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Prepared by: Mark Dodd (Project Officer)
Checked by: Ben Ford (Senior Project Manager)
Edited by: Leo Webley (Head of Post-Excavation)
Approved for Issue by: David Score (Head of Fieldwork)
Signature:



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OA South

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford
OX2 0ES

t. +44 (0)1865 263 800

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridge
CB23 8SQ

t. +44 (0)1223 850 500

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane Mills
Moor Lane
Lancaster
LA1 1QD

t. +44 (0)1524 880 250

e. info@oxfordarch.co.uk

w. oxfordarchaeology.com

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Chief Executive Officer
Ken Welsh, BSc. MCIFA
Private Limited Company, No: 1618597
Registered Charity, No: 285627
Registered Office: Oxford Archaeology Ltd
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES

The Yard, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Mark Dodd

*With contributions from John Cotter and illustrations by
Matt Bradley*

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology were commissioned by Turnberry to undertake an archaeological watching brief to monitor ground investigation works in advance of development at Oxford Brookes University, Headington Hill campus. The work took place over a period of three days from 8th to 10th March 2022.

The groundworks revealed a relatively uniform sequence of a possible buried soil or disturbed land surface overlain by crushed chalk and tarmac forming the current car park. Pottery and ceramic building material fragments of post-medieval date were recovered from a deposit beneath the car park, but otherwise no significant archaeological remains were encountered.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Turnberry for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to David Radford who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Ben Ford. The fieldwork was carried out by Gary Evans, and the figures were created by Matt Bradley. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen and 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 Turnberry, on behalf of Oxford Brookes University, to undertake a watching brief on ground investigation works in advance of a proposed development.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken to inform the Planning Authority in advance of a submission of a Planning Application. Although the Local Planning Authority did not set a brief for the work, discussions with David Radford, Archaeologist for Oxford City Council (OCC) established the scope of work required and a written scheme of investigation (WSI) was produced by OA prior to carrying out the investigations (OA 2022a). This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements and details the results of the investigation.
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Code of Conduct (CifA 2014a) and Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (CifA 2014b), and local and national planning policies.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site is located on Headington Hill, at c 95m aOD, and 1.5km east of central Oxford. It is within Headington, a suburb of Oxford, and was previously part of the parish of St Clement's until 1836.
- 1.2.2 The site is situated on the north side of Headington Road within the Oxford Brookes University Headington Campus. It is currently in use as a car park to the east of the Richard Hamilton Building. It is bounded to the north and east by a stone wall, to the south by a mid-19th-century lodge building and to the west by the Richard Hamilton Building, an access road and associated landscaping. Headington Hill Hall, a Grade II* listed building is located 150m west of the site.
- 1.2.3 The underlying bedrock geology of the site is sandstone of the Beckley Sand Member a sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 157 to 164 million years ago in the Jurassic Period. There are no superficial deposits mapped for the site (BGS online).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in a desk-based assessment produced by OA (2022b). This information was summarised in the WSI (OA 2022a) for the works and is repeated below for reference.

Prehistoric period (500,000 BP–AD 43)

- 1.3.2 No prehistoric activity has been recorded within the site boundary and no evidence of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic or Bronze Age activity has been recorded in the immediate vicinity. A probable Iron Age settlement was recorded during a watching brief at Headington School, located 200m east of the site. This investigation recorded early Iron Age pits which produced 110 sherds of pottery of later prehistoric date.

Fired clay, worked flint, unworked stone, charcoal and burnt bone were also recorded in the pits. These features may relate to an early Iron Age domestic site located nearby, as the main focus of the settlement was not recorded. Residual later prehistoric pottery was also recorded within Roman features during an excavation at Headington School located 400m north-east of the site.

Romano-British period (AD 43–410)

- 1.3.3 There appears to have been a number of small rural Roman settlements within the wider Oxford area along with an extensive pottery-production industry operating within east and south-east Oxford. The closest of the pottery-production sites is the complex of kilns recorded in the 1970s at the Churchill Hospital, located 1km south-east of the site (Young 1972; 1973; 1974).
- 1.3.4 Seven ditches and four gullies were recorded during an excavation at Headington School, located 400m north-east of the site. The majority of these features were dated to the early Roman period, although residual Iron Age pottery was also recorded. It is possible that the ditches were part of a rectilinear layout such as for a field or paddock. One gully also contained 120 sherds of early Roman pottery which tentatively suggests that contemporary occupation lay in the vicinity (TVAS 2008).

Early medieval period (AD 410–1065)

- 1.3.5 Several loom weights made of clay were found 50m south of the site in 1876 during excavation of a reservoir at the top of Headington Hill. It is possible that the loom weights were of Saxon date as they are recorded by the Victoria County History as baked clay rings (Salzman 1939, 356). This may indicate the presence of Saxon activity close to the site, although no further evidence of Saxon finds, or features have been recorded in the vicinity of the site.
- 1.3.6 Part of an early Saxon cemetery was recorded 1km north-east of the site during a watching brief at 2 Stephens Road, Oxford in 2002. The investigation recorded a female inhumation grave with a number of grave goods dating to the 6th century AD (OA 2003). It is possible this burial may have been associated with an early Saxon settlement located c 1km north-east of the site.
- 1.3.7 In AD 1004, a charter dating to the reign of King Ethelred gave three hides beyond Cherwell Bridge to the monastery of St Frideswide's. Two of these hides had previously belonged to the royal manor of Headington (Lobel 1957, 258–66). It is therefore possible that during the later Saxon period the site was part of the royal manor of Headington, the focus of which may have been Old Headington located 1km north-east of the site. The site may have been used as part of arable land or pasture during this period.

Later medieval period (1066–1550)

- 1.3.8 The site is located in the area of the manor and later parish of St Clement's. The manor was known as Bruggeset (Bridset) or Bolshipton (Boldshipton, Bowlshipton). The manor of Bruggeset/Bolshipton was owned by the monastery of St Frideswide's

until the dissolution, after which John Brome (or Browne), lord of Headington manor, bought it in 1547 (Lobel 1957, 258–66).

- 1.3.9 During the later medieval period, the site and the study area was probably in use as part of arable and pasture fields associated with the parish of St Clement's. The LiDAR survey indicates that areas of ridge-and-furrow earthworks survive in the south-western part of the study area. These features appear to be aligned NE–SW, following the line of the slope, and may be truncated by later features aligned north–south and NW–SE. During the later medieval period, ridge and furrow may have covered more of the study area but later development has removed any above-ground remains.
- 1.3.10 A medieval drove road may have been located 300m south of the site, following Cheney Lane. This road was turnpiked in 1719.

Post-medieval period (1550–1900)

- 1.3.11 The area remained rural and sparsely populated until the mid-19th century. The urban development in the early post-medieval period was concentrated in St Clement's parish around Magdalen Bridge located 1km south-west of the site. Several farms were located in the study area in the 17th and 18th century along Pullen's Road and Cheneys Road. A 17th-century farm was located at Pullen's Gate (Brocklease Farm) located 200m north-east of the site with an associated barn. An 18th-century barn was located at Cheneys Farm, 450m south-east of the site. In the 1770s and 1780s Headington Road was straightened and turnpiked, and this may have led to further linear development along this road (Oxford City Council nd, 12). Davis' map of 1797 indicates that in the later 18th century the site was probably part of a large open field.
- 1.3.12 During the later stages of the Civil War (1644–46), the site was, based on current understanding, located east of the Parliamentary siege lines, marked by an entrenchment with several bastions established on Headington Hill. Thomas Fairfax, the general of the New Model Army, established these lines and an encampment to attack Royalist Oxford and cut off access from the east. In 1644 Bernard de Gomme, a Royalist engineer, mapped both the Royalist defence lines around Oxford and the Parliamentary siege lines. His mapping of the Royalist defences was probably more accurate than his location of the Parliamentary siege lines and entrenchment on Headington Hill, which he must have viewed from a distance or gained information about from covert intelligence. The extent of the Parliamentary siege lines has only been partially mapped by the Oxford HER.
- 1.3.13 In 2007, OA undertook a detailed study of Oxford Brookes Headington Campus and assessed the potential for Civil War features (OA 2007). The study located the approximate position of the Parliamentary siege lines on Headington Hill based on de Gomme's map, aerial photographs, topographical information and a walkover survey which recorded a NW–SE aligned linear in South Park. This indicates the site was probably located away to the east of large Parliamentary entrenchment and siege defences. The entrenchment comprised three bastions west of the site, probably linked by a ditch and bank. The lines continued north-west through Headington Hill Park and south-west through South Park. The LiDAR survey indicated

a probable fortlet and section of ditch in Headington Hill Park, which were probably part of the lines. This feature clearly cuts the earlier ridge and furrow in this area. This information suggests that further work is needed to map the Parliamentary siege lines more accurately.

- 1.3.14 The entrenchment was used as a Parliamentary camp for 3000 men in 1645 before the second siege of Oxford (Barratt 2015, 199). The location of this camp within the large area demarcated by the siege lines is uncertain but there remains a possibility that some elements of this may have been located within the vicinity of the development site.
- 1.3.15 The location of the original later 18th-century Headington Hill Hall is unknown. Davis' map of 1797 does not show any house just west of the site, on the site of the 19th-century Headington Hall. It may be that the original house was located just north or south of Headington Road and west of the site. The Morell family subsequently brought the land and built Headington Hill Hall 150m west of the site between 1817–24 (Oxford City Council nd, 12–13). This early 19th-century house can be seen on the St Clement's tithe map of 1865 which shows a square building located 150m west of the site.
- 1.3.16 In 1856–58, James Morell's son, James, built an Italianate mansion which overshadowed the older house. The 1865 tithe map must have been created before the new mansion was built as it is not shown. The site is shown on this map as part of land parcel 1, which was owned by the trustees of James Morell and was an arable field located east of Headington Hill Hall. The house was surrounded by Headington Hill Park, which is labelled on the 1880 OS map. In the later 19th century, Headington Hill Park was connected to South Park by a bridge over Headington Road.
- 1.3.17 The 1880 OS map shows that a driveway had been created leading to Headington Hill Hall from Headington Road. Two lodges had been constructed at entrances to the hall from the main road, one just south of the site. Several paths intersected within the southern part of the site and just north of the Lodge. One long thin building was located within the eastern part of the site in 1880, adjacent to the eastern boundary wall. This may have been a garden shed or workshop building associated with grounds maintenance. By 1899, this outbuilding had been demolished and a new U-shaped building had been constructed just west of the site. This is the eastern part of the Richard Hamilton building which is still extant.

Modern

- 1.3.18 The OS map of 1939 shows little change in the use of the site from 1899. It was used as a part of an access road and gardens to the east of the Richard Hamilton building and as an access road to Headington Hill House. By the 1960s, the Richard Hamilton building had increased in size and an access road and probably car park had been constructed within the site. A large Pergamon Press building was constructed to the south of the site.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The general aim of the archaeological works was to mitigate the impacts of the intrusive groundworks on any buried archaeological remains that may be present. This was to be achieved through the recording of any archaeological features and deposits present by written, drawn and photographic record.

2.2 Specific aims and objectives

2.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the watching brief were:

- i. To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present;
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;
- iii. To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence;
- iv. To contextualise the findings within the local and regional landscapes;
- v. To disseminate the results of the archaeological works through the production of a fieldwork report.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 A programme of archaeological monitoring was undertaken alongside the ground investigations, which included both machine- and hand-excavated test pits. The extent and layout of the ground investigations are detailed in Figure 2. In a change to the proposed layouts presented in the WSI, HP2 was relocated away from the car park area towards the eastern edge of the site. Also, an additional hand-dug test pit, HP7, was excavated on the eastern boundary and SA2 was not excavated. A total of five machine excavated test pits were excavated (TP's 1-5), seven hand dug test pits (HP's 1-7) and three soakaway pits (SA's 1, 3 and 4).

2.3.2 The watching brief was maintained during all groundworks with the potential to disturb archaeological deposits or features and were monitored to their full depth. The revealed sequences were then recorded and any finds were recovered.

2.3.3 The work was undertaken in accordance with the ClfA Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (ClfA 2014b).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the watching brief are presented below and include a stratigraphic description of the deposits observed during the investigations. Finds data and spot dates are tabulated in Appendix A.

3.2 Ground conditions

3.2.1 Ground conditions throughout the watching brief were generally good, and the site remained dry throughout. Although the interventions were limited in size, the deposits were easily identifiable.

3.3 General distribution of deposits

3.3.1 Overall, a relatively uniform sequence of deposits was recorded across the site. Beneath the area of the car park the natural geology of sand was overlain by a possible buried soil horizon that was typically represented by a grey-brown sandy clay deposit. This was sealed beneath a layer of crushed chalk and a layer of tarmac.

3.3.2 The two hand-dug test pits, HP2 and HP7, were located to the east of the car park, in a grass verge against the existing boundary wall. Both pits revealed backfill deposits filling the construction cut of the wall. This was sealed beneath a layer of grass turf.

3.3.3 TP2 (Plate 1) revealed a slightly different sequence of deposits to the other pits excavated in the car park. A mid-brown, silty sand deposit (002) with charcoal flecks was observed between 0.4m and 1m below ground level. Even at a depth of 1m, the natural geology was not revealed. It is possible that this represents the fill of a cut feature, but no finds were recovered from this deposit and the limited scope of the work prevents any firm conclusions about the nature of this material.

3.3.4 In TP5 (Plate 2) the possible buried soil layer represented by deposit 003 contained a number of artefacts including two sherds of post-medieval pottery, a pipe stem of 17th to 18th century date and two pieces of CBM.

3.3.5 A full summary of the deposits observed is provided in Appendix A.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 Due to the good weather and ground conditions that were encountered during this investigation the observations made are considered to be a reliable representation of the remains present. It is of course difficult to interpret the results given the small windows that these interventions provided and it should be noted that they only represent a very small portion of the site.

4.2 Interpretation

4.2.1 The investigation revealed no significant archaeological remains. Overall, the results indicate the survival or remnants of a possible soil horizon or disturbed ground beneath a layer of crushed chalk. The chalk was evidently laid down as a foundation layer for the current tarmac surface. The deeper sequence of deposits and lack of natural geology observed in TP2 may represent evidence for a cut feature. But the lack of associated finds means it is difficult to determine if this was a horticultural feature in the grounds of Headington Hill Hall, or something more significant. The small assemblage of finds from beneath the car park provides no evidence for activity on the site prior to the 17th century, though these interventions represent only a small fraction of the proposed development area.

4.3 Significance

4.3.1 Due to the lack of distinct archaeological features and limited scope, these results are considered to be of low significance.

APPENDIX A TEST PIT SUMMARIES

Table 1: Trial pits

	Deposit	Depth bgl (m)
TP1 (2.5m x 0.7m)	Tarmac	0-0.1
	Crushed chalk	0.1-0.4
	Grey brown silty clay – Possible soil horizon	0.4-0.6
	Natural	0.6+
TP2 (1.1m x 0.6m)	Tarmac	0-0.1
	Crushed chalk	0.1-0.4
	(002) Mid brown silty sand with charcoal flecks – possible fill	0.4-1+
TP3 (2.4m x 0.7m)	Tarmac	0-0.1
	Chalk	0.1-0.4
	Mid grey brown sandy clay	0.4-0.7
	Natural (coarse sand)	0.7-0.1
	Natural (clay sand)	0.1+
TP4 (2.4m x 0.7m)	Tarmac	0-0.15
	Type 1	0.15-0.20
	Crushed chalk	0.2-0.3
	Grey sandy clay	0.3-0.5
	Natural	0.5-0.86+
TP5 (2.3m x 0.75m)	Tarmac	0-0.1
	Crushed chalk	0.1-0.4
	(003), grey silty clay with charcoal, pottery and CBM	0.4-0.6
	Natural	0.6-0.7+

Table 2: Hand-dug test pits

	Deposit	Depth bgl (m)
HP1 (0.4m x 0.4m)	Tarmac	0-0.1
	Crushed chalk	0.1-0.4
	Natural	0.4-0.6+
HP2 (0.4m x 0.4m)	Topsoil	0-0.2
	(001) - Backfill of boundary wall foundations	0.2-1.15+
HP3 (0.4m x 0.4m)	Tarmac	0-0.1
	Crushed chalk	0.1-0.28
	Greyish brown sandy clay	0.28-0.33
	Natural	0.33-1.1+
HP4 (0.4m x 0.4m)	Tarmac	0-0.1
	Crushed chalk	0.1-0.4
	Grey brown silty clay	0.4-0.65
	Natural	0.65-1.05+

HP5 (0.4m x 0.4m)	Tarmac	0-0.1
	Type 1	0.1-0.18
	Crushed chalk	0.18-0.25
	Grey sandy clay	0.25-0.4
	Natural	0.4-0.96+
HP6 (0.4m x 0.4m)	Tarmac	0-0.1
	Crushed chalk	0.1-0.3
	Mid-grey silty clay	0.3-0.6
	Natural	0.6-1.2+
HP7 (0.4m x 0.4m)	Topsoil	0-0.2
	Backfill of boundary wall foundations	0.2-0.8

Table 3: Soakaway pits

	Deposit	Depth bgl (m)
SA1 (2.3m x 0.74m)	Tarmac	0-0.14
	Crushed chalk	0.14-0.4
	Grey-brown sandy clay, charcoal and clinker	0.4-0.5
	Natural	0.5-2.3+
SA2	Not excavated	
SA3 (1m x 0.45m)	Tarmac	0-0.1
	Crushed chalk	0.1-0.4
	Brown-grey silty clay	0.4-0.5
	Natural	0.5-1+
SA4 (0.4m x 0.4m)	Tarmac	0-0.1
	Crushed chalk	0.1-0.3
	Light brown, sandy clay	0.3-0.42
	Natural	0.42-1.1+

APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

By John Cotter

Introduction

B.1.1 Two sherds of pottery weighing 16g were recovered from the same context. Given the small quantity present, this has not been separately catalogued but is fully described and spot-dated below. Post-medieval fabric codes referred to are those of the Museum of London (MOLA 2014).

Description

B.1.2 **Context (003) Spot-date: c 1730–1800.** Description: 2 sherds (weight 16g). Two small abraded sherds of post-medieval Brill slipware (Fabric BRSL, c 1650–1800). Includes the flat base of a dish and a smaller sherd probably from a separate dish. The larger dish base is decorated internally with trailed white slip lines with green glaze highlights and a glossy clear brown glaze over this. The smaller sherd also has traces of white slip decoration. The presence of green highlights in the decoration dates this to c 1730–1800. This is a common post-medieval ware in the Oxford area.

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

B.1.3 The pottery has little potential for further analysis and may be discarded, if so desired.

B.2 Clay tobacco pipe

By John Cotter

Introduction and methodology

B.2.1 A single piece of clay pipe weighing 2g was recovered. Given the small quantity present, this has not been separately catalogued but is fully described and spot-dated below.

Description

B.2.2 **Context (003) Spot-date: Late 17th to 18th century?** Description: 1 piece (weight 2g). A small piece of pipe stem (length 17mm) in a fine sandy off-white fabric typical of 17th–18th pipes in the Oxford area. The piece is lightly burnished and has a stem bore diameter of c 2mm suggesting a late 17th to 18th century dating.

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

B.2.3 The piece has little potential for further analysis and may be discarded, if so desired.

B.3 CBM

By John Cotter

Introduction and methodology

B.3.1 Two pieces of CBM weighing 89g were recovered from the same context. Given the small quantity present, this has not been separately catalogued but is fully described and spot-dated below.

Description

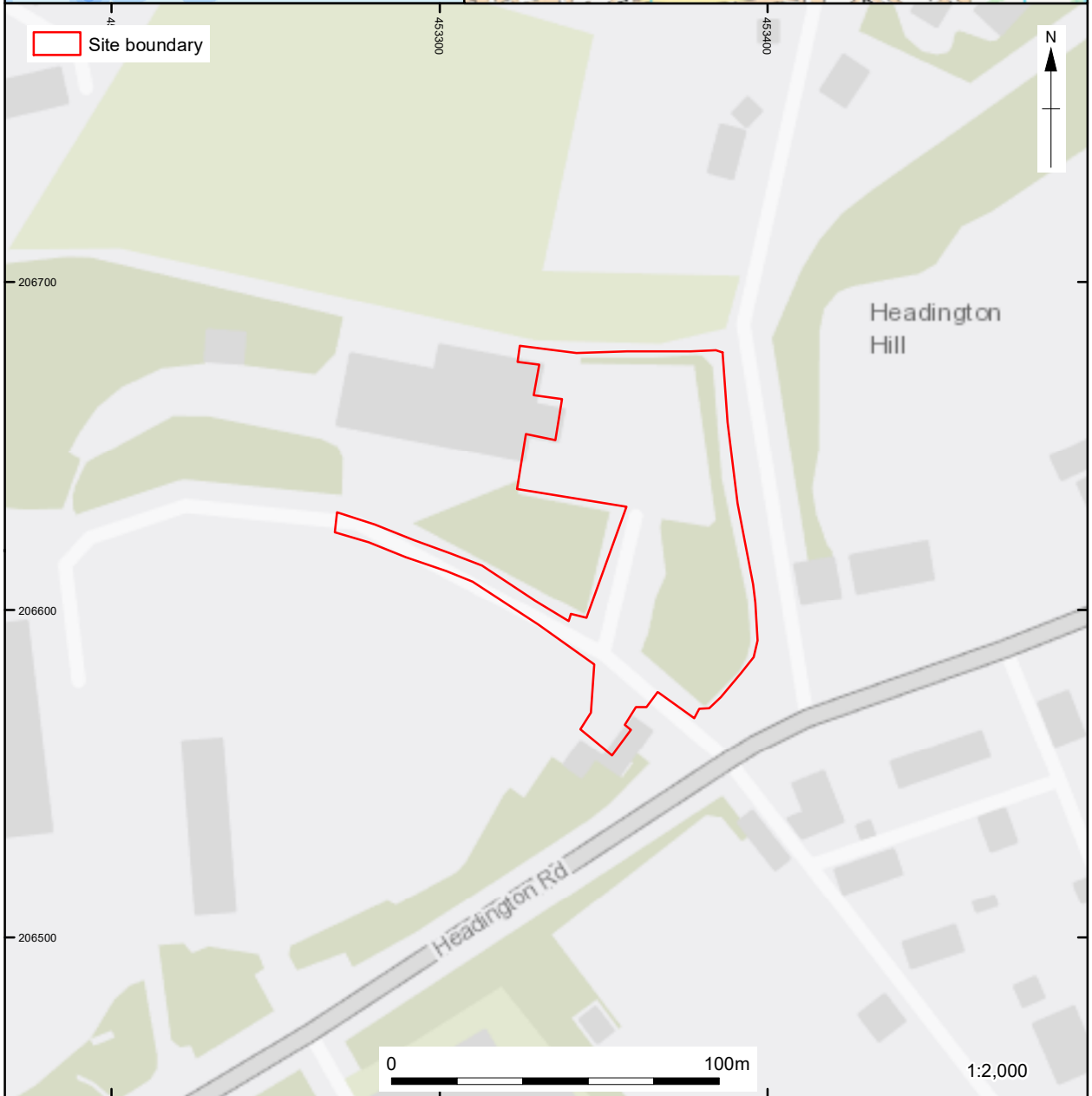
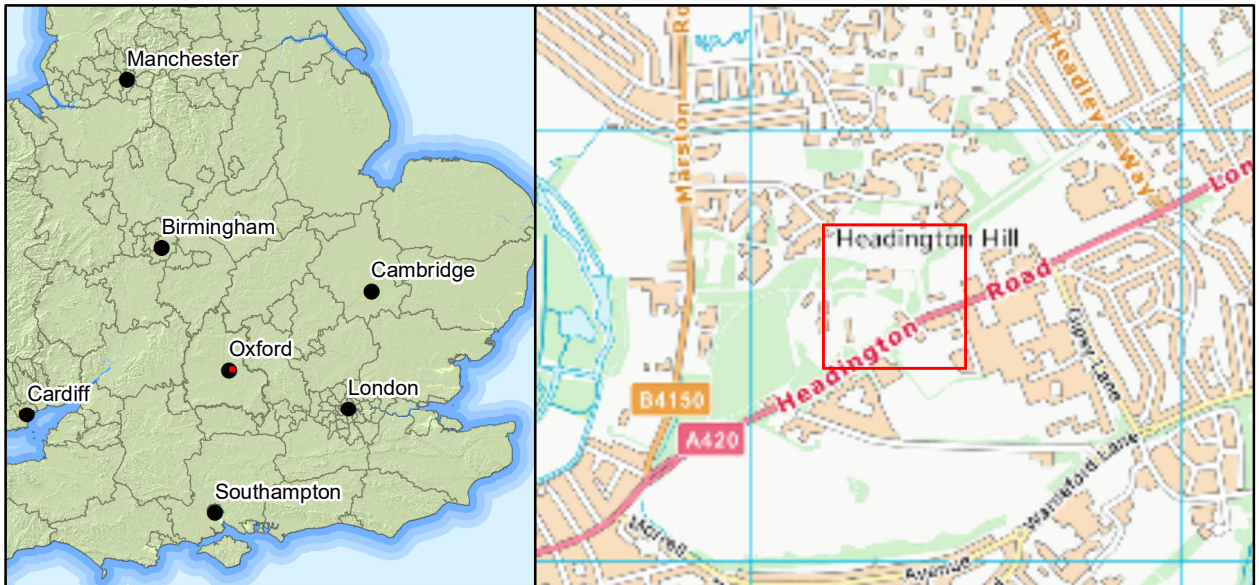
B.3.2 **Context (003) Spot-date: 18th to mid-19th century?** Description: 2 pieces (weight 89g). Two joining pieces of flat tile in a fine sandy red-brown fabric resembling post-medieval terracotta flowerpot etc. The upper surface bears traces of a thin, rough, black glaze and possibly shows very slight (concave) curvature. The item is 17mm thick and has no surviving original edges. The underside is fairly smooth and featureless. These limited features, but particularly the thin black glaze, suggest it may be from the flattish central part of a pan tile (roof tile). Otherwise it may be from an unusually thin floor tile?

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

B.3.3 The CBM has little potential for further analysis and may be discarded, if so desired.

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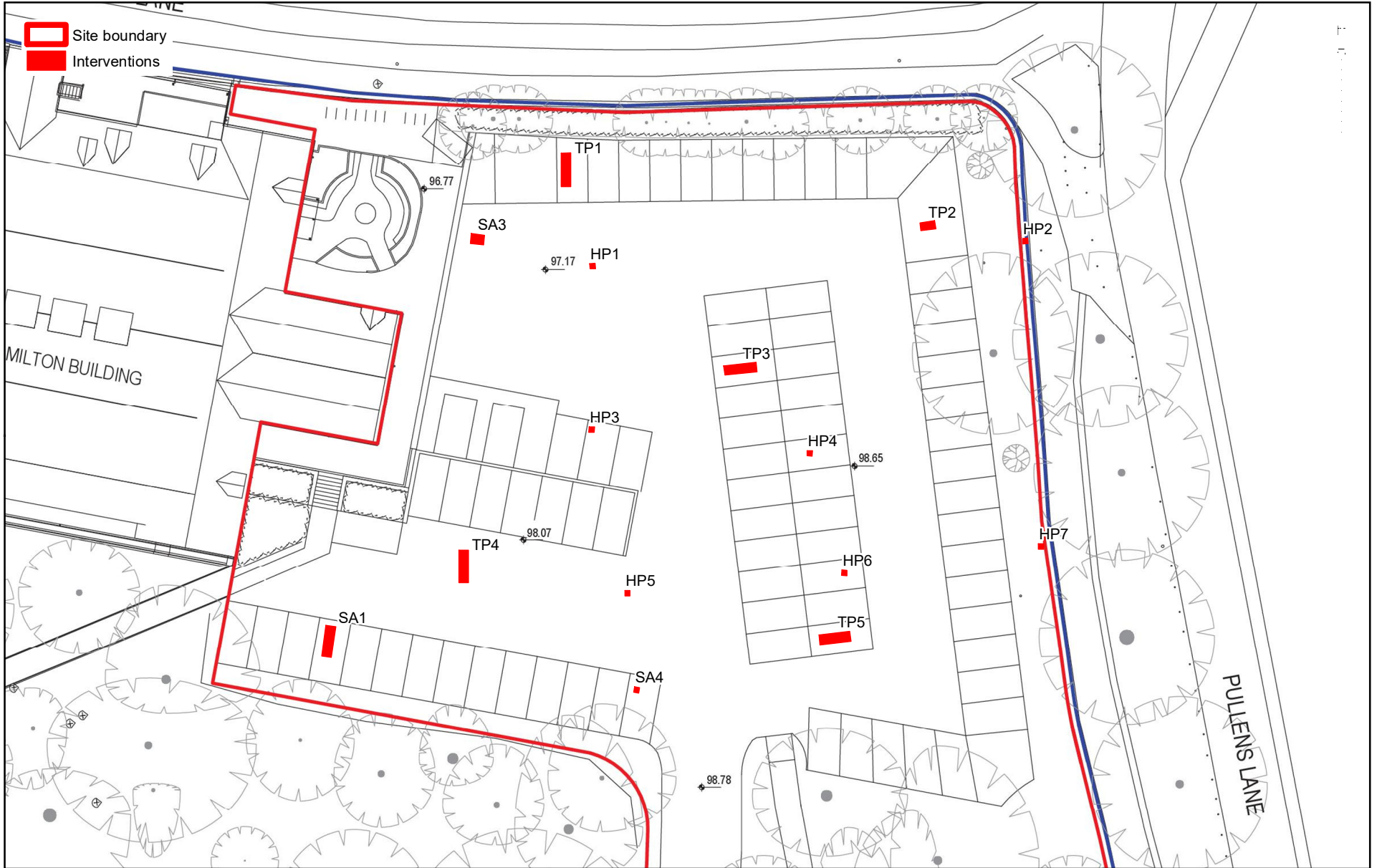


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Figure 1: Site location

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matt.bradley*13/04/2022



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Figure 2: Plan of ground investigations



Plate 1: North facing section of TP2



Plate 2: East facing section of TP5



**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
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>



Chief Executive Officer
Ken Welsh, BSc, MCIFA
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