



# Sobell House Hospice, Old Road, Headington, Oxford

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

July 2018

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# Sobell House Hospice, Old Road, Headington, Oxford

## *Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

*Written by Emma Powell*

*with illustrations by Magdalena Wachnik*

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## Summary

During May and June 2018, Oxford Archaeology undertook a watching brief during groundworks associated with construction of an annex at Sobell House Hospice, Old Road, Headington, Oxford. No archaeological remains were identified. Any potential remains appear to have been removed by 20th and 21st century construction and demolition works, which had disturbed most of the area of the site.

## Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank GBS Health for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to David Radford, who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council, for his advice and guidance, and to Rob Cruickshank, Site Manager for Kingerlee, for his cooperation.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Ianto Wain. Digitizing and figure production was carried out by Magdalena Wachnik. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that 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 GBS Health to undertake a watching brief at Sobell House Hospice which forms part of the main Churchill Hospital complex, located off Old Road, Headington, Oxford.
- 1.1.2 The development comprised the construction of a two storey annex (with plant room at third floor level), to create six new palliative care bedrooms, a new lymphedema clinic, administration office and staff welfare facilities.
- 1.1.3 The work was undertaken as a condition of planning permission (planning ref. 17/00770/FUL/). The works were carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by OA and approved by the Oxford City Archaeologist, David Radford (OA 2018).
- 1.1.4 The works were carried out over a three-week period between 22nd May-15th June 2018.

### 1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site is located on the southern fringe of Headington, within the Churchill Hospital complex at NGR SP 54312 05723 (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The area of the development consisted of planting beds and paved pathways.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as bedrock of the Beckley Sand Member (sandstone) which is sedimentary bedrock (BGS online). The site lies at c 90m OD and is situated on the west-facing slope of Headington Hill, which drops to a height of 80m OD at the base of the Boundary Brook valley. The Boundary Brook stream is located 85m south-west of the site.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in the desk-based assessment (OA 2017). A summary of key information from this document is presented below.

#### *Prehistoric period*

- 1.3.2 There is limited evidence of prehistoric activity within the Study Area, with archaeological deposits that relate to the Neolithic period, Bronze Age and Iron Age identified. None of the identified prehistoric remains have been recorded from the area of the Churchill Hospital.
- 1.3.3 An evaluation at Warneford Meadow in 2006, 344m north-west of the site, identified Iron Age pottery. Elsewhere, late Iron Age to early post-conquest pottery came from superficial contexts in the same area. Two pieces of worked flint from this area are both from later contexts and may be indicative of late prehistoric activity.

- 1.3.4 A watching brief was undertaken in 2012 at Oxford Golf Club, 400m west of the site. A number of discrete features considered to be prehistoric or early Roman in origin were identified, related to a possible nearby settlement with an iron-working industrial zone.
- 1.3.5 During the late 19th century a significant prehistoric site was discovered 600m south-east of the Site. Between 1893 and 1895 numerous flint arrowheads, scrapers and flakes were found close to Cowley Marsh, near the footpath leading to Headington Quarry. These finds indicate the site of a Neolithic/Bronze Age flint factory.

### *Romano-British period*

- 1.3.6 Archaeological evidence for the Roman period within the Study Area is dominated by the evidence of pottery production, representing part of the regionally important Oxford pottery industry.
- 1.3.7 Roman activity in the vicinity of the Churchill Hospital complex is limited to two distinct areas. The remains of Romano-British pottery kilns have been recorded in the south-eastern part of the area and Roman pottery sherds have been identified in the northern part.
- 1.3.8 Small amounts of Roman pottery were recovered from the site of the Oxfordshire Ambulance Service Management HQ Building at the Churchill Hospital. The finds were recovered 440m north-east of the site.
- 1.3.9 Surface indications of kilns on the site of the Churchill Hospital were first noticed in the 19th century. The site of these kilns was inspected in 1953 and they were found to have been totally destroyed. Large quantities of 3rd and 4th century pottery were recovered. The kilns were 323m east of the site. Areas adjacent to the kilns were excavated in the 1970s and a further eight kilns and structures such as drying sheds were identified. During the 1972 excavation evidence for early Roman field systems was also discovered, with pottery in the lower fills dating from the 2nd century or earlier.
- 1.3.10 There are a number of Roman sites within the wider area. The remains of Romano-British potteries have been identified to the north-east and settlement activity west of the site. An evaluation at Warneford Meadow, 344m north-west of the site, identified Iron Age pottery and Roman features. Several Roman ditches and Roman pottery recorded in four trenches on the western side of the meadow suggest the presence of significant remains. A watching brief at Oxford Golf Club, 400m west of the site, found a late Iron Age/early Roman settlement with an iron working industrial area.
- 1.3.11 Roman pottery was found the Lye Valley in 1895, 495m south-east of the site, as well as a coin of Constantius II.
- 1.3.12 A series of kilns with associated finds of pottery and coins was identified in the late 19th century, 523m north-east of the site. Coins of Antoninus Pius and Tetricus the Younger suggest a 2nd-3rd century date for the remains.

### *Anglo Saxon period*

- 1.3.13 Headington is known to have Saxon origins. The name Headington derives from a Saxon personal name, Hedena. During the Saxon and Norman periods Headington was the core of a Royal Manor and is mentioned in a charter of King Ethelred dated 1004.
- 1.3.14 No archaeological remains within the immediate area have been identified that date to the Saxon period.

### *Later Medieval period*

- 1.3.15 The village of Headington is named in the Domesday Book of 1086 and was a substantial settlement with 44 households, assessed for 10 geld units. The village had six lord's plough teams, 14 men's plough teams, two mills and five fisheries. The manor was held by King William at the time of the survey and prior to this it was owned by King Edward. The earliest maps of the area, Davis (1797) and Bryant (1823), both show the site as lying within the open fields to the south of the core of the medieval settlement, and this is likely to reflect the medieval character of the area.
- 1.3.16 Sherds of medieval pottery were identified and recovered from the area of the Oxfordshire Ambulance Service Management HQ Building at the Churchill Hospital, 440m north-east of the site. The absence of associated archaeological features is likely to indicate that the material derives from medieval manuring of the area when it formed part of the South Field of Headington village, on the southern fringe of the parish.

### *Modern*

- 1.3.17 The 1956 1:2500 OS map shows the north-eastern part of the study area had completely changed in character from its rural origins to become part of a large hospital complex. The site was located at the south-west edge of the hospital complex and three small buildings appear to have been located on the western part of the site. The three buildings appear to have been small huts orientated E-W. The huts appear to have been replaced by 1961, as the 1961 1:10,560 OS map shows two N-S huts located on the western part of the site. By the later 20th century these huts had been demolished and a large N-S building appears to have been constructed on the western part of the site and a N-S pathway appears to be situated to the east of the site. This is shown on the 1987 plan of the Churchill Hospital, which shows that Building 9 (Sobell House) was located within the site.

## WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 1.4 Aims

1.4.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- To gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of burial of archaeological remains within the area to be impacted by the development;
- To identify and record any significant remains, particularly of Roman date and especially features that may relate to the Roman pottery manufacturing industry and its supporting infrastructure.

### 1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 A detailed watching brief was maintained for three weeks, during intrusive works that had the potential to impact archaeological remains, specifically during the removal of overburden, ground beam foundations and service trenches.

1.5.2 The work was carried out between 22nd May and 15th June 2018. Trenches were opened on a daily basis in the first part of the day and monitored for archaeological remains. Following confirmation that no archaeological was present, permission was given to backfill the trenches with concrete for the remainder of each day, with no archaeological supervision.

1.5.3 The first week of work involved the removal of garden soils and pathways to a depth of 0.45m. This was then followed by two more weeks of machining ground beam foundation trenches to a depth of 1.5-1.9m below the previous strip, along with foundation pads.

1.5.4 Overburden and foundations trenches were machined using a 360-degree mechanical excavator with a toothless bucket, under the constant supervision of an archaeologist.

## 2 RESULTS

- 2.1.1 The results of the watching brief are presented below. The full details of site with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A.
- 2.1.2 The initial ground reduction strip exposed a natural geology of sand (4) in the eastern part of the site (Area C, Fig. 2). This was overlain in the south-western part of the site by a thin layer of material that was interpreted as *in situ* subsoil (3; Area B, Fig. 2). The absence of subsoil from the majority of the site is likely to be due to truncation during construction of the modern buildings that formerly occupied the site. In the north, west and middle parts of the site there was a thick layer (0.5m-1m) of made ground (2) with inclusions of concrete, brick, pipes and cables (Area A, Fig. 2). Further south and east of this area was a thin layer of made ground overlying the natural, most likely from the construction of the garden area that was removed prior to works. These deposits were overlain by garden soils and pathways (1).
- 2.1.3 No archaeological features were present. The foundations of buildings from the 1940s and 1960s were present c 0.45m below the ground surface. The foundations were 0.5-1m deep. A number of concrete chambers were also noted in various parts of site and were present c 2m below the stripped surface.

### 2.2 Finds summary

- 2.2.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

### 3 DISCUSSION

3.1.1 No archaeological remains were identified during the watching brief. The majority of the site had been heavily truncated by the construction of 20th and 21st century buildings. Any archaeological remains that may have been in the area would most likely have been destroyed during these building works. The southern and eastern areas of the site, which had been identified in the desk-based assessment as having the potential for archaeological survival, showed no evidence of archaeological remains.

## APPENDIX A      CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context no.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1	Topsoil	-	0.45	Mid grey brown sandy silt with brick, concrete and root inclusions	-	Modern
2	Made ground	-	0.5-1.0m	Includes concrete, brick, pipes and cables	-	Modern
3	Subsoil	-	0.5	Mid brown silty sand. Occasional roots	-	-
4	Natural	-	-	Light brownish yellow silty sand	-	-

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## **APPENDIX B      BIBLIOGRAPHY**

OA, 2017 Proposed annex at Sobell House, Churchill Hospital, Oxford: desk-based assessment, Oxford Archaeology unpublished client report

OA, 2018 Sobell House Hospice, Old Road, Headington: written scheme of investigation, archaeological watching brief, Oxford Archaeology unpublished client report



**APPENDIX C****SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

<b>Site name:</b>	Sobell House Hospice, Old Road, Headington, Oxford
<b>Site code:</b>	OXCHSB18
<b>Grid Reference</b>	SP 54312 05723
<b>Type:</b>	Watching Brief
<b>Date and duration:</b>	22nd May-15th June 2018
<b>Area of Site</b>	***
<b>Location of archive:</b>	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2017.161
<b>Summary of Results:</b>	During May and June 2018, Oxford Archaeology undertook a watching brief during groundworks associated with construction of an annex at Sobell House Hospice, Old Road, Headington, Oxford. No archaeological remains were identified. Any potential remains appear to have been removed by 20th and 21st century construction and demolition works, which had disturbed most of the area of the site.





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 Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA,

Figure 1: Site location

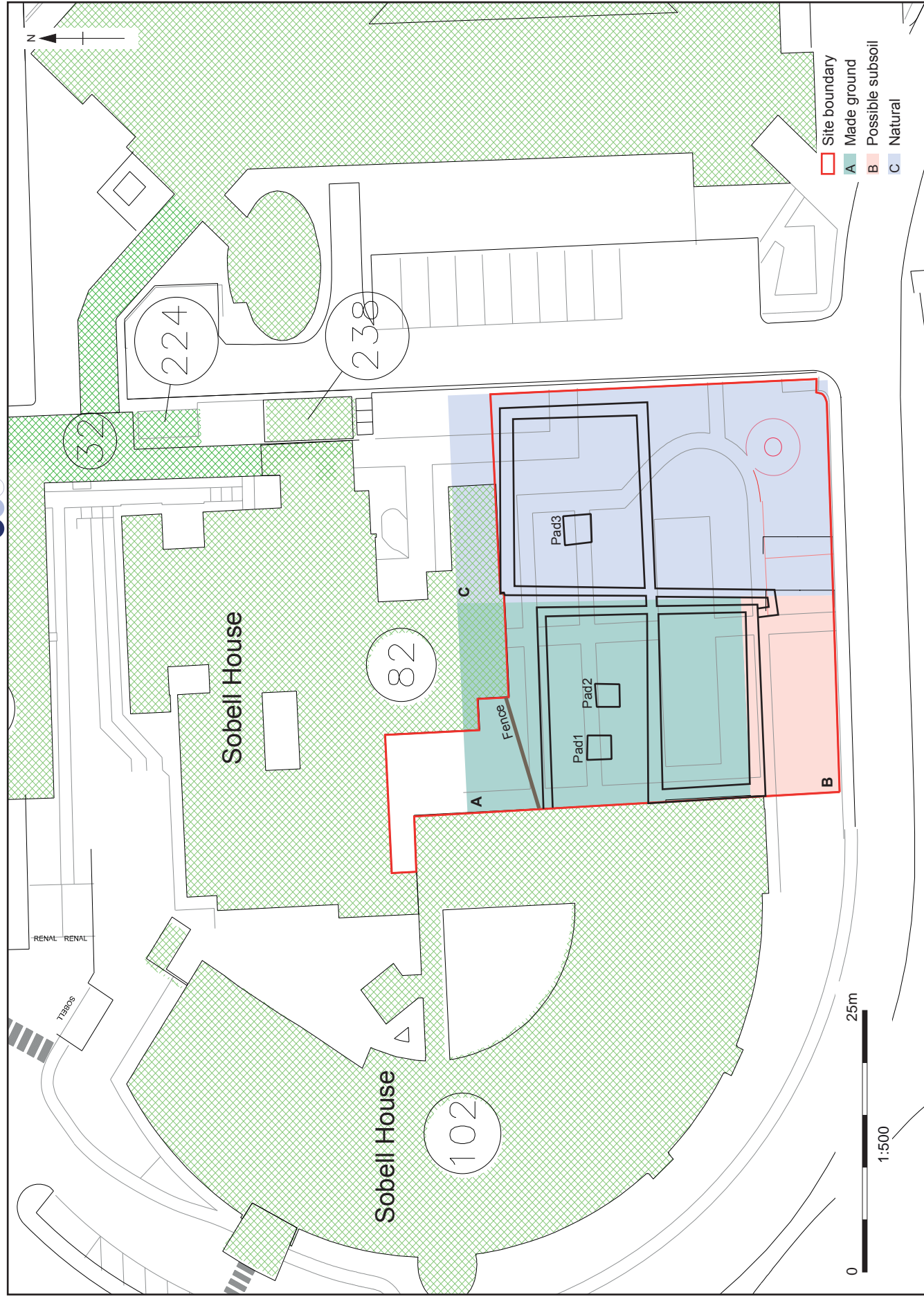


Figure 2: Plan of watching brief



Plate 1: General view of site



Plate 2: Section of ground beam trench showing modern disturbance



Plate 3: Eastern area after initial machine strip



Plate 4: Evidence of ground disturbance after initial machine strip



Plate 5: Section of ground beam trench



Plate 6: Modern concrete truncations within pad 2



Plate 7: Location of pads 1 and 2



Plate 8: Northern area being machined





Plate 9: Pad 3, showing made ground and natural



Plate 10: One of the concrete chambers encountered on site



Plate 11: Foundation trenches filled in with concrete



Plate 12: General view of work being carried out



Plate 13: View of infilled ground beam trenches



Plate 14: Infilled ground beam trenches in the eastern part of site



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