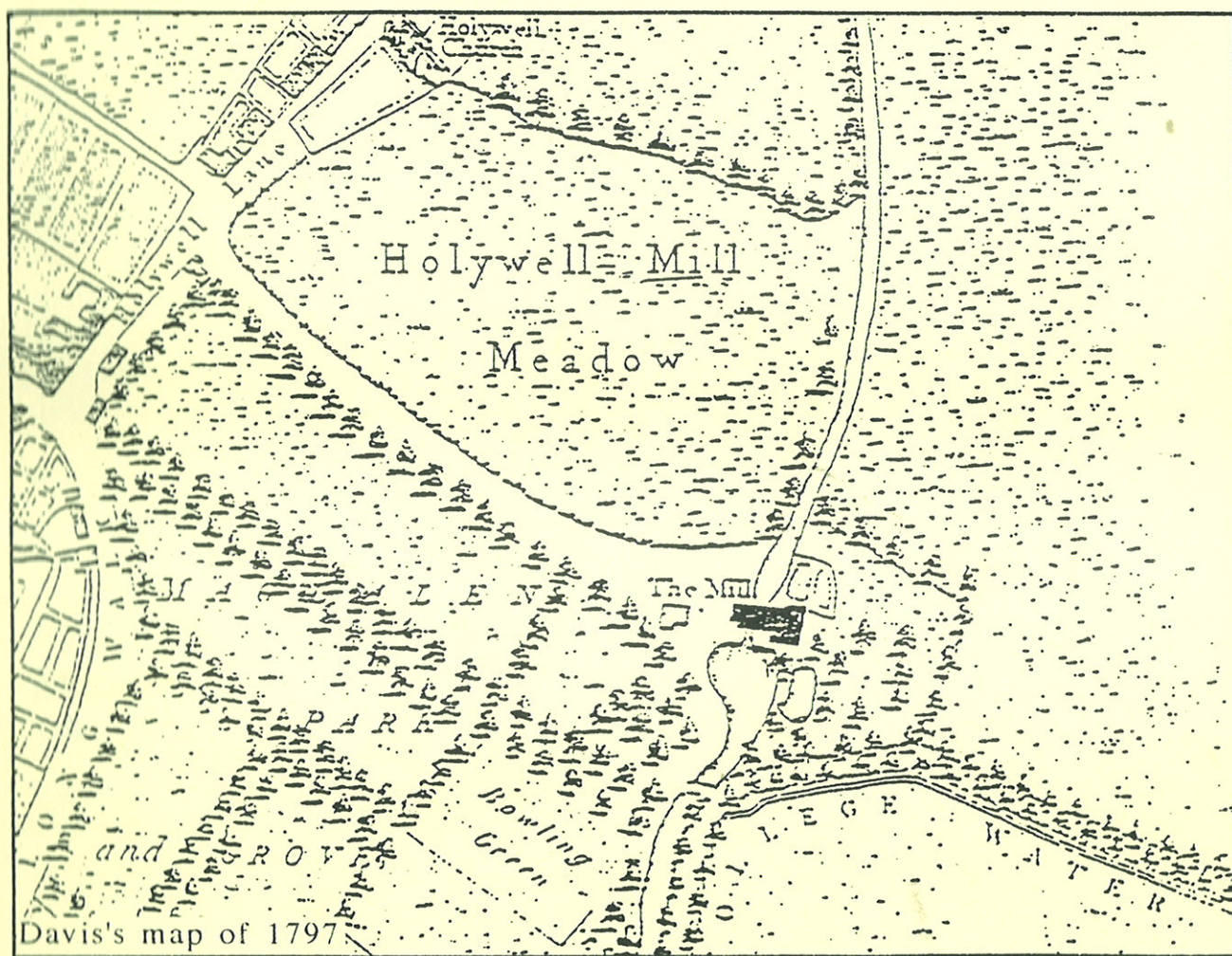


# Squash Court Development Magdalen College, Holywell Ford Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

NGR SP 5211 0652



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

February 1995

**MAGDALEN COLLEGE, HOLYWELL FORD, OXFORD**  
**SQUASH COURT DEVELOPMENT**  
**NGR SP 5211 0652**

**1. SUMMARY**

Magdalen College, Oxford constructed new squash courts adjacent to the access road to Holywell Ford during 1995 [Fig. 1]. The groundworks were undertaken by T.A. Bickton and Son of Oxford.

Due to the potential for disturbance of archaeological remains (discussed below) the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS) advised the Oxford City Council that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the development. The Oxford Archaeological Unit duly undertook the work in February 1995.

**2. INTRODUCTION AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

The underlying geology of the site is the second gravel terrace. The site lies at a general level of 57.40 m O.D., and slopes gently from west to east.

Significant numbers of prehistoric worked flints were recovered during work in connection with the new student accommodation to the east of Holywell Mill Stream.

Holywell Mill, situated at the end of Holywell Lane, is not mentioned in Domesday Book (1086). The first mention of the mill is about 1200. Excavations by the OAU in 1993 on the site of the mill located wall foundations and deposits, of Medieval and later date, relating to earlier mill structures.

The date of the lane to Holywell Ford is uncertain. During the Medieval period a road ran E-W along the line of Holywell Street and then on to the river and Holywell Mill. The exact alignment of the road to the mill is unknown. Presumably it would have maintained a straight line through what is now Magdalen Grove, but could have 'dog-legged' owing to a structure or topographical obstacle. Alternatively the lane could have been formed after the late C15 inclosure of the Grove, when the S edge of Holywell parish boundary was extended northwards to accommodate the inclosure. It is possible that buildings associated with the lane may exist in the vicinity of the development.

Post-Civil War mapping of earthworks suggests that there was a Royalist fortification ditch (1640's) on the north side of Magdalen Grove. Whether it would have extended as far as the development area is unclear. De Gomme's map of 1644 shows the line of the main Civil War defences, which were situated to the E of Holywell Mill.

**3. THE DEVELOPMENT**

The new building required foundation trenches, and a number of new services. The excavation of these was monitored for the presence of features and finds.

#### 4. RESULTS FROM THE WATCHING BRIEF [Fig. 2]

##### Trench 1

Trench 1 was excavated along the line of a demolished dry stone wall which formed the N boundary of Holywell Lane. The trench was 1.60 m wide and 0.65 m deep. The earliest deposit observed at the base of the trench was a mixed layer [5] of light grey sandy clay, with limestone inclusions and occasional pieces of brick and Willow pattern china. The foundation material [7] for the demolished dry stone wall [6] was cut into layer 5. Wall 6 was constructed of roughly hewn limestone blocks and was 0.30 m wide.

Prior to demolition, wall 6 was abutted by two layers. Layer 4 was a light brown sandy loam, with frequent gravel inclusions, and brick. This layer was 0.37 m thick, and overlay layer 5. Layer 4 was overlain by layer 1, the present topsoil. The topsoil was loose dark-brown sandy loam, and was 0.17 m thick. A service trench [2] containing a N-S aligned steel pipe [3] was observed at the E end of trench 1. The trench cut through the topsoil.

No archaeological features or deposits were observed in this trench.

##### Trenches 2, 3, 4

Each was 10.2 m long, 0.60 m wide and 0.30 m deep. Each trench was cut through topsoil and part of loam layer 4. No features or finds were observed.

##### Trench 5

Numerous modern services were present in trench 5, including electric cable ducts, a water main encased in a brick duct, and a brick-built manhole. The trench was cut to a maximum depth of 0.50 m below the present road level. No archaeological features or finds were observed.

##### Trench 6

This trench was aligned N-S and linked trenches 1 and 7. The trench was cut through the concrete raft [8] observed in trench 5. No features or finds were present.

##### Trench 7

This trench formed the S extent of the new building and was cut through the concrete raft [8] observed in trenches 5 and 6. No features or finds were present.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

On site conditions were favourable for monitoring the work. The contractors were helpful at all times, and the weather conditions were good. The excavations at Holywell did not reveal any archaeological features or finds. Pre-modern/Victorian levels, if present on this site probably lie at a greater depth than encountered in these excavations.

The level at which medieval deposits were encountered during the excavations at Holywell Mill was 56.00 O.D. The present trenches bottom at or about 56.80 O.D., the level of overburden being considerably greater. No evidence of medieval structures relating to Holywell Ford Lane were visible.

## 6. Sources consulted

*Victoria County History of Oxfordshire, Volume iv*

De Gomme's map of Oxford, 1644 [*Oxoniensia I, 1936*]

Loggan's map of Oxford, 1675

Davis's map of Oxford, 1797

O.S. maps 1800-1900

J.Hiller

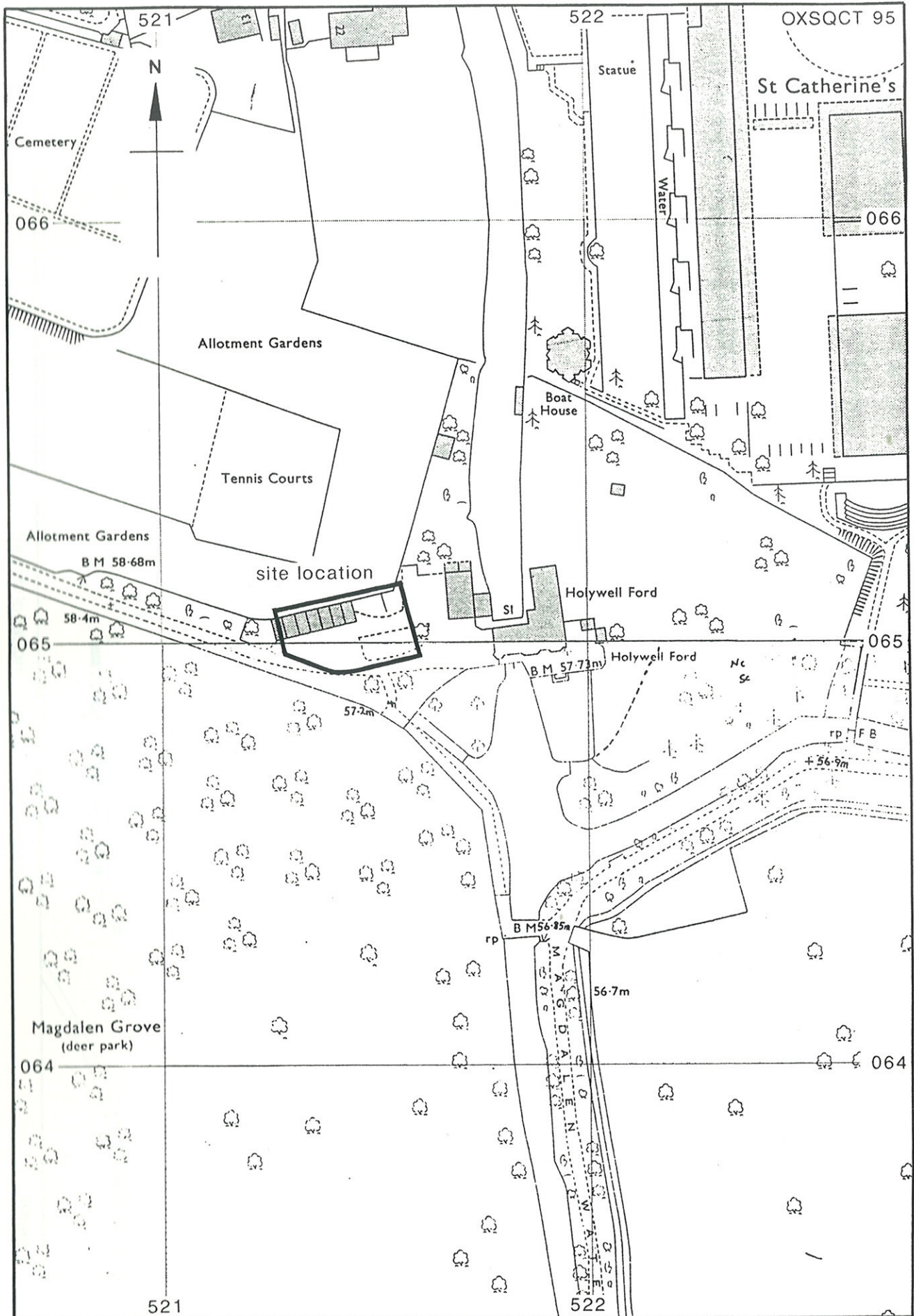
OAU

February 1995

Table of context information

Trench	Ctx	Type	Comments
1	1	Layer	Topsoil
1	2	Cut	Service Trench
1	3	Fill	Service Pipe
1	4	Layer	Make up deposit, modern [Victorian or later] finds
1	5	Layer	Make-up deposit, modern finds
1	6	Wall	Dry stone wall, limestone
1	7	Foundation	Mortared foundation material in construction cut for wall 6
5	8	Layer	Concrete raft, former parking area
5	9	Layer	Current surface of Holywell Lane
5	10	Service	2x plastic ducts for electrics in brick duct
5	11	Layer	Loam, similar to 4 in Tr. 1
5	12	Service	Brick duct containing water main





scale 1:1250

site location

figure 1

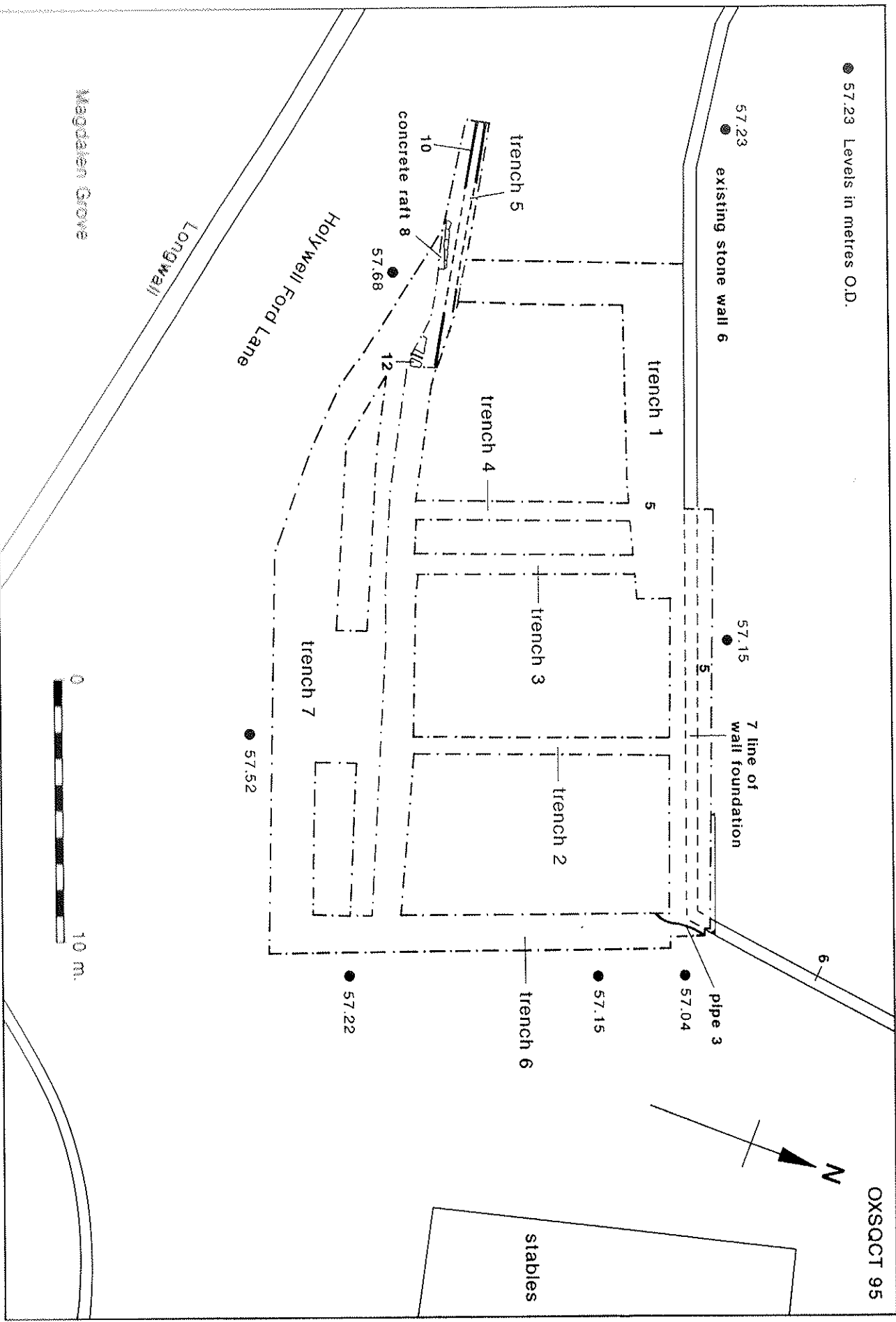


figure 2

Oxford Archaeological Unit

46 Hythe Bridge Street  
Oxford OX1 2EP



Tel: 0865 243888 Fax: 0865 793496

Registered Charity No. 285627  
Private Limited Company No. 1618597