

6 -12 George Street Oxford



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Trial Pits, 6-12 George Street, Oxford

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

On the 26th and 27th June 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during geo-technical test pitting at 6-12 George Street, Oxford (NGR: SP 5122 0641). The work was commissioned by Borgos Architecture in advance of proposed building work. The watching brief revealed deposits of made ground associated with its construction and showed that the development area had been truncated down to terrace gravel deposits by the excavation of the basement. No other significant archaeology was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between 26th and 27th June 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 6-12 George Street, Oxford (NGR: SP 5122 0641). The work was commissioned by Borgos Architecture in respect of proposed redevelopment of the premises.
- 1.1.2 As part of the planning consent, the City Archaeologist, Brian Durham, requested that an archaeologist be present during the excavation of the test pits.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 George Street (Fig. 1) is located on the crest of a slight rise in the centre of Oxford and the site occupies an area of $c200\text{ m}^2$ at approximately 65 m above OD. The development site is bounded to the south east by George Street and to the east, west and north by retail properties. The underlying geology is alluvium over floodplain terrace gravel (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no 236).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Evidence for early activity in Oxford is scarce although Neolithic arrow heads have been recovered and evidence for Bronze age and Iron Age burials has been observed approximately 600 m north of the site. Roman boundary ditches and evidence of occupation in Oxford has been observed most notably in the South Parks area 500 m to the east.
- 1.3.2 In the Saxon period an abbey was established and Oxford underwent a period of growth due to its location on the trade route between the Kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex. Coins stamped with the mark “Ohsnafordia” have been found suggested that there may have been a royal mint at Oxford in this period. King Alfred established a system of “burhs” or fortified towns to counter the threat of Danish raiders and Oxford became a “burh in 911.
- 1.3.3 Following the Norman invasion Robert D’Oily built Oxford castle, by the late 11th or early 12th-century Oxford was established as an academic centre for training clerics

in spite of a calamitous fire razing Oxford in 1138. By the 13th-century this was centred on houses established by the Dominicans (1221), Franciscans (1224), Carmelites (1256) and the Augustians (1267). The city suffered during the Black death (1348-1350), the population of the city dropped heavily and the colleges took advantage of the situation by buying up vacant property and greatly expanding their holdings within Oxford.

- 1.3.4 The city became the de-facto capital for the Royalist cause in the English Civil War in spite of the towns people supporting the parliamentary cause, however the university was staunchly Royalist and the presence of the Royalist army in the city carried the argument. Oxford was surrounded by a series of fortifications including a ditch running down Broad Street and possibly continuing along George Street.
- 1.3.5 By the time of the Loggan map in 1675 the defences have been slighted and George Street is shown as composed of tenement buildings and their backyards.
- 1.3.6 In the 18th century Oxford's economy continued to rely on the presence of the university and as a market town. With the coming of the railways in the 1840s and establishment of an industrial base including a foundry the city underwent a period of economic growth continuing into the 20th century. The area surrounding George Street became part of the commercial centre of the city in this period with consequential periodic development and refurbishment of the area. The current buildings were used as retail premises prior to the current redevelopment.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of this phase of ground works.
- 2.1.3 To provide information to determine a mitigation strategy for the main phase of construction.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as an archaeological presence during the hand excavation of the test pits.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the location of the test pits was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and the sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations and any recorded sections were photographed using digital colour and black and white print film.

Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Test Pit 1

3.1.1 This was located in the centre of the northern extent of the basement (Fig. 2). The underlying terrace gravel (16) was encountered at a depth of 0.8 m below the basement floor level (Fig. 3, Section 1). This had been cut by the 0.5 m deep foundation trench (15). Built within this trench was a brick constructed wall using machine made red brick and lime mortar (14) forming the north wall of the basement. The remainder of the trench was backfilled with a mixed gravel and grey-brown silt (13). Overlying the backfill and butting up to the wall was a 0.12 m thick layer of construction debris (12), consisting mostly of brick fragments.

3.1.2 Sealing this layer was a 0.6 m deep layer of light yellow-brown dirty gravel and silt mix (11) representing a layer of made ground laid in order to bring the basement area up to floor level. A later concrete floor (10) had been laid on top of this layer.

Test Pit 2

3.1.3 This was located within the south-western corner of the basement area under evaluation (Fig. 2, Test Pit 2)

3.1.4 The underlying terrace gravel (24) was encountered at a depth of 0.3 m below the basement floor level (Fig. 3, Section 2). This was cut by the foundation trench (22) containing the southern wall of the basement (23) built using machine made red brick and lime mortar. Overlying 24 and butting up to 23 was a 0.3 m deep layer of mixed gravel, brick and stone fragments (21), a layer of made ground levelling the basement floor area. As elsewhere in the basement this was sealed by the later concrete floor (20).

Test Pit 3

3.1.5 This was located against the south-eastern corner of the basement in the main building (Fig. 2, Test Pit 3)

3.1.6 The underlying terrace gravel (33) was encountered at a depth of 0.22 m below the current basement floor level (Fig. 3, Section 3). This was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep layer of mixed silts and gravel (32), a layer of made ground similar to Layers 11 and 21. This was overlaid by a 0.05 m deep modern concrete floor (31).

Test Pit 4

3.1.7 This was located within the north-eastern corner of the basement (Fig. 2, Test Pit 4).

- 3.1.8 The underlying terrace gravel was encountered at a depth of 0.5 m below the current basement floor level (Fig. 3, Section 4). This had been cut by a vertically edged foundation trench (43). Built within this was a red brick and lime mortar constructed wall (46) forming the north wall of the basement. Backfilling the space between the foundation cut and the wall was a mixed grey-brown silt and gravel deposit (45). Sealing the backfill and the gravel was a 0.4 m deep layer of mixed gravel, silt, brick and stone fragments (42), a layer of made ground similar to, and a probable continuation of, layers 11, 21 and 32. The modern concrete floor (41) had been laid directly on top of this layer.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No dating evidence other than intrusive modern finds were recovered during the course of the watching brief. The presence of these artefacts was recorded but they were not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were observed during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 All the archaeologically significant deposits and structures observed relate to the 19th-century building(s) and later structural alterations.
- 4.1.2 It is highly probable that the construction cut for the basements has destroyed the archaeological potential of the area truncating the area down below the level of any potential archaeological impact.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
Test Pit 1						
10	Layer	0.05 m	-	Concrete floor of basement	-	C20th
11	Layer	0.55 m	-	Made ground	Brick	C19th
12	Layer	0.15 m	-	Made ground	Brick	C19th
13	Fill	0.45 m	0.2 m	Backfill of construction cut	Brick	C19th
14	Structure	> 3 m	-	North wall of basement	Brick	C19th
15	Cut	0.55 m	-	Construction cut for basement	-	C19th
16	Layer	> 0.8 m	-	Terrace gravel	-	-
Test Pit 2						
20	Layer	0.05 m	-	Concrete floor of basement	-	C20th
21	Layer	0.35 m	-	Made ground	Brick	C19th
22	Cut	0.12 m	> 0.2 m	Construction cut for basement	-	C19th
23	Structure	> 3 m	-	South wall of basement	Brick	C19th
24	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Terrace gravel	-	-
Test Pit 3						
31	Layer	0.05 m	-	Concrete floor of basement	-	C20th
32	Layer	0.25 m	-	Made ground	Brick	C19th
33	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Terrace gravel	-	-
Test Pit 4						
41	Layer	0.12 m	-	Concrete floor of basement	-	C20th
42	Layer	0.35 m	-	Made ground	Brick	C19th
43	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Terrace gravel	-	-
44	Cut	> 0.3 m	-	Construction cut for basement	-	C19th
45	Fill	> 0.3 m	0.15 m	Backfill of construction cut	Brick	C19th
46	Structure	> 3 m	-	North wall of basement	Brick	C19th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological watching Briefs*

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: 6-12 George Street, Oxford, Oxfordshire

Site code:

Grid reference: Centred at SP 5122 0641

Type of watching brief: Hand excavation of 4 test pits.

Date and duration of project: 26th and 27th June 2008, two site visits

Area of site: c400 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief observed deposits and structures relating to the 19th-century construction of the building and evidence for the truncation of the area down to the terrace gravel. No other significant archaeology was encountered.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location

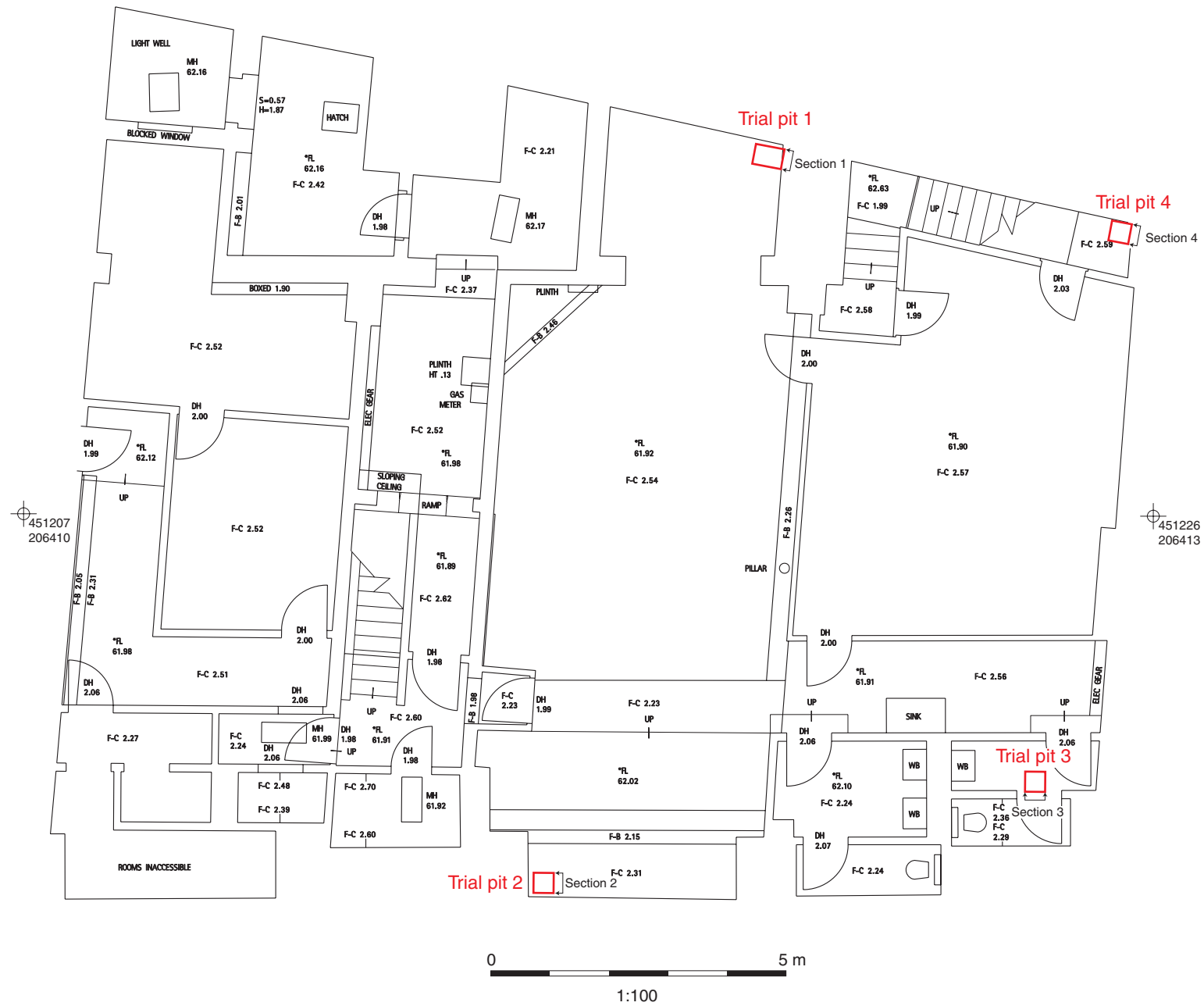


Figure 2: Site plan (based on Drawing A0010 by Borgos Architecture)

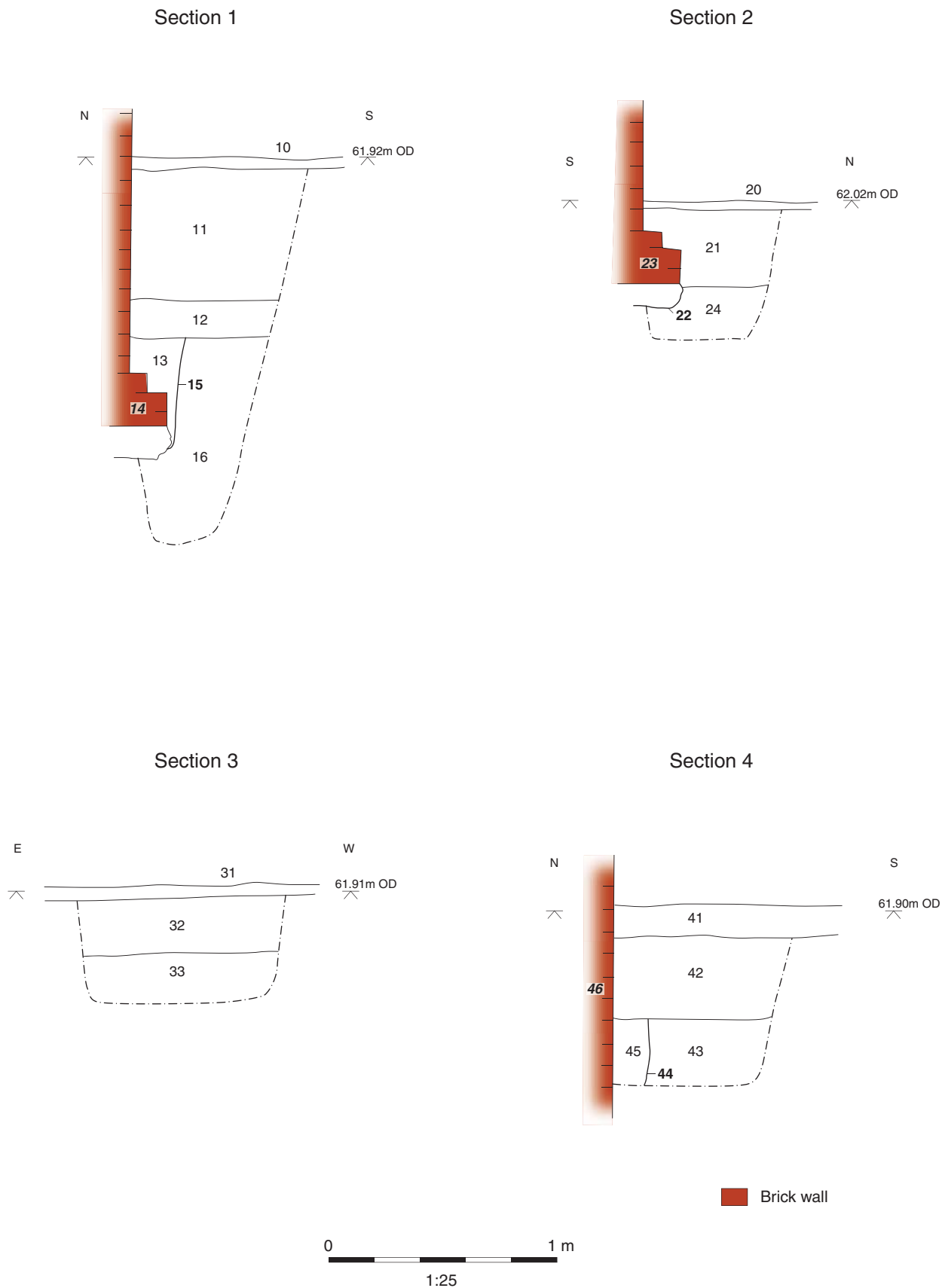


Figure 3: Sections



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