JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

FORMER BRITISH TELECOM DEPOT,

JAMES WOLFE ROAD, OXFORD OX4 2PY

NGR SP 5116 0511

On behalf of

Unite Students

SEPTEMBER 2017

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FIELDWORK	18 – 20th September 2017
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REPORT ISSUED	25th September
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JMHS Project No:	3821
Site Code:	OXJWR 17
OASIS No:	johnmoor1-296426
Archive Location:	The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to Oxfordshire County Museum Services with the accession number: awaited

CONTENTS

FIGURES AND PLATES

Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an evaluation at British Telecom Depot, former Cowley Barracks, on James Wolfe Road, Oxford, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 55160511). Of the seven trenches opened, five yielded no archaeological remains earlier than the 19th / 20th century, consisting mostly of services and possible remnant of the military barracks. In the two other trenches, a late medieval deposit was encountered (dated from a single potsherd). It overlaid a narrow but deep undated possible gully in one. In the other trench was a shallow linear feature or depression, presumably of modern date (one tile fragment found within).

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located at the site of the former British Telecom Depot and adjacent units (Napier and Moore buildings), on the east side of Hollow Way and north of James Wolfe Road, OX4 2PY (NGR SP 55160511 centred). The site lies on a relatively flat piece of land, between 90m and 91m above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The underlying geology is Wheatley Limestone with deposits of Beckley Sand just to the west according to BGS maps (sheet 237). The site is currently occupied by disused buildings and most of it is recovered by tarmac. Some limited areas are under a concrete layer and other directly on made-up ground.

1.2 Planning Background

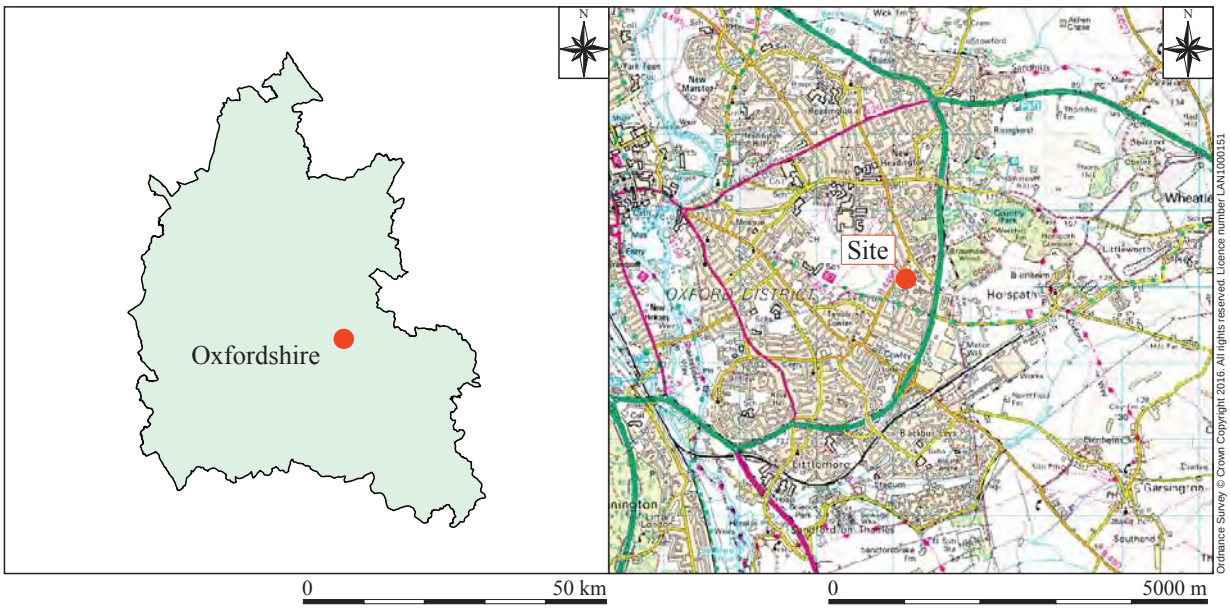
A planning application has been made to Oxford City Council for the demolition of existing buildings and the erection of new student accommodations on site (ref. 17/02140/FUL). As part of the consideration of the application an archaeological evaluation has been carried out.

1.3 Archaeological Background

An archaeological desk-based assessment of two-thirds of the site has been carried out (CgMs 2008). This concluded that there was a low potential for the prehistoric, Saxon/early medieval and medieval periods. For the Roman period a moderate potential was given due to the number of Roman remains previously found within a 500m radius of the site. There was a high potential for unknown remains relating to the 19th century barracks that formerly stood on the site.

The Roman remains in the area consisted of a Roman kiln located 240m east (HER No 16300) and several burials 250m to the south (HER No 9932).

In 1876 military barracks were erected as part of the “Cardwell Reforms” in view of modernizing the British Army.



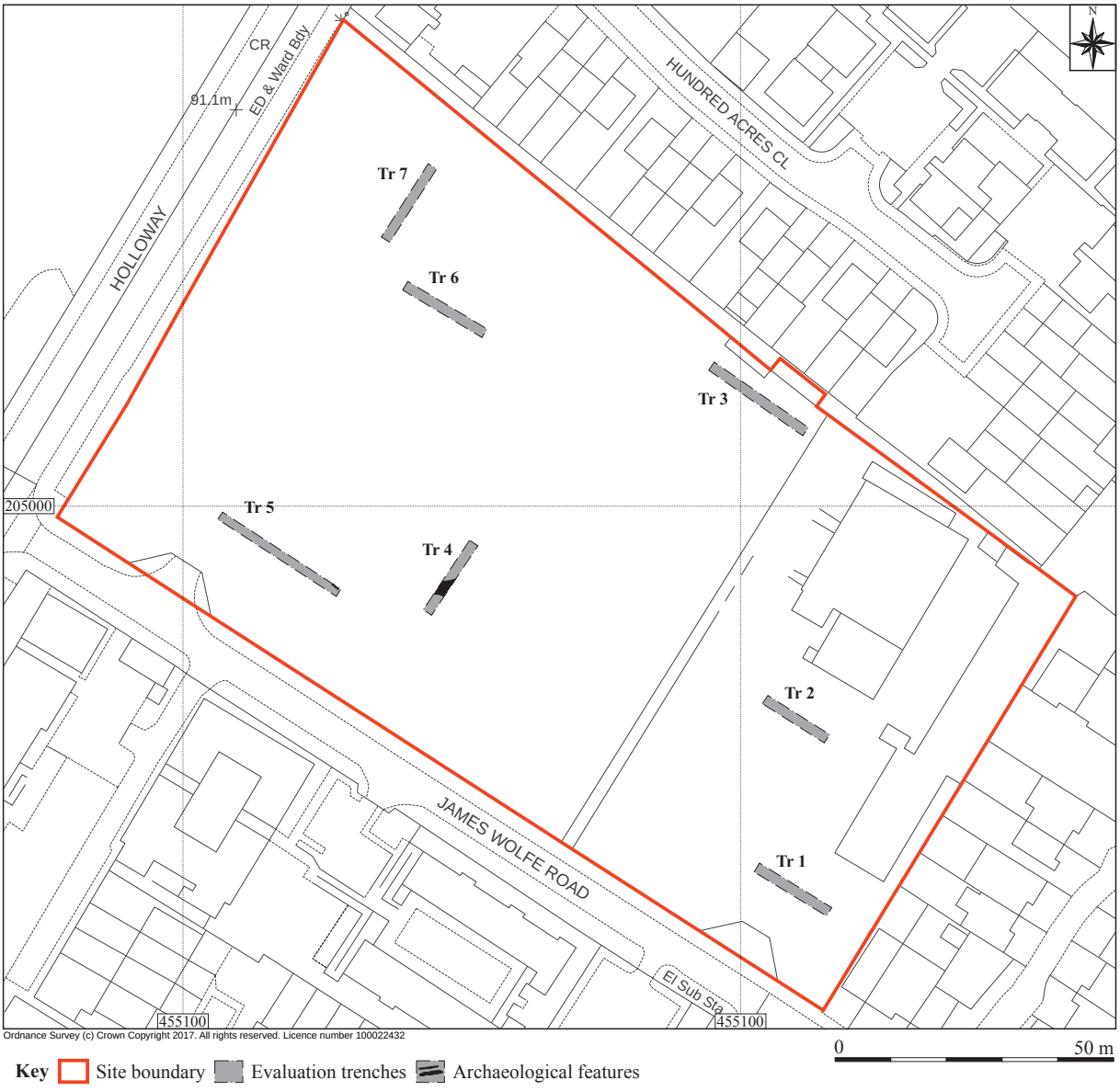


Figure 1: Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To 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 any horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present.
- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present.

In particular:

- To determine whether any Roman activity was previously on the site and whether unknown remains relating to the 19th century barracks are buried.
- To inform the need for, and scope of, further phases of work to mitigate the impact of the development under consideration.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with David Radford, Oxford City Council Archaeologist.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014).

3.2 Methodology

Seven trenches of various length were defined in the WSI. They were excavated across the proposed site by an 8 ton 360° Kubota tracked excavator equipped with a 1.50m wide toothless bucket with a break to break through tarmacadam and concrete layers.

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.

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate cuts, numbers in ( ) show features, fills or deposits of material, while numbers in bold indicate structural features.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The archaeological investigations took place in generally clement conditions with good light and visibility with excellent cooperation from BT employee. The archaeological investigation was monitored by David Radford on behalf of Oxford City Council.

In all trenches the deepest deposit observed was a light orange brown sandy clay or clay matrix with very frequent limestone inclusions of varying sizes. It ass probably an interface before more solid bedrock but appeared untouched by human hands. The range of depth at which it was observed below actual ground was between 0.20-0.25m in the eastern part of the site to 0.92-1.12m in the central area (Trenches 4 and 6).

Trenches 1 and 2, located on the eastern part of the site, were immediately backfilled after recording took place as they yielded no archaeological evidence. They targeted an area already heavily impacted by modern services and only layers related to the present parking and driveway asphalt surface were noted (see specific description in the context inventory). The same applied to Trench 3 in the north-east quadrant and Trench 7 in the north-west area.

In trench 4 a substantial deposit, (4/09) was observed immediately above the geological layer. It was a mid orange brown clayey silt with occasional charcoal flecks. Its thickness was up to 0.46m. Cut into it or just filling a natural depression was 4/04. The edges were somehow a bit diffuse and the profile was very shallow bringing some uncertainties regarding a proper ditch interpretation. It was longer than 2.20m, orientated E-W. Its width was at least 3m. The main characteristic of its fill, (4/03), a compact mid brown grey clayey silt with few stones inclusions and common small fragments of wood, was its specific smelly odour. It measured 0.24m in thickness.

Plate 1: deposit (4/03)

Above this was a compact light brown grey sandy silt with frequent small and medium-sized stones throughout (4/08). It was 0.18m thick that could be considered as a preparatory layer for the above. The soft mid grey yellow silty sand on top (4/07) was only 0.10m maximum thick and looked like a levelling layer. It was underneath two different deposits, (4/06) and (4/11). (4/11) could have been a paved orange red brick surface but appeared demolished and crushed. It was observed in section for 3.65m. It was 0.03m thick. (4/06), a compact mid grey sandy silt with similar inclusions to (4/08) and a thickness of 0.12m, also shared its function, that of a preparatory or levelling layer for tarmac (4/05). The later had been disturbed and was quite friable. It occupied 0.16m in section. This disused asphalt layer was crowned by a more recent one (4/01) with its prepared deposit under, (4/02).

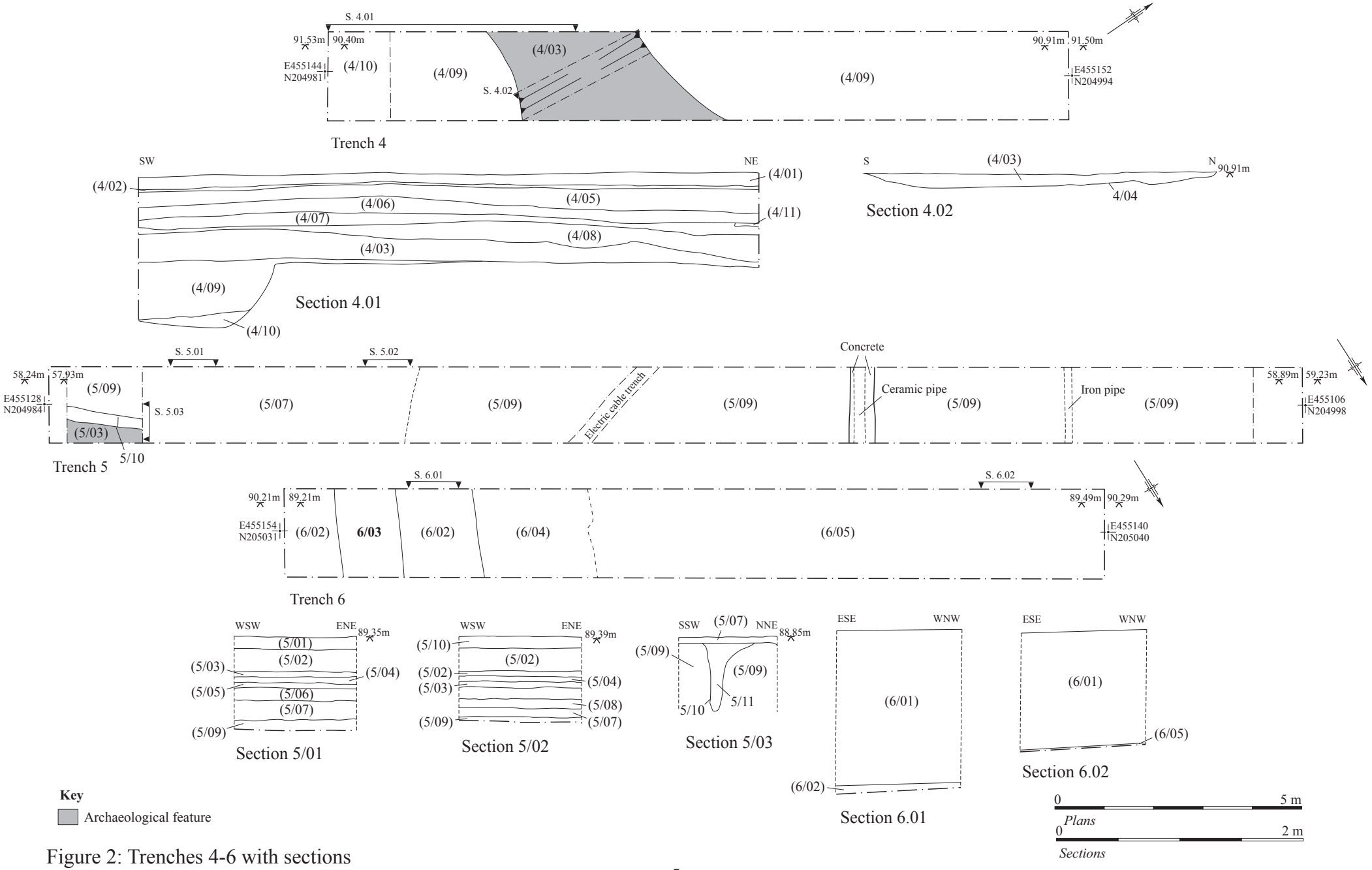


Figure 2: Trenches 4-6 with sections

In Trench 5, orientated NNW-SSE, was linear feature 5/10; a 0.25-0.30m wide possible gully with very steep slopes cut into the natural. Observed for 1.50m across the trench, a 0.50m slot showed it had a sharp and narrow V-profile, 0.55m deep, and was filled by (5/11), a fine mid-brown silt with no inclusions, containing no finds. Only a relative date can be provided, thanks to its position below (5/07).

Plate 2: Gully 5/10 below (5/07)

(5/07) was a similar colluvium as (4/09), though it was thinner as one goes towards north-west, oscillating between 0.12 and 0.20m. A single potsherd found within, late Medieval Brill-Boarstall ware, was the only dating evidence found.

Occasionally patches of (5/08) were visible on top of it. It was alike (4/03) and the absence of any clear edge points towards natural deposits. Higher layers only related to the set-up of concrete and tarmacadam surfaces.

Trench 6 consisted of a massive friable demolition layer (6/01), up to 1.30m deep, with light to mid brown clayey silt accompanied by occasional debris of demolition (bricks, tiles, concrete fragments). It presumably came from the demolition of the 19th century barracks and subsequent levelling of the ground. Remnants of those barracks could be found below (6/01). Some structural elements indeed have avoided destruction. At the south-east end, at the bottom of the trench, a concrete surface **6/02** and a wall partitioning it, 6/03, were observed. Including the wall that covers an area of >4m x >1.6m. The wall itself is made of a cemented deposit between arrays of bricks. Some natural looking deposit to the west, (6/04), could constitute the backfill of a foundation trench.

Plate 3: General view of Trench 6 looking WNW

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery

The evaluation resulted in a very small assemblage, consisting of a single well-preserved potsherd, weighing 6.4g. It came from (5/07), a colluvium deposit. This potsherd provided a late Medieval date for this layer as it was assessed as being Brill-Boarstall ware.

It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 1 sherd, 6.4g

It is not recommended to retain it due to its extremely limited potential for further analysis.

5.2 Tile

A single piece of ceramic building material was found, within context (4/03). It weighed 19.4g and was positively identified as a modern tile fragment.

It is not recommended to retain it due to its extremely limited potential for further analysis.

6 DISCUSSION

No significant archaeological remains were found other than an undated possible gully in Trench 5. Geology was relatively close to modern ground surface and the thicker older deposit, encountered in Trenches 4 and 5, probably dated back to the late or post-Medieval period. However it is possible that this was a levelling deposit for the construction of the barracks. The underlying linear feature looks from its profile that it is of geological or geomorphological origin. Above the thick deposit a possible ditch or depression was observed and yielded only a modern tile fragment. The only other evidence present, in Trench 6, was residual structural elements from the former military barracks in the form of a wall and a concrete surface under the related demolition layer.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents
The archive consists of the following:

Paper record	Physical record
The project brief	Finds
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 Oxfordshire County Museum Services.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

CgMs 2008 *Archaeological Desk Based Assessment – Napier & Moore Buildings, BT Depot, Oxford*, 2008.

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2014 *Standards and Guidance for an archaeological field evaluation*, 2014.

Mellor, M 1994 (M.), "Oxford Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region", *Oxoniensia* **59**, 1994, pp.17-217.

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Interpretation	Date
Trench 1								
1/01	Layer	Hard black bitumen macadam	~0.20	>1.60	>15	No	Parking surface and driveway	Modern
1/02	Layer	Friable light brown clayey sand with inclusion of medium limestone fragments	~0.20	>1.60	>15	No	Preparatory layer	Modern
1/03	Deposit	Mid orange brown clay with very high percentage of angular limestone fragments	>0.01	>1.60	>15	No	Top geological horizon	-
Trench 2								
2/01	Layer	Hard black bitumen macadam	~0.18	>1.60	>13	No	Parking surface and driveway	Modern
2/02	Layer	Friable light brown clayey sand with inclusion of medium limestone fragments	~0.30	>1.60	>13	No	Preparatory layer	Modern
2/03	Deposit	Mid orange brown clay with very high percentage of angular limestone fragments	>0.01	>1.60	>13	No	Top geological horizon	-
Trench 3								
3/01	Layer	Hard black bitumen macadam	~0.12	>1.60	>20.5	No	Parking surface and driveway	Modern
3/02	Layer	Friable light orange brown coarse sand	~0.04-0.05	>1.60	>20.5	No	Levelling layer	Modern
3/03	Layer	Medium compacted mid orange brown sand with very frequent small angular limestones (0.01-0.10m)	~0.15-0.16	>1.60	>20.5	No	Preparatory rubble	Modern
3/04	Deposit	Compact light orange brown sand matrix with very frequent angular limestones (0.01-0.30m)	>0.01	>1.60	>20.5	No	Top geological horizon	-
Trench 4								
4/01	Layer	Hard black bitumen macadam	~0.12	>1.60	>15	No	Parking surface and driveway	Modern
4/02	Layer	Soft grey and yellow sand	~0.04	>1.60	>15	No	Levelling layer	Modern
4/03	Fill	Compact mid grey clayey silt with few stone inclusions but frequent wood fragments	~0.24	>=3	>2.20	1 tile	Fill of ditch	Modern
4/04	Cut	Linear	~0.24	>=3	>2.20	n/a	Ditch/Natural depression?	Modern
4/05	Layer	Friable black bitumen macadam	0.16	>1.60	>15	No	Old tarmac surface	Modern
4/06	Layer	Compact mid grey sandy silt with frequent medium stones throughout	0.12	>1.60	>15	No	Levelling layer	Modern
4/07	Layer	Soft grey and yellow silty sand	0.10	>1.60	>15	No	Levelling layer	Modern
4/08	Layer	Compact light brown grey sandy silt with frequent small and medium stones	0.18	>1.60	>15	No	Preparatory rubble	Modern

4/09	Deposit	Compact mid orange brown clayey silt with occasional charcoal inclusions	0.46	>1.60	>15	No	Colluvial deposit	Late Medieval / Post-Medieval?
4/10		Hard light grey silty sand with frequent stones inclusions	>0.01	>1.6	>1	No	Top geological horizon	-
4/11		Hard orange red bricks fragments	0.03	>1.60	3.65	No	Brick levelling deposit	Modern
Trench 5								
5/01	Layer	Hard black bitumen macadam	~0.05-0.06	>1.60	>25.4	No	Parking surface and driveway	Modern
5/02	Layer	Hard concrete	0.12-0.20	>1.60	>21	No	Yard	Modern
5/03	Layer	Friable dark brownish yellow clayey sand with inclusions of fine pebbles	0.01-0.02	Unknown	>6	No	Levelling layer	Modern
5/04	Layer	Friable light black greyish clayey sand with brick fragments	~0.01-0.02	unknown	>7	No	Demolition layer	Modern
5/05	Layer	Friable brownish orange clayey sand with fine pebbles inclusions	~0.03-0.10	>1.6	>21	No	Levelling layer	Modern
5/06	Layer	Moderately sorted angular limestones	~0.12	>1.6	>25.4	No	Preparatory layer	Modern
5/07	Deposit	Medium compacted mid brown clayey silt with occasional charcoal inclusions	0.12-0.20	>1.6	>25.4	1 potsherd	Colluvial deposit	Late Medieval / Post-Medieval?
5/08	Deposit	Medium compacted mid greenish grey silty clay	~0.05	>1.6	unknown	No	Colluvial deposit	Modern
5/09	Deposit	Limestone fragments in a mid-brown clayey matrix	>0.70	>1.6	>25.4	No	Top geological horizon	-
5/10	Cut	Linear, NW-SE, sharp break on top, gradual at base, straight steep sides but irregular base	0.55	~0.25	>1.50	n/a	Gully	Late Medieval or earlier
5/11	Deposit	Soft light brown reddish brown clayey silt with no inclusions	0.55	~0.25	>1.50	No	Fill of gully	Late Medieval or earlier
Trench 6								
6/01	Layer	Very friable light to mid brown clayey silt with common demolition debris inclusions (tile, brick, concrete fragments)	Up to 1.30	>1.60	>16.50	No	Demolition layer	Modern
6/02	Structural	Hard concrete surface	-	>1.6	0.9	No	Floor or basement ceiling?	19th C.
6/03	Wall	Possible brick wall made of layers of bricks and cemented deposit in-between	-	>1.6	1.2	No	Wall	19th C.
6/04	Deposit	Friable light yellowish brown clayey silt with frequent limestones inclusions	>0.15	>1.6	1.2	No	Backfill of foundation trench?	19th C.

6/05	Deposit	Very frequent limestones inclusions in a mid yellowish brown clayey matrix	>0.01	>1.60	>8	No	Top geological horizon	-
Trench 7								
7/01	Layer	Hard black bitumen macadam	0.12-0.18	>1.60	>15.7	No	Parking surface and driveway	Modern
7/02	Layer	Friable dark pink coarse sand with very frequent small angular limestones (0.01-0.03m)	~0.08	>1.60	>12.5	No	Levelling layer	Modern
7/03	Layer	Medium compacted light yellowish beige clayey sand matrix with very frequent angular and sub-angular limestone, moderately sorted (0.01-0.15m)	~0.10-0.18	>1.60	>15.7	No	Preparatory rubble	Modern
7/04	Deposit	Compact light orange brown sandy clay matrix with very frequent angular limestones (0.01-0.30m)	>0.18	>1.60	>15.7	No	Top geological horizon	-