

Limborough Road
Wantage
Oxfordshire



**Archaeological
Excavation Report**

February 2008

Client:
Bowmer and Kirkland

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Planning Ref N^o: WAN/12562/5

NGR:SP 3985 8810

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Cover Plate: View of excavation area from the north.

SUMMARY

In January 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an excavation at Limborough Rd, Wantage, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 3985 8810) on behalf of Bushbuy Ltd prior to the construction of new development on the site. The watching briefs and excavation showed the site to have been open fields and pasture, which had slowly been engulfed with the growth of Wantage from the Saxon period to the present.

INTRODUCTION

Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In January 2006 OA carried out a small excavation and watching brief at Limborough Road, Wantage, Oxfordshire (Figure 1) on behalf of Bushbuy Ltd in respect of a planning application for the new development of the site (WAN/12562/5). Mr Hugh Coddington, Deputy Archaeological Officer for Oxfordshire County Council, prepared a *Brief* detailing the requirements for archaeological works in order to fulfil the planning condition (OCAS 2003). A series of watching briefs in areas where ground reduction and ground works were to be carried out and an area excavation (rear of 19-27 Grove Street) were required along the position of a proposed retaining wall within the development area. OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

Geology and topography

- 1.1.2 The development site situated between the Letcombe Brook to the west and Grove Street to the east. The site is bounded by Mill Street to the south and the existing Sainsbury's building to the north (SU 3985 8810). The current land use comprises a mixture of retail, office, light industrial, car parking and a disused bus garage.
- 1.1.3 The geology is mainly composed of Head and younger Coombe deposits with outcrops of Gault clay and Upper Greensand.

Archaeological background

1.1.4 Wantage is a well known historic market town although its development is poorly documented. In 1993 and 1994 a series of excavations by Trust for Wessex Archaeology and the Cotswold Archaeological Trust at 76 Mill Street encountered 1st to 4th century enclosures, wells and palisades. A 2nd century aisled building was also recorded which was replaced by a 3rd century stone building. Fifth to eighth century pottery and loomweights were recovered indicating Saxon occupation.

- 1.1.5 In May 1997 Wessex Archaeology undertook an evaluation, Trench 7 was located within the footprint of the current excavation area. The evaluation revealed medieval features and deposits that probably related to the rear of Mill Street (WA 1997).

EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork methods and recording

Watching Brief

- 1.1.6 The watching briefs consisted of daily visits during the course of the ground works. Any ground disturbances (demolition, general site strip and levelling, reduction for roads, excavation for service trenches and foundation trenches) will be monitored by an archaeologist. All archaeological features and deposits exposed will be recorded; these will be located on a site plan, planned, and recorded by written description and by photographs.

Excavation area

- 1.1.7 The excavation area consisted of a 38 m x 10 m tapering to 2 m trench forming the area of the new development at the rear of properties fronting Grove Street (Figure 2). The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 20 ton 360⁰ excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The area was then cleaned by hand and the features revealed were fully excavated.
- 1.1.8 All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20 and 1:10. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

Finds

- 1.1.9 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and generally bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number. The finds recovered from the excavation were few and consisted of bone and pottery fragments dating from the Saxon period to 17th century. The reports of finds are found at the back of the report in appendix 2.

Palaeo-environmental evidence

- 1.1.10 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the excavation.

RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS**Watching Brief results**

- 1.1.11 The watching briefs in areas in the development site did not reveal any archaeological features and deposits. The watching briefs did reveal that some areas had been heavily truncated during the late 19th century with the construction of the gas works and the Wantage tramway or were open fields and had been levelled up in the 19th and 20th century. These demolition and levelling materials sealed the sites in depth of 0.30 m to 2 m and in area of the car parks in the west end of the site the natural was below the surface.
- 1.1.12 Prior to the major works starting on the site, primary works were carried out clearing some of the site and securing it. During this phase a small brick soakaway of a dry-stone construction with bricks measuring (0.22 m x 0.11 m x 0.07 m) was located at the rear of properties fronting on to Grove Street. It measured 1 m in diameter and with a vaulted top, which had been knocked in and filled the soakaway to a depth of 0.48 m from the surface. This was a 19th century soakaway for one of the terrace house's fronting onto Grove Street.

Excavation area (*Figure 3*)

- 1.1.13 Natural (1000) was green sand with chalk flecks to the south end of the site, changing to a silty clay alluvium at the north end of the site. This had been cut by a number of features and sealed below a number of garden cultivated soil horizons. The site had been divided in two by a 4 m wide modern service trench for mains sewage and storm.

North area of the site

- 1.1.14 In the centre of the site the remains of a small palaeo channel (1015) filled by a mid brown silty clay and sealed below a 0.16 m thick mid grey alluvium clay (1014) was exposed. This was sealed below a 0.25 m thick dark grey black silty clay (1011) cultivated soil, which had been cut by a 19th-century gas pipe trench (1012). This measured 8.80 m long, 0.80 m wide and 0.57 m in depth and was filled by a light grey and mid brown silty clay (1013) with an 8" cast pipe in base. Overlying this was a 0.35 m thick very dark grey brown silty clay (1009) cultivated soil with a 0.23 m thick very dark greyish brown silty sand loam (1008) fine cultivated garden soil. Along the southern edge of the site these soil horizons had been cut by the line of small brook running to join Letcombe brook to north-west of site. The modern service trench had removed the south side of the brook's channel. The north side of the brook was contained within the 19th century cut (1006) for stone revetment wall (1007) channelling brook under the line of the Wantage tramway to west of the site. The brook had been in-filled by a dark brown and light grey silty clay (1010) late 19th-century, sealed below a 0.20 m thick dark grey brown silty clay (1018) re-deposited old topsoil (Fig. 4, section 100).

1.1.15 Cutting the top of the revetment wall (1007) was the construction cut (1016) for a 20th century industrial building shown in figure 2 of the Wessex Archaeology report. The brick wall (1005) for the building was built directly onto the stone revetment wall 1007. With a compact sand (1004) floor make-up for brick floor of building. Thin 0.20 m thick very dark grey brown silty sand and demolition rubble (1003) in-filled the building. Against the south side of brick wall 1005 was a 0.20 m thick dark black brown silty clay (1017) material back filling the brook. Sealing this was a 0.25 m thick layer of modern demolition material (1002) from the brick industrial building (Fig. 4, section 100).

South area of the site

1.1.16 The south side of the modern service trench the natural (1000) green sands sloped down northwards to the service trench. This was sealed below a 0.25 thick mid grey alluvium clay (1035) similar to 1014 and contained fragments of pottery dating from the 16th and 17th century. This has been cut by an oval posthole (1033) with near vertical sides and flat base. It measured 0.47 m x 0.40 m x 0.35 m and filled by a mid brown silty clay (1032) with chalk fragments for packing (Figs 3 and 4, section 103) and contained pottery from the late 15th and 16th century. To the south of the post hole on the slope were two root holes. Cut 1030 was a large sub circular feature with uneven sides and base. It measured 1.8 m x 1.7 m x 0.16 m and filled by dark grey brown silty clay (1031). Just to the west was a small oval feature (1028) with uneven sides and concave base. It measured 0.6 m x 0.4 m x 0.12 m and filled by very dark grey brown silty clay (1029) (Fig. 3).

1.1.17 Along the west side of the trench a series of boundary ditches were partly exposed. A ditch (1019), which had very steep sloping sides and flat base with only 5.5 m x 0.55 m x 0.54 m being exposed. It contained a fill of light grey brown silty clay (1020) (Fig. 4, section 101). This had been cut by ditch (1021), which had steep sloping sides and concave base measuring 12.5 m x 0.45 m x 0.26 m and was filled by a dark grey brown silty clay (1022) (Fig. 3). To the south of this ditch 1019 turned to the south-east and terminated in cut 1040. This had a round end and had very steep sloping sides and flat base measuring 1.4 m x 1.3 m x 0.7 m. It did contain three fills of a mid brown silty clay (1049) primary silting with pottery dating from the Saxon period. This was overlain by a pale brown silty clay loam (1048) and sealed by a light grey brown silty clay loam (1047) (Fig. 4, section 105). The terminal end cut into the natural (1000) and a linear feature (1051) aligned east to west with very steep sloping sides and flat base and ending in an square end (Fig. 3). Only 1 m x 0.8 m x 0.16 m was exposed with a fill of mid grey brown silty clay (1050). To the south of the terminal end 1040 was a posthole 1046. This was round with very steep sloping sides and flat base, measuring 0.5 m x 0.3 m x 0.2 m and filled by a mid brown silty clay (1045) (Fig. 4, section 105).

1.1.18 To the south of these features in the south-east corner of the site was a pit or root hole (1039). It measured 1.3 m x 1.2 m x 0.49 m and was filled by a dark brown silty clay (1038), overlain by a mid grey silty clay (1037) and sealed by a light grey silty sand loam

(1036). All these features were sealed below a 0.15m - 0.20 m layer of old cultivated topsoil horizon of grey brown silty clay loam (1025) with pottery from the 16th to 18th century and was similar to layer 1009 on north side of the site (Fig. 4, sections 101, 104 and 105). This had been cut by a semi-circular feature (1023) with vertical sides and concave base. It measured 0.6 m x 0.5 m x 0.7 m and filled by a very dark grey brown silty clay loam (1024). At the south end of the site layer 1025 was cut by a modern service trench (1042) measuring 2 m x 1 m x 0.3 m and filled with a compact dark grey brown silty clay (1041) cover a number of pipes. To the south of this was a narrow foundation trench (1044) with vertical sides and flat base measuring 2 m x 0.4 m x 0.38 m and containing the lower course of chalk wall (1043) (Fig. 4, section 105). Across the northern half of the site from the top of the slope a layer very dark grey brown silty clay cultivated topsoil (1034) similar to layer 1008 on the north side of site overlaid layer 1025. These were all sealed below a 0.10 m thick hardcore (1026) ground make up for the tarmac, crushed stone and concrete surface (1027) across the site. The whole site was all sealed below a 0.15 m - 0.35 m thick layer of demolition material (1001) from present works being carried out on the site.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 1.1.19 The excavation revealed no archaeological deposits or features pre-dating the late Saxon period, but a number of features dated from the 5th to 9th Saxon to post medieval period when Wantage began to expand due to economic growth. The earliest known feature was the boundary ditch 1019 and appears to stop against a small stream running east to west and dividing the site across the centre. The stream appears to have been open running along the base of the slope into Letcoombe brook, until it was revetted in the 19th-century, properly during the construction of the Tramway by the Wantage Tram Company in 1873. The stream being contained and directed under the tramlines which ran north to south to the west of the site.
- 1.1.20 To the north of the stream a series of cultivated soils dating from the post-medieval period with later 19th and 20th century ground make-up. The soil horizons were very sterile and suggest that the area was open fields pasture. The later 19th and 20th century ground make-ups are from when for the construction of tramway and after it closed in 1945, later brick built industrial building was constructed on the site.
- 1.1.21 The south side of the stream a number of features was exposed on the slope rising southwards. These were the Saxon boundary ditch 1019 along the west edge of the site and had a round terminal end at its south end and ran into or stopped against the stream. The ditch was possibly a property or field boundary to land north of the present town centre. The site is then covered with a series of cultivated soil layers dating from the post medieval period with small pits, post holes and root holes filled with finds suggesting domestic activity. These are from activity at the rear of properties fronting onto Grove

Street. These are then cut by property boundaries and services from the 19th century when Wantage started to prosper and the brick terraces were built along Grove Street.

- 1.1.22 These findings along with the results from the watching briefs show that the site was fields in the Saxon period, which were slowly built over and developed with the growth of Wantage from the post-medieval period to the present. With the first major change being in the late 19th century when the site was partly in-filled and levelled for the construction of the tramway and gas works to the north and north-west.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Depth/H eight (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1000	Natural				Green sand	
1001	Layer			0.15 m - 0.35 m	Modern topsoil/demolition layer	
1002	Layer			0.25 m	Modern demolition layer	
1003	Layer			0.20 m	Modern demolition layer	
1004	Layer			0.10 m	Construction/floor make up	
1005	Structure	0.40 m	4 m	0.40 m	Wall	
1006	Cut	4.40 m	10 m	1.50 m	Construction cut	
1007	Structure	0.48 m	10 m	0.80 m	Revetment wall	
1008	Layer			0.23 m	Cultivated soil horizon	
1009	Layer			0.35 m	Cultivated soil horizon	
1010	Fill			0.40 m	Material filling in brook	
1011	Layer			0.25 m	Cultivated soil horizon	
1012	Cut	0.80 m	8.80 m	0.57 m	Service trench	
1013	Fill				Fill of trench	
1014	Fill				Fill of brook	
1015	Fill	1 m	5.50 m	0.23 m	Alluvium/Palo channel	
1016	Cut	12.6 m	10 m	0.70 m	20th Century construction trench	
1017	Layer			0.20 m	Demolition layer	
1018	Layer			0.20 m	Cultivated soil	
1019	Cut	0.55 m	5 m	0.54 m	Boundary ditch	
1020	Fill				Fill of ditch	
1021	Cut	0.45 m	12.5 m	0.26 m	Boundary ditch	
1022	Fill				Fill of ditch	
1023	Cut	0.50 m	0.60 m	0.70 m	Modern feature	
1024	Fill				Fill of feature	
1025	Layer			0.20 m	Cultivated soil	Pottery, CBM and Bone

<i>Context No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Depth/H eight (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i> Finds</i>
1026	Layer			0.10 m	Hardcore Make-up	
1027	Layer			0.12 m	Tarmac/stone standing	
1028	Cut	0.40 m	0.60 m	0.12 m	Root hole	
1029	Fill				Fill of root hole	
1030	Cut	1.70 m	1.80 m	0.16 m	Root hole	
1031	Fill				Fill of root hole	
1032	Fill				Fill of post hole	Pottery
1033	Cut	0.47 m	0.40 m	0.35 m	Post hole	
1034	Layer			0.30 m	Cultivated soil	
1035	Layer			0.25 m	alluvium layer	Pottery and bone
1036	Fill				Fill of feature	
1037	Fill				Fill of feature	
1038	Fill				Fill of feature	
1039	Cut	1.05 m	1.10 m	0.49 m	Modern feature	
1040	Cut	1.30 m	1.40 m	0.72 m	Ditch	
1041	Fill				Fill of service trench	
1042	Cut	1 m	2 m	0.30 m	Service trench	
1043	Structure	0.40 m	2 m	0.38 m	Chalk wall	
1044	Cut	0.40 m	2 m	0.38 m	Foundation trench	
1045	Fill				Fill of post hole	
1046	Cut	0.30 m	0.50 m	0.20 m	Post hole	
1047	Fill				Fill of ditch	Bone
1048	Fill				Fill of ditch	
1049	Fill				Fill of ditch	Iron object, pottery and bone
1050	Fill				Fill of ditch	
1051	Cut	0.80 m	1 m	0.16 m	Ditch	

APPENDIX 2 FINDS REPORTS**Pottery from Wantage, Linborough Road. (WALIMR 06) by John Cotter**

Introduction and methodology

- 1.1.23 A small collection of 17 sherds of pottery weighing 195 g. were recovered from 4 contexts. The sherds are of medieval and post-medieval date. All the pottery was examined and spot-dated during the present assessment stage. For each context the total pottery sherd count and weight were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet, followed by the context spot-date which is the date-bracket during which the latest pottery types in the context are estimated to have been produced or were in general circulation. Comments on the presence of datable types were also recorded, usually with mention of vessel form (jugs, bowls etc.) and any other attributes worthy of note (eg. decoration etc.).

Date and nature of the assemblage

- 1.1.24 The pottery assemblage is in a fragmentary state although most of the sherds are fairly fresh - particularly the five post-medieval sherds some of which are quite large. Ordinary domestic pottery types appear to be represented. Pottery types and forms present are detailed in the Excel spreadsheet and summarised below.
- 1.1.25 The earliest piece in the assemblage is a small sherd (2 joining) of Anglo-Saxon organic-tempered ware from context (1049). This dates to the 5-9th century. Most of the assemblage is of medieval date, probably 13th century. Although these sherds are quite fresh, the contexts producing them (1025 and 1035) also produced a single sherd each of post-medieval pottery. The medieval fabrics comprise glazed jugs and cooking wares from a number of fairly local or regional industries including Medieval Oxford ware (Fabric OXY; Mellor 1994), East Wiltshire coarseware (OXAQ), Minety ware (Wilts) (OXBB). The commonest medieval fabric is a coarse orange sandy ware which may be a variant of Berkshire Newbury C ware (OXAG, formerly Abingdon-type ware). However this includes a sherd from a highly decorated, white-slipped, green-glazed jug which is not a known Newbury type. This sherd has closer affinities with the Surrey pottery industries at Kingston (Kingston slipware) and Earlswood.
- 1.1.26 The post-medieval sherds have a strong early post-medieval emphasis, possibly 16th century, and include late products of the Brill/Boarstall ware industry (Bucks) including a Cistercian-type blackware cup sherd with applied white clay decoration and plain glazed redwares.

Summary and recommendations

- 1.1.27 In view of the small size and fairly poor condition of the assemblage, no further work is recommended.

Animal bones from the excavation in area 2 at Limborough Road, Wantage by Rachel Scales

Introduction

1.1.28 Twenty five mammal bones were recovered by hand from the excavation of pit and ditch features associated with Late Medieval/ Post- Medieval tenement houses and their immediate surroundings in Limborough Road, Wantage. Bones were identified with the aid of the Oxford Archaeology bone reference collection and published texts.

Nature and description of the assemblage

1.1.29 Fifteen of the bones collected were identified to species level. Cattle (*Bos taurus*) bones were the most frequent (48%) bones recorded (Table 1). Sheep/ goat (*Ovis aries/ Capra hircus*) bones were also present in smaller numbers (12 %). Five medium mammal sized bone fragments, and three large mammal sized bones were also noted (Table 1).

1.1.30 Much of the bone was well preserved with only a few specimens showing signs of weathering or fragmentation. There was no evidence for burning in the assemblage. Butchery cut and chop marks probably associated with filleting and dismembering processes were observed on three of the bones. Four of the bones had signs of carnivore gnawing.

1.1.31 A cattle first phalange had evidence of a severe pathological condition (1025). Extensive bony exostoses were observed over the entire bone surface. This extra bone growth could have been due to a severe trauma to the toe, or may reflect the later stages of a bone disease. It could also possibly reflect the wear and tear caused to an animal used for traction over a long period of time; a number of similar pathologies have been recorded in draught populations across Europe (De Cupere et al., 2000; Groot, 2002).

1.1.32 The presence of bones from most parts of the body for cattle (Table 1) suggests that these animals were likely to have been butchered and consumed on or close to site. The range of elements recorded and the assemblage as a whole appear to reflect domestic activity. While this assemblage is not large, it is reasonably well preserved and should be considered alongside material from further excavations at the site, should bone of similar date be retrieved.

Table 1. Number of mammal bones recorded in each context from Limborough Road, Wantage.

CONTEXT	ELEMENT	SPECIES				
		CATTLE	SHEEP/ GOAT	LARGE MAMMAL	MEDIUM MAMMAL	INDETERMINATE
1025	Tooth	2				
	Scapula	1				
	Humerus	1	1			
	Radius		1			
	Carpal	1				
	Rib				1	
	Vertebra			1	1	

	Femur	1				
	Metapodial	1				
	First phalange	1				
1035	Tooth	1				
	Scapula		1			
	Metacarpal	1				
	Metatarsal	1				
1047	Scapula			1		
	Rib				1	
	Indeterminate					2
1049	Skull	1				
	Rib			1		
	Long bone fragment				2	
	Total	12	3	3	5	2
	Percentage %	48	12	12	20	8

APPENDIX 3 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Bea De Cupere, An Lentacker, Wim Van Neer, Marc Waelkens. (2000). Osteological evidence for the draught exploitation of cattle: First applications of a new methodology. *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* **10**. pp 254-267.

Groot, M. (2002). Palaeopathological evidence for draught cattle on a Roman site in the Netherlands. In, Davies, J. and Fabisetal, M. (eds.) *Diet and health in past animal populations*. 9th ICAZ Conference, Durham. pp52-27.

OCAS 2003 Limborough Road, Wantage Brief for Archaeological Recording Action

OA 2006 Land at Rear of 19 - 27 Grove Street (Area 2), Wantage, Oxfordshire
Archaeological Investigation Written Scheme of Investigation

Wessex Archaeology 1997 *Limborough Development, Wantage, Oxfordshire*
Archaeological Evaluation

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (1st edition. ed. D. Wilkinson)

APPENDIX 4 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Limborough Road, Wantage, Oxfordshire

Site code: WALIMR 05

Grid reference: NGR SU 3985 8810

Type of excavation: Excavation of area in line of proposed retaining wall.

Date and duration of project: Five days from the 9/1/2006 to 16/1/2006.

Area of site: 10 m x 38 m

Summary of results: The watching briefs and excavation showed the site to have been open fields and pasture, which had slowly been engulfed with the growth of Wantage from the Saxon period to the present.

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 no: OXCMS:2005.126



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Figure 1: Site location

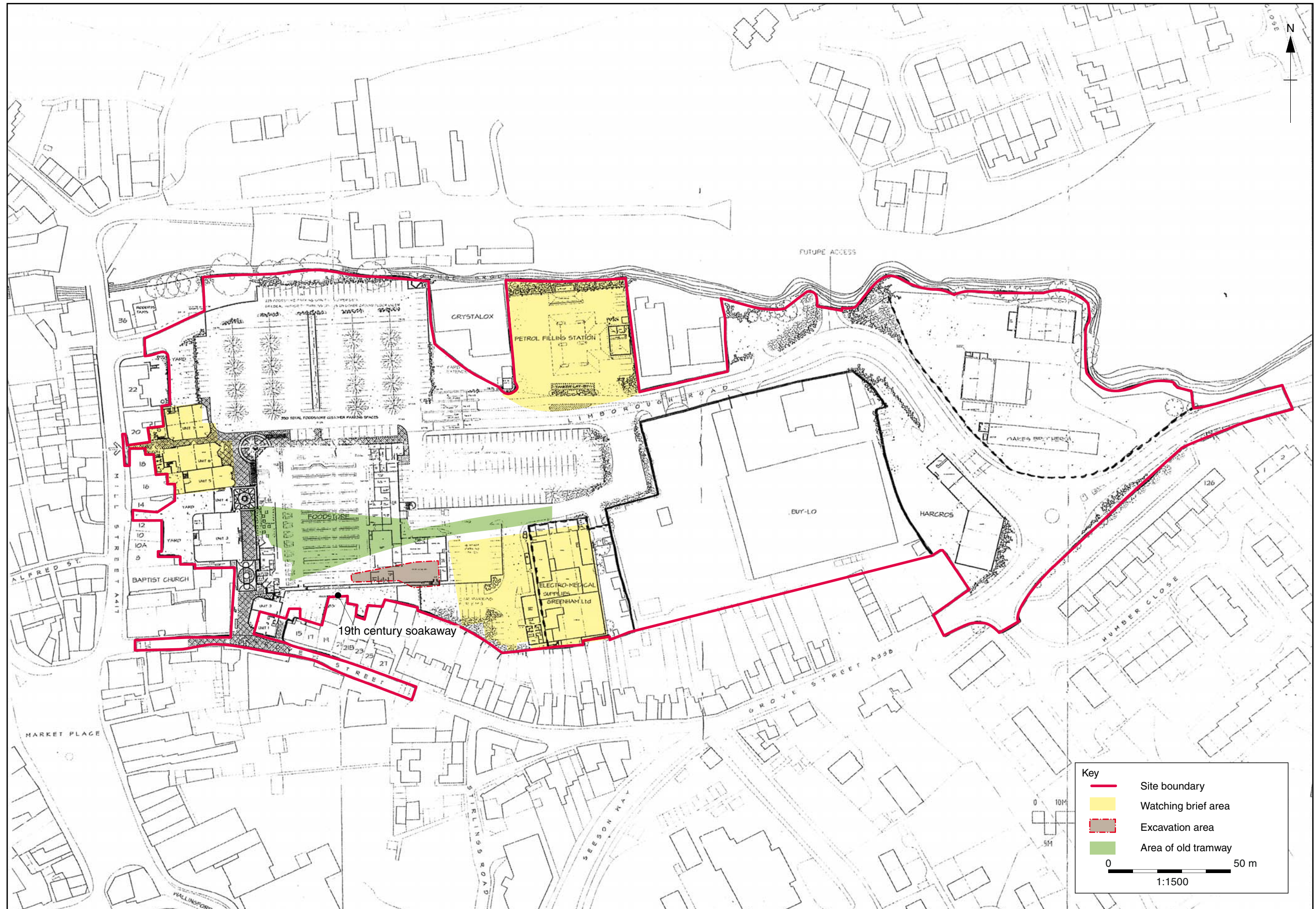
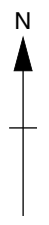
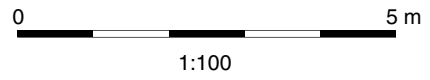
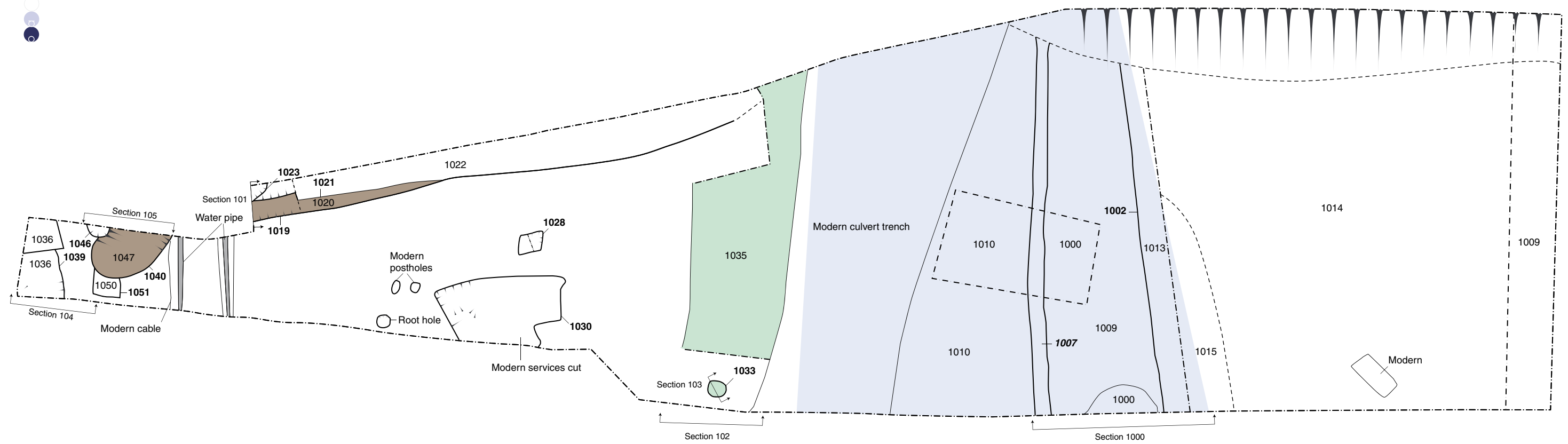


Figure 2: Site plan



Plan 1



Key	
	Saxon (5th - 9th century)
	18th century
	19th century
	Known extent of stream bed

Figure 3: Site plan and location of sections

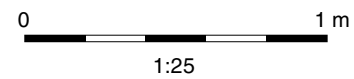
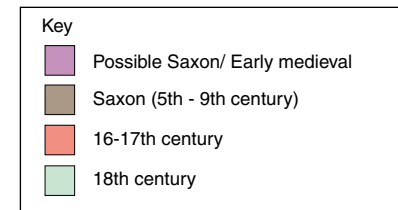
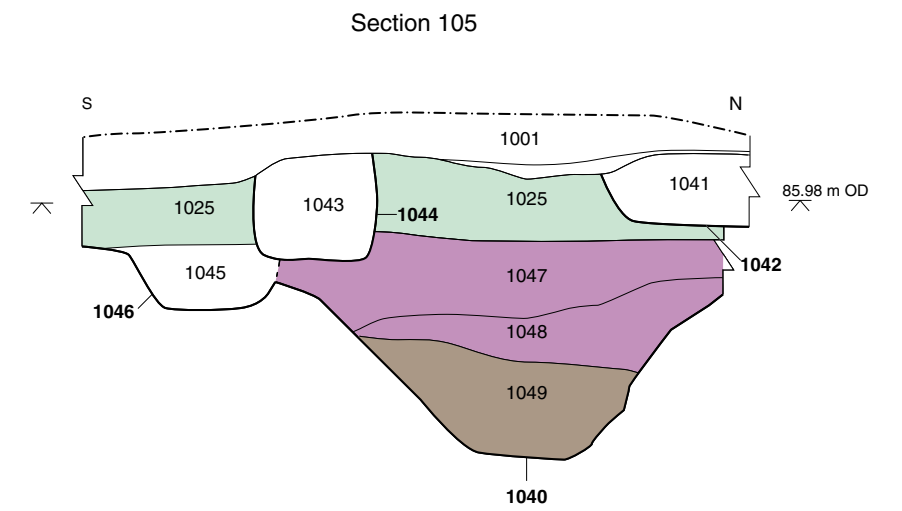
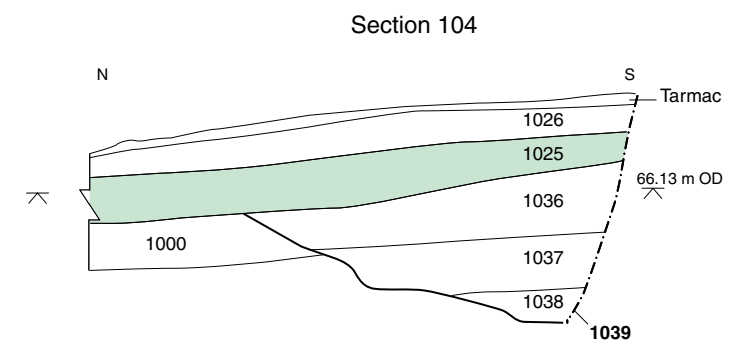
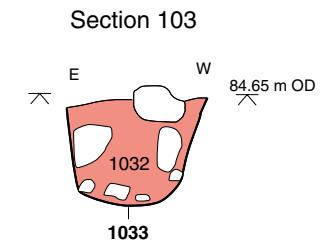
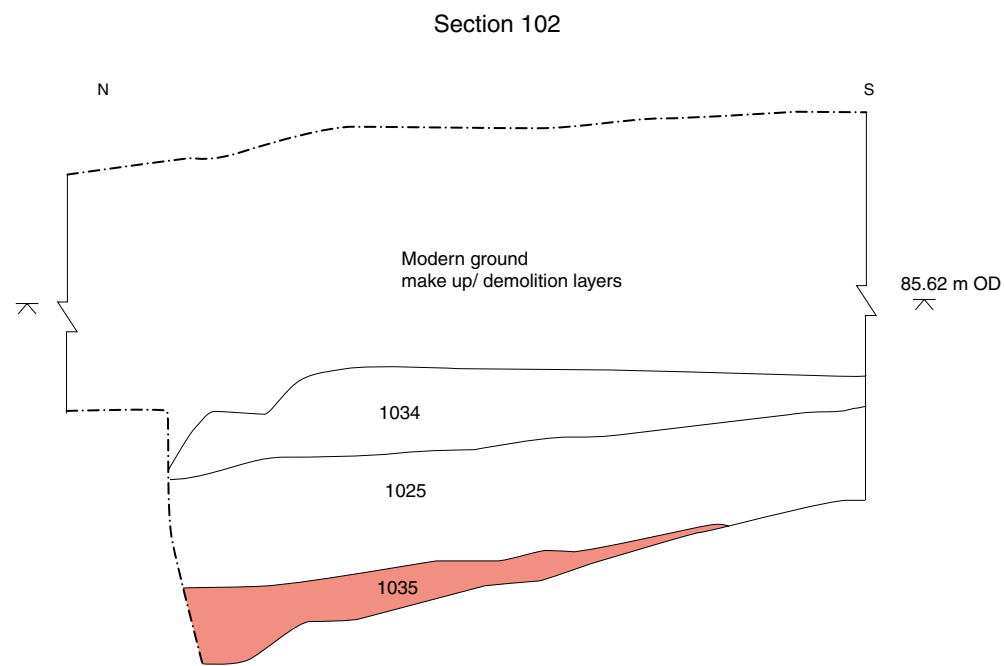
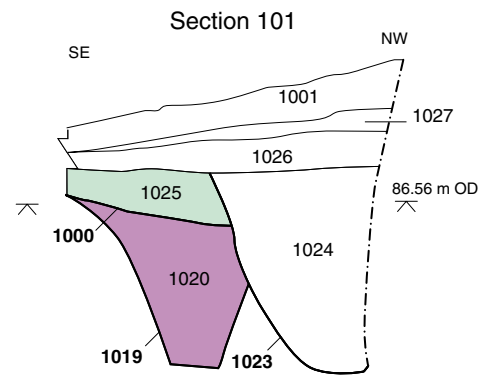
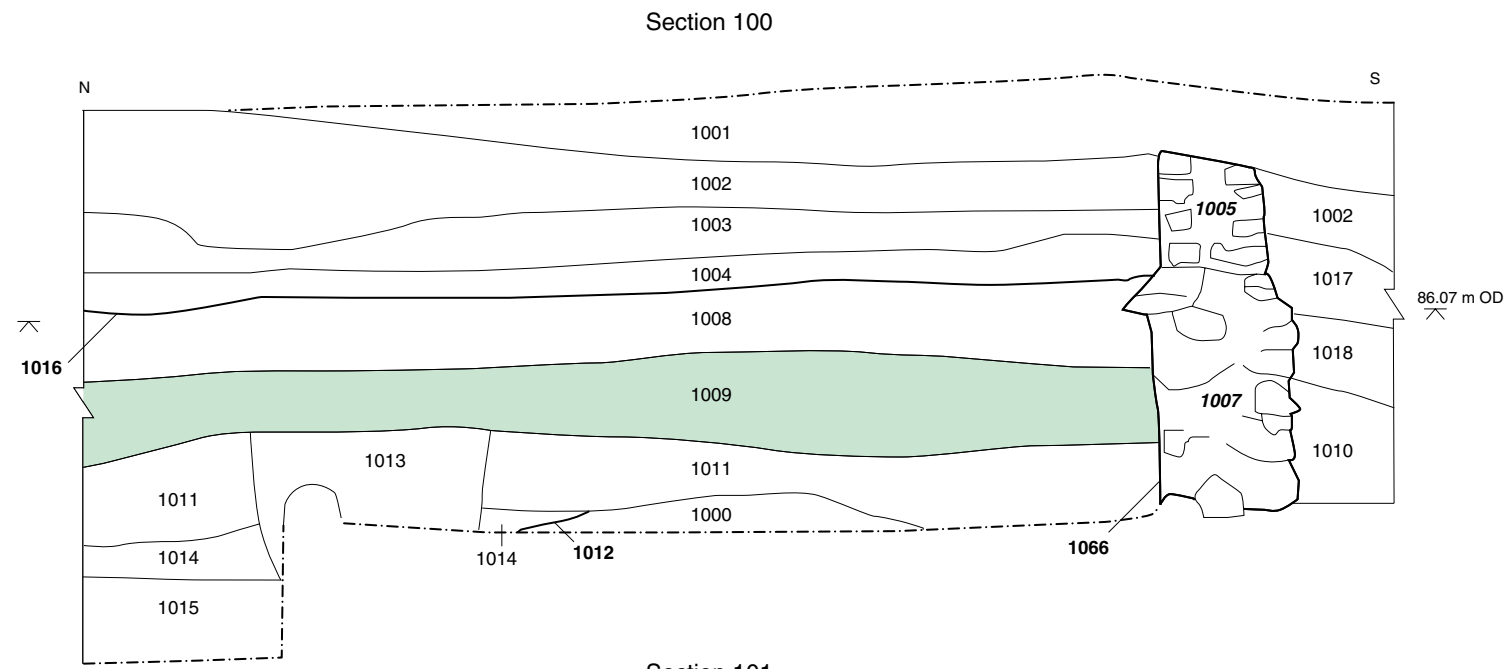


Figure 4: Sections