

St Nicholas School Abingdon Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology

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St Nicholas School, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

NGR SU 4960 9788

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SUMMARY

In May 2001 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Nicholas School, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 4960 9788). The work was commissioned by W S Atkins in advance of the construction of an extension for a new Information Technology and administration area. The watching brief revealed a single undated ditch cutting the natural gravel.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In May 2001 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Nicholas C of E School, Boxhill Walk, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 4960 9788). The work was commissioned by W S Atkins in respect of a planning application for a building extension for an IT and administration area.

1.1.2 A project brief was set by Hugh Coddington, Deputy Archaeologist, County Archaeological Services, Oxford County Council. OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The area of development is on the north side of Boxhill Walk, which is situated on the east side of Wootton Rd (B4017), Abingdon (NGR SU 4960 9788). The site lies at approximately 58 m AOD and the geology is second terrace gravel.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA, 2001) and has been supplemented by additional background material from the wealth of known information from the town.

1.3.2 The site lies in the centre of Abingdon which is an area rich in archaeological remains of all periods, and has seen human occupation and settlement for approximately five and a half thousand years, beginning with a Neolithic settlement dated c 3,500 BC. Evidence of 'Beaker' activity has been recovered from the town centre (Allen 1990, 73). The Neolithic monument complexes known from Abingdon later became *foci* for Bronze Age cemeteries and lines of round barrows at Radley (Barrow Hills) are locally the best known (Barclay and Halpin 1999).

1.3.3 Around 1 km to the west of this development an early and middle Iron Age settlement was established on the site of Ashville Trading Estate and Wyndyke Furlong, just west of Larkhill Stream (Parrington 1978; Muir and Roberts 1999).

1.3.4 By the late Iron Age, 'Abingdon' had evolved as a native '*oppidum*' and became a market-centre by the early Roman period, prospering into the 4th century (see Allen

1991; Allen 1993; Allen 1995; Allen 1997). Villas such as that at Barton Court Farm (Miles 1986) hint at the land division locally, and ditches, wells and features have been identified at Ashville Trading Estate and Wyndyke Furlong (Parrington 1978; Muir and Roberts 1999). A small late-Roman cemetery is recorded close to the Marcham Road (Parrington 1978, 23-5) west of this development site.

- 1.3.5 Saxon evidence from the town comprises small settlements such as those found at the Vineyard (Allen, 1990), east of the town at Audlett Drive (Keevill 1992), at Barrow Hills (Miles 1986) and on the site of the former Roman villa at Barton Court Farm (Miles 1986). These complement the known mixed cemetery at Saxton Road (Leeds and Harden, 1936).
- 1.3.6 The early medieval abbey sacked by the Danes was re-founded and features in Domesday. The abbey came to dominate the town's affairs, and a large number of chapels were founded including two at opposite ends of Ock Bridge.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The site was stripped of topsoil to the level of the subsoil. Strip foundations were then excavated through the underlying soil layer, which was a brown clay silt (2) with gravel inclusions. This layer, probably a former undated topsoil, overlay the natural gravel (1) to a depth of 0.3 m.
- 3.1.2 A linear feature (3) was observed aligned north-west - south-east towards the centre of the footprint for the new building. The feature had steep sloping sides and a concave base and was 1.2 m wide and 0.6 m deep. The feature, probably a ditch, cut the natural gravel (Figs 2 and 3). It was filled by a mid greyish brown silty clay (4) with gravel inclusions, that was sealed below the layer 2. No dating evidence was recovered from the ditch.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 No finds were recovered from the site.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No environmental samples were taken.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The only feature observed in the course of the work was a single ditch of unknown date. The feature may represent a boundary ditch, though the absence of dating material and related features from the watching brief make further interpretation impossible.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Height</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1	Layer				Natural substratum	None
2	Layer	0.3 m			Subsoil	None
3	Cut	0.6 m	1.2 m		Ditch	
4	Fill				Ditch fill	None

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Allen, T G 1990 Abingdon Vineyard redevelopment, *South Midlands Archaeology* 20, 73-8

Allen, T G 1991 An *oppidum* at Abingdon, Oxfordshire, *South Midlands Archaeology* 21, 97-9

Allen, T G 1993 Abingdon, Abingdon Vineyard 1992: Areas 2 and 3, the Early Defences, *South Midlands Archaeology* 23, 64-6

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Keevill, G D 1992 An Anglo-Saxon site at Audlett Drive, Abingdon, Oxon., *Oxoniensia* 57, 55-79

Leeds, E T and Harden, D B 1936 *The Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Abingdon*. Oxford

Miles, D (ed) 1986 *Archaeology at Barton Court Farm, Abingdon, Oxon*. Council for British Archaeology Research Report 50. London

Muir, J and Roberts, M 1999 *Excavations at Wyndyke Furlong, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, 1994*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph 12, Oxford Archaeological Unit. Oxford

Parrington, M 1978 *The excavation of an Iron Age settlement, Bronze Age ring-ditches and Roman features at Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon (Oxfordshire) 1974-76*. Council for British Archaeology Research Report 28. London

Wilkinson D, (ed) 1992, *OAU Fieldwork manual*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Nicholas C of E School, Boxhill Walk, Abingdon

Site code: ABNICS 00

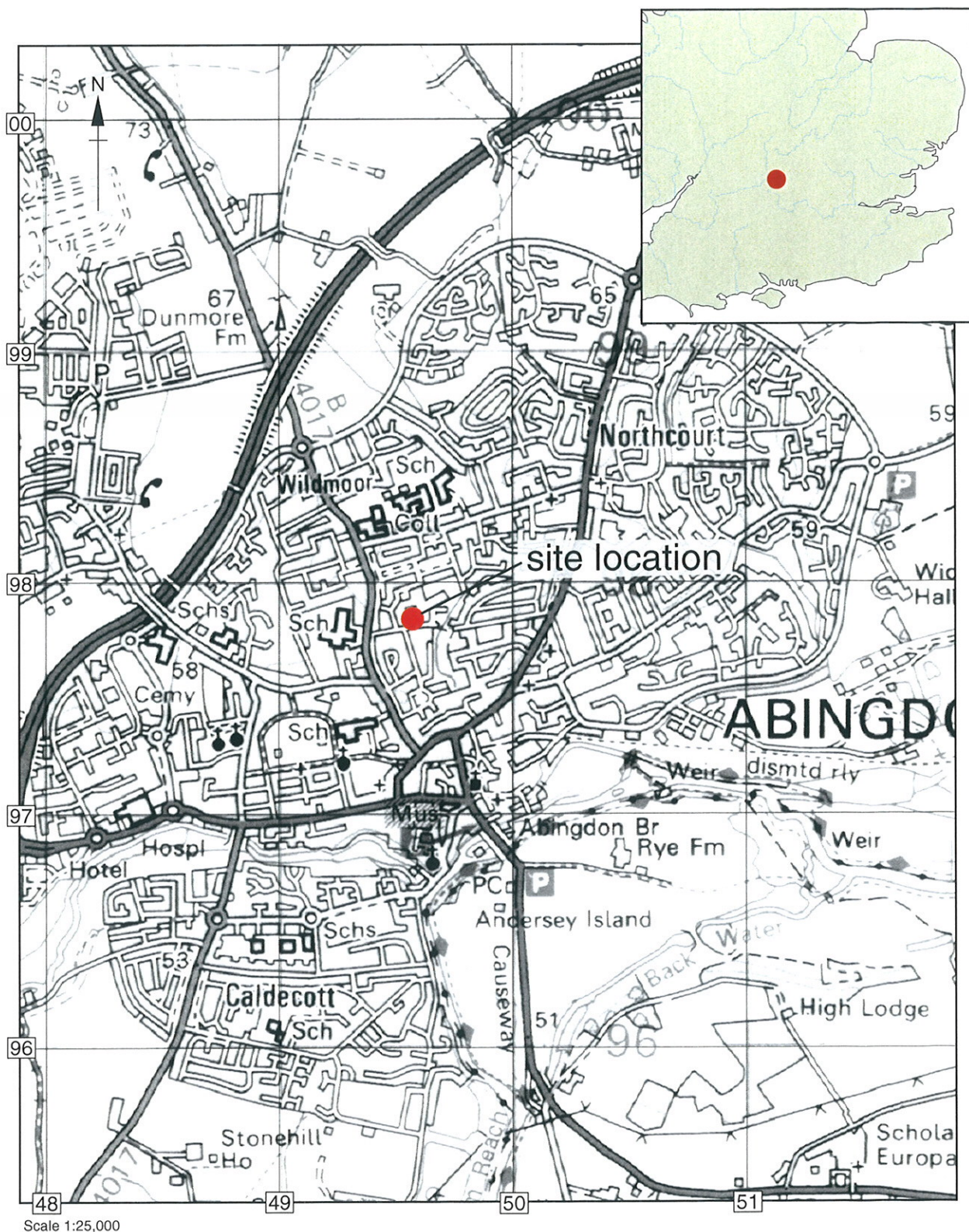
Grid reference: NGR SU 4960 9788

Type of watching brief: Machine stripping for foundations

Date and duration of project: Two site visits in May 2001

Summary of results: One linear ditch of unknown date

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: 2000.153



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Figure 1: Site location.



Figure 2 : Site plan.

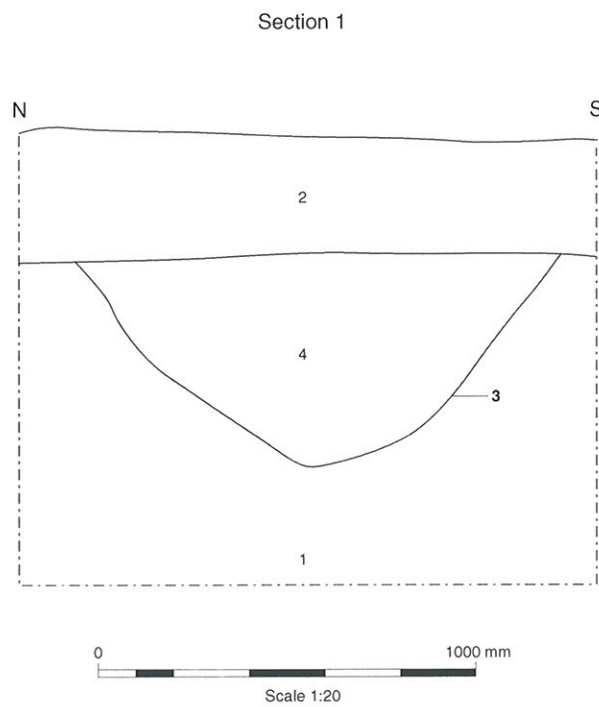


Figure 3 : Section.



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