

**JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES**

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

**AT**

**SAID BUSSINESS SCHOOL  
OXFORD**

**SP 5054 0638**

*On behalf of*

*Soil Mechanics*

**JULY 2007**

**REPORT FOR** Soil Mechanics

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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological evaluation in June 2007. Four test pits were excavated on the site of the proposed development, to reveal an undated palaeo-channel.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

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

Part of the proposed development site lies within the Rewley Abbey Scheduled Monument (Oxon 80). The geology of the area is Thames gravels, which are overlain in most areas by varying depths of alluvial silts. The area subject to the archaeological evaluation lies outside the limits of the Scheduled Monument at NGR SP 5054 0638. The site is currently an area of “wild” garden (Fig. 1) while the inspection pits for the services were in an adjacent car park to the west and boreholes were within both areas (Fig. 2).

### **1.2 Planning Background**

As part of the consideration of a proposed extension to the Said Business School an archaeological evaluation was carried out. The Archaeological Officer of Oxford City Council recommended that two trenches should be dug to evaluate the site and a watching brief carried out on inspection pits for services. This was in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan policies.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

Rewley Abbey was founded in 1280 as a Cistercian place of study. The crown granted the buildings of the Studium to the Abbey in 1381 after the Studium had failed. The Cistercians remained at Rewley Abbey until the dissolution in 1536.

Remains of the Abbey are shown on Agas’ map of 1578. Logan’s map of 1675 depicts a system of moats surrounding the Abbey complex. These still existed in 1850 and are clearly shown on Hoggar’s map.

An evaluation in 1993 to the east of Rewley Road recorded significant structural remains associated with the Abbey (OAU 1993). Further more extensive evaluation work the next year uncovered further remains of the Abbey and outbuildings as well as pre-Abbey activity (OAU 1994). Trench 5 of this evaluation lay close to the proposed site. It revealed a palaeo-channel that had been covered by a considerable amount of more recent deposits.

An associated boundary ditch was located near Rewley Road as was an assemblage of medieval pottery. The old land surface dated to 1850 was also discovered (OAU 1995). Later work in 2001 failed to recover any remains (OA 2001).

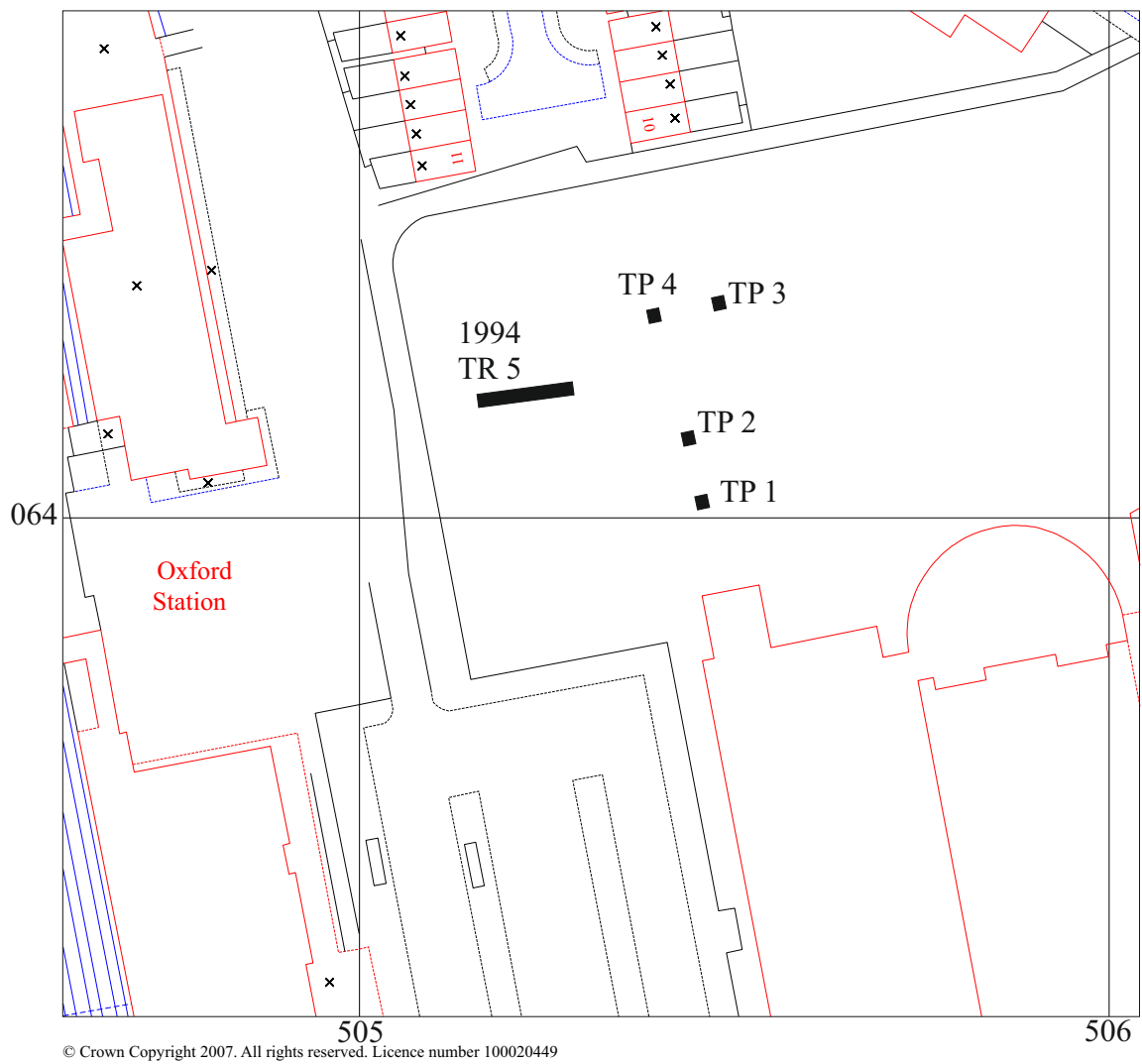


Figure 1. Site location and Archaeological Test Pit location

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

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

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

In particular:

- To confirm the presence of a palaeo-channel in the area
- To investigate any possible evidence of the medieval Abbey outbuildings in the area

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the Oxford City Archaeological Officer. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

### **3.2 Methodology**

Two trenches 10m long and 1.5m wide were to be excavated in the area. Due to Health and Safety reasons an area surrounding these trenches was to be excavated 1.5m all the way around each trench to a depth of 1.2m. The main trench would then be excavated to a full depth of 2.4m from the present ground level.

However, due to the presence of unexpected services in the area the methodology was revised to dig a series of test pits in areas of opportunity.

This work was conducted using a JCB Sitemaster employing a toothless 1.6m ditching bucket.

The excavation of the inspection pits for services was monitored.

The work was monitored by Brian Durham the Oxford City Archaeological Officer.

## **4 RESULTS (Figure 2)**

All features were assigned individual context numbers. This number covered both the feature cut and the fill for pits, unless the feature was sample excavated by hand.

Context numbers in [ ] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material.

All of the test pits excavated revealed the same soil profiles, with varying thickness of the same deposits.

#### **TP 1.**

This was the furthest south of the pits dug; it measured 6m long by 4m wide and was excavated to a depth of 2.50m (55.55m OD) where the top of the natural geology (Thames gravels) was encountered.

The natural gravel (1/6) was overlain by a 0.65m thick deposit of black organic material (1/5), which has been interpreted as alluvial deposits within the palaeo-channel. On top of this deposit was a 0.70m thick deposit of blue clay (1/4), which in turn was overlain by 0.35m thick deposit of crushed brick rubble (1/3). Overlaying (1/3) the brick rubble was a 0.10m thick deposit of blackened stones and coal dust (1/2); this deposit has been associated with the station car park, on top of which was a 0.40m thick deposit of mid brown gravelly silt clay (1/1) that had been deposited as a topsoil for the gardens.

#### **TP2.**

This was 3m wide by 3.5m long and dug to a depth of 2.4m (55.62m OD). The lowest deposit encountered was a stiff grey blue clay (2/6). This was overlain by a 0.80m thick deposit of black organic peat (2/5), which was overlain by a 0.50m thick dump of blue clay (2/4) that is considered to be same deposit as (1/4). This deposit was then overlain by the same sequence of brick rubble (0.30m thickness), car park surface (0.08-0.11m) and garden soil (0.32m).

#### **TP3.**

This was 2m wide by 7m long and dug to a depth of 2.4m (55.73m OD). The lowest deposit encountered was a slightly gravelly grey blue clay (3/6), this was overlain by a 0.25m thick deposit of black organic peat (3/5), which was overlain by a 0.50m thick dump of blue clay (3/4) and is considered to be the same deposit as (1/4). This deposit was then overlain by the same sequence of brick rubble (0.15m thickness), car park surface (0.45m) and garden soil (0.20m).

#### **TP4.**

This was 1.5m wide by 2.6m long and dug to a depth of 2.5m (55.51m OD). The lowest deposit encountered was a gravelly grey clay (4/6). This was overlain by a 0.60m thick deposit of black organic peat (4/5), which was overlain by a 0.58m thick dump of blue clay (4/4) that is also considered to be the same deposit as (1/4). The last deposit was then overlain by the same sequence of brick rubble (0.46m thickness), car park surface (0.14m) and garden soil (0.28m).

The inspection pits to locate existing services were not sufficiently deep enough to expose any underlying archaeological remains.

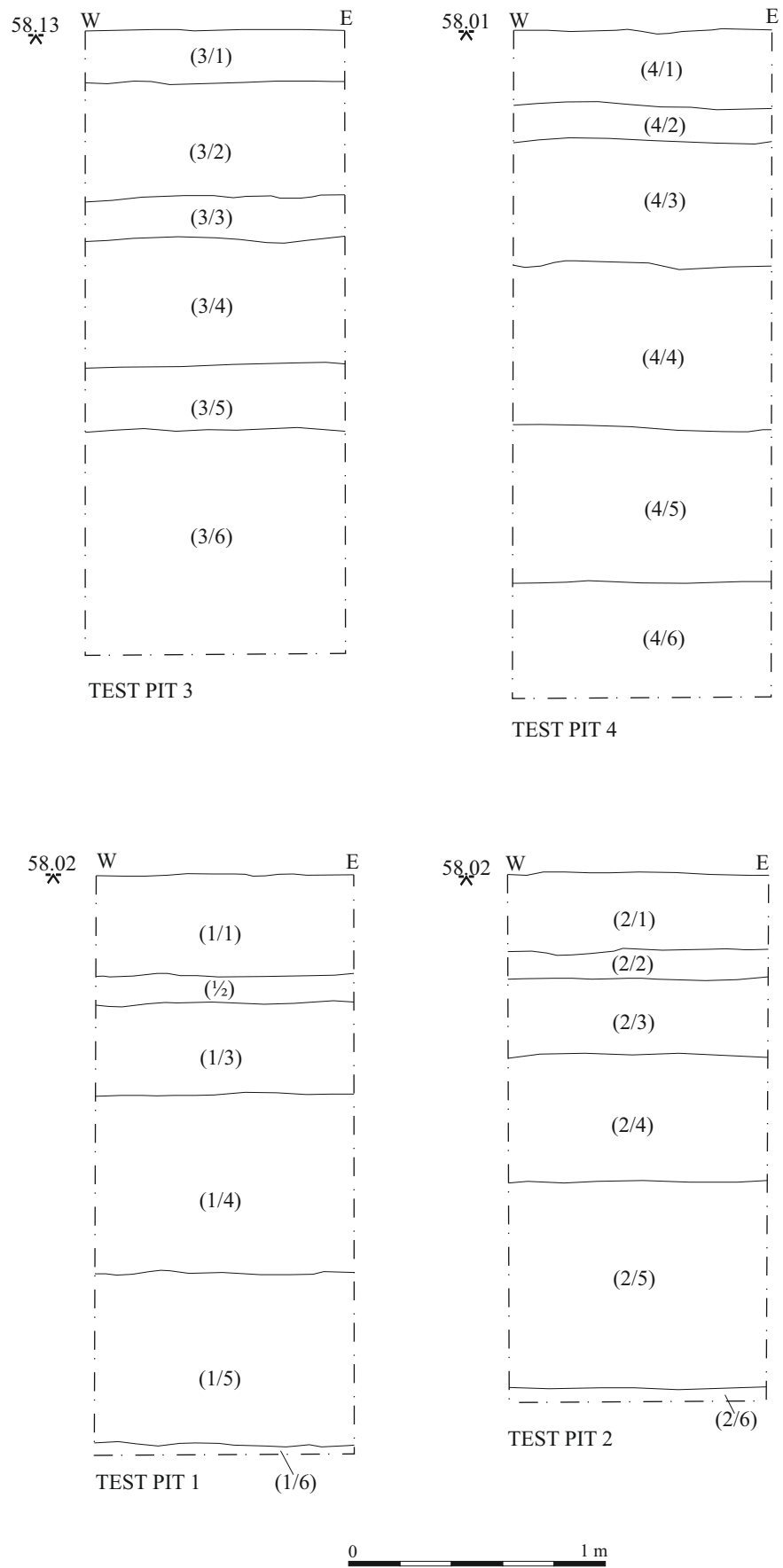


Figure 2. Test pit sections



## 5 FINDS

### 5.1 Pottery (By Paul Blinkhorn)

The pottery assemblage comprised 10 sherds with a total weight of 56g. It comprised mainly late post-medieval and modern wares, along with two sherds of residual medieval material, which indicates that there was activity at the site during the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 1 sherd, 33g.

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 1 sherd, 2g.

OXFI: Chinese Porcelain, c. 1650+. 1 sherd, 3g.

OXFM: Staffordshire White salt-glazed Stoneware, 1730 – 1800. 1 sherd, 2g.

WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, mid 19<sup>th</sup>C+. 6 sherds, 16g.

The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

*Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type*

Context	OXY		OXAM		OXFI		OXFM		WHEW		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
2/5					1	3	1	2	2	10	19thC
3/5	1	33	1	2					4	6	19thC
Total	1	33	1	2	1	3	1	2	6	16	

## 6 DISCUSSION

The test pits have revealed the presence of the palaeo-channel that was expected to run through the site, no banks or edges were observed due to the nature of the excavations. A thick dump of blue clay (1/4, 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4) appears to seal the palaeo-channel prior to the construction of the railway sidings and yards that were later replaced by the station car park.

A borehole survey of the area was carried out at the same time as the evaluation (Fig. 3). Five boreholes were examined. The first BH1 was very close to TP1, just to the east. It revealed a similar sequence of deposits, but showed that layer (1/5) increased in thickness to 1m in this area. The second BH 2 was east of TP2 and revealed that layer (2/5) also increased to 1.2m thick. A third BH3 was positioned just to the north-east of TP3, here (3/5) was seen to increase from 0.25m to 2.30m thick. This probably indicates that the bank edge is close by and that it slopes into the main channel at a very steep angle here.

Two other boreholes were examined to the west of the trial pits. One BH4 was located in the north-west of the site. Here the natural gravels were recorded at 3.6m below ground level and were covered by a 1.1m thick deposit of organic clay. South of this was another (BH5) that showed that the natural gravels were 2.5m below the present ground surface and were covered by a 1.3m thick deposit of organic clay.

These deposits would suggest an irregular area of pooling being fed by a deep channel. Such areas and channels develop in the area from the Roman period onwards (Robinson 2003). A stream and an area of pooling are depicted on maps of 1750 and 1793 (supplied by client). There are differences between the two and it is possible that the area of pooling shifted its edges over time. The pottery associated with these deposits comes only from the very top of the layers. This does little to date the channels but does show that they were open or at least marshy in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century confirming the depictions on Hoggar's map of 1850.

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