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Royal Horticultural Society

Chelsea Royal Hospital

**Chelsea Flower Show 2000
New Marquee**

**NGR TQ 2830 7800
Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Date:

8/10/1999

Royal Horticultural Society
Chelsea Royal Hospital
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NGR TQ 2830 7800

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Summary

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief during the groundwork in advance of construction of a new marquee for the Chelsea Flower Show 2000 at Royal Chelsea Hospital (NGR TQ 2830 7800). The work was undertaken in August and September 1999. The watching brief was commissioned by the Royal Horticultural Society at the request of English Heritage, as the site of the new marquee overlies a late 17th century formal garden designed by Christopher Wren. A series of trenches for drainage were excavated by contractors. Some slight traces of the formal and later kitchen garden known on the site were identified as soil layers at the base of the trenches, and deposits associated with the late 17th – 19th century canals that once flanked the causeway leading to the River Thames were identified. Localised spreads of late post-medieval pottery were recovered from beneath substantial make-up layers of soil and clay; these were laid when Chelsea Embankment was constructed in the 19th century. Of note was a row of modern concrete blocks adjacent to the causeway. Their function is unclear, but they may have supported some kind of structure or acted as anchors for barrage balloons in either of the world wars. The remainder of the features comprise 19th and 20th century service pipes and drains.

1 Introduction

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by the Royal Horticultural Society to maintain a watching brief during groundwork for the construction of a new marquee at Chelsea Royal Hospital, Middlesex (Fig. 1). The new marquee forms part of the plans for the Chelsea Flower Show 2000 display. The work was carried out in August and September 1999 to the south-west of the Hospital's South Lawns. English Heritage requested a formal programme of archaeological monitoring during the excavation of drainage channels and soakaways for the new structure; the marquee site overlies the site of a late 17th century formal garden.

2 Historical Background

The Royal Hospital is situated in the ancient parish of Chelsea on the edge of the first gravel terrace of the River Thames. The medieval village centres on the parish church west of the hospital; prior to the construction of the hospital the site was open fields adjacent to the Thames. Chelsea is mentioned in a number of Anglo-Saxon charters and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that Offa, King of the Mercians, held a synod in

Chelsea in c. AD 787. During the medieval period the site of the hospital lay within *Thameshott*, an arable field at the eastern edge of the parish.

Faulkner (1804, 237) records that Thameshott was the site of an 'Ancient Cross' which reputedly stood within the area now occupied by the south-west precinct of the Royal Hospital. The cross is undated, though it is known that such features were often erected in open fields or at the roadside to act as boundary markers, memorials, or aids to the traveller. The cross was removed in 1642.

In 1682 Christopher Wren was appointed to build the Royal Hospital at Chelsea. The original plan was for buildings around a single courtyard (Figure Court); the side courtyards (Light Horse Court and College Court) were additions of 1686. The Hospital incorporated part of a (unsuccessful) theological college built in the reign of James I, and the layout of the hospital remains essentially unchanged since the end of the 17th century.

3 Archaeological Background

No prehistoric or Roman sites have been identified in the immediate vicinity of the Royal Hospital. The chance find spots of prehistoric and Roman material (OAU, 1996) may suggest minor local activity. A Roman coin of Tetricus (259-274 AD) was found in College Court during sewer works in 1886.

A number of burials have been discovered during groundwork in the 19th and 20th centuries. The burials are concentrated near College Court and to the west. It is unclear if the burials are contemporary or predate the construction of the hospital. However, it is known that the original college building was a prison after the Civil War, housing Dutch prisoners of war, and there are records of plague burials from 1666 (Dean 1950, 30, 31).

The site of the new marquee is south of the hospital complex within an area of the formal garden designed by Christopher Wren in the 1680s. The layout of the garden was an elaborate arrangement of canals, boulevards and flowerbeds; these are clearly depicted on Sturt's plan of the site (1692). The gardens were bisected by a raised causeway leading down to the Thames, and the causeway was flanked by two 12m wide canals. These canals survived into the 19th century, when the construction of Chelsea Embankment removed the southern extent of the gardens. The canals were infilled at this time. The present road through maintains the alignment of the original causeway.

4 Recent Archaeological Work

In 1997 OAU maintained a watching brief during the installation of an automatic irrigation in College Court, Figure Court and Light Horse Court (OAU, 1997). Brick wall footings perhaps associated with the original college were found. A recent watching brief was carried out by OAU during the installation of a communication duct system and evidence of 18th century garden features was found (OAU June 1999).

5 Methodology

An archaeological supervisor monitored the excavation of drainage trenches and soakaway pits/gully holes along the length of the new structure (Fig. 2) for a period of four weeks. The trenches were between 0.5-2.6 m deep, with an average width of 0.5 m. Archaeological deposits were inspected, and where necessary were manually cleaned and recorded in accordance with to standard OAU procedures (OAU, 1992). Section drawings were made at a scale of 1:20 at selected points along the trenches, and overall plans of the trenches were drawn at scales of 1:500 and 1:100. All deposits, structures and features were assigned unique context numbers and records made on pro forma context sheets. Black and white and colour photographs were taken.

6 Results (Fig. 2)

The drainage trenches were excavated by the contractors as a rolling process between designated points (A-B, B-C etc) and the pipes laid prior to immediate infilling of the trenches. For the purposes of this report the trench lengths are described between these designated points. For example: Run A-B, B-C and so on. Soil layers are described from the drawn section points along the trench runs and notable features observed in plan are also described.

Run A-B

Depth at point A: 0.6 m

Depth at point B: 1.5 m

Section 100 (Fig. 3)

At this point of the trench the earliest excavated deposit was a layer of dark grey tenacious clay (202) with occasional brick inclusions, which lay below a 0.65 m thick layer of compact brown loam (201) containing frequent brick pieces. This layer was sealed by topsoil (200). These deposits were consistently observed along the trench length interrupted only by the insertion of modern service pipes (203, 204, 206 and 207). Some 1.5 m north-west of service 206 was a large concrete agglomerate block (205). The block was apparently deliberately placed, and comprised concrete mixed with large nodules of flint gravel. The structure was 1.5 m wide, and is discussed further below.

Section 101 (Fig. 3)

Above layer 202 was a localised patch of black charcoal and ash with cinders and brick fragments (208). The deposit was 0.4 m thick and extended for a length of 3 m along the length of the trench. The layer, presumably the remnants of a recent fire lay beneath dumped layer 201.

Run B-C

Depth at point B: 1.5 m
Depth at point C: 1.7 m

Section 102 (Fig. 4)

At this point of the run the earliest excavated deposit was a layer of light brown-grey silty clay (212) with patches of mortar and brick fragments. This was overlain by a tenacious light red-brown clay (209) that abutted layer 202, but was nonetheless stratigraphically equivalent. Pottery of 18th-19th century date was recovered from this layer, which was overlain by layers 201 and then 200. This sequence of deposits continued along the length of the trench run, broken only by the insertion of several modern service pipes (211, 213, 215, 216). Towards the end of the run (Point C), Layer 212 merged with a similar layer (220), a compact dark brown clay silt (220) with patches of mortar and brick fragments. The layer contained a single pottery sherd dating to the 19th or 20th century. The layer was overlain by layer 212 as seen in the trench to the west.

Layer 212 was sealed beneath a dumped deposit of coal, cinders and ash (219) similar in nature to the deposit seen in trench run A-B. layer 219 was 0.22 m thick and was overlain by layer 209 described above. Two service pipes (217, 218) cut layer 201 that sealed 209 here.

Run C-D

Depth at point C: 1.7 m
Depth at point D 2.1 m

Section 108 (Fig. 4)

At this point of the trench run the natural gravel (243) was exposed 1.7 m below the topsoil. Above the gravel was a 0.18 m thick layer of loose material (242) comprising bricks, pottery, clay pipes and oyster shells. The pottery dates to the 19th century. A vertical sided feature (241) was observed cut from the level of 242. The feature was at least 0.8 m deep and at least 6 m wide although the east side of the feature was not observed (see below). The feature was filled with a blue-grey clay (232), above which lay a tenacious brown-grey clay (231) that was 0.58 m thick. The fill contained flecks of brick, gravel and charcoal, and pottery from the fill was of 18th or 19th century date. The function of this feature and its fills is discussed later. Fill 231 was sealed by layer 209, in turn overlain by a 0.28 m thick layer of reddish-brown sandy clay (230) that lay below layer 201.

Run D-E

Depth at point D: 2.1 m
Depth at point E: 1.1 m

The trench was cut entirely through the upper fills of feature 241 so that fill 231 appeared consistently at the base of the trench. Adjacent to the memorial of 1849 fill 231 was sealed beneath layer 209, itself cut by several modern services (245, 244,

214, 215, 246) above which a layer of make-up material (239) had been placed for the tarmac surface surrounding the memorial.

Section 105 (Fig. 5)

North of the memorial was a series of structures (226, 227, 228, 234, 237, 238) directly on the line of the trench run. The structures were constructed of concrete agglomerate and broken bricks mixed with gravel. Each structure was c. 1 m wide and up to 0.5 m deep within the trench and the top of each structure lay directly beneath the topsoil. Structure 226 was set into a layer of made ground (221). The function of these structures, clearly of modern date, is discussed later. The remainder of the D-E trench run contained a few modern service pipes only.

Run G-F

Depth at point G: 2.1 m

Depth at point F: 1.2 m

Section 110 (Fig. 5)

The stratigraphic sequence was similar to that seen at point D, suggesting that the soakaway here was cut down into a similar feature (see discussion below). At the base of the sequence was a deposit of grey clay (258), sealed beneath a thicker deposit of clay (259) that contained occasional brick fragments. Fill 259 was sealed by layer 219, in turn sealed by the make-up layers (209, 201) and lastly the topsoil.

To the north of point G the trench contained a number of modern service pipes (244, 245, 254, 255 etc), but otherwise contained no other changes in the soil profiles observed along the D-E part of the route, to the immediate south-west.

Run G-H

Depth at point G: 2.1 m

Depth at point H: 3 m

Fill 231 was observed for a distance of c. 5 m along the base of the trench to the north of point G, which at this point had to be shored for safety reasons; the remainder of the trench sections were not observed as a result. A number of services were observed (247, plastic drains).

Section 111 (Fig. 5)

At the base of the section at point G was a layer of very dark grey silt (257) including 19th century clay pipe pieces, pottery and bricks at a depth of 2.8 m. The pottery also dates to the 19th century. The layer was sealed by a 0.6 m thick layer of redeposited natural sand and gravel, which lay beneath layer 209, as seen elsewhere.

Run H-I

Depth at point H: 3 m

Depth at point I: 1.7 m

Deposit 257 was traced at the base of the trench for a distance of c. 4 m, indicating a wide area of rubbish disposal. The remainder of the trench contained a similar sequence of dumped soil and clay layers to that recorded in the other trench runs, and a few small modern service pipes were present.

7 The Finds

The Pottery

The pottery is tabulated below by context followed by a short discussion of the material, all of which is of post-medieval date.

Context No.	Pottery Sherd Nos.	Spot dating
209	4	18 th -19 th century
220	1	19 th /20 th century
231	2	18 th -19 th century
242	17	19 th century
257	1	Early-mid 19 th century

Of the contexts that produced pottery, the 17 sherds from layer 242 comprise willow pattern china together with several sherds mid-19th century Mocha ware. A 19th century date can be assigned to this assemblage. Context 231 produced 2 pieces of a glazed red earthenware vessel typical of the later post-medieval period and context 209 contained 4 sherds from a single red earthenware vessel that has red external glazing and cream-coloured internal glazing.

The Clay Pipes

Clay pipe pieces were recovered from 5 contexts. Those from 242 range in date from the 18th and 19th centuries, suggesting that the deposit is mixed. Context 210 produced a pipe that is of 17th to 18th century date. The remainder of the material (contexts 212, 220, 257) is generally undiagnostic, and dates to the late-18th or 19th century.

Miscellaneous Finds

A single piece of glass came from context 242, and is the top of a bottle of Victorian date.

8 Conclusions

The natural gravel was exposed only at the south-west part of the site, where the deepest drainage runs were dug. The silty soil layer exposed at the base of trench run

B-C may represent part of the former garden soil here, possibly that of Wren's period, though no dating evidence was recovered.

The canals either side of the causeway were identified by the silty clay lower fills, suggesting water born silting, and the fact that the trench runs were dug consistently through these fill deposits. The west edge of one of the canals – perhaps a re-cut along the original line of the feature - was confidently identified, though the full limits of both canals were not visible in the limited confines of the trenches. Pottery from the layer cut by one of the canals dates to the 19th century suggesting that the re-cut dates to this period. Shoring of trench run G-H precluded proper identification of the canal here. The upper fill deposits suggest that the canals were deliberately infilled, and the finds are consistent with the infilling of the features in the 19th century.

The majority of the excavated layers would appear from their nature and content to date to the construction of Chelsea Embankment, when it is known that the south end of the original gardens were swept away. The pottery requires little further comment as mostly it dates to the 19th century with some sherds potentially of 18th century date, as does the small collection of clay pipes. Most of the material may have been left on the site when the embankment was under construction.

The row of concrete structures (Run D-E) and the similar structure to the west (A-B) are difficult to interpret with certainty. They are clearly modern and probably date to the present century. The remainder of the structural features relates to modern drainage works and there are many service pipes of varying type across the site. In general there appears to have been a landscaped build-up of between 1 and 2 m of material during the construction works.

J Hiller
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October 1999

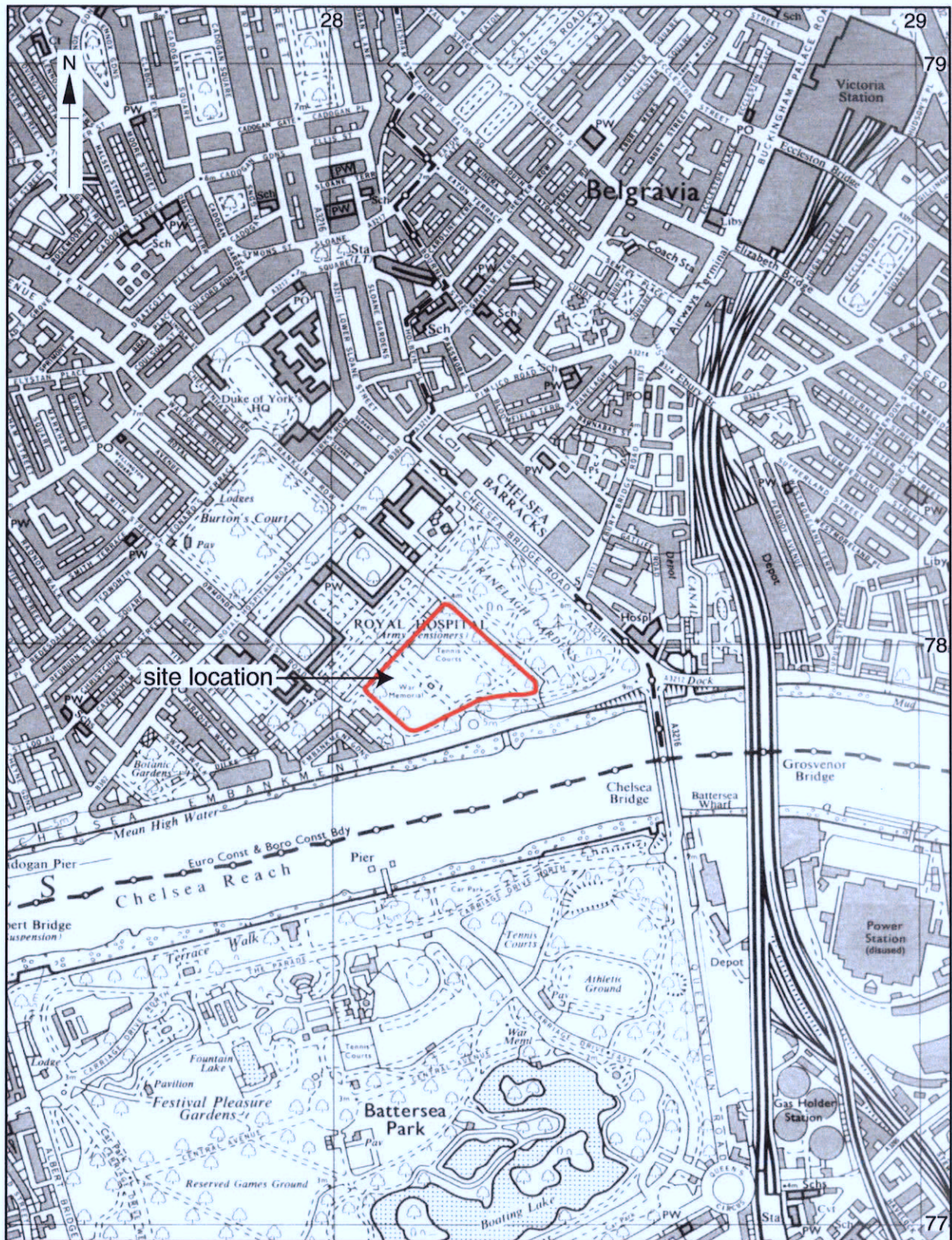
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- OAU 1999 *Installation of a Communication Duct System. Archaeological Watching Brief Report*. Oxford Archaeological Unit (unpublished).

Table of context information

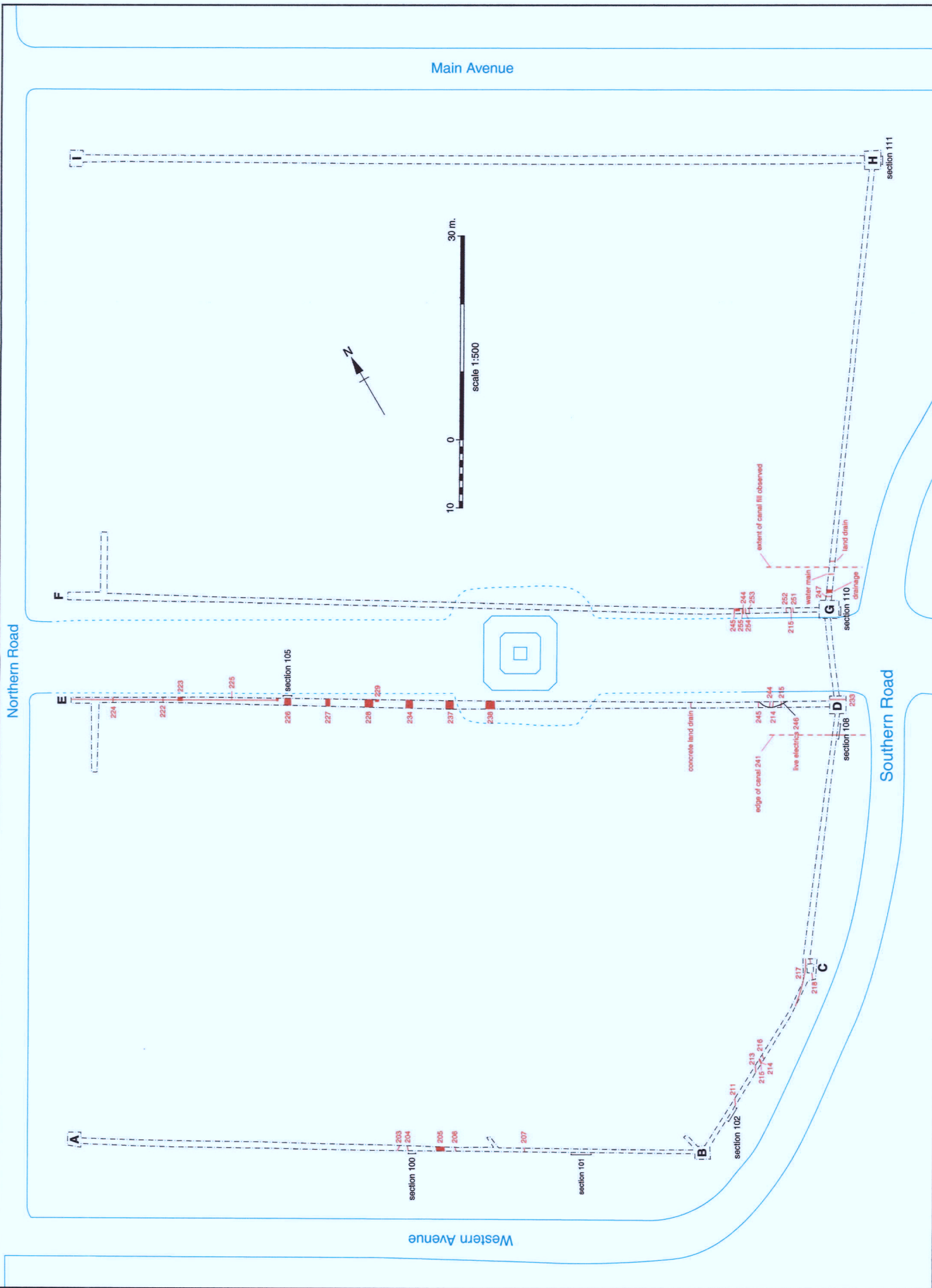
Context	Type	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Comments
200	Layer	0.21	-	Topsoil
201	Layer	0.65	-	Loam layer with brick, gravel – 19 th century embankment landfill
202	Layer	0.34	-	Clay embankment landfill
203	Service	-	0.08	Service duct
204	Service	-	0.05	Service pipe, lead
205	Layer	0.75	1.5	Concrete agglomerate block, function unclear
206	Service	-	0.08	Plastic pipe
207	Service	-	0.08	Plastic pipe
208	Layer	0.4	-	Burnt dumped material, part of 202
209	Layer	0.4+	-	Clay with brick fragments, embankment material
210	Layer	0.15	-	Grey gravel and silt
211	Service	-	0.06	Insulated service pipe
212	Layer	0.24	-	Dumped grey clay, clay pipes, post medieval embankment material
213	Service	-	0.04	Metal pipe
214	Service	-	-	Water pipe
215	Service	-	-	Water pipe
216	Service	-	0.07	Irrigation pipe
217	Service	-	0.12	Former marquee drainage pipe
218	Service	-	0.12	Former sewage pipe
219	Layer	0.22	-	Dumped coal, part of embanking process
220	Layer	0.3+	-	Brown soil, predates embanking deposits, possible garden soil
221	Layer	0.68+	-	Made soil below topsoil
222	Service	-	0.4	Ceramic pipe, soakaway
223	Service	-	0.6 x 0.4	Brick soakaway pipe fed by 224, 225
224	Service	-	0.14	Ceramic pipe leads to 223
225	Service	-	-	Ceramic pipe, feeds into 223
226	Structure	0.48+	0.96	NE-SW aligned concrete structure wall bordering former path.
227	Structure	0.48+	0.96	Similar build to 226
228	Structure	0.5	1.1	Similar structure to 226/227 – possibly anchors for WWI/WWII barrage balloons, or pads for colonnade along line of central pathway. Possibly gun emplacement pads
229	Structure	0.46	0.6	19 th century brick drain
230	Layer	0.28	-	Clay dump
231	Layer	0.58	-	Clay dumping
232	Fill	0.4+	1 +	Fill of former canal adjacent to central walkway
233	Service	-	0.05	Metal service pipe
234	Structure	-	1.1	As 226/227 etc
235	Layer	0.7	-	Clay dump
236	Layer	0.35+	-	Dumped layer
237	Structure	-	-	As 226/227
238	Structure	-	1.45	As 226/227 etc
239	Layer	0.36	-	Make-up for 240
240	Layer	0.04	-	Tarmac around monument
241	Cut	0.6+	-	Early 19 th century canal cut
242	Layer	0.18	-	Dumped material adjacent to 241
243	Layer	-	-	Natural gravel
244	Service	-	0.35	Metal pipe
245	Service	-	0.06	Metal electric cable
246	Service	-	0.04	Electric cable
247	Service	-	0.07	Water pipe

248	Service	-	0.2	Ceramic pipe
249	Service	-	6.5	Metal water pipe
250	Service	-	0.05	Plastic pipe
251	Service	-	0.03	Metal pipe
252	Service	-	-	Metal pipe
253	Service	-	0.07	Metal service
254	Service	-	-	Plastic service
255	Service	-	-	Metal pipe
256	Layer	0.6	-	Redeposited gravel over 257
257	Layer	0.5+	-	Post-medieval pottery dump
258	Fill	0.1+	-	Canal fill
259	Fill	0.4	-	Canal fill



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figure 1: site location



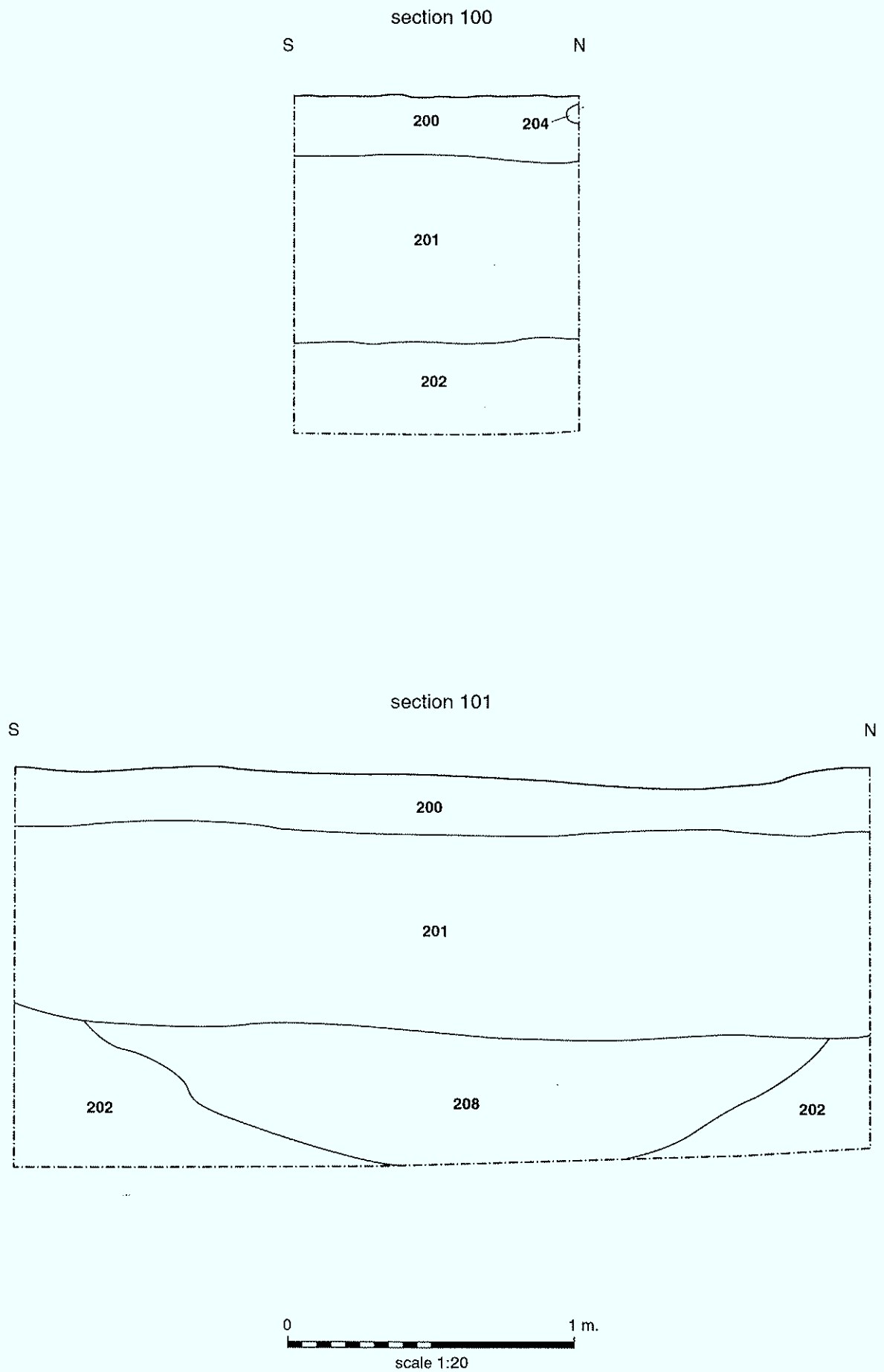
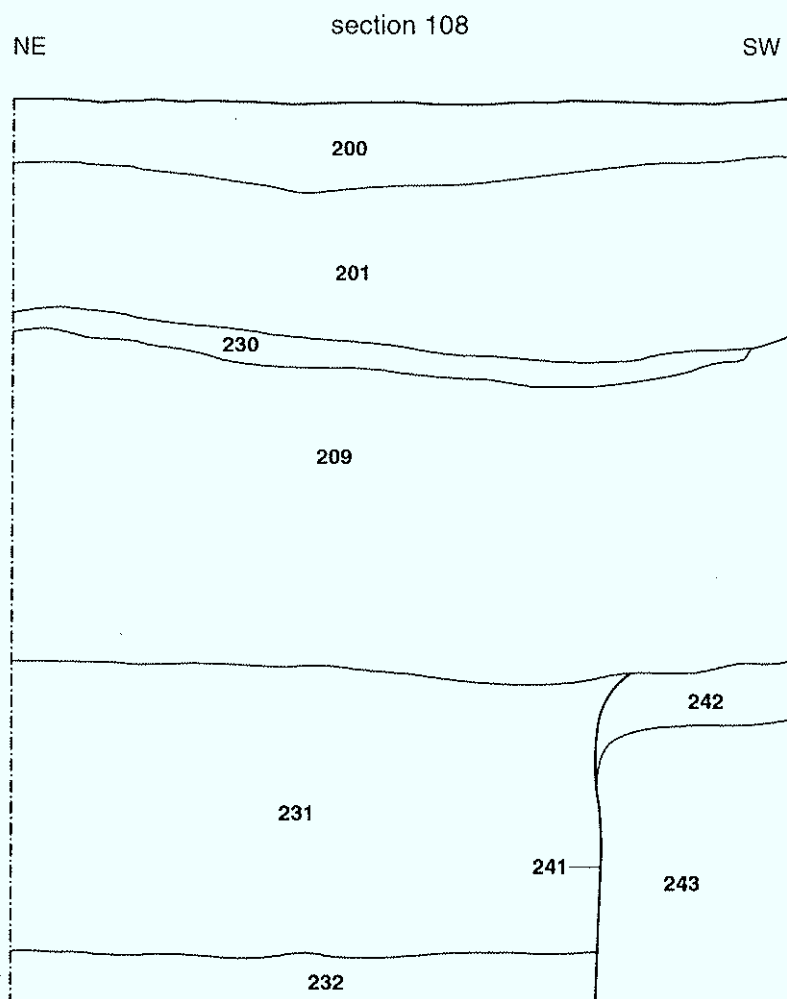
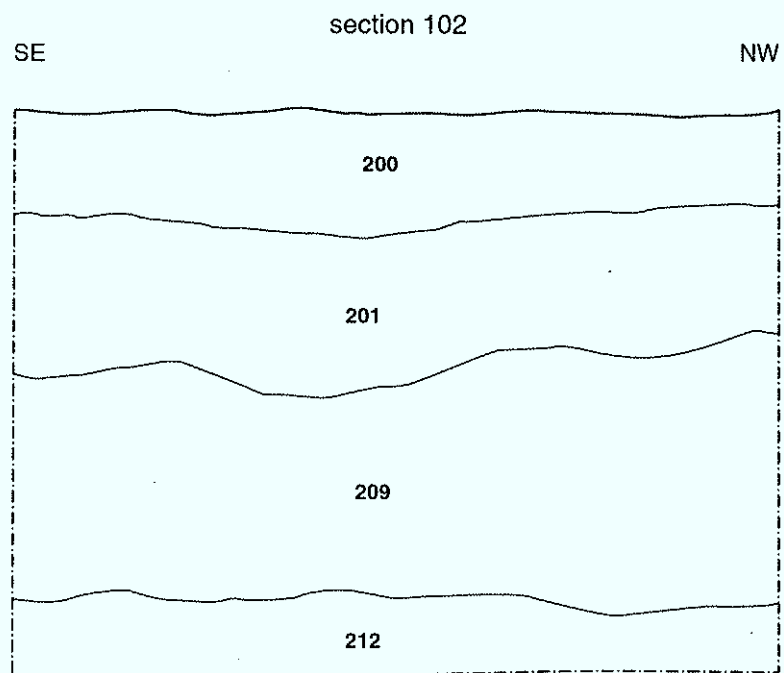


figure 3: sections 100 & 101



0 1 m.
scale 1:20

figure 4: sections 102 & 108

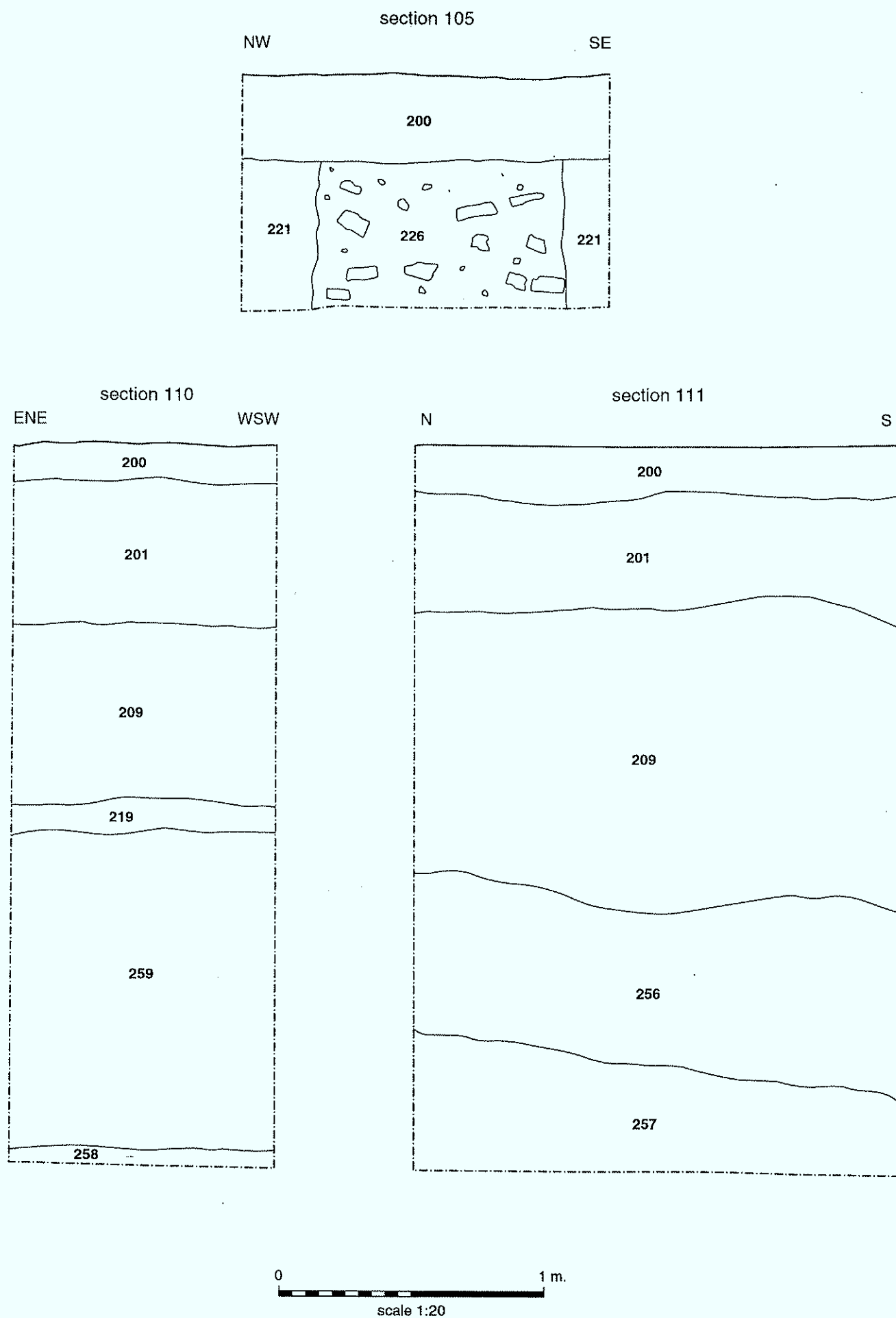


figure 5: sections 105, 110 & 111



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