

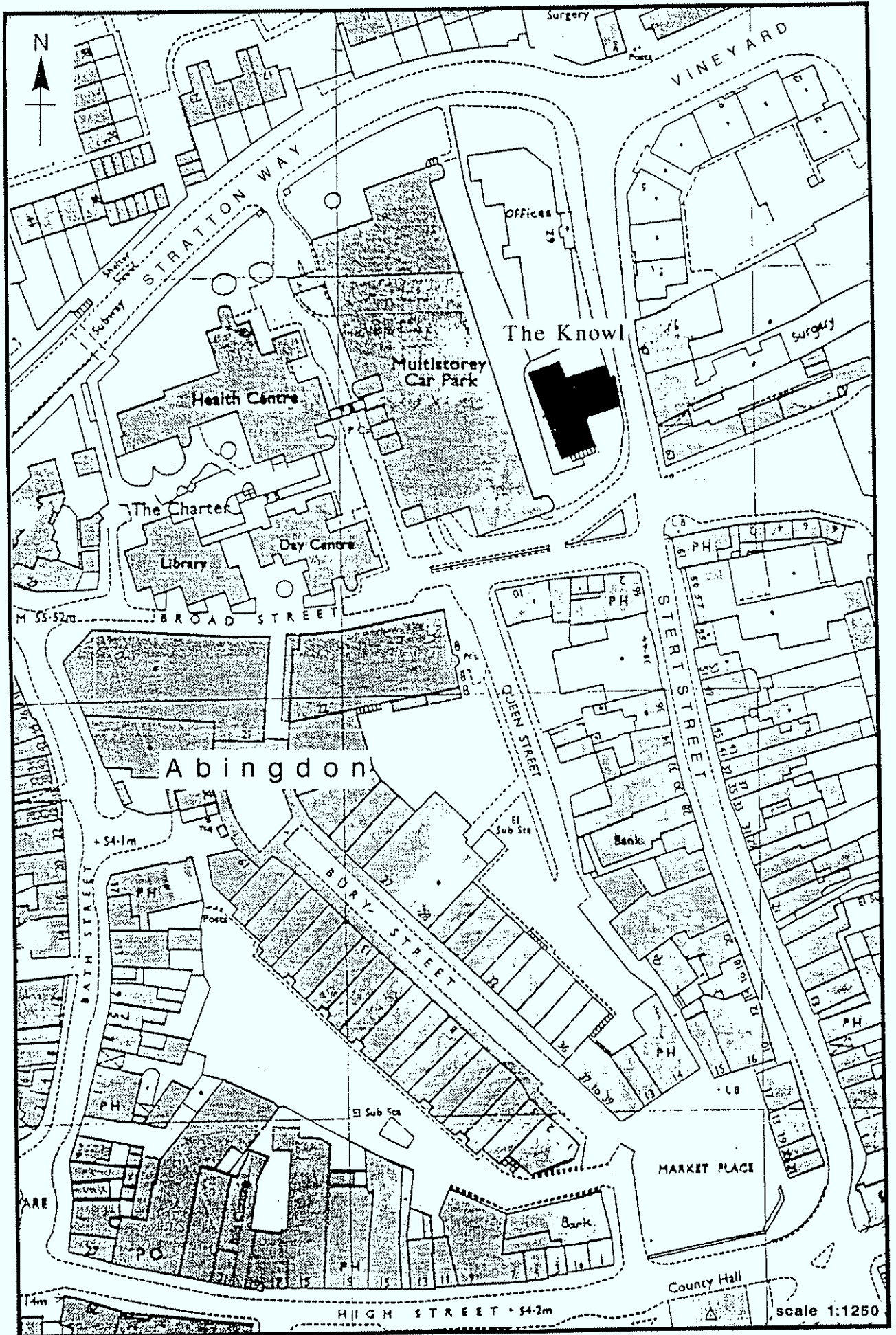
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THE KNOWL,  
STERT STREET,  
ABINGDON

WATCHING BRIEF

September 1993

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT



# THE KNOWL, STERT STREET, ABINGDON WATCHING BRIEF

## INTRODUCTION

In August and September 1993 a Watching Brief was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) on behalf of 2-Care in respect of an extension and renovation works for a residential home at The Knowl, Stert Street, Abingdon. There were three elements to the archaeological deposits; homogenous layers similar to river silts which were seen in both the N and S of the site, a sequence of ?medieval floors including an internal hearth in the N of the site and 19th century activity. The site is at grid reference SU 49679724.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Excavations carried out by M Parrington and C Balkwill of the OAU in 1973 to the W of the site revealed Roman ditches, a medieval building and pits with post medieval pits (Parrington and Balkwill 1975).

Excavations carried out by T G Allen of the OAU in 1987-93 to the E of the site in the precincts of the saxon Abingdon Abbey revealed Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman settlement with an element of Saxon occupation. The Late Iron Age occupation in this area is bounded by three very large (possibly defensive) ditches which may indicate that Abingdon is the site of a late Iron Age Oppidum. These ditches are aligned towards the Knowl.

The River Stert now runs underneath Stert Street as it was put into a culvert in the 12th century. It may have been diverted (either E or W or both) into one of the large late Iron Age ditches which may have still been in existence as earthworks and may have run in a semi-circle to the Thames. Medieval streets and property alignments to the W of the site may show the line of these ditches. Both Stert Street and Broad Street which the site now adjoins are known to have been built up by the 12th century.

## Topography

The site is approximately 0.54 Hectares at a height of 53 m O.D. The natural subsoil across the site is second terrace gravel overlying Kimmeridge Clay.

## Strategy

Three site visits were made to observe and record the archaeological deposits. The first was an introductory visit which coincided with the trial holes excavated to determine the nature of the underpinning or foundation work required. The second visit recorded the excavated foundation trenches and the final visit was to observe the excavated manhole trench and foundation and underpinning work.

The archaeological features encountered were hand cleaned to determine their nature and to recover dating evidence. The sections of the trenches drawn at a scale of 1:20 where relevant.



## **RESULTS**

### **Archaeology**

There were three elements to the archaeological deposits; homogenous layers similar to river silts which were seen in both the N and S of the site, a sequence of ?medieval floors including an internal hearth in the N of the site and 19th-century activity.

There was an extensive deposit of dark grey/black silt seen in trenches at the N and S of the extension works. This was seen in part of the foundation trench at the N of the building and in trenches to the SW of the extension fronting on to Broad Street. The underlying gravel was not seen underneath these deposits. In the N these deposits yielded 12th- to 13th-century medieval pottery.

In the N, at the point where a recent kitchen had been added to the Knowl and there was a re-entrant in the wall (visible on the building outline on the first edition O.S map and Fig. 1), there was a sequence of ?medieval floors up to 0.4 m thick (Fig. 2). The dark silt had been covered by a silt and stone rubble layer, up to 0.3 m thick, on which was a red-brown sandy silt dump to level up the ground for the floors. The floors were principally red brown mortary silts apart from the black ashy hearth layer underlying the make-up for the present floor surfaces. The older wall (ie the E side) of the Knowl cut these floor layers on one side. Immediately to the N of this wall there were the floor layers were cut by the wall. This wall foundation was built in one side of a trench and cut into the floor layers.

These deposits in the N had been truncated by later activity. There were walls which incorporated brick which formed a cellar which cut the river silts and demolition layers and pits full of demolition debris.

To the S there were 19th century pits which cut down to the gravel which was at a depth of 1.5 m from the present surface at the SE corner of the extension works. On the SW the river silts were 0.95 and 1.1 m deep from the present surface and the gravel was not observed. The river silts were homogenous and did not contain any finds.

### **Finds**

In total 5 sherds of pottery and 2 of tile were recovered. The preservation of the pottery was generally good. Five sherds of medieval pottery weighing 73 g were recovered from two contexts. From context 7 (the river silts at the N of the site) came four sherds; two sherds which may be from a 12th- to 13th-century shouldered pitcher of fabric OXY, which generally ranges from 12th- to 14th-century in date, one knife trimmed smoothed sherd of fabric OXAE of a similar date range to fabric OXY and one base sherd of fabric OXBF dating between the 11th- and 12th-century. One sherd of medieval fabric OXBF came from context 30 (the modern pits at the S of the site) which also yielded modern brick fragments.

## **COMMENTS ON THE RESULTS**

### **Reliability of field investigation**

The sample size was limited due to the limited nature of the extension work. The additions to the buildings were only to be keyed in to the standing structures or existing foundations. These limiting factors make absolute interpretations difficult.

### **Overall Interpretation**

Although the river silts were only seen in small areas they are similar to river deposits seen elsewhere. Large post medieval pits with dark silty fills were seen to the E (Allen pers. com.) the extent of the silts at the Knowl in the S is over 6 m across. This would be considerably larger than would be expected for a pit. The river silts are in an unexpected location; either the river ran NE-SW or was a wider braided course before it was put into a culvert. The lack of post-medieval deposits cut into the river silts at the SW of the site suggests that road side activity never extended to this area.

The floor layers in the N were undated but as they were on a levelling up layer and contained an internal hearth they resemble medieval floor sequences seen elsewhere. They were directly overlain by the activity associated with The Knowl but appeared to extend beyond the confines of the later walls which suggests that the property/building alignments have changed significantly.

The later walls, cellars and demolition debris in the N are from buildings shown on the 1875 O.S map. It is interesting to note that there appears to be a building over the silts to the W of, and abutting, the Knowl which may account for the lack of later intrusive features in the SW. The 1848 Christ's Hospital map only shows property boundaries but the area to the W of the Knowl is one property and may be a nursery garden (Parrington and Balkwill, 1974 passim)

Mark Roberts MIFA  
September 1993

### **Bibliography**

Parrington M and Balkwill C, Excavations at Broad Street Oxoniensia xl 5-58  
1975  
1875 Ordnance Survey map 6 inches to the mile  
1848 Christ's Hospital map large scale  
T G Allen many pers coms

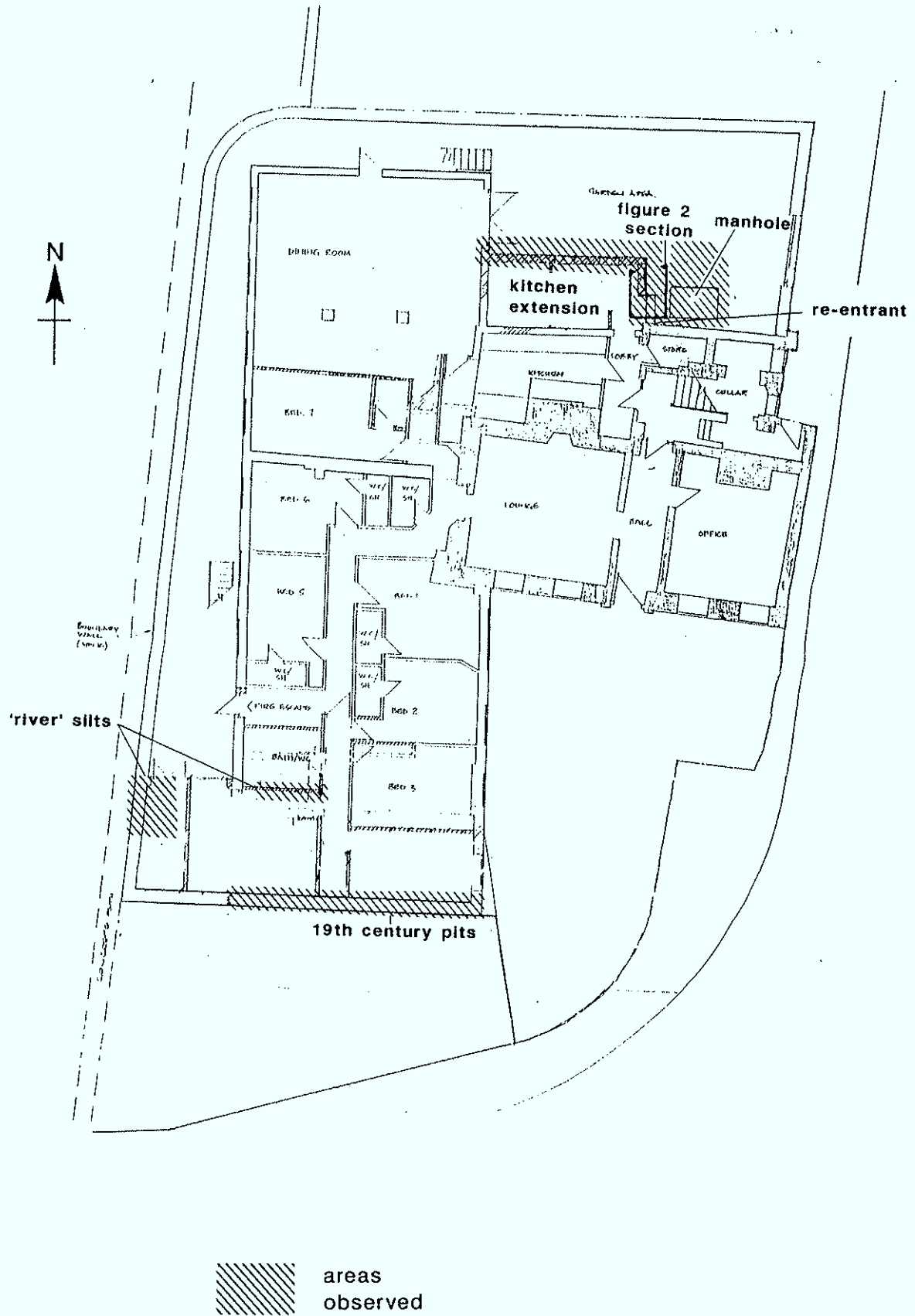


figure 1

Abingdon, The Knowl  
 Section showing possible medieval floors

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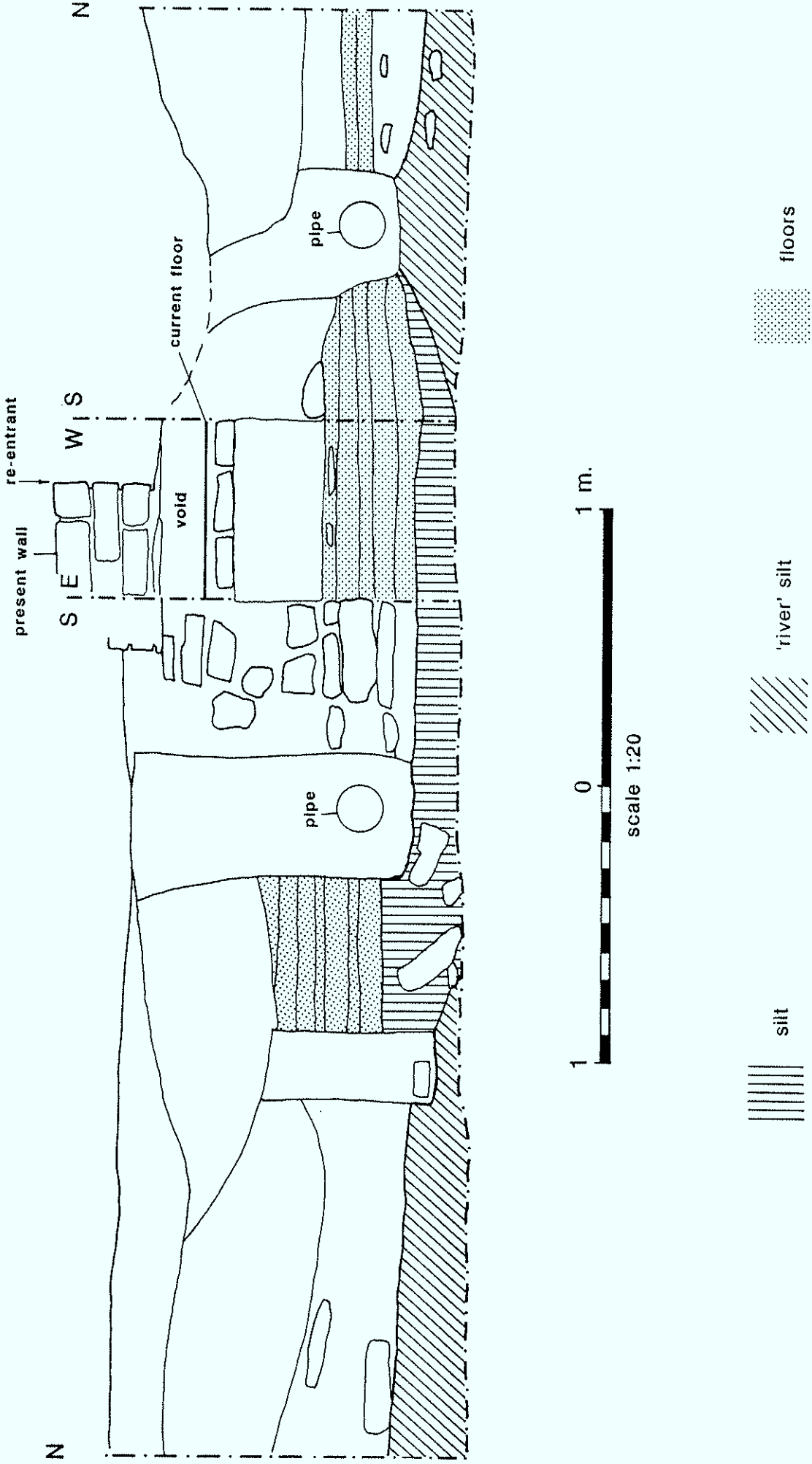


figure 2

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