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BRADSHAWE ROSE HARKER

**Nos 13-21 Cornmarket Street, Oxford**

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

NGR SP 5130 0632

Oxford Archaeological Unit  
April 2000

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### Archaeological Watching Brief Report

NGR SP 5130 0632

Prepared by:

*Rachel Burton*

Date:

*12.4.00*

Checked by:

*R. Harker*

Date:

*12.4.00*

Approved by:

*R. Harker*

HEAD OF FIELDWORK

Date:

*12/4/2000*

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## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

### *Summary*

*A watching brief held by the Oxford Archaeological Unit during redevelopment of the basement of Nos 13-21 Cornmarket Street Oxford identified the truncated remains of a single 10th century Saxon pit behind the Saxon street frontage.*

### **1 INTRODUCTION (Fig 1)**

- 1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by Bradshawe Rose Harker to maintain a watching brief during development work in the basement of Nos 13-21 Cornmarket Street, Oxford. Part of the work entailed the lowering of the basement floor under nos 20 and 21 to bring it level with the basement of nos 13 - 19, an operation which, in the opinion of the City Archaeologist, could impact on any surviving archaeological deposits. Therefore, in accordance with Policy EN 43 of the Oxford Local Plan, which follows PPG 16, an archaeological presence was required during the operation.

### **2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The site fronts onto the east side of the main north-south axis of the Saxon and medieval town. The area of the basement belonged to Gloucester Abbey during the 12th century and had been donated to them by William fitz Nigel (Sturdy and Munby 1985). In the late 19th century it was the site of the White Hart Inn. The site was redeveloped in the 1930's for Marks & Spencer and since 1979 has been retail premises.

### **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Excavations on the site of 13 -19 Cornmarket, prompted by the enlargement and development of the Marks & Spencer's store, and carried out between 1959 and 1962, revealed the earliest activity dating from the 10th century in the form of pits sealed by 11th and 12th century yard surfaces. Later medieval and post-medieval structural and occupational evidence was also found.

### **4 METHODOLOGY**

- 4.1 A recent geotechnical survey indicated a deposit of silty sand up to 0.60 m deep immediately below the existing concrete basement floor of nos 20-21. Therefore, once the concrete floor was removed, the resulting surface was examined for surviving archaeological features, and a detailed record made of areas of deeper truncation.

## 5 RESULTS (Figs 2 and 3)

- 5.1 The natural subsoil, a mix of sand and gravel, was revealed immediately beneath the make up (02) below the concrete floor (01) in the eastern half of the basement, at a level of 60.95 m OD. In a sample section evidence was noted of possible solution holes. A heavily truncated pit, (04) was identified at a point approximately 7.2 m east of the front (west) wall of the basement, its surviving surface at a similar level of approximately 60.95 m OD. The surviving part measured 2.40 m W-E x 0.40 m N-S in plan. Only a small part of the west side of the pit cut survived. It had been cut to the south by the construction of the south wall of the basement, and to the north and east by the construction of a large concrete pad and adjacent footing. A depth of 0.80 m was reached in a sample section cut through the feature, at which point a primary silting fill (05) was revealed. The upper fills (06, 07) of the feature formed a sequence of dark brown silty clays, with inclusions of charcoal and lenses of sand. These layers also contained numerous animal bone fragments and sherds of 10th century pottery. A large piece of burnt wall-daub, with wattle marks on one side, and a fragment of (residual) 3rd century mortarium were also recovered.
- 5.2 The rest of the exposed area was heavily disturbed by modern concrete pads and drains, cutting into the natural gravel. No further features of archaeological significance were noted.

## 6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 Although the exact level of the undisturbed natural gravel was not recorded in the 1959-62 excavations in nos 13-21, (see Sturdy and Munby 1985 fig. 4) an approximate level of 61.1 m OD can be deduced, assuming that the section was drawn from modern street level. The level of the top of pit 04 was recorded at 61.02 m OD, suggesting that perhaps 0.3 m of the original pit has been truncated, if a reasonable depth of contemporary (i.e. late Saxon) topsoil is assumed. Clearly the truncation effected by the construction of the existing basement had also removed all traces of later medieval occupation.
- 6.2 The dimensions of the surviving part of the pit suggest that it could have been of the order of 2-3 m square and 1.2 m deep. Its location relative to the street frontage is similar to those found in the plots immediately to the south (Sturdy and Munby 1985 fig. 2) possibly implying a similar size of contemporary building footprint, behind which the pit would represent a typical domestic rubbish pit, a possibility supported by the finds recovered. It is most likely that further contemporary pits would have survived in the area, but for the extensive modern disturbance below the basement level.
- 6.3 The burnt daub from the pit fill is comparable in shape and thickness to pieces found in Late Saxon pit fills at a number of locations on the opposite side of Cornmarket Street, (Sturdy and Munby 1985, fig 12; and see Hassall 1971, 31 and pl. VI), although it is not possible to say whether these pieces represent the result of one or more major conflagrations or, more prosaically, the lining from demolished chimneys or ovens.

6.4 The single sherd of mortarium is further support for the contention that there was likely to have been significant Romano-British occupation in the vicinity of the north-eastern quarter of the Saxon burgh.

Rachel Barton  
Alan Hardy  
OAU  
April 2000

## Bibliography

Sturdy D and Munby J, 'Early Domestic Sites in Oxford: Excavations in Cornmarket and Queen Street, 1959-62' *Oxoniensia* 1 (1985) 48-94.

Hassall T. G, 'Excavations at 44-46 Cornmarket Street 1970' *Oxoniensia* xxxvi (1971) 15-33



## Appendix 1

### Table of Contexts

Context	Type	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Finds	Comments
01	Layer	0.15	-	-	Modern basement floor
02	Layer	<0.85	-	-	Make up for 01
03	Natural	-	-	-	Gravel/Sand
04	Pit	>0.80	0.40N-S x 2.40m W-E	-	Late Saxon
05	Fill	<0.18	0.60	-	Primary silting of pit 04
06	Fill	<0.40	0.60	Pot/bone/daub	Cumulative fill of pit 04
07	Fill	<0.20	<1.20	Pot/bone	Upper surviving fill of pit 04
08	Natural			-	Silty sand/gravel
09	Natural			-	Silty sand
10	Natural			-	Sandy silt solution hole fill
11	Feature			-	Solution hole
12	Natural			-	Solution hole fill
13	Feature			-	Solution hole



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Figure 1. Site Location.

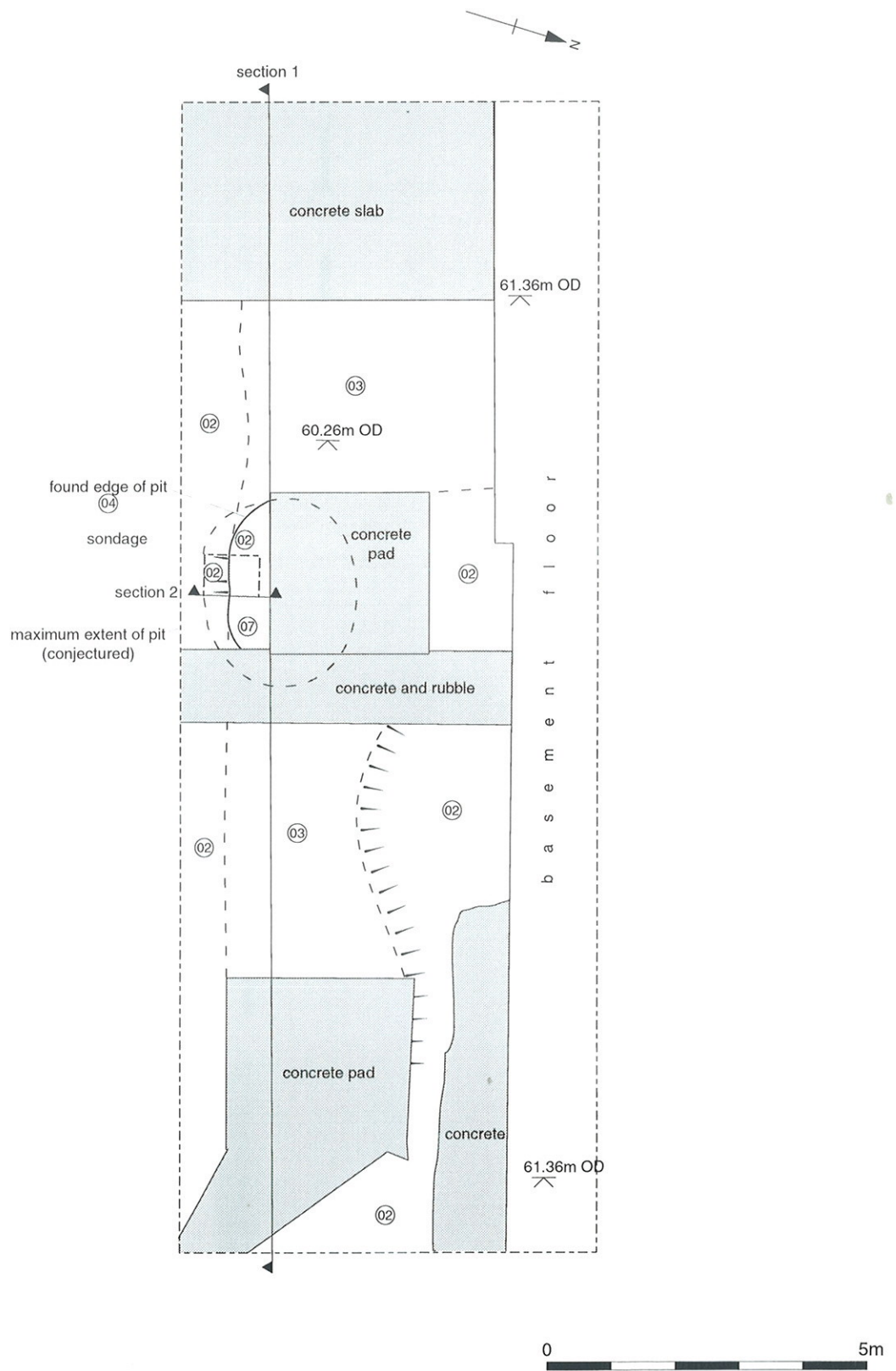


Figure 2. Plan of basement after the removal of the floor.

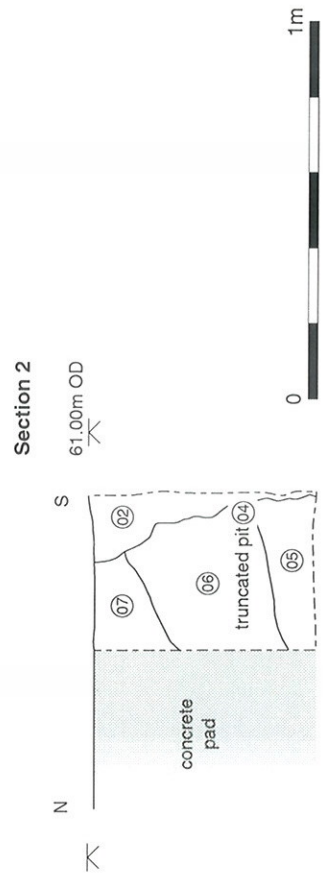
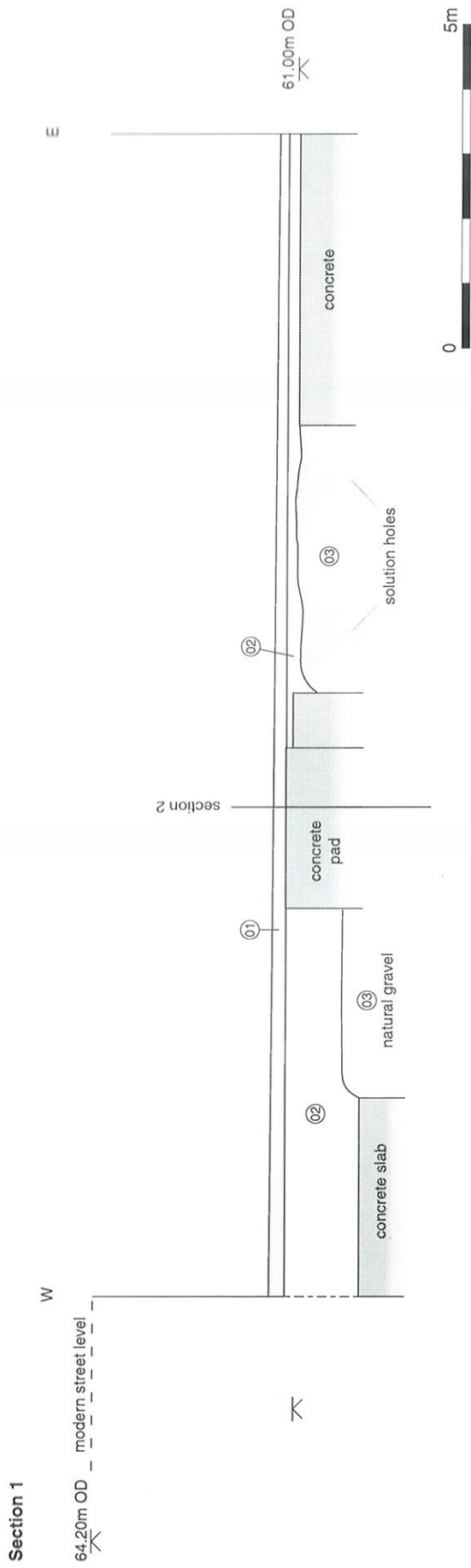


Figure 3. Sections 1 and 2 through revealed deposits.



## OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496  
email: [postmaster@oau-oxford.demon.co.uk](mailto:postmaster@oau-oxford.demon.co.uk)



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Director and Chief Executive: David Jennings B.A., M.I.F.A. Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited.  
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Charity Number: 285627.  
Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES