

Former Garage Dawson Street Oxford Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeology

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Former Garage, Dawson Street Oxford

NGR SP 5245 0580

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Front Cover Plate: View of machining during the site clearance of contaminated soil.

SUMMARY

From March to April 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Former Garage, Dawson Street, Oxford, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 5245 0580). The work was commissioned by Knowles and Son Ltd and Dawson Trust in advance of construction of new student accommodation. The watching brief revealed a sequence of soil layers above the natural, some of which probably date to the medieval period when the site was unoccupied/pasture land. A post-medieval soil was cut by a pit containing a pig skeleton. No evidence for the possible site of Oxford's Civil War defences was observed during the work.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In March and April 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the former garage site in Dawson Street, Oxford (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Knowles and Son Ltd and the Dawson Trust in respect of a planning application for demolition and remediation of the garage site and the construction of two new buildings (Planning Application No. 01/02282/FUL).
- 1.1.2 A project brief was discussed with Oxford City's Archaeological Advisor, Brian Durham. Original discussions requiring a two-trench evaluation were revised to a watching brief in the light of the contaminated nature of below-ground deposits.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the discussions held with the City Archaeologist (OA 2002).

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The development site is located on the east edge of the historic core of Oxford, and in the vicinity of an outlying part of Oxford's Civil War defences. The garage site at Dawson Street is located c 250 m east of the River Cherwell within the ancient parish of Cowley.
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology of the site is Flood Plain Drift, comprising Terrace and River Gravels overlying Oxford Clay. A geotechnical borehole survey undertaken in October 2002 found a general sequence of Oxford Clay from a depth of c 3 m, overlain by clay of probable alluvial origin, in turn covered by a layer of modern sand, gravel and brick (Environ 2002).

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 reproduced below. Individual sites/finds are referred by their sites and monuments no (SMR).

- 1.3.2 There are no known archaeological find spots from Dawson Street itself. However a number of finds and archaeological works have been logged in the vicinity of the site. Excavations at 31-4 St Clements Street in 1980 during removal of a cellar wall revealed a ditch that may have formed part of a Civil War star-work shown on de Gomme's plan of Oxford's Civil War Defences dated 1644 (SMR 6614). Excavations at 56 St Clement's Street in 1912 during demolition of the Mission Hall revealed a late medieval carved stone head, with a cowl or wimple.
- 1.3.3 To the west of Dawson Street, archaeological excavations by OUAS at Magdalen College School in 1958 in advance of construction of a new science block revealed a mound dug during the Civil War for the defence of Magdalen Bridge. Ditches were found associated with the mound. Early medieval ditches, probably early property boundaries, and a pit were found to the north. (SMR 6199).
- 1.3.4 Excavations by Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) at the former British Restaurant on St Clement's Street in 1983 revealed that half the site was on the line of a massive ditch some 3.5 m deep and 17 m wide. This was interpreted as probably part of the Civil War defences (SMR 6671).
- 1.3.5 Archaeological excavations by OAEC at the Old Black Horse Yard, St Clement's Street in 1973 revealed pits and a well containing late medieval and Tudor pottery. Three possible parallel beam slots overlain by the remains of stone walls and stairs of cellars were recorded (SMR 6177).
- 1.3.6 Excavations in nearby York Place in 1945 recovered medieval pottery of types current from the 12th to 15th centuries; a 15th century jetton was also recovered (SMR 3561). A stray find is known from St Clement's Street dating to c 1869 and is a small leaden cross, with a shrouded figure, possibly part of a crucifix.

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 After the garage buildings were demolished the site was levelled and fuel tanks exposed and removed. The upper non-contaminated material was machined out and stored on site until the lower contaminated material was excavated and removed from site.
- 2.2.2 The clean material was then used to backfill the site, which was then covered with hardcore before the piling matt was installed. The proposed archaeological trenches were not opened: instead an extended watching brief was maintained throughout all groundwork operations.

2.2.3 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. 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 The general stratigraphy of the site was recorded in two sections (Fig. 3, sections 1 and 2). The natural of the site was a light brown and grey clay (112). This was overlain by a possible early ploughsoil of reddish brown (115) and dark brown (111) silty sand loam. The plough soil layer (111=115) was overlain by a layer of contaminated dark grey silty sand (110). Overlying these layers was a 0.4 m thick cultivated layer of dark brown silty sand (109 and 114).

3.1.2 Along the west side of the site, layer 109 was covered with a thin 0.1 m thick layer of gravel (108) in turn overlain by a deposit of dark brown silty sand (107) that contained 19th-century building debris. The site was covered with a 0.45 m to 0.70 m thick layer of disturbed dark brown silty sand and clay loam (106 and 113), an old topsoil. Concrete and hardcore associated with the garage sealed all underlying deposits.

3.1.3 To the middle of the site, a feature (Fig. 3 and 4, section 3) was revealed sealed below the post-medieval cultivated soil (114). This was an irregular shaped pit (102), with irregular but sloping sides from vertical and an uneven base. It was filled by a dark brown silty clay loam (101), which contained the remains of a pig skeleton (see below). The fill also contained sherds of late post-medieval glazed pottery.

3.1.4 This pit had been cut into a plough soil (100, same as 111/115) that contained wide-bore clay pipe stems, post-medieval tile and a white china pottery sherd. The fill of the pit had been cut by a modern rectangular test pit (104) that had been backfilled with sand (103). Sherds of a white china cup were also within the fill.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 A number of finds were recovered from the site during the watching brief and consisted of the following:

Animal Bone Report by Emma-Jayne Evans

3.2.2 A total of 124 (352 g) bones were excavated from the site. From this number, 117 (94.3%) bones and teeth (317 g) could be identified to species. The animal bones excavated were in good condition. A list of all the species identified is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Total number of bones identifiable to species

Context		Cattle	pig	s/g	Unid	Total
100	Quantity				1	1
	Weight (g)				6	6
101	Quantity	1	114*	2	6	123
	Weight (g)	35	272	10	29	346
Total Quantity		1	114	2	7	124
Total Weight (g)		35	272	10	35	352

*pig burial

- 3.2.3 The pig remains from this site make up the large majority of bones recovered. The pig bones are from a burial aged 1 - 3 months as determined using tooth eruption and wear stages and fusion data. The cattle and sheep/goat remains both had evidence of butchery marks, but the small quantity of bones available does not allow any conclusions to be drawn as to the importance and use of individual species from the site.

Pottery by Paul Booth

- 3.2.4 The pottery comprises a total of 10 sherds of late post-medieval/modern date material date. Two sherds of green glazed ware were recovered from pit fill 101.

Other finds by Leigh Allen

- 3.2.5 Twelve pieces of late post-medieval date clay pipes were recovered: these require little comment (context 100). A single iron object from context 100 appears to be the corroded remains of a ?knife.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The watching brief exposed a sequence of soil layers above the natural of uncertain date. Some probably date to the medieval period when the site was unoccupied/pasture land. A post-medieval soil was cut by a pit containing the pig skeleton, suggesting that by this time there was occupation nearby.
- 4.1.2 Precise dating for the feature was not possible on the basis of the few finds recovered. A possible gravel surface was seen in section below layers and deposits relating to 18th/19th century developments on the site, and latterly the garage site itself.
- 4.1.3 No evidence of the line of Oxford's Civil War defences was revealed in this exercise.

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>
100	Layer	0.2 m+	-	-	Post-medieval soil	PM pottery
101	Fill	0.5 m	-	-	In pit 102	Pig skeleton
102	Cut	0.4 m	1.5 m	0.5 m+	Post-medieval pit	
103	Fill	0.2 m	-	-	Fill of 104	Modern
104	Cut	0.2 m	1.8 m	-	Modern pit	-
105	Layer	-	-	-	Contaminated soil	-
106	Layer	0.5 m	-	-	Topsoil	-
107	Layer	0.15 m	-	-	19th century building material	-
108	Layer	0.1 m	-	-	Gravel layer	-
109	Layer	0.3 m	-	-	Soil layer	-
110	Layer	0.3-0.4 m	-	-	Soil layer	-
111	Layer	0.3 m	-	-	Soil layer/subsoil	-
112	Layer	0.12 m+	-	-	Natural clay	-
113	Layer	0.33 m	-	-	Topsoil	-
114	Layer	0.35 m	-	-	Soil layer	-
115	Layer	0.22 m	-	-	Soil layer	-

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Environ 2002 *Phase 2 Site Investigation, for Knowles and Son Design and Build Limited*

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

OA 2002 Dawson Street Oxford. *Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological evaluation*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Former Garage, Dawson Street, Oxford, Oxfordshire

Site code: OXDAWS 03

Grid reference: NGR SP 5245 0580

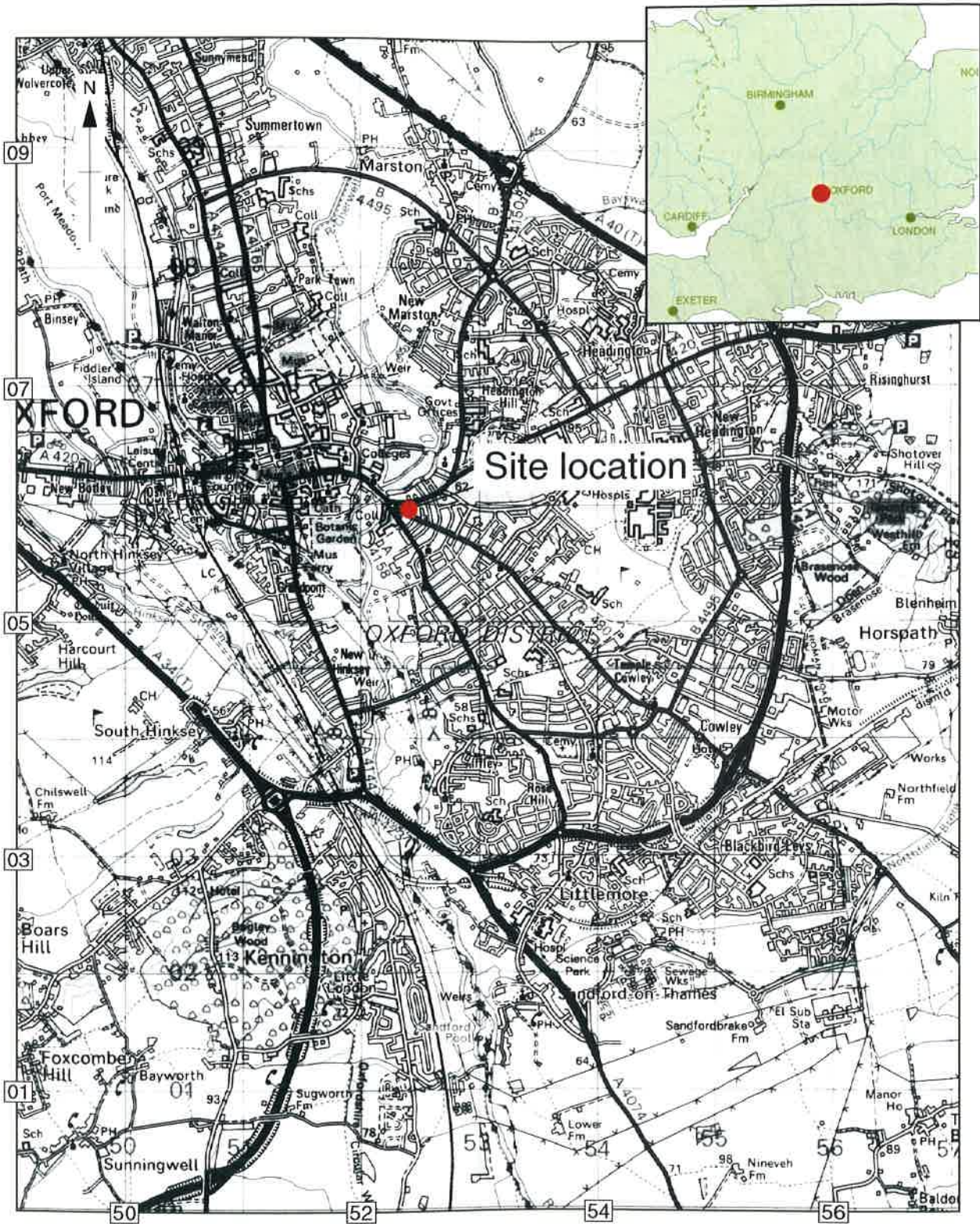
Type of watching brief: Extended watching of soil remediation and reinstatement

Date and duration of project: March and April 2003

Area of site: 40 m X 20 m

Summary of results: Soil layers above the natural; post-medieval soil was cut by a pit containing a pig skeleton. Possible gravel surface below layers and deposits relating to 18th/19th century developments on the site.

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: OXCMS 2003.36



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location



Figure 2: Detailed site location

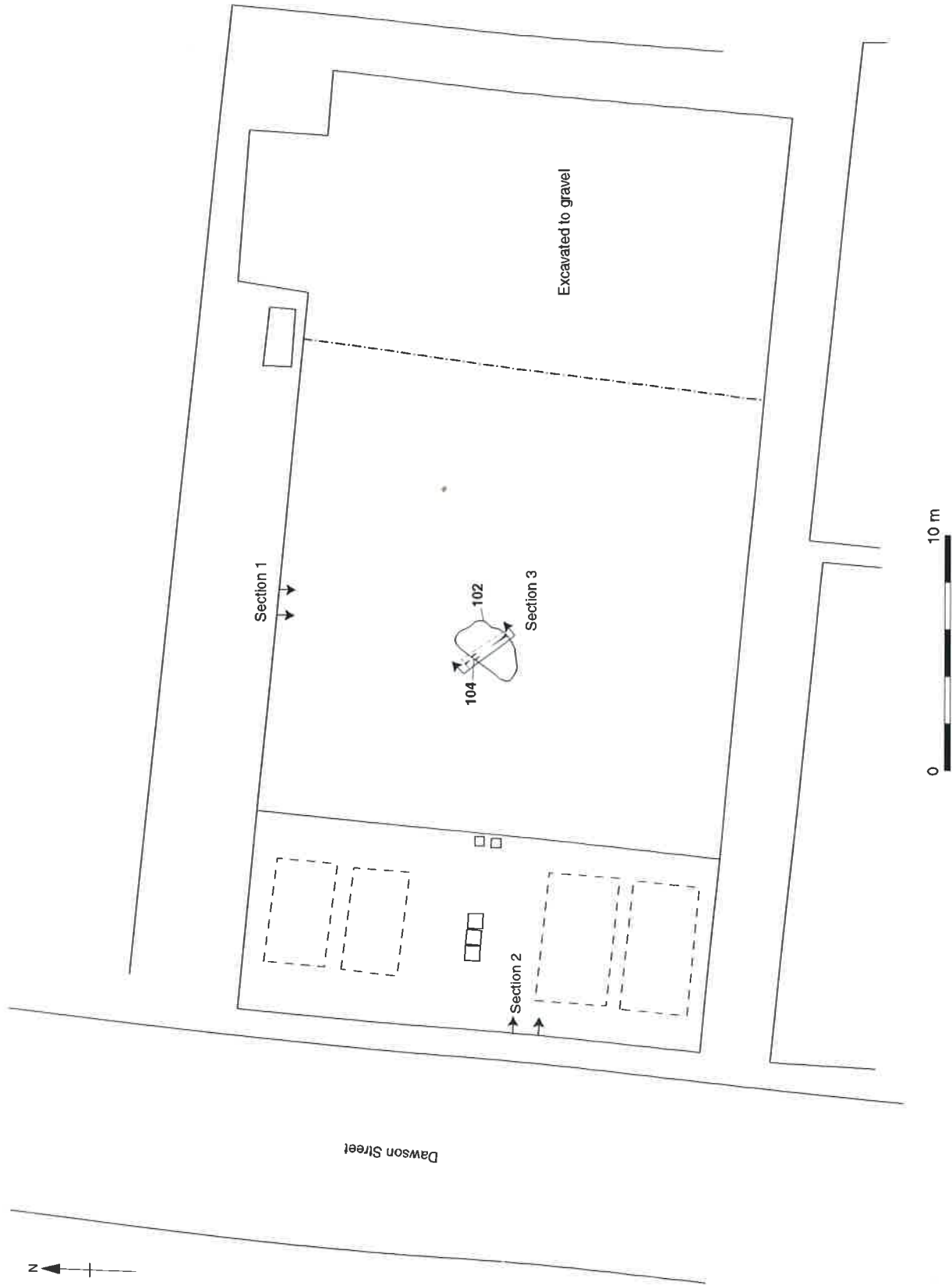
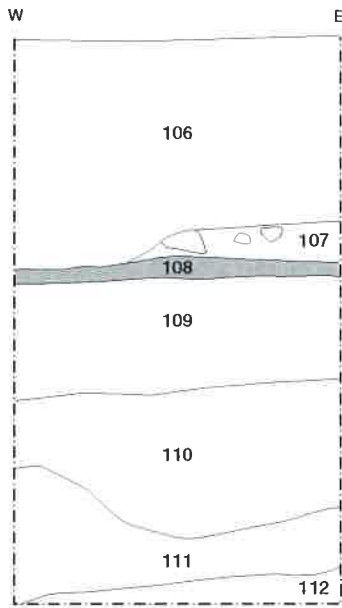
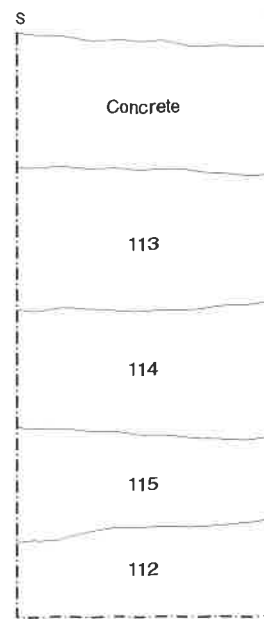


Figure 3: Site plan and location of sections

Section 1



Section 2



Section 3

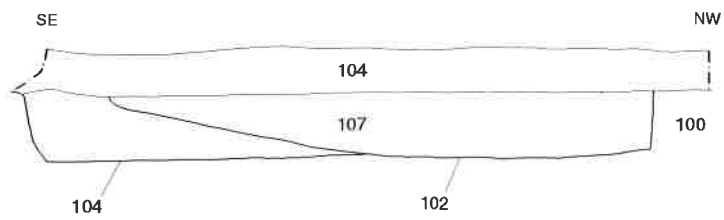


Figure 4: Sections



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