

PSS Construction Limited

1 THE CAUSEWAY, STEVENTON, OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SU 4175 9195

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Oxford Archaeological Unit

July 2001

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Summary

In May 2001, Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook a watching brief at 1 The Causeway, Steventon. Two limestone wall footings and a brick-lined well were observed during the watching brief, as were two anomalous deposits of uncertain date.

1. Introduction

Permission has been granted by Vale of the White Horse District Council to demolish the existing dwelling at 1 The Causeway, Steventon and to erect two four bedroom dwellings. Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological features, a condition for an archaeological watching brief was attached to the permission in line with PPG16 and Policy HE19 of the District Local Plan.

The development site lies on the south western corner of the junction of The Causeway and the B4017 at Steventon, Oxfordshire (NGR 4715 9195). The site is approximately 0.05ha in area and lies at c 62 m OD. At present the site comprises the existing dwelling and a garden. The geology is alluvium overlying gault clay.

2 Background

The development site lies within the historic core of the medieval settlement of Steventon. There is an entry in the Domesday Survey of 1086 which reads "*The King holds Stivetune now in the Hundred of Ock in demense. Harold held it*" and it seems likely that the village originated in the late Anglo-Saxon period.

The proposed development lies immediately to the south of The Causeway, an upstanding paved linear earthwork that dates to at least 1418 and in all probability prior to then. The Causeway begins at the Church and continues through the village on to what was once moorland on the east side, where it ends rather abruptly, although it is possible that it originally continued as far as Sutton Courtenay. By tradition, The Causeway was constructed by the monks, then resident at the Priory, to provide a route from the village to the Church in times of flood. It was certainly used for this purpose in 1947 when the entire village was flooded. An inscription recorded in the Church states that "*Two sisters, by ancient report, gave a yard of land, one acre of meadow, four swathes, one tailor's yard, one close, and a copps, to the maintenance of the causeway of Steventon.*"

The site is also situated at an important crossroads within the village that is shown on the Roque Map of Berkshire dating to the late 18th century.

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 separate inspection visits.

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

The existing building was demolished prior to the intrusive groundwork. The watching brief monitored the subsequent site reduction and the excavation of the strip foundations for the new buildings. Although foundations for two plots were excavated separately, the results have been presented together due to the similarity of the deposits and features observed.

General Site Reduction

The development site was reduced by approximately 0.20 m which did not impact below the construction / demolition rubble which covered the site.

Strip Foundation Trenches (Figs 2 and 3)

The general stratigraphic sequence revealed by the strip foundations comprised clay natural (1) overlain by a *c* 0.46 m thick layer of mid-blue grey silty sand and gravel alluvium (2) which was in turn overlain by a *c* 0.50 m thick layer of made ground / demolition rubble (3) (Fig. 3, Section 1).

Two anomalous deposits were observed to the west of the foundations. These comprised a mid-dark grey silty clay deposit at least 2 m wide and 0.85 m in depth (5) which appeared to overlay a mid-blue grey clay deposit (6) similar in composition to the clay natural and probably a re-deposition of the same (Fig. 3, Section 1). Deposit 5 appeared to fill a linear feature (4) although the cut was only clearly visible in the north-west corner of the southernmost plot. Deposit 5 appeared to be truncated by a limestone wall footing (7) running SE-NW across the southern plot one but terminating approximately 6 m north of the south-west corner of the plot - no return was apparent although a possible SW-NE footing (9) was observed in the southernmost foundation trench (Fig. 2). A ceramic service pipe was observed running parallel to footing 7, and *c* 0.40 m to the east of it.

A brick lined well (8) was also recorded in the westernmost trench of plot two.

All these features appeared to cut the alluvial deposit (2) and were sealed by the overlying made ground / demolition rubble.

6 Finds

As the trenches were fairly unstable and excavated below the water table, no firmly stratified finds were recovered during the watching brief. Samples of the brick work taken from the well appeared to be of a date no earlier than the late 19th century. A mortar sample was also taken from the limestone wall footing but could provide no additional information as to the date of the construction of the wall(s). No other finds were recorded.

7 Environmental results

Although full consideration was given to various sampling strategies, due to the absence of any suitable deposits and the tight constraints of the excavation, no environmental soil samples were taken.

8 Discussion

The inaccessibility of the trenches made cleaning and proper characterisation of the deposits observed problematic. It also negated the retrieval of securely stratified dating evidence from the deposits recorded and as a result the interpretations presented below are somewhat tenuous.

Although deposit 6 is similar in composition to the clay natural observed elsewhere within the foundation trenches, and is very sterile, it is unlikely to be undisturbed as it appears to overlie the alluvial deposit (2). This would suggest re-deposition but it is unclear whether the deposit is the fill of a large, unidentified feature as the extent of the deposit was not established during the groundwork.

The composition of deposit 5 was more indicative of a ditch fill and a clearly defined cut was observed to the east of section 2. While this is far from conclusive, it may suggest a ditch running SE-NW across the western side of both plots.

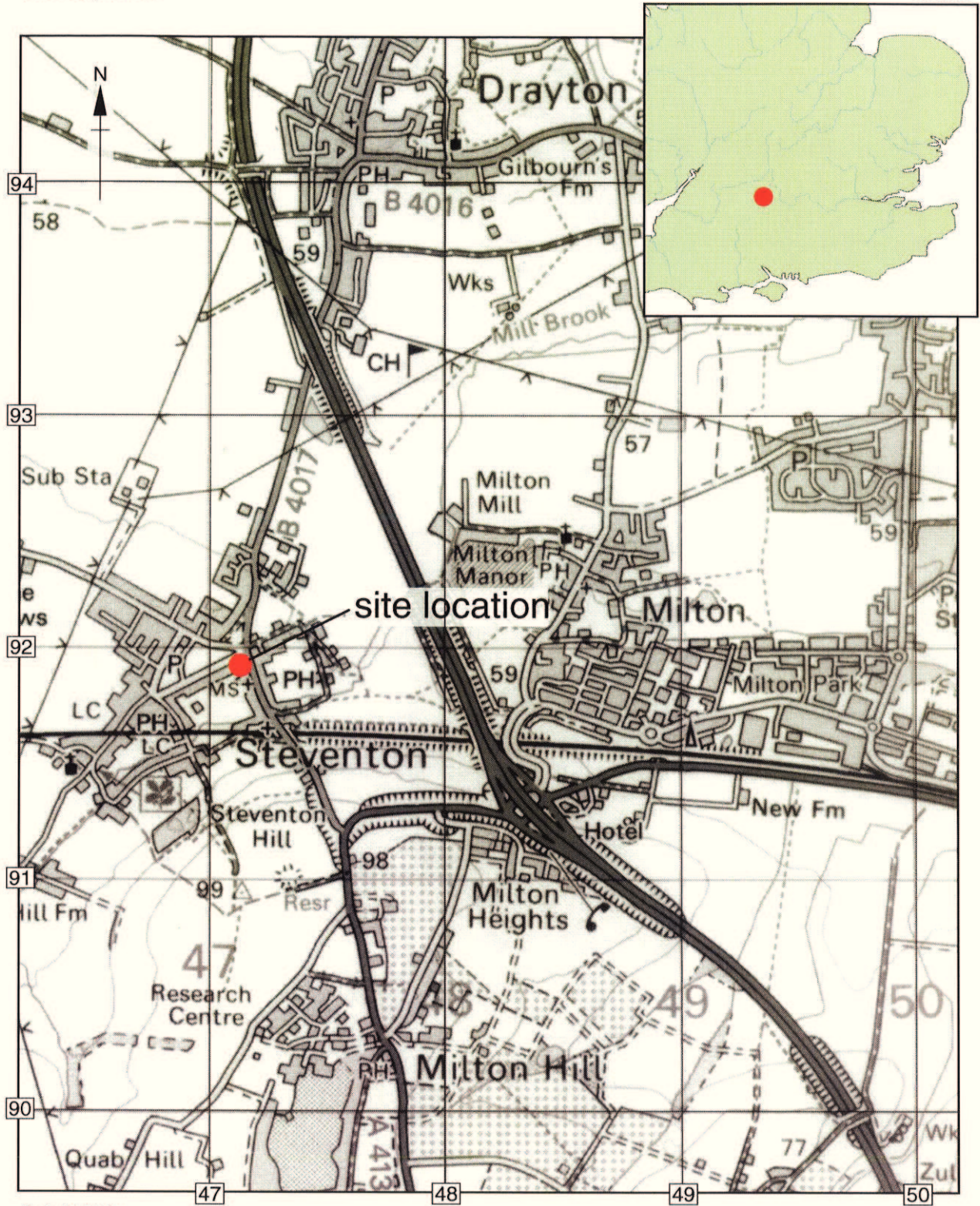
The wall footing (7) appeared to truncate deposit 5 and the alluvial deposit (2). No dating evidence was recovered although the ceramic pipe observed may suggest a 19th-century date. If this is the case it is possible that the wall and the well observed to the west of plot two are contemporary although it is possible that they represent two different phases of construction.

Although no definitive interpretations could be made during the watching brief it seems likely that the limestone wall footing and the brick lined well are the remains of a building(s) which occupied the site prior to the construction of the recently demolished building in the early 20th century.

The potential ditch (4) appears to pre-date the wall and the well but no suggestion as to its function or date can be made given the limited evidence recovered during the groundwork. It is feasible that the wall footing superseded the 'ditch' as a delineation between two plots of land although this supposition is based purely on the fact that they appear to be on the same alignment.

References.

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



Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 1: Site location.

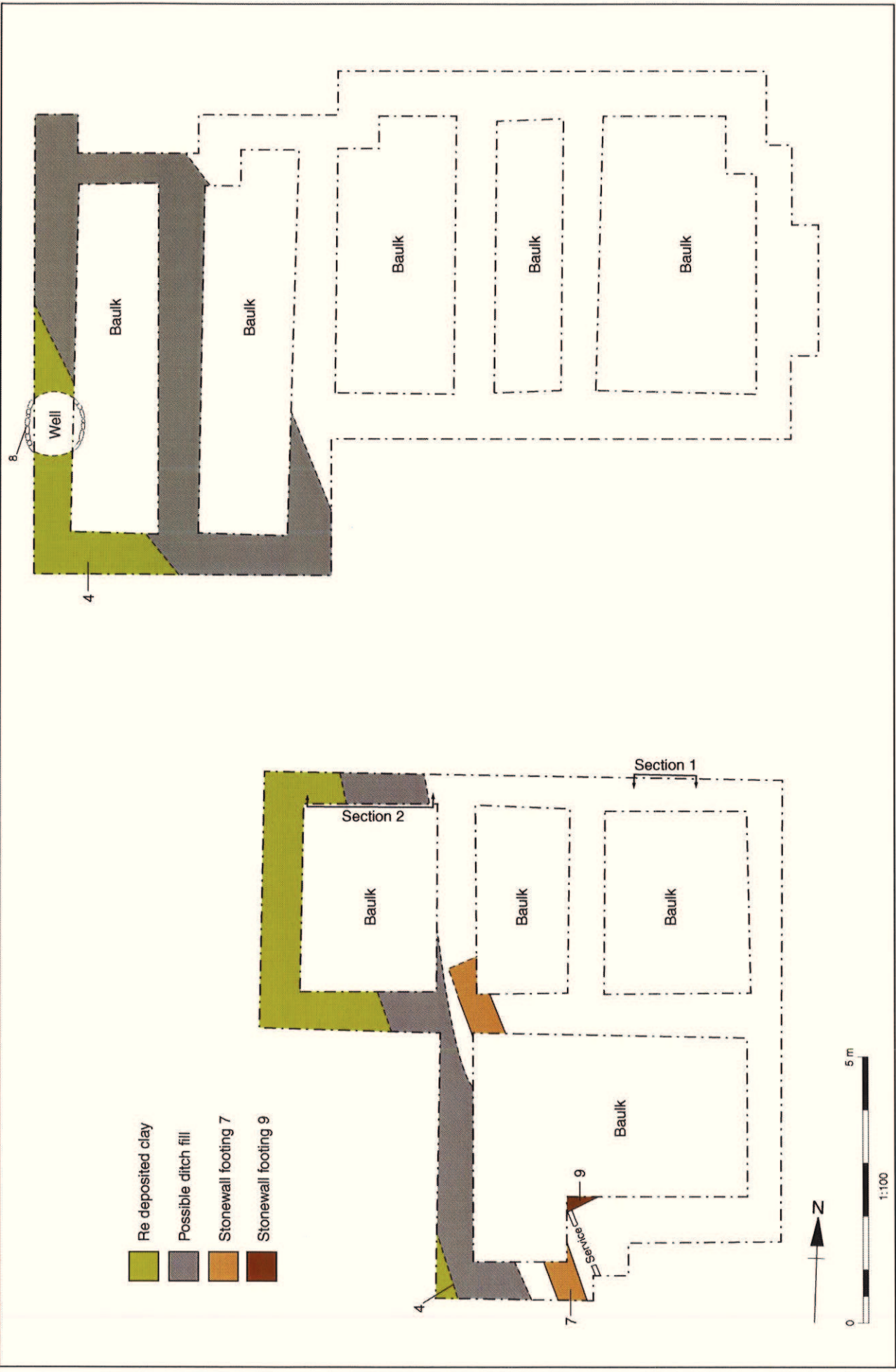


Figure 2 : Site plan.

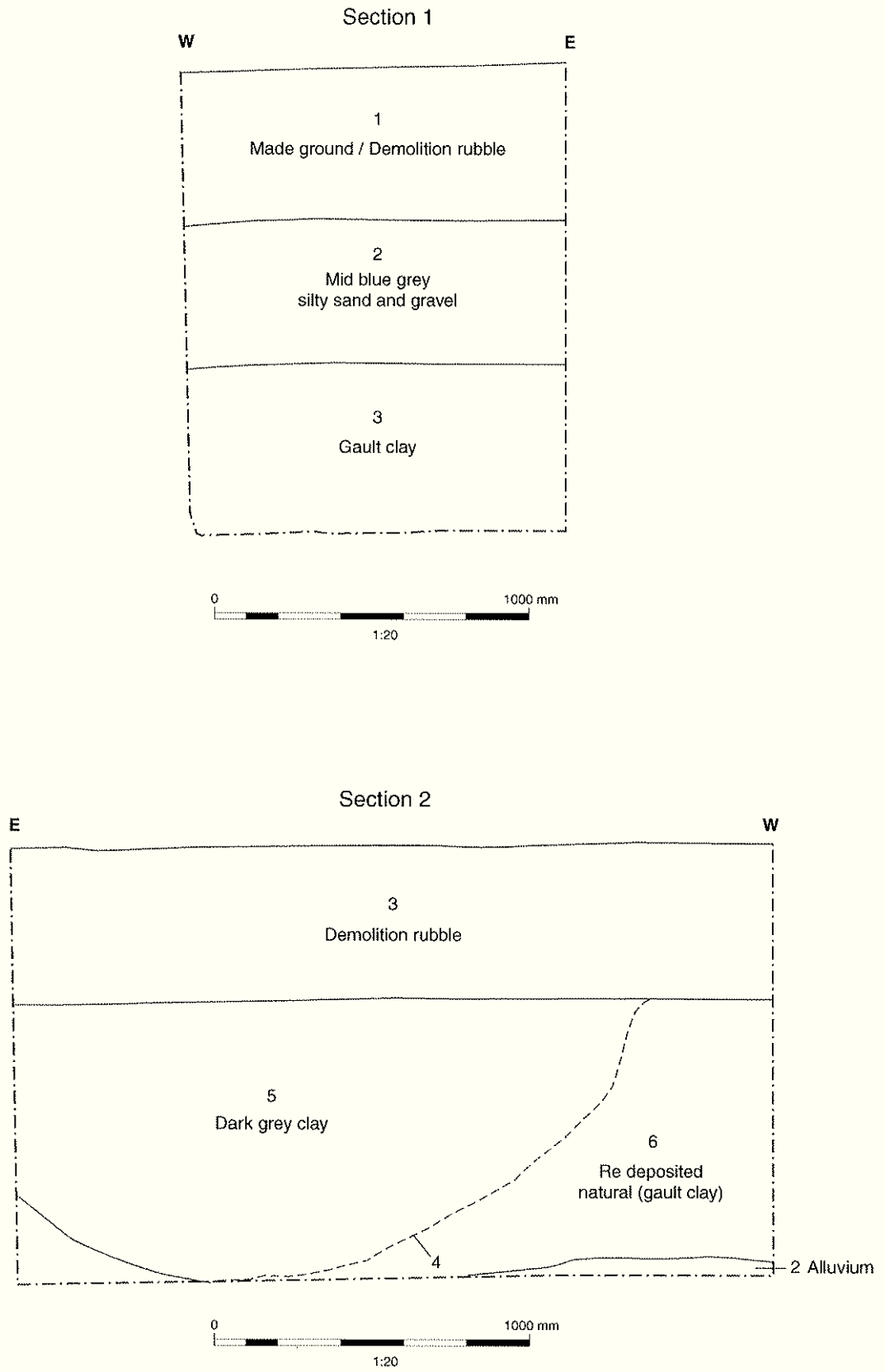


Figure 3 : Sections 1 and 2.



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