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Maidstone Borough Council

MAIDSTONE RIVER PARK, AMPHITHEATRE SITE, MAIDSTONE, KENT

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

March 2001

Maidstone Borough Council

Maidstone River Park, Amphitheatre Site, Maidstone, Kent

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Date: March 2001

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Date:

30/3/2001

Oxford Archaeological Unit

March 2001

Summary

In February 2001 Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Maidstone River Park, which lies within the boundary of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Kent County Monument No.24348). Scheduled Monument Consent has been granted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), but due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological deposits a condition for an archaeological watching brief was attached to the consent. No archaeological features were observed during the watching brief.

1 Introduction

Scheduled Monument Consent has been granted for the construction of a new amphitheatre on an existing open space within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of The College of All Saints, Maidstone, Kent (TQ75805505).

2 Background

Although the site lies within the Scheduled Ancient Monument which encompasses the medieval College of All Saints, the area covered by the watching brief (Fig. 1) lies outside the present college grounds. Although the available records suggest that the site may have been utilised as part of the College gardens, no structures are apparent with the exception of a small building on the riverbank shown on the OS plan of 1868. The historical and archaeological significance of the College, Archbishops' Palace and neighbouring buildings are described in a separate report produced by OAU in 1997. The amphitheatre site has also been the subject of an archaeogeophysical survey by Bartlett-Clark Consultancy for OAU on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council (Bartlett-Clark Consultancy, 1998). This identified a number of anomalies, particularly to the north and west of the site, but could draw no definitive conclusions as to their nature.

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 mechanical excavator.

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

The groundwork comprised the removal of topsoil from the development area and the excavation of strip foundations for the proposed 'amphitheatre'. The topsoil varied in depth from 0.20 m to 0.40 m, and overlay a mid-light brown silty clay (2). Deposit 2 appeared to be an alluvial deposit and was also present to the west of the standing wall which marks the western edge of the site. This suggested that the wall is quite recent, and has been constructed in an attempt to prevent the site from flooding.

Present throughout deposit 2 were localised deposits of a dark grey clay silt with 19th century building rubble and domestic refuse (glass, china etc) (3). These deposits appeared to correspond with the anomalies identified in the geophysical survey and may represent demolition rubble from the building which occupied part of the site in 1868.

The strip foundations were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.20 m through deposit 2 and did not impact on the underlying natural gravel except in the easternmost trench at the top of the slope.

6 Finds

The deposits observed during the watching brief contained concentrations of 19th/20th century building material which was not retained.

7 Environmental results

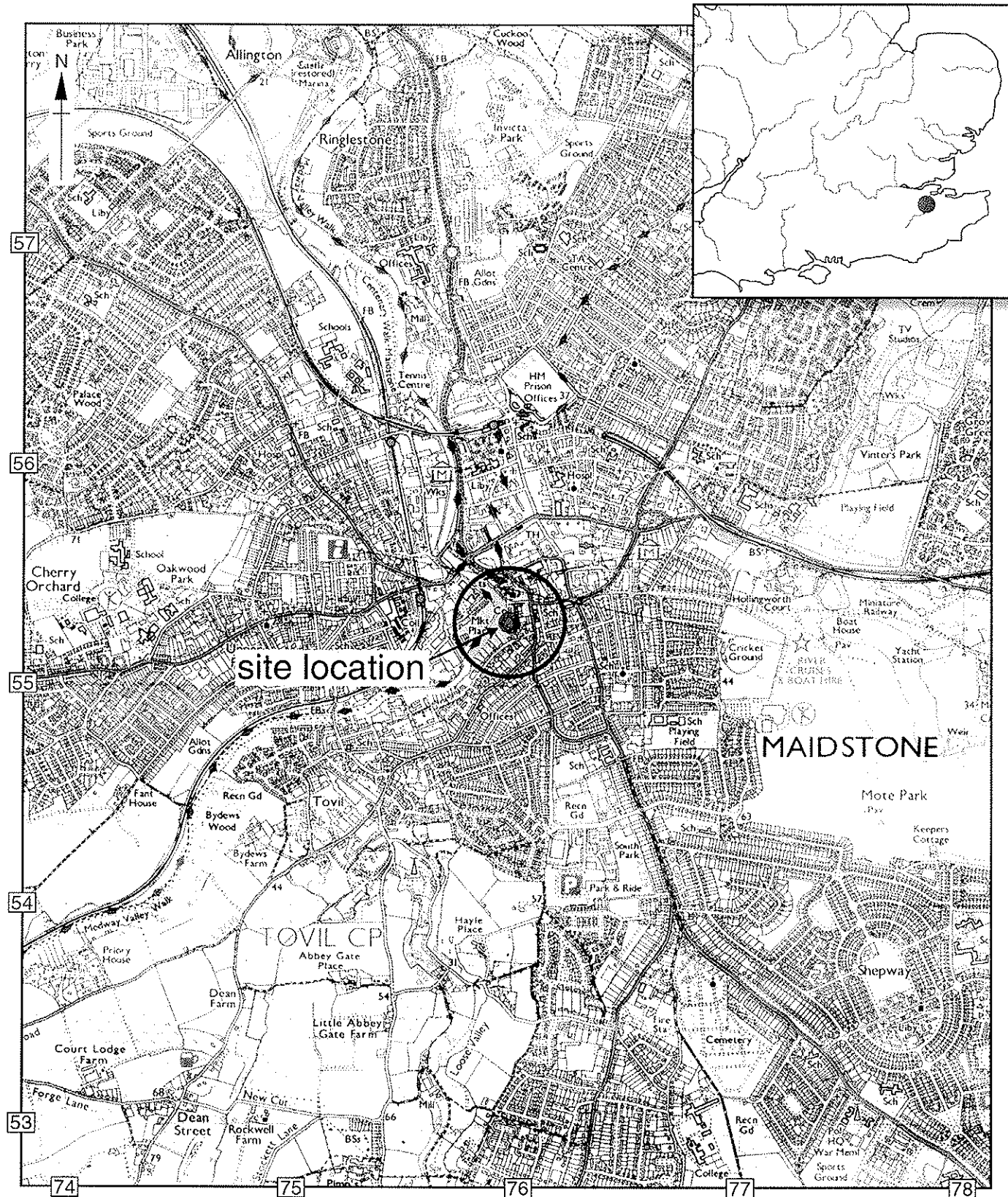
While due consideration was given to various environmental sampling strategies, no suitable deposits were observed during the watching brief.

8 Discussion

No archaeological features connected with the College or the Archbishop's Palace were observed during the watching brief. It is possible that the site has been landscaped and utilised as part of the College gardens and that any archaeological remains have been truncated during the landscaping. As the development had a limited impact on the underlying natural gravel, it is possible that archaeological features survive below the alluvial deposit (2) and were not picked up by the geophysical survey due to the building rubble within deposits 2 and 3.

References.

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



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Figure 1: Site location

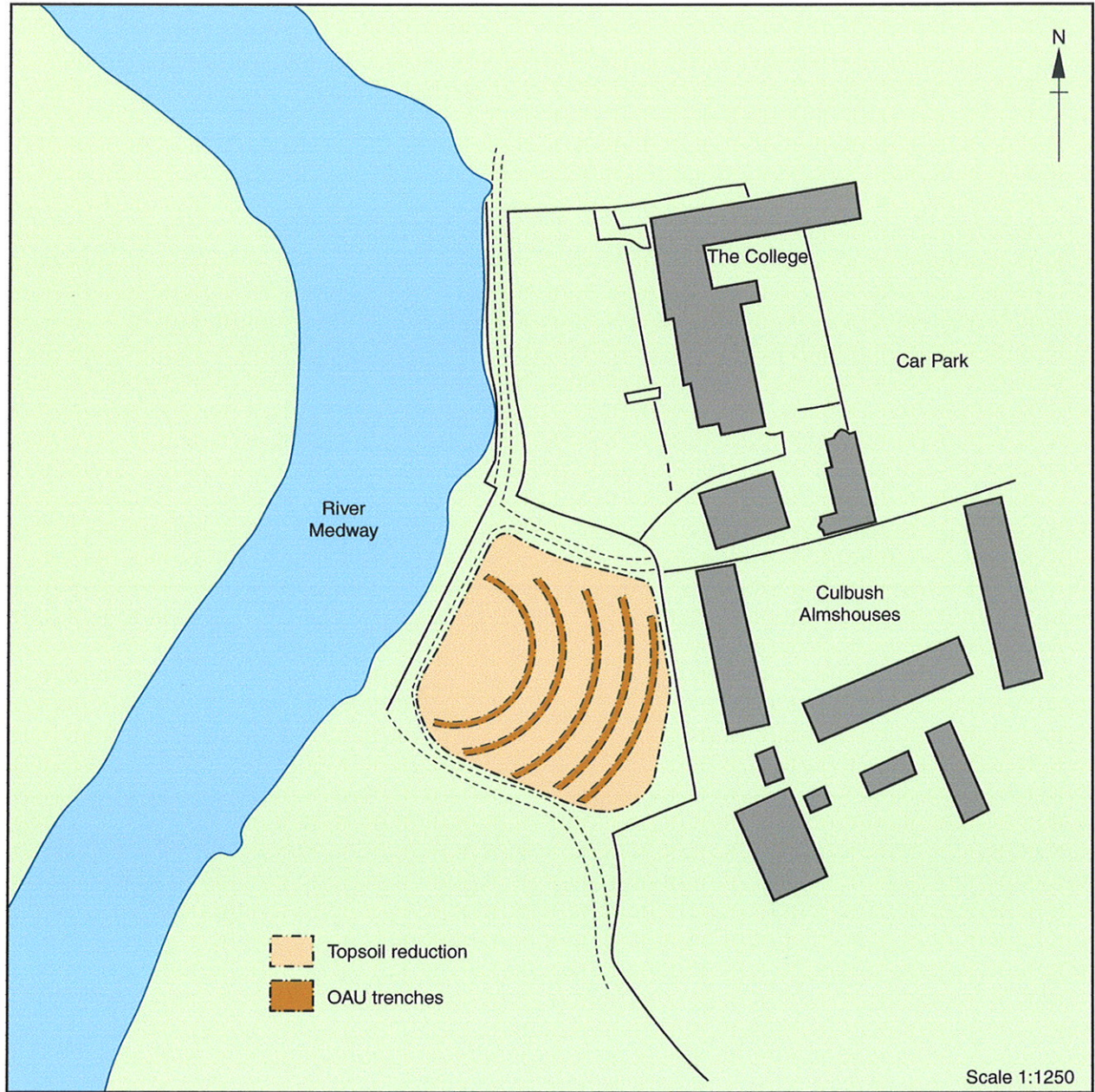


Figure 2: Approximate trench location and area of topsoil reduction



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