

Cox's Meadow  
Balancing Pond  
River Chelt Flood  
Alleviation Scheme  
Cheltenham



**Archaeological  
Watching Brief Report**



**Oxford Archaeology**

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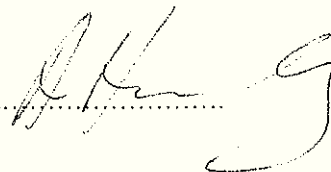
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**Cox's Meadow Balancing Pond,  
River Chelt Flood Alleviation Scheme,  
Cheltenham, Gloucestershire**

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT***

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## SUMMARY

*Between the 28th April 2004 and 24th June 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Cox's Meadow, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (NGR: SO 956 212). The work was commissioned by Jackson Engineering in advance of excavation of a new balancing pond and construction of a concrete flume. The watching brief confirmed the findings of the earlier evaluation, carried out by OA revealing extensive ridge and furrow cultivation, foundation remains of a post-medieval agricultural building and a palaeo-channel of the former River Chelt to the north of the site. No other significant archaeological features were observed.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between the 28th April 2004 and 24th June 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Cox's Meadow, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (NGR: SO 956 212). The work was commissioned by Jackson Engineering Ltd in respect of the excavation of a new balancing pond, associated earthworks and construction of a concrete flume as part of the flood alleviation works along the River Chelt at Cox's Meadow.
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by, and a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2004) agreed with Charles Parry, Senior Archaeological Officer for GCC detailing how OA would undertake the requirements of the brief.
- 1.1.3 The watching brief includes observations made during the excavation of geo-technical pits on the 28th May and those made during the main body of work.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Cox's Meadow is situated to the south-east of the centre of Cheltenham, immediately north-west of the confluence of the River Chelt and Lilley Brook (Fig.1). The site is bounded to the north east by Sandford Mill Road and the present channel of the River Chelt, to the south-west by a sports ground and residential areas, to the north-west by the A 40 and to the east by residential gardens (NGR: SO 956 212). The site lies on alluvium overlying sands and gravel at approximately 66 m OD. The site is presently used for recreational purposes and occupies an area of 5.3 hectares.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA 2004a) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 In October 2003 OA carried out a geophysical survey of the meadow, which detected multiple anomalies with archaeological potential including several linear features, a rectangular enclosure and a possible palaeo-channel representing an earlier course of

the River Chelt (OA 2003). The subsequent evaluation (OA 2004b) confirmed the majority of the geophysical findings, including the location of the palaeo-channel while showing that many of the results were the result of post-medieval activity including the rectangular enclosure.

- 1.3.3 The meadow is known to have been used for grazing animals until recently. The concrete bases observed on the eastern side of the meadow attest to the location of former agricultural buildings on the eastern side of the meadow which formed part of a pastoral farm.
- 1.3.4 An earlier agricultural regime is indicated by the presence of ridge and furrow, which appear to respect the old river channel and are potentially medieval in date.
- 1.3.5 To the north of the meadow is the site of Sandford Mill. The canalised nature of the current river course may be linked to this creating a more efficient use of water power.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological remains (where present) which the ground works may remove or damage within the development area.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief consisted of a series of site visits to monitor the progress and extent of the excavations and geo-technical pits, and to record any archaeological features and stratigraphy exposed during these works.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the location of the test pits, the extent of the excavations and the location of sections was drawn at a scale of 1:200, while the sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The sections and excavated areas were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (OAU, 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 With the exception of the palaeo-channel the stratigraphy exposed was uniform across the site.
- 3.1.2 Within the deepest areas of ground reduction a layer of tenacious blue-grey clay (13) was reached at a depth of 2.3 m below the original ground level (Fig. 3, section 2).

The surface of this deposit undulated considerably and was overlaid by large pockets of fine yellow brown oolitic gravels (5) up to 1.5 m in depth. These gravels and the blue-grey clay were sealed below a layer of yellow-brown sandy clay (4) of between 0.6 m and 0.9 m in depth. A natural alluvial clay, this layer incorporated pockets of a pale yellow clay (11) (Fig. 3, sections 1 and 3).

- 3.1.3 These deposits were overlaid by a layer of orange-brown clay silt (3), a layer of alluvium whose depth varied between 0.4 m to 1.4 m. This probably represented a post-glacial deposit rather than flooding. Overlying this deposit was a layer of pale yellow-brown clay silt (2) between 0.15 m to 0.3 m in depth. The presence of charcoal flecking and the undulating nature of the base of this deposit suggests that this is a ploughsoil, probably associated with the ridge and furrow observed over the site.
- 3.1.4 Cutting into layer 2 and running across the north-west extent of the site before finally running into the present course of the River Chelt was a palaeo-channel (6), measuring 12.5 m wide by up to 2.6 m deep (Fig. 3, section 2). This represents an earlier meander of the River Chelt, which was probably isolated when the present river channel was excavated to serve Sandford Mill. The primary fill of the channel was a fine dark grey silt (12), up to 1.2 m in depth which produced no dating evidence but probably accumulated when the meander was isolated. In places this was overlaid by a 0.2 m thick layer of a dark reddish-brown sandy silt (8) which contained bottles dating to c.1960. The remainder of the channel had been backfilled by a 0.7 m deep layer of redeposited clay (7) containing fragments of 20th century frogged bricks, with levelling layers of 20th-century demolition debris (9 and 10) observed towards the north-western extent of this feature.
- 3.1.5 At the eastern extent of the site, within the area shown to be part of the original farm yard, layer 2 was overlaid by a 0.2 m thick layer of black silty loam (14) containing many concrete and brick fragments probably relating to the demolition of the agricultural buildings. Elsewhere the ploughsoil (2) and the backfilled meander were sealed below a 0.2 m thick layer of a dark brown clay loam (1) representing a modern landscaping layer.

## 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 All the finds recovered were of 19th- and 20th-century date and consisted of pottery, bottle glass and brick fragments.

## 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 The silting deposits within the old meander were considered too modern in date to warrant sampling.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The results of the evaluation shows very little archaeological remains exist on the site confirming the information gathered prior to and following the findings of the



earlier evaluation. The presence of a buried ploughsoil, layer 2, is characteristic of soil buildup produced by ridge and furrow ploughing.

- 4.1.2 The presence of the river meander within confirms both the geophysical survey results and visible undulations in the present day ground surface. The organic silting layer (12) found near the base of the channel was indicative of stagnant or low water flow conditions, suggesting isolation and may have formed as the result of the construction of a leat feeding Sandford Mill. The backfilling and levelling of this feature with clay and modern brick appears to have been undertaken with the last 30 years possibly to facilitate recreational use of the site.
- 4.1.3 The site of the construction of the concrete flume and partial re-alignment of the current water channel of the River Chelt at the eastern edge of the site failed to produce any evidence for earlier water management features relating to the Sandford Mill leat.
- 4.1.4 The information gathered during this monitoring phase relates to medieval and post-medieval farming practice, with no indication of earlier archaeology or landuse.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.2 m	-	Modern topsoil	Pottery, brick, glass	C20th
2	Layer	0.25 m	-	Earlier ploughsoil	-	Medieval ?
3	Layer	Up to 1.4 m	-	Alluvium	-	-
4	Layer	Up to 1.3 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
5	Layer	> 1.5 m	-	Natural gravels	-	-
6	Cut	2.5 m	12.0 m	Old isolated river meander	-	-
7	Fill	0.8 m	-	Modern backfill of 6	Brick, wood	C20th
8	Fill	0.2 m	-	Silting layer within 6	Bottle glass	C20th
9	Fill	0.3 m	-	Modern backfill of 6	Brick	C20th
10	Fill	0.25 m	-	Modern backfill of 6	Bottle glass	C20th
11	Layer	>1.3 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
12	Fill	1.35 m	-	Primary silting of 6	-	-
13	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
14	Layer	0.2 m	c.25 m	Demolition layer relating to old farm buildings	Brick, concrete, metal pipe	C20th

### APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OA, 2003 *Geophysical Survey of Cox's Meadow, Cheltenham. Archaeological Evaluation Report*

OA, 2004a *Cox's Meadow, Cheltenham Flood Alleviation Scheme Archaeological Evaluation Report*

OA, 2004b *Cox's Meadow, Cheltenham Flood Alleviation Scheme, Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson)



### APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** River Chelt Flood Alleviation Scheme, Cheltenham, Cox's Meadow

**Site code:** CHCMFA 04

**Grid reference:** SO 956 212

**Type of watching brief:** Monitoring excavation of a balancing pond, flume and culvert.

**Date and duration of project:** April to June 2004, three months

**Area of site:** 5.3 hectares

**Summary of results:** Post-medieval farm buildings, possible medieval ridge and furrow, old river meander with 20th century backfill.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Cheltenham Museum Service in due course.

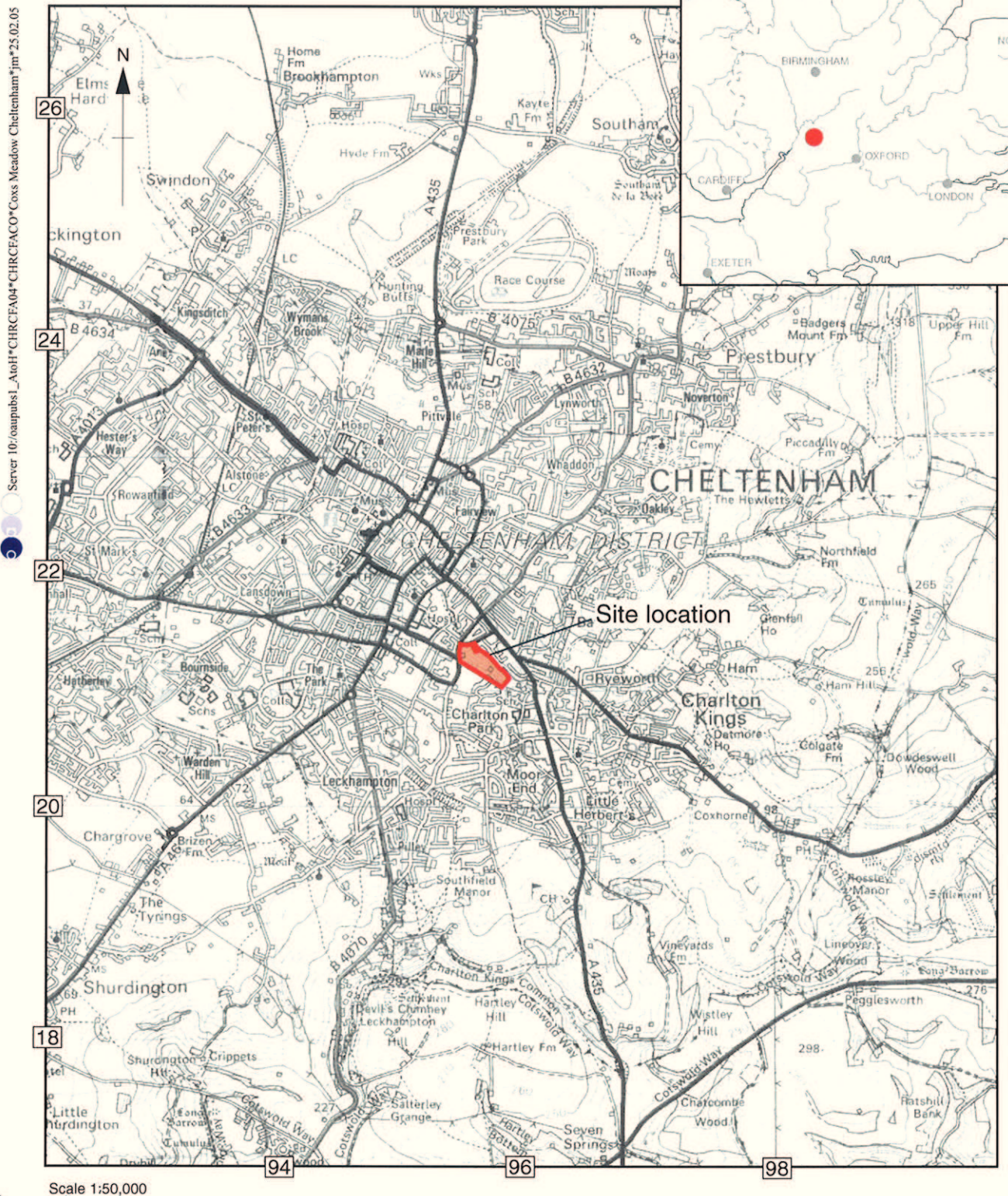


Figure 1: Site location



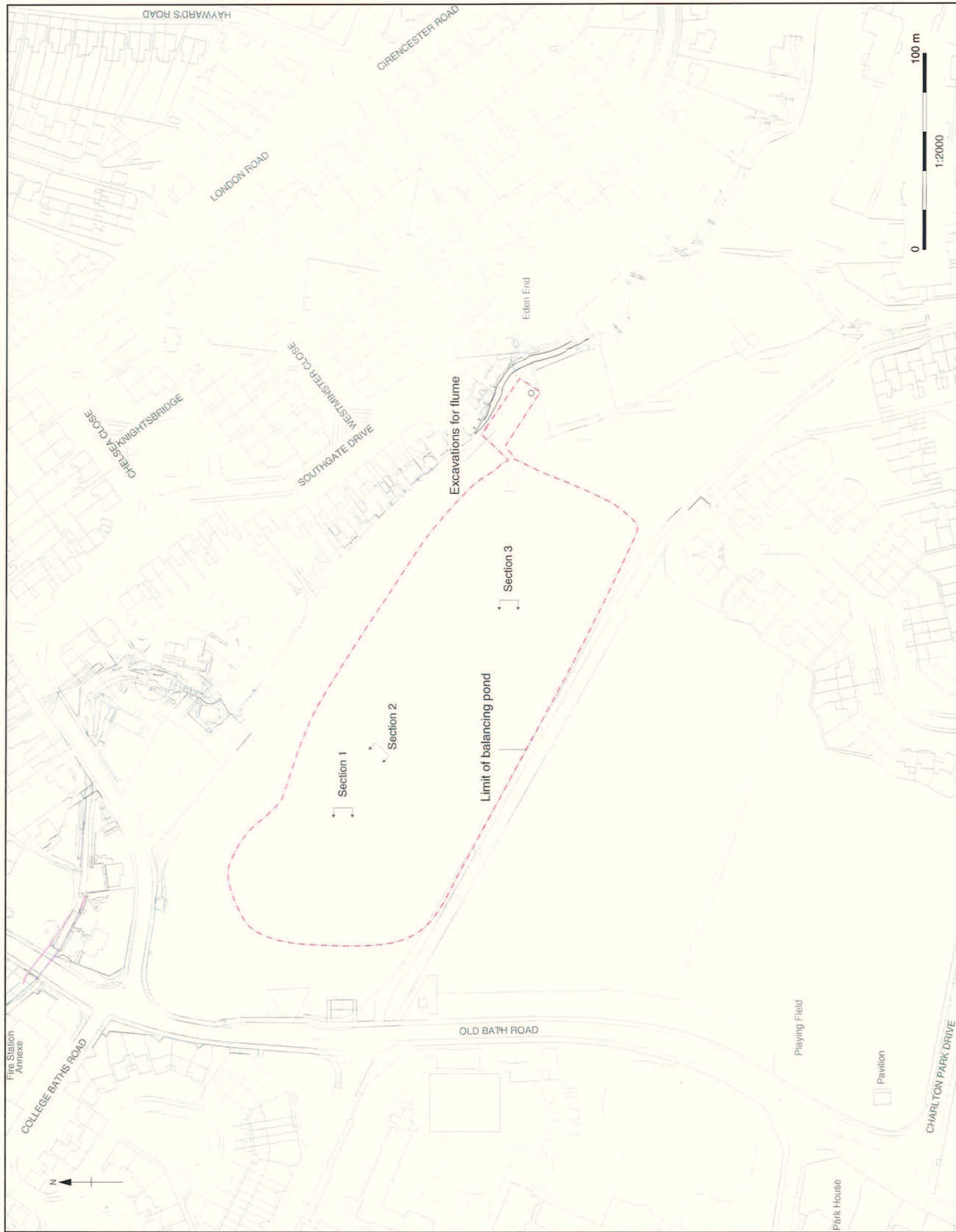
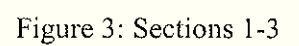
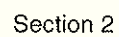


Figure 2: Site plan showing Watching brief area.





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