

6 Highland Close Brill Buckinghamshire



Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology

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6 Highland Close, Brill Buckinghamshire

NGR SP 65305 14086

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In October 2001, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 6 Highland Close, Brill in Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 65305 14086). The work was commissioned by Kavan Davies Architecture Ltd in advance of the construction of an extension at the rear of the premises. The watching brief revealed a large pit/quarry feature and a thick ?garden soil layer, both of which can be dated to the 17th-18th centuries or later.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In October 2001 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at 6 Highland Close, Brill, Buckinghamshire (Figs 1 & 2). The work was commissioned by Kavan Davies Architecture Ltd in respect of a planning application for a single storey extension to the existing dwelling (Planning Application No.00/01219/APP).
- 1.1.2 A project brief was set by Alexander Kidd of Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Services. OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The development site is located within the historic core of Brill (NGR SP 65305 14086) and is bounded to the south-west by Windmill Street and to the east by Temple Street. The underlying geology is Upper Greensand overlying Limestone. The development site is immediately to the rear of the present dwelling and lies at approximately 187 m OD.

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, 2001) and is summarised below.
- 1.3.2 The village of Brill is situated 14 miles west of Aylesbury and 13 miles north east of Oxford. The village owes its name to its position on a limestone outcrop rising from the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire plain that surrounds it. The name derives from the Celtic bre, meaning hill and the Anglo-Saxon synonym hyll - in other words hill-hill.
- 1.3.3 There is some evidence for Iron Age occupation adjacent to the Church of All Saints (which was largely rebuilt in 1888 but is probably 13th century in origin). This is in the form of an earthwork that may be the remains of a hillfort rampart (Farley, 1979 quoted in Bateson 1966).

- 1.3.4 Archaeological evidence for Roman activity in the village is scarce, although there is some anecdotal evidence published in 1755 by Browne Willis in "The History and Antiquities of the Town, Hundred and Deanery of Buckingham." In his visit to Brill in 1730, Browne Willis records that "Tradition says here was a Market and that it was an old Roman City".
- 1.3.5 Whilst this claim is clearly overstated, it is possible that there was some activity in Brill during the Roman period. Roman 'villa' sites are known at Rymans Farm and Oakley to the south and south-west respectively. Roman tiles and pottery have also been found at Muswell Hill to the north-west and it has been suggested that this may also be the site of Roman 'villa'. Additionally, the Roman road from Silchester to Towcester passes approximately six miles to the east, and Akeman Street (the main road from St Albans to Cirencester) approximately five miles to the north. Indeed, the two roads intersect a mile or two to the south of Bicester, which lies approximately 8 miles to the north west of Brill.
- 1.3.6 In the late Saxon period, Brill was a royal manor, one of only six royal manors known in Buckinghamshire prior to the Norman Conquest (Bateson, 1966), and the centre of an estate which may have its origins in a pre-Saxon 'multiple estate' (Baines, 1995).
- 1.3.7 Brill was the administrative centre and the most important settlement within the medieval forest of Bernwood, which was legally established following the Conquest, based on the pre-existing woodland, and hunting lodge constructed by Edward the Confessor. The forest of Bernwood (sometimes referred to as Brill Forest (Bateson, 1966, p. 3) is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for 921, and the Domesday Book of 1086.
- 1.3.8 In the 13th and 14th centuries Brill was described as a borough but thereafter it went into decline and lost its status as a town. Brill was the centre of an important regional pottery and tile industry that is believed to have originated in the 12th century and continued into the post-medieval period when it also produced bricks (Harvey, 1997). Extensive remains of the kilns and their products have been found in close proximity to this site, including at least two at the adjacent Prosser's Yard (Cocroft, 1985).
- 1.3.9 Brill also figured briefly during the Civil War. Following the battle of Edghill on the 29th of November 1642 - and the subsequent withdrawal of Charles I to Oxford - a small Royalist force occupied Brill under the command of Sir Gilbert Gerard. January 1643 saw an abortive attempt by the parliamentary forces under the command of Arthur Goodwin to dislodge the Royalists.

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 OA extends its thanks to Bryan Davies Architect, Mrs M Giles and the workmen from Burges Construction for their assistance.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To preserve by record any archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works.
- 2.1.2 To signal, before the destruction of the material in question, the discovery of a significant archaeological find, for which the resources allocated are not sufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard. All building work will be halted until the remains have been suitably investigated and dealt with.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The trench for the extension foundations was excavated by a mini-digger to a depth of 1 m below ground level, with areas around service pipes excavated by hand (Fig. 3).
- 2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:50 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* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 Below a 0.1 m thick layer of modern topsoil (6) lay a thick dark reddish brown silty sand loam (1) - with charcoal flecks, small fragments of sandstone and small patches of yellowish sand; a few fragments of pottery and bone were recovered. This layer appeared to represent a thick and well-cultivated soil (Fig. 4).
- 3.1.2 Layer 1 was cut by modern service trenches and a large pit (Figs 3 and 4). This feature (2) was located in the south-west corner of the foundation trench and extended below the depth of the foundation trench. Within the confines of the trench, the feature measured 2 m x 3.15 m x 0.85 m, and it had steep sloping and stepped sides. The basal profile was not observed, but the feature must represent a large pit feature.
- 3.1.3 The earliest observed fill (3) was a light yellow-brown silty sand with charcoal flecks, fragments of mortar and fired clay. This was overlain by a thick deposit of red-brown loam (4) with charcoal flecks, fired clay specks, patches of ash and

fragments of tile, which was overlain by a thinner deposit of light yellowish sand (5) containing red sand, charcoal flecks, and fragments of ceramic building material.

3.1.4 The upper fill of the feature was sealed below the modern topsoil (6).

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 A total of nine fragments of ceramic building material and tile were recovered from the pit (2), all of which are dated to the post-medieval period.

3.2.2 Layer 1 produced six pottery sherds of 17th-18th century date. One sherd appeared to be a fragment of a kiln waste.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No environmental samples were taken from this site.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The watching brief revealed that the foundation trenches for the new building were cut through a thick layer of well-cultivated probable garden soil that contained 17th-18th century pottery. This layer was certainly cut by a large feature, which is either a rubbish pit or possibly represents evidence of quarry activity. By implication the pit post-dated the formation of layer 1 and is of 17th-18th century date or later.

4.1.2 Limited evidence for kiln waster material was recovered from the thick layer of ?garden soil, though no direct evidence for kiln material was recovered from the investigation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1	Layer	0.80m			Cultivated soil	Pottery and Bone
2	Cut	0.85m	2m	3.15m	Large pit	-
3	Fill	0.20m			Dumped material	None
4	Fill	0.68m			Dumped material	CBM, Tile
5	Fill	0.40m			Dumped material	CBM
6	Layer	0.10m			Topsoil	None

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Baines, 1995 *Bernwood: Continuity and Survival of a Romano-British Estate*, Records of Bucks, 35.

Bateson, F W, 1966 *Brill; A Short History*, The Brill Society.

Cocroft, 1985 *Two Post-Medieval Pottery Kilns and associated products from Prosser's Yard*, Brill Buckinghamshire, Recs of Bucks, 27.

Harvey, 1997 *Bernwood in the Middle Ages* in Broad, J & Hoyle, R (eds), *Bernwood. The Life and Afterlife of a Forest*

Farley, M, 1979 *An Iron Age Hill Fort at Brill*, Records of Bucks, 31.

Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire, Vol. IV, 1927, London.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992).

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: 6 Highland Close, Brill, Buckinghamshire

Site code: BRHIC 01

Grid reference: SP 65305 14086

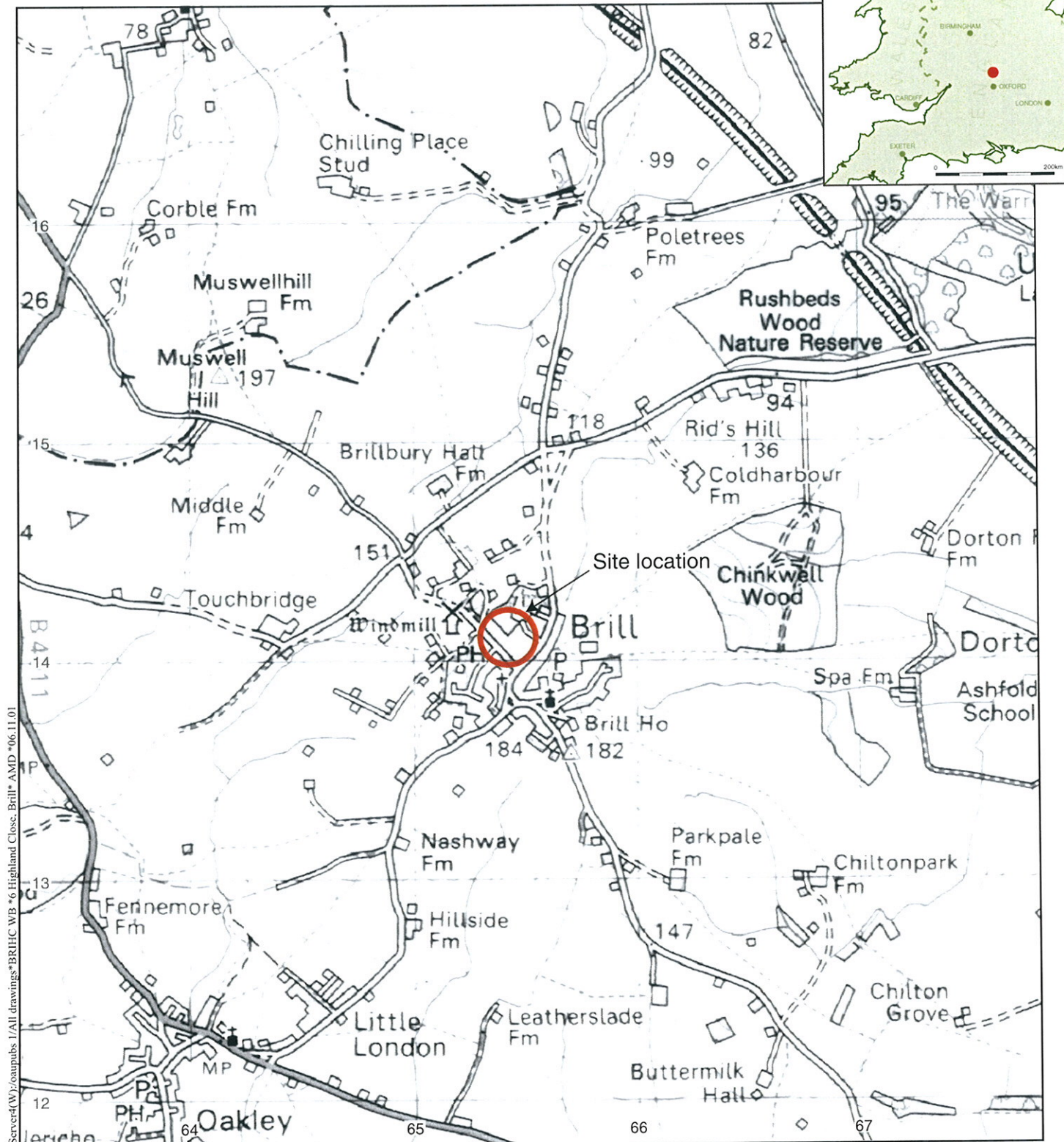
Type of watching brief: Excavation of foundations for extension to existing dwelling

Date and duration of project: Three site visits in October 2001

Area of site: 3.9 m x 3.8 m

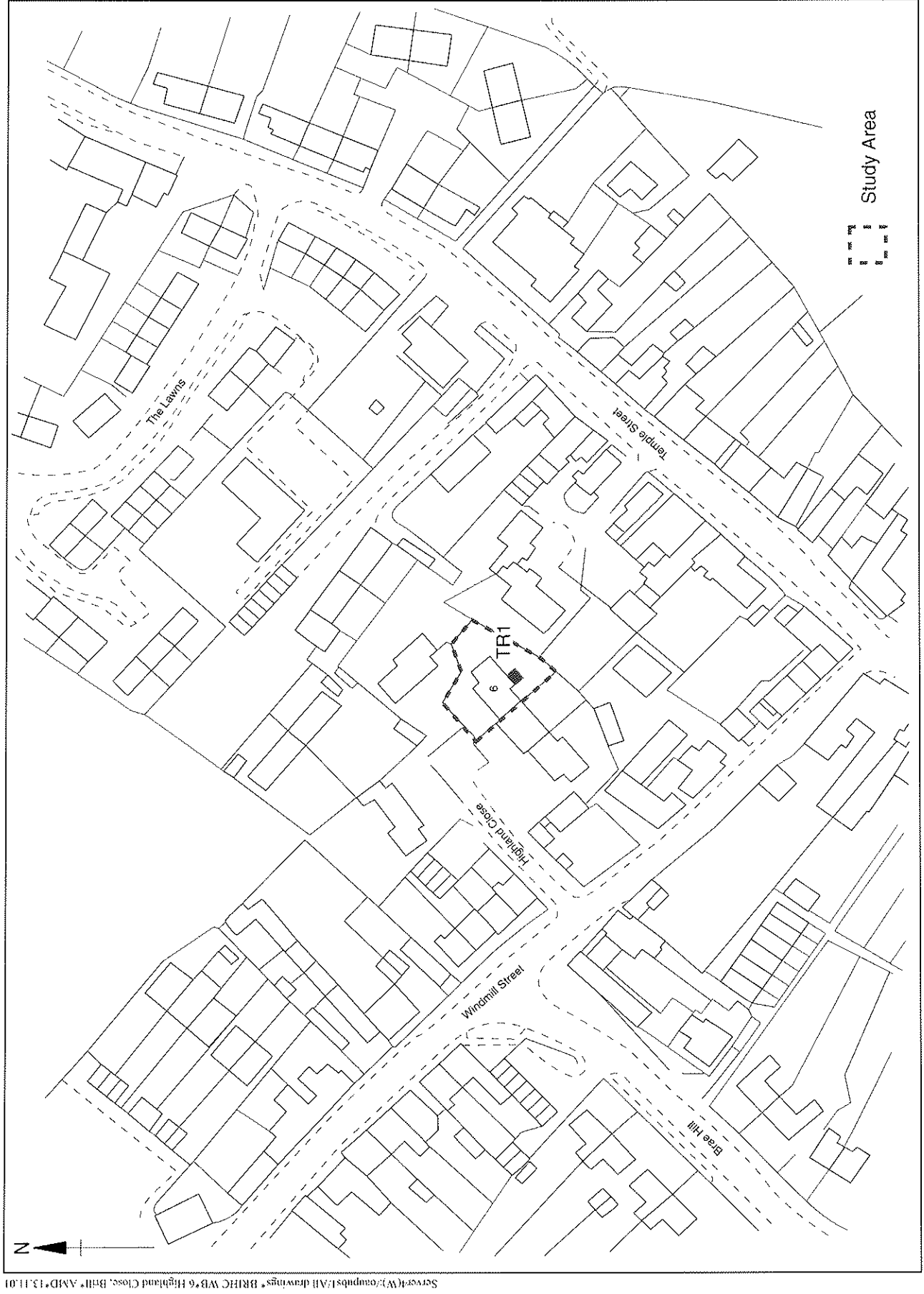
Summary of results: Post medieval cultivated soil and a large rubbish or quarry pit.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckingham County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: 2001.98



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Figure 1: Site location



Scale 1:1250

Figure 2: Trench Location Plan

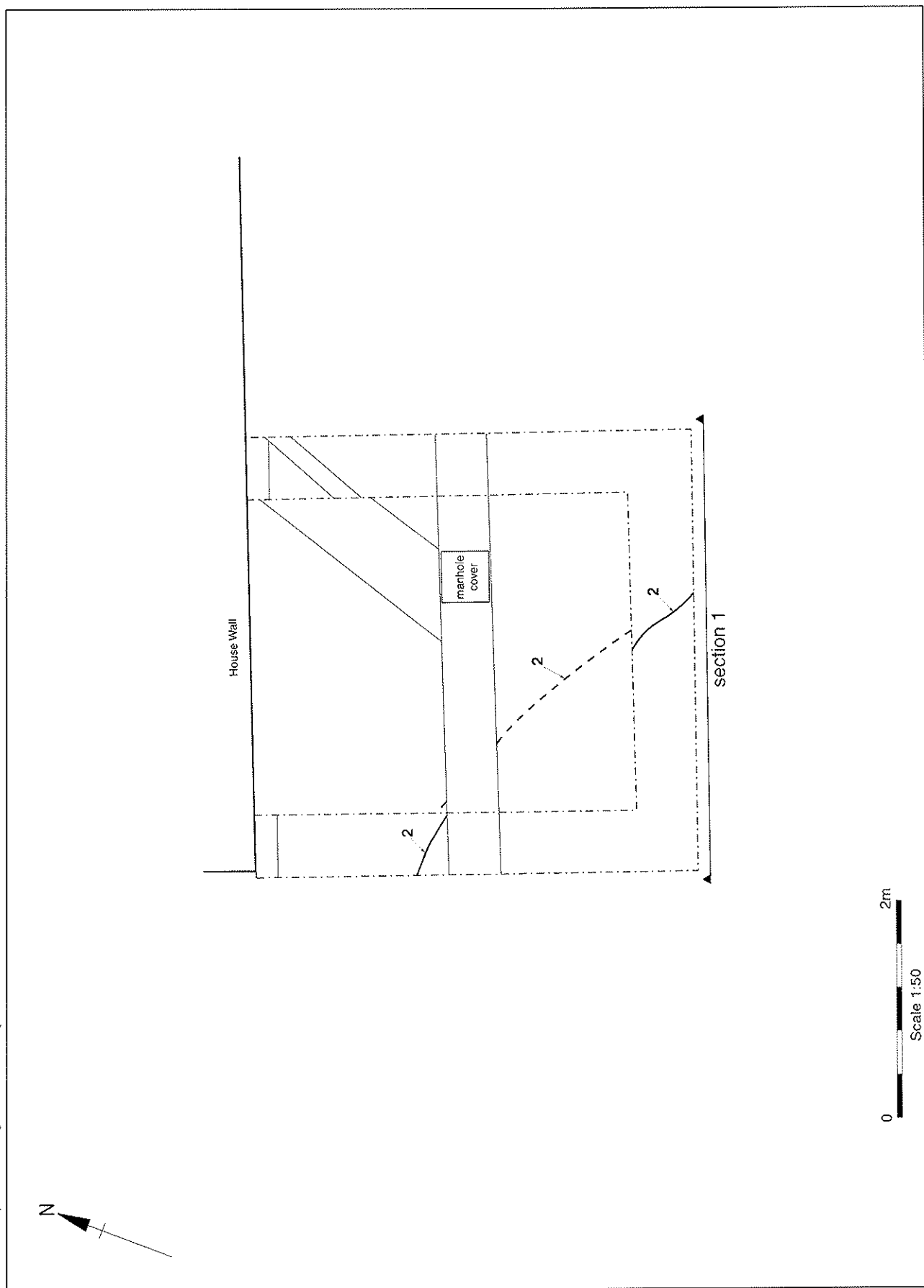


Figure 3: Trench 1: Plan

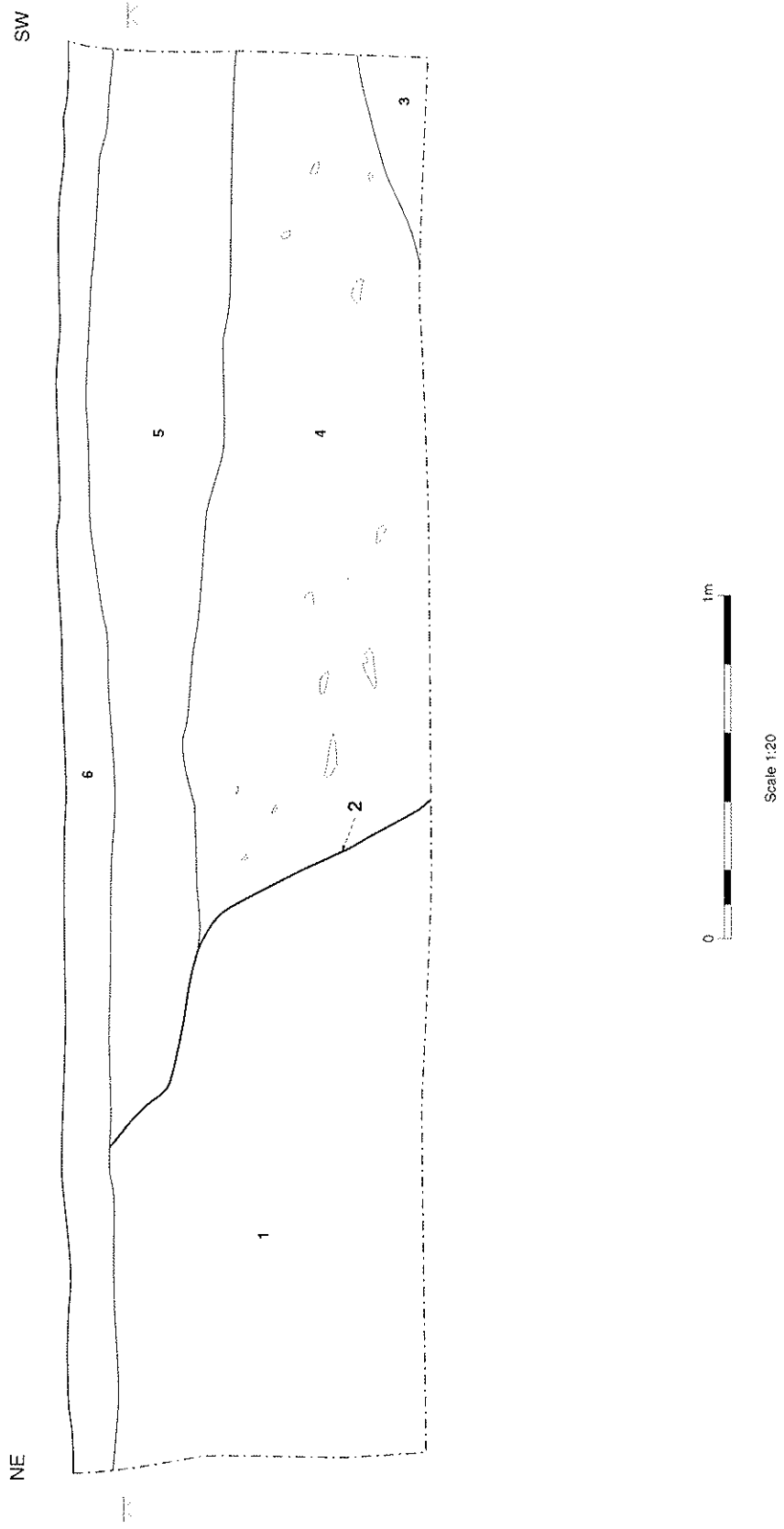


Figure 4: Trench 1: Section



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