Ian Darby Partnerships

(Parish of Crowmarsh)

The Institute of Hydrology, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

SU

NGR SP 6160 8955

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. P98/W0387

Oxford Archaeological Unit

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Prepared by:	
Date:	2/12/98
Checked by:	
Date:	4/12/1998
Approved by:	R Williams
Date:	8/12/1998

Oxford Archaeological Unit

November 1998

Summary

In October 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at The Institute of Hydrology, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 6160 8955), during construction of four new buildings. No archaeological features were seen and no finds were retrieved. Two possibly alluvial deposits were identified.

1 Introduction

The development proposal (planning application no. P98/WO387) comprised the construction of two entirely new buildings, the front block and the west wing, and extensions to two existing buildings, the restaurant and the library. Construction was divided into two main areas of groundworks, areas A and B; the west wing was constructed in area B and the front block, library extension and restaurant extension in area A.

The watching brief was commissioned by Ian Darby, Chartered Architects & Project Managers, on behalf of Weatherald Construction. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the County Archaeological Officer, prepared in response to Condition 8 of the Town and Country Planning Acts.

2 Background (Fig. 1)

The site is located just to the east of the River Thames, outside the Saxon *burh* of Wallingford. A cropmark ring ditch and an enclosure lie just to the east of the Institute, part of an extensive series of prehistoric archaeological complexes in the immediate vicinity. An extensive complex of probable Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age ritual, funerary and settlement sites lies to the south-west of the development site, in the vicinity of Winterbrook. The prehistoric earthwork of Grim's Ditch, also on the eastern bank of the river, lies to the south. Mesolithic flints were recovered from relict ploughsoils preserved under the Grim's Ditch bank; several Neolithic flint scatters have also been recovered in the immediate vicinity. Three Mortlake Ware bowls have been recovered from the river to the south of the development site.

A late Bronze Age riverside settlement, located on a long eyot, lies to the south-west and is bounded to the east by the present course of the Thames and to the west by a silted-up former channel. As a part of the Wallingford Bypass Project the OAU excavated several trenches in an effort to determine the size and nature of this occupation; the trenches revealed a large contemporary palaeochannel to the west with sixteen wooden piles driven into its bed together with a quantity of preserved timber, charcoal and a pottery vessel of Bronze Age date. The timbers were thought to represent one or more bridges, or jetties, and the piles were thought to extend beyond the limited area investigated. Finds of a similar date were also uncovered at the OAU excavations at Grim's Ditch. Although the works at The Institute of Hydrology were some distance from the present course of the Thames, the possibility of similar finds and/or features could not be entirely discounted.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

4 Methodology

The initial topsoil strip of areas A and B and their associated access routes and dumper runs was undertaken by a tracked 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket working in tandem with a dumper. Upon completion of this work a smaller toothed bucket was used to excavate the foundation trenches, with the excavated spoil being removed from site regularly due to limited working space. Archaeological inspection commenced with the topsoil strip; inspection of the trenches was undertaken both during and after their excavation.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil description utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (Figs. 2 & 3)

The initial topsoil strip in areas A and B reduced the ground level by c. 0.40 m, revealing:

(1) – 0.25 m of mid gray silty clay loam topsoil, over:

(2) – 0.15 m of mid buff/brown sandy silt containing occasional small fragments of modern housebrick, concrete and pieces of quartzite. This deposit was quite heavily rooted in places, possibly where trees predating the construction of the Institute had been grubbed out.

Following the topsoil strip the foundation trenches were dug to a further depth of c. 1 – 1.5 m depending upon the prevailing ground conditions. The sequence of further deposits seen appeared to be relatively consistent across the site and went as follows:

Context (2) was seen to be on average 0.30 – 0.34 m thick and sealed:

(3) – 0.40 m of silty brown/buff sandy loam containing quartzite pieces and some small, possibly water-smoothed pebbles. This deposit sealed:
(4) – 0.60 – 0.66 m of mid-dark brown friable slightly silty clay loam with small, possibly water-smoothed pebbles and occasional quartzite pieces.

The bottom of context (4) was not seen as it lay below the contractor's base of dig. None of the deposits seen contained any finds.

6 Discussion

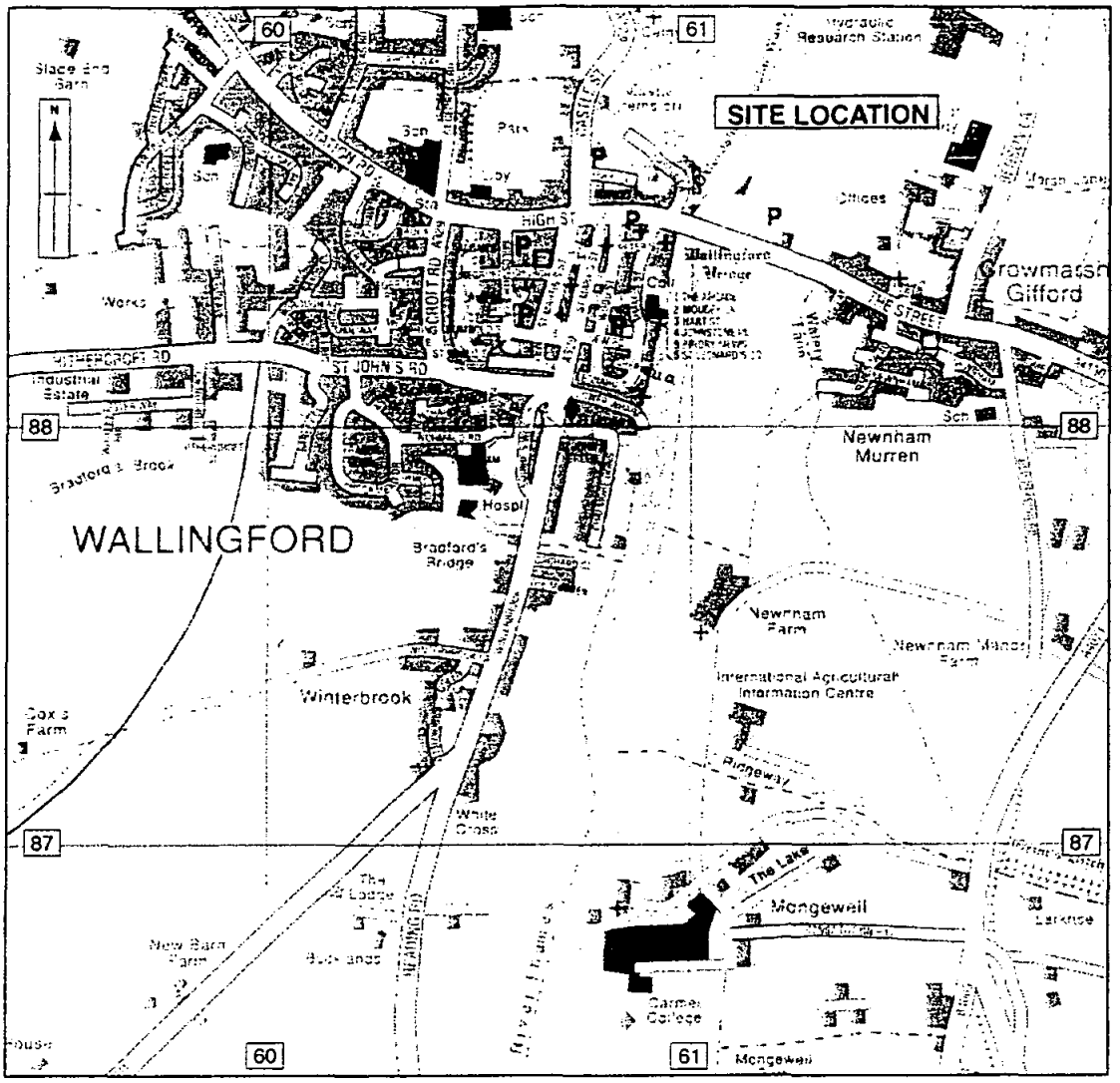
Those groundworks undertaken on that area of the site directly opposite the cropmark ring ditch and enclosure were intensively monitored for the presence of subsoil features; however, none were seen either here or elsewhere.

It is likely that context (2) represents a subsoil extensively disturbed during the construction of the Institute, containing as it did pieces of concrete and modern housebrick.

It is possible that contexts (3) and (4) represent alluvial deposits, given their generally silty nature and the presence of possibly water-smoothed pebbles within both of them. It was not possible to sample these deposits from within the contractor's trenches, and the excavated material was rapidly removed from site giving only a brief window for hand-sorting for finds and further inspection. If they are alluvial deposits, then the presence of two distinctly different deposits may indicate separate periods of flooding here over time. If this is the case, it is possible that deposit (4) may seal other alluvial deposits and/or archaeological remains.

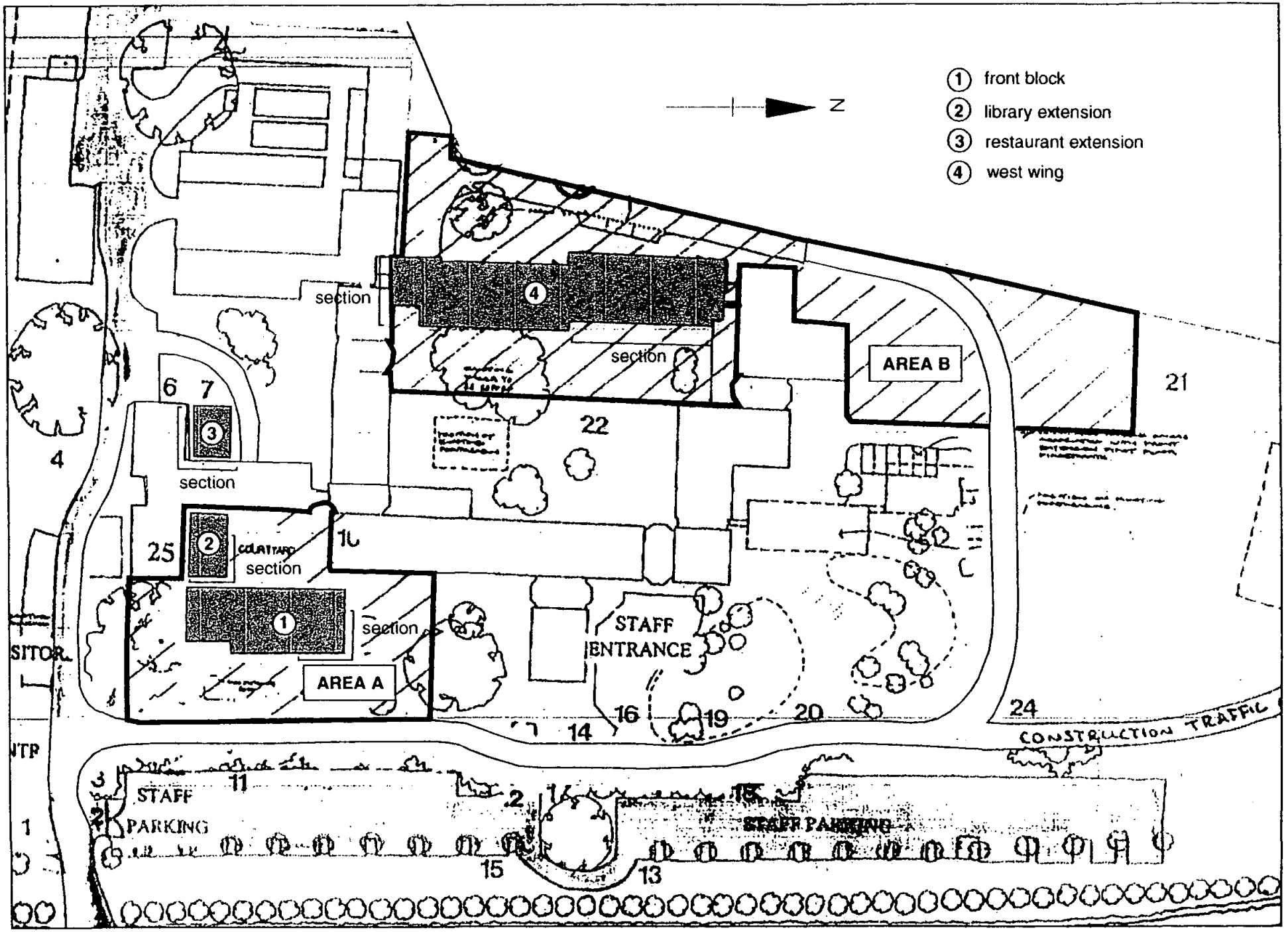
References.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).



Site location

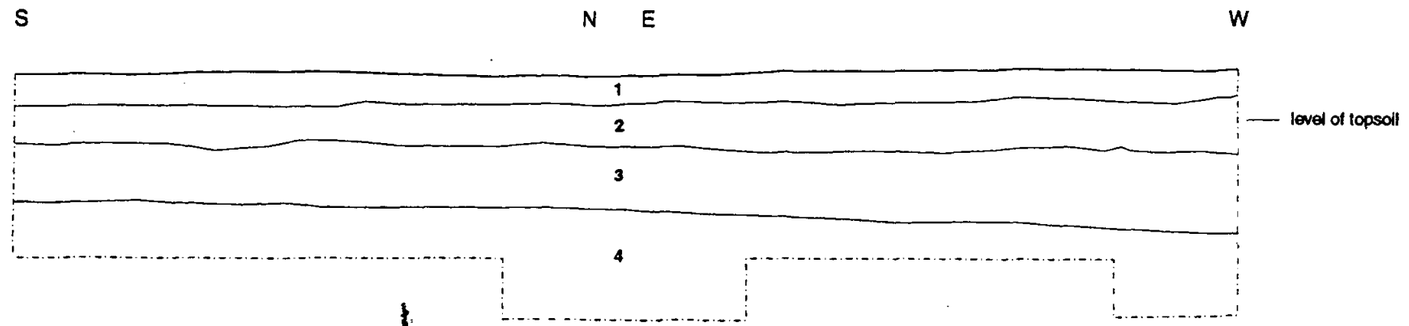
Figure 1



Site plan

Figure 2

Block 1 section



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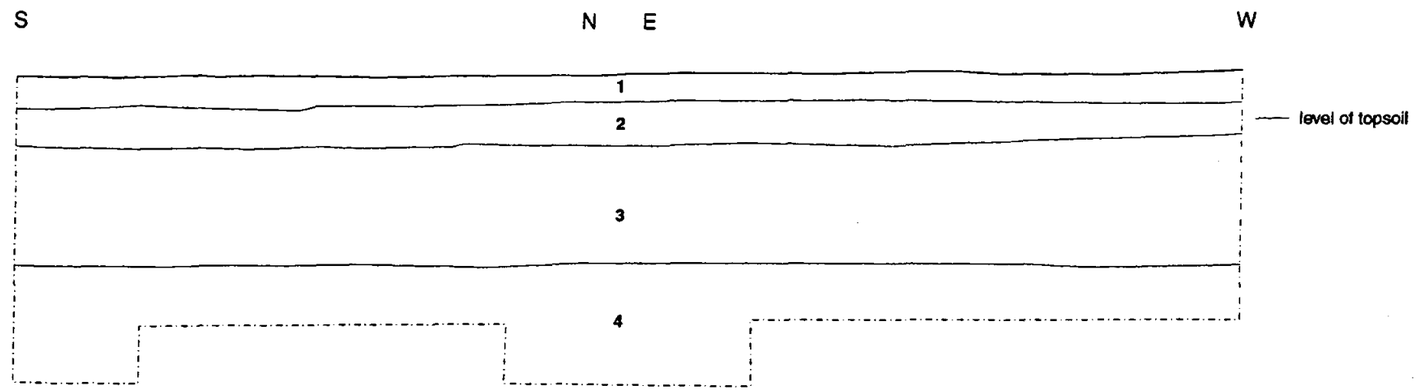

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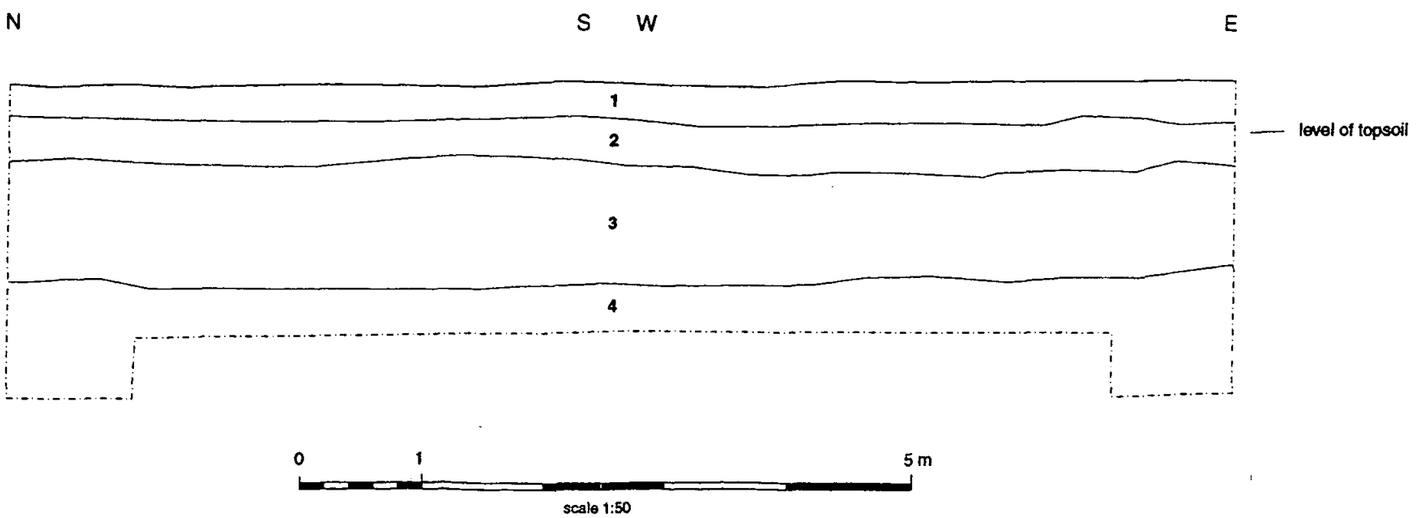
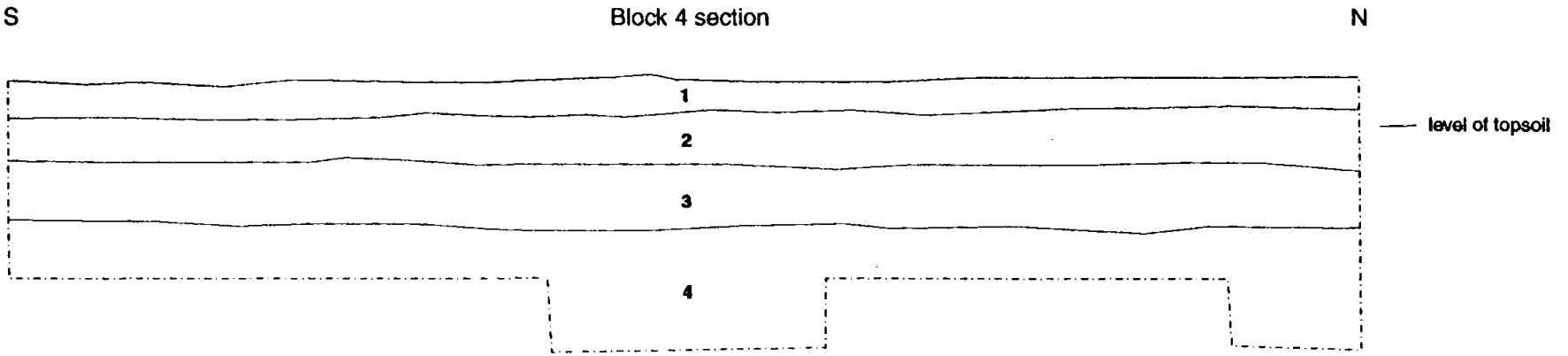
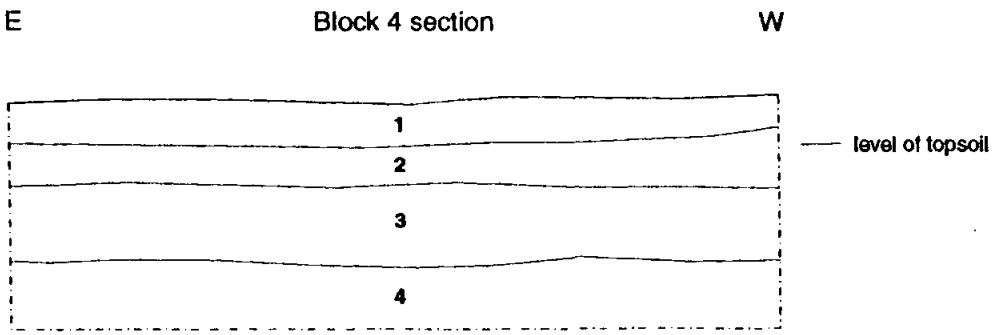


Sections

Figure 3





Sections

Figure 4

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES
Telephone: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496
email: oau-oxford.demon.co.uk

Director: David Miles B.A., F.S.A., M.I.F.A. Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited.
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Charity Number: 285627.
Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES