

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

7 STEPHEN ROAD, HEADINGTON,

OXFORD

NGR SU 5443 0714

On behalf of

Mr. S. Longthorp

OCTOBER 2012

REPORT FOR Mr S. Longthorp
184 London Road
Headington
Oxford
OX3 9EE

PREPARED BY David Gilbert

ILLUSTRATION BY Andrej Čelovský

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ENQUIRES TO John Moore Heritage Services
Hill View
Woodperry Road
Beckley
Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ
Tel/Fax 01865 358300
Email: info@jmheritageservices.co.uk

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SUMMARY

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an evaluation at 7 Stephen Road, Headington, Oxford. Despite the potential for the site to be with e Saxon cemetery, the single trench located only mid 20th century horticultural beds.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

The site is located at 7 Stephen Road, Headington, Oxford (SU 5443 0714). The site is currently a surfaced driveway. The underlying geology is Beckley Sand

1.2 Planning Background

Planning application 12/01926/FUL for the erection of a two-storey dwelling house was refused. One reason being that it requires the implementation of a staged programme of archaeological works. This is due to the site's potential to contain archaeological remains. The applicant was advised to secure the implementation of a phased programme of archaeological work in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation. This is in line with NPPF. The City Archaeologist prepared a Brief for the first phase of the work, namely a field evaluation. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* agreed with the county planning archaeologist proposed a method to satisfy the requirements of the Brief.

1.3 Archaeological Background

In 2002 the remains of a Saxon inhumation burial were found in a construction trench at No 2 Stephen Road (Oxford Archaeology 2003). The skeleton was of a Saxon female and was accompanied by two disc brooches, a pin, a knife and about fifty amber beads. The amber necklace has been dated diagnostically to the mid-late 6th century. The burial at No 2 Stephens road was unusual in the arrangement of grave goods and it has been suggested that the brooch located on the forehead related to a headscarf.

Subsequently archaeological recording has taken place at No 10 Stephen Road in 2012. This work identified the remains of a further burial on the site of the former garages (comprising of in situ leg bones within a truncated or disturbed grave cut) pointing to the presence of a dispersed cemetery spread across the plateaux of higher ground in this location. The report is currently being compiled for this site (JMHS 2007; D. Radford *pers. comm.*).

Anglo-Saxon cemeteries can be concentrated or dispersed. For example at Dinton (Buckinghamshire) a later 5th-6th century part of a compact inhumation cemetery of twenty burials (18 with grave goods) was excavated within an area of 15 x 25m. At Tring roundabout (Buckinghamshire) an extensive dispersed inhumation cemetery was excavated. Eighteen inhumations were recorded, mainly orientated south-north, spread out over area 90 x 170m.

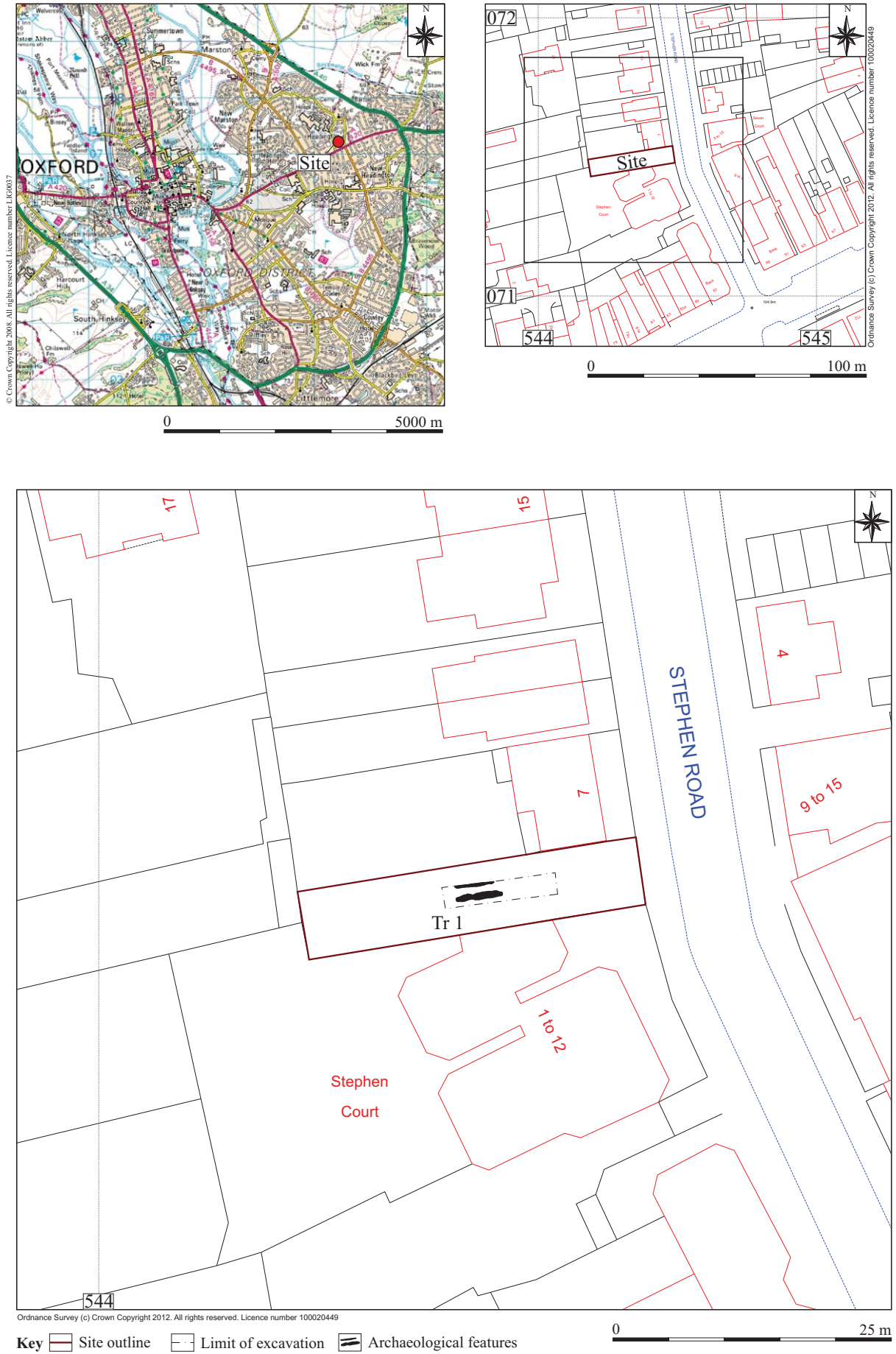


Figure 1. Site location

Burials of this period were usually placed in grave cuts, although sometimes a wooden coffin or chamber enclosed the body. Bodies were usually extended or loosely flexed, they can be accompanied with grave goods (weapons, belt buckles and jewellery etc). Many inhumation cemeteries are also associated with cremation burials (mixed cemeteries). The cremations can be buried in ceramic, glass or metal containers or with no container; they can also be accompanied with grave goods (food offerings, jewellery).

The settlement of Headington (the recorded historic core of which is located further to the north at 'Old Headington') is one of the oldest continuously settled locations in Oxford and is first mentioned in 1004 in a Charter of King Ethelred as *Hedenandun*. The Domesday Book of 1086 records that *"Rex tenet Hedintone"* or "the King holds Headington. Ethelred's charter to St. Frideswide's in 1004 was witnessed *'in villa regia quae vocatur Hedindond* that translates as "in the royal residence which is called Headington", however the character and location of this residence is not known.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- 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 Saxon activity or burials.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In accordance with the *Written Scheme of Investigation* designed by JMHS and agreed with the City Archaeologist, JMHS carried out the work, which comprised the excavation of a single trench across the site.

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 for Archaeologists (2008).

3.2 Methodology

The investigation involved the mechanical excavation of one trench across the site by a 3-tonne excavator equipped with a ditching bucket, supplemented by limited hand investigation of archaeological deposits. The trench was 10m long and 1.85m wide (Fig. 1).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Field Results (*Figure 2*)

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.

The lowest deposit revealed in the trench was a geological layer consisting of a mottled yellow-grey sand (004) related to the Beckley Sand deposits in the area.

Above the natural sand (004) was a layer of mid brown-orange clay-sand with rare charcoal flecks (003). This deposit contained fragments of clay tobacco pipe stems

Cut into this layer (003) were two long but narrow pits 005 and 007.

Context	Description	Dimensions	Fill
005	cut	4.75m x 0.65m	Mid-dark grey sand-clay (006) 0.15m thick
007	cut	4.75m x 0.35m+	Mid-dark grey sand-clay (008) 0.15m thick

Both pits contained 18th-19th century pottery sherds, fragments of clay tobacco pipe and coal.

Overlying these was a 0.3m thick layer of dark grey-black sandy-clay loam (002) that was once a topsoil before being covered by 0.2m thick of concrete slab and make-up deposit (001).

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The archaeological evaluation took place during good weather conditions. The percentage size of the sample was considered sufficient for the development area.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery

A small quantity of pottery sherds were recovered from contexts (002, 006 and 008) a representative sample was examined in the field. These were recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994) and not retained.

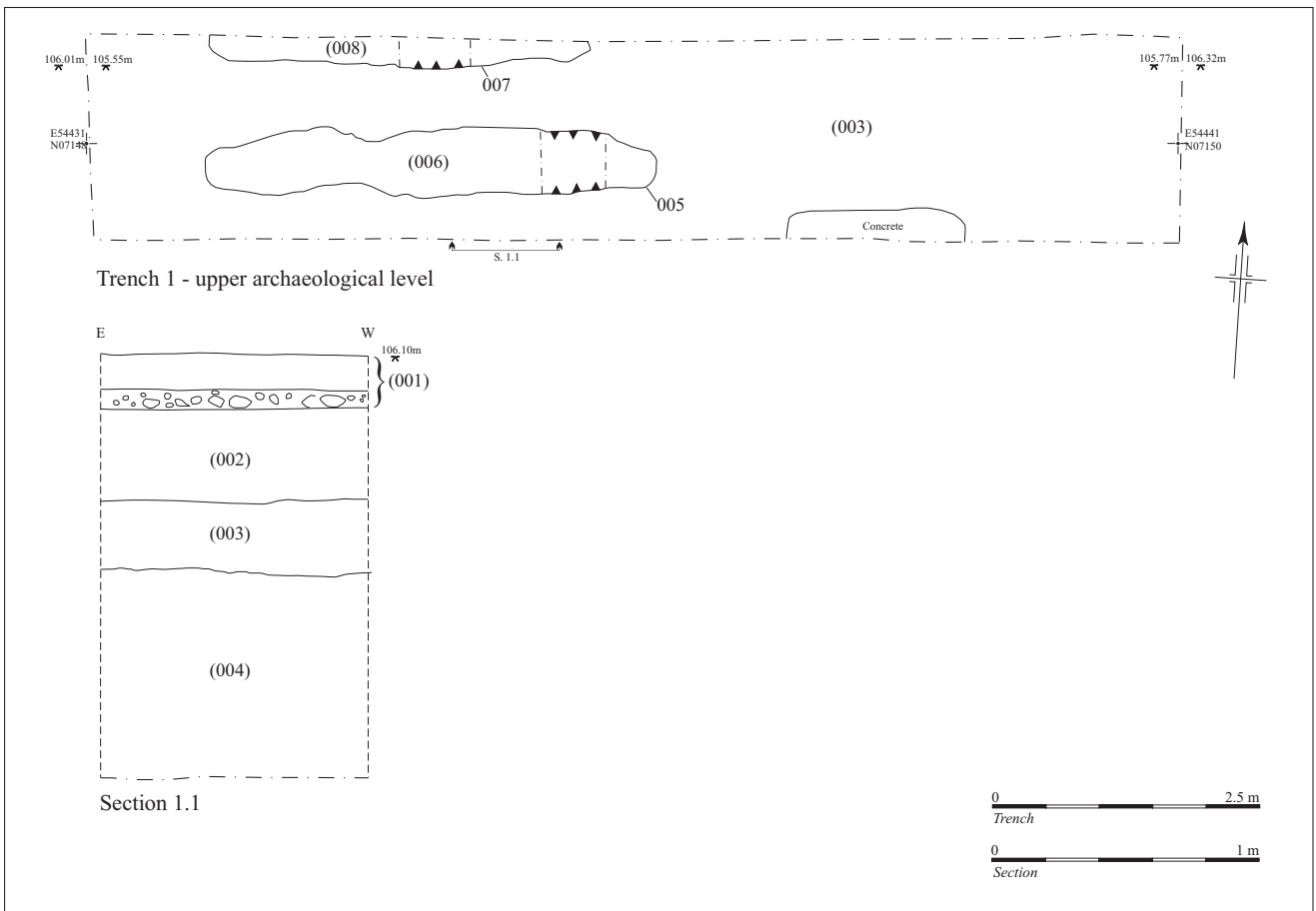


Figure 2. Trench 1 and section 1.1

Fabrics included:

OXDR:	Red Earthenware, dated 1550+	(002) & (006)
CRM:	Creamware, late 18 th – early 19 th century	(002)
WHEW:	Mass-produced white earthenwares, 19 th - 20 th C.	(002), (006) & (008)

5.2 Environmental Remains

No environmental samples were taken as the potential of the deposits was not felt to be sufficient to warrant sampling.

6 DISCUSSION

The level of the natural sand deposits was encountered between 0.6m and 0.8m below the present ground surface. Due to difficulties recognising grave cuts on the nearby 10 Stephen Road (D. Radford *Pers. Comm.*) it was agreed to carefully machine excavate this deposits in thin layers to test for the presence of any inhumations. This was done to a depth of 1.6m across the entire trench. No inhumations, bone fragments or indicators of grave cuts were encountered.

The site is within a area marked as a wooded boundary between two fields on the 1:2,500 OS maps of 1880 and 1899. Stephen Road has been constructed by the publication of the 1:2,500 OS map of 1921, although no houses have been constructed by this date there are narrow linear plots marked running back from the road in the area of the site. House are first seen on the 1:2,500 OS map of 1939. It seem most likely that the linear cuts 005 and 007 represent planting pits or horticultural beds dating to this per-war period.

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