

St Hugh's College, Oxford

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

SP 450207

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

June 1998

St Hugh's College, Oxford

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SUMMARY

Between the 8th and 12th June 1998, the Oxford Archaeological Unit conducted an evaluation at St Hugh's College, Oxford on the behalf of the College authorities. Trial trenches were positioned in an area to the rear of The Lawns, 87 Banbury Road, and to the rear of houses in Canterbury Road. The evaluation revealed no significant archaeological deposits within the area of the proposed new buildings. The only recognisable archaeological deposit was a layer of former ploughsoil, which contained a small number of finds indicating cultivation during the medieval period.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

From the 8th to the 12th of June the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at St Hugh's College (NGR SP450207) in an area to the rear of The Lawns, 87 Banbury Road, and to the rear of houses in Canterbury Road (Fig. 1). The evaluation was carried out on behalf of the College in respect of a planning application for new student rooms (Planning Application No. NFH/0775/93) and a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS) The development site lay in an area of lawn with trees. The development area is approximately 90 m x 50 m.

1.2 Geology and topography

The site lies on the Summertown Radley Gravel Terrace at approximately 63 m above OD. The site is currently used as College lawns for recreational purposes. Previous land use appears to have been associated with cultivation.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

The site lies within an area of North Oxford, which is still substantially in its original Victorian residential form. It is ringed on the east and south by recorded finds of a wide range of material from the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods (PRNs 3258, 3591-2, 3594, 3864, 6048), and there is a widespread assumption that the Banbury Road and Parks Road follow the line of a minor Roman road.

The open fields of St Giles parish are recorded a 14th-century survey and an estate map of 1769 (Fig.4) at St John's College. The site was occupied in 1769 by a furlong (Mr Eaton's 4 acres) which probably had ridge and furrow running east-west. A field road is shown on the estate map running through the site. After enclosure in 1832 the site was occupied by the houses (The Mount, The Lawn and The Shrubbery) and a nursery garden.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.
- 2.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.
- 2.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.

2.4 To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The evaluation was based upon a 2% sample of the development area, and consisted of five trenches. The first trench measured 15 m long m long whilst the remaining four trenches were each 10 m. All the trenches measured approximately 1.50 m wide (Fig. 2).

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

The overburden was removed by a mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision. The trenches were then cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. All archaeological features were planned and, where excavated, their sections drawn at scales of 1:20 and 1:50 respectively. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 Finds

All identifiable artefacts were retained

3.4 Environmental data

In view of the absence of any significant archaeological deposits no environmental soil samples were taken during the evaluation.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

The general soil type was a sandy silt overlain by a clayey silt with generally good preservation of bone. Ground conditions were generally dry throughout the excavation and conditions for archaeological excavation and recording were good.

4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits.

The sequence of deposits identified within the trenches during the evaluation was generally the same and the natural gravel was exposed at roughly the same depth throughout the five trenches. None of the trenches revealed any archaeological features.

4.3 Presentation of results

The results of the evaluation are described by trench from the earliest deposit onwards. The site chronology is based on the earliest possible date of the latest dated pottery found within each context (*terminus post quem*). Following the results of the excavation there is a discussion of the significant results and the significance of these deposits. An inventory of all contexts is presented in Appendix 1.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits (Trenches 1-5)

The similarity of the sequence of deposits within each of the trenches (section 4.2) and the absence of any archaeological features has allowed the descriptions of the trenches and their associated deposits to be largely amalgamated rather than being described individually. The field road seen on the 18th-century estate map (Fig. 4) was not located although it should have been present in Trench 5.

All the trenches were positioned within the footprint of the proposed development (Fig. 2). The natural gravel was observed within each trench at a depth varying between 62 and 63 m OD. Considerable root disturbance was observed within the surface of this gravel throughout the area. In Trench 1, the surface of this layer undulated in an east-west direction (Section 1). The fact that the other trenches were aligned north-south made it impossible to confirm that this was the case across the rest of the site.

Overlying the gravel and at roughly the same depth through out the trenches was a deposit of orange-brown sandy-silt varying in thickness from 0.14 to 0.28 m in depth. It contained a notable component of redeposited natural gravel. This deposit was numbered according to the trenches as 106, 205, 304, 402 and 503. No finds were retrieved from this layer which remains undated.

Overlying this deposit in all five trenches was a greyish-brown clayey-silt varying in depth from 0.20 to 0.38 m (contexts 102, 202, 302, 401 and 502). It was cut by a modern drain in trenches 3 and 5. All five trenches were capped with topsoil and turf.

5.2 Finds

5.2.1 Medieval pottery

The only medieval pottery recovered from the excavation were two very abraded sherds from Brill/Boarstall ware glazed jugs (Fabric OXAM; Mellor 1994) from the upper soil horizon in Trench 4 (context 401). Such pottery can be given an *terminus post quem* of the early 13th century (*ibid.*). The levels of abrasion of the sherds are entirely consistent with them having been deposited within a ploughsoil.

5.2.2 Post-medieval pottery

The only post-medieval pottery from the site was a large sherd (205 g) from the basepad of a redware pancheon from context 102, and a smaller sherd (47 g) from the base of a Metropolitan Slipware example in context 401. Such pottery came into production in the mid-16th and the 17th centuries respectively. Both sherds were completely unabraded.

5.2 Environmental data

In view of the absence of any significant archaeological deposits no environmental soil samples were taken during the evaluation.

6 INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Interpretation

The undulations of the surface of the natural gravel within trench 1, coupled with the noticeable pebble inclusion in the overlying layer, suggests the remains of former ridge and furrow cultivation orientated north to south, although the fact that all the remaining trenches were orientated north to south made it impossible to confirm the existence of it over the rest of the site. This also appears to contradict the alignment suggested from the 18th-century estate map.

The lack of finds in the layer overlying the gravel makes it impossible to ascribe a date to the start of cultivation, but the two sherds of Brill/Boarstall ware in the upper horizon, coupled with the lack of any later cut features, might suggest that ploughing activity ceased in the 13th century, after which the area became grassland or waste. The presence of sherds of post-medieval pottery in contexts 104 and 401 may be indicative of a return to ploughing in the later sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, but the large size and unabraded condition of the material is not conducive with pottery deposited in such an environment.

Some building work appears to have occurred within the last fifty years, evidenced by a tennis court and a drain which is possibly associated with a temporary World War II hospital.

6.2 Significance

The paucity of recovered artefacts in the ploughsoils means that the ascribed dating must be treated with some caution, but it is worthy of note that other sites in the south midlands have produced similar chronology for ridge-and-furrow cultivation, such as Culworth, Northants. (Audouy 1995) and Fringford, Oxon. (Blinkhorn *et al.* forthcoming). Whilst this may represent a change in manuring practices during the 13th century, it is more likely it evidences a large-scale change from arable to pasture, as wool became an extremely important commodity at that time (*ibid.*). Apart from this, the archaeological remains cannot be considered as significant.

6.3 Impact of development

The development drawing indicates an asymmetrical cross-shaped plan for the proposed building, with an eastward arm described as a teaching area. Ground disturbance would arise from eighteen soakaways, a foul drain, and substantial basements and a pond and from foundations of the proposed buildings, which are likely to be of concrete trench-fill construction. Such ground disturbance is likely to involve the removal of all the soil down to at least the surface of the natural gravel.

Bibliography and references

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Blinkhorn, P, Bloor, C, and Thomason, D, forthcoming Excavations at The Paddock, Fringford, near Bicester, Oxfordshire *Oxoniensia*

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

Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory

Trench	Ctxt	Type	width (m)	thick. (m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date
001								
	100	layer		0.23	Topsoil			
	101	layer		0.24	Former tennis court			
	102	Layer		0.18	Earlier plough soil	pot		C.16th
	103	Fill	1.20	0.43	Fill of root hole			
	104	cut	1.20		Former root hole			
	105	layer			Natural gravel			
	106	layer			Former soil			
002								
	200	Layer	0.06		Turf			
	201	Layer	0.28		Topsoil			
	202	Layer	0.36		Earlier plough soil			
	203	Fill	0.64	2.20	Fill of root hole			
	204	Cut	0.64	2.20	Former root hole			
	205	layer			Earlier soil			
	206	layer			Natural gravel			
003								
	300	layer	0.12		Turf			
	301	layer	0.32		Topsoil			
	302	layer	0.18		Earlier plough soil			
	303	layer			Natural gravel			
004								
	400	layer	0.08		Topsoil			
	401	Layer	0.40		Earlier plough soil	pot		C.13th
	402	layer	0.22					
	403	Layer			Natural gravel			
005								
	500	layer	0.08		Topsoil			
	501	layer	0.26		Make up			
	502	layer	0.26		Earlier plough soil			
	503	Layer	0.26					
	504	fill	0.14		Fill of root hole			
	505	Cut	0.14		Former root hole			
	506	layer			Natural gravel			

Illustrations

- Fig. 1 Site Location
- Fig. 2 Site Plan showing trench locations
- Fig. 3 Sample sections
- Fig. 4 1769 Estate Map of St Giles Parish

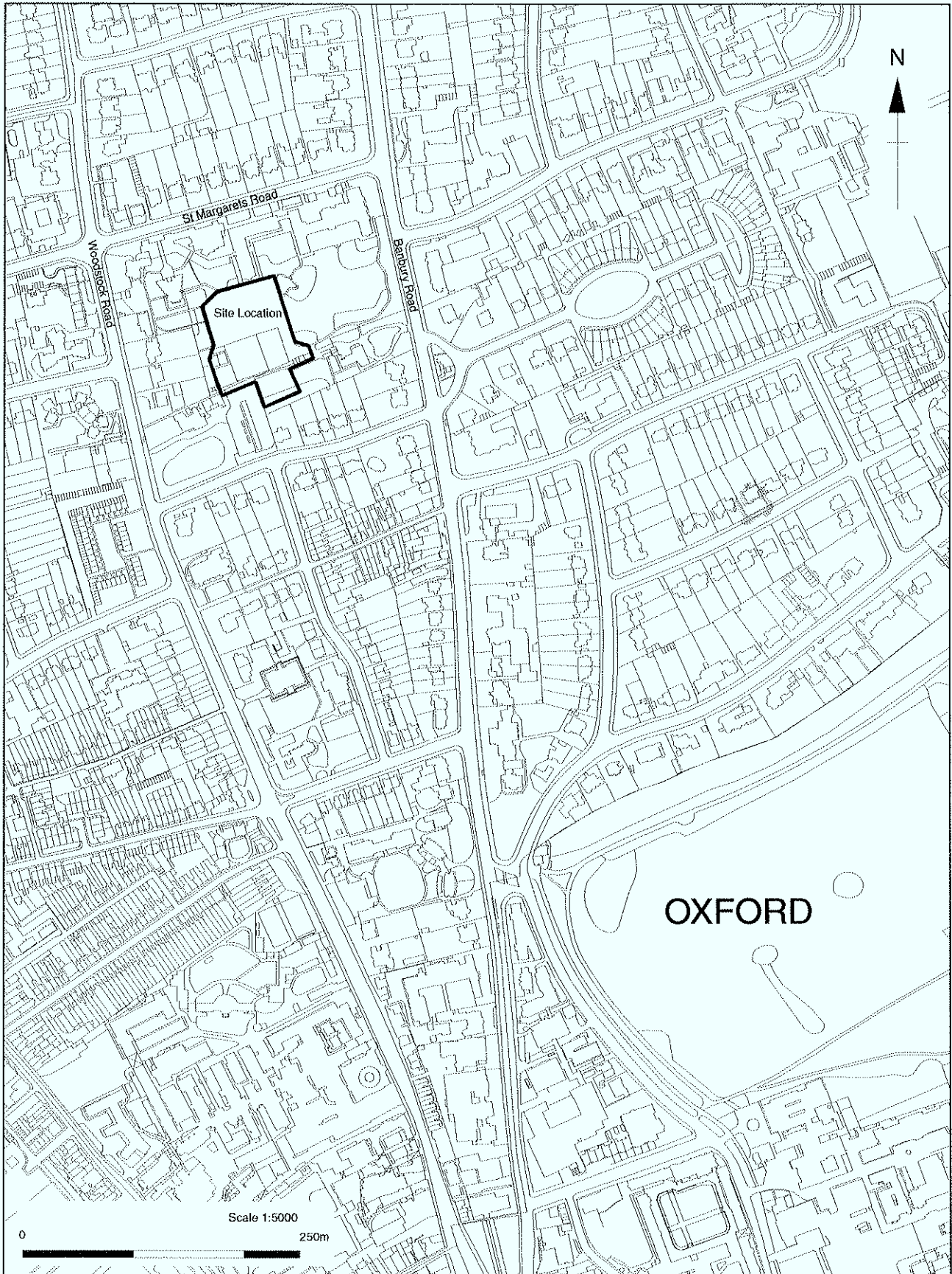


FIGURE 1 Location Plan

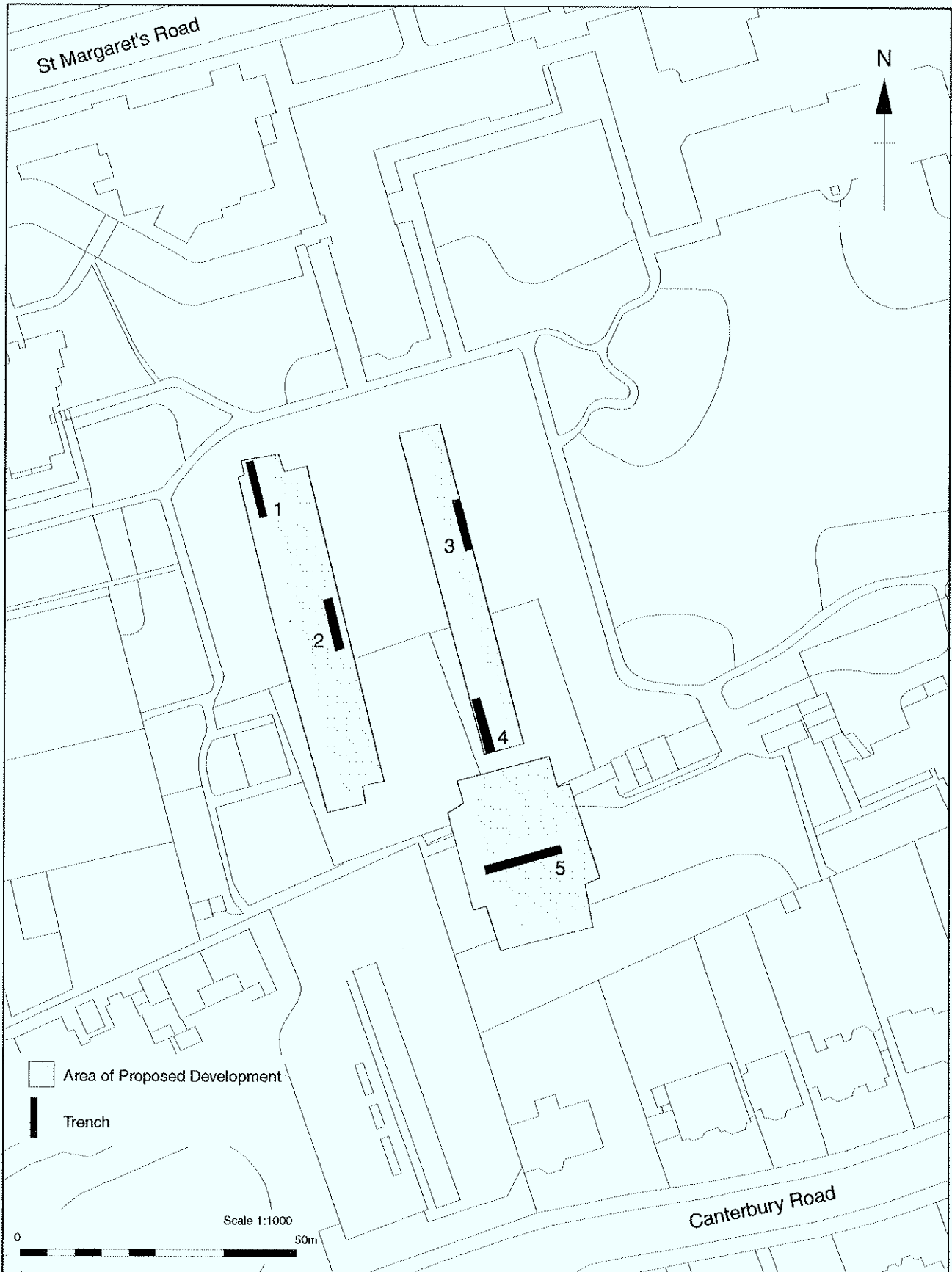
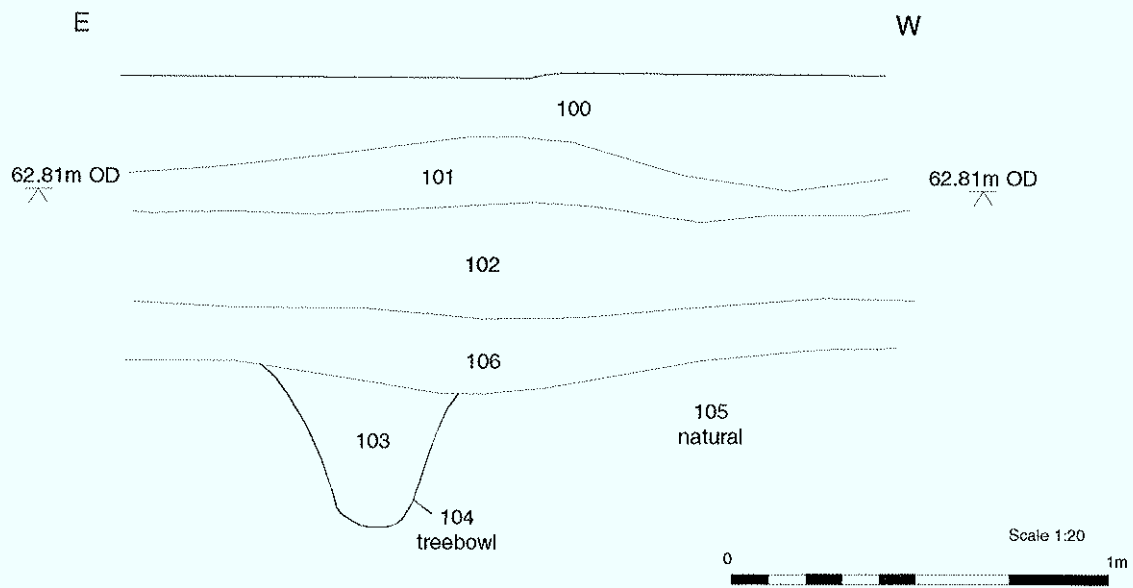


FIGURE 2 Trench Locations and Area of Proposed Development

Trench 1 Section 1



Trench 5 Section 5

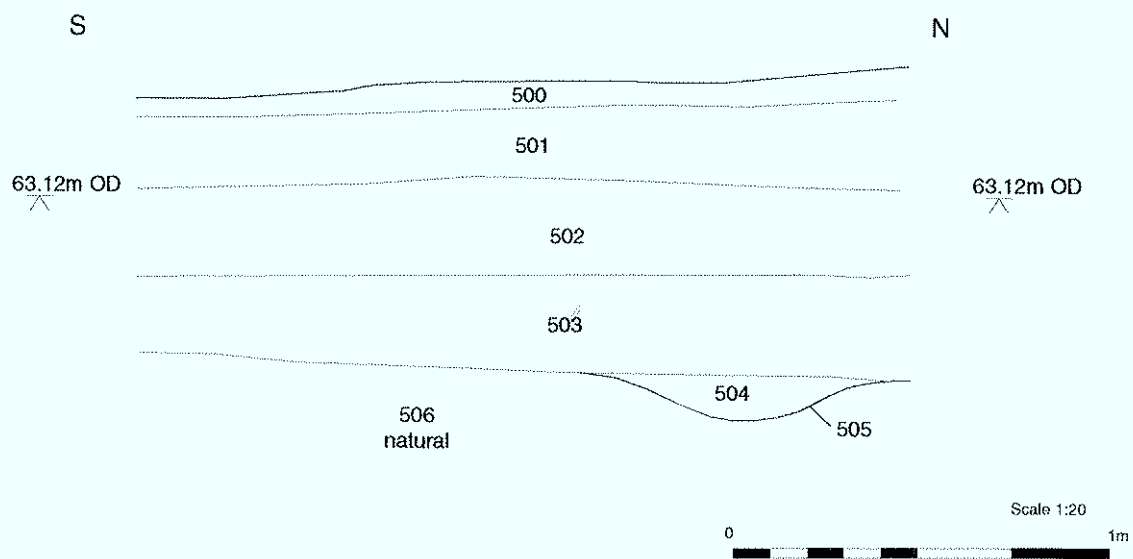


FIGURE 3 Sample Sections

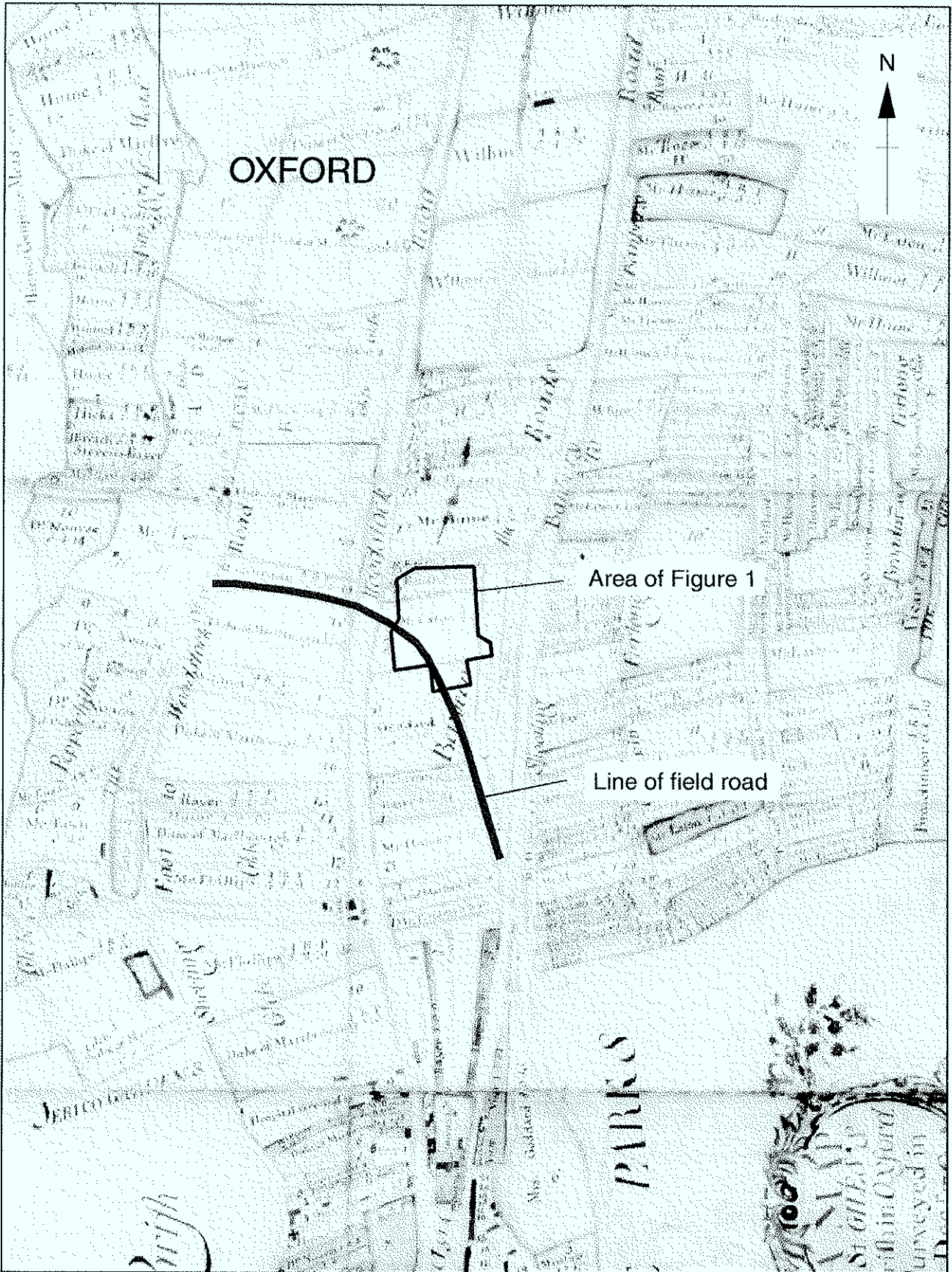


FIGURE 4 A map of St. Giles parish in Oxford, surveyed in 1769



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