



British Telecom Cables Thames Street Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

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SUMMARY

In August 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Thames Street, Oxford, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 5140 0580). The work was commissioned by Skanska Construction UK Limited in advance of new British Telecom Cables. The watching brief revealed no archaeological deposits or features due earlier disturbances by deep cable ducting.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In August 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Thames Street, Oxford, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Skanska Construction UK Limited in respect of a planning application for new British Telecom Cables.

1.1.2 No formal design brief had been prepared, though discussions took place between Chris Welch at English Heritage, Brian Durham for Oxford City Council and Oxford Archaeology regarding the works.

1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2002).

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on alluvial clays and gravels, overlying Oxford Clay, on the Thames floodplain, at c 57.54 m OD, at the top of the modern road surface.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA 2002) and is reproduced below.

1.3.2 Environmental evidence indicates that the course of the River Thames to the south of Oxford has undergone a series of changes since the last Ice Age. During the Neolithic period and the Bronze Age the river channel was much wider than that which can be seen today. A number of clay banks have been dated to the early Saxon period, forming channels which remained stable into the mid-late Saxon period as a result of both increased alluviation caused by a rise in the water table, and reclamation activity.

1.3.3 Evidence from archaeological excavations and observations over the last 25 years suggests that in the Saxon period the southern approach to Oxford was carried across this series of streams and islands, initially by means of a ford and from the late Saxon period, by a timber bridge. Later, a stone causeway is believed to have been built as a part of the 'great bridge' built by Robert D'Oilly in the late 11th century. It

ran from close to the southern end of Christ Church to South Hinksey, on the far side of the floodplain, a distance of ≈ 1.5 miles.

- 1.3.4 A gate tower with a drawbridge was built in the 13th century, where the bridge crossed the main stream of the Thames. Repairs to the bridge are recorded in the 14th century. The gate tower, also known as the Folly, was finally demolished in 1779, with the bridge itself being rebuilt in 1825. Simultaneously, a major redevelopment of the riverside facilities took place, including new wharves and streets constructed on the north side of the river, fronting a basin, while the navigation stream was diverted south through a pound lock (to the south of the development site).
- 1.3.5 Several excavations and monitoring exercises have been carried out in the immediate vicinity of the study area. These include rescue work in the Telecom Tunnel beneath St Aldates very near to this site that revealed possible late Saxon or Norman occupation following construction of the bridge and filling a former river channel (Campbell, forthcoming).
- 1.3.6 To the south-east, evaluation work at the "Head of the River" Public House produced information relating to medieval land reclamation (OAU 1994). An archaeological desktop study, field evaluation and watching brief at Salter's Boatyard located evidence of substantial dumping and levelling in the 19th century (OAU 1997, OAU 1998a, OAU 1998b).
- 1.3.7 An archaeological watching brief at 1-2 Folly Bridge similarly identified evidence of substantial dumping and levelling works dating from the 19th century (OAU 1999).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The new cable ducting was laid within earlier ducting within an old trench. These works were not observed archaeologically. The excavation of the new manhole and junction (Fig. 2) was carried out with a mini excavator using a toothless 0.5 m wide bucket. This was carried out under archaeological supervision.
- 2.2.2 A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The hole excavated for the new manhole and cable junction measured 2.2 m x 1.2 m x 2.7 m. This cut down onto top of concrete cover of British Telecom cables and cut through a series of silt loams back filling the trench. These had been cut by later service trenches at 0.6 m below the surface (Fig. 2).

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 No archaeological features or deposits were observed as the ground had been extensively disturbed for the laying of earlier cables in concrete covered ducting in the base of the new manhole.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Campbell, G E forthcoming 'Excavations at Thames Street, St Aldates, Oxford', draft for OA monograph *Oxford before the University*.

OAU 1994 41-43 *St Aldates & The Head of the River, Oxford. Archaeological Evaluation Report, July 1994.*

OAU 1997 *Salter's Boatyard, Folly Bridge, Abingdon Road, Oxford. Archaeological Desktop Study.*

OAU 1998a *Salter's Boatyard, Folly Bridge, Abingdon Road, Oxford. Archaeological Evaluation Report, January 1998.*

OAU 1998b *Salter's Boatyard, Folly Bridge, Abingdon Road, Oxford. Archaeological Watching Brief Report, December 1998.*

OAU 1999 1-2 *Folly Bridge, Abingdon Road, Oxford. Archaeological Watching Brief Report, January 1999.*

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

OA 2002 *Thames Street, Oxford, British Telecom Cables Written Scheme of Investigation*

APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: British telecom cables, Thames Street, Oxford

Site code: OXTS 03

Grid reference: NGR SP 5140 0580

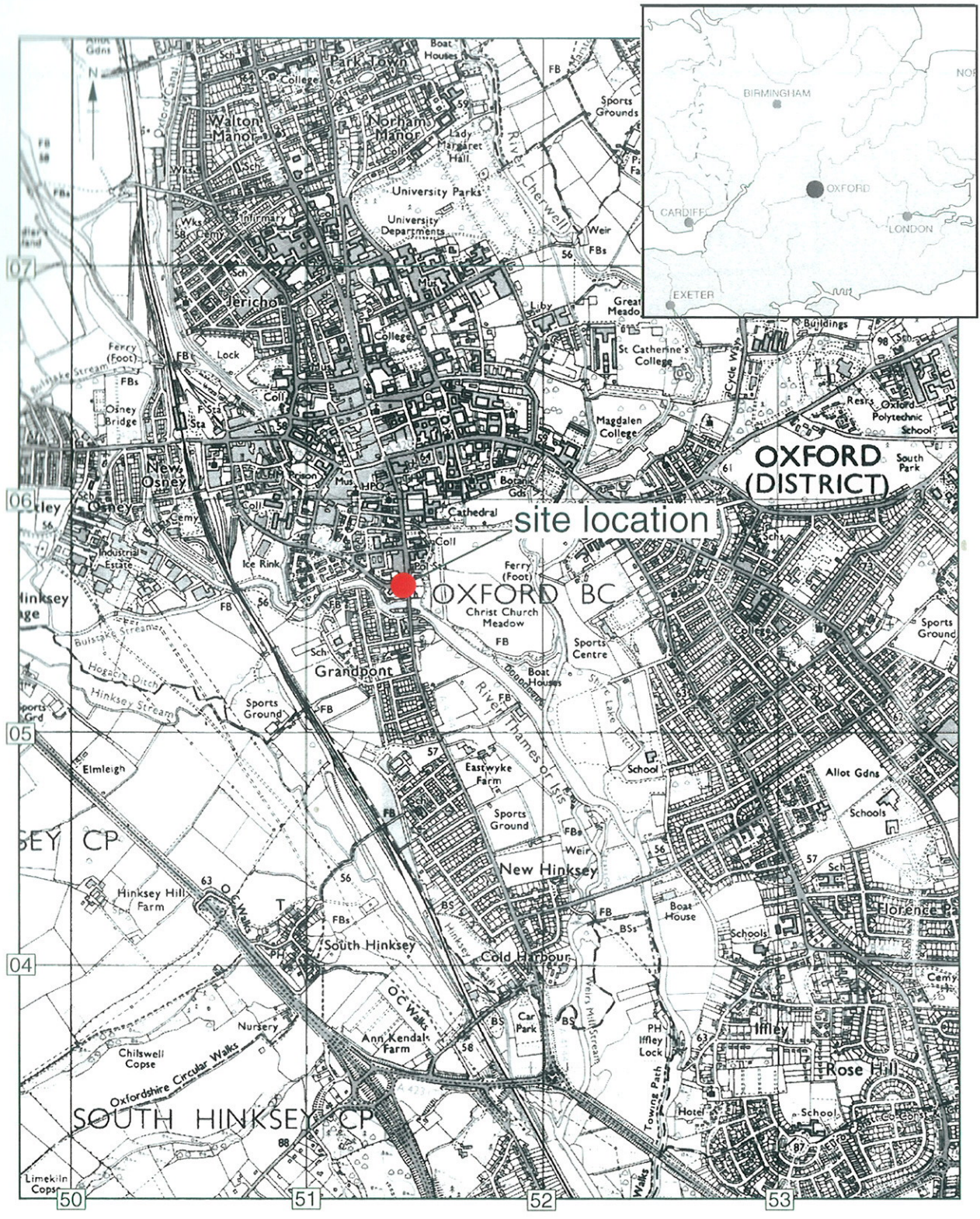
Type of watching brief: Excavation of hole for new manhole.

Date and duration of project: Two site visits on the 7th and 8th August 2003.

Area of site: 2.2 m x 1.2 m x 2.7 m

Summary of results: No archaeological deposits or features were revealed due earlier disturbances by deep cable ducting.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS 2003.75



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Figure 1: Site location

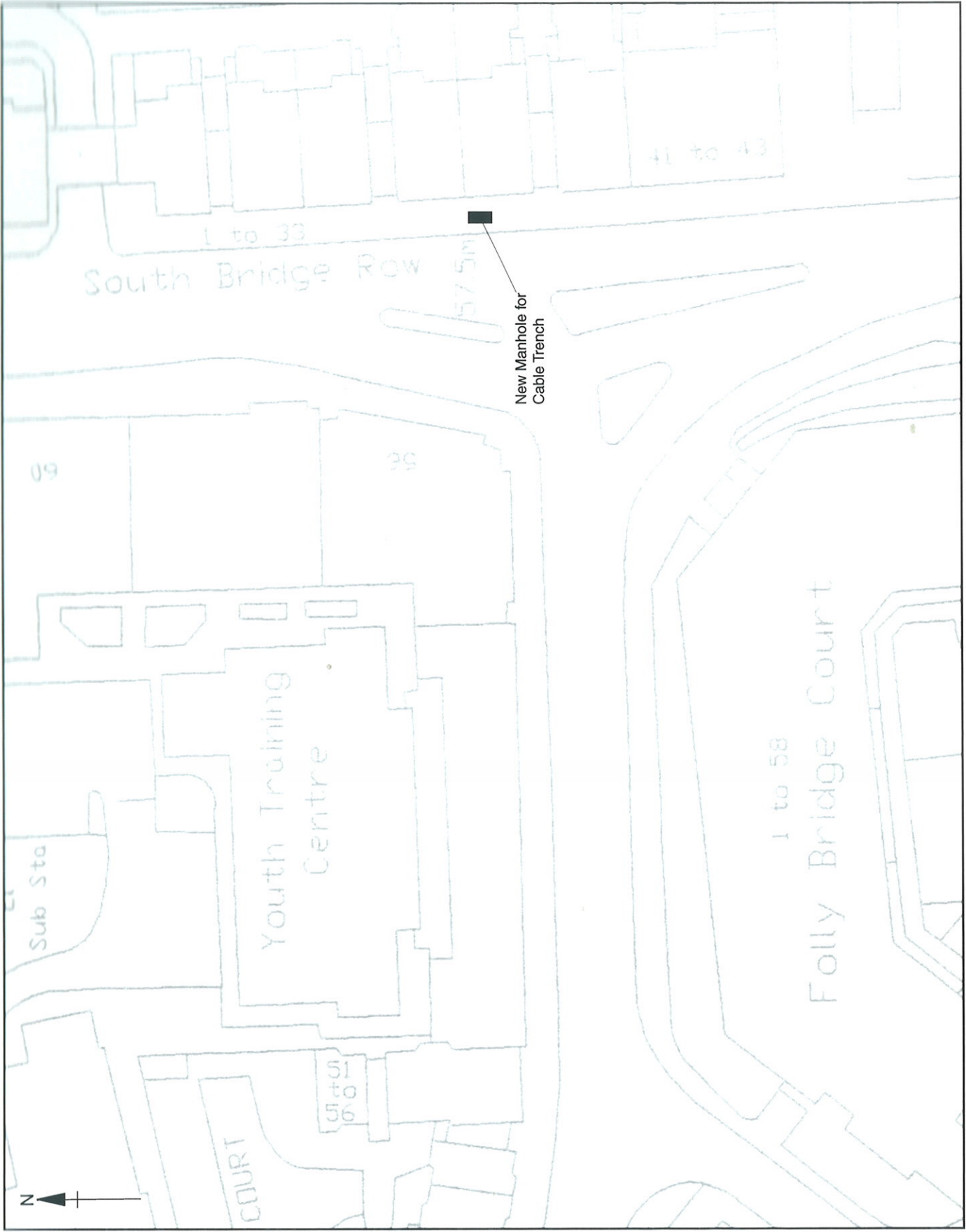
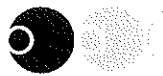


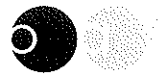
Figure 2: Location of new manhole



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