

98/19



LINDSEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

**Bassingham, Hall Wath
Plot 2**

Archaeological Monitoring

NGR: SK 909⁵⁸~~6~~ 5995~~0~~
Site Code: BHW 98
LCNCC Museum Accn. No. 199.98
NKDC Planning Application No. N/7/364/97

Report prepared for Mr. G. Blackburn

LAS Report No. 315

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Lincolnshire County Council
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62596 4183386 Undated

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Bassingham, Hall Wath
Plot 2
Archaeological Monitoring

NGR: SK 909559950

Site Code: BHW 98

LCNCC Museum Accn. No. 199.98

NKDC Planning Application No. N/7/364/97

Summary

A watching brief during machine excavation of house footings identified four sherds of late third and fourth century Romano-British pottery and a single medieval sherd. Part of a heavily-fired clay object with impressions was found but insufficient remains for a reliable identification. Although parts of several possible post-holes and pits were found, these could not be dated. The development probably lies at the southern periphery of a Romano-British site, perhaps the same site as that previously identified at Hall Field 150m to the north.

Introduction

Lindsey Archaeological Services (LAS) was commissioned by Mr G. Blackbourn in May 1998 to conduct a watching brief during excavation of footings for a house and garage adjacent to a private road east of Hall Wath, Bassingham (Figs. 1 and 2). Archaeological monitoring had been requested by the North Kesteven District Council Heritage Officer as a condition of full planning permission.

The watching brief by the author took place on 14th May 1998, when the trenches for the house foundations were completed. LAS verbally contacted the NKDC Heritage Officer on 15th May and she agreed that monitoring of the garage footings was no longer required.

Archaeological Background

Archaeological investigations in 1995 on Hall Field, Bassingham (150m north of the present development) located a Romano-British enclosure overlying an earlier Romano-British field system together with a 12-13th century manorial complex.

The Watching Brief

Method

Monitoring began after the turf had been removed from the site of this house plot, and an examination of the stripped surface produced two sherds of Romano-British pottery and a single medieval splash-glazed sherd from the NW corner (Pls. 1 and 2). Only modern rubbish was present over the remainder of the plot, suggesting that any archaeological features would be to the NW or buried beneath deep deposits of introduced material.

The foundation trenches were excavated by machine fitted with a 0.7m wide toothed bucket. Trench depth varied from 0.9m in the NW corner where

suitable undisturbed deposits were present, to 1.2m in the NE corner and 1.4m deep in the SE corner. Trenches deeper than 1.2m were recorded from the surface as ground conditions (especially to the south of the plot) were unstable.

Context numbers were assigned to identified features for recording purposes, and scale section drawings were made of parts of trench faces in which archaeological features were evident.

Northern External Trench

The topsoil deposit **1** was a brown loam layer 0.45m thick which, in addition to the surface finds, produced a lump of heavily fired clay. The fired clay lump contains several linear rounded grooves, at least one of which retains striations as from a stick to which the unfired clay adhered. Another groove exhibits close striations across the groove and may have been around a different material. Its identification is unclear; one suggestion is that it may have formed part of a poorly made small household god statue or a plinth (Jane Cowgill, pers. comm.). A second interpretation has been made that it represents not an object but part of a structure subsequently destroyed by fire with intense heat (M. Darling, pers. comm.).

This overlaid a darker brown loam **2** which was between 0.3m and 0.5m thick, with its base at about 10.7m OD. It produced two sherds of fourth century Romano-British greyware pottery, infrequent pieces of flat limestone and one piece of fired clay. Layer **2** has been interpreted as a buried topsoil, presumably of Romano-British date, subsequently buried by flood alluvium **1** from the adjacent River Witham. The introduction of this upper material by flooding would explain its unusual thickness as a topsoil; indeed the lower layer may also have partly derived from alluvium deposition. This common derivation of soils made definition of layers and fills particularly difficult, and relationships between some layers and feature fills could not be confirmed.

Layer **2** covered the highest remaining undisturbed deposits on the site, **10**, an yellow sandy gravel with a high clay content. This probably represents a water-lain deposit, perhaps from within a pre-Roman channel of the river.

Deposit **4**, a dark brown loam similar to the overlying **2**, filled an undulating feature only evident in the NW corner of the foundations (Pl. 3). The apparent thickness varied from 0.1m to 0.18m and may have been filling a number of adjacent features or a shallow depression cut into **10**.

The deposit had been cut by post-hole **16**, filled with similar coloured loam **5** but with a single small piece of limestone on the upper eastern edge which may have been part of post-packing (Pl. 4). The post-hole was probably about 0.5m diameter and 0.3m deep but dimensions were unclear in the similar soils. The position of **16** at the southern edge of the depression **15** may be fortuitous, or reflect a traditionally defined piece of ground.

The base of another possible post-hole **17** was seen 2m east of **16**. This feature was 0.1m shallower and it had a pointed base. The dark brown loam

fill 7 was only distinguished where the feature cut into the yellow natural, but a flat piece of limestone 0.2m above the base indicated that the post-hole had possibly been cut from a higher level and had originally contained packing stones.

Doubts as to the stratigraphic relationships of post-holes 16 and 17 to layer 2 prevent certain interpretation of them as part of a structure or fence line, but the similarities are sufficient to suggest that possibility. Lesser anomalies in the surface of the yellow natural at 18 (0.8m east) and again 1.3m beyond that feature could represent additional post-hole locations. The higher that these features were cut from, the less likely it is that they are Romano-British features.

NE Corner

In the NE corner of the house plot, a deep feature 19 was revealed, cut down to the water-table at 10.2m OD (Pl. 5). The shape of this feature was difficult to establish within the trench corner: although it appeared to be the western end of a narrow curvilinear ditch or gully, the NE corner was deeper and a more complex feature may have been present. At its base, the feature was over 1.3m west-east and 2.3m north south. The fill in the deepest part, 6, was a dark brown loam which contained two cattle bones (Pl. 6). To the south of this a dark green/brown fill 9 occupied the curvilinear part, with a small zone of grey loam 23 on the southern edge. In the centre of the curve the higher deposit was a gravel and clay mixture, slightly olive green in colour rather than the yellow of natural further to the west. One possible explanation for this feature is that it represents the disturbance caused by a wind-blown tree or sapling and its associated root system.

The Northern Internal Trench

The preparatory turf removal across the plot had removed some topsoil within the centre of the house site, probably between 0.2 and 0.3m. The features seen in the NW corner of the plot (15 - 17) did not extend south as far as the next west-east trench which formed the internal foundation of a wall between the study and sitting room. Several different features were noted in the north face of this trench, each immediately adjacent to another but with no surviving stratigraphic relationships (Pls. 7 and 8).

The most westerly was 20, a 1m wide feature with a very slight slope to the east and a slightly steeper slope to the west. A maximum of 0.2m of dark brown loam fill 11 survived at the base, above the undisturbed yellow clay with gravel 10. Immediately to the east was 21, 0.25m deep, 1m wide and with both sides sloping uniformly to a rounded point at the base. To the east of this feature was 22, where only the lower 0.08m of dark brown loam fill 13 survived. This 5m wide feature had no obvious function, although those to the west might have been small pits. Between 22 and the eastern end of the trench the interface between the dark brown soil and the light clay undisturbed natural 10 remained uneven, but it was unclear whether this represented further separate features or a single large pit; no evidence of refuse disposal was noted and the deposit remains unexplained.

Southern part of the plot

The foundation trenches had to be excavated progressively deeper towards the southern side of the plot before firm material was reached. The modern ground surface slopes downward in this direction to the southern plot boundary fence, which appears to coincide with an almost filled boundary or drainage ditch. The ditch is marked at intervals on plans of the site, eventually leading to the Witham. From its position and course, this ditch may occupy the course of a former stream.

Within the deeper trenches, the indistinguishable dark brown loam deposit/s observed to the north increased to 0.6m thick in the centre of the plot, and 0.7m thick in the southern internal foundation, overlying the yellow clay with gravel **10** (Pl. 9). An exception to this trend was in the SE corner where 0.4m of recently dumped soil covered a fine homogenous silt deposit at least 1m thick, containing small stones **14** (Pls. 10 and 11). This seemed to be a waterlain deposit within a natural channel or large artificial feature, perhaps at the edge of the stream.

A series of ill-defined deep anomalies to the north of that corner were difficult to interpret. Modern material in the uppermost fills could have been levelling of earlier features, or the only evidence of recent deep pits. The shape of the features could not be determined within the trenches, and it is unclear whether one or several features were present. It is probable that they were associated with the deep feature **14** in the SE corner, and their very indeterminate character may suggest that they were naturally created watercourse channels within riverside ground.

Conclusion

The nature of the upper deposits on this site resulted in particularly difficult problems of feature recognition and definition. The deposits probably derive from river sediments deposited during flood episodes which have then become reworked by a combination of natural and human processes. The light texture resulted in rapid drying of uppermost layers and differential moisture retention which appeared to have no correlation with archaeological features.

To the south of Plot 2 the foundation trenches encountered a deep feature which probably represents a backfilled natural pond or watercourse. It lies immediately north of a drainage and property boundary ditch. Parts of this ditch are evident as a feature at ground level and it is unlikely to be of great antiquity. However, observations from the watching brief suggested that the ditch had replaced the natural watercourse acting as a minor tributary to the River Witham. This stream could have provided a limit to Romano-British settlement.

Although archaeological features of Romano-British date were found on this site they appear to represent pits and other ephemeral ground disturbances at the periphery of an occupation or industrial site. The highest concentration of finds were identified at the northern edge of the development plot, suggesting that the focus of activity lies in that direction. The sherds were not

abraded and were at least 65mm wide, indicating that they probably derived from the close vicinity. The existing house to the north of Plot 2 was recently built but was not the subject of an archaeological condition on planning consent; no archaeological discoveries were reported from that site.

The most interesting find retrieved from the monitored plot was the piece of fired clay bearing impressions, although insufficient remains to allow a satisfactory identification.

Acknowledgements

LAS are grateful to the developer Geoff Blackbourn and to Stefan Miksza for their interest and co-operation during the watching brief. Thanks are also due to Kate Orr (North Kesteven Heritage Officer).

The Roman pottery was identified by Barbara Precious and the fired clay by Jane Cowgill and Maggi Darling. Mick McDaid prepared the illustrations, and the report was produced and collated by Jane Frost.

Geoff Tann
Lindsey Archaeological Services
24th September 1998

Archive Summary

Field section drawings

Field sketch plan

Context sheets

Photographs: LAS colour print film no. 98/61

Archaeological finds: pottery, animal bone, fired clay

Specialists' archive notes/lists: Roman pottery, fired clay

Developer plans and elevation drawings (photocopies)

Correspondence

Context Summary

- 1 Modern topsoil: dark brown loam up to 0.45m thick. Overlies 2. Probably incorporates post-Roman alluvium.
- 2 Dark brown loam layer up to 0.5m thick, below 1, above 5-7,11-13. Infrequent pieces of limestone. Probably a buried topsoil incorporating pre-Roman alluvium.
- 3 Not used.
- 4 Dark brown loam fill of depression 15. Cut by 16.
- 5 Dark brown loam fill of 16. Below 2.
- 6 Dark brown loam fill of 19. Below 2.
- 7 Dark brown loam fill of ?post-hole 17.
- 8 Dark brown loam fill of ?post-hole 18.
- 9 Green/brown clay loam fill of ?tree throw-hole 19.
- 10 Orange/yellow sandy gravel natural, with high clay content. Iron-panned in places.
- 11 Dark brown loam fill of scoop 20.
- 12 Dark brown loam fill of scoop 21.
- 13 Dark brown loam fill of 22.
- 14 Large irregular feature, filled with silty soil and fine stones, with grey silty clay and gravel at base. Peripheral anomalies which might be watercourse channels. ?pond or edge of natural stream.
- 15 North-south aligned oval depression. Filled by 4, cut by 16.
- 16 Post-hole, up to 0.5m diam., up to 0.28m deep. Filled by 5, cuts 4.
- 17 Post-hole, diam. 0.5m. Filled by 7; relationship with 2 unclear but probably cuts it. Sealed by 1.
- 18 Post-hole, diam. 0.4m. Filled by 8.
- 19 Irregular shaped feature, probably a tree throw-hole. Filled by 6 and 9.

- 20 Shallow scoop, 0.2m deep. Filled by 11.
- 21 Shallow scoop, 0.2m deep. Filled by 12.
- 22 Shallow flat-bottomed feature, 0.08m deep and 1.5m long. Filled by 13.

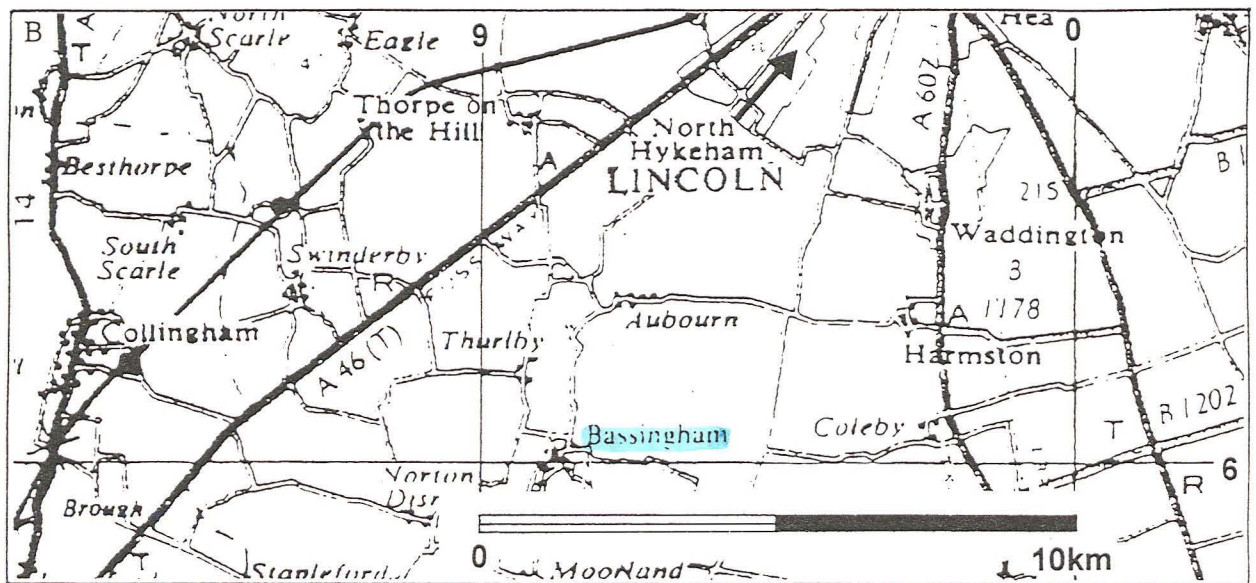


Fig. 1 Location of Bassingham (inset C based on the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map. Crown Copyright, reproduced at enlarged scale with the permission of the Controller of HMSO. LAS Licence No. AL 50424A).

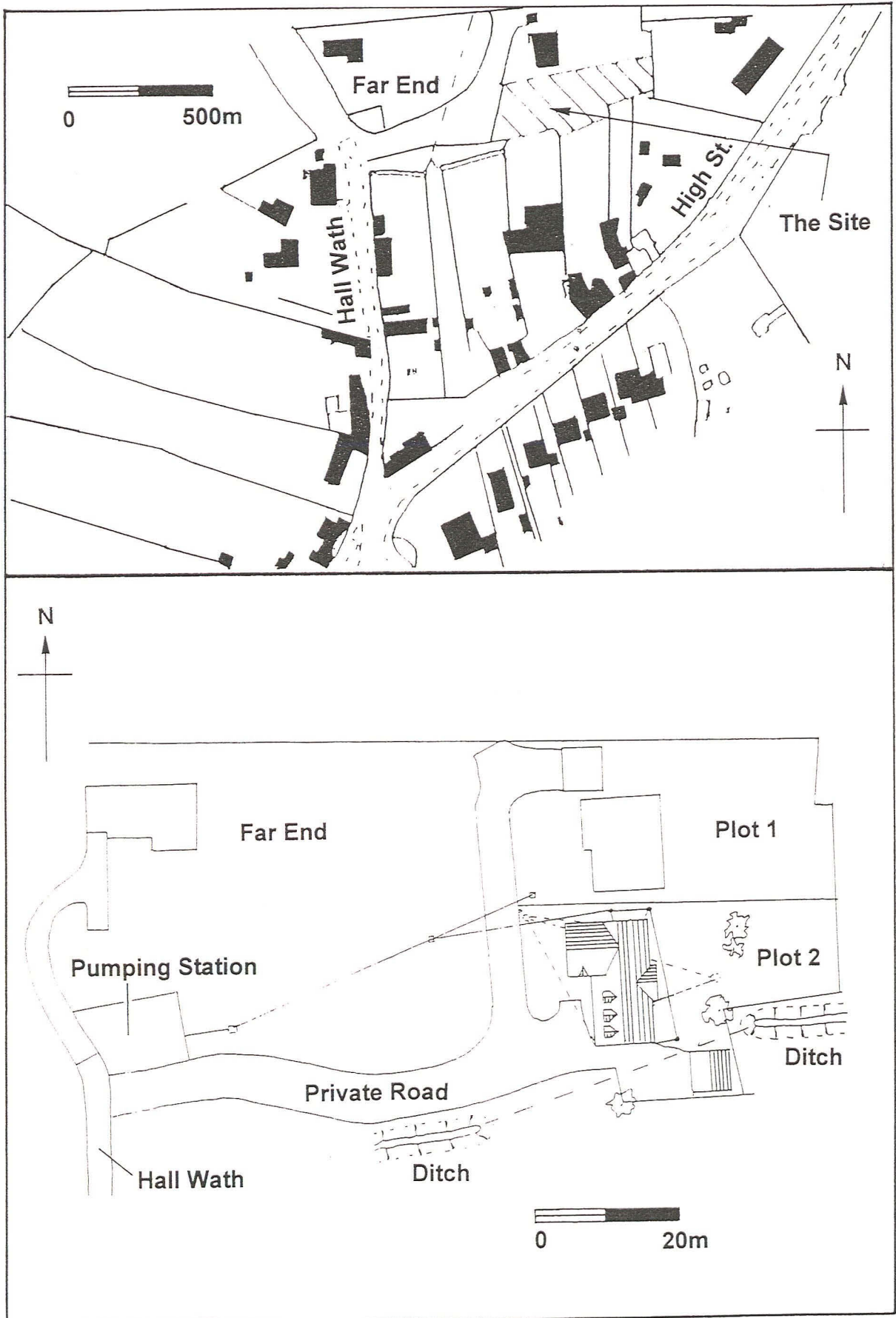


Fig. 2 Location of Hall Wath and the development plot (based on plans supplied by the client).

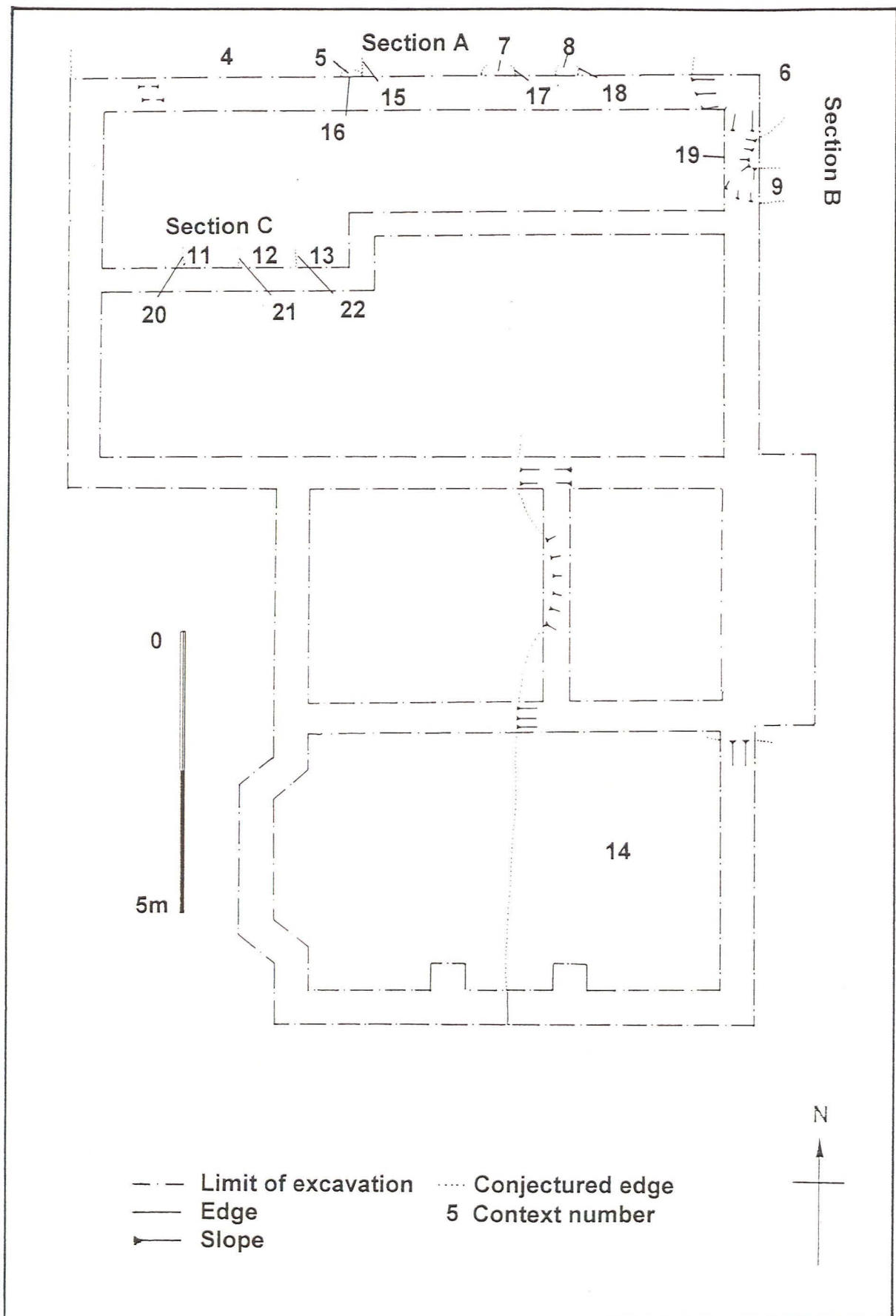


Fig. 3 Plan of the monitored house foundation trenches, showing the positions of archaeological features (McDaid).

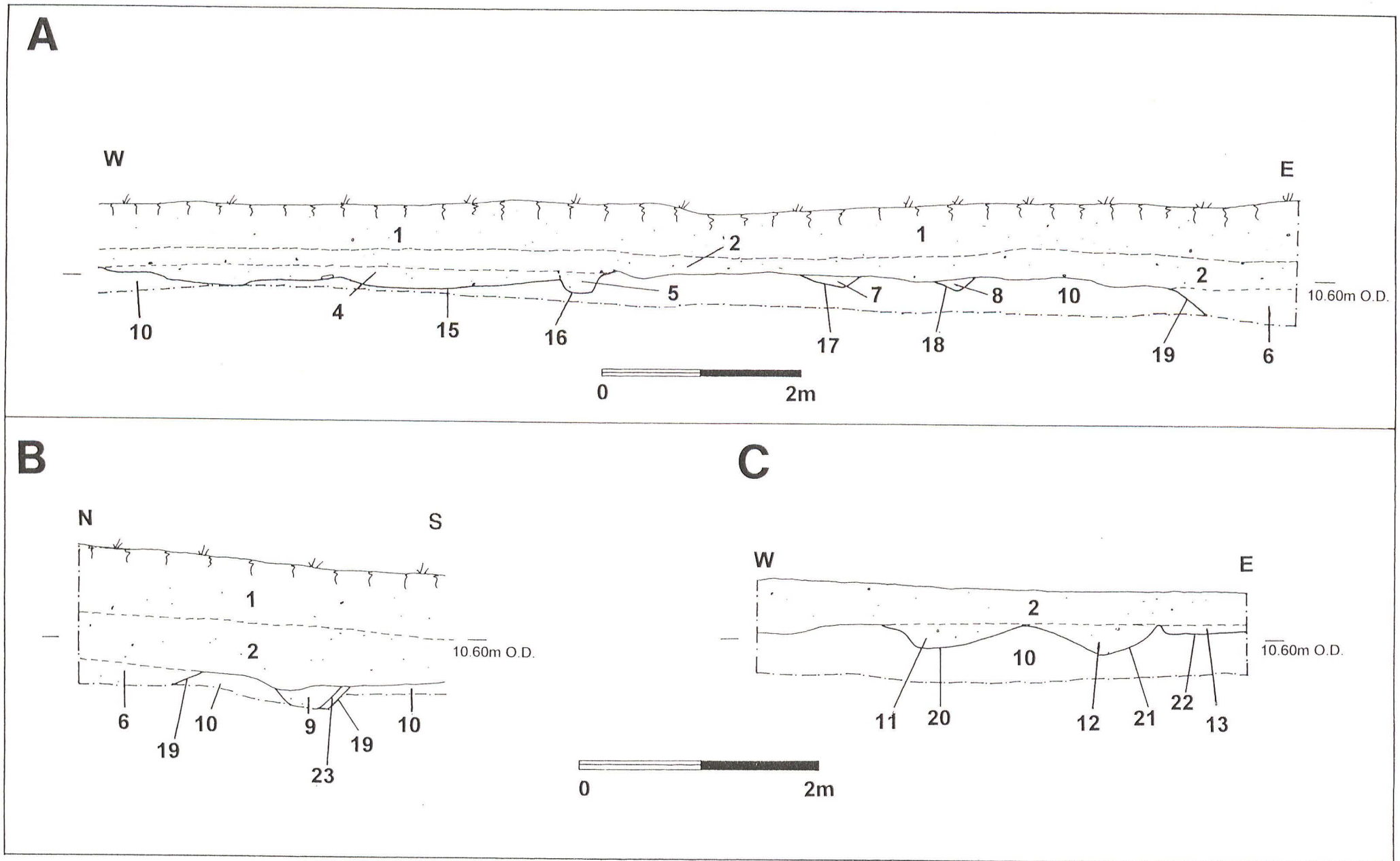


Fig. 4 Sections across archaeological features identified in the foundation trenches (McDaid after Tann).



Pl. 1 The development plot after initial turf clearance. The existing ditch lies beyond the far wall line, mid right. Looking SE from the estate road.

Pl. 2 Excavation of the foundation trenches (looking SE from beside Plot 1).





PI. 3 Features visible as undulations in the yellow natural sandy clay in the northern wall trench. The 1m red/white scale is to the east of 16. Looking east.

PI. 4 Detail of the base of post-hole 16. Scale divisions 0.2m.





Pl. 5 Water standing at the base of tree throw-hole 19. Looking north, scale divisions 0.2m.

Pl. 6 Mixed green/brown fill 9 within 19, seen in the eastern wall foundation trench. Looking east, scale divisions 0.2m.





Pl. 7 Dark fills filling features 20, 21 and 22 within the northern interior wall trench (looking NW).

Pl. 8 Dark brown loam fills of undefined features to east of 22. Looking NE.





PI. 9 Grey clay loam with stones filling large ?pond 14 in SE corner of the house plot. Note the edge of the yellow gravel 10 in the lower foreground. Looking SE.



PI. 10 Dark brown silty loam deposit above grey clay loam (at base) within 14, at SE corner of the house plot.



PI. 11 Dark brown loam overlying dense sandy gravel at trench base close to SE corner of the house plot. Looking south; trench depth 1.2m.