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College of Arms

COLLEGE OF ARMS, QUEEN VICTORIA STREET,  
LONDON EC4  
NGR TQ 325896

REPORT OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF

QVC 97

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT  
OCTOBER 1997

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WATCHING BRIEF**

Prepared by: Duncan Wood
Date: 29 October 1997
Checked by: Graham Keevill
Date: 29 October 1997
Approved by: Graham Keevill
Date: 29 October 1997

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## **SUMMARY**

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by the College of Arms to undertake an archaeological watching brief prior to the backfilling of a site for a proposed library building to the east of the present College of Arms. This included the monitoring of two test pits and the cleaning and recording around an undated piece of wall within the 35 m by 4 m site. A suitable backfilling strategy would then be discussed. This report describes the results of the watching brief and assesses the significance of the exposed archaeology.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In 1996 the OAU were asked to undertake a desk-top assessment of the archaeological potential of the derelict area on the east side of the present College of Arms. The desktop study identified a length of undated wall, within the area of a post-medieval cellar. In September 1997 the OAU were commissioned to undertake a watching brief on the proposed site to record the piece of wall and investigate the area around it for further archaeological potential in the northern part of the site. At the southern end of the site two test pits were excavated to establish the level of the cellar floor and any surviving archaeological horizons with regard to future planning applications for the library development.

The proposed area was 35 m in length and 4 m wide at the southern end narrowing to 1.5 m at the north. The work was intended to assess the significance of the site and to allow decisions to be made on a suitable backfilling strategy to effectively seal the piece of masonry and any archaeological deposits which may be preserved below the cellar's present rubble infill. This backfilling would take place under archaeological supervision and was not seen as a permanent measure, but to improve both the safety and appearance of the potential development site.

## **SITE LOCATION**

The site of the proposed library extension lies on the eastern flank of the College of Arms. It is situated approximately 140 m to the north of the present line of the river Thames, on the brickearth-capped sands and gravels that constitute its northern bank (NGR TQ 325896). The site is bounded on the east by the post-war line of St Peter's Hill and on the south by Queen Victoria Street. The site lies in Castle Baynard Ward, within the Roman and medieval city, approximately 250 m. east of the western city wall.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Few controlled excavations have been undertaken within the area of Queen Victoria Street and little is known of the archaeological development of the area around the College of Arms. This section attempts to highlight the potential for archaeological deposits around the site and represents a summary of the desktop study (Wain 1996).

## **Prehistoric**

Due to the lack of substantial evidence for early activity in this area and the likely density and destructive nature of later activity the site is considered to be of low potential for the recovery of prehistoric data. However, survival of prehistoric deposits on this site remains a possibility and any such discoveries would be of great interest.

## **Roman**

The College of Arms site has considerable potential for the recovery of important archaeological data relating to the Roman period. In particular its proximity to the demonstrated line of the "Northern Long Wall" and the fact that site investigation has suggested that the site may contain the (much damaged) remains of the Southern wall makes this site of considerable importance for our understanding of the Roman development of this part of the City. Although it has been argued that the Southern walls form a southern parallel to the Northern walls recent works have inclined towards the view that these walls may represent individual buildings within a large building complex bounded on the north by the larger continuous walls.

## **Anglo-Saxon**

The potential of the College of Arms site to provide significant data pertaining to this period is enhanced by its position. Knighttrider Street, possibly the main east-west street of the late Saxon intramural settlement runs 10 m to the north and the site lies 120 m to the south of the St. Paul's Cathedral precinct.

Evidence for early activity in the City is likely to have focused on this centre and, similarly, this area might be expected to have been included in any later town planning, for which there is some evidence from the area to the east of the site. Such evidence is most likely to take the form of refuse pits, buildings fronting onto Knighttrider Street and tracks and ditches marking property boundaries; such boundary ditches have been found to survive below modern cellars in the Strand settlement area.

## **Later Medieval**

The College of Arms site has the potential to contain medieval deposits relating to the line of the medieval St Peter's Hill. This street is first documented in the 13th century and is shown on its basic pre-fire alignment on maps dating back to the mid-16th century. If early street layers survive, this could help to both accurately establish the date of its foundation and confirm its medieval orientation. Although it has been demonstrated that the general alignment and location of the pre-1666 St Peters Hill reflects that of the post-1666 road the exact location of the street is less clear. The possibility remains that foundations of medieval buildings fronting onto St Peters Hill survive, such as those discovered in Upper Thames Street in the 1970's.

## **Post-Medieval**

The site would appear to have only a limited potential to contain early post-medieval deposits. The area to the east of the present College of Arms suffered extensive disturbance throughout

the post-medieval period. In the early 18th century the site was occupied by a tavern. However, in the 1740's this building was removed to be replaced by an eight-storey Sugar House. The site of the proposed library appears to have continued to suffer significant disturbance throughout the 19th and 20th century. This was primarily due to the cellars and a large sewer constructed in 1884-5 to the west of the site, and substantial service ducts to the east.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The OAU were asked by the College of Arms to clean and record the area of exposed masonry, removing any modern deposits that may adhere to the surface of the wall. The deposits sealed under the western wall were then cleaned to fully analyse their relationship with the masonry and any features identified during the cleaning of the base of the trench. Any possible features within this area would be investigated as long as they were deemed non-intrusive into the fabric of the wall. The proposed backfilling strategy involved the area being covered by plastic and sand to a depth of 100 mm and then covered by sand bags before completely backfilling to present ground level with hard core.

Two test pits were excavated by the college against the western wall at 7 m and 12 m from the southern limit of the site. The test pits were approximately 1 m x 1 m and designed to establish the nature and Ordnance Datum (OD) level of the possible cellar floor. These were monitored by OAU personnel to identify the presence of possible surviving archaeological deposits. Significant archaeologically sensitive horizons would be recorded but remain unexcavated. The monitoring etc. was undertaken by Duncan Wood (supervisor) and Graham Keevill (project manager).

The project was assigned the Museum of London code QVC 97. Archaeological operations such as excavations and recording follow standard OAU methods and procedures (Wilkinson 1992).

## **DESCRIPTION**

The following section describes the stratigraphy, starting with the earliest of the deposits found within the trench. The text has been broken down into two parts, the test pits and the area around the exposed masonry.

### **Test Pits**

No archaeological horizons were identified within the two pits. The cellar floor was identified in both test pits which were filled with modern rubble debris and rubbish to a depth of c. 0.4 m from the present backfilled level. A level was taken on the floor of test pits 1 and 2, these were recorded as 9.37 OD and 9.60 OD respectively. The slight difference in floor level may be due to a modern toilet, which was identified in test pit 1. A small section of the floor had been removed so that the toilet fed directly into an adjacent sewer.

### **Masonry**

The earliest deposit seen within the northern confines of the trench was a natural orange

brickearth (100). The deposit was 0.30 m thick and only extended for 0.9 m in the western section. The deposit could only be seen in plan in small patches within 80 mm of the western wall, where it sloped downwards to the east due to post-medieval truncation. The brickearth was truncated 4 m from the northern wall by a vertical cut (101) 0.30 m deep and 1.4 m in length. The cut extended 0.2 m into the trench before being obscured by the cellar's rubble backfill. The cut was filled by a friable dark grey to black sandy silt with a 5% gravel inclusion. The fill was seen to extend for 0.2 m, the remainder of the cut being filled by limestone wall 103. The wall measured 1.2 m north-south, was 0.56 m high to 11.96 OD and extended 0.51 m into the trench. It was made of roughly coursed irregular fragments of limestone with a white lime mortar bond. The northern face appeared to be of roughly hewn blocks but these were obscured by lumps of mortar and splatterings of accreted concrete which could not be removed without risk of significant damage to the masonry.

The masonry was truncated by a construction cut for an existing brick wall. The cut (107) extended the entire length of the cleaned area, and was filled to a depth of 0.32 m by a make-up layer of light brown sandy silt (104) with 40% brick and gravel inclusions. Overlying this make up layer was an existing red brick wall (105) which defined the trench limits to the west. The bricks measured roughly 210 mm x 90 mm x 70 mm and the nature of the wall seemed to be part of the Sugar House which stood on the site until 1844. The cellar was filled with a mixture of extremely fragmented brick rubble and concrete (108). The final phase of construction relates to the existing north wall (106) which consists of re-used irregular rubble and brick with a coarse cement matrix. This wall could be clearly seen to crudely butt the Sugar House wall in the northwest corner of the site.

## **DISCUSSION**

Only 0.51 m of the masonry remains due to the truncation by post-medieval construction. The presence of a sewer constructed in 1844-5 to the west of the site may well have impacted on any remains west of the Sugar House wall (106). The sewer is recorded as being 4 ft (1.2 m) high and 4 ft (1.2 m) wide and was laid at a depth of 14 ft (4.32 m) below the 1844 ground level (City Sewers Plan 373). As the present horizon was recorded as 13.27 OD and the masonry at 11.87 OD partial or complete removal of this earlier feature would appear inevitable. If the sewer is accurately recorded on city plans this would leave a maximum of 1.2 m of existing wall before being truncated by the present College of Arms building.

Deposits 104 and 108 which seal the brickearth are both 19th century or later and have little archaeological interest. Layer 108 contains large quantities of brick rubble and concrete. Presumably it is the presence of this deposit which left splatterings of concrete adhered to the masonry (103). This would appear to have come from building demolition and debris material from an adjacent construction site. Unfortunately this deposit could not be effectively removed from the confines of the site due to the substantial nature of the concrete lumps.

No finds were recovered from the site. An attempt was made to take a brick sample from the Sugar House wall (105). This proved unsuccessful as the lowest course was very degraded and an adequate sample could not be recovered. The bricks did not appear to be frogged, which would indicate a possibly late 18th to early 19th century date, but the upper surfaces were

obscured so this could not be fully established.

## CONCLUSION

The wall is aligned roughly east-west with only the north face showing signs of working. The limestone used is roughly coursed and the remains appear to be surviving core work only. Any information which could have been recovered from the north face is obscured by mortar or concrete which could not entirely be removed by hand at this point. The surviving stonework would appear to follow the alignment of existing Roman walling within the area of St. Peter's Hill. However, no accurate date could be obtained for masonry as the associated stratigraphy was completely truncated by the post-medieval wall and no pre-modern finds were present.

The construction cut for the masonry truncates a substantial brickearth deposit (100). This brickearth could not be recorded in plan due to the presence of the brick and rubble layer 108 and no floor surface was recorded in the northern end of the site. It is therefore possible that further archaeological material exists cutting through this deposit. The cellar floors located in the two test pits lie at 9.37 OD and 9.60 OD. The debris layer was recorded at 11.36OD. It is likely that at least two separate cellars exist on the site. The retaining wall for the southern cellar differs from that of the Sugar House. The relationship between the two walls could not be investigated due to obstructions on the site.

The masonry was recorded and effectively backfilled with the proposed plastic and sand covering to preserve the remains in situ. However, the presence of the sewer to the west of the trench may well have removed any further remains of the wall between the site and the College of Arms. The wall has also been truncated by 19th and 20th century constructions to the east.

## REFERENCES

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| OAU 1997,             | College of Arms, Queen Victoria Street, Proposed Library Extension, Archaeological Recording Action, Written Scheme of Investigation |
| Wain I 1996           | College of Arms, Queen Victoria Street, Proposed Library Extension Archaeological Desktop Report                                     |
| Wilkinson D (ed) 1992 | OAU Field Manual (Oxford Archaeological Unit)  |
| <b>Map sources</b>    | City Sewer Plan 373 (c.1844)   |



## ILLUSTRATIONS

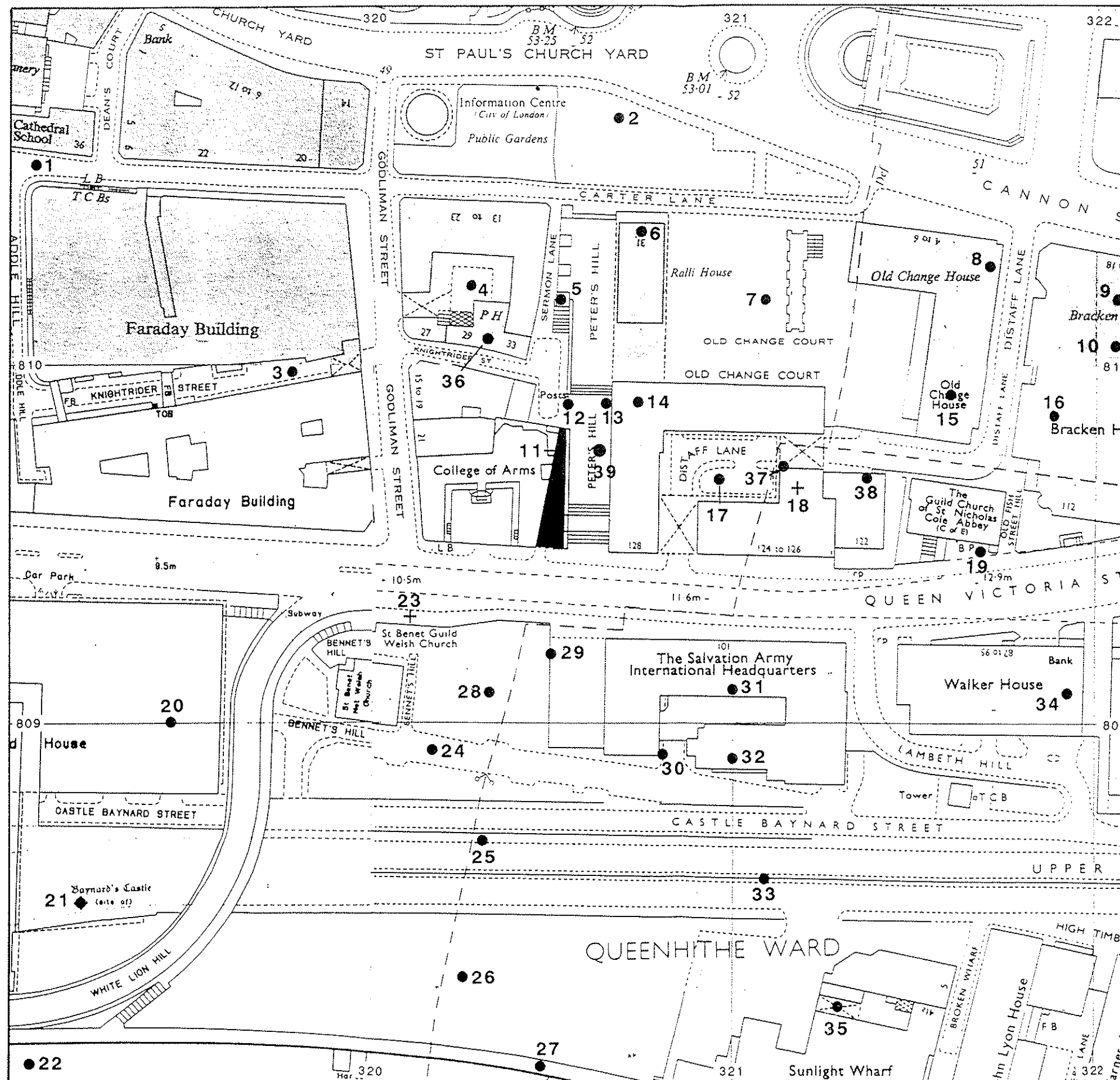
- Figure 1 Trench Location Plan  
 Figure 2 Site Plan (scale 1:200)  
 Figure 3 Plan of Masonry (scale 1:20) Section (scale 1:20)

Graham Keevill and Duncan Wood  
 Oxford Archaeological Unit  
 24 October 1997

## APPENDIX

### Table of contexts

Context	Type	Plan	Section	Strat Below	Strat Above	Comments
100	Layer	101	100	101		Brickearth
101	Cut	101	100	102	100	Cut for masonry
102	Fill	101	100	103	101	Fill of 101
103	Structure	100/1	100	107	102	Limestone wall
104	Fill		100	105	107	Fill of 107
105	Structure	100/1	100	108	104	Cellar wall
106	Structure	100	100		108	Modern wall
107	Cut			104	103	Cut for cellar wall
108	Layer	100/1	100	106	105	Modern debris



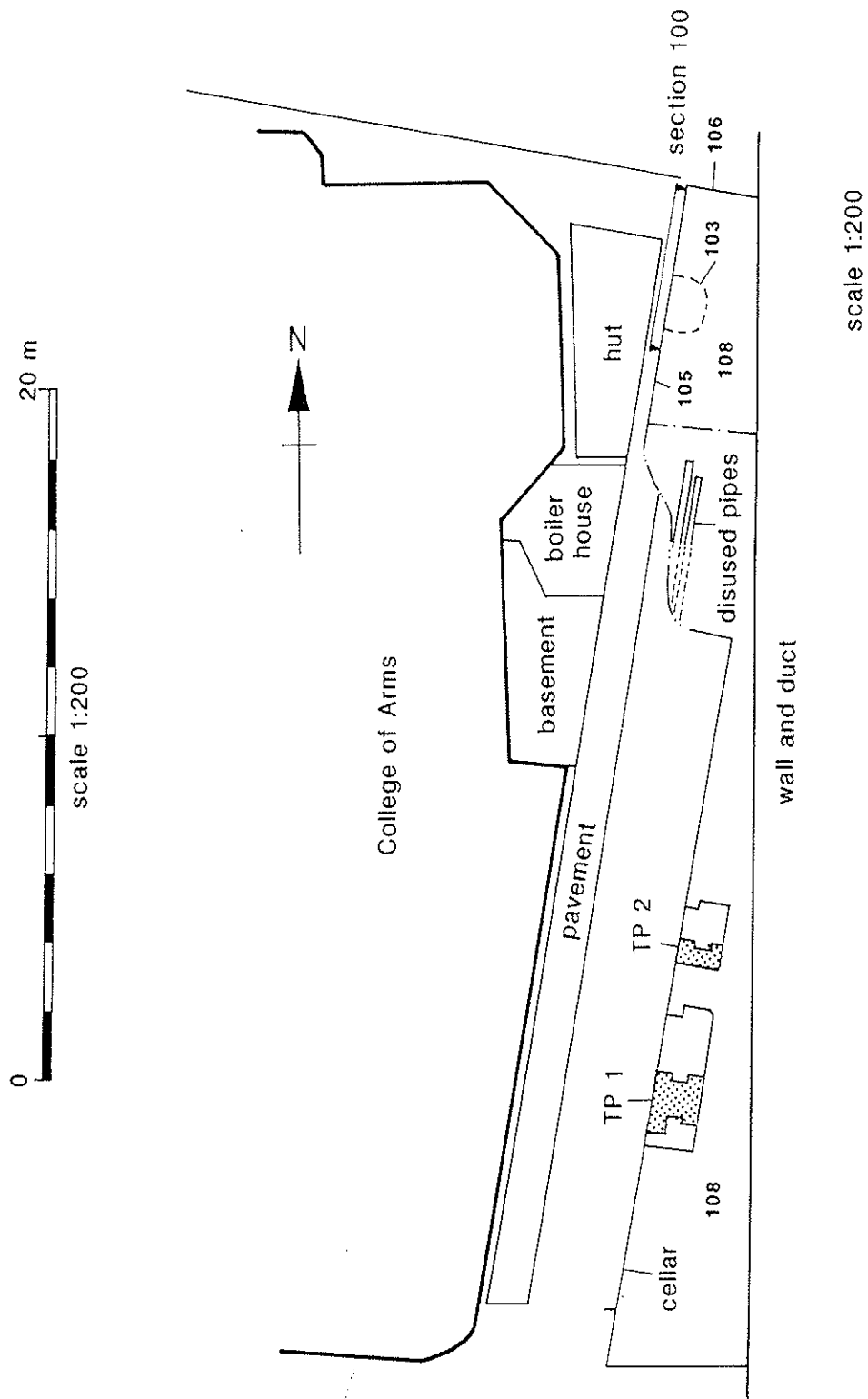
- KEY
- Archaeological site
  - + Archaeological findspot
  - Proposed site of library

For details of archaeological sites refer to: College of Arms  
Queen Victoria Street  
Proposed Library Extension  
Archaeological Desk-top Report

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Trench location plan

Figure 1



Site plan

Figure 2





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