

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING

WITHIN

THE DIVINITY SCHOOL,

OXFORD

SP 51560 06405

On behalf of

Oxford University Estates Directorate

OCTOBER 2007

REPORT FOR Oxford University Estates Directorate
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Summary

Archaeological recording and limited investigation was carried out after excavation to a depth of c. 260-300mm by Ashlar Construction Ltd on behalf of Oxford University Estates Directorate. The excavation was in preparation for a base for a proposed temporary display of a statue. A floor of 13th or 14th century date that may relate to the Bicester Schools was found preserved under the Divinity School. A lamp-base that is found in large numbers on medieval sites in Oxford which were associated with places of learning was recovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location

The site for the proposed temporary display of the statue was towards the south-east corner of the east/west part of the Divinity School, which lies to the west of the quadrangle of the Schools and Bodleian Library (NGR 51560 06405) (Fig. 1). The excavation for the proposed base was 1.6m N/S by 1.3m E/W with the centre 3m diagonally from the south-east corner of the east/west wing.

1.2 Historical background

The Divinity School must have been begun about 1420 (although the tenement known as St Hugh's Hall and the tenement to the east at the corner of School Street was not leased to the University until 1427 – Salter 1960) and finished by 1490. The Divinity School is a rectangle, five bays long. The projections to the east and west which give the building its H-shape are later; the east of 1610-12, the west of 1634-7 (Sherwood & Pevsner 1974).

The original build occupied the part of the medieval tenement of St Hugh's owned by William Pille and Christina his wife in 1268. In 1310 Walter de Sanford sells it to representatives of Balliol. In 1370 it was a garden. The tenement to the east lying on the corner of School Street was granted in 1295 by Thomas de Sowry to three clerks of Balliol four schools (i.e. Bicester schools) and 3 messuages. In 1310 they pass to Balliol by royal licence. Earlier the Hospital of St. John obtained this land from Alured Loth c. 1220 (Salter 1960). The east projection was built across School Street (Loggan's map of 1675) and partly across a garden owned by Balliol to the south of the corner plot.

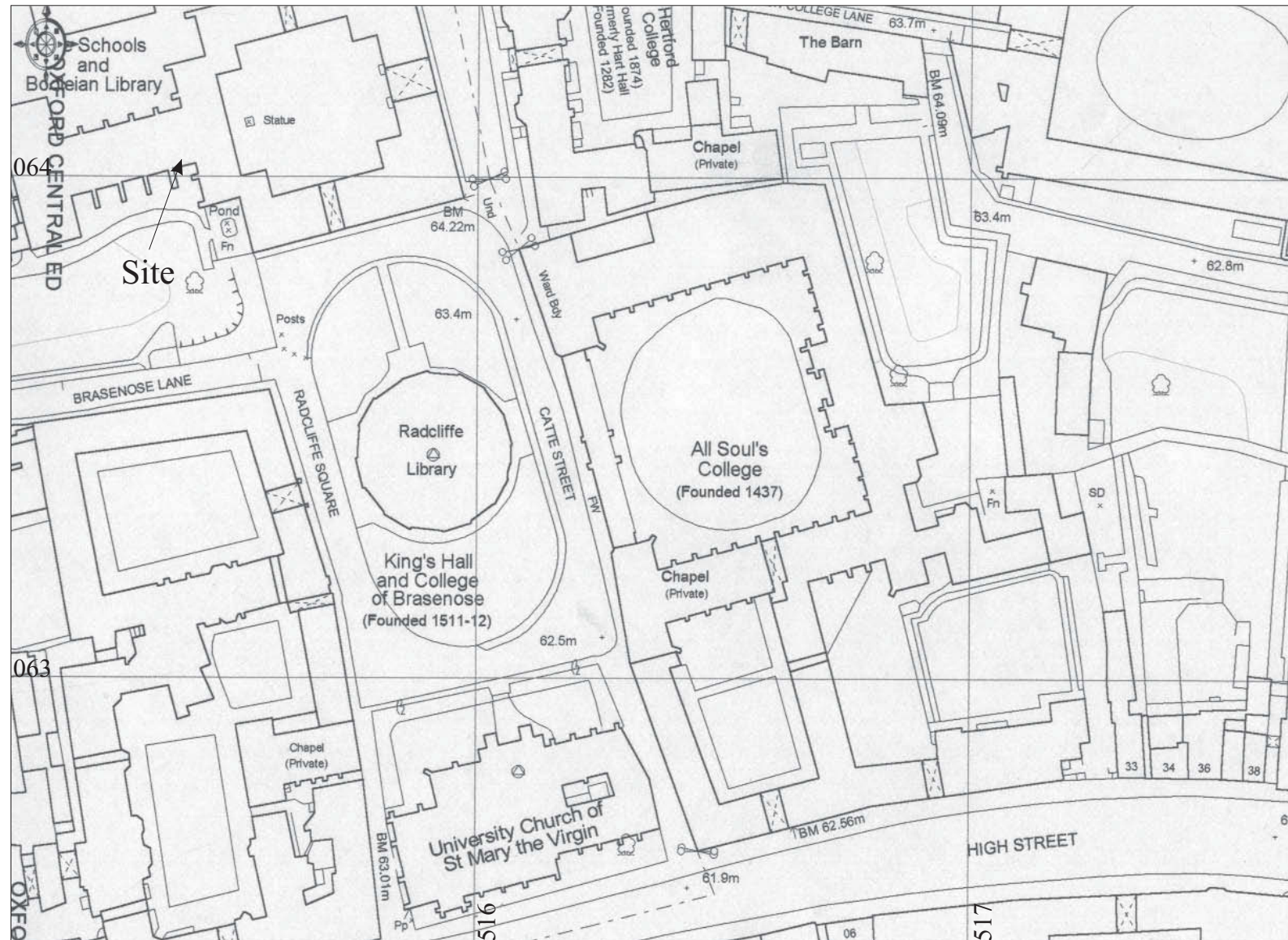
1.3 Aims of the recording

The aim of the recording was to determine whether significant deposits were present that may be affected by the construction of the base for the proposed display of a statue.

2 STRATEGY

2.1 Methodology

The surface left by the main contractor was hand cleaned revealing deposit (06). This was partly hand excavated to reveal floor (07). A small sondage was excavated in the south-west corner where the contractors had gone through deposits (06) and (07). The material excavated by the contractors had been bagged and removed to the contractor's yard where it was sieved to recover finds.



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Figure 1. Site location

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

3 RESULTS

All deposits and fills have been assigned an individual context number indicated in brackets thus () and cuts in brackets thus [].

The lowest deposit investigated in the sondage in the south-west corner of the trench was a deposit of pale-mid grey-brown and yellow-brown (50:50) silty sand with 10% by content of very fine gravel and 40% small limestone pieces (average 150x110x65mm) and some pieces of mortar (09). This was at least 170mm thick and was not bottomed. This was overlain by a friable pale grey-brown sandy silt with 20% pale yellow sandy silt some (08). It contained 2% fine gravel and 30% small-medium sized limestone pieces (average 120x80x80mm), and large patches of mortar. This may have been a demolition layer. Overlying this was a heavily compacted layer (07) of mid yellow-brown sandy silt and mortar containing 30% angular stones (average 40x20x10mm). This was 10-20mm thick and although not fully exposed was assumed to extend to the trench limits. Worm holes were seen through this deposit. This is considered to be a floor within a building.

Overlying floor (07) was a deposit of friable mid black-brown sandy silt containing 15% sand and gravel with charcoal flecks and some small angular pieces of limestone (06). This was 80mm thick and was throughout the trench. The top of the deposit had in part been slightly excavated by the main contractor, more noticeably in the south-west corner where it had been cut through this deposit and the underlying layer (07). This is where the sondage was excavated. This last deposit was cut by a circular posthole [05] 280-300mm in diameter. It was not excavated but the upper fill was a compact deposit of mid cream-white, with some brown, sandy silt (04).

Sealing the posthole was a 170mm thick deposit of friable dull-mid grey-brown sandy silt containing 30% small gravel and occasional charcoal flecks (03). This deposit was very dry and only seen in section having been excavated by the main contractor. The dryness prevented distinction of any possible different deposits in this material. The upper layer within the trench comprised the floor slabs (01) set in a hard white limestone mortar (02) up to 40mm thick.

4 FINDS

4.1 Pottery by *Paul Blinkhorn*

The pottery assemblage comprised 33 sherds with a total weight of 98g. It was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXBF: North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050 – 1400. 3 sherds, 4g.

OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 8 sherds, 23g.

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 21 sherds, 68g.

OXBN: Tudor Green Ware, late 14th century - c. 1500. 1 sherd, 3g.

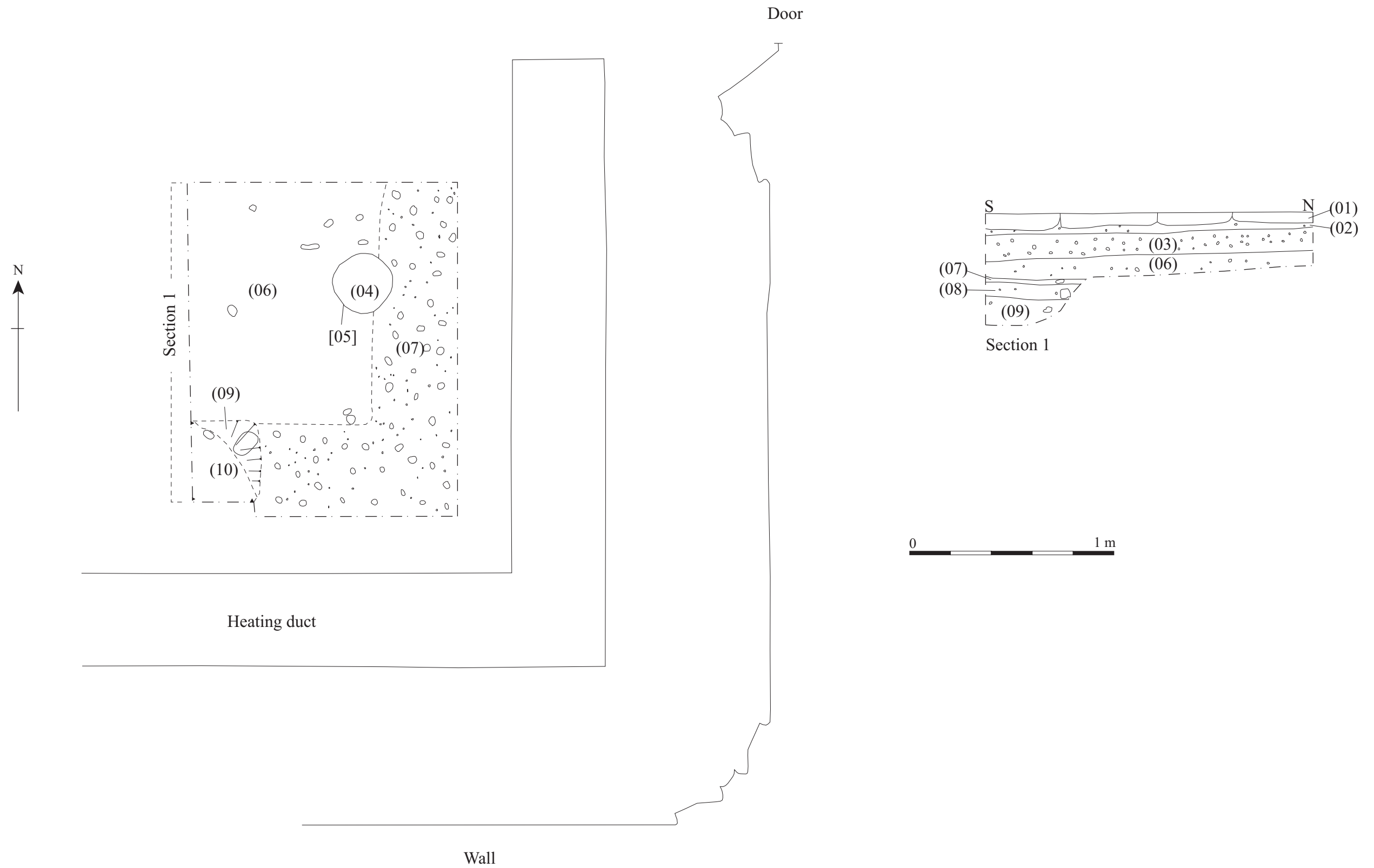


Figure 2. Plan of Trench

It was all unstratified, apart from two sherds of OXAM (5g) from context 6, which give the deposit a *terminus post quem* of the 13th century. The range of fabric types is typical of medieval sites in the city of Oxford. The sherd of 'Tudor Green' pottery shows that there was activity at the site in the 15th century, but some of the other pottery present hints at earlier activity. The sherds of OXY and OXBF shows that there was occupation at the site during the 14th century, if not earlier, and some of the Brill/Boarstall wares, such as fragments of highly decorated baluster jugs, are of 13th – 14th century type. The rest of the OXAM assemblage is more typical of the later medieval period.

In terms of status, a fragment of an OXAM lamp-base may be significant. Such vessels usually occur in very small numbers at domestic sites, but more recent work has shown that they occur in large quantities at medieval sites in Oxford which were associated with places of learning, such as Merton College (Blinkhorn in print). The fact that only a single fragment occurred here is not conclusive, but given that the assemblage is so small, it suggests that a similar pattern may be found under this building.

4.2 Other finds

Seven fragments of roof tile were recovered from the sieving along with more than 60, mainly small, fragments of animal bone and *c.* 20 oyster shells and 1 mussel shell.

Deposit (09) contained eight small fragments of animal bone and two oyster shells from that part excavated. Ten pieces of animal bone and three fragments or whole oyster shells came from deposit (06).

5 DISCUSSION

Deposit (07) is considered to be a floor surface. The material (06) above it has a *terminus post quem* of the 13th century and therefore the floor may relate to the Bicester Schools. Underlying the floor are undated medieval deposits. These contain fragments of limestone and mortar suggesting that these relate to demolition of earlier buildings. The posthole [05] relates to some activity after the building represented by the floor has gone and before construction of the Divinity School. The lamp-base may have come from the Bicester Schools.

The small scale investigation has proved that well-preserved deposits of the medieval period survive under the Divinity School.

6 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The primary site records The drawn record
The project report
The finds (pottery, animal bone, shells, glass, roof tile)

The archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Service under accession number OXCMS: 2007.109

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