

OXCSC  
201/94

(OX)

# St. Christophers First School Temple Cowley, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

February 1995

St CHRISTOPHER'S FIRST SCHOOL, TEMPLE COWLEY. OXFORD.

(NGR SP550045)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

INTRODUCTION

During October and November 1994, the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) conducted a watching brief at St Christophers First School, Temple Cowley, Oxford, during the levelling of the ground and subsequent excavation of ground beam trenches for two new classrooms.

The work was carried out on behalf of the main contractor Basil Wyatt & Sons Ltd, in accordance with the conditions of planning consent, in line with Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG16). The brief was prepared by the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service (OAAS).

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Temple Cowley was a manor of the Knights Templars in the 12th and 13th centuries. The later manor house was in the angle of Hollow Way and Oxford Road, but the Victoria County History (VCH) concluded that an earlier preceptory stood on Temple Road, to the SE of the development area. (VCH IV, 77).

The development area lies behind the southern frontage of Temple Road, and behind any surviving boundaries relating to the medieval village plan. The local topography suggests that the area was predominantly medieval pasture. No recorded archaeological work has previously been undertaken in the vicinity of the school.

RESULTS (Fig. 1, 2, 3)

The insertion of concrete piles at strategic points along the path of the ground beam trenches, prior to their machine excavation, meant that close examination of long sections was very difficult, and made more so by heavy rain and flooding in the open trenches.

Area 1

The site slopes appreciably from east to west, so the the specification of works called for the initial stripping of material in the area to a depth of approximately 1.0 - 1.4 m. The OAU was only notified of the commencement of this operation after most of the area had already been stripped. Only approximately 60 sq m in the NE corner of the trench could therefore be

properly observed, before the archaeological deposits were removed.

The lowest layer identified was a bluish green sandy clay (5), at a depth of 1.0 m below ground level. This was overlaid by a colluvial sandy silt (4), 0.30 m deep.

Layer 4 was cut by a ditch (6), oriented NE-SW, 1.4 m wide and over 0.70 m deep. The ditch was revealed for a distance of approximately 8.5 m. in the first instance, but a further inspection during the excavation of the ground beam trenches in the rest of the area enabled the continuation of the ditch to be traced to the SW, as its depth meant that the lowest part of the feature had survived the initial ground stripping.

Two sherds of 12th century pottery and some bone fragments were recovered from the upper sandy silt fill of the ditch.

Sealing the ditch was a 0.20 m deep dark grey/black sandy silt (3) which contained a few pieces of limestone. This was sealed by a buried topsoil (2), and the present topsoil/turf (1), which totalled 0.40 m in depth.

## Area 2

Little or no area stripping was undertaken prior to the excavation of the ground beam trenches. A possible subsoil layer 13, an orange silty clay, was identified in Section 3, on the E side of the trench. This was overlaid by a dark grey silty clay layer, with occasional limestone rubble (12) from which two pieces of roof tile were recovered. This was sealed by a mid/light brown colluvial layer of sandy silt (11), averaging approximately 0.30 m deep, which produced two sherds of 19th century pottery.

In the vicinity of section 4 layer, 11 overlaid a dark grey silty clay (17) which contained 20 -25% limestone rubble. Medieval pottery, bone and tile fragments were retrieved from the layer. Layer 17 was only exposed in a short sondage below the machined depth in the vicinity of section 4, but it can reasonably be construed as a continuation of layer 12 to the S.

In section 4 layer 11 was cut by a W-E stone wall footing (15), comprising a fairly loose matrix of unworked limestone blocks and slabs and sandy silt. The cut (16) of the wall was 0.50 m deep and 0.50 m wide. It was possible to trace the wall across the site for approximately 15 m to the W. as it was visible in the sections of the footings. The wall 15 was sealed by the topsoil (1) and an accumulation of material from the present works (14).

On the W side of the Area, (section 2), the lowest layer reached by the excavation was a sandy silt colluvium (10) at a depth of 0.60 m. This was sealed by a buried topsoil (2). Between these two layers was a sporadic layer of flat unworked limestone slabs (9). Over layer 2 was the present topsoil (1).

## DISCUSSION

The earliest archaeological feature is the NE-SW ditch, of possible 12th century date, which may have been a field boundary ditch associated with the medieval manor. Any less substantial features associated with the ditch would have been destroyed by the unobserved stripping.

The layer 17, on the E side of Area 2 is also of a 12th/13th century date, but given the small area of the layer exposed, no interpretation of it is possible.

The wall footing 15 could be interpreted as a continuation of the existing NW-SE property boundary running back from Temple Road to the east. This boundary is shown on the 1st edition O.S. map of 1874, but does not appear on the County Map of 1794. The dating evidence from layer 11, through which the wall is cut, seems to support the conclusion that this wall is of 19th century origin.

The sporadic occurrence of limestone rubble, and roof tile fragments, especially in the apparently post-medieval hillwash layers (9) (11) (3) suggests the possibility of a demolished medieval building nearby, presumably up the slope to the east.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the problems over proper observation it appears likely from the archaeological evidence that the development area did serve as medieval pasture, the ditch suggesting a possible link with the medieval manor to the SE.

Alan Hardy  
OAU  
February 1995

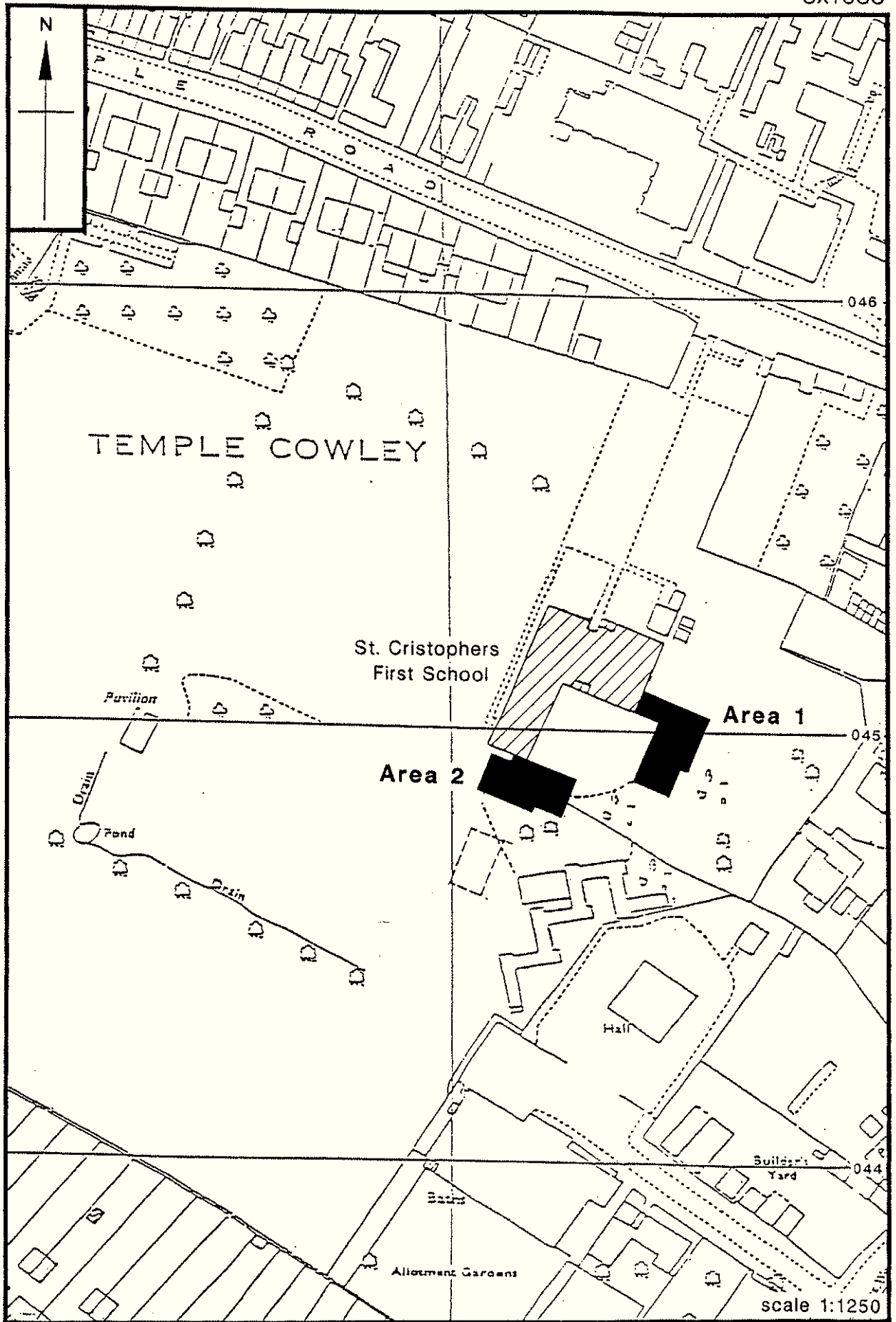
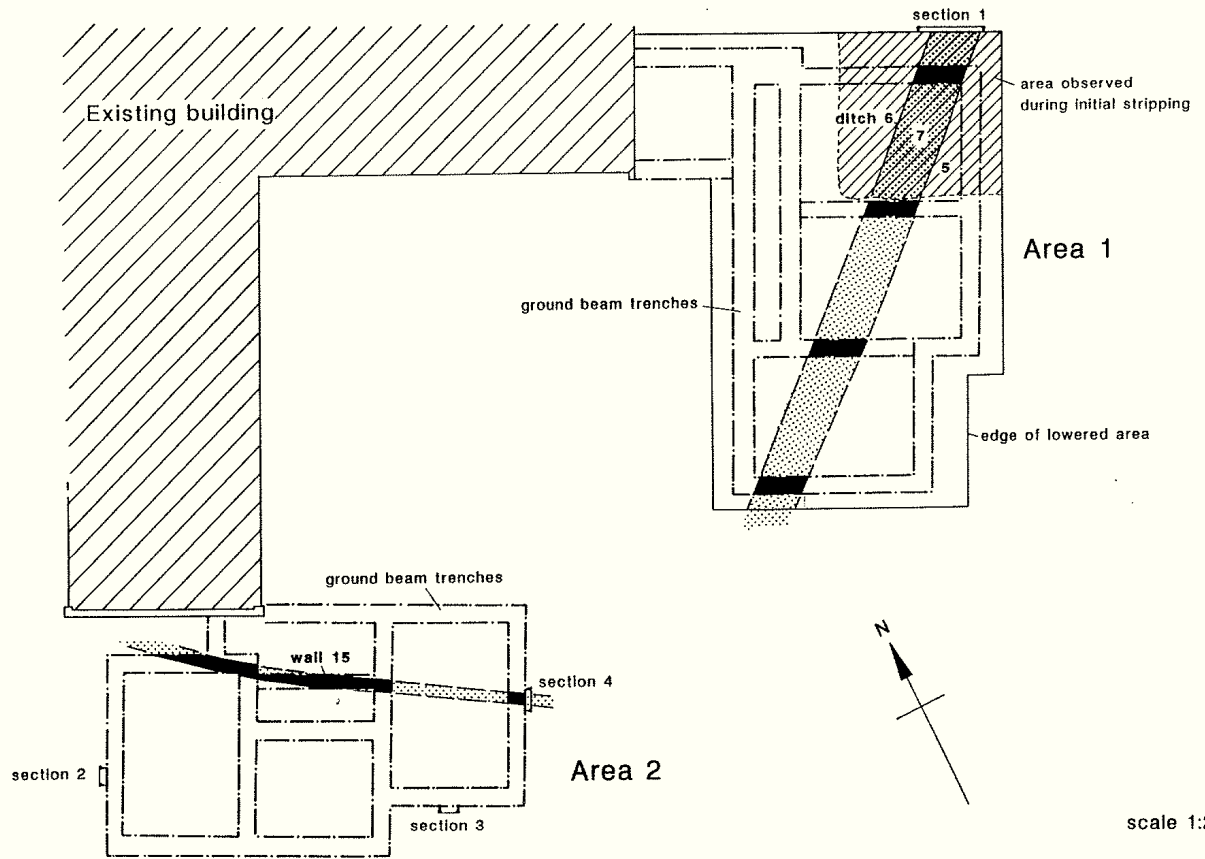


figure 1

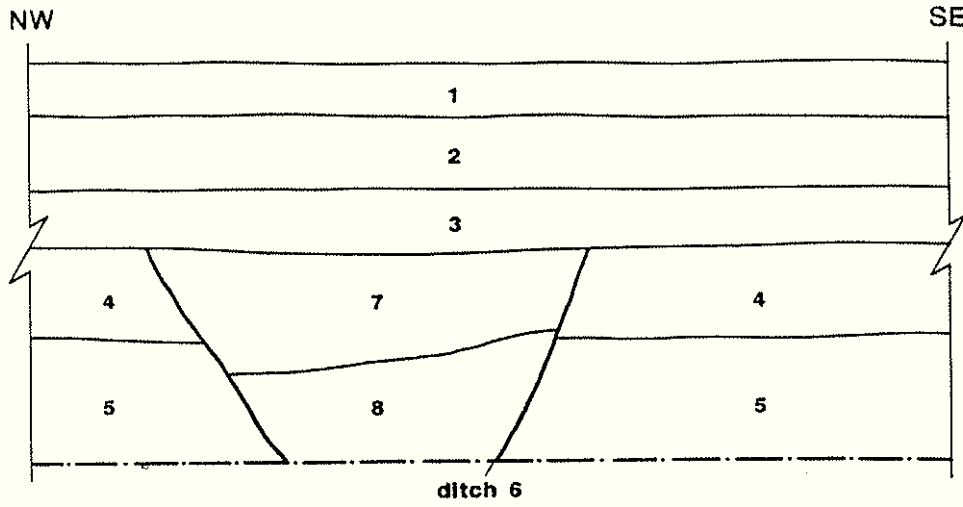
OXTCSC



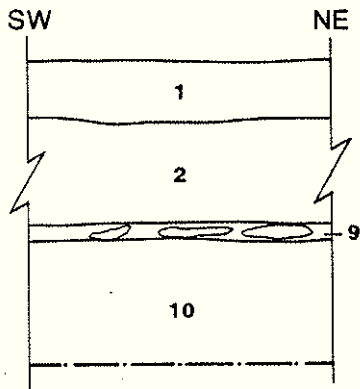
scale 1:250

figure 2

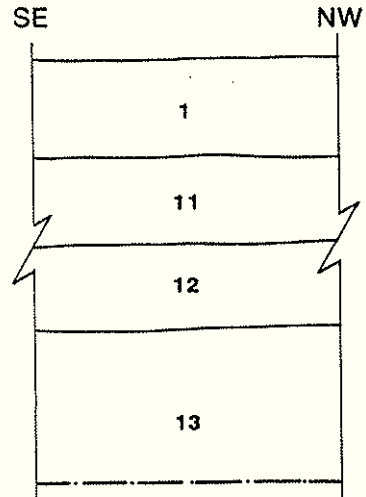
Area 1 section 1



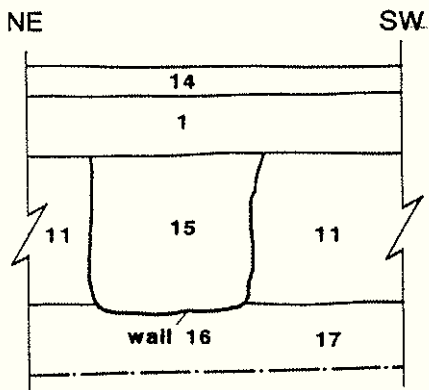
Area 2 section 2



Area 2 section 3



Area 2 section 4



scale 1:25

figure 3

Oxford Archaeological Unit

46 Hythe Bridge Street  
Oxford OX1 2EP



Tel: 0865 243888 Fax: 0865 793496

Registered Charity No. 285627  
Private Limited Company No. 1618597