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The Rector and Fellows of Exeter College

Staircase 4 Basement Extension, Exeter College, Oxford
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR SP 5150 0630

January/2000

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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Staircase 4, Basement Extension Exeter College, Oxford

SUMMARY

In December 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a field evaluation at Exeter College on behalf of The Rector and Fellows of Exeter College. The excavation of a column of soil below the SCR luncheon room revealed a sequence of archaeological deposits associated with the extant 17th century building. 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.

The construction of a proposed basement extension in this area would remove landscape/in-fill deposits associated with the construction of the 1618 Peryam's Building as well as contemporary cellar floors.

1.1 Location and scope of work

In December 1999 OAU carried out an evaluation at Exeter College on behalf of The Rector and Fellows of Exeter College. The aim of the evaluation was to assess the impact of a proposed basement extension on any archaeological deposits or remains that might have been preserved below the floor of the SCR luncheon room.

1.2 Geology and topography

Exeter College 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. The college is sited on the second gravel terrace of the Thames. The internal and external ground floor level lies at c 64.5 m OD. The basement floor level lies at c 62.00 m OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

The archaeological background to the evaluation has been the subject of a separate desk study (OAU, May 99), the results of which are presented below.

Prehistoric and Roman

The gravel peninsula on which Oxford stands has been continuously occupied since prehistoric times, and both prehistoric and Roman remains have been found in central Oxford, though none of them nearby.

Anglo-Saxon

The site of 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. Saxon occupation has very recently been identified below the kitchen yard at Lincoln College, where the major part of a townhouse has been excavated.

Later Medieval

The site of the college was occupied by a number of private houses and academic halls, as shown on Salter's *Map of Medieval Oxford*, and described in his *Survey of Oxford*. Although plot measurements for many of these are unknown, it is likely 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.

Exeter College

After the foundation of Exeter College the present site was gradually purchased. The first college buildings faced onto the intra-mural road, with Palmer's Tower representing the original front gate. The first Chapel was on or near the site of the present Library (north of Castell Hall), and the first Hall was somewhere near the present Chapel. The other early college buildings are not certainly identified, and some accommodation may have continued in the buildings of former halls. Scot Hall may have continued to be a separate hall in college ownership, but Castell Hall was an empty *placea* when acquired in 1358. The first college Library was built on the site in the fourteenth century, and can be seen both in Loggan's view of the college in 1675, and William Williams' plan of 1733.

The second college Hall was built along Brasenose Lane in 1618, with a short return (known as Peryam's Building) northwards as far as the old Library. There is no indication in the building or on old plans or views that Peryam's Building had a cellar. When the old Library was demolished in 1708 for the new range (known as the Armagh Building), this part was given a cellar, and probably at that time a short connecting passage was made to Staircase 4. A small wine store was subsequently inserted into this area where the basement extension is now proposed.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

The aim of the evaluation was to characterise and date the stratigraphic sequence within the proposed basement extension limits, in order to identify archaeologically significant deposits or remains that may be removed by the development.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork, methodology and recording

The evaluation consisted of a single vertical slot, exposed by the removal of brickwork in the eastern wall of the wine store. The slot was 0.60 m wide. The excavated sequence was in total 2.5 m high (slightly below the existing floor level of the basement and up to the underside of the floor at ground level).

The exposed section was cleaned, photographed and drawn at a scale of 1:20. Each layer was then hand excavated. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.2 Finds

Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context.

3.3 Environmental evidence

Four c10 litre samples were taken from a range of deposits (contexts 5,7, 13 and 14) exposed in the section. Deposit 7 was specifically targeted as a potential occupation layer.

The samples were processed by mechanical flotation in a modified Siraf-type machine, with the sample held on a 500µm mesh and the flot collected on a 250µm mesh. The flots were then air-dried and scanned under a microscope at x10 and x20 magnification. The remaining gravel residues were wet-sieved through 10, 4 and 2mm sieves. The coarser two residues were sorted for bone and artefacts, and the finest scanned for small animal bones.

4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

4.1 Description of deposits (See Fig 3 and Appendix 1)

The exposed sequence of deposits comprised a series of sandy silt layers containing varying quantities of charcoal flecks, chalk fragments, tile and bone (14, 13, 12, 10, 7, 5, 4 and 2) interspersed with compact sterile chalk layers (11 and 3), heavily compacted and horizontally banded earth floor layers (9, 8 and 6) and deposit 1 which was the fine layer of dust accumulated by filtration through the floorboards from the room above.

4.2 Finds

The pottery by Catherine Underwood-Keevill

A small assemblage of medieval and post-medieval pottery was recovered from six stratified contexts. The assemblage consisted mainly of C13th-15th medieval types from the Brill/Boarstall area (fabrics OXAW and OXAM) with occasional regional imports such as Late Saxon to Medieval Abingdon ware; a Berkshire fabric type

(OXAG) and Early to Late Medieval East Wiltshire ware (OXAQ). Early medieval pottery was present in very small quantities and was limited to Oxford Medieval ware (OXY). A notable import was a small quantity of medieval white wares possibly from the Warwickshire area and dated to the C13th-C14th (OXAH).

The post-medieval pottery comprised C16th-C18th century types with C16th-C17th Tudor green wares (TUDG), Brill post-medieval dishes (BRIL) and C18th post medieval red wares (PMRW).

The assemblage is not unusual for Oxford, with the possible exception of the presence of the Warwickshire white wares which are not a common type in the region.

A quantity of ceramic roof tiles was also recovered and recorded. These were not sufficient to measure and record on database but reveal three main fabric types which could indicate different sources.

4.3 Environmental remains

Carbonized plant remains and charcoal

All four samples produced flots of a reasonable size, given the small sample size. In general, preservation was good with identifiable remains. Charcoal dominated all the flots, with a range of identifiable taxa in each sample. *Quercus* sp. (oak), *Alnus/Corylus* (alder/hazel), *Maloideae* (hawthorn, apple type) and possible *Fagus* sp. (beech) were present. A number of the charcoal fragments were from twigs and there was also some possible rootwood. Small quantities of charred cereal grain (free-threshing wheat and oats), some of which had germinated, were also present in all four flots. No quantity of chaff was apparent. Other charred remains included hazelnut shell (contexts 5, 7 and 13) and a possible pea/bean from context 13. Non-plant materials which were also in the flots comprised small quantities of molluscs and a large amount of fish bones and scales.

Finds from flotation

A range of artefacts were recovered from the samples – pot/tile fragments, marine shells, Fe objects and Cu pins. The largest component of the samples was animal bone, with a large quantity of fish and small animal remains from context 7. The fine (4-2mm) residue from this context was retained for fish bone and copper pins.

5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Reliability of field investigation

The evaluation slot is clearly a small area of excavation from which to base definitive interpretations on deposits. Therefore only the interpretation of deposits 9, 8 and 6 as floor surfaces (these are unmistakable in character) can be regarded as completely reliable.

The dating of the deposits is based on a few sherds of pottery with the majority being regarded as residual. However this dating should be taken as being reliable due to the method of excavation, which left little possibility for contamination of contexts and the (chronologically) mixed up nature of the majority of the pottery (many of the earliest sherds were at the top of the sequence) which clearly indicated re-deposition.

5.2 Overall interpretation

The presence of 17th-18th century pottery from deposit 13 (low down within the sequence) places almost all the deposits as being contemporary with or later than the construction of the original Peryam's Building in 1618.

This dating would suggest that the floor surfaces seen halfway up the sequence are either the floor of an original cellar (perhaps in-filled in conjunction with a change of floor levels associated with the construction of the Armagh Building?) or temporary surfaces associated with the construction of Peryam's Building. The animal/fish bone and finds rich flotation residues from deposit 7 (overlying floor 8) suggest the interpretation of cellar floors is most likely.

The space between the uppermost of the floor deposits (context 6) and the bottom of the present SCR luncheon room floor joists is only 0.80 m, which is insufficient height for a cellar requiring a sequence of beaten earth floors. It seems likely then that the in-filling of this cellar space also coincided with a rearrangement of the ground floor levels. This could conceivably have occurred during the construction of the Armagh Building or during the insertion of the passage connecting staircase 4 to the new range.

The profile of the sequence has been compared to a profile of the stratigraphic sequence at Lincoln College *c*15 m to the south (see Appendix 3). The sequence from Lincoln College shows a clear chronological development from the prehistoric levels at 62.32 m OD rising up through the Saxon and Medieval deposits to the present day ground level. However the sequence from Exeter Hall shows 62.07 m OD as being the interface between deposits 13 and 14, the upper dating to the 17th -18th centuries, the lower to at least the 13th-15th centuries. This clearly suggests a deep truncation which can only sensibly be either a construction cut for the Peryam's Building or the in-fill of the cellar of a building pre-dating the Peryam's building immediately prior to its construction.

6 IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT

The proposed basement extension will effectively remove all presently surviving archaeological deposits and remains to a depth of *c* 61.80 m OD. As stated above this seems likely to consist of deposits relating to the construction of the 17th century Peryam's Building, including probably contemporary cellar floor deposits. However, given the somewhat limited extent of the evaluation in relation to the size of the proposed extension there must remain the possibility that if the truncation described above is not as extreme as predicted, earlier deposits of Saxon date may still be extant within the development area.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OAU 1999 Staircase 4, 5 and 6 Basement, Exeter College. *Archaeological Appraisal of Proposed Basement Extension*. Oxford Archaeological Unit, March 1999.

Wilkinson D (ed)1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Ctxt	Type	Thick. (m)	Comment	Date suggested by all pot and tile
1	Deposit	0.06 m	Material filtered through existing floor boards	
2	Deposit	0.30 m	Build up of material accumulated during C18th renovation?	
3	Deposit	0.08 m	Construction material residue associated with C18th renovation?	
4	Deposit	0.24 m	In-fill of cellar?	C13th-C15th
5	Deposit	0.22 m	In-fill of cellar?	C18th
6	Deposit	0.03 m	Floor surface	
7	Deposit	0.12 m	Accumulation over floor surface 8	C13th-C15th
8	Deposit	0.20 m	Floor surface	C13th-C15th
9	Deposit	0.02 m	Floor surface	C15th-C16th
10	Deposit	0.20 m	Dump deposit /leveling for overlying floor surfaces?	
11	Deposit	0.08 m	Construction residue	
12	Deposit	0.38 m	Landscaped material or feature fill	C16th-C17th
13	Deposit	0.80 m	Same as 12	C17th-C18th
14	Deposit	0.30 m	Landscaped material or feature fill	C13th-C15th

APPENDIX 2

Pottery assessment/ spot dating






Ctx	Fabric	No	wt	date	Comments
4	OXAW	2	8	late c13-c14	Square clubbed rim jug
4	OXAQ	1	6	late c12-c15	
4	FTLQ	2	41	c13+	floor tile? Green glazed+ mortar
8	OXAM	1	1	c13-c15	
9	TUDG	1	4	C15-C16	lobed cup rim
12	OXAM	2	8	c13-c15	late c13 speckled geen glaze
12	BRIL	2	19	c16-c17	light orange splashed glaze
12	PMGW	1	5	c16-	Reduced grey ware late med/post-med
13	OXAH	2	11	C13/C14	Yellow glaze white ware
13	OXAM	5	50	c13-c15	Speckled gr gl/yellow gl/ mid-late c13 splayed jug base
13	OXY	2	6	late c11-c13	burnt cp base and bodysherd
13	OXAG	1	1	C12-C14	Orange gl jug/pitcher sherd
13	OXAQ	1	4	late c12-c15	burnt ext cp sherd
13	OXAW	1	32	c13-c14/c15	large flat base pitcher/jug
13	BRIL	1	20	C17/C18	wide triangular rim flat dish. Splash yellow gl
13	TUDG	1	1	C16	dark gr gl
13	FTQL	1	6	C13+	Quartz and limestone temper floor tile with partial glaze
14	OXY	2	78	C12-C13	Partial sooted cp sagging base and burnt body sherd
14	OXAW	3	33	C13-C14	mid c13 long neck jug rim with yellow/green gl
14	OXAM	1	12	c13-c15	
14	RTL	1	17	C13+	dense limestone tempered roof tile- Cotswold type?
5[1]	OXAQ	1	1	C12-C15	
5[1]	PMRW	1	1	C18	Brown gl red ware mid -late c18
7[2]	OXAM	2	1	C13-C15	
7[2]	OXAW	1	1	C12-C15	
7[2]	OXY	1	3	C11-C13	
13[3]	OXAW	4	4	C13-C15	

APPENDIX 3

Comparison of Lincoln College archaeological levels with Exeter College Staircases 4
 Basement

OD metres	Archaeological surface level	Deposits recorded at Lincoln College 1999	Deposits recorded at Exeter College 1999
65.0	c. 64.7 64.12	Modern level of Brasenose Lane Earthen floor of 15 th century kitchen	
64.0	63.7 – 63.8 63.34	Medieval deposit at Lincoln College	C17th cellar floors
63.0	62.50 62.40 62.32 62.07	Floor level of second Saxon building Floor level of first Saxon building Prehistoric ground level (top of 'supranatural')	C17th landscape/fill deposits
62.0	61.85		Earliest deposits seen, C13-C15th from pottery, more likely C17th.
61.0	60.95	Deepest point at Lincoln Coll to produce stratified deposits	

EXETER COLLEGE

-  15th CENTURY
-  17 " "
-  18 " "
-  19 " "
-  20 " "

BROAD STREET

OLD
ASHMOLEAN

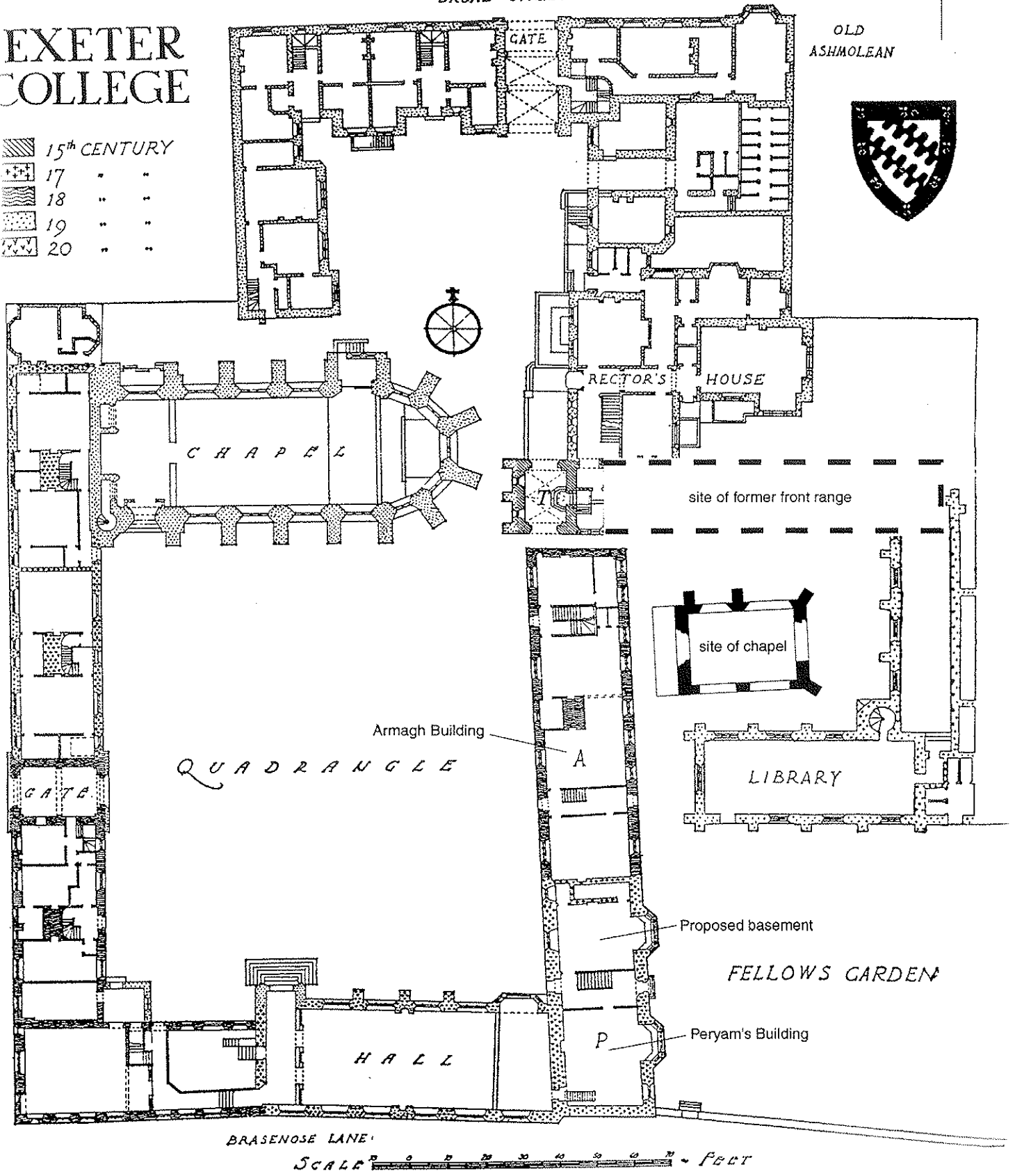
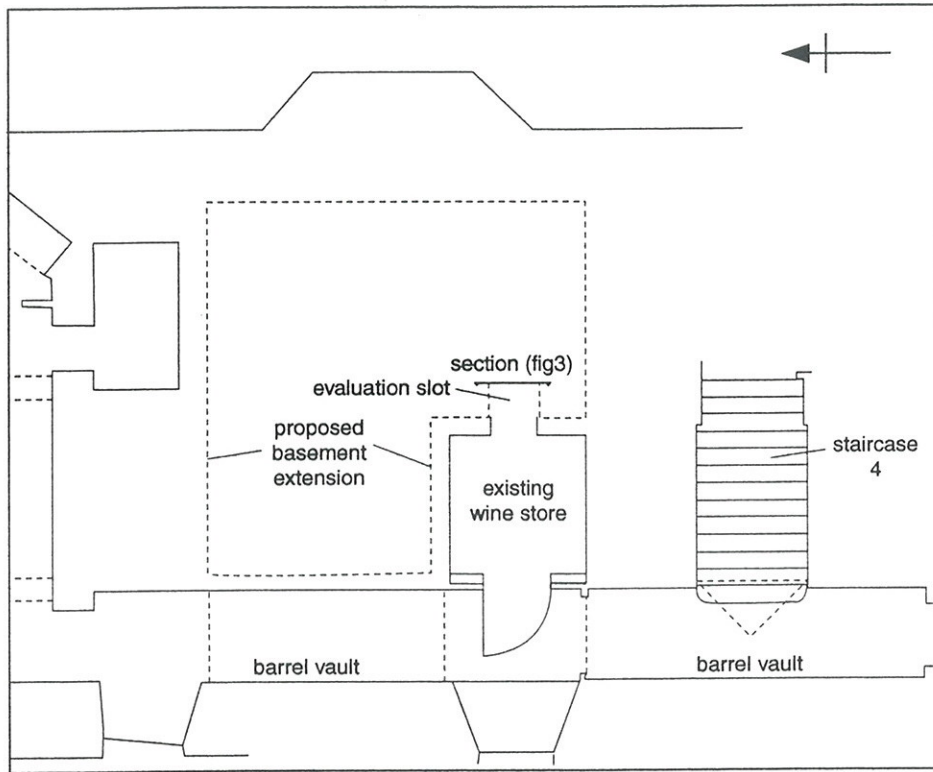


Figure 1. Plan of Exeter College



1:100 0 5m

Figure 2. Plan showing the proposed basement extension and evaluation slot.

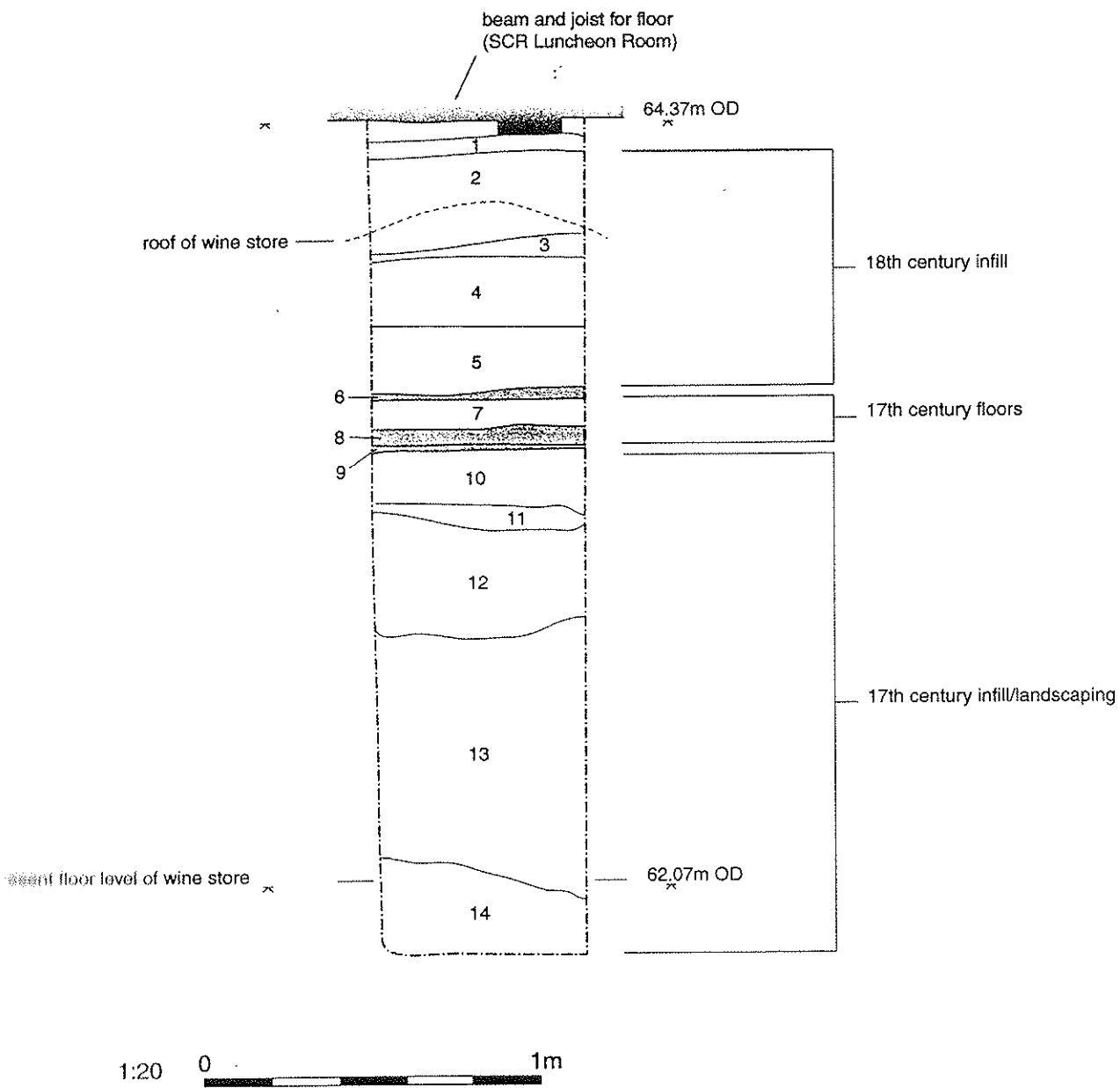


Figure 3. Elevation of slot section



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