

**24 Castle Street, Wallingford,
Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
For Mr and Mrs Karen Taylor**

by Stephen Hammond

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code 24CSW
06/31

April 2006

Summary

Site name: 24 Castle Street, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 60765 89795

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 15th – 23rd March 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Stephen Hammond

Site code: 24CSW 06/31

Summary of results: Part of a large (undated) ditch. One sherd of medieval pottery was identified.

Monuments identified: Outer defensive ditch of Wallingford Castle

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museums Service in due course.

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24 Castle Street, Wallingford, Oxfordshire
An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Stephen Hammond

Report 06/31

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at 24 Castle Street, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (SU 60765 89795) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mrs Karen Taylor of 16 Milldown Avenue, Goring on Thames, Reading, RG8 0AS.

A planning consent (P05/W0593) has been gained from South Oxfordshire District Council for the construction of a two-storey extension to the rear and a single-storey extension to the north side of the existing property. The rear of the property falls within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Wallingford Castle (Mon. 176) with both new builds falling within the Scheduled area. Thus under the provisions of the 1979 *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act* due to the presence of nationally important archaeology within the application area, the development also requires Scheduled Monument Consent for a watching brief to be carried out during groundworks.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Chris Welch, Inspector of Ancient Monuments for English Heritage after an initial brief issued by Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer for Oxfordshire County Council (Smith 2006). The fieldwork was undertaken by Stephen Hammond between 15th-23rd March 2006 and the site code is 24CSW 06/31.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the eastern side of Castle Street, Wallingford, to the north of the town centre and close to the west of the standing remains of the former castle (Fig. 3). The area designated for development currently forms part of the rear garden of the property. The site lies at a height of approximately 49m above Ordnance Datum and according to the underlying geology is river gravel (BGS 1980). This was observed during the watching brief.

Archaeological background

The high archaeological potential of the area has been highlighted by a brief prepared by Mr Paul Smith of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Smith 2006). The site lies within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Wallingford Castle which lies within the north eastern corner of the Saxon and medieval town (Fig. 2). This castle was built during the 11th century with the final phases of the moat defences being constructed during the 13th century, extending existing defences. This enlargement required a realignment of Castle Street some 30m westwards to its current position. Parts of the earlier roadway, a stone-built 13th-century gateway and its timber precursor have all been located within the castle precinct, buried beneath the late 13th-century extensions to the castle (Airs *et al.* 1975). The location of the development was in an excellent position to locate the pre-13th century road surface. The site is also just to the south of a probable north-west entrance to the castle bridging the outer moat and going through the barbican that was built into the second phase of the defences by the early 13th century.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record all archaeological deposits which were threatened by the digging of foundation trenches and any other groundworks. This would involve examination of all areas of intrusive groundwork. Sufficient time would be allowed during the ground workers' schedules in order to achieve this objective. Provision was made for additional contingency arrangements if necessary.

Results

All of the foundation trenches and the excavation of a soakaway were observed (Fig. 4).

The soakaway measured 2.00m by 1.60m with a maximum depth of 2.00m. Safety considerations precluded entry to the hole. Instead measured notes were taken of the section from the surface. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.30m of topsoil covering 0.90m of green/grey clay silt with occasional charcoal flecking and occasional brick and tile fragments. This covered 0.25m of light blue/grey sandy silt which in turn overlay 0.10m of orange/brown sandy silt with occasional to moderate sandy gravel inclusions. This sealed a brown/grey slightly clayey sandy silt with occasional flint gravel inclusions which continued to the base of the trench. No naturally occurring geological horizons were observed. The spoil heap created from digging the soakaway was inspected but no finds were revealed.

Other areas excavated close to the boundary wall and to the north of the existing house were very limited in nature consisting of a narrow service run dug no deeper than the thickness of the topsoil. Their resulting spoilheaps were checked for finds but none were recovered. The most westerly foundation trench (family room) was dug very close to this run and revealed far more useful information (see below).

The existing concrete foundations were grubbed out behind the rear of the house using a 360° type machine and it was not possible to record any stratigraphy. However, all the areas disturbed were checked for finds but none were recovered.

After initial grubbing out, a ground reduction of *c.* 1.0-1.2m over the family room extension area and 3.0m further beyond to the east. Ground was also reduced by *c.* 0.50m over the area designated as the proposed kitchen/dining room before the excavation of foundation trenches. The original project design envisaged that trenches measuring 0.60m wide and 1.00m deep would be adequate for the foundations. However, due to the presence of poor load bearing ground across most of the proposal area, both the width and depth of the trenching had to be increased considerably especially throughout the kitchen/dining room extension plot.

The family room

Measured observations taken from the family room showed the foundation trench to be a maximum of 2.70m deep when measuring down from the original ground height and 0.65m wide. The eastern facing section of the N-S trench closest to the wall boundary (Section 4; Fig. 5) revealed 0.30m of topsoil (50) covering 0.40m of green/grey slightly clayey sandy silt (53) with occasional brick, tile and flint gravel inclusions which in turn sealed natural sandy gravel. The trench was stepped up from an initial depth of 2.00m to 1.77m closer to the south before increasing to 2.70m on the corner with the east-west aligned part of the trench where the depth was maintained for the rest of the area. Observations made of the east facing section also showed a fairly steep ditch cut (2) approximately 5.70m from the southern end. The fill for this feature (56) appeared identical to the green/grey layer (53) sealing natural elsewhere and was noted to continue to a depth of 1.97m at the corner with the E-W part of the trench.

Across the south facing section (Section 2, Fig. 5) the stratigraphy comprised of 0.30m of topsoil (51) overlying 0.40m of green/grey sandy clay/silt (53), with occasional pieces of modern printed willow pattern china and brick and tile inclusions. This in turn covered a thin band 0.10m thick of purple/black ashy clay/silt (54) noted to seal a probable soakaway (3) filled with brick rubble (55). This cut fill 56, continuing around from the east facing section but now seen to contain faint bands of orange/brown sandy gravel. The base of the cut for

the ditch just observed the and of this but otherwise the foundation trench fully lay with the ditch and the base of the ditch was not reached.

The kitchen/dining room

The foundation trenches for the kitchen/dining area were very shallow, only present from the surface because of continuously collapsing sections. The foundation trenches were typically wide and 0.5m deep where natural ground was reached and typically 0.6m wide and up to 40cm deep where natural ground was not reached. Measured at the north facing section closest to the southern boundary of the kitchen, the trench showed 0.1m of topsoil (50), 0.3m of grey/brown sandy silt with occasional to moderate brick and tile inclusions and occasional slate and flint gravel inclusions. This sealed the trench edge with a fair steel ditch through the natural ground 0.6m from the existing wall of the house with fill consisting of greenish grey/brown sandy silty clay (52). This fill contained occasional brick tile and pottery fragments and continued to the base of the trench with the total depth of the feature being reached.

Areas of foundation trenching adjoining both the kitchen/dining room and the farm were revealed. Evidence of a fairly steep ditch towards the base of the trench approximately 1.5m from the eastern wall of the existing house. Unfortunately due to continuous collapsing sections, no detailed measurements of this ditch could be taken. However, part of this section did show a fairly stable detailed section of the ditch could be taken from a safe distance (Fig. 10 Section 10). The south facing side of the trench revealed the ditch to be sealed by 0.3m of topsoil and 0.2m of greenish grey/brown sandy silty clay (57) and noted as silty. The uppermost fill of the ditch was yellow/brown sandy silty clay (58) at least 0.1m thick composed of dark grey/brown silty clay (53). Both of these appeared to be a deep loess (60) fill which was thick similar to 52 and 56 also noted occasionally. Below this appeared blue/grey light silty clay which continued to the total depth of the trench, measured in this section.

Findings

Medieval Pottery by Timothy

A single small sherd from a ribbed strap handle decorated with the spoonhead. The fabric is hard, dark brown, medium sand with occasional flint, conforms to late Saxon/medieval Ware (Mellor 1999). The handle likely from an unglazed spouted pitcher. The surface is hard, but only the edge is present. Date late 11th/early 12th century.

Post-medieval finds

From ditch (52) a single body sherd of brown glazed earthen ware (18th/19th century date) was recovered along with three brick fragments, one tile fragment, one corroded iron lump and one unshaped lump of middle or lower chalk. Finds from the family room area (53) included body sherds of brown glazed earthen ware pottery (18th-19th century), plate fragments of transfer print ware and four plain white plate fragments of mass produced white earthen ware (19th/20th century date), the neck of a dark green wine bottle together with one body sherd of the same vessel, one slate fragment, one orange tile fragment one brick fragment and two clinker fragments. The modern finds from 53 will not be retained.

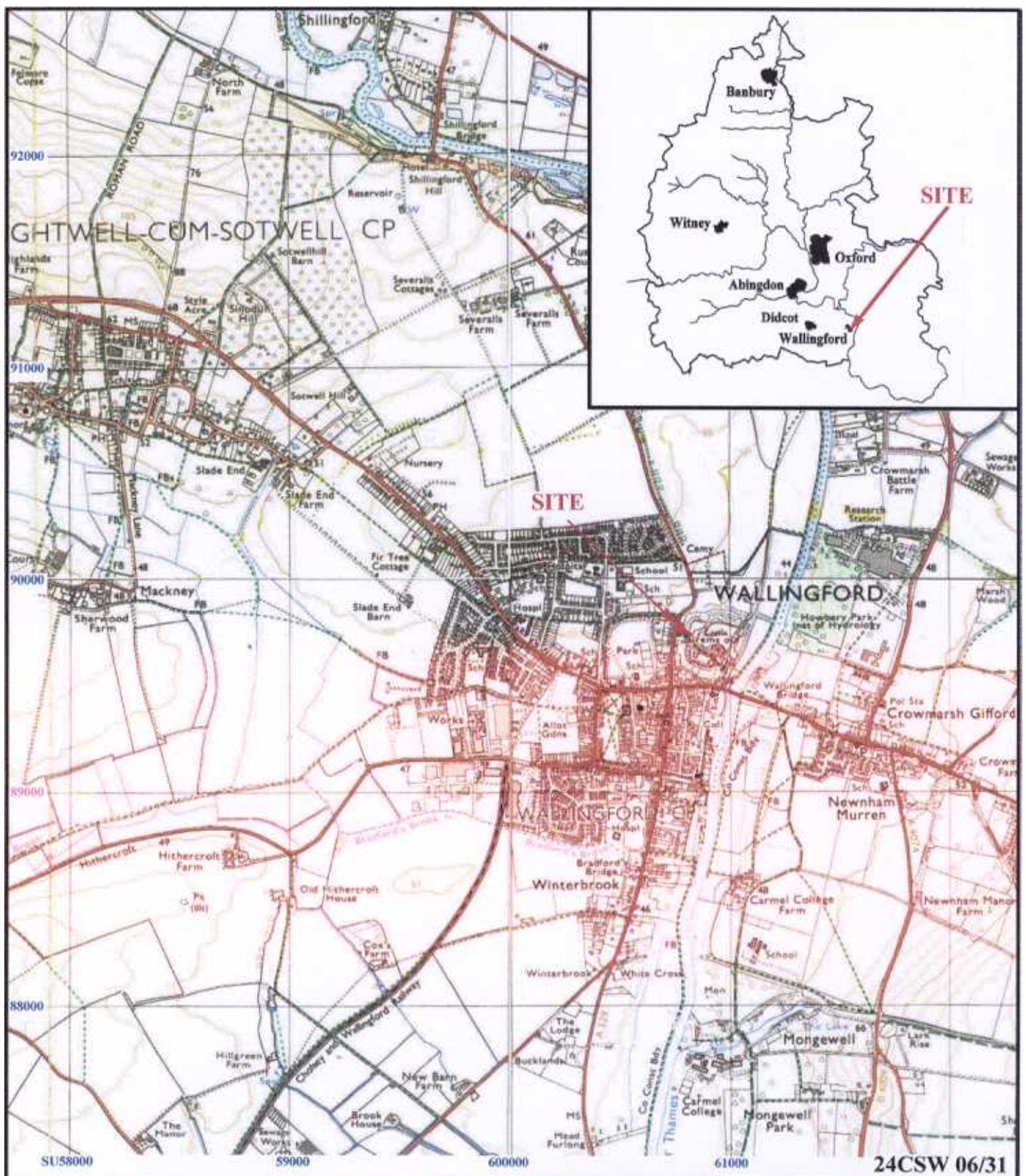
Conclusion

The results from the watching brief suggest that much of the new property extension to both the north and the east of the existing house plot was built over a ditch aligned north-south. The soakaway appears to have been dug entirely within the ditch. It is highly likely that this ditch originally formed part of the massive outer defences of Wallingford Castle belonging to the final phases of moat constructions during the 13th century. It is also possible to suggest from observations made that this ditch becomes wider towards the northern limit of trenching or perhaps kinks slightly with an irregular eastern edge. Ordnance Survey mapping of the area (Fig. 3) shows the outer ditch of the castle both to the north and south of the site and it is easy to extrapolate from this information that the ditch must continue through the development area.

Only one piece of medieval pottery was recovered from the spoil heap created during construction work with no examples being recovered from the ditch itself. Although the ditch was not bottomed, the limited number of finds uncovered within one of the two fills exposed shows this area of ditch was at least partially backfilled during the later post-medieval period. This is consistent with the documentary history of Wallingford Castle which is known to have been in use up to and during the English Civil War, holding out against Parliamentary forces for sixteen weeks before being captured and eventually demolished in 1652 under orders of the Council of State (Ford 2004).

References

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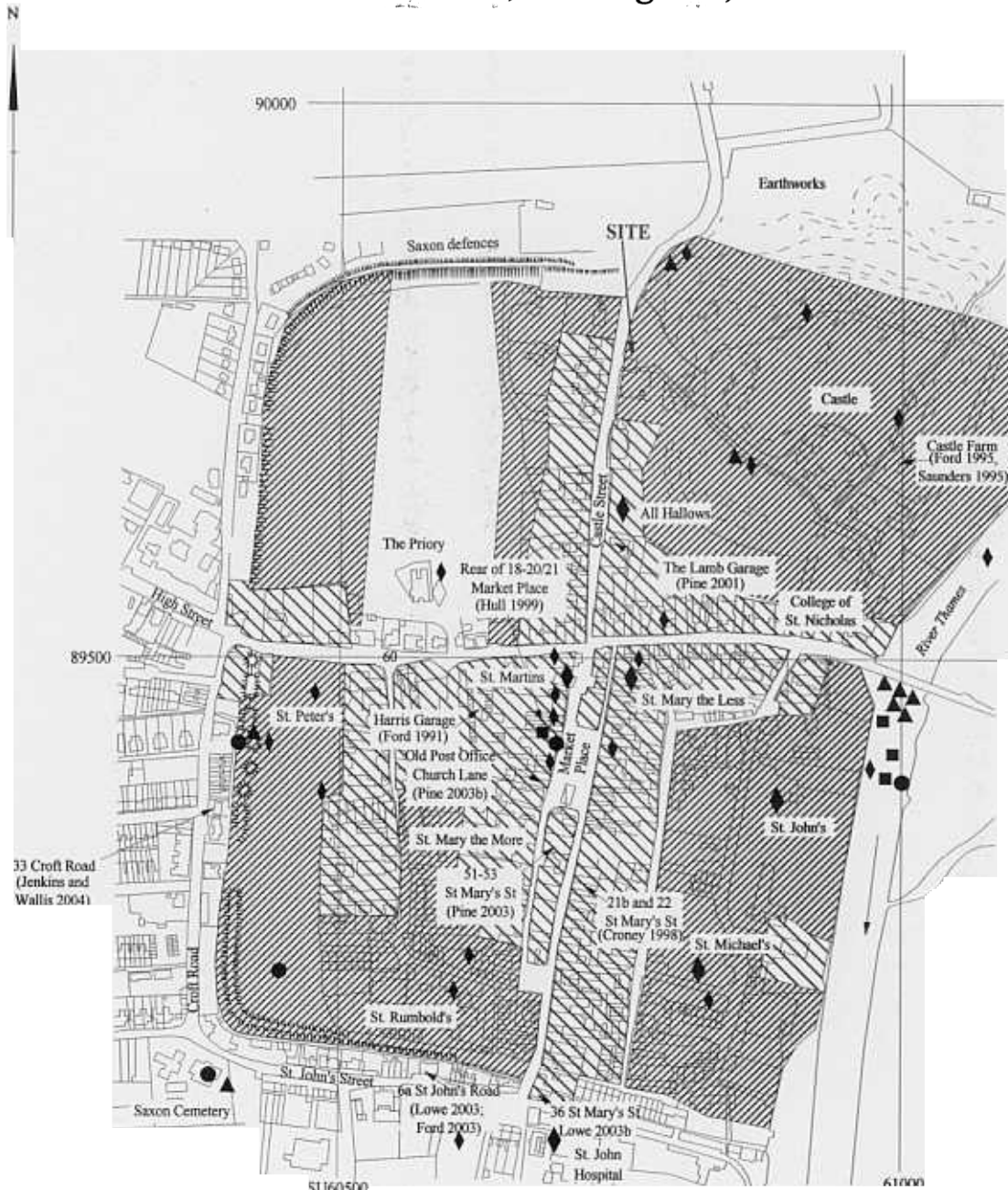
Figure 1. Location of site within Wallingford and Oxfordshire.

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THAMES VALLEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES

24 Castle Street, Wallingford, Oxfordshire



Key

■	Prehistoric Find	◆◇	Site of Medieval building (uncertain)
●	Roman Find	▨	Approx. extent of town c. 1200
▲	Saxon Find	▧	Approx. extent of town c. 1500
◆	Medieval Find		
△	Find spot uncertain		

0 250m

Figure 2. Location of the site on Castle Street and relative to other archaeological finds within the town.



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Figure 3. Location of site on Castle Street.

Scale 1:1250

T H A M E S V A L L E Y
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
 S E R V I C E S

2. Castle Street, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

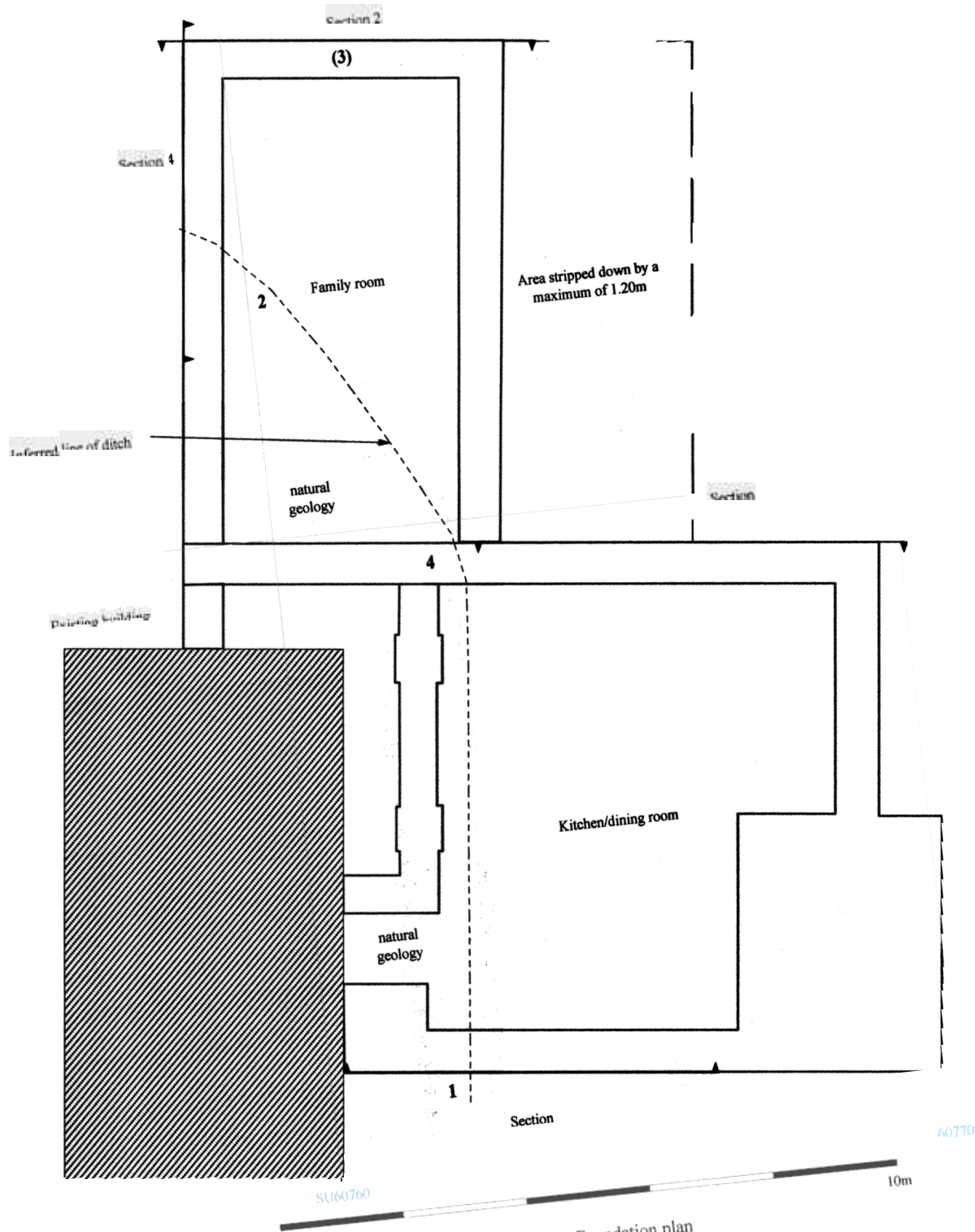
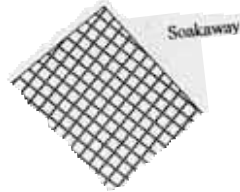


Figure 4: Foundation plan

24 Castle Street, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

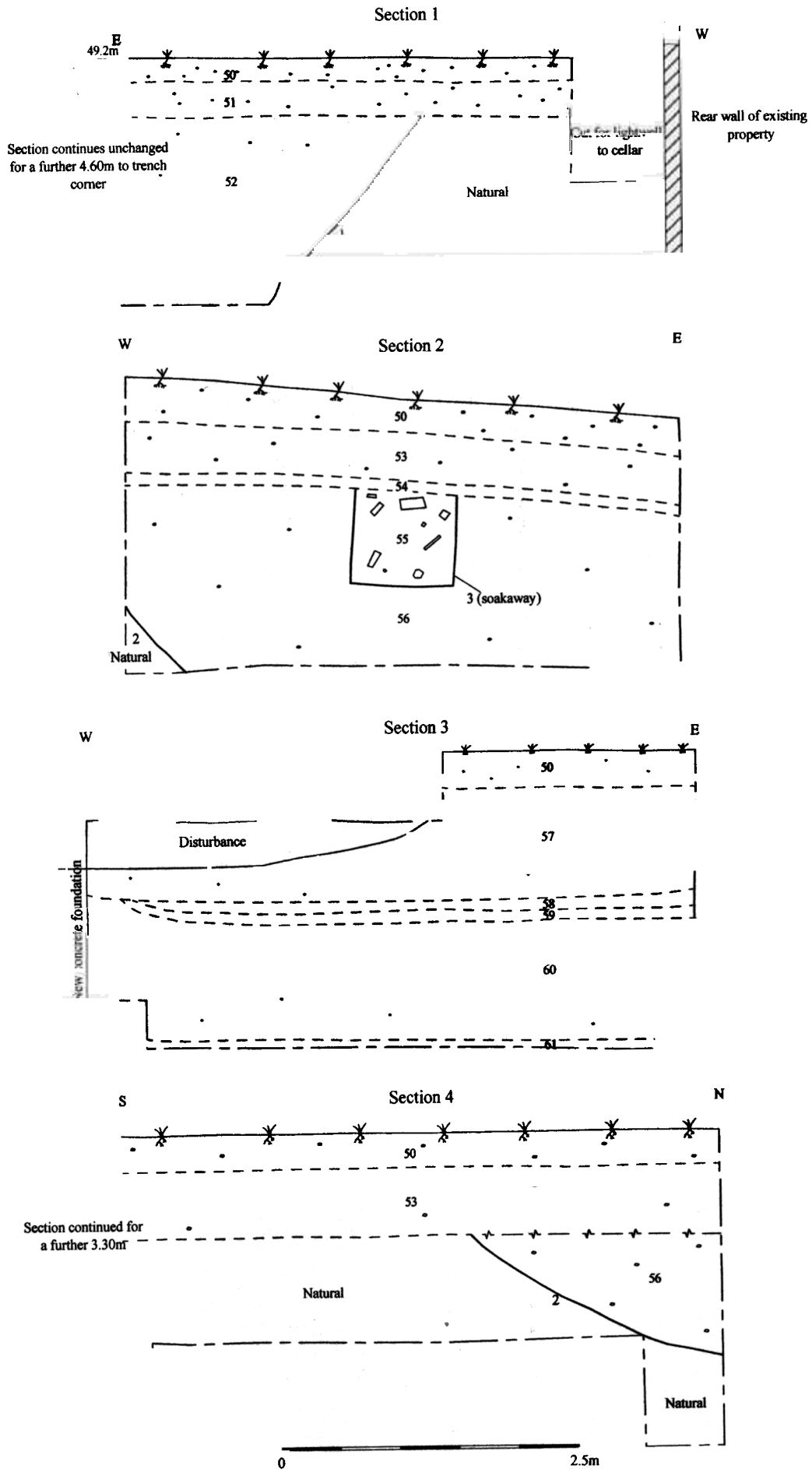


Figure 5 Sections