



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

**AT**

**ST EDWARD'S SCHOOL, WOODSTOCK ROAD,  
OXFORD,**

**OXFORDSHIRE**

**NGR SP 5040 0910**

*On behalf of*

*TSH Architects*

**FEBRUARY 2012**

**REPORT FOR** TSH Architects  
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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological evaluation on land within the grounds of St Edward's School, Woodstock Road, Oxford. Two trenches were machine-excavated – one 15m in length (Trench 1); and one 5m in length (Trench 2). No archaeological features or deposits were present in either trench, and only a few unstratified fragments of late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century porcelain and brick were recovered from the topsoil and subsoil in Trench 2.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)**

The development area (hereafter referred to as 'the Site') is located on the western side of Woodstock Road, Oxford (NGR SP 5040 0910) (Figure 1). It is bordered to the east by Woodstock Road, to the south and west by playing fields, and to the north by a car park and buildings belonging to the school. The immediate development area currently consists of a small area of lawn with several mature trees, adjacent to tennis courts (Trench 2); and playing fields bordered by paths and further mature and young trees (Trench 1).

The underlying geology consists of Summertown-Radley gravel terrace sands and gravels. The ground level at the car park was 62.70 metres above Ordnance Datum (OD), and the ground had been terraced slightly to the south in order to create a level playing field area at c. 62.50m OD.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

Pre-planning consultation was sought from Oxford City Council for the construction of a three storey boarding house within the grounds of St Edward's School, Woodstock Road, Oxford (11/02424/PAC). Due to the potential for archaeological remains to be present on the Site, the Archaeological Officer of Oxford City Council advised that an archaeological evaluation should be carried out to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains and prepared a Brief for the work.

John Moore Heritage Services were commissioned to undertake this work, and a *Written Scheme of Investigation* was prepared by John Moore Heritage Services to satisfy the requirements of the Brief. This Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) proposed the methodology by which the archaeological evaluation was to be carried out.

The WSI was accepted by the Archaeological Officer of Oxford City Council, and the fieldwork for the archaeological evaluation took place on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2012.

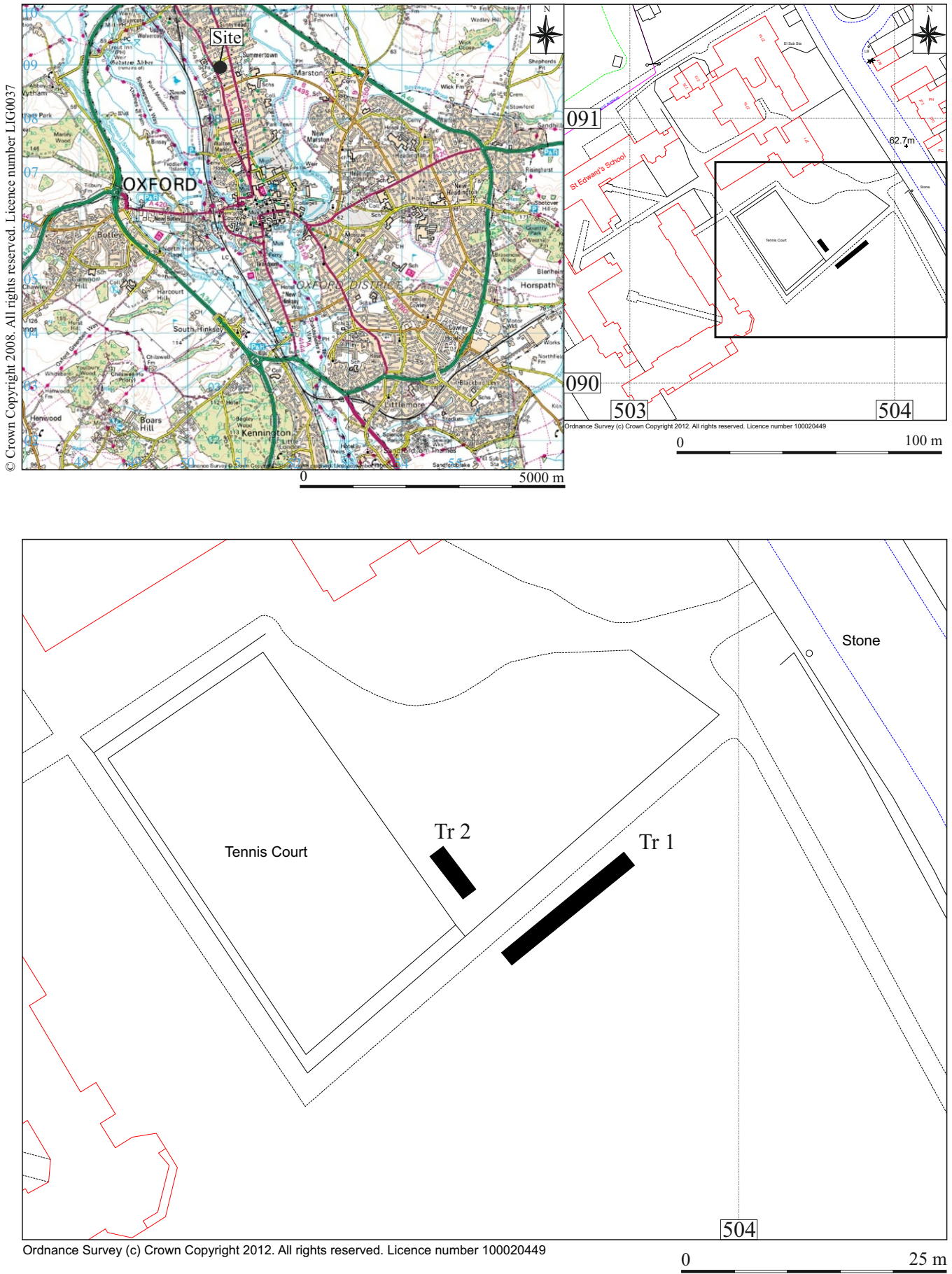


Figure 1. Site location

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

As noted in the Brief by the Archaeological Officer of Oxford City Council this area of Oxford is located on part of a gravel terrace between the Rivers Cherwell and Thames that has produced evidence of Neolithic to early Bronze Age ritual and funerary features, and was subsequently also the setting for dispersed Iron Age and Romano-British rural settlement. The evidence for prehistoric and Romano-British archaeology extending from the historic core of the city of Oxford and northwards into the north Oxford Suburb has been outlined in the Oxford Archaeological Plan Resource Assessment (Beckley and Radford 2011a, 2011b).

The Site is adjacent to parch marks identified on the St Edward's School playing fields through aerial photography, which suggested the presence of Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age monuments and/or later prehistoric or Romano-British fields and enclosures (Oxfordshire County HER Nos. 3575 and 3576). Approximately 480 metres to the south-west on Port Meadow, a series of Bronze Age ring ditches were identified and investigated by Atkinson during the 1940s (Atkinson 1942), along with other earthworks. An archaeological evaluation by Museum of London Archaeology at the Radcliffe Infirmary also recorded parts of four large ring ditches or round barrows (Braybrooke *et al.* 2009), along with evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement. Enclosures and trackways of later prehistoric or Romano-British occupation were also identified at Port Meadow, off the Woodstock Road and at Summertown (Lambrick 1982; RCHME 1992). In 1924, the construction of a tunnel under Woodstock Road 180m south of the Site recovered 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century Romano-British pottery (Beckley and Radford 2011b, 8; OC HER No 3814).

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the Site;
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered;
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits;
- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present;
- In particular to establish the character and extent of any prehistoric or Roman activity;
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation;
- To inform a decision regarding the need for a further stage of archaeological work;
- To address some of the key issues highlighted in the Solent Thames Research Framework. This will depend on the type and date of remains encountered.

### **3 STRATEGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

In response to the Brief issued by the Oxford City Archaeologist, JMHS carried out the work, which comprised an evaluation within the proposal area (Fig. 1). This consisted of machine excavation of two trenches, one 15m long and one 5m long.

#### **3.2 Methodology**

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the WSI and agreed with the Archaeological Officer of Oxford City Council.

A mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless 1.5m wide ditching bucket was used to excavate the trenches. Any archaeological deposits and features revealed were then cleaned by hand and recorded in plan before being excavated and recorded at an appropriate level. Archaeological features had written, drawn and photographic records made of them, and all deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in brackets ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material. All context numbers are preceded by trench number and /. Details of individual trenches are presented in Appendix 1 – the context inventory – at the rear of this report.

Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material. All artefacts were collected and retained. The trenches without archaeology had record photographs taken of their stripped areas, whilst photographs and drawings recorded representative sections of the deposits above the undisturbed natural subsoil. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (2008) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991). David Radford, the Archaeological Officer of Oxford City Council, visited the Site on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2012 in order to monitor the fieldwork.

### **4 RESULTS**

#### **4.1 The Recorded Archaeology**

A JCB Sitemaster mechanical excavator equipped with a 1.50m wide toothless ditching bucket was first used to remove the turf which was stockpiled separately, and then to excavate the trenches.

Trench 1 was 15m long and 1.52m wide, and excavated to a maximum depth of 0.43m. The topsoil (1/100) consisted of dark brown sandy silt 0.15-0.19m thick, with some small pebbles and considerable tree root disturbance. There was also light brown or light yellow brown sand subsoil (1/101) between 0.20 to 0.23m thick, again with large amounts of root disturbance. The natural undisturbed subsoil (1/102) was light yellowish brown sand.



No archaeological features, deposits or finds were present in Trench 1. A narrow cable encased in black plastic was revealed extending obliquely across the base of the trench, within a narrow cut up to 0.10m filled with dark grey-brown silty sand. This probable electricity cable was not revealed during a CAT scan of the area, but fortunately it was not damaged by the bucket of the JCB.



Figure 2. Trench 1 after excavation, looking south-west.

Trench 2 was 4.80m long, 1.56m wide and a maximum of 0.45m deep. The topsoil (2/200) was 0.15-0.20m deep, and was dark grey brown sandy silty loam that also contained early modern brick and tile fragments, occasional small subangular limestone fragments, and pieces of clinker and charcoal. There was again considerable tree root disturbance. The subsoil (2/201) was 0.30-0.35m thick and consisted of light brown sand, mixed with what appeared to be re-deposited gravel, perhaps brought in to level the area. The natural subsoil (2/202) was light grey-brown sand mottled with some darker brown silty sand, much of this from root disturbance.

No archaeological features or deposits were present in Trench 2. Along with early modern brick and tile fragments, only two sherds of unstratified late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century porcelain were recovered from topsoil (2/200). These were not retained.



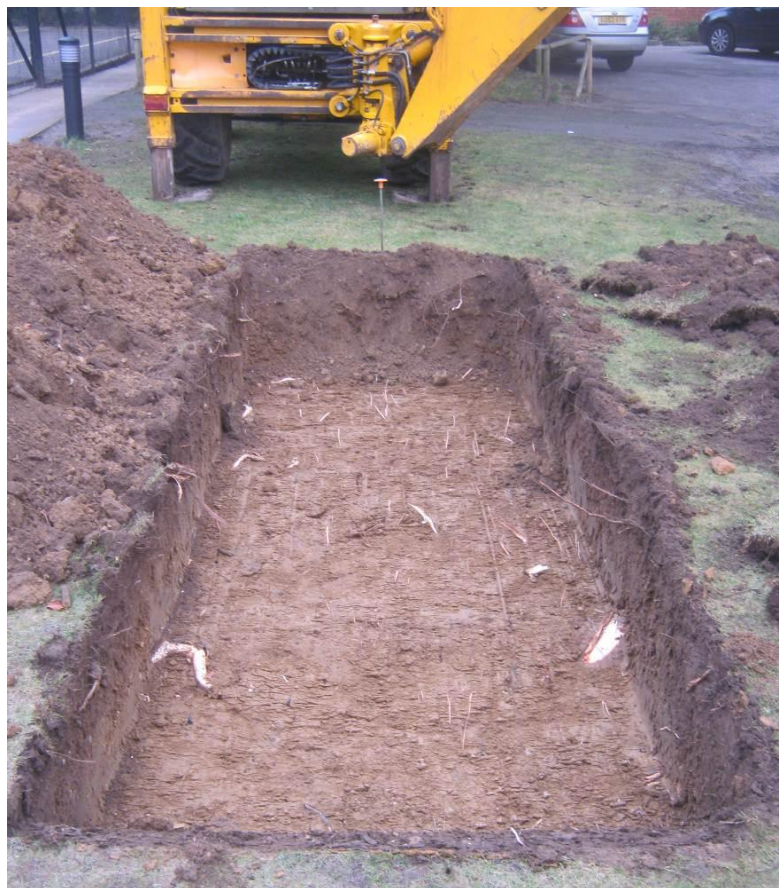


Figure 3. Trench 2 after excavation, looking north-west.

#### **4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results**

The reliability of the results is considered to be good. The archaeological evaluation took place in cold but dry and clear conditions, and the light and visibility were good.

### **5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS**

Two sherds of late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century porcelain and some fragments of relatively recent brick and tile were recovered from the topsoil (2/100) and subsoil (2/101) of Trench 2. These were unstratified finds, and were not retained.

No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental analysis were identified.

### **6 DISCUSSION**

No archaeological features or deposits were present in Trenches 1 and 2. The playing field surface at Trench 1 was approximately 0.50m lower than the ground surface at Trench 2, and it is likely that in the recent past there has been some landscaping work in order to create a level sports field. This may well have involved some terracing to reduce the ground level. In addition, in the low oblique winter sunlight on the day the evaluation took place, it was apparent that most of the playing fields were within area

of ridge and furrow, and the faint earthworks of this had survived the more recent landscaping. The earthworks of these medieval field system features extended to only c. 20m south of Trench 1. These were probably once part of a more extensive system of medieval fields that formed part of the North Gate Hundred (Cam 1936).

Additional ridge and furrow is now visible on Google Maps and Google Earth as sinuous, characteristically reverse S-shaped linear earthworks on the rough scrubland to the west of St Edward's School, between the school and the higher ground on Port Meadow. Straighter earthworks visible on the lowest ground west of the school may represent the remains of water meadow management systems.

This combination of ridge and furrow agriculture with later school playing field landscaping may have severely eroded or removed any previous archaeology surviving from earlier periods. Indeed, it is possible that some of the parch marks detected on the St Edward's School playing fields were actually derived from ridge and furrow.

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**Appendix 1: Archaeological Context Inventory**

<b>St Edward's School, Woodstock Road, Oxford</b>									
	<b>Context</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>L (m)</b>	<b>B (m)</b>	<b>D(m)</b>	<b>Finds</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Trench 1	(1/100)	Layer	Dark brown sandy silt with considerable root disturbance.	15.00	1.56	0.15-0.19	-	Modern	Topsoil
	(1/101)	Layer	Light brown/light yellow-brown sand with root disturbance.	15.00	1.56	0.20-0.22	-	-	Subsoil
	(1/102)	Layer	Light yellow-brown sand with root disturbance.	15.00	1.56	-	-	-	Natural subsoil
Trench 2	(2/200)	Layer	Dark greyish brown sandy silty loam with limestone frags, charcoal & clinker, brick & tile frags, 2 sherds of late 19 <sup>th</sup> /early 20 <sup>th</sup> century pottery & considerable root disturbance.	4.80	1.56	0.15-0.20	-	Modern	Topsoil
	(2/201)	Layer	Light brown sand & gravel with root disturbance.	4.80	1.56	0.30-0.35	-	-	Subsoil
	(2/202)	Layer	Mottled light grey-brown sand & dark brown silty sand with root disturbance.	4.80	1.56	-	-	-	Natural subsoil