

*Trinity Care*

*Ardenham Hill House, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire*

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

*NGR SP817142*

**Oxford Archaeological Unit**

**March 2000**

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. A\99\0920\APP

Prepared by: R Bashford and D Poore

Date: 13 March 2000

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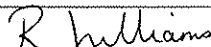
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**Oxford Archaeological Unit**

**March 2000**

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## *Summary*

*In February 2000 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Ardenham Hill House, Aylesbury (NGR SP 817 142). The proposed development area was divided into three zones. Zone 1 revealed limited archaeological evidence other than three post-medieval linear features and three possible post holes of uncertain date. Zone 2 revealed a rectangular post medieval pit, possibly associated with the features in Zone 3. Zone 3 revealed a group of sub-rectangular post medieval quarry pits and a number of linear features.*

### **1 Introduction**

The development proposal (Planning Ref. No. A/99/0920/APP) comprised the construction of a two-storey nursing home and apartments. An archaeological watching brief was considered necessary for this site following a field evaluation conducted by OAU (OAU February 1999), which identified a number of archaeological features of potential significance.

The watching brief was commissioned by Trinity Care plc. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed with the Buckinghamshire County Council Archaeological Service (CAS).

### **2 Background**

The archaeological background to this watching brief has not been the subject of a separate desk study but is taken in part from the evaluation report (OAU 1999) and the WSI (OAU 2000).

The site itself has produced limited archaeological evidence. The field evaluation identified two areas of potential archaeological significance. Trench 3 contained one post medieval ditch, two possible late Iron Age ditches and an earlier trackway. Trench 4 revealed a very large post medieval feature which was interpreted as a possible Civil War defensive ditch. (see 'Discussion' for an updated interpretation of these features).

The site lies adjacent to the Bicester Road (A41) which follows the line of Roman Akeman Street. It is also just outside the projected line of a defensive enclosure first established in the Iron Age. The complete circuit of this defence has not been established although it has been identified during excavations at Prebendal House, Temple and Bourbon Streets and Kingbury. The proximity of the historic town centre and the historic road, together with the possible ditch identified in Trench 4, suggested the possibility of later fortifications within Zone 3 (Fig. 2), perhaps relating to the English Civil War during which Aylesbury was a Parliamentarian stronghold. It is also thought that the Royalist gun emplacements were situated to the west of the town, although the site at Quarrendon which was previously supposed to be the location of these gun emplacements has subsequently been identified as a warren (pers.comm. Mike Farley).

The site is situated on the western slope of Ardenham Hill (Fig.1), adjacent to the Bicester Road (A41). The site lies on Kimmeridge Clay at c.85.5m above OD at the top of the slope, and c.82.15m at the bottom. There is a colluvial deposit to the west of the site which represents the archaeological horizon in this area. The majority of the area within Zone 1 (Fig. 2) has been disturbed by the demolition of an earlier building in the 1990's. The demolition rubble within the footprint of this building is present to

at least the depth of the current development and appears to represent an infilled cellar. As a result, any archaeology surviving beneath the cellaring will remain undisturbed. The area to the north of the infilled cellar has been heavily truncated by services relating to the demolished building and no significant archaeology has survived. To the west of the demolition rubble is the colluvial deposit which had remained relatively undisturbed. Zones 2 and 3 have been partially truncated by access roads associated with the demolished building. There are allotments to the south of the site which may have extended north but no trace of them was observed during the groundworks.

### **3 Aims**

#### *3.1 General*

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.

#### *3.2 Specific*

- Record any part of the possible Iron Age ditches and trackway identified in evaluation Trench 3.
- Identify and record the large post medieval feature identified in Trench 4.

### **4 Methodology**

The WSI (OAU 2000) divided the impact area into three Zones defined according to the archaeological potential inferred from the field evaluation (Fig. 2). An intermittent watching brief was considered sufficient for the majority of the impact area (Zone 1). The area defined as Zone 2 was situated between the two most archaeologically sensitive areas and was the subject of an intensive watching brief. Within the archaeologically sensitive areas a sample excavation was required (Zone 3). Zone 3 was subdivided into two areas. These will hereafter be referred to as follows: Zone 3a; encompassing the area around the large post-medieval feature identified in evaluation Trench 4. Zone 3b; located adjacent to the possible Iron Age features in Trench 3. Following the sample excavation of Zone 3a, the area was closely monitored during machine reduction of the ground level to ensure that any further evidence relating to the function of the pits in that area was not missed (see below).

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.

### **5 Results**

#### *5.1 Zone 1*

Zone 1 encompassed the majority of the impact area and revealed little significant archaeology. The north-eastern area of Zone 1 consisted largely of demolition rubble from the building which had previously occupied the site. The north-western and southern areas consisted of clay natural (600), overlain either by a colluvial layer

(602) to the west of the site, or directly overlain by topsoil or a modern layer of made up ground (601) to the east.

Three probable post-medieval linear features (603, 612 and 621) were identified running east - west across the site which appeared to cut the colluvial deposit (602). The linears appeared to be of similar width; 603 was at least 25m long and 3m wide, 612 was at least 17m long, 3.20m wide and 0.22m deep and 621 was 8.50m long and 2m wide. In each case the full extent of the feature was not revealed. Whilst the spacing between these features is substantial (*c.*30m between 603 and 612; 15m between 612 and 621), it is possible that any similar features in the intervening gaps have been truncated. Alternatively, the area under the existing service road, which is not affected by the development, may conceal a further linear feature. If this is the case then it might imply that these features represent plough furrows approximately 15m apart.

Three possible post holes were also recorded at the southern extent of Zone 1; 606 (0.50m diameter), 607 (0.45m diameter) and 608 (0.55m diameter). In addition to these features a possible post-medieval pit 615 (2.50m diameter x 0.52m depth) was revealed to the north of Zone 1 but was heavily truncated by services for the demolished building and was interpreted as a possible tree-throw pit.

## 5.2 Zone 2

Zone 2 was situated between the two areas identified in the evaluation as archaeologically sensitive (Zone 3a and Zone 3b). Where the area was stripped to the archaeological horizon, little archaeology was revealed. However, a large rectangular feature (700) with vertical sides (measuring 4.60m by 7m by at least 1m deep) was identified and may represent the southern extent of the group of the pits in Zone 3a (group 527). Whilst the majority of this zone was stripped to the archaeological horizon, the new access road was only reduced by 0.5m, which was not sufficient to reveal any archaeological remains. Unfortunately this is also the area in which any southern extension of the pit group 527 would have been apparent and as a result the inference that 700 is the southern extent of these pits cannot be confirmed.

## 5.3 Zone 3

Zone 3a (Fig. 3) was stripped to a depth of approximately 0.80m from the surface (85.15 above OD). Natural clay (513) was observed at a depth of 0.45m, but its upper level was disturbed and was therefore removed by machine to aid identification of features. A number of intrusive finds were recovered in the process (see Context inventory). 513 was overlain by a modern make up layer and tarmac surface (526). The feature in evaluation Trench 4 (OAU 1999, 411) was identified as one (507) of a series of at least 11 large sub rectangular pits ranging in size from 9m x 3m to 5.50m x 5m. Four hand-dug slots were excavated across three of the pits (507, 503 and 500) as well as two machine-dug slots to obtain a longitudinal section across two of the pits (503 and 510). The excavated slots revealed the pits to vary in depth from 0.45m (503) to 1.09m (507) and the artefacts recovered (these included pottery, ceramic building material (CBM) and a small quantity of clay pipe stems) suggested that a 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century date could be attributed to these features. All the excavated pits proved to be steep sided and predominantly flat based. However during excavation of the machined slots some irregularities in the base were observed. These appeared to follow the line of seams of concreted iron staining in the clay. The clay seems to have

been excavated up to this concretion and this implies that the seams have been left due to their unsuitability for quarrying. This has created irregularities in the base of at least two of the pits (503 and 510). The fills of the pits were all very similar, an example being 511 which was a tenacious, mid olive brown silty clay with patches of orange brown sandy clay, indicating a possible redeposition of overburden.

Zone 3b was stripped to a depth of approximately 0.40m from the surface (82.97 above OD). Natural clay (513) was observed at a depth of approximately 0.35m and was directly overlain by the topsoil (540). Five east-west aligned linear features were observed (Fig. 4).

The possible western extent of the putative Iron Age trackway (OAU 1999, 301) was observed (534) and was cut by linear 530 which almost certainly represents the eastern continuation of the linear observed in Zone 1 (603).

Three other possible east-west aligned linear features (538, 541 and 543) were recorded within Zone 3b. Linear feature 541 (2.25m) appeared to be the western extension of the post medieval ditch recorded in Trench 3 (OAU 1999, 302).

Features 538 (1.50m x 0.24m) and 543 (0.45m x c.0.25m) appeared to represent linear features which were not observed during the evaluation and it is reasonable to suppose that they terminate to the west of Trench 3.

## **6 Artefactual evidence**

### *6.1 Pottery by Maureen Mellor*

Pottery was recovered in small quantities from ten contexts in Zone 3a and five contexts in Zone 3b. All contexts included post-medieval sherds, local country pottery and evidently residual earlier sherds (a rim of late-medieval reduced ware dish and a possibly pre-Roman grogged sherd). Most sherds were moderately abraded.

The distribution of pottery suggests that activity in the area of the rectangular pits (Zone 3a) was 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, while the activity in the area of the trackway (Zone 3b) was later, including 19<sup>th</sup> century material. See Context inventory for further detail.

### *6.2 Ceramic Building Material (Brick and Tile) by Nick Mitchell*

A total of 230 fragments of ceramic building material (CBM) was retrieved from 17 contexts (see Context inventory for further detail). Eight are brick fragments, with the remainder being flat plain roof-tiles, all of which are small fragments. At least four fabrics are present, most of which are fine and fired to a mid orange. There is no potential for further analysis of this material since it is unlikely to provide any further useful information.

### *6.3 Clay Tobacco Pipes by Dan Poore*

Eighteen pieces of clay tobacco pipe stem were recovered from ten contexts, 502, 504, 506, 508, 509, 511, 512, 513, 514 and 519, all of which are fills of the sub-rectangular/sub-square pits in Zone 3a. All appeared relatively unabraded, but were undiagnostic, and only serve to confirm the post-medieval date of the probable clay quarrying in Zone 3a.

## 7 Ecofactual evidence

### 7.1 *Animal Bone by Bethan Charles*

A total of 38 fragments of bone were retrieved by hand from the site. Most of the bone came from clay quarry pits and was of a post medieval date. The bone was in good condition with only a few fragments of bone with bad attritional damage, primarily from contexts 501 and 502.

Cattle and sheep bones were the most numerous species identified from the assemblage. The majority of cattle bones came from context 620 and included a partially complete femur, a complete metatarsal and two female right pelvis bones. It is possible that some of these bones may have belonged to the same individual. Part of a shed red deer antler was found in context 511, and a large dog ulna was found in context 537. The bones from the domestic species were large which indicates that the animals were improved breeds. None of the bones appeared to be from immature animals. Both the cattle and sheep appear to have been over the ages of 2 - 2.5 years.

Only one sheep metatarsal from context 513 had clear butchery knife marks on the bone and one fragment of burnt bone was retrieved from context 508.

**Table 1 Number of hand collected fragments of bone by context and species**

| Context | Cattle | Sheep | Red Deer | Dog | Unidentified | Total |
|---------|--------|-------|----------|-----|--------------|-------|
| 501     | 1      | 0     | 0        | 0   | 3            | 4     |
| 502     | 0      | 0     | 0        | 0   | 2            | 2     |
| 508     | 0      | 2     | 0        | 0   | 3            | 5     |
| 509     | 0      | 0     | 0        | 0   | 2            | 2     |
| 511     | 1      | 0     | 1        | 0   | 9            | 11    |
| 513     | 0      | 1     | 0        | 0   | 0            | 1     |
| 517     | 0      | 1     | 0        | 0   | 0            | 1     |
| 535     | 0      | 1     | 0        | 0   | 2            | 3     |
| 537     | 0      | 0     | 0        | 1   | 0            | 1     |
| 539     | 1      | 1     | 0        | 0   | 2            | 4     |
| 620     | 4      | 0     | 0        | 0   | 0            | 4     |
| Total   | 7      | 6     | 1        | 1   | 23           | 38    |

Most of the material appeared to be domestic refuse apart from the elements from context 620. The red deer antler may also have been part of refuse from antler working

### 7.2 *Environmental Soil Sample by Dana Challinor*

An environmental sample was taken from the fill of pit 510 (511) within group 527. An initial examination of the sample confirmed that the deposit was fairly sterile, probably re-deposited natural, and that further analysis was therefore unnecessary.



## 8 Discussion

It is now clear that the feature identified in Trench 4 (OAU 1999, 411) was not related to defensive works associated with the Civil War, but was in fact part of a complex of large sub-rectangular and sub-square pits.

The function of the pits within Zone 3a was unclear although the most likely interpretation is that they were quarry pits (Fig. 3). An Aylesbury resident who visited the site suggested that a nearby brickworks had quarried the darker natural clay (505, which was overlain by natural clay 513) until relatively recently and it may be that these pits represent an earlier, if less intensive, brickworking industry. However, where excavated, the pits were seen not to intrude significantly into the darker clay (505) which perhaps indicates that the overlying natural clay (513) was preferred. The irregularities in the base of two of the pits (see 'Results' above) also suggest quarrying as a possible function of these pits, with the lighter clay natural (513) being specifically targeted.

Whilst the supposition that the clay was being quarried for bricks is somewhat tenuous, the interpretation of the features as quarry pits is strengthened by the fact that the near vertical edges of the pits suggested that they would not have been open for any period of time. The clay into which they were cut (513) could not have survived in its present condition if exposed to any degree of weathering. This supposition is further supported by the fact that the fills are predominantly mixed natural, possibly suggesting deliberate backfilling with the spoil produced by the initial excavation of the pits (once the quarried material had been removed).

It is assumed that the layout of the pits, with narrow baulks surviving between them, is the result of the 'parcelling up' of the area available for quarrying. This could either be for the purpose of selling off individual plots within that area, or for keeping track of the extent of quarrying done by labourers in order to pay fairly for the amount of work done.

The extent of these pits is uncertain; to the west they are truncated by the demolished building, whilst to the east and north their extent cannot be recorded as this lies outside the impact of the development. To the south the impact was not sufficient to establish the presence of further pits. The southern extent is possibly represented by 'pit' 700 in Zone 2, although this is far from conclusive.

The relationships between the linear features in Zone 3b and those recorded in evaluation Trench 3 were difficult to establish (Fig. 4). As mentioned above ('Results'), the possible western extent of the putative Iron Age trackway (OAU 1999, 301) was observed (534) and was cut by linear 530. The southernmost possible Iron Age ditch (OAU 1999, 300) was not observed and it is reasonable to suppose that it has been truncated by the linear (530). Alternatively the ditch in Trench 3 (OAU 1999, 300) may represent the eastern 'terminus' of (530) as it tapers off toward the top of the slope (this was also observed in linear 612 to the north). This latter explanation could also explain why this feature was seen to cut the 'trackway' during the evaluation. Both these features (530 and 534) produced post-medieval finds and although the presence of an Iron Age ditch cannot be entirely discounted, it has not survived anywhere to the west of the evaluation trench.

The northernmost of the possible Iron Age ditches recorded in the evaluation (OAU 1999, 303) was not observed, although its alignment within Trench 3 would suggest that it has been truncated by 541.

Post-medieval pottery was recovered from the fill of 538 (539) and although no finds were recovered from the fill of 543 (544) it seems likely that it is either an earlier feature on the same alignment as 538, or an irregularity in the base of 538.

### **Acknowledgements**

The fieldwork was carried out by Dan Poore and Robin Bashford, with help from Jim Mumford and George Anelay, under the direction of Brian Durham. This work would not have been possible without the patience and co-operation of Jeff Dunn of Denne Construction, who were the principal contractors.

### **References**

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

OAU December 1999 - Aylesbury, Ardenham Hill House: Archaeological Evaluation Report (unpublished client report for Trinity Care)

OAU February 2000 - Aylesbury, Ardenham Hill House, Buckinghamshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief

## 9 Context Inventory

NB: numbers in brackets in context column refer to OAU evaluation (OAU 99)

| Zone  | Context (OAU 99) | Type   | Width | Thick-ness | Comment                           | Finds                            | Date     |
|-------|------------------|--------|-------|------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|
| 1     | 600              | layer  |       |            | clay natural                      |                                  |          |
|       | 601              | layer  |       | 0.32m      | modern make up and tarmac surface |                                  |          |
|       | 602              | layer  |       |            | Colluvium                         |                                  |          |
| 1 (S) | 603              | cut    | c.3m  |            | linear (s.a 530)                  |                                  |          |
|       | 604              | fill   |       |            | fill of 603                       |                                  |          |
|       | 605              | fill   |       |            | fill of 609                       |                                  |          |
|       | 606              | cut    | 0.50m |            | possible posthole                 |                                  |          |
|       | 607              | cut    | 0.45m |            | possible posthole                 |                                  |          |
|       | 608              | cut    | 0.55m |            | possible posthole                 |                                  |          |
|       | 609              | cut    |       |            | Unidentified feature              |                                  |          |
| 1 (W) | 610              | cut    |       |            | possible posthole                 |                                  |          |
|       | 611              | fill   |       |            | fill of 610                       |                                  |          |
|       | 612              | cut    |       |            | Linear                            |                                  |          |
|       | 613              | fill   |       |            | fill of 612                       |                                  |          |
|       | 614              | fill   |       |            | fill of 612                       |                                  |          |
| 1 (E) | 615              | cut    |       |            | possible pit                      |                                  |          |
|       | 616              | fill   |       |            | fill of 615                       |                                  |          |
|       | 617              | fill   |       |            | fill of 615                       |                                  |          |
|       | 618              | cut    |       |            | Rectangular pit (same as 516)     |                                  |          |
|       | 619              | fill   |       |            | fill of 618                       |                                  |          |
| 1 (S) | 620              | dep    |       |            | modern deposit                    | Animal Bone, Tarmac              | C20th    |
| 1 (W) | 621              | linear |       |            | Linear                            |                                  |          |
| 2     | 700              | ?pit   |       |            | ?rectangular pit                  |                                  |          |
|       | 701              | fill   |       |            | fill of 701                       | Pot, CBM                         |          |
| 3 a   | 500              | pit    | 2.30m |            | Rectangular pit                   |                                  | post med |
|       | 501              | fill   |       | 0.42m      | fill of 500                       | Pot, CBM, Animal bone            | post med |
|       | 502              | fill   |       | 0.25m      | fill of 500                       | Pot, CBM, Animal bone, Clay pipe | post med |

| Zone | Context (OAU 99) | Type  | Width  | Thick-ness | Comment                             | Findings                         | Date      |
|------|------------------|-------|--------|------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|
|      | 503              | pit   | c.3m   |            | Rectangular pit                     |                                  | post med  |
|      | 504              | fill  |        | 0.75m      | fill of 503                         | Pot, CBM, Clay pipe              | post med  |
|      | 505              | layer |        |            | dark grey clay natural              |                                  |           |
|      | 506              | fill  |        |            | same as 504                         | Pot, CBM, Clay pipe              |           |
|      | 507              | pit   | 2.54m  |            | sub square pit                      |                                  | post med  |
|      | 508              | fill  |        | 0.95m      | top fill of pit 507                 | Pot, CBM, Animal bone, Clay pipe | post med  |
|      | 509              | fill  |        | 0.50m      | primary fill of 507                 | Pot, CBM, Animal bone, Clay pipe | post med  |
|      | 510              | pit   | 5.00m  |            | sub square pit                      |                                  | post med  |
|      | 511              | fill  |        | 0.82m      | fill of 510                         | Pot, CBM, Animal bone, Clay pipe | post med  |
|      | 512              | fill  |        | 0.40m      | fill of 503                         | CBM, Clay pipe                   | post med  |
|      | 513              | layer |        |            | ? disturbed light grey clay natural | CBM, Animal bone, Clay pipe      |           |
|      | 514              | pit   | 2.15m+ |            | Unexcavated pit                     |                                  | post med  |
|      | 515              | fill  |        |            | fill of 514                         | Pot, CBM, Clay pipe              | post med  |
|      | 516              | pit   | 1.75m+ |            | Unexcavated pit                     |                                  | post med  |
|      | 517              | fill  |        |            | fill of 516                         | Pot, CBM, Animal bone            | post med  |
|      | 518              | pit   | 3.35m  |            | Unexcavated pit                     |                                  | post med  |
|      | 519              | fill  |        |            | fill of 518                         | CBM, Clay pipe                   | post med  |
|      | 520              | pit   | 3.15m+ |            | Unexcavated pit                     |                                  | post med  |
|      | 521              | fill  |        |            | fill of 520                         |                                  | post med  |
|      | 522              | pit   | 2.60m+ |            | Unexcavated pit                     |                                  | ?post med |
|      | 523              | fill  |        |            | fill of 522                         |                                  | ?post med |
|      | 524              | pit   | 0.80m+ |            | Unexcavated pit                     |                                  | ?post med |
|      | 525              | fill  |        |            | fill of 524                         |                                  | ?post med |

| Zone | Context (OAU 99) | Type   | Width  | Thick-ness | Comment                                  | Finds                 | Date                  |
|------|------------------|--------|--------|------------|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|      | 526              | layer  |        | 0.30m      | modern make up and tarmac surface        |                       |                       |
|      | 527              | group  |        |            | group of sub square and rectangular pits |                       | post med              |
|      | 528              | pit    | 1.50m+ |            | unexcavated pit                          |                       | ?post med             |
|      | 529              | fill   |        |            | fill of 528                              |                       | ?post med             |
| 3 b  | 530              | linear | 4.75m  |            | linear (s.a 603)                         |                       | post med              |
|      | 531              | fill   |        | 0.13m      | fill of 530                              | Pot, CBM              | post med              |
|      | 532              | fill   |        | 0.30m      | fill of 530                              |                       | post med              |
|      | 533              | fill   |        | 0.12m      | fill of 530                              | Pot, CBM              | post med              |
|      | 534 (=301)       | cut    | 2.00m+ |            | probable trackway                        |                       |                       |
|      | 535              | fill   |        | 0.36m      | fill of 534                              | Animal bone, CBM      | ?post med             |
|      | 536              | rut    | 0.28m  |            | rut within 534                           |                       |                       |
|      | 537              | fill   |        | 0.12m      | fill of 536                              |                       |                       |
|      | 538              | linear | 1.90m  |            | possible ditch                           |                       |                       |
|      | 539              | fill   |        | 0.34m      | fill of 538                              | Pot, CBM, Animal bone | 18-19 <sup>th</sup> C |
|      | 540              | layer  |        | 0.27m      | topsoil                                  |                       |                       |
|      | 541 (=302)       | linear |        |            | possible ditch                           |                       |                       |
|      | 542              | fill   |        |            | fill of 541                              | Pot                   | ?Post-Med             |
|      | 543              | ?gully |        |            | possible earlier cut in base of 538      |                       |                       |
| 3 b  | 544              | fill   |        |            | fill of 543                              |                       |                       |

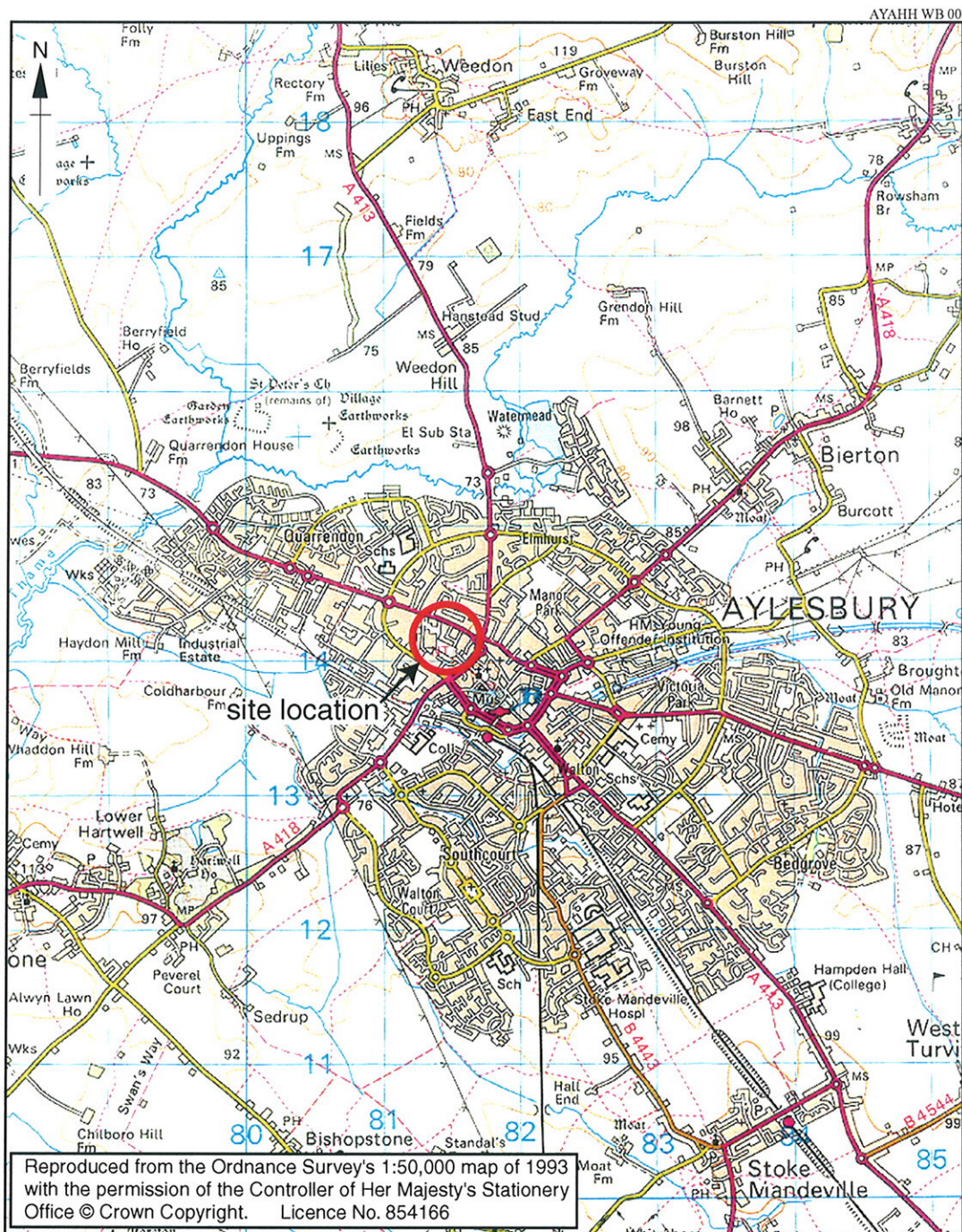
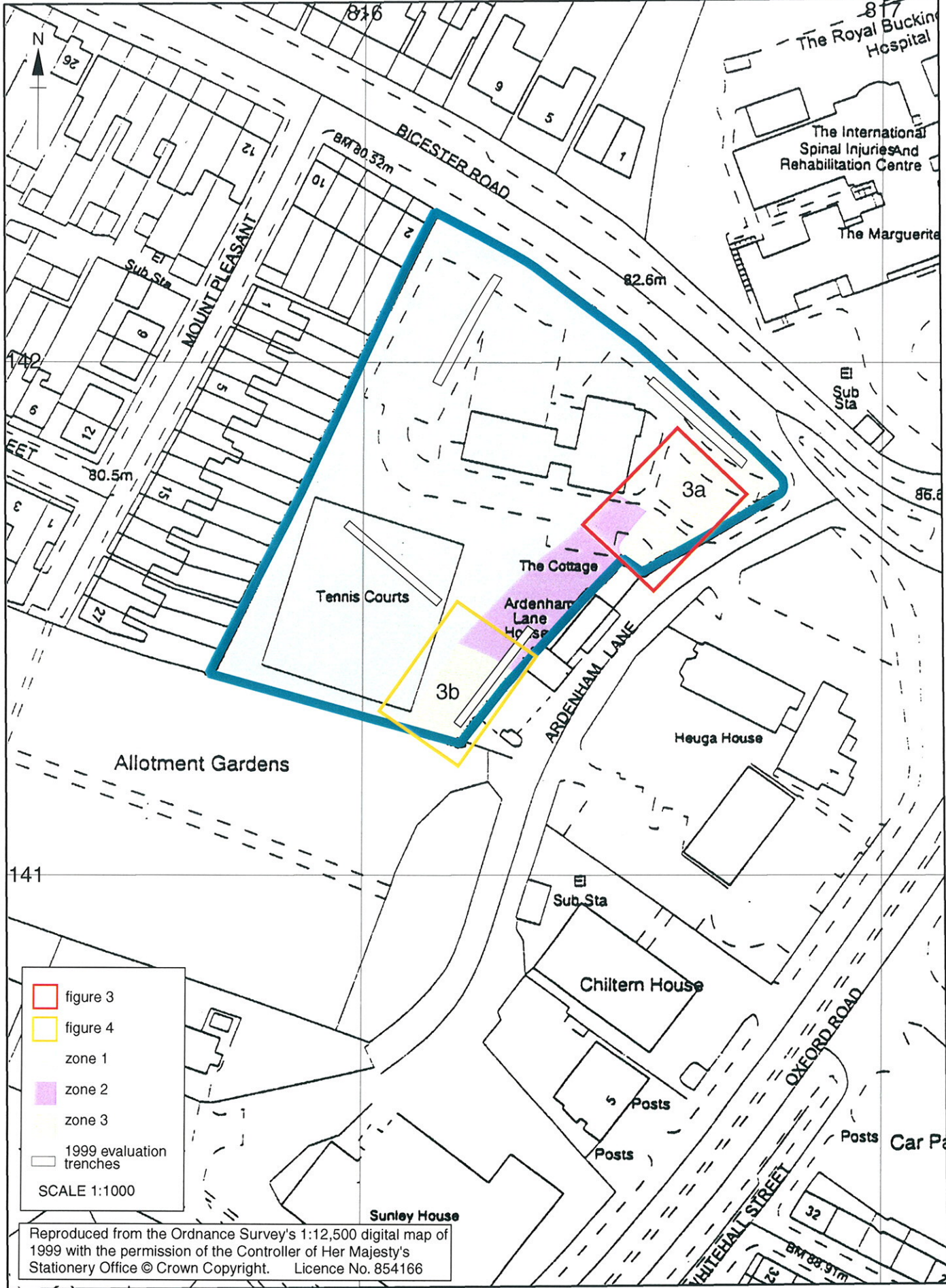


Figure 1: Site location



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Figure 2: Watching brief area location plan



Figure 3: Clay quarry pits in zone 3a (group 527).





Figure 4: Linear features in Zone 3b and relationship with evaluation trench 3.



Plate 1: Sample Area of pit group 527, Zone 3a, viewed from the South-West during excavations of pits 500 and 503.



## OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496  
email: [postmaster@oau-oxford.demon.co.uk](mailto:postmaster@oau-oxford.demon.co.uk)



---

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