



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION TO THE REAR OF 17-41 MILL STREET,
OXFORD**

SP 505 061

On behalf of

Cantay Estates Ltd

FEBRUARY 2013

REPORT FOR	Cantay Estates Ltd 25 St Thomas Mews St Thomas Street Oxford OX1 1JA
PREPARED BY	Paul Riccoboni AIFA
EDITED BY	John Moore MIFA
ILLUSTRATION BY	Andrej Čelovský
FIELDWORK	28 th January 2013
REPORT ISSUED	4 th February 2013
ENQUIRES TO	John Moore Heritage Services Hill View Woodperry Road Beckley Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ Tel/Fax 01865 358300 Email: info@jmheritageservices.co.uk
Site Code	OXOL13
JMHS Project No:	2745
Archive Location	The archive is currently held by JMHS and will be deposited with Oxford Museum Services in due course with Accession Number: 2013.11

CONTENTS

	Page
<i>SUMMARY</i>	1
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Site Location	1
1.2 Planning Background	1
1.3 Archaeological Background	1
2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION	3
3 STRATEGY	3
3.1 Research Design	3
3.2 Methodology	3
4 RESULTS	4
4.1 Trench 1	4
4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results	6
5 FINDS	6
5.1 The Pottery <i>by Dave Gilbert</i>	6
6 DISCUSSION	6
7 ARCHIVE	8
BIBLIOGRAPHY	8
APPENDIX 1: Context List	9

FIGURES

Figure 1	Trench location	2
Figure 2	Trench 1: Plans & Sections	5

PLATES

Plate 1:	Ditch 1/9 looking west (2m scale)	10
Plate 2:	Sunken way 1/13 looking west (2m scale)	10

Summary

John Moore Heritage Services conducted an archaeological evaluation on land to the rear of 17-41 Mill Street Oxford, north of Osney Lane (SP 505 061). The site has planning permission for erection of two storey building to provide 55 en-suite student rooms plus warden's accommodation (11/02382/FUL). One trench totalling 15m was excavated to the surface of the archaeology or natural ground. Two linear features were discovered; one considered to have been the tree lined road shown on the historic map of 1587 and the other a side ditch. The southern side ditch contained 19th century finds within its fill. The road has been suggested in this report to have been a 'sunken way'. It contained no dateable finds with only a piece of iron and animal bone recovered. Perhaps the iron fragment and animal bone once formed part of a rough cobbled road surface. There was no evidence for any cart ruts indicating it was primarily used for pedestrians visiting the church of St Thomas to the east of the site. Two sondages revealed the natural gravels reaching depths of a minimum of 1m.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location and Geology (Fig. 1)

The site is located at to the rear of 17-41 Mill Street Oxford, north of Osney Lane (NGR SP 505 061). This was the site of a former railway siding on the west side of the railway line running south from Oxford Station. It is bounded on its west side by terraced properties on Mill Street, on the south side by Osney Lane and on its north by railway buildings. The site is currently uneven wasteland.

The area of proposed development lies on the alluvial floodplain of the River Thames on the First gravel terrace. The underlying geology is Oxford Clay.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission for erection of two storey building to provide 55 en-suite student rooms plus warden's accommodation, and provision of cycle and bin storage facilities, landscaping and access from Osney Lane has been granted by Oxford City Council (11/02382/FUL). A condition of the permission requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological works. The Archaeological Officer of Oxford City Council has provided a Brief for the programme of archaeological work. This was followed by a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2013) which proposed a method to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains on the site as Stage 1.

1.3 Archaeological Background

A desk-based assessment of the site has been completed by Oxford Archaeology (2011). In summary a single early Saxon cremation was recovered from Osney in the 19th century (UAD No. 724) and further burials may be present in the general area.

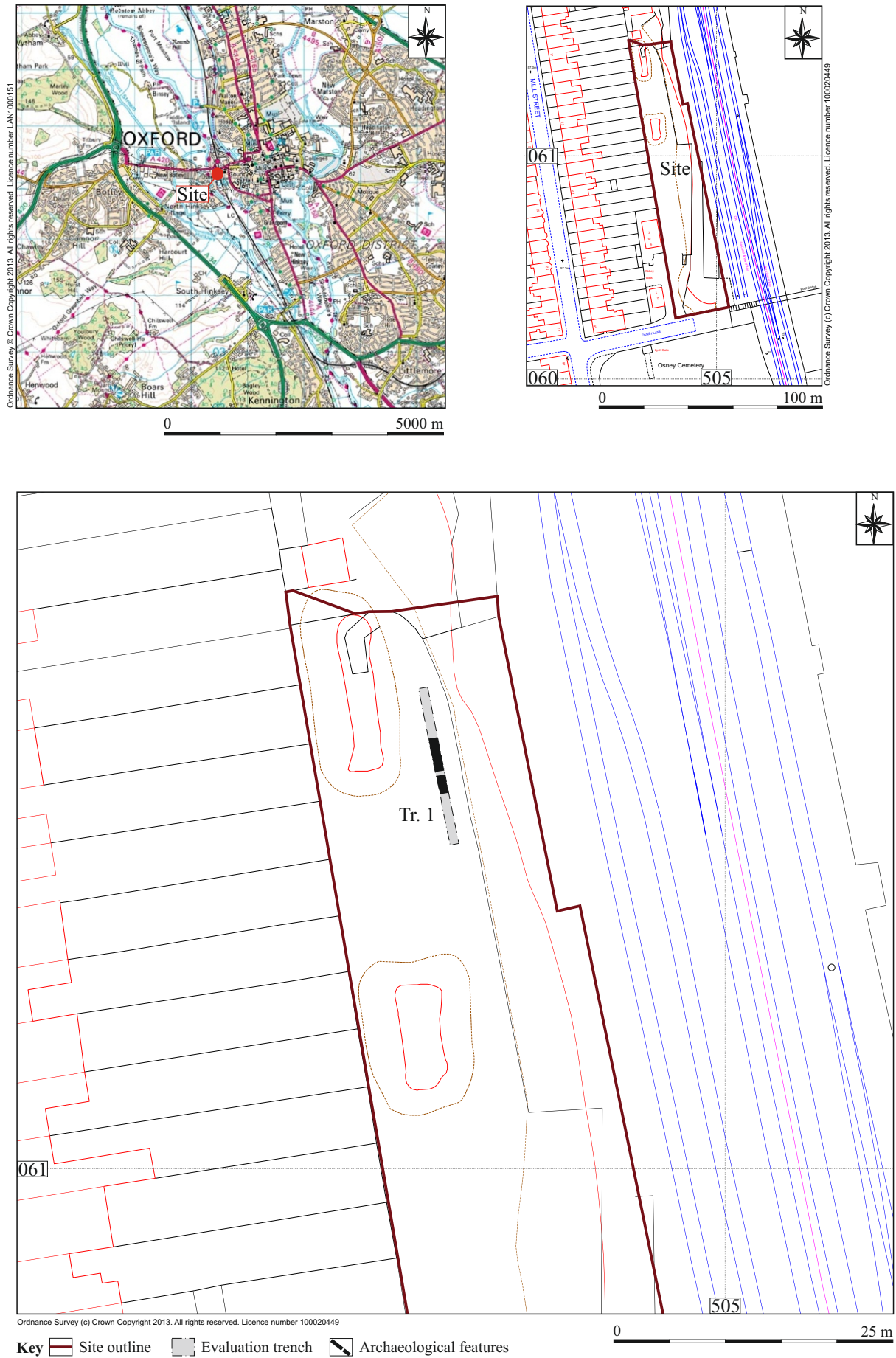


Figure 1. Site location

The medieval precinct of Osney Abbey is suggested by map regression to lie just to the south of the site. The route of a post-medieval (or earlier) tree-lined road is shown on Agas's 1587 map running through the site towards the Thames.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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 presence or absence, date and character of the known post-medieval road or trackway;
- to establish the level and extent of any previous disturbance from the construction of the railway at the northern end of the site;
- to make available to interested parties the results of the investigation;
- to inform a decision regarding the need and extent for a further stage of archaeological work; and
- to address some of the key issues highlighted in the Solent Thames Research Framework and city resource assessments. This will depend on the type and date of remains encountered.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2013). The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The trenching sample required was achieved through the excavation of one trench measuring 15m.

The trench was 1.5m in width and was excavated by a JCB type tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand prior to hand excavation of the archaeological features.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced. The trench was backfilled after recording.

A site meeting took place which allowed David Radford, City Archaeologist for Oxford City Council to monitor the work.

4 RESULTS

The trench was positioned in a pattern providing good coverage of the proposed development and aligned to assess the survival of the potential east-west aligned trackway which traversed the site leading from St Thomas the Martyr Church. All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 Trench 1 (Figs. 1 - 2)

General overburden west facing section; northern end of trench (Fig. 2; S. 1.1)

The natural gravels (1/6) were seen at the base of the trench. Overlying the natural was 0.30m thick dark brownish black silty clay loam with modern finds throughout (1/5). This was overlain by 0.45m thick red crushed brick deposit (1/4). The edge of a brick wall (1/3) overlay the brick crush. It was four courses high (0.30m) orientated on a north-south direction. Above the brick wall was a layer of crushed stone and brick (1/2) which may have been the demolition material from the temporary structure. The final layer was 0.40m thick topsoil (1/1).

On the east facing section at the northern end of the trench were wooden ply boards seen in the side of the trench. These must have been instated as shuttering within a previous deep trench.

General overburden east facing section; southern end of trench (Fig. 2; S. 1.2)

Above the natural gravel (1/6) and overlying the two ditches was 0.25-0.50m thick dark brownish black silty clay (1/5). This was overlain by c. 0.25m thick crushed building materials (1/4). Overlying (1/4) was 0.15-0.20m thick dark greyish brown silty clay (1/11) covered by 0.05m thick tarmac (1/7). A 0.60m thick deposit of organic topsoil covered this end of the trench (1/1).

Ditches; cut into natural (1/6)

Ditch 1/9 was linear shaped 1.60m wide and 0.25m deep with shallow concave sides and a gently rounded base (Fig. 2; S. 1.2, Plate 1). It was filled by loose yellow brown sandy silt (1/8) with occasional cinder specks and stone fragments. There were also post-

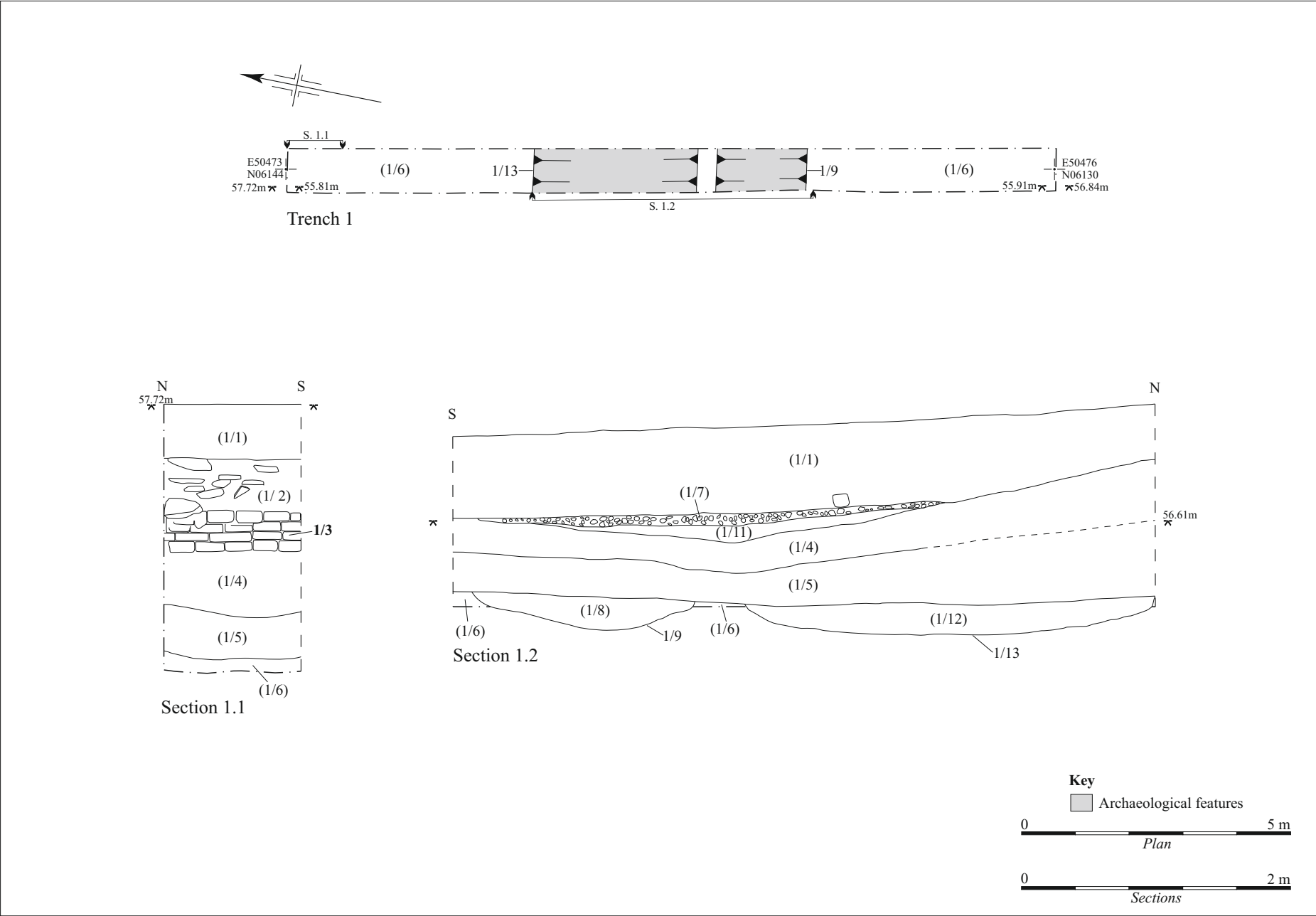


Figure 2. Plan and sections of Trench 1

medieval pottery fragments (see finds section) and blue and white transfer printed china and iron slag (not retained). The ditch was sealed by (1/5).

Feature 1/13 was linear in shape and *c.* 3m wide and 0.24m deep with shallow concave sides and a flat base (Fig. 2; S. 1.2, Plate 2). It was filled by loose yellow brown (1/12) with one iron fragment and animal bone. This may have been the trackway/ 'sunken way' seen on the historic map of 1587. The trackway may have been a sunken path or holloway which was tree lined. It was sealed by (1/5).

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The excavation of the trench took place in wintry weather conditions. As the trench was over 1.5m deep staff were not permitted to enter the trench at the northern end where the overburden was greatest. Some hand excavation did take place at the southern and central areas of the trench where the sides are shallower, although as the trench was deep hand excavation was kept to a minimum.

5 THE FINDS

5.1 The Pottery by Dave Gilbert

Two sherds of post medieval pottery weighing a total of 10g were recovered from context (1/08), the fill of ditch 1/9. The pottery was recorded utilising the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1989, 1994) and not retained.

The fabric present: Creamware (CRM), late 18th – early 19th century – 1 sherd, 2g
London stoneware (OXST) *c.* 1680 plus – 1 sherd, 8g

It is recommended that the pottery is not retained.

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological evaluation was successful in gathering sufficient information to understand the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of burial of archaeological remains within the area of study as set out in the *Brief* (OCC 2013) and *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2013). The desk based assessment (OA 2011) highlighted the potential for prehistoric remains, especially as the site is situated on the Thames Gravels, a geology favoured by early settlers. As a result of the trench excavation no prehistoric features or artefacts were recovered. It would also seem that no Roman or Saxon remains were encountered within the trench. However, an isolated Saxon cremation was discovered close to the study site and so the potential of finding further isolated burials surviving on other parts of the site is still possible.

The depth of overburden was deep (as expected) due to the railway line to the immediate east. There is an old platform still surviving and the ground level had been

raised considerably for this and the railway line itself. As a result the railway siding was formed of deep made ground deposits (c. 4m deep). The trench was very close to the railway siding and cut through imported materials such as crushed brick and tile used to raise this area for the tracks. The trench sections also revealed a brick wall (1/3) and demolition deposit above it indicating a small modern temporary structure once existed here, perhaps similar to the temporary buildings to the immediate north of the site.

Beneath the made ground and modern structure was intact original topsoil and subsoil deposits. Cut into the undisturbed natural gravels were two linear features. The largest of the linear features was c. 3m wide and was properly the trackway itself, which seems to have been a holloway or sunken dirt track rather than a cobbled road surface which was expected. Generally post-medieval roads are of a much more solid construction than medieval roads, with graded stones forming a firm, dry foundation and a compacted surface. Post-medieval (16th century) cobbled yard surfaces were discovered within the Osney Abbey precinct during work at Trajan House, Mill Street (TVAS 2004 & 2010).

The trackway discovered at this site was on an east-west direction leading directly to/from St Thomas the Martyr Church and was therefore probably not ever associated with Osney Abbey, which may explain why it was not cobbled, although a fragment of iron and animal bone were discovered within it which may have been the remains of a once loosely metalled surface. The smaller ditch on the south side was filled with silty gravelly sand with some post-medieval finds, the earliest being from the 17th century and the latest from the early 19th century. Feature 1/9 could have been an adjacent ditch to the 'sunken way' which finally went out of use during the early 19th century. The trackway is not shown on the map of 1829. The side ditch would have been for drainage and a line of trees, on both sides, is shown on the map of 1587. The hedgerow/line of trees would have probably been on top of the bank next to the ditch, but this has left no archaeological trace, even in the trench section.

There was no evidence of wheel rutting at the base of the holloway/sunken way which may indicate wheeled carts were not using this route, and it was primarily used by pedestrians. As no dating evidence was recovered from the 'sunken way' we do not know when it originated, but it would seem likely that this route may have been established as a result of the construction of church of St Thomas during the 12th century.

It was not considered worthwhile to assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits as modern finds had been recovered from ditch 1/9. The 'sunken way' was not sampled for environmental remains as the route was used for centuries and no meaning information could be gained. Furthermore contamination from overlying later deposits would have been high.

Research aims

Post-medieval below-ground archaeology tends to be investigated only as a by-product of sites identified for their medieval interest. The Solent Thames Historic Environmental Framework stated that established post-medieval ceramic sequences would be particularly productive for urban sites in Oxford, Wallingford, Wantage,

Abingdon, Bicester and Witney (Rhodes 2006). There were no important ceramic or other post-medieval artefacts at this site.

Conclusion

Other research aims set out in the Solent Thames Historic Environment Framework could not be fulfilled in this report, but analysis of relevant historic maps first undertaken in the desk based assessment (OA 2011) has helped identify the trackway uncovered during fieldwork. Further archaeological work would be necessary to fully understand the nature of the features but it would seem that the known trackway does survive. We now know it was a 'sunken way' or dirt track with perhaps a sparsely metalled surface.

A confidence rating is good that the best possible results were achieved.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record

The project brief	The project report
Written Scheme of Investigation	The primary site records
The drawn records	

The archive is currently maintained by John Moore Heritage Services.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects 2*

Institute of Field Archaeologists. 1994 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation. Revised 2008*

Mellor, M, 1984 A summary of the key assemblages. A study of pottery, clay pipes, glass and other finds from fourteen pits, dating from the 16th to the 19th century in TG Hassall, CE Halpin and M Mellor, *Excavations at St Ebbe's Oxoniensia* **49**, 181-219.

Mellor, M, 1994 Oxford Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region *Oxoniensia* **59**, 17-217

Oxford City Council 2012 Planning Control and conservation: *Brief for Archaeological Evaluation*. Unpub. OCC Document.

John Moore Heritage Services 2013 *11/02382/FUL – R/O 17 to 41 Mill Street, Oxford; Archaeological Evaluation; Written Scheme of Investigation*. Unpub. JMHS Doc. 2745.

Oxford Archaeology 2011 *Site at Osney Lane, Oxford; Archaeological Desk Based Assessment*. Unpub. Doc. Ref. 4984

Rhodes J 2006 *Solent Thames Historic Environment Research Framework Oxfordshire: Post-medieval and modern*

Thames Valley Archaeological Services 2004 *Trajan House, Mill Street, Osney, Oxford: Archaeological Evaluation*

Thames Valley Archaeological Services 2010 *Trajan House, Mill Street, Osney, Oxford: Archaeological Watching Brief*

APPENDIX 1: Summary of Context list: Trench 1

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
1/01	Deposit	Dark brown silty clay topsoil	0.40	Tr.	Tr.	Brick and plastics	Modern
1/ 02	Deposit	Mottled brick and stone silty clay	0.30	Tr.	c.3.0	/	/
1/03	Deposit	Brick wall	0.30	unknown	c.3.0	/	Modern
1 /04	Deposit	Crushed brick and tiles	0.45	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
1/05	Deposit	Dark brown sandy clay	0.30	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
1/06	Deposit	Light brown yellow clay and gravels natural	n/a	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
1/07	Deposit	Tarmac	0.10	Tr.	3.5	/	/
1/08	Deposit	Loose yellow sand and gravels	0.24	2.0	Tr.	pottery and clay pipe	19 th century
1/09	Cut	Cut of ditch	0.24	2.0	Tr.	/	/
1/10	Deposit	Dark orange gravelly silt natural	n/a	Tr.	Tr.	/	/
1/11	Deposit	Dark brown silty sand	0.12	Tr.	2.8	/	/
1/12	Deposit	Loose yellow sand	0.20	3.0	Tr.	Animal bone and iron fragment	Post-medieval
1/13	Cut	Cut of trackway?	0.20	3.0	Tr.	/	/



Plate 1; Ditch 1/9 looking west (2m scale)



Plate 2; Sunken way 1/13 looking west 2m scale