

Extension to 23 Banbury Road, Keble College, Oxford



Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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1	Robin Bashford Site Supervisor	(name) (position)	(name) (position)	

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Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263800

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk

f: +44 (0) 1865 793496

w: oxfordarchaeology.com

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Extension to 23 Banbury Road, Keble College, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Robin Bashford

and illustrated by Lucy Gane

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Summary

In May 2014, Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook an archaeological watching brief at 23 Banbury Road, Oxford. The work was commissioned by Keble College in advance of the construction of an extension to the rear of 23 Banbury Road, following advice from the City Archaeologist at Oxford City Council (OCC) that a watching brief would be required. The watching brief was maintained during the excavation of strip foundation trenches and a reduced dig within the footprint of the new build. The excavation of the strip foundations revealed the natural gravels overlain by a post-glacial loessic subsoil which overlies the gravel terrace upon which Oxford sits. The loess was in turn overlain by a buried topsoil deposit which was directly overlain by landscaping and bedding deposits associated with the existing car park surface. The gravel, loess and buried topsoil had been truncated by a large discrete feature which was likely to be a pit, but the function and date of the feature were unclear. The northern edge of the footprint of the new build had been subject to significant modern truncation. The reduced dig did not impact below the top of the buried topsoil horizon and no further features were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In May 2014, Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook an archaeological watching brief at 23 Banbury Road, Oxford. The work was commissioned by Mr Nicholas French, Domestic Bursar, Keble College, Oxford to undertake the archaeological work following advice from the David Radford (City Archaeologist at Oxford City Council (OCC)) that a watching brief would be required. OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which detailed how OA would implement the requirements of OCC. The watching brief was maintained during the excavation of strip foundation trenches and a reduced dig within the footprint of the new build.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is bounded to the north and west by The former Acland Hospital site, to the east by Banbury Road and to the south by University of Oxford, Department of Materials, 21 Banbury Road, Oxford at NGR SP 5110 0715 (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The Site sits on the Oxford promontory at c63.8m OD. The Rivers Thames and Cherwell both run within 1 km of the area of proposed development, which is situated on the edge of the Summertown-Radley gravel terrace. The underlying geology is Oxford Clay.
- 1.2.3 The wider site comprises of a mixture of 19th and 20th century buildings, with grass, landscaped and tarmac areas, the specific area of the development is under asphalt to the rear of 23 Banbury Road.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 A Desk Based Assessment (DBA) has not been prepared for the specific Site, however OA have produced an Archaeological Impact Assessment (OA 2007) for the wider site of the Former Acland Hospital. OA has also produced DBA's for other sites close to the current Site, and the summary below principally draws upon a DBA for a sub-station in University Parks c. 300 m to the east of the current site (OA 2008).

Prehistoric Period (500,000 BP – 43 AD)

- 1.3.2 Two Palaeolithic stone axes were recovered from the old Girls' High School, 21 Banbury Road, immediately to the south of Felstead House.
- 1.3.3 A large Late Neolithic henge monument was partially excavated by TVAS approximately 200m to the SSE of the site. Radiocarbon dating places the material from the henge ditch at the end of the 3rd millennium (c 2200 BC)
- 1.3.4 The Acland Hospital site lies c 100 m west of the University Parks, where there is an extensive area of cropmarks, including a possible Iron Age settlement and Bronze Age ring ditches from burial mounds. A number of ring ditches have been identified across the northern part of the city, from the Science Area to the Sackler Library in St John's Street.

Roman Period (43 AD – 410 AD)

- 1.3.5 There have been finds of Roman coins and pottery across much of north Oxford. A settlement has been identified in the Science Area and it is possible that the activity in the University Parks continued into this period.

Early Medieval Period (AD 410 – 1066)

- 1.3.6 The presence of possible burial mounds and excavation of skeletons in the 18th century suggests an early Saxon cemetery may have existed around the Radcliffe Infirmary, which is immediately west of the Acland Hospital site on Woodstock Road.
- 1.3.7 From the 9th century onwards Oxford developed into a substantial defended town, but this did not extend as far north as the area the Acland Hospital site. At that period the land belonged probably to the manor of Walton and it is probable that it was a mixture of arable land and meadow.

Later Medieval Period (AD1066-1550)

- 1.3.8 St Giles parish was established in the early 12th century, taking in Walton manor. The fields were known as Walton fields in the 14th and 15th centuries and were a mixture of arable and meadow, with common pasture rights recorded in the 14th century. The area became known as St Giles Field in 1542 and much of it was purchased by St John's College in 1573. Evidence for medieval ridge and furrow was found 30m north of the site.

Post-Medieval Period (AD1550-1850)

- 1.3.9 During the post-medieval period, the site lay within open fields. Archaeological excavations 30m to the north of the site at St Anne's College (OAU 1991) produced evidence of post medieval quarrying and a half groat from the Civil War period
- 1.3.10 The site lies immediately north of the plotted extent of the Civil War defences, and may contain evidence of the conflict such as canon balls, musket balls etc.

Early Modern Period (AD1851-1939)

- 1.3.11 The Ackland home building lies over the footprint of Northgate House and its garden (built c. 1841-1850). This was one of the earliest houses built along the Banbury and Woodstock Roads in the 19th century. It was constructed by Jonathan Browning, Mayor of Oxford and Ironmonger, as a family home. Northgate house was demolished in 1936 when extensive new buildings that expanded the capacity of the Acland Hospital (based

at 25 Banbury Rd since 1897 after moving from Wellington Square, Oxford) were constructed.

1.4 Previous Archaeological Work (Fig. 3)

- 1.4.1 In July 2009 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation on the Former Acland Hospital Site immediately to the north and west of the proposed development (OA, 2009), the trench positions are shown on Fig. 3. The earliest features found were a series of possible postholes and a NW-SE aligned ditch within a car-parking area adjacent to the Banbury Road. The location of a pre-historic ring ditch is tentatively postulated in the SW corner of the site (potentially re-used as a bastion within the Civil War defences).
- 1.4.2 A large pit was also located to the east of the site which produced a sherd of 10th-12th century pottery. This suggests some sort of low-level occupation activity. A layer of reworked loessic loam overlay the pit and may indicate ploughing in this area in the 13th century.
- 1.4.3 A very large pit or ditch was identified in the SW corner of the site. Its fills contained early post-medieval finds giving a date from 1630 onwards. This feature is probably the ditch that encompassed the northernmost bastion of the civil wall defences, as represented on de Gommies Plan of 1644. A later re-cutting of the fills of this feature is likely to have been caused by subsequent post-medieval pits.
- 1.4.4 Within the NW of the site, another deep feature was identified. The interpretation was problematic, given the limited profile obtained, although a single sherd of 18th century pottery was recovered from just above the base of this feature. It is probable that this is a relatively late substantial pit, probably a quarry hole for gravel extraction.
- 1.4.5 The foundations of the former Northgate House were also uncovered close to the centre of the site.
- 1.4.6 Trench 4 was positioned c. 10m to the west of the current proposal. This trench recorded underlying natural sandy gravel at a depth of 0.9 m BGL (62.30 m AOD). It was overlain by 0.3 m of reddish brown sandy silt subsoil, then 0.25 m of dark brown sandy silt. These soils were overlain by a concrete set former parking area and the present tarmac car park surface.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

General

- 2.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were to:
- establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the development area,
 - determine and confirm the character of any remains present,
 - determine or estimate the date range of any remains from artefacts or otherwise,
 - characterise any underlying archaeological strata down to undisturbed geology,
 - determine the palaeo-environmental potential of archaeological deposits

Specific aims and objectives

- 2.1.2 The specific aims and objectives of the watching brief were to:
- establish whether significant later prehistoric remains are present (e.g. Neolithic or Bronze Age funerary monuments or related remains, also any evidence for Iron Age or Roman agricultural landscapes),
 - establish whether any significant Saxon remains are present,
 - establish the character and extent of any medieval and post medieval activity (e.g. is there evidence for ridge and furrow, field boundaries, gravel quarry's, Civil War siege related activity etc).

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 A summary of OA's general approach to excavation and recording can be found in Appendix A of the WSI. Standard methodologies for Geomatics and Survey, Environmental evidence, Artefactual evidence and Burials can also be found in the appendices to that document (Appendices B, C, D and E respectively).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 Natural gravel (3) was encountered at approximately 62.90m OD and was overlain by a c0.3m thick layer of mid reddish brown clay silt (4) which was in turn overlain by a 0.2m thick layer of humic mid-dark grey silty clay (5). In the westernmost of the north-south aligned foundation trenches, these deposits had been truncated by a large feature (1) which was at least 2m in diameter and 1m deep where it was revealed in the east facing section of the trench. The feature was not present in the west facing section and must therefore have terminated within the trench itself. The fills of the feature had been truncated by bioturbation associated with a ?recently felled tree which had also truncated the overlying modern topsoil.
- 3.1.2 The topsoil was only present along the western extent of the footprint of the new build. Across the remaining area subject to the watching brief, the buried topsoil horizon was directly overlain by landscaping and bedding deposits associated with the existing tarmac car park surface. Along the southern edge of the new build footprint, these deposits had been truncated by - and were re-deposited within - a large modern feature.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

3.3 Environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits were encountered which were suitable for environmental sampling.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The excavation of the strip foundations revealed the natural gravels overlain by the post-glacial loessic subsoil which overlies the gravel terrace upon which Oxford sits. The loess was in turn overlain by the topsoil horizon pre-dating the construction of the modern car park.



- 4.1.2 No evidence for significant pre-historic, Saxon or medieval activity was revealed. It seems likely that Feature 1 represents a pit, the function and date of which were unclear. However, the fact that it cut the buried topsoil horizon may suggest it was relatively late in date.

**APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
1	Cut	1m	2m	0.6m+	Probable pit		?19thC
2	Fill	1m	2m	0.6m+	Fill of probable pit		
3	Layer				Natural gravel		
4	Deposit	0.3			Loess		
5	Deposit	0.2			Buried topsoil		



APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- | | |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| OA, 2007 | Archaeological Impact Assessment. Keble College, Ackland Hospital Site, Banbury Road Client Report |
| OA, 2008 | Oxford University Parks, Electricity Sub-station: Desk Based Assessment |
| OA, 2009 | The Former Ackland Hospital Site, Oxford: Archaeological Evaluation Report |
| OA, 2014 | Extension to 23 Banbury Road, Keble College, Oxford: Written Scheme of Investigation for and Archaeological Watching Brief |



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Extension to 23 Banbury Road, Keble College, Oxford

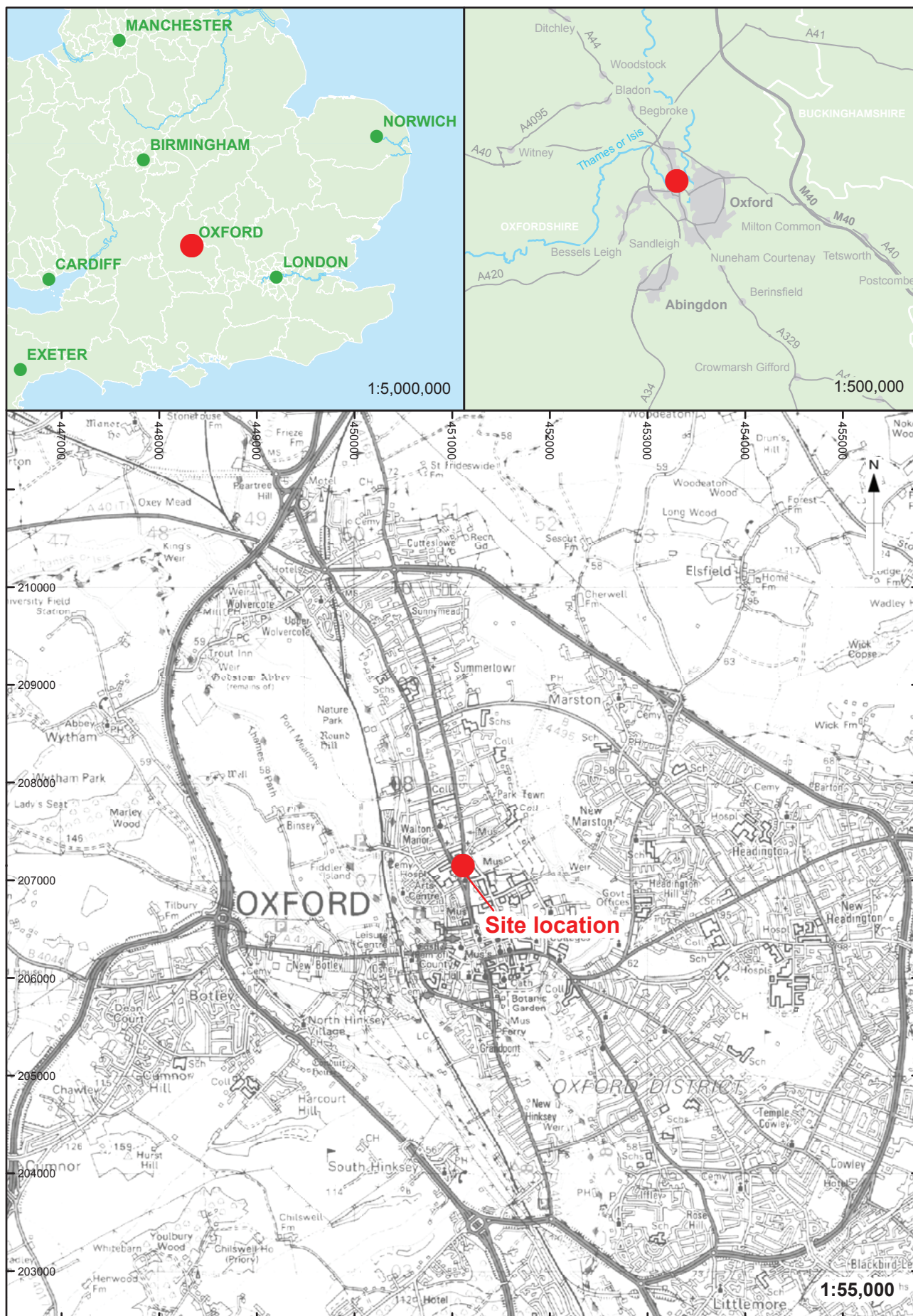
Site code: OXKHFH14

Grid reference: Centred at NGR SP 5110 0715

Date and duration of project: May 2014, 3 visits

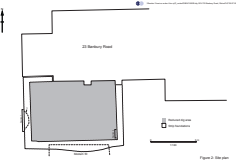
Summary of results: In May 2014, Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook an archaeological watching brief at 23 Banbury Road, Oxford. The work was commissioned by Keble College in advance of the construction of an extension to the rear of 23 Banbury Road, following advice from the City Archaeologist at Oxford City Council (OCC) that a watching brief would be required. The watching brief was maintained during the excavation of strip foundation trenches and a reduced dig within the footprint of the new build. The excavation of the strip foundations revealed the natural gravels overlain by a post-glacial loessic subsoil which overlies the gravel terrace upon which Oxford sits. The loess was in turn overlain by a buried topsoil deposit which was directly overlain by landscaping and bedding deposits associated with the existing car park surface. The gravel, loess and buried topsoil had been truncated by a large discrete feature which was likely to be a pit, but the function and date of the feature were unclear. The northern edge of the footprint of the new build had been subject to significant modern truncation. The reduced dig did not impact below the top of the buried topsoil horizon and no further features were observed.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: TBC.



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Figure 1: Site location



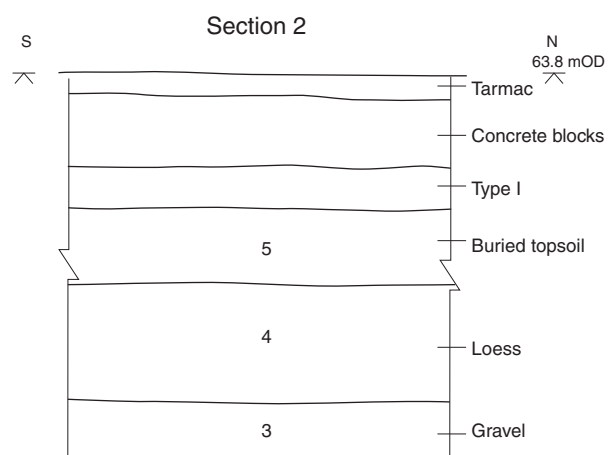
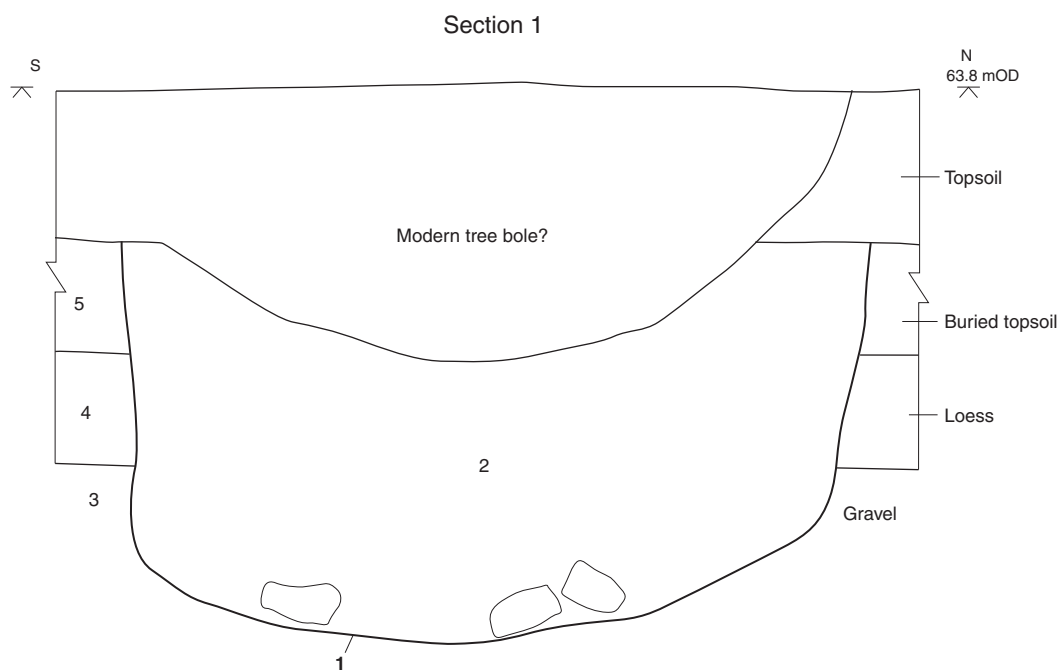


Figure 3: Sections 1 and 2



**Head Office/Registered Office/
OA South**

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1QD

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850 500
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



Director: Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MIFA
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