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S E R V I C E S**

SUMMARY REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF AT ST DENYS CHURCH CENTRE, SOUTHAMPTON 1997.

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1. ABSTRACT

Southampton City Heritage Management decided that groundworks for the construction of a new church centre at St Denys Church, Southampton (NGR SU 4345 1408) should be subject to a planning condition providing for an archaeological watching brief. The contract for this was awarded to Southern Archaeological Services Ltd of Southampton. The site lies at an approximate height of 5.5m above OD on gravels of River Terrace No. 1, with loam and clay deposits overlying the northern part of the site. Observations revealed the presence of a V-shaped ditch containing Roman pottery and building materials. The ditch was aligned approximately east-west. Three ditches and one ditch or pit also produced Roman finds. There were three undateable features on the site, and an undateable remnant ploughsoil (which may have been present elsewhere, but unrecorded) was observed sealing the fills of two features. Another ditch was observed running roughly northwest- southeast into the adjoining development site (see watching brief report on SOU807). The fieldwork was conducted between 10th December 1996 and 11th March 1997. Observations were funded by St Denys Parochial Church Council.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Southampton City Heritage Arts and Entertainment Management (hereafter Heritage Management) required that a programme of archaeological observation be carried out on groundworks associated with the erection of a new church centre at St Denys Church. Studio Four Architects of Romsey, agents for the Parochial Church Council, awarded the contract for this work to Southern Archaeological Services Ltd (SAS) of Southampton. The fieldwork was conducted between 10th December 1996 and 11th March 1997.

2.2 The planning consent no. is 960242/27088/W.

Heritage Management's internal reference no. is 3333.

The site code allocated by SAS is SAS 81.

The site code allocated by Heritage Management is SOU794.

2.3 The site lies in Local Area of Archaeological Importance no. 6a.

2.4 The groundworks were carried out by Grist Building Services Ltd, of Southampton, and Bee-Jay Construction of Bishops Waltham, using both a tracked 360° excavator and a mini-digger.

3. SITE BACKGROUND

3.1 The site lies at an approximate height of 5.5m above Ordnance Datum to the south of St Denys Church, St Denys Road at OS NGR SU 4345 1408, (see Fig 1). The site is fairly level.

3.2 The geology of the site is River Terrace Deposits (loam and clay) overlying gravel of River Terrace Deposit No 1.

3.3 Archaeological evidence of previous land use has been recovered from nearby sites. The evidence from these sites is as follows:

3.3.1 An archaeological evaluation at 8 Priory Avenue (SOU448) revealed a Mesolithic flint-knapping site of national importance some 220m to the east of the site.

3.3.2 The main range of buildings of the Mediaeval Priory of St Denys stood some 100m to the northeast of the present church.

3.4 The church is dedicated to St Michael. The site lay under agriculture until the area was developed for housing in the mid-19th Century.

3.5 A Watching Brief (site code SOU807) was carried out at the same time by Southampton City Archaeological Operations Unit on a housing development on the plot immediately south of St Denys Church. The observers liaised on site so that features observed on both sites could be cross-referenced.

4. METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

4.1 The Archaeological Watching Brief was undertaken in accordance with the *Watching Brief Scheme of Investigation* supplied by Heritage Management.

4.2 The prime purpose of the Watching Brief was to record any archaeological features encountered on the site, recover any associated objects and to record the nature, dimensions and relationships of the natural deposits encountered.

4.3 Particular attention was to be paid to the possibility of Prehistoric features or finds being encountered, because of the results of the evaluation at SOU448.

4.4 All recording was in accordance with techniques approved by Heritage Management. This recording - written, drawn and photographic - will form an archive to be deposited with Southampton City Museums.

4.5 The Watching Brief took place between 10th December 1996 and 11th March 1997. A soakaway that was supposed to be observed was dug without the observer being notified, so the Watching Brief was terminated when this became apparent, on 7th October 1997.

5. RESULTS

5.1 35 numbers (*context* numbers) were allocated for soil layers, features and their fills, and unstratified finds (see Table 1). Two of these were for natural soils. 13 features were recorded, of which 10 contained finds, two contained inclusions of burnt flint and charcoal, and one had no visible inclusions.

5.2 No feature contained more than one fill. One feature, ditch **23**, was identified as being the same as ditch 7 from the adjoining site (SOU807).

5.3 Features were drawn in section where they appeared in the sides of the trenches, except where roots and building activity had disturbed the ground so much that no clear edges could be seen (see Figures 3-8).

5.4 After fieldwork all records were cross-referenced. It was deemed unnecessary to phase the contexts.

5.5 Despite an initial estimate of 5-6 days, the groundworks took considerably longer, with the observer being present on 20 days over a period of a month and a half. The reasons for this were various, and included heavy rain on several days and the unpredictable course of existing gas and water pipes across the trench layout, which caused several delays (see Fig 2). The rain, in particular hampered archaeological recording and increased the extent of disturbance of the site by machinery.

5.6 After completion of the foundation works, SAS requested a restriction on the scope of the watching brief to the remaining deeper drainage works (in accordance with the Scheme of Investigation 5.3) on the grounds that the combination of spoil spread across the site, wet weather and repeated tracking of machines across most of the site had made archaeological observation of shallow drainage trenches difficult or impossible. The restriction was agreed by Heritage Management. However, the soakaway at the east end of the church centre was not observed, due to the observer not being informed of the groundworks by the Site Agent. This was responsible for the delay between completion of the previous groundworks in March 1997 and production of this report in December 1997. The soakaway was apparently dug after 20th June 1997.

5.6 A summary of the contexts observed, ordered numerically, follows (Table 1). In the text, context numbers appear in **bold**.

Dimensions are given in metres, in the form 'length x width x depth'.

'Mod' means Modern; 'incl' means inclusions; 'dk' means dark; 'lt' means light; 'bcl' means burnt clay; 'bfl' means burnt flint; 'cbm' means ceramic building material; '>' means greater than; 'UE' means unexcavated; N/A means not applicable; 'c.' means 'about'.

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'Later/Earlier than' refer to the stratigraphic relationships

* 1 is later than 5, 7, 11, 12, 15, 17, 20, 24, 28, 31, 33, 34

* 2 is earlier than 4, 8, 14, 16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32

Context 12 is the same as contexts 15 and 34; context 8 is the same as context 25; context 9 is the same as context 26.

For Material Codes, see Section 6. Finds.

Periods encountered on the site are as follows:

Roman	= AD43-410
Post-Mediaeval	= 1500-1800
Early Modern/Modern	= 1800-present

Context	Description	Dimensions	Later than	Earlier than	Mat Nos	Fig Nos
1	Topsoil and demolition rubble	90.00 x >25.00 x 0.60	*	N/A	-	2;3;4;5;6;7;8
2	Natural brickearth	>60.00 x >15.00 x >0.60	3	*	-	2;3;4;5;6;7;8
3	Natural gravel	>60.00 x >15.00 x UE	UE	2	-	2;4;5;6;7;8
4	Feature: concrete structure	>4.70 x >1.10 x >0.90	2	5	-	2
5	Fill of 4: dk yellow/brown sandy clay loam; Mod incl	>4.70 x >1.10 x >0.90	4	1	-	2
6	Feature: rectangular cut beside church wall	>1.00 x 0.60 x >0.20	9/26	7	-	2;3
7	Fill of 6: dk grey/brown silty clay loam; no inclusions	>1.00 x 0.60 x >0.20	6	1	-	2;3
8	Feature: steep-sided, flat-bottomed linear	>12.00 x 0.58 x >0.45	2	9/26	-	2;3
9	Fill of 8: dk grey/brown silty clay loam; charcoal,bfl,bcl	>12.00 x 0.58 x >0.45	8/25	31	1	2;3
10	Feature: straight-sided, assoc. with brick buttress?	>0.80 x >0.80 x UE	9/26	11	-	2
11	Fill of 10: dk grey/brown sandy loam; Mod inclusions	>0.80 x >0.80 x UE	10	1	-	2
12	Fill of 14: dk yellow/brown silty clay; bfl,bcl,charcoal	>19.00 x >1.40 x 0.74	14	1	1;3	2;4
13	Unstratified finds from spoilheap - mainly from 12	N/A	-	-	1;3;5;6;8	N/A
14	Feature: V-shaped ditch with shoulder	>19.00 x >1.40 x 0.74	2	12/15/34	-	2;4
15	Fill of 14:dk yellow/brown silty clay; charcoal,bfl,bcl	>19.00 x >1.40 x 0.74	14	1	1;3	2
16	Feature: U-shaped ditch	>11.00 x 1.20 x 0.60	2	17	-	2;5
17	Fill of 16: dk yellow/brown silty clay; charcoal,bfl	>11.00 x 1.20 x 0.60	16	1	3	2;5
18	Unstratified finds from spoilheap	N/A	-	-	3	N/A
19	Feature: pit - vaguely defined & inaccessible	2.20 x >0.70 x >0.90	2	20	-	2
20	Fill of 19: lt yellow/brown silty clay; no inclusions	2.20 x >0.70 x >0.90	19	1	-	2
21	Feature: pit or linear below boiler house	>2.00 x >0.70 x 0.55	2	22	-	2
22	Fill of 21: brown silty clay loam; charcoal, bfl	>2.00 x >0.70 x 0.55	21	35	-	2
23	Feature: U-shaped ditch = SOU807 context 7	>5.50 x >0.70 x 0.90	2	24	-	2;6
24	Fill of 23: brown silty clay; charcoal,bfl,bcl,few slate	>5.50 x >0.70 x 0.90	23	1	3	2;6
25	Feature: U-shaped ditch	>12.00 x >0.70 x >1.00	2	9/26	-	2;7;8
26	Fill of 25: dk yellow/brown silty clay; charcl,bfl,bcl,slate	>12.00 x >0.70 x >1.00	8/25	31	3	2;7;8
27	Feature: pit? Much disturbed	>0.40 x >0.60 x 0.36	2	28	-	2
28	Fill of 27: dk brown silty clay loam; slate,charcoal,cbm	>0.40 x >0.60 x 0.36	27	1	-	2
29	Feature: pit or ditch?	>1.20 x >0.40 x c0.50	2	30	-	2;8
30	Fill of 29: brown silty clay; charcoal,bfl	>1.20 x >0.40 x c0.50	29	31	-	2;8
31	Layer: buried ploughsoil? charcoal	>8.00 x >1.50 x 0.30	9/26/30	1	-	7;8
32	Feature: pit/ditch? Much disturbed	>2.80 x >0.40 x 0.50	2	33	-	2
33	Fill of 32: brown silty clay; charcoal,bfl	>2.80 x >0.40 x 0.50	32	1	3	2
34	Fill of 14: dk yellow/brown silty clay; charcoal,bfl	>19.00 x >0.35 x >0.45	14	1	3	2
35	Boiler House: Modern brick structure	8.60 x 2.70 x ?	22	N/A	-	2

Table 1: List of Contexts

6. FINDS

6.1. Finds were recovered from 10 contexts.

6.2. The finds are listed below. The material groups are those specified by Heritage Management for sites within Southampton.

MATERIAL GROUP 1 STONE

9 fragments were recovered from 3 contexts:

Context	Count	Description
9	3	burnt flint
13	1	burnt slate
	4	burnt? limestone - 3 shelly; 1 fine sandy
15	1	shelly limestone

MATERIAL GROUP 3 CERAMICS

Pottery

128 sherds of pottery were recovered from 5 contexts. The pottery was scanned by Charlotte Matthews:

Context	Count	Description	Date
12	21	most grog-tempered; some flint/grog tempered; greywares; whitewares; colour-coat?	Roman
13	65	grog-tempered storage jars (several vessels), everted-rim jar; New Forest ware beakers (2+ vessels); greywares incl everted rim jar, plain rim dish, everted rim jar with carinated shoulder	Roman AD270-400
	1	green glazed sherd	Post-Med?
15	20	grog-tempered thick-walled storage jars (3+ vessels), 1 with internal slip, 2 sherds fit	Roman C3rd-4th
18	16	grog-tempered; greywares; black-burnished	Roman
34	5	grog-tempered; colour-coat; very abraded Samian	Roman

Ceramic Building Material

42 fragments were recovered from 9 contexts. The ceramic building material was scanned by R G Thomson:

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Context	Count	Description	Date
12	9	2 <i>tegula</i> ; 7 prob. Roman, incl <i>tegula</i> & <i>pelis</i> ;	Roman
13	13	13 prob. Roman, incl 1 <i>pelis</i> or <i>imbres</i> , 8 <i>tegula</i> , 1 floor tile, Roman 3 very small;	Roman
15	5	All prob. Roman, incl 1 <i>pelis</i> , 1 <i>tegula</i> , 3 uncertain	Roman
17	1	Slightly curved - <i>imbres</i> ?	Roman
18	5	3 Roman, fairly abraded 2 prob. Roman	Roman
24	1	Roman	Roman
26	1	Box-flue tile with wavy lines	Roman
33	1	Prob. Roman	Roman
34	6	All abraded, Roman	Roman

MATERIAL GROUP 5 METAL

Iron

2 iron objects were recovered from 2 contexts:

Context	Count	Item no.	Description
13	1	001	nail
33	1	002	nail

The iron has been x-rayed at Salisbury conservation laboratory.

MATERIAL GROUP 6 MINERAL WASTE

1 fragment of slag was recovered from context 13.

MATERIAL GROUP 8 ANIMAL BONE

1 fragment of animal bone, sawn and chopped, was recovered from context 13.

7. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

7.1 NATURAL DEPOSITS

Natural deposits were encountered in all foundation trenches, and consisted of natural brickearth up to 0.60m thick overlying gravel of River Terrace Deposit No. 1 (see Figure 2).

7.2 OTHER EVIDENCE

Roman

7.2.1 Ditch 14 ran ENE-WSW across the southeast part of the new church centre, and had a V-shaped profile with a pronounced 'shoulder'. All the finds recovered from its fill, 12 (also numbered as 15 and 34) were Roman in date, and most could be assigned to the 3rd-4th Century. The presence of a wide variety of roof tiles, floor tiles, flue tiles (from a hypocaust, or under-floor heating system), as well as limestone and several pottery types suggests that there was settlement nearby, as it is unlikely that domestic refuse would have been transported far, and the nearest known settlements were at Bitterne Manor and near the Magistrates Court on The Avenue. Some of the pottery was very abraded, and may have been deposited in field manuring and ploughing, but much was in better condition, implying deposition *in situ* in the Roman period. The absence of any finds of later date in the ditch fill supports this interpretation. The function of the ditch is unknown, but it was probably a boundary ditch, and may have served a drainage function too. The different numbers were allocated to finds from different locations on the site, with those from 34 coming from a shallower service trench alongside the southern foundations (see Figs 2 and 4).

7.2.2 Ditch 16 ran east-west adjacent to and converged with 14, but it was not possible to tell which ditch cut the other. Ditch 16 was not observed beyond the southeastern corner of the new Hall, but whether that was because it did not extend any further or whether the ground was too disturbed to identify it is uncertain: a vague feature was observed approximately in line with 16, but a foundation trench between the two showed only natural brickearth. Only one fragment of a Roman *imbrex* (roof tile) was recovered from 17, the fill of 16, but the absence of any more recent finds or inclusions suggests that it too may have been a Roman ditch (see Figs 2 and 5).

7.2.3. Feature 32 was very uncertain: it may have been either a pit or a linear feature, but its shape was not clearly visible in the service trench in which it was observed. However, the

presence in its fill, 33, of an undiagnostic, but probably Roman, piece of ceramic building material, a hand-made nail (item 002), and charcoal and burnt flint inclusions suggests an early, possibly Roman date.

7.2.4 Ditch 23 was observed at the west end of the new building, and ran roughly NW-SE towards the adjacent development site (SOU807). The ditch fill, 24, contained one fragment of Roman brick or tile, but also contained a few fragments of slate, which is more characteristic of Mediaeval or later periods. From this evidence, it is not possible to say whether the slate is intrusive, or the Roman material is residual. Because archaeological observers were present on both sites at the same time, it was possible to correlate context numbers for both sites: 23 and 24 on this site correspond to contexts 7 and 8 on SOU807 (see Figs 2 and 6, and SOU807 report).

7.2.5 Ditch **8=25** ran about 14m north of, and parallel to, **14**. Where it was first observed (as **8**) it was truncated, and only the lower part was exposed, but it was later seen in an adjacent foundation trench (as **25**), sealed by a buried soil, **31**. A piece of Roman box-flue tile, from a hypocaust (underfloor heating system) was recovered from the fill **26** (see Figs 2, 3 and 7).

Unstratified Roman finds

7.2.5 Two context numbers, **13** and **18**, were allocated to unstratified finds. Those numbered **13** were recovered from the spoilheap just after excavation of one of the bays that was crossed by ditch **14**. 66 sherds of pottery, 13 fragments of brick or tile, and 5 fragments of stone were recovered from a small area of the spoilheap where the soil description matched that of ditch fill **12**. Of these finds, one potsherd was Post-Mediaeval, a piece of burnt slate was either Mediaeval or Post-Mediaeval, and all four pieces of limestone were undateable, but all the rest of the finds were Roman in date, and the pottery was identified as all dating from AD270-400. The large quantity of pottery recovered from here (compared to elsewhere in the same ditch) suggests the possibility that there may have been a small pit dug into the ditch fill.

Finds allocated number **18** were also recovered from the spoilheaps on other occasions. Obviously Modern finds were not recovered, but it is interesting that, although there was no conscious collector bias, all the pottery and probably all the building material recovered was of Roman date.

Undated contexts

7.2.6 Three features (**19**, **21**, **29**) were undateable due to a lack of finds or diagnostic inclusions: the fills of **21** and **29** contained only charcoal and burnt flint, and the fill of **19** had no visible inclusions. It was also not clear whether these were pits or linear features. Feature **19** lay in a deep foundation trench and was both disturbed and inaccessible for Health and Safety reasons: it may have been plant disturbance. Feature **21** was observed below the Boiler House, but again the trench was too deep to enter, and it could not be fully recorded. Feature **29** appeared more likely to be a linear feature than a pit, but unfortunately there was only just time to record its description before a load of concrete arrived. The only dating evidence for **29** was that it was sealed by the buried soil **31** and thus pre-dates it. As noted above, this soil layer also sealed feature **8=25**, which was dated as Roman from its finds (see Figs 2 and 8).

7.2.7 Context **31** was only observed in one foundation trench, and was interpreted as a buried soil, possibly a ploughsoil, as the upper parts of the features and fills sealed by it were not very clearly defined - in fact it was very similar to the fills below it and the fills of other features on the site, and so may have extended further than it was seen to. No finds were recovered from **31** and the only inclusions observed were fragments of charcoal. Although the site was under agriculture until the mid-19th Century, the absence of Modern material suggests that **31** may have been a Saxon or Mediaeval ploughsoil.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Evidence of Roman land use in the form of ditches was recovered, but no archaeological remains of any other date before the Modern period were observed, apart from the undateable features discussed above. The Roman evidence is significant because it indicates use of the area which was previously unknown, and the location of the remains may be important for the identification of the route of the supposed, but not yet observed, Roman Road from Bitterne Manor to Winchester along the west bank of the Itchen. The nature of the Roman land use is not known, but the possibility that a crossing-point to Bitterne Manor existed in the St Denys area should be borne in mind. The variety of finds, and of types of pottery and building material recovered, strongly suggests the presence of habitations, including a high-status building, nearby, but the absence of any structural features on the site itself suggests that they were some little distance away. Whether there was a nearby farm, or perhaps a guest-house by the river crossing, cannot be said.

8.2 Although the site had considerable vegetation along the southern boundary which disturbed the upper parts of archaeological deposits, and the combination of heavy rain and vehicle tracking caused difficulties in the later stages of the observation, confidence in the quality of the information recovered is high where contexts were relatively undisturbed, and fairly high where the upper levels were disturbed.

9. SOURCES

British Geological Survey *Solid & Drift Geology: Sheet 315 - Southampton (1:50 000)*
Southampton City Heritage Management *St Denys Church, St Denys Road, Southampton*
Watching Brief Scheme of Investigation

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

10.1 SAS acknowledges the collaborative role of Southampton City Council Heritage Management, and would also like to thank the Rev Simon Foulkes for his co-operation during the project.

Funding by St Denys Parochial Church Council

Agent: Studio Four Architects

Construction: Grist Building Services Ltd

Groundworks by Bee-Jay Construction

Brian Shuttleworth of Southampton Archaeology Operations Unit for his co-operation on site

10.2	Fieldwork:	Brian Whitehead, Ron Brading & Pete Higgins
	Post-fieldwork & Report:	Brian Whitehead
	Finds Report:	Susan Higgins
	Pottery scan:	Charlotte Matthews
	Ceramic building material scan:	R G Thomson
	Editing	Brian Whitehead and SAS collective

11. ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1: Site location plan
- Figure 2: Trench and feature location plan
- Figure 3: North- and east-facing sections of **8**
- Figure 4: West-facing section of **14**
- Figure 5: West-facing section of **16**
- Figure 6: North-, east- and south-facing sections of **23**
- Figure 7: West-facing section of **25**
- Figure 8: South-facing section of **25** and **29**

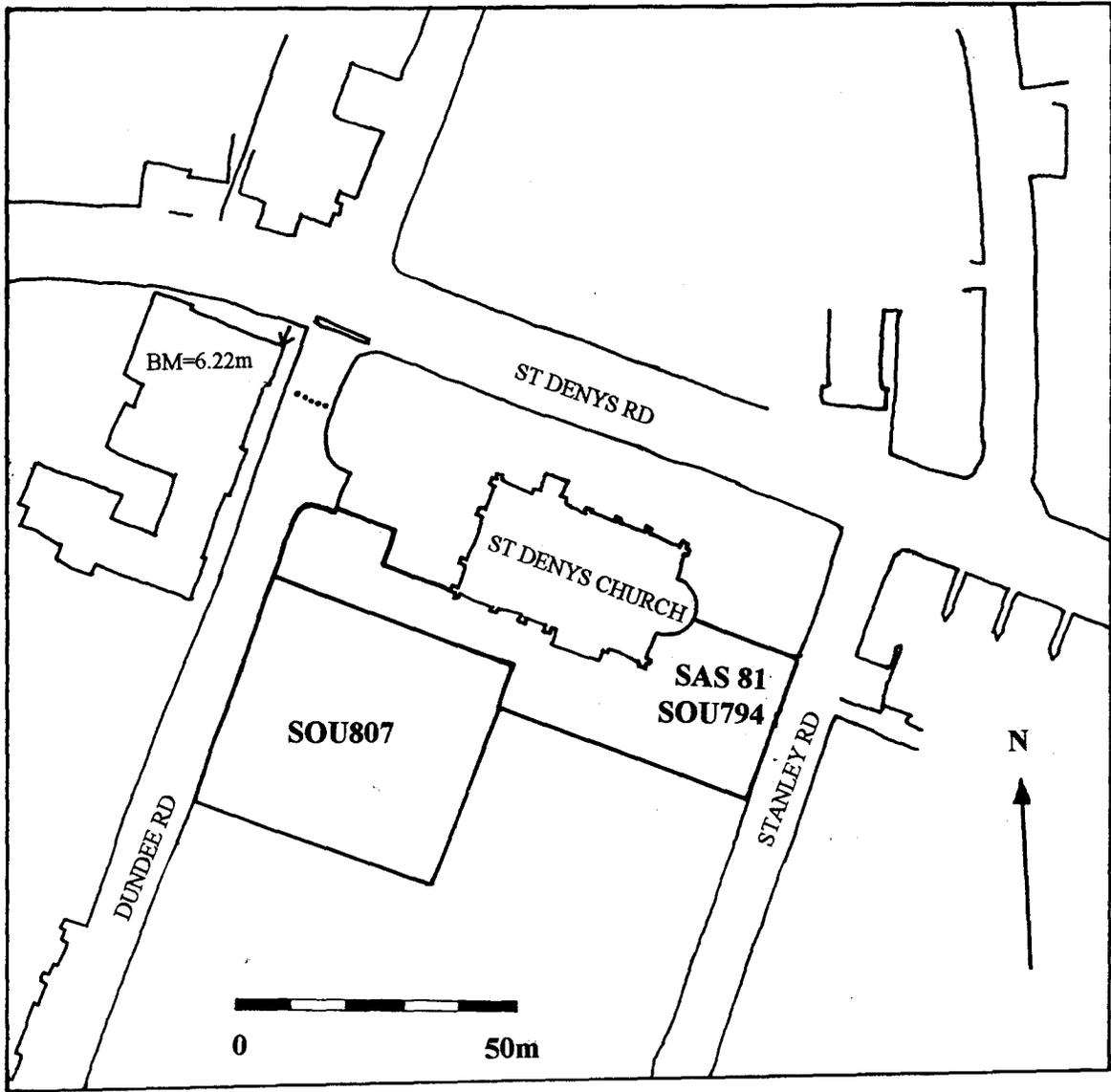


Figure 1: Site location plan

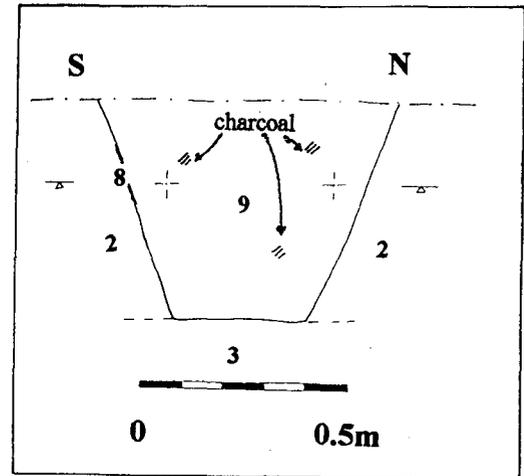
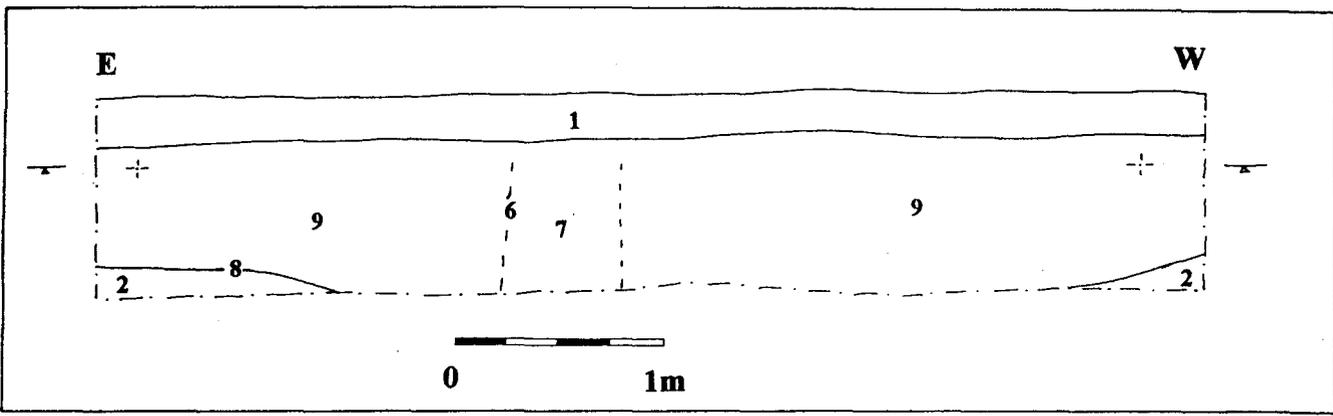


Figure 3: North- and east-facing sections of ditch 8

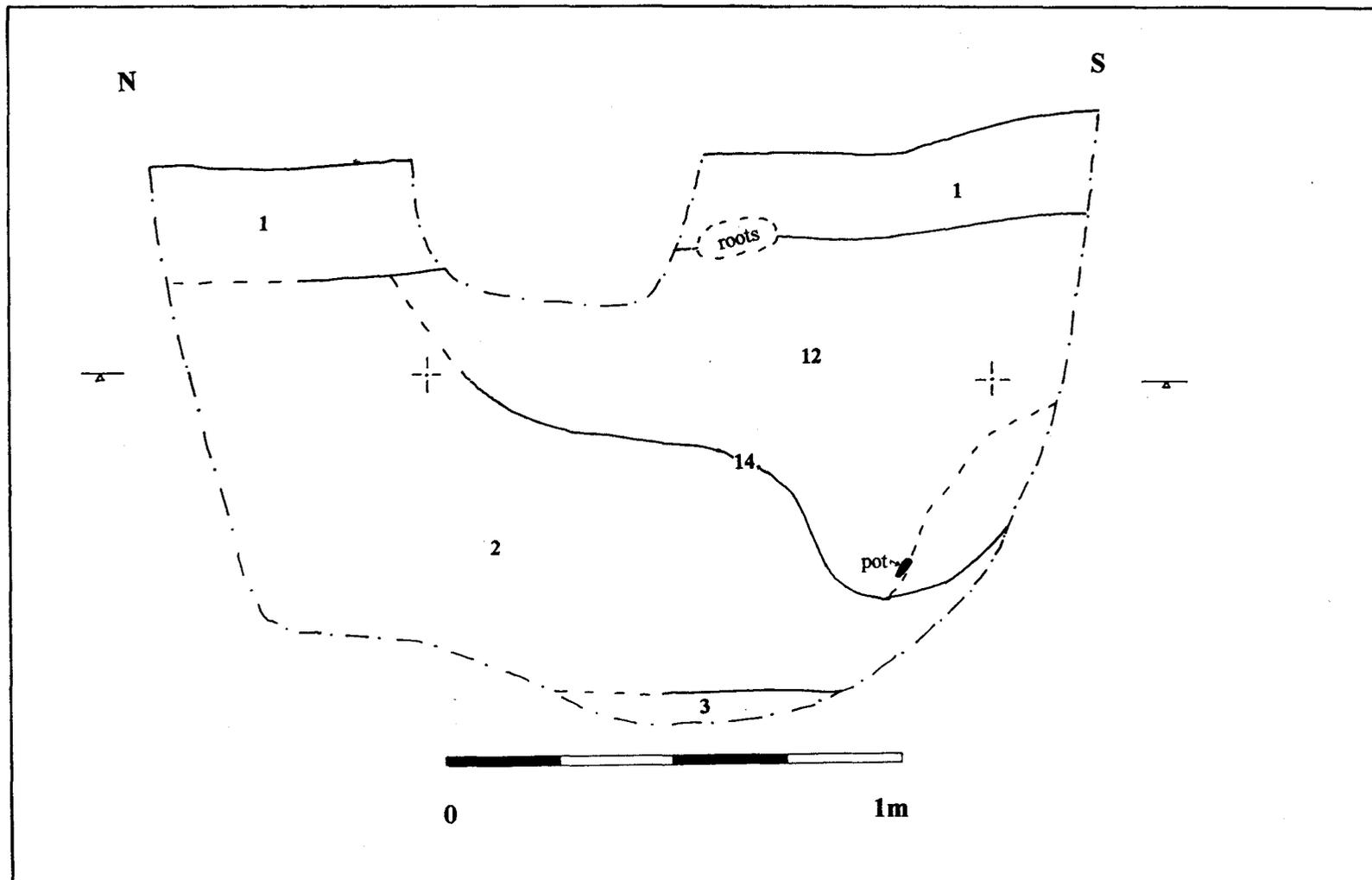


Figure 4: West-facing section of 14

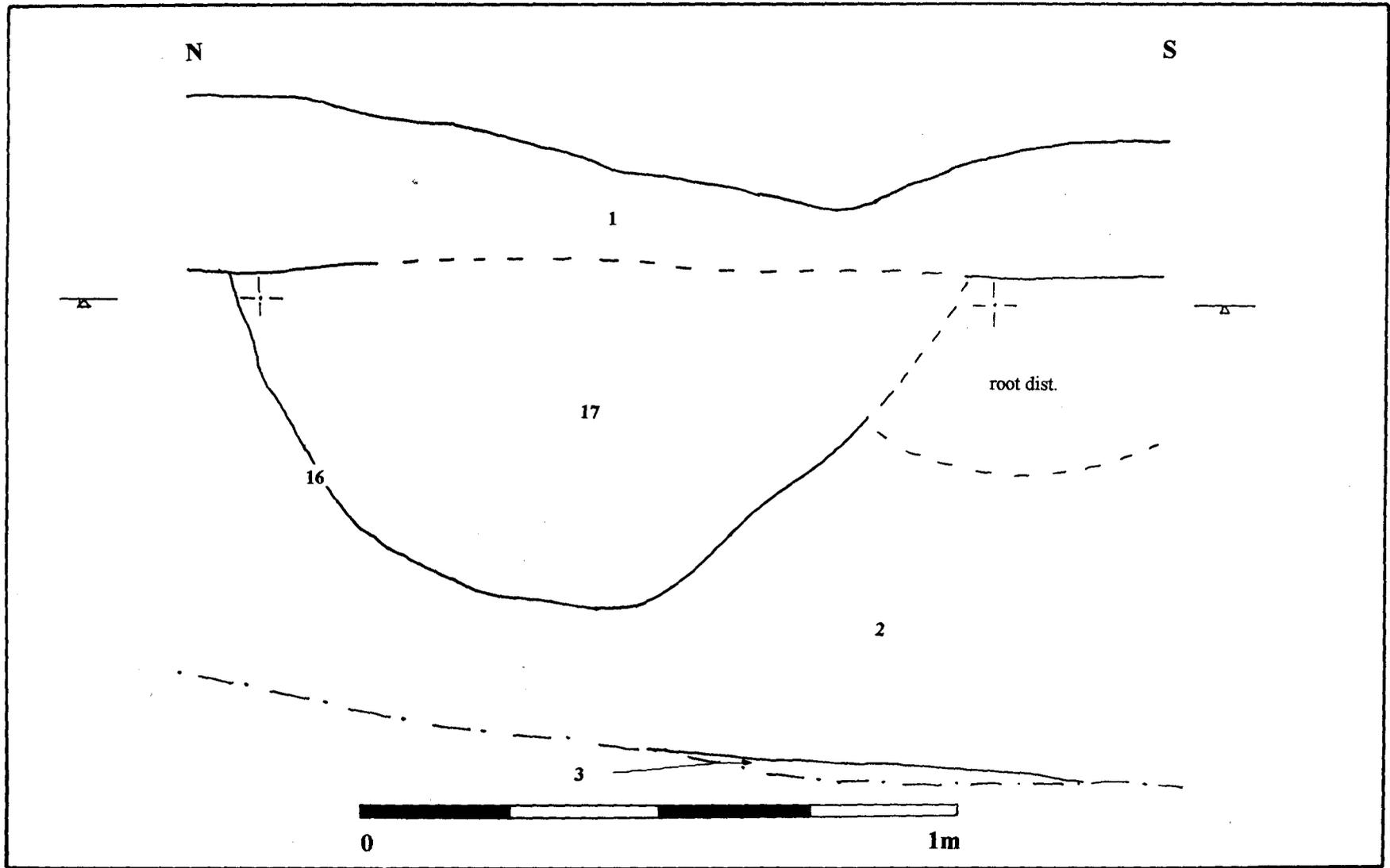


Figure 5: West-facing section of 16

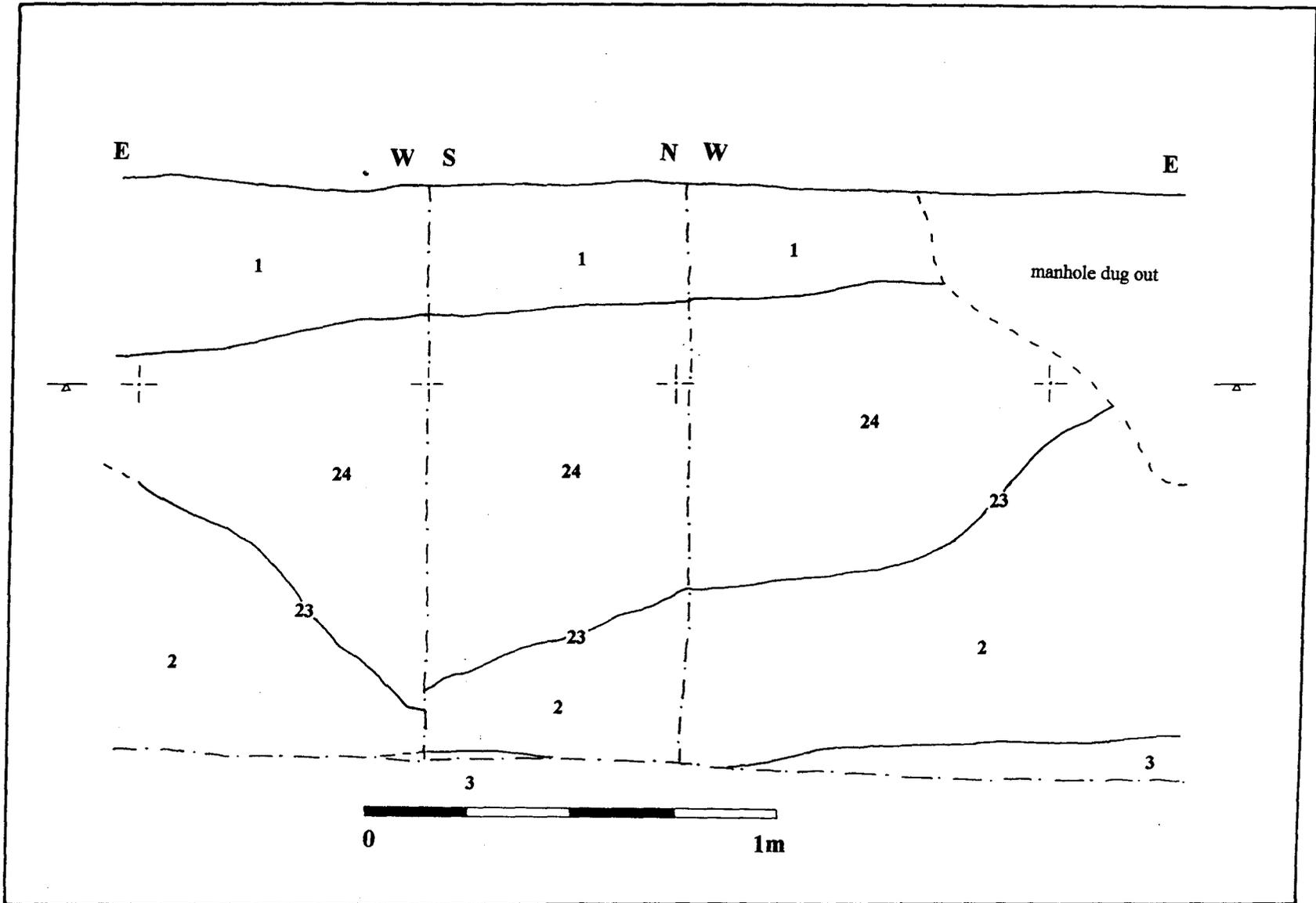


Figure 6: North-, east- and south-facing sections of 23

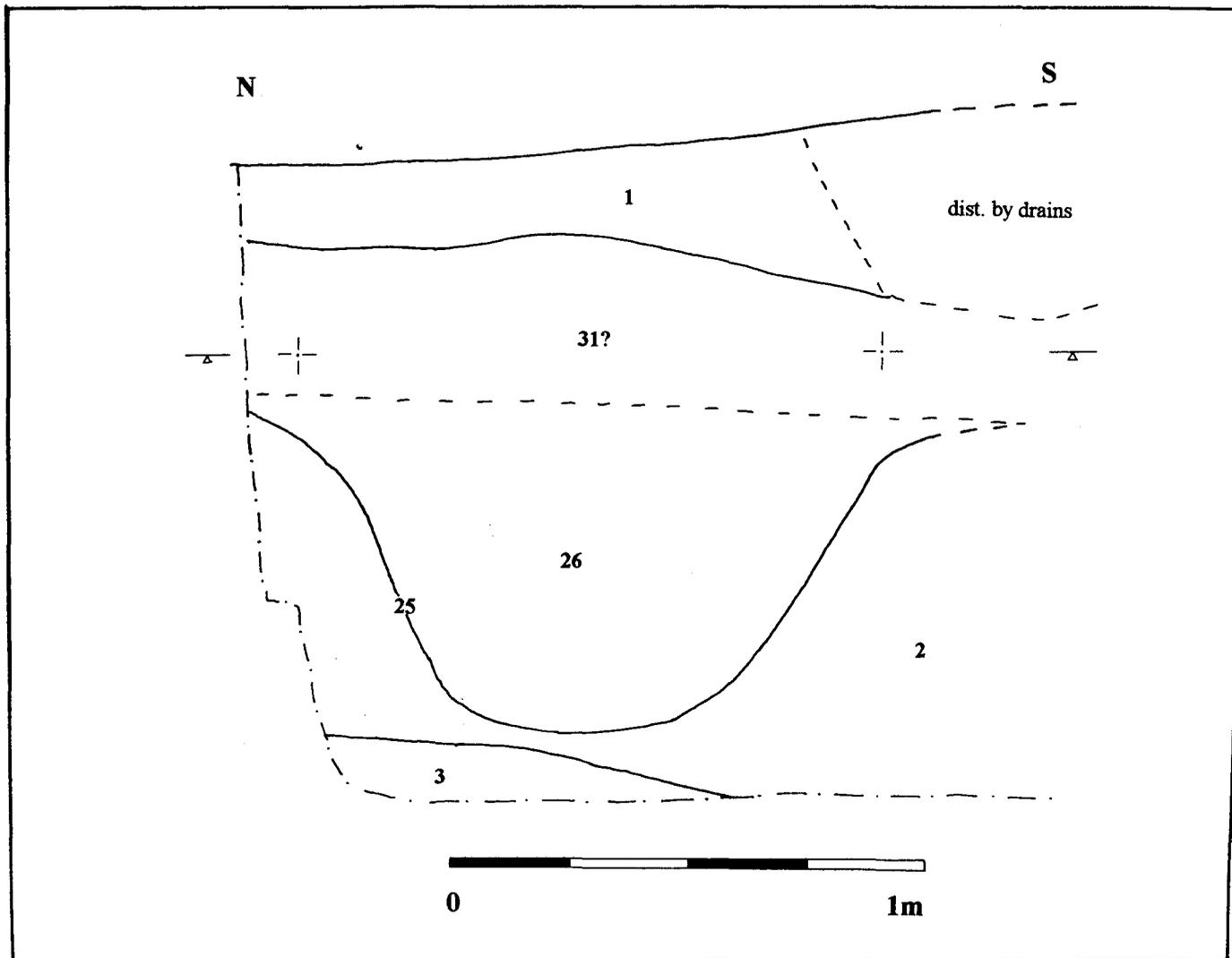


Figure 7: West-facing section of 25

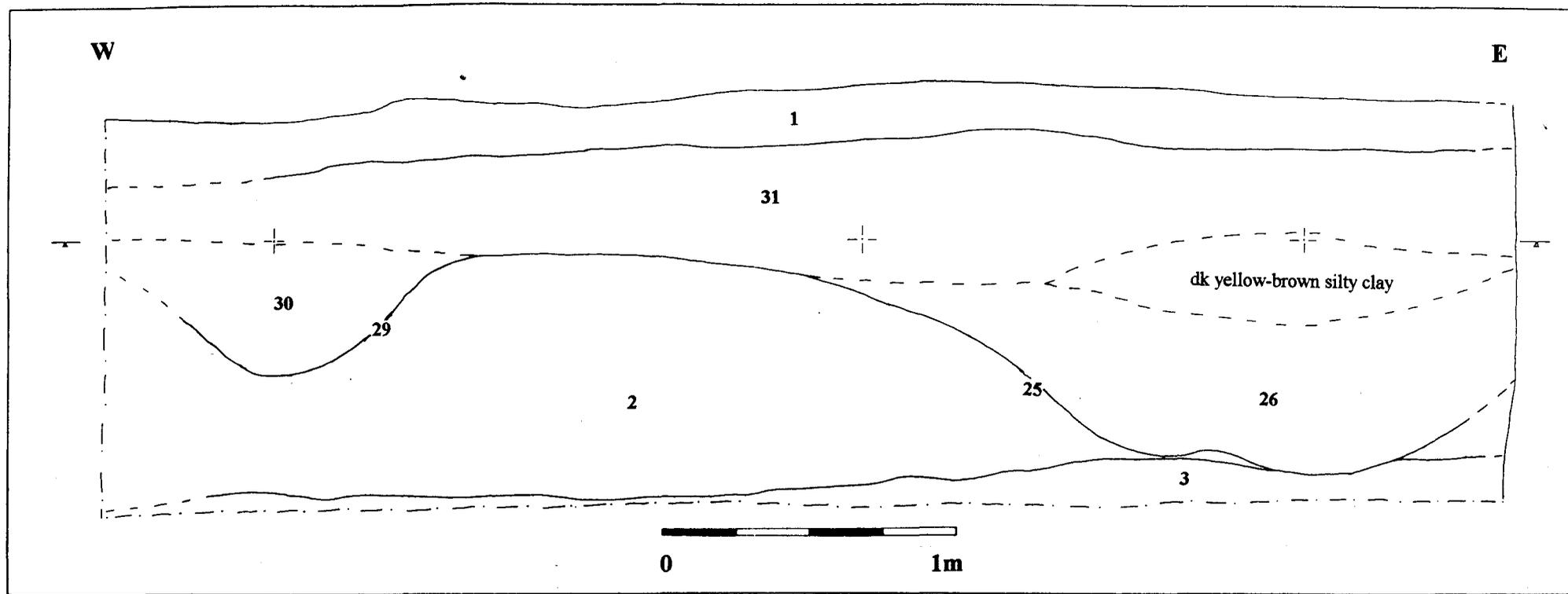


Figure 8: south-facing section of 25 and 29