Littlemore Hospital, Oxford

NGR SP 5306 0205

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Oxford Archaeological Unit

August 1996

LITTLEMORE PARK ROAD (LITTLEMORE HOSPITAL GROUNDS)
OXFORD
NGR SP 536 023
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

1 SUMMARY

This watching brief revealed a very low density of archaeological activity in the south and east areas of Littlemore Hospital. A probable medieval plough-soil was identified, but no archaeological features were observed. A few sherds of medieval pottery were recovered during topsoil stripping.

2 INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a new road in the grounds of Littlemore Hospital during the summer of 1996 (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Aldensleigh Associates on behalf of the Oxford and Anglia Regional Health Authority. The groundwork was undertaken by CAMUS Associated Asphalt Ltd.

A Written Scheme of investigation (WSI) was prepared by OAU in response to a request from Aldensleigh Estates for a mitigation strategy to accommodate archaeological finds during the course of the new development. The WSI was based upon a brief for archaeological work issued by the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS) on behalf of the City Planning Authority in respect of an earlier planning application (NO/0391/93). That application related to the construction of a major service route through, and the redevelopment of part of the Littlemore Hospital complex, immediately adjacent to the line of the new road. The new WSI also took account of the results of the archaeological evaluation which followed the original planning application in 1995 (see below).

The proposed road line runs along the south and east sides of the Littlemore Hospital complex. Almost all of its route lies within 10-50 m of the locations of evaluation trenches excavated in 1995.

3 TOPOGRAPHICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Littlemore Hospital is sited on sandy subsoil on a southeast facing slope which descends to a tributary stream of the River Thames (Littlemore Brook). The main part of the Hospital itself lies at a general level of c 68 m OD. The level of the proposed road drops from c 67.50 m at its west end to c 58.70 m on the east side of the hospital, towards the bottom of the slope.

Limited evidence for prehistoric activity in the area consists of records of two

Palaeolithic hand axes (Oxfordshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record Primary Record Number (PRN) 12905) and a flint arrowhead (PRN 3658) found to the north of this site. Recently flint finds were retrieved from west of the Oxford-Henley road (PRN 3843), and further flint flakes were recovered during work in the grounds of the Ashurst Clinic opposite Littlemore hospital. These finds were not associated with archaeological features, however.

The most significant archaeological remains near this development site relate to the Roman pottery industry of the 2nd-4th centuries. Pottery kilns have been located at three sites within a 0.5 km radius of the hospital (PRNs 3656, 6191, 8017), the nearest being found at the Ashurst Clinic in 1954.

Medieval centres of activity are found at Minchery Farm to the east, the site of a house of Benedictine nuns founded in the 12th century (PRN 1434), and at Temple Farm, Sandford to the west. A preceptory of the Knights Templars was sited here, and some of the earthworks survive today.

Littlemore Hospital was built in 1843 and has grown considerably in size since then. There are no archaeological records relating specifically to the hospital site.

An archaeological evaluation was carried out for the Anglia and Oxford Regional Health Authority by the OAU in advance of proposed activities relating to partial redevelopment of the hospital site in 1995 (see above). The evaluation consisted of limited geophysical survey supplemented by trenching. This work was fully reported (*Littlemore Hospital, Oxford, Yamanouchi Site Redevelopment NGR SP 5306 0205 Archaeological Evaluation Report*, Oxford Archaeological Unit, August 1995).

No significant archaeological features or deposits were recovered from any of the 1995 trenches. There was slight evidence for agricultural activity, perhaps of Roman as well as medieval date, but the only cut features or structures observed were of post-medieval date and all probably related to the 19th and 20th century hospital. The depth of modern topsoil varied considerably and in places it consisted of recently dumped material. In several trenches the undisturbed subsoil was located at a depth of over 1 m, the deposits above being in large part formed by dumping.

4 STRATEGY AND METHODOLOGY

A watching brief was maintained during earthwork operations relating to the new road, and included observation of trench sections which were dug for the installation of new services. The method of road construction involved lowering the ground level in places by c. 0.5 m and locally even more (for location of the areas of deepest disturbance see Fig. 2). Along substantial parts of the route the ground surface for the new road was raised, and consequently no archaeological monitoring was required. Spoil removed from the road line was examined for the presence of finds. This report contains the results of this investigation. A table

of context information is located at the rear of the report.

5 RESULTS

Observations from the watching brief on the new road are described from west to east. The road runs due south-east from the Sandford Road entrance and then curves to the north-east around the Yamanouchi Institute Building (Fig. 2).

5.1 FROM SANDFORD ROAD TO RIVENDELL III BUILDING

The natural subsoil (2002) was observed at variable depths below the present topsoil level, owing to landscaping of the Hospital grounds. The subsoil was a light yellow-grey sand which contained outcrops of limestone pieces. It was disturbed in places by tree roots.

Above the subsoil was a layer (2001) of compact mid-dark grey clay loam with occasional brick and tile pieces, on average c 0.20 m thick. The irregular depth of machining between this layer and the subsoil below gave the impression of features cutting the subsoil. However, when these 'features ' were investigated they were found to be patches of 2001 not fully removed. Two sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from layer 2001, together with several modern sherds of white china, brick and tile. Layer 2001 was perhaps a medieval ploughsoil, subsequently disturbed by later soil landscaping.

The modern finds were not retained.

Layer 2001 was sealed by the present topsoil (2000), which again was of variable depth (0.1 - 0.35 m). Topsoil was a dark grey-brown sandy loam.

5.2 FROM RIVENDELL III BUILDING TO SITE OF PROPOSED LAGOON

This stretch of the road also included a deep service trench (The Service Reserve) which was excavated after removal of tarmac and topsoil deposits. The trench was 1.2 m deep, and was cut through the natural sand and into the underlying natural clay below. No features were observed within the trench, and no finds were recovered from the excavated spoil.

The upper part of the sequence in a further service trench dug to the north of the Rivendell 3 building was also observed. The earliest deposit identified within the trench was a 0.25 m thick layer of dark reddish-brown silty sand (2004). This layer was similar in character to layer 1203 which contained medieval pottery sherds and was observed in the 1995 evaluation. Although no artefacts were recovered from layer 2004, it is almost certainly a ploughsoil of medieval date, and the same deposit as 1203. Above 2004 was 2003, a compact tarmac layer bedded on a shallow spread of hardcore, and presumably a recent surface. Layer 2003 was covered with

2000, the topsoil.

5.3 FROM PROPOSED LAGOON TO NORTH-EAST END OF ROUTE

At the most southerly point of the new road line, where it turned to the north-east, it passed through an area previously occupied by allotments, including brick and stone structures. A disused Water Treatment Plant was dismantled and the foundations removed. No archaeological features or finds were identified in the course of these operations. The construction of a lagoon lying immediately south-east of the corner of the new road is proposed. The extension of the new road to the north of the Water Treatment Plant was used by the contractors for access for machinery, and as such was unavailable for inspection. At the north end of the site the new road extends along a terraced slope. Here the soil was a mixture of topsoil and building debris similar to that seen elsewhere on the site. A substantial quantity of brick and glass was also present within the soil, all of which was of modern date. No archaeological features were observed in this area of the site.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This watching brief identified a similar sequence of land use to that revealed during the adjacent 1995 evaluation. There were no obvious features seen cut into the natural sand where it was clearly exposed. A mixed soil at the Sandford Road entrance to the site may have been a mixed medieval ploughsoil, similar to those identified in the evaluation. The only deposit of probable medieval date was a ?ploughsoil (2004) observed in a service trench to the north of the Rivendell 3 building. This layer was very similar to a comparable layer (1203) observed in the nearby 1995 evaluation Trench 12, which produced medieval dating evidence. The mixture of ?ploughsoil and imported soil which produces an uneven topography across the site indicates that landscaping has had a major effect on the present appearance of the hospital site. This activity may have resulted in truncation of archaeological deposits, but the absence of any definite evidence for this, and the almost total lack of finds, suggests that no important features have been lost.

No evidence of significant activity of any period before the 19th century was identified in the areas examined.

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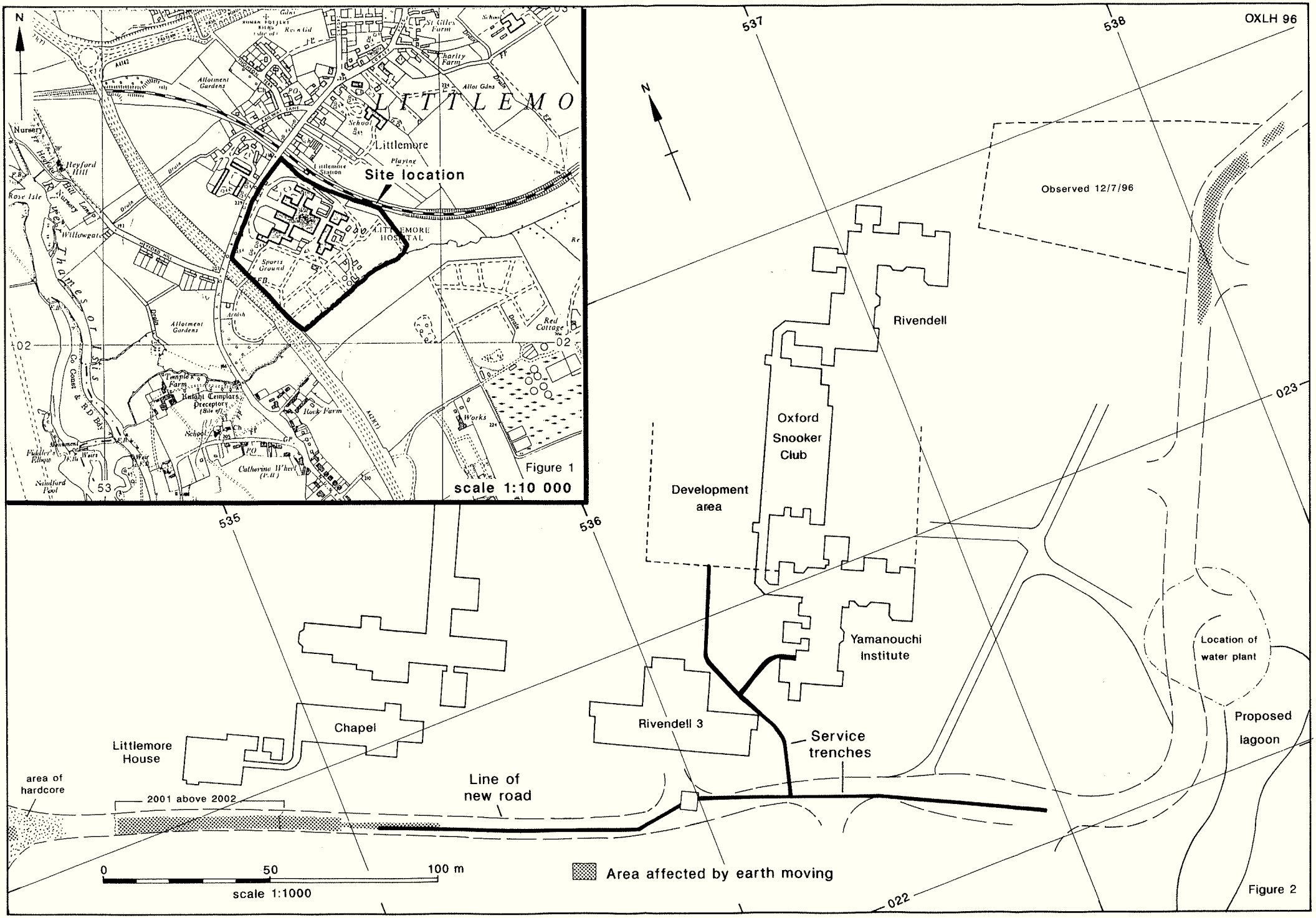
August 1996

TABLE OF CONTEXT INFORMATION

CONTEXT	TYPE	DEPTH	COMMENTS
2000	LAYER	0.1-0.35 m	Topsoil
2001	LAYER	0.1-0.5 m	Mixture of ?ploughsoil and former topsoil and in places landscaped to incorporate dumped deposits
2002	LAYER	1 m+	Natural sand
2003	LAYER	0.05 m	Modern buried tarmac surface
2004	LAYER	0.25 m	?Medieval ploughsoil layer, similar to context 1203 from Evaluation Trench 12


OXLH 96
N
537
538
Site location
Littlemore
Observed 12/7/96
Rivendell
Oxford
Snooker
Club
Development
area
023
535
536
Yamanouchi
Institute
Location of
water plant
Chapel
Littlemore
House
Rivendell 3
Service
trenches
Proposed
lagoon
area of
hardcore
2001 above 2002
Line of
new road
0
50
100 m
scale 1:1000
Area affected by earth moving
022
Figure 2
Figure 1
scale 1:10 000

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