

15 Belbroughton Road Oxford



Archaeological Evaluation Report

oxfordarchaeology



southsouthsouth

May 2010


Client: Gareth Phillips

Issue No: 1

NGR: SP 51192 08504



Client Name: Gareth Phillips
Client Ref No: n/a
Document Title: 15 Belbroughton Road, Oxford
Document Type: Evaluation Report
Issue/Version Number: 1
Grid Reference: SP 51192 08504
Planning Reference: pre planning
OA Job Number: 4702
Site Code: OXBELB 10
Invoice Code: OXBELBEV
Receiving Museum: Oxfordshire County Museum
Museum Accession No: OXCMS:2010.22

Issue	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by	Signature
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Document File Location \\OXBELBEV_Belbroughton_Road_Oxford\002Reports
Graphics File Location \Servergo\invoice codes i thru q\O_codes\OXBELBEV
Illustrated by Georgina Slater

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15 Belbroughton Road, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Summary

In April 2010, Oxford Archaeology South completed a field evaluation at 15 Belbroughton Road, Oxford. Excavation of a single trench did not encounter any significant archaeological features and only revealed deposits associated with the construction of the existing property in the first half of the 20th century and a preceding ploughsoil horizon.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology South (OAS), was commissioned by Gareth Phillips (owner) to undertake an archaeological evaluation at 15 Belbroughton Road, Oxford (Fig. 1). A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced by OAS outlining how it would meet the requirements of a Brief issued by David Radford, Oxford City Council Archaeologist, prior to the start of the fieldwork. The evaluation was undertaken pre-application to planning.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site is situated in a residential area in the north of Oxford at grid reference SP 51192 08504. It is bound to the south by Belbroughton Road, to the east by Charlbury Road and to the north and west by a school and another residential property.

1.2.2 The site is situated on the edge of the 2nd (Summertown-Radley) River Gravel Terrace. Immediately to the east of the site lies an outcrop of the 1st (Floodplain) Terrace, which is separated from the 2nd Terrace by a linear area of the underlying Oxford Clay and Kellaway Beds (BGS, Sheet 236). At the time of the investigation the site was maintained as a garden to 15 Belbroughton Road.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 Evidence from aerial photographs and archaeological excavations indicates the presence of an extensive prehistoric ritual and agricultural landscape across this part of the gravel terrace of Oxford, comprising Neolithic/Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments, Iron Age /Roman agricultural field systems and subsequent Saxon settlement.

1.3.2 Prehistoric and Roman finds have been recovered to the south at Park Town and a concentration of Roman and Saxon activity, including an inhumation cemetery, is recorded to the north at Summer Fields. A desk-based assessment and trial trenching has also been undertaken previously for a new building at Oxford High School, located 80m to the north of 15 Belbroughton Road although the latter did not encounter any archaeological deposits (TVAS 2001).

1.3.3 The 1st edition OS map, and subsequent mapping up to 1937, shows the area around Belbroughton Road as a field, probably associated with the adjacent Blackhall Farm to the south-east, or alternatively with Summer (Somer) Ville House to the north-west (presumably the origin of the name of Summertown). There does appear to be a boundary or trackway on the earlier mapping which corresponds with the position of Belbroughton Road on the 1937 map. This map also shows this as the Ward boundary that was not marked on earlier maps. It is possible that an existing boundary ditch or trackway was used as the new boundary that recognised the development of Summertown in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a separate ward.



2 AIMS

2.1 General

2.1.1 The aim of the evaluation was to determine the location, extent, date, character, and state of preservation of any archaeological remains surviving within the proposed development area.

2.2 Detailed aims and objectives

2.2.1 The aims and objectives of the evaluation as agreed in the WSI were as follows:

- (i) to establish if late prehistoric, Roman or Saxon remains were present, noting the potential for palaeo-environmental evidence at this location;
- (ii) to determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present;
- (iii) to determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;
- (iv) to determine or confirm the approximate extent of any remains;
- (v) to determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains;
- (vi) to determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present;
- (vii) to determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of any artefactual evidence present;
- (viii) to determine the potential of the site to provide palaeo-environmental and/or economic evidence and the forms in which such evidence may be present.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of works

3.1.1 A single trench measuring 12 m by 2 m was positioned within the footprint of the proposed development (see Fig. 2).

3.2 Survey

3.2.1 The trench was positioned by the attending archaeological supervisor in relation to existing structures, and accurately related to the national grid. All levels were taken in relation to Ordnance Survey datum level.

3.3 Mechanical excavation

3.3.1 The trench was machine excavated using a toothless bucket to the surface of the natural geology in the absence of archaeological deposits above this level. Care was taken not to damage any archaeological deposits through excessive use of mechanical excavation. A small trial pit was excavated within the western end of the trench to investigate and characterise the natural deposits following on site discussions with David Radford.

3.3.2 All machine excavation was under the supervision of the archaeological supervisor. The groundwork contractor backfilled the trench following approval given by David Radford.



3.4 Excavation and recording

- 3.4.1 Following the initial machine excavation of the overburden deposits, the exposed level and potential archaeological features were cleaned to clarify the remains and sample excavated to fulfil the aims outlined above.
- 3.4.2 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established OAS practice and the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation, 2008 revision*. Detailed recording procedures are outlined in the OAS Standard Fieldwork Methodology. Bulk finds were collected by context. The stratigraphy of the trench was recorded even where no archaeological deposits were identified.
- 3.4.3 Colour transparency and black-and-white negative photographs were taken during the works along with digital photographs. A site plan was drawn at a scale of 1:100. Section drawings of features and sample sections of stratigraphy were drawn at a scale of 1:20. General site excavation and recording procedures were as defined in the the WSI.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 4.1.1 The trench is described below with individual contexts listed in an inventory presented as Appendix A.
- 4.1.2 Where encountered, finds were retained from the deposits described below. Due to the relatively recent origin of most of the finds and the lack of association with significant archaeological features or deposits, these have not been analysed in detail although all identifications have been made by OAS's medieval and post-medieval pottery specialist (John Cotter). The finds are discussed where relevant within the trench description below and quantities/dates are also presented within Appendix A.

4.2 Trench description

- 4.2.1 A trial pit was excavated to a depth of 0.7 m within the western end of the trench to investigate the upper horizons of the natural sand and gravel (9), the surface of which was encountered at c 59.1 m OD (Fig. 3, section 2). This revealed a sequence of laminated and interleaved sand, silt and gravel deposits that differed in composition from the second terrace gravels observed closer to the city south of Summertown. These deposits were clearly of natural origin and related to the gravel terrace sequence of the Thames Valley although the depositional origin of these specific layers are discussed further below.
- 4.2.2 Machine excavation across the remaining part of the trench revealed a reddish brown silty sand deposit (4) which was encountered at 59.4 m OD. This was interpreted as being the Loessic deposit known to overlie the second gravel terrace within the Oxford area. This was overlain by a similar deposit (1) that clearly derived from reworking of Layer 4 and probably represents a historical ploughsoil horizon that would have existed here prior to development of the area in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- 4.2.3 Three relatively thin and localised patches of slightly greyer silty clay (6, 7 and 8) were recorded across the top of Layer 4. The relationship between these and Layer 1 was not particularly clear due to the similarity of these deposits and they may have derived from the same origin. These deposits produced artefactual remains that each included post-medieval clay pipe fragments or porcelain. However, deposit 6 also produced two abraded medieval sherds; a glazed body shoulder sherd of Brill/Boarstall ware jar dated



from the 14th century and a rim sherd from a cooking pot of East Wiltshire Ware likely to date from the 12th century. The small quantity and abraded appearance of these along with an association with later material clearly identifies these as residual items within later deposits.

- 4.2.4 A service trench and pipe was also identified on a NW-SE alignment cut into Layer 1 and through Layer 4 across the eastern part of the trench. This contained an 8" ceramic pipe with a later repair within a small square pit along the line of the service trench. The repair was not sealed suggesting that this was a drain rather than a foul service.
- 4.2.5 A thin (40mm) layer of brick rubble, brick dust and mortar (2) sealed Layer 1. This is most likely to represent the construction horizon for Number 15 and was overlain by a silty clay topsoil deposit (3) that was probably imported or spread out over the garden area following the construction of the house.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Interpretation

- 5.1.1 No archaeologically significant features or deposits were encountered within the trench although a distinct construction horizon (Layer 2) does provide a clear marker for the pre and post 20th century housing development levels and deposits at this location. The horizon sealed below Layer 2 probably represents a former ploughsoil partly deriving from reworked deposits of the underlying silty sand layer sealing the sand and gravel natural. The OS 1st edition map clearly shows the area as a variety of enclosed fields with this site located in open ground between *Summer Villa* and *Blackhall Farm*. The small amounts of artefactual material recovered from the deposits below Layer 2 are consistent with this, with the latest items being of 19th century origin.
- 5.1.2 The geological deposits (9) are of some interest in that they differ slightly from that of the 2nd terrace within the city area to the south. At this location the sequence is much more mixed between fast and slower moving water deposits. The location of the site on the periphery of the second terrace, together with the linear nature of the 'outcrop' of Oxford Clay and Kellaway Beds between the 2nd terrace and an isolated 1st terrace gravel island (BGS, Sheet 236), may suggest the presence of a palaeochannel. However, this was not firmly established due to the limited nature of the excavation through the sand and gravel deposits. It may also be possible that the deposits encountered represent a very localised variation in the composition of the terrace at this point.



APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1							
General description				Orientation		E-W	
No archaeological deposits or features were encountered. Sand and gravel natural was overlain by a silty deposit (probable Loess) and a buried ploughsoil horizon that included a small amount of medieval and post-medieval artefactual material. This was sealed by a thin layer of building debris overlain by the current garden soil and turf.				Avg. depth (m)		0.5	
				Width (m)		2	
				Length (m)		12	
Contexts							
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date	
1	Layer		0.14	Buried ploughsoil			
2	Layer		0.04	Construction horizon	Brick (not retained)	20th C	
3	Layer		0.20	Garden topsoil			
4	Layer		0.18	Loess			
5	'Cut'	1.50	0.10	Shallow hollow within the surface of Layer 4			
6	'Fill'		0.10	Fill of 5	pottery (x3) shell (x1) glass (x1)	medieval and 19th C	
7	Layer			Shallow hollow within the surface of Layer 4	clay pipe (x1)	post-medieval	
8	Layer		0.10	Shallow hollow within the surface of Layer 4	pottery (x1) slate frag. (x1) clay pipe (x1)	post-medieval	
9	Layer		0.70	natural geology			



APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Oxford Archaeology 1992 Fieldwork Manual, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

Oxford Archaeology 2010 Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Evaluation at 15 Belbroughton Road, Oxford

OCC 2010 Brief for an Archaeological Field Evaluation at 15 Belbroughton Road, Oxford

TVAS 2010 Oxford High School, Belbroughton Road, Oxford: Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment and Evaluation for the Girls Day School Trust

APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

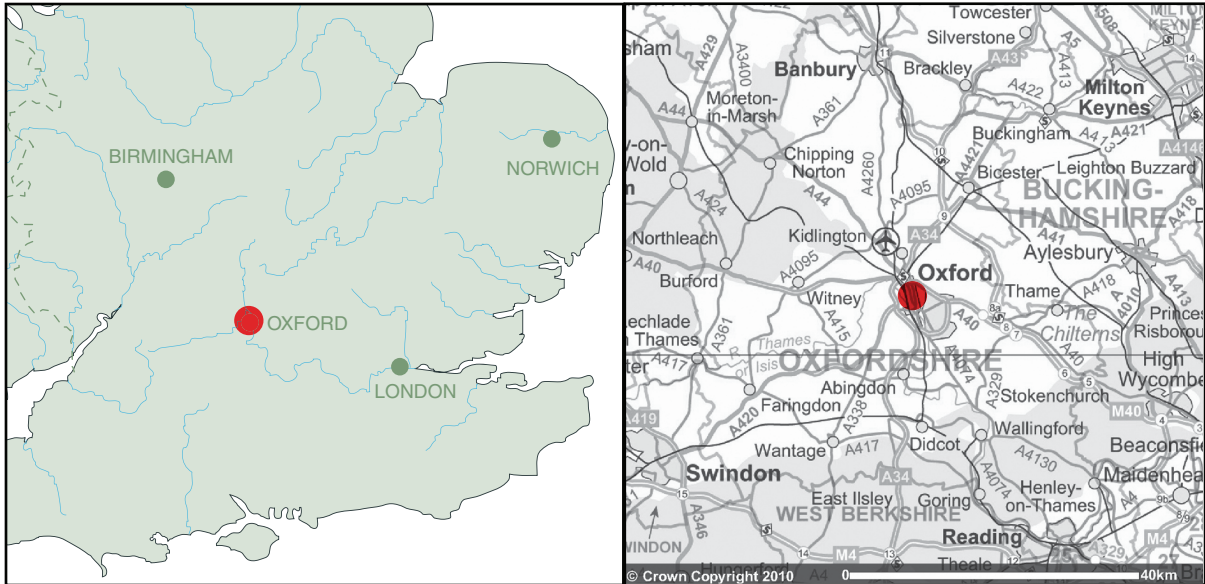
Site name: 15 Belbroughton Road, Oxford
Site code: OXBELB 10
Grid reference: SP 51192 08504
Type: Evaluation
Date and duration: 8th April 2010
Area of site: One trench measuring 12 m by 2 m

Summary of results:

In April 2010, Oxford Archaeology South completed a field evaluation at 15 Belbroughton Road, Oxford. Excavation of a single trench did not encounter any significant archaeological features and only revealed deposits associated with the construction of the existing property in the first half of the 20th century and a preceding ploughsoil horizon.

Location of archive:

The archive is currently held at OAS, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited in due course with the Oxfordshire County Museum under the accession number OXCMS:2010.22.



Scale 1:12,500

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Figure 1: Site location

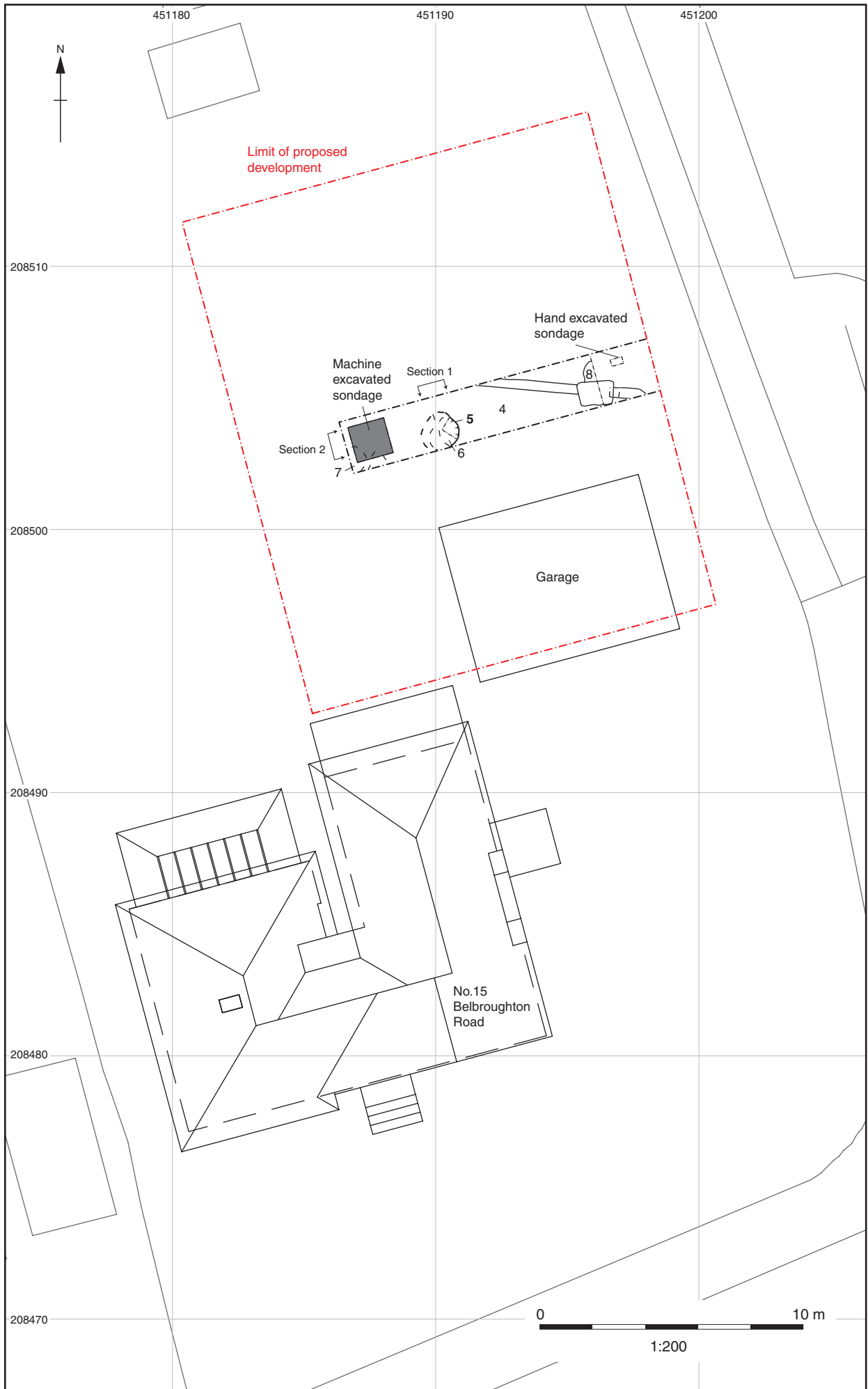


Figure 2: Plan

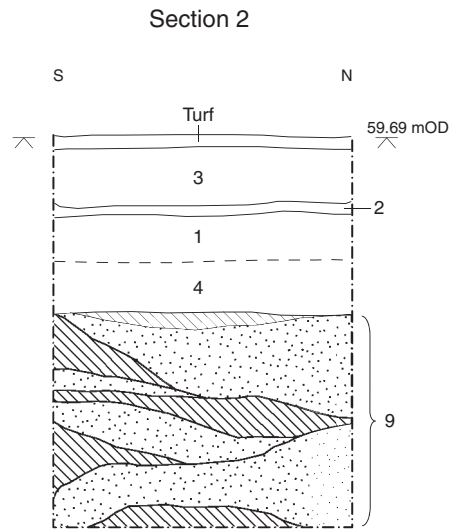
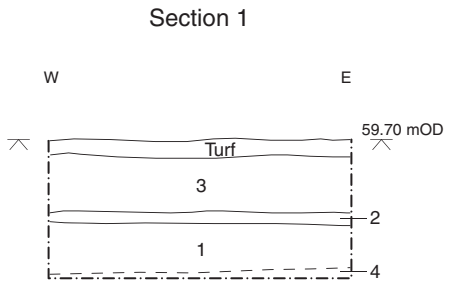


Figure 3: Sections



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