

Stowe House New Forecourt Stowe Buckinghamshire

Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology

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Stowe House, New Forecourt Stowe, Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

CONTENTS

Summary.....	1
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Location and scope of work	1
1.2 Geology and topography	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background.....	1
1.4 Acknowledgements	2
2 Project Aims and Methodology.....	3
2.1 Aims	3
2.2 Methodology.....	3
3 Results	3
3.1 Description of deposits	3
3.2 Finds	5
3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains	5
4 Discussion and Conclusions.....	5
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory	7
Appendix 2 Bibliography and references.....	7
Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details.....	7

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 Site location map
Fig. 2 Site plan
Fig. 3 Sections
Fig. 4 Detail of stone and brick structures

SUMMARY

In August and September 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Stowe House, Stowe, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 6700 3750). The work was commissioned by Purcell Miller Tritton architects in advance of re-laying of the north forecourt and the installation of new drainage.

The watching brief revealed two stone structures, which pre-date the existing east colonnade at the front of the main house. The structures appear to be the foundations of aedicules (small rooms), which once formed part of a structure flanking the terrace in front of Stowe House. The structures are depicted on Jacques Rigaud's illustration of the building dated 1739. The structures are thus of 18th century date or earlier. Also revealed were 19th-century brick-built culverts, which had been inserted into the remains of an earlier 18th-century terrace gravel surface.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In August and September 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief in the forecourt of Stowe House, Stowe, Buckinghamshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Purcell Miller Tritton architects in respect of a scheme for the laying of a new forecourt to replace the old one and new drainage facilities.
- 1.1.2 The project was undertaken in accordance with the methodology for previous works at the site and in keeping with OA standards for watching briefs.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on cornbrash within the School grounds, which are generally level, at approximately 130 m OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for an earlier watching brief carried out at Drayson Hall (OA, 2002) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The earliest known human activity within the study area dates to the Roman period and a Roman villa of early 4th century date lies c 500 m north-west of the Site. The main Towcester to Alchester Roman Road runs south-west/north-east c 200 m to the west and the Fenny Stratford to Buckingham road, lies immediately to the north of the site on a south-east/north-west alignment.
- 1.3.3 Roman pottery kilns were uncovered nearby in the early 1990s (Marshall 1999, Booth 1999). Part of a pottery kiln was salvage recorded in 1990, and further indications of a kiln were noted in 1995. Among the artefacts recovered was a quantity of pink-grogged ware from both kiln locations. This material dates from the

2nd-4th centuries (Booth and Green, 1989), and similar material has been found by the National Trust's archaeologists during ground disturbance in and around the gardens of Stowe Park. A Saxon relic has been found by the gardeners at Stowe.

- 1.3.4 Domesday records four manors, which are likely to have represented the pre-conquest settlements within the area. In the early medieval period these settlements became nucleated around a church and manor house. The four manors recorded in Domesday comprise Stowe, Boycott, Lamport and Dadford (of which the latter two were divided into two holdings each).
- 1.3.5 Recorded as *Stov* in Domesday, it was leased from the Bishop of Bayeux by Robert d'Oilly and Roger of Ivry in 1086. In the 13th century it was granted to Osney Abbey (Oxfordshire), who held it until the dissolution. It was eventually granted to Queen Elizabeth, who proceeded to grant it to Thomas Wright in 1590. In 1591 the manor of Stowe was sold to the Temple family, who had made their money from sheep farming.
- 1.3.6 The mansion, which stands in the Grade I listed registered park at Stowe dates originally to the 16th/17th centuries, and was remodelled in the 18th century. The original manor house was demolished and replaced by Sir Richard Temple before his death in 1697. Later his son (the first Lord Cobham) re-built the front and added the wings. The house was further enlarged by Earl Temple, who died in 1779 and afterwards by the Marquis of Buckinghamshire. During this time, the Temple family had begun to invest heavily in the gardens. The first Lord Cobham, who died in 1749, had started to extend the area of parkland (which had been present as a Deer Park from the 13th century). By the end of the 1720's due to the ever expanding Stowe Park, the village of Stowe, which in 1712 had 31 houses, had been largely cleared, leaving only the 13th century church of the Assumption of St. Mary the Virgin.
- 1.3.7 The land within Stowe Manor became an extensive, complex pleasure garden, surrounding a country mansion, probably one of the finest examples of later Renaissance houses in England. Worked on by a number of famous landscape designers, including Charles Bridgeman and Capability Brown, by the 18th century it was supremely influential to English landscape gardening. At its largest the designed landscape and woodlands covered some 250 hectares.
- 1.3.8 Notable post-medieval structures in the grounds include Conduit House and the Bourbon Tower, both probably of 18th century date.

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 The OA would like to thank John Cook from the Historic Buildings Survey who monitored the start of the groundworks and recorded the stone foundations uncovered on the east side of the colonnade.

- 1.4.2 He has kindly supplied drawings and text detailing the early discoveries during the watching brief and his conclusions are included in the discussion section of the report.

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 The old forecourt was reduced by a general depth of 0.2 m before the lines of new drains were marked out and excavated. The drains were laid and connected to an older brick-built culvert, retained for the purposes of these works and which extended in front of and beneath Stowe House. A new French drain was laid around the base of the colonnade flanking the front of the House and was connected to the newly inserted drains. The construction trenches were then filled in and a new forecourt surface with grassed areas was laid out.
- 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 *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Forecourt Deposits

- 3.1.1 The old forecourt surface was removed revealing a 0.14 m thick layer of compact red-brown sandy loam (1), which formed the base of the old forecourt. This layer overlay an earlier forecourt surface of compacted yellow-brown sandy gravel (2) that in turn overlay a thick layer of compacted red-brown silty clay (3) with bands of sand and gravel.
- 3.1.2 At the base of this layer (3), building debris was observed consisting of brick, stone, and mortar fragments. This material appears to represent material deposited to build up an earlier terrace in front of the house, though was undated. Sections were recorded of the general site stratigraphy within trenches for new mains water (Figs 2 and 3).

Stone structures beneath the east Colonnade

- 3.1.3 During excavations for the new French drain at the base of the east colonnade, two stone structures were uncovered set within layer 3 (Figs 2 and 4). The first structure (5) was situated at the south-west corner of the east colonnade. This structure consisted of four courses of roughly hewn sandstone blocks, which extended from under the east wall of the colonnade, adjacent to the north wall of the main house. The stones projected 0.6 m from the colonnade wall face and the top face lay 1.2 m below the wall skirting. The stones clearly continued below the level that was excavated. The surviving blocks stepped down to the north, the final block being 1.57 m below the skirting.
- 3.1.4 The stonework was bonded with a hard light brown mortar with small (1-2 mm) gravel inclusions, including brick dust and ash. The junction with the north wall of the house was not uncovered. Most of the stone blocks were of a hard light coloured sandstone, however some are of a softer greensand.
- 3.1.5 The second structure was a square fragment of wall (4) that was situated directly north of structure 5. The structure was exposed at the point where the colonnade starts to curve away to the north-east. Five courses of stonework were visible, the southern-most edge being 0.8 m south of the point at which the colonnade starts to curve to the north-east. The stonework extended northwards for a length of 1.7 m. At this point the stones returned to the east for a length of 1.8 m but the junction with the colonnade was not exposed. As with structure 5, it projected 0.6 m away from the east wall of the colonnade and continued underneath it. The stonework comprised hard sandstone with some softer greensand blocks, bonded with a light brown mortar.
- 3.1.6 When the French drain was excavated along the west side of the colonnade no sign of foundations similar to those on the east side (walls 4 & 5) were observed. These are thought to have been damaged by later services in this part of the forecourt but may survive *in situ* at a lower level.

Brick Culverts beneath the forecourt

- 3.1.7 Also exposed during groundworks by the east colonnade was a brick-built culvert (7) consisting of two parallel 'dwarf' walls that were three courses tall and spaced 0.165 m apart (Fig. 4). The culvert extended diagonally to the north-west from the south-east corner of the forecourt. The bricks measured 230 mm x 110 mm x 65 mm and were bonded with a fine light brown mortar.
- 3.1.8 To the north, further excavations revealed that the walls were capped with roughly cut stone blocks and was joined to a similarly constructed drain (also numbered 7, Fig. 4) running north-east / south-west. The drain continued under the porte-cochere of the house, where the construction was seen to have changed from stone capping to a brick arch some 7 m from the junction.

- 3.1.9 The drain was also seen on the west side of the porte-cochere where it extended parallel to the north wall of the main house with a brick drainage duct extending to it from the house (Fig. 2).

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No environmental samples were taken during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The watching brief revealed former forecourt surfaces overlying a thick deposit of clay soil material that may derive from terracing work on the north terrace dating from around the early 18th century.
- 4.1.2 This soil horizon was the construction level for the remains of the two stone foundations, which certainly appear to pre-date the existing colonnade. The foundations extend beneath the existing colonnade wall base but there was no sign of a wall linking the two structures. The two structures are best explained as the remains of structures removed when the east and west colonnade was constructed. It is very possible that they formed the bases for two of the aedicules (small rooms/niches) depicted on Jacques Rigaud's 1739 illustration of the entrance to Stowe House (Plate 1). The illustration is a view from the portico steps looking to the north and to the east. The wall and quadrant can be seen emerging from the right of the picture and rusticated aedicules can be seen at the far end of the quadrant and at its junction with the east wall of the forecourt. The northern corner of a third aedicule can be seen at the extreme right of the picture, on the southern end of the east wall. These structures project from the wall face and would appear to be in the order of 2 m square, broadly comparable with the structures found during this exercise. Those at each end of the east wall thus tie up reasonably well, both in size and position with the foundations recorded recently.
- 4.1.3 The brick drain exposed dates from the early 1800s and is known from the 1939 plan of services for the house.

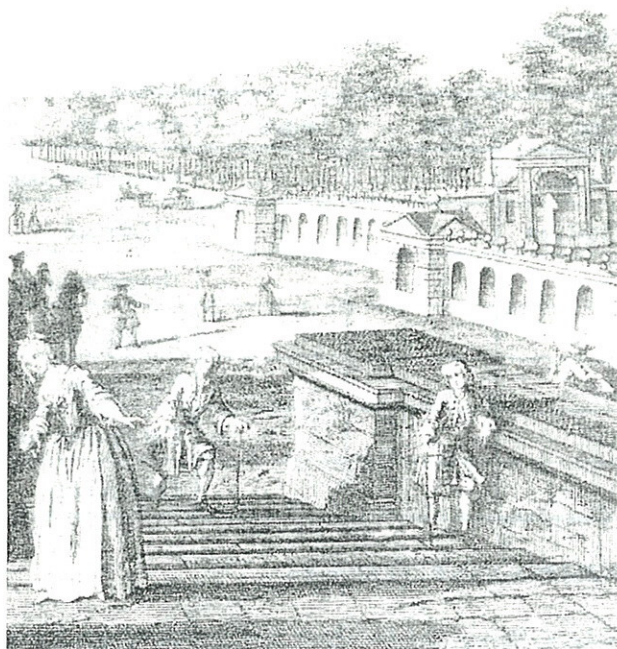


Plate 1: Jacques Rigaud's 1739 illustration of the entrance to Stowe House Jacques Rigaud's 1739 illustration of the entrance to Stowe showing rusticated aedicules at the far end of the forecourt quadrant and at its junction with the east wall of the forecourt.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 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	0.14 m			Former Forecourt base	None
2	Layer	0.10-12 m			Old surface	None
3	Layer	1 m			Ground make up	None
4	Structure				Foundation	
5	Structure				Foundation	
6	Cut				Cut for brick culvert	
7	Structure				Brick culvert	

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- OAU, 2000 *Stowe School, Stowe, Buckinghamshire* Archaeological Watching Brief
- OA, 2002 *Drayson Hall, Stowe School, Buckinghamshire* Archaeological Watching Brief
- OAU 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (first edition, ed. D Wilkinson)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Stowe House, New Forecourt, Stowe, Buckinghamshire

Site code: STHO 02

Grid reference: NGR SP 6700 3750

Type of watching brief: Watching brief during re-laying of new north forecourt.

Date and duration of project: A total of nine site visits from 14/08/2002 to 29/08/2002.

Area of site: 125 m x 53 m

Summary of results: The results from the watching brief exposed the remains of an earlier front of the house and 19th century services all cut into the remains of an earlier 18th century terrace.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number:



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Figure 1 Site location

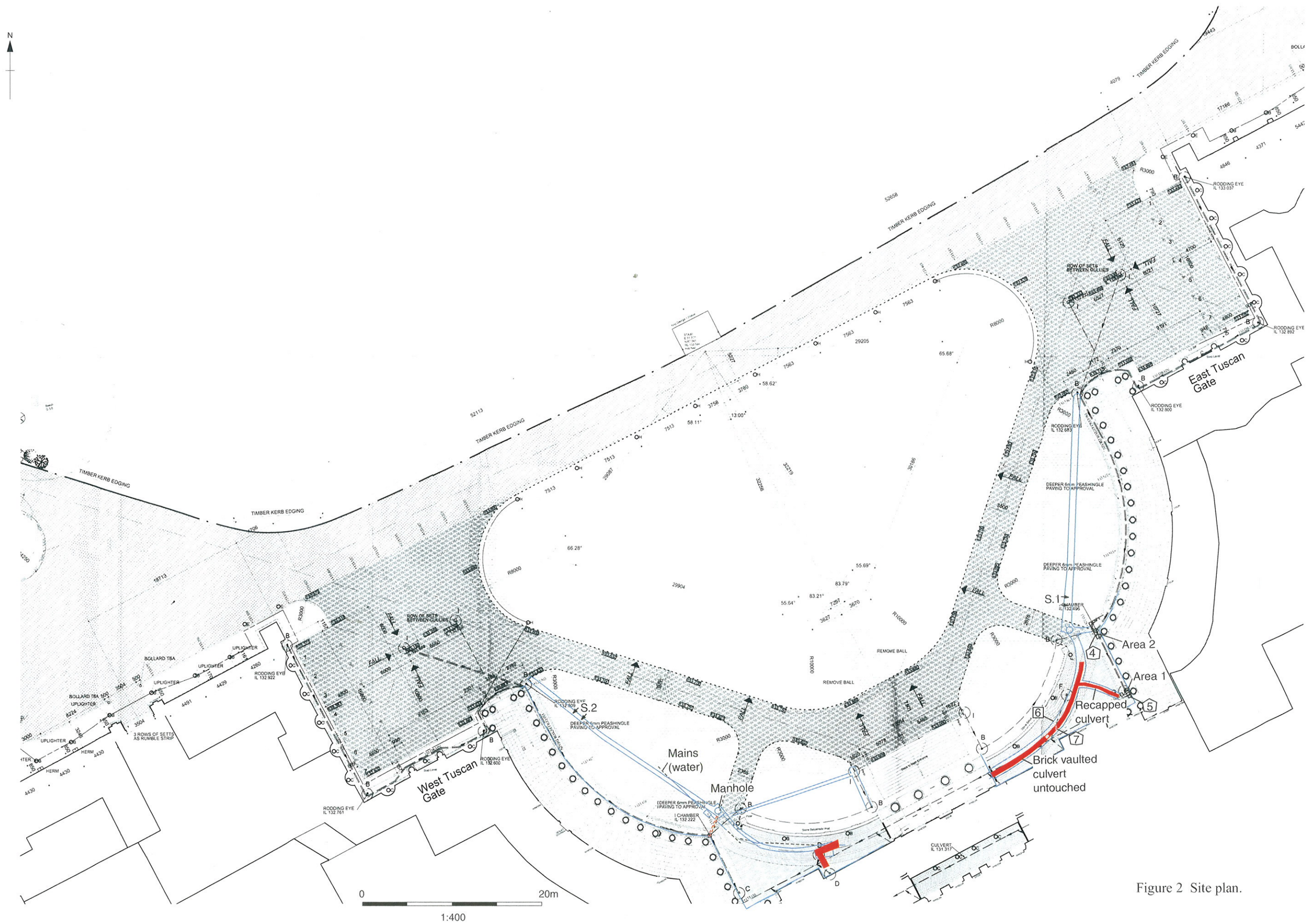
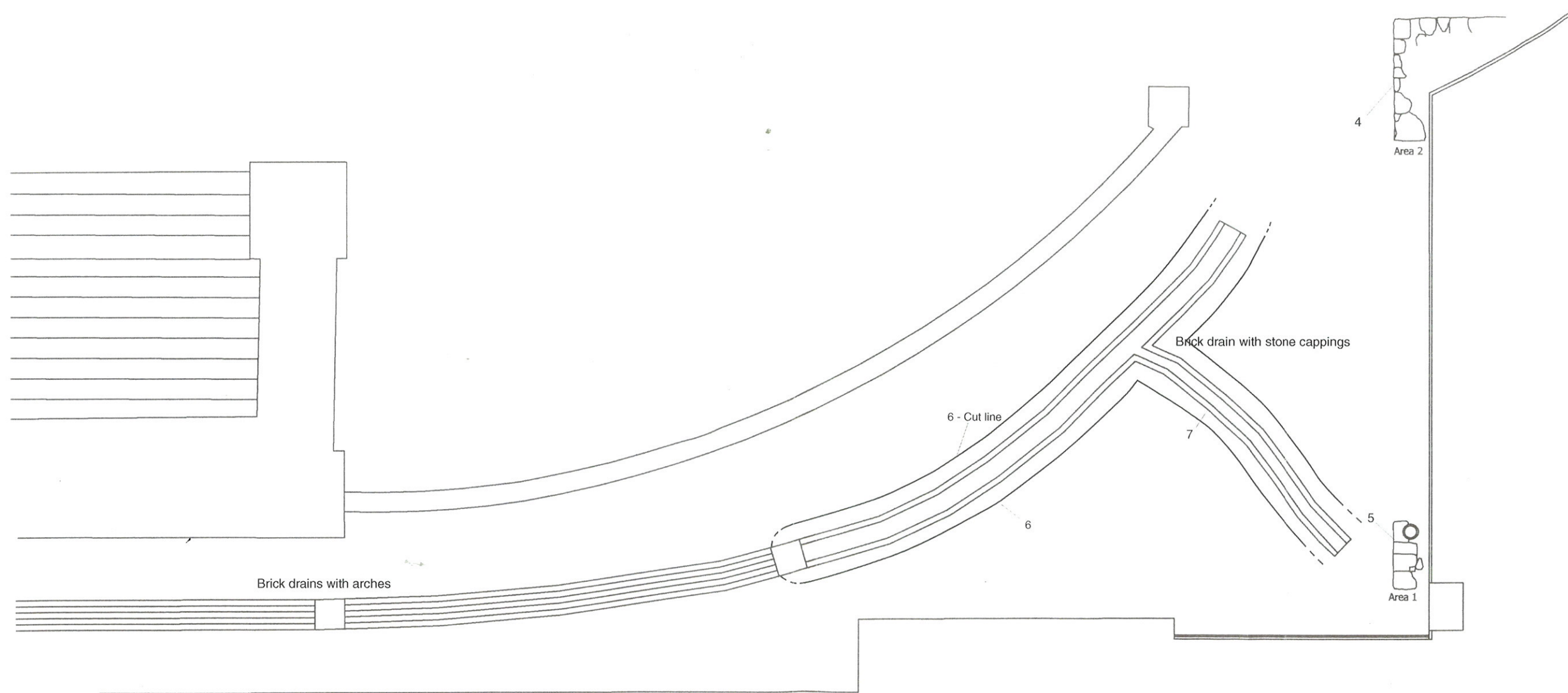


Figure 2 Site plan.



0 5m
1:75

Figure 4: Detail of stone and brick structures

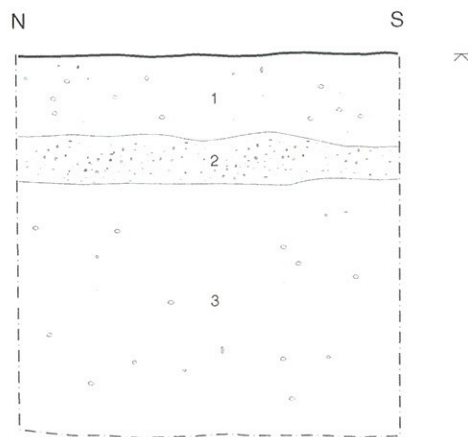
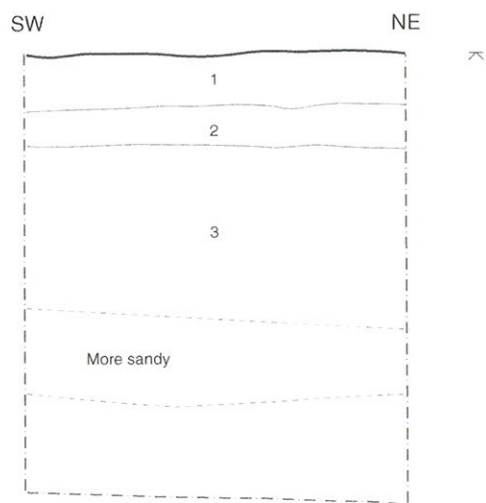


Figure 3 Sections



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