

OXFORD (OX)

OX+HUGHWB  
462/98

David Morley Architects

St Hugh's College, Oxford

509079  
NGR SP ~~450 200~~

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. NFH/0775/93

Oxford Archaeological Unit

March 1999



David Morley Architects

St Hugh's College, Oxford

NGR SP 450 207

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Prepared by:

*John Dabbs*

Date:

*16/3/99*

Checked by:

*JRS*

Date:

*16/3/99*

Approved by:

*R. Williams*

HEAD OF FIELDWORK

Date:

*23/3/1999*

Oxford Archaeological Unit

March 1999



## ***Summary***

*During the second half of 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at St Hugh's College, Oxford (NGR SP 450 207). No archaeological features were seen and no finds were retrieved.*

### **1 Introduction (Fig. 1)**

The development proposal (planning application no. NFH/0775/93) comprised the construction of new student accommodation, with associated services, access routes and landscaping of surrounding grounds.

The watching brief was commissioned by David Morley Architects on behalf of St Hugh's College. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service.

### **2 Background**

The site lies within an area of North Oxford which is still substantially in its Victorian residential form. It is ringed on the east and south by recorded finds of a wide range of material from the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods (PRNs 3258, 3591-2, 3594, 3864, 6048), and there is a widespread assumption that both the Banbury Road and Parks Road follow the line of a minor Roman road.

This watching brief is further to an archaeological evaluation of the site (OAU 1998) undertaken between 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> June 1998. Trial trenches were positioned to the rear of The Lawns, 87 Banbury Road, and to the rear of houses in Canterbury Road (see Fig. 2). The evaluation revealed no significant archaeological deposits within the area of the proposed new buildings. The only recognisable archaeological deposit was a layer of former ploughsoil which contained a small number of finds indicating cultivation during the medieval period.

The site lies on the Summertown Radley Gravel Terrace at approximately 63 m above OD. The current land use is as College lawns for recreational purposes. Previous land use would appear to have been associated with cultivation

### **3 Aims**

The aims of the watching brief were to record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

### **4 Methodology (Fig. 2)**

Topsoil stripping in the areas of proposed development, the haulage road and contractor's compound was monitored for the presence/absence of archaeological remains: the monitoring took the form of separate inspection visits in September and October 1998. Topsoil stripping was undertaken by a 360° tracked mechanical



excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under the supervision of an archaeologist from the OAU.

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 descriptions use standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

## **5 Results (Fig. 3)**

Generally the soil type was a sandy silt overlain by a clayey silt, with the sequence of deposits being identical across all areas monitored; the similarity of deposits allows a general description across the site, rather than describing areas individually. Particular attention was paid to that portion of the site in the vicinity of evaluation trench 5, as the field road depicted on the 18<sup>th</sup> century estate map is thought to lie in this area; however it was not seen and may lie outside the affected area. Natural gravel was exposed at roughly the same depth across the site, between 62 and 63 m OD. No archaeological features were seen in any portion of the site.

The surface of the natural gravel was much disturbed by root action but could be seen gently to undulate in an east-west direction; overlying the gravel at roughly the same depth across the site was a deposit of orange/brown sandy silt, which varied in thickness from 0.14 m to 0.28 m, and contained a notable percentage of redeposited natural gravel (4). No finds were retrieved from this layer during either the evaluation or the watching brief, and as such it remains undated.

Overlying this deposit was a greyish brown clay silt varying in depth from 0.20 m to 0.38 m, (3). This was cut by various live and redundant modern services and was sealed by a thin skim of topsoil (2) and turf (1).

## **6 Environmental data**

In view of the absence of significant archaeological deposits, no environmental soil samples were taken during the watching brief.

## **7 Discussion**

The 1998 evaluation report concluded that the undulating gravel surface, as seen in trench 1, combined with the redeposited natural inclusion in the overlying layer (4), suggested the remnant of former ridge and furrow, oriented north-south. The alignment of the rest of the trenches, however, made it impossible to confirm its existence over the rest of the site. The 18<sup>th</sup> century estate map would appear to suggest an east-west alignment, however monitoring of the topsoil strip across the development site has confirmed the remnants of ridge and furrow on a broad north-south alignment.

The lack of finds from the layer sealing the gravel makes it impossible to ascribe a date for the start of cultivation.



Some of the services cutting the upper deposits were redundant and possibly associated with the establishment of a hospital for the treatment of head injuries on the site during World War II. The absence of the field road in the vicinity of evaluation trench 5 may imply that it was removed by this activity, or that it lies outside the site.

### **References.**

OAU 1998 St Hugh's College, Oxford. Archaeological Evaluation Report.

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





FIGURE 1 Location Plan



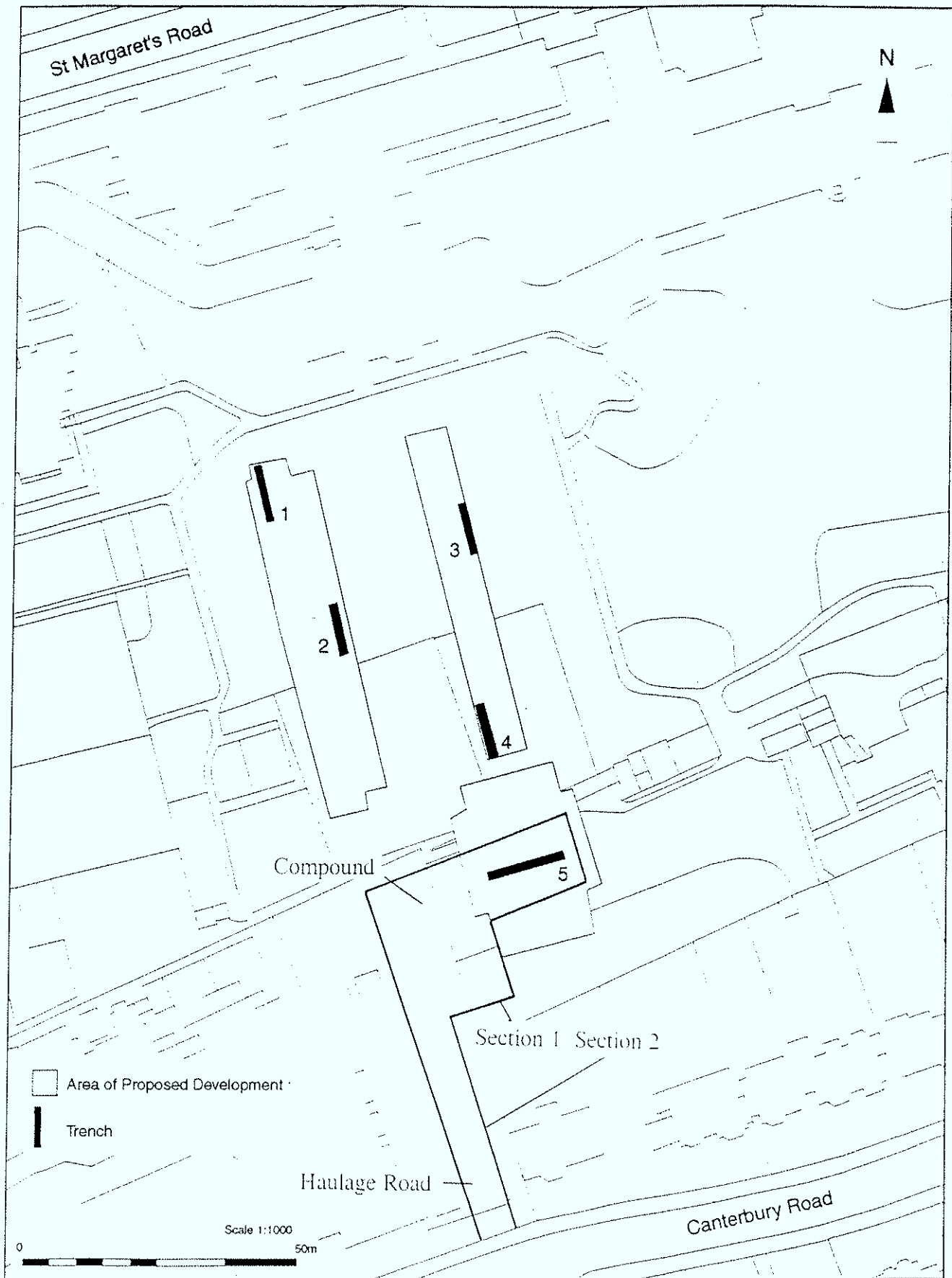


FIGURE 2 Trench Locations and Area of Proposed Development



Section 1



Section 2

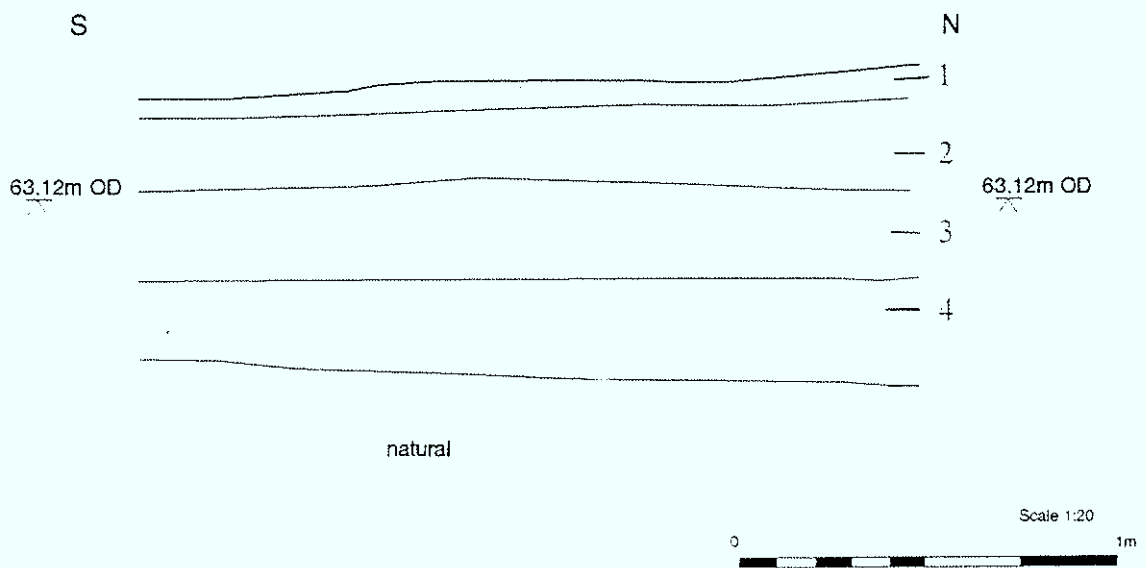


FIGURE 3 Sample Sections



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