

Kiln Farm
Blackthorn
Near Bicester
Oxfordshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



Oxford Archaeology

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**Kiln Farm,
Blackthorn, near Bicester, Oxfordshire**
NGR: SP 6202 1966

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

CONTENTS

Summary	1
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Location and scope of work.....	1
1.2 Geology and topography.....	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background	1
2 Project Aims and Methodology	2
2.1 Aims.....	2
2.2 Methodology.....	2
3 Results.....	2
3.1 Description of deposits	2
3.2 Finds.....	3
3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains.....	4
4 Discussion and Conclusions	4
Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory.....	5
Appendix 2 Bibliography and References.....	5
Appendix 3 Summary of Site Details.....	4

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 Site location
 Fig. 2 Plan of area of watching brief
 Fig. 3 Sections 1-8

SUMMARY

Between April and September, 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Kiln Farm, Blackthorn, Near Bicester, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 6202 1966). The work was commissioned by Hark Developments Ltd. in advance of demolition of an existing building, reuse of two barns and the construction of a new dwelling and garage. The watching brief revealed extensive ground reduction within the area of the old farm yard. After removal of the concrete farmyard surface a truncated layer of organically stained post-medieval soil overlying an earlier backfilled pond and deep deposits of alluvium/flood deposits was revealed. No deposits, features or artefacts relating to the Saxon or medieval origins of the village were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Between April and September 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Kiln Farm, Blackthorn, Nr. Bicester, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 6202 1966). The work was commissioned by Hark Developments Ltd. in respect of a planning application for demolition of an existing building, reuse of two barns and the construction of a new dwelling and garage (Planning Application No. 03/00081/F)

1.1.2 A project brief was set by Hannah Fluck the Planning archaeologist for Cherwell District Council (Oxfordshire County Archaeological Advisory Service (OCAAS), 2004) and OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA, 2004) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The site is located on the north-west edge of the village of Blackthorn, approximately 5 km south-west of Bicester (Fig. 1). The development area is level ground and was originally utilised as an open farmyard, surfaced with a concrete capping.

1.2.2 The site lies at approximately 61 m OD and is 0.13 hectares in area. The underlying geology is Oxford Clay with Kelloways Beds and lies close to the junction with Cornbrash (British geological Survey Sheet no. 219).

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 development area is in the historic core of Blackthorn where early settlement is suggested by its place name 'blaec-porn' or 'pyrne', thought to be of late Saxon origin. The site is close to a historic village green, which was converted to arable

fields in 1776. Part of a documented shrunken medieval and post-medieval settlement is known to have developed here (PRN 12889).

- 1.3.3 Previous archaeological evaluation at Elm Tree Farm, 400 m to the south-west, produced one trench which contained medieval midden deposits over in-filled ditches, possibly of late Saxon date (TVAS 2001. Report No.01/66). It is therefore a distinct possibility that archaeological deposits relating to the Saxon / early medieval origin of the locale, or its later agrarian development may be encountered during the development of Kiln Farm. The name of the site itself may in fact reflect its original use and evidence of this may also be encountered.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development. In particular any remains relating to the Saxon or early medieval origin of the locale.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological remains that the works may remove or damage within the area being investigated.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief consisted of 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 approximately 200 m length of foundation and service trenching dug using a mechanical excavator (JCB) fitted with a 0.8 m wide toothed bucket.
- 2.2.3 A plan of the excavations and any archaeological features was drawn at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and any sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All sections and any excavated features 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* (OAU, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 An undisturbed layer of yellow-brown clay (4) was reached at a depth of 1 m below ground level within the south-eastern edge of the excavations rising to 0.6 m below ground level along the north-western edge. This was a probable prehistoric alluvial deposit (Fig. 3, all sections).

- 3.1.2 On the eastern edge of the foundations this was overlain by a 0.18 m thick, 3 m wide lens of grey-brown silt clay (5) (Fig. 3, section 2). Containing a degree of organic tainting, this was an isolated alluvial deposit. Sealing this lens and overlying the natural within the rest of the development area was a layer of dark grey-brown silt clay alluvium (3) of between 0.2 m and 0.4 m in depth. This probably represents an accumulation of flood deposits over the site. No artefacts or evidence of activity such as charcoal was observed within this layer. A thin lens of reddish-brown clay silt (12), 0.07 m thick by 2 m wide, was observed overlying this alluvium within the centre of the eastern edge of the site (Fig. 3, section 7). This material had the appearance of burnt earth although no evidence of burning such as charcoal was observed and it may represent a small flood deposit.
- 3.1.3 Sealing 12 was a 0.28 m thick, 3 m wide lens of olive-brown silt clay (11). Situated in front of one of the standing cow byres this was probably caused by cattle "poaching" the ground and it may be that both 11 and 12 are connected.
- 3.1.4 In the centre of the development area, layer 3 could be seen to be cut by a steeply sloping ovoid feature (8), measuring approximately 14 m long by 10 m wide with a depth of 1.8 m (Fig. 3, section 5). This appears to be a "dew pond" or watering hole which predates the use of the area as a farm yard. The base of this feature was filled by 1.1 m deep layer of very dark grey clay silts (7). These were heavily organically tainted and contained flecking of a blue phosphate compound *Vivianite*, produced when urine reacts with iron deposits in the soil and which appears to confirm its use as a watering hole by livestock. These silts were overlaid by a 0.7 m thick layer of grey-brown silty clay (6). This layer contained many laminations of a yellow-brown clay suggesting that it was composed of a sequence of flood deposits rather than deliberate backfilling.
- 3.1.5 In the northernmost corner of the building footprint a 0.7 m wide by 0.6 m deep foundation trench (10) (Fig. 3, section 4) was observed cut into the surface of layer 3. This was aligned north-west to south-east, and ran parallel to the standing yard wall. This contained the truncated base of a wall constructed using limestone, fragments of clay tile and lime mortar (9). This was probably part of the original 18th-19th century farm yard buildings, demolished and reduced below ground level when the 20th century concrete yard surface was laid.
- 3.1.6 Overlying layer 3 within the majority of sections was a very dark grey/black clay silt (2), of between 0.1 m and 0.17 m in depth. With a high degree of organic staining and producing 18th and 19th century pottery this was probably the truncated base of the original farm yard surface, a mixture of topsoil and animal manure. A layer of modern hardcore (1), 0.15 m thick seals the entire site.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Fragments of pottery including a local glazed earthenware and mass produced transfer printed ware dating between the 18th and early 20th century were recovered

from layer 2. Their presence is probably due to domestic refuse being added to the farm yard midden or muck heap.

3.2.2 Fragments of a red clay tile were observed within the structure of wall (9), probably fragments of roofing tile reused and suggesting a post-18th century date.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 Samples of fills 6 and 7 within feature 8 were taken and are awaiting processing.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The deposits observed show that the development area was part of a flood plain and was originally used for pastoral or marginal agricultural activities with no evidence of any occupation. The presence of the watering hole (8) would confirm the pastoral use. The flood deposits within this feature shows that this area was still subject to periodic flooding, although no dating evidence was recovered from the fills to demonstrate this period of use.

4.1.2 The first datable occupation layers and structures occur with the construction of farm yard buildings during the 18th century as instanced by the standing structures and the remains of wall (9). The deposition of the occupation layer (2) also occurs from this date. The ground reduction which occurred during the mid 20th century prior to the laying of the concrete farm yard surface had almost completely truncated this layer and presumably any deposits which had accumulated between the late 18th and early 20th centuries above it.

4.1.3 No evidence, such as intrusive features or residual artefacts, was observed relating to the Saxon or medieval origins of the village.

4.1.4 Local oral tradition states that the farm owes its name to the presence of a brick works, including a firing kiln on the site, however no evidence to support this was observed during the course of the watching brief. Further documentary research may be needed to support or disprove this tradition.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I 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	0.12 m	-	Crushed stone hardcore	Brick	C20th
2	Layer	0.15 m	-	Truncated base of the original organic tainted farmyard surface	Pot	C18th/ C20th
3	Layer	0.35 m	-	Alluvium, probable flood deposits	-	-
4	Layer	> 0.5 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
5	Layer	0.14 m	c. 3 m	Lens of organic tinged alluvium	-	-
6	Fill	0.7 m	10 m	Upper fill of pond 8, silting deposit	-	-
7	Fill	1.1 m	8.5 m	Lower fill of pond 8, accumulation of organic debris	-	-
8	Cut	1.8 m	10 m	Small pond or watering hole	-	-
9	Structure	0.6 m	0.65 m	Truncated, roughly built stone wall foundations	Ceramic tile	C18th/ C19th
10	Cut	0.6 m	0.65m	Foundation trench	-	C18th/ C19th
11	Layer	0.28 m	c.3 m	Organically stained clay, probable cattle poaching predating concrete yard	-	C18th/ C19th
12	Layer	0.07 m	c. 2m	Lens of burnt earth?, Cattle poaching ?	-	C18th/ C19th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA 1992, *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OCAAS 2004, *Kiln Farm, Blackthorn, Near Bicester: Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief*

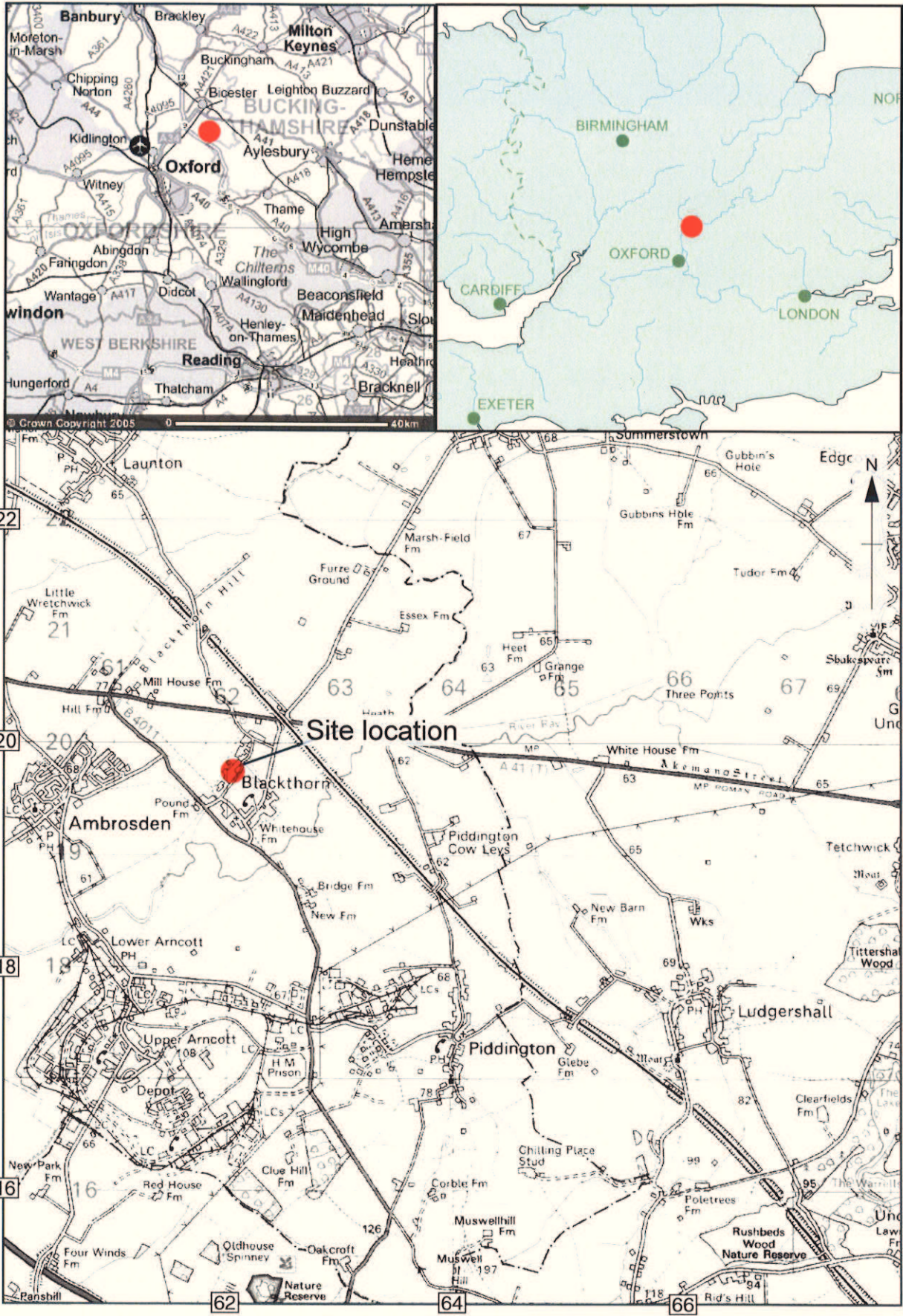
OA 1992, *Field Manual* (ed. Wilkinson D)

OA 2002, *Elm Tree Farm, Station Road, Blackthorn, Oxfordshire; Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OA 2004, *Kiln Farm, Blackthorn, Near Bicester, Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

TVAS 2001, *Elm Tree Farm, Blackthorn, near Bicester, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Evaluation*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**Site name:** Kiln Farm, Blackthorn, Near Bicester, Oxfordshire**Site code:** BIKFY 04**Grid reference:** SP 6202 1966**Type of watching brief:** Excavation of foundation and services trenches, ground reduction**Date and duration of project:** 4th April to 28th September 2005, 6 months**Area of site:** 0.13 hectare**Summary of results:** Extensive flood and alluvial deposits, an undated watering hole overlaid by 18th century farm buildings. No datable evidence pertaining to the Saxon or medieval origins of the locale was observed.**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 2004.133



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

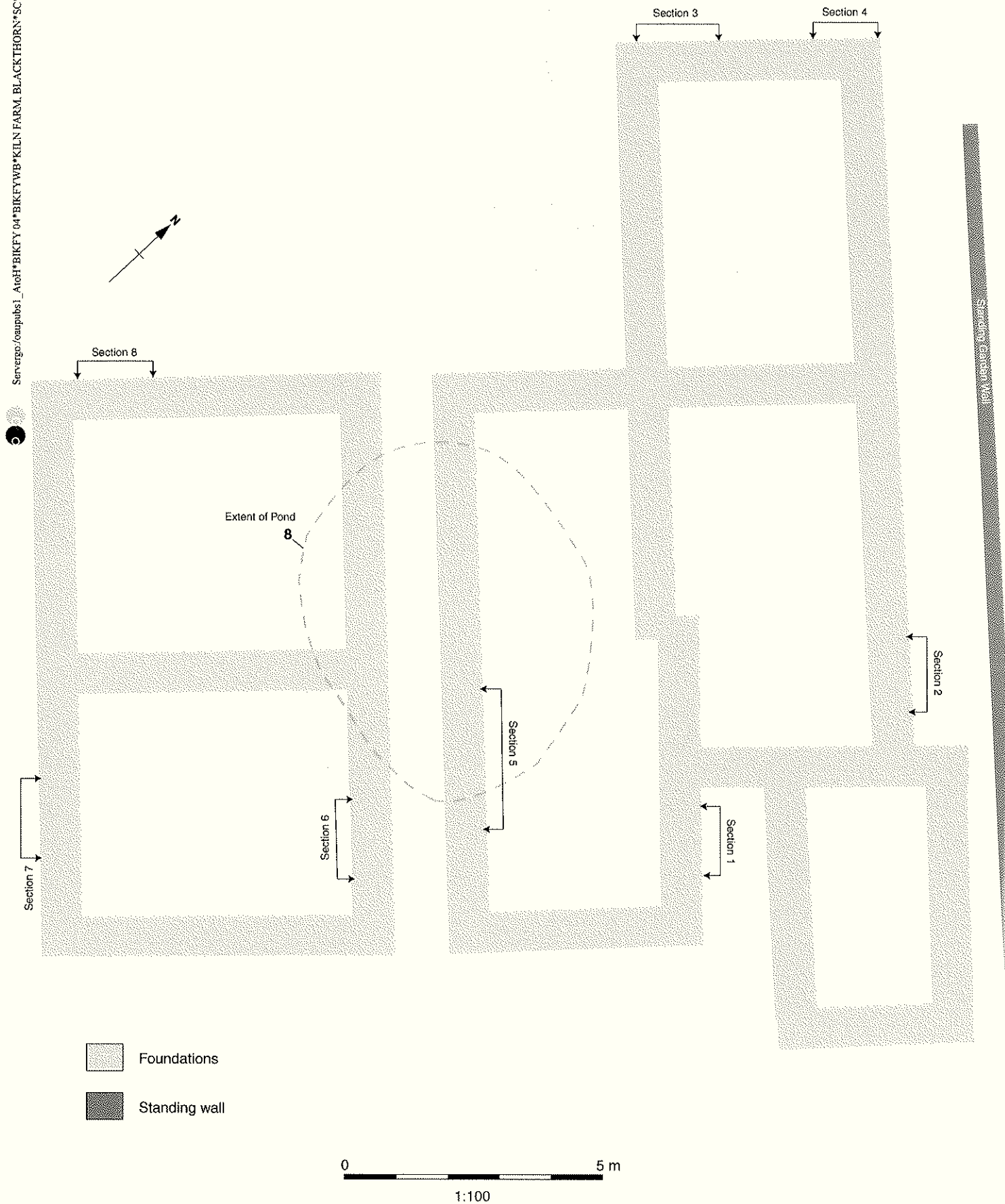


Figure 2: Plan of Area of Watching brief

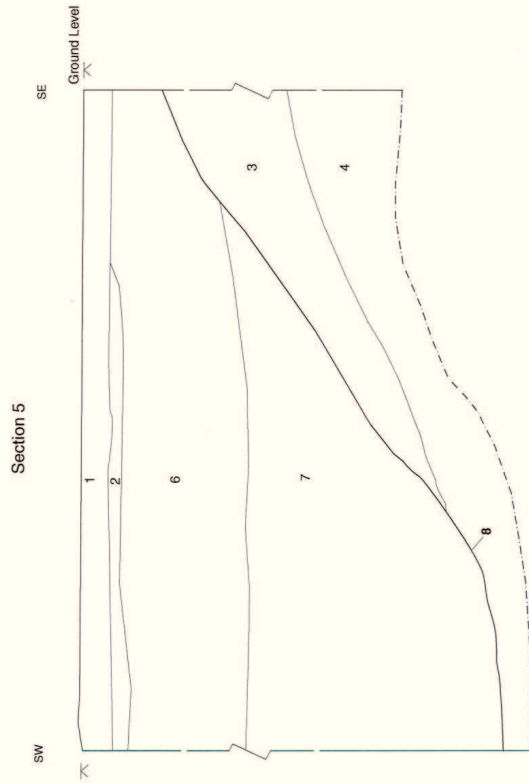
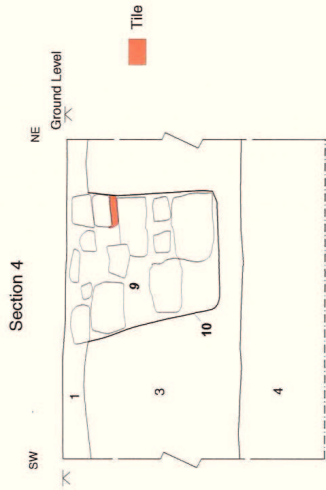
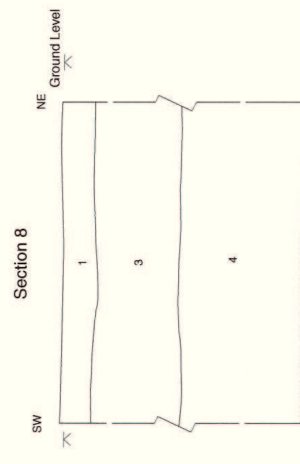
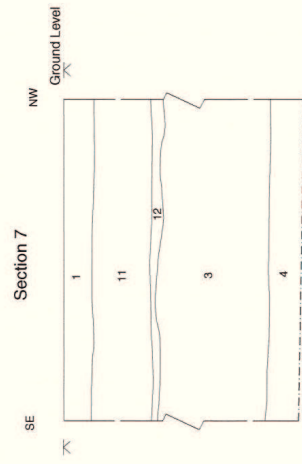
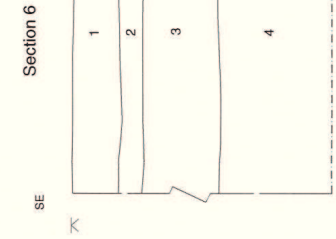
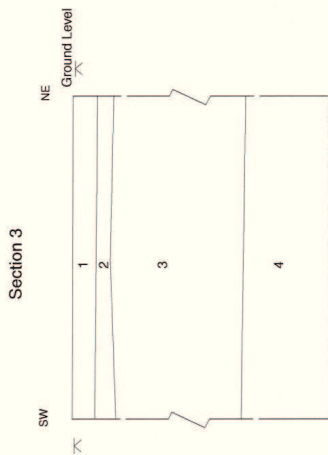
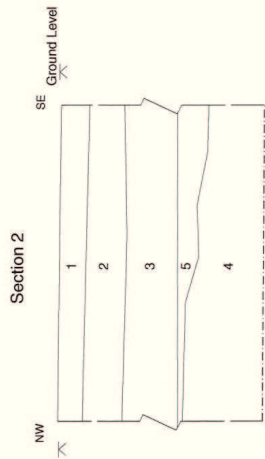
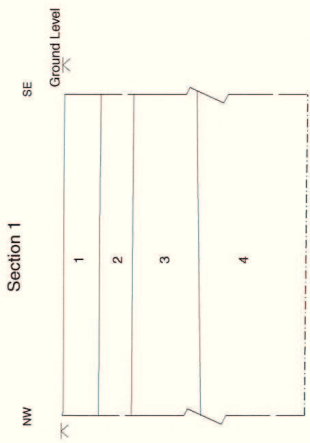
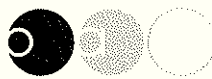


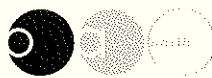
Figure 3: Sections 1 - 8



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