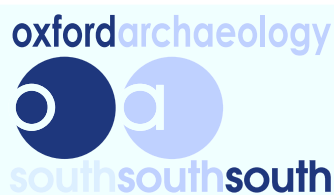


# Old School Site Nettlebed Henley-on-Thames Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



October 2010

**Client: Builders Ede Ltd**

Issue No:1  
OA Job No: 4453  
NGR: SU 699 867



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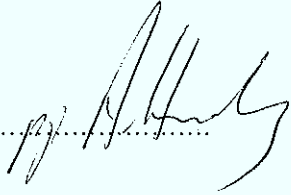
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# Old School Site, Nettlebed, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*Between November 2009 and January 2010, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at The Old School Site, Nettlebed, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 699 867). The work was commissioned by Colin Goodgame of Builders Ede Ltd in advance of the construction of a new access road, several new dwellings and associated landscaping. The watching brief revealed deposits of topsoil overlying natural clay and features relating to the demolished school buildings, but no other archaeology was observed.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between November 2009 and February 2010, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at The Old School Site, Nettlebed, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 699 867). The work was commissioned by Mr Colin Goodgame of Builders Ede Ltd in respect of a planning application for the construction of a new access road, new dwellings and associated landscaping (Planning Application No. P07/E1350)
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by Paul Smith, the County Archaeological Officer outlining the framework for a detailed archaeological investigation (OCAS, 2007).
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA, 2009).

#### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The village of Nettlebed is located 7 km north-west of the town of Henley-on-Thames and 9 km north of Reading (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The site is located on the western side of the village and is bordered to the north by the High Street (A4130), to the south by the new school premises and to the west and east by residential properties. The development area is approximately 0.3 hectares in area and lies on a gentle, south facing slope running between 185 m and 182 m above OD. The site was previously used for the village school and was originally occupied by school buildings and the playground.
- 1.2.3 The underlying geology is clay with flints and loam overlying chalk (Geological Survey of England and Wales, sheet no 254).

#### 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, 2009) and is reproduced below.

*The following background information is reproduced from the Design Brief produced by the County Archaeological Officer*

- 1.3.2 The site lies approximately 500 m to the south-west of Windmill Hill, where several instances of Mesolithic activity have been recorded.
- 1.3.3 In 1913, an apparently *in situ* Mesolithic 'working floor' was recorded in the section of a sand pit located on the west and south-west margins of Windmill Hill, from which was recovered a significant assemblage of blades, blade cores microliths and other possible tools. At least one hearth was also recorded (Peake, 1915). Subsequent work on the assemblage has suggested that it is probably early Mesolithic in date (Jacobi, 1973). Mesolithic activity has also been observed at two other locations in the same locality (Boismier, 1996).
- 1.3.4 In April 1994, Wessex Archaeology undertook a sample excavation on the north-eastern side of Windmill Hill, revealing evidence for flint working dating to the later Mesolithic period. Spatial analysis of the assemblage indicated that the site was subject to multiple reoccupations by hunter-gatherers (Boismier, 1996).
- 1.3.5 St. Bartholomew's Church located to the northwest of the proposal site was built in 1845-6, superseding an earlier church of which little is known. It may however have had Norman origins. If so, then this end of the High Street may have been the early nucleus of the settlement. The earliest find within the general environs of the proposal site is a coin of Vespasian (69-79 AD) found in a garden off the High Street not far from the proposal area (SMR 2022 – SU 6995 8670) (OA, 2007).
- 1.3.6 An archaeological watching brief was carried out in 2005 by Thames Valley Archaeological Services on the adjoining land to the west during the construction of the new school buildings (TVAS Site Code NSN04/124). This revealed a probable boundary ditch of unknown date, but no other significant evidence was recorded (OA, 2007).
- 1.3.7 Nettlebed has long been associated with the brick-working industry as well as associated clay quarrying. The first literary reference to such activity dates to the 15th century and the industry was in evidence until the 20th century. A bottle kiln dating to the 18th or 19th century approximately 200 m north-east of the development site, is the only one of its type surviving (Lethbridge Kingsford, 1919; Bond et al). By the 19th century, earthenware pottery was also being produced in Nettlebed (OA, 2007).
- 1.3.8 From an entry in the vestry minutes dated March 24th 1845 it was resolved that a Parochial School room be built, Mrs Bennett having offered a subscription for the same. The school was built in 1847 and enlarged again in 1887. It was taken over by the School Board in 1888 enlarged again in 1897 and taken over by the County Council in 1902. The next school was opened on 26th October 1928. The school was originally for juniors and seniors, but in 1959 was changed to a primary school and took in children from Bix and Assendon. The old building was taken over as a church

hall. The present primary school was built in 2005/6 on land to the south of the 1928 school which has been subsequently demolished.

## 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 (if present) that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of these works.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the site and to take samples where appropriate.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was undertaken as a series of site visits during those works likely to impinge or disturb any potential archaeological deposits. These works included the construction of an access road, ground reduction and the excavation of both service and foundation trenches.
- 2.2.2 A 13 tonne mechanical excavator was used for these works fitted with either a 1.8 m wide toothless ditching bucket or a 0.8 m wide trenching bucket as appropriate. All the material excavated was retained on site.
- 2.2.3 A plan showing the extent of the excavations and the locations of any features and sections was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using digital photography, colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The groundworks were conducted as a series of excavations of discrete plots. These consisted of a southern block, a western block, a northern block and service trenching. These will be described separately followed by an overall discussion and conclusions.

#### *The Southern Block*

- 3.1.2 This was located in the south-eastern corner of the site and was composed of six dwellings (Fig. 2).



- 3.1.3 Prior to the excavation of the foundation trenches an area measuring approximately 40 m by 20 m was reduced in depth to provide a level building platform. The depth of excavation varied from 0.3 m at the western edge of the plot down to 0.6 m at the eastern edge of the area. The foundation trenches, measuring up to 0.8 m in depth, were then excavated within this levelled area.
- 3.1.4 Within the foundation trenches along the eastern edge of the area a layer of pale red-brown silt clay (5) was exposed at a depth of 1.25 m below the original ground level (Fig. 3, Section 2). This deposit was overlaid by a 0.4 m deep layer of stiff orange brown silty clay containing numerous sub-angular flints (3). This deposit could be seen to rise towards the west where it was encountered at a depth of 0.4 m below the original ground level along the western edge of the reduced area (Fig. 3, Section 1).
- 3.1.5 Within the south-eastern corner of this site this deposit was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep band of dark grey-brown clay silt (4). This layer was only visible within the south-eastern corner of the block, and may represent a buried soil horizon. Sealing layer 4 and also overlying layer 3 elsewhere, was a layer of dark yellow-brown clay silt (2) measuring between 0.2 m and 0.35 m in depth (Fig. 3, sections 1 and 2).
- 3.1.6 Within the south-east corner of the block layer 2 was overlaid by a grey-brown silt loam (6), measuring up to 0.4 m deep in the south-east corner tapering off towards the west.
- 3.1.7 Overlying this deposit and layer 2 elsewhere within the block was a 0.2 m deep layer of very dark grey-brown clay loam (1) containing fragments of brick and mortar flecking.

#### *The Western Block*

- 3.1.8 This was located within the south-western corner of the site (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.9 The underlying natural clay (3) was encountered at a depth of 0.6 m below ground level (Fig. 3, Section 3). Overlying the natural was a layer of light yellow-brown sandy silt (7) containing many sub-angular flint nodules. This deposit measured 0.3 m in depth at the western edge of the area decreasing in depth towards the east. Sealing this layer was a continuation of the clay loam (1), up to 0.35 m in depth.

#### *The Northern Block*

- 3.1.10 This was located on the northern edge of the development area against the High Street (A423) (Fig. 2). Prior to the excavation of the foundation trenches an area measuring 19 m by 11m was reduced in depth by up to 0.6 m in order to provide a level building platform. The foundations were then excavated from this level.
- 3.1.11 During the excavation of the foundation trenches a layer of pale yellow-brown clay silt (13) containing numerous angular small stones was encountered along the southern edge of the block at a depth of 0.8 m below the original ground level (Fig. 3, Sections 8 and 9). This was overlaid by a layer of red-brown silt clay containing

many sub-angular flints (11) measuring up to 0.3 m in depth. This deposit was also exposed in the bases of sections 6 and 7.

3.1.12 Within the region of Section 6 a lens of orange-brown sandy clay silt, up to 0.4 m in depth (10) was observed overlying layer 11. This deposit was not encountered elsewhere within the block. Sealing 10 and overlying layer 11 elsewhere was a mid brown clay silt (9), up to 0.25 m in depth. This is very similar to, and may be a continuation of, layer 2. Sealing this deposit was a layer of grey-brown clay loam (8) up to 0.4 m in depth. This deposit contained numerous brick and mortar fragments similar to layer 1 and represents the modern topsoil and turf..

3.1.13 Within the area of Sections 8 and 9 this was overlaid by a 0.1 m deep layer of crushed stone, an area of modern hardstanding.

#### *Service Trenches*

3.1.14 A trench measuring 0.5 m wide and 0.6 m deep was excavated across the entrance to the site for connection to the mains electric cable (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, Section 5). The trench was wholly contained within a layer of dark brown silt loam (14) containing numerous fragments of brick, concrete and mortar. No other stratigraphy was observed.

#### *Other Works*

3.1.15 Two test pits, one measuring 1.7 m x 1.4 m and 0.7 m deep and the second 2.7 m x 1.8 m also 0.7 m deep were excavated along the northern frontage of the site adjacent to the High Street (Fig. 2). These were dug to determine the ground conditions of the area prior to construction of the bus parking bay.

3.1.16 The stratigraphy exposed was similar in both pits (Fig. 3, Section 4). A red-brown silt clay with small flint nodules (17) was encountered at a depth of 0.65 m below the road level. This deposit was overlaid by a 0.45 m deep layer of dark red brown silt clay which produced many brick fragments (16). Sealing this was a 0.2 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (15), a layer of topsoil and turf.

### **3.2 Finds**

3.2.1 All the finds recovered were post-medieval in date (19th and 20th-century). these included both transfer printed and creamware pottery, bottle glass, brick and tile. It is probable that these originated during the construction, demolition and use of the school(s) which previously occupied the site. These finds were evaluated on site and were not retained.

3.2.2 No finds predating the 19th century were observed during the course of the watching brief.

### 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 No evidence for any occupation or activity predating the 19th century was observed during the course of the watching brief. The absence of any evidence for any buildings predating the school despite the fact that the site fronts onto the main highway through Nettlebed suggests that the site was on the margin of the village and had remained agricultural in nature prior to the construction of the first school in 1847.
- 4.1.2 From observation of the buildings to the east and west of the site it is apparent that the buildings to the east of the site show elements of both 17th and 18th century construction suggesting that they form the historic core of the village. The buildings to the north and west of the site (with the exception of the church) display forms suggesting 19th or early 20th century construction. This appears to confirm that this site was outside the core of the village and was only encroached upon during the expansion of the village in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- 4.1.3 The buried soil horizon, layer 4, is probably prehistoric in date and has been sealed below later layers of colluvium. No evidence for any soil horizons earlier than the 19th-century was encountered.
- 4.1.4 The presence of the brick and mortar fragments within layer 1 is probably the result of the continued expansion of the school, its rebuilding in 1925 and its subsequent demolition. The layer of made ground (14) was probably deposited during the demolition of the school in order to provide an access ramp for lorries.

## 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>Dates</i>
1	Layer	0.3 m - 0.6 m	-	Present day topsoil and turf	Pottery, brick	C19th/ C20th
2	Layer	0.2 m – 0.3 m	-	Subsoil, possible colluvium	-	-
3	Layer	0.35 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
4	Layer	> 0.2 m	-	Buried soil horizon	-	-
5	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
6	Layer	0.35 m	-	Modern made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th
7	Layer	0.2 m – 0.3 m	-	Subsoil, possible colluvium	-	-
8	Layer	0.3 m - 0.6 m	-	Present day topsoil and turf	Pottery, brick	C19th/ C20th
9	Layer	0.2 m – 0.3 m	-	Subsoil, possible colluvium	-	-
10	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
11	Layer	0.3 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
12	Layer	0.12 m	-	Modern hardstanding	-	C20th
13	Layer	> 0.35 m	-	Undisturbed natural, probable colluvium	-	-
14	Layer	> 0.6 m	-	Modern made ground	Brick	C20th
15	Layer	0.25 m	-	Present day topsoil and turf	Brick	C19th/ C20th
16	Layer	0.4 m	-	Modern made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th
17	Layer	> 0.15 m	-	Undisturbed natural, probable colluvium	-	-

**APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

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**APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

**Site name:** Old School Site, Nettlebed, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** NETTLE09

**Grid reference:** SU 699 867

**Type of watching brief:** Construction of 13 new dwellings, access road and services.

**Date and duration of project:** November 2009 to January 2010, 9 site visits

**Area of site:** 0.51 hectare

**Summary of results:** No evidence of activity predating the post-medieval period. No significant archaeology was observed.

**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:2009.63





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Figure 1: Site location





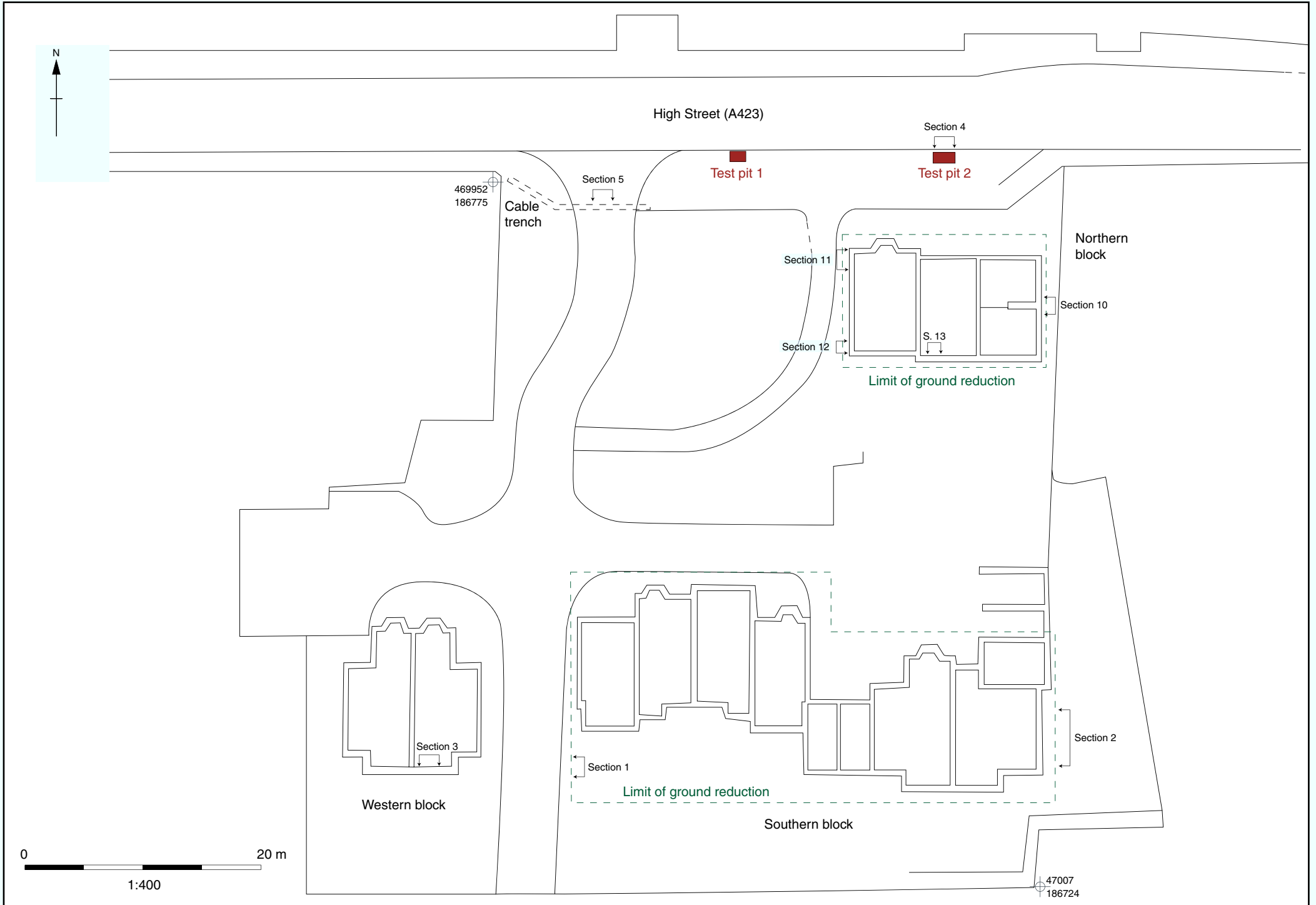


Figure 2: Site plan



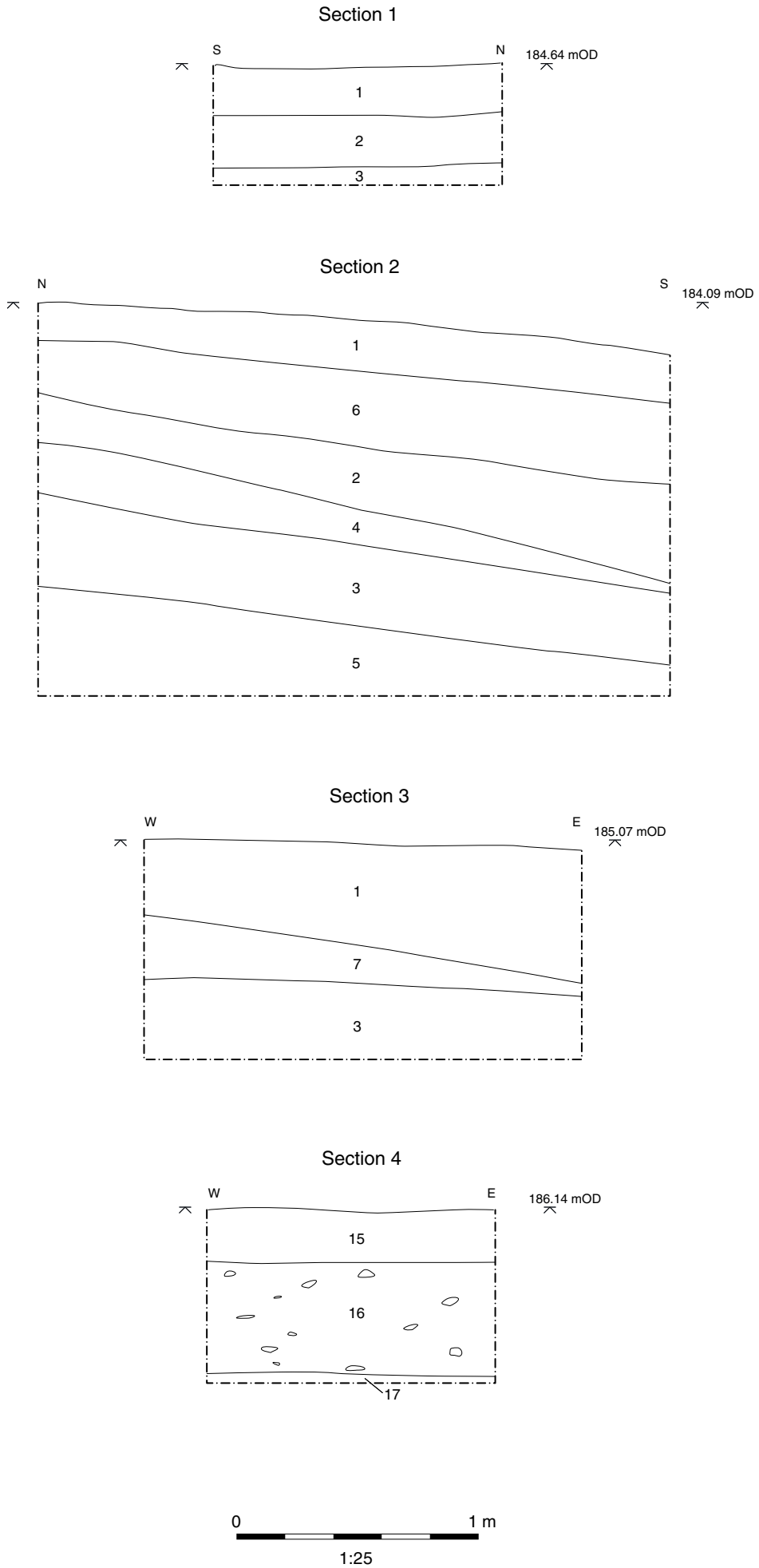


Figure 3: Sections



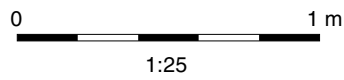
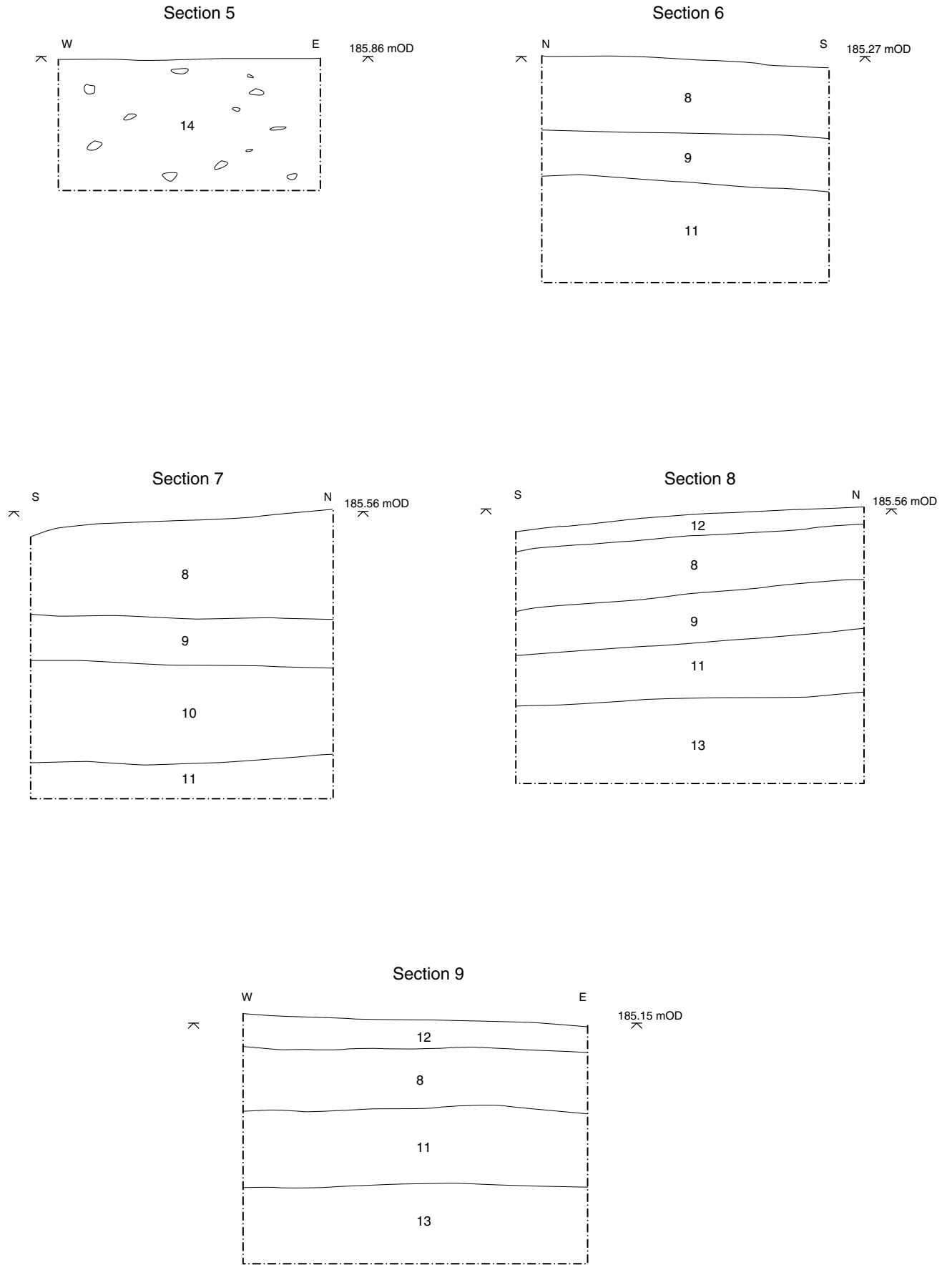


Figure 4: Sections







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