



Enabling Works, Keble College, Acland Hospital Site, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Enabling Works, Keble College, Acland Hospital Site, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

In November 2013 Oxford Archaeology (OA) conducted an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a trench for a guide wall to facilitate a piling rig. This was in advance of the installation of a contiguous pile wall along the southern-western boundary of the site of the former Acland Hospital, Woodstock Road, Oxford (centred at SP 5132 0639). The watching brief recorded evidence for a post-medieval building and deposits associated with its demolition prior to the construction of the Acland Hospital buildings from the latter part of the 19th century. A stone lined well was also recorded, although the relationship between this structure and the building was uncertain. A relatively sterile reddish-brown deposit appeared to be the earliest deposit encountered and may represent the post-glacial brickearth known to overlay the second gravel terrace on which Oxford sits. Alternatively, it is possible that it represented fills derived from the brickearth. Features with fills of similar composition have been excavated on numerous sites across the city, and are often associated with activity pre-dating the urban development of Oxford following the foundation of the burh in the 9th-10th century.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Rick Mather Architects to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the enabling works at the site of the former Acland Hospital, Oxford.
- 1.1.2 The work concerned the demolition of an approximate 14m length of standing stone wall flanking the south side of the vehicular access from Woodstock Road and forming the northern side of the Royal Oak's beer garden. Following demolition, two test piles were augered (TPs 1 and 2 on Figure 2) and a trench excavated in the location of the former wall in order to form a guide wall for the piling rig (Fig. 2).
- 1.1.3 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (09/00322/FUL). A brief was set by David Radford (Oxford City Council Archaeologist), and a written scheme of investigation was produced by OA (OA 2013) detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the discharge the planning condition. This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The 0.7 hectare site comprises of a mixture of 19th and 20th century buildings, with grass, landscaped and tarmac areas. The site was formerly Acland Hospital part of the Nuffield Hospital estate and is now owned by Keble College. The site lies within a Conservation Area and encompasses No. 25 Banbury Road ('The Acland Home') a Grade II listed building. Another Grade II listed building borders the southern boundary of the site (No. 21 Banbury Road).
- 1.2.2 The site is bounded to the west by Woodstock Road, to the north by St Ann's college, to the east by Banbury road and to the south by the Royal Oak public house.
- 1.2.3 The former hospital sits equidistant between the Rivers Thames and Cherwell flowing c. 800-900m from the site which is situated on the edge of the Summertown-Radley gravel terrace. The underlying geology is Oxford Clay. The level of the ground at the site is relatively flat with a consistent height at 63.5m OD, this falls away gently to the south, east and west.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

No Desk Based Assessment (DBA) was commissioned for the site, however OA did produce an Archaeological Impact Assessment (OA 2007) to compliment a Heritage Statement by Rick Mather Architects (2007) which contained a limited archaeological background. OA has produced DBA's for other sites close to the current site, and the summary below principally draws upon a DBA for a sub-station in University Parks c. 400 m to the east of the current site (OA 2008).

Prehistoric Period (500,000 BP – 43 AD)

- 1.3.1 Two Palaeolithic stone axes were recovered from the old Girls' High School, 21 Banbury Road, immediately to the south of Felstead House.

1.3.2 A large Late Neolithic henge monument was partially excavated by TVAS approximately 200m to the SSE of the site. Radiocarbon dating places the material from the henge ditch at the end of the 3rd millennium (c 2200 BC).

1.3.3 The Acland Hospital site lies c 100 m west of the University Parks, where there is an extensive area of cropmarks, including a possible Iron Age settlement and Bronze Age ring ditches from burial mounds. A number of ring ditches have been identified across the northern part of the city, from the Science Area to the Sackler Library in St John's Street.

Roman Period (43 AD – 410 AD)

1.3.4 There have been finds of Roman coins and pottery across much of north Oxford. A settlement has been identified in the Science Area and it is possible that the activity in the University Parks continued into this period.

Early Medieval Period (AD 410 – 1066)

1.3.5 The presence of possible burial mounds and excavation of skeletons in the 18th century suggests an early Saxon cemetery may have existed around the Radcliffe Infirmary, which is immediately west of the Acland Hospital site on Woodstock Road.

1.3.6 From the 9th century onwards Oxford developed into a substantial defended town, but this did not extend as far north as the area the Acland Hospital site. At that period the land belonged probably to the manor of Walton and it is probable that it was a mixture of arable land and meadow.

Later Medieval Period (AD1066-1550)

1.3.7 2.1.8 St Giles parish was established in the early 12th century, taking in Walton manor. The fields were known as Walton fields in the 14th and 15th centuries and were a mixture of arable and meadow, with common pasture rights recorded in the 14th century. The area became known as St Giles Field in 1542 and much of it was purchased by St John's College in 1573. Evidence for medieval ridge and furrow was found 30m north of the site.

Post-Medieval Period (AD1550-1850)

1.3.8 During the post-medieval period, the site lay within open fields. Archaeological excavations 30m to the north of the site at St Anne's College (OAU 1991) produced evidence of post medieval quarrying and a half groat from the Civil War period

1.3.9 The site lies immediately north of the plotted extent of the Civil War defences, and may contain evidence of the conflict such as canon balls, musket balls etc.

Early Modern Period (AD1851-1939)

1.3.10 The Ackland home building lies over the footprint of Northgate House and its garden (built c. 1841-1850). This was one of the earliest houses built along the Banbury and Woodstock Roads in the 19th century. It was constructed by Jonathan Browning, Mayor of Oxford and Ironmonger, as a family home. Northgate house was demolished in 1936 when extensive new buildings that expanded the capacity of the Acland Hospital (based at 25 Banbury Rd since 1897 after moving from Wellington Square, Oxford) were constructed.

Previous Work

- 1.3.11 In July 2009 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation on the site digging seven trenches (OA, 2009). The earliest features found were a series of possible postholes and a NW-SE aligned ditch within a car-parking area adjacent to the Banbury Road. The location of a pre-historic ring ditch is tentatively postulated in the SW corner of the site (potentially re-used as a bastion within the Civil War defences). centre of the site.
- 1.3.12 A large pit was also located to the east of the site which produced a sherd of 10th-12th century pottery. This suggests some sort of low-level occupation activity. A layer of reworked loessic loam overlay the pit and may indicate ploughing in this area in the 13th century.
- 1.3.13 A very large pit or ditch was identified in the SW corner of the site. Its fills contained early post-medieval finds giving a date from 1630 onwards. This feature is probably the ditch that encompassed the northernmost bastion of the civil wall defences, as represented on de Gomme's Plan of 1644. A later re-cutting of the fills of this feature is likely to have been caused by subsequent post-medieval pits.
- 1.3.14 Within the NW of the site, another deep feature was identified. The interpretation was problematic, given the limited profile obtained, although a single sherd of 18th century pottery was recovered from just above the base of this feature. It is probable that this is a relatively late substantial pit, probably a quarry hole for gravel extraction.
- 1.3.15 The foundations of the former Northgate House were also uncovered close to the centre of the site.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

General

2.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were to:

- establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the development area,
- determine and confirm the character of any remains present,
- determine or estimate the date range of any remains from artefacts or otherwise,
- characterise any underlying archaeological strata down to undisturbed geology,
- determine the palaeo-environmental potential of archaeological deposits

Specific aims and objectives

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

- Establish whether significant later prehistoric remains were present (e.g. Neolithic or Bronze Age funerary monuments or related remains, also any evidence for Iron Age or Roman agricultural landscapes),
- Establish whether any significant Saxon remains were present,
- Establish the character and extent of any medieval and post medieval activity (e.g. is there evidence for ridge and furrow, field boundaries, gravel quarry's, Civil War siege related activity etc).

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 A summary of OA's general approach to excavation and recording can be found in Appendix A of the WSI. Standard methodologies for geomatics and survey, environmental evidence, artefactual evidence and burials can also be found in that document (Appendices B, C, D and E respectively).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Test piles

- 3.1.1 Two test piles were augered to a depth of approximately 1.7m below the level of the existing tarmac, and measured approximately 0.4m in diameter. These were located over the grubbed out footing of the north-south section of the recently removed wall between the site and The Royal Oak public house to the south-west.
- 3.1.2 Given the nature of the excavation, it was not possible to ascertain the presence - or otherwise - of archaeological features or deposits. However, in the northernmost of the two test piles, the auger appeared to encounter a relatively sterile looking yellow-brown sandy gravel at between 1m and 1.5m below the level of the existing tarmac.

Guide wall trench

- 3.1.3 A 16m x 1.35m trench was excavated to an average depth of 1m below existing ground level. The earliest deposit encountered appeared to be a fairly sterile mid reddish brown clayey silt (100), which was revealed in plan at two locations in the base of the trench. Approximately 9.7m from the western end of the trench, deposit 100 appeared to have been cut by a north-south aligned rubble filled linear feature (101), which extended c0.8m into the trench before returning to the east along the northern section of the trench, before being truncated by a modern ?manhole. This was thought likely to represent a robbed out wall footing. To the south of the east-west section of this feature was a charcoal rich deposit (102), which may have been within a feature cut into Deposit 100 - although this was far from certain.
- 3.1.4 To the south of Feature 101, Deposit 100 appeared to be overlain by interspersed layers of charcoal and mortar rich material, with varying concentrations of building material, clay pipe and glass (amalgamated as a single context (103)).
- 3.1.5 Approximately 6.7m from the western end of the trench, a well (104) was revealed. This lay immediately to the north of the northern edge of the trench and was at least 3.8m deep, with an internal diameter of 0.5m. It had been capped with a large slab of ?limestone and had a length of lead pipe feeding out of it, with an iron hoop driven in to the southern face.
- 3.1.6 The remaining upper courses of the well, Deposit 103 and "Structure" 101 were overlain by approximately 0.65m of mixed modern made ground - the majority of which is likely to be disturbance from the recently demolished boundary wall between the Acland site and the Royal Oak public house to the south.

4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 As the scope of the works monitored during the watching brief was very limited, any interpretation of the features and deposits encountered is necessarily tentative.
- 4.1.2 It is possible that the sterile sandy gravel deposit encountered in TP1 represents the terrace gravel, and the depth of the deposit would appear to be roughly consistent with the results of the earlier evaluation (OA, 2009). This saw gravels revealed at between 0.82m and 1.13m below the existing ground level (62.30m - 62.78m OD across the whole site).
- 4.1.3 The interfaces between the deposits in the base of the guide wall trench appeared to be on a roughly north-south alignment, possibly indicating linear features, and it is possible that deposit 100 represented re-worked brickearth. However, the relationship between the deposits was not definitively established within the confines of the trench, and this interpretation is far from conclusive.
- 4.1.4 The results from the evaluation suggested that the terrace gravels and the overlying brickearth formed a relatively flat area of slightly higher ground in the north-east of the site with the top of the brickearth at c.63.05mOD, although falling away slightly to 62.61mOD in the west and 62.72m OD in the south. As the top of the reddish brown deposit in the trench monitored during the recent watching brief was approximately 62.34m OD, it is possible that it represented the fill of a negative feature.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context Inventory						
Context	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Comment	Date
100	Deposit	-	-	Friable, mid reddish brown clay silt	Possible brickearth	-
101	Structure	0.5	-	Limestone rubble	Possible robbed wall	-
102	Deposit	-	-	Friable mid-dark grey silty clay with concentrations of charcoal	Possible ditch fill??	-
103	Deposit	-	-	Interspersed layers of charcoal and mortar rich material, with varying concentrations of building material, clay pipe and glass	Uncertain	-
104	Structure	0.5 (internal diameter)	3.8+	Stone-lined well	Well	-

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

OA, 2007 Archaeological Impact Assessment. Keble College, Acland Hospital Site, Banbury Road Client Report

OA, 2008 Oxford University Parks, Electricity Sub-station: Desk-Based Assessment

OA, 2009 The Former Acland Hospital Site, Oxford: Archaeological Evaluation Report

OA, 2013 Enabling works, Keble College, Acland Hospital Site, Oxford. Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief

Rick Mather Architects, 2007 Acland Site Heritage Statement

APPENDIX C SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	Enabling works, Keble College, Acland Hospital Site, Oxford
Site code:	OXKEAC13
Grid Reference	SP 5132 0639
Type:	Watching Brief
Date and duration:	2 visits in November 2013
Area of Site	0.7 ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS: 2013.160
Summary of Results:	<p>In November 2013 Oxford Archaeology (OA) conducted an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a trench for a guide wall to facilitate a piling rig. This was in advance of the installation of a contiguous pile wall along the southern-western boundary of the site of the former Acland Hospital, Woodstock Road, Oxford (centred at SP 5132 0639). The watching brief recorded evidence for a post-medieval building and deposits associated with its demolition prior to the construction of the Acland Hospital buildings from the latter part of the 19th century. A stone lined well was also recorded, although the relationship between this structure and the building was uncertain. A relatively sterile reddish-brown deposit appeared to be the earliest deposit encountered and may represent the post-glacial brickearth known to overlay the second gravel terrace on which Oxford sits. Alternatively, it is possible that it represented fills derived from the brickearth. Features with fills of similar composition have been excavated on numerous sites across the city, and are often associated with activity pre-dating the urban development of Oxford following the foundation of the burh in the 9th-10th century.</p>



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

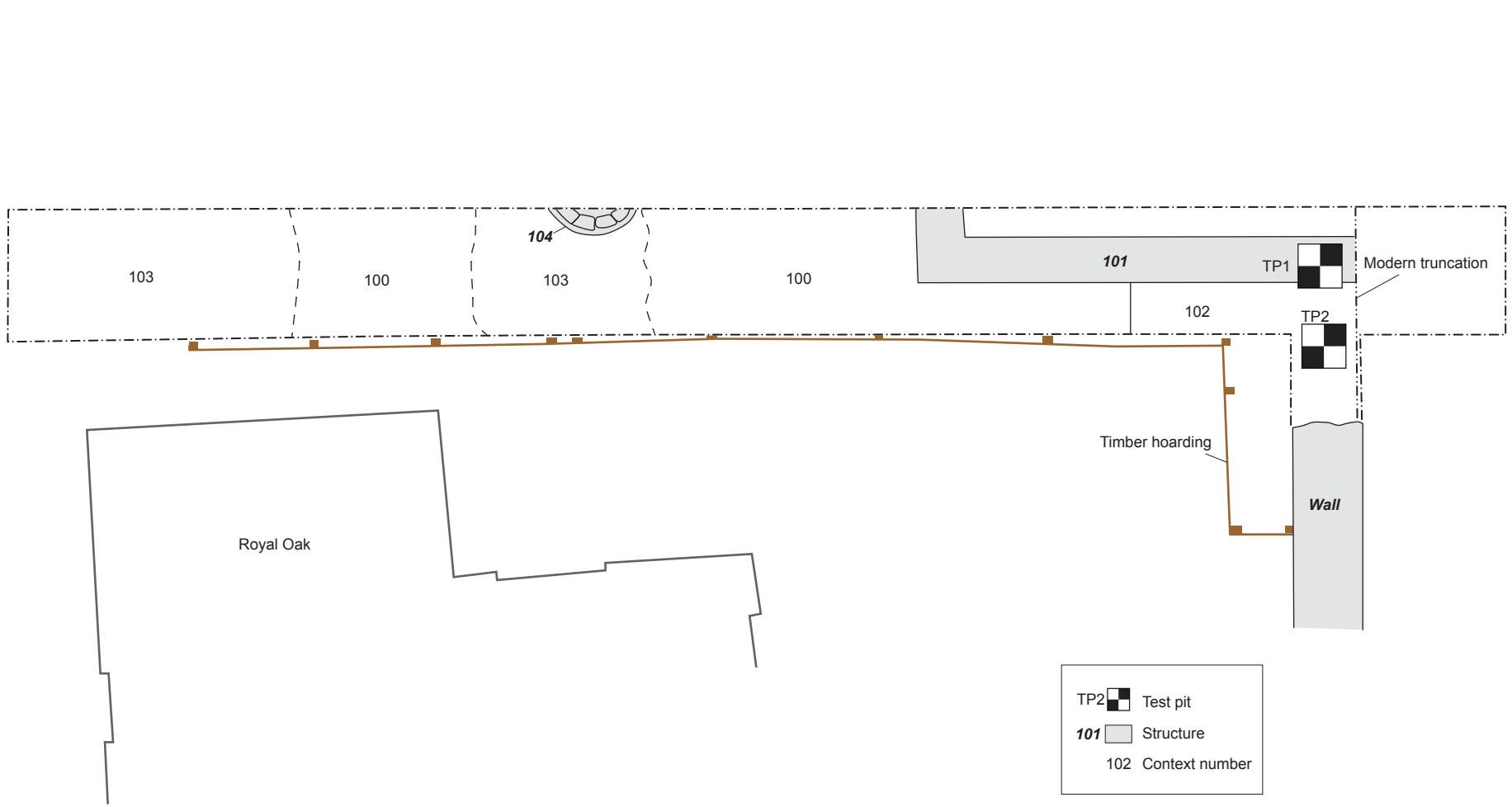


Figure 2 : Trench plan

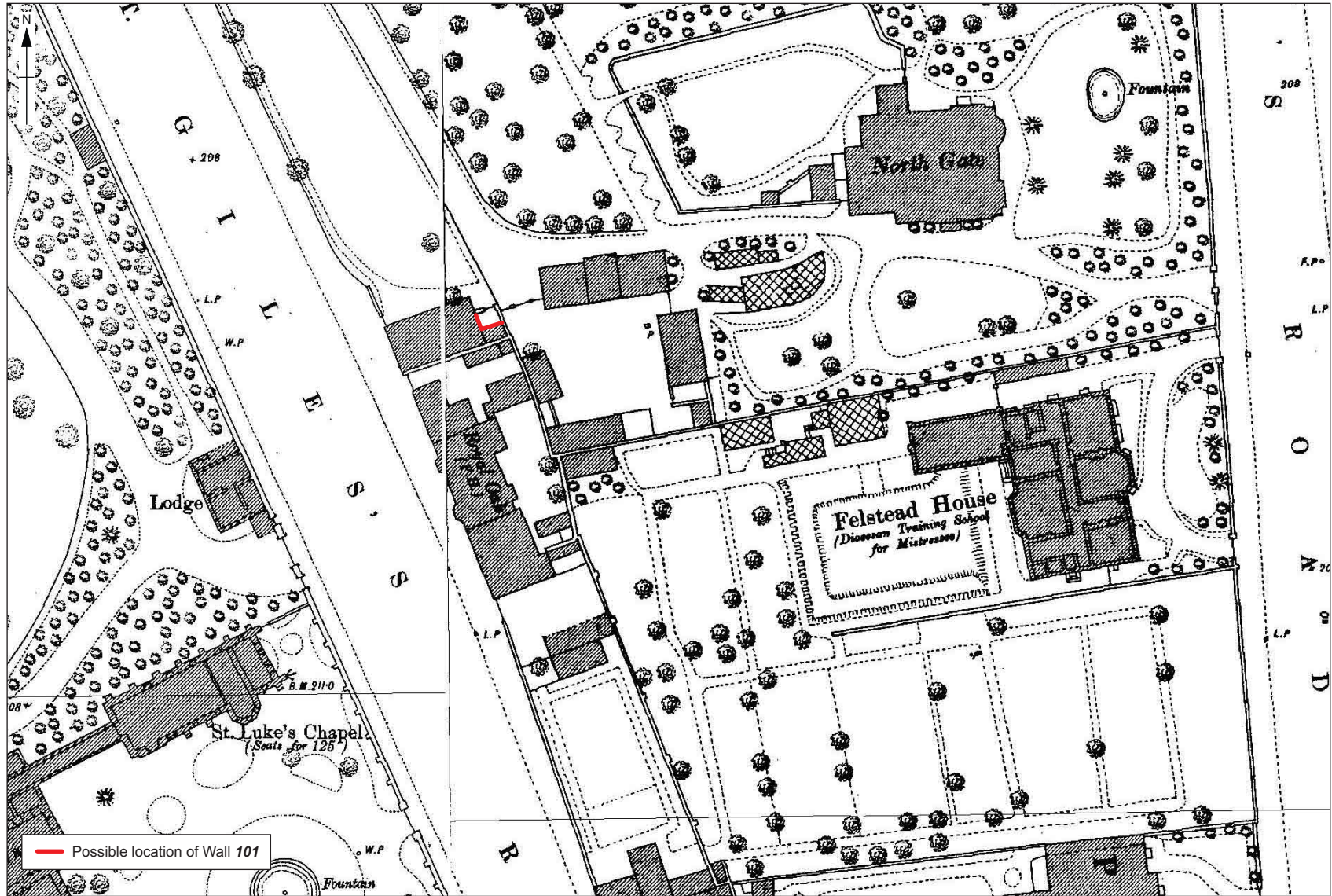


Figure 3 : OS 1st Edition with possible location of Wall 101

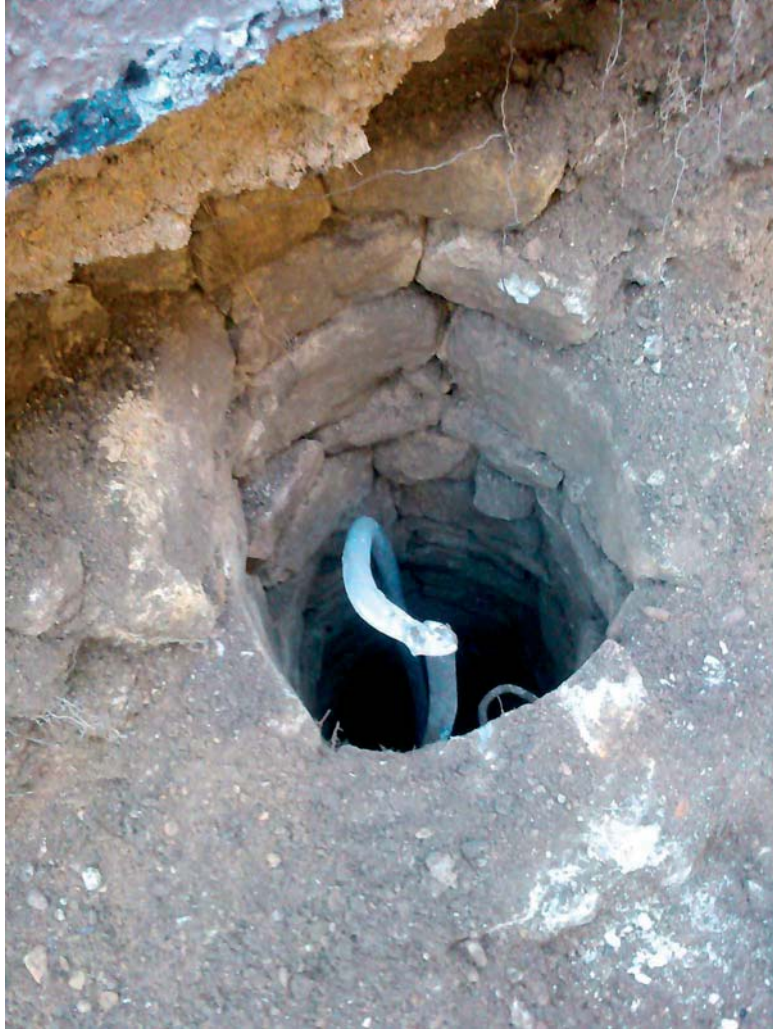


Plate 1: Well 104



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