

EBOR HOUSE, BLUE BOAR ST, OXFORD  
SUPPLEMENT TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
DESKTOP STUDY

Report prepared for Oxford City Council by  
Oxford Archaeological Unit

July 1994

**EBOR HOUSE, BLUE BOAR ST, OXFORD**  
**SUPPLEMENT TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESKTOP STUDY**  
Oxford Archaeological Unit, July 1994

## **1 Introduction and methodology**

In September 1993 a Desktop Assessment of the western half of the above site was prepared by OAU for Oxford City Council. Following submission of the report it became clear that the proposed development would also include the following: the building fronting Blue Boar St known as Ebor House (No.5 Blue Boar St), the adjoining structure and open yard which lie behind it, and part of the passage east of Ebor House known as Kemp's Hall Passage (Fig.1). The text which follows provides an archaeological desktop appraisal of these areas and is intended to cover the aspects in which they differ from the western half of the site.

Sources examined are mainly listed in the bibliography of the original desktop study (OAU 1993) - additional sources are listed in the bibliography below. The Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record was examined, as was the Oxfordshire Photographic Archive, and a visit was made to the existing Ebor House.

## **2 Geology**

The geology of the site is as given in the original report.

## **3 Archaeological and historical background**

### **3.1 Prehistoric and early medieval**

The potential of the site to produce evidence for these periods is the same as that for the western half of the site - therefore, see original report, Section 3.1.

### **3.2 Medieval and later**

The poor documentation of tenements in this area of Oxford means that the details of use and ownership are basically no clearer than for the western half of the site. The known history of the site up to the expulsion of the Jews from Oxford in 1290 is the same as that previously given (original report, Section 3.2, first three paragraphs), with the exception that we can be more certain about the eastern boundary of the study area. This was originally formed by the western boundaries of the Canon School, and St Edward's Hall (see original report, Fig.2).

As before, we have no real knowledge of what may have happened between 1290, and the creation of Tresham's Lane (later Blue Boar St) in 1554. In general, therefore, it is only possible to say that we are dealing here with a property, or possibly

properties, which originally lay somewhere between the Blewboare, to the west, and St Edward Hall, to the east. The documents make some mention of a garden or gardens in this area, although it is difficult to place these precisely. For example, the city leased to Henry Bailie, in 1557, a parcel of land compassed with stone walls at the back of the Blue Boar (Salter 1926: 147). Again, in 1587, we have 'a garden of the heirs of Henry Bailie' which itself lay south of gardens reached by the passage through Kemp Hall (Ibid.: 134). Kemp Hall can be securely placed as being behind 130 High St, i.e. north of the site under investigation here (Pantin 1947), and the passage mentioned is the northern part of Kemp Hall Passage, which still exists today.

To the above can be added the evidence from Agas' Oxford map of 1578 (Fig.2), which shows the area as open ground, with a wall along the north side of Blue Boar St. There are reasonable grounds, then, for believing that there were no structures on the site at this time. Structures prior to this cannot be ruled out, but the agreement for the making of Tresham's Lane in 1554 mentions only a corner of St Edward Hall which was to be taken down (Cart. Osen. i, 339). This does raise one important point - early rentals for St Edward Hall describe it as 'aula in cemeterio', in that it stood either in or close to the cemetery of St Edward's Church, which stood to the west. The creation of the southern end of Kemp Hall Passage may have encroached onto the St Edward Hall tenement, although this is difficult to prove, and there is thus a possibility that some medieval burials could exist on the eastern edge of the site.

The situation had changed considerably by the time of the next map of Oxford, that drawn by Loggan in 1675. This shows a building, perhaps two adjoining houses fronting onto Blue Boar Lane (Fig.3) with strips of garden or yard running back to the north. Kemp Hall Passage is also clearly visible. We thus have structures, perhaps with cellars, built on the site by the later 17th century.

Davis' map of 1797 (Fig.4) shows a similar situation to that depicted by Loggan, but by the time of the 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map (1:500) in 1878 (Fig.5), a large amount of in-filling had clearly taken place, including the blocking (later re-opened) by buildings of Kemp Hall Passage. The Ebor House site is shown as a series of buildings around a small courtyard.

There are few useful documentary references for the later period, although the city is recorded as buying 4 and 5 Blue Boar Lane, the 'Chief Constable's House', in 1896 (Salter 1926: 152). This is clearly a reference to the Ebor House site although the acquisition of the property at this time does not fit easily with the references to medieval gardens owned by the city (see above) - the problem here is again the fragmentary documentary record.

The current Ebor House bears the date 1899, and was therefore built just after the city acquired the site. It is, of course, possible that parts of earlier structures were incorporated in the structure.

Altogether, the Ebor House site has the potential to show the development of a medieval 'back yard' site which may have been used to some extent for the dumping of rubbish, or for the burial of rubbish in pits. Evidence of the medieval garden could also survive. The creation of Tresham's Lane changed the status of the site, and, beginning sometime between the mid 16th and mid 17th centuries, it became gradually in-filled by buildings.

#### 4 Survival of archaeological stratification

There is an immediately obvious and substantial difference in the potential survival of archaeological stratification, compared with the western half of the site, in that there is a discrepancy in current ground levels of 2.1 m. Thus while the whole of the western area covered in the original report has been reduced by cellars, on present evidence this is not the case to the east. A small cellar lies below Ebor House (Fig. 1), but there is no evidence for other cellars to the north. The construction of the foundations for the current Ebor House may have destroyed some earlier evidence, depending on the extent to which earlier foundations were re-used.

The eastern half of the site thus offers the possibility of an archaeological sequence which extends up to the post-medieval period and beyond, while on the western side this has been truncated.

#### Bibliography

*Cart. Osen. i* Cartulary of Oseney Abbey, Volume 1, ed. H.e. Salter, OHS LXXXIX, Oxford, 1929

Pantin, W.A 1947 The development of domestic architecture in Oxford, in *Oxoniensia* 28, 120-50.

David Wilkinson  
Senior Archaeologist

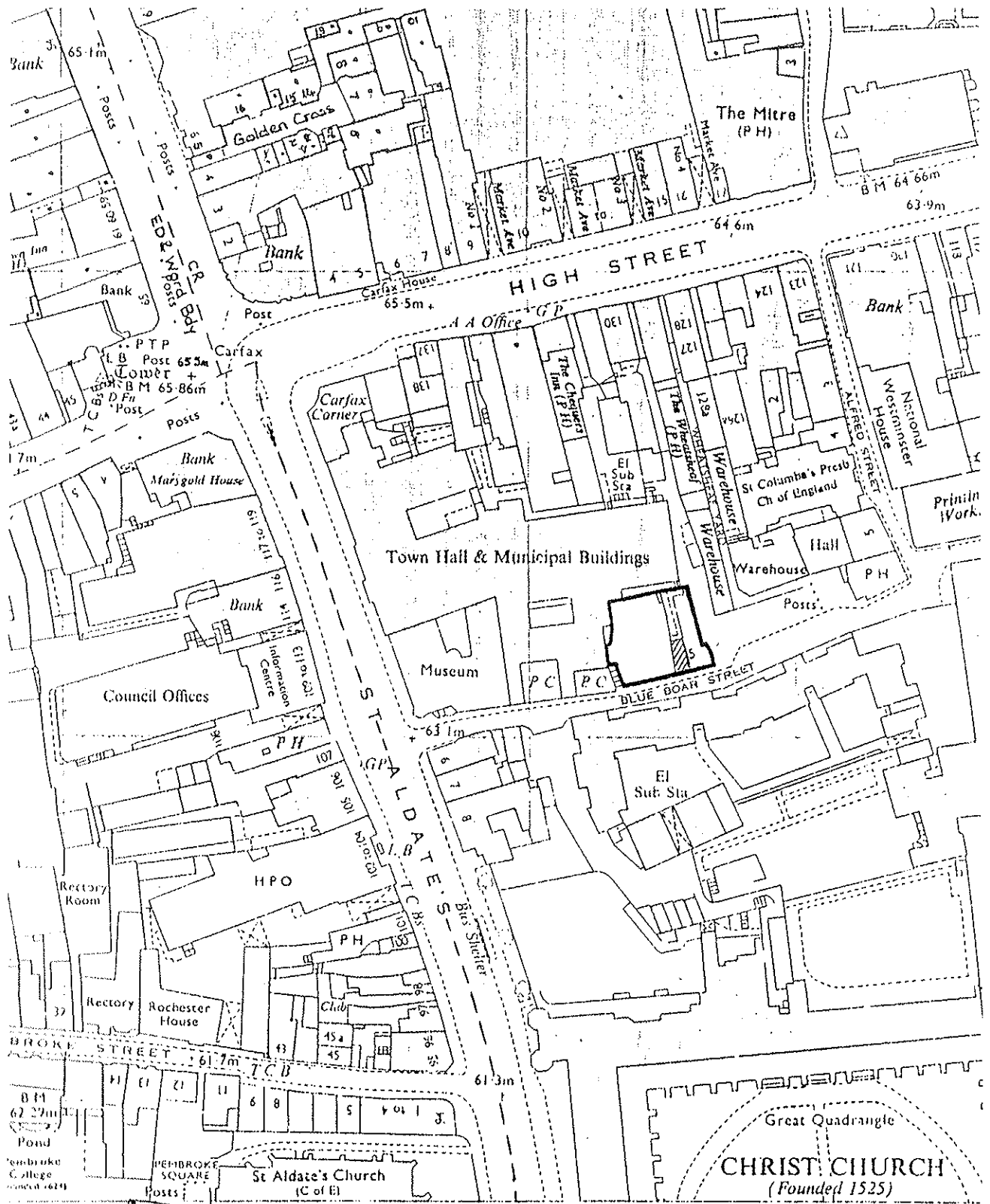


Figure 1: site location and extent of cellar (hatched)  
 Scale - 1:1250

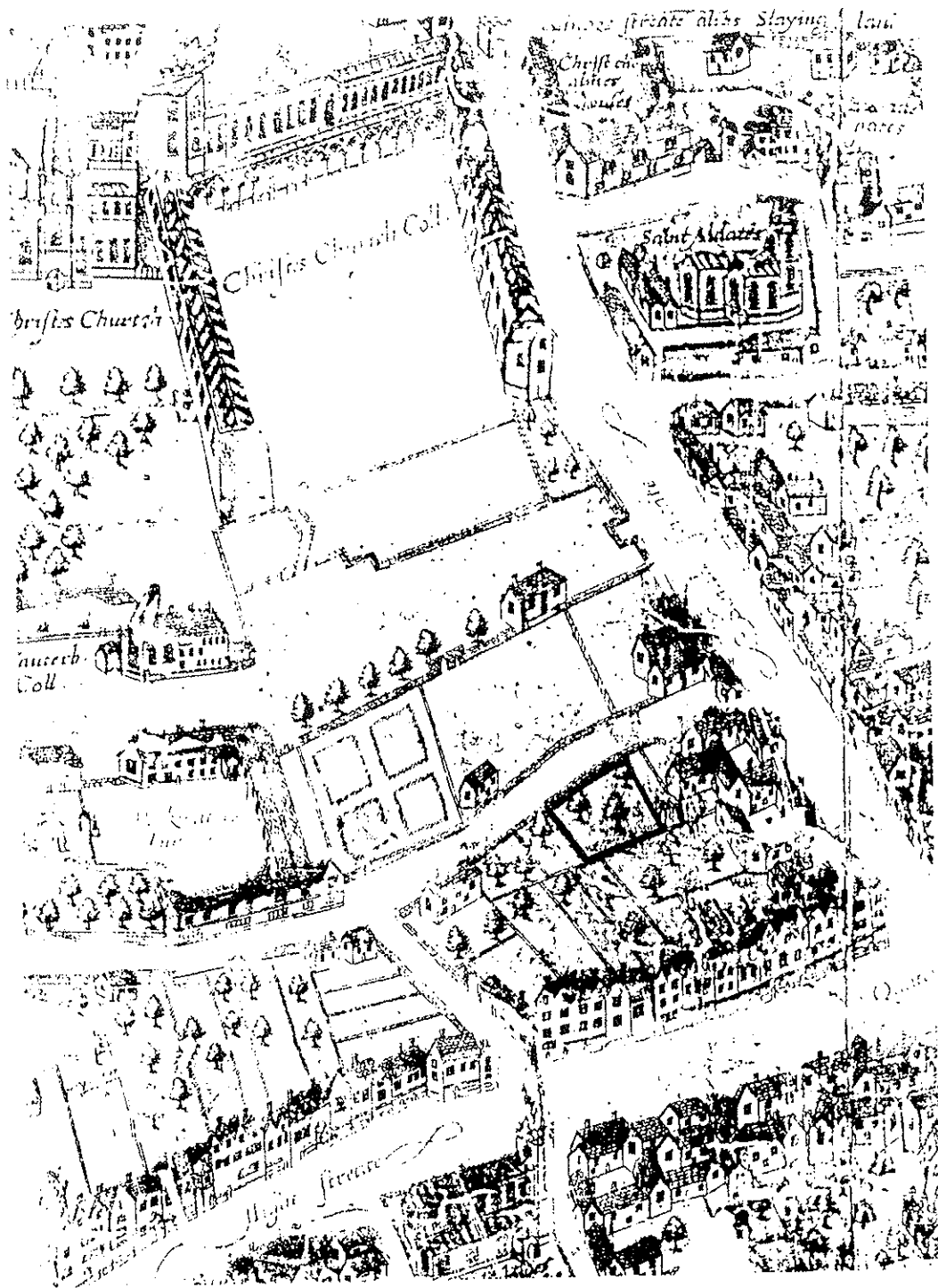


Figure 2: Agas' map of 1578 - dark line shows extent of site



Figure 3: Loggan's map of 1675 - dark line shows extent of site

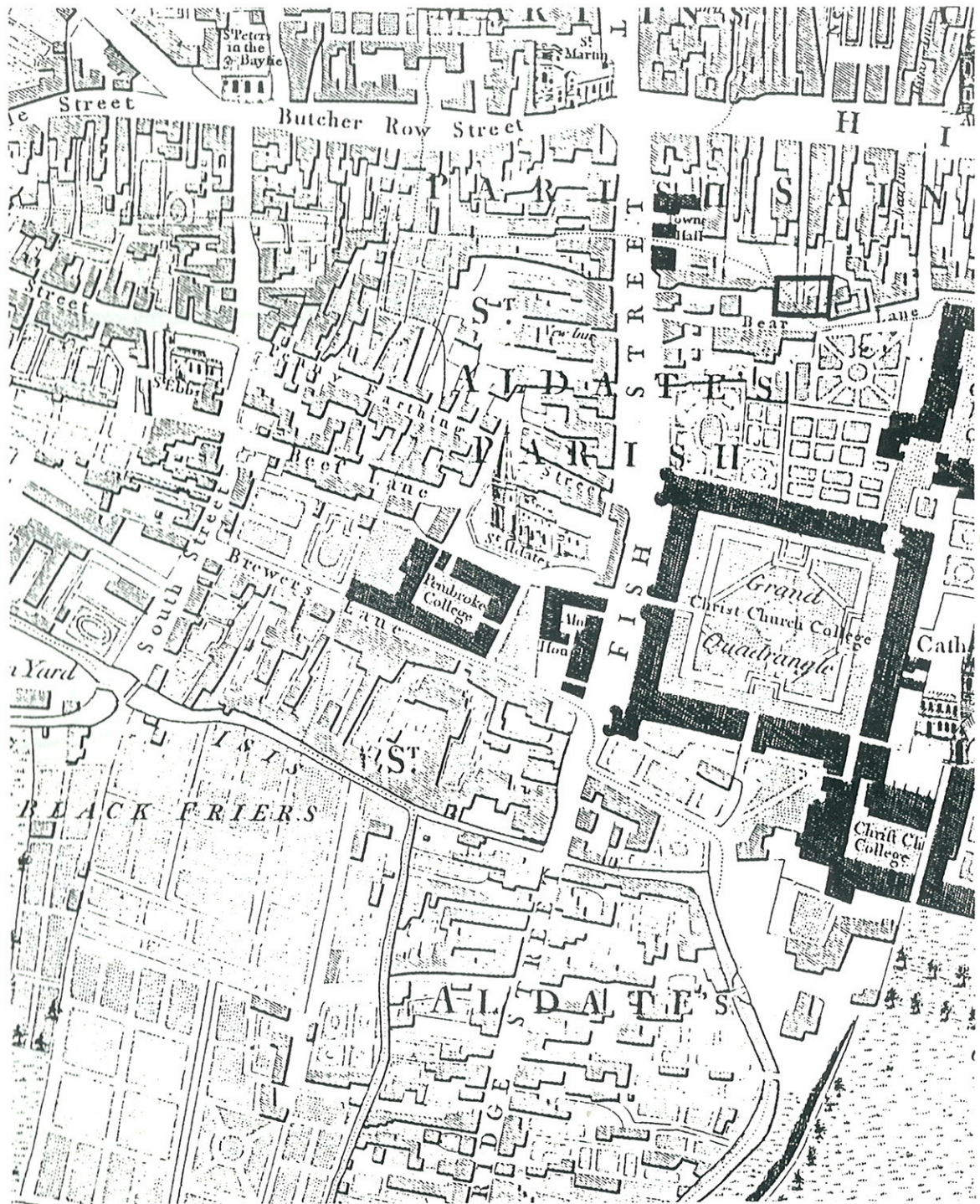


Figure 4: Davis' map of 1797 - dark line shows extent of site



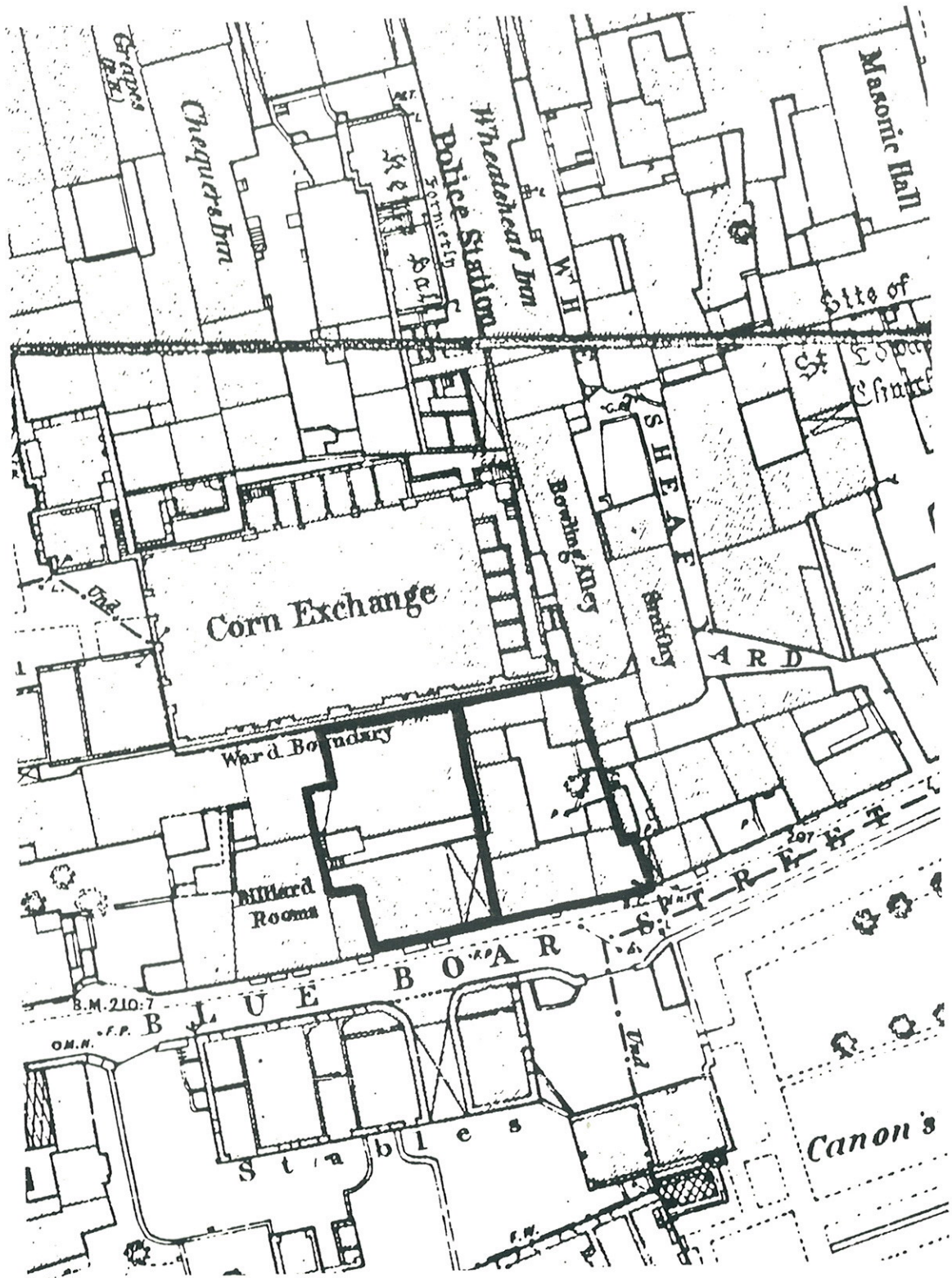


Figure 5: 1st edition 1878 OS map (1:500) - dark line shows extent of site



The Oxford Archaeological Unit  
46 Hythe Bridge Street  
Oxford OX1 2EP  
tel. (0865) 243888 fax. (0865) 793496