

2008.017

*An Archaeological Evaluation on the site of a  
Proposed New Building  
at*

Box House, BOX  
WILTSHIRE

WITHIN SAM 30299

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PREPARED FOR  
MR CHARLIE TULL



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March 2008



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## **Site Details**

DCMS Reference     HSD9/2/9076

SAM                    30299

Site address         Box House, Box, Wiltshire

OS NGR                ST 8224 5242

Site Type             Archaeological Evaluation

Client                 Mr Charlie Tull

Date of Fieldwork    4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> of March 2008

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the author in March 2008 on the site of a proposed new building within the grounds of Box House, Box, Wiltshire. The proposed development area lies within the scheduled area of Scheduled Ancient Monument 30299, a large Roman villa complex centred on an area to the north-east of the parish church in Box.*

*The archaeological evaluation involved the excavation of two trial trenches, one within an existing outbuilding known as the Coach House and one on the adjacent lawn area to the north of the main house.*

*Both trenches revealed sections of wall on north-east by south-western alignments, probably part of the same structure. The wall was stratigraphically and stylistically dated to the Romano-British period, and the alignment and location indicate that it was associated with the villa complex which has been excavated to the north-east. There are indications that the wall may have formed the southern wall of a building constructed on a terrace created by dumping material on the natural hillside. It is also possible however that it connected with another section of wall recorded along Church Lane to the east and could be an external boundary wall.*

*The evaluation has shown that well preserved Romano-British structures and associated stratigraphy lie within the proposed development area. The top of these archaeological deposits lies just 0.4m below the northern Coach House floor. Under the lawn they are more heavily truncated by 19<sup>th</sup> century landscaping and the top of stratigraphy is 1.8m below ground, with the top of the wall at a depth of 2.3m. As features associated with a major Roman villa complex they are of significant importance and interest, and any development within this area could potentially have a major impact on the archaeological resource.*

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1** This report presents the findings of an archaeological evaluation carried out by Kim Watkins during March 2008 in the grounds of Box House on the south-western edge of the village of Box in Wiltshire. The work was commissioned by Mr Charlie Tull the owner of Box House who has applied for planning permission to demolish the existing Coach House building to the north-east of the main house, and erect a new building on a larger footprint extending several metres westwards into the present lawn area on the northern side of the main house.
- 1.2** The evaluation was carried out in line with a Project Design produced by Kim Watkins in consultation with Mr Philip McMahon, the Inspector of Ancient Monuments at English Heritage and subsequently approved by him. The work was also in accordance with *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (IFA 1999).
- 1.3** This evaluation work has been carried out in order to inform the Scheduled Monument Consent application for the proposed building works at the request of the Inspector of Ancient Monuments at English Heritage.

## **2 Site Location (Fig 1)**

- 2.1 The site is located on the south-western edge of the village of Box in Wiltshire on the northern side of the main A4 Bath Road (see Fig 1). The proposed development site is centred on ST 8224 6848 and is currently occupied by a 19<sup>th</sup> century outbuilding known as the Coach House with a lawn area at a higher level on the western side. The main house is just to the south-west. Geologically the area is located on clays of the Lower Lias (BGS 1990).
- 2.2 At present the main portion of the proposed development site consists of a two storey 19<sup>th</sup> century Grade II Listed stone outbuilding known as the Coach House. On the western side this building is abutted by a relatively flat lawn area at approximately 1m above the ground level of the Coach House. To the east the area is bounded by Box House Cottage which is outside the grounds of Box House, and to the north there is a flat hard surfaced road which is at approximately the same level as the ground floor of the Coach House. Along the boundary of the southern side of the road and the lawn area there is a revetment wall.

## **3 Background**

- 3.1 The proposed development area lies within the western boundary of Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM ) number 30299, a large Roman villa complex, the core of which is centred on an area approximately 90m to the north-east. The villa was discovered in 1829 and was partially excavated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The main core of the villa complex was excavated in 1902-1903, and the work including detailed plans of the buildings was published in 1904 by H Brakespear. This excavation work revealed three ranges of a large masonry villa complex with rooms containing hypocausts, mosaics and baths. Further excavations carried out in 1967-68 beneath Selwyn Hall some distance to the north-east of Box House showed that the Roman villa complex extended eastwards at least to Valens Terrace (Hurst, Dartnall, Fisher 1987).
- 3.2 More recent small scale archaeological work has shown that Roman occupation and activity also extended to the south and west of the excavated nucleus of the villa. In 1995 an archaeological field evaluation was carried out by the Bath Archaeological Trust (BAT) in the grounds of Box House including two trenches on the lawn area just to the west of the proposed development site and one to the east of the house, all of which revealed traces of Roman activity. A trench several metres to the north of the main house on the lawn appears to have shown the top of probable Romano-British stratigraphy at 43.27m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum). The deposits recorded in this area do not appear to have contained dating evidence but are described as demolition deposits, dump layers and a massive stone capped drain of probable Roman date (Beaton 1995). To the north of this another trench was excavated on the lawn which recorded the top of Romano-British stratigraphy at 43.06m AOD. A small section of wall was recorded described as the south-west corner of a masonry building, the top of which was at 42.66m AOD.

Within this trench a cobbled surface of Romano-British date was also recorded and a sequence of demolition and dump layers. The exact relationship between these deposits is not clear as there are no section drawings from this excavation.

- 3.3 During the 1980's trial excavations were carried out in the grounds of Box House by students from Chippenham College. A trench adjacent to the east wall of the main house revealed a probable Roman wall 1m below the modern ground level.
- 3.4 During works in 1980 a Roman ditch of late 1<sup>st</sup> century to mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century date was recorded in the garden of The Hermitage to the south of Box House. This ditch was orientated south-west by north-east, on the same alignment as the villa complex. Excavation of the ditch produced a large assemblage of Roman pottery and other finds.
- 3.5 In 1992 a water pipe trench was excavated along Church Lane to the east of the proposed development area. This revealed a Roman wall on a north-east by south-west alignment running for over 8.5 metres along the south verge of the lane, in places just 0.3m below the surface (Beaton 1995).

## **4 Aims**

- 4.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to gather high quality data from the excavation and observation of archaeological deposits in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving archaeological remains. This will enable recommendations to be made for the management of the resource, including further archaeological works if necessary.
- 4.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following objectives:
- i) To define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits within the proposed development area and to date these where possible.
  - ii) To attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site.
  - iii) To recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

## **5 Methodology (Fig 2)**

- 5.1 The evaluation involved the excavation of two trenches. The position of these is shown on the site plan in Fig 2. Trench 1 was located within the Coach House building and was 2m by 2m. Trench 2 was located on a higher level on the lawn area to the west and was 3.5m by 2m on a north-west by south-east orientation.
- 5.2 All non-significant topsoil and overburden was removed by hand in Trench 1 and machine in Trench 2 down to the first archaeological horizon or undisturbed natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. Any potential archaeological deposits were then hand excavated and fully recorded.

## 6 Results of the Evaluation

### 6.1 Trench 1 (Figs 3a and 3b and Fig 5)

- 6.1.1 This trench was 2m by 2m and was hand dug through the concrete Coach House floor to an average depth of 0.46m. This revealed the top of a wall (112) at a depth of 0.4m. The wall was 0.59m wide and running on an east north east by west south-west alignment. It was neatly constructed from large subangular limestone blocks on both faces of average depth 0.09m, with a smaller rubble infill, bonded with a hard creamy white lime mortar. On the northern side a sondage revealed that the wall (112) was abutted by a loose gritty light grey layer of decayed limestone and silty clay with occasional rubble (113). The top of this deposit was at 42.98m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum). The base of this layer was not found but it continued to a depth of over 1.4m below floor level and contained no dateable artefacts. Overlying this was a layer of compacted mid brown silty clay 0.4m deep (111) which contained common inclusions of pennant tile fragments and moderate to small subangular limestone stone rubble but no other dateable artefacts. The wall was abutted in the south-western corner of the trench by a compacted mid brown silty clay with occasional rubble (115), which was not excavated but similar to (111). This layer had been cut in the south-eastern corner of the trench by a 19<sup>th</sup> century feature [105] which was filled with loose dark brown soil containing occasional pieces of 19<sup>th</sup> century china (109). A sondage revealed that this later feature was over 0.62m deep and the base was not found. The sondages also revealed that the wall survived to a depth of over 7 or 8 courses and continued to a depth of over 1.4m below floor level, approximately 42.44m AOD.
- 6.1.2 The upper part of the wall (112) and abutting layers had been truncated by a 19<sup>th</sup> century floor level which stratigraphically overlay the fill of cut [105]. This 19<sup>th</sup> century building phase (group context 102 including (103) (106), (107) and (108)) was comprised of several components and its base was at approximately 43.38m AOD (see Fig 5). There was a straight stone built channel (103), 0.27m deep and 0.2m wide running parallel to the front wall of the Coach House building with a flat flagstone base (107). At the northern end of the trench the sides of the channel were formed by two large limestone blocks (106). These were abutted to the south by a compacted mid greyish silty clay soil which contained occasional Post-medieval pottery (108). The sides of the channel in the southern half of the trench were constructed from small subangular limestone blocks and abutted the compacted earth layer (108). The channel was filled with a loose brown soil containing 19<sup>th</sup> century glass and ceramics. The channel and associated contexts were then overlain by a thin layer of compacted soil (116) with occasional stones and 19<sup>th</sup> century ceramics up to 0.1m deep. Above this was a mortar bedding layer with a brick floor on top overlain by a later concrete scree surface.



## 6.2 Trench 2 (Figs 4a, 4b,4c and Fig 6)

- 6.2.1 This trench was 3.5m long by 2m wide, orientated north-west by south-east, and was machined to an average depth of 2.45m. At this level a very compacted stony brash like layer (215) was revealed in the southern half of the trench, this layer was very clean apart from occasional tile flecks on the surface and was interpreted as possible natural substrate although it could have been a redeposited layer. Due to the limitations of the trench further sondages to confirm this were not possible although it was visible to a depth of over 0.44m in the side of a cut [209]. This layer sloped moderately upwards towards the south-western end of the trench, where it was at approximately 42.63m AOD.
- 6.2.2 Context (215) had been cut by a vertically sided straight edged cut [209], the foundation cut for a wall (206). The cut was over 0.44m deep with no obvious base found and contained a wall (206), of which the base was at approximately 41.99m AOD. At the base the southern side of the wall was abutted by a loose light greyish brown stony fill (210) with a high decayed limestone component which produced no artefacts. The southern face of the wall at this level was relatively crudely faced and constructed from subangular limestone blocks of average 0.15m depth, with smaller rubble infill. On the northern face the wall was not excavated but appeared to be of similar construction. There were traces of a pale creamy orange fine gravely material with occasional peagrit forming an ephemeral bonding matrix. The wall was 0.59m wide and orientated east north-east by west south-west and the top of the surviving courses was 2.32m below current ground level at 42.59m AOD. The lowest three or four courses had survived with the bottom course stepped out by 0.1m on the southern side. A further context (207) within cut [209] partially overlay fill (210) in the eastern half of the trench. This consisted of a finely crushed deposit of cream coloured limestone, possibly from construction of the wall. It contained an unabraded Romano-British tile fragment and lenses of loose stone rubble. Later disturbance appeared to have significantly truncated this context.
- 6.2.3 On the southern side of the wall, deposit (207) was overlain by a moderately compacted orange iron (Fe) stained stoney layer (203) 0.2m deep on average with occasional small subangular limestone rubble. This may have been a hard surface layer associated with the wall or just a hillwash type deposit. It contained an abraded sherd of Romano-British pottery and occasional tile flecks. Overlying this was a layer of moderately loose light brown soil (211) with occasional lenses of decayed stone and Fe stained brash and occasional peagrit. This context had been cut by a moderately steep sided U-shaped feature [208] visible in both east and west sides of the trench, interpreted as a Post-medieval robber trench following the wall (206). Cut [208] was filled with a loose light brown soil with common small subangular stone rubble (205).

- 6.2.4 On the northern side of the wall (206) a compacted subangular limestone rubble in a greyish brown clay matrix was visible abutting the wall in the base of the trench (214). This was overlain by (204) a thin compacted orangey brown clay layer up to 0.1m deep with occasional small stones and tile flecks. Overlying this was a moderately loose light brown soil (213) with occasional peagrit and decayed stone lenses stratigraphically equivalent to context (211), and also cut by the U-shaped feature [208].
- 6.2.5 The stratigraphic relationship between deposits to the north and south of the wall (206) had been removed by cut [208] which appeared to be a robber trench as it had truncated the wall and the deposits abutting it. Overlying the fill of the cut (205) there was a mid greyish brown redeposited silty clay soil (202) up to 1.5m deep containing Post-medieval sherds of glass and other finds extending across the whole of the trench, a make-up layer for the landscaping of the lawn area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was overlain by a layer of decayed limestone and rubble (201) 0.2m deep, and above this was the topsoil and turf (200) which was approximately 0.45m deep.

## 7 Discussion

- 7.1 This evaluation has shown that sections of a substantial wall which appear to be part of the same structure are present beneath the Coach House and lawn area of Box House. The structure has survived particularly well beneath the northern half of the Coach House where although the base was not found, 8 courses were revealed over 1.04m high. In this area the top of the wall was just 0.4m below the current floor level. No surfaces associated with the wall were recorded beneath the Coach House. On the southern side a 19<sup>th</sup> century cut had removed much of the earlier stratigraphy. On the northern side the lowest part of the wall which was excavated was abutted by a loose layer of decayed stone and occasional rubble in a clay matrix. This layer was nearly 0.6m deep and quite clean and could be some sort of make-up layer associated with the wall as there was a clear horizon between this and the context above. The latter was a compacted clay layer with rubble and pennant tile fragments and had the appearance of a more gradually accumulated collapse layer. Although there was little dating evidence from this trench the build of this wall and the presence of the pennant tile are both an indication that it formed part of Romano-British structure.
- 7.2 Beneath the north-eastern corner of the lawn the foundations of what appears to be the same wall were revealed. The base was found at the bottom of a foundation trench on the southern side. Here the wall was more heavily truncated and survived to a height of 0.46m, the top being 2.32m below current lawn level. On the northern side of the wall a rubble layer was visible but could not be excavated to determine if this predated the wall or was a collapse or demolition deposit. The wall and overlying stratigraphic sequence had been cut through during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the upper section of wall appears to have been removed during landscaping of the grounds. A piece of unabraded Romano-British tile apparently within the upper fill of the wall

foundation cut was the only dating evidence for the wall recovered. Some stratigraphy has survived to the north and south of the robber trench although the relationship between the wall and these horizons has been lost. Possible natural brash was recorded to the south of the wall sloping up towards the south and overlain by a stony Fe stained layer with a sherd of abraded RB pot and occasional tile flecks. It is possible that this represents a deliberately laid hard-standing surface of Romano-British date. A truncated early soil horizon with hillwash lenses was overlying and was the highest pre-19<sup>th</sup> century deposit to survive within the trench. The deposit was undated but stratigraphically could be of early Post-Roman date.

- 7.3 No evidence has been recorded for internal floor surfaces within either trench, although there is some evidence for levelling up of the ground to the north of this wall and a possible hard standing stone surface to the south. As the natural topography slopes upwards to the south this would suggest that a building may have been on a terrace to the north of this wall, with make-up layers within the building to create a level floor. This was found to be the case during excavations of the main villa complex to the north-east in 1969 (Hurst, Dartnell, Fisher 1987, 22). A previous trial trench on the lawn recorded the south-west corner of a building approximately 12m to the west of the wall section recorded here at a similar level (Beaton 1995), and this could therefore be the end of the same building and confirmation that it extended northwards from this wall. To the south-west of the present evaluation trench on the lawn a stone capped drain was recorded within a few metres of the main house on a north-south alignment (Beaton 1995). This was interpreted as a Romano-British feature and is also a possible indication that the southern part of the lawn area was outside rather than within any buildings. This interpretation assumes that the wall is part of a building whereas there is also the possibility that it is an external boundary wall.
- 7.4 Within the Coach House area the Romano-British wall and Roman or early Post-Roman stratigraphy associated with this had been truncated during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. A terrace was formed for the new building and a stone lined channel constructed on top of this with compacted clay floors and stone pads to support the original front entrance of the Coach House (altered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century). The channel ran parallel to the Coach House walls and was probably built for drainage purposes. On the south side of the Roman wall the earlier stratigraphy had been heavily disturbed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century possibly during excavation of the basement area under the southern part of the Coach House. A brick floor had then been laid in this area at a later date.

## 8 Conclusions

This work has shown the presence of a Romano-British structure within the proposed development area on the same alignment as the main Box villa complex to the east. Within the Coach House area the uppermost surviving courses of a wall and associated stratigraphy were recorded at just 0.4m below the current floor level. The lawn area is approximately 1m higher than the ground level of the Coach House and in this area the top of the wall is approximately 2.32m below the ground, with the top of undisturbed stratigraphy at a depth of approximately 1.8m on either side of the Post-Medieval robber cut (43.07m AOD). This level is consistent with the top of Romano-British stratigraphy recorded in the 1995 BAT evaluation trenches to the west and south-west, becoming gradually higher towards the south.

There is some limited evidence that this wall formed part of a building that extended northwards from the wall under the northern part of the Coach House and also across the northern part of the lawn, with a possible south-western corner having been recorded in the north-western corner of the lawn by BAT in 1995. A large stone covered drain recorded on the southern part of the lawn during the 1995 evaluation by BAT was running down the slope towards this wall and may be an associated feature. A long section of wall recorded by BAT in 1992 running along the southern side of Church Lane on the other side of Box House Cottage also appears to be running on a similar alignment to this wall and may be an associated structure. The fabric of the walls indicate a substantial well built structure.

An exact function for this structure cannot be determined at present. It is located some distance to the south-west of the known core of the Roman villa complex, but within a spread of associated features including a Romano-British ditch on a similar alignment found to the south in the Hermitage grounds in 1980. It could therefore form part of an ancillary building to the main villa or possibly even be an external boundary wall. It is however firmly within the context of the villa complex and it is of a high archaeological importance.

This evaluation has shown that the top of archaeological stratigraphy within the proposed development area is approximately 0.4m below floor level under the northern part of the Coach House, and approximately 1.8m below the lawn. At present details of the proposed building works have not been provided. However any works which disturb these areas to a depth below the top of the archaeological stratigraphy observed during this evaluation are likely to have a severe impact on the archaeological resource.

## 9 References

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- BGS 1965 British Geological Survey of England & Wales Sheet 265, Bath.
- Hurst, H.R  
Dartnall, D.L &  
Fisher, C 1987 Excavations at Box Roman Villa 1967-8. *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, Vol 81 pp19-51
- IFA 1999 Standards and guidance for field evaluation
- Watkins, K 2007 Box House, Box, Wiltshire Proposed redevelopment of The old Coach House Outbuilding. An Archaeological Evaluation.

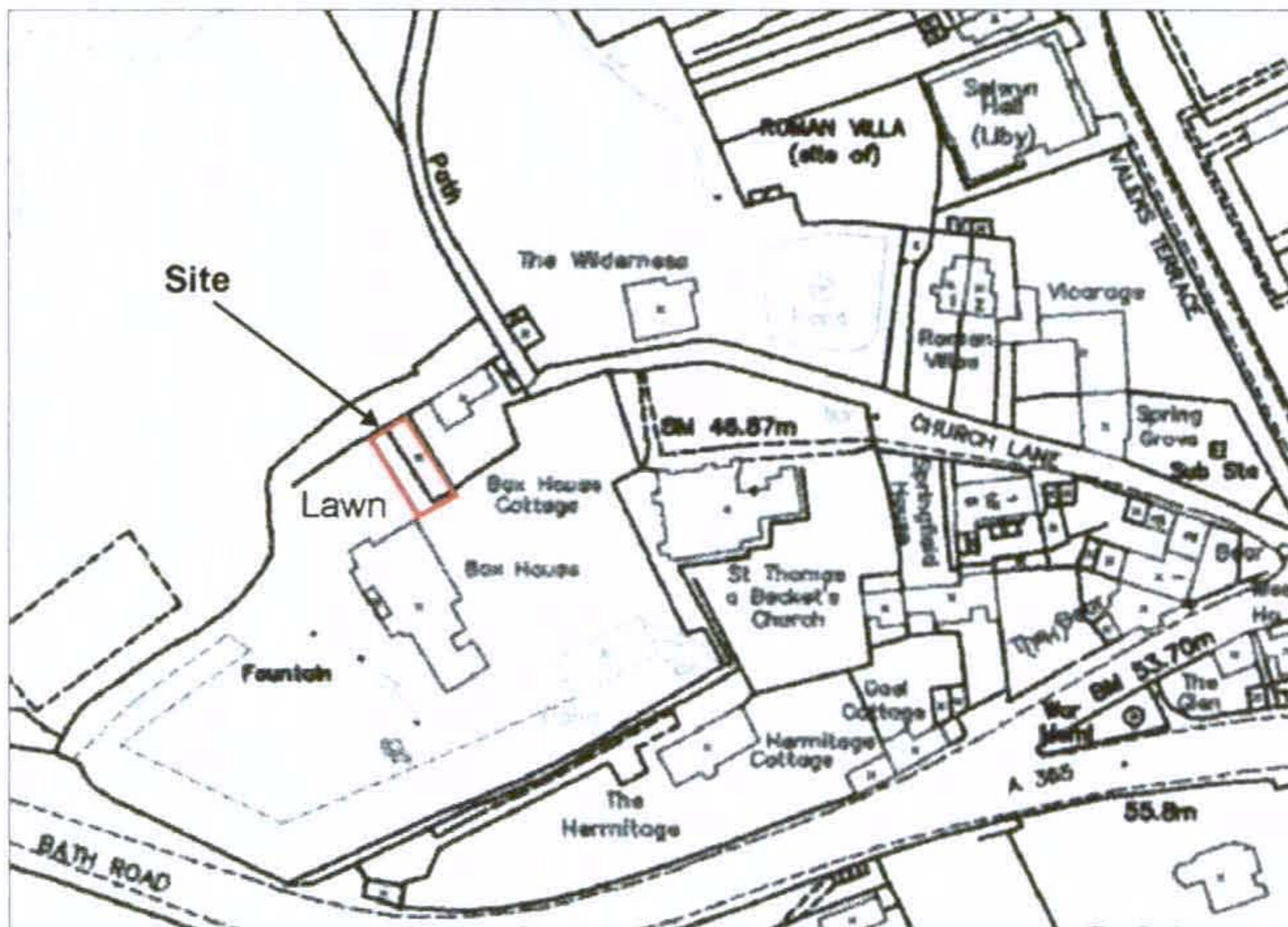
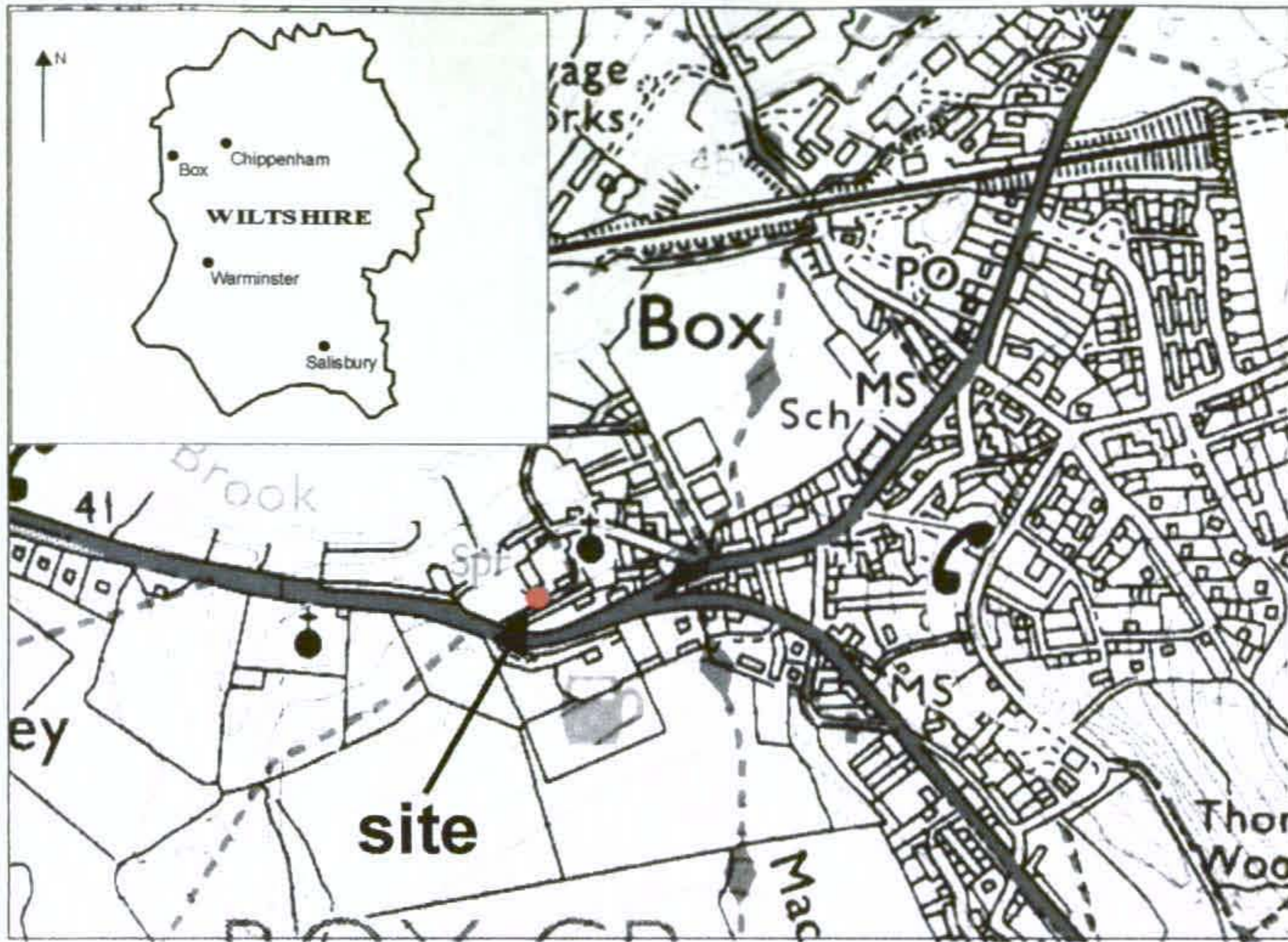


Fig 1: Site location

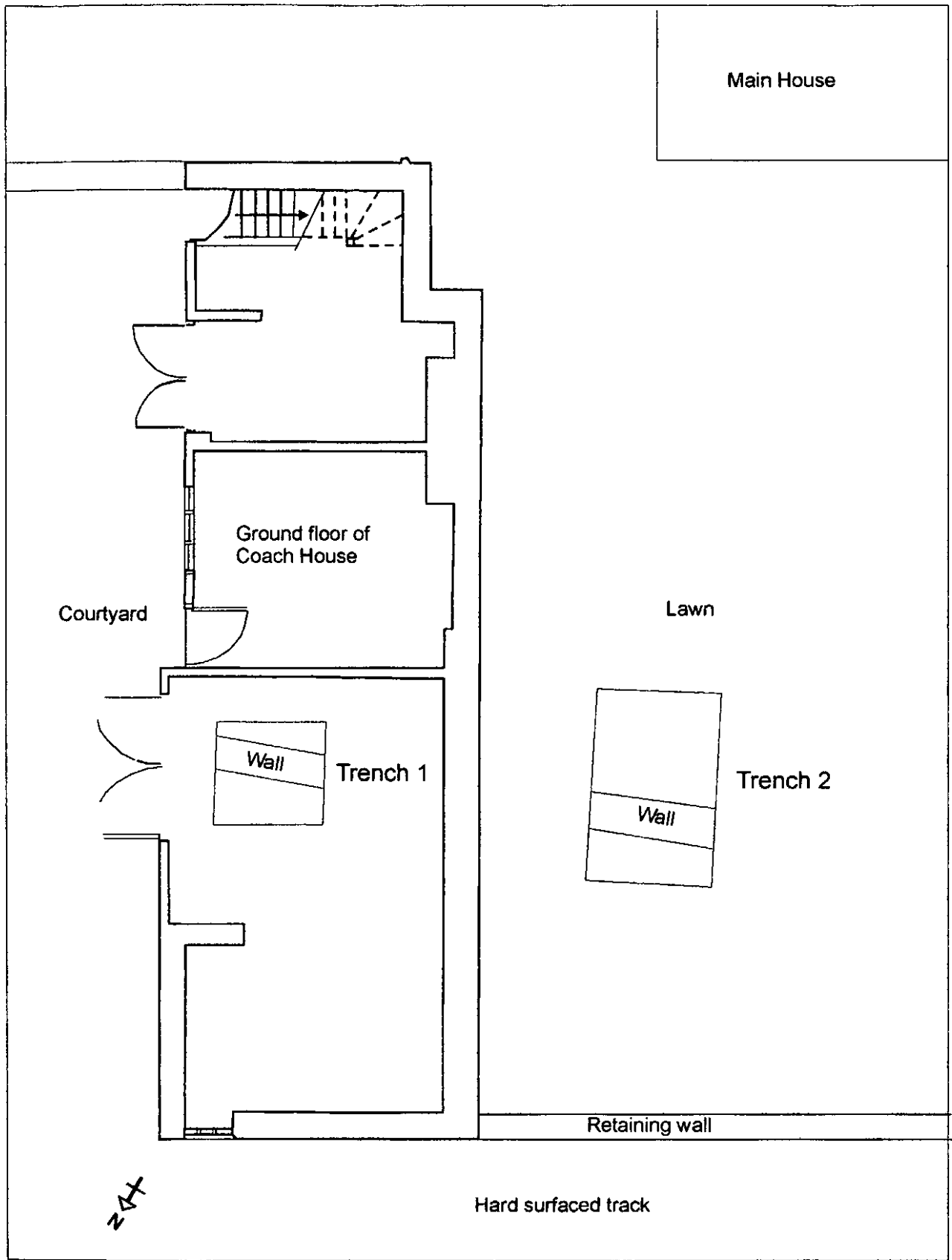


Fig 2: Plan showing trench locations and Roman wall 1:100

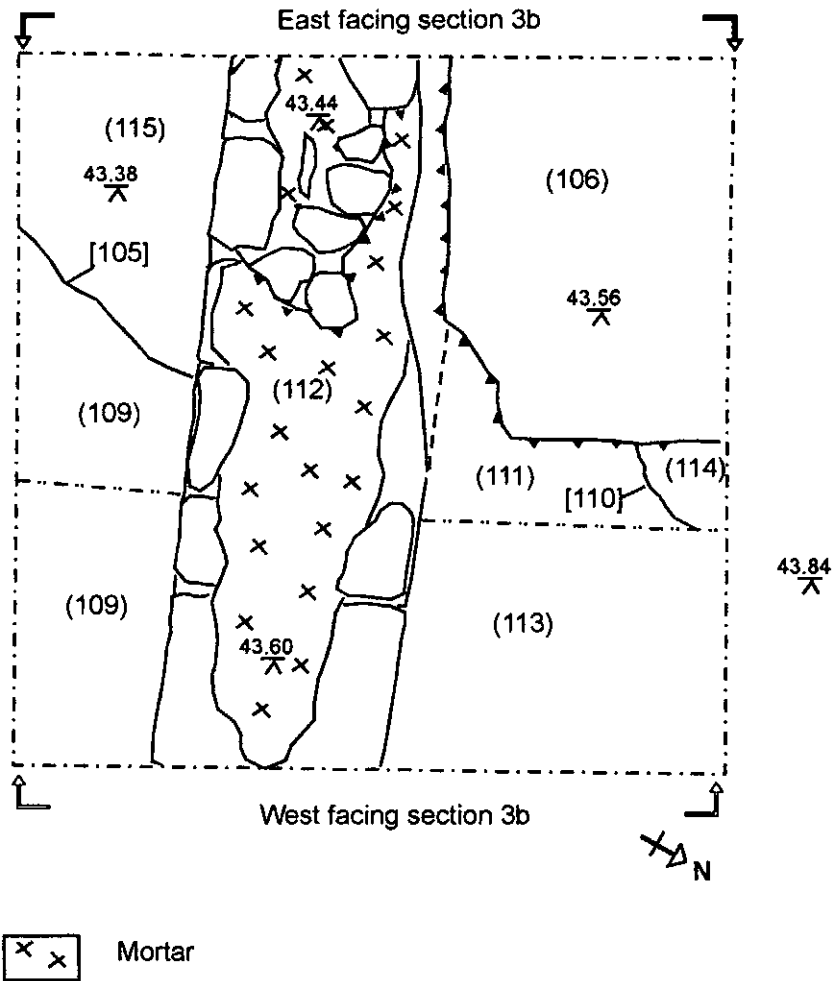
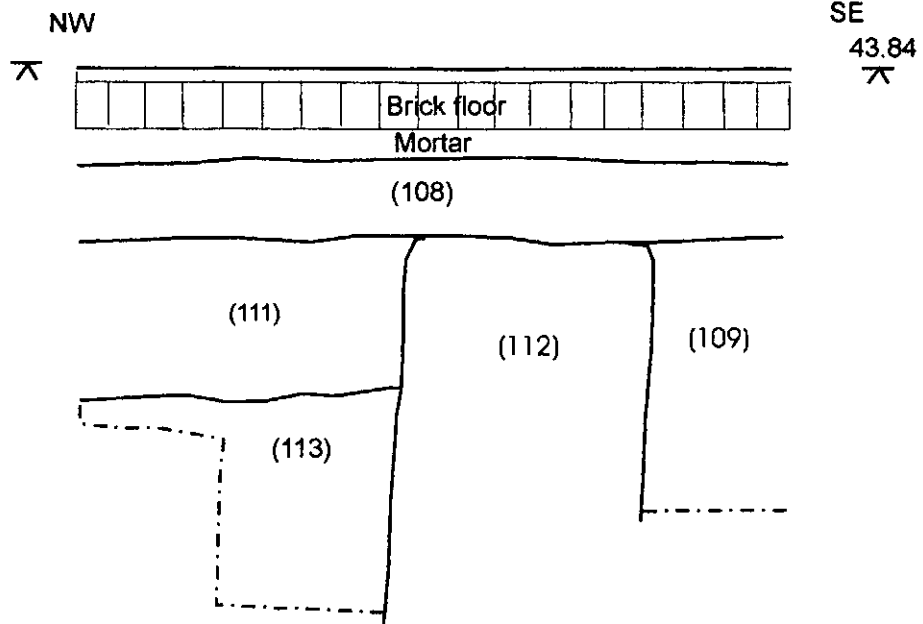


Fig 3a: Plan of Trench 1 1:20



West facing section



East facing section

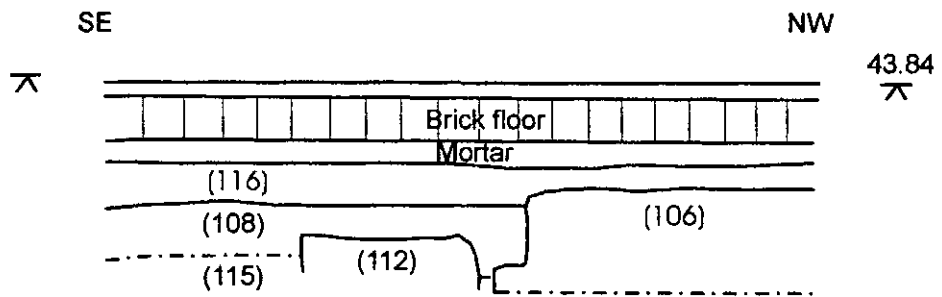


Fig 3b : Sections in Trench 1 1:20

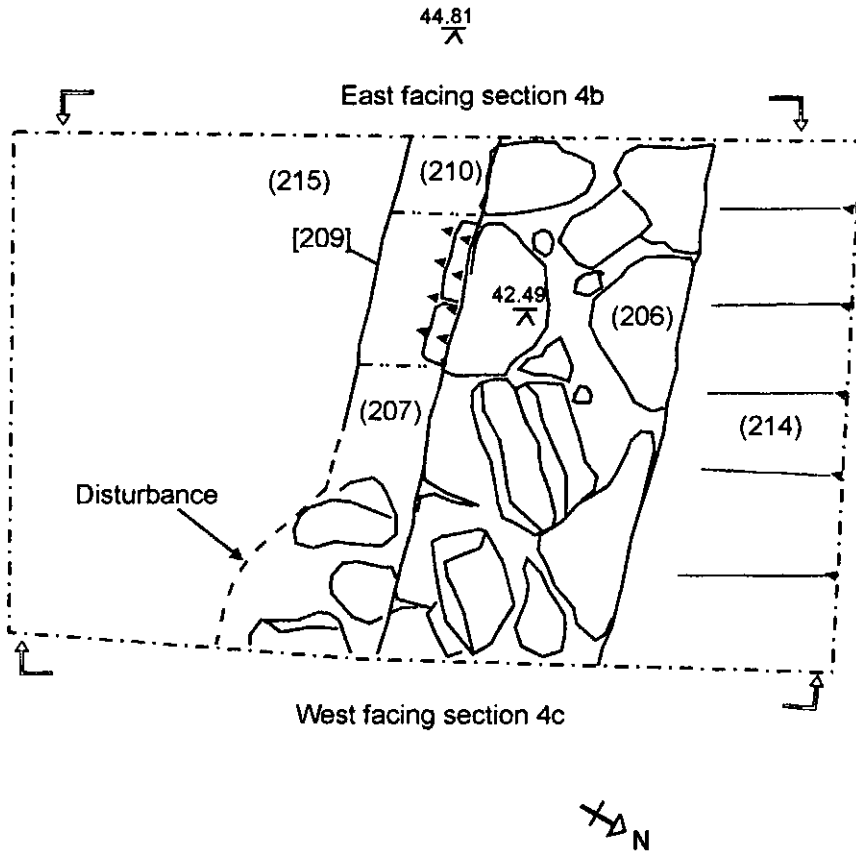


Fig 4a: Plan of Trench 2 1:20

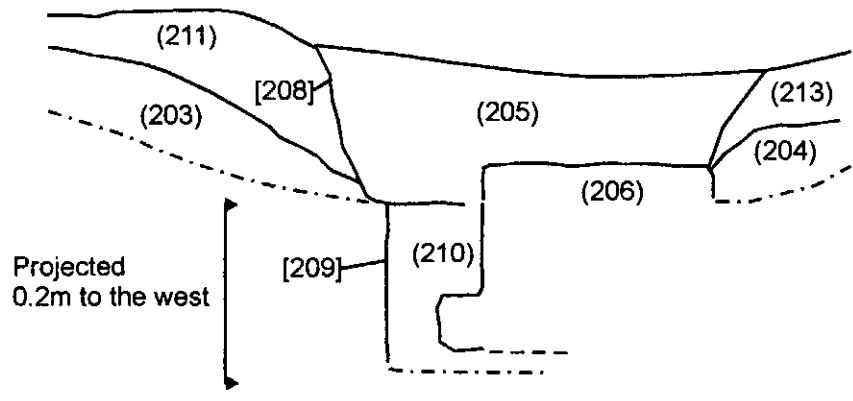
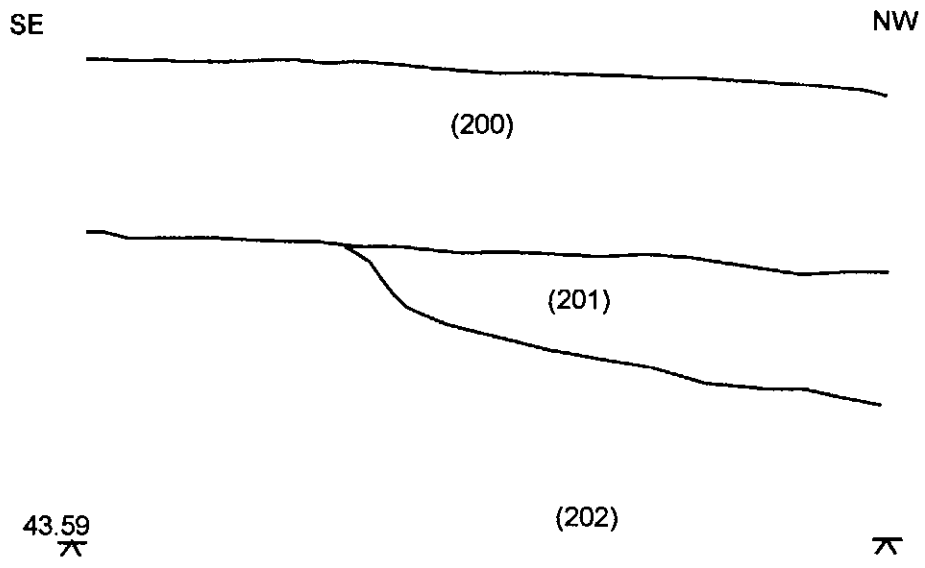
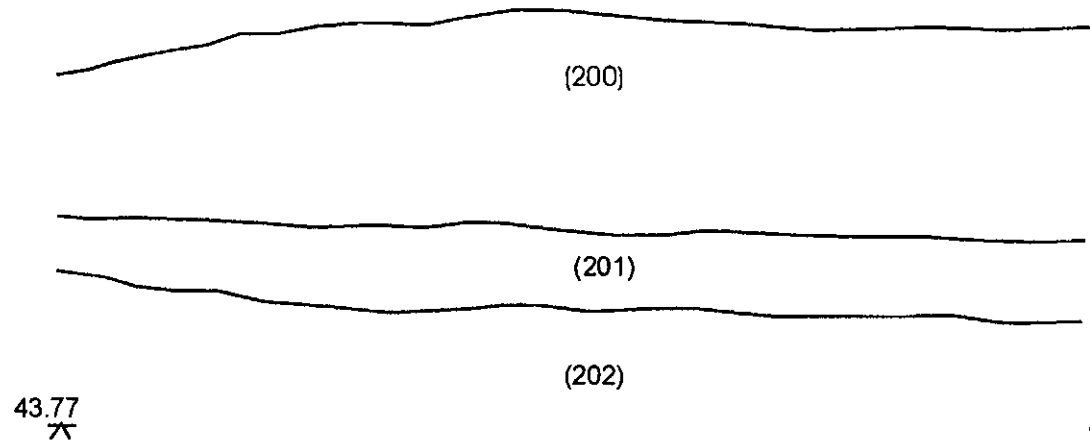


Fig 4b: East Facing Section of Trench 2 1:20

NW

SE



43.77  
△

△

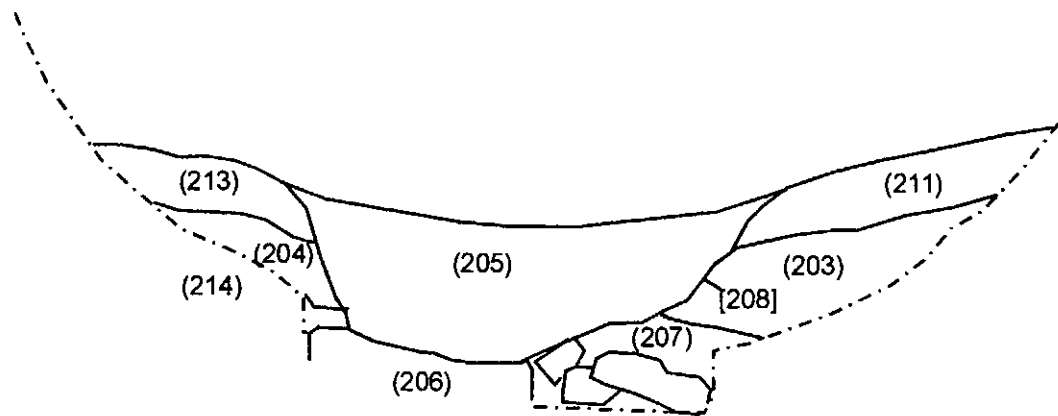


Fig 4c: West Facing Section of Trench 2 1:20



Wall of Romano-British date

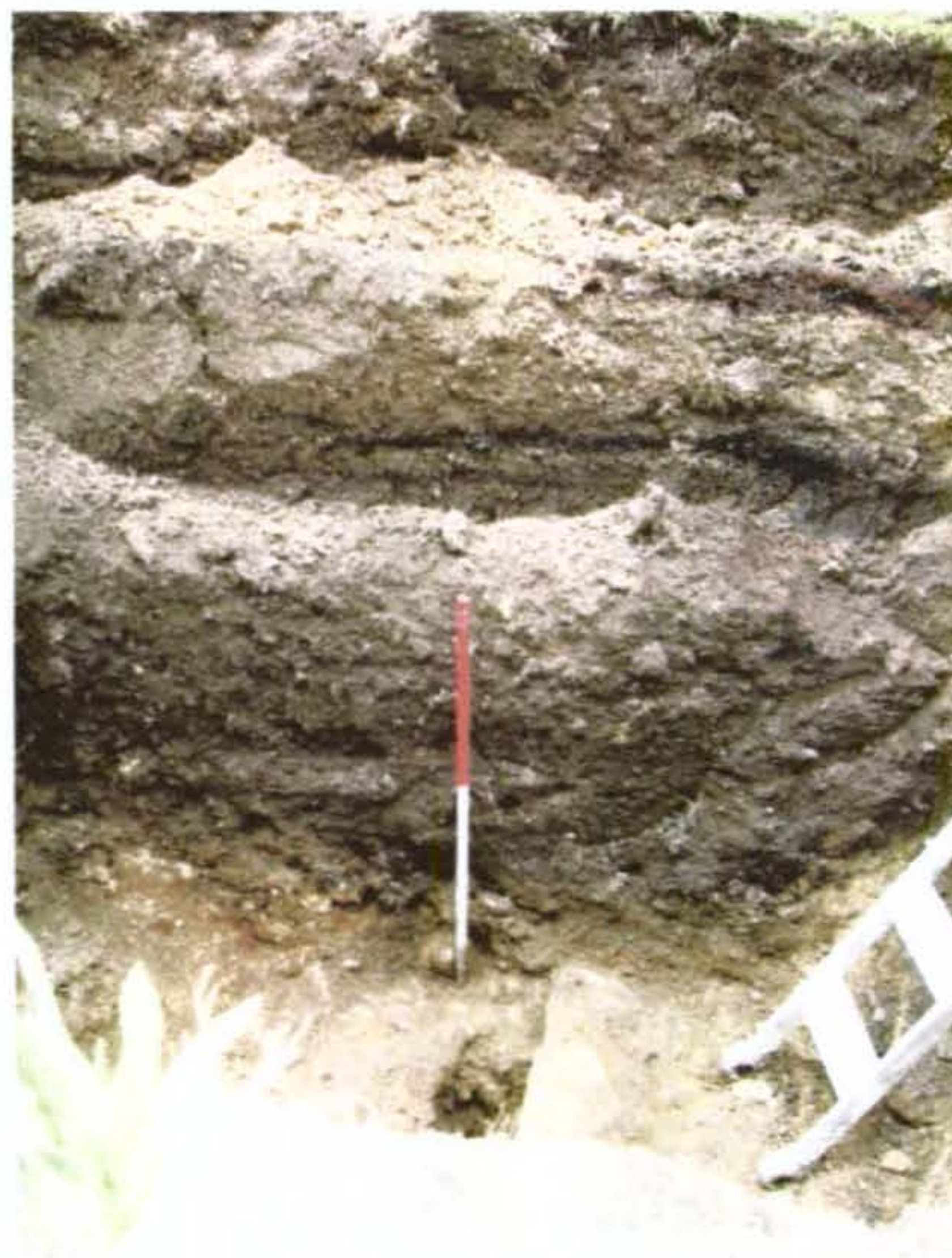


Surface of 19th century date with channel and stone pads (on left hand of picture)

Fig 5 : Photographs of Trench 1



Wall in Trench 2 looking westwards



East facing section of Trench 2

Fig 6 : Photographs of Trench 2

## **APPENDIX A**

### Context Description Table

Context	Context Type	Description	Interpretation	Date
100	layer	Concrete 0.04m deep	Concrete floor	20 <sup>th</sup> c
101	layer	Brick 0.12m deep	Brick floor	19 <sup>th</sup> c
102	Group	Surface with stone lined channel, includes contexts 103, 108, 107, 106	Coach House surface with stone pads and drain	19 <sup>th</sup> c
103	Structure	Straight sided feature with small subangular rubble sides and flagstone base 108, 0.27m deep and 0.2m wide	Drain	19 <sup>th</sup> c
104	Fill	Loose dark brown soil	Fill of drain 103	19 <sup>th</sup> c
105	cut	Irregular cut, over 0.71m deep	Cellar disturbance?	19 <sup>th</sup> c
106	structure	Bathstone blocks over 1m wide	Pad supporting original structure of Coach House	19 <sup>th</sup> c
107	layer	Flagstone slabs	Base of drain 103	19 <sup>th</sup> c
108	layer	Compacted mixed clay and stone layer	Compacted surface	19 <sup>th</sup> c
109	fill	Loose dark brown garden soil	Fill of cut 105	19 <sup>th</sup> c
110	cut	Cut feature	disturbance	19 <sup>th</sup> c
111	layer	Compacted mid brown silty clay with frequent limestone rubble and pennant tile fragments 0.41m deep	Collapse layer abutting wall 112	Early Post RB ?
112	Structure	Wall	Wall associated with Roman villa complex	RB
113	layer	Loose light grey gritty material with decayed stone and occasional rubble over 0.56m deep	Layer abutting wall 112, could be make-up	RB
114	fill	Mixed soil	Fill of cut 110	19 <sup>th</sup> c
115	layer	Compacted mid brown silty clay with occasional rubble (not excavated)	Collapse layer?	Early Post RB?
116	layer	Compacted redeposited soil 0.1m deep	Floor make-up	19 <sup>th</sup> c
200	layer	Dark brown topsoil 0.54m deep	Make-up for lawn	19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> c
201	layer	Loose decayed limestone rubble 0.35m deep	Garden landscaping	19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> c
202	layer	Mid greyish brown silty clay with occasional small stones 1.4m deep	Redeposited layer from garden landscaping	19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> c
203	layer	Fe stained layer of small stones and brash 0.2m deep	Surface / redeposited layer ?	RB or early Post RB?



204	layer	Compacted orangey clay with occasional very small stones	Abutts wall 206	No date
205	fill	Loose topsoil and rubble	Fill of cut 208	19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> c
206	Structure	wall	Wall associated with Roman villa complex	RB
207	fill	Soft cream coloured decayed stone layer, quite disturbed only partially surviving, contained large piece of RB tile.	Upper fill of foundation cut 207, possible construction horizon	RB
208	cut	Large U shaped linear cut 0.4m deep and over 1m wide	Robber trench following wall 206.	19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> c
209	cut	Straight edged vertical sided linear cut 0.23m wide and over 0.44m deep	Foundation trench for wall 206	RB
210	fill	Loose light greyish brown stony layer with decayed stone	Fill of foundation trench 209	RB
211	layer	Moderately loose light brown soil with occasional peagrit, decayed stone and Fe stained brash lenses 0.14m deep	Hillwash / soil horizon	Post RB
212		Void context		
213	layer	Same as 211	See 211	Post RB
214	layer	Compacted layer of subangular limestone rubble in clay matrix (not excavated)	Not known	RB or early Post RB?
215	layer	Compacted brash over 0.4m deep	Natural or redeposited rubble ?	