

T H A M E S V A L L E Y

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**The Warden's Lodgings,
19 Merton Street, Oxford**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Jamie Lewis

Site Code: 19MSO10/58

(SP 5190 0615)

The Warden's Lodgings, 19 Merton Street, Oxford

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Merton College

by James Lewis

Thames Valley Archaeological Services

Ltd

Site Code 19MSO10/58

December 2010

Summary

Site name: The Warden's Lodgings, 19 Merton Street, Oxford

Grid reference: SP 5190 0615

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 1st–16th November 2010

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: James Lewis

Site code: 19MSO 10/58

Summary of results: No archaeological deposits were identified

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 08.12.10 Steve Preston ✓ 08.12.10
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The Warden's Lodgings, 19 Merton Street, Oxford. An Archaeological Watching Brief

by James Lewis

Report 10/58

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at the Warden's Lodgings, 19 Merton Street, Oxford (SP 5190 0615) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr David Finley, of Acanthus Clews Architects, Acanthus House, 57 Hightown Road, Banbury, Oxon, OX16 9BE.

Planning permission (app 10/00644/FUL) has been gained from Oxford City Council to refurbish the building with the erection of a new street level porch, stone stairs and a platform lift. Due to the location of the development within the historic core of Oxford a condition (6) relating to archaeology has been placed on the consent. The development includes digging within a basement to connect up drainage services and it is possible that this digging might expose archaeological deposits associated with the town wall.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Planning Policy Statement, *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5 2010), and Oxford City Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr David Radford, Oxford City Council Archaeologist. The fieldwork was undertaken by James Lewis between 1st–16th November 2010 and the site code is 19MSO10/58. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in the centre of the city of Oxford which lies on an area of high ground between the Rivers Thames and Cherwell. The site is south of the Eastgate on the corner of Merton Street. Immediately north-west are the Oxford University Examination Schools, while to south-west, south and east are buildings of Merton College and beyond these are more commercial and residential buildings. Further south is Christchurch Meadow. Approximately 700m to the south-west is the River Thames (Isis) and approximately 100m to the south-east is the River Cherwell. The underlying geology is 2nd (Summertown-Radley) Terrace deposits (BGS 1982) and the site is at approximately 59m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

Oxford city centre as a whole has a rich and varied archaeological heritage, with a long and distinguished history of research (Hassall 1986; Dodd 2003), and evidence for settlement from Neolithic times onwards. The recent discovery of a henge monument at St John's College indicates that the isthmus between the River Thames and River Cherwell may have formed part of a ritual landscape (Wallis 2010). Despite the potential existence of two major river crossings in the area the city itself had no or little Roman settlement (Henig and Booth 2000). A Saxon *burh* was founded here by 900AD and the development of the Saxon town can be traced through the development of the street systems and town defences (Hassell 1986). The High Street appears to have existed in its current form already built up by the 11th century (Dodd 2003) and although it has been argued that the Saxon defences extended no further than the Church of St Mary the Virgin and Oriel Street (Hassall 1975), what has been thought to be a Saxon bank has been identified on the same line as the medieval walls within Merton College very close to the present site (Fig. 2) (Dodd 2003). Early Norman Oxford appears to have suffered from initial decline, however, this was short-lived and Oxford was once again one of the country's major towns by the early 12th century. Recent work just to the south-east of the site has found the remains of medieval and post-medieval ditches (Lewis 2008).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to monitor any invasive groundwork excavations and to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by these. All archaeological deposits were hand cleaned and recorded. All spoil heaps were monitored and metal detected.

Results

The Drainage Trench (Fig. 3)

Only a single drainage trench was excavated and recorded during the watching brief. The trench was initially aligned north-south for approximately 1.25m then it turned north-east for 2.62m. The total length of the trench was 3.87m, it was 0.35m wide and between 0.33–0.47m deep. At the southern end of the drainage trench a rectangular area was excavated. This measured 1.8m long, 0.93m wide and 0.36m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.18m of tile and concrete above at least 0.25m deep of made ground, which was not fully excavated.

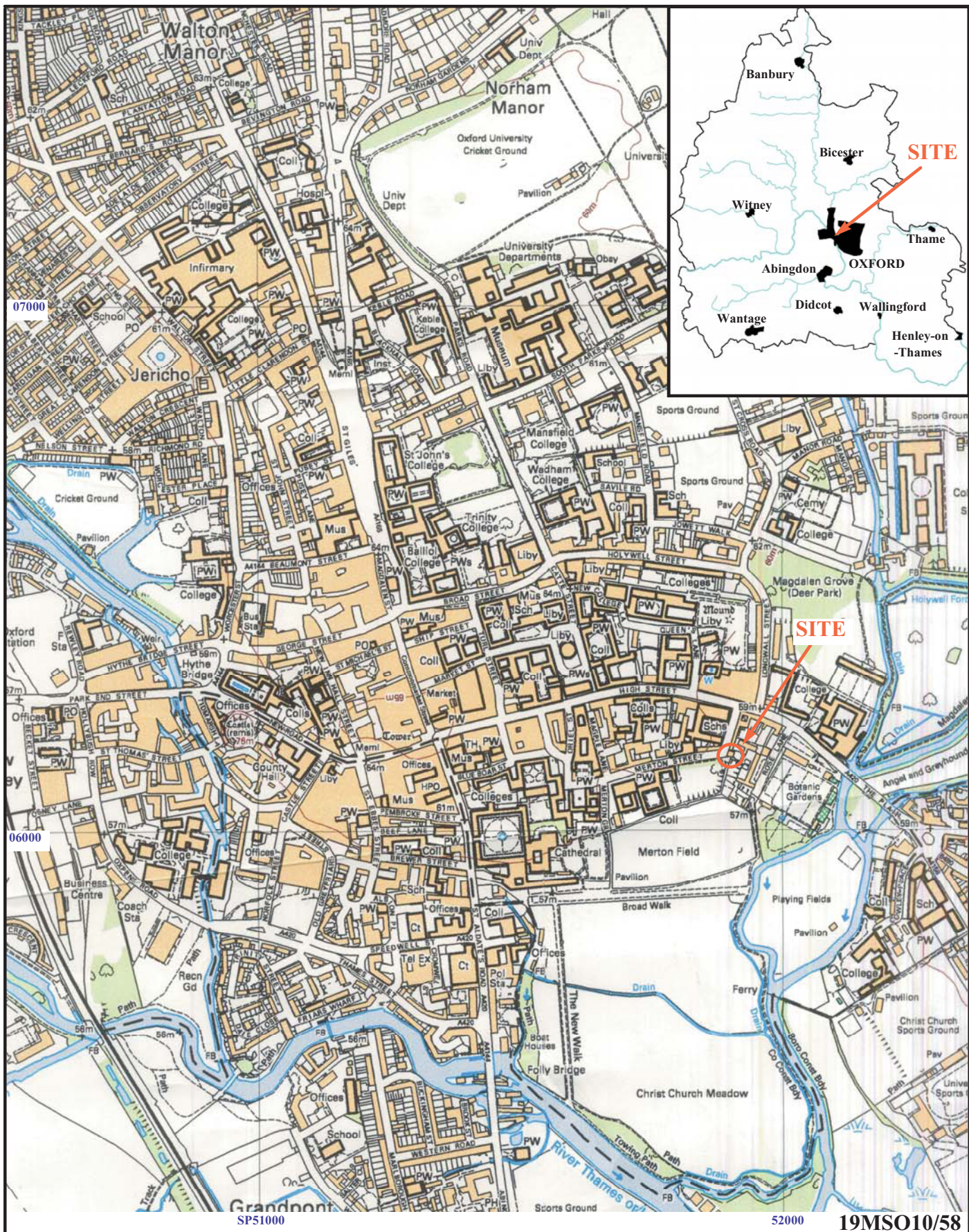
At the location where the trench turned, a modern wall which was the continuation of the present day above ground wall, was observed. No finds or any archaeological deposits were recovered from these trenches.

Conclusion

The watching brief failed to find any archaeological deposits. The reason for this is that the drainage trench was not deep enough to penetrate to any surviving archaeological deposits which might exist under the present construction.

References

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- Hassell, T, 1986, 'Archaeology of Oxford City' in G Briggs, J Cook and T Rowley, (eds), *The Archaeology of the Oxford region*, 115-34, Oxford University dept of External Studies, Oxford.
- Henig, M and Booth, P 2000, *Roman Oxfordshire*, Stroud.
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Figure 1. Location of site within Oxford and Oxfordshire.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Landplan SP50NW at 1:10 000
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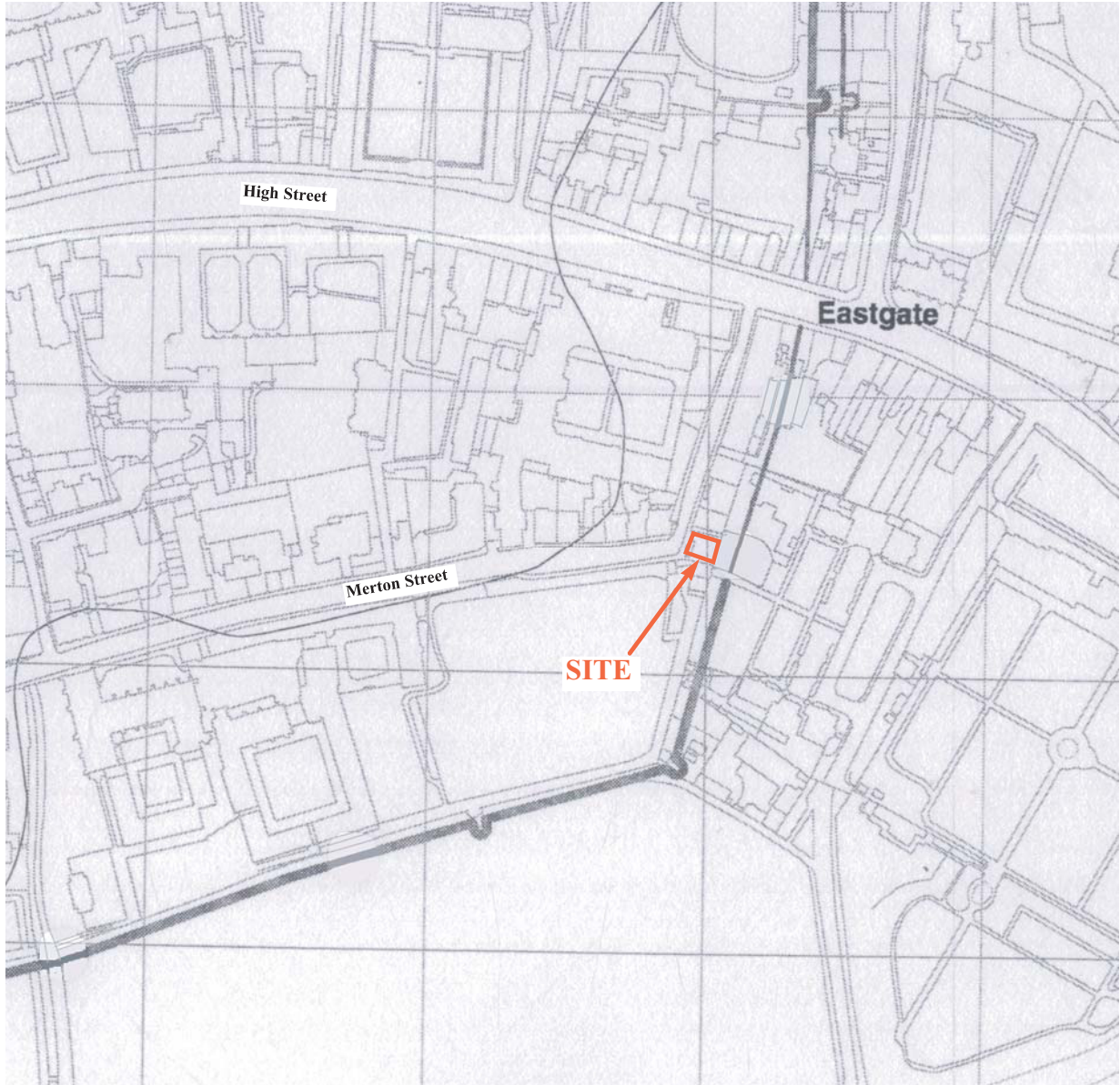


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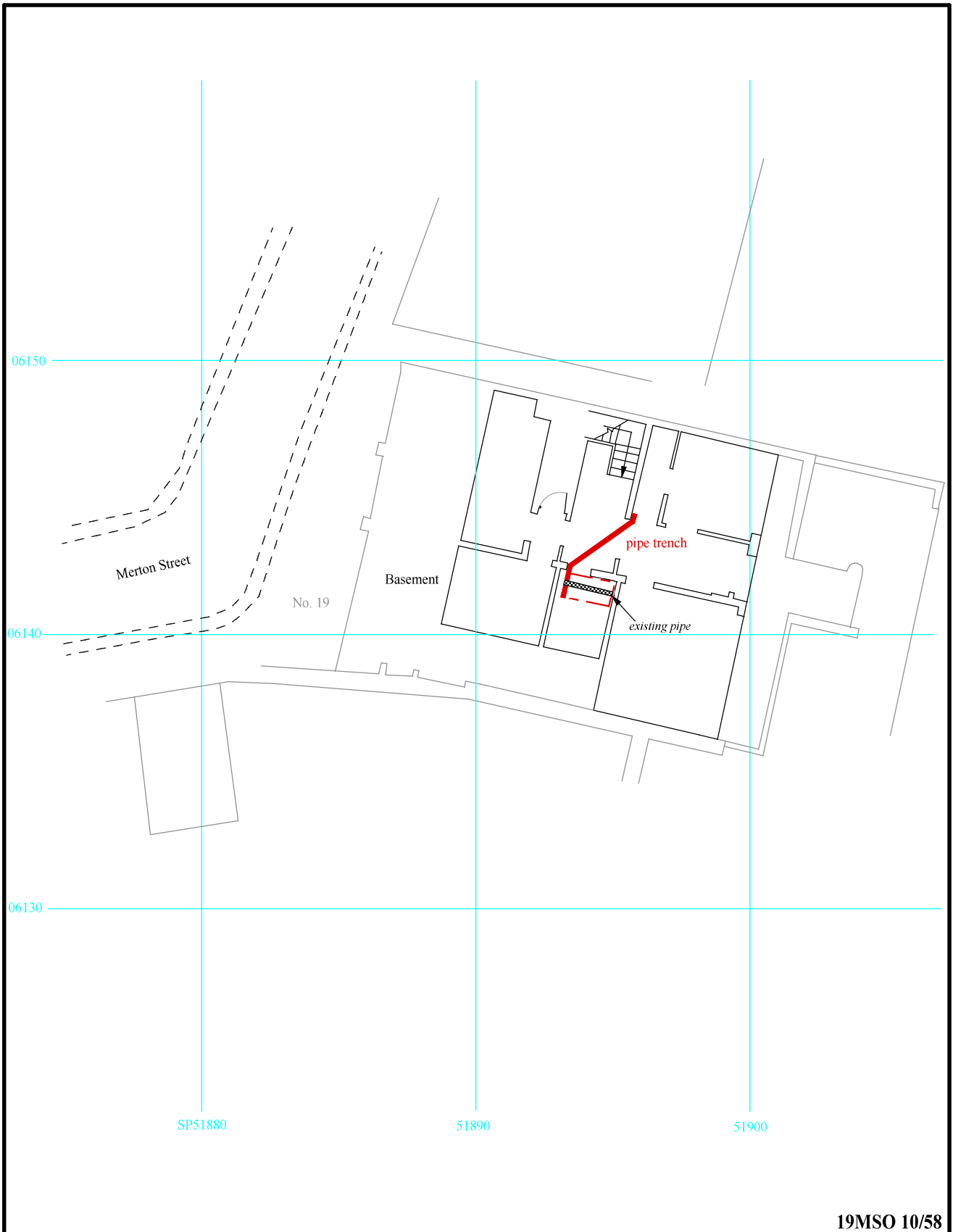
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Merton Street, in relation to the historic city wall (after Dodd 2003, modified).

Scale: 1:2500

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Figure 3. Detail of trench within basement interior.

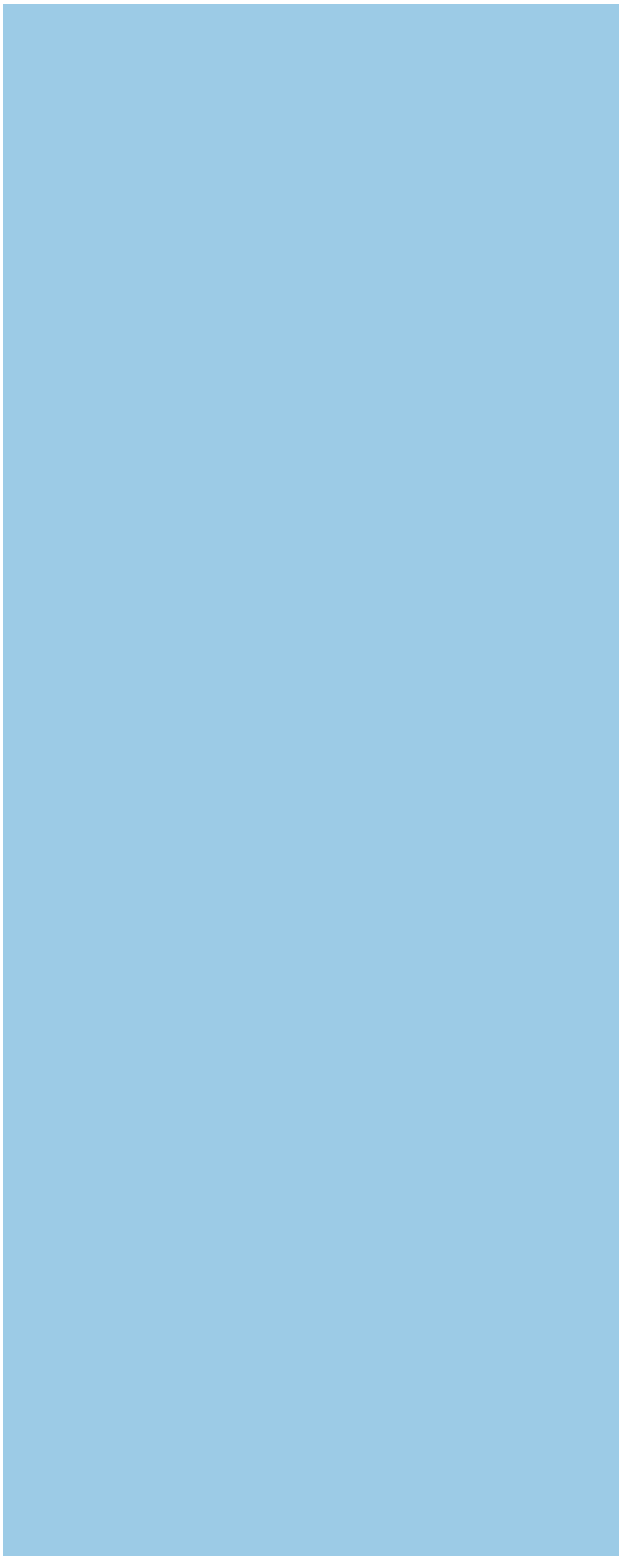
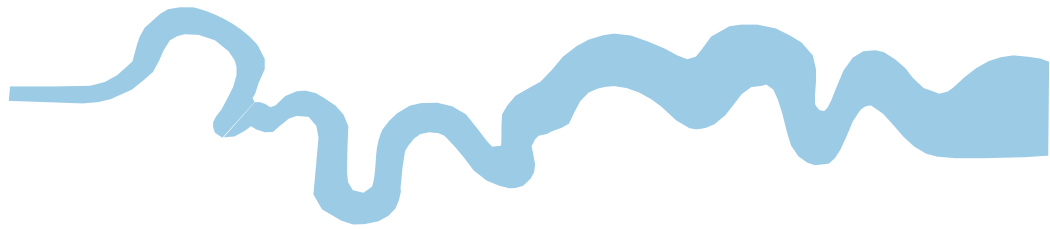


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TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 750 BC
Bronze Age: Late _____	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle _____	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early _____	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower	2,000,000 BC





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