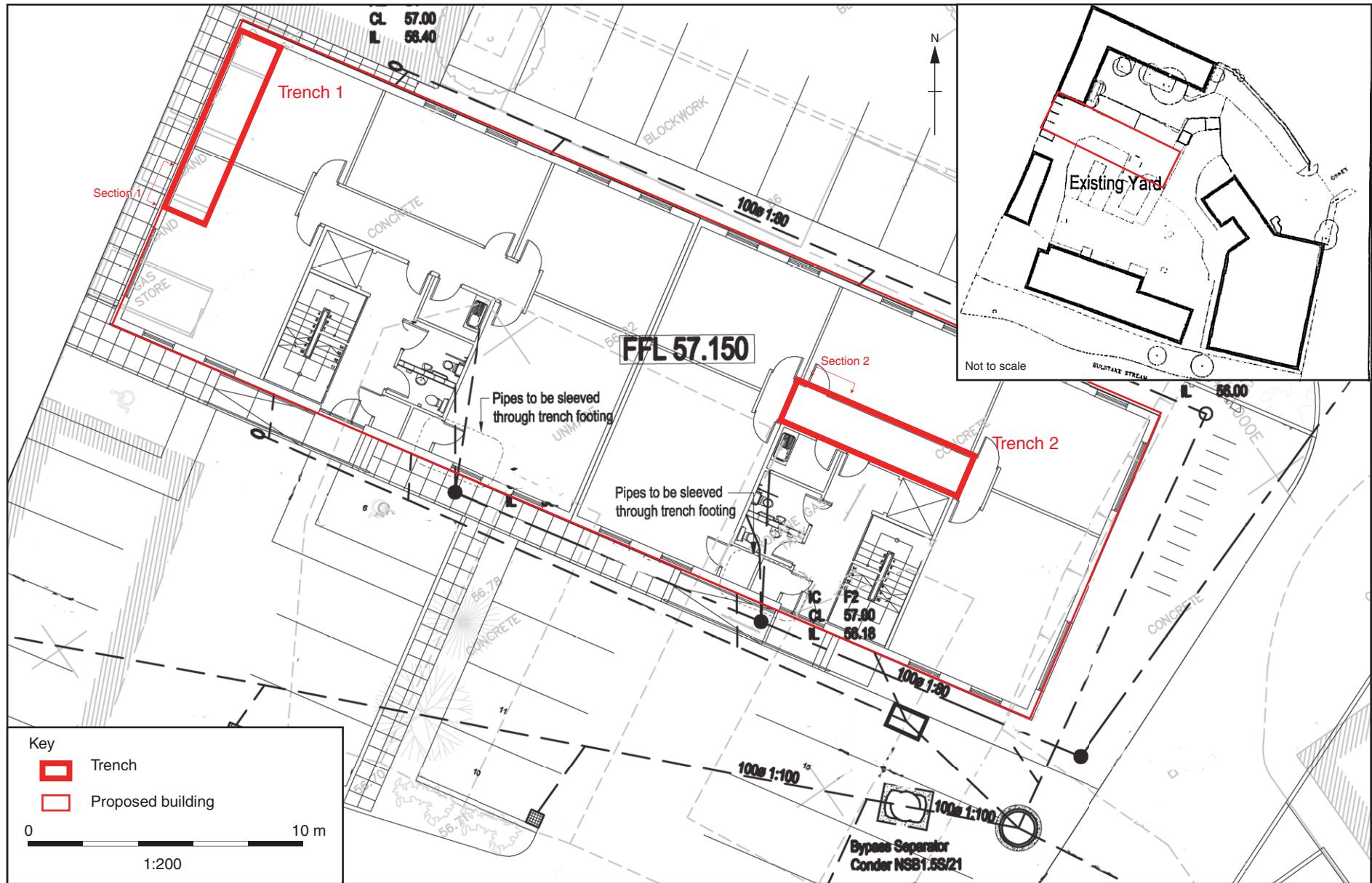


Figure 2: Site plan

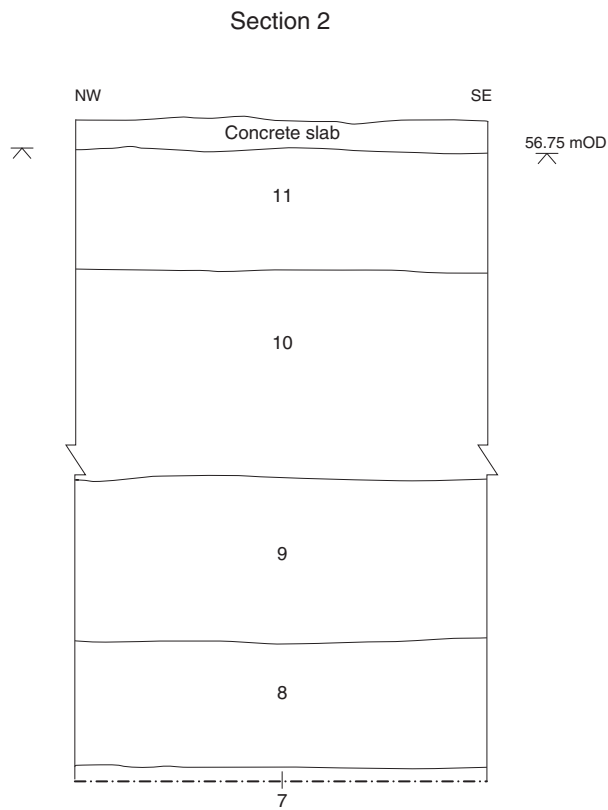
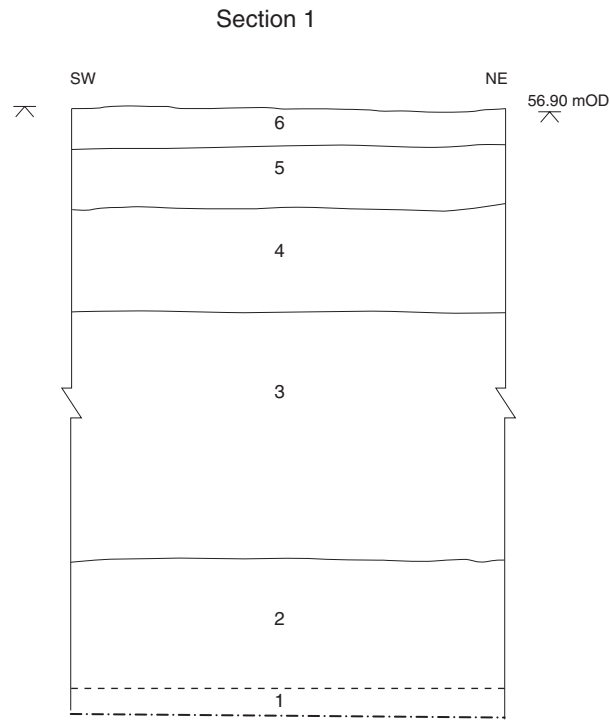


Figure 3: Sections 1 and 2



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