

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

LAND TO REAR OF 17 BETWEEN TOWNS ROAD

OXFORD

NGR SP 544 041

On behalf of

Michael Bott

SEPTEMBER 2015

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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological field evaluation at this site in August 2015. The aims of investigation were to establish the character and extent of any remains relating to the known Roman pottery industry in the immediate vicinity.

A mechanically excavated trench of 15m length of was opened across the site (Fig. 1). The only indications of pre-modern archaeological remains were two sherds of Oxford colour coated ware of 1st-3rd century AD date.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The application site is located at the rear of 17 Between Towns Road, Oxford (NGR SP 544 041). Topographically the site is reasonably level, and lies at an approximate height of 75m OD. The underlying geology is shown as Beckley Sand Member (BGS). The site is currently used as car park, and covered by tarmac surface.

1.2 Planning Background

Outline planning application has been submitted to Oxford City Council for the erection of three story building, consisting of seven two bedroom flats and provision of amenity space, car park, cycle and waste storage (15/02245/OUT).

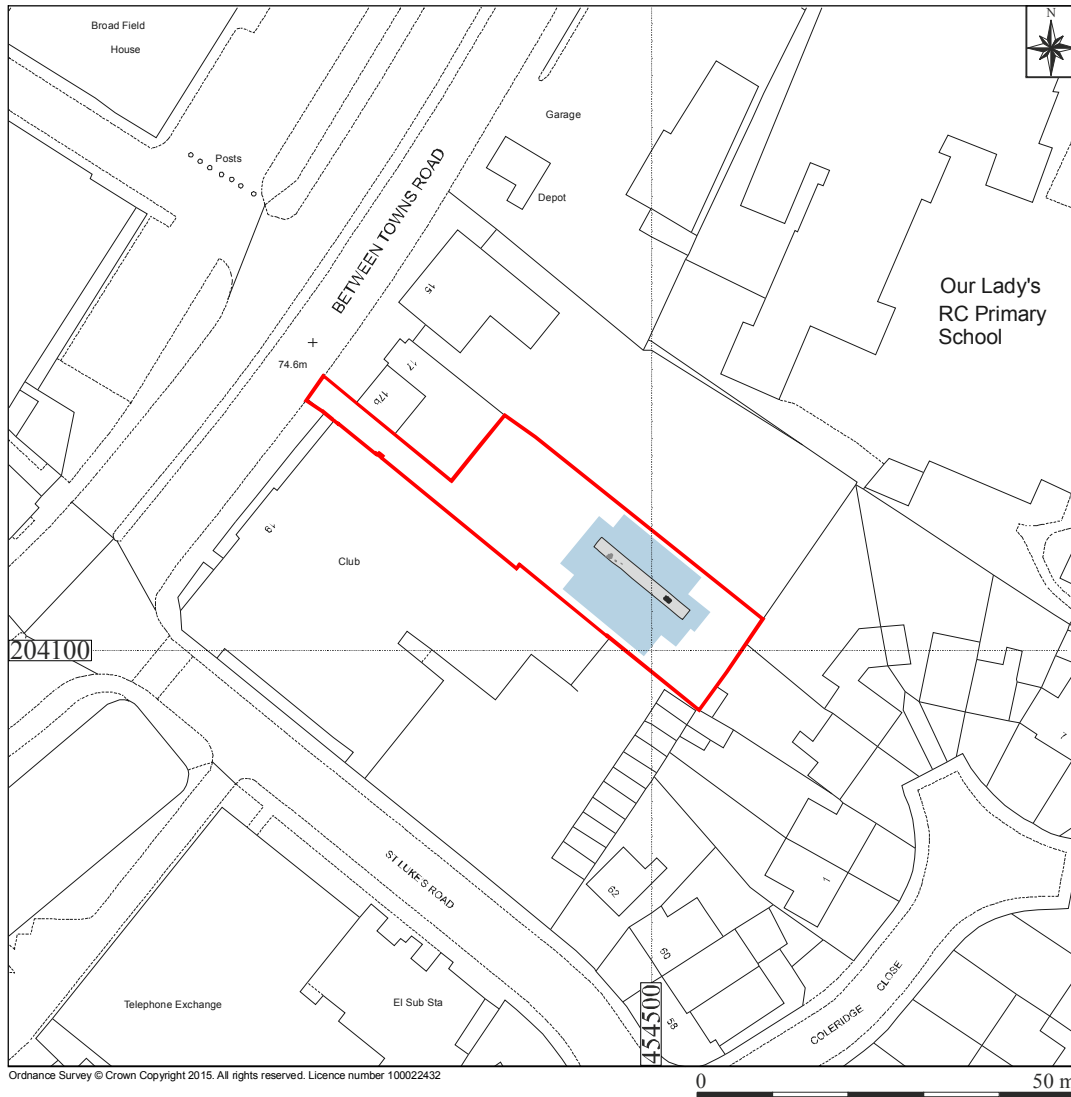
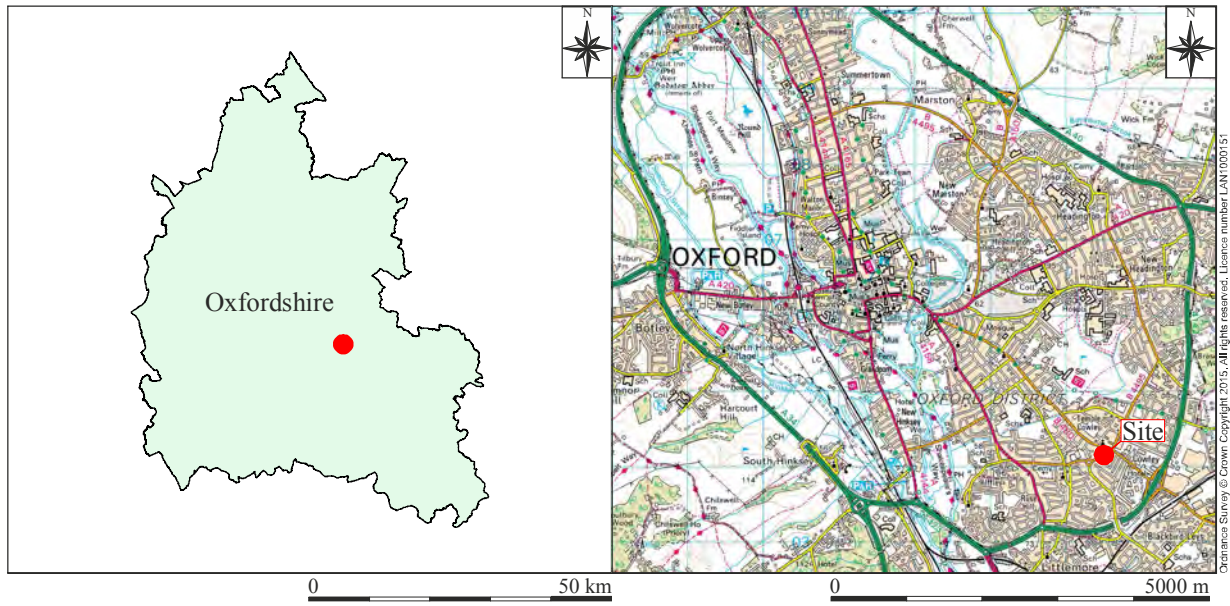
Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological features, the Oxford City Council Design, Heritage and Specialist Services Team (OCCDHSST) on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, required a pre-determination archaeological field evaluation as part of the determination of the planning application. OCCDHSST prepared a *Brief for an Archaeological Field Evaluation* (OCCDHSST 2015).

John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) was commissioned to undertake this work, and a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2015) was prepared to satisfy the requirements of the *Brief*. This *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) proposed the methodology by which the archaeological field evaluation was to be carried out.

1.3 Archaeological and Background

The available evidence suggests that St Luke's Road was the focus of a 2-3rd century pottery manufacturing site that was producing mortaria in the 2nd century and red colour-coated vessels and bowls and orange ware jars in the 3rd century. The site forms part of a major regional pottery industry that is of nationally importance in terms of Roman studies.

A desk based assessment was submitted for the adjacent Conservative Club site by Oxford Archaeology in 2011, which noted significant potential for Roman remains. Magnetometer and radar surveys have also been undertaken at the Conservative Club site by Stratascan in 2011. The magnetometer survey identified a series of



- Key Site boundary Evaluation trench Archaeological feature
 Footprint of proposed building

Figure 1: Site location

thermoremnant features which are considered to be four 'possible kilns'. Subsequently an archaeological evaluation by Oxford Archaeology was undertaken in the car park of the adjacent Conservative Club in 2015. A single Roman pit was recorded containing a small pottery assemblage which included a rare white ware flagon face mask. Previously identified geophysical anomalies were partially sampled and did not prove to be archaeological in origin (JMHS 2015, OCCDHSST 2015).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) were:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the site and the depth of soil deposits that overlie these remains.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present.
- To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the Roman landscape.
- To determine the implications of the remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.
- To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits. The forms in which such evidence may be present will be determined in accordance with the guidelines set out in English Heritage's *Environmental Archaeology: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Methods, from Sampling and Recovery to Post-excavation* and *Geoarchaeology: Using earth sciences to understand the archaeological record*.
- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present.
- To inform the need for, and scope of, further phases of work to mitigate the impact of the proposed development.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

JMHS carried out the archaeological field evaluation in accordance with the WSI (JMHS 2015). Fieldwork comprised a scheme for the mechanical excavation of one 15m trial trench across the footprint of the proposed building. Site procedures for the

investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the WSI (Sections 3.1 – 3.7).

3.2 Methodology

Prior to excavation of the trench, tarmac surfaces was cut by ground saw and broken by jackhammer. A five tonne excavator fitted with a toothless 1.5m wide ditching bucket was used to excavate one 15m long trench. At the northwest end of the trench, a sondage was excavated in order to establish the stratigraphic sequence of deposits within the site. Subsequent mechanical excavation of the trench was carried out down to top of the archaeologically significant level (top of geology).

All archaeological deposits and features revealed were cleaned by hand and recorded at an appropriate level. Archaeological features had written, drawn and photographic records made of them, and all deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. All artefacts were collected for analysis.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014) and the principles of MoRPHE (Historic England 2015).

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

4.1 Field Results

All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers with no brackets indicate feature cuts, numbers in round brackets () show feature fills or deposits of material and numbers in bold indicate any form of masonry.

4.1.1 Trench 1 (Appendix 1)

Trench 1 was 15m long and 1.6m wide, orientated northwest to southeast. It was located across the footprint of proposed building (Fig. 1 & 2: Tr. 1; Pl. 1). The sondage was excavated down to 0.9m (73.99m OD) below the tarmac surface.

The lowest deposit encountered within Trench 1 was light orange brown clayey sand (1/06) (Fig. 2: Tr. 1, S. 1.1; Pl. 1 & 2). It was interpreted as natural deposit.

Cut into the natural deposit (1/06) were three features. In first instance, features 1/08 and 1/10 seemingly represented possible postholes and feature 1/12 possible masonry (Fig. 2: Tr. 1, S. 1.2 & 1.3; Pl 3; Appendix 1). However, investigation revealed that these features were of geological origins. Similar features were encountered during the archaeological investigation at Oxford Thames Four Pillars Hotel, Sandford-on-Thames (JMHS 2013) on similar geology.

The natural features were overlaid by up to 0.24m thick layer of mid brown loamy sand (1/05) with occasional small sub-angular stones (Fig. 2: S. 1.1; Pl. 2). The layer was interpreted as subsoil and contained some modern finds.

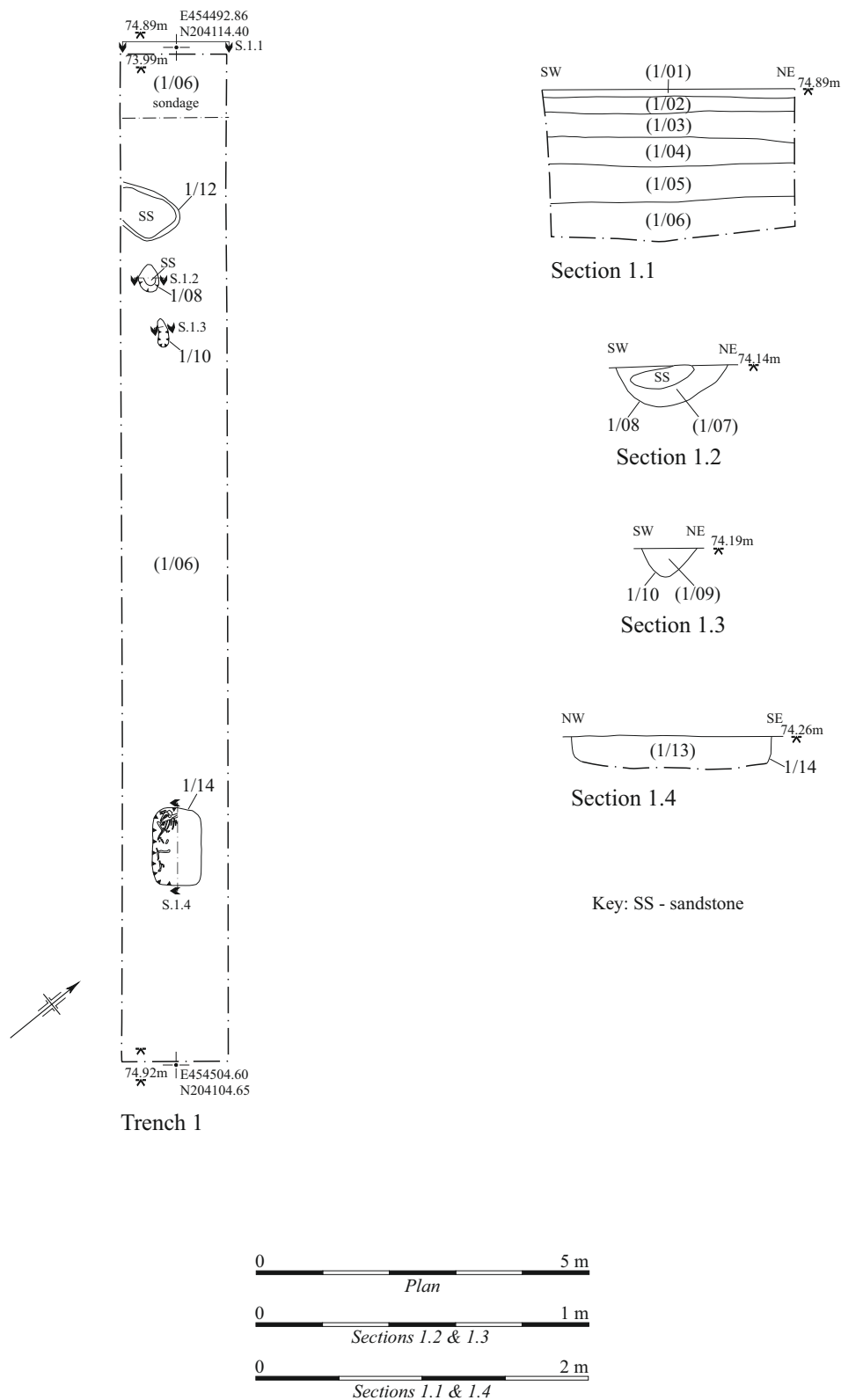


Figure 2: Trench 1 - plan and sections

Cut into layer (1/05) was sub-rectangular pit 1/14, located at southeast end of the trench (Fig. 2: Tr. 1 & S. 1.4; Pl. 1 & 4). Fill (1/13) was a dark brownish grey sandy silt with occasional charcoal that contained a complete sheep/goat skeleton (see 5.2), pottery sherds (5.1), an unidentified iron object and a cooper alloy button (5.4). The pit was interpreted as an animal burial, early 20th century in date.

Overlying the animal burial and subsoil was a buried topsoil (1/04) 0.16m thick, under a levelling layer 0.23m thick and two layers of asphalt for the car park surface.

4.2 Reliability of Results

The reliability of results is considered to be very good. The archaeological field evaluation took place in very good weather conditions with average light and visibility.

5 FINDS by *Simona Denis*

5.1 Pottery

A total of 6 pottery fragments, of a combined weight of 33 gr, was collected from two different contexts. Three fragments from context (1/13) were identified as transfer-printed whiteware (TPW). The two plate/platter fragments have blue decoration, very popular in the first half of the 19th C (Brown 1982); one of the fragments also preserved part of the maker's crest, GAB(?) ENGL(AND). The third shard shows a less common yellow/gold decoration, and was recognised as part of a teacup.

The remaining two fragments from context (1/13) were identified as colour coated ware (OXSR), and dated between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD. One of the sherds shows the typical brown-slipped roulette decoration usually associated with this type of pottery.

A single fragment of modern, undecorated whiteware was recovered from context (1/05).

Context	Type	Date	Context Date
1/05	Whiteware	Modern	Modern
1/13	OXSR	1 st -3 rd C	Modern
	TPW	19 th -Present	

5.2 Animal Bone

142 fragments of animal bone, with a total weight of 1544 gr, were recovered from context (1/13). The entirety of the assemblage was positively recognised as belonging to sheep/goat. The vast majority of the assemblage (98%) belongs to an almost complete single individual, identified as a young sheep/goat (Zeder 2010a).

5.3 Glass

A single fragment of the foot and stem of a modern wine glass was recovered from context (1/05). The surface is visibly milky and opaque, as result of the degradation of modern soda-lime glass in moist environment (Zeimath 1997).

5.4 Metalwork

Iron Nail

A single hand-wrought nail shaft was found in context (1/04). The absence of head and point and the long period of use of the manufacturing technique (from prehistory until the 19th C) prevent from any positive dating of the object.

Iron Objects

Four iron objects were recovered from context (1/13). Three of the fragments consist in flat, narrow (20 mm ca) strips, showing advanced corrosion, possibly part of fittings or hinges. The poor state of preservation and the fragmentary nature of the objects prevent from a positive identification or dating.

Copper Alloy Button

A complete, two piece domed copper alloy button with shank through back was collected from context (1/13). The back of the item preserved the complete back stamp, **CROSSED SWORD TRADE MARK – MADE IN ENGLAND**. The object was produced by Buttons Ltd, a company based in Birmingham and active between 1907 and 1952 (<http://www.ukdfd.co.uk/pages/button-makers.html>).

5.5 Ceramic Building Material

A complete, frogged brick weighing 3445 gr was found in context (1/05). Its measurement (220x105x66 mm) comply with the 1965 British Standard (BS 3921: 1965), indicating a modern date for the object (Sharpe 2011).

It is not recommended to retain modern materials.

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological field evaluation was successful and meets the aims of the investigations, which were laid out in the WSI.

A modern animal burial along with a subsoil containing modern material was found. Two sherds of Oxford colour coated ware pottery of 1st-3rd century AD date were found in the animal burial backfill. This is just an indication of Roman activity in the area and must relate to the nearby Roman pottery industry remains that have been found in the past.

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

Physical record

Finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to Oxfordshire Resource Centre under accession number OXCMS: 2015.160.

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Appendix 1: Trench Context Inventory*

ID	Type	Description	Depth	Length	Width	Finds	Interpretation	Date
Trench 1								
1/01	Deposit	Mid grey asphalt	0.04m	15.10m	1.60m	-	Upper layer of car park surface	L 20 th C.
1/02	Deposit	Dark grey asphalt	0.10m	15.10m	1.60m	-	Lower layer of car park surface	L 20 th C.
1/03	Deposit	Light yellowish brown sub-angular stones and sand	0.23m	15.10m	1.60m	-	Levelling layer	L 20 th C.
1/04	Deposit	Dark brown sandy loam with occasional charcoal	0.16m	15.10m	1.60m	-	Buried topsoil	L 19 th / E 20 th C.
1/05	Deposit	Mid brown loamy sand with occasional small sub-angular stone	0.24m	15.10m	1.60m	Brick, glass	Subsoil	Modern
1/06	Deposit	Light orange brown clayey sand	0.21m	15.10m	1.60m	-	Natural deposit	Undated
1/07	Fill	Mid brown clayey sand with one rounded sandstone	0.10m	0.45m	0.30m	-	Fill of natural feature 1/08	Undated
1/08	Cut	Seemingly sub-circular cut	0.10m	0.45m	0.30m	n/a	Natural feature	Undated
1/09	Fill	Mid brown clayey sand	0.11m	0.30m	0.17m	-	Fill of natural feature 1/10	Undated
1/10	Cut	Seemingly sub-oval cut	0.11m	0.30m	0.17m	n/a	Natural feature	Undated
1/11	Fill	Large sandstone surrounded by mid brown clay sand	Unexca.	0.90m	0.70m	-	Fill of natural feature 1/12	Undated
1/12	Cut	Seemingly sub-oval cut	Unexca.	0.90m	0.70m	n/a	Natural feature	Undated
1/13	Fill	Dark brownish grey sandy silt with occasional charcoal	0.22m	1.20m	0.65m	Pottery, animal bone, cu-alloy button, Fe objects	Fill of rubbish pit 1/14	E 20 th C.
1/14	Cut	Sub-rectangular cut with vertical sides. Orientation: NW-SE	0.22m	1.20m	0.65m	n/a	Rubbish pit	E 20 th C.

* – All dimensions of context are given as excavated