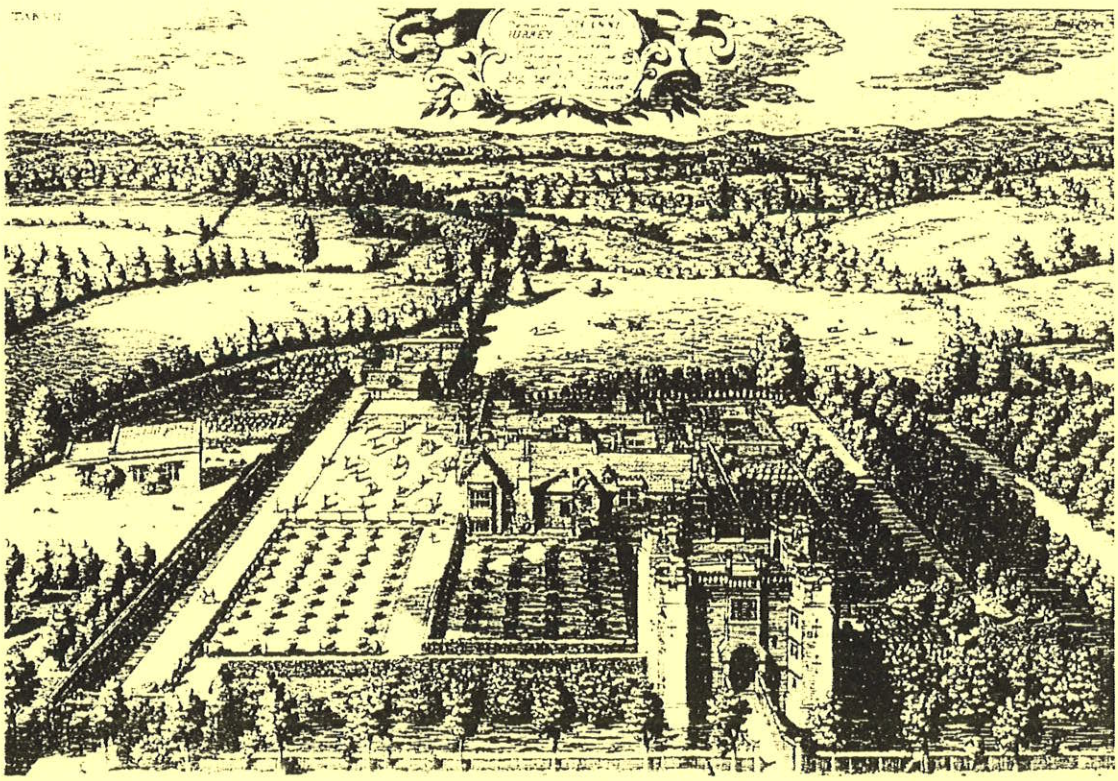
The National Trust
(Thames and Chilterns Region)

BOARSTALL TOWER, BOARSTALL, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

NGR: SP 6225 1420



Oxford Archaeological Unit
January 2000

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING DURING BUILDING WORK

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Summary

During 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Boarstall Tower, Boarstall, Buckinghamshire (NGR SP 6225 1420); this was further to a building recording exercise undertaken there during 1998 and 1999 also by the OAU. Buried foundations, upper fills of the moat, cut features and a mortar spread were identified; a substantial quantity of medieval pottery was retrieved from one cut feature. The artefactual evidence suggests that preservation of the medieval archaeology is likely to be good.

1 Introduction (Fig. 1)

The development proposal comprised the excavation of a new electricity cable trench, and substation pit. An archaeological watching brief was required in accordance with the planning consent granted under PPG 16, as the site is an area of proven archaeological interest.

The watching brief was commissioned by the National Trust. It was undertaken to a WSI agreed with the National Trust's Archaeologist, Mr Garry Marshall.

2 Background

The history of the site has been discussed in far greater detail elsewhere (Hall 1989), and thus a short summary is presented below. Boarstall Tower is the only medieval military building remaining in Buckinghamshire being constructed shortly after 1312, along with the moat, by John de Handlo. The tower is turreted at all four corners, with the two on the moat side being both shorter and wider than the two facing the garden. All the turrets are crenellated. The defensive works guard the interior of the site, in which was located the dwelling-house of the de Handlo family.

The interior of the site was also the location of Boarstall's noted 17th-century formal garden, which featured box hedges, gravel paths and *parterre*. After 1777 the garden was abandoned and gradually reverted to a field grazed by sheep and cattle. A new garden was created in 1925 by Antonio Pinzani, along romantic rather than classical lines. Today the interior of the site is grassed with various earthworks clearly visible.

It was thought likely that the watching brief could locate deposits and/or structures associated with the formal garden and also, possibly medieval, evidence of former occupation of the interior of the site.

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 cable trench, along the top of the moat, was excavated by hand to a depth of 0.50 m; the stretch running along the existing driveway to the mains connection in the road was dug by Kubota mini-digger to a depth of c. 0.75 m. The sub-station pit similarly was dug by Kubota and measured 2 m square by 2 m in depth. All excavation was undertaken by Latimers, the National Trust's contractors.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits and features 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 utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (Fig. 2)

The earliest deposit seen was 23, a mid gray silty clay loam with 2% fine subangular gravel. Along the majority of the trench it was sealed by 19, a very stony gray clay loam with 5% subangular fine-coarse gravel, and a substantial amount (40%) of unworked limestone rubble. Cutting deposit 23, and sealed by layer 19, was a possible pit 22, filled by 21. Cut 22 was difficult to define within the confines of the trench, but appeared roughly to be subcircular. Its fill, (21), was a mixed deposit of mid-dark grayish black silty clays containing a quantity of medieval pottery (see below). To the north-east the pit cut layer 20, which was very similar to 23 if slightly lighter.

The only variations from deposit 19 occurred at either end of the trench. Near to the tower this deposit was cut by modern concrete and breezeblock foundations for a wood store and an ill-defined and root-disturbed deposit of mortar; the provenance and significance of this deposit remains unknown at this time. The modern breezeblock foundation appeared to continue beyond the base of the trench, with a suggestion of red bricks replacing breezeblock and concrete at this point; however the confines of the trench were such that defining and identifying this feature was not possible. It has been suggested by the National Trust's archaeologist that this feature may represent a well associated with the 17th century formal garden, but this cannot be confirmed at this time owing to the very limited nature of the excavations. If this is the case, it would suggest that ancient features on the site have been reused as foundations.

Towards the north-east end of the trench deposit 19 was cut by a brick wall 18; this measured 0.60 m high by 0.50 m in width. This feature consisted of red unfrogged bricks, bonded with a yellow gritty mortar which was seen to contain several aluminium ties, typically measuring 0.20 x 0.08 x 0.10 m. A further brick wall numbered as 13 and measuring 0.55 m in height by 0.60 m at its base and 0.65 m at its top was seen to the north-east of this feature; this wall also was bonded with a yellow gritty mortar containing several aluminium ties. Both walls comprised six courses of bricks, the lowest of which appeared to coincide with the base of the trench, and a sequence of deposits was identified between the two. The earliest of these was 17, a mid gray stony clay loam with 5% silt and fine subangular gravel. It was sealed by 16, a light-mid gray silty clay loam with 2% silt and fine subangular gravel, 15, a mid-

dark gray stony clay loam with 2% silt and fine subangular gravel and 14, a dark gray stony silty clay loam with 5% silt and fine subangular gravel, and ultimately by grass-bearing topsoil, a mid gray silty clay loam with 2% fine subrounded silt, numbered as 1.

To the north-east of wall 13 a further sequence of deposits was identified, the earliest of which was 12, a mid gray stony clay loam with 5% silt and medium-coarse subangular gravel, sealed by 11, identical to 12 but dark gray in colour and with a similar percentage of inclusions. This underlay 10, a light-mid gray silty clay loam with 5% medium-coarse subangular gravel, which was sealed by 9 a mid-dark gray stony clay loam with 2% fine silt. This deposit also was sealed by topsoil 1, identical to that seen elsewhere.

This sequence of deposits was cut by a narrow vertical cut, 2, the base of which was not seen as it lay below base of dig for the trench, containing a modern plastic drainage pipe. Cut 2 was filled by 3 and 4, a backfilled mixture of deposits 9 and 5; all were sealed by topsoil 1. To the north-east of cut 2 a further sequence of deposits, 8, 7, 6 and 5, was identified all of which were sealed by topsoil 1. Deposit 8 was a mid gray stony clay loam with 5% silt and medium-coarse subangular gravel; 7 was very similar but a darker gray in colour and with only 2% silt. Deposit 6 was a light-mid gray silty clay loam with 5% medium silt and was sealed by 5, a mid-dark gray stony clay loam with 2% fine silt and 5% medium-coarse gravel. Deposit 5 was sealed by topsoil 1, identical to that seen elsewhere.

Excavation of the substation pit revealed an identical sequence to that seen within the cable trench at this point; as such it is not described separately.

In the trench section along the existing driveway, four deposits were identified; 24, 25, 26 and 27. All were very similar dark pinkish brown highly compacted gravelly silty clay loams. Typically they contained between 10 and 20% coarse subrounded gravel and between 20-30% small-medium pebbles; none of them produced any artefactual material and as such remain undated at this time.

6 Finds

See Appendices 1 and 2.

7 Environmental results

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

8 Discussion

The very limited nature of the excavations means that definitive conclusions are not possible; it is unclear as to whether the red brick foundations seen at the east end of the trench relate to a structure within the 17th century formal garden, although this is thought to be unlikely as they were cut from immediately below the topsoil and did

not appear to align either with the structure that appears in the vicinity on the 1695 engraving, the churchyard wall or the wall which once encircled the garden. The balance of probability on the evidence obtained during this exercise is that they are from a greenhouse, since demolished, as was indicated on site during the watching brief by the National Trust's resident gardener. Were they ancient it is thought likely that they would have been sealed by quantities both of topsoil and material scoured from the moat.

Similarly the extent and nature of the small mortar spread and possible red brick structure below the modern breezeblock wood store seen near the west end of the trench remains uncertain at this time, as is the case with the one definitive cut feature seen. The fact that this feature contained a relatively large amount of medieval pottery and some animal bone does not date it absolutely. It is possible that this material was disturbed and reburied, possibly during scouring works to the moat, and the cut feature itself may not necessarily be ancient; given this, it is not possible to say definitively that this represents the horizon at which medieval deposits begin, although it is possible. However, study of the pottery recovered indicates that abrasion of the medieval sherds is minimal and it is probable that preservation of medieval deposits on the site generally may be good. If this does represent a primary deposition then medieval deposits are in existence at a relatively shallow depth, at least in this location; having said this, conditions which exist along the top of the moat may not hold true for the rest of the site. Given the location of the trench special attention was paid to the possibility of identifying any traces of defensive works, postholes, ramparts, and form of structure etcetera, however nothing of this nature was seen.

The deposits seen during excavation within the gravelled drive were all highly compacted, with high percentages both of gravel and stone, and devoid of finds; access to the site has been along the same route for many years and it is at least possible that some of the deposits seen here are ancient. In the absence of any dating evidence however, such conclusions are entirely speculative.

References.

Hall 1989 *Boarstall Tower, Buckinghamshire* The National Trust.

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

APPENDIX 1

Finds excluding pottery
K. Brown

A small number of finds were recovered from three contexts, comprising animal bone, ceramic building materials (CBM), a single fragment of a clay pipe stem, shell, a heavily corroded fragment of iron sheet and stone. The number and weight of these finds are quantified by context and type in the table below. The animal bone assemblage included fragments of a pig mandible and metapodial fragment and a cattle metatarsal from the fill of feature 22. A cattle rib fragment displaying butchery marks and possible rodent gnawing and fragments of a sheep tibia and Lagomorph were recovered from layer 24. The CBM material included small brick fragments, some with mortar still attached, and 29 fragments of tile, two with peg holes. All the CBM material occurred in a sandy fabric and although no complete tiles were recovered the average thickness of the fragments was 12 mm.

Context	19		21		24		TOTAL	
Type	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)
Bone			3	181	4	38	7	219
CBM	18	678	1	36	24	940	43	1654
Clay Pipe					1	2	1	2
Iron Object					1	5	1	5
Shell	1	6	1	3			2	9
Stone	1	40			1	73	2	113
TOTAL	20	724	5	220	31	1058	56	2002

Appendix 2

The Pottery

by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 18 sherds with a total weight of 669 g. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in the table below.

All the wares were well-known types, and, where appropriate, have been recorded using the coding system employed by the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit (e.g. Mynard and Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat et al. 1994). The following fabric types were noted:

Oxford ware. *c.* L 11th – 14th century (Mellor 1994). Abundant sub-angular quartz with some rounded clay pellets and occasional polycrystalline quartz. Handmade and wheel-thrown vessels. Only jars, and no glazed vessels from this site, despite them being common elsewhere. 5 sherds, 44 g.

Brill/Boarstall Ware (MK **MC9**). *c.* AD1200-?1600 (Mellor 1994). Wheel-thrown. Hard buff, orange, pale pink, or yellow-grey fabric, sometimes with fine 'pimply' surface. Rare to common sub-angular to sub-rounded orange, clear and grey quartzite up to 0.5mm, rare subrounded to sub-angular red ironstone up to 1mm. Mottled pale to dark glossy green exterior glaze, often with copper filings. Applied rouletted strips common, sometimes in red-firing clay, rosettes, spirals also occur. Usually 'three-decker' or baluster jugs, although puzzle jugs also known. Jars, bowls, etcetera occur at the end of the medieval period. Later vessels are plainer, and include the full range of medieval and early post-medieval vessel types. 10 sherds, 576 g.

Red Earthenware (MK **TLMS12**). 16th – 17th century. Hard-fired, slightly sandy red earthenware with a pale core and orange-red surfaces and a pale olive-green to clear glaze. Probably a product of the Brill/Boarstall kilns. Range of utilitarian vessels typical of such industries. 3 sherds, 49 g.

	Oxford Ware		Brill		Red Earthenware		
Context	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	Date
1	1	2	1	5			13thC
19	4	42	2	12			13thC
21			6	556			13thC
24			1	3	3	49	16thC
	5	44	10	576	3	49	

The most notable assemblage from this excavation is that from context 21, which mainly comprises three large sherds from two Brill/Boarstall glazed jugs. The size of the sherds indicate that they possibly are a product of primary deposition. When the fact that such vessels were often used as tablewares during the medieval period (Blinkhorn in prep) is taken into consideration, it appears likely that a medieval domestic settlement is located in the very near vicinity.

Bibliography

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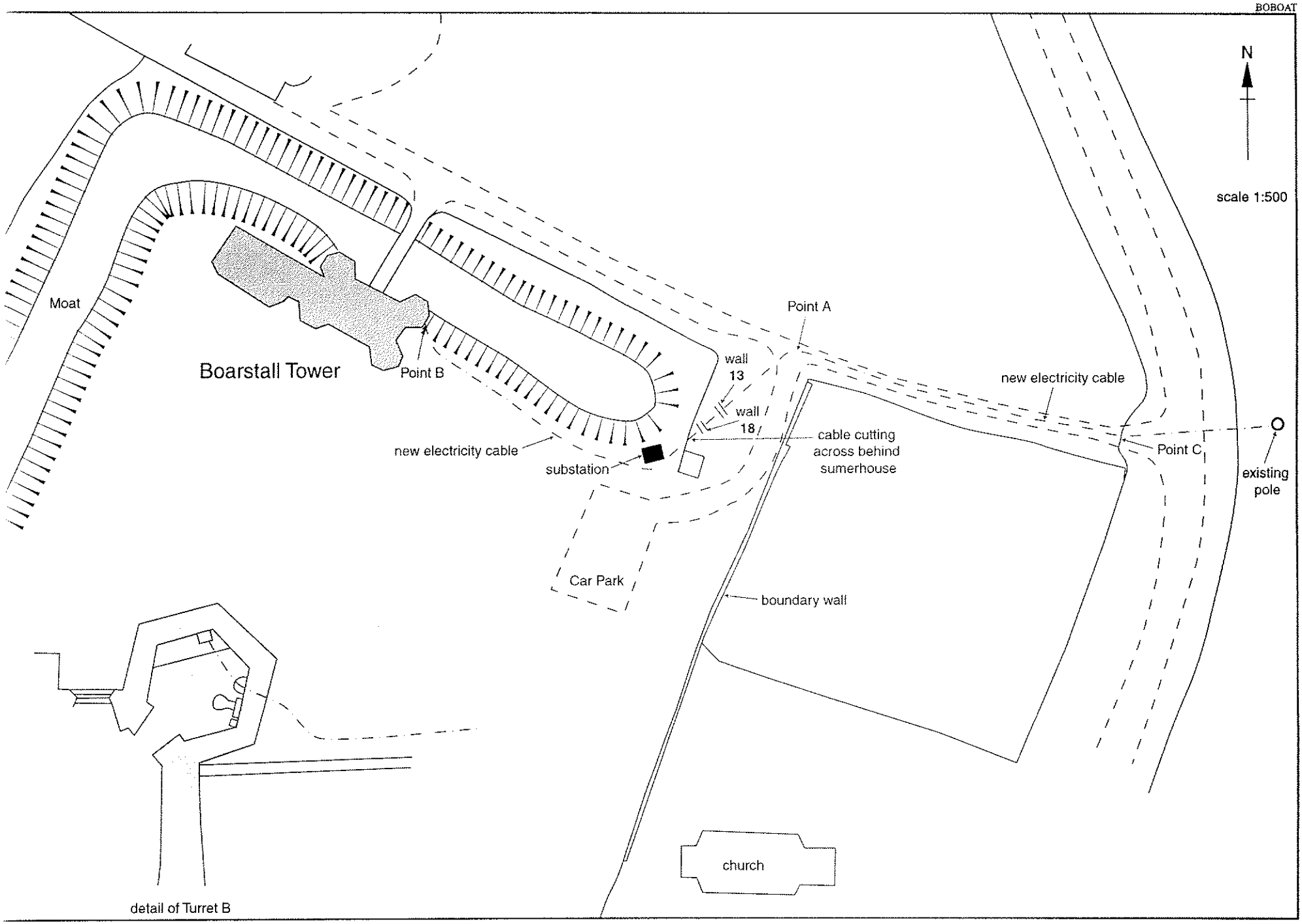

Figure 1: site plan

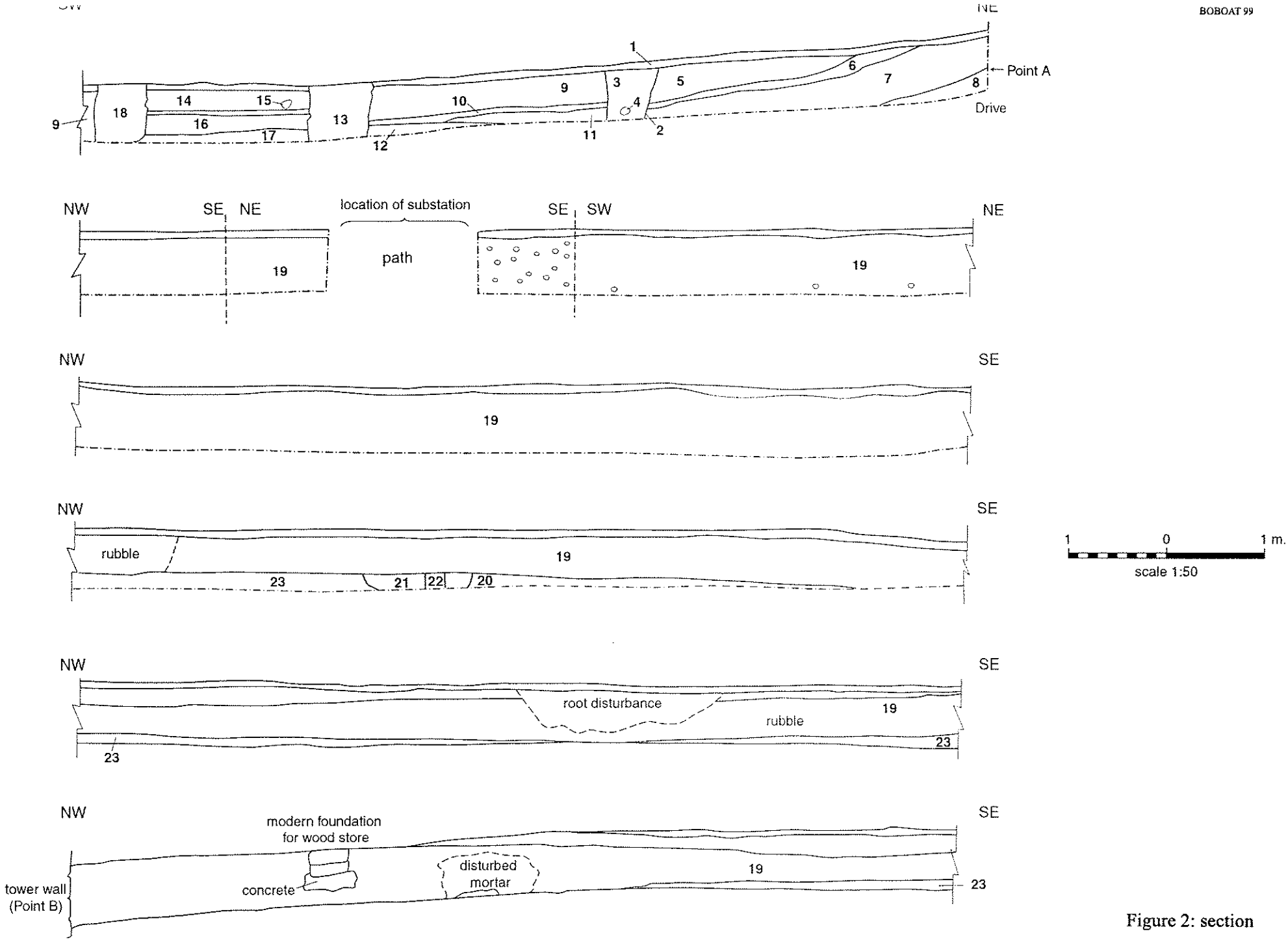

Figure 2: section

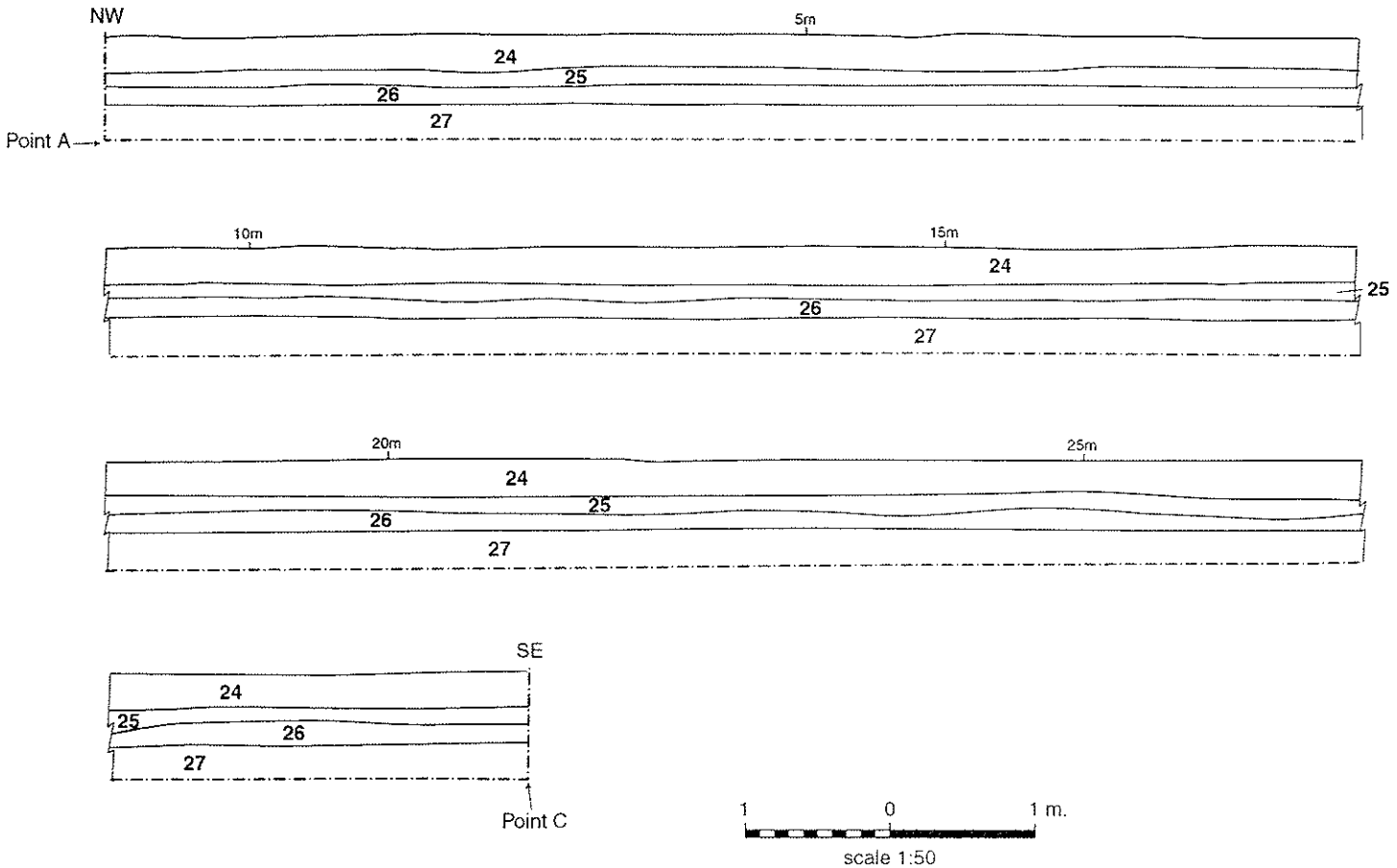

Figure 3: Section through driveway

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