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St. Lawrence's Church,
Appleton, Oxon

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

NGR SP 4440 0155

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

September 1995

ST. LAWRENCE'S CHURCH, APPLETON, OXON
NGR SP 4440 0155
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

1. SUMMARY

Excavations for a cesspool and associated drains to the NW of St. Lawrence's Church revealed a soil cut by a NE-SW aligned ditch (possibly the original boundary of the medieval churchyard), and a stone drain which services the western end of the church.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a watching brief during July 1995 at this church in the village of Appleton, Oxon. Appleton is situated some 8 km to the SW of Oxford, a little to the NW of the A420 Faringdon road (Fig 1).

In January 1995 a planning application was submitted by this church to the Vale of the White Horse District Council for permission to excavate and install an underground cesspool and drain in the church grounds. An archaeological watching brief on the excavations was required as a condition of the planning consent (in accordance with PPG 16), owing to the presence of known sites of archaeological interest in the vicinity (see below). The work was undertaken to the N of the church, at the end of Church Road.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The settlement of Appleton has its origins in the Anglo-Saxon period, and is mentioned in Domesday Book. St. Lawrence's Church dates to the 12th century, and in common with many Norman churches, may have been sited on an earlier Saxon building.

The church consists of a chancel, N chapel, nave and N aisle with a W tower as well as N and S porches. The development of the building is rather obscure but the N arcade is probably of 12th century date, with the chancel perhaps rebuilt in the 13th century. The W tower was built in the 15th century. The S porch is an early 16th century addition. The N aisle was rebuilt and the N chapel added probably in the 17th century. The N porch is probably an 18th century addition. The church has been slightly restored in modern times.

Immediately SW of the church is Appleton Manor, a building principally of 16th century date but containing important 12th century structural elements, ie of similar date to the earliest extant work in the church. The house is surrounded on three sides by an earthwork moat, the NW side of which is no longer visible. The NE arm of the moat runs parallel to the SW boundary of the churchyard within

10 m of the W tower of the church. A further moated site, at Tubney Manor Farm, lies only just over 0.5 km distant to the SE.

The underlying geology of the site is clay, and the present surface level of the churchyard lies at approximately 90 m OD.

4. METHODOLOGY

The cesspool was excavated with a 360° machine. The pit measured 3.15 m square with a depth of 4 m and is situated 15 m north-west of the church at the end of Church Road.

The drain run extended north from the north-west corner of the church to the cesspool. It was excavated by hand by the contractors to an average depth of c 0.70 m.

All intrusive work was observed and detailed in written and drawn records as well as on colour slides and monochrome film. All spoil heaps were searched for finds.

5. RESULTS (Figs 2 and 3)

The earliest deposit revealed was the natural subsoil, layer 107, a tenacious light yellow clay with blue-grey clay mottling and occasional orange sand patches. This was seen in the section and plan view of the cesspool excavation.

Overlying layer 107 was layer 106, a friable mid grey brown sandy clay with occasional small limestone fragments, up to 0.22 m deep. Cutting layer 106 to the SW of the cesspool excavation was a NE-SW aligned linear feature 105. This feature was 0.60 m deep, at least 1.10 m wide and was visible in the NE and SW facing sections. Cut 105 was filled by two sandy clay layers (104 and 103) and sealed by deposit 102, a tenacious light yellow sandy clay with patches of mid grey sandy clay. This layer was generally only c 0.06 m thick, but over the fill of the ditch attained a maximum thickness of c 0.40 m.

Overlying layer 106 within the service cut was layer 101. This was only identifiable as a layer separate from 106 due to it being separated from 106 by layer 102 in the area of the cesspool excavation.

Cutting layer 101 within the drain run was structure 109, a stone culvert. This was a N-S orientated limestone drain comprising four courses of rough hewn limestone (average size 0.12 x 0.12 x 0.02 m) either side of and capped by larger (average size 0.35 x 0.24 x 0.04 m) coarse limestone slabs. The culvert was 0.40 m wide, 0.30 m deep and had no bonding material.

Layer 101 and layer 108 (the fill of the construction cut for the stone drain) were both truncated by deposit 100, the make-up and surface of the existing roadway.

6. FINDS

Two sherds of pottery were recovered from the site. One sherd from deposit 103 is part of a tripod pitcher base and dates from the 12th-13th century. The other, from deposit 106, was in a coarse sandy black/brown fabric possibly of middle Iron Age date.

No other significant finds were recovered.

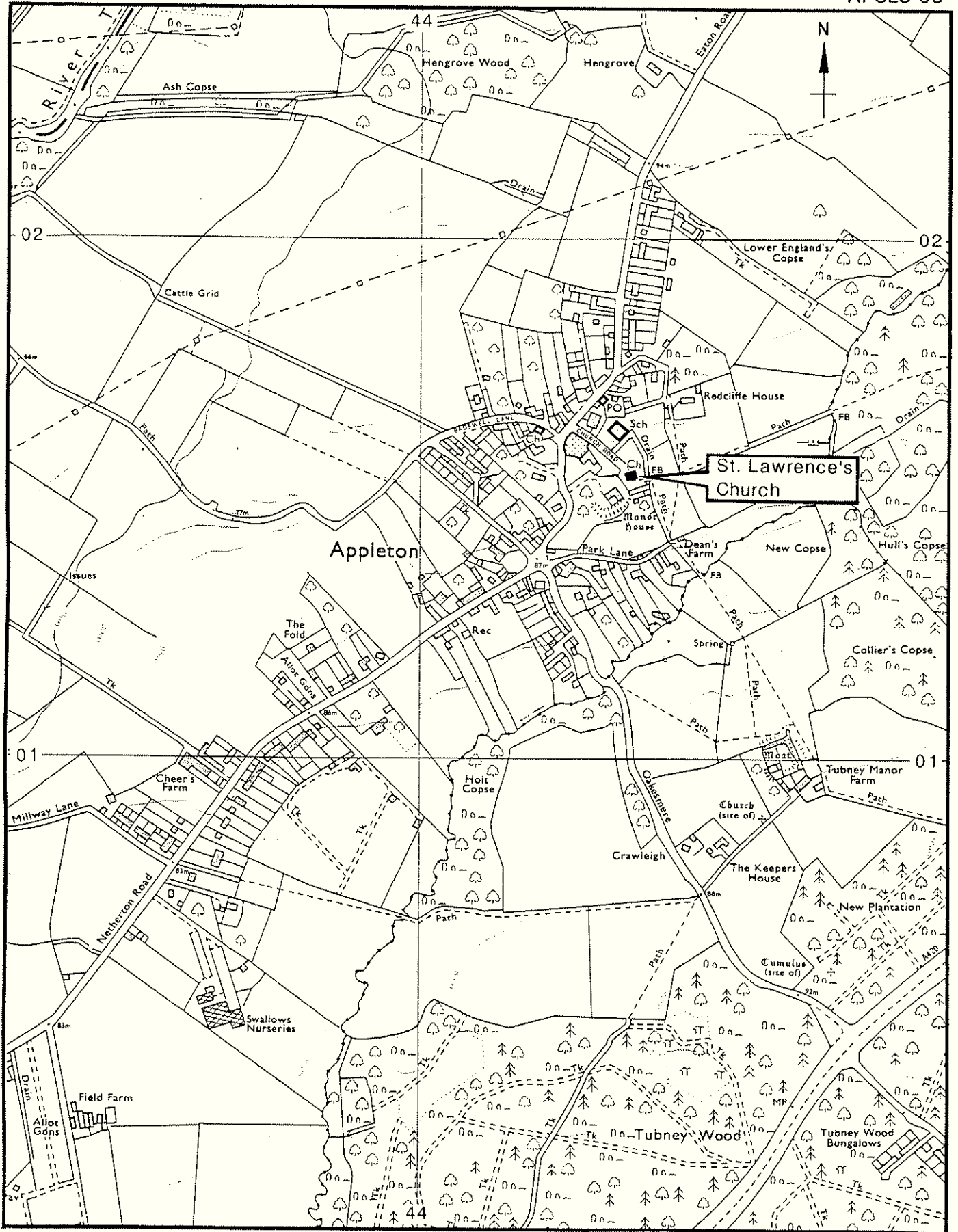
7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The nature and date of layer 106 are uncertain. It may have been the topsoil at the time of the excavation of ditch 105, and had probably accumulated over a considerable period of time. It is uncertain if this layer had ever been subject to agricultural activity. The single sherd contained within this layer was relatively unabraded, which might suggest that the layer had not been ploughed. If so, however, the presence of this sherd might suggest prehistoric settlement somewhere in the vicinity of the site. The character of the fabric of this sherd is such, however, that its date is not absolutely certain. It is just possible that it should be assigned to the mid-late Saxon period.

Cut 105 is a boundary ditch. It is on a similar alignment to that of the northern boundary of the churchyard as it existed until about the middle of the present century, when the churchyard was extended to the N. The alignment of this boundary, c SW-NE, is perpetuated in a short length of boundary NW of the church and in another boundary running NE from the stream which forms the eastern boundary of the churchyard. The boundary would or could have connected with the NW corner of the Manor House moat. It is probable that ditch cut 105 represents an earlier version of this boundary, for which the single sherd of 12th-13th century pottery suggests, but does not prove, a medieval date. 105 may have been the original northern boundary of the churchyard. After the accumulation of fills the feature was deliberately levelled with 102, consisting of redeposited natural subsoil, possibly spoil from grave digging. It is however uncertain when this levelling took place, whether immediately prior to the construction of the existing Church Road or earlier.

The orientation of the stone culvert 109 suggests that it may have been the same feature as one observed adjacent to the W tower of the church. This feature presumably served to drain rainwater away from the tower. The style of construction might suggest that the drain was contemporary with the tower (15th century), but a later date is as likely.

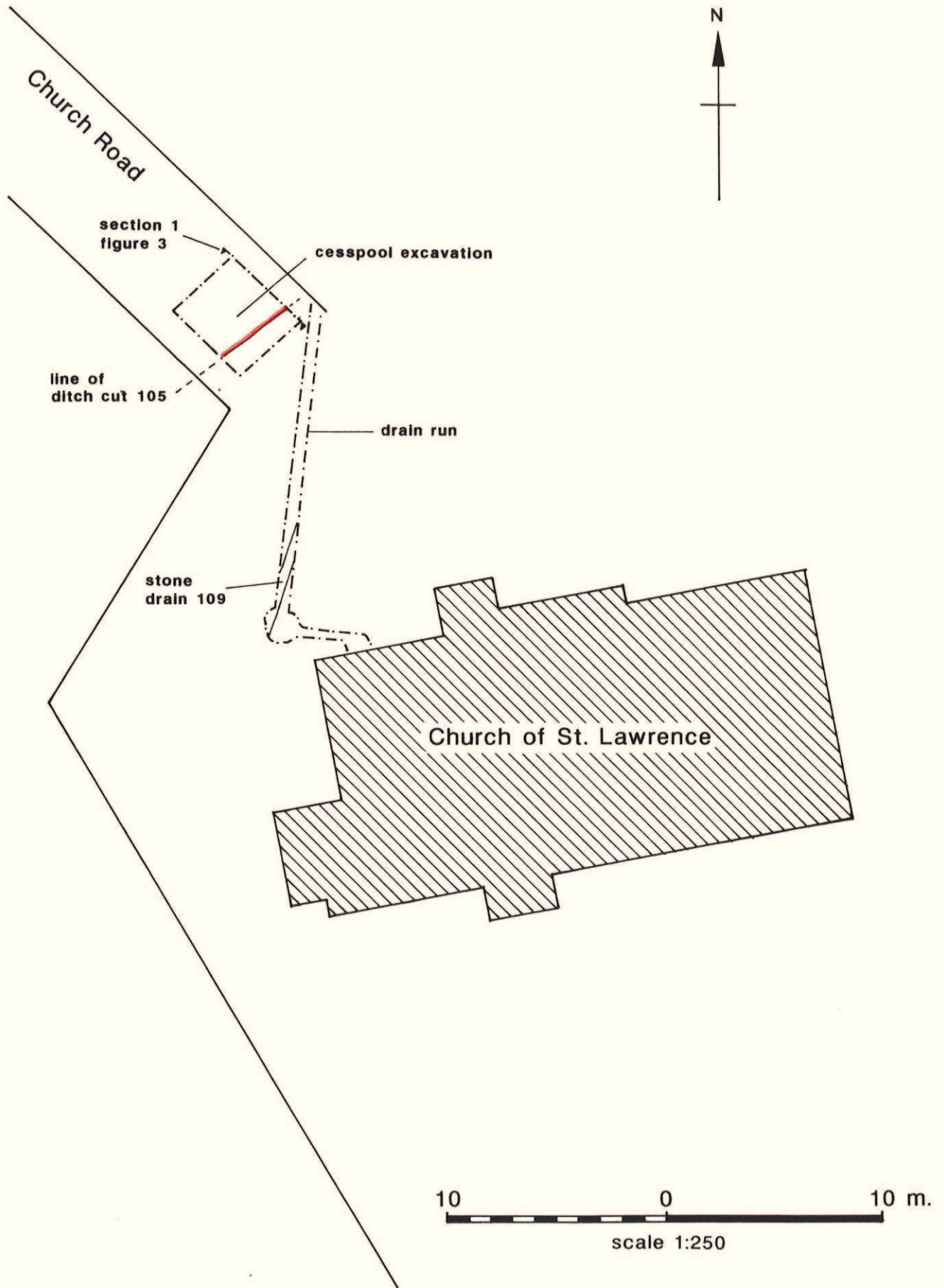
R.Brown
O.A.U
August 1995



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scale 1:10 000

SP 40 SW



site plan

figure 2

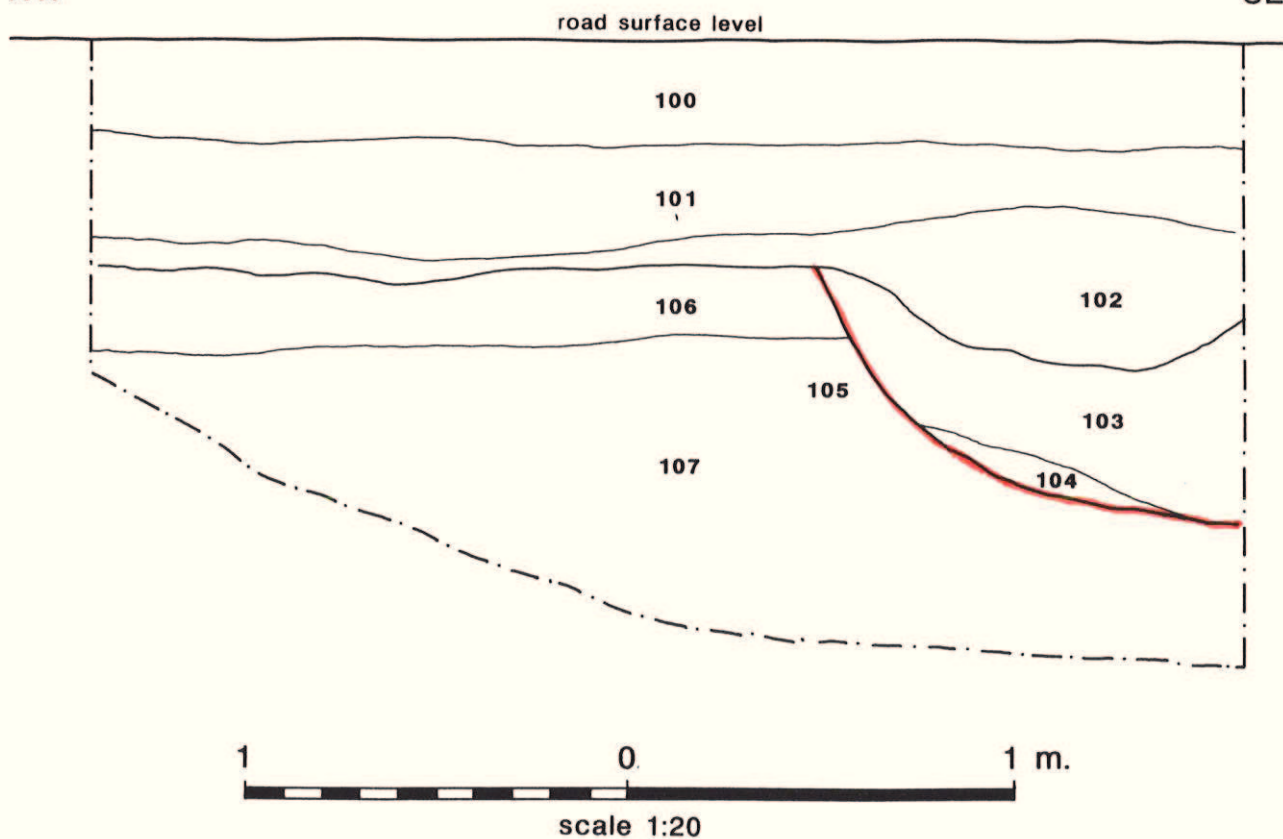
APPENDIX: TABLE OF CONTEXT INFORMATION

CTX	TYPE	COMMENTS
100	Deposit	Existing Church Road surface and make-up.
101	Deposit	Buried (truncated) topsoil
102	Deposit	Redeposited natural, purposeful infilling of ditch (105)
103	Deposit	Naturally accumulated fill of (105)
104	Deposit	Primary fill of ditch (105)
105	Cut	Ditch cut
106	Deposit	Sandy clay subsoil
107	Layer	Natural clay
108	Deposit	Construction cut infill for (109)
109	Structure	Stone drain
110	Cut	Construction cut for (109)

section 1

NW

SE



Appendix: Table of Context Information and section 1

figure 3



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