

Manor Community School Keary Road Swanscombe



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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**Manor Community School,
Keary Road, Swanscombe, Kent**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

During August 2009, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Manor School (formerly Sweyne County Junior School), Swanscombe, Kent (NGR: TQ 606 738). The work was commissioned by Kent County Council in advance of the demolition of an existing structure and construction of a new school. The watching brief revealed extensive post-medieval landscaping of the site and also encountered the post-medieval features observed during the 2008 evaluation trenching. The groundworks were wholly contained within the sterile clay silt (considered to be an estuarine deposit equivalent to Upper Loam of the Pleistocene sequence) observed by CAT during test pitting in 2008, and any earlier Pleistocene deposits were not encountered. No features or artefacts pre-dating the post-medieval period were observed or recovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between 3rd and 26th August 2009 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Manor School, Swanscombe, Kent (NGR: TQ 606 738). The work was commissioned by Kent County Council in respect of planning permission for the redevelopment of the school, including the demolition of part of the existing school buildings and the construction of new buildings and access (Planning reference DA/08/0982).
- 1.1.2 A *Specification for a Detailed Archaeological Watching Brief* was set by Wendy Rogers of the Heritage Conservation Group of Kent County Council, detailing the requirements and specifications for conducting an archaeological watching brief during the redevelopment of the site (KCC 2009).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is on the south-east outskirts of the built-up centre of Swanscombe, Kent, immediately to the west of the larger Swan Valley Community School (site centre c. NGR 560670 173860) (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The site is situated high up on the western side of the Ebbsfleet Valley, a small tributary draining north into the Thames. It occupies an elongated plot of land c. 300 m long by 100 m wide, trending broadly north–south. The ground surface at the site slopes down to the north-east from c40 m aOD at the south-west corner to c30 m aOD at the north-east corner. Much of the site is covered by the existing school buildings, but in the southern part there is substantial virgin ground in use as playing fields, and other parts of the site were covered by a shallow layer of asphalt and in use as play-areas. The ground falls off sharply to the east of the site, marked by steep banks and almost vertical faces, where the virgin ground has been severely cut down

in the last 50 years, creating a level platform for the adjacent Swan Valley Community School buildings and grounds.

- 1.2.3 The British Geological Society's present information on the site (Sheet no. 271) states that it lies on Thanet Beds Sands with upper Chalk and London Clay to the east, but work at adjacent sites has shown that Boyn Hill/Orsett Heath Gravels overlie the Thanet sands and chalk.

1.3 **Archaeological and historical background**

A summary of the archaeological and historical background to the site from the 2009 evaluation report is reproduced below (OA 2009).

- 1.3.1 The stretch of the Boyn Hill/Orsett Heath Formation preserved between Dartford Heath and Northfleet is rich in Lower Palaeolithic archaeological remains, representing hominin occupation in the Hoxnian interglacial between c425,000 and 350,000 BP. Flint artefacts, faunal remains and other biological evidence relating to climate and environment have been recovered from numerous sites, often revealed by quarrying (Wymer 1968; Wessex Archaeology 1993).
- 1.3.2 The best-investigated site is Barnfield Pit, Swanscombe (Ovey 1964; Conway et-al. 1996), c1 km northwest of the site. The deposits contained lithic artefacts, mammalian remains and other biological palaeoenvironmental evidence incorporated in stratified fluvial sand and gravel units of the three major depositional phases I, II and III (cf Table 1). Undisturbed horizons preserving intact evidence of hominin activity were present in the Phase I deposits (in the Lower Loam). One horizon within Phase II of the sequence — at the base of the Upper Middle Gravel — produced an early human fossil skull (the Swanscombe Skull), as well as copious artefacts, making it one of only two sites in Britain with Lower Palaeolithic hominid skeletal evidence.
- 1.3.3 The Church of St Peter and Paul to the north-west is considered to be of medieval or earlier date and associated with a possible medieval settlement.
- 1.3.4 The Swanscombe Manor complex, an 18th century manor reputedly built on the foundations of a medieval manor, lies to the north-west.
- 1.3.5 Swanscombe itself is located immediately to the west of the Ebbsfleet Valley, an area of known prehistoric and Roman archaeological potential.

Previous work at the Site

- 1.3.6 In 1997 a new classroom was constructed in the south-west corner of the Sweyne Junior School building complex. The bulk ground excavation was monitored for Palaeolithic remains and a geological section was drawn, and subsequently published (Wenban-Smith and Bridgland 2001). This section showed that this part of the school is sited on several metres of stiff brown clay, regarded then as equivalent to the Upper Loam of the Barnfield Pit and Swan Valley School sequences. There was also

a contorted gravel deposit between 0.50–0.80 m thick overlying the clay and immediately beneath the topsoil, regarded as equivalent to the Upper Gravel. No artefacts were found in the brown clay, and it did not appear likely to have any potential for faunal or other palaeo-environmental preservation. A small humanly worked flint flake in fresh condition was found in the Upper Gravel, but it was technologically undiagnostic, and the nature of the deposit also makes its age very uncertain.

- 1.3.7 Between 1997 and 2001, the Swan Valley Community School and Swanscombe Surgery were built immediately to the east of the site. This work exposed sediment sequences at various locations along the Site's eastern boundary. These confirmed the continuation of the Lower Middle Gravel (here a cross-bedded, sandy gravel) the Upper Middle Gravel (here a cross-bedded and ripple-laminated sand, occasionally slightly gravelly) and the Upper Loam (here a stiff silty clay with occasional sand lenses and fine gravel trails) broadly horizontally to the west under the site. Numerous Palaeolithic artefacts were recovered from the Lower Middle Gravel, comprising pointed handaxes, occasional cores and abundant debitage. Some large mammalian remains were also recovered from the upper parts of the Lower Middle Gravel. Faunal preservation appeared to be better in the western side of the Swan Valley School site (towards the Sweyne Junior School and Swanscombe Infants School plots), where the Lower Middle Gravel was more thickly buried by clayey Upper Loam. There was also sparse pollen preservation in the clayey silt lenses within the bottom part of the Upper Middle Gravel.
- 1.3.8 In 2005, investigations in Eastern Quarry, immediately to the south of the Site, discovered a range of important Palaeolithic remains, including,] continuation of the Lower Middle Gravel, a new deposit of uncertain correlation containing a thick sequence comprising apparently a series of undisturbed palaeo-land surfaces and a range of other deposits, also of uncertain correlation with the main Swanscombe sequence (Wessex Archaeology 2006). Large mammalian remains were also present.
- 1.3.9 Excavations at Swan Valley School in 1997 (CAT 1997) and 2000 (Wenban-Smith and Bridgland 2001) have produced evidence for Romano-British activity, including evidence for a masonry building and a Roman burial.
- 1.3.10 In May 2008, the window sample evaluation by CAT (Wenban-Smith and Allison 2008) confirmed that the majority of the Site was overlaid by a thick Pleistocene sequence, dominated by at least 5 m of brown silty clay equivalent to the Upper Loam. This was shown to be underlain by Lower Middle Gravel with its upper surface at *c*28.5 m aOD in the northern part of the site. Investigations did not reach down to this depth in the remainder of the site, so the deeper Pleistocene sequence remains uncertain in its central and southern parts.

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 revealed by the groundworks, paying particular attention to any that may impinge on the underlying Pleistocene or Holocene deposits.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological remains that may be truncated or disturbed during intrusive ground works.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as an archaeological presence during the demolition of buildings where the work included the grubbing out of foundations, reduction of ground level and the excavation of foundation trenches. The excavations were closely examined for any features and the spoil was examined in order to collect dating evidence.
- 2.2.2 A plan of the extent of any excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and sections of exposed features and sample sections showing the stratigraphy were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations and recorded sections were photographed using digital photography, 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 The site was divided into a series of areas by the developer (see Fig. 2 for extents). Areas A and B ran approximately north-south along the eastern edge of the development area. Area C ran across the northern edge of the development, while Area D was sited approximately 3 m higher than Areas A, B and C and ran along the western edge and connected to the standing building.

Areas A and B

- 3.1.2 These areas measured a total of 42 m in length by 18 m wide, with a general slope to the east. Prior to the excavation of the foundation trenches the ground was reduced in level to a height of 34.54 m aOD.
- 3.1.3 The ground reduction exposed a series of tip lines within the sides of the excavation. Full details of the deposits exposed can be found within the description of the sections. The foundation trenches were dug to a maximum depth of 1.2 m below this reduced level (Fig. 2). A series of sections were recorded showing the full profile of

the stratigraphy including both that above the ground reduction and also that exposed within the foundation trenches (Sections 1000, 1001, 1002, 1003 and 1004).

- 3.1.4 All the excavations encountered the top of the underlying undisturbed natural, a yellow-brown fine clay silt (15). This deposit was encountered at a depth of approximately 37 m aOD at the south-western corner of Area A, with a general slope away to the north-east to approximately 34 m aOD in the north-eastern corner of Area B. This layer could be seen to be in excess of 1.4 m deep at the southern end of Area A (section 1003). This deposit had few inclusions consisting mainly of sub-angular gravels. It is probable that this layer is the same as the stiff silty clay identified as the equivalent of Upper loam of the Pleistocene sequence by CAT during their evaluation in 2008 (Wenban-Smith and Allison 2008).
- 3.1.5 Layer 15 was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay silt (13). This contained charcoal flecking and represents a buried soil horizon, probably the original topsoil. No dating evidence was recovered from this deposit. Along the western edge of the reduced area layer 13 was overlaid by a layer of grey-brown clay silt measuring between 0.35 m and 0.5 m in depth (12) (Sections 1001 1002). This layer contained lenses of yellow-brown clay and numerous fragments of brick, suggesting that it is a layer of made ground. Overlying layer 12 and layer 13 within the north-western corner of the reduced area was an orange-brown silt clay (7). This was up to 0.4 m in depth within section 1000. Fragments of creamware and transfer-printed pottery were recovered from this deposit which together with a fragment of clay pipe stem suggest a 19th or early 20th-century date for this layer.
- 3.1.6 Along the western edge of the reduced area context 7 was overlaid by a 0.25 m deep layer of yellow-brown silt clay (11) (Section 1002), a probable layer of modern made ground. Overlying this was a 0.15 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (10). The presence of chalk flecking within this context suggest that it may have been imported.
- 3.1.7 Overlying layer 13 within the southern half of the reduced area and the edges of Layer 7 and layer 10 within the western edge of the reduced area was a 0.3 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay silt loam (6) (Sections 1000, 1002 and 1003). This layer also produced fragments of creamware and transfer-printed pottery as well as fragments of stoneware pottery consistent with a 19th or early 20th-century date. Along the eastern edge of Areas A and B layers 6 and 7 were sealed by a 0.15 m deep layer of grey-brown silt (5) (Section 1000). This contained numerous small fragments of brick and probably also represents a landscaping layer of made ground.
- 3.1.8 Layers 5, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12 represent tiplines of made ground, probably imported onto the site.
- 3.1.9 Within the area of the former playground layer 5 had been overlaid by a 0.18 m deep layer of crushed demolition debris (4). This is a probable continuation of layer 9 which overlies the modern made ground along the northern edge of the area (Section

1001). Overlying layer 4 within the footprint of the former playground was a 0.25 m deep layer of light grey silt (3), a probable modern levelling deposit. This was sealed by a 0.08 m deep layer of crushed stone (2), the hardcore base for the tarmac playground surface (1).

- 3.1.10 Within the areas of sections 1001 and 1002 layers 6 and 9 respectively were overlaid by a layer of grey-brown clay silt loam (8), up to 1 m in depth. This probably represents a modern landscaping layer associated with the construction of the now demolished school.

Area C

- 3.1.11 This area was also reduced in depth down to a level of 34.54 m above OD before the excavation of the foundation trenches.
- 3.1.12 A continuation of the underlying alluvium (15) was exposed within the base of the excavations (Sections 1005, 1006 and 1007). This also reflected the general south-west to north-east slope of this deposit. Within this area layer 15 was overlaid by a layer of dark green-grey clay silt (14), measuring up to 0.3 m in depth. This was overlaid by a continuation of the buried soil horizon 13. Along the southern edge of the area layer 13 was sealed by a continuation of the layer of made ground 12 (Section 1006).
- 3.1.13 In the north-eastern corner of the area layer 13 was overlaid by a layer of orange-brown silt clay (16), measuring up to 0.7 m in depth (Section 1005). This is also a probable layer of made ground. Within the north-west corner of the area layer 13 was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of similar yellow-brown clay silt (19) which may be the same as layer 16.
- 3.1.14 Overlying layer 16 was a 0.25 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (22), a probable landscaping deposit.
- 3.1.15 Within the area of the carpark on the northern edge of the area layer 19 was overlaid by a 0.1 m deep layer of crushed stone (18), the hardcore base for the tarmac carpark surface (17) (Section 1007).

Area D

- 3.1.16 This area was reduced in depth down to a level of 37.22 m above OD. Large parts of this area had been disturbed both by the construction and subsequent demolition of the original school buildings.
- 3.1.17 The alluvium (15) was encountered at a depth of 37.48 m above OD (Section 1008). This was directly overlaid by a 0.22 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (21) containing fragments of bricks. Sealing this was a layer of crushed slate 0.05 m in depth, a modern landscaping deposit.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Dating evidence was recovered from layers 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 22. The vast majority of this was composed of fragments of brick which could be readily identified as being of 19th-century or later origin. The presence of this material was recorded but it was not retained.
- 3.2.2 Fragments of pottery were recovered from layers 6, 7 and 22. These consisted of fragments of creamware, transfer-printed and stoneware ceramics all originating in the 19th and early 20th centuries.
- 3.2.3 No dating evidence earlier than the 19th century was recovered during the course of the watching brief.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The majority of the deposits appear to date to the 19th and 20th centuries. These directly overlie the original topsoil horizon (13), which together with the tiplines evident on the sections suggest that the material had been imported. This may have occurred as part of the topsoil strip during quarrying operations to the south-east of the site or possibly during the construction of nearby housing. The dating evidence recovered would be consistent with this phase of activity. The area of the original school buildings (Area D) appears to have been truncated prior to the construction of the buildings with modern made ground being deposited directly onto the underlying alluvium 15.
- 4.1.2 No dating evidence was recovered from the buried topsoil, although the presence of charcoal flecking suggests that there was activity nearby. It is probable that this area was agricultural in nature until chalk quarrying started nearby and that the charcoal has been deposited as part of the manuring process. Although there is considerable Romano-British activity nearby, at sites such as Springhead 1,400 m to the south-east and Northfleet 900 m to the east, no evidence in the form of residual finds or truncated features was observed during the course of the watching brief. The site's location, on an outcrop of hilly ground may have precluded its occupation, while its distance from the known Romano-British sites may indicate that it would have formed part of the outlying regions of any estates and that its use would have been agricultural in nature, possibly pastoral, due to the slope of the ground.
- 4.1.3 No dating evidence was recovered from the probable Pleistocene deposit (15). This is consistent with previous work on the site which has suggested that this deposit may be sterile. It is evident that the depth of impact on the site was insufficient to impinge upon the lower, archaeologically significant deposits.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.05 m	-	Modern tarmac playground surface	-	C20th
2	Layer	0.08 m	-	Hardcore base for surface 1	-	C20th
3	Layer	0.25 m	-	Modern made ground	-	C20th
4	Layer	0.15 m	-	Crushed demolition debris, modern made ground	-	C20th
5	Layer	0.12 m	-	Tipline of modern made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th
6	Layer	0.15 m- 0.35 m	-	Tipline of modern made ground	Brick, pottery, clay pipe	C19th/ C20th
7	Layer	0.25 m	-	Tipline of modern made ground	Brick, pottery	C19th/ C20th
8	Layer	0.5 m	-	Tipline of modern made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th
9	Layer	> 0.45 m	-	Tipline of modern made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th
10	Layer	0.15 m	-	Tipline of modern made ground	-	C19th/ C20th
11	Layer	0.25 m	-	Tipline of modern made ground	-	C19th/ C20th
12	Layer	0.35 m – 0.5 m	-	Tipline of modern made ground	Brick	C19th/ C20th
13	Layer	0.1 m – 0.25 m	-	Buried soil horizon, probable original topsoil	-	-
14	Layer	0.15 m – 0.3 m	-	Subsoil, probable colluvium	-	-
15	Layer	> 0.85 m	-	Alluvium, probable Pleistocene deposit	-	-
16	Layer	0.35 m	-	Modern landscaping layer	-	C20th
17	Layer	0.08 m	-	Modern tarmac surface	-	C20th
18	Layer	0.1 m	-	Hardcore base for Layer 17	-	C20th
19	Layer	0.3 m	-	Modern landscaping layer	-	C20th
20	Layer	0.05 m	-	Modern landscaping layer	-	C20th
21	Layer	0.22 m	-	Modern landscaping layer	-	C20th
22	Layer	0.25 m	-	Modern landscaping layer	Pottery	C20th

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APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Manor Community School, Keary Road, Sheepscombe, Kent

Site code: SWGRMS 09

Grid reference: TQ 606 738

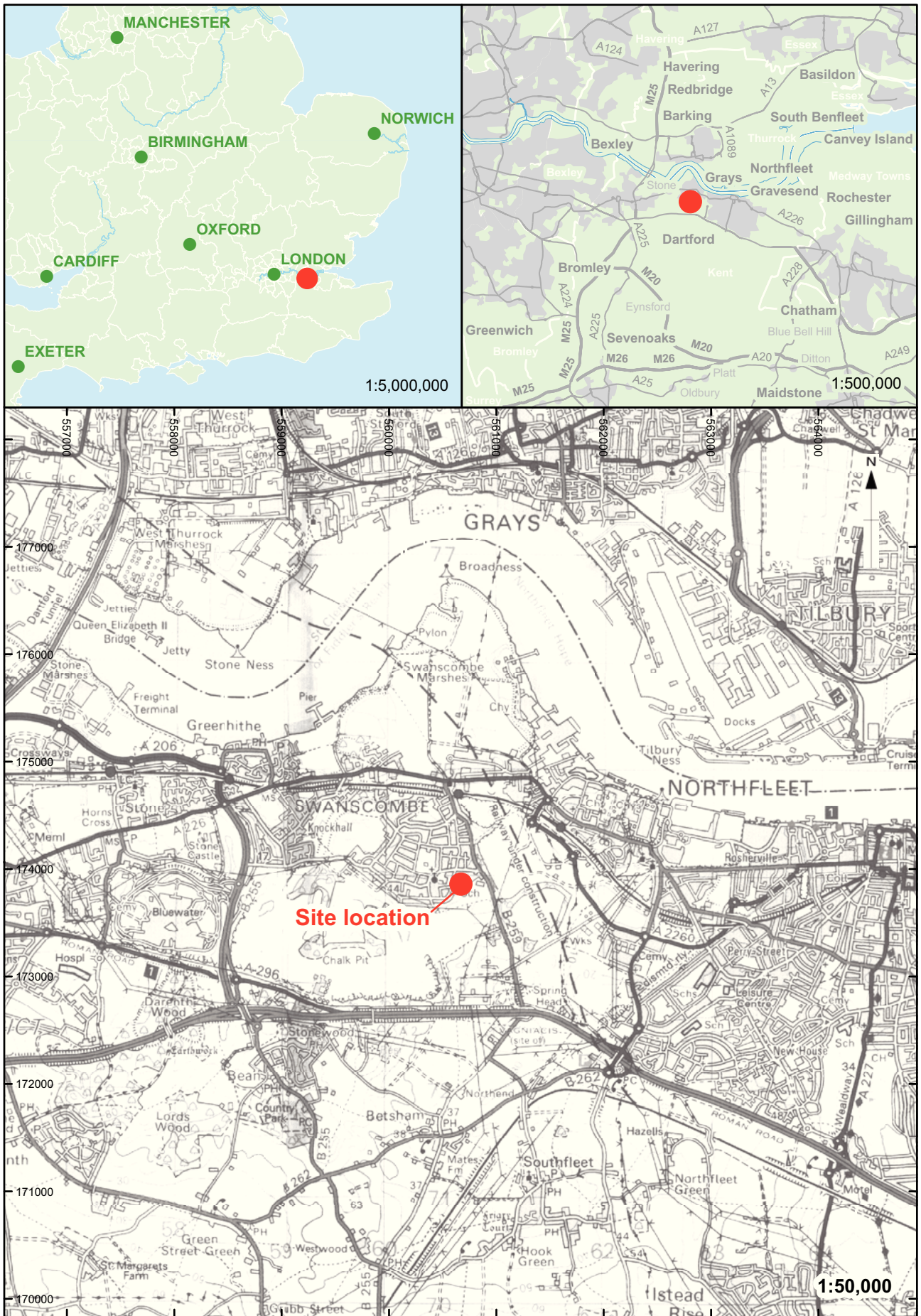
Type of watching brief: Ground reduction and machine excavation of foundation trenches

Date and duration of project: September 2009, 8 days on site.

Area of site: 6,400m²

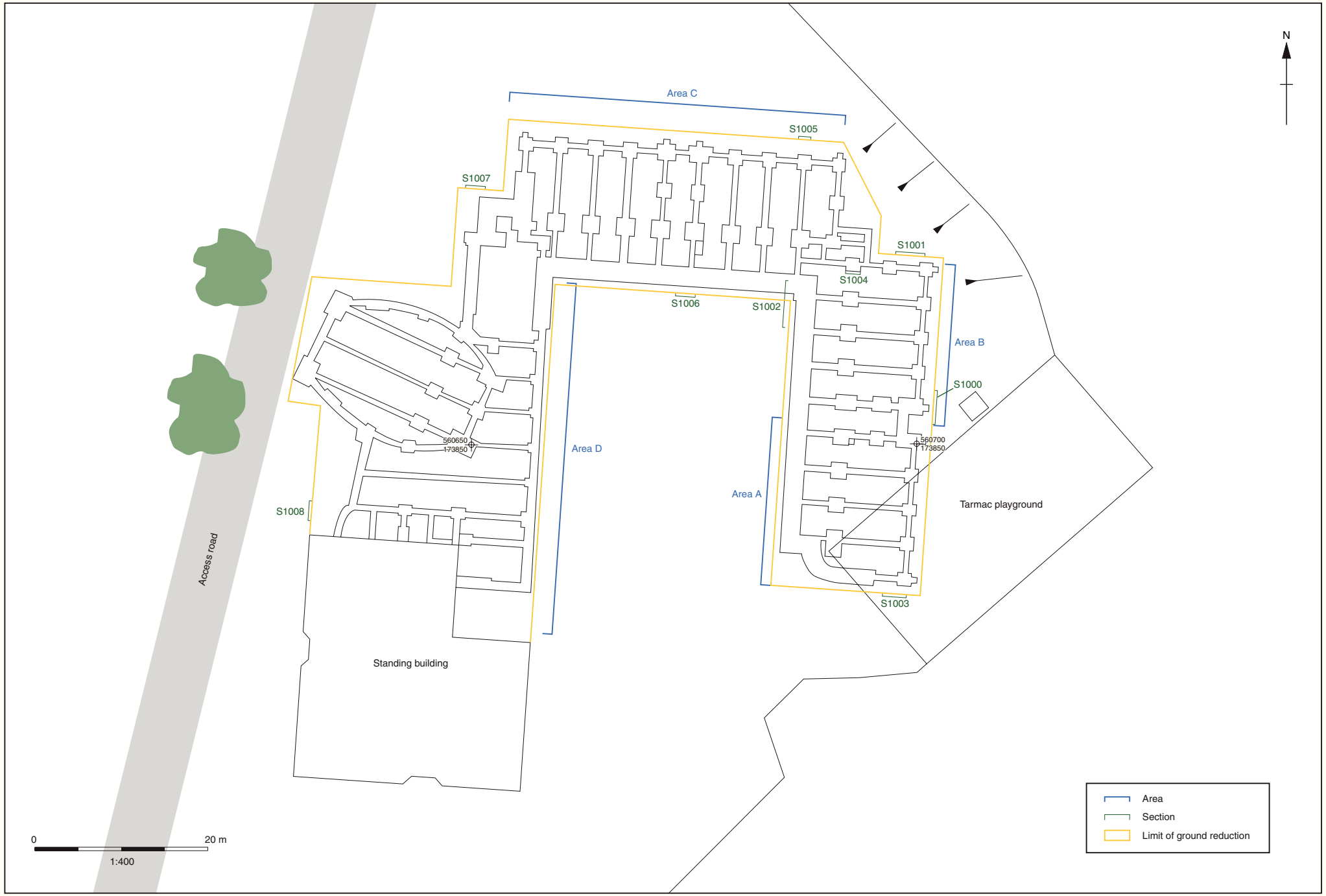
Summary of results: The watching brief observed extensive deposits of post-medieval tipping and landscaping, an undated buried soil horizon and probable Pleistocene alluvial deposits. No artifacts or features earlier than the 19th-century were encountered.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES.



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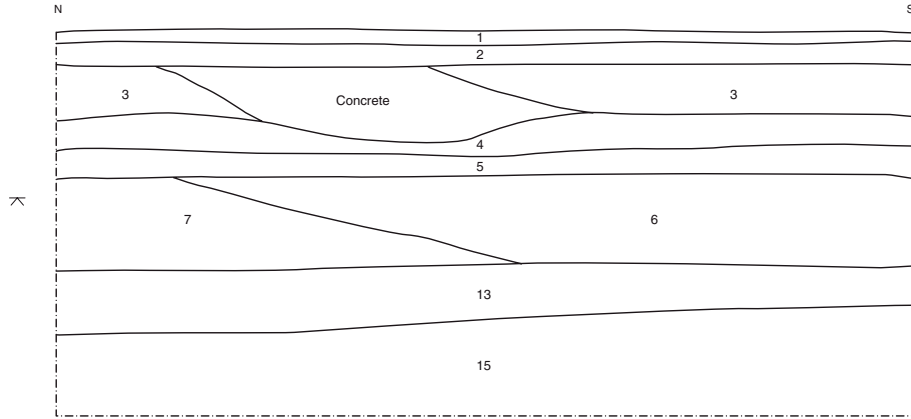
Figure 1: Site location



	Area
	Section
	Limit of ground reduction

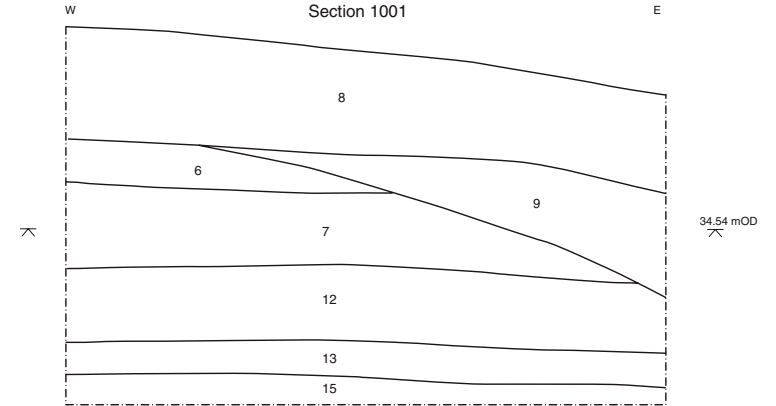
Figure 2: Site plan

Section 1000

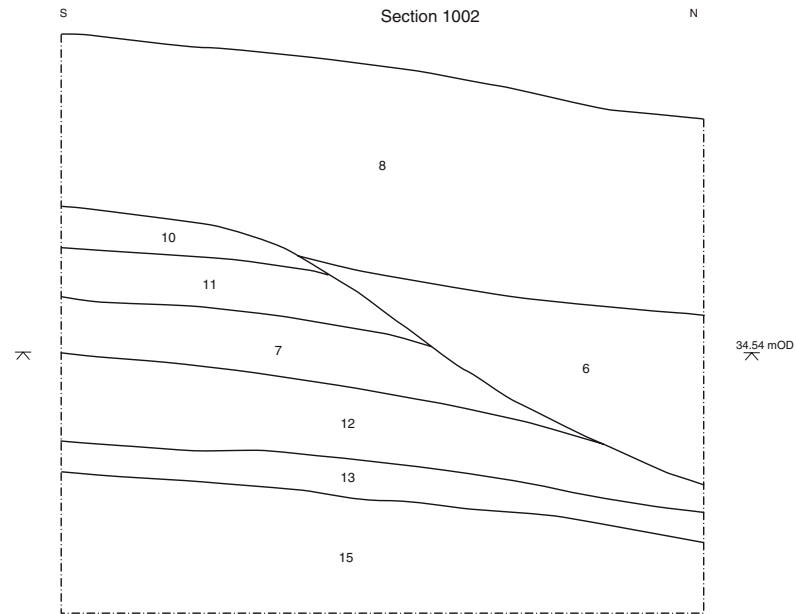


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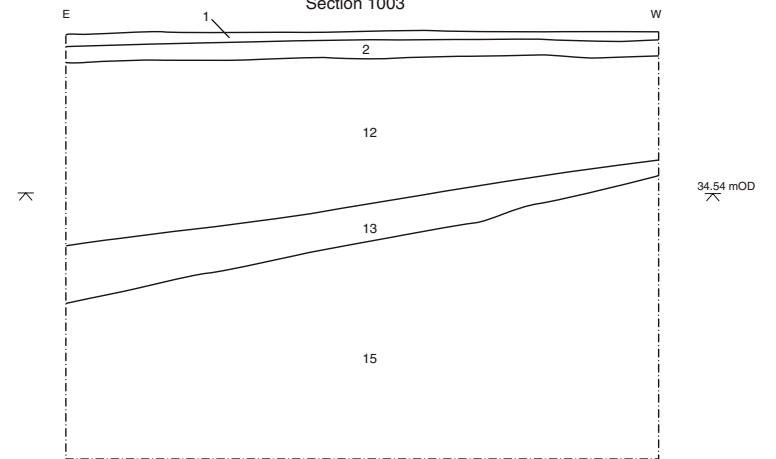
Section 1001



Section 1002



Section 1003



Section 1004

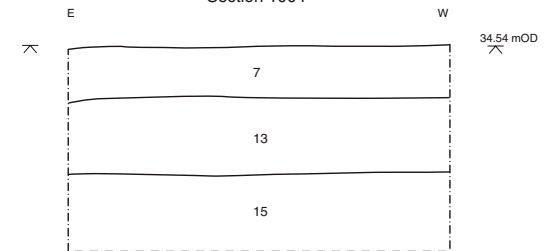


Figure 3: Sections

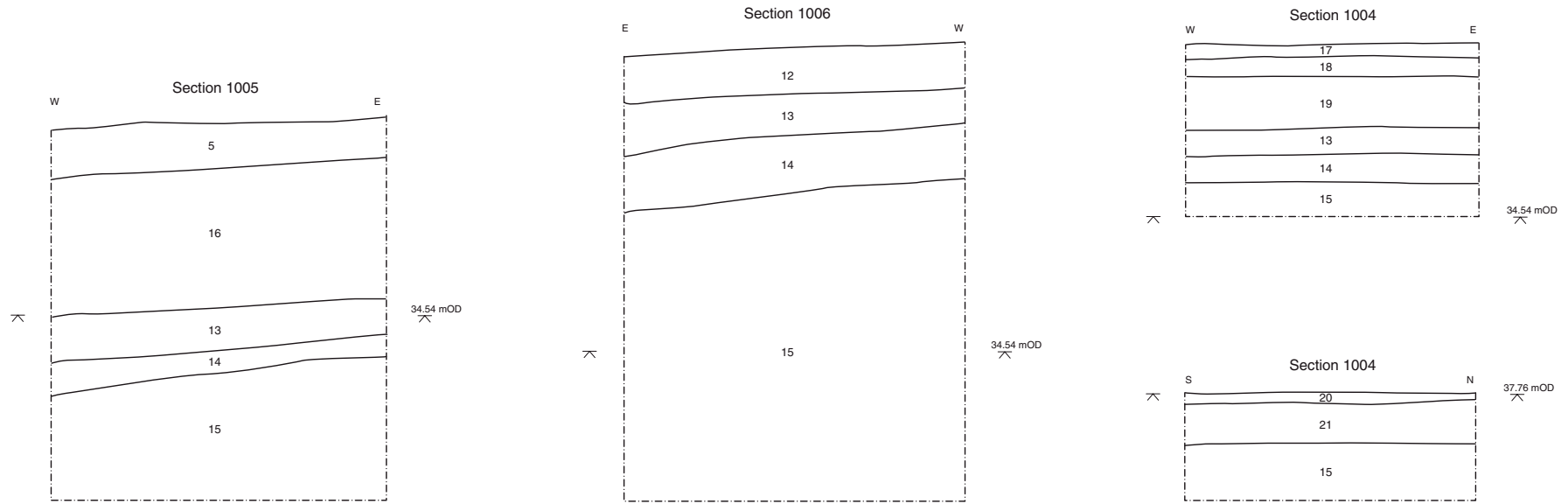


Figure 4: Sections



OA East

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Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
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