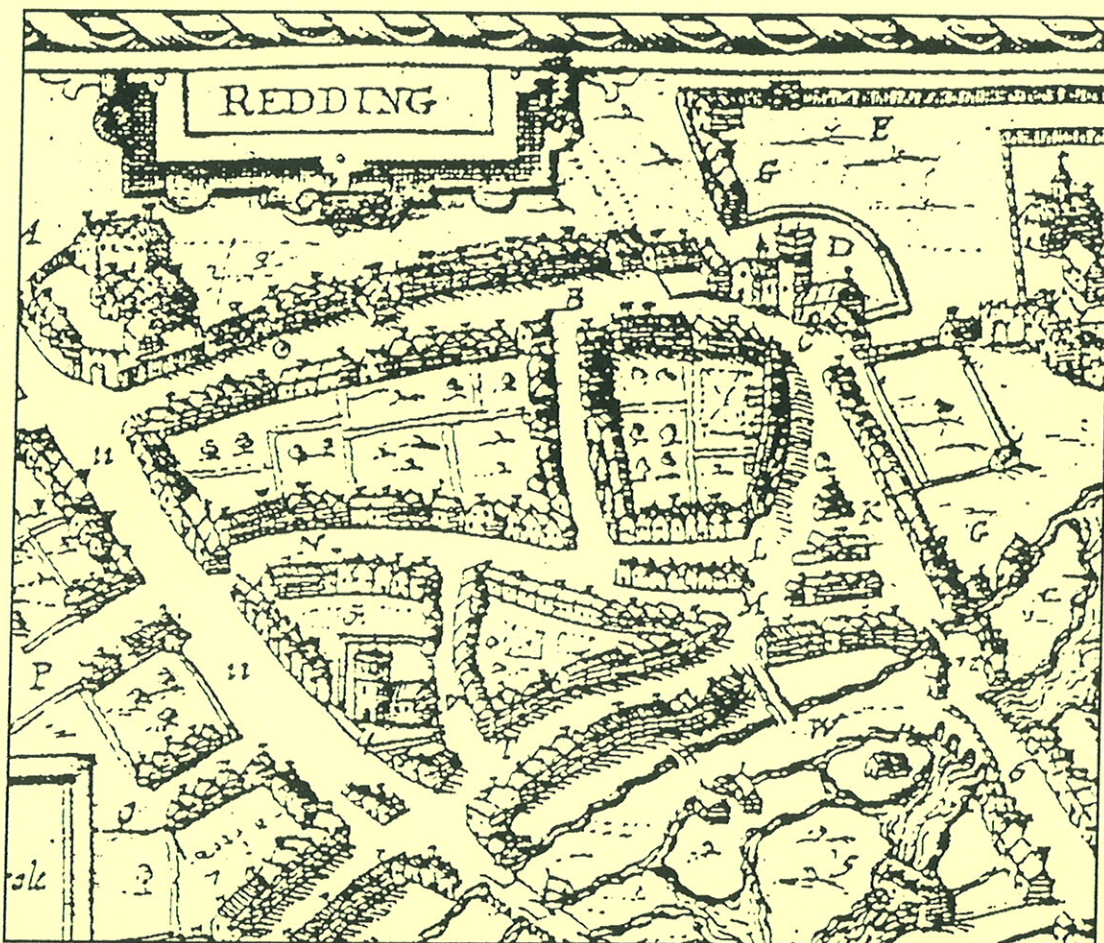


# Proposed Marks and Spencers, Friar Street, Reading Berkshire

NGR SU 7164 7353

## Archaeological Evaluation Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

July 1997

[Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners]

PROPOSED MARKS AND SPENCERS, FRIAR STREET,  
READING, BERKSHIRE

*ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT*

[NGR SU 7164 7353]

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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

(NGR SU 7164 7353)

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**PROPOSED MARKS AND SPENCERS, FRIAR STREET,  
READING, BERKSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

(NGR SU 7164 7353)

**1. Summary**

*The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) excavated two evaluation trenches on the site of the former Woolwich Building adjacent to Marks and Spencers in Friar Street, Reading. The earliest feature in Trench 1 was a tile hearth. The hearth was cut by a pit, possibly resulting from the robbing of a wall. The hearth tiles and pottery indicate a medieval date. The hearth and pit/robber trench was overlain by a later mortar floor, which may have been the base for a brick floor. This is probably contemporary with a flint and mortar wall at the west end of the trench. A similar type of floor construction which is currently under excavation by the OAU, at the site of the 'Yield Hall' in Reading, indicate a possible 17<sup>th</sup> century date.*

*Trench 2 identified a badly truncated silt deposit which may be the remnants of a floor make-up. The remaining area of the trench had been cut away by a later feature which is post-medieval in date.*

*The results from the two trenches suggest medieval features survive on the site both as stratified deposits and features cut into the natural gravel.*

**2. Introduction**

- 2.1. The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook an evaluation on the site of the former Woolwich Building Society between 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of May 1997. The work was commissioned by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, on behalf of Marks and Spencers Ltd, who plan to extend their existing store onto the site. It had been advised by Babbie Public Services (Berkshire County Council) that a field evaluation should be carried out prior to the development.

**3. Location** (Fig. 1 & 2)

- 3.1. The site is situated in Friar Street in the centre of Reading (SU 7164 7353) and was formerly the Woolwich Building Society. The existing Marks and Spencers forms the western boundary. The Woolwich, along with the neighbouring electricity sub-station occupy an area of 0.42ha. Approximately 36% of this area consists of a basement which fronts onto Friar Street. This part of Reading lies at 44.9m above Ordnance Datum (O.D).

**4. Strategy**

- 4.1. The evaluation, originally comprised of four trenches, two within the former Woolwich Building Society and two within the tarmac area between the Woolwich and Marks and Spencers. The proximity of a wide spread of live electricity cables, running from the electricity sub-station to Friar Street, prevented the two outside trenches from being excavated.

## 5. Archaeological Background

- 5.1. The site lies in the centre of medieval Reading and findspots nearby also indicate prehistoric, Roman and Saxon activity (see Appendix A & Fig. 1). The plan of the existing town still reflects the medieval street pattern as shown in the early Speed's map of Reading in 1611 (see cover of report).

## 6. Results

### 6.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

- 6.1.1. Trench 1 measured 4.3m long and 1.2m wide and was located just south of the line of the existing basement. The natural coarse gravel, 122, was located at 44.32m above OD. This was overlain by a silt layer 119 which produced no finds. Layer 119 was cut by a number of re-used red roof tiles, 115, set in vertically and surrounded by a scorched red silt. The red tiles were cut by a near vertical sided feature 125. This feature was not fully exposed in the trench so the exact shape was unclear. Due to the depth and constricted area it was not possible to excavate to the bottom of the feature, but it is at least 1.16m in depth. The latest fill of 125 contained redeposited red roof tile and scorched silt identical to that in hearth 115. The feature 125 was overlain by a silty make-up layer 114 with associated mortar layer 109. Some additional silt and mortar layers (112 & 113) were apparently laid to compensate for subsidence into the top of 125. The mortar 109 had some faint impressions on the surface which may indicate it once formed a bed for a brick floor.
- 6.1.2. There was no direct relationship between the mortar floor 109 and the flint and mortar wall 110. Wall 110 had a mortar render on the north and west facing faces. The east side of wall 110 was partly cut away by 116 and this in turn was cut by 105. The void defined by 110 was filled by 104 which contained 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery. Due to the depth it was not possible to excavate the full extent of this deposit although a hard deposit, possibly natural gravel, was detected at a depth of 1.4m. Presumably the wall 110 also extends down to this depth. Large nodules of flint were present in 104 and this deposit was practically identical to layer 103 and is probably the same deposit, which would also indicate a late/recent date for 104. Layer 103 consisted of predominately large flint nodules and appeared to be spread across the whole trench presumably to level of the site prior to a phase of re-building.
- 6.1.3. A pit 121 (not shown in Fig. 3) cut layer 108 and contained clay tobacco pipe stems and 18<sup>th</sup> century wares.

### 6.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 4)

- 6.2.1. Trench 2 measured 3.2m in length and 1.4m wide. The natural coarse gravel, 211, was located at 44.335m OD. This was overlain by a mottled yellow and reddish brown silt, 207, which was 0.01m thick. The south side of 207 was cut by linear feature 210 which measured 0.40m in depth and ran northwest/southeast along the edge of the trench. The fills of 210 contained medieval pottery, although the red roof tile predominate and include a complete hand made brick with vitrification occurring mainly on two of the faces (length 220mm - 230mm, width 108-115mm and 51mm-54mm thick).

## 7. Pottery: Paul Blinkhorn

- 7.1. The pottery assemblage comprised 29 sherds with a total weight of 413g (see Appendix 2). The assemblage from this site is too small to allow any firm chronology to be advanced, other than to give a *Terminus Post Quem* for each of the contexts which produced pottery. The range of wares is typical of urban sites in Berkshire,

particularly the Ashampstead wares, which occur in quantity in Reading, and are also known from Newbury and Windsor, Oxford, Abingdon and Wallingford (Mephem and Heaton 1995, 39-41). The industry began producing pottery in the late 12<sup>th</sup>-early 13<sup>th</sup> century (*ibid*). The other medieval coarsewares are all common types, and occur at many sites in the south midlands region (cf. Mellor 1994).

- 7.2. The majority of the sherds from the assemblages appear to be of medieval date, all unabraded, suggesting that there are no immediate grounds for suggesting that they are redeposited in later contexts which lack contemporary pottery.

## 8. Environmental

- 8.1. A 10 litre bulk sample was taken from the fill of pit/robber trench 125 which contained a number of well preserved small bones as well as carbonised material.

## 9. Conclusions

- 9.1. A well stratified sequence of deposits was identified in Trench 1, the earliest features was a hearth, 115, constructed of reused clay roof tiles and later pit /robber trench 125. The pottery and tile from these two features, indicate a medieval date. The pottery assemblage was not sufficient to provide an unequivocal date and it is possibly some of the pottery is redeposited. The Speed map of 1611 shows the properties along Friar Street and the rear as open plots it is therefore possible that Trench 1 has identified the rear of one of these properties which on the 1611 map are shown with a narrow frontage running at right angles to Friar Street.
- 9.2. There was no clear dating evidence for the flint and mortar wall 110, although it is probably related to later floor levels 109. This type of floor layer is similar to those currently under excavation by the OAU at the Oracle Site in Reading, which are associated with the 17<sup>th</sup> century 'Yield Hall'.
- 9.3. The accumulation of late post-medieval material up against the wall 110 probably indicates the face of this wall was exposed until fairly recently so it could have been still standing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was subsequently demolished to make way for the present building.
- 9.4. Trench 2 also produced medieval pottery along with a quantity of tile and hand-made brick. The pottery in Trench 2 also dates to the medieval period although quantity of tile and brick probably indicate reworked material caused by later disturbance. This would be supported by the stratigraphic evidence which shows that the only deposit which may relate to the medieval period is the silty floor make-up 207.
- 9.5. The results from the two trenches would suggest that the remains of floors, probably post-medieval in date, survive at a depth of 0.54m (44.55m OD) below the present floor level and the remains of earlier buildings, probably medieval also survive at 0.66m (44.43m OD) below the present floor level. There is some evidence of truncation from later post-medieval disturbance, more significantly in the area of Trench 2. There was no evidence for Saxon or prehistoric features, although the natural gravel was identified at 0.80m below the present floor level and if prehistoric features do exist they will not be badly disturbed by later building(s).

Andrew Parkinson  
OAU  
7 July 1997

## 10. References

Mepham L. and Heaton M.J., 1995 A Medieval Kiln at Ashampstead Berkshire Medieval Ceramics 19, 29-44

Mellor M., 1994 'A Synthesis of Middle and Late Saxon Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Pottery in the Oxford Region.' Oxoniensia 59, 17-218

'Proposed Redevelopment at Market Way, Broad St., Reading'. Oxford Archaeological December 1996, (unpublished client desktop report).

APPENDIX 1.

Gazetteer of Archaeological Sites in the vicinity of Friar Street, Reading (see Fig. 1).		
OAU no	Description	SMR no
1	Medieval findspot. Sherds of medieval pottery, glass, copper waste and post-medieval clay pipes found during digging of foundations west of Wiston Terrace.	2113/35
2	Medieval findspot. A jug of possible 12/13th century date was discovered in Blagrave Street.	2113/30
3	Early Iron Age copper Brooch found during digging for foundations in Friar St.	2060
4	Medieval findspot. Two gilt and enamelled bronze heraldic pendants were found on the site of the post office in Friar St.	2113/07/1
5	Prehistoric and Saxon finds. 19th century findspot of part of a Neolithic ground axe and three burials, dated to the 7th century.	2017
6	Post-medieval human remains. 6 skeletons associated with a Charles I farthing and two brass pins are reported as having been found in Friar St in 1888.	2114/07/10
7	Flint walling was found during construction work on the site of the Wheatsheaf Inn in Friar St.	2113/07/20
8	Medieval findspot. A quantity of 13th century pottery found 6ft down at 10 Queen Victoria St.	2113/34
9	Four small Roman coins discovered during construction at the Vaudeville Theatre in early 20th century.	2061
10	Medieval site. A well was located during building works to extend Lloyds Bank. Well was excavated by machine but preserved leather, cloth and wooden objects and pottery and glass from bottom of well was recovered. Pottery suggests that the well was used as a dump from the mid 14th century onwards.	2113/29
11	Prehistoric findspot. Undated prehistoric flint net sinker and bone needle discovered during excavation of Bank Vault at no 25 Broad Street.	2025
12	Medieval site. During excavations at 14 Broad Street in 1933 Flint and tile walling was discovered at a depth of 7ft together with fragments of 13th-14th century pottery and the neck of a glass bottle.	2113/26/1
13	Prehistoric findspot and Roman findspot. An Iron Age gold coin and Roman sherds have been discovered in Market Place.	2055, 2061
14	Medieval site. During demolition and construction works at 160-3 Friar St, a complex of cess and rubbish pits was revealed. Much medieval material was recovered, most of 13th-14th century date.	2113/07/10
15	Building works on the east side of the Market Place uncovered a long	2113/05



Gazetteer of Archaeological Sites in the vicinity of Friar Street, Reading (see Fig. 1).		
OAU no	Description	SMR no
	ditch or elongated pit, which produced much medieval pottery mostly of 14th/15th century date.	
16	Excavations in advance of construction of Reading Library revealed a pre-Abbey ploughsoil dated, from the pottery, to the 10th to early 12th century. The Abbey stables were constructed on the site in the late 12th century or early 13th century and these remained on the site until their demolition in the 16th or 17th centuries.	1022/11
17	Undated well. A flint-lined well, with a total depth of 16ft found on the site of No 1 Buttermarket.	2114/04/1
18	Medieval findspot. During building work at 118 Broad St a late Norman or early medieval pot found just above the natural chalk.	2113/28
19	Undated human remains. Upper part of a human skull found during building works in Minster St in 1939.	2114/02
20	A coffin in the St Mary's churchyard was disturbed in 1839. It was found to contain a hoard of mid 9th century Saxon or Danish Silver pennies.	2101
21	Findspot of a Saxon spearhead discovered in 1937.	2091
22	Undated wall. An undated brick wall, running out from shop frontage on north side of Kings road was reported by telephone engineers.	2113/22
23	Medieval findspot. A 14th or 15th century pilgrims bottle was recovered from 'a depth of about 8ft on a building site on the site of the old Corn Exchange' in 1964. The precise location of this findspot is unclear: the Corn Exchange itself was not demolished until 1968 and the grid reference given by the Berkshire SMR places it some way to the north-west.	2113/39
24	Post-medieval findspot. Five nearly complete pots of the 17th-18th centuries and fragments of two more were found in a pit 'under the Market Arcade about 70 yards from the Friar St end' in 1964.	

APPENDIX 2.

Pottery by Fabric

Proposed Marks and Spencers, Friar Street, Reading, (REFMS 97)

Context	East Wilts ware AD 1000+	Ashampstead AD 1200+	Brill Boarstal ware 1200+	Red Earthenware AD1450+	Border Green ware AD 1580+	18 <sup>th</sup> C	Context Date <i>Terminus Post Quem</i> (TPQ)
104						3(20)	1790+
106				2(107)			1450+
118	3(23)	2(19)					1200+
120				1(6)	1(2)	3(62)	1700+
124		2(6)					1200+
127		1(11)					1200+
205		7(88)	1(19)	1(19)			1450+
208		1(10)					1200+
209		1(21)					1200+
Total	3(23)	14(155)	1(19)	4(132)	1(2)	6(83)	

(weight in grams in brackets)

## APPENDIX 3.

## Context Inventory (for details of pottery see Appendix 2).

Proposed Marks and Spencers, Friar Street, Reading (REFMS 97)							
Ctx	Type	Depth	Width	Brick	Tile	Other	Comments
101	Layer	0.23					Concrete floor
102	Layer	0.10					Make-up layer
103	Layer	0.14					
104	Fill	0.80+				Pot	Fill of 105
105	Cut	0.70+	1.60				
106	Fill	0.15				Cu Alloy pin	Fill of 116
107	Fill	0.08					Fill of 116
108	Fill	0.14					Fill of 111
109	Layer	0.05				Sample taken	Mortar bed for floor
110	Wall	0.36+	0.50		√	Sample taken	Flint and mortar wall
111	Cut	0.17					Cut to ?remove brick floor
112	Layer	0.01					Make-up layer for floor
113	Layer	0.005					Mortar surface
114	Layer	0.07					Make up layer for floor
115	Fill	0.12			√		Tile Hearth
116	Cut	0.19					
117	Cut	0.13					Cut for hearth 115
118	Fill	0.16				Glass. Bone. Pot	Fill of 125
119	Layer	0.14					Soil horizon above gravel
120	Fill	-			√	Clay tobacco pipe. Pot	Fill of 121
121	Cut	-					Post-medieval pit
122	Layer	0.45+					Natural gravel
123	Cut	0.11	0.13				Construction trench for 110
124	Fill		0.48+			Bone. Pot	Fill of 125
125	Cut	0.72+	0.35+				Pit/robber trench
126	Fill		0.13				Fill of 123
127						Pot	
Trench 2							
201	Layer	0.26					Concrete floor
202	Layer	0.10					Make-up for floor
203	Layer	0.08					Infill/levelling post-med. deposit
204	Layer	0.20					
205	Fill	0.25		√	√	Bone. Shell. Pot	Fill of 210
206	Layer	0.08					Infill/levelling post-med. deposit
207	Layer	0.01					Make-up for floor
208	Fill	0.10		√	√		Fill of 210
209	Fill	0.30			√	Worked stone. Pot	Fill of 210

Proposed Marks and Spencers, Friar Street, Reading (REFMS 97)							
Ctx	Type	Depth	Width	Brick	Tile	Other	Comments
						Shell	
210	Cut	0.40					
211	Layer						Natural gravel
212	Mortar	0.22	0.31				Remains of brick wall



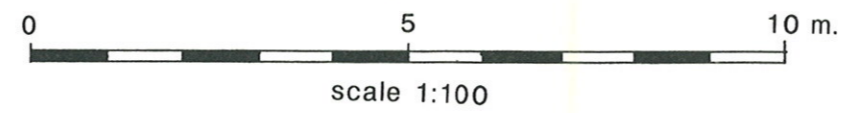
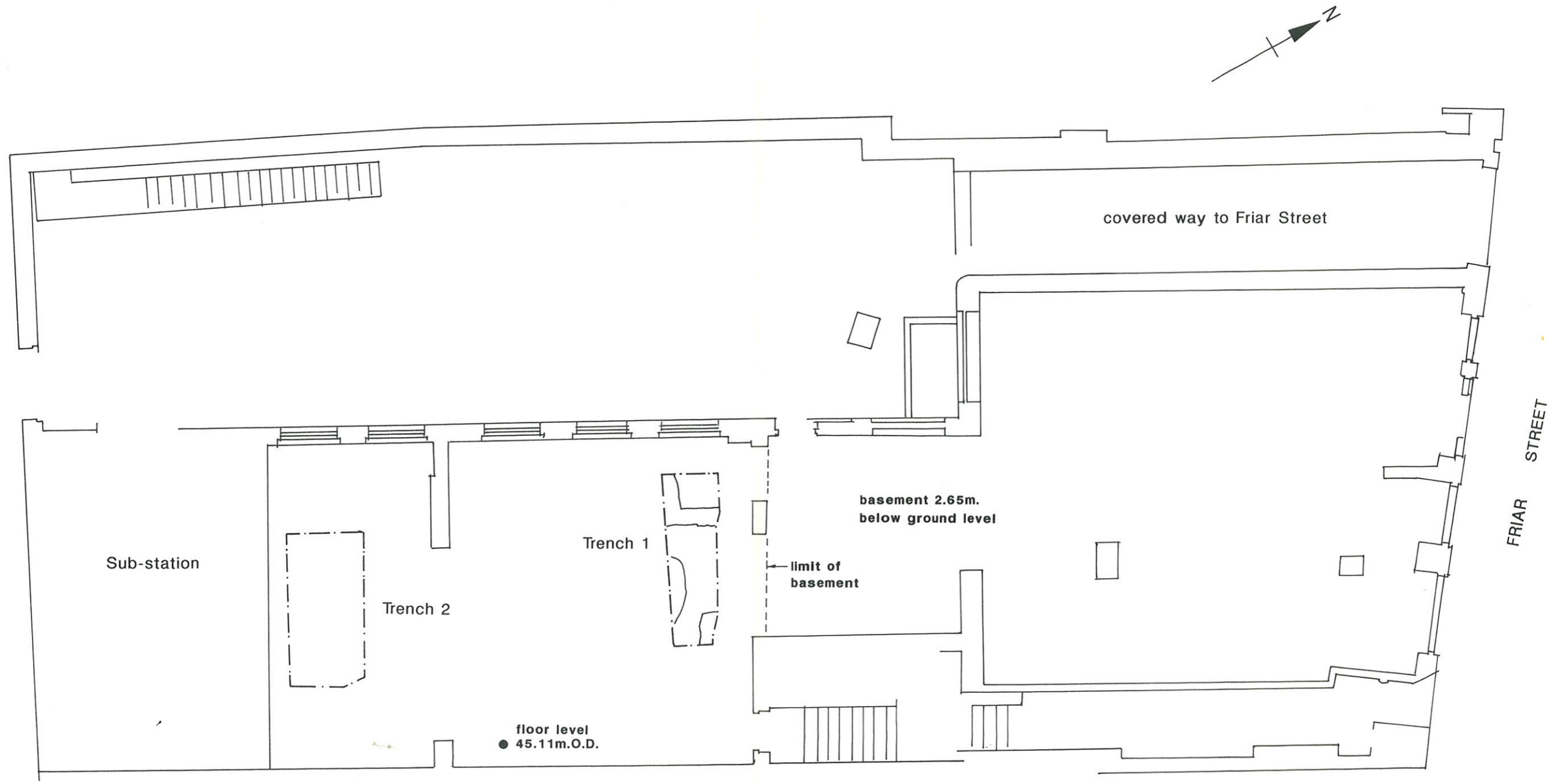
Scale 1:2500

Location of archaeological sites  
in the vicinity of development site

- Archaeological site
- + Archaeological finds spot

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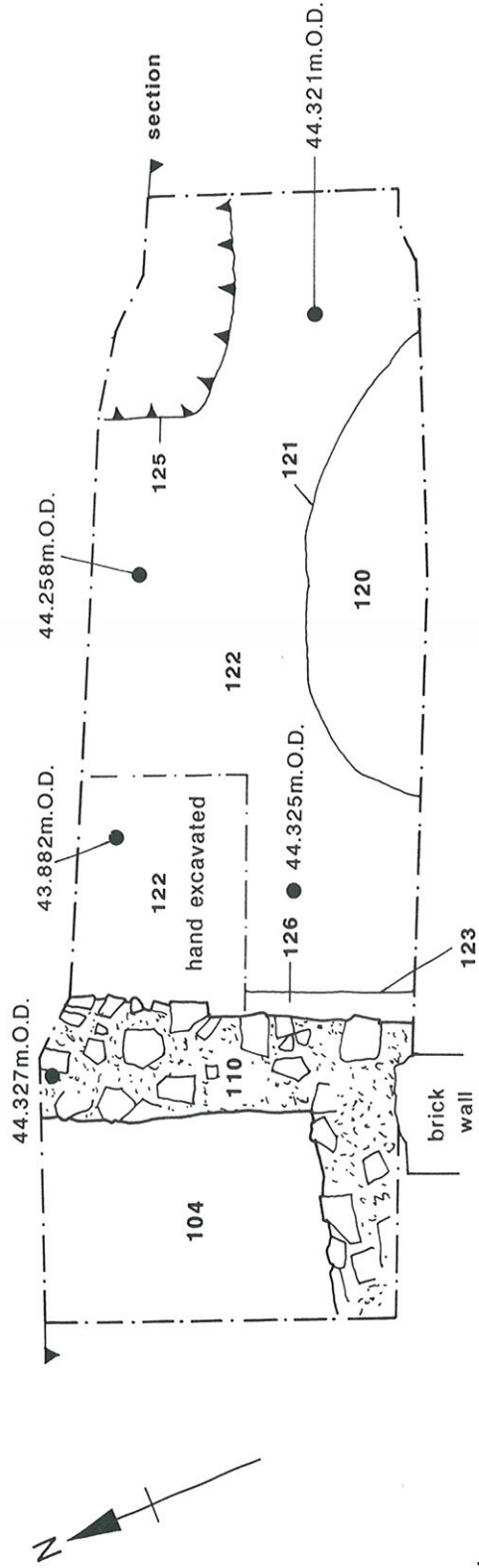
Figure 1



Trench location plan

Figure 2

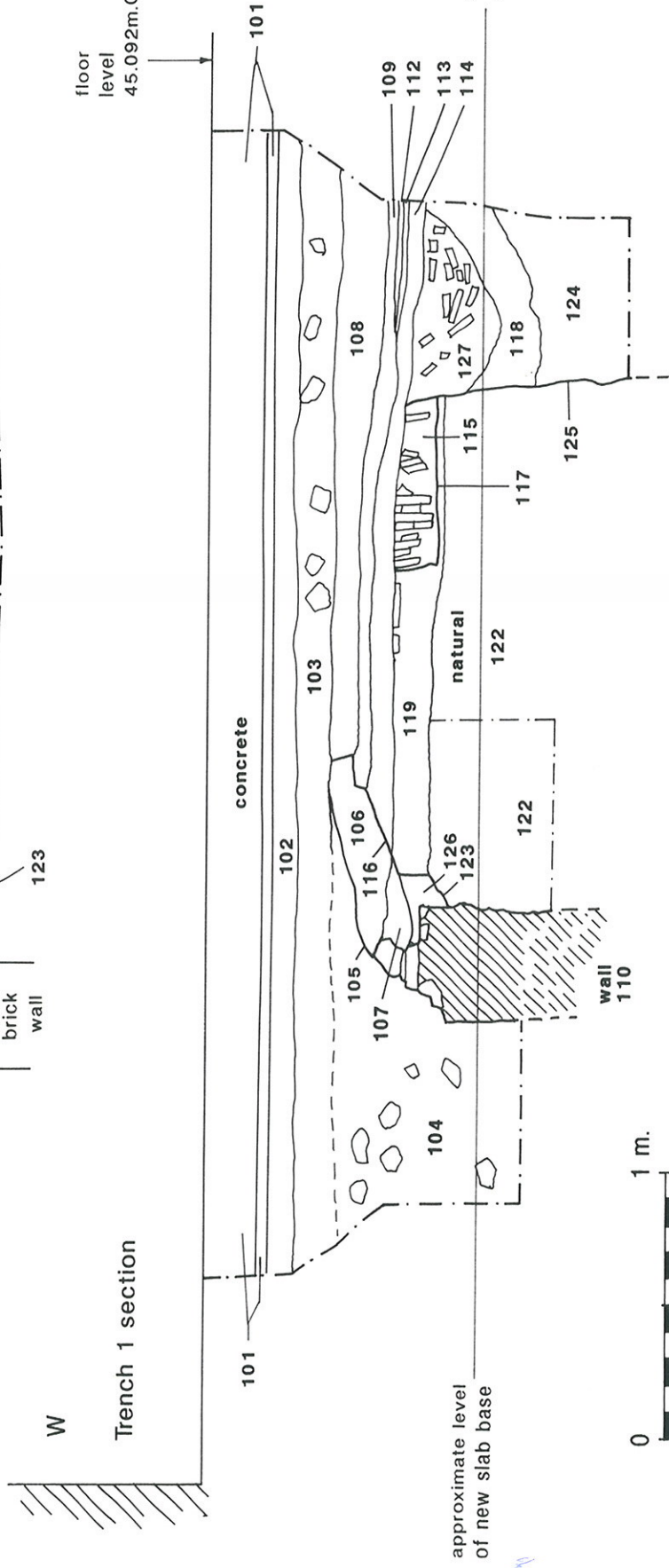
Trench 1 plan



E

floor level 45.092m.O.D.

Trench 1 section



approximate level of new slab base

approximate level of new slab base



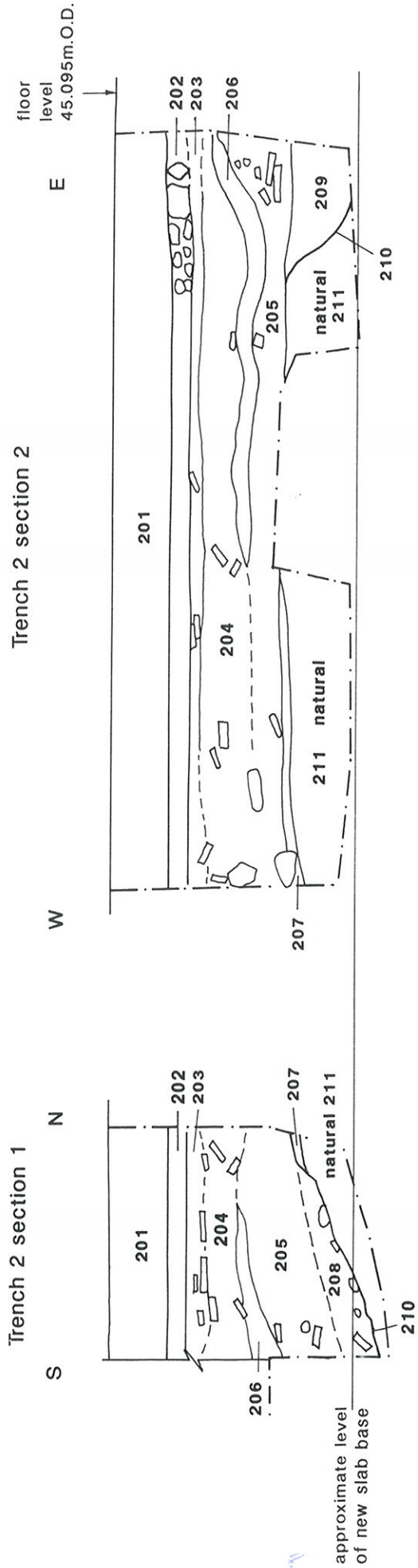
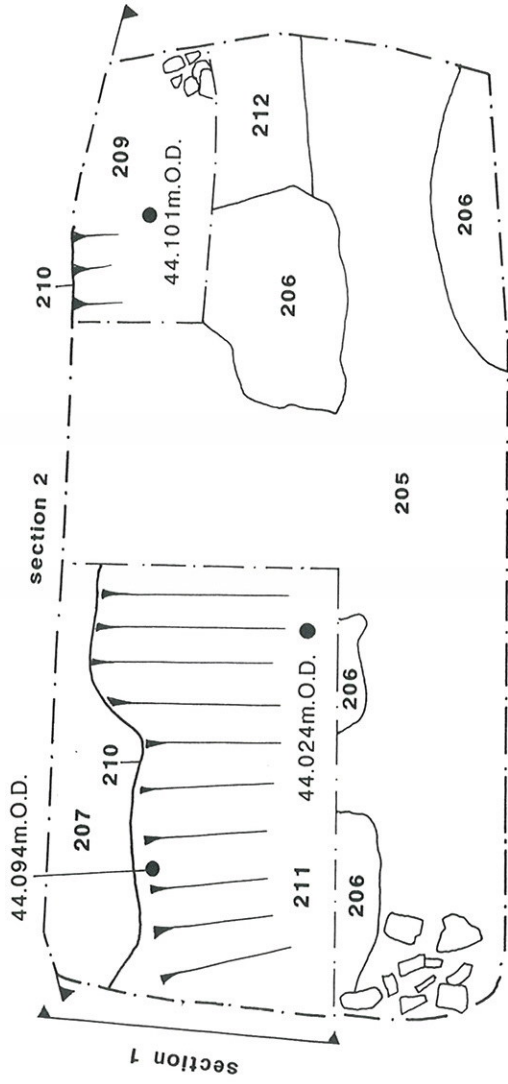
scale 1:25

Trench 1 plan and section

Figure 3

Trench 2 plan

REFMSEV 97



Trench 2 plan and sections

scale 1:25

Figure 4





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