



**17 SWEETHILL ROAD, SOUTHWELL, PORTLAND, DORSET**  
**Archaeological Evaluation**



**Report No. 53348/2/1**

**May 2011**

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**Archaeological Evaluation, May 2011**

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### **SUMMARY**

*In May 2011, Terrain Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation in the grounds of number 17 Sweethill Road, Southwell, Portland, Dorset (centred on NGR SY68526997). Four evaluation trenches were mechanically excavated within the garden area, comprising a c. 0.5% sample of the land plot. These revealed undated colluvial deposits containing occasional waste flakes of Portland chert and trace amounts of probably late prehistoric pottery over paler Late Pleistocene head deposits. A shallow northwest – southeast aligned feature exposed in trenching at the southeastern end of the garden may be part of a ploughed-out lynchet boundary, probably originally of medieval date.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Mr P Grenfell ('the Client) to undertake archaeological evaluation in the garden of number 17 Sweethill Road, Southwell, Portland, Dorset DT5 2DS (centred on NGR SY68526997, Figure 1, hereafter referred to as 'the site'), prior to submission of an application for outline planning consent to develop the site.

An archaeological evaluation, as defined by the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008) is "a limited programme of intrusive fieldwork, which determines the presence, or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within a specified area or site. If such archaeological remains are present, field evaluation defines their character, extent, quality and preservation, and enables an assessment of their worth in a local, regional, national or international context, as appropriate."

The fieldwork was carried out on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011 by Peter Bellamy and Mike Trevarthen.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and cooperation of the following during this project: Mr Pete Grenfell, Dean, the machine driver from G Crook & Sons Ltd, and Steve Wallis (Senior Archaeologist (Advice and Management), Dorset County Council), who monitored the project on behalf of the local planning authority.

### **THE SITE**

17 Sweethill Road lies at approximately 46m above Ordnance Datum on the southeast side of Sweethill Road, almost at the base of a north-facing slope forming part of an approximately east-west aligned coombe. The property comprises a slightly curvilinear land plot of c. 0.3 hectare with a post-war house, driveway and garage at its north end (Figure 2). The remainder of the plot is given over to garden, now largely untended, with grassed areas, mature shrubs and trees. The far-southern end of the plot was previously dug as horticultural beds and a now-derelict wooden shed standing adjacent to the southern boundary was used by the former owner for amateur research into bee-keeping (P.Grenfell, pers. comm.).

Soils within the site are primarily heavy and clay-rich, and the underlying geology is mapped as limestone of the Lulworth Formation of the Purbeck Group. This has been shown to be mantled locally with an unknown thickness of Late Pleistocene soliflucted rubbly clay head.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest evidence for human activity in the immediate area dates from the Mesolithic period (c. 8000-4000 BC). An important Late Mesolithic site has been excavated at Culverwell (Palmer 1999) about 0.7 km to the south, and a sparse scatter of possible Mesolithic worked chert has been found to the west of the site on the northern slopes of Sweethill itself (Terrain Archaeology 1999).

Important evidence of Early Neolithic (c. 4000-3700 BC) occupation has been found on the northern slopes of Sweethill; about 0.25 km to the west, where the remains of a rectilinear house were associated with a pit containing burnt hazelnut shells and grain (Terrain Archaeology 20001a). In the bottom of the coombe to the north of Sweethill, two burnt mounds of probable Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date (c. 2600-1600 BC) have been excavated (Terrain Archaeology 2000b). Further evidence for Bronze Age activity has been noted from Suckthumb Quarry (RCHME 1970, 450).

Iron Age and Romano-British occupation appears to have been centred on Avalanche Road and the Sweethill Lane housing estate (RCHME 1970, 607-8; Putnam 1970) but a number of Roman burials, including one in a stone sarcophagus, have been found on Sweethill Road close to the site (RCHME 1970, 608). A scatter of Roman pottery has also been found along this road.

Evidence for medieval occupation in Southwell is concentrated on Sweethill Road. Limpet shell midden deposits associated with 12th-13th century pottery have been found at the lower end and upper end of Sweethill Road. In the medieval and early post-medieval period, the site lay within the open field system of Portland, in what was known as the 'Great West Field'. The 1842 Tithe Map shows that the site had been enclosed by this date and archaeological investigations at the top of Sweethill Road suggests that this enclosure may have taken place in the late 18th century (Terrain Archaeology 2002a).

An archaeological evaluation at 18 Sweethill Road, almost opposite the site, revealed no archaeological features or deposits (Terrain Archaeology 2002b).

Much of the site comprised agricultural land (probably pasture) until converted as a garden in the 1950s. The original house was extended to the north east in 2005 (P.Grenfell, pers. comm.).

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the archaeological works were established in a Written Scheme of Investigation (Terrain Archaeology 2010, Document No. 3330/0/1). These were:

- To establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on the site.
- To observe and record all the *in situ* archaeological deposits and features revealed during the groundworks to an appropriate professional standard.
- To present the evaluation results in a report.

The results of the evaluation may be used to formulate a strategy for the preservation or management of any archaeological remains; and/or formulate an appropriate response or mitigation strategy to planning applications or other proposals which may affect adversely any such archaeological remains, or enhance them; and/or formulate a proposal for further archaeological investigation within a programme of research.

## METHODS

No formal written brief was issued for the archaeological works. The evaluation was therefore undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Terrain Archaeology 2011), compiled in accordance with National planning policy as laid out in *Planning Policy Statement 5*

(PPS5), in particular, Policy HE12: *Policy principles guiding the recording of information related to Heritage Assets*; and with the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) *Code of Conduct and Standard and Guidance For Archaeological Field Evaluation* (IfA 2008) and *Standard and Guidance for the creation, preparation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives* (IfA 2009). It also took account recommendations and advice given to the previous owner of the site, the late Ronald Jarvis, by Dorset County Council's Senior Archaeologist (Advice and Management), who had recommended the excavation of four trenches measuring 3m by 1.5m.

Four trial trenches were mechanically excavated in the positions shown on Figure 2. The location of the trenches was determined by areas of the garden that were relatively open and free of trees and shrubs. Three trenches (Trenches 1-3) measured 4.5m by 1m and the fourth (Trench 4) measured 3.5m by 1m. This comprised a c. 0.5% sample of the land-plot.

All trenches were stripped of overburden under the direct supervision of a suitably qualified and experienced archaeologist, using a tracked 1.5 tonne mechanical excavator fitted with a 1m wide toothless ditching bucket. Mechanical excavation continued to the upper interface of undisturbed natural deposits, after which select manual cleaning of trench-bases and sides was undertaken as necessary.

All trenches were recorded to a standard commensurate with the aims and objectives of the project, using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records. These have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current AAF guidelines (AAF 2007), with the IfA's *Standard and Guidance for the creation, preparation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives* (IfA 2009), and with the requirements of the receiving museum. A digital photographic record of the evaluation was maintained.

Upon completion of archaeological recording, all trenches were mechanically backfilled to a standard approved by the Client.

## RESULTS

The results are presented on a trench-by-trench basis. The trench locations are shown in Figure 2: See Appendix 1 for detailed deposit- and feature descriptions.

### Trench 1

Trench 1 lay in the eastern end of the garden (Figure 2; Plate 1). Some 0.15m depth of coarse grass turf and dark humic garden-or horticultural soil (100) overlay 0.2m of homogenous former ploughsoil. Below this, the north-eastern half of the trench contained the plough-truncated remains of a northwest-southeast aligned negative lynchet scar (Figure 3; Plate 2): Its basal formation interface (101) survived to a depth of up to 0.15m and was flat-bottomed. Its western edge sloped abruptly upwards at c. 30° from horizontal. A corresponding remnant of terrace ploughsoil (102) was of firm yellowish brown silty clay. Systematic ploughing-out of medieval lynchet terraces locally is unlikely to pre-date their enclosure, probably in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Terrain Archaeology 2002a).

At the southwestern end of the trench, a layer of reddish-brown clay-silt subsoil (103) survived to a thickness of c. 0.15m, producing two struck flakes of chert. Below this, natural deposits (104) comprised mixed orange- and yellowish-brown clay-rich head.

### Trench 2

Trench 2 lay in the lower northern part of the garden (Figure 2; Plate 3). Some 0.15m depth of grass turf and dark humic garden soil (201) overlay 0.25m of homogenous former ploughsoil.

Beneath this, a layer of firm reddish brown clay-silt subsoil (202) was c. 0.15m thick: Part excavation of layer 201 produced a single struck flake of chert. Sealed below subsoil 202, natural deposits comprised firm light yellow-brown clay-rich head with common limestone rubble. No archaeological features were identified.

### Trench 3

Trench 3 lay on the upper slopes of the southern side of the garden, close to the rear of the house (Figure 2; Plate 4). Some 0.15m depth of grass turf and dark humic garden soil (201) overlay 0.35m of homogenous former ploughsoil. Beneath this, an additional 0.48m of firm yellowish brown colluvium yielded nine struck flakes of chert and trace amounts (2 sherds, 8g) of undated (possibly late prehistoric) pottery. Natural deposits comprised firm pale yellow-buff rubbly clay-rich head. No archaeological features were identified.

### Trench 4

Below thin regenerated turf, up to 0.35m of dumped and compacted crushed limestone, grading to firm stony grey clay-silt (400) probably relate to construction and extension of the adjacent house. Below this, 0.15m of firm dark humic soil (401) sealing 0.25m of homogenous grey-brown silty clay (402) represent the former garden soil over older ploughsoil. As with Trench 3, the former ploughsoil sealed c. 0.25m of yellowish brown silty clay colluvium (403) over natural deposits comprising yellow-brown rubbly clay head (404). No archaeological features were identified.

### Finds

A small assemblage of finds was recovered from the evaluation (Table 1). None appear to have been in their primary depositional context. None of these finds are considered to inform further the archaeological potential of the site, or to be of intrinsic archaeological significance. Therefore, all finds have been excluded from the archive following quantification and recording.

Context	Trench	Pottery		Flaked Chert	
		No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)
100	1	2	10		
103	1			2	7
105	1	1	12		
202	2			1	2
302	3	2	8	9	34
<b>Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>43</b>

Table 1: Total finds assemblage by number and weight.

#### Pottery

Five sherds (30g) of pottery were recovered. Two of the sherds (both from topsoil 101) were industrial white ware with blue transfer decoration of 19th century date. A single sherd of well-fired orange-red earthenware with a reduced grey core and pale green glaze (former ploughsoil 105) may be 18th-19th century. The remaining two small, abraded fragments of pottery, both from context 302 were not positively identified. One is thin-walled with orange silty fabric and an intermittent reduced grey core and the other has a friable grey/brown slightly sandy fabric. Both may be late prehistoric in date.

## *Flaked Stone*

Twelve pieces (43g) of flaked Portland chert were recovered from three contexts. All were unmodified waste flakes and none exhibited any evidence for secondary working. One piece was burnt. A considerable span of human occupation and land use is attested locally and a broadly Neolithic-Bronze Age date range is suggested for the majority of the group. One piece (from subsoil 202) appears to be the distal end of a snapped blade, and could therefore potentially be Mesolithic or Early Neolithic.

Ex-situ chert knapping waste is common across the southern part of Portland as, more occasionally, are small abraded pottery sherds. The latter are often indicative of little more than manuring of farmland with domestic waste.

## **DISCUSSION**

The evaluation sampled only about 0.5% of the area of the site. This sample is rather smaller than normally applied to an evaluation of this type (typically 2% or 5%). Therefore, the confidence in the results of the evaluation accurately reflecting the full range of the archaeological resource on the site is reduced. However, the location of the trenches was such that both the upper sloping part of the site to the southwest and the lower, flatter northeastern part of the site were sampled and the overall results of the evaluation broadly reflect similar archaeological sequences found in the vicinity (cf. Terrain Archaeology 2002a).

The evaluation identified only one archaeological feature; namely the truncated base of a negative lynchet scar (Trench 1). This former field boundary lay on a northwest-southeast axis and fits, both in its alignment and its physical spacing, with a series of similar field divisions (known locally as lawnsbeds) fossilised as landscape features and property boundaries parallel to an unmetalled trackway to the southwest, linking Sweet Hill with Portland Bill Road. These lawnsbeds are a result of medieval agricultural practice and reflect localised downslope plough-movement of soils within open strip-fields. Their significance may have persisted into the 18th century, after which local agricultural land was enclosed (Terrain Archaeology 2002a).

Trenches 3 and 4 both lay in the slightly steeper northwestern parts of the site and contained deposits of colluvium (hillwash). Whilst probably pre-medieval, this colluvium cannot be closely dated. As a deposit type, the formation of colluvium can span very long periods of time and the potential difficulties inherent in identifying and excavating archaeological remains interleaved with it are well known (e.g. Hutcheson 1992).

In conclusion, the evaluation results have demonstrated the existence of medieval and later cultivation traces on the site and has identified the presence of colluvium of possible prehistoric date over part of the site. The sample excavation of this colluvium was too small to fully map its extent or to confidently predict the presence or absence of any archaeological features or deposits sealed beneath it.

## **ARCHIVE**

The project archive (Terrain Archaeology Project Number 53348) will, in due course and after any necessary legal transfer of title from the landowner has been obtained, be deposited for long-term curation by the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, which has agreed in principle to accept it, subject fulfilment of the Museum's requirements of the preparation of archaeological archives.

A copy of this report will be lodged with Dorset County Council's Historic Environment Record and a digital summary of the archive and its contents (along with a digital pdf of this report) will be uploaded the OASIS (Online access to the index of archaeological investigations) project website ([www.oasis.ac.uk](http://www.oasis.ac.uk)), under the OASIS reference code *terraina1-101777*.



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**APPENDIX 1: TRENCH SUMMARY TABLES**

<b>TRENCH 1</b>			
<b>Length:</b>	4.5m	<b>Width:</b> 1m	<b>Depth:</b> 0.52m
<b>Context Number</b>	<b>Description and interpretation</b>	<b>Depth below ground level</b>	
100	<b>Topsoil/garden soil.</b> Below grass turf, firm mid-dark greyish brown silty clay, abundant roots, occasional small stones, clinker and other modern debris including pottery.	0.00 – 0.15m	
105	<b>Former ploughsoil.</b> Stiff mid-dark greyish brown silty clay, moderate small stones.	0.15 – 0.35m	
102	Terrace ploughsoil developed over interface 101. Firm mid-yellowish brown silty clay, moderate small stones.	0.35 – 0.52m	
101	<b>Plough interface of lynchet terrace.</b> Northwest – southeast aligned, flat-based with an abrupt edge sloping at c30° to the west. 'Filled with' 102.	0.35 – 0.52m	
103	<b>Subsoil.</b> Stiff reddish brown silty clay, occasional small stones.	0.35 – 0.52m	
104	<b>Natural deposits.</b> Soliflucted head deposit of stiff mid-orange/yellow brown silty clay, occasional pieces and pockets of tabular limestone. Occasional smeary patches of yellow clay.	0.52m+	
<b>TRENCH 2</b>			
<b>Length:</b>	4.3m	<b>Width:</b> 1m	<b>Depth:</b> 0.50m
<b>Context Number</b>	<b>Description and interpretation</b>	<b>Depth below ground level</b>	
200	<b>Topsoil/garden soil.</b> Below grass turf, firm mid-dark greyish brown silty clay, common roots, occasional small stones and clinker.	0.00 – 0.15m	
201	<b>Former ploughsoil.</b> Stiff mid-dark greyish brown silty clay, moderate small stones.	0.15 – 0.40m	
202	<b>Subsoil.</b> Stiff reddish brown silty clay, occasional small stones.	0.40 – 0.50m	
203	<b>Natural deposits.</b> Soliflucted head deposit of firm light yellow-brown silty clay, common fragmented and rubbly limestone.	0.50m+	
<b>TRENCH 3</b>			
<b>Length:</b>	4.3m	<b>Width:</b> 1m	<b>Depth:</b> 0.93m
<b>Context Number</b>	<b>Description and interpretation</b>	<b>Depth below ground level</b>	
300	<b>Topsoil/garden soil.</b> Below grass turf, firm mid-dark greyish brown silty clay, common roots, occasional small stones and clinker.	0.00 – 0.15m	
301	<b>Former ploughsoil.</b> Firm mid-dark greyish brown silty clay, moderate small stones.	0.15 – 0.45m	
302	<b>Colluvium.</b> Firm mid-dark yellowish brown silty clay becoming slightly paler at base of unit, patchy sparse – occasional small stones.	0.45 – 0.93m	
303	<b>Natural deposits.</b> Soliflucted head deposit of firm pale yellow-buff silty clay, common decayed and rubbly limestone.	0.93m+	
<b>TRENCH 4</b>			
<b>Length:</b>	3.5m	<b>Width:</b> 1m	<b>Depth:</b> 1.10m
<b>Context Number</b>	<b>Description and interpretation</b>	<b>Depth below ground level</b>	
400	<b>Modern levelling.</b> Thin, poorly developed grass and turf over dumped (compacted?) crushed limestone aggregate, grading with depth to stony dark grey-brown silty clay.	0.00 – 0.35m	
401	<b>Former topsoil/garden soil.</b> Firm mid-dark greyish brown silty clay, occasional small stones and clinker.	0.35 – 0.50m	
402	<b>Former ploughsoil.</b> Stiff mid-dark greyish brown silty clay, moderate small stones.	0.50 – 0.75m	
403	<b>Colluvium.</b> Firm mid yellowish brown silty clay, patchy sparse small stones.	0.75 – 1.00m	
404	<b>Natural deposits.</b> Soliflucted head deposit of firm light yellow-brown silty clay, moderate rubbly limestone.	1.00m+	



Figure 1: Location map.

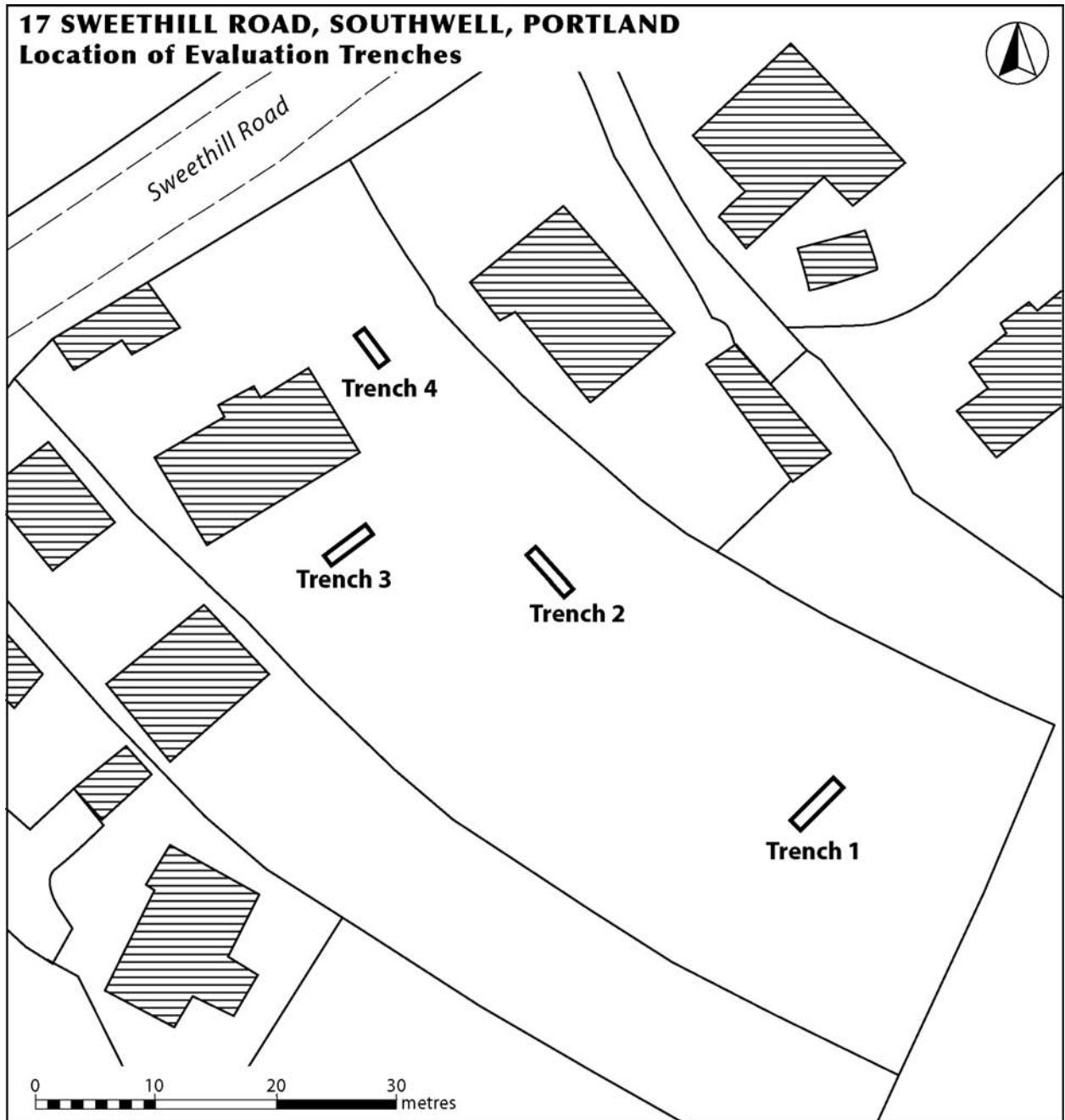


Figure 2: Location of evaluation trenches.

## 17 SWEETHILL ROAD, SOUTHWELL, PORTLAND Trench 1 Section

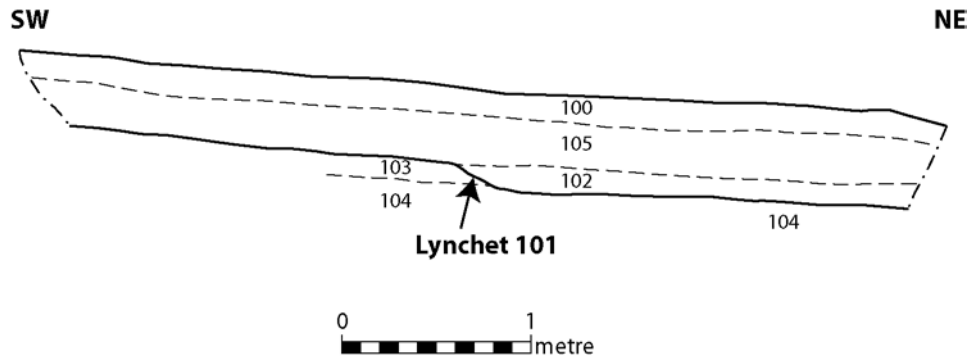


Figure 3: South east facing section of Trench 1 showing lynchet 101.



*Plate 1: General view of the east end of the garden and the location of Trench 1, looking west.*



*Plate 2: Trench 1 showing lynchet 101. 1m scales.*



*Plate 3: Trench 2, looking north east. 1m scales.*



*Plate 4: Trench 3, looking north west, 1m scales.*



*Plate 5: Trench 4, looking north east, 1m scales.*