

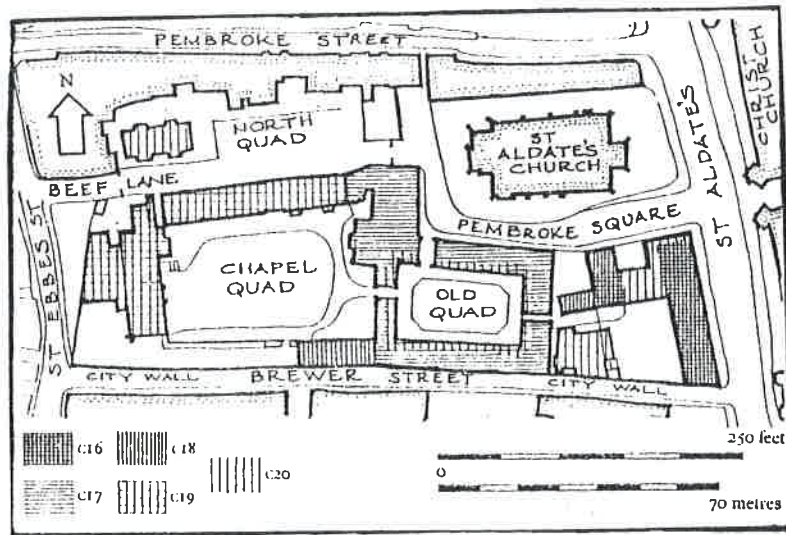
Pembroke College

Staircase 2, Pembroke College, Oxford

NGR SP 513 059

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. 00/0460/L



Oxford Archaeological Unit
January 2001

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Date: January 2001

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Date: *8/1/2001*

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Summary

In July and August 2000 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Pembroke College, Oxford (NGR SP 513 059). The watching brief was carried out during construction and refurbishment works in the vicinity of Staircase 2 in the North Range. Excavations by contractors adjacent to the staircase (Trenches 1 and 2) were recorded, while the excavation of shallow ground beam trenches in nearby rooms (Trenches 3-5, Junior Common Room; Trenches 6-7, Kitchen) was also monitored for the presence of features and finds.

The earliest deposits in Trench 1, adjacent to the north side of the staircase, appeared to represent shallow layers of occupation material, the earliest of which contained a few sherds of early medieval pottery, possibly as early as the 12-14th centuries. However, these sherds were recovered from the upper surface of a deposit that was not fully excavated, so it is unclear whether they formed part of an 'in situ' medieval horizon.

Above the occupation layers in Trench 1 was a stone structure set within a layer of mortar. The stones exhibited signs of burning and the approximate circular shape of the stone arrangement suggests that this was the remains of a small hearth. Above the level of the hearth were superimposed layers of probable levelling or building debris, that contained artefacts of post-medieval date. The remainder of the trenches (3-7) were cut through a similar layer of general debris, probably construction material, that produced a number of post-medieval finds including animal bone, tile, pottery and iron nails. A small amount of disarticulated human bone was also recovered, which was presumably residual and derived from previous disturbances to the underlying deposits associated with the adjacent St. Aldates Church.

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief at Pembroke College, Oxford (NGR SP 513 059) during construction and refurbishment works in late summer 2000. The development proposal (Planning Application No. 00/0460/L) comprised internal alterations in the vicinity of staircase 2 in the North Range, Main Quadrangle.
- 1.2 The major impact of the works comprised two trenches measuring 2 m by 5 m immediately adjacent to the staircase. Additional works included five new ground beam trenches for the construction of new flooring in the Kitchen and the Junior Common Room. No formal brief for archaeological recording was issued at the outset of the project.
- 1.3 However, as the depth of the likely impact on the underlying deposits became clear, a formal agreement was made between the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS), OAU and the college that the best form of mitigation for the project would be a watching brief in the course of the works. Thereafter the watching brief was commissioned by Carter Jonas, Architects, on behalf of Pembroke College, within a brief in accordance with planning consent granted under PPG 16, and Oxford City Council Policy (EN 40, 41 and 43).

2 Background

- 2.1 Pembroke College is located on the west side of St Aldates, situated between Beef Lane to the north and Brewer Street to the south (Fig 1). The College was founded in the 17th century on a site immediately north of the line of the medieval City Wall.
- 2.2 Construction of the new college began in 1624 on a site including Broadgates Hall, one of the many medieval halls; to the north was the site of St Aldates Church. In common with many of the early colleges of the modern era, Pembroke was short of funds and incorporated into its make up rooms and buildings from the previous hall on the site. A new set of rooms was constructed on the south side of the present main quadrangle. The chapel and library were initially located in the south aisle of St Aldates Church itself. The existing front quadrangle was not completed until 1699 (Tyack, 1998).

3 Aims

- 3.1 The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (OAU, 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

4 Methodology

- 4.1 The watching brief was maintained by means of separate inspection visits undertaken by an archaeological supervisor.
- 4.2 Two 2 m by 5 m trenches (Trenches 1 and 2) were excavated by the contractors immediately below and to either side of Staircase 2, in advance of underpinning works. Five ground beam trenches aligned approximately east-west (Trenches 3-7) were excavated in the Junior Common Room and the Kitchen (Café), prior to the installation of a new suspended floor (Fig. 2). At the first archaeological horizon reached, excavation was undertaken by the attending archaeologist. All excavation and spoil removal was monitored for the presence of finds.
- 4.3 Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits and features exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan and section. A colour slide and monochrome print photographic record was made of the work. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil descriptions are based on standard charts for the approximation of inclusions.

5 Results

5.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

The earliest deposit revealed at the base of Trench 1 was a layer of light whitish-grey sandy silt with charcoal (9) that formed the base of the trench excavation. Four sherds of early medieval pottery were recovered from the upper surface of the layer (see Finds, below), perhaps suggesting that there was a medieval surface here. However no further detailed investigation of the layer was possible. Layer 9 was overlain by a grey-brown sandy silt (8), which contained limestone fragments, charcoal flecks, animal bone and building tile. The layer extended across the central deepest part of the trench.

Sealing deposit 8 were several thin un-burnt lenses of yellow-brown sandy silt with some charcoal flecks and occasional animal bone fragments. These proved difficult to distinguish in section and were collectively recorded (7). These deposits had a maximum combined thickness of 0.15 m, and were seen in the centre of the trench. Above lay a further sequence of thin lenses of blackish-red and yellow sandy silt with occasional small animal bones that were grouped as one layer (6). All the lenses showed traces of burning.

Overlying the upper part of layer 6 was an extensive spread of grey-white mortar (5) within which lay a stone structure (10). This feature consisted of one course of limestone with the blocks measuring c 0.3 m - 0.5 m in length and 0.3 m in width. The bases and the sides of the stones were dressed and the upper surfaces roughly finished; there was no evidence for any bonding material. The stones were all burnt and appeared to have a central depression. It is unclear as to whether this was the original form or whether the central area had eroded over time from repeated fires. Two other limestone blocks were observed set into layer 5 and these extended into the east edge of the trench section. The function of these stones is unclear.

Layer 5 and the stonework were sealed by a further light grey-white mortar (4) containing gravel. The layer may have been a surface sealing the hearth and it extended beyond the confines of Trench 1. Above lay a grey-brown sandy silt (3) with occasional fragments of animal bone and charcoal flecks to a depth of 0.25 m. The layer extended fully across the length of the trench and may represent a levelling layer. This lay beneath a similar make-up deposit of light yellow-brown sandy silt (2) containing 30% mortar fragments. At the top of the sequence was a substantial light grey-brown sandy silt (1) containing occasional fragments of unworked limestone measuring c 0.05 - 0.15 m.

5.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

The only deposit revealed in this trench was a mid grey-brown sandy silt (11) similar in composition to the upper layer Trench 1. This layer was 0.8 m deep and contained post-medieval tile and clay pipe fragments, occasional bone and a leather shoe.

5.3 Trenches 3, 4, 5 (Fig. 2)

Trenches 3, 4 and 5 were excavated on an east-west alignment within the Junior Common Room. The trenches were an average of 0.4 m deep and 0.5 m wide. All were cut through a grey-brown sandy silt (12) similar to deposits 11 in Trench 2 and 1 in Trench 1. The layer was mixed and contained fragments of brick, tile and pottery of post-medieval date and clay pipe fragments. Also recovered was a quantity of disarticulated human bone. No articulated burials were seen and no grave cuts, coffin furniture or grave goods were observed.

5.4 Trenches 6 and 7 (Fig. 2)

Both trenches were excavated within the Kitchen and were aligned east-west. The trenches were c 0.4 m deep and 0.5 m wide and cut through a layer of material (13) similar to layers 11, 12 and 1 seen elsewhere. Further human bone and tile were recovered from the layer.

6 The Finds

6.1 The Pottery

A total of 22 sherds of pottery were recovered from the trenches. The majority of the material was of post-medieval date and was recovered from make-up layers that formerly supported the floor layers within the college buildings. Four sherds of earlier material were recovered from the earliest deposit identified in Trench 1. Of these, one appears to exhibit some light green glazing, while the remaining sherds appear to be crude locally made types. A date in the 12th-14th centuries is likely, though from the limited excavation it is unclear if these sherds came from a medieval horizon. The post-medieval materials require little comment - the sherds presumably derive from activity in the college either during construction or during previous floor refurbishment work.

6.2 Other finds

A total of sixteen pieces of clay pipe were recovered, all of post-medieval date. No bowls or diagnostic stamped materials were found. Tile fragments were recovered from Trenches 1 and 2; all are of post-medieval date and may derive from building works. Three iron nails and a wooden handled iron corkscrew were recovered from Trench 1 and a leather shoe was found in Trench 2. A substantial quantity of animal bone, including material from cattle, sheep and pigs, and a small quantity of oyster shell were also found in Trench 1. The material may derive from kitchen waste and have become incorporated within the make-up for the floor during previous building works. All of the disarticulated human bone was retained for reburial on the site at the completion of works.

7 Environmental

No environmental samples were taken during the course of the watching brief as no suitable deposits were observed.

8 Discussion

The most significant archaeological remains were found in Trench 1. The presence of early medieval pottery at the top of a possible occupation surface may suggest that the layers at this level and below were part of a building associated with Broadgates Hall. Layers of burnt material above may have derived from fires and or from cooking activity, though little can be said about them given the limitations of the excavation. The stone hearth (10) and associated mortar floor surface appear to be of post-medieval date, and presumably formed part of the heating or cooking arrangements in the newly founded college after 1624. The limited investigation also precludes further interpretation. The layers above presumably relate to the formation levels for the floors in the later post-medieval period - similar make-up layers were observed in trenches 2-7, so an episode of general levelling is likely.

None of the human bone was *in situ*, and can be assumed to have derived from disturbance to deposits associated with the burial ground of the adjacent church - the date for this disturbance is unclear.

A Holmes/J Dalton/R Bashford/J Hiller
January 2001

Appendix: Table of context information

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Finds	Dating/Comments
1	Layer	0.55 m	-	FE tool with wood handle 4 sherds of pottery 34 pieces of animal bone 2 pieces of oyster shell 13 fragments of clay pipe	Post-medieval
2	Layer	0.15 m	-	-	Post-medieval
3	Layer	0.15 m	-	-	Post-medieval
4	Layer	0.22 m	-	-	Post medieval
5	Layer	0.2 m	-	-	Mortar layer
6	Layer	0.15 m	-	2 FE nails 3 sherds of pottery 1 piece of animal bone 12 fragments of BM 2 pieces of oyster shell	Post-medieval
7	Layer	0.15 m	-	-	Undated
8	Layer	0.4 m	-	12 sherds of pottery 1 piece of animal bone 1 piece of BM 3 pieces of oyster shell	Undated
9	Layer	-	-	1 FE nail 4 sherds of pottery 6 pieces of animal bone	Medieval, 12th-14th century
10	Structure	0.2 m	0.75 m	Limestone blocks, dressed	Post-medieval
11				3 sherds of pottery 3 fragments of clay pipe 1 leather shoe	Post-medieval
12	Layer	0.8 m	-	-	Post-medieval
13	Layer	0.4 m	-	-	Post-medieval

References

Tyack, G 1998 *Oxford: An Architectural Guide* Oxford University Press.

OAU 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992, ed.).

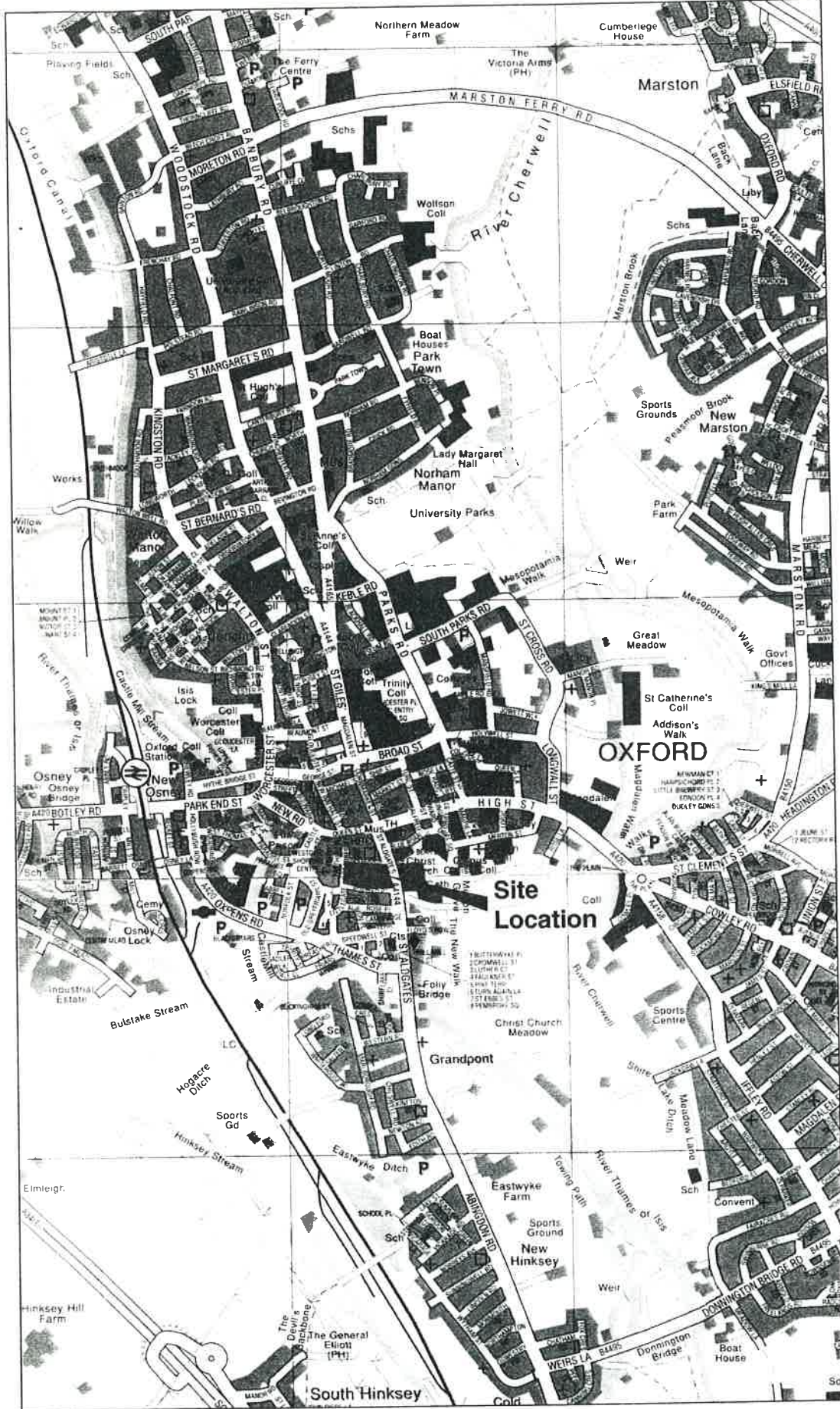
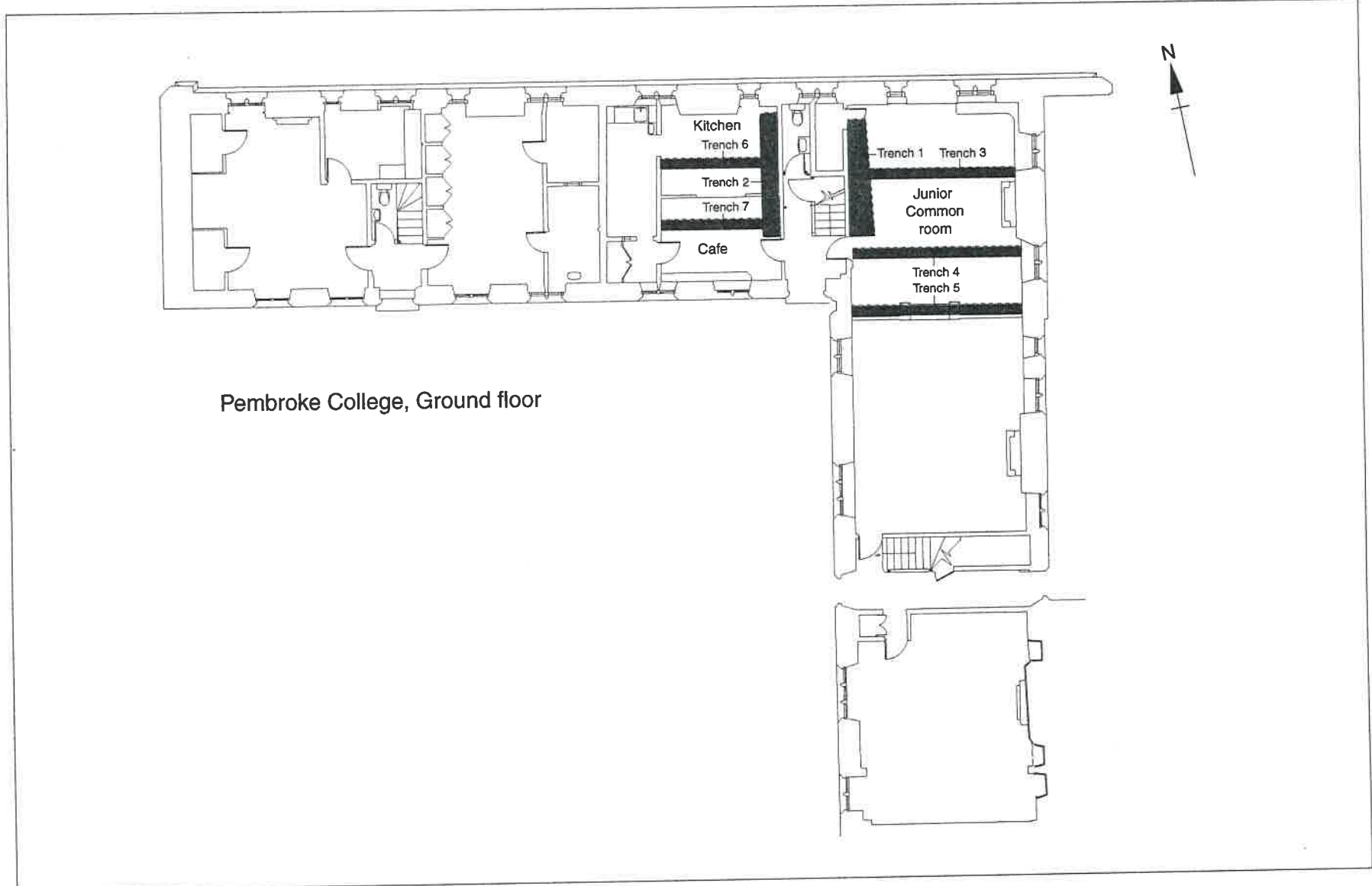


Fig 1. Site location map



Pembroke College, Ground floor

Fig 2. Trench location map 1 : 200

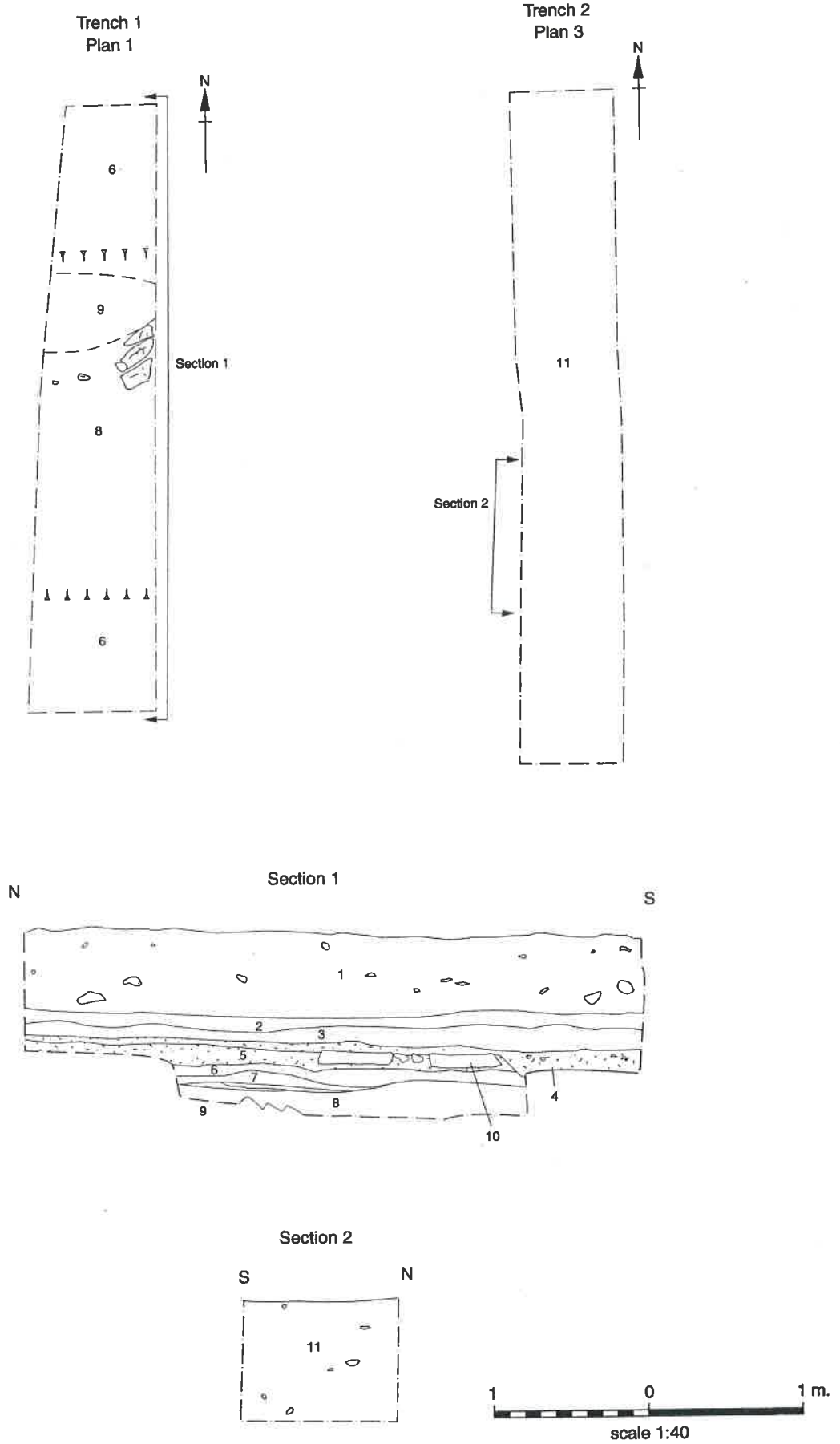


Fig 3. Trenches 1 & 2, Sections and plans