

Memorial Garden
Rothermere Library
South Parks Road
Oxford



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



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**Memorial Garden,
Rothermere Library, South Parks Road, Oxford**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

Between 2nd and 11th August 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the site of the Memorial Garden, Rothermere Library, South Parks Road, Oxford (NGR: SP 516 067). The work was commissioned by Anthony Stiff Associates in advance of developments to the extension of the Rothermere Library. The watching brief revealed the presence of a Romano-British boundary ditch and the continuation of the English Civil War defensive ditch.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between 2nd and 11th August 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the site of the Memorial Garden, Rothermere Library, South Parks Road, Oxford (NGR: SP 516 067). The work was commissioned by Anthony Stiff Associates in respect of a development at the extension of the Rothermere Library.
- 1.1.2 Brian Durham, the Oxford City Archaeologist, requested that OA sample and record any hitherto unknown archaeological remains, and OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet these requests (OA, 2005).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is situated close to the centre of the City of Oxford (Fig. 1). The development area lies on level ground to the south of the Rothermere Library and to the east of Love Lane. The site occupies an area of 320 m² at a height of 63.4 m above OD. The underlying geology is 1st Terrace River Gravel (Geological Survey of Great Britain sheet no. 236).

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, 2005) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 Excavations carried out on the site in 1998 and 1999 by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) revealed a single Neolithic pit, dated by flintwork, part of a Roman settlement and a section of a component ditch of the civil war defences of Oxford. The Roman settlement was of rural character and based on ditched enclosures. It was of two main phases, late 1st- to mid 2nd century date and late 3rd- to 4th century date respectively. Despite fairly clear evidence of chronological discontinuity there were close similarities of feature alignment between the two phases. Within the settlement a small late Roman timber structure was associated with deposits of domestic rubbish including significant charred plant remains.

- 1.3.3 The component ditch of civil war date was exposed at the western side of the site, running parallel with Love Lane.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any deposits or features that may be disturbed or removed during the development work.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a series of site visits during works likely to disturb archaeological deposits.
- 2.2.2 A mechanical excavator (mini-digger) fitted with a toothless grading bucket was used for these excavations which included ground, reduction landscaping and excavation of foundations.
- 2.2.3 A plan of these works and any archaeological features encountered was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2), while any sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavated features and sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The underlying natural gravel (107) was encountered at a depth of 0.55 m below the original ground level, sloping down slightly to the east (Fig. 3). This was overlaid by a 0.4 m thick layer of red-brown clay silt (104), representing a layer of subsoil. Cut into the surface of this layer was a 1.5 m wide by 0.6 m deep linear feature (100), running south-east to north-west. The primary fill of this cut was a pale orange-brown sandy clay (101) of up to 0.2 m in depth and which contained fragments of Romano-British pottery. The remainder of the cut was filled by a grey-brown silt clay (102) which also contained fragments of Romano-British pottery.
- 3.1.2 Also cut into layer 104, and encroaching approximately 2.5 m in from the western edge of the development area, was a linear feature (105), which ran parallel to Love Lane. This feature was filled by a dark grey clay silt (106), which was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.75 m but was not bottomed. Both these features were sealed by

a 0.2 m thick layer of dark brown silty loam (108), a landscaping layer comprising the modern topsoil and turf.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 Examples of 18th and 19th century pottery were recovered from Layer 108 and examples of Romano-British pottery from fills 101 and 102. No dating evidence was recovered from fill 106 of the English Civil War ditch 105, however this had been comprehensively dated from previous excavations. All artefacts have been retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The north-west by south-east aligned feature (100) is a probable Romano-British boundary ditch, a possible continuation of ditch 366 exposed during the 1998/9 excavations (Booth and Hayden 2000). It appears to belong to an early phase of alignment, possibly denoting plot boundaries.

4.1.2 Feature 105 is the eastern edge of the English Civil War defence ditch known to have run along the same alignment as Love Lane. It could be seen to be a continuation of ditch 554 exposed during the 1998/9 excavations.

4.1.3 The area appears to possibly have been truncated, probably when the footprints of the standing buildings were excavated. The deposition of the landscaping layer of topsoil appears to date to the 19th century.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
100	Cut	0.6 m	1.6 m	Romano-British boundary ditch	-	C2nd - C4th
101	Fill	0.2 m	1.3 m	Primary fill of ditch	Pottery	C2nd - C4th
102	Fill	0.4 m	1.6 m	Secondary fill of ditch	Pottery	C2nd - C4th
103	Cut	0.8 m	0.9 m	Tree throw hole	-	-
104	Layer	0.3 m	-	Subsoil	-	-
105	Fill	> 0.75 m	> 2.5 m	Backfill of Civil War ditch	-	C17th
106	Cut	> 0.75 m	> 2.5 m	English Civil War defence ditch	-	C17th
107	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Natural gravel	-	-
108	Layer	0.2 m	-	Topsoil and turf, landscaping layer	Pottery	C18th - C19th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Booth, P and Hayden C, *et al* 2000 *A Roman Settlement at Mansfield College, Oxford* In *Oxoniensia* LXV 2000

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

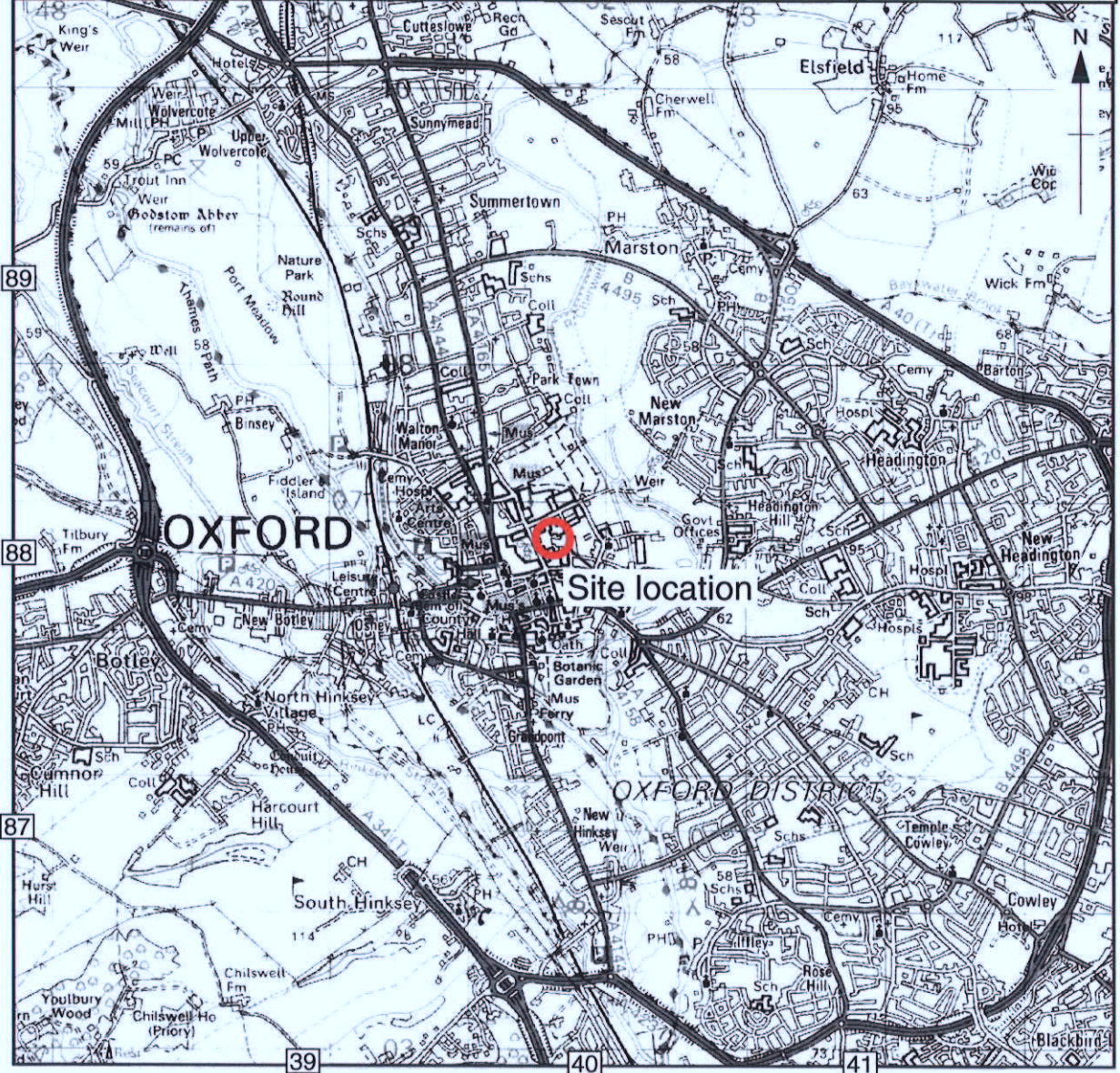
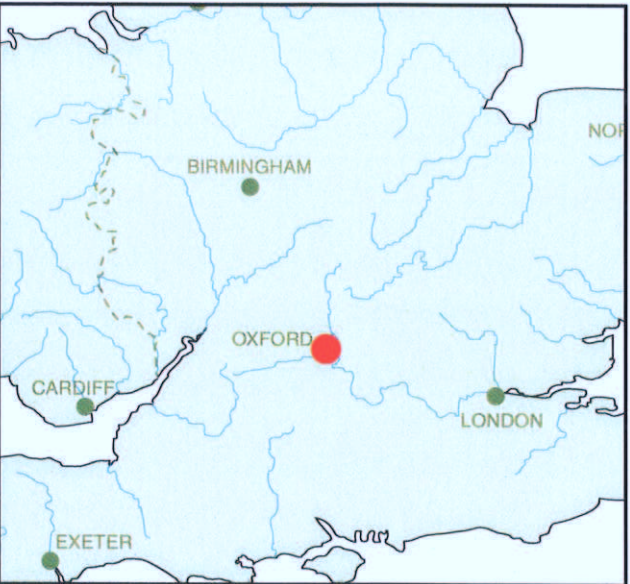
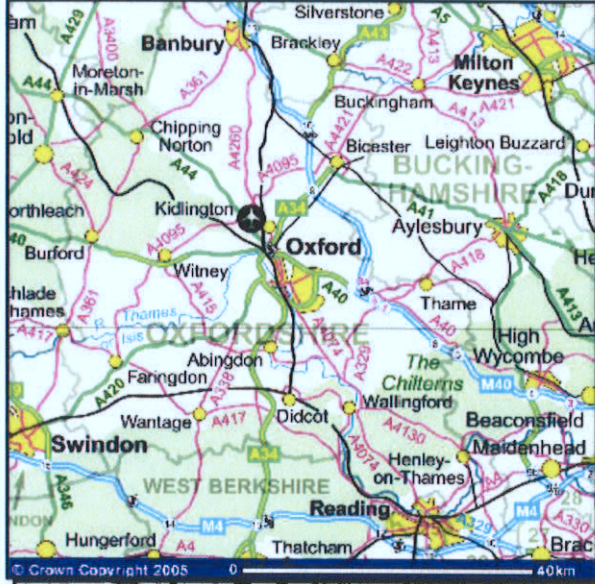
OA, 2000 *Environmental Sampling Guidelines*

OA, 2005 *Memorial Garden, Rothermere Library, South Parks Road, Oxford: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**Site name:** Memorial Garden, Rothermere Library, South Parks Road, Oxford**Site code:** OXMEMG 05**Grid reference:** SP 516 067**Type of watching brief:** Machine ground reduction and foundation excavation**Date and duration of project:** 2nd to 11th August 2005, 10 days**Area of site:** 320 m²**Summary of results:** Presence of a Romano-British boundary ditch and the continuation of the Civil War defence ditch**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: OXCMS:2005.90

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Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

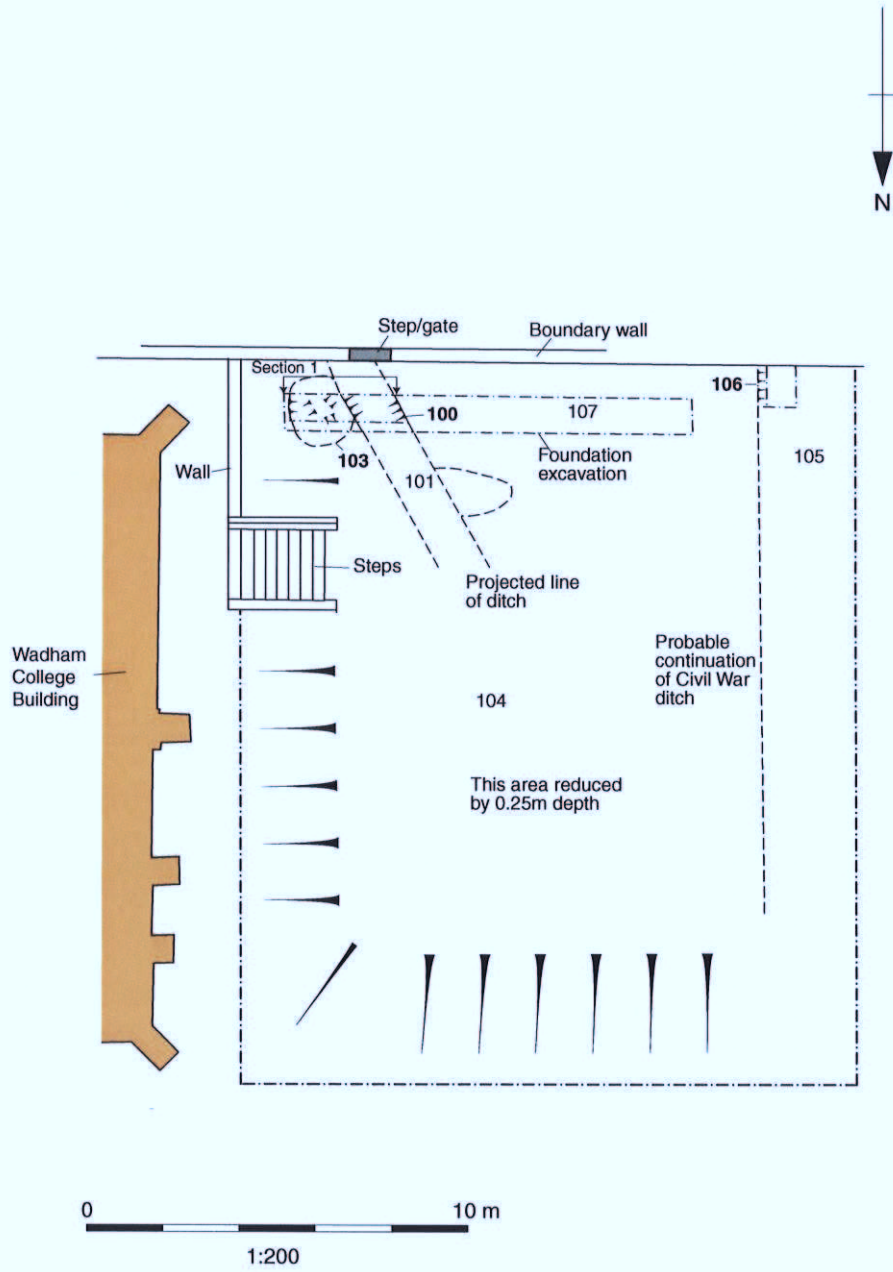


Figure 2: Site plan

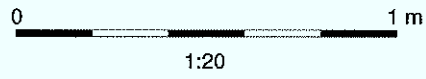
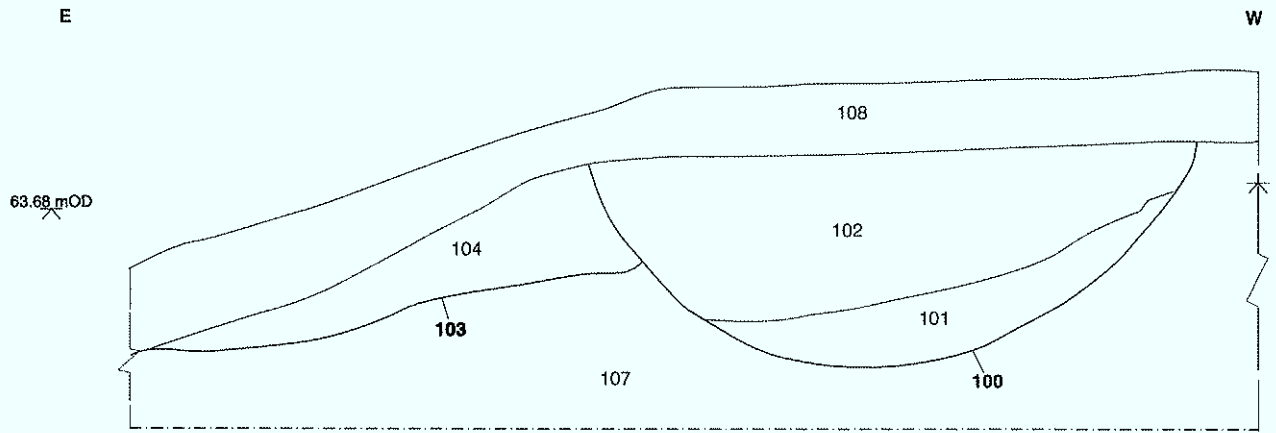


Figure 3: Section 1



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