

# Archaeological Evaluation Report

## Big Data Institute Oxford



### Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief Report

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## **BDI Building, Oxford University, Oxford**

### *Archaeological Evaluation Report*

*Written by Ashley Strutt and illustrated by*

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## **Summary**

*Between the October 2014 and February 2015 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a programme of watching briefs and an evaluation as part of the programme of development of the BDI Building, Oxford University, Oxford. The work was commissioned by RB Development Management Ltd on behalf of Oxford University and was carried out during groundworks managed by MACE. The evaluation site was located on the site of the decant (temporary) accommodation and the watching briefs were located on the eastern side of the campus (NGR SP 543 062) identified in the Written Scheme of Investigation as Plots B-4 and B-5. The site is located within the grounds of Boundary Brook House and is bounded by Roosevelt Drive to the South and Old Road to the North. It was originally agreed that two 50 m long trenches would be excavated to sample Plots B-5 and B-4. However, due to the quantity of groundworks that were monitored in Plot B-4, it was decided by the City Archaeologist that the proposed Trench 2 excavation was no longer necessary to sample this area.*

*The watching brief was generally successful in establishing the presence/absence, extent, conditions, nature, character and quality of archaeological remains encountered. In Plot B-4, the service trench for the substation had a number of features seen in section which had no artefacts recovered. A further trench running from the fence and across a car park was found to contain a shallow pit which had a piece of 18<sup>th</sup> century pottery. The substation foundation excavations revealed modern backfill. The pad pits for the new build were largely empty apart from Pit 3 where an undated posthole was found and Pit 7 where a possible undated irregular negative feature was identified.*

*In Plot B-5, two negative features that contained modern building material and disused service trenches were the only archaeological features found in the 50 m long evaluation trench.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by RB Development Management Ltd on behalf of Oxford University to undertake an archaeological evaluation in advance of construction and a series of watching briefs during the laying of services and construction of a substation. These works were associated with Plots B-4 and B-5 only at the request of the client (Figure 1).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: 12/02072/OUT). A brief was set by David Radford, Planning Archaeologist for Oxford City Council, detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition; this document outlines the results of those requirements.
- 1.1.3 The site is located within the grounds of Boundary Brook House, Oxford and is bounded by Roosevelt Drive to the south and Old Road to the north. The site is centred upon NGR SP 543 062 and slopes upwards to the east from c. 92m to 98m OD

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The underlying geology of the area is Beckley Sand Member, formed 156-161 million years ago during the Jurassic period (Geology of Britain viewer, <http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer/>). This is overlain by Oxford Clay deposits (WA 2011).
- 1.2.2 The area of proposed development currently consists of partially wooded grounds together with a number of university building with associated parking.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site and its environs has been described in detail in a desk-based assessment produced by Wessex Archaeology (WA 2011;2012), and is summarised here.

#### *Prehistoric*

- 1.3.2 A number of excavations in the more general Oxford area has illustrated that the local geology comprises river gravel deposits which have yielded some Palaeolithic artefacts. The site, however, is situated on Oxford Clay deposits which would be unlikely to produce artefact dating to the palaeolithic period (WA 2011). The site was probably forested during the prehistoric period so settlement and farming would be less likely (Salzman 1939).
- 1.3.3 There is very limited evidence for Neolithic and Beaker activity. Neolithic pits were recovered on the University Parks site (Booth and Hayden 2001) and Beaker inhumations were recorded on the northern side of the city and at St. Thomas Street (Hassel 2000).
- 1.3.4 Activity increases during the Bronze Age with settlements and funerary monuments recorded at University Parks, Port Meadow and within the University Science Area (Dodd 2003; Hassell 2000).
- 1.3.5 Settlements have been recorded on the slopes of the opposite side of the river valley at Wytham Hill, Hinksey Hill and Cumnor (Dodd 2003). A possible barrow was excavated at Headington Quarry (OHER).
- 1.3.6 Evidence of prehistoric activity was recorded 900m to the north side of the site suggesting activity between the late Mesolithic and the early Bronze Age with pottery from the Iron Age also recovered. This opens up the possibility of settlement to the north of the site (WA 2002).

**Romano-British**

- 1.3.7 A number of defended sites have been recorded in the region but to date none have been encountered in Oxford itself. Settlement patterns are assumed to follow a similar pattern to that of the Iron Age with Oxford remaining peripheral at that time (Dodd 2003). More dispersed rural settlement may be exemplified by the settlement evidence recovered at Mansfield College (Booth and Hayden 1996). This suggests that the area's river gravels were utilised by smaller farming communities (Rodwell 1975). Further evidence has been identified to the south west, the south east and the east of the site (WA 2011).
- 1.3.8 Although no evidence for settlement has been observed in Headington, probably a result of the factors which made settlement less desirable in the previous periods, the first evidence for activity does appear in this period (WA 2011). During the Romano-British period Headington was the centre of a major ceramic industry from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD to the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD (Dodd 2003). The industry would have benefited from the presence of ample raw material required to service the industry as well as transport links via the Roman road linking Dorchester on Thames to Alchester which was situated 1.1km to the east of the site. In addition, Headington was located on the boundaries of three tribal areas (Atrebates, Catuvellauni and Dobunni) providing multiple markets to exploit (WA 2011).
- 1.3.9 Further evidence for pottery manufacture was recorded in the grounds of Churchill Hospital 400m to the south east of the site. Kilns, a possible circular workshop, a drying oven and a well were identified during the investigations by Wessex Archaeology (WA 2011). The apogee of the industry appears to be during the 4<sup>th</sup> century with the production of the distinctive mortaria as well as parchment ware and colour-coated wares (Dodd 2003).
- 1.3.10 A number of investigations in the area have failed to identify any significant features in the immediate vicinity of the site (WA 2011).

**Saxon**

- 1.3.11 During the early Saxon period Oxford was again peripheral and situated on the boundary between Wessex and Mercia. No activity dating to the period has been identified within the setting of the Medieval town but some evidence was recovered to the north (Dodd 2003).
- 1.3.12 Evidence was recovered for activity in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries with the town being mentioned for the first time in the Saxon Chronicle AD911-912 where it was described as a late Saxon burh or fortified settlement (Blair 1994).
- 1.3.13 A later Saxon manor (vill) was established at Headington by the 10<sup>th</sup> century and there is a high probability that a manor was in existence in the preceding centuries (Blair 1994). Despite a lack of physical evidence it has been suggested that it was located in high ground at Dunstan Road c 1.5km north of the site.
- 1.3.14 Two burials were recovered from watching briefs in Stephen Road c 785m north of the site. One was an adult female accompanied by two brooches, a needle, a knife and amber beads. A second, unaccompanied skeleton was fragmentary and of unknown age and sex. Both were buried in a supine position but were buried on slightly different axes. The former was dated to the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century but the latter remains undated but may be associated with the former (OA 2013). A further unaccompanied inhumation cited as Saxon was recovered in Barton c 400m east of Headington (OA 2013).
- 1.3.15 Although there is convincing evidence for activity in the region and at the above examples, none has been identified in the vicinity of the site.

**Medieval**

- 1.3.16 A settlement at Headington was recorded in the Domesday Book with St Andrew's Church, Headington being constructed during the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century. The settlement is



likely to have developed from the earlier manor. Settlement probably did not see much change during the Medieval period and the site most probably remained agricultural with the gradual clearance of woodland (WA 2011).

#### ***Post-Medieval and Modern***

- 1.3.17 The site remained within the parish of Headington until it was incorporated into the city of Oxford in 1928 (Lobel 1957) during which time the area remained rural. Settlement appears unaltered with the exception of a small hamlet that was established during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- 1.3.18 Cartographic evidence from the 19<sup>th</sup> century shows the site as arable land with only settlement being Headington to the north and the developing hamlet to the west. A more recent suburb of New Headington was established in 1860 with a focus on the area of Old Road. The area rapidly developed following the sale of Highfield Farm in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which can be seen through comparison of Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping between 1899 and 1914. To the east and north development included housing, hospitals and medical buildings (WA 2011)
- 1.3.19 The site itself was parkland by 1899 associated with Highfield House which has since been incorporated into the Park Hospital building. The woodland was removed by 1912 and Highfield House was extended. The 1939 OS map was not markedly different to that produced in 1912. Development in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the further loss of woodland. Small pockets of woodland remain extant today (WA 2011).

#### ***Built Heritage***

- 1.3.20 No buildings of local interest are extant within the site. Two buildings of local interest are extant within the wider study area (WA 2011).

#### ***Historic Landscape***

- 1.3.21 Two historic tree lines are situated within the site. These extend along the northern boundary of the site formed by Old Road and along the western limit formed by Boundary Brook (WA 2011). It is planned that these are to be preserved during the development.

### **1.4 Acknowledgements**

- 1.4.1 RB Development Management Ltd commissioned the work on behalf of Oxford University. We would like to thank David Radford of Oxford City Council for enabling the work. We would also like to thank MACE for their help during the field phase of the project. The watching brief and evaluation were undertaken by Robin Bashford, Rob Early and Ashley Strutt.



## 2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The aims of the investigations, as stated in the WSI (OA 2014) were as follows:

- (i) To determine, investigate and record the form and function of any deposits encountered during the investigations;
- (ii) To date, where possible, the features identified through artefactual evidence recovered from said deposits;
- (iii) To mitigate the impact on deposits through preservation by record of the deposits revealed during the investigations;
- (iv) To interpret the nature of the archaeological site;
- (v) To interpret and understand any archaeological deposits in terms of the cultural and environmental context.
- (vi) The specific aims and objectives of the investigations for this site was to establish the character and extent of any Romano-British activity.
- (vii) The data from the investigations can be used to inform as to any further mitigation that may be necessary should the deposits be interpreted as locally, regionally or nationally important.

### 2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 A summary of OA's general approach to excavation and recording is included in Appendix A of the WSI, Standard methodologies for Geomatics and Survey, Environmental evidence, Artefactual evidence and Burials can also be found in Appendices B, C, D and E of the WSI respectively.

Site Specific methodology were as follows:

2.2.2 The watching brief was carried out in the south western area of the campus which includes the car park (Plot B-4). It ran in conjunction with the programme of works set out by the client and their contractors.

2.2.3 The archaeological investigation was carried out in advance of the construction of a new Big Data Institute on Plot B-5 (Figs. 1 and 2) within the site of Old Road Campus, Oxford University. Following the demolition works and removal of any hard standing, a single east-west aligned trench measuring 50m x 2m was excavated across the centre of the footprint of the proposed building (Fig. 2).



### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 3.1.1 The following section summarises the results of both the watching brief and evaluation. The location of the watching brief and evaluation (Trench 1) is shown in Figure. Archaeological descriptions are presented in the context inventory (Appendix A), and within the descriptive text. Artefacts recovered are noted in the trench descriptions below where they occur.
- 3.1.2 Various archaeological features were noted during watching brief. Most were only seen within service trench sections, and as a result their true form and function was not clearly understood. A possible linear feature was seen in the SW/NE-aligned trenches dug over the present day car park (Fig.3). This has been tentatively interpreted as the remains of a hedge line (Plate 5). A ill-defined feature was identified within Pad Pit 7 and a Posthole in Pad Pit 3 (Fig. 3 and Plate 4). A shallow pit was seen within the substation service trenches which was dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Plate 8). The substation excavation largely comprised modern material.
- 3.1.3 Evaluation Trench 1 revealed no significant archaeology.

#### 3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 The watching brief was undertaken in varying conditions, mostly good and there were good weather conditions during the evaluation. Ground conditions were fairly good and dry.
- 3.2.2 The soil sequence varied across site depending on the location of the work being carried out.
- 3.2.3 The stratigraphy observed during the excavation of the substation base consisted of 0.15m mid brown sandy loam topsoil overlying a very compact layer of made ground comprised of light brown sandy loam with flecks of chalk, brick and charcoal. Below this was a deposit of disturbed natural orange sand with occasional flecks of chalk and charcoal.
- 3.2.4 The service trenches that crossed the car park were stratigraphically different to those close to the substation. They were characterised by a 0.20m of grey gravel (geotextile) overlying 0.20m of reddish brown sandy silt with chalk inclusions (<10%) and flecks of charcoal. This overlay a 0.40m thick layer of rubble in a chalky sand matrix. Natural corn-brash was observed within these trenches in places.
- 3.2.5 The stratigraphy observed in the Trench 1 evaluation comprised a 0.50m layer of demolition material that overlay a mid-brown silty clayey sand that was 0.12m deep. At the bottom of the observed sequence natural was exposed and was characterised by a very light grey to orange brown sand with patches of clay.

#### 3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

- 3.3.1 The watching brief was carried out in Plot B-4 in the eastern area of the Old Road Campus and consisted of the monitoring of a series of service trenches and the excavation to lay a foundation for two electrical substations and the relocated New Richards Building to the north (Fig. 3). A number of undated negative features were recorded, and most were only observed within the trench sections so their nature is difficult to ascertain with certainty. To the north, foundation pits for the New Richrads Building were largely empty, although Pit 3 was seen to have a posthole and pit 7 also had a possible feature (Plate 4).
- 3.3.2 The Trench 1 evaluation trench in plot B-5 contained no archaeological features.



### 3.4 Service trenches and Sub stations.

- 3.4.1 An irregular linear with diffused edges was observed within the SW/NE-aligned trenches in the carpark area. It is considered that this may indicate a hedge line (Plate 5). Both of these features had a fill consisting of reddish brown topsoil with broken chalk inclusions.
- 3.4.2 The E/W-aligned service trench in the car park contained no archaeological evidence.
- 3.4.3 A large 5m in diameter and 0.7m deep feature was found in the N/S-aligned service trench (Fig.3 and Plate 3). Its fill consisted of a reddish stained broken down chalk with lines of dirty sand and 20% root activity. No artefacts were recovered. The feature was observed in the west facing section, but was not present in the east facing section. Its nature suggests that it is modern.
- 3.4.4 The stratigraphy encountered within the substation service trenches consisted of a mid brown sandy loam topsoil that was between 0.20m and 0.35m deep and contained flecks of chalk and approximately 20% root action. This overlay a reddish brown sandy loam with a depth that varied between 0.10 and 0.15m that contained 80% broken down chalk and pea gravel (Plates 7, 8 and 9). The lower layer identified to the limit of excavation of 0.60m was a deposit of broken chalk. This deposit had a dirty appearance and it was not clear if it was natural or disturbed natural.
- 3.4.5 Two features were found in the southwestern baulk of the service trences (Fig.3 - Plates 8 and 9). One was U-shaped in profile and 0.40 m deep with a mid-brown loam fill containing roots and chalk. The other had a flat base and was 0.40m deep with less root activity and a peagrit fill. Both features were overlain by topsoil and remain undated.
- 3.4.6 Sub Station one was located 6m to the north of Roosevelt Road and contained no archaeology. The excavated area measured 3m x 3m and was 0.6m in depth. The stratigraphy comprised a 0.15m deep mid-brown sandy loam topsoil (101). This overlay a light brown sandy loam with flecks of chalk, brick and charcoal (102). This deposit was very compact and is likely to be made ground. The lower deposit observed was disturbed natural orange sand with occasional flecks of charcoal and chalk (103).
- 3.4.7 Sub station 2 was located to the north of sub station 1 and measured 3.5m x 2.5m and was excavated to a depth of 0.60m. The sequence comprised a mid brown sandy loam topsoil that was 0.15m in depth (201) and overlay a made ground (202) comprising of an orange sand that contained large fragments of brick and chalk. To the base of the substation excavation this deposit had a depth of 0.50m.
- 3.4.8 Fourteen foundation pits for a new building were located to the north of the car park. All were 1m x 0.5m and dug to depth of about 1m. They were spaced at 2m intervals around the area of the new build. A possible posthole in the south west corner (Plate 4) was observed in Foundation Pit 3 and another possible feature was observed with Foundation Pit 7. These have not been dated. No other archaeological remains were observed.

### 3.5 Evaluation Trench 1

- 3.5.1 Trench 1 was located within the footings of the central area of the campus (Fig.2) and was excavated on a NNE-SSW alignment, measuring 50 x 2m. Excavation reached a depth of 0.70m (Plate 1). The stratigraphy observed in the most representative section comprised a top layer of demolition material, mostly broken concrete, bricks, mortar and metal (101) that had a varying depth but reached a maximum of 0.50m. This deposit was interrupted 0.11m from the NNE end of the trench by a mid-grey brown silty clay with a depth of 0.25m, the likely remains of topsoil (100). A deposit of mid-orange brown silty clay sand with a average depth of 0.12m (102) was overlain by deposits 101 and 100 and itself overlay a deposit of mid-orange brown silty clay sand



with patches of a very light grey sand mixed with <1% blue grey clay (103) . The depth of this deposit varied along the trench to a maximum of 0.08m (Plate 2). No archaeology was observed along the length of the trench.

### **3.6 Finds summary**

- 3.6.1 A single sherd of 18<sup>th</sup> century blue and white ware was retained for dating only. No other finds were recovered.



## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The work was undertaken in good weather conditions, and the archaeological features were clearly visible as soil mark. Only Trench 1 as specified in the original WSI was excavated, as monitored services trenches in Plot B-4 provided the necessary archaeological sample of this area (Fig. 3; following agreement with the City Archaeologist). The results of the evaluation are considered a reliable sample of the development area.

### 4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

- 4.2.1 The watching brief and evaluation was generally successful in establishing the presence /absence, extent, conditions, nature, character and quality of archaeological remains encountered. The date of the majority of features identified remains uncertain as they had no associated artefacts.

### 4.3 Interpretation

- 4.3.1 The absence of artefacts and archaeological features suggest that either the site lies outside the Roman, medieval and post medieval main settlement area as described above (Section 1.3) or that 20<sup>th</sup> century construction has destroyed archaeological remains within this area.
- 4.3.2 The date of many of the features remains uncertain as they had no associated artefacts. Various features found during are considered to be associated with parkland use of the site.
- 4.3.3 The variation in the levels of natural between Plot B-4 and Plot B-5 suggests that the area has been truncated through terracing during the construction of the original hospital. Topographically this is clearly visible. The level of natural from the southeastern corner of the campus (Plot B-4) to Trench 1 (Plot B-5) drops by an average of 3.30 m (96.80mOD to 93.50m OD).

### 4.4 Significance

- 4.4.1 No significant archaeological remains have been identified during the watching brief and evaluation. Result suggest ground works associated with the original construction of the university campus have truncated earlier ground that might have had potential for archaeological discoveries.



## APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description				Orientation	NNE-SSW	
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of demolition material and natural sandy silt and natural clay sand deposits.				Avg. depth (m)	0.70m	
				Width (m)	2.00	
				Length (m)	50.00	
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.25	Topsoil	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.50	Demolition material	-	-
102	Layer	-	0.12	Redeposited natural	-	-
103	Layer	-	0.38	Natural	-	-

## APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: BDI Building (Plots B-4 and B-5)

Site code: OXBDI14

Grid reference: Centred at NGR SP 543 062

Type of watching brief: Watching Brief and Evaluation

Date and duration of project: October 2014 to February 2015

Area of site:

Summary of results: *Between the October 2014 and February 2015 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a programme of watching briefs and an evaluation as part of the programme of development of the BDI Building, Oxford University, Oxford. The work was commissioned by RB Development Management Ltd on behalf of Oxford University and was carried out during groundworks managed by MACE. The evaluation site was located on the site of the decant (temporary) accommodation and the watching briefs were located on the eastern side of the campus (NGR SP 543 062) identified in the Written Scheme of Investigation as Plots B-4 and B-5. The site is located within the grounds of Boundary Brook House and is bounded by Roosevelt Drive to the South and Old Road to the North. It was originally agreed that two 50 m long trenches would be excavated to sample Plots B-5 and B-4. However, due to the quantity of groundworks that were monitored in Plot B-4, it was decided by the City Archaeologist that the proposed Trench 2 excavation was no longer necessary to sample this area.*

*The watching brief was generally successful in establishing the presence/absence, extent, conditions, nature, character and quality of archaeological remains encountered. In Plot B-4, the service trench for the substation had a number of features seen in section which had no artefacts recovered. A further trench running from the fence and across a car park was found to contain a shallow pit which had a piece of 18<sup>th</sup> century pottery. The substation foundation excavations revealed modern backfill. The pad pits for the new build were largely empty apart from Pit 3 where an undated posthole was found and Pit 7 where a possible undated irregular negative feature was identified.*

In Plot B-5, two negative features that contained modern building material and disused service trenches were the

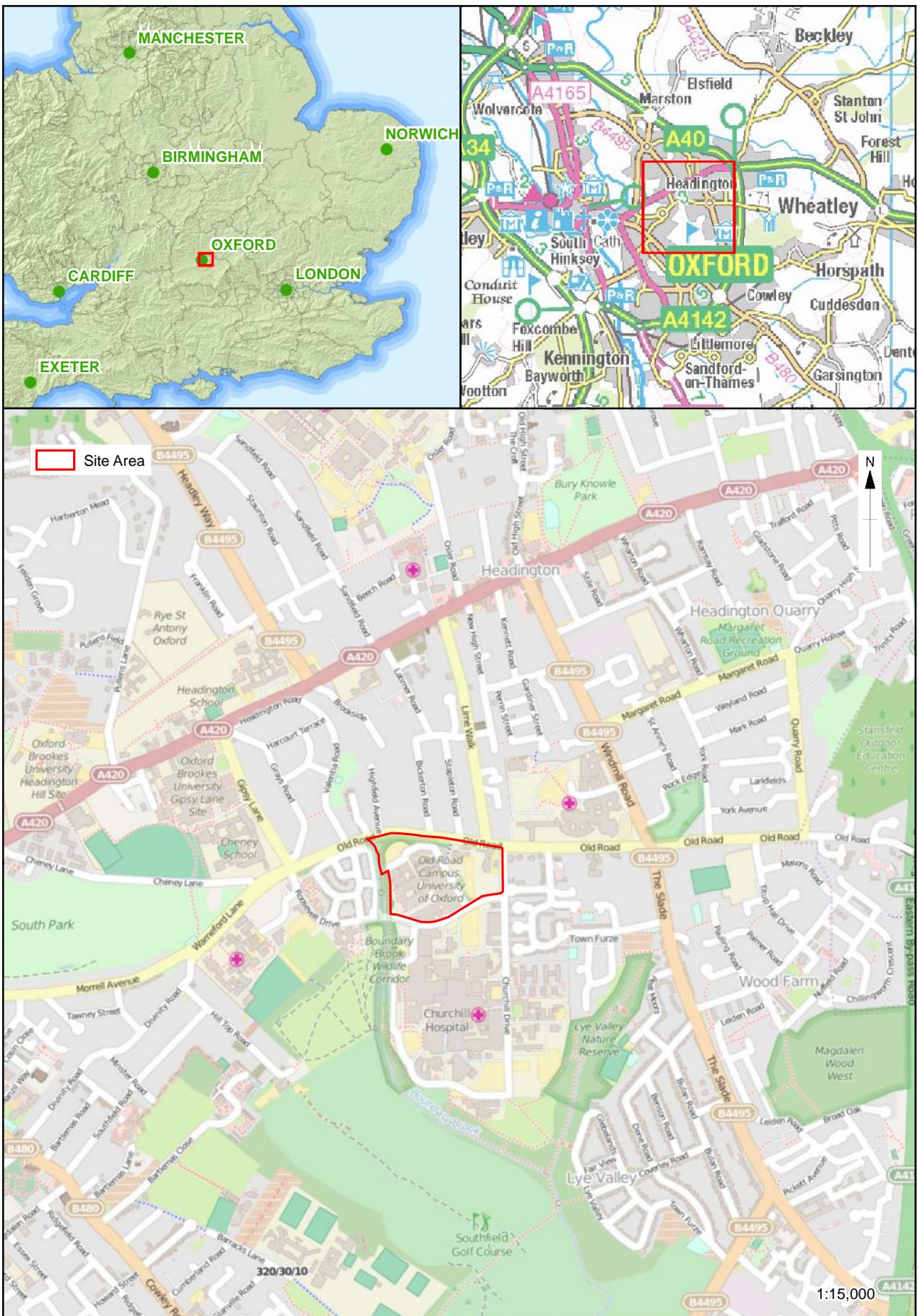


only archaeological features found in the 50 m long evaluation trench.

**Location of archive:**

The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Services in due course.





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Figure 1: Site location



Figure 2: Location of archaeological works

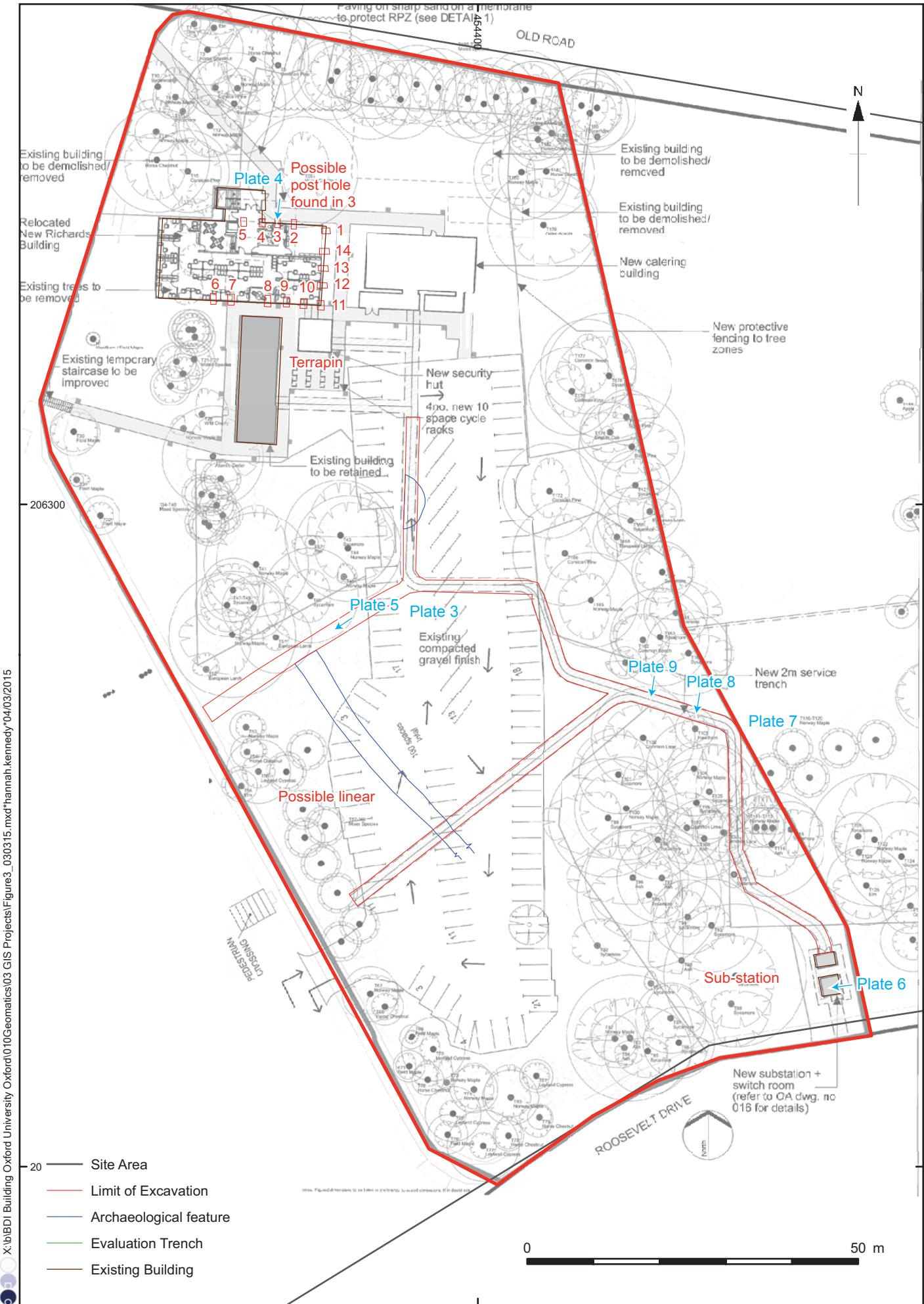


Figure 3: Plot B-4 Watching Brief area



Plate 1: Overall shot of Trench 1



Plate 2: Representative section, Trench 1



Plate 3: Shot of service trench with large feature



Plate 4: Shot of Pad Pit with possible post hole



Plate 5: Shot of service trench with possible hedge line linear feature



Plate 6: Foundation excavation of the substation



Plate 7: Base of service trench connecting the substation



Plate 8: Discrete feature observed in the southwestern baulk of the substation service trench





Plate 9: Discrete feature observed in the southwestern baulk of the substation service trench



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