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FREWIN HALL, OXFORD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



Oxford Archaeological Unit



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Summary

A field evaluation was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) at Frewin Hall, Oxford, on behalf of Brasenose College, in respect of an application for planning permission for student accommodation and car parking. The site is in the centre of Oxford, at grid reference SP 512062 (Fig.1).

In the area of trench 1 (Fig. 2, site E) there were no archaeological deposits due to the construction of a post-medieval cellar.

In trench 2 (Fig. 2, site B) there were undated features cut into the gravel which were overlaid by early garden or ploughsoils. These were cut by 13th- and 14th-century features that may date from the use of the site as the centre of an urban manor and which were overlaid by 14th-century garden soils. The wall of a substantial building was cut into the 14th-century garden soils. The wall had been robbed. There may have been a parallel wall and the traces of a floor. An 18th-century cellar or large stone lined pit was found in the W of the trench. 18th- and 19th-century floor layers and robber trenches are from more recent buildings. There were 19th-century refuse pits cut into the garden soils and the later buildings.

Archaeological background (Fig. 1)

The site has already been the subject of an archaeological desk-top study¹ and the information is summarised in this report.

A Bronze Age ring ditch was excavated at 24a St. Michael's Street in 1985,² indicting the use of this area for burials.

There is Roman and Iron Age activity, signified by pottery finds, present in the city centre but as yet no sites have been found.

The site lies in a block, lying just inside the City Walls, formed by two of Oxford's oldest streets, St. Michael's Street and New Inn Hall Street, which are an original element of the street layout of the planned Anglo-Saxon town dating to the early 10th century. The wall to the S and E of the site marks an old boundary which may be of Saxon origin (Fig. 1 and 5).

Excavations on the site of the Clarendon centre in 1954-5 found Saxon to 13th-century rubbish pits cut into the gravel at a depth of around 2.4 m.³

The undercroft of Frewin Hall was probably built between 1090 and 1150 as part of an extensive manorial complex. In the 13th century the site was the centre of a large urban estate.

¹Miles D, 1993, Frewin Hall desk-top study, OAU

²Durham B, Oxford Before The University (forthcoming)

³Jope E M and Pantin W A, 1958, The Clarendon Hotel, Oxford, Oxoniensia 23, 1-129

From 1435 to 1540 the site was occupied by St. Mary's College for the Austin Canons. Their building programme was incomplete when Cardinal Wolsey began another series of buildings in 1518. Excavations carried out by J Blair in 1976 located the chapel of St. Mary's College and a suggested reconstructed plan of the college is included as Fig. 2 of the desk-top study⁴.

After the dissolution of the monasteries St. Mary's was the only theological establishment not to be obtained immediately by an Oxford College. The site was used as a Bridewell, or poorhouse, and as a place of correction until it was obtained by Brasenose College in 1580.

During the Civil War the site was used as a gun foundry. In the 19th century the area of site E was almost completely occupied by houses that were gradually removed in the 20th century while site B seems to have only been occupied by small structures (perhaps lean-to sheds) according to the maps (see cover, Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 for 1750, 1870 and 1969 maps).

Topography

The site lies on the W side of the gravel ridge on which Oxford is built, just at the edge of the Thames flood plain. The site is approximately 0.5 hectares in area at a height of 62.4 m O.D. The site is used as a garden and car park.

The natural subsoil across the site was gravel which is overlain by red loess where the surface of the gravel has not been disturbed. The undisturbed top of the gravel was expected at a depth of 2.2 m from the present surface from information derived from the excavations at 24a St. Michael's Street and the Clarendon Centre.

Evaluation strategy (Fig.2)

The evaluation strategy was based on two trenches, one in each of the two areas of proposed development. Trench 1 was dug in the N of the site (site E) on the frontage of St. Michael's Street where a garage with student accommodation is proposed. The trench was 5.2 m long and 1.5 m wide, the deepest excavated extent was 2.84 m. Trench 2 was dug in the car park area at the S of the site (site B) where parking and student accommodation is proposed with a basement to be used as a college store. This trench was moved from its origin location to avoid a series of surface drains (Fig. 5). The trench was 8.2 m long and 1.5 m wide, the deepest excavated extent was 2.84 m.

The archaeological features encountered were sampled by hand to determine their nature and degree of preservation and to recover dating evidence. The features were planned and their sections drawn at a scale of 1:20.

⁴Blair J, 1978, Frewin Hall : A Norman Mansion and a Monastic College, Oxoniensia 43, 48-99

Results

Soils

The general soil type was a slightly silty loam. The underlying subsoil was gravel.

Archaeology

In Trench 1 (site E) as the excavation of a cellar for the previous building (see Fig. 2) had removed any archaeological deposits (see appendix for trench details).

In Trench 2 (site B, Figs. 3 and 4) there were six elements to the archaeological deposits; undated features were cut into the gravel and overlaid by garden soils; the undated garden soils were cut by 13th- and 14th-century pits and overlaid by 14th-century garden soils; the walls and possibly floors of a substantial building that had been robbed overlaid and cut the 14th-century garden soils; an 18th-century cellar or large stone lined pit may be a remnant of a building aligned from remaining walls of the monastic college; 18th-century floor layers and robber trenches are from more recent buildings; 19th-century pits cut into the garden soils and the later buildings.

The undated features (95 and 100) cut into the gravel and the overlying red brown gravelly silt (70/91) were without finds of any sort. The overlying layers contained many residual sherds, of all dates from the 9th century onwards. The features were not fully excavated and had vertical sides.

As the gravel is overlain by red brown gravelly silt (70/91), rather than red brown loess, it is likely to have been truncated even though the difference in the expected and the actual level of the gravel is minimal (0.05 m).

The red brown gravelly silt in the W of the trench was cut by two pits (66 and 98). These and the overlying garden soils (60-65, ?83 and ?89) are 14th-century in date. There were two large pits (filled by 84, 85 and 87 and 90) to the E that were not fully defined in the trench but as 87 contained 14th-century pottery and roof tiles and 90 contained 13th-century pottery they may be part of the same activity.

The pits at the E of the trench (84, 85 and 87 and 90) were cut by a N-S large wall (92, see Figs. 3 and 4) which survived below a very large stone which was probably left when the wall was robbed (in the 18th century, robber trench 78, Fig. 4) as the stone is too large to move manually (due to the presence of this stone only one course of the wall was uncovered and the stone is still in place). It was not possible to determine at what level the wall had been constructed in order to relate it to the other deposits, but as the wall was built through 13th- and 14th-century pits it must be later than that and may be of 15th- to 18th-century date. The size of the wall is similar to other monastic structures in the area which dates it before the mid 16th century.

The garden soils which were removed in spits (60-65) did not show any difference in the date of the pottery (14th-century). The gravel surface (30) which overlaid the garden soils is 15th century and may be a floor packing. The finds from layer 60, which is shown as 18th century on the section drawing (Fig. 4), are contaminated from the construction trench of the stone lined cellar or pit (68) as the soil difference was not noted at this level of the excavation due to the

similarity of the soils. There were no finds from the other probable garden soils (83 and 89) or the mortar layer (82) which may be a packing layer similar to, or the same as, the gravel surface (30).

The N-S wall of the cellar or pit (71) in the W of the trench survived to a height of 1.2 m with a slimmer return built at right angles. The two different sections of wall indicate at least two phases of building, with different mortar bonds (a red brown gravel in the 0.64 m thick N-S section of wall and a buff mortar in the 0.48 m thick E-W section of wall). The size of the walls suggests a substantial structure although no structures that may be related are shown on any maps. These walls were built in a pit formed by a vertical cut (69). The lower part of this cut was filled by a very different material (81) to the upper part of the pit fill and it may be that this fill relates to a robber trench for a wall similar and parallel to 92. The gravel surface (30) ran up to the edge of the construction pit which may also indicate that it is part of a robber trench of a wall parallel to 92.

The two blocks of 18th- and 19th-century floor layers (54-59 and 31 with 39, 47, 37, 48, 49, 50, 51 and 52=53) and robber trenches (38, 39 and 42), at right-angles to the line of the S range of Frewin Hall, indicate buildings off the S end of the present N-S range of Frewin Hall. Robber trenches 38 and 42 were on the same alignment and may be from the same wall although 38 cut through the floors (54-59 and 31) and 42 was overlaid by them (Fig. 3). This may show the partial demolition of a wall that was used for another phase of building and the later robbing of the wall remnant. The parallel robber trench (39) may indicate a passage way. As these robber trenches were comparatively small they may represent internal walls or walls of a single storey building.

Finds

Cathy Underwood-Keevill

A total of 273 sherds weighing 3.7 kg was recovered from all contexts. From Trench 1 (site E) there were eight sherds of 20th-century pottery. The remainder came from Trench 2 (site B).

All the pottery has been assigned to fabric types based on the Oxford Fabric Type Series (Haldon and Mellor 1977), and counted and weighed by context. The majority of the assemblage was post-medieval in date with some residual early medieval material in isolated contexts.

The earliest fabric type comprises one sherd of Late Saxon Shelly type (OXB), dated to the 9th-to the 10th-century, in context 23. A limited amount of St. Neots type ware (OXR), dated to the 10th or 11th century, was noted in contexts 30 and 63. Although the numbers are small it adds to the distribution pattern of this type in Oxford. The main type present is Oxford Early Medieval ware (OXAC), dated to the 11th to 12th century. This fabric is present in contexts: 36, 42, 44, 61, 65, 78, 84, 86 and 87 (see Table 1 for residual sherds).

The medieval material is dominated by Brill/Boarstall ware (OXAM), which varies from speckled green glazed jug sherds to highly decorated ribbed and rouletted jug sherds dated to the 13th to 14th century. The later 14th- to 15th-century plain and part glazed baluster types in fabric OXAW are also present in contexts 30 and 87. Oxford Medieval ware (OXY) is also present in small

numbers.

The main post-medieval type is 16th- to 17th-century Tudor Green ware, including a lobed cup rim in context 23, a plain cup rim in context 25 and a seventeenth century large bowl type in context 41. Sixteenth to seventeenth century Frechen tankard sherds are also present in contexts 23, 25 and 43. Seventeenth century Brill/Boarstall ware was noted in contexts 36, 38 and 40. Eighteenth and nineteenth century material consists of glazed red earthenware pancheon and creaming pan sherds in contexts 21 and 38, a grafitto decorated red earthenware West Country type dish in context 29, English stoneware in contexts 28, 29, 31, 37, 38 and 78 and one sherd of English porcelain in context 41.

Table 1: residual sherds

Fabric	Date	CTX	CTX type and date
OXB?	9th-10th	23	Pit fill (18th)
OXR (St Neots)	10th-11th	30	gravel surface (15th)
OXBF	Saxo-Norman	30	gravel surface (15th)
OXAC	11th-12th	36	garden soil? (18th)
OXAC	11th-12th	42	robber trench (18th)
OXBF	rim 12th	43	garden soil? (18th)
OXAC	11th-12th	44	pit fill (18th)
OXAC	decorated 12th	61	spit garden soil (14th)
OXAE grey	12th and Roman	62	spit garden soil (14th)
OXR St Neots	10th-11th	63	spit garden soil (14th)
OXAC	11th-12th	65	spit garden soil (14th)
OXAE	12th	74	pit fill (14th)
OXAC BBII	12th Roman	78	robber trench fill (18th)
OXAC	11th-12th	84	pit fill (14th)
OXAC	12th	86	garden soil (17th)
OXAC	base 11th-12th	87	pit fill (14th)

Environmental

One soil sample was taken from 85 which was almost all charcoal.

Comments on the results

Reliability of field investigation

The sample size sufficient to define adequately and interpret the archaeology apart from the E area of site B (Fig. 5).

Overall Interpretation

There were no archaeological deposits in Trench 1 (site E). The cellar must be associated with the large building seen on the 1879 O.S. map (Fig. 1). The adjacent building, to the W, has two levels of cellars that are more than 3 m deep and run up to the street frontage and there is no reason to suppose that cellars under site E should be of smaller extent.

The archaeological deposits in Trench 2 (site B) are consistent with undisturbed archaeological deposits elsewhere on the site (the site of St. Mary's College chapel).

The undated features and ploughsoil or garden soil show that areas of the gravel and negative features cut into it have survived. The apparent lack of disturbance of the soils forming the 14th-century garden soils and pits overlying these features shows that other similar preserved deposits are likely. The large amount of residual pottery in the overlying layers is indicative of the documented activity on the site and in this light the lack of any pottery from the features cut into the gravel and the overlying red gravel may mean that these deposits are of some antiquity. As these deposits are cut by features of 13th century date they must predate this. It is unlikely that they are linked to Bronze Age or Roman activity but are probably related to Saxon or Saxo-Norman activity on the site. The presence of Roman pottery should not be discounted but as there is a consistent 2% of Roman pottery in any assemblage from Oxford (B Durham pers. comm.) this may not mean that the deposits are Roman.

The 13th- and 14th-century activity may be related to the use of the site as a manorial centre. The depth of the 14th-century deposits with the quantity of residual pottery shows a long term use of the site with a reworking of the ground to redeposit the pottery from earlier features.

The large wall of St. Mary's College on the same alignment as the S range of Frewin Hall may be that seen on Taylor's 1750 Map of Oxford (see cover). That these walls are not to be seen on Agas' 1578 map or Hollar's 1643 map or Loggan's 1675 map is probably due to the difficulty of showing such walls in perspective combined with primitive surveying techniques. Frewin Hall seen on Taylor's map is larger and of different proportions than the present structure. The standing walls of the monastic college are documented in the late 16th century while they were being demolished. The thin 15th-century gravel surface (30) may be a packing layer for a stone floor as monastic floor layers do not often leave deep archaeological deposits. No occupation layers were observed in connection with the walls. It is unlikely that there would have been a basement (the undercroft

of Frewin Hall) inside the cloister of St. Mary's College so it is doubtful that there was another court in addition to that shown by Blair (J Blair pers. comm.). It is possible that there were large monastic buildings not built into the cloister arrangement.

The later buildings may have in filled the space to the S of the S range of Frewin Hall in the same manner as to the N (Fig. 1, 2 and cover). The stone lined pit or cellar may be aligned on a wall parallel to 92 and might relate to an E-W range although a later pit has removed evidence for any further E-W wall. No structures which may be related to these walls and floors can be seen on maps. Apart from the observation that both wings of Frewin Hall have been rebuilt there is no evidence for buildings or ranges of buildings that these deposits relate to, or whether the buildings are related to remnants of St. Mary's College which may have had a different plan to that suggested by Blair.

Recommendations

The presence of deep stratified archaeological deposits in the area of site B may have a bearing on the proposed development.

- 1) The proposed basement may have to be moved in order not to disturb archaeological deposits. It should be noted that archaeological deposits on the E of this site, adjacent to The Anglo-Saxon deposits under the Clarendon Centre, have not been evaluated and it is likely that deep stratified deposits are present in this area (see Fig. 5 and evaluation strategy above) although the quality of archaeological deposits is unpredictable. If the basement is to be retained as part of the design then it may be necessary to excavate the basement area as an archaeological trench.
- 2) If piled foundations are to be used for the building then it may be necessary to move and/or monitor the piling in view of the size of the medieval and post-medieval walls which were located. The substantial size of the walls may prevent the penetration by piles. Any digging out of obstructions would disturb archaeological deposits.
- 3) Further work might take the form of either evaluation/excavation in the area of the basement if the basement is to be retained (whether it is moved or not) and/or geophysical survey and/or desk-top study using cartographic sources to locate walls. Although the latter is not likely to be useful considering previous research. It may be possible to provide enough information to allow piling not to disturb substantial walls. This would also provide evidence for the plan of St. Mary's College that would add details and confirmation to Blair's suggested reconstruction and define the relationship of later buildings.

M R Roberts
OAU
April 1993

Appendix

Trench description

Trench 1, Site E

This trench was 5.2 m long and 2.84 m deep. There was a consistent surface at a depth of 3.06 m from the top of the trench, which was established by probing through layers 14 and 8, which may be a concrete cellar floor. The size of this cellar was not determined within the confines of the trench. This cellar was filled by a sequence of dumped layers (9-14). Overlying the surface was a compact layer of dark brown silt loam (14) which contained 20th-century pottery. Over 14 was a thin layer of off-white mortar/plaster (13) which was under a dark brown layer (12) similar to layer 14. Another layer of off-white mortar/plaster (11) was over 12 and under 10 which was a mixed layer of brown loam and mortar/plaster. A thick layer of mortar/plaster (9) was over 10.

A later cellar had been inserted into the large cellar. The evidence for this was a thick layer of brick rubble (8) and a brick wall with an internally concreted face (5) which was aligned at right-angles to St. Michael's Street and overlaid layer 9. Overlying wall 5 was a layer of dark buff gravel (7) and over this was a yellower gravel (6). These gravels abutted the wall and are later levelling or infill layers.

The area had been levelled up with two layers of similar dark grey silt loam (3 and 4). The top of these layers had been the level of the garden area before the large (60' plus) sycamore and chestnut trees had been felled in 1987. The roots of these trees (2) were up to 0.90 m thick and reached a depth over 2.84 m. The area had then been built up 0.26 m by garden soil (1) since 1987.

Trench 2, site B

This trench was 8.2 m long and at most 2.84 m deep. The trench was generally excavated to a depth of between 0.8 and 1.1 m with two deeper areas, one at the W end and the other at the E end over a large wall. The natural gravel was encountered a depth of 2.25 m from the present surface.

The gravel was cut by two features 95 and 100, which were filled by 96 and 101 respectively. It was not possible to determine the exact nature of these features within the trench nor was there any dating evidence from these features. These features were more than 0.30 m deep and were not fully excavated in the confines of the trench. These features and the gravel were overlaid by red brown gravelly silt 70=91 which may be an old garden or ploughsoil as there was no trace of the red brown loess which is the geological strata overlying the gravel elsewhere in Oxford.

The red brown gravelly silt was cut by two small pits (66 and 98) at the W end of the trench. There was a series of layers (84, 85 and 87) to the E of the trench that may have been the fills of a pit including one layer of roof slates (87) although the extent and nature of these layers was not fully determined within the trench. At the E of the trench the gravel was cut by a larger pit (90). These features were overlaid by garden soil (89=83=60-65). No clear differences were seen in these layers but in the W they were removed in 0.05-0.10 m spits (60-65)

to recover and identify any dating differentiated by depth.

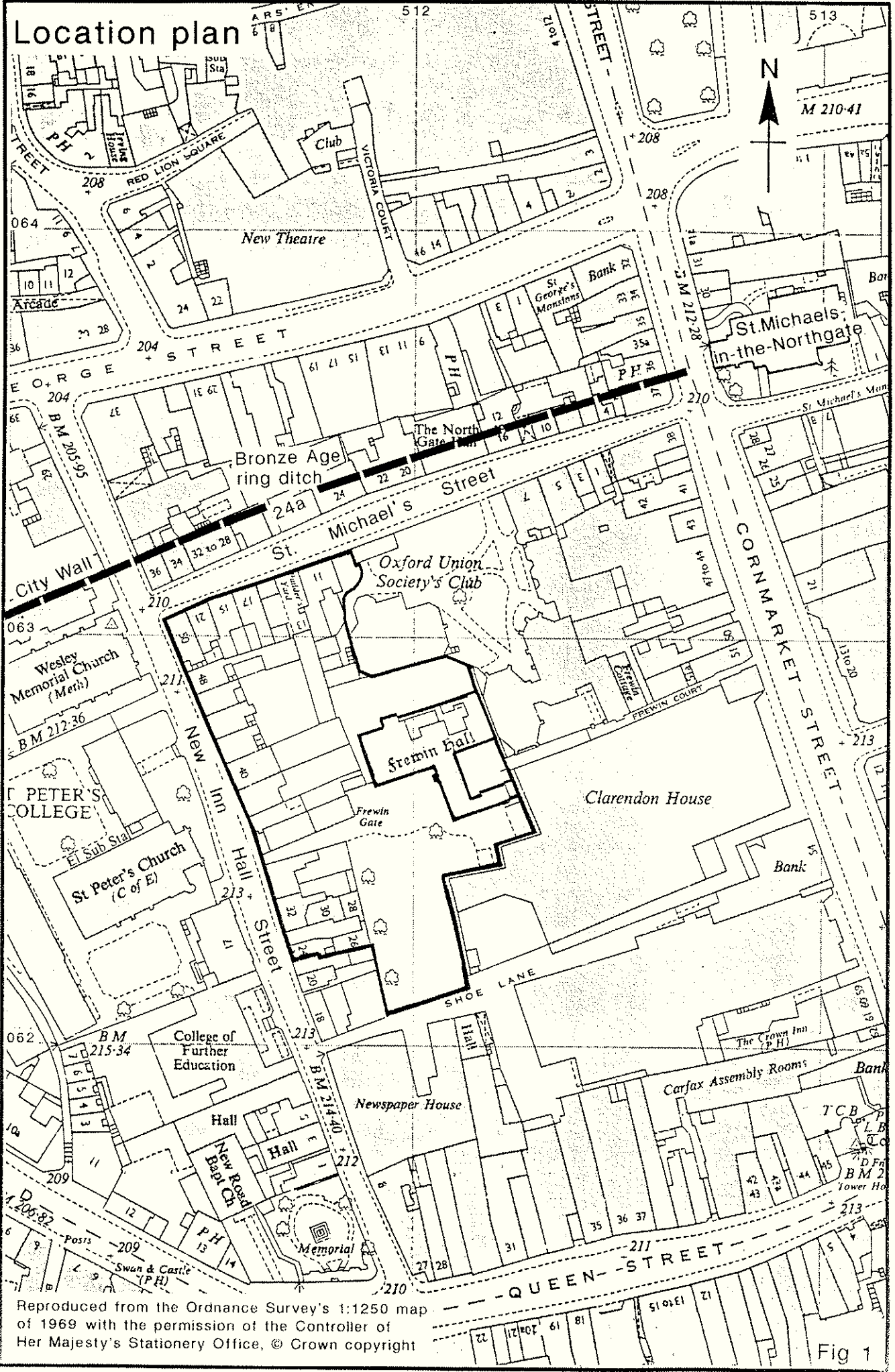
In the E of the trench N-S wall 92 was 1.4 m wide and built of squared pieces of white limestone 0.3x0.3x0.15 m with at least one piece of limestone that was 1.1x0.65x0.6 m. The wall was bonded by off-white mortar. It was not clear what level the wall had been built from as the robber trench (78) cut away the deposits above and to the sides of the wall but the substantial remains are probably those of foundations.

In the W of the trench there was a N-S wall (71) which survived to a height of 1.2 m with a return built at right angles. The two sections of wall were of different thicknesses (0.64 and 0.48 m) and had different mortar bonds (a red brown gravel in the thicker N-S section of wall and a buff mortar in the narrower E-W section of wall). These walls were built in a pit formed by a vertical cut (69) which was filled by a dark grey gravelly silt loam (68). The lower part of this cut was filled by a very different material- a dark brown gravelly silt loam (81).

There was a fine layer of scorched gravel (30) on top of the garden soils 60-65 which may have been the levelling layer for a stone flagged floor or an external surface. This may have been the same as a mortar layer (82) seen next to wall 92.

This surface was cut by a N-S robber trench (42) which ran under a sequence of floors (54-59 and 31) which were only seen in the S trench section and were cut in turn by another robber trench on the same alignment as 42 (38). Robber trench 38 also cut a sequence of floors (39, 47, 37, 48, 49, 50, 51, and 52=53) at the E end of the trench that were cut in turn by a robber trench (39) parallel to 38. The sequence of floor layers in the centre of the trench and the robber trenches cut through an unexcavated gravel layer which was probably a make-up layer for the floors and buildings. Over these floors and robber trenches was a destruction layer (46).

The destruction layer was cut by two pits (25 and 44). At the W end of The trench a large pit (fills 29, 40, 41, 75 and 77) had been dug into the cellar or pit formed by wall 71 that had destroyed the E-W return of the wall. This pit had been cut by the robber trench for wall 71 (97). These deposits were overlaid by brown garden soil (22). The garden soil was cut by one pit (23) which was on almost the same alignment as robber trench 78 and pit 44 but pit 23 did not extend to the S side of the trench. These layers were capped by a dark garden soil and the tarmac car park surface (20 and 21).



Location plan

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's 1:1250 map of 1969 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright

Fig 1

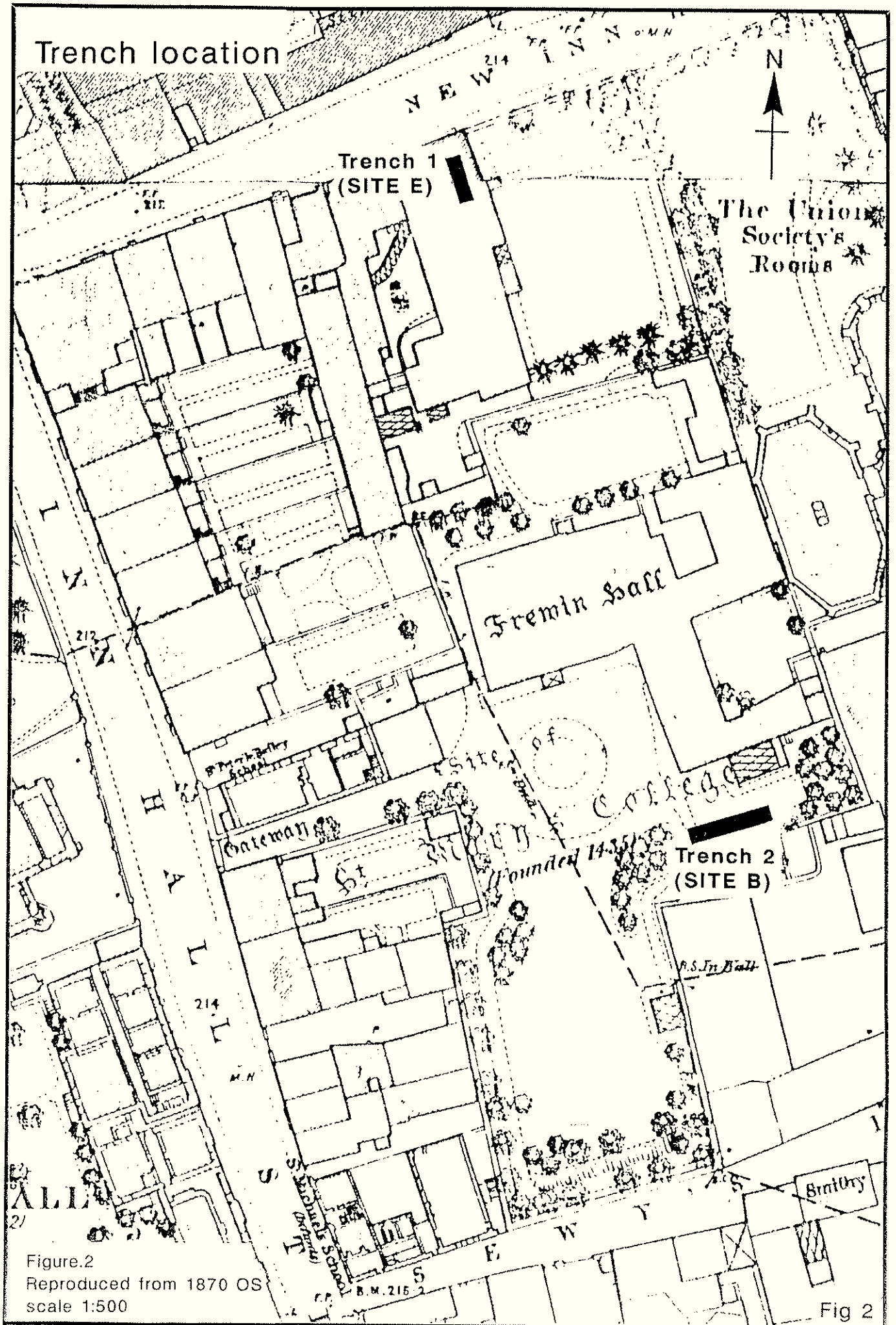
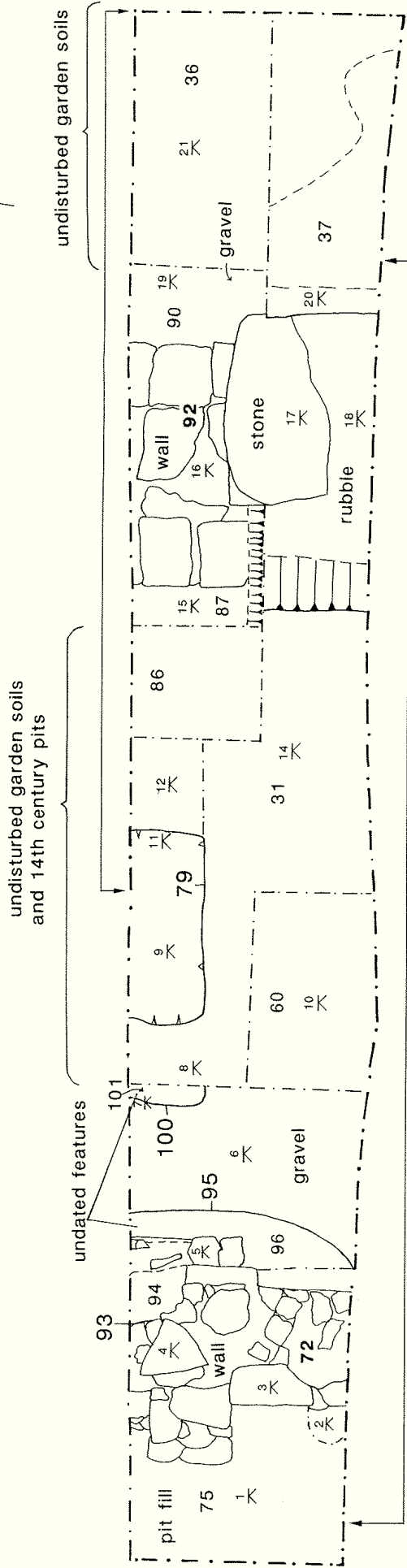


Figure.2
 Reproduced from 1870 OS
 scale 1:500

Fig 2

Plan of TRENCH 2 (SITE B)

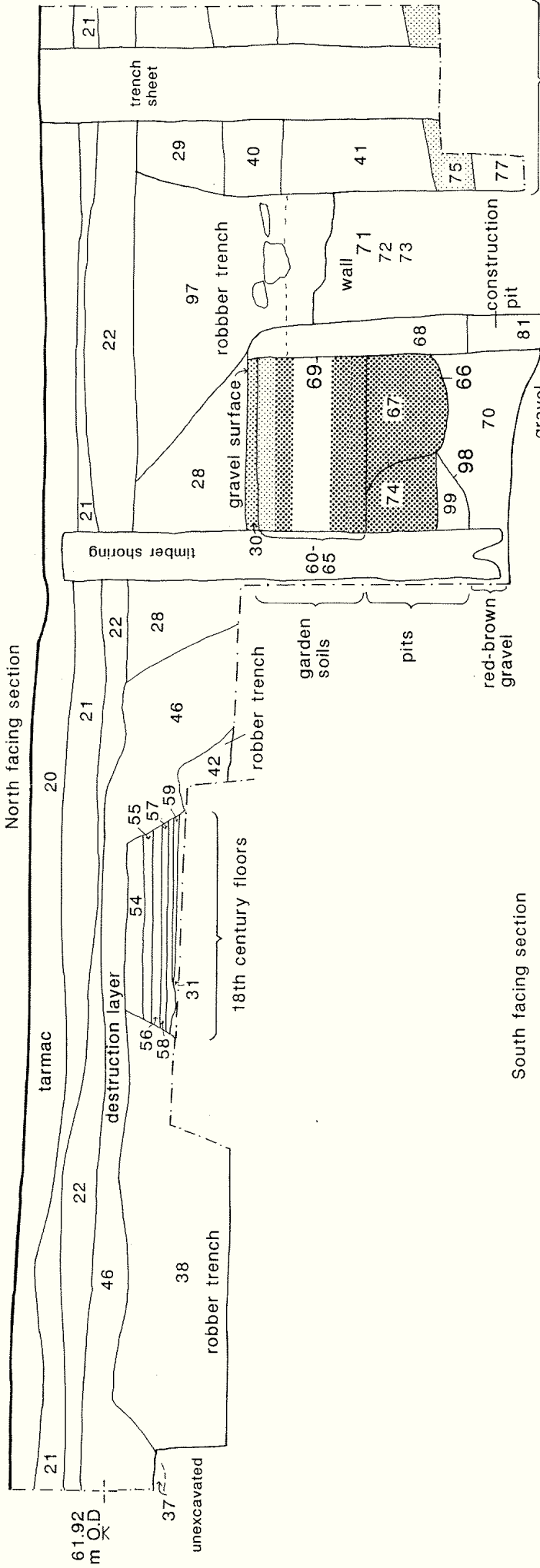


Spot heights in m.O.D.

1	60.29	6	59.95	11	61.53	16	60.23
2	60.06	7	60.04	12	61.71	17	60.76
3	60.94	8	61.67	13	61.14	18	60.69
4	61.04	9	61.52	14	61.60	19	59.88
5	60.44	10	61.27	15	60.01	20	61.65
						21	61.48

Fig 3

North facing section



South facing section

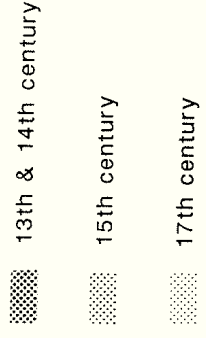
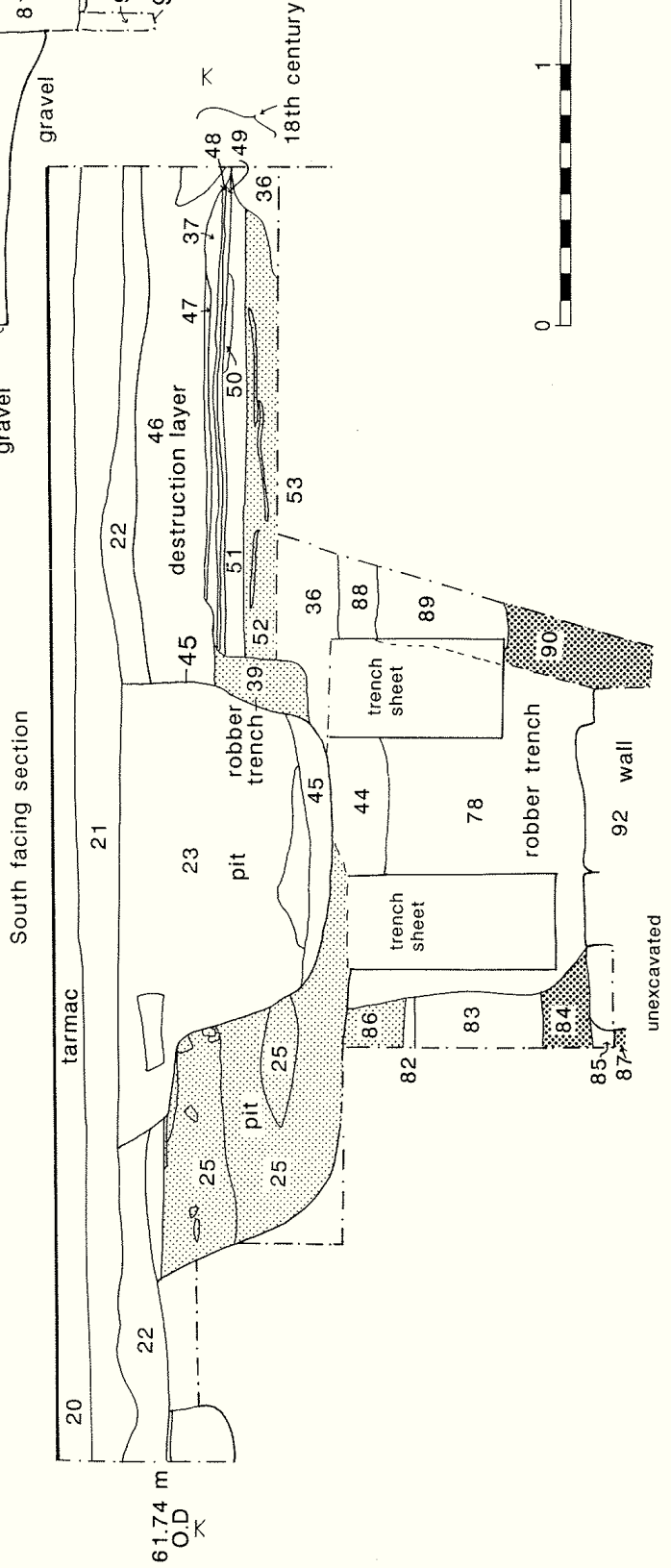


Fig 4

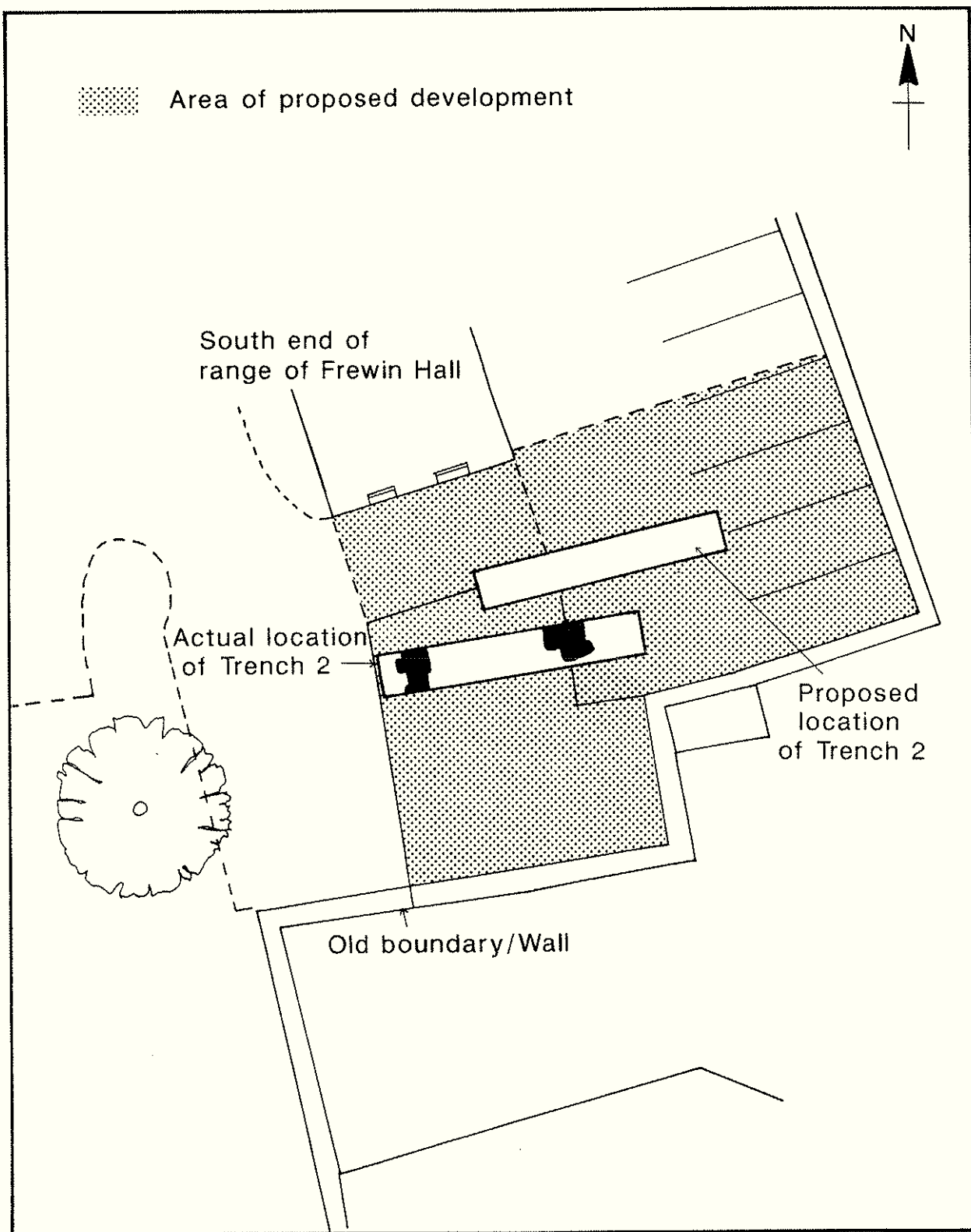


Fig 5



The Oxford Archaeological Unit

46 Hythe Bridge Street

Oxford OX1 2EP

tel. (0865) 243888 fax. (0865) 793496