

OXFORD  
298/95

(OX)

# Yates Wine Lodge George Street, Oxford

Archaeological Evaluation

NGR SP 5103 0634

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

March 1995

## **1 Summary**

- 1.1 The Oxford Archaeological unit (OAU) undertook a small archaeological evaluation on the site of 53 George Street, Oxford, at the beginning of March 1995. The work was carried out in connection with a proposal to build a Wine Lodge and was undertaken as part of a condition attached to planning consent.
- 1.2 The evaluation consisted of a single trial trench, measuring 5m long x 1.5m wide, which was excavated in the NE corner of the site.
- 1.3 Wall foundations and a backfilled cellar belonging to a 19th century building which would have fronted on to George Street were located. Where earlier deposits survived in the south half of the trench, external to the cellar, a small 'island' of soil containing medieval pottery was located, cut away to the south by a deep disturbance, backfilled in the 17th century.

## **2 Introduction**

- 2.1 The site of the proposed development lies on the corner of George Street and Chain Alley, NGR SP 5103 0634. Planning consent has been granted with an attached condition requiring a programme of archaeological work. This evaluation was designed to assess the significance of any archaeological remains on the site. Disturbance to possible archaeological remains on the site would be caused by the excavation for foundations and services of the proposed new building.
- 2.2 Fieldwork took place over a period of 3 days at the beginning of March 1995.

## **3 Archaeological and Historical background (by Julian Munby)**

George Street, named after the inn of that name in Cornmarket, is the extra-mural road following the north walls of Oxford towards the castle, and leading towards the medieval bridge over the Thames at Hythe Bridge Street. The site was waste throughout the medieval period, and is not recorded as having been built on,<sup>1</sup> and the space outside the north wall is still shown as open ground on Agas' map of 1578. This waste land was bought by the City in 1592 with 'the liberty of the Northgate Hundred, the waste land in Brokenhays and Gloucester Green, the waste land in the streets as far as the Hundred extends...'.<sup>2</sup> On de Gomme's survey of the defences in 1644 there is an open space shown on both sides of George Street Fig.1, with an irregular series of tracks or lanes diverging northwards from the castle.<sup>3</sup> It would appear that at this date Brokenhays (the present Gloucester Green) encompassed both

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<sup>1</sup> Salter, *Map of Medieval Oxford*, 1934.

<sup>2</sup> Salter, *Oxford City Properties* (OHS 83, 1926), 254.

<sup>3</sup> *Oxoniensia I*, 1936; see also the c. 1615 Christ Church map of the castle for the same detail.

sides of George Street, and was bounded on the south side by these diagonal lanes. By the time of Loggan's map of 1675 the area between one of the lanes and the city wall had been developed with a row of houses, and another block of enclosed plots had appeared between the lane and George Street. It is within this second block that the site lies.

The stages of development of this area could be discovered in part from the City lease books and rentals, which have not been studied for George Street.<sup>4</sup> From the single building on the corner shown by Loggan in 1675 (Fig. 1) there appeared an almost continuous row by the time of Taylor's map in 1750 (Fig. 2), as is recorded in the street survey of 1772.<sup>5</sup> The street continued to be built and rebuilt through the 19th century, being one of the few streets in Oxford with more than one phase of modern commercial rebuilding. The modest brick houses occupying the site probably all date from before 1850 (Fig. 2). This row of shops and houses survived the building of the Central Boys School, which took most of the land to the rear, and the general rebuilding of George Street towards the end of the 19th century. Nos. 53-7 were demolished c. 1930 and replaced by a temporary Nissen-hut schoolroom, itself replaced by a portable building more recently. Some of these changes are shown in old photographs.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4 Methodology and Strategy** (see Fig. 3 for trench location)

- 4.1 The evaluation consisted of a single trial trench, 5 m long x 1.5 m wide, excavated in the NE corner of the site Fig.3. The position of the trench had been dictated by the existence of the present building (portable) on the site and the need to avoid existing services.
- 4.2 The trench was excavated down to the top of the first significant archaeological deposits using a mini mechanical excavator (kubota). The kubota was also used to dig two deep sondages at either end of the trench, where large, backfilled, post-medieval features were located.
- 4.3 As excavation proceeded the various phases of deposits located were described, planned and photographed and sections were drawn where appropriate.

#### **5 Archaeological Description**

- 5.1 In the centre of the trench Fig. 4, some 0.90m below the present ground surface, a narrow strip of soil was located, which produced a small quantity of medieval pottery (113). This deposit was cut away to the south by a deep disturbance (115), which

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<sup>4</sup> This area was excluded from *Oxford City Properties* by Salter; the 1923 *Schedule of City Property* refers to map nos. 54 & 55 in the Vellum Book.

<sup>5</sup> Slater, *Surveys and Tokens* (OHS 75, 1920), 36.

<sup>6</sup> J Caton, *Oxford in Old Photographs*, 25 & 29.

existed throughout the remaining southern half of the trench. Because of the depth, and homogenous character of the backfill within this disturbance (109 and 111), a sondage was dug through it in spits using the mechanical excavator and the excavated soil was then carefully examined for finds. The sondage was excavated to a depth of 2m below the present ground surface, but the feature was still not bottomed, and 17th century pottery and clay pipes were still being produced from the lowest level.

The whole of the north half of the trench was taken up by the SW corner of a deep, stone lined structure, backfilled with demolition material, including bricks (103). A machine excavated sondage was dug through the backfill within the structure to a depth of nearly 2m below the present ground surface, but it was still not bottomed. The walls of the structure, consisting of a N-S wall (104), which ran along the west edge of the trench, and an E-W wall (105), which returned eastwards across the centre of the trench, were narrow (0.40m), but well built of limestone. The N-S wall of the structure also continued through the south half of the trench (107), but this section to the south of wall 105 was only 0.20m deep and overlaid the backfilled disturbance 115.

Two large blocks of limestone laid flat on top of each other (106), in the area immediately to the south of wall 105, appeared only in section, so it was uncertain whether or not these were also part of the structure.

A small extension made to the west edge of the trench in order to establish the full width of wall 104, also located well preserved cobble stones (112), abutting the west face of the wall.

The deposits which overlay the walls, and which were removed by machine, consisted of a mixed layer silty loam in the south half of the trench (108), overlaid by what appeared to be a demolition material (102) and which extended throughout the trench, above which was a modern garden soil (101) and the present gravel surface (100).

## **6 Pottery (by Lucy Bown)**

- 6.1** A total of 46 sherds (0.7kg) were recovered from five contexts. These included a typical range of Oxford fabric types ranging from the late 11th to early 19th centuries. With the exception of context 113 all the sherds occur in assemblages of mixed date.
- 6.2** Context 113 is likely to be early/mid 13th century in date containing a tripod pitcher handle in East Wiltshire fabric (OXAQ), Oxford Medieval Ware (OXY) and decorated jug sherds in Brill fabric (OXAM).
- 6.3** The remaining contexts are mixed, containing early medieval wares (OXAC, OXAQ, OXY), late medieval wares (OXAX) and post medieval wares dated late 11th to early 13th century, 15th century and 17th to early 19th century respectively. Some of the sherds in contexts 108 and 109 are possibly from the same vessels.

## 7 Clay pipes (by John Moore)

- 7.1 5 clay pipe bowls were retrieved from deposits 109 and 111 (the fills within the deep disturbance at the south end of the trench) and these all pre-dated 1650, consisting of one bowl of the Oxford series type A and 4 bowls of type B.<sup>7</sup>

## 8 Discussion

- 8.1 As only a very small area of the apparent medieval soil 113 survives it is unclear whether this is an in situ soil horizon, or in fact the fill of a truncated pit, or other such feature. However, the relatively large amount of medieval pottery which was retrieved from such a small area of the deposit (14 sherds) suggests that it is more likely that this is the remains of a pit, or possibly a dump layer.
- 8.2 The full dimensions, and function of the disturbance (115) at the south end of the trench are uncertain, as only a small part of this feature could be observed in the evaluation. However, given the considerable depth, date, and character of its backfill, the most likely explanation seems to be that this disturbance is the result of post-medieval gravel quarrying. A borehole c. 5 m south of the trench encountered fill material to a depth of 3.5 m (geotechnical engineer pers comm).
- 8.3 The foundation walls which were discovered belonged to a building which would have fronted on to George Street, and is almost certainly the 19th century building which existed on this plot and was only demolished as recently as the 1930's. The deep, backfilled part of the building, in the north half of the trench, is clearly a cellar.
- 8.4 The cobbles found immediately to the west of the building appeared to be contemporary, and are almost certainly related to the alleyway which existed between numbers 53 and 55 George Street, which was known as Queens Court. (see Fig.2, OS plan of 1878).

## 9 Conclusions

- 9.1 The occurrence of what appears to be post-medieval gravel quarrying, combined with the existence of 19th century cellared buildings along the front of the site, makes it likely that any medieval, or earlier deposits which may have existed will already have been largely destroyed, with only a few small 'islands' of archaeology surviving in between these disturbances.

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<sup>7</sup>T.G. Hassal, C.E. Halpin and M. Mellor, *Excavations in St. Ebbes, Oxford*, 1967-1976, *Oxoniensia* Vol. XLIX 1984

- 9.2** As only one corner of the site could be evaluated at this stage the full extent of the disturbance is uncertain, however, it seems likely that the type of deposits located will occur throughout the site.

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*Other sources consulted*

De Gomme's map of Oxford 1644 (Oxoniensia vol. 1 1936)

Loggan's map of Oxford 1675

Taylor's map of Oxford 1750

Davis's map of Oxford 1797

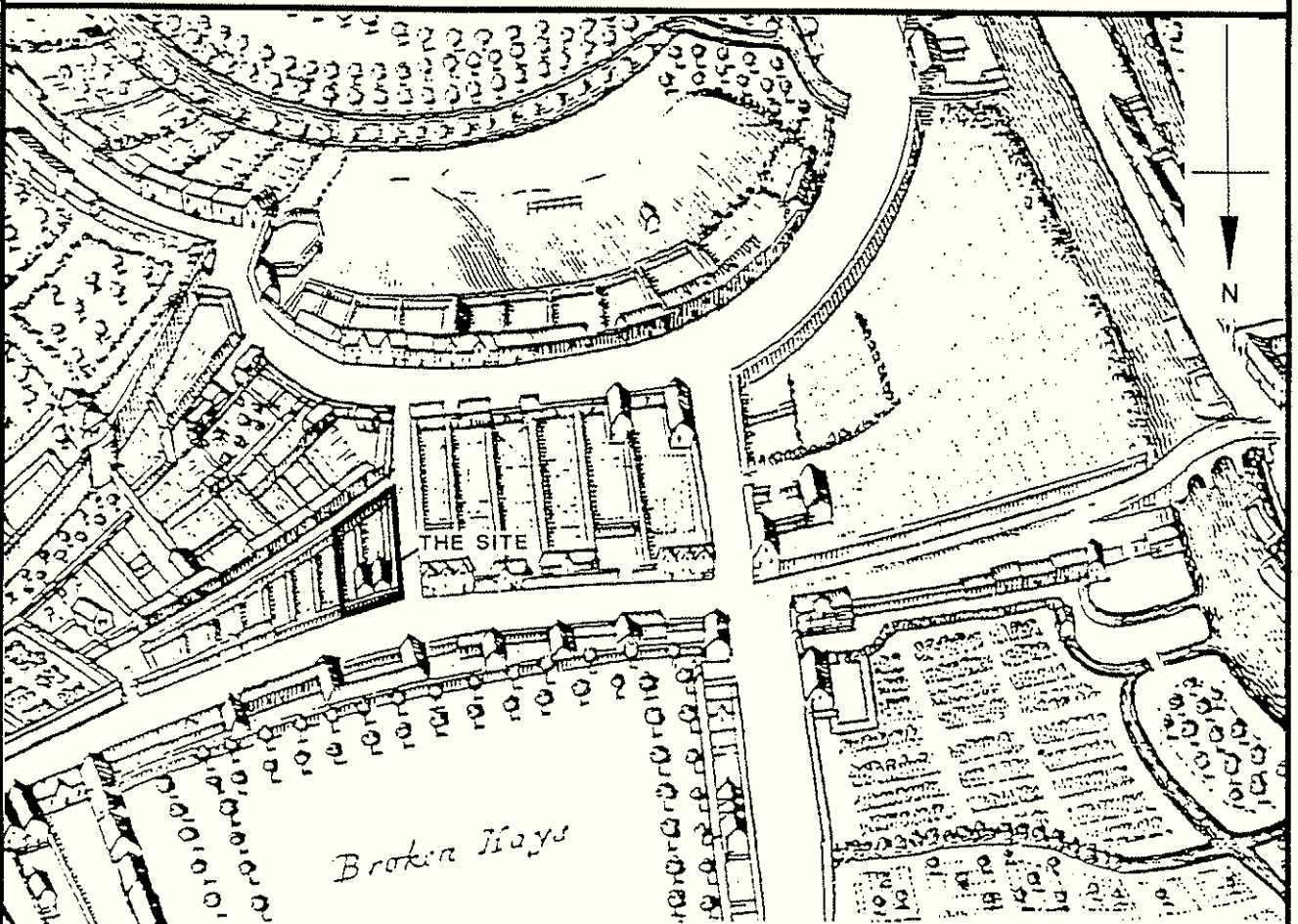


**Table of Contexts and Finds**

CXT	TYPE	WIDTH	DEPTH	COMMENTS	FINDS
100	Layer		0.06	Present gravel surface	
101	Layer		0.60	Modern garden soil	
102	Layer		0.28	Demolition layer	1 sherd of post-med pottery + 1 clay pipe stem frag.
103	Layer		> 1.25	Backfill within cellar	Bricks
104	Wall	0.40	> 1.25	West wall of cellar, part of building 110	
105	Wall	0.42	> 1.25	South wall of cellar, part of building 110	
106	Wall ?	0.60	0.50	Part of building 110 ?	
107	Wall	0.42	0.22	West wall of building 110	
108	Layer	0.37		Post-med dump layer	8 sherds of post-med pot, 2 sherds of medieval pot, 1 clay pipe bowl, 7 pieces of animal bone, 9 pieces of tile and 5 pieces of glass
109	Fill	0.30		Fill within disturbance 115	6 sherds of post-med pot, 8 sherds of medieval pot, 16 pieces of animal bone, 1 piece of tile, 1 clay pipe bowl and 1 piece of glass.
110	Structure			Building, consisting of wall 104, 105, 106 ? and 107 .	
111	Fill	> 1.00		Backfill within deep disturbance 115	7 sherds of post-medieval pottery, 4 clay pipe bowls, 3 pieces of animal bone, 1 piece of tile, 1 piece of glass and one piece of worked flint
112	Cobbling			Cobble surface abutting west face of wall 104	
113	Layer	> 0.46		Heavily truncated medieval deposit	14 shreds of medieval pot and oyster shells
114	Foundation trench	0.30		Construction trench for wall ? 106	
115	Deep disturbance	> 1.30		Backfilled gravel quarry ?	
116	Foundation trench	> 1.25		Construction trench for walls 104 and 105 (cellar)	

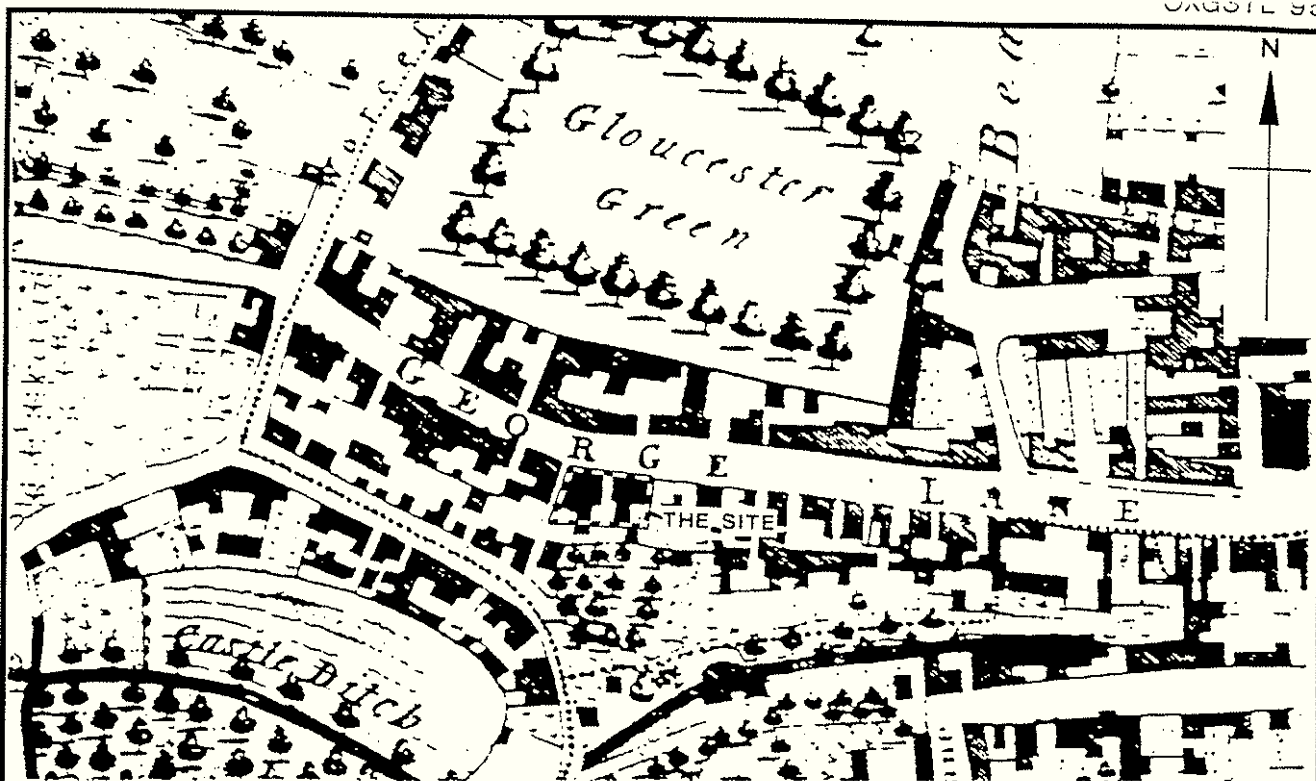


Extract from de Gomme's map of Oxford, 1644

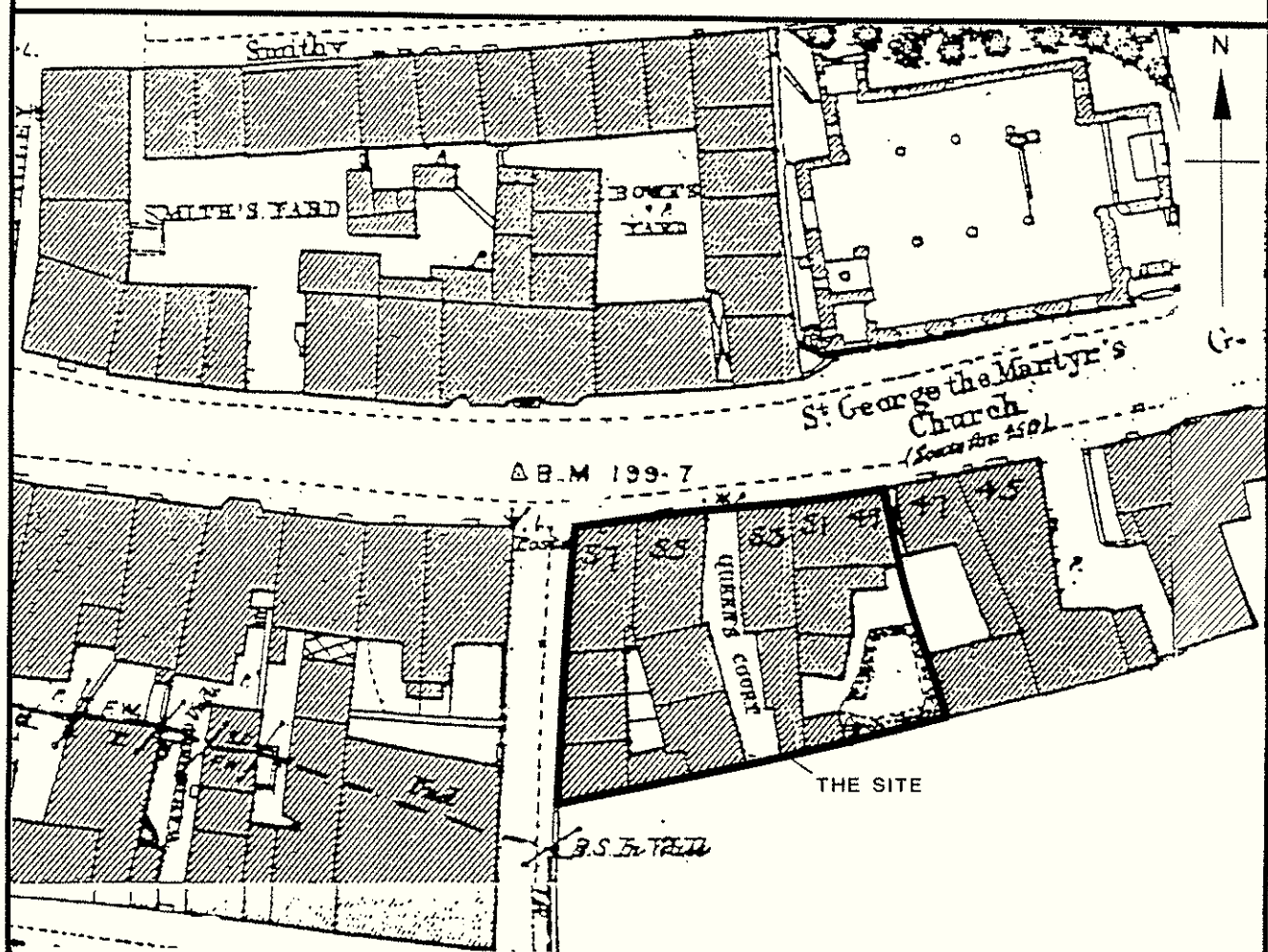


Extract from Loggan's map of Oxford, 1675





Extract from Taylor's map of Oxford, 1750



OS 1:500 plan of 1878

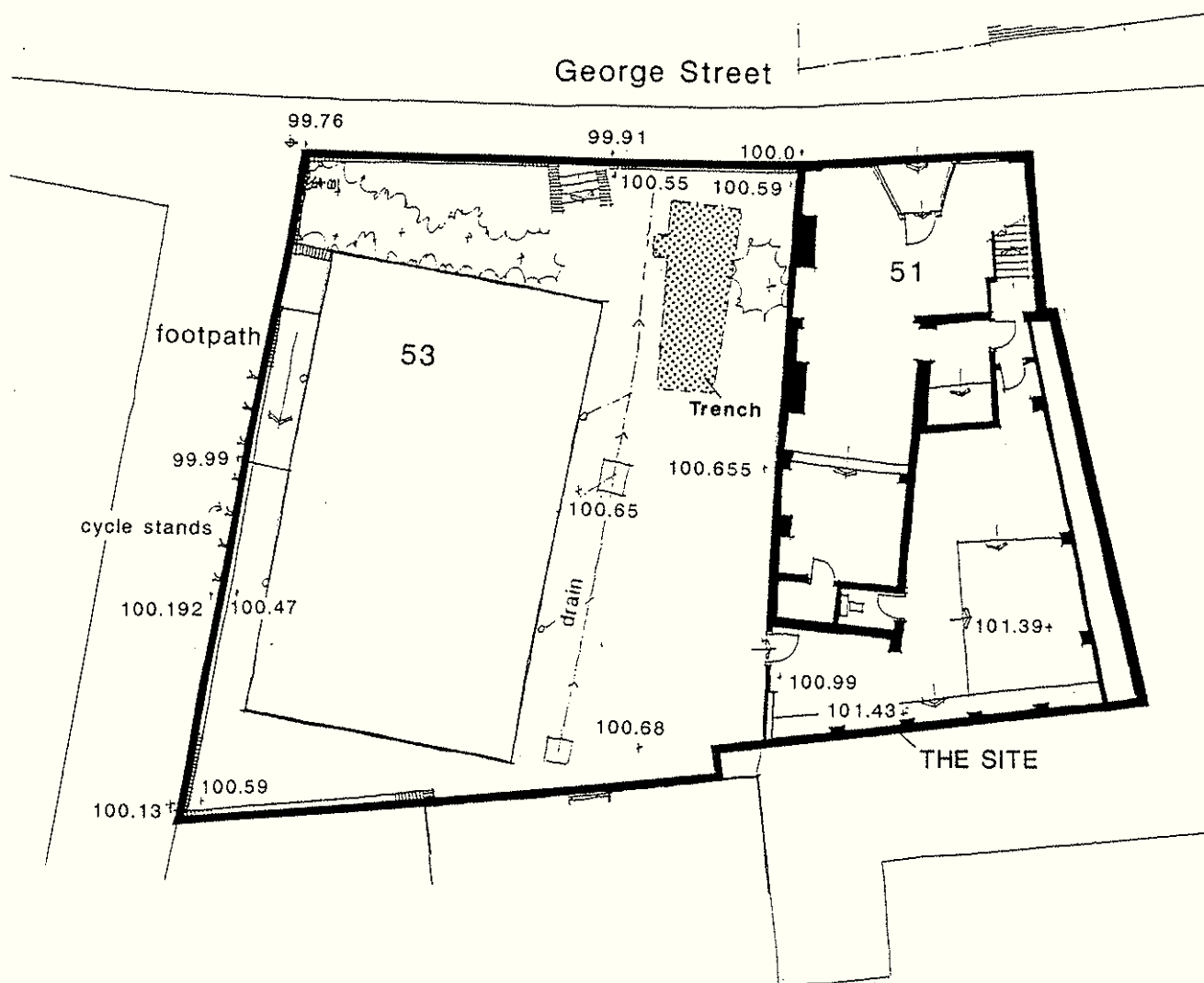


figure 3: Trench location

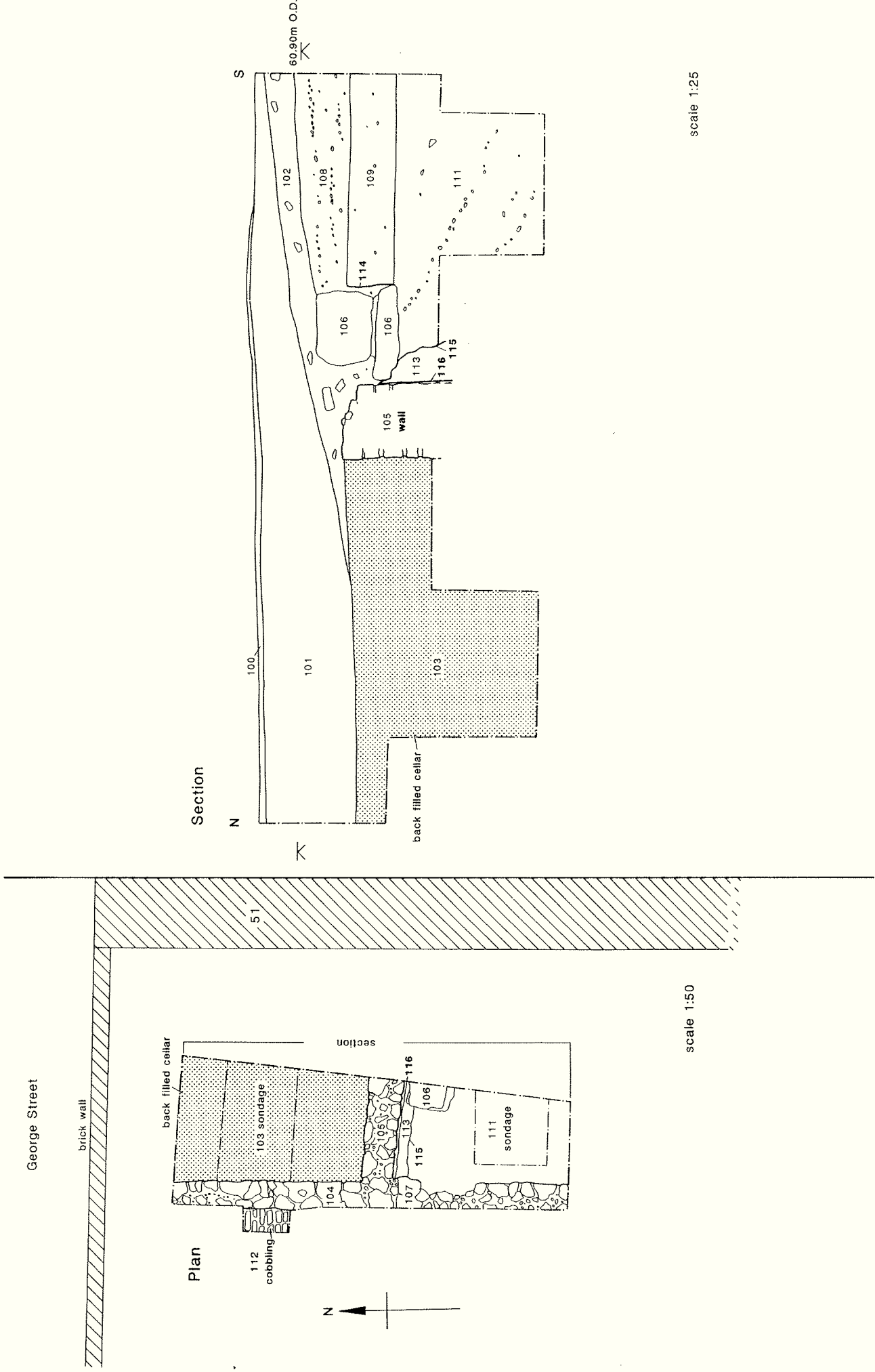


figure 4: Trench plan & section

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