

First Church of Christ the Scientist 36 St. Giles Oxford



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

March 2004

Client: Bozeat Partnership

Issue N^o: 1

OA Job N^o: 1908

Planning Ref N^o: 02/2233/FUL

NGR: SP 5100 0689

Client Name: Bozeat Partnership

Client Ref No:

Document Title: First Church of Christ the Scientist, 36 St Giles, Oxford

Document Type: Watching Brief

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: NGR SP 5109 0689

Planning Reference: 02/2233/FUL

OA Job Number: 1908

Site Code: OX36SG 03

Invoice Code: OX36SGWB

Receiving Museum: Oxfordshire County Museum Service

Museum Accession No: OXCMS 2003.91

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Document File Location U:/OAU/wbREPORTS/Oxford City/OX36SG.doc
Graphics File Location Server 10:/oapubs 1/ItoQ*OX36SGWB*36 St. Giles,
Oxford*RL*22.01.04
Illustrated by Robin Latour

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SUMMARY

From July to December 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at First Church of Christ the Scientist, 36 St Giles, Oxford (NGR SP 5109 0689). The work was commissioned by Bozeat Partnership in advance of a new reading room is to be constructed as an extension to the extant church building, with an extension to the existing railings. The watching brief revealed cultivated soils pre dating the 19th century development and building on the site.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 From July to December 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at First Church of Christ the Scientist, 36 St Giles, Oxford (Figs 1 and 2). The work was commissioned by Bozeat Partnership in respect of a planning application for a new reading room, to be constructed as an extension to the extant church building, with an extension to the existing railings (Planning Application No. 02/2233/FUL).
- 1.1.2 An advice note regarding the development was prepared by Brian Durham, the City's Archaeologist on behalf of Oxford City Council.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on Oxford clay and Kellaways beds (British Geological Survey, Sheet 236) at 63.9 m. The development area is currently used as a courtyard incorporating a flower bed area.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA 2003) and is summarised/reproduced below.

Prehistoric (500,000 BP – 43 AD)

- 1.3.2 No archaeological finds or sites dated to the prehistoric period have been identified from within the immediate area of proposed development. However, prehistoric archaeology has been identified in the overall vicinity of St. Giles.
- 1.3.3 A number of Bronze Age barrow ditches have been identified in central Oxford and it has been suggested that there was an extensive barrow cemetery dating to this period. Within the University Parks, c 500 m to the north-east of the area of proposed development, aerial photographs show a concentration of cropmarks including a number of ring ditches. In 2002 a ring ditch with four inhumations was excavated at the new Gene Function Centre, c 450 m to the east of the development site. Other

ring ditches have also been found in excavations at the Sackler Library around c 250 m to the south-west of the site.

- 1.3.4 Aerial photographs have also shown evidence for settlement activity. The results of excavations in the Science Area to the south-east of the area of proposed development have shown that there was activity from the early Iron Age.

Roman Period (43 AD – 410 AD)

- 1.3.5 No archaeological finds or sites dated to this period have been identified within the immediate area of proposed development. However, Romano-British archaeology has been identified in the overall vicinity of St. Giles.
- 1.3.6 Finds evidence and the results of archaeological excavations have identified a Roman-British settlement, which extends across a substantial area to the south-east of the area of proposed development and may extend into it. There is substantial overlap with the Iron Age settlement and it is likely that this continued to be occupied into the Roman period.
- 1.3.7 The clearest evidence for settlement came from the archaeological excavations to the west of Mansfield Road. Around 350 m south-east of the area of proposed development, at the Institute for American Studies site, two phases of ditched enclosure were found, the latter containing remains of a timber structure (Booth & Hayden 2000, 291). The New Chemistry Laboratory site, 300 m to the south-east, contained ditches, gullies and roof tiles. An inhumation burial was also found (Charles, Poore & Hardy, 2002, 9).

Early Medieval (410 – 1066)

- 1.3.8 Evidence for activity during the early Saxon period has been found at a number of locations across Oxford, although no evidence for such activity has so far been produced for the immediate area of St. Giles. Barrow burials have been identified at the Radcliffe Infirmary, c 200 m north of the area of proposed development. Little is known about this period in Oxford, but there may have been settlement on the gravel terrace upon which the development site lies.
- 1.3.9 A defended burgh was laid out at Oxford in the 9th century onwards. After this a substantial town developed, but this did not extend as far north as the area of proposed development. At that period the land probably belonged to the manor of Walton, with which it was associated until the 16th century (VCH IV, 381-2). It is probable that during the early medieval period the area of proposed development was a mixture of arable land and meadow, the situation known to have existed in the northern part of St Giles parish during the later medieval and post medieval periods.

Later Medieval (1066 – 1550)

- 1.3.10 Salter's *Survey of Oxford* (1969) shows that tenements were constructed along both sides of St Giles, outside the city walls, during the later medieval period. The area of proposed development was divided with Black Hall on its north side. Black Hall had a significant area of farmland associated with it and Salter suggests that it was

established by the mid 14th century when it was sold at the death of Nicholas Bicester. It was willed to Rewley Abbey early in the 16th century (Salter 1969, 204).

- 1.3.11 St Giles Church and parish were established in the early 12th century. The church is c 130 m north of the area of proposed development. It was initially granted the tithes from Walton, suggesting that the land around it formed part of Walton Manor. The fields in the north of the parish were known as Walton Fields in the 14th and 15th centuries. It was a mixture of arable and meadow, with common pasture rights recorded in the 14th century (VCH IV, 276-7).
- 1.3.12 The area of proposed development lies c 150 m north of St John's College. This occupies the site of St Bernard's College that was founded by the Cistercians in 1437 on land fronting St Giles. The college was dissolved in 1539 and the site was granted to Christ Church who sold it to Sir Thomas White to found St John's College in 1555.
- 1.3.13 Evidence for later medieval occupation was found during excavations at St John's College in 1959, c 170 m south of the area of proposed development, and on the opposite side of St Giles at No's 33-4 and at No 37a 100 m west of the site. The results suggest that occupation may have begun in the 11th century. These locations all lie within the tenements identified by Salter and the backyards behind would have been used for gardens, storage, animals, workshops, domestic and human waste etc.
- 1.3.14 Excavations by OA at St John's College in 2003 found evidence that quarrying may have begun there during the later medieval period.

Post-Medieval Period (AD1550-1850)

- 1.3.15 Following the Dissolution the manor of Walton was granted to George Owen of Godstow who also bought Black Hall from Rewley Abbey. In 1573 his son sold the estates to the newly founded St John's College (VCH IV 1979, 276). At that point Black Hall was a substantial farm with more than 100 acres of land, mostly under arable. Its farmyard was accessed from Blackhall Road.
- 1.3.16 The earliest available historical map to show the area of proposed development is Agas' Map of Oxford, 1587. This shows buildings all along the St Giles frontage. The tenements run back to a wall beyond which is open land. Within the area of proposed development a number of boundaries are marked and there is one building in the garden area. As in the later medieval period, the yards behind would have been fully utilised.
- 1.3.17 Quarry pits from this period have been found at St John's College 170 m to the south of the area of proposed development, at 37a St Giles 100 m to the west, and at Rewley House 220 m to the south-west. This quarrying may have been linked to building work in the vicinity or to the construction of the Civil War defences in 1642-4. The fortifications were based on a plan by a military engineer, Bernard de Gomme. In the north part of Oxford inner and outer lines were built, with the inner defence situated c 40 m east of the area of proposed development. Although little remains of the defences the projected line has been confirmed during excavations at a number of locations including Keble Road 100 m north of the site and in the University Museum area 200 m to its east.

- 1.3.18 Since 1789 there had been little change in or close to the area of proposed development. The layout of buildings along St Giles is not identical to the present one, but the south part of Black Hall and the building to its north can be distinguished.
- 1.3.19 An Enclosure Act was passed for St Giles parish in 1832 and development began to encroach into the area to the north and west of St Giles church as Hoggar's map of 1850 shows. This is the earliest available map to show Blackhall Road along the east side of the area of proposed development. Some building has taken place on its east side, but most of that area was still under cultivation.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 Prior to the groundwork for the new development, two test pits were excavated to examine the ground conditions (Fig. 3). The ground works consisted of the laying of the new service trenches, followed by the excavation of the foundation trenches for the new reading room (Fig. 4). The last of the service trenches were connected after the foundations were laid. The work was carried out by a mini excavator and a number of site visits were carried out by an archaeologist during the course of the ground works.
- 2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Test Pit 1 (Figs 3 and 5, section 1)

- 3.1.1 Test pit 1 measured 1.3 m x 0.6 m x 1.22 m and was placed against the south boundary wall of the site. The test pit revealed the foundation cut (1) of the boundary wall cutting into the natural gravel (13) at 1.18 m below the courtyard surface. The base of the cut was filled by a dark brown silty sand (2) on which the limestone and clay bond footings (3) were built. The footings were surmounted by the boundary wall (4), stepped in by 0.08 m. The wall had a 0.02 m thick skim of render over its surface. Against the wall was a thick 0.60 m layer of dark brown silty sand (8) cultivated and made up ground.

Test Pit 2 (Figs 3 and 5, section 2)

- 3.1.2 Test pit 2 was close to the centre of the new building and measured 1.7 m x 1.1 m x 1 m. It cut alongside an earlier brick-lined manhole (7). This was built on a 0.09 m thick concrete base (6). This was set into a thick 1 m layer of dark brown cultivated silty sand (8) made up ground, which was sealed below 0.1 m thick layer of hardcore (9) for the courtyard brick surface and flower bed base (10) and wall (11). Two metal pipes were also recorded laid in layer (8).

Service trenches and foundation trench (Fig. 6)

- 3.1.3 The excavation of these trenches cut through into the natural gravel (13) at 1.2 m below the surface. This was sealed below a 1 m thick layer of dark brown and dark reddish brown cultivated silty sand (8) soil. This had been cut by a number of 19th and 20th century services. A cellar constructed of stone and mortar with a rubble core and a brick vaulted roof. The cellar measured 3 m x 3.5 m x 1.6 m and was part of the extension on No 36 St Giles Street, Oxford as shown on the 1981 map (1:1250 scale OS Map, SP5106 NW) (see Fig. 2). Sealing the cellar was hardcore layer (9) for the modern courtyard surface and flowerbeds.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No finds were recovered from the watching brief.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The results from the watching brief showed cultivated soils. These pre dated the 19th century and had been cut by early 19th-century features relating to the construction and development of properties of the houses along St Giles Street.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

| <i>Context</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Depth</i> | <i>Width</i> | <i>Height</i> | <i>Comments</i> | <i>Finds</i> |
|----------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Cut | 1.18 m | 1 m | | Foundation cut for boundary wall | |
| 2 | Fill | | | | Fill at base of cut | |
| 3 | Footings | 0.60 m | 0.08 m offset | | Wall footings | |
| 4 | Wall | | | | Boundary wall | |
| 5 | Layer | 0.02 m thick | | | Wall render | |
| 6 | Structure | 0.09 m | | | Concrete base | |
| 7 | Structure | | | | Brick manhole | |
| 8 | Layer | 1 m | | | Cultivated soil | |
| 9 | Layer | 0.10 m | | | Hardcore base | |
| 10 | Layer | 0.09 m | | | Base for flower bed | |
| 11 | Concrete | | | | Base for flower bed | |
| 12 | Pipes | | | | Service pipes | |
| 13 | Natural | | | | Natural gravel | |

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: First Church of Christ the Scientist, 36 St Giles, Oxford

Site code: OX36SG 03

Grid reference: NGR SP 5109 0689

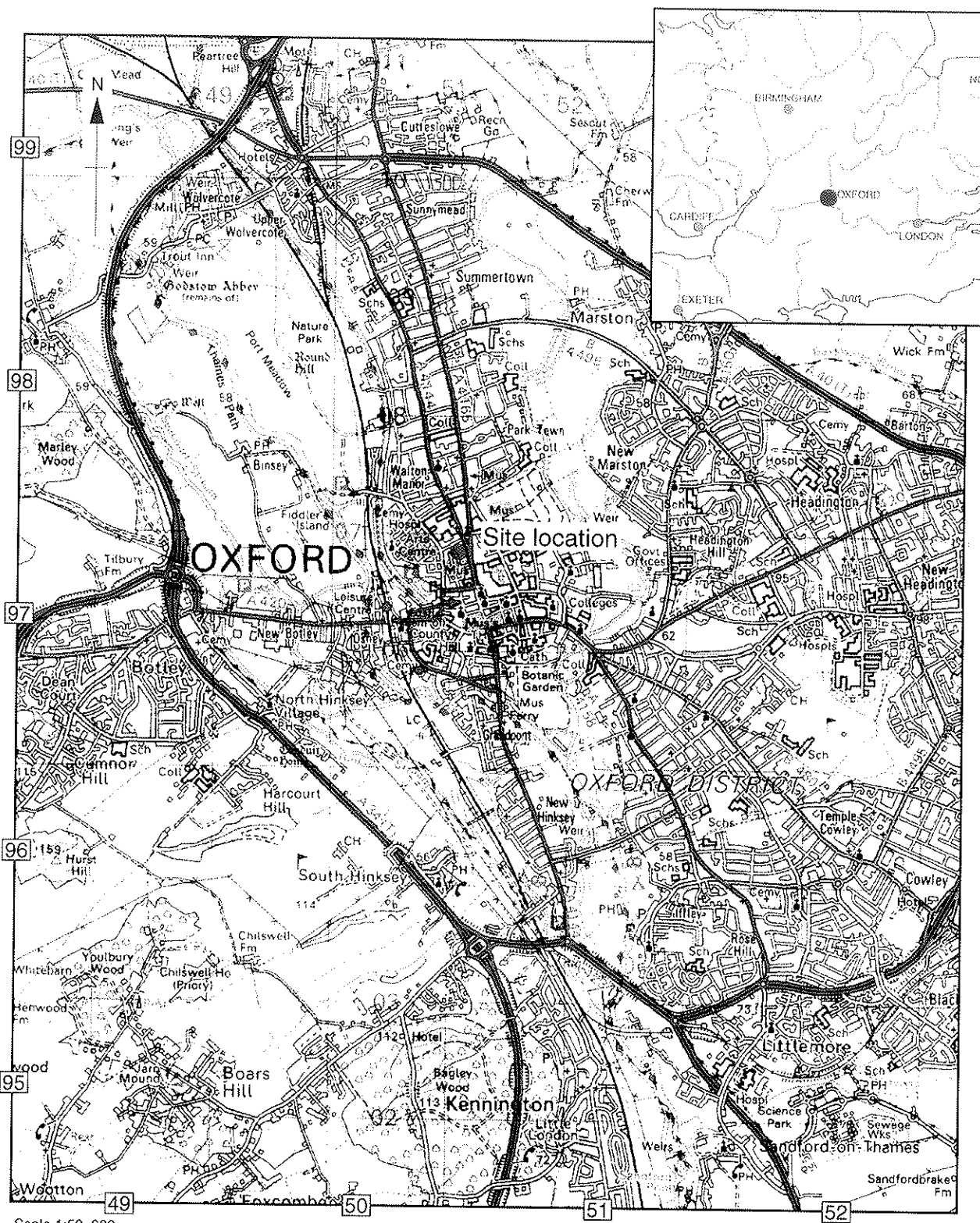
Type of watching brief: Ground works for the construction of new reading room is to be constructed as an extension to the extant church building, with an extension to the existing railings at the First Church of Christ Scientist

Date and duration of project: A total of five visits were carried out from the 7/7/03 to 16/12/03.

Area of site: 28 m x 11 m

Summary of results: The watching brief revealed cultivated soils pre dating the 19th century development and building on the site.

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, under the following accession number: OXCMS 2003.91



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Figure 1: Site location

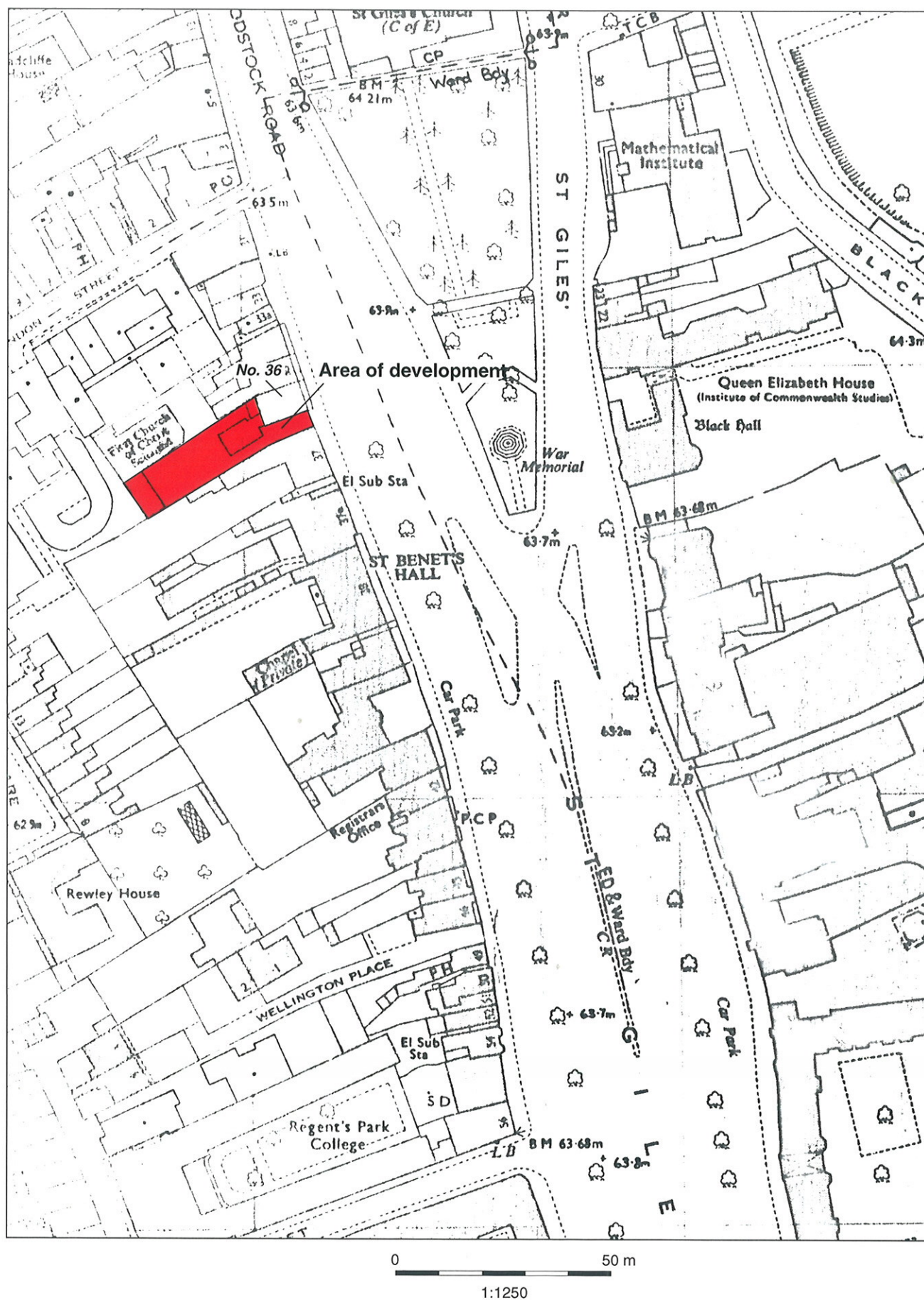


Figure 2: Site location

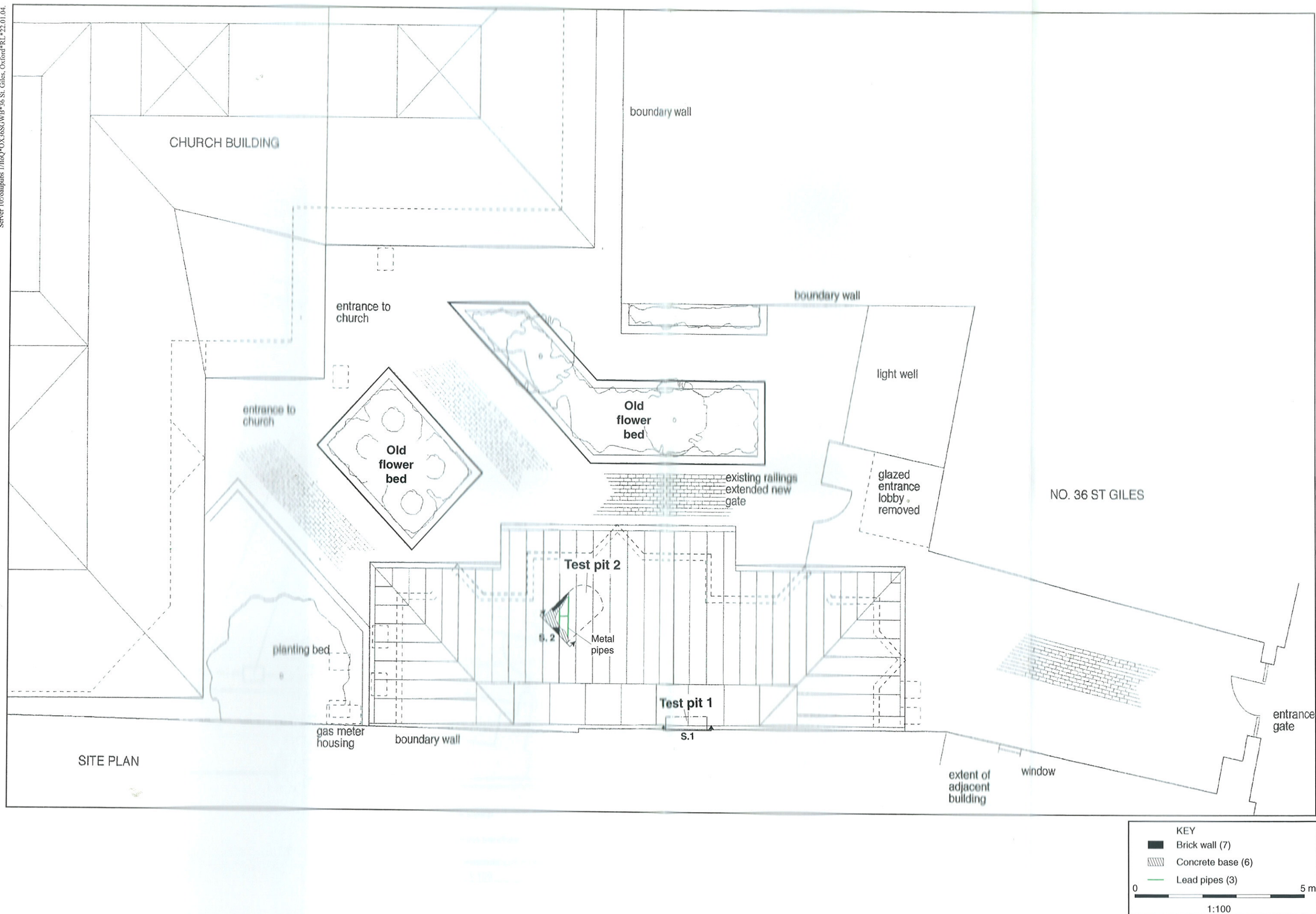


Figure 3: Plan showing test pits and old flower beds

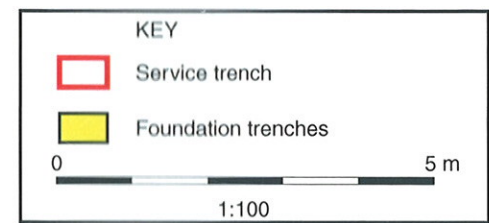
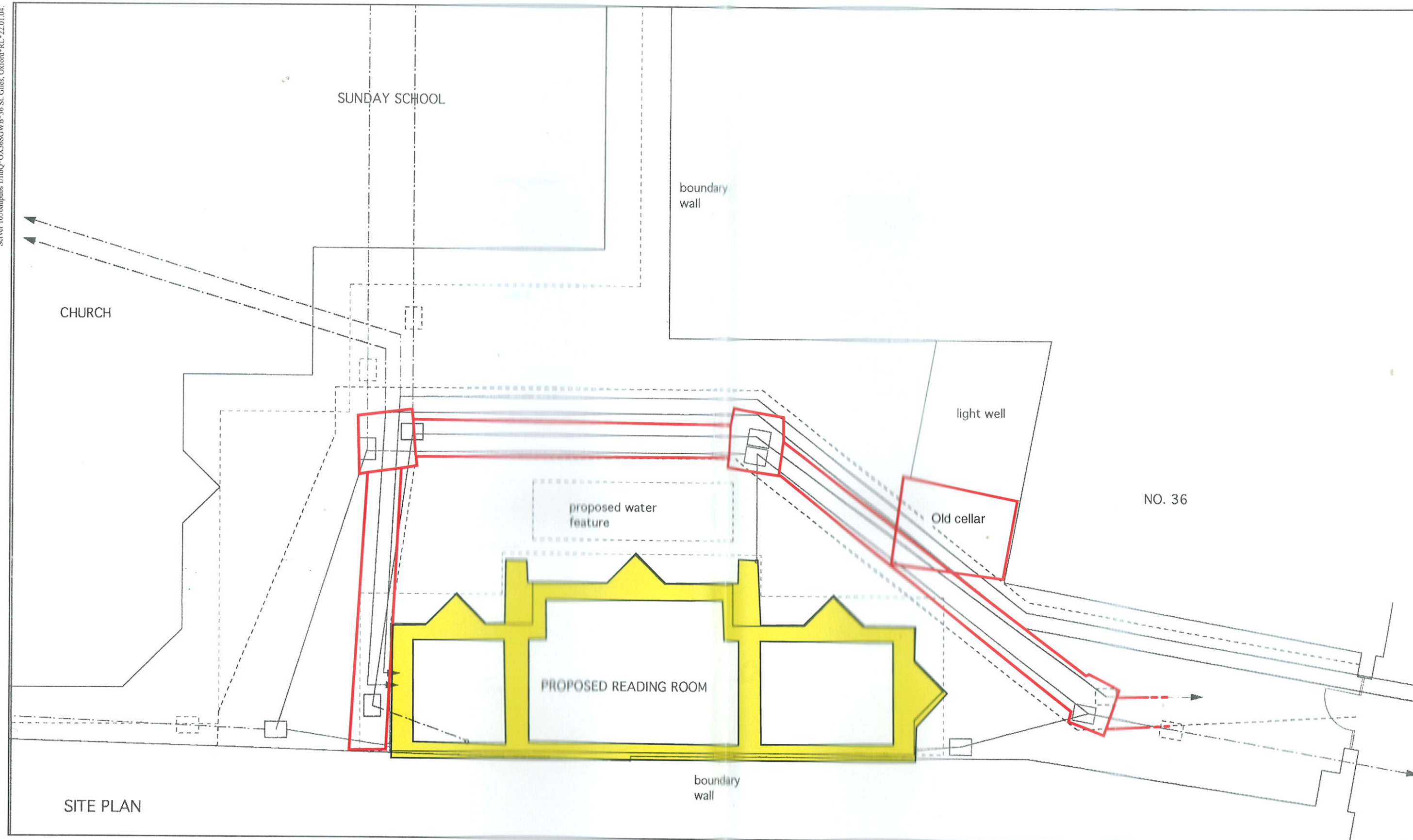


Figure 4: Plan showing service trench and foundations of Reading Room

Figure 5: Sections 1 and 2



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