6-7 High Street

Oxford



Archaeological Evaluation Report



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6-7 High Street, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Written by Jacek Gruszczynski

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Summary

In February 2012, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a test pit evaluation in the basement of 6-7 High Street Oxford (NGR SP 514 062). The work was commissioned by Stride Treglown on behalf of Henderson Global Investors.

The evaluation revealed an archaeological horizon directly below the rubble levelling for the existing concrete slab floor, approximately 0.3m below the floor surface.

Exposed archaeological features comprised a number of pits containing domestic waste and demolition material, as well as possibly being related to animal processing. Part of a Saxon loomweight was also recovered. The remains indicated occupation from the Saxon to early post-medieval period.



1 Introduction

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a test pit investigation at 6-7 High St during February 2012. OA were appointed by Stride Treglown on behalf of Henderson Global Investors (HGI).
- 1.1.2 HGI have applied for and been granted Listed Building Consent in relation to proposed internal alterations and floor level changes at the site.
- 1.1.3 On the advice of the Oxford City Council Archaeologist a condition was attached to the consent. This states:

No development shall take place until the developer has:

- 1. Carried out an archaeological evaluation of the site in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved in writing by the planning authority
- 2. Secured the implementation of a scheme of mitigation of any significant archaeological impact, which may be achieved by redesign, or by archaeological recording action in accordance with a supplementary written scheme of investigation to be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: Because the development may have a damaging effect on known or suspected elements of the historic environment of the people of Oxford and their visitors, including Saxon, medieval and post-medieval remains in accordance with policy HE2 of the adopted Local Plan 2001-2016.

- 1.1.4 Subsequently OA were issued a brief for the required works produced by the Oxford City Council Archaeologist (OCC 2012). This set out the detailed requirement for work which comprises in summary Stage 1: Three 1 x 1m test pits and Stage 2: Subject to the results of Stage 1, provision to be made for 1) the full excavation of the basement footprint to the proposed reduced level depth or 2) detailed watching brief during ground reduction works.
- 1.1.5 OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation for Stage 1, in adherence to the planning condition, setting out the work required by the OCC brief, the methodologies that would be employed and a provisional programme of work. The WSI was approved by OCC.
- 1.1.6 This document is the evaluation report and contains the results of the test pit investigation.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Nos 6 & 7 High Street are located on the northern side of High Street close to Carfax, the historic crossroads at the centre of Oxford. The site lies within the city parish of St Michael at the Northgate. The site is located with the Oxford Central (City and University) Conservation Area and within the designated Oxford City Council Area of Archaeological Interest for Oxford.
- 1.2.2 The geology of the area is Summertown-Radley river gravels overlying Oxfordshire Clay and West Walton Formation (Mudstone).



1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The site has been the subject of a desk-based assessment (OA 2011). The conclusion of that assessment (as stated in brief OCC 2012) was that potential existed for Late Saxon, medieval and post medieval remains associated with tenement activity in this location. The site being located along one of the principle street frontages of the Late Saxon and medieval town, close to the central cross roads at Carfax. The tenements here would have fronted onto the regular street market that spread along the streets approaching Carfax.
- 1.3.2 The assessment noted the potential for the survival of deep cut archaeological features in this location, such as late 10th-11th century Saxon cellar pits and/or later medieval or post-medieval features such as wells and deep pits. Previous construction works in the 1950s may have significantly truncated the basement area, however the surviving plans from this period indicate that undisturbed areas may survive between existing foundations.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The specific aims and objectives of the Stage 1 evaluation were to investigate the presence /absence of archaeological remains within the basement that may be subject to development impact as well as to characterise the archaeological remains should they be present and obtain sufficient data to inform a programme of mitigation (Stage 2).

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 Site procedures followed standard OA practice as defined in Appendix B of the WSI.
- 2.2.2 Three test pits each measuring 1 x 1 m in plan were excavated in the basement (see Figure 2 for location). Following slab breakout, hand excavation continued to the level of natural geology or the depth of impact of the proposed development (approximately 1.0m below the basement floor level) in Test Pits 1 and 2, excavation in Test Pit 3 was impeded by a concrete ground beam.
- 2.2.3 Spoil excavated by hand was stored in areas adjacent to test pits, which were manually backfilled after the full recording was completed.

3 Results

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The following section summarises the results of the evaluation by test pit and from the earliest to the latest archaeological deposits encountered during the archaeological works. Detailed context descriptions are presented in the context inventory (Appendix A), and within the descriptive text where they are integral to the interpretation of the context in question.

3.2 Test Pit 1

(See Fig.4)

3.2.1 The stratigraphically earliest deposit in Test Pit 1 was a compacted gravel layer (109), which might have formed a surface. It is however possible that along with deposit of



- organic and domestic waste (108) it might have constituted fills of a pit, edges of which were not observed within the investigation.
- 3.2.2 Context 108 was spot dated to the late11th mid 13th century. It was cut by a sub-rectangular rubbish pit (cut 106) dated to late 11th-early 13th century which contained large amount of animal bone, particularly lower jaw, and unfused lower leg bones, suggesting its association with butchery.
- 3.2.3 The feature was sealed by a fairly firm levelling deposit (105) also spot dated to late 11th mid 13th century and containing pottery which was all soot marked cooking pots. This was truncated to the east by a construction cut (context 103) for a north-south aligned foundation wall (104). The wall was built from large unworked limestone blocks bonded with soft creamy sandy lime mortar. It was trench built and it extended beyond the limit of excavation towards the north and to the east. It terminated (or returned to the east) before the southern edge of the test pit. The wall was exposed to the height of 0.6m with the top recorded at 62.06mOD.
- 3.2.4 A compacted gravel surface (102) was laid directly over the levelling deposit (105) and it is likely that it the ground surface associated with wall 104. The archaeological horizon recorded at 62.20mOD was sealed by rubble levelling (101) for existing modern concrete floor (100).

3.3 Test pit 2

- 3.3.1 Test pit 2 exposed truncated natural gravel overlain by 0.1m thick layer of 'supranatural' (context 217) at 61.80mOD.
- 3.3.2 The natural deposit was truncated by a partially exposed construction cut (context 216) for a probable stone drain or wall foundation (215) recorded at 61.69mOD. A Saxon loomweight was found within the backfill, which may suggest that the feature formed a post-pad associated with a sunken feature building.
- 3.3.3 Natural deposit 217 also appeared to be truncated by pit (cut 218), however it is possible that there is no cut and that deposit context 213 is a buried topsoil rather than a feature fill.
- 3.3.4 Both above mentioned features were truncated by a shallow pit (cut 212) which was filled with a number of charcoal and ash rich deposits. These produced no artefacts. It is possible that the feature might have served as a rake-out pit for charred refuse from a domestic hearth/oven.
- 3.3.5 The sequence was cut by a large, partially excavated rubbish pit (206), which contained a large quantity of medieval CBM, particularly roof tiles. The finds retrieved from the fills (205, 204 and 203) give a confusing indication of date with 12th-14th century pottery in the lowest excavated fill and 16th-17th century pottery from the uppermost fill as well as the CBM which is likely to date to the 13th -14th century. However this can be sensibly explained if the pit contains artefacts from demolition whereby the earliest pot is residual and the CBM represent the long-lived roofing of a medieval building demolished in the early post-medieval period.
- 3.3.6 The archaeological horizon was sealed by rubble levelling (201) for existing modern concrete floor (200).

3.4 Test pit 3

3.4.1 The removal of existing concrete floor (301) revealed a substantial modern concrete beam or service casing aligned NW-SE running through the centre of the test pit.



- 3.4.2 The related rubble levelling and backfill (301) for the beam's construction cut were too big to be removed by hand within the test pit.
- 3.4.3 Only a small patch of compacted yellow gravelly sand (302) was exposed in the SW corner of the test pit. It is not clear if the deposit formed a part of an archaeological horizon.
- 3.4.4 Further excavation of the test pit was not possible due to the obstruction of the ground beam.

4 Discussion

4.1 Interpretation

- 4.1.1 Two of the three test pits revealed a largely undisturbed archaeological horizon directly below the rubble levelling for the existing concrete slab floor, approximately 0.3m below the floor surface.
- 4.1.2 Exposed archaeological features comprised a number of pits containing domestic waste and demolition material, as well as possibly being related to animal processing. The available dating evidence suggests activity from the Saxon period (a Saxon loomweight was recovered) continuing through to the early post medieval period. There is a striking absence of clay pipes and modern material suggesting that the archaeological horizon was in some way sealed in the early post-medieval period.
- 4.1.3 It is unclear as to whether surfaces in the test pits are at historic ground level (this is possible from external spot height data) or within a basement that has been replaced by the existing structure.
- 4.1.4 Works were carried out to inspect foundations prior to the archaeological investigation (see Fig.3). These holes were all inspected by OA. All the holes were within the construction cut infills of the foundations they were intended to inspect. Ground beams linked to the column bases were also visible in some of the holes.

4.2 Conclusions

- 4.2.1 The investigation has shown that as indicated in the desktop assessment archaeological remains dating from the Saxon period to the early post medieval period survive just below the concrete slab of the basement. These are represented by pits, surfaces and structures.
- 4.2.2 Modern impacts have removed part of the archaeological deposits: specifically the cutting of trenches for the column base foundations, underpinning works and the previously unknown ground beams. However a significant amount of archaeological remains is likely to survive in between these disturbances.



APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Test pit 1							
General d	lescription				Orientation	n/a	
		-		and lime mortar wall built	Avg. depth (m)	1 m	
	in the cons he surface		Width (m)	1.02 m			
two interc		was lala	Length (m)	1.04 m			
Contexts					1		
context no.	type	Width (m)	comment	Soil Description			
100	Layer	-	0.12	Concrete			
101	Layer	-	0.2	Rubble			
102	Layer	-	0.03	Surface	Orangey grey sandy gravel		
103	Cut	>0.4	>0.61	Construction cut for wall 104			
104	Structure	>0.4	>0.61	Limestone wall			
105	Layer	-	0.2	Levelling layer	Dark grey silty sand		
106	Cut	>0.22	>0.6	Rubbish pit			
107	Fill	>0.22	>0.6	Fill of pit 106	Dark brown sandy slit		
108	Fill/Layer	-	0.3	Fill or rubbish dump	Mixed dark grey and br	own sandy	
109	Fill/Layer	-	>0.01	Fill or surface	Dark orangey brown gr	avelly sand	

Test pit 2							
General d	escription	n			Orientation	n/a	
					Avg. depth (m)	1m	
Test pit restructure	evealed a	number	Width (m)	1m			
Structure			Length (m)	1m			
Contexts							
context no.	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	Soil Description		
200	Layer	-	0.12	Concrete			
201	Layer	-	0.2	Rubble			
202	Layer	-	0.14	Made ground	Greyish brown sandy silt		
203	Fill	>1.0	0.38	Fill of pit 206	Brownish grey sandy s	silt	
204	Fill	>1.0	0.08	Fill of pit 206	Orangey brown silty sa	and	
205	Fill	>1.0	0.24	Fill of pit 206	Greyish brown sandy	silt	
206	Cut	>1.0	>0.78	Pit			
207	Fill	>0.7	0.12	Fill of pit 212	Brownish grey clayey	silt	
208	Fill	>0.7	0.03	Fill of pit 212	Grey sandy silt		
209	Fill	>0.7	0.08	Fill of pit 212	Brownish grey sandy silt		





210	Fill	>0.7	0.05	Fill of pit 212	Orangey brown silty sand
211	Fill	>0.7	0.2	Fill of pit 212	Brownish grey sandy clay
212	Cut	>0.7	0.2	Pit	
213	Fill	>0.33	0.25	Fill of pit 218	Brownish grey sandy silt
214	Fill	0.4	0.22	Fill of pit 216	Orangey brown sandy clay
215	Structure	0.2	0.12	Stone wall/drain or post pad	
216	Cut	0.4	0.24	Construction cut for wall\ drain or a posthole	
217	Layer	-	-	Natural	Orangey brown gravel
218	Cut	0.32	0.3	Pit	

Test pit 3							
General c	lescriptio	n	Orientation	n/a			
	evealed a		Avg. depth (m) 0.3m				
	ısing. Arch orner is dou	-	Width (m)	1.05m			
1110 000 00	711101 13 000	abtiui.		Length (m)	1.05m		
Contexts						'	
context no.	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	Soil Description		
300	Layer	-	0.18	Concrete			
302	Layer	-	0.22	Rubble			
303	Layer	0.3	>0.02	Levelling?	Compact yellowish gre	y gravelly	



Appendix B. Finds Reports Pottery by John Cotter

Introduction and methodology

4.2.3 A total of 32 sherds of pottery weighing 653g. were recovered from six contexts. These represent a range of medieval and early post-medieval pottery fabrics. All the pottery was examined and spot-dated during the present assessment stage. For each context the total pottery sherd count and weight were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet, followed by the context spot-date which is the date-bracket during which the latest pottery types in the context are estimated to have been produced or were in general circulation. Comments on the presence of datable types were also recorded, usually with mention of vessel form (jugs, bowls etc.) and any other attributes worthy of note (eg. decoration etc.).

Date and nature of the assemblage

- 4.2.4 Overall the pottery assemblage is in a fragmentary condition, although some sherds are quite large and fresh. Ordinary domestic pottery types are represented. These are detailed in the spreadsheet and summarised here. Fabric codes referred to for the medieval wares are those of the Oxfordshire type series (Mellor 1994).
- 4.2.5 The range of medieval and post-medieval wares here is typical of sites along the main thoroughfares of central Oxford. Most of the pottery here appears to date to the period c 1075-1300, and mainly perhaps within c 1075-1250. Six sherds from two contexts however are of late medieval/early post-medieval date probably 16th-century (Ctxs 203 and 204). The four other 'early medieval' contexts all contain a few sherds of Medieval Oxford ware (OXY, c 1075-1300) and two also contain sherds of Cotswold-type ware (OXAC, from c 900 but mainly c 1050-1225 at Oxford). All the early medieval sherds here appear to be from cooking pots and several large fresh rims and typical sagging bases with sooting marks are present. The handful of later sherds mainly comprises plain jugs and a single costrel (flask) sherd in late medieval Brill/Boarstall ware (OXAM/OXBX, c 1450-1625), and a single sherd of early post-medieval red earthenware (PMRE, c 1475-1600).

Spot date table:

Context	Spot date	No.s	Weight	Comments
105	c1075-1250	5	78	4x Medieval Oxford ware (OXY) - all sooted cookpots incl sagging base & shoulder with groove or ledge. 1x fairly fresh bodysherd (bs) Early Medieval Oxford ware (OXAC)
107	c1075-1250	3	107	2x OXY cpot bss. 1x bs v coarse flinty Newbury A ware (OXBF)
108	c1075-1250	15	313	Date might be within c1075-1150? as OXAC rims fairly early-looking. Fresh large sherds. 4x OXY incl 2 cpot bases. 11x OXAC incl 4
203	c1550-1625?	6	123	Fresh bs early post-med redware with int lustrous dark brown glaze, fine orange fabric with reduced surfaces. 5x late Brill
204	c1450-1625?	2	22	Fresh rim sherd from late Brill jug, unglazed. 1x resid OXY bs
205	c1075-1300	1	10	OXY cpot rim, large beaded form. Sooted. SEE CBM FOR LATER SPOT-DATE c1175-1350?
Total		32	653	



The ceramic building material (CBM) by John Cotter

- 4.2.6 A total of 31 pieces of CBM weighing 3312g. were recovered from three contexts. This was examined and spot-dated during the present assessment stage in a similar way to the pottery (see elsewhere) and the data recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. As usual, the dating of broken fragments of ceramic or other building materials is an imprecise art and spot-dates derived from them are necessarily broad and should therefore be regarded with caution.
- 4.2.7 Although fragmentary, the assemblage mostly consists of large fresh pieces of medieval roof tile and ridge tile. Some of the pieces are unusually large (up to 220mm. long) but no complete widths or lengths were preserved. Although many pieces are large and quite fresh they still exhibit signs of weathering suggesting a long period of use on the roof they originated from. The assemblage is described in some detail in the spreadsheet and summarised only briefly here. As usual in Oxford, fragments of plain flat roofing tile (peg tile) predominate, some with circular nail holes and most showing evidence of glaze typical of medieval roof tiles. Several large thick pieces of glazed medieval ridge tile are also present including edge and corner fragments. Over-all, the character of this material suggests a mainly 13th-14th century date, and one of the ridge tiles is in an early limestone-tempered fabric datable c 1175-1300. No obviously later pieces were identified.

Fired clay loomweight by John Cotter

4.2.8 A single fragment (215g.) of an Anglo-Saxon annular loomweight in fired clay was recovered from Context (214), a wall foundation. This has not been separately catalogued but is fully described here. The loomweight is of flattened annular or discoidal form with slightly tapered edges. It has an external diameter of c 130mm., a central perforation with a diameter of c 25-30mm, and has a maximum thickness of 35mm. About a third of the object survives. It is quite worn and weathered over most of its surfaces and one side in particular is guite badly flaked or spalled. On the better preserved side the edge of the perforation shows a few possible cord wear impressions or grooves. The loomweight has a hard dense fine grey brickearth fabric which is burnt and blackened along part of its edge. Where unworn it appears originally to have had pale grey-brown surfaces. The fabric contains sparse coarse organic inclusions (plant matter) and at least one very large flat shell inclusion c 18mm. long - possibly freshwater clam or something similar. A much larger triangular impression - up to 35mm. long - with fine parallel striations, may also have been caused by a piece of flattish shell (now lost) or perhaps a large wood-chipping. The large size of this inclusion caused a weakness in the fabric and probably contributed to its eventual breakage. Annular discoidal loomweights such as this example are thought to belong to the early and middle Anglo-Saxon periods (c 400-850) rather than later when 'bun'shaped examples became commoner. Saxon loomweights are generally quite rare in Oxford although several examples were found in recent excavations at Oxford Castle (Cynthia Poole, pers. comm).



CBM Spot date table:

Context	Spot date	No.s	Weight	Comments
203	C1200-1400?	18	2141	Large fresh and some worn/weathered frags. Prob all 13/14C? Incl thick med pegtile corners 16-18mm thick with neatly bored circular nail-holes, thin greenish glaze on sandy pale orange fabric with grey core - grey cores on all examples. Several glazed incl prob thick ridge tile corner (20mm thick) in sandy orange-buff Fabric VIIBB with pale olive green glaze ext. 1x reduced ridge tile edge. Orange sandy Fabric IIIB frags. Glaze on most
204	C1200-1400?	5	639	2x large fairly fresh med ridge tile (1 tile) in VIIBB with pale olive green glaze - poss joins (203)? But coated ext in rusty brown cessy deposit. Large pegtile edge frag in similar fabric unglazed. Plus scraps
205	1175-1350?	8	532	4x fresh joining sherds from top corner/apex of ridge tile in oolitic limestone-tempered fabric (Fabric IB c1175-1300) with dimple near apex - prob at base of a missing crest. 2x fresh joining frags from lower right-hand corner of a pegtile in pale orange-buff Fabric VIIBB with grey core and thin decayed glaze, max surviving length 220mm. 1x worn thicker tile in similar fabric with glaze specks. 1x small worn fine orange sandy tile frag with thin clear glaze
Total		31	3312	

Animal bones By Lena Strid

- 4.2.9 A total of 86 re-fitted animal bones were recovered from this site (see table below). Most bones were in a fair to good condition, suggesting a rapid disposal of waste. Gnaw marks from dogs were noted on six bones, while traces of burning was absent.
- 4.2.10 The small assemblage is dominated by domestic animals such as cattle, sheep/goat, pig and domestic fowl. Dog is implicitly present as evidenced by traces of gnawing. Judging by tooth wear, epiphyseal fusion and bone structure, all bones, with the exception of one juvenile bird tarsometatarsus, derived from adult or sub-adult animals. The skeletal representation of cattle and sheep/goat suggest that the assemblage represent butchery and kitchen waste.
- 4.2.11 Since the assemblage is so small, it is not possible to discuss socio-economic consumer patterns for the inhabitants of the household/s. However, all species present are common animals in urban medieval assemblages.
- 4.2.12 Butchering marks were found on bones from cattle, sheep/goat as well as from unidentified large and medium mammals. The butchery marks on the cattle bones represent skinning, disarticulation of the lower limb and portioning of the upper limb. A single sheep/goat metatarsal had transverse cleaver marks on the distal metaphysis, suggesting disarticulation of the foot. Ribs and vertebrae of large and medium mammals showed evidence of portioning.

Bones/context table:

	Levelling layer	Fill of Pit 106	Pit/ Layer	Fills of Pit 206	TOTAL
	105	107	108	203, 204, 205	
Cattle	1	13	7	3	24
Sheep/goat	1		4	8	13
Pig	1		1	1	3
Domestic fowl				1	1
Indet. bird			2		2
Medium	2	3	6	6	17
mammal					
Large mammal	1	4	7	6	18
Indeterminate	1	2	2	3	8





TOTAL	7	22	29	28	86
Weight (g)	154	1777	514	480	2925

Number of bones and weight per context.

Context	Species	No. of bones (refitted)	Sum of weight (g)
105	Cattle	1	154
	Sheep/goat	1	
	Pig	1	
	Medium mammal	2	
	Large mammal	1	
	Indeterminate	1	
107	Cattle	13	1777
	Medium mammal	3	
	Large mammal	4	
	Indeterminate	2	
108	Cattle	7	514
	Sheep/goat	4	
	Pig	1	
	Indet. bird	2	
	Medium mammal	6	
	Large mammal	7	
	Indeterminate	2	
203	Cattle	2	189
	Sheep/goat	3	
	Medium mammal	2	
	Large mammal	2	
	Indeterminate	3	
204	Cattle	1	218
	Sheep/goat	5	
	Domestic fowl	1	
	Medium mammal	3	
	Large mammal	2	
205	Pig	1	73
	Medium mammal	1	
	Large mammal	2	

APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Mellor, M 1994 Oxfordshire Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region' Oxoniensia 59, 17-217

OCC 2012 Oxford City Council Planning Control and Conservation. Brief for an Archaeological Excavation

OA 2011 6-7 High Street Oxford. Desk-based Assessment

OA 2012 6-7 High Street Oxford. Written Scheme of Investigation



Appendix D. Summary of Site Details

Site name: 6-7 High Street, Oxford

Site code: OXHIGH12

Grid reference: SP SP 5137 0620

Type: Evaluation

Date and duration: 27th -29th February 2012

Area of site: 3m²

Summary of results: In February 2012, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a test pit evaluation in the basement of 6-7 High Street Oxford (NGR SP 514 062). The work was commissioned by Stride Treglown on behalf of Henderson Global Investors.

The evaluation revealed an archaeological horizon directly below the rubble levelling for the existing concrete slab floor, approximately 0.3m below the floor surface.

Exposed archaeological features comprised a number of pits containing domestic waste and demolition material, as well as possibly being related to animal processing. Part of a Saxon loomweight was also recovered. The remains indicated occupation from the Saxon to early post-medieval period.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES.

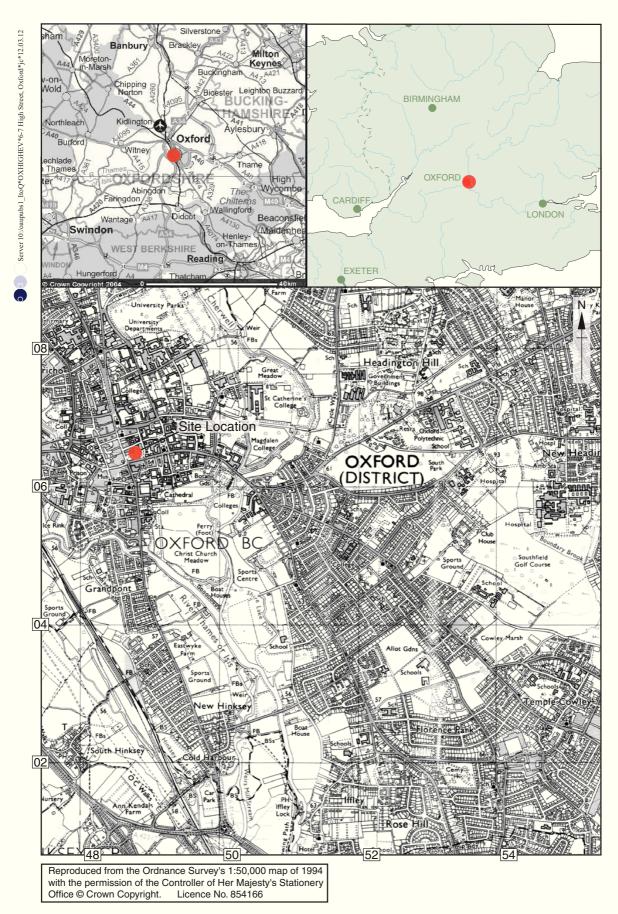


Figure 1: Site location

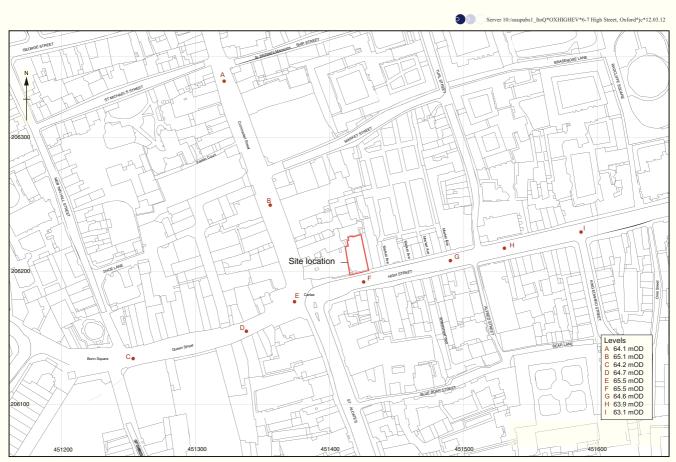
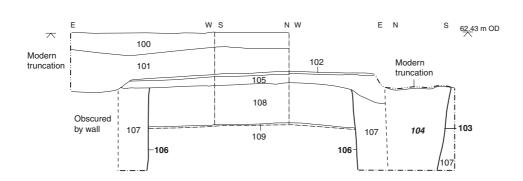


Figure 2: Location plan

Survey Data supplied by : J. Grusczynski Scale at A4 1:125

with archaeology

Section 100



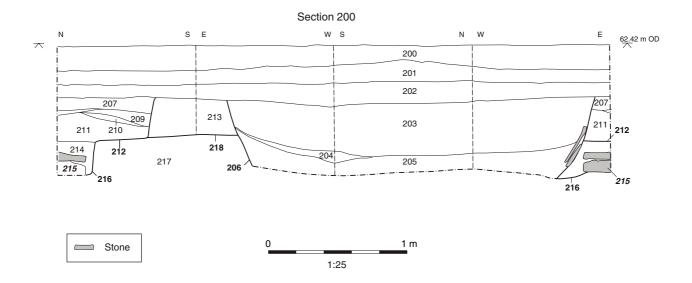


Figure 4: Sections 100 and 200