

**An Archaeological Watching Brief  
At The Church of St James,  
Liverpool.  
(NGR SJ 3527 8904)  
Site Code 143**

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## Non-Technical Summary

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief conducted initially during the hand-dug excavation of six test pits in the memorial garden at the church of St James, Upper Parliament Street, Liverpool.

Trenches I to III along the northern side and Trench VI at the west end of the southern side located what appear to be undisturbed gravemarkers dating to the mid-19th century at depths of 0.33 to 0.65 m below present ground surface. Two trenches on the southern side did not locate graves, though this is likely to be because they were located on the boundary of grave plots marked by numbers carved into the string course at ground level. There is a strong probability that graves lie close to these test-pits at levels similar to those seen elsewhere.

The grave in Trench II (situated mid-way along the northern side) overlies a brick wall likely to be one side of a brick lined grave or vault. All of the markers found seem to relate to multiple burials.

The soil and clay overlying the graves probably derives from landscaping of the cemetery in c. 1901. At c. 0.5 m deep this is significantly shallower than that recorded in trial trenches excavated along the northern churchyard wall in 2010 where it was 0.8 to 1 m deep suggesting that the original land surface north of the church sloped from south to north.

The churchyard appears to contain a mix of unmarked graves, ledger covered 'earth-fast' graves and brick-lined vaults. Although there was some evidence that gravemarkers were moved and some graves cleared during the 1901 landscaping works, at least some of the brick lined graves contain undisturbed burials. The latter consist of open spaces containing undisturbed lead lined coffins.

In general it is likely that any undisturbed earth containing human burials along the proposed pipe routes will be deeper than the proposed depth of excavation. In principal there is nothing to stop the excavation of drain runs along the proposed routes by cutting through the grave markers.

However, the biggest concern is the potential for burials within brick lined vaults present as voids along the route, such as that in Trench II. Although of limited archaeological interest (any further work could be confined to recording inscriptions as they are exposed), approached incorrectly these burials present a number of potential health and safety risks. The 2010 work showed that some of these are badly cracked and there is a risk of collapse if carelessly disturbed.

The author is not qualified to give advice on mitigating for the risks posed by the above and it is suggested that the Environmental Health Dept at Liverpool City Council is contacted for advice. One option might be to carefully cut a channel through any slabs along the route, checking for voids as work progresses. It might be necessary to make provision to fill any voids with concrete or similar, though the methodology for this would require some consideration.

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# **An Archaeological Watching Brief at the church of St James, Liverpool.**

## **1. Introduction**

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief at the Church of St James, Liverpool. The project was commissioned from National Museums Liverpool Field Archaeology Unit (NMLFAU) by William Anelay Ltd.

The church is located in Liverpool City Centre NGR SJ 3527 8904 (Fig. 1).

The watching brief was undertaken by Dr Mark Adams of National Museums Liverpool Field Archaeology Unit on 14 May 2012.

The works consisted of hand dug test pits adjacent to the northern and southern church walls (Fig 2).

## **2. Archaeological and Historical Background**

A desk study, field evaluation and watching brief were conducted during recent repair works to the northern church wall (SLR Consulting 2009, 2010 & 2011) and are summarised below.

The site contains three known significant historic environment assets: a Grade II\* Listed Church established in 1774/5, a multi-phase Grade II Listed Boundary Wall and a late 18th and early 19th century burial ground. The potential for the presence any pre 1774 archaeological remains is low, and if any are within the site boundary they are likely to have been heavily truncated by later activities on the site.

Although the site is located against the south side of Toxteth's historic boundary, the evaluation and watching brief found no evidence for any associated remains.

The evaluation excavation was confined to the area affected by the works to the northern churchyard wall. Three trenches found unmarked graves, vaults and individual inhumations.

Three broad phases of activity were defined:

1. Pre-cemetery deposits (pre-1775). This consisted of shallow topsoil, with no evidence for any significant archaeological remains such as the historic Toxteth boundary.
2. The cemetery (1775-1901) consisting of inhumations, "cemetery soil", brick-built "vaults" and a two-phase northern boundary wall with buttresses along its southern side. The skeletal remains of four individuals were lifted and examined to permit access to the base of the boundary wall.
3. Post-cemetery landscaping of the graveyard with a deposit of up to 1m of imported

material over the former graveyard surface.

The evaluation demonstrated the presence of densely-packed, multi-occupancy graveyard plots, with both inhumations and stone-capped vaults immediately to the rear of the northern boundary wall and it is reasonable to assume that these extend across the churchyard.

The watching brief during repair works to the wall found no significant archaeological deposits.

### **3. Watching Brief Methodology and Aims**

The project consisted of monitoring the excavation initially by hand of six test pits all measuring c. 1 x 1 m. Trenches I to III were located against the northern wall of the church, Trenches IV to VI against the southern wall (Fig. 1).

The aims of the watching brief were to provide information on the presence/absence, location and characteristics of archaeological remains at the site. All artefacts (including disarticulated human skeletal remains) were recovered and recorded. Disarticulated human skeletal remains were to be re-interred on site though none were found. The spoil heaps were scanned for finds by hand.

Observations of stratigraphy were hampered by hoardings and scaffolding which restricted access and lighting but it is not considered that these significantly affected observations on the stratigraphy.

The site records and recovered artefacts have been analysed in order to produce the report on the archaeology of the site which will enable production of an ordered archive to be placed in a suitable local repository. It was intended that all finds 19th century or later in date would be catalogued before returning to the church for future displays.

However, no finds were retained.

All archaeological fieldwork was undertaken by M. Adams.

## **4. Results**

### **Trench 1**

Trench I was located at the north-western corner of the church.

After the initial removal of turf and topsoil(context 1) to a depth of 0.20 m, a compacted, reddish brown layer of clay (context 2) which including frequents fragments of brick rubble was observed. This layer sealed an in situ grave slab which lay partly within the trench at 0.47 m below the present ground surface (Plate ???). This slab continued under the northern edge of the trench and only part of the inscription was visible. This read:

Here lieth.....  
Elliott, t.....  
Susanne....  
This life

Here lieth  
Elliott, w....  
Elliott, w....  
Novem...

Also...

Although partial the inscription suggests that at least 4, possibly 5 or more, members of the Elliot family were buried below this slab.

The style of the lettering suggests a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century date.

Context 2 appeared to continue below the excavated depth to the south of the slab. A second slab was situated to the west though only a small section was within the trench.

A cast iron pipe ran east-west across the trench at a depth of 0.33 m.

### **Trench II**

Trench II was located at the centre of the northern church wall.

Top soil and turf (context 1) were excavated to a depth of 0.23 m and sealed Context 3 which was very similar in make-up to context 2 in Trench but contained more sandstone and brick rubble including smashed grave slabs. At the western side of the trench this sealed an *in situ* grave slab which had been cut through to insert an east-west aligned pipe obliterating the inscription. This slab was over a brick lining to a grave.

Context 3 was excavated to a depth of 0.5 m below the present ground surface and sealed a further layer of compacted, reddish brown clay with brick fragments (Context 4).

### **Trench III**

Trench III was located at the western end of the northern wall and was slightly larger than the others at 1.2 m across.

After the initial removal of turf and topsoil(context 1) to a depth of 0.15 m, a compacted, reddish brown layer of clay (context 5) which including frequents fragments of brick rubble was observed. Set within this layer was a network of cast iron pipes which hampered excavation. This layer sealed an in situ, east-west aligned grave slab which extended under the northern edge of the trench

...Oct<sup>r</sup> 1819 age...  
Likewise of Martha...  
Of John & Martha For...  
this life the 16<sup>th</sup> of August....

Also in Memor....  
MARTHA

This shows the presence of at least two early 19<sup>th</sup> century inhumations.

#### **Trench IV**

After the initial removal of turf and topsoil(context 1) to a depth of 0.20 m, a compacted, reddish brown layer of clay (context 6) which including frequents fragments of brick rubble was observed to a depth of c. 0.90 m. The only significant feature was the brick foundations to the church which were observed at a depth of 0.80 below present ground surface.

#### **Trench V**

After the initial removal of turf and topsoil (context 1) to a depth of 0.18 m, a compacted, reddish brown layer of clay (context 6) which including frequents fragments of brick rubble was observed to a depth of c. 0.90 m.

Set within these deposits were two sandstone hoppers relating to drainage, one superimposed above the other.

#### **Trench VI**

After the initial removal of turf and topsoil (context 1) to a depth of 0.18 m, a compacted, reddish brown layer of clay (context 7) which including frequents fragments of brick rubble was observed to a depth of c. 0.75 m.

This sealed the northern end of an apparently *in situ* grave slab, only part of the inscription was visible. This read:

SACRED to the MEMORY  
of  
FRANCES  
third daughter of the late  
Francis Asley of Frodsham  
.....parted this

The style of the lettering suggests a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century date.

## **5. Conclusions**

Of the six test-pits excavated around the church, Trenches 1 to III along the northern side and Trench VI at the west end of the southern side located what appear to be undisturbed gravemarkers dating to the mid-19th century at depths of 0.33 to 0.65 m below present ground surface. Two trenches on the southern side did not locate graves, though this is likely to be because they were located on the boundary of grave plots marked by numbers carved into the string course at ground level. There is a strong

probability that graves lie close to these test-pits at levels similar to those seen elsewhere.

All of the gravemarkers are in red sandstone and are 0.1-0.15 m thick and are likely to be ledgers, i.e. slabs laid horizontally over the grave plot similar to those described in SLR Consulting 2010, though only small sections lie in the excavated areas so it is impossible to be sure of this, some may be headstones laid flat during landscaping works in 1901. The grave marker in Trench II (situated mid-way along the northern side) overlies a brick wall likely to be one side of a brick lined grave or vault. All of the markers found seem to relate to multiple inhumations of at least 2-4 individuals.

The soil and clay overlying the graves probably derives from landscaping of the cemetery in c. 1901. At c. 0.5 m deep this is significantly shallower than that recorded in trial trenches excavated along the northern churchyard wall in 2010 where it was 0.8 to 1 m deep (SLR Consulting 2010) suggesting that the original land surface north of the church sloped from south to north.

The 2010 work is also relevant in that it demonstrated that the churchyard contains a mix of unmarked graves, ledger covered 'earth-fast' graves and brick-lined vaults. These are organised in a less precise manner than that depicted on the graveyard survey of 1901 which can therefore only be used as an approximate indicator of the positions of graves. In addition it was shown that although there was some evidence that gravemarkers were moved and some graves cleared during the 1901 landscaping works, at least some of the brick lined graves contain undisturbed burials. The latter consist of open voids containing undisturbed lead lined coffins.

In general it is likely that any undisturbed earth fast human burials along the proposed pipe routes will be deeper than the proposed depth of excavation. In principal there is nothing to stop the excavation of drain runs along the proposed routes by cutting through the grave markers.

However, the biggest concern is the potential for burials within brick lined vaults present as voids along the route, such as that in Trench II. Although of limited archaeological interest (any further work could be confined to recording inscriptions as they are exposed), approached incorrectly these burials present a number of potential health and safety risks. For example, breaking through the slab with a pneumatic breaker would cause fragments of masonry to collapse into the void shattering fragile wood and lead coffins. The 2010 work showed that some of these are badly cracked and there is a risk of collapse if carelessly disturbed. In addition to the risks from lead and/or other dust generated by this disturbance there is an unquantifiable risk from pathogens such as small pox. However, given the date at which the churchyard was closed it is very unlikely that remains covered by the Human Tissues Act (2004) will be present.

The author is not qualified to give advice on mitigating for the risks posed by the above and it is suggested that the Environmental Health Dept at Liverpool City Council is contacted for advice. One option might be to carefully cut a channel through any slabs along the route, checking for voids as work progresses. It might be necessary to make provision to fill any voids with concrete or similar, though the methodology for this would require some consideration.

## 5. Bibliography

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## **6. Figures**

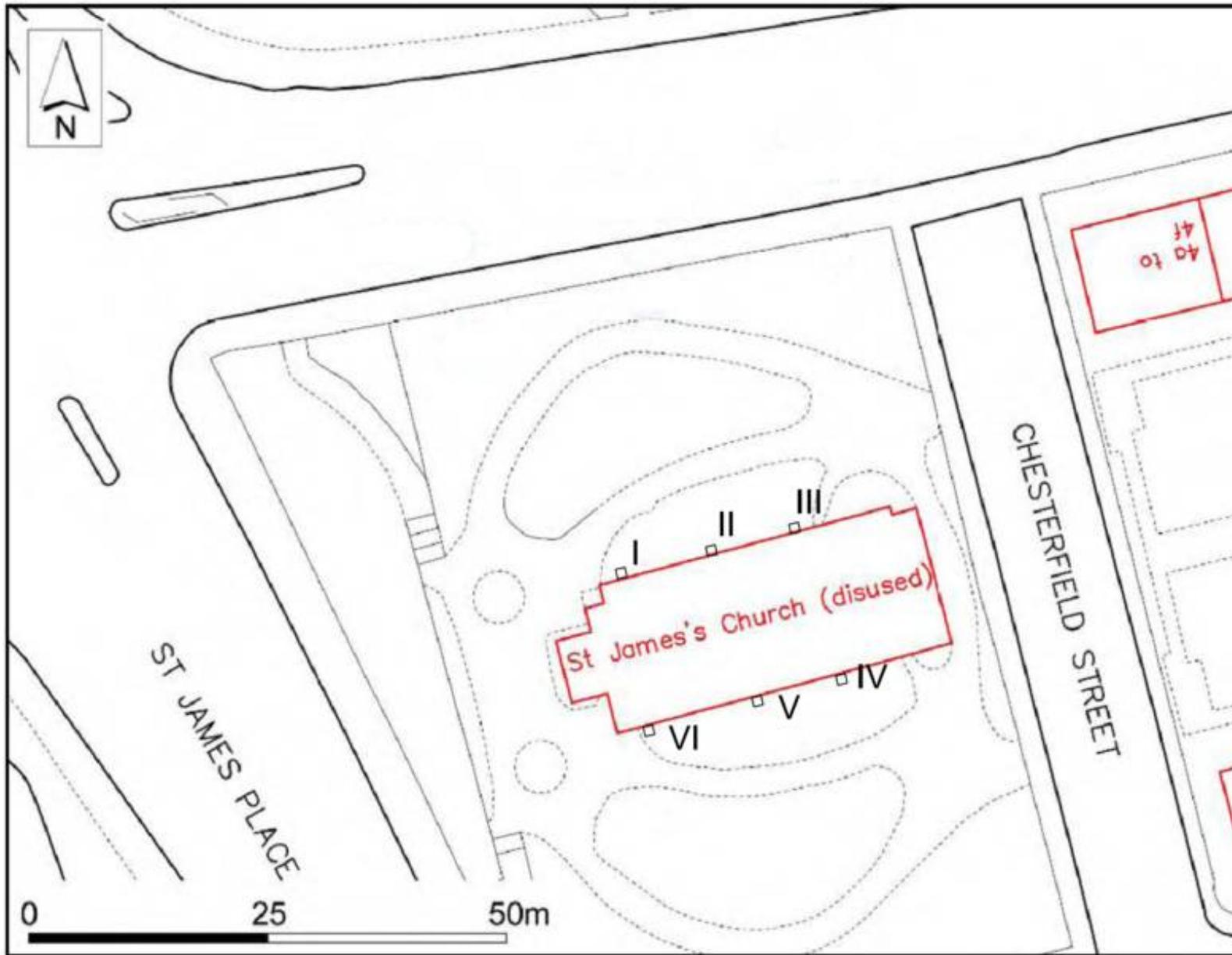


Fig. 1. Trench locations.

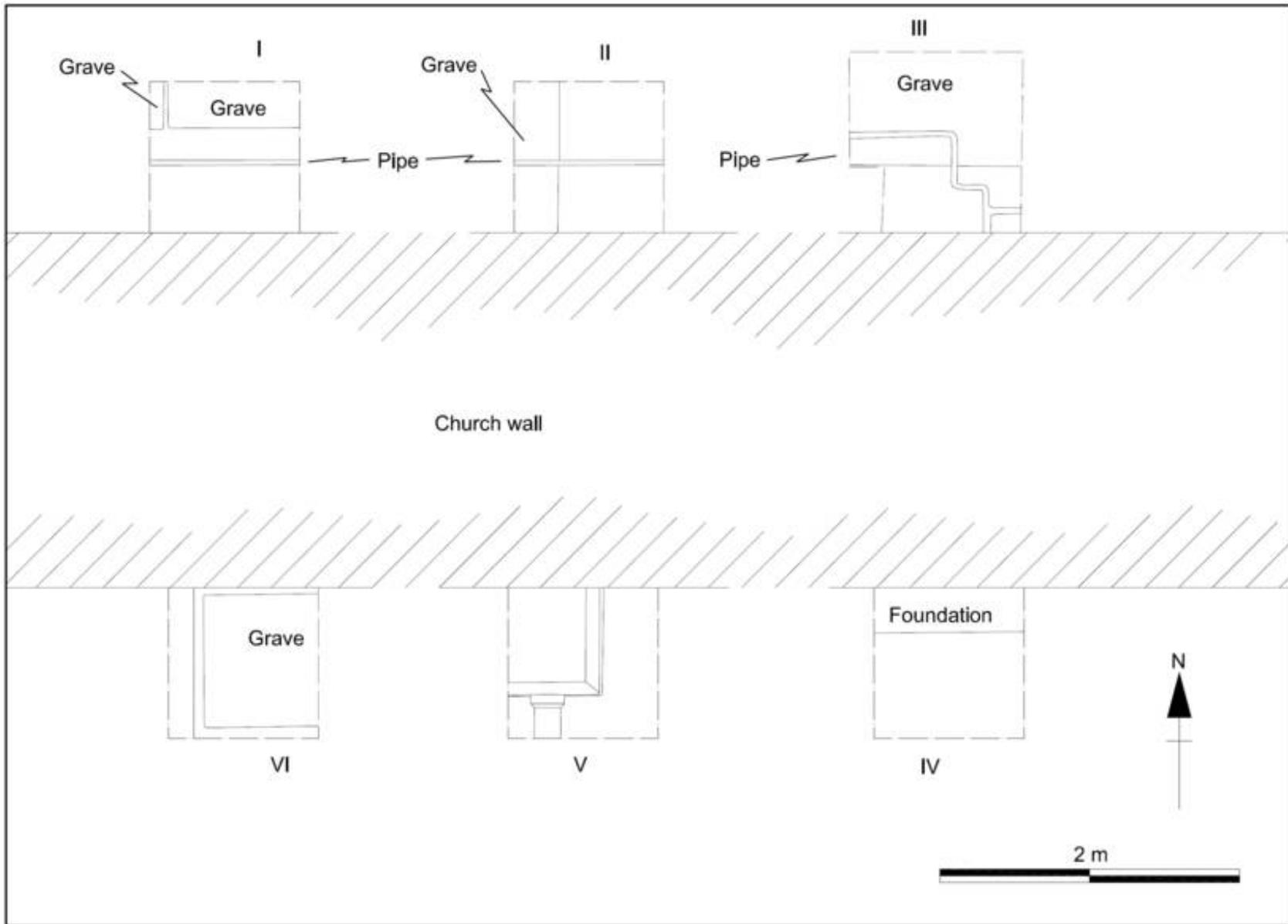


Fig. 2. Trench plans

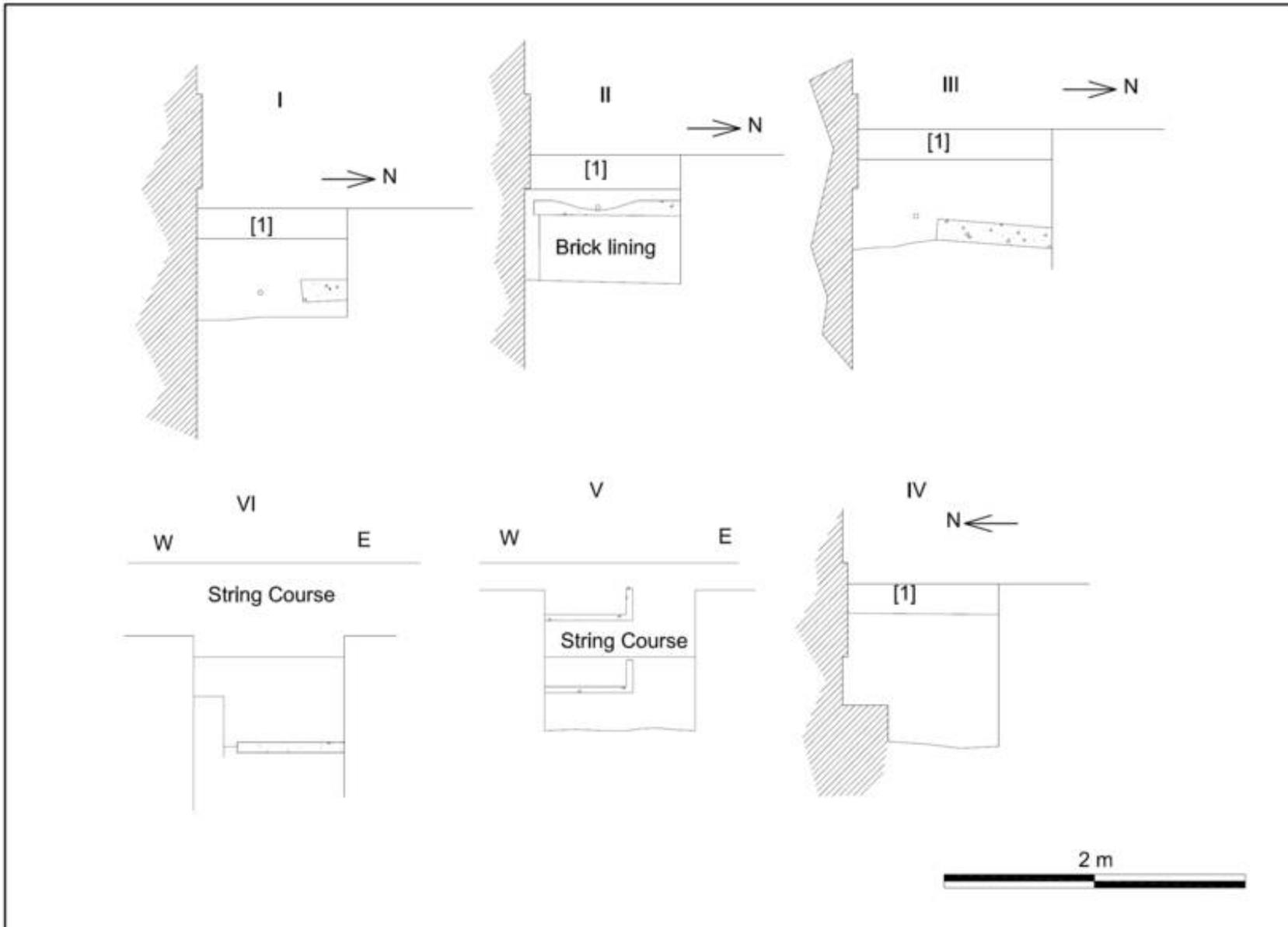


Fig. 3. Trench profiles.



## 7. Plates



Plate 1. Trench I showing excavated deposits. From the east



Plate 2. Trench II showing excavated deposits. From the north-east.



Plate 3. Trench III showing excavated deposits. From the north-east.



Plate 4. Trench IV showing excavated deposits. From the south



Plate 5. Trench V showing superimposed drains. From the south-east.



Plate 6. Trench VI Plate 4. Trench IV showing excavated deposits. From the south