

Redlane Court, Reading Berkshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

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**Redlane Court,
Reading, Berkshire*****ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*****CONTENTS**

Summary.....	1
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Scope of work.....	1
1.2 Location, geology and topography	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background	1
2 Project Aims and Methodology.....	3
2.1 Aims	3
2.2 Methodology.....	3
3 Results	3
3.1 Description of deposits (<i>Fig. 4, Sections</i>)	3
3.2 Finds	4
3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains	4
4 Discussion and Conclusions	4
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory	5
Appendix 2 References	5
Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details.....	5

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 Site location
Fig. 2 Plan of watching brief area
Fig. 3 Location of sections
Fig. 4 Sections 1-4

SUMMARY

Between the 4th October 2004 and 2nd November 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Redlane Court, Reading, Berkshire (NGR: SU 7255 7245). The work was commissioned by ROK in advance of construction of key worker housing. The watching brief revealed no evidence for occupation or activity on the site prior to modern landscaping and residential construction within the development area.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Between the 4th October 2004 and 2nd November 2004, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Redlane Court, Reading, Berkshire (NGR: SU 7255 7245)(Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by ROK on behalf of the Western Challenge Housing Association, in respect of a planning application for construction of key worker housing (Planning Application No. 003/01150/FUL).

1.1.2 A project brief (BSMR 2004) was set by, and a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2004), was agreed with Mike Lang-Hall of the Berkshire Sites and Monuments Record.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 Redlane Court is located in the central-east side of the city and is situated within the area known locally as the Mount, c 200 m to the south-east of the University Hospital. The development site is bounded by to the west by gardens, to the east and south by private roads and to the north by residential buildings. Prior to the start of construction three terraced houses which were situated at the southern end of the site were demolished (Fig. 2).

1.2.2 The site slopes significantly from approximately 58 m OD at the southern end down to 54 m at its northern extent. The development is 480 m² in area. The underlying geology is Middle Chalk bedrock and Reading Beds (Palaeogene) with overlying pebble gravel (Institute of British Geological Sciences Ed. 1979, Sheet 268).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA 2004) and is reproduced below.

1.3.2 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, although 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.

- 1.3.3 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 here until the later 11th century. A reference to Reading in Domesday 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.
- 1.3.4 The post-Conquest history of Reading is dominated by the presence of the abbey and its effect on the town. Henry I'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.
- 1.3.5 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.
- 1.3.6 The town's prosperity was, however, severely dislocated during the Civil War, with the 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, whilst the 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 centuries.
- 1.3.7 The site is in an area of potential for encountering prehistoric remains, located away from the medieval core of the city. The site is c 1 km to the south-east of Reading Abbey (Monument Number 19019) and the earthworks of the Civil War Defenses of Reading Town.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To preserve by record any archaeological remains (if present) that the works may remove or damage within the area of site being investigated.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The works monitored consisted of general ground reduction over the entire site, construction of a terrace as part of the ground reduction, excavation of foundation trenches and excavation of service trenches. These works were done by a combination of 18 ton and 9 ton tracked excavators fitted with 1.8 m wide toothless grading buckets and 0.6 m wide toothed buckets as required. Monitoring was done on the basis of regular site visits during the course of these works.
- 2.2.2 A plan of the extent of the works and the location of the sections was drawn at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 3) while the sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All features and the sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (OAU 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits (*Fig. 4, Sections*)

- 3.1.1 All the groundworks monitored exposed an orange-brown natural clay (4) at between 1.2 m and 0.6 m below ground level. Within the southern end of the site (Sections 1 and 2) this was overlaid by a layer of yellow-brown silty clay (3) 0.5 m in depth, which may represent an alluvial deposit.
- 3.1.2 In section 1 this possible alluvial deposit was overlaid by a 0.2 m thick layer of a grey brown clay silt (2), a probable buried soil relating to the 19th century landscaping of the site. This layer, and layer 3 within section 2 was sealed by a dark grey clay loam (1), between 0.2 m and 0.6 m in depth. This represents a modern worked soil associated with the demolished terraced houses at the southern extent of the site.
- 3.1.3 Lying directly over the natural clay (4) in sections 3 and 4, and sealing layer 1 in section 2 was a 0.25 m thick layer of made ground (5). Composed of a grey silt clay this contained many brick and mortar fragments, representing a mixture of worked soil and construction debris. In sections 3 and 4 this was sealed by a 0.2 m layer of demolition debris (6), while a 0.15 m deep layer of modern crushed brick hardcore (7), overlaid deposit 6 as shown in section 4.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Fragments of pottery, brick and glass of late post-medieval date were recovered from the modern worked topsoil (1), and were evaluated on site but were not retained. A fragment of animal bone and fragments of brick were recovered from layer 5, but were likely to be residual remains resulting from construction in the 19th century.

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 Deposits exposed during the watching brief suggest that there had been little or no archaeological activity within the development area prior to landscaping of the area, probably during the 19th century and the construction of the now demolished terraced houses at the southern end of the site.
- 4.1.2 There is a possibility that the 19th century landscaping may have destroyed earlier archaeological remains, however the lack of residual finds dating to before the 19th century would seem to confirm that this is due to the absence of activity rather than its truncation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.56 m	Modern worked garden soil	-	C20th
2	Layer	0.2 m	Subsoil / earlier worked soil	-	-
3	Layer	0.5 m	Alluvial deposit	-	-
4	Layer	> 0.5 m	Natural clay	-	-
5	Layer	0.3 m	Made ground	Brick, Bone	C19th
6	Layer	0.2 m	Demolition debris	Brick	C20th
7	Layer	0.15 m	Crushed brick, hard standing	Brick	C20th

APPENDIX 2 REFERENCES

BSMR, 2004 *Redlane Court, Addington Road, Reading: Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief*

IFA, 1992 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

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

OA, 2004 *Redlane Court, Reading, Berkshire : Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Redlane Court, Reading, Berkshire

Site code: RERC 04

Grid reference: SU 7255 7245

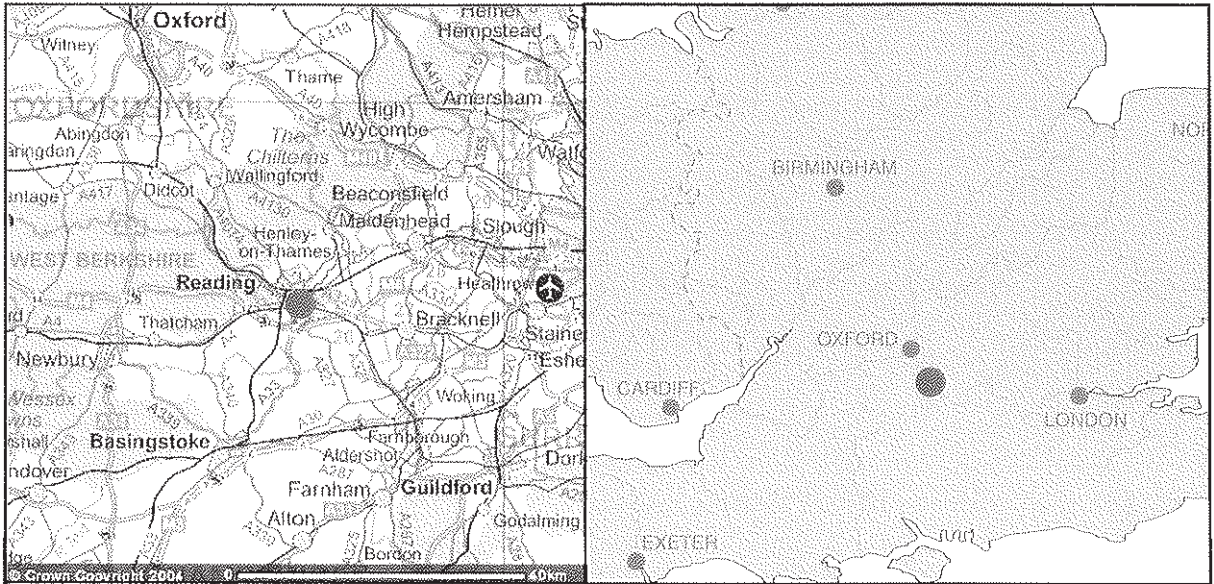
Type of watching brief: Monitoring of groundworks for new dwellings.

Date and duration of project: 4.10.04 to 02.11.04, 8 site visits

Area of site: 480 m²

Summary of results: Deposits relating to the modern residences and landscaping within the development area. No evidence for earlier archaeological activity encountered.

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



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

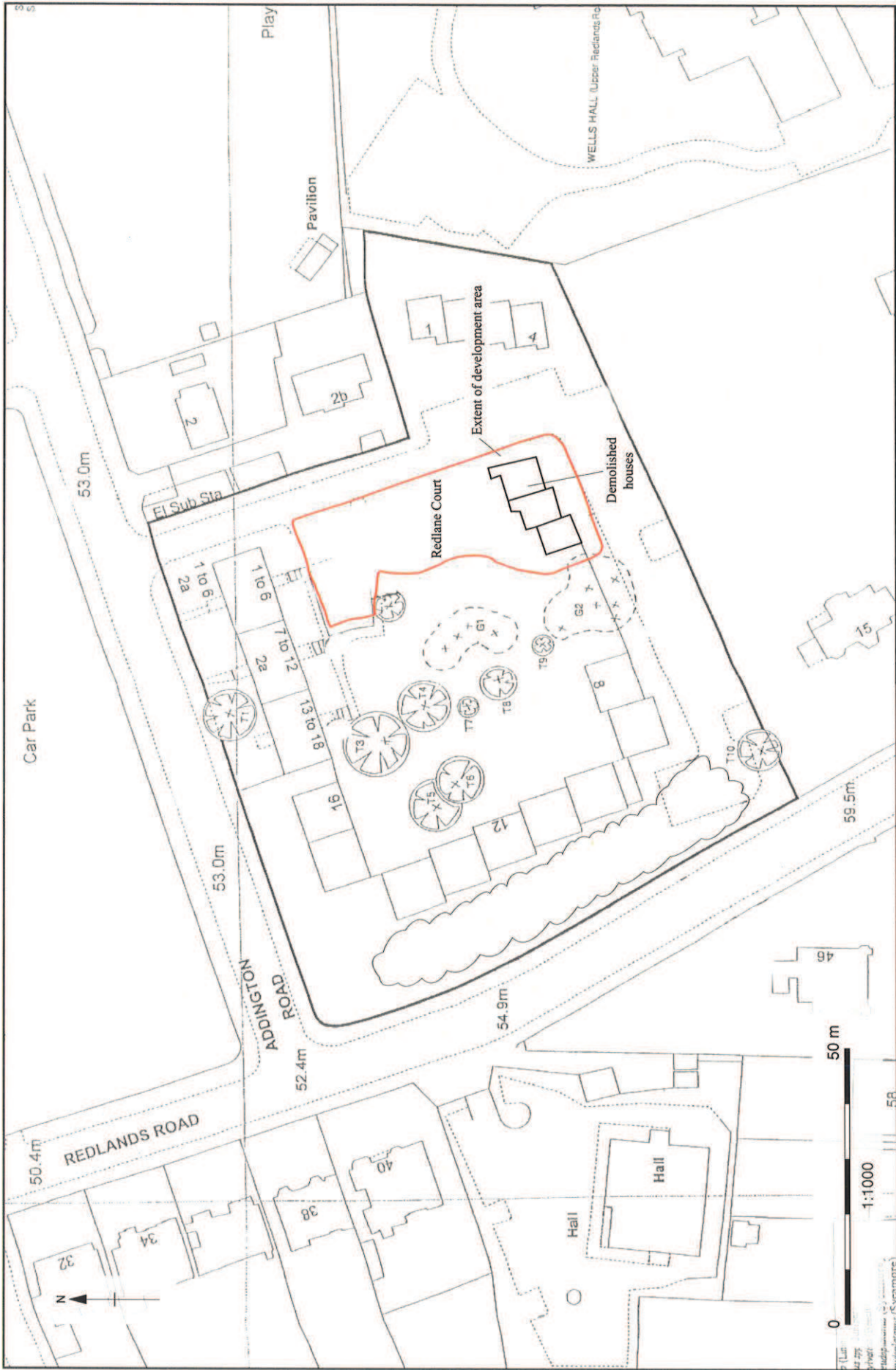


Figure 2: Plan of watching brief area

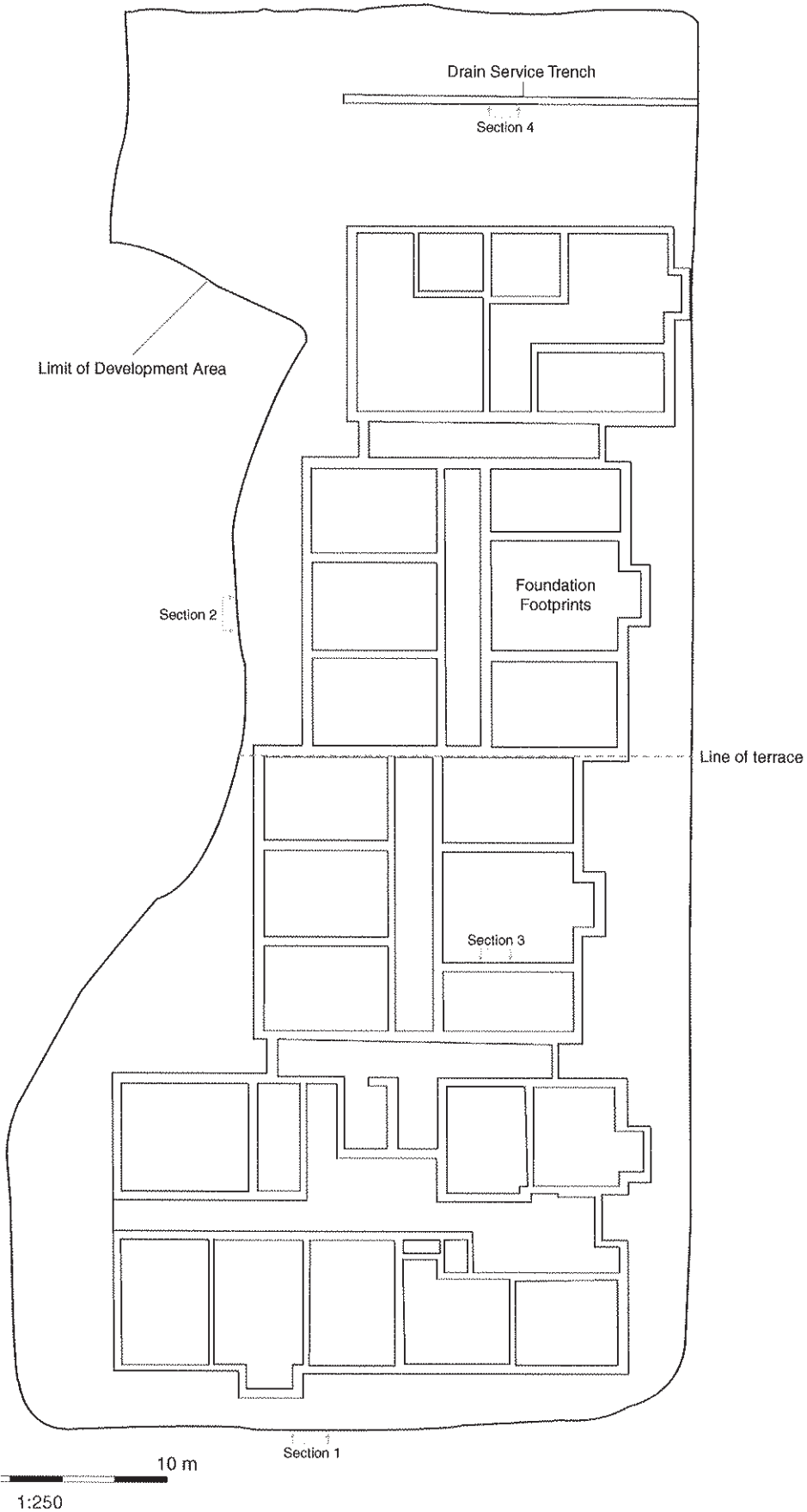


Figure 3: Location of sections

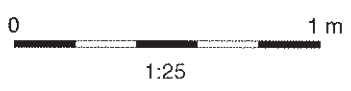
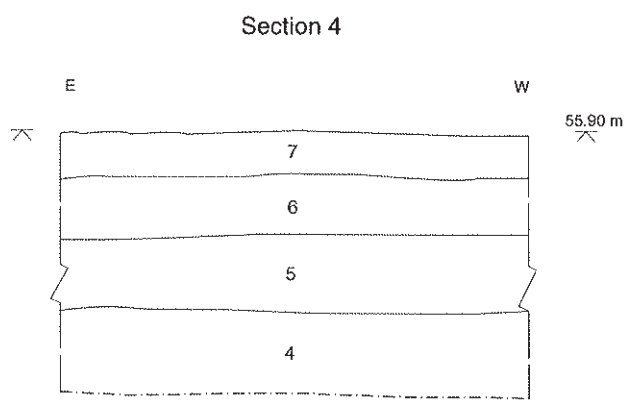
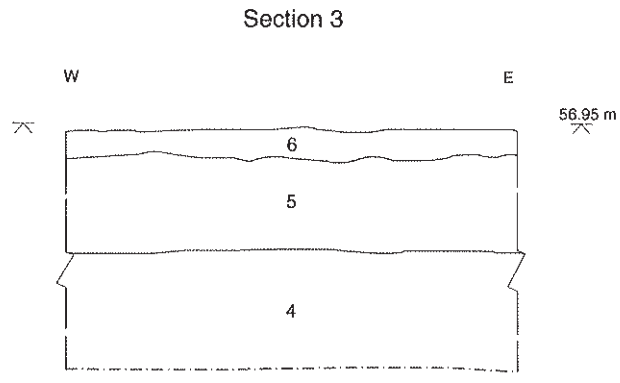
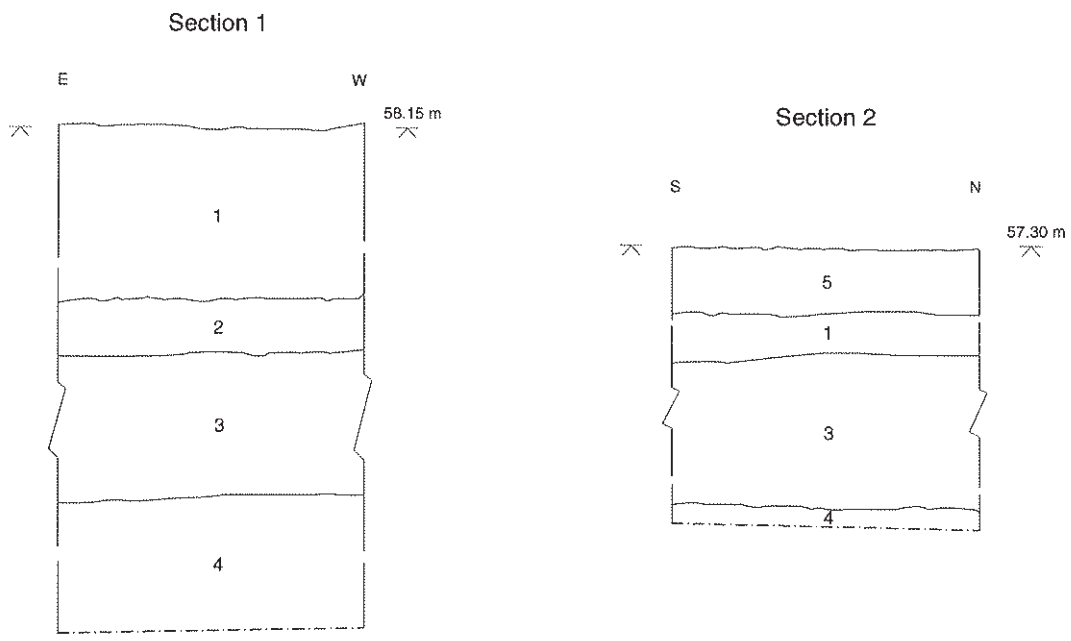


Figure 4: Sections 1- 4



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