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The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple

**The Library, Middle Temple Lane
London**

NGR TQ 3131 8079

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

April 1997

THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE

THE LIBRARY

MIDDLE TEMPLE LANE

LONDON

MDT 97

NGR TQ 3131 8079

REGISTERED PLAN No. 95-5065A

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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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Summary.

In March 1997 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at The Library of the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple, Middle Temple Lane, London (NGR TQ 3131 8079), during the excavation of a small foundation prior to the insertion of a new external fire escape staircase. No cut features were seen, but a quantity of finds were retrieved from the subsoil, which is thought to represent demolition rubble resulting from bomb damage to the standing building during World War 2. Nothing further was seen.

1. Introduction.

Permission for development at the above site has been granted by the Corporation of London, with a condition attached that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the excavation works. The watching brief was necessitated by PPG 16, on the advice of English Heritage, as the site is of considerable historical, architectural and archaeological interest.

2. Background.

The site lies within the Temple complex founded by the Knights Templar during the 12th century; it therefore was possible that deposits relating to the temple itself, or to associated Medieval remains, would be encountered. Roman burials and deposits dating from the Saxon period have been uncovered in close proximity to the site. The OAU has carried out similar works at 35 Essex Street, WC2 and at Fountain Court, Middle Temple Lane, where deposits of Medieval and post-Medieval date were located.

3. Aims.

To record any archaeology exposed within the foundation excavation, and to recover datable artefactual material from the excavated deposits, the ultimate goal being the preservation by record of any archaeological remains the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance of the works, to previously established standards (OAU Fieldwork Manual, First Edition, 1992).

4. Methodology.

A constant presence was maintained on site during the two days of hand excavation for the foundation pit, the digging taking place under close archaeological supervision. Deposits were inspected in-situ and excavated material was also inspected for stray finds. Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations the deposits exposed in section and plan were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and black and white print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets.

5. Results.

Two deposits were exposed in plan and section within the foundation pit; they were seen in section only on the western side of the pit; the east and south sections being occupied by the foundations of the library itself, and the northern section being obscured by a subterranean brick-built conduit conveying services under the lawn west towards another building.

Subsoil (2) was a friable mid brown/gray silty clay loam with 30% mixed sand and gravel, and a very high percentage of modern brick and tile. All of the artefactual material was drawn from this deposit. (2) measured 0.50m to the base of the foundation pit (see fig. 2).

Topsoil (1) was a friable mid gray clay loam with 10% silt and pea gravel, no finds were seen in this material. (1) measured a constant 0.10m thick.

6. The Finds.

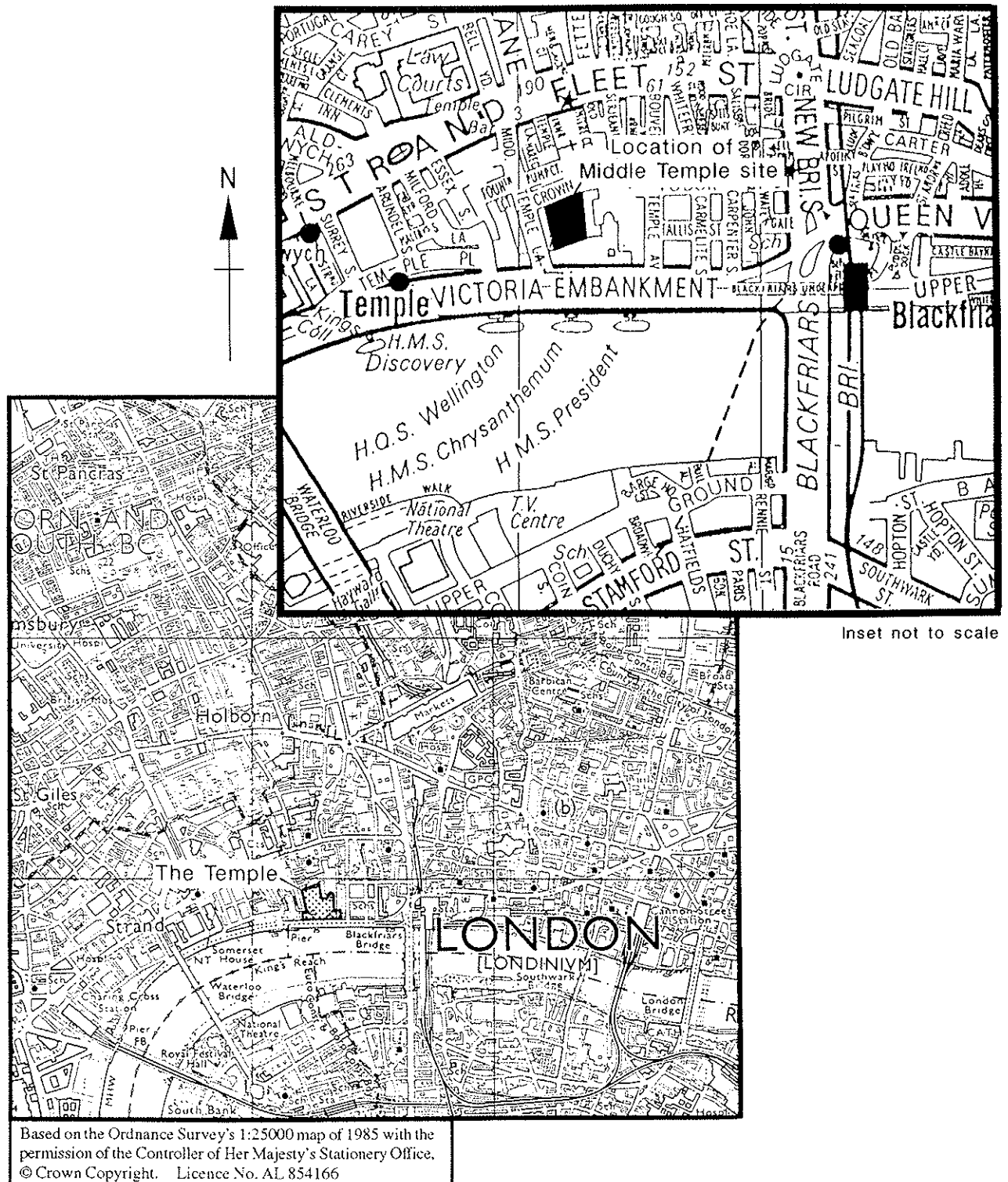
A total of 15 pieces of painted wall plaster were recovered from (2). Three of them are thought to be fragments of decorated external stucco of probable 18th-19th century date (J Munby pers comm) and it is probable that the remainder of the fragments are of a similar date and provenance. One of the larger pieces bears the letters "CLE", although it has apparently been almost vitrified and it is not possible to make out anything further.

The remainder of the finds consisted of miscellaneous pieces of glass, oyster shell, animal bone, an FE rod of undetermined function, one piece of clay pipe and three pieces of flint, all of which have been severely burnt. Fourteen separate pieces of building material were recovered, including one piece of glazed ceramic bearing the legend "Hellyer's Drain Interceptor London WC".

7. Discussion.

The foundation pit was of insufficient depth to impinge upon any medieval or other archaeological deposits which may exist beneath it. It is thought likely that those deposits seen relate to the destruction of the existing building during the second world war, and the subsequent reordering and reconstruction of the site. All of the material recovered would appear to originate from the pre-war building.

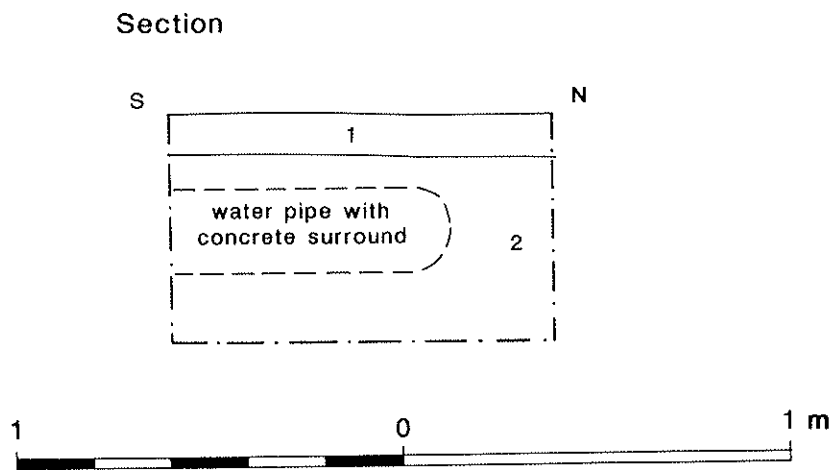
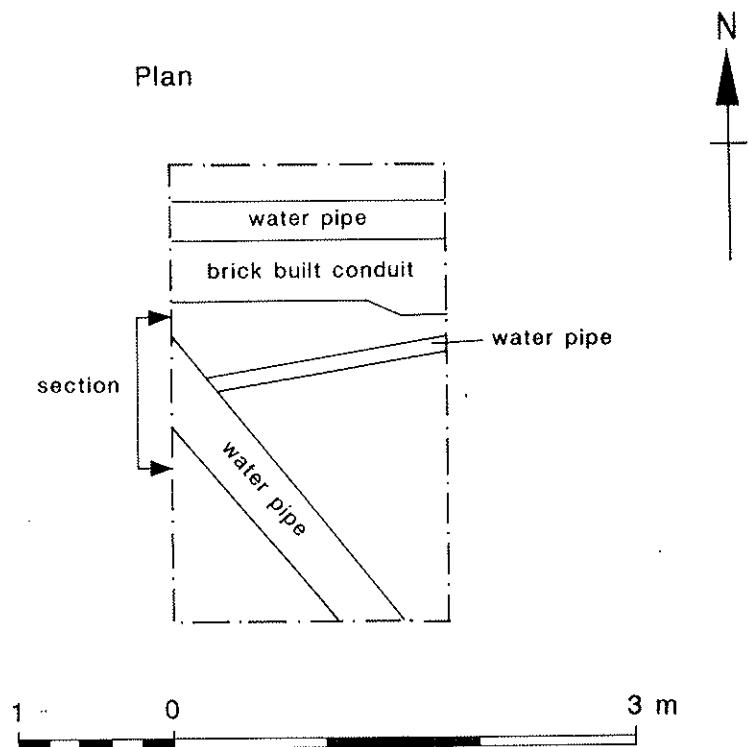
John Dalton
OAU
April 1997.



Inset not to scale

Location plan

figure 1



Plan and section

figure 2



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