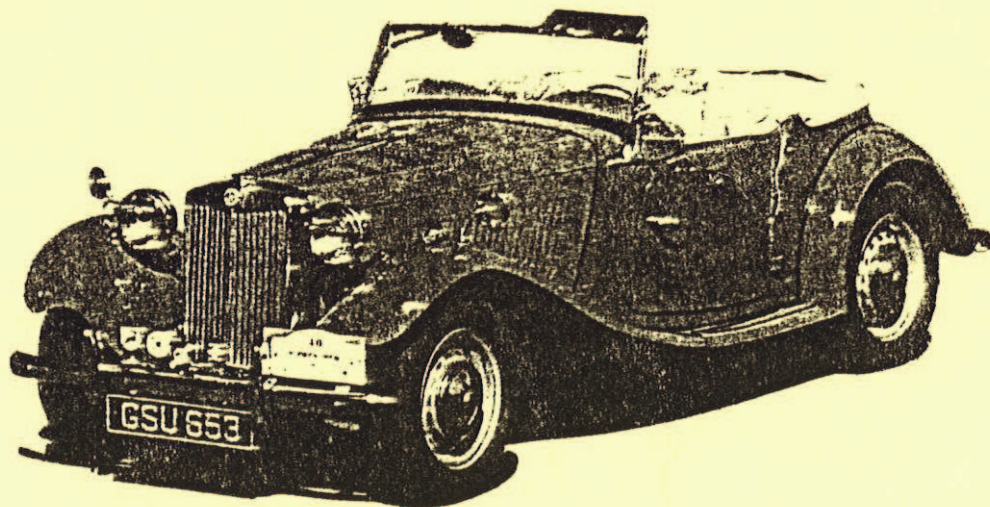


PLOT A, ABINGDON BUSINESS PARK
(FORMER MG WORKS)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

NGR SU 48609710



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

March 1993

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(FORMER MG WORKS)
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6 April 1994

SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at the former site of the MG works. There were no significant archaeological deposits. The Larkhill stream, which runs N-S through the site, had been culverted and the shallow valley which the stream had run through was levelled up prior to the construction of the Pavlova Leather works (subsequently the MG works).

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INTRODUCTION

In March 1994 an archaeological field evaluation was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) on behalf of Hall and Tawse, in respect of an application for planning permission for a warehouse and offices (Fig. 2). The site lies to the W of Abingdon, at grid reference SU 48609710 (Fig.1).

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND (Fig.1)

Historical background

The present building was built in 1912/1913 as a part of the Pavlova Leather Works. MG sports cars were built on the site until 1980 (Cliff Bray pers comm. worked for MG for 42 years). The factory buildings extended to the N and W of the present structure (Stone nd, 7 pre-1938 aerial Photograph and 1975 plan OCC library).

Archaeological Background (Fig.1)

The site lies in an area which has proved to be rich in archaeological remains. In particular there is evidence of extensive prehistoric, Roman and Saxon activity on the adjacent gravel terraces. There were no known sites within the proposed development.

A cropmark which is tentatively interpreted as a Neolithic *Cursus* lies to the S of the River Ock at Caldicott. Cropmark ring-ditches which may be the remains of Early Bronze Age burial mounds can be seen surrounding the site (Benson and Miles, 1974). Two ring-ditches were located at Ashville Trading Estate to the NE of the site (Parrington, 1978).

Extensive and intensive Iron Age settlement which was superseded by Late Iron Age and Roman field systems has been located at Ashville Trading Estate (Parrington) and the MG works car parking area (Halpin excavations 1981-5). Work carried out by T G Allen has located further Roman field systems to the N of the site. Abingdon town centre to the E overlies a late Iron Age *oppidum* or defended market. The defensive bank and ditch of the settlement were slighted and a Roman villa was built on the E edge of the settlement. Roman material has also been found under Abingdon school to the W of the defences (T G Allen pers. comm.). A small Roman cemetery has been located 200 m S of Ashville Trading Estate.

Abingdon has Early Saxon cemeteries and settlements around it. Middle to late Saxon settlement is known from the town centre. Saxon cemeteries lie to the N and S of the River Ock.

TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies on the N side of the Ock valley and is approximately 2.3 hectares at a height of 53 m O.D, surrounded by slightly higher ground at 55 m O.D. The site is currently flat with a warehouse (the former MG works occupying most of the area) but appears to have been built up as the ground by the Marcham Road to the S and by the Pavlova Leather Works to the N is lower than the site. The Larkhill Stream flows N-S through the site in a culvert to the River Ock. To the

N of the site the stream flows in a ?natural channel through the recently closed Pavlova Leather works. The natural across the site is gravel over Kimmeridge clay.

FIELD EVALUATION STRATEGY (Fig.2)

The field evaluation strategy was based on a 1.5% sample of the area. The sample was to have consisted of seven 30 m long and 1.5 m wide trenches dug by a mechanical excavator (see Fig. 2). Following the excavation of two 30 m trenches and study of the results of the geotechnical report two further short trenches were excavated to verify the archaeological repercussions of the results of the trial holes and test pits. This suggested that no archaeological deposits were to be encountered and so, with the agreement of the Deputy County Archaeologist work was halted.

The archaeological features encountered were to be sampled by hand to determine their nature and depth and to recover dating evidence. The features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and their sections drawn at a scale of 1:50.

RESULTS

Soils

The general soil type was a silt. The underlying natural was gravel with sand lenses.

Archaeology

The two 30 m long trenches showed the sequence of deposits across the site. In Trench 1 to the N of the warehouse 19th-century silt was overlain by compacted dumped material which had gravel make-up, concrete floors and walls from the car factory on top of it. The 19th-century silt appeared to be sloping in to the Larkhill Stream. The water level was high. The floors from the demolished factory were covered by tarmac.

Trench 2 showed natural gravel which had no geological soils overlying it. Modern demolition debris and tarmac surfaces covered the trench. A modern concrete wall lay at the S end of the trench. The trench filled with water upon excavation.

Trench 3 showed a similar sequence to Trench 2. Trench 4 was dug inside the building and revealed a similar sequence of layers to trench 1. Both these trenches filled with water upon excavation.

Table of 'Made Ground'

Type of Excavation	number	depth of 'Made Ground'
Trench	1	1.15

Type of Excavation	number	depth of 'Made Ground'
Trench	2	0.75
Trench	3	0.8
Trench	4	0.93
Test pit	1	1.3
Test pit	2	1.7
Test pit	3	0.6
Test pit	4	0.5
Test pit	5	0.7
Test pit	5a	0.7
Test pit	7	1.1
Borehole	1	0.8
Borehole	2	0.8
Borehole	3	1.4
Borehole	4	1.4
Borehole	5	0.6
Average depth		0.85

Finds

In total 2 sherds of pottery and several pieces of brick were recovered. One of the pieces of pottery was a small abraded sherd, probably Oxford colour coated ware, which dates to the Late Roman period. However, this sherd came from a dumped layer and therefore provides no indication of the date of the deposit. The other sherd was a 19th-century glazed ware and came from the lowest silt in trench 4.

Environmental

Soil samples were not taken as there were no deposits which were deemed to be able to provide meaningful palaeoenvironmental data.

COMMENTS ON THE RESULTS

Reliability of field investigation

The sample size was sufficient to define and interpret the archaeology adequately in conjunction with the geotechnical report.

Overall Interpretation

The gravel or sand natural in Trenches 2 and 3 appeared to be water laid and had no original soils overlying it. Where waterlaid silts were located they were dated to the 18th or 19th centuries. The silts and natural subsoil were overlain by layers relating to the factory. The geotechnical trial holes and test pits encountered walls which may have been connected to the leather works but are more likely to be walls from the MG works. No underground pits were associated with the production lines for the MG works within the standing building (Cliff Bray pers. comm. and photos held by MG Owners Club), although there may have been pits associated with armoured fighting vehicle production during the Second World War. No underground production pits were found.

'Made ground' in the geotechnical pits included sheet metal and bricks and is similar to the dump seen in Trenches 1, 3 and 4 and was encountered up to a depth of 1.7 m along the line of the culvert.

The absence of any residual finds predating the 19th century in the silts suggest that no earlier activity took place on or near the site. The drop in level from 60 m OD at Ashville Trading Estate to around 51.2 at the open stream and the high water table suggests that the site was wet and lowlying. A road may have run W from the *oppidum* at Abingdon to the amphitheatre at Frilford and this road may have run through the site but it is more likely that the road was aligned further to the N through the Roman find spots to the Roman cemetery at the old MG works (Fig. 1).

Conclusions

There were no significant archaeological deposits. The Larkhill stream, which runs N-S through the site, had been culverted and the shallow valley which it had run through was levelled up prior to the construction of the Pavlova Leather works (subsequently the MG works).

Mark Roberts MIFA
6 April 1994

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APPENDICES

TABLE 1
CONTEXTS AND FINDS

Trench	CTX	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comments and Finds date
1	101	tarmac		0.2	
1	102	make-up		0.15	
1	103	dump		0.08	
1	104	make-up		0.1	
1	105	dump		0.95	
1	106	silt		0.3+	clay pipe and brick
1	107	wall			concrete wall
1	108	wall		1.7+	brick wall
1	109	dump			as 104?
1	110	make-up		1.1+	as 105?
1	111	dump			as 105
1	112	wall			concrete wall
1	113	concrete floor			for cornish boiler?
1	114	dump		0.1	as 105
1	115	wall			wall on concrete footing
2	201	tarmac		0.15	
2	202	make-up		0.5	
2	203	dump			demolition debris
2	204	natural subsoil			sand and gravel
2	205	wall	0.5	-	concrete wall
3	301	tarmac		0.18	
3	302	make-up		0.2	
3	303	dump		0.35	demolition debris
3	304	modern works disturbance			for heavy stores
3	305	natural subsoil			

Trench	CTX	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comments and Finds date
4	401	concrete		0.17	factory floor
4	402	make-up		0.2	
4	403	dump		0.25	
4	404	silt		0.22	19th-century pottery
4	405	natural subsoil			

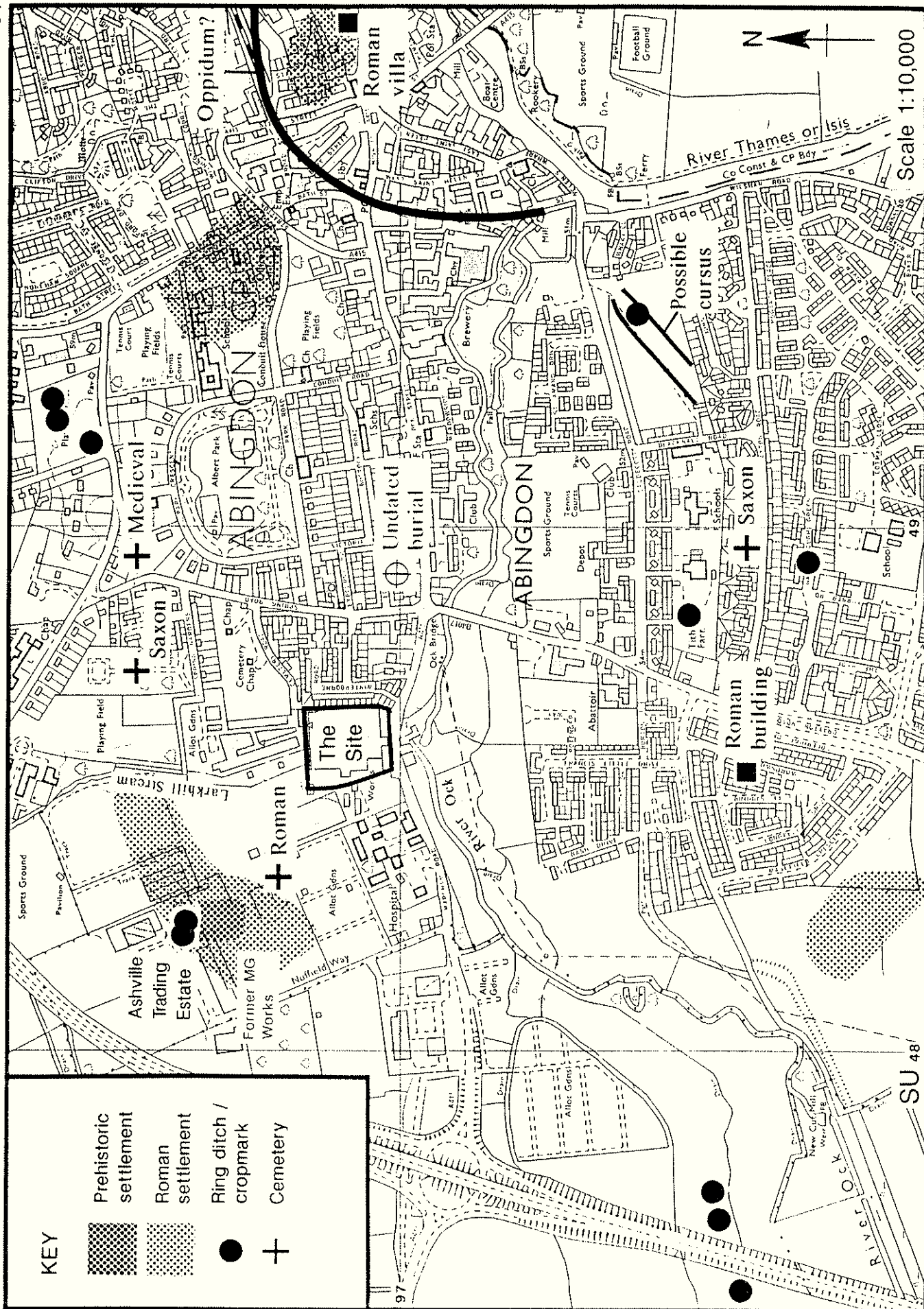


Figure 1

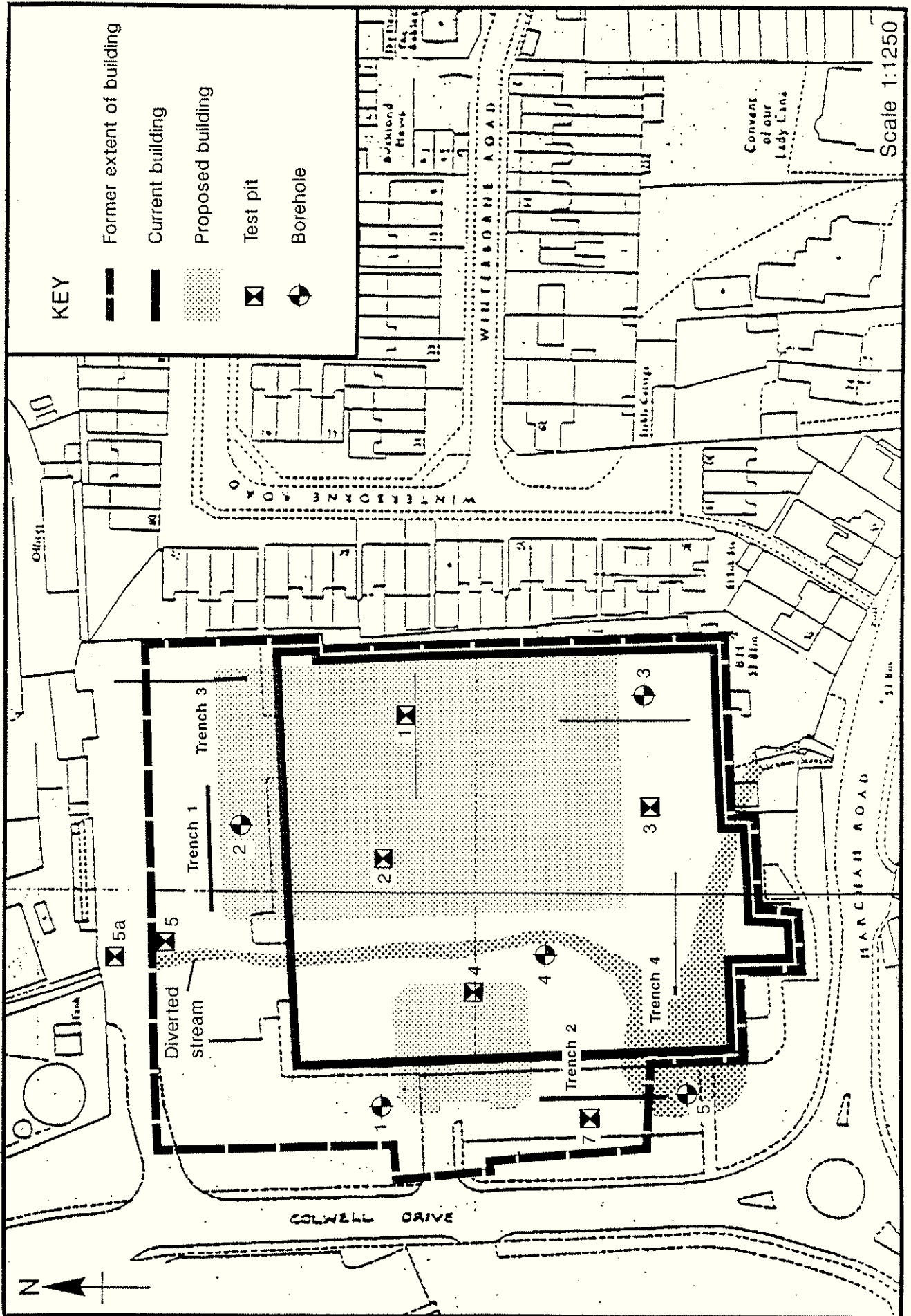


Figure 2

Oxford Archaeological Unit
46 Hythe Bridge Street
Oxford OX1 2EP



Tel: 0865 243888 Fax: 0865 793496

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