

Magdalen College

Old Bursary Opening-up works



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Old Bursary Opening-Up Works Magdalen College, Oxford

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|---|
| Summary | 1 |
| 1 Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Scope of work..... | 1 |
| 1.2 Location, geology and topography | 1 |
| 1.3 Archaeological and historical background | 2 |
| 2 Project Aims and Methodology | 3 |
| 2.1 Aims | 3 |
| 2.2 Methodology | 3 |
| 3 Results | 3 |
| 3.1 Description of deposits (Fig. 2)..... | 3 |
| 3.2 Finds | 4 |
| 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains | 4 |
| 4 Discussion and Conclusions | 4 |
| Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory..... | 6 |
| Appendix 2 Bibliography and references | 7 |
| Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details..... | 8 |

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 Site location
- Fig. 2 Trench locations showing college buildings, conjectured medieval hospital (after Durham, B, Fig. 4) and archaeology in plan and section.

SUMMARY

In July 2009, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during investigatory floor slab removal within the Music Room/ Store, Linen Room and Lobby at Magdalen College, Oxford (NGR: SP 5214 0618). The work was commissioned by Steven Smith of Wright and Wright Architects LLP on behalf of Magdalen College.

In the Music Room/Store a short stretch of stone wall/foundation aligned NE-SW was found, and probably relate the medieval infirmary of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist at Oxford. These remains were overlain and abutted by foundations and floor make-up deposits relating to the current college buildings. Only service runs, pipework, modern wall foundations and modern floor make-up deposits were observed in the Linen Store and Lobby. No dating evidence was retrieved during the works.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 In July 2009 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during the break out and removal of a limited area of floor slab and associated sub-base, to a depth no greater than 0.5m, in the Music Room/Store, Linen Store and Lobby at Magdalen College, Oxford (NGR: SP 5214 0618). The work was commissioned by Steven Smith of Wright and Wright Architects LLP on behalf of Charles Young, Bursar at Magdalen College, Oxford.

1.1.2 No formal brief was issued by the Local Planning Authority, although a note was issued by David Radford, City Archaeologist for Oxford (e-mail 8th June 2009). No Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared for the work, however the project was dealt with using OA's standard Watching Brief methodology. The attending archaeologist was given a copy of the published results from previous excavations (Durham, B, 1991). Good and clear communication and cooperation was established with the Main Contractor (Steve Bully of W G Carters).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies within modern Oxford, on the north side of the High Street and immediately to the west of Magdalen Bridge and the River Cherwell (Fig. 1). This area was in the eastern suburb of medieval Oxford, some 100 - 200m east of the medieval East Gate.

1.2.2 The site currently sits on relatively level ground at approximately 59m OD. However, its situation on the west bank of the Cherwell (which runs immediately adjacent to the east) strongly suggests that prior to development (i.e. pre-medieval) this area would have sloped down to the river and been seasonally, if not permanently wet (Durham,

B, 1991, p.61). The underlying geology is First Terrace River Gravel (BGS Sheet 236).

- 1.2.3 The works were located on either side of the southern wall of the current hall, towards its eastern end. Three small areas were opened-up; the Music Room/Store (2m x 2m), Linen Store (2m x 2m) and Lobby (3.5m x c. 2m).

1.3 **Archaeological and historical background**

- 1.3.1 Significant excavations were carried out at the site in 1987; this section draws heavily from the subsequent report (Durham, B, 1991)
- 1.3.2 Prior to development the site would have been low lying and liable to seasonal flooding, if not permanently wet.
- 1.3.3 In 1231 the Hospital of St John the Baptist was constructed on the site. St John's Hospital were a major landowner in the town, with significant additional landholdings elsewhere.
- 1.3.4 Elements of structures on 3 sides of a large courtyard were recognised (Durham, B, Fig. 4), with substantial remains of the eastern end of the main infirmary and adjacent hall located in the south-east corner of the site. The westwards extents of the infirmary were conjectured.
- 1.3.5 In 1457 the Hospital was suppressed, and formed part of the land granted to Magdalen College. Magdalen College was founded in 1458 by William Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester and Lord Chancellor. Waynflete demolished all the hospital's buildings except for the chapel (part of the High St. Range), and part of the hall alongside the river, which eventually became a college kitchen. The initial construction phase commenced in 1467, when the Charter was confirmed by King Edward IV, and lasted until c.1480.
- 1.3.6 The Cloister or Great Quad, Hall, Chapel and Library were built between 1474 and c.1484. Construction of the West Cloister Range dates to 1474-77 (Haddon-Reece et al., 1989), and the Cloisters completed soon after a visit by King Richard III in 1483 (Gardiner, R).
- 1.3.7 The Great Tower was built between 1492 and 1509; in 1505 the bells and clock were installed. The College then completed the High Street range, to link the Tower with existing buildings (Gardiner, R, 2003).
- 1.3.8 Many of these buildings have been altered several times since construction. In 1822, the north range of the Great Quad was in a bad state of repair and was knocked down and rebuilt shortly afterwards. In the early 1900s, renovations returned to a more medieval character.
- 1.3.9 The New Building was built across a large lawn to the north of the Great Quad in 1733.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of this phase of ground works.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was maintained during the period of all ground works that had the potential to affect or reveal archaeological deposits.
- 2.2.2 Excavation of archaeological features was undertaken to fulfil the basic objective of retrieval of archaeological data affected by the works.
- 2.2.3 When significant archaeological remains were discovered, all groundworks with the potential to effect this archaeology were halted and the attending archaeologist allowed sufficient time and working space to carry out a suitable archaeological record. These works were undertaken in such a way as to minimise delays to the work programme of the main contractor.
- 2.2.4 Features and deposits, of note, were issued with unique context numbers, and recording was in accordance with the established OA *Field Manual* (OAU 1992). Photographs were taken of all trenches and archaeological features.
- 2.2.5 Site plans and sections were drawn at 1:20.
- 2.2.6 The fieldwork was carried out by Chris Richardson under the direction of Ben Ford, Senior Project Manager and overall direction of Dan Poore, OA Head of Fieldwork.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits (Fig. 2)

The Linen Store

- 3.1.1 No significant archaeological remains were encountered in the Linen Store. The removal of the modern floor deposits partially revealed the offset foundations to the four surrounding extant walls, and a stretch of brown salt glaze sewage(?) pipe.

The Lobby

- 3.1.2 In the Lobby the removal of the floor slab revealed a number of service runs for various pipes and ducts. Work here ceased when suspected asbestos was encountered.

The Music Room Store

- 3.1.3 The earliest remains were observed only in a small part of the trench and consisted of a sandy deposit (8), representing a possible construction horizon, which was cut by the construction cut (7), for a limestone wall foundation (6) that had a yellow mortar bond. This wall foundation was only partially revealed, and the full width was not seen. It extended for 1.5 m on a NE-SW orientation on the eastern side of the trench and had a short stretch of return at its southern end that extended to the NW. The western end of this return appeared to have been truncated by a demolition cut (9).
- 3.1.4 Limestone wall foundations (10) and (4), which abutted and overlay the earlier medieval foundation (6), probably relate to the standing southern wall of the extant late medieval hall.
- 3.1.5 Abutting (10) and (4) was a deposit of silty-sand containing limestone pieces (2); this probably relates to the construction of the hall.
- 3.1.6 This deposit was cut by limestone foundations (5) for the current west wall of the Music Room/Store. Later deposits of brick rubble abutted these foundations and formed the base for the current concrete floor.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No significant finds were recovered from the watching brief.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were observed during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The alignment of the earliest structural remains discovered in the Music Room (wall 6) is slightly askew to the extant late medieval hall and is therefore probably earlier in date. Its position suggests that it probably relates to an internal room or division along the north side of the medieval infirmary, whose north wall has been conjectured to pass through this area (Fig. 2, and Durham, B, 1991, Fig. 4).
- 4.1.2 These remains were found at a depth of c. 0.40m below the existing floor levels.
- 4.1.3 The conjectured line of the northern wall of the medieval Infirmary (Fig. 2) passes through the area of the works in both the Music Room/Store and the Linen Store, however no evidence of such a wall was observed during the works. A number of reasons could account for this: the works in the Music Room/Store did not reach levels at which this wall would have been encountered, and the foundations for northern wall of the Linen Store may have removed earlier remains.

- 4.1.4 These works neither confirm or deny the suggested northern extent of the medieval Infirmary (Durham, B, 1991), but do demonstrate the possibility that it had structural internal divisions.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

| <i>Context</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Thickness (m)</i> | <i>Comments</i> | <i>Date</i> |
|----------------|-------------|---|----------------------|---|----------------|
| 1 | Deposit | Layer of concrete rubble | | Sub base to concrete floor | modern |
| 2 | Deposit | Layer of silty sand with limestone pieces | 0.12 | construction horizon | postmed/modern |
| 3 | Structure | Limestone foundation bonded by yellowish-white mortar | 0.23 | Not related to current college buildings | post med? |
| 4 | Structure | Limestone wall foundation bonded by grey mortar | 0.28 | Aligned NE-SW wall foundation for standing college building (S wall of Music Room/Store) | modern |
| 5 | Structure | Limestone wall foundation bonded by yellowish-white mortar. | 0.19 | Aligned NE-SW. Wall foundation for standing college building (W wall of Music Room/Store) | modern |
| 6 | Structure | Limestone wall foundation bonded by yellow mortar. | 0.26 | Aligned NE-SW with short return at S end aligned NW-SE. Wall foundation Fill of 7? | medieval ? |
| 7 | Cut | Construction Cut? | | Cut for 6? | medieval ? |
| 8 | Deposit | Layer of compacted sand | 0.05 | Make-up for earlier floor? | med? |
| 9 | Cut | Demolition cut | | Possible demolition/robbing of wall 6 | late med? |
| 10 | Structure | Limestone wall foundation bonded by brown mortar | 0.07 | Aligned NW-SE. Wall foundation. | late med? |
| 11 | Deposit | Layer of brick rubble | 0.28 | Made underlying ground existing concrete floor | modern |

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001, *Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological watching Briefs*

OAU, 1992, *Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)

Durham, B, et al., 1991, *The Infirmary and Hall of the Medieval Hospital of St. John the Baptiste at Oxford*. Oxoniensia, LVI, p.17-75

Dodd, A, (ed), 2003, *Oxford Before the University*. Oxford Archaeology Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph 17

Gardiner, R, 2003, *The Story of Magdalen*. Magdalen College
[http://www.magd.ox.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/4303/Illustrated_Magdalen_College_History.pdf]

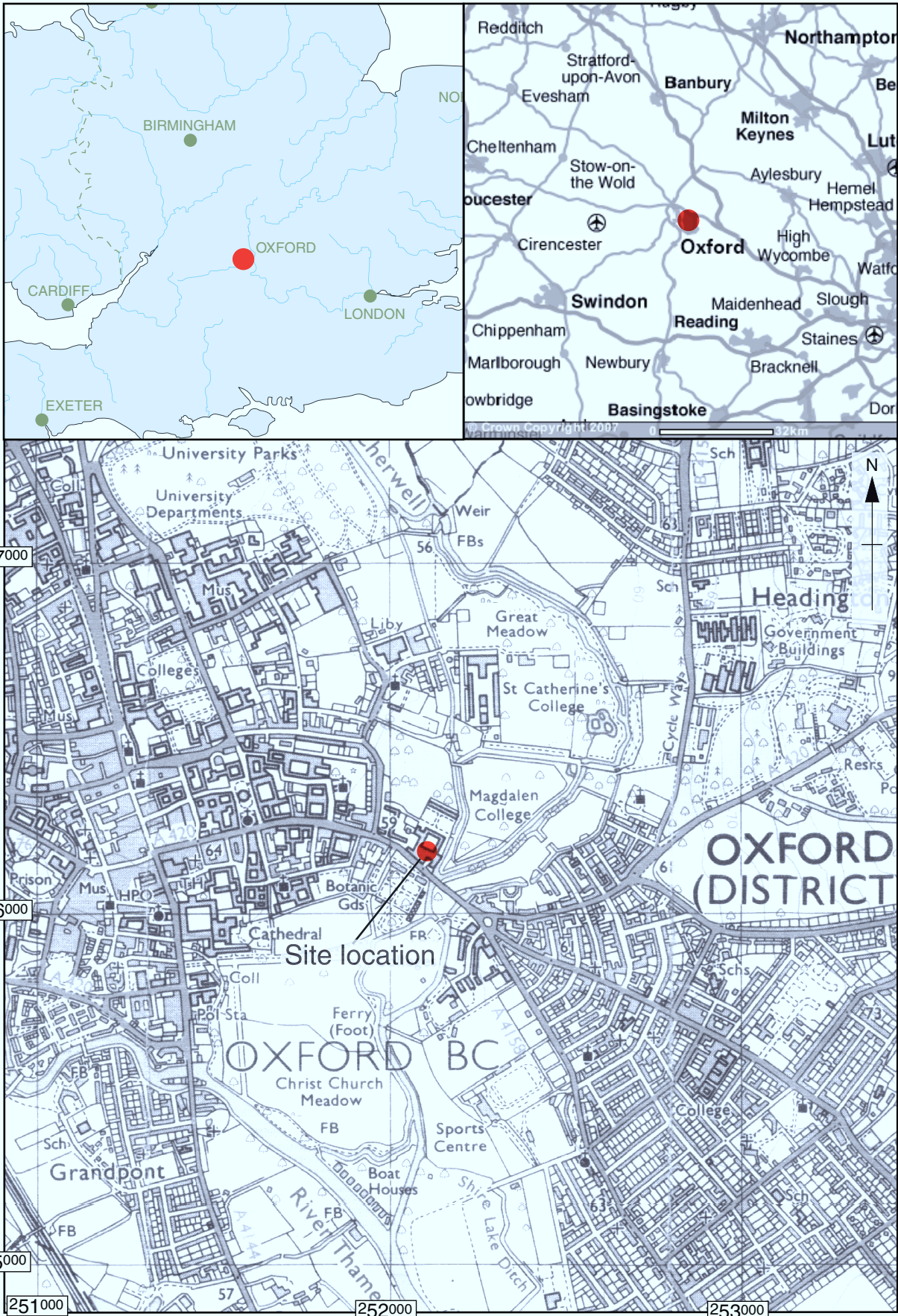
Haddon-Reece, Miles, and Munby, 1989, *Venacular Architecture* 20, list 32

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**Site name:** Opening-up works, Magdalen College, Oxford**Site code:** OXMDALN 09**Grid reference:** Centred at SP 5214 0618**Type of work:** Watching brief**Date and duration of project:** July 2009, 2 days**Area of site:** *c* 20 m²

Summary of results: In the Music Room/Store a short stretch of stone wall/foundation aligned NE-SW (with a very short element of a return to the NW at its southern end). These remains were slightly askew to the orientation of the current South Range of the Great Quad. The remains probably relate to structural internal division along the northern wall of the principal structure of the medieval infirmary of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist at Oxford. These remains were overlain and abutted by foundations and floor make-up deposits relating to the current college buildings.

Only service runs, pipework, modern wall foundations and modern floor make-up deposits were observed in the Linen Store and Lobby. No dating evidence was retrieved during the works.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location

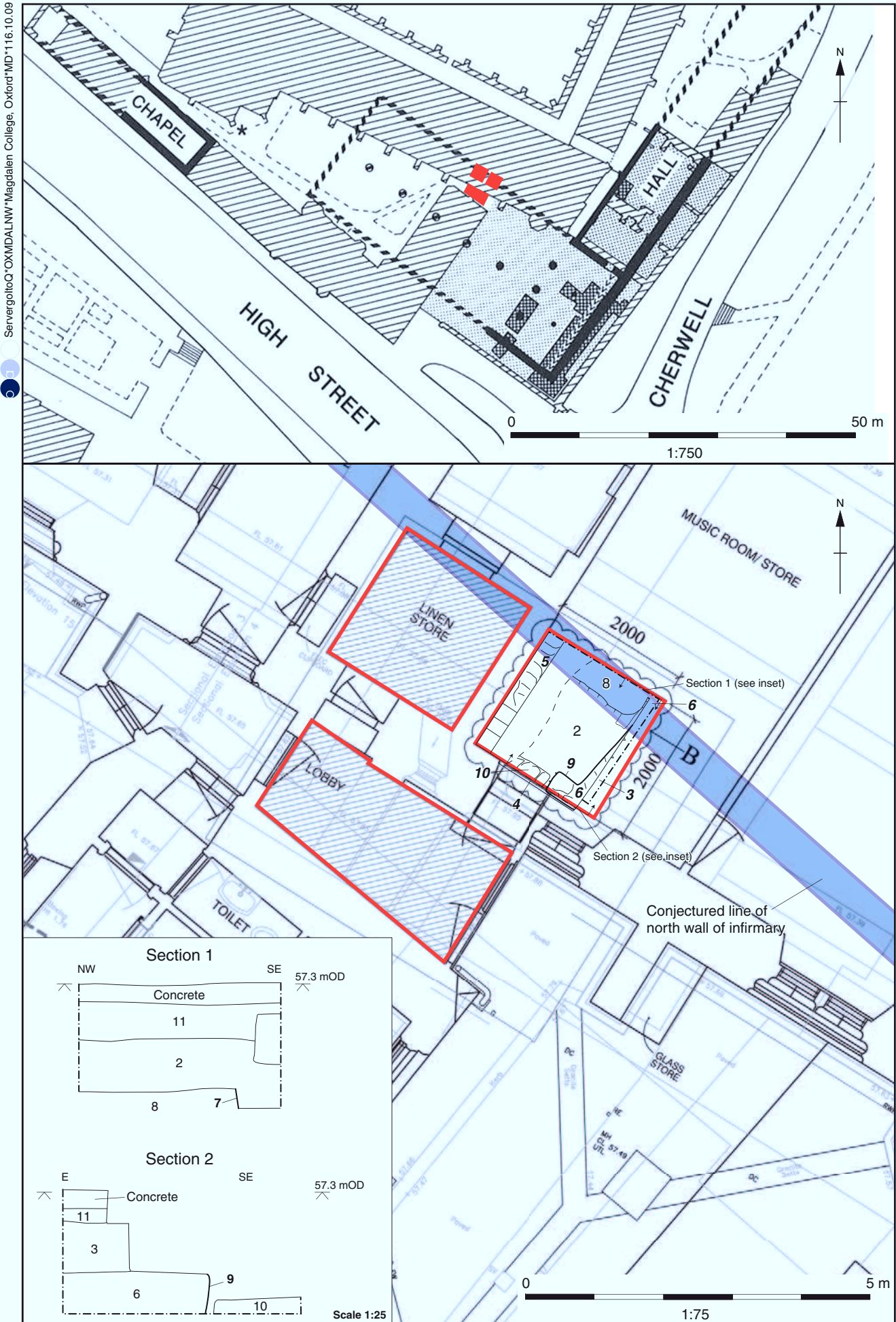


Figure 2: Site plan and sections



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