

Pebble Court Swinbrook Oxfordshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



February 2008

Client: Mr and Mrs T F Bell

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Prepared by: Mike Sims
Position: SWD Supervisor
Date: 16th February 2008

Checked by: Dan Dodds
Position: Head of Small Works
Date: 16th February 2008

Approved by: Nick Shepherd
Position: Head of Fieldwork
Date: 16th February 2008

Signed.....

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Oxford Archaeology

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Janus House

Osney Mead

Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800

f: (0044) 01865 793496

e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk

w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

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Pebble Court Swinbrook, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In February 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Pebble Court, Swinbrook, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 2798 1209). The work was commissioned by Mr and Mrs T. F. Bell in advance of the demolition of an existing 2 storey extension and the construction of 2 new extensions to the west and south of the court. The watching brief revealed deposits and structures relating to earlier garden features associated with the court, but no other significant archaeology was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In February 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Pebble Court, Swinbrook, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 2798 1209). The work was commissioned by Mr and Mrs T. F. Bell in respect of a planning application for the demolition of an existing two storey extension and the construction of two new extensions to the south and west of the court (Planning Application No. 07/0198/P/FP).
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by Hugh Coddington, the Deputy County Archaeologist for the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service requiring that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the period of any intrusive groundworks (OCAS, 2007).
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA, 2008).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The village of Swinbrook lies 8 km west of Witney (Fig. 1). Pebble Court is situated south of the Church of St. Mary on the south-eastern edge of the village. The development area is sited on a south-facing slope leading down to the River Windrush at a height of approximately 98 m above OD. The underlying geology is Limestone overlain by alluvial deposits (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no 236).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA, 2008) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 Pebble Court is a Grade II listed building dating to the early eighteenth century consisting of two storeys made of stone. Dendrochronology has provided a date of AD1436-37 for some of the roof timbers. It stands either on the site or in the immediate vicinity of an earlier mansion that was constructed by the Fettiplace

family in around 1490. The mansion was demolished in 1805 when the last member of the Fettiplace family died.

- 1.3.3 Pebble Court itself is believed to incorporate some of the building materials from the earlier mansion. The Fettiplace family was of considerable regional importance and wealth and it is likely that the mansion was a sizeable structure. This would be in line with the extensive garden features seen to extend westwards to Widford.
- 1.3.4 Excavations for a septic tank behind the adjacent Old Post Office revealed substantial limestone foundations approximately 2 m below the present ground surface, and were noted to stand approximately 1 m high. They were aligned north-east south-west turning to the north-west, creating a corner. The wall was constructed of well cut limestone quoins approximately 0.6 m². South-west of the church is an earthwork that possibly formed part of an enceinte relating to the mansion.
- 1.3.5 Previous work on the site by OA in 2004 and 2005 encountered foundations relating to the earlier Fettiplace Manor together with a stone culvert and related garden features dating to the 17th-century (OA, 2005).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the groundworks, particularly any structures relating to extent and location of Fettiplace Manor.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as an archaeological presence during the excavation of the foundation trenches for the new extensions. These were dug using a mechanical excavator (JCB) fitted with a 0.8 wide toothed bucket. Excavation proceeded in spits down to the required level.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of the excavations and the location of any recorded sections was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2), and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All the excavations and recorded sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The underlying natural, a laminated bed of Oolitic limestone (3) was encountered at a depth of between 0.3 m at the northern edge of the site and 1.8 m at the southern extent of the site (Fig. 3, sections 1-4). This was overlaid by a layer of grey-brown clay silt (2) of between 0.25 m and 0.6 m in depth, the depth increasing to the south. This deposit produced charcoal flecking suggesting it may represent a layer of earlier worked soil.
- 3.1.2 In roughly the centre of the development area this was cut by an east-west running trench (7) measuring 0.6 m wide with 0.6 m depth remaining (Fig. 3, section 3). This contained the truncated base of a drystone constructed wall (6) built using roughly dressed limestone blocks. The wall was below the surface of the garden within the area of the western extension, but was visible as a low wall butting up to the west wall of Pebble Court, suggesting it was associated with the current building. Overlying layer 2 and running over the top of wall 7 was a layer of light grey-brown clay silt (5), measuring 0.3 m deep, tapering off to the south. This layer contained many angular fragments of limestone and occasional fragments of 18th-century brick and probably represents a layer of landscaping material used to level the garden. This deposit probably originally butted up against the northern face of the wall, but since the wall's truncation has migrated southwards.
- 3.1.3 Sealing layers 2 and 5 was a thick layer of dark yellow-brown clay silt (4). This deposit contained numerous small fragments of limestone together with pockets of grey-brown clay silt and is a probable landscaping layer of imported material used to level this portion of the garden.
- 3.1.4 Overlying layer 5 and layer 2 elsewhere in the garden was a layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (1). This varied in depth from 0.15 m at the north end of the garden increasing to 0.4 m deep at the southern edge. This layer produced numerous examples of domestic refuse and represents a layer of worked garden soil associated with Pebble Court.
- 3.1.5 Within the excavations for the southern extension layer 1 was sealed by a 0.3 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (8) (Fig. 3, section 4). This is a probable modern deposit used to raise the level of the garden in this area.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 All the finds recovered during the course of the watching brief were post medieval in origin, dating to the 18th and 19th centuries. These finds included fragments of earthenware and creamware pottery, clay pipe stems, bottle glass, brick and butchered bones. The majority of these were recovered from layer 1, the worked garden soil, and represent domestic refuse both from the occupation of Pebble Court

and residual finds from Fettiplace Manor. Fragments of 18th-century brick were recovered from layer 5 and these may represent demolition material from Fettiplace Manor, however since layer 5 represents a layer of landscaping material these may have been brought in from elsewhere.

3.2.2 The presence of these finds was noted, although they were not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The watching brief did not observe any features, structures or deposits relating to the earlier Fettiplace Manor. The deposits of post-medieval made ground observed (Layers 2, 4, 5 and 8) are all associated with the present day Pebble Court.

4.1.2 The presence of the truncated garden/ terrace wall 6 and the later deposits of made ground/ levelling layers suggest that at least 2 phases of garden landscaping have taken place to the west and south of the court, both tentatively dated to the 19th-century. The alignment of the truncated terrace wall 6, and of the visible above ground remnants, correspond with a straight joint running the full height visible in the west wall of the court. This joint suggests that the south wing of the court has been extended in the past, with possibly the garden terrace extended southwards at the same time to its present extent. The original terrace wall would have been truncated and the layers of made ground, 4 and 5, probably deposited at this time.

4.1.3 No earlier archaeology either in the form of residual finds, deposits or truncated features was observed during the course of the watching brief.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth/ Height</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.15 m - 0.4 m	-	Worked garden soil	Pottery, glass, clay pipe stem, brick	C19th
2	Layer	0.2 m - 0.5 m	-	Earlier worked soil	Brick	C18th
3	Layer	> 1.2 m	-	Natural limestone	-	-
4	Layer	Up to 1.1 m	-	Made ground	-	C19th ?
5	Layer	0.3 m	-	Made ground	-	C19th ?
6	Structure	0.6 m	0.6 m	Earlier terrace wall, partly truncated in areas	-	C19th ?
7	Cut	0.6 m	0.6 m	Foundation trench for wall 6	-	C19th ?
8	Layer	0.3 m	-	Made ground	-	C19th/ C20th

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 2000 *OA Environmental Guidelines for sampling (first edition, July 2000)*

OA, 2005 *Pebble Court, Swinbrook, Oxfordshire: Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

OA, 2008 *Pebble Court, Swinbrook, Oxfordshire: Written scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OAU, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)*

OCAS, 2008 *Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief: Pebble Court, Swinbrook, Oxfordshire*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Pebble Court, Swinbrook, Oxfordshire

Site code: SWPEBC 08

Grid reference: SP 2798 1209

Type of watching brief: Machine excavation of foundation trenches

Date and duration of project: 8th to 12th February 2008, 3 site visits

Area of site: 800 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief observed 2 phases of garden landscaping associated with Pebble Court, but no other significant archaeology was encountered.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2008.12



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

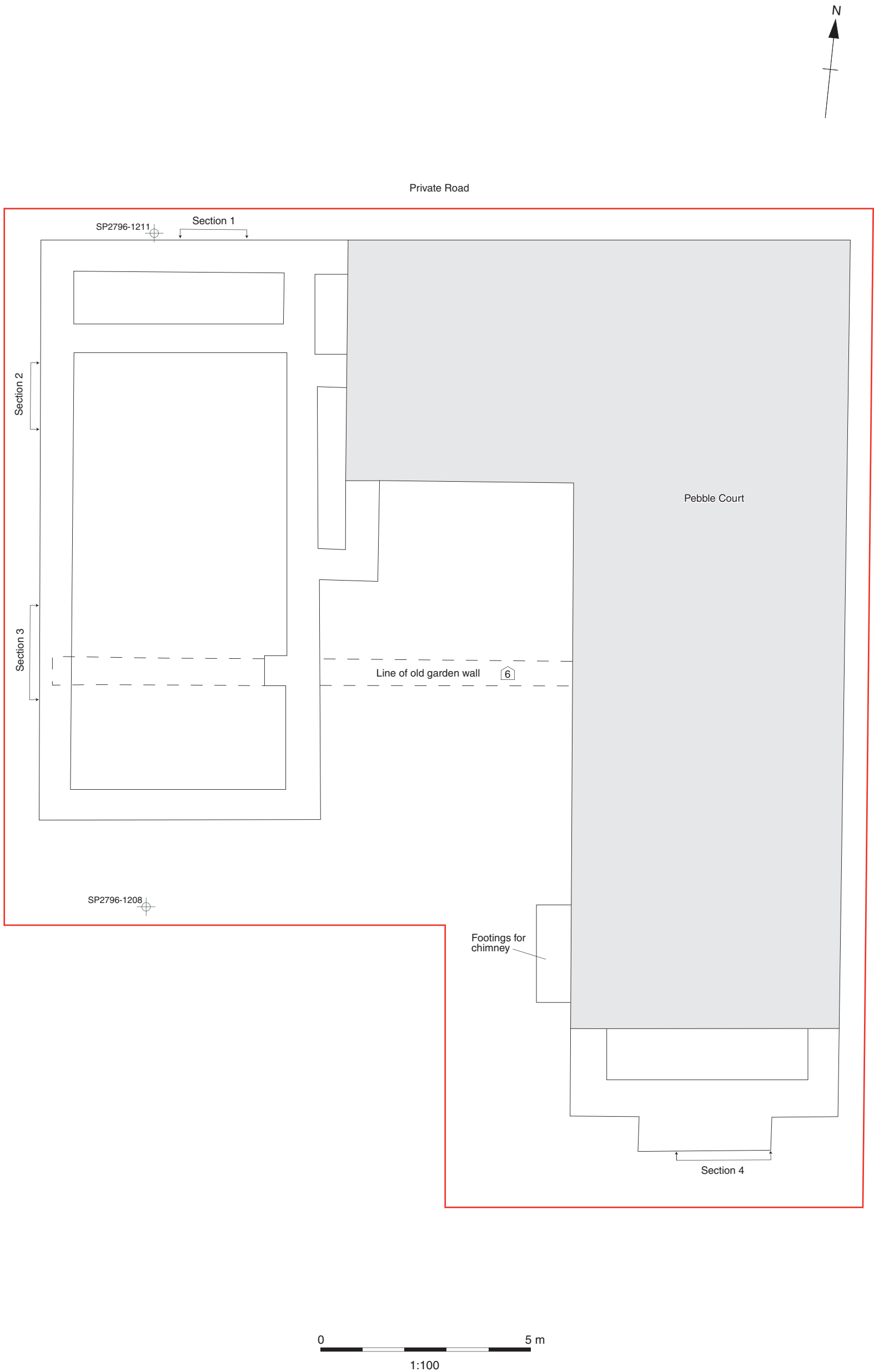


Figure 2: Site plan

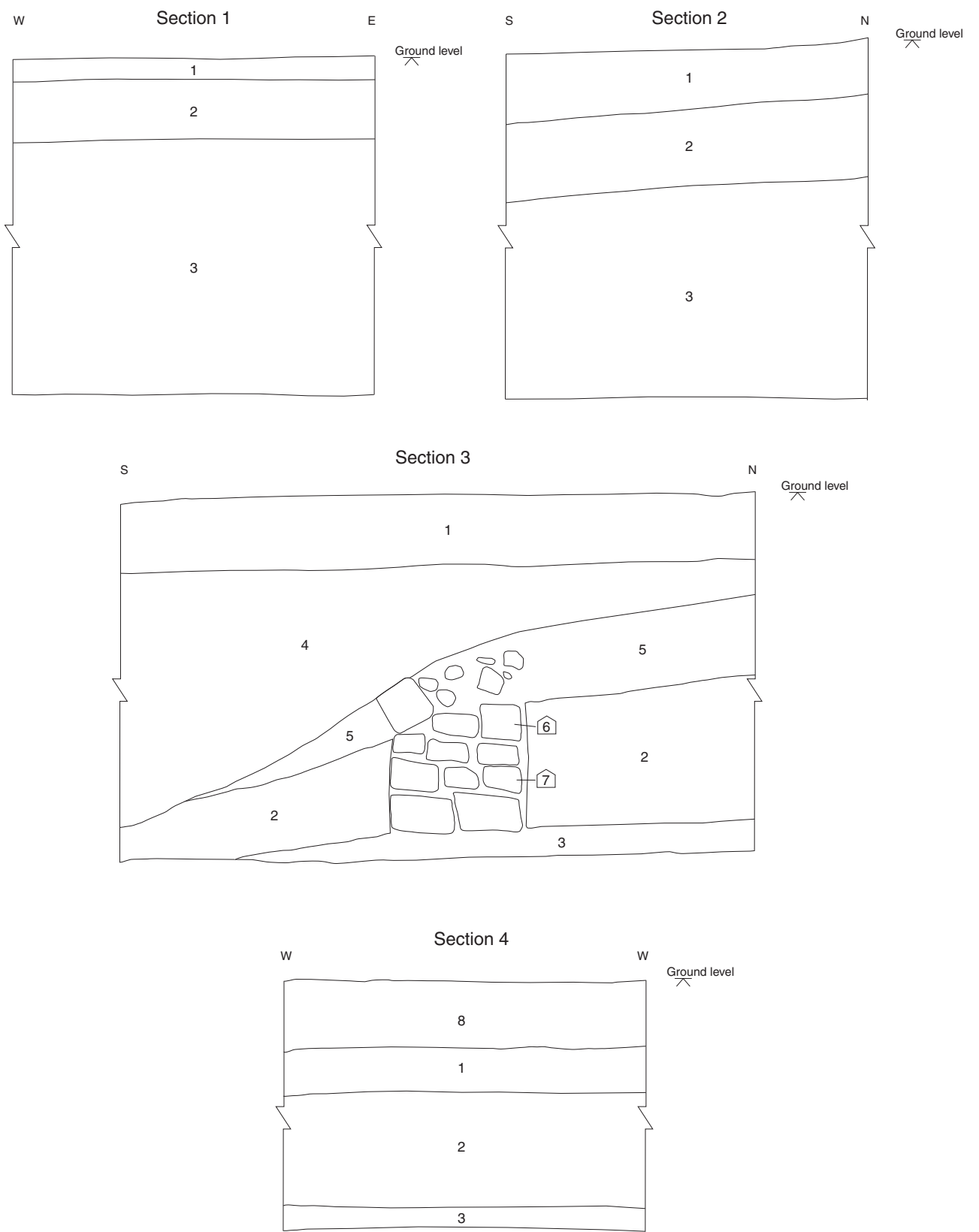


Figure 3: Sections



Oxford Archaeology

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800
f: (0044) 01865 793496
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.thehumanjourney.net



Oxford Archaeology North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: (0044) 01524 541000
f: (0044) 01524 848606
e: lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.thehumanjourney.net



Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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