

**Sansomes Farm, Woodstock, Oxfordshire  
NGR SP 4505 1899**

**Archaeological Watching Brief  
[Archive Report]**

**Sansomes Farm, Woodstock, Oxfordshire  
NGR SP 4505 1899**

**Archaeological Watching Brief  
[Archive Report]**

Oxford Archaeological Unit  
May 2001

**Sansomes Farm, Woodstock, Oxfordshire**  
**NGR SP 4505 1899**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**  
**[Archive Report]**

**1 Introduction**

- 1.1 In May 1996 planning permission was sought from West Oxfordshire District Council for the construction of a new studio building at the Oxford School of Drama at Sansomes Farm (Application W96/0731).
- 1.2 Due to the immediate proximity of a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and in line with PPG 16, an archaeological field evaluation was required and was carried out in September 1996 (OAU 1996). This revealed two shallow ditches of second-century AD date close to the line of Roman Akeman Street. No other features were located. Moderate quantities of Roman were recovered, as well as a few fragments of human bone. The deposits appeared to have been truncated by ploughing.
- 1.3 Planning permission for the development was granted, subject to the execution of an archaeological watching brief during all ground disturbance related to the development. A brief for this work was prepared by the County Archaeological Services on behalf of the Local Planning Authority. Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) prepared a WSI detailing how it would implement the requirements of the Brief. .

**2 Location and archaeological background**

- 2.1 The site lies approximately 2 km north of Woodstock and 1 km south-east of Wootton on the B4027 at NGR SP 4505 1899. The underlying geology is Cornbrash limestone.
- 2.2 Sansomes Farm is situated on the south side of Akeman Street, the principal Roman road between Verulamium and Cirencester, at a location which has long been known as a probable Roman settlement. The line of the Roman road is followed approximately by the modern Stratford Lane on which Sansomes Farm lies, and to the east, beyond the line of the B4027, is followed by a footpath. The site of proposed development is immediately adjacent to Scheduled Ancient Monument (Oxon SAM 150). In 1972 a gas pipeline was cut across the site to the south of Sansomes Farm. Archaeological work on the pipeline was confined to a watching brief, in the course of which a major Roman building was located at the point where the pipeline crossed the B4027. Five potential rooms with substantial wall footings were identified. They belonged to a building of considerable status with red and white painted wall plaster, fragments of box flue tile suggesting a hypocaust system, painted mortar floors and roof tiles. Artefactual evidence also included coins and pottery including samian ware.
- 2.3 The site was interpreted as either a Roman villa or a substantial farm complex (Chambers 1978, 43) and was subsequently scheduled at the end of 1972. There has been no subsequent field investigation of the site and its full extent is not known, though haphazard finds of surface material have been made, particularly to the south of the 1972 discovery towards Sansome's Platt, the name

sometimes given to the Roman site.

- 2.4 In 1996 aerial survey by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (RCHME) revealed for the first time significant information on the plan of the Roman settlement. The photographs show that, rather than being centred along the frontage of the main road, as is normal in settlements of this type, Roman buildings were densely clustered on both sides of a minor road running away from the line of Akeman Street in a south-westerly direction. The identified buildings lie entirely within the field east of the B4027 and south of the line of Akeman Street, though it is possible that the settlement continued further to the south-west. The substantial building recorded in 1972 can now be seen as one of a row of buildings along the north-west side of the minor Roman road. The buildings now evident from the air include a Romano-Celtic temple of concentric circular plan within a walled enclosure.
- 2.5 The archaeological evaluation consisted of a single north-south aligned trench. The only archaeological features encountered were at the northern end of the trench close to the assumed course of the Roman road. These were two shallow parallel ditches 2 m and c 1.65 m wide and 0.70 m apart aligned roughly west-north-west - east-south-east, roughly parallel to the line of the road and perhaps associated with its line. Between the two features an area of well weathered and worn small fragments of limestone bedrock may have been a trackway surface. A moderate quantity of pottery (some 177 sherds) suggested that the feature fills were probably of 2nd century date, though the absence of later material may have been a consequence of truncation of the deposits across the site. Three fragments of human bone from one of the ditches were presumably redeposited here.

### **3 Aims**

- 3.1 The principal aim of the watching brief was to preserve by record any archaeological remains (if present) which would be removed by construction within the development area.
- 3.2 In the event of archaeological remains, OAU would will signal to all parties that an archaeological find had been made, for which the resources allocated were not sufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard.
- 3.3 To make available the results of the investigation.

### **4 Strategy**

- 4.1 The excavation of foundation and drainage trenches and any topsoil stripping (by mechanical or other means) was to be monitored by an archaeological supervisor to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains
- 4.2 Any features were hand excavated and recorded. Site recording and sampling levels for archaeological features was in accordance with standard OAU fieldwork practise (OAU, 1992)

### **5 Results**

- 5.1 Ground reduction within the building footprint was monitored. Roadside ditches beside Akeman Street were observed, and proved to be on the same alignment as those recorded in the previous evaluation. A small pit (108) produced some limestone fragments and sherds of Roman pottery.

Roman pottery was also recovered from the topsoil strip.

5.2 Drainage trenches were also monitored. These cut through feature 103. A soakaway pit revealed no archaeology.

## **6 Conclusion**

6.1 The watching brief confirmed the line of the Roman Road and the alignment of the roadside ditches.

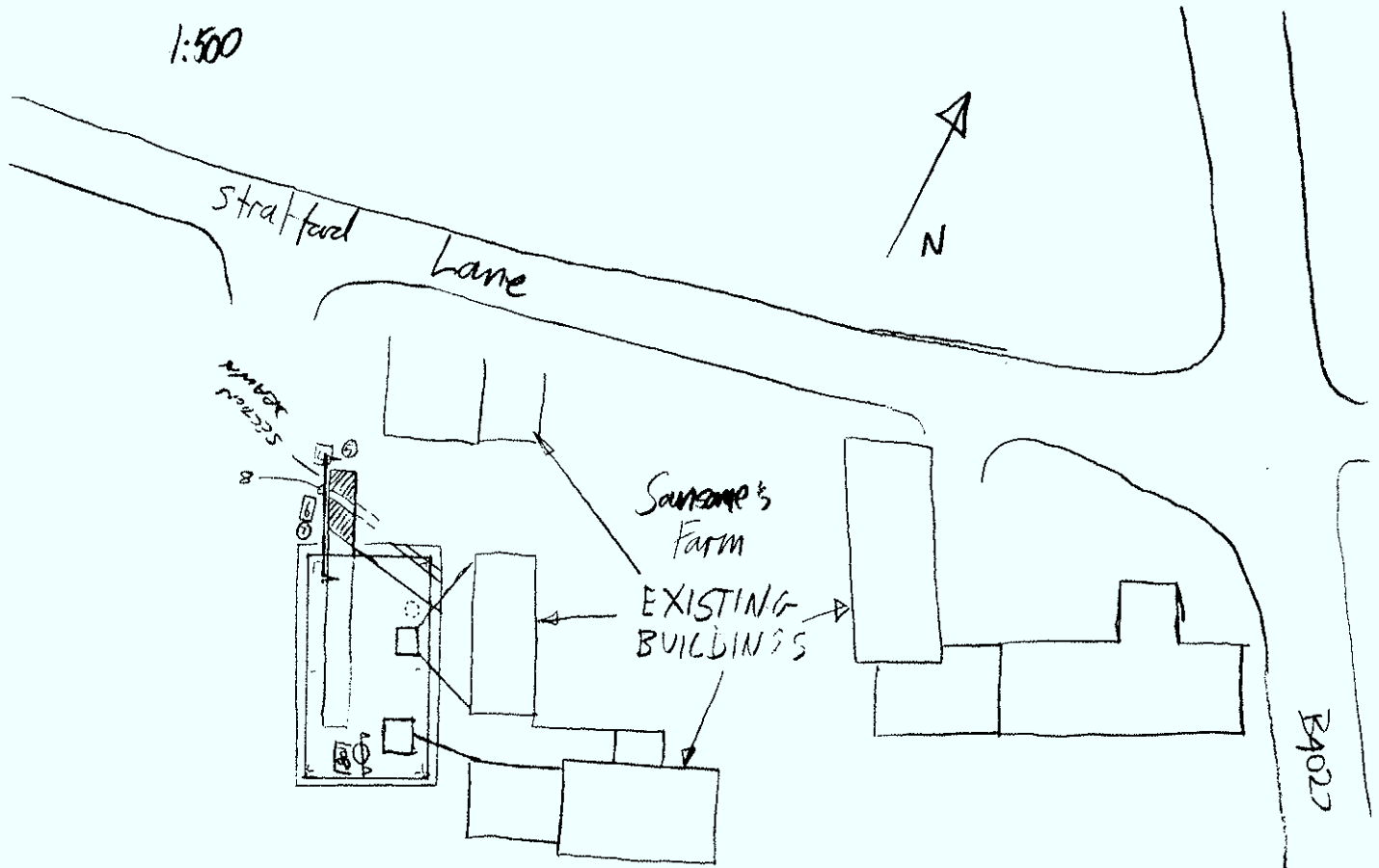
## References

OAU 1992 Fieldwork Manual (First Edition, 1992)

OAU 1996 Sansomes Farm, Woodstock, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Evaluation Report.

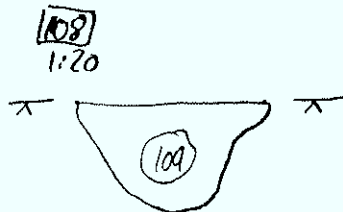
OAU, May 2001

WOSAF 97  
 Site Plan  
 1:500



Trenches 60 cm wide x 45 cm deep from top of reduced area.

- ⑩① - Topsoil as ①
- ⑩① - Limestone building rubble as ②
- ⑩② - natural as ③
- ⑩③ - as ④
- ⑩④ - as ⑤
- ⑩⑤ - as ⑥
- ⑩⑥ - as ⑦
- ⑩⑦ - as ⑧
- ⑩⑧ - Pitcut 50 x 45
- ⑩⑨ - Pitfill

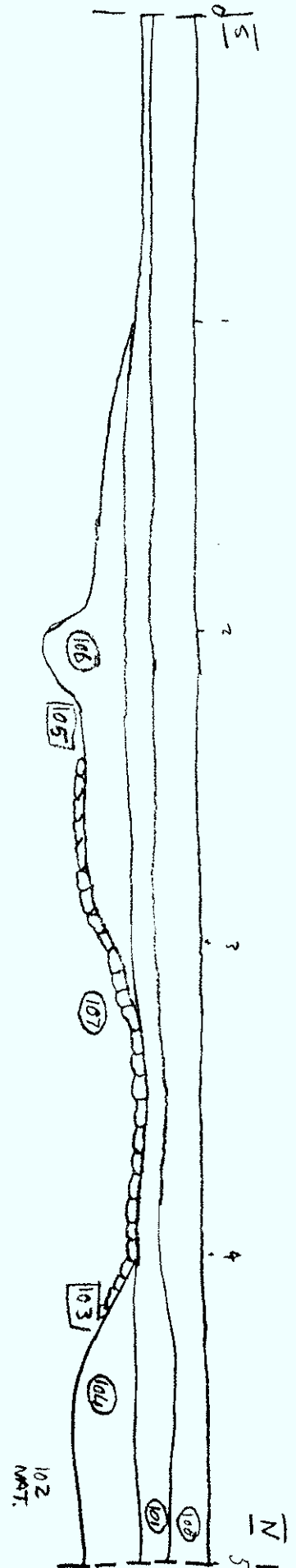


Finds: dark brown/gray  
 silty clay loam, 5% silt  
 2 med. pieces burnt limestone.

WOSAF 97

Section

1:20





## OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496

email: [postmaster@oau-oxford.com](mailto:postmaster@oau-oxford.com) [www.oau-oxford.com](http://www.oau-oxford.com)



---

Director and Chief Executive: David Jennings B.A., M.I.F.A. Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited.  
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Charity Number: 285627.  
Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES