

# New Sewer Box Vicarage Box Wiltshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief



January 2008

**Client: Diocese of Bristol**

Issue N<sup>o</sup>: 1  
OA Job N<sup>o</sup>: 3645  
NGR: ST 823 685



**Client Name:** Diocese of Bristol

**Client Ref No:**

**Document Title:** New Sewer, Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire

**Document Type:** Watching Brief

**Issue Number:** 1

National Grid Reference: ST 823 685

Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 3645  
Site Code: BOXVIC 07  
Invoice Code: BOXVICWB  
Receiving Museum: Wiltshire Heritage Museum  
Museum Accession No:

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Date: 20th December 2007

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Document File Location H:\PROJECTS\Wiltshire WI\7709 BOX VIC  
WB\wbREP.doc

Graphics File Location Servergo:/oaupubs1\_a thru h\*BOXVICWB\*Box  
Vicarage, Wiltshire\*AH\*21.12.07

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# Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*In December 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire (NGR: ST 8238 6853). The work was commissioned by the Diocese of Bristol in advance of the excavation of a new service trench and access chamber. The watching brief encountered evidence for a continuation of a known Romano-British wall, a possible return and a robber trench all relating to the Romano-British villa, and also for a post-medieval stone culvert associated with the Vicarage.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In December 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire (NGR: ST 8238 6853). The work was commissioned by the Hookway Partnership LLP on behalf of the Diocese of Bristol in respect of an application to undertake new drainage works and a replacement septic tank within the environs of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 30299).
- 1.1.2 Following on from earlier work on the site (OA 2007a) English Heritage had requested that a watching brief be maintained during the course of the groundworks.
- 1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2007b).

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The village of Box is located approximately 6.5 km east of the city of Bath (Fig. 1). The site is situated in the middle of the village on the northern side of the A4. The site lies in the rear garden of the vicarage on ground sloping down to the north. The site is bounded to the north, south and west by buildings and to the east by a public highway, Valens Terrace. The garden occupies an area of  $c900\text{m}^2$  running from 46 m AOD at its southern end down to 44 m AOD along its northern edge. The site lies at a junction of Inferior Oolite limestone to the west and Lias clays to the east and the underlying geology is mixed and includes a deposit of Mesolithic spring deposited tufa (OA 2006a).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA 2007) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 The following background has been taken from Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire: Archaeological Impact Assessment (OA 2006a). This document in turn had utilised various previous sources and reports. The full bibliography is contained in the Archaeological Impact Assessment and is not repeated here.

- 1.3.3 There have been two archaeological investigations during which excavations have been carried out within the garden of Box Vicarage. In 1968-9, when Selwyn Hall was built, a trench was dug on the south side of the boundary wall to help link the known villa remains in the south-west with the results from Selwyn Hall (Hurst et al 1987). More extensive work was carried out in 1994 to evaluate the location of a proposed new Vicarage, not subsequently constructed, within the garden (WA 1994). Evidence connected to the Roman villa was found on both occasions.
- 1.3.4 Archaeological evidence for the Roman remains at Box has been accumulating since the early 19th-century. Excavations to investigate their extent and nature have been carried out at intervals since the 1880s when the scale of the villa became apparent. Since 1982 a further series of excavations have taken place to the west of Box Vicarage, extending beyond the Scheduled area of the Roman villa. Work was carried out at The Hermitage to the south in 1983-4 (Carless 1984), along Church Lane in 1993-4, at Box House in 1989 and 1995 (WRAP 1989, BAT 1995) and at Box House Cottage in 1994. A Desk-based Assessment carried out in 1997 combined information from the reports produced with discussions with the excavators involved (Matthews 1997). Again Roman material was found in all locations. In the 21st century when Selwyn Hall was extended in 2003 a Watching Brief was carried out (BAT 2003). In addition, a geophysical survey was carried out in the gardens north of The Wilderness in 1998-9 (Payne 1999).
- 1.3.5 The late 20th century and early 21st century reports were examined for information on surface levels and the depths at which the archaeological horizon and Roman remains were encountered. These results demonstrate that, where below-ground archaeological deposits dating from the Roman period survive, they can lie as little as 0.4 m below the present ground surface.
- 1.3.6 In 2006 OA excavated 2 test pits as part of the preliminary work for the project. One of these exposed the truncated remnants of a wall and a possible buried soil horizon (OA 2006b). Further work in 2007 confirmed the presence of Romano-British deposits in the area (OA 2007b).

## **2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Aims**

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological remains (if present) that the works may disturb or destroy during the course of any groundworks.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

## 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The trenching and the excavation for the septic chamber was undertaken by a mechanical excavator fitted with a 0.4 m wide toothless bucket. The machining was undertaken in a series of spits under constant archaeological supervision until the required depth was achieved. When an archaeological horizon or feature was observed machining was suspended until the required archaeological recording was done.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of the excavations and any archaeological features encountered was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations, features and recorded sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 At the northern end of the trench the underlying natural, a light grey silt clay (54) was encountered at a depth of 1.25 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 11). This was overlaid by a 0.5 m deep layer of dark grey clay silt (53), a probable layer of colluvium. This was sealed by a 0.35 m deep layer of yellow-brown silt clay (52), which also contained numerous small fragments of limestone and lenses of crushed stone. It is possible that this layer may represent a demolition layer associated with the Roman Villa, however the lack of dating evidence recovered suggest that it may equally be the construction layer associated with the garden wall. This layer was sealed by a 0.4 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (51), the current garden soil.
- 3.1.2 Approximately 2 m further south a layer of grey brown clay silt (58) was encountered at a depth of 0.5 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 12). This layer appeared very humic and produced some charcoal flecking suggesting it is a layer of worked soil, possibly a continuation of the buried soil horizon noted in the 2006 excavations. This was cut by a 1 m wide linear feature with steeply sloping sides, whose depth was in excess of 0.35 m (60). This was filled by a light grey silt loam (59) containing many small angular fragments of limestone. The feature was aligned east-west, consistent with the alignment of other features observed within the Roman site. The presence of the stone fragments suggest that this may represent a robber trench.
- 3.1.3 The feature, its fill and layer 58 had been truncated by cut (69). This was a 20th century trench dug to contain the pipes leading from the original septic tank. A layer of geo-textile membrane had been laid in the bottom of this trench and overlaid with a 0.18 m deep layer of pea gravel (57) containing perforated plastic piping to act as a field drain. This was sealed by a redeposited 0.15 m deep layer of the worked garden

soil 56. Overlying this was a 0.1 m deep layer of yellow gravel (55) forming a garden path.

- 3.1.4 Layer 58 continued throughout this area and was cut by a second east-west aligned robber trench (64) a distance 6.8 m south of the robber trench 60 (Fig. 3, Section 13). This trench measured 0.9 m wide, had steeply sloping sides and measured 0.2 m deep. At the base of this feature the truncated remnants of a 0.6 m wide wall constructed of roughly dressed limestone blocks and lime mortar was encountered (63). The alignment and location of this feature suggests that it may be a continuation of Wall 5 exposed in Test Pit 1 of the 2006 evaluation. The remainder of the robber trench was filled with a light grey clay silt (62). Sealing this feature and overlying layer 8 was a 0.12 m deep layer of dark yellow-brown clay silt (61) which produced numerous angular fragments of limestone suggesting that it may represent a demolition layer. This layer had been truncated by trench 69 and overlaid with the pea gravel 57, which in turn was overlaid by layer 56.
- 3.1.5 Approximately 1.7 m south of Wall 63, a north-south aligned wall (65) was encountered running obliquely across the line of the trench (Fig. 3, Section 14). This measured 0.6 m wide with approximately 5.2 m length exposed within the trench. The wall consisted of 2 courses of roughly dressed limestone with occasional brick inclusions bonded with a lime mortar. The alignment of this wall suggests that it may form a return of wall 63, although the junction was not exposed. The wall was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep continuation of the layer of dark yellow-brown clay silt (61). This layer had also been truncated by service trench 69 and had been overlaid by a 0.25 m deep layer of the pea gravel 57, which in turn was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of the redeposited garden soil 56.
- 3.1.6 As the trench excavation turned westwards the undisturbed garden soil (71) was encountered. This was a dark grey-brown silt loam measuring over 0.6 m in depth. Cut into this layer was a 0.85 m wide flat bottomed feature (68), 0.55 m in depth (Fig. 3, Section 15). This feature was aligned NW to SE running diagonally across the trench. Built within this cut was a stone built culvert (66). This was constructed using a stone slab as its base with 3 courses of stone laid on either edge and capped with a stone slab leaving a 0.3 m x 0.2 m void. Upon removal of this culvert within the line of the trench a fragment of 18th/19th century creamware was recovered from underneath the base slab suggesting that the culvert was of post-medieval construction, possibly contemporary with the construction of the vicarage. The culvert trench had been backfilled with a grey-brown silt loam (67), probably redeposited garden soil. Sealing the backfill was a 0.25 m deep layer of very dark grey silt loam (70), the present day topsoil and turf.
- 3.1.7 The stratigraphy within the remainder of the trench was similar, with the base of the trench exposing the top of Layer 71 overlaid by a 0.2 m deep layer of the current topsoil and turf 70 (Fig. 3, Section 16).

## 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 All the dating evidence recovered dates to the 18th and 19th centuries and comprised pottery, bottle glass and clay pipe stem. No earlier dating evidence was recovered during the course of the watching brief.

### 3.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

## 4 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1.1 The watching brief has confirmed the findings of the earlier test pits and has also shown that structures probably relating to the Roman villa extend throughout the garden. The walls observed probably represent ancillary structures on the margin of the villa site rather than the main structure, since no associated floor levels normally present in a villa were observed. However the walls had been robbed out almost completely, which together with later cultivation of the site may have destroyed such evidence.
- 4.1.2 The lack of residual earlier finds recovered during the course of the watching brief would also suggest that the area of the excavations was on the margins of the villa site.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

| <i>Context</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Depth</i> | <i>Width</i> | <i>Comments</i>                             | <i>Finds</i>   | <i>Date</i>          |
|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---|----------------|----------------------|
| 51             | Layer       | 0.3 m        | -            | Worked garden soil                          | Pottery        | C19th/<br>C20th      |
| 52             | Layer       | 0.25 m       | -            | Construction ?<br>Demolition? layer         | -              | -                    |
| 53             | Layer       | 0.6 m        | -            | Colluvium                                   | -              | -                    |
| 54             | Layer       | > 0.6 m      | -            | Natural clay                                | -              | -                    |
| 55             | Layer       | 0.1 m        | 0.9 m        | Modern garden path                          | -              | C20th                |
| 56             | Layer       | 0.25 m       | 0.6 m        | Redeposited garden soil                     | Pottery, tile  | C20th                |
| 57             | Fill        | 0.18 m       | 0.6 m        | Gravel fill of drainage field               | -              | C20th                |
| 58             | Layer       | > 0.3 m      | > 0.6 m      | Buried soil horizon                         | -              | Romano-<br>British ? |
| 59             | Fill        | > 0.3 m      | 1.0 m        | Backfill of robber trench                   | -              | -                    |
| 60             | Cut         | > 0.3 m      | 1.0 m        | Robber trench                               | -              | -                    |
| 61             | Layer       | 0.15 m       | -            | Possible demolition layer                   | -              | -                    |
| 62             | Fill        | 0.2 m        | 0.9 m        | Backfill of robber trench                   | -              | -                    |
| 63             | Structure   | 0.15 m       | 0.6 m        | Truncated remnants of<br>robbed out wall    | -              | Romano-<br>British   |
| 64             | Cut         | > 0.2 m      | 0.6 m        | Foundation trench                           | -              | Romano-<br>British   |
| 65             | Structure   | 0.15 m       | 0.6 m        | Truncated remnants of<br>robbed out wall    | -              | Romano-<br>British   |
| 66             | Structure   | 0.45 m       | 0.7 m        | Stone built culvert                         | Pottery        | C18th/<br>C19th      |
| 67             | Fill        | 0.12 m       | 0.7 m        | Backfill of 18                              | -              | C18th/<br>C19th      |
| 68             | Cut         | 0.55 m       | 0.7 m        | Cut for culvert trench                      | -              | C18th/<br>C19th      |
| 69             | Cut         | 0.5 m        | 0.8 m        | Cut for modern septic tank<br>overflow pipe | -              | C20th                |
| 70             | Layer       | 0.18 m       | -            | Modern topsoil and turf                     | -              | C20th                |
| 71             | Layer       | > 0.6 m      | -            | Earlier garden soil                         | Pottery, glass | C18th/<br>C19th      |

**APPENDIX 2    BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)

OA, 2006a *Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire: Archaeological Impact Assessment*

OA, 2006b *Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire: Archaeological Evaluation Report*

OA, 2007a *Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OA, 2007b *Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire: Archaeological Evaluation Report*

**APPENDIX 3    SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

**Site name:** Box Vicarage, Box, Wiltshire

**Site code:** BOXVIC 07

**Grid reference:** ST 823 685

**Type of watching brief:** Excavation of service trench and new septic tank

**Date and duration of project:** 11th and 12th December 2007, 2 days

**Area of site:** 900m<sup>2</sup>

**Summary of results:** The watching brief encountered evidence for a continuation of known Romano-British wall, a possible return and a robber trench all relating to the Romano-British villa, and for a post-medieval stone culvert

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.







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Figure 1: Site location

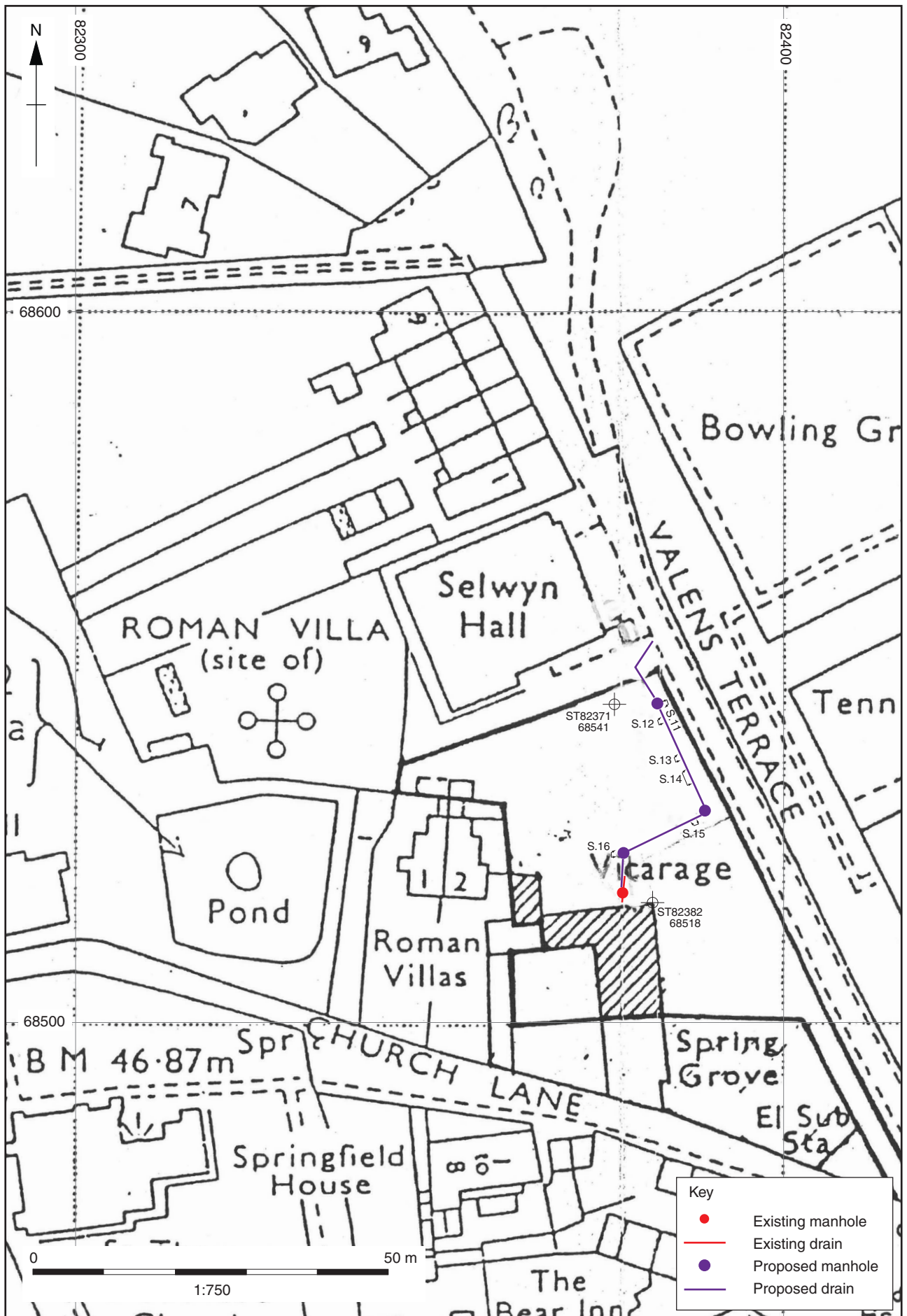


Figure 2 : Plan showing extent of excavations



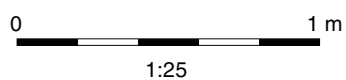
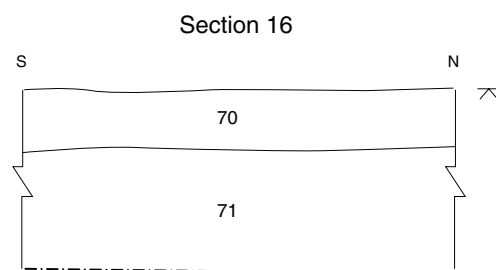
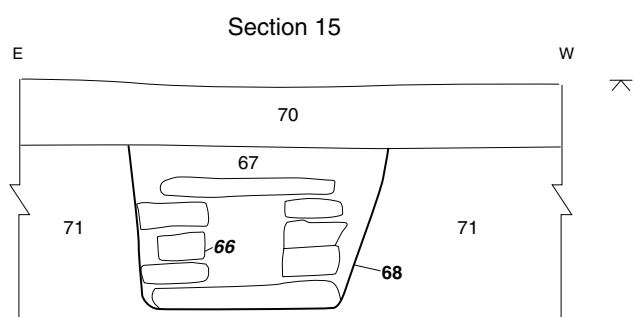
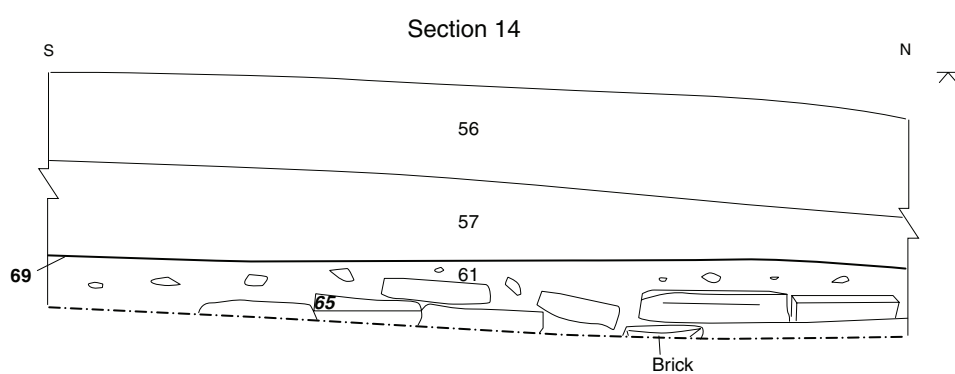
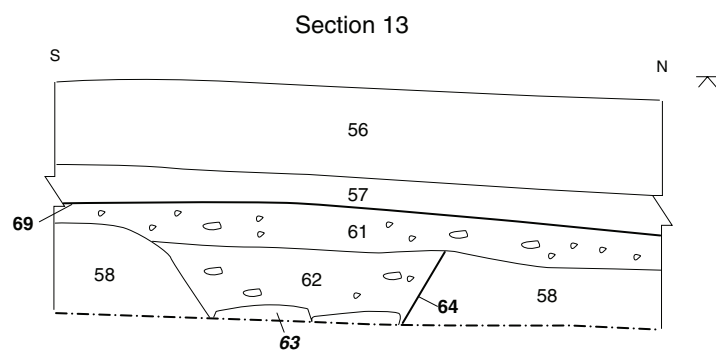
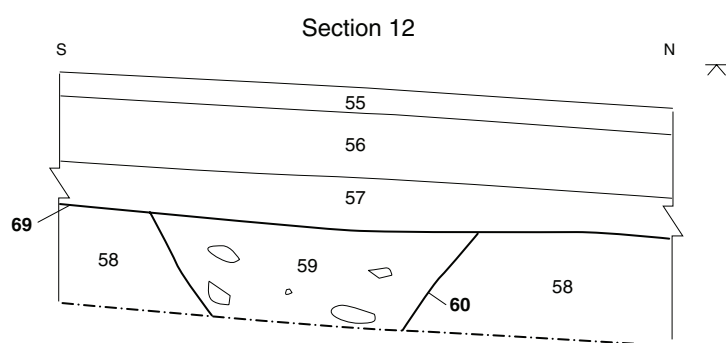
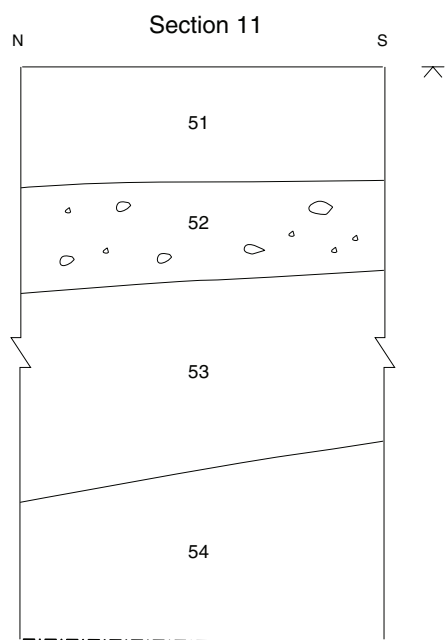


Figure 3 : Sections





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