

28-29 Belmont Wantage Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



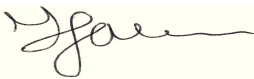
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28-29 Belmont, Wantage, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

In April and May 2012 Oxford Archaeology conducted an archaeological watching brief on the site of 28 and 29 Belmont, Wantage, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 3960 8827) during the construction of two new dwellings. A 19th century brick-lined well was observed together with a deep deposit of 19th/20th century worked soil. An undated layer of earlier ploughsoil was observed directly overlying the natural Greensand and colluvium. No deposits, features or residual finds pre-dating the 19th century were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA), was commissioned by Hanbury Development Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief at 28-29 Belmont, Wantage, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The existing buildings were demolished and replaced with two new detached dwellings, carparking facilities and amenity spaces.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: 10/01606/FUL). A brief was set by Hugh Coddington, Principal Archaeologist, Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services, detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition (OCAS 2012). All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Belmont is situated to the NW of the centre of the market town of Wantage, to the east of Denchworth Road (A417). Number 28-29 Belmont is located approximately half way along Belmont on the south side of the road and is centred on National Grid Reference SU 3960 8827. It is bordered by the house and gardens of Linden Lea to the west, a public footpath to the south, the house and gardens of 17 Belmont to the east and the public road of Belmont to the north.
- 1.2.2 The underlying bedrock geology is recorded as upper Greensand Formation – Calcareous Sand and Siltstone. Superficial deposits of Head Clay, consisting of clay, silt, sand and gravel have also been recorded (Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet no. 253, 1971).
- 1.2.3 The underlying trend of the ground is sloping down to the south-east, towards the Letcombe Brook. The site lies at approximately 95m above Ordnance Datum.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background contained within the brief (OCAS 2012) states:

The site of proposed development is located within an area of considerable archaeological potential. Part of a Romano British villa was recently identified on the other side of Denchworth Road, approximately 200m to the north-west. The full extent of the villa estate was not revealed. It is plausible to suggest that they relate to the granaries found off Mill Street, 250m to the south-east, and that these formed part of an extended complex of buildings associated with the villa. Romano British pottery and burials have been found off Barwell, approximately 150m to the north but it is unclear whether this was a cemetery or if they were



isolated burials. However the number suggests that these form part of a larger cemetery. The Roman road from Frilford also crosses this area.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were to:

- (i) preserve by record any archaeological deposits, structures or features encountered during the course of any ground intrusions;
- (ii) seek to establish the extent, nature and date of any archaeological deposits, structures or features encountered within the scope of the ground intrusion;
- (iii) secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site;
- (iv) disseminate results through the production of a unpublished client (grey literature) report.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The remit of the watching brief was to observe all works that may disturb or destroy below ground archaeological remains. These works included topsoil stripping, excavation of foundation and service trenching, access roads and landscaping. The watching brief was conducted as a site presence during the undertaking of any of the above works.
- 2.2.2 All spoil generated by the machine excavations was examined for the presence of archaeological artefacts.
- 2.2.3 All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers, and context recording was in accordance with established Oxford Archaeology practices. Bulk finds were collected by context. Black-and-white negative photographs and a digital photographic record was taken of all excavations, general settings and archaeological sections.
- 2.2.4 A site plan showing the location of any excavations and any recorded sections was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2). Sample sections of trenches were drawn at a scale of 1:20.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 Prior to the excavation of the new buildings foundations the previous block of two semi-detached houses was demolished and the topsoil stripped across the site and stockpiled. The stripping of the topsoil (1) did not completely remove the layer, and the underlying stratigraphy was not exposed.
- 3.1.2 The work was undertaken in two phases with each plot (1 and 2) being excavated separately.

Plot 1

- 3.1.3 Along the northern edge of the site the excavation of the foundations exposed a layer of green weathered clayey sand (2) was exposed at a depth of 0.3m below the original



garden level (Fig. 3, Sections 1 and 2). This layer was very clean and appeared to be undisturbed. Overlying this deposit was a layer of cultivated soil, a dark grey-brown clay loam (1) measuring between 0.25m and 0.32m in depth. No discernible layers were visible within this deposit and it appeared to be homogeneous throughout. Examples of 19th and 20th century artefacts including pottery, clay pipe, brick and tile were observed at all levels.

- 3.1.4 Excavations in the south-west corner of the plot exposed a similar stratigraphy (Fig. 3, Section 3) with the exception of a thin layer of greenish grey clayey silt (3), 0.12m in depth, observed between layers 1 and 2.

Plot 2

- 3.1.5 This was excavated along the southern edge of the development area, parallel to the public footpath.
- 3.1.6 Excavation of the foundations started in the south-west corner of the plot. Exposed within the base of the excavation was a continuation of the pale greenish grey clayey sand (2) at a depth of 0.5m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 4). Overlying layer 2 was a 0.12m deep layer of gingery brown silty loam (4), a probable layer of earlier cultivated/plough soil. This was overlain by a 0.3m deep continuation of layer 1.
- 3.1.7 The natural sand (2) followed the underlying slope of the area and fell away to the south-east. At the south-east corner of the plot the natural was observed at a depth of 0.9m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 5) (Plate 1). At this point the natural was overlaid with a 0.7m deep layer of a pale greenish-white sandy silt (7), a probable layer of colluvium. This was covered by a continuation of the gingery brown silty loam (4), 0.12m in depth. This in turn was overlaid by a continuation of the cultivation soil (1), 0.25m in depth.
- 3.1.8 Further up the slope of the garden at the north-east corner of the plot (Fig.3, Section 6), the natural, (2), was encountered at a depth of 0.6 m below the current ground level. The layer of colluvium (7) was thinner in here, measuring only 0.3m deep.
- 3.1.9 As elsewhere on the site this was overlaid by the topsoil, (1), 0.25m in depth.
- 3.1.10 In the centre of the northern edge of plot 2, the top of a brick lined well (5) was exposed during the topsoil strip (Fig. 2). This feature was circular in plan and was constructed using a plain machine made red brick, 0.225m x 0.110m x 0.07m in size (Plate 2). These had been laid without using mortar tangentially around the circumference of the well. The cut (6) for the well shaft was exposed during later machining was seen to be approximately 1.2m in diameter and was probed to a depth of 3.4m below the garden level. The remains of a lead suction pipe could be seen rising up the side of the well before turning through 90 degrees and running out eastwards through the top courses of the brickwork. The style of construction and brick size would suggest a mid to late 19th century construction.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Numerous examples of 19th and 20th material such as pottery, clay pipe stem, bottle glass, brick and roof tile were recovered from the layer of topsoil (1). These were evaluated on site but were not retained. No earlier dating evidence was recovered from this layer.
- 3.2.2 No artefacts were recovered from the remainder of the contexts.



3.3 Environmental remains

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

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 Layer 2 appears to be the weathered top of the underlying greensand, while layers 3 and 7 are both probable layers of colluvium. The site's location, close to the base of a moderate slope leading down to a tributary of the Letcombe Brook, would have been favourable to an accumulation of material washed down from further up the slope.
- 4.1.2 No evidence of activity such as charcoal or finds was observed within these deposits suggesting that they may be of prehistoric origin, but this lack of evidence is not conclusive.
- 4.1.3 The composition of layer 4 suggests that it forms the truncated base of an earlier phase of cultivation or ploughsoil. No dating evidence was recovered from this deposit, but it most likely represents the land use prior to the construction in the 19th century of the semi-detached houses which previously occupied the site.
- 4.1.4 The size and style of the bricks used in the lining of well 5 suggests that it was probably contemporary with the construction of the demolished houses.
- 4.1.5 Layer 1 is a thick deposit of worked or cultivated soil. Its composition and the dating evidence recovered suggest that it was a garden soil associated with the occupation of the demolished houses and can be dated to the 19th and 20th centuries.
- 4.1.6 No evidence either in the form of deposits, truncated features, or of residual finds suggestive of activity prior to the 19th century was observed during the course of the watching brief.
- 4.1.7 Considering the density of Romano-British sites in the immediate area, this lack of evidence may be an indication of the sites position on a slope, making it only suitable for agricultural use.



APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Comments	Finds	Date
1	Layer	0.28m	> 10m	Topsoil/ garden soil	Pottery, clay pipe, glass, brick, tile	C19th/ C20th
2	Layer	>0.7m	> 10m	Natural green sand	-	-
3	Layer	0.12m	> 10m	Colluvium	-	-
4	Layer	0.12 m	> 5m	Possible earlier plough soil	-	-
5	Structure	3.4m	1m	Brick built well	Brick, lead pipe	C19th
6	Cut	3.4m	1.2m	Well shaft	-	C19th
7	Layer	0.14m	> 5m	Colluvium	-	-



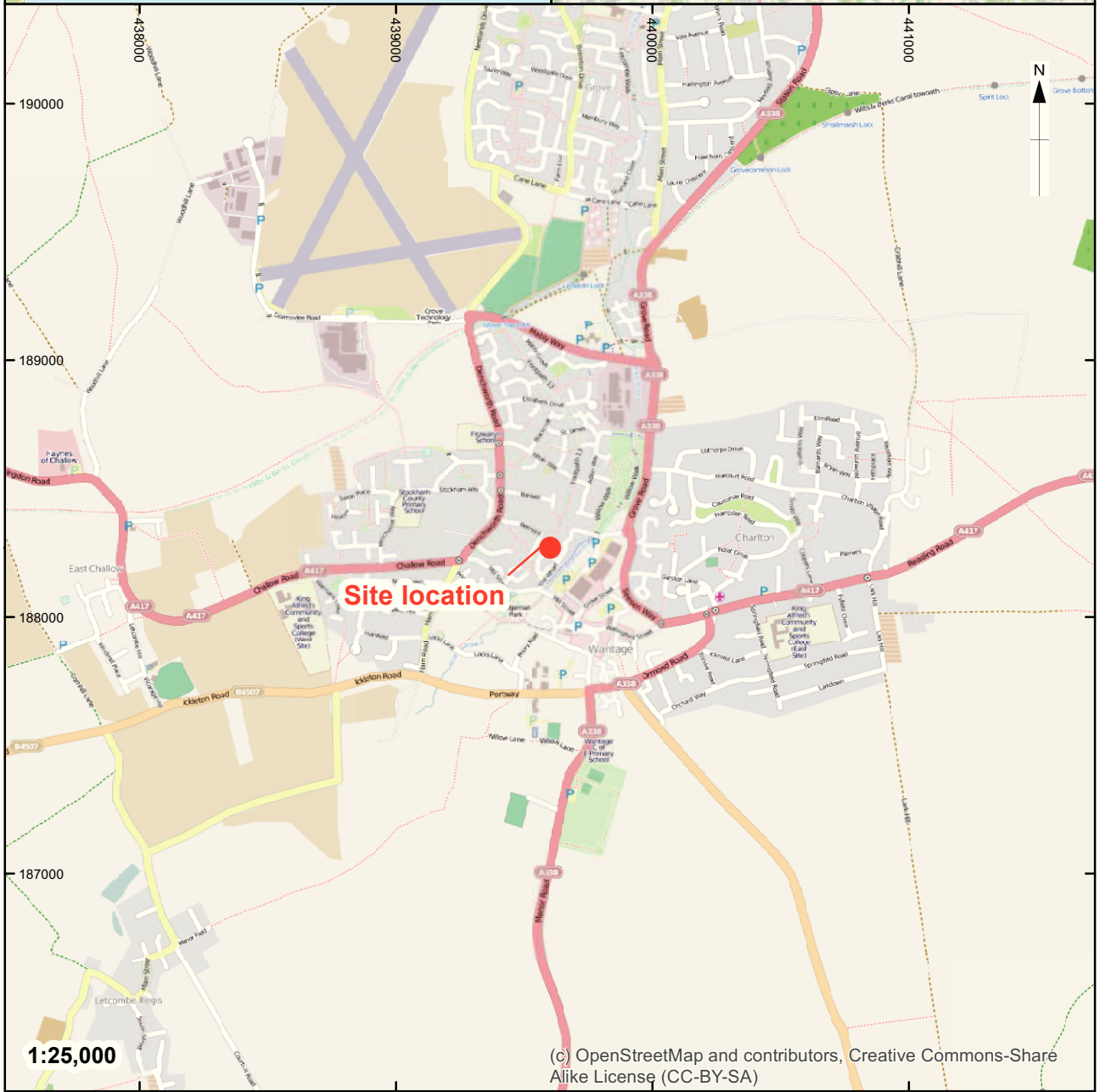
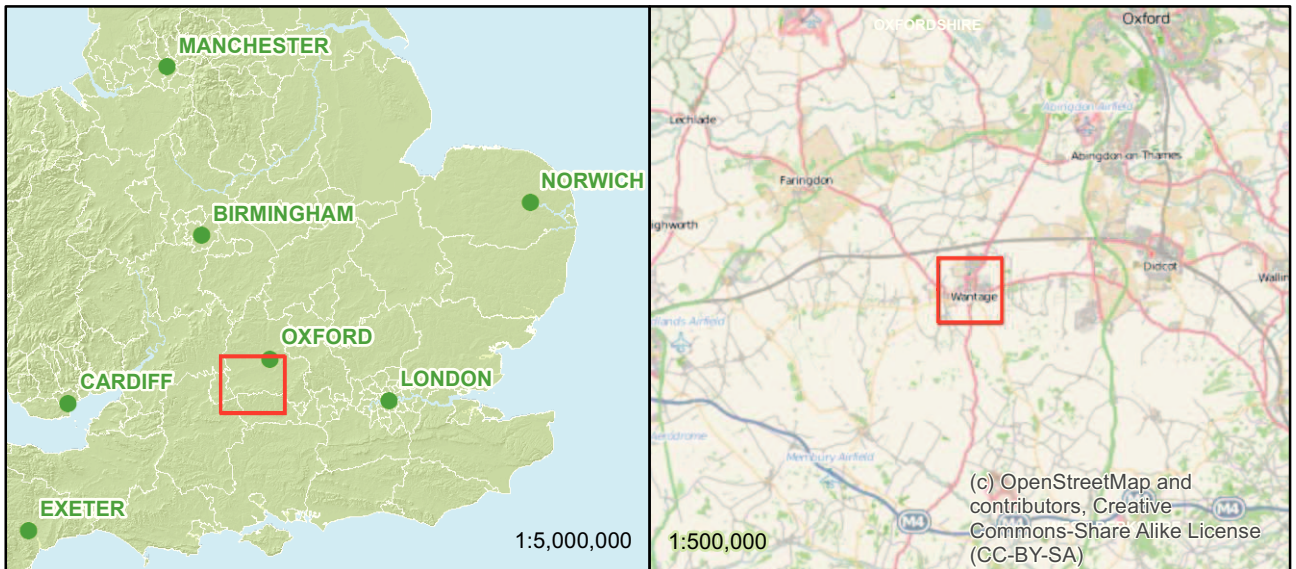
APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OA, 2012	28-29 Belmont, Wantage: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief
OCAS, 2012	28-29 Belmont, Wantage: Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief.



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	28-29 Belmont, Wantage, Oxfordshire
Site code:	WABEL 12
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SU 3960 8827
Type of watching brief:	Machine excavation of building foundations and service trenches for two new dwellings
Date and duration of project:	April and May 2012, 6 weeks
Area of site:	Approx 800m ²
Summary of results:	The watching brief observed a modern layer of cultivated soil throughout the site sealing an undated earlier plough soil horizon. No evidence for activity pre-dating the 19 th century, either in the form of features or residual finds was recorded.
Location of archive:	The archive is currently stored at Janus House and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service under the accession number OXCMS:2012.52.



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Figure 1: Site location

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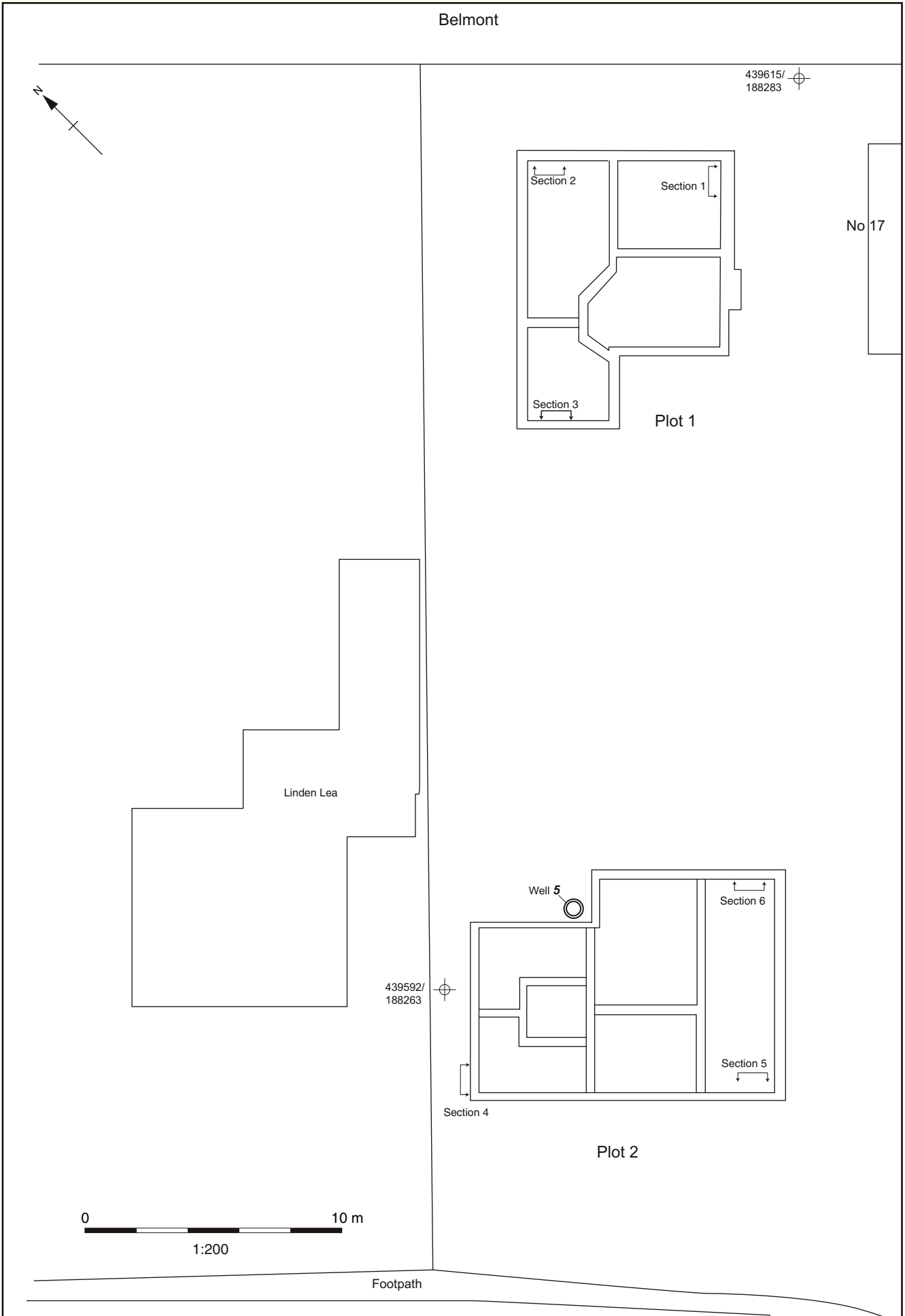


Figure 2: Site plan

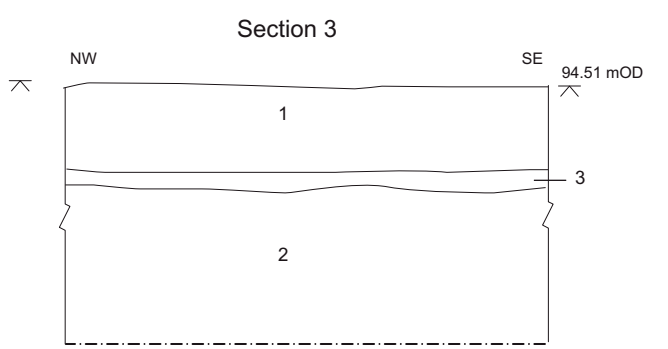
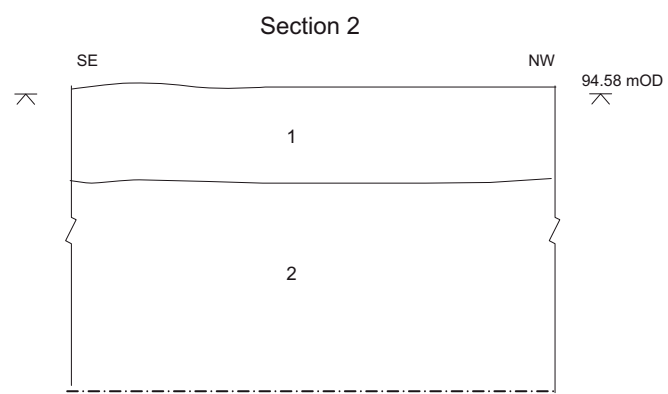
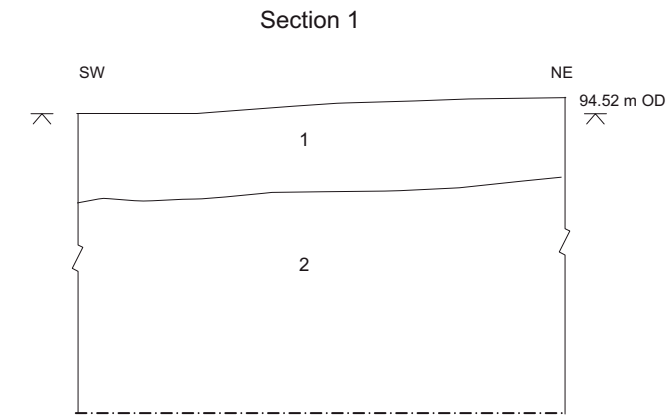
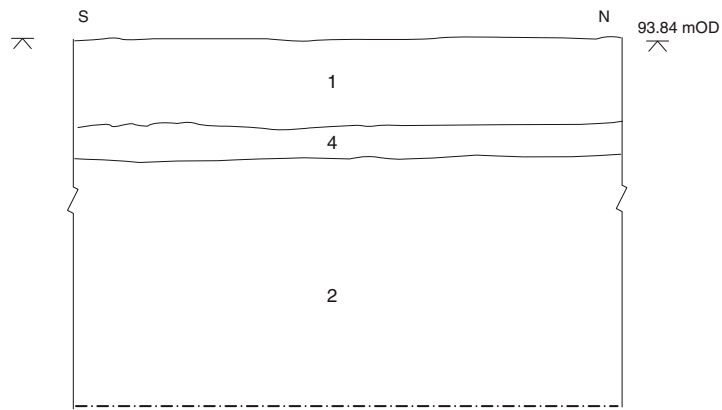
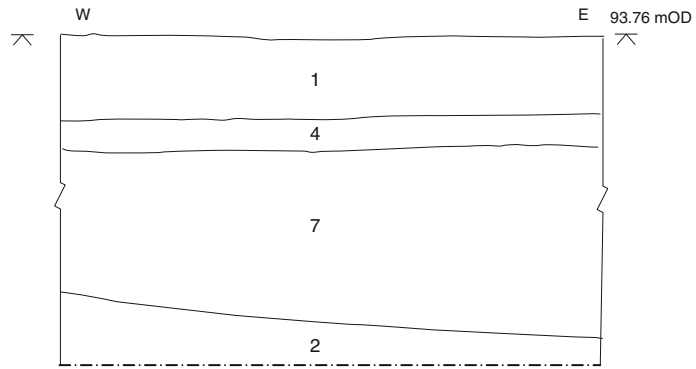


Figure 3: Sections 1-3

Section 4



Section 5



Section 6

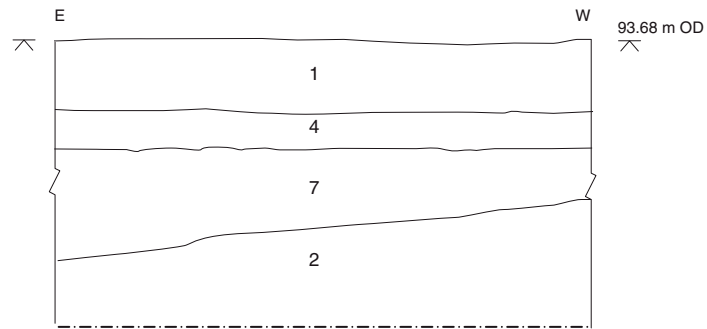


Figure 4: Sections 4-6



Plate 2: Well 5

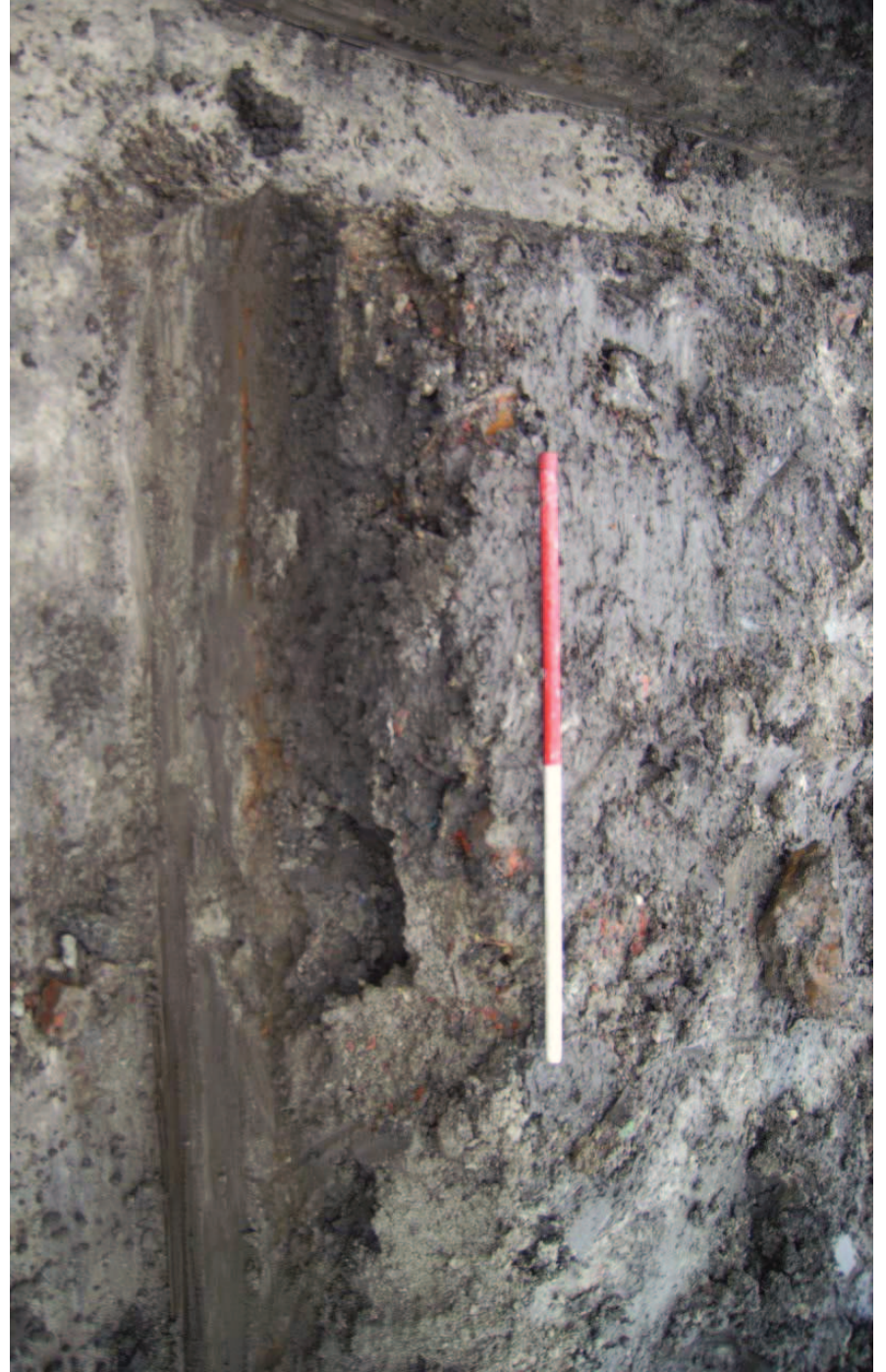


Plate 1: Section 5



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