

Oxford School of Drama
Woodstock
Oxfordshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



May 2006

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Prepared by: Mike Sims
Position: SWD Project Supervisor
Date: 2nd May 2006

Checked by: Dan Dodds
Position: Head of Small Works
Date: 4th May 2006

Approved by: Nick Shepherd
Position: Head of Fieldwork
Date: 8th May 2006

Signed.....

JRH/CS

pp. N. SHEPHERD.
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Oxford Archaeology

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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

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Woodstock, Oxfordshire*****ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*****CONTENTS**

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SUMMARY

Between October 2005 and April 2006, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Oxford School of Drama, Woodstock, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 4501 1898). The work was commissioned by BGS Architects in advance of the construction of a new building and change of access. The watching brief revealed the continuation of one of the roadside ditches observed within the 1996 evaluation, post-medieval topsoil and the original farmyard surface, but no other significant deposits or features were encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between October 2005 and April 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Oxford School of Drama, Woodstock, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 4501 1898). The work was commissioned by BGS Architects in respect of a planning application for the construction of a new building to provide a new performance space, foyer/common room and auxiliary accommodation, and to allow for a change of access (Planning Application No. 03/1298).
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by Hugh Coddington, the Deputy County Archaeologist representing West Oxfordshire County Council (OCAS, 2003).
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA, 2005).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The development site is located approximately 2 km north of Woodstock at the junction of Stratford Lane and the B 4027 (Fig. 1). The site was originally part of an old farmyard, although the site was cleared and levelled prior to the start of excavations. The site lies at approximately 93 m above OD and occupies an area of 400 m². The underlying geology is loam overlying limestone cornbrash (British Geological Survey Sheet no. 236).

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, 2005) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The development site lies within an area of considerable archaeological potential. Stratford Lane runs east-west immediately north of the development and follows the approximate line of Akeman Street, the Roman road, linking Alchester and Corinium. Immediately to the east is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 150). This is the site of a Romano British settlement that was centred on a smaller road off Akeman

Street. The settlement includes a series of roads and buildings including a circular structure within an enclosure that has been suggested as a temple site.

- 1.3.3 Archaeological evaluation and watching brief (OAU 1996 and 2001) within the site of the Drama School revealed two parallel ditches on a NW-SE alignment bounding a possible road surface. The ditch fills contained second century pottery and some fragments of human bone.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify 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 remains that may be damaged or removed during the course of the development.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a series of site visits during groundworks likely to penetrate or disturb deposits with archaeological potential. These works included surface stripping, the excavation of service and foundation trenches and other invasive works.
- 2.2.2 A plan of the excavations was drawn at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and the recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The sections and extent of the excavations 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 *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 Within the south-west extent of the development (Fig. 3, section 5), a layer of yellow-brown clay and sub-angular limestone fragments (8) was encountered 0.9 m below ground level. This was overlaid by a 0.6 m thick band of fractured and laminated limestone bedrock (7), which elsewhere within the site was seen to be in excess of 0.7 m thick but was not penetrated.
- 3.1.2 At the south-west corner of the development the bedrock was cut by a 1.5 m wide by 0.2 m deep east-west aligned linear feature (10) (Fig. 3, section 6). This was filled by a grey-brown clay silt (9), which produced abraded fragments of pottery of a possible Romano-British date. Elsewhere the bedrock was overlain by a layer of yellow-brown silty clay (5) (Fig. 3, sections 2, 3 and 4), which contained many small to

medium sized sub-angular limestone fragments. Measuring between 0.2 m and 0.5 m in depth (Sections 2, 3, 4 and 5) this represents a layer of cornbrash. This deposit also occurs within the north-east corner of the excavations (Fig. 3, section 1) where it was seen to be in excess of 0.55 m deep, but was not penetrated.

- 3.1.3 Within the area of sections 1, 2, 3 and 4 the cornbrash was overlain by a layer of reddish-brown silty clay (4) measuring between 0.1 m and 0.2 m in depth. This layer contained many small angular fragments of limestone and represents a layer of frost damaged cornbrash or subsoil. Overlying layer 4, Cut 10, Fill 9 and layer 5 within section 5, was a layer of grey-brown silty loam (3) of between 0.12 m and 0.2 m in depth. This produced fragments of red pantile and represents a layer of topsoil.
- 3.1.4 Within the south-east corner of the development (Sections 2 and 3) this layer was sealed by a light grey-brown clay silt (6), 0.18 m in depth and which produced post-medieval artefacts including baler string and fragments of plastic fertilizer bags suggesting it was the truncated remains of the farmyard. Alongside Stratford Lane (Section 1), layer 3 was overlain by a 0.3 m deep layer of dark yellow-brown clay silt (2), a layer of made ground sealed by a 0.17 m thick layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (1), the present day topsoil and turf.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Examples of post-medieval brick and tile and general farmyard detritus were recovered during the course of the development. These were evaluated on site but were not retained. Abraded fragments of pottery were recovered from fill 9, provisionally dated as Romano-British. No other finds were recovered during the course the watching brief.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 Because of its proximity to the surface, fill 10 was adjudged to be too contaminated to be worth sampling and no other deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered elsewhere during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The archaeology observed correlates closely with the results of the 1996 evaluation trench, located immediately to the south-west of the current development. Within this evaluation a Romano-British feature comprising two ditches, 3 m apart, bounding a 1.8 m wide area of worn bedrock, possibly a road surface, was observed. Elsewhere within the evaluation trench the observed stratigraphy was cornbrash overlaid by subsoil and post-medieval deposits with no other features or deposits.
- 4.1.2 The south-west corner of the current development crossed the projected alignment of the ditch feature, where a linear feature could be seen cutting across the excavations and which was of a similar profile to the northernmost ditch encountered in 1996, it is reasonable to suggest that Cut 10 is a continuation of this 1996 feature.

- 4.1.3 Within the remainder of the development area the absence of any earlier features or deposits is consistent with the results of the earlier evaluation, suggesting that this area was outside the main focus of activity within the known Romano-British settlement. There is the possibility that later ploughing may have destroyed any features (if present), however the absence of any truncated bases of deeper features, and of residual finds would mitigate against this.

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	0.17 m	Landscaping layer, made ground	Brick	C 20th
2	Layer	0.3 m	Made ground	-	C20th
3	Layer	0.2 m	Buried topsoil	Tile	C20th
4	Layer	0.18 m	Subsoil	-	-
5	Layer	> 0.5 m	Corn brash	-	-
6	Layer	0.18 m	Occupation layer, farmyard surface	Brick, tile plastic	C20th
7	Layer	> 0.6 m	Laminated bedrock	-	-
8	Layer	> 0.35 m	Natural clay	-	-
9	Fill	0.2 m	Fill of ditch 10	Pottery	Romano- British
10	Cut	0.2 m	Ditch	-	Romano- British

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

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

OAU, 1996 *Sansomes Farm, Woodstock, Oxfordshire: Archaeological Evaluation Report*

OAU, 2001 *Sansomes Farm, Woodstock, Oxfordshire: Archaeological Watching Brief*

OCAS, 2003, *Oxford School of Drama, Sansomes Farm Studio, Woodstock, Oxfordshire : Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief*

OA, 2005 *Oxford School of Drama, Woodstock, Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Oxford School of Drama, Woodstock, Oxfordshire

Site code: OXDRAM 05

Grid reference: SP 4501 1898

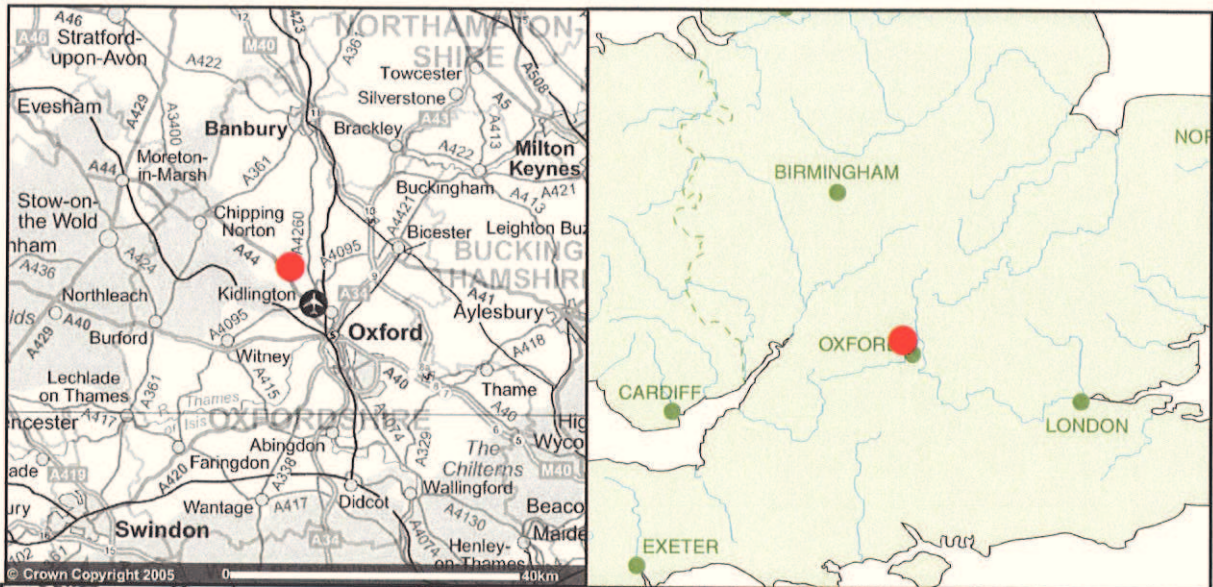
Type of watching brief: Machine excavation of foundation and service trenches

Date and duration of project: October 2005 to April 2006, 6 Site visits

Area of site: 400 m²

Summary of results: The continuation of a possible roadside ditch noted in the 1996 evaluation was observed together with post-medieval deposits directly overlying natural, no other significant deposits or features were encountered.

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.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

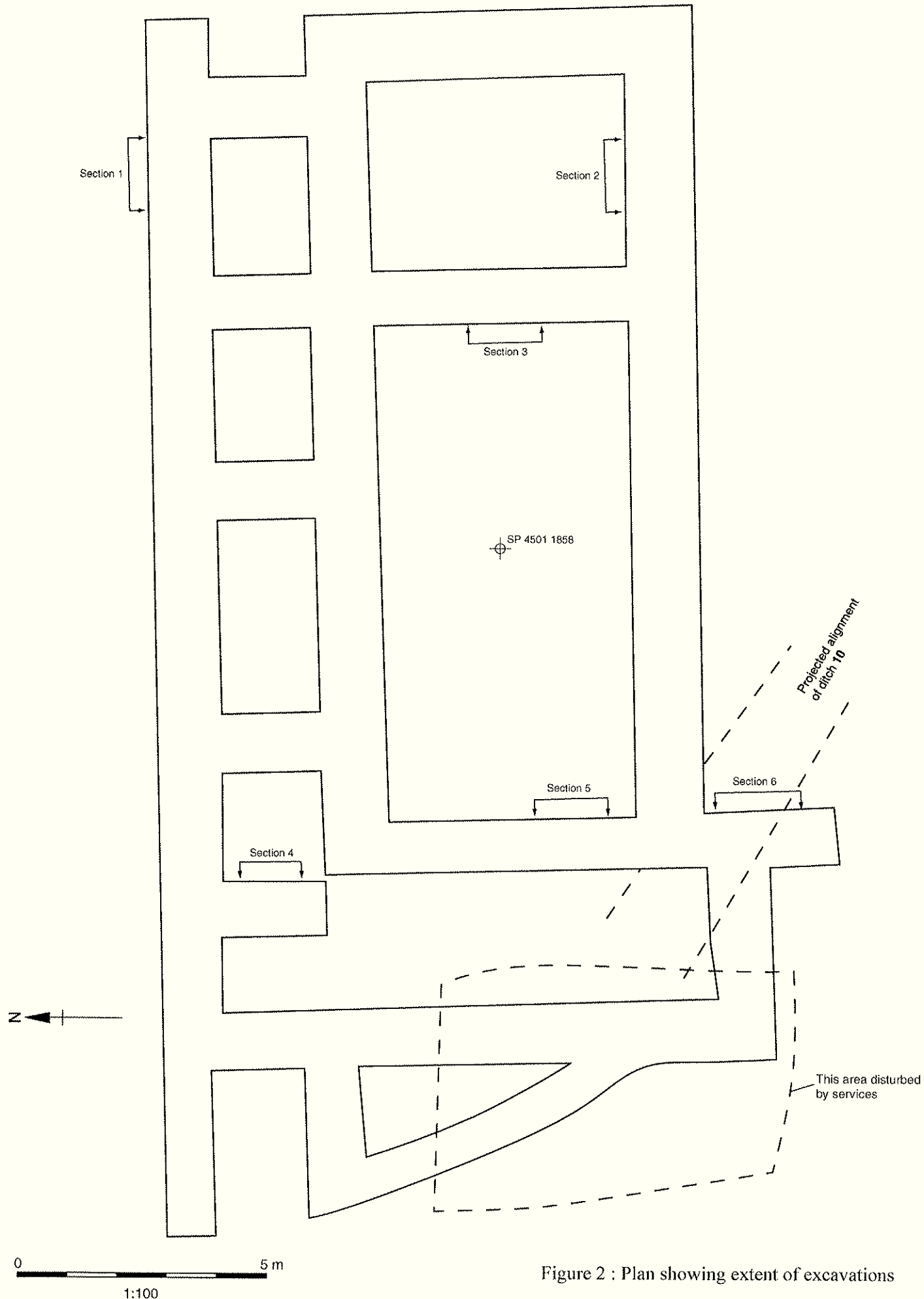


Figure 2 : Plan showing extent of excavations

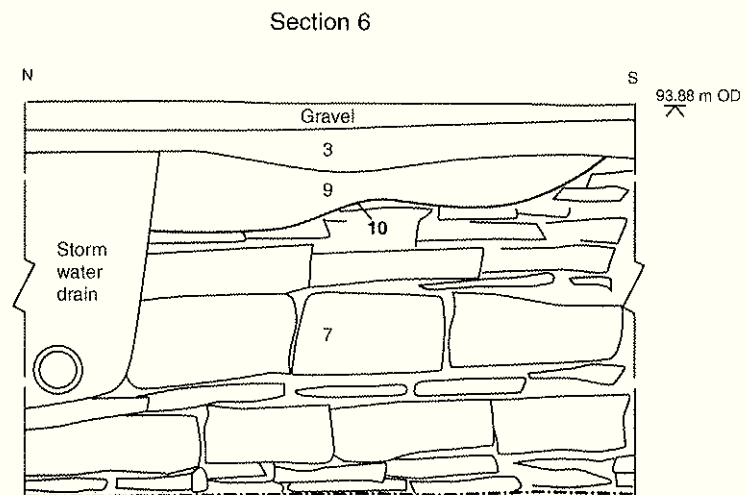
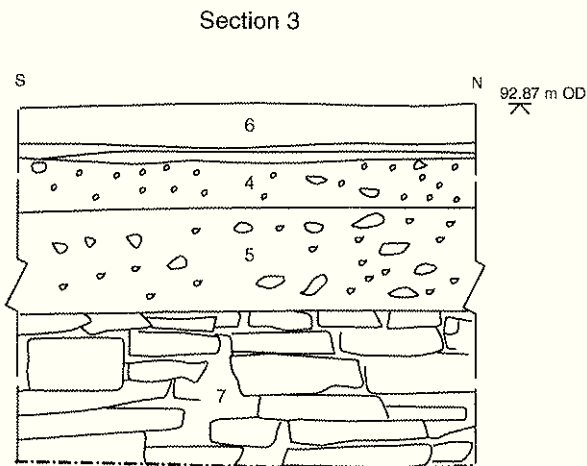
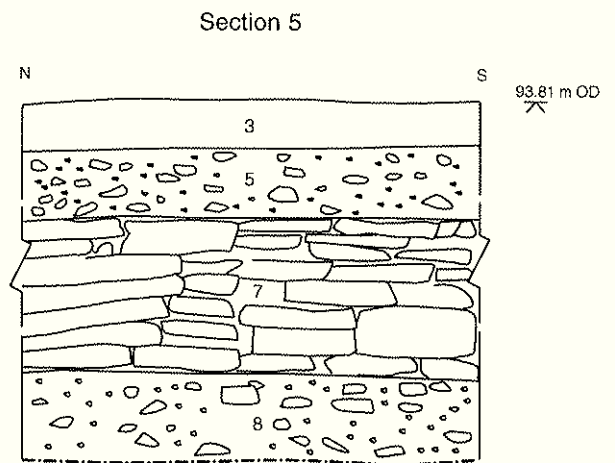
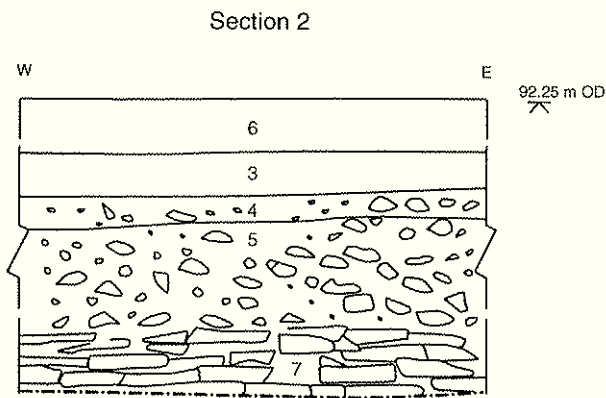
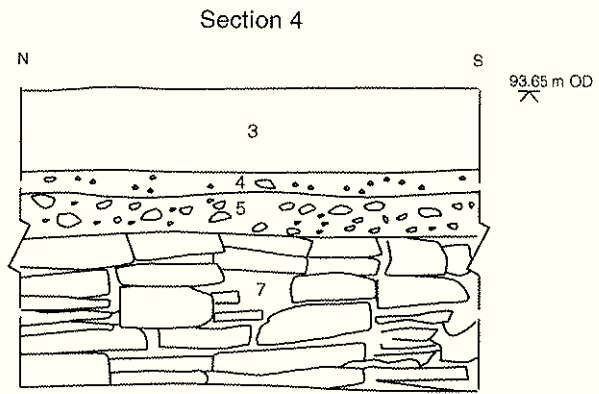
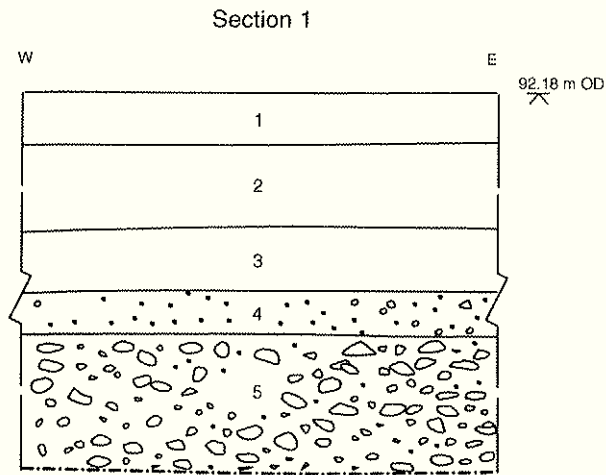


Figure 3 : Sections 1 - 6



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 541000
f: (0044) 01524 848606
e: lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk



Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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