

23-25 High St Marlow

Buckinghamshire



Archaeological Evaluation Report



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Prepared by: Mike Sims
Position: SWD Supervisor
Date: 24th April 2008

Checked by: Dan Dodds
Position: Head of Small Works
Date: 28th April 2008

Approved by: Nick Shepherd
Position: Head of Fieldwork
Date: 5th May 2008
Signed.....

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Oxford Archaeology
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Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800
f: (0044) 01865 793496

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

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23-25 High Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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SUMMARY

On the 22nd April 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at 23-25 High Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SU 849 865) on behalf of Comland Commercial PLC. The evaluation revealed layers of post-medieval occupation deposits cut by a chalk block lined feature. This is a probable well, or possibly a cess pit, which had been reused as a rubbish pit in the 19th/20th-centuries. No evidence for any earlier periods, including any possible structures was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 On the 22nd of April 2008, OA carried out a field evaluation within the rear yard of 23-25 High Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SU 849 865) on behalf of Comland Commercial PLC, in respect of a planning application for the refurbishment of the existing shop front and the construction of new dwellings (Planning Application No. 07/5218).

1.1.2 A brief was set by the Buckinghamshire County Council Archaeological Officer, David Radford, requiring that trial trenching be undertaken prior to development of the site (BCAS 2007). OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) showing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA, 2008).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The town of Marlow is located approximately 6 km south of High Wycombe (Fig. 1) on the north bank of the River Thames. The development site consists of two adjoining shop fronts, and is located centrally within the town. The site is bounded to the south-west by the High Street and by commercial and residential properties on the other three sides. The trial trench was located in the rear yard of the property which was originally concrete covered and contained outbuildings relating to the original shop. The site is on level ground at approximately 35 m above OD. The site lies on the boundary between the Taplow Terrace gravel to the north and the Flood Plain gravel terrace to the south. Both these deposits are overlaid with alluvium (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no. 255).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The site lies within the historic core of the medieval and post-medieval town of Marlow, to the rear of the high street frontage, within the High Street tenement/burgage plots. The work will also affect a locally listed post-medieval building which is suspected to conceal traces of an earlier structure.

1.3.2 There is little evidence for pre Saxon activity in the near vicinity, with only a small number of finds, mostly material dredged from the Thames, being recovered. Marlow is first documented in 1015; by the time of the Domesday survey the estate had

passed from Saxon Earl Algar to Matilda, the wife of William the Conqueror, and consisted of a sizable population of 35 villagers, 23 smallholders and 1 slave (Morris 2004). Burgage rights were granted by 1183 along with the right to hold a market, and the settlement subsequently developed into a prosperous market town. The market owed its importance to its location on the high road between Reading and High Wycombe. The hundred rolls of 1278-9 names almost 200 Marlow burgesses (Brown and Hunt, 1994). A medieval hospital (The Hospital of St Thomas) is associated with the town and is thought to be located along "Spittal Street".

- 1.3.3 An excavation in 1996 at the Whitbread Brewery site on the opposite side of the High Street revealed settlement evidence from the 11th century onwards, whilst a small number of earlier pottery sherds suggest that occupation may have begun as early as the 10th-11th centuries (Bonner, 1996). A more recent evaluation to the rear of 25-27 High Street by Thames Valley Archaeological Services revealed a number of post-medieval pits, chalk walls and a small quantity of medieval pottery (TVAS, 2006).

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the area affected by the proposed development.
- 2.1.2 To clarify the nature and extent of existing disturbance and intrusion on the site and assess the degree of archaeological survival of all buried deposits and surviving structures of archaeological significance.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of a single trench measuring 10 m long and 1.5 m wide located running the length of the rear yard of the property (Fig. 2). The concrete yard surface had been previously broken out and removed prior to excavation, while the overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 0.8 m wide toothless bucket. Excavation proceeded in spits down to either the top of the underlying natural geology or to the top of the first significant archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The trench was cleaned by hand and any revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and if possible, environmental samples. A plan showing the extent of the trench and the location of any archaeological features was drawn at a scale of 1:50 (Fig. 2) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The trench, any features and the recorded

sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 Finds

3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context. Finds of special interest were given a unique small find number.

3.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

3.4.1 Due to the relatively recent date of the deposits and features encountered it was considered that no further evidence would be gained by environmental sampling.

3.5 Presentation of results

3.5.1 The results of the evaluation are presented by a written description of the features and deposits observed, followed by an overall discussion and interpretation.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

4.1.1 The deposits encountered had been truncated and disturbed in areas by the insertion of modern services, particularly drains, however these were concentrated within the top 0.5 m depth of the section leaving the base of the trench and the sections undisturbed. The water table was not encountered during the course of the evaluation.

4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits

4.2.1 The archaeologically significant deposits were roughly uniform along the length of the trench.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

5.1.1 The underlying natural, an orange yellow-brown sandy clay silt (8) was encountered at a depth of between 0.75 m and 1 m below the current yard level (Fig. 3, Sections 1, 2 and 3). This was sealed by a 0.2 m deep layer of dark yellow-brown clay silt (3), which produced fragments of clay roofing tile. Overlying this deposit was a 0.15 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (2). This deposit contained some charcoal flecking and fragments of 18th/19th-century pottery suggesting an occupation layer.

5.1.2 Cutting this layer was a roughly circular feature with steeply sloping sides (4) (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, Sections 1 and 2) measuring 3.3 m in diameter. Constructed within this cut was a circular vertical faced wall of roughly dressed chalk blocks, a single block in thickness laid without mortar (5). The space between the back of this circular lining and the edge of the cut was backfilled with a grey-brown clay silt (6) which

contained fragments of chalk and stone and produced a single piece of 17th/18th-century green glazed pottery.

- 5.1.3 A sondage dug through this feature prior to backfilling the trench showed that the cut and the chalk lining extended deeper than 2 m below the current ground level, but the base of the cut and the chalk lining was not encountered.
- 5.1.4 The centre of the feature was filled with a dark grey-brown clay silt (7). This deposit contained some charcoal flecking and also gritty ash inclusions. Finds recovered from this deposit included 19th-century pottery (earthenware and creamware), butchered bone and numerous fragments of flat clay roofing tile. These finds and the ash content suggest dumping of domestic rubbish.
- 5.1.5 Sealing the top of the feature and the earlier layers was a 0.5 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay (1). This contained some charcoal flecking, occasional 19th-century pottery and fragments of brick and tile indicative of an occupation layer. The concrete yard surface (removed before excavation started) was laid directly onto this layer.

5.2 Finds

- 5.2.1 Fragments of post-medieval pottery were recovered from Layers 1 and 2 and from Fill 7. These include earthenware, stoneware and creamware, and also transfer printed material. These fragments have been tentatively dated to the late 18th/ mid 19th century and represent domestic refuse rather than wasters from a kiln. These deposits produced a large quantity of finds and only a representative sample was retained.
- 5.2.2 A fragment of late 17th/ early 18th-century pottery was recovered from the construction backfill of feature 4, but this represents a residual find rather than dating evidence for the construction of the chalk lining.
- 5.2.3 Numerous fragments of flat roofing tile were recovered from all the layers and these probably originate from the various phases of post-medieval alteration/extension of the shop and the construction of the surrounding buildings.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 6.1.1 The trench represents a trial trenching sample of over 13% which is considered to be a good representation of the site as a whole, while the location of the trench provided a sample from immediately behind the rear of the shop to the far extent of the site, producing a section running the full length of any potentially undisturbed ground. The underlying natural alluvium was exposed throughout the length of the trench, except where cut by later features, showing that there were no earlier buried archaeological horizons.

6.2 Overall interpretation

Summary of results

- 6.2.1 Layers 1, 2 and 3 represent occupation layers dating to the late post-medieval period. The circular chalk built structure 5 is similar to other features exposed on other sites in Marlow (D. Radford *pers comm.*) and probably represents a communal well shared between the shops. An alternative explanation is that it may represent a cess pit. However its location immediately behind the rear of the building would mitigate against this, whereas for business premises possibly requiring large volumes of water it would be an ideal location for a well. Excavation using the machine failed to bottom this feature but showed it to extend more than 2 m below the current yard level. No definitive evidence for its date of construction was recovered.
- 6.2.2 This feature had been backfilled by a mixture of domestic refuse and demolition/construction debris (notably tile fragments) which may have occurred during one of the phases of alterations to the shop buildings, possibly after the arrival of mains water to the town.
- 6.2.3 No evidence for any features or deposits predating the late post-medieval period was encountered during the course of the watching brief. The presence of post-medieval deposits directly overlying the underlying alluvium suggests that there may have been a degree of truncation within the area of the site in the past. This may have removed evidence of any earlier occupation layers but the truncated bases of deeper features such as rubbish pits or foundation slots would probably have survived. However no such evidence was observed suggesting that the area was outside the main area of activity along the High Street and possibly undeveloped until at least the 18th-century.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	-	0.45 m	Occupation layer	Pottery, tile, glass	C19th/ C20th
2	Layer	-	0.2 m	Occupation layer	Pottery, clay pipe stem	C19th
3	Layer	-	0.15 m	Occupation layer	Tile	C18th/ C19th
4	Cut	3.2 m diameter	> 1.5 m	Cut for probable well	-	C19th ?
5	Structure	2.6 m diameter	> 1.5 m	Chalk block lining to well	-	C19th ?
6	Fill	0.15 m	> 1.5 m	Backfill between lining and cut for well	Pottery	C19th ?
7	Fill	2.2 m	> 1.5 m	Later backfilling of well	Pottery, glass, tile	C19th/ C20th
8	Layer	-	> 0.1 m	Natural alluvium deposit	-	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

BCAS, 2007 *23-25 High Street, Marlow: . Brief for an Archaeological Excavation*

Bonner, D. 1996 *Interim report on an archaeological excavation at the brewery site, High Street Marlow, Buckinghamshire* BCMAS report 384, Halton

Brown, R and Hunt, J. 1994 *Marlow: A Pictorial History*

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluations*

OA, 2000 *Oxford Archaeology Environmental Sampling Guidelines*

OA, 2008 *23-25 High Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire: Written scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation*

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

TVAS, 2006 *Evaluation at 25-27 High Street, Marlow.*

Morris, J, 2004 *Domesday Book: Buckinghamshire*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**Site name:** 23-25 High Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire**Site code:** MAHST 07**Grid reference:** SU 849 865**Type of evaluation:** Single 10 m by 1.5 m machine dug trench**Date and duration of project:** 22nd April 2008, 1 day**Area of site:** 110 m²**Summary of results:** The evaluation exposed several layers of post-medieval occupation deposits cut by a 19th-century chalk lined cess pit which had been later reused as a rubbish pit. No earlier significant archaeology was encountered.**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM:2007.168



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Figure 1: Site location

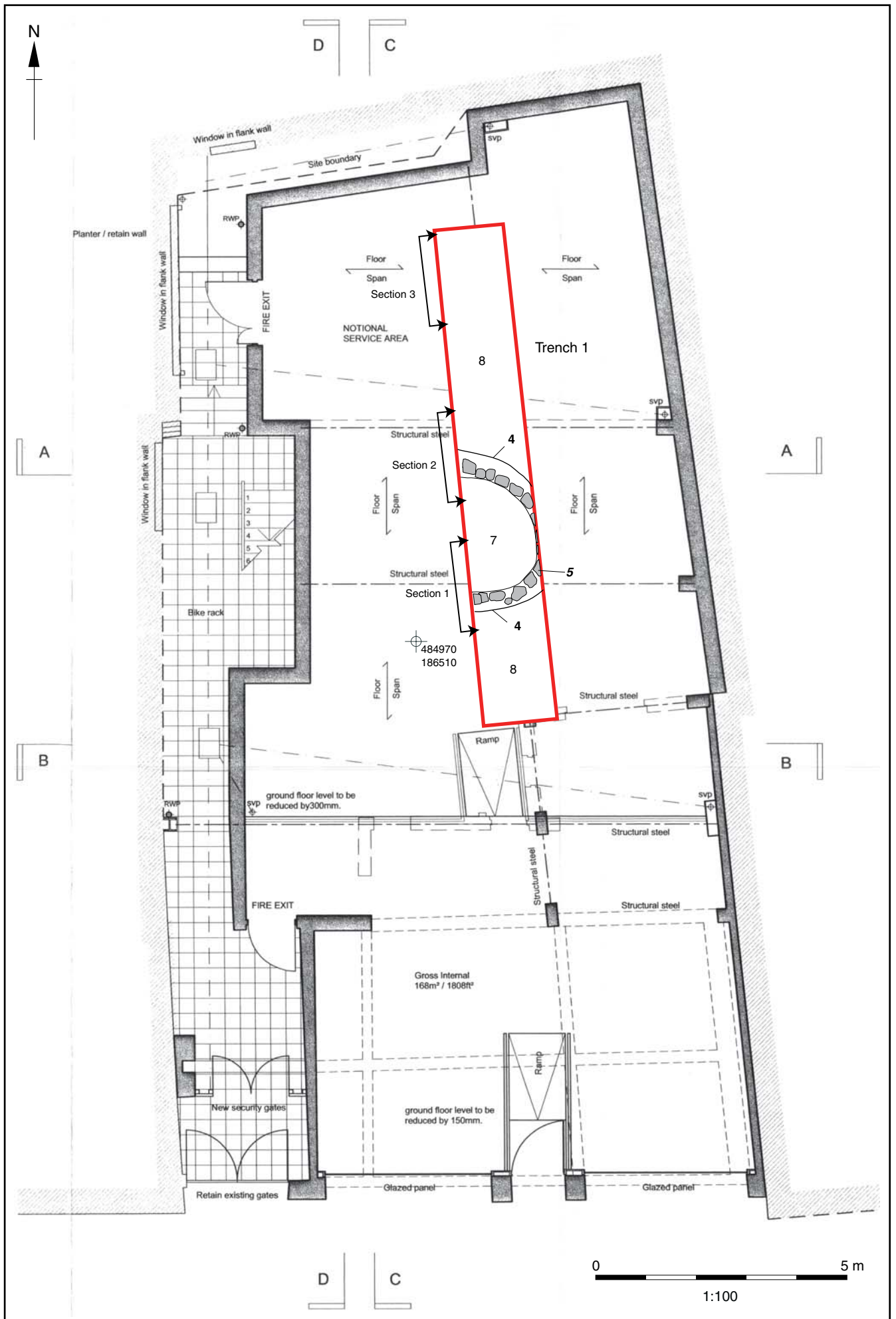
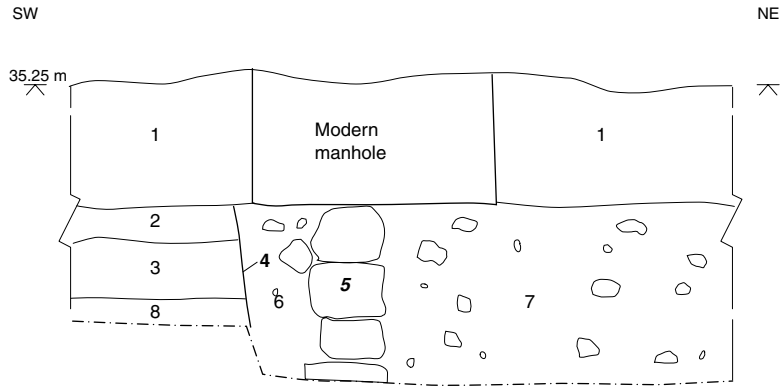
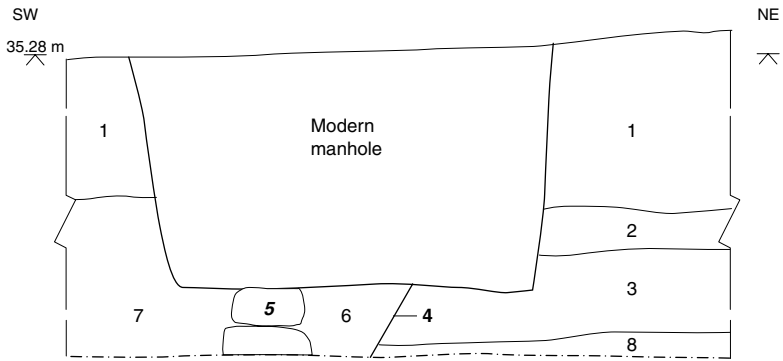


Figure 2: Trench location plan showing archaeology

Section 1



Section 2



Section 3

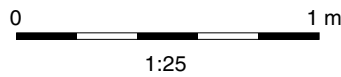
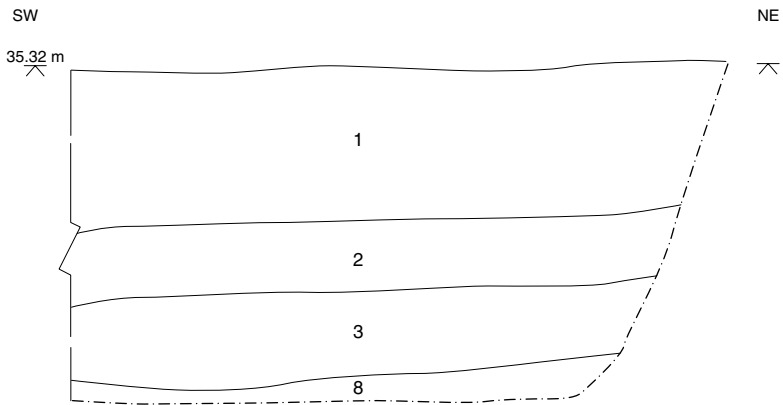


Figure 3: Sections



Head Office

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263 800
f: (0044) 01865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: thehumanjourney.net

Oxford Archaeology North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: (0044) 01524 541 000
f: (0044) 01524 848 606
e: lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: thehumanjourney.net

Oxford Archéologie Méditerranée

115 Rue Merlot
Zac la Louvade
34130 Mauguio
France

t: (0033) 4868 70220
f: (0033) 4868 70221
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: thehumanjourney.net



Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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Oxford Archaeological Unit
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES