

New Liftshaft Taylor Institute

St Giles
Oxford



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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New Liftshaft, Taylor Institute, St Giles, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

In October and November 2011 OA conducted an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a new liftshaft at the Taylor Institute, St Giles, Oxford (NGR: SP 5120 0657). Evidence for post-medieval occupation layers, a stone lined well and a cellar wall was observed. These are probably associated with the buildings fronting St Giles which were demolished in 1931 prior to the construction of the extension to the Taylor Institute. No earlier deposits or features were encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned to undertake an archaeological watching brief by Purcello Miller Tritton LLP on behalf of the Oxford University Estates Directorate during the excavation of the base for a new liftshaft located at the Taylor Institute, St Giles, Oxford.
- 1.1.2 No brief was issued but discussions with David Radford, the City Archaeologist for Oxford City Council established the level of recording necessary (David Radford *pers comm*, 2011).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The Taylor Institute is located in the centre of Oxford on the corner of Beaumont Street and St Giles (Fig. 1). The new liftshaft is sited within an existing stairwell situated on the ground floor of the 1932 extension to the Taylor Institute (Fig. 2). The floor level at this point is approximately 65 m above OD and the underlying geology is alluvium over floodplain terrace gravel (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no 236).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Evidence for early activity in Oxford is scarce although Neolithic arrow heads have been recovered, and evidence for Bronze age and Iron Age burials has been observed approximately 450 m north of the site. Roman boundary ditches and evidence of occupation in Oxford has been observed most notably in the South Parks area 550 m to the east.
- 1.3.2 In the Saxon period an abbey was established and Oxford underwent a period of growth due to its location on the trade route between the kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex. Coins stamped with the mark \square Ohsnafordia \square have been found suggested that there may have been a royal mint at Oxford in this period. King Alfred established a system of \square burhs \square or fortified towns to counter the threat of Danish raiders, and Oxford became a \square burh \square in 911.
- 1.3.3 Following the Norman invasion Robert D'Oily built Oxford castle, by the late 11th or early 12th-century Oxford was established as an academic centre for training clerics in spite of a calamitous fire razing Oxford in 1138. By the 13th-century this was centred on houses established by the Dominicans (1221), Franciscans (1224), Carmelites (1256) and the Augustians (1267). The city suffered during the Black Death (1348-1350); the population of the city dropped heavily and the colleges took advantage of the situation by buying up vacant property and greatly expanding their holdings within Oxford.



- 1.3.4 The city became the de-facto capital for the Royalist cause in the English Civil War in spite of the townspeople supporting the parliamentary cause; However, the university was staunchly Royalist and the presence of the Royalist army in the city carried the argument. Oxford was surrounded by a series of fortifications including a ditch running down Broad Street and possibly continuing along George Street, running parallel to Beaumont Street approximately 120 m to the north, putting the area of Beaumont Street outside the city defences.
- 1.3.5 By the time of the Loggan map in 1675 the defences had been slighted and the site of Beaumont Street is shown as composed of tenement buildings, their backyards and an open area (fields ?) known as Beaumont. From the 17th-century onwards the expanding population of the town found living space in the backs of the suburban tenements and many of the yards were built up with rows of cottages with the Taylor map of 1750 showing rows of tenements running back from St Giles along the line of what was to become Beaumont Street.
- 1.3.6 The present Beaumont Street was laid out in 1821 when the fields called Beaumont were developed, and the frontage on St Giles was opened to create Beaumont and John Streets. The site of the Ashmolean Museum was formerly occupied by a number of properties fronting St. Giles Street, with their yards extending westwards down Beaumont Street. These properties were acquired by the University in the years prior to 1839 when work started on the Taylorian Institution and University Galleries, later to become the Ashmolean Museum.
- 1.3.7 A drawing was made of the site prior to the demolition of the buildings in 1839, which shows a range of substantial late medieval/17th-century buildings fronting St Giles with a row of terraced cottages running westwards along Beaumont Street. These tenements were set back from the street with a high boundary wall running along the edge of the pavement. The tenements themselves were of apparent 17th-century construction.
- 1.3.8 William Tuckwell states in Reminiscences of Oxford that the Taylorian was built on the site of a lofty edifice, once a mansion, afterwards decayed, and let out in poverty-stricken tenements. Robson's Commercial Directory for 1839 lists the following businesses in the five small shops at 74-78 St Giles Street that had to be demolished in 1841 prior to the construction of the Taylor Institute:
- Entrance to Wyatt's Yard
 - 74: John Cox, Tailor
 - 75: Thomas Tomkins, Broker
 - 76: Thomas Grimsley, Sculptor
 - Gateway
 - 77: ?
 - 78: Robin Hood Inn
- 1.3.9 The Taylor Institution (or Taylorian) forms the east wing of the Ashmolean Museum and was built in 1841-5 to the designs of Charles Robert Cockerell by Baker & Son of Lambeth.
- 1.3.10 The building is named after Sir Robert Taylor, an architect who died in 1788 and bequeathed a considerable sum to the chancellor and scholars of the university of Oxford and their successors, for the purpose of applying the interest and produce



thereof in purchase of freehold land within, or if possible, to be made within, the jurisdiction of the said university, for the erecting a proper edifice therein, and for establishing a foundation for the teaching and improving the European languages, in such manner as should from time to time be approved by the said chancellor and scholars, in convocation assembled.□

- 1.3.11 Taylor's son contested the will, but when the son died in 1834 the money went to the University. The University Registrar, Philip Bliss, had the idea of combining the building with new University Galleries. He launched a competition in 1839 for a 'Grecian' design, which Cockerell won.
- 1.3.12 The building was extended to the north in 1931/2 when four houses (Nos. 70-73) were demolished in December 1931 to make way for the southern part of the new extension.
- 1.3.13 The first section of the new extension was opened by the Prince of Wales on 9 November 1932.
- 1.3.14 The entrance to the old Wyatt's Yard (which was given the number 74 when all the houses to the south were demolished to make space for the old part of the Taylorian) is now a side entrance to the Taylorian between the original building and the first extension.
- 1.3.15 Previous archaeological work in the immediate area includes work on the Ashmolean Museum Forecourt 35 m to the south-west of the site by OA (then Oxford Archaeological Unit) in 1994 showing that the area had been truncated by the excavations for the museum cellars, although the bases of medieval rubbish pits were encountered (OAU 1994). Further evidence of the tenements alongside Beaumont Street was encountered during service trenching adjacent to the Ashmolean Museum when a stone built cess pit was broken into (OA 2009).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were to:

- (i) Preserve by record any archaeological deposits, structures or features encountered during the course of ground intrusions;
- (ii) Seek to establish the extent, nature and date of any archaeological deposits, structures or features encountered within the scope of the ground intrusion;
- (iii) Secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site;
- (iv) To disseminate results through the production of a unpublished client ('grey literature') report.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was undertaken as a series of site visits conducted during any groundworks which had the possibility of impinging upon areas of potential archaeology.
- 2.2.2 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established OA practices. Bulk finds were collected by context. Colour digital photographs were taken of all recorded sections and features together with a general record of the works.



2.2.3 Site plans and sample sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The excavation for the new liftshaft comprised a rectangular area measuring 2.5 m east-west by 2 m north-south which was hand excavated to a depth of 2.6 m below the existing ground floor level.
- 3.1.2 The base of the excavation terminated within a layer of dark grey-brown clay silt loam (12), first encountered at a depth of 2 m below floor level (Fig. 3, Plan 2 and Fig. 4, Section 1). This deposit contained charcoal flecking, brick fragments and butchered animal bone. Overlying this was a 0.15 m deep layer of redeposited soil and gravel (11), which in turn was overlaid by a 0.9 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt loam (4) containing charcoal flecking, fragments of brick and tile, bone and pottery.
- 3.1.3 This deposit was cut by a number of features. Along the northern edge of the pit a construction cut (17) (not shown in plan) containing a brick built cellar wall (13) was exposed (Fig. 3, Plan 2). The wall was constructed using wire cut plain red brick measuring 0.23 m x 0.11 m x 0.078 m laid using English stretcher bond and cement mortar. The smearing and roughness of the mortar showed that this was the external, trench built face, of the cellar.
- 3.1.4 Immediately to the south of the cellar wall, a circular shaft approximately 1.4 m in diameter could be observed cut into the surface of layer 4 (Fig. 3, Plan 1). Built within this shaft was a stone well lining (1). This had been constructed using limestone blocks measuring 0.5 m x 0.3 m x 0.15 m whose inside face had been carved to follow the curve of the well. The remaining faces were roughly dressed. The interior of the well had been backfilled using a grey-brown clay silt (2), which produced fragments of bone, brick and peg tile.
- 3.1.5 A linear feature (15) could be observed running across the western side of the pit (Fig. 3, Plan 1 and Fig. 4, Section 1). This was recorded as having a depth of 1.2 m and a width in excess of 0.7 m. The bottom 0.25 m of this cut was filled by a light grey-brown clay silt (14). Above 14 was a 0.4 m deep band of grey-brown clay silt (10). The remaining 0.6 m depth of the feature was filled by a loose mix of light grey-brown clay silt and medium sized fragments of limestone and brick (9).
- 3.1.6 Sealing 1, 2, 3, 4, 9 and 15 and butting up to wall 13 was a light grey-brown clay silt, 0.2 m in depth (8) which produced fragments of brick. This was cut along the eastern side of the pit by a 2 m deep straight edged linear feature (6). Built in the base of this cut was the cast concrete ground beam (7), part of the Taylor Institute structural framework. The cut had been backfilled with a loose clay silt (5).
- 3.1.7 Overlying 5 and 8 was a compacted layer of pale grey clay silt (16). This deposit contained quantities of lime mortar and brick fragments. The present day concrete floor had been cast directly above this layer.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Butchered animal bone and fragments of pottery were recovered from both of the occupation layers. Fragments of brick and ceramic roof tile were recovered from the majority of the deposits. Spot dating of the pottery and brick fragments indicate an 18th to mid 19th century time frame for the stratigraphy exposed within the excavation.



3.2.2 The fragments of brick were evaluated on site and discarded, the remainder of the artefacts were retained.

3.3 Environmental remains

3.3.1 Due to the late post-medieval dating of the deposits it was felt that no additional evidence could be gained by palaeo-environmental sampling.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The composition and artefactual evidence recovered from layer 12 suggest that it represents an occupation layer. Layer 11 is a mixture of redeposited gravel and soil, possibly cast up from nearby cellar (or similar) excavations nearby.

4.1.2 Layer 4 also represents an occupation layer. The butchered animal bone probably originates from domestic consumption rather than indicating the use of the area by a butchers or slaughter house. The dating evidence recovered from the deposits suggest that they are both 18th or 19th century in origin.

4.1.3 The shape, size and construction of the stone shaft lining 1 would indicate that it is a well rather than a cess pit, presumably dug and used by one of the earlier premises fronting St Giles. Feature 15 has the appearance of a robber trench, but it is unclear if it is related to the demolition of the earlier buildings in 1839-41 and 1931 or to earlier phases of building within the demolished building(s). The cellar wall (13) probably relates to the buildings demolished in 1931, specifically No. 73. The use of cement mortar in its construction indicates that it may have been one of the last phases of development prior to the building of the extension to the Taylorian.

4.1.4 Layers 8 and 16 together with feature 6 all relate to the construction of the Taylor Institute extension.

4.1.5 The relatively late date of the deposits recorded would suggest that the depth of excavation was insufficient to encounter any deposits pre-dating the post-medieval period.



APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
1	Structure	> 0.8 m	1.2 m	1.2 m	Stone well lining	-	C18th
2	Fill	> 0.8 m	-	-	Backfill of well	Brick	C19th
3	Cut	> 0.8 m	1.4 m	1.4 m	Construction cut for well	-	C18th
4	Layer	0.9 m	-	-	Occupation layer	Brick, bone	C18th
5	Fill	2.0 m	0.6 m	> 2.0 m	Backfill of Cut 6	Brick	C19th/ C20th
6	Cut	2.0 m	0.6 m	> 2.0 m	Construction cut	-	C19th/ C20th
7	Structure	0.6 m	> 0.5 m	. 2.0 m	Concrete foundation for Taylor Institute	-	C19th/ C20th
8	Layer	0.2 m	-	-	Disturbed ground, probable levelling layer	Brick, tile	C19th/ C20th
9	Fill	0.6 m	> 0.6 m	-	Upper fill of 15	Brick	C19th
10	Fill	0.4 m	> 0.6 m	-	Layer of fill within 15	Brick	C19th
11	Layer	0.15 m	-	-	Layer of redeposited gravel	-	C18th
12	Layer	> 0.6 m	-	-	Occupation layer	Brick	C18th
13	Structure	1.8 m	> 0.2 m	> 1.8 m	Cellar wall	Brick	C19th
14	Fill	0.25 m	> 0.6 m	-	Layer of fill within 15	Brick	C19th
15	Cut	1.2 m	> 0.6 m	-	Possible robber trench	Brick	C19th
16	Layer	0.5 m	-	-	Made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th



APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- OAU, 1994 *Ashmolean Museum Forecourt, Oxford: Archaeological Field
Evaluation Report*
- OA, 2009 *Trenching Adjacent to the Ashmolean Museum, Beaumont Street,
Oxford: Archaeological Watching Brief Report*



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	New Liftshaft, Taylor Institute, St Giles, Oxford
Site code:	OXTAYR 11
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR NGR: SP 5120 0657
Type of watching brief:	Monitoring of a hand excavated pit at the base of a new liftshaft
Date and duration of project:	September to November 2011, two site visits
Area of site:	Approximately 8 m2
Summary of results:	Evidence for post-medieval occupation layers, a stone lined well and a cellar wall was observed. These are probably associated with the buildings fronting St Giles which were demolished between 1839 and 1841 prior to the construction of the new University Galleries (now the Ashmolean) and the Taylor Institute. No earlier deposits or features were encountered.
Location of archive:	The archive is temporarily stored at Janus House and will be lodged with the Asmolean Museum in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location

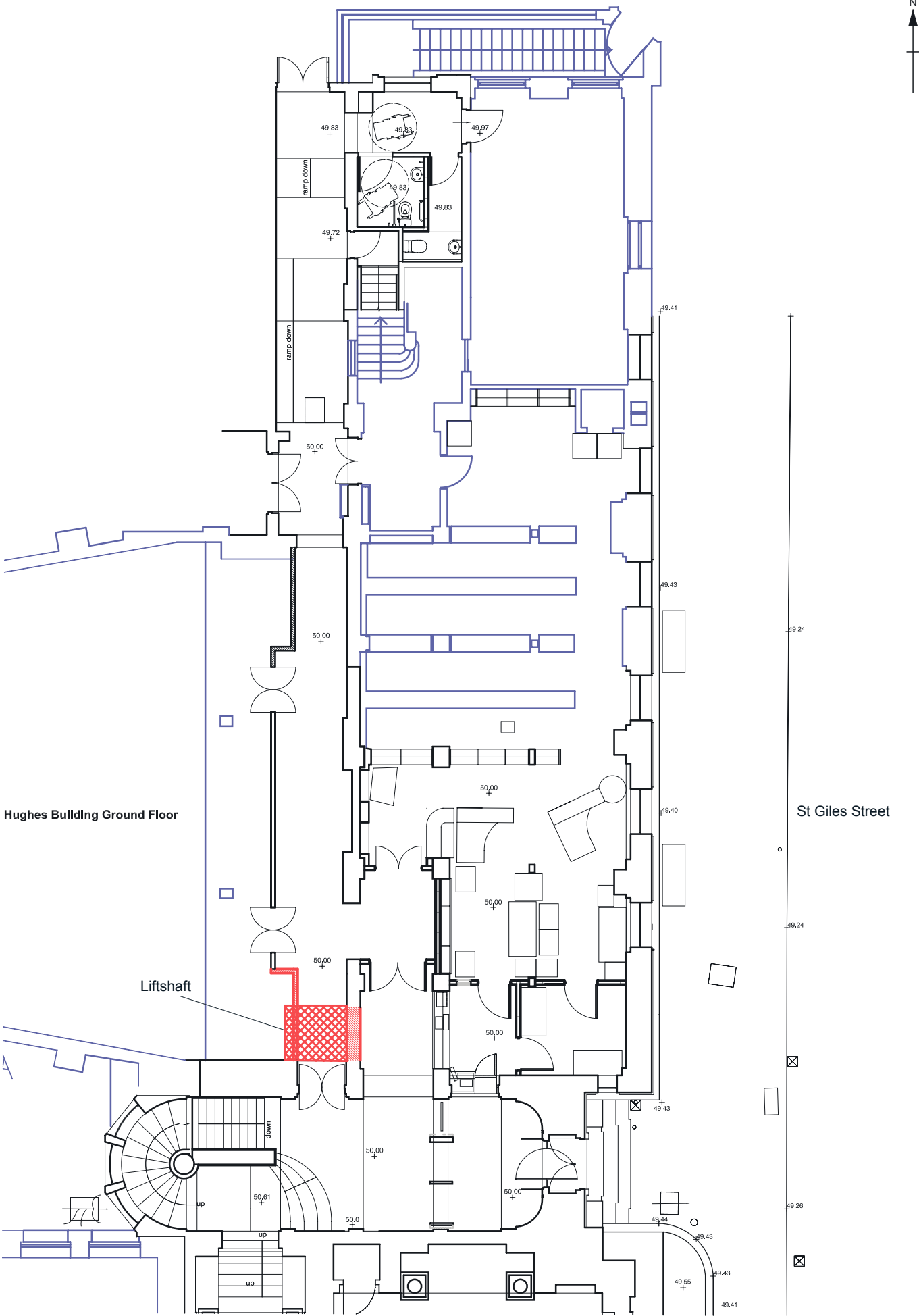


Figure 2: Lift shaft location

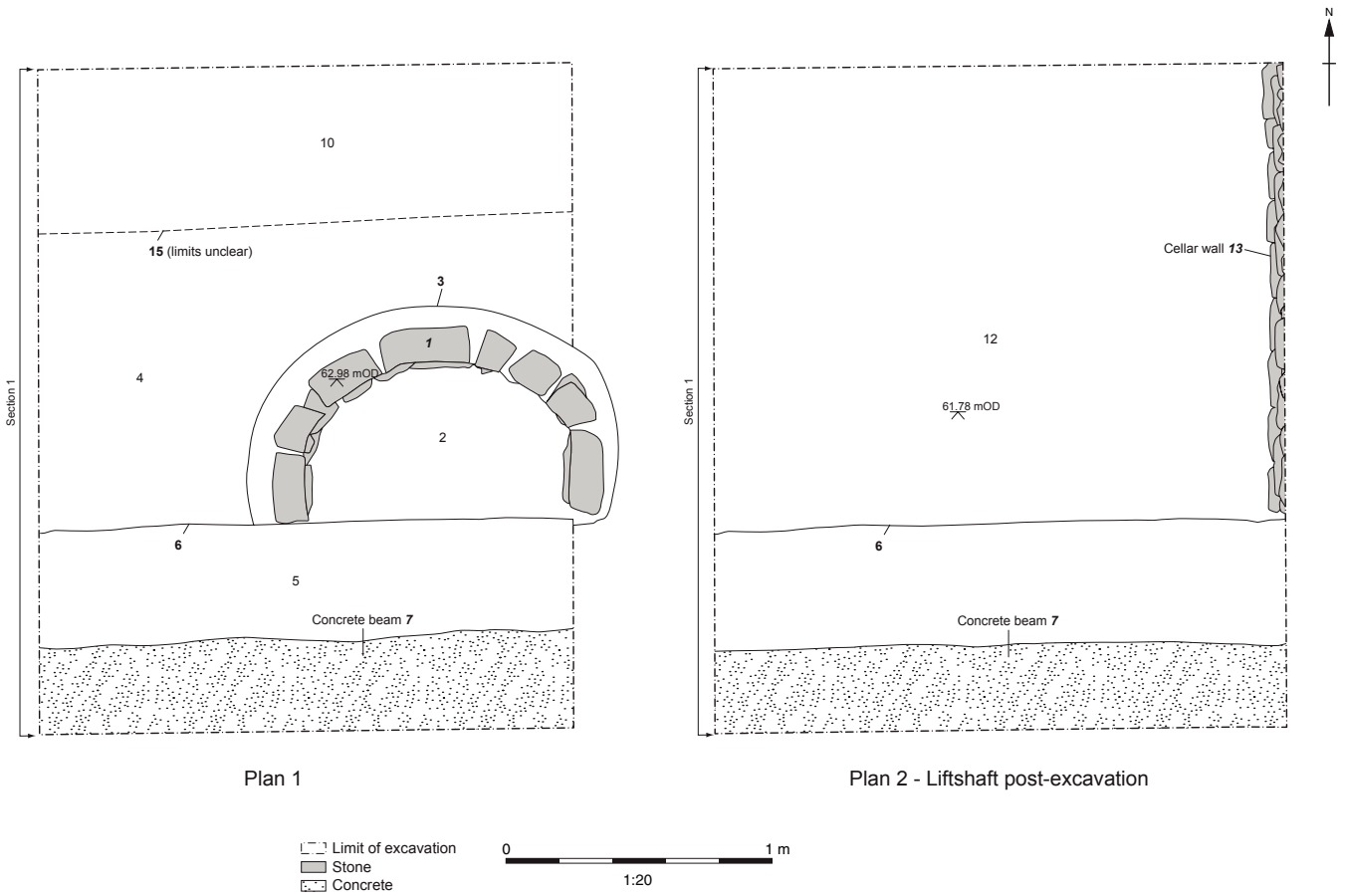


Figure 3: Site plans 1 and 2

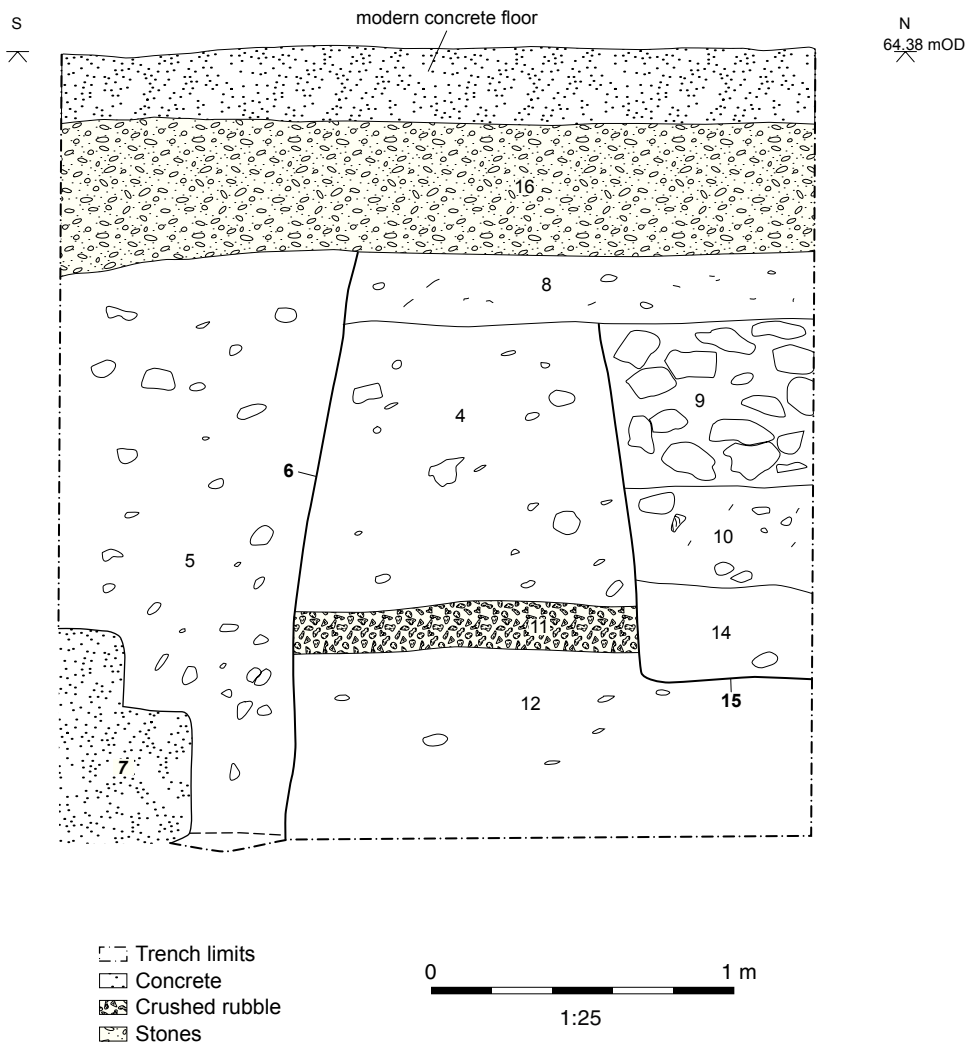


Figure 4: Section 1



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