



University College, Oxford- North Site

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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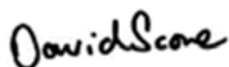


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University College, Oxford – North Site

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Summary

Between 16th and 20th January 2023, Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation at the proposed site of a number of new buildings on the University College, Oxford – North Site (bounded by Woodstock Road, Banbury Road and Staverton Road, Oxford), OS Ref: SP 5081 0817. The investigation comprised the excavation of seven trenches, measuring 1.8m wide and varying lengths of between 4-10m.

No archaeological features or artefacts were identified during the course of the evaluation. There was no evidence to indicate there was any significant human activity on the site prior to use for agricultural purposes in the medieval and post-medieval periods.

It is perhaps notable that the usual relatively thin brickearth/loess cover seen overlying the second terrace gravels of the Oxford promontory was not apparent; instead, a much thicker deposit of loess/brickearth mixed with silty-clay and clay deposits was recorded. This suggests that on this central part of the Oxford promontory there is an undulating surface to the second terrace gravels and that these subsequent prehistoric deposits have accumulated in a wider and as-yet undefined hollow area.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank UnivDevCo Ltd for commissioning this project, and particularly Scott J. Walker, Univ North - Project Manager, and Huw Davies, University College, Oxford. Thanks, are also due to the archaeological consultant Mick Rawlings (RPS) who set the scope of the work and liaised with all parties, plus Farid Zadeh, David Heard and Rob Little of construction company SDC who assisted with site practicalities. Finally, thank you to David Radford, City Archaeologist who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Ben Ford MCIfA FSA. The fieldwork was carried out by Ben Slader and Rob Backhouse. Survey and digitising was carried out by Ben Slader and Marjaana Kohtamaki. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that prepared the archive under the supervision of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Through the agency of Mick Rawlings at RPS, Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by UnivDevCo Ltd to undertake a trial trench evaluation on the site of a number of proposed new buildings between the rear of 115 Banbury Road and properties on Woodstock Road and Staverton Road which form the University College, Oxford – North Site.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken in response to Condition No. 5 of Planning Permission (planning ref. 20/00116/FUL). The scope of the work required and how this would be undertaken was detailed in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by RPS and approved by David Radford, Archaeologist for Oxford City Council (RPS 2022). This document outlines how OA implemented the requirements of the WSI and the results of the investigation.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site is located to the north of Oxford city centre and is bounded to the east by the A4165 Banbury Road and to the west by the A4144 Woodstock Road, and to the North by Staverton Road; OS Ref: SP 5081 0817 (Fig. 1). The land is currently predominantly occupied by a number of buildings along with landscaped grounds that form the North Site, University College, Oxford.

1.2.2 The areas of investigation were relatively flat at a height of c 64-5mOD and are currently in use as landscaped gardens or hard standing for parking.

1.2.3 The underlying solid geology of the site is mapped as Oxford Clay Formation and West Walton Formation (undifferentiated), comprising mudstone. This is overlain by superficial deposits of the Summertown-Radley Sand and Gravel Member (BGS n.d.).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been detailed within a Desk-Based Assessment produced by RPS and submitted in support of the planning application for this development. A brief summary of this background was then developed for inclusion in the WSI produced by RPS (2022) and is included below for reference.

1.3.2 The development site was identified as having the potential to contain archaeological remains of all periods; features and deposits of Palaeolithic or Mesolithic date are unlikely, although artefacts of these periods may be present in residual contexts.

1.3.3 Neolithic and Bronze Age material has been found at three locations within 1km of the development site and features of these periods, including burials, are known to be present within the slightly elevated land between the floodplains of the Rivers Thames and Cherwell (OCC 2012).

1.3.4 Features (pits) of middle Iron Age date have been identified at a location approximately 750m from the development site and contemporary material has been

recovered from another location within 1km. Features and deposits of this period are known to be present within the slightly elevated land between the floodplains of the Rivers Thames and Cherwell (OCC 2012) and recently further evidence has been located just to the east of the Cherwell floodplain (CA 2018).

- 1.3.5 Evidence for the presence of Roman cemeteries is known from two separate locations within 1km of the development site, whilst Banbury Road has been suggested as a possible Roman road (OCC 2012).
- 1.3.6 Banbury Road is likely to have continued to be used as a main route during the early medieval period, with Woodstock Road also being established at this time (OCC 2012), and there is evidence for a burial of this period within 1km of the development site.
- 1.3.7 During the medieval and post-medieval periods the development site seems to have been located within an area of strip fields, which were then enclosed in the 18th century. Settlement or activities other than those associated with farming are unlikely to have occurred within the development site during those periods.
- 1.3.8 The development site was gradually settled from the 1880s onwards, with a documented history of buildings, gardens and associated features.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The general aim of the evaluation was to provide further information regarding the potential location and nature of archaeological remains within those parts of the development site where new buildings will be constructed on land where little or no previous impacts are known to have occurred.
- 2.1.2 The specific project aims and objectives were as follows:
- i. To identify the nature, character, extent and possible date of any archaeological sites and/or features within those parts of the development site identified above;
 - ii. To assess the survival, quality, condition and significance of any archaeological remains;
 - iii. To ensure the preservation by record of all archaeological remains revealed during the course of the archaeological evaluation; and
 - iv. To prepare an appropriate archaeological archive including the treatment and preservation of any artefacts.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The investigation comprised the excavation of seven trenches, measuring 1.8m wide and between 4m and 10m in length. The trenches were laid out manually as per the WSI, with some alterations. Trench 5 was moved slightly to the east of its proposed location to provide a suitable buffer from an adjacent Magnolia tree. Trench 3 was reduced in width to 1.3m to ensure it would avoid adjacent buried services and also prevent destabilising the adjacent wall. Trench 1 was also shortened to a length of 4m to avoid damaging an area of mature planting.
- 2.2.2 The trenches were excavated using 1.8 tonne and a JCB-type mechanical excavators fitted with toothless buckets, working under the direct supervision of an archaeologist. In the grassed areas the machine was tracked around the site on plastic ground protection boards to prevent unnecessary damage to the existing landscaping. Spoil was stored adjacent to, but at a safe distance from the trench edges. Turf and topsoil were stored separately on one side of the trench and subsoil on the other.
- 2.2.3 Mechanical excavation was achieved through the repeated removal of level and thin spits of ground to the top of the undisturbed drift geology or the first archaeological horizon, depending upon which was encountered first. At this level the exposed surface was sufficiently cleaned to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains. Where no archaeological features were present additional depth was excavated to ensure the correct level had been achieved.

3 RESULTS

3.1 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.1.1 The soil sequence in the trenches was largely consistent across the site. In Trenches 1 and 2 and Trenches 4-7 the second terrace geology comprising silty sandy gravels was overlain by relatively thick deposits consisting of a reddish silty clay brickearth with notable patches of lighter clayey silts and clays, which in turn were overlain by topsoil/garden soil. Trench 3 revealed similar second terrace deposits and overlying subsoils which were overlain by a sequence of made ground serving as consolidation for the current tarmac surface in this area.
- 3.1.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good as the weather remained fine throughout the fieldwork. Some groundwater was encountered in Trenches 4 and 7, but this accumulated slowly as it percolated through the soil and did not impact on the recognition of archaeological features.

3.2 Results

- 3.2.1 All seven trenches were found to be devoid of archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A.

3.3 Finds and environmental summary

- 3.3.1 No artefacts were observed during the course of this investigation and no deposits were identified as being suitable for environmental sampling.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Interpretation of results

- 4.1.1 No archaeologically significant deposits, features or artefacts were encountered during this evaluation. No evidence for ridge and furrow cultivation was observed, and nor were any field boundaries.
- 4.1.2 Usually, the second terrace gravels of the Oxford promontory are overlain by a 0.2-0.3m deposit of loess/brickearth so at this site the depth of and mixed nature of this deposit (including silty clays and clay deposits) is notable. This suggests that on this central part of the Oxford promontory there is an undulating surface to the second terrace gravels and that these subsequent prehistoric (early Holocene) deposits have accumulated in a wider and as-yet undefined hollow area.
- 4.1.3 It is apparent that there has been little in the way of significant truncation from agricultural activities or construction. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the area experienced little activity prior to the medieval period and then continued as agricultural, perhaps pastureland until the development of the modern north Oxford suburbs we see today.
- 4.1.4 Given that archaeological evaluations look at only a sample of the site it is worth noting that although no archaeological evidence was recovered archaeological activity may be present beyond the limits of these excavations.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	NNW-SSE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sandy gravel.					Length (m)	4
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.8
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.6	Subsoil. Orangey brown, sandy clay.	-	-
102	Layer	-	-	Natural. Brownish orange, sandy gravel.	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	ENE-WSW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sandy gravel.					Length (m)	10
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.63
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.24	Topsoil	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.39	Subsoil. Orangey brown, sandy clay.	-	-
202	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	ENE-WSW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of tarmac and made ground overlying natural geology of sandy clay and gravel.					Length (m)	7.5
					Width (m)	1.3
					Avg. depth (m)	0.95
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.06	Tarmac	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.73	Made ground. Compacted limestone rubble and brick onto a deposit of mid orangey brown, sandy clay with brick inclusions.	-	-
302	Layer	-	0.16	Natural? Orangey brown to light brownish yellow, sandy clay.	-	-
303	Layer	-	-	Natural. Patch of gravel at WSW end.	-	-

Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	ENE-WSW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sandy gravel. A small sondage was excavated to a depth of 1.1m at the SW end of the trench to test the natural geology – no variation was observed.					Length (m)	10.7
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.6
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
401	Layer	-	0.3	Subsoil. Mid yellow brown, firm, silty clay	-	-
402	Layer	-	-	Natural. Light, yellow-brown, sandy clay	-	-

Trench 5						
General description					Orientation	ENE-WSW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sandy clay.					Length (m)	8
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.55
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
500	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
501	Layer	-	0.35	Subsoil. Mid to dark greyish brown, firm, silty clay.	-	-
502	Layer	-	-	Natural. Mixed, mid orangey brown, sandy gravel and clay with light brownish yellow, sandy clay.	-	-

Trench 6						
General description					Orientation	NNW-SSE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sandy clay.					Length (m)	4
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.65
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
600	Layer	-	0.28	Topsoil	-	-
601	Layer	-	0.37	Subsoil. Mid to dark, greyish brown, silty clay.	-	-
602	Layer	-	-	Natural. Mixed light brownish-yellow, sandy clay with patches of mid orangey brown, sandy gravels and clay.	-	-

Trench 7						
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General description					Orientation	ENE- WSW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying natural geology of sandy clay.					Length (m)	5
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.64
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
700	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
701	Layer	-	0.44	Subsoil. Mid to dark greyish brown, silty clay.	-	-
702	Layer	-	-	Natural. Light brownish yellow, sandy clay.	-	-

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

BGS, n.d. *Geology viewer*, British Geological Survey, <https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk/>

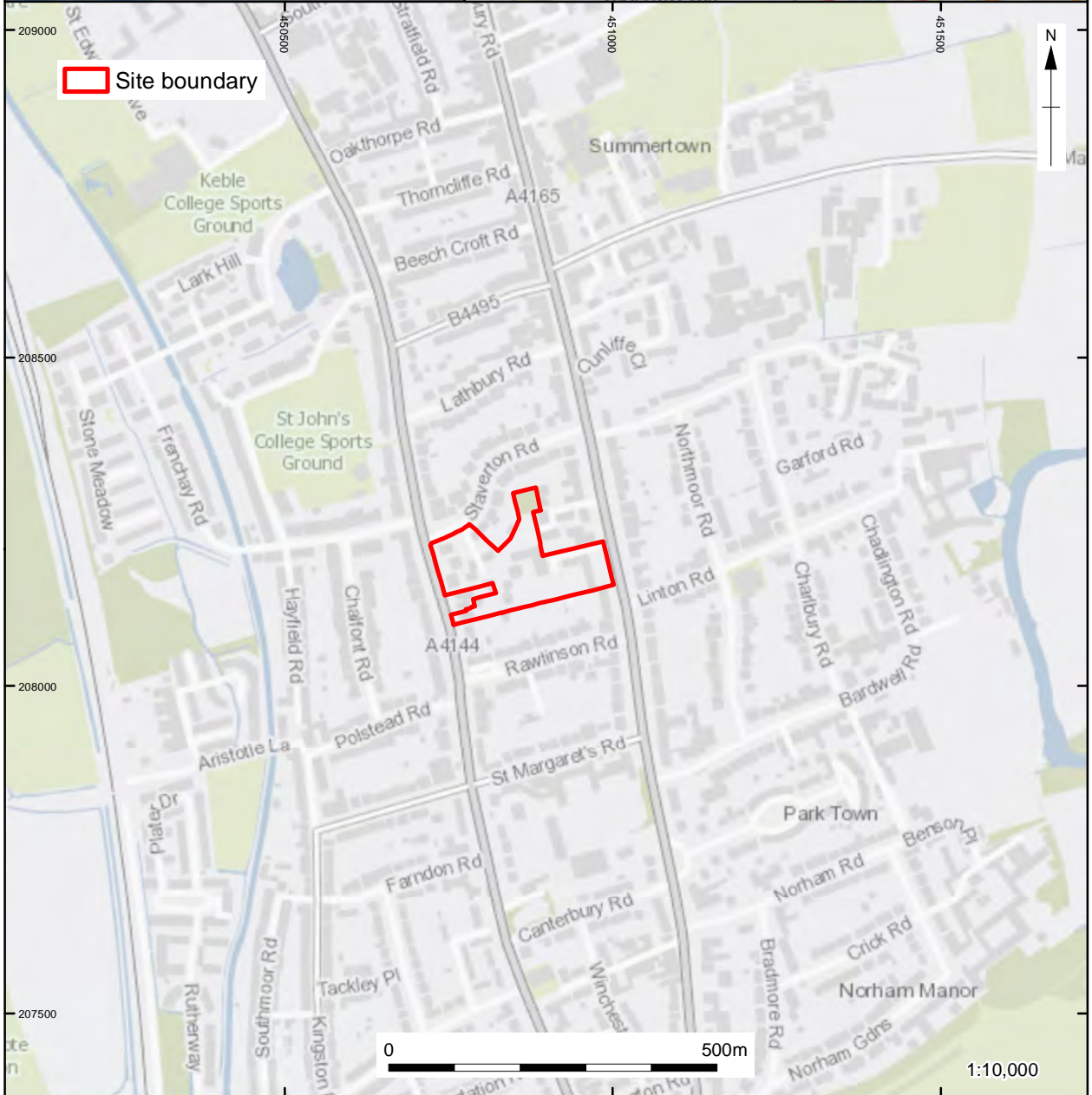
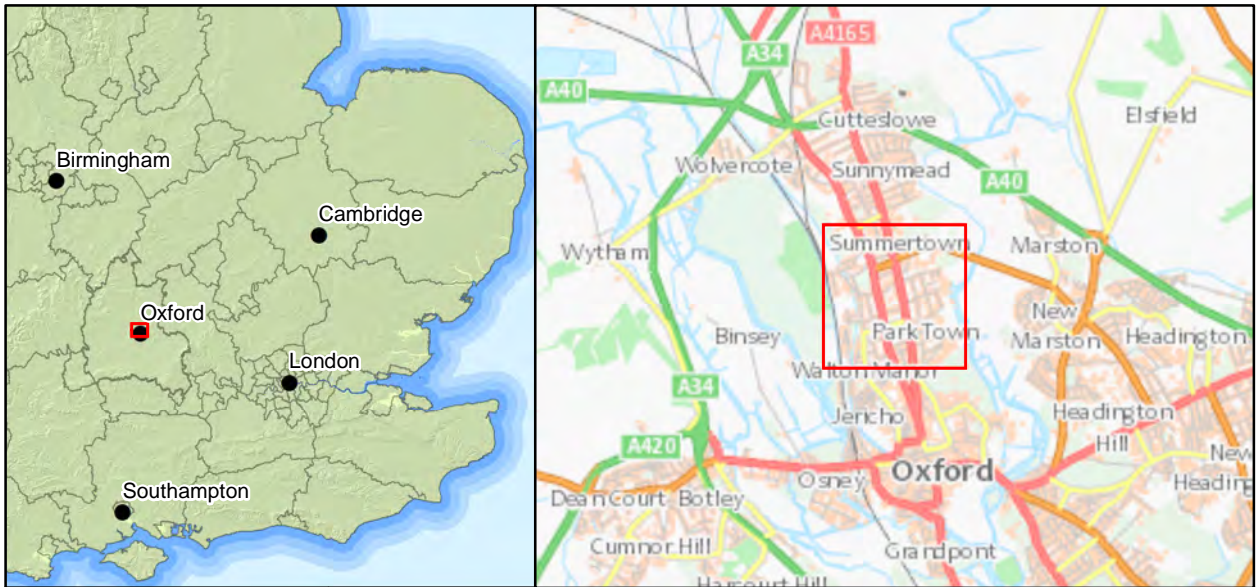
CA, 2018 The Harlow Centre, Raymund Road, Oxford: archaeological evaluation, Cotswold Archaeology unpublished report ref. 18394

OCC, 2012 *Oxford urban archaeological resource assessment and research agenda*, Oxford City Council

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APPENDIX C SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

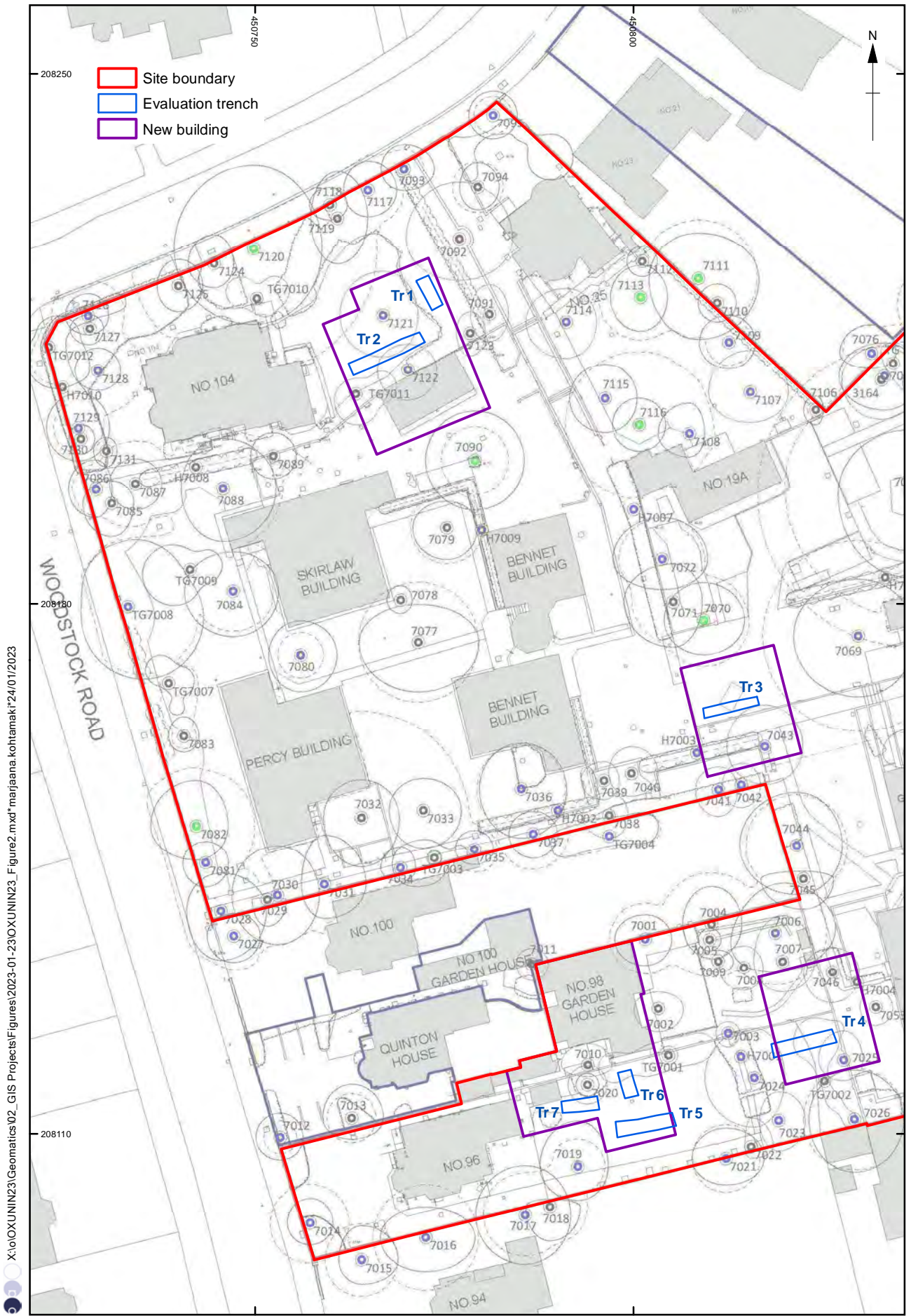
Site name:	University College, Oxford - North Site
Site code:	OXUNIV23
Grid Reference	SP 508081
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	16-20 January 2022
Area of Site	c 2ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2023.4
Summary of Results:	<p>Between 16th and 20th January 2023, Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation at the proposed site of a number of new buildings on the University College, Oxford – North Site (bounded by Woodstock Road, Banbury Road and Staverton Road, Oxford). The investigation comprised the excavation of seven trenches, measuring 1.8m wide and varying lengths of between 4-10m.</p> <p>No archaeological features or artefacts were identified during the course of the evaluation. There was no evidence to indicate there was any significant human activity on the site prior to use for agricultural purposes in the medieval and post-medieval periods.</p> <p>It is perhaps notable that the usual relatively thin brickearth/loess cover seen overlying the second terrace gravels of the Oxford promontory was not apparent; instead, a much thicker deposit of loess/brickearth mixed with silty-clay and clay deposits was recorded. This suggests that on this central part of the Oxford promontory there is an undulating surface to the second terrace gravels and that these subsequent prehistoric deposits have accumulated in a wider and as-yet undefined hollow area.</p>



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Figure 1: Site location



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Figure 2: Trench layout

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Plate 1: Trench 2 (view to east)



Plate 2: Trench 3 (view to west)



Plate 3: Trench 4 (view to east)



Plate 4: Trench 5 (view to east)



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