

# 77 Walton Street Oxford



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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## 77 Walton Street, Oxford

### *Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

*Written by Mike Sims*

*and illustrated by Georgina Slater*

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## Summary

*Between July 28<sup>th</sup> and August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011 Oxford Archaeology conducted an archaeological watching brief at 77 Walton Street, Oxford (NGR: SP 506 072) during work to enlarge existing light wells to the front and rear of the property. The watching brief observed that the 1895 construction of the terrace had completely truncated any earlier archaeology at the front of the building. A buried (undated) soil horizon was recorded at the rear of the house. No evidence for the late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval activity noted at number 75 extending into the development area was observed.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 As part of the renovation work being undertaken at 77 Walton Street, Oxford a planning application was submitted proposing that the front and rear lightwells be enlarged and new windows and entrance doors be installed in place of the existing windows.
- 1.1.2 As these works have the potential to disturb or destroy archaeological deposits a condition was attached to the Planning Permission (planning ref: 10/00942/FUL) requiring that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during the period of intrusive groundworks. A brief was set by David Radford (Oxford City Council) detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition (OCC 2010) and OA produced a Written Statement of Investigation (WSI) showing how it would meet these requirements (OA 2011) and OA was commissioned by Wayne Eagon to undertake the watching brief.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Oxford is located on Quaternary River Gravels of the 2nd (Summertown-Radley) Terrace Deposits (British Geological Survey sheet 236). The terrace forms a north-south ridge of higher ground between the River Thames (Isis) c1.5 km to the west and the River Cherwell c1 km to the east. Overlying these gravels is a red-brown loessic loam (usually 0.3 m thick). Walton Street lies to the north west of the city centre, with number 77 at its northern end.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

#### 1.4 Prehistoric and Roman

- 1.4.1 Neolithic (c4,000-2,400 BC) pits have been found within excavations at Mansfield College (Booth and Hayden 2000, 293), the Institute for American Studies (Booth and Hayden 2000, 291) and at the New Chemistry Laboratory (Bradley et al 2005,145). Recent work at St John's College's Kendrew Quadrangle has revealed a henge monument dated to around 3,000 BC. The henge would have encompassed the area now occupied by Keble College and the Pitt Rivers Museum.
- 1.4.2 A number of Bronze Age (c2,400-700 BC) barrow ditches have been identified in central Oxford. It is probable that there was an extensive barrow cemetery dating to this period, extending along the gravel promontory between the River Thames and River Cherwell from University Parks, southwards to the site of the new Sackler Library (Poore and Wilkinson 2001, fig. 13). The northern extent of this cemetery is unknown,

although ongoing work at the site of the Radcliffe Observatory – immediately to the east of Walton Street - has revealed three large ring ditches, which are likely to be the remains of truncated barrows. Other features, such as ditches and post holes, were also identified, although they remain undated at present (MOLA 2009).

- 1.4.3 Recent investigations at the Rex Richards and Rodney Porter buildings, found evidence of Iron Age ditches, pits and pottery. It is possible that rectilinear cropmarks observed in University Parks relate to Iron Age field systems and/or settlement.
- 1.4.4 A number of sites, along with moderate quantities of Roman pottery, have been found within the city and clearly indicate a Roman presence. Seven inhumations were found at the Radcliffe Science Library, and a timber building was found at Mansfield College. Other evidence including ditched enclosures and field systems indicate the presence of small-scale rural settlement dating from the late 1st to the 4th centuries (Booth and Hayden 2000, 301-2 and 329).

## 1.5 Saxon and Medieval

- 1.5.1 Archaeological evidence for early-mid Saxon activity at Oxford is almost exclusively restricted to the southern limit of the south edge of the Second Gravel Terrace, and the Thames crossing beyond. However, traces of a dispersed Saxon settlement, probably of 5th/6th-century date, were also recorded at the Radcliffe Observatory site (MOLA, 2009).
- 1.5.2 A possible late-Saxon pit was recorded following observations made during the excavation of a small extension to a flower border at the rear of 75 Walton Street in 1975. The deposit from which the late-Saxon pottery was recovered was overlain by a possible 15th-16th century midden deposit. A post-12th century glazed ridge tile from the latter deposit was thought to suggest a substantial dwelling nearby (Mellor in Inskeep 1998, 44).
- 1.5.3 It is feasible that the possible late-Saxon pit is associated with the settlement of Walton mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086, and that the midden deposit and “substantial dwelling nearby” relate to the later Manor at Walton, which may have originated as a grange of Oseney Abbey in the early 14th century (Inskeep 1998).

## 1.6 Post-Medieval

- 1.6.1 A 1769 century survey of St Giles's Parish shows the possible location of the 18th century Walton farmhouse, which is thought to have occupied the site of the earlier manor, and lies at the northern end of Walton Street. The site is near the junction with Walton Well Road which leads to a crossing over the Isis and which is shown on the OS first edition as Walton Ford.
- 1.6.2 The existing terrace was built about 1895, and replaced an early 19th century terrace which is shown on the OS 1st edition of 1876.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The general aims of the investigation were to:
  - To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of all archaeological remains in the areas affected by the works.

- To signal, before the destruction of the material in question, the discovery of a significant archaeological find, for which the resources allocated are not sufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard.
- To make available the results of the investigation.

2.1.2 A site specific aim was to pay particular regard to the potential for late Saxon and medieval remains.

## 2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a series of site visits during those works which had the potential to disturb or destroy below ground archaeological remains at the notified locations. These works consisted of two hand-excavated trenches, each approximately 3.2 m square centred on the existing lightwells (Fig. 2).

2.2.2 Each trench was carefully observed and recorded until undisturbed natural geology was encountered.

2.2.3 Provision was also made for taking environmental/organic samples in accordance with OA Environmental procedures (OA 200).

2.2.4 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established OAS practices. All contexts were allocated unique numbers. Black-and-white negative photographs and a digital photographic record were taken of all excavations, general settings and archaeological features/sections.

2.2.5 Site and location plans were drawn at an appropriate scale. Section drawings of the excavations were drawn at a scale of 1:20.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

#### *Rear Light Well*

3.1.1 The natural geology, a clean terrace gravel (13), was encountered at a depth of 0.72 m below the current garden level (Figs. 2 and 3; Section 1). Overlying this was a 0.12 m deep layer of mixed gravel and grey-brown silt (12). This was covered by a 0.3 m deep layer of grey-brown silt (11), this layer also contained a small percentage of gravel.

3.1.2 Cutting this layer was a 0.45 m deep linear feature (14), the foundation trench for the boundary wall (15) separating the gardens of No. 77 and No. 78.

3.1.3 The present day garden soil, which butts the wall and overlies layer 11 elsewhere was a 0.32 m deep layer of grey-brown silt loam (10).

#### *Front Light Well*

3.1.4 The terrace gravel (27) was encountered at a depth of 1 m below pavement level (Fig. 2 and 3; Section 2). This deposit had been severely truncated by a steeply sloping (approximately 45 degrees) cut (26), the foundation cut for the brick built coal chute (28), the original light well and cellar for the house.

3.1.5 Subsequent to the construction of these features it had been backfilled primarily with a 0.7 m deep layer of reddish brown gritty silt (25). This was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep layer of grey-brown silt and gravel (24). Covering the edge of the cut and the fill was a





0.2 m deep deposit of dark reddish brown clay silt (23). This was sealed by a 0.28 m deep layer of discarded brick ends lying within a matrix of reddish brown silt, gravel and lime mortar (22). The concrete foundations (21) for the brick kerbing (20) surrounding the front yard of the house had been laid directly on top of this.

- 3.1.6 Not shown on the section is a mixed layer of grey-brown sandy silt made ground (0.2 m deep) supporting the concrete slab forming the front yard surface, running between the old light well and the brick kerbing.

### 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 A large quantity of fragments of brick and tile were recovered from layers 10, 22, 23 and 24. These were evaluated on site and determined to date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were not retained.
- 3.2.2 A number of pieces of animal bones, some showing evidence of butchery, together with occasional oyster shells were recovered from layer 10.

### 3.3 Environmental remains

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

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### *Rear Light Well*

- 4.1.1 The clean gravel (13) is the top of the underlying natural geology, a terrace gravel. Layer 12 has been formed from a mixture of the gravels and organic silts. This is most likely to have occurred as a result of water action or bio-turbation rather than as the result of cultivation. No evidence for any activity (such as pits or postholes) were observed in the surface of either deposit.
- 4.1.2 Layer 11 is an earlier layer of worked soil pre-dating the construction of the current terrace housing. No dating evidence was recovered.
- 4.1.3 Layer 11 had been cut by the foundation trench 14 for the boundary wall 15, presumably part of the 1895 construction. Butting up to the wall and sealing the backfill of the foundation trench is the present day garden soil 10.

### *Front Light Well*

- 4.1.4 The natural gravel (27) exposed within the excavation is a continuation of the gravel observed to the rear of the house. This deposit has been severely truncated by the edge of the 1895 cellar excavation (26). This cut continues under the pavement outside the front yard. The sharp slope of this cut is presumably due to deliberate battering back of the cellar excavations in order to prevent collapse of the sides.
- 4.1.5 The cellarge of the house together with the protruding coal chute and front light well have been constructed within this excavation with the space between the structure and the gravel being progressively backfilled (layers 23, 24 and 25), possibly to provide a working platform.
- 4.1.6 Layer 22 is a probable construction layer or levelled dump of waste material formed during the construction of the upper floors of the house. The shallow wall (20) and its associated foundation (21) were subsequently built enclosing the front yard. The brick size and lime mortar bonding suggests that it is contemporary with the house.



### **Conclusions**

- 4.1.7 The watching brief has shown that the stratigraphy in front of the house has been heavily truncated with no deposits or features pre-dating the 1895 construction of the house surviving.
- 4.1.8 To the rear of the house there is a buried soil horizon (11) surviving outside the footprint of the existing light well together with layers of undisturbed natural deposits 12 and 13.
- 4.1.9 As has been noted previously no evidence for any activity such as pit or postholes were observed within the surface of either 12 or 13.
- 4.1.10 No dating evidence was recovered to place place layer 11 chronologically and it is unclear if this is a medieval or earlier buried soil horizon or garden soil associated with the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century terrace shown on the OS map of 1876. Layer 10 is the layer of garden soil associated with the present house.
- 4.1.11 No evidence either in the form of datable deposits or residual finds was observed during the course of the watching brief to suggest that the late Saxon activity recorded at number 75, or the later medieval and post-medieval Walton Grange, extended into the rear of Number 77.



## APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
Rear Light Well							
10	Layer	0.32 m	-	-	Present day garden soil	Brick, tile, bone, pottery	C19th/ C20th
11	Layer	0.3 m	-	-	Buried soil horizon	-	-
12	Layer	0.12 m	-	-	Bio-turbation layer	-	-
13	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	-	Natural gravel	-	-
14	Cut	0.5 m	0.5 m	> 5 m	Foundation cut	-	C19th
15	Structure	1.8 m	0.4 m	> 5 m	Boundary wall	Brick	C19th
16	Fill	0.45 m	0.1 m	> 5 m	Backfill of foundation cut	-	C19th
Front Light Well							
20	Structure	0.8 m	0.4 m	> 5 m	Boundary wall	Brick	C19th
21	Footings	0.2 m	0.5 m	> 5 m	Concrete foundation	-	C19th
22	Layer	0.28 m	-	-	Construction layer	Brick, tile	C19th
23	Fill	0.2 m	-	-	Backfill	Brick	C19th
24	Fill	0.18 m	-	-	Backfill	Brick	C19th
25	Fill	0.7 m	-	-	Backfill	Brick	C19th
26	Cut	> 2.1 m	-	-	Cellar excavation	-	C19th
27	Layer	> 0.7 m	-	-	Natural gravel	-	-
28	Structure	> 2.5 m	-	-	Coal chute, light well and cellar	Brick	C19th



## APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Booth and Hayden, 2000 A Roman settlement at Mansfield College, Oxoniensia LXV, 291-331

Bradley, P, Charles, B, Hardy, A and Poore, D, 2005 Prehistoric and Roman activity and a Civil war ditch: Excavations at the Chemistry Research Laboratory, 2-4 South Parks Road, Oxford, Oxoniensia LXX 71-202

Inskeep, RR, 1998, Medieval Finds on Walton Street, Oxford, and the Settlement and Farmhouse of Walton, Oxoniensia LXIII

MOLA, 2009, Oxford University: Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (Radcliffe Infirmary Site) Oxford, Evaluation Report

OA, 2000 OA Environmental Guidelines for sampling

OA, 2011 77 Walton Street, Oxford: Written Statement of Investigation

Poore and Wilkinson, 2001 Beaumont Palace and the Whitefriars: excavations at the Sackler Library, Beaumont St, Oxford OA Occasional Paper 9

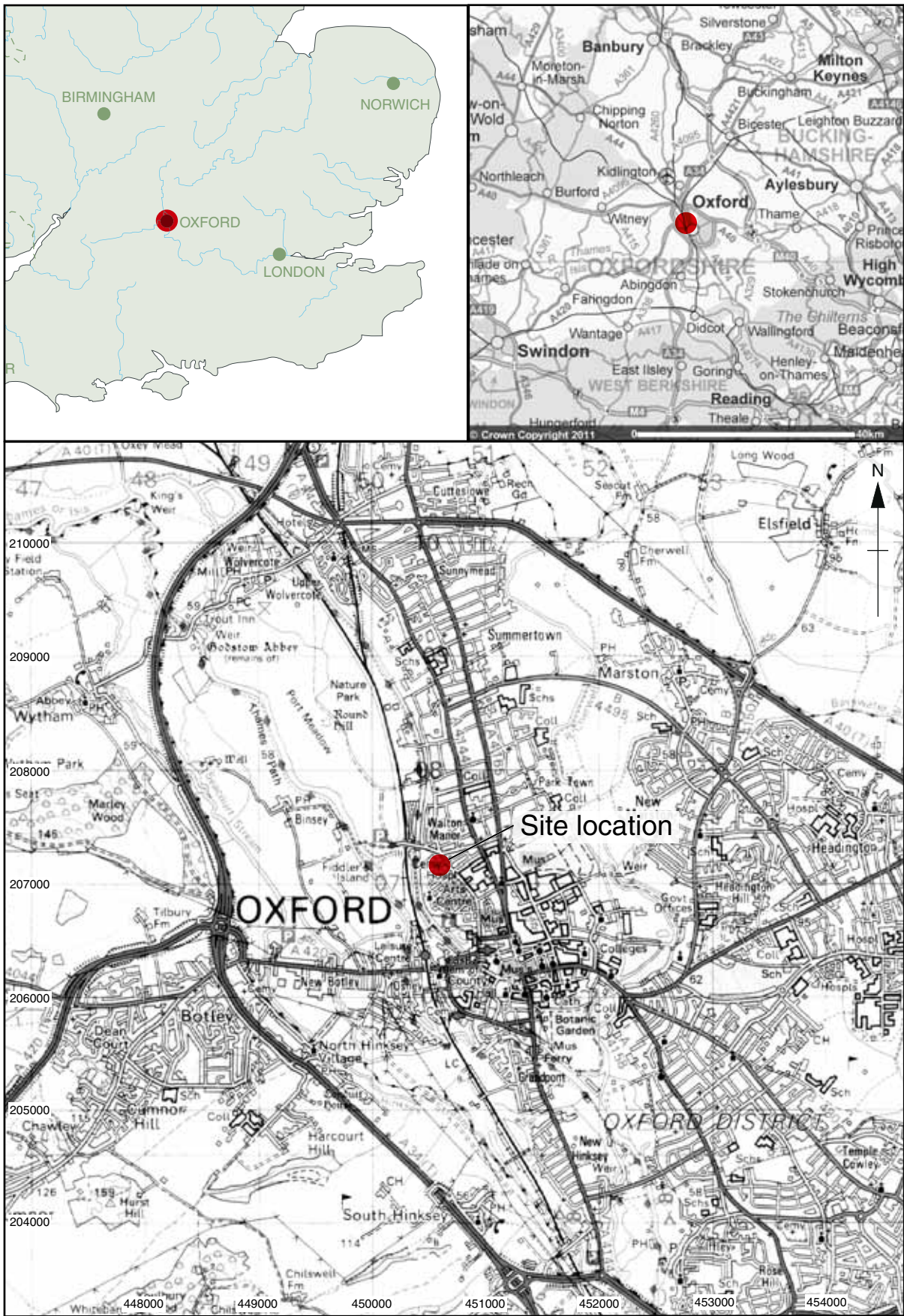
OCC, 2010, Brief for and Archaeological Watching Brief, 77 Walton Street, Oxford



## APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	77 Walton Street, Oxford
Site code:	OX77WA 11
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SP 506 072
Type of watching brief:	Hand excavation of two enlarged light wells to the front and rear of the property.
Date and duration of project:	28 <sup>th</sup> July to 2 <sup>nd</sup> August 2011.
Area of site:	C100 m <sup>2</sup>
Summary of results:	The watching brief showed that the area to the front of the house had been severely truncated during the 1895 construction of the terrace with no earlier archaeology surviving. A buried soil horizon predating the construction of the standing building was observed to the rear of the building but no dating evidence was recovered. No continuation of the late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval activity noted at Number 75 extending into the development area was encountered.
Location of archive:	The archive will be lodged with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service under the accession number OXCMS:2011.136





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Figure 1: Site location





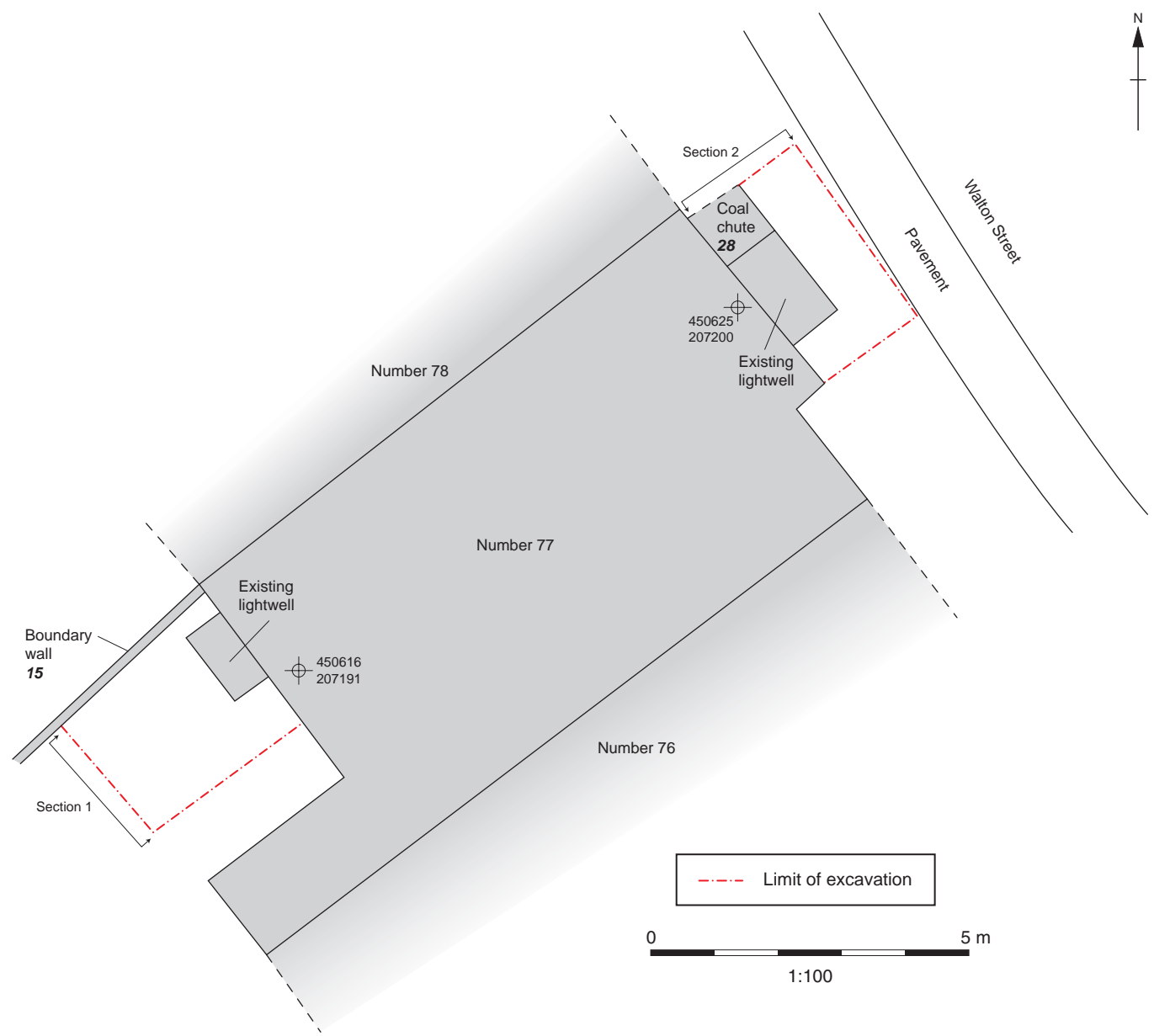
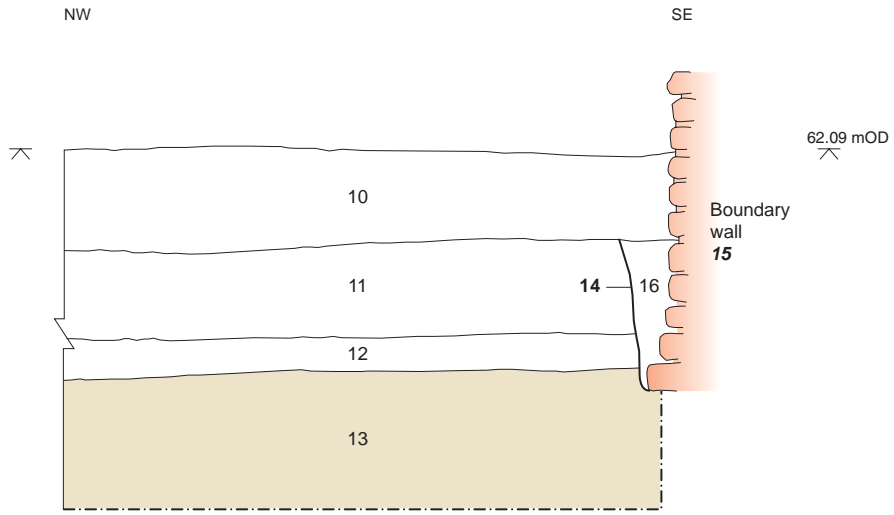


Figure 2: Site Plan



### Section 1



### Section 2

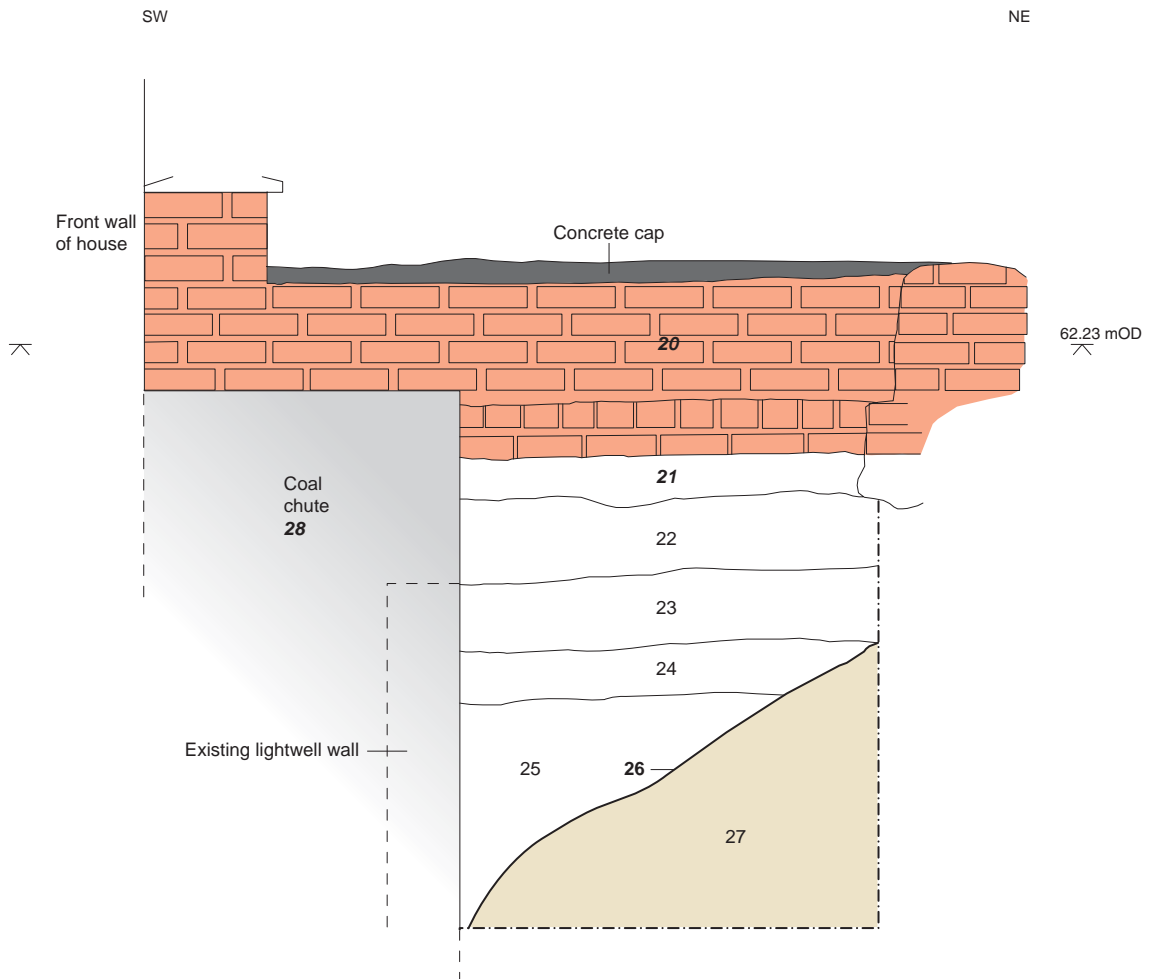


Figure 3: Sections







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