

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT 123-127 WALTON ST

& 32 LITTLE CLARENDON ST,

JERICHO, OXFORD

NGR SP 50935 06858 (centred)

On behalf of

CgMs Consulting

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REPORT FOR CgMs Consulting
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out a watching brief to the rear of 123-127 Walton St/32 Little Clarendon St, Oxford. No archaeological remains were present.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

The site is located at the junction of Walton Street and Little Clarendon Street, Oxford NGR SP 50935 06858 (centred). The solid geology of the study site is Oxford Clay Formation and West Walton Formation (undifferentiated), comprising mudstone. This is overlain by 2nd Terrace (Radley Summertown) sand and gravel deposits. The natural topography of the site has been significantly altered due to 19th and 20th century development. The site is situated at around 60m above ordnance datum.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission (11/00711/FUL) was granted by Oxford City Council for the retention of the front part of 123-125 and 127 Walton Street, Oxford and the erection of a new structure, the demolition of 126 Walton Street and 32-32A Little Clarendon Street and their replacement with new three- and four-storey buildings and the provision of 6 retail units on ground and basement floors with student accommodation on upper floors. A building recording was previously carried out by CgMs Consulting. A condition of the permission required an archaeological watching brief to be carried out during the work. The Oxford City Archaeologist was consulted and prepared a Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* was prepared by CgMs Consulting for the archaeological watching brief, proposing a suitable methodology to satisfy the requirements of the Brief.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site is situated within the north western corner of the Oxford Central Conservation Area. Building recording and an archaeological watching brief is considered necessary for this site because the late 19th - early 20th century shops being redeveloped are of local interest and because the site lies in an area with potential for prehistoric, Saxon and Post medieval remains activity (Dodd 2003, Braybrooke 2009 and 2010, Radford 2011). However, the archaeological potential of the site itself is poorly understood and the survival of such deposits is dependant upon the later urban development of the site from the late 18th century onwards.

The site is located c.140m south of the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter where extensive prehistoric and Saxon remains were identified (Braybrooke 2009 and 2010). The remains of a rectilinear Middle Neolithic Enclosure and four Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age ring ditches were excavated in addition to a sunken featured building and associated 6th century pottery (possibly representing a dispersed low-density rural settlement of the 5th-6th century AD focused around the earlier barrow cemetery).

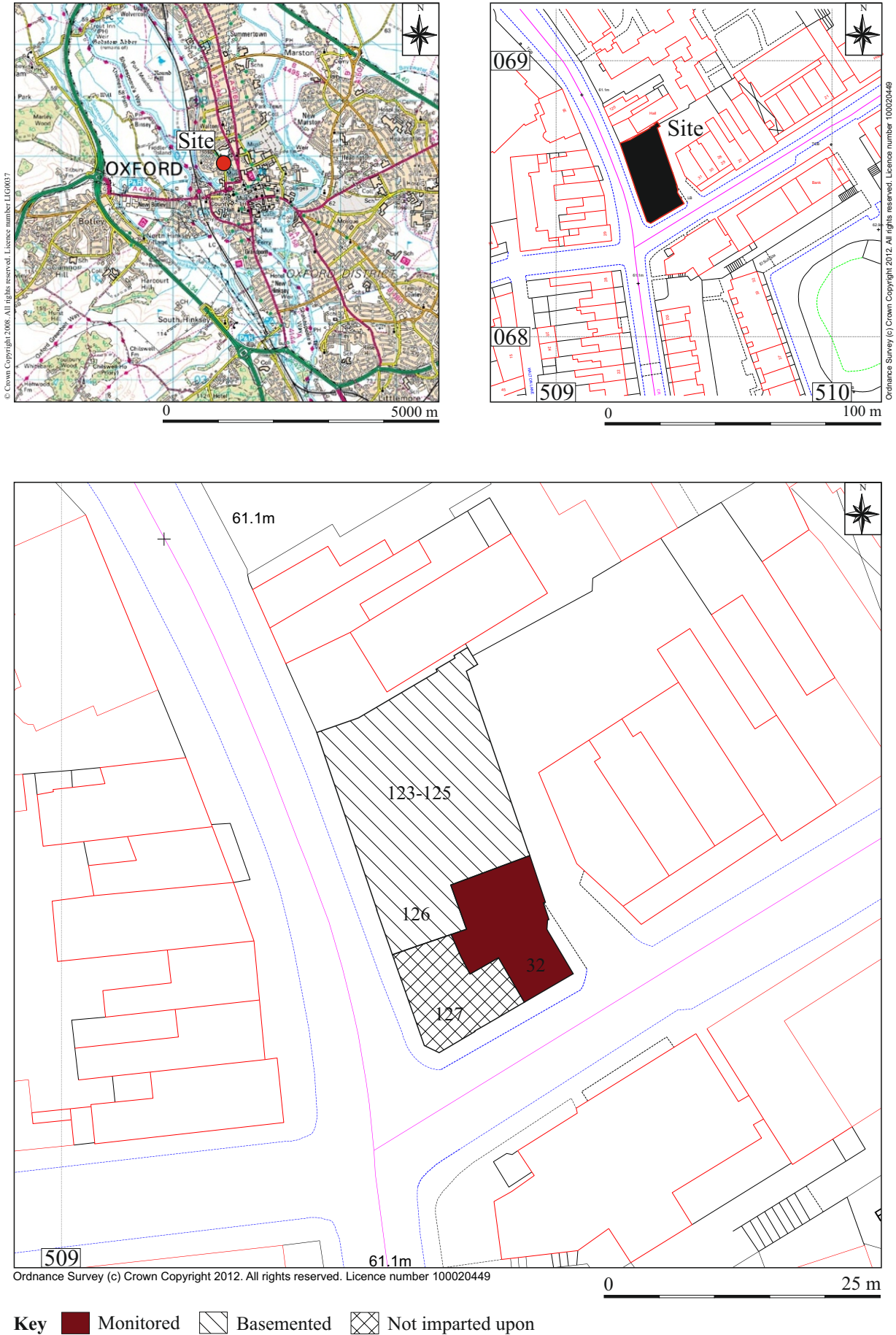


Figure 1. Site location

The Bronze Age ring ditches are likely to form part of a wider ritual landscape extending beneath this part of Oxford, as evidence elsewhere with the cropmark ring ditches at University Park to the east and the barrows at Beaumont Street/St John Street and St Michael's Street to the south (Parkinson *et al* 1996, Poore and Wilkinson 2001).

From the medieval period onwards, the site is likely to have formed part of an agricultural landscape situated beyond the walled town of Oxford and the documented hamlet of Barrowcroft (Braybrooke 2009). The projected line of the Royalist Civil War defences out line runs through the application site (as mapped by the UAD), although its exact route in this part of the City has not been archaeologically demonstrated.

Cartographic evidence has shown that Little Clarendon and Walton Streets existed as routes since at least the 17th century. The site was then subjected to urban development in the late 18th century, and subsequently re-developed throughout the 19th century (Ettwein Bridges Architects 2009). The site consists of a block of 19th and 20th century shops and houses; the buildings of 123-126 Walton Street have basement floors. The oldest building on the application site is 127 Walton Street (built c.1876); 126 Walton Street is a two storey shop rebuilt in the mid 20th century and 123-5 Walton Street are three houses built in c.1899. The building at 32 Little Clarendon Street is a single-storey shop unit and is of interest as an example of local vernacular architecture.

The above background is drawn from the CgMs Consulting WSI.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To preserve by record any archaeological remains which may be disturbed by the development works
- To make available the results of the survey and investigation

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a *Brief* from the Oxford City Archaeologist a *Written Scheme of Investigation* was prepared by CgMs Consulting; this was submitted with details of building recording methodology to the Oxford City Archaeologist.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

A first site visit was carried out 16th April to examine the extent of the impact upon any potential archaeology from the cellars of the previous buildings at 123-125 Walton St. Due to shoring it was not possible to see the full extent of the exposed natural; however, it was clear that no significant archaeological remains were present. Whether archaeological remains with a lesser footprint – such as postholes or gullies – were present could not be ascertained due to the depth of the observing position – c 2.5m below modern ground-level – and the presence of shoring. The presence of a cellar at 126 Walton St had removed any potential for archaeological remains to subsist.

The only area with any potential for subsisting archaeological remains was to the rear of 127 Walton St and below and to the rear of 32 Little Clarendon St. Subsequent visits were made to monitor areas of reduced excavation here. Excavation of the reduced area was carried out with a 7.5-tonne excavator by the contractor.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Fieldwork (Figures 2 & 3)

123-126 Walton St

As reported in the methodology no archaeological remains were present due to basementing.

127 Walton St & 32 Little Clarendon St

No archaeological remains were present. A reduced excavation was carried out to the rear of these properties by the main contractors, Knowles. The reduced dig only revealed natural 2nd Terrace gravels (Figs. 2 & 3). Footings for the east side of 127 Walton St were observed but gravel deposits were observed.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The watching brief took place during clement conditions on April 16th, and June 11th, 18th and 26th with good cooperation from the on-site contractors.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Finds

No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

5.2 Environmental Remains

No palaeoenvironmental samples were taken.



Figure 2. North end of ground reduction area round piles; looking south.



Figure 3. South end of ground reduction area adjacent to Little Clarendon St; looking west.

6 DISCUSSION

Despite the proximity of a number of barrows at the Radcliffe (Braybrooke 2009; 2010), the Sackler (Poore and Wilkinson 2001) and in University Parks (Parkinson, Barclay and McKeague 1996) there was no evidence for prehistoric activity; this may well be due to previous groundworks at the site during the 19th and 20th centuries rather than a reflection of an absence of prehistoric activity in the immediate area.

Similarly, no evidence was forthcoming for Roman, medieval or post-medieval – particularly activity associated with the Civil War defences of Oxford – during the watching brief. While less significant negative features would have had the potential to have been removed historically the Civil War defences would surely have been visible. It is therefore likely that while they certainly existed in the vicinity of the development site, the defensive ditch and associated bank could not be localised during this watching brief.

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