

**Berman, Guedes, Stretton & Thomas Rayson Partnership**

**Wychwood School, Bardwell Road, Oxford**

*NGR SP 5130 0780*

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

**Planning Ref. No. 98/835/NFH**

**Oxford Archaeological Unit**

**February 2000**

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. 98/835/NFH

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Date: 7/2/00

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Date: 11/2/00

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Date: 21/2/2000

Oxford Archaeological Unit

February 2000

## *Summary*

*In late 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Wychwood School, Bardwell Road, Oxford (NGR SP 5130 0780). No archaeological features were seen and no finds were retrieved.*

### **1 Introduction (Fig. 1)**

The development proposal (planning application no. 98/835/NFH) comprised the construction of a four-storey extension to the existing school, with a substantial basement and associated services. Archaeological mitigation of the impacts took the form of a watching brief/recording action.

The watching brief was commissioned by Berman, Guedes, Stretton & Thomas Rayson Partnership, Architects and Designers, on behalf of Wychwood School. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service.

### **2 Background**

The development site lies in an area of North Oxford which is rich in archaeology of Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman date, and lies in close proximity to the University Parks. Aerial photography has identified enclosures within the Parks which may be of Iron Age or Roman date; fairly dense Roman settlement has been identified in north Oxford since the last century. Settlements in the area were probably spaced along a Roman road which approximated the line of the modern Banbury Road. The Roman road ran south, crossing the floodplain at North Hinksey, heading for the unwallled Roman town at Frilford.

Previous works in the area include an excavation in Parks Road, in front of the University Museum, which identified a ditch and some burials. Finds dating to a wide range of periods, from the Neolithic through Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon (PRNs 3258, 3591-2, 3594, 3864, 6048), are recorded to the east and south of the development area.

In 1994 the OAU undertook an evaluation at St Anthony's College on the Woodstock Road, which revealed a gravel quarry backfilled with soils containing substantial quantities of redeposited Roman material, suggesting a settlement in the vicinity.

More recently the OAU undertook an evaluation in the parks during the enlargement and regrading of a pond. One trench was excavated, which contained two palaeochannels (former courses of the Cherwell), medieval ploughing and a post-medieval ditch and bank perhaps defining a riverbank. A further evaluation was undertaken in 1996 on land to the rear of 6-8 South Parks Road identifying possible further medieval ploughing. A watching brief on works at the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology in South Parks Road, also in 1996, identified two undated possible pit features, a natural linear feature and a large amount of modern disturbance.

Recent excavations at St Hugh's College, immediately to the west of the site revealed no significant archaeological deposits, save for an old ploughsoil which produced two abraded sherds of medieval pottery. The open fields of St Giles parish are recorded on a 14<sup>th</sup> century survey and an estate map of 1769 at St John's College. The estate map shows the area of the site to have been divided into small plots.

The current land use on the site was a grassed area with stepped access to the basement of the existing school building, prior to the commencement of groundworks. The underlying geology is Summertown-Radley gravel terrace.

### **3 Aims**

The aims of the watching brief were to record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

### **4 Methodology**

Separate inspection visits were made to the site by prior arrangement with the main subcontractor, Benfield & Loxley, after excavations for the basement had already begun. All excavation was by JCB.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits and features 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 utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

### **5 Results**

Excavation in advance of the construction of the basement was already well advanced when the watching brief commenced. This measured 8 by 9 metres in plan and a little over 3 metres in depth. The Summertown-Radley gravel terrace was exposed across the pit, to an average height of 1.75 metres from the base of excavation. This was sealed by an average thickness of 1.25 metres of very mixed mid-brown silty clay loam, riddled with modern services. The sides of the excavation were battered prior to the installation of steel reinforcing rods and pouring of concrete. No evidence of archaeological features nor deposits were seen, and no finds of any description were either noted or collected.

The cutting of service trenches around the basement excavation was also monitored. These trenches were dug in 6 metre sections, 0.95 metres in width and to an average depth of 3 metres, exposing those deposits described above. The only variation to this occurred in the first trench to be dug between the front of the school and Bardwell Road, where the super-natural was seen to seal a dump of Victorian brick, tile and china which cut the natural gravel to a depth of a little under 2 metres.

## 6 Finds

Sundry pieces of Victoriana were seen in a cut feature at the eastern end of the drainage trench; these were examined and noted but not retained.

## 7 Discussion

Natural gravel was exposed in all those excavations monitored, and any cut features and/or deposits which predated the construction of the school would have been seen. It is probable that the site was levelled prior to construction of the school, and this activity may have removed any archaeological traces, if present. It is thought likely that the Victoriana seen in one of the drainage trenches is construction debris derived from the building of the school.

## References.

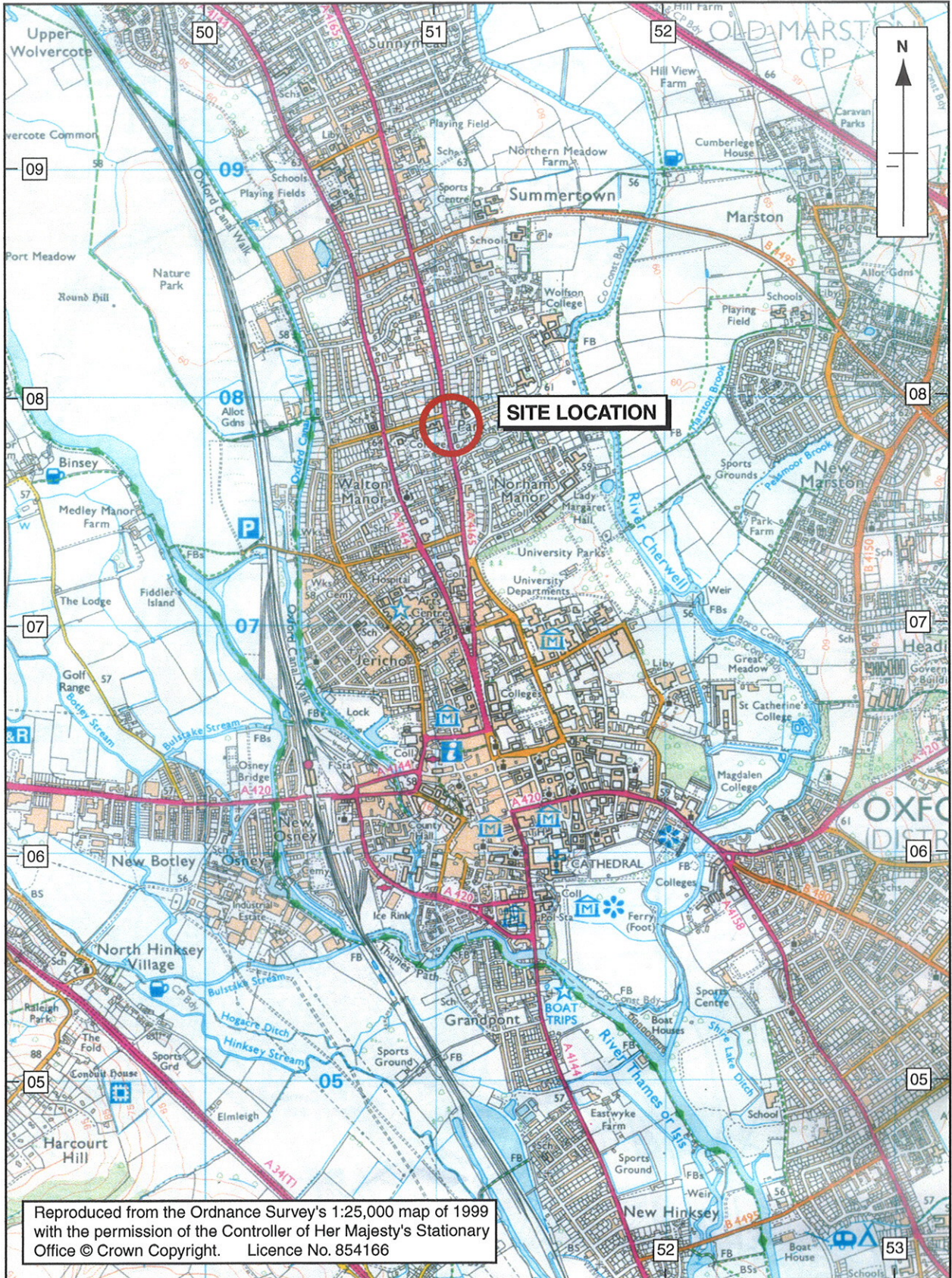
OAU 1994 St Anthony's College, Woodstock Road, Oxford. Archaeological Evaluation Report.

OAU 1995 Enlargement and Regrading of Pond, University Parks, Oxford. Archaeological Evaluation Report.

OAU 1995 Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, South Parks Road, Oxford. Archaeological Watching Brief Report.

OAU 1996 Wellcome Centre for Epidemiology of Infectious Diseases, 6-8 South Parks Road, Oxford. Archaeological Evaluation Report.

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



Scale 1:25,000

Location of site

Figure 1



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