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Oxon Planning Partnership

**Eastwyke Farm, Abingdon Road
Oxford**

NGR SP 5171 0492

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. 98/0778/NF

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August 2000

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Prepared by: J Dalton/J Hiller

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Checked by: J Dalton

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Date: August 2000

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Summary

In September 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Eastwyke Farm, Abingdon Road, Oxford (NGR 5171 0492) during groundwork in advance of the construction of a new hotel. The watching brief followed an archaeological evaluation of the site. Soil profiles identical to those found in the evaluation were noted; no archaeological features or finds were discovered.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Planning permission was granted for the construction of a new hotel complex on the site of Eastwyke Farm Abingdon Road, Oxford (Fig. 1). The site lies just outside the City Council's Area of Archaeological Interest (Deposit Policies EN 43-45).
- 1.2 OAU undertook an archaeological field evaluation of the site in June 1998, and as a result of the findings, a watching brief was attached to the remainder of the development by the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service.
- 1.3 OAU was commissioned by Oxon Planning Partnership on behalf of The Four Pillars Group to undertake this phase of work. It was undertaken in accordance with a brief set by, and a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service.
- 1.4 The Watching Brief was carried out in October and November 1998.

2 Background

The archaeological background to this watching brief has been the subject of a separate desk study (OAU 1998), the results of which are summarised below:

- 2.1 The site lies on a gravel island between braided channels of the river Thames. Periglacial deposits overlie the gravel. The present ground level is at 56 m OD.
- 2.2 The site is situated on a former farm adjacent to the Abingdon Road; at the time of the watching brief the site was level and occupied by disused farm buildings.
- 2.3 The site lies within the former historical county of Berkshire, to the east of Grandpont, which is the Norman causeway to Oxford (Abingdon Road). Grandpont Bridge succeeded a series of fords and timber bridges across the floodplain south of Oxford (Durham 1984).
- 2.4 In the medieval period the site was the property of Abingdon Abbey, though it is unclear if there were buildings on the site at that time. In 1511 University College acquired the land, which was leased to brewers in the 1540s.

Thereafter, until 1820 subsequent tenants included gentlemen, clerks and clergy.

- 2.5 Eastwyke farmhouse is a Grade II listed building constructed in the 17th century; de Gomme's map of 1642 depicts a star shaped fort on or near the site of the farmhouse.
- 2.6 Locally, excavations at Whitehouse Road in 1992 to the north-west of this development recovered settlement evidence of middle Iron Age date.
- 2.7 The evaluation of the development site revealed modern farming related features and deposits, including animal burials, rubbish pits and temporary structures. South of the farmhouse three late-medieval/post-medieval features were discovered.

3 Aims

- 3.1 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, in order to secure their preservation by record (OAU 1992).
- 3.2 Specific aims were to establish the distribution and date of features either side of the mapped drain and
- 3.3 monitor any contractor excavations within a 30 m radius of evaluation trench 1, in order to ascertain whether all features recorded in the evaluation relate to the known farmhouse or to a separate property, and whether the drain may originally relate as a wet moat to the farmhouse
- 3.4 To make available the results of the investigation in the form of a written report

4 Methodology

- 4.1 An archaeological supervisor was in attendance during groundwork likely to affect archaeological deposits. The work involved the monitoring of topsoil stripping and the excavation of foundation and service trenches. The contractor's excavations for a new swimming pool were also monitored.
- 4.2 Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations, any deposits and features exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in accordance with standard OAU practices (OAU 1992). Written records were made on pro-forma sheets. Soil descriptions were compiled using estimated percentages using standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types soils.

5 Results

- 5.1 The autumn and early winter weather was extremely wet, and this hampered the contractor's excavations, particularly during topsoil stripping operations. Two areas of the development area were the subjects of the watching brief (fig. 2).
- 5.2 The excavation of the swimming revealed a large linear cut feature aligned east-west that contained modern service pipes. The backfill of the cut comprised gravel and clinker. The service cut appeared to have been cut from just below the concrete surface of the site, and was cut down through a layer of loam that sealed the underlying subsoil, a yellow-brown sandy silt.
- 5.3 The installation of a new de-watering system was monitored. The trench for the de-watering system was aligned north-west-south-east and was 0.85 m deep. In the lower part of the trench was a 0.55 m thick layer of mid-brown/orange loam. This was undated and was sealed beneath a topsoil that was 0.3 m thick. The topsoil contained a substantial quantity of building or demolition material. The service trench seen in the area of the swimming pool excavation was observed during the excavation of the de-watering ditch.

6 Finds

- 6.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

7 Environmental results

- 7.1 No environmental samples were taken during the course of the work.

8 Discussion

- 8.1 No archaeological features were observed during the investigation here, confirming the generally low level of archaeological potential of the site established by the evaluation. The general soil horizon encountered in the intrusive works corresponded to the soil levels found within the evaluation trenches, sealing the natural subsoil.

J Dalton/J Hiller
July 2000

References

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

OAU 1998 Eastwyke Farm, Abingdon Road, Oxford. Evaluation Report

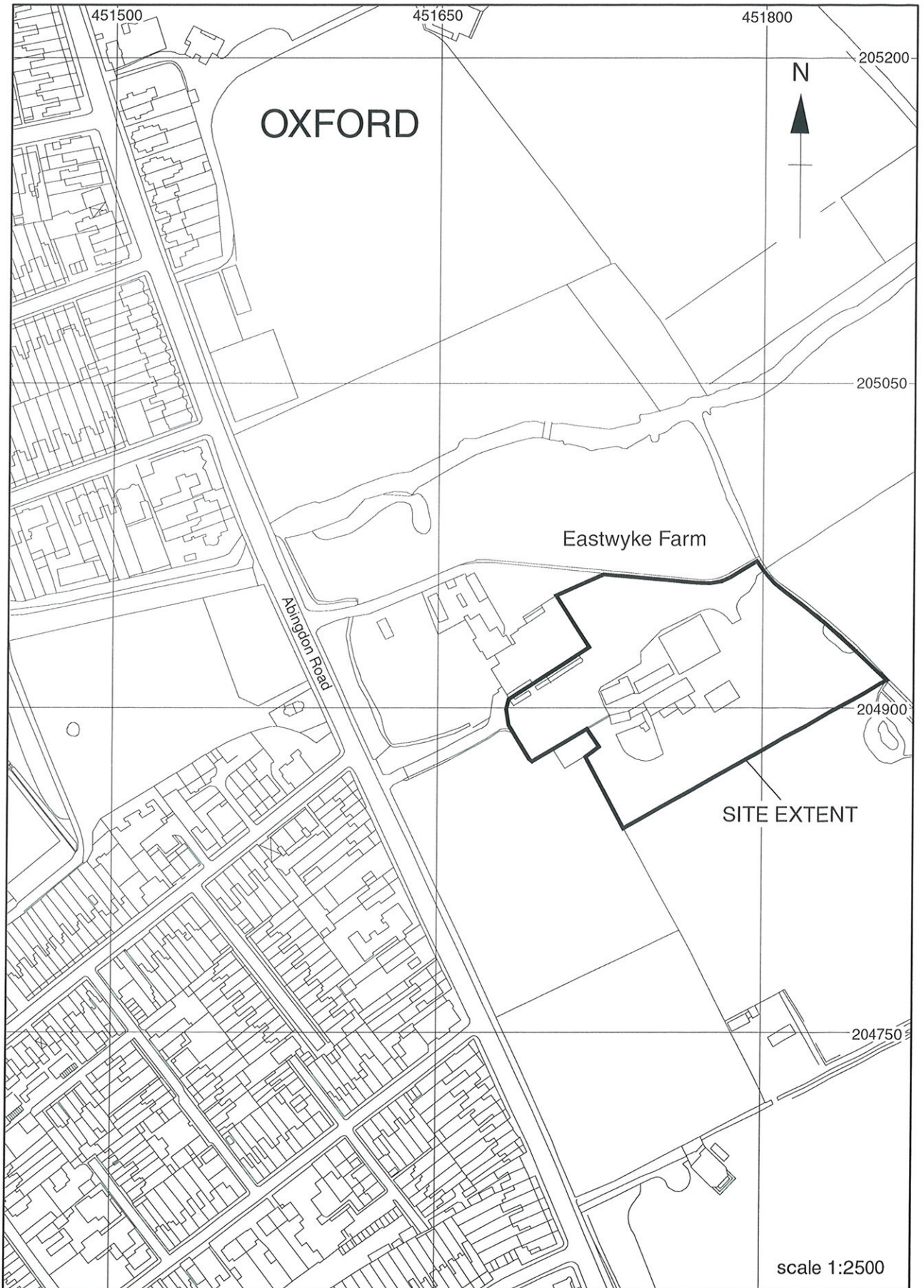


Figure 1: Site location



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