

THACGWB

10 -11 Church Gate  
Thatcham  
Berkshire



**Archaeological  
Watching Brief Report**



**Oxford Archaeology**

January 2005

**Client: Wilding Butler Construction  
Ltd**

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# 10-11 Churchgate, Thatcham, Berkshire

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

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Cover picture: North-west view of the Church of St. Mary's

## SUMMARY

*Between 14th October 2004 and 26th November 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 10-11 Churchgate, Thatcham, Berkshire (NGR: SU 5167 6715). The work was commissioned by Wilding Butler Construction Ltd in advance of construction of 5 new dwellings. The watching brief revealed two post-medieval east-west running ditches, a possible medieval plough soil and two undated ditches pre-dating the plough soil which may therefore have been early medieval, Saxon or earlier in origin. The nature of the site suggests it may have suffered seasonal flooding or have been marshland and therefore marginal and unsuitable for settlement.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Between 14th October 2004 and 26th November 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 10-11 Churchgate, Thatcham, Berkshire (NGR: SU 5167 6715). The work was commissioned by Wilding Butler Construction Ltd in respect of a condition attached to the planning permission for construction of 5 new dwellings on the site requiring the an archaeological watching brief being carried out during the period of the groundworks. (Planning Application No. 03/02170/FUL )

1.1.2 A project brief was set by Duncan Coe, the Principal Archaeologist for West Berkshire District Council. OA prepared and had approved a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2004).

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The site is located on the south side of Churchgate, directly opposite the Church of St. Mary's (Fig. 1). The site is situated on level ground on the edge of the River Kennet flood plane at approximately 70 m OD. It is bounded to the east and south by residential properties, to the west by a bridleway and to the north by a public highway. The site itself previously contained 2 bungalows, now demolished, and measures 0.33 hectares in area. The underlying geology is River and Valley Gravels (Institute of British Geological Survey sheet 267).

### 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 lies at the heart of historic Thatcham, which has its origins in the Late Saxon period. Documentary evidence of Thatcham exists from AD 971, by the time of the Domesday Book (AD 1086). The town seems to have grown in importance to become an important administrative and religious centre. Despite its early prominence the town did not prosper during the later medieval period, largely due to

the success of the new town at Newbury. The town was eventually granted borough status and there appears to have been an attempt at town planning with the laying out of a wide market place, 'The Broadway'.

- 1.3.3 The exact location of the original Saxon settlement is still unknown, but in common with other minster towns of the period it is assumed that the church would have been at the heart of the settlement during this period.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To preserve by record any archaeological remains (if present) that the works may remove or damage within the area of the proposed development.
- 2.1.2 To determine the presence or absence, date and character of any deposits relating to the late Saxon origins and development of Thatcham and to the later medieval phase of the town.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 Monitoring was undertaken during all ground intrusive works likely to expose, disturb or damage archaeological deposits. During these site visits the edges, bases and sections of any excavations were closely examined and where appropriate the sections recorded. The spoil from excavated trenches and soil stripping was also examined for dating evidence.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of the excavations undertaken, archaeological features exposed and the location of the sections was prepared at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) Recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All drawn sections were photographed using 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 Field Manual* (OAU 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 Throughout the site the underlying geology, a loose yellow brown gravel (7, 16 and 20) composed of angular medium to large flints, was reached at a depth between 0.5 m and 1.8 m below ground level (Sections 3 and 9). This appeared to slope both northwards (Section 9) and southwards (Sections 3, 8 and 11) within the site and probably represents small flood channels cutting through the gravel terrace, north of the River Kennet. Within the area of section 3 this was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of small sub-angular flint gravel (6).
- 3.1.2 Overlying natural gravel 7 and was an alluvial deposit, a 0.25 m deep tenacious reddish-brown silty clay (5). This was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep deposit of small sub-

angular reddish orange flint gravel (4). A thick deposit of tenacious yellow-brown silty clay alluvium (3) overlaid the remainder of the terrace. Sections 1 and 2 appear to be located within one of these channels as shown by the alluvial deposits recorded (Fig. 3).

- 3.1.3 A layer of orange brown silty clay (14), up to 1.1 m depth, overlaid the natural 16, gradually increasing towards the north of the site. Overlying both clay natural 14 and the alluvial deposit 3 within one of the flood channels was a light brown silty clay alluvium (22).
- 3.1.4 Cut into the top of terrace gravel 14 within plot 5 was a 1.6 m wide by 0.5 m deep ditch (26) (Fig. 3, section 12) running approximately south-west to the north-east, leaving plot 5 at its north-east corner (Same as 24, section 13). This was filled by a dark grey-brown clay-silt (25) containing many charcoal flecks (Same as 23, section 13). Cut into the top of gravel terrace 6 was a 1.2 m wide by 0.4 m deep east-west aligned concave shaped ditch (11) of similar shape (Fig. 3, section 5). This was filled by a pale brown clay-silt (10), a probable silting deposit containing many charcoal flecks.
- 3.1.5 Both ditches 11 and 26 were sealed by a layer of pale brown clay-silt (2), between 0.2 m and 0.35 m in depth. This was a layer of worked soil, probably a plough soil, of possible medieval origin, although no dating evidence was recovered. Cut into 2 was a 0.8 m wide by 0.4 m deep concave shaped ditch (9), filled by a pale brown clay-silt (8) which produced abraded brick fragments (Fig. 3, section 4). Aligned roughly east-west this appears to have been a post-medieval field boundary or drainage ditch.
- 3.1.6 A 2.8 m wide by 1.1 m deep ditch (13), running parallel to Churchgate was also seen cutting into the top of layer 2 (Fig. 3, section 6) in the north-west corner of the site. This was filled by a dark brown silty loam (12) containing many fragments of modern frogged brick. This roadside ditch appears to have been backfilled with construction debris and redeposited topsoil during the construction of the 1950's bungalow which originally occupied the site.
- 3.1.7 An overall layer of a dark brown clayey loam (1), between 0.5 m and 0.7 m in depth sealed the site. This layer produced many examples of modern finds and represents the garden soil associated with the former bungalows.

## 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 The majority of the finds recovered were of 17th-20th century origin, although some residual sherds of a 12th century flint tempered cooking vessel were recovered from the modern garden soil (1) and therefore was residual.

## 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 The alluvial deposits appeared homogenous and sterile. It was therefore decided that there were no suitable palaeo-environmental remains worth sampling on site.

#### 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 Although the site is located immediately to the south of the Church of St. Mary's there was no evidence encountered to suggest that the development area had been occupied during the Saxon or medieval periods. The presence of the two ditches (11 and 26) sealed by a ploughsoil suggests that they may have an early medieval, Saxon or earlier origin, however, there was no dating evidence to confirm this.
- 4.1.2 Ditch 9 was seen to cut the ploughsoil (2) and is therefore likely to be post-medieval, this is also supported by the finds retrieved from within its fill (8). Ditch 13 ran parallel with the existing road to the north of the site and is therefore likely to represent a recent roadside drainage ditch.
- 4.1.3 The lack of activity within the site prior to the post-medieval period may be accounted for by the presence of the edge of the gravel terrace observed running across the southern edge of the site. The alluvial deposits also observed overlying the terrace gravels, and what appear to be small flood channels cutting through it, suggests that this area had suffered flooding in the past and may therefore have only been of marginal agricultural use. The earlier ditches may reflect drier periods or attempts to drain this area. It is also worth noting that the presence of post-medieval water management systems in the area, particularly for the Kennet and Avon canal may have contributed to the site being brought into mainstream agriculture and later into residential use.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.5 m	Modern garden soil	Brick, pottery, glass, metal, bone	C20th
2	Layer	0.25 m	Subsoil - possible medieval plough soil ?	-	C15th ?
3	Layer	0.35 m	Alluvial deposit	-	-
4	Layer	0.4 m	Natural gravel	-	-
5	Layer	0.25 m	Natural alluvial clay	-	-
6	Layer	> 0.5 m	Top of gravel terrace	-	-
7	Layer	> 0.5 m	Layer of terrace gravels, same as (16) and (20)	-	-
8	Fill	0.4 m	Fill of ditch 9	Abraded brick	C17th/C18th
9	Cut	0.4 m	E-W ditch	-	C17th/C18th
10	Fill	0.4 m	Fill of ditch 11	-	Early medieval / Saxon?
11	Cut	0.4 m	E-W ditch	-	Early medieval / Saxon?
12	Fill	1.15 m	Fill of roadside ditch 13	Frogged bricks	C20th
13	Cut	1.15 m	Roadside ditch	-	C20th
14	Layer	1.1m	Natural clay	-	-
15	Layer	0.4 m	Mixed clay and gravels	-	-
16	Layer	> 0.4 m	Terrace gravel	-	-
17	Layer	0.3 m	Modern topsoil, same as (1)	-	C20th
18	Layer	0.8 m	Natural clay, same as (14)	-	-
19	Layer	0.3 m	Mixed gravels and clay, same as (15)	-	-
20	Layer	> 0.6 m	Terrace gravel, same as (16)	-	-
21	Layer	0.8 m	Mixed sand and clay	-	-
22	Layer	0.4 m	Silting deposit against edge of gravel terrace	-	-



<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
23	Fill	0.5 m	Fill of ditch 24, silting deposit	-	Early medieval / Saxon?
24	Cut	0.5 m	E-W ditch, probable continuation of (26)	-	Early medieval / Saxon?
25	Fill	0.5 m	Fill of ditch 26, silting deposit	-	Early medieval / Saxon?
26	Ditch	0.5 m	E-W ditch, probable continuation of (24)	-	Early medieval / Saxon?

## APPENDIX 2 REFERENCES

IFA, 1992 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 2004 *10-11 Churchgate, Thatcham, Berkshire: Written Scheme of Investigation*

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

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** 10-11 Churchgate, Thatcham, Berkshire

**Site code:** THACG 04

**Grid reference:** SU 5167 6715

**Type of watching brief:** Excavation of groundworks for 5 new dwellings

**Date and duration of project:** 14th October 2004 to 26th November 2004, 19 site visits

**Area of site:** 0.33 hectares

**Summary of results:** Extensive deposits of modern garden soils overlying 2 post-medieval ditches and a possible medieval plough soil which sealed two undated but possibly early medieval or Saxon ditches.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with West Berkshire Museum in due course, under the following accession number: NEBYM.2004.54.





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Figure 1: Site location



Figure 2: Plan of of watching brief area, showing location of sections

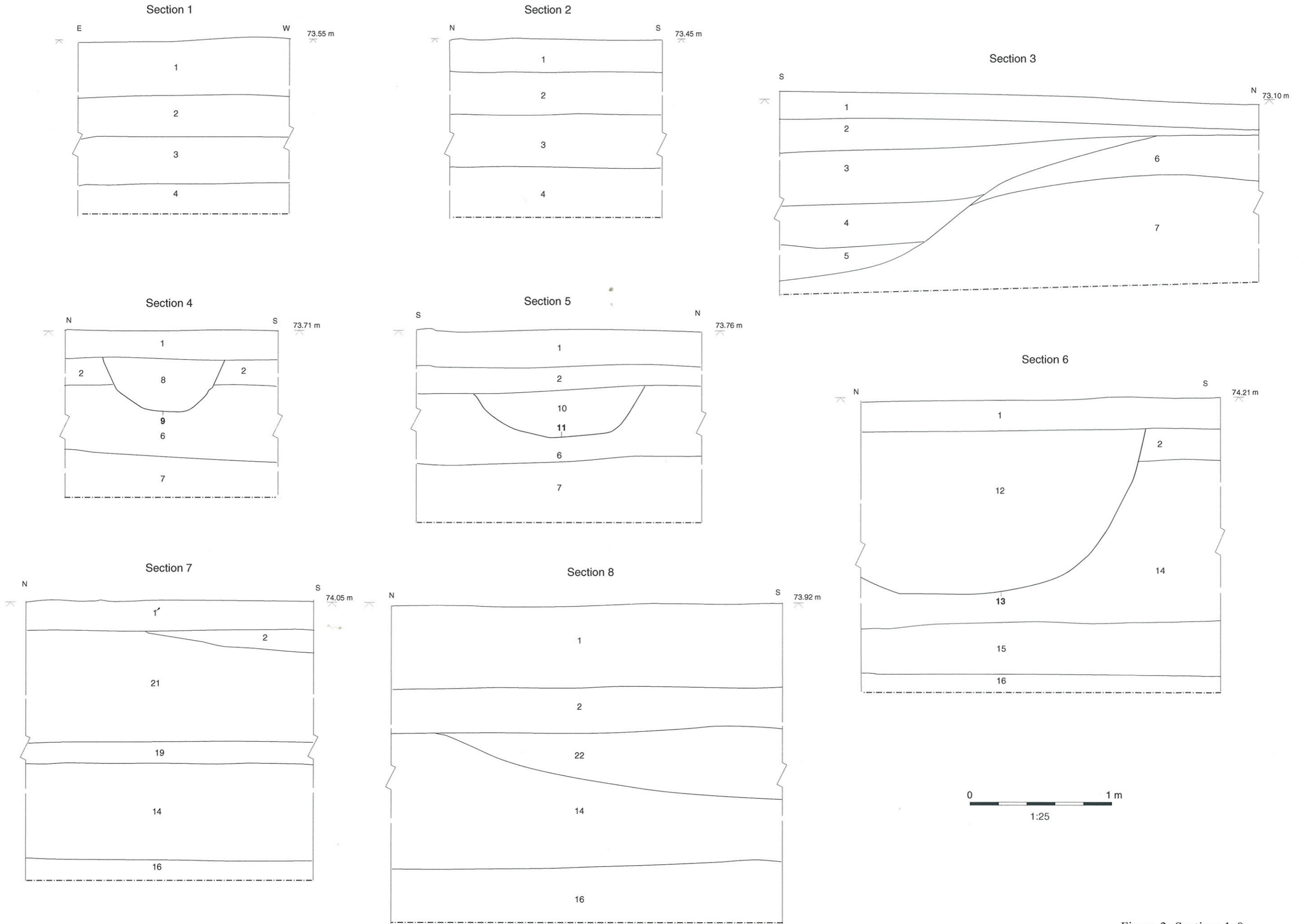


Figure 3: Sections 1-8

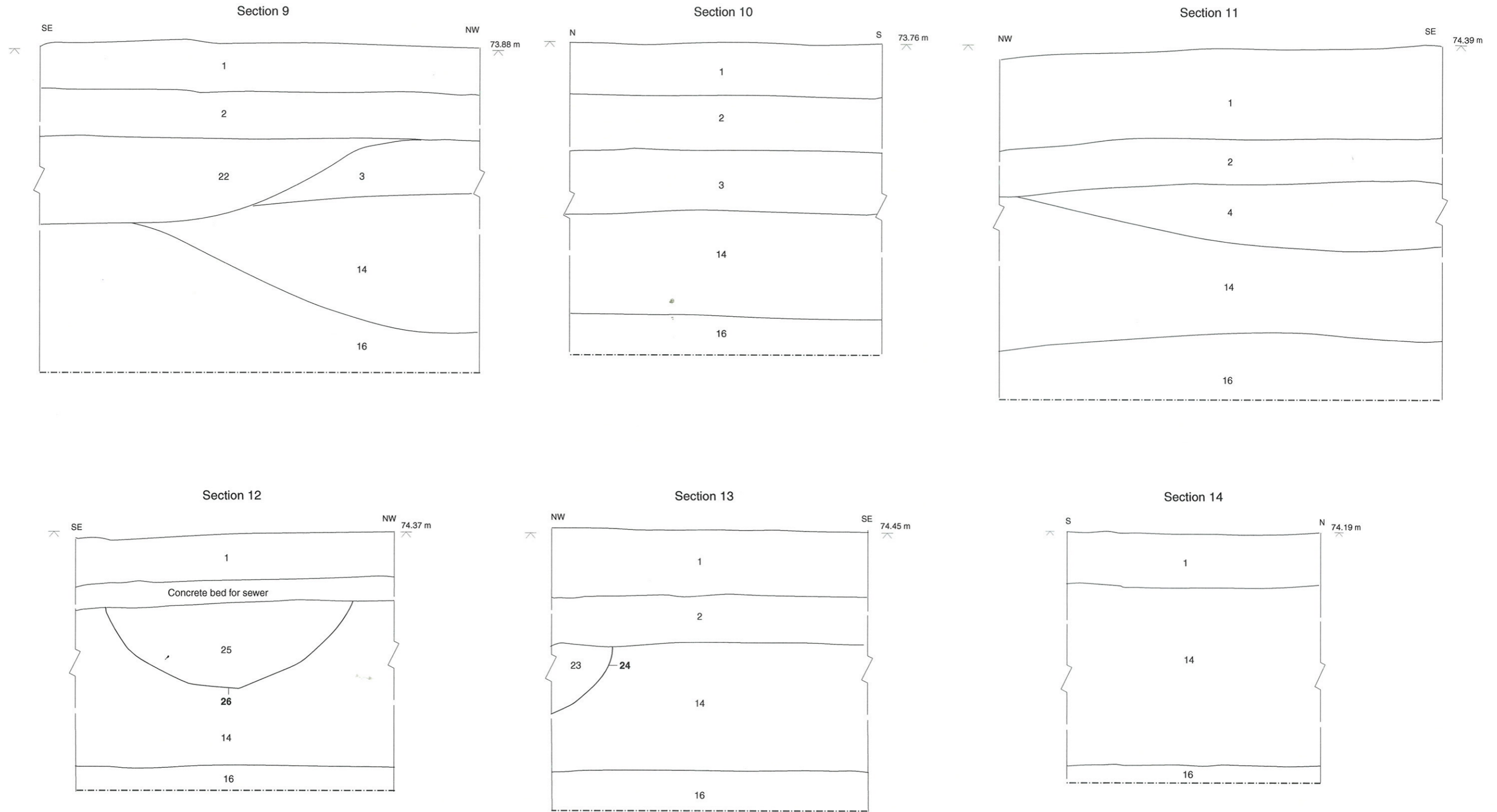


Figure 4: Sections 9-14



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