

2-4 Northcroft Lane
Newbury
West Berkshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



Oxford Archaeology

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Signed.....



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SUMMARY

Between July and November 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 2-4 Northcroft Lane, Newbury, West Berkshire, (NGR: SU 470 672). The work was commissioned by John Clark Associates in advance of construction of three dwellings and the conversion of the former Alms House on the site. The watching brief revealed 19th and 20th century demolition layers overlying alluvial deposits, of which only the upper layer showed any evidence of activity. No evidence for any archaeology earlier than the 19th century was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 Between July and November 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at No. 2 Northcroft Lane, Newbury, West Berkshire (NGR SU 470 672). A Level 2 building record was also undertaken by OA at No. 4 Northcroft Lane (forthcoming) in advance of the conversion works to be carried out on the former Alms House (Fig. 2). The work was commissioned by John Clark Associates in respect of a planning application for construction of three new "Town Houses" and conversion of the grade II listed former Alms House (Planning Application No. 02/02116/LBC).

1.1.2 A project brief was set by Veronica Fiorato, Principal Archaeological Officer for West Berkshire Council, in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan policies.

1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief, which was approved by the Principal Archaeological Officer prior to intrusive works starting on site.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on at approximately 76 m above OD. The site is situated on the north side of Northcroft Lane, adjacent to the River Kennet (Fig.1) and is approximately 20 m x 20 m in area. The underlying geology is alluvium overlying river gravel.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 An archaeological background to the site was prepared for the WSI (OA, 2003) and is summarised below.

1.3.2 The site is located within the medieval historic core of Newbury. Astill, in his *Historic Towns of Berkshire: an Archaeological Appraisal (1978)*, identifies this area of the town as being of archaeological interest in having the potential to elucidate the medieval and post-medieval development of the settlement and specifically to assist in the understanding of the town's burgage plots. These are the narrow plots of land running back from the main streets at right angles, which were laid out early in the life of the town.

- 1.3.3 No. 4 Northcroft Lane is a grade II listed building and former almshouse erected in 1821. It is a red brick building, two storeys tall with a hipped roof, and is constructed in a Gothic style. An inscription over the doorway shows that it was erected by Mr. John Childs, a sailcloth manufacturer, '*for poor men of good moral character, natives and parishioners of Newbury*' (Victoria County History, 1972).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To preserve by record any archaeological remains (if present) that the development may remove or damage during site preparation, the excavation of ground beams, pile caps and any additional services.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 All excavations within the defined area of 2-4 Northcroft Lane, whether by hand digging or by machine were undertaken in the presence of a qualified archaeologist.
- 2.2.2 The extent of these excavations (Fig. 2), and their locations was planned at a scale of 1:50. A number of representative sections, as well as those of specific interest, were drawn at a scale of 1:20, with their locations recorded on the main plans. These sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made.
- 2.2.3 Use was made of the architects plans as well as offsetting from standing buildings to survey the site. An optical level was used to record levels.
- 2.2.4 Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The primary deposit located within the sequence (Fig. 3, section 3) was a dark grey silty clay (104). This was a fine deposit with no inclusions, whose full depth was not exposed. A sequence of laminated alluvial deposits (103) overlay the thick clay (104). Layer 103 was a tenacious olive green silty clay alluvium containing a large amount of flint gravel.
- 3.1.2 These alluvial deposits (103 and 104) were sealed by a tenacious olive yellow silty clay (102), which was very clean with no observable finds. This in turn was overlain by a friable clay silt alluvium (101), which produced large amounts of fragmented and abraded ceramic building material dating to the 19th and 20th century (Fig. 3, section 3). This context may have been part of the foreshore or bank of the River Kennet before being reclaimed for development.

- 3.1.3 The main area of the site was then sealed by a friable sandy silt (100), containing large amounts of demolition debris and modern finds. This layer had been spread during the demolition of the previous standing structure (Browness Sports shop) and the removal of the floor base to seal the truncated footings of the structure (Fig. 3, sections 1, 2 and 3). This layer (101) was a mix of alluvial silts together with construction and demolition debris, all dated to between the 19th and 20th centuries.
- 3.1.4 Within the footprint of the Almshouse a levelling layer (105) was exposed below the brick floor (Fig.3, section 4). This was composed of a mixture of silts and construction debris of the same date as the house. This lay directly over alluvial layer (101), which suggests that the construction of the Almshouse was probably the first activity on this site. Layer 100 also sealed fill (106), a mix of redeposited soils and 19th and 20th ceramics (Fig. 2). This was rubbish backfilling pit (107), which was cut into the surface of alluvium (101).

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 The overlying demolition layer (100) produced 19th and 20th century finds including brick, window and bottle glass, transfer printed ceramics and mass produced stoneware, as well as an assortment of modern plastic and metal tins. These finds were evaluated on site and were not retained. The upper alluvial layer (101) produced many fragments of ceramic building material, however these were undiagnostic due to their size. The lower alluvial layers (102, 103 and 104) did not produce any finds within the limited extent excavated. Leveling layer (105) produced fragments of hand made brick consistent with the early 19th century date of the Almshouse. The fill (106) of rubbish pit 107 produced a large amount of factory produced Saltglazed ware, all parts of storage jars dating to between the late 19th and early 20th century.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for the recovery and preservation of palaeo-environmental remains were encountered.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The location of the site, close to the medieval core of Newbury had the potential to expose possible burgage plots and evidence for the post-medieval development of this area. The results from this watching brief have proven disappointing in this respect, with only a limited activity showing in the site stratigraphy.
- 4.1.2 Clearly demolition layer 100, dating to the 19th and 20th century, overlaid the latest alluvial deposit (101), which in turn sealed earlier alluvial deposits of the River Kennet. This indicated that building activity within this area did not developed until the later post-medieval and modern era, though equally this does not rule out earlier activity, which may have been truncated prior to or during the construction of the Almshouse.
- 4.1.3 Such activity could have been the reclamation of river foreshore for the purposes of building. If this was the case though, we would expect to find earlier features such as postholes and beam-slots used to tie in and pin down tipped deposits commonly used

in land reclamation and again no evidence for this was found during the watching brief. Neither was there evidence of ploughing or dredging activity that may account for the lack of archaeology in this location. A more detailed desktop assessment of this area, particularly of earlier maps and the construction dates of adjacent buildings may provide additional information to support these conclusions.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
100	Layer	0.2 m - 0.3 m	Overall demolition layer	Brick, tile, glass, pottery, metal	C19th and C20th
101	Layer	0.25 m - 0.3 m	Disturbed alluvium	Brick and tile fragments	Unknown
102	Layer	0.15 m	Alluvium	-	-
103	Layer	0.15 m	Alluvium	-	-
104	Layer	> 0.18 m	Alluvium	-	-
105	Layer	0.2 m	Levelling layer	Brick, tile	C19th
106	Fill	> 0.5 m	Fill of rubbish pit	Saltglazed pottery	Late C19th and early C20th
107	Pit	1 m x 0.7 m diam. by > 0.5m deep	Victorian rubbish pit	-	Late C19th and early C20th

APPENDIX 2 REFERENCES

- Astill, 1978 *Historic Towns of Berkshire: an archaeological appraisal*
- OA, 2003 *2-4 Northcroft Lane, Newbury, West Berkshire: Written Scheme of Investigation*
- OAU, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual*, (ed. D. Wilkinson, August 1992)
- Victoria County History, 1972 *Berkshire* 4,153

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: 2-4 Northcroft Lane, Newbury, West Berkshire

Site code: NENOL 03

Grid reference: SU 470 672

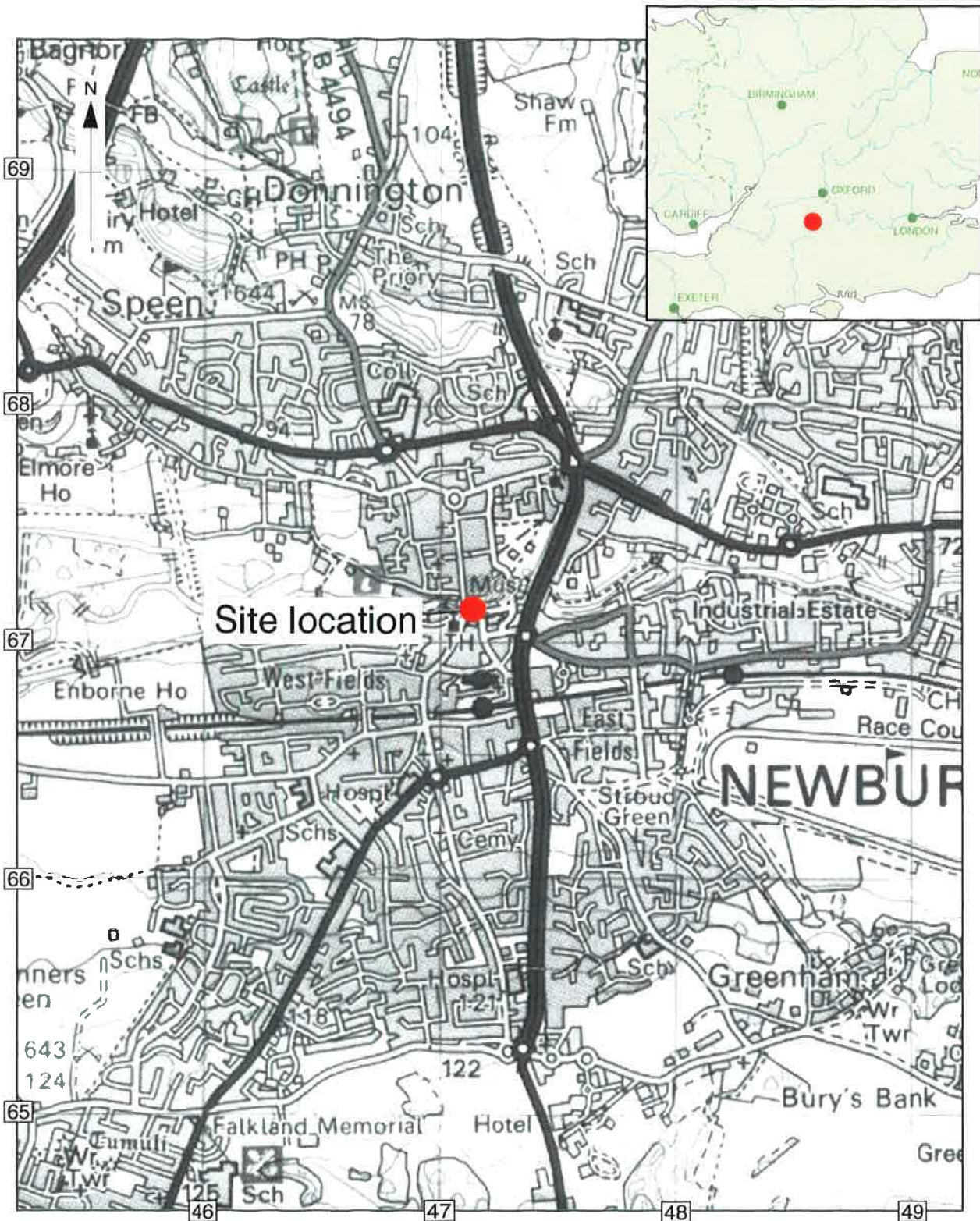
Type of watching brief: Monitoring of groundworks during the new construction of townhouses and the conversion of existing building.

Date and duration of project: 14 site visits between 2nd July and 4 November 2003

Area of site: Approximately 20 m², 0.04 ha

Summary of results: Evidence for late post-medieval activity overlying alluvial deposits, suggesting late development of the site and possible reclamation of land.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with West Berkshire Heritage Services in due course.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

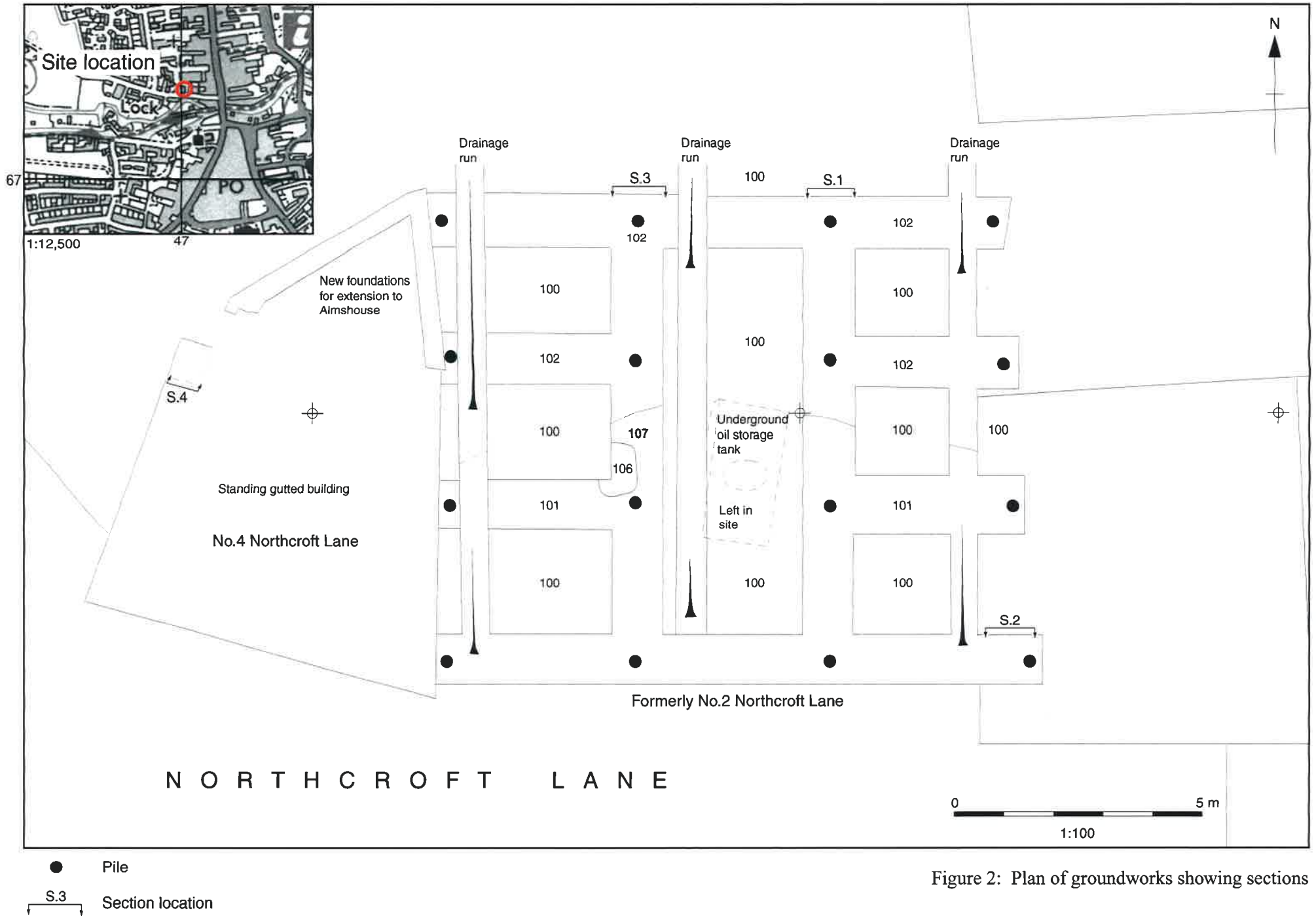


Figure 2: Plan of groundworks showing sections

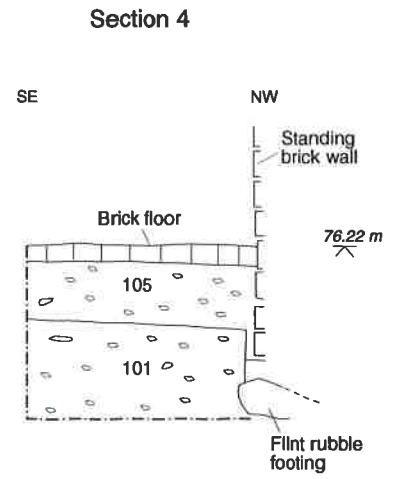
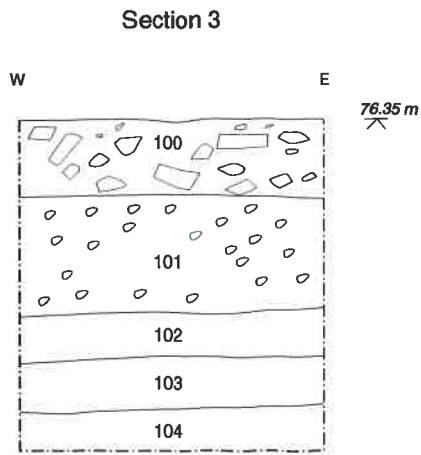
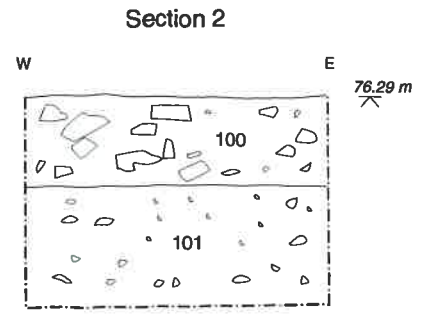
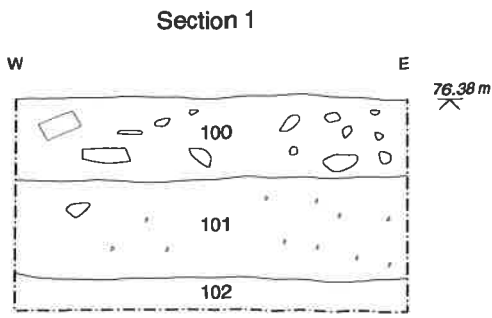


Figure 3: Sections 1-4



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