

Oxford Archaeological Unit  
May 2001

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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TREE NURSERY, SCHOOL HOUSE, NOKE, OXFORDSHIRE

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Date: 15.5.01

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The watching brief was undertaken by means of separate inspection visits.

#### 4 Methodology

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 Aims

St Giles Church is located to the north-west of the site. The south porch and doorway and the lancets in the south chancel and west nave walls date from 1190-1250 (Pevsner), although alterations and additions have been made throughout the 14-19th centuries.

Manor Farm is an L-shaped building, the north wing of which dates from the 16th-17th century. The west wing is Georgian but has been modernised (Pevsner). A 16th century, two storey stable with three bays and mullioned windows also stands nearby. Finds from the area indicate that the standing buildings of Manor Farm are likely to have superseded an earlier structure.

The development is located within the historic core of Noke. A settlement at Noke is first mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086, but the place name would suggest that it is Late Anglo-Saxon in origin. Prehistoric, Roman and medieval activity has been identified within the development area. While no archaeological features have been recorded, this activity is represented by the recovery of a number of Neolithic/Bronze Age struck flints, a Bronze Age spearhead and Roman and medieval coins. In addition a dense scatter of medieval pottery and stone identified within the proposal area may indicate the location of an earlier manor house.

#### 2 Background

The development area is located to the east of The Old School House and south of Manor Farm (see below). It lies approximately 62.8 m above OD and the geology is fine loamy soils over clay. The site was a field until c1955 when the tree nursery was established. Some temporary structures associated with the nursery were demolished prior to the start of the groundwork for the present development. In recent years the site has been turfed and utilised as a domestic garden.

#### 1. Introduction

Planning permission has been granted by Cherwell District Council for the construction of a replacement nursery at the Tree Nursery, Old School House, Noke, Oxfordshire. Due to the potential presence of below ground archaeological deposits a condition was attached to the planning permission requiring that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the groundwork. No archaeological features were observed during the groundwork.

#### Summary

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

## References.

While the limited impact of the development made characterisation of the deposits problematic, it seems likely that deposits 2 and 3 represent buried soils associated with the former use of the site as a field and latterly a tree nursery. No archaeological features were observed during the watching brief but the proximity of Manor Farm and St Giles Church suggests that the presence of archaeological remains in the area cannot be entirely discounted.

## 8 Discussion

Although full consideration was given to various sampling strategies, due to the absence of any suitable deposits and the tight constraints of the excavation, no environmental soil samples were taken.

## 7 Environmental results

Some unstratified 20th-century building material was observed during the watching brief but no finds were retained.

## 6 Finds

The stratigraphic sequence revealed consisted of natural clay (1) overlain by a 0.20 m thick deposit of mid orange brown silty clay (2) which was in turn overlain by a 0.40 m thick layer of mid brownish grey silty loam (3). All of these deposits showed evidence of root disturbance from the former tree nursery.

The watching brief monitored the removal of the existing turf in the development area and the subsequent excavation of the strip foundation trenches for the new building and associated services.

## 5 Results

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 profoma sheets. Soil description utilised standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

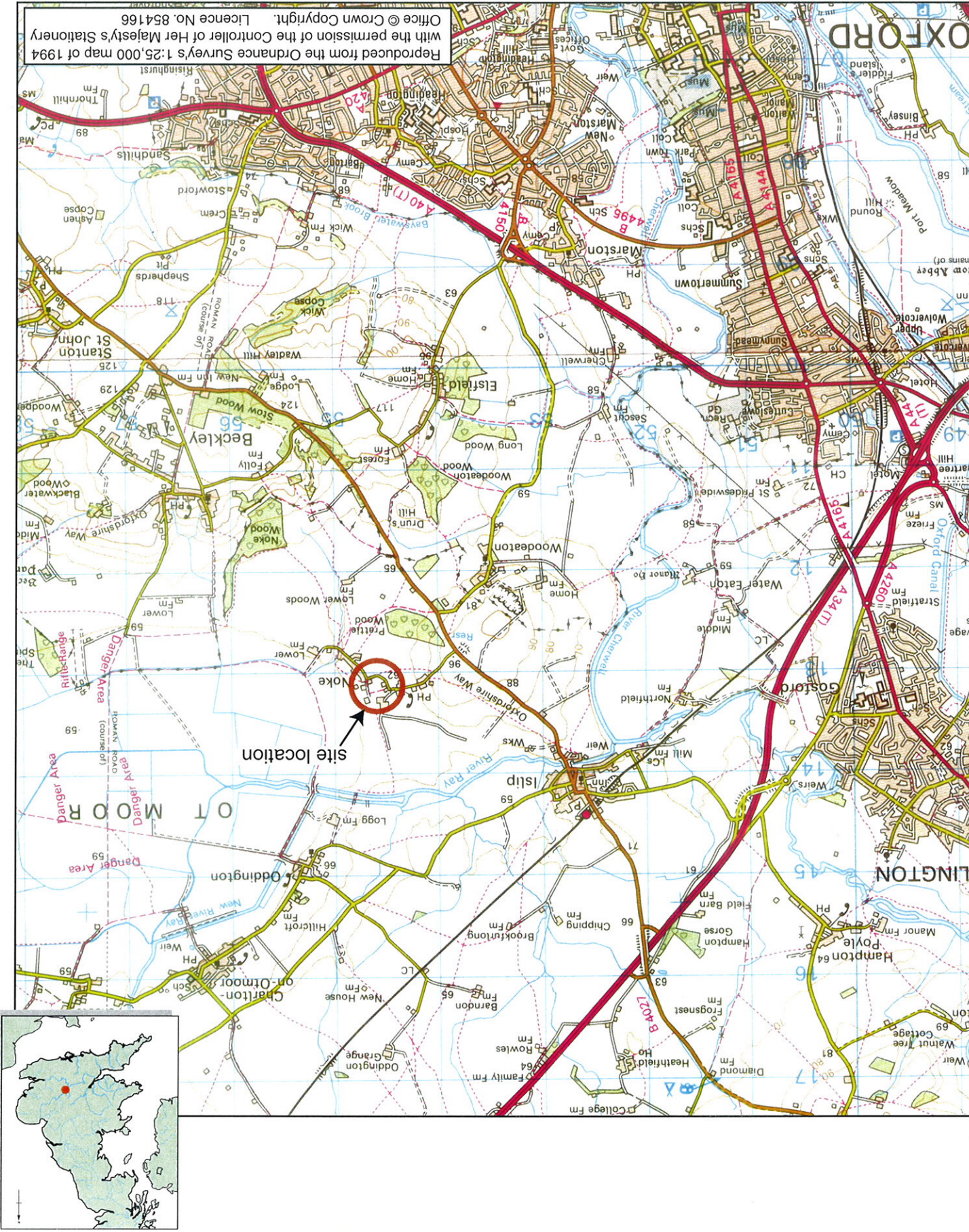


Figure 1: Site location.

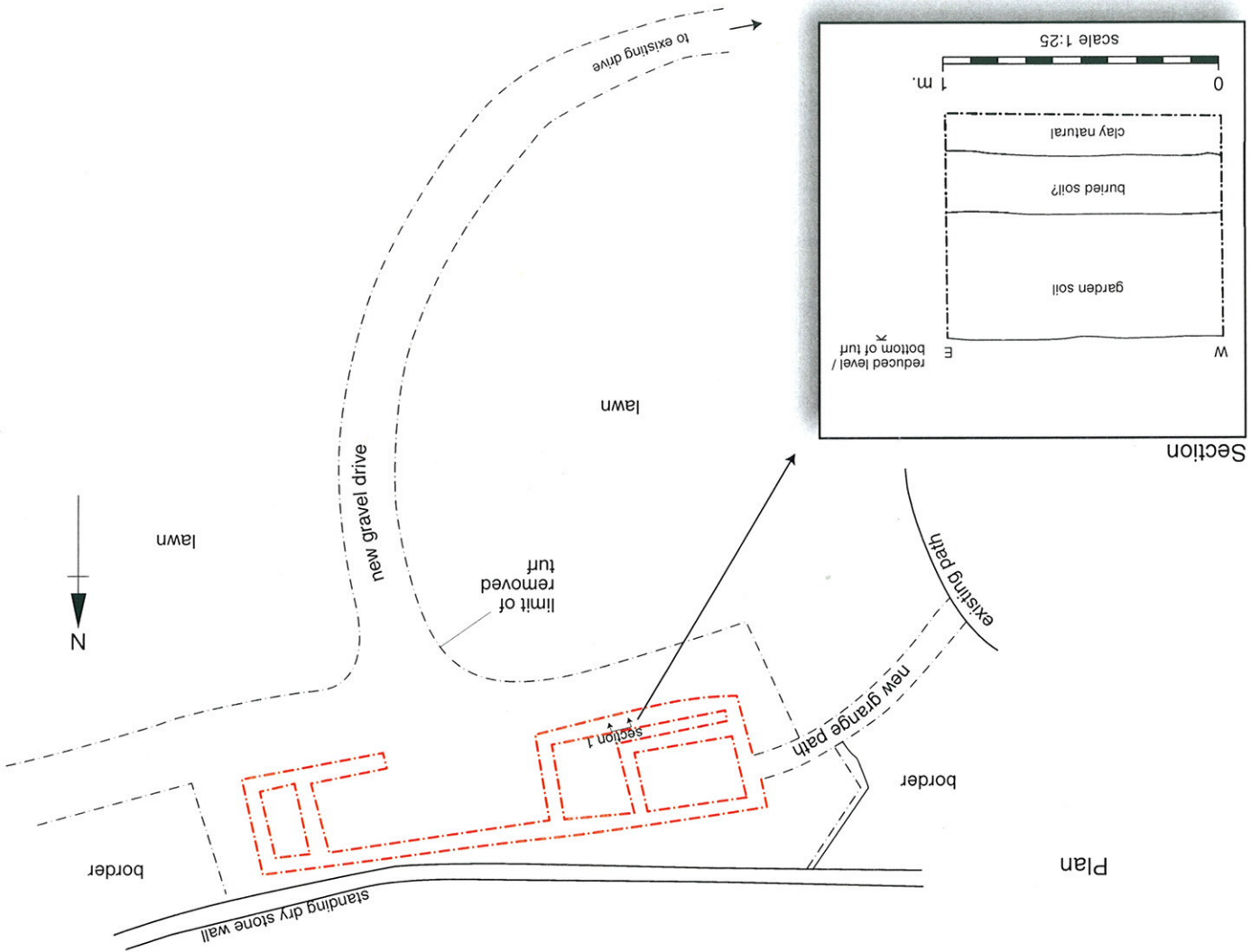
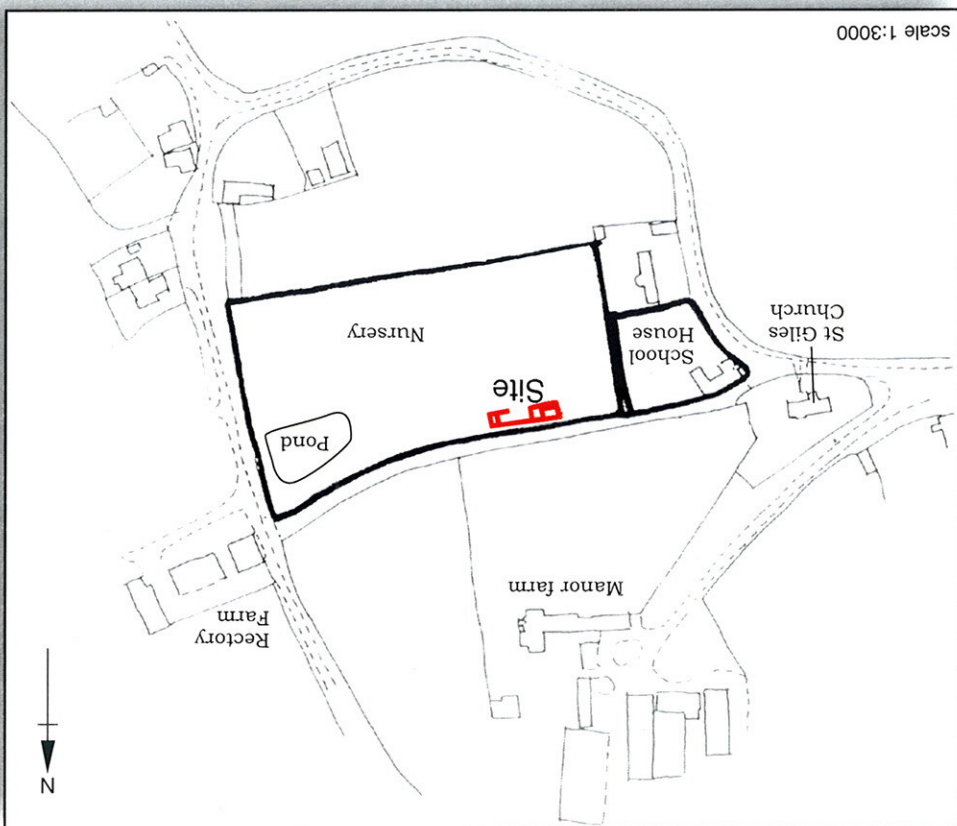


Figure 2: Trench plan and section.



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