

OXFORD, ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM FORECOURT (OX AFC92)

The Oxford Archaeological Unit was commissioned to conduct a watching brief at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, during the digging of two geotechnical test pits, preparatory to the construction of a cafe under the museum's forecourt.

Both pits were to be dug into the floors of old storage/coal cellars which at present occupy part of the forecourt area, and were to be excavated only as deep as was necessary to determine the depth of the cellar foundations.

The site was visited on 24 August 1992, when the two pits were excavated.

Test Pit No 1 (see location plan) was 0.9 m wide x 1.2 m long and 0.5 m deep. This revealed the depth of the wall foundation but did not go through the ground/mortar make-up layer for the floor. No archaeological finds or activity were in evidence.

Test Pit No 2 was dug against the south wall of the cellar on the south side of the forecourt. The foundation was deeper as the cellar wall also serves as a revetment for Beaumont Street itself. A superficial examination of the cellar wall indicated a lime mortar construction.

The present floor surface in the cellar was approximately 2.1 m below street level.

Beneath the present floor 1, and make-up layers 2, 4 and 5, was a medieval layer 6, and the fills 7 and 8, of a partially revealed pit 9.

Two sherds of late medieval pottery and two fragments of bone were recovered from layer 6.

Interpretation

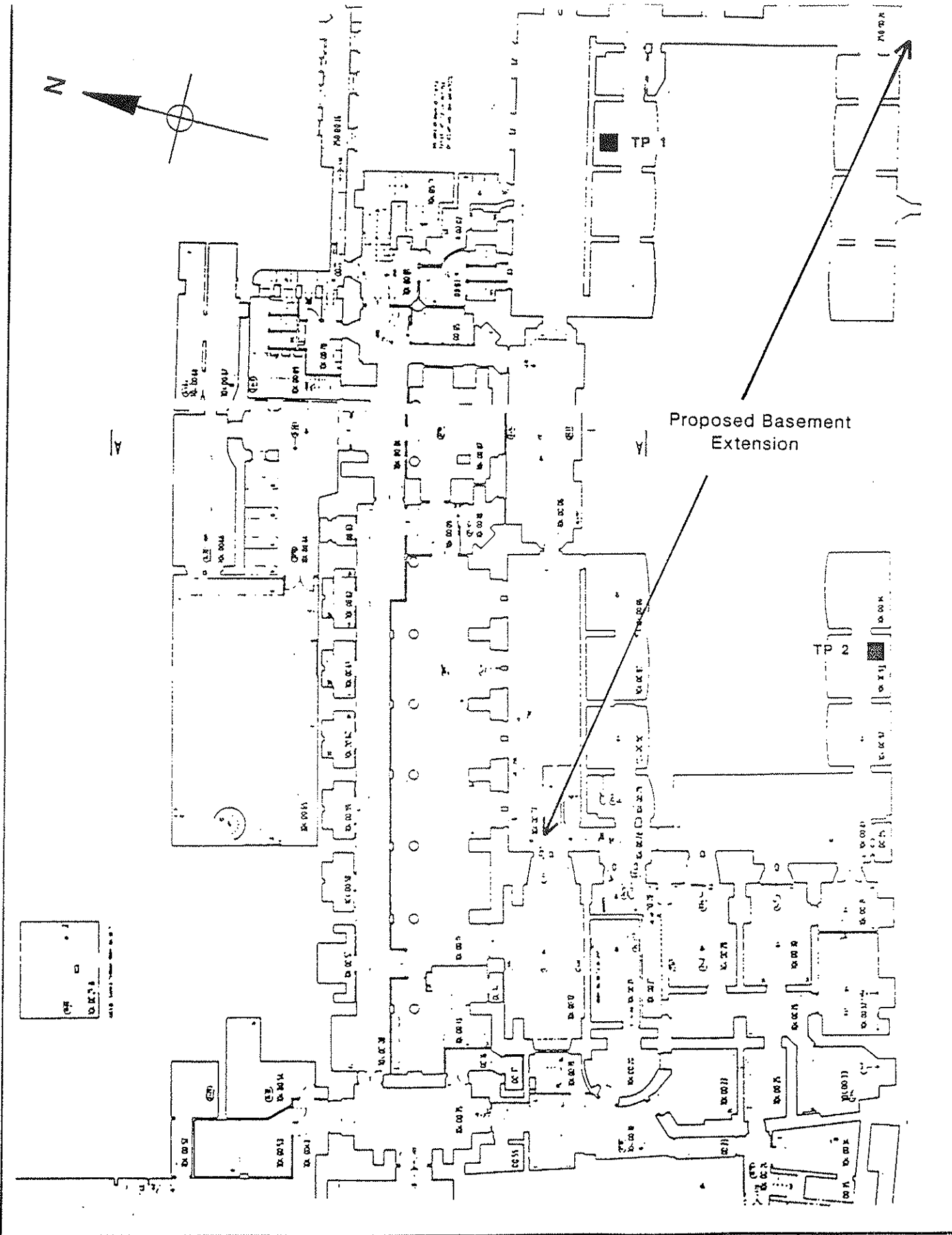
The stratigraphy under these cellars has obviously been very heavily truncated, but what little archaeological evidence remains is in accord with the documentary evidence of tenement plots, extending west from St Giles, in the late medieval period and containing, most commonly, rubbish pits, of which 9 is a truncated example.

Implications

It is assumed that when the Museum was built the cellars were dug from the then ground level. Material from the excavation of the cellars and basements of the Museum was used to build up to the present forecourt level. Therefore there is a probability that medieval archaeology survives, under the levelling up material, in the area of the forecourt where cellars have not been excavated.

This archaeology would probably consist of rubbish and cess pits in the back of the medieval tenement plots. It is possible that remains of minor structures (out buildings) may exist.

OAU
September 1992

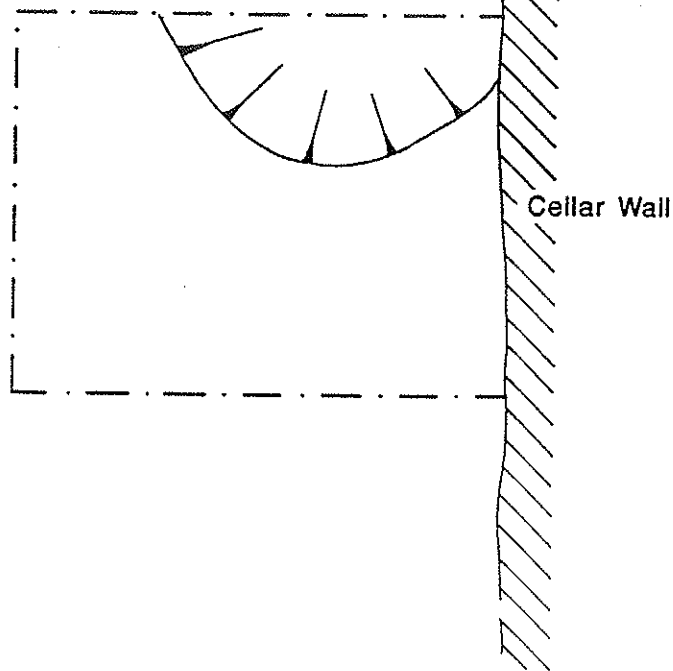


Oxford, Ashmolean Museum
 Test Pit Location
 Not to Scale

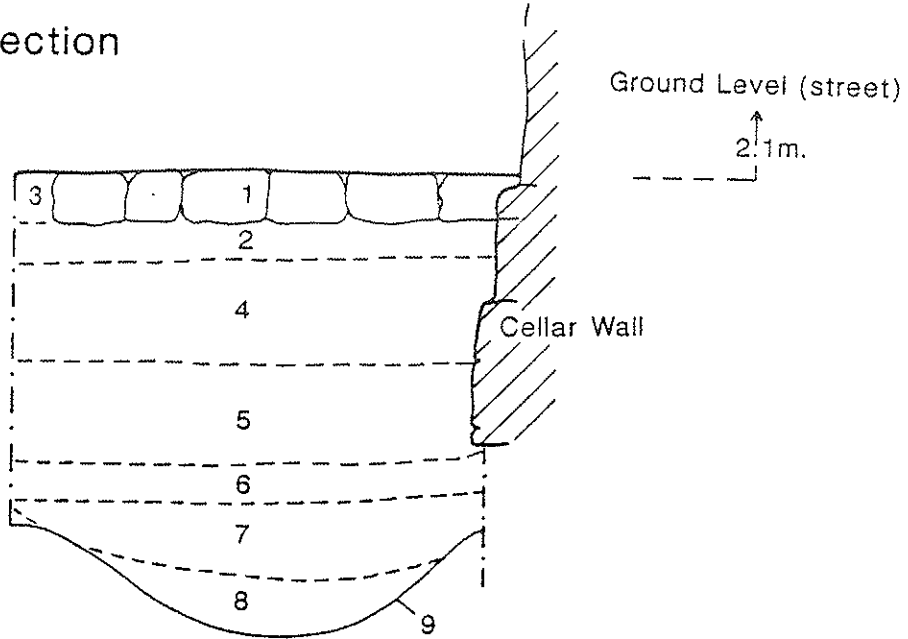
Fig 1.

Oxford, Ashmolean Museum Forecourt.
Test Pit 2

Plan



Section



Ground Level (street)
↑
2.1m.



Fig 2.