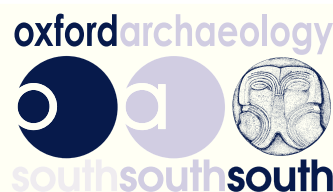


# New Fish and Wildlife Bypass Channel Aborfield Berkshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



April 2011

**Client: Environmental Agency**



ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Issue No: 1

OA Job No: 4868

NGR: SU 7465 6799





Client Name: Environment Agency

Client Ref No:

Document Title: New Fish and Wildlife Bypass Channel, Aborfield, Berkshire

Document Type: Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Issue/Version Number: 1

Grid Reference: SU 7465 6799

Planning Reference:

Invoice Code: ABORBYWB

OA Job Number: 4868

Site Code: ABORBY 10

Receiving Museum: Reading Museum

Museum Accession No.: REDMG:2010.113

Event No.:

Issue	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by	Signature
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Document File Location: Smallworks on Server 1\Projects\Berkshire BR\Reading RD\12380 Aborfield Fish Channel\WB Report (1).odt

Graphics File Location: Server go:/oapubs 1\_AtoH\*ABORBY10\*ABORBYWB\*Aborfield fish channel\*MD\*07.04.11

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## **New Fish and Wildlife Bypass Channel, Aborfield, Berkshire**

*Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

*Written by Mike Sims*

*and illustrated by Markus Dylewski*

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## Summary

*Between October 2010 and January 2011 Oxford Archaeology undertook a watching brief on the River Loddon near Aborfield Berkshire (centred at SU 7465 6799). The work was commissioned by the Environment Agency during the construction of a new fish and wildlife channel. The watching brief observed evidence for an earlier river channel and modern dredging of the river. No evidence for any earlier form of water management was encountered.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology South (OAS) was commissioned by the Environment Agency to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a new fish and wildlife channel within a loop on the River Loddon west of the village of Aborfield (centred on National Grid Reference SU 7465 6799, see Fig.1).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a part of a condition of Planning Consent as specified by Berkshire Archaeology (BA, 2010).
- 1.1.3 OAS produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) in response to this requirement prior to the fieldwork being undertaken.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is located approximately 2.5 km south-east of Reading, roughly halfway between the villages of Shinfield and Arborfield (Fig. 1). The proposed bypass is sited on the west bank of the River Loddon, approximately 350 m north-east of Arborfield Bridge.
- 1.2.2 The area of proposed development currently consists of flood meadows on either side of the river at an approximate level of 42 m AOD. There is a thick band of trees fronting onto the river on either bank.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is alluvium over River Gravels and clay of the Reading Beds (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no. 268).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site has been prepared by the Environment Agency prior to WSI and is included here together with relevant information taken from the Victoria County History of Berkshire.
- 1.3.2 There are no Scheduled Monuments in the immediate study area, but approximately 200 m south east of the weirs (in the grounds of the Reading University site) are the remains of St. Bartholomew's Church. This has been designated as a Scheduled Monument. In addition there are four nearby listed buildings:
  - Bridge House
  - Remains of old church
  - Hall Place Farmhouse, and
  - Simonds family tomb (4 m north of the old church).



- 1.3.3 A search of the National Sites and Monuments Record has identified prehistoric to medieval artefact scatters in the surrounding ploughed fields. Cropmark studies in the parish of Shinfield also supply supporting evidence for prehistoric and Romano-British settlement in the area. Adjacent to the site of St Bartholomew's Church and Hall Farm, two pieces of archaeological work have been conducted. These have yielded 19th and 20th century finds and exposed an undated pit. One of these was a watching brief for the installation of the gas pipeline which crosses the scheme area.
- 1.3.4 Also noted is the discovery of a Neolithic hand axe on the opposite bank to the weirs (NGR SU 74819 68112). Finds such as this are not necessarily signs of settlement in the area and do not significantly increase the archaeological risk.
- 1.3.5 A site visit undertaken by the EA Archaeologist identified additional areas of archaeological significance:
- Arborfield Papermill NGR 474870/168170
  - Boat house NGR 474780/168070
  - Brick Bridge and the course of former gas pipeline NGR 474780/168200
  - Site of former bridge and the course of former gas pipeline NGR 474817/168210
- 1.3.6 The Brick Bridge and site of the former bridge crossing are linked by a slightly raised track and iron fence. The river itself from approx NGR 473900/167400 to the mill is perched above the floodplain. The landscape has presumably been designed with the River Loddon diverted to feed the mill. An additional intention, or supplementary advantage, may have been to create a series of flood meadows (NGR 474200/167500) sited between the Loddon and a tributary to the south. These fields are currently flooded. There is no clear evidence to suggest that these are water meadows rather than flood meadows, and LiDAR images support this as they show north-east to south-west ridges approximately 15 m in width running parallel to the river which are evident elsewhere. These features would be consistent with the perception of a design which encompasses more than just the industrial function of the mill.
- 1.3.7 The manor of Arborfield is not mentioned by name in the Domesday Survey, and at that date probably formed part of the manor of Sonning, held by the Bishop of Salisbury. Subinfeudation of Arborfield was apparently made later, for at the beginning of the 13th century Richard Bullock held a quarter and a twentieth part of a fee there off the bishop.
- 1.3.8 There was a fishery in the waters of Arborfield appurtenant to the manor, which is mentioned in 1589 and later. Rights of fishing were also held by others than the lord of the manor.
- 1.3.9 A programme of ground investigations was undertaken at Arborfield in March 2010. This included soil profiling from a series of six boreholes taken along the route of the bypass channel.
- 1.3.10 Boreholes 1 and 2 (located on the northern bank of the River Loddon, at the southern end of the proposed channel) showed made ground overlying clay, silt sand or gravel layers. The remaining boreholes (3-6, situated approximately 20 m to the north-west of the river channel) revealed a layer of surface clay, overlying sand and gravel and in some cases further clay layers. The borehole logs were reviewed by the Environment Agency's Archaeologist. Borehole 3 is of interest as a layer of black and bluish grey material was recorded at about 1.0m below ground level (BGL). At 2.1 m to 2.5 mBGL, thin layers of pseudofibrous peat were also recorded. The latter were also recorded at a similar depth from borehole 5.



- 1.3.11 The black and bluish grey layers from borehole 3 have been interpreted as an indicator of the presence of an historical area of open water, which may be a backwater pond or sediments within a former channel of the river. Either of these has the potential to have been used by nearby settlements and have an associated potential risk of discovering archaeology.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The specific aims and objectives of the watching brief were:
- To gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of burial of any potential archaeological remains within the area of study.
  - Subject to the results of the watching brief, to seek to establish, as far as is practical, the chronology, plan form and function of archaeological features affected by development and interpret the results in terms of the known archaeology of Arborfield and its surrounds.
  - To provide sufficient information to enable Wokingham Borough Council to discharge the conditions relating to archaeological investigations contained within the planning consent.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The archaeological investigation was conducted as a watching brief consisting of a series of site visits during those works likely to impact on potential archaeological deposits. These works include the excavation of the bypass channel and environmental scrapes. The base and sides of all the excavations were closely examined for archaeological evidence and the spoil was examined for artefactual remains.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of the excavations and the location of the recorded sections was maintained at a scale of 1:50 (Figs. 2 and 3). The trench and sections were photographed using colour digital photography and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the OA Field Manual (Wilkinson, 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 Prior to the excavation of the channel two trial pits were excavated adjacent to the sites of boreholes 3 and 5 in order to confirm the borehole findings and to determine the archaeological potential of the deposits.

#### *Trial Pit 1 (Fig. 4, Section 1)*

- 3.1.2 This was excavated approximately 10 m south-west of Borehole 5. It was dug using a toothless bucket to a depth of 2.55 m below ground level.
- 3.1.3 At a depth of 2.4 m below ground level the underlying river gravel, a pale yellow sub-angular flint gravel (8) was encountered. This lay below a 0.25 m deep layer of light grey sandy silt containing quantities of coarse grit and small gravel (7). Sealing this was a 0.4 m deep layer of light blue-grey clay (6), one of the possible open water deposits



noted by the EA Archaeologist. Sitting on the top of this deposit was a 1.4 m wide and 0.2 m deep lens of purple-brown fibrous material (5). The composition of this deposit suggests that it may be a lens of peat in the process of formation.

- 3.1.4 Sealing the lens and overlying layer 6 elsewhere was a 0.35 m deep layer of dark blue-grey clay (4), another possible open water deposit. Overlying layer 4 was a 0.7 m deep layer of reddish brown silt clay (3). The deposit exhibited many laminations, c0.01 m, thick suggesting that it was laid down in a series of discrete events of a long period of time. Overlying this was a 0.3 m deep layer of light reddish brown silt clay containing flecks of light grey clay (2). This was sealed by a 0.4 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt clay loam (1), forming the present day topsoil.

*Trial Pit 2 (Fig. 4, Section 2)*

- 3.1.5 This was excavated adjacent to the site of Borehole 3. It was dug using a toothless bucket to a depth of 1.9 m below ground level.
- 3.1.6 A layer of light grey sandy silt containing quantities of grit and small gravel (26) was encountered at a depth of 1.8 m below ground level. This was very similar to, and a probable continuation of layer 7. Overlying this was a 0.25 m deep layer of light blue-grey silt clay (25), a continuation of layer 6.
- 3.1.7 Layer 25 was overlain by a layer of dark grey-blue silt clay (24), 0.35 m deep, a probable continuation of layer 5. Sealing this was a 0.6 m deep continuation of the reddish brown laminated silt clay (23). Overlying this was a 0.35 m deep layer of light reddish brown silt clay with grey clay flecking (22). The overlying topsoil, a dark grey-brown clay silt loam (21), was thinner at this point being only 0.25 m in depth.

*Section 3 (Fig. 4, Section 3)*

- 3.1.8 This was located approximately in the centre of the channel. At the base of the section a pale orange-brown clay (36) was encountered at a depth of 1.3 m below ground level. Overlying this was a 0.16 m deep layer of orange-brown clay (35). Both these were alluvial clay deposits. Sealing 35 was a 0.16 m deep layer of light reddish brown silt clay (34), also an alluvial clay, which in turn was overlaid by a layer of reddish brown silty clay sand (33). All four of these deposits displayed signs of lamination.
- 3.1.9 Layer 33 was overlaid by a 0.27 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (32) containing lenses of gravel, again suggesting an alluvial origin. A 0.36 m deep deposit of dark grey-brown silt loam, (31) had accumulated above this layer.

*Section 4 (Fig. 4, Section 4)*

- 3.1.10 This was located approximately 10 m north of section 3 and displayed similar stratigraphy.
- 3.1.11 A probable continuation of the layer of pale orange-brown silt clay (46) was exposed at a depth of 1.35 m below ground level. This was overlaid by a 0.18 m deep layer of orange-brown silt clay (45). which was in turn was overlain by a 0.37 m deep layer of light reddish brown silt clay (44). This deposit was sealed by a 0.13 m deep layer of red-brown silt clay (43).
- 3.1.12 Overlying layer 43 was a 0.33 m deep layer of grey-brown mixed silts with lenses of fine gravel (42). A 0.3 m deep layer of grey-brown silt loam (41) completed the section.

*Section 5 (Fig. 4, Section 5)*

- 3.1.13 This was located at the southern end of the channel as it connected to the river.



- 3.1.14 A layer of red-brown silt clay (56) was exposed at a depth of 1 m below ground level. Overlying this was a 0.4 m deep layer of pale reddish brown silt clay (55). This was sealed by a 0.45 m deep layer of grey-brown silt clay loam (54) which contained lenses of gravel and abraded brick fragments. This was overlaid by a 0.18 m deep layer of dark grey brown clay silt loam (53) forming the current topsoil.
- 3.1.15 Immediately adjacent to the river the topsoil was covered by a 4 m wide by 0.4 m high bund or bank. This was constructed using a grey-brown clay silt containing quantities of small pebbles (52). It is probable that this represents material dredged from the river. Overlying the bank was a 0.12 m deep layer of dark grey-brown leaf litter and organic matter (51).

*Section 6 (Fig. 4, Section 6)*

- 3.1.16 This was located approximately 10 m south of section 3 and displayed similar stratigraphy.
- 3.1.17 A layer of pale reddish brown silt clay (64), a probable continuation of layer 34, was exposed at a depth of 1.05 m below ground level. This was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of red-brown silt clay (63). Overlying this was a 0.5 m deep layer of grey-brown mixed silts containing lenses of fine gravel (62). A 0.25 m deep layer of grey-brown silt loam (61), the present day topsoil, completed the section.

## **3.2 Finds**

- 3.2.1 Dating evidence recovered was only recovered from the uppermost layers of topsoil and from the dredged material forming part of the bank. The majority of the finds consisted of abraded brick which had presumably been carried by flood water, or in the case of the bank (52) been dredged from the river.
- 3.2.2 Numerous examples of modern plastic material were observed either within or lying on the surface of the topsoil deposits. These had been carried into place by flood water. The presence of these artefacts was noted but they were not retained.
- 3.2.3 No finds predating the 19<sup>th</sup> century were observed.

## **3.3 Environmental remains** Written by Laura Strafford

### **3.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

- 3.3.2 This report describes one sample taken from the watching brief at Aborfield bypass channel in January 2011. The sample was taken primarily for the recovery and interpretation of waterlogged plant remains (WPR) from a deposit thought to be the black and bluish grey layer interleaved with thin layers of pseudofibrous peat previously identified from borehole 3, which were interpreted as an indicator of the presence of an historical area of open water.

### **3.3.3 METHODOLOGY**

- 3.3.4 One litre was hand-floated (standard washover technique) for the recovery of WPR. The flot and the residue were collected separately on 250µm meshes and are stored in water-filled containers at 4°C. The waterlogged flots were rapidly scanned for WPR and insects using a binocular microscope at approximately x15 magnification. Thirteen litres of unprocessed sediment was retained pending the results of this assessment.



### 3.3.5 RESULTS

3.3.6 The sediment was predominantly a moist dark greenish grey soft and sticky slightly silty clay. Approximately 30% of the sediment was brown, and this colouration was predominantly found on the outside of clods, suggesting it is the result of oxidisation. Occasional black staining was observed throughout the sediment, which may represent the “peat” identified in borehole 3, although the examples were very small and ephemeral, so it was not possible to select this deposit for separate processing. Small fragments of wood were occasionally observed throughout the sediment, with no obvious bedding structure. Occasional angular to subrounded flint pebbles were present.

3.3.7 No finds were recovered from the processed sample.

### 3.3.8 Plant Remains

3.3.9 Table 1 summarises the assessment results for the waterlogged plant remains (WPR).

3.3.10 The material recovered in the flot was very poor and dominated by heavily degraded wood fragments. Rootlets were also common. There were occasional larger examples of wood, the largest observed being approximately 30mm in length; these pieces would potentially be identifiable. No seeds were observed.

### 3.3.11 Discussion

3.3.12 The silty clay deposit appears consistent with the interpretation previously put forward of a backwater pond or sediments within a slow-running former channel of the river. The dark lens(es) within it are, however, not peat but rather organic silt. The deposit as a whole contains some woody fragments, suggesting that the organic content of the sediment has degraded over time. Further work on this horizon could include pollen and diatom analysis, to investigate the nature of the waterbody and the surrounding environment. For this to be worthwhile, the horizon would need to be dated, and sub-samples should be obtained from the borehole sequence rather than from the remainder of the bulk sample.

*Table 1: Assessment of waterlogged plant remains from ABORBY 10*

NumberSample	Context	Feature Type	Floated volume	Flot volume	Waterlogged wood	Waterlogged seeds	CPR	Charcoal	Insects	Molluscs	Comments
1	25	Open water deposit	1 litre	10 ml	Many small – very small fragments						ca. 20% of flot scanned. Material poorly preserved and degraded. Waterlogged wood/ rootlet fragments abundant yet very fragmented. Occasional larger examples of wood present, the largest observed being approximately 30mm in length. No seeds noted. No charred remains noted. WPR (waterlogged plant remains) assessed as POOR

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 It was obvious from the stratigraphy, particularly those from the deeper test pits, that the area has been subject to large amounts of alluvial activity.

4.1.2 The underlying geology is composed of river gravels (Layers 7, 8 and 26) which were encountered at a depth of between 1.8 m and 2 m below the current ground level.



Within the majority of the site these were overlaid by a sequence of alluvial deposits laid down during periodic flooding of the area.

- 4.1.3 Within the area of boreholes 3 and 5 at the southern end of the channel deep deposits of silts possibly laid down by standing or slow moving open water were encountered. The composition of the majority of these deposits (Contexts 4, 6, 24 and 25) included fine silts and clays with inclusions or lenses of organic silts. It is probable that these deposits indicate that the area was formed of lagoons or ponds with only a slow movement of water
- 4.1.4 These may have occurred within a former channel of the river which had become isolated when the main river channel changed course (for example during a period of high water or flooding). No artefactual evidence was recovered to determine the date at which this may have occurred. These deposits were subsequently overlaid by alluvial or flood deposits.
- 4.1.5 The lens of purple brown fibrous material (5) appears to be a deposit of partially decomposed organic material, possibly material that had sunk to the bottom before being sealed by the flood deposits, again no artefactual evidence was recovered to determine at which date this may have occurred.
- 4.1.6 No evidence for water management such as mill leats or weirs associated with water meadow management were encountered during the course of the watching brief.



## APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
1	Layer	0.4 m	-	-	Topsoil, leaf litter	-	C20th
2	Layer	0.3 m	-	-	Flood deposits	-	-
3	Layer	0.7 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
4	Layer	0.35 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
5	Layer	0.2 m	1.4 m	-	Lens of peat in the early stages of forming	-	-
6	Layer	0.4 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
7	Layer	0.25 m	-	-	River gravel	-	-
8	Layer	> 0.15 m	-	-	River gravel	-	-
21	Layer	0.25 m	-	-	Topsoil, leaf litter	-	C20th
22	Layer	0.35 m	-	-	Flood deposits	-	-
23	Layer	0.6 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
24	Layer	0.35 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
25	Layer	0.35 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
26	Layer	> 0.1 m	-	-	River gravel	-	-
31	Layer	0.36 m	-	-	Topsoil, leaf litter	-	C20th
32	Layer	0.27 m	-	-	Flood deposits	-	-
33	Layer	0.18 m	-	-	Flood deposits	-	-
34	Layer	0.16 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
35	Layer	0.16 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
36	Layer	> 0.15 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
41	Layer	0.3 m	-	-	Topsoil, leaf litter	-	C20th
42	Layer	0.33 m	-	-	Flood deposits	-	-
43	Layer	0.13 m	-	-	Flood deposits	-	-
44	Layer	0.37 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
45	Layer	0.16 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
46	Layer	> 0.18 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
51	Layer	0.12 m	-	-	Leaf litter, humus	-	C20th
52	Layer	0.5 m	4 m	>10 m	Dredged material forming raised bank/berm along edge of river	-	C19th/ C20th
53	Layer	0.18 m	-	-	Topsoil	-	-
54	Layer	0.45 m	-	-	Flood deposits	-	-
55	Layer	0.25 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
56	Layer	> 0.18 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
61	Layer	0.22 m	-	-	Topsoil	-	-
62	Layer	0.48 m	-	-	Flood deposits	-	-
63	Layer	0.35 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
64	Layer	> 0.25 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-
64	Layer	> 0.25 m	-	-	Alluvial Clay	-	-



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## APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	New Fish and Wildlife Bypass Channel, Aborfield, Berkshire
Site code:	ABORBY 10
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SU 7465 6799
Type of watching brief:	Machine excavation of a new channel within a loop of the River Loddon
Date and duration of project:	Between October 2010 and January 2011, 5 site visits
Area of site:	10,000 m <sup>2</sup>
Summary of results:	Oxford Archaeology undertook a watching brief on the River Loddon near Aborfield Berkshire (centred at SU 7465 6799). The work was commissioned by the Environment Agency during the construction of a new fish and wildlife channel. The watching brief observed evidence for an earlier river channel and modern dredging of the river. No evidence for any earlier form of water management was encountered.
Location of archive:	Reading Museum under the accession number REDMG:2010.113





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Figure 1: Site location

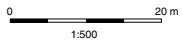


Figure 2: Plan of fish and wildlife channel

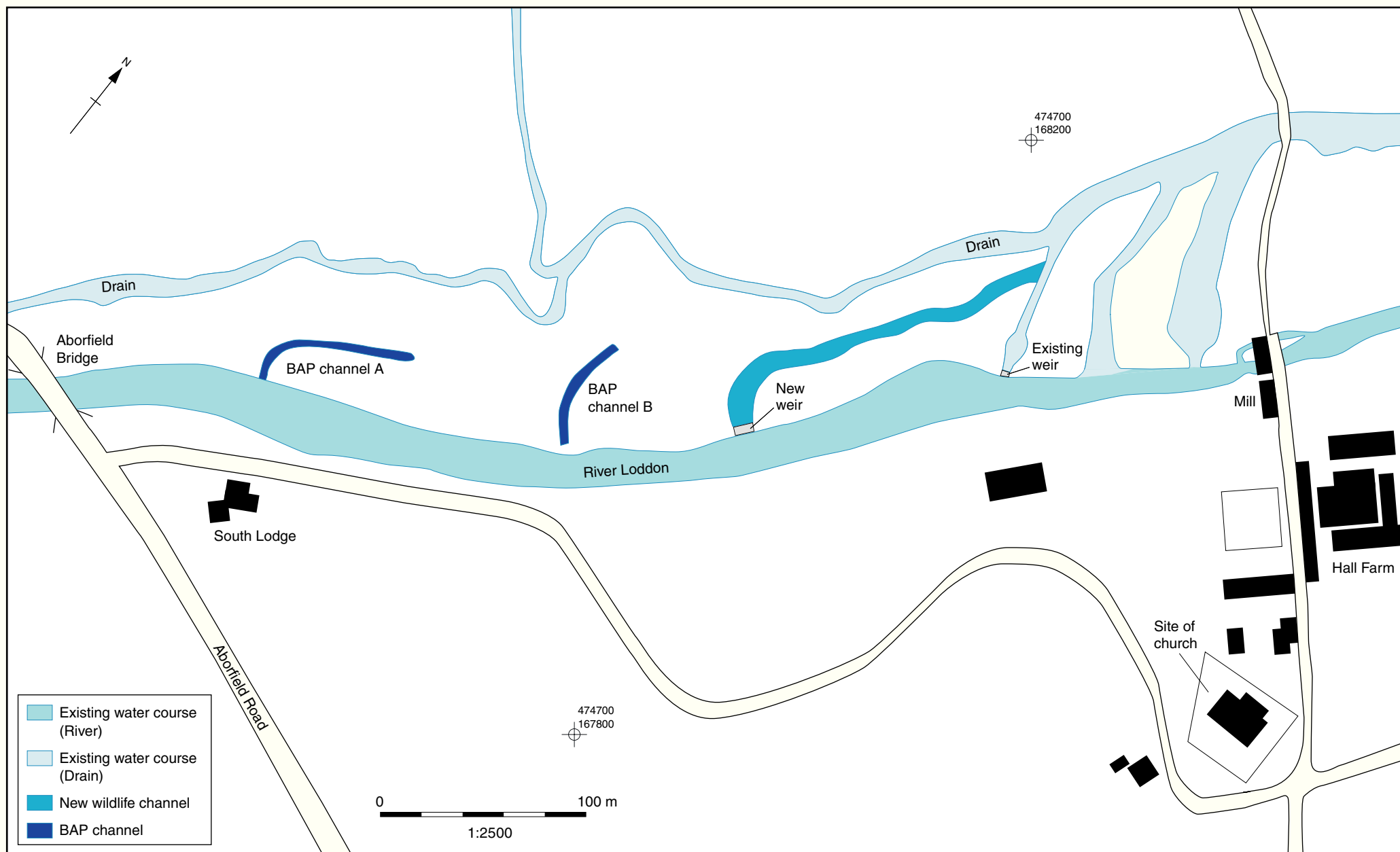


Figure 3: Location of BAP channels

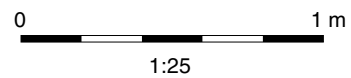
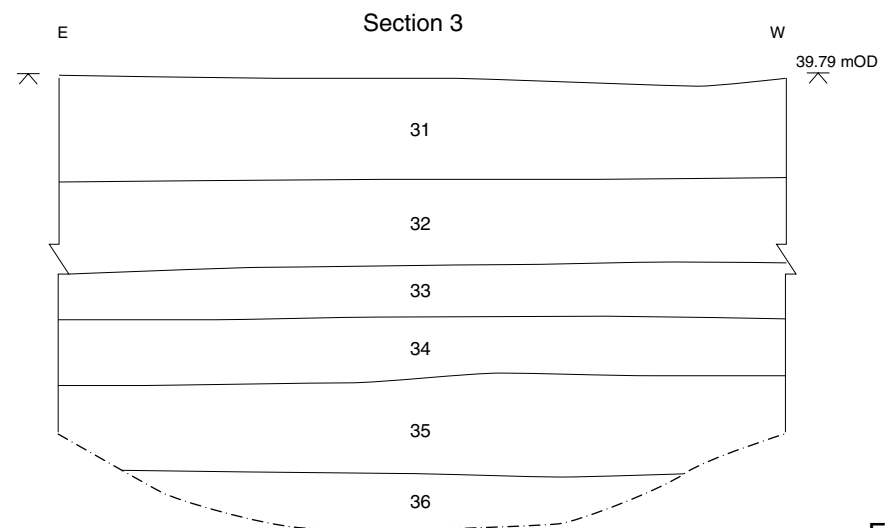
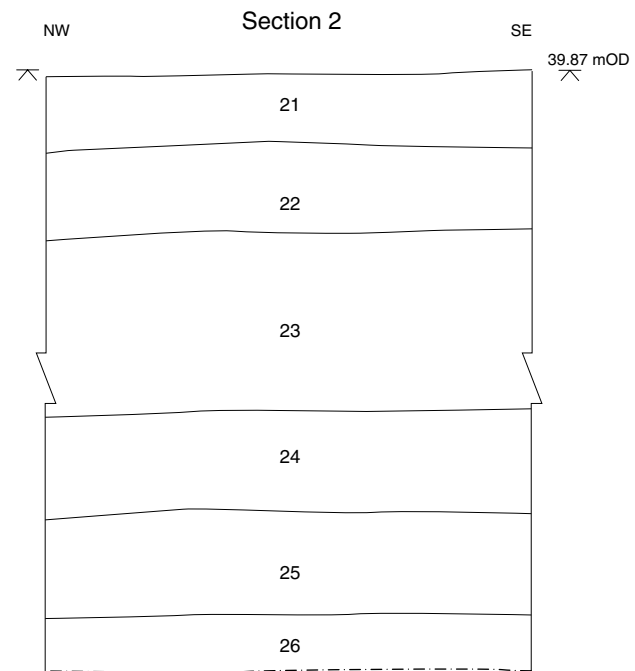
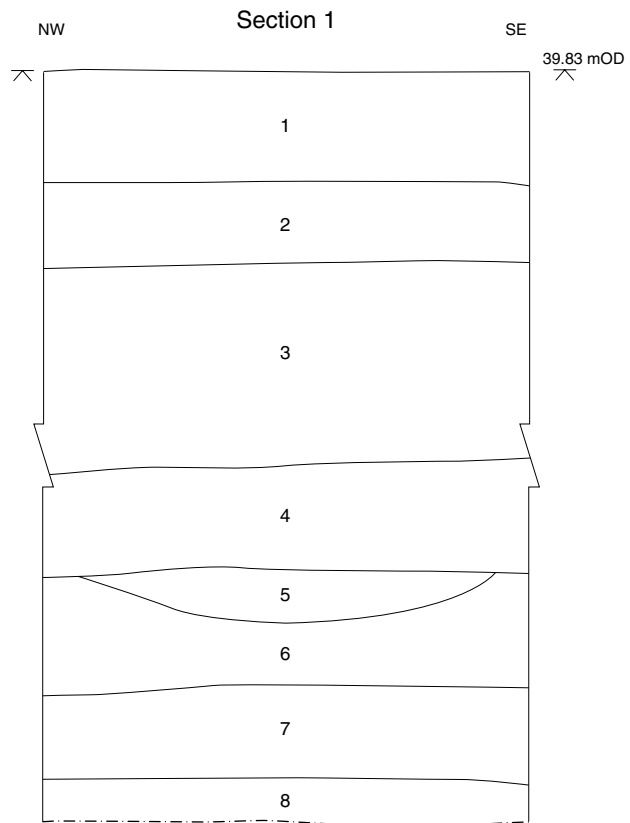


Figure 4: Sections

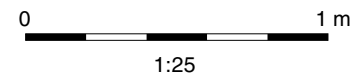
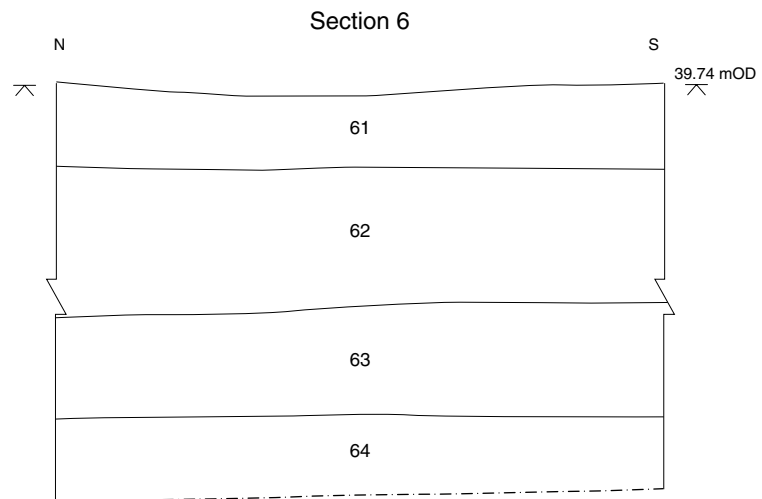
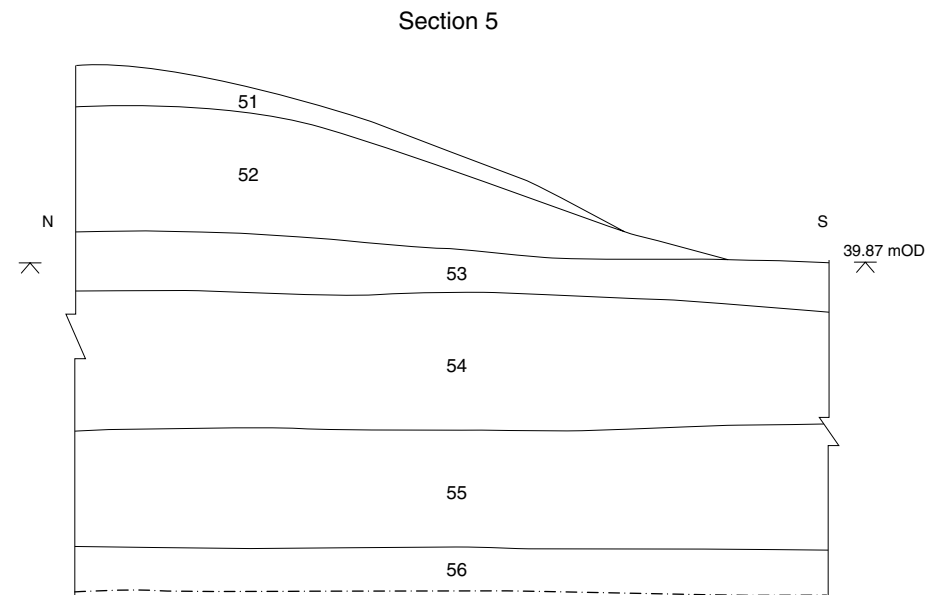
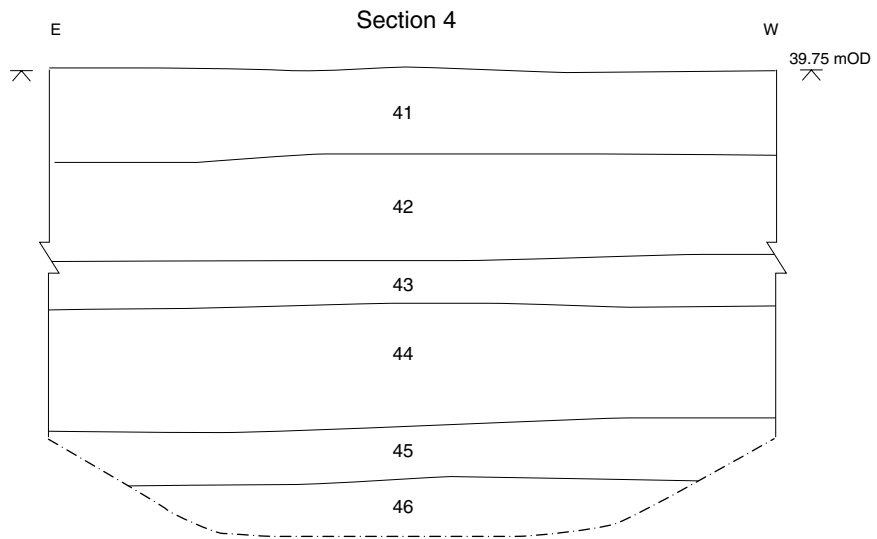


Figure 5: Sections



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