

Royal Hospital
Chelsea
London
New Infirmary Building



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



Oxford Archaeology

June 2004

Client: CMS Bath Ltd

Issue N^o: 1

OA Job N^o: 2265

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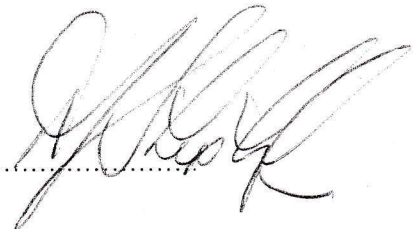
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Royal Hospital Chelsea, New Infirmary Building

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In April 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. The work was commissioned by CMS Bath Ltd in advance of the excavation of foundation pits and service trenches for a modular infirmery building. The watching brief revealed deposits of 18th and 19th century garden soils consistent with formal landscaping and garden design. No evidence of earlier archaeological remains was encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In April 2004 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 planning application for construction of a modular building and associated services for a new infirmery.
- 1.1.2 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation for English Heritage detailing how it would undertake the watching brief in accordance with Greater London Archaeological Advisory Services (GLAAS) guidelines.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on level ground at approximately 7 m OD and occupies an area of 0.06 hectares. The underlying natural geology is Terrace gravels overlying London clay.

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,2004) 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 tells

us 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 us to reconstruct fairly exactly 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 1690's.
- 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 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 an area of meadow, described as the Governors Garden Meadow, to the north-east.
- 1.3.11 The most drastic change came in the 1850's 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 will form the site of the new permanent Marquee.

Previous investigations

- 1.3.12 In 1997 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU now Oxford Archaeology, OA) maintained a watching brief during the installation of an automatic irrigation system in College Court, Figure Court and Light Horse Court (OAU 1997). Brick wall footings perhaps associated with the original college were found. A watching brief was carried out by OAU in 1999 during the installation of a communication duct system; evidence of 18th century garden features was found (OAU 1999a).
- 1.3.13 In the summer of 1999 OAU maintained a watching brief during the excavation of trenches for a marquee (OAU 1999b), that uncovered traces of the former canals on the site together with more recent garden evidence and 20th century structures.
- 1.3.14 A watching brief was carried out by OAU on the site of Ranelagh House that dates to the late 17th century in November 2000. Parts of existing drainage trenches were re-opened by contractors, with an archaeologist in attendance as required. The former cobbled road surface was re-exposed along the line of Chelsea Bridge Road to the east of the hospital (OAU 2000).
- 1.3.15 From October 2003 to February 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Royal Hospital, Chelsea. The work was commissioned by CMS Bath Ltd in advance of the construction of new structures with associated services. The watching brief revealed no archaeological features or

deposits pre-dating the 19th-century garden redevelopment and construction of greenhouse buildings.

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 preserve by record any archaeological remains (where present) which the ground works will 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 a series of site visits to monitor the progress and extent of the excavations and to record the stratigraphy exposed during the works.
- 2.2.2 The excavations consisted of 40 pits for the foundation pads, each measuring 0.6 m by 0.6 m by 0.6 m deep and approximately 25 m length of trench 0.5 m wide by 0.6 m deep. The material was excavated using a 3 ton mini digger fitted with a 0.3 m wide toothed bucket. The pits were trimmed to their final dimensions by hand. Finds were collected by hand and bagged by context.
- 2.2.3 A plan recording the extent and position of the excavations and the location of the sections was drawn at a scale of 1:100 (Fig.2) and a number of representative sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 (Fig.3). The sections were photographed and a general photographic record of the work was made using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 With the exception of where the service trench crossed the road the stratigraphy exposed within the foundation pits for the modular building and the remainder of the service trench was the same with only a slight variation in the depth of the deposits (Fig. 3, sections 2 - 5).
- 3.1.2 The base of the excavations cut between 0.15 m and 0.4 m into the top of a friable dark reddish brown sandy silt (2). This contained many small pebbles and widespread charcoal flecking. The presence of numerous 18th century finds suggests that this may be a landscaping layer, possibly a layer of made ground composed of dredged river material.
- 3.1.3 This was overlaid by a deposit of a friable dark brown sandy loam (1) of between 0.2 m and 0.45 m in depth representing the modern topsoil and turf, the variations in

depth may represent deeper areas of planting (flower beds ?) before the present day lawn was established.

- 3.1.4 At the eastern end of the service trench (Fig. 3, section 1) a layer of made ground (5) was exposed for over a depth of over 0.35 m in the base of the trench. This may be a variation of layer (2) or possibly deliberate make up for the road foundation. This was overlaid by a coarse crushed stone hardcore (4), 0.15 m deep, the base for the present tarmac surface (3).

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Finds recovered from layer (2) consisted of fragments of clay pipe and earthenware consistent with a mid to late 18th century date. Finds from the topsoil layer (1), include clay pipe fragments, glazed earthenware and transfer printed ware which suggest a 19th century 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 garden soil deposits, suggesting an earlier arrangement of flower beds now sealed below the present day lawn. The limited area exposed during excavation of the pits mitigates against any supposition of the shape and extent of these beds.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.0 m - 0.25 m	Worked garden soil / Topsoil	Pottery, Clay pipes, Bone, Oyster shell	C18th
2	Layer	0.25 m - >0.6 m	Made ground / landscaping layer	Pan tile, Pottery, Bone, Oyster shell	C18th
3	Layer	0.0 m - 0.1 m	Modern tarmac roadway	-	C20th
4	Layer	0.1 m - 0.25 m	Hardcore base for tarmac surface	-	C20th
5	Layer	0.25 m - >0.6 m	Made ground	-	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- Dean C G T, 1950 *The Royal Hospital Chelsea* (London)
- OAU, 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)
- OAU, 1996 *A Desk-Top Assessment of the possible archaeological implications of the Installation of an Automatic Irrigation System at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea*. Oxford Archaeological Unit (unpublished).
- OAU 1997 *An Archaeological Watching Brief conducted during the installation of an Automatic Irrigation System at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea*. Oxford Archaeological Unit (unpublished).
- OAU 1999a *Installation of a Communication Duct System. Archaeological Watching Brief Report*. Oxford Archaeological Unit (unpublished).
- OAU 1999b *Chelsea Flower Show 2000, New Marquee*. Archaeological Watching Brief Report. Oxford Archaeological Unit (unpublished)
- OAU 2000 *Chelsea Royal Hospital, Ranelagh House, Drainage, rehabilitation works*. Archaeological Watching Brief Report
- OA 2004 *New Superintendent Building, Chelsea Royal Hospital : Archaeological Watching Brief Report (Client Report)*
- OA 2004 *Royal Hospital Chelsea, New Infirmery Building - Written Scheme of Investigation*

APPENDIX 3 GLSMR/RCHME NMR ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT FORM

1) TYPE OF RECORDING

Evaluation, Excavation, **Watching Brief**, Building Recording, Survey,
Geoarchaeological Evaluation, Fieldwalking, Other

2) LOCATION

Borough: Kensington and Chelsea

Site address: Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, London

Site Name: Royal Hospital Chelsea Site Code: RHCINF 04

Nat. grid Refs: centre of site: TQ 2830 7800

Limits of site: N TQ 2830 7802 S TQ 2830 7798

E TQ 2828 7800 W TQ 2832 7798

3) ORGANISATION

Name of archaeological unit/company/society: Oxford Archaeology

Address: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 OES

Site director/supervisor: Mike Sims Project manager: Andy Holmes

Funded by: CMS Bath Ltd.

4) DURATION

Date fieldwork started 26.04.04 Date finished: 29.04.04

Fieldwork previously notified? YES/NO

Fieldwork will continue? YES/NO/NOT KNOWN

5) PERIODS REPRESENTED

Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman, Saxon (pre-AD 1066),
Medieval (AD 1066-1485), **Post-Medieval**, Unknown

6) PERIOD SUMMARIES Deposits of garden soils relating to C18th landscaping exposed
within the sections

7) NATURAL

Type: Not exposed during the watching brief

Height above Ordnance datum:

8) LOCATION OF ARCHIVES

- a) Please provide an estimate of the quantity of material in your possession for the following categories:

NOtes x3	PLans x1	PHotos	Ngtives x12
SLides x12	COrrispondence	MScRipts (unpub reports, etc)	
BULk finds x1 Kg	SMall finds	SOil samples	
OTHer			

- b) The archive has been prepared and stored in accordance with MGC standards and will be deposited in the following location: Royal Chelsea Hospital Museum
- c) Has a security copy of the archive been made?: NO

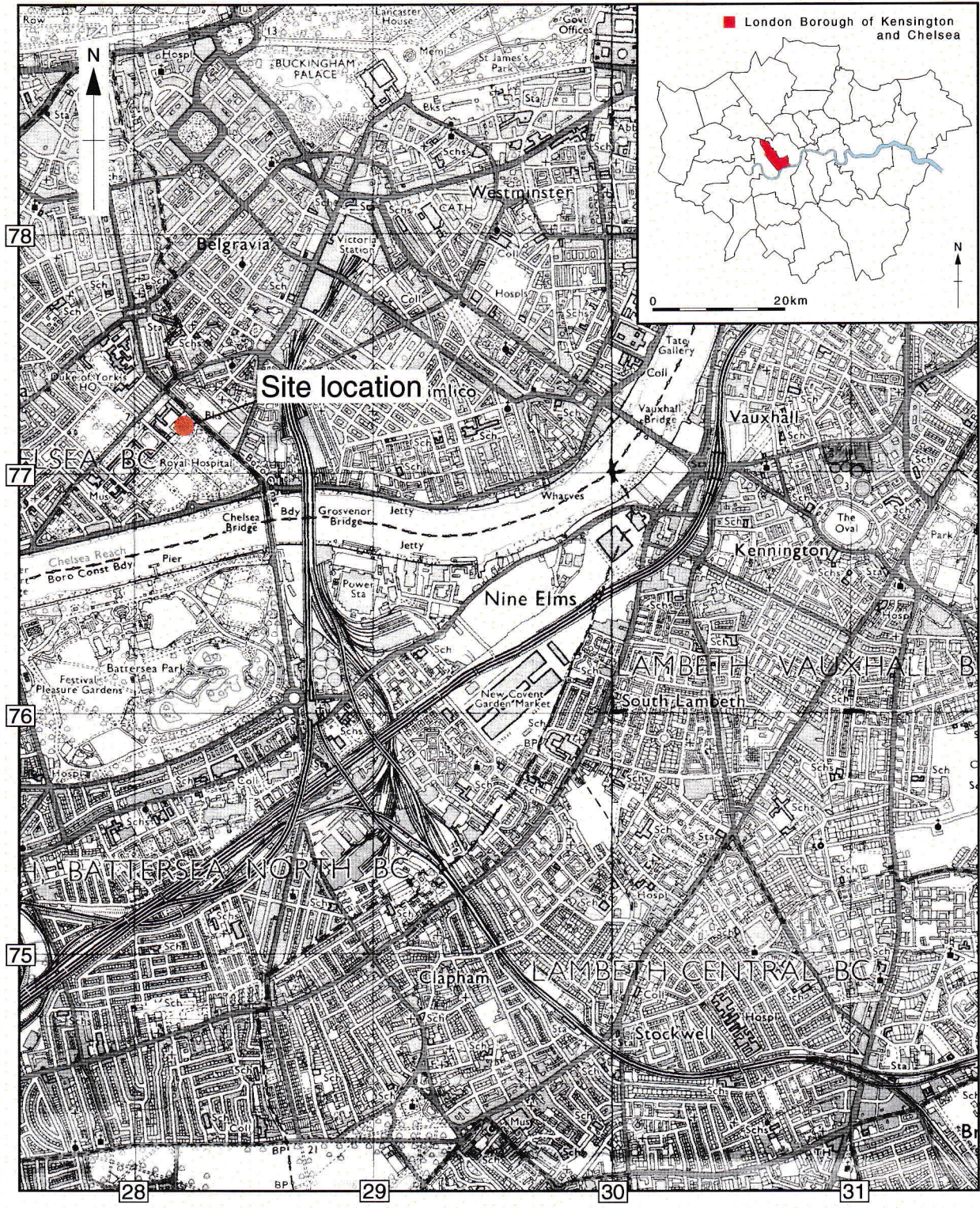
10) BIBLIOGRAPHY

See Appendix 2 Bibliography and references

SIGNED:

DATE:

NAME :



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Figure 1: Site location

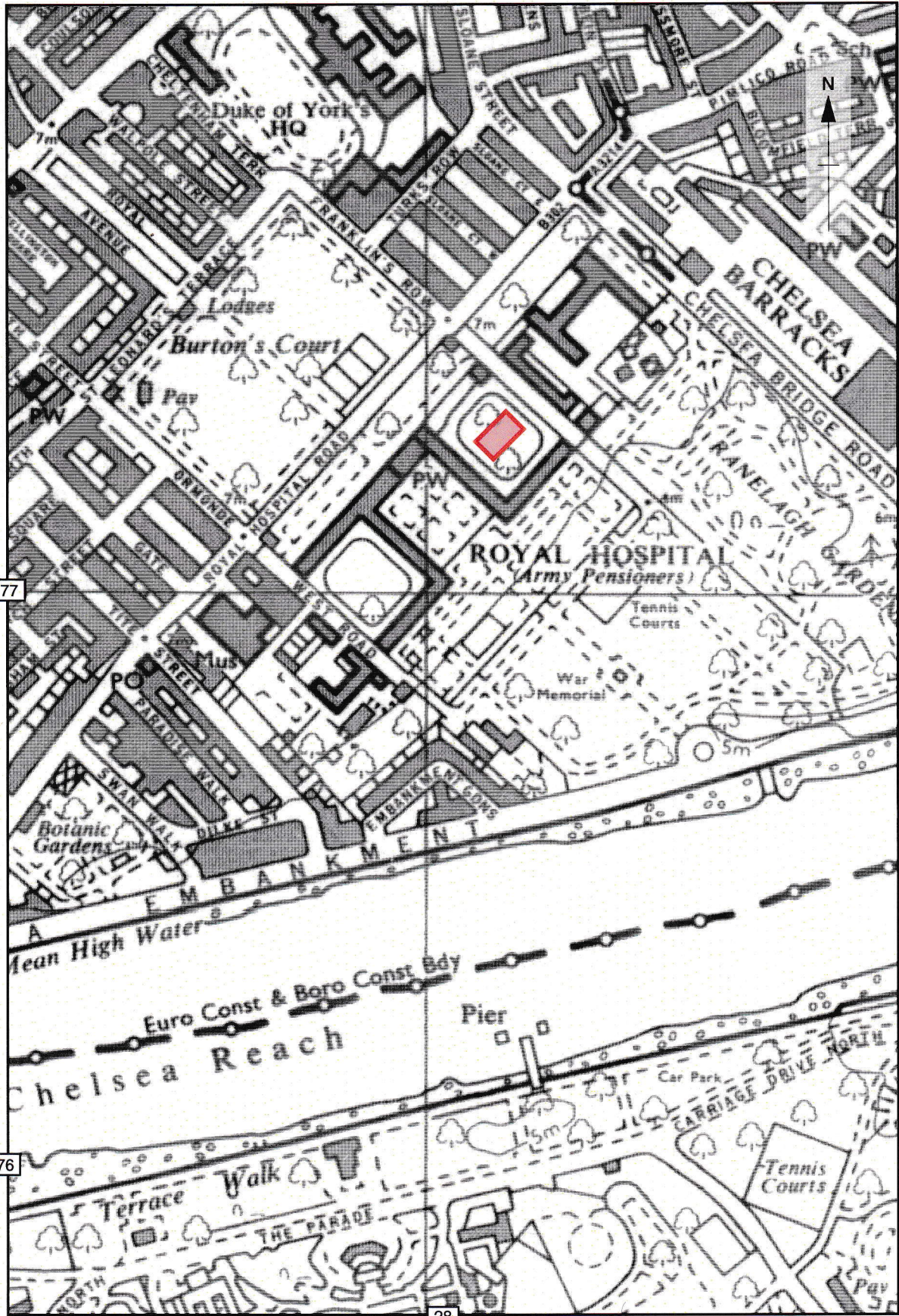


Figure 2: Plan of watching brief area

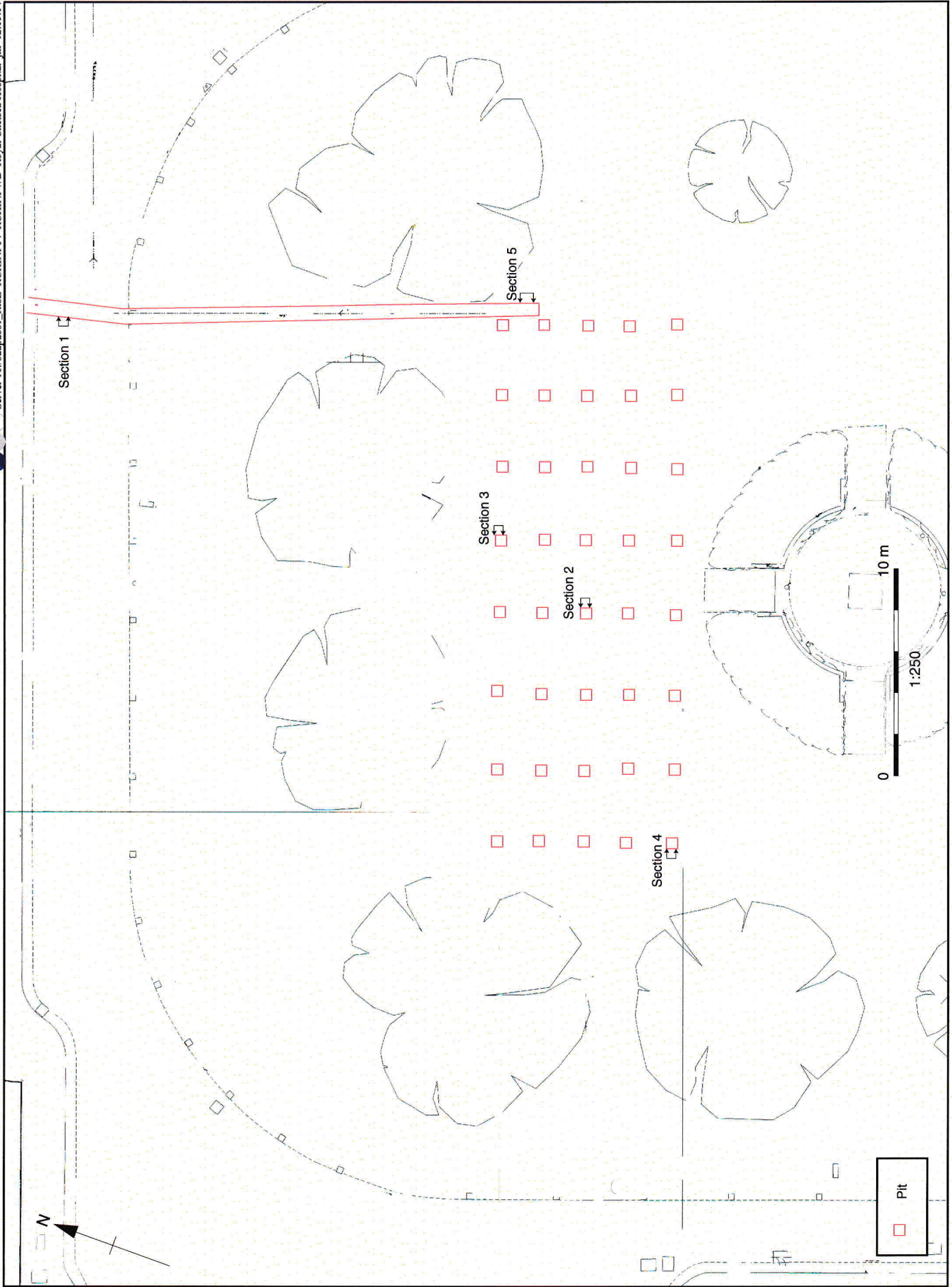


Figure 3: Plan showing location of pits and sections

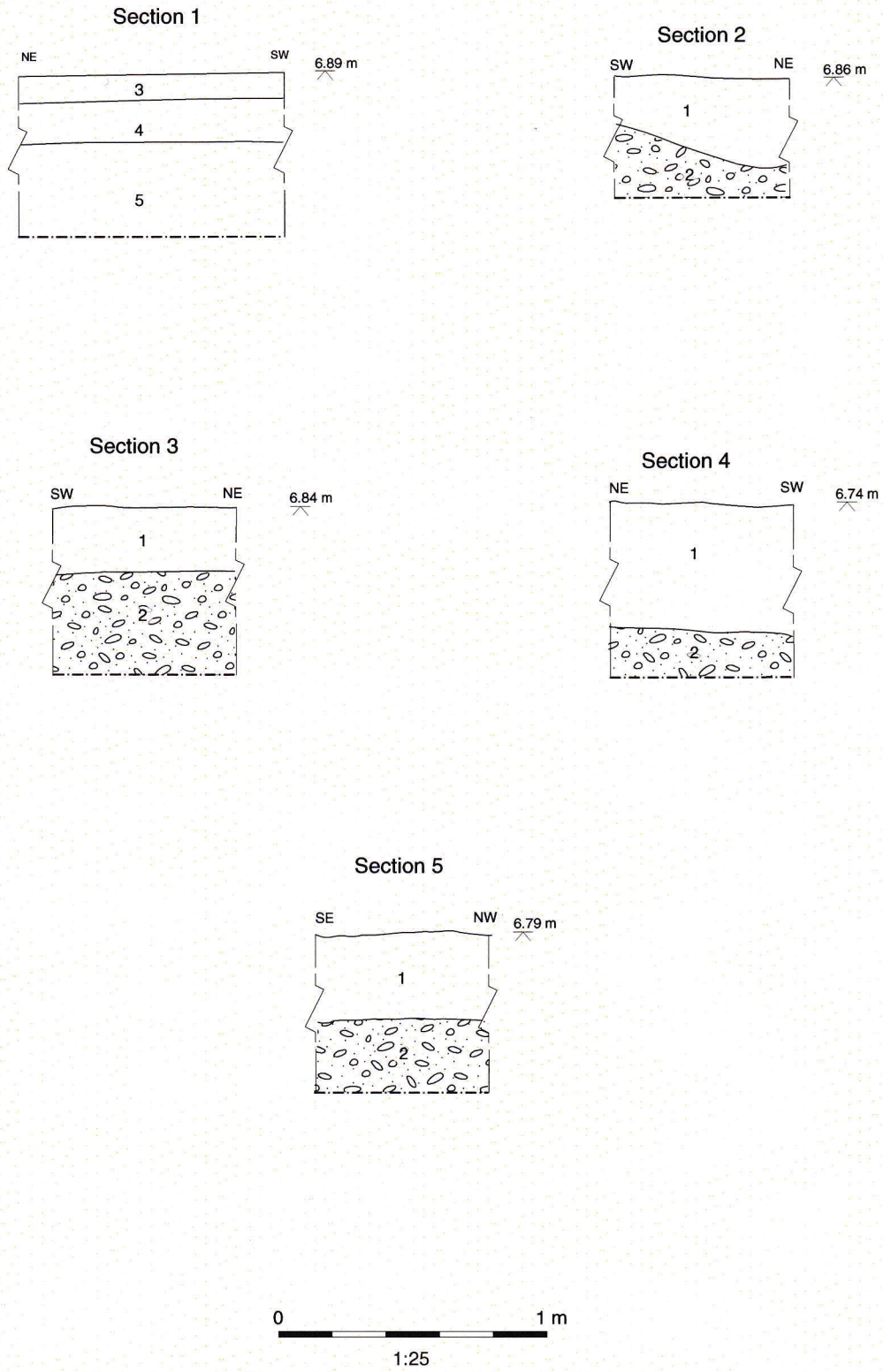


Figure 4: Sections 1-5



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