

OXFORD (OX)

**Oxford St. Frideswide's Bridge,
Botley Road, Oxford**

NGR SP 5012 0622

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report
[archive report]**

Oxford Archaeological Unit
April 2001

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In the autumn of 1997 the Oxford Archaeological Unit maintained a watching brief on the re-siting of a sewer inspection chamber adjacent to St Frideswide's Bridge, Botley Road, Oxford (NGR SP 5012 0622). The project was undertaken Oxford City Council on behalf of Thames Water, as part of the Botley road/Ferry Hinksey Lane junction road widening scheme.
- 1.2 The archaeological observation work was arranged following discussions with representatives of Thames Water who had contacted the County Archaeologist, Paul Smith. Previous work on the bridge had recovered stonework during the re-routing of British Telecom Cables immediately adjacent as part of the same scheme.
- 1.3 OAU agreed to undertake a limited Watching Brief to be funded by Thames Water. The Project engineers were WS Atkins Ltd of Oxford.

2 Background

- 2.1 In the early 17th century there was a narrow footbridge and a ford on the site of St. Frideswide's Bridge, west of Osney Bridge.
- 2.2 Historian Anthony Wood claimed that a stone bridge was built there in c 1674, but this may have been altered when the Turnpike was constructed, and a seven arch bridge was built in the 18th century (*VCH* iv, 1979, 288).

3 Methodology

- 3.1 Colour photographs were taken of the site works and hand written notes made. A single post-medieval glass fragment was recovered for dating evidence but was not retained.

4 Results

- 4.1 The inspection area comprised a large open pit excavated by the contractors, situated immediately east of the northerly bridge abutment. In the north part of the pit at depth

was the north wall of a culvert, with facing stones on its south side. The culvert appeared to have been filled previously with a large ceramic sewer pipe c 0.6 m in diameter. The pipe obscured the full depth of the culvert wall.

- 4.2 The wall comprised two parts: the lower part was at least 0.85 m high and a minimum of five courses of stone. From the base upward, stone courses 1 to 4 consisted of roughly squared limestone blocks of various sizes up to 0.44 m by 0.16 m. The upper course of limestone consisted of less regular blocks but with a level top surface; the largest block measured 0.59 m by 0.19 m. The stones were bonded with a hard sandy mortar.
- 4.3 The second part of the wall overlay this, comprising two courses of smaller squared limestone up to c 0.26 m by 0.1 m; its total height was 0.25 m. Fragmentary traces of further stone coursing overlay this, clearly damaged both by the contractors' excavations and by the earlier insertion of the sewer pipe. The upper surfaces of the second set of coursing sloped slightly to the south from the north, suggesting that at one time the culvert was roofed with an arch. The top of the main part of the wall lay 1.57 m below the present ground surface at its west end, and 1.49 m below at its east end.
- 4.4 Fragmentary soil deposits abutted the wall face in places and in the interstices of the stones. These soils were generally grey-black gritty loams, from which a fragment of post-medieval glass was recovered.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 The watching brief was limited in nature. There appears to have been a modified or reused culvert at depth on the north side of the present bridge.
- 5.2 The date of the construction of the culvert is unclear, although the fragment of glass may suggest that it was *in situ* in the post-medieval period, and this may accord with Wood's suggestion that there was a stone bridge here by 1674.

Reference

Victoria County History of Oxford, iv, 1979

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April 2001

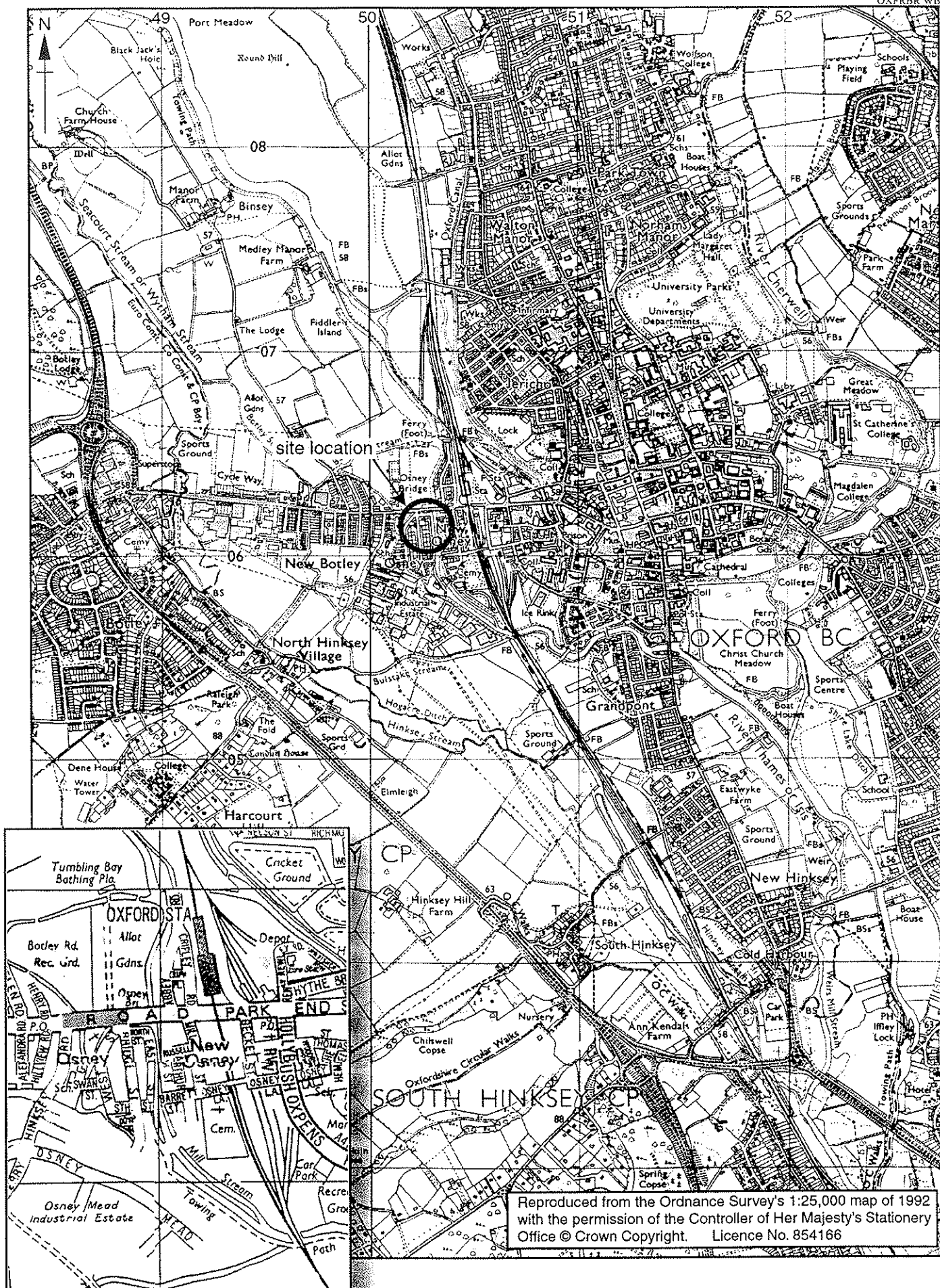


Figure 1: location of site.



scale 1:1000

Figure 2: Trench location plan with trench plan (inset).



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