

Bloor Homes

**DRAYTON MILL
DRAYTON
OXFORDSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

NGR SU 4897 9335

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October 2001

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SUMMARY

Between June and October 2001, the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Drayton Mill, Drayton, Oxfordshire (SU 4897 9335). Two potential drainage channels and a pit of uncertain date were observed during the groundwork.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Permission had been granted by Vale of the White Horse District Council for the development of the mill site for residential purposes. Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological deposits, a condition for an archaeological watching brief was attached to the permission, in line with PPG16 and local plan policy and in accordance with a brief prepared by Oxfordshire County Council Cultural Services. The development site lies at 55 m OD and the underlying geology is well drained loams overlying second terrace gravel.

2 Background

- 2.1 The development site is bounded to the north by a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 248). Aerial photographs indicate the presence of cropmarks in the fields to the immediate north, north west and south east of the site. A series of cropmarks extend from east of Milton to the south, to sites north of Drayton, including Corporation Farm. The cropmarks indicate features which include a Neolithic Cursus, ten ring-ditches, several enclosures and linear features. A Saxon cemetery lies 750 m to the south at North Field and a Roman Villa at Drop Short c 700 m to the north.
- 2.2 A predetermination archaeological field evaluation was carried out on the site by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in 1995. The trial trenching revealed limited Anglo-Saxon or early medieval activity including a ditch or hollow and layers of peat and alluvium.

3 Watching Brief Aims

- 3.1 To record the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of archaeological remains within the entire area affected by development.
- 3.2 If exceptional archaeological remains were discovered, for which the resources allocated were insufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard, the OAU would signal to all parties that such an archaeological find had been made.
- 3.3 To make available the results of the investigation.

4 Methodology

4.1 Scope of fieldwork

The watching brief was undertaken on all areas of ground disturbance.

4.2 Recording

- 4.2.1 Archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100, sections were drawn at 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures lay down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson, 1992).

5 Results (*Figs 2 and 3*)

- 5.1 The groundwork for plots 1 and 2 - to the north of the Mill Stream - comprised the excavation of strip foundation trenches through a spread of demolition rubble associated with the recently demolished buildings. The remaining plots lay to the south of the stream and the groundwork associated with these was carried out in three stages. First the areas around the building footprints were reduced (by varying depths) as the deposits overlying the gravel were too unstable for the excavation of strip foundation trenches. The trenches were then excavated through the exposed gravel and the spoil resulting from the initial reduction was re-deposited around the new foundations.
- 5.2 As the key stage of this process was the initial reduction, this was closely monitored and the results are presented below on a plot-by-plot basis.

Plot 1

- 5.3 The strip foundations for plot 1 were excavated through *c* 0.6 m of demolition rubble which directly overlay the natural gravel. Numerous services associated with the demolished buildings were observed but no archaeological features or deposits were apparent.

Plot 2

- 5.4 The demolition rubble overlying the gravel in plot 2 was considerably thinner and in places the gravel was overlain by a mid brown silty clay subsoil (3). No features or deposits were observed.

Plot 3

- 5.5 The area around the footprint of plot 3 was reduced by a maximum of 3 m below ground level and revealed a stratigraphic sequence comprising *c* 0.35 m of topsoil overlying *c* 0.48 m of subsoil (3) which directly overlay the gravel. No archaeological features were observed.

Plot 4

- 5.6 The depth of reduction and stratigraphy revealed within plot 4 was very similar to that observed within plot 3. However, two roughly linear, north-south aligned spreads of mid blue grey clay were observed within the gravel. One of these deposits was very sterile and was not clearly defined in plan or section (*Figs 2 and 3*) and was tentatively interpreted as an old channel (see below). To the west of this potential channel was a

second 'linear' deposit, similar in composition although considerably darker. Fragments of ceramic drainage pipe were observed during the excavation of this deposit and it is likely that it represents a modern drainage ditch.

Plots 5 and 6

- 5.7 The area around plots 5 and 6 was reduced by an average of 1.5 m and revealed a similar stratigraphic sequence to that which was revealed in plots 3 and 4. The two 'linear' deposits observed during the reduction for plot 4 continued to the south through plot 6 although no evidence was recovered to further establish the nature of either deposit. A pit (5) was observed in section to the east of plot 5 which was filled by a mid grey clayey silt with 15-20 % gravel inclusions (6). No dating evidence was recovered from the pit fill.

Ancillary Buildings

- 5.8 Excavation of the foundations for the garages associated with each plot, together with the footings for the apartments to the east of the site revealed no archaeological features or deposits.

The Bridge Footings and Balancing Pond

- 5.9 Excavation of the footings for a new bridge across the Mill Stream revealed the same stratigraphic sequence as plots 3 and 4 - although the gravel was more disturbed, presumably due to the proximity of the trees which flank the Mill Stream.
- 5.10 A 'balancing pond' was excavated to the west of the site to alleviate future flooding. No archaeological features were observed although the gravel did appear to undulate to the south of the area covered by the pond. A sterile, mid-light brown silty clay deposit, similar to the subsoil, was observed to the south of this area at the same depth as the top of the gravel. Whilst it is possible that this represented a large feature, it seems more likely to be a natural depression in the gravel.

Finds

- 5.11 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

Environmental Results

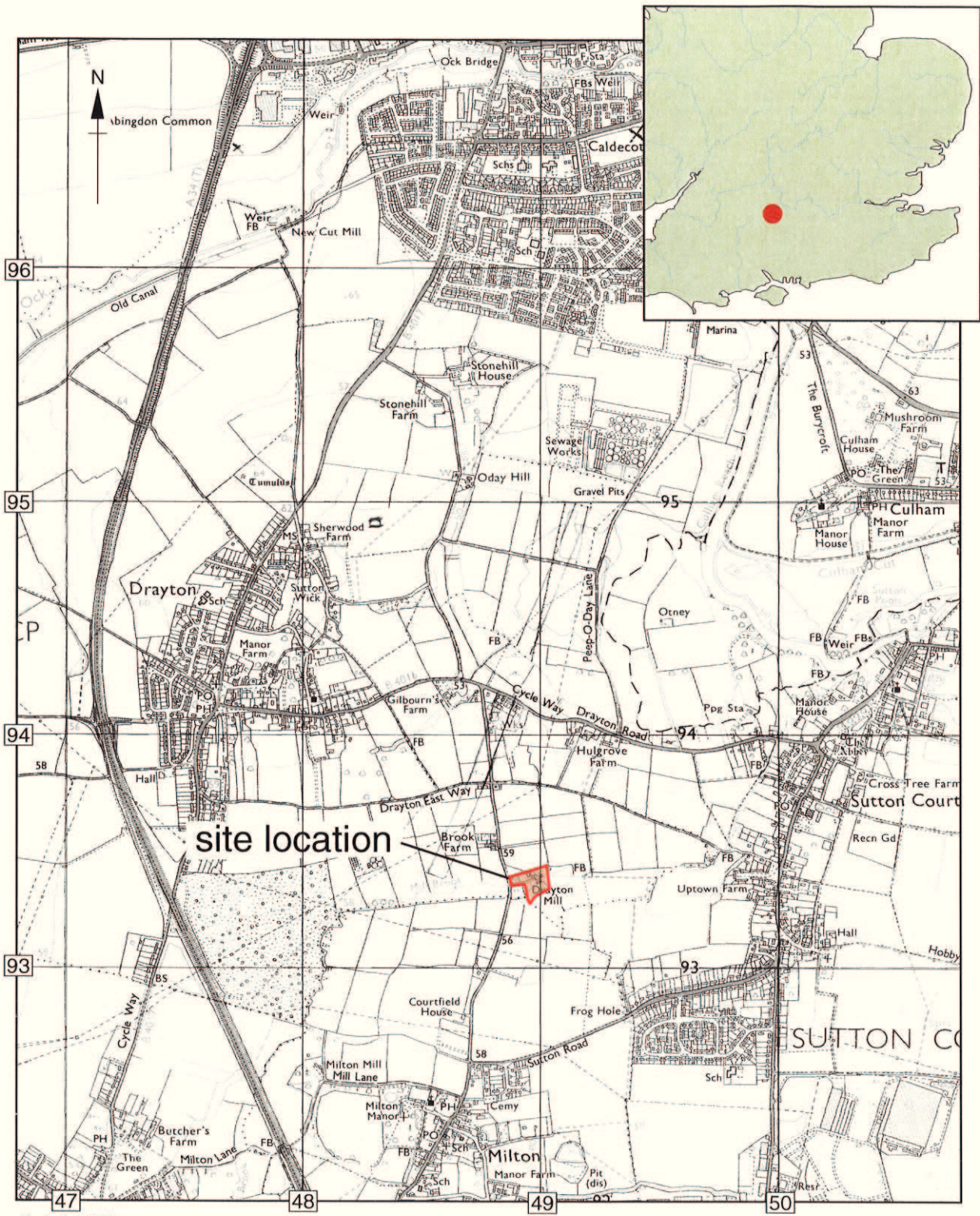
- 5.12 Although full consideration was given to various sampling strategies, due to the absence of any suitable deposits and the tight constraints of the excavation, no environmental soil samples were taken.

6 Discussion And Interpretation

- 6.1 Although a considerable area of the second terrace gravel was revealed during the groundwork, no significant archaeological remains were observed. The presence of the potential river channel within plots 4 and 6, and the deposit observed during the excavation of the pond - together with the later drainage ditch - may suggest that the area in the vicinity of the recently demolished Mill has a propensity for flooding. Consequently, any archaeological remains which do survive are likely to be located beyond the southern or eastern boundary of the current development. The single undated pit may suggest activity to the east although no definitive conclusions can be drawn given the lack of evidence produced by the groundwork.

References.

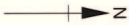
Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).






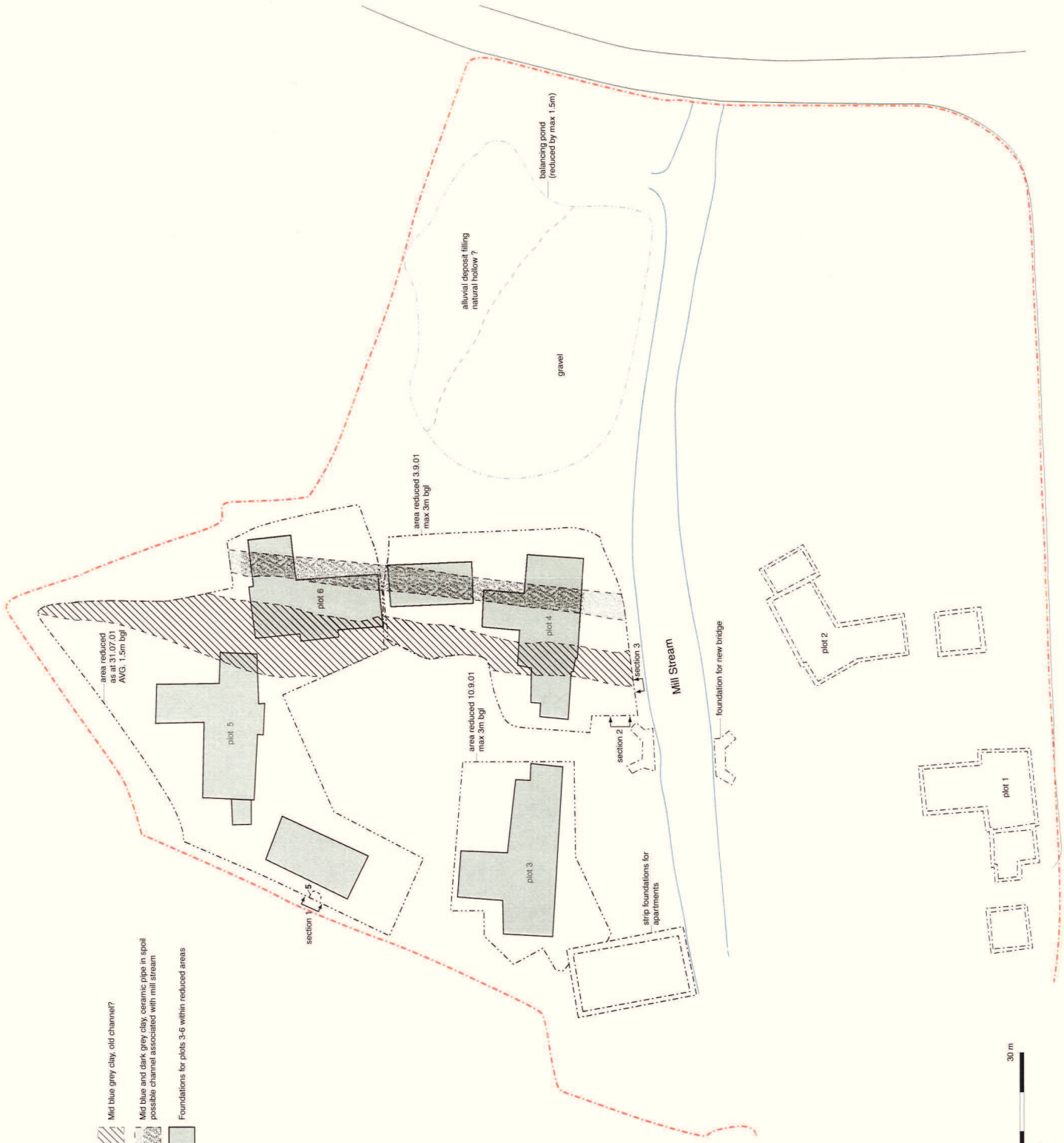
Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location.

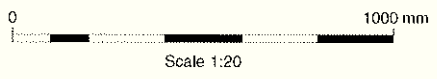
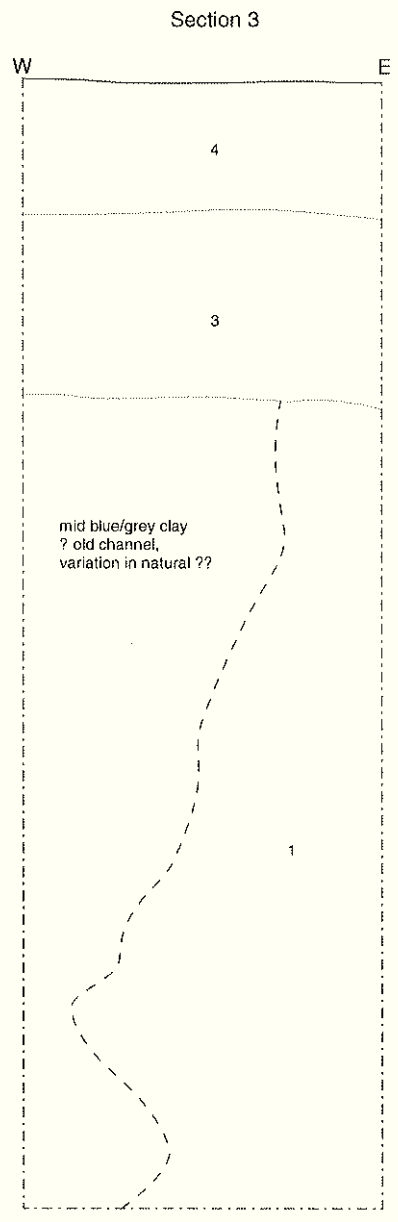
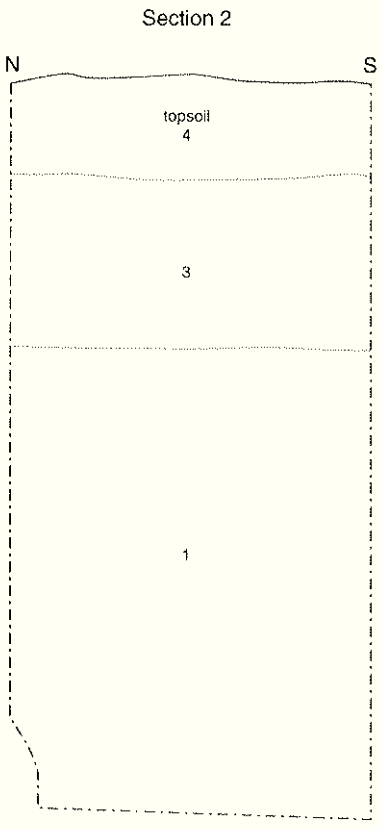
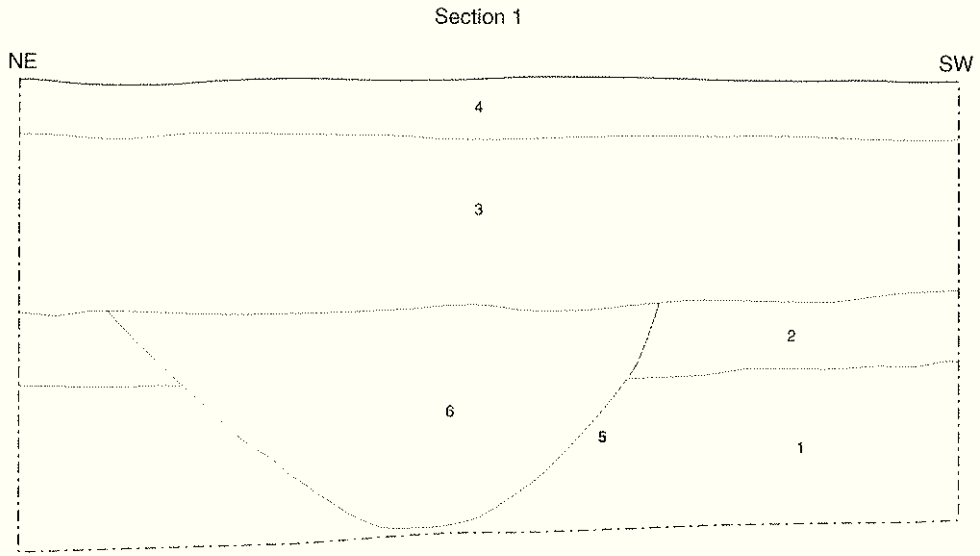


-  Mid blue grey clay, old channel?
-  Mid blue and dark grey clay, ceramic pipe in spoil possible channel associated with mill stream
-  Foundations for plots 3-6 within reduced areas



scale 1:500

Figure 1: Site location.



site code* site name* illustration* (00.00.00)

Figure 3 : Sections.



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