

Cover Images

Machine stripping, Soham	On-site surveying
Roman corn dryer, Duxford	Guided walk along Devil's Dyke
Bronze Age shaft, Fordham Bypass	Medieval well, Soham
Human burial, Barrington Anglo-Saxon Cemetery	Timbers from a medieval well, Soham
Blue enamelled bead, Barrington	Bed burial reconstruction, Barrington Anglo-Saxon Cemetery
Aethusa cynapium 'Fool's parsley'	Medieval tanning pits, Huntington Town Centre
Digging in the snow, Huntingdon Town Centre	Beaker vessel
Face painting at Hinchingsbrooke Iron Age Farm	Environmental analysis
Research and publication	Monument Management, Bartlow Hills

CCC AFU Report Number 847

**Post-Medieval Occupation at
North Street, Wisbech,
Cambridgeshire**

**Archaeological Monitoring and
Recording**

Dennis Payne BA (Hons)

With a contribution by Carole Fletcher

Site Code: WISNST05
CHER Event Number: ECB 2081
Date of works: 9/11/05
Grid Ref: TL 4608 0986

Editor: Elizabeth Popescu BA MIFA
Illustrator: Carlos Silva

Summary

Between the 9th and 30th of November 2005 archaeological monitoring was undertaken within the town of Wisbech. The development consisted of directional piling and trenching in order to lay ground beams for the foundations of the New Foyer Building, North Street, Wisbech. The work was undertaken by staff of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit and commissioned by Burmor Construction.

Successive phases of marine inundation over the centuries have created deeply stratified deposits, representing an accumulation of occupation layers interspersed with the marine silts, which occur over a wide area of the centre of Wisbech. These periodic events have created a unique situation for the town with deeply stratified deposits concealing the archaeology consisting of building foundations and occupation layers. These deposits were revealed in some parts of the trenching for the building foundations, exposing a predominantly post-medieval period of silt deposition interspersed with occupation layers, as anticipated.

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


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Drawing Conventions

Sections

Limit of Excavation	
Cut	
Cut-Conjectured	
Soil Horizon	
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	
Intrusion/Truncation	
Top of Natural	
Top Surface	
Break in Section/ Limit of Section Drawing	
Cut Number	
Deposit Number	117
Ordnance Datum	19.45m ODN 
Stone	

Plans

Limit of Excavation	
Deposit - Conjectured	
Natural Features	
Intrusion/Truncation	
Sondages/Machine Strip	
Illustrated Section	
Archaeological Deposit	
Excavated Slot	
Cut Number	118

1 Introduction

This archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Kasia Gdaniec of the Cambridgeshire Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Advice team (CAPCA); Planning Application [F/YR05/0629/F], supplemented by a Specification prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit (CCC AFU).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 - Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by CAPCA, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

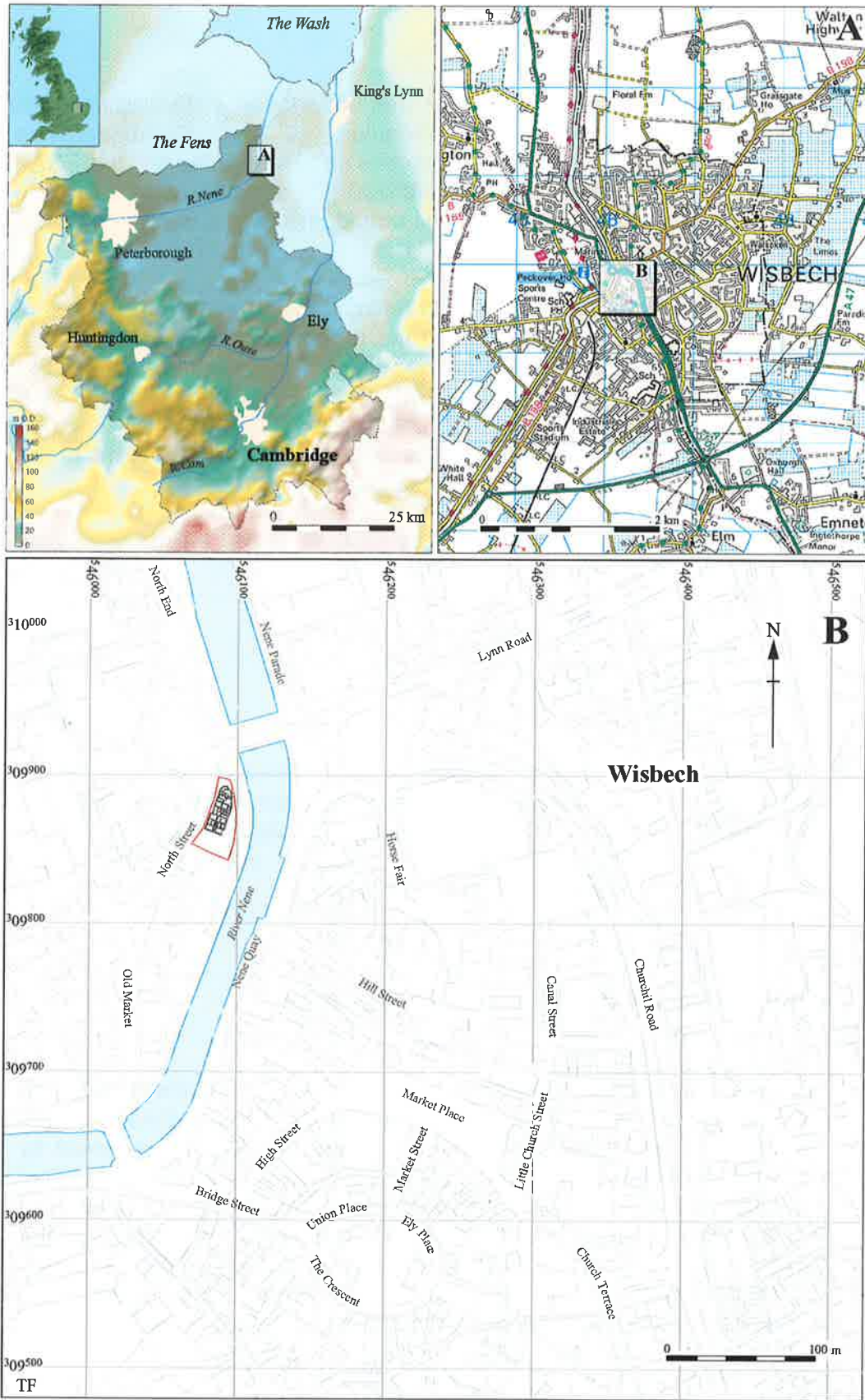
The site archive is currently held by CCC AFU and will be deposited with the appropriate county store in due course.

2 Geology and Topography

The site overlies episodic marine alluvials, which in turn overlie the Terrington Beds: younger salt marsh and tidal creek deposits (silty clay and sandy silt) with interspersed Amphill clay (British Geological Survey, Sheet 159, 1995). The site lies on marginal land with a gradual incline towards the River Nene (Fig. 1).

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

Excavation of deeply stratified medieval and post-medieval deposits took place at Market Mews in 1996 (Hinman 1996). Evidence was found of an extensive sequence of episodic flooding interspersed by layers of occupation. Occupation comprised floors and building footings, often associated with well preserved organic remains and metalworking waste. The whole sequence covered the period from the 13th to the 17th century. Market Mews is located approximately 0.3km to the south west of the site. The subject site is located close to late medieval features and pottery finds at New Inn Yard (HER CB14017) 134m to the south-east, and the Saxon inhumation with brooches (HER CB4875), found 187m to the south-west.



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Figure 1 Site location showing position of trenches (black) and development area (red)

Wisbech is located at the point where the Well Stream joined the 'Wysbeck', the stream from which the town derived its name.

Wisbech is first referenced in a grant to the abbey of Ely in c.1000AD from the East Anglian bishop Aelfwine. The scale and nature of Saxon occupation is unknown but a manor is thought to have been located on the west bank of the 'Wysbeck' due to the siting there of the Old Market which is presumed to have pre-Norman origins (Pugh 1967, 243).

The growth of Wisbech was hampered by periodic flooding, the most devastating example being the sea flood of 1236, the effects of which were still apparent in 1251. The Well Stream (latterly the Wisbech Canal from 1794 and now the course of the A1101) carried the main outfall of the Great Ouse. The diversion of the Great Ouse to its present course via Kings Lynn c.1300 after violent storms and the latter cutting of Moretons Leam in 1478 reduced the importance of this river to the town. The 'Wysbeck' has now swollen into the main River Nene. The above factors taken together prevented the town from becoming one of the great English ports of the Middle Ages.

4 Methodology

The objective of this watching brief was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The specification required that archaeological monitoring would be carried out during two phases of ground-works. The first phase of work was piling (to a depth of 15m) using the spoil displacement method, during which very little spoil was extracted and therefore no archaeology by way of displaced finds could be seen. The second phase of work consisted of sixty-three foundation trenches (Fig. 2) for the concrete ground beams, and these were excavated to a minimum depth of 0.80m and a maximum depth of 1.50m with a standard width of 0.70m, using a JCB with a toothed bucket. A lift pit, excavated to 1.50 in depth, extending 2m by 2m, gave the best opportunity to inspect any potential archaeology.

A number of visits were required in order to inspect when the works were being carried out – no bad weather was encountered during the visits and access to the site was possible at all times.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those that were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using CCC AFU's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

5 Results

Following the excavation of the trenches a selected number of sections were cleaned and inspected, particularly within the deepest shown. A number of occupation levels were noted interspersed with marine silts from episodic flooding (4, 16, 17, 18, 20), as shown in Fig. 3. Finds from the occupation layers and marine silts produced pottery and building materials of post-medieval date, predominantly 17th-18th century. A blackish grey, silty peat deposit (19, 21, 24 and 27) at the base of the sequence contained no building materials although a relatively large quantity of animal bones were found in these deposits (0.934kg; see Appendix 1) suggesting a building hiatus on the site. This may have allowed a marshy well-vegetated area to develop adjacent to the River Nene, probably during the 17th-18th centuries. The present depth of the work did not locate the beginning of the sequence, which could be several metres below the level excavated.

6 Discussion

Given the location of this site, along the marginal land adjacent to the River Nene, it is not surprising that a sequence of periodic flooding deposits interspersed with occupation levels was found within the trenches. A similar sequence has been found in other excavations of Wisbech town, notably, at Market Mews (Hinman, 1996). This report showed similar evidence of flooding and occupation, albeit with much deeper sequences. The monitoring and recording carried out, therefore, shows similar evidence continuing to the margins of the river edge with a possible hiatus of building activity represented by deposits of silty peat.

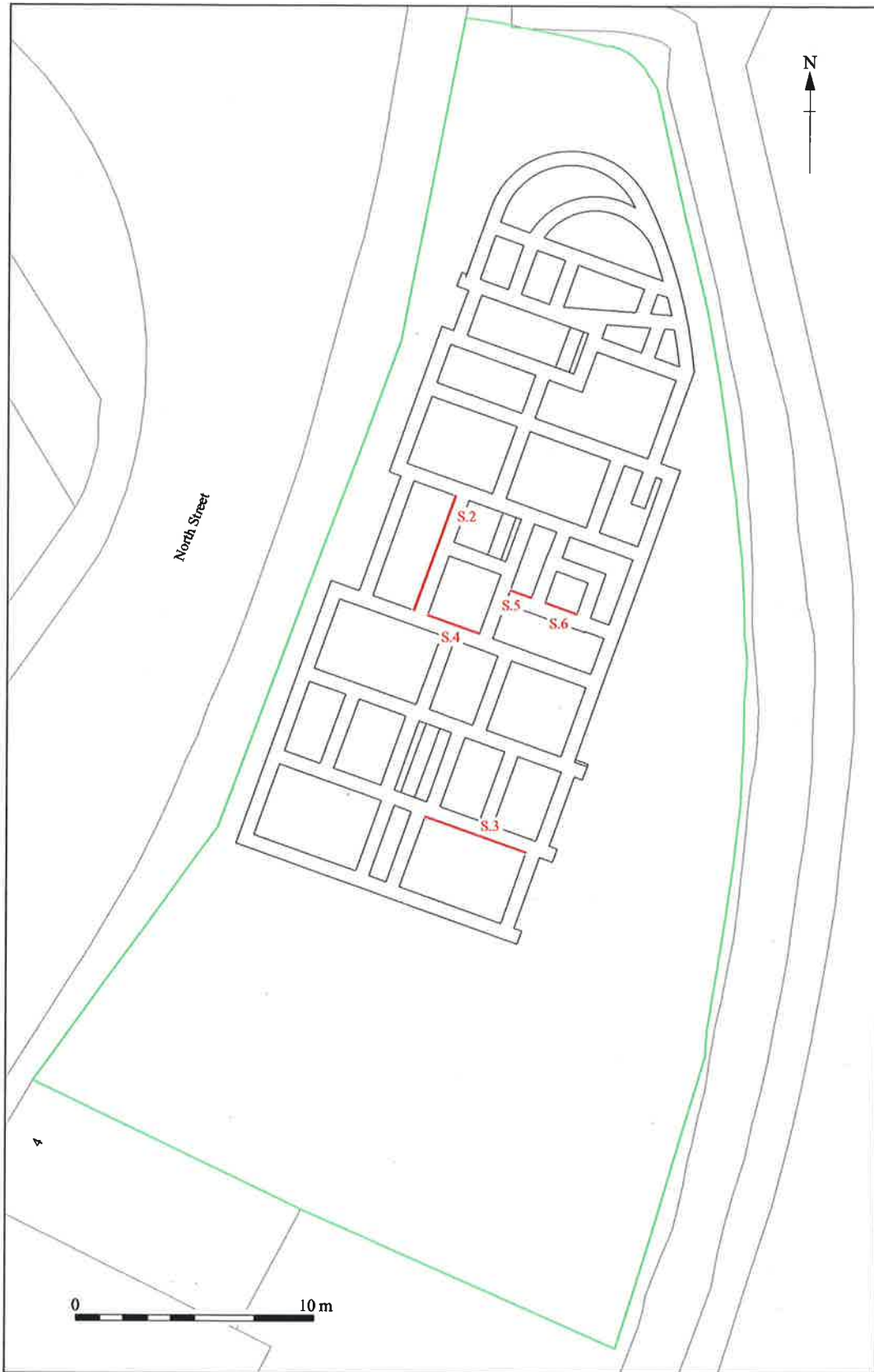


Figure 2: Plan showing foundation trenches and location of sections

7 Conclusions

Trenching for the ground beams carried out by Burmor Construction permitted a thorough investigation of the levels exposed (to a depth of 1.50m) for any potential archaeology. Within the sections revealed, it was possible to conclude that the interspersed deposits of marine silt and occupation layers all dated to the post-medieval period. Pottery from the occupation layers confirmed a post-medieval date with no pottery dating earlier than c.1500. Examination of the pottery from the earliest deposits gave a predominant date range of the 16th to mid 17th century while the upper deposits produced 18th-century pottery.

Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

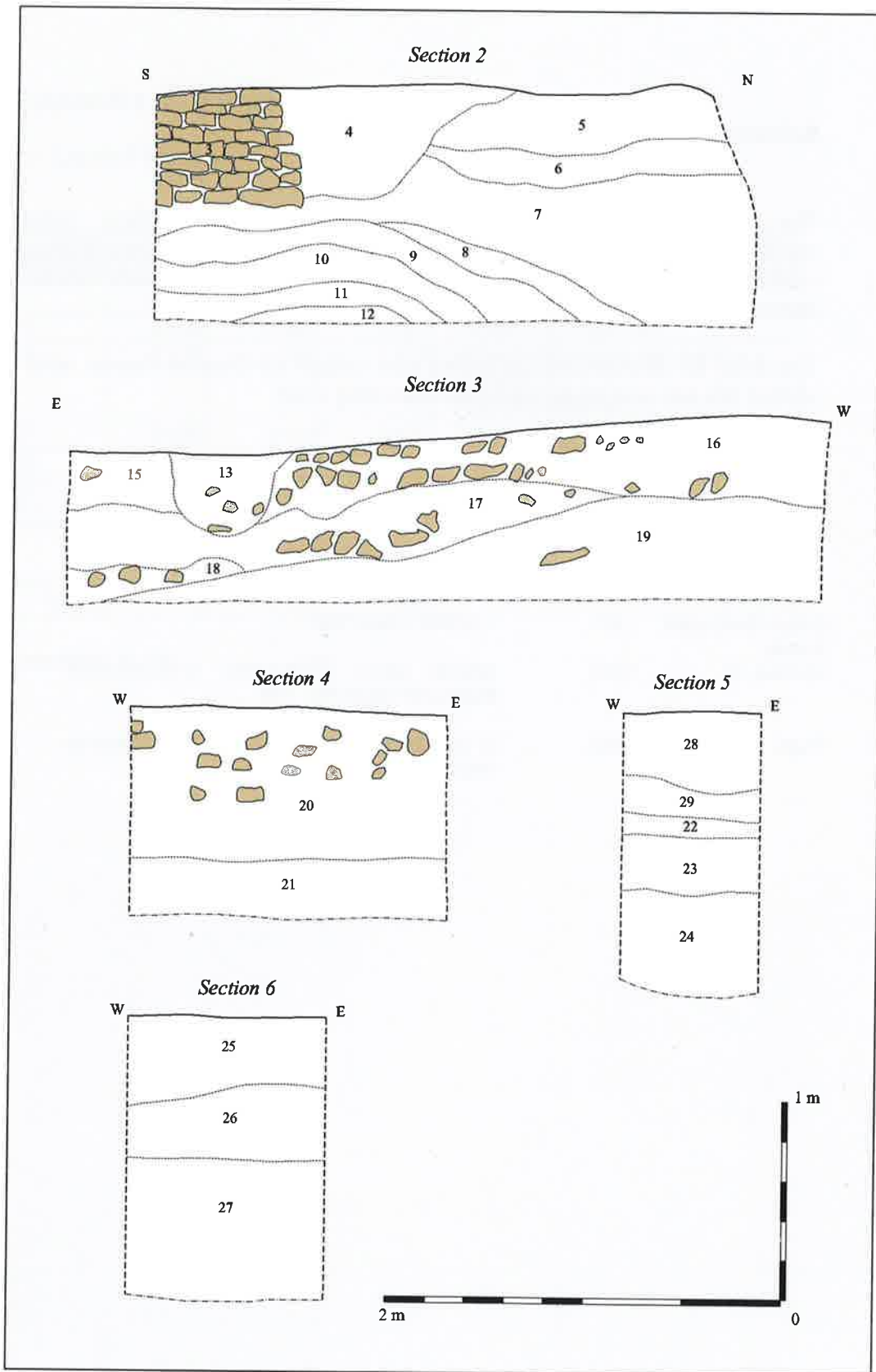


Figure 3: Section drawings

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Burmor Construction who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Toby Gane. Thanks are also due to Carlos Silva for the illustrations and Elizabeth Popescu for editing the report.

The brief for archaeological works was written by Dennis Payne, who visited the site and supervised the watching brief.

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| Hinman, M. | 1996, | <i>Market Mews Excavation</i> , Archaeological Field Unit, report No. 156 |
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Appendix 1: Finds

by Carole Fletcher

Context	Bone	Window Glass	Pottery	Pottery/other details
2	0.005	0.000	0.010	Bourne D (c.1500-1650)
11	0.000	0.000	0.025	Bourne D (c.1500-1650)
19	0.228	0.001	0.013	White Staffordshire salt glazed (c.1700) Clay tobacco pipe
21	0.000	0.000	0.003	Bourne D (c.1500-1650)
23	0.358	0.000	0.000	
27	0.706	0.002	0.000	
Unstrat.	0.022	0.000	0.247	Frechen ware Staffordshire slipware Post-Medieval Redware
TOTAL	1.319	0.003	0.298	

(weights in kg)



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