



# Corn Exchange, North Square, Dorchester

## Building Recording of Cellars beneath Car Park



Report No. 53552/5/1

July 2021



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**Client:** Dorchester Town Council

**Agent:** Crickmay Stark Architects, 13 & 14 Princes Street, Dorchester, DT1 1TW

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### Document Version History

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2				
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## Project Report Summary Page

Project Details			
<b>OASIS Reference</b>	terraina1-427344		
<b>Project Title</b>	Cellars below car park, Corn Exchange, North Square, Dorchester, DT1 1HY		
<b>Short Description of Project</b>	Terrain Archaeology undertook building recording of cellars beneath the car park to the rear of the Corn Exchange, North Square, Dorchester. The cellars run along the North Square frontage, but only two cells are accessible – a third cell to the south had been filled with concrete. They are probably eighteenth century in date. The cellars are constructed in brick and stone with brick barrel vaults over. There is a blocked window in the north cell and possibly another in the next cell to the south, but this has been destroyed by later repair. A series of cement-lined brick vats were built within the cellars, possibly in the later nineteenth century, and these may have been used for curing hams and bacon. It is possible that the cellars continued to be used after the demolition of the original eighteenth century building and the construction of the Market House in 1848.		
<b>Project Dates</b>	Start: 29-06-2021	End: 29-06-2021	
<b>Previous/Future Work</b>	Yes/No		
<b>Project Code</b>	53552		
<b>Monument Type and Period</b>	Cellar (Post-medieval)		
<b>Significant Finds</b>	None		
Project Location			
<b>County/District/Parish</b>	Dorset/ West Dorset/ Dorchester		
<b>Site Address</b>	Corn Exchange, North Square, Dorchester, DT1 1HY		
<b>Site Coordinates</b>	SY 6927 9079		
<b>Site Area</b>	31 m <sup>2</sup>		
<b>Height OD</b>			
Project Creators			
<b>Organisation</b>	Terrain Archaeology		
<b>Project Brief Originator</b>			
<b>Project Design Originator</b>	Terrain Archaeology		
<b>Project Supervisor</b>	Peter Bellamy		
<b>Project Manager</b>	Peter Bellamy		
<b>Sponsor or Funding Body</b>	Dorchester Town Council		
Project Archive			
<b>Archive Type</b>	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Digital</b>	<b>Paper</b>
<b>Location/Accession No</b>	None	Archaeological Data Service	None
<b>Contents</b>	None	Plan, Elevations, Photographs, Written Notes, Report	None

# Corn Exchange, North Square, Dorchester

## Building Recording of Cellars beneath Car Park

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Project introduction

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Dorchester Town Council, through their architects Crickmay Stark Architects, to record the cellars beneath the car park behind the Corn Exchange on North Square, Dorchester. This work was done as part of investigations to determine the future fate of these cellars. They lie partially beneath the entrance to the car park and it is unclear whether they would be able to withstand the weight of future traffic likely to use the car park, in particular, construction plant relating to the refurbishment and extension of the Corn Exchange and delivery lorries servicing the new biomass heating system.

The recording work was carried out on the 29th June 2021 by Peter Bellamy.

## 2. Site

### 2.1 Location

The Town Hall and Corn Exchange lies in the centre of the historic core of Dorchester, at the convergence of High East Street, High West Street, Cornhill and North Square (Figure 1). On the north side of the Corn Exchange is a car park that is accessed off North Square. The cellars lie beneath the western end of this car park along the east side of North Square, centred on SY 6927 9079 (Figure 2).

### 2.2 Geology

The underlying solid geology is mapped as Chalk of the Portsdown Chalk Formation, which is shallow-marine in origin, formed in an environment of warm chalk seas, formed approximately 72 to 84 million years ago in the Cretaceous Period. No overlying Superficial Deposits are mapped on the site (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

### 2.3 Designations

**Conservation Areas:** The site lies within the Dorchester Conservation Area (WDDC 2003).

**Designated Heritage Assets:** The Municipal buildings (Corn Exchange) are Grade II\* Listed (NHL Entry No. 1110585).

**Scheduled Monuments:** There are no Scheduled Monuments on or adjacent to the Site.

**Registered Historic Parks and Gardens:** There are no Registered Historic Parks and Gardens on or adjacent to the Site.

## 3. Aims and Objectives

### 3.1 Aims

The aim of the Archaeological Building Investigation and Recording is to create a record of the existing layout of the cellars prior to any works to alter or infill them.

## 3.2 Objectives

Its objectives were:

- To understand the structural form and chronological development of the cellars.
- To record significant details of the cellars prior to any alteration or infilling.
- To present the results in a report to the appropriate standard.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1 Fieldwork Methods

The building survey was to English Heritage Level 2/3 recording standard (Historic England 2016) and all works were carried out in accordance with the standards of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, as set out in their *Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (CIfA 2014).

The cellars were examined and recorded internally by a combination of measured drawings using taped measurements, photography, and written field notes.

### 4.2 Archive and Dissemination

#### 4.2.1 Archive

The digital archive consisting of the digital plans and elevations, digital photographs, descriptive notes and report is currently being prepared for submission to the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) archive for long-term data storage. No physical archive will be retained.

#### 4.2.2 Artefacts

No artefacts were collected from the building survey fieldwork.

#### 4.2.3 Report

A copy of this report will be lodged with the Dorset Council Historic Environment Record, which is a publicly funded and accessible resource, and deposition of the report will place it, and the project results, in the public domain.

A digital summary of the project and archive will be placed with the OASIS project ([www.oasis.ac.uk](http://www.oasis.ac.uk)) under the reference code *terrains1-427344*. A digital copy of this report will be uploaded for inclusion in the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) online 'grey literature' library.

## 5. Historical and Archaeological Background

### 5.1 Historical Background

In the 18th century, North Square was known as Bull Stake. It is a wide street to accommodate the market that spread out from the central crossroads in the town, with butchers' shops or stalls recorded from the medieval period onwards.

It is likely that the street frontage was developed from the medieval period. The 17th and 18th century maps of Dorchester suggest that the east side of North Square was lined with buildings, and the first detailed map of Dorchester (1810) shows the whole of the east side filled with houses. The area of the Corn Exchange car park in 1810 had a large house occupied by George Squibb, with a large outbuilding behind. The 1848 plan of Dorchester shows the area of that house taken over by the Borough, and that same year a large Market House was built on the site, at the back of the new Town Hall. The 1888 Ordnance Survey 1:500 map shows the large Market House on the site. By 1964, the Ordnance Survey map shows that the Market house had been demolished, and most of the shops had gone. The site was turned into a car park. The cellars are likely to pre-date the Market House and are probably related to the large house on the site depicted on the 1810 map.

## 5.2 Previous Fieldwork

A rapid inspection of the cellars was undertaken by Terrain Archaeology in 2004 (Terrain Archaeology 2004).

## 6. Building Description

The structure survives as a series of underground vaulted cells along the North Square frontage, beneath the north west part of the car park behind the Corn Exchange and is accessed by a small rectangular manhole into the top of Cell 2 (Figure 2; Plates 12 & 15). No trace of the building(s) above the cellars is now visible. The cellar structure consists of a row of two rectangular barrel-vaulted cells aligned along the North Square frontage, with a third blocked cell to the south (Figure 3). These have been numbered 1-3 from the north.

The interior of the cellars is obscured by piles of debris. In Cell 1 was a pile of stone rubble, soil and timber in the west part (Plate 2) and another smaller dump of concrete rubble, brick and cement (together with a motorcycle tyre) at the east end (Plate 1). In Cell 2 but is a large amount of rubble and a large quantity of concrete that has flowed in from the blocking of Cell 3 (Plates 3 & 11). There is also a large mound of concrete and tarmac at the west end beneath the existing access opening (Plate 12).

Cell 1 at the north end is rectangular, measuring 4.38 m by 3.93 m across and with a maximum height of 2.12 m. It is connected to Cell 2 by an opening in the east end of the south wall. The north and south walls of the cell are of limewashed brick and the segmental brick vault springs from these walls. The east wall is of limewashed brick in an irregular English Bond (Plate 1). The west wall is primarily of limewashed limestone rubble with occasional brick (Plate 2). There is a central former window opening, measuring 0.95 m by 0.90 m, set in the upper part of the wall. It is blocked by two rows of bricks and concrete blockwork above (Plate 4). The reveals are partly of brick and at the bottom is a cut-out on each side, perhaps for a sill. The floor is of brick.

In the north west corner of the room, is a rectangular opening in the vault, 1.47 m by 1.25 m across, which was originally open at the top (Plates 5-6). The north wall here is of rubble stone and slopes outwards towards the top. There is an area of brick in the west wall. This opening has been sealed by a concrete slab, supported by a concrete beam behind wooden shuttering and a single vertical square post (Plate 6). This opening is partly obscured by a modern concrete support on brick piers.

Along the north wall was a range of seven rectangular vats built of brick with a cement render, each measuring 0.72 m by 0.55 m across and 0.79 m deep (Plates 7-9). Another large vat, built of brick with a cement render lining and measuring 1.95 m by 1.11 m internally and 0.62 m deep, lay on the south side of the room (Plate 10). Along the east wall was a low wooden shelf 0.64 m wide and 0.30 m high supported on brick piers.

Cell 2 is to the south of Cell 1 and is connected to it by a 1.25 m wide doorway with a semi-circular vaulted head (Plate 3). Cell 2 is rectangular, measuring 4.38 m by 2.81 m across and with a maximum height of 2.15 m. The north and south walls of the cell are of limewashed brick and are of one build with the barrel-vaulted ceiling. The east wall is of limewashed limestone rubble with occasional brick. The west wall is also of limewashed stone rubble, but most of the visible part of this wall has been rebuilt in concrete block with some brick (Plate 12). The ragged edge of the original stonework is visible around the edge of the barrel vault. The floor is of brick (Plate 13). Across the west part of Cell 2 was a large vat, measuring 2.81 m by 1.19 m internally and 0.62 m deep, built of brick with a cement lining (Plate 14). Two iron brackets are fixed to the north wall at the east end.

There is a small roughly rectangular opening pierced through the vault towards the west side, which forms the current access point to the cellars. It is clearly a secondary feature cut through the vault and is covered by a modern metal manhole cover. This opening reveals the vaulting is a single brick thick and over is rough brickwork (Plate 15).

Cell 3 lay to the south of Cell 2 and is connected to it by an opening similar to that between Cells 1 and 2. The whole of Cell 3 was blocked with concrete, which had flowed out into Cell 2, with the upper part blocked with concrete blocks (Plates 3 & 11). The size and layout of Cell 3 is not known, nor whether there are further cells beyond to the south.

## 7. Analysis

The three cells were built as a single unit, but it is unclear how far south the cellars extend, as the southernmost visible cell has been filled with concrete. No stairs or other original access into the cellars is visible and it is assumed that this was in the blocked southern part of the cellar range. The opening to the floor above in the north west corner of the vault in Cell 1 appears to be original and its function is unclear. Perhaps it may have been used for a hoist, or dumb waiter, or similar.

The blocked opening in the west wall of Cell 1, with the evidence of a removed sill, was most likely a window, providing light to this northern cell. It is possible that there was a similar window opening in Cell 2, but all evidence for this has been removed by the modern rebuild of the upper part of the west wall.

The vats in both Cells 1 and 2 are built over the top of the brick floor and are butted against the walls. It is likely they are a later insertion as the brickwork is bonded with a grey sandy cement mortar, unlike the lime mortar bonding of the cellar walls and vaulting. The low wooden shelf in Cell 1 is also a secondary addition with modern brickwork and mortar.

There is no evidence for the original use of the cellars. The form of construction and the character of the bricks and lime mortar suggest a later eighteenth century or early nineteenth century date. Analysis of the historic maps of Dorchester suggest that they may relate to a large house(s) with garden behind that sits on the North Street frontage shown on the 1774 Hutchins map (Hutchins 1774). The buildings along North Square are shown in more detail on the 1810 map of Dorchester (DHC D1/OE1). The cellars appear to run along the frontage of two properties (Nos. 174 and 175) (Figure 4). By 1848, the southern property had been demolished and replaced by another structure owned by the Borough (Figure 5). Shortly after in 1848, both properties were demolished to make way for the Market House, which projected further forward beyond the line of the cellars.

The vats in both Cells 1 and 2 are not closely datable, but the character of the bricks and the cement render used in their construction suggests a later nineteenth century or later date. The function of the vats is not certain, but may have been associated with the butchery trade. North Square was historically the location of the shambles and continued to have a concentration of butcher's shops into the twentieth century. For example, the 1893 Ling's Dorchester Almanack contains a map of North Square that shows that the house just north of the site was occupied by J. H. Groves, butcher, and there were two more butcher's shops in North Square, with other butchers trading in the Market House. One possible use of the vats may be for brine to cure hams and bacon. If the vats are of later nineteenth century date, then this suggests the cellars were still accessible and in use after the construction of the Market House in 1848. Perhaps they were used by one or more of the butchers trading in the Market House.

## 8. Conclusions

The cellars are probably eighteenth century in date. Only the two northern cells are accessible and there is at least one more cell to the south that has been filled with concrete. The cellars are constructed of brick and stone with brick barrel vaults over each cell. There appears to be a blocked window facing the street frontage in the north cell and possibly another in the next cell to the south, but this has been destroyed by later repair. The access into the cellar was not within the part of the cellars still accessible. A series of cement-lined brick vats were built within the cellars, possibly in the later nineteenth century and these may have been used for curing hams and bacon. It is possible that the cellars continued to be used after the demolition of the original house and the construction of the Market House in 1848.

## 9. References

- Cifa, 2014 *Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures*. December 2014. Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.
- Historic England 2016 *Understanding Historic Buildings. A Guide to Good Recording Practice*.
- Hutchins, J., 1774 *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*. 2 volumes.
- Terrain Archaeology 2004 *New Wall, Victory Court, North Square, Dorchester, Dorset Archaeological Watching Brief, March 2004*. Terrain Archaeology Report No. 53149.1, March 2004.

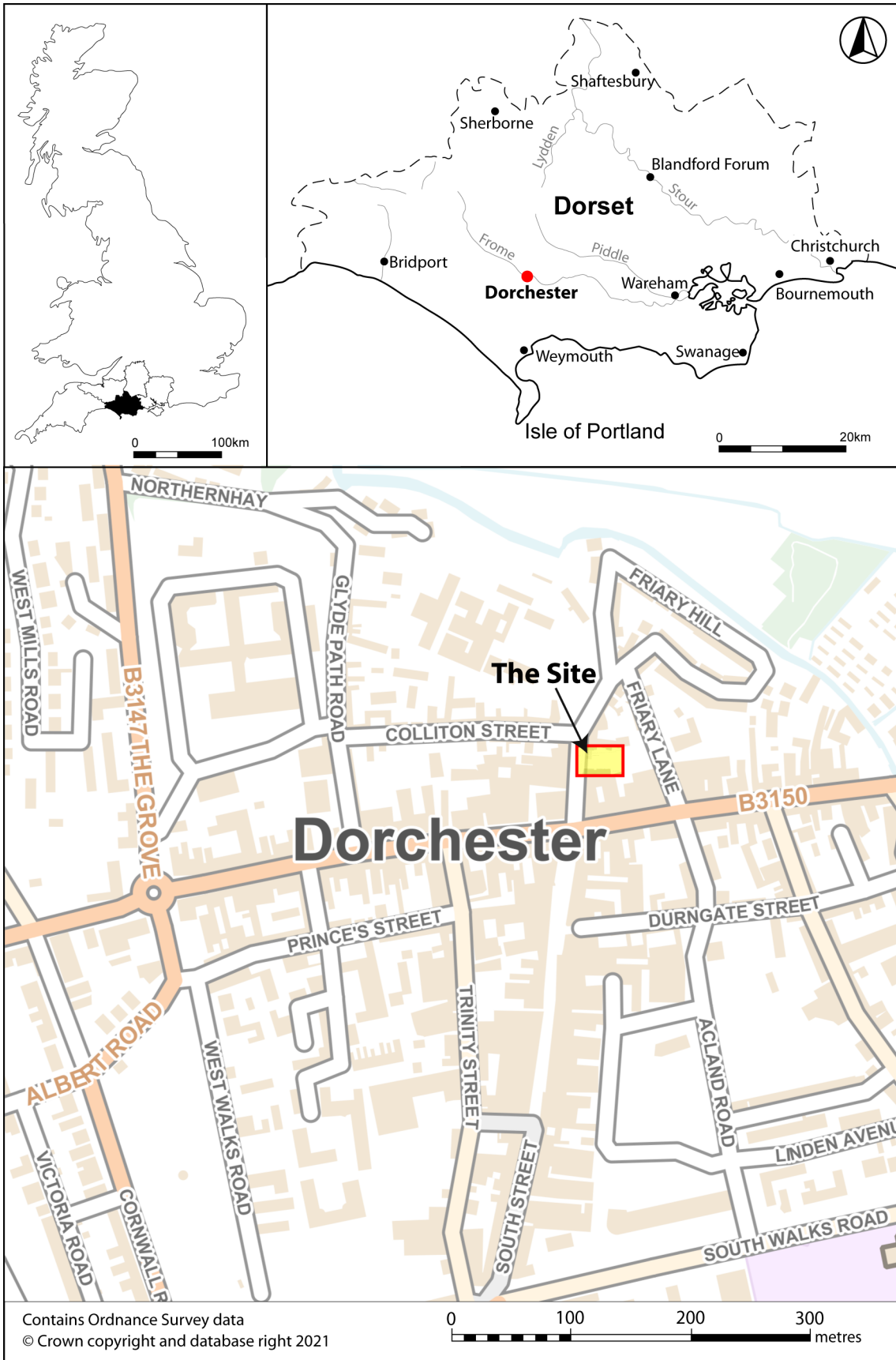
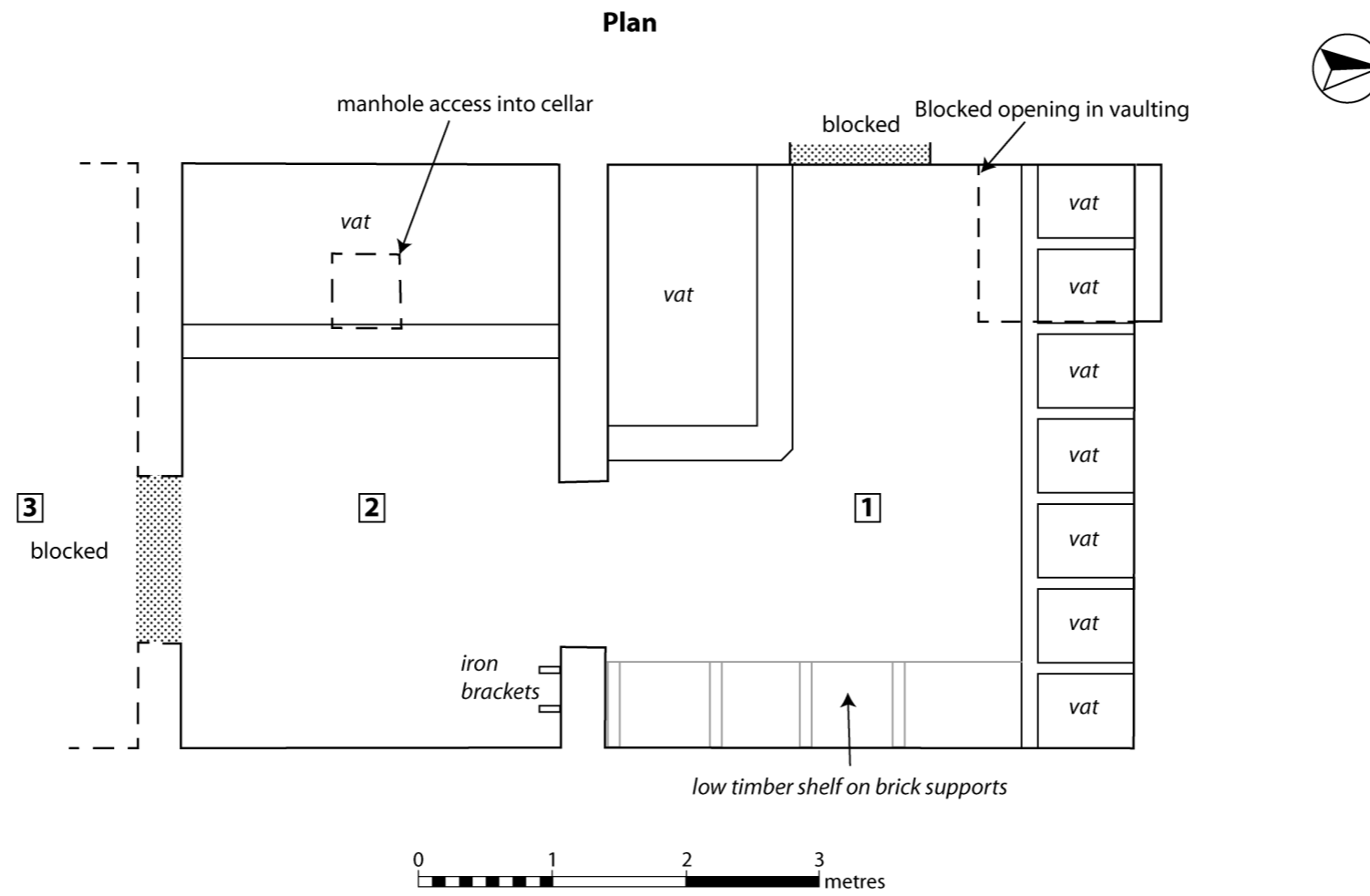


Figure 1: Site Location.



Figure 2: Location plan of cellars

**CORN EXCHANGE CAR PARK, NORTH SQUARE, DORCHESTER, DORSET**  
**Plan and Elevation of Cellars**



**West Internal Elevation**

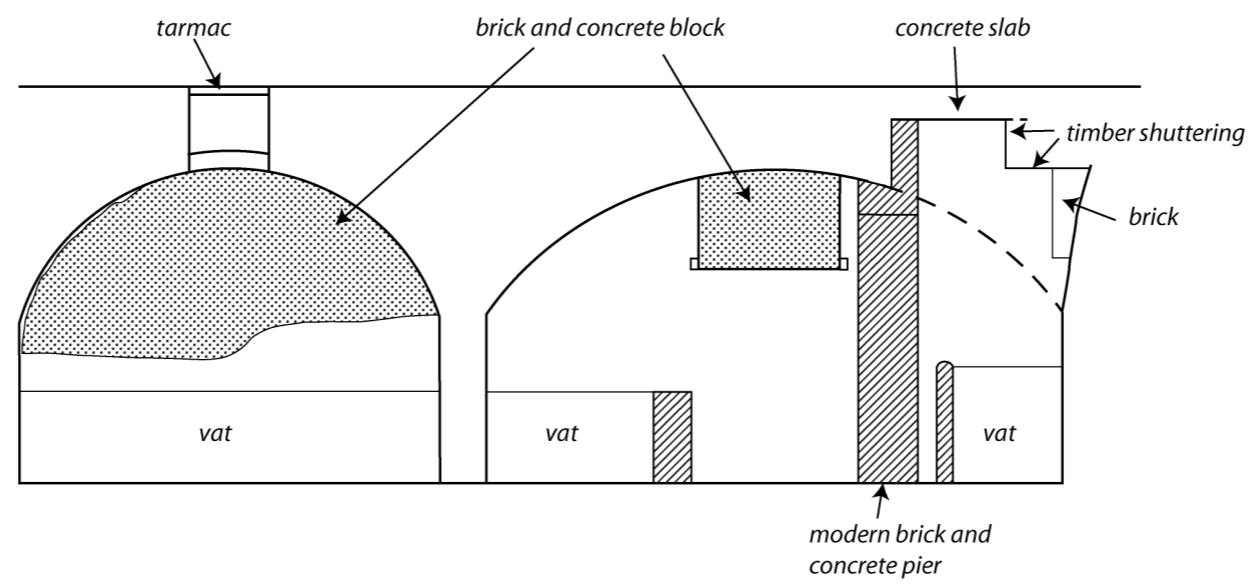


Figure 3: Plan and elevation of cellars.



Figure 4: Location of cellars superimposed on 1810 map (DHC D1/OE1).



Figure 5: Location of Cellars superimposed on 1848 map (DHC D/COO:E/7).

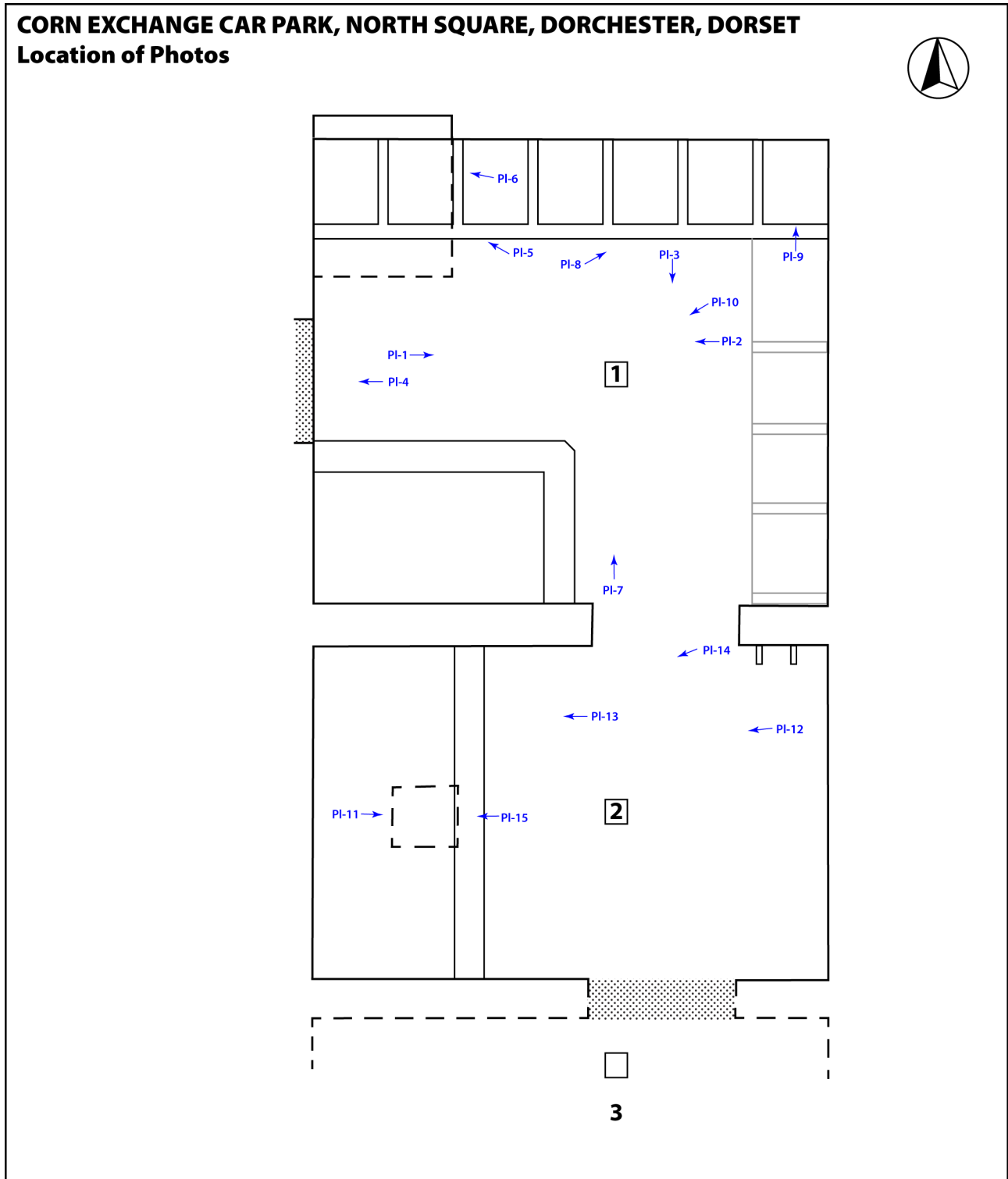


Figure 6: Plan showing location of photographs.



*Plate 1: Cell 1 looking east. 1m scale.*



*Plate 2: Cell 1 looking west. 1m scale.*



*Plate 3: Looking South from Cell 1 into Cell 2 and blocking of Cell 3 in background. 1m scale.*



*Plate 4: Blocked window in west wall of Cell 1.*



*Plate 5: View of north west corner of Cell 1.*



*Plate 6: Detail of north west corner of Cell 1 showing detail of blocking of opening.*



*Plate 7: Cell 1 looking north showing row of vats along north wall. 1m scales.*



*Plate 8: Vats along north wall of Cell 1. 1m scale.*



*Plate 9: Detail of vat.*



*Plate 10: Vat against south wall of Cell 1. 1m scale.*



*Plate 11: Cell 2 looking east with concrete from blocking of Cell 3 to right.*



*Plate 12: Cell 2 looking west showing rebuilt west wall and access through opening in vault.*



*Plate 13: Detail of brick floor in Cell 2.*



*Plate 14: Vat in west end of Cell 2.*



*Plate 15: Detail of brickwork in access hatch in vault of Cell 2.*