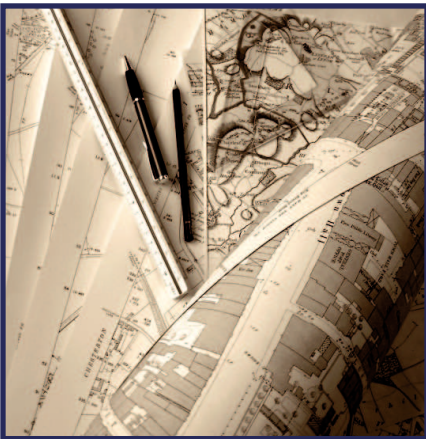


Wolfson Building Extension
Somerville College
Oxford



Archaeological
Evaluation Report

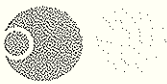


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Wolfson Building Extension, Somerville College, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Written by Mike Sims

and illustrated by Julia Collins

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Summary

On the 19th and 20th of September 2011 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an Archaeological Evaluation on the site of a proposed extension to the Wolfson Building, Somerville College, Oxford (Centred at SP 5091 0692). The evaluation revealed a sequence of late 18th/19th century worked soils directly overlying the prevailing natural. These deposits had been severely truncated by a number of large pits, probably dug for gravel extraction, which had been backfilled with redeposited material, domestic refuse and construction debris dating to the 19th century. These pits may be associated with either the construction of the original manor house in 1829 or possibly the late 19th century college building programme. No evidence for the continuation of the archaeology observed in the adjacent Radcliffe Infirmary site was encountered.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by AKS Ward to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the site of a proposed extension to the Wolfson Building at Somerville College, Oxford.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken in advance of submission of a Planning Application. Because of the complexity of the archaeology from adjacent sites, a brief was set by David Radford, the City Archaeologist for Oxford City Council (OCC 2011), detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process. OA produced a Written Statement of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet these requirements (OA, 2011).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Somerville College lies between Walton Street and St Giles, with the Radcliffe Infirmary to the north and Little Claredon Street to the south. The development area is situated to the north-east of the Wolfson Building (centred at SP 5091 0692).
- 1.2.2 The area of proposed development currently consists of a level grassed open space within the college grounds (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.3 The underlying geology of the area is 1st Terrace River Gravel (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no. 236).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site has been prepared for the brief and is reproduced here.
- 1.3.2 Somerville college was founded in 1879. Walton House built in 1829 was its original home, but a building programme commenced in 1881 and continued into the 20th century. The West Building, north of the Wolfson Building is a Grade II listed 19th century structure. The 1st edition OS 1:500 map shows a tree lined track belonging to the gardens of Walton House running through the proposed building's footprint.
- 1.3.3 An extensive open area excavation on the adjacent Radcliffe Infirmary site in 2009 by Museum of London Archaeology recorded evidence for prehistoric, Saxon, medieval, post-medieval and early modern remains, which included the remains of a truncated middle Neolithic enclosure, four late Neolithic-early Bronze age ring ditches and contemporary satellite cremation burials. Evidence was also recovered for dispersed 6th century Saxon occupation, including a sunken featured building close to the Walton Street frontage. A double Late Neolithic-early Bronze Age ring ditch was recorded 40 m north-east of the Wolfson Building and a Saxon pit containing unfired loom weights was recorded 70 m to the north. Numerous undated features were also recorded across the site (MOLA, 2010).



2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The primary objective of the evaluation was to gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of burial of important archaeological remains (and associated palaeo-environmental deposits) within the area of study. This would then be used to formulate a suitable mitigation strategy for the extensions construction.
- 2.1.2 A secondary objective was to establish whether prehistoric or Saxon remains are present given the extensive Neolithic-Bronze Age ritual and funerary landscape and early Saxon settlement identified at the adjacent Radcliffe Infirmary site.
- 2.1.3 As part of the above objectives it was necessary to:
- (i) Establish the extent, nature and date of any archaeological deposits encountered within the area of trial trenching;
 - (ii) Preserve by record any archaeological deposits encountered during the course of the evaluation;
 - (iii) Secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.;
 - (iv) Disseminate results through the production of a grey literature report.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The brief issued by David Radford requires that a total of 10 m length of trial (evaluation) trenching be excavated within the footprint of the proposed development. To avoid a complex and dense network of buried services this was accomplished by the excavation of two 5 m long trenches as shown in Fig. 2. The overburden was removed in approximate 0.15 m spits by a machine using a 1.6 m wide toothless grading bucket. This continued until either the first significant archaeological horizon was encountered or until undisturbed natural geology was observed.
- 2.2.2 Hand excavation of archaeological features was undertaken in order to achieve reliable identification of both extent and character of any identified features and to recover dating evidence.



3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results from each trench will be described separately followed by an overall discussion and conclusion.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil conditions were dry and the context boundaries were clearly defined. The groundwater was not encountered.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 The stratigraphy observed was similar in both trenches with comparable dating evidence recovered from the deposits.

3.4 Trench 1 (*Fig. 3, Plan 10 and Fig. 4, Sections 10 and 11*)

3.4.1 This trench measured 5 m long, 1.55 m wide and was excavated to an average depth of 1.15 m with a 2.3 m deep sondage dug at its southern end.

3.4.2 The underlying natural, a reddish brown sandy clay silt (16) was encountered at a depth of 0.96 m below the current ground level (Plan 10 and Sections 10 and 11). This was overlaid by a 0.25 m deep layer of mid brown sandy clay silt (19), containing charcoal flecking, abraded fragments of brick and C19th pottery (Section 11).

3.4.3 Above this was a 0.2 m deep layer of brown clay silt (18) which produced many small fragments of crushed and fractured stone. This in turn was overlaid by a 0.25 deep layer of reddish grey-brown clay silt (17) which produced fragments of clay pipe stem.

3.4.4 This deposit was cut by a very step sided feature (15) running the full width of the trench (Plan 10 and Section 10). A sondage was dug at the southern end of the trench in order to determine its depth but this was terminated at 2.3 m below ground level for safety reasons before bottoming the feature. A layer of dark grey-brown clay silt (14) exhibiting charcoal flecking and lens of oolitic gravel was exposed in the base of the sondage. This was overlaid by a layer of grey-brown clay-silt (13) measuring up to 0.5 m in depth. This deposit also contained a quantity of charcoal flecking. Covering this layer was a tipline of dark reddish brown clay silt (12) measuring up to 0.6 m in depth. This too contained quantities of charcoal flecking and produced fragments of pantile and salt glazed sewer pipe.

3.4.5 A layer of grey-brown clay silt (11), 0.3 m in depth overlaid 12 and produced fragments of 19th century clay pipe stem together with sherds of earthenware and creamware pottery. The southern half of this deposit was covered by a layer of reddish brown clay silt (10) which contained charcoal flecking and was up to 0.5 m deep. Overlying 10 and layer 11 in the northern half of the feature was a 0.6 m deep deposit of grey-brown clay silt (9). This contained a quantity of crushed and broken stone fragments together with charcoal flecking and produced fragments of creamware pottery, bottle glass and brick.

3.4.6 Sloping away to the south was a 0.08 deep layer of mixed gravel and grey brown clay silt (8). A layer of light grey-brown clay silt (7), up to 0.35 m in depth and containing crushed stone had been deposited in the top of the feature.

3.4.7 Cutting the northern edge of Feature 15 and its fills was a later steep sided Pit (6) whose south-east corner appears in plan (Plan 10, Sections 10 and 11). The lowest



deposit observed within this feature was a layer of dark grey-brown clay silt containing charcoal flecking and crushed stone (5). This deposit could be seen to be in excess of 0.3 m deep in section. Overlying this was a layer of grey-brown clay silt (4) tipping down to the south containing a percentage of gravels and displaying charcoal flecking.

- 3.4.8 Above this deposit was a layer of orange brown sandy silt clay (3) containing a large percentage of gravel and producing fragments of both red and yellow brick and clay pipe stem. Layer 3 measured between 0.15 m and 0.35 m in depth. The top of the feature was filled by a 0.15 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (2).
- 3.4.9 Overlying the top of the pits and layer 17 was a 0.25 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silty loam (1), the present day topsoil and turf.

3.5 Trench 2 (*Fig. 3, Plan 20 and Fig. 4, Section 20*)

- 3.5.1 This trench measured 5 m long and 1.55 m wide and was excavated to an average depth of 0.96 m with a sondage, an extra 0.3 m deep, hand dug at the southern end.
- 3.5.2 The underlying natural, a reddish brown sandy clay silt (24), similar to (16), was encountered at a depth of 0.88 m below the current ground level (Plan 20 and Section 20). This deposit contained lenses of yellow-brown (terrace ?) gravel, particularly towards the southern end of the trench.
- 3.5.3 Overlying this was a 0.25 m deep layer of mid brown sandy clay silt (23), containing charcoal flecking, fragments of ceramic roof tile and glazed creamware 19th century pottery. Covering this was a 0.2 m deep layer of brown clay silt (22) which also produced examples of creamware pottery. Above this was a 0.25 m deep layer of reddish grey-brown clay silt (21) which produced fragments of clay pipe stem and a large flake of flint.
- 3.5.4 Cutting layer 21 at the south-western corner of the trench was a very steep sided pit (25). A sondage approximately 0.3 m deep was dug across the feature in order to determine its profile and to recover dating evidence.
- 3.5.5 Exposed within the base of the sondage and section was a layer of yellowish grey-brown clay silt (29). This could be seen to be in excess of 0.2 m deep within the section and contained charcoal flecking together with sherds of earthenware and creamware pottery, bottle glass, brick fragments and fragments of a corroded curved iron strip, possibly part of a barrel hoop.
- 3.5.6 This was overlaid by a layer of grey-brown clay silt (28), up to 0.5 m in depth. This deposit contained numerous fragments of brick and tile, roofing slate, bottle glass and creamware pottery. Above this was a 0.28 m deep layer of light yellow-brown clay silt (27) which produced some iron objects including nails and part of a tin can. The top of the pit was filled by a light brown clay silt loam (26), up to 0.38 m in depth.
- 3.5.7 Layer 21 and Pit 25 was covered by a 0.25 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (20), the present day topsoil and turf.

3.6 Finds summary

- 3.6.1 The vast majority of the dating evidence recovered could be dated to the later part of the 18th and 19th centuries. These artefacts included fragments of hand and machine made brick and tile, bottle glass, clay pipe stem (no makers stamps observed), creamware pottery (including transfer printed "willow pattern" types), glazed earthenware and iron/steel articles including a piece of barrel hoop and part of the seam from a tin can.



- 3.6.2 The sole example of an earlier artefact was the single flint flake recovered from layer 21. Examination of the flake showed no evidence of working and it is probable that it represents a plough struck flake, however since black flint does not occur locally its presence might be considered indirect evidence for possible nearby neolithic activity, possibly that observed in the adjacent Radcliffe Infirmary site.



4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The evaluation trenches represent a 16% sample of the development area. The stratigraphy observed and dating evidence recovered was comparable in both the trenches, which together with the percentage sample and the location of the trenches at diagonal ends of the development area would suggest that the stratigraphy would be similar across the area allowing a reliable prediction of the potential archaeology within the unexcavated area.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 As can be seen 4.1.1 the similarity of the results from the two trenches would suggest that the results can be used as a predictive model throughout the site.

4.2.2 No evidence for the continuation of the archaeology encountered on the adjacent Radcliffe Infirmary site continuing into the development area was observed. It is possible that the post-medieval cultivation of the site together with the excavation of the pits may have truncated any such evidence, however the absence of truncated features observed within the natural and the lack of residual finds suggests an absence of pre 18th century archaeology.

4.3 Interpretation

Trench 1

4.3.1 Layer (16) exposed at the northern end of the trench is similar to the material known as "supra-natural" encountered elsewhere within the City of Oxford. This material is a clean deposit which normally overlies the terrace gravel. The stratigraphy observed above this deposit within the trench suggest a sequence of worked (possibly garden) soils dating between the late 18th and 19th centuries (Layers 17, 18 and 19). This conclusion is drawn from the evenness of the deposits together with their composition and the dating evidence recovered.

4.3.2 These had been cut by two large, very steep sided, rectangular pits (6 and 15). The full depth of these features was not established but their depth would seem to be in excess of that normally excavated for the purpose of rubbish or cess pits. Their size, shape and absence of any form of lining would mitigate against their being wells. The edges of the features are still well defined in section with no evidence of slumping or erosion which suggests that they were not open for any length of time. A probable explanation is that they represent gravel extraction pits. The fills recorded appear to be a mixture of redeposited material (possibly material cast out from newly opened pits), with some residual finds and possible construction debris. It is possible that they may have been dug to supply material either for the construction of Walton House or more likely for the expansion of the college in the 1880s and onwards.

4.3.3 The overlying topsoil and turf (1) appears to be a later landscaping layer probably associated with the college's building programme from the 1880s onwards. The absence of any accumulated soil above the backfilled features prior to landscaping may also be indicative of the pits being contemporary with the late 19th century building programme.



Trench 2

- 4.3.4 The material known as “supra-natural” (24) was encountered throughout the base of the trench. As in Trench 1 a sequence of worked soils dating between the late 18th and 19th centuries (Layers 21, 22 and 23) was observed above this deposit .
- 4.3.5 A corner of a steep sided rectangular feature (25) was observed cutting these deposits in the south-west corner of the trench. The similarity of the feature and also its fills suggest a similar purpose and date to those encountered in trench 1.

4.4 Significance

- 4.4.1 The deposits observed were of low significance and the stratigraphy recorded in both of the trenches is very similar. Earlier archaeological deposits, if they were ever present, have been destroyed as a result of truncation from agriculture or quarrying.
- 4.4.2 The only potential for survival of any significant deposits is for those that have been cut into, or below, the “supra-natural” that has survived across much of Trench 2, and possibly elsewhere on the site.
- 4.4.3 The evaluation suggests that there is a low potential for the survival of significant remains within the area likely to be impacted by the planned development.



APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description				Orientation		SE-NW
A sequence of late 18 th and 19 th century worked soils directly overlying the natural. These had been cut by two large vertical sided pits backfilled with 19 th century material.				Avg. depth (m)		1.15 m
				Width (m)		1.55 m
				Length (m)		5 m
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
1	Layer	1.55 m	0.25m	Present day topsoil and turf	Clay pipe, brick	19 th century
2	Fill	> 0.7 m	0.28 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 6	Brick	19 th century
3	Fill	> 0.7 m	0.15 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 6	-	19 th century
4	Fill	> 0.7 m	0.35 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 6	Brick	19 th century
5	Fill	> 0.7 m	> 0.3 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 6	Brick	19 th century
6	Cut	> 0.7 m	> 1 m	Probable gravel extraction pit	-	19 th century
7	Fill	> 1.5 m	0.35 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 15	Brick	19 th century
8	Fill	> 1.5 m	0.08 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 15	-	19 th century
9	Fill	> 1.5 m	0.65 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 15	Brick	19 th century
10	Fill	> 1.5 m	0.55 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 15	-	19 th century
11	Fill	> 1.5 m	0.35 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 15	Brick, pottery	19 th century
12	Fill	> 1.5 m	0.6 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 15	Tile, salt glazed pipe	19 th century
13	Fill	> 1.5 m	0.5 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 15	-	19 th century
14	Fill	> 1.5 m	0.35 m	Tipline of fill within Pit 15	-	19 th century
15	Cut	> 1.5 m	> 1 m	Probable gravel extraction pit	-	19 th century
16	Layer	> 1.5 m	> 0.1 m	"Supra-natural"	-	-
17	Layer	> 0.8 m	0.2 m	Worked (garden) soil	Clay pipe	18 th / 19 th century
18	Layer	> 0.8 m	0.2 m	Worked (garden) soil	Clay pipe, brick	18 th / 19 th century
19	Layer	> 0.8 m	0.25 m	Worked (garden) soil	Clay pipe	18 th / 19 th century



APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- MOLA 2010 *Oxford Radcliffe, Observatory Quarter, Radcliffe Infirmary Site, Oxford: Draft Post-excavation Assessment*
- OA, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)*
- OA, 2011 *Wolfson Building Extension, Somerville College, Oxford: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation*
- OCC 2011 *Brief for an Archaeological Field Evaluation (Trial Trenching), Somerville College, Wolfson Building Extension*



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Wolfson Building Extension, Somerville College, Oxford

Site code: OXWOLF 11

Grid reference: Centred at SP 5091 0692

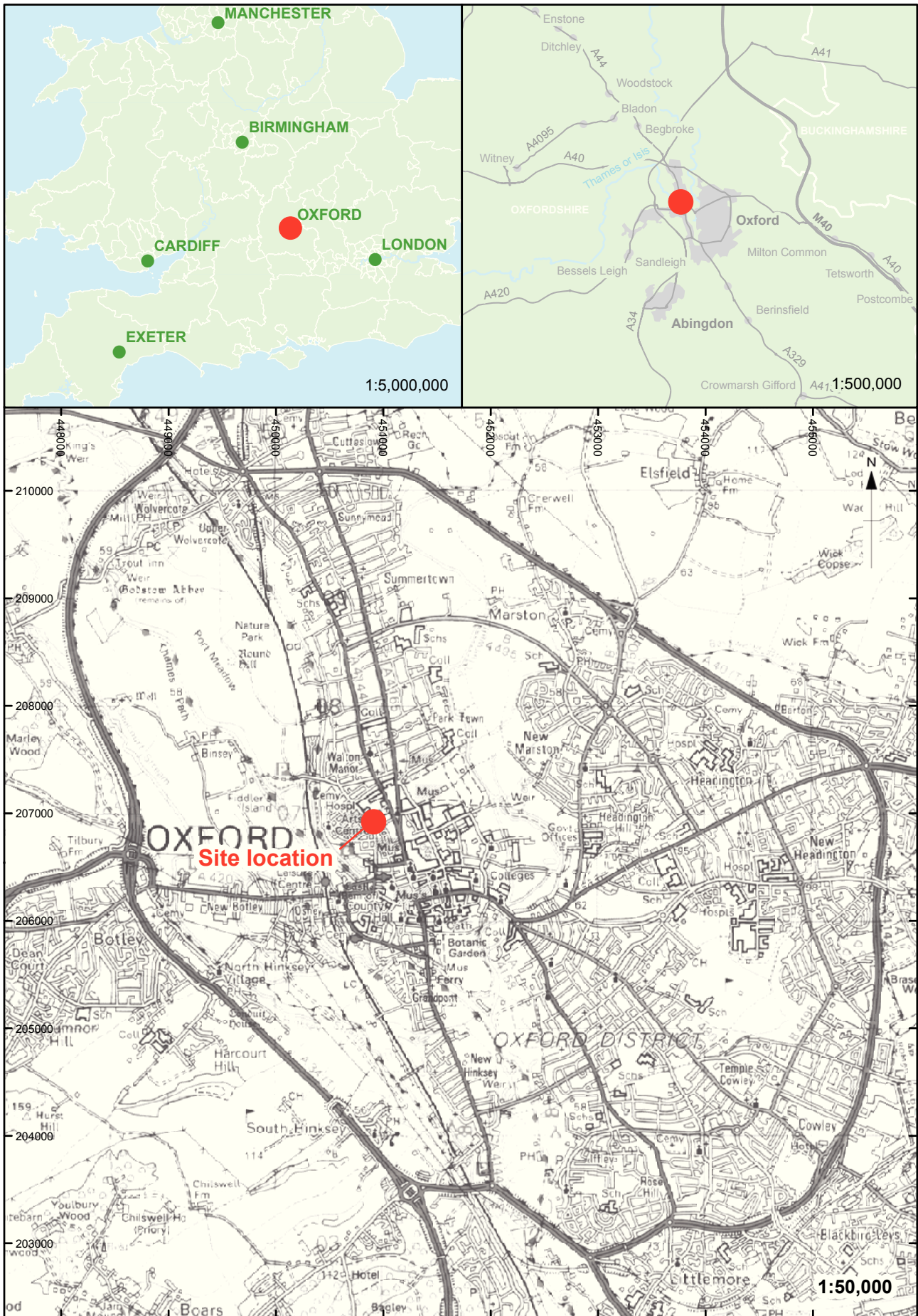
Type: Evaluation

Date and duration: 19th and 20th September 2011

Area of site: c200 m²

Summary of results: The evaluation revealed a sequence of late 18th/19th century worked soils directly overlying the prevailing natural. These had been severely truncated by a number of large pits, probably dug for gravel extraction, which had been backfilled with redeposited material, domestic refuse and construction debris dating to the 19th century. These pits may be associated with the construction of the original manor house in 1829 or more probably the late 19th century college building programme. No evidence for the continuation of the archaeology observed in the adjacent Radcliffe Infirmary site was encountered.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, under the accession number: OXCMS:2011.159



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Figure 1: Site location

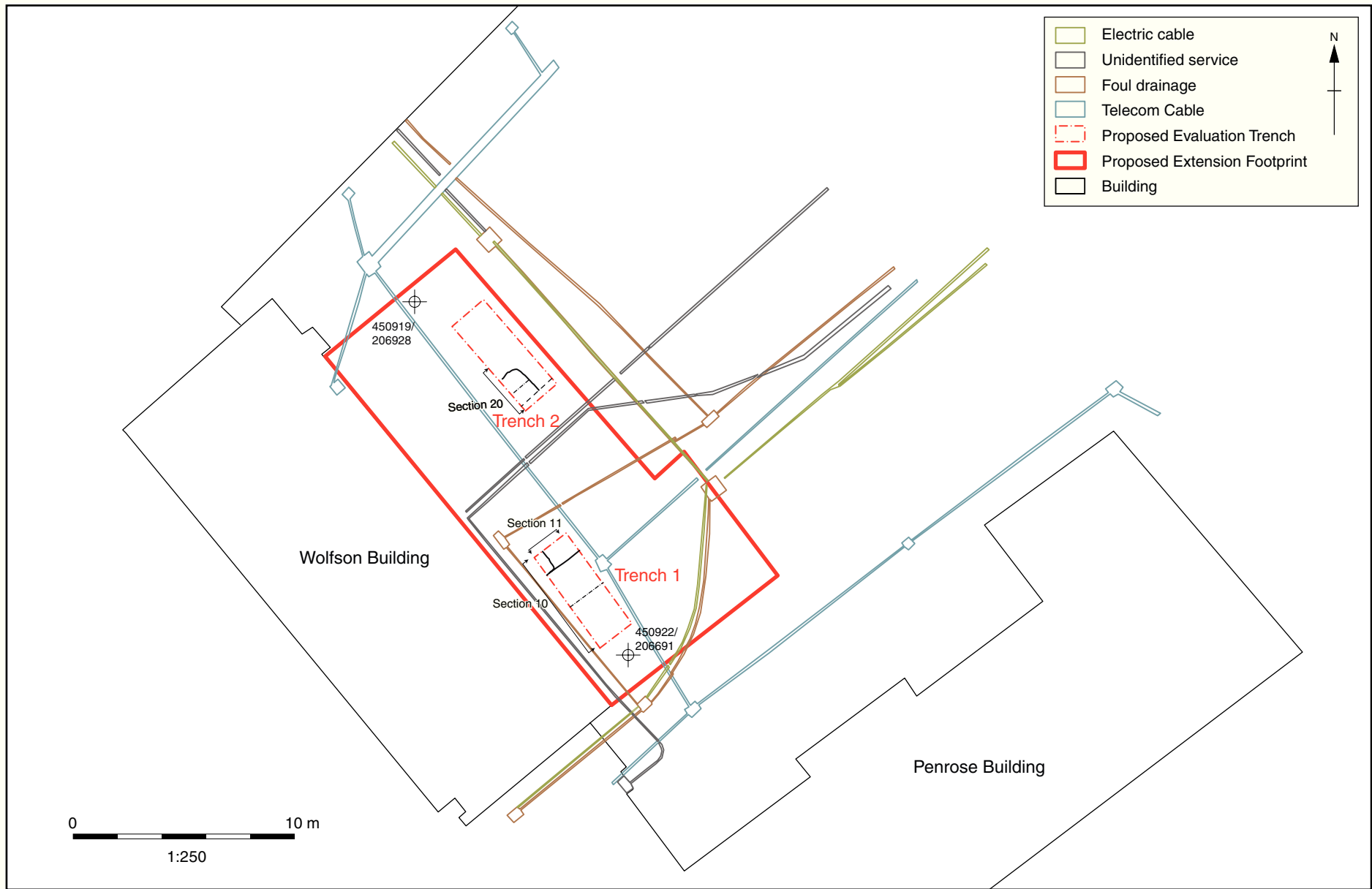


Figure 2: Trench locations



Figure 3: Trench plans



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