

Oxford Castle Mound New Road Oxford



Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology

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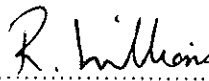
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In October and November 2001, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Oxford Castle Mound, New Road, Oxford (NGR SP 510 063). The work was commissioned by WS Atkins and was undertaken during installation of new security measures and lighting on the mound. The watching brief took the form of a photographic record of the installation of new lighting in the well chamber of the mound, and the erection of a new gate to the well chamber; a new fence was also erected at the base of the mound.

Excavations were limited to a shallow trench for a new electricity cable dug up the side of the mound, and the excavation of small pits for the erection of the new gate and fence. The floor deposits of the well chamber and base of its stair well were partly excavated and inspected; a bowl from a late 18th- century clay pipe was recovered from the floor.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In October and November 2001 Oxford Archaeology (OA, formerly Oxford Archaeological Unit, OAU) was commissioned by WS Atkins of Oxford to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Oxford Castle Mound, New Road, Oxford (NGR SP 510 063).
- 1.1.2 Oxfordshire County Council were granted Scheduled Monument Consent for a scheme to enhance the security of the Castle Mound. A new fence, gate to the mound and electric cabling to light the well chamber formed the scope of works. The proposals were required for health and safety reasons, and to protect this Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 21701) from damage from unauthorised intrusion. The Castle Mound is part of the Oxford Prison and castle site that is situated within the Central Oxford Conservation Area and the Area of Archaeological Interest defined in the Oxford Local Plan (1998).
- 1.1.3 Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services prepared a design brief for the works (CAS 2001). OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would implement the requirements of the project brief, in order to satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements under the Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, 1979. The watching brief was also required in accordance with PPG 16, Oxfordshire Structure Plan and Oxford City Local Plan Policies.

1.2 Archaeological background, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA,2001) and is reproduced below.
- 1.2.2 Oxford Castle and the prison (hereafter referred to as 'the castle') is situated in the centre of Oxford, and is bounded by Castle Street to the east, New Road to the north,

- Tidmarsh Lane to the west and Paradise Street to the south. The castle is built on the southern spur of the Summertown-Radley gravel terrace, to the east of the River Thames and to the west of the river Cherwell.
- 1.2.3 The topography of the site slopes from north-east to south-west; at the north-east the ground level is at *c* 62.5 m OD, in the south-west it is at *c* 58.5 m OD.
- 1.2.4 The archaeological background of the site has been extensively studied in *Oxford Castle – a Heritage Survey* commissioned by Oxford County Council (OAU 1996). The following is based on the information contained in that document, where full references will also be found. The date references given below (e.g. 1952, 1972e etc) refer to the entries in Appendix B of that document.
- 1.2.5 The castle was built in 1071 by Robert d'Oilli at the west side of the late-Saxon town, known to have been in existence as early as AD 911. There is no known evidence for activity pre-dating the Saxon period. Pre-conquest late Saxon material has been found beneath the Castle mound (1952) and within the vicinity of the castle at Nuffield College (1948-9) and New County Hall (1972), indicating that the Saxon town extended as far west as the river – as represented by the present Castle Mill Stream.
- 1.2.6 Jope's excavations at the mound in 1952 revealed pits, occupation debris and traces of the houses overlain by the castle and part of a Saxon timber house was observed recovered during construction of the new County Hall in 1972. OAU undertook an evaluation of the prison site in 1999, including two trenches near the base of the castle mound (OAU 1999) that identified a post-medieval ditch cut into earlier deposits.
- 1.2.7 Originally the castle consisted of a motte and bailey, much of the latter of which survived into the 18th century, and the motte (the castle mound) still remains. Within the mound is a well chamber that is Listed Grade I, with an entrance on the upper SE side of the mound.
- 1.2.8 The mound is presently turfed with mature trees and scrub growing. The mound is 24 m tall with an upper diameter of *c* 18 m; the base diameter is *c* 76 m where it lies at 62 m OD.
- 1.2.9 The mound was investigated in 1794 by the then Keeper, Mr Harris, who cleared the well and found among other things human remains. The stone wall on top of the mound was cleared and proved to be the footing of a ten-sided tower with corresponding internal wall.
- 1.2.10 The well chamber dates to the 13th century, and above the entrance are 3 stones bearing shield-of-arms thought to be those of Fox, Bishop of Winchester, the See of Durham and Newcastle and the Bishop of Exeter. A flight of stone steps descends 6 m into a hexagonal chamber with stone vaulted roof supported on chamfered ribs.

Deposits associated with the mound were investigated by Hassall in the 1960s and 1970s (Hassall 1976).

1.3 Acknowledgements

- 1.3.1 OA extends its thanks to the groundworkers from WS Atkins, who were helpful at all times. WS Atkins Project Manager, David Mitchell, kept OA informed of all site works and provided OA with site plans of the proposals.

2 PROJECT OUTLINE AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Project Outline

- 2.1.1 A 2 m high roll-top fence was to be erected on the west boundary of the mound, adjacent to Macclesfield House (Plan A91877/921/70503C).
- 2.1.2 A new electricity supply was to be installed from Macclesfield House to the well chamber (Plan A91877/910/0102), extending up the west side of the mound to the well chamber entrance.
- 2.1.3 New lighting was needed in the well chamber, including affixing of the MICC cable to the chamber stair wall and the fixing of spotlights to the metal frame of the well (Plan A91877/910/0102).
- 2.1.4 A new entrance gate and steel cage to the well chamber was to be constructed, including the excavation by contractors of two 0.3 m x 0.3 m x 0.45 m deep pad foundations (Plan A91877/910/0101A).

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 An OA supervisor was in attendance during all works. Recording took the form of a colour and black-and-white photographic record of all new installation work and some minor excavation work. Sketch plans were also made of the location of ground intrusions, and brief context recording undertaken on the limited excavations.
- 2.2.2 Site recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 COMMENTARY ON THE PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

3.1 Excavations on the mound

- 3.1.1 The cable trench for the new electricity supply extended from the south-east side of the adjacent Macclesfield House (Fig. 4, plate 1) along the base of the castle mound and up its north side (Fig. 4, plate 2). It followed the lower terrace of the mound to the summit, and was cut through the topsoil to a depth of 0.15 m. A CP9 gun was used to cut the trench for the cable (Fig. 4, plate 3), supplemented by hand digging as required.

- 3.1.2 About half way up the mound a limestone block was encountered on the line of the trench. Though probably not *in situ*, the stone was nonetheless left in place and the cable run over the top of the stone. The cable trench was routed up to the entrance to the well chamber, where the cable was fed along the wall of the stairwell.
- 3.1.3 On top of the mound it was noted that a number of holes were present. The purpose and function of these was unclear, but they may have been dug for a display board in recent times (Fig. 4, plate 4).
- 3.1.4 At the entrance to the well chamber, two small square pits were excavated either side of the stone walls forming the entrance (Fig. 3; Fig. 4, plate 5). The pits were excavated for new gate posts. Pit 1 was 0.36 m deep and 0.33m wide and cut through a layer of brown silty gravel (3) that lay below the present topsoil (5). Pit 2 was cut to a similar depth and through a similar soil (4).
- 3.1.5 The construction of the new fence at the base of the mound was monitored (Fig. 4, plate 9) but no archaeological features or finds were observed.

3.2 Work inside the well chamber

- 3.2.1 A limited amount of excavation took place at the base of the well chamber to insert the electricity cable. The floor of the well chamber (1) consisted of brown silty soil which was well trodden and compact, and just at the base of the stairwell the floor here consisted of closely packed small stones (2) in a sandy soil matrix.
- 3.2.2 A small length of trench c. 0.15 m wide and 0.1 m deep was excavated against the wall of the well chamber, through the floor deposits (Fig. 4, plate 6). Finds from the floor inside the well chamber included clay pipes and a copper alloy ?thimble. The small trench was backfilled after the cable had been installed (Fig. 4, plate 7)

3.3 Finds

- 3.3.1 A few finds were recovered from the excavations. These included a thimble-shaped copper alloy object from the floor deposit in the well chamber, which also produced the bowl from a clay pipe. The bore is wide and it has a heel, suggestive of types current in the later 18th century, as noted at the excavations at the castle in 1999 (Higgins, in OAU 1999, 31).
- 3.3.2 A total of 6 sherds of post-medieval pottery was recovered from the soils from the gate-post pits. These comprise white china pieces and one sherd of hard-fired earthenware with a brownish-purple glaze. From the limited spoil excavated for the cable trench at the side of the mound a single sherd of vessel glass was recovered. .

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The project afforded an opportunity for limited additional information to be obtained from this scheduled monument. The floor of the well chamber comprises a beaten

earth layer, while the stairwell floor is partly paved with small stones. The clay pipe bowl from the well chamber floor may derive from the time in the late 18th-century when the well chamber was excavated and cleared.

- 4.1.2 The work was notable for the limited impact made on the mound and the well chamber to achieve the much needed improvements for security and lighting here. The new arrangements comprise a steel cage with gate over the entrance to the well chamber (Fig. 4, plate 8), and access to the well chamber will in the future be by appointment.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>
1	Layer	0.15m +	-	Beaten earth floor of well chamber	Clay pipe, cu thimble
2	Layer	0.15 m	-	Stone flooring material of stairwell	-
3	Layer	0.15 m+	-	Soil layer on top of castle mound	-
4	Layer			same as 3	-
5	Layer	0.1 m	-	Topsoil on the mound	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

County Archaeological Services, 2001 *Oxford Castle Mound - AM 21701 Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief*

OAU 1996 *Oxford Castle – a Heritage Survey*. Oxford Archaeological Unit, 1996.

OAU 1999 *Oxford Castle Project. Archaeological Field Evaluation Report*. October 1999

OA 2001 *Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological watching brief*.

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Oxford Castle Mound, New Street, Oxford

Site code: OXCAMO 01

Grid reference: SP 510 063

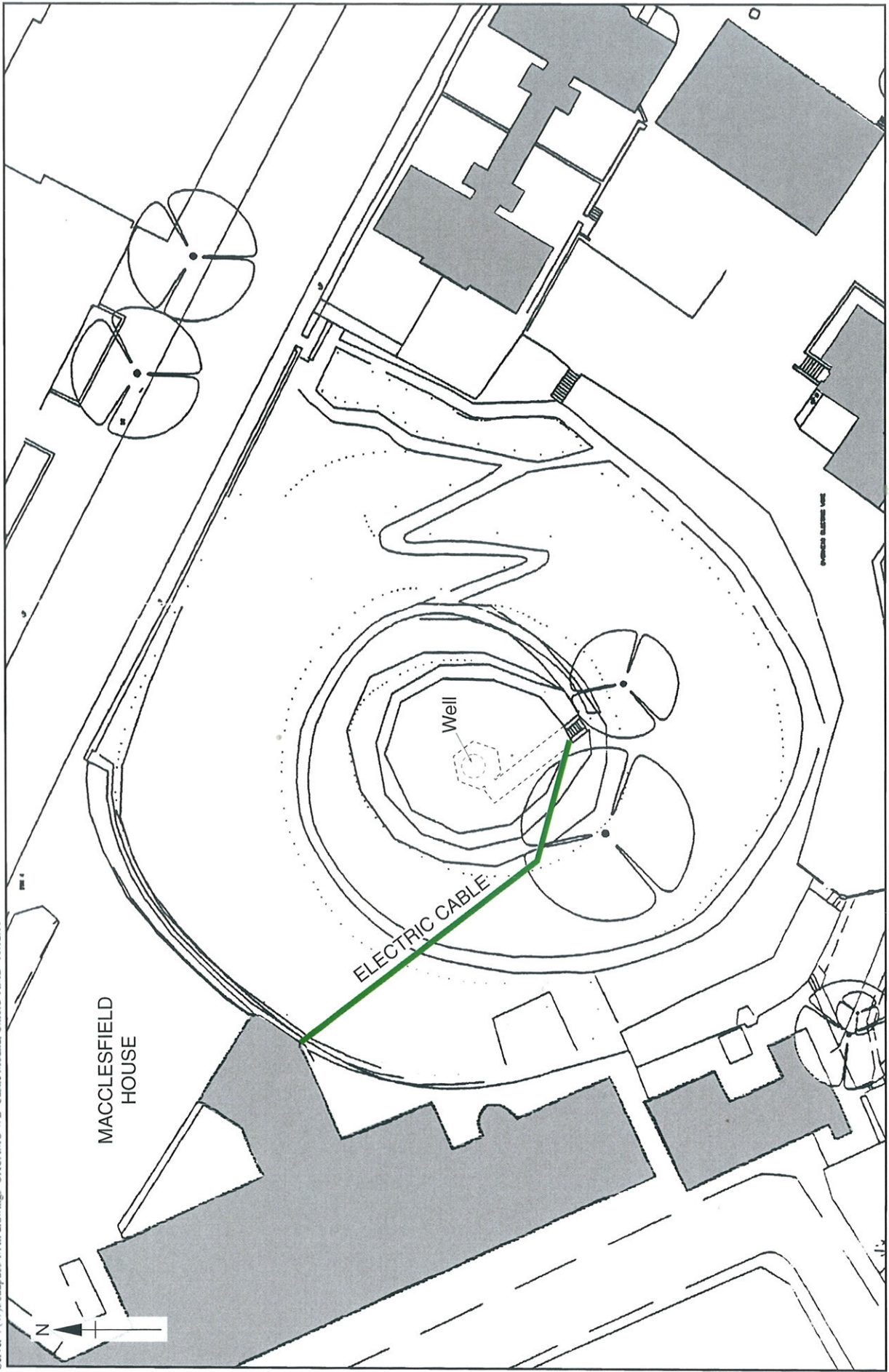
Type of watching brief: Photographic record of contractors excavations

Date and duration of project: October-November 2001

Summary of results: Topsoil deposits on the mound were investigated, as were the floors of the well chamber and the base of the stairwell to the well chamber.

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: 2001.140

Server 4 (W):\oupubs\1\All drawings\OXCAMO WB\Castle Mound, Oxford\AMD*18.12.01



Scale 1:500

Figure 2: Location of Cable Trench on Mound

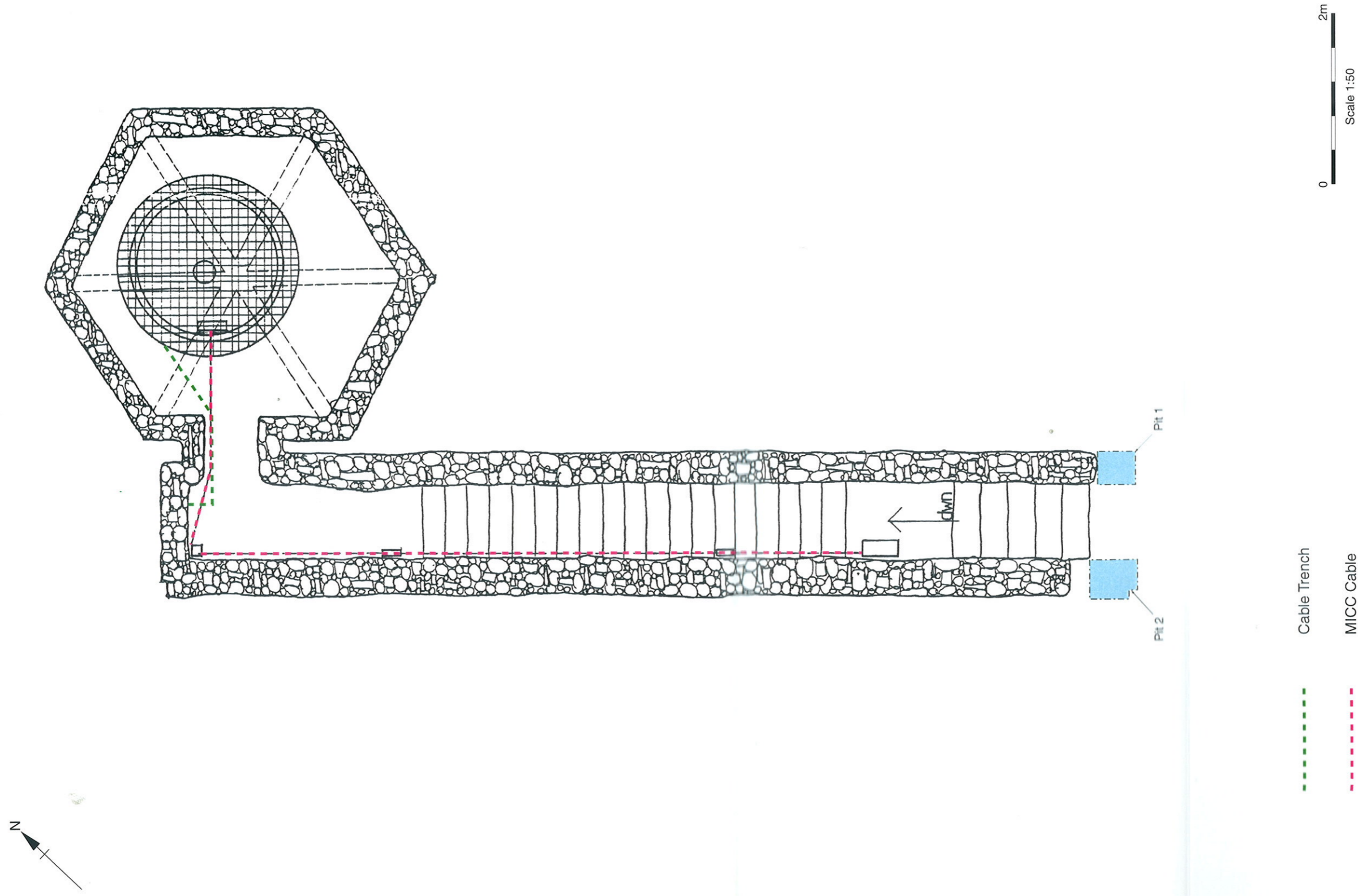


Figure 3: Plan of Well Chamber and Stair-well



Plate 1:
Cable trench
excavation at
the side of
Macclesfield
House



Plate 2:
Cable trench
excavation on
the west side of
the mound



Plate 3: Cable trench excavation using CP9 gun



Plate 4: Hole on top of the castle mound

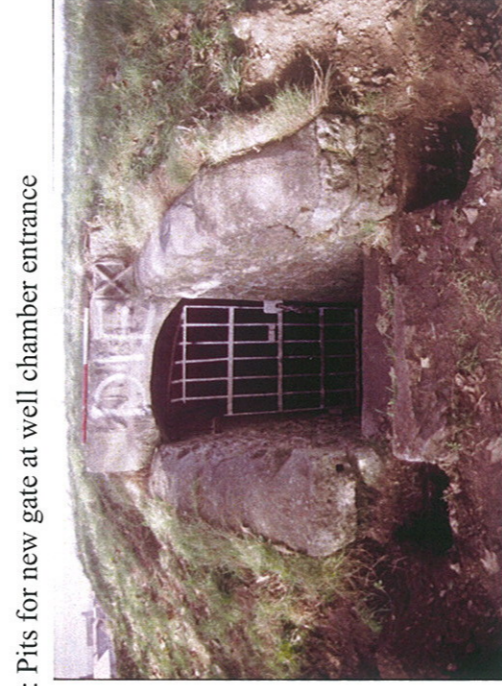


Plate 5: Pits for new gate at well chamber entrance



Plate 6:
Excavation
inside the well
chamber



Plate 7: In-filled cable trench



Plate 8:
Finished
lighting and
gate



Source: <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/oxford-castle-mound>

Plate 9: New Roll-top Fence at Oxford Castle Mound



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