



Littlemore Mental Health Centre, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Littlemore Mental Health Centre, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of a proposed extension to Littlemore Metal Health Centre. The work consisted of the excavation of two trenches. No archaeological features or deposits were identified. A made ground deposit was recorded and suspected to extend across the majority of the site, probably resulting from the original construction of the Mental Health Centre.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Oxford Health NHS Trust for commissioning this project. Thanks is also extended to David Radford who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council for their advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by John Boothroyd. The fieldwork was directed by Diana Chard, who was supported by Rachael Legge. Survey and digitizing was carried out by Diana Chard and Matt Bradley. Thanks is also extended to the teams of OA staff prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of a proposed extension to Littlemore Mental Health Centre.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken in support of a Planning Application (planning ref: 18/01654/FUL). A brief was set by David Radford, Oxford City Archaeologist detailing the Local Authority's requirements for the work necessary to inform the planning process and a written scheme of investigation was produced by OA detailing how those requirements would be implemented (OA 2018b). This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site lies to the western edge of Littlemore, a parish within Oxford, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1; NGR: SP 53341 02318).

1.2.2 The area of proposed development lies to the south of the existing Littlemore Mental Health Centre. It currently consists of heavily sloping green space, falling from the north-west to the south east, covered mostly with large shrubs and trees, and bordered by a paved pedestrian walkway on its northern edge. Littlemore Mental Health Centre is bounded to the south-west by the A4074, to the south-east by Sandford Road, to the north-east by Morell Crescent and to the north-west by open green space.

1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Beckley Sand Member - Sandstone, a sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 157-164 million years ago in the Jurassic Period (BGS Online).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in the desk-based assessment (DBA; OA 2018a) and will not be reproduced here. This report should be read in conjunction with the DBA.

1.3.2 The DBA concluded that although no known archaeological sites or features are located within the proposed development area, there is a general potential for remains of all periods to be present. There is high potential for remains of a later prehistoric date with significant activity having been recording in the vicinity of the site, including the presence of a banjo enclosure immediately to the north.

1.3.3 The greatest potential within the site is for remains dating to the Roman period. The site lies within an area of Romano-British pottery production, one of the largest in Roman Britain. Large scale settlement remains and pottery production sites have been recorded in the vicinity of the site.

- 1.3.4 The potential for remains dating to the early-medieval period is considered to be low. Dispersed settlement has been recorded approximately 550m to the south-east of the site but it is not considered likely that this extends into the site boundary.
- 1.3.5 A review of the available historic maps for the area suggests the site remained in agricultural use during the medieval and post-medieval periods. As such, any remains dating to these periods within the site are likely to be of limited significance.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The primary objective of the investigation was to assess the impact of the proposed development on any surviving buried archaeological remains.

2.1.3 The specific project aims were as follows:

- i. To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive.
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains.
- iii. To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means.
- iv. To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains.
- v. To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy.
- vi. To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.
- vii. To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive
- viii. To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.
- ix. To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The trenches were laid out as shown in Figure 2, using a GPS with sub 25mm accuracy. The written scheme of investigation proposed the excavation of two trenches within the footprint of the structure. However, due to the presence of a service, Trench 1, located towards the north of the site, was split into two 4m sections. Ground conditions meant that Trench 2 was not able to be positioned in its original planned location, and as such the length of the trench was shortened from 15 to 6m and it was shifted southwards slightly, this was due to a dense and tall shrubs that occupied most of the intended trench footprint.

2.2.2 The trenches were excavated using a 1.8 ton mechanical excavator fitted with a 1m toothless bucket. Excavation occurred under the direct supervision of the Project Supervisor. Spoil was stored at a safe distance from the edge of the trenches.

2.2.3 All deposits encountered were issued with a unique context number.

2.2.4 Digital photos were taken of representative sections, general evaluation work and site conditions.

2.2.5 Upon approval of the City Archaeologist, trenches were backfilled.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of the trenches. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A.
- 3.1.2 Context numbers reflect the trench numbers unless otherwise stated e.g. deposit 102 is a layer within Trench 1.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 The soil sequence between the two trenches presented significant variation. Natural geology was not observed in Trench 1 due to the extent of made ground. In Trench 2 the natural geology was observed to be a light brownish yellow sand and was overlain by a soft light greyish brown sandy silt subsoil, which in turn was overlain by topsoil.
- 3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the trenches remained dry throughout.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

- 3.3.1 No archaeological features or deposits were observed within either trench.

3.4 Trench 1

- 3.4.1 Trench 1 was located towards the north-east of the site atop a well-defined rise in ground level (sloping from the north-east down to the south-west), c 68.65m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).
- 3.4.2 Natural geology was not encountered within the trench. Excavation ceased at 1.2m below ground level due to the presence of a contaminated deposit smelling richly of petrochemicals. A 0.9m thick deposit of made ground (101) containing plastic, modern debris and concrete was recorded. This was directly overlain by topsoil (100) (Plate 1).

3.5 Trench 2

- 3.5.1 Trench 2 was located to the south-west, at the base of the slope at c 67.13m aOD. Natural geology (202) was observed at a depth of 0.5m below ground level and was overlain by subsoil (201) and topsoil (200) (Plate 2).

3.6 Finds summary

- 3.6.1 No artefacts were recovered during the work.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 Given the reduction in the scope of trenching due to on site constraints, the results of the evaluation cannot be considered to compressively rule out the presence of archaeological features or deposits within the proposed development area. However, they do provide reliable information that can be used to inform the requirements for further archaeological mitigation.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The primary aim of the evaluation was to assess the potential impact of the proposed development on any buried archaeological remains present within the site.

4.2.2 Although no archaeological remains were identified during the evaluation, the limited scope of the works means their presence can not be ruled out completely. However, the complete absence of material culture, other than modern building rubble, suggests an absence of archaeological features or deposits within the site. The trenching did confirm that a large proportion of the proposed development area has been subject to previous disturbance, likely associated with the construction of the existing Health Centre.

4.2.3 In the base of Trench 2 the natural geology was observed at 66.27m aOD suggesting the potential for up to 2.4m of made ground at the north-west extent of the site. While this deposit decreases in thickness towards the south-west before petering out completely, the majority of the footprint of the proposed structure lies within the area of made ground.

4.2.4 The results of the evaluation suggest that, depending on the design of the proposed structure, the works are likely to have little impact, or additional impact, on previously unidentified archaeological remains within the site.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench consisted of a loose mid grey brown sandy silt topsoil, on to a substantial layer of made ground, consisting of a compacted mixed deposit containing plastic and concrete with areas of dark brown grey silty clay with an oily aroma.					Length (m)	8
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	1.2
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
101	Layer	-	>0.9	Made ground	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of a loose mid grey sandy silt topsoil and light grey brown sandy silt subsoil overlying natural geology of light brownish yellow sand.					Length (m)	6
					Width (m)	1
					Avg. depth (m)	0.50
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.33	Topsoil	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.17	Subsoil	-	-
202	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

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OA, 2018b, Littlemore Mental Health Centre, Oxford, Written Scheme of Investigation for an
Archaeological Evaluation.

APPENDIX C SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	Littlemore Mental Health Centre, Oxford
Site code:	OXLMC18
Grid Reference	SP 53341 02318
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	1 day, 17th September 2018
Area of Site	
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2018.103.
Summary of Results:	Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of a proposed extension to Littlemore Metal Health Centre. The work consisted of the excavation of two trenches. No archaeological features or deposits were identified. A made ground deposit was recorded and suspected to extend across the majority of the site, probably resulting from the original construction of the Mental Health Centre.

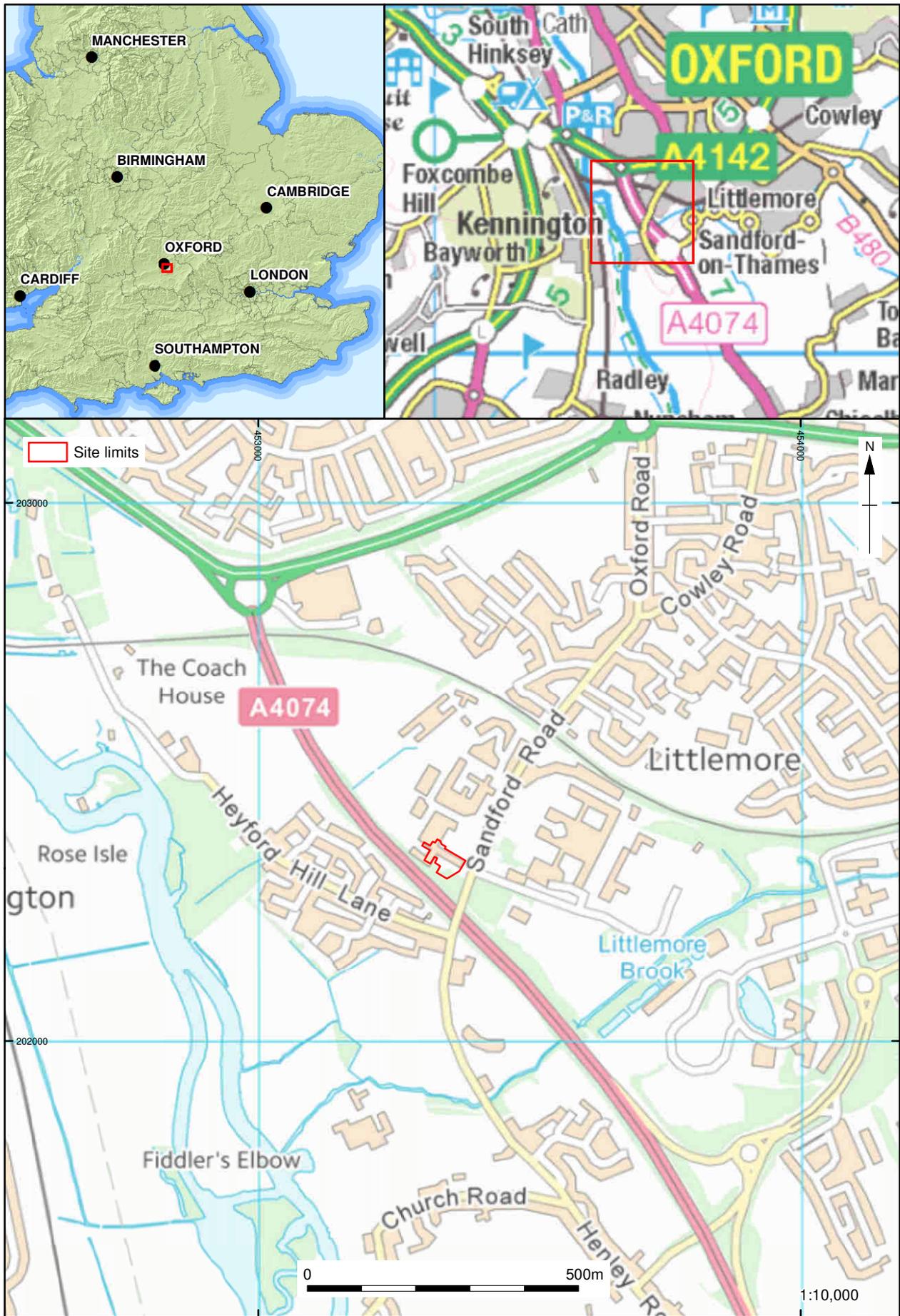


Figure 1: Site location



Plate 1: Trench 1 - deposit sequence, view to SW



Plate 2: Trench 2 - deposit sequence, view to W



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