Areen Design Services

Centre for Islamic Studies, King's Mill Lane, Oxford

NGR SP 5275 0650

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

November 1998

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Prepared by:	
Date:	3/12/98
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Date:	3/12/98
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Date:	4/12/1998

Oxford Archaeological Unit

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Summary

In October 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at the site of the proposed Centre for Islamic Studies, King's Mill Lane, Oxford (NGR SP 5275 0650). No archaeological features were seen and no finds were retrieved.

1 Introduction (Fig. 1)

The groundworks comprised the excavation of five geotechnical test pits in the vicinity of the rugby pitch at Magdalen College Sports Ground, for inspection by the project's structural engineer. The site comprises an area of approximately 3.25 acres (approximately one half of the pitch). Data obtained from this exercise will inform the eventual planning application.

The watching brief was commissioned by Areen Design Services on behalf of their clients. It was undertaken in consultation with the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service; no brief was prepared as this work is at the pre-planning stage.

2 Background

The archaeological background to this watching brief has been the subject of a separate desk study (OAU 1998), the results of which are summarised below.

The history of the site has been traced from the 11th century; throughout much of the medieval period the site lay within the holdings of King's Mill, a Domesday Mill which belonged to the Hospital of St John until the Dissolution, and which then passed to Magdalen College, to whom it still belongs.

The desktop study concluded that there are no known archaeological sites within the area of the proposed development, nor within its immediate environs; however, the site is located within an area of moderate archaeological potential. The historical and map research undertaken for the desktop survey suggests that the open area of the site has been unoccupied, unploughed and in pasture for much of the medieval and post-medieval period. This would suggest that any archaeological deposits present will have suffered little or no disturbance. Some 20th century disturbance is possible due to use of the site as a market garden, orchard and playing fields. Particularly, any deposits within the area currently occupied by the playing fields, which appear to have been terraced into the natural slope, are likely to have been damaged.

The development area also contains some standing buildings, apparently dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. These buildings are not listed but are of local historical interest. The foundations of these buildings are likely to have damaged, although not removed, any archaeological deposits present. The date of the foundation of the farm is unknown at this time, and it is possible that this area of the site may contain the buried foundations of earlier farm buildings.

The site lies on Oxford Clay and Kellaway beds of the upper Jurassic period. The site is situated above and to the east of the alluvial flood plain of the River Cherwell, between the Marston Road and King's Mill Lane. The land slopes gently from

Marston Road to the east towards the River Cherwell to the west, although there has been some levelling on site during creation of the rugby pitch. Historically the site lay within the manor of Headington, but was an extra-parochial area between the parishes of St Clement's, Marston and Headington.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992).

4 Methodology

Groundworks on site consisted of pre-planning geotechnical test-pitting in order to gather information to inform the planning application. Five in all were dug; all excavation was by a tracked 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothed bucket.

Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil descriptions use *estimated* percentages based on the use of standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (Fig. 2)

All test pits measured approximately 1.10 m by 2 m in plan.

Test Pit 1.

(1) – mid brown loamy topsoil, 0.50 m thick.
(2) – light-mid brown silty clay loam with 15% sand and gravel, 0.60 m thick.
(3) – buff clay, 0.20 m thick.
(4) – gray clay, consistent to the base of the cut.

Test pit 1 terminated at 1.50 m depth; no groundwater was observed.

Test Pit 2.

(20) – mid brown loamy topsoil, 0.10 m thick.
(21) – mid brown slightly clayey loam subsoil, 0.30 m thick.
(22) – dry, fragmented mid gray silty stony clay consistent to the base of the cut.

Test pit 2 terminated at 1.5 m depth; no groundwater was observed.

Test Pit 3.

(30) – heavily rooted mid brown loamy topsoil, 0.25 m thick.
(31) – lens of coarse subangular orange gravel with (30) to either side.
(32) – dry, fragmented mid gray silty stony clay consistent to the base of the cut.

Test pit 3 terminated at 1.10 m depth; no groundwater was observed.

Test Pit 4.

(40) – mid brown slightly clayey topsoil, 0.40 m thick.
(41) – light-mid brown subsoil, 0.60 m thick.
(42) – dry, fragmented mid gray silty stony clay consistent to the base of the cut.

Test pit 4 terminated at 1.5 m depth; no groundwater was observed.

Test Pit 5.

(50) – a thin skim of stony topsoil, 0.05 – 0.10 m thick.
(51) – light-mid brown silty loam, 0.80 m thick.
(52) – dry, fragmented mid gray silty stony clay consistent to the base of the cut.

Test pit 5 terminated at 1.5 m depth; no groundwater was observed.

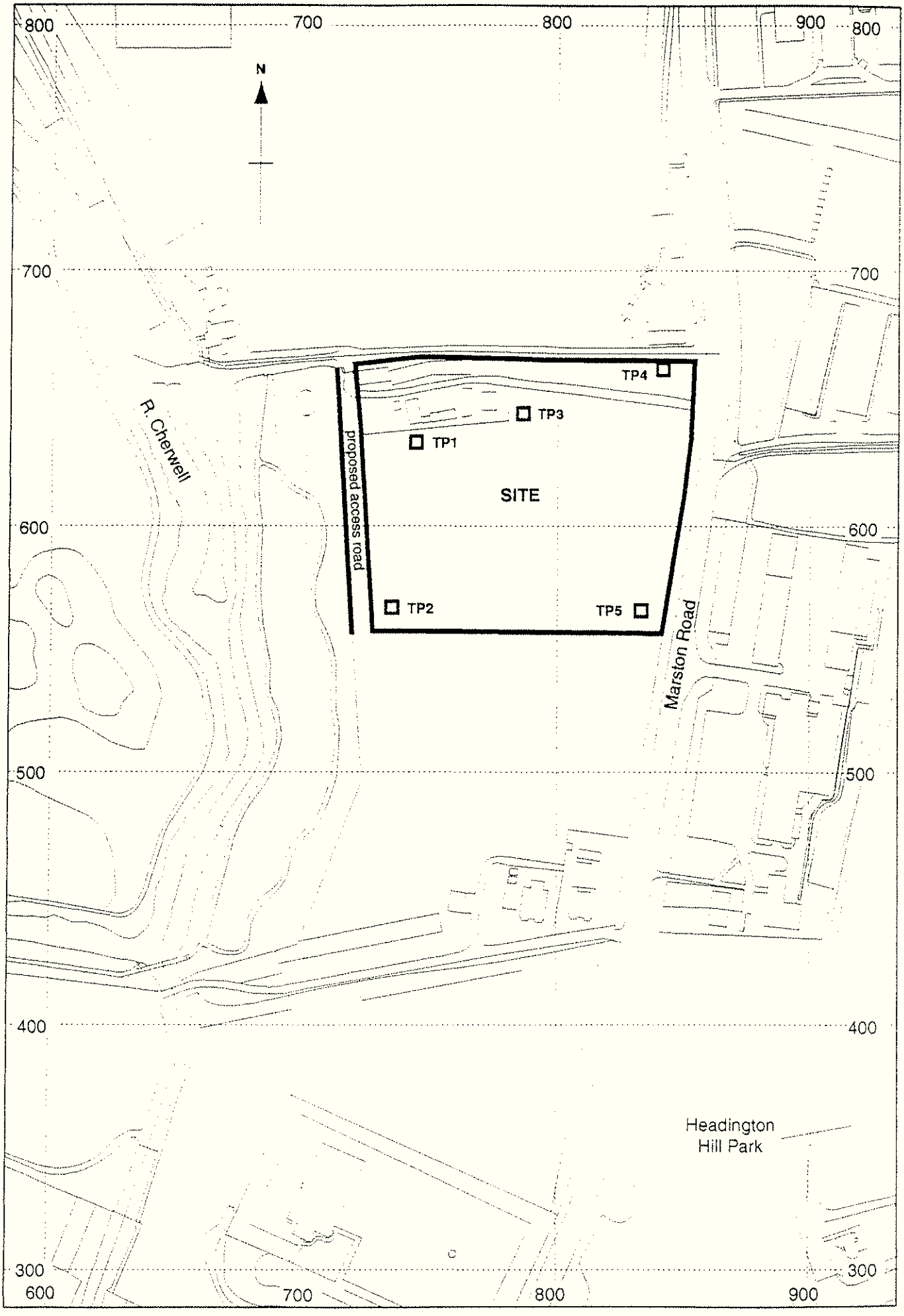
6 Discussion

The majority of the test pits produced a similar sequence of topsoil and subsoil overlying a possibly alluvial clay. The only exception to this occurred in test pit 1, located in close proximity to the standing buildings, which produced a quantity of gravelly backfill and two different types of clay at its base. Given that the desktop study explicitly predicted the possibility of buried remains of further buildings, it is at least possible that TP 1 impacted upon disturbance associated with the construction/demolition of farm buildings. However, given the absence of any structural evidence (worked stone, roof tiles/slates, etcetera) it is thought to be unlikely.

References.

OAU 1998 Proposed development at King's Mill Lane. Archaeological desk-based assessment.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).



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Location of site

Figure 1

Sections of test pits

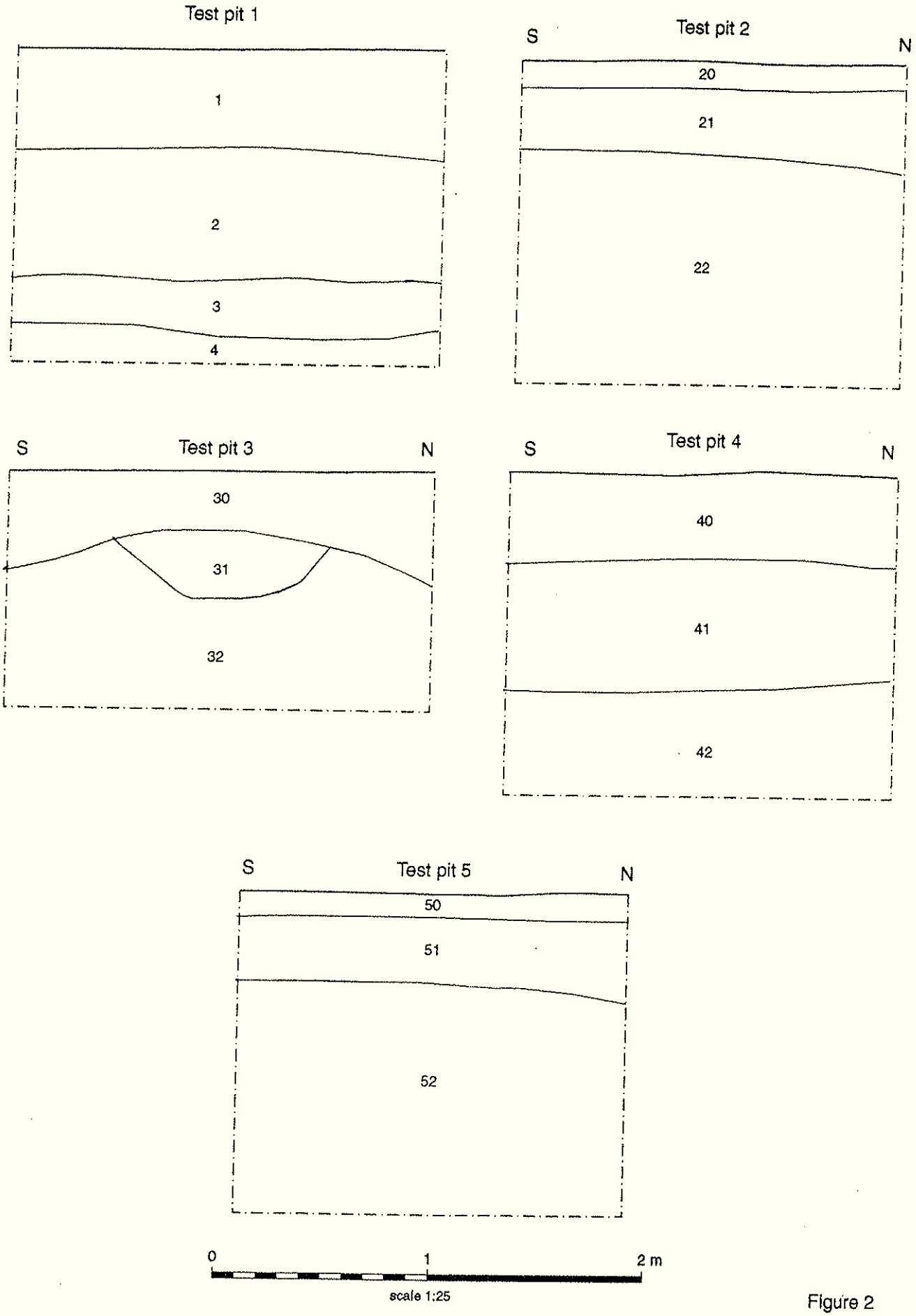

Figure 2

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