ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT THE FORMER PARKER KNOLL FACTORY, CHIPPING NORTON, OXFORDSHIRE

Jonathan Webster

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

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Historic Environment and Archaeology Service,
Worcestershire County Council,
Woodbury Building,
University of Worcester,
Henwick Grove,
Worcester WR2 6AJ

Project P3776
Report 1883
EOX 3223

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Archaeological Evaluation at the Former parker Knoll factory, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire

Jonathan Webster (project leader)

Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the former Parker Knoll factory, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 3197 2728).

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken on request of Arthur Amos Associates on behalf of their client Sainsbury's PLC, who intend to construct a new food supermarket and associated car parking for which a planning application has been submitted.

This report on an archaeological evaluation describes and assesses the significance of a heritage asset with archaeological interest potentially affected by the application. The impact of the application on the significance is assessed.

The evaluation showed that the development and later demolition of the Parker Knoll factory complex had caused severe truncation of underlying deposits and that any archaeological features that may have been significant have been removed during the latter half of the 20th century.

The factory itself was also removed to a greater extent and with the exception of a small buried concrete floor surface no other elements of the former building could be distinguished beyond debris within the general make up.

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Part 2 Detailed report

1. Planning background

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the former Parker Knoll factory (NGR SP 3197 2728), Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire (Fig 1), for Arthur Amos Associates on behalf of their client Sainsbury's PLC. Sainsbury's PLC intend to construct a new shopping supermarket and associated car parking and have submitted a planning application to West Oxfordshire District Council (reference number 11/1360/P/FP).

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008).

On completion of a desk-based assessment (Miller 2011) of the area of investigation a brief was prepared by Hugh Coddington, Acting County Archaeological Officer, West Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (unpublished document dated 6 October 2011) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (HEAS 2011).

2. Aims

The archaeological brief indicated that significant deposits may be present and particularly Romano-British in date. As such the aims of this archaeological evaluation are:

- to describe and assesses the significance of the heritage asset with archaeological interest;
- to establish the nature, importance and extent of the archaeological site;
- to assess the impact of the application on the archaeological site.

More specifically the following aims have been identified.

- To establish the presence or absence of Romano-British features or artefacts associated with a shrine or other important activity.

3. Methods

3.1 Fieldwork methodology

3.1.1 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2011).

Fieldwork was undertaken between 15 and 17 November 2011. The site reference number and site code is EOX 3223.

Five trenches, amounting to 225m² in area, were excavated over the site area of 2ha, representing a sample of 5%. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a JCB wheeled excavator, employing a toothless bucket and under archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their

nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

All deposits and features were inspected for there potential artefactual and ecofactual potential but due to the extremely modern nature of the finds recovered no material was retained for further analysis, nor environmental samples taken.

3.1.2 Structural analysis

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

3.2 Artefact methodology

3.2.1 Artefact recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995; appendix 2). This in principal determines that all finds, of whatever date, must be collected. However, in this case only a sample of later material was collected. These comprised the majority of the finds recovered from the site. All artefacts were recovered from stratified deposits and due to their modern nature, once inspected, were not retained.

3.3 Environmental archaeology methodology

3.3.1 Sampling policy

The environmental sampling strategy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995; appendix 4). All deposits were inspected for there palaeoenvironmental potential, but due to the modern nature of all deposits and features noted no samples were taken as no additional information could have been gleaned.

3.4 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. The techniques used allowed for each deposit and structural element to be inspected and analysed independently, before being placed within the wider archaeological context. All relationships, both physical and stratigraphic were investigated and a clear and concise record for the development of the site was compiled. It is not believed that any further information could have been reached by a change in the methodologies used.

4. Topographical and archaeological context

The development area lies on level ground at the western edge of a large Limestone plateau roughly 224m above Ordinance Datum (AOD). The solid geology is mapped as part of the Greater Oolith sequence dated to the Jurassic period (BGS 1968 and 1987). This is overlain by soils that have been mapped as shallow calcareous clay and clay loams of the Elmont series (Ragg *et al* 1984).

The site is bounded to the west by a school and east by a private housing estate. The south of the development area butts an area of open shrub land whilst the north is limited by the route of the A44 London Road.

At present the site is open and derelict, with the northern quarter of the site being used as a car park. The former buildings of the Parker Knoll factory were demolished and cleared between

2005 and 2007, leaving only concrete, tarmac and gravel hard standing areas. The southern third of the site was not intensively developed and remnants of an unmortared limestone rubble wall orientated east to west was still present. The north and north-west boundaries of the site are also marked by more substantial and kept dry stone walls. (See below for details). This southern third also contains a thicker and more developed area of shrubbery and weeds.

The earliest known archaeological material known from the vicinity comprised a number of Prehistoric flint that have been recovered from the south-west, south and south-east of the current development area (SMR nos. 5339, 12558, 16497 and 26405). It is currently thought however that due to the highly dispersed nature of finds that these represent waste or accidental dropping of items during movement across the landscape as opposed to specific settlement sites. A sherd of Neolithic pottery was found *c*290m to the south of the site within an area pits (SMR 3300), whilst a cropmark to the south-east is thought to indicate a later Prehistoric roundhouse or Barrow site (SMR 12558).

Romano-British material has been found to the south (SMR 3927) and east (SMR 26405) of the current area of investigation and the nature of this material which mainly comprises coins, metalwork and pottery is thought to represent more than a simple settlement site. The high densities of 'valuable' items are thought at present to possibly represent a focus for ritualistic deposition of goods such as a shrine (Brief Section 2.3). Although at present this is informed postulation and no further evidence for such a conclusion is known.

An Anglo-Saxon spearhead was recovered *c*320m to the south-east of the development area (SMR 11309) in an area thought to be a burial ground. This would also suggest that a settlement of this date may be present in the immediate vicinity of the proposed site, although as with the Romano-British material this at present is merely informed speculation.

The wall noted within the development was certainly built by 1880 as it is shown on the 25-inch first edition map. At the same time the wall enclosed a large field that included the current development area and the private housing estate to the immediate east. It is not known how much older the wall is, although the boundary itself is known to date to at least 1770 when it is thought that the area was enclosed from a former open or common field (ORO E/254/M/1 and P/260/M/1). The awards from this time state that the owner must keep up the repair of "hedges, ditches and fences" (ORO E/254/M/1, m 48) and no mention is made of a stone wall, as such it is believed that this structure may have been built in the early or mid 19th century (Miller 2011).

The stone wall forming the north-west boundary is thought at present to have been built in the early or mid 19th century and is certainly present by the 1st edition map of 1880. This wall acted as a boundary for a quarry site that is noted on both the 1st and 2nd edition Ordinance Survey maps. The wall that runs along the northern face of the site is however believed to be modern in date. Traditionally the boundaries butting London Road (The current A44) were hedged rather than walled and it is believed that the wall was most likely built after 1962 when Parker Knoll developed the site (Bland 1995, 168-172).

As mentioned above the site was taken over by Parker Knoll in 1962 who constructed a number of large warehouse like buildings and associate car park across the majority of the site, from here they built furniture until the closure of the factory in 2004. The site was then briefly taken over by the local bus company who used the site as a depot before the site was sold on for the current development. The demolition of the factory buildings was undertaken between 2005 and 2007.

5. Results

Due to the highly intrusive nature of the development and later demolition of the Parker Knoll factory complex within the development area it is clear that the ground had been intensively reworked during the latter half of the 20th century, and as such no archaeologically significant

deposits or structures were revealed. The following narrative provides a descriptive overview of the deposits seen rather than describing each individual deposit in detail, most of which are the results of the same processes in recent history.

5.1 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Fig 3. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

Where the Natural geology was observed it comprised a weathered Limestone brash overlain (where surviving) by a sterile silt-rich clay of very firm compaction. The Natural was noted on average 0.70m BPGL (below present ground surface) to a maximum of 2m below surface level within trench 4 where it had been subjected to severe truncation. On average the natural substrate was revealed at 222.70m in the northeast corner of the site (Trench 5) rising gently to 225.10m in the south of the area of investigation (Trench 1).

5.1.2 Phase 2: Modern deposits

It was clear during the investigations that the site had undergone extensive reworking and that the current ground level was the result of modern make up material and demolition. Due to the extremely recent and homogonous nature of the deposits recorded it is not intended to discuss each individual trench within the following narrative, but, rather, to provide an overview with any specific anomalies noted.

On average between 0.40 and 0.60m of overburden was revealed in the trenches and this comprised dumps of general building demolition, CBM and industrial rich bands. These large dumps often showed evidence of specific tip lines and laminations that suggested that that they had been deposited under relatively high energy circumstances such as from a mechanical dumper or excavator. Plastic, metal, chocolate and drink packaging and modern porcelain were frequently seen within the deposits and while they were noted they were not retained.

Within trench 4 a concrete floor surface (402) was noted 0.70m BPGL (below present ground level) truncating modern make-up deposits. The floor measured at least 1.80m in width by 6.96m in length. Evidence of former walls were present along the north and south extents of the surface but these had been removed during previous demolition. As mentioned above, investigation of these lower make up deposits revealed modern material containing plastics down to a depth of 2m or 221.47m AOD.

6. Synthesis

The archaeological evaluation revealed that the site had been subjected to extensive and in some places deep truncation and reworking of deposits during the construction and later demolition of the former Parker Knoll Factory. No features, deposits or artefacts were noted that predated the modern period and the natural substrate had been scalped to such an extent that the preservation of any earlier archaeologically significant material is likely to be extremely unlikely. The reworking of the soils appears to be consistent with the site having had a detoxifying program placed upon it where chemicals and the likes have been removed.

Whilst a floor surface was noted within trench 4, the majority of former factory buildings appear to have not survived the demolition process beyond CBM and concrete mixed within the general site demolition/make-up layers.

7. Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the former Parker Knoll factory, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 3197 2728; HER ref. EOX 3223).

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8. Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Julia Mussett (Arthur Amos Associates) and Hugh Coddington (West Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services).

9. Personnel

The fieldwork and report preparation was led by Jonathan Webster. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers. Fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew Mann and Jonathan Webster assisted by Graham Arnold and illustration by Carolyn Hunt.

10. Bibliography

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Plates

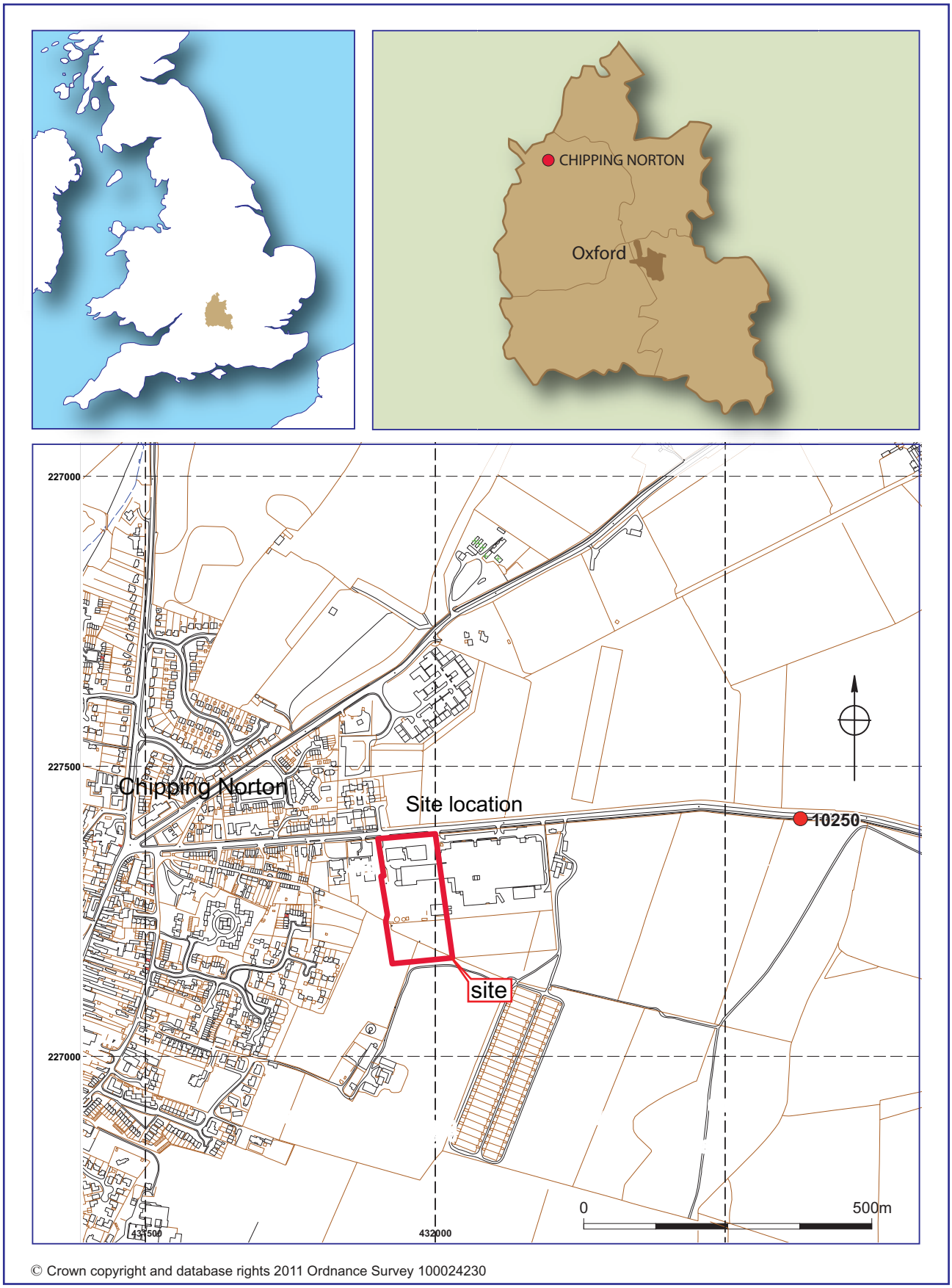
Plate 1: Trench 3, looking south

Plate 2: Trench 2, west facing section through stratigraphy

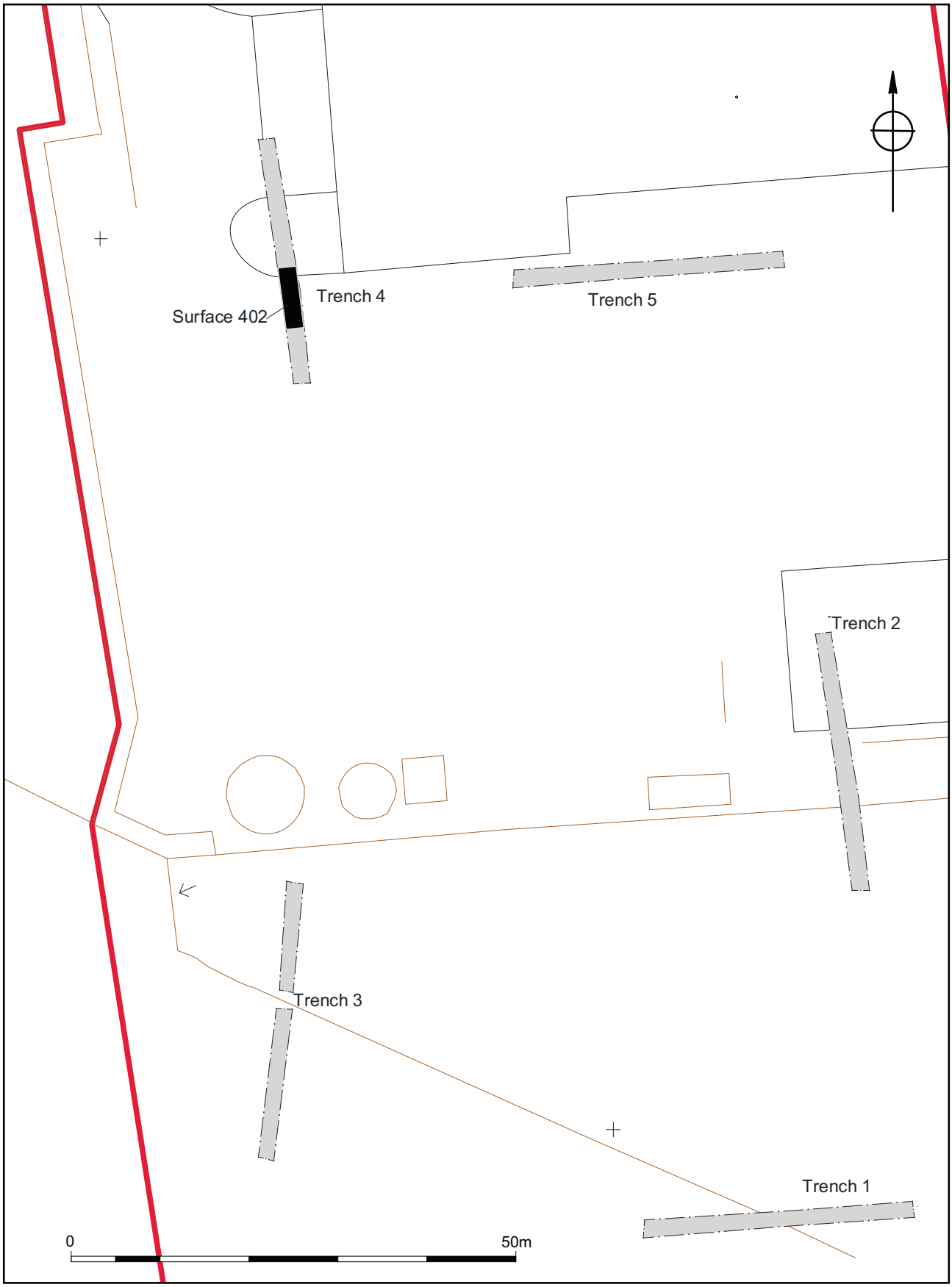
Plate 3: Trench 5, looking west

Plate 4: Trench 5, north facing section through stratigraphy

Figures



Location of the site *Figure 1*



Trench plan *Figure 2*

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 30m Width: 1.80m Depth: 1.30m

Orientation: East/west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Modern levelling	Whitish grey and yellowish brown mixed gravel hardcore	0.00-0.35m
101	Topsoil	Mid reddish brown loose sandy silts with moderate CBM fragments and charcoal flecks throughout	0.35-0.70m
102	Subsoil	Compact light yellow sandy clay with pockets of redeposited weathered limestone.	0.70-1.00m
103	Natural substrate	Light yellowish red sands of loose compaction, no inclusions but scrapped, weathered interface noted with overlying 102.	1.00-1.25m
104	Natural substrate	Weathered limestone bedrock	1.25m+

Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 30m Width: 1.80m Depth: 1.10m

Orientation: North/south

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Modern levelling	Whitish grey and yellowish brown mixed gravel hardcore	0.00-0.30m
201	Topsoil	Dark blue/brown silty clay, moderately compact, contains metalwork and moderate CBM throughout	0.30-0.60m
202	Made ground	Dark grey/blue compact gravels and tarmac mix. Contains frequent CBM and industrial lenses throughout. Levelling material raises towards surface towards south of the trench	0.25-0.40m
203	Natural substrate interface	Highly disturbed weathered limestone brash that has been mixed with overlying deposit. Evident of toothed machine bucket having impeded on underlying hard geology.	0.40-1.00m
204	Natural substrate	Weathered limestone bedrock	1.00m+

Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 30m Width: 1.80m Depth: 0.80m

Orientation: North/south

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
300	Modern levelling	Whitish grey and yellowish brown mixed gravel hardcore with modern plastics and refuse noted throughout	0.00-0.35m
301	Topsoil	Mid reddish brown loose sandy silts with moderate CBM fragments and charcoal flecks throughout	0.35-0.55m
302	Levelling layer	Mid brownish orange silty clay with frequent limestone and CBM fragments throughout.	0.55-0.75m
303	Natural substrate	Weathered limestone bedrock	0.75m+
304	Deposit	Dark bluish brown silty loam topsoil around existing stone wall	0.00-0.30m
305	Natural substrate	Light orange sand and clay mix that overlies 303 at the south of the trench.	0.55-0.75m

Trench 4

Maximum dimensions: Length: 30m Width: 1.80m Depth: 0.75-2.00m

Orientation: North/south

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
400	Modern levelling	Whitish grey and yellowish brown mixed gravel hardcore with modern plastics and terram noted throughout	0.00-0.60m
401	Modern deposit	Redeposited topsoil mixed with industrial waste, Dark bluish brown silty clays with plastic, refuse and metal seen throughout	0.05-0.70m
402	Surface	Concrete surface at least 1.80m in width by 6.96m in length	0.70-0.95m
403	Make-up deposit	Dark blue grey levelling layer underlying surface 402. Comprises tarmac crush and CBM	0.95-2.00m
404	Make-up deposit	Dark blue/grey silty clays, including frequent CBM, metal, charcoal flecks and modern refuse throughout noted at south end of trench only	0.60-0.75m+
405	Redeposited natural substrate	Heavily weathered and disturbed slabs of limestone that show evidence of having been disturbed by mechanical action. Seen at the south end of trench only.	0.60-0.75m+
406	Natural substrate	Hard geology comprising limestone that has disturbed interface with overlying deposit 403.	2.00m+

Trench 5

Maximum dimensions: Length: 30m Width: 1.80m Depth: 0.50-1.46mm

Orientation: East/west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
501	Topsoil	Topsoil and turf mixed, humic and loose in nature with occasional gravel inclusions throughout	0.00-0.09m
502	Make-up deposit	Series of highly mixed dumped layers and laminations, contains frequent CBM, metal, plastic and fabrics throughout. Very hard compaction	0.09-0.71m at eastern end dropping to 1.35m at the west of trench
503	Natural substrate	Weathered limestone brash with disturbed upper surface showing that it had been partially scalped by a toothed bucketed excavator.	0.71-1.46m+

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Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive (site code: EOX 3223)

The archive consists of:

3	Field progress reports AS2
1	Photographic records AS3
40	Digital photographs
5	Trench record sheets AS41
1	Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Oxfordshire County Museum and Archive Store
Witney Road,
Standlake,
Oxon.
OX8 7QG