



Somerville College Kitchen and Servery Refurbishment, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Somerville College Kitchen and Servery Refurbishment, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Adam Fellingham

*With contributions from John Cotter and illustrations by
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Summary

Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by TMD Building Consultancy on behalf of Somerville College to undertake archaeological watching brief for the groundworks associated with the renovation of the kitchen and dining hall at Somerville College, Oxford

Archaeological mitigation took place as an intermittent watching brief depending on the principal contractor's work programme between October and December 2020.

The watching brief has shown that whilst untruncated natural gravel survives within the site no significant archaeological deposits or features were observed. The 19th-century garden soils and construction deposits associated with the kitchen and dining hall recorded during the archaeological watching brief are considered to be of low significance.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank TMD Building Consultancy for commissioning this project on behalf of Somerville College. Thanks are also extended to David Radford, who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Ben Ford, MCIFA. The fieldwork was directed by Adam Fellingham. Digitizing was carried out by Matthew Bradley and Charles Rousseaux. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen and prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by TMD Building Consultancy on behalf of Somerville College to undertake archaeological watching brief for the groundworks associated with the renovation of the kitchen and dining hall at Somerville College, Oxford. The site is located at NGR SP 5101 0700 (Fig. 1).

1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref. 19/02710/LBC) A brief was set by David Radford (Oxford City Council) and a written scheme of investigation was produced by OA (2020) detailing the local authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition. This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site is situated within the campus of Somerville College, Oxford. The college lies between Woodstock Road, to the east, and Walton Street to the west, with Little Clarendon Street to the south, and some 900m north of Oxford Castle.

1.2.2 The site is located on the western side of a N-S promontory which slopes gradually down to the west towards the River Thames. The nearest, and easternmost channel of the Thames, the Castle Mill Stream, lies c 600m away, down slope. The underlying natural geology of the area is floodplain terrace gravel (BGS 2021).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detailed in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by Oxford Archaeology (2020) and will not be reproduced here.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The general aim of the project was to record any archaeological remains that might be damaged or destroyed by intrusive groundworks within the site. Information gathered about the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of buried archaeology was recorded.

2.1.2 The specific aims and objectives of the watching brief were:

- To determine or confirm the general nature of any archaeological remains present, specifically remains exposed during the removal of the current kitchen/servery slab and service runs along with the excavation of the proposed new service runs and inspection chamber.
- To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;
- To undertake controlled archaeological excavation, within the extent of the impact of the proposed works, of any significant archaeological remains that may be encountered;
- To publish any significant archaeological remains that may be encountered, if appropriate.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Archaeological mitigation took place as an intermittent watching brief depending on the principal contractor's work programme between October and December 2020.

2.2.2 The watching brief areas were machine excavated, using a toothless ditching bucket, by the principal contractor with an archaeologist in attendance to record the stratigraphic sequence within each area.

2.2.3 All archaeological remains encountered were excavated and recorded stratigraphically in accordance with the approved recording system. Spoil was monitored in order to recover artefacts.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the watching brief are presented below and include a stratigraphic description of the trenches that contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches, with dimensions and depths of all deposits, can be found in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates are tabulated in Appendix B.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence was fairly uniform. The natural geology of sand and gravel was overlain by a post-medieval garden soil, which in turn was overlain by either topsoil in Trench 1 or modern crush and concrete within Trench 2.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the watching brief were generally good, and the site remained relatively dry throughout.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 Post-medieval deposits were present in both Trenches 1 and 2

3.4 Trench 1 (Figs. 2 and 4, Plates 1 and 2)

3.4.1 Trench 1 was located within Chapel Quad, adjacent to the kitchen and dining hall. It measured approximately 100m long by 0.60m wide and 0.90m deep.

3.4.2 The natural gravel (3) was only encountered within the northern limits of the trench and was observed to have a natural fall to the south-west (approximately 22.5m north of the chapel; Fig. 4, section 3). This was overlain by a post-medieval garden soil (2), which was a mid-yellowish brown sandy clay and extended beyond the depth of the trench. This layer contained pottery dating from 1820-1840. It was in turn overlain by topsoil and turf (1).

3.4.3 Immediately adjacent to the kitchen and dining hall, the earliest deposit encountered was a layer of mid-yellowish brown sandy silt (5), which was either construction backfill for the kitchen and dining hall or an associated construction horizon, consisting of degraded mortar and ceramic building material (Fig. 4, section 4). It contained pottery dating from 1815-1840 and was overlain by the topsoil (4) of the current flowerbeds.

3.5 Trench 2 (Figs. 3 and 5, Plate 3)

3.5.1 Trench 2 was located within the kitchen and dining hall. It measured 0.40m wide and varied in depth between 0.40m and 0.80m below ground level with associated manholes at 0.90m below ground level.

3.5.2 In general, the natural gravel (10) was overlain by a Loess 'supranatural' deposit (9), comprising a mid-reddish brown silty sand. This was overlain by a mid-yellowish brown sandy silt garden soil (8), which is most likely post-medieval in date. This was in turn overlain by a modern crush levelling layer (7) for the existing concrete floor (6). No cut features were observed.

3.5.3 Within the northern area of the trench the natural gravel was not encountered as it was cut by the construction cut (12) for the northern basement of the kitchen and dining hall. This contained a single fill (11), which was a mid-yellowish white silty sand with frequent limestone and mortar inclusions. This was overlain by levelling deposit 7.

3.6 Finds summary

3.6.1 A total of 23 sherds of pottery were recovered from two contexts dating from the 19th century.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of the field investigation

4.1.1 The archaeological watching brief gave a good sample area of the wider context of the site and consisted of the recording of two trenches (Tr 1 and 2), which were machine excavated with an archaeologist present.

4.2 Interpretation and significance

4.2.1 The watching brief has shown that whilst untruncated natural gravel survives within the site no significant archaeological deposits or features were observed. The 19th-century garden soils and construction deposits associated within the kitchen and dining hall recorded during the archaeological watching brief are considered to be of low significance.

APPENDIX A DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	Mainly N-S
Trench consisted of natural gravel overlain by post-medieval garden soil, overlain by topsoil. Within the northern end of the trench adjacent to the kitchen and dining hall a construction deposit was encountered.					Length (m)	110
					Width (m)	0.60
					Avg. depth (m)	0.90
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1	Layer	-	0.30	Topsoil	-	-
2	Layer	-	0.60+	Post-medieval garden soil	Pot	1820-1840
3	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
4	Layer	-	0.20	Flowerbed topsoil	-	-
5	Layer	-	0.40+	19th century construction deposit	Pot	1815-1840

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	Mainly E-W
Trench consisted of natural gravel overlain by Loess 'supranatural' which was in turn overlain by post-medieval garden soil. This was overlain by levelling and a concrete floor. Within the northern end of the trench construction backfill was encountered for the northern basement.					Length (m)	45+
					Width (m)	0.40
					Avg. depth (m)	0.80
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
6	Layer	-	0.20	Current floor	-	-
7	Layer	-	0.18	Leveling for 6	-	-
8	Layer	-	0.24	Post-medieval garden soil	-	-
9	Layer	-	0.20	Supranatural	-	-
10	Layer	-	-	Natural gravel	-	-
11	Fill	-	0.24+	Fill of 12	-	-
12	Cut	-	0.24+	Construction cut for basement	-	-

APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Post-Roman Pottery

By John Cotter

Introduction and methodology

- B.1.1 A total of 23 sherds (613g) of pottery was recovered from two contexts. Only post-medieval pottery is present.
- B.1.2 All the pottery was scanned during the present assessment and spot-dates were provided for each context. Each context group was quantified by sherd count and weight and recorded on a spot-dating spreadsheet. The pottery is fragmentary, but many large and fresh sherds are present.
- B.1.3 The context spot-date is the date-bracket during which the latest pottery types or fabrics are estimated to have been produced or were in general circulation. Comments on the range of fabrics were recorded, usually with mention of vessel form (jugs, bowls etc) and any other attributes worthy of note (eg, decoration etc). Post-medieval fabric codes referred to are those of the Museum of London (MoLA 2014). The range of pottery is described in some detail in Table 1 and is therefore only summarised below.

Table 1. Description of post-Roman pottery by context

Context	Spot-date	Sherds	Weight	Comments
2	c 1820-1840	15	200	8x transfer-printed whiteware (TPW) incl willow pattern dish rims & small ?child's toy teacup rim with brown-stippled transfer decoration showing rural scene. 2x refined whiteware (REFW PNTD) incl dish rim & mug rim with purple border lines. 1x dish rim Creamware (CREA DEV). 1x Creamware mug rim with industrial slip-banded dec (CREA SLIP). 1x Pearlware (PEAR) dish rim with blue feather edge dec. 1x bo (body sherd) L18/19C Derbyshire stoneware (DERBS) brown-glazed storage jar with rouletted dec. 1x base English brown stoneware (ENGS) blacking bottle with faint stamped excise mark and inscription on lower wall including 'EX' dating it to 1817-1834, the rest of the inscription unclear but probably includes 'PATENT' and 'BLACKING BOTTLE'

				2x ENGS brown stoneware blacking bottles incl complete rim & a flat base. 1x rim small mug in transfer-printed Pearlware (PEAR TR, c1780-1840) with Chinese-style huts & trees ext & with 'Greek key' border int. 2x joining sherds from footring base of moulded dish in Wedgwood-style green-glazed Creamware (CREA GRN, c1760-1830) with attractive basketwork and diaper decoration. 1x bo brown London stoneware (LONS) flagon/jug (18/E19C). 2x sherds post-medieval red earthenware (PMR) incl large sherd from globular jar with flat base and int orange glaze
5	c 1815-1840	8	413	
TOTAL		23	613	

Discussion

B.1.4 The assemblage comprises ordinary domestic pottery of the late 18th and first half of the 19th century, although it was all deposited in the first half of the 19th century. The range of mass-produced tablewares and kitchenwares present is typical of the Oxford area but also typical of most sites in southern England by this date. An English brown stoneware blacking bottle carries an excise (tax duty) mark dating it to 1817-34, and thus provides a useful dating indicator for the assemblage.

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

B.1.5 The pottery here has little potential for further analysis and could be discarded.

APPENDIX C BIBLIOGRAPHY

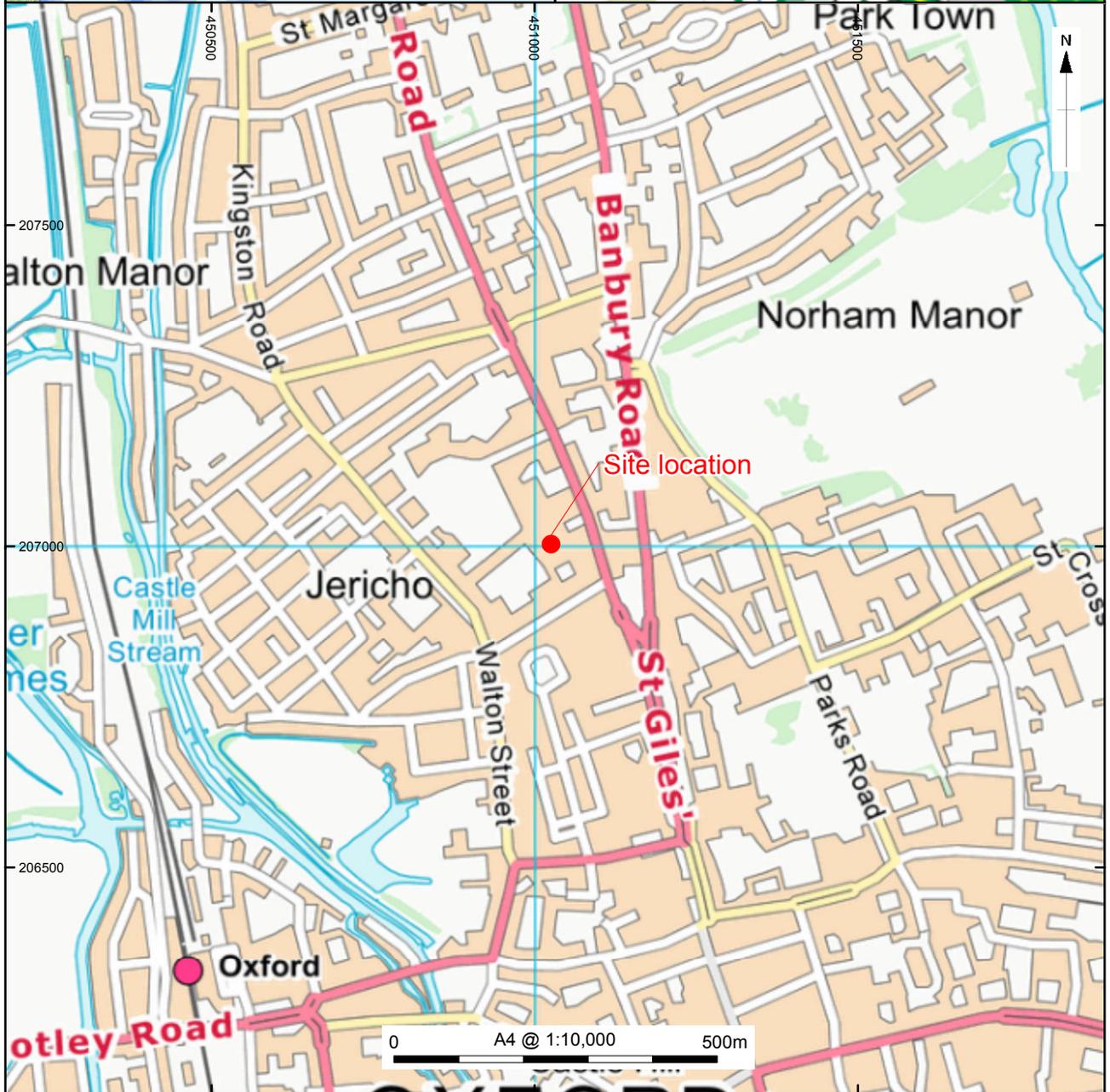
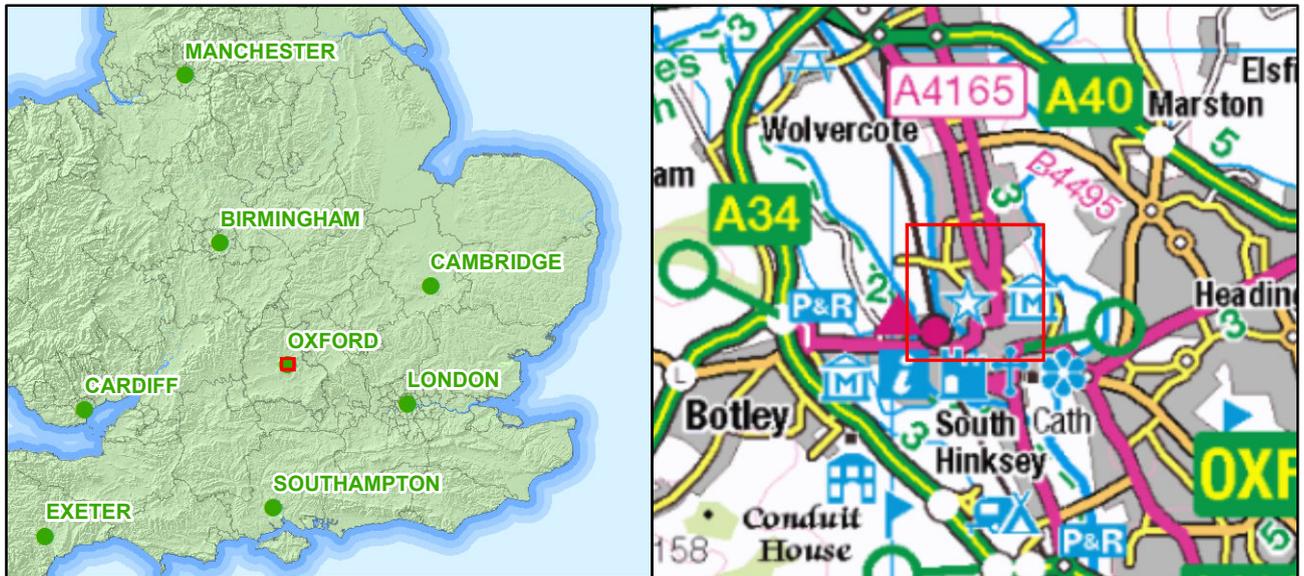
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APPENDIX D**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS / OASIS REPORT FORM**

Site name:	Somerville College Kitchen and Servery Refurbishment, Oxford
Site code:	OXSOKS20
Grid Reference	SP 5101 0700
Type:	Watching Brief
Date and duration:	Between October and December 2020
Area of Site	
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at Oxford Archaeology, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Services in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS: 2020.73.
Summary of Results:	<p>Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by TMD Building Consultancy on behalf of Somerville College to undertake archaeological watching brief for the ground works associated with the renovation of the kitchen and dining hall at Somerville College, Oxford.</p> <p>Archaeological mitigation took place as an intermittent watching brief depending on the principal contractor's work programme between October and December 2020.</p> <p>The watching brief has shown that whilst untruncated natural survives within the site no significant archaeological deposits or features were observed. The post-medieval garden soils and construction deposits associated within the kitchen and dining hall recorded during the archaeological watching brief are considered to be of low significance.</p>



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Figure 1: Site location



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Figure 2: Trench locations



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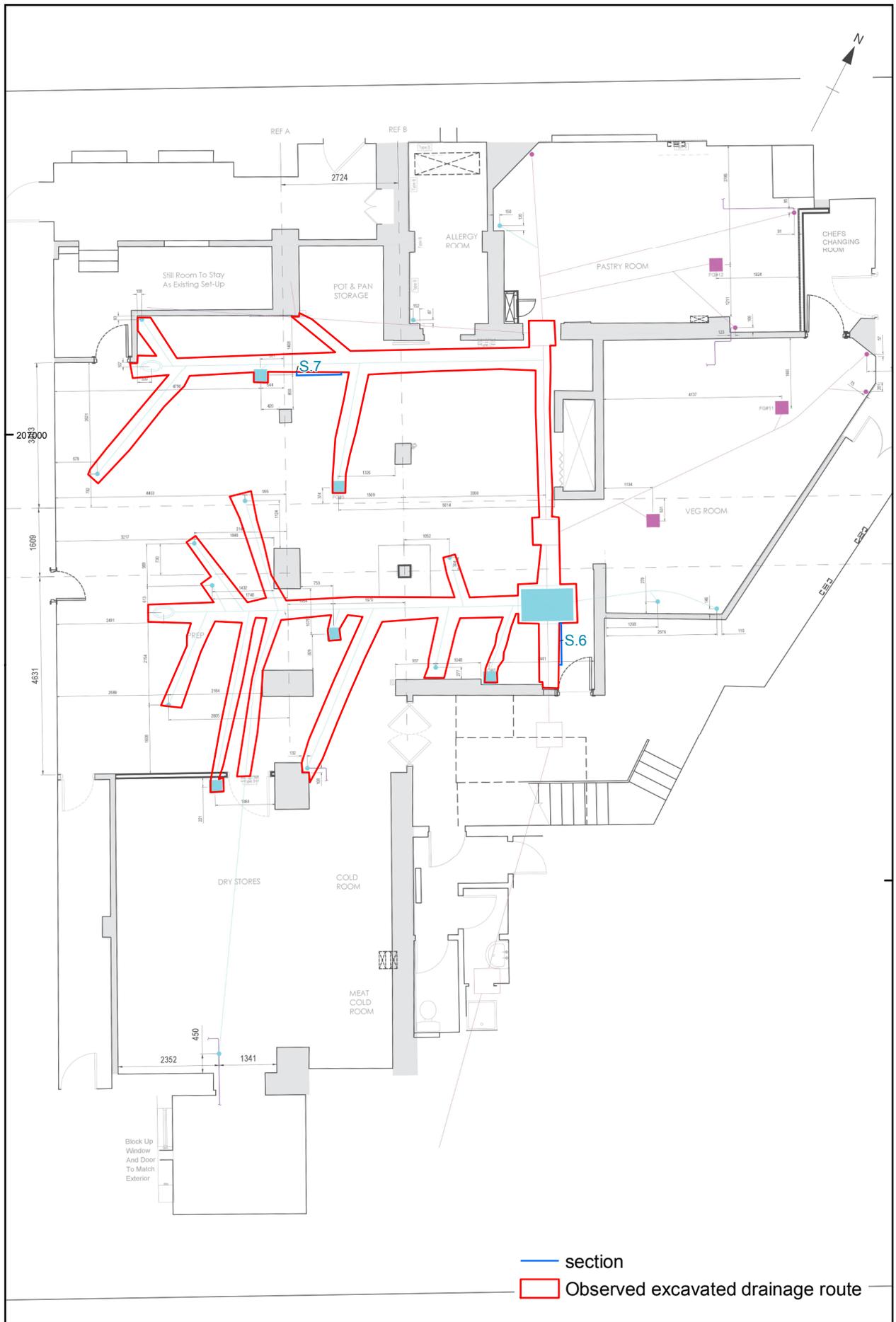


Figure 3: Trench 2

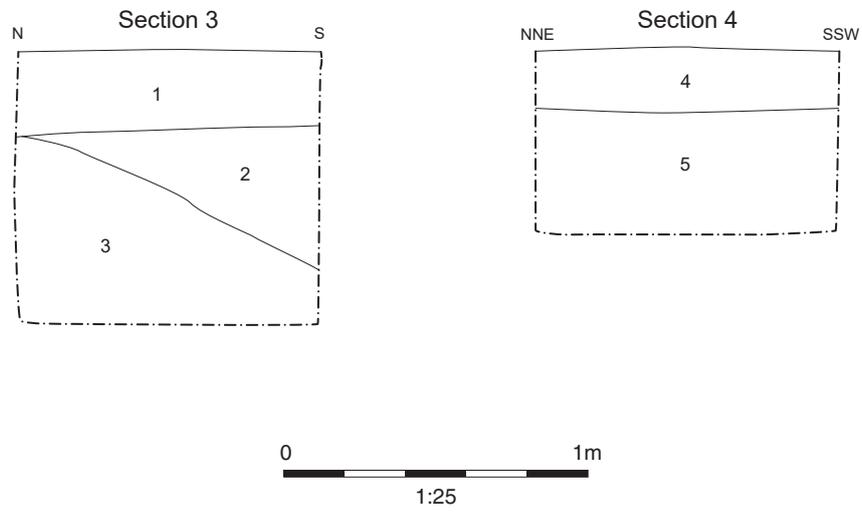


Figure 4: Trench 1 sections

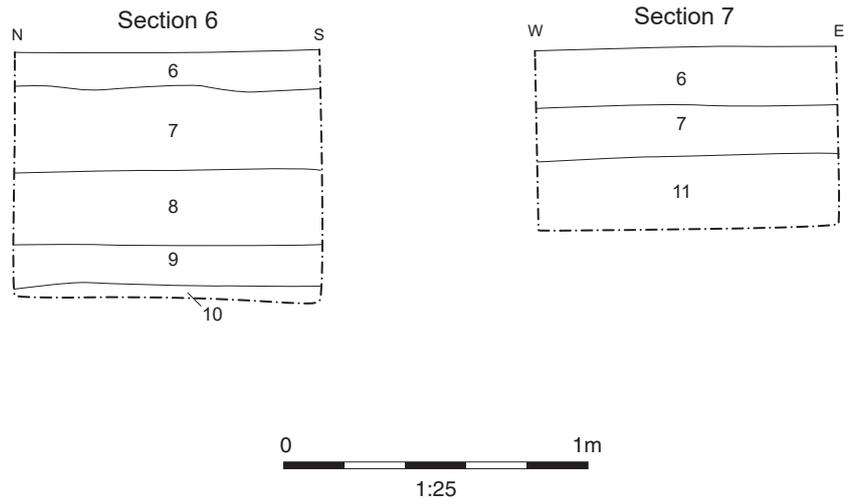


Figure 5: Trench 2 sections



Plate 1: Trench 1, section 3, looking north-east



Plate 2: Trench 1, general shot of northern area, looking north



Plate 3: Trench 2, section 6, looking east



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