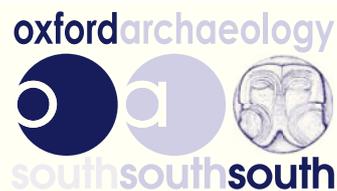


Mill Street Aylesbury



Archaeological Evaluation Report



April 2011

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NGR: SP 8237 1404
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|-------|----------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Mike Donnelly Project Officer | Jodie Ford | Dan Poore Head of Fieldwork | |

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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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Mill Street, Aylesbury

Archaeological Evaluation Report

*Written by Mike Donnelly, with contributions by Jon Cotter and Dan Stansbie and
illustrated by Markus Dylewski, Leo Heatley and Dan Watkeys*

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology South was commissioned by Hill Partnerships Ltd to undertake an archaeological evaluation at land off Mill Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. The work took place over two days in March 2011.

Due to severe contamination and considerable truncation caused by the previous use of the site as a car dealership/garage, very little archaeological evidence was discovered. No trace was discovered of the Roman road known as Akeman Street, but a sherd of Iron Age or Roman pottery was found perhaps indicating a limited presence here at that time.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project details

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA), was commissioned by Hill Partnerships Ltd to undertake an archaeological evaluation at land off Mill Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. The proposed development consists of 23 two-bed flats and includes car parking, external landscape, a plant room, bicycle and refuse stores.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: 07/02956/APP). A brief was set by Eliza Alqassar of Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process, and in response OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (OA 2011b) defining the methodology by which those requirements would be implemented.

1.2 Location and scope of work

- 1.2.1 The area of proposed development currently consists of 0.19 ha (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The site is located c 375 m north east of Aylesbury town centre in the historic parish of Aylesbury. It is situated at the south east end of Mill Street, to the rear of Laneway and Norfolk Terrace with the dual carriageway of Vale Park Drive to the south east. The site is currently occupied by waste ground and is approximately 85 m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

1.3 Geology and topography

- 1.3.1 The underlying geology of the site is Kimmeridge Clay including Hartwell Clay, dating from the Jurassic period (Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales), Sheet 238).

1.4 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.4.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site has been described in detail in the Cultural Heritage Assessment (OA 2011a) and is summarised below.
- 1.4.2 The earliest archaeological feature identified to date in Aylesbury belongs to the Iron Age and takes the form of a large ditch, encountered on several occasions during archaeological works, which appears to have enclosed the area of the town centre. Stray finds of brooches have also been made here.
- 1.4.3 The main focus of the works at Mill Street was an attempt to identify any surviving remains of a Roman road known as Akeman Street. The exact route taken by this road is uncertain: one projection has it passing within 10 m of the southern corner of the site while another has it passing some 220 m to the south. Numerous Roman discoveries have been made within the town over the years and include the road, pits and ditches, more extensive occupation deposits and stray finds including several coins.
- 1.4.4 No earlier medieval activity is known from the town but several later medieval sites have been identified and include listed buildings, pits, wells and ditches.



2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 General

2.1.1 The evaluation aimed to gather sufficient information to establish the archaeological potential of the site. To achieve this the general objectives were to:

- establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area,
- determine and confirm the character and depth of any remains present, without compromising any deposits that may merit detailed investigation under full area excavation,
- determine or establish the date range of any remains from artefacts or otherwise,
- characterise any underlying archaeological strata down to undisturbed geology without significantly impacting upon significant younger (overlying) deposits where possible,
- determine the geo-archaeological and palaeo-environmental potential of any archaeological deposits encountered,
- establish what archaeological remains/deposits may be affected by any proposed development.

2.2 Specific aims and objectives

2.2.1 The specific aim of the evaluation was to determine if Roman remains were present in order to further the research agenda for Aylesbury defined in the Town Report (Beckley and Green 2008). The report for Aylesbury was prepared as part of the Historic Towns Project to inform and advise the planning process. The report highlights the need for more detailed research into the path of Akeman Street to the north of the historic town centre.

2.3 Methodology

- 2.3.1 Two 25m trenches were excavated across the site area by a JCB with a flat toothless bucket 1.8 m wide. The trenches had depths varying from 0.6 m to 1.2 m. One of the trench footprints coincided with a new service put in place prior to archaeological works commencing, this allowed us to view the deposits at that locality to a depth of 2 m.
- 2.3.2 The fieldwork took 1.5 days to complete, by a team consisting of a Project Officer, directing one Project Archaeologist/Surveyor, under the management of a Senior Project Manager.
- 2.3.3 Both trenches were excavated at an angle of 90 degrees across the projected path of the NW – SE aligned Roman road.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The report will briefly outline the ground conditions met here and then describe each trench in turn.



3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The evaluation encountered severe difficulties in the underlying ground conditions. The site had been used as a car dealership/garage for some time, and the degree of disturbance and contamination was much greater than expected from the borehole and test pit logs. Trench 1 had localised contamination, while Trench 2 was unworkable due to the excessive contamination. In addition, most of Trench 2 had been heavily truncated by activity associated with the garage and the remaining third was stained with hydrocarbons down to a depth of 2m below ground level (bgl).

3.3 Trench 1

3.3.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 2) was sealed by concrete along most its length (context 100), except at the northern corner where the trench cut through a former garden area and at the north-eastern side where it had been cut by a geotechnical test pit (TP 1). Below this was context 101, a mix of bricks and garden soil made ground overlying at the northern end context 102, an area of redeposited/disturbed natural (Fig. 3). This contained post-medieval ceramic building material (CBM), glazed pottery and a single abraded sherd of probable Iron Age/Roman pottery.

3.3.2 Several dark, irregular soil-marks were observed on the surface of the exposed natural (weathered Kimmeridge clay 103), some of which smelled distinctively of diesel or other fuels. Most of these proved to be contamination from the former garage/car dealership but two represented features, albeit natural in origin. The southern end of the trench contained further evidence of the garage in the form of a brick and metal lined oil trap.

3.3.3 Natural features 104 and 106 showed as broad irregular bands across the trench, similar in plan to slightly irregular ditches around 4 m wide. Their 'cuts' displayed irregular sides, mostly vertical or undercutting, and they were filled with a very dark greyish-blue sandy-clay material with a polygonal pattern of thin brown clayey-sand wedges spaced throughout (Fig. 3). These dived downwards at acute angles through the main body of the fill.

3.3.4 Examination of two of these 'features' revealed them to be natural in origin and they are most likely periglacial ice wedges dating to the late Pliocene.

3.3.5 No archaeological features were present within Trench 1.

3.4 Trench 2

3.4.1 Trench 2 (Fig. 2) ran for part of its course along the same alignment as a very recently cut service trench which had significantly truncated the central part of the trench's location. As the concrete cap (context 200) had already been broken, it was decided against moving the trench. The service trench allowed view of a deeper (c 2 m) sondage through the encountered soil horizons.

3.4.2 The central part of Trench 2, just south of the most heavily disturbed section, contained another oil trap. South of this, the entire area to a depth of over 1.2 m consisted of context 201, a very heavily disturbed/contaminated made ground containing bricks, concrete, and a crushed oil drum, indicating that most of this disturbance had occurred very recently.

3.4.3 The northern half of Trench 2 contained no obvious archaeology but appeared to contain very contaminated Kimmeridge Clay natural (202)(Fig. 4). Due to the high degree of contamination, no effort was made to establish if this was redeposited or *in situ*.



3.4.4 No visible archaeological features or deposits were present within Trench 2.

3.5 Finds summary

3.5.1 Very few finds were recovered from the evaluation. One sherd of probable Iron Age/Roman pottery, a sherd of glazed pottery and two fragments of tile were all recovered from context 103 and are described in more detail below.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The evaluation met with severe difficulties in the form of significant ground contamination and a fairly high degree of truncation of the natural clays. However, despite the contaminants, the results obtained would appear to be a fair reflection of the archaeological potential of the site. The northerly trench, Trench 1, had far less contamination and truncation than Trench 2 to the south, but the trench had still been affected by the previous use of the site as a garage, and it is likely that the intervening zone between the trenches will be similarly affected.

4.1.2 Although no trace was discovered of the Roman road, a high degree of truncation has taken place and this may have removed any traces of it or associated Roman activity.

4.2 Interpretation

4.2.1 The only discovery of note was the single sherd of pottery of later prehistoric or Roman date. This might suggest activity of that date in the vicinity of the site, but equally may be a stray find of no significance.

4.2.2 No evidence of the projected line of Akeman Street was found. This is either because the feature did not pass along its projected alignment at this point, or because later activity at the site has removed evidence for it.

4.3 Significance

4.3.1 The results show that there appears to be low potential for important archaeological remains to survive within the site boundaries.



APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

| Trench 1 | | | | | | |
|---|---------|-----------|-----------|--|-----------------------|---------------|
| General description | | | | | Orientation | NNE-SSW |
| Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil and subsoil overlying a natural of silty sand. | | | | | Avg. depth (m) | 0.6 |
| | | | | | Width (m) | 1.8 |
| | | | | | Length (m) | 25 |
| Contexts | | | | | | |
| context no | type | Width (m) | Depth (m) | comment | finds | date |
| 100 | Layer | - | 0.2 | Reinforced concrete capping | no | Modern |
| 101 | Layer | - | 0.2-0.4m | Mixture of brick course and garden type soil made ground | no | Modern |
| 102 | Layer | - | 0.2m | Mid greyish brown silty clay, redeposited/disturbed natural | Pot and CBM | Post-Medieval |
| 103 | Layer | - | 0.2m+ | Natural mid-light brown clay weathered Kimmeridge clay | no | Geological |
| 104 | Cut | 3.8m | 0.2m+ | 'natural feature cut' probable ice wedge | - | ?Pleistocene |
| 105 | Deposit | - | ? | Dark greyish blue sandy clay with polygonal light brown clayey sand wedges | no | ?Pleistocene |
| 106 | Cut | 4.2m | 0.3m+ | 'natural feature cut' probable ice wedge | - | ?Pleistocene |
| 107 | Deposit | - | ? | Dark greyish blue sandy clay with polygonal light brown clayey sand wedges | no | ?Pleistocene |

| Trench 2 | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|-----------|--|-----------------------|------------|
| General description | | | | | Orientation | NNE-SSW |
| Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of very contaminated natural and made ground under a concrete capping. | | | | | Avg. depth (m) | 1.2m |
| | | | | | Width (m) | 1.8 |
| | | | | | Length (m) | 23 |
| Contexts | | | | | | |
| context no | type | Width (m) | Depth (m) | comment | finds | date |
| 200 | Layer | - | 0.2 | Reinforced concrete capping | - | Modern |
| 201 | Layer | - | 1m+ | Heavily disturbed and contaminated made ground, very rich in hydrocarbons. | Modern material | Modern |
| 202 | Layer | - | 1.5m+ | Natural mid-light brown clay weathered Kimmeridge Clay | no | Geological |



APPENDIX B. FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

By Dan Stansbie and John Cotter

- B.1.1 One sherd (4 g) of probable Iron Age or Roman pottery was recovered from context 102 in Trench 1 along with more recent material, including CBM and post-medieval pottery. The pottery has been made from local clay which contains naturally occurring shell fragments as temper and could date from any time between the late Bronze Age to early post-medieval period, although the date range given above is most likely.
- B.1.2 A single sherd of glazed pottery (7 g) was recovered from the same layer. This represents a base sherd from a glazed vessel, probably a cup of 18th century date.

B.2 CBM

By John Cotter

- B.2.1 Two sherds of heavily abraded CBM, weighing 31 g, were recovered from context 102 and are probably fragments of post-medieval peg tile.



APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- Beckley, R, and Green, D, 2008, *Aylesbury: Historic Town Assessment*
- Oxford Archaeology, 1992 Fieldwork Manual, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)
- Oxford Archaeology, 2011a Mill Street, Aylesbury, Archaeological Evaluation, Cultural Heritage Assessment
- Oxford Archaeology, 2011b Mill Street, Aylesbury, Archaeological Evaluation, Written Scheme of Investigation



APPENDIX D. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Mill Street, Aylesbury - Archaeological Evaluation

Site code: AYML 11

Grid reference: SP 8237 1404

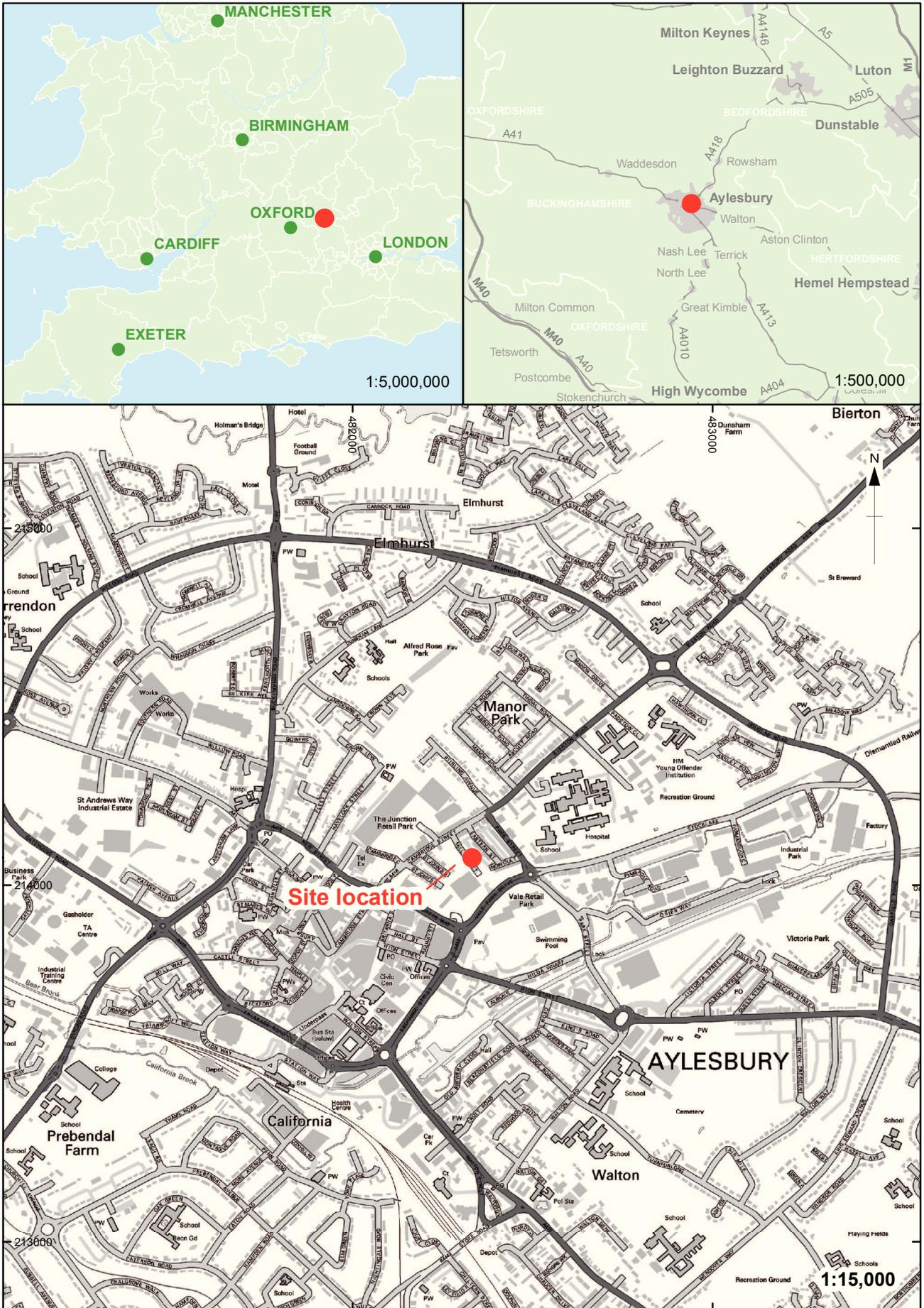
Type: Evaluation

Date and duration: 30th to 31st March 2011

Area of site: 0.19 hectare

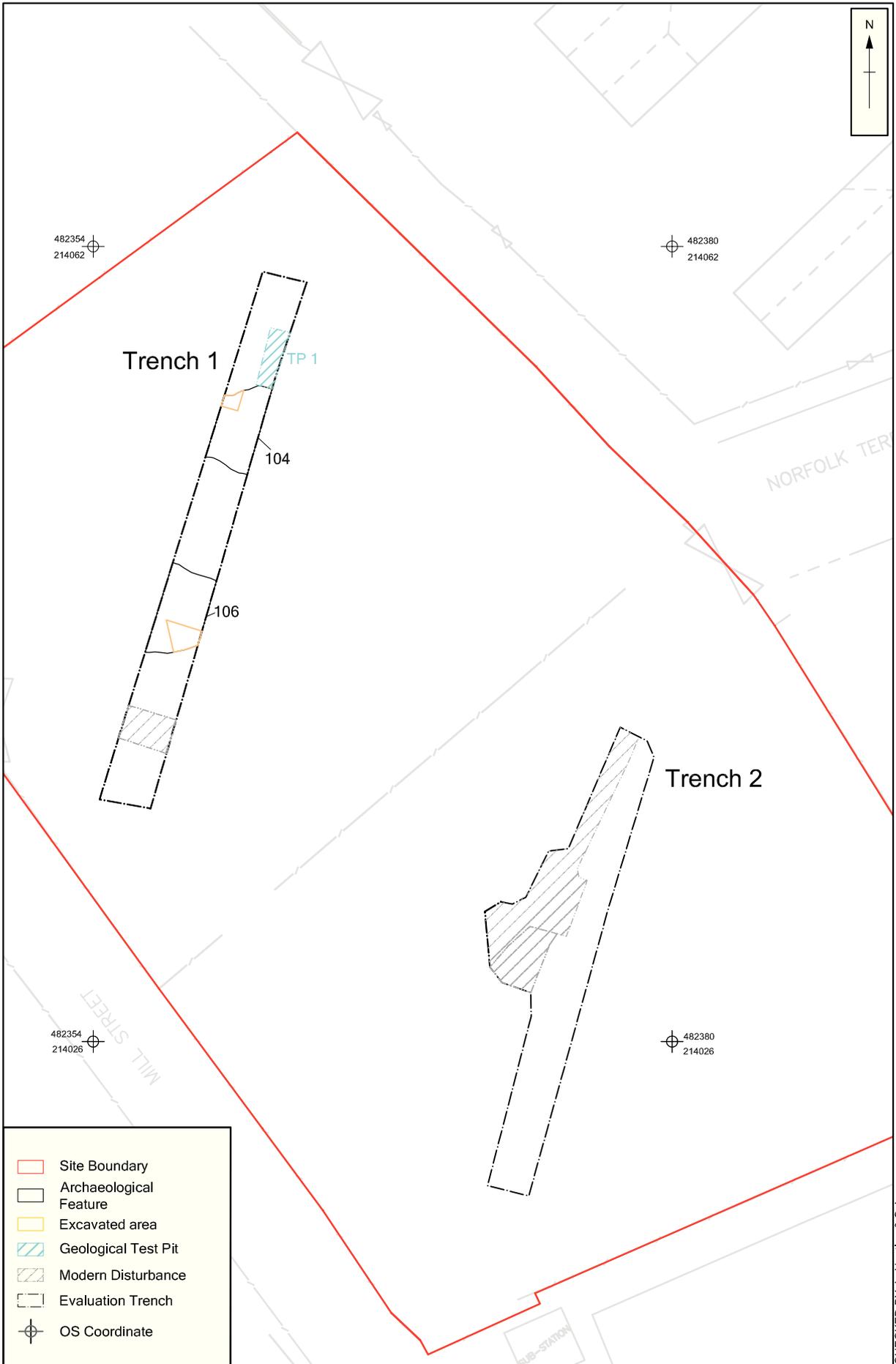
Summary of results: Two trenches were excavated at Mill Street, Aylesbury. Both trenches displayed high evidence of hydrocarbon contamination and a degree of truncation of the natural by a forecourt garage/ car dealership dating from the post-war period. This has largely removed any chance of determining the original archaeological potential of the site. The sole discovery of the evaluation was a sherd of later prehistoric or Roman pottery found in a later horizon. Glacial features dating to the Pleistocene were observed in the natural.

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



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Figure 1: Site location



X:\Aylesbury, Mill Street\Geomatics\02 CAD\001\current\AYML11_310311_OS.dwg(A4 portrait)****dan.watkeys* 08 Apr 2011

CHECKED BY: L. Heatley & S. Lucas

0 10 m
Scale at A4 1:250

Fig 2: Trench Plan

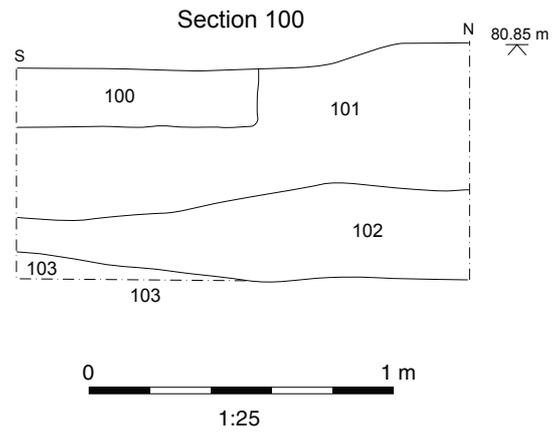
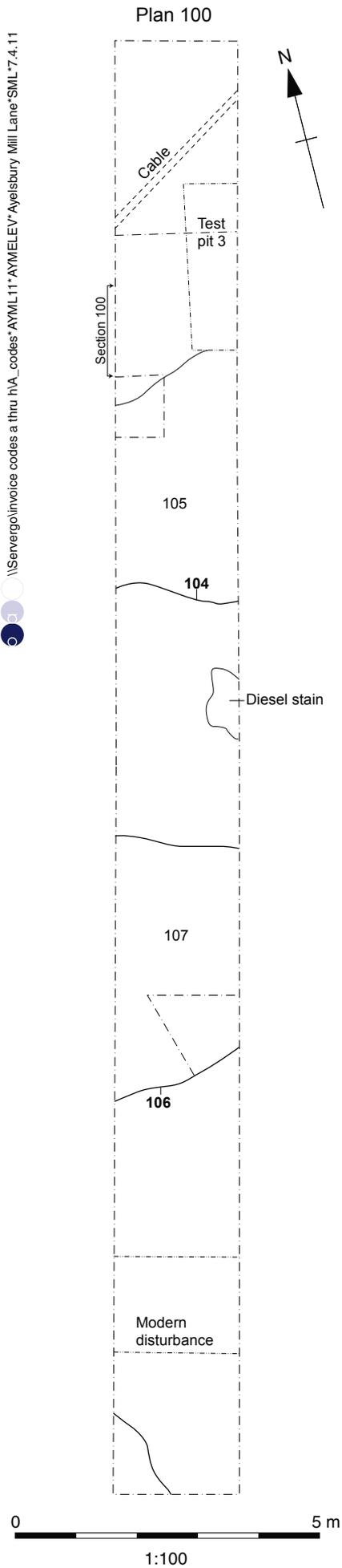
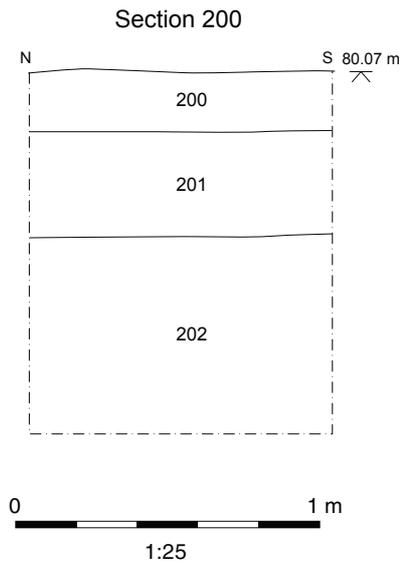


Figure 3: Trench 1, plan, section and photographs



Trench 2, from the north-east

Figure 4: Trench 2, section and photograph



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
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>

OA Méditerranée

115 Rue Merlot
ZAC La Louvade
34 130 Mauguio
France

t: +33 (0) 4.67.57.86.92
f: +33 (0) 4.67.42.65.93
e: [oamed@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oamed@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://oamed.fr/>

OA Grand Ouest

7 Rue des Monderaines
ZI - Ouest
14650 Carpiquet
France

t: +33 (0) 249 88 01 01
f: +33 (0) 249 88 01 02
e: [info@oago.fr](mailto: info@oago.fr)
w: <http://oago.fr>



Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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