

Farnham Bourne
Channel Diversion

Farnham Surrey



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

In October 2013 Oxford Archaeology conducted an archaeological test-pit evaluation and watching brief during the excavation of a channel diversion at Farnham Bourne, Surrey (centred at NGR: SU 8472 4617).

The excavation exposed modern reinforcement of the south bank of the water course together with two phases of probable garden soils overlying alluvial deposits.

The existing channel's location, above the level of the gardens to the south, suggests that the water course was channelised, probably to supply a mill further to the east. No evidence for activity pre-dating the 19th century or for any earlier channels was encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 The existing route of the Bourne Stream has been subject to a series of landslips in the past which have threatened to block the existing water course and flood adjacent residential properties. In order to prevent this the Environment Agency began work on remedial measures.
- 1.1.2 In October 2013 Oxford Archaeology (OA) conducted an archaeological watching brief commissioned by the Environment Agency (EA) during the excavation of a channel diversion on the Bourne Stream near Middle Bourne, Farnham, Surrey (Centred at NGR: SU 8472 4617).
- 1.1.3 The work was undertaken as part of best management practice by the Environment Agency.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is situated on the southern edge of the outskirts of the town of Farnham, Surrey within an area known as 'The Bourne' (Fig. 1). The existing channel lies in a valley at the base of a steep slope dividing Middle Bourne from Low Bourne. The channel itself appears to be man-managed and is significantly higher (c 1m) than the properties to the south. The stream drains the southern edge of Farnham Common and discharges into the River Wey, 1.8km to the east.
- 1.2.2 The area through which the channel diversion was excavated was originally an open grassed area located south of the original channel. The development area was bounded to the north by a raised berm or bank running along the southern edge of the existing channel and the rear gardens of properties fronting Steam Farm Close to the south.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is alluvium over sandy beds of the Folkestone Series (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no. 285).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Historical research has found no evidence for previous archaeological work or historical references directly linked to the site, but the site itself sits within a wider historical landscape which should be considered when determining the potential of the site.



- 1.3.2 The area around Bourne Mill, approximately 1.2km to the north-east has produced extensive evidence for occupation during the Mesolithic period with lithic scatters and a settlement being recorded to the east and south-east of Farnham (SCC SMR Ref.:1717). Gravel extraction to the north of the site has produced tranchet axe heads and microliths ((SCC SMR Ref.:1720), burins, microliths, cores and flakes (SCC SMR Ref.:1722).
- 1.3.3 Neolithic finds recorded within the immediate area are rather limited, although chipped axe, flint flakes and axe heads have been recovered to the east and south-east of Farnham (SCC SMR Ref.: 2161and 2167).
- 1.3.4 Within the wider landscape gravel extraction 2.5km to the east exposed the presence of a potential Neolithic settlement comprising a long barrow together with domestic debris, including flint scatters, pottery and bone have been recorded (SCC SMR Ref.:1724).
- 1.3.5 Occupation of Farnham is believed to have continued throughout the Bronze Age, albeit on a rather less 'visible' scale than before with the earlier sites still remaining as focuses of activity (SCC SMR Ref.:2156 and 2166).
- 1.3.6 The occupation of the sites continued into the Iron Age with isolated pits and pottery having been recorded (SCC SMR REF.:1697 and 2157).
- 1.3.7 Activity during the Romano-British period is concentrated to an area to the south-east of Farnham, where excavation revealed an extensive Roman pottery works (c AD 100-400), with an associated aqueduct along with two 3rd-4th century buildings (a dwelling and a bath house) (SCC SMR Ref.:1717).
- 1.3.8 Approximately 1km north of the site, two pottery vessels forming part of an early 2nd century cremation burial group (SCC SMR Ref.:1684) were found at Fairfield, near Farnham Station.
- 1.3.9 The place name of Farnham can be traced to the Saxon charters where we have records for 'Fearn hamme'. The etymology for the name would appear to derive from the plentiful ferns ('fearn') and bracken found in the area and 'hamme' referring to the water meadows that were at its centre.
- 1.3.10 The early town of Farnham appears to have grown up around the junction of the London/Southampton road and that orientated from the east to the southwest. By the middle of the 12th century the town had developed into the centre of trade and commerce within the area with the castle providing the residence of the Bishop of Winchester, an establishment midway between London and Winchester. Built by Henry of Blois (the contemporaneous bishop) during the first half of the 12th century, little is known about this early castle other than it had a tower, possibly made of stone, on top of a large motte. The castle was demolished under the order of Henry II in 1155 and rebuilt in the late 12th and early 13th century until it was dismantled by Oliver Cromwell following unsuccessful attempts to blow it up during English Civil War.
- 1.3.11 For many centuries, the Bourne was the 'waste land' or Common to the Manor of Farnham. Squatters encroached upon the Common, and by 1750 there were probably about 20 families scratching a living from the poor soil.
- 1.3.12 By the enclosure of the Common in 1861, there were nearly 600 residents, the majority of the working population being hired for agricultural work in neighbouring villages.
- 1.3.13 The Farnham-Guildford-London railway line, constructed in 1849, and the quicker route via Woking by 1870 made the West Surrey Hills with its heathland a favourite location for wealthier people eager to move out from highly polluted London.



- 1.3.14 Examination of the First Series Ordnance Survey map of the area (c 1874) showed that while the first of the villas had started to appear on the Red Hill above the site, the area alongside the stream was still undeveloped with no structures shown.
- 1.3.15 The buildings adjacent to the site appear to date from the late 19th century onwards, and were presumably built as the urbanisation of Farnham spread southwards.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The general aims of the watching brief were to:
- establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area;
 - record the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains affected by the proposed works;
 - establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the site and to take samples where appropriate; and
 - make available the results of the investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The programme of works submitted by the Environment Agency comprised the excavation of approximately 40m of new channel connecting into the existing channel at its eastern and western ends (Fig. 2).
- 2.2.2 The channel measured approximately 4m wide and was of varying depth measured from ground level, with a maximum depth of 1m at either end and an average depth of 0.6m elsewhere.
- 2.2.3 The channel was excavated using a tracked excavator fitted with a 1.5m wide toothless grading bucket.
- 2.2.4 The material was removed in spits of approximately 0.1m depth until either the first archaeological horizon was exposed or the required depth of excavation was achieved.
- 2.2.5 Archaeological investigation and recording was undertaken in line with procedures established in the OA Field Manual (Wilkinson 1992) and Institute for Archaeologists' guidance for undertaking watching briefs (IfA 2008).
- 2.2.6 All features and deposits and any small finds and samples from them were allocated unique numbers. Bulk finds were collected by context. Colour digital and black-and-white negative photographs were taken of archaeological features and of the site works in general.
- 2.2.7 Site plans were drawn at an appropriate scale (normally 1:50 or 1:100) with larger scale plans of features as necessary. Section drawings were drawn at a scale of 1:20.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The excavation started at the eastern end of the channel diversion. A layer of compact light yellow brown sandy clay silt (4) was encountered at a level of approximately 71.4m



aOD. This deposit was exposed throughout the length of the excavation (Fig. 3, Sections 1-6; Plates 1-3).

- 3.1.2 Lying directly above this deposit was a layer of grey-brown clayey sandy silt (3) measuring between 0.2m and 0.25m in depth (Fig. 3, Sections 1-6; Plates 1-3). This context produced fragments of brick, tile, bottle glass and pottery.
- 3.1.3 Above 3 was the present day topsoil and turf, a layer of mid brown sandy loam (2), up to 0.28m in depth (Fig. 3, Sections 1-6; Plates 1-3). Recovered from within this context were sherds of pottery, fragments of glazed tile and bottle glass.
- 3.1.4 At both ends of the channel diversion (Plate 4), as it intercepted the existing channel, a sloping bank of dark brown silty clay loam containing large quantities of demolition debris such as brick, concrete and metal objects was truncated (1). These banks measured roughly 1.5m wide and 0.6 m in depth (Fig. 3, Section 1). The banks had been constructed directly upon the existing topsoil and butted up to a wall of concrete filled sandbags lining the south side of the existing channel.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Fragments of 19th/20th century pottery, brick, tile and bottle glass were observed within layers 1, 2 and 3. A number of iron objects such as cast iron guttering, wire mesh, reinforcing bar, piping and metal drums were observed within context 1. The presence of this material was recorded but it was not retained.

3.3 Environmental remains

- 3.3.1 Because of the relatively modern date of the deposits encountered it was determined that they were unsuitable for plaeo-environmental sampling.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The excavations showed that the course of the new channel was through an area of relatively simple stratigraphy, with evidence of post-medieval activity being observed directly overlying the natural sandy silts (4).
- 4.1.2 The layer of clayey sandy silt, 3, appears to have the product of cultivation, with the inclusion of 19th century artefacts suggesting a probable date. Its composition suggests that it may have originated as an alluvial deposit which was later dug over, either as part of a garden or possibly by local inhabitants making use of unclaimed land.
- 4.1.3 The present day topsoil, 2, exhibits similar traits, with 19th and 20th century finds being recovered. It is unclear if the area was originally formed part of the rear gardens of the houses to the south.
- 4.1.4 The levee, 1, appears to have been constructed relatively recently, probably in an attempt to protect the low lying gardens to the south.
- 4.1.5 The existing channel's location, being situated approximately 1.2m above the lower lying gardens to the south, would suggest that an existing water course was channalised, probably to form a leat supplying water to a mill further down the valley to the east. No evidence for any earlier channels was observed during the course of the watching brief and it is probable the Bourne's original path followed the line of the lower ground to the south, outside of the impact area of the new channel.
- 4.1.6 No evidence for activity earlier than the 19th century was recorded, which may suggest a date for the construction of the present channel.

**APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY**

| Context | Type | Depth | Comments | Finds | Date |
|---------|-------|-------|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Layer | 0.25m | Man made bank or levee along the south side of the original channel | Pottery, brick, tile, glass, iron | 20th century |
| 2 | Layer | 0.25m | Present day topsoil and turf | Pottery, brick, tile, glass | 20th century |
| 3 | Layer | 0.2m | Earlier cultivated soil (garden?) horizon | Pottery, brick, tile, glass | 19th/Early 20th century |
| 4 | Layer | 0.18m | Natural sand deposit | - | - |



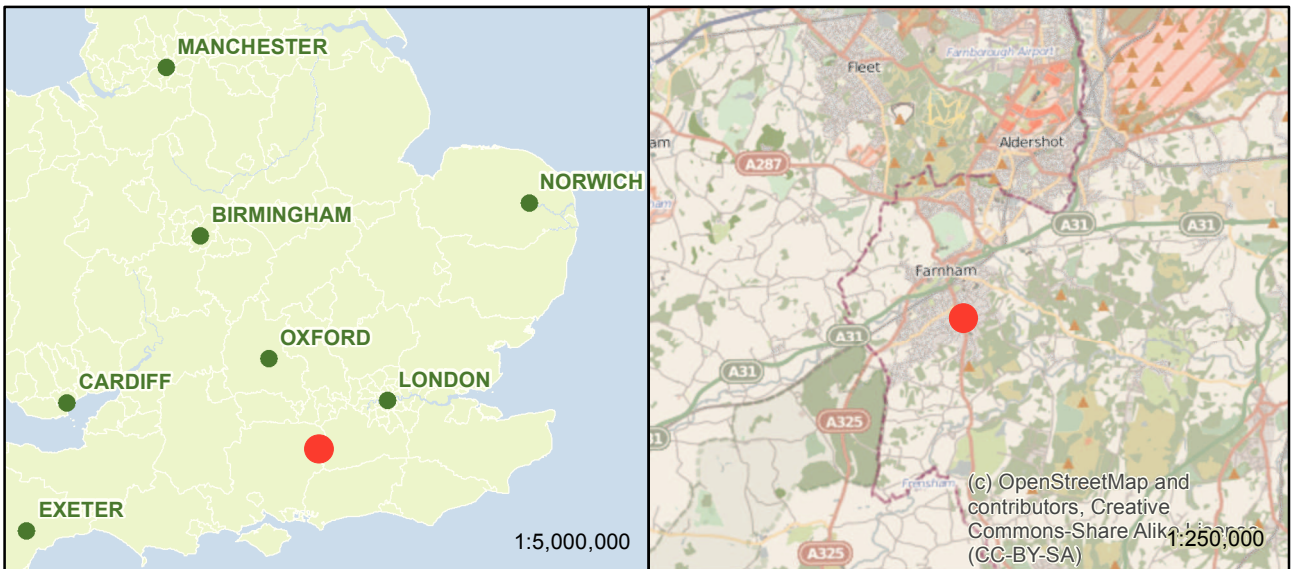
APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY

IfA, 2008 *Standards and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*, Institute for Archaeologists, Reading

Wilkinson, D (ed.), 1992 *Field Manual*, Oxford Archaeological Unit

**APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Site name: | Farnham Bourne Channel Diversion, Farnham, Surrey |
| Site code: | FABCHD 13 |
| Grid reference: | Centred at SU 8472 4617 |
| Type of investigation: | Machine excavation of a new channel approximately 40m in length, dug in order to divert existing stream away from possible landslips. |
| Date and duration of project: | 4 site visits between |
| Area of site: | Approximately 1000m ² |
| Summary of results: | The Excavation exposed modern reinforcement of the south bank of the original water course together with two phases of probable garden soils overlying alluvial deposits. No evidence for activity pre-dating the 19th century or for any earlier channels was encountered. |
| Location of archive: | The archive is currently held at Janus House Oxford, and has been offered to Farnham Museum |



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Figure 1: Location of site

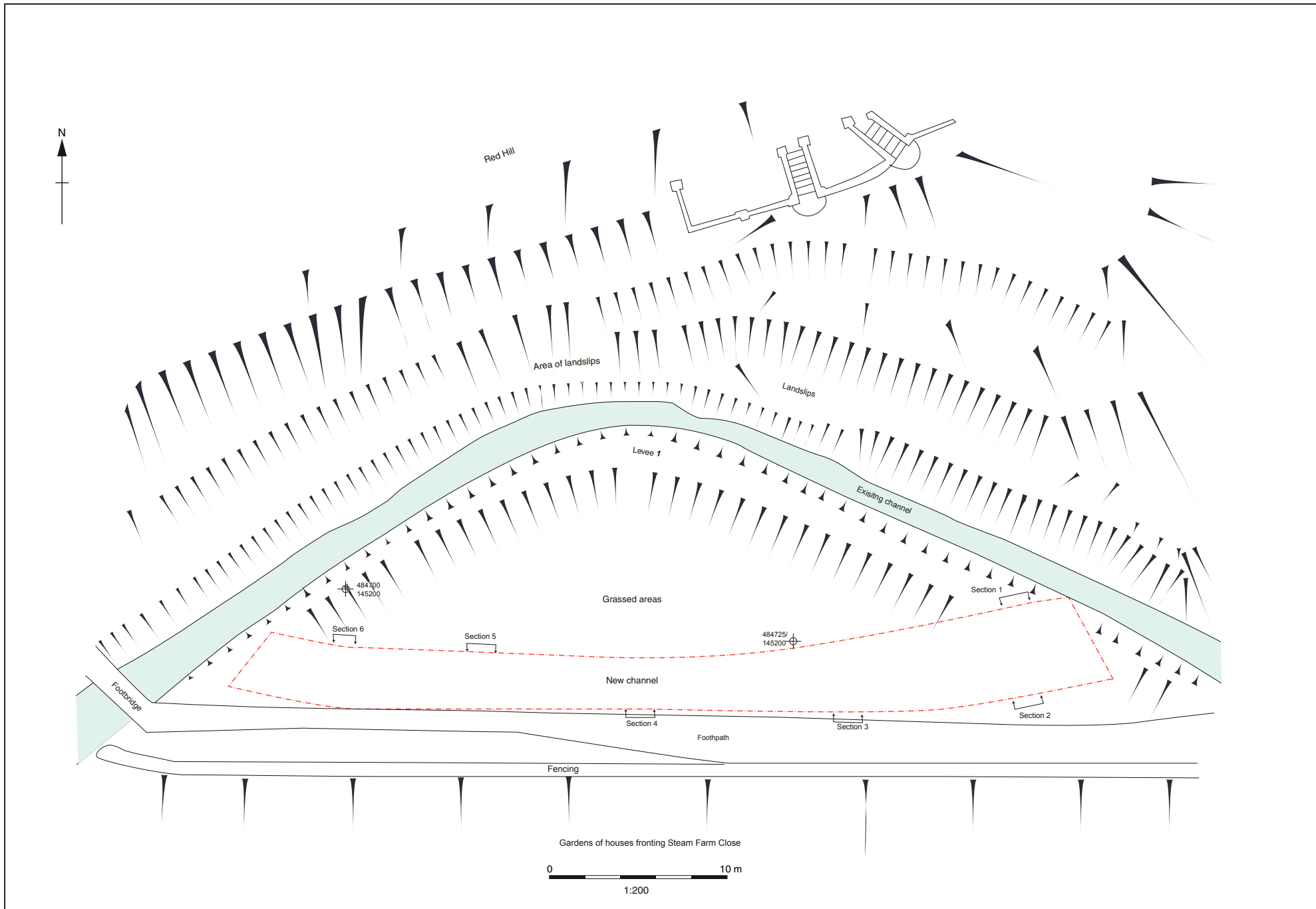


Figure 2: Site plan showing location of sections

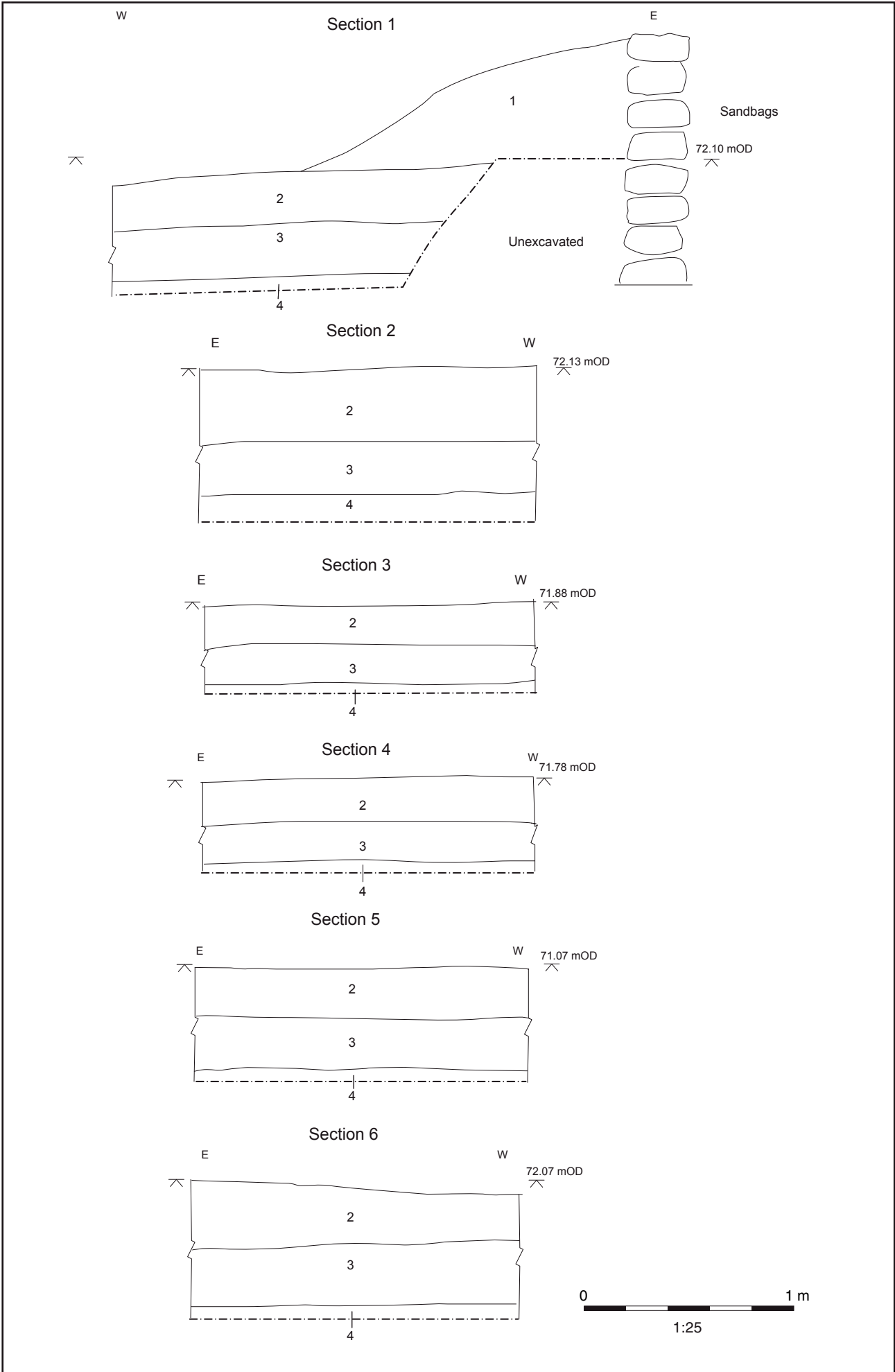


Figure 3: Sections



Plate 1 : Section 2



Plate 2 : Section 4



Plate 3: Section 6



Plate 4: Post-excavation view of channel diversion



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