

Stratford House Buckingham Buckinghamshire



Archaeological Investigation Report



Oxford Archaeology

October 2003

**Client Name:
MOH Properties Ltd.**

Issue N^o: 1

OA Job N^o: 1944

Planning Ref N^o: 02/03243

NGR: SP 6985 3417

Client Name: MOH Properties

Client Ref No:

Document Title: Stratford House, Stratford Road, Buckingham,
Buckinghamshire

Document Type: Archaeological Investigation Report

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: SP 6985 3417

Planning Reference: 02/03243

OA Job Number: JN 1944

Site Code: BUS 03

Invoice Code: BUS EX

Receiving Museum: Buckinghamshire County Museum

Museum Accession No: AYBCM 2003.136

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Document File Location H:\PROJECTS\Buckinghamshire BU\Aylesbury Vale
AV\4718StratfordHoEX\REP\Report.doc

Graphics File Location Server100AUpubsBUSEX
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Stratford House, Stratford Road, Buckingham, Bucks

Archaeological Investigation Report

NGR SP 6985 3417

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SUMMARY

Between 13th and 15th August 2003, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an excavation at Stratford House, Stratford Road Buckingham on behalf of MOH Properties Ltd, in order to mitigate the effects of the construction of a new driveway.

The results of the excavation, combined with those of a previous archaeological evaluation of the site indicate that the site was occupied from the 11th to 13th centuries and then again from the 17th century down to the present day, with a hiatus in occupation between these two periods. This could indicate that the town contracted in the aftermath of the Black Death, with the excavation site then lying derelict until the town expanded again in the post-medieval period.

On 5th September 2003, additional works were carried out by OA on behalf of Robert Burns of RB2 Architects, on land adjacent to Number 2 Stratford Road. The additional works were undertaken in order to ascertain the potential impact on any archaeological deposits from the proposed construction of a new house.

The works comprised two test pits, which were monitored under an archaeological watching brief. These pits revealed two cultivation layers that had been cut by a 19th century foundation trench.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 Between 13th and 15th August 2003 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an excavation at Stratford House, Stratford Road, Buckingham (Fig. 1) on behalf of MOH Properties Ltd of Buckingham.
- 1.1.2 This work was commissioned at the request of David Radford of Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service, in line with the requirements of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG 16), in order to mitigate the construction of a new driveway as part of the renovation of the property.
- 1.1.3 A prior evaluation (OA 2002) had identified significant archaeological remains on the site dating to the medieval and post-medieval periods. The construction work comprised the excavation of a ramped slot sloping down from the street frontage to a maximum depth of 1.25 m at the rear of the development.
- 1.1.4 On 5th September 2003, OA carried out additional works as a watching brief at land adjacent to Number 2 Stratford Road. These works were commissioned by Robert Burns of RB2 Architects on behalf of the landowner, Mr. J. K. Holford. These works were undertaken in order to mitigate the proposed construction of a new house to be located on land adjacent to Number 2 Stratford Road (Section 7 of this report, below).
- 1.1.5 A brief was issued by Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (July 2003) and OA prepared a detailed Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2003).

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Stratford House, Buckingham, is located in the valley of the Great Ouse River. The development site is a currently derelict plot located at NGR SP 6985 3417 on the south-west side of the Stratford Road, with the river passing along the rear of the property.
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology consists of river gravels overlain by alluvium. The site lies at c 80 m OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Buckingham is sited on a defensive position within a meander of the Ouse on a ridge of well drained land and is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as a double-burh, fortified with a ditch and bank.
- 1.3.2 The Anglo-Saxon chronicle for AD 914 states that 'King Edward went to Buckingham with his army, and stayed there for four weeks, and made both the boroughs on each side of the river, before he went away'. The town is also listed in the Burghal Hidage and by the 10th century there was also a mint. It was an important centre in the late Saxon period when it was the county town complete with Minster church. A Viking iron spearhead is recorded near the site of the castle moat at the foot of castle hill.
- 1.3.3 The site of the excavation lies to the north-east of the defences of the Saxon burh established by Edward the Elder in 915 AD, and may therefore lie outside the limit of the original Saxon town. To the south-west is the hill where the Norman castle stood and where the present parish church now stands. The Victoria County History (VCH 3, 476) records that the Castle was 'seated in the middle of the town upon a great mound, of the very ruins of which scarce anything now remains'. The motte was flattened to create the present churchyard.
- 1.3.4 The status of the development site in the medieval and post-medieval period is unclear, as it may have lain outside the limit of the medieval town at this time. No buildings are depicted here on the maps of Speed (1610) and Jeffrey (1770), though there are structures nearby.
- 1.3.5 The site lies within a close fronting onto the end of the market place that could, however, have been occupied in the medieval period and become deserted if as is suspected, the medieval town shrank (Sandy Kidd, *pers. comm*). During the 17th and 18th centuries this area, on the north-east edge of the historic town, was known as "North End" or "North East End".
- 1.3.6 In the immediate vicinity of Stratford House is the site of the post-medieval prison. A map of 1788 depicts a 'castle' in this location, presumably the present gaol building, which is a castellated structure with small towers at the angles. Nearby was the leper hospital of St. Lawrence founded in 1597, presumed to have been erected on the site of the ancient (medieval) hospital of St. Lawrence.

- 1.3.7 A disused post-medieval cemetery is located west of the development site, and a number of notable post-medieval buildings can be seen in the north part of the town.
- 1.3.8 An evaluation of the development site carried out by OA in 2002 revealed evidence of medieval occupation in the form of rubbish pits dating to the 11th-13th centuries.
- 1.3.9 An apparent hiatus in occupation from the 14th-17th centuries was then followed by the construction of a boundary ditch and the digging of post-medieval pits containing domestic refuse (OA 2002).

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 2.1.1 The slot for the driveway had been excavated using a mechanical excavator (JCB) without archaeological supervision, and hardcore laid down in it as make-up for the eventual surface. In order to allow archaeological recording, this hardcore was removed, again using a JCB, to a distance of 12 m from the rear end of the development area.
- 2.1.2 The trench as exposed was cleaned by hand and the features thus revealed were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples.
- 2.1.3 A number of pits were seen in the sections formed by the faces of the trench, and in these cases the features were recorded in section and, where present, finds were retrieved from the section. Each context encountered was allocated a unique number. Finds were generally collected by hand and bagged by context, except special finds which were given their own unique number.
- 2.1.4 Provision was made for environmental sampling, but no deposits suitable for such analysis were encountered. All archaeological features were planned and where excavated their sections drawn at a scale of 1:20.
- 2.1.5 The sections of the trench were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. A photographic record was made of all features, as well as more general shots of the site as a whole. The recording procedures used were in accordance with established OA practice (OA 1992).
- 2.1.6 A watching brief was maintained on the test pits excavated on the adjacent plot, in accordance with the project brief and standard OA fieldwork practices.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Presentation of results

- 3.1.1 The stratigraphy encountered in the excavation is described below, followed by analyses of the artefactual material recovered. These lines of evidence are then brought together in an overall discussion and interpretation.

3.2 Description of deposits

- 3.2.1 The undisturbed natural geology of the site was an orange sandy clay alluvium (5), encountered at *c.* 77.5 m OD. This was overlain throughout the trench by a layer of compact red-brown silty sand (4), interpreted as a buried former cultivated/garden soil 0.2-0.25 m thick, which contained medieval pottery. Four features (19, 21, 23 and 25) were cut into the surface of this deposit.
- 3.2.2 The largest of these features was pit 25, a vertical-sided pit with a flat base (Fig. 3 and 4, section 1). This feature measured 0.7 m in diameter and was 0.43 m deep. It was back-filled with a deposit of dark greyish brown silty sand (24), which contained 4 sherds of 12th century pottery, as well as pieces of animal bone, one of which was worked piece of bird bone that was interpreted as a small whistle (SF2). This material is likely to represent domestic refuse, indicating that the feature is a rubbish pit.
- 3.2.3 Pit 21 was identified in the section formed by the southern face of the trench (Fig. 4, Section 3), the north part of the feature having been truncated by the original digging of the trench by the site contractors. The pit was 0.6 m wide in the section, with a depth of 0.15 m. Like pit 25, it had vertical sides and a flat base, and its wide, shallow profile suggests that it is the truncated base of a pit. The feature was dated by a single sherd of 11th century medieval pottery retrieved from its fill (20) during cleaning of the section.
- 3.2.4 Two smaller features were also observed in the southern face of the trench (Section 3, Fig. 4). Features 19 and 23 were both steep-sided with slightly concave bases, and may both be postholes rather than pits. Posthole 23 was 0.45 m wide and 0.28 m deep. Its only fill (22) contained an irregularly shaped piece of limestone 0.15 m across which was possibly a packing stone, along with a piece of 11th century medieval pottery and some animal bone. Located a short distance to the east, posthole 19 was a very similar size, with a width of 0.45 m and a depth of 0.22 m. It was filled by a dark brown silty sand (18) which yielded a sherd of 13th century pottery.
- 3.2.5 These features were sealed by a layer of greyish brown silty sand made ground (3) 0.4 m thick, dated to the mid 18th century by the pottery and clay pipe within it. This in turn was overlain by a modern garden soil (2) 0.25 m thick and a brick rubble hardcore surface (1). Along the southern edge of the excavation were a line of five square footings (8, 11, 13, 15, 17) each 0.75 m square and up to 0.8 m deep, containing concrete stanchions that formerly supported a wooden barn of 19th/20th century date.

3.3 Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

- 3.3.1 The pottery assemblage comprised 37 sherds with a total weight of 181g. All the pottery was late Saxon or later, with the range of fabric types typical of sites in the area. They also suggest that there was occupation at the site throughout the medieval

period, although some of the medieval pottery was redeposited in later, post-medieval contexts.

- 3.3.2 The late Saxon and later pottery was recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (e.g. Mynard and Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat et al. 1994), as follows:

SNC1: *St. Neots Ware*, c AD900-1100. 1 sherd, 2g.
MC3: *Medieval Shelly ware*, AD1100-1400. 6 sherds, 26g.
MC6: *Potterspury Ware*, AD1250 - 1600. 11 sherds, 69g.
MC9: *Brill/Boarstall Ware*, AD1200-?1600. 2 sherds, 6g.
MS3: *Medieval Grey Sandy Wares*, Mid 11th – late 14th century. 4 sherds, 23g.
MSC1: *Sandy and shelly ware*, late 11th – mid 13th century. 2 sherds, 16g.
TLMS12: *Red Earthenware*. 16th – 19th century. 2 sherds, 8g.
PM15: *Cistercian ware*, AD1470-1550. 1 sherd, 2g.
PM22: *Staffordshire White Salt-Glazed Stoneware*. 1720-1780. 1 sherd, 5g.
PM23: *Creamware*, mid - late 18th century. 1 sherd, 3g.
PM25: *White Earthenware*. Late 18th – 20th century. 4 sherds, 15g.
PM56: *Staffordshire Manganese Glazed Ware*. Late 17th – 18th century. 2 sherds, 6g.

- 3.3.3 The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*.

Table: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Cntxt	SNC1		MS3		MSC1		MC3		MC9		MC6		PM15		TLMS12		PM22		PM56		PM23		PM25		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
2															2	8			1	4			4	15	19thC
3	1	2					2	11	1	5	11	69	1	2			1	5	1	2	1	3			M18thC
4			1	6			3	13																	12thC
18									1	1															13thC
20			1	7																					M11thC
22			1	7																					M11thC
24			1	3	2	16	1	2																	12thC
Total	1	2	4	23	2	16	6	26	2	6	11	69	1	2	2	8	1	5	2	6	1	3	4	15	

Animal bone by Emma-Jayne Evans, OA

- 3.3.4 A total of 22 (137 g) fragments of bone and teeth were retrieved from excavated deposits. Identification of the bone was undertaken at Oxford Archaeology with access to the reference collection and published guides. All the animal remains were counted and weighed, and where possible identified to species, element, side and zone (Serjeantson 1996). Ribs and vertebrae were only recorded to species when they are substantially complete and could accurately be identified, or were from an identifiable articulated skeleton in which there could be no doubt as to their species. Undiagnostic bones were recorded as small (small mammal size), medium (sheep size) or large (cattle size).

- 3.3.5 The condition of the bone was graded using the criteria stipulated by Lyman (1996). Grade 0 being the best preserved bone and grade 5 indicating that the bone had suffered such structural and attritional damage as to make it unrecognisable.
- 3.3.6 The quantification of species was carried out using the total fragment count, in which the total number of fragments of bone and teeth was calculated, and this figure broken down into the total number of fragments identifiable to each species. Tooth eruption and wear stages were measured using a combination of Halstead (1985) and Grant (1982), and fusion data was analysed according to Silver (1969).
- 3.3.7 The bone from this site survived in good condition, with the majority of the bone scoring 2 using Lyman's method. Although the bone was in good condition, the assemblage largely comprised small unidentifiable fragments, resulting in only 8 bones (36.4%) identifiable to species, as shown in Table 1.

Table: Total fragments identifiable to species and date

	S/g	Pig	Cattle	Dog	Bird	Unid	Total
Medieval	2	2			1	11	16
Post medieval	1		1	1		3	6
Total	3	2	1	1	1	14	22

- 3.3.8 No gnawing, butchery, pathology or burning was noted on any of the bones present. Age at death could be ascertained for 1 sheep/goat mandible, giving an age of 5 - 8 years. One fragment of worked bird bone was present in context 25, which is of 12th century date. This appears to be a bone whistle (Leigh Allen, OA, *pers comm*) probably made from a tibio-tarsus. It appears that main domestic species are present and the bones presumably represent general domestic waste.

4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 Interpretation of the results of the excavation is hampered by the small number of features on the site and the consequently similarly small quantity of artefactual material retrieved.
- 4.1.2 However, it is uncertain whether this reflects a genuine paucity of features or whether it is due to truncation of the archaeology resulting from the slot for the driveway having been excavated without archaeological supervision. The latter supposition is supported by the fact that three of the four features which were identified in the sections of the trench did not extend deep enough to appear in plan in its base, suggesting that other features of a similar depth that did not intersect with the trench sections may have been destroyed in this way.
- 4.1.3 Nonetheless, the deposits and features that were present were consistent with the results obtained from the evaluation, and it is possible to combine the results of the two operations to produce a cogent narrative for the site.

- 4.1.4 There was no evidence for activity of any sort here prior to the medieval period, perhaps indicating that this area, adjacent to the Great Ouse River, may have been prone to flooding or otherwise too wet for occupation before this time. The evidence from both the excavation and evaluation indicates that the earliest occupation dates to the medieval period, commencing in the 11th century. The evidence for this period of occupation takes the form of domestic rubbish pits which are likely to have been located in the back yard of a property or properties facing onto the street frontage, beyond the area of the excavation to the north. Such occupation would date to a period of prosperity for the town of Buckingham when it enjoyed the status of county town for Buckinghamshire and served as a major market centre for the surrounding area, as reflected in the size of the market square a short distance from the excavation site. The site itself would at this time have lain on the north-east edge of the occupied area, possibly forming part of development along the Stratford Road.
- 4.1.5 The medieval occupation of the site seems to have come to an end in the first half of the 14th century, after which the plot remained empty for some time. This would be contemporary with the occurrence of the Black Death and may indicate the possibility that the reduction in population and the economic disruption resulting from the outbreak led to a contraction of the area occupied by the town, with the outlying area in which the site lies being abandoned.
- 4.1.6 The hiatus in occupation lasted until the post-medieval period, when the digging of posthole 19 and of a ditch and rubbish pits identified in the evaluation herald a resumption of occupation during the 17th century as the town expanded once again. These results corroborate the findings of the 2002 evaluation by OA that has been previously reported.

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6 ADDITIONAL WORKS AT LAND ADJACENT TO 2 STRATFORD ROAD, BUCKINGHAM, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE - WATCHING BRIEF - SITE CODE BASAR03

6.1 Methodology

6.1.1 Two small test pits were excavated within the area of development. These were carried out with a mini excavator with a 0.4 m wide bucket. The two test pits were excavated under archaeological supervision (Fig. 4).

6.1.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:200 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features 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 OAU Fieldwork Manual (OAU, 1992).

6.2 Description of deposits

Test Pit 1

6.2.1 This test pit measured 1.5 m x 0.4 m x 1.2 m and had sloping sides and concave base. It cut into the compact orangey brown silty sand (3) cultivated soil, which had been overlain by a greyish brown silty sand (2) cultivated made ground 0.4 m thick. Sealing this was a modern garden soil (1) 0.25 m thick with a brick rubble hardcore surface compacted into its surface (Figs 2 and 3, Section 1).

Test Pit 2

6.2.2 This test pit measured 2.6 m x 0.4 m x 1.3 m with a sloping side and vertical side both, which rounded to a concave base. It also cut into the compact orangey brown silty sand (3) cultivated soil, overlain by a greyish brown silty sand (2) cultivated made ground. This had been cut by a 19th century foundation trench (4) with vertical sides and flat base. It measured 0.4 m x 0.9 m x 0.84 m and was filled by a dark brown silty sand loam (5) with building debris. Sealing all this was modern garden soil (1) 0.25 m thick with a brick rubble hardcore surface compacted into its surface (Figs 2 and 3, Section 2).

6.3 Finds

6.3.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

6.4 Palaeo-environmental remains

6.4.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1.1 The results from the watching brief exposed two layers of cultivated soils, which had been cut by a 19th century foundation trench. These had all been sealed by modern topsoil with hardcore make up pressed into its surface.
- 7.1.2 This may be representative of agricultural activities being undertaken outside the limits of the medieval boundary of Buckingham and may relate to the occupation evidence located at the adjacent site. The 19th century foundation cut may relate to the outbuildings previously associated with Stratford House. No evidence as to the size and form of the associated structure was observed.

APPENDIX 1 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Stratford House, Buckingham

Site code: BUS EX

Grid reference: SP 6985 3417

Type of investigation: Excavation of features and recording of excavated trench.

Date and duration of project: 13-15th August 2003

Area of site: 0.1 ha

Summary of results: Occupation deposits and features were recorded suggesting activity on the site from the 11th to the 13th centuries and then again from the 17th century down to the present day, with a hiatus in occupation between these two periods.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM 2003.136

APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL WORKS DETAILS

Site Name: Land Adjacent to No.2 Stratford Road, Buckingham

Site Code: BA2SR 03

Grid reference: SP 6985 3417

Type of investigation: Watching Brief on two test pits

Date and duration of project: 5th September 2003

Summary of results: Two cultivation horizons were located in both pits that were cut by a construction trench located in test pit 2.

APPENDIX 3 Table of Context Information - BUSEX

Ctx No.	Type	Thick (m)	Width (m)	Relationship	Description	Date
1	Layer				Hardcore surface	
2	Layer	0.25		below 1	Former garden soil	19th C
3	Layer	0.4		below 2	Made ground	M 18th C
4	Layer			below 3	Buried topsoil	12th C
5	Layer			below 4	Natural	
6	Fill			fill of 8	Concrete stanchion	
7	Fill			fill of 8	Make-up for concrete stanchion, 6	
8	Cut	0.7		filled by 6, 7	Footing for concrete stanchion, 6	
9	Fill			fill of 11	Concrete stanchion	
10	Fill	0.23	0.25	fill of 11	Make-up for concrete stanchion, 9	
11	Cut	0.6	0.75	filled by 9, 10	Construction cut for footing 10	
12	Fill			fill of 13	Footing for removed concrete stanchion	
13	Cut	0.7	0.5	filled by 12	Construction cut for footing 12	
14	Fill			fill of 15	Footing for removed concrete stanchion	
15	Cut	0.62	0.75	filled by 14	Construction cut for footing 14	
16	Fill			fill of 17	Footing for removed concrete stanchion	
17	Cut			filled by 16	Construction cut for footing 16	
18	Fill	0.22	0.46	fill of 19	Fill of pit 19	13th C
19	Cut	0.22	0.46	filled by 18	Pit cut	
20	Fill	0.15	0.6	fill of 21	Fill of pit 21	M 11th C
21	Cut	0.15	0.6	filled by 20	Pit cut	
22	Fill	0.28	0.45	fill of 23	Fill of pit 23	M 11th C
23	Cut	0.28	0.45	filled by 22	Pit cut	
24	Fill			fill of 25		12th C
25	Cut	0.43	0.7	filled by 24	Pit cut	



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site Location

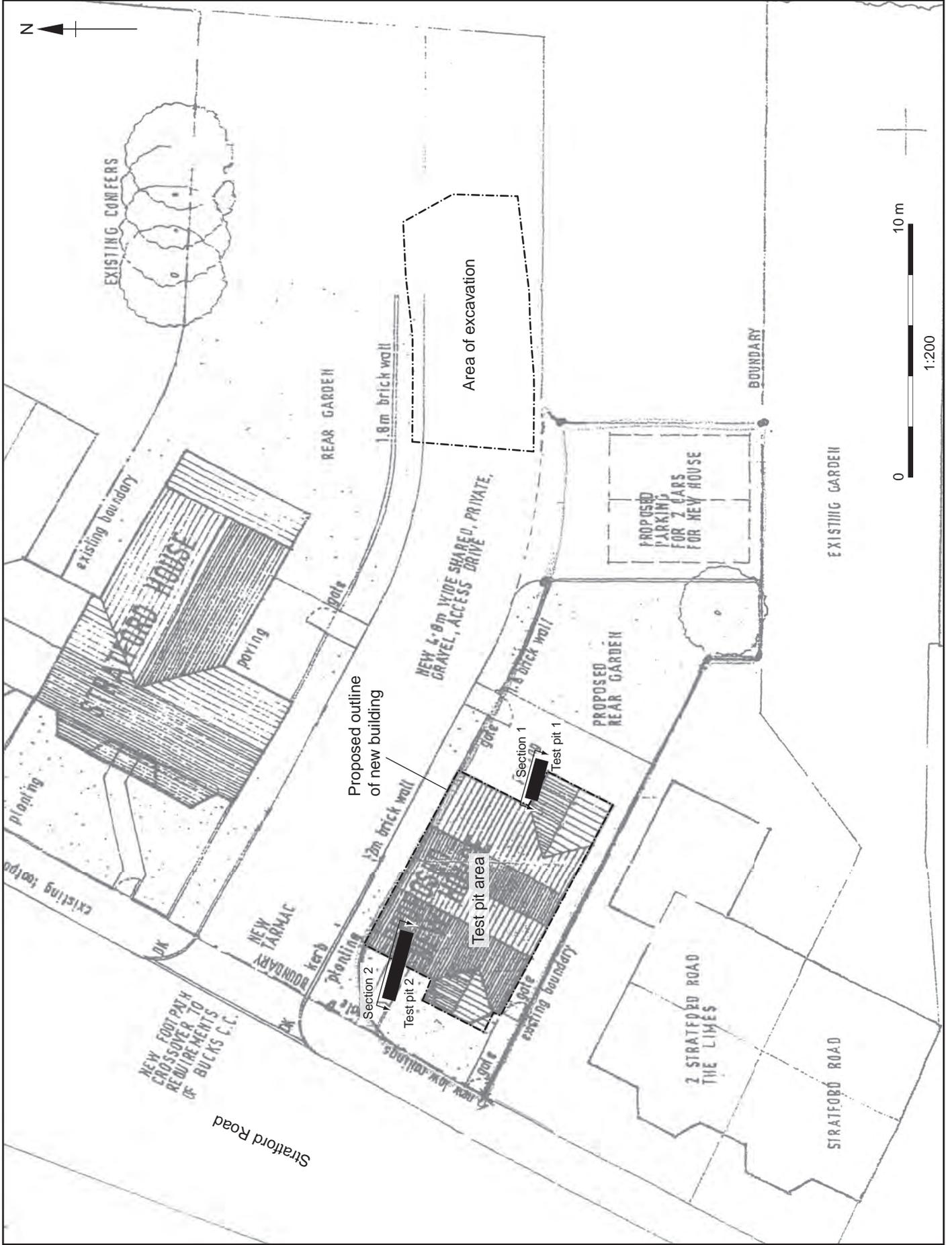
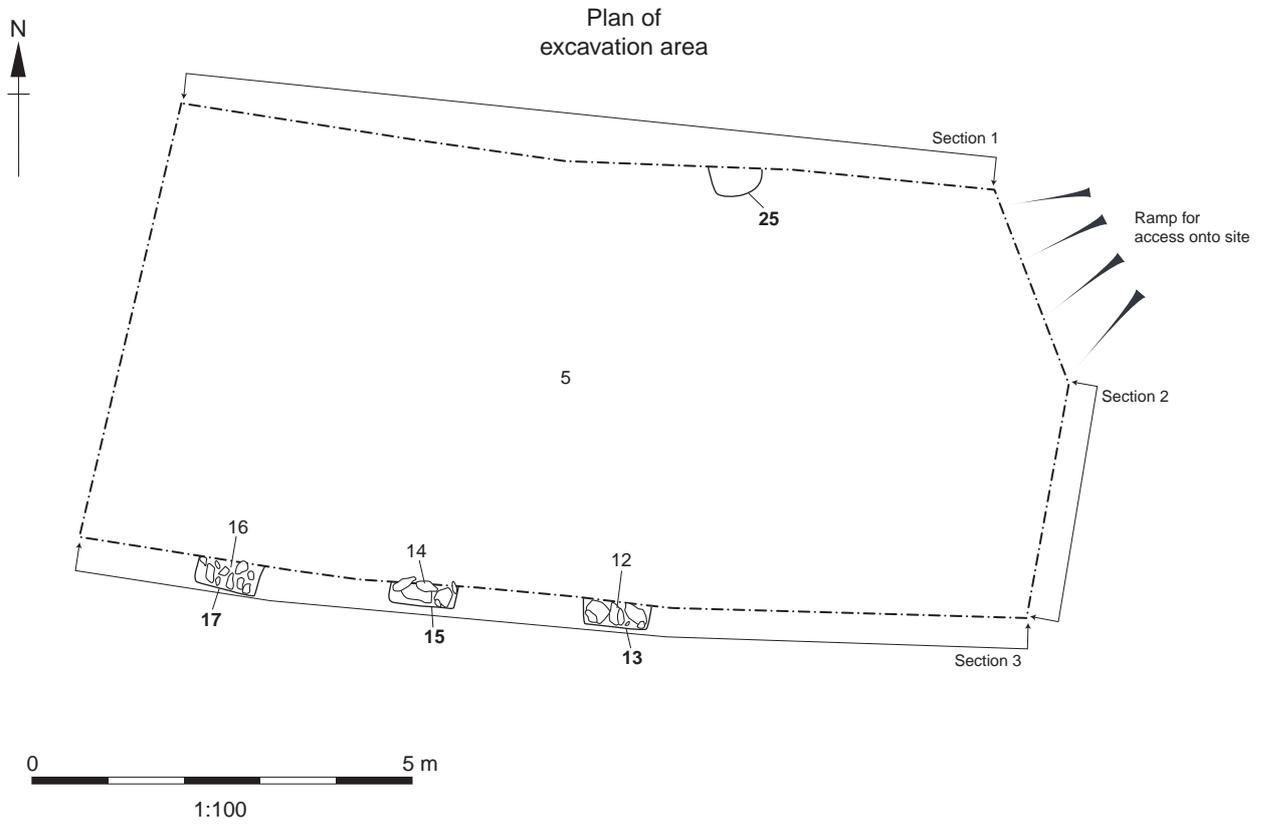
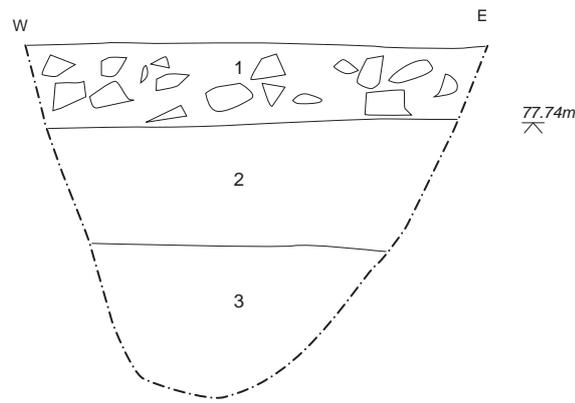


Figure 2: Site plan showing testpits, sections, proposed outline of new building and area of excavation



Test pit 1
Section 1



Test pit 2
Section 2

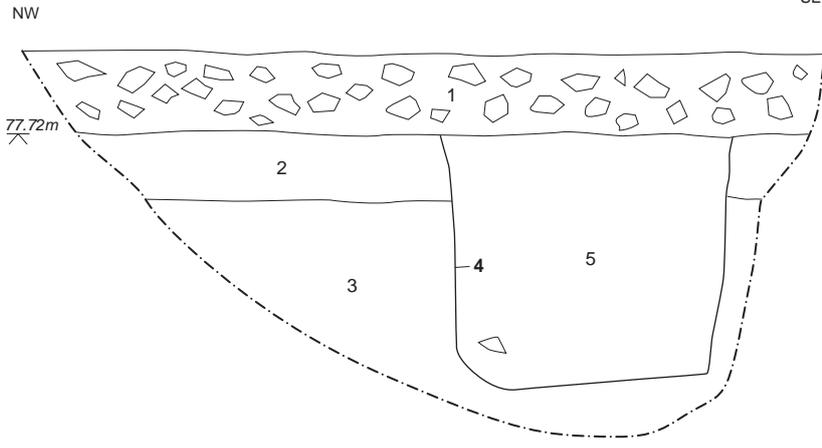
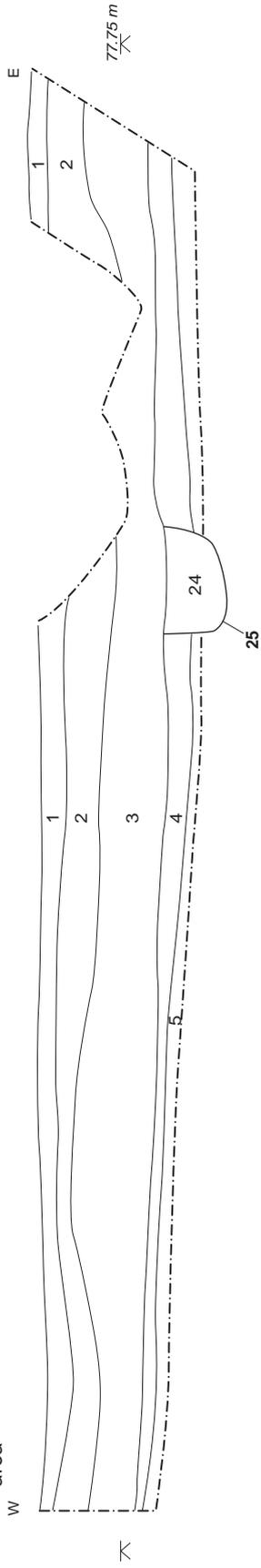
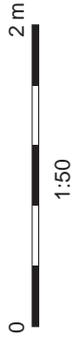
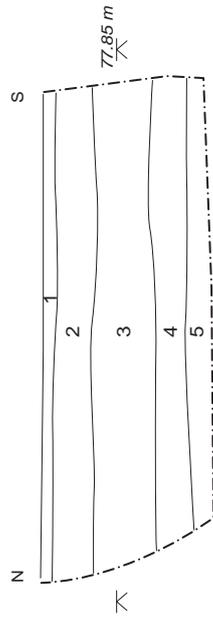


Figure 3: Plan of excavation area and sections through test pits

Section 1: South-facing section of excavation area



Section 2: West-facing section of excavation area



Section 3: North-facing section of excavation area

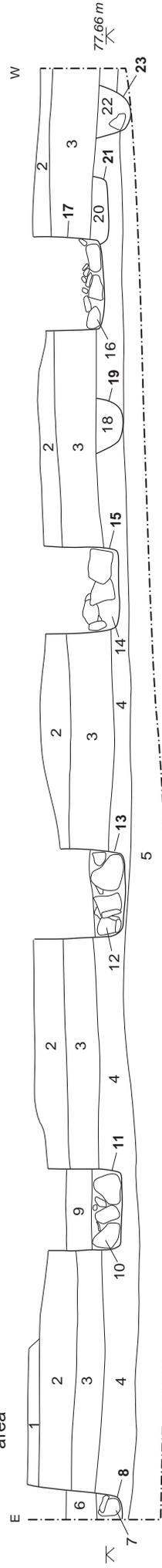


Figure 4: Sections through excavation area



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