Architects Design Partnership

Magdalen College School

NGR SP 5228 0584 (centred)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. 96/1784/NFH

Oxford Archaeological Unit

February 1998

Architects Design Partnership

Magdalen College School

NGR SP 5228 0584 (centred)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. 96/1784/NFH

Prepared by:	John Dalton
Date;	12/3/98
Checked by:	Ann Dodd
Date:	1/4/98
Approved by:	R. Williams HEAD OF FIELDWORK
Date:	9/4/1998

Oxford Archaeological Unit

February 1998

Summary

In September/October 1997 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Magdalen College School, Oxford (NGR SP 5228 0584 - centred). The watching brief located a large infilled cellar at the south-western end of the site, which produced a quantity of modern building rubble.

1 Introduction (Fig. 1)

The development proposal (planning application no. 96/1784/NFH) comprised the excavation of foundation trenches for a new three-storey teaching extension, situated on level ground towards the south-western edge of the complex of buildings occupied by the school. The new block was to be located along the northern edge of an existing block (constructed in 1956) and its construction was to involve the demolition of an existing corridor, which ran parallel to the existing building, and an area of changing rooms which extended at right angles from it.

The watching brief was commissioned by Architects Design Partnership on behalf of Magdalen College School due to the presence of known sites of archaeological interest in the immediate vicinity. It was undertaken in consultation with the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS).

2 Background

The site is located on the western edge of the Oxford Clay deposits of the Cherwell valley, close to the floodplain of the river Cherwell.

The archaeological and historical background to this watching brief has been the subject of a separate desk study (OAU 1997). The results of recent work in the area are summarized below.

In 1990 a watching brief was undertaken by the OAU during the construction of the Quincentenary Building, which runs parallel to the Iffley Road. Only one archaeological feature, an 8 m wide linear feature running east-west across the site, cut into the natural gravel, was identified. This feature was not sampled and its significance remains unclear at this time. A subsequent visit to the site, after a further reduction in the ground level, failed to identify any remaining trace of this feature. It is possible that it represented the line of the Civil War ditch, although its shallow nature, as indicated by its absence from the lower levels of the excavation, remains an unresolved problem.

No record of any archaeological excavation or monitoring during the construction of any of the other buildings on the site, including the new Big School of 1966 (which is located on a feature likely to represent the mound of the Civil War fortifications) has been located. It would appear that no archaeological work was carried out during the construction of the other buildings.

3 Aims

The main specific objective of the watching brief was to confirm the conclusion of the desktop study (OAU 1997) that medieval pottery was being distributed in the area as a result of manuring ploughed fields. It has been theorised that less pottery in any ploughsoil seen here would be an indication that pottery in the northern part of the site comes from another source, possibly a ploughed-out medieval settlement (Brian Durham, pers. comm.). The fact that no medieval pottery was recovered during the watching brief means that this question has yet to be resolved.

In general, the aims of the watching brief were to record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works to established standards (Wilkinson 1992), and to secure the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

4 Methodology

The foundation trenches were dug in phases by a 360° mechanical excavator, and separate inspection visits were made to the site subsequent to excavation. Natural gravel was seen in all trenches inspected; no shoring was available, and therefore trenches over 1.20 m deep were inspected and recorded from the surface.

Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations the deposits and features exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and black and white print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets.

5 Results (Fig. 2)

In the majority of those trenches inspected the sequence of deposits remained consistent as follows;

(1) - Tarmac
(2) - Hardcore makeup
(3) - A friable mid brown clay loam with 5% fine silt. This deposit was repeatedly cut by modern intrusions and contained high (20 - 30%) percentages of modern house brick, tile and charcoal inclusions.
(4) - Natural; a fine olive/white silty sand, becoming darker and more gravelly towards the base of the excavation.

One large cut feature [5] was seen at the south-western end of the site. Apparently rectangular it was cut from immediately below (2) and extended to a depth of 1.5 m. The full width of this feature north-east/south-west remains unknown at this time. It was filled by (6), a loose, mixed brown/gray silty clay loam with 10% medium-coarse subrounded silt. The upper portion of this material contained high percentages of building rubble - modern housebrick, tile and charcoal - similar to that seen within (3).

6 Discussion

It is thought likely that the large cut feature [5] represents an infilled cellar, from a building now demolished. The upper portion of this feature, together with deposit (3), had been extensively disturbed by modern intrusion. This activity would appear to have removed all traces of medieval St Clements from this portion of the site.

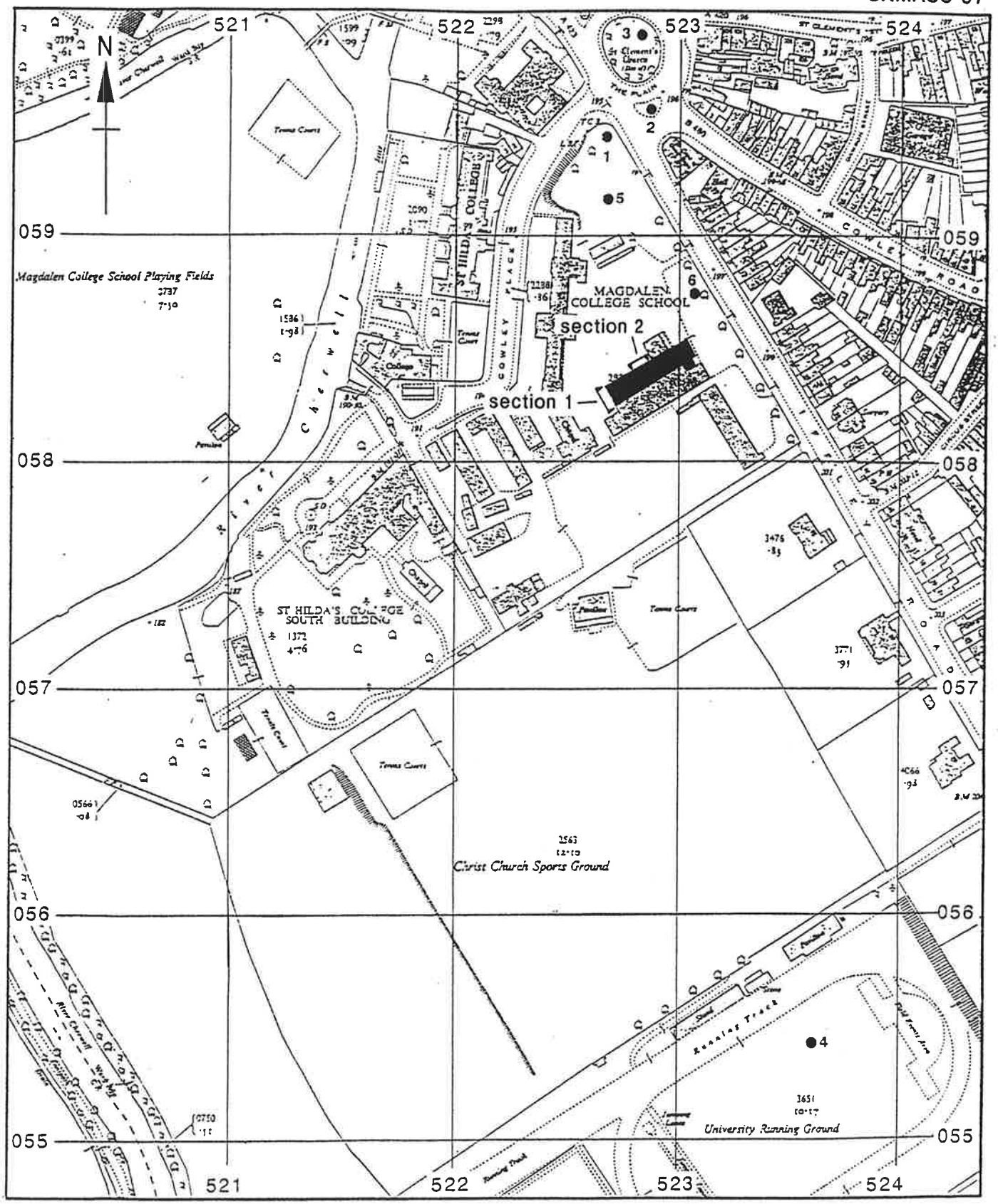
The only good candidate for a ploughsoil seen during the watching brief was (3); however this was a substantial deposit and no horizons were seen within it. Truncation of this deposit was considerable and it may be the case that medieval deposits, if present, have been removed by later activity.

John Dalton
OAU
February 1998

References.

OAU 1997 Magdalen College School, New Three-Storey Extension. Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment.

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



New teaching block at Magdalen College School

Based on the Ordnance Survey's 1:2500 map of 1958 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
© Crown Copyright.
Licence No. AL 854166

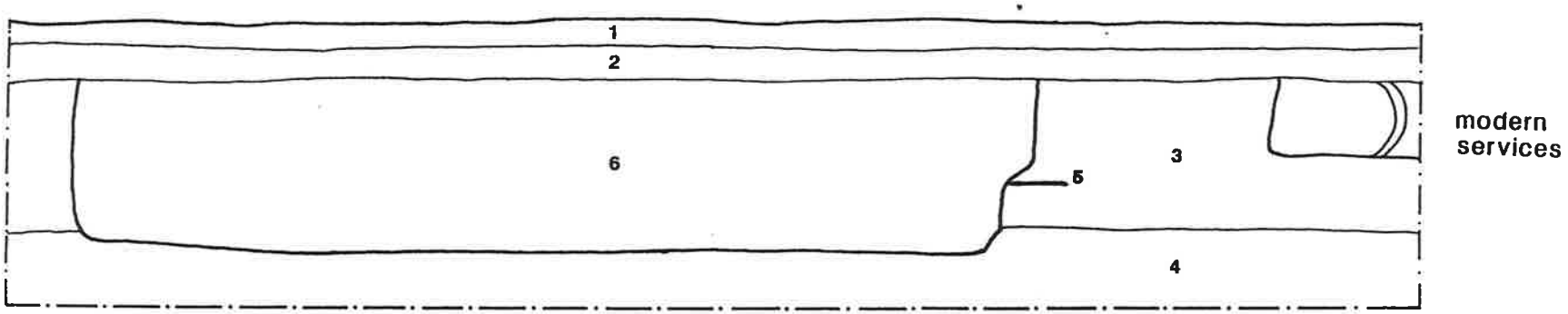
●2 Archaeological sites

Location of new building

Location of archaeological sites

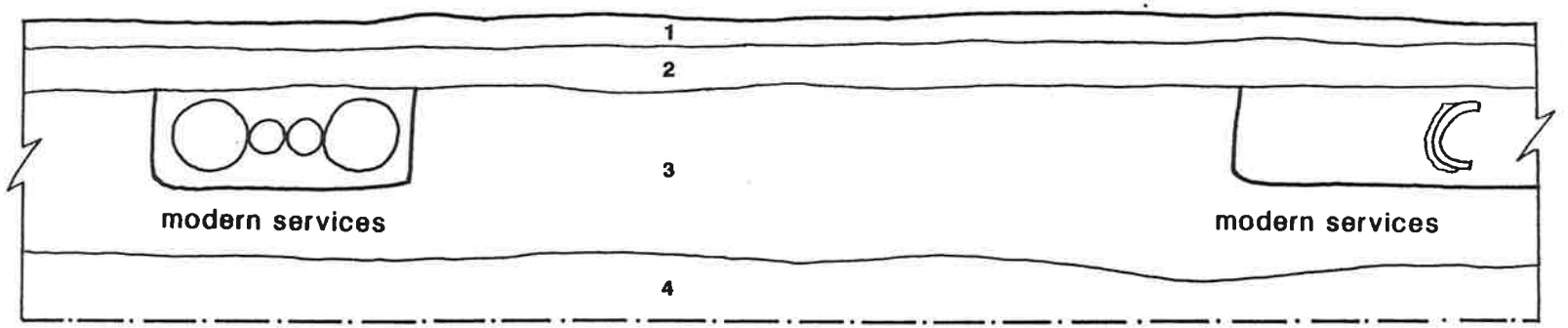
Figure 1

SE Section 1 NW



scale 1:50

SW Section 2 NE



scale 1:50

scale 1:50

Sections

Figure 2