

Oxford Transport

Rose Cottage, Church Lane, Burford, Oxfordshire

NGR SP 2528 1230

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Oxford Archaeological Unit

February 2001

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Summary

In January 2001, Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief in the garden of Rose Cottage, Burford, Oxfordshire. Two east-west aligned ditches were observed during the watching brief, as well as a localised deposit of large, unworked limestone blocks.

Introduction (Figs 1 and 2)

Permission had been granted by West Oxfordshire District Council for the construction of a two-storey dwelling in the garden of Rose Cottage, Burford, Oxfordshire. Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological deposits, a condition for an archaeological watching brief was attached to the permission, in line with PPG16 and local plan policy.

The site is located at c.102m OD, and is bounded to the south and west by Church Street, to the east by Tiverton Villa and to the north by Dove Cottage. The geology is alluvium, overlying gravelly limestone with patches of clay. Prior to development, the site was the residential garden of Rose Cottage.

2 Background

The archaeological potential of the development site was primarily due to its location within the historic core of Burford. It lies to the south of the church of St John the Baptist, the oldest existing parts of which date to the Norman period (these being the central tower and the west wall of the nave). The church is recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086, and is likely to have replaced an earlier Anglo-Saxon church - the location of which is unknown but may be on or near to the site of the existing church. The Anglo-Saxon and early medieval settlement is thought to have been centred on the church and the crossing of the River Windrush - both of which lie to the north of the site - which places the development site close to the early medieval core of the town. During recent archaeological investigations carried out opposite Rose Cottage, to the south of Church Lane, medieval and post medieval pits were recorded (Thames Valley Archaeological Service, 1999). Some Anglo Saxon pottery was also retrieved, although its context is unclear. Other medieval finds have been recorded at Warwick Hall, just to the north of Rose Cottage, and at several locations along Church Lane.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

4 Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken by means of periodic inspection visits; all digging was undertaken by mechanical excavator.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil description utilised standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (*Figs 2, 3, 4 and 5*)

Prior to the excavation of the strip foundation trenches for the new building, the topsoil was reduced across the whole site to a maximum depth of 0.3 m, which did not impact upon the interface between the topsoil and the underlying deposit (3).

The foundations were then excavated and revealed a stratigraphic sequence comprising clay natural (1) overlain by a c0.50 m layer of limestone gravel (2). Both these deposits were cut by an east-west aligned ditch (8) of considerable depth (c1.9m+ from the reduced ground surface) which had a V-shaped profile and measured approximately 1.4 m wide at the top, and 0.22 m wide at the base (Fig. 5). The primary fill of the ditch was predominantly re-deposited natural clay (9) and was overlain by a mid-grey silty clay (10). The upper fill (11) was similar in composition to 10, but contained a high concentration of charcoal. Due to the restricted nature of the strip foundation trenches, there was not a sufficient quantity of the deposits exposed to provide an adequate sample without undermining the trenches. As a result, no further evidence regarding the possible function of the ditch could be recovered.

Ditch 8 was sealed by a deposit of mid-light brown silty clay with c.5-10% gravel inclusions (3). The depth of this deposit varied and appeared to be deeper to the north of the site (c0.5 m) than it was to the south (c0.25 m). The limited nature of the development, and the similarity of this deposit and the fills of Ditch 6 (see below), made characterisation of this deposit problematic. Despite this, it was tentatively interpreted as a disturbed alluvial layer (post-medieval finds were apparent throughout the deposit, but may be residual as the site has been utilised as a garden).

Ditch 6 appeared to cut the 'alluvial' deposit and the upper fill of Ditch 8. The similarity of the fills (4 and 7) and the 'alluvial' deposit (3) made this difficult to establish with any degree of certainty. The ditch was approximately 0.9 m in depth and 3.12 m wide. No finds were recovered and no obvious function was apparent.

In addition to the two ditches, a localised deposit of unworked and apparently uncoursed, stone blocks (12) was recorded in the north-west corner of the footprint of the new building, within a matrix of sandy clay (13), (Fig. 4). This was initially thought to be a wall footing, as the southern limit of the stones appeared to form an east-west aligned face. However, during recording, it became apparent that the stone was not mortared and there were large voids between some of the blocks. The size and dimensions of the stones also seemed to suggest some function other than a foundation. The larger of the stone blocks was c1 m x 0.80 m x 0.60 m, and several similarly sized stone blocks were recorded. The removal of the stones was carefully monitored, but the extent of the deposit appeared to lie within the confines of the foundation trenches. Although no obvious cut was apparent, the deposit of stones appeared to truncate both ditches.

Despite the apparent localised nature of this deposit, a test pit (c2 m²) excavated to the north of the foundations revealed further stone blocks. These lay within a mid-dark grey silty clay, and were apparent to a depth of c2.3 m. Whilst the dimensions of these stones were considerably smaller than those observed to the south (c0.25 m x 0.14 m x 0.1 m), and they were noticeably less concentrated (making up c15% of the deposit), it is possible that the deposit observed within the test pit, and the deposit of large stones observed in the strip foundations, are part of the same phase of activity (see below).

Several blocks of worked stone - some of which were probably elements of window tracery - were observed within the fabric of the dry stone wall surrounding the garden, and possibly originated from one of the phases of church refurbishment. The dry stone wall was demolished during the groundwork and the worked stone photographed. It is possible that these pieces of masonry were damaged, or not of sufficient quality for use in the refurbishment, and as a result were discarded and later used in the dry stone wall. Given that traces of mortar were apparent on some of the re-used masonry, it seems likely that these were damaged pieces rather than poor quality ones. However, the date for construction of the dry stone wall is not known.

6 Finds (*Identification by Paul Booth, OAU*)

Very few firmly stratified finds were recovered during the watching brief; those that were are detailed below:

One sherd of Oxford Colour Coated Ware was recovered from the upper fill of Ditch 8 (context 11), which dates the ditch to no earlier than 3rd to 4th century AD. Although it should be stressed that this is by no means a definitive date as it is based upon a single sherd (probably from the stem base of a bowl).

Two post-medieval pot sherds were recovered from the matrix surrounding the large stone blocks (context 13) and are probably no earlier than 18th century.

A relatively large quantity of post medieval material within the disturbed 'alluvial' deposit was observed but not retained.

7 Environmental results

No environmental soil samples were taken due to the restrictive nature of the strip foundation trenches.

8 Discussion

The function and date of the ditches observed during the watching brief are unclear. Ditch 8 was of particular interest given the unusual deposition of the fills. All three fills (9, 10 and 11) appear to have been deposited from the northern edge of the ditch (Fig 5), which may suggest that the feature has been deliberately backfilled. Alternatively, the unusual deposition of the fills may suggest that the ditch had an associated bank along its northern edge which had subsequently eroded and was the source of the fills within ditch 8.

Given the limited nature of the groundwork for this development, no definitive conclusions could be drawn regarding the date of the two ditches observed within the strip foundations. It is possible that ditches 8 and 6 respectively relate to the medieval and post-medieval features recorded during the recent excavations to the south of Church Lane, and that the Roman pottery recovered is residual. It is also possible that the ditch is Roman in origin, although the dating evidence is minimal. Without further evidence of the extent of the ditches, their date and function is unclear.

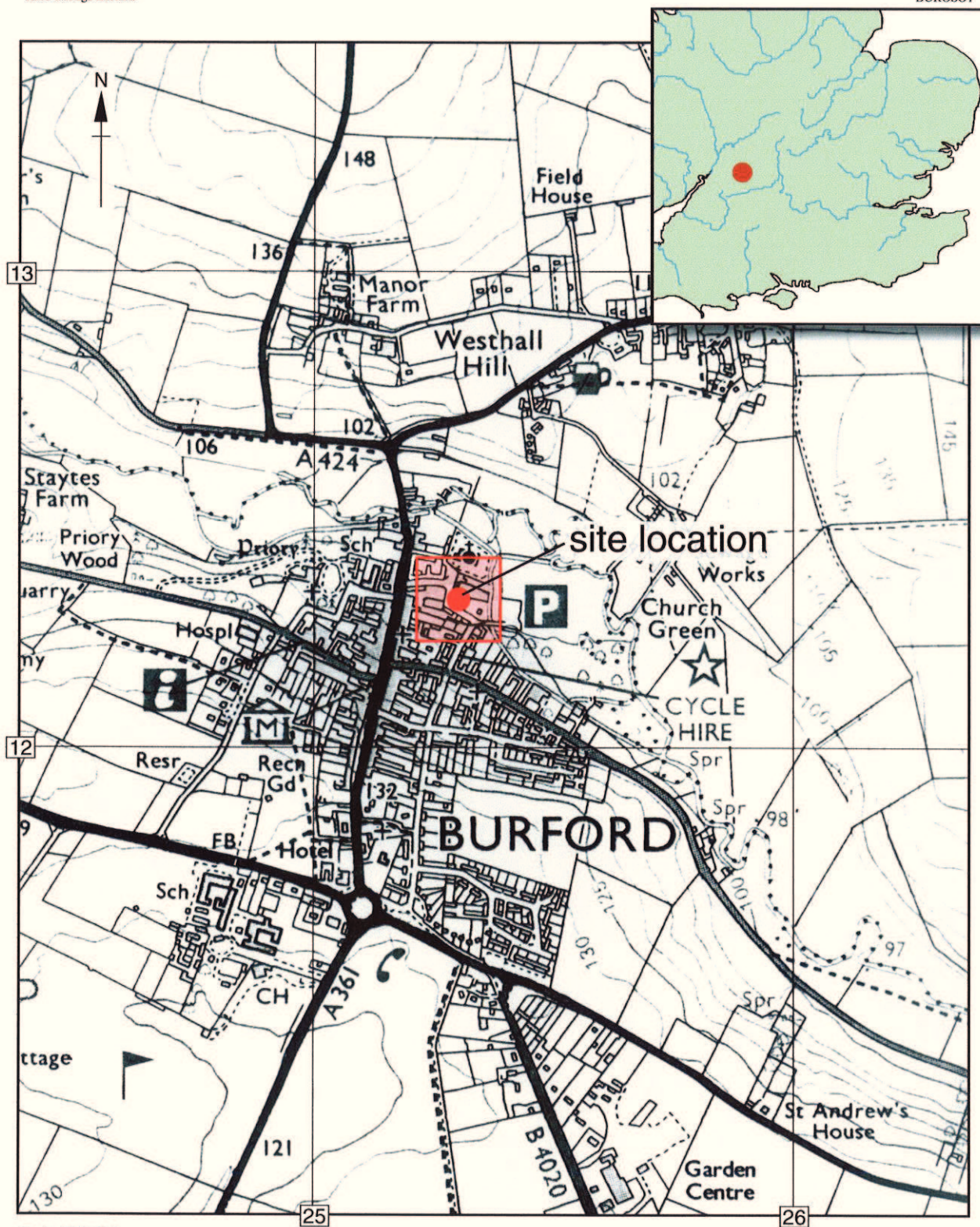
With regard to the deposit of large stone blocks, one possible interpretation is that this is quarried stone originally intended for use during the refurbishment of the church, but was never used. The date for this deposit is tenuous, as it is based on only two sherds of post-medieval pottery recovered from the matrix of sandy clay (13).

The stone within the deposit revealed by the test pit, whilst not as concentrated or large as the stone observed to the south, also attests to a general spread of unworked stone, particularly to the west of the site. Whilst an interpretation of these deposits is problematic - given that the extent of the stone within the test pit was not observed - it is possible that the site was utilised as a masons yard during one of the phases of refurbishment at the church. It is tentatively suggested that this may have been associated with the refurbishment which occurred in the 18th century, following the collapse of the spire and subsequent damage to the north chapel in 1707 (Pevsner, 1974) - possibly the origin of the 'window tracery'. However, this suggestion is based on the tenuous dating evidence from the matrix surrounding the large stone blocks.

References.

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

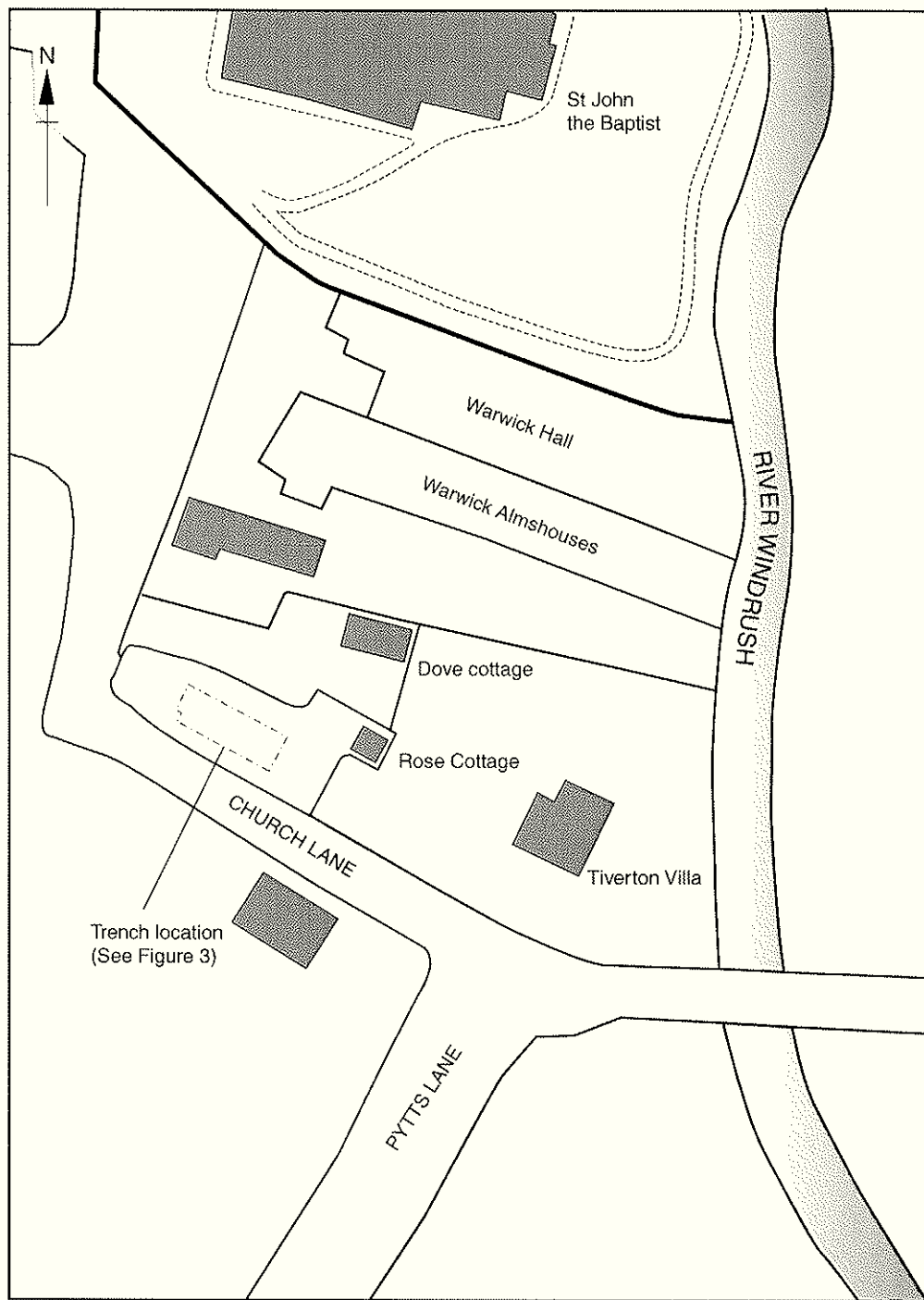
Pevsner, N 1974 *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (Penguin Books Ltd, 1974)



Scale 1:12,500

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Figure 1: Site location.



Scale 1:1000

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Figure 2 : Location of strip foundations.

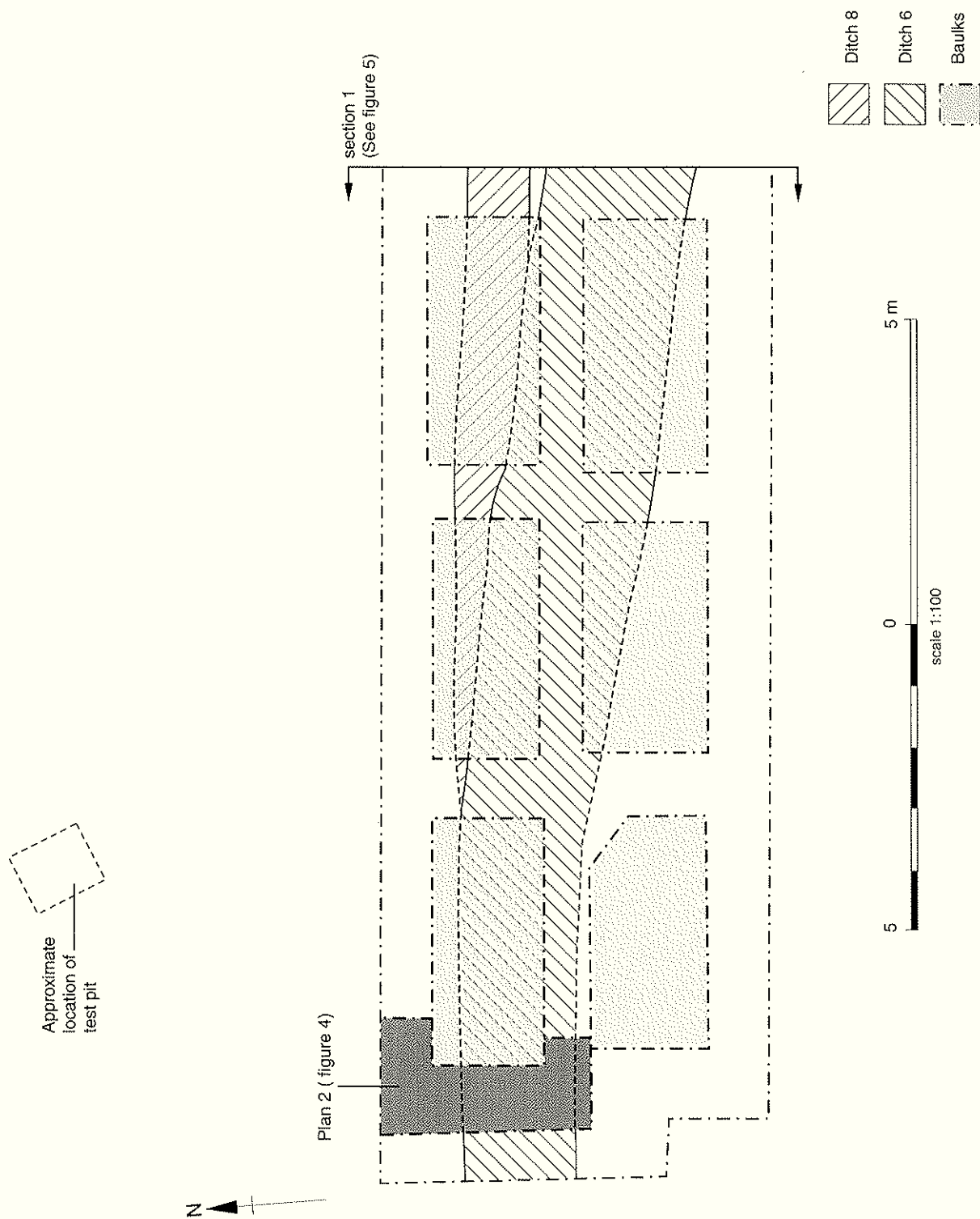


Figure 3 : Plan 1.

Figure 4 : Plan 2

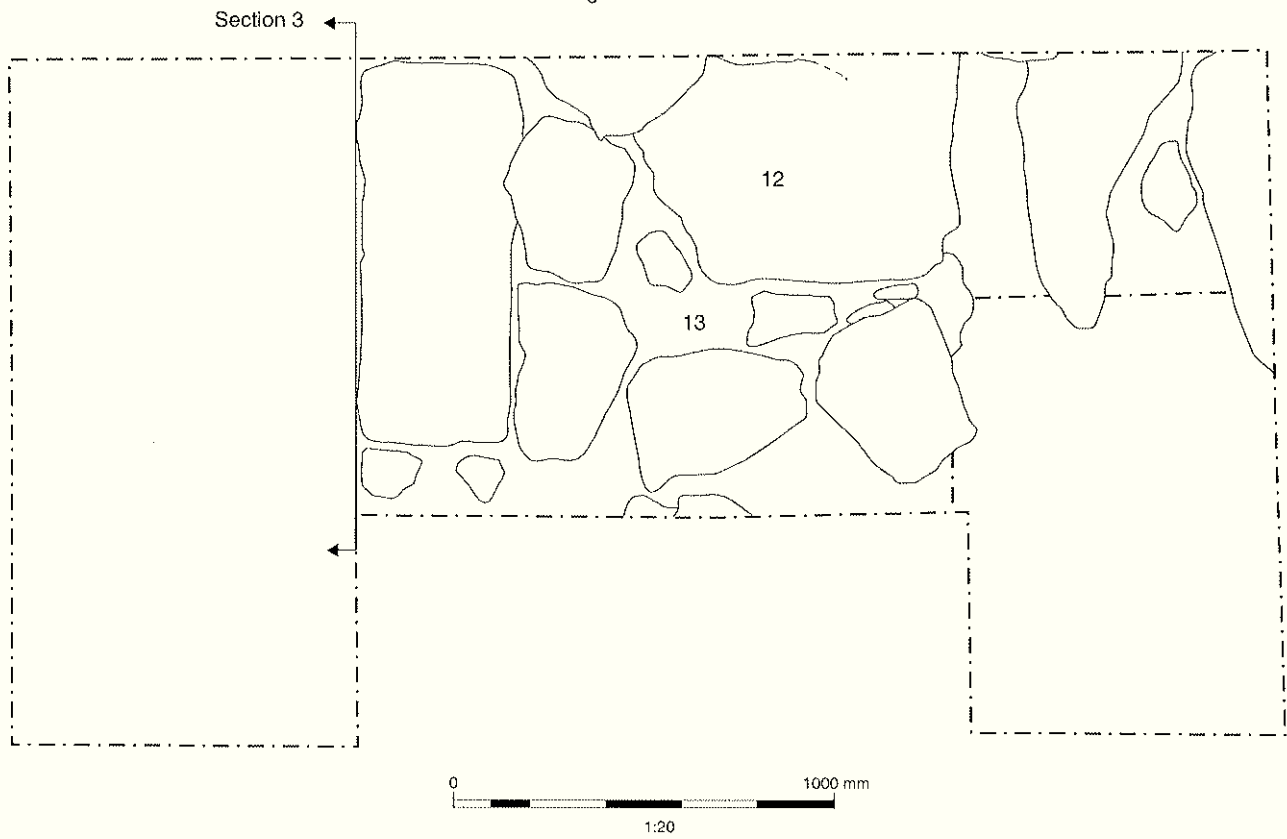


Figure 4 : Section 3

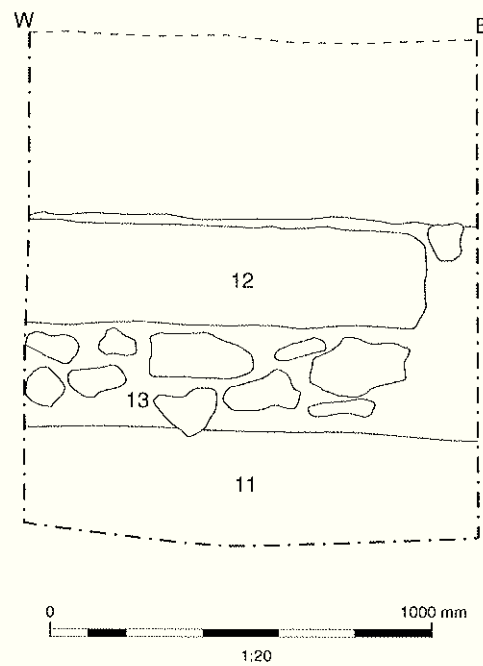
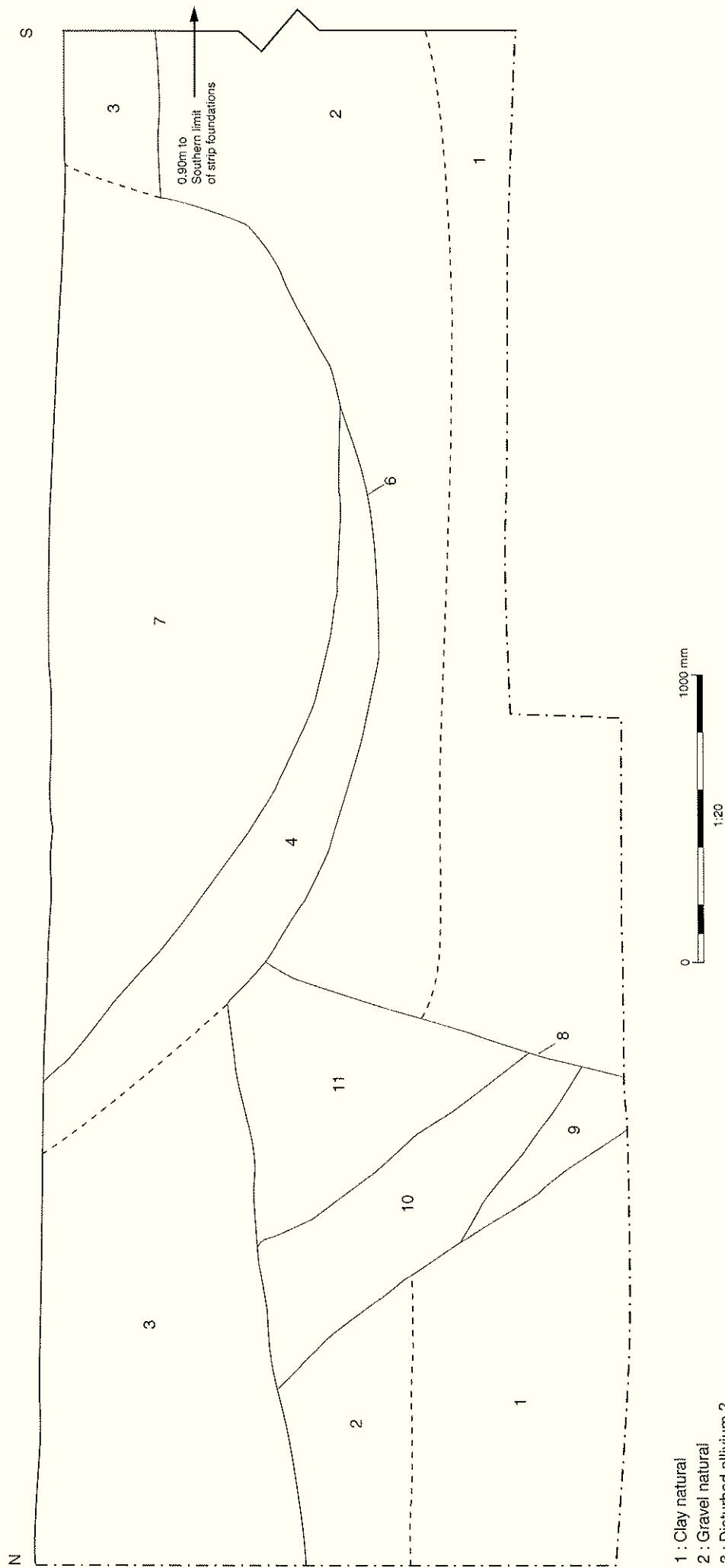


Figure 4 : Plan 2, section 3.



- 1 : Clay natural
- 2 : Gravel natural
- 3 : Disturbed alluvium ?
- 4 : Primary ditch fill - Redeposited gravel/alluvium
- 6 : East-West ditch cut
- 7 : Top fill of ditch
- 8 : East-West ditch cut
- 9 : Mid grey blue clay
- 10 : Mid grey silty clay
- 11 : Mid-dark grey clayey silt

Figure 5 : Section 1.



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