

# Chapel Car Park Stowe School Stowe Buckinghamshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



May 2007

**Client: Stowe School**

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**Chapel Car Park  
Stowe School,  
Stowe, Buckinghamshire**

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT***

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## SUMMARY

*Between April 2006 and February 2007 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at land adjacent to the School Chapel, Stowe School, near Buckingham, Buckinghamshire (centred at NGR: SP 673 374). The work was commissioned by Stowe School in advance of construction of two new residential boarding houses and associated access road / car-parking. No artefacts, deposits or features dating earlier than the late 19th century were observed.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between April 2006 and February 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to the School Chapel, Stowe School, near Buckingham, Buckinghamshire (centred at NGR: SP 673374). The work was commissioned by Stowe School in respect of a planning application for two new residential boarding houses and associated access and car-parking (Planning Application No. 05/1511/APP).
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by David Radford, Archaeological Officer for Buckinghamshire County Council (BCAS 2005).
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2005).

#### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site occupies an area of land measuring approximately 0.75 hectares situated immediately to the west of the present chapel. The site comprised a car park and is bounded to the north by Bruce House, to the south by Chatham House and to the west by Roxburgh Hall. The site is generally flat and lies at *c.* 115 m OD. The underlying geology comprises glaciofluvial deposits of sand and gravel (BGS 2002).

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA, 2005) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 In 1922 Stowe School was founded, making use of the existing mansion. The mansion, which stands in the Grade I listed Registered Park dates originally to the 16th/17th centuries, and was remodelled in the 18th century. The original manor house was demolished in 1683 and replaced by Sir Richard Temple before his death in 1697. By the end of the 1720s the village of Stowe had been largely cleared to make space for the development of the park. The land within Stowe manor became an extensive, complex pleasure garden surrounding a country mansion, probably one of the finest examples of later renaissance houses in England. The gardens were

created initially by Charles Bridgemen between 1713 and 1734, who laid out a semi formal garden that has since been extensively reworked. Further extensions to the gardens had been made by 1732 and included schemes by William Kent and James Gibb. From 1742 to 1750 Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown was head gardener at Stowe, by which time the gardens had become supremely influential to English landscape gardening.

- 1.3.3 After the founding of Stowe School significant construction was undertaken to the west of the mansion which has resulted in the almost total loss of Bridgeman’s earliest landscape design. A notable loss was a brick temple constructed by John Vanburgh in 1719. This Temple to Bacchus had commanding views from Lady Temple’s Spinney overlooking Home Park which is now occupied by the golf course. The Temple was demolished in 1927 to be replaced by the present School Chapel.
- 1.3.4 The application site lies immediately west of the site of the Temple to Bacchus and there was the possibility that remains of the Temple and of Lady Temple’s Spinney may be present. A watching brief undertaken by the National Trust in 1999 alongside the access road on the western boundary of the Chapel Car Park did not identify any extant archaeological features. However, fragments of architectural stone possibly from the demolished temple were recovered.
- 1.3.5 Evaluation trenching by Oxford Archaeology in October 2005 (OA, 2005) did not reveal any remains of garden features leading to or around the temple. The main features exposed during the evaluation were a brick wall and surface of a brick path around the west side of the Chapel and an area of hardstanding around Wisteria Cottage as shown in the general plan of Stowe School in 1937. These were laid during or after the Chapel construction, and were terraced into the natural slope.

## **2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Aims**

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record, any archaeological features or deposits that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the development.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### **2.2 Methodology**

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a series of site visits during works likely to disturb potential archaeological deposits. These works included topsoil stripping, ground reduction, grubbing out of foundation trenching and the excavation of service trenches.
- 2.2.2 A site plan showing the extent and location of these works was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and any sections recorded were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations and recorded sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The stratigraphy exposed throughout the site was broadly similar. The only differences being the varying depths of the topsoil.
- 3.1.2 Apart from the larger scale ground reduction in the north east part of the site, excavation was limited to the digging of service trenches and manholes, these excavations were between 1.2 and 1.4 m deep and were excavated beyond the depth of the natural geology and as such no sections were drawn for Health and Safety reasons, though depths and other observations were recorded on written records. Where the service trench was located closest to the existing Design and Technology Building, the natural Sand and Gravel (1) was up to 1.2 m below the current ground level. This was overlain by a reddish brown layer of sandy gravel subsoil up to 0.4 m thick (2). Capping the sequence was a dark brown silty loam topsoil (3). This topsoil layer was thickest closest to the Design and Technology Building (up to 1 m) and gently thinned as the trench neared Wisteria Cottage. This was due to the upcast of soil from the construction of the Design and Technology Building - being cut into the natural slope of the site.
- 3.1.3 The ground reduction in the north east part of the site (Fig. 2) was in most cases beyond a metre in depth, and as above resulted in excavation well into the natural geology. Here the natural was overlain by a series of modern layers of rubble and hardcore (4). These layers originated from the construction of the Chapel Car Park and works associated with the construction of Wisteria Cottage. A large badly corroded fragment of a leaf spring probably from a tractor or lorry was recovered from the rubble.
- 3.1.4 An area measuring c. 12 m x 6 m of fragmentary brick surface (5) was identified during the ground reduction. This surface was up to 1 m below the ground level at its northern extent though this dropped to 0.6 m at the southern end. The bricks were bonded with a cement mortar and were in a generally bad state of survival. This surface is that identified in the 2005 evaluation carried out by OA and represented on



the Stowe School plan of 1937. Much of this area was under hard standing for the Chapel Car Park.

- 3.1.5 The grubbing out of the existing foundations of Wisteria Cottage after demolition resulted in unstable trenches of 1.4 m deep. Thus as above, the trenches were recorded but not entered for safety reasons. The stratigraphy was the same as that for the service trench.

### 3.2 **Finds**

- 3.2.1 Fragments of brick and pottery, steel and plastic artefacts were observed within Layers 3 and 4, all dating to the 19th and 20th centuries, however no other dating evidence was recovered from any other context. These were evaluated on site but were not retained.

### 3.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were observed during the course of the watching brief.

## 4 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1.1 The watching brief was undertaken during all phases of the groundworks. The excavated areas, and the spoil heaps were closely examined for evidence of archaeological activity and for residual finds. Despite the size of the area monitored and the potential of the site from the historical background, the revealed stratigraphy was consistent with the plan of 1937.
- 4.1.2 The site displayed stratigraphy consistent with agricultural use prior to incorporation into school grounds, and structural evidence as seen on plan of 1937. No dating evidence, deposits or features dating earlier than the late 19th century were observed.

**APPENDICES****APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth/ height</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	-	-	Glaciofluvial Natural	-	Pleistocene
2	Layer	0.3 m - 0.4 m	-	Subsoil, probably glacial colluvium in origin	-	-
3	Layer	0.8 m - 1.0 m	-	Topsoil	Metal, ceramic, plastic	19th - 20th century
4	Layer	0.15 m - 0.6 m	-	Hardcore/rubble	Metal, ceramic, plastic	20th century
5	Layer	0.6 m to 0.8 m	-	Brick pavement	Brick	C19th/ C20th
6	Layer	0.2 m - 1.5 m	-	Car park surface	Brick, metal, plastic	C19th/ C20th

**APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

- BCAS 2005 *Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief, Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service*
- IFA 2001 *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*
- OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (1st edition. ed. D. Wilkinson)
- OA 2005 *Chapel Car Park, Stowe School, Stowe, Buckinghamshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

**APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

**Site name:** Chapel Car Park, Stowe School, Buckinghamshire

**Site code:** STSCCP 06

**Grid reference:** Centred at SP 673 374

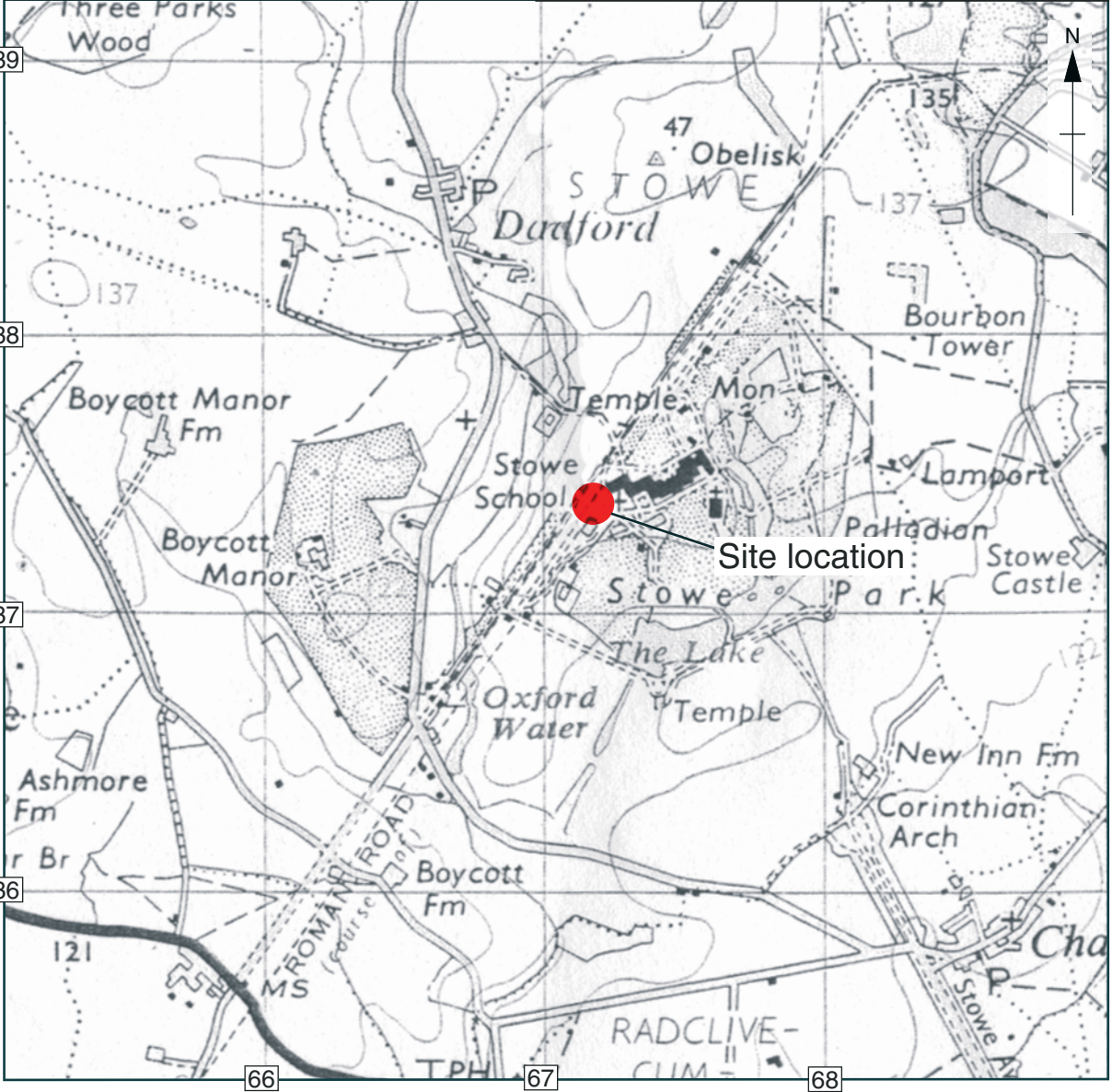
**Type of watching brief:** Machine excavation of foundation trenches, soil stripping, and service trenches.

**Date and duration of project:** 27/04/06 to 16/2/07, 10 months

**Area of site:** 0.75 hectares

**Summary of results:** The site displayed stratigraphy consistent with agricultural use prior to incorporation into school grounds, and structural evidence as seen on plan of 1937. No dating evidence, deposits or features dating earlier than the late 19th century were observed.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM:2006.140



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location



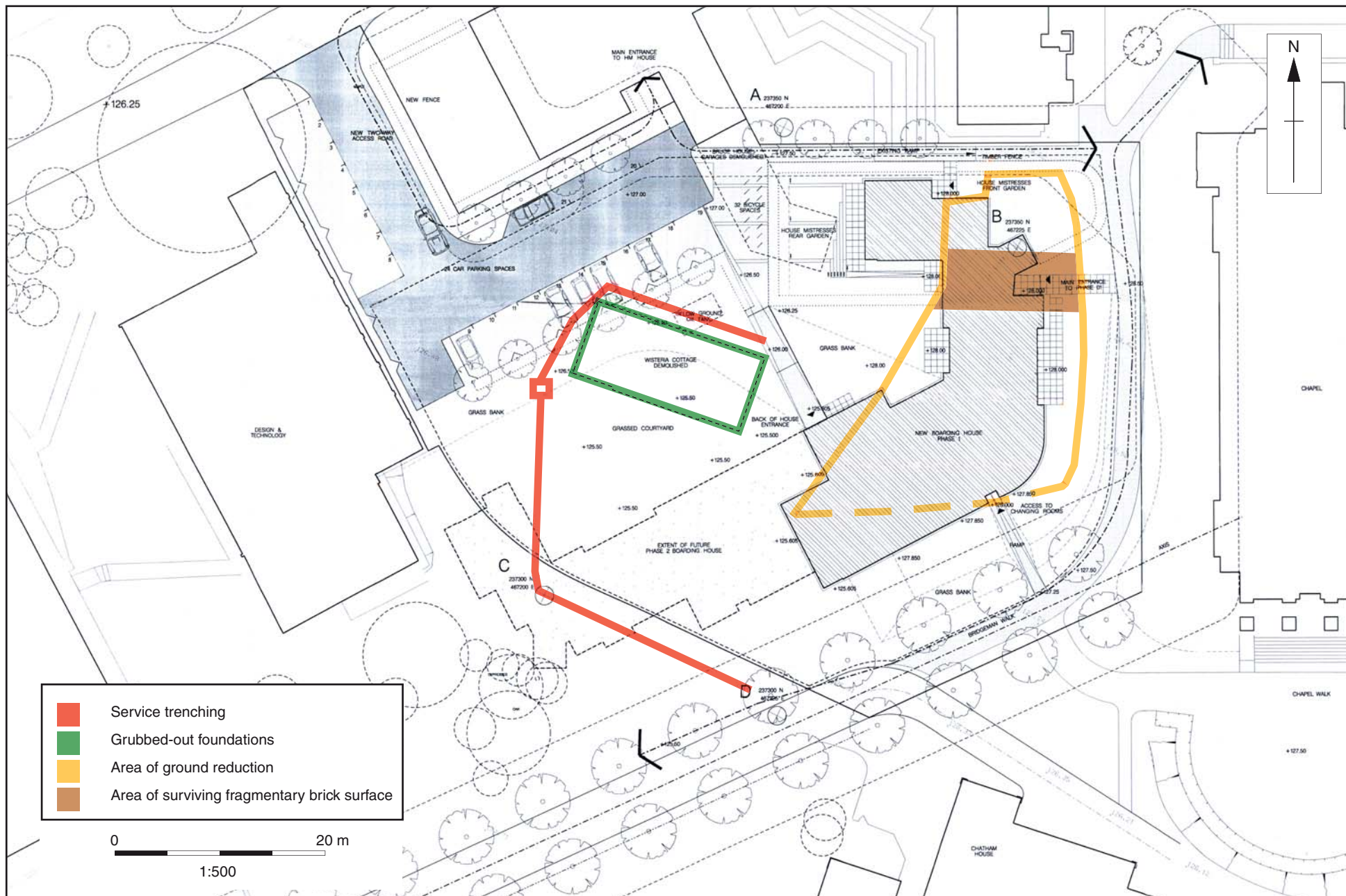


Figure 2: Areas of watching brief







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