

B R A D L E Y S T O K E P R I M A R Y S C H O O L

Avon SMR 10830

An archaeological evaluation of the site

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Bradley Stoke Primary School

Avon SMR 10830

1). Introduction:

An evaluation of the archaeological potential of the site of the proposed Primary School was carried out by Bath Archaeological Trust for the owners, Avon County Property Services Department. The work was carried out by a team of three people and took place over a period of four days, from February 26th to February 29th 1996.

2). The site (Grid ref. ST 628807):

The site, mostly covered by rough and uneven grassland, occupies an area of c.1.1 hectares and is approximately quadrant-shaped. Its southern edge is curved and is bounded by Baileys Court Road. Along its north-west side is a hedge, beyond which is a cricket ground, bowling green and club car-park. Its north-east side is defined by a wooden panelled fence, beyond which is the Breaches Gate housing estate. The site has a maximum length of 185m (from west to east) and a maximum width of 115m (from north to south). It slopes down 4m from south-east to north-west, from c.58m OD to c.54m OD. The ground levels out c.30m to the east of the hedge.

3). Proposed development (Drawing no. E7625/LS.01.P):

The new school will be situated in the north half of the site and will be parallel to the north-east boundary. It will be built on a level platform which will be raised up above

present ground level at its north-west end because of the slope of the land. A "sunken" garden will be constructed in the north corner, but it will only be "sunken" in relation to the "high" end of the school and will not penetrate into the natural bedrock. There will be a car-park and pedestrian apron in the east corner of the site, with vehicular access from Breaches Gate. The south half of the site will be mainly occupied by a netball court/kickabout and a playing field, with a small conservation garden in the south-west corner.

4). Archaeological discoveries in the vicinity:

The area immediately to the north and north-west of the site produced, in 1990-1, a considerable amount of archaeological evidence for intense activity in both the prehistoric and the Roman period. A complex of soil features containing flint flakes and fragments of Pennant sandstone, which were interpreted as late Neolithic or early Bronze Age pits or post-holes, was recorded close to Webbs Farm (Avon SMR 8273) (Erskine and Young 1992, p.55). Excavations on the line of Bradley Stoke Way, to the north of Great Meadow Road (Avon SMR 7441), revealed Iron Age ditches and structures, and 1st-2nd century Romano-British occupation debris and post-holes, as well as two inhumations. Further Romano-British occupation was found on the line of Webbs Wood Road, near its junction with Bradley Stoke Way. A series of walls forming the boundaries of 1st-2nd century Romano-British paddocks and a driveway were recorded when the houses in Great Meadow Road were being

constructed (Avon SMR 7676). Beneath the present cricket ground, 50m north-west of the north corner of the Primary School site, two Romano-British buildings were recorded (Avon SMR 9676). One of them had a stone floor in which a flagon containing an early-4th century coin was found. The walls of the building had been robbed out and sealed by a layer of black soil in which at least six infants had been buried (Russell 1990). An evaluation and salvage recording in 1992 on the south side of Baileys Court Road (Avon SMR 5258), opposite the south-west corner of the Primary School site, revealed yet more Romano-British pits and ditches, and also some residual prehistoric pottery (Erskine and Young 1992, p.55).

These archaeological sites all appear to have formed part of the same complex, extending at least 250m from south-west to north-east. Prior to the current project none of the boundaries of the complex had been identified. As a result of these earlier discoveries the Primary School site was considered to be potentially of considerable archaeological significance, and an evaluation in advance of the granting of planning consent was required.

5). Previous disturbances to the site:

a). A Ministry of Defence oil pipe-line crosses the site from west to east. It is 1.2-1.3m below present ground level.

b). A pair of drains, one for storm water the other for foul water, have been laid on the west edge of the site. They

enter the site through the north-east boundary fence, c.44m from the north corner, and turn north-westwards, running parallel to the fence. They then turn south-westwards and run parallel to the hedge as far as Baileys Court Road. The shallower of the two drains is 1.6m below ground level at the north corner, and 2.6m deep at the south-west corner of the site.

c). Five test holes were dug in January 1996 by Jenkins and Potter, Consulting Engineers, on behalf of Avon County Council. in order to establish the nature, depth and stability of the underlying geology. They are described in the engineers' report (Ref. no. MD/HLC/40434). They were backfilled but were still visible as disturbances in the topsoil.

6). Method of excavation:

Six trenches (Trenches 1-6) were excavated by a JCB fitted with a 3' wide toothless bucket. The trenches were designed to sample the site while avoiding the oil pipe-line, the drain runs, the test holes and the modern soil dump on the area of the proposed car-park. Disturbance to the footprint of the school building itself was kept, as far as possible, to a minimum. Only Trenches 3 and 5 encroached on it. The longest trench (Trench 1) was 60m in length and the shortest (Trench 2) was 28m. As soon as the mechanical excavation had been completed, two metal-detectorists (who have assisted Bath Archaeological Trust on previous occasions) examined the base

and sides of each trench, as well as the spoil-heaps.

The trenches and the majority of the development area were planned at 1:200. The whole of Trench 4 and most of Trench 1 were cleaned down to bedrock. The other trenches were carefully examined and any areas of possible archaeological interest were investigated by hand. By chance the north-east end of Trench 1 was found to be directly above the middle of an infilled ditch. A short trench was therefore dug at right-angles to the main trench in order to locate the edges of the ditch. A small portion of the ditch was excavated manually and a plan and section were drawn at 1:20. The ditch section was photographed as were the cleaned-up bases of Trenches 1 and 4. The trenches were then backfilled by the JCB.

7). Levels:

In the absence of any known Ordnance Survey benchmark in the vicinity, all levels were measured in relation to the concrete cover of the drain access chamber on the verge adjacent to Baileys Court Road, at the south-west corner of the site. On the drainage plan sent to B.A.T. by Avon County Council the ground-level close to this point is marked as as 54.25m O.D. Although the ground-level has been altered by the drainage works, this must be very similar to the level of the concrete cover. **All levels on the site are based on the assumption that the level of the top of the concrete chamber is at 54.25m O.D.** If/when its precise level is established, the site levels may need to be amended.

8). Description of the excavations:

a). The geology of the site consists of white lias, forming part of the Lower Oolitic Series. This covers the whole area and is generally solid and even, though in places it is fractured. The ditch section in Trench 1 revealed that the lias was laid in thin bands separated by layers of clay which were greenish-grey in colour with yellow streaks. The recorded level of the bedrock ranged from 56.57m O.D. at the south-east end of Trench 5 to 53.80m O.D. at the south-west end of Trench 1. In some places, as in the south-east half of Trench 4, the bedrock was overlain by a thin upper 'natural' layer of yellow-green sandy clay mixed with fractured lias, with a maximum thickness of 50-100mm. However it was usually directly overlain by the brown subsoil, which was generally 0.20-0.30m thick. This in turn was sealed by topsoil, averaging 0.15-0.20m thick.

b). Three "features" were observed, one at the north-east end of Trench 3, the other two in Trench 6. They were filled with reddish-brown clay and contained no artefacts. They were generally "cut" c.0.30m into the underlying bedrock/natural clay and were roughly oval-shaped, with a maximum width of c.1m. They could conceivably be prehistoric features, because similar features at Savages Wood and Webbs Farm contained fragments of pottery, flint flakes and pieces of Pennant sandstone (which is not native to the immediate locality). However the features on the present site are perhaps more likely to have been natural solution holes.

c). The only definite archaeological feature located during the evaluation was the ditch at the north-east end of Trench 1 (104). It was c.2.8m wide with gently sloping sides, and had a flat bottom, 1.5m wide, formed by a horizontal layer of lias. It was c.0.60m deep. The profile of the ditch was dictated by the geology through which it was cut. If the sides had been any steeper they would have collapsed, because of the layers of natural clay dividing the bands of lias.

The lowest fill layer of the ditch consisted of reddish-brown silt with small stone fragments (107). Above this was a layer of slightly reddish mid-brown loamy silt with scattered stones and charcoal flecks (106), which was overlain by a layer of concentrated angular lumps of stone in a mottled grey-brown matrix (105). Fill layer 105 merged with the subsoil (103), which sealed the whole of the ditch.

The precise alignment of the ditch was uncertain because its edges, cut through the bedrock, were uneven, but it appeared to run from west south-west to east north-east. It was oblique to Trench 1, and at an angle of c.18° to it. The south edge of the ditch crossed Trench 1 obliquely. A step in the bedrock, c.0.20m deep, may have represented the upper part of the edge, but the lower part of the south side was at a slightly different alignment.

d). The topsoil along the whole length of Trench 1 and in almost all of Trench 2 had been redeposited. It overlay a layer of greenish-grey clay and rubble (upcast from the drain

trenches along the edge of the site), which in turn sealed the brown subsoil.

9). Excavated finds and dating evidence:

a). Three flints, all tertiary flakes, were found in the subsoil in Trench 1 (103). Two of them were in the top of the ditch fill. They were undiagnostic and undatable, but must be prehistoric.

b). Twenty seven sherds of pottery, some of which were very small, were recovered from the fill of the ditch and from the bottom of the subsoil immediately above it. All the infill layers contained pottery, which derived from at least two late-Iron Age vessels and four Romano-British vessels including rim sherds belonging to a Severn Valley ware flat-rimmed bowl and a tankard. The ditch was probably filled in during the 2nd century A.D., though it includes earlier material from the early-mid 1st century.

c). Twenty four pieces and fragments of animal bone were found in the ditch fill and in the subsoil just above it. The majority formed part of the long-bones of medium mammals (sheep/goat) and large mammals (cow/horse), but layer 106 contained part of the pelvis of a sheep and there were also fragments of the mandible and skull of a medium mammal.

d). Two other finds came from the ditch fill. A corroded iron object, 90mm x 50mm was in layer 105. A small limestone disc, 21mm in diameter, with a hole 9mm in diameter cut in it, was found in the subsoil on the surface of the ditch (103). It

was too small to be a spindle whorl and may have been an item of ornament.

10). Results of metal-detecting:

The results were very limited. A few nails were found in the topsoil, together with the decorative terminal of a piece of iron fencing (in Trench 3). The bent shaft of a bronze tack was found in the subsoil immediately above bedrock in Trench 6, 15.8m from the east end.

11). Conclusions:

a). The ditch cutting diagonally across the north corner of the site appears to have formed the south-eastern boundary of the extensive area of Late Iron Age/Romano-British occupation found to the north and north-west of the site.

b). The fill of the ditch contains 1st-2nd century pottery, comparable in date to much of the material recovered from the other neighbouring sites. The excavation beneath the adjoining cricket ground also revealed a 3rd-4th century building, but the ditch seems to have been filled in before this date.

c). The modern pipe trenches along the north-east and north-west edges of the site are much deeper than the ditch itself, and have almost certainly obliterated it, but the ditch may survive in the north angle of the site over a distance of up to 20m.

d). There are no signs of any Iron Age or Romano-British occupation continuing beyond the ditch onto the Primary School

site. No features were seen in the evaluation trenches and no pottery, coins or other metal artefacts were found. It should be noted that the south-west part of the site, south of the oil pipe-line, was not investigated during the evaluation, and it is just possible that archaeological features could exist there.

e). There is no clear evidence of any prehistoric activity apart from the residual flint flakes. The oval depressions filled with reddish-brown clay are more likely to be natural than man-made, though bearing in mind the discoveries nearby, the possibility that they are prehistoric cannot be entirely ruled out.

12). Recommendations:

a). On the basis of the evaluation, I would suggest that the archaeological response to the development can be kept to a minimum, and full-scale excavation of the site in advance of the development will not be required.

b). The only part of the site which merits further investigation is the north corner. It would be useful to confirm the alignment of the ditch before the sunken garden is constructed, and perhaps to recover more dating evidence. The investigation need only be fairly small-scale.

c). A watching brief during earth-moving operations and drainage works, particularly in the south-west part of the site, might be useful in order to record any features which were not detected in the evaluation.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks are due to Avon Property Services Department, in particular Dave Pearce, for co-operation in providing information in advance of the evaluation. The excavation and recording was carried out by Tina Barnett-Tucker, Marek Lewcun and Derek Cater under the direction of the author, during the site work. The JCB was supplied by Channel Plant Hire of Henbury, and operated with great efficiency by Jim Hallett. I am also grateful to Dave Ollis and Tony Snailum for carrying out a metal-detecting survey of the trenches. The pottery and flints were identified by Vince Russett and the animal bone was examined by Gerry Barber. The metal artefacts were X-rayed by Amanda Wallace, of Bristol City Museum.

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16/3/1996

References:

- Erskine J.G.P. and Young A.C. 1992, Avon Archaeology 1992, Bristol and Avon Archaeology 10, p. 55-6
- Rawes B, 1982, Gloucestershire Severn Valley Ware, Trans. Bristol and Gloucs Archaeol. Soc., 100, pp. 33-46
- Russell J 1990, Excavations at Baileys Court Farm, Stoke Gifford, 1990 (A preliminary note), Bristol and Avon Archaeology 8, pp. 53-4

Appendix**Finds from Bradley Stoke Primary School evaluation (ASMR 10830)**

All finds will be deposited in Bristol City Museum under
Accession No. 13/1996

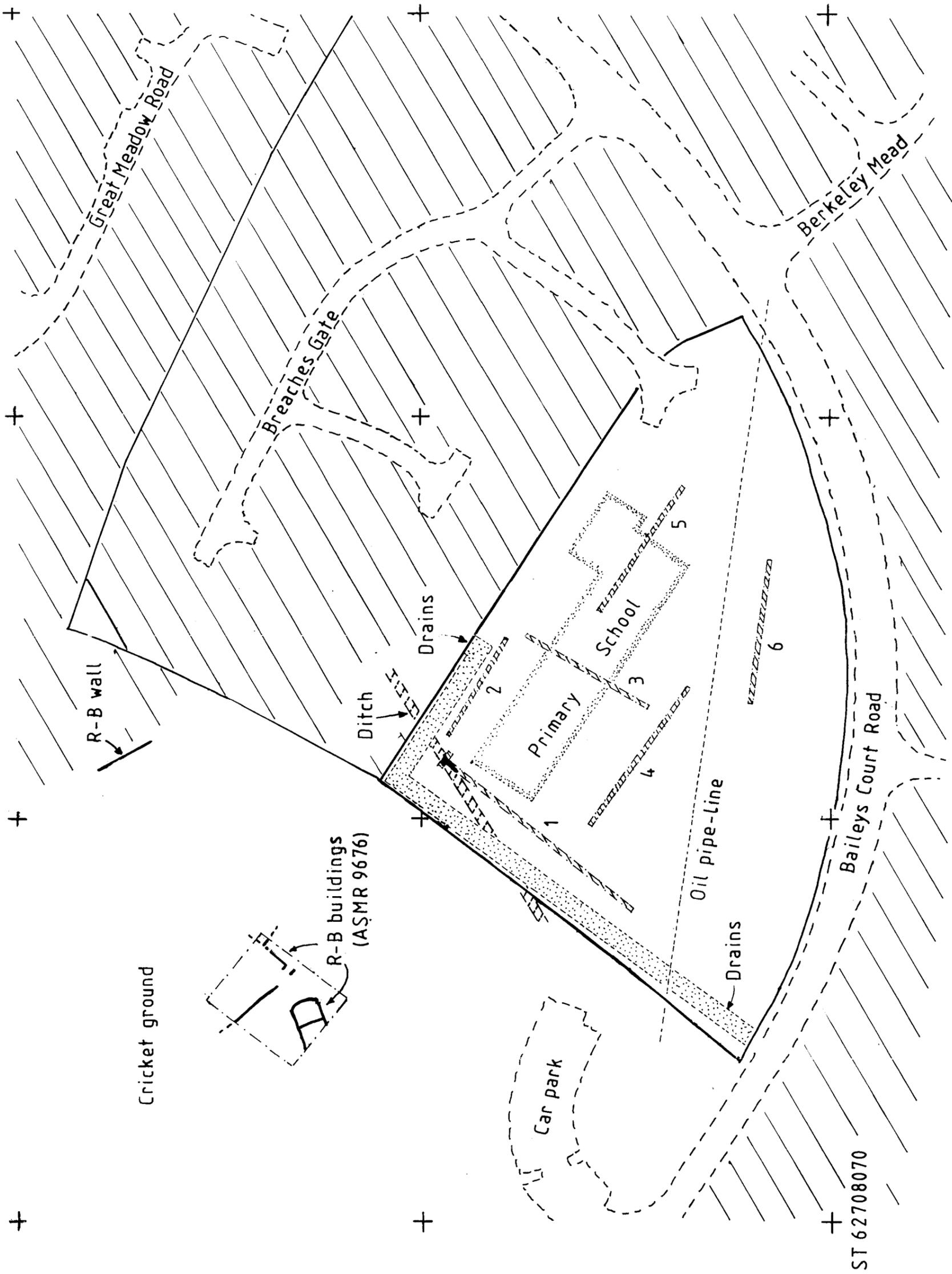
Ditch 104:

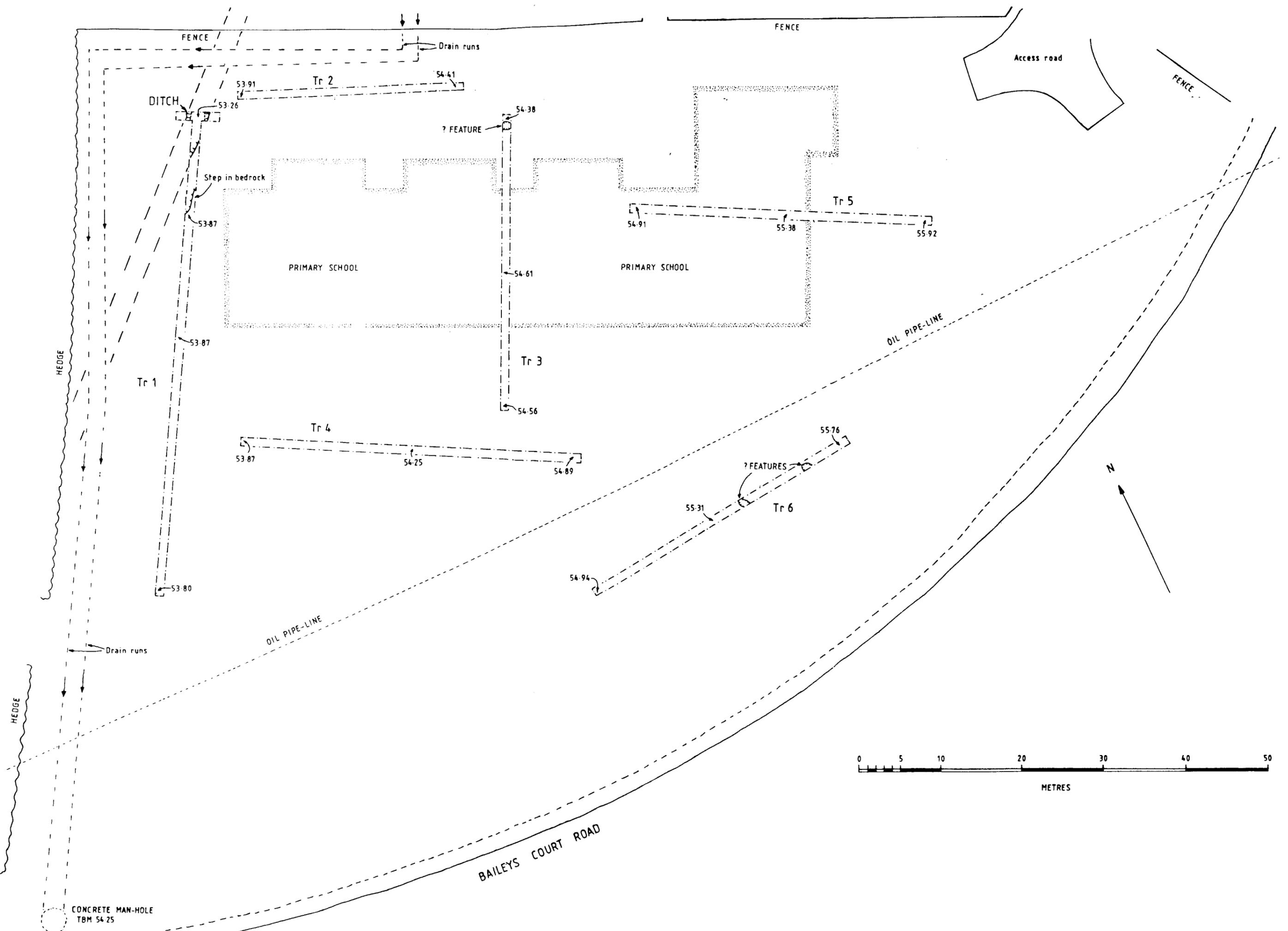
- Layer 103:** Flints: 2 Tertiary flakes
- Pottery: 5 sherds of Severn Valley ware (1 rim,
Rawes 1982, Fig. 7, no. 143)
7 small sherds of grey-ware
1 lump of burnt clay
- Bone: 4 frags. including 2 frags of long-bone
shaft (sheep/goat)
- Other: 1 circular ? limestone disc; 21mm diam.
with circular hole 9mm diam; 2 - 4mm
thick
- Layer 105:** Pottery: 4 sherds of late-Iron Age pottery (2
fabrics)
4 sherds of early-Roman Severn Valley ware
- Bone: 1 distal tibia (horse)
6 frags. long-bone shaft (horse/cow)
1 frag. left tibia (sheep/goat/pig)
1 frag. mandible
3 frags shaft (sheep/goat)
3 frags. skull (sheep/goat)
- Metal: 1 fe. obj. (90mm x 50mm)
- Layer 106:** Pottery: 11 sherds of late-Iron Age pottery
(1 base, 1 rim)
1 sherd of Roman pottery (1 base)
- Bone: 3 frags. long-bone ?humerus (horse/cow)
1 long-bone shaft (sheep/goat)
1 frag. adult pelvis (sheep/goat)
- Layer 107:** Pottery: 2 sherds of late-Iron Age pottery
2 joining sherds of Severn Valley ware
(1 rim of flat-rimmed bowl; Rawes 1982,
Fig. 6, no. 111/119)

Other finds:

- Trench 1, Layer 103: 1 tertiary flint flake (26m from N.E. end of trench)
- Trench 3, topsoil: 1 wrought iron ?fence terminal
- Trench 6, topsoil: 1 pewter button
subsoil: 1 copper alloy bent shaft of ?tack (15.8m from E. end of trench)

ST 63008090





FENCE

FENCE

Access road

FENCE

DITCH

? FEATURE

Step in bedrock

PRIMARY SCHOOL

PRIMARY SCHOOL

OIL PIPE-LINE

HEDGE

Tr 1

Tr 3

Tr 5

Tr 4

Tr 6

? FEATURES

N

BAILEYS COURT ROAD

CONCRETE MAN-HOLE
TBM 54 25



53 91

Tr 2

54 41

53 26

54 38

53 87

54 91

55 38

55 92

54 61

53 87

53 87

54 25

54 89

55 76

53 80

54 94

55 31

Drain runs

HEDGE

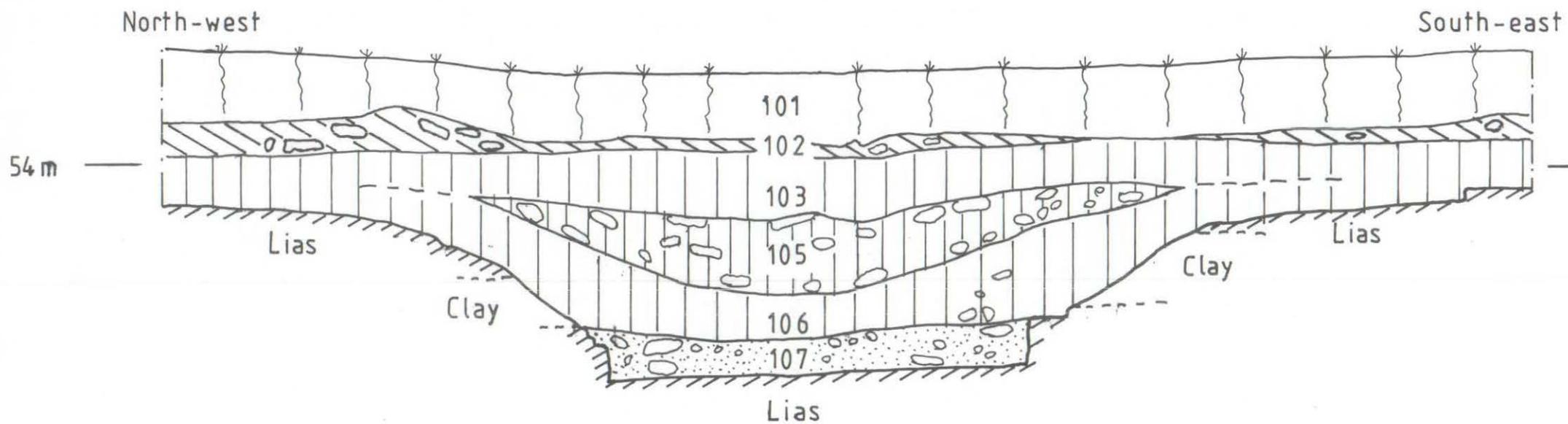
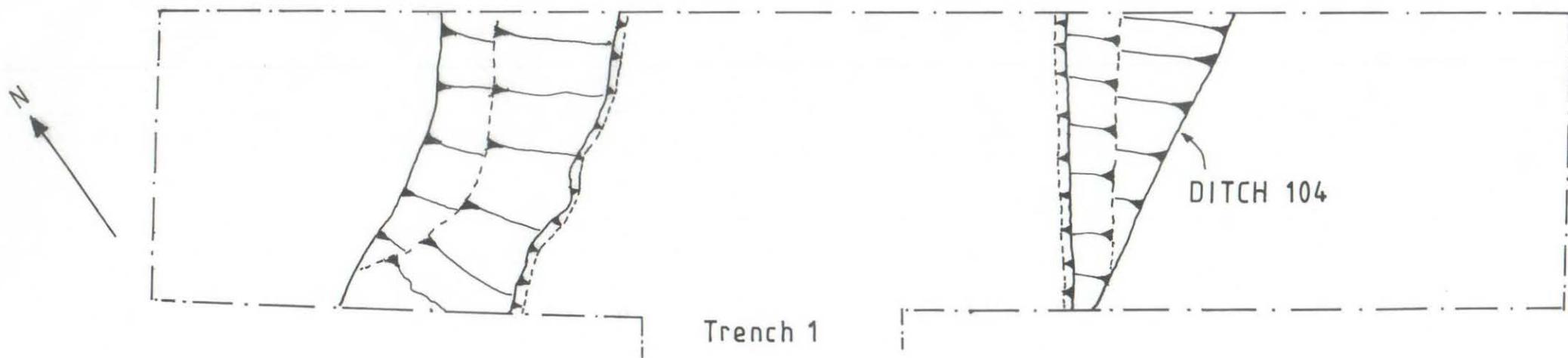




FIG. 1
Machine excavating Trench 5. Looking east.



FIG. 2
B.A.T. Metal-detectorists scanning Trench 5. From south-east.



FIG. 3
Romano-British ditch at
north-east end of Trench
1. Looking east.



FIG. 4
Trench 1 looking north-
east after cleaning down
to bedrock.