



# 8-10 Market Square, Witney, Oxfordshire

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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## 8-10 Market Square, Witney, Oxfordshire

### *Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

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## Summary

Between the 18th and the 24th July 2019 of July Oxford Archaeology carried out a watching brief on behalf of Keble Homes on a site of Market Square, Witney during groundworks associated with the construction of an apartment building with storage buildings.

The watching brief uncovered the remains of three buildings, all of post medieval date, as well as evidence for more recent truncation. No earlier archaeological features or deposits were present within the observed areas.

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## Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Michael McDonald of Keble Homes for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Hugh Coddington, County Archaeologist at Oxfordshire County Council, who set the scope of works.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Joakim Thomasson and Gerry Thacker. The fieldwork was directed by Bernadetta Rzadek. Digitising were carried out by Matt Bradley. Thanks is also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen, and prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Keble Homes to undertake a watching brief at Market Square 8-10, Witney.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref. 18/01600/FUL). A written scheme of investigation was produced by OA detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition (OA 2019). This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

### 1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 Market Square is located in the central part of the medieval town Witney, West Oxfordshire. The development comprised the demolition of existing buildings and construction of an apartment house and associated storage buildings. The site is centred on National Grid reference SP 35543 09727 (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The site comprises an area of c 600 m<sup>2</sup>, located in a walled inner-yard behind two 19th century buildings that front onto Market Square (Fig. 1). Historically the site sits within two long narrow medieval burgage plots, with differing current ground levels (Fig. 2; Plates 1-4). The southern part of the site, (relating to number 10 Market Square), was situated at approximately 84.5 – 85m above Ordnance Datum (OD), whereas the ground level in the northern part (relating to number 8 Markets Square) was situated at approximately 82.5m OD.
- 1.2.3 The town is situated on the Cornbrash Formation, consisting of limestone, a sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 164 to 168 million years ago in the Jurassic Period. The superficial geology is gravel and alluvium (BGS 2019).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 This archaeological and historical background of Witney is derived from the survey of Historic towns in Oxfordshire published by the precursor of Oxford Archaeology in 1975 (Foster, *et al.* 1975). The following summary provides a context for the proposed works.
- 1.3.2 Witney is situated on a north-south orientated dry island of Cornbrash which projects from the alluvial valley of the river Windrush. The built-up town area is aligned along the main street, (defined as Church Green - Market Square - High Street,) which stretches from St Mary's Church in the south to the river crossing at Bridge Street in the north. Long narrow burgage plots aligned at right angles to the main street defined the medieval layout of the town. Witney was historically surrounded by forests and located on the old main road between London and Gloucester.
- 1.3.3 Flint implements and a Bronze Age sword have been recovered in the town area. The main Roman settlement in the area seems to have been Ducklington to the south. Roman coins have however been found in Witney itself.

- 1.3.4 The town was founded in the Anglo-Saxon period. Witan, the council of the Saxon kings, met in Witney according to written sources. The Domesday Survey from 1086, noted that the settlement comprised 56 households, 36 villagers, 11 smallholders and 9 slaves (Open Domesday 2019). The bishop of Winchester is recorded to be in possession of a palace in the town by 1044, probably located in the vicinity of St Mary's church.
- 1.3.5 The urban development of the town took place later during the medieval period. Written records from the beginning of the 13th century mention a royal permission to build on newly cleared grounds. In 1278 the town had a market and two fairs. The present St Mary's church can be traced back to the 13th century, but most probably had a predecessor. St Mary's Priory, immediately on the eastern side of river Windrush, was established in the late 12th century. Neighbouring Coggs Manor dates to the 13th century. During the late Medieval and post-Medieval periods, the town prospered due to the weaving trade.
- 1.3.6 Prior to the 17th century, Witney would have contained a substantial number of timber-framed houses. From the 17th century and onwards, buildings were constructed of locally sourced rubble limestone, and later provided with characteristic Georgian and Victorian front facades. The houses had carriageways, reflecting that Witney was an industrial town, and an important staging-post on the road from the west to London, and that many of its inhabitant were engaged in blanket making or employed in inn-keeping, waggon building or the carrier trade. From the late 17th century the medieval burgage plots began to be built over, with rows of cottages constructed to house the employees of the master weavers and other tradespersons. Craft occupations were carried out in the yards and alleyways, and some of the rear wings and back buildings were used for blanket production or as weaving sheds.
- 1.3.7 The 19th century saw the development of larger economic units for expanded blanket production and the other industries of the town. The workforce was now principally absorbed by six large concerns operating in steam-powered factories, such as Smith's in Bridge Street.

## **2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Aims**

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To reveal the archaeologically significant horizon (or natural horizon) at the site and determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains.
- ii. To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present.
- iii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.

### **2.2 Methodology**

2.2.1 Existing buildings had been demolished before the watching brief commenced. The contractor provided an appropriate mechanical excavator fitted with a 1m or a 2m wide toothless ditching bucket.

2.2.3 The works was carried out under archaeological supervision, and the attending archaeologists was given the necessary time and opportunity to record any uncovered remains.

2.2.4 The ground works comprised excavations for wall foundations (Fig. 2). In order to document the general ground conditions and stratigraphic sequences, a series of sections were photographed and recorded.

## **3 RESULTS**

### **3.1 Introduction and presentation of results**

3.1.1 The results of the watching brief are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of the uncovered remains. The full details and dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates are tabulated in Appendix B.

### **3.2 General soils and ground conditions**

3.2.1 The soil sequence was fairly uniform. The natural geology of olive coloured firm clay and cornbrash was overlain by the topsoil (004) and a levelling layer (001).

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the watching brief were generally good, and the site remained dry throughout.

### **3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits**

3.3.1 Archaeological features of presumed post-medieval and modern date were present in all parts of the monitored trench.

3.3.2 Structural remains from three buildings were uncovered and recorded (Fig. 3, sections 3 and 5). The complete western gable as well as masonry walls (007) and a concrete floor (005) from the east-west orientated building of recent date that was demolished prior to the watching brief, were observed in the central western parts of the site. Two north-south orientated brick walls were uncovered in the north-western part of the site (009, 011). The short distance between the walls, adjacent to the western plot boundary, and the different brick-laying techniques, suggest the walls would have formed the western limits of two north-south aligned, but not contemporary buildings. Buildings corresponding to the alignment of the recorded walls are depicted on historic Ordnance Survey Maps issued between 1878 and 1921, but could also relate to the development of cottage rows within the inner yard during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

3.3.3 A 0.7 to 1.3m thick layer of porous brownish grey sandy silt (001), spatially corresponded with the east-west aligned slope and plot boundary in the central parts of the site. The layer contained waste material such as brick, timber, cables, pipes, plastic, glass and late 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery sherds. The layer was likely deposited in order to level the inner yard of 10 Market Square and is interpreted as a levelling layer.

3.3.4 A 0.1 to 0.3m deep layer of dark brownish grey sandy silt (004) was recorded in the northern half of the site and at one location in the very south, sitting directly above the natural cornbrash. The layer likely formed part of the historic garden soil or bedding layer for any yard surface. No finds were retrieved from the layer, which was truncated by the structural remains recorded, which suggest it was deposited before the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **3.4 Recorded observations**

3.4.1 A series of sections were recorded at key locations during the watching brief (Fig. 2). A selected example of the most informative of these are presented below (Figs. 3-4).

### **Section 1**

3.4.2 The earliest deposits encountered were the natural clay geology sealed in places by cornbrash geology (Fig. 3). These deposits were overlain by 1.3m thick levelling layer, 001. A masonry wall, 007, with an inner concrete lining (not depicted on the recorded section), was visible in the western trench side, and was cut into the cornbrash. The stratigraphic relations between levelling layer 001 and the wall could not be established.

### **Section 3**

3.4.3 The foundation of a masonry wall, 007, truncated the cornbrash (Fig. 3). A made ground layer, 006, and concrete floor, 005, were situated directly to the south of the east-west aligned wall. The stratigraphic relationship between topsoil, 004, north of the wall was not established, but, most likely, the construction of the structures truncated this layer.

### **Section 5**

3.4.4 Two north-south aligned brick walls (009 to the west and 011 to the east) were uncovered in the north-western part of the site (Fig. 3). Their construction truncated topsoil, 004, which overlay the cornbrash natural.

### **Section 6**

3.4.5 The earliest encountered deposits were clay and cornbrash natural that were overlain by the topsoil, 004 (Fig. 6).

### **Section 11**

3.4.6 The earliest encountered deposits were clay and cornbrash natural, the latter 0.4m deep (Fig. 3). These were overlain by the levelling layer, 001, which had been truncated during the demolition of the previous building.

### **Section 14**

3.4.7 The earliest encountered deposits were the clay and cornbrash geologies (Fig. 4). A north facing slope in the cornbrash layer was detected, indicating previous truncation. The topsoil, 004, was preserved in the southern edge of the recorded section. This was overlain by the levelling layer, 001, which was up to 0.7m thick in the northern part of the recorded section.

### **Section 15**

3.4.8 The earliest encountered deposits were the clay and cornbrash (the latter c 2m thick), that was overlain by topsoil, 004 (Fig. 4).

## **3.5 Finds summary**

3.5.1 Three sherds of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Nottinghamshire red ware and one sherd of 19<sup>th</sup> century English stoneware were retrieved from the levelling layer, 001 (see Appendix B.1).

## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The weather conditions were good throughout the watching brief; the soils were not waterlogged. The natural geology was distinct, easily identifiable from the overlying deposits.
- 4.1.2 The machine excavated trenches and the recorded sections provide a representative sample of the general stratigraphic sequences present at the site.

### 4.2 Watching Brief objectives and results

- 4.2.1 No archaeologically significant horizon was identified at the site, although late post-medieval deposits and structures were recorded.
- 4.2.2 The archaeological features of post-medieval and modern date comprised two deposits, structural remains from three buildings and evidence for truncation.

### 4.3 Interpretation

- 4.3.1 The earliest maps from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century show 8 Market Square as consisting of several adjacent buildings aligned along the southern boundary, from the High Street in the east to the western edge of the plot. The buildings within 10 Market Square were clustered towards the street front. The inner yard is depicted as an open area.
- 4.3.2 Located on a relatively steep northern slope, named *the Hill* on the earliest Ordnance Map issued in 1878, the use of the burgage plots was notably influenced by the topographic location and were terraced to accommodate the slope.
- 4.3.3 The fluctuating depth of the Cornbrash layer indicates that this deposit was truncated in order to level the inner yard surfaces at 8 Market Square. This was most notable adjacent to the potential location of the plot boundary in the central part of the site, and in the eastern area close to the existing building facing the street. No finds were retrieved from the buried topsoil that overlay the truncated areas of the cornbrash. The levelling of the ground level must however have been a prerequisite for settlement and could date back to the medieval period.
- 4.3.4 The levelling layer, 001, is likely to have formed part of the terracing of the inner yard of 10 Market Square. It was spatially confined to the border area in the central part of the site. The deepest parts of the layer were noted in the area between the southern wall of the recently demolished house (007) and the natural rise in the topography to the south. The major differences in ground levels further suggest that the terracing of the inner yard of 10 Market Square must have been structurally supported. It is therefore likely that the areas closest to the boundary had been cleared and backfilled during construction works on the neighbouring burgage plot. The finds material suggest it was deposited during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuously altered until the latest demolition of the previous buildings on the site.
- 4.3.5 Remains from an east-west orientated modern building were uncovered in the south-western corner of the site (007), whose western gable was still standing at the time of the watching brief (Plates 1-3). The southern wall was clearly built onto an older wall

foundation of unknown older date. The age of the two north-south orientated brick walls recorded in the eastern parts of the northern boundary wall could not be established. But the trajectory of the walls corresponds to buildings depicted on historic Ordnance Maps issued between 1878 and 1921.

#### **4.4 Significance**

- 4.4.1 The archaeological findings of the watching brief are of limited archaeological significance.

## APPENDIX A DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

General description					Orientation	Fig. 2
Trench devoid of significant archaeology.					Length (m)	-
					Width (m)	1-3
					Avg. depth (m)	0.8- 2.9
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Findings	Date
001	Layer	-	0.30	Levelling layer, porous brownish grey sandy silt	Pottery	19 <sup>th</sup> century
002	Layer	-	2.0	Natural, Cornbrash	-	-
003	Layer	-	1.30	Natural, olive coloured clay	-	-
004	Layer	-	0.30	Topsoil, fine- grained sediment soft dark brownish grey sandy silt	-	-
005	Structure		0.12	Concrete floor, same structure as wall 007	-	-
006	Layer		0.25	Ballast for floor 005, fine-grained sediment soft dark yellow silty sand	-	-
007	Structure	0.47	0.60	Stone wall, same structure as floor 005	-	-
008	Cut	0.47	0.60	Construction cut for stone wall 007	-	-
009	Structure	0.56	0.60	Brick wall, west	-	-
010	Cut	0.56	0.56	Construction cut for wall 009	-	-
011	Structure	0.47	0.47	Brick wall, east	-	-
012	Cut	0.47	0.47	Construction cut for wall 011	-	-



## APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

### B.1 Pottery

*Identified by John Cotter*

Context	Description	Date
1	Three post medieval red ware (PMR) flower pot rim sherds, one with rouletted decoration and one with part of the legend (underlined here) 'SANKEYS <u>LTD BULLWELL</u> NOTTINGHAMSHIRE', and one body sherd.  One English Stoneware (ENGS) flagon rim sherd. 108g	1870 – 1900  19 <sup>th</sup> century

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## APPENDIX C      BIBLIOGRAPHY

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**APPENDIX D****SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

<b>Site name:</b>	8-10 Market Square, Witney
<b>Site code:</b>	WIMTSQ19
<b>Grid Reference</b>	SP 35543 09727
<b>Type:</b>	Watching Brief
<b>Date and duration:</b>	18 <sup>th</sup> to 24 <sup>th</sup> of July 2019
<b>Area of Site</b>	600m2
<b>Location of archive:</b>	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire Museum Services in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS 2019:52.
<b>Summary of Results:</b>	The watching brief uncovered the remains of three buildings, all of post medieval date, as well as evidence for truncation. No earlier archaeological features or deposits were present within the observed areas.

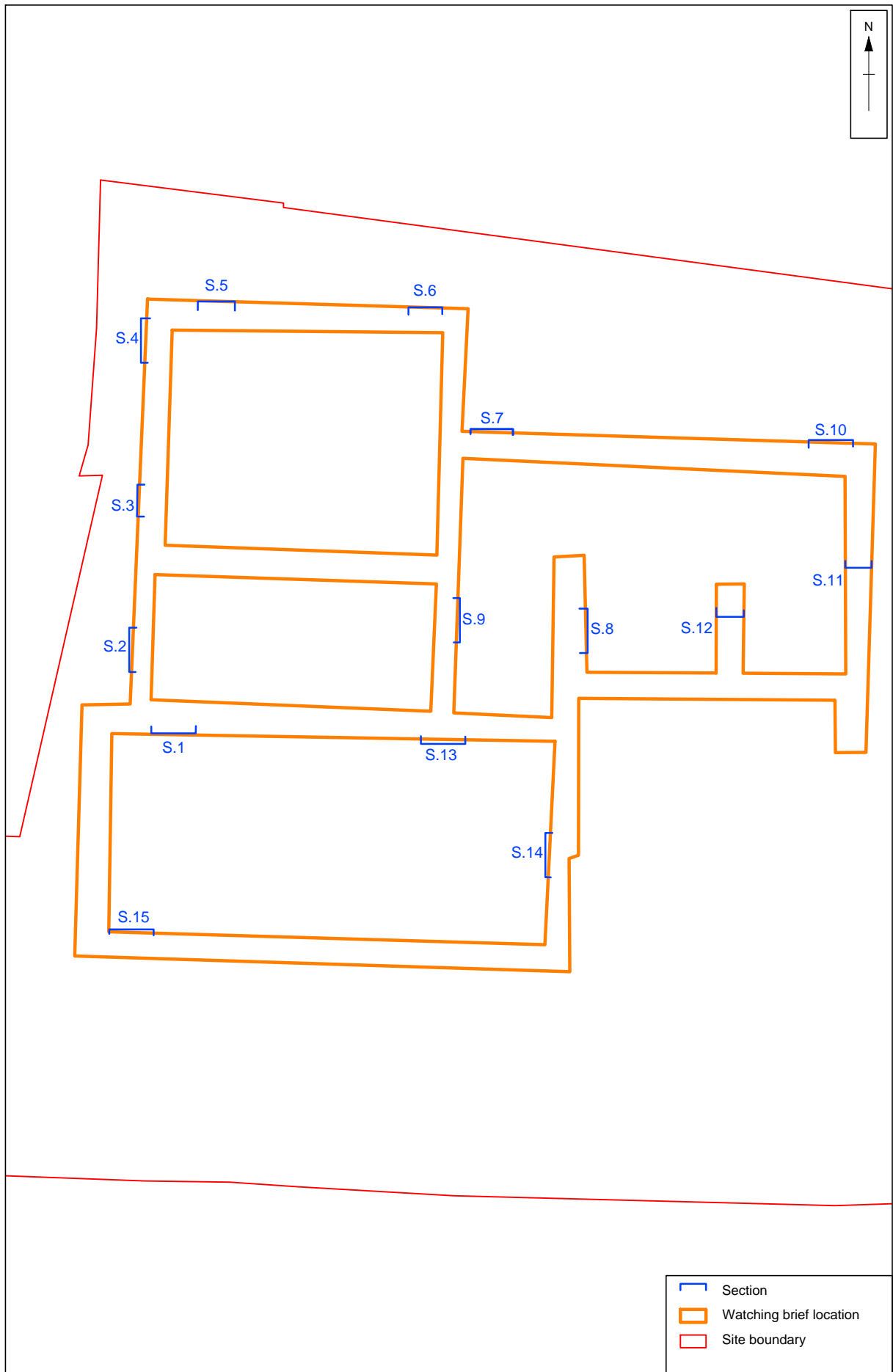




X:\Witney\_Market-Square\_wb\010Geomatics\03 GIS Projects\WITMSWB\_Figure\_1\_2019-08-07.mxd\matt.bradley\07/08/2019

Figure 1: Site location

X:\w\Witney\_Market-Square\_wb\010Geomatics\02 CAD\WIMTSQ19\_2019-08-06.dwg(Figure 2)\*WIMTSQ19\*WIMTSQWB\*Witney Market Square\*matt.bradley\* 07 Aug 2019



	Section
	Watching brief location
	Site boundary

CHECKED BY: JT

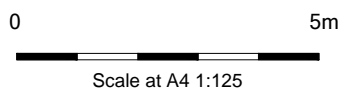


Figure 2: Watching Brief location



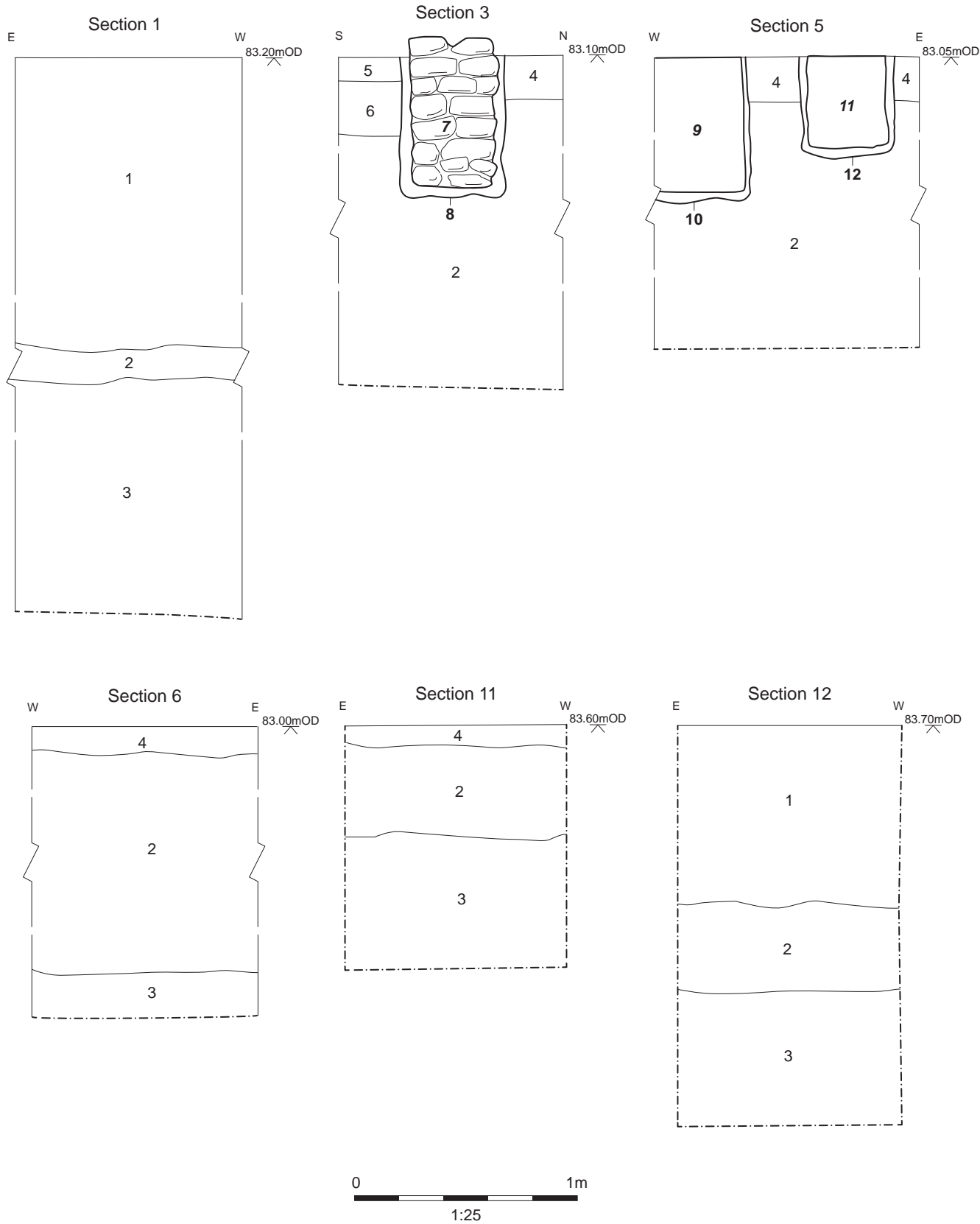


Figure 3: Sections 1, 3, 5, 6, 11 and 12

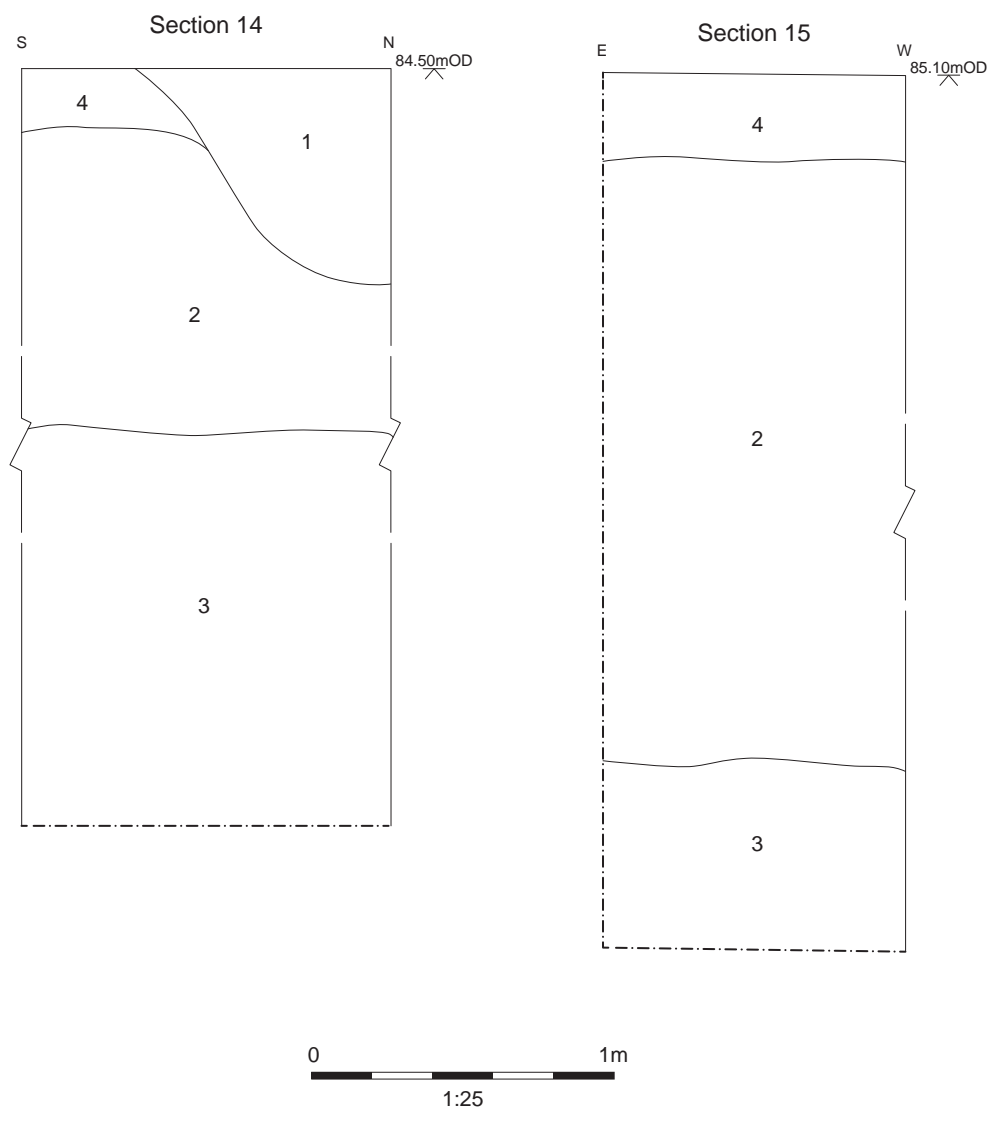


Figure 4: Sections 14 and 15





Plate 1: Site overview, looking south-west



Plate 2: Site overview, looking west





Plate 3: Site overview, looking north-west



Plate 4: Site overview, looking north-east





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