



Corpus Christi College, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

May 2020

**Client: Wright and Wright Architects on behalf
of Corpus Christi College, Oxford**

Issue No: 1

OA Reference No: 24241

NGR: SP 51633 06003

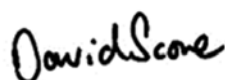


Client Name: Wright and Wright Architects on behalf of Corpus Christi College
Document Title: Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Watching Brief Report
Document Type: Watching Brief Report
Report No.: 1
Grid Reference: SP 51633 06003
Site Code: OXCOCH20
Invoice Code: OXCOCHWB
Receiving Body: Oxford County Museum Service
Accession No.: OXCMS: 2020.13

OA Document File Location: \\10.0.10.86\Projects\o\Oxford_Corpus_Christi_Site InvestigationsWB\Report

OA Graphics File Location: \\10.0.10.86\Projects\o\Oxford_Corpus_Christi_Site Investigations_WB\010Geomatics\01 PDFs

Issue No: 1
Date: May 2020
Prepared by: Paul Murray (position)
Checked by: Gerry Thacker (Senior Project Manager)
Edited by: Gerry Thacker (Senior Project Manager)
Approved for Issue by: Dave Score (Head of Fieldwork)
Signature:



Disclaimer:

This document has been prepared for the titled project or named part thereof and should not be relied upon or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and prior written authority of Oxford Archaeology being obtained. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this document being used for a purpose other than the purposes for which it was commissioned. Any person/party using or relying on the document for such other purposes agrees and will by such use or reliance be taken to confirm their agreement to indemnify Oxford Archaeology for all loss or damage resulting therefrom. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for this document to any party other than the person/party by whom it was commissioned.

OA South

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford
OX2 0ES

t. +44 (0)1865 263 800

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridge
CB23 8SQ

t. +44 (0)1223 850 500

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane Mills
Moor Lane
Lancaster
LA1 1QD

t. +44 (0)1524 880 250

e. info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w. oxfordarchaeology.com

Oxford Archaeology is a registered Charity: No. 285627



Director and Chief Executive
Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MCIFA
Private Limited Company, No: 1618597
Registered Charity, No: 285627
Registered Office: Oxford Archaeology Ltd
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES

Corpus Christi College, Oxford
Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Paul Murray

With illustrations by Mathew Bradley and Magda Wachnik.

Contents

Summary.....	vii
Acknowledgements.....	viii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Scope of work.....	1
1.2 Location, topography and geology	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background	1
2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY.....	4
2.1 Aims.....	4
2.2 Specific aims and objectives	4
2.3 Methodology	4
3 RESULTS	5
3.1 Introduction and presentation of results.....	5
3.2 General soils and ground conditions	5
3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits	5
3.4 Test-pit 1.....	5
3.5 Test-pit 2.....	5
3.6 Test-pit 3.....	6
3.7 Finds and environmental sampling summary	6
4 DISCUSSION	7
4.1 Reliability of field investigation.....	7
4.2 Watching Brief objectives and results.....	7
4.3 Interpretation	7
APPENDIX A DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY.....	8
APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY	9
APPENDIX C SITE SUMMARY DETAILS	10

List of Figures

- | | |
|--------|------------------------|
| Fig. 1 | Site location map |
| Fig. 2 | Test-pit location plan |
| Fig. 3 | Test-pit sections |

List of Plates

- | | |
|---------|------------|
| Plate 1 | Test-pit 1 |
| Plate 2 | Test-pit 2 |
| Plate 3 | Test-pit 3 |

Summary

Oxford Archaeology were commissioned by Wright and Wright Architects on behalf of Corpus Christi College to undertake archaeological monitoring of the excavation of three test-pits designed to investigate college wall foundations.

The archaeological monitoring works recorded a former stone road surface potentially of 14th-century date, and an overlying refuse deposit, as well as deposits backfilling the construction trenches of the walls.

The monitoring works were conducted over the course of three visits in January and February 2020.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Wright and Wright Architects for commissioning this project. Thanks, are also extended to David Radford, Oxford City Archaeologist, who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Gerry Thacker. The fieldwork was carried out by Benjamin Attfield and Camille Guezennec. Digitizing was carried out by Matt Bradley and Magda Wachnik. Thanks, is also extended to the team 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 Wright and Wright Architects to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Corpus Christi College.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken under permitted development. Discussions between David Radford, Oxford City Archaeologist, and Gerry Thacker of Oxford Archaeology established the scope of works required. A written scheme of investigation was produced by OA detailing the Local Authority's requirements (OA 2020). This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site lies within the centre of Oxford, to the south of Merton Street, and is centred on SP 51633 06003 (Fig 1).
- 1.2.2 The area of proposed development is located within the western part of the precinct of Corpus Christi College. (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.3 The site is located on the southern edge of the secondary river gravel terrace and the underlying geology is Oxford Clay. The site is relatively level and lies at c 60m OD (BGS website).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in a brief produced by Oxford City Council (OCC 2016) and is summarized below.
- 1.3.2 Founded in c 1517 by Bishop Fox, the area of the site is of interest because it is located within the extent of the late Saxon burh, the medieval walled town and the precinct of Corpus Christi College. The college was founded in the early 16th century and extended over the site of a number of early 14th century academic halls that fronted onto Oriel Street and Merton Street, including Urban Hall and St Christopher Hall. The college is located in the eastern sector of the city against the former line of the town wall and on the line of the hypothesised primary late Saxon burh defenses. It originally comprised a single quadrangle on the Merton Street frontage, later expanded to the south.
- 1.3.3 Archaeological investigations have recorded remnants of the 14th century Canterbury College boundary wall along with the remains of an earlier road and medieval tenements on the western side of the college. Possible evidence of the late Saxon defensive primary burh ditch has also been recorded to the rear of the college. The town wall has also been examined.
- 1.3.4 Archaeological investigations in 2000 at the Emily Thomas Building recorded several rubbish pits and a well containing fragments of 11th-13th century pottery and may relate to the former academic hall known to have existed on the site. The presence of animal bone from both cattle and sheep along with environmental evidence from the well indicate the excavations were centred in a former farmyard or kitchen area. At the

Emily Thomas Building the 11th-13th century was recorded at a depth of 0.4 to 0.5m on the eastern side of the college.

- 1.3.5 An excavation by Oxford Archaeology in 2008 on the site of the new college auditorium identified a phase of late Saxon burials related to the nearby precinct of St Frideswide, a large ditch possibly defensive in character and evidence for industrial activity in the medieval period (tanning), also pit digging likely to be related to the foundation of the college and also elements of the 16th century garden layout.
- 1.3.6 In 2013 archaeological observations during the excavation of an electric cable trench at Merton Grove in the Grove Garden of Merton College, recorded an apparent midden deposit comprising a large quantity of oyster shells, and Brill Boarstall Ware pottery from the late 14th to 16th century. The midden pit was recorded at a depth of 180mm below ground level. Unstratified material associated with high-status medieval buildings in the form of glazed ridge and floor tiles was also recovered (Jessop Consultancy 2013)
- 1.3.7 Geophysical survey, bore hole investigations and trial trenching by Oxford Archaeology and limited trial trench excavation by Museum of London Archaeology were undertaken in 2015 in Garden Quadrangle and the car park to the west. Within Garden Quad, the field work established a sequence of dumped layers of soil and mortar which were clearly mixed given the residual pottery in the lowest deposits. The earliest layers appeared to date from the medieval period, perhaps the 13th century, though earlier ceramics mixed in suggest early medieval activity elsewhere. The sequence of deposits continued through to the 16th or 17th century and confirmed the sequence identified in the auger holes by Oxford Archaeology. The single feature found was probably an 18th century path. The results of this work suggest that if the primary burh ditch is located under Corpus Christi College then it is likely to be located further east.
- 1.3.8 Within the carpark trenching revealed a possible buried soil which was overlain by a series of clay silt deposits, some of which contained waterlogged material, which may have represented trample and/or domestic refuse possibly associated with an unmetalled right of way pre-dating the late Saxon Shidyerd Street, the projected line of which runs through the site. These deposits were overlain by a layer of limestone rubble which may have represented the first in a series of rudimentary surfaces interspersed with thick accumulations of silty material which produced a considerable quantity of animal bone, presumably deposited by the occupiers of structures fronting on to the street. The majority of datable artefacts recovered from these layers appear to suggest that they were deposited between the 11th and 12th centuries, with the predominance of St Neot's ware probably suggesting a pre-conquest date for the majority of the sequence. The latest of the rudimentary surfaces appear to date from the 12th–14th century.
- 1.3.9 The uppermost of the sequence of surfaces was well-metalled and was predominantly constructed from large limestone cobbles. The dating evidence suggested that this may have been laid as early as the 14th century, and is perhaps contemporary with the acquisition of the lower end of Shidyerd Street by Merton College in 1321, with the materials used to construct it possibly originating from buildings which are documented as having been demolished by the College in 1317. The deposits overlying

this surface were of uncertain origin, although they are likely to be 16th-century in date and may relate to the early use of the site following the foundation of Corpus Christi in 1517. The paucity of evidence for any activity between the 14th and 16th centuries may reflect the economic decline in Oxford throughout the 15th century.

- 1.3.10 In 2016 Oxford Archaeology carried out an intermittent watching brief at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, on works to replace electric sub-main cables in the eastern part of the College (OA 2016). Two sections of cable trench were monitored, and three test pits were observed to inform the depth of a third section of trench, also subsequently monitored. Evidence for burials associated with the 16th chapel was encountered, including the capping of a stone and brick burial vault which contained a coffin observable through a void in the structure. Some disarticulated human bone was also recovered and reburied on the site, providing evidence for additional disturbed burials in the area. A rubbish pit dating from 1650-1700 contained pottery and animal bones, including a rare example of a turkey bone from this date. Walls and pillar bases from earlier incarnations of the College buildings were also recorded.
- 1.3.11 A more recent watching brief (OA 2019) was undertaken on the replacement of the western submain. This revealed the wall foundations of buildings suspected to belong to the academic halls that preceded the College. The upper courses of these structures were located only a few centimetres below the current ground level.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 To identify and record any significant archaeological remains revealed during the ground works, in particular remains of medieval and post-medieval date. Any remains will be interpreted with regard to the known archaeology of the College and grounds and appropriate resource assessments and agendas.

2.2 Specific aims and objectives

2.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the Watching Brief are:

- i. To mitigate the impact of the intrusive works through preservation by record.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 A watching brief was maintained during the excavation of three hand dug test-pits designed to investigate the depths of wall foundations.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the watching brief are presented below, which include a stratigraphic description of the test-pits that contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates are tabulated in Appendix B.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequences recorded within the test-pits varied, although generally comprised backfill of foundation trenches, make-up layers and garden soils. A former road surface was recorded in Test-pit 1. The geological horizon (river terrace gravel sealed by brickearth) was not encountered within any of the test-pits.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the watching brief were generally good, and the site remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, if present, would have been difficult to identify due to the limited size, c 0.25 x 0.25m, and depth of the test-pits which were between 1.25m and 2.25m below ground level (BGL).

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 A stone surface was recorded in Test-pit 1. Test-pits 2 and 3 recorded deposits backfilling the construction trenches for walls. Modern layers were recorded in all of the test-pits, comprising make up layers and garden soils.

3.4 Test-pit 1

3.4.1 Test-pit 1 was excavated to a depth of 1.24m BGL (Fig. 3). The test-pit was located against the wall which separates Corpus Christi and Christchurch Colleges (Fig. 2). It established that the walls foundations were constructed to a depth of 1.24m BGL.

3.4.2 The lowest deposit, 1005, comprised a loose, dark grey-brown sandy silt, 0.4m thick. This appeared to be a make-up layer for stone surface 1004. The stone surface was formed from large limestone slabs, 0.08m thick.

3.4.3 The limestone surface was overlain by a dark grey brown sandy/silty gravel with oyster shell and animal bone, 1003, 0.28m thick. This layer possibly represented a former garden soil, or a refuse deposit formed when the surface had gone out of use.

3.4.4 Deposit 1003 was overlain by a layer of loose, greyish-yellow sandy gravel, 1002, containing occasional large stones, 0.3m thick.

3.4.5 The uppermost layers comprised a make-up layer, 1001, for square paving stones (0.1 x 0.1m x 0.1m) forming the current ground surface 1000.

3.5 Test-pit 2

3.5.1 Test-pit 2 was excavated to a depth of 2.16m BGL (Fig. 3). The test-pit was located on the external side of a wall on the west side of Main Quad (Fig. 2). It established that the walls foundations were constructed to a depth of 2.16m BGL. At between 0.4m

and 0.58m BGL the wall foundation stepped out three times, to a maximum width (within the test pit) of 0.3m.

- 3.5.2 The lowest deposit encountered, 2003, comprised moderately compact, dark grey clayey silt, 1.26m in depth. This deposit almost certainly represented the backfill of the construction trench for the wall, although the cut for this was not exposed within the test-pit.
- 3.5.3 Overlying 2003 was a mixed deposit, 2002, containing modern brick and 0.34m thick. This was overlain by a loose, light greyish yellow sandy gravel, 2001, 0.34m thick. This in turn was overlain by the current garden soil, 2000, which was 0.22m thick.

3.6 Test-pit 3

- 3.6.1 Test-pit 3 was excavated to a depth of 2.25m BGL (Fig. 3). The test-pit was located on the external side of the College's west wall (Fig. 2). It established that the walls foundations were constructed to a depth of 2.25m BGL. At between 1.1m and 1.82m BGL the wall foundation stepped out four times, to a width of 0.8m.
- 3.6.2 The lowest deposit, 3003, comprised a loose, dark grey-brown loam with brick and oyster shell inclusions, 1.48m in depth. This deposit almost certainly represented the backfill of the construction trench for the wall, although the cut for this was not exposed within the test-pit.
- 3.6.3 Backfill 3003 was overlain by a mixed deposit, 3002, comprising loose, light yellowish-grey loam with inclusions of brick and slate, 0.24m thick. This layer was cut by a brick-built drain (3004), measuring 0.32m x 0.32m and contained a metal pipe. The drain was overlain by a thin layer of concrete which in turn was overlain by foundation layer 3001, the base for the current stone surface, 3000.

3.7 Finds and environmental sampling summary

- 3.7.1 No finds were retained during the watching brief. No deposit suitable for environmental sampling were encountered.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The watching brief was carried out in clear dry conditions. The investigative holes were limited in size, typically 0.3m x 0.3m, and excavated to depths of between 1.24m and 2.25m, which limited the visibility of the deposits that they were excavated through.

4.2 Watching Brief objectives and results

- 4.2.1 The watching brief recorded the depth and construction methodology of the walls, and associated deposits. A former road or pavement surface was recorded in Test-pit 1.

4.3 Interpretation

- 4.3.1 The stone surface recorded in Test-pit 1 was not associated with any datable artefacts, but is likely to correlate with the uppermost surface of the former Shidyerd Street uncovered by the previous evaluation trenches (OA 2015). The surface is thought to date from potentially as far back as the 14th century. Its presence within the test pit, adjacent to the boundary wall between Corpus Christi and Christchurch Colleges, would suggest that it was built to abut the precursor to the wall, which although 18th century in date, is thought to have been partially constructed on an earlier 14th century wall foundation. The lack of any of the preceding, more rudimentary surfaces within Test pit 1 suggests that these were removed by the 14th century wall's construction, although these would have been difficult to spot given their fragmentary nature and the small size of the test pit. Alternatively, the wall foundation could have been constructed against the side of the foundation trench from the Christchurch College side, so that there would have been little disturbance of the adjacent strata. Given the presence of the refuse deposit of potential 16th century date overlying the road surface, the latter is the more likely hypothesis.
- 4.3.2 Test pits 2 and 3 contained only backfilled material within the construction cuts for the wall footings. None of this contained any datable material.

APPENDIX A DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Test-pit 1						
General description					Orientation	N/A
Backfill deposit. Limestone surface overlain by garden soils/make-up layers.					Length (m)	0.25
					Width (m)	0.3
					Depth (m)	1.24
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1000	Layer	-	0.1	Current pavement surface	-	-
1001	Layer	-	0.1	Make-up for 1000	-	-
1002	Layer	-	0.3	Make-up layer	-	-
1003	Layer	-	0.28	-	-	-
1004	Layer	-	0.08	Limestone surface	-	-
1005	Layer	-	0.4 +	Possible make-up for 1004		

Test-pit 2						
General description					Orientation	N/A
Backfill deposits, modern layers and garden soils.					Length (m)	0.2
					Width (m)	0.25
					Depth (m)	2.16
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
2000	Layer	-	0.22	Garden soil	-	-
2001	Layer	-	0.34	Modern make-up	-	-
2002	Layer	-	0.34	Modern make-up	-	-
2003	Layer	-	1.26	Possible pit fill	-	-

Test-pit 3						
General description					Orientation	N/A
Backfill deposits, modern layers and a drain.					Length (m)	0.3
					Width (m)	0.3
					Depth (m)	2.25
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
3000	Layer	-	0.1	Current stone surface	-	-
3001	Layer	-	0.1	Make-up for 3000	-	-
3002	Layer	-	0.52	Modern layer	-	-
3003	Layer/fill	-	0.74 +	Backfill of foundation trench?	-	-
3004	Structure	0.34	0.36	Drain	-	-

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

OA 2015 Corpus Christi College, Oxford. New Library. Evaluation report. Oxford Archaeology unpublished client report.

OA 2016 Corpus Christi College, Oxford. New Sub Main Works. Archaeological Watching Brief Report. Oxford Archaeology unpublished client report.

OA 2019 Corpus Christi College, Oxford. New Sub Main West. Archaeological Watching Brief Report. Oxford Archaeology unpublished client report.

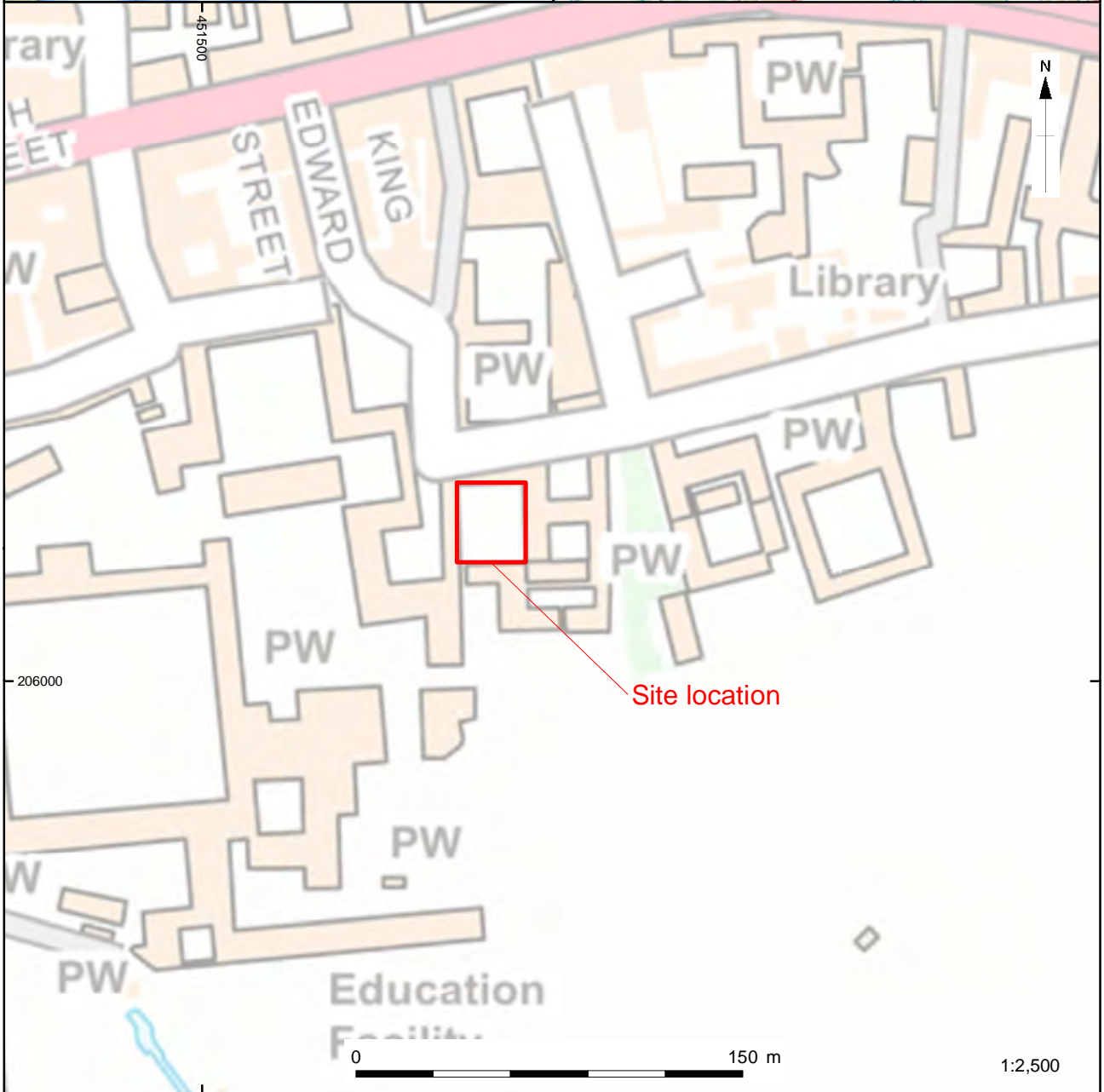
OA 2020 Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Written Scheme of Investigation for Watching Brief on Site Investigations

OCC 2016 Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief.

APPENDIX C**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

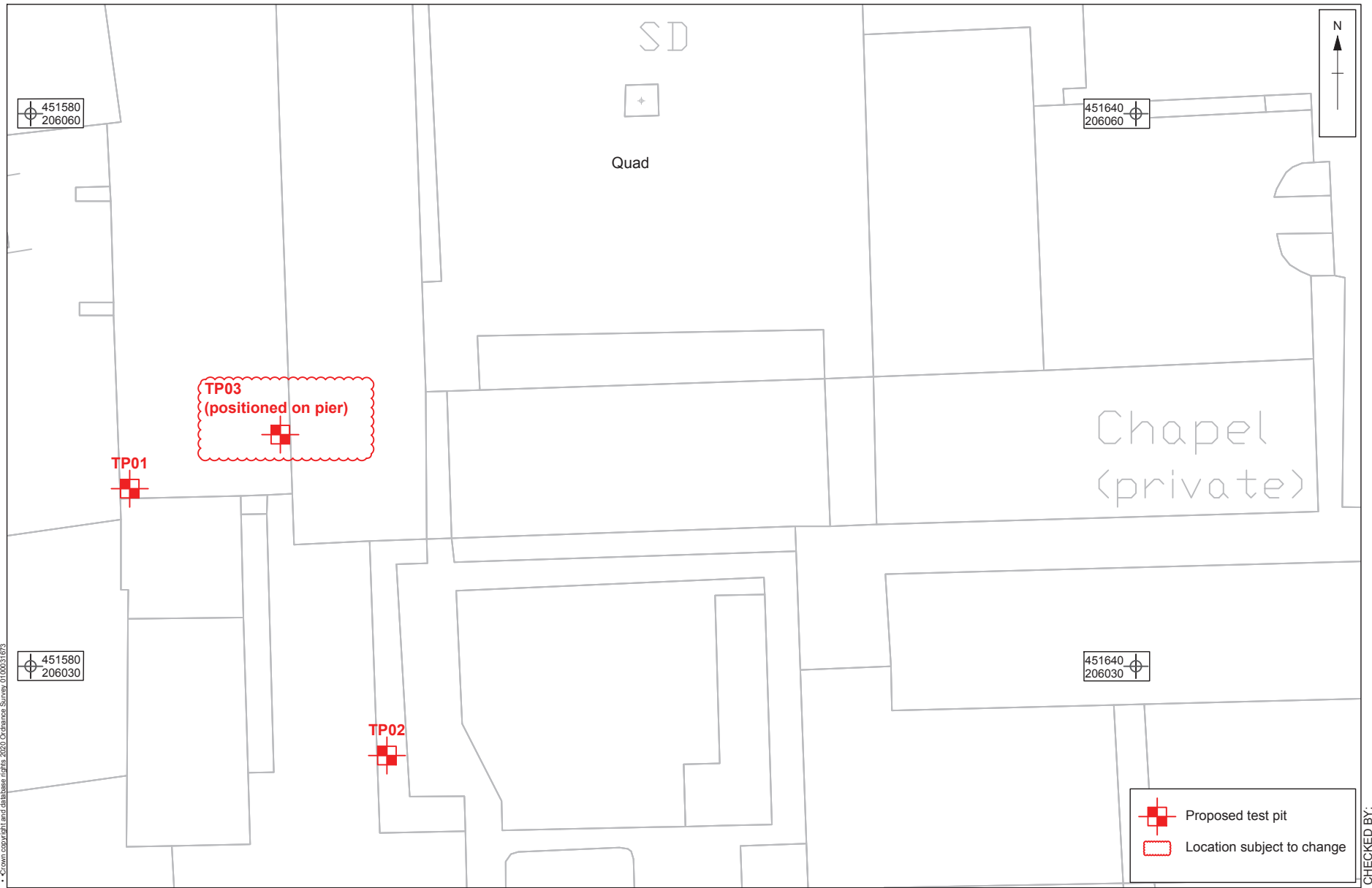
Site name:	Corpus Christi College, Oxford
Site code:	OXCOCH20
Grid Reference	SP 51633 06003
Type:	Watching Brief
Date and duration:	Three visits: 8/1/2020, 10/2/2020, 11/2/2020
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA and will be deposited with Oxford County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS: 2020.13.
Summary of Results:	Oxford Archaeology were commissioned by Wright and Wright Architects on behalf of Corpus Christi College to undertake archaeological monitoring of the excavation of three test-pits designed to investigate college wall foundations.

The archaeological monitoring works recorded a former stone road surface potentially of 14th-century date with an overlying refuse deposit, and deposits backfilling the construction trenches of the walls.



X:\Oxford Corpus Christi New sub mains Project\010Geomatics\03 GIS Projects\OXCWUBWB_2019-06-24_Figure_1.mxd*matt.bradley*25/06/2019

Figure 1: Site location



• Crown copyright and database rights 2020 Ordnance Survey 0100031673

0 15m
Scale at A3 1:300

Figure 2 Test pit location plan

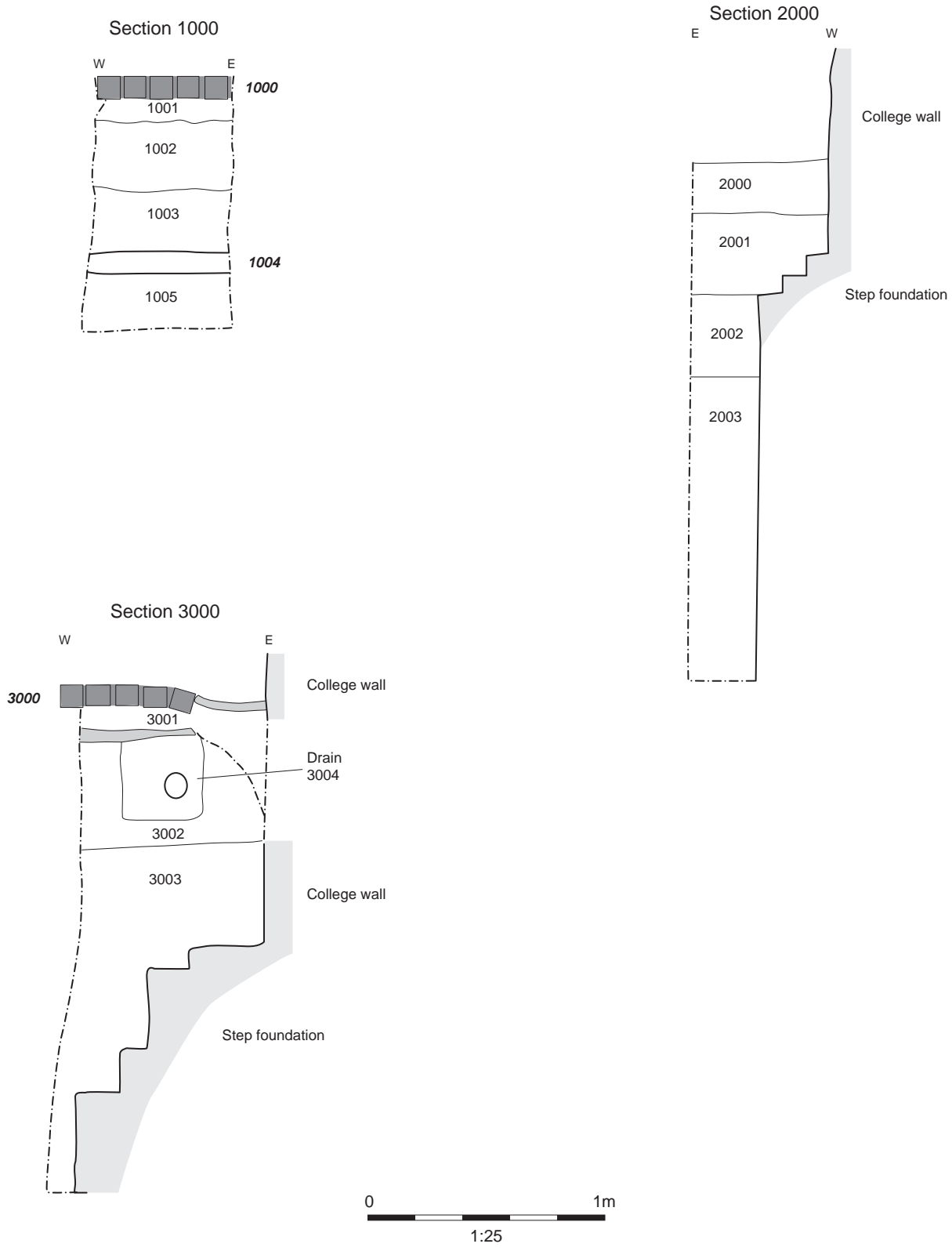


Figure 3: Sections



Plate 1: Test pit 1, view to N



Plate 2: Test pit 2, view to W



Plate 3: Test pit 3, view to N



**Head Office/Registered Office/
OA South**

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1QD

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850 500
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



Director: Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MCifA
*Oxford Archaeology Ltd is a
Private Limited Company, N^o: 1618597
and a Registered Charity, N^o: 285627*