

EAST OXFORD (OX)
COWLEY

DXRPPWB
370/98

Rover Group Ltd
Integrated Logistics Centre

**New Pallet Area east of
Rover Integrated Logistics Centre
Railway embankment and car parking area**

Watlington Road, Cowley

NGR SP 557 037

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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July 2000

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Prepared by: J Dalton/J Hiller

Date: June 2000

Checked by: J Hiller

Date: July 2000

Approved by: Paul Booth

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Summary

In October 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Rover's Cowley Works, Oxford (NGR SP 557 037) during groundwork in advance of the construction of a pallet park. The watching brief followed an archaeological evaluation of the same site that revealed evidence of an ancient ploughsoil. A relict but undated ploughsoil was identified in several pits excavated by the contractors, together with a modern brick structure. No archaeological features or finds were observed.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This rolling development comprised the construction of a new logistics centre, parking storage areas and associated access works. The removal of railway tracks and associated deposits was undertaken prior to the construction of the Integrated Logistics Building. A pallet park was to be constructed with an associated lighting system, as part of the project (Fig. 1).
- 1.2 The site is located on the southern edge of the Rover Group Cowley Car Plant (NGR SP 557 037) and is bounded to the west by the Watlington Road and the Cowley Works to the north and east. The geology comprises sand and calcareous sandstone of the Berkley Sand Member, part of the Corallian Formation (BGS sheet 237).
- 1.3 Policy EN 40 in the Oxford Local Plan requires that, where archaeological remains of more than local importance may be affected, the Planning Authority may ask a developer to submit sufficient information to define their character and extent.
- 1.4 The Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS) advised the Planning Authority on the need for the work (June 1998). The Watching Brief was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) approved by the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS). Rover Group commissioned OAU to undertake the watching brief.

2 Background

- 2.1 The development site is situated in the vicinity of Roman Way, the Roman road between Alchester and Dorchester-on-Thames. Burials were found in 1940 west of Roman Way to the north of this site, and further burials were known c 500 m to the north.
- 2.2 Roman settlement is recorded to the south of the site; Roman pottery and coins have been found at Northfield Farm, 500 m east of the site. Ditches, possible wall foundations and a kiln were uncovered close to Roman way where the Watlington Road crosses it.
- 2.3 The general area was the focus of the Oxfordshire Roman pottery industry, which is thought to have evolved within an extensive pattern of rural settlement.

At present this settlement pattern is as yet not clearly understood, though it probably consisted of farms and hamlets.

- 2.4 Excavations by the OAU immediately north of this site at the new Rover 'Quality Building' and Paint-shop have revealed a late Bronze Age/early Iron Age ditch. Environmental evidence from the ditch suggests that in this period at least the area was scrub or un-grazed grassland. Evidence from excavations on the Blackbird Leys Peripheral Road indicates a cleared pastoral landscape. A late Bronze Age/early Iron Age settlement has been excavated by the OAU on the line of the new peripheral road.
- 2.5 An archaeological field evaluation was undertaken on the site in July 1998 and the results have been made available (OAU 1998).

3 Aims of the Investigation

- 3.1 To preserve by record any archaeological remains that would otherwise be removed or damaged by construction within the development area.
- 3.2 To make available the results of the investigation.

4 Strategy

- 4.1 An archaeological supervisor was in attendance during groundwork likely to affect archaeological deposits.
- 4.2 Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations deposits and features were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on pro-forma sheets. Soil descriptions were compiled using estimated percentages using standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types soils. Recording was in accordance with standard OAU practice (OAU 1992).

5 Results

- 5.1 The first phase of work involved the monitoring of 5 light tower foundation pits dug within the area of the new pallet park (Fig. 2). The pits measured 3 m by 3 m and were excavated by the contractors to a depth of 1-1.2 m. Natural cornbrash limestone was observed at the base of one of the pits. Two pits displayed a mid-dark brown clay silt towards the base, that may have represented a relict ploughsoil. One pit had concrete and made ground at its base. No artefacts were observed from any of these pits.
- 5.2 A second visit was made to monitor completion works on the lighting pits. Two further pits were excavated by the contractors. The pits measured 3 m by 1.5 m. At the base of the first pit was a clay loam containing cornbrash limestone that represented the upper surface of the natural. A red-brick structure lay in the south-east corner of the pit; the function of the structure was unclear. Above lay a 0.1 m thick layer of clinker and gravel in turn sealed

by a 0.3 m thick deposit of limestone pieces. The upper deposit in the pit sequence was a 0.18 m thick layer of tarmac. Natural was observed at the base of the second pit at a depth of 1.12 m, sealed beneath a 0.5 m thick layer of loam. Above lay a 0.08 m thick layer of clinker followed in turn by a 0.32 m thick layer of broken limestone. Tarmac completed the sequence here.

- 5.3 No results were obtained from the construction of the road that impinged only on the upper deposits observed in the light pits.

6 Finds

- 6.1 No finds were recovered in the course of the work. Modern bricks observed in one of the light pits were not retained for further analysis.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The deposits observed in the light pits corresponded to the general sequence observed during the evaluation of the site. The relict ploughsoil identified was undated, although it can be confirmed to extend over a wide area of this site.
- 7.2 The absence of features or finds might suggest that the site was in open ground, or fields, until the construction of the factory.

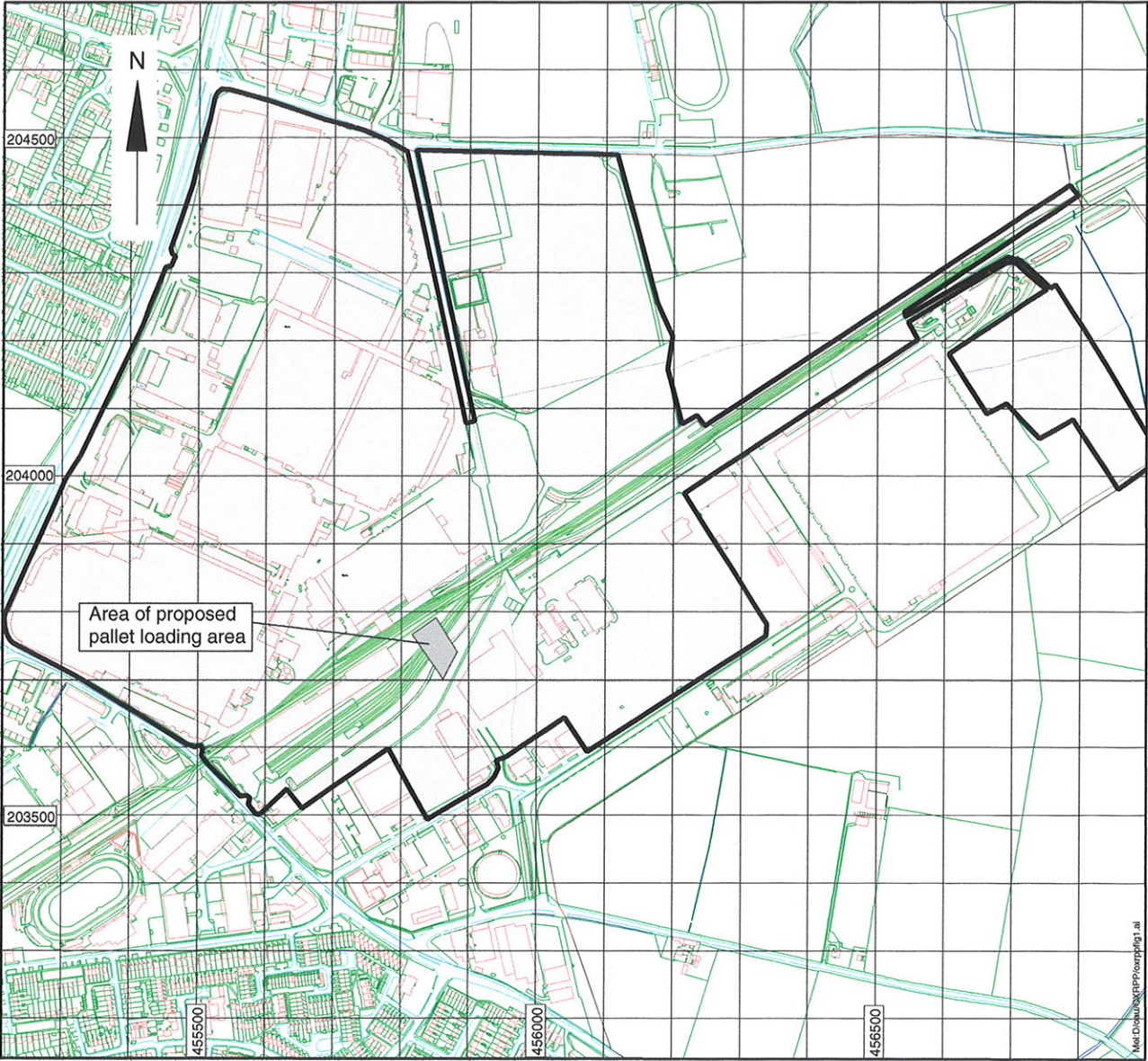
J Dalton/J Hiller
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References

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OAU 1992 Fieldwork Manual (First Edition).

OAU 1998 Rover Pallet Park, Archaeological Evaluation Report.



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Figure 1: Location of site

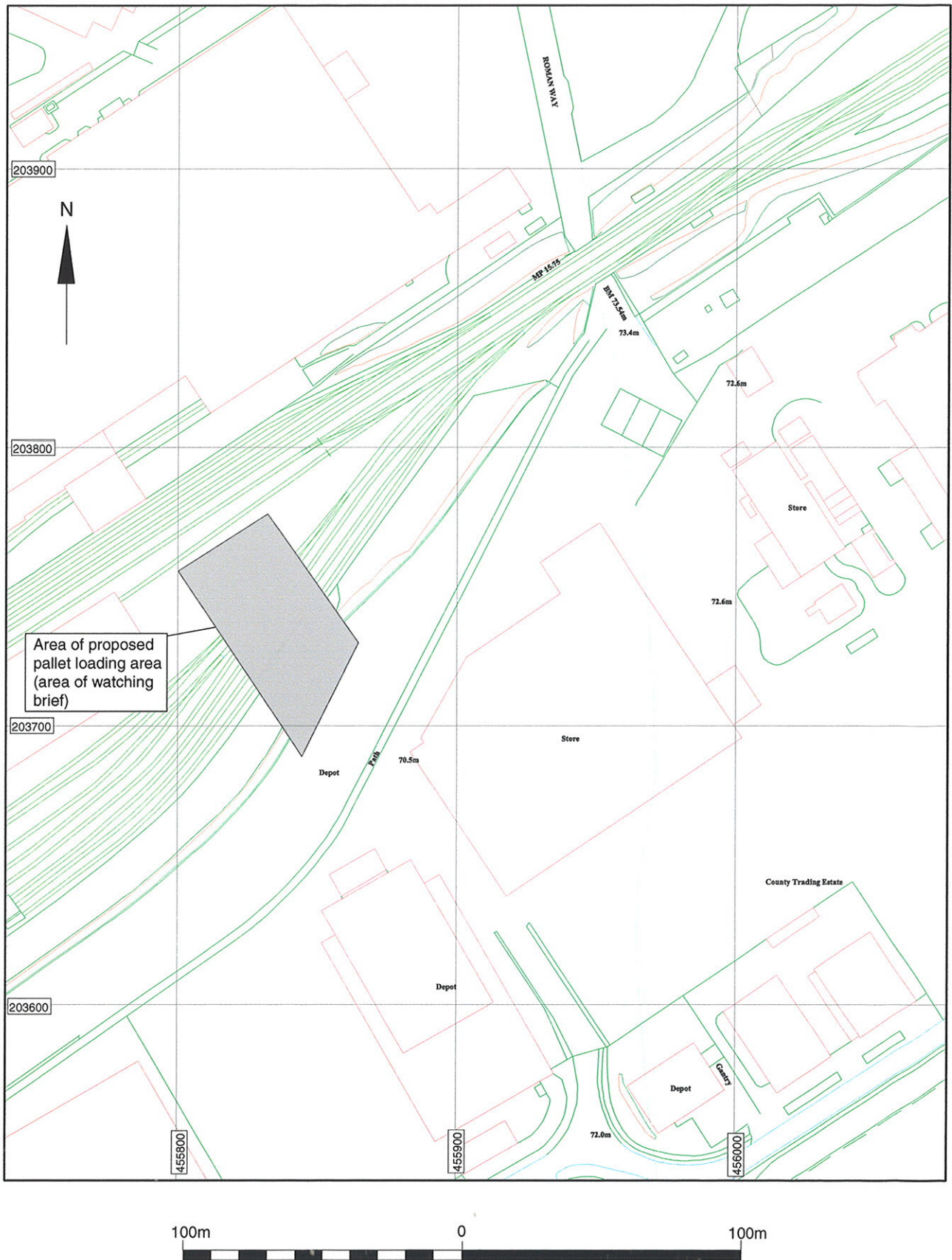


Figure 2: Area of watching brief



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