

Blenhiem Palace Woodstock Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

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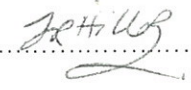
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Blenhiem Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire***ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*****CONTENTS**

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Cover Plate: Blenhiem Palace viewed from the north.

SUMMARY

In April 2004 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Blenhiem Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 441 161). The work was commissioned by Blenhiem Palace in advance of a new length of gas pipe and new meter. The watching brief revealed an earlier cobble surface of the Kitchen court and cultivated soil layer in the park land.

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 Blenhiem Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Blenhiem Palace in respect of excavations for a new length of gas pipeline and new meter.
- 1.1.2 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief following discussions with Rob Parkinson, Conservation Officer for Blenhiem Palace.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is located to the north-east of the Kitchen block of Blenheim Palace within the grounds of the Lower Park. It lies at approximately 90 m OD and is presently part of an ornamental garden. The underlying geology is Oolitic limestone, with the drift geology represented by 3rd terrace river gravel deposits.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared from a desktop assessment compiled for the Woodstock area (OA 2002) and is summarised below.
- 1.3.2 Whilst the Woodstock area contains no excavated sites from the prehistoric period, the topographic setting of the area, which lies upon a high limestone plateau overlooking the river Glyme would probably have proven attractive to early settlement. A number of flint finds have been recovered from the area around Woodstock including a Mesolithic blade and a quartzite pebble macehead recovered from within Blenheim park itself. The earthwork remains of Grim's Ditch, a probable Bronze age boundary, can be seen in the northern extent of the Great Park.
- 1.3.3 Running across the north end of Blenheim park is the Roman Akeman Street connecting the Roman towns of Verulamium (St. Albans) and Corinium (Cirencester). Several Romano-British settlements and farmsteads can be identified within the park boundary notably west of North lodge and south-east of Furze Platt. Coins of Vespasian, Gallienus, Tetricus I & II, Carausius, House of Constantine and Valentinian have been found in the park.

- 1.3.4 The town of Woodstock, to the north-west of Blenheim Palace derives its name from “place in the woods” (*Wudustoc* c.1000 AD) which is reflected by much of its history as the home of a hunting lodge for the Kings and Queens of England.
- 1.3.5 The Royal hunting lodge and park is believed to date from 1113-1114 AD, and may be the oldest in England, it was thought to have been enclosed by a wall some 7 miles in circumference. New Woodstock was founded in “waste” ground on the eastern edge of the park to provide accommodation for the Royal retinue of Henry II.
- 1.3.6 By the early sixteenth century Woodstock Palace had fallen into decay with only the gatehouse habitable. The palace was garrisoned during the Civil War when in 1646 it was bombarded and the Royalist garrison captured. By 1659 Lord Lovelace had taken up residence in the gatehouse and was organising race meets within the park.
- 1.3.7 In 1704 the estate of Woodstock was given to the Duke of Marlborough and in 1705 the building of Blenheim Palace was begun under the direction of Sir John Vanbrugh and later Nicholas Hawksmoor, whilst the gardens including a walled kitchen garden and great parterre were overseen by Henry Wise. By the 1760’s Capability Brown had started to landscape the existing grounds including grassing over the state gardens and the grand parterre. The construction of the new palace saw a huge revival in the fortunes of the town of Woodstock, and many of its citizens became dependant upon the palace and estate as the main employer and customer in the area.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The car park tarmac surface was cut with a saw, then a 0.6-7 m wide trench was excavated with a mini excavator with a 0.6 m wide toothed bucket. The depth of the trench was 1 m and the work was carried out under archaeological supervision.
- 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 made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Car park area (Figs 2 and 3)

3.1.1 The trench cut through to a natural of limestone bedrock (8), which was overlain by cornbrash (7) and clay (9 and 10). This was sealed below a 0.15 m thick layer of compacted silty sand (6), the base for a cobbled surface (5). The cobble surface extended approximately 22 m from the house and was edged by dressed stone blocks. Overlying this was a 0.12 m thick layer of gravel (4), possibly resurfacing of the cobbled surface, which was covered by a 0.4 m thick layer of dark grey brown silty clay (3) soil. The present car park tarmac surface (1) on a layer of sand (2) sealed the area over the cobbles (5). Where the tarmac car park extended over the area of the cobbled surface it was laid on a 0.2 m thick layer of crushed stone (11).

Park land (Figs 2 and 4)

3.1.2 Where the trench left the area of the car park and entered into the park land, it extended south-east to the new meter station and north-west to the mains. To the south-east the trench crossed the Ha Ha to the site of the new meter station. It cut into the natural (10) with a 0.15 m thick layer of dark grey brown silty clay (12) topsoil.

3.1.3 Where the trench was excavated north-west towards the gas main, it cut into the natural (15), which was sealed below a 0.3 m thick layer of dark grey brown silty clay (14) cultivated soil. Overlain by a 0.15 m thick layer of dark grey brown silty clay (13) topsoil.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The watching brief revealed an earlier, but undated courtyard surface outside the north-east entrance to the kitchen court. This was sealed below the present tarmac car park. The trench outside the area of the car park revealed that to the south-east the garden landscaping and Ha Ha had truncated deeply into the natural, removing any shallow archaeological features. To the north-west towards the avenue from the Hensington Gate the trench cut through a thick cultivated soil layer of the park land.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Height</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1	Layer	0.10 m			Tarmac	
2	Layer	0.08 m			Hardcore base	
3	Layer	0.04 m			Soil make up	
4	Layer	0.12 m			Gravel surface	
5	Layer	0.12 m			Cobble surface	
6	Layer	0.15 m			Base for cobbles	
7	Natural				Limestone brash	
8	Natural				Limestone	
9	Natural				Clay natural	
10	Natural				Clay natural	
11	Layer	0.18 m			Hardcore base	
12	Layer	0.15 m			Topsoil	
13	Layer	0.14 m			Topsoil	
14	Layer	0.32 m			Cultivated soil	
15	Natural				Limestone	

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

J. Bond and K Tiller (Eds), 1987 *Blenheim. Landscape for a Palace*. Alan Sutton. Oxford.

OAU, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson)

OA, 2002 *Land at Oxford Road, Woodstock : Desktop Assessment*

Oa, 2004 *Blenhiem Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire* Written Scheme of Investigation

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Blenhiem Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire

Site code: OXBP 04

Grid reference: NGR SP 441 161

Type of watching brief: Excavation of new gas pipe trench.

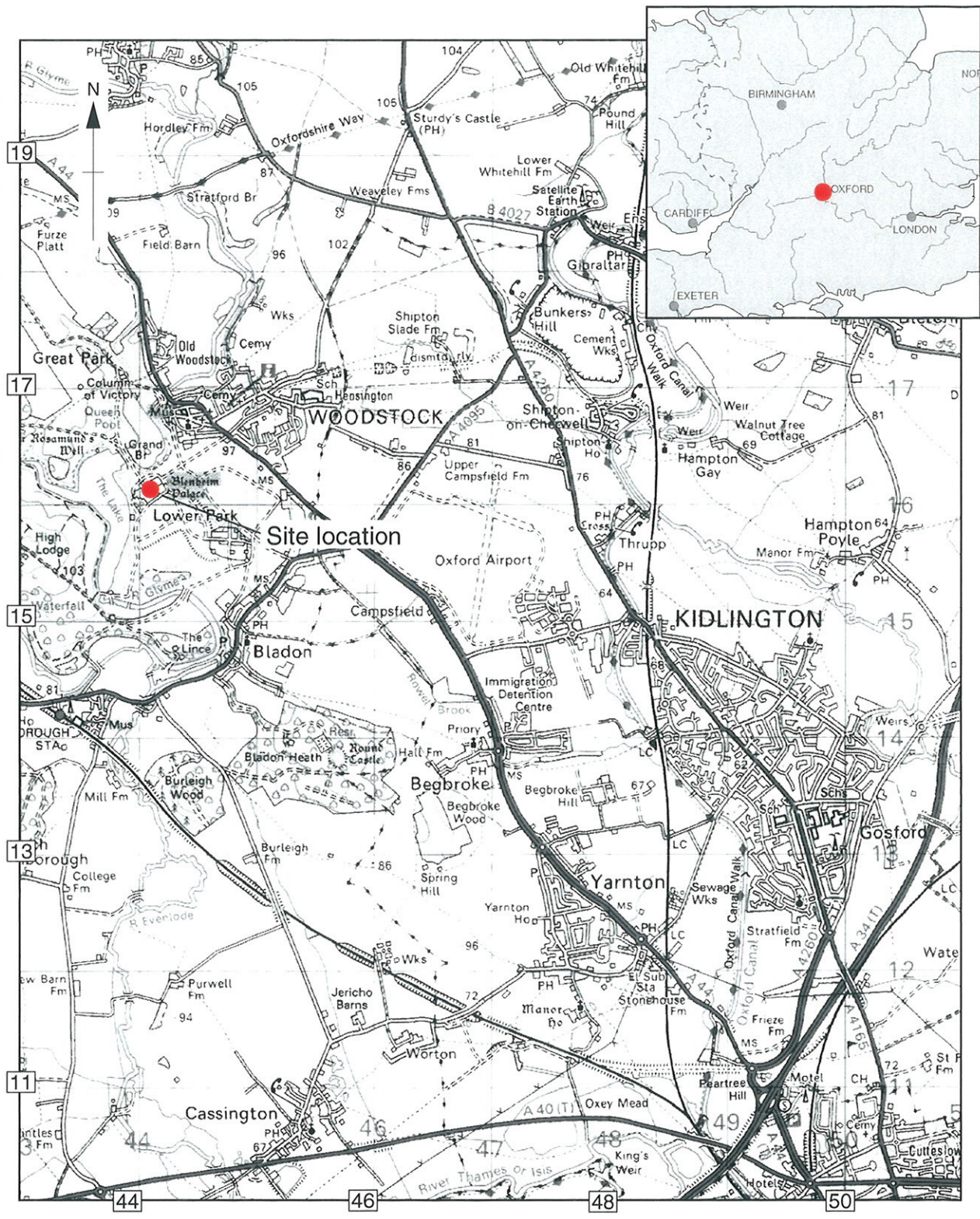
Date and duration of project: Three visits on the 1st to 3rd April 2004.

Area of site: 120 m x 0.7 m

Summary of results: The watching brief revealed an earlier cobble surface to the Kitchen court and cultivated soil layer in the park land.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS 2004.35

Server 10:/caupubs/1/itoQ*OXBPWB*OXBP04*JM*22.04.04.



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Figure 1: Site location

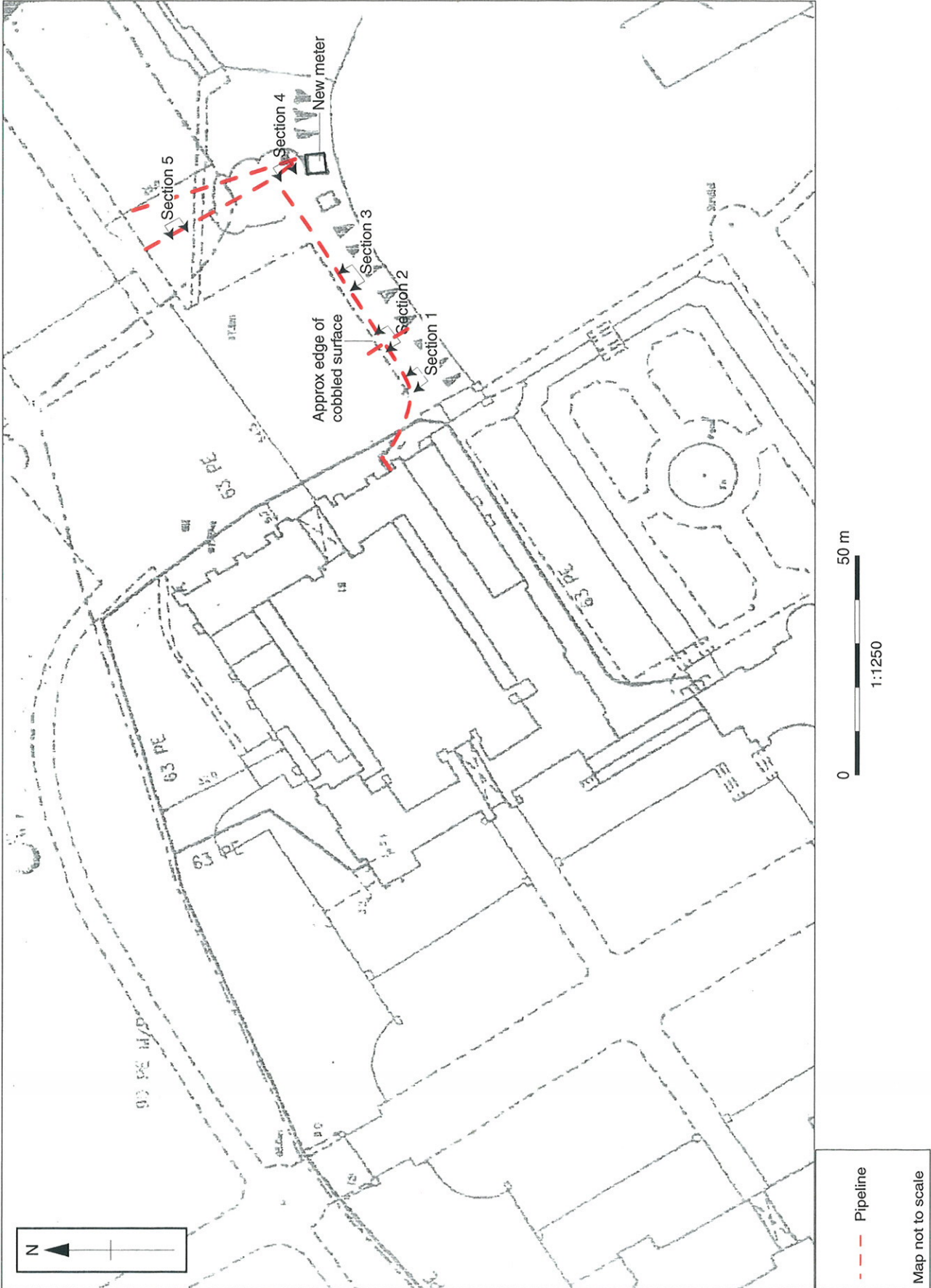


Figure 2: Location of trench and sections

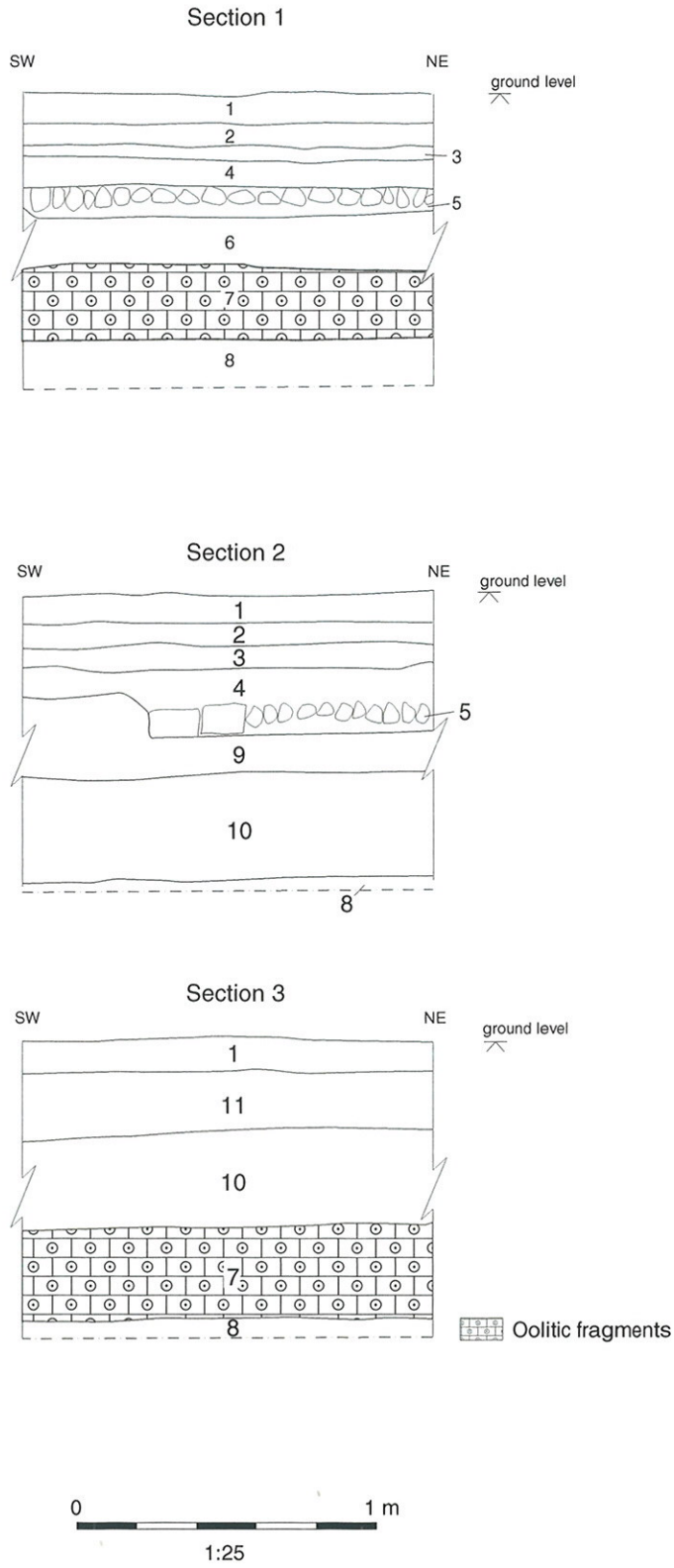


Figure 3: Sections 1, 2 and 3

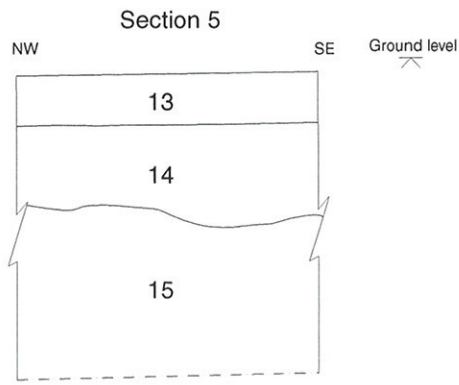
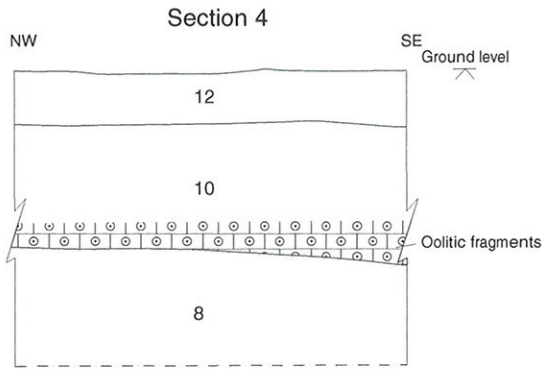


Figure 4: Sections 4 and 5



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