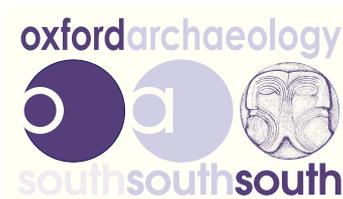


Boundary Wall Repairs
St Peter's Church
Brackley
Northamptonshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



November 2009

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Committee**

Issue No: 1

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**Boundary Wall Repairs,
St Peter's Church,
Brackley, Northamptonshire**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Front cover: Excavation of the new foundation trench

SUMMARY

In November 2009, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Peter's Church, Brackley, Northamptonshire (NGR: SP 5916 3730). The work was commissioned by the St Peter's Church Building Committee in advance of the reconstruction of a section of boundary wall. The watching brief revealed two phases of churchyard soil deposits overlying a buried soil horizon. No other significant archaeology was encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In November 2009, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Peter's Church, Brackley, Northamptonshire (NGR: SP 5916 3730). The work was commissioned by St Peter's Church building Committee on behalf of the Parochial Church Council in advance of the reconstruction of part of the boundary wall along the eastern edge of the churchyard.
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by the Diocese of Peterborough, Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) and OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2009).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The town of Brackley is situated approximately 22 km south-west of the county city of Northampton (Fig. 1). St Peter's church is located on the eastern edge of the town on a gentle east-facing slope running down to the Great Ouse River. The churchyard is bounded to the north, east and south-east by buildings and gardens, and to the west and south-west by allotments. The damaged section of the wall is located in the south-eastern corner of the churchyard at approximately 115 m above OD.
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology is alluvium overlying Oolitic limestone (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no. 219).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the evaluation was prepared for the WSI (OA 2009) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 Brackley lies on the south-west border of the county of Northamptonshire. The town is recorded in Domesday, when Earl Aubrey held of the King two hides in Hasou (Hawes), two in Sigresham (Syresham) and one in Brachelai (Brackley) with a church and mill (VCH I, 330). Domesday lists a population of 24 (six serfs, ten villeins and eight bordars). The "Old Town" of Brackley, centred around the parish church of St Peter, corresponds with this settlement. The fabric of the church is

predominantly 13th century and later, but limited Norman features survive, including a fine doorway preserved in the south wall of the south aisle. St Peter's churchyard was originally ovoid; this is generally considered to be an indicator of a pre-Norman origin. A southward extension to the cemetery was added in the 19th century.

- 1.3.3 The medieval town was laid out before 1173 along the old road from Northampton to Oxford, which forms the main street of the bypassed town (RCHM 1982, 21). The impetus for the shift was probably provided by the castle, which lay at the south end of the new settlement. The town was separately represented in the Assizes by 1202, but its rent of £66 18s 4d in 1173 demonstrates its previous existence. Burgesses are mentioned in the mid 13th century, when the name Old Town was already used to describe the vicinity of St Peter's (Beresford 1967, 468-9).
- 1.3.4 Various finds of Roman, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval date have been made around St Peter's, especially during housing developments to the south and the east of the church. Some of these would appear to suggest that a high-status site lies in the immediate vicinity. A number of chance finds of mid to late Saxon artefacts have been found within both town and parish, although unfortunately few of these have a secure provenance. Pottery of 12th-14th century date has been found in Old Town, including within the area of the cemetery expansion.
- 1.3.5 Previous work by OA in 1993 and 2002 during the conduction of an Archaeological Evaluation and a Watching brief during the installation of a new gas main respectively, produced evidence for extensive inhumations from the Saxo-Norman period onwards together with prehistoric, Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon pottery showing activity within the area predating the founding of the church. (OAU, 1993 and OA, 2002).

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 features or deposits that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of any groundworks.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was undertaken as series of site visits during works that were likely to impinge or damage any potential archaeological deposits or features. These works included the dismantling of an approximately 17 m length of collapsed and unstable wall and the excavation of a new 0.7 m wide foundation trench for the reconstructed wall.

2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of the excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2, Site plan) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations, features and any recorded sections were photographed using digital photography, colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits (*Fig 3, Sections 1 and 2*)

3.1.1 The underlying natural geology, a weathered limestone brash (7), was encountered approximately 1.3 m below the level of the churchyard. This was sealed by a 0.35 m deep layer of very dark grey silty clay loam containing abraded limestone fragments, mortar flecking and charcoal flecking (5). This had been cut by the 0.3 m deep foundation trench for the boundary wall (6). Built within this trench was a 1.4 m high wall (3) constructed using roughly dressed limestone blocks bonded with a light yellow-brown sandy mortar.

3.1.2 Butting up against the wall on the inside of the churchyard was a 0.2 m deep layer of very dark grey silty sand loam containing occasional abraded limestone fragments and charcoal flecking (4).

3.1.3 Overlying layer 4 and also butting up to the inside of the boundary wall was a grey-brown clay silt (2), between 0.3 m and 0.4 m in depth. This deposit produced charcoal flecking and abraded limestone fragments.

3.1.4 This was overlaid by a layer of grey-brown clay silt loam measuring 0.2 m in depth (1). This represents the current churchyard topsoil and turf.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 No dating evidence was recovered during the course of the watching brief.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

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

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The excavation of the new foundation trench allowed a complete stratigraphy of that area of the churchyard to be compiled.

4.1.2 Layer 7 represents a weathered deposit of the underlying natural geology, oolitic limestone.

- 4.1.3 Overlying this was a probable layer of worked soil (5). The presence of mortar flecking within this deposit suggests that may be contemporary with either the church's construction, or more probably, the original construction of the boundary wall. It may also represent an earlier layer of churchyard soil which has been subsequently buried.
- 4.1.4 This was overlaid by two distinct phases of churchyard soil, layers 2 and 4. Unfortunately no dating evidence was recovered from either.
- 4.1.5 Layer 1 represents the current churchyard topsoil and turf.
- 4.1.6 It is probable that both layers 2 and 4 had been built up against the wall in order to level that area of the churchyard.
- 4.1.7 No inhumations were disturbed during the course of the work and no charnel was recovered from any of the churchyard soil layers.
- 4.1.8 No evidence for any activity predating the churchyard was observed during the course of the watching brief.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.35m	-	Current churchyard topsoil	-	C19th/ C20th
2	Layer	0.25 m	-	Earlier churchyard soil	-	-
3	Wall	1.4 m	0.6 m	Churchyard boundary wall	-	-
4	Layer	0.25 m	-	Earlier churchyard soil	-	C19th
5	Layer	0.3 m	-	Worked soil, possibly predating the churchyard	Charcoal, mortar	-
6	Cut	0.3 m	0.6 m	Construction cut for boundary wall	-	-
7	Layer	> 0.2 m	-	Natural, oolitic limestone brash	-	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Beresford, M, 1967 *Gazetteer of Markets and Fairs to 1516: Northamptonshire* 468-9

DAC, 2009 *Diocese of Peterborough, Diocesan Advisory Committee: St Peter's Church, Brackley, Archaeological Condition*

IFA, 2008 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 2002 *St Peter's Church, Brackley: Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

OAU, 1993 *St Peter's Church, Brackley: Archaeological Evaluation Report*

OAU, 1998 *St Peter's Church, Brackley: Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

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

Pevsner, N, 1970 *The Buildings of England: Northamptonshire* 115-116

Victoria History of the County of Northamptonshire Vol.I 330

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Peter's Church, Brackley, Northamptonshire

Site code: BROSPC 09

Grid reference: SP 5916 3730

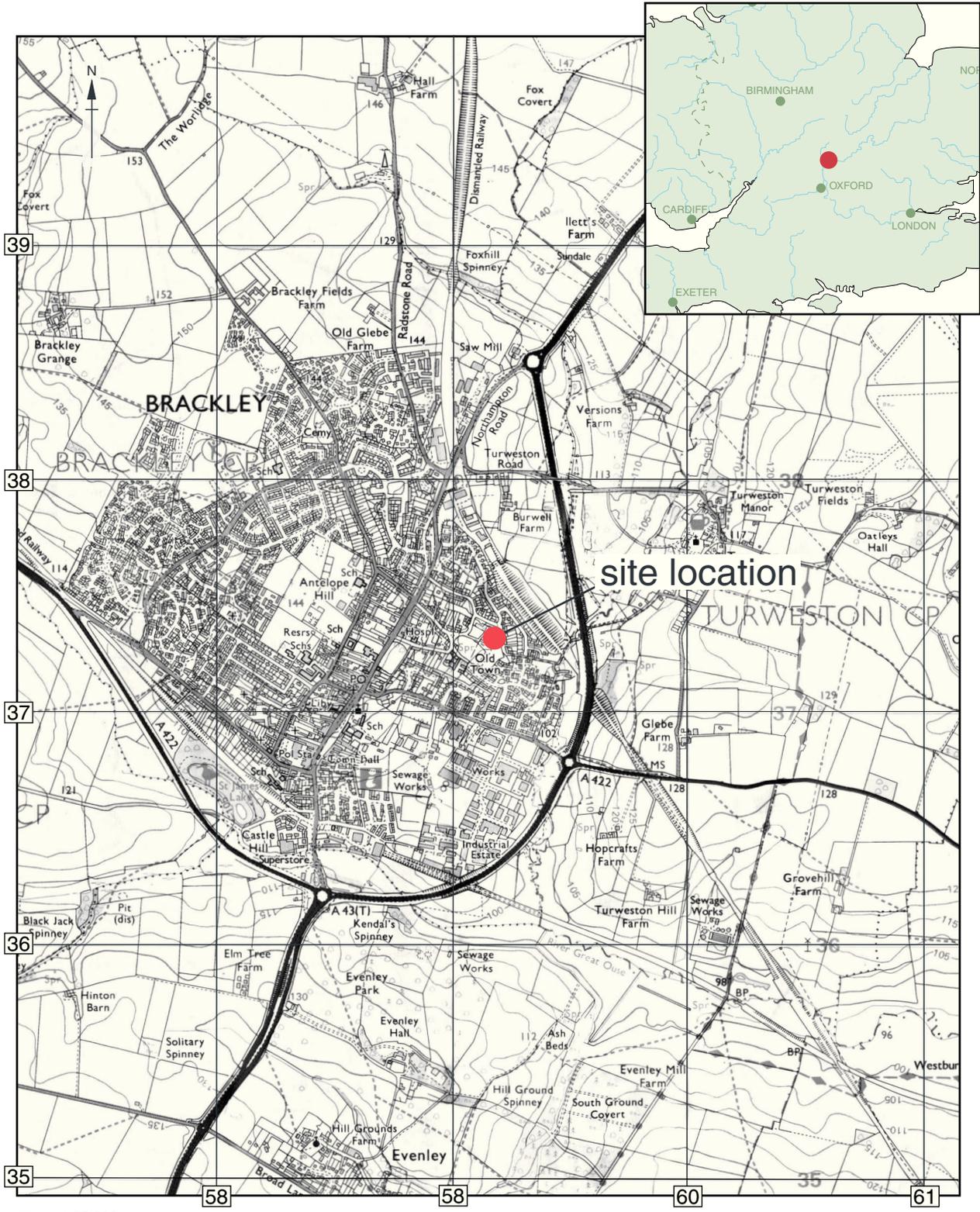
Type of watching brief: Dismantling of a section of boundary wall and the machine excavation of a new foundation trench

Date and duration of project: 4th to 17th November 2009, 4 site visits

Area of site: 600 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief exposed 2 phases of churchyard soil overlying a buried soil horizon. No evidence for any activity predating the church was observed.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

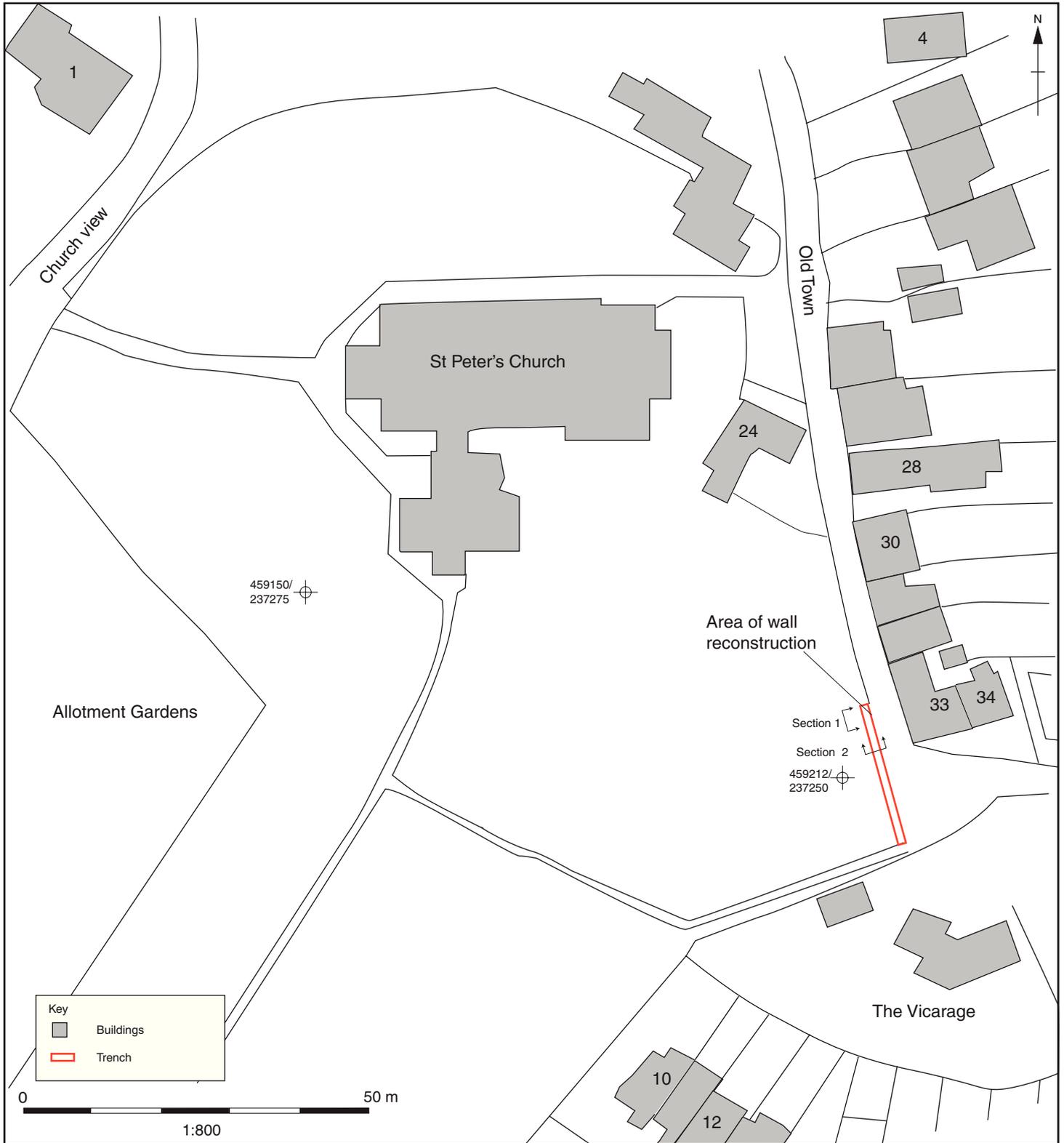
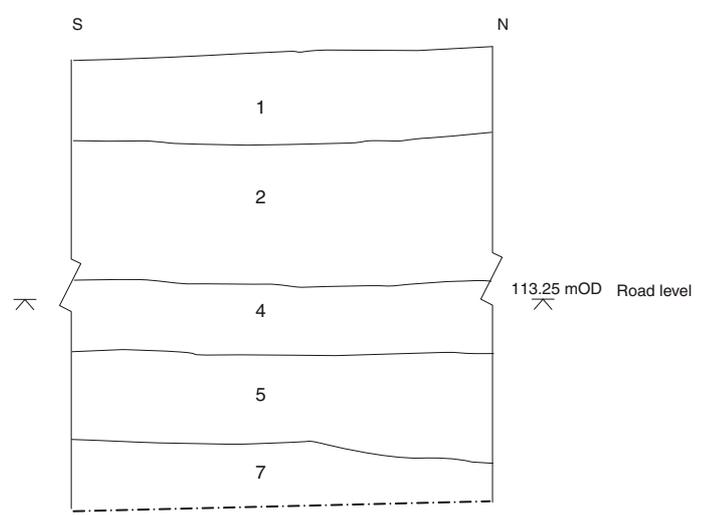


Figure 2: Site plan

Section 1



Section 2

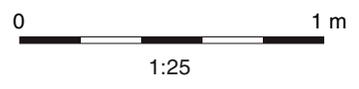
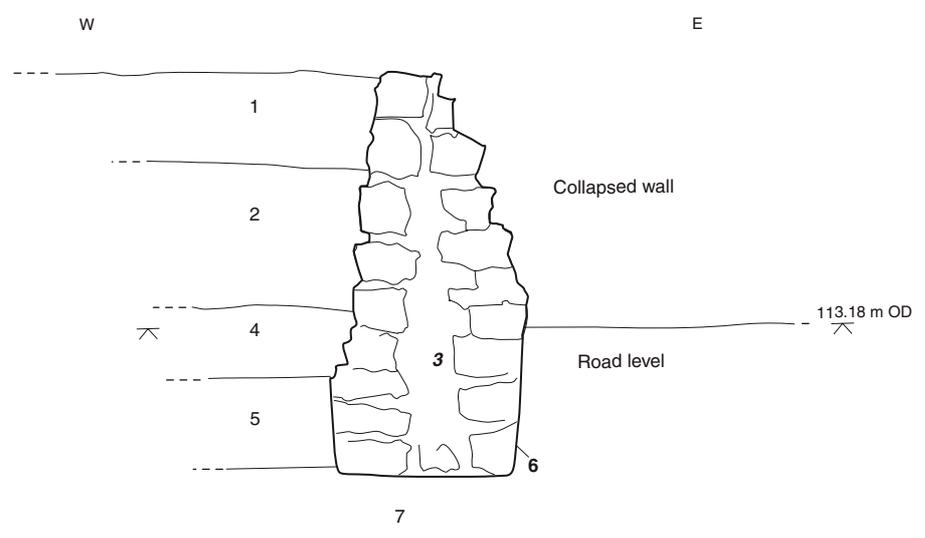


Figure 3: Sections