



Gradel Quad, Gas Main and Meter Enclosure, New College, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

June 2022

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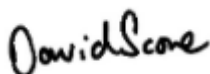
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Prepared by: Robin Bashford (Archaeologist)
Checked by: Ben Ford MCIfA FSA (Senior Project Manager)
Edited by: Mark Dodd MCIfA (Project Officer)
Approved for Issue by: David Score MCIfA (Head of Fieldwork)
Signature:



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OA South

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford
OX2 0ES

t. +44 (0)1865 263 800

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridge
CB23 8SQ

t. +44 (0)1223 850 500

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane Mills
Moor Lane
Lancaster
LA1 1QD

t. +44 (0)1524 880 250

e. info@oxfordarch.co.uk

w. oxfordarchaeology.com

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Chief Executive Officer
Ken Welsh, BSc, MCIfA
Private Limited Company, No: 1618597
Registered Charity, No: 285627
Registered Office: Oxford Archaeology Ltd
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES

Gradel Quad, Gas Main and Meter Enclosure, New College, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Robin Bashford

With illustrations by Benjamin Brown and Charles Rousseaux

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by Ridge and Partners LLP on behalf of Longwall II Ltd, to undertake a watching brief during groundworks to install a new gas main and meter enclosure adjacent to the Clore Music Room at Savile House, Mansfield Road, Oxford, as part of the Gradel Quadrangle Project for New College.

The watching brief revealed part of the geological sequence on the periphery of the second gravel terrace, and a probable buried soil which overlay it. The remainder of the deposits encountered were either associated with the construction of Mansfield Road from the late 19th century onwards or works associated with the construction of the Clore Music Rooms between 2014 and 2019.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Ridge and Partners LLP for commissioning this project on behalf of Longwall II Ltd. Thanks are also extended to David Radford, who monitored the works on behalf of Oxford City Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Ben Ford. The fieldwork was undertaken by Robin Bashford. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff who prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Ridge and Partners LLP, on behalf of Longwall II Ltd, to undertake a watching brief during groundworks to install a new gas main and meter enclosure adjacent to the Clore Music Room at Savile House, Mansfield Road, Oxford, as part of the Gradel Quadrangle Project for New College.
- 1.1.2 The work, which is associated with an amendment (20/00834/NMA7) to Planning Ref: 17/03330/FUL, was undertaken at the request of David Radford, Archaeologist for Oxford City Council (OCC) who, working with Ridge and Partners, established the scope of archaeological response required. A written scheme of investigation (WSI) was produced (OA 2022) which outlined how OA would implement those requirements. This report details the findings of the watching brief.
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2014a) and *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (CIfA 2014b), and local and national planning policies.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site is situated immediately to the north of Savile House, New College, on the west side of Mansfield Road, Oxford (NGR SP 5172 0671; Fig. 1). The site straddles the remnants of an existing earthwork that forms part of the Civil War defences of Oxford.
- 1.2.2 It lies at approximately 62m aOD, between the Cherwell and the Thames, near the edge of the second (Summertown-Radley) gravel terrace and a short distance west of the first (Flood Plain) terrace, overlying Oxford clay and Kellaway beds (BGS online).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

Oxford Archaeology, 2014 and 2015

- 1.3.1 Following an original phase of evaluation in 2014, during 2015 part of an extant bank at Savile House, Mansfield Road, Oxford, was investigated prior to an extension to the building for the Clore Music Room (OA 2021 and forthcoming). The forthcoming publication report concludes:
- 1.3.2 The earthwork, which formed part of the inner Civil War defences of Oxford, was found to seal possible postholes of medieval date that may have formed part of a field boundary that the earthwork later followed.
- 1.3.3 The bank was carefully constructed with two main dumps comprising reddish brown loam over which was compacted gravel, likely to have derived from a ditch dug on its north side.
- 1.3.4 Pits dating from the late 17th to mid 19th centuries suggest that the area of the bank was used for the dumping of rubbish.
- 1.3.5 Residual prehistoric flintwork (including an early Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowhead) as well as residual degraded Roman pottery fragments were recovered from the bank.

Museum of London Archaeology, 2019

- 1.3.6 The executive summary in the Post-excavation Assessment of MoLA's 2019 excavations to the north of the site (MoLA, 2021) concluded:
- 1.3.7 Prehistoric activity was found in the form of residual finds and two sherds of pottery.
- 1.3.8 Evidence for Roman activity consisted of a peripheral part of a previously identified settlement, from which two phases of late Roman period activity (AD 240-410) were identified. The first phase was represented by postholes, pits, gullies, drip gullies, ditches, and a substantial field boundary. This was overlain by an occupation deposit which was truncated by the second phase of activity which consisted of pits, postholes, a gully, a drip gully and a kiln.
- 1.3.9 During the Saxon period (AD 880-985) evidence for a rampart or lynchet was constructed to the north of the site.
- 1.3.10 Scattered remains of medieval date were found on site, but no evidence of structures was uncovered, with the exception of a single posthole which was tentatively assigned to a late medieval period (15th century).
- 1.3.11 The post-medieval period was also divided into two phases. The first phase (17th century) comprised the redevelopment of the Saxon lynchet into the second line of the Oxford defences during the English Civil War. Related features included a back ditch and pits containing refuse. The second phase (18th-19th century) showed the use of the land for cultivation and for refuse disposal.
- 1.3.12 An undated grave, which contained two inhumations, was also identified; it was located away from the centres of activity which were focussed in the north of the development area.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 General

2.1.1 The general aim of the archaeological works was to mitigate the impacts of the intrusive groundworks on any buried archaeological remains that were present. This was to be achieved through the excavation and recording of any archaeological features and deposits present by written, drawn and photographic record.

2.2 Specific aims and objectives

2.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the watching brief were outlined in the WSI as follows:

- i. To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present;
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;
- iii. To determine the potential of the site to provide paleoenvironmental and/or economic evidence;
- iv. To contextualise the findings within the local and regional landscapes;
- v. To disseminate the results of the archaeological works through the production of a fieldwork report;
- vi. Given the range of scientific dates previously obtained from the loam band opportunities will be sought to further clarify the date/sequence of the loam bank deposits (ie retrieval of suitable samples for radiocarbon dating).

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 A programme of archaeological monitoring was undertaken alongside the ground works which included both machine and hand excavation of a trench for the new gas main and the foundation for the meter enclosure. The extent and location of the works are shown on Figure 2.

2.3.2 The watching brief was maintained during all groundworks with the potential to disturb archaeological deposits or features. The excavations were monitored to the impact depth of the project or the surface of the natural geology, whichever was encountered first.

2.3.3 The work was undertaken in accordance with the *CIfA Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (CIfA 2014b).

2.3.4 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered during the works and no finds were recovered.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The following section details the stratigraphic sequence of the deposits revealed along the length of the service trench.

3.2 Area adjacent to Clore Music Room

3.2.1 The trench was excavated exclusively through backfill of the previous OA excavations or construction backfill deposited during the construction of the adjacent building. The southern edge of the trench followed the northern face of the north wall of the music room basement and the northern edge was excavated against the foundation of the building and boundary wall to the north of the site (Fig. 2; Plate 5).

3.2.2 The trenching to the west of the music room was also excavated through modern backfill material. A deposit of sterile reddish-brown material, similar to the composition of the bank recorded in previous excavations was observed but was redeposited above a spread of concrete and had modern material going under it (Plates 3 and 4).

3.2.3 Two manholes and other modern truncations were recorded in the north-south section of the trench, to the west of the music room.

3.3 Trench across Mansfield Road

3.3.1 The trench across the pavement and Mansfield Road lay outside the area previously subject to archaeological mitigation. The deposits at the eastern end of the trench (Fig. 3) revealed a sandy layer at the base of the sequence in excess of 0.5m thick, which had a band of pale bluey grey sandy clay within it approximately 0.1m from the base of the trench. The top of the sandy deposit was overlain by 0.25m of sterile sandy gravel. These were interpreted as a mixed deposit of natural geology (100).

3.3.2 The natural geology (100) was overlain by 0.25m of mid reddish brown clayey silt (101). It was cut by a number of features which appeared to be linear in nature and aligned north-south. These were filled with material redeposited from the sequence of deposits through which they were cut, and a number of cast iron service pipes were recorded within these linear features (Figs 2 and 3; Plates 1 and 2), together with a shingle filled modern cut on a SW-NE alignment at the western end of the trench.

3.3.3 The remaining deposits within the trench were a c 0.2m thick layer of hardcore and/or brick rubble overlain by the existing tarmac road surface, which was approximately 0.1m thick.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Interpretation and conclusion

- 4.1.1 Deposit 100, encountered at the eastern end of the trench across Mansfield Road is likely to represent the natural geology, and the mixed, banded nature of the interleaving layers of sand, clay and gravel probably reflect the location of the site on the periphery of the second terrace as it drops away toward the floodplain of the River Cherwell. Similarly changeable geological deposits were recently encountered during works at Norham Gardens, c 825m NNW of the site, and at the Tinbergen Building off South Parks Road, c 240m to the NE. Additionally, during the original evaluative work on the site to the west (OA 2014a) “[a] sondage was excavated through [the natural geology] to verify that it was terrace gravel, and this revealed a slightly “cleaner”, sandier deposit.....c 0.3m below the top of [the gravel]”, and as such it would appear that the sequence revealed within the recent trenching reflects that recorded to the west.
- 4.1.2 It is possible that the reddish-brown material (101) overlying this sequence is the remnant of the eastern continuation of the rampart recorded to the west, although it may alternatively represent the post-glacial brickearth deposit which overlies the second terrace gravels and/or “the pre-bank land surface” previously identified during the excavations to the west (OA 2021 and forthcoming).
- 4.1.3 Although the fills of the service trenches encountered within the trench across Mansfield Road did contain lenses and concentrations of the probable geological material (100), they appeared to be composed of a disproportionate amount of the reddish brown “layer” overlying the geological sequence. Mansfield Road was originally laid out between 1887 and 1893, and it is possible that this material originates from the destruction of this section of the earthwork during the construction of Mansfield Road and its subsequent redeposition as the backfill of associated service trenches.
- 4.1.4 The remaining deposits encountered within the trenching were all of modern origin.

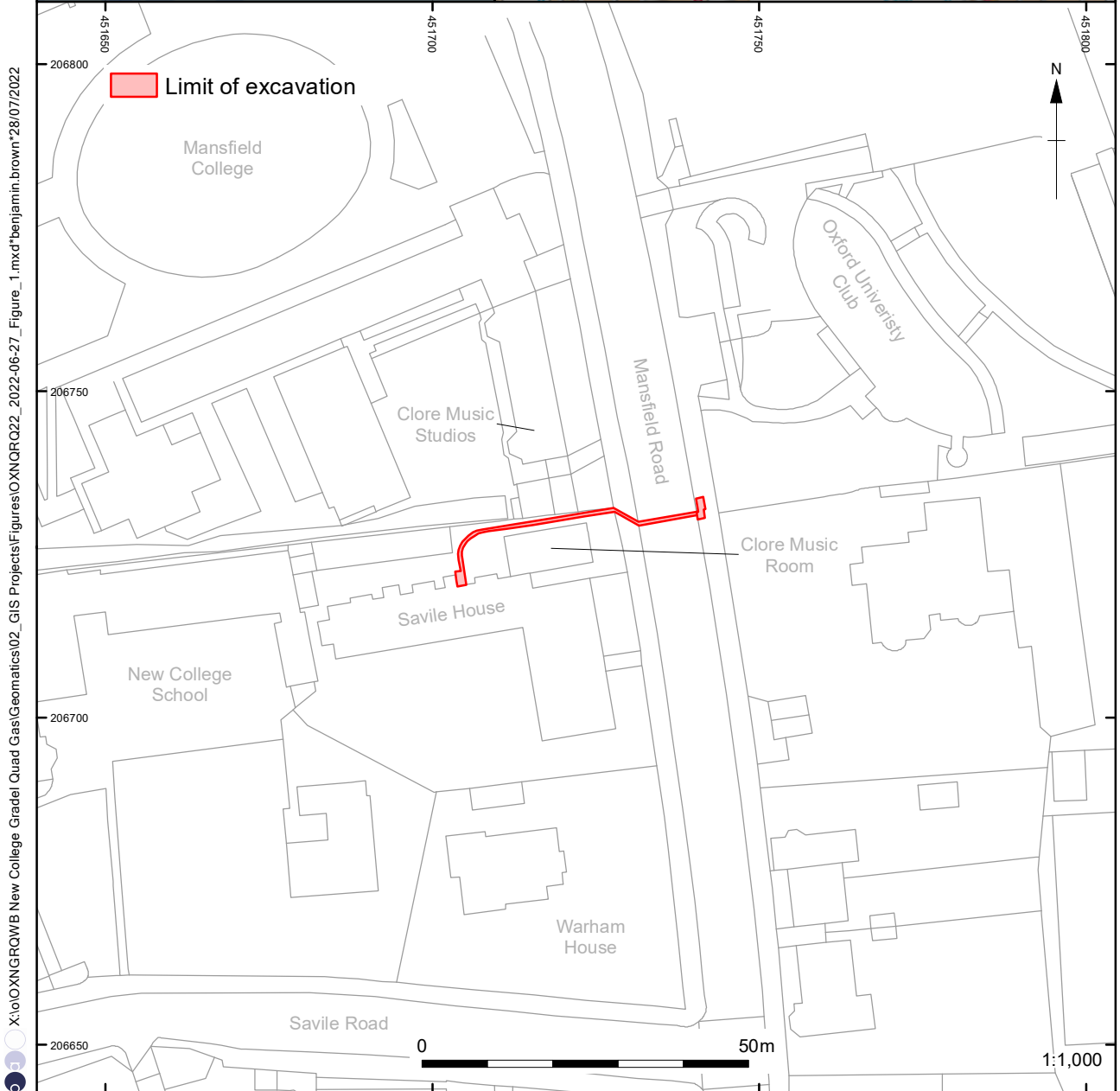
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APPENDIX B**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

Site name:	Gradel Quad, Gas Main and Enclosure, New College, Oxford
Site code:	OXNGRQ22
Grid Reference	SP 5172 0672
Type:	Watching Brief
Date and duration:	April-June 2022
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Services in due course, under the following accession number: TBC
Summary of Results:	Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by Ridge and Partners LLP, on behalf of Longwall II Ltd to undertake a watching brief during groundworks to install a new gas main and meter enclosure adjacent to the Clore Music Room at Savile House, Mansfield Road, Oxford as part of the Gradel Quadrangle Project for New College.

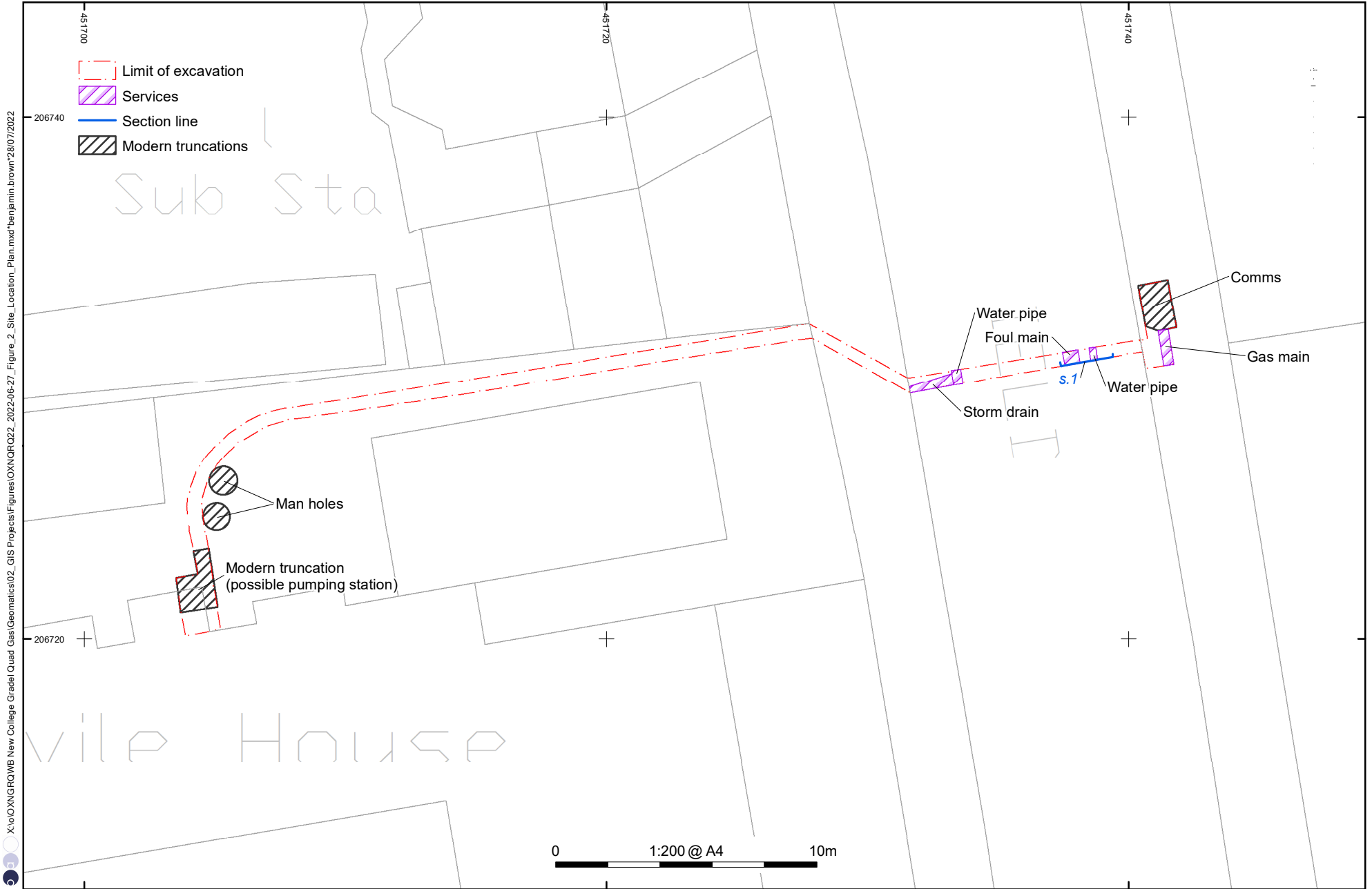
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Figure 1: Site location



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Figure 2: Plan of service trench

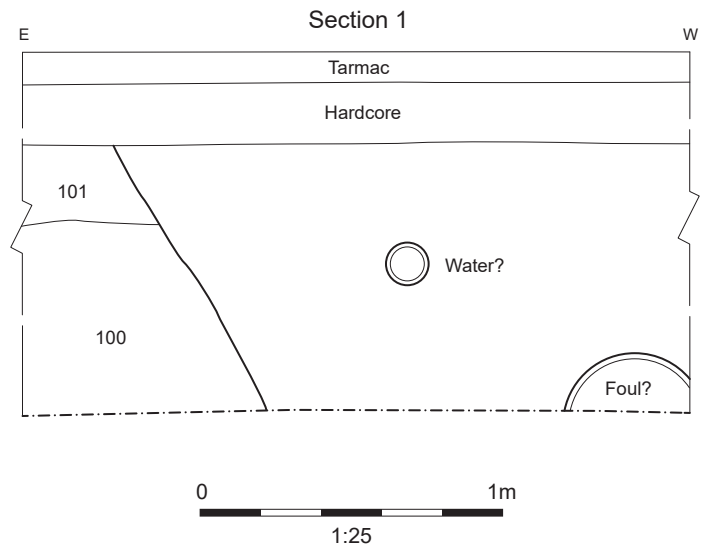


Figure 3: Section 1



Plate 1: Section 1



Plate 2: Services in eastern end of Trench across Mansfield Road



Plate 3: Modern backfill under re-deposited brickearth in Trench to west of Music Rooms



Plate 4: Concrete under re-deposited brickearth in Trench to west of Music Rooms



Plate 5: Trench to north of Music Rooms through modern backfill



**Head Office/Registered Office/
OA South**

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1QD

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



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