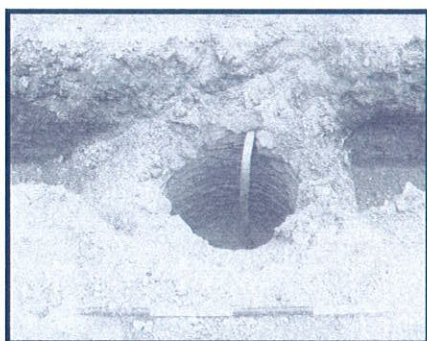


# 56a, Rear of High Street Witney Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



August 2007

**Client: Mr Finlayson**

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OA Job N<sup>o</sup>: 3700  
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Witney, Oxfordshire*****ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*****CONTENTS**

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## SUMMARY

*In June and July 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 56a, Rear of the High Street, Witney, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 3575 0993). The work was commissioned by Hall and Ensom in advance of the construction of 5 new dwellings. The watching brief revealed a possible burgage plot boundary ditch, two 18th-century wells, a 19th-century boundary wall and overall deposits of late post-medieval made ground.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In June 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 56a, Rear of the High Street, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 3575 0993). The work was commissioned by Hall and Ensom in respect of a planning application for the construction of new dwellings (Planning Application No. 03/1308).
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by Hugh Coddington, the Deputy County Archaeological Officer representing West Oxfordshire District Council, requesting that an Archaeological Watching Brief be undertaken during the course of the groundworks (OCAS, 2006).
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA, 2007).

#### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The town of Witney is located approximately 14 km west of Oxford (Fig. 1). The site is situated on the east side of the High Street, to the rear of number 54 (now 56a) and to the north of the Methodist church. The site is level ground, c400 m<sup>2</sup> in area and lies at roughly 80 m above OD. The underlying geology is alluvium over terrace gravel deposits (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no 236). The site is currently used as car parking.

#### 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, 2006) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 A number of important Neolithic and Bronze Age sites are known in West Oxfordshire, though not specifically from Witney itself. The major henge monument of Devil's Quoits at Stanton Harcourt, was surrounded by numerous barrow groups, though this suggests that the focus of early prehistoric activity may have lain on the gravels further down the Windrush river (Barclay *et al.* 1995). Further evidence from the north and west of Witney of Neolithic remains, namely Hawks Barrow near

Minster Lovell and upstanding barrows at Leafield and Astall show that the Witney area was surrounded by prehistoric activity. A number of finds of Prehistoric axes and pottery have been discovered in Witney itself and a sword of Bronze Age date was recovered from the line of Emma's Dyke in Witney.

- 1.3.3 For the later prehistoric period a similar pattern of mid-late Iron Ages sites are known around Witney, extending up the river from Standlake to Ducklington (Chambers 1976a and Chambers and Williams 1976). Importantly excavations 2 km west of Witney at Deer Park Farm show that Iron Age settlement also existed on the Kellaway clays.
- 1.3.4 Evidence for the Roman and post-Roman periods in and around Witney is scarce. A few sherds of Romano British pottery from excavations at Cogges to the south east of the development site and some 2nd century settlement features at Church Green in Witney, may suggest some type of settlement in the vicinity. Evidence from the post-Roman period is restricted to the line of Emma's Dyke, a silted up rampart and ditch feature enclosing Witney from the west and thought to be of Saxon Origin. Of interest are the settlement features found during excavation at Cogges (Rowley and Steiner 1996).
- 1.3.5 As with the prehistoric period, the pattern of settlement in the Roman and post-Roman periods appears to form a picture of known activity around Witney but with little direct evidence from Witney itself.
- 1.3.6 The medieval core of Witney grew up around St Mary's church and the manorial site of Mount House. The site lies within an area of considerable archaeological potential. Earlier archaeological work along the south side of the High Street revealed evidence of late medieval activity. This was in the form of ditches and pits, which appear to respect the medieval burgage plots that radiate out at right angles to the High Street. The cartographic evidence suggests that burgage plots existed in the area of the development and existing property boundaries appear to respect them.
- 1.3.7 An earlier evaluation of the site revealed a series of gullies and a ditch dating to between the 11th and 13th centuries. These appear to respect the medieval tenement boundaries and burgage plots. A series of post medieval pits were also revealed (Cotswold Archaeology 2003). The initial watching brief phase did not reveal any archaeological features (Cotswold Archaeology 2004).

## 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 deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the groundworks.

2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

## 2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The foundation trenches were excavated using a tracked machine fitted with a 0.6 m wide toothless bucket. The material was removed in spits until the desired depth of excavation was reached.

2.2.2 A plan showing the location and extent of the excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations, features and sections were photographed using 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 underlying natural, the top of the gravel terrace (5), was encountered at a depth of 1.1 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Sections 3 and 4). This was overlaid by a layer of dark yellow-brown silt clay (4) of between 0.2 m and 0.4 m in depth (Fig. 3, Sections 1, 2 and 4). This deposit probably represents a layer of alluvium.

3.1.2 In the centre of the site this layer was cut by a parallel sided feature (8), 1.9 m wide by 0.6 m deep (Fig. 3, Section 3). This feature had steeply sloping sides and a flat base and was visible in both sides of the foundation trench. The cut ran NE - SW across the site, running roughly parallel to the High Street, and is a probable burgage plot boundary ditch, possibly relating to the late medieval and early post-medieval periods.

3.1.3 Filling the base of the ditch was a 0.15 m deep deposit of very dark grey silt clay (7). This had a high organic content and represent the primary silting deposit within the ditch. No dating evidence was recovered from this deposit. The remainder of the ditch was filled by a dark grey-brown clay silt (6), containing some small fragments of oolitic limestone. This deposit probably represents deliberate backfilling rather than silting.

3.1.4 Elsewhere within the site Layer 4 was overlain by a 0.3 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay silt (3). This contained some charcoal flecking suggesting that it may be a buried soil horizon, but again no dating evidence was recovered.

3.1.5 Within the south-western corner of the site this layer was cut by a circular shaft (10) approximately 1.8 m in diameter and 2.5 m deep (Fig. 2). Built within this pit was a circular drystone constructed well lining (11), with an internal diameter of 0.6 m, which ended flush with the top of layer (3) (Plate 1). Running up the north-east side of the well was a lead suction pipe which turned and ran westwards along the surface

of Layer 3, before being truncated after a length of 1.5 m. The well was capped by a corbelled dome of limestone constructed similarly to the shaft lining and measured approximately 0.4 m high. The presence of a suction pipe and a well cap suggests that this well dates to the late 18th/ early 19th centuries.

- 3.1.6 A second well shaft (12) was encountered roughly in the centre of the site. This was of a slightly larger diameter (2.2 m ) and also contained a drystone constructed lining using limestone (13) leaving an internal diameter of 1.3 m (Fig.2). The top of this well had been collapsed into the shaft which had then been backfilled with a grey-brown clay silt (14) containing fragments of brick. Upon removal of the well it could be seen to have been cut to a similar depth (approximately 2.5 m deep).
- 3.1.7 Sealing the site and the two wells was a layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (2), measuring between 0.2 m and 0.5 m in depth. This deposit contained many fragments of stone, fragments of machine made red brick and fragments of post-medieval pottery and bottle glass, all dating to the 19th and early 20th centuries. This represents a layer of made ground, possibly raising the level of the yard to avoid flooding from the River Windrush located to the south-east of the site. Along the eastern boundary of the plot this was cut by a 0.3 m deep by 0.5 m wide trench (15) (Fig. 3, Section 3) which contained a roughly built foundation (16), constructed using dressed limestone blocks laid using random and irregular courses. This was a probable footing for an earlier structure on the site which had been demolished prior to the site's use as a car park. The use of dressed material within the foundations suggest that the material had been reused, possibly from an earlier phase of building. No returns for this structure were encountered during the course of the excavations suggesting that it may have been a boundary wall.
- 3.1.8 Within the northern half of the site Layer 2 was overlaid by a 0.2 m deep layer of pale yellow silt sand (1) (Fig. 3, Section 1). This contained large quantities of crushed stone and gravel and forms the current car park surface. In the southern half of the site Layer 2 was sealed by a 0.25 m deep layer of light grey clay silt (9) which also contained quantities of crushed stone and formed part of the car park surface (Fig. 3, Section 4).

## 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Finds were collected by context (where possible) from both the spoil and from the trench sections. The finds recovered were all post-medieval in date and included both stoneware and transfer printed pottery, fragments of brick, bottle glass and fragments of clay pipe. The presence of these finds was recorded, but they were not retained.

## 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 Because of the nature of the excavation and the instability of the sections it was impossible to recover suitable samples for palaeo-environmental processing

#### 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The results of the watching brief have provided evidence for the continuous use of the land forming part of the yard to the rear of the building fronting the High Street.
- 4.1.2 The earliest feature is the SW - NE ditch (8) running parallel to the High Street across the width of the development area. This was a probable burgage plot boundary ditch possibly dating to the medieval period. This feature was later backfilled and the entire area currently forming part of the development area, was in use leaving an occupation layer (3), deposited throughout the site. At the later part of this period the 2 wells (11) and (13) were excavated, with the style and form of their construction suggesting a late 18th to earlier 19th century date.
- 4.1.3 A later period of development during the 19th and early 20th centuries deposited the layer of made ground (2) throughout the site, possibly to raise the area and prevent flooding. During this period a substantial boundary wall (17) was constructed along the eastern boundary of the site and well (13) was probably backfilled.
- 4.1.4 More modern developments have included the demolition of the wall and the construction of car park/ hard standing over the entire site.
- 4.1.5 No other significant archaeology was encountered.



**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	0.2 m	-	Modern hard standing	-	C20th
2	Layer	0.2 m - 0.3 m	-	Post-medieval made ground	Pottery, clay pipe	C18th/ C19th
3	Layer	0.3 m	-	Buried soil horizon	-	-
4	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Alluvium	-	-
5	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Terrace gravel	-	-
6	Fill	0.35 m	1.9 m	Upper fill of Ditch 8, probable deliberate backfill	-	-
7	Fill	0.25 m	1.0 m	Primary fill of Ditch 8, silting deposit	-	-
8	Cut	0.6 m	1.9 m	Burgage plot boundary ditch	-	Medieval
9	Layer	0.2 m	> 8 m	Car park surface	-	C20th
10	Cut	2.5 m	1.8 m	Well shaft	-	C18th/ C19th
11	Structure	2.1 m	1.8 m	Well lining	-	C18th/ C19th
12	Cut	2.5 m	2.2 m	Well shaft	-	C18th/ C19th
13	Structure	2.1 m	1.5 m	Well lining	-	C18th/ C19th
14	Fill	2.1 m	1.5 m	Later backfill of well 13	Brick	C19th
15	Cut	0.6 m	> 10 m	Foundation cut for 16	-	C19th
16	Structure	0.6 m	> 10 m	Footings for demolished wall	-	C19th

**APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 2000 *OA Environmental Guidelines for sampling*

OA, 2007 *Land to the Rear of 54 High Street, Witney, Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation*

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

OCAS, 2006 *Land to the Rear 54 High Street, Witney : Design Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

### APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Land Rear of 56a High Street, Witney, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** WITLRH07

**Grid reference:** SP 3575 0993

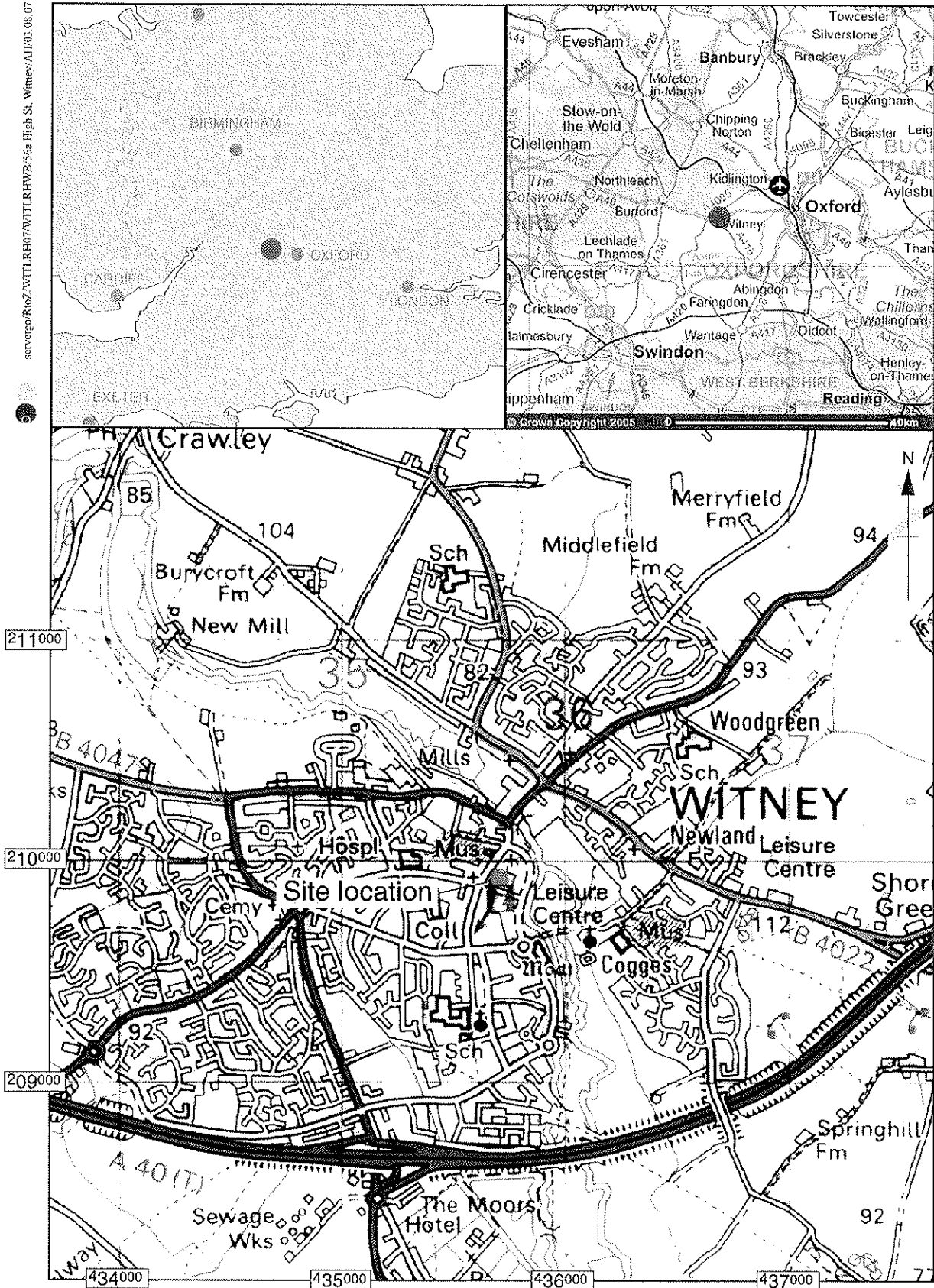
**Type of watching brief:** Machine excavation of foundation trenches

**Date and duration of project:** 7th June to 14th July 2007, 5 weeks

**Area of site:** c400 m<sup>2</sup>

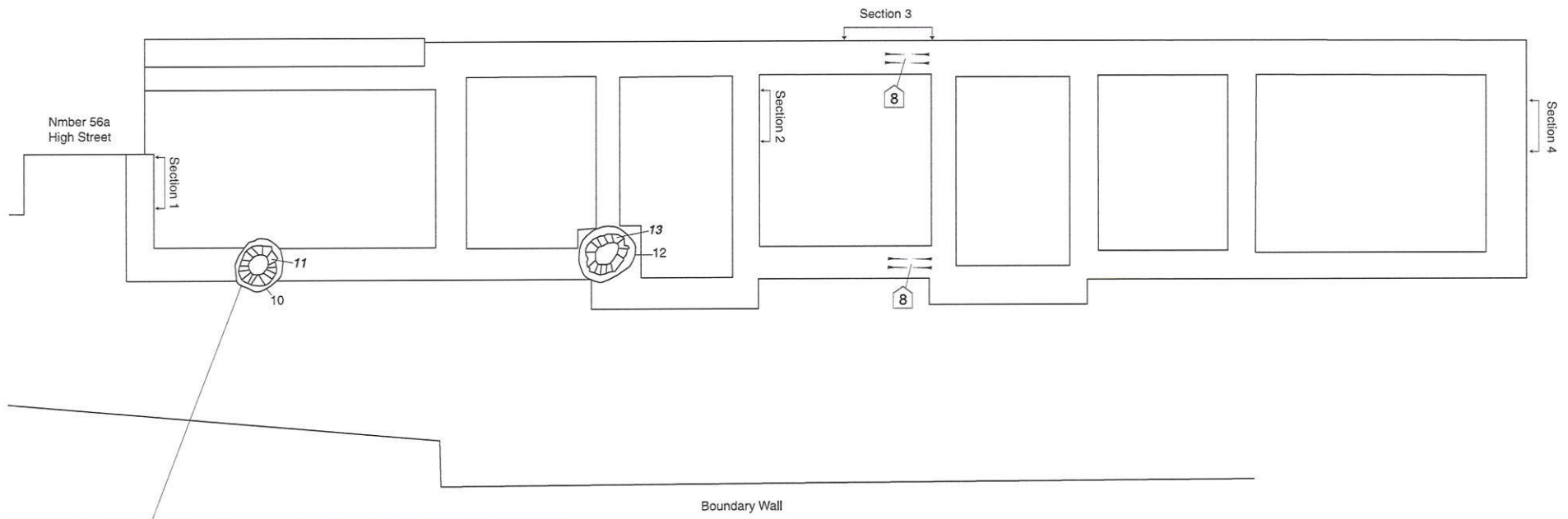
**Summary of results:** The watching brief revealed evidence for a medieval burgage plot boundary ditch running parallel to the High Street, a later occupation level, 2 post medieval wells and a 19th century wall.

**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.



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Figure 1: Site location



Well 11



Figure 2 : Site plan

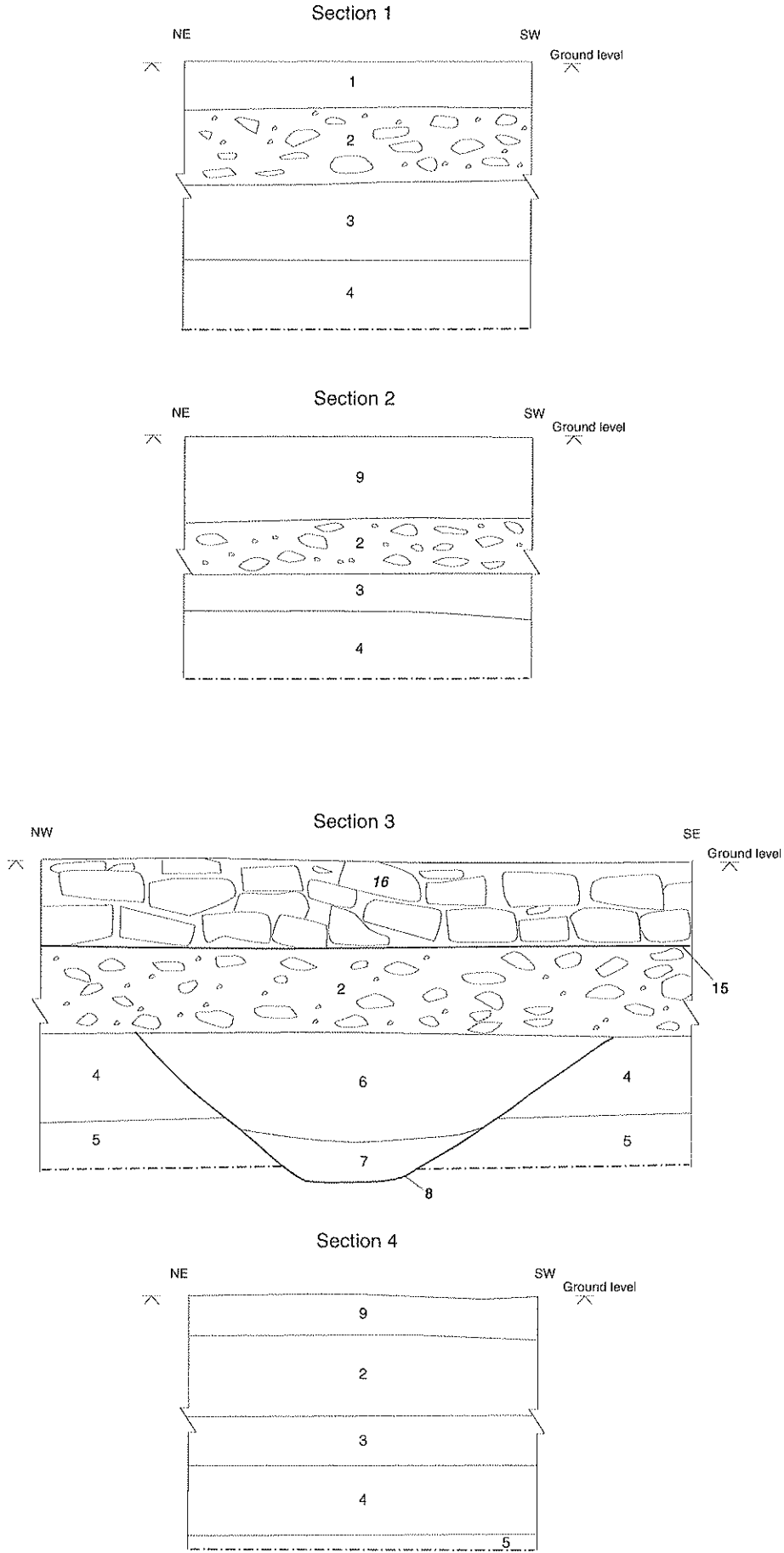


Figure 3 : Sections



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