JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

72 & 74 OLD ROAD,

HEADINGTON, OXFORD.

SP 5450 0630

On behalf of

Capita Symonds

JUNE 2004

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Summary

An archaeological field evaluation took place as a condition of planning permission for redevelopment of the site of 72 & 74 Old Road, Headington, Oxford. The only significant remains located on the site were a ditch containing a small abraded sherd of Roman pottery.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site of the proposed development is located on the south side of Old Road, Headington, Oxford (NGR SP 5450 0630). The former buildings had recently been demolished with foundations having been dug out. Part of the western side of the site and the rear of the site were gardens. At the time of the evaluation a belt of trees existed approximately two-thirds of the way into the site (between Trenches 4 and 5, Fig. 1). The underlying geology is Calcareous Grit of the Corallian Beds and the site lies at *c.* 99.8m OD.

1.2 Planning Background

Oxford City Council has granted planning permission (03/0010/FUL) for redevelopment of the site with 91 residential units. The overall footprint of the proposed development is substantially larger than its predecessor, meaning that new areas will be disturbed. Disturbance will be total for Block 4 at the rear, which is to be sunk into the ground to a depth that would destroy any known structures related to the local Roman ceramic industry. A condition for a programme of archaeological work was attached to the permission. As a first stage, Oxford City Council (OCC, 2004) prepared a brief for an assessment including field evaluation.

John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS), in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (JMHS, 2004) approved by OCC, carried out the works.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site fronts the oldest known line of the medieval London road at Oxford, and is almost equidistant between the areas of Roman pottery production at Mary Marlborough Lodge to NE and the Churchill Hospital to SW.

The earliest known activity in the area was a probable flint knapping site situated c. 2.4km to the east, on the western brow of Shotover Hill. A number of flint implements were found here by labourers digging sand in *c.* 1895 and these included flint flakes, chips, cores and a number of flint scrappers, possibly Neolithic (Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record PRN 1780 at SP 5594 0637). A Bronze Age round barrow (PRN D3645 at SP 5535 0632) *c.* 600m to the east of the site was destroyed during construction of a housing estate. Sherds of Roman pottery were found *c.* 950m to the ESE ((PRN 3811, SP 5562 0607) while a Roman settlement site (PRN 3812, SP 5572 0636) is recorded as having been observed on the west slope of

Shotover, immediately east of the Roman road (PRN 8923) and 1km east of the development site.

Sherds of late Romano-British pottery indicating a possible kiln site producing Sandford ware have been found 300m to the north of the site at the Nuffield Orthopedic Hospital (PRN 3670 and 4015, SP 5480 0660). 400m SE of the site another pottery kiln(s) was found in Harry Bear's pit when workman discovered several hollows with burnt flues filled with broken pottery (PRN D3620, SP 5498 0610). 200m due south of the site remains of a further possible pottery kiln have been found (National Monuments Record 338399, SP 5481 0599). The pottery was chiefly mortaria, cullenda of pale grey ware, and Samian ware. Coins of Antoninus Pius and Tetricus the younger were also recovered. Slightly further to the south, and probably part of the previous site, excavation found a substantial Roman pottery production and occupation site (PRN 3615, SP 5460 0570 and SP 5470 0580). Large quantities of mostly Romano-British pottery and at least two kilns were reported from the grounds of the Churchill Hospital and the Regional Blood Transfusion Unit. Subsequent excavations slightly to the east uncovered ten kilns and a large quantity of pottery. Associated with these was a circular stone building, a square stone structure and possibly a well. A series of 2nd century ditches appeared to belong to the pre-industrial use of the site, perhaps forming part of a field system. A 1st century occupation site was also discovered.

Several quarries for Coral Rag and Wheatley Limestone occur in the vicinity. These include Vicarage Quarry (PRN 1009, SP 5530 0660), Windmill stone quarry known as Harry Bear's pit (PRN 5421, SP 5500 0620), and one at the junction of Windmill Road and Old Road (PRN 1008, SP 5500 0650).

Early maps of the area did not show the site in any detail. The first building in the area is Wingfield House on the north side of Old Road at the junction with Windmill Road. This is shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1876. On the same map the site is shown as part of a small enclosure, which on the 2nd edition (1899) is to the east of Highfield House. The first house on the site appears on the 1921 edition.

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.
- 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.

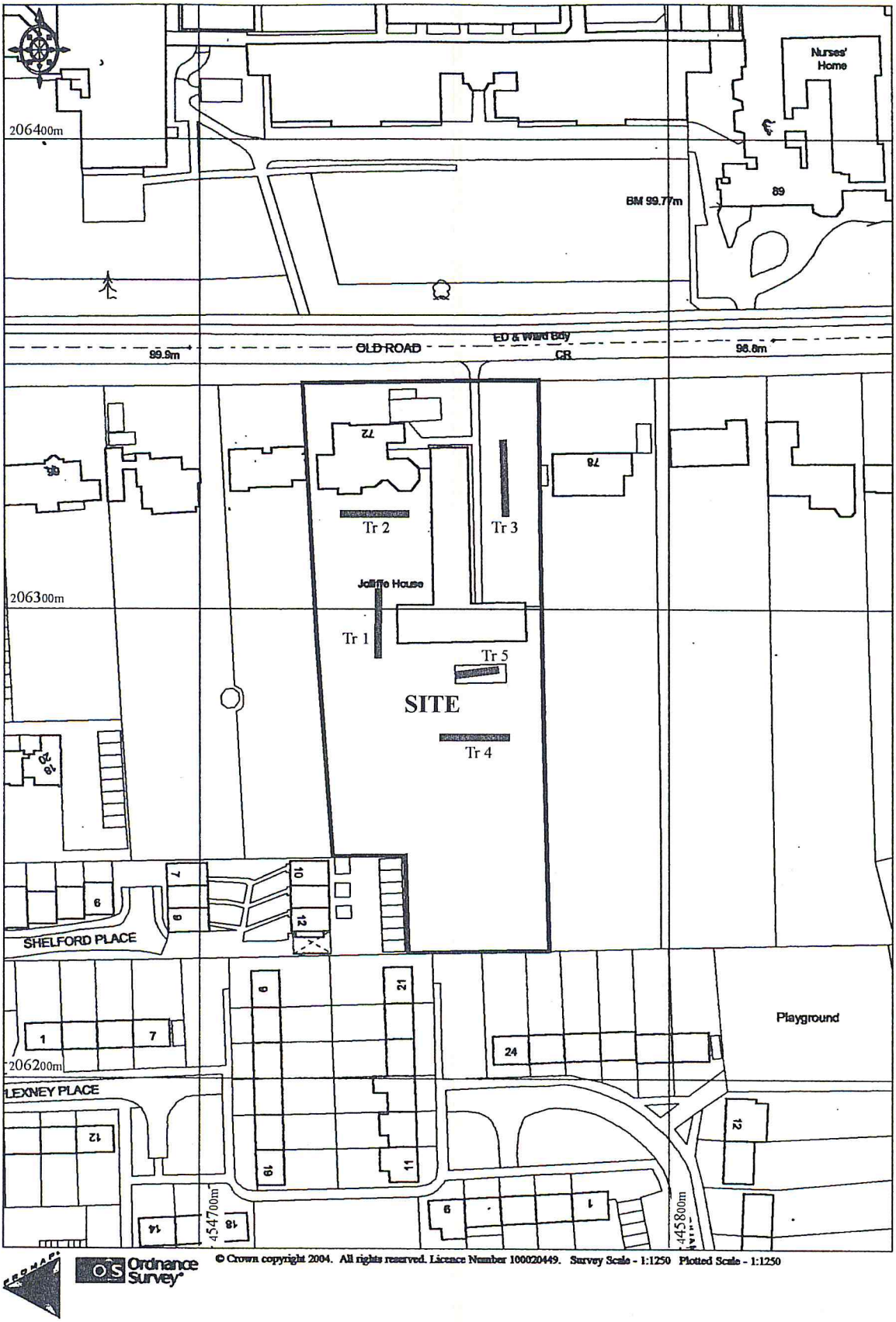


Figure 1. Site and Trench Location Plan

- In particular to establish whether remains associated with the local Roman pottery industry are present on the site.

- 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 OCC, a scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and subsequently agreed with OCC and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved an assessment of existing information known on the site and its locality, and the excavation of five trenches.

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).

3.2 Methodology

The assessment involved the examination of the County Sites and Monuments Record, which contains details of known archaeological sites and findspots. In addition relevant maps (Appendix 2) held at the County Record Office were examined.

The field evaluation comprised the excavation of five trenches. Four trenches each were of 15m lengths and were located as directed in the OCC Brief. An additional 9m long trench was also excavated. All trenches were 1.6m wide.

The trenches were excavated using a JCB equipped with a 5 foot wide ditching bucket. Trenches were excavated down to the natural geology under direct archaeological control. Features present were sampled by hand excavation.

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.

Edith Gollnast of OCC monitored the works.

4 RESULTS

Deposits and fills are referred to in the text and figures in brackets: (02), cut features are numbered in square brackets: [04].

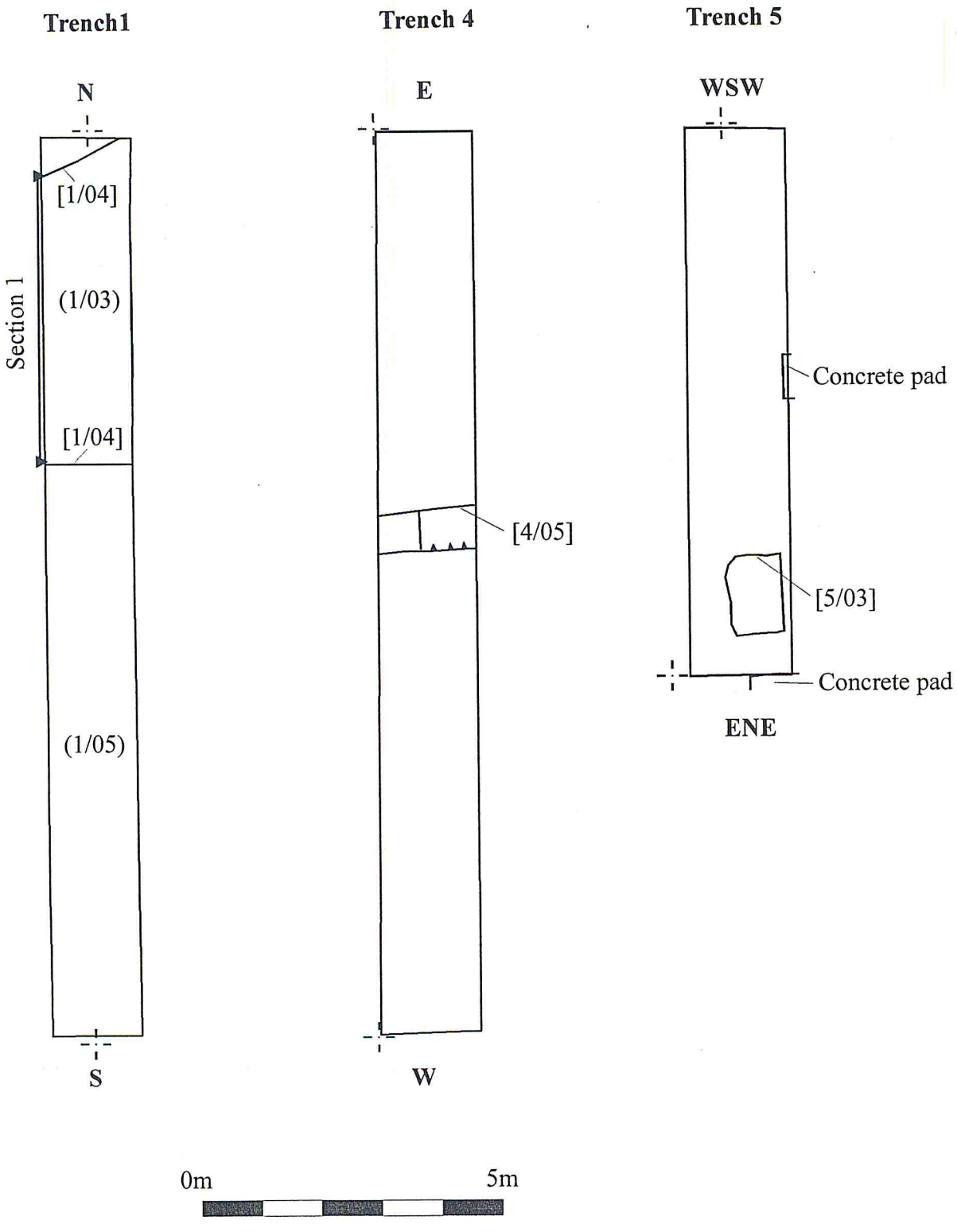


Figure. Trench Plans

The top of the Calcareous Grit was reached in all trenches. In Trenches 1 - 3 it (1/05, 2/04, 3/04) took the form of fractured rock with areas of light orange brown sandy silt with small-medium sub-angular pieces of rock. Within Trench 5 (5/02) there were also pockets of pale-mid yellow sand. In Trench 4 (4/03), further to the south, the natural was pale-mid yellow sand with occasional pieces of rock in the surface with the sand becoming increasingly more orange and containing up to 40% medium pieces rock towards the west end of the trench.

Within Trenches 1-3 the natural was overlaid by a subsoil of mid orange-brown sandy silt with 1% fine stones and occasional small sub-rectangular pieces of Calcareous Grit (1/02, 2/03, 3/03). This deposit was 100-150mm thick in Trench 1, 300-500mm thick in Trench 2 and 100-300mm in Trench 3. A 60-80mm thick deposit of subsoil (4/02) overlaid the natural in Trench 4. Here the subsoil was a pale brown-grey sandy silt with 30% fine rock particles.

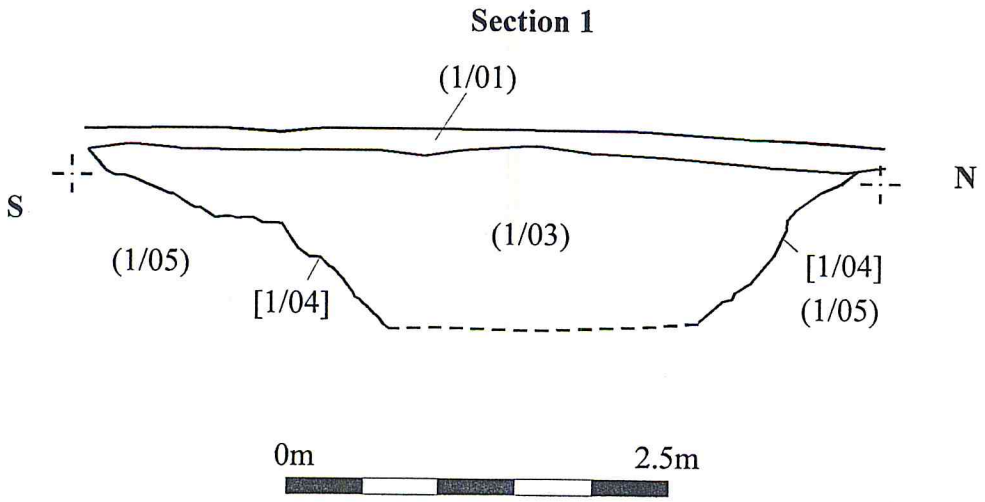
Above the subsoil in Trench 2 was a layer of construction debris (2/02) 100-115mm thick overlaid by a demolition horizon (2/01) 100-200mm thick. Above the subsoil in Trench 3 was a layer of made ground (3/02) from the construction of the pre-existing buildings. This was 250-300mm thick.

Overlying the construction horizon in Trench 3 was a 100-115mm thick layer of topsoil and grass (3/01). Topsoil and grass directly overlaid the natural horizon in Trench 5 where it was 250-280mm thick (5/01). A 260-280mm thick layer of topsoil and grass (4/01) overlaid the subsoil in Trench 4.

Three features were found during the course of the evaluation. Immediately to the west of Trench 1 was a sunken garden lined on the east and west sides by stone-built walls. This feature was a modified quarry, which extended across Trench 1 (Fig. 2). This part of the quarry [1/04] extended east west across the trench and was only *c.* 5m wide. The quarry was not completely excavated but was at least 1.2m deep. The sides were irregular (Section 1, Fig. 3) and the quarry had been backfilled with mid orange-brown sandy silt with 1% fine stone and occasional small to medium pieces of Calcareous Grit (1/03).

A sub-rectangular pit [5/03] was located at the east end of Trench 5. It was straight-sided on the north, east and south sides and had a curved west side (Fig. 2). The feature was not excavated as it had been backfilled with topsoil material containing small lumps of coal, a small piece of brick and a sherd of flower pot.

The southernmost trench (Trench 4) contained part of a small ditch. This feature [4/05] was orientated north south across the width of the trench. It was 530-580mm wide and 420mm dep. The west side was vertical while the east side was at an angle of 80^0 to the horizontal. The base of the ditch was flat and the breaks of slope at the top and bottom of the sides were sharp. The ditch was filled by a single deposit of moderately compact pale-mid brown sandy silt with 5%, by volume, rock fragments and occasional, but noticeable, charcoal fragments and flecks (4/04). From the appearance of the profile of the ditch, which did not exhibit signs of weathering of the sides, it would seem that the ditch was not open for very long. The single fill suggests



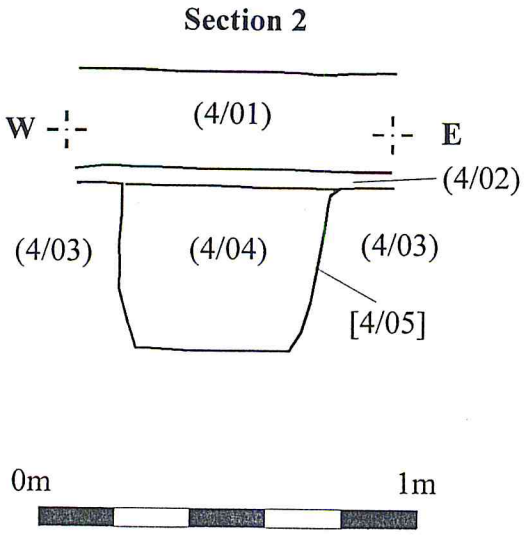


Figure 3. Sections

that the feature had been deliberately backfilled. This backfilling contained a nail and an abraded sherd of Roman Grey ware. The ditch was sealed by subsoil 4/02.

5 FINDS

Very few finds were seen during the course of the evaluation. The only retained items were the nail and sherd of Roman Grey Ware from ditch fill (4/04). Other items seen included a fragment brick and a sherd of flower pot from modern pit 5/03) and the occasional sherd of 20th century pottery from topsoil contexts. Broken bricks were seen in the construction horizons.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The small ditch may be of Roman date although the sherd of pottery may be residual. The fact that the ditch was sealed by the subsoil deposit suggests that the feature may be of some antiquity. If the ditch is of Roman date then it suggests that it may be part of the settlement and pottery production site known some 200m to the south of the site. The ditch may be at the extreme northern limits of the Roman site. The presence of charcoal in the backfilling suggests occupation in the near vicinity.

7 CONFIDENCE RATING

The work was carried out in dry, sunny conditions after demolition works had been carried out. Cut features were easily observed truncating the natural geology.

The ditch in Trench 4 suggests that occupation associated with it is towards the south part of the site. An additional trench (Trench 5) was excavated to see if there were any further remains. This trench was limited due to the presence of trees, and the fact that a deep wide area, between the former building footprint under Trench 4 and the southern edge of the building to the north, had been excavated prior to the evaluation to assess the nature of the geology.

Given that the area of proposed development may lie on the extreme edge of the settlement/industrial site known further south, the results of the evaluation probably are a true reflection of the amount of archaeological potential of the site. Features are likely to have been more widely spaced than within more central areas where occupation may have continued over several centuries. This area of the Roman site may have only been used for a short time.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Institute of Field Archaeologists. 1994. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations.*

John Moore Heritage Services 2004. *03/0010/FUL -72 & 74 Old Road, Headington. Archaeological Field Evaluation. Written Scheme Of Investigation.* May 2004.

Oxford City Council 2004. *Brief for Archaeological Fieldwork.* 25/05/2004

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (mm)	Width (mm)	Length (mm)	Finds	Date
TRENCH 1							
1/01	Deposit	Topsoil	150-250	Trench	Trench	None	Modern
1/02	Deposit	Subsoil	100-150	Trench	Trench	None	
1/03	Deposit	Quarry fill	1200+	5000	1600+	None	Post-medieval
1/04	Cut	Quarry	1200+	5000	1600+	None	Post-medieval
1/05	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	Trench	-	
TRENCH 2							
2/01	Deposit	Demolition	100-200	Trench	Trench	None	May 2004
2/02	Deposit	Construction debris	100-115	Trench	Trench	None	20th century
2/03	Deposit	Subsoil	300-500	Trench	Trench	None	
2/04	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	Trench	-	
TRENCH 3							
3/01	Deposit	Topsoil	100-115	Trench	Trench	None	Modern
3/02	Deposit	Construction debris	250-300	Trench	Trench	Brick	20th century
3/03	Deposit	Subsoil	100-300	Trench	Trench	None	
3/04	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	Trench	-	
TRENCH 4							
4/01	Deposit	Topsoil	260-280	Trench	Trench	None	Modern
4/02	Deposit	Subsoil	60-80	Trench	Trench	None	
4/03	Depsoit	Natural	-	Trench	Trench	-	
4/04	Fill	Ditch fill	420	530-580	1600+	Pottery	?Roman
4/05	Cut	Ditch	420	530-580	1600+	-	?Roman
TRENCH 5							
5/01	Deposit	Topsoil	250-280	Trench	Trench	None	Modern
5/02	Deposit	Natural	-	Trench	Trench	-	
5/03	Cut	Pit	?	750	1040	-	Modern
5/04	Fill	Pit fill	?	750	1040	Pottery, brick	Modern

APPENDIX 2 LIST OF HISTORIC MAPS CONSULTED

1605 Corpus Christi College Landholdings in Headington

1797 Davis A New Map of the County of Oxford

1847 Magdalene College, Oxford A Map of Estates situated at Headington and Shotover

1802 Enclosure Plan of Headington

1876 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1899 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1921 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1939 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1970 Ordnance Survey 1:2500