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The University Surveyor

**Centre for Vaccinology and Tropical Medicine, Churchill
Hospital, Oxford.**

NGR SP 5380 0602

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

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Date: *27/10/99*

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Date: *3/11/99*

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Date: *5/11/1999*

Oxford Archaeological Unit

October 1999

Summary

In October 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at the site of the new Centre for Vaccinology and Tropical Medicine, Churchill Hospital, Headington, Oxford (NGR SP 5380 0602). No archaeological features were seen; one small piece of Roman pottery was retrieved from the subsoil exposed in Test Pit 4.

1 Introduction

The development proposal involved the excavation of four geotechnical test pits as an information gathering exercise prior to the construction of the new building. An archaeological watching brief was required in accordance with PPG16, as the site is located within an area of proven archaeological potential.

The watching brief was commissioned by the University Surveyor's Office. It was undertaken in consultation with the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service, who did not produce a brief for the work.

2 Background

Archaeological excavations at the Churchill Hospital between 1971 and 1973 revealed extensive remains associated with the northern production area of the Oxford region Roman pottery industry. The Churchill kiln site lies c. 650 m south of the similar site at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre, 850 m north-east of the similar site at Oxford School, 1800 m north of the site at Between Towns Road, Cowley, and c. 400 m south-west of the site at Harry Bear's Pit. The road from Dorchester to Alchester runs within 1000 m of the Churchill Hospital and a spur road possibly leading to its general area was noted in 1957. Surface indications of the Churchill site were first noted at the end of the 19th century. Kilns were discovered here in 1953, 1955 and 1962. This site appears to have been in use in the late 3rd and 4th centuries (Young 1972).

In February 1994 the OAU undertook a watching brief in advance of the construction of a new Ambulance Service Management HQ at the Churchill. This site lies c. 100 m south of the present development site, c. 50 m south of where a kiln and associated features were located and c. 70 m to the south-west of a possible Roman field system. The object of the watching brief was to determine whether the pottery production area and its associated features extended as far as the development site. No evidence was found to suggest that this had been the case, but it was thought possible that Roman deposits in the area may have been truncated by later activity.

3 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.

4 Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits; all excavation was undertaken by hand to a depth of 1.2 m. All test pits subsequently were excavated by JCB as deep as practically was possible.

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 utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results

It was originally intended to excavate four geotechnical test pits, however Test Pit 2 was not dug as it became apparent that it was located in an area with many live services. Relocation within the immediate vicinity proved not to be possible for similar reasons and it was abandoned. All test pits measured c. 0.80m by 2.80 m in plan.

Test Pit 1.

- (1) – topsoil; mid brown sandy clay loam, 0.06 m thick.
- (2) – subsoil; mottled mid brown/gray sandy clay loam with 10% fine subangular gravel, fragments of red brick, pieces of slag and concrete lumps, 0.44 m thick.
- (3) – light brown natural sand with occasional pieces of limestone brash, 0.50 m thick.
- (4) – light yellow clean natural sand at 1 m depth from the ground surface.

Hand-digging ceased at 1.20 m depth; excavation by JCB was not monitored as natural deposits had already been exposed.

Test Pit 3.

- (30) – topsoil; mid brown sandy clay loam, 0.08 m thick.
- (31) – subsoil; mottled mid brown/gray sandy clay loam with lenses of clean sand and some sandstone pieces, 0.42 m thick.
- (32) – light brown natural sand with some cornbrash, c. 0.75 m thick.
- (33) – light yellow clean natural sand at c. 1.25 m depth, with a very slight silty clay inclusion, < 2%.

Hand-digging ceased at 1.20 m depth; excavation by JCB was not monitored as natural deposits had already been exposed.

Test Pit 4.

- (40) – topsoil; mid brown sandy clay loam, 0.06 m thick.
- (41) – subsoil; mottled mid brown/gray sandy clay loam with some lenses of clean sand and fragments of red brick, 0.44 m thick.

(42) – light brown natural sand with some pieces of limestone brash, 0.50 m thick.

(43) – light yellow clean natural sand at c. 1 m depth.

Hand-digging ceased at 1.20 m depth; excavation by JCB was not monitored as natural deposits had already been exposed.

6 Finds

One small abraded sherd of Romano-British pottery was retrieved from subsoil (41) in Test pit 4, and consisted of a white mortarium fragment.

7 Environmental results

Due to the absence of any significant archaeology, no environmental soil samples were taken.

8 Discussion

Neither ancient features nor deposits survived in-situ. The lowest stratified layer, variously numbered as (2), (32) and (42) contained artefactual material of very recent date; it is at least possible that this material was incorporated into a pre-existing deposit through ploughing, although perhaps not likely. Any pre-19th-to 20th-century deposits may therefore have been entirely truncated, however it is doubtful that these would have included any substantial features. The Roman sherd found in layer (41) is typical of the products of the kiln site to the south, and is comparable with the few pieces found during the 1994 watching brief. Such material would have been quite widely distributed around the environs of the site and its occurrence in TP 4 does not necessarily indicate the existence of Roman features in the immediate vicinity. Recent dumping, levelling and construction works have obscured the natural topography of the site.

References.

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

Young C J 1972 Excavations at the Churchill Hospital, *Oxoniensia* XXXVII, 10-31, 1971.

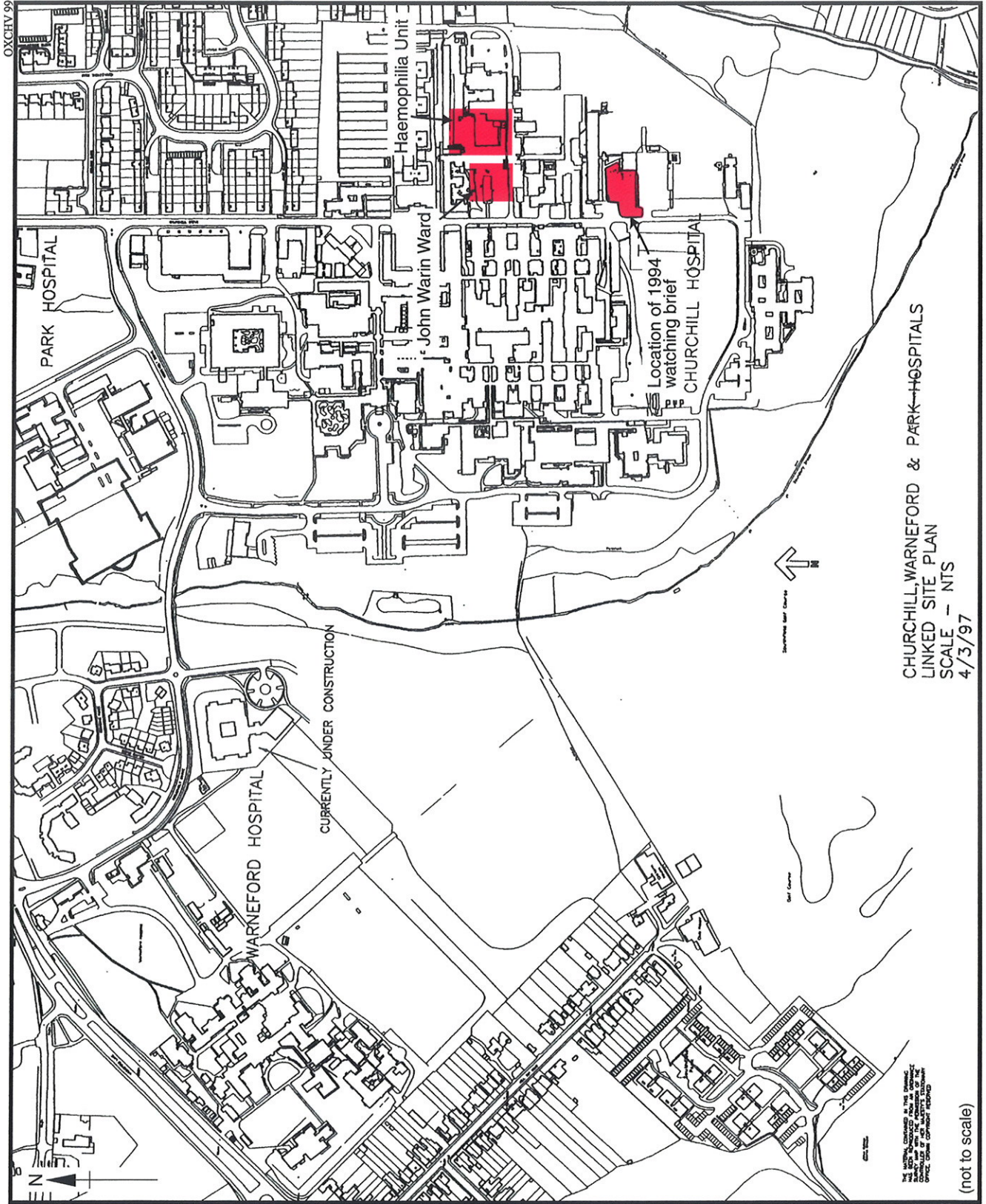


Figure 1: site location

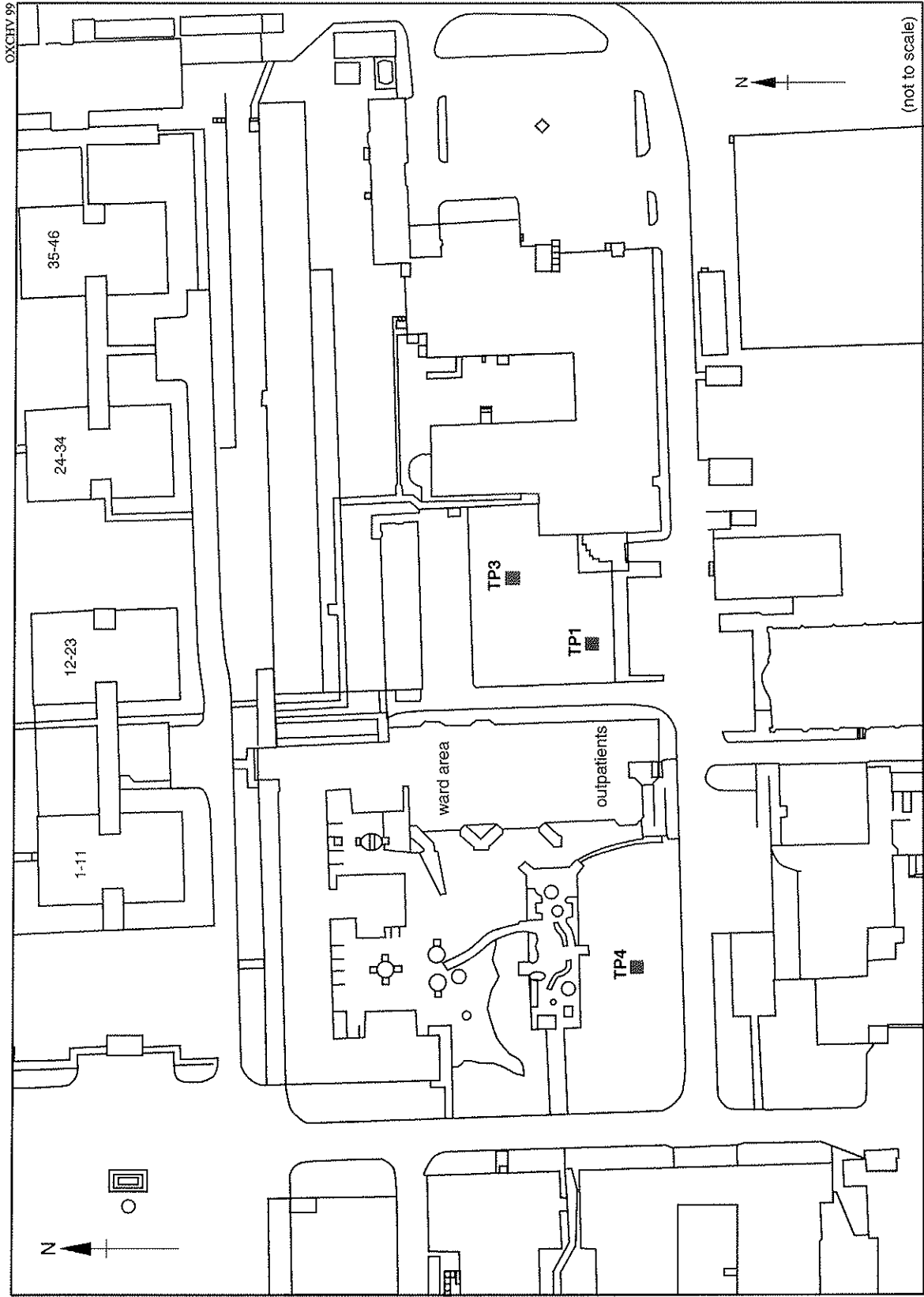


Figure 2: Test pit locations



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