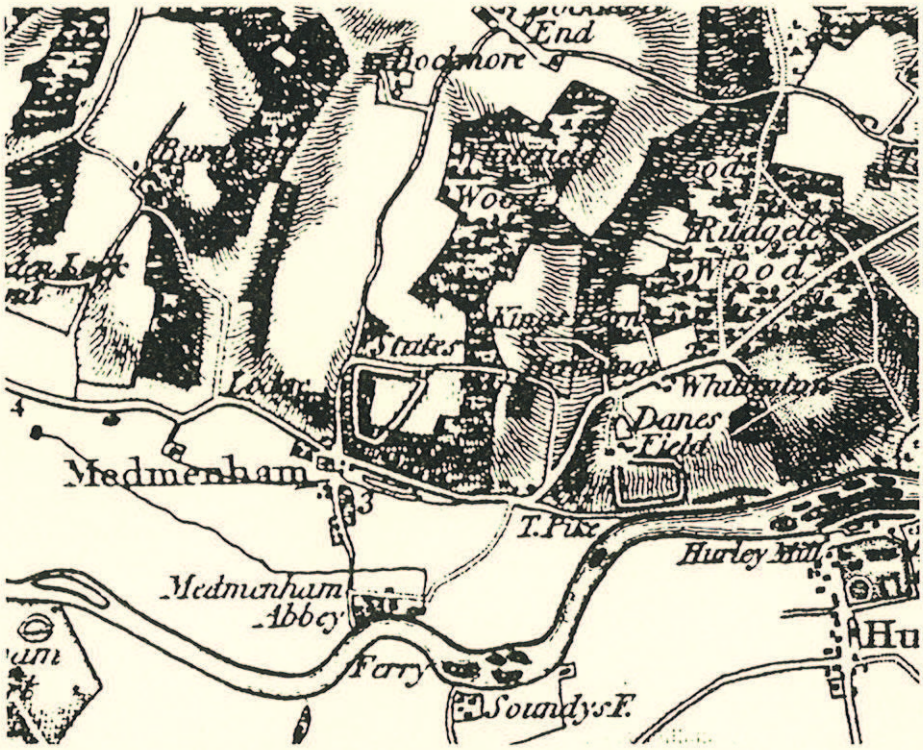
Danesfield House Hotel, Medmenham, Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR 8170 8430



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

February 1998

Danesfield House Hotel, Medmenham, Buckinghamshire

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Prepared by:	S Ford
Date:	27/2/98
Checked by:	R. Williams
Date:	6/3/1998
Approved by:	R. Williams HEAD OF FIELDWORK
Date:	6/3/1998

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SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation and watching brief at Danesfield House Hotel, Medmenham, Buckinghamshire, in conjunction with a geotechnical survey by STATS Geotechnical Limited, on behalf of the Danesfield House Hotel. The evaluation revealed no archaeological remains. Four trial trenches previously excavated by the Oxford Archaeological Unit within the footprint of the proposed building in 1990 revealed a number of undated subsoil features interpreted as tree planting holes, but no significant archaeological deposits (OAU 1990).

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation on 24th November 1997 at Danesfield Camp, Medmenham, on behalf of the Danesfield House Hotel, in respect of a planning application for a new spa facility. The work was carried out concurrently with a geotechnical survey by STATS Geotechnical Limited. The proposed development lies within the Danesfield Camp Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM No.BU 135), and is therefore under statutary protection. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by the Oxford Archaeological Unit and appproved by English Heritage. The proposed building is located at NGR 8170 8430 and will occupy an area *c.* 0.2 hectares in area.

1.2 Planning background and previous archaeological work

The site was first proposed for development as a new wing to the Danesfield House Hotel in 1990. Other work proposed at the time included a maze to be planted to the east of the house and an underground car park to the north. An archaeological evaluation carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit in 1990 investigated all three areas. Trenches 1-4 (on the site of the proposed new wing) and Trench 5 (on the site of the maze), all lay within the Danesfield Camp SAM but did not reveal any significant archaeological deposits. Trench 6, which lay outside the SAM to the north of the Hotel, revealed two middle Iron Age pits.

Although Scheduled Ancient Monument consent was granted for the footprint of the proposed new wing, on the basis of the 1990 evaluation, the proposed development did not take place. The present evaluation arises from a new planning application to build a spa facility on the site previously proposed for the new wing

1.3 Geology and topography

The site lies on an outcrop of chalk with flints, capped by a deposit of plateau gravel, at 16.3 m OD. The proposed spa facility is to be built to the east of the Danesfield House Hotel, which is located on a hilltop site above the river Thames. The site is defined on the south side by a steep

escarpment overlooking the Thames, and on the east and north-east sides by a ditch and bank, thought to form part of the outer defences of a prehistoric hillfort. The area to be built on is currently occupied by a squash court, lawns and an orchard, attached to Danesfield House Hotel. The site was used as a base by the Royal Air Force during the second world war .

1.4 Archaeological and historical background

The site has been the subject of a previous evaluation by the Oxford Archaeological Unit, carried out in 1990, the results of which are summarised below:

(i) The site falls within the scheduled area of Danesfield Camp (SAM No.BU 135). The hillfort was first identified in the later 18th century and was described as 'a strong and perfect Danish encampment' (Langley 1797). The Saxon date was questioned when the site was compared with the Iron Age promontory fort at Dorchester-on-Thames (Allcroft 1908). Defensive earthworks have been identified on the east and north-east sides.

(ii) Apart the earthwork remains, the site itself has produced limited archaeological evidence: The evaluation carried out in 1990 produced some archaeological evidence from outside the scheduled area, in the car park area to the North of the main Hotel buildings, in the form of two pits containing middle Iron Age pottery. One of the pits produced a substantial amount of burnt daub and was interpreted as a possible oven. Five trenches within the scheduled area, four of them within the area of the presently proposed development, produced no significant archaeological remains. A number of irregular subsoil features were identified as tree-planting holes associated with the current use of the site as an orchard.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

The aims of the evaluation, as stated in the WSI, were as follows:

- To establish the presence/ absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- To determine the extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was intended to comprise both a single small evaluation trench in part of the proposed building footprint not covered by the previous evaluation, and a watching brief on geotechnical test pits in the remainder of the footprint. In the event, as no archaeological deposits were encountered, and Geotechnical Test Pit 4 coincided with the proposed evaluation trench, all of the excavations were treated in the same way. Two boreholes drilled as part of the geotechnical survey were not observed by an archaeologist.

3.1 Test pit locations

The evaluation consisted of four test pits, each measuring 2 m long and 1.55 m wide (Fig. 2). The location of Test Pit 4 was intended to investigate part of the proposed building footprint not covered by the 1990 archaeological evaluation. The trench location was moved 3 m to the north-east of the originally proposed position in order to avoid an electrical service cable identified by scanning before excavation. The locations of Test Pits 1 - 3 were dictated by geotechnical considerations.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

The topsoil was removed by a mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision. The trenches were then cleaned by hand and the trench outlines were plotted on a site plan at a scale of 1:200. When it was clear that no archaeological features were present, excavation was continued to a depth of 3 m under the joint supervision of an archaeologist and a geotechnical surveyor. The geological sequence in each Test Pit was recorded on section drawings measured from the top of each trench. All trenches were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

The topsoil was a shallow, dark brown clayey silt loam containing occasional coarse gravel, black ash, brick, pottery tile and metal fragments and fine roots. The subsoil consisted of mid-brown sandy gravel overlying creamy white, weathered chalk head deposits in a silty clay matrix, becoming chalkier with depth. Solid chalk was not encountered in any of the Test Pits. Ground conditions were dry.

4.2 Distribution of Archaeological Deposits

No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

4.3 Presentation of Results

The sedimentary sequence recorded for each test pit is summarised below.

4.4 Finds

No archaeological finds were recovered.

4.5 Environmental data

No environmental samples were collected

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

5.1.1 Test Pit 1

Type	*Description*	*Max. level (m OD)*	*Thickness (m)*
Ground level:		17.00	
Topsoil	Mid-dark brown, silty clay loam, with gravel,inclusions and modern finds including fragments of pottery, window and bottle glass, metal and plastic. Root disturbed.	17.00	0.30
Natural gravel	Orange brown, medium-coarse sandy gravel, becoming slighty clayey at 1.7m	16.70	2.05
Natural chalk head deposit	White, creamy, predominantly highly weathered chalk, with cobble sized intact chalk lumps and coarse flint gravel in a silty sandy chalk matrix.	14.65	>3.00
Base of pit		14.00	

5.1.2 Test Pit 2

Type	*Description*	*Max. level (m OD)*	*Thickness (m)*
Ground level:		17.00	
Topsoil	Mid-dark brown, silty clay loam, with gravel,inclusions and modern finds including fragments of pottery, window and bottle glass, metal and plastic. Root disturbed.	17.00	0.20
Natural gravel	Mid-brown, orange sandy clayey, medium-coarse gravel with occasional cobbles of flint.	16.80	1.05
Natural chalk head deposit	White, moderately weathered structurelless chalk with intact chalk lumps set in a brown silty clay matrix.	15.75	1.00
Natural gravel	Orange brown sandy clayey sub-angular medium to coarse flint gravel	14.75	0.55
Natural chalk head deposit	White structureless chalk with intact lumps of chalk.	14.20	>0.40
Base of pit		13.80	

5.1.3 Test Pit 3

Type	*Description*	*Max. level (m OD)*	*Thickness (m)*
Ground level:		15.50	
Topsoil	Mid-dark brown, silty clay loam, with gravel,inclusions and modern finds including fragments of pottery, window and bottle glass, metal and plastic. Root disturbed.	15.50	0.25
Natural gravel	Orange brown, medium-coarse sandy gravel, becoming slighty clayey at 1.7m	15.25	0.95
Natural chalk head deposit	White, creamy, predominantly highly weathered chalk, with cobble sized intact chalk lumps and coarse flint gravel in a silty sandy chalk matrix.	14.30	>1.80
Base of Pit		12.50	

5.1.4 Test Pit 4

Type	*Description*	*Max. level (m OD)*	*Thickness (m)*
Ground level:		16.50	
Topsoil	Mid-dark brown, silty clay loam, with gravel inclusions and modern finds including fragments of pottery, window and bottle glass, metal and plastic. Root disturbed.	16.50	0.20
Natural gravel	Orange brown, medium-coarse sandy clayey flint gravel.	16.30	1.10
Natural chalk head deposit	White, creamy, moderately weathered structureless chalk, with cobble sized intact chalk lumps and coarse flint gravel in a silty sandy chalk matrix.	15.20	1.70
Base of pit		13.50	

5.1.5 Borehole records

The borehole records indicate a similiar upper sequence to that recorded in the test pits. The weathered chalk deposits are recorded to depths of 15.0 m in BH1C and 10.0 m in BH2 (STATS Geotechnical 1998).

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

The site appears to be comparatively undisturbed by modern intrusions, although a number of service trenches cross the site and the previous evaluation indicates some disturbance by tree planting associated with use of the site as an orchard. At the northern edge of the proposed building footprint, three attempts to drill Borehole 1 (BH1, BH1A, BH1B) were abandoned on striking concrete at a depth of 0.90m, below a layer of made ground, indicating the presence of a substantial modern feature in that area.

The shallow depth of the topsoil across the site may be the result of erosion, as the site lies on a south-east facing slope. Slope erosion may also account, at least in part, for the absence of archaeological deposits.

The results are consistent with the observations of the 1990 evaluation, except that the thin subsoil layer reported in the previous evaluation was not observed and is assumed to be part of the topsoil. Modern artefacts were present throughout the topsoil, which was only 0.2 m - 0.3 m thick.

6.2 Overall interpretation

Although the the site lies within the Danesfield Camp SAM, the present evaluation has not discovered any evidence for archaeological activity. This confirms the findings of the 1990 evaluation of the same area, which also failed to identify any significant archaeological remains. However, two middle Iron Age pits were discovered to the north of the hotel buildings, outside the SAM, suggesting a possible period of occupation for the earthwork.

6.2.1 Summary of Results

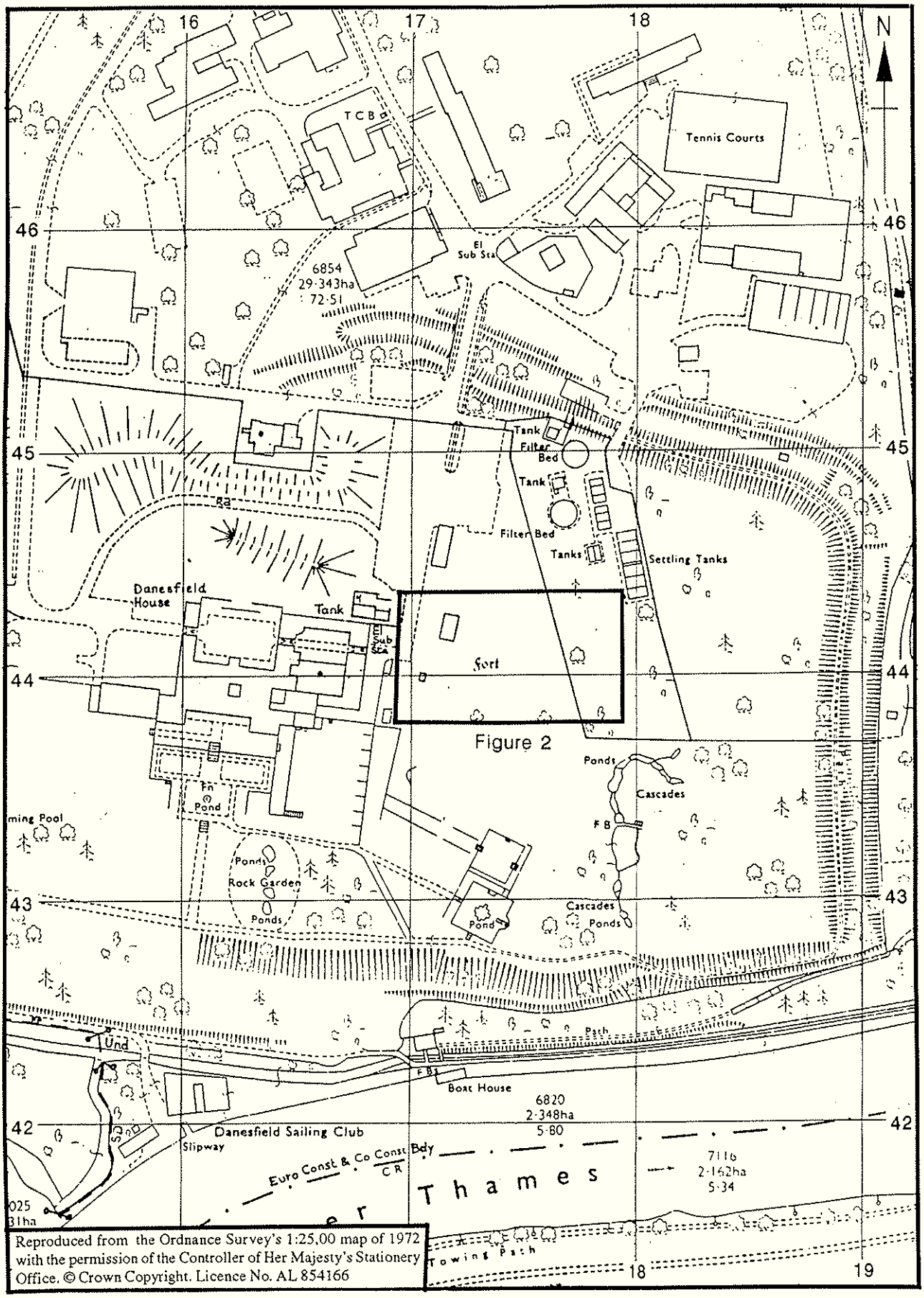
No archaeological finds or features were identified

6.2.2 Impact of development

There is no indication of surviving archaeological remains within the footprint of the proposed building. The impact of the development on buried archaeological deposits is therefore unlikely to be significant.

Bibliography and references

OAU	1990	*Danesfield Camp, Medmenham, Buckinghamshire. Archaeological Assessment.*
STATS Geotechnical	1998	*Danesfield House, Henley. Geotechnical Borehole and test pit logs.*
Wilkinson, D (ed)	1992	*Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992)



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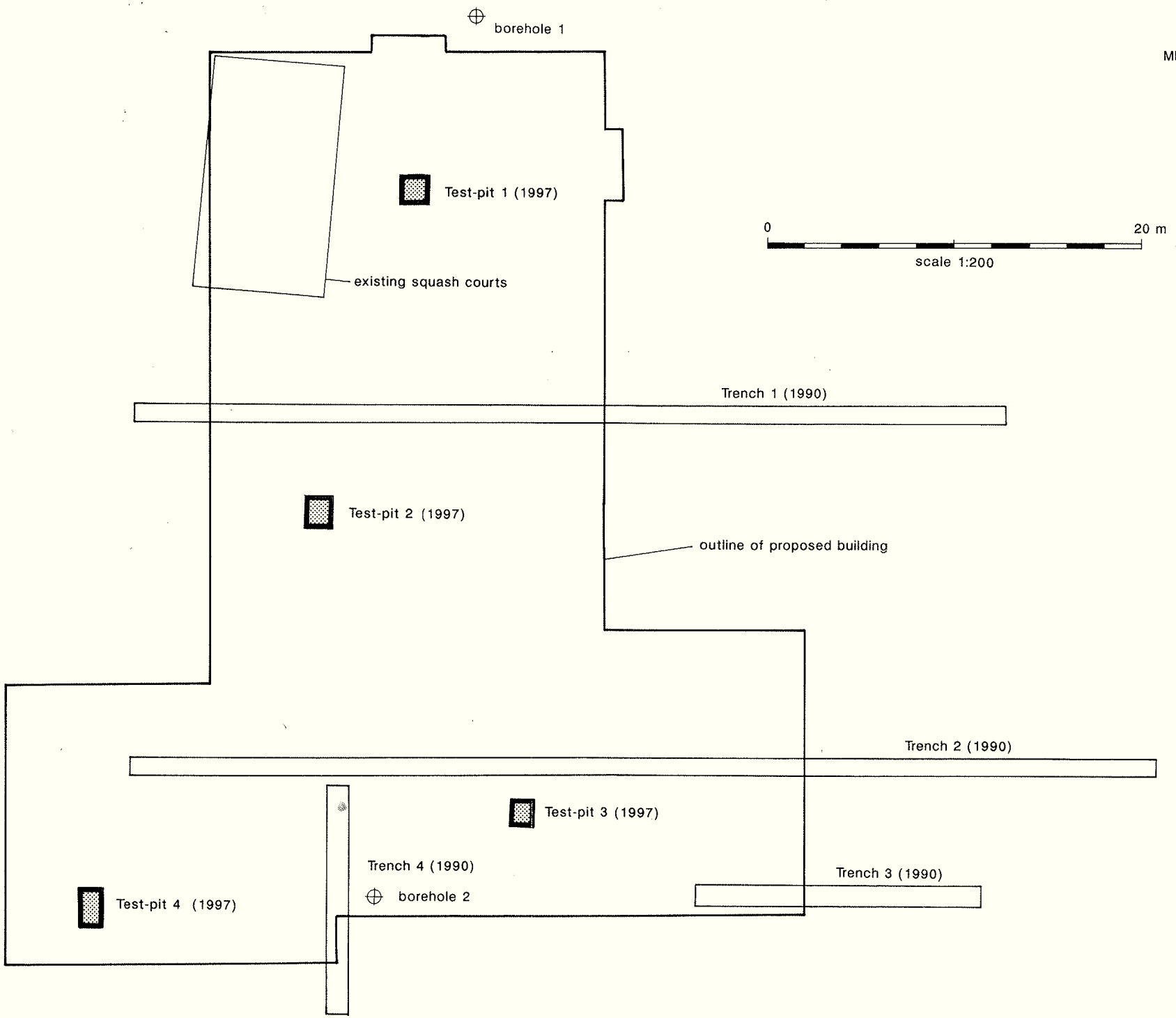
Site location

Figure 1



Trench location plan

Figure 2

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES
Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496
email: oau-oxford.demon.co.uk