



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

FORMER W.H. SMITH LTD,

UNIT 24, PETERLEY ROAD,

COWLEY, OXFORD

NGR SP 55660 04740

On behalf of

SIAD Ltd

FEBRUARY 2015

REPORT FOR SIAD Ltd
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an evaluation prior to the construction of a new build on the site of the former W.H. Smith Ltd depot, Unit 24 Peterley Road, Cowley, Oxford (NGR SP 55661 04742). Three trenches, measuring 15m x 2 m, were excavated across the site. Archaeological activity was noted only in Trench 3, where a shallow ovoid pit of unknown date was recorded. No evidence of Roman activity was present.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located at the site of the former W.H. Smith Ltd depot, Unit 24 Peterley Road, Cowley, Oxford (NGR SP 55661 04742). The site lies at approximately 85m OD, and the underlying geology is the Wheatley Limestone Member.

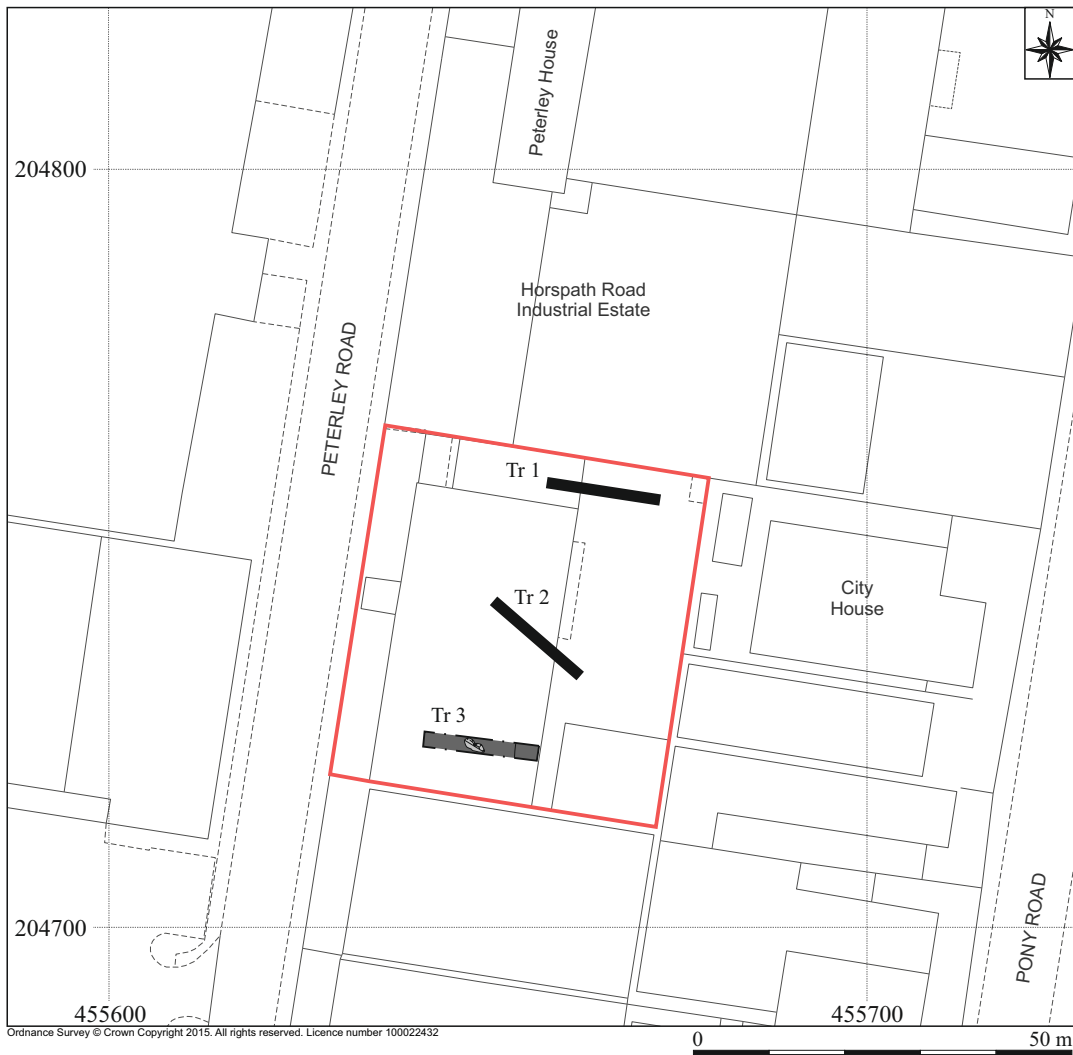
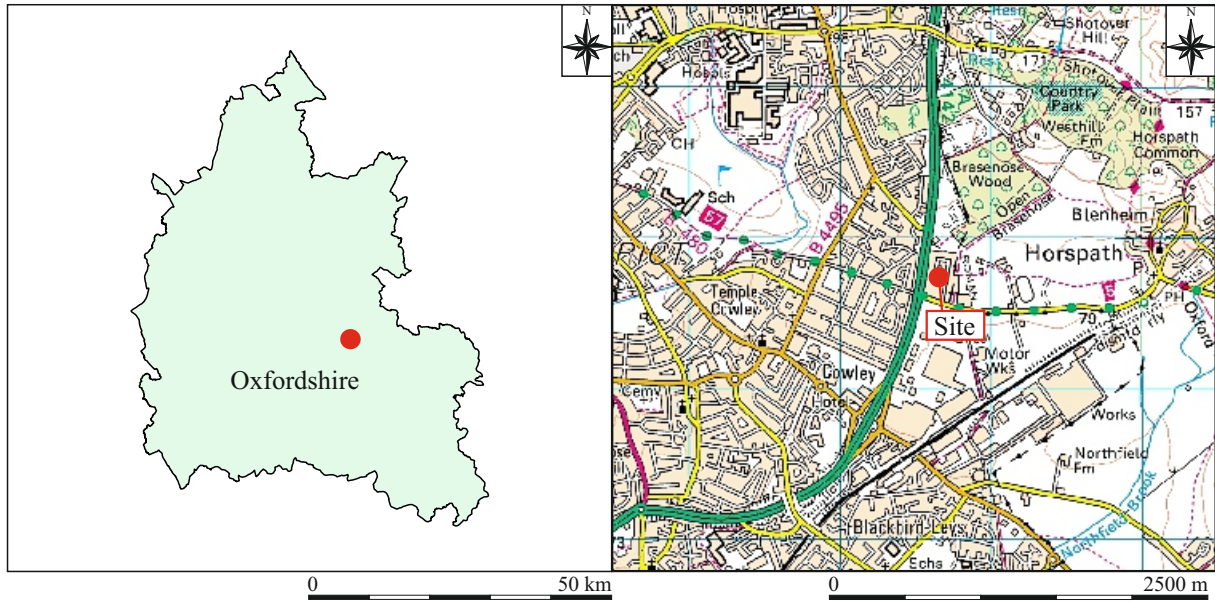
1.2 Planning Background

Oxford City Council granted planning permission for the demolition of the existing sub-standard industrial building and erection of new industrial building (Use Class B1, B2 and B8) with provision of additional car parking space (14/02076/FUL). Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological features, a condition of permission required a programme of archaeological investigation in the form of an archaeological evaluation to be carried out. This was in line with PPG 16 (the planning policy current at the time) and other Local Planning policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site is located within a zone of archaeological interest on the eastern margins of the City of Oxford; this area contains a number of recorded find spots and features indicating prehistoric settlement activity and also considerable evidence for a series of dispersed Roman pottery manufacturing sites. The site lies within an area of significant Roman activity close to the Dorchester-Alchester Roman Road, located 100m to the east. Roman pottery has previously been identified 70m to the north-west (HER No MOX5795) and two un-associated Roman burials (County HER No MOX5774) were found 110m to the south-east of the site. The concentration of activity in the vicinity suggests the presence of a dispersed roadside settlement or settlements, the focus and extent of which remains unclear.

The Oxford Roman pottery industry was orientated on the Alchester-Dorchester Road and from modest 1st century origins grew into a significant regional industry in the 3rd and 4th centuries comparable to other major production centres in the Nene Valley and the New Forest. The industry as a whole can be considered to be of national importance.






Key  Site boundary  Archaeological features  Blank trenches

Figure 1: Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation, and depth of burial of important archaeological remains and any associated palaeoenvironmental remains within the area of study.
- To establish whether significant evidence for Roman settlement and/or burials are present within the area of study, given the potential for such activity.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxford City Council Heritage Team (OCCHT). 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 Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014).

3.2 Methodology

Three evaluation trenches, 15m long by 2m wide were excavated across the proposed area of development. The trenches were excavated by a 20 tonne 360° excavator, fitted with a bladed ditching bucket.

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. A photographic record was also produced.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

Every deposit encountered was given a unique context number. Deposits are represented with standard brackets, cuts by square brackets and structures are represented with bold text.

4.1 Trench 1

No archaeological features or deposits were present in Trench 1. The geological horizon was reached at a depth of 0.65m, and was composed of a compact mid yellowish brown silty clay, with frequent sub-angular limestone inclusions (1/02). Overlying (1/02) was a layer of loose sub-angular stone and brick that had a depth of 0.6m and was present throughout the whole trench (1/01). This can be interpreted as a layer of made ground, most probably deposited immediately prior to the construction

of the former industrial unit. Cutting layer (1/01) were the foundations and associated cuts for the former industrial unit. These were numbered [1/03], **1/04**, [1/05] and **1/06**. [1/03] and **1/04** measured 3m within the trench and extended beyond the limit of excavation (l.o.e) to the north and south, while [1/05] and **1/06** measured 3m within the trench and extended beyond the l.o.e. to the north.

4.2 Trench 2

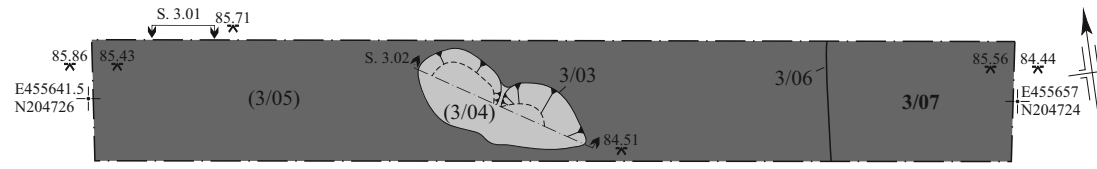
No archaeological features or deposits were present within Trench 2. The geological horizon was reached at a depth of 0.9m, and was composed of a compact mid brown silty clay, with frequent sub-angular stone (2/03). Present within deposit (2/03) was a shallow, irregularly shaped feature; 2m in length by 1m in width, with a depth of 10mm – [2/05]. This feature was filled by a deposit of firm mid reddish brown silty clay (2/04). [2/05] was interpreted as a slight depression within the natural geology, due to the similarity of the fill with soil layer (2/02) and the shallow depth of the cut. Overlying (2/04) was a layer of firm mid reddish brown silty clay, with moderate sub-angular stone (2/02). It had an average depth of 0.15m and was present across the whole trench. This layer was interpreted as a former subsoil layer.

4.3 Trench 3 (Figure 3)

The geological horizon was reached at a depth of 1.5m, and was composed of a compact mid brown clay, with areas of exposed limestone bedrock (3/05). Cutting (3/05) was [3/03]: a sub-ovoid cut with a sharp break of slope at top, gradual at base and a concave base; measuring 2.8m in length by 1.2m in width, with a depth of 0.1m. [3/03] was filled by (3/04), a firm mid brown silt, with occasional charcoal flecks and a depth of 0.1m. No artefactual evidence was recovered from this feature. Overlying (3/04) was a firm mid reddish brown silty clay, with moderate sub-angular stone (3/02). It had a depth of 0.5m, and was present for 12m within the trench; truncated by modern foundation cut [3/06] at the eastern end of the trench. This deposit was overlain by (3/08); a compact yellowish brown silty clay with frequent sub-angular stone, measuring 0.2m in depth and present across the whole trench. This deposit was interpreted as a layer of made ground associated with the former industrial unit. Cutting this layer was [3/06], a modern foundation cut associated with the former industrial building. This was filled by foundation **3/07**. These foundations, located at the eastern end of the trench, measured 3m in length by 2m in width and extended beyond the l.o.e. to the north and the south. The foundation truncated subsoil (3/02) and natural geology (3/05), and was not excavated beyond the lower limit of excavation. The top layer present in the trench was a deposit of fragmented demolition material, present across the whole trench with a depth of 1m (3/08). This was a layer of crush material associated with the current demolition works.



Figure 2: Location of trenches 1-3



Trench 3



Section 3.02

Key:

■ Features ■ Geology

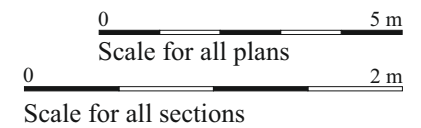


Figure 3: Trench 3 Plans and sections

5 FINDS

No artefactual evidence was recovered.

6 DISCUSSION

No archaeological features or deposits were present within Trench 1; furthermore there was no evidence of the subsoil horizon present within Trenches 2 and 3, recorded as (2/02) and (3/02). This suggests that the construction of the former industrial unit resulted in the truncation of the subsoil across this area of the site, and potentially the removal of any archaeological deposits or features.

Trench 2 contained a shallow irregular feature [2/05], with a sterile, naturally deposited fill (2/04). This feature was interpreted as a natural depression within the geology, filled with subsoil.

Trench 3 contained [3/03], a shallow sub-ovoid pit cut with a single fill (3/04). This fill contained occasional charcoal flecks; however no artefactual evidence was recovered, and the morphology of the pit was not indicative of a particular purpose. As such no date or particular function can be assigned. This feature may represent a tree throw; the charcoal present being residual material associated with the removal of the tree by burning.

Trenches 2 and 3 both showed evidence of a subsoil horizon preserved below the made ground associated with the modern industrial building. This horizon increases in depth between Trenches 2 and 3, from 0.2m to 0.5m, suggesting the potential for superior preservation of archaeological deposits toward the southern end of the site.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

The project brief

Written scheme of investigation

The project report

The primary site record

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the County Museums' Store under accession number OXCMS: 2015.15.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs

John Moore Heritage Services, 2015. 14/02076/FUL, Former W.H.Smith Ltd, Unit 24 Peterley Road, Cowley, Oxford. Archaeological Evaluation. Written Scheme of Investigation. Unpublished document.

ID	Type	Description	Depth	Width	Length	Finds	Interpretation	Date
Trench 1								
1/01	Deposit	Loose, sub-angular stone.	0.6m	Whole trench	Whole trench		Modern made ground	Modern
1/02	Deposit	Compact, mid yellowish brown silty clay. Moderate sub-angular stone inclusions.	0.2m +	Whole Trench	Whole Trench		Natural	
1/03	Cut	Modern foundation cut. Rectangular cut with sharp BoS at top and vertical sides.	0.6m +	2m	3m		Modern foundation cut	Modern
1/04	Structure	Modern foundation	0.6m +	2m	3m		Modern foundation	Modern
1/05	Cut	Modern foundation cut. Rectangular cut with sharp BoS at top and vertical sides.	0.6m +	1.5m	3m		Modern foundation cut	Modern
1/06	Structure	Modern foundation	0.6m +	1.5m	3m		Modern foundation	Modern
Trench 2								
2/01	Deposit	Loose, fragmented demolition material.	0.5m	Whole trench	Whole trench		Crush	Modern
2/02	Deposit	Firm, mid reddish brown silty clay. Moderate sub-angular stone inclusions.	0.15m	Whole trench	Whole trench		Subsoil	
2/03	Deposit	Compact, mid brown silty clay. Frequent sub-angular stone inclusions.	-	Whole trench	Whole trench		Natural	
2/04	Fill	Firm, mid reddish brown silty clay	10mm	1.5m	2m		Fill of divet 2/05	
2/05	Cut	Sub-ovoid, gradual BoS at top and base. Gently sloping sides and a concave base.	10mm	1.5m	2m		Shallow natural divet	
Trench 3								
3/01	Deposit	Loose, fragmented demolition material.	1m	Whole trench	Whole trench		Crush	Modern
3/02	Deposit	Firm, mid reddish brown silty clay. Moderate sub-angular stone inclusions.	0.5m	2m	12m		Subsoil	
3/03	Cut	Sub-ovoid. Sharp BoS at top, gradual at base. Gently sloping sides and a concave base.	0.1m	1.2m	2.8m		Ovoid pit cut	Undated
3/04	Deposit	Firm, mid brown silt. Occasional charcoal flecks.	0.1	1.2m	2.8m		Fill of 3/03	Undated
3/05	Deposit	Compact, mid brown silty clay with moderate patches of limestone bedrock.	-	2m	12m		Natural	
3/06	Cut	Modern foundation cut. Linear with sharp BoS at top and vertical sides.	1.5m +	2m	3m		Modern foundation cut	Modern

3/07	Structure	Modern Foundation	1.5m +	2m	3m		Modern foundation	Modern
3/08	Deposit	Compact, brownish yellow silty clay. Frequent sub angular stone.	0.2m	Whole trench	Whole trench		Made ground	Modern

10 PLATES



Above: Trench 3, looking east.

Below: Trench 3, representative section 3.01, looking north.





Trench 3: Section 3.02. Pit [3/03] and fill (3/04), looking south west.