

Box Vicarage Box Wiltshire



Archaeological Evaluation Report



September 2006

Client: Hookway Partnership LLP

Issue N^o: 1

OA Job N^o: 3349

NGR: ST 823685

Client Name: Hookway Partnership LLP

Client Ref No:

Document Title: Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire

Document Type: Evaluation

Issue Number: 1

National Grid Reference: ST 823 685

Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 3349

Site Code: BOXVIC 06

Invoice Code: BOXVICEV

Receiving Museum: Wiltshire Heritage Museum

Museum Accession No:

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Document File Location H:\PROJECTS\Wiltshire WI\6991 Box Vicarage
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Box, Wiltshire*****ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT*****CONTENTS**

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SUMMARY

On 11th September 2006, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire (NGR: ST 823 685) on behalf of the Hookway Partnership LLP, in advance of new drainage work and the installation of a replacement septic tank. The evaluation revealed the existence of probable Romano-British wall within the area of the replacement septic tank and natural colluvium sealed by a buried soil horizon on the line of the new drainage works. .

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 On 11th September 2006, OA carried out a field evaluation at Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire (NGR: ST 823 685) on behalf of the Hookway Partnership LLD, in respect of proposed new drainage works and a replacement septic tank. The site itself occupies part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Box Roman Villa (SAM 30299) and an application was submitted to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for Scheduled Monument Consent. In order for the DCMS to agree to Monument Consent, it was proposed that 2 trial pits be dug under archaeological conditions in order to ascertain the likely impact of the drainage works on the underlying archaeological horizons. OA produced a WSI showing how it would meet these conditions (OA, 2006).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The site is located 6.6 km north-east of Bath on the north side of the village of Box (Fig. 1). The development area is located to the east of the Vicarage on a gentle north facing slope, and is currently used as a garden. The site lies between approximately 46 m and 43 m above OD and occupies an area of 0.1 hectares. The site lies at a junction of Inferior Oolite limestone to the west and Lias clays to the east and the underlying geology is mixed and includes a deposit of Mesolithic spring deposited tufa.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the evaluation has been the subject of a separate desk study (OA, 2006), the results of which are presented below. The site itself has produced significant archaeological evidence.

1.3.2 Archaeological evidence for the Roman remains at Box has been accumulating since the earlier parts of 19th century. Excavations to investigate their extent and nature have been carried out at intervals since the 1880s when the scale of the villa became apparent. Since 1982 a further series of excavations have taken place to the west of Box Vicarage, extending beyond the Scheduled area of the Roman villa. Work was carried out at The Hermitage to the south in 1983-4 (Carless 1984), along Church

Lane in 1993-4, at Box House in 1989 and 1995 (WRAP 1989, BAT 1995) and at Box House Cottage in 1994. A Desk-based Assessment carried out in 1997 combined information from the reports produced with discussions with the excavators involved (Matthews 1997). Again Roman material was found in all locations. In the 21st century when Selwyn Hall was extended in 2003 a watching brief was carried out (BAT 2003). In addition, a geophysical survey was carried out in the gardens north of The Wilderness in 1998-9 (Payne 1999).

- 1.3.3 There have been two archaeological investigations during which excavations have been carried out within the garden of Box Vicarage. In 1968-9, when Selwyn Hall was built, a trench was dug on the south side of the boundary wall to help link the known villa remains in the south-west with the results from Selwyn Hall (Hurst *et al* 1987). More extensive work was carried out in 1994 to evaluate the location of a proposed new Vicarage, not subsequently constructed, within the garden (WA 1994). Evidence connected to the Roman villa was found on both occasions.
- 1.3.4 The late 20th century and early 21st century reports were examined for information on surface levels and the depths at which the archaeological horizon and Roman remains were encountered. This data was used to prepare the composite section shown in Figure 3. These results demonstrate that, where below-ground archaeological deposits dating from the Roman period survive, they can lie as little as 0.4 m below the present ground surface.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence or absence, extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of archaeological remains within the proposal area. In particular, evidence relating to the known Roman villa.
- 2.1.2 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation comprised two hand excavated test pits, each measuring 1 m x 1 m. The test pits were excavated on the site of the proposed manhole, and as close to the existing septic tank (due for replacement) as was possible (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.2 The test pits were excavated by hand by the site supervisor. Excavation was continued until either natural deposits were encountered or to the first archaeologically significant horizon, whichever was encountered first.

3.2 **Fieldwork methods and recording**

3.2.1 The trenches were cleaned by hand and any revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. Both trenches were planned at a scale of 1:20 and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All trenches and sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 **Finds**

3.3.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context.

3.4 **Palaeo-environmental evidence**

3.4.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the evaluation.

3.5 **Presentation of results**

3.5.1 The results of the evaluation will be presented on a trench by trench basis followed by an overall discussion and conclusion.

4 **RESULTS: GENERAL**

4.1 **Soils and ground conditions**

4.1.1 The site is located on a gentle north facing slope and comprised of garden soils. Contamination by water draining out of the existing soakway was experienced during the excavation of Test Pit 2.

4.2 **Distribution of archaeological deposits**

4.2.1 Significant archaeological deposits were encountered within Test Pit 1, while Test pit 2 was sterile.

5 **RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS**

5.1 **Description of deposits**

Test Pit 1 (Fig. 3, Plan and sections 1 and 2)

5.1.1 This was located within a flower bed at the southern end of the existing soakaway.

5.1.2 The edge of a north-west to south east aligned stone structure (5), was encountered at a depth of 0.4 m below the current ground level. Consisting of 3 courses of roughly laid limestone slabs, no bonding agent was visible. Its alignment matched that of previously exposed structures within the Roman Villa and excavation was stopped at

this level. This structure was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (4). This contained many small limestone fragments and charcoal flecking and is a probable buried soil horizon. Cutting this layer was a circular feature (3), approximately 1.1 m in diameter, and in excess of 0.5 m deep. This was filled by a light grey-brown clay silt (2). This contained much charcoal flecking and ash as well as nails and a nut and bolt. The fill suggests that this was a post-medieval rubbish pit. Cut into the western edge of this pit was a straight linear feature (8), running parallel to the garden boundary. This was a steeply sided cut running the full width of the pit and was in excess of 0.3 m deep. Built along the eastern edge of this cut was a stone wall built of large limestone blocks bonded with a lime mortar (7). The back (east) edge was of rough construction, however its west face was vertical and flat. The resulting cavity was filled by a layer of loose grey-brown clay silt (6) overlying a geotextile membrane and pea gravel. Its construction suggests that is the present day soakaway. Overlying this feature was a 0.3 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (1), the present day garden soil.

Test Pit 2 (Fig. 4, Plan and sections 3 and 4)

- 5.1.3 This was located in the north-east corner of the garden on the site of the proposed new manhole.
- 5.1.4 A layer of pale yellow clay silt (22) was encountered at a depth of 0.55 m below the current ground level. This was a clean, compact layer with several small rounded limestone blocks embedded in its surface. This probably represents a layer of colluvium, possibly pre-historic in origin. Overlying this was a 0.25 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (21). This contained numerous small limestone fragments and some charcoal flecking and is a probable buried soil horizon, possibly a continuation of Layer 4.
- 5.1.5 This was sealed by a 0.3 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (20), the present day garden soil. Within the south-west corner of the test pit this was overlaid by a 0.1 m deep layer of crushed sandstone (23), the edge of the garden path.

5.2 Finds

- 5.2.1 Fragments of Romano-British pottery and ceramic building material were recovered from both the test pits. These were however, within worked soils and must be considered to be residual finds. Many fragments of post-medieval (18th and 19th century) pottery were also recovered. These were probably deposited after the vicarage was constructed.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 6.1.1 While the test pits can only give a “snap shot” of the potential of the site, the results are broadly similar to those from earlier excavations and give an indication of the scale of activity within this area of the villa site.

6.2 Overall interpretation

Summary of results

- 6.2.1 Evidence of the extent of the villa was only encountered within Test Pit 1. The alignment of the structural feature is consistent with those previously encountered and it is probable that it may form part of an outbuilding associated with the villa. The area around Test Pit 2 produced no demolition debris nor finds, suggesting that it was outside the main area of activity, or possibly that the area has been truncated or reduced in depth. The presence of a buried soil horizon suggests that the area was under cultivation prior to the construction of the present day vicarage.

7 IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT

- 7.1.1 The test pits have shown that the density of Romano-British activity within this area is small. It is probable that if any new drainage works are kept wherever possible within the footprint of existing disturbed areas then the impact will be small.
- 7.1.2 The results from Test Pit 2 suggest that the excavation of a new drainage trench within the north-east corner of the garden is within a low density area and that again its impact should be small.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick/Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
Test Pit 1							
	1	Layer	-	0.3 m	Modern garden soil	Pottery, brick, tile glass	C19th/ C20th
	2	Fill	1.1 m	> 0.5 m	Backfill of rubbish fill	Pottery, nails, nut and bolt	C19th
	3	Cut	1.1 m	> 0.5 m	Post-medieval rubbish pit	-	C19th
	4	Layer	-	0.15 m	Buried soil horizon	-	-
	5	Structure	> 0.3 m	> 0.2 m	Possible wall footings	-	Romano-British
	6	Fill	> 0.4 m	0.2 m	Backfill of soakaway pit	-	C20th
	7	Structure	0.4 m	> 0.2 m	East wall of soakaway pit	-	C20th
	8	Cut	> 0.8 m	> 0.2 m	Construction cut for soakaway pit	-	C20th
Test Pit 2							
	20	Layer	-	0.3 m	Modern garden soil	-	C20th
	21	Layer	-	0.25 m	Buried soil horizon	Pottery, tile	-
	22	Layer	-	> 0.1 m	Natural colluvium	-	-
	23	Surface	1.5 m	> 0.1 m	Garden path	-	C20th

APPENDIX 2 POTTERY ASSESSMENT/ SPOT DATING

After preliminary washing the recovered artefacts were examined, identified and spot dated.

Context 1: 1 fragment of Severn Valley Ware pottery, 1st to 5th century
 1 fragment of Romano-British flu tile
 1 fragment of Romano-British brick
 6 fragments of post-medieval pottery, 18th to 20th century

Context 2: 4 fragments of post-medieval pottery

Context 21: 2 fragments of Romano-British Imbrix

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APPENDIX 4 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire

Site code: BOXVIC 06

Grid reference: ST 823 685

Type of evaluation: 2 hand dug test pits, each 1 m square

Date and duration of project: 11th September 2006, 1 day

Area of site: 0.1 hectare

Summary of results: The truncated remains of a possible Romano-British wall were encountered in Test Pit 1 while the second showed natural colluvium sealed by a buried soil horizon.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Wiltshire Heritage Museum in due course.



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location

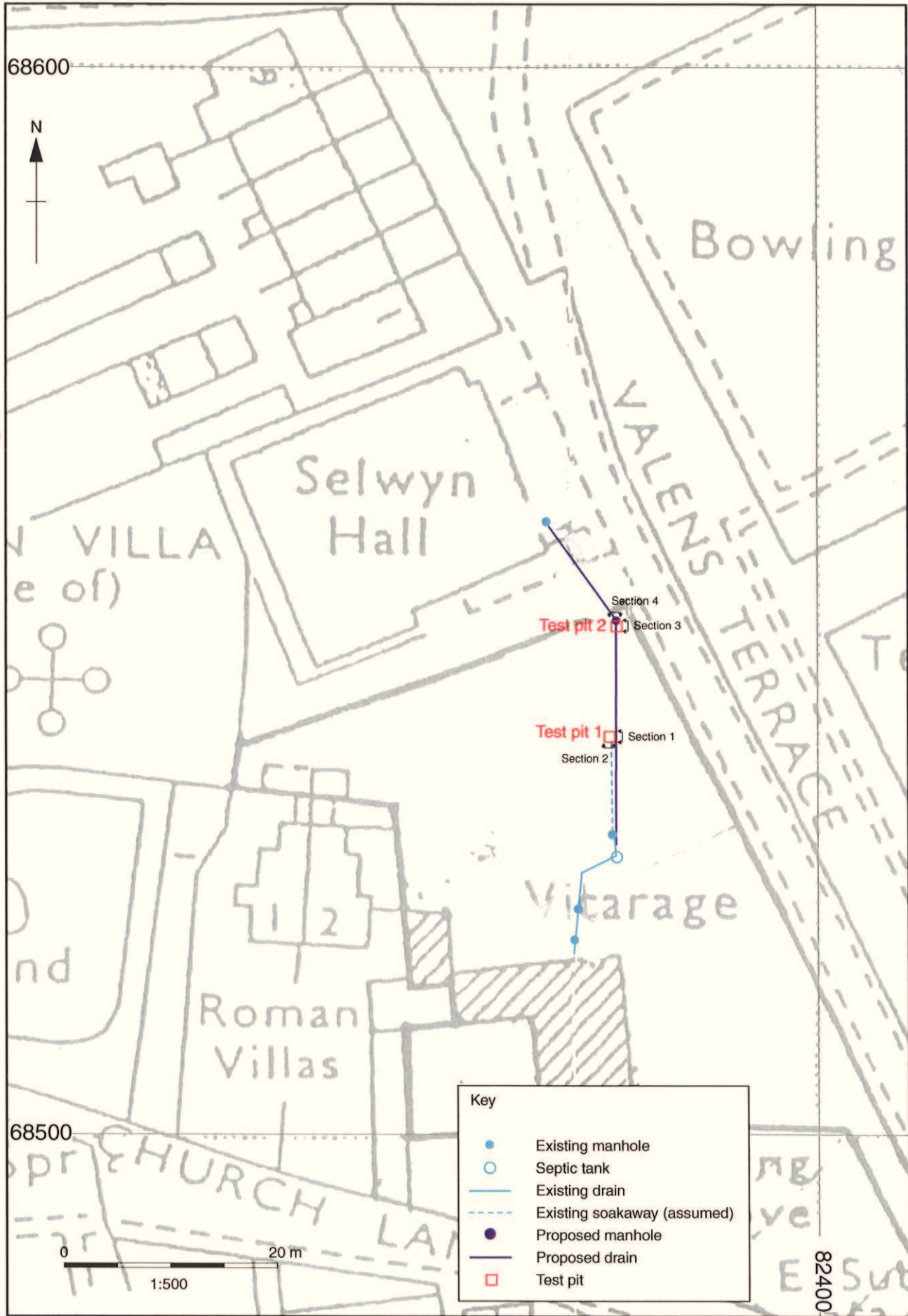


Figure 2: Box Vicarage drainage plan

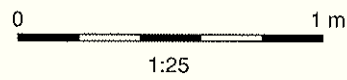
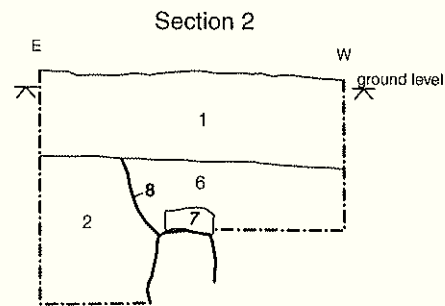
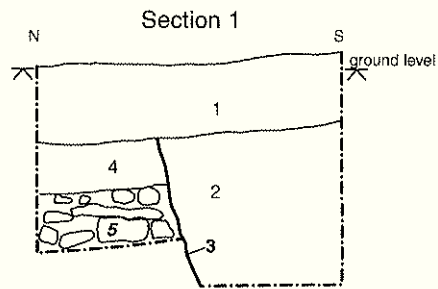
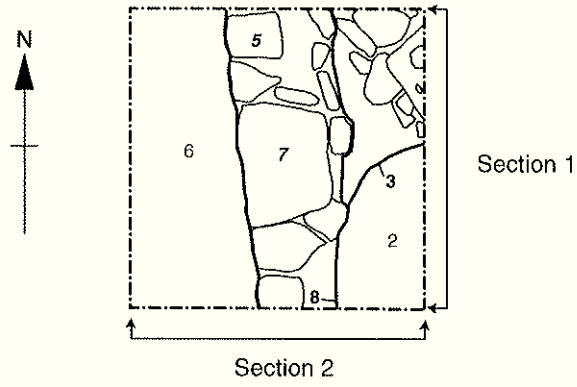


Figure 3: Test pit 1 plan and sections

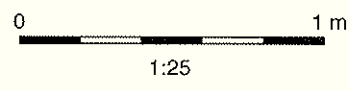
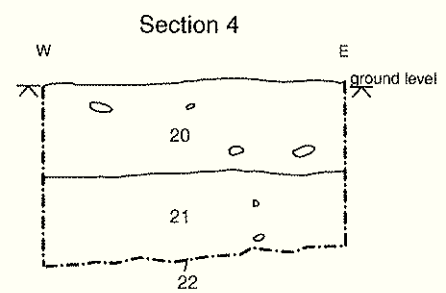
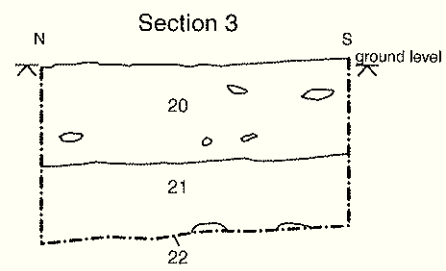
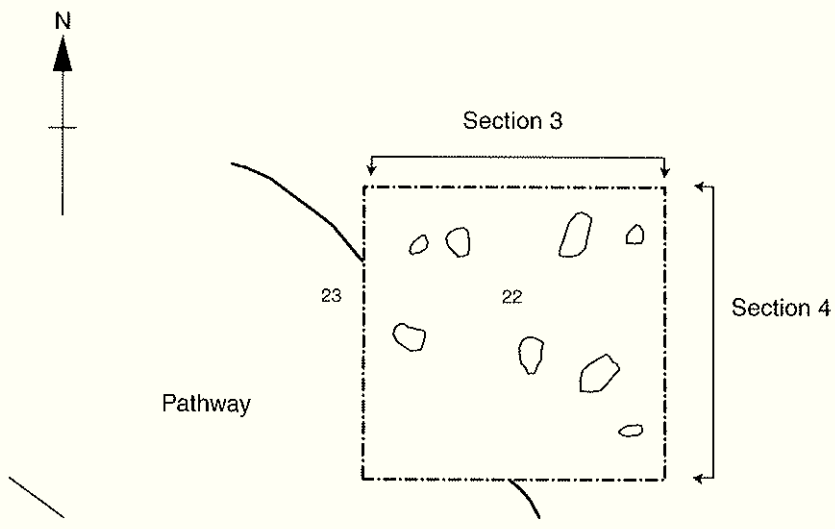


Figure 4: Test pit 2 plans and sections



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