

# 91 High Street Wallingford Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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# 91 Wallingford High Street

## *Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

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*with contributions by John Cotter, Geraldine Crann, Ian R Scott, Lena Strid and Rebecca Nicholson and illustrated by Conan Parsons and Markus Dylewski*

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## Summary

*Between February and April 2014 Oxford Archaeology undertook an intermittent watching brief on works to remodel the rear of 91 High Street, Wallingford. The works uncovered occupation deposits of 12th to 15th century dates lying just below the current concrete floor. Two probable chalk wall footings were observed to cut a layer of 12th or 13th century date, and may represent the remains of a building that fronted onto the High Street. Excavations to the rear of the property only uncovered made ground of recent date.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between February and April 2014 Oxford Archaeology undertook an intermittent watching brief on the renovation of the former dry cleaners (Fig 1). The work involved the demolition of part of the rear of the building, the reduction of an area of the rear yard and the excavation of trenches for new beams, drainage and mini piles (Fig. 2).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of planning permission (ref. 13/00557/F), and a design brief for the work was set by Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS 2013). The work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2013).

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is located in the centre of Wallingford, (Fig. 1), on the northern side of High Street and to the west of Castle Street (NGR SU 6086 8951). The site lies at approximately 50m OD, and the underlying geology is river gravel overlain by alluvium (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no. 254). The site was previously in commercial use as a dry cleaners.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The site is situated in an area of archaeological interest, to the south of the Castle, (a scheduled monument SM 176), and is located on one of the two major historic routes through the town.
- 1.3.2 Construction on the Castle began in 1067 by order of William the Conqueror and was supervised by Robert D'Oyley. The motte and bailey castle was completed in 1071 and expanded in the 13th century under King John, and later King Henry III. Excavations in the 1970s revealed a C12th cob building which predated the expansion of the castle, and which was located 100m north of the present site. It is likely that further buildings were located in the area before the building of the castle.
- 1.3.3 The High Street is likely to have formed one of the major route-ways through the town from at least the 12th century, and may date to the earliest town layout.
- 1.3.4 Wallingford is located in an area containing some of the most important archaeological complexes in the Thames valley. The town may possibly have had a Roman precursor, and the presence of a Saxon cemetery pre-dating the 9th century defensive works may indicate a settlement in this area. The Domesday entry for 1086 records 491 houses in Wallingford with a mint, a market and a guildhall. Wallingford was the second largest burgh in Berkshire and played a prominent role in the conflict between King Stephen

and the Empress Matilda. The town was very prosperous until the 13th century after which it began a slow and steady decline. By the 16th century Wallingford's once large and impressive castle was in decay. The town briefly revived in the 19th century, after the opening of the canal to Bath and Birmingham.

- 1.3.5 The town's rectilinear street pattern was laid out at the burgh's foundation and at least one street formerly existed within the Bullcroft. It has been suggested that in the 12th century the town occupied all the interior of the defences. In 1982-83 a medieval ditch and a sequence of ashy deposits were recorded during redevelopment on the frontage site at 56 High Street, approximately 100m west of the current development. In 2012 a watching brief at 3 Thames Street, 80m to the south, observed a sequence of possible medieval occupation levels and associated rubbish pits dating to the 11th and 12th centuries overlain by post-medieval worked soil (OA, 2012).

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area.
- 2.1.2 To record the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains affected by the proposed works.
- 2.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the site and to take samples where appropriate.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 OA were contacted by the site construction manager on dates when intrusive works were programmed to be undertaken. This resulted in three visits to monitor works or to observe and record works which had been previously undertaken.
- 2.2.2 Scale plans and sections were drawn of all revealed deposits, and a digital and black and white film photographic record maintained. All deposits were recorded on standard OA context record sheet pro formas, and finds were recovered and bagged by context.
- 2.2.3 The watching brief comprised the monitoring of the reduction of the soils to either side of the steps rising up from the building to the rear garden; the excavation of two slots through the concrete floor within the building to take mini piles and ground beams, and a diagonal drainage channel, also cut through the concrete floor (Fig. 2).
- 2.2.4 Different context number blocks were used on two of the site visits.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The earliest deposits encountered (13 and 14) are likely to represent occupation horizons of medieval date. These deposits were only observed beneath the concrete footing (15) of the extant eastern wall of the current building, and within the west east aligned ground beam slot (Figs. 2 and 3 ; Plates 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 ).
- 3.1.2 Layer 14 was a mid greenish-brown silty clay from which a two sherds of Wallingford ware were recovered (see 4.1 below). Within Section 10 (Fig. 3) layer 14 was sealed by



layer 13, a dark brownish-grey silty clay containing occasional flecks of charcoal and shell, and a sherd of Kingston-type ware. The construction of concrete footing 15 had removed layer 13. Two probable chalk wall footings 20 and 22 were cut into layer 14. These had possibly supported a cob walled building which could have fronted onto the high street.

- 3.1.3 Chalk foundation 20 was only observed in section (Fig 3 ;Plate 2), beneath concrete foundation 15, and measured 0.55m wide and 0.25m deep, with the individual blocks' maximum dimensions up to 0.2m. Foundation 22 (Fig. 3; Plate 3) was located 1.14m to the south of 20, and measured 0.5m wide and 0.2m deep. Individual stone and chalk blocks had maximum dimensions of up to 0.4m.
- 3.1.4 Two pits, 17 and 26 , (Fig. 3;) were observed cutting layer 14. Pit 26 had a shallow curved profile and contained two fills, the lower of which (25) was a mid brownish-grey silty clay containing frequent pieces of chalk and mortar. Above this fill 24 had a similar soil composition, with a greyer hue, and contained occasional fragments of stone. Neither fill contained any datable material.
- 3.1.5 The second pit, 17 (Fig. 3), had a similar curved profile to 26 and contained a single fill (16). Fill 16 was a mid greyish-brown silty clay which contained domestic waste including a horse bone and roof tile fragments dating from the 15th – 17th century.
- 3.1.6 Layer 13 was sealed by 12 (Fig. 3), a dark brownish-grey silty clay, interpreted as a garden soil, and which contained glass of 20th century date. Layer 12 was sealed by the current concrete floor of the building (11).
- 3.1.7 A further pit (104) was uncovered within the drainage trench (Figs 2 and 3), the upper part of the fill having been removed. The pit was sheer sided, and the single identified fill (105) was a compact mid greyish-brown clay silt from which no finds were recovered, although on stratigraphic grounds the pit is of post-medieval or later date. The majority of the pit was not subject to further disturbance. The pit cut a loose dark brown silt deposit (103), which contained pottery of 15th -16th-century date, and was interpreted as a former garden soil, or occupation horizon.
- 3.1.8 The excavation of the deposits to either side of the steps within the rear of the property revealed only made ground of recent date (101), sealed by topsoil 100. Finds recovered from 101 included post-medieval pottery sherds and clay pipe stems, but also modern glass and plastic.
- 3.1.9 Two other areas within the west of the building (see Fig. 2, those interventions with no associated section) were unfortunately excavated without an archaeological presence, but a review of the finds retained indicated that only later post-medieval deposits were disturbed.

## 4 FINDS

### 4.1 Pottery

*Identified by John Cotter and compiled by Geraldine Crann*

Context	Description	Date
13	1 Kingston-type ware (KING) slip jug sherd, 3g	1250 -1400
14	2 sherds Wallingford ware (WA38) including shoulder of large jar with combed lattice decoration, 24g	12th - early 13th century



101	Dish sherds in transfer printed ware (TPW) and pearl ware (PEAR TR); 1 sherd cream ware chamber pot (CREA DEV), 133g	1830 – 1900
103	1 jug sherd ?late Brill ware (OXB), 9g	15th – 16th century

***Discussion and recommendations.***

4.1.1 The pottery from the evaluation is of low potential and requires no further work.

## 4.2 Ceramic building material

*Identified by John Cotter and compiled by Geraldine Crann*

Context	Description	Date
16	2 roof tile fragments, 55g	15th – 17th century

***Discussion and recommendations.***

4.2.1 The ceramic building material is of low potential and requires no further work.

## 4.3 Clay pipe

*Identified by John Cotter and compiled by Geraldine Crann*

Context	Description	Date
101	2 stems; 3 stems, 21g	Late 18th- 19th century late 17th – 18th century

***Discussion and recommendations.***

4.3.1 The clay pipe is of low potential and requires no further work.

## 4.4 Animal bone

*Identified by Lena Strid*

Context	Description
14	Juvenile mammal long bone, 7g
16	1 medium mammal rib, horse distal radius, metacarpal, phalanx 1-3 and carpals – wither's height 128cm (May 1985), 443g

***Discussion and recommendations.***

4.4.1 All bones are fragments unless stated otherwise. The animal bone assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work.

## 4.5 Shell

*Identified by Rebecca Nicholson*

Context	Description
16	5 oyster ( <i>Ostrea edulis</i> ) shells, 1 complete small rounded oyster left and right valves, 1 right valve fragment and 2 indeterminate fragments, 25g

### ***Discussion and recommendations.***

4.5.1 The shell assemblage is of low potential and requires no further work.

## 4.6 Metals

*identified by Ian R Scott*

4.6.1 The only metal find is a penny of George VI dated 1944. This was recovered from context 101.

## 4.7 Glass

*identified by Ian R Scott*

4.7.1 There are 5 pieces of glass, comprising 2 pieces of window glass and 2 pieces of vessel glass and a glass stopper from a chemical jar or similar. The glass comes from two contexts.

4.7.2 Context 12 ( 1) Moulded fragment probably from the body and/or neck of a moulded jar in colourless metal. Possibly machine moulded, 20th century or later.

4.7.3 Context 101 (2) Small jar or bottle with cylindrical body short vertical neck and square rim. Almost complete. Machine moulded with mould or design number on base. Colourless. 20th century or later. Ht: 67mm; D: 30mm. (3) Glass stopper with flat disc top. Moulded. Possibly from a small chemical bottle. Pale blue green metal. Ht: 27mm; D: 28mm. (4 & 5) Two pieces of window glass, with regular flat surfaces and possibly modern. No refit but the pieces are probably from the same piece of glass. Colourless with traces of a painted pattern in opaque light blue with thick black border. Possibly from an advertisement painted on the glass or on the window. Thickness of sherds: 3mm.

4.7.4 None of the glass need be earlier than the 20th century, and certainly the small bottle or jar (no. 2) from context 101 is of 20th-century or later date. The presence of a penny of George VI dated 1944 confirms the date.

## 4.8 Environmental samples

4.8.1 No environmental samples were taken due to the possibility of contamination in the confined spaces available for investigation, and the limited potential for interpretation of the deposits uncovered.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1.1 The two possible chalk and stone wall footings (20 and 22), although only partially revealed by the limited nature of the trench impacts, may be evidence of a building that fronted onto the high street. The underlying deposit (14), which the wall footings cut



into, contained only limited dating material (two pottery sherds), but these date to the 12th or early 13th century.

- 5.1.2 Layer 14, and the overlying layer 13, which contained a single pottery sherd of 13th -15th century date, only appeared to survive within the eastern part of the development site. Within the central area, as seen within the drainage trench, deposit 103 was present and dated (again from a single pottery sherd) to the 15th - 16th century. However it is possible that layers 103 and 13 are the same, and 15th-century in date, and that layer 14 is more extensive, and survives below deposit 13, to the west of where it was observed.
- 5.1.3 Similarly dated deposits were uncovered during a watching brief at 3 Thames Street (OA 2012), some 80m to the south, although these were slightly deeper in the revealed sequence. It is clear in this instance that the construction of the current 91 High Street, or its predecessor, has removed any potential deposits of later post-medieval date, and that deposits of 12th or 13th century date are very close to the current ground surface.
- 5.1.4 The rear garden area of the property has been shown to have been built up, and this made ground is of recent date.



## APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
100	Layer	0.3	-	-	Garden soil	-	Modern
101	Layer	1.48	-	-	Made ground	Pottery, Clay pipe, glass, plastic	Modern
103	Layer	-	-	-	Garden soil	Pottery	15th-16th century
104	Cut	-	-	-	Pit cut	-	-
105	Fill	-	-	-	Pit fill	-	-
11	Layer	0.12	-	-	Concrete flooring	-	-
12	Layer	0.2	0.6	5	Garden soil	Glass	Modern
13	Layer	0.2	0.6	5	Occupation deposit	Pottery	1250 -1400
14	Layer	0.2	0.6	5	Occupation deposit	Pottery	12th - early 13th century
15	Layer	0.18	-	1.4	Concrete footing	-	Modern
16	Fill	0.33	1.5	-	Fill of 17	Bone, CBM, Shell	15th – 17th century
17	Cut	0.33	1.5	-	Pit cut	-	15th – 17th century
18	Layer	-	-	-	Make up for concrete floor 11	-	-
19	Fill	0.25	0.3	-	Construction cut backfill of wall 20	-	-
20	Wall	0.25	0.55	-	Chalk block wall footing	-	-
21	Cut	0.25	0.85	-	Construction cut for wall 20	-	-
22	Wall	0.2	0.5	-	Chalk wall footing	-	-
23	Cut	0.2	0.5	-	Construction cut for wall 22	-	-
24	Fill	0.18	1.2	-	Fill of pit 26	-	-
25	Fill	0.2	1.4	-	Fill of pit 26	-	-
26	Cut	0.4	1.4	-	Pit cut	-	-



## APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

May, E, 1985 *Widerristhöhe und Langknochenmasse bei Pferd - ein immer noch aktuelles Problem. Zeitschrift für Säugtierkunde*, **50**. 368-382

OA, 2012. 3 Thames Street Wallingford, Oxfordshire. Archaeological watching brief report. Oxford Archaeology

OA, 2013. 91 High Street Wallingford, Oxfordshire. Written Scheme of Investigation for a watching brief. Oxford Archaeology

OCAS, 2013. Classic Cleaners, 91 High Street, Wallingford. Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief



## APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: 91 Wallingford High Street

Site code: WA91HS13

Grid reference: Centred at NGR SU 608 895

Type of watching brief: Intermittent

Date and duration of project: February to April 2013

Area of site: 65m<sup>2</sup>

Summary of results: Between February and April 2014 Oxford Archaeology undertook an intermittent watching brief on works to remodel the rear of 91 High Street, Wallingford. The works uncovered occupation deposits of 12th to 15th century dates lying just below the current concrete floor. Two probable chalk wall footings were observed to cut a layer of 12th or 13th century date, and may represent the remains of a building that fronted onto the High Street. Excavations to the rear of the property only uncovered made ground of recent date.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course.

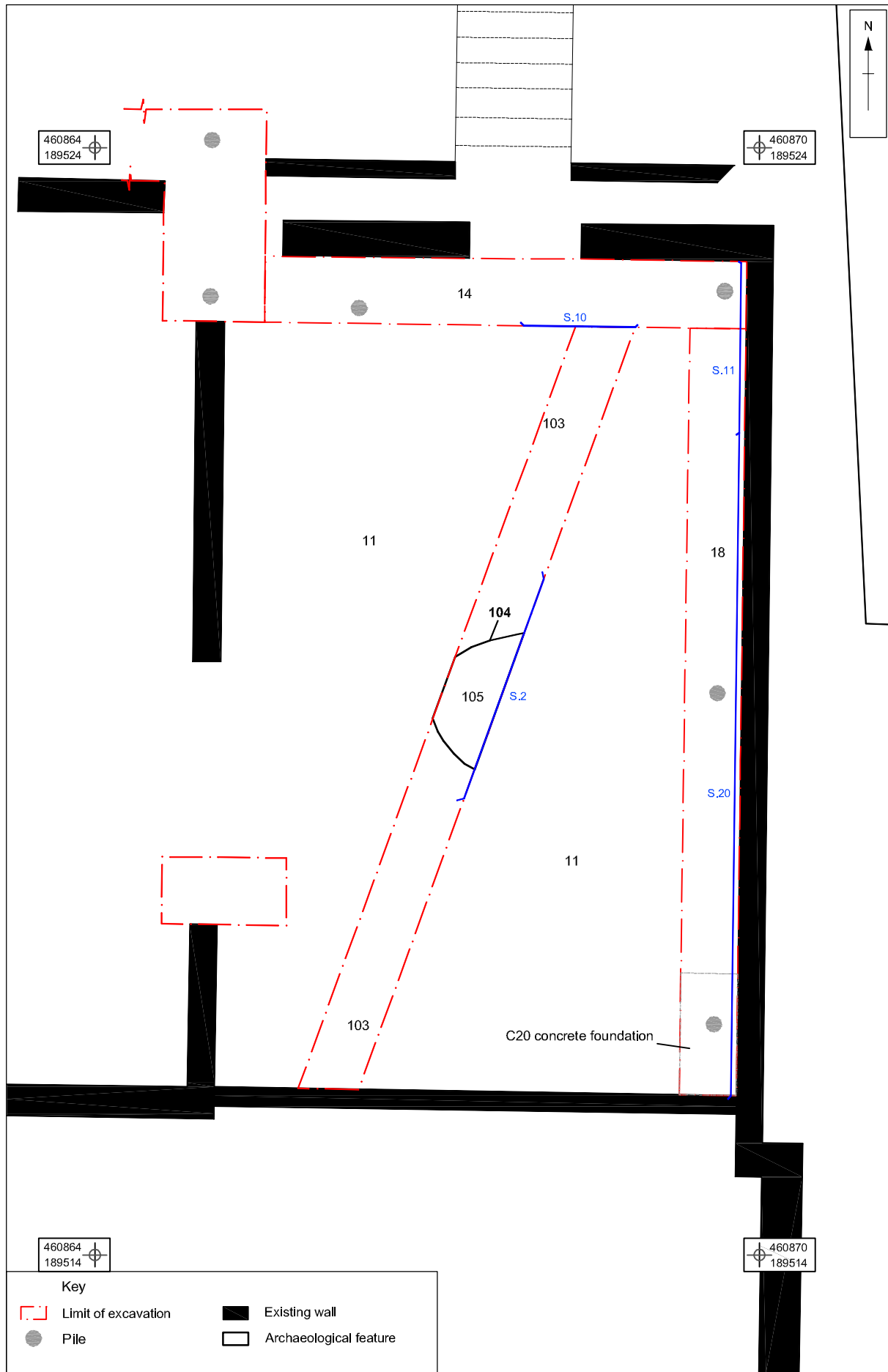






Figure 1: Site location

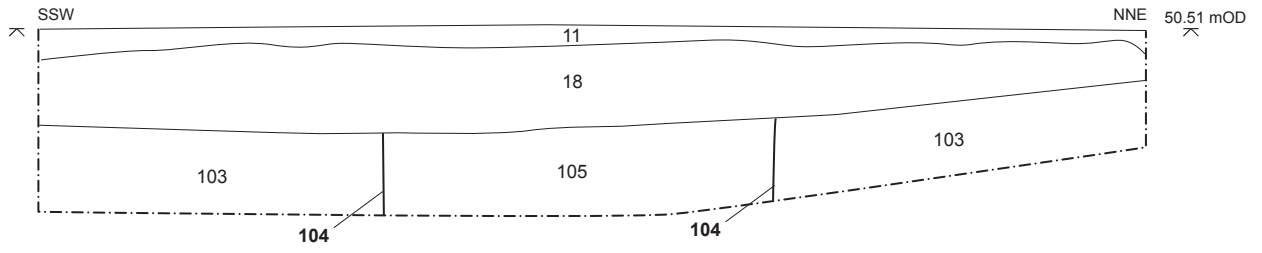
X:\w\Wallingford High St\High St, Wallingford\Report\WA91WB 91 High Street Wallingford 2014-11-18.dwg(A4 Figure 2)\WA91HS\4\*WA91HSWB 91 High Street Wallingford\matl.bradley 20 Nov 2014



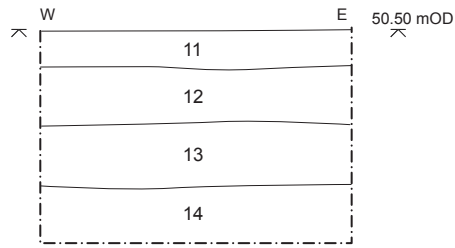
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Figure 2: Trench location plan

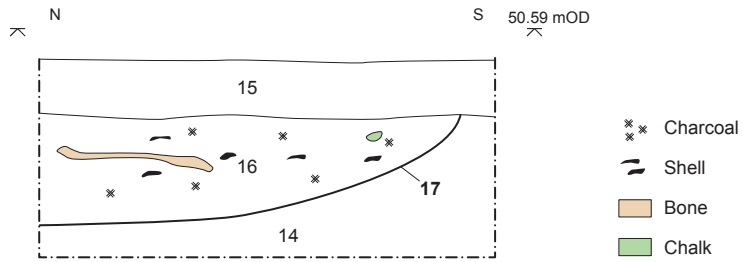
### Section 2



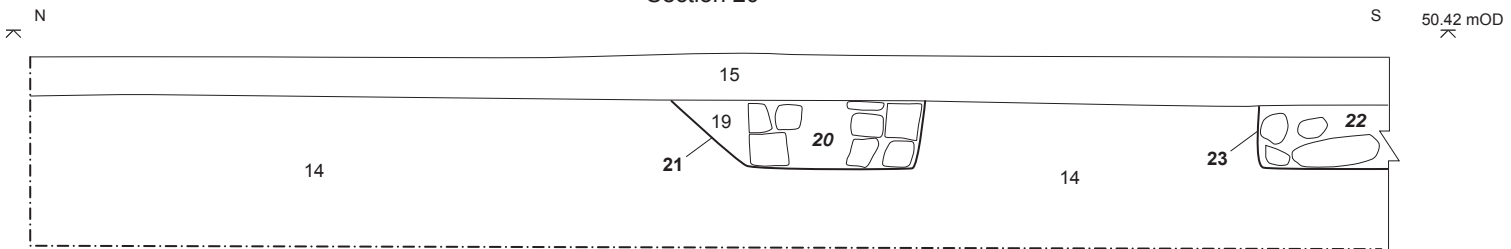
### Section 10



### Section 11



### Section 20



### Continuation of section 20

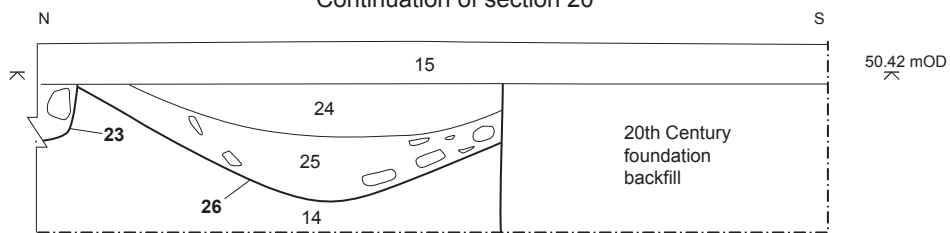


Figure 3: Sections 2, 10, 11 and 20



Plate 1: Section 10. Representative shot. View to south



Plate 2: Wall 20



Plate 3: Wall 22 with mini pile



Plate 4: General shot of drainage trench section



Plate 5: General view of ground beam trench



Plate 6: General view of ground beam trench





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