

OXTJB2
905/93

(OX)

Garsington Road, 'J' Block Cowley, Oxford

Tesco

WATCHING BRIEF

NGR SP 5515 0350

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

November 1994

GARSINGTON ROAD, 'J' BLOCK, COWLEY, OXFORD

TESCO

WATCHING BRIEF

NGR SP 5515 0350

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

AIMS AND STRATEGY

LOCATION

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

RESULTS

POTTERY

CONSIDERATION OF THE RESULTS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDIX 1: Table of Contexts and Finds Summary

**OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
OCTOBER 1994**

GARSINGTON ROAD, 'J' BLOCK COWLEY OXFORD

TESCO

WATCHING BRIEF

NGR SP 5515 0350

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

In January and February 1994 a watching brief was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) during the construction of a store for Tesco Stores Ltd. The watching brief was requested by the Planning Authority according to a brief set by the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS).

The watching brief located no archaeological features during the monitoring of groundwork. Much of the site had been disturbed and levelled during the construction of the former Cowley Car Works. An earlier ploughsoil, possibly of medieval date was observed in the northern area of the site.

AIMS AND STRATEGY

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any significant archaeological deposits or features on the site located during groundworks. The strategy was to visit during major groundwork operations. Any deposits identified were then to be recorded to assess the distribution of activity within the development site.

LOCATION (Figure 1, area A)

The site is a part of the former Cowley Car Works, recently demolished and currently undergoing major redevelopment. Situated immediately SE of the Bypass, the site occupies the southern half of a development area bounded by the Garsington Road to the N and the Cowley Works railway to the SE. It is centred at about SP 55150350. The site occupies approximately 4 ha, most of the area formerly being Rover Car Plant J Block, North and South Works, mainly used for car parking. The site lies at about 67.50 m above Ordnance Datum (OD). The present ground level slopes down from a high point at about 68 m OD at the N end to a lowest point about 67 m OD at the S.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site was considered to have archaeological potential as it was thought that relatively undisturbed deposits might survive beneath the extensive carparks associated with the former Cowley Car Works.

Romano-British finds have been recovered from the line of the Eastern Bypass. The

Roman Road from Alchester to Dorchester on Thames passes the site c. 750 m to the E. Roman coins have been found E of the site between Northfield Farm and Northfield Brook (Manning 1898). The southern and eastern edge of Oxford was a very important area of Roman pottery production. Pottery kilns and other features have been located at a number of sites including Rose Hill, Between Towns Road Cowley, Brasenose Farm, Littlemore, Blackbird Leys and Sandford (Young 1977).

RESULTS

A 3 m wide trench, orientated approximately N-S across the site, was dug to accommodate twin drainage pipes. The exposed section was only seen in limited areas. Further service trenches provided sections allowing a cross-section of the site running approximately NW-SE.

The machine dug trenches were generally too deep to provide safe access for any detailed examination, although a general inspection of the site provided an interpretation of the later stratified layers exposed.

Deposits associated with the former Cowley Works

Much of the existing surface of the site consisted of tarmac, (1), the former Cowley Works car park surface. The tarmac was laid on top of a makeup layer, (2), 0.10-0.25 m in depth. The makeup layer overlaid a layer of clay, (3), which appeared to spread over most of the site. The depth varied but typically was between 0.50 m and 1.00 m, generally becoming deeper (up to 1.50 m) towards the railway in the SE. An exposure of the railway embankment revealed it to be constructed of the same clay material. It seems likely that the clay was dumped at the time of the construction of the Cowley Works in order to level the site. The general topography of the site suggests that prior to this levelling the ground would have sloped off to the SW. The site appears to have been scraped clean prior to the clay dumping as no earlier layers or buried soil horizons were seen, except in the N area of the site.

Stripping of Access Road

The opportunity to observe a major area of ground clearance occurred during the construction of the access road. The overburden was removed using a 360° excavator with a toothless grading bucket, providing good conditions for the examination of a 10 m wide strip. The results from a 30 m length of the road stripping tended to confirm what was seen within the service trenches. The depth of the strip varied from 0.60m to 0.70m and was still within the dumped deposit associated with the levelling for the former Cowley Works, so it was not deep enough to reveal any archaeological features which may have been cut into the natural undisturbed subsoil.

Earlier ploughsoil

The N area of the site contained the best preserved areas with potential for survival of earlier layers. This area was just N of the proposed new Filling Station and extended further to the N towards the Garsington Road roundabout (in the process of being replaced by a flyover), an area roughly 30 m x 50 m.

A ploughsoil was observed at about 0.70 m below the present ground surface. It was possible to examine the section in some detail. The sample section recorded was 1.30 m in depth from the top of the tarmac to the top of the natural subsoil. The layers associated with the construction of the Cowley Works totalled 0.80 m in depth. Below this was a dark brown sandy silt, (4), 0.39 m in depth, with moderate charcoal flecking. This could have been a ploughsoil although it was somewhat disturbed so that it was impossible to be sure of its exact nature. A single sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from layer 4. Below this an earlier ploughsoil, (5), was observed, a mottled light and mid brown sandy silt which graded into the layer above and the natural subsoil, which consisted of a reddish brown sandy silt, below. No archaeological features were observed.

POTTERY

A single sherd of unabraded medieval pottery, fabric type OXAQ, was recovered from layer 4. This is broadly dateable to the 13th-15th centuries.

CONSIDERATION OF THE RESULTS

Although much of the groundworks were observed the nature of the construction work varied. The drainage trenches were open for a long period of time and provided a good cross section across the site although most were too deep to safely examine in detail. In contrast the road stripping and the laying of hardcore for the access road was undertaken as a continuous process in a short period of time. This is standard practice on construction sites although it inevitably meant some areas were not examined.

The reliability of the results should be considered in relation to the type, density and date of any features which might have been expected on the site.

The drainage trenches dug across the development site would have revealed large linear features such as ditches, although they are not likely to show shallow or smaller discrete features. There was evidence for scraping of the site prior to the dumping of clay for the construction of the former Cowley Car Works, but the full impact of the scraping on earlier deposits was difficult to gauge.

The presence of Roman activity in the form of ditches would have been located unless it was within a very localised area, estimated approximately at a maximum area of 50 m x 50 m. The presence of activity concerned with Roman kilns and pottery manufacturing would also have been evident even if truncated by later ploughing (Booth, Boyle and Keevill 1993), unless again it was very localised. While the undetected existence of very small discrete areas of Roman features is possible, therefore, this is not considered very likely.

The survival of prehistoric remains is more problematic due to the likely occurrence of more dispersed or isolated features. Prehistoric activity is more likely on the light silt soils typical of this area, than in areas of heavier soils overlying Oxford Clay. The fills of prehistoric features in areas of light sandy silt soils also tend to be very similar to the natural subsoil and features would only tend to appear clearly if seen in plan. Isolated flint scatters would also be unlikely to be located as a result of deep trench excavation.

The stripping of overburden for the construction of the access road provided better conditions for locating archaeological features in plan, but the area observed was not deep enough to reach the level of the natural subsoil where deep-cut archaeological features would have been identifiable.

CONCLUSIONS

No archaeological remains were located during groundworks for the Tesco store. The results suggest that there are no significant extensive archaeological remains within the area under development. If archaeological deposits did exist on the site they are likely to have been localised and dispersed and therefore difficult to identify. This would have been particularly true of prehistoric activity. Evidence for scraping prior to the construction of the Cowley Works and the character of the recorded ploughsoils (layers 4 and 5), of a loose silt soil, together suggest that any shallow features would have been heavily truncated or ploughed out. The absence of artefacts is also suggestive of a very low level of early activity on the site.

Andrew Parkinson
Paul Booth
OAU, October 1994

BIBLIOGRAPHY

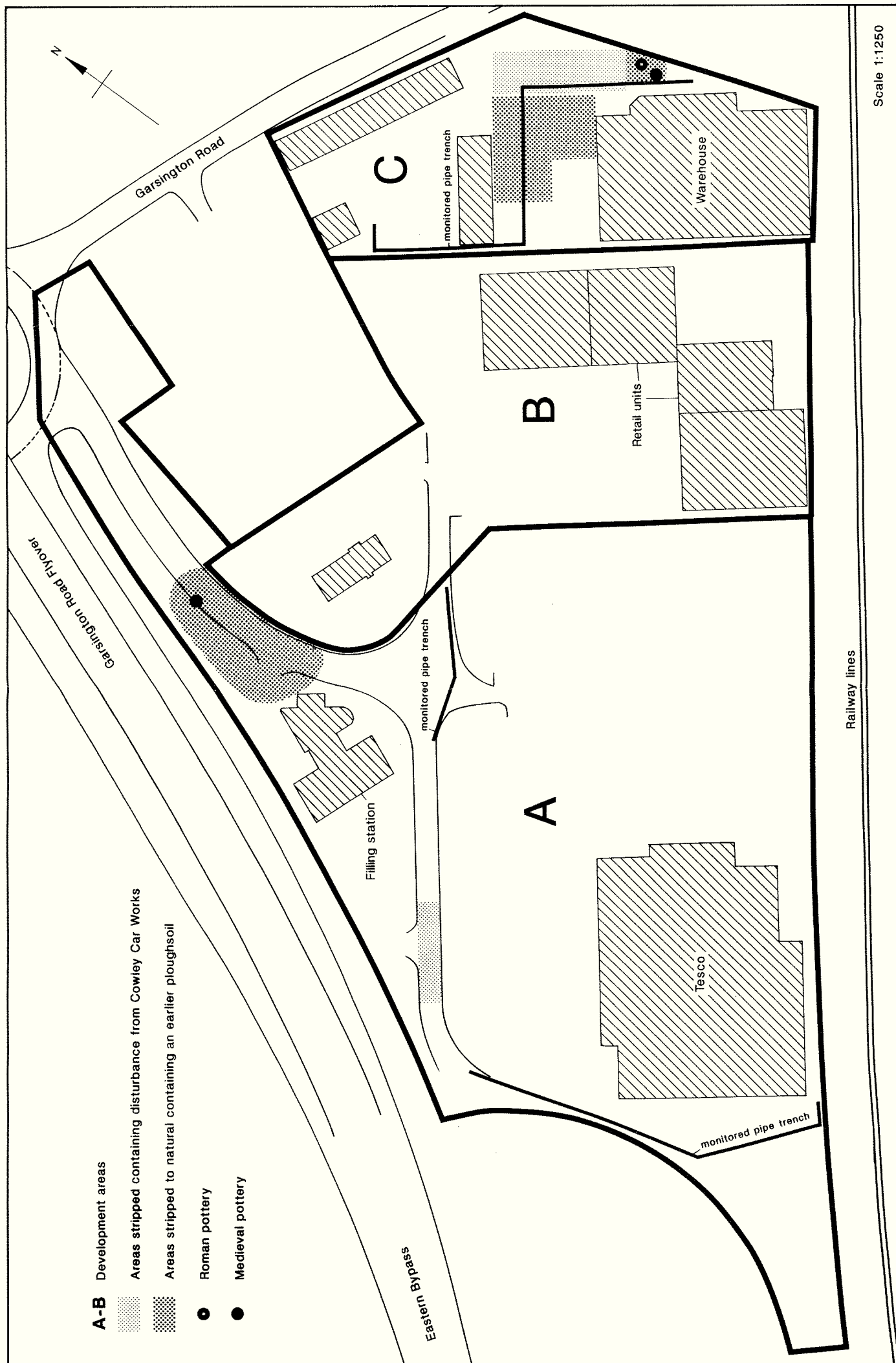
Booth, P, Boyle, A, and Keevill, G D, 1993, 'A Romano-British Kiln at Lower Farm, Nuneham Courtenay, and Other Sites on the Didcot to Oxford and Wooton to Abingdon Water Mains, Oxfordshire'
Oxoniensia LVIII 1993, 87-217

Manning, P, 1898, *The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Archaeological Journal*, Vol 4 No 1, 1898, 18

Young, C J, 1977, *The Roman Pottery Industry of the Oxford Region*, BAR 43, Oxford

APPENDIX 1: Table of Contexts

TESCO 'J' BLOCK COWLEY OXFORD OXTJB 94					
Context	Type	Depth (m)	Length (m)	Comments	Finds
1	Layer	0.10		Tarmac	
2	Layer	0.10-0.25		Makeup layer/concrete	
3	Layer	0.50-1.50		Dumped layer	
4	Layer	0.39		Ploughsoil	1 sherd medieval pottery
5	Layer	0.17		?Ploughsoil	
6	Layer	-		Natural Subsoil	



Oxford Archaeological Unit

46 Hythe Bridge Street
Oxford OX1 2EP



Tel: 0865 243888 Fax: 0865 793496

Registered Charity No. 285627
Private Limited Company No. 1618597