

# The Courtyard Theatre Stratford-upon-Avon Warwickshire



## Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief Report



**Oxford Archaeology**

November 2005

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Company**

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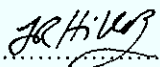
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# **The Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire**

## ***ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF REPORT***

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## SUMMARY

*On May 16th 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at the Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire (NGR: SP 20136 54578) on behalf of The Royal Shakespeare Company. The evaluation revealed modern made ground directly overlying river terrace deposits. No significant archaeological features or deposits were observed. A subsequent watching brief on the foundation trenches for the new building revealed no features or finds.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 On May 16th 2005 OA carried out a field evaluation at the Courtyard Theatre, Southern Lane, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire (NGR: SP 20136 54578) on behalf of The Royal Shakespeare Company, in respect of a planning application for the erection of a temporary thrust stage theatre and alteration of "The Other Place's" existing building to provide ancillary facilities (Planning Application No. 04/03899/FULL ).
- 1.1.2 A brief (Warwickshire Museum Field Service 2005) was set by Warwickshire's County Field Archaeologist, Jonathan Parkhouse, and OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (OA 2005) detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The development site is situated towards the southern edge of Stratford-upon-Avon (Fig. 1), approximately 50 m west of the River Avon. The site is currently a carpark to the immediate north-east of "The Other Place Theatre" building. The site occupies roughly 0.13 hectares with a gentle north-west to south-east slope running from 38 m AOD down to 37.2 m AOD.
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology is 2nd Terrace Gravels (BGS Sheet 200, Stratford-upon-Avon, Solid and Drift Geology, 1974).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The background research for this site has previously been undertaken by the AOC Archaeological Group (AOC 2001) in their archaeological assessment. A summary of this document has been given below.
- 1.3.2 The site lies within an area of significant archaeological potential, lying immediately outside of the borough boundary of medieval Stratford-upon-Avon (SMR no. MWA 9582). The present borough boundary is believed to respect the former 12th century settlement boundary. Across from the site on the east side of the river, an Anglo-Saxon cemetery was discovered in 1932, containing both inhumed and cremated

burials along with rich grave goods. Prior to this period little is known about Stratford having developed after the Roman settlement at Tiddington, 1.5 km to the east. During the mid-Saxon period, this area formed part of the Bishopric of Worcester and later Stratford became its centre following the establishment of a minster at *Ilfera* (Upper) *Stretford* by the late 8th century.

- 1.3.3 The town developed in the 12th century with the creation of a planned town in 1196, which was based on a grid and divided into burgage plots. There is, however, less archaeological potential along the riverside for remains of this period. During the post-medieval period the town expanded and the majority of historic buildings within Stratford today date from this later period. There is therefore a greater potential to encounter remains of this period above the rest (WMFS 2005).

## **2 EVALUATION AIMS**

## **3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Scope of fieldwork**

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of one trench measuring 23 m in length by 1.8 m wide. The trench was aligned south-east by north-west and located towards the eastern edge of the car park (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.2 The overburden was removed under close archaeological supervision by a mechanical excavator (JCB) fitted with a 1.8 m wide toothless grading bucket. Excavation proceeded in spits down to either undisturbed natural deposits or to the first significant archaeological horizon, whichever was encountered first. A 1.6 m deep sondage was dug in the north-western end of the trench in order to determine if there were any buried soil horizons sealed below the alluvial deposits.

### **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 where possible, to retrieve finds and environmental samples. An overall plan of the trench was drawn at a scale of 1:50 and sample sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The trench and the 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 Palaeo-environmental evidence**

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the evaluation.

### **3.4 Presentation of results**

- 3.4.1 The results of the evaluation are presented overleaf, starting with the stratigraphic account of the trench followed by an overall discussion and interpretation.

## **4 RESULTS: GENERAL**

### **4.1 Soils and ground conditions**

- 4.1.1 The site is located on a gentle slope and comprised tarmac, hardcore and made ground overlying natural river terrace deposits. The water table was not encountered.

### **4.2 Distribution of archaeological deposits**

- 4.2.1 No significant archaeological deposits were encountered.

## **5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS**

### **5.1 Description of deposits**

- 5.1.1 Within the sondage (Fig. 3, section 2) a sequence of river terrace deposits was exposed starting with a layer of pale yellow gravels (17), which was reached at a depth of 1.4 m below ground level. Sealing this was a 0.15 m thick layer of dark red-brown sand (16) containing many small river pebbles. This was overlaid by a 0.45 m deep layer of coarse dark red sand (15). Overlying this was a 0.2 m thick layer of dark red-brown clayey sand (14) containing many small river pebbles (Fig. 3, sections 1 and 2). This was sealed by a layer of dark red-brown sandy clay (13), of between 0.1 m and 0.15 m in depth, which contained occasional charcoal flecking and small lenses of yellow-brown silt and which may represent the last phase of river terrace deposits.

- 5.1.2 This layer was sealed by a geo-textile membrane upon which the 0.2 m thick layer of mixed yellow-brown clay silt and modern hardcore (12) had been laid. This was overlaid by a 0.1 m thick layer of pale yellow crushed stone (11), the base for the 0.08 m thick layer of tarmac (10), the current car park surface.

### **5.2 Finds**

- 5.2.1 The only artefacts recovered during the course of the watching brief were modern in date from within layer (12). These included modern frogged bricks, crisp packets and a lorry mud flap. These were evaluated on site but were not retained.

### **5.3 Palaeo-environmental remains**

- 5.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were observed during the course of the watching brief.



## 6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

### 6.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 6.1.1 The percentage sample of the proposed development area (2.2 %) and the uniformity of the deposits throughout the length of the trench give a high confidence that the interpretation will apply across the development area.

### 6.2 Overall interpretation

- 6.2.1 The lower deposits within the trench are consistent with river terrace deposits associated with the River Avon. The uppermost of these, Layer (13), shows some evidence of alluvial activity as indicated by the charcoal flecking and lenses of silt. The absence of an alluvial silt deposit sealing the gravels and sands may be indicative of ground reduction within the vicinity of the development area. The presence of a geo-textile membrane sealing the gravels would also suggest this. It is possible that previous development had removed the top and sub soils during the construction of the existing car park.
- 6.2.2 While it is possible that this truncation may have removed some archaeological evidence the absence of intrusive features or residual finds suggests that this area supported only minimal activity and may have been originally flood meadows or part of the river foreshore prior to establishment of the current river banks.

## 7 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

- 7.1.1 After a verbal summary of the evaluation results, Jonathan Parkhouse, Warwickshire's County Field Archaeologist, attached a condition requiring a watching brief be kept on the excavation of the proposed buildings foundation. Particular attention was to be paid to the excavations along the western edge of the buildings footprint since this may encounter the medieval borough boundary.
- 7.1.2 The foundation excavations consisted of a total length of 112 m of 4 m wide by 2.2 m deep trenching (Fig. 2). The stratigraphy exposed within these excavations was similar to the stratigraphy exposed in the sondage within the evaluation trench (Fig. 3, section 2), with no intrusive features observed within any of the sections or residual finds recovered from the spoil heaps.
- 7.1.3 The same degree of truncation observed during the evaluation was noted throughout the site during the course of the watching brief. No evidence for the medieval borough boundary was encountered.
- 7.1.4 The evidence from the watching brief supports both the conclusions and interpretation derived from the evaluation.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
10	Layer	0.08 m	Modern tarmac surface	-	C20th
11	Layer	0.1 m	Crushed stone	-	C20th
12	Layer	0.2 m	Modern made ground	Brick, plastic, rubber	C20th
13	Layer	0.18 m	Dirty sand	Charcoal flecking	-
14	Layer	0.2 m	Small pebbles in a clay-sand matrix	-	-
15	Layer	0.45 m	Coarse sand	-	-
16	Layer	0.18 m	Small pebbles in a clay-sand matrix	-	-
17	Layer	> 0.2 m	Oolitic gravels	-	-

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- AOC, 2001 *Royal Shakespeare Company Stratford-upon-Avon Redevelopment Project. An Archaeological Assessment*
- IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluations*
- OA, 2005 *The Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation*
- OAU, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)
- WMFS, 2005 *Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation. The Other Place, Southern Lane, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire*

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** The Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire

**Site code:** SBT 2005.17

**Grid reference:** SP 20136 54578

**Type of evaluation:** 1 machine dug trench, 23 m in length

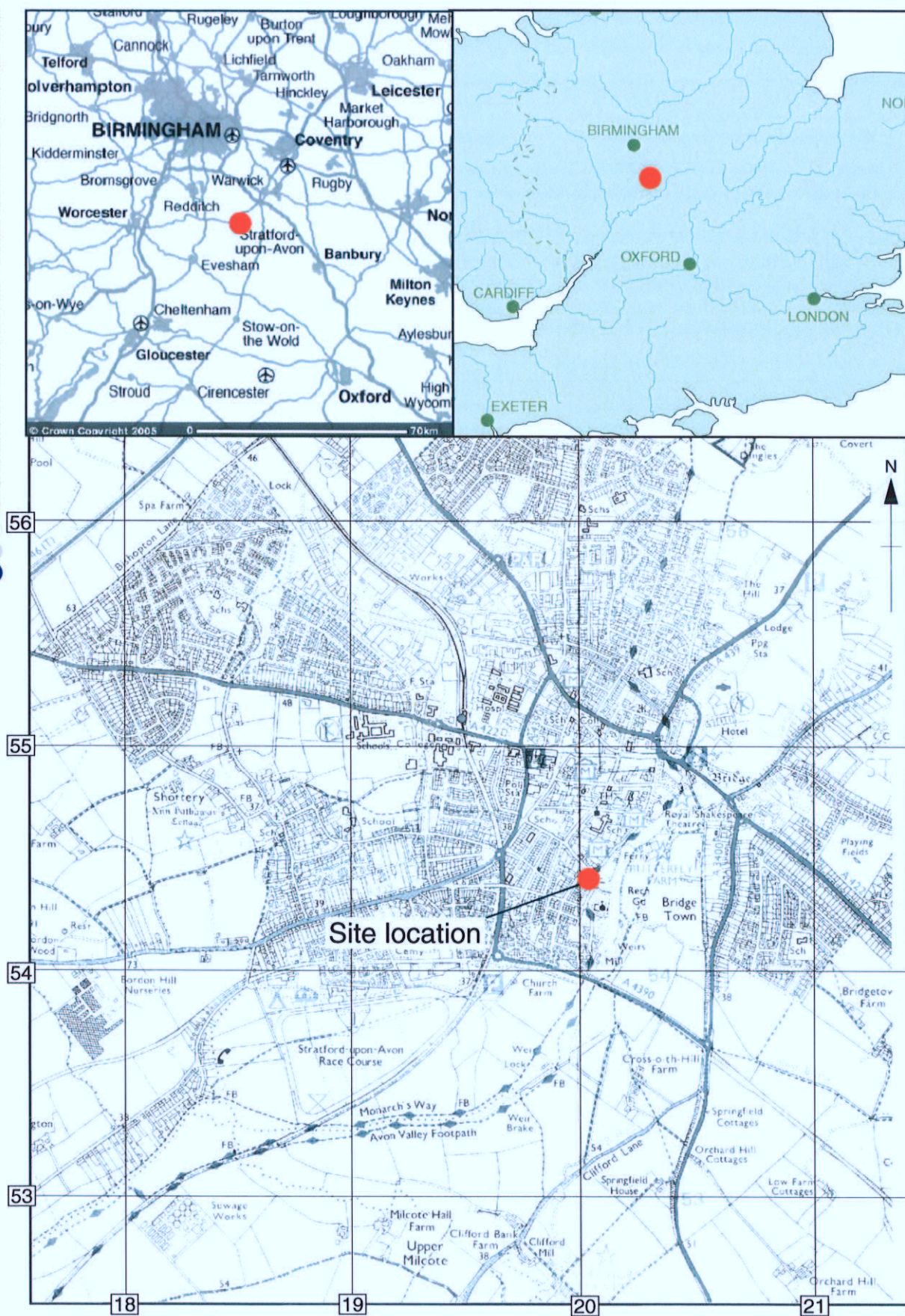
**Date and duration of project:** 16th May, 2005, 1 day (Evaluation) and 3 site visits between July and September 2005

**Area of site:** 0.13 hectares

**Summary of results:** Modern tarmac and made ground directly overlying river terrace deposits

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in due course, under the following accession number: SBT 2005.17





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Figure 1: Site location



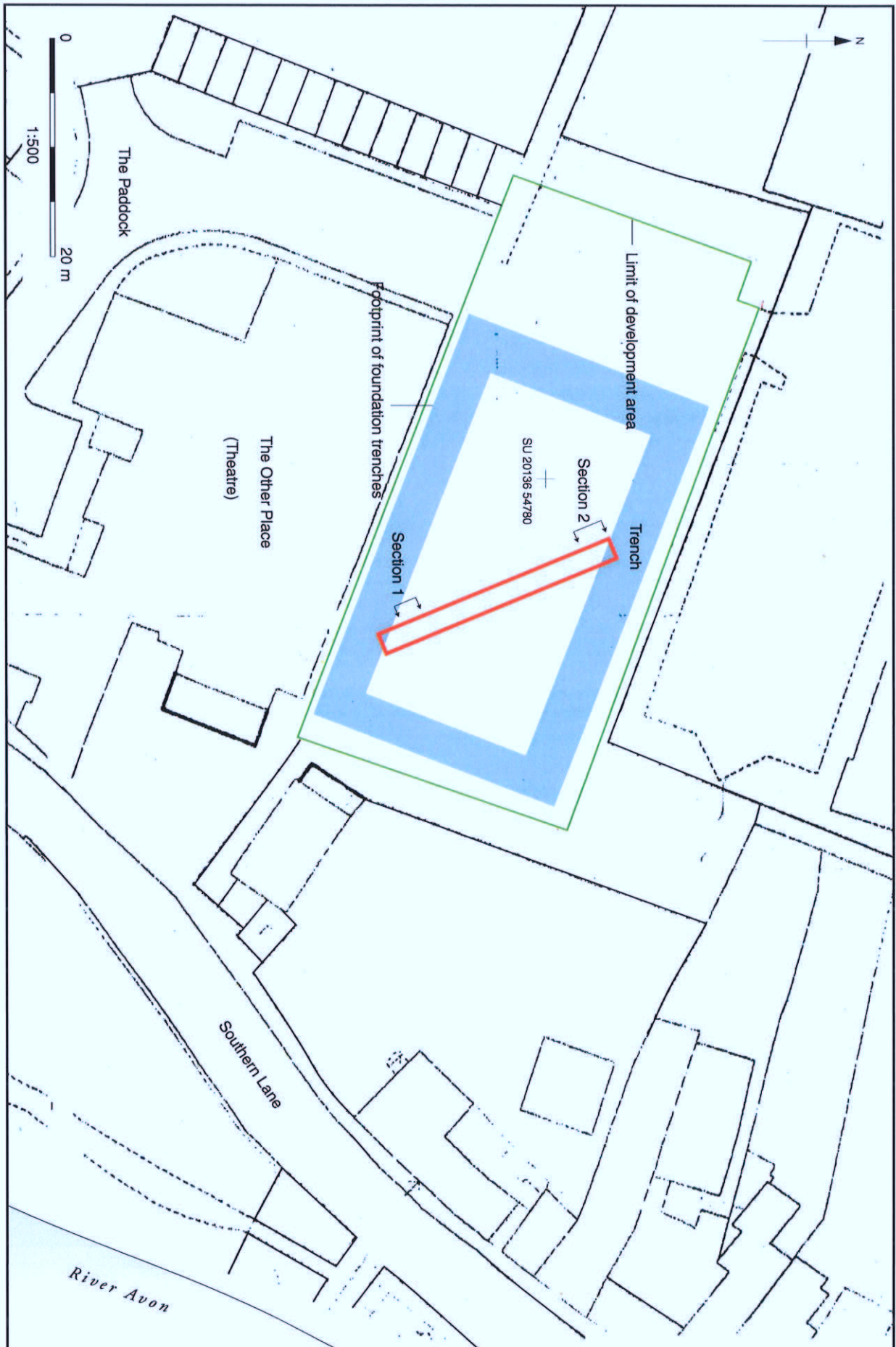


Figure 2: Trench location plan

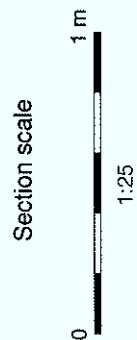
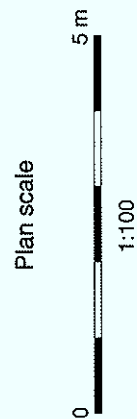
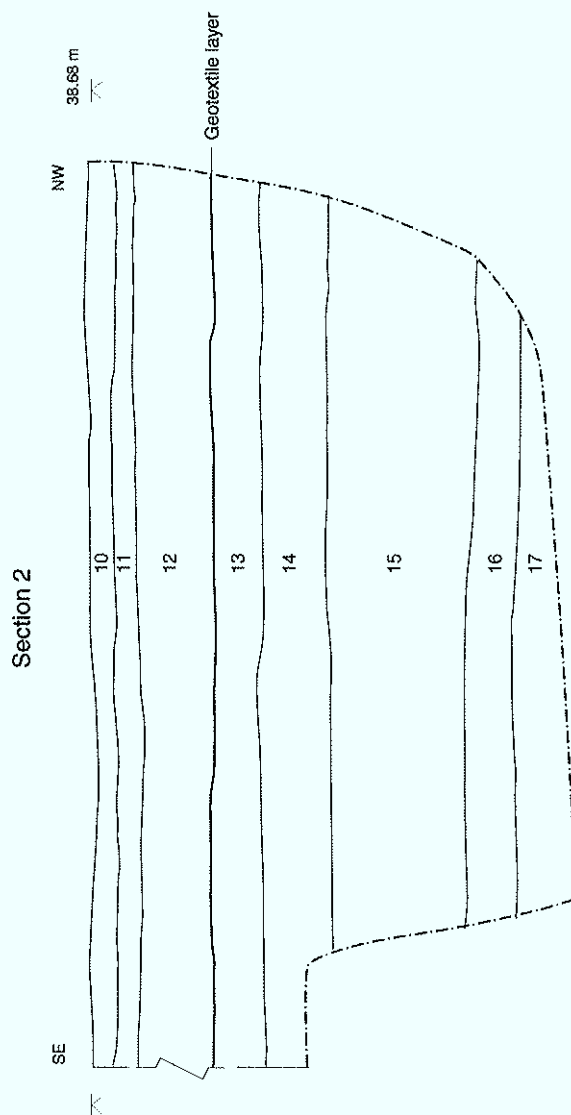
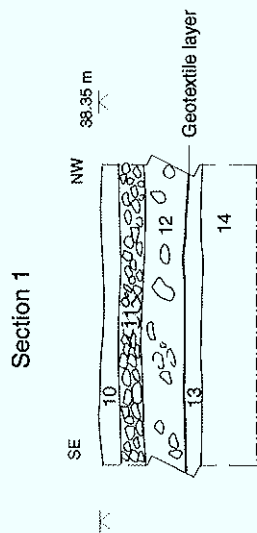
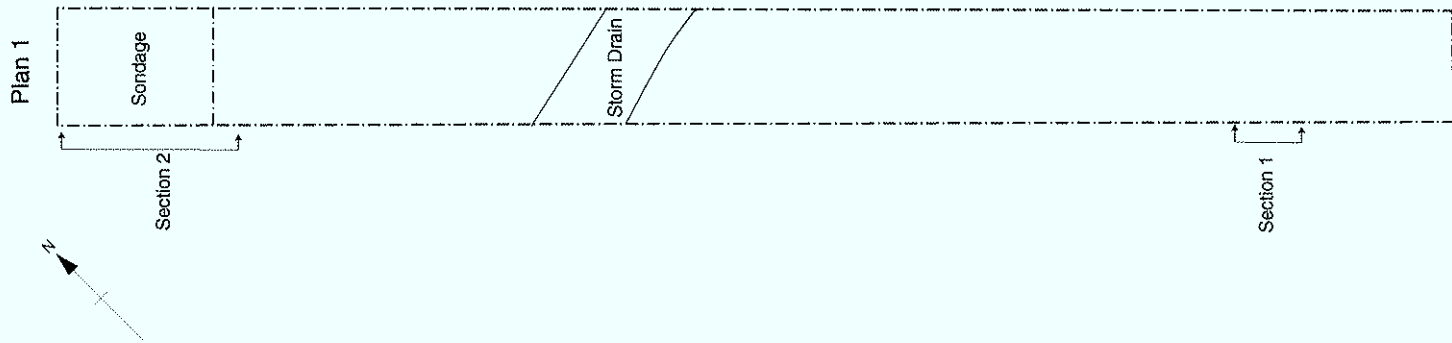


Figure 3: Plan and sections



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