

RESGC03

# St Giles Close Reading Berkshire



## Archaeological Evaluation Report



**Oxford Archaeology**

16th September 2003

**Client: Turley Associates**

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## St Giles Close, Reading, Berkshire

*ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*On 1<sup>st</sup> September 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at St Giles Close, Reading, West Berkshire on behalf of Turley Associates. The evaluation revealed the remains of extensive post-medieval cellars, backfilled with demolition debris. No further archaeological remains were encountered during this evaluation.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 On the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 2003 OA carried out a field evaluation at St. Giles Close, Reading, Berkshire on behalf of Turley Associates in respect of a planning application for redevelopment of the site. A brief was set by and a WSI (OA 2003) agreed with Elizabeth Rowe of the Babbie Group, representing Reading Borough Council. The site is situated immediately to the south of St Giles Close, and comprises a carpark and office block which fronts Crown Street (NGR: SU 7179 7290).

### 1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on a gentle slope running from south to north at approximately 45 m above OD. The underlying geology is river gravels. The development site was approximately 0.1 hectares in area.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 Historic Reading straddles the gap in a gravel ridge through which the River Kennet flows. With the supplanting of the road system based on Silchester, Reading became an important communications centre during the medieval period. The roads from Oxford to Southampton and from London to Bristol passed through or close to the town and, while the town does not lie on the banks of the River Thames, it was sufficiently near to the river to provide easy access to London, Wallingford and Oxford. The ease of access from the capital and the major provincial towns has ensured that Reading has retained an important place in the country's communications.

1.3.2 Reading is first documented by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in 870-1 AD when the Danes wintered there and repulsed the attacks of King Ethelred and his brother Alfred. Although the Danes wintered again in 1006, no further mention is made of the settlement until the later 11th century. A reference to Reading in Doomesday indicates that it had become a town by 1066. A royal borough separately mentioned, which included 29 *hagae*, a pasture called "portmansbrook" and land held for official guests, points to an urban community.

1.3.3 The post-Conquest history of Reading is dominated by the presence of the abbey and its effect on the town. Henry 1's foundation of the abbey in 1121 AD gave the town an increased impetus to urban development. Construction of a new bridge over the

Kennet by 1186 and the creation of another wide street, London Street, with burgage plots either side were part of this phase of urban expansion. London Street runs immediately to the east of the development.

- 1.3.4 The major industry for this period came to be cloth working, with its attendant trades, weaving and fulling. By the mid 13th century fulling mills along the Kennet are documented as well as the town wharf with its wool beam. By the 14th century Reading had become established as the major town in Berkshire, having long outstripped Wallingford. In the 15th and 16th centuries the population had probably tripled, and there was a corresponding increase in manufactories and commerce.
- 1.3.5 The town's prosperity was, however, severely dislocated during the Civil War, with alternate occupations by the Parliamentary and Royalist forces between October 1642 and July 1644. These occupations hastened the decline in the old industries of cloth and leather working and contributed to a reorientation of the town's economy. This reorientation was finally achieved with the completion of the Kennet and Avon canal, linking Reading with Bristol in 1810. The decline in the clothing industry was offset by the manufacture of gauze, silk and sailcloth, while brick and tile making and tanning had expanded considerably. The success of the town's economy is reflected in the virtual rebuilding of the town centre in the late 18th and early 19th century.
- 1.3.6 The site itself is situated on the south eastern extent of the medieval town of Reading, forming a bridge development between London street and Wood street lying within the towns civil war defences. To the north-west of the site is the 12th century Church of Saint Giles, while to the south-west are the preserved remains of a medieval tile kiln. During the post-medieval period and especially after 1945 this area has been the focus of much redevelopment and this will have affected the potential to find any archaeological remains.
- 1.3.7 The site itself has previously produced no archaeological evidence. There are no known sites with archaeological remains adjacent to the development site.

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area.
- 2.1.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present and in particular to establish the sequence of medieval and early post-medieval development in this part of Reading.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the investigation.

### 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Scope of fieldwork

3.1.1 The original evaluation plan considered the area of the entire carpark and proposed three evaluation trenches, one of 30 m length and two of 20 m representing a 10% sampling of the area. Following late clarification of the actual development area boundary, (the development only comprised of just over half of the parking area) the evaluation was therefore revised to two 30 m trenches (Fig.2).

3.1.2 The trenches were aligned approximately E-W, running roughly parallel to each other and to St Giles Close.

3.1.3 The car park surfaces and existing overburden were then removed under close archaeological supervision by a mechanical excavator (JCB) fitted with a toothless bucket.

3.1.4 It was clear while excavating that the instability of the overburden was such that the excavation was limited to a depth of 1.2 m, at which point no natural deposits had been reached. Sondages were therefore excavated at the eastern end of both trenches in order to try and establish the depth of overburden. This was abandoned at a depth of 2.2 m below ground level, at which point only modern made ground was still evident.

#### 3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

3.2.1 Due to the instability of the trench sides it was deemed unsafe to enter the trenches. Recording was therefore done from ground level. The absence of archaeological features requiring cleaning and sampling meant that this did not materially effect the results.

3.2.2 Recording procedures followed the methods laid out in the OA Fieldwork Manual ((OA 1992, Ed. D.Wilkinson) and the Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2003).

#### 3.3 Finds

3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and collated by context. All the finds recovered were of 20<sup>th</sup> century date and were evaluated on site but not retained.

#### 3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

3.4.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during this evaluation.

#### 3.5 Presentation of results

3.5.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, with the stratigraphic accounts of the trenches described, followed by an overall discussion and interpretation.

## 4 RESULTS: GENERAL

### 4.1 Soils and ground conditions

- 4.1.1 The site was located on open gently sloping ground, comprising tarmac surfaces overlying a thick deposit of clearly defined demolition debris and associated truncated cellar walls. The water table was not encountered in either of the two trenches, nor was natural gravel.

## 5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 5.1 Description of deposits

- 5.1.1 The similarity of the stratigraphy within both trenches is such that the description will apply equally, with exceptions noted by context number.
- 5.1.2 The trenches were excavated to the maximum of 1.2 m depth considered safe, with the sondages reaching a maximum depth of 2.2 m below ground level.
- 5.1.3 The bases of the trenches cut between 0.6 m to 0.8 m into loose rubble layers (104, 105 and 203) representing demolition debris used to backfill post-medieval cellars (Figs. 3 and 4). An example of these cellar walls, 207 with its associated construction cut 208, and backfills of the cut 205 and 206 was exposed and recorded in Trench 2 (Fig 4). Sealing these contexts were post-demolition levelling layers 106, 107, 201, 202 and 204 all relating to preparation of the site for the present day development. Overlying these layers is the existing car park surface and its associated gravel base 101, 102 and 200.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

### 6.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 6.1.1 The trial trenching sample of 10% gave a good representation of the site as a whole and although it was impossible to fully expose the stratigraphy of the site the depth of the modern disturbances, observed at over 2.2 m, make it unlikely that any historic horizons have survived. Conditions during the evaluation were dry and visibility was good.

### 6.2 Overall interpretation

- 6.2.1 Both trenches produced extensive post-medieval cellars consistent with terraced back to back houses. These cellars had been backfilled with building rubble during their demolition. It was not possible to determine the depth or extent of the cellars during the evaluation, though comparison with other house cellars in the vicinity may give an accurate idea.
- 6.2.2 It is not clear whether the demolition of these houses is attributable to WW II bombing raids or simply development. The extent and depth of the cellar excavations give a low probability of archaeological remains surviving below them.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1						
	101	Layer	0.0m - 0.1m	Modern tarmac car park surface.	-	C 20th
	102	Layer	0.1 m - 0.2 m	Base for modern car park surface	-	C 20th
	103	Layer	0.2 m - 0.3 m	Crushed concrete, levelling layer	-	C 20th
	104	Layer	0.3 m - 0.7 m	Demolition debris	Brick, tile, wood, iron, plastic	C 20th
	105	Layer	0.7 m - 2.2 m	Demolition debris	Brick, tile, wood, iron	C 20th
	106	Layer	0.2 m - 0.3 m	Crushed concrete	Brick, tile	C 20th
	107	Layer	0.2 m - 0.28 m	Redeposited soils	-	C 20th
002						
	200	Layer	0.0 m - 0.16 m	Gravel base and modern tarmac car park surface	-	C 20th
	201	Layer	0.16 m - 0.4 m	Finely crushed brick, levelling layer	Brick	C 20th
	202	Layer	0.16 m - 0.4m	Crushed concrete, levelling layer	-	C 20th
	203	Layer	0.4 m - 2.2 m	Demolition debris	Brick, tile, wood, iron, plastic	C 20th
	204	Layer	0.4 m - 0.6 m	Redeposited soils	Brick, tile	C 20th
	205	Fill	0.5 m - 0.8 m	Backfill of construction cut for cellar	Brick, tile	C 19-20th
	206	Fill	0.8 m - 1.2 m	Backfill of construction cut for cellar	-	C 19-20th
	207	Wall	0.6 m - 1.2 m	Cellar wall	-	C 19-20th
	208	Cut	0.6 m - 1.2 m	Construction cut for cellar	-	C 19-20th



## APPENDIX 2 REFERENCES

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)

OA 2003 *St Giles Close, Reading, Berkshire; Written Scheme of Investigation*

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** St Giles Close, Reading

**Site code:** RESGC 03

**Grid reference:** SU 7179 7290

**Type of evaluation:** 2 x 30 m trenches

**Date and duration of project:** 1<sup>st</sup> September 2003, 2 days

**Area of site:** 0.1 hectare

**Summary of results:** The evaluation found extensive C19th/20th cellar excavations throughout the site, no evidence of earlier archaeology was encountered

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the appropriate museum in due course.

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Figure 1: Site location

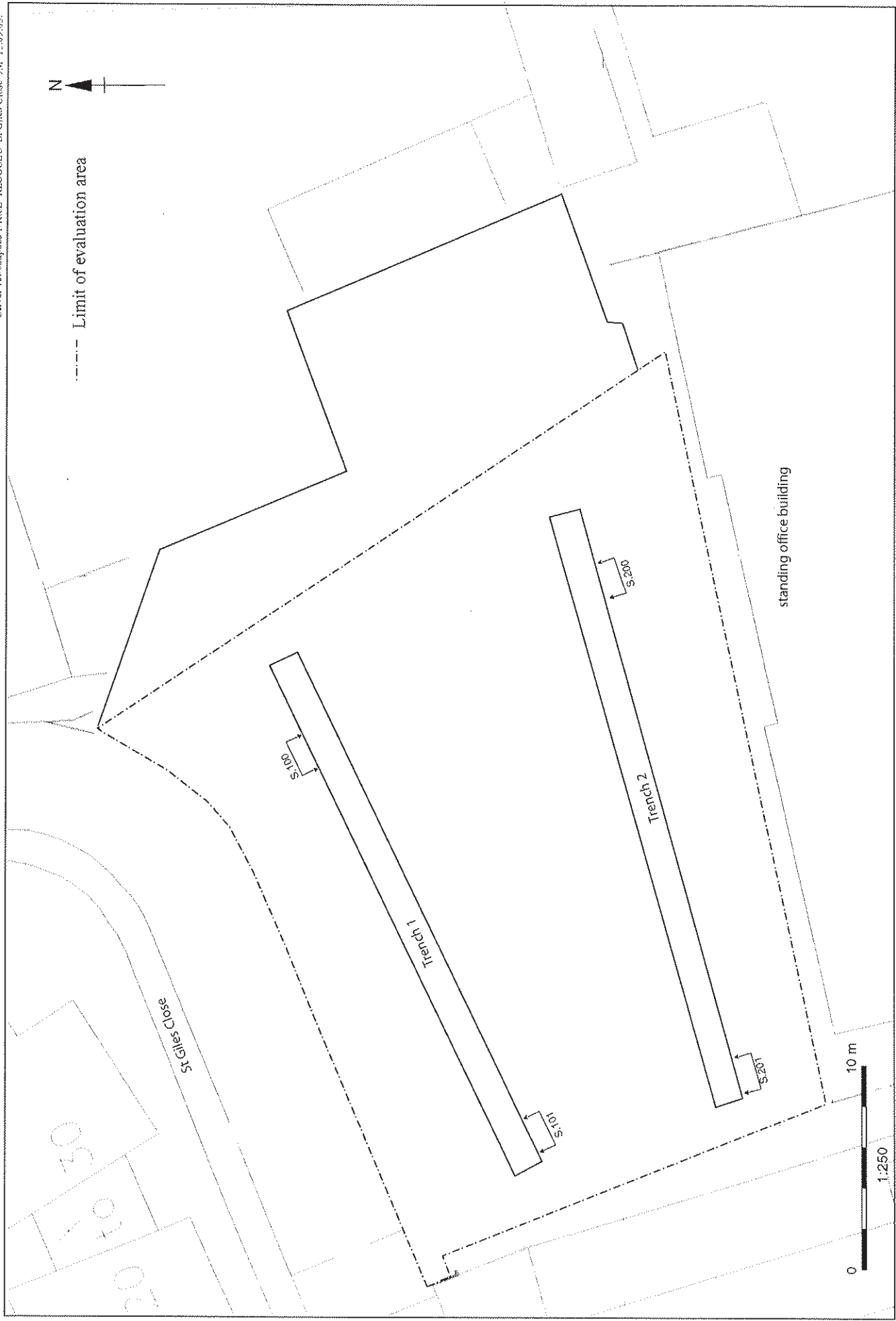
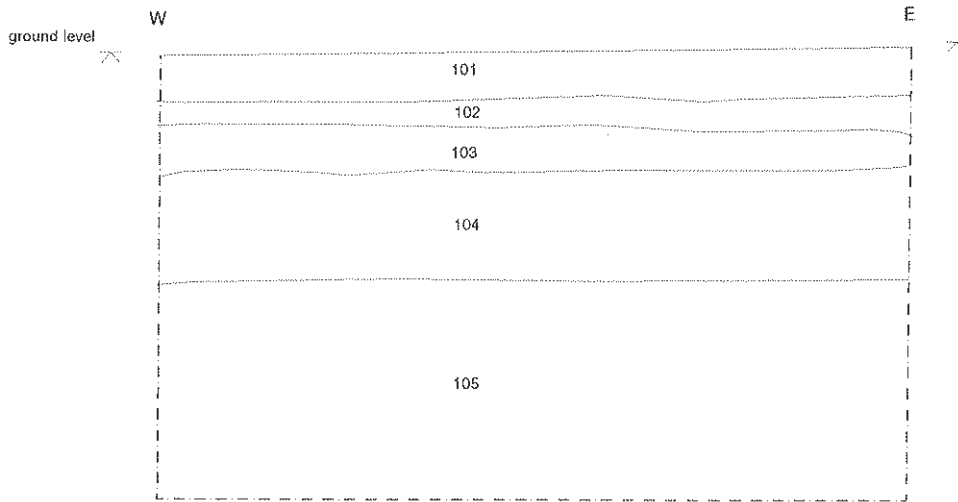


Figure 2: Trench location plan

### Section 100



### Section 101

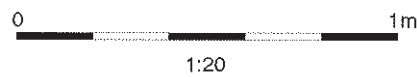
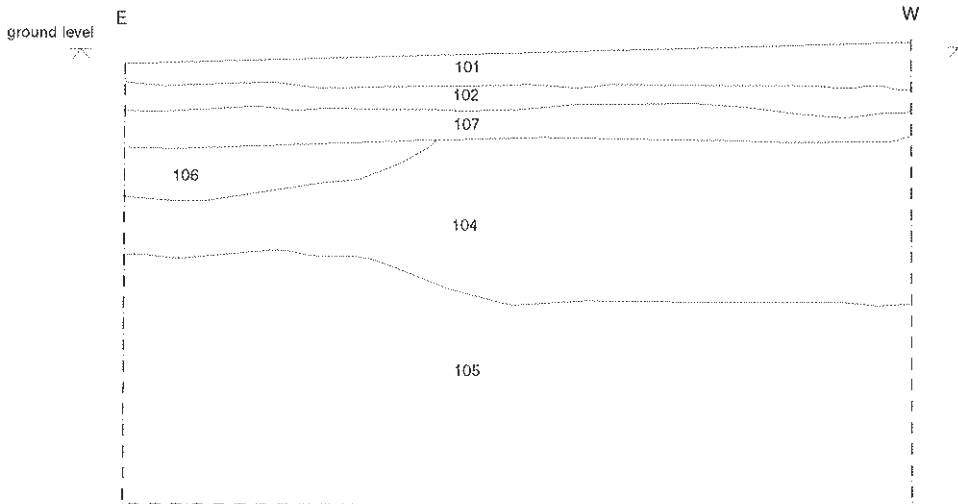
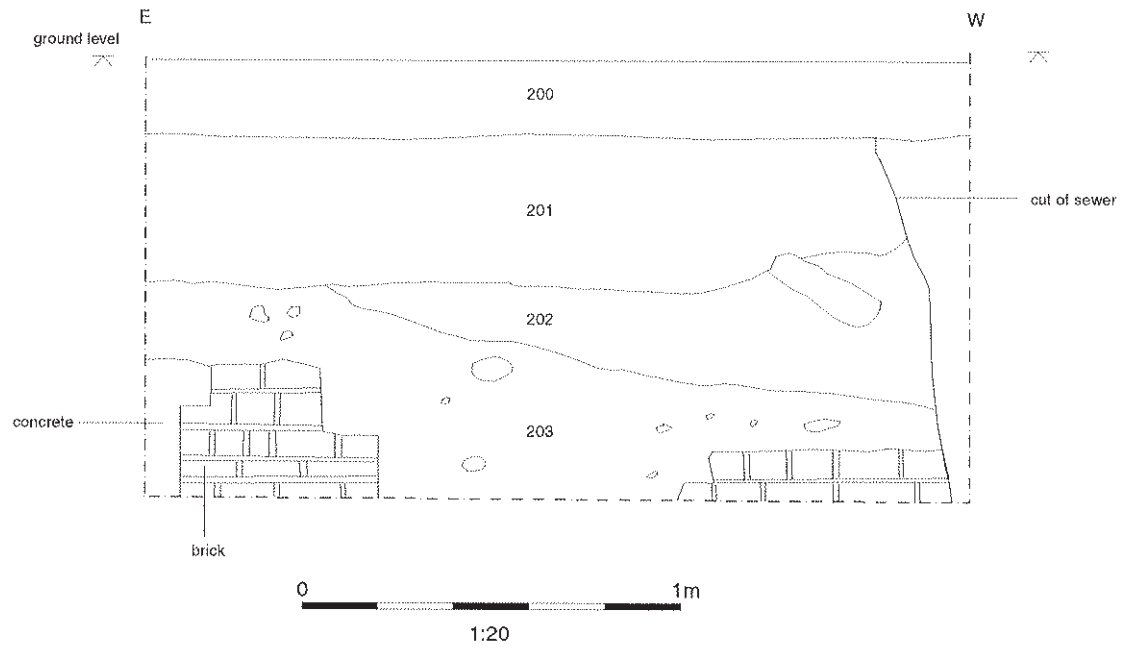


Figure 3: Trench 1, sections

### Section 200



### Section 201

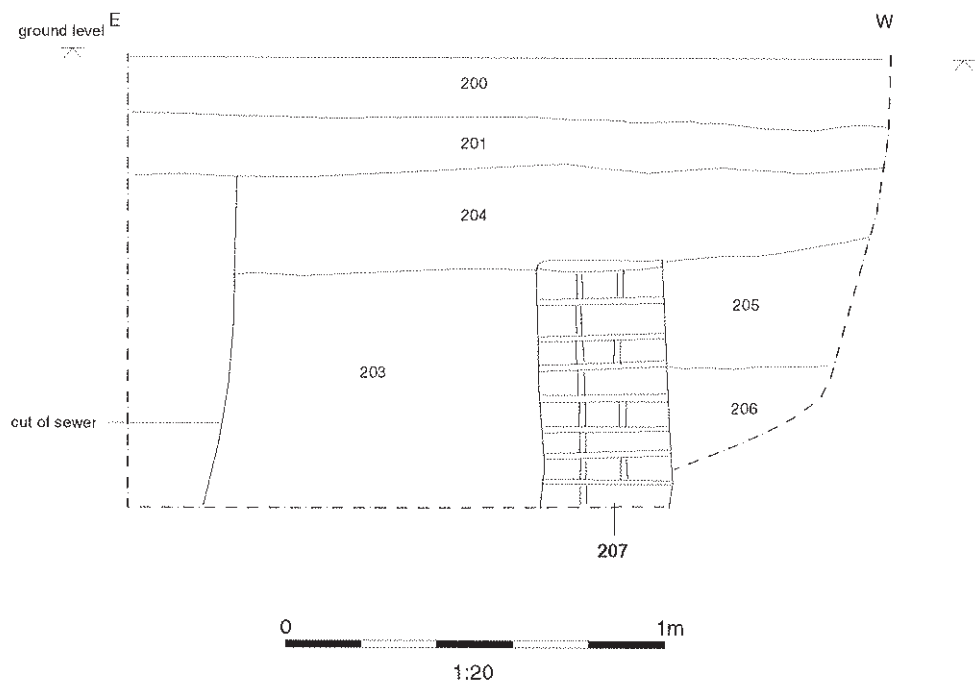


Figure 4: Trench 2, sections



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