

**Land Adjacent to Cooper's Gate,
East of Southam Road, Banbury,
Oxfordshire**

NGR SP 4545 4105

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Oxford Archaeological Unit

December 1996

**LAND ADJACENT TO COOPER'S GATE, EAST OF SOUTHAM ROAD
BANBURY, OXFORDSHIRE
NGR SP 4545 4105
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a Watching Brief at Land Adjacent to Cooper's Gate, Southam Road, Banbury, during the construction of new housing. No archaeological features or finds were observed during the excavations of foundations and services for new houses.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a Watching Brief between May 1995 and November 1996 at Land Adjacent to Cooper's Gate, Southam Road, Banbury (Fig. 1) on behalf of Persimmon Homes during the construction of a new housing development (Planning Reference No. CHN. 592/94). The Watching Brief was required by the County Archaeological Officer in accordance with PPG 16, owing to the presence of known sites of archaeological interest within the vicinity of the development. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for the work was prepared by OAU in accordance with the requirements of the brief set by the County Archaeological Officer on behalf of Cherwell District Council. The development site (Fig. 2) is situated 200 m north of Castle Street and is bounded by the Oxford Canal to the east and Southam Road to the west. The site comprised 2.97 hectares of land.

1.2 Geology and topography

The site lies at a general level of 92 m OD, and is situated at the junction of the alluvial clayey soils of the Cherwell floodplain, and silty drift over Jurassic and Cretaceous clays. Prior to the development the site was level waste ground, part of which had been under horticultural management by a nursery.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

The origins of Banbury are still obscure: Roman and Saxon occupation is only suggested by a small amount of pottery of both periods recovered from small excavations in the town. Banbury is recorded in the 1086 Domesday survey as a manorial centre, and probably served as a small administrative centre for the bishops of Lincoln (Fasham 1973, 315). The expansion of the town began in the twelfth century, when Alexander de Blois, 'The Magnificent', was Bishop of Lincoln. He was responsible for the construction of Banbury Castle some time between 1125 and 1136. The inner enclosure of the castle lay in the area of the junction of Castle Street and Market Approach, to the north of the

present town centre. The castle was in existence for about 500 years, and was demolished in 1648 by the townspeople, who had successfully petitioned Parliament for permission to use the castle stone to rebuild their properties which had been destroyed during the Civil War. The development site lies in close proximity to the northern defences of the castle: the gardens associated with the castle lay to the south-west. Part of the Oxford Canal constructed by James Brindley in the 1770s passes to the east of the development site.

In 1988 a borehole survey was undertaken on the site by Palladium Consulting Engineers for Talon Construction Ltd., in advance of a proposed marina development which was never built. The borehole results indicated that topsoil and localised 'fill' deposits were present across much of the site to a maximum depth of 1.5-1.7 m, and overlaid the natural geology. No previous archaeological work had been carried out on the site.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS

The aims of the Watching Brief were to record any archaeological remains exposed on the site during the course of the development, and to make the results of the project available.

3 METHODOLOGY

Visits were made to the site by OAU personnel during all topsoil stripping and during the excavation of foundation trenches for new houses. Topsoil and other material was removed across the site to a maximum depth of c 0.30 m by a 360° Hymac excavator equipped with a toothless bucket. All appropriate deposits were recorded in accordance with procedures laid down in the OAU Fieldwork Manual (ed. Wilkinson, 1992). Sample sections of foundation trenches (Fig. 3) were drawn at a scale of 1:20, and general photographs of the work were taken.

4 RESULTS

Except where localised disturbance was encountered, foundation trench sections revealed a consistent profile. This was recorded formally at the western end of the site; the sequence of deposits to the east was seen to be similar and therefore, in the complete absence of any archaeological features, was not recorded in detail there. The earliest deposit revealed in the foundation trenches was a layer (3) of light brown sandy clay which was 0.8 m+ thick. This layer was interpreted as the natural clay. At the western end of the site and in places elsewhere this deposit was no more than 0.40 m below the machine stripped surface of the site. Above layer 3, and observed consistently across the site, was a layer of mid-dark grey-brown sandy loam (2). This layer contained occasional modern brick and flower pot fragments, but no earlier artefacts. The layer was generally 0.3 m thick. Layer 2 was sealed by the remnant of a layer of modern topsoil (1), which contained substantial quantities of brick, glass and flower pot fragments. None of these finds were retained. The water table was reached at a depth of 0.5 m in many of the foundation trenches, and ground conditions throughout much of the course of the Watching Brief were damp underfoot. At the level of the topsoil on the northern side of the site were the foundations of several greenhouses relating to the nursery. Against

the Southam Road frontage of the site houses dating approximately to the 1920s were demolished shortly before the commencement of development. No archaeological features were observed during the course of the project, nor were any finds recovered. Material of 20th century date was scattered across the whole site but was not collected.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This site did not reveal land use of any period predating the modern nursery. Neither in the western part of the site, where the natural subsoil was clearly observed, nor to the east where the interface between layers 3 and 2 was less well-defined, were features seen. It is possible that the entire area, generally low-lying and apparently poorly drained, never saw significant archaeologically-detectable activity until recent times.

J. Hiller
Oxford Archaeological Unit
December 1996

REFERENCES

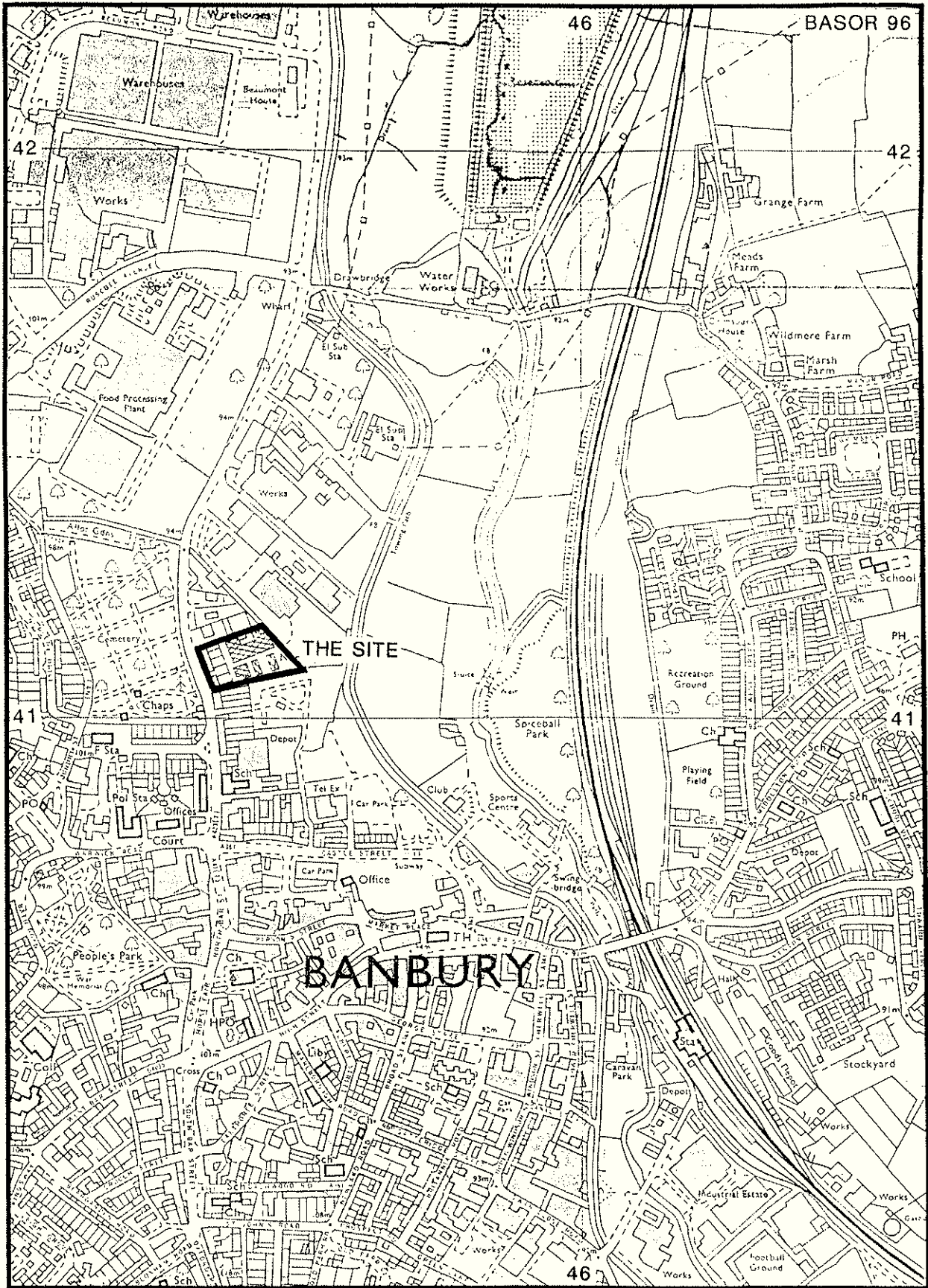
Fasham, P, 1973, Excavations in Banbury, 1972: First Report, *Oxoniensia* XXXVIII, 312-338

Palladium Consulting Engineers, 1988, Soil Engineering Report for Southam Road Banbury, Report No. 88438, February 1988

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

TABLE OF CONTEXT INFORMATION

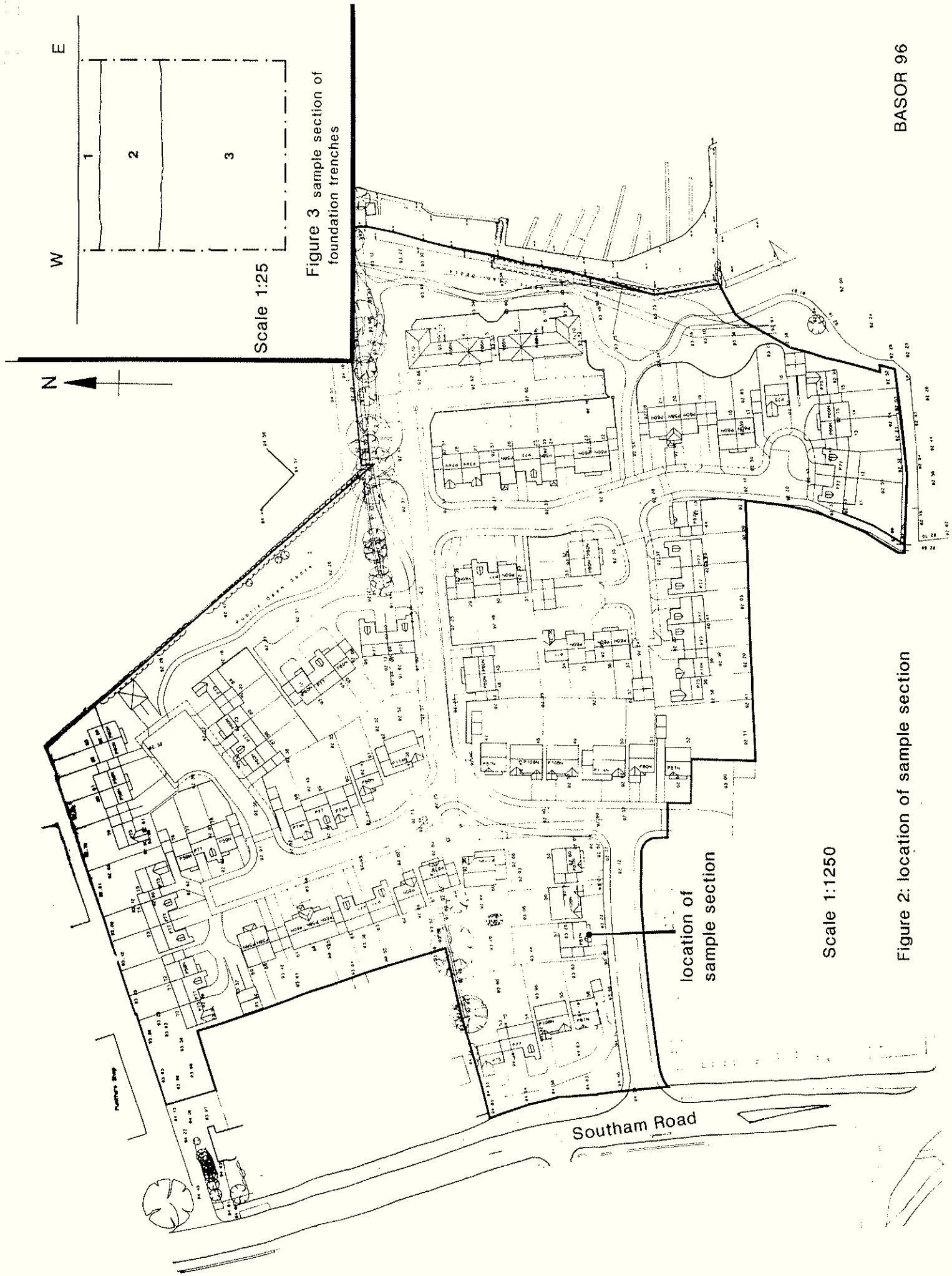
Context	Type	Depth	Comments
1	Layer	0.1 m	Topsoil and building site debris
2	Layer	0.3 m	General mixed soil horizon
3	Layer	0.8 m+	Natural clay



Based on the Ordnance Survey's 1:10 000 map of 1978 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright. Licence No. A1 854166

SP 44 SE

Figure 1: site location

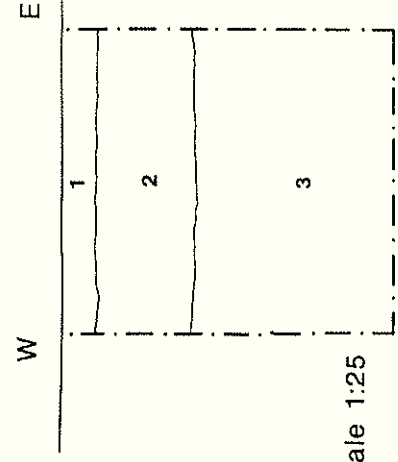


Southam Road

location of
sample section

Scale 1:1250

Figure 2: location of sample section



Scale 1:25

Figure 3 sample section of
foundation trenches



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES
Telephone: 01865 243888 Fax: 01865 793496



Director: David Miles B.A., F.S.A., M.I.F.A.
Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited. Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead
Registered Charity Number: 285627 Private Limited Company Number: 1618597