

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The area occupied by the Old High School, located on Infirmary Street, Edinburgh (NGR: NT 2615 7347; Illus 1), has played an interesting and important role in the history of the city. From the medieval period up until the present day it appears to have been prominent in shaping the city's religious and academic character. Perhaps most significantly, this area was thought to be the location of a medieval friary founded by the Dominican order (or Blackfriars) in the 13th century.

The site was also the known location of the Royal High School, established in the 16th century, the area subsequently becoming a key location for education in the city. The Old High School itself has been present on this site since 1777 and counted many prominent figures in Scottish history among its pupils.

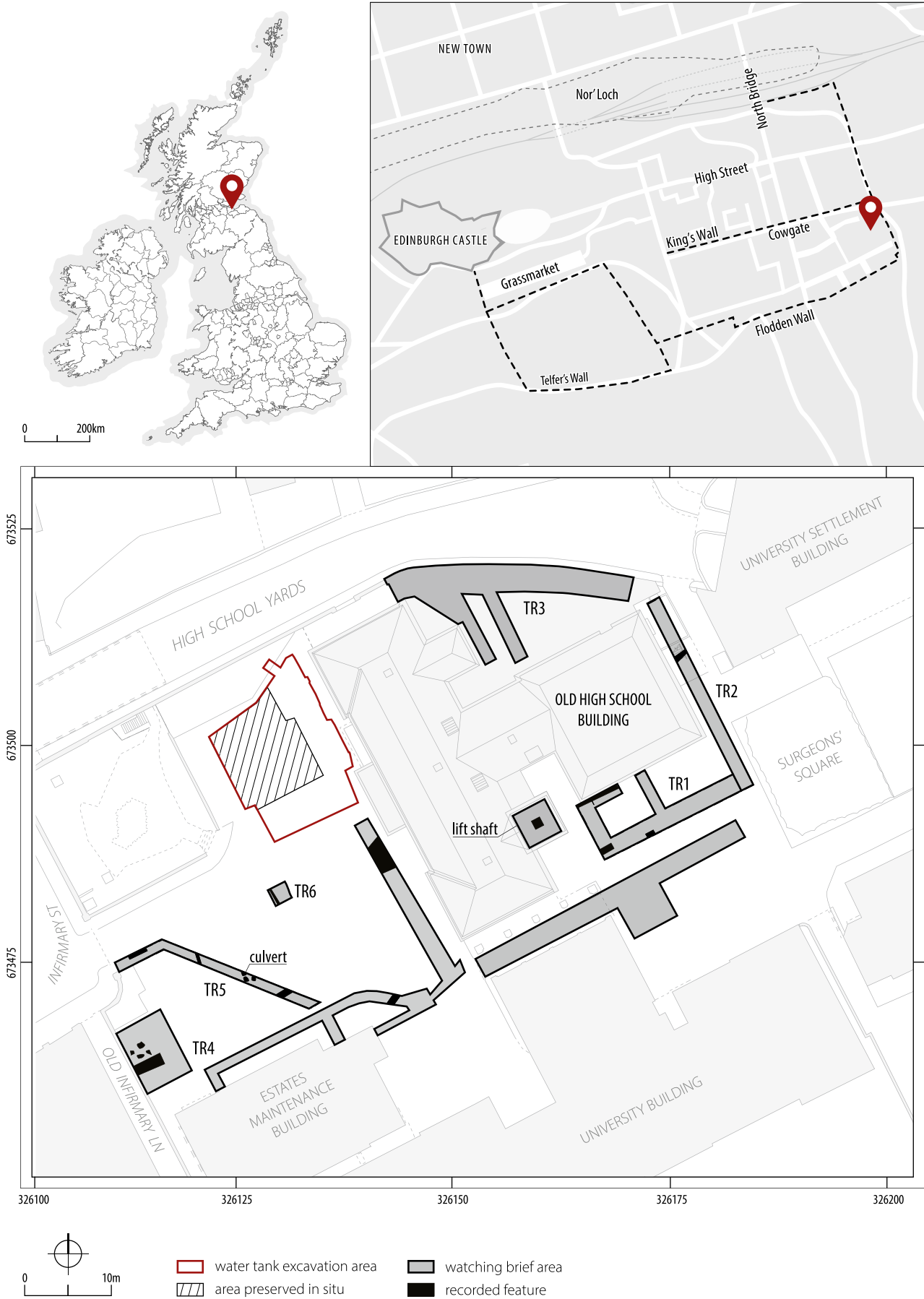
Due to the historical associations attached to the site and its location close to the heart of Edinburgh's Old Town, the redevelopment of the school into the Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation required an extensive programme of archaeological mitigation. The redevelopment involved the alteration of the internal layout of the Old High School building, the insertion of a water catchment tank to the front of the building and several associated service trenches within the grounds of the school. Malcolm Fraser Architects commissioned Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd to undertake the archaeological works associated with this development, the scope of which was agreed with City of Edinburgh Council Archaeological Service (CECAS). The archaeological programme included an evaluation and historic building survey

(Borden & Murray 2010), a watching brief on all ground works and subsequently the excavation of the water catchment tank trench (Murray 2014).

The only previous archaeological investigation undertaken in the area comprised the excavation of a test pit in Surgeons' Square in 1977 (Holmes 1977). This was excavated to a depth of 1.7m and recorded a large deposit of mortared rubble. No evidence of upstanding walls or structures was noted.

The historic building survey and evaluation (Borden & Murray 2010) were carried out prior to the redevelopment. This produced an in-depth historical record of the school, a summary of which is included below. The evaluation provided largely negative results, the most significant discovery being the remains of a crude wall to the rear of the Old High School. The wall was set into a shallow garden soil that had been heavily truncated.

The most archaeologically sensitive part of the Old High School's redevelopment involved the excavation of a large trench to the front of the building for the insertion of a rainwater collection tank. During the monitoring of the water tank excavations, in-situ human remains and a series of walls were uncovered. Following this, a mitigation strategy was agreed with CECAS to preserve in situ as much of the area as possible while allowing the development to continue. The area of the water tank was reduced, and an excavation was carried out on the new footprint of the water tank area and all connecting pipes. The development also required the excavation of several service trenches across the car park to the front of the building. These contained the remains of several walls and stone-lined culverts. The results of this work are discussed in detail in this report.



Illus 1 Location plan of the site showing the excavation area and the watching brief areas