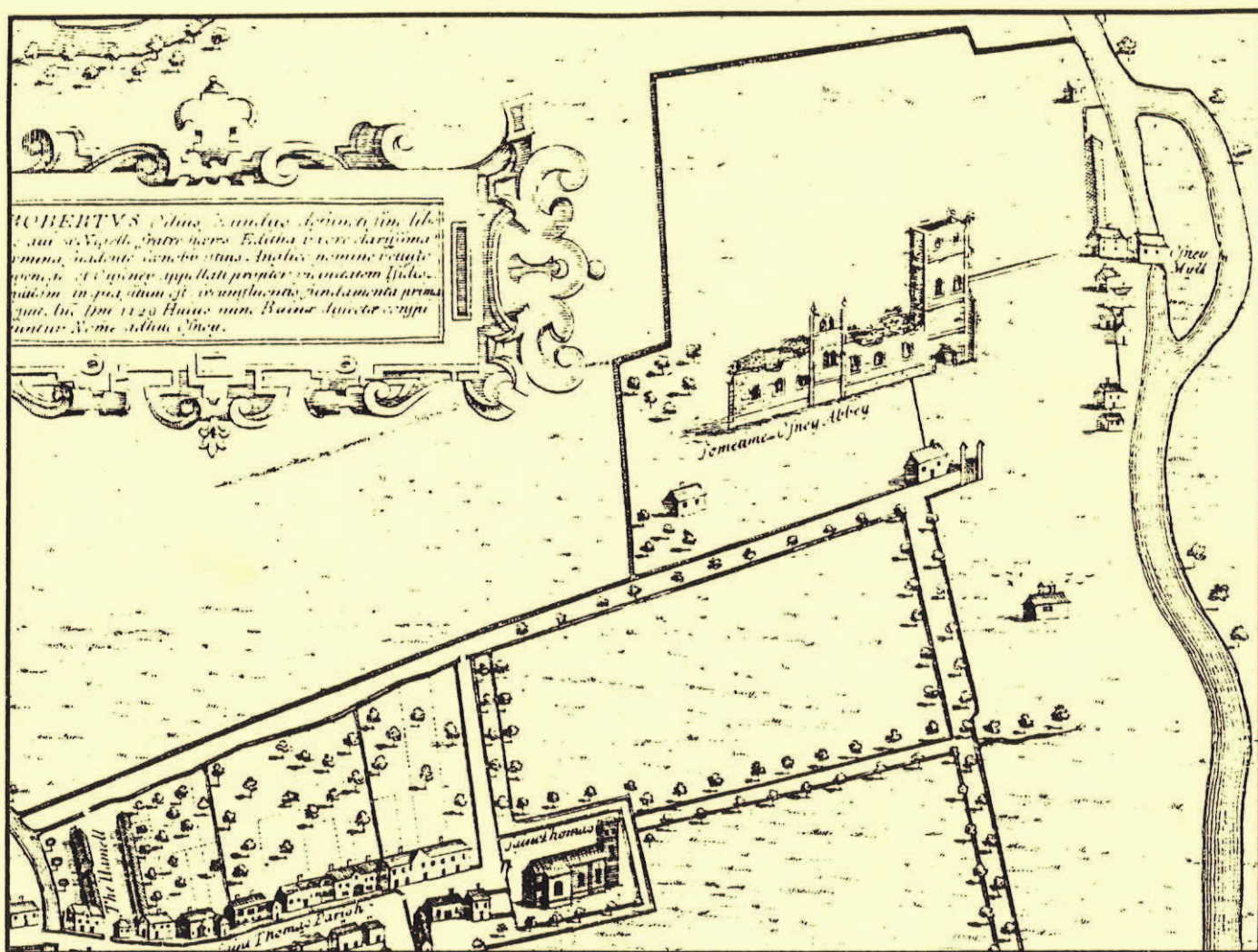


# Oseney Abbey site, at the former Bakery Site, Mill Street, Oxford

## Archaeological Evaluation Report



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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# **ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ON THE SITE OF OSENEY ABBEY AT THE FORMER BAKERY SITE, MILL STREET, OXFORD, 1994**

## **1. Summary**

An archaeological evaluation within the western part of the precinct of Oseney Abbey produced evidence for a complex and well preserved sequence of buildings relating to the western (river side) range of the outer courts of the abbey. The earliest structural traces were probably of 13th century date. At the S end of the site two buildings perhaps with an industrial function were separated by a narrow paved area. Further N a N-S wall line which can be related to the extant late medieval fragment of the abbey (and was not removed until the 18th century) superseded two earlier structures, the earliest again of 13th century date. Outside these structures to the W was an area used for pit digging.

## **2. Introduction**

The archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Aldensleigh Estates in respect of a proposal (Planning Application No. NFZ/413/94) to build flats on the site of the former Cadena Bakery, more recently part of Research Machines premises at the S end of Mill Street. The work was required by Oxford City Council Planning Department as the initial stage of a phased programme of works aimed at assessing and mitigating the impact of the proposed development on the underlying archaeological deposits, thought on the basis of previous work (see below) to be of considerable importance. The present report summarises the findings from three evaluation trenches and also makes reference to a reassessment of aspects of earlier work on the site, as summarised by Sharpe (1985). At present this reassessment is concerned with the extraction of additional information from the archive records, particularly with respect to levels. No attempt will be made here to provide a detailed critique of Sharpe's outline chronology for the development of the western part of Oseney Abbey, though this will probably form a part of a final report on the current work on the site. Finds data has not been analysed in detail at this stage. The chronological framework of the excavated deposits has been derived from a brief examination of the pottery recovered from the site. Where the pottery provides significant information this has been mentioned in the descriptive text.

## **3. Archaeological Background**

The site, centred at c SP 50430586, lies within the western part of the precinct of Oseney Abbey, founded as an Augustinian priory in 1129. This foundation, the church and cloister of which lie to the NE of the present site under the adjacent modern cemetery, grew to be the largest and most powerful monastic



establishment in Oxford. Parts of the present site were examined on a small scale and in difficult circumstances in the 1970s and early 1980s. This work is described in Sharpe 1985, which also assesses in detail the documentary and pictorial evidence for the late survival of parts of the Abbey buildings on the western side of the precinct. A single fragment of these, immediately adjacent to the present site on the NW side, survives as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Oxfordshire SAM 79). Much of the site lies on what was at the time of the priory foundation still an island with a channel running to the E. This seems to have been infilled and the abbey precinct extended to the W at some time in the 13th century, perhaps contemporary with the reduction of the early monastic precinct on the S side, in the area now occupied by parts of the marina and Gibbs Crescent. The work of Sharpe indicated that after the westward expansion of the abbey precinct the site was occupied by a range of buildings running roughly N-S parallel to the line of the medieval and modern mill stream, the edge of which was revetted with a substantial wall. Within the SW corner of the expanded precinct, formed by the mill stream and a new E-W aligned wall, situated a little to the S of the southern limit of the present site, was a complex sequence of structures, the plans and sequence of which cannot be resolved on present evidence.

In the same area, and also further N towards the northern limit of the present site, evidence for the pre-monastic channel was located, together with fragments of structures built over its infill. The function of these buildings is unknown, but one contained fragments of a floor of decorated tiles. Due W the abbey mill was probably situated on or very close to the location of the existing 19th century mill structure, which lies a little to the NW of the area of proposed development. Additional aspects of potential archaeological interest on the site, identified prior to the evaluation, included the location of an Anglo-Saxon cremation vessel, the only one known from the city, at an unspecified location in this general area, and a documentary reference to a china manufactory situated at Oseney Mill in the mid 18th century. The recent work shed no light on either of these topics.

#### **4. The Evaluation**

There were two components to the evaluation. The first consisted of an examination of the archive of Sharpe's work, both to assess as far as possible the validity of his conclusions bearing in mind the character and quality of the evidence and to extract more specific detail on questions of wall alignments and levels of deposits. This was intended both to inform the present field evaluation and provide data to assist assessment of the impact of the proposed development. The fieldwork component of the project ran in tandem with the desk-based archive re-examination.

##### **4.1. Archive reexamination**

The published 1985 report and original documentation relating to it and retained in the project archive were re-examined. The report on this exercise is given as an

appendix below. The principal conclusion was that the character of the archaeological evidence, in particular the relationships between recorded features and the dating evidence, was not adequate to support all aspects of the detailed phase structure proposed by Sharpe. Limited information on levels of significant archaeological deposits was recovered from the archive records. This was useful in supplementing data from the evaluation trenches.

## **4.2. Excavation**

Two trenches and one small hole were excavated, initially with a JCB, to establish the character, quality and sub-surface depth of any surviving archaeological deposits. Trench 1, c 15 m (E-W) x 1.5 m, was situated at the S end of the site in the grassed area to the S of the present buildings, only a few metres to the N of one of the areas of salvage recording described by Sharpe. Trench 2, c 6 m (SW-NE) x 1.6 m, was situated at the NW corner of the existing building, straddling the line of the outer (W) side of the western range of abbey buildings adjacent to the mill stream. A further small hole, Trench 3, was a re-excavation of a machine dug engineers' test pit (test pit 4), sited in the angle between the N side of the bakery building and the W side of the glass link connecting this to the main Research Machines building further N.

### **4.2.1. Trench 1**

The trench was excavated by machine to a variable depth depending on the location of the uppermost coherent archaeological deposits. These consisted of surfaces with possible wall lines. In the central part of the trench parts of the upper layers of a sequence of surfaces were inadvertently removed by machine (down to the top of 172, see below) and were therefore only recorded in section. Thereafter excavation by hand concentrated on the definition of possible walls and their relationships with adjacent surfaces and other features. The extent of excavation was limited to resolving these questions, to elucidating the character of a few discrete features and to establishing the likely depth of deposits in the least intrusive manner possible. The interpretation of the sequence in Trench 1 is not absolutely certain, but it is most likely that there were two buildings, one lying partly within and to the E of the trench (wall 139) and one partly within and to the W (wall 149), the two being separated by a paved area. Whether or not this framework is correct it is employed in the description of the site since there is no clear correlation of deposits to each side of walls 139 and 149.

The lowest detected deposit was a mottled clay (181), located towards the E end of the trench adjacent to wall 139 (see below) at a depth of c 55 m OD. Some 5 m further W a similar deposit (159) was found in the base of a foundation cut at c 55.40 m OD. It is not certain if these were parts of the same layer, though this is likely despite the differences of level.

Layers 181 and 159 were cut for the foundation trenches of two walls. The base of the easterly wall (139) was not reached at 54.74 m OD. The existence of a

construction trench was not definitely established, though one seems certain to have existed. The rough-faced foundation material of the wall was at least 0.50 m deep and extended c 0.24 m above the level of the top of layer 181 (ie to c 55.24 m OD). It was 0.10 m wider than the superstructure of the wall itself, which was 1.04 m wide and survived 0.70 m high above the top of the foundations.

The lowest deposits adjacent to wall 139 were only seen on the E side of the wall. These were slightly gravelly sandy silts (180 and 179) with a combined depth of 0.28-0.32 m. The lower of these could have been cut through by the construction trench for wall 139, but the upper was apparently dumped against the foundation and the lowest part of the wall face, which was rendered with mortar right to its base. 179 was overlaid by a layer of sand and gravel 0.06 m thick (178), in turn lying beneath a layer of greyish brown silty loam up to 0.15 deep (137). 179 contained a sherd probably of 13th century date, and 178 produced pottery of the mid 13th-15th centuries. Layer 137 may have been the same as a deposit 185 noted at the extreme E end of the trench. Above 137 was a mortar surface (138 = 184) which may have extended over much of the area of the E end of the trench but terminated some 0.50 m E of the line of wall 139. 138 was overlaid by a layer of sandy loam with some gravel (136) which was laid against the face of wall 139 to a maximum depth of 0.25 m but was generally not more than c 0.07 m thick. Above 136 was a compact greyish-brown clay some 0.15 m thick (135). Like the earlier mortar floor 138 this terminated short of the E face of wall 139. Apparently butting the edge of 135 and filling the space between it and the wall was a layer of gravelly loam (119) up to c 0.20 m thick. This layer may possibly have extended across the line of wall 139, but this seems very unlikely. When initially seen in plan 119 appeared as a possible robber trench fill c 1.20 m across and exactly parallel to and apparently contiguous with the line of 139 on its E side.

Both 135 and 119 were overlaid by 134, a layer of mortar up to c 0.10 m thick. The full extent of this deposit is unclear but it also stopped short of the E face of wall 139. 134 was cut by 163, for a hearth which lay mainly beneath the N baulk of the trench. The sloping sided and flat bottomed cut was c 0.20 m deep and its edges were lined with fragments of flat limestone (300), perhaps reused roofing material. The fill, of greyish brown silty loam with charcoal (166), was perhaps overlaid by 118/117, a layer of mortar and limestone fragments very difficult to distinguish from 134. This deposit, and the hearth, were then cut by a second hearth (164) very similar to 163, consisting of a wide shallow cut partly lined with small flat limestone fragments. Elsewhere the edge of the feature showed up as a reddening of the underlying clay 135 through which most of its sides were cut. A burnt reddish brown silty loam (162) and a thin overlying band of charcoal (both located at the extreme E end of the trench) were probably the lowest fills within the hearth. The principal fill (165) was very similar to 162 with lenses of charcoal. Burnt material also spread beyond the extent of the hearth to the S. Pottery from this deposit (150) was dated 13th-15th century.

All these deposits were sealed by a substantial loamy gravel layer up to c 0.25 m deep (116) which extended across the whole of the E end of the trench. The relationship of this deposit to the line of wall 139 is unknown. 116 may have run



up to the line of the wall (it is the latest deposit in this sequence which could have done so), or it may possibly have overlain it, though this is thought less likely. 116 was cut by 188, a shallow feature which certainly postdated the removal of the upper parts of wall 139 (see below). There was no significant dating material from this part of the sequence.

The other main structural feature in the trench was the wall represented by the foundation 149. The line of this wall was some 9° more westerly than that of wall 139, on the basis of which it is thought unlikely that the two walls belonged to the same structure. The construction trench (148) was c 1 m wide, cut through the clay layer 159 (above). It was filled with a very substantial foundation comprised of a single layer of irregular limestone blocks (149) up to c 0.38 m x 0.43 m x 0.21 m in size with smaller fragments packed between to provide a roughly level upper surface. The matrix for the foundation (154) consisted of clay and sand and gravel (not, apparently, decayed mortar). The excavation of a robber trench (145) had removed any structural material above this layer. It may be that the superstructure of the wall commenced at the level at which the robbing stopped, at c 55.30 m OD, in which case there is a striking similarity with the level of the top of the foundation of wall 139 (at c 55.24 m OD).

Sequences of deposits (not otherwise examined) were seen in each side of the emptied construction/robber trench 148/145. As with the lowest deposits to the E of 139 it is not possible to be certain whether layers were cut by the construction trench or laid against the wall once it was in place. However, the occurrence of a different sequence of deposits on each side of foundation 149 strongly suggests that the wall was in position first. To the S the lowest layer overlying the clay 159 was of loamy gravel (198) up to 0.10 m thick. Above this was a clay loam (197), almost certainly the same as a layer (186 and 173) seen a little further W. Pottery from these layers was consistently of mid 13th-early 14th century date. Above 197 were placed flat limestone slabs at least 0.25 m x 0.25 m square and c 0.05-0.10 m thick (196) forming part of a floor surface.

Broadly contemporary with the stone surface and aligned parallel to the wall was a complex cut feature, apparently a sequence of hearths. This was not completely excavated, so not all the internal relationships are clear. The principal cut (in 173/186, the earliest layer seen in this part of the site) was 177, which may have contained all the other deposits recorded in this area. It was subrectangular in plan and had a gently sloping profile. On its N side the cut was lined with a layer of mortar (175), probably the primary deposit. A layer of burnt clay loam (176) may have been the earliest evidence for the use of the feature. This seems to have extended beneath a mass of burnt clay (155) which formed a spine parallel to the N edge of the feature and centred some 0.60 m from it. Slightly offset to the N of this line a group of limestone slates set on edge formed a continuation of the alignment up to the eastern edge of the feature. 155 seems to represent a secondary lining of the original feature, though the effect of its introduction was perhaps to produce a feature which had two separate compartments, with a long narrow one to the N of 155. It is unclear whether the fill of this part of the feature (a grey-brown clay loam 174) had been cut to accommodate 155 or whether it

accumulated after 155 was in place, but the latter seems more likely. 174 and part of 155 were overlaid by 160, a mixed loam layer with a high gravel content producing mid 13th-early 14th century sherds, which may have been intended as a surface extending over part of the hearth feature and more widely beyond it to the N.

No relationship could be established between this surface and the sequence of floors to the E above the stone floor 196 because the intervening area was cut by a modern linear feature (110). Above 196 were thin layers of sand and gravel (195), a possible occupation deposit of sandy loam (194) and a mortar floor surface (123), all beneath a more substantial floor (122) of gravel and small limestone cobbles. However it is notable that some of these surfaces (particularly 123) did not even extend as far W as 110.

W of the cut 110 later features were cut into layer 160. A second phase of the hearth was represented by a shallow cut (132), the mixed fills of which (143, 142, 141 and 144) contained frequent lenses of charcoal and were collectively up to c 0.28 m deep with a maximum E-W spread of c 2 m. These fills produced a small, rather mixed pottery assemblage, with fill 141 containing a sherd assigned a 13th-15th century date range. To the N, and at right angles to the line of wall 149, was a further possible wall (152). Only two stones aligned with a face to the S were seen within the extreme NW corner of the trench (at which point the putative wall line was truncated by a modern feature 151), and they were clearly set into 160. Both the wall and the second phase of hearth were sealed by a layer of loamy gravel (140) up to c 0.16 m thick, in turn overlaid by a sandy loam layer (130) c 0.11 m deep which contained significant quantities of animal bone and still produced mid 13th-early 14th century sherds, though these were probably residual in this context. 140 beneath produced a single fragment of clay pipe. It is equally unclear if this represents the true date of these deposits and it was possibly intrusive. Both these deposits were truncated to the E by another post-medieval feature (cut 111) so their easterly extent is unknown, but they may have belonged to a phase post-dating the disuse of the building carried on wall 149. Above 130 a further brownish-grey sandy loam 0.23 m thick (109), also cut by 111, seems likely to have been of post-medieval date, but it contained no datable material.

Excavation of the sequence of deposits between walls 149 to the W and 139 to the E was limited in extent and in depth. The lowest levels in the W end of this sequence were visible in the E face of the robber trench 145, however. The first of these, above the possibly natural clay 159, was a mixed sandy clay up to 0.14 m thick (193), overlaid by a thin layer of gravelly clay loam (192) above which was a sandy gravel layer (191) up to 0.12 m thick. This was at a comparable stratigraphic and absolute level to the rather thinner layer 195 on the W side of the wall line. 191 was sealed by a substantial surface up to 0.14 m thick (182) consisting of irregular but flat limestone slabs (up to 0.16 m x 0.37 m) in a matrix of grey brown sandy loam. This extended only c 1.20 m E of the line of wall 149, at which point it was seen to overlie a mortar floor (183, like 182 not excavated). 183 extended eastwards to butt against the face of wall 139. Above 183 and 182 was a long sequence of thin surfaces with a total depth of c 0.35 m (171, 170, 169, 168/158,

157, 156, 172, 128, 127 and 114). These were characteristically composed of gravel and small limestone fragments with much pea grit. The lowest of these, 171, was the first deposit in this sequence to produce dating material, pottery of the mid 13th-early 14th century. At the W end of the sequence, against the E face of wall 149, was a small and apparently localised group of limestone blocks (199). The function and precise stratigraphic position of these stones is ambiguous. They could represent a small pile of stones deposited above layer 157 and incorporated within or butted by later surfaces, or they may possibly have been part of a drain structure against the wall perhaps cut through the surfaces from a similar level.

All the surfaces mentioned above terminated to the W at the edge of the robber trench 145 (except where affected by the presence of 199). The main fill of the robber trench was a sandy loam with limestone fragments (147), containing sherds dated late 13th-15th century, topped by a thin band of fine grey-brown gravel. This was overlaid by deposits of gravelly loam (131, 113 and 112) which extended across the top of the trench and beyond its W edge. Their relationship to the rather different layers further W (140 and 130, see above), if any, was removed by post-medieval features (111 and 110). To the E the succession of surfaces above 183 was truncated short of the W face of wall 139 by a sloping sided cut (189) up to c 0.27 m deep and 1.30 m wide, filled with very mixed sandy loam and gravel. The function of the feature is uncertain. Its fill was in turn cut by a robber trench (121) on the line of wall 139, filled with mixed material (187). 187 was likewise partly cut away by a further shallow (0.16 m deep) feature, perhaps a pit (188), which partly straddled the line of the former wall but mostly lay to the E of it. Its primary fill was a thin layer of charcoal (133), which lay beneath a brown gravelly loam (115). To the E this feature also cut the gravel layer (116) which sealed the hearths at the E end of the trench (above). These deposits contained no dating material.

All the layers and features just described were overlaid by a uniform general layer of dark brownish grey gravelly loam (107 and 108), over 0.30 m thick at the W end of the trench but more generally c 0.05-0.06 m thick. This is thought to have been a truncated orchard soil. It was overlaid (and locally cut) by deposits and features of modern date. At the W end of the trench it overlaid the possible post-medieval pit (111, fills 124, 125 and 126) already referred to as cutting 109 etc.

#### **4.2.2. Trench 2**

This trench was also excavated by machine to a variable depth. The uppermost archaeological feature visible (at c 55.80 m OD) was the post-medieval robbing of a medieval wall (cut 207). Apparently undifferentiated deposits W of the edge of this feature were removed by machine to a depth of c 55.40 m OD. From this level the trench was hand dug to a depth of between 55.46 m and 55.12 m OD depending on the nature of the archaeological deposits encountered. Nowhere did excavation reach the bottom of the archaeological sequence. The principal features in this trench related to a sequence of structures (of three major periods) at the E end, with pits to the W.



Situated in the W half of the trench at about 55.40 m was 241, a layer of mid grey silt and limestone, which included a lens of dark brown/grey silty loam (261) at 55.34 m OD. This lens contained pottery dating to the late 11th-13th century. To the E of this a building (building period 1) was indicated by the presence of an E-W running wall (251) at 55.61 m OD. This wall was 0.68 m wide at the eastern section and ran for 1.23 m until robbed. At least two courses of small limestone masonry were in situ. A possible northward return (260) was found to the W of the W end of the wall at 55.42 m OD, but was not fully excavated. To the W 260 was disturbed by a later pit (223). These features were linked by a robber trench (254) W of 251. This had vertical sides and was 0.65 m wide. Foundations in this trench were still in situ and it was filled by an orange/brown silty loam (255) with much gravel and some medium sized limestone fragments. It contained pottery dated to the mid 13th-early 14th century. It is possible that the N-S return extended further S than now indicated, as trench 254 was cut by pit 218 at this point. A slightly worn, yellow sandy mortar surface containing small to medium sized limestone fragments (265) at 55.40 m OD lay to the N of wall 251 and east of the stones (260) which formed the possible return, probably indicating a floor surface and therefore the interior of the structure. This was also not fully excavated.

On the S side wall 251 was butted by a layer of dark grey silty loam (257), which contained gravel, small to medium fragments of limestone and frequent charcoal inclusions, and pottery dated 11th-13th and 13th-15th century. It ran beneath 214, which was the construction cut for a later wall 268, to emerge beneath 256, a dark brown silty loam 0.06 m in depth and also containing gravels.

Above level 256 lay 253, a mid brown/orange slightly silty sand and gravel 0.06 m in maximum depth which extended over most of the eastern part of the trench. It overlaid the wall 251 and in the northern section extended westwards under a very similar deposit, 245, until cut by 223, a later pit. It was probably a demolition or levelling layer above the reduced remains of the building represented by walls 251 and 260.

Above 245 to the E and 241 to the W was a substantial layer of gravelly sand-silt with limestone fragments (234) which extended the length of the trench on its N side, except where it was truncated by 264 in the NE corner. Opposite in the S baulk was 246, a mid brown/grey silty loam stratigraphically comparable to 234, though a direct relationship was not established. 246 was cut by 214, the foundation trench for a poorly preserved N-S wall (building period 2) apparently of two phases, the earlier 268 and the later 209. The exact point from which 214 was cut is uncertain but the level of floor surfaces found in the extreme SE corner of the trench on the E side of the wall suggest that it cannot have been from a higher point than the top of 246, giving a maximum depth for the construction cut of only c 0.25 m, and probably rather less on the E side. Only the basal stones of the E face/foundation of wall 268 survived in situ. The wall apparently formed a corner within the E end of the trench with an easterly return (212 in construction cut 220), also poorly preserved. Between walls 268 and 212 was a sequence of floor surfaces (248, 247, 240, 239 and 238). Layers 248 and 247 were of a mid brown/orange sandy loam and between 0.05 m and 0.10 m thick; 240, 239 and 238

were of grey/white chalk and between 0.02 m and 0.08 m in thickness. Above 238 was layer 211, a white/grey silty mortar containing a little pottery dated 13th-15th century. All these surfaces butted against the E face of wall 212. Only the lowest (248), however, butted the E-W wall 268. Above this the floor layers were truncated by a vertical cut (249) in line with the E face of 268.

This cut, with its fill (250) of mid brown silty loam, 0.40 m deep and 0.12 m wide, might have indicated the existence of an interior structure based on 268, but it is more likely that it represents the removal of part of wall 268 prior to its replacement by later phase of wall (209). This was of approximately three courses of roughly hewn limestone bonded by mid grey/brown sandy loam containing 5% crushed chalk (217) containing 13th-15th century pottery. In this second phase structure wall 212 seems to have been out of use for its line was sealed by 210, a layer of sandy, slightly silty, grey/brown loam, and the overlying layer 213. These layers sealed the top of the putative construction trench for wall 209 (249) and would have butted against the E side of the wall, but the relationship was removed by cut 215 (the robbing of wall 209, filled by 216, an orange/brown sandy silt). Beyond the line of wall 212, 210 was truncated by a straight sided cut 264, some 1.40 m across and 0.50 m deep, filled by 262 (loose rubble in mid brown silt) and 263 (mid brown sandy silt). This feature is best interpreted as a robber trench or pit removing the northerly continuation of wall 209, but here the fills of 264 were overlaid by 213, whereas this layer was cut by the ?comparable robber trench (215) just to the S. The explanation for this is not clear.

Deposits to the W of this complex structural sequence were not easily related to it, being separated by a later cut (207). Layers such as 243 and the overlying 233, an extensive grey/brown silty sand up to 0.45 m deep towards the NW corner of the trench, were cut by 207, and may well have been contemporary with the use of the building carried on wall 209, though it is possible that layer 243 was earlier than wall 209 and contemporary with the use of wall 268. 233 produced a single fragment of clay pipe. It is uncertain if this is indicative of the date of the deposit or whether it was intrusive from adjacent layers and cut features. The latter seems more likely.

These deposits and the top of the robber trench of wall 209 were sealed by a general layer (206) of mid brown sandy loam with some gravel and limestone fragments, ranging in thickness from c 0.03-0.18 m. The date of this deposit is not known. A third period of building was indicated by a N-S cut 207, cut through 206. As mentioned above the W edge of this feature was the first clearly discernible feature seen during the machine excavation of the trench. Despite this the feature was most clearly seen in the north and south sections of the trench. 207 was 1.20 m wide and 0.60 m deep with vertical sides and a flat bottom, and constituted the post-medieval robber trench of a wall probably of late medieval date. The wall would have been exactly in line with the W wall of the surviving fragment of the Abbey buildings. There were no floor surfaces or other layers associated with 207. It was filled by 208, a light brown/orange sandy gravel containing worked limestone ashlar fragments, pieces of painted window glass, painted wall plaster, stone roof tile, fragments of floor tile, pottery, animal bone and clay pipe

fragments. These last and one pottery sherd indicate an 18th century date for the fill of the robber trench.

To the W of 207 were several pits. Most of these were certainly or probably cut through 206 and were therefore stratigraphically equivalent to 207. Pit 223, however, was cut from the top of layer 233, beneath 206. It was probably the earliest pit in the trench, c 1.30 m across and 0.70 m deep, and was filled by 224, a mid grey/brown sandy loam which contained pottery fragments dated to the mid 13th-early 14th century.

Layer 206 was cut by pits 218, 222 and 227. Pits 235 and 266, stratigraphically earlier than these last, may nevertheless have been cut from the same level, their upper parts having been completely truncated. Pit 235, the earliest of all this sequence, was significant in producing a sherd of 17th-18th century date from its upper fill (230). This provides a terminus post quem for all the pits in this group except 218, but this too was probably closely contemporary with the main group.

The deepest pit, 218, was roughly circular in plan, c 2.20 m across and 1.10 m deep, with a steep SE side and a concave base which bottomed at 55.12m OD. It was filled by 219, 221 and 258 and had possible unrobbed foundations of wall 251 in the bottom. Pit 218 was cut by pit 222, c 2.40 m across and up to 0.70 m deep, filled by a mid grey/brown sandy loam with stone rubble (225). This was itself truncated by 267, a shallow cut filled by 226, a dark grey sandy silt with mixed gravels and occasional charcoal flecks. Pit 222 also cut 236, the mid brown sandy silt fill of a further pit 266, which in turn truncated the fills of pit 235. The lower fill of 235 was 242, a mid brown sandy loam, overlaid by 230, a grey brown silty sand. 235 was cut to the W by pit 227, also cut from the top of 206. This was filled first by 229, a mid grey/brown silty sand, then by 228, a dark grey sandy silt. 229 contained a sherd of 17th-18th century date, but apart from this and the similarly dated sherd from 230 (above) all the pottery from these pit fills was residual medieval material.

Above the pit fills and layer 206 was a general layer of dark brown sandy loam with some gravel (205). This also produced 17th-18th pottery. It lay directly beneath the the compact orange gravel and rubble makeup (202) for the concrete car park surface (201). 201 and 202 were 0.48m at the deepest point. To the W of the concrete, 205 was overlaid by a layer of rubble contemporary with the car park concrete (204) beneath modern topsoil (203).

#### **4.2.3. Trench 3**

The engineers' test pit (test pit 4) in this location was re-excavated by JCB to check the significance of the records of its original excavation, which indicated the presence of stone down to the bottom of the hole 2.70 m below modern ground surface. The trench was not completely re-excavated, principally for safety reasons, but while careful cleaning and detailed recording were impossible for the same reasons it was possible to establish an outline sequence of events.



The lowest deposit encountered was 406, a black gritty clay with some small limestone pieces and organic fragments at least 0.15 m deep. The top of this deposit was at c 54.93 m OD and it extended across much of the N side of the trench. It was overlaid in the N section by 405, a gritty dark grey clay some 0.40 m deep. Finds were recovered from this layer, including some substantial tile fragments from its interface with 406 and pottery including a sherd dateable from mid 13th-15th century.

Both 406 and 405 appeared to have been substantially removed within the area of the trench by stonework which was identified as belonging probably to two walls, 402 to the E and 401 to the W. In the extreme NE corner of the trench 402 was shown to have a rough N face, which presumably indicates that this was an approximately E-W aligned wall, which would have occupied most of the trench and explains the difficulties encountered in the original excavation. The alignment of 401 is less clear, it could have been c SW-NE, but it is most probable that it formed part of the same structure as 402 and therefore ran roughly N-S. The relationships of the walls to 406 and 405 are uncertain, but it is much more likely that the wall trenches cut these deposits than that the layers were laid against the wall faces.

Overlying 405 in the NE corner of the trench and probably butting wall 402 on its N side was a mixed layer of brown gravel and rubble, perhaps a construction deposit. A little to the W this was overlaid by 403, a deposit of loose ?sandy mortar, perhaps a limited floor surface, apparently laid against wall 401. The top of this layer was at 55.60 m OD.

No significant archaeological deposits were observable above this layer and the surviving top of wall 401 (at about 55.81 m OD). The upper sides of the trench contained much rubble and concrete and had been extensively disturbed. The top of the concrete through which the original test pit had been dug was at 56.67 m OD. The stony backfill of the test pit contained a large fragment of a limestone pier base. Its original location is of course unknown.

#### **4.2.4. The Finds**

The finds are only summarised here as no detailed examination has yet taken place. The principal finds categories were pottery, building material and animal bone. Of these the pottery was briefly scanned to provide dating evidence for the stratigraphic sequences in the site and the evidence of the few clay pipe fragments was also taken into account for dating, though in two instances (see above) this was equivocal, with the possibility that small pipe fragments were intrusive in late medieval deposits. Further work on the finds will await the conclusion of all the fieldwork phases of the project.

The pottery assemblages were characteristic of the region and period. There was a little material dateable to the 11th-13th centuries, though most of these sherds are likely to have originated in the later part of that date range. There is still no evidence of occupation on the site before the foundation of the Abbey (initially

priory) in 1129. The 13th-15th centuries, the period within which most of the activity identified in the evaluation probably fell, was dominated by the supply of pottery from the Brill/Boarstall industry in Buckinghamshire. Small fragments of pottery assignable to this source are often not closely datable within the 13th-15th century date bracket. There was, however, a reasonable representation of vessels assignable to a 'highly decorated' phase of the industry, dated to the mid 13th-early 14th centuries. Post-medieval pottery was relatively scarce on the site, but was significant particularly in providing dating for the later features in Trench 2.

Building materials were stone, which included small worked fragments from the post-medieval feature 207 and a larger piece from the disturbed fill of Trench 3, as well as many fragments of limestone roof 'slates', and ceramic materials. These included fragments of decorated floor tiles from Trenches 1 and 2 and also roofing material. Some of the latter consisted of glazed fragments, with one or two glazed crested ridge tiles being represented. Other building related finds included small fragments of window glass, one possibly painted, and lead kames.

The animal bones were mainly from post-medieval deposits, where they were supplemented by a relatively large number of oyster shells.

## **5. Summary Discussion**

The evaluation located well preserved archaeological deposits of high quality in both Trenches 1 and 2. Deposits in Trench 3 were also of considerable significance, but lay within an area which appears to have been rather disturbed in recent times. The quality and complexity of the deposits meant that (with the possible exception of two very limited points in Trench 1) the bottom of the archaeological sequence was not identified. It is therefore not possible at present to shed light on the earliest phases of development of this part of the site, thought to have commenced in the late 12th or 13th centuries. On present evidence, however, there is nothing to contradict this view. A few pottery sherds of possible earlier date were recovered, but these could have been introduced from further E in the process of making up ground levels for building.

In Trench 1 there was little evidence for such activity, however, unless the clean clay into which both wall trenches were cut was in fact redeposited material. The dip in the level of the top of the clay layer from W to E may be accounted for by the existence of a former river channel thought to have been located immediately to the E of the E end of Trench 1. If this was so, however, it is unclear whether the clay should be seen as part of the fill of the channel or whether it reflects a natural contour contemporary with the existence of the channel prior to its infilling in the ?later 12th century preparatory to the westerly expansion of the Abbey precinct. There is no clear evidence that the clay layer was redeposited, but insufficient of it was seen for this to be certain. Probable evidence of the top of the sequence of channel fills was seen in Trench 3, where the lowest deposit encountered (406) included waterlogged organic fragments. Pottery from the overlying deposit suggests that infilling of the channel in this area did not take

place until the mid 13th century at the earliest, but this could represent a localised situation.

In Trench 1 the excavation of wall trenches seems to have been almost the primary activity after the westward extension of the Abbey precinct. The buildings represented, apparently two separate structures, seem to have been at least broadly contemporary even though laid out on different alignments. Both were substantial structures, and both contained hearth features of more than one phase, though it is not clear if these reflect the primary function of the buildings. The area between the two buildings produced deposits of very different character from those 'within' the buildings. These deposits indicated multiple resurfacing of an access way, and it was this character as much as the wall alignments which suggested the presence of two buildings rather than a single one.

The evidence for long-lived use of the Trench 1 buildings is not reflected in Trench 2. Here there were apparently three major periods of construction, all on a broadly similar alignment but all in slightly different positions. A rubble layer (241) encountered in the W part of the trench may have been broadly contemporaneous with the earliest building, again on the assumption that building construction followed almost immediately on the westward movement across the former water channel. The first period building lay largely to the N of Trench 1, with its SW corner within the trench. The second period building was sited a little to the E, but extended further S. Its extent is unclear because of its marginal position in the trench. It is likely that the E-W wall (212) was an integral part of the initial structure 2, though less clear whether it was an internal wall or marked the northern end of the building. This building contained chalk/mortar floors of quite high quality, which contrast with those of the preceding period and the succeeding rebuilt phase. The extent of the second phase of the structure is also unclear. The E-W wall seems to have been out of use, but the evidence for the relationship of the N-S wall (and in particular its robber trench) to floors which must have been associated with this phase is contradictory.

The third period of building in Trench 2 is represented only by the line of a N-S wall robbed out in the 18th century, with no associated surfaces. Despite the paucity of the evidence the alignment strongly suggests that this wall was in origin of late medieval date, a southward continuation of the W side of the extant Scheduled Ancient Monument just to the N. The absence of surfaces associated with this wall presumably indicates some truncation of deposits here, though whether this took place during the later stages of the life of the building or after its demolition is unknown. Extensive pit digging immediately to the W was broadly contemporary with the demolition phase. The date of robbing of the walls in Trench 1 is unclear, but may have occurred at the Dissolution. Agas' plan of 1578 shows no extant buildings in the SW corner of the Abbey precinct, whereas a little further N the W range of the outer court was still in place. This is consistent with the archaeological evidence from Trench 2, and with the later documentary and pictorial evidence for the development of this part of the site discussed in detail by Sharpe.



To the E in Trench 3 there was further evidence for substantial stone buildings, but the circumstances of the re-excavation of the test pit did not allow interpretation beyond the establishment of a probable SW corner (or internal wall junction) of a building aligned roughly N-S. The alignment is, however, consistent with that of a building seen in Sharpe's site D and reconstructed by him on the basis of walls F21 and F31 and a robber trench F44. It is quite possible that the features in Trench 3, if of a single phase, are further parts of the same building. There is no dating for it beyond the 13th century terminus post quem (for layer 205) already mentioned.

### A note on levels

The evidence for the levels of significant archaeological deposits is summarised in the table below. The top of these deposits occurs relatively consistently at about 56.30 m, though there are local variations above and below this value. The depth recorded for deposits in Trench 3 is well below this figure but this is probably atypical, since a value from Sharpe's Site D, immediately to the N, is also at 56.30 m. Modern ground levels (outside the existing buildings) are also relatively uniform, except at the N end of the site, to the N of Trench 3, where they begin to rise slightly.

	Top of Significant Deposit	Depth of Deposit	Modern Ground Level
Trench 1			
East End	56.06m	0.44m +	56.77m
Middle	56.24m	c. 1.24m	56.76m
West End	56.30m	c. 0.90m	56.72m
Trench 2			
East End	56.26m	0.85m +	56.76m
West End	56.38m	0.90m +	56.70m/56.90m
Trench 3			
	55.81m*	c. 1.0m +	56.67m/c. 56.90m

\* See note in text above.

Paul Booth  
Oxford Archaeological Unit  
8th August 1994

## Reference

Sharpe, J, 1985, Oseney Abbey, Oxford: archaeological investigations, 1975-1983, Oxoniensia 50, 95-130

## **Appendix: A Critical Appraisal of Sharpe's Analysis of the Archaeological and Historical Documentation of The Oseney Abbey site (by Rob Early)**

### **1. Introduction**

The Oxford Archaeological Unit was required as part of the brief for the evaluation of the site to carry out a critical commentary of a previous analysis of archaeological and historic documentation at the former Oseney Abbey site, Mill Street, Oxford in advance of a proposed residential development (Planning Application No. NFZ/413/94). An analysis of archaeological investigations carried out by B Durham between 1975 and 1983 was related to historic documentation for the site, and published by J. Sharpe in 1985.

The aim of this report is to provide a critical summary of interpretations drawn from the archaeological investigations and to supply details of depths of the surviving remains, not given in the published report. The primary source consulted was the excavation archive and the secondary source the above cited publication.

### **2. Present Topography**

The site was formerly the Cadena Bakery, later converted and used for Research Machines computers and now disused. It is part of a small industrial estate which adjoins part of a marina complex adjacent to the Mill Stream, the latter including a 15th-century building scheduled as an ancient monument (Oxon SAM 79). The site lies on the Thames alluvium and gravels.

### **3. Summary of Historic Background**

The Augustinian Abbey, founded as a priory in 1129 lay outside the city on the island of Oseney, between two branches of the Thames. It assumed Abbey status in 1154 and grew rapidly to become the largest and most powerful monastic foundation in Oxford. By the 13th century the original buildings had been enlarged, to form 'a most beautiful and large fabric, second to none in the kingdom'.<sup>1</sup>

After the Dissolution the Abbey Church became the cathedral of the new diocese of Oxford, but after only a few years was superseded by St. Frideswide's priory church. This prompted its decay, destruction and final ruin, complete by the end of the civil war.

Before archaeological investigations in 1975 understanding of the topographical layout of the western part of the Abbey relied solely on historic reference. The 12th-century topography of the site is based principally on Agas's plan of 1578 and Badcock's survey of 1829. Agas's plan shows Oseney Abbey bounded by a precinct wall, together with other then surviving buildings and boundaries. Badcock's map, prepared as a survey of Christ Church lands, shows the north-east precinct wall as

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<sup>1</sup> W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (ed. J. Caley *et al.*, 1819) vi (1), 249.



in Agas's plan. Both contributions illustrate east-west aligned ditches and this channel pattern is reinforced when compared with those planned by Hollar.

Published drawings by Aubrey, principally of the Abbey Church, whilst confirming a complex architectural history for the cloister area, are uninformative about the surrounding topography.

## **4. Summary of the Archaeological Investigations**

### **4.1. Excavations**

Four locations were excavated in advance of redevelopment (labelled here sites A to D, as in Sharpe's report), between 1975 and 1983. A salvage excavation of the west waterfront (site A), consisted of the examination of sections exposed during the cutting back of the Mill Stream to form a marina. The evidence recovered from site A suggested that further stratified deposits may survive further to the east. The opportunity to complete limited excavations in this area, believed to join the Abbey precinct, arose during further redevelopment (sites B to D) in 1983, and was funded by the Department of the Environment (figure 1).

A summary description and comments of the archaeological finds from each site excavation follows. Emphasis has been placed on those sites excavated within or close to the area of proposed redevelopment; principally site A but including sites B and D.

#### **4.1.1. Site A: Description and levels of principal archaeological features**

The difficult salvage conditions meant that only a limited number of stratigraphic relationships could be established during the 1975 recording. A further eroded section was exposed due to weathering and examined by Sharpe in 1983, which enabled useful inferences to be made to add to the 1975 reconstructed sections (*Oxoniensia* 50, 98, figure 3 and *Archive*).

Figure 2 locates the archaeological features identified during the salvage recording. A sub-division between the N and S of site A has been made for convenience in the following sections. This divide been made between features N and S of L9/0 (see Fig 2).

#### **4.1.2 . Site A, North: Description**

The features observed in this area and their interpreted relationships can be seen on the S facing reconstruction section (*Oxoniensia* 50, 98, figure 3), with the exception of four NE-SW aligned walls F5, F15, F17 and F14. It should be noted that this figure has been reconstructed from photographic and survey data and is not a scaled field drawing.

Wall F4 appears stratigraphically earlier than the other identified walls, but has no direct relationships with wall F7 to the west. Wall F5, not seen in the

reconstructed section, was at right-angles to wall F4 and described as stratigraphically later. A well made ragstone and limestone wall (F6), on a parallel alignment with F4, cut into the back of a natural bank L8/2; revetment wall (F7) cut into the front of the. Layer 8/1 immediately above natural bank L8/2 was identified at 53.78 m OD.

The south-west corner of a wall (F13) observed at the eastern extent of the section was seven courses high and was later than F5, F7 and F4. A NW-SE aligned robber-trench (F12) cut wall F4 and was attributed to the latest phase of activity in this area.

#### **4.1.3. Area A, North: Discussion**

Sharpe suggests that floor surfaces L9/1-4 were associated with wall (F4) and surface L9/0 with wall F5. These have been attributed in sequence as the remains of the earliest structures (Building I and II, Oxoniensia 50, figure 5, 105) in the phase diagram of site A. As discussed in section 4.1.2, there was no clearly identified stratigraphic link between the floor surfaces observed in the southern end of the site with walls (F4 and F5) in the north. This interpreted relationships must therefore remain in doubt.

Walls F17, F6 and F7 have been grouped together to represent the remains of a later range of buildings (building IV). F7 and F6 are parallel, cut bank 8/2 and are stratigraphically contemporary when seen in the reconstruction section. Although tentative, in the absence of direct evidence it is not unreasonable to suggest that these walls are the remains of a building. Reconstructing buildings on the basis of their apparent wall alignments, when observed in two metre wide trenches was acknowledged by the excavator. Field notes describe this problem; 'As with all these walls it was impossible to guess at its (F6) line, but it was not inconsistent with wall (F7) following the line of the mill stream'.

#### **4.1.4 . Site A, South: Description**

A series of possible floor layers (L9/0, L9/1-4) were identified between the W face of the marina cut and the features to the N (figure 2). L9/0 the top of the sequence was recorded at a depth of 53.88 m OD. A NE-SW aligned wall (F1) on a massive rubble footing 1.3 m wide was parallel to a drain (F2), and at the limit of excavation survived 5 courses high; top course recorded at a depth of 55.26 m OD. These features were interpreted as cutting the lower floor surfaces (L9/1-4), although L9/0 appeared not to continue S of the drain. A deliberate gap was observed in F1, possibly a gateway, however the drain continued without interruption with no evidence of previously being sealed. F1 was not observed in the stream bank before the excavation of the marina and presumably terminated between the stream and a 4 m mark behind the bank where it was first recorded.

A further wall (F16) with a rubble filled disturbance, noted high in section cutting layer 9/1. No further relationships were recorded and it is assumed to be late in

the phased sequence.

#### **4.1.5. Site A, South: Discussion**

The earliest recorded deposits are a sequence of mortar and ashy layers interpreted as floor surfaces (L9/0, L9/1-4). Sharpe states that these provide the only stratigraphic link between features observed in the south and the north of site A. Field notes deposited in the archive indicate that these deposits were not identified north of wall F15 and their stratigraphic relationships in field notes from the 1983 observations were recorded as uncertain. A possible explanation for the absence of L9/0 and L9/1-4 to the north was that they were cut by a pit (F14). This was not proven satisfactorily during field observations. It seems therefore that no clear stratigraphic relationships were recorded with certainty to link features in the north to those in the south of site A.

Sharpe notes that wall (F1) and drain (F2) cut floor surfaces L9/1-4, but L9/0 appeared not to continue south of drain F2. Field notes indicate that these surfaces ran up to the construction cut of F2, however their relationship with F1 is confused. The only reference to this crucial relationship (10 sherds of pottery were recovered from the floor surfaces L9/0 and L9/1), was a description of a series of mortar floors under the heading 'L9' which stated that they ran up to gully F2 and were 'clearly not cut by footing F1'. The field note evidence appears to conflict with the account published by Sharpe. The relationship between wall F1 and floor surfaces L9/0 and L9/1-4 must therefore remain unclear.

Wall F16 was cited by Sharpe as cutting L9/1. The context records for this feature state that 'no floors visible but L9/1 or L9/2 may be occurring in section to the north'. This stratigraphic relationship is therefore unclear.

#### **4.1.6. Site A: Dating and Phasing**

As stated by Mellor (Medieval Pottery, *Oxoniensia* 50, 95-130) few sherds were recovered from site A and therefore they can only usefully be used to provide *termini post quos* for their provenances.

Twenty-two sherds of pottery were recovered from site A and came from 4 contexts in the southern area. One sherd was recovered from a fill of the fishpond (F10/1), dated to the 18th-19th century; 11 from the fill of a robber trench (F1/1) immediately above wall F1, dated to the 15th century and 10 sherds recovered from floor layers L9/0 and L9/1 were attributed to the late 13th-mid 14th century.

It is suggested that a detailed phase diagram, as seen in Sharpe's report, based on dating evidence from 22 sherds from only four contexts, together with the lack of reliable stratigraphic relationships is likely to be at best tentative if not misleading.

#### **4.2.1 . Site B: Description**

The western extent of site B is about 20 m E of site A, and extends eastwards for



60 m. A brief description of the archaeology recovered follows.

A NW-SE aligned river channel (B/F1) was located at the western end of the excavated area. Three rows of stakes (F20/1-8) ran parallel to the eastern extent of the channel and were overlain by an alluvium dump (L1/3), which extended under the remains of a wall (F2), also parallel to the channel. Walls F3 and F5 were interpreted as the footings for a 15 m long structure whose western wall, not identified, was aligned with wall F2. No floor surfaces were identified in the suggested interior of this building, which contained dumped alluvium (L16/1-2). A substantial robber-trench (F8), 1.8 m wide and 25 m in length, intersected the excavation trench at four locations. Although no direct relationship with previously described features was observed, F8 was interpreted as later in the sequence from dating evidence.

A layer of alluvium (L16/3 and L19/1) extended 30 m east of the waterfront line up to the line of wall F11. An E/W-aligned wall F7 was above the alluvium and sealed by occupation surfaces L17/1-2. The occupation surfaces were cut by a shallow feature lined with tiles (F4/1).

Walls F11 and F6 were located at the eastern extent of the excavated area, and had no stratigraphic relationships with previously described features. A NW-SE aligned rubble wall (F11) bounded fishpond (F10) to the W. A substantial rubble footing (F6) which had three E facing buttresses and was 13.50 m E of wall F11.

#### **4.2.2 . Site B: Discussion**

A register of levels was recorded during excavations within this area, and are noted on the site plan (Fig 2) included with this report. Clear stratigraphic relationships were identified between the described features observed in the western area of site B, whereas relationships in the eastern area were not as well defined. None of the walls identified at this site had contemporary floors or occupation surfaces. Walls F2, F6 and F11 have been interpreted as boundary walls: F2 a revetment wall and F6 a precinct wall to enclose the waterfront extended by reclamation and replaced by F11 when the precinct was reduced. Other walls and occupation surfaces have been interpreted as remains of buildings (Buildings I-IV; phase plan, *Oxoniensia* 50, figure 5, 105). F3 and F5 (Building I) adjoin and are possibly the SE corner of a structure. Building II was interpreted from a single E-W aligned wall, Buildings III and IV from possible occupation surfaces. It is suggested that these interpretations are founded on insufficient information, particularly Buildings III and IV where occupation surfaces were the only evidence of building remains.

#### **4.2.3. Site B: Dating and Phasing**

A total of 83 sherds of pottery were recovered from site B, from 15 contexts. 38 of these sherds were recovered from a shallow feature lined with tile (F4), which cut occupation layers L17/1-2. The value of the pottery data is limited, as most contexts yielded only one or two sherds. Reliable dating of stratigraphically linked contexts is therefore difficult from this assemblage and dates attributed to phases

(site B Phases, *Oxoniensia* 50, figure 5, 105) should be noted with caution.

In contrast with the field recording obtained from site A (evidence recovered under salvage excavation conditions), the records from site B have more reliable stratigraphic relationships. Together with albeit limited pottery data, this has enabled phasing to be based on a more solid foundation. It is, however, suggested that further information is required with regards the phased building interpretations (Buildings I-IV; phase plan, *Oxoniensia* 50, figure 5, 105). These were incorporated into the phase diagram from information obtained from 2 m wide trenches where only occupation surfaces were identified (Building III and IV). Only open area excavation would allow such interpretation with certainty.

#### **4.3.1. Site D: Description**

This area lies about 100 m NW of site B. Records were made by B. Durham during excavations of deep foundations and drain-trenches for an extension of the Research Machines premises in 1983.

An infilled channel (F22) possibly 20 m wide was close to a N-S aligned stone footing (F21). Further foundations and possibly associated parallel robber trenches (F31 and F44) were recovered lying obliquely to the channel (D F22) and interpreted as Building D I. Other mortared walls were uncovered W of building D I, but were cited as too few to offer a coherent building plan. A NE-SW aligned tile pavement (F43) 1.50 m wide was identified to the W of Building D I.

#### **4.3.2. Site D: Discussion**

Channel D F22 was suggested as contemporary with channel B F1. The alignment of structure D I was cited as puzzling when compared with alignments of interpreted buildings observed at sites A and B. It was therefore suggested that this implied two functionally different alignments in this part of the precinct. These interpretations were made with caution due to the conditions of recording.

The interpretation of structure D I is founded on the evidence of a section of N-S aligned wall and an E-W robber trench F44 which is seen to return to the S (*Oxoniensia* 50, figure 6, 107). This evidence is more firmly based than building interpretations made at site B (Buildings III and IV, see section 4.2.3). The significance of the difference in this alignment from that of other reconstructed building plans remains uncertain. It is suggested that insufficient information exists to make reconstructed building plans, and that only Building IV, site A, Building I site B and Possibly Building I site D have been reconstructed from satisfactory evidence.

#### **4.3.3. Site D: Dating and Phasing**

No reference is made to pottery recovered from site D in Mellor's report (Medieval Pottery, *Oxoniensia* 50, 95-130), although it is mentioned in Sharpe's text. The archive contained no identifiable pottery records for site D, so no comments can be

made on the dating and phasing of features recorded in this area.

## **5. General Discussion**

### **5.1. Site Discussions**

Archaeological information from the excavations at the Oseney Abbey sites was recovered during salvage conditions which have inevitably affected the quality of the archive records. The quality of the records for the West waterfront (site A) was particularly limited by these conditions and levels and clear stratigraphic relationships were not sufficiently obtained.

Few sherds were recovered during the excavation of site A and came from only four contexts. Ten sherds came from floor surfaces L9/0 and L9/1 which had confused stratigraphic relationships with associated archaeological features. On the basis of the poor dating evidence and unclear stratigraphic relationships, the phase diagram of site A (*Oxoniensia* 50, figure 4, 101) cannot be relied upon. Buildings interpreted on the basis of single walls or occupation surfaces (site A Buildings II, III and V), cannot be reconstructed on such flimsy evidence, nor are their alignments easily determined.

The level of recording at site B was generally more detailed than at site A. Archive records revealed that features recovered from this sites had more secure stratigraphic relationships and more detailed levels were recorded (see Fig 2). Eighty-three sherds of pottery were recovered from excavations at site B, but crucial contexts contained only one or two sherds (often not diagnostic). Phasing and dating therefore was not reliable. As at site A, an attempt was made to interpret buildings from single walls and occupation surfaces (*Buildings II, III, and IV; Oxoniensia* 50, figure 5, 105) and to incorporate these into a phased diagram of site B. These interpretations are founded on insufficient evidence.

In general the evidence obtained from these salvage excavations is inadequate to provide detailed phased plans of the Oseney Abbey site with any degree of certainty. The phasing and dating of the excavated areas is founded on fairly loose evidence; with limited amounts of coherent stratigraphic relationships and reliable dating evidence. Sharpe's use of this data in support of his historic document based interpretations therefore requires inferences which go beyond what the evidence will allow.

### **5.2. General Archaeological Interpretations**

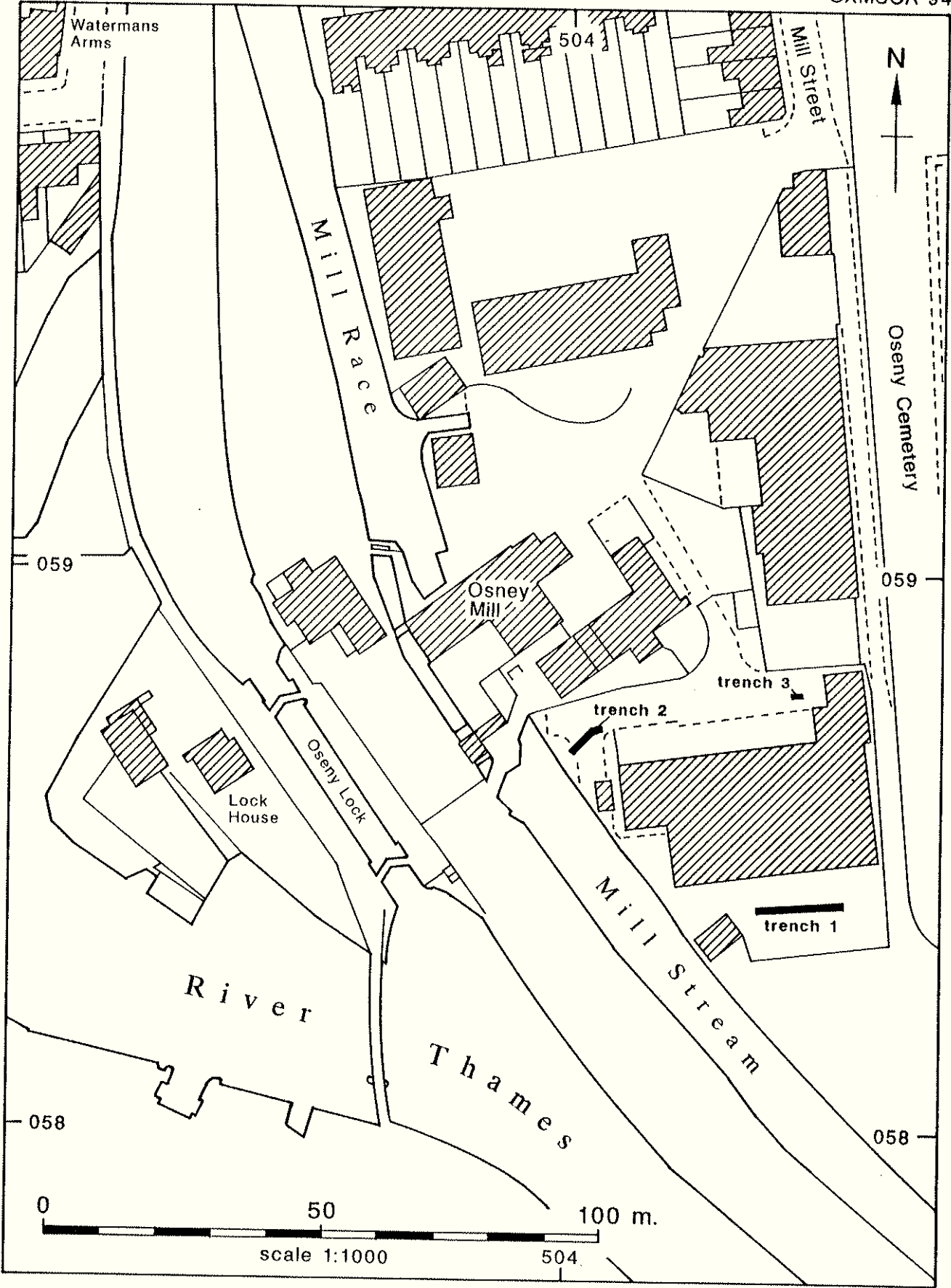
Sharp states that domestic and industrial activity were to be sited on the periphery of the site, and therefore structures identified at sites A, B and C should be industrial or domestic. This is possible but insufficient was recovered of most structures to allow any interpretation of their possible functions. Walls B F8, B F2 and A F1 were interpreted as boundary/precinct walls. Their relative positions correspond to those on Agas's Plan of the Abbey which support this interpretation. The extensive layers of disturbed alluvium observed at site B (L16/3 and L19/3-8)

may represent land reclamation, although the date of this activity remains uncertain. The re-location of the waterfront, from B F/1 to site A F4 and A F7 was cited as representing a deliberate replanning of the precinct in the 13th and 14th centuries. Further dating evidence is required to substantiate this claim.

### **5.3. Levels of Significant Archaeology**

Levels records from site A were generally poor. Those recovered from the archive indicate that significant archaeological deposits were identified at a depth of 53.78 m OD. Level records from site B (see Fig 2) indicate that archaeological deposits were identified at a depth of 54.43 m OD. Only one reference to levels on site D was identified in the site archive, this suggests that archaeological deposits were identified at a depth of 56.30 m OD.





trench location

figure 1



Trench 1 W - E section

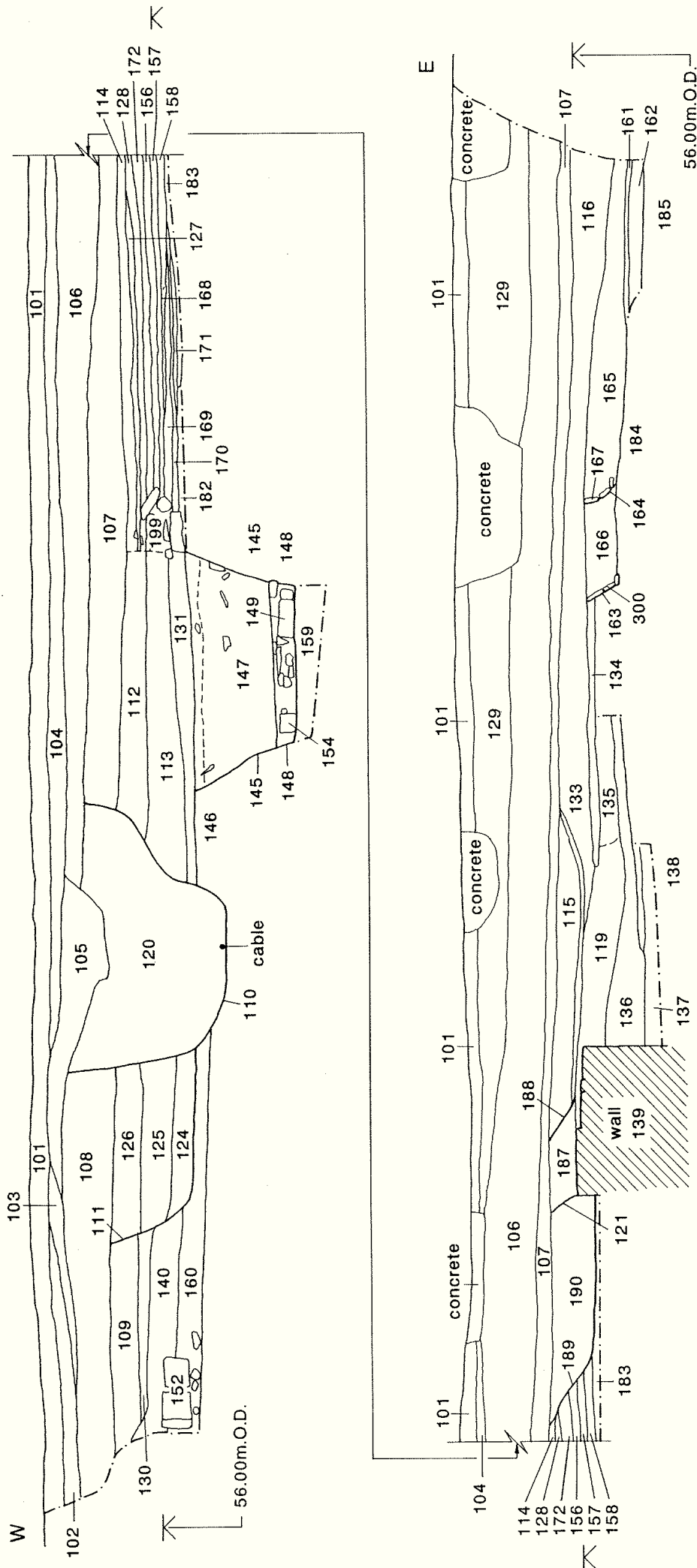


figure 3

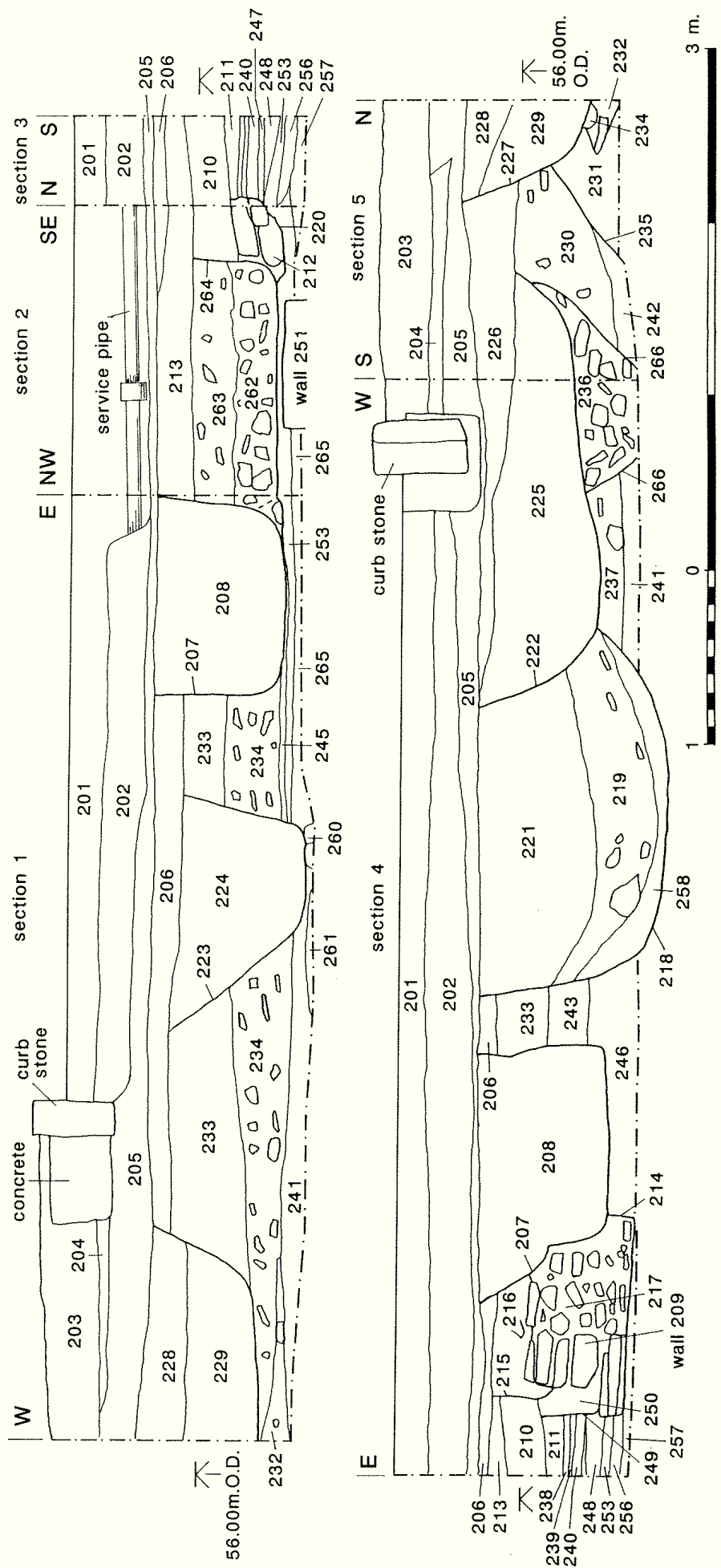
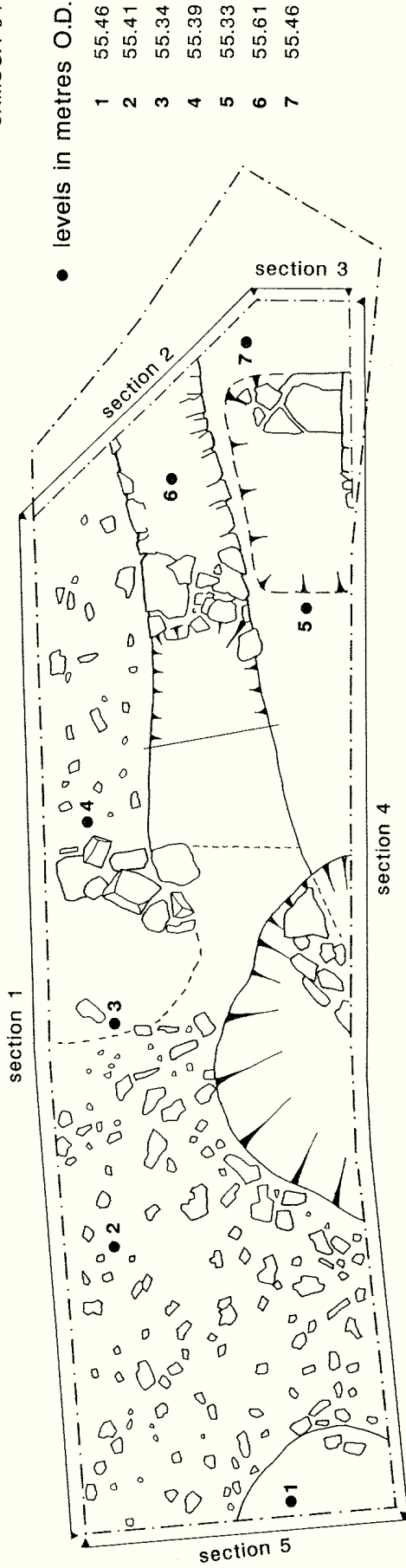


figure 4



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