

Stockham House Wantage Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report




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Stockham House, Wantage, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Dan Sykes

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Summary

Between 23rd and 25th January 2012 Oxford Archaeology conducted a watching brief during a geotechnical test pitting exercise at Stockham House, Wantage, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 392 888). 29 test pits were monitored during the course of the works, with one feature of archaeological interest observed and recorded, an east-west aligned ditch dating to the late Iron Age or early Roman period.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA), was commissioned by CgMs Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of geotechnical test pits at Stockham House, Wantage, Oxfordshire.
- 1.1.2 The work is was undertaken in advance of submission of a Planning Application for redevelopment of the land.
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies (PPS5, and the Vale of the White Horse Local Plan 2011).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site comprises approximately 24 hectares of land situated to the west of Denchworth Road, north-west of Wantage, Oxfordshire. It is centred at Grid Reference SU 392 888.
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology across the northern part of the site is Gault Formation (mudstone), with Upper Greensand Formation (calcareous sandstone and siltstone) across the southern part. Superficial Head deposits overly the Upper Greensand Formation (BGS Sheet 253).
- 1.2.3 The topography of the site is mainly flat, gently sloping downwards to the northern and western limits of the site. It lies at an average of 88m above Ordnance Datum (OD), decreasing to 79.5m OD to the west and 84m OD to the north.
- 1.2.4 The route of the former Wiltshire and Berkshire canal runs through the centre of the site. This is now in-filled in places and is lined with mature trees and vegetation. The nearest natural watercourse is Woodhill Brook, located to the west of the site.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been detailed in a previous desk-based assessment (CgMs 2011), and is reproduced below.

Prehistoric (Palaeolithic - Iron Age)

- 1.3.2 No HER or NMR records relating to the Prehistoric period are situated within or immediately adjacent to the site.
- 1.3.3 Little evidence for early prehistoric activity is recorded within the local landscape. Known Mesolithic activity is limited to a flint blade recovered during archaeological evaluation works at St Marys School over 1km south-east of the site. Bronze Age activity is similarity confined to isolated find spots (NMR 229195 - four palstaves



c.250m south of the site; HER 27448 - flint flake over 1km south of the site), re-deposited pottery fragments (250m east of the site) or small assemblages of flint artefacts or features discovered during archaeological excavation (a single ditch 340m south of the site, and pit containing middle Bronze Age pottery c500m north-east of the site). Situated further afield, over 1km south-east of the site, evidence of Bronze Age funerary activity was recorded during archaeological excavations at St Mary's School.

- 1.3.4 No previous archaeological investigation has been undertaken within the site. Numerous investigations have been carried out within the urban development and historic core of Wantage, identifying extensive Romano-British, Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval occupation, with a particular focus for occupation activity at Denchworth Road and Mill Street over 350m and 680m south of the site. Four archaeological investigations have been carried out within 250m of the site. The results of these investigations will be discussed in the relevant sections below.
- 1.3.5 A similar absence of substantial evidence for settlement activity continues into the Iron Age period. Iron Age pottery sherds have been discovered during archaeological evaluations within the town area (Iron Age pottery and post holes 72m southeast of the site and Iron Age or Romano-British settlement 700m south-east of the site), but currently no evidence of any Late Iron Age pre Roman settlement has been identified in the Wantage area. The recent archaeological evaluation carried out to the north of the site at Grove Airfield identified two ditches and a gully of Iron Age date, representing Iron Age activity c.200m north of the site.
- 1.3.6 During this period it is understood that the landscape would have undergone woodland and scrub clearance for settlement and agriculture. Although the presence of residual, isolated artefacts and funerary activity further afield would suggest that the local landscape was utilised during this period, no evidence of definitive early and middle prehistoric settlement activity has been recorded within or in close proximity to the site. Iron Age activity has been recorded to the north of the site, but as yet is limited to ditch features of possible agricultural origin. The site itself may have remained an area of woodland, waste or agricultural hinterland during this period.
- 1.3.7 On current evidence, there is a moderate potential for archaeological activity dating to the late Prehistoric period to be present within the site.

Roman

- 1.3.8 The site is situated c 170m east of the projected route of the Roman Road from Oxford to Wantage. During the 1990s a series of archaeological investigations identifying Roman settlement activity were carried out within the Denchworth Road and Mill Street areas of Wantage situated 350m and 650m south of the site. On the results of the Mill Street excavations, the Roman activity identified was interpreted as a roadside settlement, with agricultural buildings and field systems to the rear of house plots on the road frontage. It was suggested that the Letcombe Brook may have formed a natural eastern limit to such activity. Smith's (Smith 1987) analysis of roadside settlements has shown that the house plot generally did not extend more than 50m back from the roadside, with agricultural land and field systems situated to the rear of the plots. The Mill Street excavation was situated approximately 200m from the projected Roman road within the agricultural landscape to the rear of the house plots.
- 1.3.9 However, the subsequent results of the Denchworth Road excavations raises the possibility that the Roman settlement was a villa estate centre or nucleated village rather than a roadside settlement.



- 1.3.10 Despite the uncertain form and extent of the known Roman settlement activity at Wantage, it is clear that on current evidence the site is situated beyond such recorded activity. Known activity within the site is limited to a single coin findspot which may simply demonstrate a level of background 'noise' associated with the nearby settlement activity, introduced to the area by agricultural processes.
- 1.3.11 The archaeological excavation results at Mably Way, situated c 200m east of the site, further supports the consideration that the site is situated beyond the Roman settlement focus at Wantage. Although the evaluation at Mably Way initially identified the potential for Roman enclosures within the area, the subsequent archaeological excavation identified several linear features of which the majority were attributed to the modern or post-medieval field drainage system and ploughing. Although part of a Roman field system may have been identified, the dating evidence for this was sparse and therefore the interpretation speculative. The excavation concluded that the area is likely to have been situated on the outermost margins of the Roman settlement. The archaeological evaluation carried out to the north of the site at Grove Airfield identified a single ditch feature attributed to the Roman period.
- 1.3.12 The recording of Roman burials at Witan Way, north of Barwell and Belmont Farm may also suggest the presence of a Roman cemetery, traditionally positioned on the edge of a settlement, possibly indicating the northern limit of the Roman settlement situated c 160m southeast of the site.
- 1.3.13 Although the site is likely to have been situated beyond the focus of Roman activity, the area may have been situated within the agricultural landscape surrounding the known settlement activity to the south. The site may contain evidence of Roman field systems or associated agricultural activity.
- 1.3.14 On current evidence, the site is considered to have a low potential for Roman settlement activity and a moderate potential for archaeological deposits associated with agricultural practices.

Saxon - early medieval

- 1.3.15 No HER or NMR records relating to the Saxon - Early medieval period are situated within or immediately adjacent to the site.
- 1.3.16 Documentary records confirm the presence of a Royal residence at Wantage in the 9th century and is reputed to be the birthplace of King Alfred. The location of this Saxon palace has been subject to speculation. The HER records one of six possible locations for the palace at Limborough Road with the NMR recording the location of the palace in the region of Mill Street. The Mill Street excavations did not establish whether there was any continuity of occupation and settlement between the last phase of Roman activity and the earliest Anglo-Saxon phase but demonstrated Anglo-Saxon activity to the west of Letcombe Brook. It is considered that the focus of the late Anglo-Saxon settlement shifted to the eastern side of Letcombe Brook, with the medieval church of St Peter and Paul built on the site of an earlier Saxon Church or Minster situated over 800m south-east of the site. The early medieval settlement developed around the church and Market Place. A number of archaeological evaluations within the town have recorded evidence of Anglo-Saxon and Early medieval activity.
- 1.3.17 Although Anglo-Saxon and early medieval settlement activity is present at Wantage, the site itself lies over 500m north-west of such known activity and it is considered that



the site lies beyond the extent of Anglo-Saxon and Early medieval settlement at Wantage.

- 1.3.18 During this period the site lay beyond the settlement extents of Wantage. The area may have formed part of the surrounding agricultural hinterland. As such, a low potential has been identified for the presence of Saxon-Early medieval archaeological deposits or activity within the site.

Medieval

- 1.3.19 During the medieval period Wantage becomes an established market town, a fair was granted in 1213 but it is likely that a market existed prior to this owing to the prosperity of the town in the 12th century. The growth and development of the medieval town is unclear but is likely to have developed around the church of St Peter and St Paul, the Market Place and along Mill Street and Grove Street.
- 1.3.20 Despite the development and expansion of the medieval town, the site remains over 650m north-west of the likely settlement extent. The site is likely to have been situated within the surrounding open field system agricultural landscape of Wantage. The NMR records the presence of ridge and furrow of possible medieval or post-medieval origin across the central and southern areas of the site, evidence of ridge and furrow was also noted across the western extent of the site during the recent site visit.
- 1.3.21 During this period, the site remains beyond the settlement extent of Wantage. The site is likely to have remained an area of agricultural land, which may be further demonstrated by the presence of possible medieval ridge and furrow identified across the southern and central extent of the site.
- 1.3.22 On this basis, a low potential for medieval archaeological deposits or artefacts is considered for the site.

Post-medieval and modern

- 1.3.23 Throughout the post-medieval and modern period the site remains part of an agricultural landscape. The site is subject to initial piecemeal enclosure and later formal enclosure during the late 18th and early 19th century. The route of the Wiltshire and Berkshire canal, which crosses through the centre of the site in a north-east to south-west orientation was constructed in 1810 and subsequently closed in 1914.
- 1.3.24 The collection of buildings at Stockham are not listed and are not identified within either the HER or the NMR. A structure has been at the location of the existing house since at least the late 18th century.
- 1.3.25 In these periods understanding of settlement, land-use and the utilisation of the landscape is enhanced by cartographic sources, which can give additional detail to data contained within the HER and NMR.
- 1.3.26 The earliest map showing the site in any detail is a plan of the Wiltshire and Berkshire canal, dated 1793. It shows the proposed route of the canal across a number of enclosed fields to the northwest of the town of Wantage. A single building is depicted towards the southwest corner of the site, in the location now occupied by Stockham House.
- 1.3.27 The route of the canal is only shown in the northeast corner of the site on the Wantage and Grove Inclosure map of 1803 perhaps indicating the extent of construction at this point.



- 1.3.28 The canal and four buildings in the location of Stockham House are shown very clearly on the 1844 Tithe map, along with the enclosed fields. A bridge is shown crossing the canal in the centre of the site, with a second bridge (later identified as Stockham Bridge) towards the west at where several field boundaries converge. The surrounding area comprises agricultural land made up of large enclosed fields.
- 1.3.29 By the publication of the 1883 Ordnance Survey the three enclosed fields in the southwest of the site have been opened into a single field. The fields are bounded by trees and hedges. Stockham Bridge is clearly identified as is Barwell Bridge in the northeast corner of the site. The unnamed bridge in the centre is depicted as a gap in the canal. The area of Stockham House (referred to simply as Stockham) shows an extensive range of buildings mostly to the west of the main house.
- 1.3.30 The 1912 Ordnance Survey identifies the canal as disused, despite the formal closure not taking place until 1914. The previously unnamed central bridge is identified as Hunters Bridge. A number of the former field boundaries have been dispensed with.
- 1.3.31 The 1960 Ordnance Survey shows much of the site as largely unchanged over the intervening 50 year period. The exception being that a field boundary has been removed in the northeast part of the site.
- 1.3.32 The north part of the canal within the site has been filled in by the 1970s (the infill material is claimed to be from Grove airfield when it was constructed during World War 2) and Wantage Research Laboratory has been constructed to the west. The land to the south of the site has also been developed as part of the expansion of Wantage. The structures making up Stockham Farm have also changed.
- 1.3.33 The Wantage Research Laboratory is replaced by a factory by the early 1980s. The site remains unchanged. No further changes occur within the site during the 1990s and the early 2000s, but planting along the route of the canal and in the east part of the site is shown on the 2011 Ordnance Survey.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

- 1.3.34 There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within or in close proximity to the site.

Conservation Area and Listed Buildings

- 1.3.35 The Conservation Area of Wantage Town Centre is situated over 500m southeast of the site. It's setting or character will not be effected by the proposed development. There are no listed buildings situated within or in close proximity to the site that would be effected by the proposed development.
- 1.3.36 An appraisal of the historic built environment of Stockham Farm is discussed in a separate CgMs report (CgMs 2011).

Historic Landscape

- 1.3.37 The site is situated beyond the historic core of Wantage. From the medieval period and possibly early, the site is situated within the agricultural hinterland of the settlement of Wantage. Cartographic evidence shows the site remains within an enclosed agricultural land up to present day with the exception of the construction of the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal in 1810. Throughout the 20th century, residential and industrial development surrounds the site.



Summary and Assessment of Significance

- 1.3.38 There are no heritage assets of national significance within the site. Known undesignated heritage assets situated within the site are limited to the Wiltshire and Berkshire canal, remnants of medieval or post-medieval ridge and furrow and a single Roman coin. The canal is considered to be of regional significance, while the other two heritage assets are considered to be of local significance.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 2.1.1 The desk-based assessment has established that the site is considered to have a moderate potential for late prehistoric activity. Although a low potential for Roman settlement activity is considered for the site, a moderate potential for associated agricultural practices may be present. The site is situated beyond the historic core of Wantage and as such a low potential is identified for the Anglo-Saxon/early medieval and medieval periods. Overall, a low potential is considered for the post-medieval period as the area remains an area of agricultural land. A greater potential for post-medieval activity and structural remains will be present along the route of the former canal and in the vicinity of the Stockham Farm complex; such remains are considered to be of regional or local importance.

2.2 Aims

- 2.2.1 The aims of the watching brief were to:
- (i) preserve by record any archaeological deposits, structures or features encountered during the course of geotechnical test-pitting;
 - (ii) seek to establish the extent, nature and date of any archaeological deposits, structures or features encountered within the scope of the ground intrusion;
 - (iii) disseminate results through the production of a unpublished client (grey literature) report.

3 PROJECT SPECIFIC EXCAVATION AND RECORDING METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of works

- 3.1.1 The watching brief was maintained during the period of ground works, which consisted of geo-technical trial trenching.
- 3.1.2 Site specific methodologies were as follows:
- (i) The test pits were excavated by mechanical excavator (JCB or similar) fitted with a 0.6m toothed ditching bucket and taken down slowing in spits of approximately 0.20m. Each test pit was approximately 3 m in length and 0.6 m wide.
 - (ii) All excavated material was visually examined for archaeological material.
 - (iii) Spoil was mounded at a safe distance from each excavation.
 - (iv) Excavation stopped at the top of the first significant archaeological horizon, which, if present, was investigated by hand.
 - (v) Once any upper levels of archaeological remains had been recorded, excavation proceeded to the required depth.
 - (vi) Recording of test-pit sections took place from the edge of the test pit only.



4 RESULTS

4.1 Description of deposits

- 4.1.1 Naturally occurring silty clays with varying degrees of limestone inclusions were observed in the majority of the test pit locations. In only 4 of the test pits were subsoils observed (Test Pits 1, 10, 21 and 24) □ these generally consisted of a mid grey-brown or dark grey clay silt, up to 0.35 m thick. A dark brown clay silt topsoil, typically 0.2 m deep completed the sequence of deposits in all of the test pits. Most of the test pits were devoid of archaeology.
- 4.1.2 In Test Pit 5 an east-west orientated curvilinear ditch cut was recorded (502) which measured 0.74 m in width and was 0.46 m deep, and was cut into the natural silty clay (504) (see Fig. 3). Its single fill (503) was a dark grey silt clay with 20% flint inclusions which yielded bone, burnt stone and pottery of a late Iron Age or early Roman date. Please note that the alignment of the test pit on Figure 2 is at odds with that which was recorded by the supervising archaeologist and indicated on Figure 3, and therefore should be taken as indicative only.
- 4.1.3 Remains of ridge and furrow cultivation were recorded in Test Pits 7 and 23 (ridges) and 16 (furrow). A modern bank derived from upcast from a ditch situated immediately to the south was observed in Test Pit 26.
- 4.1.4 Test Pit 14 contained an undated 0.3 m thick organic silt deposit (1403) which overlay the natural clay and was sealed beneath a modern rubble deposit (1402).
- 4.1.5 An east-west aligned undated red brick wall (2003) was observed in the base of Test Pit 20, beneath a 2.3 m thick rubble deposit (2002).
- 4.1.6 Test Pits 17 and 18, located near to the north-western boundary of the site, contained 1 m thick deposits of modern rubble material, which in Test Pit 18 overlay a modern limestone path.

4.2 Finds

The pottery by Edward Biddulph

Context	Description	Date
503	3 sherds shell and sand-tempered pottery, possibly part of a large storage jar, 16g	?IA/Roman

The bone by Geraldine Crann

Context	Description	Date
503	3 fragments (1 burnt), 13g	

The burnt unworked flint by Geraldine Crann

Context	Description	Date
503	3 fragments, 8g	



The burnt stone by Geraldine Crann

Context	Description	Date
503	A single fragment, 47g	

4.2.1 The finds assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work

4.3 Environmental remains

4.3.1 No palaeo-environmental sampling was undertaken during the course of the watching brief.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1.1 A curvilinear ditch of probable Iron Age or Roman date was located in Test Pit 5 towards the south-western extent of the site. This seems likely to have formed part of a wider agricultural landscape which surrounded known settlement activity to the south of the site (see 1.3.8, above).

5.1.2 Physical remains of medieval or post medieval agricultural practices, in the form of ridge and furrow cultivation, were evident at ground level throughout the sample area and were recorded in several of the test pits during the works.

5.1.3 Structural elements of the 1810 Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal may to exist beneath 20th century backfilling and landscaping episodes as evidenced in Test Pit 20.



APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Test Pit	Context	Type	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Comments	Finds	Date
1	101	Layer	0.15			Topsoil		
	102	Layer	0.35			Subsoil		
	103	Layer	-			Natural		
2	201	Layer	0.25			Topsoil		
	202	Layer	-			Natural		
3	301	Layer	0.25			Topsoil		
	302	Layer	-			Natural		
4	401	Layer	0.25			Topsoil		
	402	Layer	-			Natural		
5	501	Layer	0.25			Topsoil		
	502	Cut	0.46	0.74	>0.60	Curvilinear ditch		
	503	Fill	0.46			Fill of Ditch 502		
	504	Layer	-			Natural		
6	601	Layer	0.25			Topsoil		
	602	Layer				Natural		
7	701	Layer	0.25			Topsoil		
	702	Layer	0.2			Subsoil		
	703	Layer	-			Natural		
8	801	Layer	0.3			Topsoil		
	802	Layer	-			Natural		
9	901	Layer	0.3			Topsoil		
	902	Layer	-			Natural		
10	1001	Layer	0.2			Topsoil		
	1002	Layer	0.2			Subsoil		
	1003	Layer	-			Natural		



11	1101	Layer	0.2			Topsoil		
	1102	Layer	-			Natural		
12	1201	Layer	0.25			Topsoil		
	1202	Layer	-			Natural		
13	1301	Layer	0.3			Topsoil		
	1302	Layer	-			Natural		
14	1401	Layer	0.25			Topsoil		
	1402	Fill	0.95			Modern Backfill		
	1403	Layer	0.3			Organic silt		
	1404	Layer	-			Natural		
15	1501	Layer	0.2			Topsoil		
	1502	Fill	0.5			Modern Backfill		
	1503	Fill	>2.5			Modern Backfill		
16	1601	Layer	0.4			Topsoil		
	1602	Fill	0.6			Fill of Furrow		
	1603	-				Natural		
17	1701	Layer	0.4			Topsoil		
	1702	Fill	0.9			Modern Backfill		
	1703	Layer	-			Natural		
18	1801	Layer	0.2			Topsoil		
	1802	Layer	0.8			Levelling deposit		
	1803	Layer	0.3			Modern Path		
	1804	Layer	-			Natural		
19	1901	Layer	0.35			Topsoil		
	1902	Layer	-			Natural		
20	2001	Layer	0.2			Topsoil		
	2002	Fill	2.3			Modern Backfill		



	2003	Wall				Canal Wall?		
21	2101	Layer	0.2			Topsoil		
	2102	Layer	0.22			Subsoil		
	2103	Layer	-			Natural		
22	2201	Layer	0.28			Topsoil		
	2202	Layer	-			Natural		
23	2301	Layer	0.25			Topsoil		
	2302	Layer	0.3			Ridge		
	2303	Layer	0.2			Subsoil		
	2304	Layer	-			Natural		
24	2401	Layer	0.32			Topsoil		
	2402	Layer	0.25			Subsoil		
	2403	Layer	-			Natural		
25	2501	Layer	0.3			Topsoil		
	2502	Layer	-			Natural		
26	2601	Layer	0.2			Topsoil		
	2602	Layer	0.55			Bank		
	2603	Layer	-			Natural		
27	2701	Layer	0.5			Topsoil		
	2702	Layer	-			Natural		
28	2801	Layer	0.28			Topsoil		
	2802	Layer	-			Natural		
29	2901	Layer	0.3			Topsoil		
	2902	Layer	-			Natural		



APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

CgMs, 2011 Archaeological Desk Based Assessment, Stockham House, Wantage,
Oxfordshire.



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Stockham House, Wantage
Site code:	WASTOCK 12
Grid reference:	SU 392 888
Type of watching brief:	Watching brief during excavation of geotechnical test pits
Date and duration of project:	23 rd - 25 th January 2012
Area of site:	Approximately 24 ha
Summary of results:	Between 23 rd and 25 th January 2012 Oxford Archaeology conducted a watching brief during a geotechnical test pitting exercise at Stockham House, Wantage, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 392 888). 29 test pits were monitored during the course of the works, with one feature of archaeological interest observed and recorded, an east-west aligned ditch dating to the late Iron Age or early Roman period.
Location of archive:	The archive will be lodged with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service under the accession number OXCMS:2012.14



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Figure 1: Site location



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Survey Data supplied by :
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0 200 m
Scale at A4 1:4000

Figure 2: Site plan

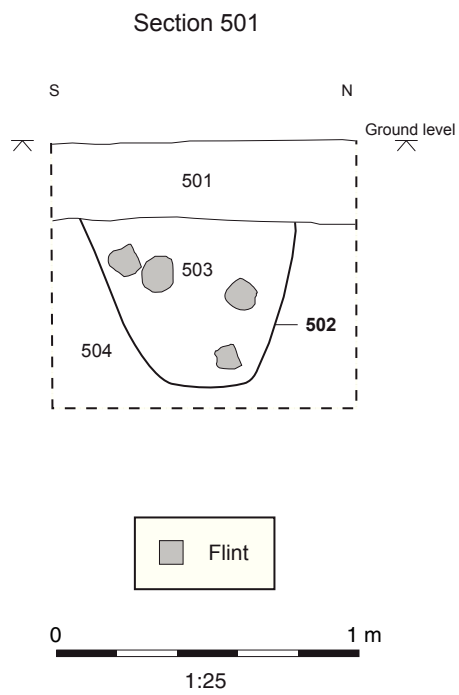
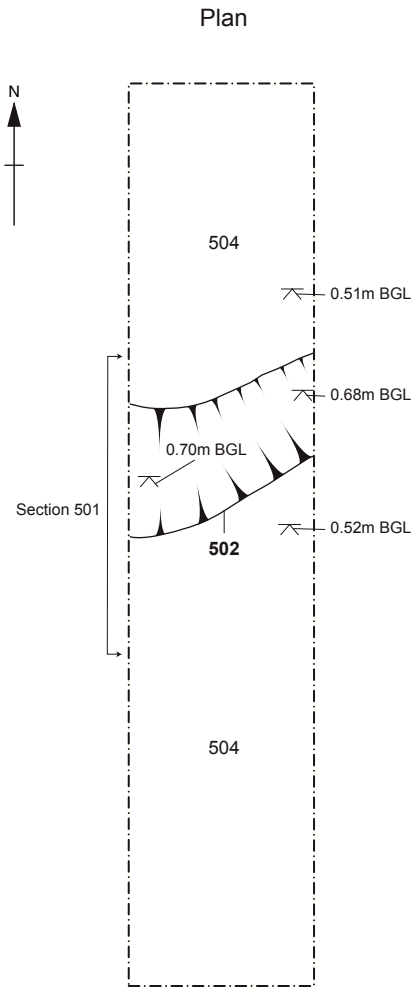


Figure 3: Plan 501 and section 501 within Test Pit 5



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