


# Bayards Hill Primary School, Headington, Oxford



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Issue	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by	Signature
1	Mike Sims Project Supervisor	Katrina Anker Senior Project Manager	Edward Biddulph Senior Project Manager	

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Janus House  
 Osney Mead  
 Oxford OX2 0ES  
 t: +44 (0) 1865 263800 e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk  
 f: +44 (0) 1865 793496 w: oxfordarchaeology.com  
 Oxford Archaeology Limited is a Registered Charity No: 285627





# Bayards Hill Primary School, Headington, Oxford

## *Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

*Written by Mike Sims*

*and illustrated by Markus Dylweski and Sophie Lamb*

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## Summary

*Between August 2013 and December 2014 Oxford Archaeology (OA) conducted an archaeological watching brief during redevelopment works at Bayards Hill Primary School, Waynflete Road, Headington, Oxford (centred at SP 55808 07492). The watching brief recorded that the areas covered by the previous school buildings and associated tarmaced areas had been truncated, destroying any potential archaeological strata. In the limited amount of undisturbed areas, evidence for post-medieval activity and a modern worked soil horizon was identified. No evidence for any significant archaeological activity was observed.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA), was commissioned by Stepnell Ltd to undertake a watching brief of the site of the partial redevelopment of Bayards Hill Primary School, Headington, near the outskirts of Oxford (NGR: SP 5581 0749) (Fig. 1). These works included the demolition of parts of the existing teaching wing and the construction of a new single storey administration and kitchen extension together with other ancillary works.
- 1.1.2 The watching brief was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: R3.0087/12). A brief was set by Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Council detailing the Local Authority's requirements for the work necessary to discharge the planning condition (OCC 2012), and OA produced a written scheme of investigation (WSI) showing how it would meet these requirements (OA 2013).
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is located on roughly level ground at approximately 99m above OD.
- 1.2.2 The area of proposed development currently consists of the existing school buildings and grounds and is bounded to the north, south and west by public highways and to the east by a playing field. Prior to the commencement of the groundworks parts of the existing school buildings were demolished.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is limestone of the Wheatley Member, overlain by a sandy clay subsoil and topsoil (British Geology Society, Sheet no 236).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site has been detailed in the brief and is briefly summarised below.
- 1.3.2 A sizeable rural roadside settlement of the Roman period existed to the north of the school, flanking the Roman road. Its core appears to be located around SP 5578 0780, about 200 metres north of the school site, but a Romano-British burial and a cremation have been recorded from either side of the Bayswater Road less than 160 metres north of the school. This may represent the southern limit of the occupation site. The discovery of a Bronze Age socketed spearhead is recorded some 320 metres east of the school.



- 1.3.3 Previous archaeological work identified 3rd century activity south of a crossing point of Bayswater Brook some 380 metres north of the school site. The projected line of the Roman road from Dorchester-on-Thames to Alchester, as shown on historical and modern OS maps, runs approximately south to north through the school grounds, roughly bisecting the school. An archaeological watching brief carried out in 2001 by Thames Valley Archaeological Services prior to the construction of two new classroom blocks in the north-west corner of the site only identified features of modern date, probably associated with the building of the school (TVAS 2002). Some 19th/20th century land drains were also observed. However, the proposed redevelopment would directly impact on the projected line of the Roman road and the extent of the redevelopment also increase the potential for archaeology being affected.
- 1.3.4 A geophysical survey on the school site revealed two parallel linear anomalies running on the same alignment as the Roman road. These were interpreted as the flanking ditches of the Roman road. Other anomalies were also indicated within the area of survey. The targeted trial trenching that followed confirmed that these were indeed flanking ditches of the road. The trenching also confirmed the survival of a partially eroded road surface and other peripheral features outside the road ditches. Pottery dating from the 2nd to 4th centuries AD was also recovered. Later intrusive features – possibly field ditches or small borrow pits – were dated to the post- medieval period.
- 1.3.5 This evaluation therefore confirmed the presence of around 80 linear metres of Roman road that had a good quality of survival, including fragments of road metalling and flanking ditches within the southern part of the school grounds. Other features possibly also dating to the Roman period and also the post-medieval period have also been identified within the proposed development area. Although the evaluation was carried out slightly to the east of the present proposal it was considered likely that further archaeological deposits related to the Roman period would be encountered by this development.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

2.1.1 As stated in the WSI, the aims of the watching brief were to:

- determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains which may survive. Should remains be found to ensure their preservation by record to the highest possible standard;
- determine or confirm the approximate extent of any surviving remains;
- determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means;
- determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains;
- determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy;
- assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape;
- determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence, and the forms in which such evidence may survive;
- determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity; and to

- determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

## 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a series of site visits during those operations which had the potential to disturb or destroy archaeological deposits.
- 2.2.2 These operations included the diversion of existing services, excavation of new service trenches, excavation of foundations, topsoil stripping and ground reduction.
- 2.2.3 During these operations a suitably qualified archaeologist was present during any works which had the potential to impact upon any archaeological deposits.
- 2.2.4 The bulk of the excavations was accomplished using a tracked excavator fitted with a toothless bucket.
- 2.2.5 All spoil generated by both the machine and any hand excavations was examined for the presence of archaeological artefacts.
- 2.2.6 During these works, features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established OA practices (OA 1991). Bulk finds were collected by context. Black-and-white negative photographs and a digital photographic record was taken of all excavations, general settings and archaeological sections.
- 2.2.7 Site plans showing the location of any excavations and any recorded sections were maintained (Figs. 2 and 3). Section drawings of features and sample sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The investigation covered several phases of work including the excavation of service trenches, foundation trenches and pads and other works such as landscaping. Each will be described separately followed by an overall discussion and conclusion.

#### ***Service trench excavations***

- 3.1.2 The excavations consisted of approximately 50m length of 0.5m wide by 0.7m – 0.8m deep trenching running from the northern side of the school building and heading north-east to south-west onto Waynflete Road (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.3 At the northern end of the trench as it exited the school grounds a layer of mixed brown and very dark brown/black silty clays containing broken bricks and other construction debris was exposed within the base and sides of the trench (102) (Fig. 3, Sections 100 and 101; Plate 1).
- 3.1.4 A bedding layer of yellow sand (101) measuring between 0.1m and 0.2m had been laid directly over 102. This formed the base for the tarmac carpark surface (100).
- 3.1.5 Within the trenching leading from the school buildings a layer of orange-yellow sand in excess of 0.5m in depth (105 and 108) was observed within the base and sides of the trench (Fig. 3, Sections 102 and 103 respectively; Plate 2). This was overlaid by a 0.12m deep layer of pale grey sandy gravel containing brick fragments (104 and 107). The tarmac playground surface (103 and 106) had been laid above this.



### ***Foundation pads***

- 3.1.6 A series of shallow foundation pads were excavated south and west of the existing cycle shelter in order to extend it (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.7 These all measured 2.5m x 1m by 0.3m in depth and the stratigraphy observed was similar within all four. A layer of pale greyish brown sandy silt over 0.12m in depth (111) was recorded within the base of the trench (Fig. 3, Section 104). This was covered by a 0.12m deep layer of orange-brown sand (110) forming a bedding layer for the tarmac playground surface (109).

### ***Foundation trenching***

- 3.1.8 As part of the redevelopment of the school a number of single storey extensions were to be constructed abutting the existing school buildings. In some cases these were to be built on the sites of earlier structures demolished as part of the redevelopment.
- 3.1.9 At the north-west corner of the site, adjacent to Waynfilete Road, the foundations were dug for a new structure on a site which had been previously a tarmaced playground (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.10 Prior to trenching the tarmac surface was removed, the foundation trenching measured 0.7m in width and up to 1.5m deep.
- 3.1.11 The stratigraphy exposed was broadly similar throughout the area (Fig. 3, Section 105; Plate 3). A band of ragstone, the local limestone, was encountered at a depth of between 1.2m and 1.5m depth (117). Overlying the stone was a clean layer of light orange silty sand measuring between 1m and 1.2m in depth (116).
- 3.1.12 Above the sand was a 0.1m layer of dark brown silty loam containing charcoal flecking, abraded brick and sherds of post-medieval pottery (115). Cutting this deposit in the south of the buildings footprint was a rectangular area of hard standing approximately 3m in width and which extended outside the area of construction (114).
- 3.1.13 The limit of the hardstanding was bounded by a single line of frogged bricks, 0.228m x 0.115m x 0.072m in size stamped "Phorpes". The hard standing itself was formed using a clinker sub-base overlaid with compacted limestone and sealed by a cement skim.
- 3.1.14 Sealing layer (115) and the hard standing (114) was a 0.15m deep layer of crushed stone and tarmac (113), which formed the base for the tarmac playground surface (112).
- 3.1.15 No evidence for any significant archaeology was observed during these works
- 3.1.16 The foundations for a second new building were monitored, located abutting the centre of the eastern edge of the standing buildings (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.17 The western and eastern edges of the footprint had been disturbed by the demolition of parts of the existing buildings, while the northern edge had been truncated by a service tunnel connecting two of the original buildings. The removal of these structures and other works reduced the level of the new build to approximately 0.7m below the surrounding area.



- 3.1.18 The foundation trenching itself measured 0.6m wide and between 1.6m and 2m in depth. The exposed stratigraphy of the undisturbed deposits was similar throughout the footprint (Fig. 3, Section 106; Plate 4).
- 3.1.19 At the deepest part of the dig, adjacent to the basement wall of the standing buildings, the top of the underlying limestone was encountered (120). Overlying this was a layer of pale orange silty sand measuring up to 1.8m in depth (119).
- 3.1.20 Sealing this deposit was a 0.15m deep layer of pale yellow-brown sand containing numerous fragments of crushed concrete, brick fragments and mortar (118).
- 3.1.21 No evidence of any buried soil horizons or intrusive archaeology was observed during this phase of work.

### **3.2 Finds**

- 3.2.1 Fragments of modern (20th century) brick together with sherds of 19th/20th century pottery such as creamware, earthenware and transfer printed pottery were recovered during the course of the watching brief. The presence of this material was noted, but it was not retained.
- 3.2.2 No artefacts pre-dating the 19th century were encountered during the course of the investigation.

### **3.3 Environmental remains**

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

## **4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1.1 No evidence of archaeological significance was encountered within the redeveloped areas.
- 4.1.2 The service trenching only encountered deposits either associated or contemporary with the original school's construction, while the northern foundation excavations only encountered post-medieval (most likely early to mid 20th century) deposits or structures. The size and construction of the area of hard standing (114) is suggestive of a garage or shed base predating the school's construction.
- 4.1.3 The southern foundation excavations showed that there were no worked soil or topsoil deposits surviving within its footprint, either owing to construction of the original school buildings, or the surrounding tarmac yard surfaces.
- 4.1.4 The results from all phases of work observed during the duration of the watching brief appear to suggest that the areas under investigation were outside the focus of the Roman (or earlier) activity and may have been pastoral in nature.
- 4.1.5 This conclusion must be caveated in that parts of site, particularly that of the southern new build, had been severely truncated with no soil horizons surviving above the natural sand. There is potential therefore for archaeology to have truncated. Elsewhere deposits of modern made ground were not penetrated, potentially leaving archaeological deposits unexposed. However, the absence of any surviving bases of deep features such as ditches, or the lack of residual finds within the remaining areas of worked soils, would appear to confirm the suggestion that the area of the redevelopment is either outside, or between, the areas of Roman (or other) activity.



## APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Comments	Finds	Date
100	Surface	0.07m	Tarmac playground surface	-	C20th
101	Layer	0.1m	Sand base for tarmac surface 100	-	C20th
102	Layer	0.12m	Made ground/ levelling layer	Brick	C20th
103	Surface	0.07m	Tarmac playground surface	-	C20th
104	Layer	0.17m	Made ground, possible construction layer	Brick	C20th
105	Layer	0.5m	Made ground	Brick	C20th
106	Surface	0.07m	Tarmac playground surface	-	C20th
107	Layer	0.12m	Made ground/ levelling layer	Brick	C20th
108	Layer	0.38m	Made ground	Brick	C20th
109	Surface	0.07m	Tarmac playground surface	-	C20th
110	Layer	0.12m	Sand base for tarmac surface 109	-	C20th
111	Layer	> 0.12	Layer of worked soil	Brick, pottery	C20th
112	Surface	0.07m	Tarmac playground surface	-	C20th
113	Layer	0.15m	Hardcore base for tarmac 112	-	C20th
114	Structure	0.25m	Edge of a rectangular area of hard standing, possibly the base of a garage/shed.	Brick, pottery	C20th
115	Layer	0.1m – 0.15m	Possibly truncated layer of worked soil	Brick, pottery	C20th
116	Layer	1m – 1.2m	Natural sand	-	-
117	Layer	> 0.2m	Band of the underlying natural limestone	-	-
118	Layer	0.2m	Construction layer associated with the schools original construction	Brick, tarmac	C20th
119	Layer	1.2m – 1.5m	Natural sand	-	-
120	Layer	> 0.15m	Band of the underlying natural limestone	-	-



## APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- OA, 1992                      *Field Manual* (ed Dave Wilkinson)
- OA, 2013                      *Bayards Hill Primary School, Headington. Oxford: Written Scheme of Investigation*
- OCC, 2012                    *Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief: Bayards Hill Primary School, Waynflete Road, Headington, Oxford*
- TVAS, 2002                   *Bayards Hill Primary School, Waynflete Road, Headington, Oxford: Archaeological Watching Brief Report*



## APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Bayards Hill Primary School, Headington, Oxford
Site code:	OXBAYH 13
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SP 55808 07492
Type of watching brief:	Redevelopment of existing school buildings, including selective demolition and the construction of new buildings and associated service trenching and landscaping.
Date and duration of project:	Between August 2013 and December 2014
Area of site:	Approximately 0.8 hectare
Summary of results:	The watching brief recorded that the areas covered by the previous school buildings and associated tarmaced areas had been truncated, destroying any potential archaeological strata. In the limited amount of undisturbed areas, evidence for post-medieval activity and an modern worked soil horizon was identified. No evidence for any significant archaeological activity, such as the projected Roman Road, was observed.
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at Janus House and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service under the Accession Number:OXCMS: 2013.116

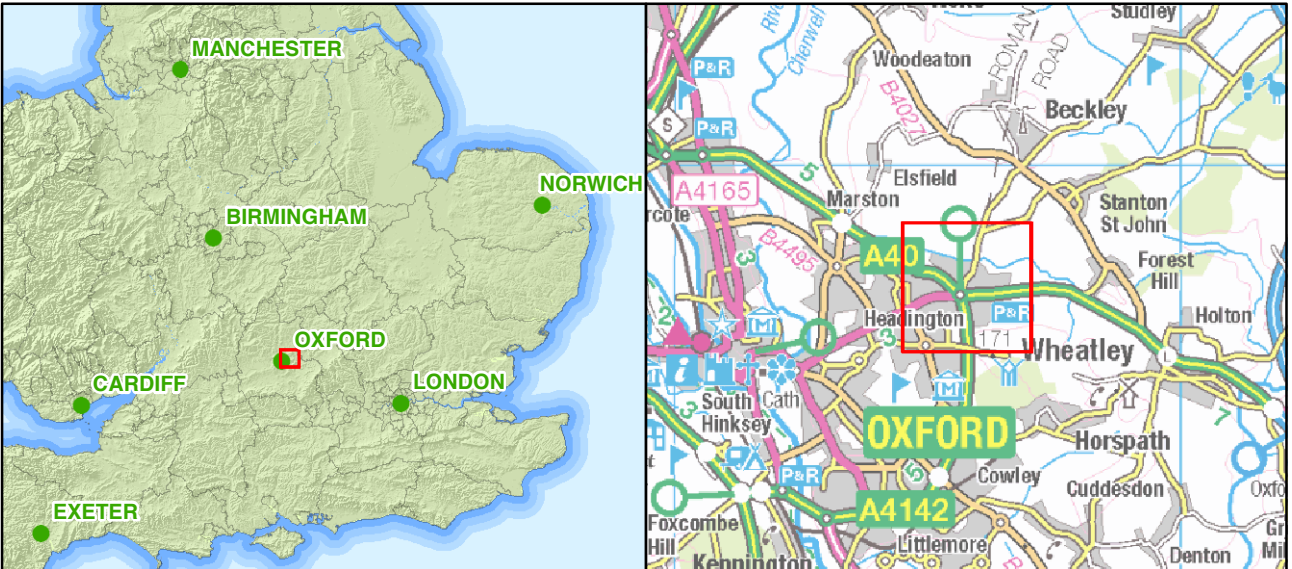


Figure 1: Site location

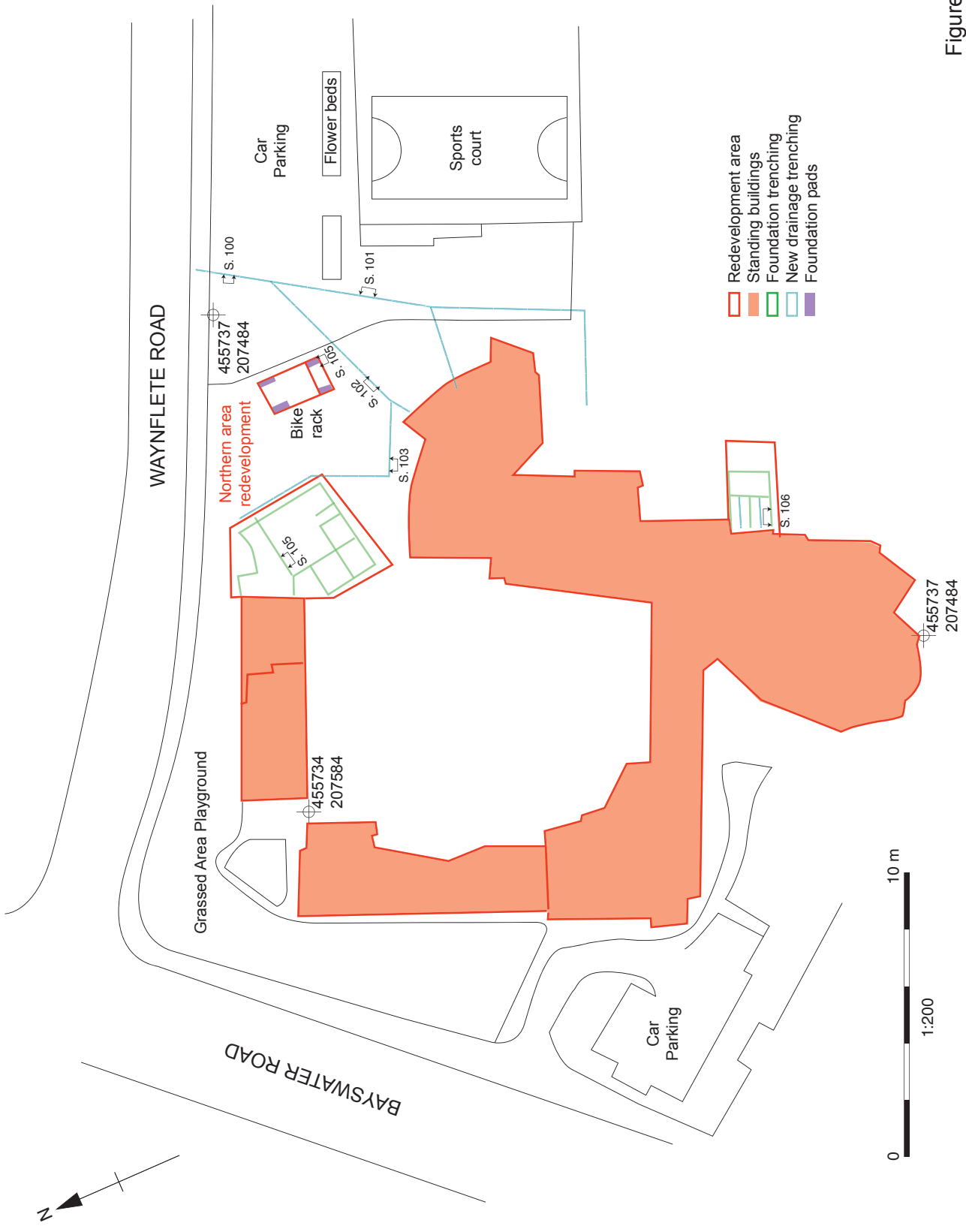


Figure 2: Site plan

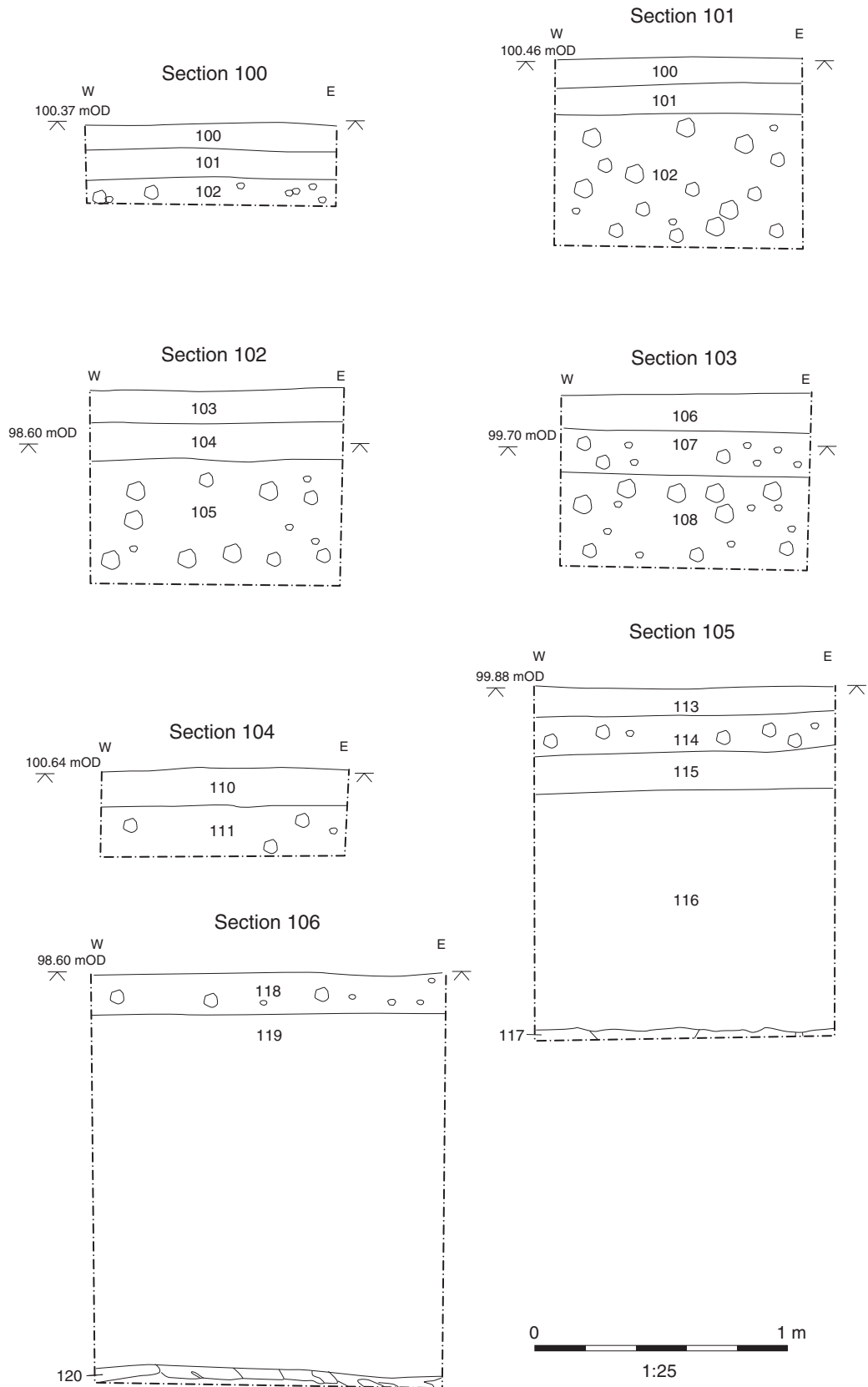


Figure 3: Sections





Plate 1: Section 100



Plate 2: Section 103



Plate 3: Section 105

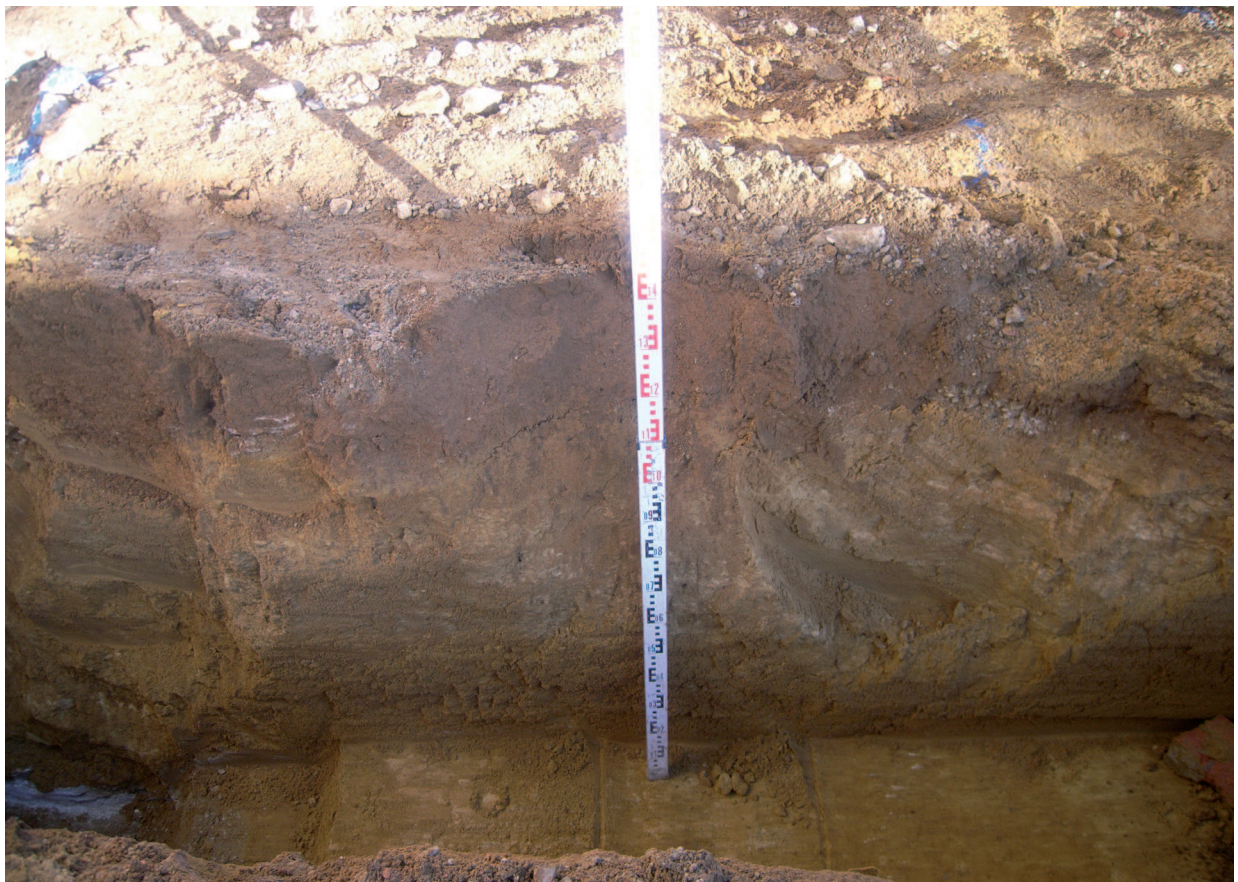


Plate 4: Section 106





**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](mailto: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 850500  
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)  
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



**Director:** Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MIFA  
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