

Exeter College Oxford

Staircase 4 and 5 Basement Works



Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology

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Exeter College, Oxford Staircase 4 and 5 Basement Works

NGR SP 5150 0630

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In August and September 2000, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Exeter College Oxford (NGR SP 5150 0630). The work was commissioned by architects Howes Allen and Montgomery on behalf of the college in advance of the installation of new drainage and associated manholes. The watching brief monitored the excavation of a number of inspection pits that cut through post-medieval strata containing both medieval and post-medieval pottery. Further finds of medieval and post-medieval pottery were recovered from a stratified layer recorded during a previous evaluation of the site.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In August and September 2000, Oxford Archaeology (OA, formerly Oxford Archaeological Unit, OAU) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Exeter College, Oxford (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Howes Allen and Montgomery on behalf of the college in respect of listed consent (ref: 99/486/L) for the installation of new drainage facilities in the college basement.

1.1.2 The project was a follow-up to the evaluation undertaken by OA of the basement in December 1999 (OA 2000). No formal brief was set for the watching brief, though discussions took place between the City archaeologist and OA as to the best method of mitigating the impact of the site works.

1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA July 2000) detailing how it would implement a recording action during the groundworks.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site is located towards the centre of Oxford and is bounded to the north by Broad Street, to the west by Turl Street and to the south by Brasenose Lane (NGR SP 5150 0630).

1.2.2 The underlying geology is the second gravel terrace of the Thames. The internal and external ground floor of the college lies at c 64.5 m OD; the college basement floor level lies at c 62.m OD.

1.3 Background

1.3.1 The background to the watching brief was prepared for the Written Scheme of Investigation for the project (OA 2000) and is summarised below.

1.3.2 Exeter College lies inside what is believed to be the first fortification of the Saxon town, within a northern line of defences running approximately through the kitchen

of the Rector's Lodging. A small part of the Saxon earthen rampart was observed during construction of the Margary Quadrangle in the 1960s

1.3.3 The site of the later college was occupied in the earlier medieval period by a number of private houses and academic halls, depicted on Salter's *Map of Medieval Oxford*, and described in his *Survey*. It is possible that the property on the site of the east side of the front quadrangle was Scot Hall or Castell Hall of St Frideswide's, which would have had buildings along the road and a garden or yard behind.

1.3.4 An archaeological evaluation within the wine store of the basement was undertaken by OA in December 1999 (OA 2000). This exercise comprised the excavation of a column of soil below the Senior Common Luncheon Room, which revealed a sequence of archaeological deposits associated with the extant 17th century building.

1.3.5 Beaten earth floor layers were revealed at a level that suggested the existence of a cellar associated with the original 1618 construction of the Peryam's Building. This would suggest a subsequent rearrangement of the ground floor levels, perhaps associated with the construction of the 1723 Armagh Building.

1.3.6 The original proposal was for the excavation of a basement extension in the vicinity of staircase 4, which would have removed landscape/infill deposits associated with the construction of the 1618 Peryam's building as well as contemporary cellar floors. This scheme was abandoned, with alterations reduced to the excavation of drainage trenches and associated manholes.

1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 OA extends its thanks to site contractors and to architect Robert Montgomery, who provided OA with site plans and drawings.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 To record the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the entire area affected by development.

2.1.2 To signal to all parties, if exceptional archaeological remains were discovered for which the resources allocated are insufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard, that such a find had been made.

2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 A new 1.2 m deep drainage trench and associated inspection chambers were excavated at basement level, situated between Staircases 4 and 5 of the Armagh building adjacent to the library (Fig. 2).

- 2.2.2 A new manhole (MH3) was excavated between the east side of the building and the library to a depth of *c* 2.3 m for further new drainage. Limited further work was carried out by the contractors at the base of the trial pit excavated earlier, prior to making good the brick walling in the room here.
- 2.2.3 A site plan of the works was made at a scale of 1:100. A general photographic record of the work was made and recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Basement Drainage trench

- 3.1.1 At the time of the site investigation a series of square pits (Trenches 1-5, Fig. 2) had been dug by the contractors into the basement floor to a depth of up to 1.2 m. These pits were cut through 18th century infill and 17th century floor deposits previously identified during the excavation of the earlier trial pit (OAU 2000).
- 3.1.2 Two sherds of 18th century red glazed earthenware were recovered from Trench 1 at a depth comparable to deposit 5 seen in the evaluation test pit. The remainder of the square pits seen produced a mixed group of finds including C13th-15th medieval types from the Brill/Boarstall area (fabrics OXAW and OXAM); late Saxon to Medieval Abingdon ware, and a few sherds of medieval white wares dated to the C13th-C14th (OXAH).

Previous Excavation trench

- 3.1.3 Further excavation was undertaken by the contractors at the base of the previously excavated trial trench into layer 14 (see OAU 2000, Figure 3). This produced further medieval pottery broadly dated to the 13th-15th century mixed with 17th-18th century material that will be added to the overall assemblage recovered from the original excavations.

New Manhole (MH3) by the Library

- 3.1.4 The manhole was excavated through previously disturbed ground beneath the ground surface and no further finds were reported.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 The small assemblage of finds is comparable is similar to that recovered during the evaluation. A few animal bones were recovered by the contractors and are to be held in the archive.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The basement excavations revealed that the previously identified deposits extend across the area of the basement, containing a mixed assemblage of finds caused by the truncation of medieval deposits at the time the 17th century cellar/basement was created.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA 2000 *Exeter College, Staircases 4 and 5, Basement. Archaeological Evaluation Report*

OA 2000 *Exeter College, Staircases 4 and 5, Basement. Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Exeter College Staircase 4 and 5 Basement works

Site code: OXECB 00

Grid reference: NGR SP 5150 0630

Type of watching brief: Excavation of new drainage

Date and duration of project: August and September 2000

Area of site: 0.05 ha

Summary of results: Recovery medieval and post-medieval pottery from previously evaluated strata.

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

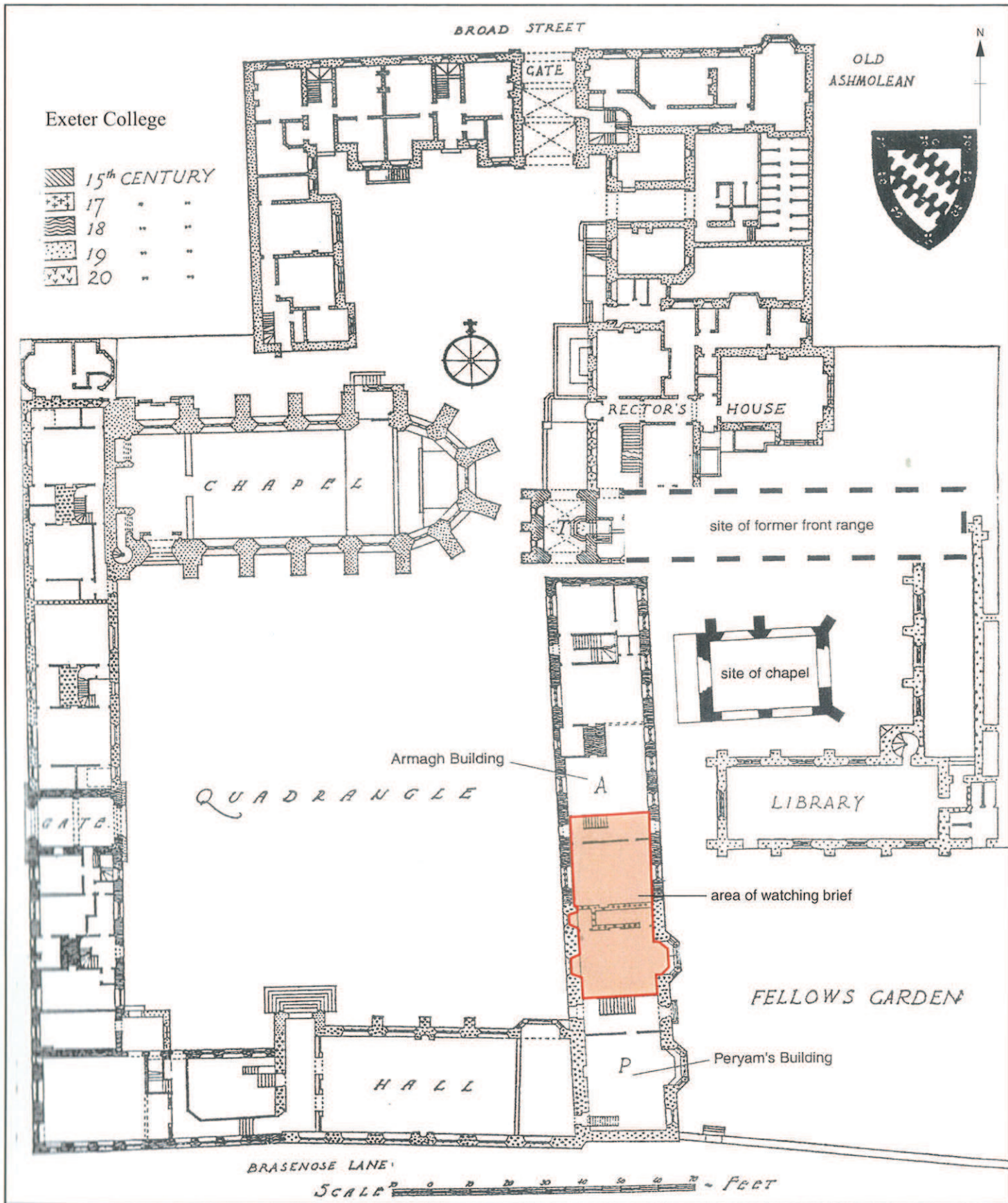


Figure 1: Location Plan of Exeter College

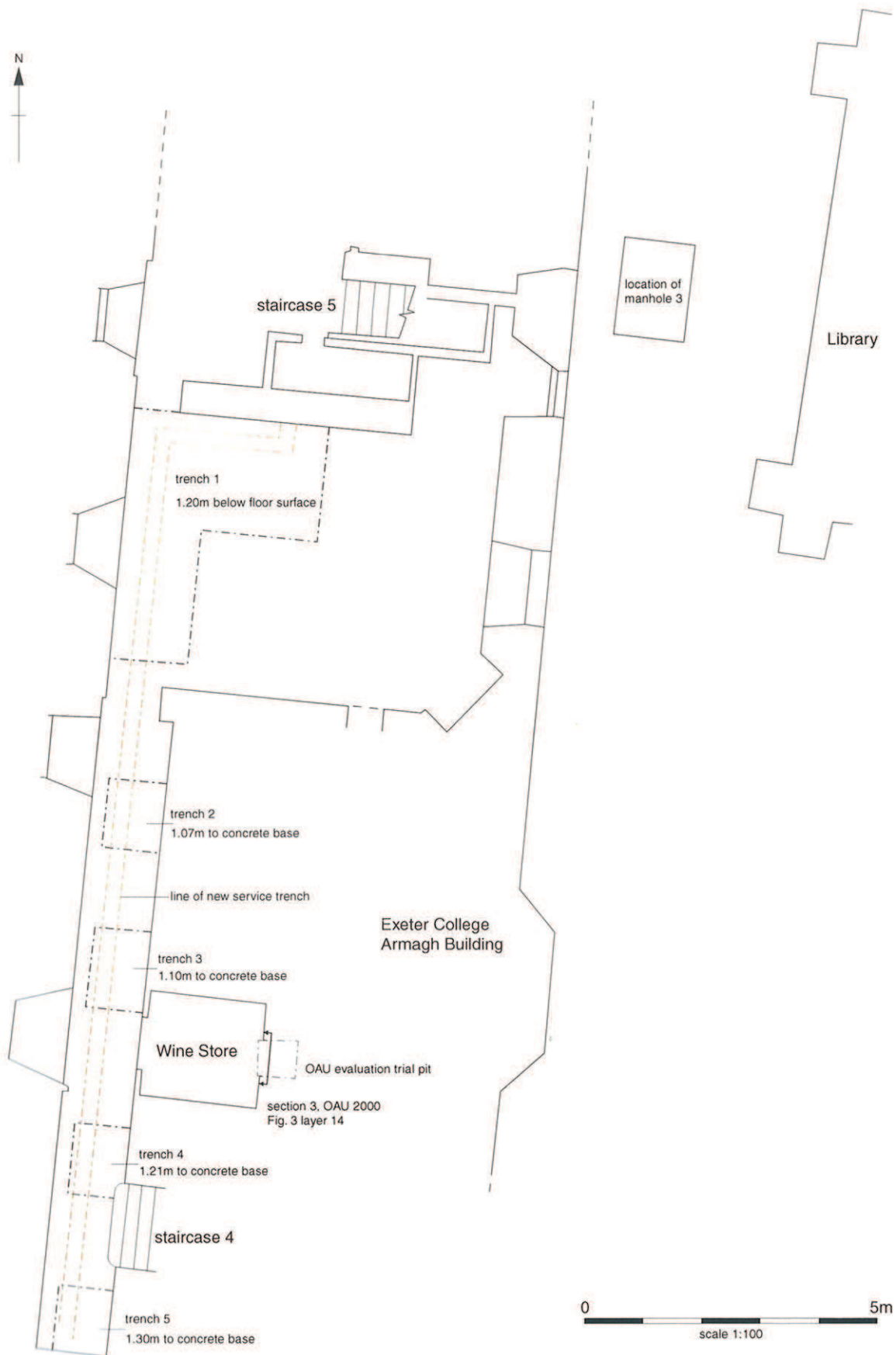


Figure 2: Plan of Service Trench in Basement



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