

St Michael's Church Barford St Michael Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



May 2008

Client: St Michael's Church PCC

Issue No: 1
OA Job No: 4022
NGR: SP 432 326

Client Name: St Michael's Church PCC

Client Ref No:

Document Title: St Michael's Church, Barford St Michael, Oxfordshire

Document Type: Watching Brief

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: SP 432 326

Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 4022

Site Code: BASTMC 08

Invoice Code: BASTMCWB

Receiving Museum: Oxfordshire County Museum Service

Museum Accession No: tbc

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Date: 6th May 2008

Document File Location W:PROJECTS Oxfordshire OX/Cherwell CH/8286 St
Michael's Church Barford St Michaels/wbREP.doc

Graphics File Location Servergo:/oaupubs
1_AtoH*BASTMC08*BASTMCWB*St Michael's
Church*AH*08.05.08

Illustrated by Amy Hemingway

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St Michael's Church, Barford St Michael, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In April and May 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Michael's Church, Barford St Michael, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 4327 3260). The work was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council in advance of the installation of new drains along the south and east sides of the tower. The watching brief revealed deposits of made ground probably originating during the construction of the south aisle in the 14th-century and from the restoration of the church in the 1850s. Also exposed were probable 19th-century repairs to the foundation plinth of the east side of the tower.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 In April and May 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Michael's Church, Barford St Michael, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 4327 3260). The work was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council in advance of the installation of new drains along the south and east sides of the tower.

1.1.2 A project design was agreed between OA and the PCC prior to the commencement of works.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The village of Barford St Michael lies approximately 8 km south of the town of Banbury (Fig. 1). St Michael's Church is located on the western edge of the village and is sited on the top of a ridge of high ground at approximately 109 m above OD. The underlying geology is a ridge of clay, silts and siltstone running parallel to the River Swere overlying clay (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no. 218)

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 *The following is an edited history of Barford St Michael and the Church of St Michael taken from the Victoria History of the County of Oxford, volume XI.*

1.3.2 The River Swere forms part of the northern boundary of the parish and the village grew up around a crossing point on the river opposite the hamlet of Barford St John. The name Barford ("Barley ford") points to the significance of the river crossing for early settlers. Both villages stand on the high ground above the valley floor which is still liable to flooding.

1.3.3 Although the parish is traversed by an ancient route and lies close to the earthwork at Ilbury (2 km to the east), no substantial traces of prehistoric settlement have been found within its limits. Remains of what may have been a Romano-British village were found near the site of Blackingrove Farm (1.7 km to the east), and similar remains were found on Iron Down (2.2 km to the south).

- 1.3.4 In 1086, 21 inhabitants, including 5 serfs were recorded, rising to 29 property holders by 1279. The Compton census of 1676 records a total of 124 adults.
- 1.3.5 The earlier layout of the village, much obscured by modern housing development, is complex. To the west stood the church and moated manor house and a triangle of housing along Church Street and Lower Street, whilst in the Hornbill area to the east was another close packed group of houses. The division between the west and east ends of the village suggests that the latter may represent a separate settlement, perhaps associated with the manor of Barford Olaf.
- 1.3.6 The comparative lack of houses close to the church, evident on 19th-century maps may have been the result of a serious fire in 1775 which is said to have destroyed 9 buildings in that area.
- 1.3.7 A tradition recorded in 1823, that there was a castle at Barford St Michael, and a related report of the discovery of the foundations of “massive walls” in the churchyard remains unsubstantiated.
- 1.3.8 The church of St Michael stands at the west end of the village on a mound which seems to be man-made, although it is possible that it was built to support the extensions made to the church rather than as a platform for the original one. The church comprises a chancel, nave, south aisle, north and south porches and a low embattled tower in the angle between the chancel and the south aisle.
- 1.3.9 In the 12th-century the church appears to have comprised only a chancel, a short nave and the tower (which is built in an unusual position on the south side of the chancel, possibly because of the restricted nature of the original site). The continuation of the tower's plinth moulding around its west side shows that there was no aisle at this time. The church is distinguished by ornate north and south doorways dating c1150. The superior quality of the north door, with its elaborate beakhead design suggests that, then as now, the manor house and the village lay on that side.
- 1.3.10 During the 13th-century the church was enlarged in 2 stages. In the first the south arcade of 2 bays and a narrow aisle were added and the south doorway presumably repositioned. During the second the nave and the aisle were extended westwards by 1 bay. The chancel arch was also rebuilt and possibly the chancel extended eastwards at this time. In the early 14th-century the south aisle was widened, the south doorway was moved to its present position in the western bay and the north wall refenestrated and possibly rebuilt. It is probable that the northern doorway was also moved to its present position in the western bay at this time. Later in the 14th-century the north porch was added, the chancel remodelled and the tower's upper stage was added or possibly an existing stage rebuilt.
- 1.3.11 In the 15th-century a large east window was inserted, the roofs of the nave and chancel rebuilt and 2 more bell openings were inserted in the tower. This east

window was replaced by a much smaller window in the 17th-century. In 1854 the south porch was added, possibly replacing an earlier one.

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 features or deposits that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of any groundworks.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was undertaken as series of site visits during works that were likely to impinge or damage any potential archaeological deposits or features.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of any excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2, Site plan) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations, any features and any recorded 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

South side of tower

- 3.1.1 These excavations consisted of a 0.5 m wide by 0.5 m deep trench along the base of the tower for the installation of a "French Drain", and 2 tapered pits each measuring 1 m by 1m located south of the trench directly underneath the downspouts projecting from the south side of the tower (Fig: 2, Site plan).
- 3.1.2 At the base of the western end of the excavation a layer of orange brown clay silt containing many sub-angular ironstone fragments (3) (Fig. 2, Section 1) was exposed. This deposit produced occasional fragments of slate but no dating material. This material butted up to the base of the tower rather and did not appear to be cut by any foundation trench.
- 3.1.3 Layer 3 was overlaid by a 0.25 m - 0.35 m deep layer of dark yellow brown clay loam which also contained many sub-angular ironstone fragments (2). This layer produced a single fragment of earthenware pottery.

- 3.1.4 Sealing layer 2 was a 0.18 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (1). This deposit had few inclusions but produced fragments of bottle glass, creamware pottery and 2 fragments of clay pipe.

East side of tower

- 3.1.5 These works consisted of the removal of the existing stone drainage channel adjacent to the tower base, excavation of a 0.5 m wide trench, 0.4 m deep at the corner between the chancel and the tower, lowering to 0.5 m at the south-east corner of the tower, and the excavation of a 5 m long trench running southwards down over the edge of the building platform to contain a discharge pipe (Fig.2, Site plan).
- 3.1.6 A continuation of layer 2 was encountered in both the trench adjacent to the tower base and in the trench leading to the south at a depth of 0.15 m below the current ground level (Fig. 2, Section 2). Immediately adjacent to the base of the east wall of the tower this deposit had been disturbed by a 0.25 m deep by 0.6 m wide cut (4). This contained a cement mortar bed upon which the stone drainage channel (5) had been laid and also a concrete edging (6), alongside the stone channel.
- 3.1.7 Exposed when the drainage channel had been removed was the foundation plinth for the east wall of the tower (7). The upper courses of stonework for this plinth appear to be contemporary with the towers construction, however at the interface between the plinth and Layer 2 a course of sawn cut stones had been inserted. It is surmised that this was done to replace frost damaged stonework.
- 3.1.8 Overlying Layer 2 and butting up to the concrete was a continuation of the layer of topsoil and turf (1).

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Fragments of slate were recovered from Layer 3, however these may be residual finds in the imported material rather than evidence of any church roofing material.
- 3.2.2 Fragments of 19th-century pottery and bottle glass were recovered from Layers 1, together with a single piece of possible 17th-century glazed earthenware from Layer 2. These finds probably represent disturbance of the upper layers both during the 1850s restoration of the church and from later inhumations.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

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

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The use of cement mortar to bed the stone drainage channel (5), and the use of concrete for the edging (6) indicates that the channel has been relaid during the 20th-century. The presence of the replacement course of sawn stone blocks within the base

of the east wall of the tower suggests that possibly a poorly maintained drain had caused dampness to occur at the base of the tower in the past, leading to frost damage of the bottom course of stonework. It is probable that both the replacement stonework and the rebuilding of the channel were part of the same action.

- 4.1.2 The alignment of the east wall of the tower differs slightly to that of the foundation plinth, with the plinth projecting approximately 0.15 m further to the east than the tower wall at the south-east corner, while the north-east corner of the tower is flush with the plinth. This difference in alignment may be evidence of 2 different campaigns of construction, or possibly an error between laying out the foundations and the commencement of the construction of the tower.
- 4.1.3 The foundation plinth exposed along the southern edge of the tower was parallel to the tower wall. No evidence for a construction cut for the foundation plinth was observed. It is possible that this is because the plinth was trench built or possibly that material has been laid against the base of the tower obscuring any construction cut.
- 4.1.4 The presence of fragments of slate within Layer 3 indicates that this deposit is not natural and that it represents a layer of made ground. It is possible that this material was laid in order to construct a building platform to support the southern side of the church, in particular when the southern aisle of the church was added in the 13th-century. It is also possible that a greater depth of the foundation plinth of the tower was exposed in the past and that this deposit was built up round it.
- 4.1.5 Layers 1 and 2 represent accumulations of graveyard soil similar that observed within other churchyards.
- 4.1.6 No evidence was observed to support the conjecture that the high ground on which the church stands is part of a castle mound, either in the form of structures or dating evidence predating the construction of the church.

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	0.18 m	-	Topsoil and turf	Pottery, bottle glass, clay pipe stem	C19th/ C20th
2	Layer	0.25 m- 0.35 m	-	Graveyard soil	Pottery	C17th/ C18th
3	Layer	> 0.1 m	-	Made ground	Slate	C14th ?
4	Cut	0.25 m	0.6 m	Cut for stone drainage	-	C20th
5	Structure	0.2 m	0.25 m	Stone drainage channel (earlier structure reused)	-	C18th/ C19th
6	Structure	0.25 m	0.35 m	Concrete apron to east of stone channel	-	C20th
7	Structure	> 0.5 m	-	Foundation plinth for tower	-	C12th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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

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

Victoria History of the County of Oxford Vol.XI (ed. R.B.Pugh, 1969)

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Michael's Church, Barford St Michael, Oxfordshire

Site code: BASTMC 08

Grid reference:

Type of watching brief: Hand excavation of new drainage trenches

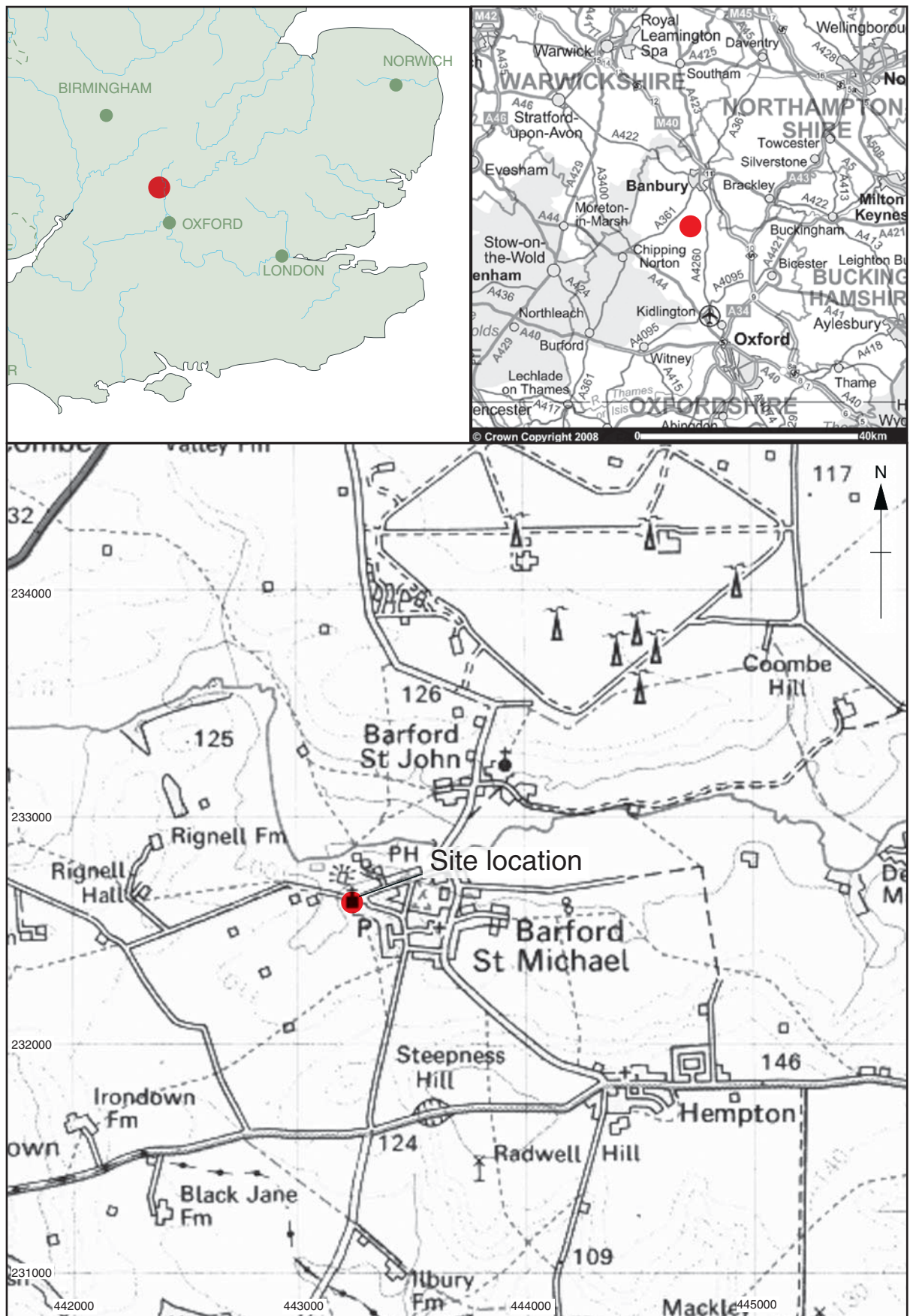
Date and duration of project: 30th April to 2nd May 2008, 3 site visits

Area of site: 300 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief exposed a layer of made ground relating to the construction of the south aisle, 2 phases of graveyard soil deposition and evidence of remedial work on the foundation plinth of the east wall of the tower.

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.

Server: go:/oaupubs1/AIoH/BASTMC08/BASTMCWB/St Michael's Church/AH*08.05.08

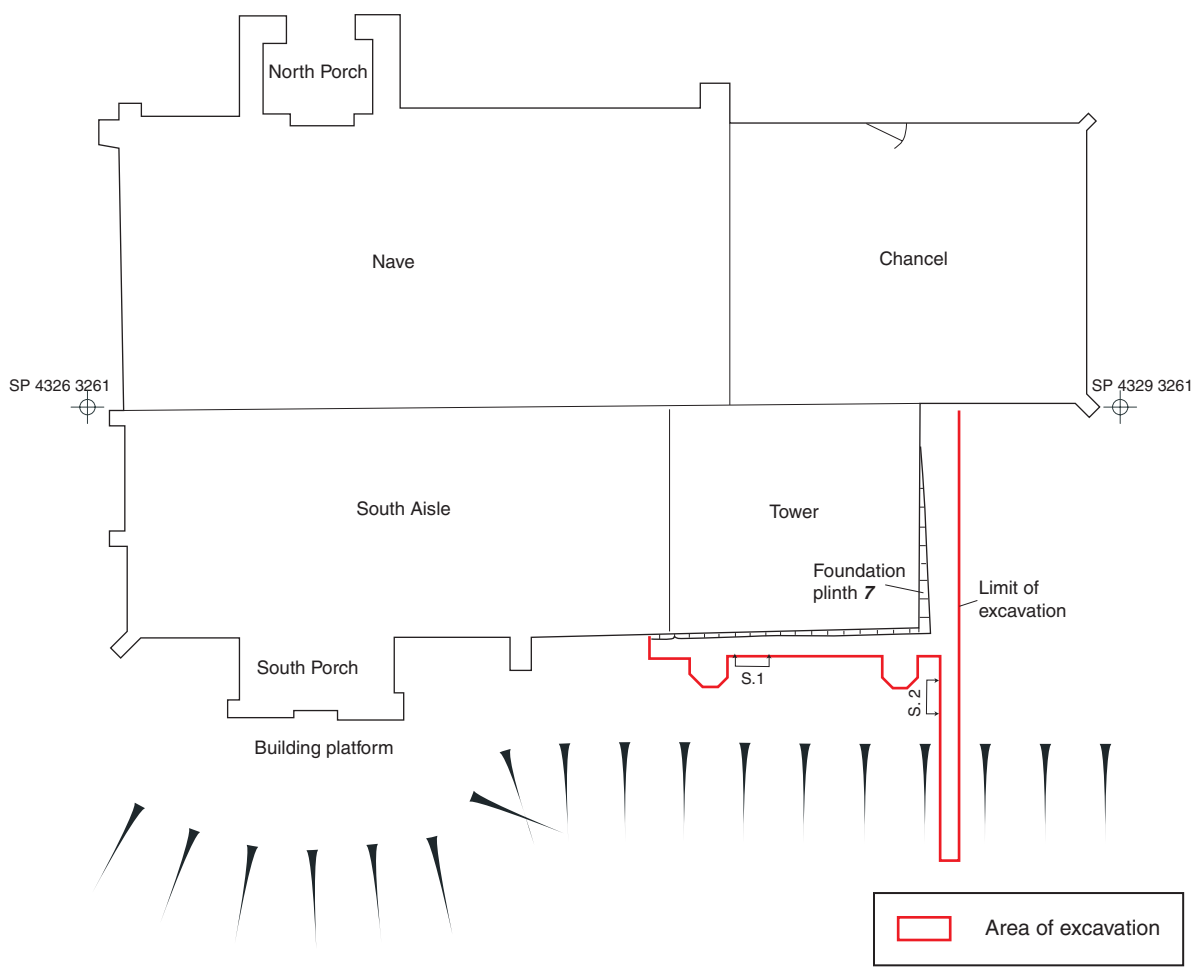


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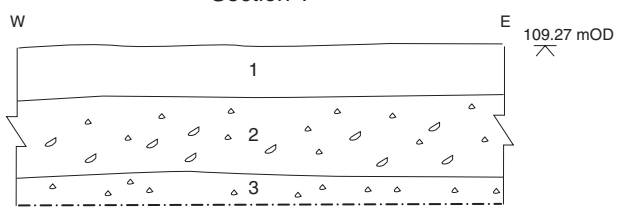
Figure 1: Site location



St Michael's Church Groundplan showing extent of excavation



Section 1



Section 2

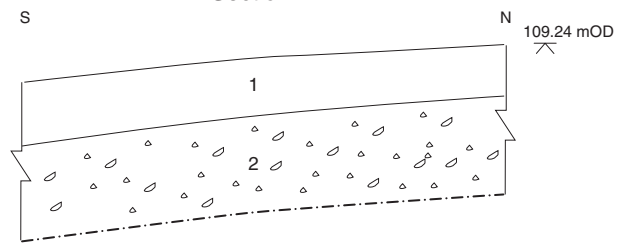


Figure 2 : Site plan and sections



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