

DORFORD BAPTIST CHURCH, DORCHESTER, DORSET
Archaeological Observations and Recording



Report No. 53141.2

January 2005

Dorford Baptist Church, Dorset

Archaeological Observations, November 2004

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SUMMARY

Archaeological observations and recording were carried out by Terrain Archaeology during the construction of a new church hall at Dorford Baptist Church, Bridport Road, Dorchester (SY68889064), in November 2004. The remains of the clay and chalk rubble of the counterscarp bank of the Roman town defences were observed in the western half of the site. The bank survived up to one metre high and was approximately 21 m wide. It appeared to run across the whole width of the site. A small part of the outer ditch of the town defences was observed to the south of the church. The evidence from this watching brief suggests that the western approach road to Durnovaria did not cross this site.

INTRODUCTION

This project was commissioned by Dorford Baptist Church, through their agents, Allied Design Partnership, as required by a planning condition for the redevelopment of Dorford Baptist Church, Bridport Road, Dorchester, Dorset (Planning Application No. 1/E/2003/1237). An archaeological evaluation of the site was undertaken by Terrain Archaeology in November 2003 (Terrain Archaeology 2003). Three trenches were excavated to the north and south of the church and church hall, which revealed the remains of the counterscarp bank and outer ditch of the Roman town defences. On the basis of the evaluation results, a condition for the implementation of a programme of archaeological observations and recording was added to the Planning consent. The archaeological works detailed in this report were undertaken in fulfilment of this condition.

‘Archaeological Observations and Recording’ (or a ‘watching brief’) is a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons, within a specified area or site where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed.

The development comprised the demolition of the existing church hall and the construction of a new larger hall complex, together with major alterations to the church itself. The new building was a steel frame structure founded on concrete stanchion bases, with shallow ground beam trenches between. Only the stanchion pits were deep enough to impinge on the underlying Roman archaeology, consequently, the archaeological observations were limited to the groundworks associated with the digging of these pits.

The site is situated on the junction of Bridport Road and Albert Road in Dorchester, at Ordnance Survey NGR SY68889064 (Figure 1), at a height of about 78.4 m above OD. The underlying geology is Upper Chalk.

The fieldwork was carried out between 8th – 16th November 2004 by Peter Bellamy.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge Dorford Baptist Church, David Cole of Allied Design Partnership, Bob Collings of Melhuish & Saunders Ltd, Steven Wallis, Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council, and the groundwork contractors on site for their help and cooperation during this project.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies immediately outside the western side of the Roman town of *Durnovaria*, close to the presumed location of the west gate, and within the area of the Roman town defences (Figure 8). The defences on the west side of *Durnovaria* have been investigated piecemeal in a number of locations (RCHME 1970, Startin *et al.* 1972) which have shown that they comprise an earthen bank, later surmounted by a stone wall with a series of V-shaped ditches beyond and a counterscarp bank outside. On the south side of the town the ditches are of triple-V section (RCHME 1970, 548) but elsewhere the full width of the ditch system has not been exposed. A short length of the stone wall still survives on the east side of Albert Road adjacent to the site (Figure 1). The possible edge of the inner ditch was seen immediately to the west of this wall during investigations in 1951 (Farrar 1953, fig. 1). Parts of two ditches were observed on the northern side of the Top o' Town in 1955 (Farrar 1962). The outer two ditches and the counterscarp bank were investigated on The Grove to the north of the site (Startin *et al.* 1972). The counterscarp bank was about 20 m wide and was constructed of clay and chalk (Bill Putnam pers. comm.). The edge of the outer ditch was about 27 m west of The Grove (about fifty metres west of the postulated line of the Roman stone wall).

The precise location of the West Gate of the Roman town is not known. A gravel layer overlying chalk, observed under the western end of High West Street, was thought to be part of a causeway across the Roman defences (Farrar 1966 and 1967). This seems unlikely as Roman building remains have been found under High West Street about forty metres east of the defences (RCHME 1970, 567), indicating that the main Roman street between the east and west gates does not run along the line of the present road. It probably lies to the south of High West Street. Unfortunately, the likely location of the West Gate cannot be determined by projecting the line of the Roman road from Exeter, as the course of this road close to the town is not known. This Roman road can be traced with some certainty up to a point about 1 km west of the Roman town. Here, the road runs along the line of the present Bridport Road and traces of the Roman road gravels beneath the modern road confirm this (Bellamy 2003). The last kilometre of the road as it approaches the Roman town changes direction and no traces of this part of the road has yet been found and its course cannot be determined from the historic maps.

A number of Roman burials have been found close to the site. Many Roman inhumations and perhaps some cremation burials were found in the Borough Gardens and under Albert Road to the north of the gardens during the 19th and 20th centuries (RCHME 1970). The burials extended up to within twenty metres of the southwest corner of the site in the gardens of 8 Albert Road and 43 Cornwall Road (Stacey 1986a and b) and are probably part of an extensive cemetery outside the Roman town defences to the south of the Roman road to Exeter. Another Roman cemetery has been found to the north of the site on the west side of The Grove (RCHME 1970, 582).

During the medieval and post-medieval period the site was part of the open fields of Fordington. It was probably pasture in the 19th century. The 1841 Tithe map shows that the site was at the end of a strip running roughly north–south and by 1877, it was in the northwest corner of a long triangular field called Townsend furlong (1877 altered Tithe map). In the mid-19th century it was used for the 5th November bonfire and was called Gunpowder Field or Guy Fawkes Field (Potter 1998).

The site was purchased by the Church of England in 1895 for a new church (St Mary's) for the rapidly expanding suburbs of Dorchester. The church, opened in 1897, was known as the 'Tin Tabernacle' or 'Tin Temple' because it was a temporary building with a corrugated iron roof (Potter 1998). It was demolished in c. 1913 after the construction of the present St Mary's Church in Victoria Park, further out in the suburbs.

The site was purchased by the Baptists in 1912, and the Baptist chapel constructed on almost exactly the same site as the earlier church. The foundation stone was laid just before the World War 1 and the building was simplified from the original plans because of war difficulties.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of the archaeological observations was to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on the site.

The archaeological works aimed to observe and record all the in situ archaeological deposits and features revealed during the groundworks to an appropriate professional standard.

In particular, the works aimed to record the character and position of the Roman town defences.

METHODS

No written brief was issued for these observations and recording works. They were undertaken in line with the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*, although it must be noted that no Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared.

The observations of the groundworks were intensive, as defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists, with a suitably qualified archaeologist present during sensitive ground disturbance.

The groundworks comprised the machine-excavation of eighteen stanchion pits and one larger trench for a new boiler room down into the top of the natural chalk (Figure 2). The stanchion pits were excavated, and then almost immediately filled with concrete, allowing very little time for archaeological recording. Health and Safety considerations, on account of the depth of the stanchion pits and unconsolidated nature of many of the fills, meant that the trenches were not entered. All recording was done from outside the trench.

All deposits exposed in the trenches were recorded using elements of Terrain Archaeology's recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records. The position of the trenches was located on a plan provided by the client.

The records have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current UKIC guidelines and the requirements of the receiving museum. The archive will be deposited with the Dorset County Museum.

RESULTS

Introduction

Eighteen stanchion pits (Trenches 5–22) between 1.0–3.6 m across and between 1.8–3.0 m deep were excavated along the south and west sides of the site, together with a larger trench (4) 8.5 m by 3.5 m against the southwest corner of the church for the new boiler room (Figure 2, Plate 1). The limited size of the observed trenches means that only a very small part of the archaeological stratigraphy was exposed in any one place. In order to understand the broader picture of the surviving archaeology across the site, an east–west transect across the site was reconstructed, running through Trenches 5, 7, 8, 12, 13, and 14 (Figure 5). The broad stratigraphic sequence across the site is described below and a list of all contexts is presented in Appendix 1 and a representative section of all the stanchion pits is shown in Figures 3 and 4.

Natural Deposits

Natural chalk was encountered in all trenches at a height of between 74.74 m and 76.00 m above OD, at a depth of between 1.5 m and 2.0 m below ground level.

Buried Soil

Immediately above the natural chalk, a layer of reddish-brown clay was exposed in Trenches 8–14

and 19–21. This was about 0.1 m thick. In Trench 8 (Plate 4), this layer petered out about 0.4 m from the east edge of the trench. In Trench 14, this layer petered out about 1.4 m westwards into the trench. This layer has been interpreted as the remains of the pre-Roman soil, traces of which have been found on many sites within Dorchester.

Early Features

In Trench 14, a steep sided, flat-bottomed pit (505) cut into the natural chalk was visible in the western baulk. The plan shape of this feature was not determined but it measured about 1.1 m across and 0.5 m deep. It was filled with dark reddish-brown clay loam (506). No finds were recovered and this feature is undated. However, the character of the fill suggests that it was likely to be prehistoric or Roman in date.

Roman Defensive Ditch

Trenches 5 and 7 were excavated across the line of the outer ditch of the Roman town defences. Trench 5 was on the eastern side and Trench 7 was on the western side (Figure 3, Plates 2–3). The angle and depth of the natural chalk in these two trenches (416, 434), together with the results of earlier observations of this feature (Startin *et al.* 1972) has enabled the overall profile of this ditch to be reconstructed (Figure 5). This ditch was V-shaped and had a projected width of about 9 m and a projected depth of 2.5 m. The fill was a greyish-brown silty clay loam with occasional flint nodules (415, 432).

Counterscarp Bank

Traces of the counterscarp bank were observed in Trenches 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, and 21. This survived up to 1.0 m high and was constructed directly on top of the reddish-brown clay of the pre-Roman ground surface. It comprised layers of reddish-brown clay and chalk rubble in varying quantities (Plates 5–6). Although no definite bank deposits were recognised in Trench 8, the survival of the pre-Roman buried soil (443), becoming thicker towards the west, in the western half of this trench may indicate that this soil layer was originally protected by the bank. If this is the case, then the eastern edge of the bank probably ran along the line of this trench. The overlying deposit of chalky soil (442) may be eroded bank material. Similar chalky soil deposits (464) were found in Trench 10. The western edge of the bank may run through Trench 14, where the pre-Roman soil (504) and the overlying chalky clay bank material (503) gradually peter out towards the western side of the trench (Figure 5).

Post-medieval agricultural soils

Above the Roman deposits in Trenches 5, 7, 8, 11, 14, 20, and 21 was a layer of brown clay loam soil between 0.3 – 1.7 m thick. This probably represents the development of agricultural soils during the medieval and post-medieval periods.

Modern Features

The majority of modern features were not fully recorded and were probably associated with the demolition of the church hall immediately prior to the redevelopment of the site. In addition, there are a small number of other features exposed. None of these was fully recorded.

The remains of a brick wall footing, aligned north–south were found in Trench 5 (Figure 3, Plate 2). These footings were not associated with any of the structures belonging to the present church and may be the remains of the earlier ‘Tin Tabernacle’. The 1902 Ordnance Survey 25-inch map indicates that the vestry was in this area.

The east–west brick wall footing exposed in the north end of Trench 20 may also be related to the

earlier church. It was not on the line of any of the walls of the recently demolished church hall. It was inside the area of the west end of the earlier church.

Some detail of the foundations of the original boiler room of the present church was exposed in Trench 4. The brick footings were built directly on top of the natural chalk and were three courses high, projected a maximum of 0.17 m beyond the south face of the church wall. The remains of a 0.2 m wide vertical construction trench (405) was also found. It was filled with mixed brown clay loam with moderate chalk lumps (406).

At the southern end of the site, part of a large feature was exposed in Trench 6. The upper surface of the chalk sloped down to the north and east. Not enough of this feature was exposed to be certain of its character. It was filled with greyish-brown soil with some tree root disturbance. This feature may be related to the cut found in Trench 2 during the archaeological evaluation (Terrain Archaeology 2003). This was originally identified as part of the Roman defensive ditch, but the additional data from the watching brief now cast doubt on this interpretation.

Finds

No finds were recovered.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the small areas exposed and the difficult conditions on site, this watching brief has clarified a number of points about the Roman town defences at this point and has enabled a transect across the counterscarp bank and outer ditch to be reconstructed (Figure 5) and the course of the defences to be projected across the site (Figure 6).

The results demonstrate that the hypothesis that the Roman approach road ran through the site (Terrain Archaeology 2003) is incorrect. The remnants of the counterscarp bank have now been identified across the whole width of the site. The earlier hypothesis was based on an apparent difference in alignment of the counterscarp bank in Trench 1 to the north of the church and the defensive ditch in Trench 2 to the south of the church. The discovery of parts of the defensive ditch in Trenches 5 and 7 now suggest that the feature found in Trench 2 was not part of the defences, but belonged to some other large disturbance of unknown date and character.

The results suggest that the counterscarp bank was about 21 m wide and over one metre high and the outer ditch was about 9 m wide and about 2.5 m deep. The projected alignment of the ditch and counterscarp bank is shown on Figure 6. This alignment is similar to the line of the defences north of the site in The Grove, rather than that to the south along West Walks. This implies that the likely course of the approach road is to the south of the present site. The precise position of this road is not known.

PROJECT ARCHIVE

The archive (Terrain Archaeology Project No. 53141) will be deposited with Dorset County Museum, which has agreed in principle to accept the archive, subject to fulfilment of the Museum's requirements of the preparation of archaeological archives. A copy of the microfilmed archive will be deposited with the National Monuments Record.

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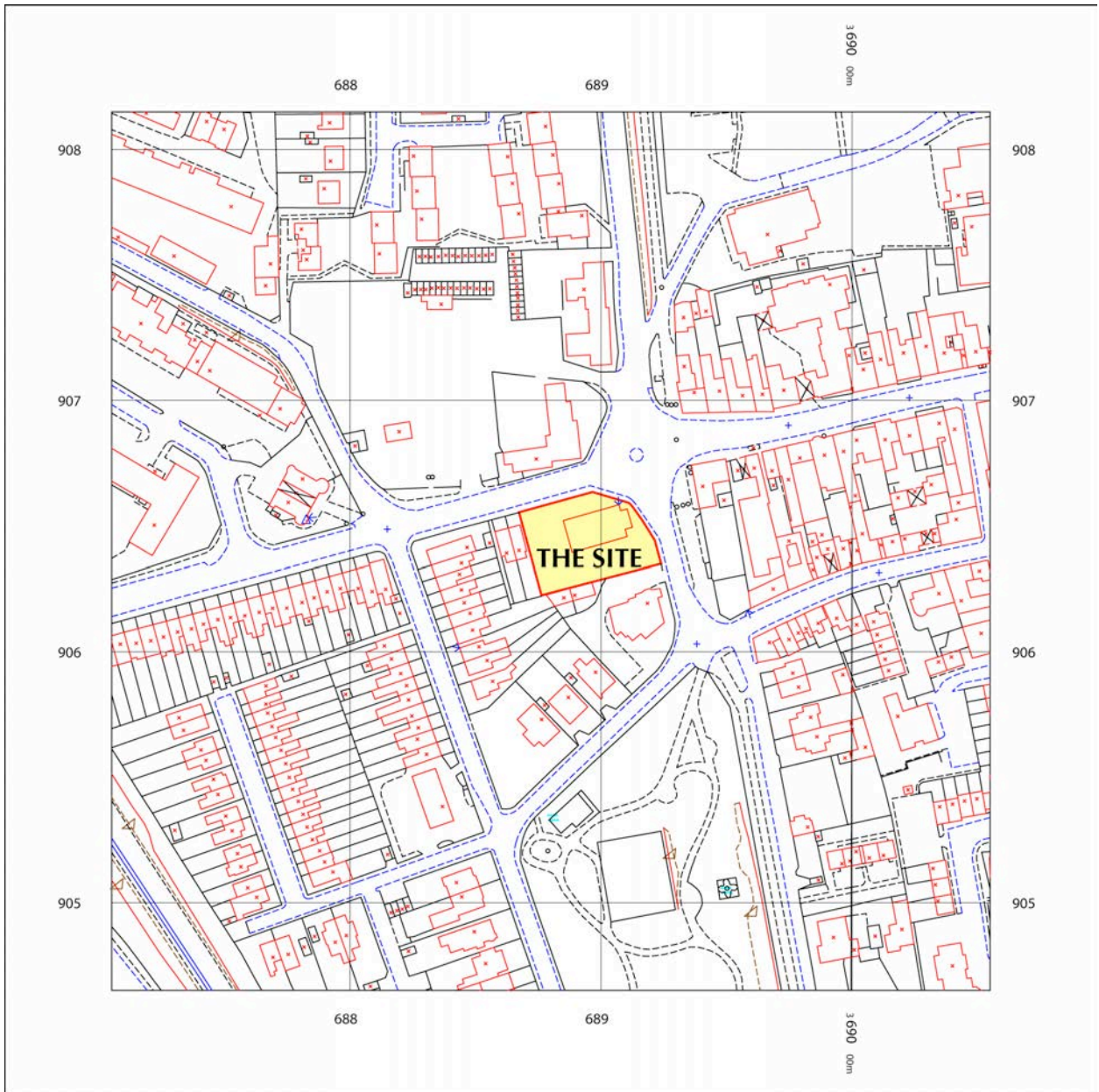


Figure 1: Location Map

(Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Superplan Data Drawing No. 00005367, © Crown copyright 2003. All Rights reserved)

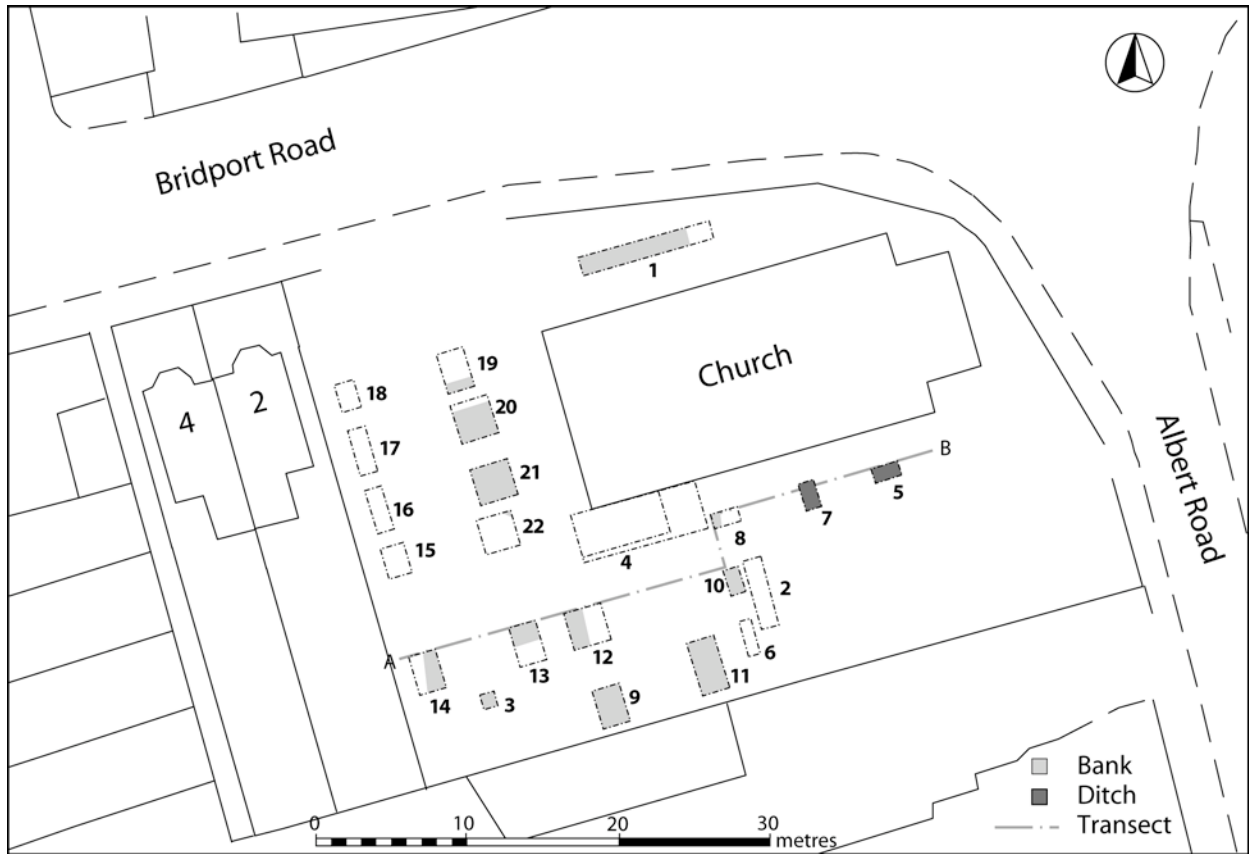


Figure 2: Plan of all trenches.

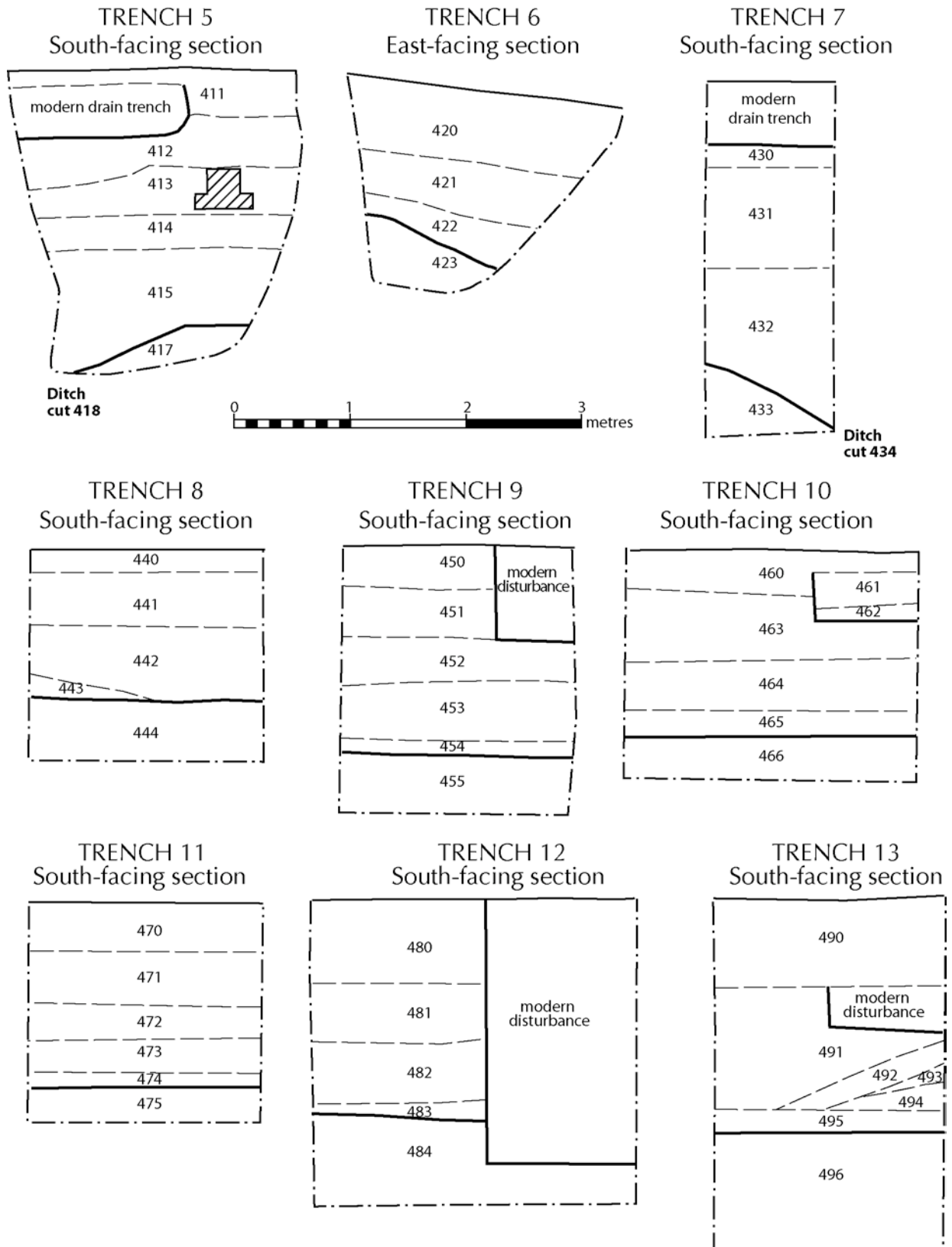


Figure 3: Sections of Trenches 5–13.

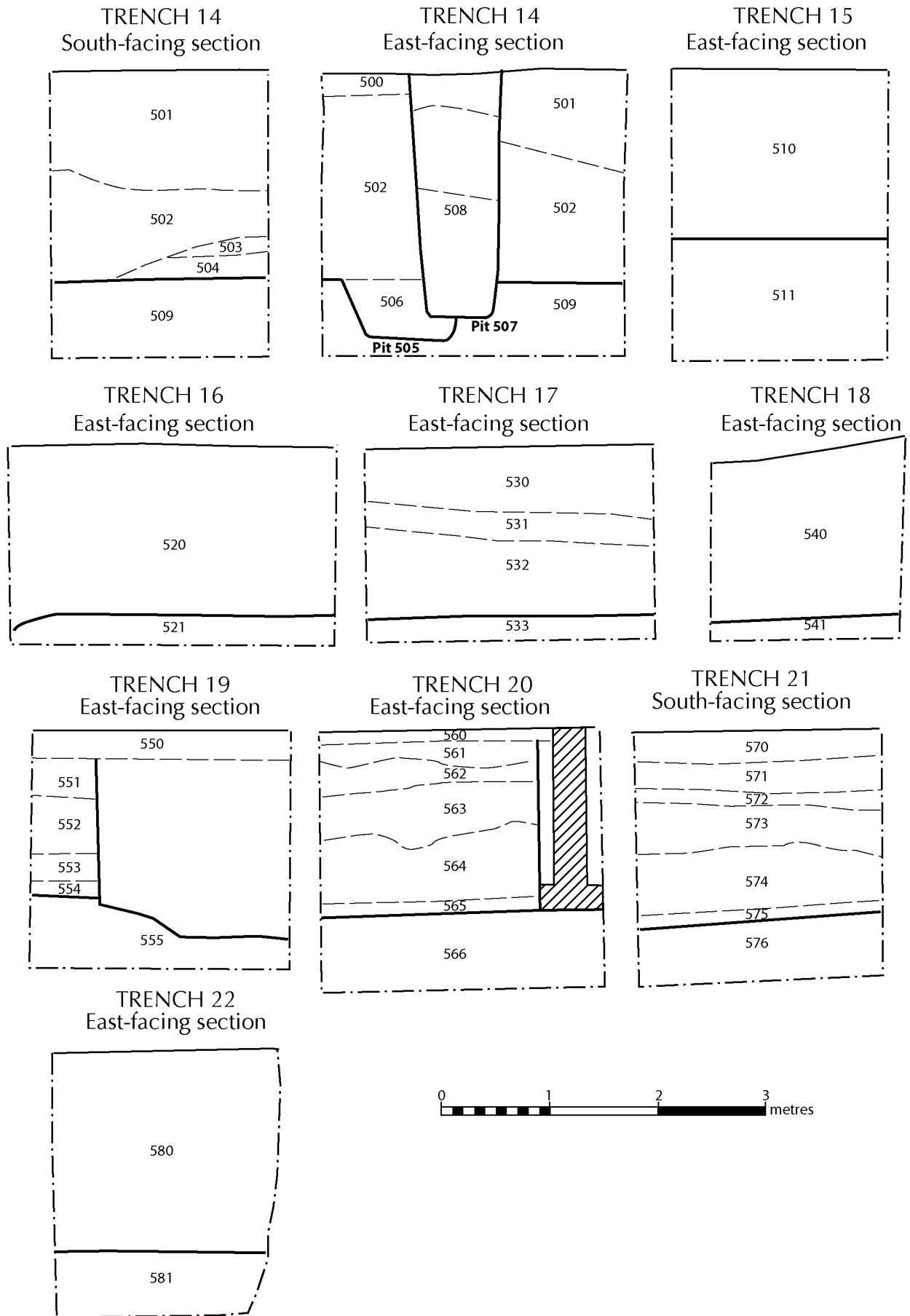


Figure 4: Sections of Trenches 14-22

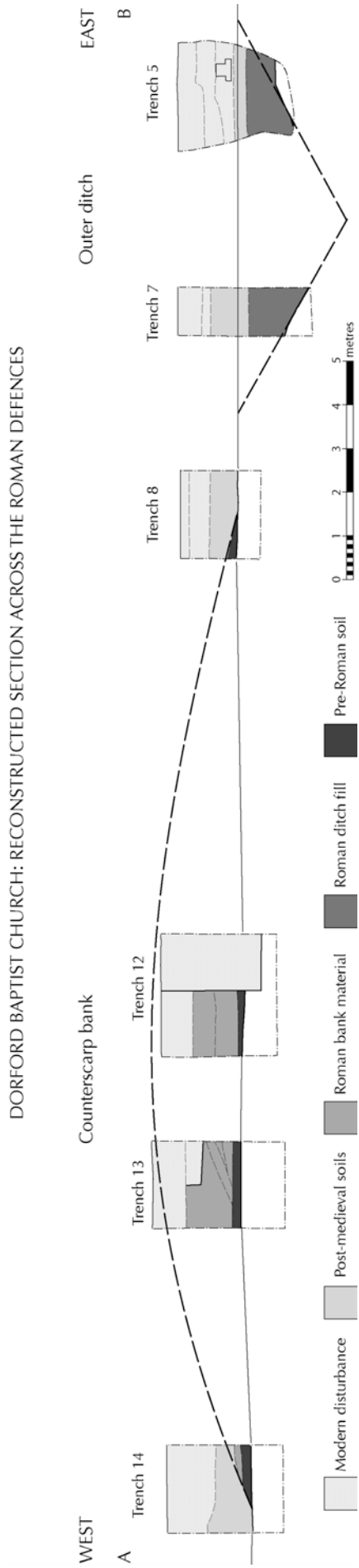


Figure 5: Reconstructed transect across outer ditch and counterscarp bank. (Note: the original profile of the bank has not been fully reconstructed.)

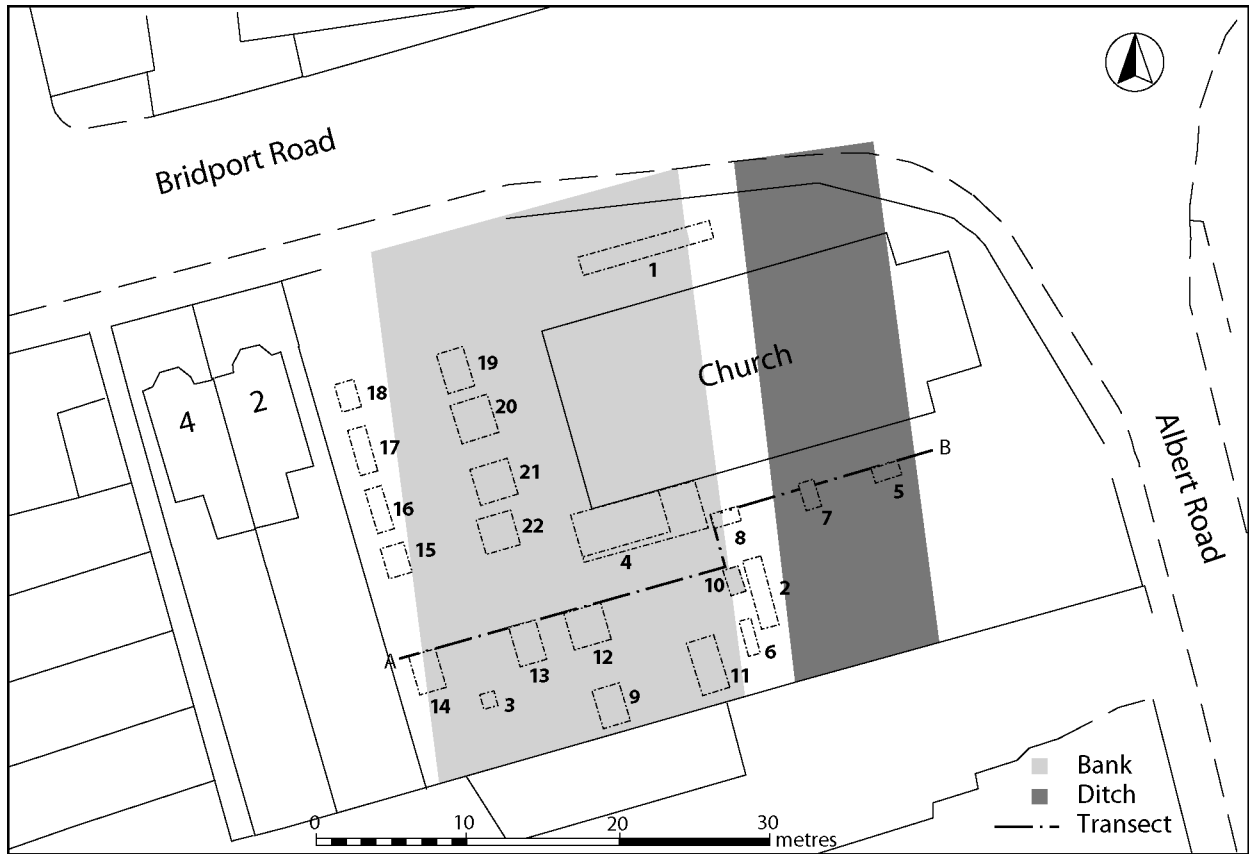


Figure 6: Projected line of the Roman town defences across the site



Plate 1: General view of south side of site looking east.



Plate 2: Trench 5, looking north.



Plate 3: Trench 7, looking north, showing Roman ditch cut.



Plate 4: Trench 8, viewed from south.



Plate 5: View of Roman counterscarp bank deposits in Trench 9. Viewed from east.



Plate 6: View of Roman counterscarp bank deposits in Trench 21. Viewed from east.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF ALL RECORDED CONTEXTS

Context	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Height above OD
401	4	Mixed greyish-brown clay loam with frequent chalk lumps and brick fragments.	Modern levelling material	
402	4	Greyish-brown clay loam with frequent chalk rubble.	Roman bank material?	
403	4	Reddish-brown clay.	Old ground surface	
404	4	Mixed disturbed soil	Modern disturbance	
405	4	Linear vertical cut, 0.2 m wide, on south side of church.	Construction trench for boiler room of church	
406	4	Mixed brown clay loam with moderate chalk lumps	Fill of construction trench 405.	
407	4	Brick wall	Wall of boiler room of church	
411	5	Mixed greyish-brown clay loam.	Modern levelling material.	77.24 m
412	5	Mid greyish-brown silty clay loam with lenses of sand.	Modern levelling layer.	76.84 m
413	5	Mixed dark brown clay loam with brick footings	Post-medieval agricultural soil.	76.39 m
414	5	Mid brown silty clay loam with frequent chalk lumps.	Post-medieval agricultural soil.	75.55 m
415	5	Greyish-brown silty clay loam with occasional flint nodules.	Fill of Roman defensive ditch 416.	75.64 m
416	5	Sloping cut on east side of large ditch.	Roman defensive ditch	75.64 m
417	5	Natural chalk.	Bedrock.	75.04 m
420	6	Loose dark brown clay loam with frequent roots.	Topsoil	
421	6	Greyish-brown clay loam with moderate chalk lumps.	Post-medieval agricultural soil.	
422	6	Greyish-brown clay loam with moderate chalk lumps and frequent tree roots.	Fill of possible feature.	
423	6	Natural chalk.	Bedrock	
430	7	Mixed greyish-brown clay loam with lenses of soil and debris.	Modern levelling material	77.24 m
431	7	Mid brown clay loam.	Post-medieval agricultural soil.	76.49 m
432	7	Dark brown clay loam with occasional flints.	Fill of Roman defensive ditch 434.	75.59 m
433	7	Natural Chalk	Bedrock	74.74 m
434	7	Sloping cut on west side of large ditch.	Roman defensive ditch.	75.59 m
440	8	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris.	Modern levelling layer	77.19 m
441	8	Mid brown clay loam	Post-medieval agricultural soil.	76.99 m
442	8	Brown clay loam with chalk rubble.	Eroded bank material.	76.54 m
443	8	Reddish-brown clay.	Old ground surface.	76.09 m
444	8	Natural chalk.	Bedrock.	75.94 m
450	9	Mixed dark brown clay loam, chalk and debris.	Modern levelling layer	77.44 m
451	9	Dirty chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	77.09 m
452	9	Chalk rubble.	Roman bank material	76.64 m
453	9	Reddish-brown clay and chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	76.24 m
454	9	Reddish-brown clay.	Old ground surface.	75.74 m
455	9	Natural chalk.	Bedrock.	75.64 m
460	10	Mixed dark brown soil and chalk.	Modern levelling layer.	77.28 m
461	10	Mixed grey soil with brick, slate and mortar debris.	Demolition debris.	77.13 m
462	10	Red gravel.	Modern layer.	76.83 m
463	10	Greyish-brown clay loam.	Post-medieval agricultural soil.	76.88 m
464	10	Reddish-brown clay with very frequent chalk rubble.	Eroded bank material?	76.33 m
465	10	Reddish-brown clay.	Old ground surface.	75.88 m
466	10	Natural Chalk.	Bedrock.	75.63 m
470	11	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris.	Modern levelling layer.	77.31 m
471	11	Greyish-brown clay loam.	Post-medieval agricultural soil.	76.86 m
472	11	Chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	76.41 m
473	11	Reddish-brown clay with frequent chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	76.11 m
474	11	Reddish-brown clay.	Old ground surface	75.81 m
474	11	Natural chalk.	Bedrock	75.71 m
480	12	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris.	Modern levelling layer.	77.62 m

Context	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Height above OD
481	12	Chalk rubble	Roman bank material.	76.92 m
482	12	Reddish-brown clay with frequent chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	76.42 m
483	12	Reddish-brown clay	Old ground surface.	75.87 m
484	12	Natural chalk.	Bedrock	75.77 m
490	13	Dark brown mixed soil.	Modern levelling layer	77.84 m
491	13	Yellowish-brown clay with frequent small chalk pieces.	Roman bank material.	77.09 m
492	13	Fine chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	76.64 m
493	13	Reddish-brown clay and chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	76.39 m
494	13	Chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	76.24 m
495	13	Reddish-brown clay.	Old Ground surface.	76.04 m
496	13	Natural chalk.	Bedrock	75.84 m
500	14	Dark brown clay loam	Topsoil	77.68 m
501	14	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris	Modern levelling layer	77.68 m
502	14	Dark brown clay loam with lenses of chalk	Post-medieval agricultural soil.	77.48 m
503	14	Small chalk rubble	Roman bank material.	76.13 m
504	14	Reddish-brown clay	Old ground surface	75.98 m
505	14	Cut with steeply sloping sides and flat bottom.	Pit	75.73 m
506	14	Dark reddish-brown clay loam	Fill of pit 505	75.73 m
507	14	Steep vertically sided narrow cut.	Robber trench for church hall wall	77.68 m
508	14	Mixed dark brown soil and chalky soil	Fill of cut 507	77.68 m
509	14	Natural chalk	Bedrock	75.73 m
510	15	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris	Modern levelling layer	77.49 m
511	15	Natural chalk	Bedrock	75.89 m
520	16	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris	Modern levelling layer	77.47 m
521	16	Natural chalk	Bedrock	75.87 m
530	17	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris	Modern levelling layer	77.59 m
531	17	Chalk rubble	Modern levelling layer	77.09 m
532	17	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris	Modern levelling layer	76.84 m
533	17	Natural chalk	Bedrock	75.99 m
540	18	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris	Modern levelling layer	77.75 m
541	18	Natural chalk.	Bedrock	76.15 m
550	19	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris	Modern levelling layer	77.89 m
551	19	Reddish-brown clay with moderate chalk pieces	Roman bank material.	77.64 m
552	19	Chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	77.29 m
553	19	Reddish-brown clay with occasional flint nodules and moderate chalk pieces.	Roman bank material.	76.74 m
554	19	Reddish-brown clay.	Old ground surface	76.49 m
555	19	Natural chalk.	Bedrock	76.39 m
560	20	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris	Modern levelling layer	77.81 m
561	20	Chalk rubble.	Modern levelling layer	77.66 m
562	20	Brown clay loam.	Post-medieval agricultural soil.	77.51 m
563	20	Reddish-brown clay with frequent chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	77.21 m
564	20	Reddish-brown clay with moderate chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	76.76 m
565	20	Reddish-brown clay.	Old ground surface	76.21 m
566	20	Natural chalk.	Bedrock	76.11 m
570	21	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris	Modern levelling layer	77.80 m
571	21	Chalk rubble.	Modern levelling layer	77.50 m
572	21	Brown clay loam	Post-medieval agricultural soil.	77.25 m
573	21	Reddish-brown clay with frequent chalk rubble.	Roman bank material.	77.10 m
574	21	Reddish-brown clay with frequent chalk rubble and flint nodules.	Roman bank material.	76.65 m
575	21	Reddish-brown clay.	Old ground surface.	76.10 m
576	21	Natural chalk.	Bedrock	76.00 m
580	22	Mixed dark brown soil, chalk and debris	Modern levelling layer	77.81 m
581	22	Natural chalk.	Bedrock	75.91 m