

# Kitchen Basement Exeter College Oxford



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



**Oxford Archaeology**

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Exeter College

**Kitchen Basement  
Exeter College  
Oxford**

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT***

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## SUMMARY

*In April 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Exeter College kitchen basement, Oxford (NGR SP 5145 0635). The work was commissioned by Montgomery Architects in respect of a general reduction of the basement floors and the excavation of two lift shafts. Eleventh to thirteenth century walls and subsequent phases of rebuilding were uncovered within one of the lift shafts, and the other revealed the top of a stone built well. The remains of a brick archway and disturbed floor levels were also found.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In April 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Exeter College Basement, Oxford, in respect of a general reduction of former basement floor level and the excavation of two lift shafts. The work was commissioned by Montgomery Architects on behalf of Exeter College.

1.1.2 Due to the potential impact on archaeological remains within this area, an archaeological condition to monitor the works under a watching brief was set by the City Archaeologist, Brian Durham. This is in line with PPG 16 and Local Planning Policy.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The development area is located within the basement of Exeter College, Turl Street, Oxford (NGR; SP 5145 0635)(Figs. 1 and 2).

1.2.2 For descriptive and recording purposes the site was described in terms of Areas 'A', 'B' and 'C'. Area A describes a small rectangular room within the west of the basement area and includes the smaller of two lift shafts. Area B describes a larger square room to the east of the basement area. Area C describes the larger of the two lift shafts, within the south eastern corner of area B (Fig. 2).

1.2.3 The college lies on level ground at approximately 64 m OD. The underlying geology is 1st Terrace river gravel.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to this watching brief had been the subject of a previous Watching Brief Report in the same area (OA 2002), and are reproduced below.

1.3.2 The gravel peninsula on which Oxford stands has been continuously occupied since prehistoric times, and both prehistoric and Roman remains have been found in central Oxford, though none of them close to the college.

- 1.3.3 The site of Exeter College lies inside what is believed to be the first fortification of the Saxon town, within the northern line of defences running approximately through the kitchen of the Rector's Lodging. A small part of the Saxon earthen rampart was observed during construction of the Margary Quadrangle in the 1960s. Saxon occupation has been identified below the kitchen yard at Lincoln College, 25 m to the south, where the major part of a townhouse was excavated.
- 1.3.4 The site of the college was occupied by a number of private houses and academic halls, as shown on Salter's *Map of Medieval Oxford*, and described in his *Survey of Oxford*. Although plot measurements for many of these are unknown, it is likely that the property on the site of the east side of the front quadrangle was Scot Hall or Castell Hall of St Frideswide's, which would have had buildings along the road and a garden or yard behind.
- 1.3.5 After the foundation of Exeter College the present site was gradually purchased. The first college buildings faced onto the intra-mural road, with Palmer's Tower representing the original front gate. The first Chapel was on or near the site of the present Library (north of Castell Hall), and the first Hall was somewhere near the present Chapel. The other early college buildings are not certainly identified and some accommodation may have continued in the buildings of former halls. Scot Hall may have continued to be a separate hall in college ownership but Castell Hall was an empty *placea* when acquired in 1358. The first college Library was built on the site in the fourteenth century, and can be seen both in Loggan's view of the college in 1675, and William Williams' plan of 1733.
- 1.3.6 The second college Hall was built along Brasenose Lane in 1618, with a short return (known as Peryam's Building) northwards as far as the old Library. There is no indication in the building or on old plans or views that Peryam's Building had a cellar. When the old Library was demolished in 1708 for the new range (known as the Armagh Building), this part was given a cellar and probably at that time a short connecting passage was made to Staircase 4. A small wine store was subsequently inserted into this area where the basement extension was monitored during a watching brief undertaken in 2001 by OA. No features were encountered at the time, however, the stratigraphy represented years of accumulated medieval and post-medieval waste and included several sherds of Brill/Boarstall ware dating to the 13th-15th centuries and late Saxon Abingdon Ware of the 13th-14th centuries.

## 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 The watching brief was maintained during the full period of ground works affecting archaeological deposits and included monitoring the excavation of the lift shaft pits, the general reduction of the basement floor level and other invasive groundworks.

2.2.2 Some excavation of archaeological features was undertaken to fulfil the basic objective of retrieval of archaeological data affected by the works.

2.2.3 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with the established OA *Field Manual* (OAU 1992). All contexts were allocated unique numbers. Colour transparency and black-and-white negative photographic record was maintained.

2.2.4 Site plans were drawn at scale of 1: 50 or 1: 20. Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 or 1:10.

2.2.5 The project was carried out by Bryan Matthews, OA supervisor, under the direction of Andrew Holmes, Head of Small Works and overall direction of Nick Shepherd, OA Head of Fieldwork.

2.2.6 The watching brief was monitored by Brian Durham, Oxford City Archaeologist.

## 2.3 Presentation of results

2.3.1 The archaeological deposits are described within areas A, B, and C, according to the stratigraphic sequence revealed, i.e. describing the earliest features or deposits first.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

#### ***Area A: Room to west of basement area, including shallow lift shaft (Fig. 2)***

3.1.1 The former basement floor level was reduced by up to 0.5 m. A lift shaft within the west of area A was reduced by a further 0.33 m to reveal the capping stones (129) of a former well (130).

3.1.2 Within the south eastern corner of the room a brick culvert (101), remnants of former floor levels (103, 104) and earlier stonework (105), were uncovered.

3.1.3 Stonework 105 lay just beneath the impact level of the on-going works, and was only partially uncovered. It appeared as a group of limestone flags laid horizontally with a patchy mortar bonding and occasional loose stone infilling between the larger flags. It was not possible to determine the overall shape or function of this stonework, however, the horizontally laid flags suggest this may have been part of a former floor surface.

- 3.1.4 Another area of horizontally laid stonework (104) overlay stonework 105 within the Southeast corner of the room. It consisted of small roughly squared limestone blocks, typically measuring 0.19 m x 0.15 m x 0.06 m, with a gritty sandy loam between the stonework. This stonework appeared to be the base for the remnants of a brick built arch (101).
- 3.1.5 As revealed, brickwork 101 consisted of two parallel courses of angled springer brickwork, 1 m apart and aligned east-west, in line with the entrance to this basement room. A north-south aligned horizontal course of stretcher brickwork lay 1.5 m west of the rooms entrance and marked the western extent of this structure. The bricks used in its construction were plain, machine made red bricks. Such bricks became common after the 1850s.
- 3.1.6 The brickwork was partially overlain by disturbed and uneven stonework, 103. A single horizontal slab abutted the brickwork within the south eastern corner of the room and overlying stonework 104. Another single large limestone slab was found at approximately the same level within the north eastern corner of the room and was presumed to be part of the same surface.
- 3.1.7 A lift shaft was excavated within the northwest of the room revealing two large capping stones (129) and a well (130). The well was constructed with closely fitted, shaped stonework. Individual pieces had curved internal and external faces and typically measured 0.4 m long by 0.28 m high by 0.12 m thick. No bonding was apparent. The well had an internal diameter of 0.96 m and was at least 3.4 m deep. There were no obvious signs of wear on its inner face. The top of the well was found at a depth of 1.13 m beneath the former floor level and partially underlay the western wall of the basement. Two very large flagstones (129) capped the well. The largest of these measured 1.2 m long by 0.68 m wide and was 0.1 m thick. The well was surrounded by a grey brown gravel silt (132), containing frequent mortar, coal and limestone fragments representing the backfilling of the construction cut.
- 3.1.8 The revealed disturbed stone flooring (103), brick arch work (130) and the well capping stones were overlain by homogenous dark brown gravel silts (131).

***Area B: Large room to east of basement area (Fig. 2)***

- 3.1.9 The general basement floor level was reduced by approximately 0.5 m, and a hollow wall between areas A and B was removed as part of the on-going works. A stone footing (139) and two stone pillar pads, (140 and 141) were revealed beneath the removed wall and two remaining upright masonry columns. The footings and pillar pads consisted of roughly laid medium sized roughly faced limestone blocks, bonded by soft pale yellow mortar. This stonework stood to a height of two courses and appeared to overlay more general spreads of gravelly loam (100, 129). No other features were identified during the general reduction of this area.

**Area C: Lift shaft in south eastern corner of basement (Fig. 2)**

- 3.1.10 Area C comprised a lift shaft excavated within the south-eastern corner of the basement area. The lift shaft measured 2.2 m square and was excavated to a depth of 1.65 m beneath the former floor level.
- 3.1.11 The earliest deposit revealed was a pale brownish orange sandy gravel (150), which was seen within the south western base of the excavated shaft pit.
- 3.1.12 The gravel was cut by the construction trench (148) containing the footings (146). These footings were 'T' shaped in plan with a main north-south alignment and a shorter wall 'stub' aligned east-west. Their overall visible dimensions were 2 m from north to south by 1.4 m from east to west. The western 'stub' of the footings was 0.57 m wide. The build of the footings consisted of a mixture of small, medium sized and large irregular limestone in a loose matrix of sandy silt loam. These continued beneath the impact level of the lift shaft, but were seen to a height of 0.24 m. No bonding was apparent.
- 3.1.13 A grey brown loamy sand and gravel (149), containing occasional decayed limestone and charcoal flecks, filled the construction cut around footings 146. This fill contained a single sherd of Medieval Oxford ware pottery, which dates from the late 11th Century.
- 3.1.14 A single very large piece of limestone (113), had been incorporated into the footings, forming the western end of the wall stub. This piece was a roughly hewn irregular block, measuring 0.64 m x 0.45 m x 0.38 m. The construction cut 146 also respected this stone, indicating that the wall did not originally continue further to the west. The purpose of the wall stub is unknown, but it is thought that it may originally have been part of a buttress for a main north-south wall.
- 3.1.15 A wall (109), consisting of medium to large sized unworked limestone blocks, measuring up to 0.28m x 0.44 m x 0.63 m, of which several courses survive, was observed, was constructed along the north-south arm of the footings. A single sherd of Brill/Boarstall ware was recovered from this context.
- 3.1.16 A layer of grey brown loamy gravel (147) abutted the southern side of this wall and overlain by a layer of orange brown loamy clay and gravel (126) and a substantial north-south aligned wall (109). A large horse bone was recovered from layer 147 and layer 126 contained a mixture of bone including fragments of horse, pig, and sheep or goat bone. Layer 126 also contained a mixture of Oxford ware and Brill/Boarstall ware, dating from the 13th century.
- 3.1.17 Within the western wall stub a very large piece of unworked limestone (145) overlay limestone 113. This piece measured up to 0.8 m long by 0.5 m wide by 0.26 m thick, and sloped down towards the southwest. It was found at the same level as north-south wall 109, but didn't appear to be part of the same build. Its position and a lack of



bonding to the surrounding stonework suggests that it may have been dislodged in antiquity, possibly as part of the east-west buttress to north-south wall 109.

- 3.1.18 North-south Wall 109 was overlain by a 0.1 m thick band of dark reddish brown loamy silt (142). This layer appeared as a band of soil between wall 109 and a course of limestone (108) above. It contained animal bone and four sherds of 13th century pottery.
- 3.1.19 Stonework 108 consisted of a single course of limestone, laid flat over the top of wall 109 and soil layer 142. A single large horizontal slab of stone (110) was incorporated into 108 at the junction between the north-south wall and the east-west wall stub and partially overlay limestone 145. This piece measured 0.43 m x 0.39 m x 0.25 m.
- 3.1.20 Stonework 108 and stone 110 were in turn overlain by a 0.06 m thick layer of dark reddish brown loamy silt (114). This deposit contained frequent mortar and charcoal flecking.
- 3.1.21 Within the eastern edge of the lift shaft pit, soil layer 114 was overlain by a low stone wall (107). This consisted of up to two courses of roughly worked medium sized limestone placed on a north-south alignment, measuring 0.2 m wide by 0.2 m high. This wall was on the line of the present upstanding north-south wall of the basement. The stonework was bedded in a grey-brown loamy silt with occasional decayed limestone, but was otherwise unbonded.
- 3.1.22 An area of loose stone in a gritty reddish brown silty loam lay between wall 107 and a modern doorway set into the south eastern corner of the basement. This deposit was quite loose and powdery and appears to be an infilling behind the wall.
- 3.1.23 The existing southern wall (136) of the basement area post-dates of these phases of construction, and this was clearly seen in section (Fig.4). However the construction cut for the wall (138) was only seen at a relatively low level, appearing as a shallow east-west aligned trench cutting gravelly loamy clay 126 and loamy gravel 147, within the south of the lift shaft area.
- 3.1.24 The construction trench contained a dark brownish grey gravelly silty clay backfill (137), with an overlying limestone and mortar infill (143, 144) adjacent to the eastern end of wall 136.
- 3.1.25 Above limestone and mortar fills 143 and 144, a rough limestone wall (127), measuring 0.4 m wide by 0.33 m deep by 0.37 m high, was keyed into the southern wall (136) using a grey yellow lime mortar. This wall may be part of the same build as north-south wall (107) which ran along the eastern edge of the lift shaft.
- 3.1.26 Within the western side of the lift shaft, two large pits (118 and 134) cut several redeposited soils. These deposits were dark grey silty clay (120), a relatively clean pale brown gravel, (119), and orange brown silty clay (122).

- 3.1.27 The earliest of the pits (118) cut within the northwest of the lift shaft and measured 2.1 m east-west by 0.5 m north-south. It was not fully bottomed during the excavations but was at least 1 m deep. It was filled by dark brown clay silt (117), brown gravelly silt (116), brown clayey gravel (115), and a grey brown silty clay (128). These fills seemed to abut the various phases of walling (108, 109, 146) within the eastern side of area C. A group of large, well-preserved pottery sherds, dating to the 11th-13th centuries were recovered from these fills but were almost certainly residual.
- 3.1.28 Within the southwest of the lift shaft area, another pit (134), appeared to cut pit 118. A short length of roughly built wall (112) appeared to be built into the upper fills of the later pit.
- 3.1.29 Pit 134 cut within the southwest of the lift shaft area. It post-dated the construction of the main southern basement wall (136), and its fills abutted the wall. Pit 134 measured 1.5 m in diameter and was over 0.8 m deep. It was filled by a pale yellow sandy gravel (135), a grey silty clay (123) and grey sandy silt (125). Fill 135 contained a single sherd of 13th century Brill/Boarstall ware that was probably a residual find.
- 3.1.30 Wall 112 appeared to be built into the top of fill 125, although its construction cut was difficult to define. The wall was aligned WNW-ESE and was relatively poorly built. It consisted of up to two irregular courses of roughly hewn limestone blocks which sat on a shallow bedding of pale yellow mortar. The largest stone within this construction measured 0.22 m x 0.24 m x 0.15 m. The wall extended 0.66 m from the western balk and measured 0.26 m wide by 0.12 m high.
- 3.1.31 Wall 112 and pit fill 125 were overlain by a 0.18 m thick deposit of dark grey brown gravelly loam (124). This deposit, and the upper pit fills were removed by workmen as part of the general reduction of the basement area..

## 3.2 Finds

### *The Pottery*

By Paul Blinkhorn (Freelance Pottery Specialist)

- 3.2.1 The pottery assemblage comprised 35 sherds with a total weight of 1,442 g. It was all medieval in date, with all but one context-specific group dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was most notable for a group of large, well-preserved sherds from contexts 115, 116 and 117. These were mainly in fabric OXAC, and included several partly reconstructable jars and the full profile of a bowl.
- 3.2.2 The pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD975-1350. 21 sherds, 1,191 g.  
 OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 4 sherds, 17 g.  
 OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 10 sherds, 234 g.

- 3.2.3 The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The pottery types are all well-known in the region, and are common finds on sites in the city of Oxford, although the level of preservation is greater than the norm.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Context	OXAC		OXY		OXAM		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
109					1	12	13thC
115	3	125			3	131	13thC
116	5	315					11thC
117	11	723			2	19	13thC
126			3	11	1	3	13thC
135					1	1	13thC
142	2	28			2	68	13thC
149			1	6			L11thC?
Total	21	1191	4	17	10	234	

### The Bone

By Emma Evans (Animal Bone Specialist, OA)

- 3.2.4 A total of 22 bone fragments were recovered from this site, all of which have survived in good condition. A total of eight bones were identified to species, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Total number of fragments identified to species

Context	Sheep/goat	Cattle	Horse	Pig	Crow	Bird	Unidentified	Total
117	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	3
126	1	-	1	1	-	-	5	8
142	1	1	1	-	-	-	4	7
147	-	-	1	-	-	-	3	4
Total	2	1	3	1	1	1	13	22

- 3.2.5 Butchery marks were only observed on a single sheep/goat pelvis which had been chopped, probably during the initial dismemberment of the carcass. The

measurement of a complete horse radius has given a withers height of approximately 14 hands, (Kieserwalter, in Boessneck and von den Driesch 1974, 334). The single fragment of pig skull appears to be from a juvenile animal. Unfortunately very little further information can be gained from analysing these bones, except to say that is likely that the crow bone comes from a wild bird that has died naturally and become incorporated into the assemblage.

### 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 Wall footings 146 appear to be date no earlier than the 11th century, and wall 113/145/109 was built between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. The main run of this wall runs north-south with a short wall stub to the west. The purpose of the wall stub is unknown, but its substantial build would indicate that it formed a buttress for the main north-south wall. A thin layer of demolition soil containing 13th century pottery (142), and a course of limestone (108/ 110) overlay the earlier build. Limestone 108 appeared to be a capping or dressing on top of the earlier wall and may indicate a remodelling after this date, after the removal of the upper courses of the wall.

4.1.2 The present southern basement wall (136) post dates these phases of wall/footings (108, 109, 113, 145), but may be roughly contemporary with a later shallow north-south wall (107) and a small stub of walling (127), and these relate to the construction of the basement in its present form.

4.1.3 Two pits (118, 134) were seen within the west of area C. The earliest of these pits (134) contained 23 sherds of 11th-13th century pottery and must be later than wall 113, 145 and 146, as no differentiation between the fills and the soil around the stonework was seen, i.e. no construction cut was seen within the pit fills.

4.1.4 Pit 118 postdated the southern basement wall (136). The function of a poorly built ESE-WNW wall (112) built into its upper fill is unknown, and it does not appear to relate to any of the other structural remains.

4.1.5 The remnants of former stone floors were found within area A, and appear to have been disturbed by the insertion of a brick built archway (101). This brickwork appears to be fairly late and is probably a Victorian construction. It's function is uncertain, and it may be the remnants of a brick culvert or possibly a span over access to a lower level.

4.1.6 A well located within the western lift shaft was undated, but the lack of wear on its inner surfaces suggest it is was also fairly late, although the western basement wall overlay its western side.

## APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF CONTEXTS

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Comments/finds	Date
100	Layer	Clearance	0.4				
101	Structure	Brick wall		1.2	1.6+		
102	Structure	Mortar bonding of 101					
103	Structure	Remains of stone surface		Unknown	Unknown		
104	Structure	Stone floor		Unknown	Unknown		
105	Structure	Stone wall?		Unknown	Unknown		
106	Structure	Rubble in-fill		0.6	1.12		
107	Structure	N - S wall		0.2	1.5		
108	Structure	N - S wall	0.09	0.36			
109	Structure	Wall footings		0.45	1.3	Pottery	13th C
110	Structure	Part of wall structure	0.25	0.39	0.43		
111	Fill	Stoney in-filling over 126		0.7	0.8		
112	Structure	E-W wall		0.26	0.66+		
113	Structure	E-W wall	0.38	0.45	0.64		
114	Layer	Reddish brown loamy silt	0.06				
115	Fill	Fill of pit 118	0.12		1.54+	Pottery	13th C
116	Fill	Fill of pit 118	0.26			Pottery	11th C
117	Fill	Fill of pit 118	0.18			Pottery and bone	13th C
118	Cut	Pit	1.0+	0.5+	2.1+		
119	Layer	Pale brown gravel	0.4+				
120	Layer	Redeposited clay within 119	0.14				
121		Not used					
122	Layer	Orange brown silty clay	0.34				
123	Fill	Grey silty clay fill of 134	0.18				
124	Layer	Fill of pit 134	0.18				
125	Fill	Fill of pit 134	0.36				
126	Layer	Orange brown loamy clay	0.18			Pottery and bone	13th C
127	Structure	Wall stub	0.37	0.33	0.4+		
128	Fill	Fill of pit 128	0.32				
129	Structure	Well capping stones					
130	Structure	Well	3.4+	1.16	1.16		
131	Layer	General soil deposit	0.38+				
132	Layer	Grey brown stoney gravelly silt	Unknown				
133	Cut	Construction cut for wall 112	0.18	0.5			
134	Cut	Pit	0.8+	1.5+	1.5+		
135	Fill	Redeposited fill within 134	0.3			Pottery	13th C
136	Structure	Main southern basement wall					
137	Fill	Fill of pit 138	0.23				
138	Cut	Construction cut of wall 136		0.24+	0.8		
139	Structure	N-S wall	0.25(+)	0.26	2.1		
140	Structure	Column pad	0.12	1.02	1.34		
141	Structure	Column pad	0.17	0.63	1.03		
142	Layer	Reddish brown loamy silt	0.1			Pottery and bone	13th C
143	Fill	Construction debris/ infilling?	0.22				
144	Fill	Fragmentary Limestone	0.26				
145	Structure	V. large limestone block	26	0.5	0.8		
146	Structure	Wall footings	0.24+	0.56(+)	2.0+		
147	Layer	loamy gravel	0.1			Bone	
148	Cut	Construction cut for 146	0.34+	0.56+	2.1+		
149	Fill	Sandy gravel fill of 148	Unknown			Pottery	L 11th C?
150	Layer	Natural gravel?	Unknown				

**APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

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**APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

- Site name:** Exeter College Kitchen Basement, Exeter College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
- Site code:** OXECKB 05
- Grid reference:** SP 5150 0630
- Type of watching brief:** Monitoring of reduction of basement levels and excavation of new lift shafts.
- Date and duration of project:** Visits between 28th March and 11th April 2005
- Area of site:** 62 sq. m.
- Summary of results:** The watching brief revealed:
1. 11th - 13th century walls.
  2. Later medieval walls, including the footing for the current standing structure.
  3. Later pits
  4. A Victorian brick built arch and culvert and other poorly dated stone surfaces.
- 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: OXECKB 2005

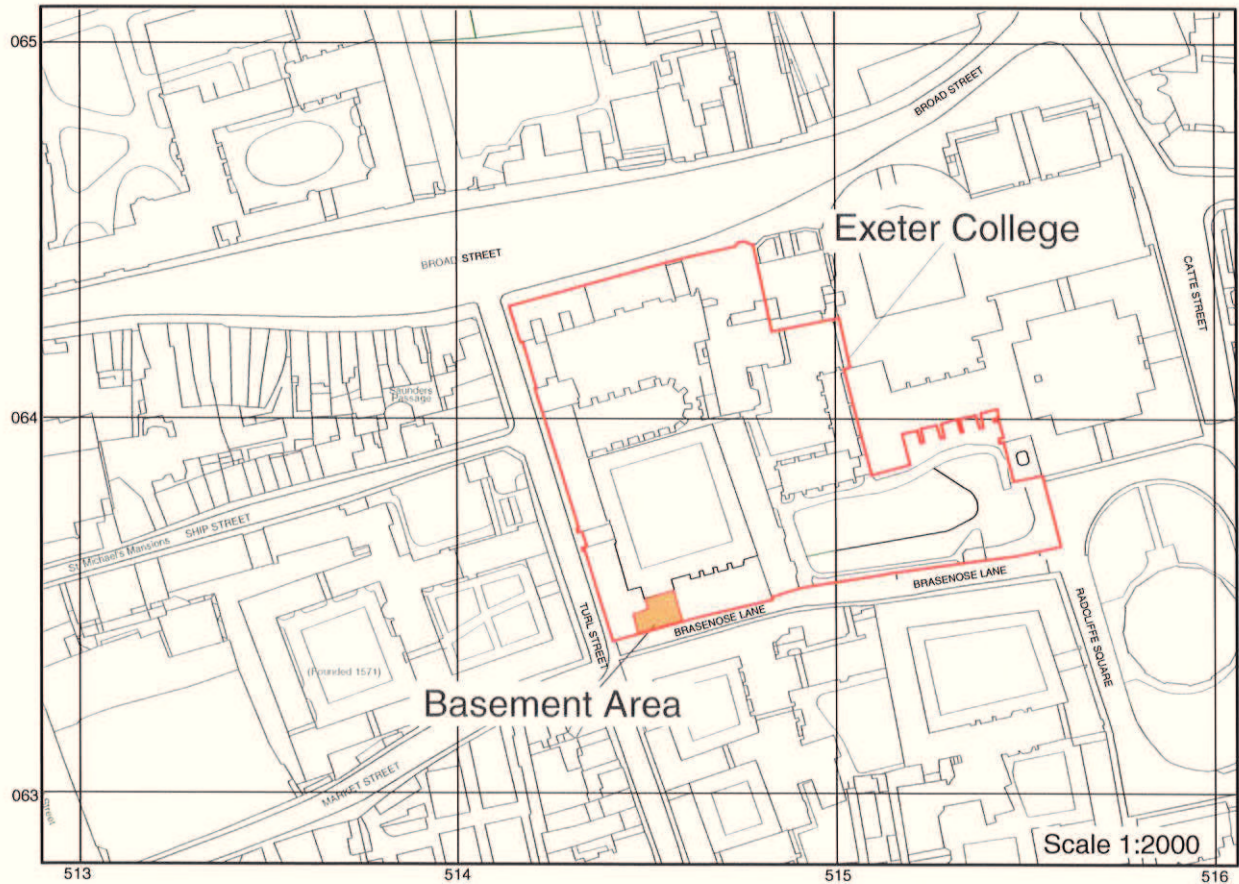


Figure 1: Site Location

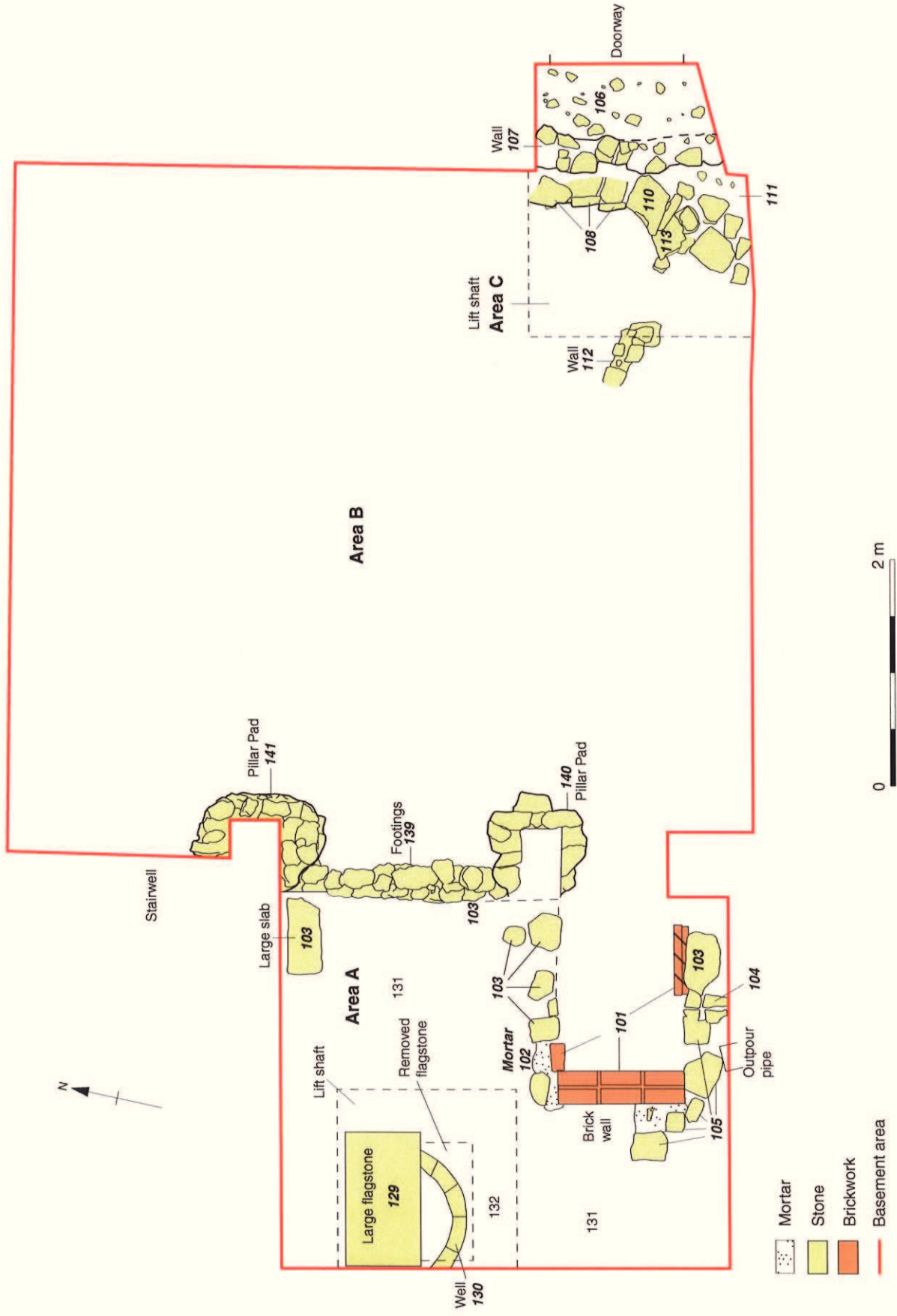


Figure 2: Plan of Basement



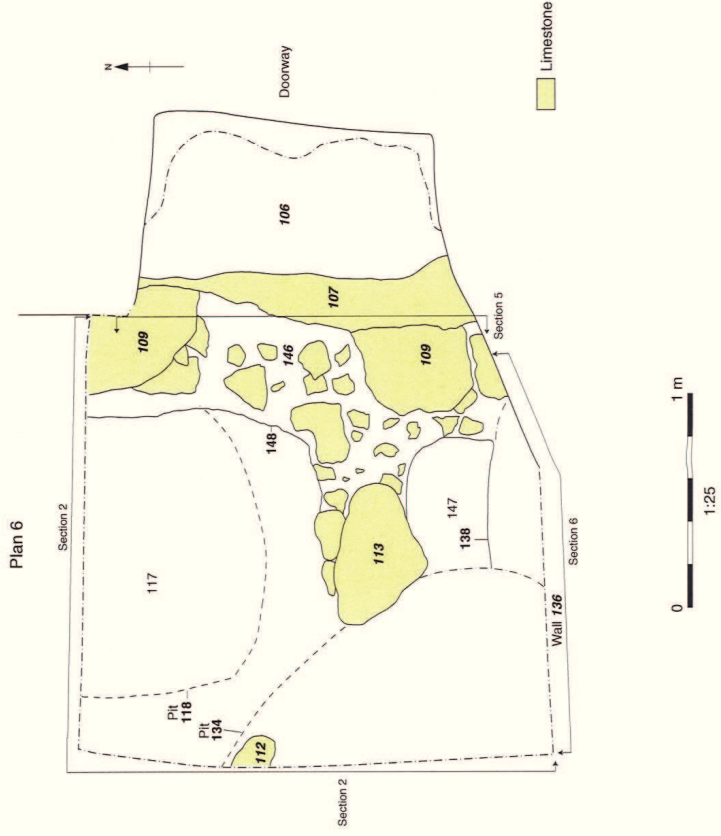
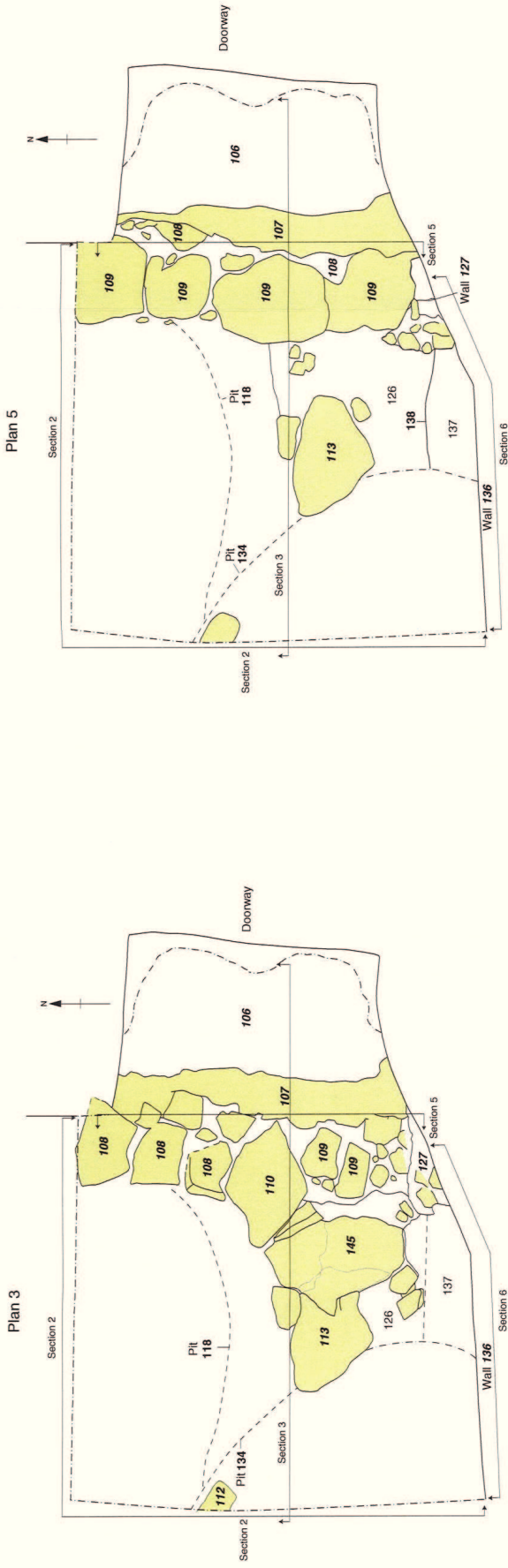
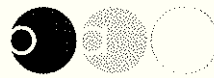


Figure 3: Lift Shaft Plans: Area C



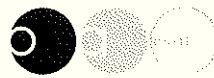
Figure 4: Lift-Shaft Sections: Area C



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