

WS Atkins Consultants Ltd

ST FRANCIS FIRST SCHOOL
HORSPATH ROAD
OXFORD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

NGR SP 5525 0455

© OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

October 2001

WS Atkins Consultants Ltd

ST FRANCIS FIRST SCHOOL
HORSPATH ROAD
OXFORD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

NGR SP 5525 0455

Prepared by: Robin Bashford Date: October 2001
Checked by: Date:
Approved by: <i>R. Williams</i> Date: <i>Assistant Director</i> <i>19/10/2001</i>

© OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

October 2001

ST FRANCIS FIRST SCHOOL
HORSPATH ROAD
OXFORD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

CONTENTS

Summary	4
1 Introduction.....	4
2 Background.....	4
3 Watching Brief Aims.....	5
4 Methodology.....	5
4.1 Scope of fieldwork.....	5
4.2 Recording.....	5
5 Results.....	5
5.4 Finds	6
5.5 Environmental Results.....	7
6 Discussion And Interpretation	7

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 Site Location
- Fig. 2 Site Plan
- Fig. 3 Sample Section

ST FRANCIS FIRST SCHOOL
HORSPATH ROAD
OXFORD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

SUMMARY

In September 2001, the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at St Francis First School, Horspath Road, Oxford (SP 5525 0455). No significant archaeological features or deposits were observed during the watching brief, although an undisturbed deposit of prehistoric subsoil was recorded.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Permission had been granted by Oxfordshire County Council for the construction of a new extension to the existing school buildings at St Francis First School, Horspath Road, Oxford (SP 5525 0455). Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological deposits, a condition for an archaeological watching brief was attached to the permission, in line with PPG16 and local plan policy and in accordance with a brief prepared by Oxfordshire County Council. The development site lies off Horspath Road with access from Paget Road and is situated at 84 m OD. The underlying geology is Coral Rag and Oolite deposits.

2 Background

- 2.1 The archaeological potential of this area of Oxford, particularly in relation to the nationally important Roman pottery industry, is clear and has been evident for some time. The industry is thought to lie within an extensive pattern of rural settlement, although at present it is not clearly understood. Evidence of Roman kilns has been found to the north-east of the site (south of Brasenose Wood) and in Temple Cowley to the south-west. Evidence for intensive pottery production in the area was also discovered during an evaluation in Blackbird Leys by Tempus Reparatum in 1995. Although this is approximately 1.5 km to the south of the site, it attests to the scale of the activity within the area. An important Iron Age settlement, possibly with Bronze Age origins, was also discovered on the Blackbird Leys development site.
- 2.2 Roman Way, the road from Alchester to Dorchester, runs on a north-south alignment to the east of the site and numerous, predominantly Roman, sites have been identified over the last 100 years in close proximity to the road - many of them inhumations. Although none of the burials are well documented or securely located, they are clearly associated with the line of the Roman Road and may represent an extra-mural cemetery. Indeed, it is suggested in a desk-based assessment produced by OAU in 1999, that the discovery of Roman burials some distance to the west of Roman Way (see 1.5 below), suggests that the cemetery may have extended at least 1 km to the west (it may also continue to the east of Roman Way).
- 2.3 A number finds of Roman coins and pottery are also recorded in the area, most significantly, immediately to the north east of the junction of Horspath Road and the Eastern Bypass (A4142).

- 2.4 The proximity of Horspath Road is also significant in that it forms a relatively straight alignment (together with Barracks Lane) which links many of these sites. Indeed, burials recorded along the length of Horspath Road (three to the east of the Eastern Bypass and one on the junction of Horspath Road and Hollow Way) suggest that Horspath Road / Barracks Lane may have been a significant Roman thoroughfare. If this is the case then the junction between Roman Way and Horspath Road, to the east of the site, may be significant.
- 2.5 A recent archaeological watching brief on a site immediately to the north of the current development (52-94 Horspath Road, OAU, 2001) recorded a high degree of truncation during the construction of the buildings which had previously occupied the site.

3 Watching Brief Aims

- 3.1 To record the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of archaeological remains within the entire area affected by development.
- 3.2 If exceptional archaeological remains were discovered, for which the resources allocated were insufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard, the OAU would signal to all parties that such an archaeological find had been made.
- 3.3 To make available the results of the investigation. These should be briefly stated. They should be reproduced from the WSI, Desk Study, or Brief, for the work.

4 Methodology

4.1 Scope of fieldwork

The watching brief was undertaken on all areas of ground disturbance.

4.2 Recording

- 4.2.1 Archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100, sections were drawn at 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures lay down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson, 1992).

5 Results

- 5.1 Prior to the excavation of the strip foundations for the new extension, topsoil was removed to a depth of approximately 0.5 m to the top of the underlying deposit (see below) within the footprint of the new building. The footings were then excavated to an average depth of 1 m below reduced ground level.
- 5.2 The stratigraphy revealed by the groundwork for the new development consisted of c 0.5 m of topsoil overlying a 0.35 m thick deposit of mid reddish brown silt which directly overlay the natural geology.
- 5.3 During the laying of the hardcore and tarmac surface for the existing playground to the south of the site, a small degree of truncation appears to have occurred. This comprised an incursion of approximately 0.1 m into the sub-soil. Other modern truncation was apparent in the form of service trenches, although the degree of disturbance was minimal.

5.4 Finds

5.4.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

5.5 Environmental Results

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

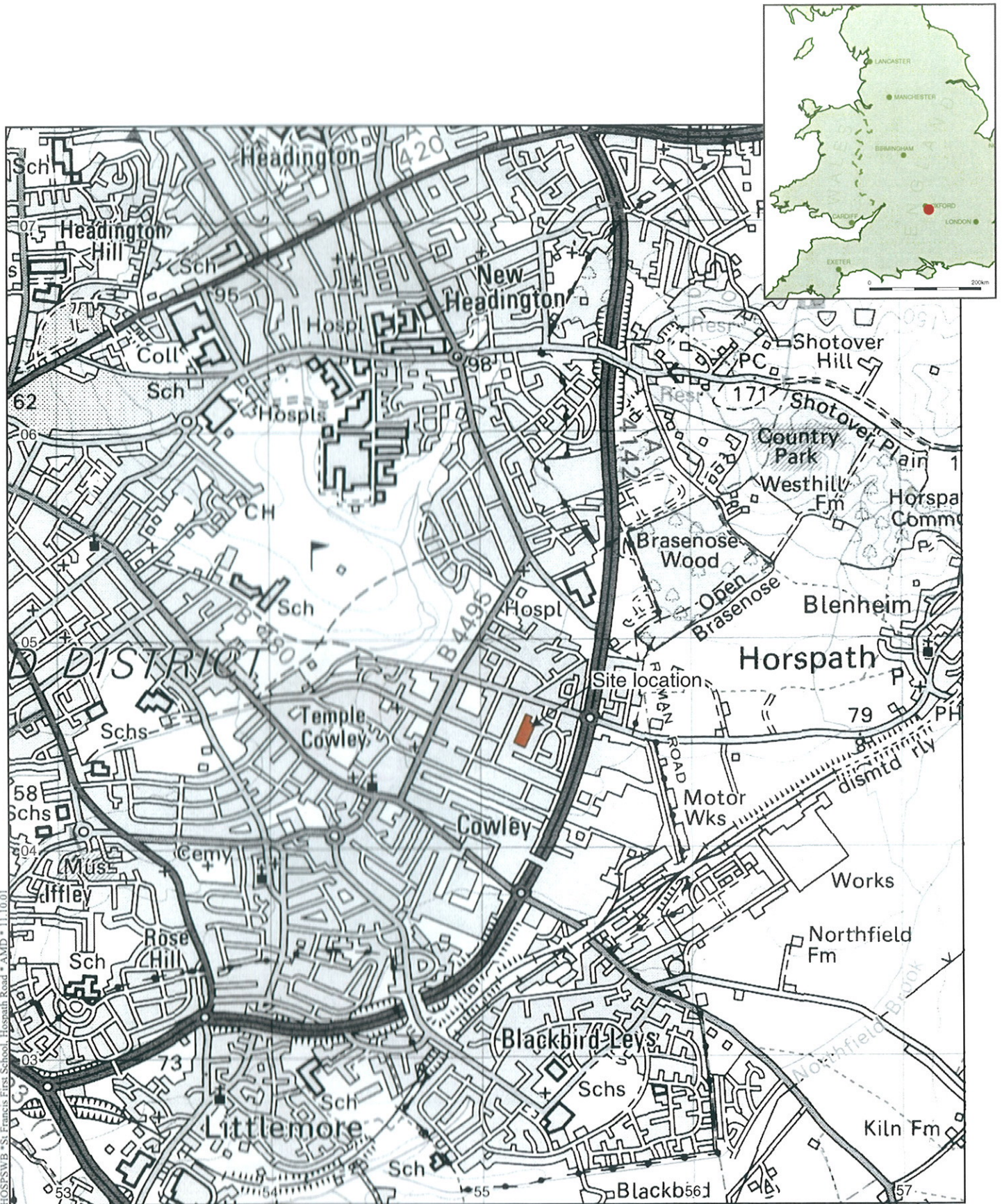
6 Discussion And Interpretation

6.1 The strip foundations for the new extension revealed a stratigraphic sequence familiar in this part of Oxford. The underlying geology appears to be overlain by a deposit which has previously been identified as a pre-historic subsoil which is in turn overlain by topsoil. Although no archaeological features or deposits were observed during the watching brief, it is worth noting that no truncation of the pre-historic subsoil has occurred during the construction of the existing school buildings (with the exception of a small incursion into the sub-soil in the area of the existing playground). This is in contrast to the adjacent site at 52-94 Horspath Road where the natural geology had been heavily truncated during the construction of the buildings which previously occupied the site (OAU, 2001). This would suggest that there remains potential for preserved archaeological remains in the vicinity of St Francis School.

References.

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

Archaeological Watching Brief Report: 52-94 Horspath Road: OAU, 2001

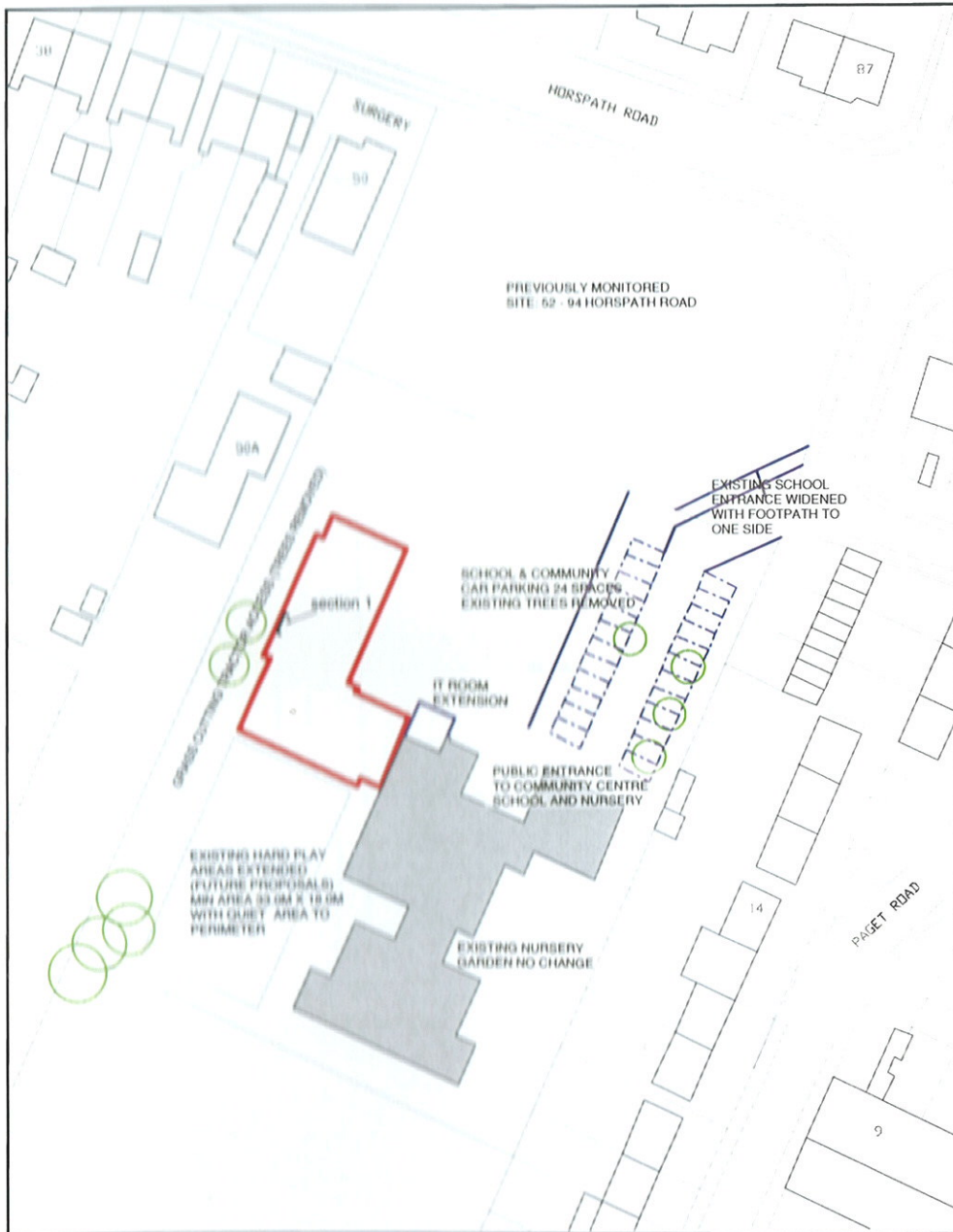


HOSP5WB *S1 Francis First School, Horspath Road * AMD * 11.10.01

Reproduced from the Landranger 1:50,000 scale by permission of the Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright 1989. All rights reserved. Licence No AL 100005569

Scale 1:25000

Figure 1: Site location



Footprint of new development

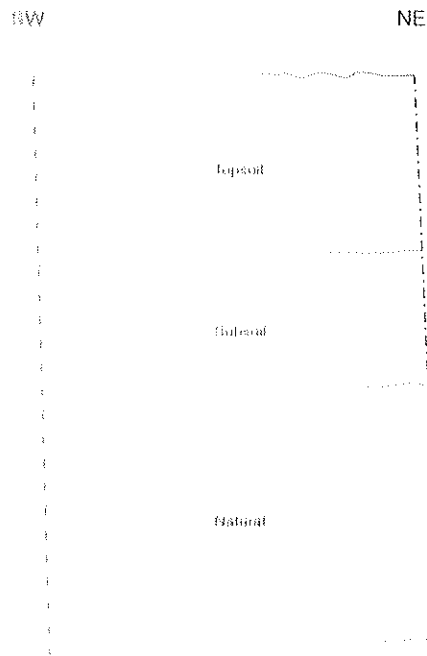


Next phase of development

Scale 1:1000

Figure 2: Study Area

Section 1



HOSP SW-B-S: Francis First School, Horspath Road*AMD*11.16.01

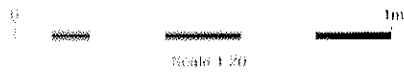


Figure 3: Section 1



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496

email: postmaster@oau-oxford.com www.oau-oxford.com



Director and Chief Executive: David Jennings B.A., M.I.F.A. Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited.
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Charity Number: 285627.
Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES