

Walcot Manor
Garden Design
Charlbury
Oxfordshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



Oxford Archaeology

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Prepared by: Dan Dodds
Position: Project Manager
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Checked by: Jon Hiller
Position: Senior Project Manager
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Approved by: Jon Hiller
Position: Senior Project Manager
Date: 6th July 2005

Signed.. *JRH* *PP. N. SHEPHERD*
HEAD OF FIELDWORK

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Oxford Archaeology
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Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES
t: (0044) 01865 263800
f: (0044) 01865 793496

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

Between the 16th and 23rd of May 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Walcot Farm, Burford Road, Charlbury, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 245 198). The work was commissioned by MCL Garden Design to be carried out during the implementation of a series of new garden designs within the grounds of the old manor house, which with its gardens forms part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument. This watching brief pertains specifically to a cluster of new tree planting to the south of the farm's barns near the old bowling green. The watching brief revealed no archaeological deposits associated with the 18th century garden design.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 In March 2004 planning permission was sought from West Oxfordshire District Council for series of developments at Walcot Farm (Planning Ref: 04/0416 and 04/0279). Part of the proposal included a series of new garden designs to be implemented around the grounds of the manor house. Due to the potential for below ground archaeological remains associated with the ornamental gardens of the mansion (SAM 30831) to be disturbed or truncated by the digging of holes for planting of trees, Chris Welch of English Heritage agreed that works could proceed on the condition that an archaeological watching brief was maintained. A total of 20 Tree Pits were monitored during the watching brief.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 Walcot Farm is located approximately 2 km to the west of Charlbury and to the north of the B4437 (NGR: SP 346 198). The geology is clay and the site lies at approximately 100 m OD. The area of the site that was subject to the watching brief lies within the grounds of the farm.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The development site is located in the vicinity of the former mansion of the Jenkinson family. Although the precise location of it is unknown all the documentary evidence strongly suggests that the existing farm now occupies the site. The house was clearly substantial in size since it was included within the 1705 survey of the principal residences of Oxfordshire. To the west of the existing farmhouse are a series of well defined earthworks including five ponds that formed an ornamental cascade/water feature, garden terraces including a bowling green and a large house platform. These are part of the ornamental gardens associated with the mansion, which form the Scheduled Ancient Monument SAM 30831. East of the farm are some earthworks that represent the medieval settlement of Walcot and the original Manor House (OA 2004).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area.
- 2.1.2 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was maintained during the digging of holes for tree planting. A total of 26 tree pits were monitored and their sections recorded. Each tree hole was excavated at a pre-designed location within the farm grounds and the pits formed a cluster at the south-western corner of the site (Fig. 2).
- 2.2.2 A plan of the extent of the excavated tree pits is drawn at a scale of 1:250 (Fig. 3) and all sample sections were recorded at a scale of 1:20. A full photographic record of the work was made using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The stratigraphy across the area of investigation was fairly uniform and consisted mainly of a sequence of natural limestone bedrock, overlain by a cornbrash subsoil and finally a loamy topsoil. In some of the pits isolated layers of rubble were identified but this was by no means representative of the site. Each of the deposits described below were observed within separate pits that measured 0.6 m wide by an average of 1.2 m in length. The pits were 0.6 m deep.
- 3.1.2 With the exception of Tree Pits 4 and 6, the stratigraphy exhibited during the watching brief was fairly uniform and was absent of any features or deposits of archaeological significance. The stratigraphy comprised a limestone bedrock (4) which was overlain by a cornbrash subsoil material that had suffered varying degrees of weathering (2 and 3). The cornbrash was sealed beneath a layer of modern topsoil (1).
- 3.1.3 Tree Pit 4 exhibited only topsoil to its maximum depth (0.6 m). It is thought that this Pit was cut into a backfilled quarry pit associated with the localised extraction of limestone.

3.1.4 Tree Pit 6 was thought to be cut into the same quarry pit as that of Pit 4. Both Tree Pits were cut through the same topsoil material. Part of a limestone path measuring 1 m (and two slabs) wide was uncovered prior to the excavation of this pit. This path was situated on top of a low bank that originally ran around the bowling green.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the watching brief. Finds were present in the topsoil (1) only. All the finds recovered were of 20th century origin and were evaluated on site but not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

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

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The watching brief revealed a possible pathway (5) of limestone slabs. This path was probably dated to the 18th century designed garden and formed a path around the bowling green. No other features were observed that appeared to relate to the ornamental gardens or earlier.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

| <i>Context</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Thickness</i> | <i>Comments</i> | <i> Finds</i> | <i>Date</i> |
|----------------|-------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Layer | 0.3 / 0.6m | Garden topsoil | CBM/Pot/ Glass | C20th |
| 2 | Layer | 0.25 m | Subsoil / Weathered natural | - | - |
| 3 | Layer | 0.15 m | Subsoil / Partially weathered natural | - | - |
| 4 | Layer | 0.4 m | Natural limestone bedrock | - | - |
| 5 | Structure | - | Tree root disturbed lens | - | - |

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OUA, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual (ed. D. Wilkinson)*

OA, 2004 *Walcot House, Ornamental Fishponds and Garden Earthworks, Charlbury: Historical Statement For Scheduled Monument Consent*

OA, 2005 *Walcot Farm, Burford Road, Charlbury, Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Walcot Manor, Garden Design, Charlbury, Oxfordshire

Site code: CHWMGD 05

Grid reference: SP 245 198

Type of watching brief: Monitoring of tree planting pits

Date and duration of project: 2 visits. 16th and 25 of May 2005

Summary of results: No archaeology earlier than 20th century activity was observed. An 18th garden path was exposed.

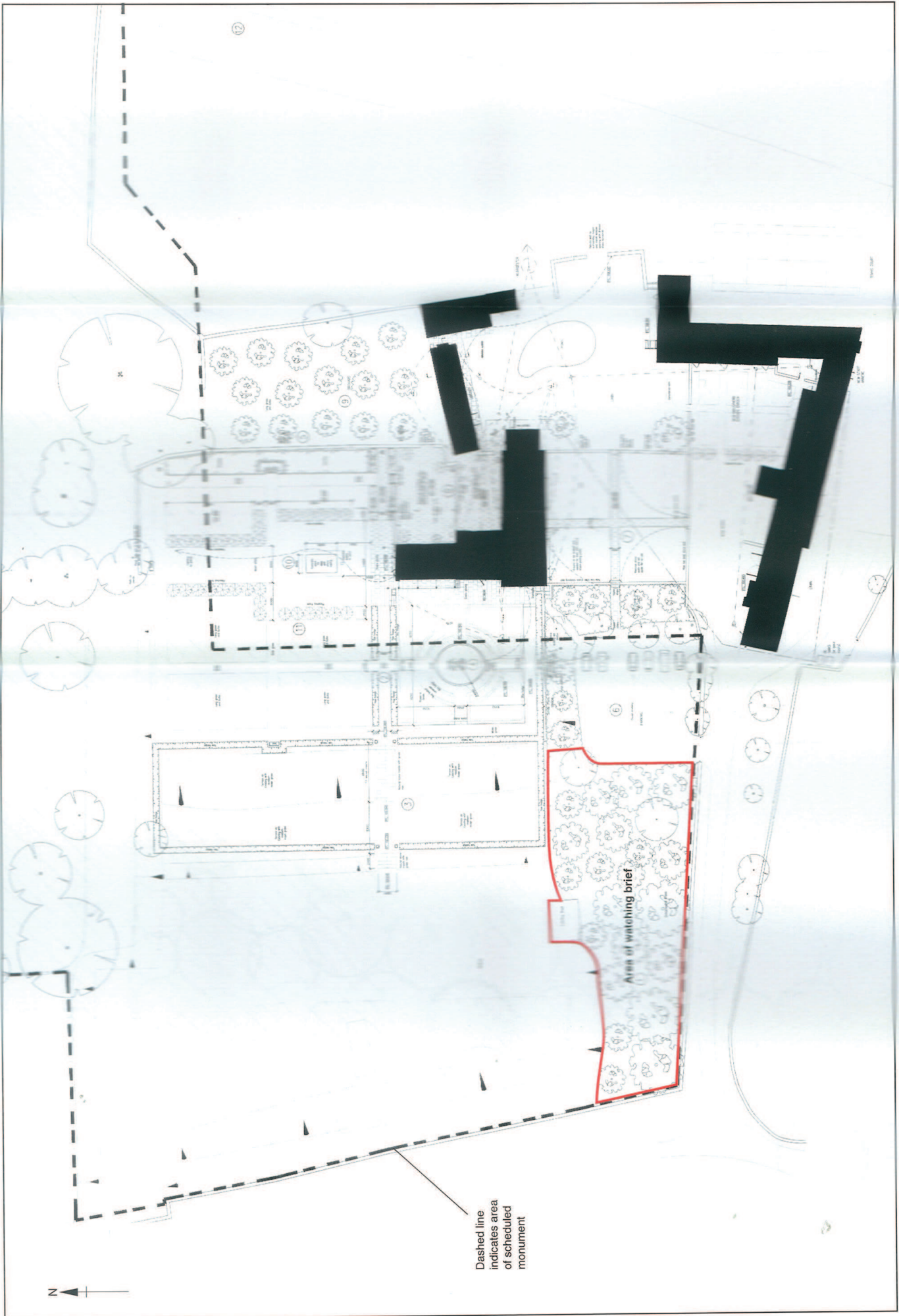
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location



Dashed line indicates area of scheduled monument

Figure 2 : Plan of development area

Scale: 1:200 at A3

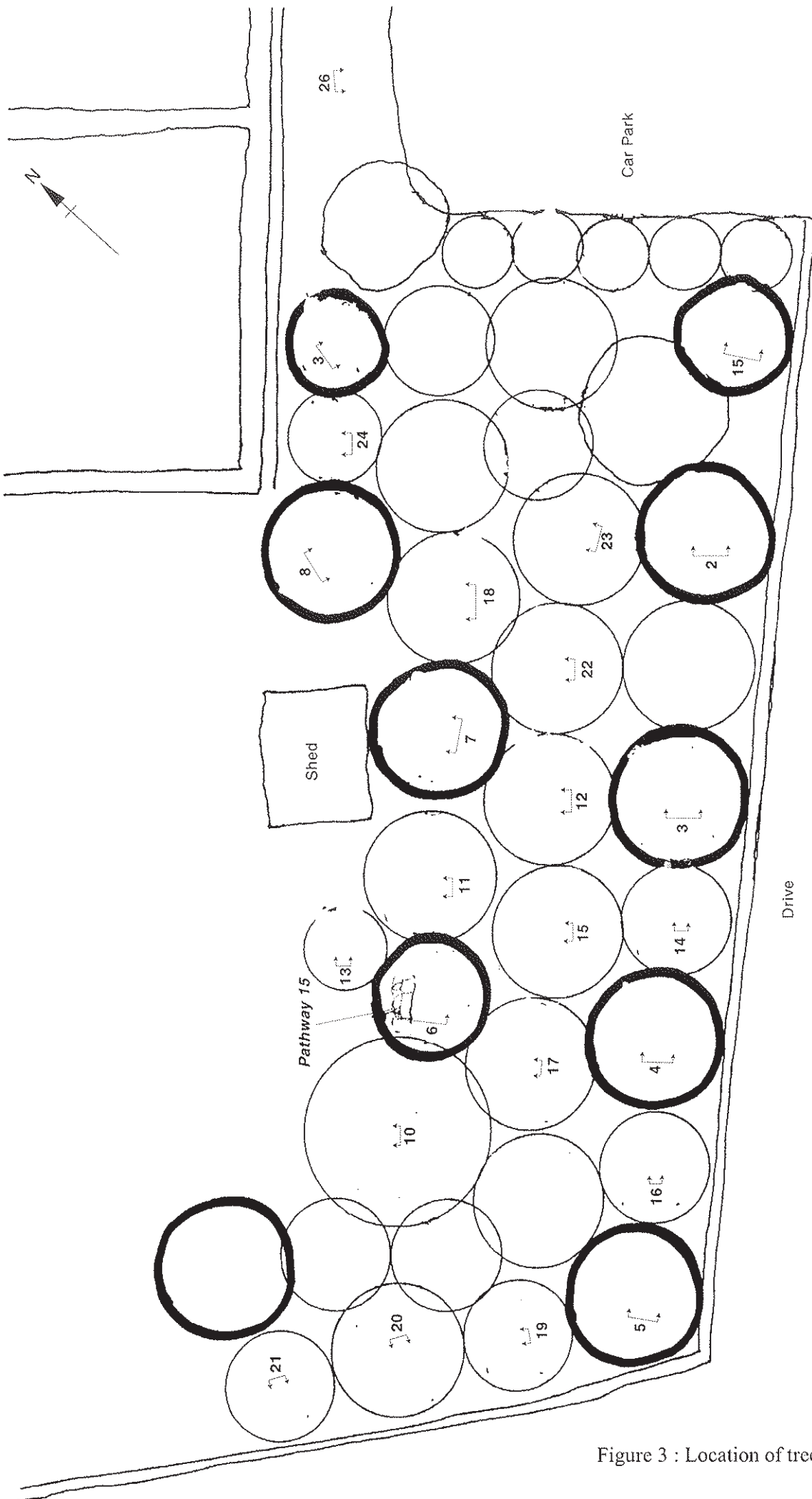


Figure 3 : Location of tree pits and sections

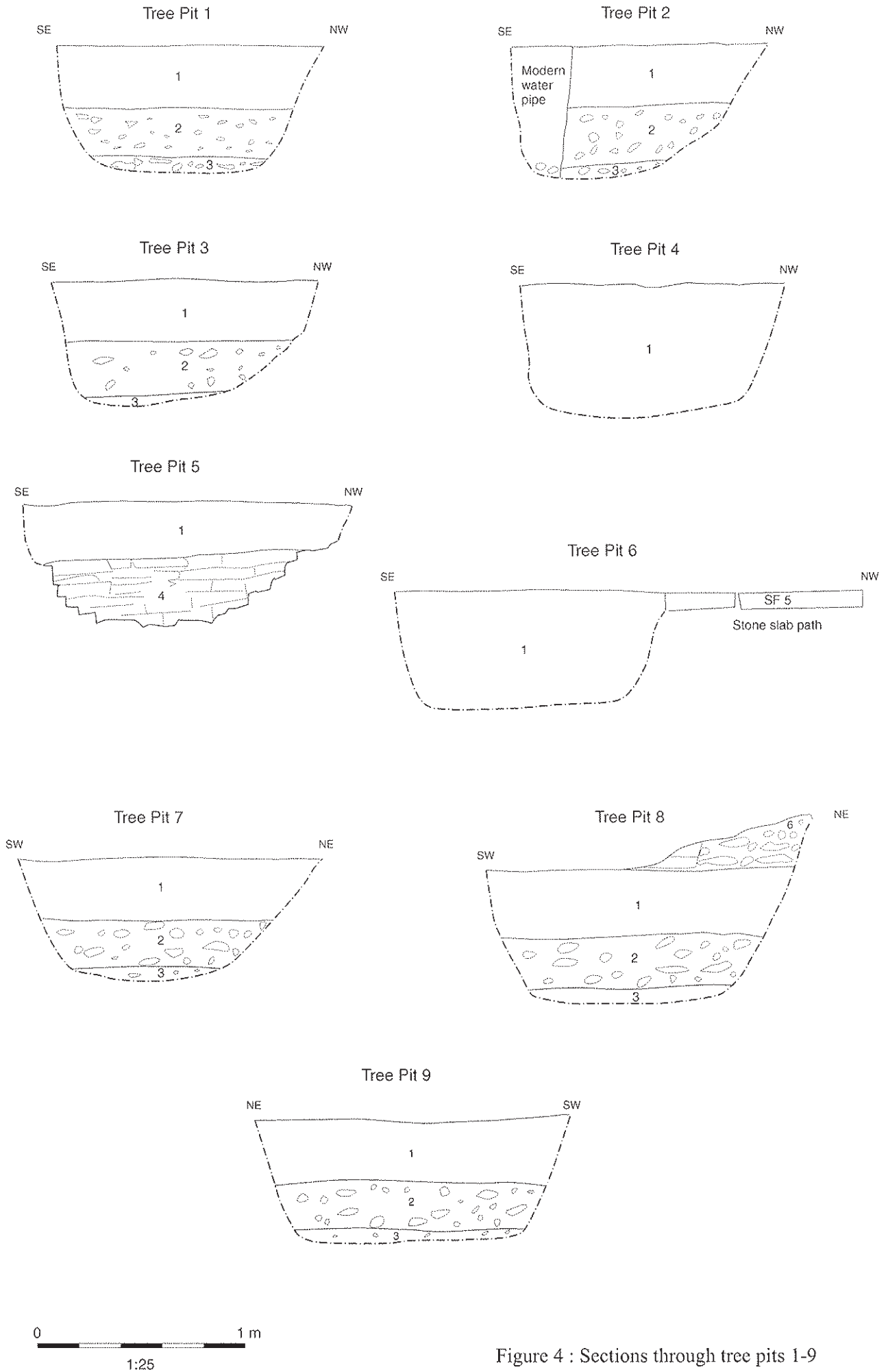


Figure 4 : Sections through tree pits 1-9

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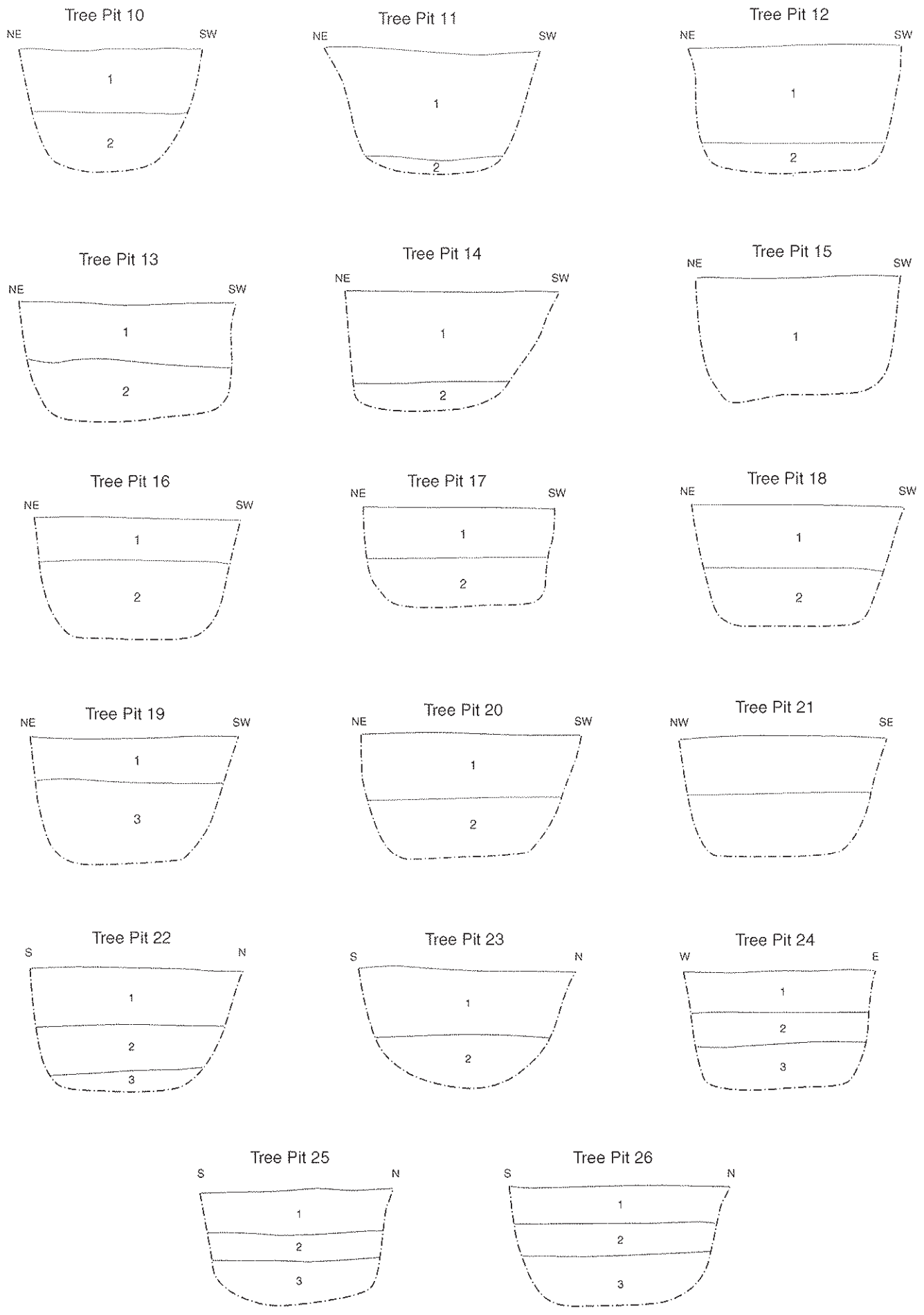
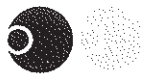


Figure 5 : Sections through tree pits 10 - 26



Oxford Archaeology

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800
f: (0044) 01865 793496
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk



Oxford Archaeology North

Storey Institute
Meeting House Lane
Lancaster LA1 1TF

t: (0044) 01524 541000
f: (0044) 01524 848606
e: lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk



Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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