



Planning, Transport  
and Environment

INDEX DATA	RPS INFORMATION
Scheme Title Woodbury Great Close	Details Archaeological Watching Brief.
Road Number	Date Feb '93.
Contractor Exeter Museums	
County Exeter.	
OS Reference SU 29	
Single sided ✓	
Double sided	
A3 0	
Colour 0	

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
AT WOODBURY GREAT CLOSE,  
AXMINSTER, 1992

by

J. Bedford and S. Reed

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Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit

Report 93.14

February 1993

## PREFACE

This report comprises two sections. The first section summarises, in the form of a site narrative, the main results of the watching brief at Woodbury Great Close, Axminster during the laying of a pipe-trench. The second section contains the more detailed archaeological evidence upon which the site narrative is based. In Section 2, excavation records are presented in a processed form using matrices and stratigraphic groups and sub-groups with standardised descriptions of individual contexts.

### Contents : Section 1

- Introduction**
- 1.1 Organisation of this report
- 1.2 Site narrative
- 1.3 Acknowledgements
- 1.4 Bibliography

### List of illustrations found in Section 1

- Fig. 1 The location of the 1992 pipe-trench and sections.  
Scale 1:2500.

### Contents : Section 2

- Introduction**
- 2.1 Context matrix identification
- 2.2 Group and sub-group identification
- 2.3 Context information
- 2.4 The matrix diagrams and group/sub-group discussions
- Matrices**
- Group/sub-group discussions
- Group Matrix
- Group/matrix index
- 2.5 The context descriptions and main indices
- Context descriptions
- General context index
- Archive section index
- 2.6 Photographic index

### List of illustrations found in Section 2

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- Fig. 2 Sections through fort ditch showing positions of environmental sampling boxes. Scale 1:50 (816)
- Fig. 3 Sections of fort ditch in silage pit. Scale 1:50 (817)
- Fig. 4 Section 39, showing pits/ditches. Scale 1:50 (818)
- Fig. 5 Section 40, showing pits/ditches. Scale 1:50 (819)
- Fig. 6 Section 41, showing Roman soil development horizons. Scale 1:50 (820)
- Fig. 7 Section 42, showing Roman road and a pit/ditch. Scale 1:50 (821)
- Fig. 8 Section 43, showing Roman soils, clay dump and area of disturbance. Scale 1:50 (822)
- Plate 1 Section 38 through fort ditch, looking east. 1.5m scale.
- Plate 2 Pipe-trench spoil showing large stones from road make-up, looking north. 0.5m scale.

## Section 1

### Introduction

During July of 1992, the Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit (EMAFU) undertook a watching brief at Woodbury Farm, Axminster, observing the excavation of a silage pit and pipe-trench and recording the archaeological deposits. The fieldwork was directed by C.G. Henderson and the site supervisor was S. Reed. Post-excavation work for this archive report was undertaken in 1993 by J. Bedford. The pipe-trench and pit were located in the field known as Woodbury Great Close (SY 297974), immediately west of the Roman fort site which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, Devon No. 1031. The fort site was the subject of excavations by EMAFU in 1990 (Simpson 1993). The 1992 observation revealed part of the defences and a road, thought to represent a perimeter road to the fort.

The pipe-trench was dug by machine and was 0.7m deep and 0.2m wide. The silage pit was 5m wide and 13m long. As well as recording the sections, environmental samples were taken of the fort ditch fills and sent for analysis by V. Straker of HBMC and J. Jones at the University of Bristol. Their reports have been published elsewhere (Weddell, 1992). Only a small amount of pottery was recovered; it is still under analysis, and will be published elsewhere. The primary site records, full pottery listings and full photographic record are currently stored at EMAFU. The full project archive will be deposited in the RAM Museum, Exeter on completion of publication.

#### 1.1 The organisation of this report

Section 1 contains a site narrative. This narrative is an interpretative and stratigraphic account based on the discussion of the archaeological records contained in Section 2. Section 2 contains the detailed archaeological evidence for the stratigraphic development of the site as well as a summary photographic record.

#### 1.2 Site narrative

This narrative will concern only the direct evidence noted during the watching brief with respect to the fort site at Woodbury Great Close; for a more extensive and detailed examination of the site as a whole and its importance within the South West see Simpson 1993 *Archaeological excavations at Woodbury Great Close 1990*.

The silage pit dug by the landowner lay on the northern side of a hedgebank, and observation of the sections revealed that the pit had been cut along the line of the fort's defensive ditch, here aligned SE-NW. The ditch was cut through the natural clay/flint subsoil and was approximately 5m wide at the top and 2m deep. The profile of the ditch was shallower at the top, although this could be due to weathering and then sharpened to a more acute V-shape, approximately 1m from the bottom. No evidence of a cleaning slot was observed in the base of the ditch. Environmental monolith samples were taken throughout the fills of the ditch (for detailed assessment, see Weddell 1992), which proved more fruitful in the lower ditch fills, which were partially waterlogged deposits. The bottom of the ditch contained natural silts, accumulated over time, and some slumped material from the sides of the ditch. This, together with the environmental samples showing a rich flora in the lower deposits, would seem to indicate that the ditch was not particularly well-maintained after it was dug.

Excepting the topsoil and the make-up for the concrete farmyard surface, the rest of the ditch fills were mostly redeposited natural, contaminated with charcoal fragments (sometimes abundant), and occasional tile fragments. This would seem to indicate contamination from occupation debris, and thus this material, or at least a proportion of it, may be interpreted as slighted rampart material, pushed into the ditch once the fort had passed out of use during the civil occupation. No trace of the rampart was found, as it was probably lying underneath the line of the present hedgebank. In total, a stretch of the ditch some 13m long was recorded. Running away from the silage pit and skirting the northern and western edges of the Scheduled Ancient Monument before turning west across Woodbury Great Close, was the drainage channel. This was only a small trench 0.7m deep and 0.2m wide, and the scope for interpretation of many of the features was somewhat limited. It was known from the 1990 excavations that there are a number of ditches and gullies in the settlement area west of the fort, but it was impossible to tell from the small amount of any one feature exposed whether the portions found in section were representative of ditches or pits. Many of these features were cut into natural and were not bottomed by the relatively shallow trench. Alignment was obviously also difficult to determine.

Although most of these features were cut from the level of natural subsoil, some were cut into a buried soil that had been deposited over it, here interpreted as a Roman ploughsoil. It was a pale brown clay that had been deposited before the road foundation cut was dug through it. The other layer found under the topsoil was a very dark grey friable silt. This material had a very high charcoal content and contained almost all of the pottery recovered from the trench, and this would almost certainly seem to indicate that it is representative of occupation debris from the settlement already known to exist west of the fort. It blanketed the whole area, and was observed to fill many of the earlier gullies/ditches/pits, indicating that they had passed out of use by the time the horizon was deposited.

Next to the western edge of the Scheduled Ancient Monument, where the trench turned northwards, a large number of stones were noted in the spoil from the trench. When the sections were cleaned up, it could be seen that the trench had cut through a road. This road had large chert blocks dumped in a cut as a foundation, which had then been covered with a gravelly hardcore of stones. No traces of a surface were found on top of the road, which lay under topsoil and it would seem that later ploughing had, in this area at least, removed the traces of it. The road was aligned approximately N-S parallel with the western defences of the fort.

This watching brief confirmed evidence from the 1990 excavation concerning the exact positions of both the fort, the road and the settlement, and exposed a large portion of the defensive ditch of the fort, which permitted the taking of environmental samples which helped an understanding of the development of the ditch fills and the potential agricultural activity occurring close by the fort.

#### 1.3 Acknowledgements

Recording work at Woodbury was carried out with financial assistance from East Devon District Council and the post-excavation work has been funded by a grant from English Heritage. The plans in this report were drawn by T. Ives and were photographed for reduction by G. Young. Site drawings were drawn by N. Goodwin, P. Stead and S. Reed.

#### 1.4 Bibliography

- Simpson, S.J. 1990 SWW Musbury to Axminster water main  
1990. Summary results of archaeological investigations.  
EMAFU Report No. 90.16.
- Simpson, S.J. forthcoming Archaeological excavations at  
Woodbury Great Close 1990.
- Weddell, P.J. 1992 A35 Axminster bypass and Woodbury  
Great Close Excavations 1990. Assessment report and  
post-excavation research design.
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## SECTION 2

### Introduction

This section of the report contains a record of the detailed archaeological evidence upon which the narrative produced in Section 1 is based. The stratigraphic sequences are presented in the form of context matrices. The matrices have been produced according to a series of stratigraphic groups and sub-groups which illustrate events and stages in the archaeological record.

### 2.1 Context matrix identification

Matrices have been constructed for the contexts of the site. These are numbered Matrix 1 and Matrix 2. The sub-group number is found immediately to the left hand side of the contexts that form the sub-grouping.

### 2.2 Group and sub-group identification

The contexts for the Woodbury Great Close 1992 watching brief have been divided into five separate groups. Each group represents an archaeological event and, where appropriate, the group may be divided further into sub-groups. These sub-groups represent distinct stages in an archaeological event and they usually consist of a number of contexts that have a clear association. The stratigraphic relationships between the sub-groups are themselves illustrated by the group matrix.

The nature and content of each sub-group is given in the section on sub-group descriptions. The nature and content of each stratigraphic group is given in the section on group discussions. This section includes the interpretation conclusions that can be drawn from a consideration of the stratigraphic evidence. A concordance between the groups and the matrices is given by way of a group/matrix index.

### 2.3 Context information

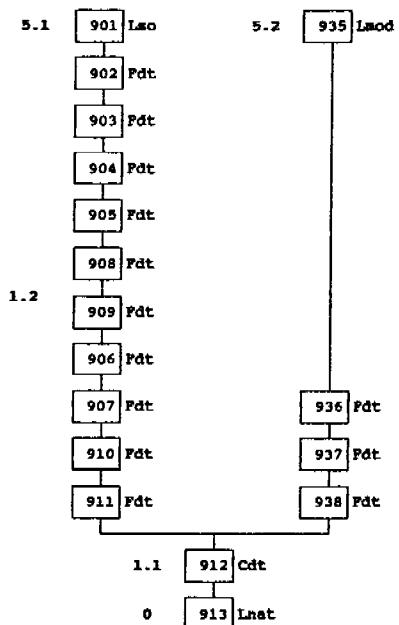
Information about individual contexts is provided in two forms. Firstly, the context number as it appears in the context matrix is annotated with an abbreviated 'type' description (Cph = Cut, post-hole). The list of abbreviations is given at the beginning of the series of matrix diagrams. Secondly, a standardised summary description of each context in numerical order is included in the report.

### 2.4 The matrix diagrams, sub-group descriptions and group discussions

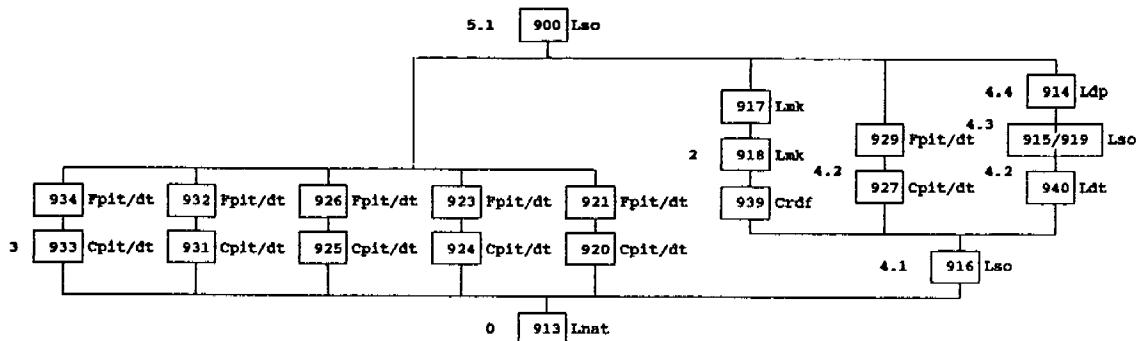
#### List of abbreviations (for matrices)

Build	B	Layer	L
Buried soil	bs	Make-up	mk
Cut	C	Modern	mod
Demolition	dem	Natural	nat
Ditch	dt	Pit	pit
Dump	dp	Soil	so
Fill	F	Surface	S

MATRIX 1



MATRIX 2



## Group discussions

### Group 0

This group concerns the natural clay and flint subsoil on the site, covering the whole area. Most of the observed features cut this material. Contains context: 913.

### Sub-group 1.1

This sub-group concerns the cut for the ditch of the Roman fort observed in the 1990 excavation in the same area. The ditch had a 'shouldered' V-shaped profile, with shallower sides at the top, and was here aligned E-W. Contains context: 912.

### Sub-group 1.2

This sub-group concerns the fills of the fort ditch. At the base of the ditch was dark grey silt from the life of the ditch. This was overlain by olive clay, which would appear to be slumping from the weathered sides of the ditch during its period as an open feature. The remaining fills of the ditch would appear to be redeposited natural, and are probably derived from the slighting from the rampart, which would presumably have been composed to some extent of upcast from the ditch. The bottom part of the ditch fill was waterlogged and contained organic material which was taken for environmental analysis. Contains contexts: 902-911, 936, 937, 938.

### Group 2

This group concerns the cut for and make-ups of a road on the site, aligned NW-SE. The lower layer was a solid foundation set into the natural subsoil, and consisted of large blocks of chert; the fact that these larger stones were at the base of the road further confirms the findings of the 1990 excavation. Over this hardcore layer, which was not bottomed, was a layer of smaller angular and sub-angular stones set in a clay matrix. No surface was detected on this make-up and had presumably been lost due to later ploughing activity. The road ran along the western edge defining the scheduled area. Contains contexts: 917, 918, 939.

### Group 3

This group concerns a series of features which were detected in the sections of the pipe-trench. Due to the limited scope for further investigation, it was impossible to tell whether these features were ditches or pits, as the trench was only 0.2m wide and 0.7m deep; thus only a few of the features were bottomed, and alignment, if any, was impossible to ascertain. The features were filled with material that was essentially the same as the buried Roman soil 915/919 (Group 4.3) and were, it would seem, infilled at the time of its development. No certain function could be ascribed to any of the features, and finds from them were limited. Contains contexts: 920, 921, 923, 924, 925, 926, 931, 932, 933, 934.

### Sub-group 4.1

This sub-group concerns a layer of pale brown clay which has been interpreted as a Roman ploughsoil. It was located to the west of the road and had been cut by it, indicating that it was in use before the road was constructed. It was also cut by other features but their function was uncertain. It was relatively clean and did not contain charcoal, as noted in the other buried soil (sub-group 4.3). Contains context: 916.

### Sub-group 4.2

This sub-group concerns the features which cut the soil of sub-group 4.1, excepting the road. These consisted of two cuts of indeterminate function. They were cut through the soil into natural, and appeared to be deeper than many of the others in group 3. Cut 940 was infilled by the later soil 915/919, indicating the end of its use at the time of deposition. Contains contexts: 927, 929, 940.

### Sub-group 4.3

This sub-group concerns a later development of soil on the site which lay over 916. It was very dark grey silt which had probably been stained by the large amount of charcoal it contained. This charcoal may have derived from industrial processes in the area outside the fort over a period of time. It appeared to fill many features and blanketed the area, running from the hedgebank defining the east of the scheduled area for at least 50m. This may constitute a settlement/industrial area that has been truncated due to later ploughing further away from the fort. The layer also produced a large quantity of potsherds. Contains contexts: 915, 919.

### Sub-group 4.4

This sub-group concerns a layer of redeposited natural over part of sub-group 4.3, which probably derived either from the fortress ditch, rampart, or another feature that was not exposed by excavation. Contains context: 914.

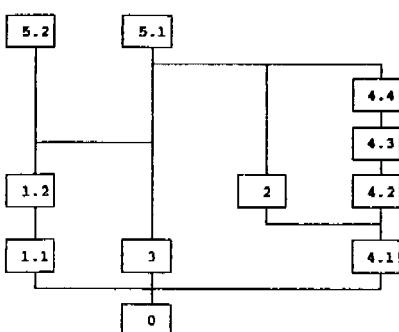
### Sub-group 5.1

This sub-group concerns the topsoils on the site. 900 was a friable silty loam and was relatively clean, while 901 contained other material. It was a sandy clay loam which was possibly mixed with material from the slighted rampart which had been pushed into the top of the silted ditch when the fort fell into disuse, thus contributing the clay content to the soil. Contains contexts: 900, 901.

### Sub-group 5.2

This sub-group concerns the concrete surface of the farmyard, overlying the ditch to the east of the silage pit. Contains context: 935.

## GROUP MATRIX



## GROUP MATRIX INDEX

<i>Context</i>	<i>Group Matrix</i>		<i>Context</i>	<i>Group Matrix</i>	
900	5.1	2	920	3	2
901	5.1	1	921	3	2
902	1.2	1	922	3	2
903	1.2	1	923	3	2
904	1.2	1	924	3	2
905	1.2	1	925	3	2
906	1.2	1	926	3	2
907	1.2	1	927	4.2	2
908	1.2	1	929	4.2	2
909	1.2	1	931	3	2
910	1.2	1	932	3	2
911	1.2	1	933	3	2
912	1.1	1	934	3	2
913	0	1.2	935	5.2	1
914	4.4	2	936	1.2	1
915	4.3	2	937	1.2	1
916	4.1	2	938	1.2	1
917	2	2	939	2	1
918	2	2	940	4.2	1
919	4.3	2			

## 2.5 The context descriptions and main indices

## List of abbreviations (for contexts)

Depth	D	North	N
East	E	Occasional	occ
Fragment	frag	South	S
Frequent	freq	West	W

## Context descriptions

900	Topsoil, silty friable loam, stones, grading upwards. D = unrecorded.	910	Ditch fill, olive clay, freq grit, occ to freq waterlogged plant remains created by the weathering of the ditch sides. Munsell 5Y 5/3.
901	Topsoil, dark greyish brown sandy clay loam, freq small angular stones (mostly flint), iron panning. Possibly mixed with slighted rampart material. Munsell = 10YR 4/2	911	Primary silting of ditch, dark grey, sticky, stoneless. Munsell 7.5YR 4/0.
902	Layer of silting in Roman fort ditch. Grey sandy clay, plastic, occ small stones. Munsell 7.5YR 5/0.	912	Cut for ditch of Roman fort; contains 902-911, cutting natural; basically a V-profile, more open at the top. D = 2.0m; excavated width = 5.3m.
903	Ditch fill, grey clay, occ stones, freq charcoal frags and stones. Munsell 2.5Y 5/0.	913	Natural clay and flint subsoil; underlies the entire area at Woodbury Great Close and Woodbury Farm. Munsell 7.5YR 5/8.
904	Ditch fill, grey silty sandy clay, sticky, stoneless, with tile frags. Munsell 2.5Y 6/0.	914	Redeposited natural from ditch; overlies 915. Brown plastic clay with flint nodules. Munsell 7.5YR 5/8.
905	Ditch fill, grey fine sandy silty clay, abundant charcoal. Munsell 2.5Y 5/0.	915	Roman soil development; very dark grey friable silt, < 5% stones, high charcoal content, many sherds. Munsell 10YR 3/1.
906	Silting within ditch, grey coarse sandy clay, sticky, occ charcoal, stoneless. Munsell 2.5Y 5/0.	916	Roman ploughsoil, pale brown clay, freq small angular stones. Munsell 10YR 6/3.
907	Ditch fill, dark grey clay, plastic, sticky, occ charcoal frags. Munsell 2.5Y 4/0.	917	Upper make-up of road, clay with medium to small angular and sub-angular stones.
908	Ditch fill, dark grey coarse sand lens, common tile frags. Munsell 2.5Y 4/0.	918	Road make-up, large blocks of stone for hardcore, set into subsoil 913 within road construction cut 936.
909	Ditch fill, grey fine sandy silty clay, freq charcoal, probably same as 905. Separated by sandy lens 906. Munsell 2.5Y 5/0.	919	Roman soil development, probably the same as 915; very dark grey sandy silt, stoneless, high charcoal content. Munsell 10YR 3/2.
		920	Cut for pit/ditch revealed in section. Function unknown. Contains 921.
		921	Fill of 920. Same as 915/919.
		923	Fill of 924. Same as 015/919.
		924*	Cut for pit/ditch. Function unknown. Like 920; unbottomed by trenching.
		925	Cut for shallow ditch/pit. Fill 926.
		926	Fill of 925; same as 915/919.
		927	Cut for feature of unknown purpose; contains 929.
		929	Fill of 927; very dark grey coarse sandy silt, friable, stoneless, high charcoal content. Probably a truncated part of 915/919. Munsell 10YR 3/1.
		931	Cut for pit/ditch; function unknown; not bottomed; contains 932.
		932	Dark grey/black silt loam. Fill of 931.
		933	Cut for shallow ditch/pit; function unknown. Contains 934.
		934	Fill of 933; same as 515/519.
		935	Concrete surface of farmyard.
		936	Fill of Roman fort ditch; yellow grey clay with gravel, angular stones within 912.
		937	Fill of fort ditch, within 912, yellow grey clay, gravel, sand.
		938	Primary fill of 912. Dark grey clay, freq coarse sand and gravel inclusions, organic waterlogged deposit.
		939	Cut for road foundations, make-up 918.
		940	Cut for ditch/pit west of road. Contains 919.

## GENERAL CONTEXT INDEX

*Abbreviations*

<b>Modern</b>	MOD	Natural	NAT
Roman	R		

*Context Period Area Type Plan*

900	R-MOD	-	L	-
901	R-MOD	-	L	-
902	R	-	F	-
903	R	-	F	-
904	R	-	F	-
905	R	-	F	-
906	R	-	F	-
907	R	-	F	-
908	R	-	F	-
909	R	-	F	-
910	R	-	F	-
911	R	-	F	-
912	R	-	C	-
913	R	-	NAT	-
914	R	-	L	-
915	R	-	L	-
916	R	-	L	-
917	R	-	L	-
918	R	-	L	-
919	R	-	L	-
920	R	-	C	-
921	R	-	F	-
923	R	-	F	-
924	R	-	C	-
925	R	-	C	-
926	R	-	F	-
927	R	-	C	-
929	R	-	F	-
931	R	-	C	-
932	R	-	F	-
933	R	-	C	-
934	R	-	F	-
935	MOD	-	L	-
936	R	-	F	-
937	R	-	F	-
938	R	-	F	-
939	R	-	C	-
940	R	-	C	-

## ARCHIVE SECTION INDEX

<i>Context No.</i>	<i>Sheet</i>	<i>Location</i>
900 39,40,42,43	818,819,820,821,922	Plan
901 35,36,43	816,817	"
902 35,36	816,817	"
903 35,36	816,817	"
904 35,36	816,817	"
905 35	816	"
906 35,36	816,817	"
907 35,36	816,817	"
908 35	816	"
909 35	816	"
910 35	816	"
911 35	816	"
912 35	816	"
913 35,36,37,39,40,41,42	816,817,818,819,820,821	"
914 43	822	"
915 43	822	"
916 39,41,42	819,820,821,822	"
917 42	821	"
918 42	821	"
919 41	820,821	"
920 40	818	"
921 40	818	"
923 40	818	"
924 40	818	"
925 40	818	"
926 40	818	"
927 39	819	"
929 39	819	"
931 39	819	"
932 39	819	"
933 39	819	"
934 39	819	"
935 42	821	"
936 42	821	"
937 38	816	"
938 38	816	"
939 38	816	"
940 38	816	"

## 2.6 Photographic Index

## Colour Print

No.	Description	View
1	Roman fort ditch on west face of pit	W
2-8	Roman fort ditch on east face of pit	E
9-13	Southern face of pit showing ditch fills	S
14,15	Pipe-trench dug westward towards Wyke Lane	W
16-18	Pipe-trench cutting across Roman road	N
19,20	Pipe-trench as dug along west side of Roman road	N

## Colour Slide

No.	Description	View
1,2	Roman fort ditch on west of pit before cleaning	W
4-11	Roman fort ditch on west of pit after cleaning	W
12,13	Roman fort ditch on east of pit	E
14,15		
16,17	Completed silage pit	S
18-21	General shots of pipe-trench	-

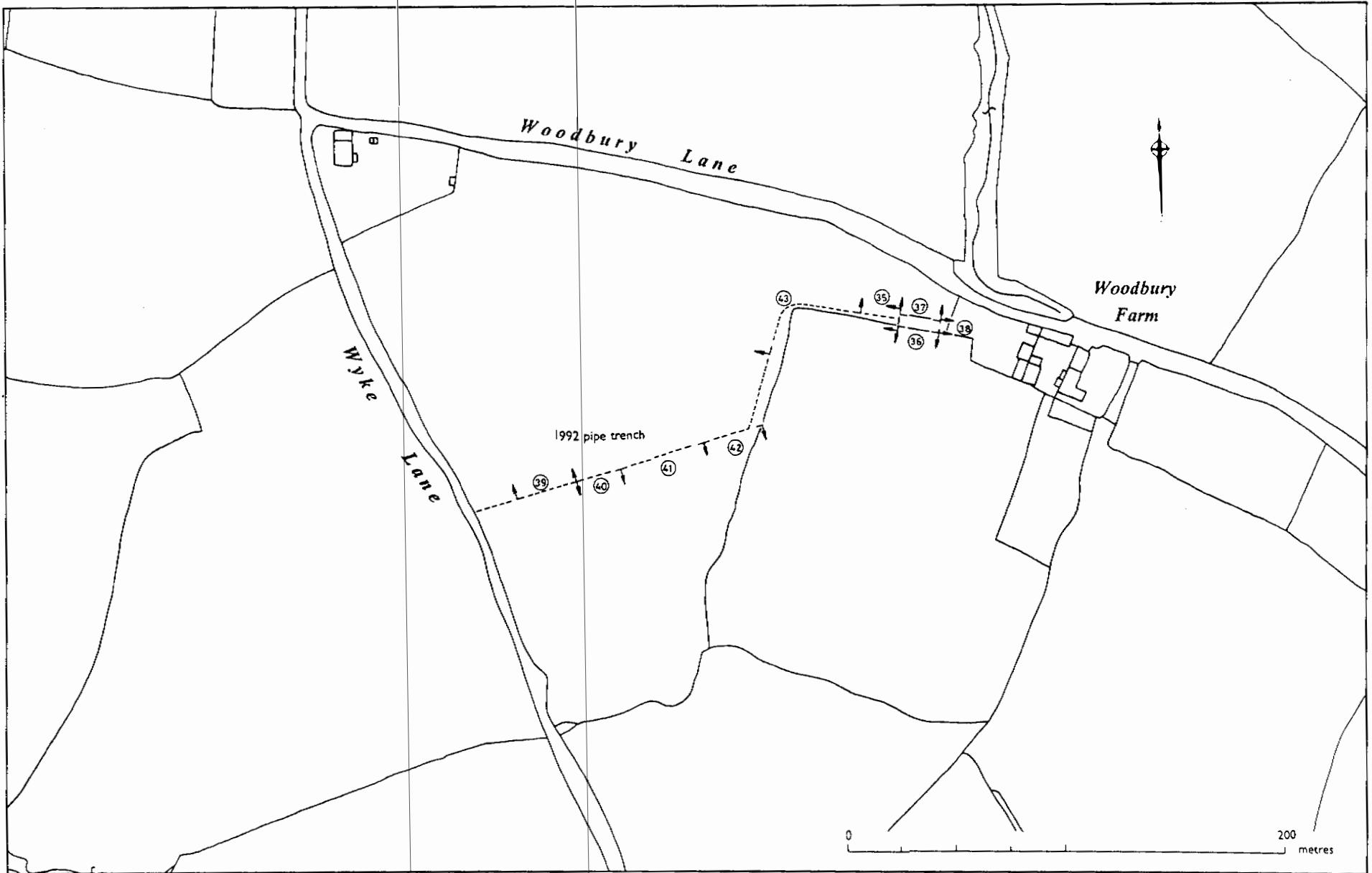
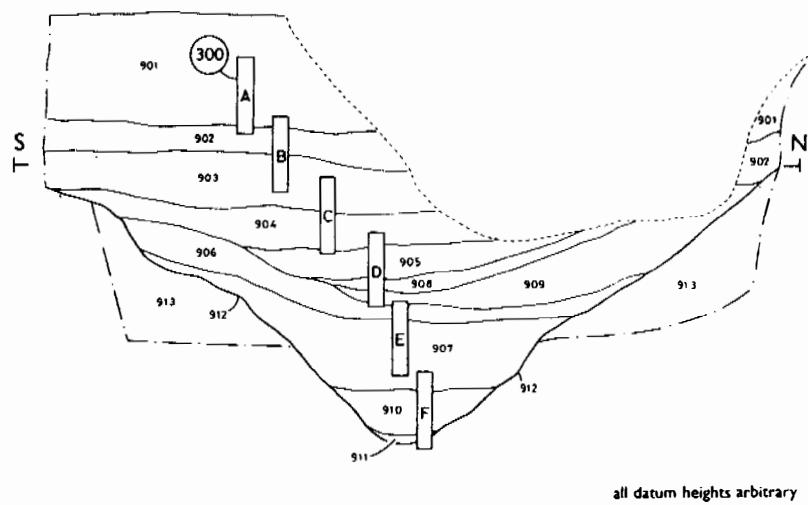


Fig. 1 The location of the 1992 pipe trench and silage pit. Scale 1:2500.

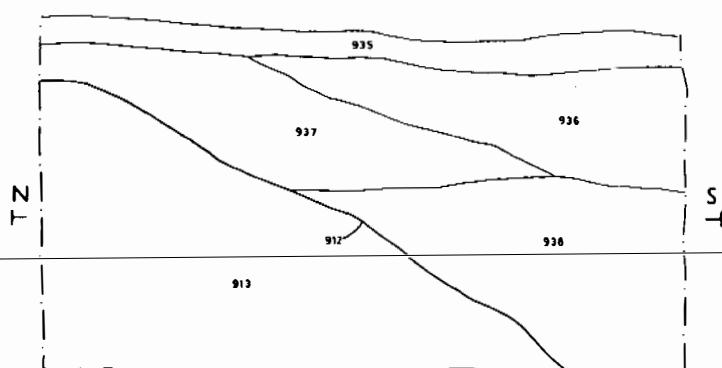
## Sections

35



all datum heights arbitrary

38



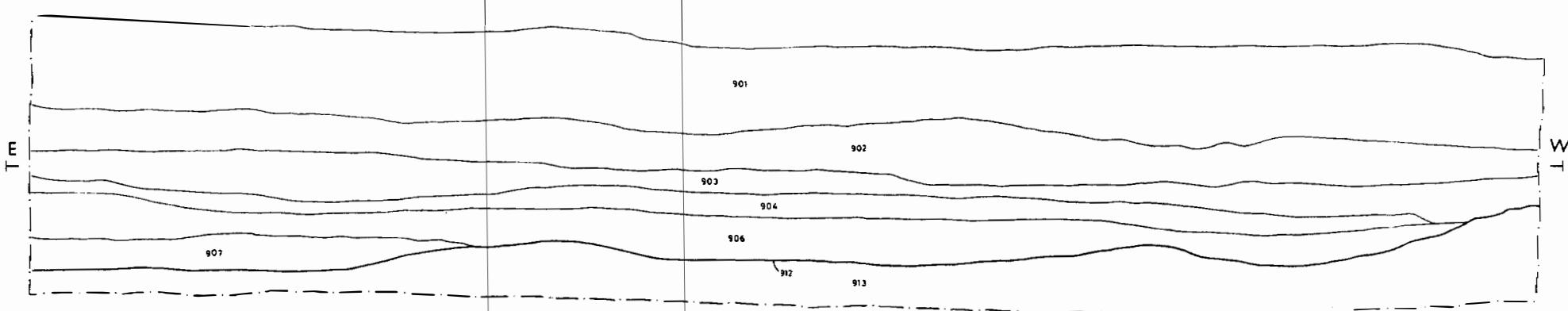
0

4 metres

Fig. 2 Sections through fort ditch showing positions of environmental sampling boxes. Scale 1:50.

## Sections

36



all datum heights arbitrary

37

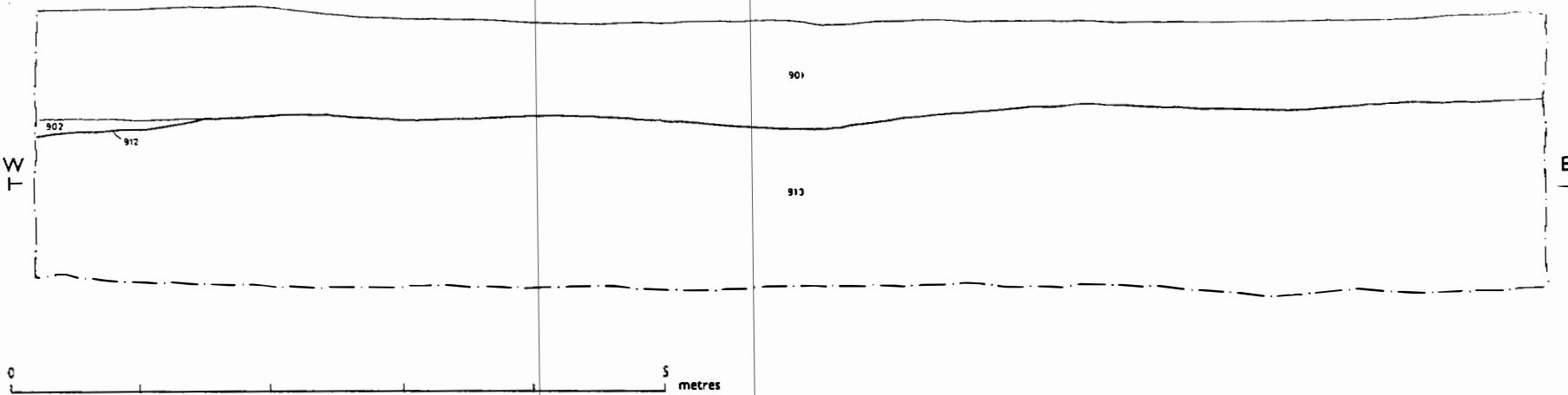


Fig. 3 Sections of fort ditch in silage pit. Scale 1:50.

## Section 39

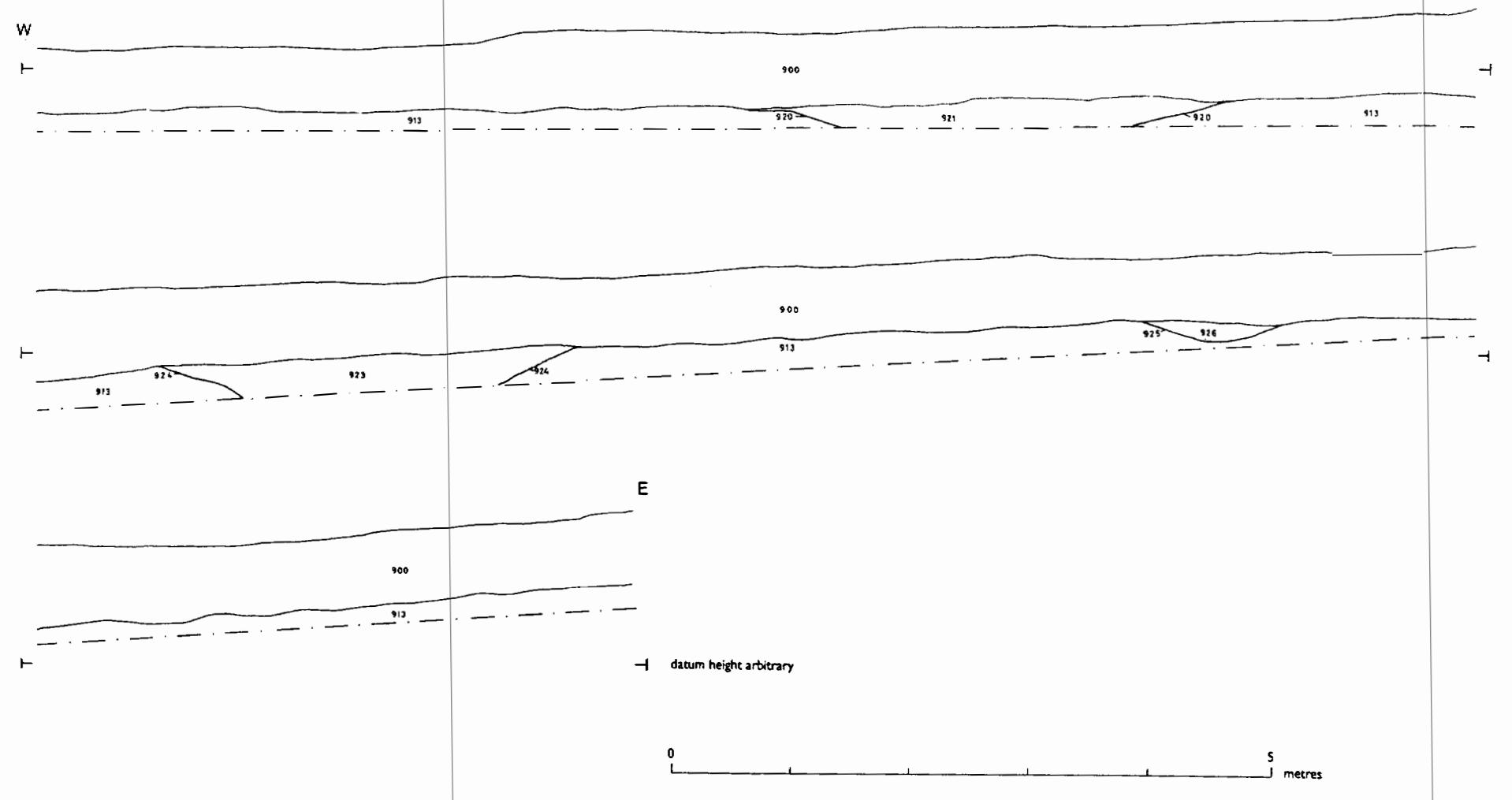


Fig. 4 Section 39 showing pits/ditches. Scale 1:50.

## Section 40

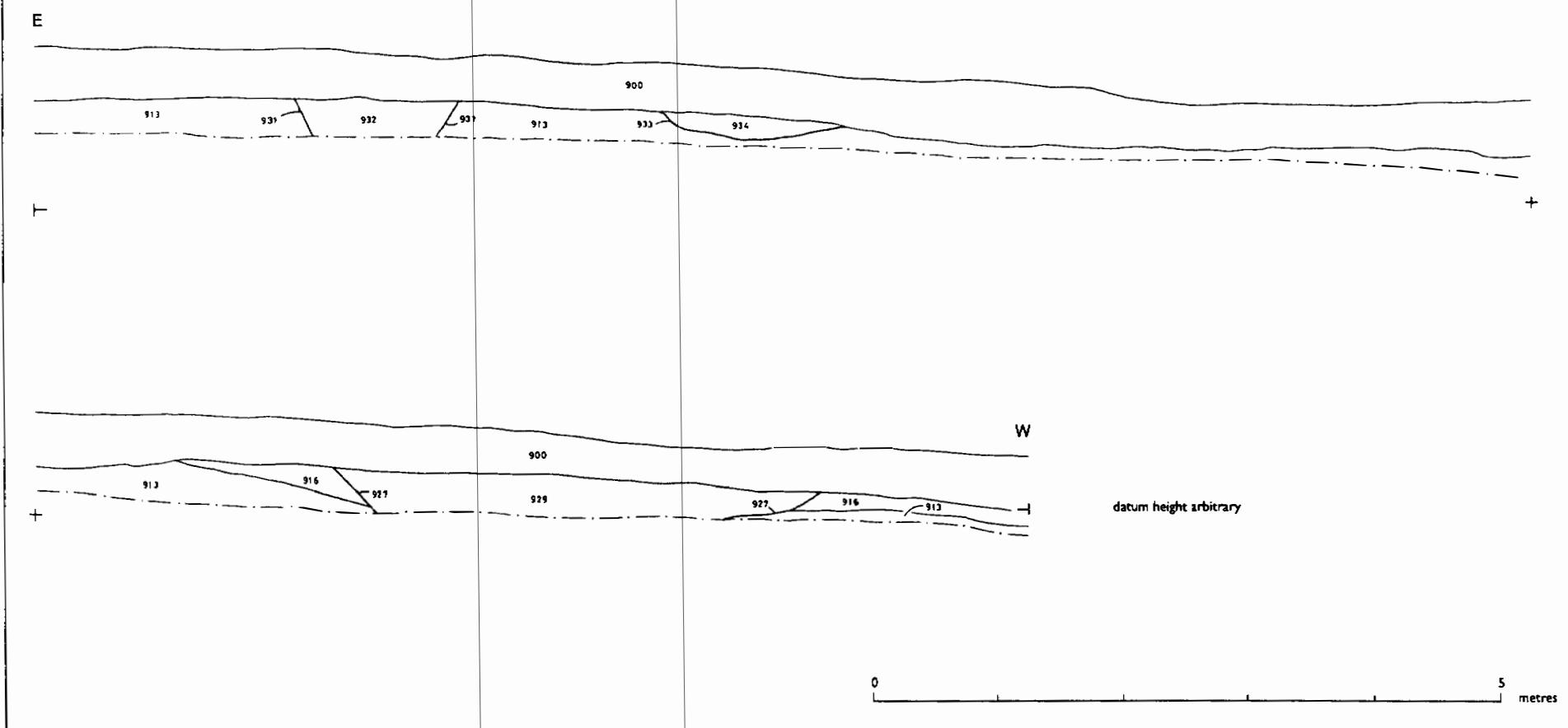


Fig. 5 Section 40 showing pits/ditches. Scale 1:50.

## Section 41

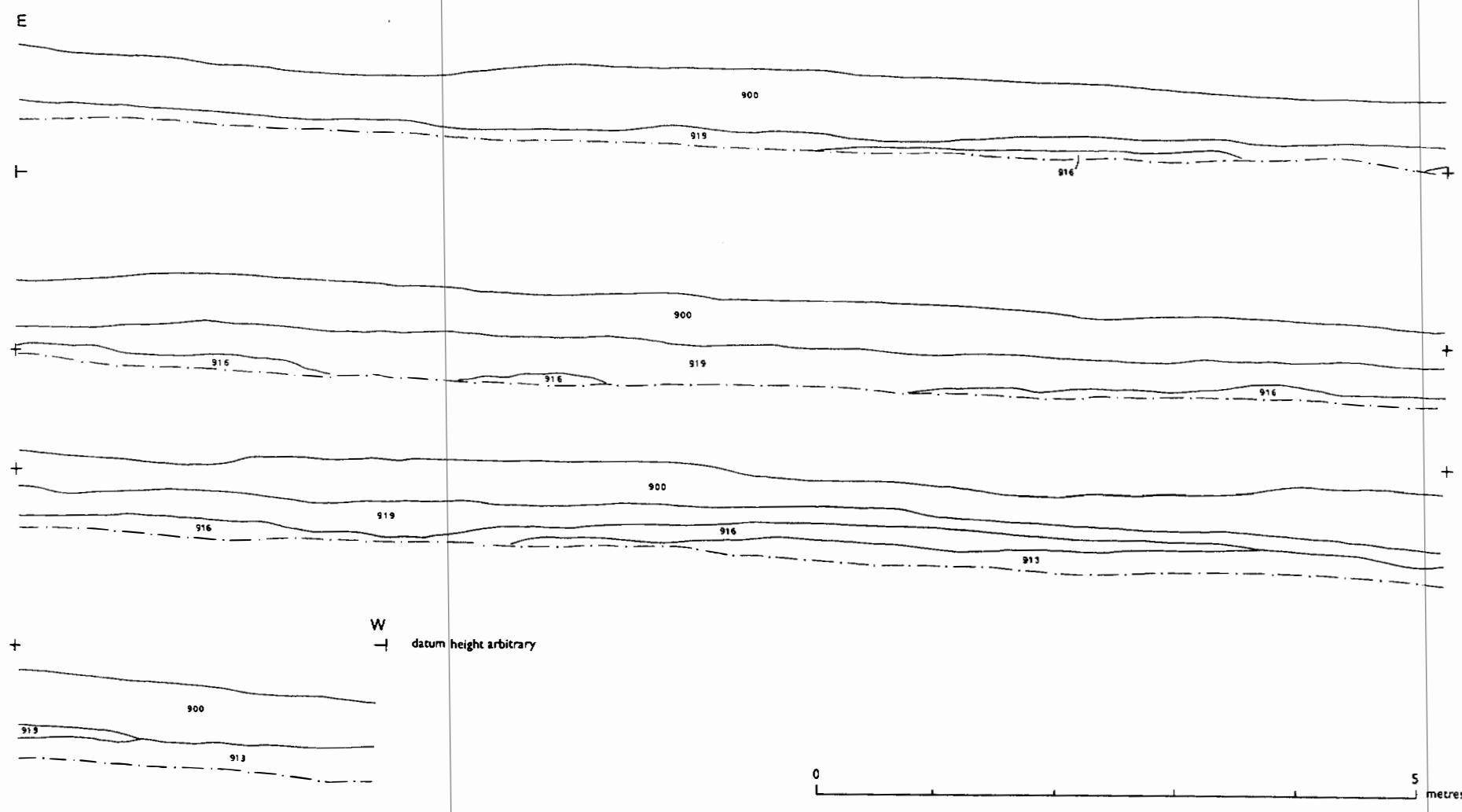


Fig. 6 Section 41 showing Roman soil development horizons. Scale 1:50.

## Section 42

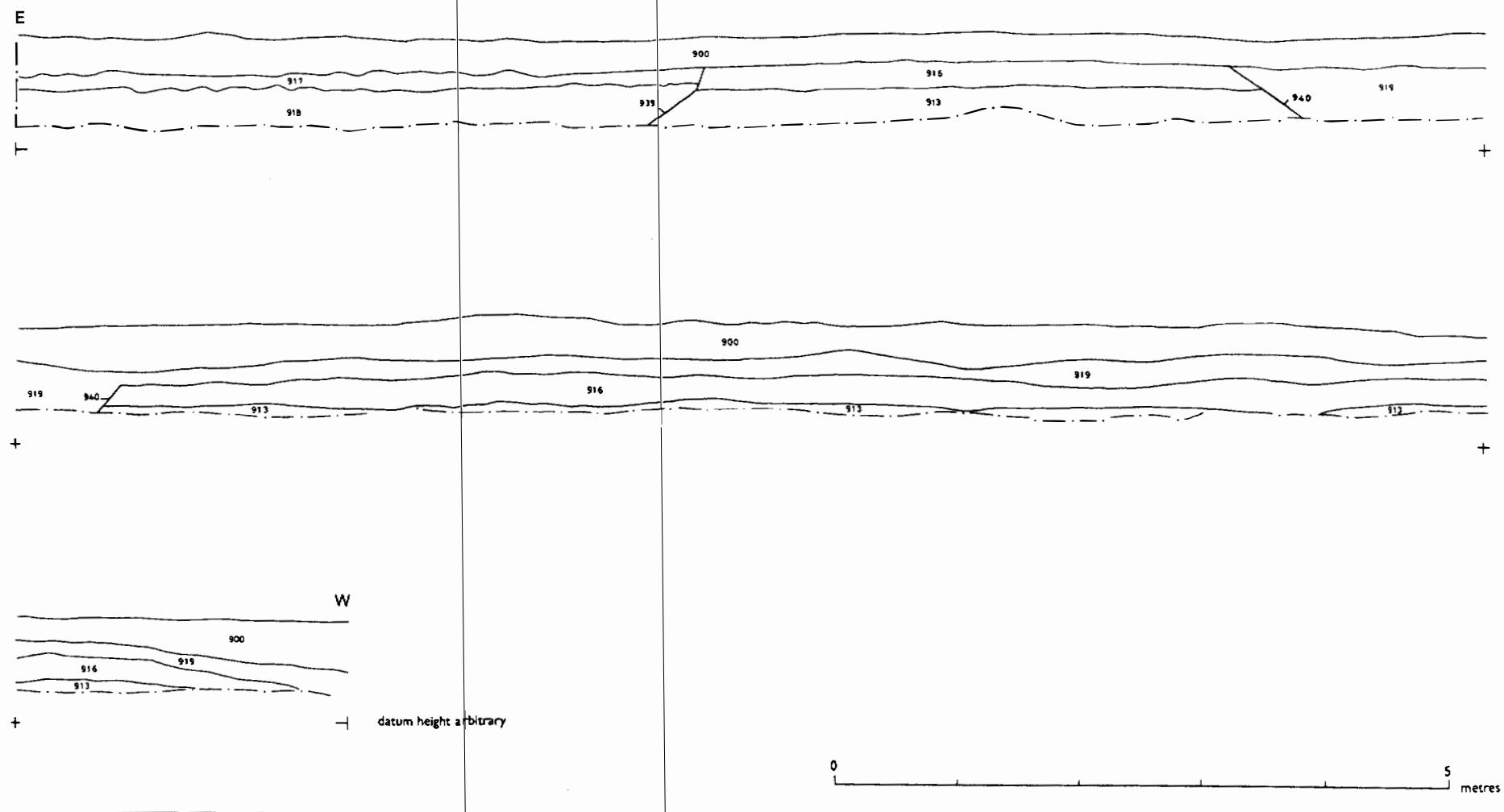


Fig. 7 Section 42 showing Roman road and a pit/ditch. Scale 1:50.

## Section 43

S

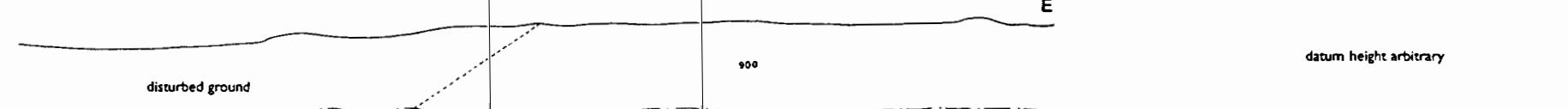
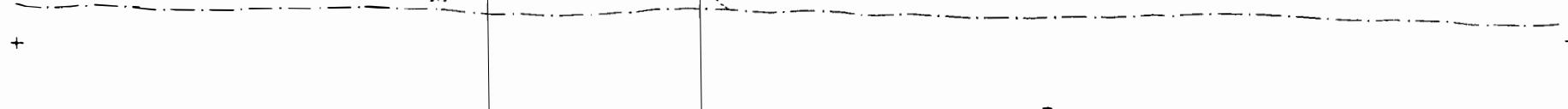
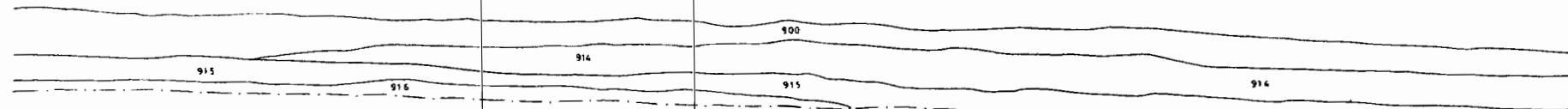


Fig. 8 Section 43 showing Roman soils, clay dump and area of disturbance. Scale 1:50.

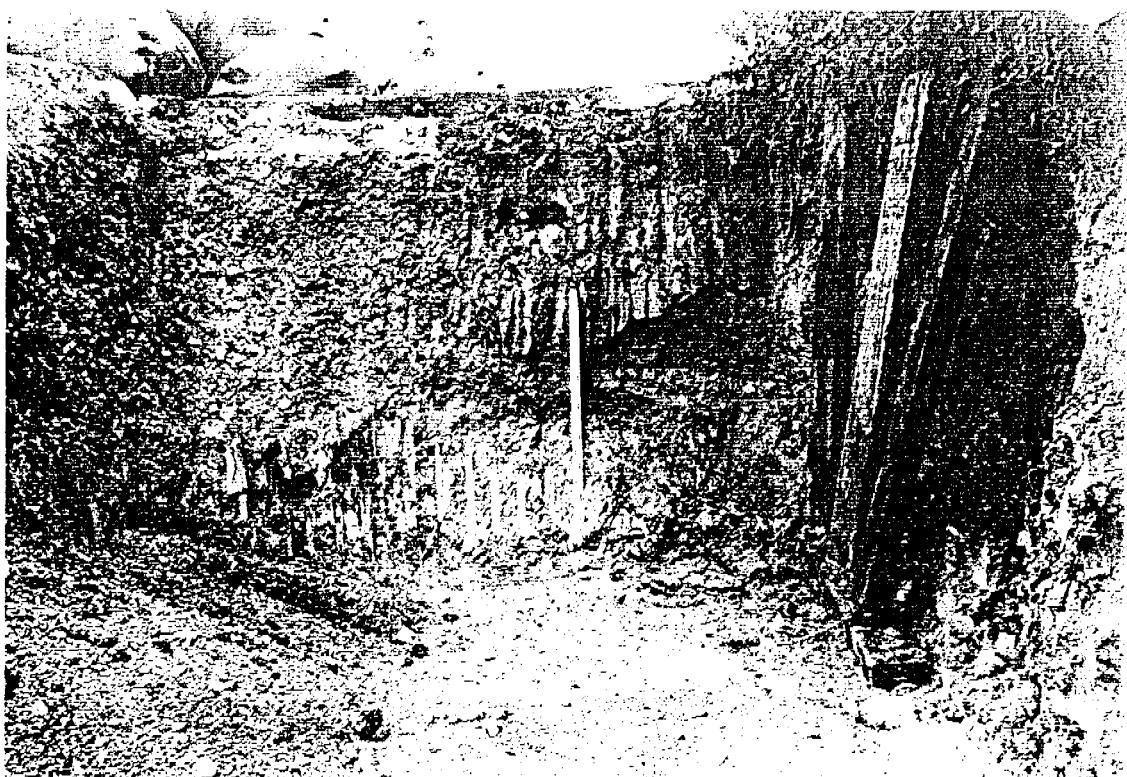


Plate 1. Section 38 through fort ditch, looking East - 1.5m scale.



Plate 2. Pipe trench soil showing large stones from road make-up, looking North - 0.5m scale.