

Offa's Dyke Path 2011

***A Watching Brief on the Installation of New Path Furniture
at Churchtown, Edenhope Hill, and Selley Hall***

by
H R Hannaford

Archaeology Service



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A WATCHING BRIEF ON THE INSTALLATION OF NEW PATH FURNITURE AT
CHURCHTOWN, EDENHOPE HILL, AND SELLEY HALL

by
H R HANNAFORD MifA

A report for
Countryside Recreation Team, Outdoor Recreation,
Shropshire Council

Archaeology Service

Historic Environment Team, Environment,
Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, SY2 6ND
Tel: (01743) 252575 Fax: (01743) 252505



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SUMMARY

In 2011 the Archaeology Service carried out a watching brief on the installation of new path furniture at 5 sites along the Offa's Dyke Path at Churchtown, Edenhope Hill, and Selley Hall, in southwest Shropshire. These sections of Offa's Dyke were scheduled Ancient Monuments, and it was part of the scheduled monument consent for the work that it should be carried out under archaeological supervision. The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, carried out the watching brief on the work. The excavations were all carried out by hand by the Shropshire Council Outdoor Recreation Service Countryside Recreation Team. The excavations were carried out with minimal disturbance to the ground. Ditch fills and bank deposits were observed at Edenhope Hill and at one of the locations near Selley Hall. Otherwise, no significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered in the excavations for the new path furniture.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In 2011 a number of stiles and gates were replaced on the Offa's Dyke path in Mainstone and Llanfair Waterdine parishes in southwest Shropshire, at Churchtown, Edenhope Hill, and Selley Hall. Several of these locations (see Figs. 1 & 2) lay within sections of the dyke which have been scheduled as ancient monuments as defined by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

1.2 In accordance with the scheduled monument consent for this work, the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council was commissioned to carry out an archaeological watching brief on the excavation of post-holes for the gates on five of these sites:

NGR	Location	Mon. no.	Mon. name
SO 2634 8726	Churchtown (ODP11 C)	32596	Offa's Dyke: section 430m north east of Middle Knuck Farm
SO 2627 8827	Edenhope Hill (B) (ODP11 EH-B)	SA 77	Offa's Dyke: section 1600yds (1460m) long, N from St John the Baptist's Church to River Unk
SO 2663 7660	Selley Hall (A) (ODP11 SH-A)	32605	Offa's Dyke: section 400m north and 170m east of Selley Hall.
SO 2657 7675	Selley Hall (B) (ODP11 SH-B)	32605	Offa's Dyke: section 400m north and 170m east of Selley Hall.
SO 2642 7699	Selley Hall (D) (ODP11 SH-D)	32605	Offa's Dyke: section 400m north and 170m east of Selley Hall.

The excavations were all carried out by hand by the Shropshire Council Outdoor Recreation Service's Countryside Recreation Team.

1.3 The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to allow for the preservation by record of any archaeological remains that were encountered during the excavations for the new path furniture.

1.4 A schedule of work was prepared for the work on each of the sites and submitted to English Heritage with the application for scheduled monument consent, and a written scheme of investigation was prepared by the Archaeology Service for the watching brief (Hannaford, 2011b).

1.5 The Archaeology Service has previously carried out a watching brief during the replacement of a finger post and the installation of a retaining board across the path within Churchtown Wood in 2008 (Hannaford, 2008). In 1993 David Hill and Margret Worthington are understood to have cut a section through the dyke on the southern side of the Unk valley south of Nut Wood (cited grid ref. SO263 887), about 400m north of the Edenhope Hill B site, in advance of the laying of drainage pipes through the line of the Dyke (Hill & Worthington, 2003). In 2009 the Archaeology Service conducted a watching brief during the replacement of two finger posts adjacent to the Selley Hall A site. No archaeological features or deposits were observed (Hannaford, 2009). In 2010 the Archaeology Service also carried out a watching brief on the opposite side of the road to the Selley Hall A site on the installation of a new gate. The original gate-post hole here was seen to have cut through a deposit of brown sandy clay and gravel which lay beneath 0.3m of a brown sandy clay loam with gravel and stone fragments (Hannaford, 2010).

2 THE WATCHING BRIEF

2.1 Churchtown: NGR: SO 2634 8726; ; SAM: 32596; Site Code: ODP11-C

The site at Churchtown lay on a steep hillside overlooking Churchtown and a tributary stream of the River Unk to the north. The footpath work here involved the replacement of a stile with an oak wicket gate. Although the gate was situated on the line of the bank element of the dyke, no above-ground remains survived in the immediate location; the bank emerges as an earthwork c. 10m south of the gate.

Two postholes were excavated by hand, one 1.1m deep, the other 1m deep, both 0.4m in diameter. The bedrock, a grey siltstone (33), was seen at a depth of between 0.9m and 1.1m, and lay beneath a layer of yellowish brown clay with rock fragments (32), probably natural subsoil. This was covered by a brown sandy clay loam (31) with stone chippings, probably hillwash, and a topsoil (30) of dark greyish brown humic loam up to 0.2m thick.

2.2 Edenhope Hill B: NGR: SO 2627 8827; SAM: SA 77; Site Code: ODP11-EHB

The Edenhope Hill B site lay on the line of the ditch component of the dyke on the south side of the lane which runs along the top of the hill and down to Lower Edenhope. The work here involved the replacement of a stile with a new kissing gate.

Six postholes for the new gate were excavated by hand; two postholes 1.00m deep by 0.4m x 0.3m in plan, for the corner and strainer posts and four postholes 0.7m deep by 0.3m in diameter for the remaining posts. In the deeper postholes, the lowest deposit, seen at c. 0.95m depth, was a light brown silty sand (28) with stone chippings. Above this was a layer 0.4m thick of brown sandy loam (27) with stone chippings and a similar layer with fewer chippings (26) about 0.35m thick. These deposits may have represented fills of the Dyke ditch but were not considered to have significant environmental potential. The latter deposit (26) was absent in the post holes in the centre of the gate, along the centre-line of the ditch, where there was instead a deposit 0.1m thick of a thin deposit of dark grey-brown very humic loam (29). This deposit had more potential for holding environmental information, however, its insubstantial nature, its late position in the stratigraphic sequence, and its proximity to the ground surface decided against sampling it for analysis. The uppermost deposit in all the postholes was a topsoil 0.15m thick of dark brown humic loam (25).

2.3 Selley Hall A: SO 2663/7660; SAM: 32605 ODP11 SH-A

The work here comprised the removal of an old stile and dog gate and its replacement with a new kissing gate. New raised stone filled steps were to be built up in front of the gate and a stone-filled stepway made down the bank to the stream. The gate was situated on a hedgeline on the hillside above the north edge of the lane to Selley Hall. No archaeological provision was required for the installation of the steps and stepway.

Six postholes were excavated by hand; two postholes 0.80m deep by 0.4m x 0.3m in plan, for the corner and strainer posts and four postholes between 0.75 and 0.9m deep by 0.3m in diameter for the remaining posts. These cut into a natural subsoil of yellowish brown sandy silt (40) at a depth of 0.38m below the ground surface, sealed by a topsoil of dark greyish brown sandy silty loam (39).

2.4 Selley Hall B: SO 2657/7675; SAM: 32605 ODP11 SH-B

The work here comprised the removal of an old stile and dog gate and its replacement with a new kissing gate. The gate here was situated on the line of the bank component of the dyke, although this was apparent only as a level berm on the hillside, with a substantial ditch up to 8m wide on the west (downslope) side.

Six postholes were excavated by hand; two postholes 0.90m & 1.00m deep by 0.4m x 0.3m in plan, for the corner and strainer posts, and four postholes between 0.70 and 0.9m deep by 0.3m in diameter for the remaining posts. The lowest deposit encountered was a light brown sandy silty clay (44) with small stone fragments, possibly the natural subsoil, seen at a depth of between 0.4m and 0.7m below the ground surface. In the northern three postholes this lay beneath a deposit of brown sandy loam (43) up to 0.3m thick with many stone fragments, and a similar almost stone-free deposit (42) up to 0.35m thick, both almost certainly part of the fabric of the bank. In the southern three post-holes, the subsoil lay below a deposit 0.3m to 0.55m thick of stone fragments in a light brown silty loam (42), again probably part of the composition of the bank. These all lay beneath a thin topsoil layer (41) between 0.5 and 0.15m thick.

2.5 Selley Hall D: SO 2642/7699; SAM: 32605 ODP11 SH-D

The work here comprised the removal of an old stile and dog gate and its replacement with a new kissing gate, situated on a hedgebank on the east side of the road opposite Garbett Hall. The new gate was sited on the line of the bank, although this did not survive as an earthwork feature in the location of the gate. The six postholes for the new gate were excavated by hand; two postholes 1.00m deep by 0.4m x 0.3m in plan, for the corner and strainer posts, and four postholes between 0.70 and 1.0m deep by 0.3m in diameter for the remaining posts. The grey clay or siltstone bedrock (37) was seen in the base of the deeper holes for the cornerposts. This lay below a deposit 0.2m thick of broken greyish brown clay 0.2m thick (36) and a dark brown silty loam (35) 0.25m thick, and a topsoil layer of dark greyish brown loam (34) up to 0.55m thick.

2.6 Discussion At Selley Hall B the post-holes for the new gate may have cut through deposits associated with the bank element of the Dyke, although the bank was not visible as a raised, above-ground earthwork feature here. At Edenhope Hill B, the new gate was located over the line of the ditch element of the Dyke, which was marked here by a slight hollow. The presence of a humic loam deposit here within the possible ditch fills, although not itself considered viable for sampling, suggests that there may well be deposits in this section of the Dyke ditch that might provide useful environmental data.

Otherwise, no other significant archaeological features or deposits were seen in the excavations at any of the five sites monitored during these works on the line of the Dyke. The site archive, comprising the written, drawn, and photographic records form the watching brief, will be deposited with the Shropshire Museum Service.

3 REFERENCES

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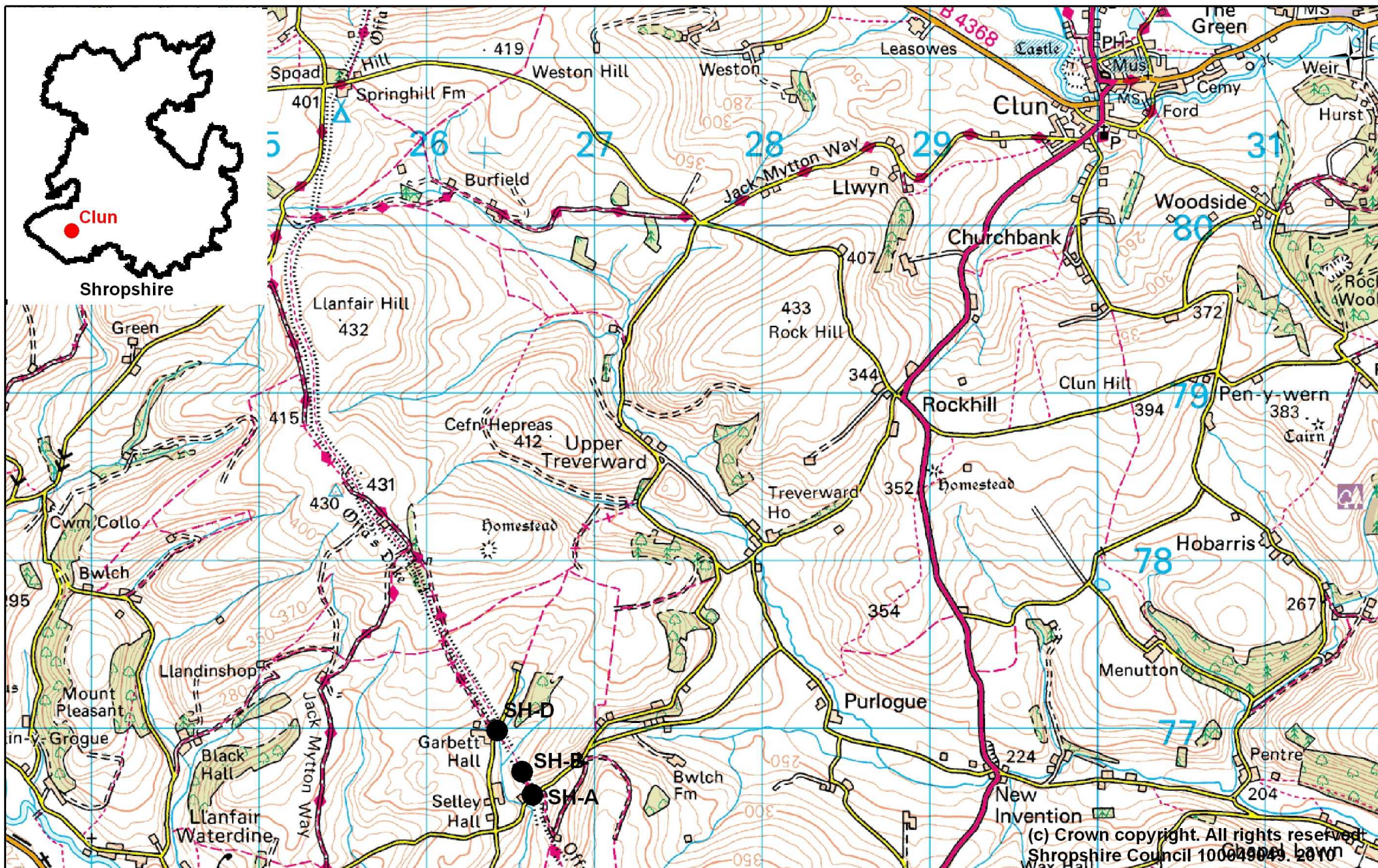
ABBREVIATIONS

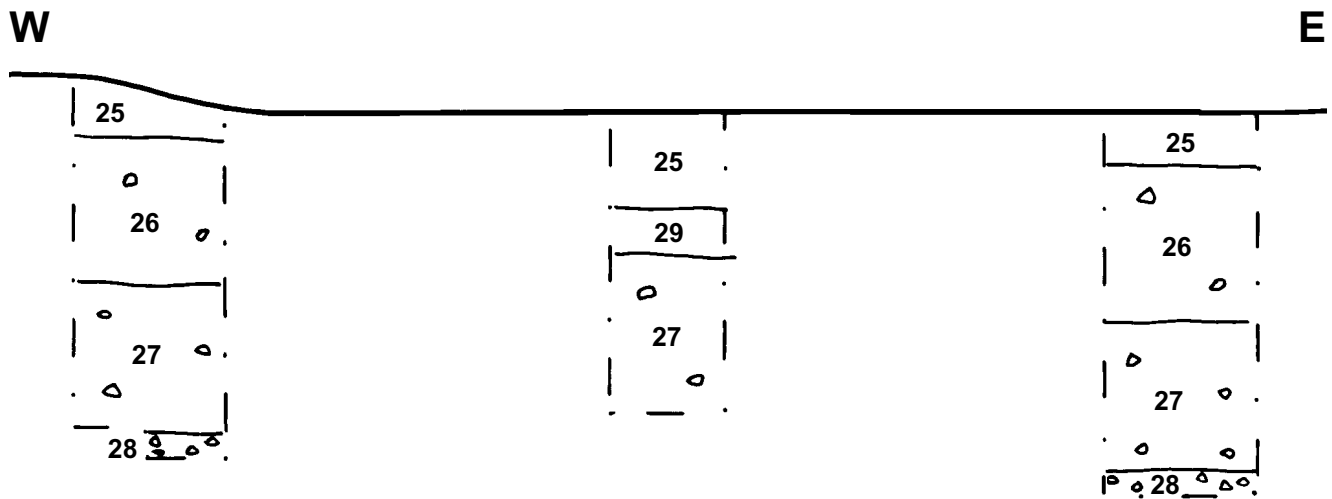
CBA	Council for British Archaeology
HER	Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council
NGR	National Grid Reference
OS	Ordnance Survey
SAM	Scheduled Ancient Monument
TSAHS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society



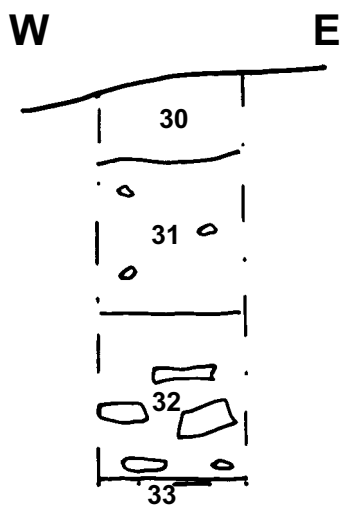
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Figure 1: Location of sites at Churchtown (ODP11 C) and Edenhope Hill (ODP11 EH-B)

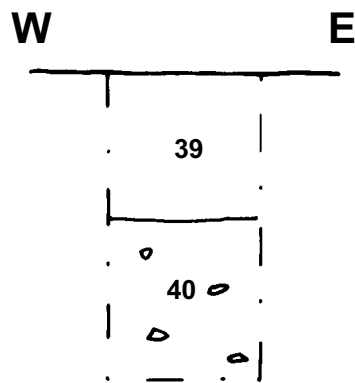




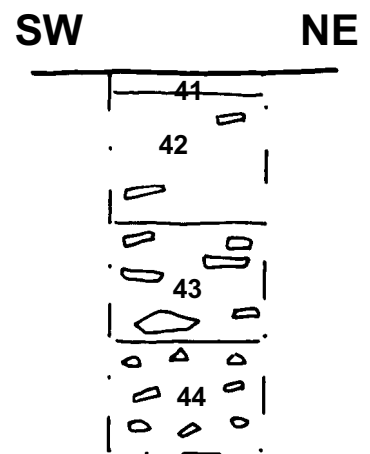
a) Edenhope Hill B: section through postholes on north side of new gateway



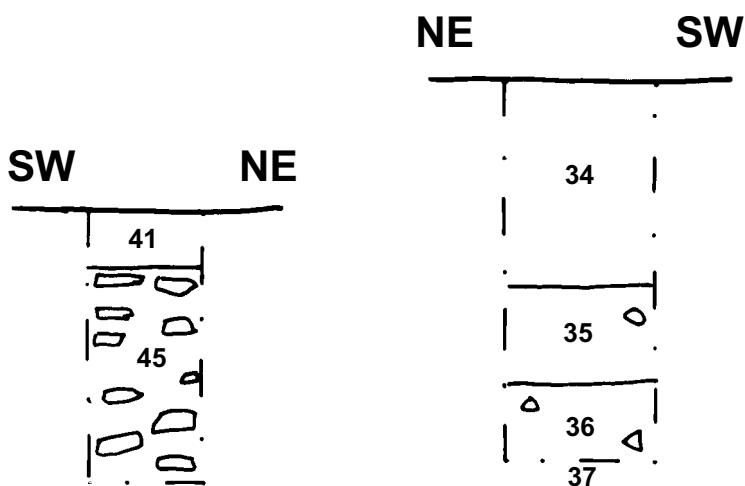
b) Churchtown



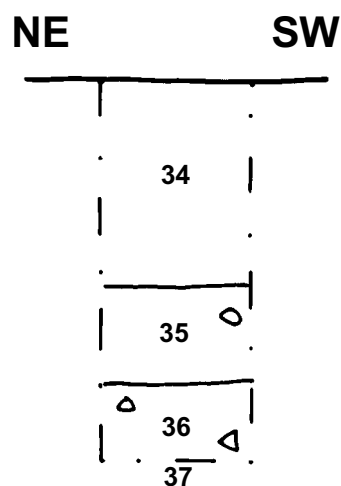
c) Selley Hall A



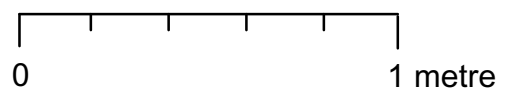
d) Selley Hall B



e) Selley Hall B



f) Selley Hall D



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Figure 3: Churchtown, Edenhope Hill B, and Selley Hall A, B & D; sections through post-holes; 1:20 scale



Photo 1: Location of the old stile at Churchtown, looking NE



Photo 2: One of the deeper postholes at Edenhope Hill B, looking N (scale 1m)



Photo 3: The location of the new gate at Selley Hall A, looking N



Photo 4: The location of the old stile at Selley Hall B



Photo 5: One of the postholes at Selley Hall B, looking N (scale 1m)



Photo 6: The new gate at Selley Hall D, looking NE