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The National Trust  
Thames and Chilterns Region

# CHASTLETON HOUSE

Archaeological Evaluation of Stables/Brewhouse Courtyard



Oxford Archaeological Unit  
February 1993

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## Archaeological Evaluation of Stable/Brewhouse Courtyard

### 1. *Introduction*

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of the National Trust within the area of the courtyard adjacent to the brewhouse/stable buildings. The work was carried out between the 16-18 December 1992, in advance of building work on the brewhouse due to commence early in 1993, in order to ascertain the nature and extent of any surviving courtyard surfaces. A visual survey was undertaken of any yard surfaces not currently obscured by turf and these were plotted onto an existing 1:50 survey of the courtyard; a limited amount of probing was undertaken to trace the extent of brickwork surfaces immediately below the modern turf (Fig. 2). In addition, a total of five trenches were excavated by hand (Fig. 1), one of which was intended to investigate the relationship of the courtyard surface to any surviving floor levels within the supposed barn on the eastern side of the stable yard that is mentioned in the early inventory.

### 2. *Summary*

Visual examination of the courtyard, together with probing, revealed that much of the yard was cobbled, with areas of large cobbling outside the doors in the north range. The stable doors have brick paving outside them, and a brick path crossing the yard between the stable and cartshed. An area of stone flags runs between the two stable doors alongside the west range.

Four 1m square trenches were excavated by hand within the central area of the courtyard, the fifth trench (1m x 1.5m) being positioned to the eastern side of the yard across the wall of the supposed barn.

Cobbled surfaces were located in all 4 of the trenches in the central area of the courtyard, though preservation was variable. However, no floor layers were identified within the area of the supposed barn, where wall footings and modern services have caused much disturbance. No artifactual dating evidence was retrieved from any of the exposed surfaces.

### 3. *List of figures*

Fig. 1 Location of evaluation trenches (scale 1:200)

Fig. 2 Location of visible courtyard surfaces (scale 1:200)

Fig. 3a Trench 5, plan (scale 1:20)

Fig. 3b Trench 5, northern baulk section (scale 1:20)



#### 4. *Trench descriptions*

##### **Trench 1 (1m x 1m)**

Trench located within central area of courtyard. The trench was excavated by hand to reveal a well compacted surface comprising smooth rounded cobbles up to 0.10m in diameter with occasional flat semi-angular limestone pieces of similar size within a matrix of pale grey mortar and gravel. The cobbled surface was overlaid by a fairly well compacted pale grey chalky layer containing pea grit and small gravel, this in turn being overlaid by modern turf and topsoil. The cobbled surface was located at a height of 174.10m OD.

##### **Trench 2 (1m x 1m)**

Trench located within central area of courtyard. Turf and topsoil directly overlie a well compacted cobbled surface similar in nature to that encountered in Trench 1. In the southern half of the trench the cobbled surface has been disturbed by the laying of a brick paved area which appears to extend most of the way across the courtyard terminating just short of the garage/coach house on the eastern edge of the yard (fig. 2). The cobbled surface was located at a height of 173.98m OD.

##### **Trench 3 (1m x 1m)**

Trench located within central area of courtyard. Turf and topsoil directly overlie a well compacted cobbled surface similar in nature to that located in Trench 2. The northern half of the exposed surface appeared to be stained by cinders or coal ash. The cobbled surface was located at a height of 173.91m OD.

##### **Trench 4 (1m x 1m)**

Trench located within central area of courtyard. The topsoil was mixed with substantial amounts of building debris (predominantly stone tile fragments). This layer overlaid a further deposit of building debris which appears to disturb the cobbled surface in this trench which only appears in the north-east corner of the excavated area. The precise nature of the disturbance was not apparent within the limited area of excavation, though the proximity of modern services (electricity and water) was noted. The cobbled surface was located at a height of 173.85m OD.

##### **Trench 5 (1m x 1.5m; Figs. 3a & 3b)**

Trench 5 was positioned to investigate the relationship of the courtyard surface to any surviving floor layers within the supposed barn on the east side of the courtyard. A rubble foundation (503) for the extant wall was located at a depth of 0.15m below the present ground surface, and the construction trench for this wall (502) would have destroyed any surviving floor layers within the limits of the trench. A metal pipe 0.02m diam. containing an electricity cable (508) was exposed running east-west across the trench, cutting the rubble foundation and further disturbing any deposits

relating to the supposed barn. A possible flat stone surface (506) was located in the extreme north-east of the trench at a height of 174.07m OD, but the limited area exposed within the trench makes positive identification of this feature as a floor layer very tentative. No cobbled courtyard surface was encountered within this trench, and so no relationship between courtyard and floor layer could be defined.

#### 5. *Visual survey (Fig. 2)*

In addition to the five hand-excavated trenches described above, a visual survey was undertaken to record any visible surfaces. These surfaces were plotted onto an existing 1:50 plan and the results are summarised in Fig.2. As has already been stated, a small amount of probing was involved in defining the limits of identified surfaces. The north-west corner was obscured by scaffolding at the time of the survey, apart from a concrete patch outside the Brewhouse window that is related to water services. This end of the yard is probably all cobbled, since cobbles were found in Trench 3, and in distinct areas outside the two doors into the north range. These last consisted of patches of larger cobbles than those observed in the trenches.

The brickwork uncovered in Trench 2 is also visible outside the stable door, and was traced by probing in a broad path across the yard leading towards the cartshed, where it may reach the brick paving that is also visible round the north entrance of the shed. The south door to the stable also has a patch of brick outside the door, and this is linked to the north door by a flagstone path.

The cobbled surface found in Trenches 1 and 4 were of small stones, and a similar surface probably extends across the southern end of the yard, though its exact extent was not discovered. It is understood that the extent of this surface is visible on early aerial photographs.

#### 6. *Recommendations*

The cobbled courtyard surfaces, where located, were overlaid by an average of c.0.10m of turf and topsoil and it is felt that unless heavy machinery is to be manoeuvred within the courtyard area during building work, this depth of overburden will be sufficient to protect the surfaces from damage from normal traffic. However, in the immediate vicinity of the brewhouse, where scaffolding, ladders and building activities are likely to be more intensive, some protection with planking may be necessary to preserve the cobbling from damage. Similarly, the brick surfaces next the stable doors should be protected from damage from traffic and heavy gear.

At a stage when the building work has ceased, and the yard is no longer being used for constant access, it may be appropriate to strip off the soil overburden and

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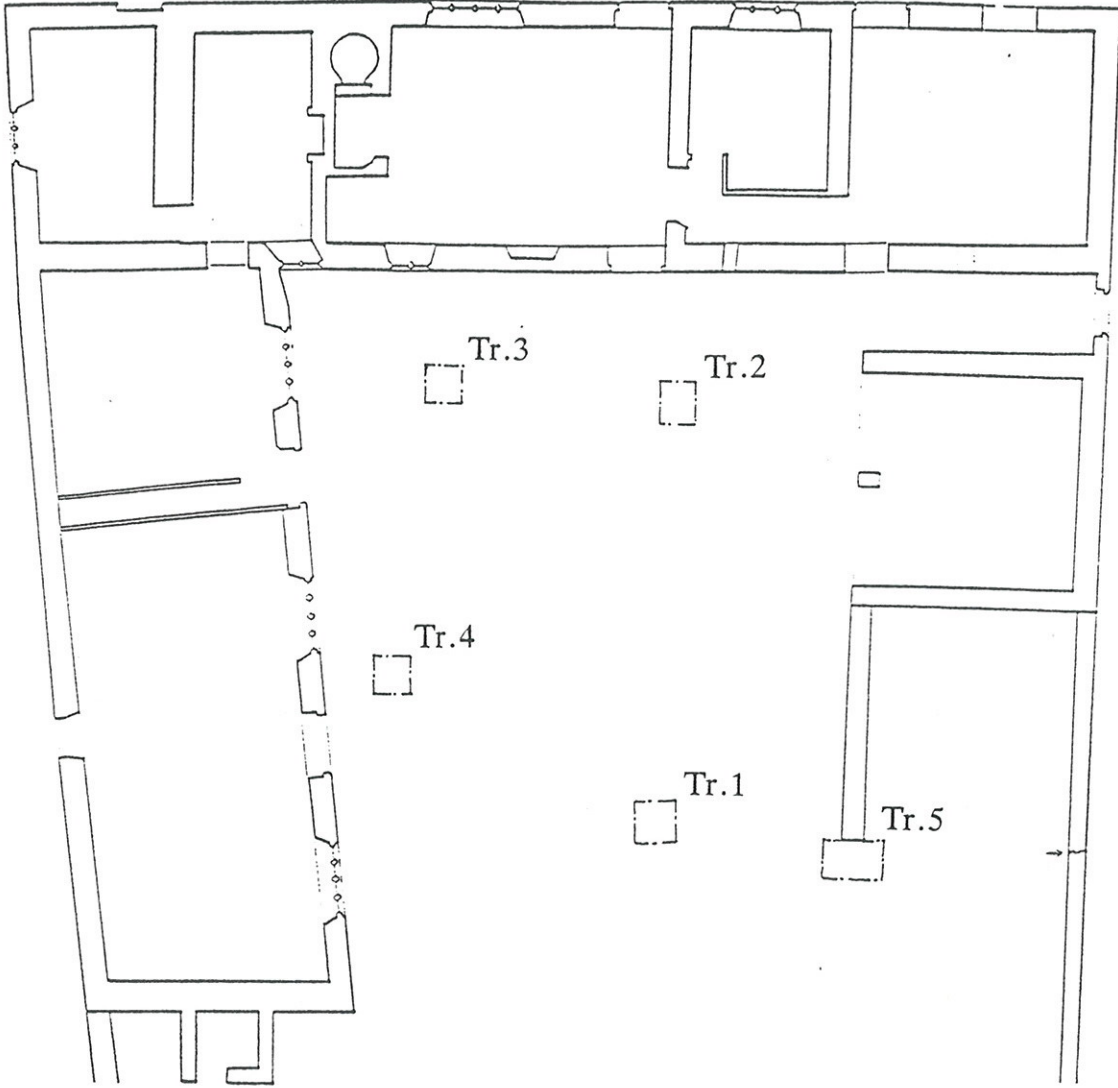
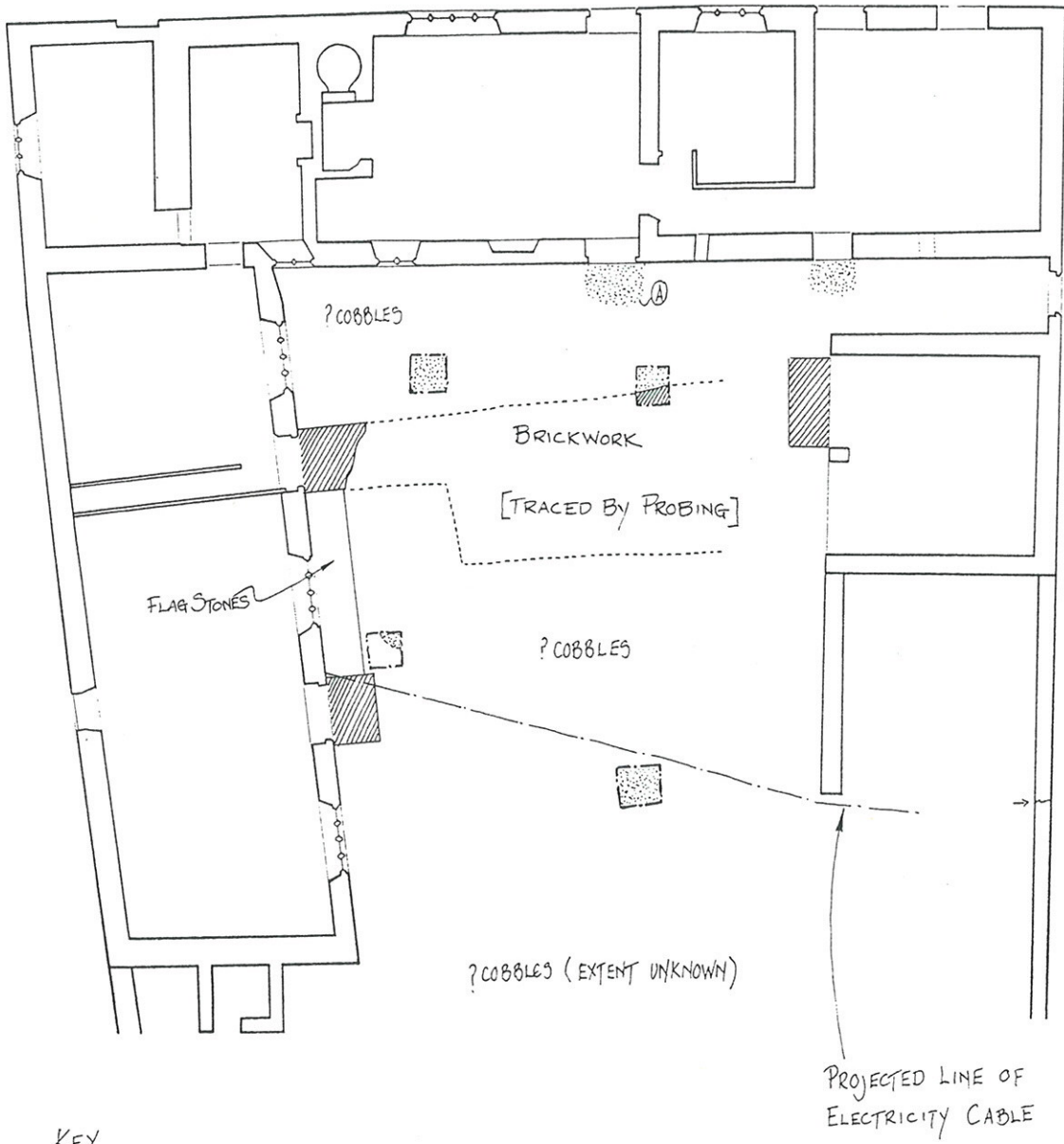


Fig. 1 Location of evaluation trenches (scale 1:200)





KEY

-  - VISIBLE/UNCOVERED COBBLED SURFACE
-  - VISIBLE BRICKWORK SURFACE

Fig. 2 Location of visible courtyard surfaces (scale 1:200)

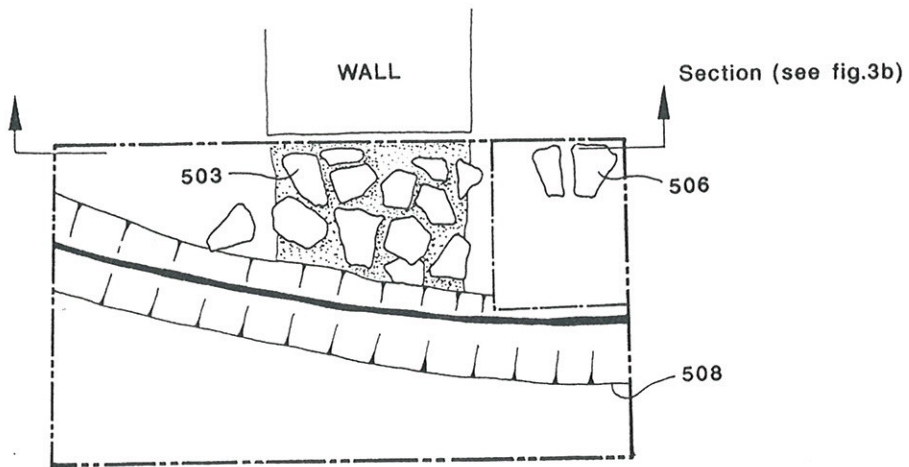


Fig. 3a Trench 5 Plan (scale 1:20)

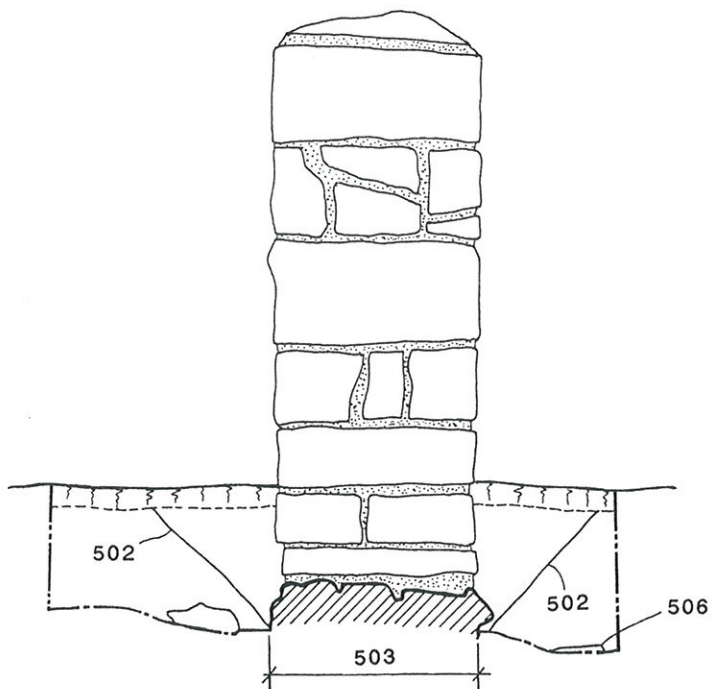


Fig. 3b Trench 5 Northern baulk section (scale 1:20)





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