

St Mary's Cottage
11 Station Road
Witney
West Oxfordshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



Oxford Archaeology

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St Mary's Cottage, 11 Station Road Witney, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 3570 0923

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Cover Plate: New Driveway and house

SUMMARY

In October and November 2002, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary's Cottage, 11 Station Road, Witney, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 3570 0923). The work was commissioned by Mrs J Swindells in respect of a planning application for extensions to the existing building and the creation of a new driveway. The watching brief revealed layers of soil containing limestone pieces at the base of the excavations. These layers may derive from the final phases of demolition of the adjacent medieval Bishop's Palace buildings in the 17th and 18th centuries. Above the general rubble layers were deposits formed during the construction of the present cottage and occupation layers/topsoil layers from recent times. A small quantity of medieval pottery and a worked stone moulding found in a general soil layer for the new driveway may date from the Palace phases of activity.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In 2001, Planning permission was sought from West Oxfordshire District Council for the erection of extensions to the north, south and west elevations of St Mary's Cottage, 11 Station Lane, Witney, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 3570 0923). The plans also included the conversion of the existing garage to a store with first floor above, and the formation of a new access.
- 1.1.2 The development site lies within the area of a Scheduled Ancient Monument: Site of Bishop of Winchester's Palace [SAM 12834] and immediately west of the excavated medieval remains.
- 1.1.3 Consequently a condition was attached to the planning permission (Ref: W2001/0628) in accordance with PPG 16, requiring that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during the period of construction and during all associated groundworks.
- 1.1.4 Scheduled Monument Consent was also obtained for the works, subject to the fulfilment of the watching brief. E R Tollady of Witney prepared plans for the new development.
- 1.1.5 A project brief was set by Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (OCAS 2001) and OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2002).
- 1.1.6 The work was commissioned by Mrs J Swindells, owner of the property and in October and November 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out the archaeological watching brief.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The development area is located at the south-east corner of the historic town centre, just east of St Margaret's Church and just off the south-east corner of Church Green. Access to the site is via Station Lane.
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology of the site is limestone cornbrash overlain by a thin covering of clay. The site lies at about 85 m OD, and is a private dwelling.

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 2002) and is summarised below.
- 1.3.2 The cottage of St Mary's was built in the late 1940s in the south-west corner of the garden of Mount House. No buildings are shown in this location on earlier O.S. maps, on the Tithe Map of 1843 or on earlier estate maps of the Mount House, but excavations in 1984 showed that the Mount House corresponded approximately to the site of the medieval palace of the Bishops of Winchester, which was founded early in the 12th century. A massive wall surrounded a complex of stone buildings with a rock-cut moat outside, and the cottage probably lay within the south-west part of the walled enclosure.
- 1.3.3 More specifically, excavation immediately to the east revealed up to 2 m of archaeological stratigraphy overlying the natural clay. Geophysical survey of the area immediately to the north suggests that walls below ground continue into the property, and documentary evidence (Blair in Allen and Hiller, 2002) suggests that this might have been the site of the kitchen.
- 1.3.4 To the south of the development site the land, now occupied by further domestic properties, was formerly part of the railway yard. The ground here is considerably lower, thought at the time of the preparation of the WSI to have been the site of the medieval moat.

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 OA extends its thanks to Daybridge Builders of Freeland, Oxon, who kept OA informed of all excavation works. Matt Ridley of OA carried out the fieldwork.

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 A supervisor from OA was in attendance during all groundworks undertaken by the site contractors.
- 2.2.2 All trenches were inspected for features and finds and all archaeological trenches were planned at a scale of 1:50; where excavated the trench sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 A number of areas around the present house were opened by excavation in the course of the work. This included the new driveway, foundation trenches and soakaway inspection pit. These interventions were numbered on site by trench and contexts issued to the identified deposits - see Fig 2.

Trench 1 - New Driveway

- 3.1.2 This trench (Fig. 2) comprised a general ground reduction for the construction of a new driveway. The reduction was to a depth of 0.4 m below the ground level. The lowest deposit was a tenacious brown clay (3) at least 0.1 m in thickness that contained no finds or inclusions. It is unclear if this was the upper part of a natural deposit or imported soil material used to raise the area of the site. Layer 3 was overlain by loose grey/brown sandy silt (2) that contained building debris, mortar, broken brick and tile and also 19th/20th century glass bottles and white china fragments. This was sealed by the extant topsoil (1) a humic sandy loam with occasional fragments of 20th century white china.

Trench 2 - Foundation trenches

- 3.1.3 At the base of the trench (Fig. 3, section 1) was a 0.7 m+ thick layer of light grey silty clay (22) containing over 50% limestone rubble pieces, occasional fragments of clay pipe and pieces of willow pattern china (not retained). This layer was below a 0.2 m thick brown/grey silty clay with broken brick and tile pieces, probably deriving from the construction of the present house in 1949. Above this lay topsoil (20).

Trench 3 - Foundation trenches

- 3.1.4 This series of linked trenches (Fig. 3, sections 2 & 3) was excavated at the east side of the house. At the base of the trench was a grey clay layer (35) with sand inclusions and containing pieces of limestone rubble. It lay 1.1 m below the present ground surface. Above this was a 0.6 m thick layer (34) of yellow-grey clay with up to 50% inclusions of limestone rubble - possibly a contemporary deposit to layer 22. This was sealed by a reddish-brown silty sand (33) with patches of mortar, in turn covered by a further sandy layer with a larger proportion of mortar and some limestone pieces (32). A general levelling silt layer covered this (31) and was overlain by concrete slabs (30).

Trench 4 - Foundation trenches

- 3.1.5 At the base of the trench (Fig. 3, section 4) was a soil layer (42) very similar to 33 seen in Trench 3. This lay below a sandy layer containing mortar patches and limestone (41) that was up to 0.6 m in depth, above which was a layer of silty sand (40) acting as make-up for the extant paving stones.

Trench 5 - New Soakaway Pit

- 3.1.6 At the base of the excavation (Fig. 3 sections 5 & 6, Fig. 4, Plan) was a reddish-yellow layer of silty sand and gravel (53) up to 0.3 m in thickness. Some limestone pieces were noted as were a few small pieces of wall plaster. Above lay a layer of limestone slabs (52) that were not bonded but may have formed a yard surface, probably contemporary with the 1940s house. The slabs were overlain by a layer of silt (51) above which was a mixed topsoil layer of sandy loam with occasional bricks sealed by paving slabs.

3.2 Finds**Pottery by Carole Wheeler, OA**

- 3.2.1 A total of 5 pottery sherds weighing 115 g were recovered from the archaeological investigations at St Mary's Cottage, Witney. The assemblage comprises 4 body sherds and a handle fragment of medieval date.
- 3.2.2 The assemblage has been recorded utilising the coding and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type series (Mellor 1994).

Table of pottery information

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Major inclusions</i>	<i>Chronology</i>	<i>Form</i>
u/s	OXAC	Calcareous gravel tempered	end 9thC- mid 13thC	
u/s	OXBF	Flint and limestone tempered	Late 9thC-end 13thC	Cooking jar
u/s	OXAG type	White sub rounded quartz	mid 11thC-14thC	Jug

Worked stone by Julian Munby

- 3.2.3 A single piece of worked stone was recovered from general soil layer 2. It is of oolitic limestone with a flat back and rounded front with some tooling evident on the sides. The piece is probably a nook shaft and part of a decorative pillar arrangement, or it may be part of a window mullion. It is probably of medieval date and may originally be from the nearby medieval palace.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The earliest deposits on the site appear to contain quantities of limestone rubble that may derive from the final phases of demolition of the medieval palace buildings in the 17th and 18th centuries. No finds were recovered to date these layers, however, nor was it possible to ascertain whether these rubble layers were filling in a feature such as the moat, that is likely to have passed around the south-west side of the Palace site.
- 4.1.2 Above the general rubble layers were deposits derived from the construction of the cottage and occupation layers/topsoil layers from recent times.
- 4.1.3 The pottery and moulding stone/window mullion found in the general soil layer 2 in the driveway excavation may date to and derive from the Palace phases of activity. However, if the soil was imported to raise the ground level at the time of the construction of the cottage, then the finds could be from an unknown source.

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	0.2 m	-	-	Topsoil	-
2	Layer	0.2 m	-	-	Soil layer, C20	Pottery; Stone moulding
3	Layer	0.1 m+	-	-	Clay layer	
20	Layer	0.15 m	-	-	Topsoil	-
21	Layer	0.25 m	-	-	1940s building layer	-
22	Layer	0.6 m+	-	-	?Levelling layer from demolition of Bishop's Palace	-
30	Layer	0.25 m	-	-	Construction layer	-
31	Layer	0.4 m	-	-	“ “	-
32	Layer	0.3 m	-	-	Make-up	-
33	Layer	0.2 m	-	-	Mortar layer	-
34	Layer	0.35 m	-	-	?Levelling layer from demolition of Bishop's Palace	-
35	Layer	0.1 m+	-	-	?Medieval soil/not dated	-
40	Layer	0.3 m	-	-	1940s building layer	-
41	Layer	0.6 m	-	-	?Levelling layer from demolition of Bishop's Palace	-
42	Layer	0.2 m	-	-	Similar to 33	
50	Layer	0.5 m	-	-	C20 rubble	
51	Layer	0.1 m	-	-	Silt occupation layer C20	
52	Layer	0.1 m	-	-	Limestone slabs, C20 paving	
53	Layer	0.2 m+	-	-	?Levelling layer from demolition of Bishop's Palace	

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Allen, T G with Hillier, J 2002 *The excavation of a medieval Manor House of the Bishops of Winchester at Mount House, Witney, Oxfordshire, 1984-1992*. Oxford Archaeology, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph 13

Mellor, M. 1984 'Oxfordshire Pottery: A Synthesis of middle to late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford region'. *Oxoniensia* 59.

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual*, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA 2002 *St Mary's Cottage, 11 Station Road, Witney, Oxfordshire Written Scheme of Investigation*

OCAS 2001 *St Mary's Cottage, 11 Station Road, Witney, Oxfordshire. Design brief for an archaeological watching brief.*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Mary's Cottage, 11 Station Road, Witney, Oxfordshire

Site code: WIMSC02

Grid reference: SP 3570 0923

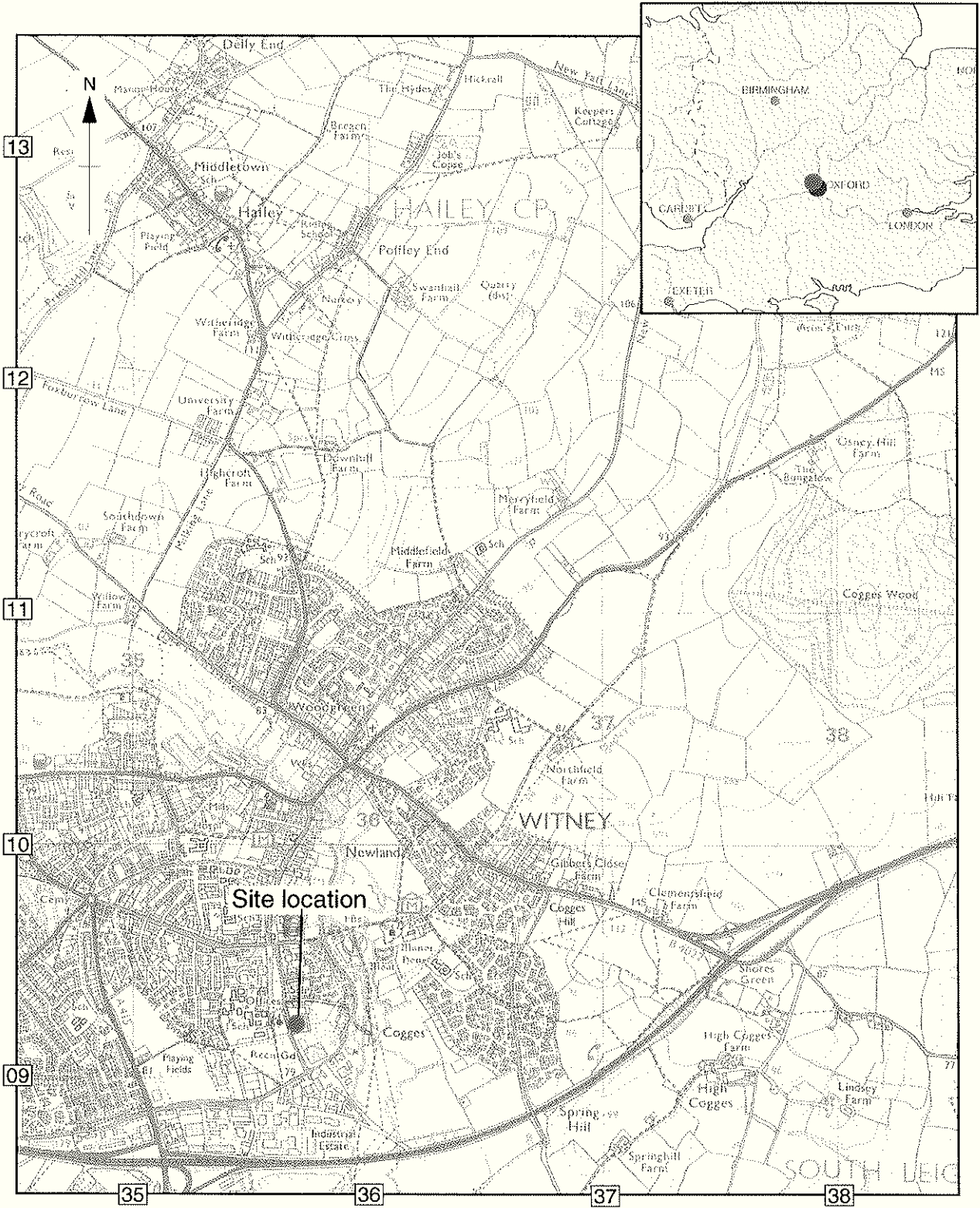
Type of watching brief: Monitoring of trenching and associated groundworks for building improvements

Date and duration of project: October to November 2002

Area of site: 0.2 ha

Summary of results: Soils containing limestone, possibly from final phases of demolition of the medieval palace buildings in the 17th and 18th centuries. Layers formed when the cottage was built in the 1940s. Some pottery of medieval date and part of a worked stone of probable medieval date are re-deposited in a later soil layer.

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: OCMS 2002.203



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

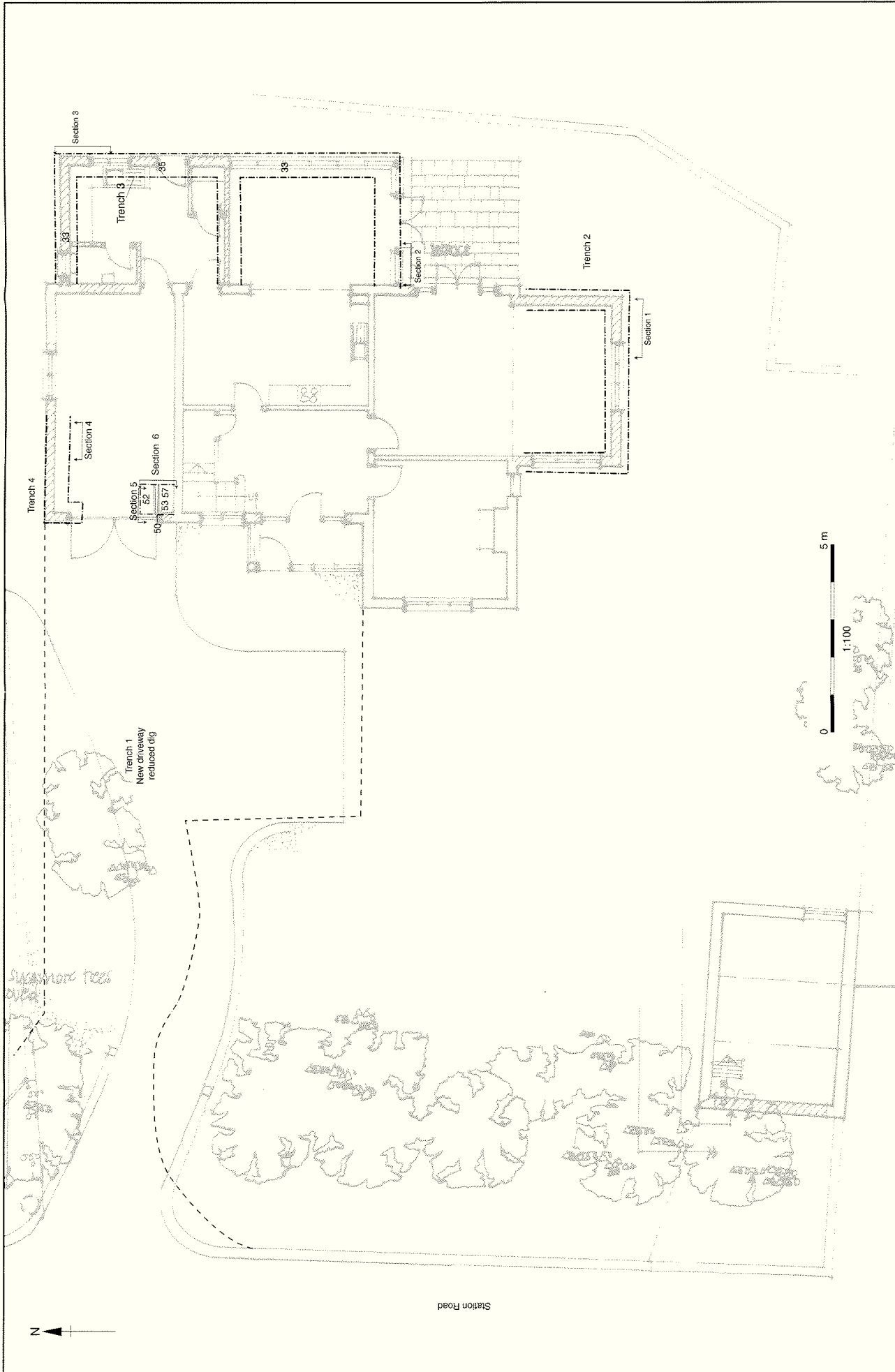


Figure 2: Site plan and excavation areas

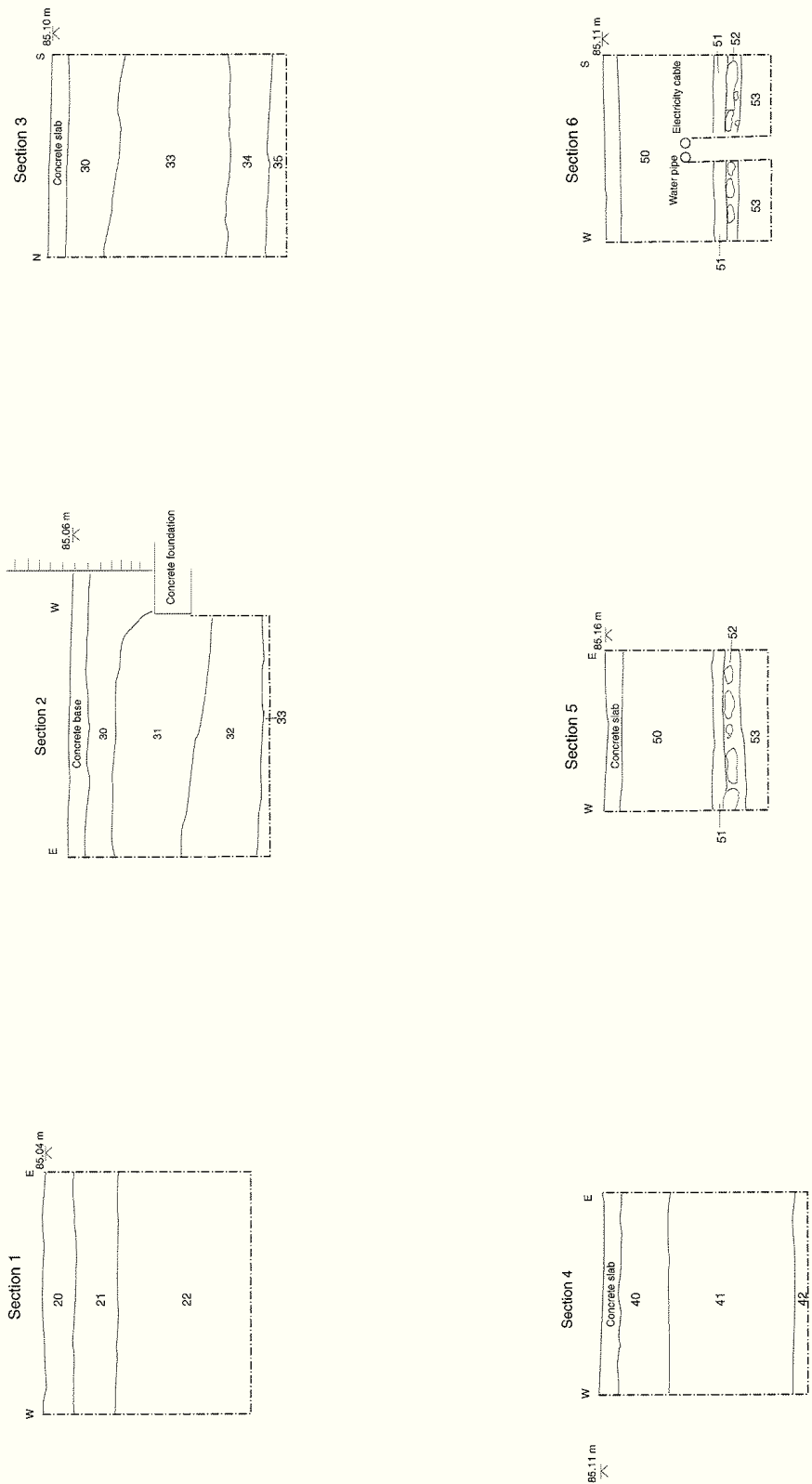
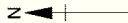


Figure 3: Sections J-6

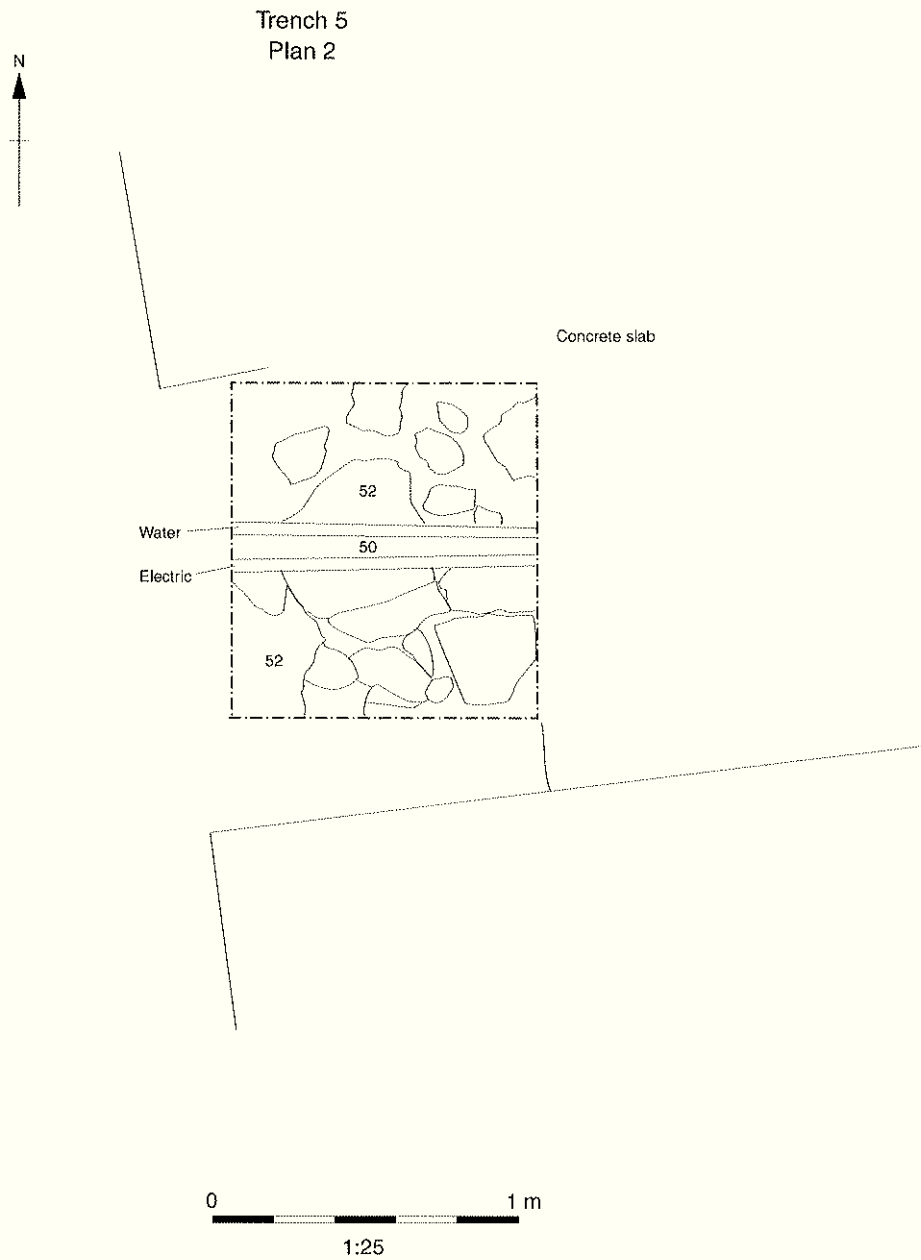
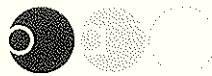


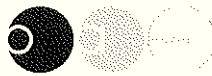
Figure 4: Plan of Trench 5



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