

Building 81

Upper Heyford Airbase
Oxfordshire



Historic Buildings Recording and Investigation



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Building 81, Upper Heyford Airbase, Oxfordshire

Historic building recording

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Building 81, Upper Heyford Airbase, Oxfordshire

Summary

Upper Heyford Airbase is a site of great historical significance which has been subject to considerable study since its closure as an airfield in 1994 and particularly in the last 5 years. In 2006 Cherwell District Council designated the site as a Conservation Area and a number of the buildings have been afforded protection as Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The site retains a number of buildings from before the Second World War but the key significance of the site is its remarkably well preserved Cold War landscape, parts of which are considered to be of international significance.

Building 81 is a small building dating from the Second World War, in an area to the south of the Cold War zone which is not considered to be of particular historical significance. Although the building is of little intrinsic interest it is within the RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area and an application for its demolition has been granted with the condition that a record be made of the structure.

Building 81 is a modest building of undetermined original function but more recently with a minor administrative use. It was constructed with pre-cast concrete panels.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology were commissioned by Pegasus Planning, on behalf of the North Oxfordshire Consortium, to undertake the recording of Building 81 at the former Upper Heyford Airbase (Heyford Park). The work was undertaken as a condition of Conservation Area Consent granted by Cherwell District Council for the demolition of the structure.
- 1.1.2 Upper Heyford Airbase closed in 1994 and it is now used for car storage and various other functions. Redevelopment proposals have been prepared but these were the subject of a planning inquiry in 2008, partly due to the historical significance of the site (particularly the surviving Cold War structures).
- 1.1.3 Due to the significance of the airbase and its possible redevelopment Chris Welch of English Heritage prepared a generic Specification for Building Recording in November 2006. It is assumed that if the site is redeveloped then the buildings to be impacted by the works will be recorded in accordance with this specification (depending on their relative significance and level of impact) and that a single final report will be produced covering the whole site. This will include a gazetteer of all the buildings. The recording of Building 81 covered by this report will be included in the final report but Dr Rose Todd (Cherwell District Council Conservation Officer) requested that a stand-alone report be produced due to the uncertainty of when the final overall report may be produced.

1.2 Aims and objectives

- 1.2.1 The main aim of the project was to produce an archive record for posterity of the building prior to its demolition. The second aim was to produce a report to be deposited in a publicly accessible repository.

1.3 Methodology

- 1.3.1 The project was broadly undertaken at Level II. The recording comprised digital photographs and 35mm black and white images.
- 1.3.2 A drawn plan was produced on archivally stable permatrace at 1:20.
- 1.3.3 The descriptive recording comprised preparing notes about the building in the same sheet as the drawn one and also a more extended description is included in this report.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Summary of Upper Heyford Airbase

- 2.1.1 The history of RAF Upper Heyford and the US Air Force base has been detailed in other recent studies and it is outside the scope of the current project to produce any more than a brief summary.
- 2.1.2 The origins of RAF Upper Heyford lie in the latter stages of the First World War and the establishment of a landing field with six hangars in 1918. After the war the airfield was released by the Air Ministry and the land reverted to New College, Oxford. In 1924 the site was re-purchased by the Government as part of the planned expansion of the Royal Air Force and Upper Heyford became the model on which airfields of this type were based in the 1925-1934 period. In the later 1930s, as the prospect of war with Germany

became ever more likely, the aerodrome was attached to the RAF's Central Area which became No 1 Bomber Group of the new Bomber Command in 1936.

- 2.1.3 During the war Upper Heyford principally served as a training base and this continued in the immediate post-war period. In 1950 the British Government approved the formation of permanent bases for the US Air Force and Upper Heyford was remodelled extensively to become one of the principal such bases. The base was upgraded between 1957 and 1959 but up to the mid 1960s it remained technically an RAF base. In 1965 it was officially transferred to the Americans as an USAF base and in the early 1970s it was again remodelled to create the 'landscape of flexible response'. By July 1971 it could claim to be the largest fighter base in Europe (Acta, 2005). Between 1977 and 1980 the airbase was equipped with hardened shelters to protect the F111 fighters.
- 2.1.4 With the end of the Cold War in c.1989-91 the USAF began to close their European bases and in 1994 Upper Heyford was handed back to the RAF.
- 2.1.5 The historical significance of the site has been gradually recognised, particularly in the last decade, with the greater appreciation of military and Cold War structures nationwide. Many other pre-World War Two airfields survive better than Upper Heyford but the level of survival of its Cold-War airfield landscape is perhaps unique in Britain. As a reflection of this many structures were designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments and the area has been awarded Conservation Area Status.

2.2 Building 81

- 2.2.1 Detailed historical research on Building 81 has not been undertaken in the current project. The on-site archive was consulted and it was confirmed that plans of Building 81 are not held there. The building was included in a summary gazetteer of the structures at the site in the Environmental Statement (OA, 2007). This showed that Building 81 is believed to have been constructed in c.1940 and that it had an undetermined function.

3 BUILDING 81: DESCRIPTION

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 Building 81 is located within the technical area of the pre-WWII airfield, close to the 1930s hangars. This area is to the south of the Cold War Zone and although it is within the RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area it is outside the areas defined as being of international and national significance in the Conservation Plan. The landscape characterisation of the site has placed Building 81 in General Area 14 (Technical Area) and sub Area 14A (Aircraft Sheds).

3.2 General description

- 3.2.1 Building 81 is a small and simple single storey structure with gabled roof largely constructed of tall pre-cast concrete panels (2.45 m x 0.62 m x 0.16 m). It has a roughly square plan c.7.7m² and a later timber-clad addition. The ground on which the building sits slopes slightly down towards the east so it has some footings and a base to ensure a horizontal ground floor inside. These footings are simple concrete structures at all four corners of the building as well as one at either middle point of the north and south façades.
- 3.2.2 The building has two doorways and large windows facing north and south. It is painted with cream colour as well as a thick strip and windows' frames in brown. It looks like the



only coat of paint the building has had as it is coming away and showing only bare blocks of concrete behind. The roof is made of corrugated iron sheets.

- 3.2.3 The internal layout has been only seen through the windows due to asbestos contamination inside so no accurate measured recording has been possible. It is divided into two halves by a partition wall, one of which remains clear whereas the other comprises a corridor and some other smaller premises.

3.3 External description

- 3.3.1 The north façade has two windows in the west half and another window and a doorway in the east half. Each window has three tall rectangular panes; those at either end being casements. The doorway is the easternmost opening and it is accessible by means of a step due to the ground sloping towards the east.
- 3.3.2 The west façade has a doorway slightly to the south of the mid-point and has no windows (Plate 3). A small timber-clad lobby projection (3.45 x 1.3m) overlies the doorway. The upper half of the lobby's door has a square pane with a horizontal casement window on it; the lower half has vertical boards. To the north of this door there is a window currently boarded. This structure is covered by a flat roof with waterproof mesh.
- 3.3.3 The south façade has two windows in the east half matching those in the north façade. It also has one smaller window in the east end of the west half which has only two tall rectangular, translucent (rather than transparent) panes and only one casement. The rest of the wall is made of the same concrete panels seen elsewhere. Under the window with translucent panes there is a pipe coming out from the wall suggesting that the room inside is likely to be a WC.
- 3.3.4 The east façade is a solid concrete vertical panels with neither doorways no windows. It does not have any other feature.

3.4 Internal description

- 3.4.1 Due to the presence of asbestos access inside the building was restricted. However, some notes and photographs could be taken through windows. It has also been possible to sketch the internal layout of the building.
- 3.4.2 The building is internally divided in two halves: east and west. The partition walls are likely to have been built with a material lighter and easier to remove than the concrete panels used for the external shell.
- 3.4.3 The eastern half is a clear space with a desk next to the door, in the north end. The west wall has two doorways; one joining this room with the corridor that leads to the doorway in the west façade and the other one to access the probable WC.
- 3.4.4 The western half of the building has at least two rooms and a corridor. The corridor is off centre (slightly to the south) and runs from the doorway in the west façade to the clear room in the east half. The north room is the largest in this half of the building and the doorway is in its southern wall's eastern end. To the north of the corridor there is at least one room which is likely to be a WC although it can not be confirmed because the doors remain closed and the windows are translucent. There is another door to the east end of the corridor's southern wall which also remains closed but looks like a cupboard.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1.1 Building 81 is a small structure of undetermined function and little intrinsic significance. It is within the RAF Upper Heyford Conservation Area and it is a surviving Second



World War airfield building so has some interest but it is outside Upper Heyford's Cold War Zone which gives the site its particular historical significance. A record has been made of the building prior to its demolition and if the site is redeveloped this will add to the wider record which will be produced of all the buildings at the former airbase.

Rafael Martinez-Jausoro

November 2009

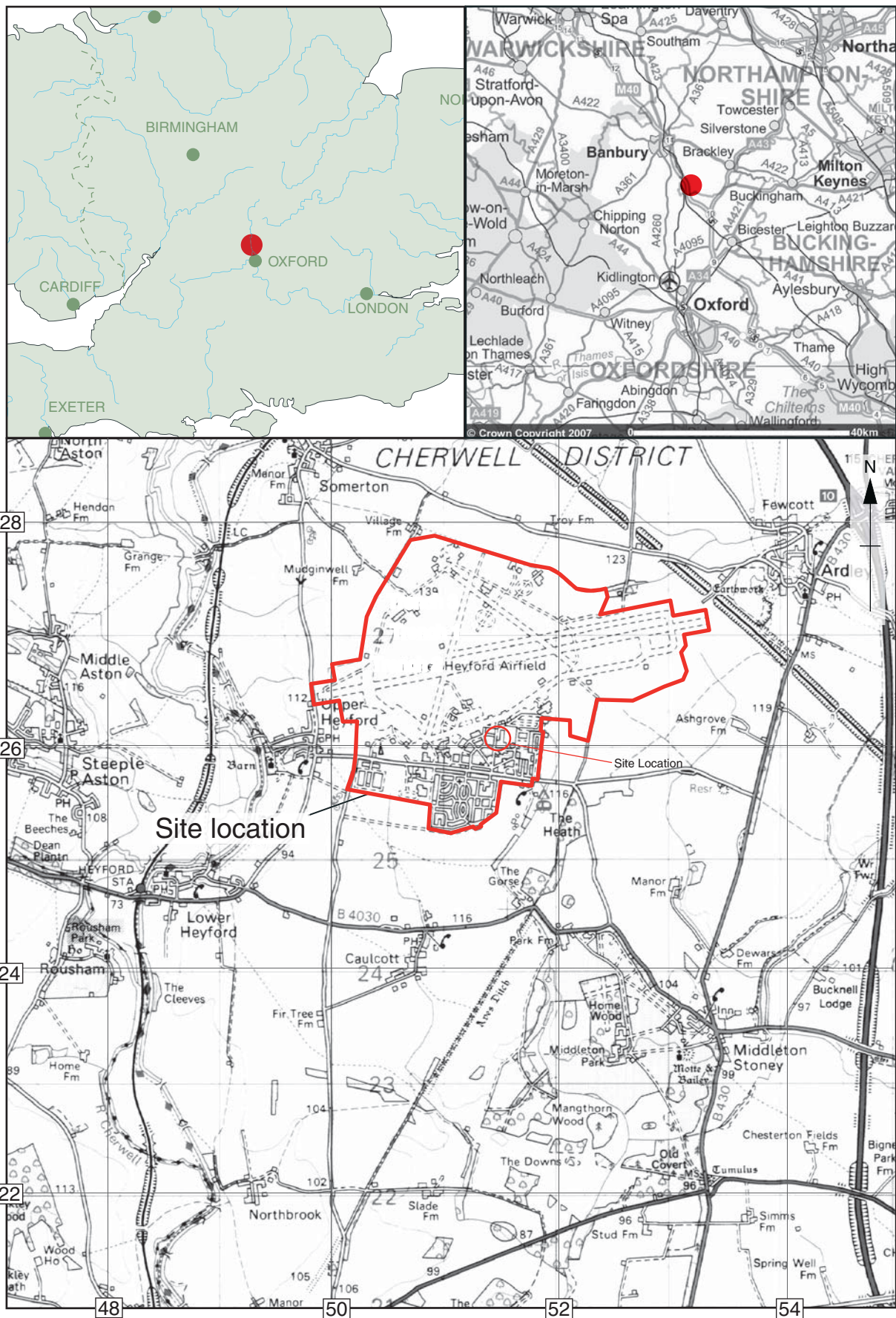


APPENDIX A. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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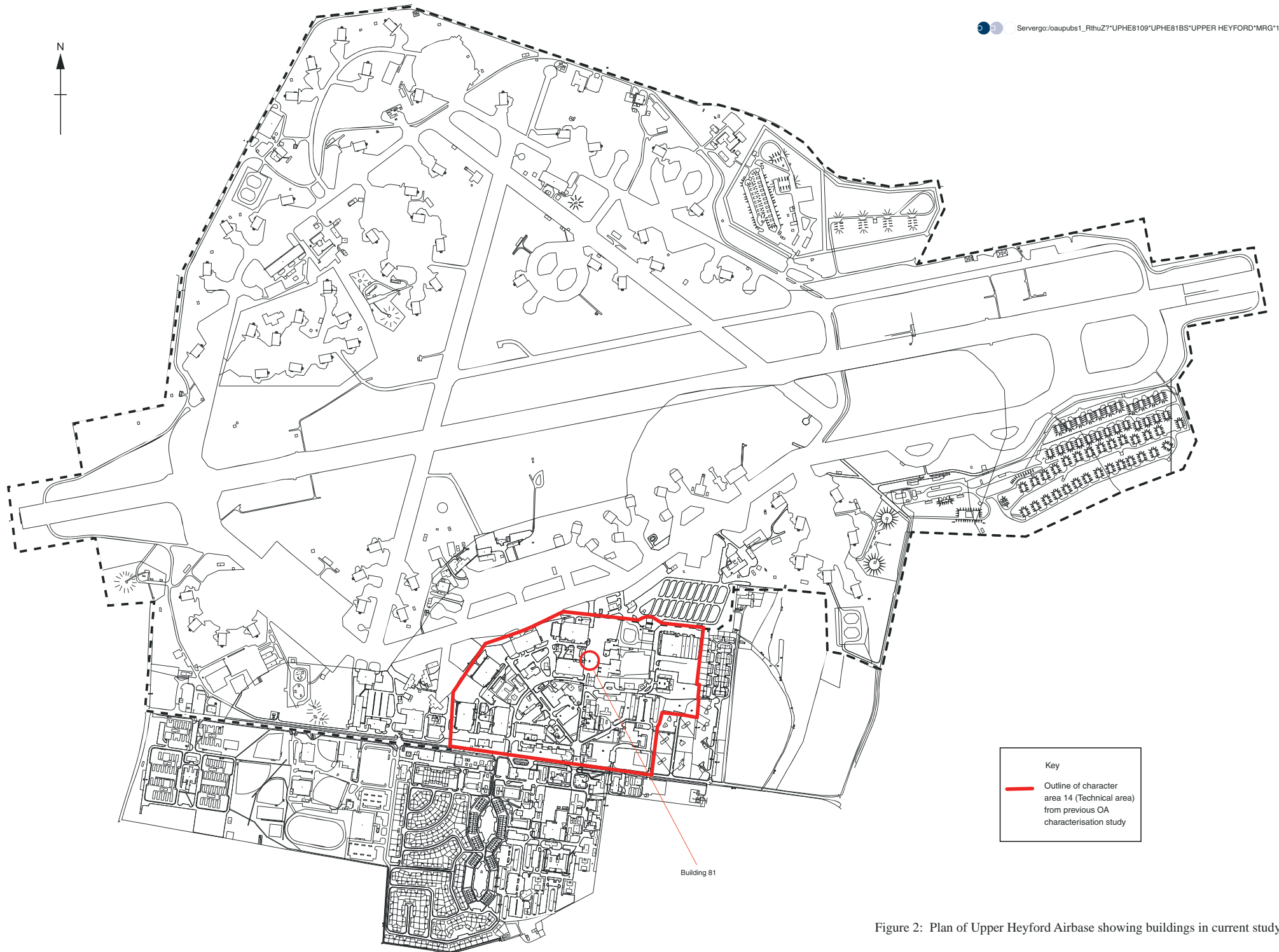
Oxford Archaeology *Heyford Park, Oxfordshire Environmental Assessment* August 2007



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location



Key

- Outline of character area 14 (Technical area) from previous OA characterisation study

Figure 2: Plan of Upper Heyford Airbase showing buildings in current study

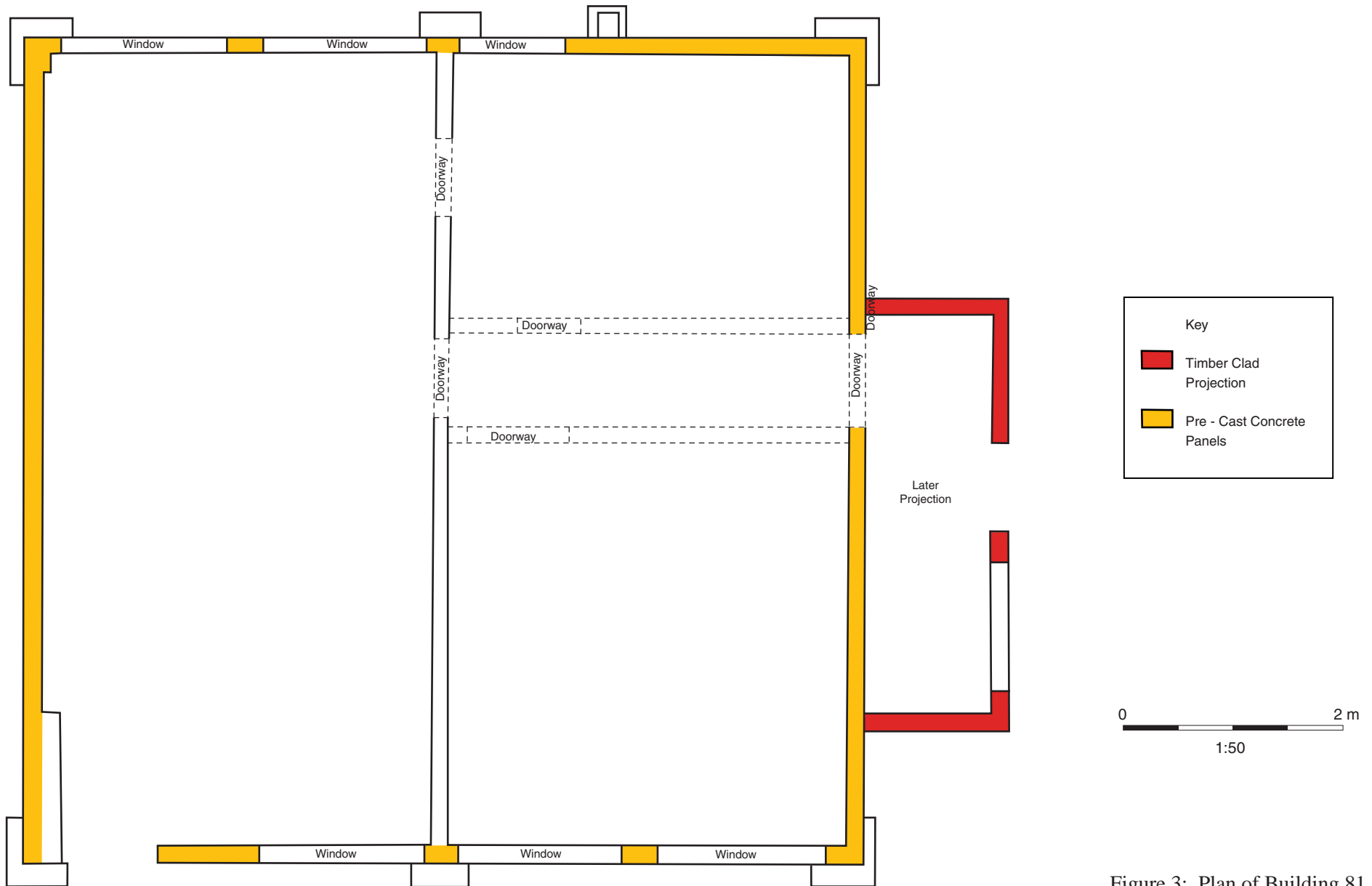


Figure 3: Plan of Building 81



Plate 1: Building 81 North Elevation



Plate 2: Building 81 West Elevation



Plate 3: Building 81 South Elevation



Plate 4: Building 81 East Elevation



Plate 5: Door in West Elevation



Plate 6: Window in South Elevation



Plate 7: Window Detail



Plate 8: Building 81 General Interior View



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