

Headington School Library Extension Oxford



Archaeological Watching Brief Report

oxfordarchaeology

southsouthsouth
September 2015

Client: West Waddy ADP

Issue No: 1
OA Job No: 6186
NGR: SP 53596 06696



**Headington School Library Extension,
Headington Road, Oxford**

SP 53596 06696

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Headington School Library Extension, Headington Road, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Summary

In July-August, 2015, Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief for West Waddy ADP on behalf of Headington School during groundworks associated with the extension of the school library. The site is located in an area that has previously produced Iron Age through to Saxon remains.

The watching brief revealed areas of previous modern truncation and the absence of archaeological remains in the undisturbed areas of the site. No archaeological deposits or finds were uncovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by West Waddy ADP on behalf of Headington School to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the groundworks associated with the construction of a new extension to the school library. The site is located in an area that has previously produced remains from the Iron Age through to the Saxon period.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition attached to the planning permission (planning ref: 14/03288/FUL). A brief was set by the Oxford City Council Archaeologist (Radford 2015), detailing the local authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition. A Written Scheme of Investigation was produced which outlined how OA would implement those requirements (OA 2015).
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The area of development is to the north-west of Oxford, approximately 2.7 km beyond the city centre at NGR SP 53596 06696 (Figure 1). It lies within the suburb of Headington, along Headington Road.
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology of the site is mapped by the British Geological Association as sandstone bedrock which is part of the Beckley sandstone member (BGS Sheet 237 1:50,000). These are shallow marine deposits that were formed in the Jurassic period around 156 to 161 million years ago. No drift geology is recorded overlying the site.
- 1.2.3 The site is currently an area of hard standing and grass between buildings within the grounds of Headington School. The site is also located within the Headington Hill Conservation area.



1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background was outlined in the brief from Oxford City Council (Radford 2015) and is briefly summarised below.
- 1.3.2 This site is of interest because it is located on a natural terrace at the top of Headington Hill, in a location that has the potential for Iron Age, Roman and early Saxon activity. Previously early Saxon finds have been found to the west, on the crest of the hill (HER No. 3629) and Iron Age and Roman rural settlement activity has been identified to the east, near the school music room (HER No. 26157).
- 1.3.3 An excavation in 2008 uncovered early Roman boundaries forming part of a rectilinear plan. The majority of features encountered can be dated to the 1st century, with a few residual sherds of late Iron Age pottery. The boundaries probably formed part of a field or enclosure complex with domestic occupation probably located a short distance away (TVAS 2008).
- 1.3.4 The most recent work took place in May 2014 when an archaeological watching brief (OA 2014) revealed a cluster of early Iron Age pits that may have been associated with unlocated domestic focus situated somewhere to the south and/or west beyond the boundary of the site. Other features included an isolated and undated pit, the base of a possible furrow, and a brick well or soakaway of probable 17th-18th century construction. Additionally, a relatively linear configuration of postholes was revealed and is likely to represent a modern fence-line.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The main aims of the watching brief were:
- To determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains within the site;
 - To assess vulnerability/sensitivity of any exposed remains;
 - To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence;
 - To provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site to enable the archaeological implications of any proposed developments to be assessed.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 A summary of OA's general approach to excavation and recording can be found in Appendix A of the WSI (OA 2015).
- 2.2.2 The excavations took place in July-August 2015. Several narrow trenches were initially opened to identify the location and extent of the existing soakaway and associated services located at the centre of the courtyard (Figure 3: Plate 1). The area surrounding was mostly undisturbed lawn and pavement framing the courtyard. The pavement extends 1-2m from the surrounding buildings and was also removed at the southern end of the site.
- 2.2.3 The initial excavation exposed the extent of the pre-existing soakaway (Plate 2), revealing in section the deposits underlying the lawn-topsoil and stone pavements. Once the soakaway crates had been removed the exposed sections were examined for signs of archaeological remains and then recorded.



- 2.2.4 The lawn area directly surrounding the soakaway was then carefully stripped of topsoil to the top of natural deposits (Figure 3; Plate 3). The machine then excavated the remaining deposits to impact depth. The attending archaeologist was present at all times but no significant archaeological finds or deposits were identified.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 3.1.1 The results of the watching brief are presented below, followed by a stratigraphic description of the deposits. More detailed contexts information is presented in Appendix A.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 The watching brief was undertaken in good weather conditions and the area was free from flooding.
- 3.2.2 The soils encountered in the trenches consisted of an sandy loamy topsoil that varied in thickness from 0.2-0.35m. This sealed a thin subsoil overlain the natural weathered sandstone.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

- 3.3.1 No archaeological features or remains were uncovered during the watching brief.
- 3.3.2 The recorded sections at the site (Figure 3: sections 100 and 101) revealed a thick sandy clay deposit, context 103, which extended across the site. The section drawing located at the western end of site (s.100) shows this clay layer commencing at a depth of 0.45m, while at the eastern end of site (s.101) it starts at only 0.3m depth. Furthermore, s.100 reveals a subsoil deposit (101), 0.2m thick, and an underlying layer (102) (suggested to be a diffuse mix of the underlying and overlying deposits) 0.14m thick.
- 3.3.3 The subsoil (102) was only visible at the eastern end of site. There is a distance of only 10m between sections, which may suggest that the original topography could have been altered during the construction of the school. In this case the slight westward slope was perhaps levelled which may have led to the truncation of earlier features and any archaeological remains in this area.

3.4 Finds summary

- 3.4.1 The removal of the topsoil revealed a mixture of modern and Victorian finds throughout. Clay pipe-fragments and pottery remains were mixed with metal drink-cans, most likely deposited during the initial excavations for the original soakaway. These finds were restricted to the topsoil and a few to the underlying subsoil.

3.5 Environmental summary

- 3.5.1 No samples were taken during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 No archaeological remains were identified within the courtyard between the Main Hall and the Library.



- 4.1.2 The area under development is dominated by the previous soakaway tank and surrounding services. This appears to have greatly reduced the probability of archaeological remains to survive in this area, possible due to previous ground levelling activity during the construction of the surrounding school buildings and associated services.

5 REFERENCES

Radford, D 2015 Archaeological brief for Headington School, Headington Road, Oxford. Oxford City Council.

OA 2014 Archaeological Watching Brief Report. Headington School, Headington Road, Oxford. Oxford Archaeology unpublished.

OA 2015 Written Scheme of Investigation for Headington School, Headington Road, Oxford. Oxford Archaeology unpublished.

TVAS 2008 Early Roman boundaries at Headington School, Headington, Oxford, Thames Valley Archaeological Services unpublished report



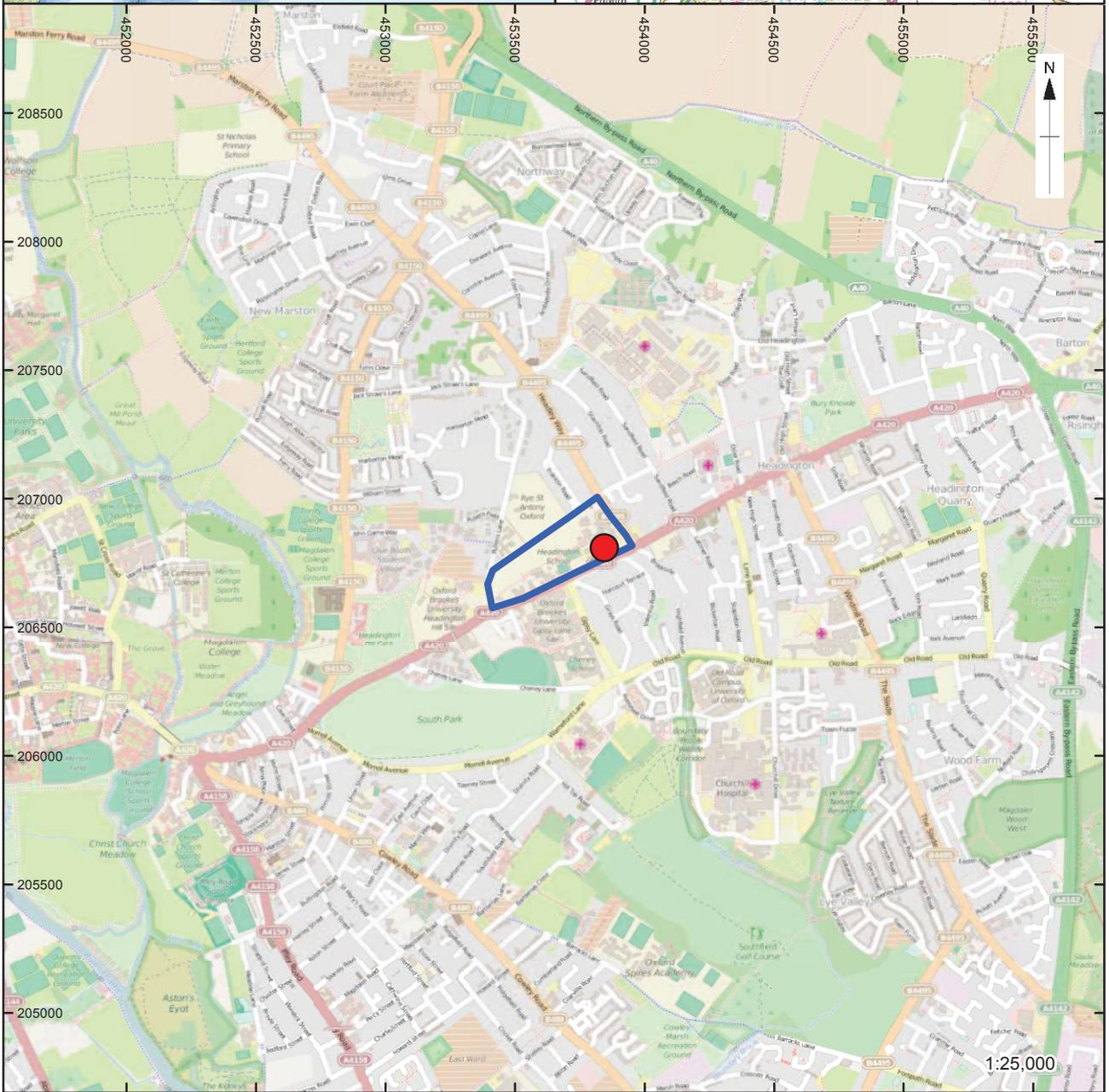
APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Soil Description
100	Layer	0.12m	>8m	>14m	Modern lawn.	Top Soil
101	Layer	0.2m	>8m	>14m	Potential subsoil (beyond root damage), or earlier garden soil.	Loose coarse grain sediment, dark brownish yellow, sandy silt loam, S.R. 2-10mm stone inclusions
102	Layer	0.14m	>8m	>14m	Potential mixing of contexts (101) and (103)	Loose coarse grain sediment, mid brownish yellow, silty sand, no inclusions
103	Layer	>0.54	>8m	>14m	Extends beyond limit of excavation	Highly compacted fine grain sediment, light yellowish brown, silty clay, no inclusions.



APPENDIX B. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Headington School Library Extension, Headington Road, Oxford.
Site code:	OXHDSC15
Grid reference:	SP 53596 06696 (centred)
Type of watching brief:	Intermittent
Date of project:	July-August 2015
Summary of results:	In July of 2015, Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by West Waddy ADP on behalf of Headington School to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of a new extension to the Library. The watching brief revealed the absence of archaeological remains and the shallow nature of the supra-natural deposits that dominate this area.
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at Janus House and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course under accession number OCMS:2015.110



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Figure 1: Site location

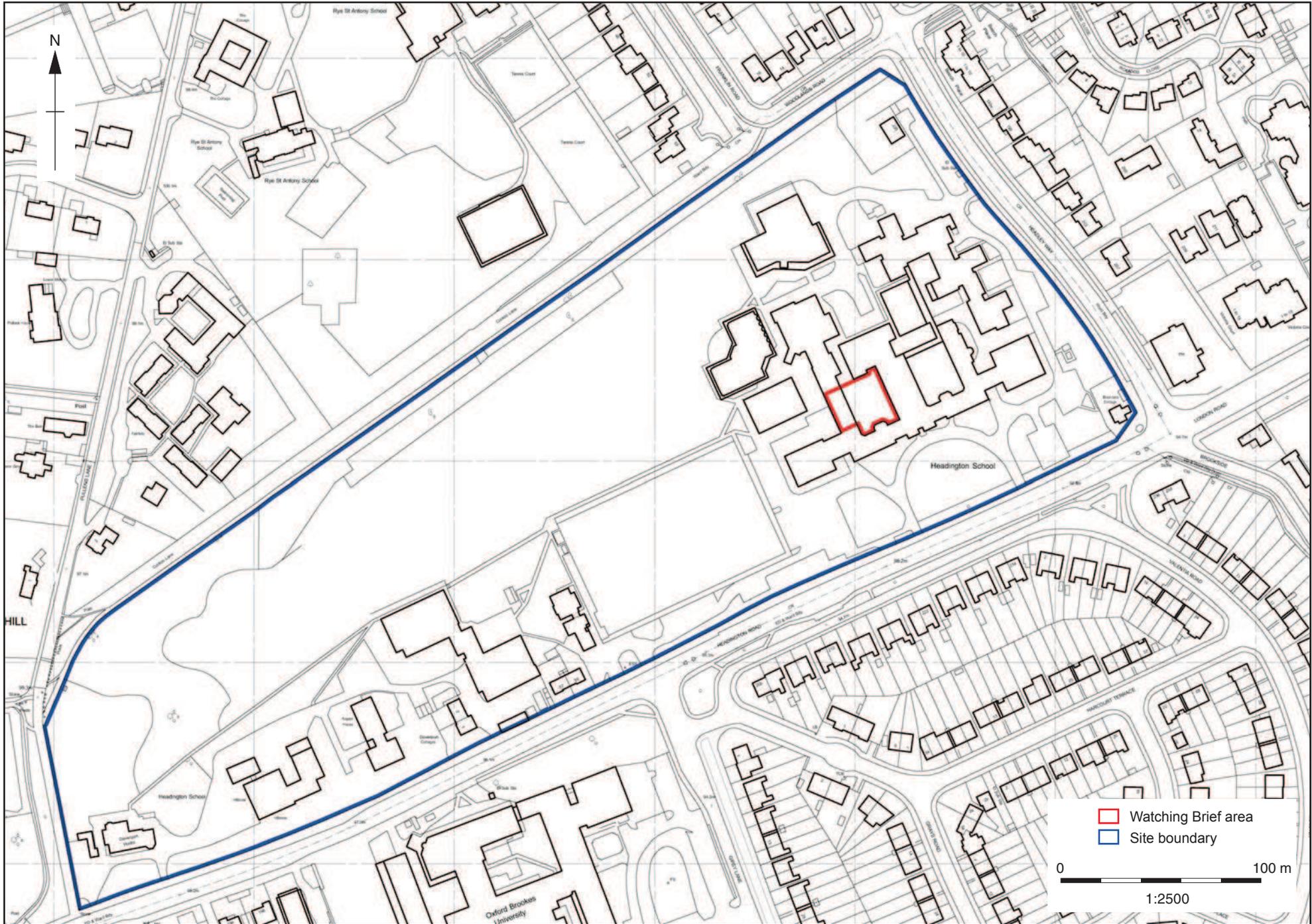


Figure 2: Watching Brief Location

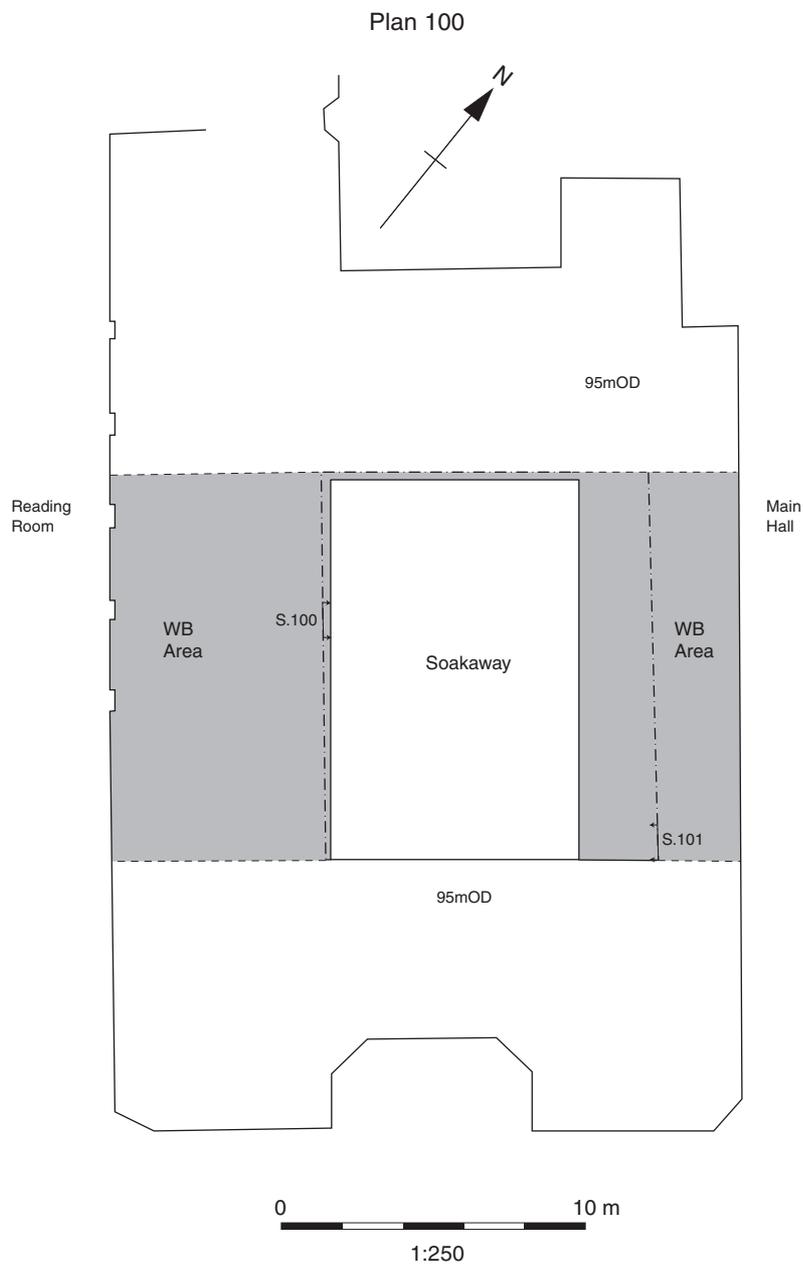
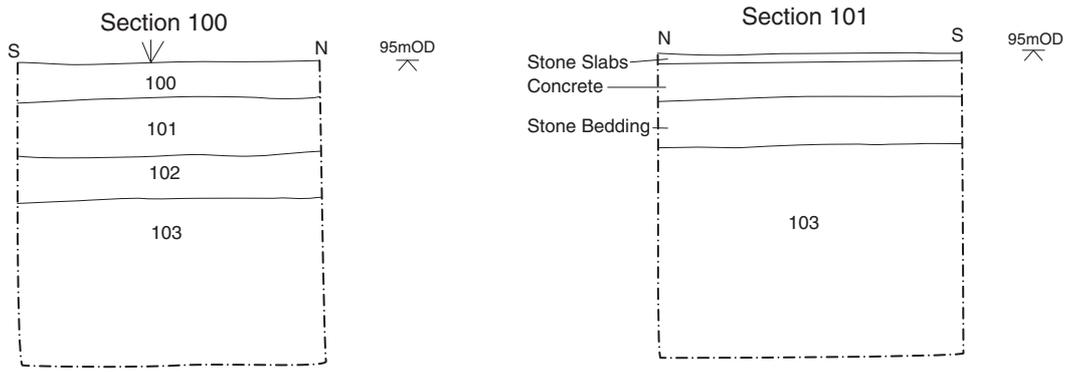


Figure 3: Watching brief area and sections

Plates



Plate 1: NW view of courtyard. Exposed soakaway crates.



Plate 2: West view of section 100. Clay deposit.



Plate 3: North view of site. Stripped area revealing no archaeological features.



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