M40/A404 Junction
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire

Archaeological Watching Brief

Oxford Archaeology

29th April 2002

Client Name:
Parsons Brinkerhoff Infrastructure Ltd

Issue N^{O}: Draft
OA Job N^{O}: 1258
Planning Ref N^{O}:
NGR: SU 853 911

Client Name:	Parsons Brinkerhoff Infrastructure Ltd
Client Ref No:	
Document Title:	M40/A404 Handy Cross Junction, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire
Document Type:	Watching Brief
Issue Number:	1
National Grid Reference:	SU 853 911
Planning Reference:	
OA Job Number:	JN 1258
Site Code:	HWHCJ02
Invoice Code:	HWHCJWB
Museum Accession No:	
Prepared by:	Tim Haines
Position:	Assistant Supervisor
Date:	20th April 2002
Checked by:	Andrew Norton
Position:	Project Officer
Date:	24th April 2002
Approved by:	Robert Williams
Position:	Director: Business Development and Operations
Date:	25th April 2002
Document File Location	ANortonU:\Recent\M40Report.doc
Graphics File Location	\\Server4\oaupubs1\All drawings\ M40/A404*High Wycombe. S. Lucas
Illustrated by	Sarah Lucas

PP Signed.....

Oxford Archaeology

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

M40/A404 Junction, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

SUMMARY

In March and April 2002, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief on a geotechnical exercise at the junction of the M40/A404 High Wycombe Buckinghamshire (NGR SU 853 911) The work was commissioned by Parsons Brinkerhoff Infrastructure Ltd in advance of road improvements. The watching brief revealed no archaeological features, however, Test Pits 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 12 all revealed in section undisturbed buried topsoil below deposits used to construct the current road embankments.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In March and April 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the M40/A404 Junction, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire NGR SU853 911 (Fig.1). The work was commissioned by Parsons Brinkerhoff Infrastructure Ltd on behalf of the DETR in respect of a road improvement proposal.

1.1.2 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on a ridge of high ground running between the River Wye and the River Thames at 140 m above OD.

1.2.2 The geology of the proposed site of development is mainly clay-with-flints, overlying soft white chalk with many flints, although in places the overlying clay layers are not present (BGS 255 1974). The test pitting was carried out within the boundaries of the current M40/A404 road junction.

1.2.3 To the south the development area is bordered by open fields currently under arable cultivation, to the north the development area is bordered by residential and commercial developments.

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, 2002) and is summarised below.

1.3.2 Research carried out for this survey suggests that the study area has been the subject of no concerted archaeological survey or fieldwork. This lack of archaeological investigation constrains our understanding of the archaeological potential of the study area, and may indicate that the distribution of known archaeology does not accurately reflect the possible density of archaeological sites within the area.

1.4 Prehistoric and Roman

1.4.1 There are two findspots within the study area during these periods, both from the prehistoric period. These comprise the findspots of a Bronze Age stone boat-shaped battle-axe and three Neolithic flints representing a piercer/borer and two axes. While there are no Roman findspots, Morris *et al* (1970) speculated that there may have been a Roman road crossing the northern section of the study area close to Wycombe Abbey, which would have connected London with the South Oxfordshire region.

1.5 Saxon

1.5.1 The site of proposed development is at the periphery of the three ancient parishes of Great Marlow, Little Marlow and High Wycombe, lying *c* 2.5, 3.5 and 2.25 km from the historic centres of these parishes respectively. The position of the site on the periphery of these parishes is likely to suggest, though not confirm, that during this period the site of proposed development was undeveloped land.

1.6 Medieval

1.6.1 The development of this area quickens during this period as it 'lay in a favourable position half-way between Oxford and London and commanded the important road to Marlow' (VCH, 1925, 113). The 1 km study area surrounding the proposed development contains the sites of two medieval farmsteads / estates.

1.6.2 Locally there is the 13th century Monkton Manor House and a possible medieval hospital at the medieval Loakes Manor.

1.6.3 The 13th century Monkton Manor house no longer survives above ground and it is likely that the grade II Monkton farmhouse, which English Heritage's Listed Building designation describes as late medieval with 16th century and later additions, now occupies the site. It seems that the Manor began to decline as after 1545 it descended with the Manor house at Little Marlow, with which it doubtless amalgamated. After 1820 it is not mentioned by name again (VCH, 1925, 113). It is this site which is associated with a findspot of an impressed medieval tile.

1.6.4 The second archaeological site is the medieval Loakes Manor house, *c*. 1.9 km to the northeast of the site of proposed development, which may have been the site of the medieval hospital of St. Margaret and St. Giles (VCH, 1925, 113).

1.7 Post-Medieval

1.7.1 The 1 km study area contains no identified archaeological sites dating to the post-medieval period. It does however contain 10 listed buildings of Grade II status, dating from this period.

2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2.1.1 OA is grateful to David Huskisson Associates for providing plans of the development area and to employees of Structural Soils Ltd for assistance on site.

3 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims

3.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.

3.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 The ground investigation consisted of the excavation of 20 Test Pits, 3 Boreholes and 6 Window Sample/Dynamic Probe holes (Fig. 2). The boreholes and window samples/dynamic probes were not monitored, as there was no potential for observing archaeological deposits from these operations.

3.2.2 Test pits 18 and 19 were excavated and backfilled prior to on site monitoring.

3.2.3 Of the remaining Test Pits, 2, 3, 4, 13, 14 and 15 were all excavated by JCB using a toothed bucket. Test Pits 2 and 3 were 2.0 m x0.7 m wide and 3.0 m deep, Test Pit 4 was 1.6 m x 0.7 m and 3.0 m deep. Test Pits 13, 14 and 15 were all 0.7 m wide x 1.0 m long and 1.0 m, 1.3 m and 1.45 m deep respectively.

3.2.4 The remaining Test Pits were all excavated by hand to varying dimensions and depths.

3.2.5 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* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Description of deposits

4.1.1 Test Pits 1-6 were all to the north of the M40.

4.1.2 Test Pit 1, a hand dug Test Pit at the top of an embankment, was excavated through a redeposited landscaping topsoil (101) 0.44 m thick and several layers of made ground (102-105). The excavation was halted at 2.65 m below ground level (bgl).

4.1.3 Test Pit 2, a machine dug Test Pit at the top of an embankment, was excavated through a redeposited landscaping topsoil (201) 0.4 m thick and layers of made ground (202) before natural undisturbed chalk (203) was reached at 3.0 m bgl.

4.1.4 Test Pit 3, a machine dug Test Pit at the top of an embankment, was excavated through a landscaping topsoil (301) 0.15 m thick and made ground (302) 2.15 m thick until natural undisturbed chalk (303) was reached at 2.3 m bgl.

4.1.5 Test Pit 4, a machine dug Test Pit at the top of an embankment, was excavated through a redeposited landscaping topsoil (401), 0.15 m thick and made ground (402-403) 1.2 m thick. At 0.55 m bgl a natural undisturbed subsoil was seen and at 1.35 m bgl natural indurated chalk was reached.

4.1.6 Test Pit 5 (Fig. 3), a hand dug Test Pit at the top of an embankment, was excavated through a redeposited landscaping topsoil (501) 0.1 m thick and made ground (502) 0.25 m thick. A buried undisturbed topsoil (503), 0.2 m thick, was encountered below which a subsoil (504) 0.2 m thick was reached before natural undisturbed chalk was seen at 0.75 m bgl.

4.1.7 Test Pit 6 (Fig. 3), a hand dug Test Pit at the top of an embankment, was excavated through a landscaping topsoil (601) 0.1 m thick and made ground (602) 0.25 m thick. A buried topsoil (603), 0.15 m thick, overlay a buried subsoil (604), 0.25 m thick, and at 0.75 m bgl natural undisturbed boulder clay (605) was reached.

4.1.8 Test Pits 7-20 were all to the south of the M40.

4.1.9 Test Pit 7 (Fig. 3), a hand dug Test Pit at the base of an embankment, was excavated through a redeposited topsoil (701), 0.16 m thick, and made ground (702), 0.08 m thick. A buried topsoil (703) 0.3 m thick was excavated at 0.24 m bgl which overlay a possible plough soil (704) 0.35 m thick which overlay the top of a buried subsoil (705).

4.1.10 Test Pit 8 (Fig. 3), a hand dug Test Pit at the base of an embankment, was excavated through a redeposited topsoil (801) 0.1 m thick and made ground (802) 0.9 m thick, a buried topsoil (803) 0.2 m thick was observed at 1.0 m bgl which overlay a buried subsoil (804) 0.9 m thick, natural undisturbed chalk (805) was reached at 2.1 m bgl.

4.1.11 Test Pit 9 (Fig. 3), a hand dug Test Pit at the base of an embankment, was excavated through a landscaping topsoil (901) 0.18 m thick and made ground (902) 0.62 m thick, a buried topsoil (903) 0.2 m thick was observed at 0.8-0.9 m which overlay a buried subsoil (904) 0.45 m thick. Natural undisturbed chalk (905) was reached at 1.45 m.

4.1.12 Test Pit 10, a hand dug Test Pit at the base of an embankment, was excavated through decayed leaf mould (1001) 0.12 m thick and a re-deposited landscaping topsoil (1002) 0.51 m thick, which overlay made ground (1003). The excavation was halted at 1.1 m before a buried topsoil, or undisturbed chalk, was reached.

4.1.13 Test Pit 11, a hand dug Test Pit at the top of an embankment, was excavated through a redeposited landscaping topsoil (1101) 0.18 m thick which overlay made ground (1102) 1.02 m thick consisting of compacted redeposited chalk. The excavation halted at 1.2 m bgl.

4.1.14 Test Pit 12 (Fig. 3), a hand dug Test Pit at the base of an embankment, was excavated through a redeposited landscaping topsoil (1201) 0.65 m thick and made ground (1202) 0.55 m thick. The top of a possible buried topsoil (1203) was observed at 1.2 m bgl although the excavation ceased at that point.

4.1.15 Test Pit 13, a machine dug Test Pit at the base of a cutting, was excavated through a redeposited topsoil (1301) 0.1 m thick and subsoil (1302) 012 m thick. Natural undisturbed indurated chalk (1303) was reached at 0.22 m bgl.

4.1.16 Test Pit 14, a machine dug Test Pit at the bottom of a cutting, was excavated through a redeposited landscaping topsoil (1401) 0.24 m thick into undisturbed natural chalk (1402). The excavation was halted at 1.3 m bgl due to the indurated nature of the chalk.

4.1.17 Test Pit 15, a machine dug Test Pit at the bottom of a cutting, was excavated through a redeposited landscaping topsoil (1501) 0.35 m thick into an indurated undisturbed natural chalk (1502). The excavation was halted at 1.3 m bgl .

4.1.18 Test Pit 16, a hand dug Test Pit at the bottom of a cutting, was excavated through a redeposited landscaping topsoil (1601) 0.22 m thick and a truncated boulder clay subsoil (1602) 1.7 m thick into indurated natural chalk (1603). The excavation was halted at 1.9 m bgl.

4.1.19 Test Pit 17, a hand dug Test Pit at the top of a cutting, was excavated through a redeposited landscaping topsoil (1701) 0.15 m thick a clayey chalk hill wash (1702) 0.86 m thick and into indurated natural chalk (1703). The excavation was halted at 1.2 m bgl.

4.1.20 Test Pit 18 was excavated prior to on site monitoring and was not observed.

4.1.21 Test Pit 19 was excavated prior to on site monitoring and was not observed.

4.1.22 Test Pit 20, a hand dug Test Pit at the top of an embankment, was excavated through a redeposited landscaping topsoil (2001) 0.15 m thick and made ground (2002). The excavation was halted at 1.2 m bgl.

4.2 Finds

4.2.1 No finds were recovered from any of the test pits or associated spoil heaps.

4.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

4.3.1 Although full consideration was given to various sampling strategies, due to the absence of suitable deposits no environmental samples were taken.

5 Discussion And Conclusions

5.1.1 The results of this watching brief have been entirely negative as the observed test pits have proved to be archaeologically sterile. The absence of archaeology is not unexpected given the number of and relatively small size of the test pits under observation. The location of the test pits at the base of cuttings and the top of embankments would obviously reduce the probability of archaeology being observed and should not be taken to imply an absence of archaeology throughout the area of the proposed road improvements.

5.1.2 It is worth mentioning the presence of buried topsoil in Test Pits 5-9 and 12 as it is possible that archaeology could be preserved in these areas below the buried topsoil.

Scale 1:25000

Figure 1: Site location

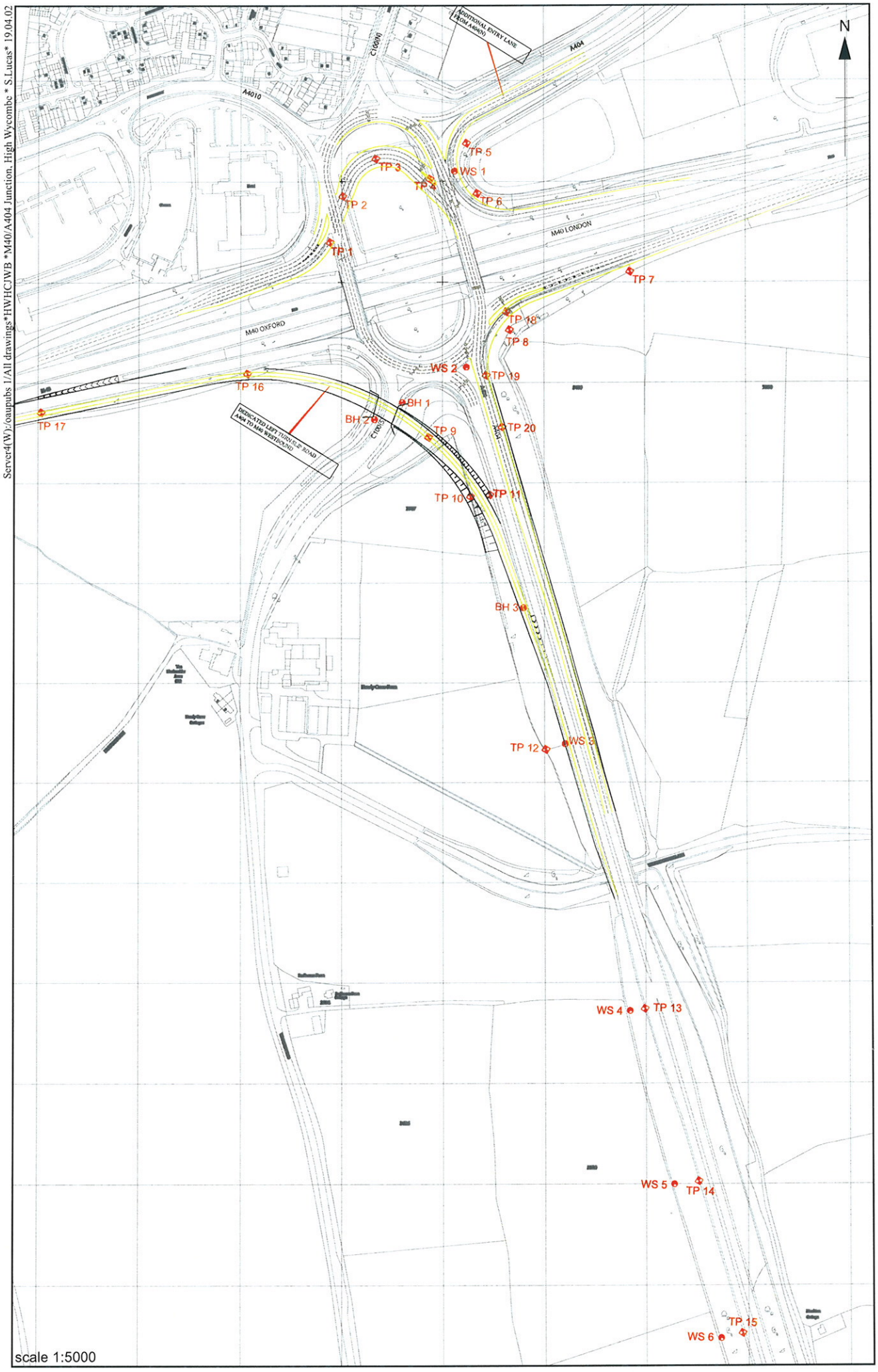

Figure 2: Location of Test Pits.

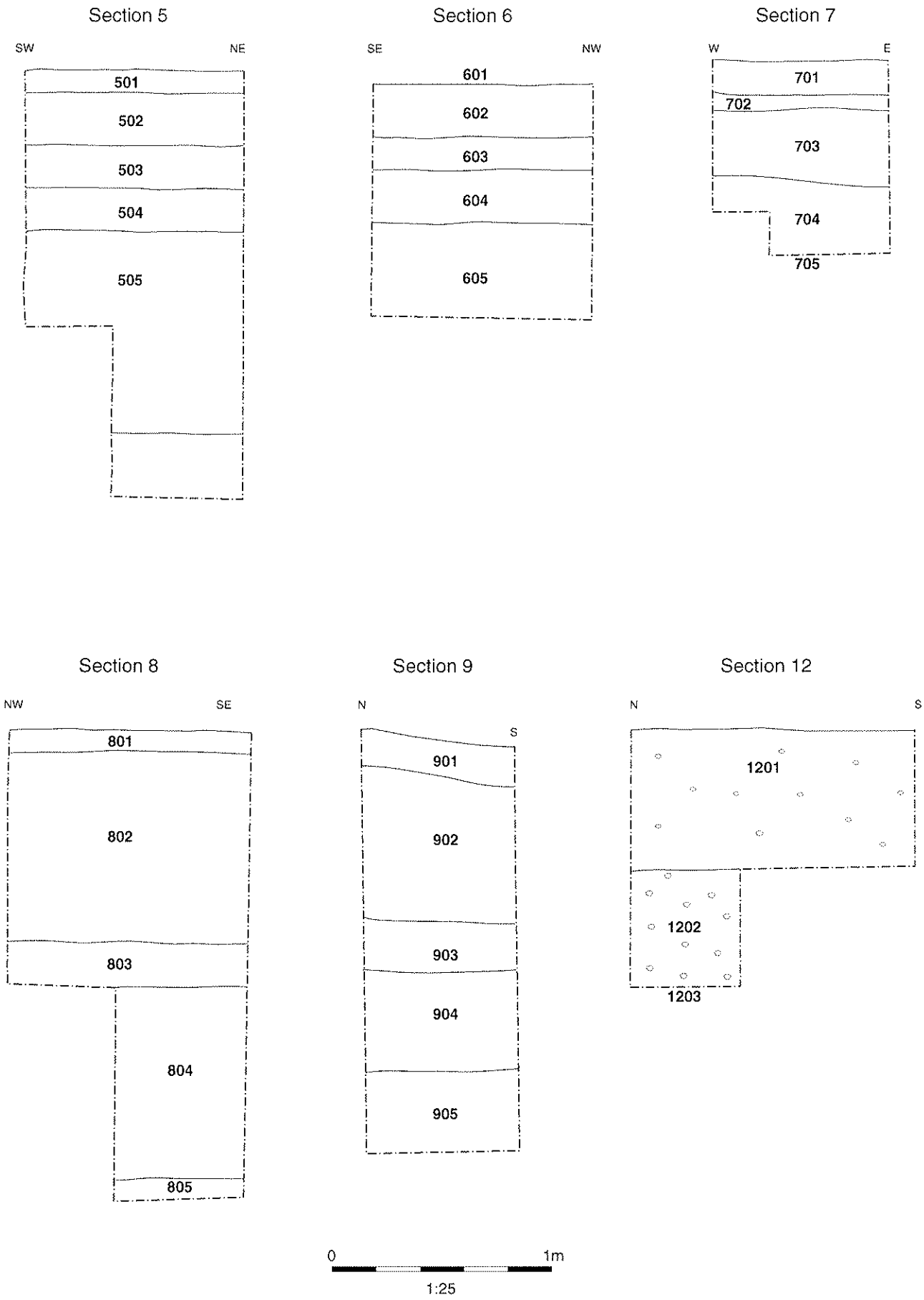

Figure 3: Sample sections.

Oxford Archaeology

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

Oxford Archaeology North

Storey Institute
Meeting House Lane
Lancaster LA1 1TF

t: (0044) 01524 848666
f: (0044) 01524 848606
e: lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk
w:www.oxfordarch.co.uk

Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

Oxford Archaeological Unit is a
Private Limited Company, N°: 1618597
and a Registered Charity, N°: 285627

Registered Office:
Oxford Archaeological Unit
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES