

# Fairfield Park Stotfold Bedfordshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



**Oxford Archaeology**

March 2004

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**P J Livesey Country Homes  
(Southern) Ltd**

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**FAIRFIELD PARK, STOTFOLD, BEDFORDSHIRE**

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT***

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## SUMMARY

*Archaeological watching brief inspection and recording work was carried out at a former Victorian country asylum in south-east Bedfordshire, now known as Fairfield Park, by Oxford Archaeology for Mills Whipp Projects Ltd (London), on behalf of P J Livesey Country Homes (Southern) Ltd.*

*The development site, which envelops a low, but prominent ridge, is known to contain significant archaeological remains dated to the Iron Age and Roman periods.*

*The inspection work, which took place in September and November 2003, was carried out in accordance with an archaeological planning condition attached to the consent for the development. It comprised monitoring the mechanical excavation of geo-technical pits and the light wells, in order to mitigate any impact on archaeological remains.*

*There were no archaeological remains other than features and deposits which dated to the 19th century asylum and later 20th century activity. The observations, however, permitted an understanding of the topography of the pre-Victorian era, which, in turn, may help determine the extent of an enclosed Iron Age settlement which is known to have been situated upon the ridge.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Inspection Rationale

- 1.1.1 Planning permission has been granted for a housing development at the site of the former Fairfield Hospital, Stotfold, Bedfordshire (centred at TL 2030 3470; Fig.1). Attached to this is an archaeological planning condition requiring the implementation of a Written Scheme of Archaeological Investigation to cover each area of ground disturbance.
- 1.1.2 The development site is currently in dual-ownership. The former hospital complex and its immediate former grounds and environs is in the ownership of P J Livesey Country Homes (Southern) Ltd., on whose behalf, the watching brief inspection works detailed in this report, was carried out by Oxford Archaeology (OA), under the consultant services of Mills Whipp Projects Ltd.
- 1.1.3 Archaeological evaluation work conducted in areas of separate land-ownership (i.e. that of Fairfield Park Re-developments) elsewhere throughout the site in 1997 and 2002 (*post. 1.4*), demonstrated that significant archaeological remains survive within the development area. Resultant mitigation excavations, in 2002 and 2003 (*post. 1.4*), in proximity to the former hospital building, revealed the presence of a significant and extensive Iron Age enclosed hilltop settlement.
- 1.1.4 The watching brief inspection reported on here comprises part fulfillment of the archaeological planning condition, and was requested by Bedfordshire County Council's County Archaeologist during the digging of geo-technical pits and light wells in the immediate proximity of the former hospital complex. The inspection and

recording of the geo-technical pits was done on the 1st and 2nd September 2003 and the light wells, between the 17th and 28th November 2003.

## 1.2 Scope of the Fieldwork

- 1.2.1 The geo-technical works comprised the digging, by mechanical excavator, of 12 test pits immediately north of the main hospital complex. In addition, as part of the on-going works, two sets of light wells were excavated adjacent to the east wing of the main hospital building.
- 1.2.2 Although archaeological investigations have shown that significant archaeological remains are present within parts of the development area, the potential for remains in the location of the light wells was uncertain.
- 1.2.3 The inspection required the presence of an archaeologist to monitor all ground-works in order to mitigate any impact that the geo-technical pits and light well excavations may have on archaeological deposits (*post.2*). The parameters of the archaeological works were set out in the approved WSI (OA 2003e).

## 1.3 Geology and Topography

- 1.3.1 Fairfield Park is situated at 80m OD on the crest of a north-south ridge. The land slopes gently downwards both to the north and south. On the eastern side there is a dry valley and to the west the land slopes down to the valley of the River Hiz. The excavation area lies at the north end of the ridge, on generally level ground beyond which the land slopes away to the north, east and west. The soils are characteristic of the Wantage 2 association, comprising well-drained calcareous silty soils. The underlying geology of the site is Middle Chalk overlain by deposits of Glacial Gravel.

## 1.4 Archaeological Background

- 1.4.1 In 1997, an archaeological evaluation of the development area (BCAS 1997) revealed significant archaeological potential in the form of remains that dated to the Iron Age and Roman periods.
- 1.4.2 The resultant mitigation investigations designed in advance of groundworks north and south of the hospital, between November 2002 and October 2003, confirmed the survival of large segments of a significant early to middle Iron Age settlement (OA 2002a; OA 2002b; OA 2002c; OA 2003a; OA 2003b; OA 2003c; OA 2003d; OA 2003e; OA 2004).
- 1.4.3 The archaeological site is, so far, understood to form part of a broader pattern of Iron Age and Roman settlement and activity in the surrounding area, which includes a concentration of activity around Baldock where there is both a late Iron Age *oppidum* and a Roman small town, and a settlement on the south east side of the modern village of Stotfold (BCC Historic Environment Record 74).

## 2 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Objectives

2.1.1 The aims of the archaeological watching brief were set out in the approved WSI (OA 2003e) and were defined as follows:

- To monitor all ground-works that may affect or reveal archaeological deposit;
- To provide an indication of potential survival of archaeological remains;
- To observe the levels at which the old ground surface is encountered. The determination of earlier topography may help define the boundaries of the ancient settlements;
- To complement our knowledge and understanding of the character and extent of ancient settlements and land-use;

### 2.2 Methodology

#### *Fieldwork Methods and Recording*

2.2.1 The fieldwork methods and recording was carried out in accordance with Section 6 of the Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2003e); the Watching Brief Specification compiled by Mills Whipp Projects Ltd; and the 'Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs' (IFA, 1999).

#### *Health and Safety*

2.2.2 The works adhered to all relevant health and safety legislation and codes of practice, and a Risk Assessment was carried out in advance of works, to be updated as appropriate throughout the operations.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Trial Pits

3.1.1 A total of twelve geo-technical trial pits were excavated across the development site north of the main hospital by Casella Stanger building (Fig. 2). The original numbering system was retained. Apart from below-ground cut features associated with the former hospital, no archaeology was revealed.

3.1.2 The depth of made ground was extremely variable in the central and east part of the site. The undisturbed geology (natural) was located generally between 0.2 m and 0.9 m, but at TP26, 1.30 m. Due to the depth of pits and the requirements of health and safety, it was not possible to determine old ground levels with any certainty. Two pits dug immediately north of the hospital's farm complex, TP14 and TP15, seemed to indicate a former hospital dumping ground with buried deposits up between 2.9 and 3.3 m deep. The spatial extent of the dumping ground is unclear.

#### 3.1.3 Trial Pit 12

<i>Dimensions:</i>	NNE - SSW; length 2.0 m; width 0.60 m ; depth 0.20 m	
<i>Stratigraphy:</i>	Ground level - 0.40	Made ground
	m	
	0.40 m - 0.60 m	Mid-brown silt

	0.60 m	Services located. No archaeology was revealed.
<i>Results:</i>		
3.1.4 Trial Pit 14		
<i>Dimensions:</i>	E-W; length 2.30 m; width 0.60 m ; depth 3.20 m	
<i>Stratigraphy:</i>	Ground level - 1.40 m	Lenses of made ground: dumps of gravels, sub-angular; grey and brown pebbly gravel.
	1.40 m - 2.90 m	Loosely packed ceramic brick and tile fragments and intact metal bedframes.
	2.90 m - 3.20 m	Natural tan white sandy chalk.
<i>Results:</i>		This trench was located on a deep cut for a coal tramline. It appears to have been in-filled rapidly by whatever material was at hand. No significant archaeology was revealed.
3.1.5 Trial Pit 15		
<i>Dimensions:</i>	E-W; length 2.0 m; width 0.60 m ; depth 2.5 m	
<i>Stratigraphy:</i>	Ground level - 0.20 m	Top soil, brown silty sand with abundant roots.
	0.20 - 1.0 m	Loose made ground: cream-white gravel with sub-rounded pebbles (0.05 -0.08 dia.) and large fragments of degraded chalk.
	1.0m - 3.6 m	Loose brown-black silty sand. A backfill with plenty of glass bottles and modern ceramic plates and bowls.
	3.6 m - 3.8 m	Natural orange-brown clay and gravel.
<i>Results:</i>		No significant archaeology was revealed.
3.1.6 Trial Pit 16		
<i>Dimensions:</i>	NNW-SSE; length 2.0 m; width 0.60 m ; depth 2.5 m	
<i>Stratigraphy:</i>	Ground level - 0.60 m	Made ground.
	0.60 m - 1.10 m	Mid-brown silt.
	1.10 m - 1.40 m	White grey silt.
<i>Results:</i>		No archaeology was revealed.
3.1.7 Trial Pit 18		
<i>Dimensions:</i>	NNW-SSE; length 1.60 m; width 0.60 m ; depth 1.45 m	
<i>Stratigraphy:</i>	Ground level - 0.08m	Tarmac.
	0.08 -0.45	Made ground. Mid tan brown sub-angular gravels (0.05 -0.08 m dia.) with 30% brick and tile fragments and bricks.
	0.45 - 1.45 m	Natural, brown silty clay with manganese flecking.
<i>Results:</i>		This trench revealed a modern trench which truncated the natural, perpendicular to the trench length, perhaps associated with an iron pipe exposed in the west side. The trench had been back-filled with modern rubble. No significant archaeology was revealed.
3.1.8 Trial Pit 20		
<i>Dimensions:</i>	NNW-SSE; length 2.20 m; width 0.60 m; depth 1.10 m	
<i>Stratigraphy:</i>	Ground level - 0.20m	Made ground.
	0.20 - 1.10 m	Natural. Grey - white to mid-brown silt.

*Results:* No archaeology was revealed.

### 3.1.9 Trial Pit 21

*Dimensions:* NNW-SSW; length 1.90 m; width 0.60 m; depth 1.90 m  
*Stratigraphy:* Ground level - 0.08 m Tarmac  
 0.08 m - 0.40 m Made ground: dark grey-brown sandy clay with brick / tile fragments  
 0.40 m - 0.80 m Mid-brown sandy clay with chalk inclusions  
 0.90 m - 1.90 m Natural. Loose light tan white sandy chalk with medium to large chalk and limestone cobbles.

*Results:* No archaeology was revealed.

### 3.1.10 Trial Pit 22

*Dimensions:* NNW -SSE ; length 1.80 m; width 0.60 m; depth 1.90 m  
*Stratigraphy:* Ground level - 0.08 m Tarmac.  
 0.08 - 0.70 m Made ground: dark grey-brown silty clay with fragments of brick, tile and ceramic drains.  
 0.30 m - 2.5 m Natural, loose, tan white degraded chalk.  
 0.70 m - 1.90 m Natural, tan chalk with limestone fragments.

*Result:* No archaeology was revealed.

### 3.1.11 Trial Pit 23

*Dimensions:* NNW-SSE; length 1.60 m; width 0.60 m; depth 1.47 m  
*Stratigraphy:* Ground level - 0.10m Concrete.  
 0.10 m 0.80 m Made ground. Mid-brown sandy silt with 10% flint (0.05 -0.10 m dia.), 30% ceramic brick and tile fragments.  
 0.80 m - 1.47 m Natural chalk

*Results:* No archaeology was revealed.

### 3.1.12 Trial Pit 25

*Dimensions:* NNW - SSE; length 2.20 m; width 0.60 m; depth 2.5 m  
*Stratigraphy:* Ground level - 0.30m Top soil, loose grey brown silty sand with abundant roots; 15-20% loose gravels and pebbles, well-sorted.  
 0.30 m - 2.5 m Natural, loose, tan white degraded chalk

*Results:* No archaeology was revealed other than the foundations for the 19th/ 20th century hospital building. The trench exposed a construction cut for the building to the immediate east, with a possible re-cut which suggested repair or modification to the structure.

### 3.1.13 Trial Pit 26

*Dimensions:* N-S; length 2.0 m; width 0.50 m; depth 2.2 m  
*Stratigraphy:* Ground level - 0.06m Tarmac.



0.06 m - 1.30 m Grey-brown packing sand  
At 1.10m ceramic 350mm drainpipe, not recorded on service mapping, which ran the length of the test trench. The pipe was polythene and packed around with fine pea gravel.

1.30 m -2.2 m Natural compact tan brown sandy clay with abundant component of degraded chalk.  
Natural truncated by pipe trench.

*Results:*

No archaeology was revealed.

## 3.1.14 Test Pit 27

*Dimensions:* NNW-SSE; length 2.0 m; width 0.50 m ; depth 1.90 m*Stratigraphy:* Ground level - 0.08 m Tarmac.

0.08 m - 0.45 m Made ground for levelling. Loose light grey tan silty sand with 10% chalk and 15% flint cobbles.

0.45 m - 1.90 m Natural, light grey tan chalk with flint cobbles and nodules.

*Results:*

No archaeology was revealed.

## 3.2 Light Wells

3.2.1 The excavation of two light wells at the eastern wing of the former hospital building was overseen by an archaeologist (Fig 2). Each light well was excavated to a depth of *c.*1.75 m. Most of the material removed was made-up ground, the back-fill of the construction cut for the hospital building. In the south baulk, at approximately 1.5m depth, an alternating layer of dark brown silty clay and dark orange brown sand was revealed which had the appearance of undisturbed geology. This was also observed in a geo-technical sondage, dug later *c.*5 metres south of the light wells, where a buried soil and possible old ground surface could be seen. The observation was made during a site visit and closer inspection was not possible.

## 4 SYNOPSIS

## 4.1 Observations

4.1.1 The watching brief of the excavation trial pits and light wells provided some particularly useful indicators of the extent of 19th and 20th century disturbance at the former hospital site. There were no archaeological remains other than associated features and deposits of the period.

4.1.2 One of the main objectives of the archaeological exercise was to observe the levels at which the old ground surface was encountered. For this might not only provide an indication of potential survival of archaeological remains, but also permit a limited understanding of earlier topography, which, in turn, might assist definition of the limits of the ancient settlements.

4.1.3 Due to the confines of each trial pit, and health and safety working parameters, it was not always possible to determine old ground levels with any certainty. The depth of

made ground was extremely variable in the central and eastern part of the site. The light well excavation demonstrated that the extreme east wing of the main Victorian building had been constructed on the east slope of the ridge. The ground was then landscaped up to conceal the foundations. Elsewhere across the site north of the hospital site, the undisturbed geology, and presumably old ground surface, was observed between 0.2 m and 0.9 m below ground level.

- 4.1.4 Immediately north of the hospital's farm complex buried hospital waste deposits up to 3.3 m were probably are likely to have been in-filled pits, rather than a reflection of earlier undulating topography.

## 4.2 Potential for the Survival of Archaeological Remains

- 4.2.1 Archaeological excavations in proximity to the former hospital structures elsewhere at the development site have revealed varying densities of archaeological remains cut into the subsoil. These had suffered varying degrees of truncation.

- 4.2.2 The geo-technical pits were few in number, far between, and each very limited in its spatial coverage. Additionally, most of them were in close proximity to the footprint of the former hospital and they did not, therefore, provide a significant sample of the area of proposed development. They did, however, give a good indication of the vertical stratigraphy. They revealed that significant and variable depths of made ground exist across the area and that the made-up ground was found directly above geological layers, without a buried soil, which implies some degree of truncation.

- 4.2.3 It is not known how widespread or to what depth, truncation occurs across the development site, although it is reasonable to infer that in proximity to the building footprint the depth of disturbance will have been generally greater than in the former gardens and open grounds. At Zone 3 (OA 2003a), for example, which lies c.100 m north of the central area of geo-technical pits, the archaeological remains had suffered truncation, most likely as result of landscaping. Equally, the extent of made ground is unknown. The geo-technical sondage dug in the lawn, just south of the east wing of the main complex showed that some areas had been 'landscaped up' on top of old soil horizons (*ante*. 3.2.1), whilst the observations made during the light well excavations at the east wing of the building suggested that the topography had been re-modelled in the Victorian period.

- 4.2.4 It is likely that only very deep features will survive in close proximity to the hospital buildings, but it is also possible that a further part of the archaeological site survives in the garden and grounds beyond the building foundations. Such remains may be only revealed during the large area, overburden stripping for construction (i.e. car park, landscaping). It is also worth noting that the trenched archaeological evaluation at Zone 3 did not provide a reliable indication of the actual presence or density of archaeological remains.

## 5 REFERENCES

BCAS 1997, 'Fairfield Hospital, Stotfold: Archaeological Field Evaluation'  
*Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service* unpublished report 1997/12

OA 2002a, 'Section 38 Loop Road, Fairfield Park, Stotfold, Bedfordshire, Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Excavation *Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd* September 2002.

OA 2002b, 'Fairfield Park, Stotfold, Bedfordshire, ZONE 3, Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation', *Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd* November 2002

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OA 2003a, 'Fairfield Park, Stotfold, Bedfordshire, ZONE 3, Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Excavation', *Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd* January 2003.

OA 2003b, 'Fairfield Park, Stotfold, Bedfordshire, Excavation along the Course of the Section 38 Loop Road, Area: Archaeological Excavation Interim Statement and Assessment of Finds and Samples, *Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd* February 2003

OA 2003c, 'Fairfield Park, Stotfold, Bedfordshire, ZONE 7, Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Excavation', *Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd* June 2003.

OA 2003d, 'Fairfield Park, Stotfold, Bedfordshire, Archaeological Excavation at ZONE 3, Archaeological Excavation Interim Statement and Assessment of Finds and Samples, *Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd* June 2003

OA 2003e, 'Fairfield Park, Stotfold, Bedfordshire, ZONE 4, Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief', *Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd* July 2003.

OA 2004, 'Fairfield Park, Stotfold, Bedfordshire ( TL 2030 3470), Archaeological Excavation, Archaeological Excavation Assessment Report (forthcoming).

#### APPENDIX 1 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Fairfield Park, Stotfold, Bedfordshire.

**Site code:** STFHWB

**Grid Reference:** TL 2030 3470

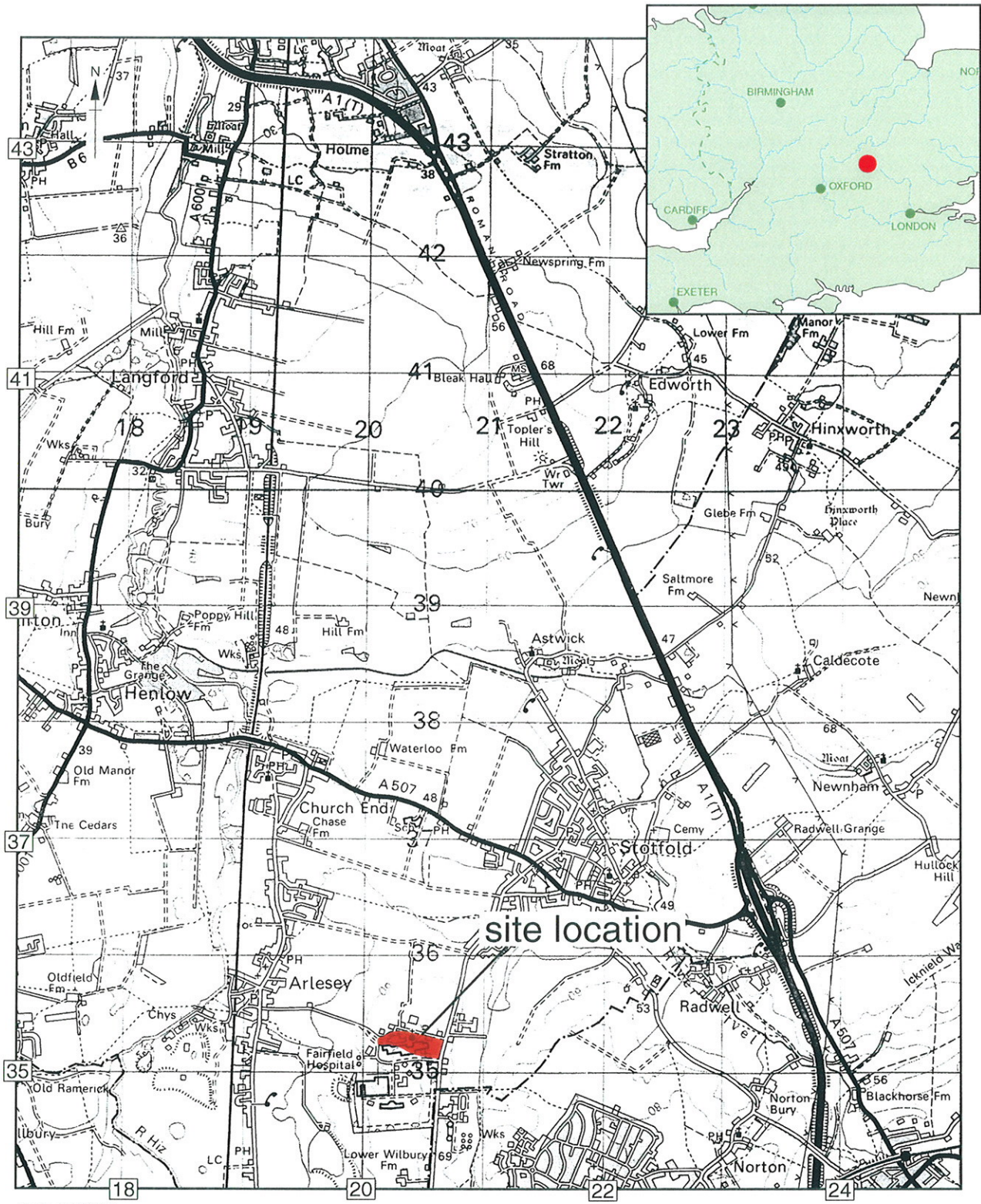
**Type of watching brief:** Excavation of geotechnical pits and light wells at former hospital.

**Date and duration of project:** The inspection and recording of the geo-technical pits was done on the 1st and 2nd September 2003 and the lightwells, between the 17th and 28th November 2003.

**Area of site:** 27.6 hectare development site.

**Summary of results:** No archaeology earlier than 20th century activity was observed

**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.



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Figure 1: Site location

N235400

N235300

N235200

TP 12

TP 16

TP 18

TP 15

TP 20

TP 21

TP 23

TP 22

TP 14

TP 26

TP 25

TP 27

BM 68.44m

BM 69.92m

69.5m

Conif

Conif




Conif


TCB

E520200

E520300

E520400

 Test Pit  
 Lightwell  
 Former hospital site

  
 0 30m

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Figure 2: Location of  
 Test Pits and Lightwells



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