

Bullcroft Park Wallingford Oxfordshire



Archaeological Evaluation Report



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Bullcroft Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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SUMMARY

Between the 19th and 20th June 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Bullcroft Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (centred at NGR: SU 606 896) on behalf of Wallingford Town Council. The evaluation revealed overall deposits of modern made ground sealing an earlier worked soil and layers of alluvium. In two of the trenches evidence for probable burgage plot boundary ditches and a post-medieval robber trench were observed. Two of the trenches revealed overall layers of demolition debris and the remaining two encountered deposits of worked soil overlying alluvium. No deposits or features relating to the Saxon origin of Wallingford were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between the 19th and 20th of June 2008, OA carried out a field evaluation at Bullcroft Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (Centred on NGR: SU 606 896) on behalf of Wallingford Town Council. The park is part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM No.182) and the town council have applied to English Heritage (EH) for Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) prior to refurbishment of the tennis courts and children's play area. In order to make an informed decision on the SMC, Chris Welch, the Inspector of Ancient Monuments for EH has requested that an archaeological evaluation of the site be undertaken.
- 1.1.2 OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would undertake the required evaluation (OA, 2008).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The town of Wallingford is located approximately 13 km south of the City of Oxford (Fig. 1). The site is situated in open parkland within the historic core of the town and is currently a mixture of tarmaced playing surfaces bounded by footpaths and trees to the east and south and grass to the west and north. The park itself is bounded to the east by Castle Street, to the south by the High Street and to the west and north by St Georges Road. The site lies at approximately 48 m above OD and the underlying geology is alluvium over valley gravel (Geological Survey of Great Britain sheet no. 254).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the evaluation was prepared for the WSI (OA. 2008) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The site of Bullcroft Park lies within the partially surviving earthwork of the Saxon Town defences and immediately west of Wallingford Castle (SAM no. 176) and its associated defensive earthworks.

- 1.3.3 Wallingford is located in an area containing some of the most important archaeological complexes in the Thames valley. The town may possibly have had a Roman precursor, and the presence of a Saxon cemetery pre-dating the 9th century defensive works may indicate a settlement in this area. Wallingford Castle was built after the Norman Conquest (eight properties being destroyed to make room). The Domesday entry for 1086 records 491 houses in Wallingford with a mint, a market and a guildhall. Wallingford was the second largest burgh in Berkshire and played a prominent role in the conflict between King Stephen and the Empress Matilda. The town was very prosperous until the 13th century when it began a slow and steady decline. By the 16th century Wallingford's once large and impressive castle was in decay. The town briefly revived in the 19th century, after the opening of the canal to Bath and Birmingham.
- 1.3.4 Bullcroft Park lies within the defences of the Saxon burgh. In 1973 a small excavation through the southern defensive earthworks, dated the bank to the 9th century (Haslam, 1984). The town's rectilinear street pattern was laid out at the burgh's foundation and at least one street formerly existed within the Bullcroft. It has been suggested that in the 12th century the town occupied all the interior of the defences (Rodwell, 1974). The Benedictine Priory of the Holy Trinity, founded after the Norman Conquest occupied most of the Bullcroft. In the 19th century massive flint foundations were uncovered just outside Bullcroft, together with inhumations, a small stone coffin, an ornamental seal and encaustic tiles. In 1982-83 a medieval ditch and a sequence of ashy deposits were recorded during redevelopment on the frontage site at 56 High Street. A watching brief was undertaken by OA in 1997 during the excavation of a service trench for multi-media cables immediately south of the current proposed evaluation. This watching brief revealed 'a massive flint foundation' and a demolition layer that may be associated with the remains identified in the 19th century. Finds from the 1997 watching brief included encaustic tiles, roof tiles and animal bone.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To determine the extent, date, character, quality, significance and state of preservation of the archaeological remains surviving on the site.
- 2.1.2 To assess the impact of the development on any significant archaeological remains and assess the need for further mitigation before and/or during construction.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the investigation and to place the results of the evaluation in wider local and regional context.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The location of the trenches was determined by the need to achieve as wide a distribution of trenching as possible and also to investigate sites where the maximum disturbance was envisaged, specifically the proposed bases of floodlighting masts (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.2 The evaluation was to originally to have consisted of eight 2 m by 2 m trenches. Upon setting out of the trenches two of these (Trenches 7 and 8) were seen to be underneath the tree canopy. Because of the potential damage to the tree roots and the lack of alternative sites, after consultation with the EH representative, Dan Bashford it was agreed that they need not be dug.
- 3.1.3 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.6 m wide toothless grading bucket. Excavation proceeded in spits down to undisturbed natural or to the first significant archaeological layer, whichever was encountered first.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand, and any revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve dating evidence. All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:50 and where recorded their sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All trenches and features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 Finds

- 3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context.

3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

- 3.4.1 No samples for palaeo-environmental analysis were taken at this stage of the investigation.

3.5 Presentation of results

- 3.5.1 The results of the evaluation will be detailed on a trench by trench basis followed by an overall discussion and interpretation.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 The site was located on dry clay silts enabling clean excavation. Groundwater was not encountered in any of the trenches.

4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

4.2.1 Significant archaeological evidence was only encountered within Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 4, at the western and northern end of the evaluated area.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

Trenches 1 and 2

5.1.1 These trenches displayed similar stratigraphy when excavated and are discussed together.

5.1.2 A layer of demolition debris composed of fragmented limestone, ceramic tile and lime mortar (1003 and 2003) was encountered at a depth of 0.5 m to 0.6 m below the current ground level (Fig 3, Sections 1 and 2). This was overlaid by layers of grey-brown clay silt (1002 and 2002) between 0.3 m and 0.45 m in depth. Overlying this was a 0.2 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (1001 and 2001). A turf line of 0.1m deep dark grey-brown silt loam (1000 and 2000) completed the sections.

Trench 3

5.1.3 The top of the underlying natural, a dark red-brown sandy clay silt alluvium (3011) was encountered at a depth of 1 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 3 and plan 3). Overlying this in areas were 0.07 m deep lenses of fine dirty gravel (3010). Sealing 3010 and 3011 was a 0.15 m deep layer of dark red-brown silt clay (3009) containing charcoal flecking suggesting it was a worked soil/occupation layer. Cut into this layer was a 0.4 m wide by 0.6 m deep linear feature with steeply sloping sides (3008). This ran north-south across the width of the trench. The base of this feature was filled with a 0.4 m deep deposit of dark brown clay silt (3007) which also produced charcoal flecking. Filling the remainder of the cut was a 0.2 m deep layer of grey silt clay (3006). It is suggested that feature 3008 may represent a burgage plot boundary.

5.1.4 Overlying Fill 3006 and Layer 3009 was a 0.15 m deep layer of dark red-brown silt loam (3005). This layer contained charcoal flecking suggesting it was a later occupation layer. This south-western area of this layer was cut by a corner of a steeply sloping feature (3004) running in from the west and southern baulks of the trench. This measured 0.55 m deep and had a distinct step on its eastern edge, but was straight-edged on its northern edge. The bottom 0.3 m was filled by a mixture of

pale yellow-brown sandy gravel and limestone fragments (3003) which included a fragment of window tracery displaying an intricately carved flower (Plate 1) which has been tentatively dated to the 12th century. The composition of this fill suggests that this was the corner of a robber trench. Filling the remainder of the feature was a 0.25 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (3002). Sealing the fill was an overall layer of 0.2 m deep layer of grey-brown silt loam (3001) containing charcoal and lime flecking. Overlying this was a 0.2 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (3000), the present day topsoil and turf.

Trench 4

- 5.1.5 The top of the underlying terrace gravel (4008) was encountered at a depth of 0.8 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 4). This was overlaid by a 0.35 m deep layer of red-brown sandy clay silt (4007), a continuation of the alluvium 3011 observed in Trench 3. This sloped away to the east towards the present course of the river. Overlying this layer was a 0.15 m deep deposit of dark red-brown clay silt (4006), possibly a worked soil horizon. The eastern edge of this deposit was cut by a 0.35 m wide by 0.55 m deep linear feature with steeply sloping sides which ran north to south across the trench (4005). This was similar to the probable burgage plot boundary ditch 3008 observed in Trench 3, and appears to run parallel to 3008. It was filled by an orange-brown sandy silt (4004), a probable silting deposit.
- 5.1.6 Also cut into Layer 4007 was a 0.35 m wide by 0.28 m deep linear feature (4002) which ran approximately 0.9 m into the trench before terminating. It was filled by a dark grey-brown sandy silt (4003) containing many large limestone blocks roughly arranged within the cut leaving many voids.
- 5.1.7 Sealing fills 4003 and 4006 was a 0.4 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (4001) containing charcoal flecking and small sub-angular stone fragments. This was overlaid by a 0.08 m deep layer of the present day topsoil and turf (4000).

Trenches 5 and 6

- 5.1.8 The stratigraphy observed within these two trenches was similar and the description can be applied to both.
- 5.1.9 The underlying alluvium, a red-brown sandy clay silt (5003 and 6003) was observed at a depth of between 0.65 m and 0.7 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Sections 5 and 6).
- 5.1.10 These were overlaid by a grey-brown clay silt (5002 and 6002) 0.5 m deep containing occasional gravel and some charcoal flecking. Overlying this was a 0.08 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (5001 and 6001), also containing small gravel and charcoal flecking. This was sealed by the present day topsoil and turf (5000 and 6000).

5.2 Finds

- 5.2.1 Few finds were recovered during the course of the evaluation. Numerous fragments of ceramic roof tile were observed within the layers of modern made ground; the presence of this was noted but it was not retained.
- 5.2.2 A fragment of worked stone was recovered from the robber trench in Trench 3. No other dating evidence or artifacts were recovered.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 6.1.1 All the trenches excavated encountered archaeology or natural deposits providing information across the evaluation area. The even distribution of both the trenches and these deposits suggest that the results can be applied across the site.
- 6.1.2 Although two of the proposed trenches were not excavated it is thought that the additional results from these trenches would not have provided significantly extra information.

6.2 Overall interpretation

- 6.2.1 Four of the trenches came down onto the top of the underlying alluvium (two of which displayed archaeology in both sections and plan) while the remaining two came down onto an archaeologically significant layer.
- 6.2.2 The demolition layer observed in Trenches 1 and 2 is probably associated with the structures encountered in earlier excavations at the southern edge of the park bordering the High Street. The possible burgage plot boundary ditches observed in Trenches 3 and 4 possibly indicate plots running north-south and also fronting the High Street.
- 6.2.3 The robber trench observed in Trench 3 probably dates to the post-medieval period and the presence of the stone rosette within the backfill suggests that it could be related to the demolition of parts of the Holy Trinity Priory post Dissolution.
- 6.2.4 The stone filled trench 4002 in Trench 4 is a probable drain, although there is the possibility that it may represent a foundation slot.
- 6.2.5 Overall deposits of made ground were observed within all the trenches suggesting that the area has been landscaped. While no definitive dating evidence was recovered from these deposits it is probable that they are relatively recent in date. The lack of dating evidence would also suggest that this material has been imported and not an accumulation of worked soils.

6.3 Recommendations

- 6.3.1 The presence of archaeologically significant deposits in the majority of the trenches suggest that this area has been the focus of activity in the past. Should any further work be undertaken it is recommended that at a minimum a watching brief be undertaken within this area.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1							
	1000	Layer	-	0.1 m	Modern topsoil and turf	-	C20th
	1001	Layer	-	0.2 m	Modern made ground	Tile	C20th?
	1002	Layer	-	0.3 m - 0.45 m	Modern made ground	Tile	C20th?
	1003	Layer	-	> 0.25 m	Demolition layer	Tile	-
2							
	2000	Layer	-	0.1 m	Modern topsoil and turf	-	C20th
	2001	Layer	-	0.2 m	Modern made ground	Tile	C20th?
	2002	Layer	-	0.3 m - 0.45 m	Modern made ground	Tile	C20th?
	2003	Layer	-	> 0.25 m	Demolition layer	Tile	-
3							
	3000	Layer	-	0.2 m	Modern topsoil and turf	Tile	C20th?
	3001	Layer	-	0.2 m	Modern made ground	Tile	C20th?
	3002	Fill	-	0.25 m	Backfill of robber trench	-	C17th?
	3003	Fill	-	0.3 m	Disgarded material after robbing	Worked stone	C17th?
	3004	Cut	> 0.3 m	0.55 m	Robber trench	-	-
	3005	Layer	-	0.15 m	Later buried soil horizon	Charcoal	-
	3006	Fill	0.2 m	0.4 m	Silting deposit	-	-
	3007	Fill	0.4 m	0.4 m	Silting deposit	-	-
	3008	Cut	0.4 m	0.6 m	Possible Burgage plot boundary ditch	-	-
	3009	Layer	-	0.15 m	Earlier buried soil horizon	Charcoal	-
	3010	Layer	-	0.07 m	Bioturbation layer	-	-
	3011	Layer	-	> 0.3 m	Underlying alluvium	-	-

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
4							
	4000	Layer	-	0.08 m	Modern topsoil and turf	Tile	C20th?
	4001	Layer	-	0.4 m	Modern made ground	Tile	C20th?
	4002	Cut	0.35 m	0.28 m	Drainage ditch ? Possible foundations ?	-	-
	4003	Fill	0.35 m	0.28 m	Fill of 4002	Stone	-
	4004	Fill	0.35 m	0.55 m	Silting deposit	-	-
	4005	Cut	0.35 m	0.55 m	Probable Burgage plot boundary ditch	-	-
	4006	Layer	-	0.15 m	Buried soil horizon	-	-
	4007	Layer	-	0.35 m	Alluvium	-	-
	4008	Layer	-	> 0.2 m	Natural gravel	-	-
5							
	5000	Layer	-	0.1 m	Modern topsoil and turf	Tile	C20th?
	5001	Layer	-	0.08 m	Modern made ground	Tile	C20th?
	5002	Layer	-	0.5 m	Modern made ground	Tile	C20th?
	5003	Layer	-	> 0.15 m	Alluvium	-	-
6							
	5000	Layer	-	0.1 m	Modern topsoil and turf	Tile	C20th?
	5001	Layer	-	0.1 m	Modern made ground	Tile	C20th?
	5002	Layer	-	0.5 m	Modern made ground	Tile	C20th?
	5003	Layer	-	> 0.1 m	Alluvium	-	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluations*

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Haslam J (ed), 1984 *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern Britain* Southampton

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluations*

OA, 1997 *Bullcroft Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire: Archaeological Watching Brief*

OA, 2008 *Bullcroft Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire: Written scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation*

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

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Bullcroft Park, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

Site code: WALB 08

Grid reference: Centred on SU 606 896

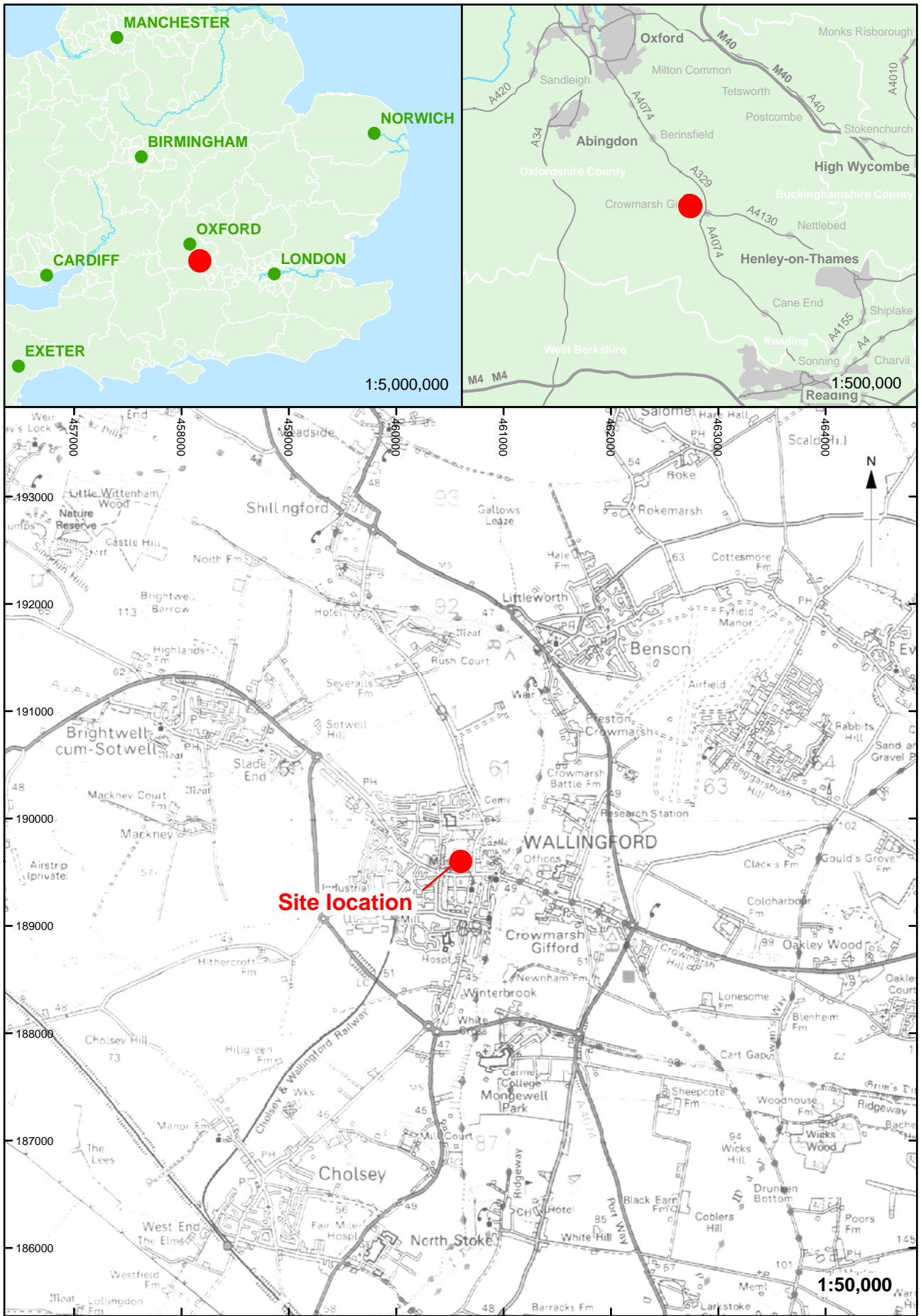
Type of evaluation: 6 machine dug trenches each 2 m by 2 m

Date and duration of project: 19th and 20th June 2008, 2 days

Area of site: 0.8 hectare

Summary of results: All trenches showed evidence of modern made ground. Two of the trenches produced evidence for probable burgage plot boundary ditches and later robber trenches. A layer of demolition debris probably associated with building fronting the High Street was also observed.

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

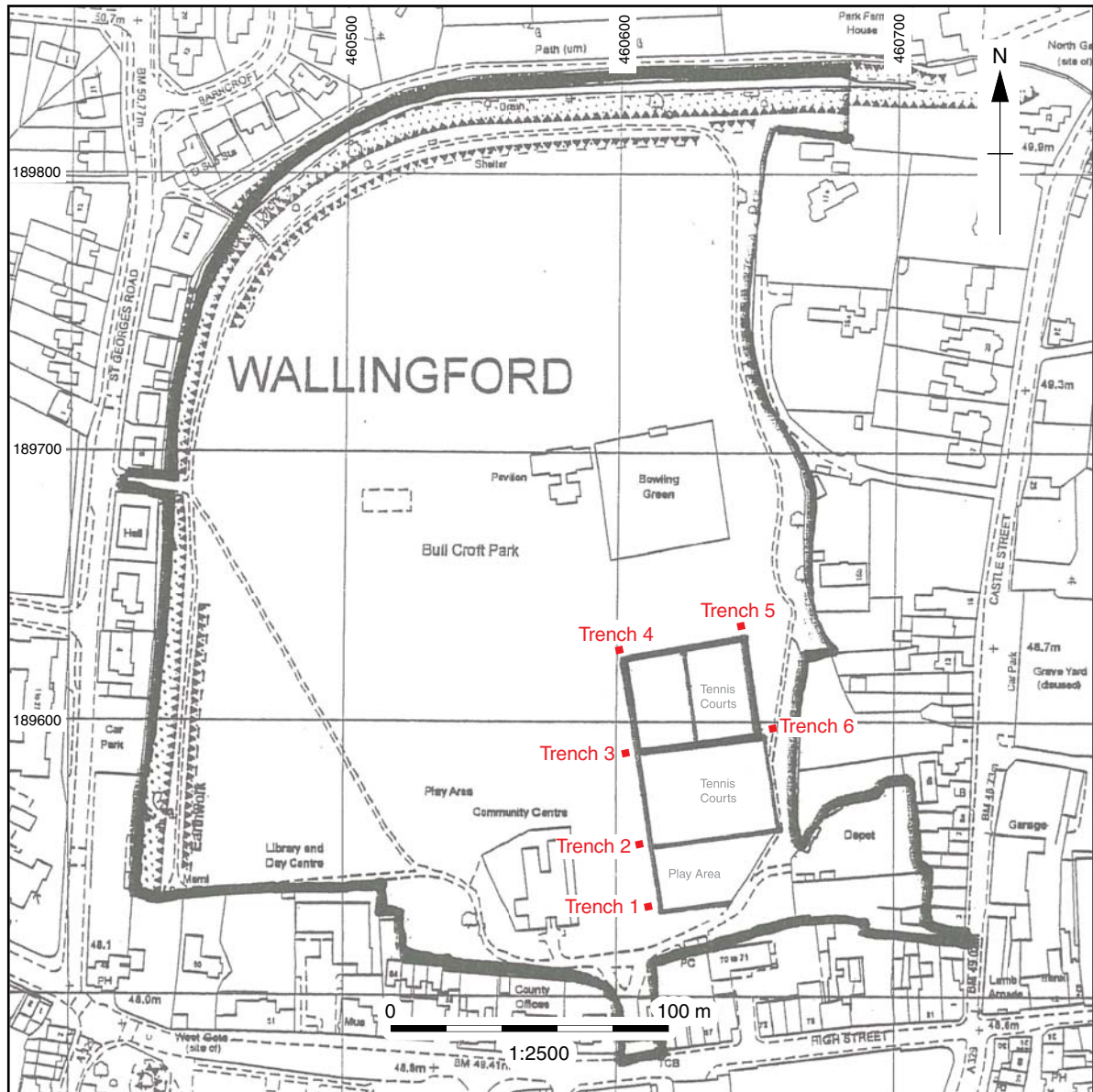


Figure 2: Trench locations

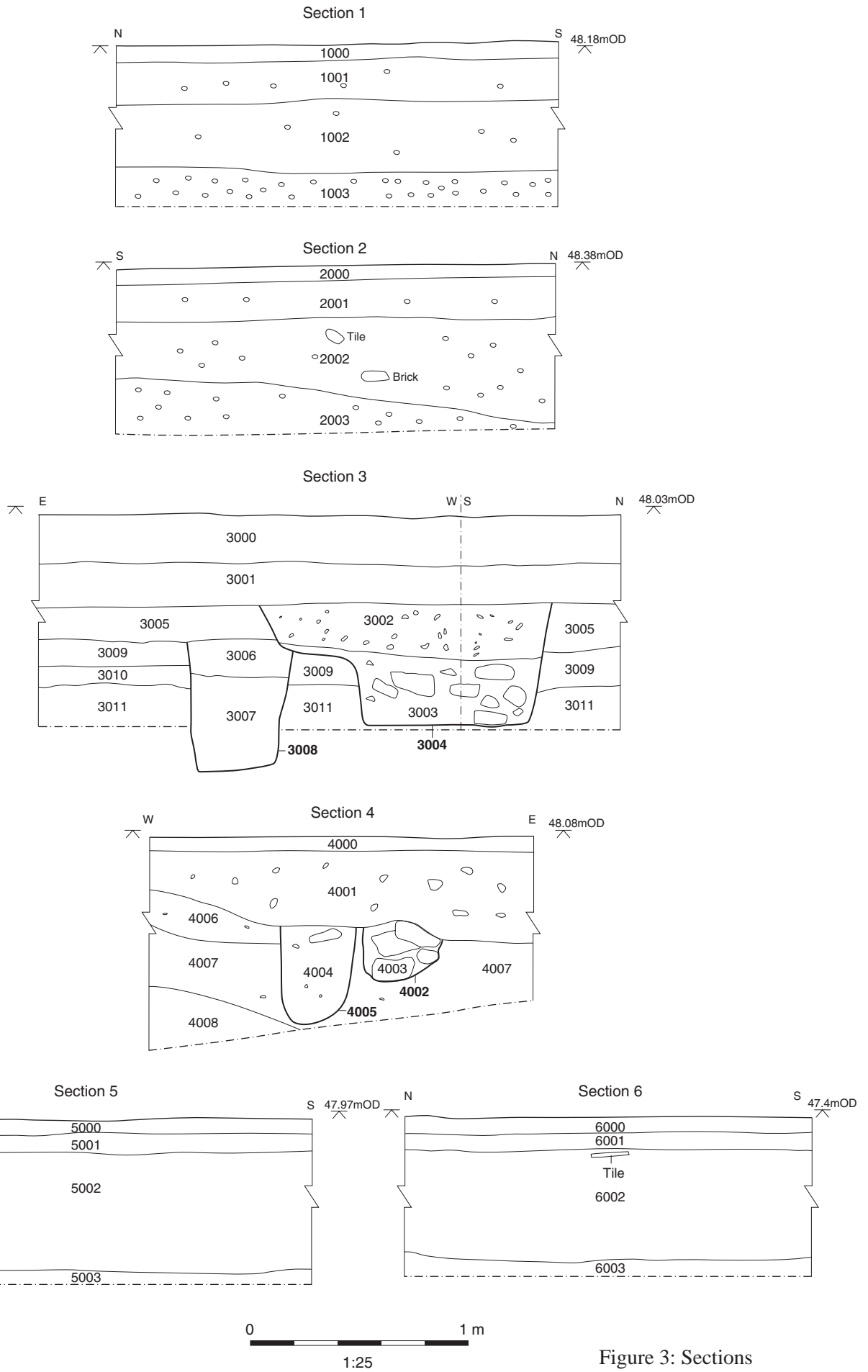


Figure 3: Sections



Plate 1: Stone nosette from fill 3003



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