

16 School Lane Stadhampton Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



December 2009

Client: Mr R Campbell

Issue No:1

OA Job No: 4497

NGR: SU 6004 9861

Client Name: Mr R. Campbell

Client Ref No:

Document Title: 16 School Lane, Stadhampton, Oxfordshire

Document Type: Watching Brief

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: SU 6004 9861

Planning Reference: P09/W0150

OA Job Number: 4497

Site Code: ST16SL 09

Invoice Code: ST16SLWB

Receiving Museum: Oxfordshire County Museums Service

Museum Accession No: OXCMS:2009.75

Prepared by: Mike Sims
Position: SWD Supervisor
Date: 4th December 2009

Checked by: David Score
Position: Senior Project Manager
Date: 11th December 2009

Approved by: Dan Poore Signed.....
Position: Head of Field work
Date: 17th December 2009

Document File Location H:\Projects\Oxfordshire OX\South Oxfordshire SO\10926
16 School Lane, Stadhampton

Graphics File Location Servergo\RtoZ*16 School Lane, Stadhampton,
Oxfordshire*ST16SL09*ST16SLWB*jm*05.11.09

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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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**16 School Lane,
Stadhampton, Oxfordshire**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Front cover: Rear of no 16 School Lane

SUMMARY

Between September and November 2009, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 16 School Lane, Stadhampton, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 6004 9861). The work was commissioned by Mr R Campbell in advance of the construction of new extensions to the side and rear of the property. The watching brief revealed evidence of extensive small scale gravel extraction, probably post-medieval in date. No other significant archaeology was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Between September and November 2009, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 16 School Lane, Stadhampton, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 6004 9861). The work was commissioned by Mr R Campbell in advance of the demolition of an existing extension and the construction of two new extensions to the rear and side of the property (Planning Reference P09/W0150).

1.1.2 The site lies within an area of archaeological potential and as part of the planning permission, an archaeological watching brief was requested during the course of the groundworks. This is in line with PPG16 and Policy C26 of the Local Plan.

1.1.3 Richard Oram, the County Planning Archaeologist, part of the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (OCAS), produced a brief specifying the work required (OCAS 2009).

1.1.4 OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) showing how it would meet these requirements (OA 2009).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The village of Stadhampton is situated approximately 6.5 km south-east of Oxford. The development site is located on the west side of the village, south of School Lane (Fig. 1). The village is sited on roughly level ground, probably originally the flood plain associated with the nearby River Thame, a tributary of which runs immediately west of the development area. The site lies at approximately 54 m above OD and the underlying geology is Alluvium over Valley Gravel (Geological Survey of England and Wales, sheet no. 254).

1.2.2 The development area was previously part of the house's garden. Prior to the commencement of work an existing single storey extension to the rear of the house was demolished.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was outlined in the brief (OCAS, 2009) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The name “Stodham” or “Stadham” has been interpreted as meaning “River meadow where horses are kept”. The village is not specifically mentioned in the Domesday Book, with the first mention of “Stadham” occurring in a Papal Bull dated 1145. The village originally served the nearby agricultural estates, later becoming a stopping place on the turnpike towards Oxford due to its proximity to the bridge over the River Thames at Chiselhampton. Little is known of the medieval village but by 1665 the hearth tax records 11 substantial houses together with labourers cottages. The village steadily grew in size through the 18th-century until by 1811 there were 44 houses recorded. Growth increased during the first half of the 19th-century with a further 34 dwellings being added by 1851, some of which were built along School Lane, then presumably known under a different name since the school itself was not built until 1879. Further dwellings were built along School Lane after both the First and Second World Wars, one of which was Number 16.
- 1.3.3 The building concerned lies within an area of some archaeological potential located to the west of the historic medieval settlement. The site is also located approximately 160 m south-east of a known Neolithic Funerary Site (Historic Environment Record, Primary Record Number (PRN) 15322). This consists of a cursus, an elongated rectilinear earthwork enclosure of middle to late Neolithic date (PRN 15322.02) (SU 5980 9862) and a hengi-form Monument, a flat roughly circular area of ground, typically between 5 m and 20 m in diameter, which is enclosed within a modest earthwork comprising a ditch with a bank on the outside (PRN 15322.03) (SU 5998 9877). The function of the cursous and hengi-form monuments are not known, although they are presumed to be ritual or ceremonial monuments. Hengi-form monuments are in most cases closely connected with burial. These sites are recorded as cropmarks visible on aerial photographs.
- 1.3.4 There are a number of other neolithic sites recorded in the same area, including a long barrow (PRN 15322.04) (SU 5990 9885) 240 m north-west of the development area and a burial recorded in a watching brief approximately 95 m to the north-west (PRN 13278). A long barrow is located 140 m south-west of the site (PRN 15322.05) (SU 5989 9859). A causewayed enclosure has also been recorded from the aerial photographs 160 m west of the site (PRN 15322.01) (SU 5990 9870). A second possible causewayed enclosure can be seen 310 m west of the site (SU 5972 9865) Further enclosures can be seen on aerial photographs to the north of the site and other undated enclosures are visible to the south of the development area.
- 1.3.5 The area immediately around the developed part of the village is wooded or under pasture and although no cropmarks are visible adjacent to the development site, there is potential for the development to disturb aspects of these features and possibly encounter buried human remains.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the groundworks.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 Both the foundation trenches and the soakaway pits were dug using a tracked excavator fitted with either a 0.6 m or 0.8 m wide bucket. Excavation proceeded in spits until the required depth of excavation (1 m – 1.4 m) was achieved. The area within the footprint of the extensions was reduced in depth by 0.2 m to 0.3 m in order to accommodate the underfloor insulation. The reduced area and the sides and base of the excavations were closely examined for archaeological evidence and the spoil was examined for dating evidence.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of the excavations and the location of any archaeological features was maintained at a scale of 1:50 (Fig. 2) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All sections and recorded features were photographed using digital photography, colour slide and black and white film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (OA, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The stratigraphy observed was consistent throughout the site. The underlying natural geology, a valley gravel (5), was encountered at a depth of between 0.55 m and 1.1 m below the current ground level. This deposit had been truncated by a series of intercutting pits (7, 9, 12, 15, 17, 19, 21, 25, 28 and 29), which have been interpreted as small scale gravel extraction pits. These are shown on Fig. 2 and can be seen on Plate 1. Sealing this activity was a layer of alluvium (2) and a layer of modern garden soil (1).
- 3.1.2 A table of the contexts referred to can be found within Appendix 1.
- 3.1.3 The following is a description of the recorded sections giving more details of the contexts, including composition and their sequence.

Section 1

- 3.1.4 The underlying geology, a fine oolitic gravel (5), was encountered at a depth of 0.9 m below the current ground level. This was cut by a 0.55 m deep flat bottomed Pit (29), filled by a grey-brown clay silt containing small quantities of gravel (4). Cutting the north-eastern end of this feature was a steeply sided pit (7). The base of this pit was filled with a dark grey-brown clay silt (6), in excess of 0.55 m deep. Filling the top of the pit was a 0.05 m deep band of very dark grey/black silt (3). The colour of this deposit may be due to organic staining.
- 3.1.5 Sealing this was a 0.18 m deep layer of grey-brown fine silts (2), possibly a layer of alluvium. Cutting this layer at the south-western end of the section was a very steep side pit (9), in excess of 0.8 m deep. This was filled with a dark brown clay silt (8). Sealing this pit was a 0.25 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (1), the modern garden soil.

Section 2

- 3.1.6 Within this section the underlying gravel (5) was encountered at a depth of 0.5 m below the current ground level. At the south-eastern end of the section this was cut by a 2.5 m diameter by 0.85 m deep roughly circular pit (17), filled by a dark brown clay-silt (16). This was cut by a later 0.5 m deep pit (15). The base of this was filled with a 0.15 m deep layer of mixed yellow-brown clay-silts and gravel (14). The remainder was filled by a dark grey clay-silt (13).
- 3.1.7 At the north-western end of the section the gravel was cut by another circular pit (21), measuring approximately 2.5 m in diameter, this could be seen to be in excess of 1.1 m deep. This pit was filled by a grey-brown clay-silt (20).
- 3.1.8 Cutting both the fills of pits 21 and 15 was a 1.8 m diameter by 0.8 m deep pit (12). The base of this feature was filled by a 0.25 m deep layer of grey-brown clay-silt (11) overlain by a 0.55 m deep layer of dark yellow-brown mixed clay-silt and gravel (10). Pits 12, 15, 17 and 21 were sealed by a continuation of the alluvium (2).
- 3.1.9 At the north-western end of the section layer 2 was cut by a 2.5 m diameter pit in excess of 1.1 m deep (19). The base of this pit was filled by a grey-brown clay-silt (18) over 1 m in depth. Filling the top of the pit was a 0.4 m deep layer of yellow-brown clay-silt and gravel (22).

Section 3

- 3.1.10 Within the area of the section the natural gravel (5) had been truncated to a depth of 1.1 m below the current ground level in this area by a succession of pits.
- 3.1.11 At the north-eastern end of the section the gravel had been cut by an approximately 3 m diameter flat bottomed pit 1 m in depth (28). The base this feature was filled by a 0.5 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (27), overlain by a 0.5 m deep layer of dark

yellow-brown mixed silts and gravel (26). The fills were sealed by a continuation of the alluvium (2).

- 3.1.12 Pit 19 could be seen extending into the south-western end of the section. Cutting pits 19 and 28 was a 2.5 m diameter by 1 m deep circular pit with steeply sloping sides (25). The base of this was filled by a deposit of dark yellow-brown mixed silts and gravel (24), up to 1 m in depth. A layer of grey-brown clay-silt 0.5 m in depth (23) filled the remainder.
- 3.1.13 Sealing this pit and layer 2 was a continuation of the modern garden soil (1) up to 0.35 m in depth.

Soakaway Pits

- 3.1.14 These consisted of two 1 m square pits dug to a depth of 1 m. The stratigraphy observed in both was similar with 0.3 m depth of the modern garden soil (1) overlying grey-brown mixed silt and gravel. The full depth of this deposit was not seen in the pits but a depth of 0.7 m was recorded. The composition of this deposit is similar to those observed within the footprint of the extension and it is probable that it represents pit fill from the same phase of activity.

3.2 **Finds**

- 3.2.1 Dating evidence was only recovered from layer 1 and consisted of brick fragments, modern pottery and offcuts of metal piping. All these were considered to be of post-medieval origin relating to the construction of the standing building and were recorded but not retained.

3.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

- 3.3.1 The fills within the gravel pits were deemed to be post-medieval in date, and it was considered that no further information would be gained from palaeo-environmental sampling.

4 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1.1 The stratigraphy observed during the course of the watching brief showed that the area within the footprint of the new extensions has been heavily disturbed by a succession of pits. These had disturbed the area to such an extent that it was not possible to determine if the area had been subject to any earlier activity.
- 4.1.2 The observed profiles and nature of these pits suggest that they were small-scale gravel extraction pits and are probably associated with post-medieval construction, most likely the expansion of the village between 1811 and 1851. Their fills appear to be a mix of redeposited soils and the backfill from earlier pits. The relatively consistent depth of their excavation suggest that digging may have been limited by the water table at the time.

- 4.1.3 There is stratigraphic evidence to suggest that there were two main phases of this activity, separated by a layer of alluvium (2), probably deposited during a period of flooding.
- 4.1.4 No residual finds were recovered to suggest that any other activity had taken place within the area of study, nor were the truncated remains of any deeper earlier features observed, although it is probable that the water table which determined the depth of the gravel pits may also have restricted the depth of any earlier features, if present, resulting in their destruction by the extraction pits.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.2 m - 0.3 m	-	Worked soil, modern garden soil	Brick, metal piping	C20th
2	Layer	0.2 m	-	Alluvium, probable flood deposits	-	-
3	Fill	0.05 m	2 m	Upper fill of Pit 7	-	-
4	Fill	0.55 m	1.5 m	Fill of Pit 29	-	-
5	Layer	> 0.5 m	-	Natural, valley gravel	-	-
6	Fill	> 0.5 m	2 m	Fill of Pit 7	-	-
7	Cut	> 0.55 m	> 2 m	Gravel extraction pit	-	-
8	Fill	> 0.8 m	1.2 m	Fill of Pit 9	-	-
9	Cut	> 0.8 m	1.2 m	Gravel extraction pit	-	-
10	Fill	0.55 m	1.8 m	Upper fill of Pit 12	-	-
11	Fill	0.25 m	1.8 m	Primary fill of Pit 12	-	-
12	Cut	0.8 m	1.8 m	Gravel extraction pit	-	-
13	Fill	0.3 m	2 m	Upper fill of Pit 15	-	-
14	Fill	0.15 m	2 m	Primary fill of Pit 15	-	-
15	Cut	0.45 m	2 m	Gravel extraction pit	-	-
16	Fill	0.85 m	2 m	Fill of Pit 17	-	-
17	Cut	0.85 m	2 m	Gravel extraction pit	-	-
18	Fill	1 m	2.5 m	Primary fill of Pit 19	-	-
19	Cut	1 m	2.5 m	Gravel extraction pit	-	-
20	Fill	0.9 m	2 m	Fill of Pit 21	-	-
21	Cut	0.9 m	2 m	Gravel extraction pit	-	-
22	Fill	0.4 m	2.2 m	Upper fill of Pit 19	-	-
23	Fill	0.5 m	2.3 m	Upper fill of Pit 25	-	-
24	Fill	1 m	2.5 m	Primary fill of Pit 25	-	-
25	Cut	1 m	2.5 m	Gravel extraction pit	-	-
26	Fill	0.4 m	2.3 m	Upper fill of Pit 28	-	-
27	Fill	0.55 m	2.5 m	Primary fill of Pit 28	-	-
28	Cut	0.95 m	2.5 m	Gravel extraction pit	-	-
29	Layer	> 0.5 m	1.5 m	Gravel extraction pit	-	-

APPENDIX 2 REFERENCES

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

OA 2009 *16 School Lane, Stadhampton, Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OCAS 2009 *16 School Lane, Stadhampton, Oxfordshire - Design Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: 16 School Lane, Stadhampton, Oxfordshire

Site code: ST16SL 09

Grid reference: SU 6004 9861

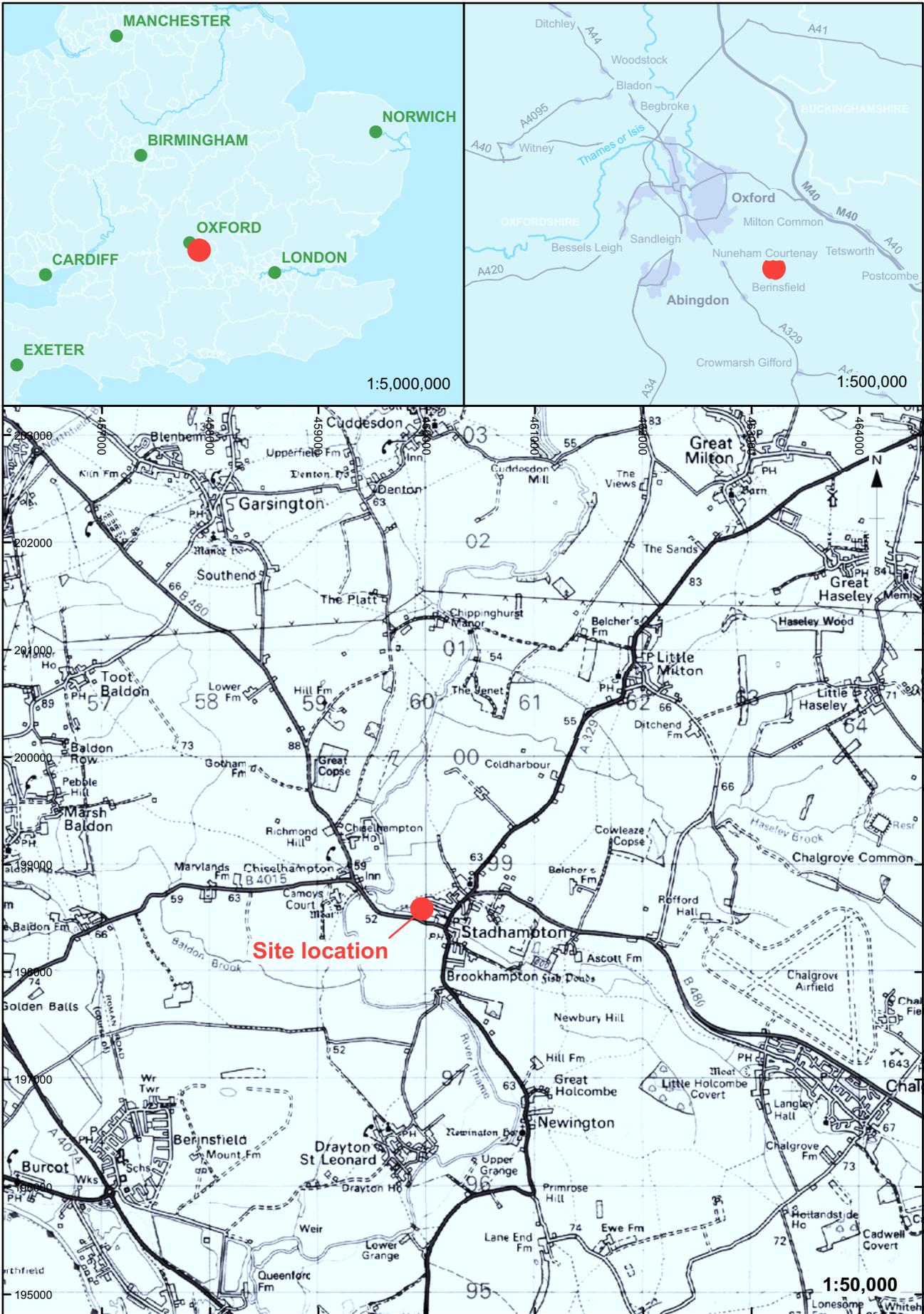
Type of watching brief: Machine excavation of foundation trenches, service trenches and ground reduction

Date and duration of project: September to November 2009, 3 site visits

Area of site: 250 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief revealed numerous post-medieval small-scale gravel extraction pits..

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 under the following accession number: OXCMS:2009.75



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Figure 1: Site location

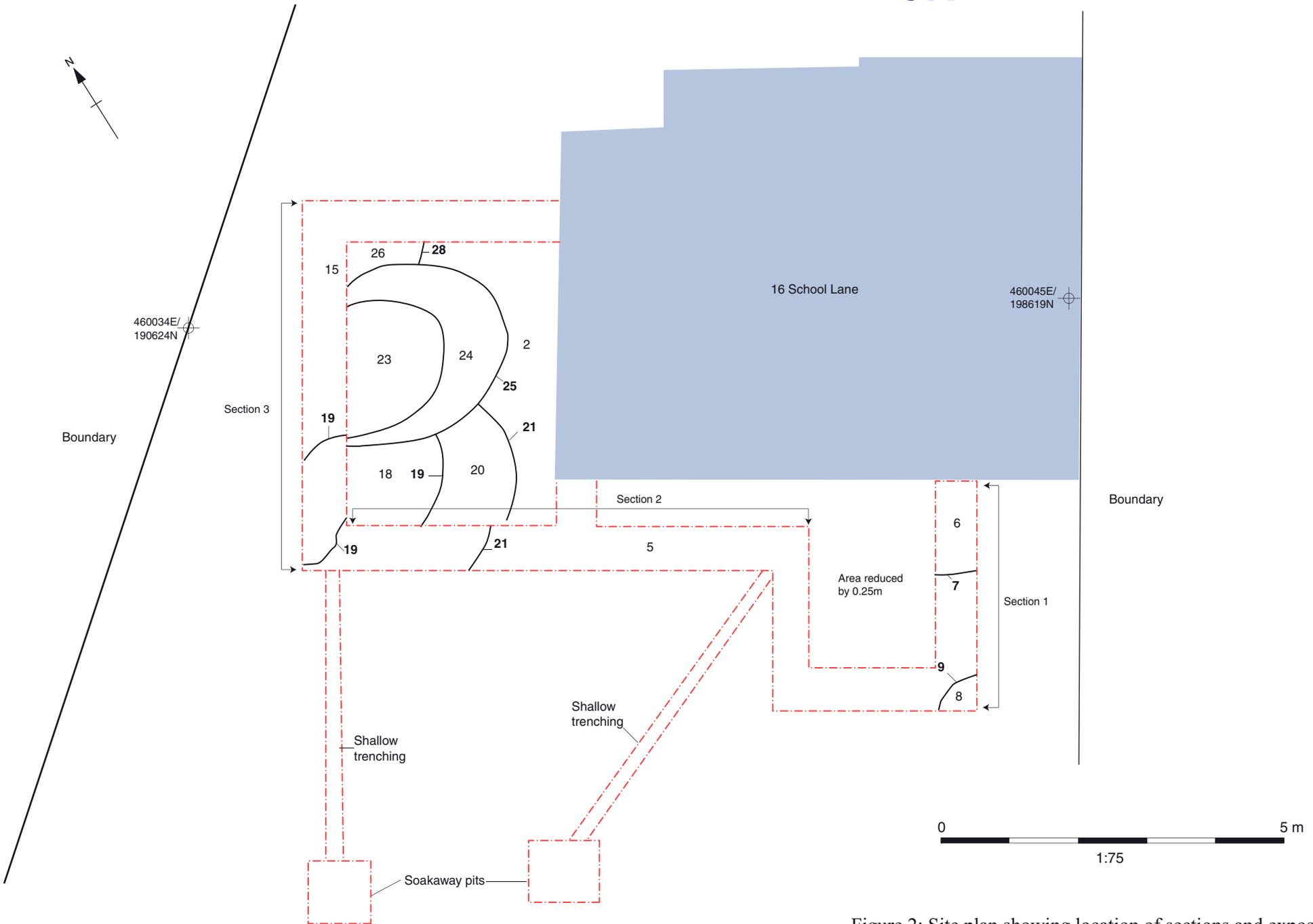
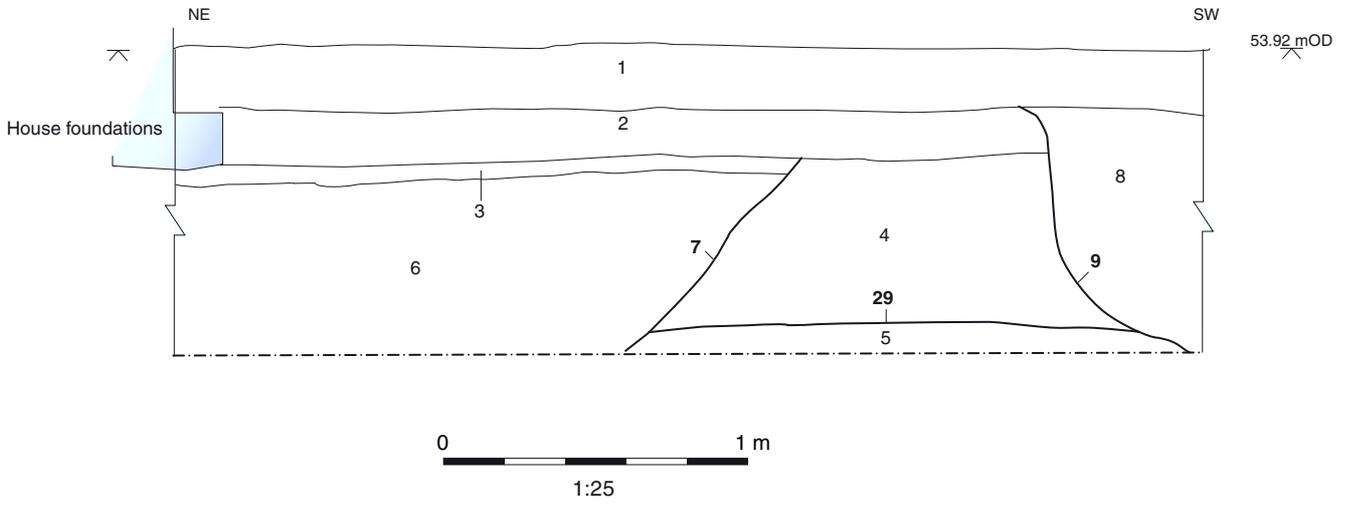
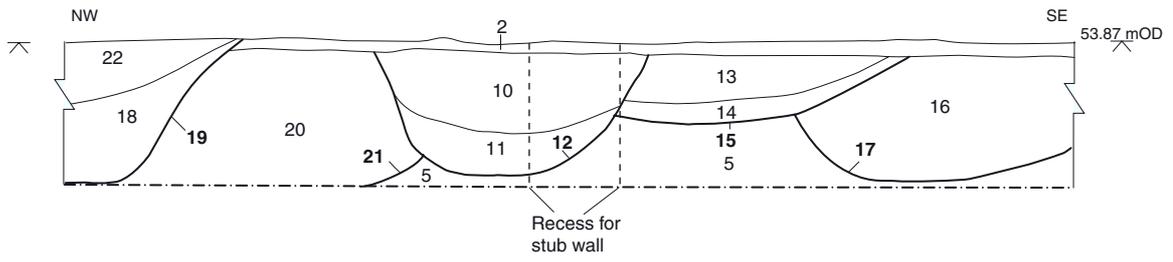


Figure 2: Site plan showing location of sections and exposed features

Section 1



Section 2



Section 3

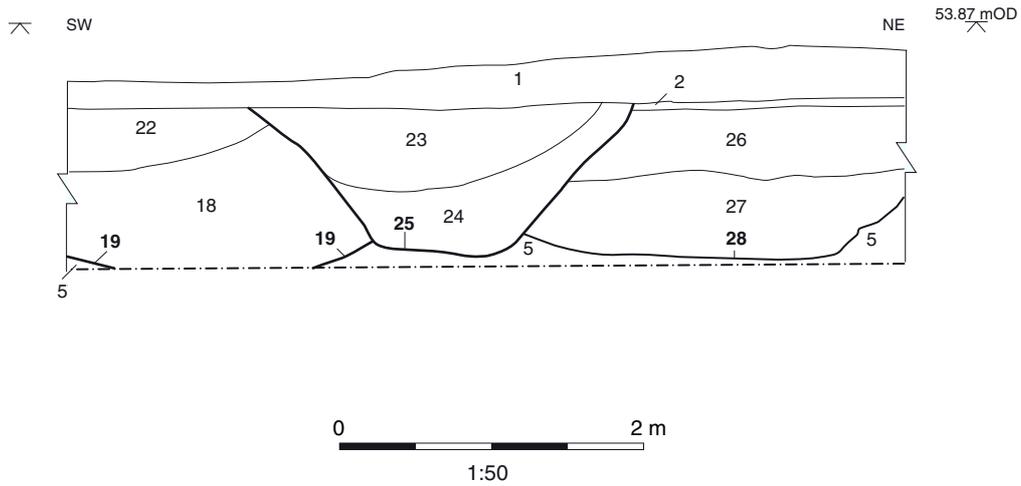


Figure 3: Sections



Plate 1: Reduced area showing intercutting pits



OA South

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane Mills
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oanorth@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
f: +44 (0) 1223 850599
e: [oaeast@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA Méditerranée

115 Rue Merlot
ZAC La Louvade
34 130 Maugeio
France

t: +33 (0) 4.67.57.86.92
f: +33 (0) 4.67.42.65.93
e: [oamed@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oamed@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://oamed.fr/>

Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA



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