

Paving Replacement Royal Hospital Chelsea London



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

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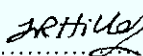
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Prepared by: Chris Jowett
Position: Assistant Supervisor SWD
Date: 25th August 2005

Checked by: Dan Dodds
Position: Head of Small Works
Date: 09th September 2005

Approved by: Nick Shepherd
Position: Head of Fieldwork
Date: 15th September 2005

Signed..........
SENIOR PROJECT
MANAGER
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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CMS Bath Ltd.

Royal Hospital Chelsea

NGR TQ 2830 7800

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
2 Project Aims and Methodology	4
2.1 Aims.....	4
2.2 Methodology.....	4
3 Results.....	4
3.1 Description of deposits	4
3.2 Finds.....	6
3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains.....	6
4 Discussion and Conclusions	6
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory.....	7
Appendix 2 Bibliography and references	7
Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details	8

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 Site location
Fig. 2 Plan of Watching Brief Area
Fig. 3 Plan Showing Features in Watching Brief Area and sections
Fig. 4 Plan Showing Culvert 104

SUMMARY

In August 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Figure Court, The Royal Hospital Chelsea (NGR TQ 2830 7800). The work was commissioned by CMS Bath Ltd., on behalf of the Hospital, in advance of the replacement of the paving dating to 1953, which forms the latest of the alterations to the South Terrace designed by Wren. The watching brief revealed deposits of 18th-20th century date, a series of recent drainage ditches and a brick-lined drainage channel contemporary with East Court. Deposits associated with construction work on the terrace were also uncovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In August 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by CMS Bath Ltd., in respect of a plan for the removal of the existing paving dating to 1953 and groundworks associated with the laying of a new pavement.
- 1.1.2 Advice was given regarding the requirements for a watching brief during the works by Diane Walls of the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service Guidelines (GLAAS) and Rory O'Donnel of the Government Historic Estates Unit (GHEU), both at English Heritage.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI, OA 2005) detailing how it would monitor all ground works, specifically the works concerning the levelling of the surface beneath the 1950s paving.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is located at the southern limit of Figure Court (Fig. 2), on a level man-made terrace at approximately 7 m above OD (NGR TQ 2830 7800). The site is situated on Terrace gravels overlying London clay and is 0.03 hectares in area.

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), based on extensive work carried out by OA (formerly OAU) at the Hospital, and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The Royal Hospital is situated in the ancient parish of Chelsea on the edge of the first gravel terrace of the River Thames. The medieval centre of the village, clustered around the church, lies to the west of the hospital and it would appear that when originally constructed the hospital lay in open fields running down to the Thames.

- 1.3.3 No prehistoric or Roman sites have been identified in the immediate vicinity of the Royal Hospital. However the location of the site on the first gravel terrace overlooking the river suggests that it would have been an attractive place to settle, both agriculturally and strategically. The area has produced chance finds of prehistoric material including a Bronze Age Palstave, a number of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic flint flakes and a considerable amount of later prehistoric metalwork dredged from the River Thames. The grounds of the Royal Hospital itself have produced Roman material: a coin of Tetricus (259-274 AD) was found in College Court during the construction of a sewer in 1886.
- 1.3.4 The parish would appear to be able to demonstrate pre-Conquest roots. Chelsea is mentioned in a number of Anglo-Saxon charters and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states that Offa, King of Mercia, held a synod in Chelsea about AD 787. No recorded Anglo-Saxon material has been discovered in the immediate vicinity of the hospital.
- 1.3.5 During the medieval period the site of the hospital lay in the open fields of the parish of Chelsea to the east of the village, which clustered around the church. Hamilton's 1717 map of the parish of Chelsea, (which probably reflects the medieval settlement pattern of the parish) coupled with the various documents relating to the purchase of the land for the hospital allows fairly accurate reconstruction of the medieval settlement pattern. The site of the hospital lies within Thameshott, an arable field at the eastern edge of the parish of Chelsea. This field was separated from Eastfield, the main open field of the medieval parish of Chelsea (now partly occupied by Burton Court) by the road from Westminster to Chelsea. This road, known as Paradise Row, to the east of the Royal Hospital and Jews Row to the west of the Hospital appears likely to have existed as a straight thoroughfare in the medieval period. It ran from Chelsea to Westminster and, as marked on Hamilton's map, passed over the Creek to the west via a stone bridge. When the Royal Hospital was built this road was diverted around Burton Court. The road was only re-routed along its original routeway, through the grounds of the hospital, along what is now Royal Hospital Road, following an act of parliament in 1845.
- 1.3.6 The Royal Hospital was built partly on the site of an unsuccessful Theological College built in the reign of James I with the stated intention of training Protestant clergy to refute the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Although this building was originally planned as having a double quadrangle, the smaller of which was to have been partly telescoped within the larger, commentators such as Faulkner (1829, 221) have argued that only one side of one, the largest, quadrangle was ever built. The college, which appears to have struggled against financial collapse from the first moment of its foundation, is recorded as 'dissolved' in a document of 1655 and between 1664 and 1666 it is recorded that it was used as a prison for Dutch Prisoners of War. Dean (1950 31) records that many of these prisoners died during the Great Plague of 1666 and were buried in the college forecourt.

- 1.3.7 In 1667 the building was transferred to the newly founded Royal Society although it appears to have been of little use to them. Despite various attempts to sell the college and its lands the property was to remain in the hands of the Royal Society until 1682 when the land was finally sold to the crown as the site of the Royal Hospital.
- 1.3.8 In this year Christopher Wren was commissioned to design and build the new Hospital. The original plan was for buildings around a single courtyard (Figure Court); the side courtyards (Light Horse Court and College Court) were additions of 1686. In 1689, 476 old pensioners were admitted although the building was not finished until 1690. With a few minor changes the main buildings that we see today are essentially those of the 1690s.
- 1.3.9 The proposed site lies to the south of the main hospital complex within the area originally laid out by Wren as an area of formal gardens. These comprised an elaborate mixture of canals, boulevards and gardens, which are clearly marked on Sturts 1692 plan of the Royal Hospital. Along the south front of the college Wren laid out a wide terrace in 1687 and to the south of this the ground fell away to an area of trees and lawns. These gardens were bisected by a raised causeway that ran down to a water gate on the river, flanked by two charming summerhouses. The causeway was flanked on either side by two 40ft (c 12 m) wide canals, which ran to the bottom of the south Terrace before branching off to run north-east and south-west along its base. On either side of the two major canals Wren laid out plantations of fruit and flowering trees (Ascoli 1974, 100-1).
- 1.3.10 This arrangement survived fairly unscathed for the next 150 years although a gradual diminution is apparent on the various historic maps consulted. The most notable change is the disappearance of the orchards, which is apparent on maps from the mid 18th century onwards. Maps of this date, and later, show that the canals survive throughout the 18th and into the 19th century but that as early as 1717 the orchards had disappeared to be replaced by a Kitchen Garden to the south-west and by a area of meadow, described as the Governors Garden Meadow, to the north-east.
- 1.3.11 The most drastic change came in the 1850s when the construction of the Chelsea Bridge Road and the building of the Embankment carved off the southern edge of the gardens. This led to not only the loss of the Water Gate and the southern edge of Wren's Gardens but also to the infilling of the canals. Later 19th century and early 20th century maps show something very close to the modern layout of the gardens with a gravelled pathway following the line of the raised causeway and lawns laid out on the site of the canals and gardens and orchards that flanked them. These fields are now in use as playing fields and form the site of the new permanent Marquee.
- 1.3.12 OA (formerly OAU) has worked extensively at the Hospital since the mid-1990s covering a variety of refurbishment projects, see also OAU 1996, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2004, which have been lodged with the Hospital.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality, character and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological remains that the groundworks would remove or damage within the development area.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief consisted of six visits to the site to monitor the progress and extent of the excavations and to record any remains exposed during the works. Particular attention was focused on the possibility of remains associated with Wren's Figure Court.
- 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 also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Building Foundations

- 3.1.1 The foundations of West and East Court, and the balustrade to the south were revealed to a depth of 0.4 m beneath ground level, and comprised four courses of hand-made red bricks laid in Stretcher Bond style. The bricks measured 0.21 m x 0.1 m x 0.07 m and were bonded with a light white/grey sandy mortar.
- 3.1.2 The foundations beneath the steps to East Court and West Court at either end of the site were of the same brick type as the main foundations but were laid in English Bond style (Fig. 3, section 102)

Layers and ditches

- 3.1.3 At a depth of 0.2 m, the top of horizon 103 was encountered. This was a dark brown grey silty sand layer containing clay pipe fragments and ceramic building materials. This horizon formed a levelling layer for the overlying pavement.
- 3.1.4 Contained within layer 103 were three sub-circular areas of construction rubble (Fig. 3), approximately 1.5 m in diameter and up to 0.25m deep. These dumps were

probably deposited at the same time as 103, as they contained broken stone paving slabs and stone chippings from the paving which was laid above.

- 3.1.5 The dumps contained three different types of worked stone paving. The first was an incomplete natural grey sandstone slab, which had been faced on all sides except the base and measured 0.43 x 0.28 x 0.04 m. The second was an incomplete light grey granite slab, which was faced on all sides and measured 0.32 x 0.24 x 0.05 m. The third type was an incomplete light grey Yorkstone slab that had been faced on all sides except underneath and had a series of striations etched into the top face. This slab measured 0.33 m x 0.22 m x 0.09 m.
- 3.1.6 The west half of the site contained six parallel ditches, equally spaced and aligned north-east/south-west (Fig.3). These extended across the entire width of the groundworks. They were cut into the top of layer 103 and were generally about 0.8 m wide and spaced 3 m apart. A section was excavated through the best preserved of the ditches: ditch 105 was filled by a dark orange brown sandy gravel (106) that contained frequent small sub-rounded pebbles to a depth of 0.2 m (Fig. 3, section 101). There was no pipe in the base of this cut.
- 3.1.7 Given the stratigraphic position of the features, it seems likely that they were opened during the 19th or possibly 20th century to act as soakaways for Figure Court. Deposit 106 contained one piece of late post-medieval glazed pottery, which was probably residual from (103).
- 3.1.8 Overlying layer 103 was a yellow/orange sandy layer (102) some 0.04 m deep and probably laid during the construction process of the 1953 pavement. Above lay a 0.1 thick layer of concrete (101) in turn overlain by a yellow/orange sand deposit (100) up to 0.02 m in thickness which acted as a final base for the paving of 1953.

Culvert 104

- 3.1.9 To the north-east of the site at a depth of 0.4 m below present ground level the excavations revealed a brick culvert (104, Fig. 4). The structure comprised two parallel lines of hand-made red bricks on an east-west alignment. It had been previously damaged, with some bricks having been removed and the interior was blocked with silt and sand.
- 3.1.10 One course of bricks survived and the structure altered direction to the north as it neared the existing building. The bricks were similar to the red brick foundations of East Court, although they varied in size, with the largest measuring 0.21 m x 0.10 m x 0.07 m.
- 3.1.11 Abutting structure 104 was a light brown orange silty sand gravel (107). Of uncertain thickness, it appeared to be sealed by deposit 103. The type of clay pipe and building materials within this deposit suggest it represented an intermediate paving or surface layer of 18th or 19th century date. There was no suggestion that it could be the remains of a 17th century layer associated with Wren's Figure Court

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Finds recovered from deposits 103 and 107 consisted of fragments of clay pipe and brick and roof tile of 18th to 20th century date. Finds were recorded and evaluated on site but not retained.
- 3.2.2 One piece of glazed pottery was found in deposit 106 and is of late post-medieval date.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for paleo-environmental sampling were encountered during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The soil stratigraphy observed during the course of the watching brief was consistent with the construction of a series of pavements from the 18th to 20th century.
- 4.1.2 No natural gravels were encountered as the works did not extend to a sufficient depth. Any features discovered were of post-medieval date and there was no evidence of the 17th century pavement.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>
100	Layer	0.02m	-	Construction layer	-
101	Layer	0.1 m	-	Concrete layer	-
102	Layer	0.04m	-	Construction layer	-
103	Layer	0.24m	-	Made ground	Clay pipe, brick, roof tile
104	Structure	0.2 m	0.45m	Culvert	-
105	Cut	0.2 m	0.7 m	Ditch cut	-
106	Fill	0.2 m	0.7 m	Ditch fill	1 piece of glazed pot
107	Layer	-	4.5 m	Earlier Construction Layer	Clay pipe, brick, tile
108	Cut	-	0.5 m	Ditch Cut	-
109	Fill	-	0.5 m	Ditch Fill	-
110	Cut	-	0.6 m	Ditch Cut	-
111	Fill	-	0.6 m	Ditch Fill	-
112	Cut	-	0.85 m	Ditch Cut	-
113	Fill	-	0.85 m	Ditch Fill	-
114	Cut	-	0.95 m	Ditch Cut	-
115	Fill	-	0.95 m	Ditch Fill	-
116	Cut	-	0.70 m	Ditch Cut	-
117	Fill	-	0.70 m	Ditch Fill	-
118	Layer	0.2 m	1.45 m	Rubble Layer	-
119	Layer	0.2 m	1.2 m	Rubble Layer	-
120	Layer	0.2 m	1.6 m	Rubble Layer	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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- SoL 1924 *Survey of London: Vol XI , part 4, 1924 (London)*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Royal Hospital Chelsea
Site code: RCHPR 05
Grid reference: NGR TQ 2830 7800
Type of watching brief: Pavement replacement
Date and duration of project: 6 visits from the 8th to the 18th August 2005
Area of site: 80 x 4 m. 0.03 ha.
Summary of results: Modern construction deposits, building foundations; a brick-built culvert and modern drainage 19th-20th century drainage ditches.
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Royal Hospital Chelsea in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location

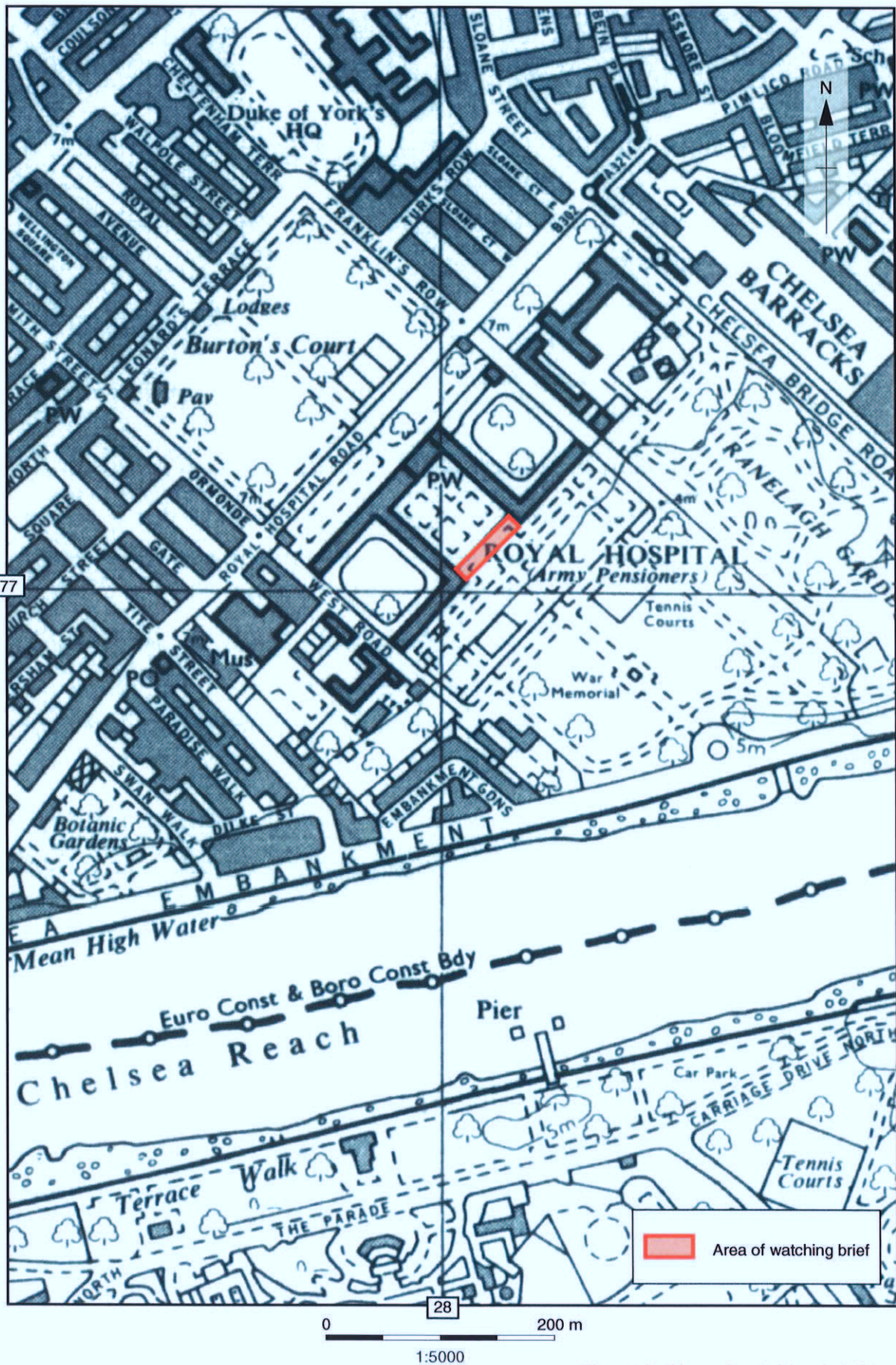


Figure 2: Plan of watching brief area

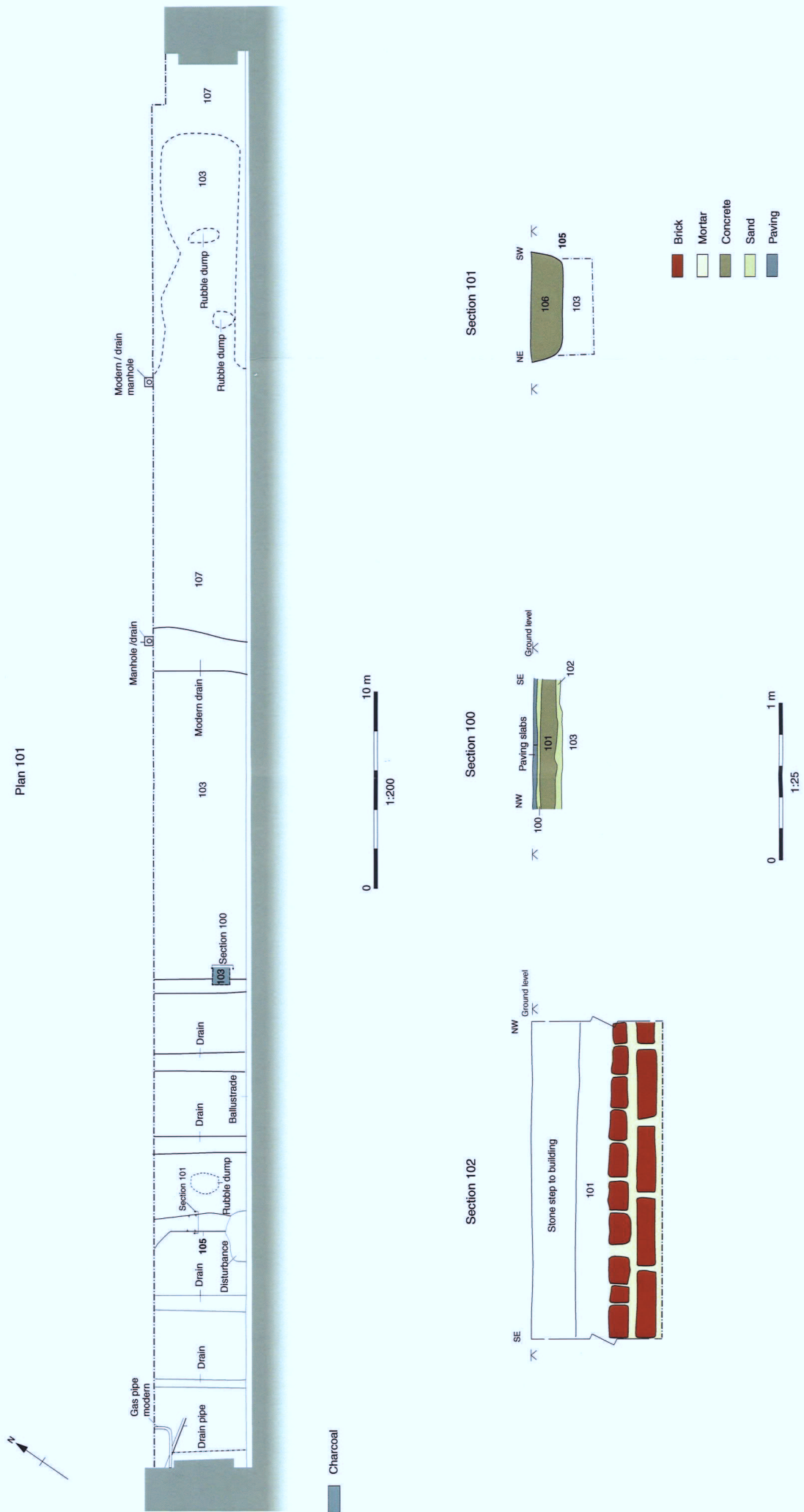
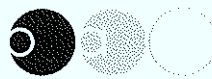


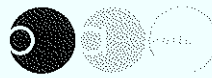
Figure 3: Plan showing features in Watching Brief Area and sections



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 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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