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Rover Group  
New Rover  
Integrated Logistics Centre  
Watlington Road  
Cowley

*Archaeological Watching Brief*

NGR SP 4557 2037

Prepared by: <i>R.J. Pyle</i> Date: <i>12<sup>th</sup> March 1998</i>
Checked by: <i>M.R. Roberts</i> Date: <i>12/March 1998</i>
Approved by: <i>R. Williams</i> HEAD OF FIELDWORK Date: <i>13/3/1998</i>

Oxford Archaeological Unit  
Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford OX2 0ES

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New Rover Integrated Logistics Centre, Watlington Road, Cowley  
Archaeological Watching Brief  
NGR SP 455700 203700

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The development proposed at the above site comprises the removal of railway tracks and up to 3 m of deposits in preparation for the Integrated Logistics Building. The site occupies an area of c. 14,400 square metres. An Archaeological Recording Action was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) after a possible buried surface was observed in geotechnical trial pits dug in July 1997.
- 1.2 The site is located on the southern edge of the Rover Group Cowley Car Plant (NGR SP 455700 203700). The site is bounded to the west by Watlington Road and the Cowley Works to the north and east. The geology comprises sand and calcareous sand stone of the Berkley Sand Member, part of the Corallian Formation (BGS sheet 237). The geotechnical trial pits showed a layer of made ground which varied from 0.4 m to at least 3.5 m thick.

## 2 Archaeological Background

- 2.1 The site lies within an area of archaeological potential. Excavations by the OAU at the new Rover Quality Building and the new paintshop, to the north of the site along Roman Way (a major Roman road between Alchester and Dorchester-on-Thames) revealed limited evidence of late Bronze Age and early Iron Age activity. A late Bronze Age/early Iron Age settlement has been excavated by the OAU on the line of the new peripheral road. These two sites indicate late prehistoric activity in the area. Activity of this date has been detected more commonly on the river gravels due to the high visibility of cropmarks and topsoil stripping of large areas for gravel extraction.
- 2.2 A desk-top survey, prepared for these sites demonstrated that there was a very strong background of Romano-British discoveries around the site. Burials were found in 1940 to the west of Roman Way, north of the site, and further burials were found c500 m to the north. Roman settlement is recorded to the south of the site and Roman pottery and coins have been found at Northfield Farm, to the east of the site. Ditches, possible wall foundations and a kiln were uncovered close to Roman Way where it is crossed by the Watlington Road.
- 2.3 The area was the focus of the Oxfordshire Roman pottery industry which it is thought lay within an extensive pattern of rural settlement, although at present is not clearly understood. Such settlements may have mainly been

farms and hamlets rather than major centres, and they may have had small burial plots or larger cemeteries.

### 3 Methodology

- 3.1 The original intention was to monitor (and in sensitive areas control) the removal of the made ground. Areas where the preserved ground surface survived were to be fenced off to facilitate the recording of the deposits. The overburden was removed by large mechanical excavators using toothed buckets to a depth of c1.8 m at the south-west end of the site to c 2.5 m at the north-east end. Tarmac, concrete and building rubble was removed from site, but the made-ground deposits were retained to be used in the stabilisation process. The removal of only some of the overburden was observed as much of the site had already been excavated. Selected areas of the bulk sections were cleaned and the deposits were recorded. A photographic record was made. Particular attention was paid to the area in the location of geotechnical trial pit C (see 4.1 below).
- 3.2 The later excavation of the area to the north of the *travelling crane* tracks, comprising warehouses, was not monitored (see figure). A subsequent visit on 12th March 1998 revealed that excavations for the connecting tunnel had been carried out.

### 4 Results

- 4.1 All of the monitored trial pits revealed made-ground, presumably to level off and raise the area for the construction of the railyard. The made-ground consisted of loose coal, clinker and roadstone and in the case of trial pit J and trial pit H, this overlaid a layer (0.30m) of dumped clay, which in turn overlaid the natural. This type of material is fairly typical of other parts of the Rover Car Plant which have been observed in the past (the new paint shop and the site of the old J Block which is now Tesco etc):

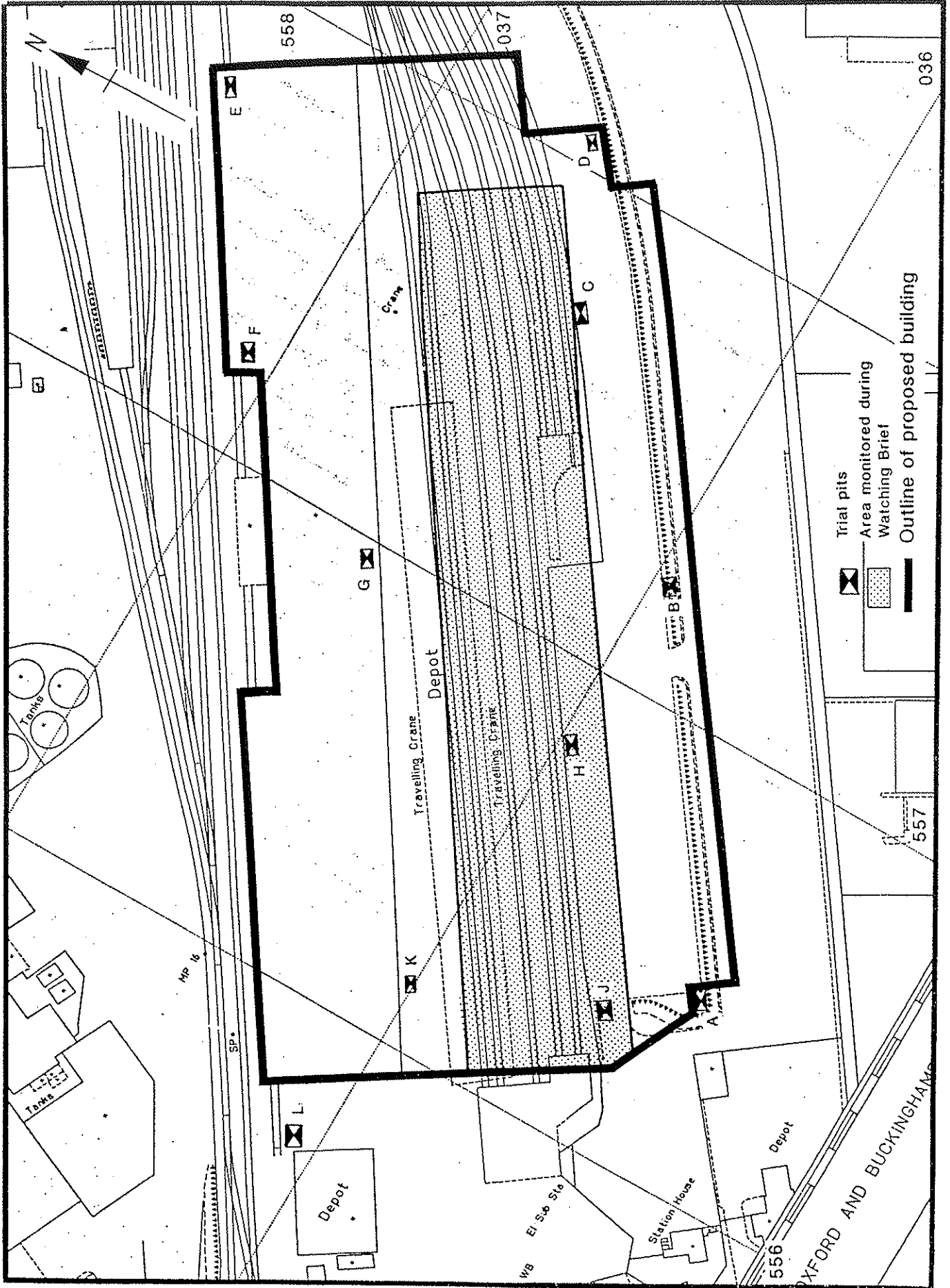
<i>Trial Pit</i>	<i>Depth of Made Ground below present ground surface</i>	<i>Description</i>
J	1.5m	
H	0.90m	
C	1.80m	Possible earlier ?ploughsoil identified at 1.80m.
D	0.40m	Situated on lower ground, to north is c.3m bank.




4.2 The deposits encountered during extraction were uniform in character throughout the site and reflected the results of the majority of the trial pits. A layer of orange brown clayey sand which was at least 0.3 m thick was encountered at the base of the excavations. A loose, dark grey layer of made ground comprising ash, clinker, coal and rubbish (domestic and industrial) overlay the orange sand. The backfill deposit was at least 0.4 m thick at the south-west end of the site and increased to 2 m at the north-east end. No archaeology was observed.

## 5 Conclusions

5.1 No archaeological deposits were encountered during the extraction process. The bulk of deposits were dumped rubbish deposits of made ground and appeared to relate to the construction of the railway during the middle part of this century. Any archaeology that may have been present is likely to have been removed before the deposition of the made ground, probably during the railway works. The possible buried soil identified in geotechnical trial pit C would appear to have been very localised.

Oxford Archaeological Unit  
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-  Trial pits
-  Area monitored during watching brief
-  Outline of proposed building