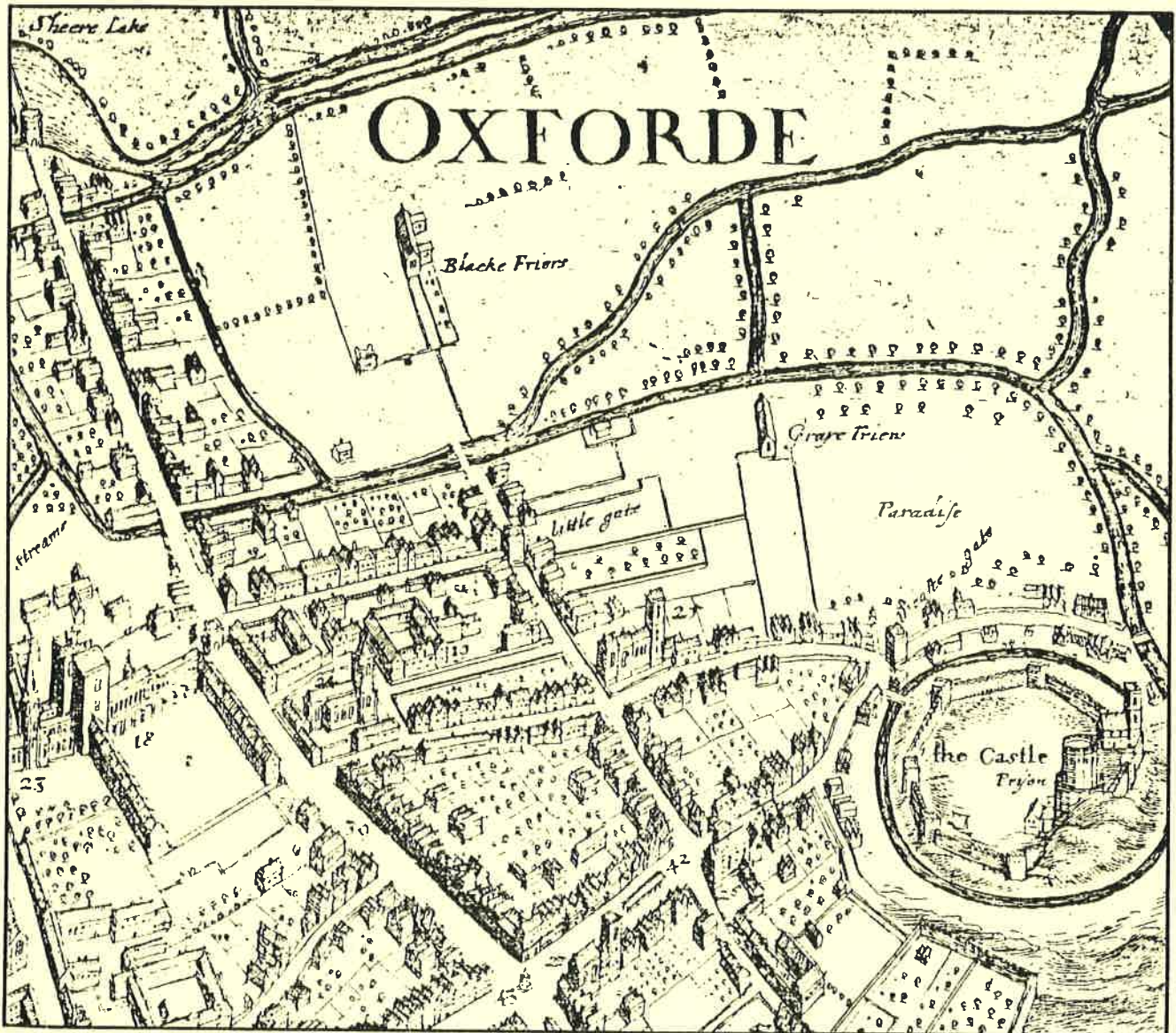


Paradise Square, Oxford

NGR SP 5100 0597
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Archaeological Evaluation Report



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

July 1994

PARADISE SQUARE, OXFORD. OXPSQ94

NGR SP 5100 0507

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) conducted an archaeological evaluation in the SE corner of Paradise Square, Oxford, and found evidence clarifying the original edge of the Trill Mill Stream, medieval gardens associated with the Greyfriars, and the post-medieval nursery gardens.

INTRODUCTION Fig. 1.

Laing Homes have proposed the construction of dwellings on the site of the former St. Ebbes School in the SE corner of Paradise Square, Oxford, (Application No. NFH/350/94).

The site lies within the Area of Archaeological Interest, as defined by Oxford City Council (OCC), and has been highlighted as being of archaeological potential by the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS) to the City Council. A desk based assessment of the site (*Paradise Square, Oxford. Archaeological Desktop Study. OAU Nov. 1993*) identified deposits likely to be affected by the development. These include those relating to the post-medieval nursery garden, the medieval 'Paradise' gardens of the Greyfriars, and a possible pre-Norman defence at the edge of the watercourse which survives as the Trill Mill Stream.

Accordingly an archaeological evaluation was requested to gather information on the type of deposits surviving on the site.

METHODOLOGY

One N-S oriented trench 10 m x 4 m was machine excavated to an initial depth of approximately 1 m, using a JCB equipped with a toothless ditching bucket.

General excavation of deposits was continued in a trench stepped in on all sides by 1 m,

except where modern disturbance was seen to have destroyed any archaeological deposits.

Below a total depth of 2 m the trench was again stepped in by 1 m , continuing down to the natural gravel (2.5 m below present ground level) in the N half of the trench.

Prior to backfilling, the S half of the trench was machine and hand excavated to compare the lower deposits with those revealed in the N half.

All archaeological features were manually cleaned, recorded in section and plan, and photographed. Sufficient of the features were excavated to understand their character and date.

Environmental samples were taken of the garden soils, but, given their poor state of organic preservation, they are, according to Dr Mark Robinson; considered unlikely to add to the archaeological evidence otherwise recovered.

Context recording was by the OAU standard method (OAU Field Manual ed.D. Wilkinson 1992).

The excavation took place from July 14th to 20th 1994.

RESULTS Fig. 2.

Undisturbed natural gravel (131) was located at the N end of the trench at 54.91 OD, and in the machined sondage at the S end at 54.69 OD.

In both cases this was overlaid by a layer of orange brown silty gravel 124, up to 0.08 m in depth. In the S sondage only, this was overlaid by 134, a compact orange grey clay, 0.24 m deep.

Sealing 138 and 124 was a compact mottled green/grey alluvium (123), with gravel inclusions and flecks of charcoal in its surface, varying in depth from 0.30 m in the N to 0.20 m in the S.

Cut into 123 was a feature 121. One edge was identified, oriented WSW and the feature extended beyond the trench to the N, W and E. The revealed cut was steep side and flat bottomed, and cut down into the natural gravel 131. The lower fill was a dark grey/brown silty clay (122), overlaid by a mottled grey/brown silty clay (119). Both contained small lumps of limestone. 122 produced sherds of a late 11th -13th century date, and late 12th -13th century pottery was retrieved from 119.

Sealing feature 121 and overlying 123 was a mixed layer of alluvial green grey silt and darker grey brown silty clay (118). The depth of this layer varied from 0.35 in the N of the trench to 0.30 m in the S. Early/Mid 13th century pottery was recovered from this layer.

A number of features were cut into 118. Five linear features were identified - four oriented W-E and one oriented N-S. In the N of the trench W-E ditch 115, up to 1.2 m wide and up to 0.45 m deep, terminated just against the W section.

To the S was a very shallow W-E gully 126, 0.60 m wide and 0.08 m deep, just N of W-E gully 128, 0.60 m wide and 0.25 m deep.

In the S machined area a W-E gully (133) was partly revealed, just cut by the terminal of N-S gully 135, 0.50 m wide and up to 0.40 m deep.

All these linear features contained similar dark grey brown silty clay fill with inclusions of gravel, tile fragments and small lumps of limestone, and produced pottery dating from the late 11th - late 13th century.

Two small sub-circular pits 117 and 130 were also cut into 118. Both contained dark silty fills and 130 produced early/mid 13th century pottery. 130 appeared to be cut by gully 128 to the N.

In the S end of the trench an irregular and shallow pit (137) was partly revealed against the E section, containing a mixed fill of green/grey silty clay and dark grey brown silty clay. One sherd of late Saxon pottery was recovered from the fill, along with four sherds of the 13th century.

Overlying 118, and sealing all these features was a layer of dark grey/brown silty loam (120), up to 0.20 m deep from which one sherd of late 11th - 13th century pottery was recovered. This was overlaid by 108, a 0.20 m deep layer of dark grey/brown silty clay, with inclusions of gravel and occasional lumps of limestone. Pottery recovered from 108 was mainly residual and of a late 11th - 13th century date, but included two sherds from the 15th century. Both 120 and 108 slumped slightly into the fill of ditch 115.

Sealing 108 were two layers 105 and 106 of dark brown silty loam, totalling up to 0.50 m in depth, and producing pottery of a 17th - 18th century date, and occasional bone and ceramic roof tile. In the W section, a 1.40 m long lens of orange brown silty clay (107) was noted between these two layers.

Over 105, in the N half of the trench was a thin layer of crushed mortar, with fragments of tile and brick. In the S of the trench 104 was overlaid by 111, a dumped deposit of crushed mortar, rubble and sandy silt, with tile and brick fragments. This layer was up to 0.70 m deep in the S section.

The central area of the trench was disturbed by a large pit (109), cut through 105 and 106, filled with mortar, brick and tile fragments, and producing 19th century pottery.

Overlying 104 and the N edge of 111 was a thin spread of silty sand (103). Over 103 and 111 was a series of levelling dumps, 102, and the modern make up (101) and tarmac (100) of the present car park surface.

General

Very small assemblages of animal bone were recovered from the medieval and post medieval contexts, but none were large enough to be diagnostic, or indicated anything other than infrequent domestic rubbish dumping.

DISCUSSION

Although no definitive edge of the Trill Mill Stream was located, the gravel 131 was noticeably more silty in the S sondage, and here also the supranatural layer 124 was overlaid by the alluvial clay 138. This suggests that the N edge of the stream lay close to the S end of the trench.

The lack of evidence for any pre-Norman defensive work and contemporary finds suggest that the site lay outside the defences, and remained undisturbed until the development of the parish of St Budoc, and the establishment of the Friars of the Sack, in the early 13th century. The feature 137 is characteristic of a tree-hole and the late Saxon pottery found within it may well be residual.

The nature and function of earliest feature 121 is not readily identifiable, as it was only partly revealed, but it could possibly be part of a leat, taking water from the stream, with the lower fill 122 representing accumulated silting, and the upper fill 119 being a deliberate infilling, prior to the cutting of the arrangement of gullies 115, 126, 128, 133, and 135, dating to the late 12th/early 13th century.

The regular alignment of these gullies suggest that by the late 13th century the area was being cultivated, possibly as part of the garden of the Friars, or the 'Paradise' of the Greyfriars. The gullies themselves possibly served as drainage for raised cultivation beds. The fragments of tile and rubble within the fills of these gullies suggest that there were buildings nearby, but no trace of any structure was found in the excavation.

The loamy layer 120 suggests that the area lay undisturbed, possibly as an orchard, for some time. This may relate to the period after the suppression of the Friars of the Sack in 1274.

Further cultivation of the area, presumeably during the time that it served as the cemetery/garden area or 'Paradise' of the Greyfriars, is indicated by layer 108. The lack of pottery dating to the 14th and 15th centuries could suggest that the area remained secluded and not subject to the dumping of refuse, as would most likely be the case with a domestic garden.

Evidence of the 17th -18th century garden is indicated by the cultivation layers 105 and 106. Loggan's map of 1675 shows the garden area formally laid out, with the rectangular 'retreats' defined by box hedges and paths. The lack of evidence of bedding trenches or paths may suggest that the excavation trench lies within one of these retreats. The lens of sandy clay (107) may represent the edge of a NS pathway to the W of the trench, but this possibility must be highly speculative, given the insubstantial nature of the evidence.

Layers 104 and 111 appear to represent the clearance of the garden and the development of the Victorian Square, and the composite levelling layer 102 was presumably the infilling prior to the building of St.Ebbe's School in 1858.

IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development includes a sub-basement with a finished floor level c.1.5 m below present ground level. Slab formation and other general disturbance associated with this construction will affect a further 0.50 m. This will remove all deposits above 118, that is, post-13th century remains. The features interpreted as possibly being associated with the garden of the Friars are likely to be exposed with parts perhaps being subject to slight disturbance.

In addition further disturbance of c. 0.50 m will take place in localised areas for the construction of drain runs. This will involve the removal of all archaeological deposits down to the natural gravel in these areas.

CONCLUSION

Given the small scale of the excavation, it seems reasonable to conclude that the area lies N of the edge of the Trill Mill Stream, and outside the Pre- Norman defences. Until the 17th century it served as gardens for St Budocs and later Greyfriars.

Although no 18th century garden features were identified, this might only be due to the position of the trench. The nursery deposits are sealed beneath a considerable depth (1 m) of modern overburden, so it is likely that, if bedding trenches and paths do exist elsewhere, their potential for survival is high.

As required under the OAAS brief, a watching brief will be undertaken during construction works. This will involve the observation of the removal of the lower material for sub-basement construction. Features associated with the 118 horizon will be cleaned, planned and recorded, aiming to provide a record of the garden layout of this period, in the area of the new build. In addition, the excavation of trenches for drains will be observed and the archaeological deposits recorded. Of particular interest will be the depth of alluvium and the number of episodes of alluviation. This may assist in determining the position of the former course of the Trill Mill Stream.

Alan Hardy & John Moore
OAU
August 1994.

Oxford Paradise Square (OXPSQ94)

Pottery Assessment

The pottery assemblage from Paradise Square is comprised of 217 sherds (2.7Kg) of which 84 are Post Medieval, 130 Medieval and 3 late Saxon. All are well known wares in the city of Oxford with a bias towards local products. This conservatism has been noted previously in association with St Thomas parish and appears to be the result of occupation further away from the commercial centre of the city. Throughout the assemblage there appear to be very few residual sherds as a result of well preserved/undisturbed stratigraphy.

The post medieval wares divide into two groups: The larger collection of sherds are of 18th to 20th-century date and are associated with the upper most modern levels on the site (contexts 101, 104 and 110). These wares include Transfer Printed Pearlware, Creamware, Mocha ware, English Porcelain, English Stoneware bottles, Glazed Red earthenwares, Red Basalt, Staffordshire White Salt Glazed stoneware and Nottingham Stoneware. The second smaller group of post medieval sherds are found in the Post Medieval Garden layers (contexts 105 and 106). These include earlier 16th to mid 18th-century earthenware from the post medieval Brill industry and Staffordshire Manganese Speckled Ware. Within these earlier post medieval contexts there are a few residual medieval sherds of Abingdon Fabric A and Brill/Boarstall (Oxford Fabric AM and AW).

The 130 medieval sherds are predominantly of local provenance including Oxford Early Medieval Ware (Fabric AC of mid 11th to late 12th century), Oxford Medieval Ware (Fabric Y of late 11th to mid 13th century), flint and limestone tempered East Wiltshire-type (Oxford Fabric AQ of late 12th to 15th century) and Brill/Boarstall products (Oxford Fabrics AM and AW of 13th to 15th century). All of these wares occur in varying associations which have been used to determine the date of various groups of contexts:

Contexts 108 and 120 (medieval garden) appear to contain an assemblage of early to mid 13th century date, characterised by the association of Oxford Fabrics AW, AM, AQ and Y. This date is suggested by the presence of Fabric Y, the occasional regional import of Abingdon Type A and the introduction of Fabrics AM and AW. There is some disturbance associated with context 108 shown by a residual late Saxon St Neots-type ware bowl and a possibly intrusive 14th to 15th century Tudor Green-type lobed cup.

Contexts 114, 125, 127, 129, 132, 134 and 136 are from various ditches/gullies which do not appear to differ greatly in date. All are characterised by the same association of Oxford Fabrics AQ, Y and AM or AW suggesting an early to mid 13th century date. Contexts 127 and 136 contain residual late Saxon St Neots-type Ware and Oxford Fabric CD.

Context 118 (alluvium below the ditches/gullies) contains exactly the same type and date of assemblage as the above ditches/gullies.

Contexts 119 and 122 (large ditch) contain sherds of the same large bowl in Oxford Fabric Y. Although there are only a small number of sherds in these contexts the predominant types are Oxford Fabrics Y and AQ, indicating a date in the late 12th to early 13th centuries. Two sherds of Oxford Fabric AW in context 119 might indicate that this

uppermost context is slightly later in date, of early to mid 13th century.

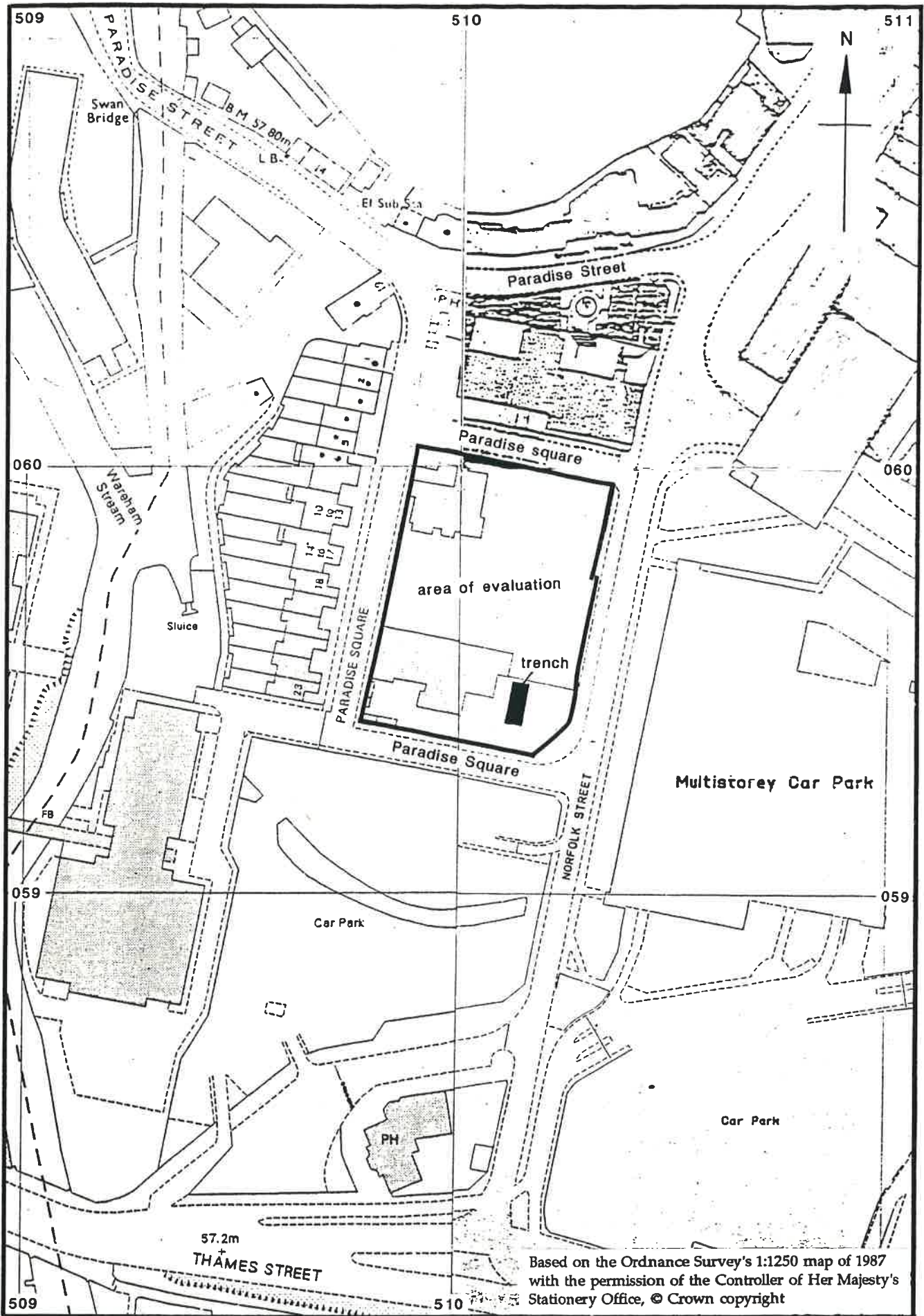
Three late Saxon (10th to late 11th century) sherds include two St Neots-type Ware bowls and one 10th-century sherd of Oxford Fabric CD. These sherds are residual in contexts 108, 127 and 136.

PARADISE SQUARE, OXFORD. OXPSQ94

Table of Contexts

CXT	TYPE	WIDTH	DEPTH	DATE	COMMENTS	FINDS-Sherds/Date
100	LAYER	-	0.20-0.32	MOD	TARMAC AND MAKEUP	-
101	LAYER	-	0.25	MOD	MOD BURIED TOPSOIL	24/ Late 18th-20th c
102	LAYER	-	0.30	MOD	COMPOSITE DUMPING	INCORPORATED WITH 101
103	LAYER	-	<0.20	MOD	DUMP/ACCUMULATION	INCORPORATED WITH 104
104	LAYER	-	<0.05	MOD	N SPREAD OF DEMO 111	44/ 17th-20th c.
105	LAYER	-	<0.35	E.MOD	PRE-19c GARDEN SOIL	2/ 16th-mid 18th c.
106	LAYER	-	<0.18	P.MED	17c CULTIVATION	2/ 17th-18th c. 1/ 13th-15th c.
107	LAYER	1.40 NS	<0.06	P.MED	DEPOSIT	-
108	LAYER	-	<0.20	L.MED	CULTIVATION	1/ 10th-11th c. 10/ 11th-13th c. 13/ 11th-13th c. 44/ 13th-15th c.
109	FILL	-	>0.45	MOD	FILL OF 110/ NOT EX.	-
110	PIT	2.5 DIA	>0.45	MOD	19c DEMOLITION PIT	11/ 18th-20th c.
111	LAYER	-	<0.70	MOD	19c DEMO/ CONSTRUCTION DUMP	-
112	FILL	-	>1.00	MOD	FILL OF 113	-
113	PIT	1.50 DIA	>1.00	MOD	19/20c RUBBISH PIT	
114	FILL	-	<0.15	MED	FILL OF 115	13/ Early/Mid 13th
115	DITCH TERMINAL	<1.20	<0.45	MED	W-E. RELATED TO 133, 135, 126, 128?	
116	FILL	-	0.30	MED	FILL OF 117	-
117	PIT	0.60 NS 0.50 WE	0.30	MED	TREE HOLE?	
118	LAYER	-	<0.30	MED	MIXED CULTIVATION/ ALLUVIUM	12/ Early /Mid 13th
119	FILL	-	<0.40	MED	UPPER FILL OF 121	6/ Late 12th c. 2/ Early 13th c.
120	LAYER	-	<0.20	MED	BURIED TOPSOIL	1/ Late 11th-13th c.
121	FEATURE	-	<0.48	MED	POSS. CHANNEL EDGE	
122	FILL	-	<0.30	MED	LOWER FILL OF 121	2/ Late 11th-13th c.
123	LAYER	-	<0.14	-	ALLUVIUM	-
124	LAYER	-	<0.10	-	SUPERNATURAL	-
125	FILL	-	<0.08	MED	FILL OF 126	1/ Late 11th-13th c.

126	CUT	0.62	<0.08	MED	W-E GULLY	
127	FILL	-	<0.32	MED	FILL OF 128	1/ 10th-11th c. 7/ Late 12th-13th c. 1/ 13th-15th c.
128	DITCH	0.57	<0.32	MED	W-E RELATED TO 115, 126, 133, 135?	
129	FILL	-	<0.15	MED	FILL OF 130	1/ Early/Mid 13th c.
130	PIT	0.50 NS 0.35 WE	<0.15	MED	TREE HOLE? SIMILAR TO 117	
131	NATURAL	-	-	-	GRAVEL	-
132	FILL	-	<0.15	MED	FILL OF 133	1/ Early/Mid 13th c.
133	GULLY	>0.25	<0.15	MED	W-E RELATED TO 115, 126, 128, 135?	
134	FILL	-	<0.40	MED	FILL OF 135	4/ Early/Mid 13th c.
135	DITCH	0.65	<0.40	MED	N-S RELATED TO 115, 126, 128, 133?	
136	FILL	-	<0.30	MED	FILL OF 137	1/ 10th c. 4/ Early/Mid 13th c.
137	FEATURE	NS 1.50	<0.30	MED	TREE HOLE?	
138	LAYER	-	<0.28	-	NATURAL CLAY	

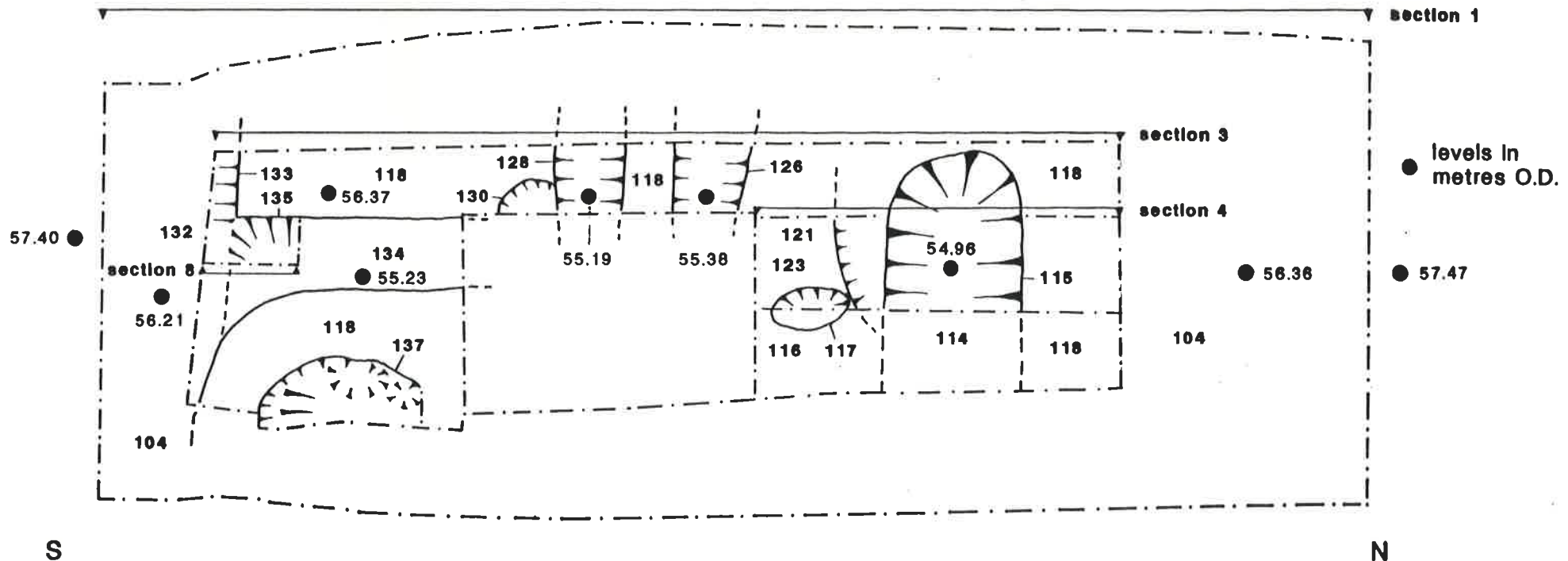


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scale 1:1250

site location plan

figure 1



composite of sections 1, 3 & 4

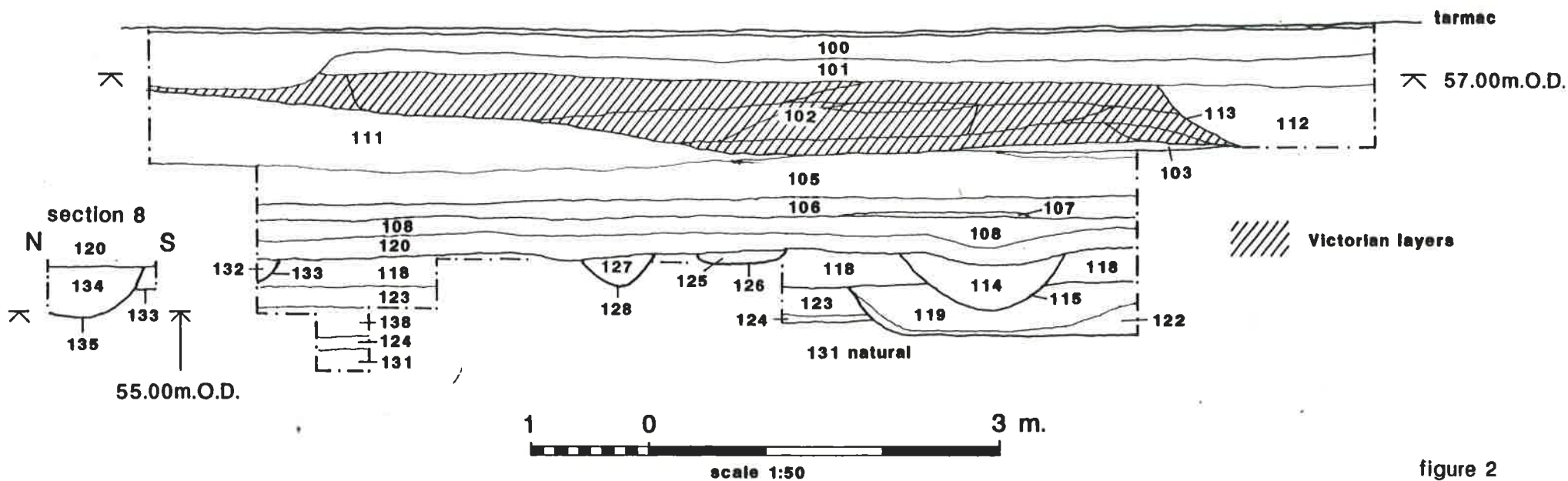


figure 2

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