

44 Salisbury Street
Amesbury
Wiltshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



October 2007

Client: Reef Estates

Issue N^o: 1
OA Job N^o: 3717
Planning Ref N^o: S/202/1333
NGR: SU 154 414

Client Name: Reef Estates

Client Ref No:

Document Title: 44 Salisbury Street, Amesbury, Wiltshire

Document Type: Watching Brief

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: SU 154 414

Planning Reference: S/202/1333

OA Job Number: 3717

Site Code: AMSAL 07

Invoice Code: AMSALWB

Receiving Museum: Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum Service

Museum Accession No: tbc

Prepared by: Mike Sims
Position: SWD Supervisor
Date: 10th September 2007

Checked by: Dan Dodds
Position: Head of Small Works
Date: 10th September 2007

Approved by: Nick Shepherd
Position: Head of Field work
Date: 10th October 2007

Signed.....

Document File Location H:\PROJECTS\Wiltshire WI\7841 44 Salisbury St,
Amesbury WB\wbREP.doc

Graphics File Location Servergo\invoice codes a thru h\AMSALWB*44
Salisbury Street, Amesbury, Wiltshire*MD*11.08.07

Illustrated by Markus Dylewski

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Oxford Archaeology

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Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800

f: (0044) 01865 793496

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk

w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

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**44 Salisbury Street, Amesbury,
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

Between the 30th of August and the 6th of September 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 44 Salisbury Street, Amesbury, Wiltshire (NGR: SU 154 414). The work was commissioned by Reef Estates in advance of alterations and construction of an extension, to an existing building. The watching brief revealed post-medieval pits and evidence of possible post-medieval terracing of the site. No significant archaeology was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Between the 30th August and the 6th September 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 44 Salisbury Street, Amesbury, Wiltshire (NGR: SU 154 414). The work was commissioned by Reef Estates in respect of a planning application for the construction of an extension and alterations to an existing building (Planning Application No. S/202/1333). A condition was attached to the planning permission requiring that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during the period of groundworks.

1.1.2 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the watching brief (OA, 2007).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The town of Amesbury is situated 10 km north of Salisbury (Fig. 1). The development site is located west of the centre of the town and is located to the rear of a property fronting Salisbury Street and lies at approximately 71 m above OD. The site is level ground and occupies an area c600m². The underlying geology is alluvium over terrace gravel.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared using the WSI for the project (OA, 2007) and public references and is reproduced below.

1.3.2 Amesbury is set in the valley of the River Avon, to the north of Salisbury, and lies at an important river crossing for the road from London to Warminster, Bridgwater and Barnstaple, with a road to Mere and Exeter branching off to the west of the town. The town itself is built on an area of gravel, on the bank of the Avon, and gravels and alluvium make up most of the valley floors. There are outcrops of chalk throughout the parish and these soils have led to the predominance of sheep farming and cereal growing that existed to the end of the 19th century.

- 1.3.3 The town is surrounded by an ancient landscape. There was settlement on the downs in Neolithic times, between 4,500 and 6,000 years ago, when the first Stonehenge and many of the surrounding earthworks were created. Stonehenge, as we know it, was built around 3,900-4,100 years ago and was probably the major religious and ceremonial structure in southern England at this time. The surrounding area was heavily farmed and the area was densely populated in Neolithic and Bronze Age times, although there was no settlement at Amesbury.
- 1.3.4 Major settlement near Amesbury first occurred in the Iron Age at the wrongly-named Vespasian's Camp. This large hill fort of c500 B.C., to the west of Amesbury on the west bank of the river, could have enclosed 1,000 people from a substantial area around. During the Roman period Romanised Iron-Age Celts would have continued to live and farm in the area, although there were no estates based on villas here as there were in other parts of Wiltshire. It has been plausibly suggested that the name Amesbury comes from a personal name 'Ambri' and that the hill fort could have been one of the strongholds of Ambrosius Aurelianus, a landowner who led resistance to the Saxons.
- 1.3.5 The area is likely to have been settled by the Saxons by the 7th century and Amesbury became a reasonable-sized community, and later a royal estate, on an important early river crossing. It was a notable settlement by the 10th century when, in 979, a nunnery was founded for the Benedictine order. Although the nunnery owned some local estates it owned nothing in Amesbury itself and did not attract great gifts of land, being one of the poorer foundations.
- 1.3.6 At the time of the Domesday Book (1086), Amesbury was owned by the King and there were 8 mills along the River Avon here. By using modern interpretation of Domesday figures we can estimate that the population of the estate was between 700 and 900 people, although only 217 heads of households are listed. These would have been scattered over a large area and it is impossible to estimate the size of Amesbury itself at this time. It was probably fairly small as, despite the nunnery, Amesbury failed to develop in the 11th century.
- 1.3.7 The town probably stagnated until the late 12th century when the nuns were accused of irregular living and their Abbey was appropriated by Henry II. He replaced it with a lavishly-endowed double Priory (for nuns and monks) of the Fonteuvaldine order. This was their fourth, final, and largest house in England and was part of the King's penance for the murder of Thomas Becket. The Priory prospered and Amesbury prospered with it. In 1219 a Thursday market was granted to the Lord of the Manor and land opposite the present Abbey Lane was used as the market place. By 1252 a 3-day fair on the vigil, feast and morrow of St. Melor was granted and local people would have enjoyed the stalls of traders from far afield.
- 1.3.8 By the early 14th century the Priory contained 117 nuns and would have been served by many lay officers and servants, living in the Priory or the town. In 1317 the Priory was granted a Saturday market and a 3-day fair, which are likely to have replaced the

earlier market and fair. The medieval town grew around the gates of the Priory and, to a large extent, provided servants and goods for it. The town would have grown outwards from its High Street, so named by 1364, with farmsteads flanking the outskirts.

- 1.3.9 There were various disputes between the Prioress and the Prior which, by the early 15th century, resulted in the Priory having nuns only and reverting to the Benedictine rule. The buildings were substantial and there has been much dispute over whether the Priory church became the parish church. It is, however, likely that the Priory church was used as the parish church until around 1400.
- 1.3.10 Life remained prosperous here but a great change happened in 1540 when the Priory, along with all other monastic institutions, was dissolved. Most of the buildings were demolished or unroofed between 1541 and 1542 and the community had to face life without its centuries old centre. By the 1540s a market house had been erected (it was demolished in 1809). Between 1595 and 1601 a new mansion was built on the Priory site, providing a new source of employment and a new market for local tradesmen.
- 1.3.11 By the 17th century the High Street was probably fully built up on both sides. In 1614 a Wednesday market and two new fairs (on 11th June and 23rd December) were granted. The market probably replaced the earlier one but there were now three fairs taking place in the streets. The fairs continued into the 1880s, by which time they were mainly for livestock.
- 1.3.12 In the latter part of the 17th century the Gauntlett family made excellent clay pipes in the town and achieved a reputation for them over a wide area. There was an hiatus in development in 1751 when a fire destroyed or damaged around 25 buildings in the High Street.
- 1.3.13 By the beginning of the 19th century the town was in decline. In 1801 the population was only 721 and, although this rose to nearly 1,200 in mid-century, it had fallen back to 981 by 1891.

Development increased in the 20th century owing to nearby military installations from 1899 at Bulford and Durrington. The railway was opened in 1902, and there was much new building, especially after 1918, to the east of the town. A new school and police station were built and many townspeople found employment in the army camps. There were substantial developments of council housing, erection of the Experimental Cottages by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, army married quarters, ribbon development and small estates.

- 1.3.14 In the 1920s a recreation ground, to the south-west of the town, was opened while, in 1925, Antrobus House was opened for public use and included a museum and library. Public sewers and disposal works were built from 1905; from 1922 electricity was generated by the Amesbury Electric Light Co. at South Mill (closed 1948) with

mains cables laid from 1927 and power also brought in from suppliers. Water mains were laid in the town in 1926 and in the mid 1930s a bus station was built. After the Second World War the town continued to expand, with many people being employed at Boscombe Down.

1.3.15 To the south of the site in 1999 Wessex Archaeology carried out a small excavation in a trench on waste ground between the car park and rear of Logans Store. This trench produced a number of small Iron Age features.

1.3.16 The development area is possibly within the probable medieval market place of Amesbury and has been disturbed by both an earlier cottage (post-medieval) on the land as well as a later garage building on the same site.

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 archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the groundworks.

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 groundworks likely to impinge upon archaeological deposits.

2.2.2 A plan showing the location and extent of any excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations and recorded 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 A thick layer of alluvial material, a green-grey sand silt (1) was encountered at between 0.3 m and 0.7 m below the current ground levels (Fig 2, sections 1 and 2). Within the excavations across the eastern edge of the site two features were observed cut into this deposit (Fig. 2). Cut 3 measured 6 m across by 0.7 m deep (full width not exposed) and was filled by a dark grey-brown silt loam (4), which contained lenses of chalk, gravel and ash and produced fragments of machine made brick suggesting a 19th or 20th century date. Cut 5 was a much smaller feature measuring

1.8 m long by 0.6 m deep and was only exposed in the eastern side of the foundation trench (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, section 1). This was filled by a dark grey-brown silty sand loam (6) which contained lenses of charcoal, chalk and flint and which also produced fragments of machine made brick and tile suggesting it was contemporary with feature 3.

- 3.1.2 Sealing these features was a 0.2 m deep layer of grey-brown sand silt (2). This deposit contained lenses of charcoal and fragments of abraded brick and tile indicative of a worked soil. Along the eastern edge of the development, outside the area of the original development, Layer 2 was overlain by a 0.4 m deep layer of dark grey-brown sandy silt loam (7). This deposit contained fragments of machine made brick suggesting a layer of made ground (Fig. 2, Section 1), although it is possible that this layer may represent the original topsoil, indicating that the site has been truncated in the past (possibly to level the site for construction of the garage buildings ?). In the centre of the development area Layer 2 was overlaid by a 0.1 m deep layer of crushed stone (8) (Fig. 2, Section 2), the base for an old concrete floor associated with the garage (now removed).

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Only post-medieval finds dating to the 19th and 20th centuries were observed. These included brick and tile fragments. These were evaluated on site, but were not 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 watching brief exposed evidence of post-medieval activity, probably the result of earlier post-medieval occupation of the site prior to construction of the existing shop. The absence of a late topsoil horizon within the development area suggests that the site has been subject to a degree of truncation in the past, possibly when the existing shop structure was constructed. No evidence of any occupation of the site prior to the post-medieval period was observed during the course of the watching brief, either in the form of residual finds or in the form of truncated bases of deeper features.
- 4.1.2 The absence of any significant archaeology may be due to the probable truncation of the site, but is more probable that this area was arable in nature prior to the 19th century development of Amesbury.

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>
1	Layer	> 0.6 m	-	Alluvial deposit	-	-
2	Layer	0.2 m	-	Subsoil. Probable worked soil	Brick	C19th/ C20th
3	Cut	0.5 m	6 m	Modern rubbish pit	-	C19th/ C20th
4	Fill	0.5 m	6 m	Fill of Pit 4, redeposited material	Brick	C19th/ C20th
5	Cut	0.55 m	1.8 m	Modern rubbish pit	-	C19th/ C20th
6	Fill	0.55 m	1.8 m	Fill of Pit 5, redeposited material	Brick	C19th/ C20th
7	Layer	0.4 m	-	Made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th
8	Layer	0.1 m	-	Scalpings, base for old concrete floor	-	C20th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA 1992, *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA 2007 *44 Salisbury Street, Amesbury, Wiltshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: 44 Salisbury Street, Amesbury, Wiltshire

Site code: AMSAL 07

Grid reference: SU 154 414

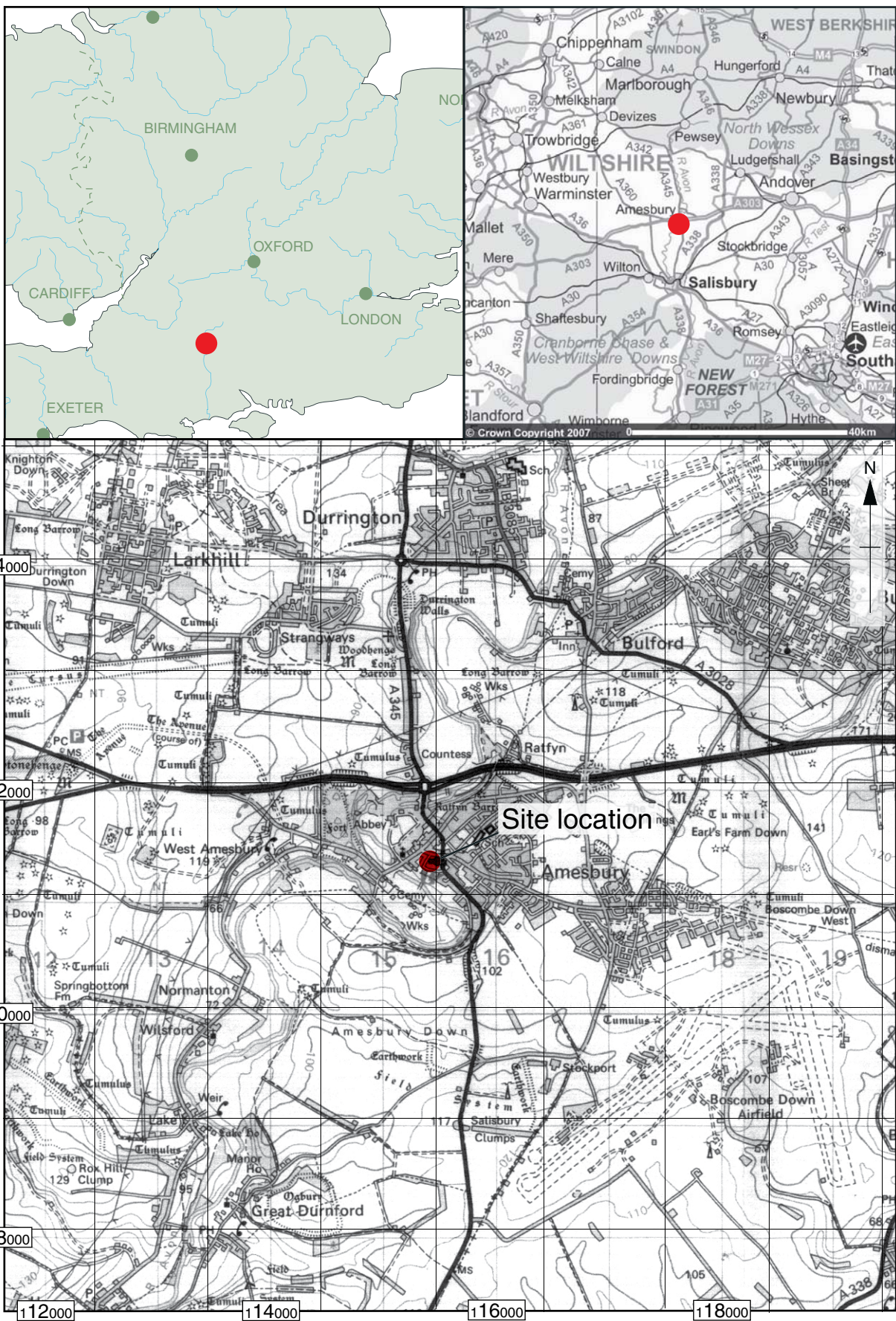
Type of watching brief: Machine excavation of foundation trenches

Date and duration of project: Between 30th August and 6th September 2007, 3 site visits

Area of site: c600 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief exposed post-medieval pits and evidence of post-medieval terracing of the site. No other significant archaeology was observed.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museums Service in due course.



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

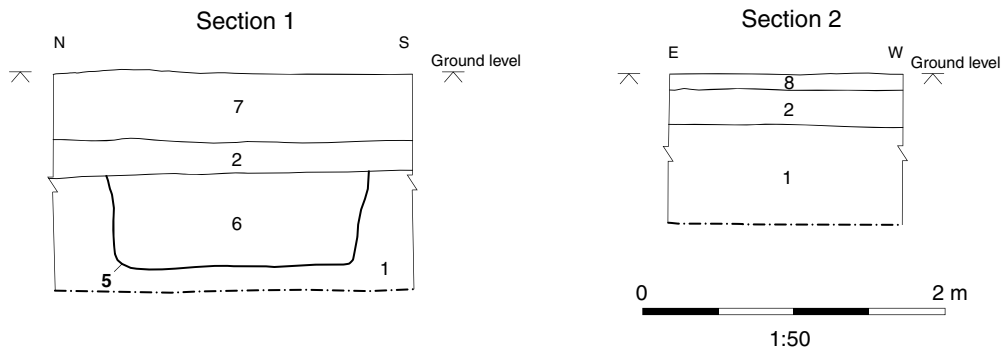
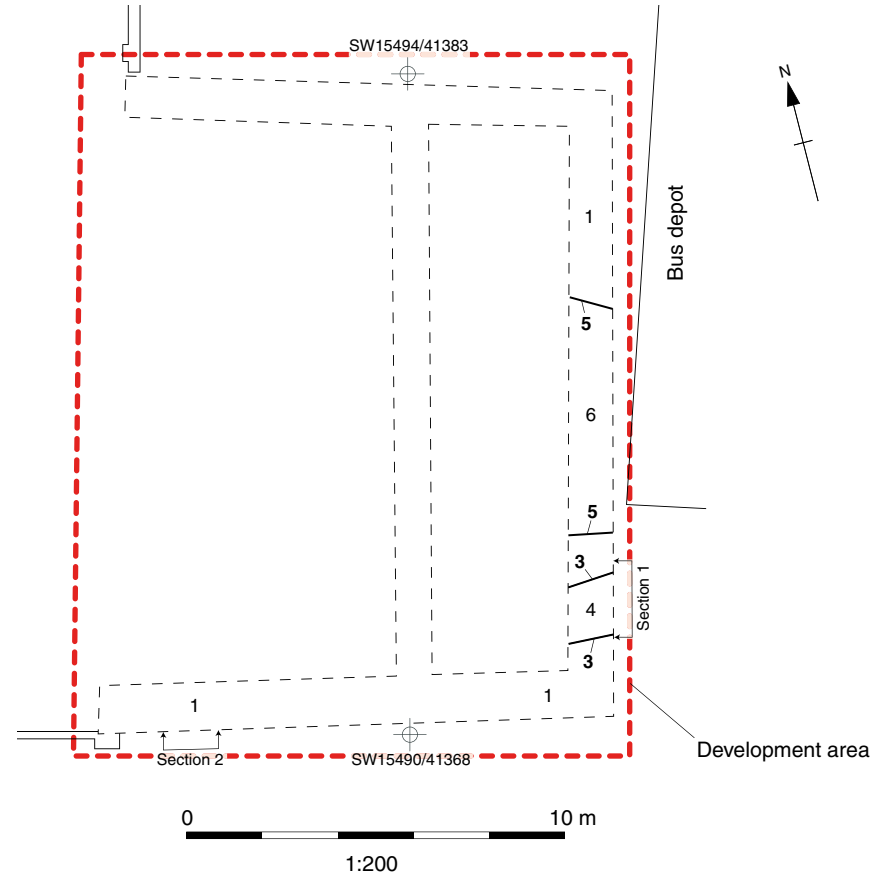
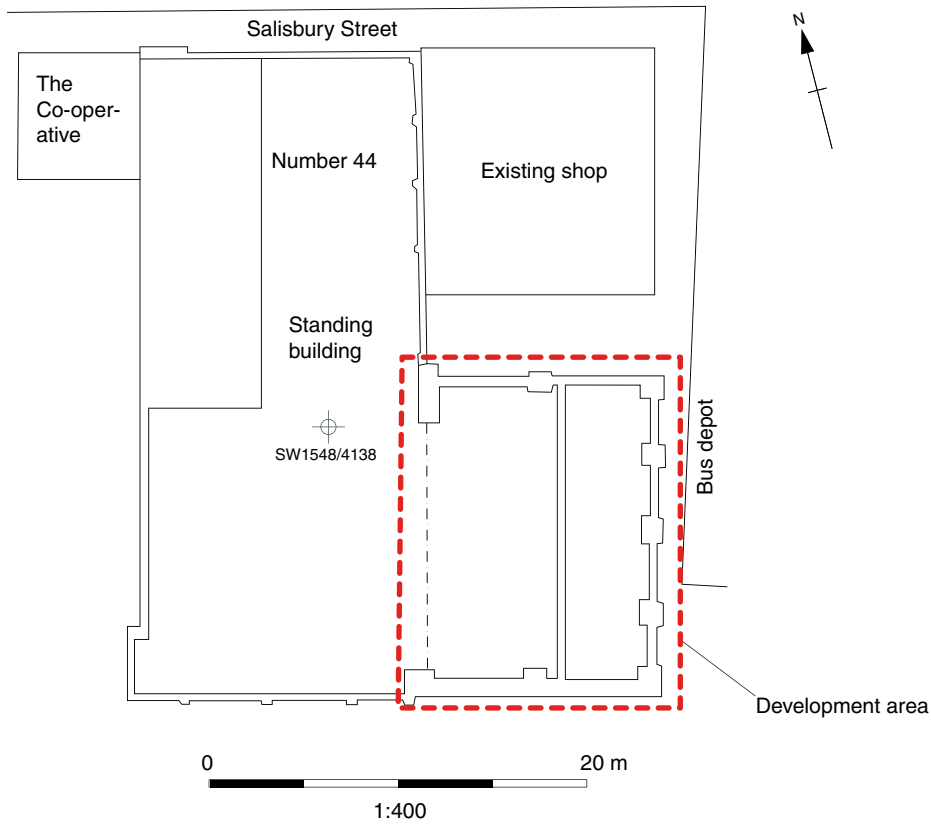


Figure 2: Detailed site location, site plan and sections



Head Office/Registered Office

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

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

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1GF

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

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
f: +44 (0) 1223 850599
e: [oaeast@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net/oaeast>

OA Méditerranée

115 Rue Merlot
ZAC La Louvade
34 130 Manguio
France

t: +33 (0) 4.67.57.86.92
f: +33 (0) 4.67.42.65.93
e: [oamed@oamed.fr](mailto: oamed@oamed.fr)
w: <http://oamed.fr/>



Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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