

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

ON LAND AT ST JOHN'S STREET, HOLBEACH

LINCOLNSHIRE (HSJ 01); NGR: TF 360 240

AUGUST 2001

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Abstract

A single evaluation trench was dug on behalf of DGM Properties Ltd on land off St John's Street, Holbeach in an area set back from the road. The trench identified late post-medieval and modern deposits including cottage foundations and features overlying silty deposits. Three post-holes and four pits, all of post-medieval origin were exposed at this level along with three pits yielding late medieval pottery and leather. The excavations indicate activity from the late Middle Ages and a potential for waterlogged remains at c2.8m above Ordnance Datum beneath 1m-thick overburden.

1 INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In August 2001 Northamptonshire archaeology undertook a trial excavation on land off St John's Street, Holbeach, Lincolnshire (NGR: TF 360 240; Fig 1).
- 1.2 The work was undertaken to inform a planning application (Ref. no: H09/0401/00 FULL), made to the South Holland District Council, for residential development by DGM Properties Ltd. The evaluation met the requirements discussed in the specification by Northamptonshire Archaeology issued on 8th August 2001 and the verbal brief given by Jim Bonnor, archaeological advisor to the local planning authority. Background information was provided by a desk based assessment by Soke Archaeological Services (New 2001).
- 1.3 The evaluation was undertaken to assess the potential archaeology on the development site, looking specifically for:
- i) The nature and depth of any archaeological deposits surviving on the site.
 - ii) The survival of medieval layers and to what extent they have been disturbed by later building and redevelopment.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The site occupies an area of approximately 25m x 30m on land currently occupied by an undertakers' buildings and yard, away from the frontages of both Barrington Gate and St

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John's Street (Fig 1).

- 2.2 The site is relatively flat with a ground level of around 3.7m OD. It has considerable late post-medieval and modern material about one metre thick.
- 2.3 The natural geology of the area varies with the main town sitting on a ridge of marine silts running east to west, the highest point of which is 4m OD. This is interspersed with river-formed roddens, which have produced gleyic brown calcareous soils (New 2001). These deposits overlie a geological stratum of marine alluvium, which seals solid Upper Jurassic clay. The marine silts were encountered during the excavation as the natural.

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 There are no historic documents directly relating to the development and the earliest detailed map of 1828 post-dates the re-organisation of the town after the diversion of the River Holbeach. As such there is no evidence for medieval or other occupation, but the proximity of the site to the town centre makes such remains likely. The Sites and Monuments Record shows that there has been little archaeological work in this part of the town.
- 3.2 In addition, a map drawn by William Stukeley, the antiquarian, shows the development area as a possible site of his birthplace. However, the accuracy of this map is questionable (New 2001).

4 FIELDWORK

Methodology

- 4.1 A single trench was dug using a JCB fitted with a toothless ditching bucket (Fig 2). It was excavated through the modern and late post-medieval buildup to the level of the silts, into which were cut the first significant archaeological features. An additional sondage was dug deeper to confirm the level of the natural geology.
- 4.2 It was intended that the trench should measure 3m x 3m in plan but the presence of services forced the layout to be curtailed at the west. Compensation was made by extending the trench to the south to ensure that a sufficient area was exposed.

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- 4.3 The trench was initially dug to a depth of 900mm, 2.8m above Ordnance Datum, at which point features cutting silt were identified. The overlying material was all late post-medieval debris including the brick foundations of a cottage previously occupying the site. A sondage was dug 900mm into the lower layer but still remained in silty deposits.

Results

- 4.4 A number of features were identified cutting the silt layer, most of which were post-medieval, except for three pits yielding late medieval pottery (Fig 3). Many of these features were only partly exposed within the trench. All are described in detail below but are also summarised in Appendix 4 for quick reference.

Medieval (Figs 3, 4 and 5)

- 4.5 The natural silt layer itself was very clean and at least 900mm deep. The deposit was probably laid down during a period of flooding sometime before the 15th century. There were no finds within it.
- 4.6 All the medieval features cut the silt deposits. Pit [19] had steep sides and was sub-circular in shape, measuring at least 1.1m by at least 800mm by 500mm deep (Figs 3 and 5). The pit was not fully excavated due to its depth from the existing ground surface and excessive amounts of water entering the feature rendered further work unsafe. The fill (24) consisted of brown/black silty material with waterlogged remains including fragments of leather offcut as well as three large joining sherds of pottery dating to the 15th century. A soil sample was taken from the fill.
- 4.7 Pit [15] measured 1.9m by 1.1m by 450mm deep and was cut by both pits [11] and [27] and post-hole [17] (Figs 3 and 4, section 6). It had gradually sloping sides and a flat base which extended into the south-west section. The pit contained three fills, the earliest of which was (23). This mid-grey silty sand with mottles of black and few inclusions, contained no finds and was directly overlain by (22), a brown/black silt, loosely compacted with inclusions of brick and small shells. This was then in turn overlain by (16), a grey/orange silty material with inclusions of charcoal and small stones.
- 4.8 Pit [27] had steeply sloping sides and a flat base and was filled by a grey brown silty clay

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with inclusions of charcoal and stones (21; Figs 3 and 4, sections 6 and 7). The pit contained pottery dating to the 15th century. A soil sample was taken from this fill. A metal ring set around the outside possibly indicates the presence of a barrel set into the ground at the base of the pit for an unknown purpose. The barrel was presumably used for storage but its contents are unknown. The barrel had probably been largely dug out in the 19th century and the hole then filled in (see below 4.16).

Post-medieval (Figs 3, 4 and 5)

- 4.9 There were a total of eight post-medieval features cutting the silt deposits, three postholes and five pits, some of which extended from high in the sections. The three postholes were:
- 4.10 Posthole [5], which measured 300mm x 200mm x 250mm deep, was sub-circular and had steep sides and a flat base (Figs 3 and 4, section 1). It cut into the natural and was filled with brown/ black silty material with inclusions of brick fragments (6).
- 4.11 Posthole [9] was sub-square, cut into natural with steep sides and a shallow, flat base (Figs 3 and 4, section 4). It measured 300mm x 300mm x 80mm deep and was filled with grey/orange sandy silt with inclusions of charcoal and brick pieces (10).
- 4.12 Posthole [17] was sub-circular with steep sides and a flat base and was cut into natural (Figs 3 and 4, section 5). It also cut pit [15]. The posthole was filled with dark grey silt (18) with inclusions of charcoal and medium sized stones but no dateable finds. The feature measured 500mm by 300mm by 200mm deep.
- 4.13 The five pits which cut, or bottomed onto, the silt deposits included:
- 4.14 Pit [3] was oval with steeply sloping sides and a flat base (Figs 3 and 4, section 2). It measured 750mm by 550mm by 350mm deep and was filled with a brownish-black loosely compacted silt (4) with inclusions of bone and pottery dating to the mid 16th century.
- 4.15 Pit [13] measured 500mm by at least 400mm by 300mm deep and was cut into the silt, with sloping sides and a flat base (Figs 3 and 4, section 3). It was sub-circular in plan and was cut by pit [7] on its north side. It was filled with grey/brown silt (14) with inclusions of small

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stones and pottery dating to the mid 16th century.

- 4.16 Pit [7] was sub-circular with steeply sloping sides and a flat base and measured 1m by 1m by 800mm deep (Figs 3 and 4, section 3). It was filled with a grey brown silty material (8) which contained brick pieces and small stones, with pottery dating to the 15th century although this must be residual as pit [7] cuts Pit [13], which contained mid 16th century pottery.
- 4.17 Pit [11] also cut from the top of the section into the silt layer and consisted of a straight sided cut 1.2m deep with a flat base and a sub-circular shape in plan measuring 1m x 1.2m (Figs 3 and 4, section 7). It was filled by a 700mm-deep black loosely compacted material (12) with inclusions of brick, pot, bone, small stones and pottery dating to the 19th century; it directly overlay fill (21) with uncanny accuracy. It is believed to have been a pit dug to remove an earlier barrel which had been set into Pit 27 lying shallowly in the silts. It had probably become buried and was rediscovered when cottages stood on the site in the 19th century. Its removal in this way would account for not just the remarkably different fills in the combined pit 11/27 but also the survival of only the lower iron coop, the other having been torn away along with the staves.
- 4.18 Pit [26], was cut through modern layer (1) and truncated the top of pit [19] and part of the silty layer (Fig 5). The pit measured 2.5m by at least 1m by 700mm deep and had sloping sides with a relatively flat base. The pit was filled with a mid-grey silty fill (20) with inclusions of animal bone, brick and pottery dating to the 19th century.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Excavation has identified post-medieval layers, pits and postholes which have truncated any earlier remains above the level of the silt deposit. Three pits which cut the silt, [19] [27] and [7], contained medieval pottery dating to the 15th century and waterlogged material including leather fragments from [19].
- 5.2 The remains recovered would suggest archaeology survives on the site at the depth of 1.7m-1.8m above OD and although there is a medieval presence in the area it is not extensive, consisting of pit activity only. There has been considerable disturbance of deposits by later

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activity of the site and the survival of any remains above 1.8m above OD would be unlikely due to extensive rebuilding. There would also appear to be no evidence for the presence of the Stukeley birthplace (New 2001).

- 5.3 The excavation was necessarily limited in scope by the area available and even this needed adjustment due to the presence of services. However a glimpse of the site's archaeological potential was gained. There is nothing to suggest that the waterlogging encountered in the pits cut into the silt is either isolated or widespread. To assume either would be to introduce speculation. The preservation of organics, albeit in very small quantities, does, however, suggest that this is not just a seasonal or periodic flooding. As a result, the potential of the archaeology on the site to contribute to a wide range of finds studies is enhanced, most particularly if these and any immediately surrounding remains can be attributed to a particular plot and frontage building. This would require a clear understanding of the origins and development of plots off St John's Street, Fishpond Land and Barrington Gate as the current site lies within an area probably influenced by all three. The apparent William Stukeley map connection of 1703 may only have served to confuse the issue.
- 5.4 The site lies within a settlement which could reasonably be called either a small town or a large village. For this reason the context of the archaeology and its potential is challenging to identify clearly.
- 5.5 An archaeological regional research framework for the East Midlands is currently being prepared and the current state of debate is posted as *Archaeological Resource Assessments* on the website of the School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester. The draft Resource Assessments for Lincolnshire have been consulted as a guide to the wider significance of the excavation (Medieval by Paul Everson; Post-medieval by Naomi Field). Field states that "*few of the county's towns have received a sustained programme of investigation*" while Everson points out that many small towns in the county do not yet figure in the English Heritage initiative to produce Extensive Urban Evaluations. Everson went on to say that Lincolnshire's potential lies "*partly in its size and diversity, offering many bases for sampling and comparison on a scale that might address regional or even national issues*".
- 5.6 In her (as yet unpublished) regional overview of the medieval period for the East Midlands

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Archaeological Research Framework Dr Carenza Lewis states that "*Investigation into medieval settlements which are still in occupation is a high priority as knowledge of medieval rural settlement is presently seriously biased towards deserted sites....*" Similarly Dr Paul Courtney, in his post-medieval overview for the same framework notes the priority of needing to "*understand the survival patterns of archaeological deposits*" and highlights the importance of pits "*for material culture analysis*".

- 5.7 Given the very small number of significant features present in the trench, combined with the very small area opened, the wider potential of the known remains is limited. However, close to the centre of Holbeach, they do begin to indicate the type of occupation in the St John's St, Fishpond Lane and Barrington Gate area over a period of 400 years, namely domestic with a possibility of early leather-working.
- 5.8 This site could ideally make a valuable contribution to the assessment of the town's archaeological resource and is one sample in the county's stated diversity, with potential to provide data which one day may form part of a wider study. As such it deserves mention as a likely source of (relatively) easily accessible medieval waterlogged deposits with its potential to preserve a variety of material culture at the end of the medieval and beginning of the post-medieval period. Conversely this very same ease of access also highlights the potential vulnerability of such deposits when they occur so close to the surface and the careful husbandry they warrant through the planning process.
- 5.9 The late post-medieval and modern overburden which lies up to 1m thick over the early post-medieval and medieval remains is of considerable benefit in blanketing this significant horizon. The current proposals would appear to have this overburden available as a protective covering between them and the archaeology if it can be sufficiently used. The medieval and early post-medieval features lie at a height above Ordnance Datum of c2.8m. They may be in excess of 500mm thick.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Northamptonshire Archaeology, 2001 *Written specification of investigation for an archaeological evaluation on land off St John's Street, Holbeach, Lincolnshire*

7. ARCHIVE

The site archive, comprising 1 box and 1 file, currently rests with Northamptonshire Archaeology and will be deposited with the City and County Museum Lincoln according to their requirements for storage.

8. APPENDICES

A1 POTTERY

A1.1 The pottery assemblage comprised 44 sherds with a total weight of 1203g. All the material is late medieval or post-medieval in date, and all the wares are well-known in the area, with the exception of an unprovenanced vessel in a coal measures-type fabric that is likely to have been manufactured in south Yorkshire.

A1.2 Fabrics

Where appropriate, the coding system of the City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit ceramic type-series was used, as follows:

TOYII. Toynton ware; Kiln 3. 15th century. Hard, sandy, pale orange to buff fabric, often with a dull olive glaze. Full range of later medieval vessel types.

BOU. Bourne 'D' Ware: c. 1450-1637 (ibid. 409). Fairly hard, smooth, brick-red fabric, often with a grey core. Some vessels have sparse calcitic inclusions up to 2mm. Full range of late medieval to early post-medieval vessel forms, jugs, pancheons, cisterns etc. Vessels often have a thin, patchy exterior white slip, over which a clear glaze had been applied.

CIST. Cistercian ware. Late 15th – 17th century. Hard, smooth fabric, usually brick-red, but can be paler or browner. Few visible inclusions, except for occasional quartz grains. Range of vessel forms somewhat specialized, and usually very thin-walled (c. 2mm). Rare white slip decoration.

LMX. Late medieval non-local fabric. Hard, purplish-brown ?coal measures fabric. Large sherd from a single jug, possibly a crude copy of a German Stoneware form. Firsby Hall-type? (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, 401).

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FREC. Frechen stoneware. c. 1550-1700. A uniform grey stoneware, characterised by either a mottled brown or 'tiger striped' salt glaze.

GRE. *Glazed Red Earthenwares:* Fine sandy earthenware, usually with a brown or green glaze, occurring in a range of utilitarian forms. Such 'country pottery' was first made at numerous centres during the 16th century, and in some areas continued in use until the 19th century.

LERTH. *Early modern black-glazed earthenwares,* 18th-19th century. Hard, well-fired, buff to red earthenware with a thick black glaze.

WS. *White salt-glazed stoneware.* 18th century. Hard, uniform white fabric with distinctive white 'orange peel glaze'

The following are not listed in the CLAU type-series:

Pearlware: Pale buff earthenware with cobalt added to the glaze, giving it a blue tinge. Later examples with painted or transfer decoration. 1765 - 19th century.

PMED. *Miscellaneous 19th/20th century wares.* Mass-produced white earthenwares, stonewares, etc.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. For adjusted dating, to take account of the stratigraphy, see the main text and Appendix 4.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Cntx	TOYII		BOU		CIST		LMX		FREC		GRE		WS		Pearl		LERTH		PMED		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
2											1	18									M16thC?
4											2	9									M16thC?
8	10	115																			15thC?
12			2	89							6		2	18	1	5	2	20	1	36	19thC
14									1	29											M16thC
20			2	53	1	3			1	22	7	232					1	67	1	43	19thC
21	2	69																			15thC?
24							1	80													15thC?
Total	12	184	4	142	1	3	1	80	2	51	16	554	2	18	1	5	3	87	2	79	

A2 ANIMAL BONE

A2.1 Animal bone was present on the site but in small quantities. In total there were 33 fragments of bone, 14 fragments of which were unidentifiable, with a total weight of 1048g.

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Context	Cow	Sheep	Pig	Unidentifiable
3	1	2	0	2
12	3	2	3	9
20	5	2	1	3

The bone numbers are too small to make any assumptions about the site other than that cow, sheep/goat and pig have all been used or consumed here. There is also evidence for butchery cut marks from all contexts and the body parts may suggest kitchen or household waste.

A3 ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES

A3.1 Method

Two 20 litre samples were processed using a siraf tank fitted with a 500 micron mesh and flot sieve. The resulting flots were examined with a microscope at 10x to establish the species present and potential for further analysis.

A3.2 Results

Sample: Context 12

This produced only occasional shell fragments (possibly oyster) and fragments of large mammal bone. A few weed seeds were present (*Polygonaceae* sp. and *Chenopodium* sp), however these had a fairly fresh, modern appearance.

Sample: Context 24

This sample produced frequent shell fragments. These were largely cockle with some oyster. Charcoal was frequent as small comminuted fragments. 200+ hulled and naked barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) grains were noted. A few weed seeds including *Chenopodium* sp and a few small indeterminate pulses were also present. Preservation of the charred seed was good with most elements identifiable to species level; however, some swelling and distortion of the barley was noted possibly due to the charring process. The presence of barley grain in such relatively large quantities and the total absence of chaff would suggest a storage or consumption crop. However, its association with large quantities of shell is problematic. The weeds present are typical crop weeds and their small size and low quantity suggests they were overlooked during crop processing.

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Table 1 Frequency of environmental remains

Sample	Charred grain	Charcoal	Shell	Animal bone
Context 12			Low	Low
Context 24	High	High	High	

For the context 12 sample, animal bone and shell is too fragmentary and abraded for even speculative analysis.

For the context 24 sample, although charcoal appears in high quantity the fragments are too small for speciation. The sample is useful for highlighting the potential for waterlogged remains in the area but its inherent value for research is limited by its current isolation.

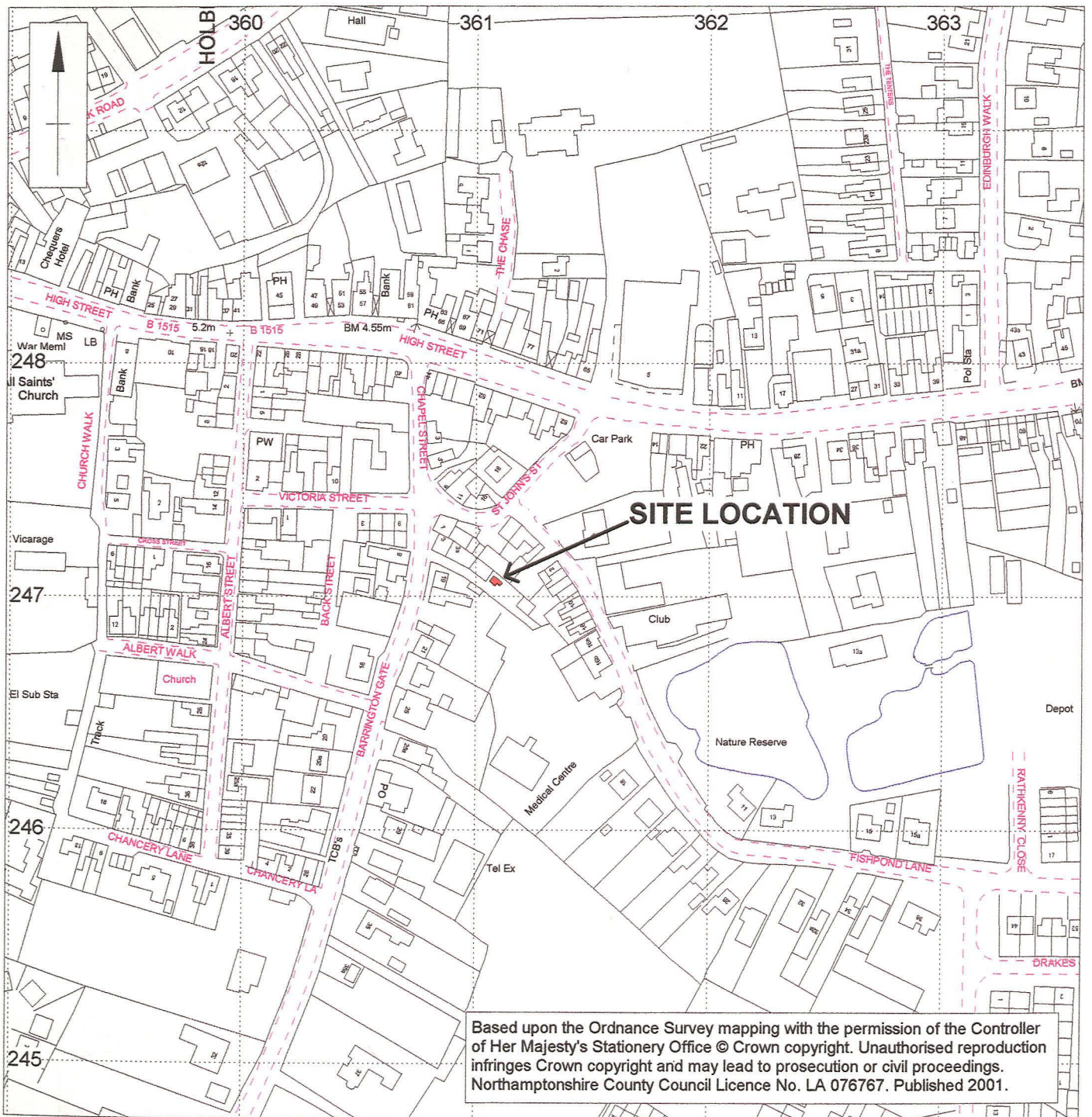
A4 QUICK CONTEXT REFERENCE TABLE

Context	Type	Date (TPQ)	Length (mm)	Breadth (mm)	Thickness (mm)
0	Natural silts	Pre- C15 th			900+
1	Concrete layer	Modern			700
2	Brick drain	C19th	400+	360+	440+
3	Pit	C16th	750	550	350
4	Fill of 3	C16th			350
5	Post-hole	Post-medieval	300	200	250
6	Fill of 5	Post-medieval			250
7	Pit	Post-medieval	1000	1000	900
8	Fill of 7	Post-medieval			900
9	Post-hole	Post-medieval	300	300	80
10	Fill of 9	Post-medieval			80
11	Pit	C19th	1000	700+	1200
12	Later fill of 11	C19th			800
13	Pit	C16th	500	400+	300
14	Fill of 13	C16th			300
15	Pit	C15th	1900	1100+	450
16	Last fill of 15	C15th			150
17	Post-hole	Post-medieval	500	300	200
18	Fill of 17	Post-medieval			200
19	Pit	C15th	1100	800	500
20	Fill of 26	C19th			300
21	Early fill of 11	C19th	1000	700+	600

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22	Mid fill of 15	C15th			150
23	First fill of 15	C15th			150
24	Fill of 19	C15th	-	-	500
25	Fill of 19	C15th	-	-	-
26	Pit	C19th	2500	1000	700
27	Pit	C15th	1000	700+	600

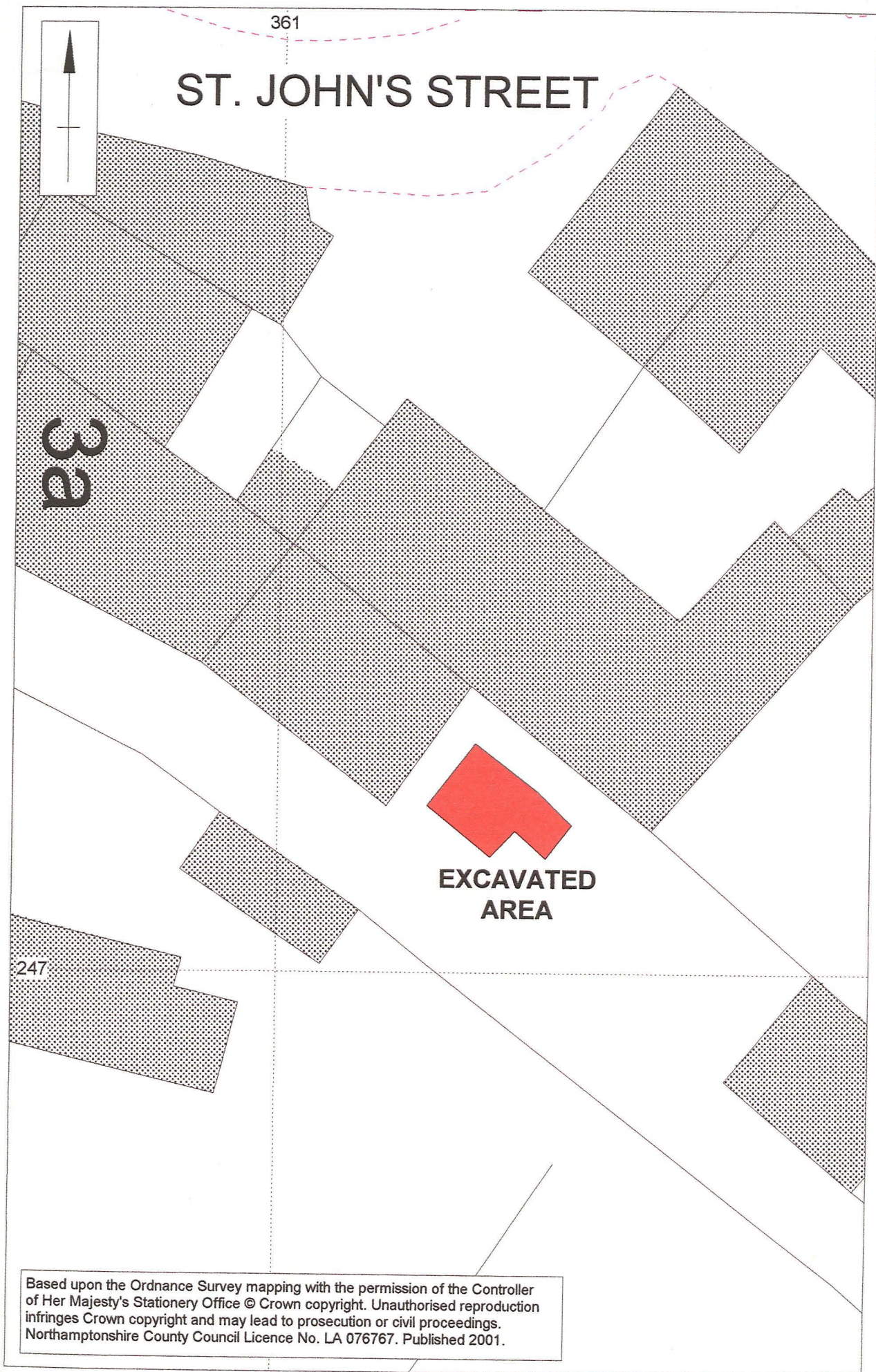
The above dating is compiled from both ceramic and stratigraphic sources. The term Post-medieval has been used where specific pottery (but not necessarily brick) dating was absent. While Lincolnshire does have some of England's earliest brick in high-status buildings (such as Tattershall Castle) its occurrence here, in almost certainly a much more lowly setting, is felt to be a better indicator of post-medieval date, albeit probably earlier than some of the East Midlands.



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Scale = 1:2500

Fig. 1



Scale 1:200

Fig. 2

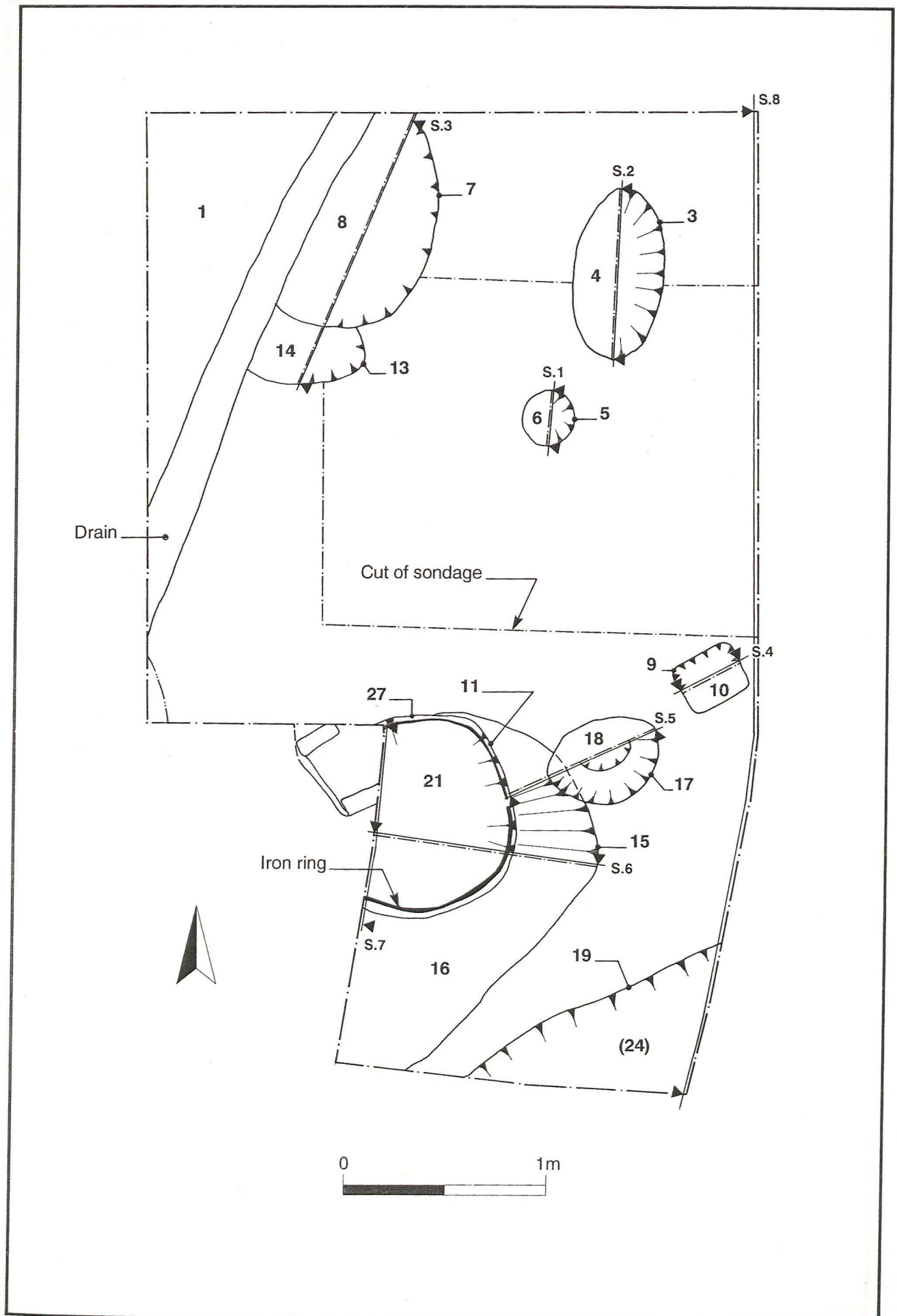
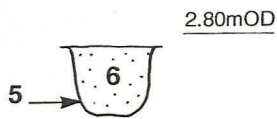
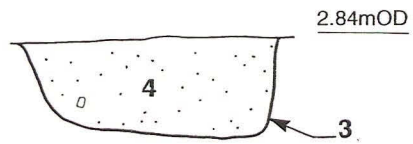


Fig. 3

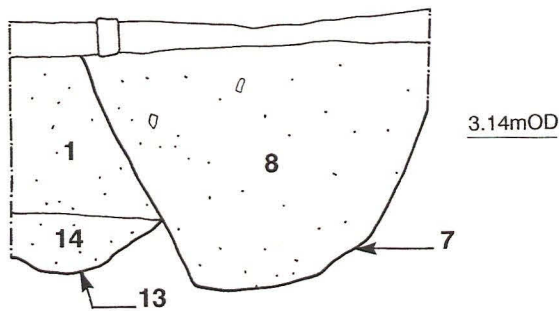
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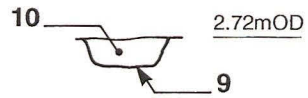
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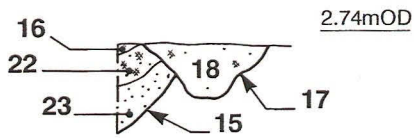
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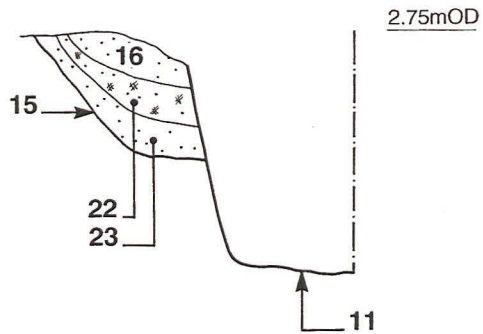
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SECTION 7
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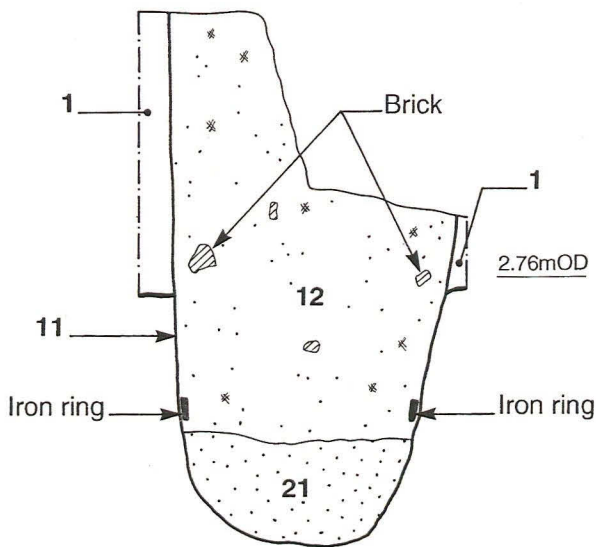
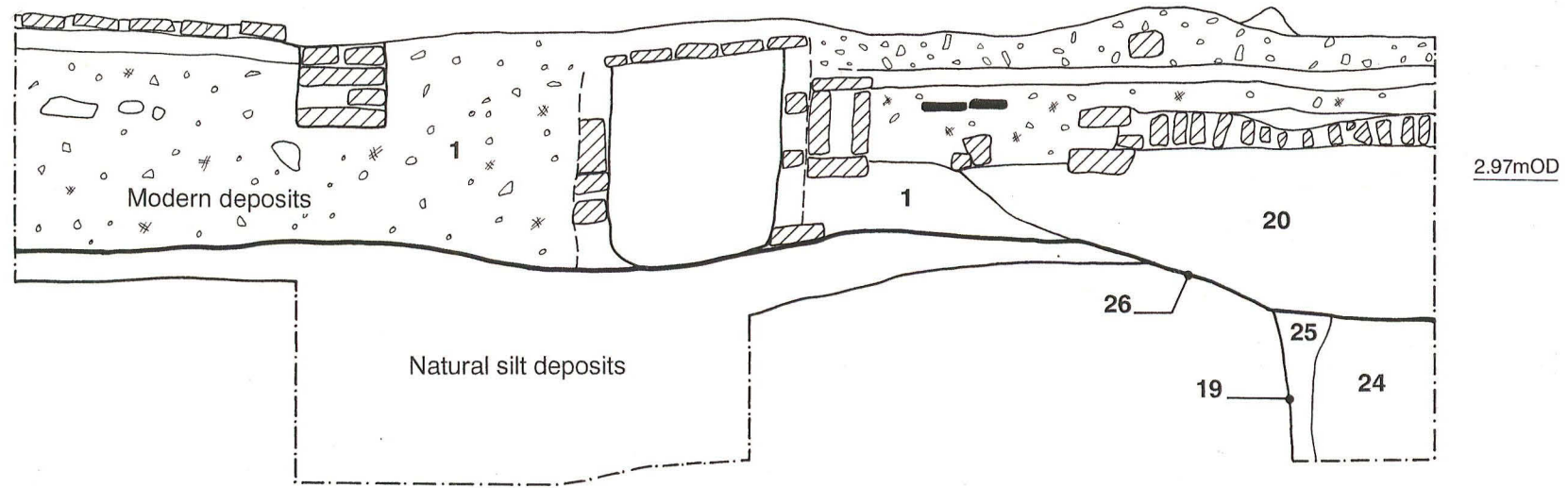


Fig. 4

SECTION 8

NW

SE





-  Tile
-  Brick



Fig. 5



Plate 1



Plate 2