

Wellcome Centre for Epidemiology
of Infectious Diseases

Land to rear of
6-8 South Parks Road, Oxford

NGR SP 5176 0693

Archaeological Evaluation Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

July 1996

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Land to rear of 6-8 South Parks Road, Oxford
Planning Application No. 95/1118/NF
NGR SP 5176 0693

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Summary

A small scale evaluation in advance of construction work revealed no significant archaeological features or deposits on this site

Introduction

The University of Oxford is proposing to build a centre for the epidemiology of infectious diseases in garden ground to the rear of Halifax House, South Parks Road, and to the west of the existing Zoology building (for location see Fig 1). Ground disturbance will result from excavation of a basement to 3.5 m depth covering the entire footprint of the proposed building, and from excavation for extensive related services to a lesser depth.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by the University Surveyors Department to carry out an archaeological evaluation in advance of the development. The results of this work, which took place in June 1996, are summarised in the present report. Full site and artefact records can be found in the project archive, which will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museums Service under the accession number 1996.82.

Geology

The geology of the area consists of an underlying gravel (Summertown Radley Gravel terrace) with localised superficial deposits above.

Archaeological background

The site lies within a strip of land between two zones of archaeological interest identified in a draft report prepared for the Planning Authority in 1993. Zone 1 to the north includes a dense concentration of prehistoric and later cropmark sites which are visible in the playing fields of The Parks. Zone AA to the south is the area of archaeological importance identified in the Deposit Local Plan, whose boundary at this point reflects the presumed outline of the 17th century Royalist defences of the Civil War.

Recent development and OAU excavations at the Rex Richards (1982 and 1993) and Rodney Porter (Plant Sciences 1989) buildings, within the Oxford University Science Area, revealed two concentric ditches of a Bronze Age barrow with a central pyre-pit barely 100 m north of the present site (Parkinson *et al* forthcoming). The main alignment of the barrow field in the University Parks appears to be east-west and it was thought that a further barrow could lie in the area of the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology to the east of the Rex Richards building. However, no significant archaeological features were uncovered during an evaluation and watching brief carried out there in advance of and during development in 1995 (OAU 1995; 1996). The present evaluation was intended to demonstrate whether or not further comparable features existed further south.

Strategy

Three trenches were machine excavated using a mini-excavator equipped with a 0.70 m toothless bucket (for location of trenches see Fig 2). The trenches, each 4 m long and 1.55 m wide, were initially machined to the top of possible archaeological deposits, or up to 1.20 m into the top of the underlying natural subsoils. Each of the trenches was later partially re-machined to a depth of approximately 2.10 m to test these underlying subsoils and ascertain the depth of the underlying gravel terrace, confirming earlier geological test pit results in the area.

Results

Trenches 1 and 2 contained no archaeological features and within Trench 3 only an irregularly shaped, relatively modern (ie Victorian or later) garden feature with root disturbance at its base was found. Summary details of all the contexts are given in tabular form (Appendix 1).

Trench 1

Trench 1 was machined initially to a depth of 0.5 m. The trench was recorded and then re-machined at its eastern end to test the natural subsoils and confirm the results of an engineers' test-pit located approximately 5 m north of the trench (see section 1, Fig 3). This confirmed that natural gravels 1/5 occurred at 2.1 m below modern ground level. Above this were layers of clean yellowish brown sandy clay 1/4 and 1/3, which became progressively more silty and stone free with depth. Both were interpreted as natural subsoils.

Above 1/3 was a layer of fine sandy clay with yellowish-brown clay mottling (1/2) c 0.08 m thick. This appeared to be a relatively recent layer levelling up the ground surface here, possibly in connection with previous building works nearby. It was sealed by topsoil (1/1) 0.22 m thick.

The top of layer 1/3 contained some finds - but these are thought to be deposited

by Victorian or post-Victorian gardening activity disturbing the top of this layer from above.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was initially machined to a depth of approximately 1.20 m and was subsequently re-machined, revealing natural gravels (2/6) at a depth of 1.85 m (see section 2, Fig 3). The trench was generally stratigraphically similar to Trench 1. Layer 2/6 was overlaid by deposits of mottled yellowish orange and grey clay and clayey sand (2/5 and 2/4) with a combined depth of up to 0.80 m. The overlying deposits 2/3, 2/2 and 2/1 corresponded to layers 1/3, 1/2 and 1/1, except that 2/2, from 0.23-0.36 m deep, was rather thicker than the equivalent deposit in Trench 1.

Trench 3

The sequence in Trench 3 was broadly similar to that in Trenches 1 and 2 (see section 3, Fig 3). Re-machining at the southern end of the trench revealed a sequence of natural deposits; sandy gravels 3/8 and 3/7, brownish-orange clayey sand (3/6) and a further thin gravel layer 3/5. This last deposit was overlaid by an orange-brown sandy loam layer (3/2), up to 0.56 m deep. The top of layer 3/2 was disturbed by root activity and was also cut by the only distinct feature located. This was a sub-oval pit (3/3) c 0.72 x 0.93 m and up to 0.17 m deep with an irregular base which was partially root disturbed. The fill (3/4) of this possible garden feature contained some non-articulated bone and post-medieval pottery and clay pipe. Fill 3/4 and layer 3/2 were sealed by the modern topsoil (3/1), which varied between 0.20 and 0.38 m in thickness.

The Finds

Only small amounts of finds, with no artefacts of any significance, were recovered from the site. Small quantities of pottery included one Roman and four medieval sherds, all redeposited in contexts of later date. All the remaining artefactual material, including further pottery, tile and brick, clay pipe and iron nail and object fragments, was of 19th-20th century date. The finds are listed by context in the table of context information (Appendix 1).

Discussion

The subsoil sequence appeared to be more complex than has been observed elsewhere in the area, though this may have been a consequence of excavation of the trenches to a depth considerably below that of the top of the subsoil. In general the sandy gravel of the terrace was overlaid by sandy and silty clays (eg 1/3, 1/4, 2/3, 3/2). The upper parts of these deposits were disturbed by root activity relating to the recent gardens, but only one cut feature, also of recent date, was observed. It is possible that some disturbance of the top of the subsoil layers occurred earlier, since a few medieval sherds were found at this level (particularly

in layer 2/3). These may have derived from an episode of medieval ploughing on the site. Here, however, it does not seem that deposits of this period survived *in situ*, whereas at the Sir William Dunn site, c 100 m to the north, a possible medieval ploughsoil survived relatively undisturbed. The depth of superficial deposits varied considerably, from c 0.20-0.65 m. This variation appears to reflect differing degrees of disturbance and dumping across the site in relatively recent times.

Bryan Matthews,
Paul Booth
OAU, July 1996

References

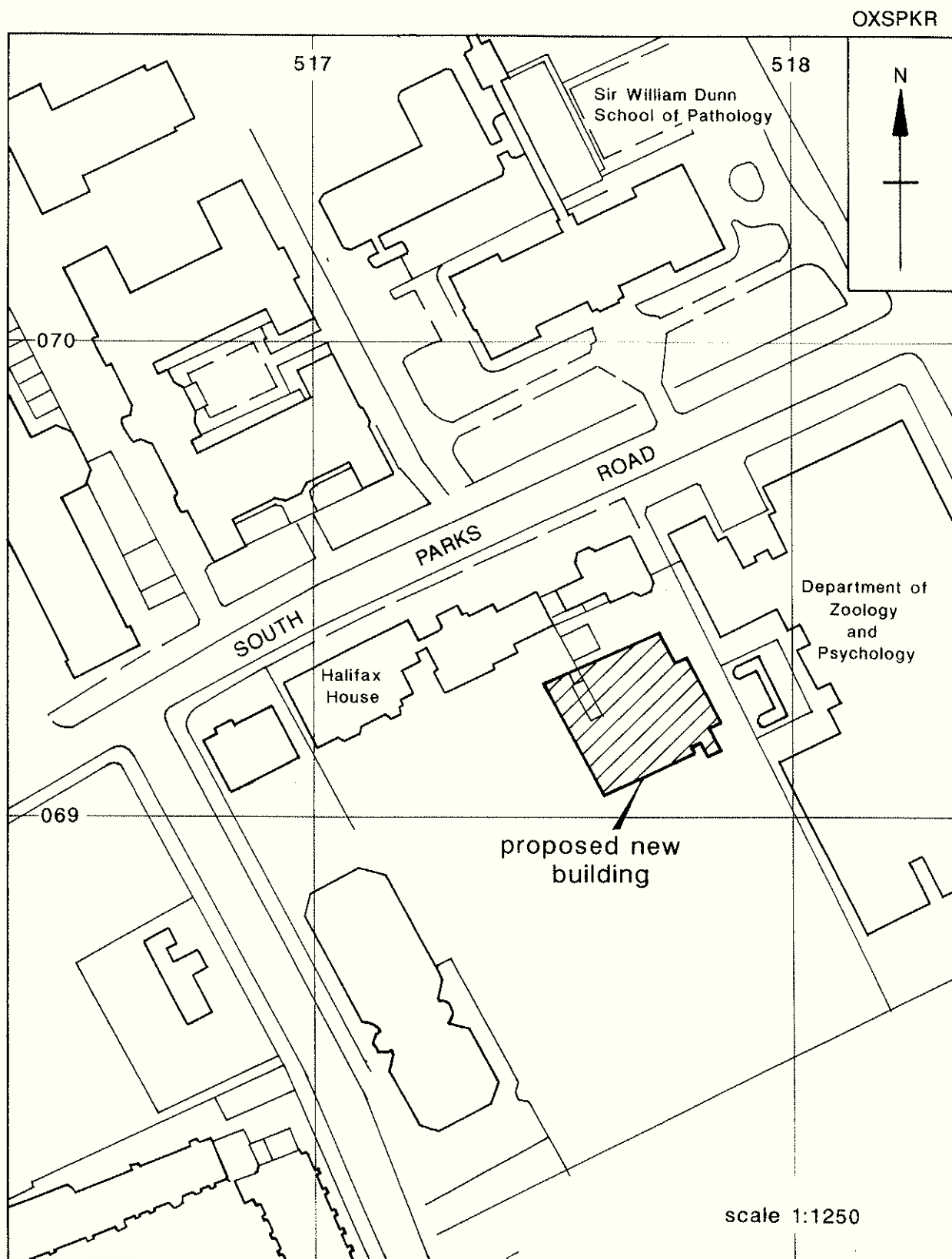
A Parkinson, A Barclay and P McKeague, forthcoming, The excavation of two Bronze Age barrows, Oxford, *Oxoniensia*

OAU, 1995, *Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, Oxford, Archaeological Evaluation*, May 1995

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APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF CONTEXTS AND FINDS

Context	Type	Depth (m)	Length (m)	Width (m)	Comments	Finds
<i>Trench 1</i>		0.50 - 2.20	4.20	1.55		
1/1	Layer	0.22			Topsoil	
1/2	Layer	0.08			Disturbed ground	1 sh 19-20C pot, clay pipe frag, animal bone
1/3	Layer	0.30			Partially disturbed natural	
1/4	Layer	1.50			Natural	
1/5	Layer				Natural gravels	
<i>Trench 2</i>		1.20 - 2.04	4.20	1.70		
2/1	Layer	0.29			Topsoil	Fe nail frag
2/2	Layer	0.37			Disturbed ground	1 sh medieval pot, 1 sh 19-20C pot, 1 tile frag
2/3	Layer	0.56			Partially disturbed Natural	3 sh medieval pot, 1 brick frag, Fe washer, animal bone & oyster shell
2/4	Layer	0.25			Natural	
2/5	Layer	0.55			Natural	
2/6	Layer				Natural	
<i>Trench 3</i>		0.30 - 1.43	4.20	1.60		
3/1	Layer	0.30			Topsoil	Animal bone
3/2	Layer	0.57			Partially disturbed natural	
3/3	Cut	0.17	0.93	0.72	Pit	
3/4	Fill	0.17			Fill of pit	1 sh Roman pot, 3 sh 19-20C pot, Fe nail, 3 clay pipe frags, animal bone
3/5	Layer	0.14			Natural	
3/6	Layer	0.44			Natural	
3/7	Layer	0.14			Natural	
3/8	Layer	0.05 +			Natural	



SP 1506 NE
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Figure 1

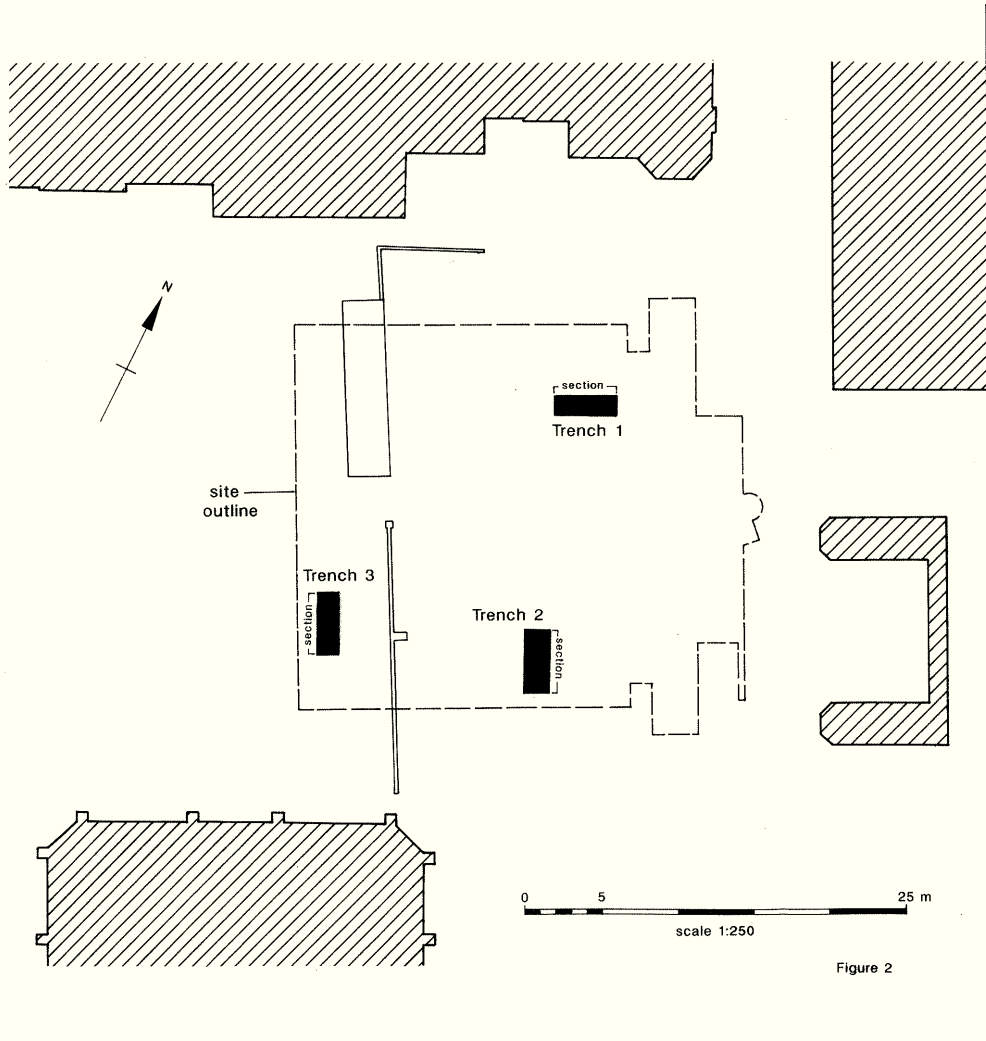


Figure 2

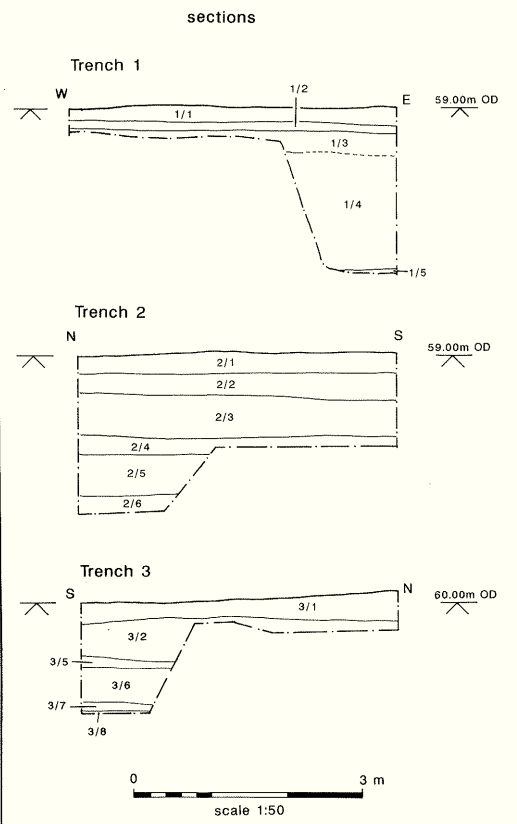


Figure 3



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