

All Saints Church Soulbury Buckinghamshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

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ALL SAINTS CHURCH, SOULBURY, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

NGR SP 8820 2705

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SUMMARY

In February 2003, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a new service trench at All Saints Church, Soulbury, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 8820 2705). The watching brief revealed made ground deposits, one of which contained concentrations of brick rubble, tile and masonry possibly associated with the 1863 renovation of the 14th-century chancel.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Aylesbury Vale District Council for the installation of a new WC and kitchen facilities inside All Saints Church, Soulbury, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 8820 2705). A programme of archaeological monitoring was requested by Diocesan Archaeological Advisor, Julian Munby on behalf of the Diocese, and also by Buckinghamshire County Council Archaeological Service, acting on behalf of the Planning Authority.

1.2 Geology and Topography

- 1.2.1 The village is in the ancient parish of Soulbury in north Buckinghamshire and has developed on an area of high ground lying at *c* 115 m above OD. Quaternary drift deposits cover the whole study area. These can be divided between an area of glacial sands and gravels, running east-west across the centre of the study area and sediments of Till, located in the northern third and along the south-western edge of the study area. The study area falls between two tributaries of the River Ouzel, which run roughly north-east/south-west. The watercourse that circles the south and east of the study area lies only 100 m from the study area boundary. The geology of the area produces a well-drained location, with fertile soils (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 Numerous earthworks are visible in the vicinity of the church (Fig. 2) and probably represent the remains of houses, crofts and closes of the medieval village. The continuation of Church Lane shown on the 1769 Estate Map is also visible as a field boundary with associated earthworks.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 A range of fieldwork was carried out in August 1981 as part of the wide-ranging survey of the parish of Soulbury (P.C. Lowther, 1981). This identified a number of earthworks, within the vicinity of All Saints Church. The earliest parts of the church are the nave (originally aisleless), chancel and chancel arch – all dating to the early 14th century. It has been subject to numerous later alterations and additions, including a substantial restoration in 1863, which included the restoration of the chancel.

- 1.3.2 In addition, in April 1999, Oxford Archaeological Unit (now Oxford Archaeology) carried out a watching brief at All Saints Church. This recorded the presence of a foundation pad under the church, assumed contemporary with the construction of the church in the early 14th century. Also a desk based assessment was carried out in 2002 by Oxford Archaeology (OA).
- 1.3.3 The favourable location close to the River Ouzel and two of its tributaries suggest that the area would have attracted early human activity/settlement, exploiting a predictable source of water, food, transport, communication and organic materials. Furthermore, the presence of glacial sands and gravels and Till would have provided fertile and well-drained soils conducive to early farming activities. However, unlike much of the neighbouring area, at this time virtually no physical evidence exists for prehistoric activity in the parish of Soulbury.
- 1.3.4 While no evidence of Roman activity is recorded within the study area, Roman settlement is well attested in the vicinity. Roman material has been uncovered close to Three Locks, c. 1.5 km to the north-east of the study area, while Stewkley Road, which runs north-eastwards c. 50 m to the north-west of the study area is believed to be Roman. In addition, Watling Street Roman road forms part of the boundary of the parish.
- 1.3.5 There are no finds from within the study area dating to the early medieval period. However, Domesday lists four late Saxon estates as having been present within the parish of Soulbury. These settlements are no doubt the descendants of a long-established, pre-conquest pattern of settlement. The settlement of Soulbury itself is recorded as *Soleberie*. This is derived from the Old English words *sulh* and *burg*. The word *burg* indicates a fortified place or fort, while the word *sulh* could represent either a person's name (Sula's burh) or a gully or narrow valley (burg by a sulh). However, the fact that a person's name is not recorded independently and the topography of the local area do not particularly reinforce either meaning.
- 1.3.6 It is from the later medieval period that archaeological and documentary evidence allows us to build a picture of human activity within the study area. The history of the settlement at Soulbury is rather blurred. Of all the settlement sites in the parish, only Soulbury village, which survived as the main settlement with the parish church, seems to lack obvious manorial connections, with no known Manor House within Soulbury village. However, the location of All Saints Church, within a roughly lozenge-shaped area, defined by roads, is reminiscent of other churches founded within the precinct of a manor house (Lowther, 1981).
- 1.3.7 Whatever the early history of the Manor of Soulbury the later history of this area descends with the adjacent manor of Liscombe. There is a reference to Ralf Gibwin holding lands 'in Soulbury and Liscombe' in 1192, while John Penver is described as lord of 'Soulbury and Liscombe' in the 1280's. By 1304 Robert Lovett is Lord of Liscombe and it is known that this family had been acquiring small parcels of land in Soulbury since at least 1297. Therefore, it appears more likely that Soulbury was originally a separate manor, which was slowly acquired, governed alongside

Liscombe and eventually amalgamated into this manor, opposed to it originally being the main manor that later changed names to Liscombe. The manor of Liscombe was still held by the Lovett family until 1907, when it was sold.

- 1.3.8 The post-medieval development of Soulbury is clearer due to the presence of maps covering the area. However, as Lowther (1981) points out, early maps and ridge and furrow plots indicate that practically all the land in the parish was at some time under cultivation. Furthermore, the 20th century settlement pattern of Soulbury Manor is, in essence, the same as in 1769 and probably earlier. This suggests that there has been no development within the area of the church during the post-medieval period and that the likely hood of finding archaeology dating to this period is low.
- 1.3.9 The site lies within the curtilage of the 14th century church of All Saints which, as mentioned possibly lies within the precinct of an, as yet unknown, undiscovered Manor house. In addition, it appears from the presence of earthworks, which are suggested to represent the buried remains of medieval houses (Fig. 2), that this location is close to what would have been the centre of the medieval settlement.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To preserve by record any archaeological remains (if present), which the works would remove or damage within the development area.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief monitored the excavation of the new service trench from an existing manhole in Church Lane to the vestry (Fig. 3).
- 2.2.2 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established OA practice (OA Field Manual, 1992). A context inventory can be found in Appendix 1.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The service trench measured approximately 50 m in total and ran northeast from an existing manhole in Church Lane. It varied in depth from c 1.1 m at the southwestern end and c 0.5 m to the northeast. The south western 10 m of the trench were excavated through made ground deposits associated with the existing road and around existing services, including a gas main. To the north of Church Lane, the ground slopes steeply up to an area of open ground to the south west of the church. The trench was excavated across this 'plateau' and revealed the following stratigraphic sequence (Fig. 3).

3.1.2 The natural of Till sediments (1) was observed in section c 13 m from the south-western end of the trench, at a depth of c 1m below ground level (Fig. 4, Section 1) and appeared to be sloping from north to south at approximately 20°. This was overlain by a possible colluvial deposit (2) consisting of a mid orange brown sandy silt. At approximately 12.5 m from the south-western end of the trench, the colluvium appeared to be overlain by a deposit of made ground (3) of mixed orange brown sandy clay and mid greenish brown silty clay with brick rubble, tile, masonry and charcoal lenses throughout (Fig. 4, Section 1). At 23.5 m from the southwest end of the trench, this was overlain by a series of 'garden soils' consisting of a mid grey silty loam (4), a mid greenish grey clay silt (5), and a mid-light orangey brown clayey silt (6). The upper 0.2 m of deposit 6 was disturbed within 5-6 m of the vestry wall and contained brick rubble and masonry together with modern domestic refuse (aluminium cans etc) (Fig. 4, Section 2).

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 No significant finds were recovered in the course of the site works; modern finds were not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The interpretation of the deposits observed during the watching brief can only be provisional given the limited extent of the service trench. It is possible that the made ground deposit (3) relates to the refurbishment of the church (particularly the renovation of the chancel) in 1863, given the large quantity of building material observed. The tile recovered appeared similar to the current roof of the chancel.

4.1.2 It is feasible that this material was used to level the gradual slope still extant to the east, and was then overlain by garden soil (4, 5, and 6), perhaps as an intended southern and western expansion of the graveyard.

4.1.3 No evidence of structural remains associated with the medieval settlement was revealed although it is possible that archaeological features may survive beneath the made ground and below the level of impact of the service trenches.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1	Layer		Natural geology	
2	Layer	0.8m	colluvium	
3	Deposit	0.85m	Made ground / construction debris	Tile/brick/masonry/ pottery
4	Deposit	0.65m	'garden' soil	CBM
5	Deposit	0.4m+	'garden' soil	Bone/CBM
6	Deposit	0.4m+	Disturbed 'garden' soil	Brick/masonry

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OAU, 1999 *All Saints Church, Soulbury, Buckinghamshire Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

OA, 2002 *Investigation of a 750 m study area surrounding proposed developments at All Saints Church, Soulbury, Buckinghamshire.*

OA, 1992, *Fieldwork Manual* (1st edition, ed. D Wilkinson)

OA, 2002, *All Saints Church, Soulbury, Buckinghamshire, Written Scheme of Investigation*

Pamela C. Lowther, 1981, *Parish Survey of Soulbury, Buckinghamshire for the County Museum, Aylesbury.*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: All Saints Church, Soulbury, Buckinghamshire

Site code: SOASC02

Grid reference: SP 8820 2705

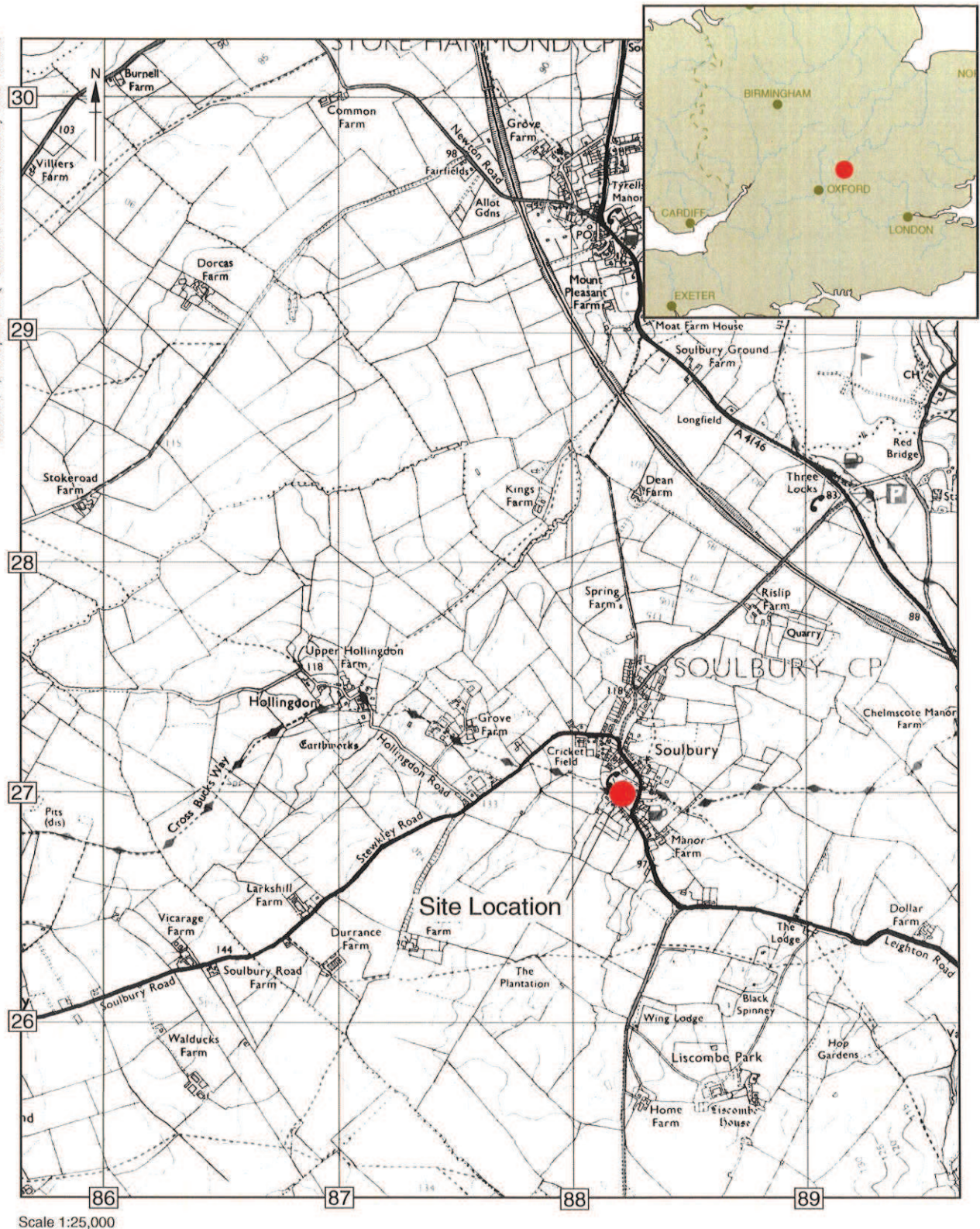
Type of watching brief: Service Trench

Date and duration of project: One site visit on the 6th February 2003.

Area of site: 50 m long and 0.5 m wide.

Summary of results: ?19th century made ground deposits

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckingham County museum, Technical centre, Tring Rd, Halton, Aylesbury, Buckingham HP22 5PJ in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM 2002.47.



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Figure 1: Site location



Figure 2: Earthworks in the vicinity of All Saints Church on plan based on the Ordnance Survey 25" Map of 1824

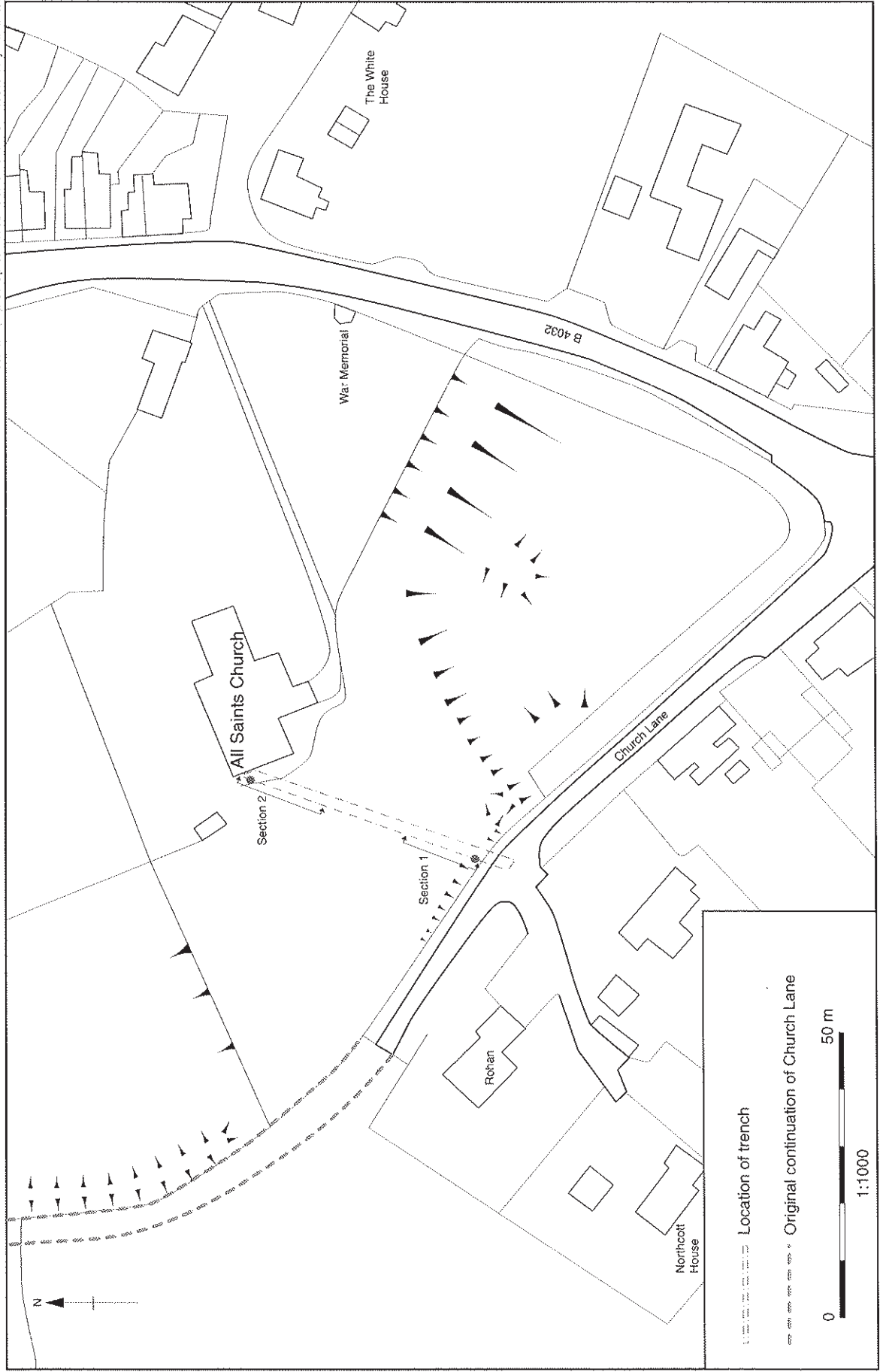


Figure 3: Site Plan

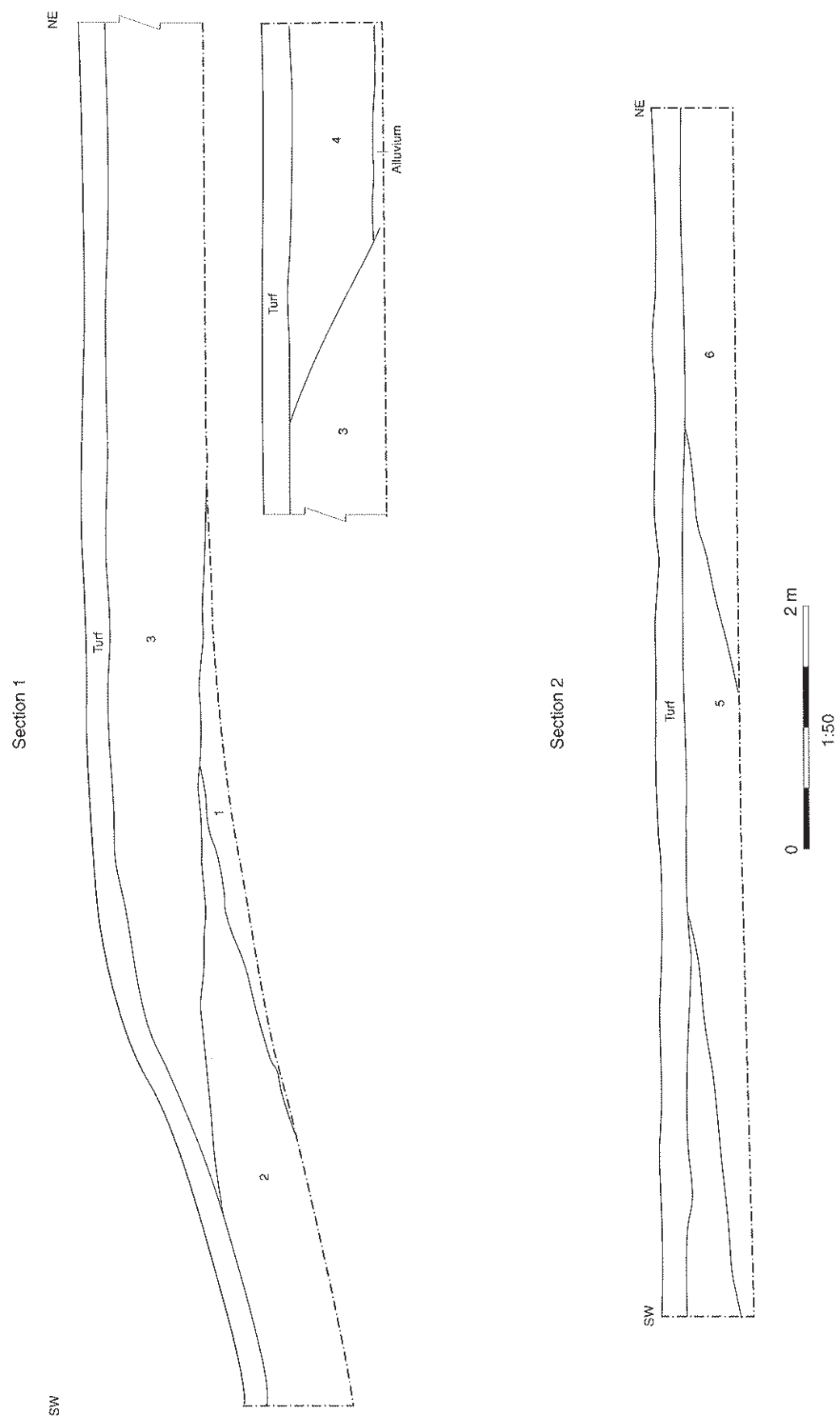

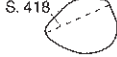









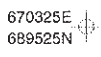


Figure 4: Sections 1 and 2

	Section line and number
	Interior section line and number
	Limit of excavation
	Sondage / Interior limit of excavation
	Fill line and number
	Cut line and number
	Structure number
	Unclear boundary
	Stones
	Hachures indicate inclination of slope inside excavated feature
	Levels
	Grid point



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