

# Turl Street Emergency Works Oxford



**Archaeological  
Watching Brief Report**

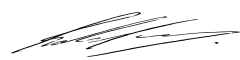
oxfordarchaeology  
  
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June 2015

**Client: Thames Water**

Issue No: 1  
NGR: SP 51447 06307



Client Name: Thames Water  
Client Ref No: N/A  
Document Title: Turl Street Emergency Works, Oxford  
Document Type: Archaeological Watching Brief Report  
Issue/Version Number: 1  
Grid Reference: SP 51447 06307  
Planning Reference: N/A  
Invoice Code: OXTSEWWB  
OA Job Number: 6143  
Site Code: OXTSEW15  
Receiving Museum: Oxford County Museum Service  
Museum Accession No.: OXCMS : 2015.52  
Event No.: N/A

Issue	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by	Signature
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Document File Location: X:\o\Oxford\_Turl Street Emergency Works\_WB\WB report

Graphics File Location:

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## **Turl Street Emergency Works, Oxford**

### ***Archaeological Watching Brief Report***

***Written by Rebecca Peacock***

*with contributions from John Cotter, Rebecca Nicholson and Ruth Shaffrey and  
illustrated by Markus Dylewski*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between 3<sup>rd</sup> March and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Oxford Archaeology undertook a watching brief, on behalf of Thames Water, on emergency works being carried out to repair a broken sewage pipe leading into the property at 14 Turl Street, Oxford.
- 1.1.2 The works do not fall under planning control. The presence of archaeological finds on the works spoil heap was noted by the city archaeologist David Radford who then requested that Thames Water provide some archaeological observation and recording. The location of the works is understood to be a primary Oxford thoroughfare and therefore would not be expected to contain typical backyard, garden or workshop finds repositories (rubbish pits etc.) that might produce archaeological material.
- 1.1.3 Thames Water contracted Oxford Archaeology to monitor the remainder of the works and to produce a report on the findings of the observations.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site (centred on NGR SP 5149 0628) is located in the north-south aligned road of Turl Street, Oxford. It is bounded to the east by Lincoln College and to the west by the shop fronts of Turl Street. The site is situated within the historic core of Oxford and is part of the Oxford Central Conservation Area.
- 1.2.2 The works lay directly in the line of the modern tarmac road of Turl Street and adjacent to the pavement.
- 1.2.3 The site is situated on drift geology on the Summertown-Radley gravel terrace, which is part of the Second Gravel Terrace of the Thames sequence. The underlying solid geology is of the Oxford Clay formation (BGS website).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The works location in Turl Street lies in the centre of Oxford in an area that has been under continuous occupation since the 10<sup>th</sup> century with sporadic evidence of a lower level of earlier occupation. Turl street itself is likely to be an early thoroughfare as is evidenced by its realignment due to the construction of the late 11<sup>th</sup> century All Saints Church.
- 1.3.2 In 1981 observations of the excavation for the Foul Sewer on Turl Street showed old street surfaces running along the alignment of Turl Street that is to the north of All Saints Church (OA 2003).
- 1.3.3 The works were external to No.14 Turl St which is a Grade II listed building. The national register for listed buildings gives the following description for the property;  
"Originally a C17 house, altered in C18 and restored in C19. 3-storeyed stuccoed timber-framed with a coved overhang at the 2nd floor with a moulded cornice above it, and 2 gables; the roof is of Welsh slate. The ground floor has a modern shop front. In the 1st floor, on the South, is a modern 3-sided bay with sashes; on the North is a modern 3-sided bay with double sashes in the centre; these lights as well as those in the returns, have gothic-traceried heads. The 2nd floor has 2 double sash windows in moulded wood frames. The gables have what appear to be 2 original moulded bargeboards and at each side is a carved grotesque bracket; in the gables are double sash windows in moulded wood frames. Down the centre of the front is a C18 lead rainwater pipe with a moulded

head. The back is stuccoed. C18 panelling and staircase. Exterior. Its state in 1824 (altered now chiefly by insertion of shop front) is shown in a Buckler drawing. Rear reconstructed 1967-8”.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The aim of the observation works was to document the retrieval of finds from the area and where possible understand the provenance of the finds.
- 2.1.2 To record any features or deposits visible during the excavation work and, if possible, upon the removal of the shuttering supports after the excavation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The emergency works area measured 2.3m square and was initially excavated to a depth of approximately 1.5m. The trench had been shored/shuttered before the watching brief commenced so visibility of the strata was restricted.
- 2.2.2 An initial finds retrieval from the spoil being excavated from the trench was requested as David Radford had noted animal bone and horn cores within the spoil. This was followed by an intermittent watching brief to record any further finds that were uncovered. The watching brief archaeologist also attended the site when the shuttering was taken away at the end of the excavation works, so that any features could be recorded in section.
- 2.2.3 In respect of health and safety protocols access to the excavation area by the archaeologist was not permitted.
- 2.2.4 All excavation was carried out by the ground crew. Deposits were excavated by hand with shovels and spades and were lifted from the excavation by a mechanical hoist.
- 2.2.5 The excavation area was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.9m in the western half. A tunnel, measuring 1m wide by 1m high, was excavated under the pavement, from this depth, to remove and replace the broken pipe. This method was used to retain the upstanding shop fronts and to avoid the services along the line of the pavement. A large service pipe ran north-south and prevented full excavation of the eastern half of the area.
- 2.2.6 The spoil from the deeper west area and the tunnel was then placed away from the excavation area and finds were removed and bagged under a single finds reference number.
- 2.2.7 The removal of the deposits in the excavation area were observed and context numbers allocated so descriptions of the finds from the different deposits could be noted. However the finds were not able to be assigned and bagged according to that context number.
- 2.2.8 All contexts and sections were recorded from the ground surface.
- 2.2.9 Photographs and recording of the sections was carried out once the shuttering supports were removed at the end of the works.
- 2.2.10 A photographic record was kept throughout the excavation monitoring.

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 Natural gravel was observed at 2.9 m below existing ground level. A cut line (10) was visible in the western section (see Figure 4) and in plan. Only one edge was visible and in plan it appeared curved (Figure 2). It was filled by a loose dark greyish brown sandy silt with frequent limestone gravel inclusions (7).
- 3.1.2 The east section revealed a layer of gravel (6) which was a loose mid greyish brown gravel deposit with frequent coarse sand and well rounded limestone pebbles. It was level and a consistent thickness of 0.14m. This could be seen in the south section to seal the possible pit fill (7).
- 3.1.3 The north section showed a series of tipped deposits (3), consisting of loose mid reddish brown and mid brownish grey banded layers of silty gravel and contained frequent limestone gravel inclusions. The deposits tipped down to west, towards the street frontage. A cut was not visible.
- 3.1.4 The modern pipe trench cut (4) and fill (5) was cut through these deposits.
- 3.1.5 The pipe trench was sealed by the modern tarmac road surface (1), immediately overlaying a rubble make-up layer (2) for the road, consisting of brick and concrete and mixed crushed materials.

#### 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 All material is derived from spoil heaps and is catalogued under one finds reference Context 8

##### ***Pottery by John Cotter***

- 3.2.2 A total of 8 sherds of pottery weighing 115g were recovered from a single finds reference, context (8). This is all of post-medieval date apart from a single sherd which is either late medieval or early post-medieval. The clay pipe however provides evidence for a 19th-century deposition date - at least for some of the material (see below). Given the small size of the assemblage a separate catalogue has not been constructed and instead the pottery is simply described and spot-dated below. Fabric codes referred to for the medieval wares are those of the Oxfordshire type series (Mellor 1994). No further work is recommended.
- 3.2.3 Description: 1x large fresh jug rim in Brill/Boarstall proto-stoneware (OXAP) - an overfired purplish variant of the standard Brill fabric (OXAM), datable c 1540-1625. The other 7 sherds are smaller and fairly worn but all broadly of early medieval date. These comprise 2 small cooking pot sherds in Medieval Oxford ware (OXY, c 1075-1300), and 5 larger cooking pot sherds in Cotswold-type ware (OXAC, c 1050-1250). The latter include a rim and a sagging base. The early medieval pottery is similar to that from previous excavations at Turl Bar (OA 2012).

##### ***Clay pipe by John Cotter***

- 3.2.4 Three pieces of clay pipe weighing 8g were recovered from Context (8). These have not been separately catalogued but are described below. No further work is recommended.
- 3.2.5 Description: Three joining pieces from a single clay pipe bowl with a length of attached stem. The front of the bowl survives and has a typically 19th-century moulded oakleaf

seam. The bowl also has a complete spur with the maker's initials on either side. Although the forename initial has been erased during manufacture the surname initial is clearly recognisable as an 'N'. This is almost certainly a product of the Oxford pipemaker George Norwood (active c 1852-1863). An identical pipe is published from St Ebbe's Church, Oxford (Oswald 1984, fig. 55.26b).

### ***CBM by John Cotter***

- 3.2.6 A total of 20 pieces of CBM weighing 994g were recovered from Context (8). The condition is generally very poor and fragmentary. The assemblage has not been separately catalogued but is described below. No further work is recommended.
- 3.2.7 Description: This is effectively a mixture of medieval and post-medieval CBM 'rubble'. It includes 5 fairly fresh pieces of very similar-looking soft red brick including a frogged piece - indicating a date after c 1820. Most of the rest of the assemblage comprises very worn pieces of medieval peg tile (one with greenish glaze). There is also a small fragment from the edge of an early ridge tile in a limestone-tempered fabric (Fabric 1B, c 1175-1325?). There are two pieces of floor tile including a 15-17th century unglazed quarry tile, and a very worn piece of medieval decorated floor tile with traces of 'printed' white slip decoration and clear glaze (probably Penn/Chiltern 14th-15th century).

### ***Fired Clay by John Cotter***

- 3.2.8 Two pieces of fired clay weighing 123g were recovered from Context (8). The condition is poor and fragmentary. The assemblage has not been separately catalogued but is described below.
- 3.2.9 Description: The larger piece (108g) has a soft orange-brown fabric with sparse limestone/chalk and rare flint inclusions. It is basically a flattish slab with one very rough flattish side and with at least five wavy impressions on the other side - all roughly parallel. It may be from a burnt wattle-and-daub structure. The smaller piece (15g) is in a hard grey earthy fabric, probably burnt, and is flattish and tile-like but has organic impressions on one side and wipe-marks on the other. It may perhaps be a piece of daub rendering.

### ***Stone by Ruth Shaffrey***

- 3.2.10 Four pieces of stone were retained during the watching brief, from finds reference context 8. Two are pieces of oolitic limestone that could be worn pieces of building stone (152g). Two others could be fragments of stone roofing but are very small and do not retain any diagnostic criteria; one is slate (32g) and one is sandy limestone (28g). None of the stone is intrinsically datable and all can be discarded now that they have been recorded.

### ***Metal by Ian Scott***

- 3.2.11 Three potential metal objects were recovered from context 8. Two of the pieces are concretions and are non-magnetic. There are no obvious signs of any other metal. The third object is an iron nail with flat circular or sub-rectangular head and tapered square section stem. The nail is almost complete and is at least 44mm long. It is handmade but otherwise not closely datable.

### ***Animal Bone by Lena Strid***

- 3.2.12 The bone retrieved from finds reference context 8 includes cattle, sheep/goat, pig, horse and dog. One indeterminate bird bone may be from a duck, or a wild bird of



similar size. Judging by fragment count, cattle are the most numerous animal, followed by sheep/goat and pig. There is a great variation in livestock abundance in other Oxford assemblages (Strid forthcoming a), however, cattle or sheep/goat are consistently the most common animal. The bone was generally in a good to fair condition with little gnawing or burning, suggesting that it had been deposited quickly with little access for scavengers.

- 3.2.13 Element representation suggests that the assemblage represents a mix of butchery and table waste. There are a similar proportion of elements from the head, upper front limb, upper hind limb and feet of sheep/goat, whereas pig foot bones and cattle skull and mandibles are over-represented.
- 3.2.14 The over-representation of pig foot bones may be related to the larger number of bones in pig feet compared to those of sheep/goat and cattle. However, the amount of cattle head elements is less likely to be caused by inter-species bias.
- 3.2.15 The ageing data was limited but indicated slaughter of sub-adult and adult cattle and sheep/goat. Pigs were mainly killed as juveniles or sub-adults. This pattern is common for most urban assemblages.
- 3.2.16 The number of bones that could provide biometric data is small however, comparisons show that the bones are within the same size range as those from other Medieval and early Post-medieval Oxford sites (cf Poole 2009; Strid forthcoming a; Strid forthcoming b; Strid 2014a, Strid 2014b; Wilson and Bramwell 1980; Wilson *et al.* 1989).
- 3.2.17 A total of eighteen bones from cattle, sheep/goat, pig, large and medium mammal displayed butchery marks. Most derived from disarticulation and portioning of the carcass: A cattle scapula had been split longitudinally through the glenoid joint, a sheep/goat tibia had had its proximal end chopped off, a pig ulna had been chopped off at the olecranon, a pig pelvis had been portioned at the ilium and a pig scapula had been split transversally across the blade. A sheep/goat atlas had a transverse chop mark on the ventral side, suggesting removal of the head. Large mammal ribs had been chopped off at the sternal end and mid-rib, whereas there was only evidence for portioning medium mammal ribs at mid-rib. A pig pelvis showed evidence of rough filleting carried out with a cleaver, removing the meat on the lateral side.
- 3.2.18 Two cattle horn cores displayed evidence of horn working: one had its tip sawn or chopped off and the other had several cleaver marks at its base. One cattle skull had had both horn cores removed, although it could not be established whether this had been carried out with axe/cleaver or with a saw.
- 3.2.19 With exception of the cattle horn core, there is no unequivocal evidence of saws being used in butchery. This suggests that the assemblage derives from the medieval or early post-medieval period, when butchery was instead carried out with cleavers and knives.

#### ***Environmental remains by Rebecca Nicholson***

- 3.2.20 Oyster shell weighing 356g in total was recovered from context 8, all from the native European flat oyster *Ostrea edulis*. Both right and left valves were present (9 valves and 6 valves respectively); one left and one right valve fitted together and clearly came from the same individual. Most of the shells came from fairly large shellfish and two valves had opening notches cut into the margin.
- 3.2.21 Oyster shell is regularly found in medieval and post-medieval rubbish deposits in Oxford, indicating that this shellfish was imported and consumed relatively frequently.

Consequently, in the absence of secure contextual information, these finds are unremarkable.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The emergency works excavations provided an opportunity to observe the deposits immediately below the modern Turl Street and to retrieve archaeological finds.
- 4.1.2 The limited area of the shuttered excavations prevented a secure stratigraphic sequence of deposits to be established. The deposits, to the east of the north-south pipe (in Cut 4) were retained during the works and used as an access point into the trench. This served to further narrow the excavation area and visibility of the deposits. The full section profiles were not seen before the installation of shoring and the collapse of deposits as the shutters were removed prevented subsequent detailed recording.
- 4.1.3 The constraints of the observations therefore render any conclusions as speculative.
- 4.1.4 Gravel layer 6 may be related to a road surface or a levelling layer for a road as it was a consistent thickness and level, however this is not certain. It is not clear that the feature sealed by this layer (fill 7- cut 10) was the origin of any artefactual material. It is possible this is a feature that pre-dates the Turl St thoroughfare and is pre-Saxon or Saxon immediately pre-dating the burh layout.
- 4.1.5 The find assemblage includes a mix of material covering a large range of dates. The assemblage may represent transport of material from several locations. The origins of the material could be caused by movement of deposits during (e.g.) the insertion of the 'modern' basement or through the trench excavations for modern services. The large tip lines recorded (context 3) may be construction cut infills for the basement of No 14 which extends under the pavement.
- 4.1.6 The speculative interpretations in 4.1.4 and 4.1.5 above allow for the presence of archaeological features and artefacts without conflict to the premise that Turl Street is a primary thoroughfare and should therefore not contain archaeological remains post-dating the establishment of the burh. However the possibility that this premise may be challenged should also inform further opportunities for observations in Turl Street.



## APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
1	Layer				Tarmac		
2	Layer				Rubble. Brick and concrete. Make up layer for modern road.		
3	Deposit	1.3	1.44		Loose mid reddish brown and mid brownish grey banded deposit of silty gravel. Contained frequent limestone gravel inclusions. Tipped deposits down to west, towards street frontage.		
4	Cut				Pipe trench. Modern. Forms step support in the excavation area.		
5	Fill				Pipe trench fill. Modern.		
6	Layer	0.14	0.2	2.3	Gravel layer. Loose mid greyish brown gravel, frequent coarse sand and well rounded limestone pebbles. Possible road layer.		
7	Fill of 10	0.6	1.3		Undisturbed deposit. Loose, dark greyish brown sandy silt, frequent limestone gravel inclusions.		
8	Finds reference				Number allocated to all finds retrieved from the spoil.		
9	Natural				Natural gravel.		
10	Cut				Cut seen in west section. Very steep concave edge. In plan appeared curved. Filled by 7. Possible large pit.		



## APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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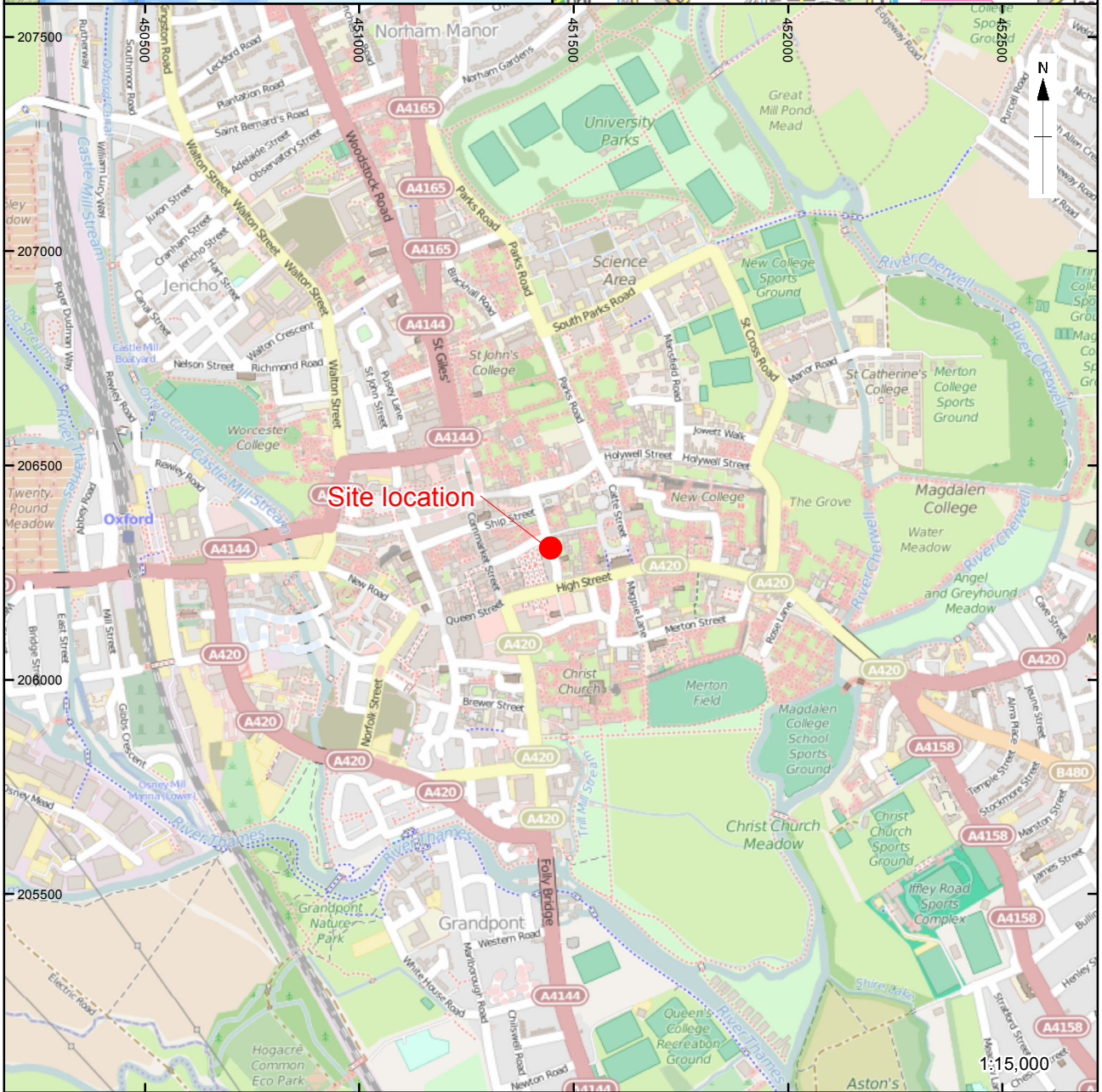
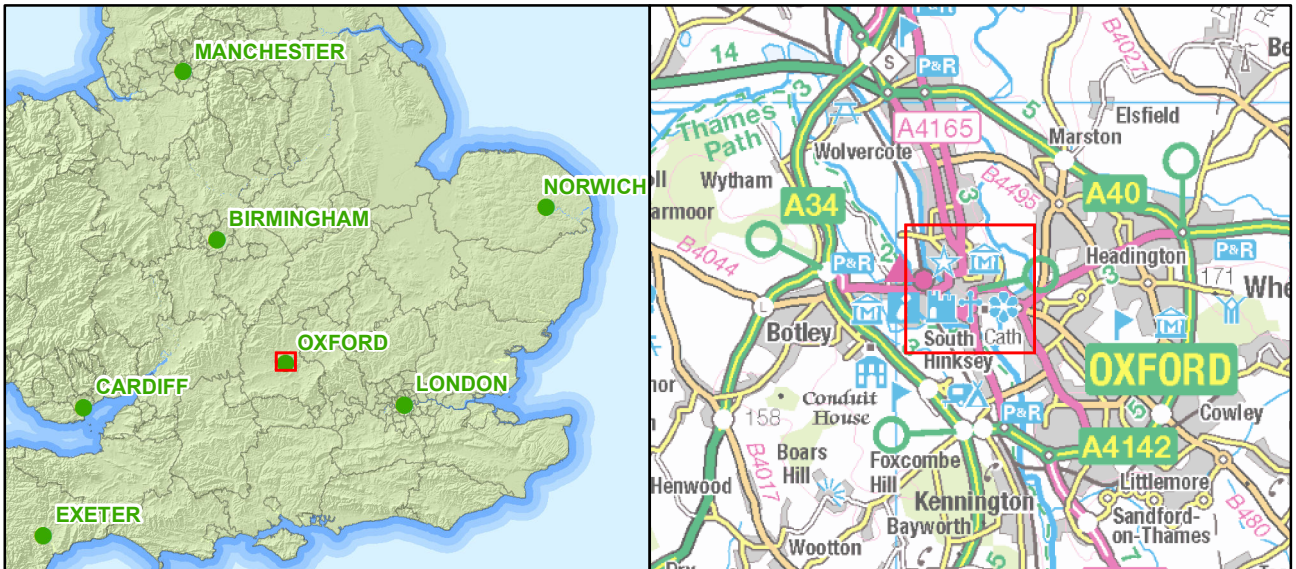
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## APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Turl Street Emergency Works, Oxford
Site code:	OXTSEW15
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SP 51447 06307
Date and duration of project:	3rd-6 <sup>th</sup> March
Area of site:	2.3 m <sup>2</sup>
Summary of results:	Medieval and post medieval artefacts were retrieved from an emergency excavation in Turl St. Constraints on the observation meant that it was not possible to determine whether the material was redeposited or indicates archaeological features in the line of what is understood to be a primary Saxon thoroughfare in Oxford
Location of archive:	Oxford Archaeology (will be deposited with Oxford County Museum Services)



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Figure 1: Site location



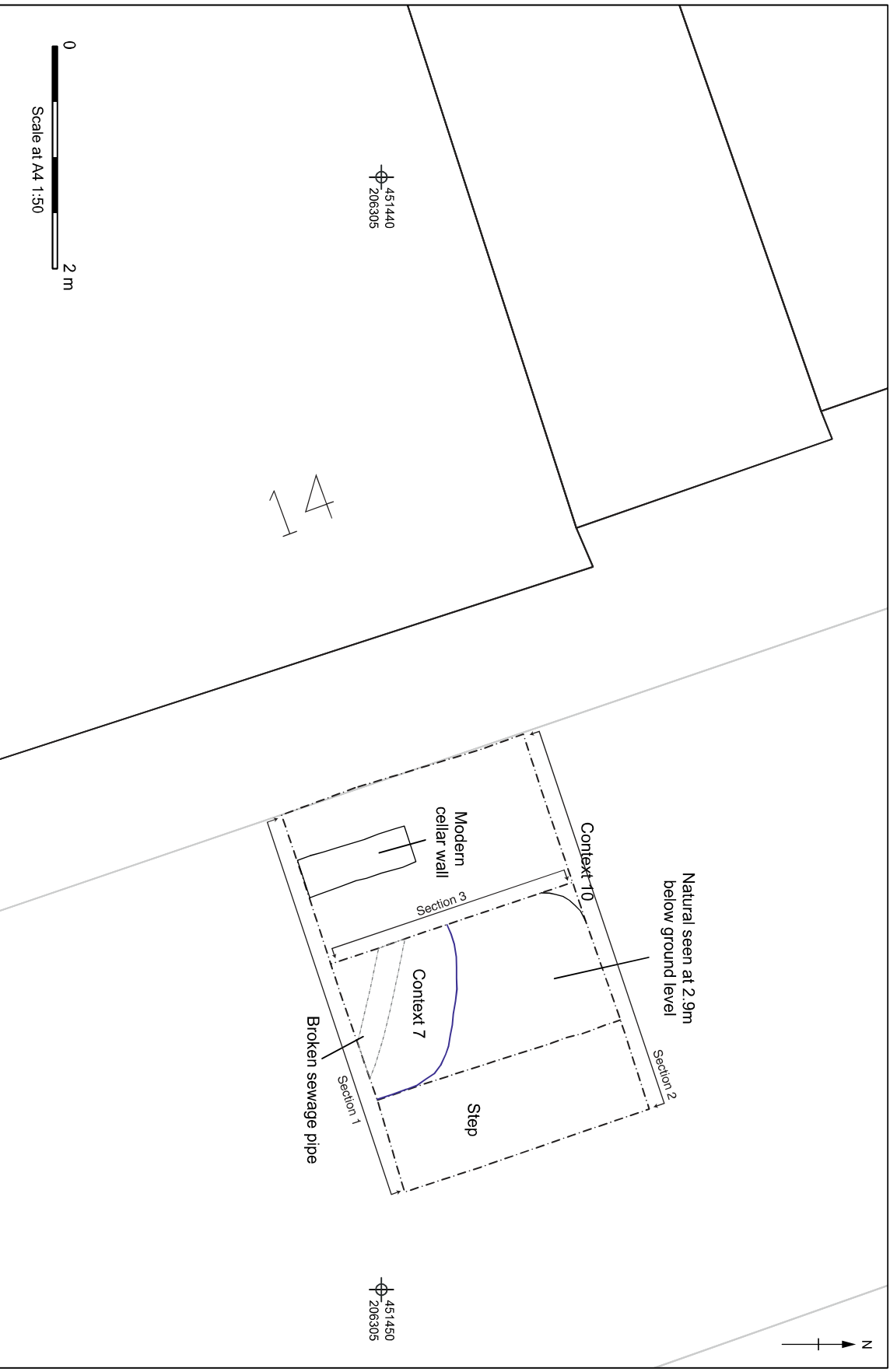


Figure 2: Excavation area

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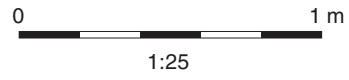
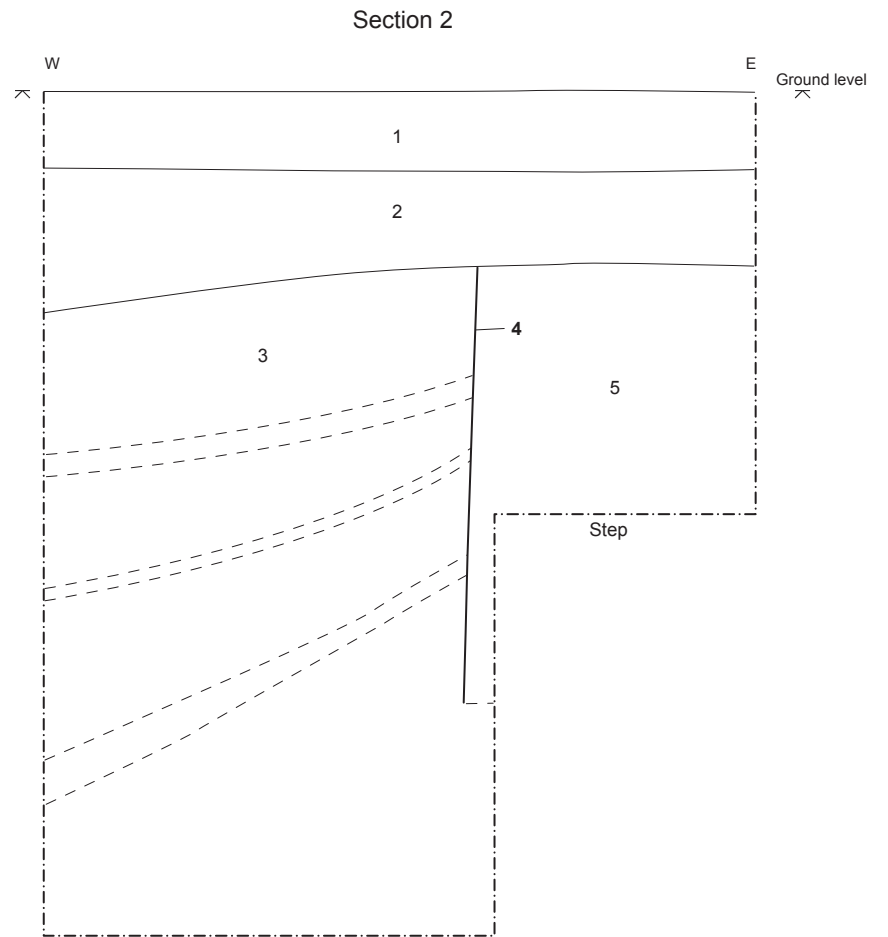
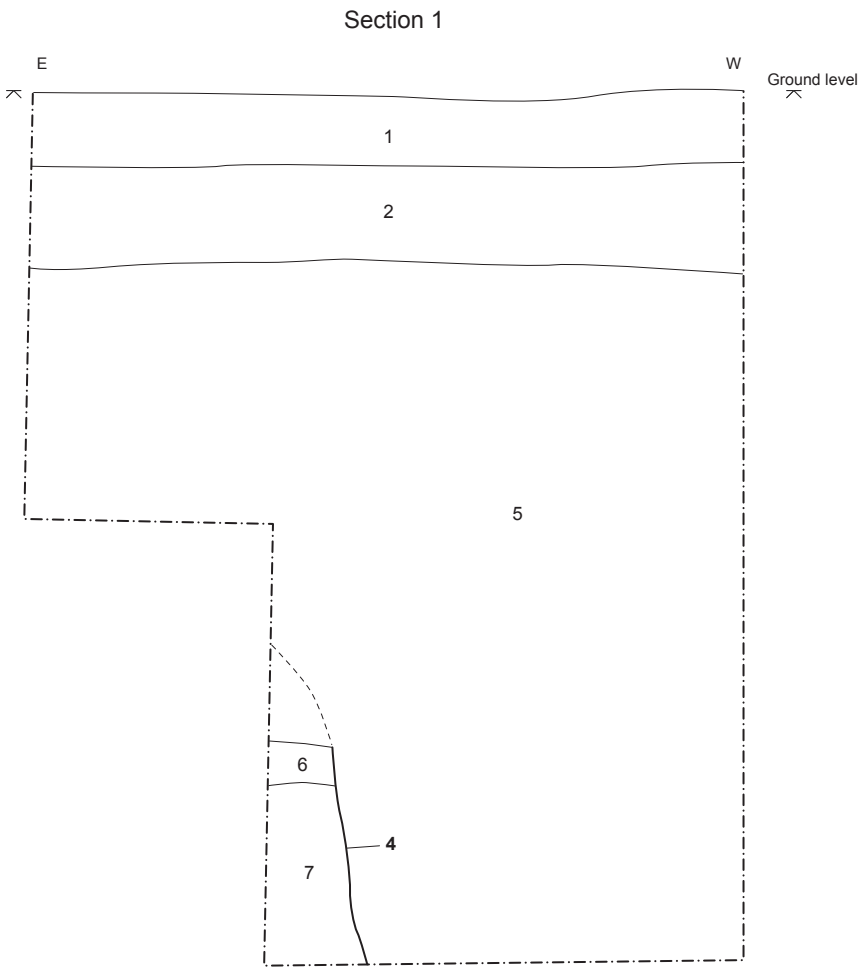


Figure 3: Sections 1 and 2



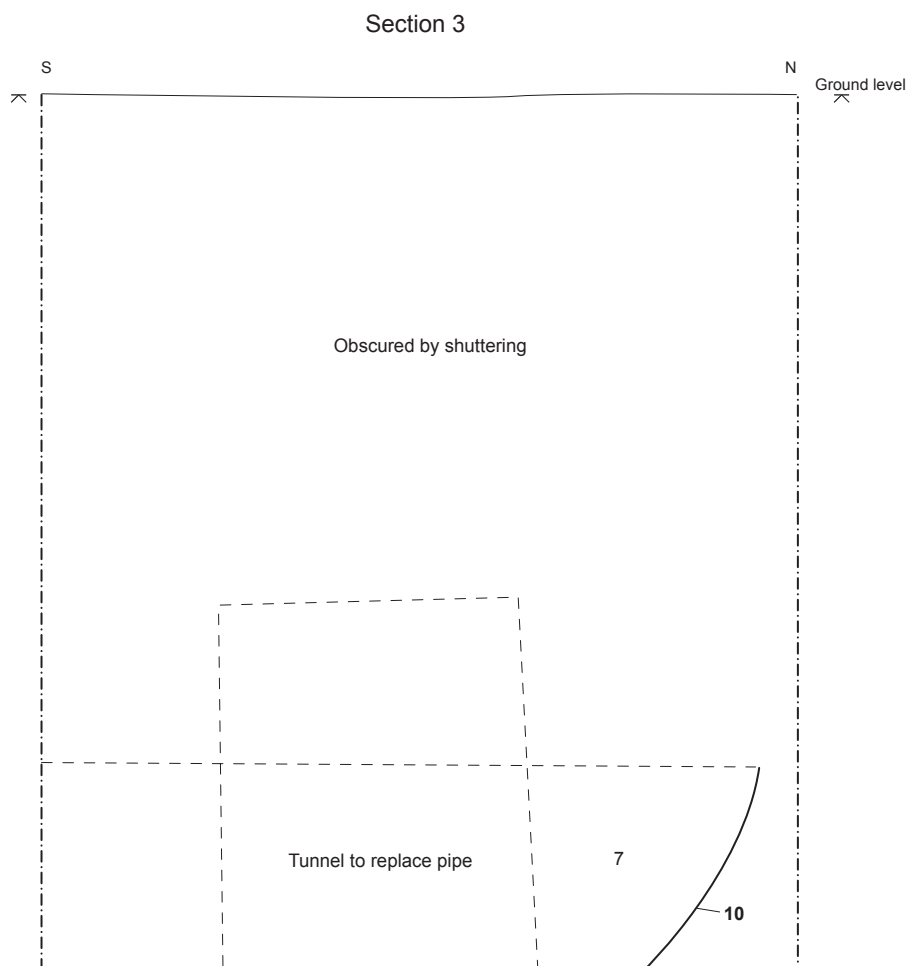


Figure 4: Section 3



Plate 1. Location of excavation in Turl Street, looking south



Plate 2. Excavation area, services and access step, looking north



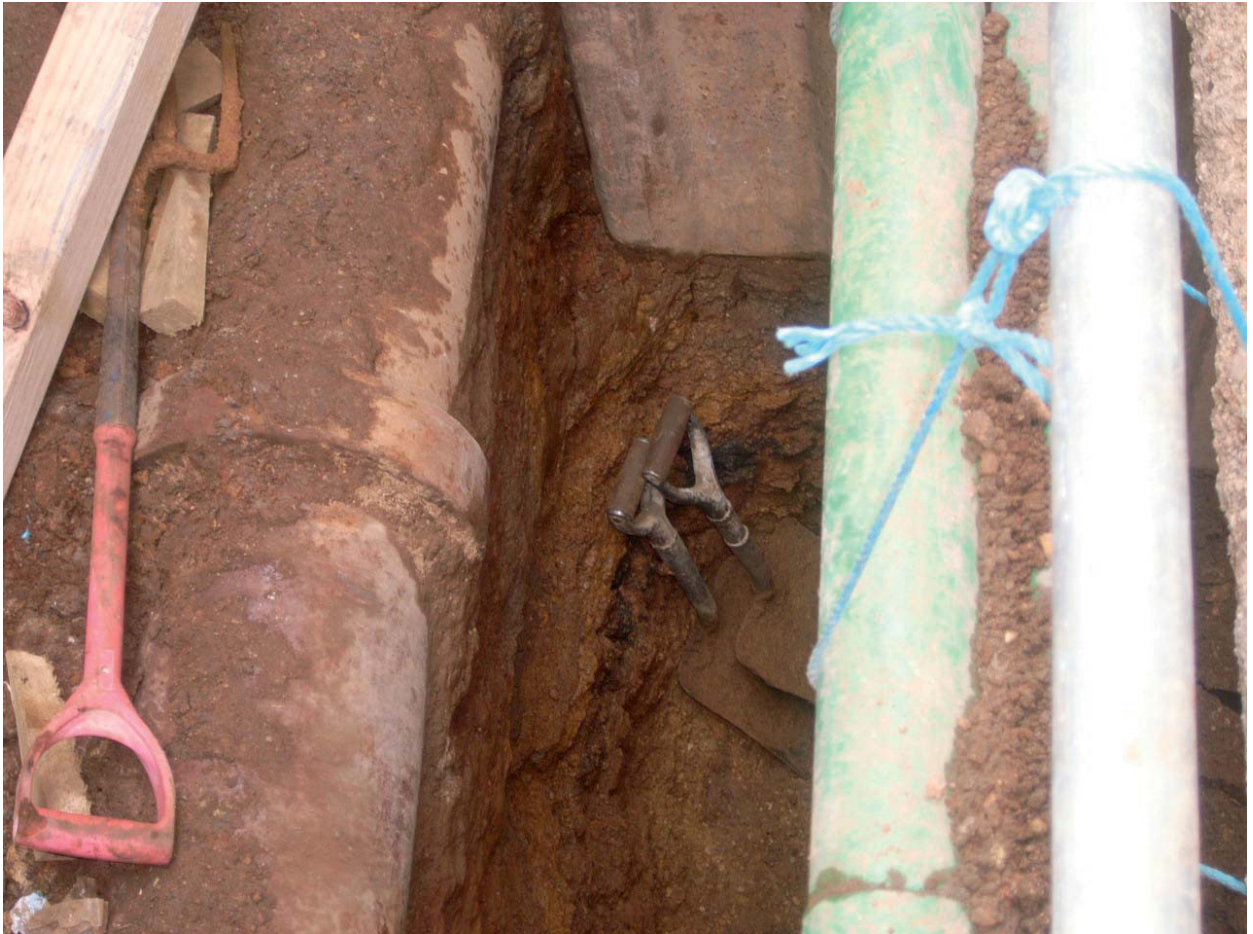


Plate 3. Gravel layers under the service pipe, looking south

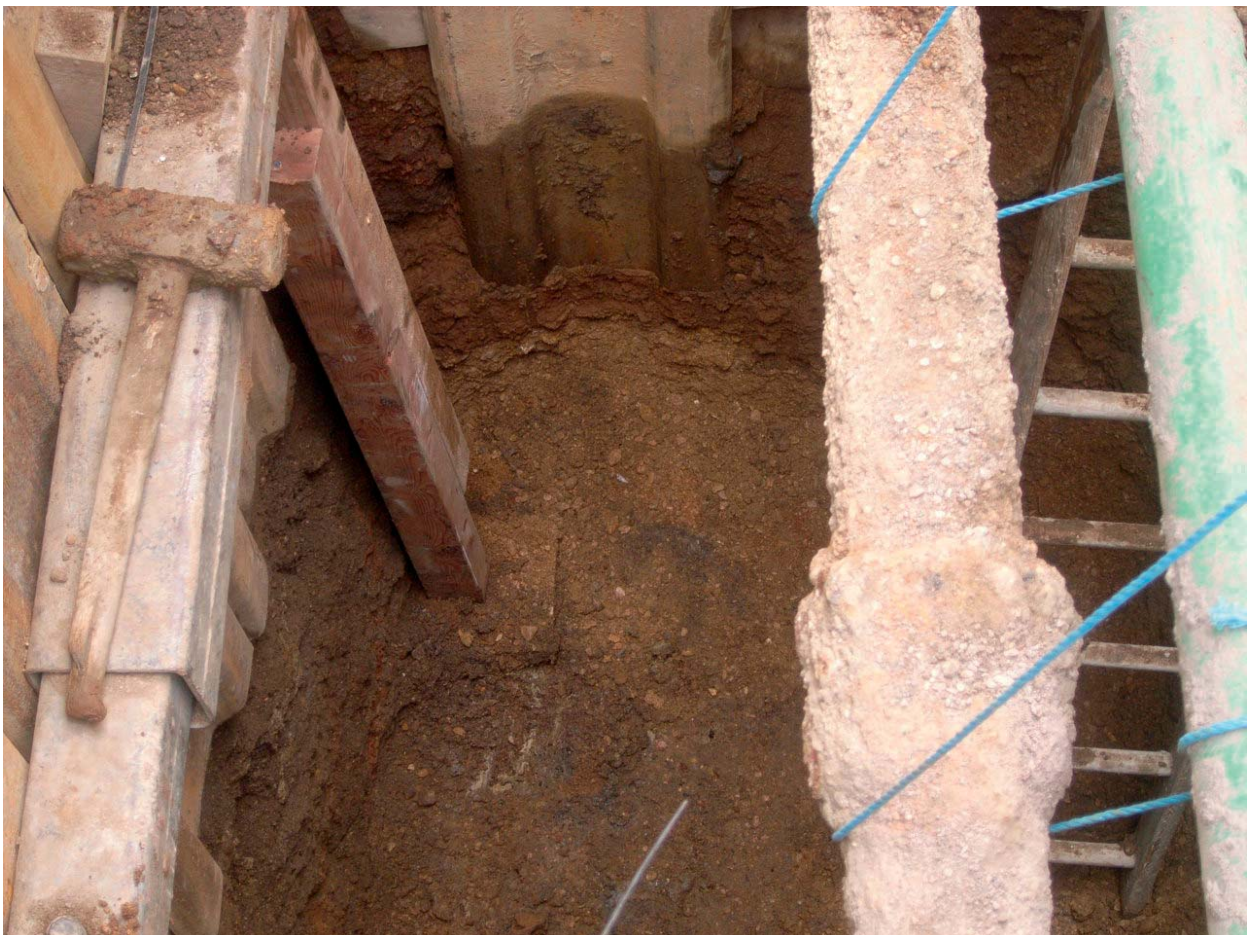


Plate 4. Natural gravels at base of excavation, looking north





Plate 5. Darker deposits seen on west side of excavation



Plate 6. Deposits on west end of section 2, looking north





Plate 7. West section, showing collapsed deposits on removal of the shuttering, looking west