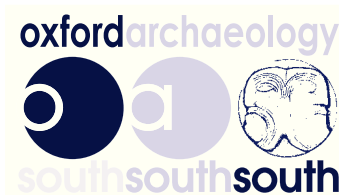


# The South Porch All Saints' Church Cuddesdon Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



April 2013

**Client: All Saints' Church Parochial  
Church Council**

Issue No: 1  
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1	Mike Sims Project Supervisor	Lousie Loe Head of Burials	Edward Biddulph Senior Project Manager	

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Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263800

e: oasouth@thehumanjourney.net

f: +44 (0) 1865 793496

w: oasouth.thehumanjourney.net

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## The South Porch, All Saint's Church, Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire

*Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

*Written by Mike Sims*

*and illustrated by Georgina Slater*

### Table of Contents

<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>2</b>
1.1 Scope of work.....	2
1.2 Location, geology and topography.....	2
1.3 Archaeological and historical background.....	2
<b>2 Project Aims and Methodology</b> .....	<b>3</b>
2.1 Aims.....	3
2.2 Methodology.....	4
<b>3 Results</b> .....	<b>4</b>
3.1 Description of deposits.....	4
3.2 Finds.....	5
3.3 Environmental remains.....	5
<b>4 Discussion and Conclusions</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Appendix A. Archaeological Context Inventory</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Appendix B. Bibliography and References</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Appendix C. Summary of Site Details</b> .....	<b>9</b>

Front cover: All Saints' Church, South Porch

#### List of Figures

Fig. 1 Site location

Fig. 2 Location of the south porch and test pits

Fig. 3 Sections 1-3



## Summary

*On the 11th of April 2013, Oxford Archaeology undertook a watching brief during the excavation of exploratory test pits adjacent to the south porch of All Saints' Church, Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 6008 2031). The watching brief observed details of the foundations of the south porch, which was overlain by churchyard soil. No evidence of burials or of any other activity was observed.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 As part of ongoing works to stabilise the south porch of All Saints' Church, Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 6008 2031), three exploratory test pits were excavated adjacent to the south porch in order to establish the depth and condition of the foundations.
- 1.1.2 Due to the potential disturbance of inhumations or exposure of earlier phases of the church's construction Oxford Archaeology was contracted to conduct an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of the test pits.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The village of Cuddesdon is located approximately 5km east of the City of Oxford (Fig. 1). The village is sited on the crest of a hill overlooking the River Thames flood plain. All Saints' Church is situated in the centre of the village slightly below the highest point.
- 1.2.2 The church itself sits roughly in the centre of a rectangular churchyard, which lies on a gentle south facing slope at a mean height of approximately 98m AOD. The churchyard is bounded by a public highway to the west and by a mixture of agricultural and domestic buildings to the east, north and south. The underlying geology is alluvium over Portland Formation Limestone (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no. 237, 1994).
- 1.2.3 The south porch is located in approximately the centre of the south aisle.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The following summary is taken from Chapman (2004) and Crossley and Elrington (1957).
- 1.3.2 Cuddesdon, standing on the uplands in the centre of the parish, overlooks the surrounding hamlets and commands views as far as Brill to the north, the Chilterns to the south-east, and Wittenham Clumps to the south.
- 1.3.3 The ancient parish of Cuddesdon stretched from Holton Brook on the north to Chislehampton on the south; it was flanked by the River Thame on the east, from a point just below Wheatley Bridge where there was a ford in 956, and, in the west, by the road from Garsington to Coombe Wood corner, a straete in Saxon times. The northern boundary followed the present London road, except where the road has departed from its old route.
- 1.3.4 There is evidence of a Roman villa on the hill, and Roman pottery has been found in Cuddesdon wood. The name Cuddesdon, 'hill of Cuthwine', points to early Saxon settlement, which has been confirmed by the finding of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery and other remains.



- 1.3.5 Many points named in the Saxon bounds can still be traced, as for instance 'Maerwelle', a spring on the Denton/Garsington boundary, and 'Ceorla Graf' (later Chalgrove) the site of the medieval quarries. The modern boundary between the new parish of Wheatley and Cuddesdon is formed by the Cuddesdon Brook, which flows through Coombe Wood, and used to cut the ancient parish in two.
- 1.3.6 In 956 land assessed at 20 hides in Cuddesdon and its hamlets was granted by Edwy to Earl Aelfhere, who in turn bestowed it on Abingdon Abbey.
- 1.3.7
- 1.3.8 The exact date of the founding of the original church is unknown but it must have been built before 1117, when Abbot Faritius, who gave it to Abingdon Abbey, died. It was rebuilt on a cruciform plan about 1180. There is good Romanesque carving on the west and south doorways, with lozenge moulding and tooth ornament. Of the same period are the tower arches, the west buttresses, the walls of the north transept (with one small roundheaded window), the stair turret at the north-west angle of the tower, and the opening to the rood loft.
- 1.3.9 The nave aisles were added in the mid-13th century, the north aisle being rougher work than the south, and three small lancet windows on the south side belong to this period. In the 14th century most of the aisle windows were replaced, the walls were raised, and the south porch added. The clerestory, the west windows, and the window in the north wall on the north transept were added just before the chancel was rebuilt in the late 14th or early 15th century, perhaps in 1375–6, when the accounts of Abingdon Abbey include a payment of 50s.
- 1.3.10 By 1520 the chancel was in need of repair and in 1630, in spite of episcopal patronage, the body of the church and the seats were noted as in great decay. Bartholomew Day, a local craftsman, undertook repairs; the upper part of the tower, the south transept, the oak roof of the nave, and other woodwork are of this date. During the 18th century many minor repairs and improvements were carried out. In 1842 major restoration work began under G. E. Street, the diocesan architect. The groining of the crossing was restored, the west gallery and the plaster ceiling of the chancel removed, and the roof repaired. Four windows in the chancel were replaced; stalls, a stone pulpit, reredos, and new glass in the choir were added. A new pulpit of oak was installed in 1896, executed by C. E. Kempe and carved by Miss Stubbs, the bishop's daughter. Hardman made the west window (Christ in Majesty) from Street's design. Electric light was installed in 1895–6, and the high altar was reconstructed in 1931 by H. S. Rogers, architect, of Oxford.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The general aims of the watching brief were to:

- preserve by record any archaeological deposits, structures or features encountered during the course of any ground intrusions;
- seek to establish the extent, nature and date of any archaeological deposits, structures or features encountered within the scope of the ground intrusion;
- secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site;



- disseminate results through the production of a unpublished client (grey literature) report.

2.1.2 Specific aims of the watching brief were to:

- determine the presence or otherwise of any surviving remains of the earlier phases of the church's construction.
- determine the extent to which human remains survive in the affected areas, and to generally observe the presence of burial vaults and graves.
- signal, before work continued, the discovery of an archaeological find for which further action was required.

## 2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The watching brief observed all groundworks that had the potential to affect or reveal archaeological deposits. These works consisted of the excavation of three test pits, each measuring approximately 0.6m x 0.6m and up to 0.8m in depth (Fig. 2).

2.2.2 The excavations were undertaken using hand tools.

2.2.3 All recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (OAU 1992). Archaeological features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers. A plan of the excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:20 and any recorded sections were drawn at 1:20. A photographic record, consisting of black and white negative and colour digital photographs, was maintained.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 The results from each test pit will be described separately followed by an overall discussion and conclusion.

#### ***Test Pit 1***

3.1.2 This test pit was located adjacent to the south-west corner of the porch (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, Section 1). The top of the foundations of the west wall of the porch (3) was exposed on the eastern side of the pit. This had been constructed using roughly dressed and squared blocks of local limestone bonded with lime mortar. Two outward steps and six courses of stonework were observed, but the bottom of the foundations was not exposed at a depth of 0.8m below ground level.

3.1.3 No evidence of a construction cut could be observed and a layer of yellow-brown silty clay loam (2) could be seen to butt directly onto the stonework. This layer could be seen to be in excess of 0.6m deep within the section and contained fragments of sub-angular stone.

3.1.4 Constructed directly upon layer 2 and abutting the east wall of the porch was a drainage gully. This had been constructed by excavating a channel approximately 0.4m deep and 0.6m wide along the outside of the west wall of the porch and the south wall of the south aisle. The western and southern sides of this channel were lined with a stone retaining wall built of three courses of roughly dressed stone laid without mortar (4).





- 3.1.5 Covering the base of the channel and butting up to the stone facing 4 and the walls of the porch and aisle 3 was a brick surface (1). This was composed of dark red bricks 0.22m x 0.145m x 0.06m in size laid on a bed of cement mortar.

### **Test Pit 2**

- 3.1.6 Test Pit 2 was located on the north-east corner of the porch (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, Section 2). The top of the foundations of the east wall of the porch (9) was exposed at approximately the same level as on the western side of the porch in Test Pit 1. Though this had been constructed using similar roughly dressed and squared blocks of local limestone bonded with lime mortar as wall 3, the second outward step was an additional two courses below that observed in Test Pit 1. As in Test Pit 1, two outward steps and six courses of stonework were observed, but the bottom of the foundations were not exposed at a depth of 0.8m below the existing ground level.
- 3.1.7 Again, as with Test Pit 1, no evidence of a construction cut could be observed and a layer of yellow-brown silty clay loam (8) could be seen to butt directly onto the stonework. This layer was in excess of 0.35m deep within the section and contained fragments of sub-angular stone (as in Test Pit 1).
- 3.1.8 A drainage channel had also been excavated against the porch wall and also alongside the south wall of the south aisle. This measured approximately 0.5m deep and 0.4m wide. As within Test Pit 1 the eastern and southern sides of this channel were lined with a stone retaining wall built of three courses of roughly dressed stone laid without mortar (7).
- 3.1.9 Laid in the bottom of the channel and butting up to both 7 and 9 was a 0.15m deep layer of broken brick and crushed mortar (6). Built directly upon this layer was a concave cement channel (5) sloping down towards the south.

### **Test Pit 3**

- 3.1.10 This was located adjacent to the north-west corner of the porch approximately 0.5m out from the aisle wall (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, Section 3). The stratigraphy (Section 3) exposed was the same as that recorded within Section 2. The maximum depth of excavation was 0.9m below the current ground level but did not expose the base of the foundations.

## **3.2 Finds**

- 3.2.1 Other than the bricks observed within the construction of the drainage channels 1 and 6, no artefacts or other evidence of activity such as dis-articulated human bone, was recovered during the course of the excavations.

## **3.3 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 Although no evidence of burial activity was observed, it is most likely that contexts 2 and 8 represent layers of churchyard soil, that is material that has been displaced several times by the action of intercutting internments.
- 4.1.2 Construction cuts for the foundations of the south porch were not observed in any of the test pits. This is probably due to any such cuts being backfilled with the churchyard



soil after construction, which together with migration of the soil over time by either ground water or biological action has made the distinction of the edges unclear.

- 4.1.3 The recorded stone foundations of the porch (3 and 9) appear to be original both in the stone and the mortar used. The slight differences in their construction are most likely due to different masons being used to complete each side.
- 4.1.4 The drainage channels appear to be a post-medieval attempt to drain water away from the church walls, to alleviate damp problems encountered as a result of the rising churchyard levels from burial activity over the years. It is probable that the brick channel, 1, pre-dates that cement channel 5
- 4.1.5 Other than the foundations of the south porch, no earlier phases of the church's construction were observed during the course of the watching brief.
- 4.1.6 No evidence of any burials were encountered during the excavation of the test pits either in the form of graves cuts or articulated or dis-articulated human skeletal remains. Given the long history of the church it is unlikely that this area had not been utilised for burial. Rather, it is most likely that the limited depths of excavation of the test pits were insufficient to expose any burials.



## APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
1	Surface	0.12m	0.6m	> 2m	Brick built drainage channel	Brick	C19th/ C20th
2	Layer	> 0.6m	-	-	Churchyard soil	Stone	-
3	Wall	> 0.8m	0.6m	> 2m	Foundations of the west wall of the south porch	-	C14th
4	Wall	0.4m	0.15m	> 2m	Drystone retaining wall along edge of drainage channel	-	C19th/ C20th
5	Surface	0.08m	0.4m	> 2m	Cement drainage channel	-	C20th
6	Layer	0.15m	0.4m	> 2m	Hardcore base for channel 5	Brick	C20th
7	Wall	0.4m	0.15m	> 2m	Drystone retaining wall along edge of drainage channel	-	C19th/ C20th
8	Layer	> 0.3m	-	-	Churchyard soil	Stone	-
9	Wall	> 0.9m	0.6m	> 2m	Foundations of the east wall of the south porch	-	C14th



## APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- Chapman, M D, 2004                      *God's Holy Hill*
- Crossley, A and Elrington, C              Parishes: Cuddesdon, in *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 5: Bullingdon Hundred*, Victoria County History, 96-116  
(eds), 1957
- OAU, 1992                                      *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson), Oxford  
Archaeological Unit



## APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	The South Porch, All Saint's Church, Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire
Site code:	CUDASC 13
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SP 6007 0306
Type of watching brief:	Excavation of three test pits
Date and duration of project:	11th April 2013, One day
Area of site:	Approximately 100m <sup>2</sup>
Summary of results:	The watching brief observed details of the foundations of the south porch which were overlaid by churchyard soil. No evidence of burials or of any other activity was observed.
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at Janus House and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service under the Accession Number OXCMS: 2013.57



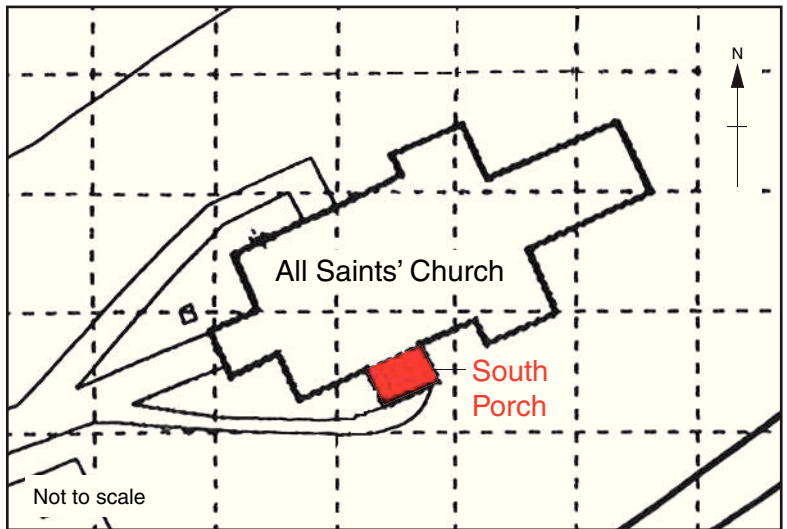


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Figure 1: Site location







Location of the south porch  
(reproduced from a plan by Montgomery Architects, 2012)

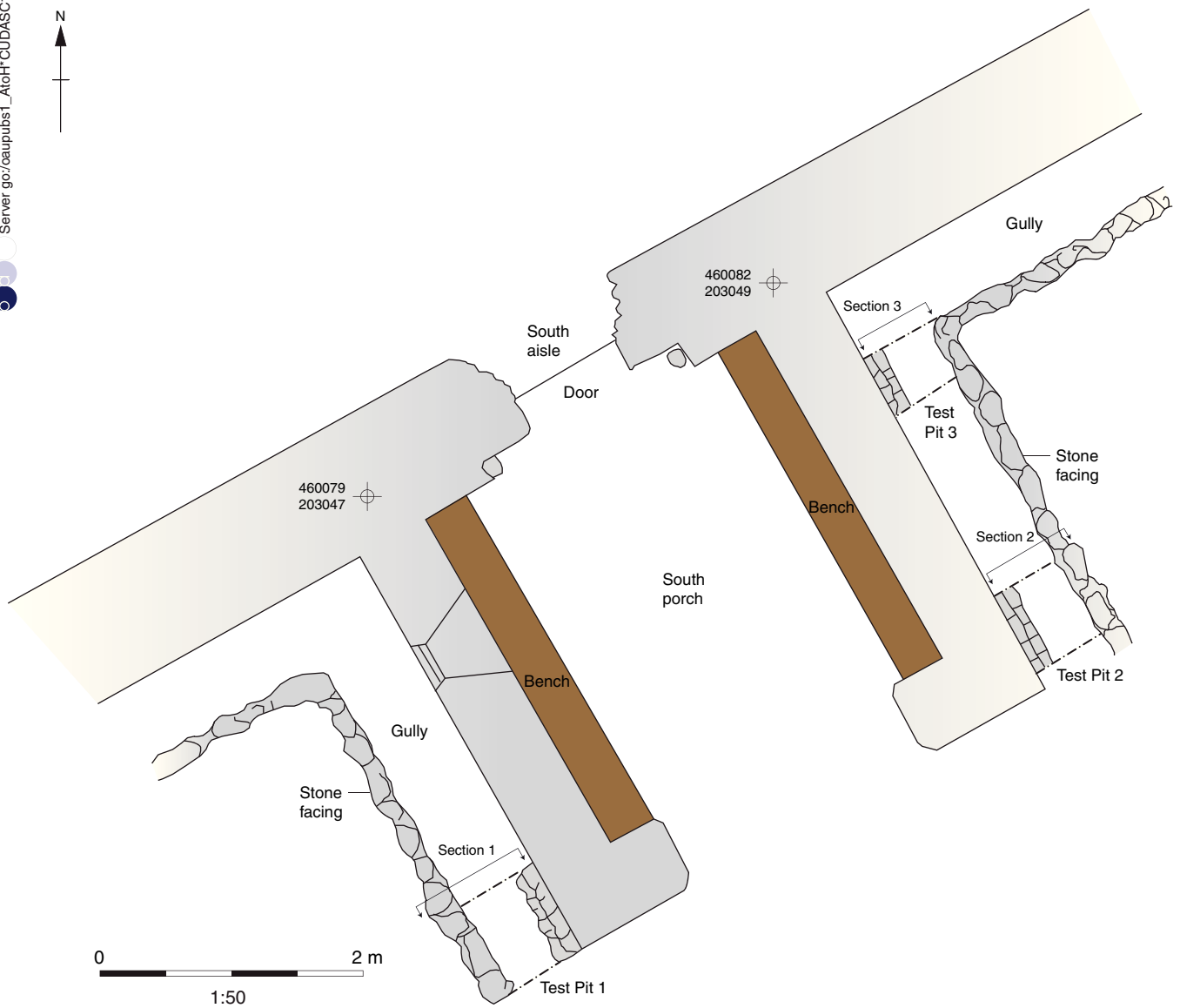


Figure 2: Location of the south porch and test pits



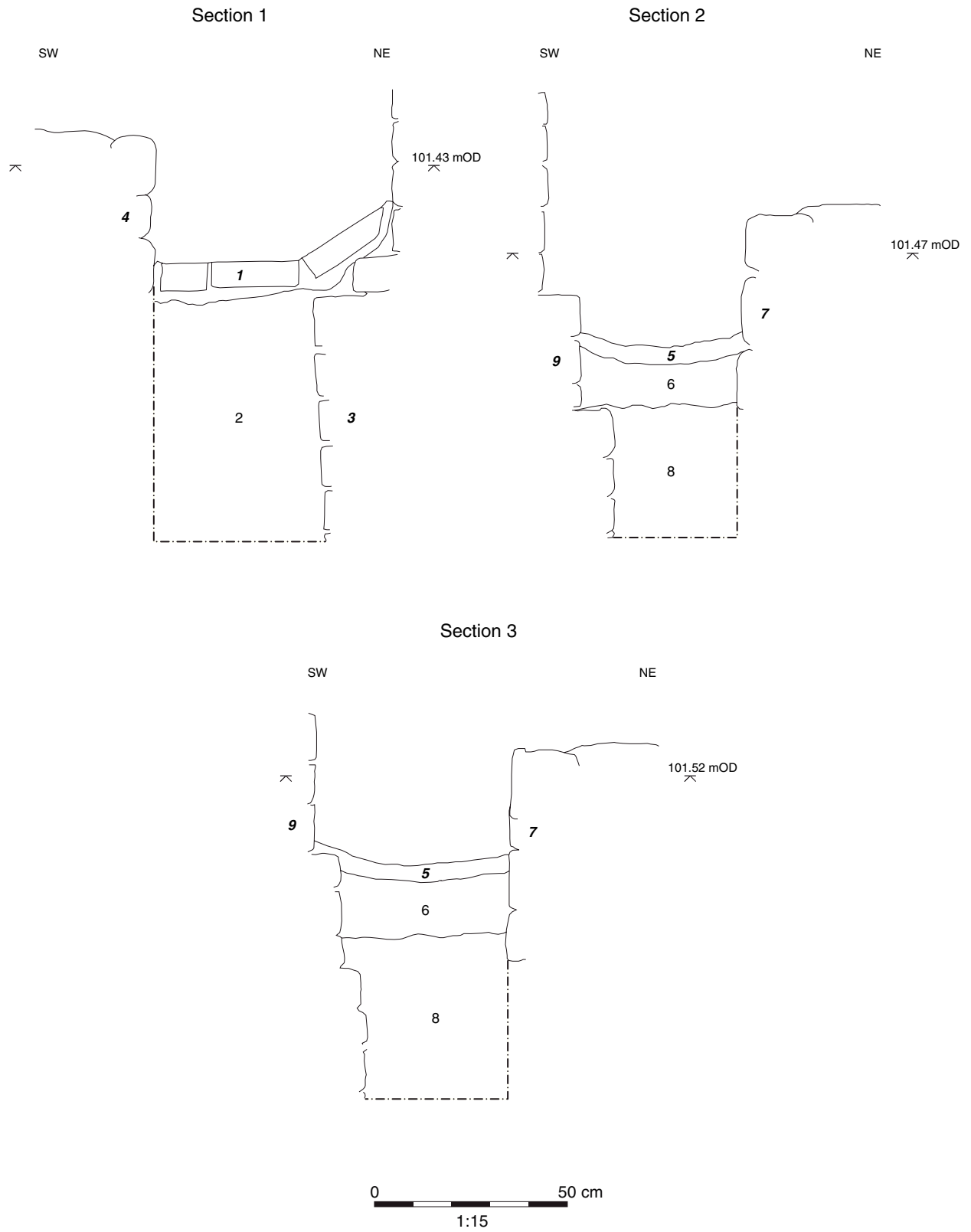


Figure 3: Sections 1-3







**Head Office/Registered Office/  
OA South**

Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800  
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496  
e: [info@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto:info@oxfordarchaeology.com)  
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

**OA North**

Mill 3  
Moor Lane  
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000  
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606  
e: [oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com)  
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

**OA East**

15 Trafalgar Way  
Bar Hill  
Cambridgeshire  
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500  
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)  
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



**Director:** Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MIFA  
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