

St Antony's College Oxford



Archaeological Evaluation Report



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St Antony's College, Oxford

(NGR: SP 509 074)

Archaeological Evaluation Report

By Paul Murray

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Summary

In July 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA), carried out a field evaluation for St Antony's College, Oxford, commissioned by Nik Lyzba of John Philips Planning Consultants. Two evaluation trenches were excavated in the college gardens. Trench one revealed Victorian soils and a Victorian brick wall, possibly forming the south wall of a backfilled cellar. Trench two revealed that the natural gravel had been truncated to a depth of 1.6m by quarrying. The quarrying was backfilled, probably prior to the formation of the garden of St Mary's Home in the Victorian period. A Victorian garden feature and soils were also revealed, again associated with the St Mary's Home garden.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In July 2008 Oxford Archaeology carried out a field evaluation for St Antony's College, Oxford, commissioned by behalf of Nik Lyzba of John Philips Planning Consultants, in advance of a proposed development of gateway buildings. Brian Durham, Oxford City Archaeologist, advised that a field evaluation should be carried out to determine whether significant archaeological remains were present or if the area had been quarried. A WSI set by Oxford Archaeology was agreed to by Brian Durham. The development site is located at Bevington Road, Oxford (NGR: SP 509 074).

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies at c. 63.3m OD, on the Summertown-Radley gravel terrace. The River Thames and the River Cherwell are both within 1 Km of the site.

1.2.2 The site is currently mostly laid to lawn with some flower beds and several mature trees.

1.2.3 The topography within the proposed development footprint is generally flat to the north west, close to the Woodstock Road. A gentle but distinct break of slope is evident just to the east of the development footprint where the ground gently slopes down to the south-east.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 St Antony's College lies within the area of second gravel terrace which has a history of ritual use in the Bronze Age, and agricultural use in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. Recent excavations at St Johns, c 600m to the south have revealed a large ditch with Neolithic pottery and human remains of a possible Saxon date.

1.3.2 In the 19th century Roman pottery, coins and a skeleton were found at St Antony's, as well as the remains of a building.

1.3.3 In July 1994 OA carried out an archaeological evaluation comprising three trenches located within St Antony's College, c 15m-35m east of the proposed development. Trenches 1 and 3 revealed that the distinct drop in ground level, mentioned above, has been caused by extensive quarrying. Trench 2, while showing no positive evidence for quarrying did suggest truncation associated with it, and may indicate the northern limit of the quarry. Trench 2 revealed natural gravel at 61m OD (OAU 1994).

1.3.4 The evaluation produced a number of notable finds from deposits back-filling the quarry. Large quantities of Romano British pottery and two coins of 3rd-4th C date were recovered, as well as four coins of a 1st C date.

1.3.5 A number of unsmoked and stamped clay pipes as well as pipe kiln furniture were also recovered, and a connection with a Mr Huggins, pipemaker, recorded as living at 76 Observatory Street (1841-1876) was suggested.



1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 Oxford Archaeology would like to express their thanks to Peter Robinson of St Antony's College for making the Colleges facilities available, and Brian Durham (Oxford City Archaeologist) for his invaluable advice with regard to locating the trenches.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- (i) To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area.
- (ii) To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains affected by the proposed works.
- (iii) To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the site and to take samples where appropriate.
- (iv) To provide information to allow a mitigation strategy to be formulated prior to development of the site.
- (v) To define any research priorities that may be relevant should further field investigation be required.
- (vi) To make available the results of the investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The archaeological evaluation comprised two trial trenches measuring 5 m by 1.3 m. Trench 1 was located on the site of the proposed gatehouse building. Trench 2 was located on the site of the proposed second building (Fig 2).
- 2.2.2 The trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision by a 13.0 tonne, 180°, mechanical excavator (JCB) equipped with a toothless ditching bucket. Excavation proceeded to the top of the natural geology (Summertown-Radley gravel) in Trench 1. Trench 2 was excavated to a maximum safe depth of 1.2 m; the natural geology was not encountered.
- 2.2.3 All archaeological features were hand sampled in order to characterise and date them. General site procedures were as defined in the Appendices to this document. All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established OA practice as detailed in the OA Field Manual (OA 1992). All contexts and samples from them were allocated unique numbers. Bulk finds were collected by context. All excavation and recording met the requirements of the *IFA Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (IFA, 2001).
- 2.2.4 Colour transparency and black-and-white negative photographs were taken during the course of the evaluation. Trench plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50. Section drawings of features and sample sections of stratigraphy were drawn at a scale of 1:20.
- 2.2.5 Provision was made for taking environmental samples in accordance with OA Environmental procedures (OA 2000).
- 2.2.6 The project was directed by Paul Murray, Senior Project Manager under the overall direction of Nick Shepherd, OA Head of Fieldwork.

3 RESULTS

Soil and ground conditions

- 3.1.1 The trenches were situated in the well maintained garden of St Antony's College. Trenches were placed to avoid mature trees, flower beds and areas of hard standing.
- 3.1.2 The evaluation was conducted in dry bright conditions over the course of four days.

3.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

Trench 1

- 3.2.1 Natural geology was not encountered within this trench. A sondage was excavated at the east end to a depth of 1.3 m (61.57 m OD).
- 3.2.2 The earliest feature identified was a Victorian brick wall (104). This was just two courses wide and aligned east-west. Sections placed either side of the wall were excavated to a depth of 0.6 m, but did not establish its full depth.
- 3.2.3 A section placed to the north of the wall identified loose rubble with frequent voids and an iron pipe parallel to the wall, suggesting that the wall formed the southern extent to a backfilled cellar.
- 3.2.4 A section placed to the south of the wall revealed a layer of undated garden soil (107) that appears to have built up against the outside of the wall.
- 3.2.5 The garden soil was overlain by a deposit of modern made ground (103), which in turn was overlain by the current turf and topsoil.

Trench 2

- 3.2.6 Natural geology (207) was encountered at a depth of 1.5 m (60.31 m OD). This trench revealed the natural geology to be sloping down to the west, with the top of natural at 60.71 m at the east end and sloping down by 0.4 m to the west.
- 3.2.7 The natural was overlain by 0.9 m of redeposited gravel (206, 204), containing an indistinct soil layer (205) within it.
- 3.2.8 A shallow rectangular feature (203) was identified cutting the redeposited gravel. This measured 1.6 m x 1 m, and was just 0.16 m deep. This was filled with a grey brown silty loam (202), similar in character to the current modern topsoil. Although a single sherd of post medieval pottery was recovered from this feature it is almost certainly redeposited.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The evaluation represents an approximate 3% sample of the proposed development footprint and therefore the results give a reasonable indication of the potential for the absence/presence of archaeological remains in the remainder of the site area.

4.2 Interpretation

- 4.2.1 Trench 1 shows that no significant archaeological remains to a depth of 1.3 m. Whether the soils represent the backfilling of quarrying, accumulated garden soils or built up ground is unclear. The truncated natural identified in Trench 2 trench almost certainly represents quarrying, and that the slope possibly indicates the trench was located close to its western extent. The evaluation almost certainly confirms that the topography of the garden is a result of quarrying.

4.3 Significance

- 4.3.1 While defining the extent of the quarrying is of some interest it cannot be considered to be of great archaeological significance. The Victorian remains are of little interest.

APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description				Orientation		E-W
Victorian wall forming cellar. Cellar backfill and Victorian garden soils				Avg. depth (m)		1m
				Width (m)		1.3m
				Length (m)		5m
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
101	Layer	-	0.42	Topsoil	-	Modern
102	Deposit	-	0.13	Made ground	-	Modern
103	Deposit		0.80	Made ground	-	Modern
104	Structure	0.52		Cellar wall		Victorian
105	Feature			Iron pipe	-	Victorian
106	Fill			Cellar backfill	-	Victorian
107	Layer		0.4	Garden soil	-	Victorian

Trench 2						
General description				Orientation		E-W
Natural deposits truncated by post med/Victorian quarrying. Victorian garden feature				Avg. depth (m)		1
				Width (m)		1.30
				Length (m)		5
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
200	Layer	-	0.38	Garden soil	-	Post medieval/Victorian
202	Fill	-	0.2	Fill of 203	-	Post medieval/Victorian
203	Cut	1.1	0.2	Pit	-	Post medieval/Victorian
204,5,6	Deposits			Re-deposited gravel lenses	-	Post medieval/Victorian
207	Deposit			Natural Gravel	-	



Bibliography and References

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation*

Oxford Archaeology, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

Oxford Archaeological Unit (1994), St Antony's College, Woodstock Road, Oxford: Archaeological Evaluation (unpublished client report)

Oxford Archaeology, 2000 OA Environmental Sampling Guidelines and Instruction Manual



APPENDIX B. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Antony's College

Site code: OXANT 08

Grid reference: SP 509 074

Type: Evaluation

Date and duration: June 2008, 4 Days

Area of site: 2 trenches; 5 m x 1.3 m

Summary of results: Trench 1; Victorian soils and structure. Trench 2; Truncation by PM/Victorian quarrying and backfill deposits.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museums service in due course, under the following accession number: 2008.85



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Figure 1: Site location

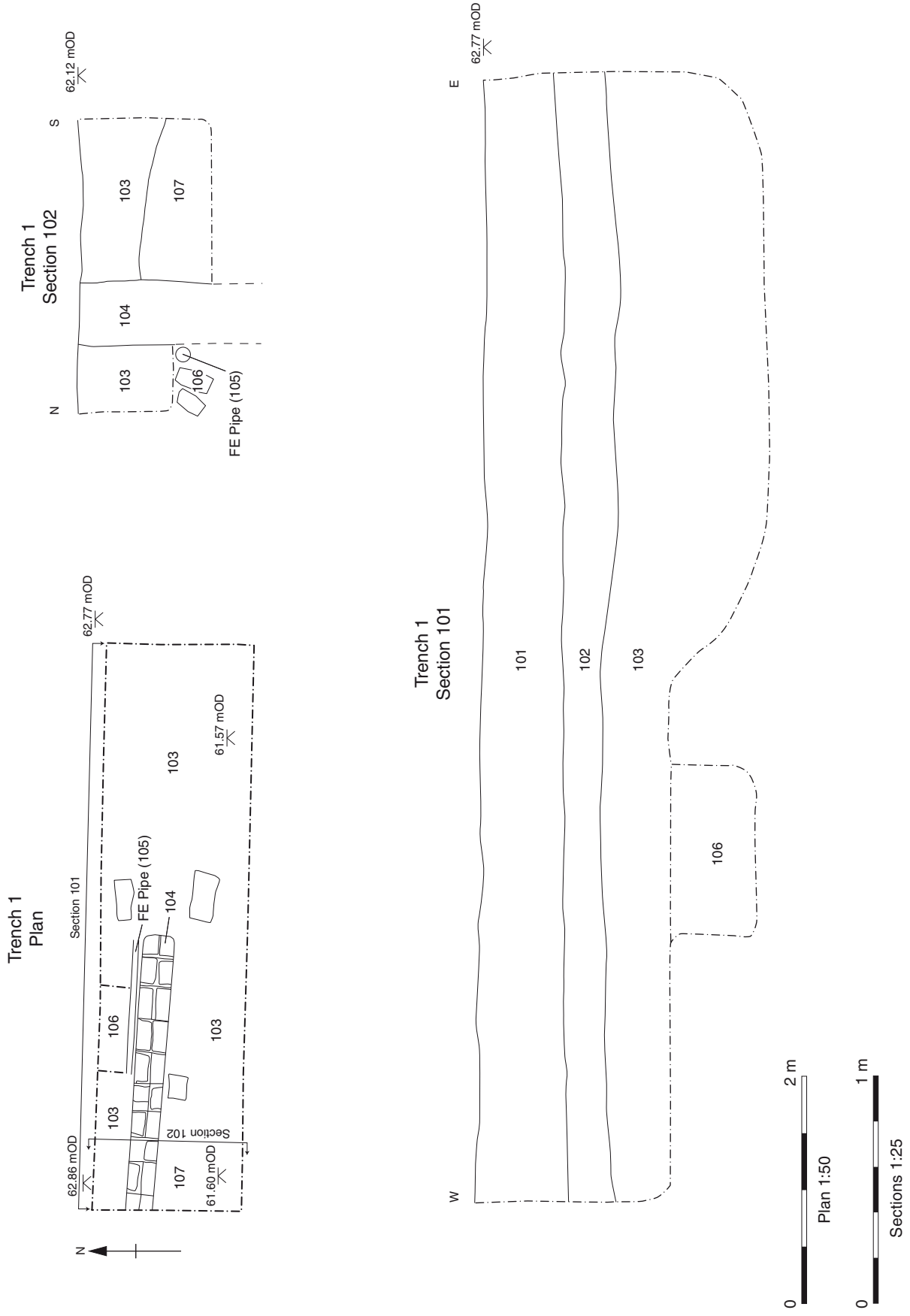
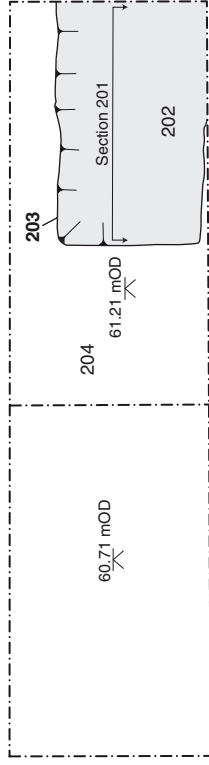
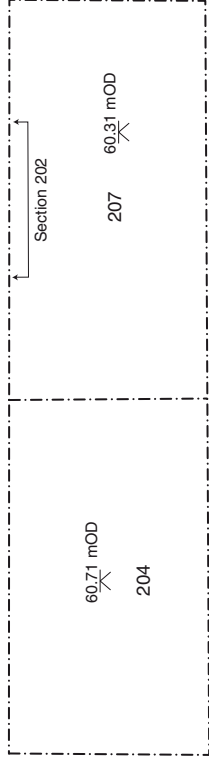


Figure 3: Trench 1 Plan and sections

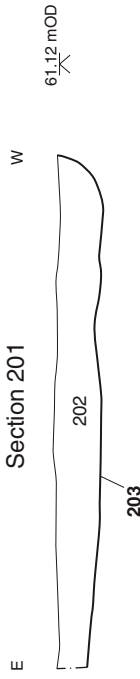
Trench 2
Plan 201



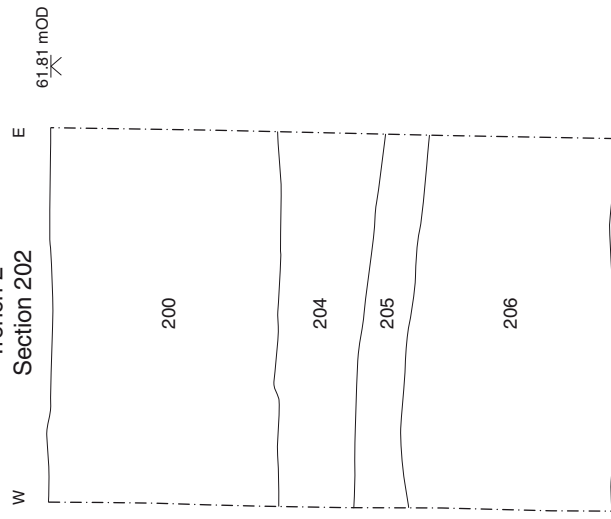
Trench 2
Plan 202



Trench 2
Section 201



Trench 2
Section 202



Plans 1:50



Sections 1:25

Figure 4: Trench 2 Plans and sections



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