

Classics Centre
65-67 St Giles
Oxford



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



Oxford Archaeology

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In December 2004, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Classics Centre, 65-67, St Giles, Oxford (SP 5116 0662). The Oxford University Estates Directorate commissioned the work in advance of a proposed planning application for a new construction with associated basements and demolition of existing buildings on the site. The watching brief revealed evidence for medieval or post-medieval tenements fronting onto St Giles. Several phases of yard surfaces were seen to the rear of the existing properties and a garden wall was also revealed. The base of a large but undated pit was seen beneath the existing basement area. No dating evidence was recovered from the monitoring exercise.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In December 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Classics Centre, 65-67, St Giles, Oxford (Fig. 1). The Oxford University Estates Directorate commissioned the work in respect of a proposed planning application for a new construction with basement and the demolition of existing buildings.
- 1.1.2 Architects van Heyningen and Haward of London have prepared plans for the new development.
- 1.1.3 A project brief was set by Brian Durham of Oxford City Council on behalf of the Local Planning Authority (OCC 2004), in accordance with PPG16. 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 area of proposed development is located along the north side of a small alleyway named Ashmolean Lane, which runs east to west to the adjacent Ashmolean Museum (centred on SP 5116 0662).
- 1.2.2 The site is currently occupied by late 19th century buildings used by the University Admissions Office and by the Modern Languages Faculty for storage, to the rear of Nos. 65-67 St Giles. St Giles once formed the main road into the medieval town of Oxford, the northern walls of which once lay c 200 m to the south.
- 1.2.3 The site is located on Quaternary River Gravels of the 2nd (Summertown-Radley) Terrace Deposits (British Geological Survey sheet 236). The terrace forms a north-south ridge of higher ground between the River Isis c 1 km to the west and the River Cherwell c 1.5 km to the east. The area of proposed development lies at c 64 m

Ordnance Datum (OD), with variations in ground levels owing to variations in building (stairs, basements etc).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The Oxford University Estates Directorate commissioned OA to carry out an archaeological desk-based assessment (OA 2004). The results of which have been combined with a desktop study commissioned for a proposed development at the Ashmolean Museum (OA 2003) and summarised below.
- 1.3.2 A considerable number of archaeological investigations have been carried out in the general study area in the past. The most relevant comprise a excavation, by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (now OA) in 1998-9, prior to construction of the Sackler Library, c 50 m to the south-west of the area of proposed development (Poore and Wilkinson 2001); and an archaeological excavation by Wessex Archaeology on the site of the Ashmolean Museum forecourt, c 50 m to the south of the area of proposed development, in 1994 (Andrews and Mephram 1998, 179).
- 1.3.3 Excavations carried out by Oxford Archaeological Unit (now named Oxford Archaeology) at the site of Oxford University's Sackler Library revealed evidence of two probable Bronze Age ring ditches (the ploughed-out remains of round barrows), one of which lay largely within the project area and enclosed an area 28 m in diameter. The development site was thought to lie at the eastern limit of the precinct of Beaumont Palace, a royal residence immediately outside the north wall of the medieval city of Oxford and in use c 1132-1318. Numerous medieval pits were found aligned in rows and were possibly dug as tree planters. The dating evidence suggested that they might have formed part of a formal garden associated with the palace. In the early 14th century, the palace site was granted to the Carmelite Friars.
- 1.3.4 The excavations found evidence for a substantial east-west aligned buttressed stone building, which may originally have been built as part of the palace, but which ultimately formed part of the Friary complex. Evidence for a second medieval building was revealed a short distance to the north-east. Excavation also revealed a number of stone-lined garden features relating to an early-19th century development of terraced housing on Beaumont Street and St John Street.
- 1.3.5 The Wessex Archaeology excavation of the Museum forecourt produced evidence of a continuous sequence of extra-mural occupation beginning in the late 12th century in the form of two successive buildings dating to the 13th century and possibly 14th century, along with a series of domestic backyard rubbish pits. Two large 14th-century bread ovens were recorded in the adjacent property to the north.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

General

- 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 and to make available the results of the investigation.

Specific Aims

- 2.1.2 To detect and characterise any islands of significant archaeological deposits surviving between existing basements relevant to project planning.
- 2.1.3 To detect any deposits or features indicative of a perimeter ditch to Beaumont Palace relevant to project planning.
- 2.1.4 To sample any rich artefactual or palaeo-environmental deposit encountered in hand dug geo-technical investigations.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The Watching Brief comprised the monitoring of six hand excavated test pits (Fig. 2) by a competent archaeologist. Any features exposed were archaeologically excavated and recorded.
- 2.2.2 All work on the project was undertaken in accordance with relevant professional standards, including MAP2 (EH 1991) and the IFA's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations 1992*, and specifically with Oxford City Council's requirements for fieldwork. Work on finds was undertaken in accordance with the *IFA's Guidelines for Finds Work 1992*, as well as the *OA Finds and Environmental Sampling Manuals*.
- 2.2.3 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 *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Test Pit 1 (Fig. 3)

- 3.1.1 Test Pit 1 was located within the basement of 67 St Giles. It was aligned N-S and measured 1 m by 1 m. Natural gravel (1) was revealed at 60.18 m OD, 0.4 m below

ground level (bgl) and was truncated by the brick footings (8) for the existing building.

Test Pit 2 (Fig. 4)

- 3.1.2 Test Pit 2 was located within the basement of 67 St Giles. It was aligned N-S and measured 1.5 m by 0.7 m. Natural gravel (1) was revealed at 59.88 m OD (0.7 m bgl). It was cut by a probable pit (2) that measured over 0.5 m in radius and over 0.2 m in depth. The pit was filled with a sandy silt (3), from which a cattle bone and undiagnostic roof tile fragments were recovered. The pit fill was overlain by a sandy silt levelling deposit (4) that was cut by the foundation trench (5) for the existing building's walls (6). The footing was overlain by a levelling deposit (7) and an internal brick wall.

Test Pit 3 (Fig. 5)

- 3.1.3 Test Pit 3 was located within the back yard of 65 St Giles and measured 1 m by 1 m. The trench was excavated to a depth of 62.99 m OD (0.8 m), but natural gravel was not seen. A sequence of silt and gravel layers (9-11) were revealed that may have formed levelling deposits or crude yard surfaces associated with a building on the street frontage. A mortar layer (12) overlay 11 and may have formed part of a yard surface. The foundations of the modern building and a stone step (14) cut into layer 13, a modern brick and concrete surface.

Test Pit 4

- 3.1.4 Test Pit 4 was located within the fire escape to the rear of 67 St Giles. The trench was aligned W-E and measured 1.2 m by 1 m. A concrete drain (31) and modern foundations were revealed at a depth of 63.42 m OD (1 m bgl) - these are not illustrated here.

Test Pit 5 (Fig. 6)

- 3.1.5 Test Pit 5 was located within the back yard of 65 St Giles. It was aligned W-E and measured 1.2 m by 0.9 m. A silty clay deposit (26) was revealed at 63.25 m OD (0.65 m bgl), overlain by a mortar surface (15). Levelling deposits (16 and 17) overlay 15 and were truncated by a foundation cut (18) for a brick and limestone garden wall (19). A possible gravel yard surface (25) was seen to the east of the wall, cut by a narrow gully (27), c 0.1 m deep. The gully was filled with a make-up deposit (20) that was overlain by a modern yard surface (21). The surface was cut by a service trench (23) filled with topsoil (22) and overlain by a soil bank (24).

Test Pit 6 (Fig. 7)

- 3.1.6 Test Pit 6 was located within a workshop to the rear of 65 St Giles. The trench measured 1 m x 1 m and was excavated to a depth of 62.88 m OD (0.8 m bgl). A brown sandy silt was revealed (28) that was truncated by the footings of the building (29) and overlain by the workshop floor (30).

3.2 Finds

Ceramic Building Material (CBM)

- 3.2.1 Three sherds of roof tile were recovered from context 3. There were no diagnostic features to them and the tiles are probably post-medieval in date, although a medieval date cannot be ruled out.

Animal Bone

- 3.2.2 A fragment of the left side of a cattle mandible was recovered from context 3.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No environmental samples were taken; the deposits encountered appeared to be environmentally sterile.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The results of the watching brief are difficult to interpret due to the lack of dating material and the small size of the test pits. The existing basements in the area of the proposed development had truncated the area along the St Giles Street frontage, although the base of a pit was revealed in Test Pit 2. The yard area behind the structures appeared to be relatively undisturbed.
- 4.1.2 No archaeological features were revealed in Test Pits 1 and 4, although, both areas of the site had been heavily disturbed by the existing buildings. The pit base seen in Test Pit 2 was undated but may have been medieval in origin. It was possibly the base of a rubbish or cess pit within the yard of a structure fronting St Giles' Street.
- 4.1.3 Test Pits 3 and 5 revealed evidence for yard surfaces that pre-dated the present structures. In Test Pit 5 a post-medieval garden wall was also revealed. A silt deposit was revealed in Test Pit 6; the deposit was undated and may have represented an upper pit fill or a levelling deposit.
- 4.1.4 Deposits that may have been related to tenements on St Giles were revealed within the test pits. Further excavation may allow the deposits to be associated with individual properties depicted on Loggan's map of 1675 (Fig. 8). No dating material was recovered although it is not unreasonable to suggest that the earlier yard surfaces could be medieval in origin.
- 4.1.5 No evidence was encountered for the continuation of the Beaumont Palace grounds.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Test Pit	Context No.	Type	Depth (m)	Finds	Comments
2	1	layer			natural
2	2	cut	>0.4		pit
2	3	fill	>0.4	bone/cbm	pit fill
2	4	layer	0.4		levelling
2	5	cut			foundation cut
2	6	masonry	0.2		wall
1	7	layer			levelling
3	8	masonry			wall
3	9	layer	0.1		make-up
3	10	layer	0.2		surface
3	11	layer	0.15		make-up
3	12	layer	0.1		surface
3	13	layer			surface
3	14	masonry			wall
5	15	layer	0.05		surface
5	16	layer	0.1		levelling
5	17	layer	0.15		levelling
5	18	cut	0.3		foundation cut
5	19	masonry	0.25		wall
5	20	layer	0.25		levelling
5	21	layer	0.1		surface
5	22	fill			service fill
5	23	cut			service cut
5	24	layer			top soil
5	25	layer	0.1		surface
5	26	layer			levelling
5	27	cut	0.08		gully
6	28	layer	>0.9		other
6	29	masonry			wall
6	30	layer			surface
4	31	group			test pit

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Andrews P and Mepham L (1997) 'Medieval and post-medieval extra-mural settlement on the site of the Ashmolean Museum forecourt, Beaumont Street, Oxford' in *Oxoniensia* **62**, 179-223.

English Heritage 1991, *Managing Archaeological Projects*

OA 1992; *Fieldwork Manual* (First edition, ed. D Wilkinson)

OA 2003 *Proposed Development at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford: Desktop Assessment*

OA 2004 *Extension to the Rear of the Ashmolean Museum and Basement Extension at the Classics Centre, St Giles, Oxford. Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OA 2004 *The Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies, Oxford: Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*

OCC 2004 *Classics Centre, St Giles. Brief for and archaeological watching brief*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: The Classics Centre 65-67 St Giles, Oxford

Site code: OXSGCC04

Grid reference: SP 5116 0662

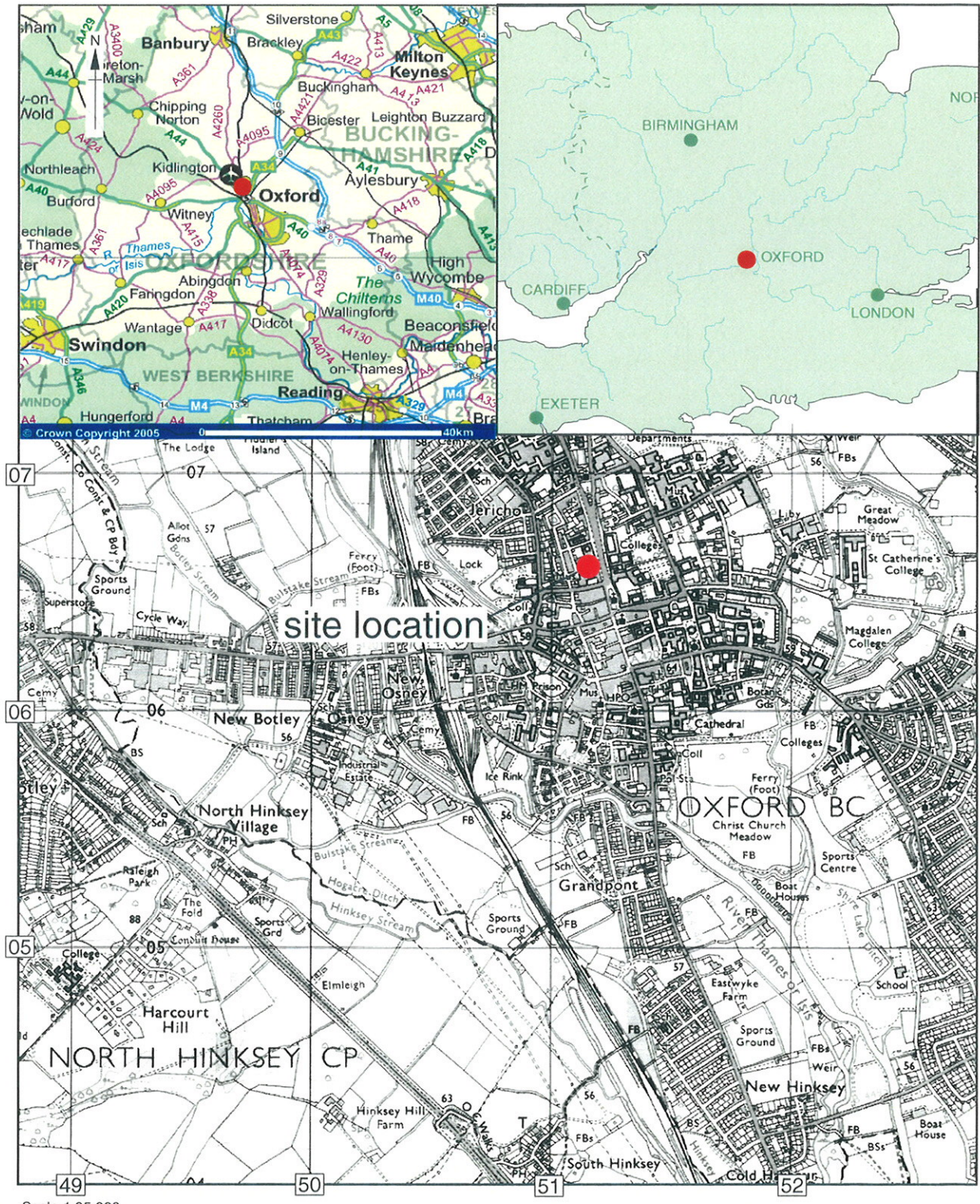
Type of watching brief: 6 hand dug geo-technical test pits

Date and duration of project: 14/12/04

Area of site: 0.08 ha.

Summary of results: Post-medieval garden wall and gully, several phases of yard surfacing and the base of a pit. No dating but probable medieval/post-medieval features.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Ashmolean Museum in due course.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

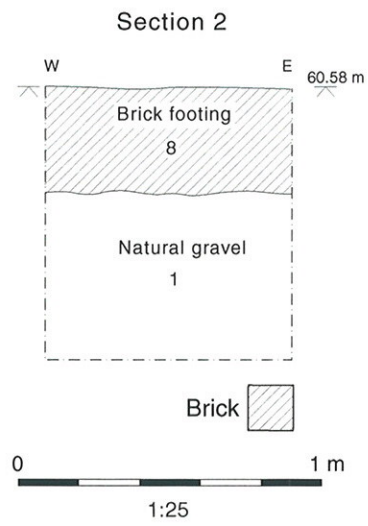
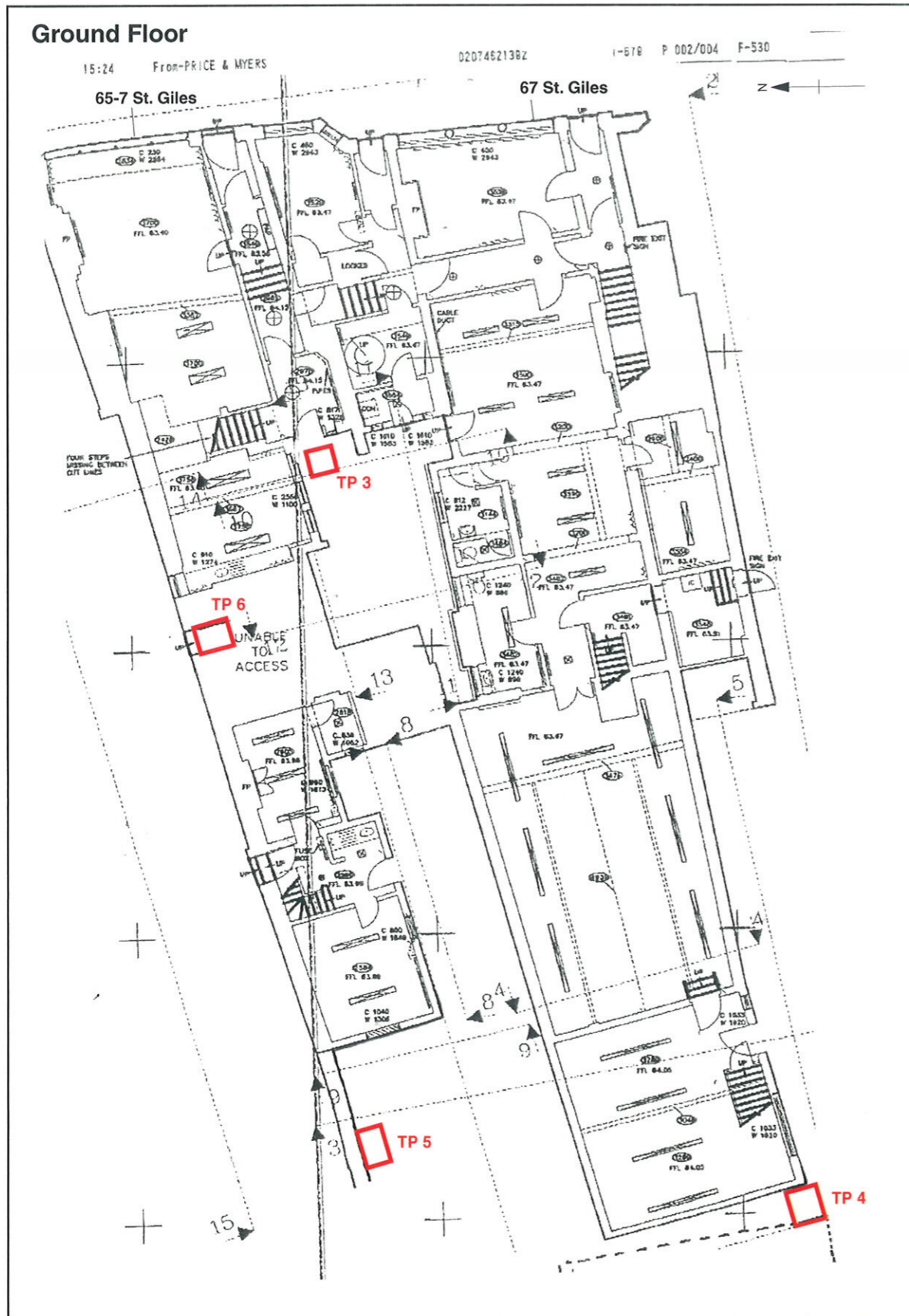


Figure 3: Test pit 1 section



Approximate scale 1:80

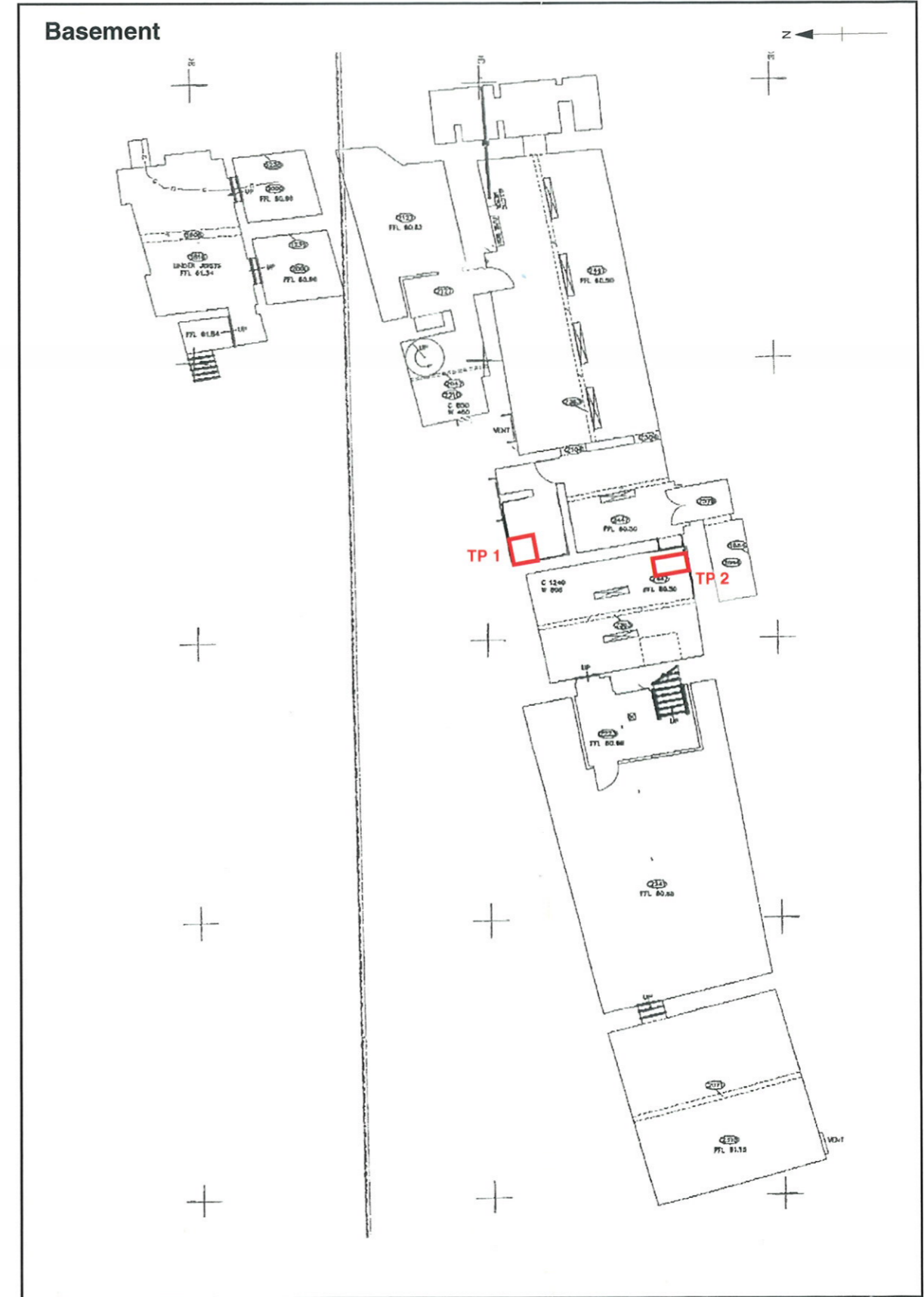


Figure 2: Test pit location plan

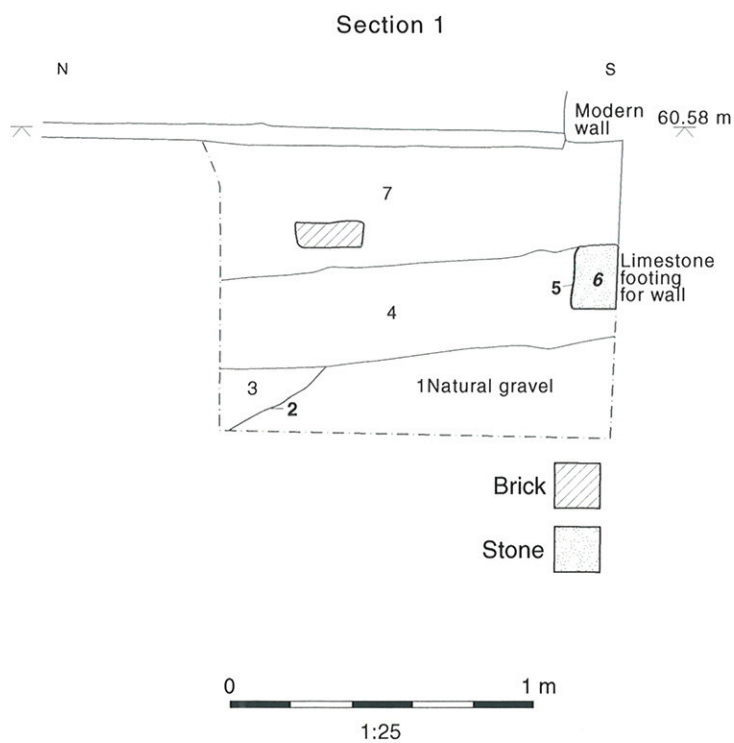
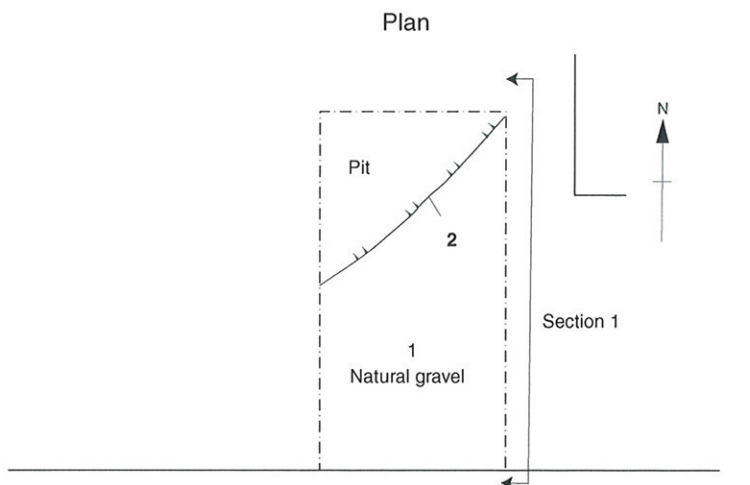


Figure 4: Test pit 2 plan and section

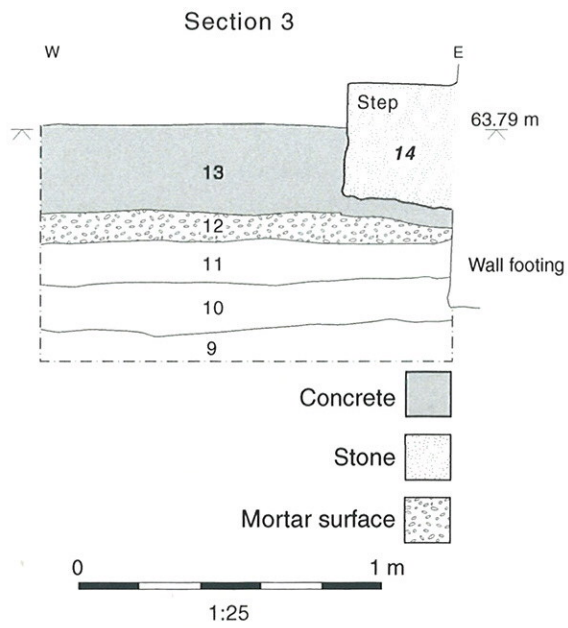
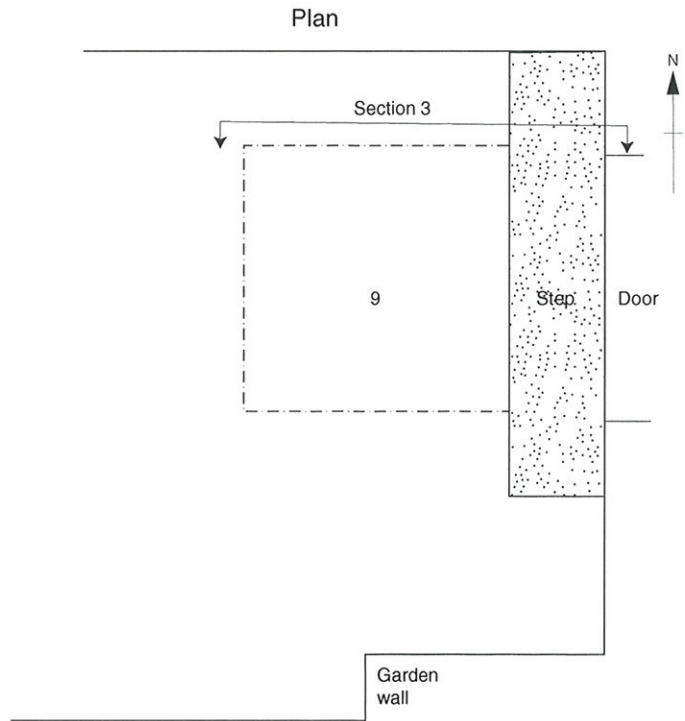


Figure 5: Test pit 3 plan and section

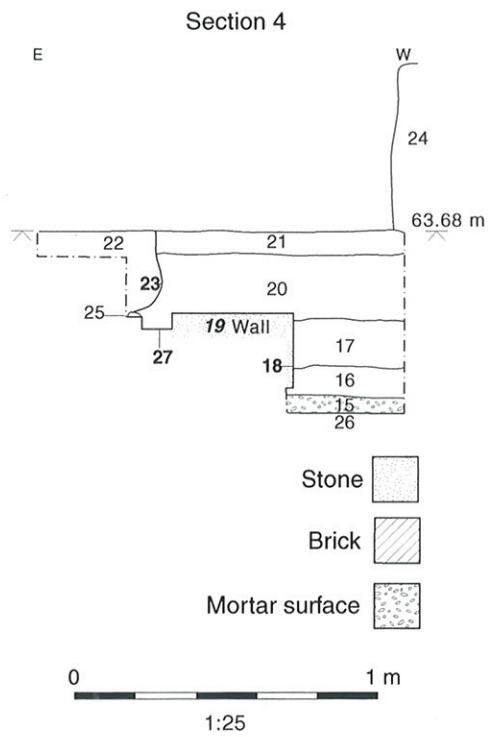
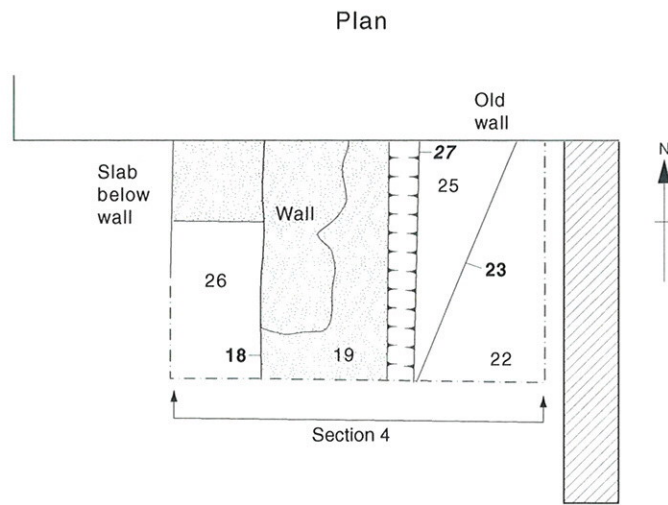
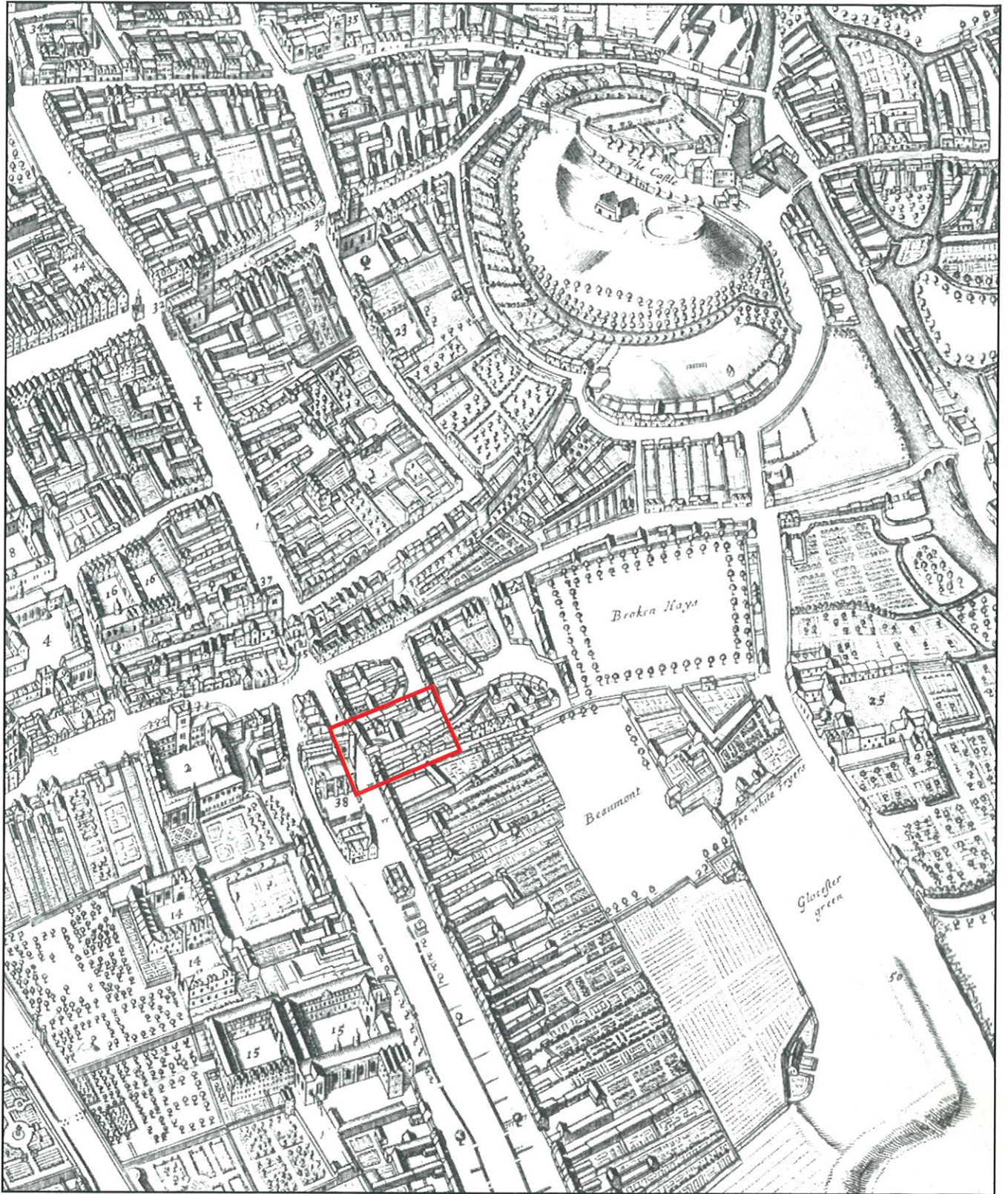


Figure 6: Test pit 5 plan and section



 Approximate site location

Figure 8: Logan's map of Oxford 1675

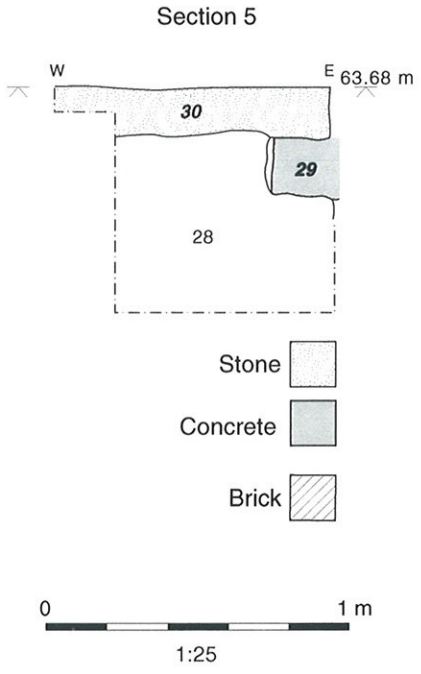
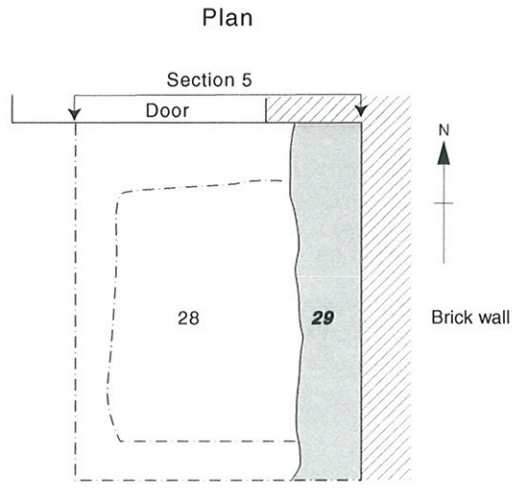


Figure 7: Test pit 6 plan and section



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