

West End Link Road (Stage 1)
Witney
West Oxfordshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



Oxford Archaeology

March 2005



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

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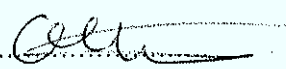
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West End Link Road (Stage 1), Witney, West Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

CONTENTS

Summary.....	1
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Scope of work.....	1
1.2 Location, geology and topography	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background	1
2 Project Aims and Methodology.....	2
2.1 Aims	2
2.2 Methodology.....	3
3 Results	3
3.1 Description of deposits	3
3.2 Finds	4
3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains	4
4 Discussion and Conclusions	5
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory	6
Appendix 2 Bibliography and References	7
Appendix 3 Summary of site details.....	7

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 Site location
Fig. 2 Plan of area of watching brief, showing location of trenches and sections
Fig. 3 Sections

SUMMARY

On 8th March 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during geotechnical and soil sampling work along the route of the proposed West End Link Road (Stage 1), Witney, West Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 3537 1030 - SP 3537 1010 - SP 3536 0993). The work was commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council in advance of construction of a new access road between Mill Street and Welch Way. The watching brief revealed a 19th century rubbish pit and contemporary agricultural soils. No evidence for any earlier archaeology or activity was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 On 8th March 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during geotechnical and soil sampling work along the proposed route of the West End Link Road (Stage 1), Witney, West Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 3537 1030 - SP 3537 1010 - SP 3536 0993). The work was commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council in respect of a planning application for a new access route between Mill Street and Welch Way (Planning Application No. PBE/J1a/7.4.410.04).
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by Mr Hugh Coddington the County Archaeologist for Oxfordshire (OCAS 2003) and OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2005) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site runs from Mill Street on the northern edge of Witney down to Welch Way in the centre of Witney, through a series of "brown field" sites and the edge of an undeveloped field (Fig. 1). The route is on a gentle, south facing slope running from approximately 86 m above OD at its northern extent down to 78 m above OD at its southernmost point and is 0.6 hectares in area. The underlying geology is Oxford and Kimmeridge clays overlying corn brash (British Geological Survey sheet 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 Relatively little is known about the archaeology for the area immediately around the development area of north Witney or indeed Witney in general. A major series of excavations was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) in the 1980s at the Mount House in Witney and the results were published in a monograph in 2002 (OA 2002). The extensive historical background provided in the monograph forms the basis for the following description of the historical and archaeological background for the West End Link Road development.

- 1.3.3 A number of important Neolithic and Bronze Age sites are known in West Oxfordshire, though not specifically from Witney itself. The major henge monument of Devil's Quoits at Stanton Harcourt, was surrounded by numerous barrow groups, though this suggests that the focus of early prehistoric activity may have lain on the gravels further down the Windrush river (Barclay *et al.* 1995). Further evidence from the north and west of Witney of Neolithic remains, namely Hawks Barrow near Minster Lovell and upstanding barrows at Leafield and Astall show that the Witney area was surrounded by prehistoric activity. A number of finds of Prehistoric axes and pottery have been discovered in Witney itself and a sword of Bronze Age date was recovered from the line of Emma's Dyke in Witney.
- 1.3.4 For the later prehistoric period a similar pattern of mid-late Iron Ages sites are known around Witney, extending up the river from Standlake to Ducklington (Chambers 1976a and Chambers and Williams 1976). Importantly excavations 2 km west of Witney at Deer Park Farm show that Iron Age settlement also existed on the Kellaway clays.
- 1.3.5 Evidence for the Roman and post-Roman periods in and around Witney is scarce. A few sherds of Romano British pottery from excavations at Cogges to the south east of the development site and some 2nd century settlement features at Church Green in Witney, may suggest some type of settlement in the vicinity. Evidence from the post-Roman period is restricted to the line of Emma's Dyke, a silted up rampart and ditch feature enclosing Witney from the west and thought to be of Saxon Origin. It is likely that the West End Link Road will cut across this feature. Of interest are the settlement features found during excavation at Cogges (Rowley and Steiner 1996).
- 1.3.6 As with the prehistoric period, the pattern of settlement in the Roman and post-Roman periods appears to form a picture of known activity around Witney but with little direct evidence from Witney itself.
- 1.3.7 The medieval core of Witney grew up around St Mary's church and the manorial site of Mount House. The history of the Mount House in particular is long and complex; a detailed account of the history is available in the Mount House monograph (OA 2002).
- 1.3.8 The proposed road passes through derelict land and a disused car park. The impact to known buildings from the post medieval period is minimal though attention should be paid to the possibility of disturbance to hitherto unknown remains of the post-medieval period.

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 provide information to formulate a mitigation strategy during construction of the proposed route.

2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The geotechnical work consisted of four 0.8 m wide trenches dug along the centre line of the proposed route, in order to establish the presence of any possible contamination and to obtain samples for chemical analysis. The trenches were dug using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 0.8 wide toothed bucket. All excavation was carried out under archaeological supervision.

2.2.2 Trench 1 measured 45 m long and was located within the Dark Lane Depot yard. Trench 2 measured 20 m long and was located crossing the south-west corner of a field adjoining the Dark Lane Depot. Trench 3 was located within a "brown field" site along the eastern edge of Dark Lane and comprised a 20 m long trench along the axis of the road and a 20 m long trench traversing the width of the road corridor cutting across the lateral trench at right angles. Trench 4 was located within the yard of the old Witney Blanket factory and again comprised a 20 m long trench running along the axis of the road and a 18 m long traverse trench crossing at right angles.

2.2.3 A plan showing the location of the trenches, features and sections was drawn at a scale of 1:500 (Fig. 2) and sample sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All sections and trenches 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* (OAU, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Trench 1 (Fig. 3, sections 1, 2 and 3)

3.1.1 Within the northern extent of the trench the top of a layer of weathered oolitic limestone corn brash in a orange-brown clay matrix (8) was encountered at a depth of 0.5 m below ground level. This deposit sloped down to the south where it was overlaid by a layer of reddish-brown silty clay colluvium (7) measuring between 0.35 m and 0.5 m in depth. Sealing this deposit was a 0.35 m thick deposit of dark reddish-brown silty clay (6), containing many subangular fragments of limestone, and representing a probable colluvium. This layer sloped down to the south where it was overlaid by a 0.4 m thick layer of dark orange-brown silty clay (3), another layer of colluvium. This was sealed below a 0.35m thick layer of dark yellow-brown silty clay (2), a probable colluvium. Overlying this was a 0.25 m deep layer of dark grey silty loam (1). Containing charcoal flecking and gravels this represents a layer of cultivated soil. Within the centre and northern extent of the trench layers 1, 2 and 3 had been truncated away and layer 6 was overlaid by a 0.25 m thick layer of crushed oolitic limestone (5), the hardcore base for a 0.06 m thick layer of tarmac (4), the current yard surface.

Trench 2 (Fig. 3, sections 4 and 5)

- 3.1.2 At the northern end of the trench a layer of corn brash (12) comprising thin oolitic bedded limestone within a pale green-grey clay matrix was reached 0.6 m below ground level. This sloped down towards the south where it was overlaid by a 0.4 m thick band of pale green-grey clay (11), a natural deposit. This was sealed by a 0.4 m thick layer of dark olive-grey clay (10), a probable layer of colluvium. Completing the section was a 0.3 m thick layer of dark greyish-brown clay loam (9), the present day topsoil and turf.

Trench 3 (Fig. 3, sections 6 and 7)

- 3.1.3 A natural stiff pale green grey clay (23) was reached at 0.5 m below ground level. This was overlaid by a 0.2 m deep layer of yellow-brown silty clay (15), representing a layer of colluvium. This was cut by an approximately 5 m diameter, 0.5 m deep pit (22) filled by a yellow-brown silty clay (21), probably redeposited soils. This fill produced many fragments of glazed earthenware and transfer printed pottery which suggests a 19th century rubbish pit. This was sealed by a 0.25 m deep layer of mixed crushed limestone and gravels (14), a probable layer of 20th century hardstanding associated with the many brick and concrete foundation piers in this area. A 0.13 m thick layer of dark greyish brown clay loam (13), a layer of windblown soils and vegetation had accumulated above (14).

Trench 4 (Fig. 3, sections 8 and 9)

- 3.1.4 At the northern most end of the trench a layer of corn brash composed of subangular oolitic limestone fragments in a orange-brown clay silt matrix (20) was reached at a depth of 0.55 m below ground level. This sloped away to the south where it was overlaid by a 0.4 m thick layer of orange-brown sand and small gravels (19), a natural gravel deposit. This lay below a 0.15 m deep layer of greyish-brown silty clay (18). This is a possible subsoil or earlier ploughsoil, however no dating evidence was recovered. This was sealed by a 0.15 m thick layer of dark greyish-brown silty clay (17), a buried topsoil/ploughsoil horizon. This had been overlaid by a compacted 0.15 m thick layer of small gravels (16), a layer of hardstanding probably associated with the adjoining Witney Blanket Company factory.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Fragments of 19th century pottery were recovered from fill 21 within Pit 22 and were retained, while fragments of 20th century brick, pottery and glass were observed within layer 1, and were recorded but not retained. No other finds were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 There was evidence for ground reduction within the areas of the northern end of Trench 1 and around Trench 3 as evidenced by the modern hardcore deposits lying directly above colluvial deposits with no intervening soils.
- 4.1.2 The majority of non-natural deposits encountered were consistent with agricultural use of the area, with evidence for cultivation showing in Trenches 1, 2 and 4. The dating evidence recovered together with the absence of any pre 19th century intrusive features suggests that there was no occupation or significant activity on the site prior to the 19th century, probably because of the sloping nature of the land. There is the possibility that the ground reduction around the northern end of Trench 1 and Trench 3 may have truncated archaeological evidence, however the lack of earlier residual finds or of truncated intrusive features mitigate against this.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1						
	1	Layer	0.25 m	Modern topsoil	Brick, glass, pottery, iron	C20th
	2	Layer	0.35 m	Colluvium	-	-
	3	Layer	> 0.4 m	Colluvium	-	-
	4	Layer	0.06 m	Modern tarmac surface	-	C20th
	5	Layer	0.25 m	Hardcore base for tarmac	-	C20th
	6	Layer	0.35 m	Colluvium	-	-
	7	Layer	> 0.35 m	Colluvium	-	-
	8	Layer	> 0.5 m	Cornbrash	-	-
2						
	9	Layer	0.3 m	Modern topsoil and turf	-	C20th
	10	Layer	0.4 m	Subsoil, possible earlier ploughsoil	-	-
	11	Layer	>0.35 m	Natural clay	-	-
	12	Layer	> 0.3 m	Cornbrash	-	-
3						
	13	Layer	0.13 m	Accumulated soils and vegetation	-	C20th
	14	Layer	0.25 m	Modern hardstanding	-	C20th
	15	Layer	0.25 m	Colluvium	-	-
	21	Fill	0.5 m	Redeposited soils, fill of Pit 22	Pottery	C19th
	22	Cut	0.5 m	Circular rubbish pit	-	C19th
	23	Layer	> 0.3 m	Natural clay	-	-
4						
	16	Layer	0.15 m	Modern gravel hardstanding	-	C20th
	17	Layer	0.15 m	Buried topsoil/ploughsoil	-	-
	18	Layer	0.15 m	Subsoil, possible earlier ploughsoil	-	-
	19	Layer	> 0.35 m	Natural gravels	-	-
	20	Layer	> 0.25 m	Cornbrash	-	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Barclay *et al*, 1995 *Excavations at the Devil's Quoits, Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire, 1972-3 and 1988* Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph No. 3, Oxford

Chambers, R A, 1976a *Late Iron Age material from Ducklington*, *Oxoniensia* 41, 36-7

Chambers, R A and Williams, G, 1976 *A Late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement at Hardwick*, *Oxoniensia* 41, 21-35

IFA, 1999 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 1992 *Field Manual*, (Ed. D Wilkinson, 1992)

OA, 2000 *OA Environmental Guidelines for sampling (first edition, July 2000)*

OA, 2002 *The Excavation of a medieval manor house of the bishops of Winchester at Mount House, Witney, Oxfordshire* Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph No. 13, Oxford

OA, 2005 *West End Link Road (Stage 1), Witney, West Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OCAS, 2003 *Design brief for an archaeological watching brief*

Rowley, T and Steiner, M (eds), 1996 *Cogges Manor Farm, Witney, Oxfordshire: The excavations from 1986-1994 and the historic buildings analysis*, Eynsham

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: West End Link Road (Stage 1), Witney, West Oxfordshire

Site code: WIWELR 05

Grid reference: SP 3537 1030 - SP 3537 1010 - SP 3536 0993

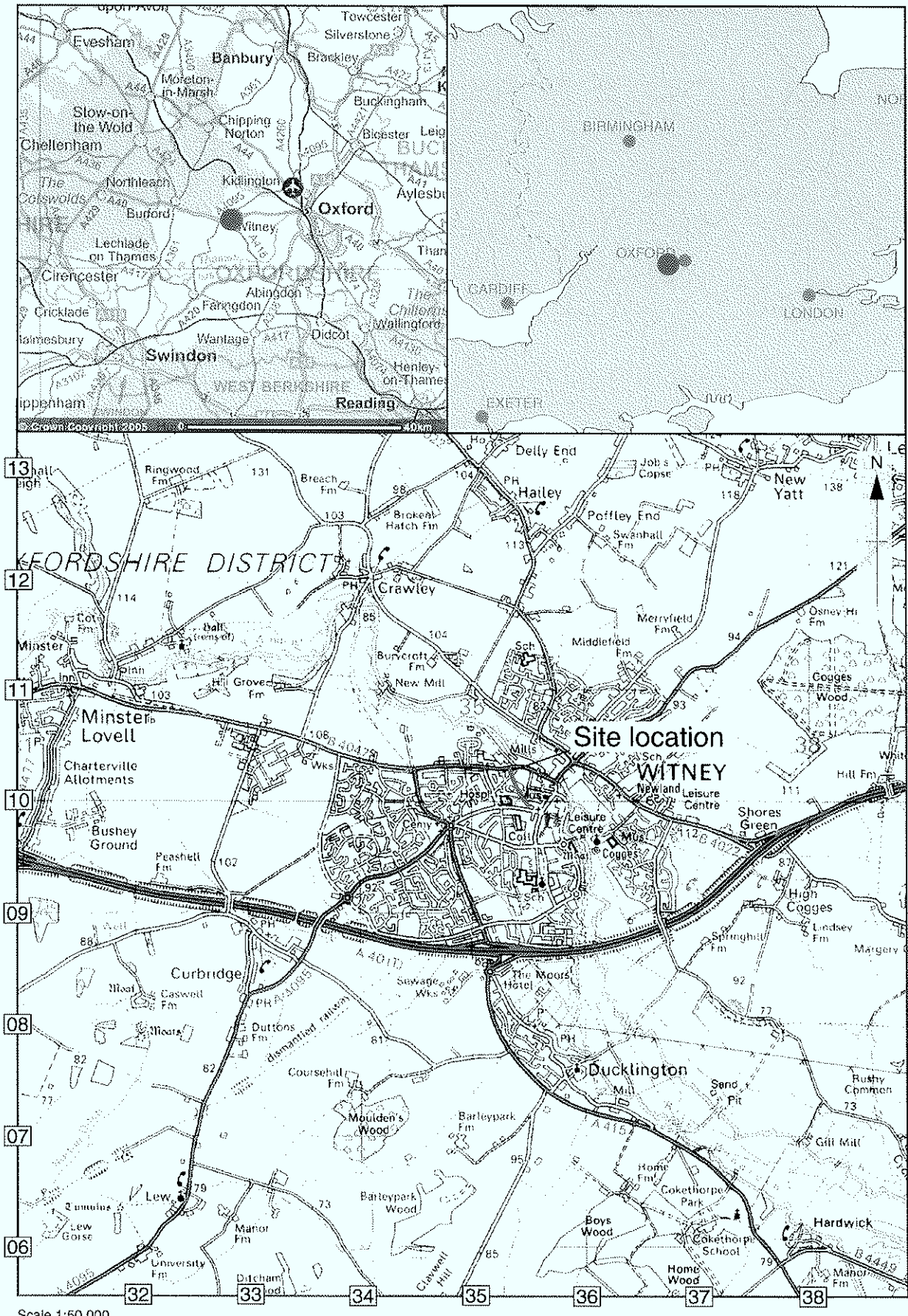
Type of watching brief: Machine excavation of geotechnical trenches

Date and duration of project: 8th March 2005, 1 day

Area of site: 0.6 hectares

Summary of results: . The watching brief revealed a 19th century rubbish pit and contemporary agricultural soils. No evidence for any earlier archaeology or activity 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.



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

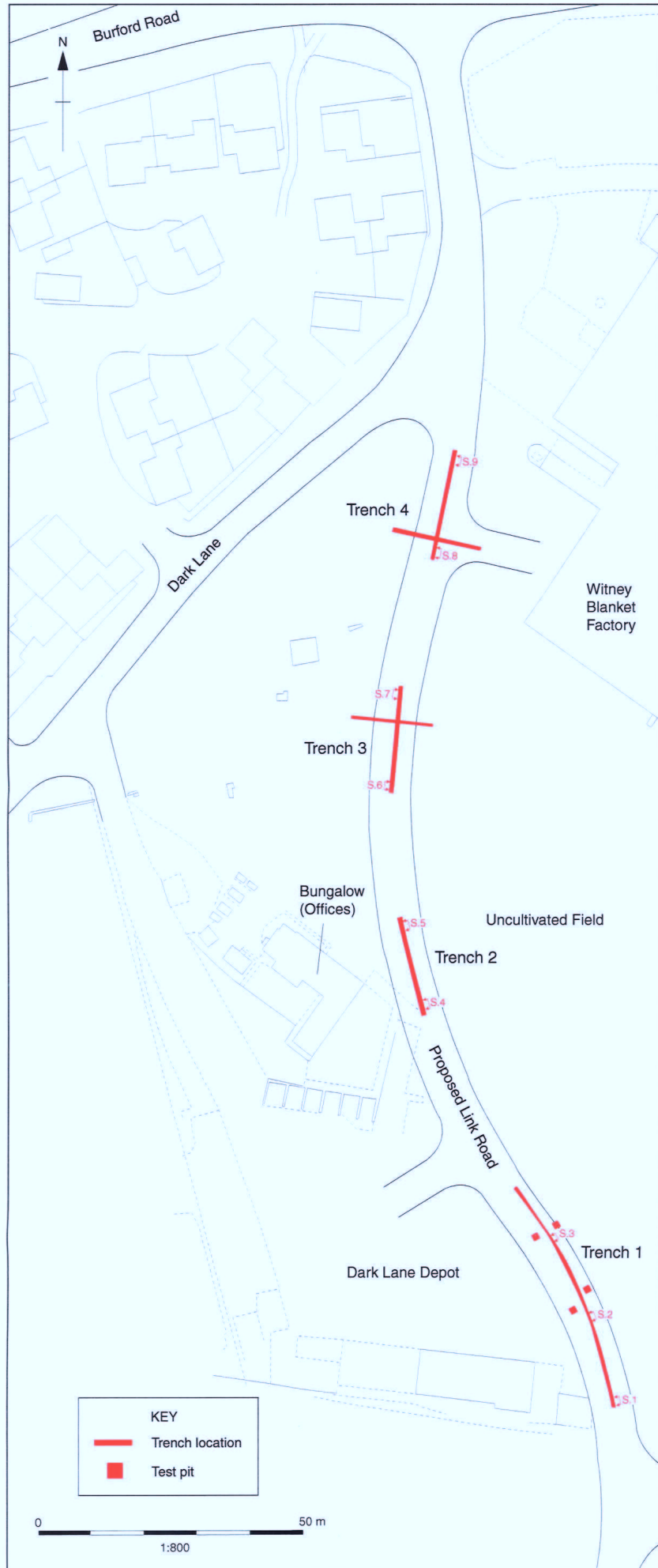


Figure 2: Plan of watching brief area showing the locations of trenches and sections

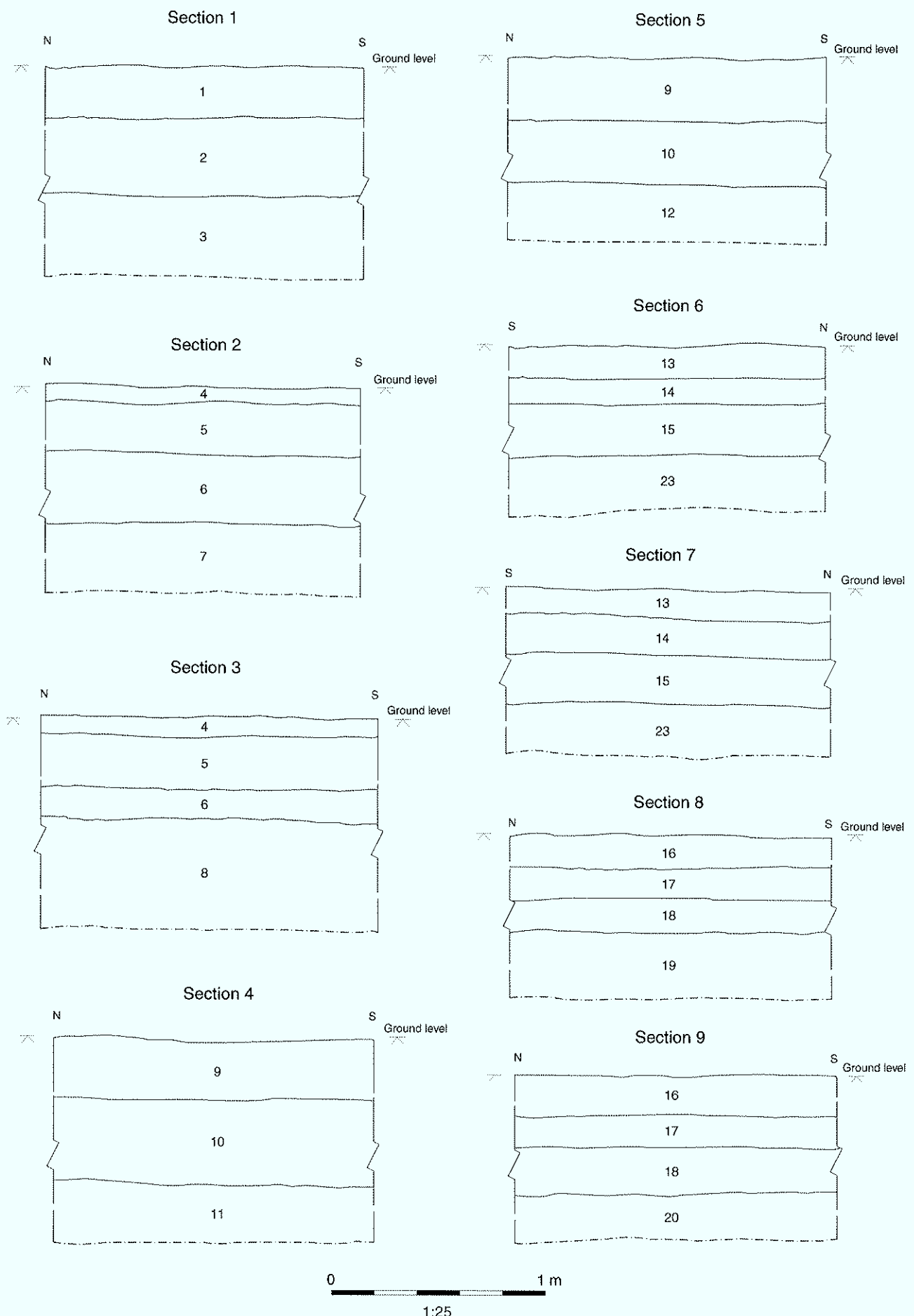


Figure 3: Sections



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