

**JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES**

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION**

**AT**

**WORCESTER PLACE,**

**OXFORD**

**SP 5081 0661**

*On behalf of*

*Leadbitters Construction*

**SEPTEMBER 2006**

**REPORT FOR** Leadbitter Construction  
Grange Court  
Abingdon Science Park  
Abingdon  
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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services conducted an evaluation of this site on the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2006. Three trenches, totalling 32 metres in length, were excavated to reveal the underlying geology.*

*Archaeological deposits were limited; Trench 2 contained a single pit of Victorian date. The most notable feature located was the southern edge of a palaeo-channel, which was identified in Trench 1.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

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

The site lies between Ruskin Lane and Worcester Place and is located within the City of Oxford at SP 5081 0661. The underlying geology is 1<sup>st</sup> gravel terrace and lies at approximately 1.30m – 1.50m below existing ground level at 56.25-56.41m OD. The site lies on relatively flat ground at approximately 57.70-57.90m OD.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

Oxford City Council has granted planning permission for the demolition of some small buildings and the erection of new buildings and landscaping for student accommodation.

Due to the potential for remains of archaeological significance to be present on the site, a condition requiring a programme of archaeological investigation was attached to the consent. The first stage of this was an archaeological evaluation of the site. This was in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan Policies.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The site lies on 1<sup>st</sup> gravel terrace, with good draining soil. The Archaeological Officer for Oxford City Council pointed out that these would have been favourable for settlement at any time over the past four millennia. A borehole survey (UAD 422) on the west side of the Oxford Canal, about 200 m from the site, placed the top of the natural between 0.8 and 3.1m below the present ground surface.

The proximity of the site to significant historic buildings and archaeological find-spots has been noted, being only 170m from Worcester College (UAD 848). It is 250m from the Royal House of Beaumont Palace, and a similar distance from Rewley Abbey (UAD 368). It also lies 350m from Burycroft, the site of Anglo-Saxon burials at the Radcliffe Infirmary.

On Worcester Place, less than 100m away, frontage cellars were unearthed in 1980 as well as a possible earlier stone wall (UAD 554). On nearby Walton Street (c.150m from site) stone implements (UAD 717), a Roman bronze coin most likely dating to Constantine (UAD 705) and medieval pottery dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> century (UAD 279) have been recovered. Slightly further away (within 250m), but also on Walton Street H. Hurst recorded the presence of earlier houses prior to demolition in 1898

(UAD 1377), and a well was discovered during a watching brief in 1993 (UAD 603). In 2005 a palaeo-channel was located to the north-west during an evaluation (JMHS 2005).

A review of the local historic maps shows that in 1578 (Agas) the site was situated on clear ground to the north of the college grounds. The site remains on clear ground on the maps of 1643, 1675 (Loggan), 1750 (Taylor), 1793 (Davis) and 1837 (Le Keux). Monte's map of 1842 in Barclay's Dictionary shows the first main buildings on Walton Place and the start of building on Worcester Place. Hoggar's map of 1850 has Worcester Place named for the first time and shows buildings on both sides of the road. This situation is unchanged on the first edition OS map of 1887. A building is shown fronting Ruskin Lane.

## **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/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- Specifically the edge to the watercourse identified in the evaluation of 2005.
- 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.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

In response to a *Brief* issued by Oxford City Council a scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with the Oxford City Council and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of three trenches across the site (Fig. 1).

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 of Field Archaeologists (1994).

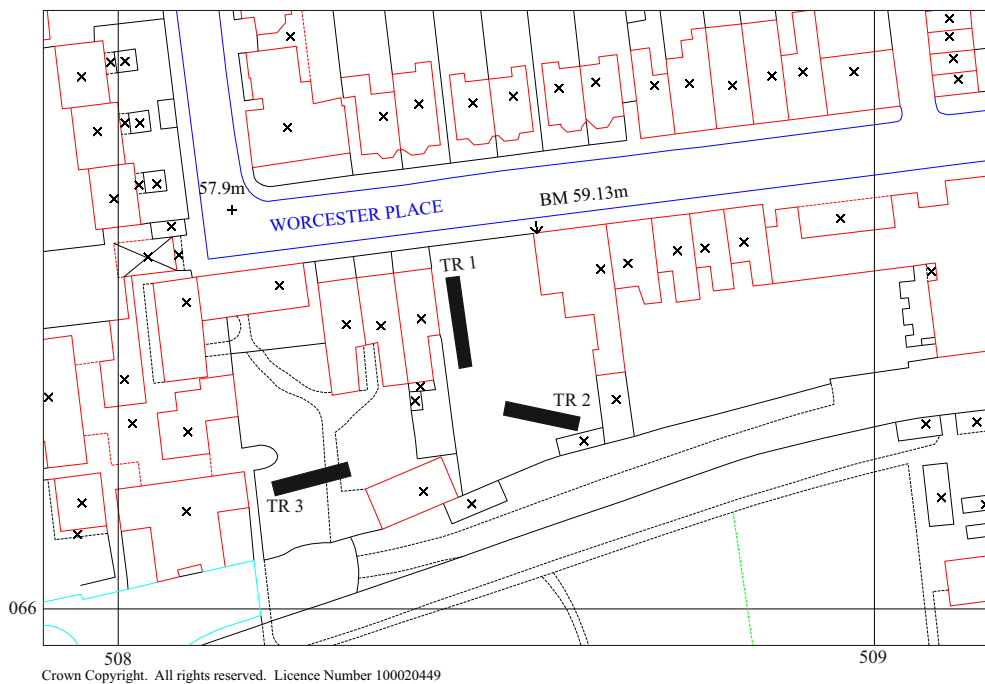


Figure 1. Site and trench location

### 3.2 Methodology

The trenching sample required by the City Archaeologist was achieved through the excavation of three trenches (Fig. 1).

All trenches were 1.6 m wide and were excavated by a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a 5 foot wide toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were recorded prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological deposits.

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 trenches were backfilled after recording.

## 4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [ ] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material.

The lowest recorded deposit in all trenches was an orange-brown silty sandy gravel (1/06), (2/03), (3/03). It was encountered at depths of 56.41m OD in TR1, 56.28m OD in TR2 and 56.25m OD in TR3. This represents the upper deposits of the 1<sup>st</sup> gravel terrace. A lower deposit (2/04) of the terrace gravels was less silty and was recorded at a depth of 55.48m OD.

#### *Trench 1 (Figure 2)*

*Located on the northern side of the area, and situated on the site of a demolished garage.*

The lowest deposit encountered (1/06), was a light orange sandy gravel, this was cut into by a gently sloping southern edge of a palaeo-channel [1/07], it was orientated E-W across the trench and was filled with a pale green-grey sandy silt (1/05). Which was recorded up to 0.60m thick, It in turn was overlain by (1/04), a compacted brown organic deposit up to 0.25m thick that contained many fresh water mollusc shells. On top of this was a dark grey-brown sandy silt (1/03), which contained quantities of brick rubble and mortar 0.60m thick. This in turn was overlain by another deposit of light brown-grey sandy rubble 0.24m thick (1/02), which was topped by a thick (0.80m) deposit of dark brown topsoil (1/01).

#### *Trench 2 (Figure 2)*

*Located at the back of the area closest to Ruskin Lane.*

Overlaying the natural sand and gravel (2/04) and (2/03), the latter a 0.70m thick deposit of orange-brown silty sand, was a mixed deposit of topsoil and building rubble consisting of bricks and mortar (2/02). This deposit in turn was overlain by up to 1m of garden /topsoil (2/01). Cutting into (2/02) was a vertical sided pit [2/05]

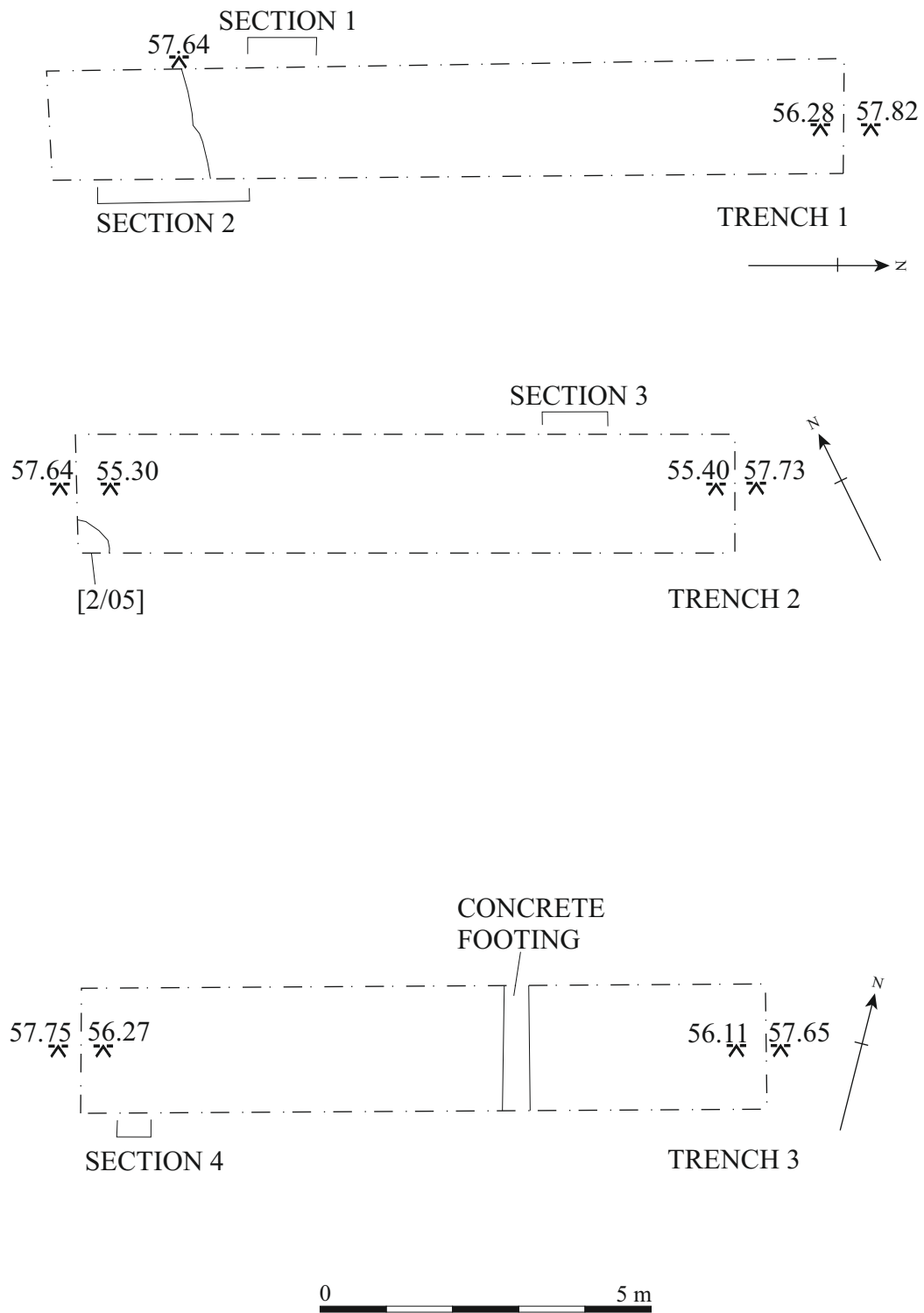
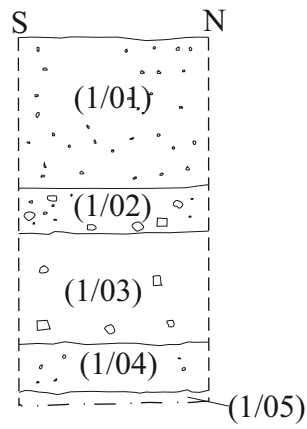
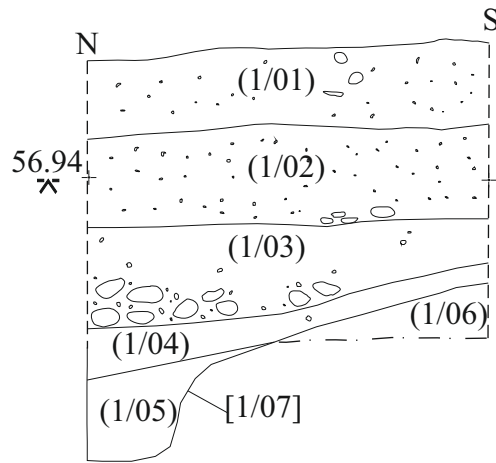


Figure 2. Plans

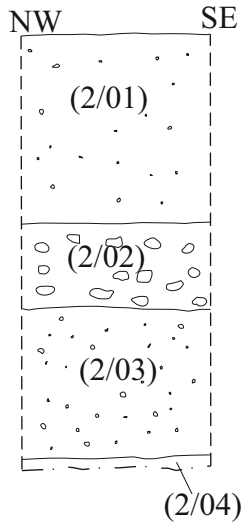




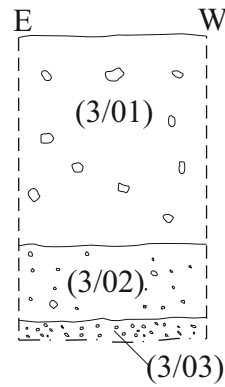
TRENCH 1  
SECTION 1



TRENCH 1  
SECTION 2



TRENCH 2  
SECTION 3



TRENCH 3  
SECTION 4



Figure 3. Sections

which was filled with (2/06) a mid brown silty sandy loam which contained quantities of broken pottery and corrugated metal sheeting.

### *Trench 3 (Figure 2)*

*Located in the western half of the site close to the Sainsbury Building.*

Overlaying the natural (3/03) was a 0.40m thick deposit of orange-brown silty sandy clay (3/02), this in turn was overlain by a thin 0.20m layer of building demolition rubble consisting of stone roof slates and ceramic roof tiles (3/04), this was overlain by a 0.90m thick deposit (3/01) which was a mixed deposit of topsoil and building rubble.

## 5 FINDS

### 5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 74 sherds with a total weight of 4,724g. The bulk of the assemblage dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although residual medieval and early post-medieval material was also noted.

The pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1989; 1994), as follows:

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 2 sherds, 16g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 4 sherds, 417g.

OXRESWL: Polychrome Slipwares, 17<sup>th</sup> century. 2 sherds, 101g.

OXEST: Later English stonewares. c. M18th-19th. 24 sherds, 2,700g.

WHEW: Miscellaneous mass-produced white earthenwares. 42 sherds, 1,490g.

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

Tr	Context	OXAM		OXDR		OXREWSL		OXEST		WHEW		Date
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
1	U/S	2	16	3	109	2	101	23	2240	28	537	U/S
1	3							1	460			19thC
2	6			1	308					14	953	19thC
	Total	2	16	4	417	2	101	24	2700	42	1490	

## 6 DISCUSSION

The investigation of these three trenches provided only limited evidence for archaeological remains in the area.

The evaluation confirmed the presence of a palaeo-channel (trench 1); no dating was recovered from the deposits and it is therefore undated. It is presumed that it is the same one as found further to the northwest (JMHS 2005). The rubble (1/03) laid over the top is presumably stabilising the area before building work just before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Worcester Place was developed. Deposit 1/02 must represent the clearance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century building. The overlying topsoil (1/01) was placed in the area (from the immediate surroundings) after the demolition of the garage immediately prior to the evaluation works. Trenches 2 and 3 exhibit evidence for gardens. However a building appears to have been demolished in the vicinity of Trench 2 for the presence of the building rubble (2/02). This must be the one shown in this area on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance survey map of 1887.

Whilst any decision regarding further work on the site must rest with Mr. Brian Durham of Oxford City Council, it is the opinion of John Moore Heritage Services that no further archaeological work needs to be conducted regarding the redevelopment of this site in Worcester Place.

## 7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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**APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Findings	Date
<b>Trench 1</b>			2.20	1.6	12		
1/01	Deposit	Grey - Brown topsoil	0.8	Tr.	Tr.	Glass	
1/02	Deposit	Brown clay with rubble	0.24	Tr.	Tr.		
1/03	Deposit	Brown / Grey silt some rubble	0.59	Tr.	Tr.	Pot	19th
1/04	Deposit	Dark brown organic with molluscs	0.25	Tr.	10		
1/05	Deposit	Grey/ blue silt	0.6	Tr.	10		
1/06	Deposit	Light orange brown sand and gravel					
1/07	Cut	Edge of watercourse					
<b>Trench 2</b>			2.30	1.6	10		
2/01	Deposit	Grey - Brown topsoil	1		Tr.		
2/02	Deposit	Rubble	0.45		Tr.		
2/03	Deposit	Orange - brown silt sand	0.7		Tr.		
2/04	Deposit	Light orange brown sand and gravel	0.05		Tr.		Natural
2/05	Cut	Circular pit	1	0.45+			
2/06	Fill		1	0.45+		Pot	19th
<b>Trench 3</b>			1.70	1.6	10		
3/01	Deposit	Grey - Brown topsoil	0.9	Tr.	Tr.		
3/02	Deposit	Orange - brown silt sand	0.4	Tr.	Tr.		
3/03	Deposit	Light orange brown sand and gravel	0.1	Tr.	Tr.		Natural
3/04	Deposit	Building rubble	0.2	Tr.	Tr.	CBM	