

Figure 1: Site location

evidence of early, middle and late Iron Age activity was seen during excavations adjacent to the Parks at the Rex Richards building (Parkinson *et al.* 1996, 47-8).

### **Roman**

No significant evidence of Roman settlement has been found near the site, though there is evidence for settlement, in the form of scattered farmsteads, in Oxford and the surrounding area (Taylor 1939). The possibility of a settlement nearby is suggested by a quern stone found 75 metres to the north-west of the development site in St John Street (Manning and Leeds 1921, 252). Excavations at the Radcliffe Science Library and at Mansfield College, both to the north-east, have revealed evidence of small-scale rural settlement dating from the late 1st to the 4th centuries, consisting mainly of ditched enclosures and field systems. A timber building was found at Mansfield College; seven inhumations were found at the earlier excavations at the nearby Science Library (Booth and Hayden 2000, 301-2, 329).

### **Anglo-Saxon**

Early and mid-Saxon evidence is rare in the vicinity of the site, with only a few observations and finds known, to the north of the site. A cemetery may have existed at the site of the Radcliffe Infirmary, 450 metres to the north (Dickinson 1976, II, no. 114); the finding of a gold bracteate during the construction of the Civil War defences in St Giles Field, opposite the entrance to the Infirmary, is recorded as an early find (Manning and Leeds 1921, 253), and a bone heddle stick, probably of Saxon date, was found to the north of the Infirmary (Anon. 1938, 168). The late-Saxon town occupying the southern end of the Oxford promontory, and dating from c 900, lay within defences 250 metres to the south of the site, with earlier evidence of settlement, in the form of a possible ford across the Thames and associated 8th- to 9th-century finds, seen at the southern limit of the medieval town (Blair 1994, 89-92). There is no evidence for a pre-Conquest northern suburb, although two important mid to late-Saxon roads (now Woodstock Road and Banbury Road, converging as St Giles) run north-south towards the ford, 100 metres to the east of the site (*ibid.*, 88).

### **Historical evidence**

#### **Beaumont**

The site of the Sackler Library lies outside the north gate of the medieval town of Oxford, in a field that seems always to have had the name Beaumont (*bello monte*) supposedly referring to the attractive views of the town enjoyed by scholars taking exercise there. Occupied successively by a medieval royal palace and Carmelite friary, the fields were eventually developed in the 19th century for housing (as Beaumont and St John Streets). Beaumont lay in the parish of St Mary Magdalen, the suburban area immediately outside the walls. On its north side it reached the fields of St Giles, and the 14th-century terrier of land in that parish starts with a furlong next the Whitefriars (Stevenson and Salter 1937); the eastern boundary of Beaumont was formed by the ends of the tenement plots of houses on St Giles, and the western boundary reached to Walton Street, which as Stockwell Street was well populated in the 13th century but later became a derelict area along with Irishman Street (now George Street) (Cooper 1972). The southern boundary of Beaumont was perhaps an old field boundary, part following the northern edge of an open area known as Broken Hays (now Gloucester Green). Along this side was formed the Friars' Entry, a narrow approach from Magdalen Street, but the gatehouse of the royal palace must have been on the south or west sides.

#### **The royal palace**

The relationship between the castle and royal palace that dominated the north and west sides of Oxford is interesting. The royal castle was little used, except by the sheriff for his county administration, and it would even seem that kings



avoided entering Oxford (perhaps in superstitious remembrance of the fate of St Frideswide's regal pursuer, struck blind at the gates of the town) and travelled round the outside of the town - along Longwall and Holywell streets - to avoid this (Cooper 1979a, 11). The palace, or 'the king's houses' as such residences were more usually known, was built in or around 1132 by Henry I (Colvin *et al.* 1963, 120), and became a favourite resting place for the itinerant Angevin kings en route from London or Windsor to the palace at Woodstock for hunting in nearby Wychwood Forest. Two of the children of Henry II and Queen Eleanor, Richard I and John, were born there (in 1157 and 1167 respectively), and indeed as Southern has argued the frequent presence of the royal courts was a significant factor in the development of the university of Oxford in the late 12th century (Southern 1984).

From references in royal building records we know that Beaumont Palace originally consisted of a hall, a kitchen, at least two chambers, a chapel and a cloister (Colvin *et al.* 1963, 986). Later additions are well documented and included (in 1237-40) extra accommodation built for the Queen - a chapel and wardrobe, connected by a pentice. In 1244-8 four gabled windows were added to the north and south walls of the hall, and a porch added to its south entrance; in or around 1255, a great gate and a chamber for the Lord Edward were added. A new stable was built in 1257-8, and the kitchens were twice rebuilt, in 1244-8, and 1268-70; on the second occasion the old timber was used to make a chamber near the gate for Henry III's chaplains. The roofs of the main palace buildings were probably originally made of oak shingles (40,000 were delivered in 1171), and later replaced by a roof made of local stone slate (Crossley 1979, 304-5; Colvin *et al.* 1963, 987).

By the late thirteenth century Beaumont was no longer used as a royal palace, and the last recorded repairs at the king's expense were made in 1289. The palace was granted to Francesco Accorso, a lawyer from Bologna, in 1275 (the year of Edward I's last visit), and then to Edmund Mortimer in 1276 and to Edward of St John in 1294 (Crossley 1979, 305). A good indicator of the decline in the importance of Beaumont is that in 1308 the Sheriff was permitted, by royal approval, to take stone and timber from the houses to repair the castle. The palace was finally granted to the White Friars in 1318 by Edward II, fulfilling a promise made at Bannockburn four years earlier. According to the 17th-century historian, Anthony Wood, the King was fleeing the battlefield accompanied by the Carmelite poet, Robert Baston ('in his time the most famous poet of this nation'), who advised him to call on the mother of God; the king did so, and vowed to found a Carmelite house if he found safety (Wood, *City of Oxford* ii, 420).

### **The White Friars**

The Carmelite or White Friars first appeared in England in the mid-13th century when groups of European hermits were bought back from Mount Carmel (near the present day city of Haifa in Israel) by the crusaders (Knowles and Hadcock 1953, 232). They had initially been established in Oxford in 1256 at a site on the opposite side of Walton Street, where buildings had been constructed over the following decade with the aid of royal benefaction, and their site (just south of Gloucester, now Worcester, College) had been enlarged by additional purchases (Salter 1907, 137-43). The Dominican (Black) and Franciscan (Grey) Friars had built in the south-west suburb of Oxford and were a prominent force in the University; by comparison the White Friars were less numerous but did have scholars at Oxford, despite their *studium generale* being in London (Sheehan 1984, 201). Oxford became one of the four *distinctions* that the English Carmelite order was divided into for administrative purposes, the other three being London, Norwich and York (Knowles and Hadcock 1953, 232). It may be a sign of their success that they moved to Beaumont, the much larger and grander site across the road, and apparently intended also to retain their old house; it is recorded that they were now allowed by the king to join the two sites with a tunnel under the road (quite possibly the only documented monastic tunnel in England), but probably did not do so. Pope John XXII authorised them to sell or exchange the old site in May 1318, when confirming the new seat (Salter 1907, 139).



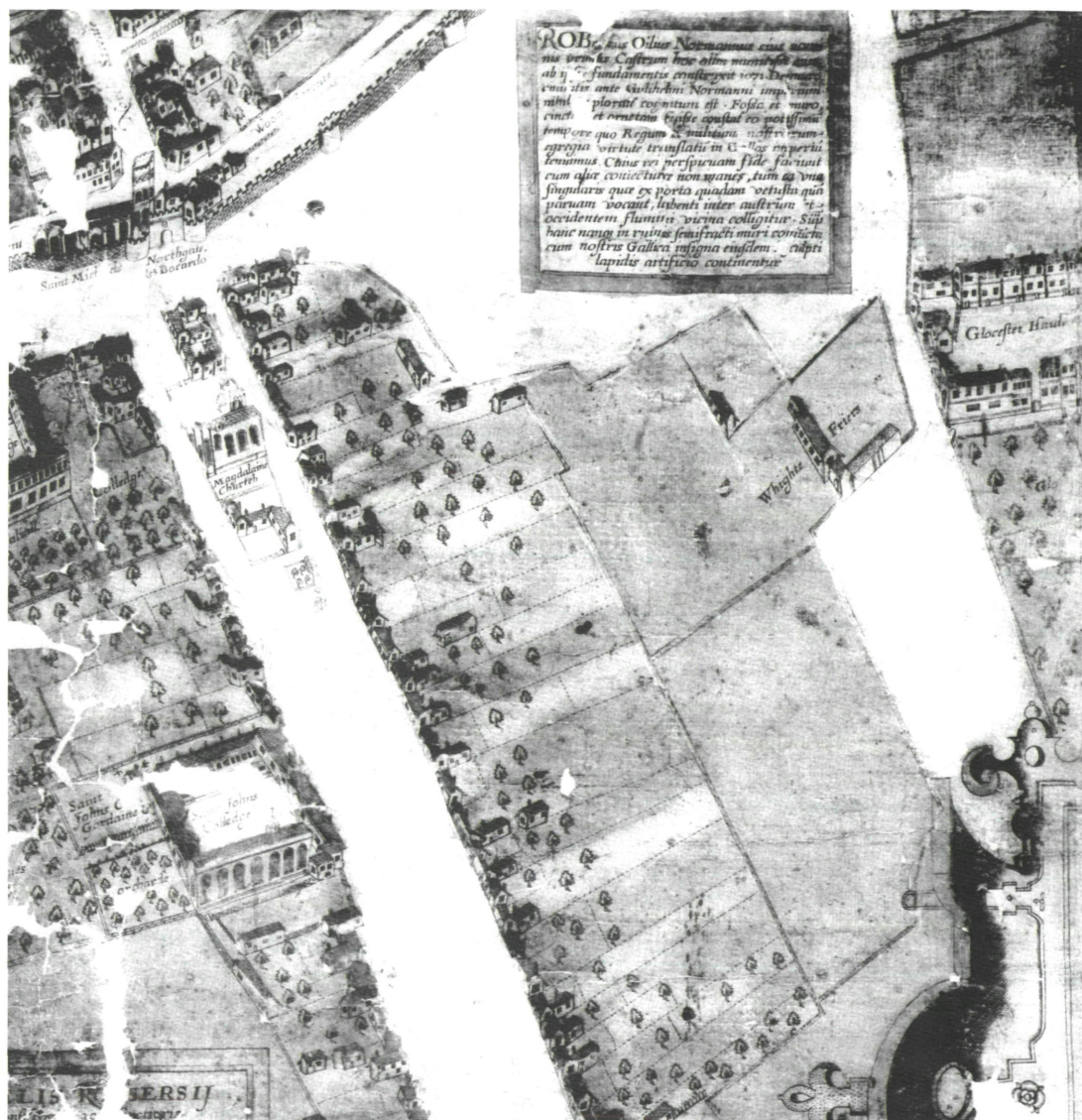


Plate 1: Detail from Ralph Agas' map of 1578 (north is to the bottom)

The friars acquired the palace 'with its closes and buildings' from the crown, and adapted the buildings to their needs: 'a large room near the chapel was furnished as a library', and the chapel itself was enlarged by the addition of a steeple and bells (Cooper 1979b, 367). The absence of the royal palace and the declining prosperity of that quarter of Oxford no doubt had an effect on the ambience of Beaumont, and in 1328 the town was ordered by the king to prevent the use of the neighbourhood of the friars for immoral purposes, the clamour of which was disturbing their services (Salter 1907, 140). However, the friars continued their modest presence at the university for another couple of centuries, and produced some scholars of note, while on occasions the king himself stayed at the friary (Dobson 1992, 556-60; Salter 1907, 140-1).

### The palace/friary precinct

Figure 14 shows the layout of the southern half of the palace/friary precinct as it relates to the current Ordnance Survey base map of the area. The walls of the precinct can be seen to follow boundaries that have survived from as early the 12th century, and certainly since the 16th century, as shown by a number of historic maps, particularly those drawn by Ralph Agas in 1578 (Plate 1) and David Loggan in 1675 (Fig. 2). Where these boundaries do not survive, they have been recreated using the limits of the Beaumont Street development of the early 19th century (Osmond 1984, fig. 1), and the 1st. edition 1:500 O.S. map (1876). Note



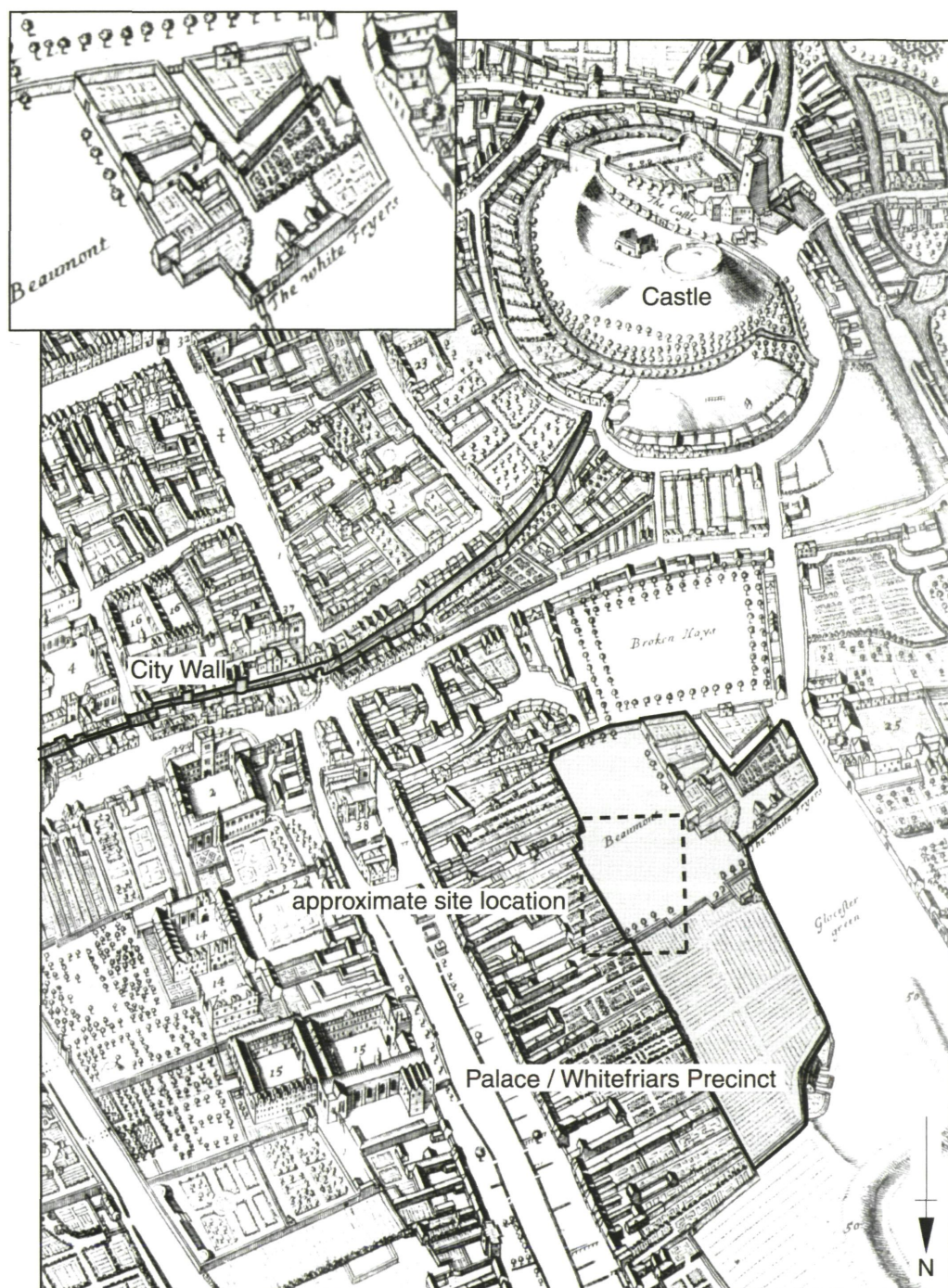


Figure 2: Detail from Logan's map of 1675 (north is to the bottom)

that the area to the east of Pusey Lane was part of that development, and that houses there have since been demolished to make way for the Oriental Institute and the extension to the Ashmolean Museum. The eastern boundary of the precinct followed the rear of the tenements fronting onto St Giles (see also Fig. 1).

In addition to the elements within the precinct that were found during excavation (discussed below), an attempt has been made on Fig. 14 to plot the buildings shown on Agas' map of 1578. These are thought to include the 'great house', recorded as having been demolished in 1595 (see below) and thus absent from Logan's map of 1675, as well as a stable in its close to the south and a building to the east, later called 'A Chapple' on a plan of St Giles' Parish dated 1769. This building to the east of the 'great house' is clearly shown by Logan and less clearly



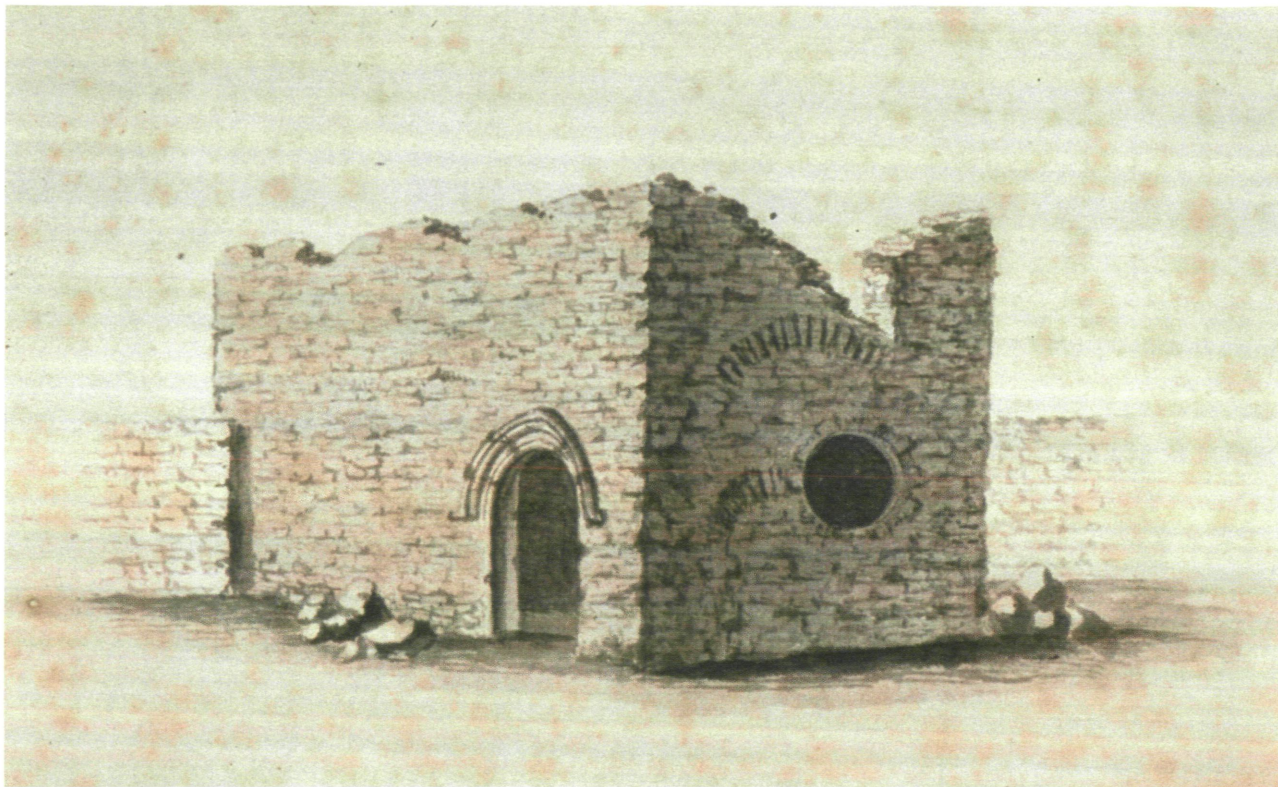


Plate 2: Green's view of the remains of Beaumont Palace c1750 (MS Gough Oxford 50, fol 29)

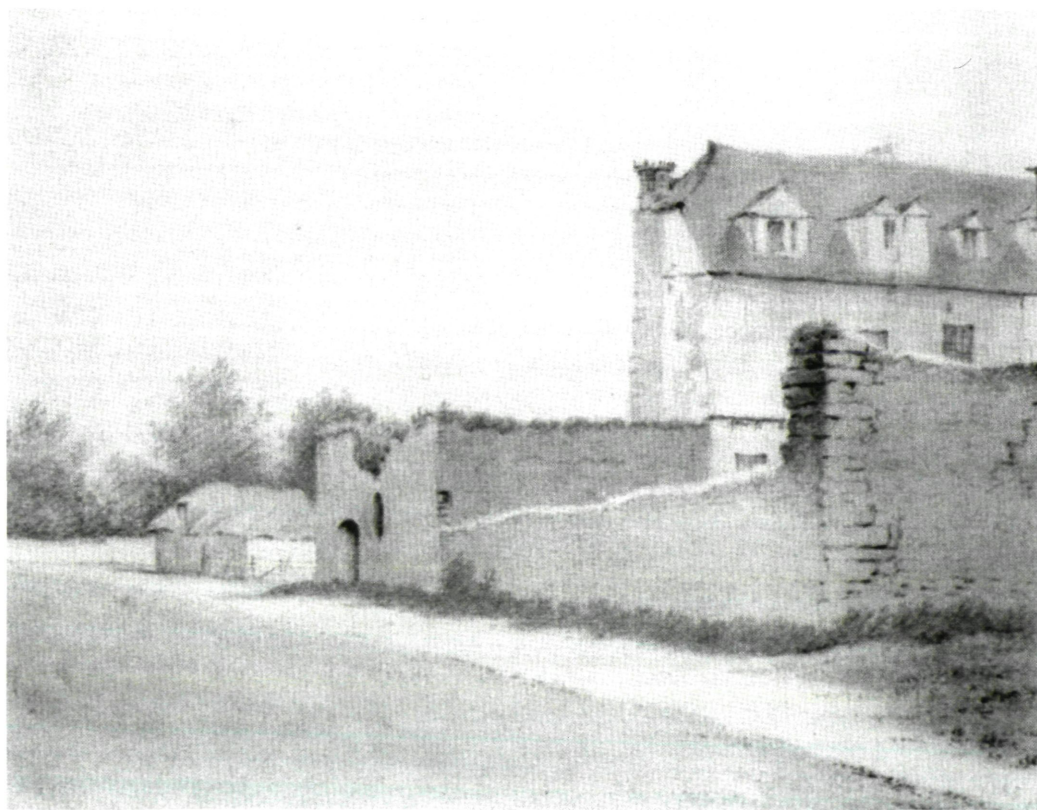
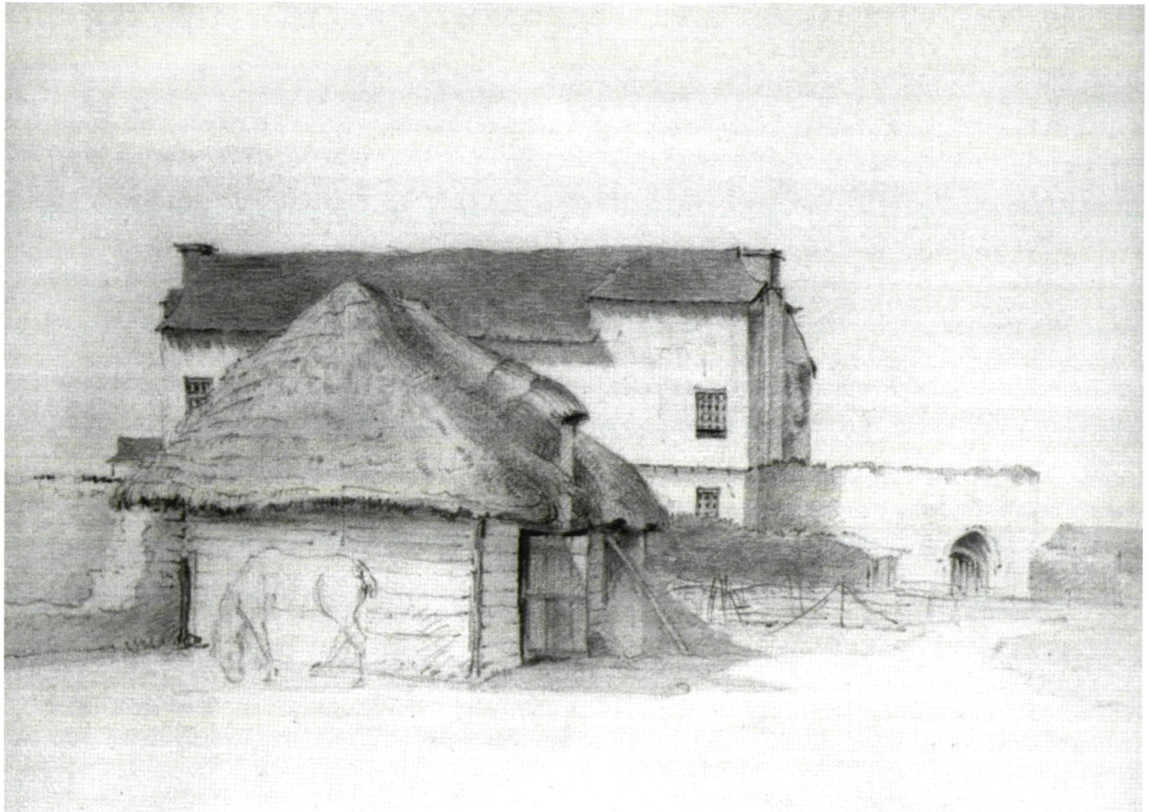


Plate 3a (above) and b (top right):  
J. B. Malchair's views of the remains of Beaumont Palace 1783





drawn but just visible on the Agas map; its ruin is depicted on a number of 18th- and 19th-century views. James Green drew the ruins in his 1750 sketchbook (Plate 2), but the influential view was that engraved by Sparrow dated 1774 and published in Francis Grose's *Antiquities of England and Wales* (reissued in 1785, Plate on front cover), from which most later drawings derive, including the copy by Hawkins published by Hogg in Boswell's *Picturesque Views* in 1786. Some valuable drawings were made by J.B. Malchair in the 1770s (Plate 3), while the most significant record was made by the architectural antiquary J.C. Buckler in the early 19th century (Plate 4 a and b); finally it was shown as the last building standing on the site when Beaumont Street was built (Plate 12). Some remnants of this building survived as an itinerant garden feature into the 20th century (Cooper 1979b, 368 no. 93, Greening Lambourn 1937, 205-7).

#### **The architecture of the 'Chapel' (Plate 4 a and b and Fig. 14)**

The building was rectangular and vaulted. In the east wall was a door with an external segmental arch and internally a shouldered lintel. Next to the door (and displaced off-centre) was a round window shown by Buckler with scars of six-part tracery; internally it had a deep splay beneath a pointed segmental arch. In the north and south walls were flanking doors with moulded jambs, two-centred arches and hood moulds. The interior was vaulted, with corner shafts and springing for a quadripartite vault. These features are most likely to date from the royal use of the site in the 13th century, with the quality of the detail suggesting that it may have been a chapel; while the number of doors at the east end make this somewhat less likely, it was clearly a building of some status.

#### **Previous archaeological evidence for the palace/friary**

The building of Beaumont Street in 1829 uncovered burials but few remains of buildings, as reported by Herbert Hurst, a local archaeologist working during the second half of the 19th century. He recollected his early observations of finding skeletons in Beaumont Street, and writes of the finds in 1829: 'one distinctly remembers the careful inspection of several heaps of bones, made one evening in 1829, by myself and school-fellows in search of rings which were rumoured to have been buried with the corpses that were being exhumed' (Bodl<sup>1</sup>. MS Top.



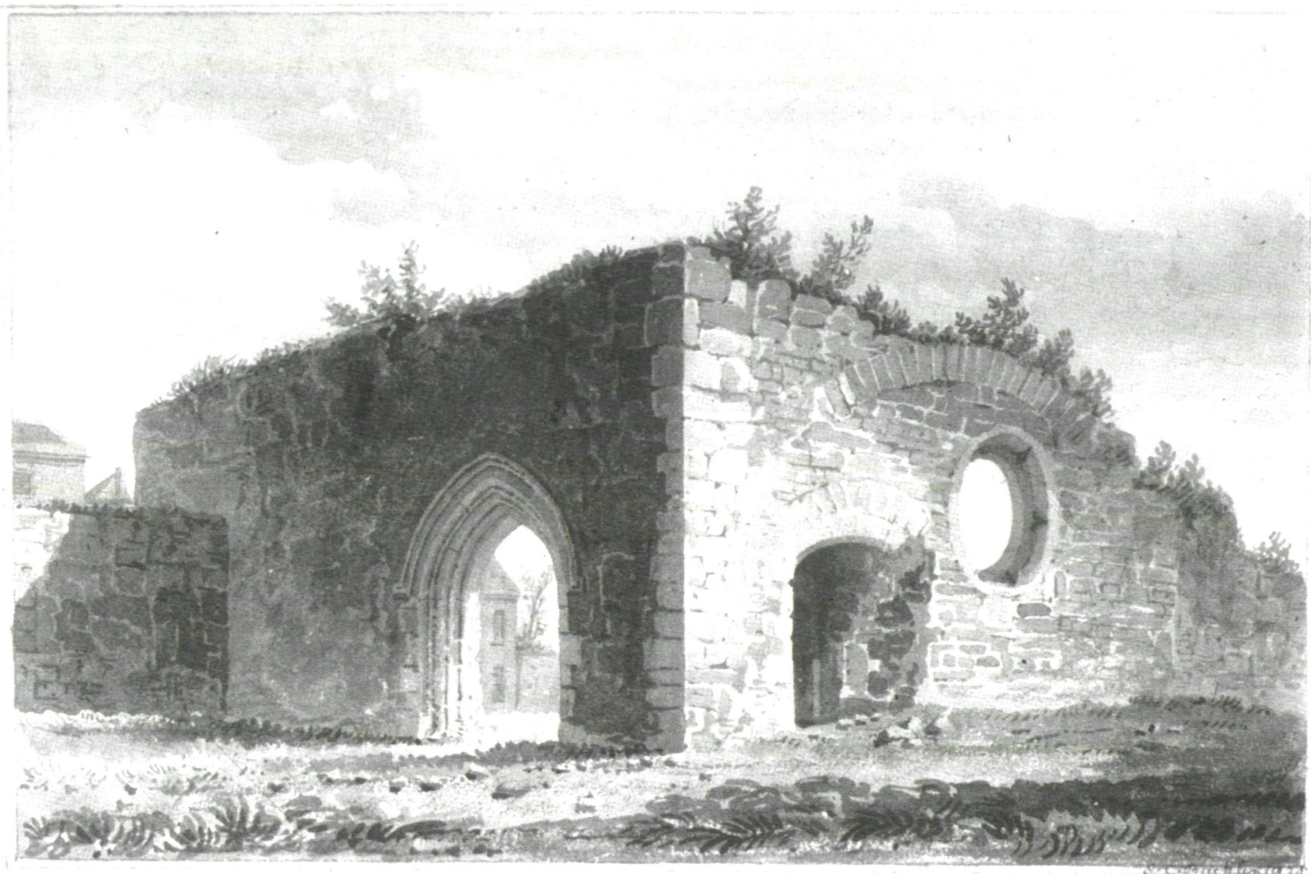


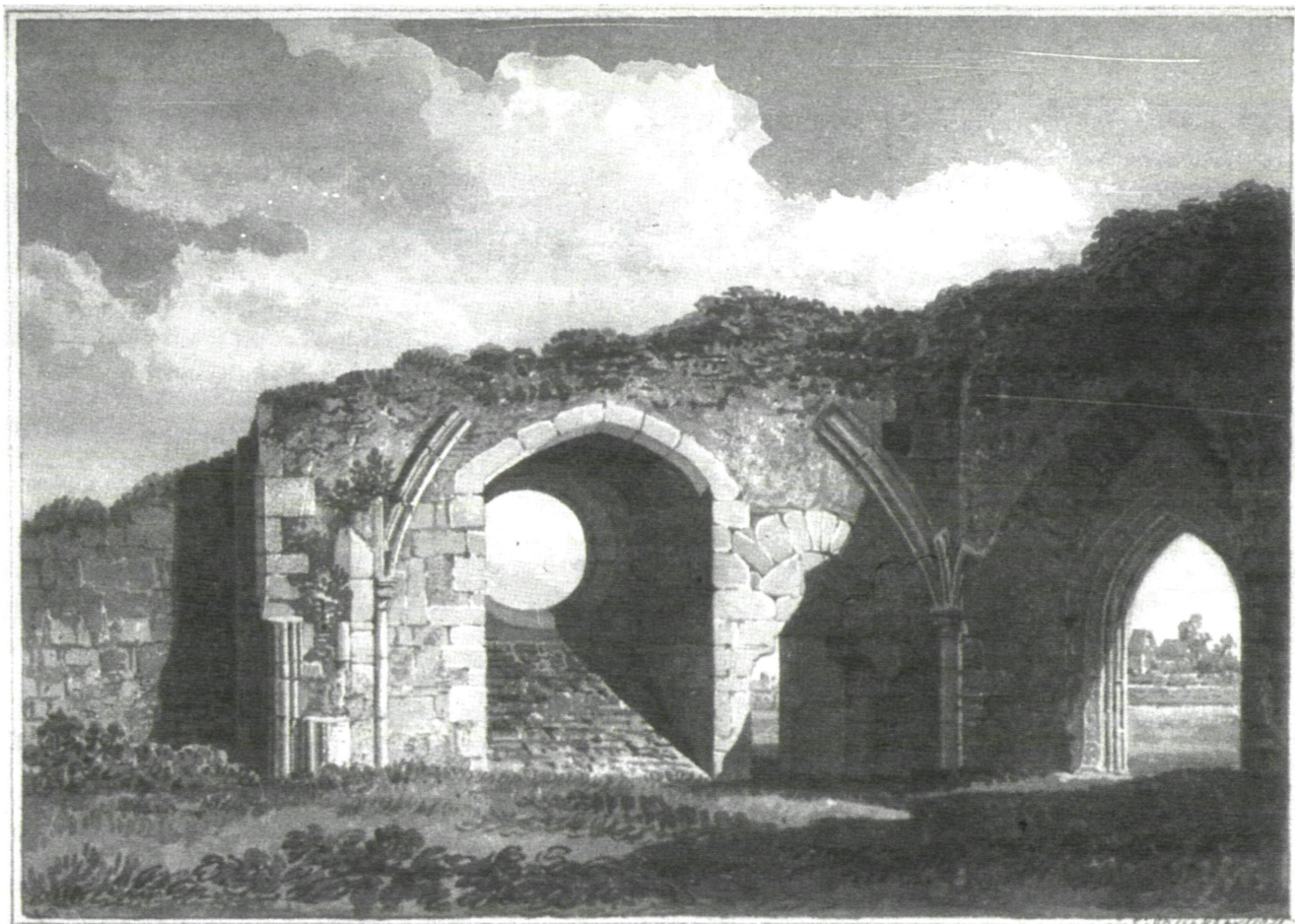
Plate 4a (above) and b (right): J. C. Buckler's views of the remains of Beaumont Palace 1820 and 1821 (MS. Don. a. 3, fol. 118 and fol. 117)

Oxon. c.194, f.330-61). He also drew a plan showing the location of burials found at the end of the century and quotes a letter he received from a former occupant of No. 15 Beaumont Street in 1890: 'on enlarging the area for the underground larder-window, a skeleton most perfect was dug up... there were no houses in those days on the north side of the street, or any in St John Street... when the houses opposite to mine were built, many bones and skeletons were dug up, and when the sewer was made in the middle of the street I heard that more were found' (Bodl. MS Top.Oxon. c.185 f.1060).

Other discoveries have been made in the course of 20th-century building works. During excavations for the foundations of the Playhouse Theatre in Beaumont Street 15 burials were located, two of which were dated to the 14th century by buckles found with the skeletons (Leeds 1938, 174-5). Workmen digging in Beaumont Street in the 1940s found a wall foundation running along the street 9 feet from the edge of the southern pavement, with associated 13th-century pottery and a ridge tile (Anon. 1940, 167-8). In 1956 a single grave was disturbed and recorded on the north side of Beaumont Street, to the west of the Playhouse (Case 1958, 134). A further 11 burials were found in 1973 during an Oxford Archaeological Unit watching brief on contractor's excavations to the rear of Nos 11 and 12 Beaumont Street (unpubl.). More recently, a series of archaeological investigations carried out in the Ashmolean Museum forecourt produced mainly medieval material including three pits, a cess pit, and an oven, from a tenement fronting on to St Giles – and so outside of Beaumont (Andrews and Mephram 1997).

The various observations, described above, of a minimum of 40 burials along Beaumont Street have been plotted and show the known extent of the cemetery, covering an area measuring at least 80 m east-west and 40 m north-south. Graves





have been shown in their actual positions, as plotted by Hurst or during the OAU watching brief of 1973, or as mentioned by other sources in varying degrees of detail (see Fig. 14).

### **Dissolution and later history**

The Carmelite friary was surrendered in 1538 at the dissolution of the monasteries, and at the time is recorded as having been in a ruinous state (Cooper 1979b, 367). The site was sold in 1542 to Edmund Powell of Sandford, when it consisted of the house, two tenements, the Entry, a stable, a close called the timber yard (1 acre), another called Gloucester College close (3.5 acres) and a close south of the church (2 acres) (Salter 1907, 143). Beaumont Close, north of the priory, had been previously leased out by the Carmelites in 1532, when it was 'between St Giles Field and the Priory', and this is likely to be the 3.5 acre field shown on the 1769 St Giles field map and all other early maps as separate from the main precinct; it is likely to be identical with 'Gloucester Close', since it lay adjacent to the small piece of common land on the east side of Walton Street then called Gloucester Green (Salter and Stevenson 1937, 430-1, and as shown on maps of Agas, Loggan and the 1769 field map). The southern half of the site was also 3.5 acres in 1769, and this may have included the 'timberyard' and 'close south of the church' described in 1542. When Powell's widow sold it all to St John's College in 1560 it comprised the site of the White Friars with a garden and close; a messuage and stable, a six-acre close called Beaumonts, two closes called the churchyard, and a messuage by the Entry; in later college records the two churchyard closes are described as being between Beaumonts and Brokenhayes (*ibid.* 430). While this evidence is not entirely consistent, it does suggest that the church and churchyard were in the eastern half of the precinct (and this is corroborated by the discovery of numerous burials described above). The majority of buildings were soon demolished, and in 1546 some thirty loads of stone were taken from the site for building work at Christ Church (Turner



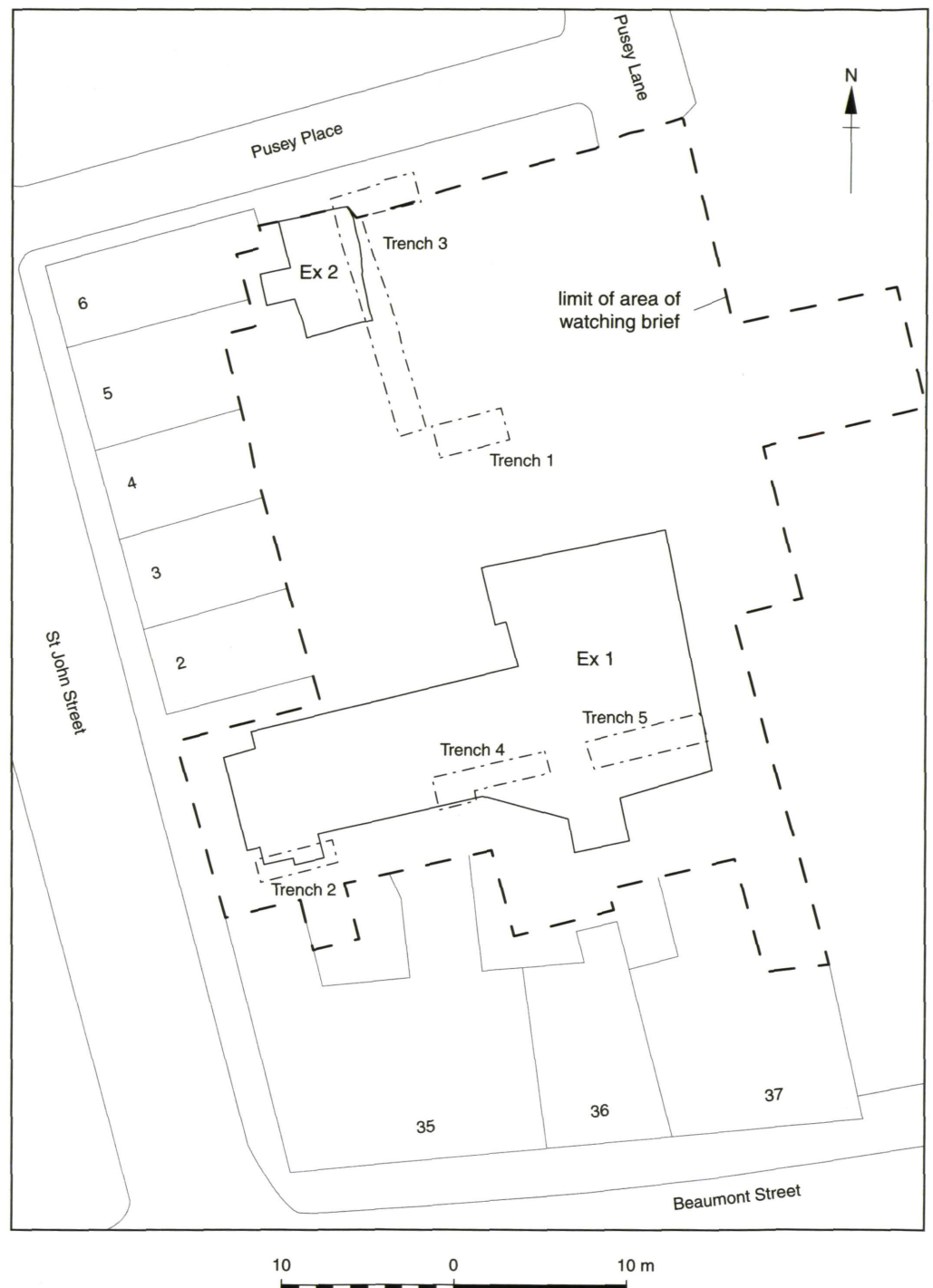


Figure 3: Locations of evaluation, excavation and watching brief areas

1880, 183). One large building is shown on Agas' map of 1578, but in 1595 the college lessee agreed to allow the 'great house' to be demolished 'to convert the stone and stuff towards the building of a new library' (Salter and Stevenson 1937, 431-2). What remained was the stable to the south-east of the great house, and a small building to the east later called the chapel. In 1660 the remaining buildings were made into a stable or byre, and in the 1690s a building was erected to house students of a short-lived Greek College for orthodox churchmen; by 1750 the ruins were being used as a parish work house (Tappe 1954, 92-111, pl. IV). The only obvious remnant of the palace that did survive was a small building marked as 'chapel' on the 1769 St Giles parish map, which was often drawn by topographical artists and antiquaries, and has been discussed above.



### **Beaumont Street**

The creation of Beaumont Street in the fields, and parallel to George Street, was an obvious development in the early 19th-century growth of the town, and indeed Worcester College had attempted to acquire land in 1803 for 'a wide and handsome avenue from the front of the college to St Giles St', but nothing came of this beyond the purchase of the houses at each end of what became Beaumont Street (Salter 1913, 226-7). The two Beaumont closes were eventually developed in the 1820s, when Beaumont and St John Streets were laid out for St John's College by the surveyor Henry Dixon. The houses were generally three storeys high, ashlar fronted with brick side and rear elevations, with 'those in St John Street being narrower and plainer' (Osmond 1984, 301-26). The houses on Beaumont Street appear to have been occupied by prominent tradesmen, while those on St John Street by those somewhat lower down the ladder of respectability. Leases on the Sackler Library site were granted in October 1824, in 'St John Street at right angles to Beaumont Street..(and).. at the same time five plots behind St John Street, intended for the building of stables, were also leased on the south and east side of Pusey lane..' (*ibid.* 301). The new Beaumont Street houses were described in Hunt's *Directory of Oxford* in 1846 as the 'finest street ensemble in Oxford'.

### **Background to the excavation**

In 1997 the University of Oxford submitted a planning application (no. 97/208/NFH) to Oxford City Council in which they proposed the building of a 'new library with research accommodation', to the west of the Ashmolean Museum. Oxford City Council's archaeological advisors, OAAS, supplied a brief for the pre-development mitigation, requiring a desk-top assessment and a field evaluation. In November 1997, OAU produced a desk-top assessment which indicated the considerable archaeological potential of the site (OAU 1997), which lies within the City Council's Area of Archaeological Interest.

An evaluation was then carried out by OAU in December 1997, which involved the excavation of two trenches, one to the rear of no. 35 Beaumont Street, and one in the car park off Pusey Lane (Fig. 3). The discovery in those trenches of medieval pits and a wall thought to date from as early as the 11th century led to the excavation of three more trenches in January 1998, in which further evidence of medieval occupation of the site was revealed (OAU 1998).

In total, the evaluation revealed evidence of prehistoric activity, in the form of a probable prehistoric ditch, middle Saxon pottery and 11th/12th-century pits. In addition, the damaged remains of substantial faced limestone walls and foundations were found, associated with numerous fragments of high-quality window glass painted with heraldic devices, along with white-slipped roof tiles and green-glazed ridge tiles, carved masonry fragments and worn slip-decorated floor-tiles. All this evidence indicated the presence of a high-status building, dating to the 12th-14th centuries. It was clear that the building had been partially robbed as early as the 17th century.

### **Excavation methodology (Figure 3)**

Following the two phases of evaluation an area to the rear of nos 35-37 Beaumont Street was identified as the most suitable for full excavation, as outlined in the Specification for Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief (OAU February 1998). This area (EX 1) was 28 m long, 7 m wide at its western end and 15 m wide at its eastern end.

A second excavation (EX 2) was located to the rear of nos 5 and 6 St John Street, and was necessitated by the discovery of a suspected Bronze Age barrow ditch during EX 1. EX 2 targeted the possible location of the anticipated central inhumation or cremation, and measured 7 by 4 m.



In both EX1 and 2 the upper deposits, comprising make-up layers and garden soil, were removed using a 360° tracked excavator, down to the uppermost significant archaeological horizon. In the case of EX1 this was found to be a ploughsoil cut by the post-medieval robbing of walls and the construction of garden features associated with the 19th century housing. Once these robbing cuts and structures had been entirely excavated, the ploughsoil was removed by hand to reveal the natural gravel and the surviving medieval horizon. During EX 2 and the watching brief, mechanical excavation continued to the gravels, as the post-medieval horizons were not encountered.

In addition to the 100% excavation of the post-medieval robber trenches, all identified pits were half-sectioned, and samples of each identified linear feature were excavated to establish orientation, character, date and stratigraphic relationships. All medieval masonry was dismantled and removed by hand following recording. A site-specific environmental sampling strategy was employed, comprising bulk sampling (100 litres) for sieving for small bones and artefacts, and flotation for charred plant remains. Mollusc samples from one of the prehistoric ditches were also collected. All archaeological recording conformed to standard OAU practice (Wilkinson 1992).

### **Watching Brief methodology (Figure 3)**

An extensive watching brief was maintained throughout the initial stage of construction, which involved demolition of outbuildings at the rear of both the St John Street and Beaumont Street properties, followed by excavation to an average depth of approximately 5 m across the whole site, in preparation for the library basement. The area to the north of EX 1 and to the south and east of EX 2 was investigated first, and involved an area measuring 28 by 23 m. Following demolition of the Griffith Institute the area underneath Pusey Lane and between the Haverfield Library and the former site of the Griffith Institute was investigated. The watching brief also involved some observation and recording of areas to the south and west of EX 1, although the limited impact of the current development and heavy disturbance during the early 19th-century development meant that the potential for the recording of significant deposits there was limited. A sample of all significant archaeological features was excavated by hand to establish character and date. Again, all archaeological recording conformed to standard OAU practice.