

# New Gateway Buildings St Antony's College Woodstock Road Oxford



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Issue	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by	Signature
1	Mike Sims Project Supervisor	David Score Senior Project Manager	David Score Senior Project Manager	

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Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263800

e: oasouth@thehumanjourney.net

f: +44 (0) 1865 793496

w: oasouth.thehumanjourney.net

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# New Gateway Buildings, St Antony's College, Woodstock Road, Oxford

*Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

*Written by Mike Sims*

*and illustrated by Georgina Slater*

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Front Cover: Preliminary work in front of the Hilda Besse Building

Fig. 1 Site location

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## Summary

*Between October and November 2011, Oxford Archaeology carried out a watching brief during the construction of the new Gateway Buildings at St Antony's College, Woodstock Road, Oxford (Centred at NGR: SP 5094 0743). The watching brief observed remains of earlier college ancillary buildings and deposits of post-medieval made ground. Evidence of small scale post-medieval gravel extraction was also noted throughout the site.*

*No evidence for any earlier activity was encountered.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by St Antony's College to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the groundworks phase on the site of the New Gateway Buildings development.
- 1.1.2 No brief was issued but discussions with David Radford, the City Archaeologist for Oxford City Council established the level of recording necessary and OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how the work would be carried out (OA 2011).

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 St Antony's College is situated approximately 1 km north of the centre of Oxford (NGR: SP 5094 0743). The site lies between the existing college buildings and Woodstock Road (Fig.1).
- 1.2.2 Prior to the commencement of construction the site was mostly laid to lawn with some flower borders and several mature trees. The topography within the area of the proposed development is generally flat to the north west, close to Woodstock Road (c. 63.3 m OD) but a distinct break of slope is evident just to the east of the development area where the ground slopes downwards to the south-east.
- 1.2.3 The underlying geology is Summertown-Radley terraced river gravels (Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet no. 236), with the Rivers Thames and Cherwell both within 1 km of the site.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background.

- 1.3.1 St Anthony's College lies within the area of second gravel terrace which has a history of ritual use in the Bronze Age, and agricultural use in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. Recent excavations at St Johns, c 600m to the south have revealed a large ditch with Neolithic pottery and human remains of possible Saxon date.
- 1.3.2 In the 19th century Roman pottery, coins and a skeleton were found at St Anthony's, as well as the remains of a building.
- 1.3.3 In July 1994 OA carried out an archaeological evaluation comprising three trenches located within St Anthony's College, c 15 m-35 m east of the proposed development. Trenches 1 and 3 revealed that the distinct drop in ground level, noted in paragraph 1.2.2, has been caused by extensive quarrying. Trench 2, while showing no positive



- evidence for quarrying did suggest truncation associated with it, and may indicate the northern limit of the quarry. Trench 2 revealed natural gravel at 61m OD (OAU 1994).
- 1.3.4 The evaluation produced a number of notable finds from deposits back-filling the quarry. Large quantities of Romano British pottery and two coins of 3rd-4th century date were recovered, as well as four coins of a 1st century date.
- 1.3.5 A number of unsmoked and stamped clay pipes as well as pipe kiln furniture were also recovered, and a connection with a Mr Huggins, pipemaker, recorded as living at 76 Observatory Street (1841-1876) was suggested.
- 1.3.6 Subsequent work in 2000 by OA during a watching brief on the construction of new study bedrooms immediately to the south-east of the development area, recorded the presence of three separate features interpreted as 19th century gravel quarry pits (OA 2000).
- 1.3.7 In July 2008 OA carried out an archaeological evaluation comprising two evaluation trenches located in the college gardens to assess the impact of the two buildings to be constructed as part of the current development. Trench 1 (centre of Gateway Building 1) revealed Victorian soils and a Victorian brick wall, possibly forming the south wall of a backfilled cellar. Trench 2 (centre of Gateway Building 2) revealed the natural gravel which had been truncated to a depth of 1.6 m by quarrying and had been later backfilled. A Victorian garden feature and soils were also observed (OA 2008).
- 1.3.8 An evaluation in 2011 was undertaken at the Middle East Centre (part of the St Antony's campus) approximately 30 m to the north of the current development area (OA 2011). The three trenches excavated all encountered evidence of 19th century quarrying backfilled with 19th century deposits. No earlier artefacts were recovered.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The aims of the work were to:

- establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area.
- record the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains affected by the proposed works.
- establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the site and to take samples where appropriate.
- make available the results of the investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was maintained as a series of site visits during any ground works that had the potential to disturb or destroy archaeological deposits. These included transplanting of trees, ground reduction prior to construction of a piling mat, removal of dead services, excavation of foundations and service trenches and other invasive ground works.
- 2.2.2 Archaeological investigation and recording was undertaken in line with procedures established in the OA Field Manual (OA 1992) and Institute for Archaeologists guidance for undertaking watching briefs (IFA 2008). Hand excavation of archaeological features was undertaken in order to define their extent and to retrieve dating evidence.



- 2.2.3 All features and deposits and any small finds and samples from them were allocated unique numbers. Bulk finds were collected by context. Colour digital and black-and-white negative photographs were taken of archaeological features and of the site works in general.
- 2.2.4 Site plans were drawn at an appropriate scale (normally 1:50 or 1:100) with larger scale plans of features as necessary. Section drawings were drawn at a scale of 1:20.

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The proposed development consisted of two separate buildings and the results from each building and the tree transplanting will be described separately with the discussion and conclusion drawing all phases of work together.

##### *Tree Transplanting (Fig. 2)*

- 3.1.2 This involved the excavation of two separate trenches, one to remove the root ball of the tree, which was then relocated into the second trench, approximately 19 m to the north-east.
- 3.1.3 The first trench was approximately 5 m in diameter and was excavated to a depth of 1.4 m. The underlying natural, a yellow brown ballast or small gravel was encountered at a depth of between 1 m and 1.2 m. This was overlaid by a sequence of layers of 19th/20th century made ground totalling approximately 0.8 m in depth. A modern landscaping layer of dark brown silt loam had been laid above this.
- 3.1.4 The second trench was located 19 m north-east of the first, measured approximately 3.5 m square and was excavated to a depth of 1.2 m. The natural ballast was exposed in the base of the trench. A similar sequence of 19th/20th century made ground to that encountered within the first trench was exposed in section together with the modern landscaping layer of topsoil and turf.

##### *Gateway Building 1 (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, Section 300)*

- 3.1.5 This was located in the northern part of the development area and occupied a footprint of approximately 30 m east-west and 25 m north-south. The maximum depth of excavation was 0.95 m at its south-western corner tapering down to 0.2 m at its north-eastern corner. The depth of excavation was such that the underlying natural gravel deposits were not encountered.
- 3.1.6 Exposed in the base of the excavation was a yellow brick wall with a rendered and white washed internal face running approximately east-west (331). Butting up to the wall and exposed throughout the area of the footprint was a layer of grey-brown clay silt (306) containing charcoal, ash, fragments of brick and sherds of creamware pottery. This deposit could be seen to be in excess of 0.15 m deep within the section. Overlying 306 was a layer of light yellow brown crushed stone, 0.12 m in depth (305). Above this was a 0.12 m thick layer of light yellow brown sandy silt (304). This was overlain by a 0.05 m deep layer of crushed coal (303). A 0.25 m deep layer of modern made ground, a mixture of demolition debris and soil (302) had been laid directly upon 303. Within the majority of the footprint this had then been grassed over. In the location of of sample Section 300 this layer formed a levelling layer for the concrete (301) used to bed a 20th century brick pathway (300).



**Gateway Building 2 (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, Sections 301 - 306)**

- 3.1.7 This building occupied the southern part of the development area and measured approximately 30 m north-south and 20 m east-west.
- 3.1.8 The underlying natural gravel (311) first observed during the tree relocation was recorded throughout this area, varying between 0.7 m and 1.1 m below ground level (Sections 301, 302, 305 and 306).
- 3.1.9 In the southern area of the site this was overlain by a layer of mid-brown made ground (310) measuring up to 0.25 m in depth (Sections 301 and 302). This deposit produced examples of 19th century brick and creamware pottery. Covering 310 was a 0.12 m deep band of mixed yellow-brown clay silt and redeposited gravels (309), possibly material cast up from gravel extraction.
- 3.1.10 During the excavation of an existing service trench running across the southern half of the site layer 309 was seen to have been cut by a 1m diameter vertical shaft (313) (Section 302), into which a roughly built circular stone lining had been constructed (312). This had been built using crudely dressed limestone blocks laid without mortar. The full depth of the feature was not exposed but it could be seen to be in excess of 1m in depth within the section. Filling and also overlaying 312, and overlying layer 309 elsewhere was a 0.38m deep deposit of mixed mid brown sandy silt (308), a probable layer of made ground. A modern landscaping layer of dark grey silty loam (307), 0.28m in depth had been laid over that.
- 3.1.11 Excavations for a lift shaft and crane base (Sections 305 and 306 respectively) also exposed the natural gravel 311. Within the crane base the truncated bottoms of a number of circular gravel extraction pits could be observed, (324, 326, 328 and 330). All these were roughly circular and measured approximately 6m in diameter. They had all been backfilled with similar redeposited material, a greyish yellow-brown mixed clay silt and gravel, (323, 325, 327 and 329). An overall layer of yellow-brown clayey silt containing gravel and fragments of bricks 0.35m in depth (322) sealed the fills of all the pits.
- 3.1.12 Layer 322 was in turn sealed below a 0.55m deep layer of grey-brown clay loam (321). This deposit contained fragments of brick and is a probable modern (20th century) landscaping layer.
- 3.1.13 Within the area of the lift shaft pit (Section 305) the underlying natural gravel 311 was overlain by a 0.3m deep layer of mid brown clay silt containing gravel and some brick fragments (319). This layer was covered by a 0.3m deep layer of yellow-brown clay silt (318), which was also exposed within the base of Section 304. Observed within the surface of this deposit were a number of timbers measuring 3m x 0.25m x 0.15m. The size of the timbers and the presence of groups of four holes in their upper face would indicate that these were re-used railway sleepers. It is probable that they were laid down during the construction of the Hilda Beese building. The timbers and layer 318 elsewhere had been covered by a 0.25 m deep layer of reddish brown silty loam (317), probably an earlier landscaping layer.
- 3.1.14 Overlying layer 317 was a 0.25m deep layer of crushed stone (316). The piling mat associated with the current phase of building (320) overlaid the entire area.
- 3.1.15 During the topsoil strip over the area of Building 2 a layer of reddish brown sandy silt containing fragments of brick was exposed (314) (Section 303), overlaid by the modern landscaping deposit, a 0.28m deep layer of dark grey-brown silty loam (307).



### 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Artefacts recovered during the course of the watching brief included examples of 19th century bricks, creamware pottery, bottle glass and occasional fragments of clay pipe stem. No dating evidence pre-dating the 19th century was observed.

### 3.3 Environmental remains

Due to nature and date of the deposits observed no samples were taken for palaeo-environmental processing.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 A number of quarry pits were identified and the whole site displayed evidence of having been disturbed by small scale gravel extraction. There were no deposits pre-dating the post-medieval period or undisturbed deposits overlying the gravel, suggesting that the area had been subject to widespread excavation which has truncated or removed any earlier deposits.
- 4.1.2 The results broadly agree with the observations made during the four previous archaeological investigations undertaken within the vicinity of the new Gateway Buildings, conducted in 1994, 2000, 2008 and 2011, all of which observed evidence for small scale gravel extraction in the post-medieval period with the subsequent truncation of any overlying deposits.
- 4.1.3 The record of quarry pits suggest that the wider area has been subject to significant gravel extraction in the Victorian period.



## APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Comments	Finds	Date
300	Surface	0.05 m	2 m	Brick pathway to Hilda Besse building	Brick	C20th
301	Layer	0.08 m	2 m	Concrete base for path 300	-	C20th
302	Layer	0.25 m	> 5 m	Landscaping layer	Brick	C20th
303	Layer	0.05 m	3 m	Spread of coal dust from old boiler room	-	C19th/ C20th
304	Layer	0.12 m	> 3 m	Made ground	-	C19th/ C20th
305	Layer	0.12 m	> 3 m	Made ground	-	C19th/ C20th
306	Layer	> 0.2 m	> 3 m	Made ground, possible backfilling of cellar	Glass, brick, iron	C19th/ C20th
307	Layer	0.28 m	> 8 m	Modern landscaping layer	Brick	C20th
308	Layer	0.38 m	> 8 m	Made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th
309	Layer	0.12 m	> 4 m	Mixed redeposited gravel and soils	-	C19th
310	Layer	0.25 m	> 8 m	Made ground	Brick, pottery	C19th
311	Layer	> 0.5 m	> 8 m	Natural gravel ballast	-	-
312	Structure	> 1 m	1 m	Stone lined cess pit/soak-a-way	-	C19th
313	Cut	> 1 m	1 m	Shaft containing 312	-	C19th
314	Layer	> 0.15 m	> 8 m	Made ground	Brick	C19th
315	Layer	0.22 m	> 2 m	Made ground, bed for concrete slab path	-	C20th
316	Layer	0.25 m	> 8 m	Modern made ground	-	C20th
317	Layer	0.25 m	> 8 m	Made ground	-	C19th/ C20th
318	Layer	> 0.18 m	> 8 m	Made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th



319	Layer	0.3 m	> 8 m	Made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th
320	Layer	0.55 m	8 m	Piling mat	Brick, iron, plastic	C21st
321	Layer	0.55 m	> 6 m	Buried topsoil, landscaping layer	Brick	C20th
322	Layer	0.35 m	> 6 m	Made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th
323	Fill	> 0.4 m	6 m	Backfill of quarry pit 324	Brick	C19th
324	Cut	> 0.5 m	6 m	Small gravel extraction pit	-	C19th
325	Fill	> 0.5 m	5.5 m	Backfill of quarry pit 326	Brick	C19th
326	Cut	> 0.5 m	5.5 m	Small gravel extraction pit	-	C19th
327	Fill	> 0.5 m	5.5 m	Backfill of quarry pit 326	Brick	C19th
328	Cut	> 0.5 m	5.5 m	Small gravel extraction pit	-	C19th
329	Fill	> 0.5 m	5.5 m	Backfill of quarry pit 326	Brick	C19th
330	Cut	> 0.5 m	5.5 m	Small gravel extraction pit	-	C19th
331	Wall	> 0.5 m	> 0.5 m	Cellar wall	Brick	C19th



## APPENDIX B. REFERENCES

IFA 2008	<i>Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs</i>
OA 1992	<i>Fieldwork Manual</i> (ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)
OA 2000	<i>St Antony's College, Woodstock Road, Oxford: Archaeological Evaluation</i> (unpublished client report)
OA 2008	<i>St Antony's College, Oxford: Archaeological Evaluation Report</i> (unpublished client report)
OA 2011	<i>St Antony's College, Woodstock Road, Oxford: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief</i>
OA 2011	<i>Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford: Archaeological Evaluation Report</i> (unpublished client report)
OAU 1994	<i>St Antony's College, Woodstock Road, Oxford: Archaeological Evaluation</i> (unpublished client report)



## APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	New Gateway Buildings, St Antony's College, Woodstock Road, Oxford
Site code:	OXANT 11
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SP 509 074
Type of watching brief:	Ground reduction prior to the laying of a piling mat, machine excavation of groundbeam trenches together with a lift shaft pit and a base for a tower crane.
Date and duration of project:	October to November 2011
Area of site:	Approximately 3000m <sup>2</sup>
Summary of results:	The whole site displayed evidence of having been disturbed by small scale gravel extraction. There were no deposits pre-dating the post-medieval period or undisturbed deposits overlying the gravel suggesting that the area had been subject to widespread excavation which has truncated or removed any earlier deposits.
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at the Oxford Archaeology offices, Janus House and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service under accession number OXCMS:2008.85 in due course.





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Figure 1: Site location

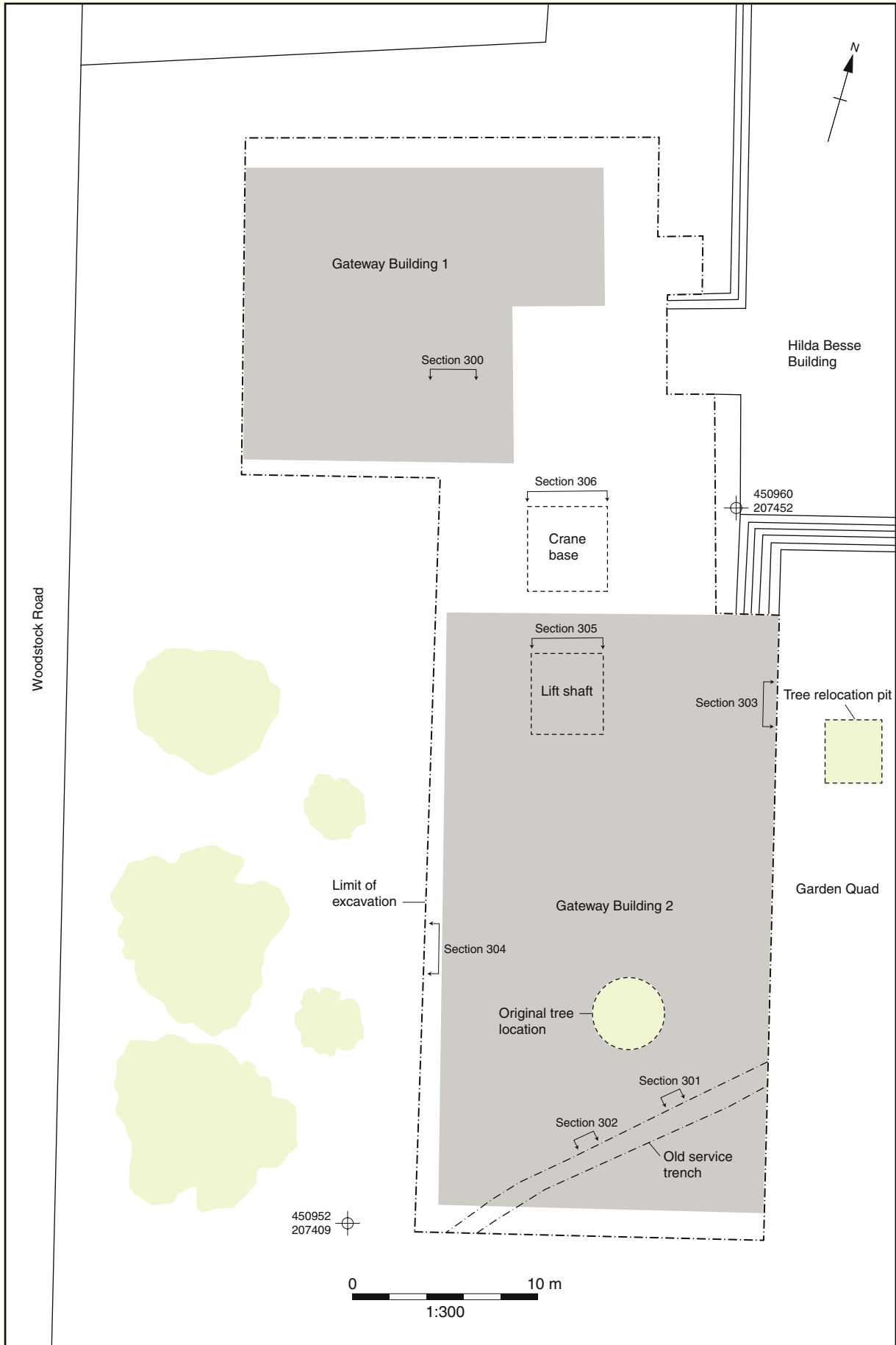


Figure 2: Site plan



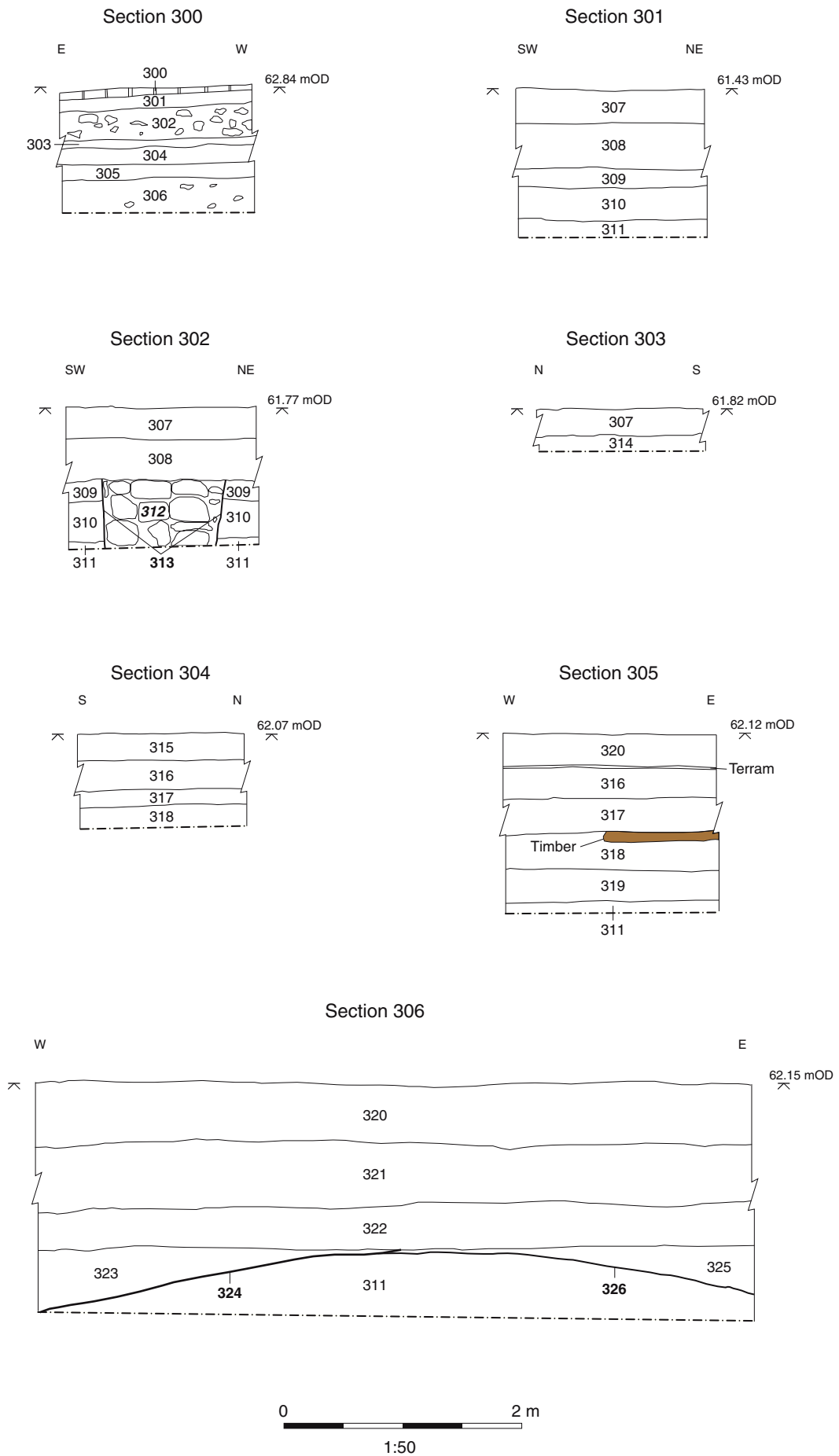


Figure 3: Sections





**Head Office/Registered Office/  
OA South**

Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800  
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496  
e: [info@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:info@oxfordarch.co.uk)  
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

**OA North**

Mill 3  
Moor Lane  
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000  
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606  
e: [oanorth@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oanorth@thehumanjourney.net)  
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

**OA East**

15 Trafalgar Way  
Bar Hill  
Cambridgeshire  
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500  
f: +44 (0) 1223 850599  
e: [oaeast@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net)  
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>



**Director:** David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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