

OXWDZ
440/95

(OX)

Sir William Dunn
School of Pathology,
Oxford

NGR SP 5169 0706

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

June 1996

SIR WILLIAM DUNN SCHOOL OF PATHOLOGY, OXFORD
PROPOSED LABORATORY
PLANNING APPLICATION No: NF/1777/94
NGR SP 5169 0706
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

1 SUMMARY

The watching brief revealed a low density of archaeological activity on this site, with the majority of features and deposits being of modern origin. Two undated possible pit features were recorded at the east end of the site along with a linear natural feature. A substantial amount of the site has been developed in recent times, which may have affected the level of the natural horizon.

2 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief in November and December 1995 during the groundwork for a new building at the Sir William School of Pathology, Oxford (Fig. 1). The development site lies to the south of an important area of prehistoric and Roman activity, located principally in the University Parks. Until recently the nearest archaeological work had been at the Rex Richards building, c. 100 m to the west of the development site.

An archaeological evaluation of this development area was carried out by the OAU in April 1995, in advance of determination of an application to redevelop the site. The evaluation demonstrated a low level of archaeological activity, consisting of medieval and undated ploughsoils. The results of this investigation and further archaeological background are contained in the evaluation report (OAU 1995: Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, Oxford, SP 5169 0706, Archaeological Evaluation). The Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS) required that a watching brief be carried out at the site during the course of the development and prepared a brief for this work. The new development consists of a new laboratory building with a large basement.

The present surface (tarmac) of the site lies at 61.80 m O.D., and the underlying geology consists of Summertown-Radley gravel terrace. The development area was c 30 m square (most of which was occupied by the deep excavation for the basement) and is situated immediately to the east of the present Plant Sciences/Glycobiology building.

3 METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGY

Work on this site was monitored at regular intervals by OAU personnel. Concrete, tarmac and make-up layers (overburden) were removed using a 360° Hymac machine equipped with a toothed bucket. Underlying soil was stripped using a toothless ditching bucket to the top of the natural gravel, c 0.60-0.70 m below the modern ground surface. The clean gravel surface was examined for the presence of features and finds. The

stripping was carried out in two phases (with the northern half of the site being stripped first) in order to maintain an access to the S half of the site for the removal of spoil by lorry. All features and deposits were assigned unique context numbers (starting at 100, to avoid duplication with the evaluation records). These context numbers are summarised in table form at the end of this report.

4 RESULTS

All of the features revealed during the stripping were recorded at the level of the stripped gravel surface (Fig. 2). Two ovoid features (Fig. 2, 3) were located at the west end of the site. Cut 101 was 0.13 m deep and 0.48 m wide, with a concave base and 45° sloping edges. The fill, 100, was a mid dark reddish-brown silt loam containing a small quantity of gravel. No finds were recovered from this fill. To the north of 101 was cut 103, an ovoid feature with steep, near vertical sides (Fig. 2, 3). The cut was 0.19 m deep and 0.59 m wide and had a concave base. The fill (102) was a mid dark reddish-brown silt loam containing a small quantity of gravel, but no dating evidence. Located between features 101 and 103 was a north-west - south-east aligned linear feature (105). The feature varied in width from 0.35-1.05 m, and was at least 0.22 m deep. The sides of this feature were near vertical, tapering to a narrow gap of only 0.07 m. The edges of the cut appeared to continue below the investigated depth.

An irregular shaped feature (107) with a clean reddish-brown silt loam fill was seen to the south of feature 105. This feature was interpreted as a tree throw hole and was not investigated.

At the extreme west of the site was a large square shaped cut (110) filled with modern tile and oil cans. This feature was not further investigated. Further modern features filled with concrete blocks, modern debris and service pipes were identified in plan but not investigated (111, 112, 114). A very substantial concrete duct ran in a zig-zag course through the middle of the area and cut deeply into the natural gravel.

No artefacts were seen apart from material of recent date incorporated in the fills of some of the modern features. These objects were not recovered.

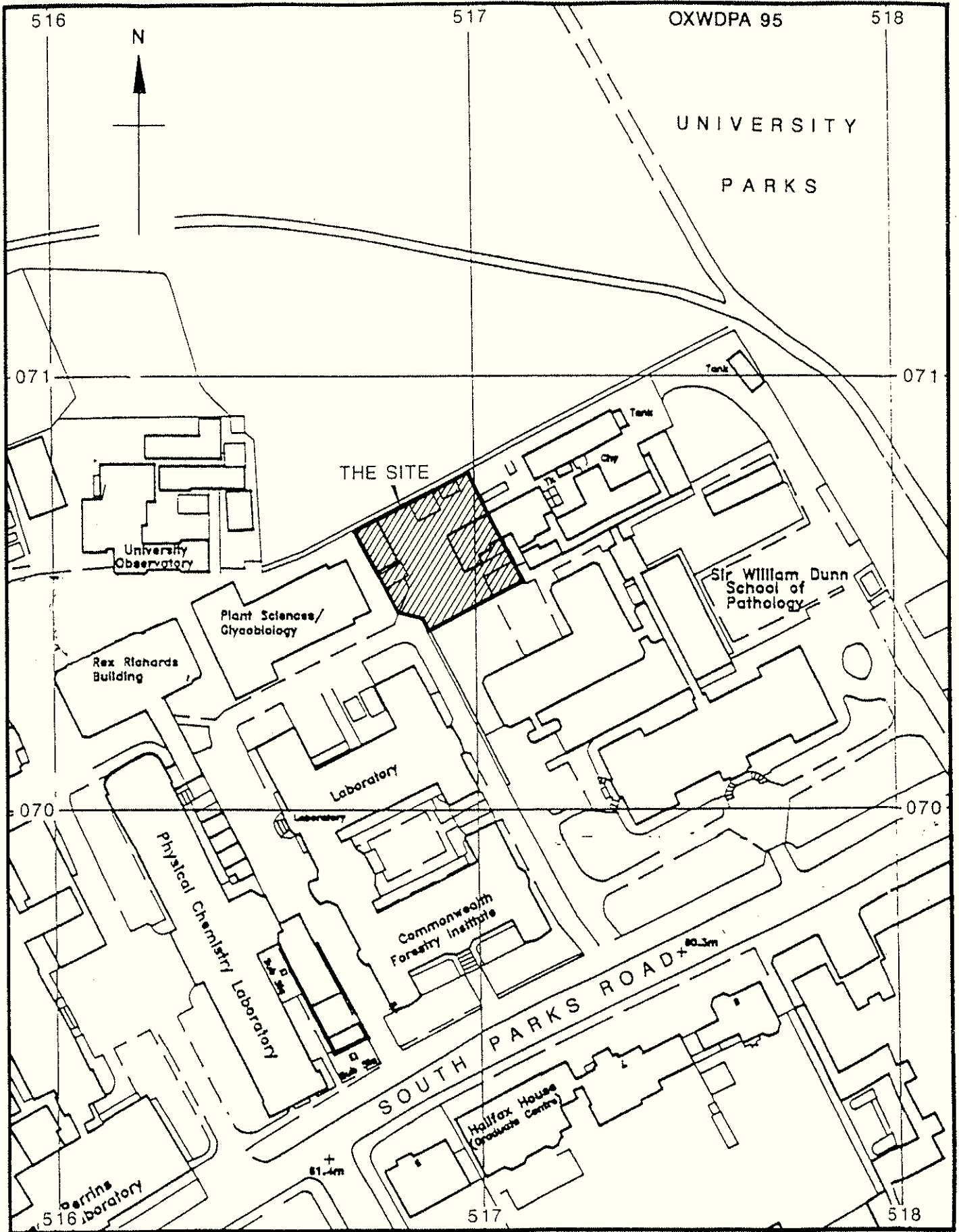
5 CONCLUSIONS

The low density of archaeological activity indicated by the evaluation on this site was confirmed by the results of this watching brief. The majority of the features observed during the work were modern. The plan and section of the linear feature 105 make it clear that this was of periglacial origin. Of the two pit features observed at the east end of the site, the profile and depth of 103 might suggest that it was a genuine man-made feature, although the absence of finds from the fill means that the feature was undated. 'Pit' 101 was very shallow, and the fill contained no finds. Its character is therefore uncertain. Despite localised truncation or removal of potential archaeological horizons, which might have resulted in the total destruction of small features, it is clear that substantial features would have been identified if present.

TABLE OF CONTEXT INFORMATION

CTX	TYPE	DEPTH	WIDTH	COMMENTS
100	Fill	0.13 m	-	Fill of feature 101
101	Cut	0.13 m	0.48 m	Feature, possibly a pit or natural hollow
102	Fill	0.19 m	-	Fill of feature 103
103	Cut	0.19 m	0.59 m	As 101, possible pit
104	Fill	0.22 m +	-	Silty loam fill of ? natural frost fracture 105
105	Cut	0.22 m +	0.35-1.05 m	?Frost fracture filled with clean silty loam
106	Cut	-	1.40 m	Tree hole, irregular shape
107	Structure	-	0.75 m	Brick and concrete manhole observed at the level of natural 108
108	Layer	1.0 m	-	Natural sand and gravel
109	Layer	0.27-0.33 m	-	Ploughsoil/medieval soil horizon
110	Cut	-	-	Modern square pit below site of removed garage building
111	Service	-	0.90 m	N-S aligned modern service cut filled with concrete blocks and bricks, pipes unseen. Lies to the W of former electricity sub-station
112	Service	-	0.90 m	N-S aligned service cut filled with 2x copper pipes
113	Deposit	-	-	Base of 1995 evaluation trench backfill
114	Cut	-	-	Modern cut/pit filled with modern refuse
115	Layer	0.30 m	-	Overburden of concrete and tarmac removed by the machine

J. Hiller
 Oxford Archaeological Unit
 June 1996



scale 1:1250

site location

figure 1

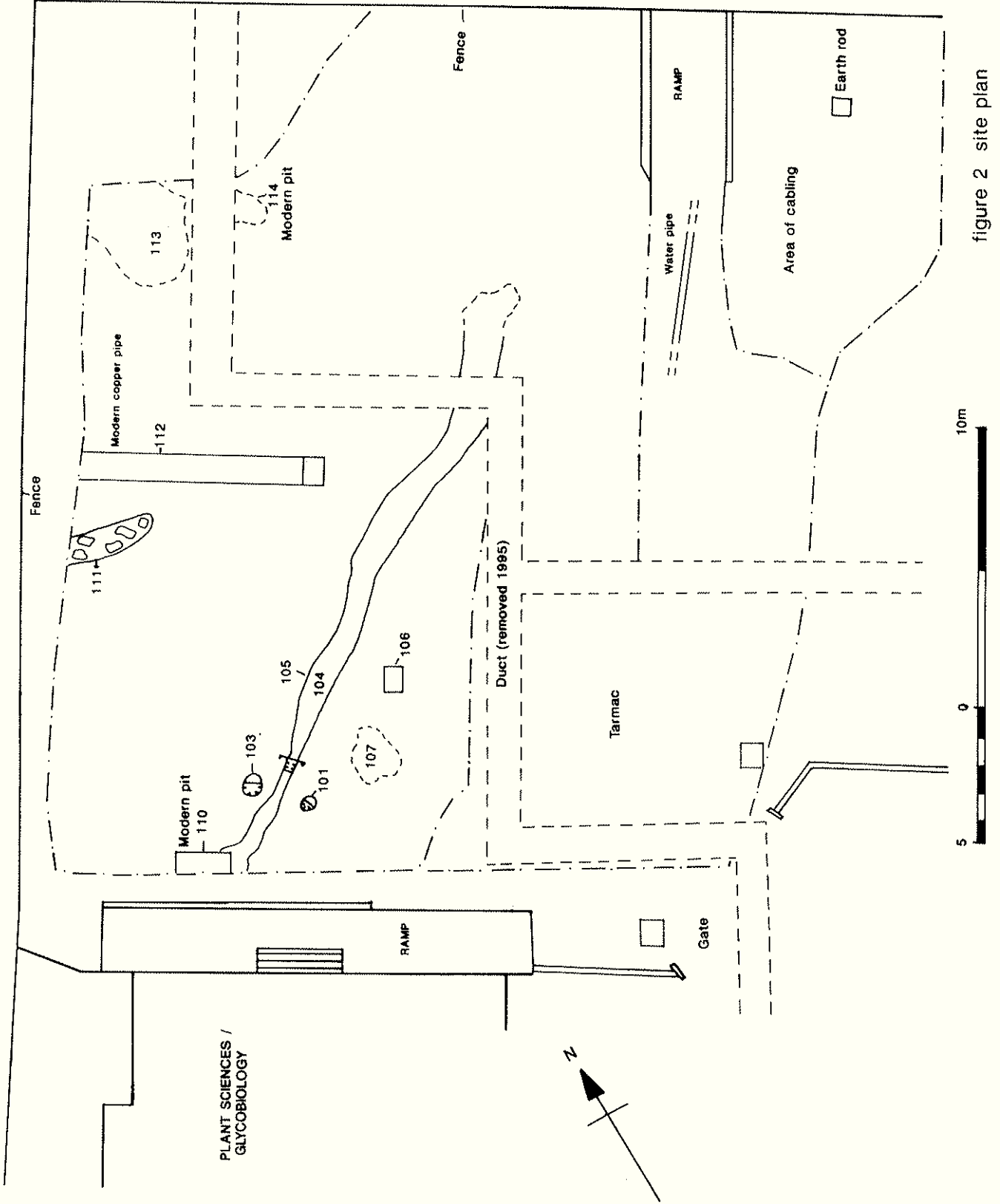


figure 2 site plan

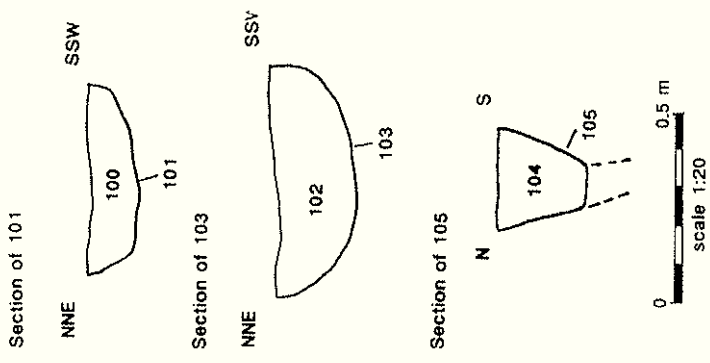


figure 3 sections