

# New Accommodation Block Mansfield College Oxford



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



February 2006

**Client: Kingerlee**

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# New Accommodation Block, Mansfield College, Oxford

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

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Cover Plate: View of site looking west.

## SUMMARY

*From January to February 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Mansfield College, Oxford, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 516 067). The work was commissioned by Kingerlee in advance of a new accommodation block. The watching brief revealed part of the civil war ditch of Oxford City's defences.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 From January to February 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Mansfield College, Oxford (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Kingerlee in respect of a planning application for the erection of a four storey building to house 24 student study rooms, 2 seminar rooms and ancillary facilities at Mansfield College, Oxford (Planning Ref. 04/00986/FUL).
- 1.1.2 A condition to the planning was set by the City Archaeologist, Brian Durham, requiring an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during the period of construction.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the archaeological requirements of the planning condition (OA 2004).

#### 1.2 Geology, topography and location

- 1.2.1 The site lies at approximately 62 m OD. The underlying geology is Flood Plain Drift, comprising Terrace and River Gravels (sands and gravels) above Oxford Clay. The site is bounded to the south, north-east and east by college buildings and to the north-west and west by the college courtyard. This is located on the north edge of the historic core of Oxford, and on the line of Oxford's Civil War defences.

#### 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 The site of the new building runs up to and cuts the bank along the southern boundary of the college, which appears to be the intermediate line of the English Civil War defences of Oxford. These defences were erected by the people of Oxford under pressure from the King in 1642, and much of their plan can be reconstructed from the maps of the time. The banks along the south and west sides of Mansfield college are clearly shown on David Loggan's map of 1675 including the adjoining stretches to the east and north, which are the only places where these earthworks survive.

- 1.3.3 The eastern continuation of this line was anticipated during the erection of the squash court at Keble College in 1981, however, no ditch was seen. This was surprising because the fronting ditch was normally the source of the material to construct the bank and was an integral part of the defences, so its absence on this stretch is unusual. It is possible that this particular bank was formed by utilising material from a plough headland or some other existing feature.
- 1.3.4 Excavations carried out by OA in 1992 immediately to the east of the new development site exposed both edges of the ditch running parallel to the bank, and presumably supplying the material to construct the bank. It is part of the bank and a section of the ditch defence earthwork that will be impacted within the footprint of the new development (OAU 1992).

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 First the area of the site was reduced and a 0.30 m thick layer of hardcore was laid over site to form piling mat. After the piles had been inserted the trenches for the connecting beams were excavated in sections. These works were carried out with a small 360<sup>0</sup> excavator with a toothless bucket under archaeological supervision.
- 2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features 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 *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (OAU 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits (*Figs 2 and 3*)

- 3.1.1 The ground works cut into the natural sandy gravel (9) and alluvium deposits (4). This was overlain by a 0.1 m thick dark reddish brown silty clay subsoil (3) and a 0.1 m thick mid brown silty clay old cultivated topsoil (2). Sealing this along the south side of the site was the edge of the bank of the city defences. The bank was partly cut by the ground works exposing a 2.5 m length by 1 m wide by 0.3 m high of dark brown silty clay loam (10). Immediately to the north was the 17th century Civil War ditch (8) of Oxford's City defences. The works exposed a 20 m length by 7.4 m width and the ditch was excavated to a depth of 1.2 m through the ditch fills. The fills consisted of slumping material on the north (16) and south (11) of light red and

yellowish silty sand. These were overlain by a series of deposits of reddish brown silty clay (12, 13, 14 and 15). Sealing all these was a deposit of material consisting of dark reddish brown silty clay (7) with some finds. This represented levelling of the ditch from the 19th-century. Layer 7 had been cut by a Victorian rubbish pit (6), which was square in shape with vertical sides and flat base. It measured 2 m x 2 m x 0.6 m and was filled by a dark grey brown silty sand loam (5) with pottery and CBM fragments, and a 0.20 m thick layer of light brown silty clay (17) from material spread out to make up the formal gardens to the north-west of the site. Sealing this was a 0.25 m thick layer of very dark grey brown silty clay loam (1) garden topsoil.

### 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 A number of finds were recovered from two of the fill contexts (5 and 7). Context 5 contained mainly white glaze ware, red ware, stone ware jar and ceramic door knob. These all dated from the very late 19th-century. From context 7 came a fragment of glass, CBM and a lead weight, which dated from the 19th-century.

### 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The watching brief did expose the line of the Civil War bank and ditch, which was part of the Oxford City defences built by Charles I in 1642. Although excavation was not carried out to the base, the ground works did expose the line of the ditch, but didn't reach the base of the ditch. However this had already been established in an earlier evaluation in 1992 by Oxford Archaeology. The watching brief did recover a few fragments of dating evidence from the upper fills and a rubbish pit, which related to late 19th-century landscaping associated with the construction of Mansfield College.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>
1	Layer				Topsoil	
2	Layer	0.1 m			Old topsoil horizon	
3	Layer	0.1 m			Subsoil	
4	Natural				Natural alluvium deposits	
5	Fill				Fill of pit	Pottery & CBM
6	Cur				19th-century Rubbish pit	
7	Fill				Material back-filling ditch	CBM, Glass and Metal
8	Cur	1.2 m	7.4 m	20 m	Civil War City ditch	
9	Natural				Natural gravel	
10	Layer				Bank material	
11	Fill				Slumping in side of ditch	
12	Fill				Material back-filling ditch	
13	Fill				Material back-filling ditch	
14	Fill				Material back-filling ditch	
15	Fill				Material back-filling ditch	
16	Fill				Slumping in side of ditch	
17	Layer				Material making up ground level	

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OA 2004 New Accommodation Block, Mansfield College, Oxford Written Scheme of Investigation

OAU, 1992 Field Manual (ed. D Wilkinson)

OAU, 1992 Mansfield College, Oxford. Archaeological Evaluation Report

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** New Accommodation Block, Mansfield, Oxford, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** OXMANC 05

**Grid reference:** NGR SP 516 067

**Type of watching brief:** Ground works for construction of new accommodation block.

**Date and duration of project:** A total of eight site visits from the 5/1/05 to the 2/2/05.

**Area of site:** 22 m x 28 m

**Summary of results:** The watching brief revealed the line of the civil war ditch of the Oxford City defences.

**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:2005.5



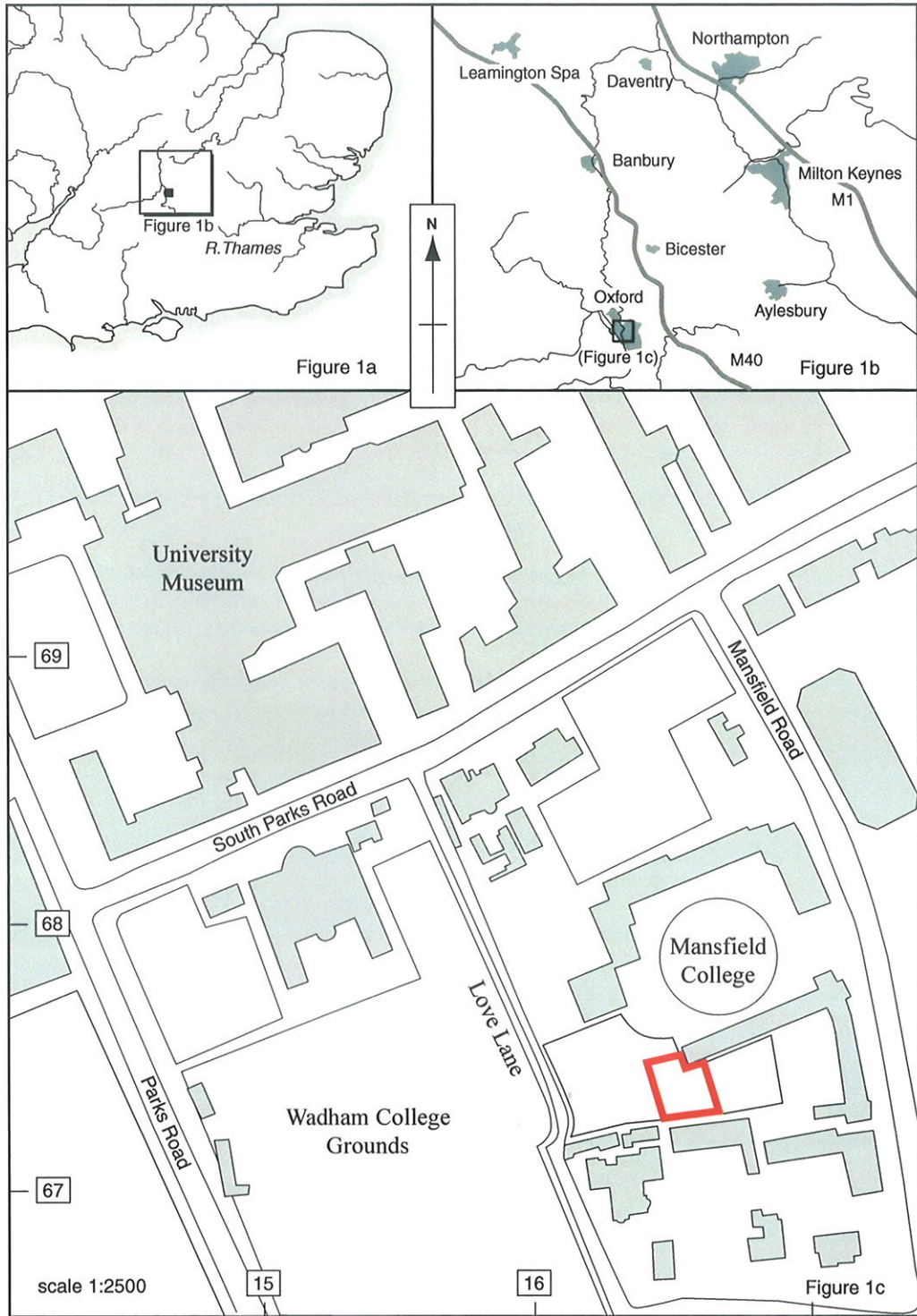


Figure 1: Site location

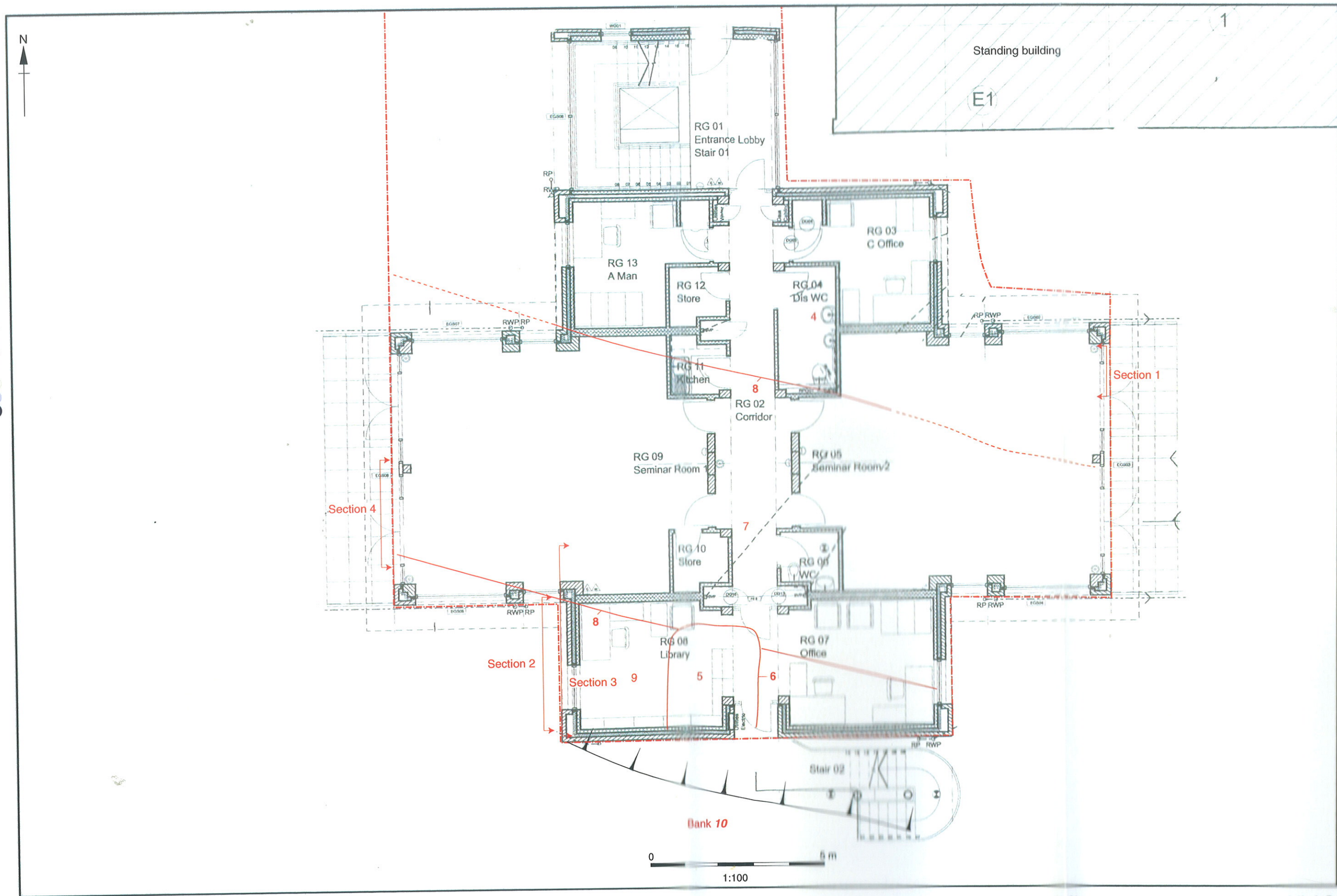


Figure 2: Location of buildings and sections, showing line of ditch

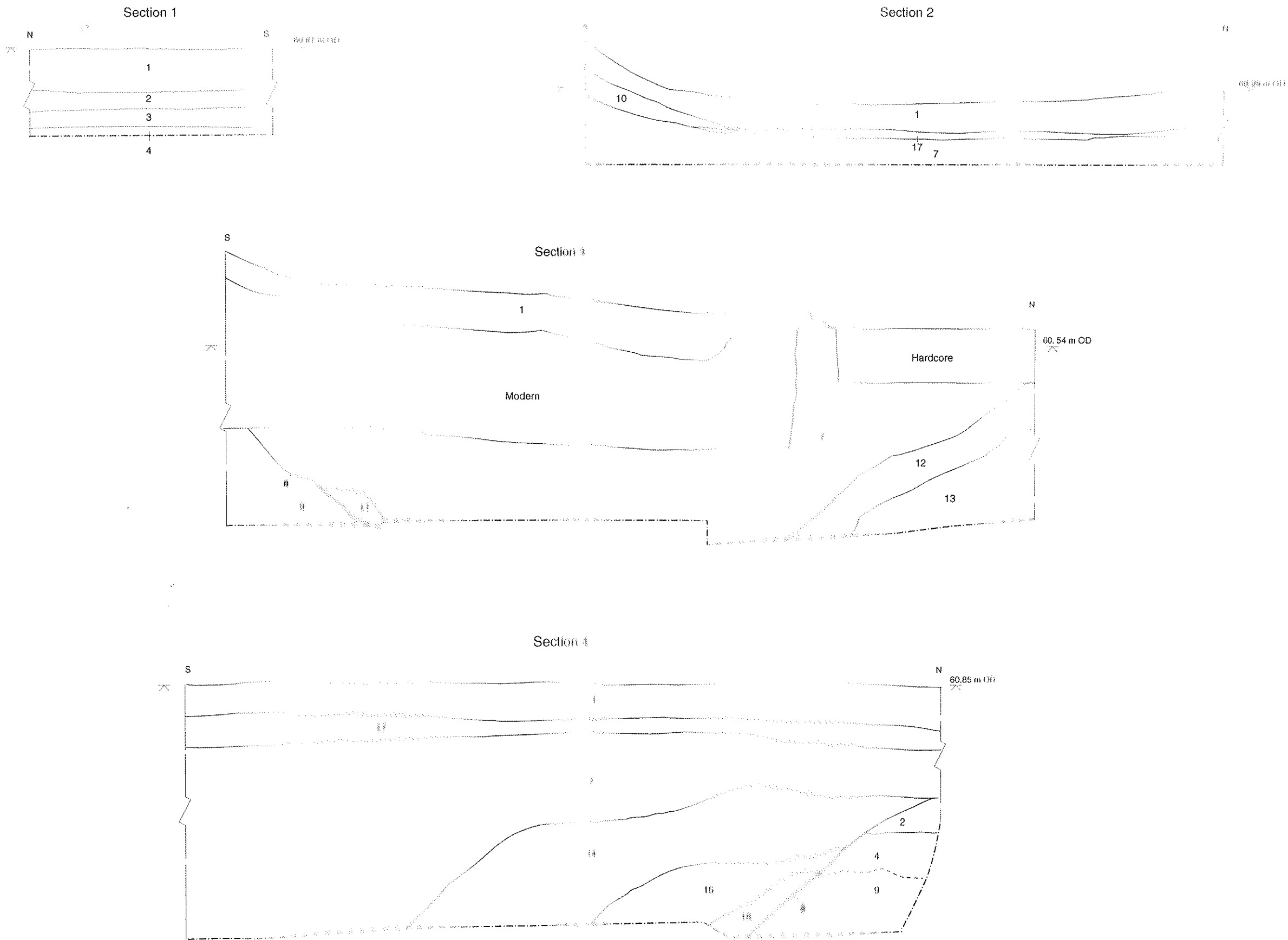
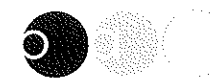


Figure 3: Sections 1-4





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