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Areen Design Services

NEW HOCKEY PITCH, MAGDALEN COLLEGE
(PLANNING REF: 99/812/NFZ)

and

NEW CENTRE FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES
(PLANNING REF: 99/1768/NFH)

KINGS MILL LANE, OXFORD

NGR SP 5275 0650

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

April 2001

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Date:

24/4/2001

Oxford Archaeological Unit

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Summary

In January and February 2001, Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Kings Mill Lane, Oxford. The site encompassed two developments. The construction of a new hockey pitch for Magdalen College (99/1768/NFH) and the construction of a new Centre for Islamic Studies (99/812/NFZ). Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological remains, a condition for an archaeological watching brief was attached to the permission. An evaluation by OAU in September 2000 revealed a number of 19th/20th century structures associated with Kings Mill Farm to the north of the site, these were observed but no further recording was considered necessary. No other significant archaeological features or deposits were observed during the watching brief.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 A planning application for the construction of a new Centre for Islamic Studies has been submitted to Oxford City Council (Planning Ref: 99/812/NFZ). The site of the proposed redevelopment is within an area of archaeological potential and as a result the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS) requested that an archaeological evaluation of the site be undertaken in accordance with PPG16 and Policy EN 40 of the Oxford Local Plan. OAU carried out an archaeological evaluation of the development site in September 2000, the results of the evaluation are summarised below (2.3). The watching brief also encompassed the monitoring of the topsoil reduction for the new hockey pitch for Magdalen College (Planning Ref: 99/1768/NFH) and the redevelopment of the remaining farm buildings at the north end of the site.

2 Location, Topography and Geology

- 2.1 The site (Figs 1 and 2) is located on the west side of Marston Road, Oxford, due south of King's Mill Lane (SP 5275 0650). The site comprises grassland and a derelict farm in the north-west corner, situated east of the alluvial flood plain of the River Cherwell. The land slopes from Marston Road down to the River Cherwell to the west, and there has been some landscaping of the site when Magdalen College constructed a rugby pitch.
- 2.2 The underlying geology is Oxford Clay and Kellaway clay beds of the Upper Jurassic. In October 1998 OAU monitored engineering test pits here. The majority of these revealed a sequence of soils over an ?alluvial clay that was encountered c 0.5 m below ground level at the west and centre of the site and c 1 m below ground level to the east (OAU 1998b).
- 2.3 The 2000 evaluation consisted of seven trenches which revealed a similar sequence of soils (OAU, 2000). There was no evidence from the trial trenches of activity from the prehistoric, Roman, Saxon or medieval periods. The open area of the development site produced a series of superimposed natural clay layers, the uppermost usually affected by natural weathering and/or alluvial processes. Post-medieval finds were located from worked soils, possibly ploughsoils, as was the line of a trackway formerly flanked by walls that is

known to date to at least 1913 from cartographic evidence. This trackway led directly from Marston Road to the farm and there was evidence of a further trackway south of the farm, also known to have been in use in 1913. Structural remains of a greenhouse and a well were also found south of the farm compound; these are both likely to date to the 19th or early 20th century. Within the limit of the farm were the remains of earlier demolished structures, including a well-preserved cobbled yard surface and stone trackway. The pottery from beneath the surface dates to the 18th/19th century, thus giving an approximate date for the construction of these structures.

3 Historical and Archaeological Background

The archaeological background regarding this site previously been presented in a desk-top study (OAU 1998a). The following is a summary of that document and the references contained therein.

3.1 *Prehistoric*

A ring ditch and a Bronze Age spearhead discovered on the river Cherwell floodplain represent local prehistoric evidence (SMR 12588, 9166). To the north-west of King's Mill Farm, cropmarks of prehistoric date are known in University Parks and on Port Meadow.

3.2 *Roman*

Roman settlement and industry is known from the kiln sites at the Churchill Hospital c 2 km south-east of this development (Young, 1975). Oxford School has likewise produced evidence of kilns, pottery, coins and structures. A pottery kiln was discovered during road construction north of Cherwell Drive in Marston (SMR 6142), while Roman pottery was discovered during excavations at Magdalen College School (SMR 3599).

3.3 *Saxon and Medieval*

King's Mill and its surroundings were located outside Oxford within the 'rural' Bullingdon Hundred. South of the site was a road (the *streat*) linking Oxford to London via Shotover. This road crossed the river Cherwell near the present Magdalen Bridge at *Pettypont*, later *East Bridge*, and latterly Magdalen Bridge. The parish boundaries of Headington, St Clements, Marston and Holywell converged at the King's Mill, which Domesday records as one of two mills within Headington manor. Some 46 acres of land adjacent to the mill was held by the Canons of Missenden from the reign of King Stephen. The King may have received rent for the property, though it is more likely that the mill was in the possession of the Hospital of St. John at Eastgate. In c 1225, the wife of one Geoffrey Flecchere gave to the hospital a mill known as *Kingesmulne*, together with its land and fishponds, and in 1232 King Henry III confirmed the grant of 'our mill in Headington called *Kyngesmelne*'. The mill and the hospital became the property of Magdalen College in the 15th

century.¹ An attempted exchange with Merton College in 1477 records *Kyngesmylle*, and describes the islands Myll Eyte and Fishers Eyte, together with a garden and millpond. Within ten years the exchange was revoked.² College leases of 1542 record 'a tenement in Headington with part of Kings Myll Meadow', and by 1572 it was called the 'College's principal farm in Hedington and half of Kinges Mill medow'.³

3.4 *Post-medieval*

The site lies outside the line of Civil War defences as depicted on De Gomme's map of 1644. The mill is drawn on a map of the estates of Magdalen College (1847); a caption identifies part of the site as King's Mill Meadows. The first edition O.S. map (1877) shows the area of the site as two parcels of land (No. 7 – houses and yards, and No. 9 – pasture) and by the time of the third edition O.S. map (1913) the south part of the site was a market garden complete with greenhouse and formal pathways (see Fig. 8). By 1966 the southerly range of farm buildings had been replaced with new structures. Part of the site was an orchard, though some of the earlier paths were still in use. The mill itself is last mentioned as a working mill in 1832.

3.5 *Buildings*

The King's Mill Farm Buildings are described in the desk-top study, and most if not all of those still standing date to the 18th or 19th century, with 20th century additions. Magdalen College had used part of the open ground as a rugby pitch. Latterly the farm has been used as a mason's store.

4 **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.

5 **Methodology**

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

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.

¹ *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Oxfordshire V, Bullingdon Hundred* (1957), 158; H.E. Salter, *Cartulary of the Hospital of St John I* (Oxf. Hist Soc. Lxvi, 1914), 77.

² Magdalen College Archives, Headington 6 & 31 (Macray Oxon. VIII, 83, 87).

³ College Lease Books EL/6, p.65 and f.204v, a reference we owe to the kindness of Dr Robin Darwall-Smith.

6 Results

6.1 *The Hockey Pitch - Sections 1 and 2, Fig. 3; Fig. 2*

The construction of the new hockey pitch involved the reduction of the topsoil across the site in order to provide a level surface. The topsoil varied in depth from 0.50 m to the east of the site (adjacent to Marston Road) and 0.2 m to the west. No archaeological features or deposits were observed during the topsoil reduction although the natural clay was cut by numerous field drains.

6.2 *The Centre for Islamic Studies - Sections 3 and 4, Fig. 3; Fig. 2*

The Centre for Islamic Studies site lies immediately to the north of the new Hockey Pitch and was similarly lacking in archaeological remains. The groundwork involved the removal of the topsoil and a significant incursion into the natural clay. This was closely monitored but no archaeological features or deposits were observed with the exception of 20th century made ground and a brick culvert associated with the standing buildings to the extreme north of the site. The trackway and associated structures recorded during the evaluation were also observed although no further recording was considered necessary. The farm buildings to the north of the site have been retained but the south range of buildings were demolished prior to the ground reduction (Fig. 2). The post demolition reduction was monitored but no evidence for earlier farm buildings was observed.

As with the Hockey Pitch site, the depth of the topsoil was greater to the east of the site - towards Marston Road - and has perhaps been banked up to facilitate drainage from the road surface, or as part of the landscaping to create a rugby pitch for the College.

7 Finds

A number of 20th century finds were apparent within the deposits associated with the standing buildings but were not retained.

8 Environmental results

Although full consideration was given to various sampling strategies, due to the absence of any suitable deposits no environmental soil samples were taken.

9 Discussion

No significant archaeological remains were observed during the watching brief. Evidence for the structures associated with the farm confirmed the results of the evaluation in 2000, although no evidence of earlier structures was observed. It is possible that some truncation has occurred during landscaping for the Magdalen playing fields but it is unlikely that this would have eradicated all traces of archaeology, had any been present. This appears to confirm the supposition presented above that for the majority of the medieval period the site appears to have been used as common meadow or

pasture land and that the impact of the market garden (OAU 2000) was limited to the area surrounding the standing buildings.

References.

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

OAU 1998a *Proposed Development at King's Mill Lane, Marston Road, Oxford. Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*. Client Report

OAU 1998b *Centre for Islamic Studies, Kings Mill Lane, Oxford. Archaeological Watching Brief Report*. Client Report

OAU 2000 *Centre for Islamic Studies, King's Mill Lane, Marston Road, Oxford. Archaeological Field Evaluation Report*. Client Report

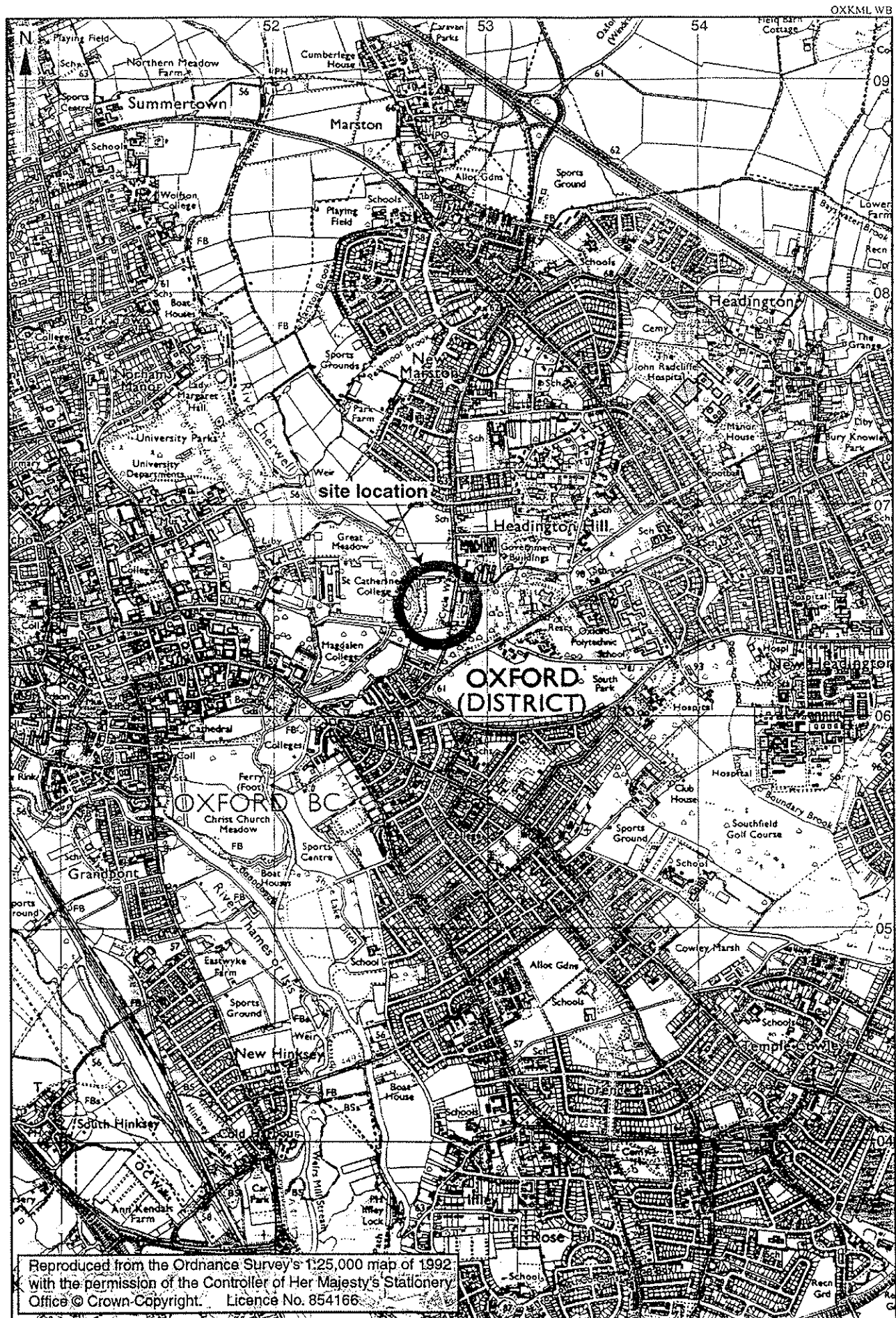
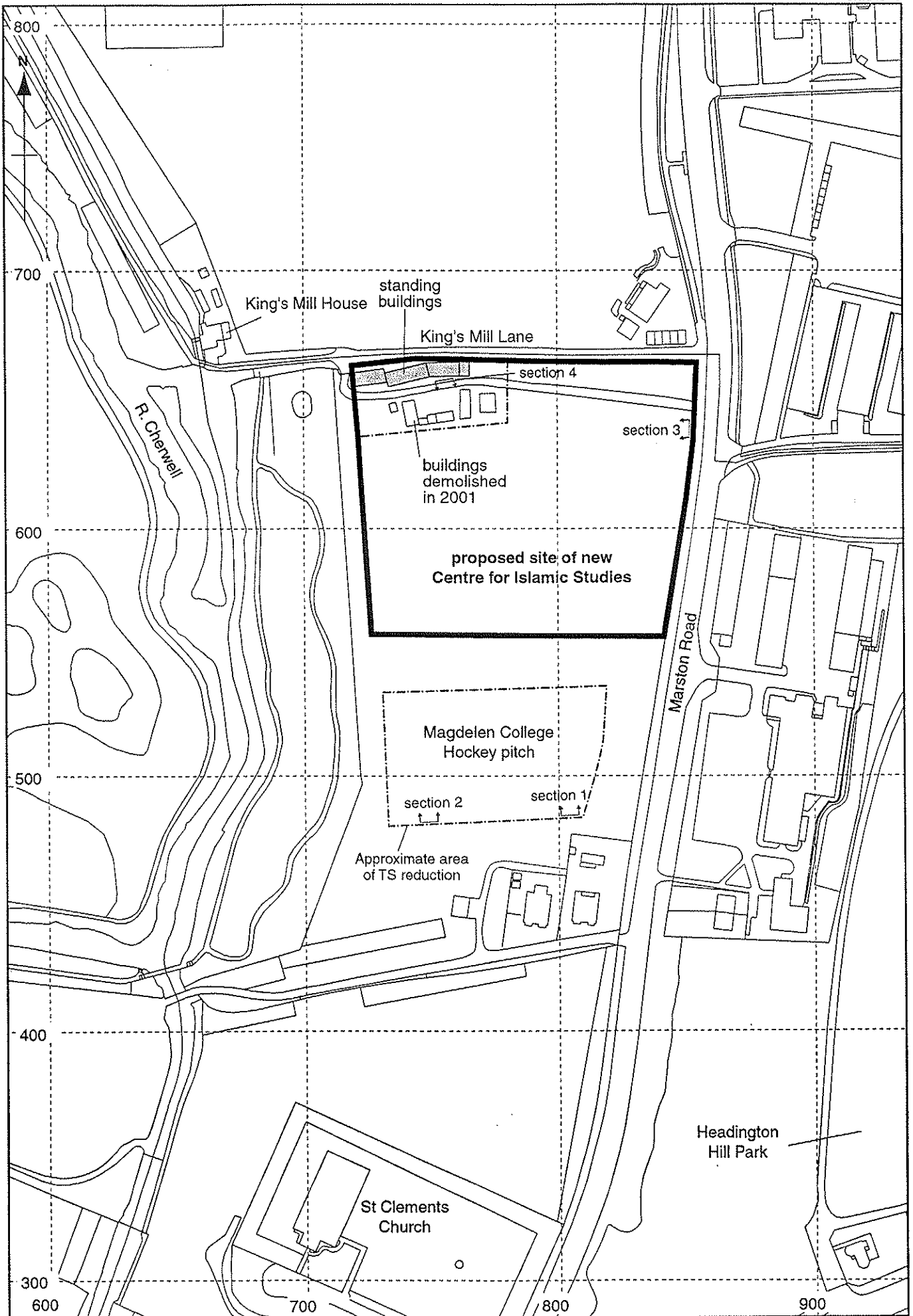


Figure 1: site location.



scale 1:2000

Figure 2: Site plan.

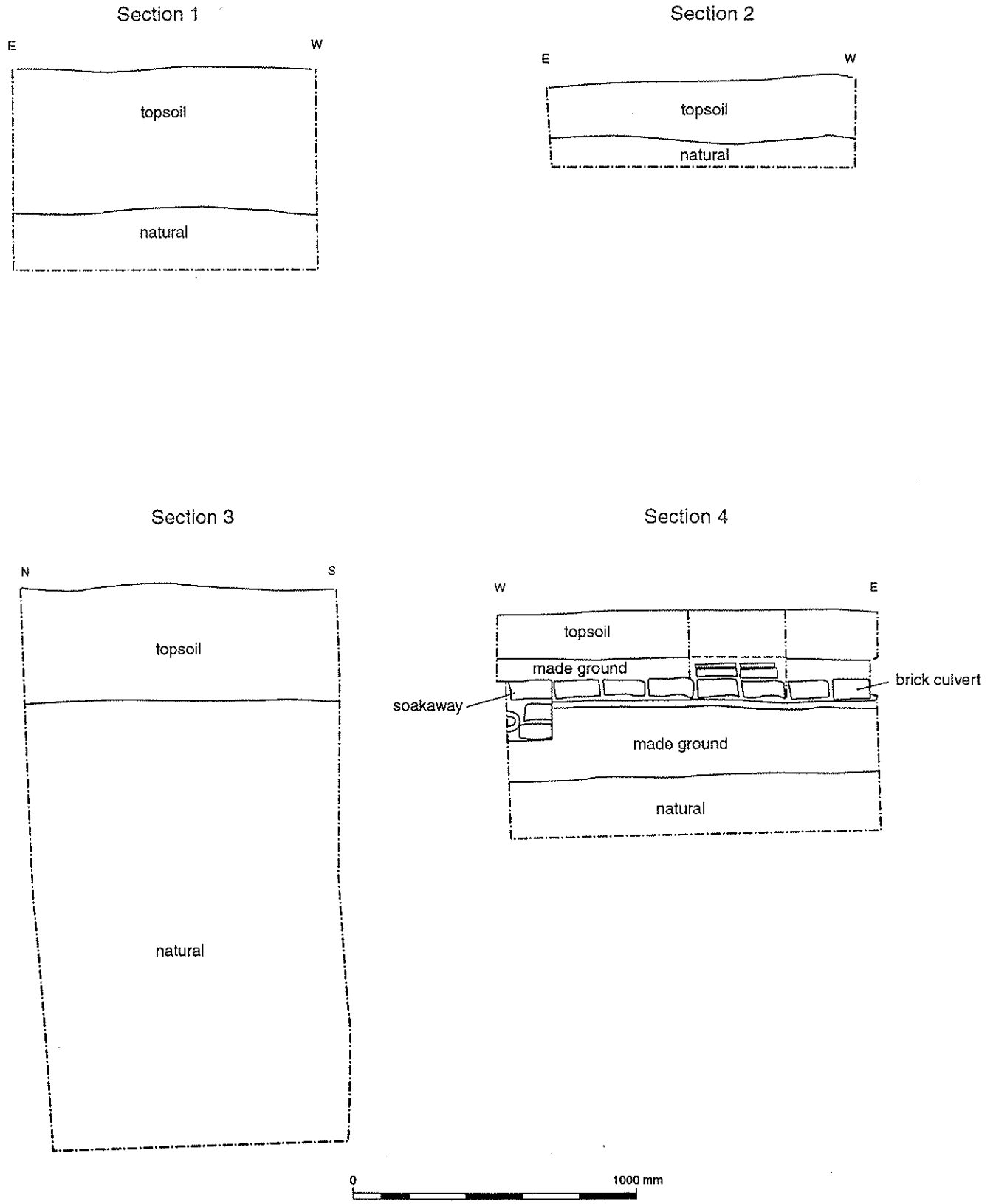


Figure 3: sections



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