The President and Fellows of Corpus Christi College

# Emily Thomas Building
# Corpus Christi College, Oxford

## *Archaeological Investigation*

**NGR: SP5160 0601**



October 2000

The President and Fellows of Corpus Christi College

# Emily Thomas Building
# Corpus Christi College, Oxford

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION*

**NGR: SP5160 0601**

| | |
|---|---|
| Prepared by: A. Holmes | |
| Date: | |
| Checked by: | I R Scott |
| Date: | 3rd November 2000 |
| Approved by: | R. Williams |
| Date: | Assistant Director 5/11/2000 |



**October 2000**

# Emily Thomas Building
# Corpus Christi College, Oxford

## *Archaeological Investigation*

### Contents



### List of Figures

SUMMARY

*In July and August 2000 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief at the Emily Thomas Building on behalf of the President and Fellows of Corpus Christi College. The watching brief revealed the remains of a well and two domestic waste pits dating to the 11th to13th century.*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 The development proposal consisted of an extension to the kitchen at Corpus Christi College. The work was carried out to a brief set by the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS) in accordance with PPG 16. The brief specified the need for an evaluation of archaeological deposits under impact but, due to the depth of intrusion by construction works, this was negated and a watching brief was set up to record all archaeological deposits exposed.

## 1.2 Historical background

1.2.1 The gravel peninsula on which Oxford stands has been continuously occupied since prehistoric times. and Bronze Age remains are known from nearby at Logic Lane. Iron Age and Roman occupation is recorded at a number of sites within Oxford, though none specifically near to the college. A natural stream, perhaps originating in a spring in the vicinity, ran southwards through Merton Grove giving, the name Gutter Hall to the property on the site.

1.2.2 Corpus Christi is situated just outside what may be the first fortification of the Saxon town which followed the line of Schools Street and Oriel (earlier Shidyerd) Street. The line of the eastern ditch (to date not located), should run through Oriel and Corpus Christi; the wall itself was seen at the north-east corner turning southwards in the Clarendon Quadrangle of Bodleian Library in 1899, and its presence is implied in the change of direction of the medieval town wall in the Corpus Music Room bastion. Rescue excavations in the southern half of the Front Quad in 1972 found a deep cut feature (in excess of 4 m deep) running south-west by north-east which may be a ditch relating to the medieval defences. Ground probing beneath the college beer cellar in 1979 found what may have been ditch-fill deposits.

1.2.3 With the addition of the eastern extension to the town, probably before the Norman Conquest, the site came within the defended circuit, as one of a series of plots lying between St John (now Merton) Street and the town wall. The kitchen yard lies within the property known as Urban Hall, which functioned as an academic hall and will probably have had a stone building on the street front. To the south of the site excavations in Merton College and the Corpus bastion have revealed the character of the stone 13th century town wall that is thought to have replaced the earlier earth-built rampart.

1.2.4 The foundation of Corpus Christi College by Bishop Fox of Winchester required the purchase of land from Merton College and others for the first buildings. Urban Hall, a St Frideswide's property, was not acquired until 1517, and probably lay outside the footprint of the first buildings. The college buildings will probably have removed most of the earlier buildings on the site, and although the kitchen was reputed to be a surviving part of Urban Hall it is probably no older than the college. On the west side the college faced onto the medieval Shidyerd Street (in continuation of Oriel Street), which was gradually colonized by the college, built over in the 17th century, and finally purchased from the City in the 19th century.

1.2.5 Since the college hall was aligned north-south the kitchen was placed opposite the screens passage extending out eastwards (parallel with the chapel), and leaving an open yard between it and the road. The kitchen yard is clearly shown on Loggan's birdseye view of the College in 1675, and at that time there were three buildings in the yard, which have since disappeared, one of them a north-south range opposite the present entrance. The yard was divided into a small garden on the west with trees and grass or beds, and a plain yard on the east.

1.2.6 The kitchen range extended east to the site boundary, though from 1737 the eastern end was rebuilt as the north end of the Gentleman Commoners Building. The Emily Thomas Building was built as a northward extension of this in 1928, to the designs of T H Hughes; in front of it was a sunken area or passage, with two coal cellars under the yard to serve the college boiler room. Subsequent to this a kitchen extension was built in the yard alongside the north side of the kitchen, and more recently an electrical sub-station was constructed beneath the cast side of the Hall, where there is also a walled enclosure for dustbins.

## 2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS

2.1.1 The aim of the watching brief was to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area and to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present. It will also establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.

## 3 WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Scope of fieldwork

3.1.1 The watching brief was undertaken on all areas where construction works impacted upon archaeological deposits, structures and features. This predominantly focused on pockets of soft ground which were removed and filled with hardcore prior to construction. (Fig. 1)

### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

3.2.1 Selected areas were cleaned by hand and the revealed deposits were planned and excavated and the section drawn and recorded on proforma sheets. A photographic record

was taken using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

### 3.3 Finds

3.3.1 All finds were labeled by context and appropriately bagged.

## 4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 4.1 Description

4.1.1 Two pits and a well were identified with in the area of impact. Both pit 1 and pit 5 were located in the south-west corner of the site and were heavily truncated by the southern cellar wall and foundation deposits. Pit 1 measured over 1 m diameter by 0.5 m deep and produced 11th - 13th century pottery from fill 2. Pit 5 measured 1.2 m diameter by over 0.4 m deep and contained a organic and charcoal rich fill (6). A well (8) was identified 1 m north of the pits along the western edge of the site. This was excavated to a depth of 1.2 m. Two fills were recorded; fill 9 measuring over 1.1 m deep by 1 m wide and sealed by fill 10 measuring 0.4 m deep by 1.4 m wide which produced 12th - 13th century pottery. (Figs 3 and 4)

### 4.2 Finds

4.2.1 Two sherds of plain ware dated to 11th - 13th century were recovered from pit fill 2. A decorated green glazed tripod pitcher in OXY fabric (M.Mellor et al, 1994) was retrieved from well fill 10. The bones of cattle and sheep and the jaw from a domestic cat were recovered from pit fill 2.

### 4.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

4.3.1 Environmental samples taken from deposits (9) and (10) produced evidence of dietary and cereal processing waste and cereal contaminants as shown in Appendix 2.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

### 5.1 Overall Interpretation

5.1.1 The location of waste pits and a well within the kitchen yard of Corpus Christi College suggests this area has been the focus of settlement activity as early as the 11th century. Both cattle and sheep bones retrieved from pit 1 and the contents of soil samples taken from the well suggest a possible farmyard setting though may equally represent a place of domestic activity such the external grounds of a kitchen. If the features are the product of domestic activity, it is possible that they could be relate to Urban Hall. No evidence was found for the earlier Saxon defensives and are therefore assumed to be located further north and west of Corpus Christi College.

# 6 APPENDIX 1

## 6.1 Archaeological Context Inventory

| Context No. | Type | Width (m) | Depth (m) | Comment | Finds | Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Cut | >1 | >0.5 | Pit | - | c.11th-13th |
| 2 | Deposit | >0.9 | >0.65 | Pit fill | Pot, bone | c.11th-13th |
| 3 | Deposit | >0.9 | 0.15 | Pit fill | - | - |
| 4 | Deposit | >0.9 | >0.3 | Pit fill | Bone | - |
| 5 | Cut | 1.2 | >0.4 | Pit | - | c.11th-13th |
| 6 | Deposit | 1.2 | >0.4 | Pit fill | - | - |
| 7 | Deposit | 6.5 x 4 | - | Gravel natural | - | - |
| 8 | Cut | 1.4 | 1.2 | Well | - | c.12th-13th |
| 9 | Deposit | 1 | >1.1 | Well fill | | |
| 10 | Deposit | 1.4 | 0.4 | Well fill | Pot, bone | c.12th-13th |
| 11 | Deposit | 4 x 1.5 | - | Clay natural | - | - |

# 7 APPENDIX 2

## 7.1 The Waterlogged Plant Remains

By Ruth Pelling, Oxford University Museum

### Introduction

During the investigation of archaeological features within the coal cellar of the Emily Thomas building, samples of waterlogged deposit were taken from the well for the extraction of plant remains. Pottery recovered from the well suggests the deposits to be of 11th to 13th century AD in date.

### Method

Two samples were examined for waterlogged plant remains (contexts 9 and 10). Sub-samples of 200g of each deposit were processed using a simple wash over technique. The resulting flots were collected onto 250µm mesh sieves. Flots were washed through a stack of sieves ranging from 2mm to 250µm. Each fraction was scanned while wet under a binocular microscope at x10 to x20 magnification. Any seeds, chaff or other quantifiable plant remains were identified and abundance recorded on a 3 point scale (+ = present; ++ = frequent; +++ = abundant). The presence of other categories of remains such as insects was also recorded. Nomenclature and taxonomic order follow Clapham, Tutin and Moore (1989).

### Results

Waterlogged plant material was present in both samples but in a very degraded condition. In addition to seeds, sample 1 (cxt 10) contained a moderate amount of very degraded wood and twigs, and occasional charcoal. Occasional insect fragments were noted in sample 2 (cxt 9).

Seeds of a range of ruderal species were identified in both samples. *Urtica urens* (small nettle) was particularly numerous, although the plant does produced a large number of seeds. Other ruderal species common on nutrient rich soils within settlements are *Solanum* sp. (nightshade), *Conium maculatum* (hemlock), *Malva sylvestris* (common mallow), *Sambucus niger* (elderberry). Some ruderal species may also have occurred as weeds of cereal crops such as *Brassica/Sinapis* sp. (brassica/mustard), *Polygonum aviculare* (knotgrass), *Chenopodium* sp. and *Atriplex* sp. (orache). Two characteristic arable weeds are *Agrostemma githago* (corn cockle) and *Anthemis cotula* (stinking mayweed). Both are particularly associated with cereal crops and are frequently recorded in archaeological assemblages in the medieval period. *Agrostemma githago* produces a large seed which often stays with cereal grain through the stages of cereal processing and can contaminate bread. In the well samples the seed was represented by fragments, and was numerous in sample 2, which does suggest that the seeds were broken up by milling or even eaten as contaminants of bread. Actual cereal remains were represented by a single charred grain of *Hordeum vulgare* (barely).

Occasional species of wet or marshy ground are represented, particularly *Carex* spp. (sedges) and *Eleocharis palustris* (common spikerush), which were presumably growing in wet ground around the well.
The *Brassica* sp./*Sinapis* sp. seed in sample 2 could be an arable weed, but could equally represent food waste. Likewise a fragment of *Corylus avellana* (hazel) nut shell in the sample could also be food waste.

**Discussion**

Both samples contain a largely ruderal element, presumably the seeds of plants growing within the settlement. In addition there is slight evidence of cereal processing waste or cereal contaminants, and possibly some dietary waste represented by the brassica, bivalve, hazel nut and possible contaminants of bread. The assemblages are therefore characteristic of manure and nutrient rich farmyard type habitats with some possible sewage waste.

Table 1: Waterlogged Plant Remains.

| | **Sample** | **1** | **2** |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Context** | **10** | **9** |
| | **Weight** | **200g** | **200g** |
| *Ranunculus acris/repens/bulbosus* | Buttercup | + | - |
| *Brassica* sp./*Sinapis* sp. | Brassica/Mustard | - | + |
| *Agrostemma githago* | Corn Cockle | + | + |
| *Stellaria media* agg. | Chickweed | - | + |
| *Chenopodium* sp. | Fat Hen/Goosefoot | + | - |
| *Atriplex* sp. | Orache | + | + |
| *Malva sylvestris* | Common Mallow | + | - |
| *Potentilla* sp. | Cinquefoil | - | + |
| *Conium maculatum* | Hemlock | + | + |
| *Polygonum aviculare* | Knotgrass | + | + |
| *Rumex* sp. | Docks | + | + |
| *Urtica urens* | Small Nettle | ++ | + |
| *Urtica dioica* | Common Nettle | + | + |
| *Corylus avellana* | Hazel | - | + |
| *Solanum* sp. | Nightshade | + | + |
| *Sambucus nigra* | Elder | + | + |
| *Anthemis cotula* | Stinking Mayweed | + | + |
| *Lapsana communis* | Nipplewort | - | + |
| *Sonchus asper* | Spiny Milk- or Sow-Thistle | - | + |
| *Eleocharis palustris* | Common Spike-rush | + | + |
| *Carex* spp. | Sedges | + | + |
| Gramineae | Grass, small seeded | - | + |
| *Hordeum vulgare* | Barley grain, charred | - | + |
| Degraded wood | | + | - |
| Charcoal | | + | - |
| Mollusc | | - | + |
| Insects | | - | + |

=+ = present; ++ = frequent

# 8 APPENDIX 3

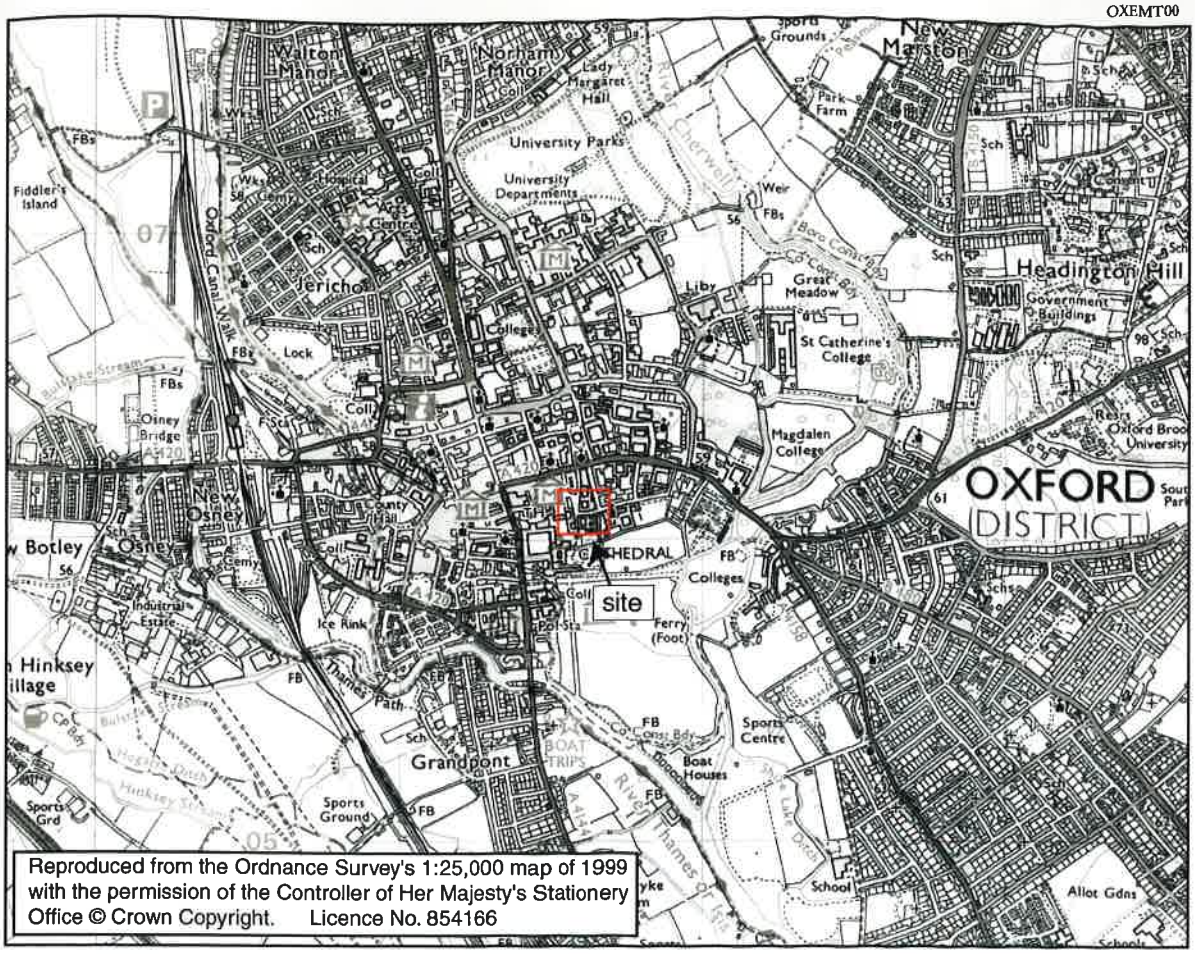
## 8.1 Bibliography


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mellor, M et al | 1994 | A synthesis of Middle and Late Saxon, Medieval and Post-Medieval Pottery in the Oxford region. Oxoniensia LIX, 1994; p 63 |
| Wilkinson, D (ed) | 1992 | Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992) |
| Clapham, A.R., Tutin, T.G. and D.M. Moore | 1989 | *Flora of the British Isles* (2nd ed). Cambridge University Press |

# 9 APPENDIX 4

## 9.1 Summary of Site Details

**Site name:** Emily Thomas Building, Corpus Christi College, Oxford
**Site code:** OXEMT 00
**Grid reference:** SP 5160 0601
**Type of fieldwork:** Watching Brief
**Date and duration of project:** 17th July - 14th August 2000
**Area of site:** 6.5 m x 5 m
**Summary of results:** 11th to 13th century domestic waste pits and well
**Location of archive:** Currently held at OAU, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES



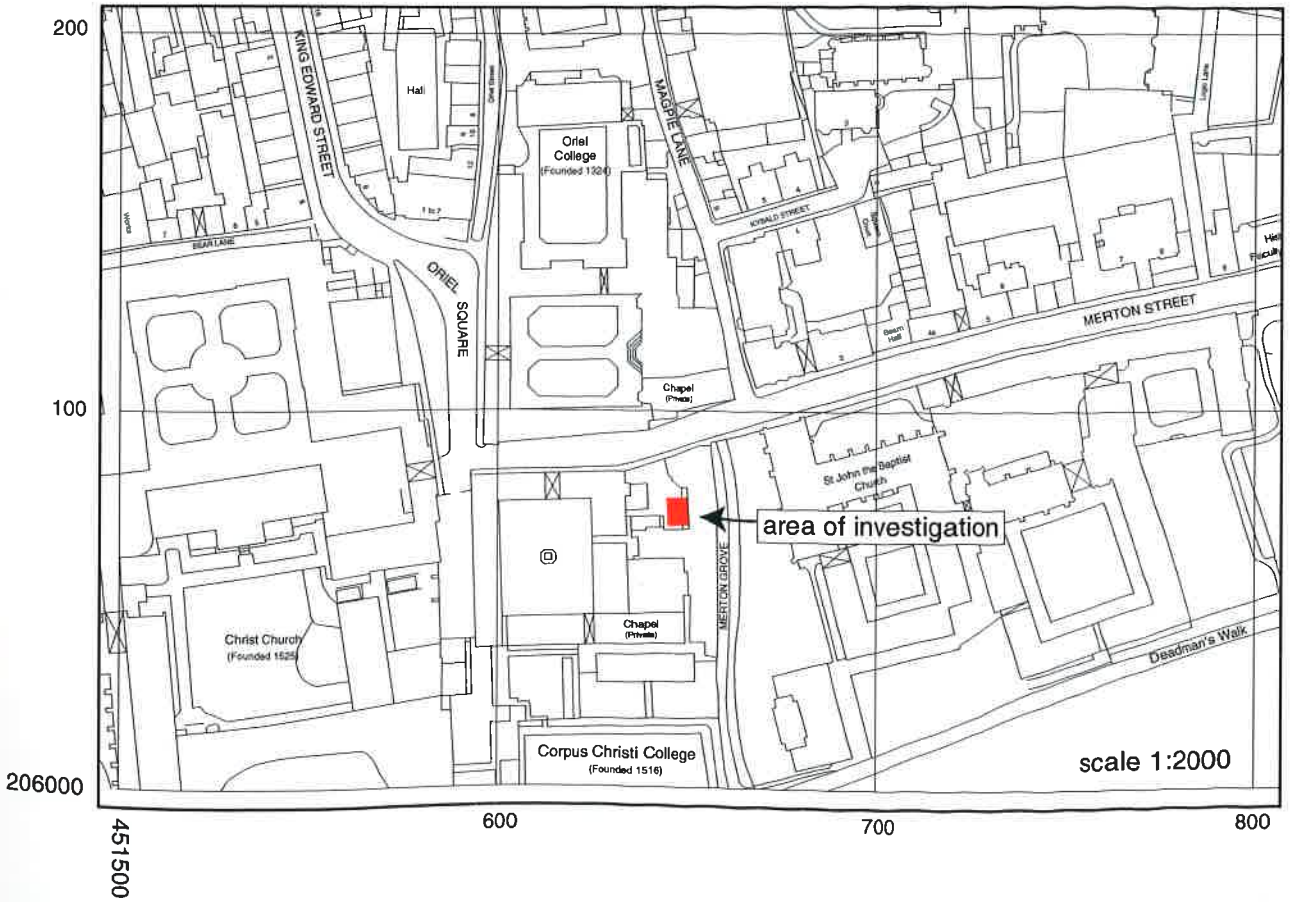




Figure 1: Site location

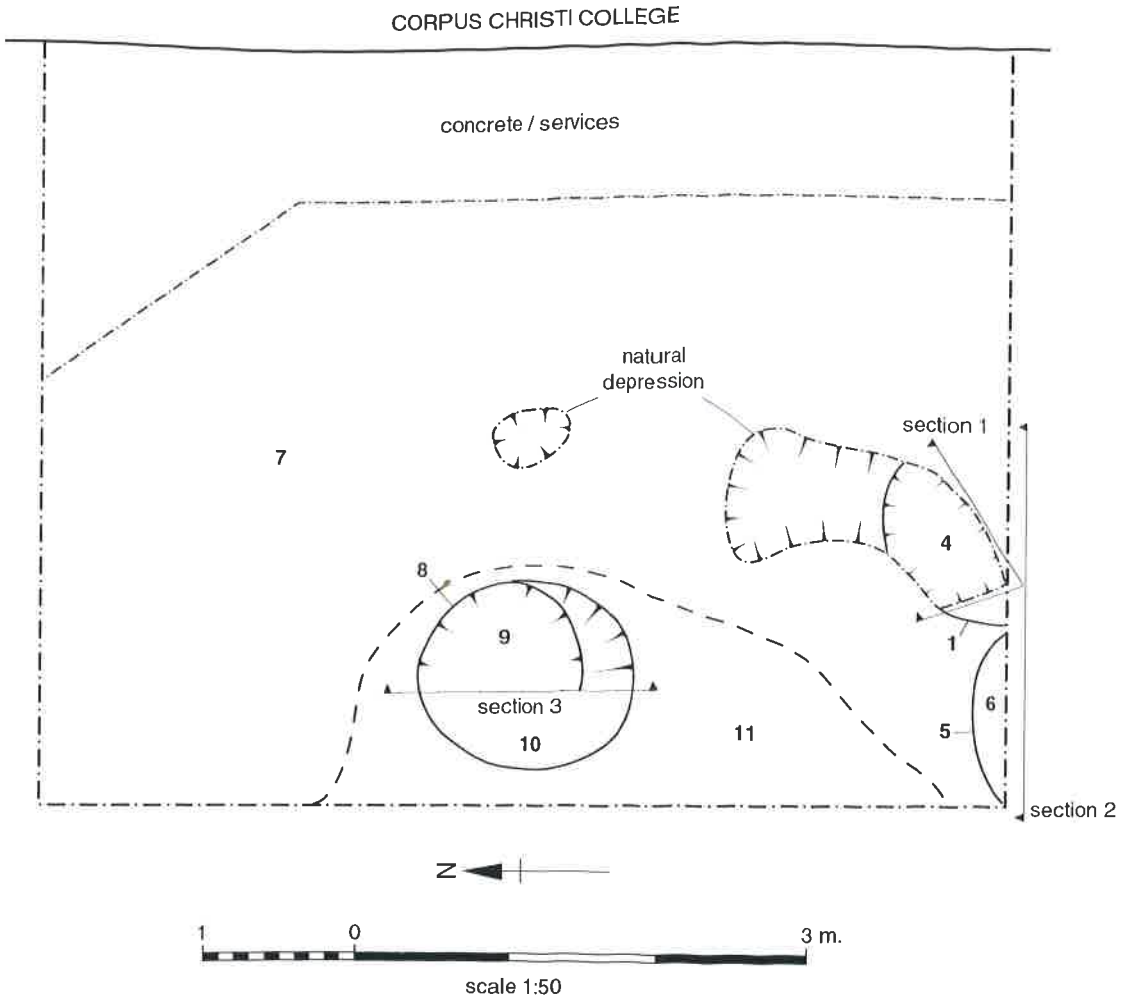



Figure 2: Site plan

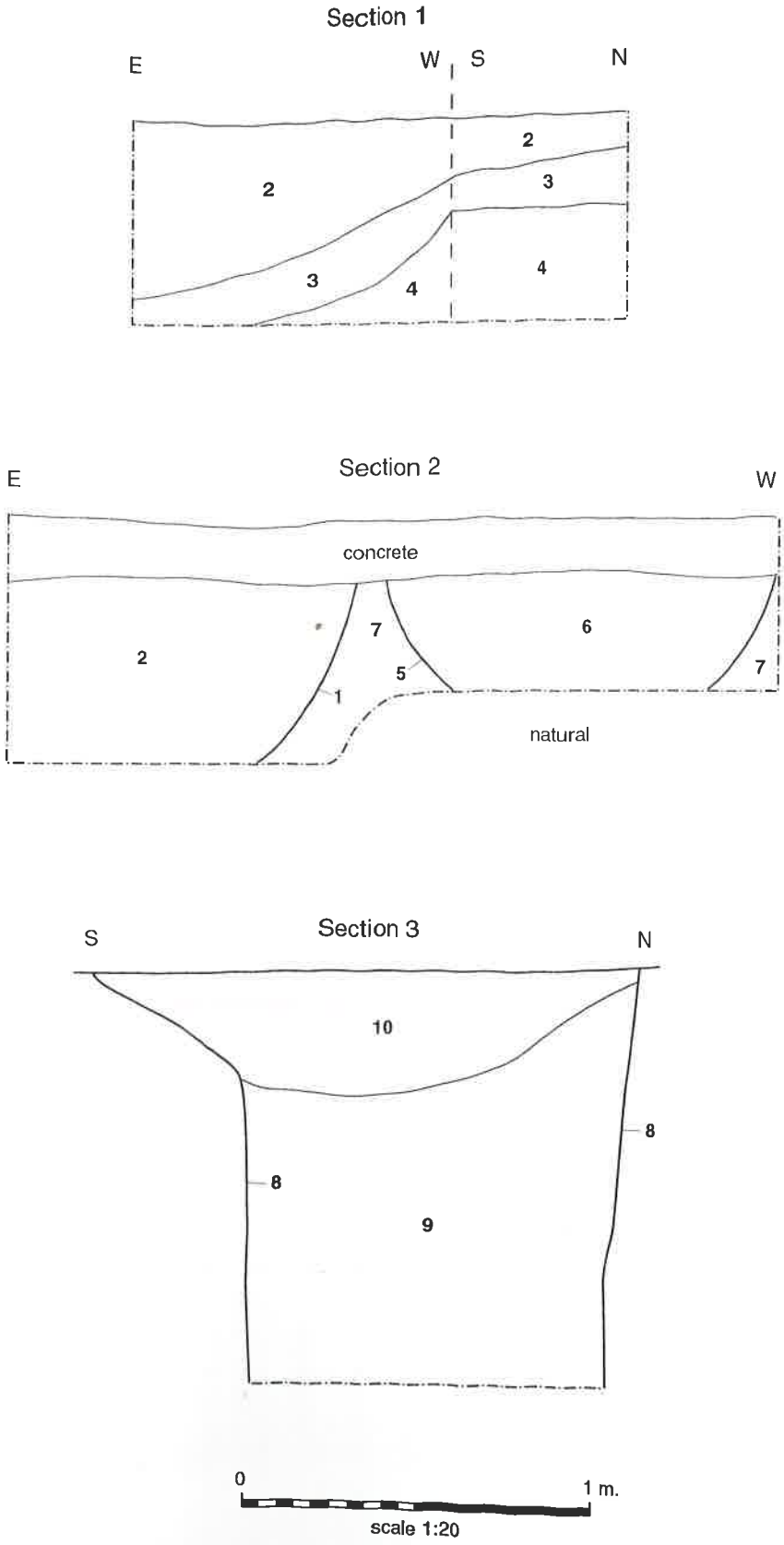



Figure 3: Site sections


# OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496

email: postmaster@oau-oxford.demon.co.uk




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