

**CJ Associates Geotechnical Ltd**

**MICHAEL SOBELL HOUSE HOSPICE, CHURCHILL HOSPITAL, OXFORD**

*NGR SP 5425 0570*

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

**Oxford Archaeological Unit**

**April 2001**

## **Summary**

*In March 2001, Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) monitored the excavation of geotechnical test pits at Michael Sobell House, Churchill Hospital, Oxford. A possible ploughsoil of indeterminate date was observed during the watching brief.*

### **1 Introduction**

Sobell House lies on the south side of The Churchill Hospital, off Old Road, Headington, Oxford (SP 5425 0570). The site covers an area of 0.75 ha and the underlying geology is Upper Jurassic Oxfordian Sand Member (British Geological Survey, 1994).

The nature and extent of the proposed development has not yet been finalised, as it is partially dependent on the results of the engineering test pitting which has been designed to inform on the foundation design.

### **2 Background**

The site lies within an area of known archaeological potential and there are several sites with archaeological remains in the vicinity of the proposed development site. Excavations at the Churchill Hospital between 1971 and 1973 revealed extensive remains associated with the northern production area of the Oxford region Roman Pottery industry (Young, 1975), and there is potential for Roman archaeology within the area of the proposed development.

### **3 Aims**

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

### **4 Methodology**

The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits; all digging was undertaken by machine.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets.

Soil description utilised standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

### **5 Results (Fig 2)**

The watching brief monitored the excavation of four observation pits (OP1-4) and two observation trenches (OT1 and 2). The observation pits all measured approximately 2 m x 0.80 m x 3 m and the trenches measured approximately 12 m x 0.80 m x 1.5 m.

#### **Observation Pit 1 (OP1) Fig 3: Section 1**

The stratigraphic sequence revealed natural drift geology (1 and 2) at a depth of 0.70 m below ground level (BGL). This was overlain by a mid reddish-brown clay-silt deposit 0.20 m thick (3), which was in turn overlain by a modern deposit of coal and black ash 0.10 m thick (4). To the north of the section, deposit 4 was overlain by a layer of hardcore (8) and a possible tarmac surface (9). All these deposits were sealed by a re-deposited mixed layer of made ground, and the present sandy-clay topsoil (5), which was 0.30 m thick.

#### **Observation Pit 2 (OP2) Fig 3: Section 2**

The same sequence was observed in OP2 with the exception of a concrete surface overlying the hardcore deposit (8) and a possible tree throw pit (11) cutting the drift geology. Drift geology was observed at a depth of 0.70 m and the tree throw pit was sealed by deposit 3.

#### **Observation Pit 3 (OP3) Fig 3: Section 3**

Drift geology was recorded at a depth of 0.55 m. This was overlain by a modern deposit of ash and coal (4) which was overlain by deposit 7 and then topsoil (5). Deposit 3 was observed in the west half of the section and appears to have been truncated at this point.

#### **Observation Pit 4 (OP4) Fig 3: Section 4**

The stratigraphic sequence in OP4 comprised drift geology (1 and 2) at a depth of 0.50 m. This was overlain by deposit 3, which was in turn overlain by deposit 4 and topsoil (5).

#### **Observation Trench 1 (OT1)**

OT1 was excavated in order to establish the exact position and depth of the services underlying the existing road and was heavily truncated by services. The stratigraphic sequence was drift geology at 0.60 m which was directly overlain by hardcore for the road surface.

#### **Observation Trench 2 (OT2)**

OT2 was also excavated to clarify the depth and alignment of services in advance of development. Drift geology was observed at a depth of 0.65 m and was overlain by deposit 7 (re-deposited natural and deposit 3). Deposit 3 was not apparent although may have been truncated prior to the deposition of deposit 7. The services appeared to be sealed by deposit 7, suggesting that it is fairly recent.

## **6 Finds**

No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

## **7 Environmental results**

No environmental soil samples were taken.

## **8 Discussion**

The nature of deposit 3 is consistent with that of a Roman 'subsoil' previously noted during archaeological work at The Churchill Hospital (Young, 1972; OAU 2000). While evidence for modern truncation was observed in all of the trenches and pits, the presence of deposit 3 within OP1-4 would suggest that archaeological remains may survive below the more recent deposits.

The depth of the drift geology is also of interest as it appears to slope from west to east. This may suggest that any truncation of deposit 3 would be more pronounced to the north and west of the development area than it is to the south and east.

## **References.**

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).

Proposed Institute of Vaccinology and Tropical Medicine, Churchill Hospital, Oxford, Evaluation Report, OAU, 2000.

Young C J, Excavations at the Churchill Hospital, 1971: Interim Report. Oxoniensia XXXVII

Young C J, Excavations at the Churchill Hospital, 1972: Interim Report. Oxoniensia XXXVIII

Young C J, Excavations at the Churchill Hospital, 1973: Interim Report. Oxoniensia XXXIX





Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's digital basemap of 1999 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright. Licence No. 854166

Figure 1: site location

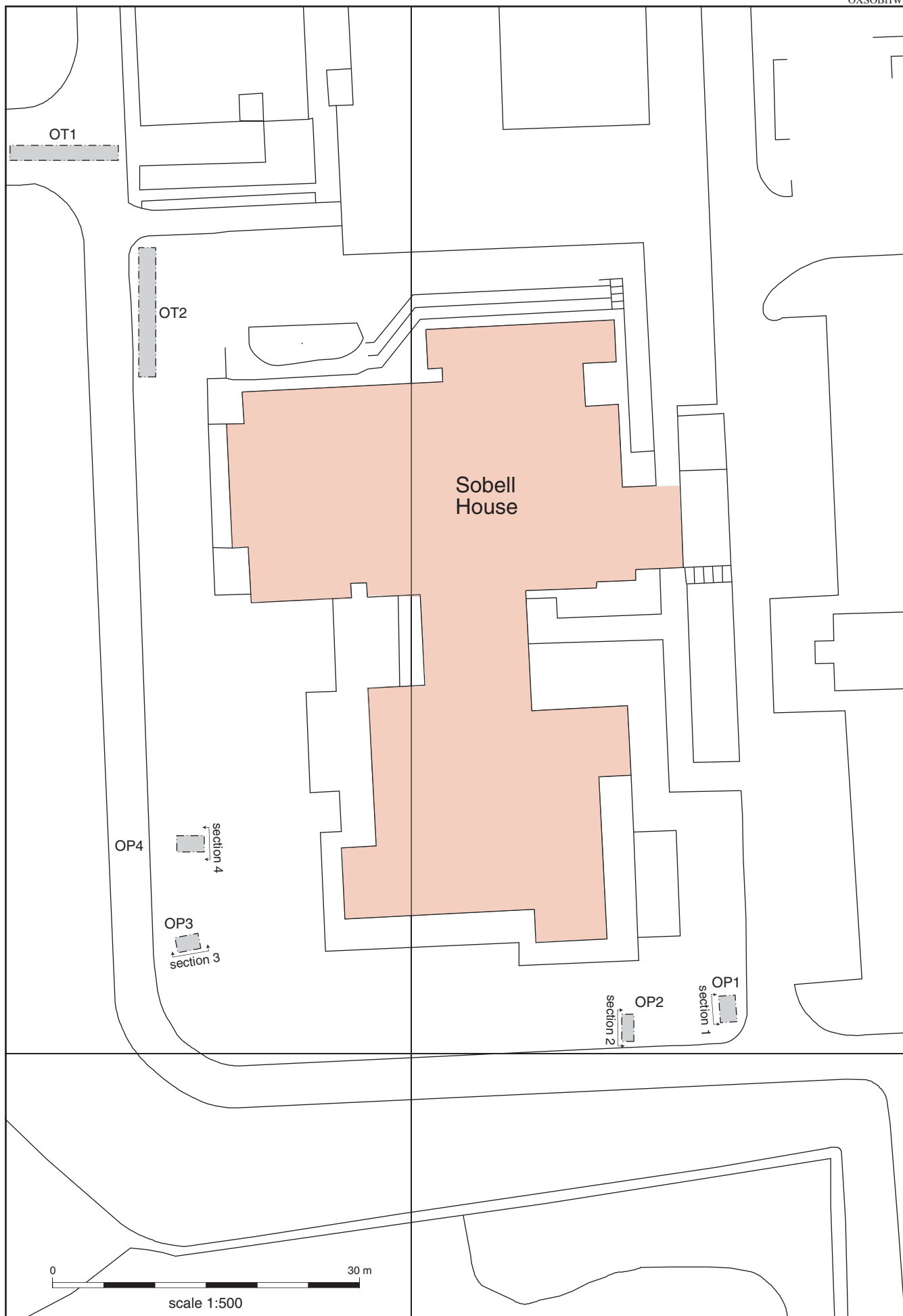
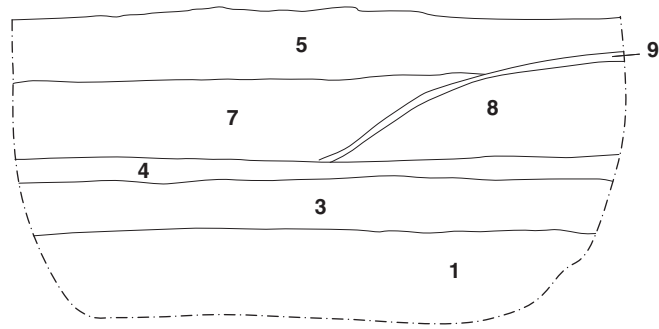
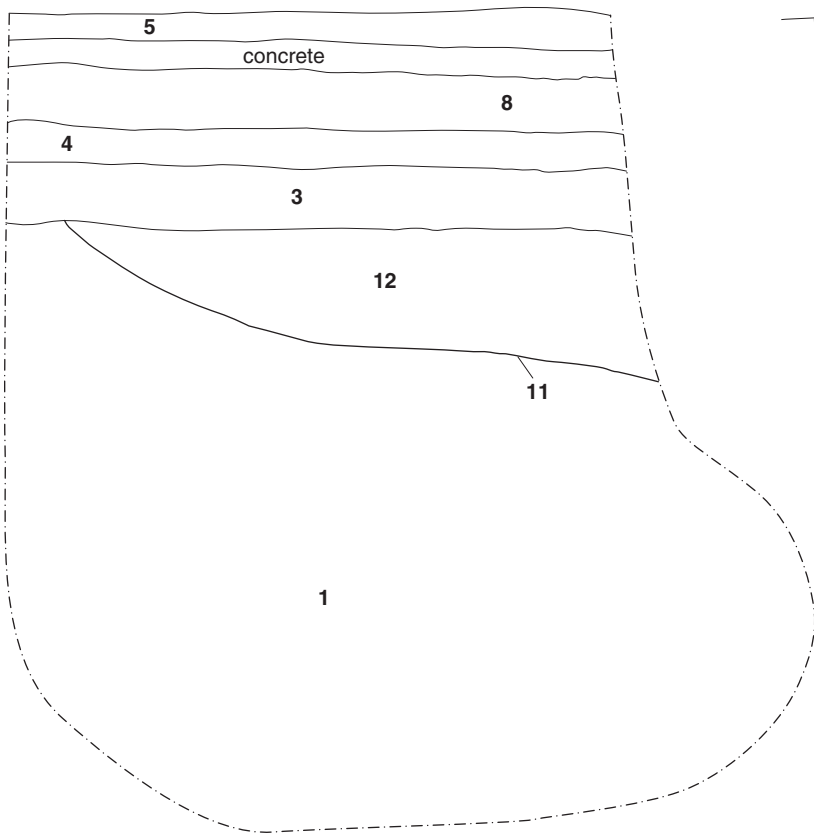


Figure 2: Trench Location plan.

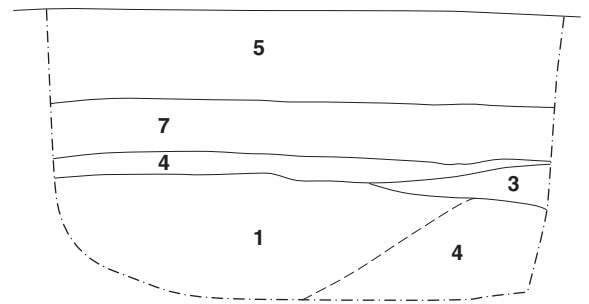
Section 1



Section 2



Section 3



Section 4

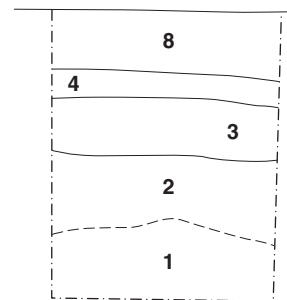


Figure 3: Trench sections.