

University Surveyor's Office Oxford

**Department of Physiology
North-East Extension**

**University Parks Science Area
Oxford**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR SP 1562 7068
5162 0768

Planning Ref: 98/1771/NH

**OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
August 2001**

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Prepared by: A.D.B.Holmes

Date: July 2001

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Date: August 14th 2001

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Date: *ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
21/8/2001*

**Department of Physiology
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SUMMARY

In July 2001 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a field evaluation at the Department of Physiology, University Parks Science Area, on behalf of the University Surveyor's Office, Oxford. The evaluation revealed a buried soil horizon of uncertain date overlain by modern road surface make up deposits. No features were identified within the evaluation trench, despite its location in an area rich in prehistoric remains.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In July 2001, the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a field evaluation on behalf of the University Surveyor's Office, Oxford, within the Science Park Area of Oxford University (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken in respect of a planning application for an extension to the Physiology building (Planning Application No.98/1771/NH). The work followed a desk-based assessment by OAU of the archaeological potential of the University Science Area (OAU, 1999).
- 1.1.3 A brief for the archaeological work was set by the City Archaeologist and OAU prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.
- 1.1.4 The development site is situated at the Department of Physiology, University Parks Science Area and is roughly 40 m x 25 m in area.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies near the edge of the second Summertown-Radley gravel terrace a short distance west of the first flood plain type terrace, overlying the Oxford Clay and Kellaway beds (Geology map sheet 236).
- 1.2.2 The site is bounded to the north by the University Park, to the south by South Parks Road and to the west by Parks Road. The site is located at the northern extent of the University Parks Science Area and is flanked by the Electrical Laboratory, the Department of Biochemistry and the Rex Richards Building.
- 1.2.3 The site is located between the rivers Cherwell and Thames. The site is relatively flat and lies at approximately 63m OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The development site is located on the north edge of the historic core of Oxford. There is evidence for extensive prehistoric activity in the area immediately to the north of the site. Aerial photographs of the University Parks show a range of features

from the ring-ditches of six Bronze Age barrows to a Roman field system. To the south-east excavations at the Rex Richards Building by OAU (Parkinson, Barclay & McKeague, 1996, 41-64) excavated two concentric ring-ditches of a Bronze Age barrow and also identified Iron Age activity.

- 1.3.2 Nearby, evidence of Romano-British agricultural and domestic activity has been seen at Mansfield College and the new Institute for American Studies (Booth & Hayden, 2000), and at the New Chemistry Research Laboratory (OAU recent excavation). Both of these sites lie south of the current proposal area.
- 1.3.3 There is little archaeological evidence for the Anglo-Saxon or medieval periods in the vicinity of the site. This matches the historical information, which suggests that this area was still farmland beyond the city boundaries at this time.
- 1.3.4 The recent excavations at Mansfield College, to the south of the development site, revealed a 7 m wide, east-west aligned Civil War defensive ditch which ran to the north of and parallel to the contemporary standing earthwork immediately to the east of Rhodes House. Excavations at the New Chemistry Research Laboratory revealed a length of the defensive ditches' outer circuit, which closely matched a drawing (Ashdown and Hassall, 1975, 141) of the predicted defensive lines.
- 1.3.5 The fortifications on the north side of Oxford were the first to be constructed in 1642, but were destroyed when Oxford fell into Parliamentary hands. Works were recommenced when Charles I retook the city on the 3rd of November 1642. The interpretative plan showing the Civil War Defences in relation to the topography of the modern city (see above) suggests that a bastion segment of the outer defensive ditch may lie very close to this development site.
- 1.3.6 There appears to have been no significant post-medieval building in the vicinity of the development site. The first OS mapping of the area in 1876 reveals that the site was parkland.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- 2.1.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of a single trench measuring 1.65 m wide by 12.5 m in length. The trench was positioned in order to avoid electrical cables to the north and a hydrogen pipeline to the south. (Figs 2 and 3).

3.1.2 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a JCB mechanical digger fitted with a grading bucket.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

3.2.1 The trench was cleaned by hand and the revealed deposits drawn, planned and recorded. A colour slide and black-and-white print film record was made of the work, which was undertaken in accordance with procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 At the time of the evaluation the site comprised a tarmac surface clearly cut by previous pipe trenches in places. The weather conditions were fine.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

5.1.1 At the base of the trench was a light yellow sandy gravel (6) that was interpreted as the natural. Within the gravel were pockets of red-brown silty loam (5) up to 0.4 m in depth. This deposit and the gravel was overlain by a layer of reddish-brown silty loam (4) to a depth of 0.25 m, which was in turn overlain by a 0.24 m deep layer of light brown silty loam (3), possibly a ploughsoil or former ground level. This layer thinned to the west end of the trench. None of these deposits contained finds.

5.1.2 A dark grey mixed deposit of modern brick rubble and silty loam (2) measuring 0.1 m in depth overlay layer 3, and was in turn sealed beneath a limestone rubble make-up layer that was covered with tarmac (1). These layers combined were 0.3 m deep.

5.2 Finds

5.2.1 No finds were recovered during the evaluation.

5.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

5.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were found.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

6.1.1 The evaluation comprised a 5% sample of the development area. It was clear that multiple service trenches have previously truncated parts of the development site. Nonetheless, the trench revealed a clear area of natural at its base and afforded clear sections of the stratigraphic build up of deposits.

6.2 Overall interpretation

- 6.2.1 The deposits at the base of the trench (layers 5 and 4) represent the prehistoric subsoil, which is often revealed at depth in Oxford where it seals the natural gravel.
- 6.2.2 The layer above may represent a buried plough soil, though it was undated, and may represent a former ground level of any period. The mixed layers above relate to the construction of the nearby University buildings that date to the 20th century.
- 6.2.3 Despite the proximity of this trench to a number of previously identified prehistoric ring ditches and barrows, there was no evidence for prehistoric human activity.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1						
	1	Deposit	-	0.3	Tarmac + makeup	-
	2	Deposit	-	0.1	Silty loam and rubble	-
	3	Deposit	-	0.24	Silty loam ploughsoil	-
	4	Deposit	-	0.25	Silty loam subsoil	-
	5	Deposit	-	0.4	Silty loam alluvium	-
	6	Natural	-	-	Sand and gravel	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- Ashdown J & Hassall T 1975 *Historic Towns of Oxfordshire*, (ed. Rodwell)
- Booth P & Hayden C, 2000 A Roman settlement at Mansfield College, Oxford, *Oxoniensia* 65
- OAU, 1999 *Proposed Development Sites in the University Science Area; Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*
- Parkinson A, Barclay A
McKeague P, 1996 The Excavation of Two Bronze-Age Barrows, & Oxford. *Oxoniensia* 61 (p41-64)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Department of Physiology, North East Extension, University Parks Science Area

Site code: OXPYNE 01

Grid reference: NGR SP 451562 207068

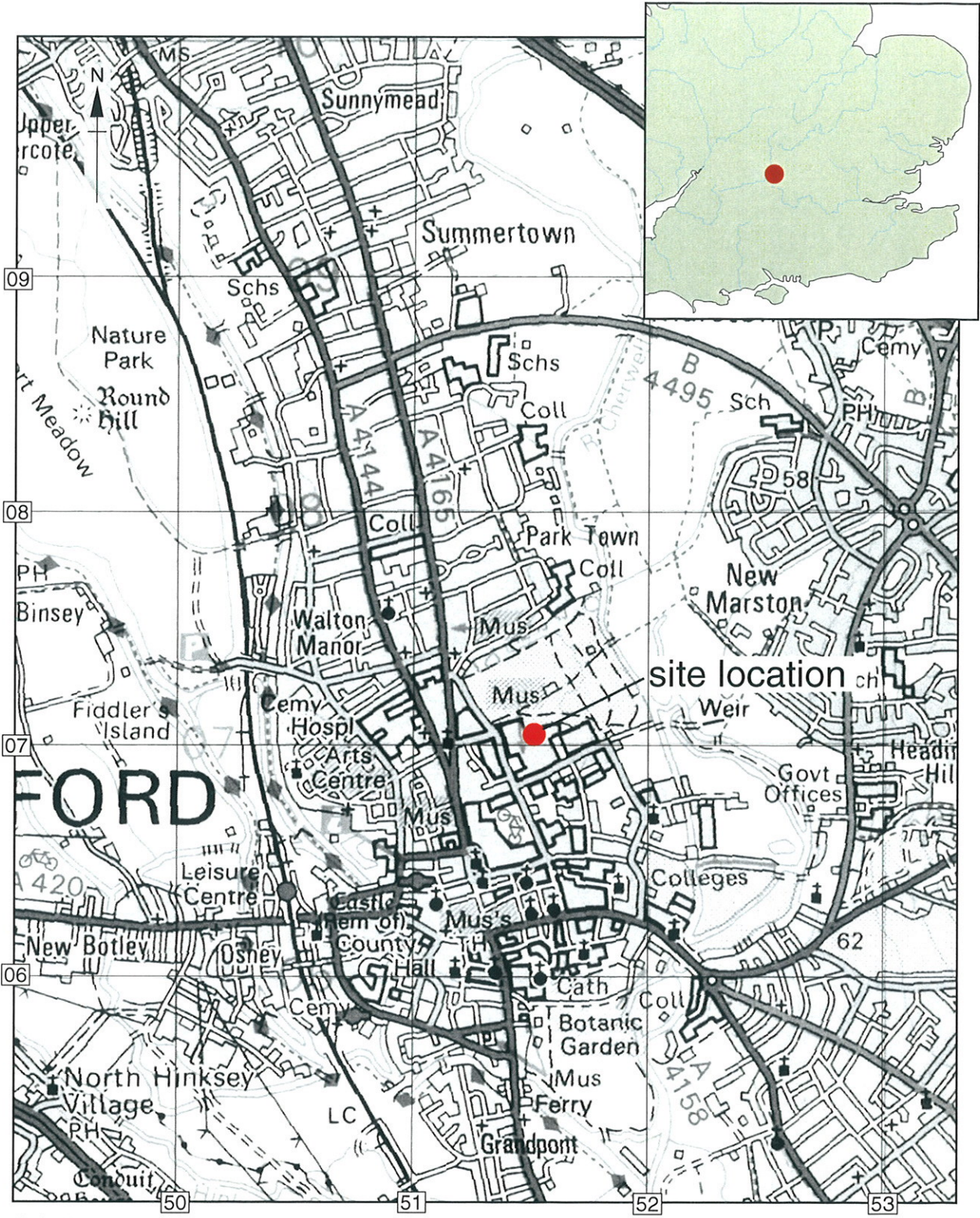
Type of evaluation: 12.5 m x 1.65 m trench

Date and duration of project: 23/07/01

Area of site: 40 m x 25 m

Summary of results: A buried plough soil was revealed. No further archaeological features or deposits were found.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OAU, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location.

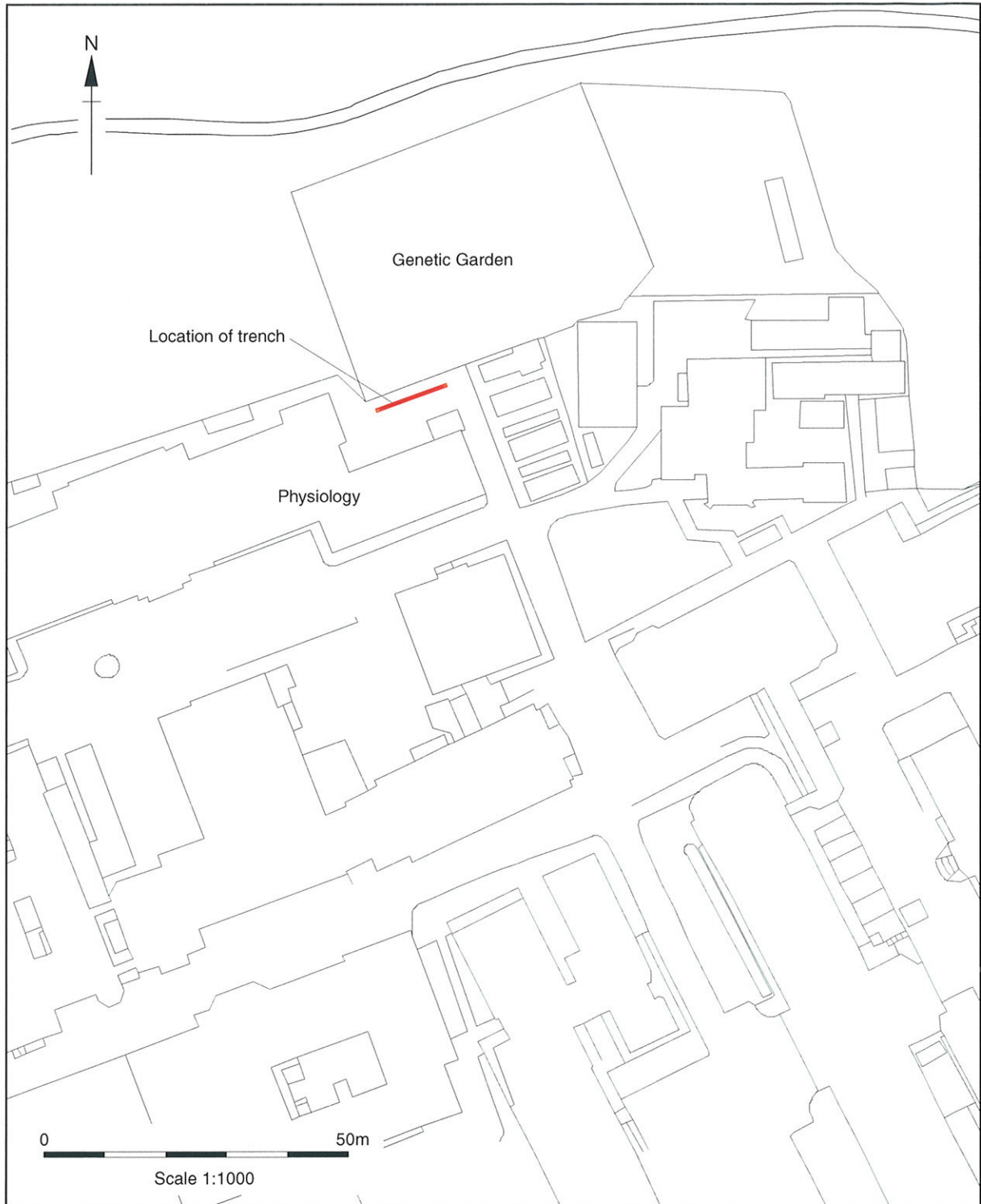


Figure 2: Trench location.



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