

21 Leckford Road Oxford



Archaeological Watching Brief Report

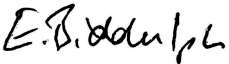
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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology (OA), was commissioned by Perioli Man Architects on behalf of Mazhar Khan to undertake an archaeological watching brief on the excavation of a basement and associated foundations and service trenches for an extension to the existing house at 21 Leckford Road, Oxford.

The work was carried out between 17th and 24th September 2014, during which time the main part of the basement area was stripped to the natural gravel under archaeological supervision. Two small garden features, one of Victorian or more recent date, the other undated, were found close to the east wall of the property, and probably represent planting holes or garden features associated with the property. A third feature, also Victorian or later, was planned immediately adjacent to the existing building, but was not excavated by hand as it clearly overlay the concrete foundation for the building. Excavation into the gravel was also monitored to ensure that this was indeed of geological origin.

The results of this work were reported to the Oxford City Archaeologist David Radford, who then advised that he was satisfied that there were no archaeological remains of value at risk, and that no further monitoring would be required.

The absence of any burials or other human remains perhaps indicates that the burial or burials found in the 19th century in the grounds of the adjacent school did not come from an extensive cemetery.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Details

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA), was commissioned by Perioli Man Architects to undertake an archaeological watching brief on the excavation of foundations and service trenches for an extension at the rear of the existing house at 21 Leckford Road, Oxford (the site), in accordance with conditions 8 and 9 of planning consent 14/00318/FUL.
- 1.1.2 An archaeological brief was provided by David Radford, Oxford City Archaeologist, and Written Scheme of Investigations (Oxford Archaeology 2014) detailed how OA planned to implement the requirements of the brief.
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies, and in accordance with the Standard and Guidance for archaeological watching brief (IFA 1999).

1.2 Location, Geology and Topography

- 1.2.1 The property at 21 Leckford Road is situated in North Oxford on the west side of the Woodstock Road, and on the south side of Leckford Road (Fig. 1). It is centred on NGR SP 5073 0744, and occupies an area 35m long and 8m wide.
- 1.2.2 The site sits upon gravels of the Summertown-Radley terrace, overlying Oxford Clay (BGS 2014), at a height of around 63m aOD. It lies almost midway between the rivers Thames and Cherwell, though the edge of the gravel terrace is much closer (500m) on the west, where it descends onto the wide floodplain of Port Meadow.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND POTENTIAL

2.1 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 2.1.1 To the south of the site the environs of Oxford have been the subject of a number of archaeological investigations, which for the prehistoric period have been summarised recently (Lambrick 2013).
- 2.1.2 The site lies just under 400m north of a 4th millennium BC Neolithic mortuary enclosure found within the former Radcliffe Infirmary site, and just over 600m north-west of the late Neolithic henge under Keble and St John's colleges (Lambrick 2013, fig. 13).
- 2.1.3 The mortuary enclosure was later incorporated into a linear Bronze Age barrow cemetery that ran west-east from the Radcliffe Infirmary site to the University Parks. A lone Bronze Age burial was found some 400m east of the site between the Banbury Road and Bradmore Road (*ibid.*, fig. 13). A few pits possibly indicating domestic activity of the same period have been found in the vicinity of the barrow cemetery. (*ibid.*, 27). A number of other ring ditches probably indicating barrows are visible on aerial photographs and as cropmarks on Port Meadow around 1km to the north-west of the site (*ibid.*, 42, fig. 24).
- 2.1.4 Iron Age and Romano-British settlement enclosures are known north of the barrow cemetery in the University Parks, some 600m south-east of the site. Iron Age pits have recently been found at Park Town 500m north-east of the site, and much Iron Age pottery from 56 Banbury Road less than 400m to the east (*ibid.*, 44). Middle and Late Iron Age enclosures are also spread across gravel islands in Port Meadow 1km or so to the north-west of the site. Roman burials are also known in the University Parks area, and in the vicinity of Park Town and Crick Road some 500m to the east (Dodd 2003, 12).

- 2.1.5 Early medieval burials are also known in the Park Town and Crick Road area, with a spearhead and two shield bosses giving a late 5th or 6th century date (*ibid.*, 12). A group of 10 burials was found in Kingston Road during building works in the 1870s, some 200-250m north-west of the site. These burials may have been Roman, but one was said to have been buried with a knife (*ibid.* 2003, 12), so were more likely of early medieval date.
- 2.1.6 A mass grave of late Saxon date, interpreted as the remains of a Viking raiding party, was found in the top of the prehistoric henge ditch at St John's College some 600m to the south-east (Dodd 2014, 189-190 and 225).
- 2.1.7 An undated human bone was found in a watching brief in 2012 just north of Canterbury Road within the grounds of St Hugh's College, some 300m north-east of the site (Oxford Archaeology 2013, 7-8). This is also likely to derive from a prehistoric, Roman or early medieval grave.
- 2.1.8 Although Oxford was established as a burh in the mid-Saxon period, and expanded rapidly in the 10th and 11th centuries, there does not appear to have been any suburban settlement extending northwards until well into the medieval period. The church of St Giles, some 600m south-east of the site, was established in the early 12th century (Dodd 2003, 57), and was soon the centre of a parish, suggesting that there was settlement adjacent. Little evidence of this has however been recovered to date, other than 12th century pottery and a coin from under St John's College (*ibid.*, 62). Excavations at Beaumont Street indicate that the first suburban settlement on the north of the city was established in the late 12th century, though by the time of the Hundred Rolls survey in 1279, the town was built up on either side of St Giles as far as the church, some 600m south-east of the site (Dodd 2003, 62).
- 2.1.9 The area of the site was probably part of the open fields of the parish of St Giles in the medieval and early post-medieval periods. An estate map of 1769 depicts the open fields of St Giles' parish, which appear essentially unchanged in character from a 14th century survey of the parish (Oxford Archaeology 2012, 5). Furrows of ridge-and-furrow cultivation were found during recent watching brief works at St Hugh's College only 300m to the north-east of the site (Oxford Archaeology 2013, 9-10).
- 2.1.10 The fields were enclosed in the 1830s, and were thereafter developed as part of the expansion of North Oxford to Summertown by the university.
- 2.1.11 One or possibly two burials of unknown date were found in St Philip and St James School in the 19th century, only 30m south-west of the site (UAD 677). These may be of prehistoric, Roman or early medieval date. A later date is less likely, as no church or chapel is known in the immediate vicinity.

3 PROJECT AIMS

3.1 General

- (i) To determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the stripped areas.
- (ii) To determine the approximate extent of any surviving remains within the stripped areas.
- (iii) To determine the date range of any surviving remains by artefactual or other means.

- (iv) To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains.
- (v) To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy.
- (vi) To assess the associations and implications of any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.
- (vii) To determine whether palaeo-environmental and/or economic evidence, is present, and to sample any deposits of potential.
- (viii) To determine the implications of any remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.
- (ix) To determine the range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.

3.2 Specific Aims and Objectives

3.2.1 The specific aims and objectives of the watching brief were:

- (x) To establish whether human remains exist within the site, and if so, to determine their date.
- (xi) If human remains were present, to determine whether these represented one or more articulated burials or disarticulated remains.
- (xii) If one or more articulated burials were present, to establish whether this was an isolated burial or part of a group or cemetery.
- (xiii) If more than one burial was present, to aim to establish whether these were of one period and phase of burial, or whether more than one period or phase was represented.
- (xiv) In the event of a cemetery being discovered, to aim to establish the age, sex and physical condition of the individuals at the time of burial, and to investigate their past health, development, occupation and status.
- (xv) To examine any grave furniture or grave goods that may accompany such burials, and any information this may provide as to the manner of burial, the status and contacts of the individuals buried, and the wider implications for the place of the group to which they belonged in the social hierarchy of the time in Oxfordshire and the region.
- (xvi) To sample any undisturbed burials for environmental information.
- (xvii) To determine whether this site was utilised in the prehistoric, Roman, early medieval, medieval or early post-medieval periods other than for agricultural purposes.

4 PROJECT SPECIFIC EXCAVATION AND RECORDING METHODOLOGY

4.1 Scope of works

4.1.1 The area of the development was at the rear (south side) of the existing building, and covered an area approaching 8m square, with service runs extending south beyond this (Fig. 2).

- 4.1.2 The reduction of the southern lower ground floor extension was subject to continuous archaeological watching brief, and during any further significant ground works (eg service trenches).
- 4.1.3 Provision was made for contacting the archaeological curator should significant evidence, whether complex vertical stratigraphy, structural remains or burials, be encountered, and for machine excavation to cease until a site meeting had taken place to discuss the appropriate mitigation strategy. A contingency was provided in the development budget to cover possible additional costs, including a specific method statement, in the event of the discovery of burials.
- 4.1.4 In the absence of any archaeological features, archaeological monitoring of the excavation was to continue to a maximum depth of 300mm into the natural, or to impact depth, whichever was the less.

4.2 Programme

- 4.2.1 The archaeological watching brief was conducted in between 17th September 2014 and 24th September 2014, by Mariusz Gorniak (Project Officer) and Robin Bashford (Project Supervisor) under the management of Senior Project Manager Tim Allen, MIFA FSA.
- 4.2.2 Fieldwork undertaken by Oxford Archaeology (South) was overseen by the Head of Fieldwork, Dan Poore MIFA.

4.3 Site specific methodology

- 4.3.1 Machine excavation was carried out using a toothless bucket, in order that any archaeological features could be detected as soon as they would be exposed.
- 4.3.2 Soils were removed in reverse stratigraphic order, and in spits no more than 0.2m deep (Plate 1).
- 4.3.3 Spoil were scanned during excavation, and a metal detector was used to scan the excavated soil for finds.
- 4.3.4 Topsoil and any subsoils were stored separately.
- 4.3.5 Test slots were cut at the east edge of the site to clarify the depth and character of the foundation for the boundary wall. Both of these revealed an archaeological feature in section, and these were photographed (Plates 2 and 3).
- 4.3.6 Machine excavation then removed the remainder of the topsoil under archaeological supervision, and excavation was then halted at the base of the topsoil to plan and further investigate the two archaeological features cut into the layer below.
- 4.3.7 The two archaeological features were sampled by hand excavation to characterise them and to recover artefactual evidence.
- 4.3.8 Sections of the archaeological features were drawn and photographed, and their positions recorded.
- 4.3.9 All finds from stratified deposits were retained. Finds that were not retained were noted and quantified before discard on site.
- 4.3.10 Once these features had been investigated, the soil into which they were cut, which appeared to be a ploughsoil, was removed by machine in shallow spits under close archaeological supervision down to the surface of the underlying gravel natural.

- 4.3.11 Environmental bulk samples were to be taken from deposits with potential, but no such deposits were found.
- 4.3.12 No surviving structural evidence, for example walls, complex posthole alignments or beamslots, or vertical stratigraphy was encountered, and no possible human bones or burials were encountered.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Extent of observation

- 5.1.1 The watching brief was carried out in a succession of visits, which monitored the stripping of most of the area of the proposed basement (Fig. 2). A narrow strip on the west side was not stripped at this time, and after consultation with the Oxford City Archaeologist David Radford, OA was not required to return to observe the stripping of this remaining area.

5.2 General soils and ground conditions, distribution of deposits

- 5.2.1 Ground conditions were relatively good, enabling good visibility of uncovered deposits.
- 5.2.2 Topsoil was numbered 100, and consisted of a very dark brown silty sand and loam with moderate amount of small-small/medium sized mostly subrounded flint gravel and pebbles. It contained moderate quantities of Victorian and more recent fragments of ceramic tile and brick. The boundary between the topsoil and deposit 101 below it was quite diffuse.
- 5.2.3 Deposit 101 comprised a mid-brown silty sand with moderate amount of small-medium sized, rounded and subrounded flints. It varied from 0.4m thick on the west to 0.25m thick on the east of the site. This layer most likely represents a former ploughsoil. It extended right across the site, and sealed the natural gravel, layer 102 (Fig. 3).
- 5.2.4 Layer 102 was a yellowish-brown coarse sand and flint gravel, and was at least 1.4m deep. It represents natural geology.
- 5.2.5 Cut 103 was slightly amorphous in plan, it had almost vertical and steep sides, and a flat base in section; measuring 0.35m across x 0.65m deep (Figs 2 and 3, section 2; Plate 2). It was cut into layer 101 and 102 and had a single fill numbered 104. It was located c. 0.3m west from the east wall of the back garden. It is likely to represent either a tree-throw hole or a post-hole for some structure of recent (? late Victorian) origin.
- 5.2.6 Deposit 104 was a mid-brown silty sand with occasional small-medium sized rounded and sub-rounded flint pebbles (Plate 2). It also contained a couple of pieces of late Victorian or more recent bottle glass. This deposit was very similar to layer 101, which 103 appeared to cut, and was sealed by topsoil 100.
- 5.2.7 Feature 105 was also located 0.3m from the east wall of the back garden, and lay c. 2.5m south of feature 103. It was sub-crescentic in plan (a curved oblong) with moderately steep sides and a concave base (Figs 2 and 3, section 3; Plate 3). This feature was also cut into layers 101 and 102, and had a single fill numbered 106. It too was most likely a garden pit of Victorian origin.
- 5.2.8 The single fill 106 of pit 105 was not homogeneous – it consisted of a brown silty sand with lenses of dark brown sandy loam (Plate 3). A few small pieces of coal were recorded in the fill. It was sealed by layer 100.

- 5.2.9 Victorian and modern walls of 21 Leckford Road property, including back-garden walls were cut into layers 100, 101, and 102.
- 5.2.10 A third feature, again of Victorian or later date, overlay the concrete foundation of the existing building just underneath the place later occupied by a set of metal steps (Fig. 2). This was planned but was not investigated by hand or further recorded due to its obviously recent date.

5.3 Finds and environmental summary

The only finds were fragments of modern and Victorian ceramic building material and a couple of pieces of late Victorian/20th century bottle glass. None of the finds was retained. No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were seen.

6 SIGNIFICANCE

- 6.1 No archaeological features older than the existing property were found. The features encountered were not structural or otherwise of significance.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 7.1.1 Ground conditions were relatively good throughout the evaluation and this contributed to good visibility of uncovered deposits.

7.2 Interpretation

- 7.2.1 The coarse sand and gravel exposed at the base of the sequence belongs to the Summertown-Radley terrace, overlying Oxford Clay (BGS 2014).
- 7.2.2 A former ploughsoil deposit sealing the gravel, and cut by two Victorian or later features, most likely represents the medieval and post-medieval open fields of the Parish of St Giles (see Chapter 2 above). The deposit did not contain any archaeological finds. No furrows indicating ridge-and-furrow cultivation were found, but the width of the plot may mean that the exposed area lay between furrows.
- 7.2.3 The topsoil horizon represents garden soil developed since the erection of the property.

7.3 Investigation objectives and results

- 7.3.1 Aims i-iv. No archaeological remains other than two Victorian or later garden features were found.
- 7.3.2 Aim v & vi. The Victorian features were sealed by topsoil and cut into an earlier ploughsoil that directly overlay the natural gravel. The ploughsoil did not contain any finds, but was probably of medieval or post-medieval date, and can reasonably be linked to the documented open fields of the Parish of St Giles.
- 7.3.3 Aims vii-ix. No deposits of environmental potential were found, and the artefactual evidence consisted only of small quantities of material of Victorian date of limited variety. No useful information related to economy, status, utility or social activity was recovered.

- 7.3.4 Aims x-xvi. No evidence of burials or human remains was recovered. The absence of such activity perhaps indicates that the burial or burials found in the adjacent school playing field did not form part of an extensive cemetery.
- 7.3.5 Aim xvii. No evidence of use of the site prior to the Victorian period, other than for agricultural purposes, was discovered.

8 PROJECT SPECIFIC REPORTING AND ARCHIVE METHODOLOGY

8.1 Report

- 8.1.1 A digital version of the completed and approved report will be provided to the Oxford City Council Archaeologist and to the HER.
- 8.1.2 A summary report will be sent to the editors of South Midlands Archaeology not later than 3 months after the end of the calendar year in which the work is undertaken.

8.2 Archive

- 8.2.1 The site archive will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museums Service following completion of the project under the accession number OXCMS : 2014.120.
- 8.2.2 Once the final report is completed an OASIS fieldwork summary form will be completed and submitted to the Archaeology Data Service.

A summary of OA's general approach to documentary archiving can be found in Appendix G of WSI (Oxford Archaeology 2014).

9 REFERENCES

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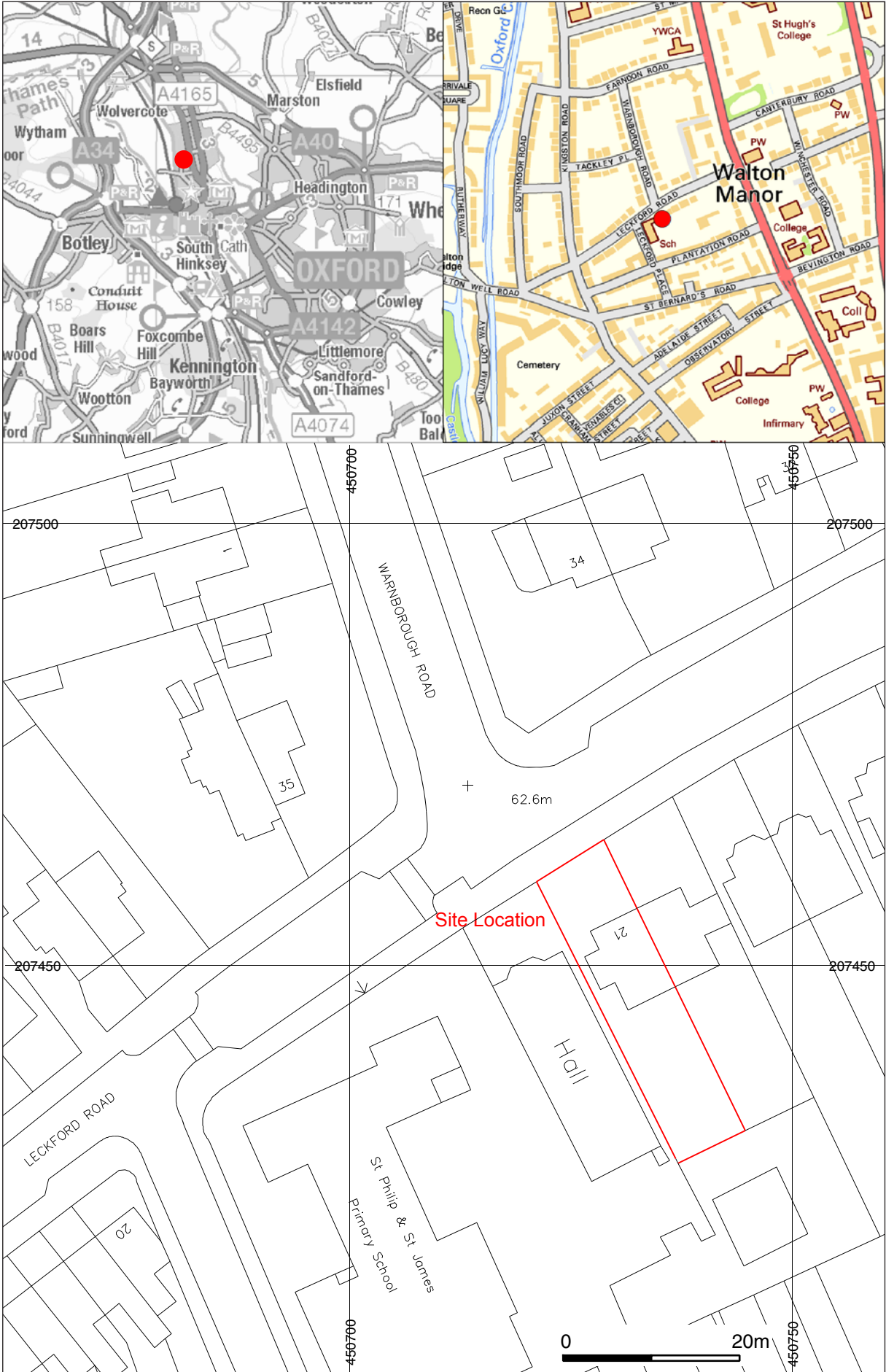


Figure 1: General site location

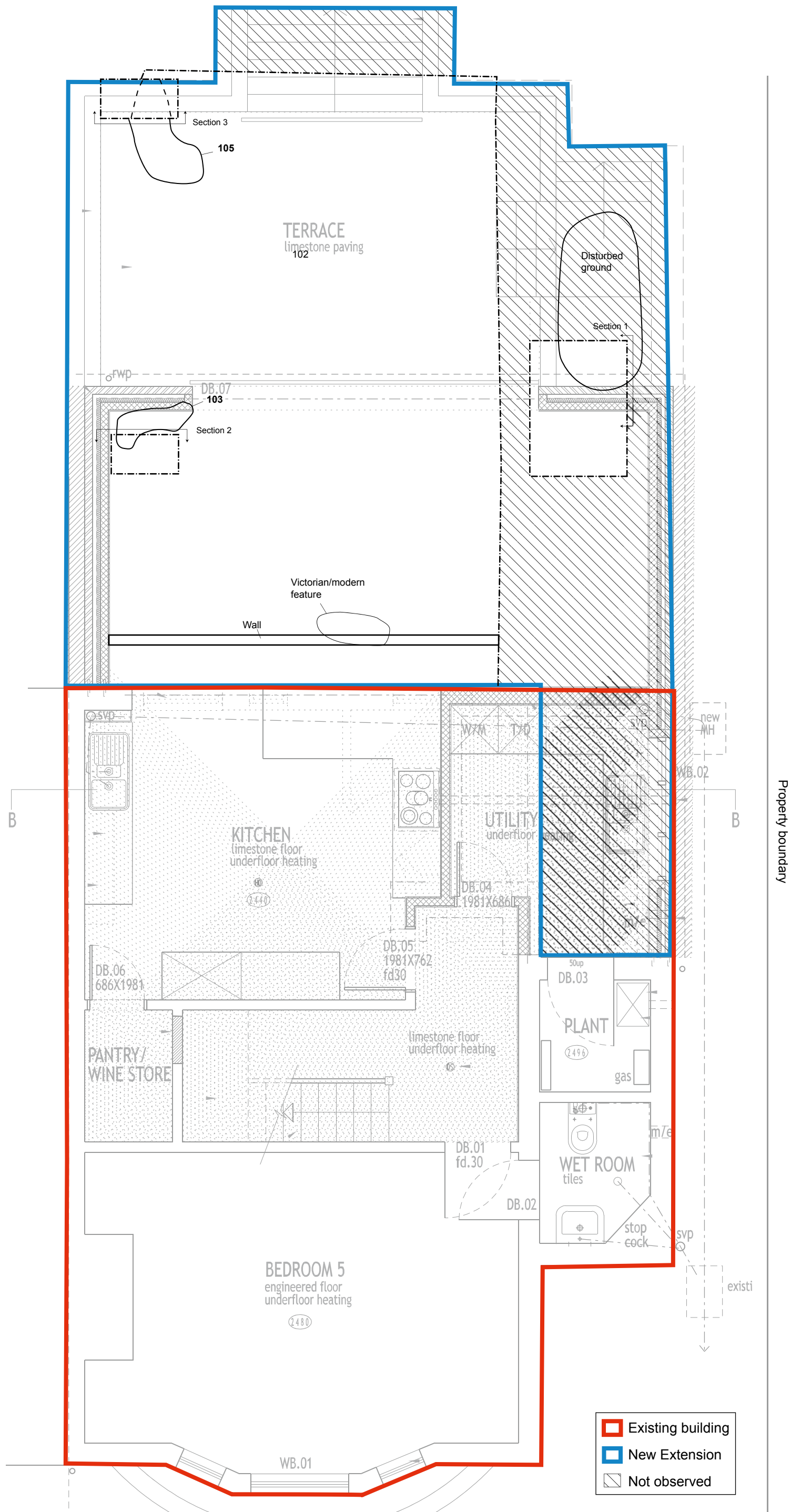


Figure 2: Plan of proposed development area, showing the area that was monitored and the investigated features

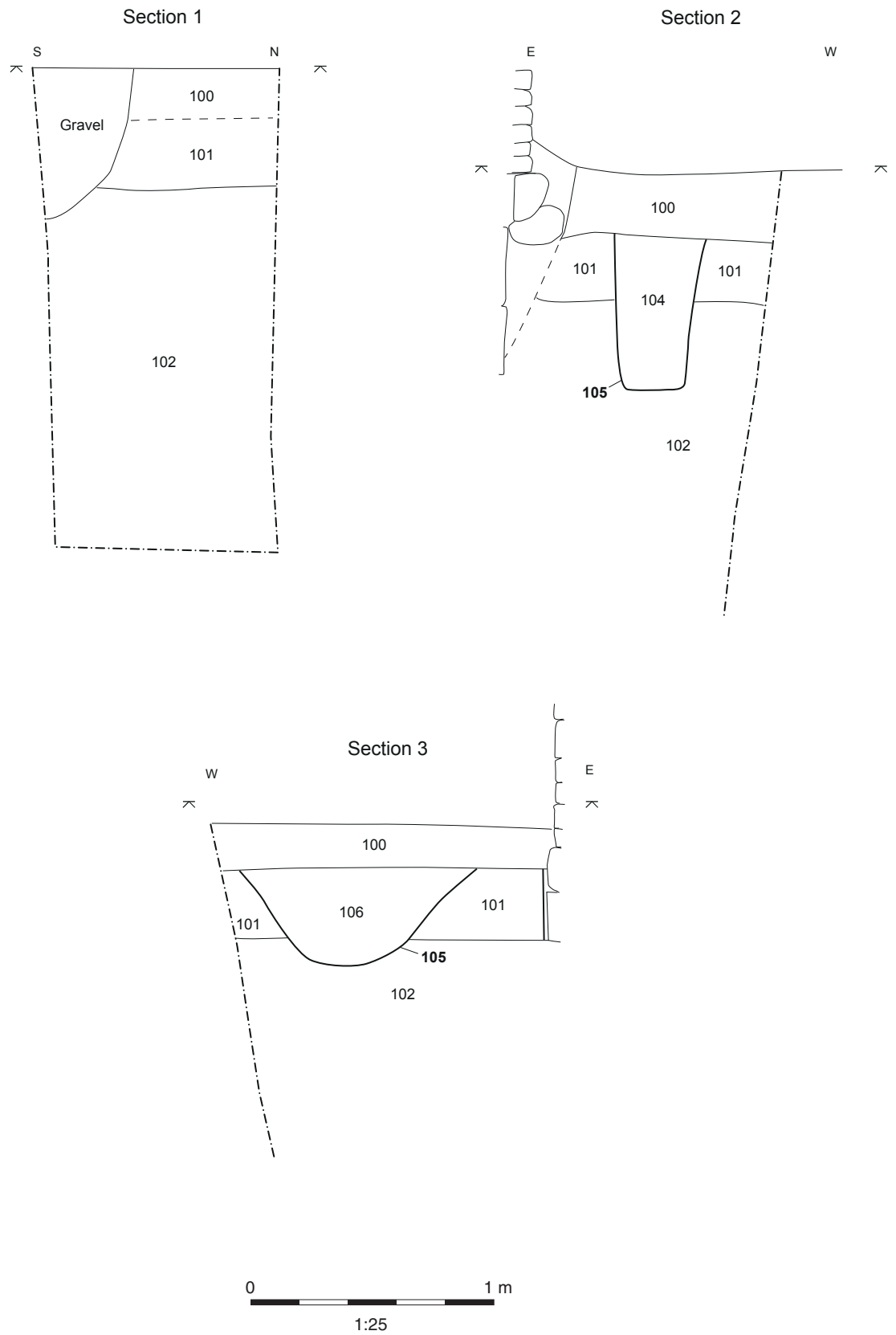


Figure 3: Sections of features 103 and 105



Plate 1: 0011 Topsoil stripping underway



Plate 2: 0007 Feature 103 and fill 104 as first exposed before full clearing and excavation



Plate 3: 0009 Feature 105 and fill 106 as first exposed before full clearing and excavation



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