Lady Margaret Hall
Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Approved by: Paul Booth Signed□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ .
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Oxford Archaeology

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES
t: (0044) 01865 263800 e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
f: (0044) 01865 793496 w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

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Lady Margaret Hall
Oxford

NGR SP 5155 0765

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

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SUMMARY

In March 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook a field evaluation within the footprint of a proposed development on land at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford (NGR SP 5155 0765) on behalf of the college. The only potentially significant discovery was a single undated gully encountered within Trench 4. This could represent the continuation of cropmark features seen within University Parks. Elsewhere 19th century rubbish dumping and ground levelling was encountered across the site reflecting the historical development of the area.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 Between the 26th and 29th of March 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook a field evaluation within the grounds of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford (Fig. 1) on behalf of the college. This was designed to inform a planning application for redevelopment within the college grounds. Brian Durham, Archaeologist at Oxford City Council, visited the site (13th March 2007) at the invitation of Mark Robson, the Treasurer of Lady Margaret Hall. Following this an outline of works for the evaluation was prepared by Mr. Durham. Subsequently OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed with Brian Durham prior to commencing fieldwork.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The college is centred on SP 5155 0765 on the north side of Oxford, approximately 1.3 km in a direct line from the city s central point at Carfax and some 500 m east of the Banbury Road, a main route leading away north from the city. The east side runs along the River Cherwell while the other sides are bounded by the late 19th-century development of north Oxford of which the college is part. The area lies within the historic parish of St Giles.

1.2.2 The college grounds lie between *c* 60 and 61 m OD upon the River Cherwell floodplain gravel. The underlying solid geology is Oxford Clay.

1.2.3 The areas available for evaluation were limited to three garden locations that would be impacted upon by the development and had previously been identified as having the best potential for archaeological survival.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background is contained within a desk-based assessment (DBA) prepared by OA (OA 2006) the key points of which are summarised below. The primary conclusion of the DBA was the clear indication that below-ground archaeological remains dating to the later prehistoric and Roman periods may be present within the development area. Lady Margaret Hall lies immediately to the north of the University Parks where an extensive network of cropmarks dating to

these periods exists. Evidence for settlement has been found on the south side of these cropmarks and burials and other finds occur across the North Oxford suburb in which Lady Margaret Hall is situated.

1.3.2 Throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods the area of Lady Margaret Hall was a mixture of meadow and arable land. The potential for the occurrence of archaeological remains from these periods is therefore low.

1.3.3 The earliest available historic map to show the area is a parish map of St Giles dating from 1769. On this map the site lies, as it does today, on the north side of the Parks, then part of Holywell Manor, in an area of open fields known as Clay Pitt Furlong. The present garden area of Lady Margaret Hall was a meadow, known as Broadmoor.

1.3.4 Development of North Oxford proceeded slowly, but plots in Norham Manor, the area between the University Parks and Park Town, were sold in the 1860s. Norham Gardens was built up from 1865 with individually designed villas. The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1881 shows all the existing roads although not all of the houses had been constructed at that point. At this point most of the Lady Margaret Hall site was still field with Benson Place on the west side making a complete loop from Norham Road to Norham Gardens. Number 19 Norham Gardens and 1 Fyfield Road, which currently flank the entrance to the college, are also shown. Lady Margaret Hall was founded in 1879 and expanded through the 1880□s and the 20th century.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

2.1.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.

2.1.2 To determine and confirm the character of any remains present, without compromising any deposits that may merit detailed investigation under full area excavation.

2.1.3 To determine or estimate the date range of any remains from artefacts or otherwise.

2.1.4 To investigate the extent of any significant remains outside the initial trenched sample through agreement with the client and City Archaeologist.

2.1.5 To characterise any underlying archaeological strata down to undisturbed geology without significantly impacting upon younger (overlying) deposits where possible.

2.1.6 To determine the palaeo-environmental potential of archaeological deposits.

2.1.7 To make available the results of the investigation to inform the planning application and the potential for any further mitigation strategy.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

3.1.1 Initially five evaluation trenches were to be excavated within the footprint of the proposed buildings. However, two trenches to the south of Norham Gardens were rotated and combined into a single trench (Trench 4) since the original layout limited site access excessively (Fig. 2). A 4.5t rubber tracked 360º mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket was used to remove overburden within Trenches 2, 3 and 4.

3.1.2 Trench 1 was excavated using a 20t tracked 360º mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket that was being used to clear and reduce the area to the west of the lecture theatre (Fig. 2).

3.1.3 All of the trenches were positioned in relation to the proposed development impact and measured between 5 m and 25 m long. Trench 1 was enlarged from the initial proposal through consultation with Brian Durham to form a U-shaped trench.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

3.2.1 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by machine within each trench to the surface of undisturbed natural geology or the archaeological horizon depending upon which was encountered first.

3.2.2 The area of ground level reduction was observed for archaeological deposits during the overburden removal.

3.2.3 Where necessary each trench was cleaned by hand and the archaeological features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. All archaeological features were planned and, where excavated, their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson 1992) in accordance with the IFA *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (IFA 1992).

3.3 Finds

3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number.

3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

3.4.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the course of the evaluation.

3.5 Presentation of results

3.5.1 This report outlines the significant findings from each area. Section 5 describes the sequence of deposits and archaeological remains in each trench. An inventory of all finds and contexts (which includes measurements not presented within the text) is

provided in Appendix 1. The plans of Trenches 1 and 4 and sections from each trench have been illustrated.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 The general soil type was a brown silty topsoil and the underlying natural geology was a yellowish orange sand and gravel as recorded in Trenches 1, 2 and 3. This differed slightly within Trench 4 where a yellowish orange brown silty clay was encountered reflecting the local site topography and limits of the gravel terrace. A reddish sandy silt deposit directly overlay the sand and gravel within Trenches 1, 2 and 3. This is characteristic of the loess deposit or 'supra natural' identified within Oxford.

4.1.2 The site and weather conditions were reasonable throughout the duration of the fieldwork.

4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

4.2.1 The evaluation revealed non significant remains within Trench 1 and positive archaeological remains within Trench 4 (Figs 3 and 5).

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

Trench 1

5.1.1 Trench 1 was positioned to the west of the standing buildings subsequently to be demolished prior to the construction of the new lecture theatre. This area was also subject to a strip, map and sample style watching brief as part of the general ground reduction of the existing gardens to the rear of the properties fronting Fyfield Road (Figs 2 and 3).

5.1.2 Prior to the excavation of the evaluation trench this area was cleared of scrub and deep overlying garden soils. Removal of these was observed under archaeological conditions. The reduced level coincidentally occurred approximately at the surface of the 'supra natural' (105) at *c* 60.1 m OD.

5.1.3 Two large rectangular pits were observed during this process present from a high level in the garden soil sequence. These were approximately 6.0 m by 3.0 m in plan and backfilled with mixed soils and clean sand and modern debris including electrical wire. No significant archaeological deposits or features were encountered within the boundary of the reduction area.

5.1.4 Subsequently a 10.0 m long trench (Trench 1) was machine excavated through the remaining level of 'supra natural' to the surface of the underlying sand and gravel to ensure that this was not obscuring potential archaeological features. The sand and

gravel was generally encountered at 59.8 m OD throughout. The trench was further extended at either end by 6.0 m and 8.5 m to the west to form a U-shaped trench.

5.1.5 A single small oval pit was recorded cut into the natural sand and gravel (106). This was approximately 0.5 m across and 0.1 m deep and infilled with a single homogenous greyish brown silty clay. No finds were recovered from this feature. It is likely that this represents a treehole rather than a significant archaeological feature.

Trench 2

5.1.6 Trench 2 (Figs 2 and 4) was positioned within the garden to the rear of the Fyfield Road property. The trench was 5.0 m long and aligned NW/SE.

5.1.7 The trench was machine excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2 m below the current ground level whereupon the surface of the natural sand and gravel was encountered at *c* 60.9 m above OD. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered within the limits of the trench.

5.1.8 The sand and gravel (203) was directly overlain and sealed by a thin reddish sandy deposit (208) consistent with the character of a loess deposit or □supra natural□ regularly identified across the 1st terrace within Oxford. The upper part of the trench sequence was characterised by thick cultivated soils (see Fig. 4 and Appendix 1) of which the lower levels probably predate the development of Norham Gardens.

Trench 3

5.1.9 Trench 3 (Figs 2 and 4) was positioned within the garden to the south side of the Fyfield Road property. The trench was 10.0 m long and aligned NE/SW.

5.1.10 Trench 3 was almost identical to Trench 2 with machine excavation ceasing at 1.2 m below the current ground level whereupon the surface of the natural sand and gravel was encountered at *c* 60.9 m above OD. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered within the limits of the trench.

5.1.11 The deposit sequence differed little from that recorded within Trench 2 other than in the presence of a mixed clay and building rubble deposit (307 and 308) directly below the current topsoil towards the western end of the trench.

Trench 4

5.1.12 Trench 4 (Figs 2 and 5) was positioned within an area of overgrown uneven ground and a recently laid temporary hard surfacing (436) to the south-east of Norham Gardens. The trench was aligned NW/SE along the line of the plot and measured 21.0 m long. Deeper levels of overburden were encountered within this area and the majority of the trench was stepped in two levels to allow safe access.

5.1.13 The geology within this trench differed from that recorded elsewhere. This was reflected by the surrounding surface topography; the University Parks area to the immediate south of the trench lies at a much lower level than the built up area of

Norham Gardens. The underlying geology here was Oxford Clay; a shallow sondage excavated at the north-western end of the trench encountered stiff blue clay (430) at a height of 58.3 m OD. Thin interleaved layers of reworked and weathered clay with occasional gravel inclusions overlay this. The uppermost of these layers, (410), marked the upper horizon of undisturbed geology encountered at 58.6 to 58.7 m OD.

5.1.14 A single feature was recorded cut into the surface of 410. This was a narrow gully (432/434) that entered the trench from the south-west on a NE/SW alignment and turned sharply to the south-east along the line of the trench continuing beyond the limit of excavation. At its largest this feature was 0.3 m wide and 0.15 m deep and was infilled by a single homogenous brown clayey silt (431/435). The infill was sterile of finds with the exception of a small iron fragment recovered from fill 435. The small size of the fragment means that it may easily have been intrusive and no firm conclusions should be drawn from its presence.

5.1.15 A mid brown soil layer (409) up to 0.5 m thick sealed gully 432/434 and extended across the extent of the trench, although it was heavily truncated to the north where it survived only as a thin layer. Numerous features cut into this soil horizon, the earliest of which appeared to be a narrow gully (414). This was truncated by later features but appears to have been 0.9 m wide and 0.7 m deep penetrating the underlying clayey geology. The gully differed from the later features in that its infill (415) clearly derived from the surrounding soil through which it was cut, being of a similar brown coloration and silty clay composition. Four sherds of late 18th century domestic pottery were recovered from this deposit.

5.1.16 A distinct and abrupt change in the sequence occurred above the level of soil horizon 409 and gully 414. A sequence of trench-like pits (see fig. 5 section 6 , features 408, 412, 416, 418 etc), each 0.3 to 0.4 m deep and flat-based, was cut into layer 409 and backfilled with debris rich in ash, charcoal, coal and domestic debris mostly consisting of broken pottery and glass vessels. All of the material dates from the 19th century with the exception of a few fragments of 18th century pottery.

5.1.17 Above the trenches/pits a sequence of mixed soils tipped from the north raise the ground level to its current height of 60.3 m OD at the north-western end and 59.7 m OD at the south-eastern end of the trench.

5.2 Finds

5.2.1 Summary data for all finds recovered during the evaluation are listed in the appendices. The pottery was scanned and spot dated by John Cotter of OA. Nearly all the pottery was of 19th century date with the exception of a few 17th-18th century fragments that may have remained in circulation alongside the 19th century vessels. Detailed reports have not been compiled at this stage due to the archaeologically insignificant character of the deposits that produced finds.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

6.1.1 The locations of the trenches provide a good sample of the area to be impacted upon. Each clearly demonstrated that the most recent undisturbed geological surface was present preserved beneath built up cultivation soils. This strongly suggests that if archaeologically significant cut features had been present these should have substantially survived. The reliability of this conclusion is further enhanced by the results from the observation of a small open area of stripped overburden revealing the potential archaeological horizon of a *c* 15 m by 35 m area around Trench 1.

6.2 Overall interpretation

6.2.1 A distinctive reddish loess or □supra natural□ was recorded within Trenches 1, 2 and 3 sealing the underling gravel surface. No archaeological deposits were encountered within these areas. Thick cultivation soils reflect the use of the area prior to development in the 19th century as farmland and within the more recent historical period as gardens.

6.2.2 The sequence in Trench 4 differed slightly in that a significant amount of 19th century disturbance was present, largely truncating and removing the remains of the earlier ploughsoil (409). The sequence of pits and/or trenches present could represent planting trenches and the use of the plot of land as a garden, as this area was not developed in the 19th century and early 20th century, unlike its immediate surroundings.

6.2.3 The only potentially significant feature recorded was sealed by the ploughsoil (409) within Trench 4. Gully 432/434 did not produce any finds so it is not possible to comment on its precise date or interpret its function further. However, its location immediately north of University Parks does suggest that it could be related to the complex sequence of cropmarks known to exist there. That being the case the potential for the presence of further related features or deposits remains high.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench	*Ctxt No*	*Type*	*Width (m)*	*Thick. (m)*	*Comment*	*Finds*	*No.*	*Date*
001								
	101	Layer			Topsoil	-		
	102	-			Void	-		
	103	Deposit			Natural sand & gravel	-		
	104	Layer		0.36	Buried plough soil	-		
	105	Layer		0.22	Loess - supra natural	-		
	106	Cut	0.60 x 0.50	0.08	Probable tree disturbance	-		
	107	Fill		0.08	Fill of cut 106	-		
002								
	201	Layer		0.24	Topsoil	-		
	202	-			Void	-		
	203	Deposit			Natural sand & gravel	-		
	204	Layer		0.32	Levelling deposit	Pottery Animal Bone CBM Clay pipe Glass Stone	4 4 1 2 1 1	19th C
	205	Layer		0.24	Cultivated soil	-		
	206	Layer		0.60	Plough soil	CBM Stone	1 1	
	207	Layer		0.30	Made ground	Pottery Animal Bone CBM Glass Shell	7 1 3 2 2	19th C
	208	Layer		0.10	Loess - supra natural	-		
003								
	301	Layer		0.38	Topsoil	-		
	302	-			Void	-		

Trench	*Ctxt No*	*Type*	*Width (m)*	*Thick. (m)*	*Comment*	*Finds*	*No.*	*Date*
	303	Deposit			Natural and & gravel	-		
	304	Layer		0.34	Cultivation soil	Pottery Clay pipe Fe nail	2 2 1	16-18th C 17th C
	305	Layer		0.26	Plough soil	-		
	306	Layer		0.36	Loess - supra natural	-		
	307	Layer		0.18	Levelling	-		
	308	Layer		0.14	Building debris	-		
004								
	401	Layer		0.38	Made ground - imported garden soil	-		
	402	Layer		0.33	Made ground - imported garden soil	Pottery Glass	5 1	19th C
	403	Layer		0.45	Made ground - imported garden soil	-		
	404	Layer		0.36	Made ground - imported garden soil	-		
	405	Layer		0.28	Made ground - imported garden soil	-		
	406	Layer		0.61	Made ground - imported garden soil	Pottery	3	19th C
	407	Fill		0.50	Dark backfill and levelling of pits/trenches 408	Pottery	1	19th C
	408	Cut	4.00	0.50	Multiple trenches/pits	-		
	409	Layer		0.46	Buried ploughsoil	Animal Bone Clay pipe Shell Stone	1 1 2 1	
	410	Deposit		0.30	Natural silty clay	-		
	411	Deposit		0.15	Natural clay	-		
	412	Cut	1.00	0.32	Pit	-		
	413	Fill		0.32	Fill of pit 412	-		
	414	Cut	0.40	0.70	Gully	-		

Trench	*Ctxt No*	*Type*	*Width (m)*	*Thick. (m)*	*Comment*	*Finds*	*No.*	*Date*
	415	Fill		0.70	Fill of gully 414	Pottery Animal Bone CBM Glass Shell Fe nail	5 2 3 4 1 1	18th C
	416	Cut	1.10	0.40	Pit	-		
	417	Fill		0.40	Fill of pit 416	-		
	418	Cut	0.80	0.48	Pit	-		
	419	Fill		0.48	Fill of pit 418	Pottery	2	19th C
	420	Fill		0.18	Upper fill of pit 422	-		
	421	Fill		0.23	Primary fill of pit 422	Pottery	1	19th C
	422	Cut	1.00	0.40	Pit	-		
	423	Cut	2.10	0.40	Pit	-		
	424	Fill		0.40	Fill of pit 423	Pottery Glass	1 1	19th C
	425	Fill		0.60	Fill of 426	Pottery Animal Bone CBM Glass	7 2 1 1	19th C
	426	Cut		0.60	Pit/trench	-		
	427	Deposit		0.33	Building debris	-		
	428	Deposit		0.30	Natural silty clay gravel	-		
	429	Deposit			Natural gravel	-		
	430	Deposit			Natural clay	-		
	431	Fill		0.14	Fill of gully 432	-		
	432	Cut	0.30	0.14	Gully	-		
	433	Layer		0.15	Made ground - imported garden soil sealing the pit/trenches	Pottery	12	19th C
	434	Cut	0.26	0.13	Gully	-		
	435	Fill		0.13	Fill of gully 434	Fe nail	1	
	436	Layer		0.36	Modern rubble surface	-		

APPENDIX 2 POTTERY ASSESSMENT

Ctxt No	*No. of Sherds*	*Weight (g)*
204	4	376
207	7	43
304	2	19
402	5	222
406	3	548
407	1	378
415	5	29
419	2	43
421	1	63
424	1	51
425	7	727
433	12	1550
Total	**50**	**4049**

APPENDIX 3 FINDS SUMMARIES

Animal Bone

Ctxt No	*No. of Sherds*	*Weight (g)*
204	4	28
207	1	17
409	1	9
415	2	34
425	2	5
Total	**10**	**93**

Ceramic Building Material

Ctxt No	*No. of Sherds*	*Weight (g)*	*Identification*
204	1	62	Brick
206	1	72	Tile
207	3	1665	Brick and tile
415	3	93	Brick
425	1	91	Slate
Total	**9**	**1983**	

Clay Pipe

Ctxt No	*No. of Sherds*	*Weight (g)*	*Identification*
204	2	7	stem
304	2	14	stem and bowl
409	1	3	stem
Total	**5**	**24**	

Glass

Ctxt No	*No. of Sherds*	*Weight (g)*	*Identification*
204	1	3	fragment

207	2	18	bottle fragments
402	1	76	?sherry glass
415	4	33	bottle fragments
424	1	7	fragment
425	1	45	wine glass base
Total	**10**	**182**	

Shell

Ctxt No	*No. of Sherds*	*Weight (g)*
207	2	14
409	2	24
415	1	4
Total	**5**	**42**

Worked Stone

Ctxt No	*No. of items*	*Weight (g)*
204	1	3188
Total	**1**	**3188**

Architectural Limestone block with four smoothed faces. Sawn faces also clearly present with fine hatched keying on its upper or lower bonding surface.

APPENDIX 4 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 1992 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations,* Institute of Field Archaeologists

OA, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA, 2006 Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. An archaeological desk based assessment. Oxford Archaeology unpublished client report

OA, 2007 Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. Written Scheme of Investigation. Oxford Archaeology unpublished document

APPENDIX 5 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford

Site code: OXLAMA 07

Grid reference: SP 5155 0765

Type of evaluation: 4 trench evaluation

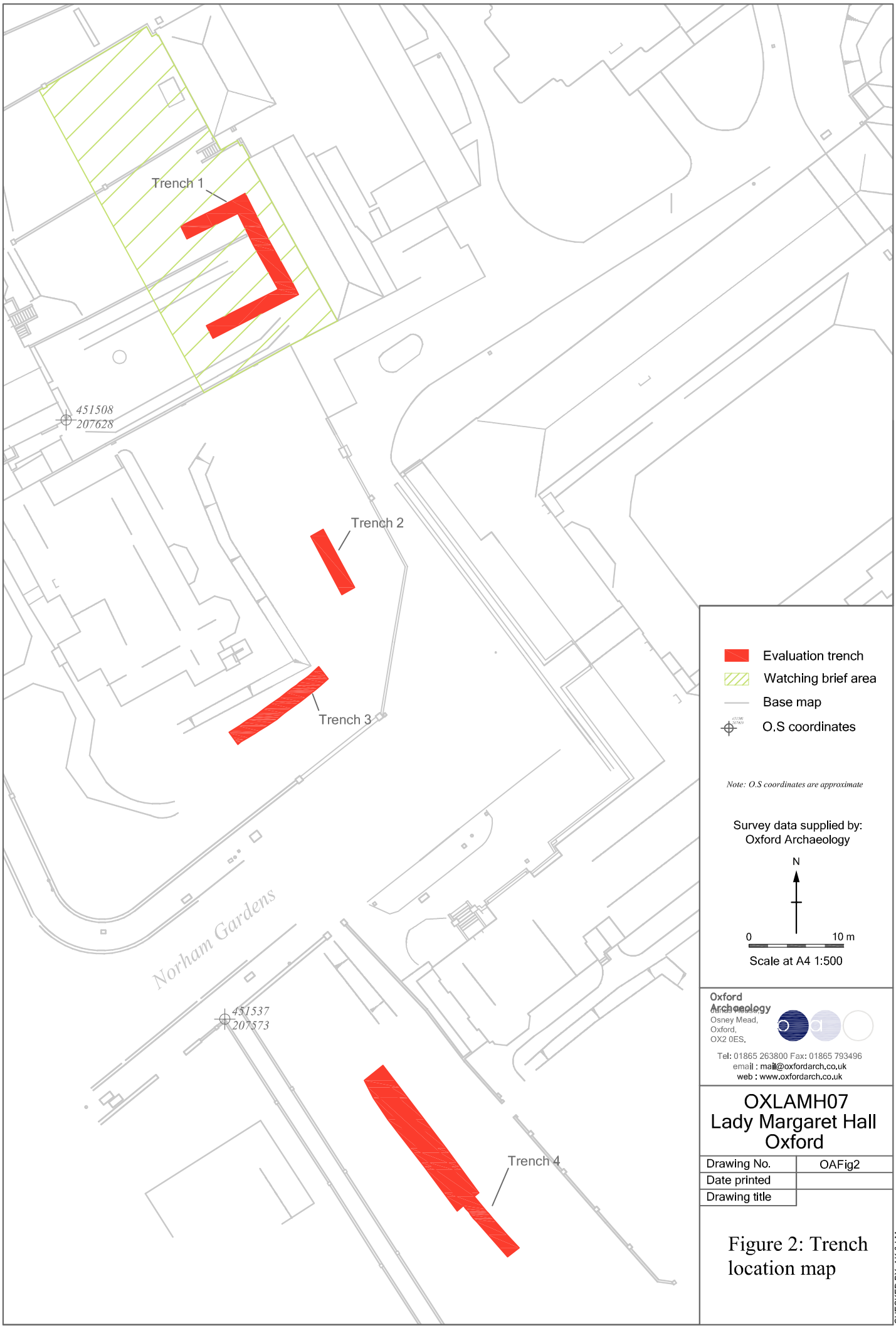
Date and duration of project: 26th - 29th March 2007

Area of site: 0.1 hectare

Summary of results:
In March 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook a field evaluation within the footprint of a proposed development on land at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford (NGR SP 5155 0765) on behalf of the college. The only potentially significant discovery was a single undated gully encountered within Trench 4. This could represent the continuation of cropmark features seen within University Parks. Elsewhere 19th century rubbish dumping and ground levelling was encountered across the site reflecting the historical development of the area.

Location of archive:
The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: 2007.18

Figure 1: Site location



Oxford Archaeology
Osney Mead,
Oxford,
OX2 0ES.
Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496
email : mail@oxfordarch.co.uk
web : www.oxfordarch.co.uk

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Figure 2: Trench location map

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Figure 3: Trench 1, plan and sections

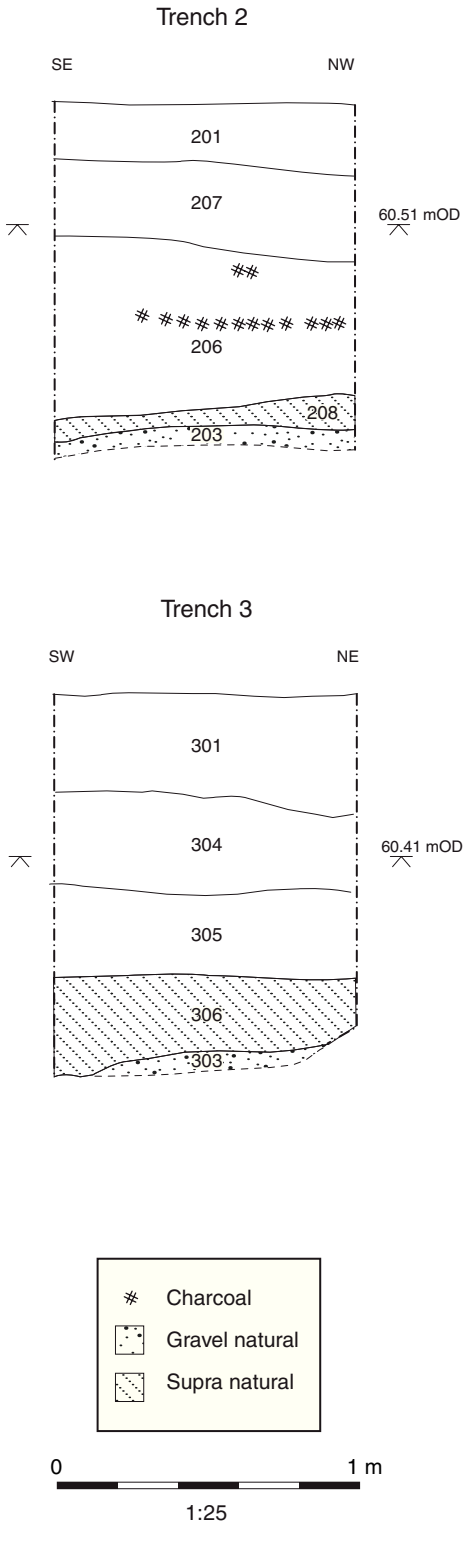

Figure 4: Trenches 2 and 3, sections

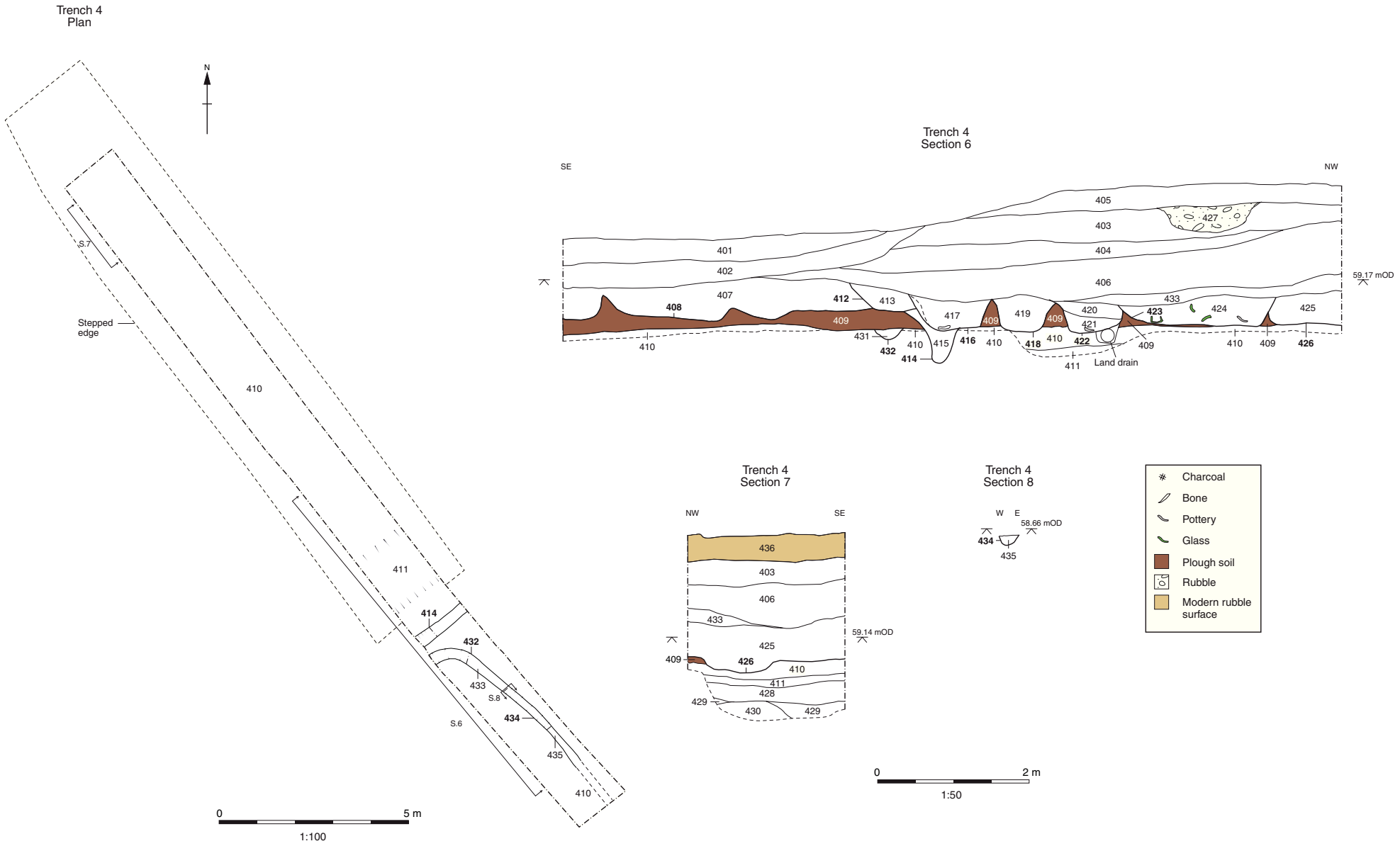

Figure 5: Trench 4, plan and sections