

***An Archaeological Watching Brief at
Bluebell Crossroads, Brompton,
Shropshire, 2010
(A489 Bluebell Crossroads Resurfacing)***

by
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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT
BLUEBELL CROSSROADS, BROMPTON, SHROPSHIRE, 2010
(A489 BLUEBELL CROSSROADS RESURFACING)

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SUMMARY

In March 2010 the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, carried out a watching brief on groundworks associated with widening and resurfacing the A489 road between Pentrehyling and Bluebell Crossroads, Brompton, in southwest Shropshire. This section of the road ran through an area occupied by the Pentrehyling Roman fort, vicus, and a number of Roman marching camps. These sites had been investigated archaeologically in the 1980s and 1990s, when finds of probable Late Neolithic date were also made. The 2010 watching brief also located a number of features associated with the Roman fort, vicus, and marching camps. These included the probable southern and eastern fort ditches, a number of pits within the vicus area, and the possible western ditch of one of the marching camps.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Pentrehyling is situated in southwest Shropshire, about 30.5km southwest of the centre of Shrewsbury. The hamlet lies on the A489 Craven Arms to Caersws road. Within the vicinity of the modern settlements of Pentrehyling and Brompton are the remains of Bronze Age funerary monuments, a Roman fort and marching camps, a section of Offa's Dyke, and a medieval settlement (Brompton). Part of the site is scheduled as an Ancient Monument (County No. Salop 308, "Three Roman camps NW of Brompton Mill including tumulus and section of Offa's Dyke").

1.2 Between February and April 2010 road resurfacing and widening was carried out on a section of the A489 between Pentrehyling (NGR SO 241 929) and Bluebell Crossroads (NGR SO 249 932). The work involved the excavation of the road verge by up to 600mm width from the existing road edge to a depth of up to 400mm below the road surface. There were additional insets for a number of road gullies.

1.3 The road widening had the potential to affect several of the known archaeological sites at Brompton, including a findspot of prehistoric flints and pits, a Bronze Age burial site, the Roman fort and associated vicus and two of the Roman marching camps.

1.4 Because of the significance of the archaeological sites likely to be affected, it was considered necessary that the road works be accompanied by the implementation of a programme of archaeological work. Scheduled Monument Consent was obtained from the DCMS for the work between Brompton View and Bluebell Crossroads that affected the scheduled Ancient Monument. The aim of the programme of archaeological work was to allow for the preservation by record of any archaeological remains that were encountered during the works.

1.5 The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was commissioned by Mouchel Ltd on behalf of Shropshire Council to undertake the programme of archaeological work. The study area for this work was considered to be between Chainage (Ch) 650 and Ch 100 of the re-surfacing scheme. The programme of archaeological work was carried out in March 2010.

1.6 All ground disturbance works associated with the proposed road widening within the study area were carried out under archaeological supervision.

1.7 The written paper record employed was based on that developed by the Central Archaeology Service, English Heritage. The graphic record comprised plans to be drawn to a 1:50 to 1:20 scale and section drawings to a scale of 1:20 or 1:10 as appropriate. A photographic record was made comprising 35mm monochrome print and digital photography as appropriate, with a supporting index.

1.8 On completion of the fieldwork, archiving and reporting processes, the site archive (the written, drawn, photographic records and the finds) will be deposited with the Shropshire Council Museum Service.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The evidence for prehistoric activity at Brompton comes principally from aerial photography and from the excavations undertaken in the 1980s-90s. The aerial photography has produced cropmarks of two ring-ditches (HER 01210 and HER 04146), probably the ploughed out remains of Bronze Age burial sites; excavations in 1990 found a group of pits with pottery and a flint scatter (HER 04481) of probable Late Neolithic date, sealed beneath the rampart of a later Roman fort (Jones, 1991).

The Roman fort, extra-mural settlement, and marching camps at Brompton were first discovered by aerial photography in 1969 and 1973 (Ferris, in Jones 1991). The fort and camp complex was the subject of a programme of archaeological investigations in the 1980s and early 1990s (Allen, 1986 – 1991). The area covered by the current road resurfacing scheme has also been the subject of archaeological recording in 1990 by the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) - now Birmingham Archaeology. This work was undertaken in advance of planned road widening along this stretch of the road (Jones et al., 1991). These archaeological investigations located and sampled the Roman marching camp ditches and also located features associated with the Roman fort defences, internal structures, the external road, and features associated with an extra-mural settlement (*vicus*) to the east of the fort. The excavations recovered a quantity of Roman pottery, glass, and metalwork, including coins, and metalworking residue comprising iron smithing debris and litharge cakes, this latter a by-product of extracting silver from argentiferous lead only known from a very few Roman sites in Britain. (Bayley and Eckstein, 1998).

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF

3.1 A watching brief was maintained on the groundworks associated with the excavations for the road widening and gulley replacements between Chainage (Ch) 650 and Ch100 (Pentrehyling Farm to Bluebell Crossroads, Brompton). The road widening involved the excavation of a strip at most 600mm but generally 450mm along the edge of the road, to a depth of about 250mm below the road surface. The road verge in places had already been reduced in height in 1990, following the previous archaeological investigations, in preparation for proposed road widening; in particular between Ch600 and Ch350, in the area of the Pentrehyling fort (HER 01214), the verge surface lay up to 0.5m below the ground level of the field to the north.

Due to the nature of the works most of the features were seen and recorded in section; where the opportunity presented, however, features were sampled where possible. The Chainage (Ch) used in the narrative runs from east to west, Ch100 lying 40m west of Bluebell Crossroads, Ch650 lying 60m east of Pentrehyling, though the site works proceeded from west to east, and the narrative follows this sequence.

Some of the features recorded in the watching brief have tentatively been identified with features excavated in 1990 – where this has been possible the features are identified by the letters BUFAU (Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit) followed by Fxxx (feature no.) and Figure reference.

The natural subsoil (2) comprised a yellowish brown sandy silt with pebbles and gravel. It generally lay beneath about 0.2m of topsoil (1) along the length of the verge on the north side of the carriageway. The surface of the subsoil is likely to have been reduced during and immediately following the 1990 excavations.

3.2 The Pentrehyling Roman Fort

At Ch 583-580, a ditch (Figs. 2 & 3a; 5) was cut into the natural subsoil (2). The ditch appeared to be at least 3.5m wide, though this was probably due to it being cut across at an angle by the groundworks, and only the eastern edge of the cut was seen. The ditch was filled with a greyish brown clay with pebbles and gravel (4). This feature may well be the same feature recorded in 1990 as BUFAU F116 (Jones, 1990, Fig.7), interpreted as the western arm of the southern fort annexe.

At Ch 574-544 another ditch (Figs. 2 & 3b; 7) was cut into the subsoil (2). This ditch was filled with a dark greyish brown silty clay (6) with flecks of charcoal and burnt bone. This may have been the southern arm of the fort ditch – the same feature as BUFAU F102 (Jones, 1990, Fig.7)

At Ch 469-6 a pebble layer (Figs. 2 & 3c; 8) up to 0.1m thick and 3.5m wide was seen lying between the topsoil (1) and the subsoil (2). This may possibly be the remains of an internal roadway within the fort or perhaps a floor surface from a structure within the fort.

At Ch 415-10 a linear feature (Figs. 2 & 4a; 10) cut into the natural subsoil (2). This feature was filled with a greyish brown sandy silt (9) flecked with rust. The feature was on the line of an intervallum road seen in the 1990 excavations

BUFAU F128 (Jones, 1990, Fig.7), although the feature seen in 1990 consisted of a cambered pebble surface rather than the linear gulley seen in 2010.

At Ch 398-89 a pit or a ditch (Figs. 2 & 4b; 12) 9m wide cut the subsoil (2). The feature was filled with a greyish brown sandy silt (11). This might possibly have been the eastern fort ditch, BUFAU F122 (Jones, 1990, Fig.7),

3.3 The Vicus

To the east of the area of the Pentrehyling Fort (from Ch 350 eastwards) the ground surface on the road verge was at a similar level to that in the fields to the north. This was the area shown by the 1980s and 1990 excavations to have been occupied by the extramural settlement or vicus (HER 04482).

At Ch 335 a shallow pit (Figs. 2 & 4c; 14) 1m in diameter by 0.2m deep cut the subsoil (2). The pit was filled with a dark greyish brown sandy silt (13) with flecks of soft red pottery or burnt clay.

At Ch 324-320 a rubble layer (Figs. 2 & 5a; 15) lay beneath the topsoil (1). The rubble comprised stone, mortar brick and tile of 19th century date, and probably derived from Brompton View whose frontage was cut back in 20th century (P Beddoes, pers. comm.)

At Ch 303 a pit (Figs. 2 & 5b-c; 17) cut the subsoil (2). The pit was 0.8m in diameter by 0.35m deep. The pit was filled with greyish brown sandy silt (16) with charcoal flecks, burnt clay, burnt bone. The pit also contained a quantity of Romano-British grey and orange coarseware pottery and Samian ware (see below, Table 1, 16,).

At Ch 298-4 a linear gulley or ditch (Figs. 2 & 5d; 20) 4m wide cut the subsoil (2). The feature was filled with a dark greyish brown sandy silt (18) which produced a number of amphora fragments (Table 1, 18), and a lower fill of light brown clay silt (19) on its eastern edge.

At Ch 272 another pit (Figs. 2 & 6a-c; 22) cut into the subsoil (2). The pit was 0.7m wide by 0.38m deep and was filled with a greyish brown silty clay (21) which also produced some Romano-British pottery (Table 1, 21, below).

At Ch 284 a shallow pit (Figs. 2 & 6d; 24) cut the subsoil (2). This pit was 1.75m wide by 0.3m deep and was filled with a grey-brown sand silt (23) with pebbles and gravel and charcoal, and again it produced some Romano-British pottery and glass (Table 1, 23).

3.4 The Marching Camps

From Ch 215 – Ch 90 the cutting back of the groundworks switched to the verge on the southern side of the road. Again, the ground surface of the verge was at a similar level to the fields to the south of the hedgeline. The subsoil here also comprised a yellowish brown sandy silt with gravel (Fig. 6; 27) beneath 0.2m depth of topsoil (26).

At Ch182 a pit or ditch (Figs. 2 & 6e; 30) cut into the subsoil (27). The feature was 1.7m wide and was filled with a dark greyish brown sandy silt (29) flecked

with charcoal and burnt clay (29). This fill also produced some Romano-British pottery and an amphora handle with stamp mark in Greek bearing the letters: omega epsilon rho sigma (Table 1, 29). This fill lay over a lower deposit of brown sandy silt (28) on the eastern side of the feature. It is possible that this feature marked the ditch of the marching camp HER 01212.

At Ch 126 a poorly defined pit or ditch 1m wide by 0.5m deep (Figs. 2 & 6f; 32) cut into the subsoil (27). The feature was filled with a greyish brown clay silt (31) with gravel and flecks of charcoal and burnt clay. It also produced a large iron nail, possibly of Roman date (Table 1, 31).

No further significant archaeological features or deposits were recorded.

Context	Roman pottery (count / weight)			Brick & tile	Roman glass	Iron
	Coarse wares	Samian	Amphora			
	1 / 1g			170g		
01	1 / 1g					
16	48 / 363g	1 / 5g				
18			10 / 473g			
21	2 / 2g					
23	8 / 129g	1 / 2g	2 / 89g		1 / 11g	24g
29	4 / 28g		1 / 509g			1g
31						131g

Table 1: The finds

4 DISCUSSION

No evidence of the known prehistoric activity in the area was recorded during the watching brief on the groundworks associated with the 2010 road widening and resurfacing. On the other hand, substantial remains were seen of the Roman period in the narrow trenches excavated for the new kerbs. These features mainly took the form of negative features – filled-in pits and ditches – some of which produced finds of Romano-British date. Some of the features, principally those which lay in the area of Pentrehyling Fort, could be tentatively correlated with features recorded during the 1990 excavations, and thus associated with the fort.

It is probable that there has been some truncation of the features in the road verge in the area of the Pentrehyling fort (HER 01214) as the verge here lies up to 0.5m below the level of the field immediately to the north. Nevertheless larger archaeological features did survive in this area, notably features tentatively identified as the fort and annexe ditches (Figs.2-4; 5, 7, & 12), based on their correlation in location with features identified in the 1990 report.

In the area of the fort vicus (HER 04482) there had been no reduction in the level of the verge, and a number of archaeological features, some producing finds of Romano-British date, were seen here (Figs. 2 & 4-6; 14, 17, 20, 22, & 24). The features seen in this area mostly seemed, on the basis of the finds they produced and lack of industrial residues, to be domestic rather than industrial in nature, though one feature possibly may have been either domestic or industrial (Figs. 2 & 4c; 14).

In the area of the scheduled Roman marching camps (Fig. 2; Sa308) at the eastern end of the study area, a couple of archaeological features (Figs. 2 & 6; 30 & 32) were recorded, one possibly representing the western arm of the ditch around one of the marching camps (HER 01212). The fill of this feature (29) produced Romano-British pottery and an amphora handle. It is also possible, however, that this feature may have been an outlying feature associated with the vicus. No evidence was seen for the western ditch of the other marching camp (HER 01211).

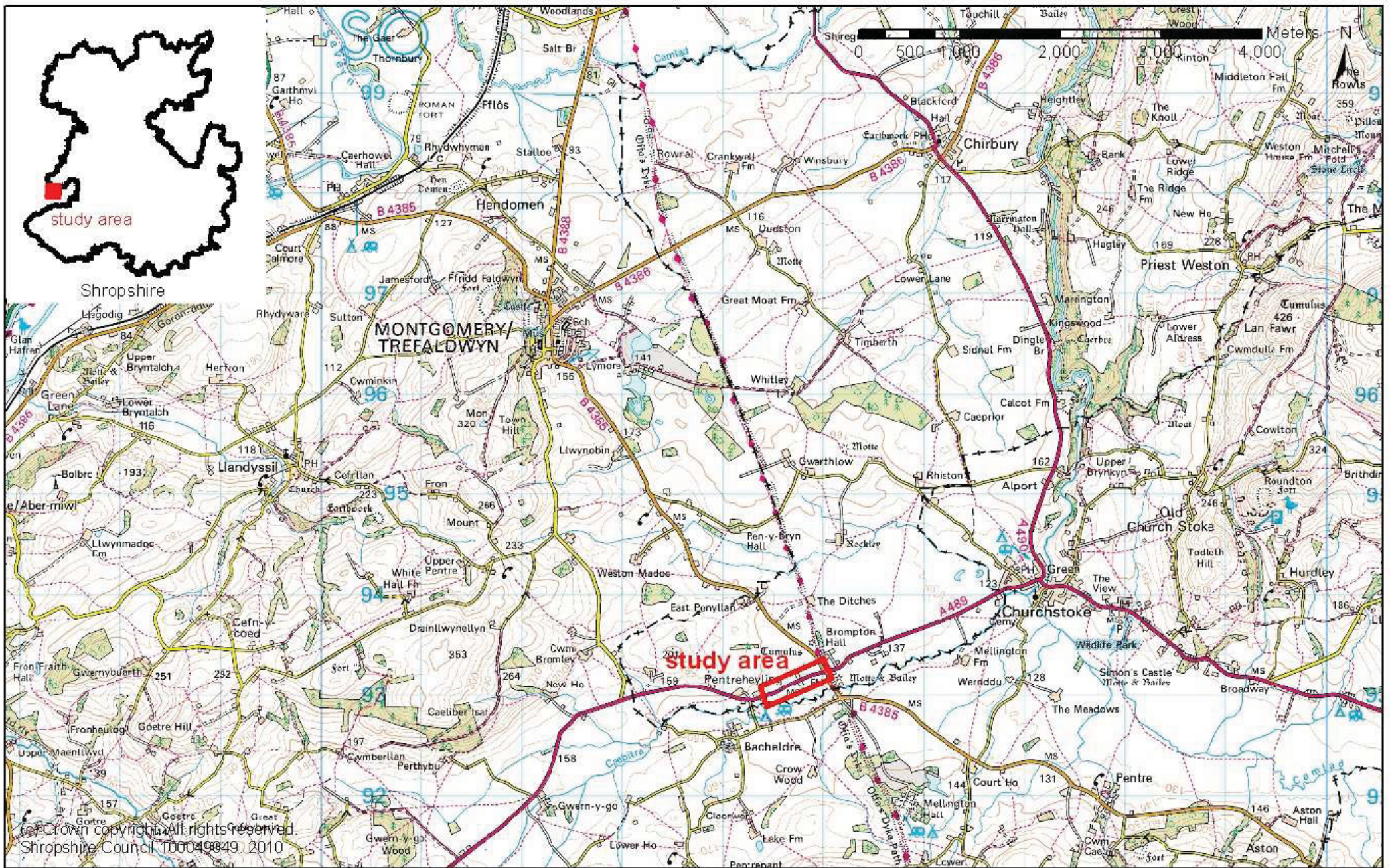
In recording these features and deposits, this watching brief has also confirmed the survival of significant and reasonably well-preserved archaeological features within the road corridor between Pentrehyling and Brompton.

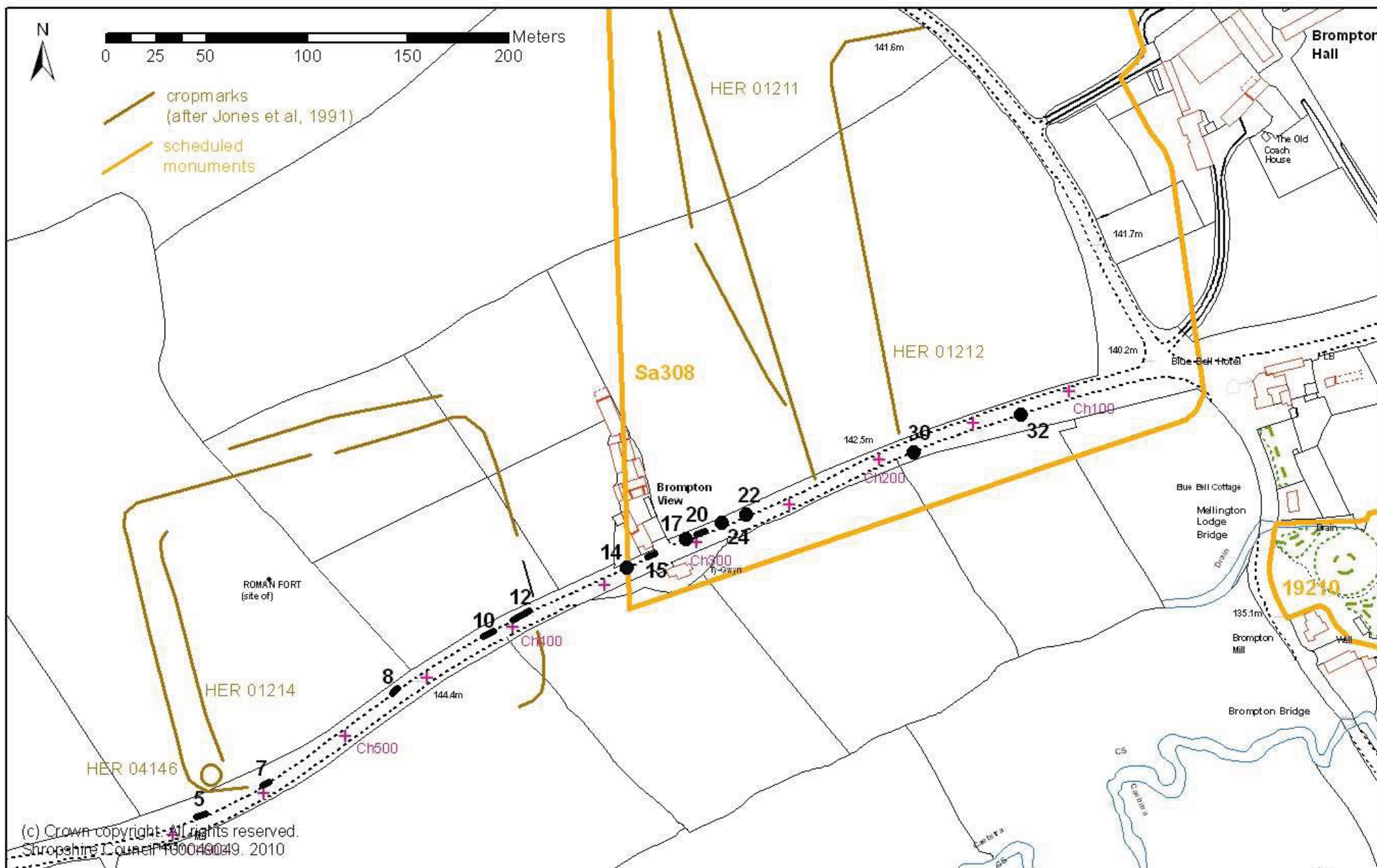
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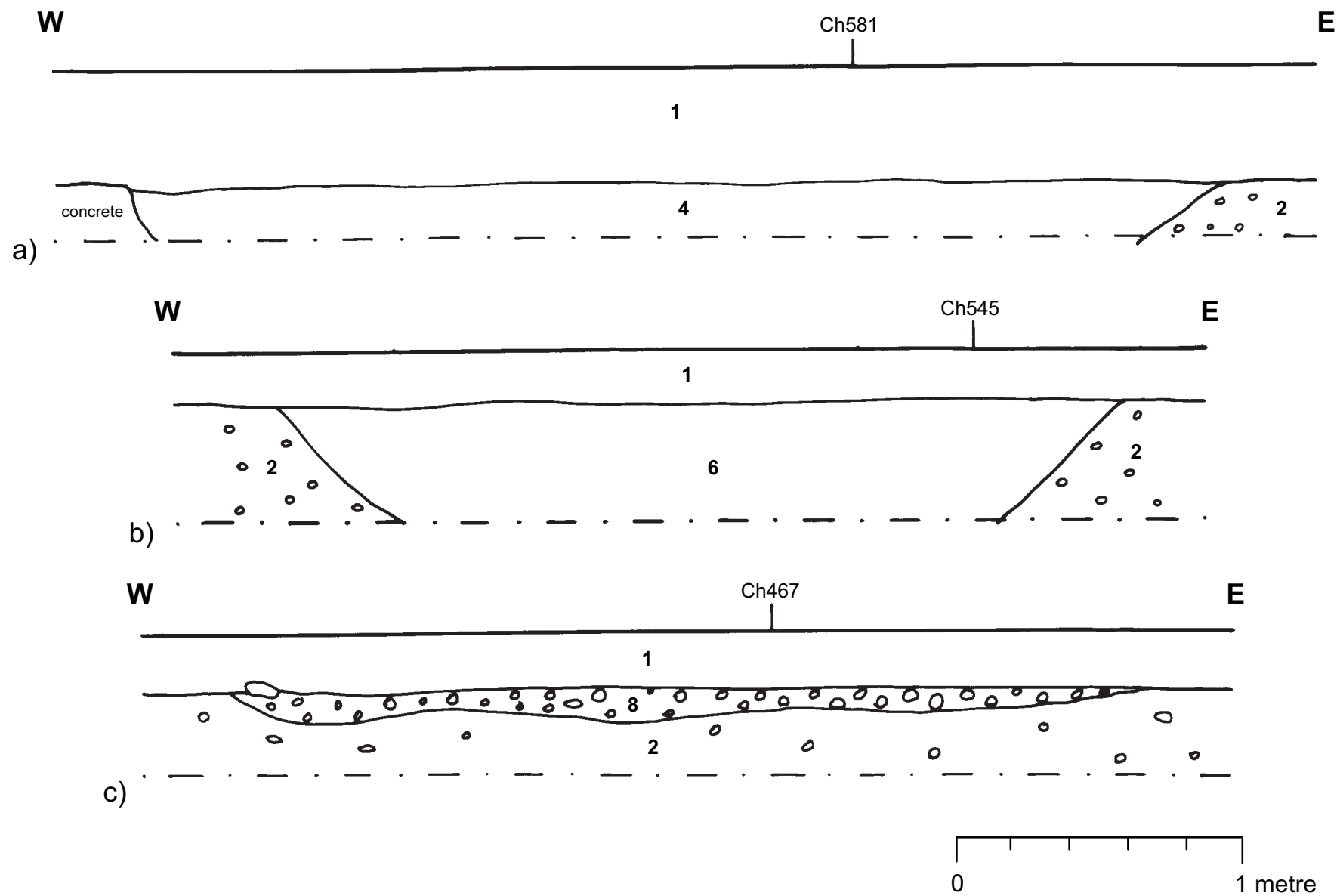
ABBREVIATIONS

ASSC	Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council
BUFAU	Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
CBA	Council for British Archaeology
HER	Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council
OS	Ordnance Survey
PRO	Public Record Office
SA	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
 TSAHS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society

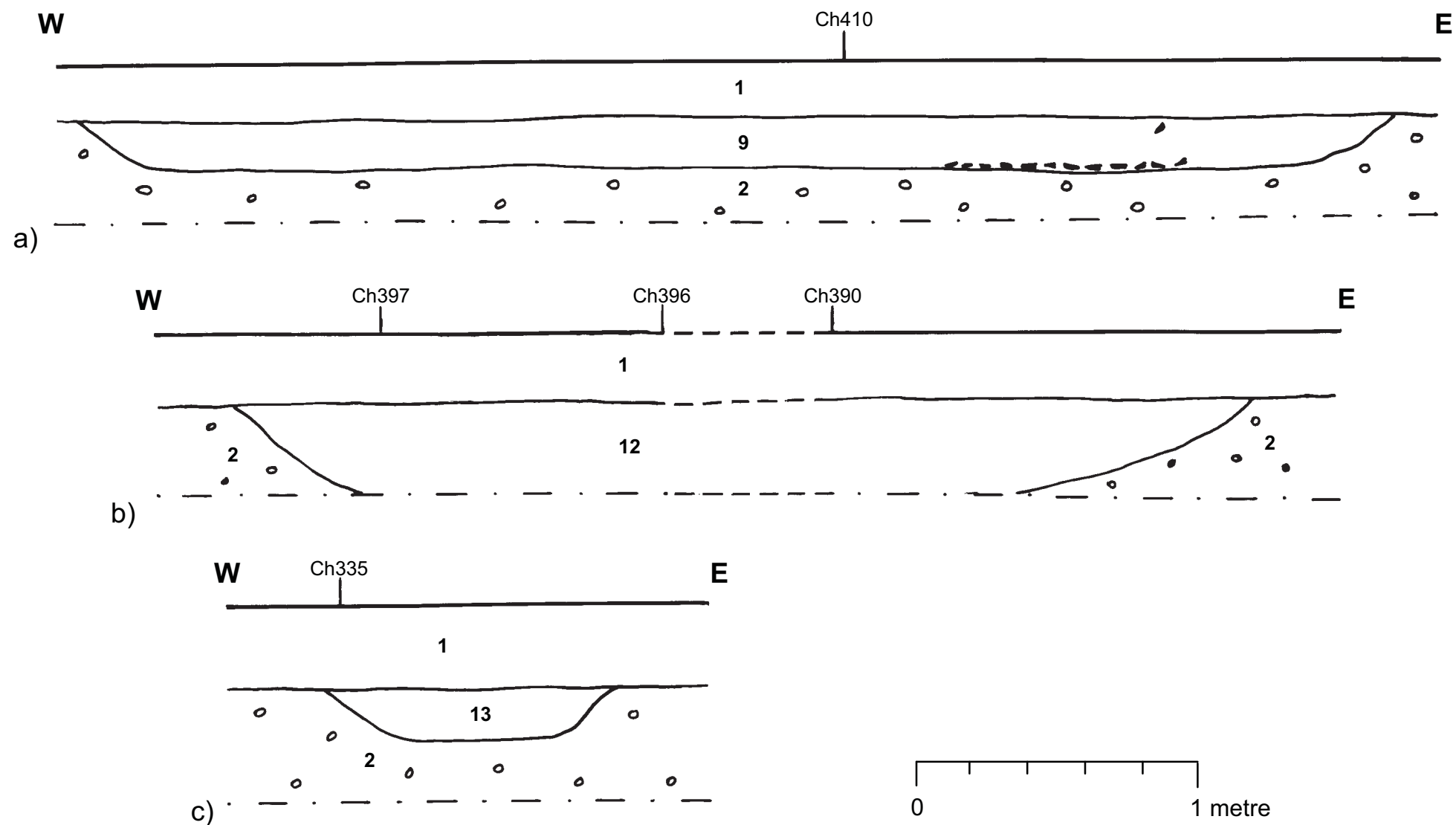




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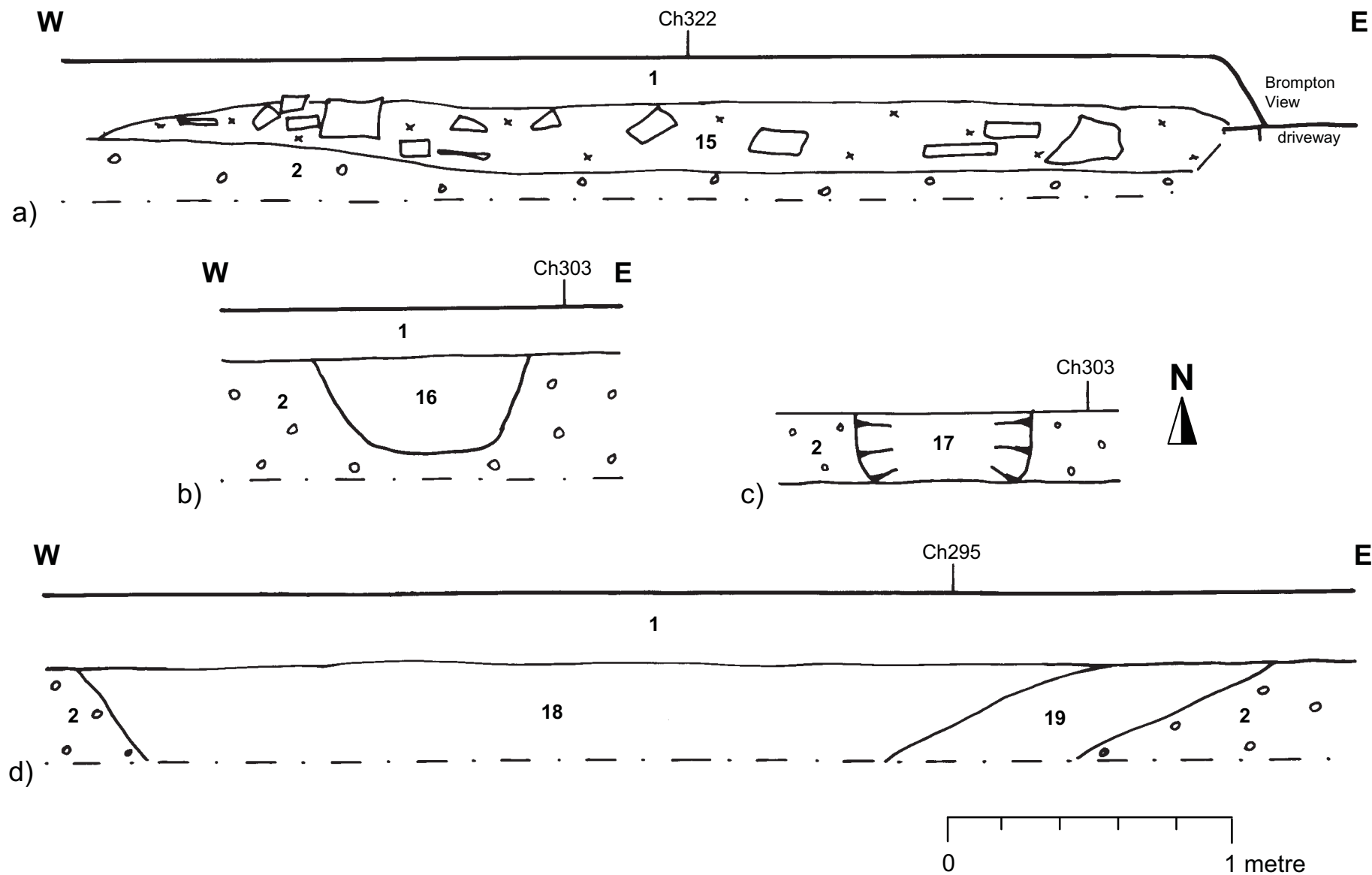


BLUEBELL CROSSROADS, BROMPTON, SHROPSHIRE 2010
 Figure 3 a) Feature 5; b) feature 7; c) layer 8; (for locations see Fig. 2); scale 1:20



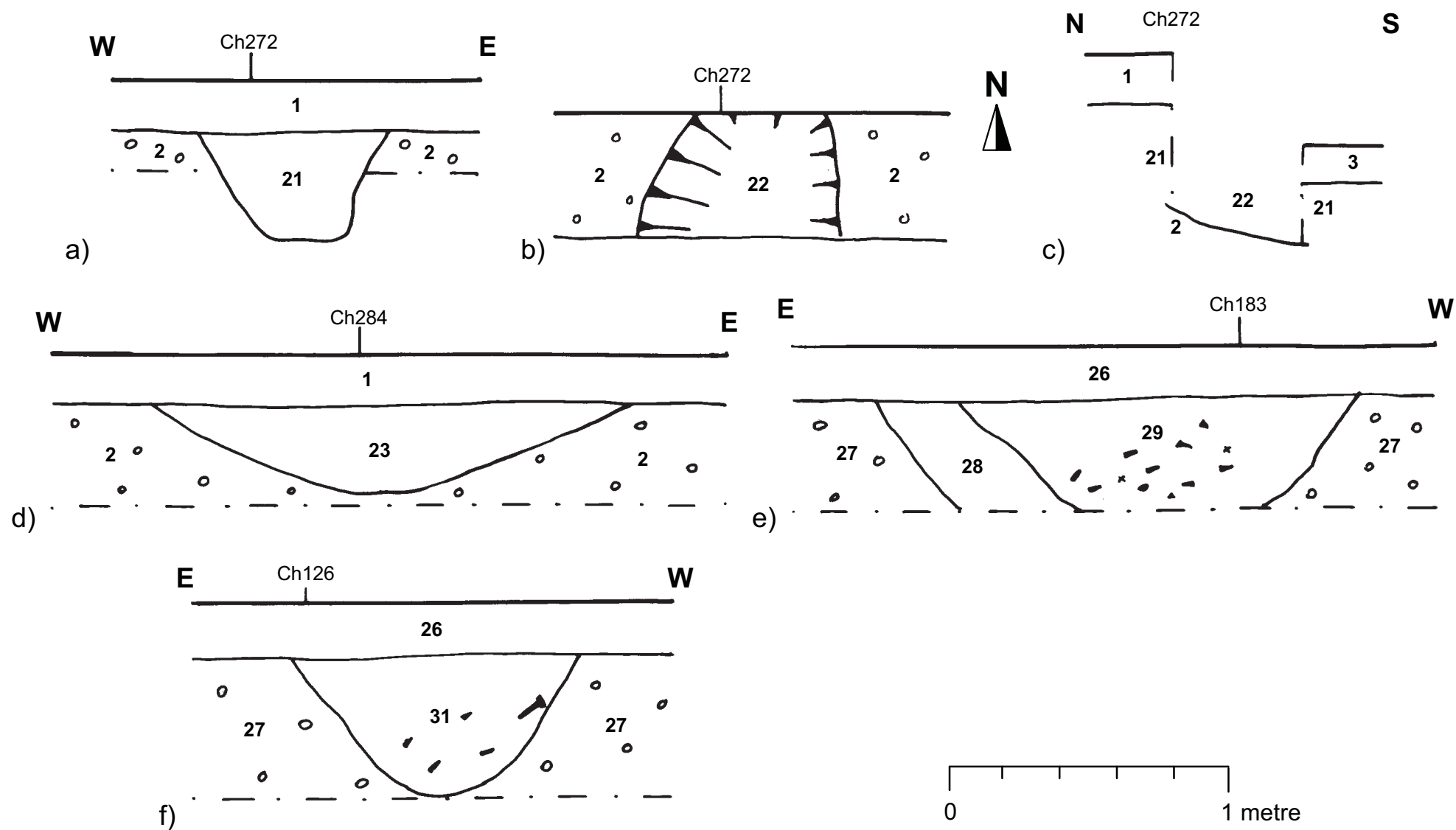
BLUEBELL CROSSROADS, BROMPTON, SHROPSHIRE 2010

Figure 4 a) Feature 10; b) feature 12; c) feature 14; (for locations see Fig. 2); scale 1:20



BLUEBELL CROSSROADS, BROMPTON, SHROPSHIRE 2010

Figure 5 a) Layer 15; b) feature 17; c) feature 17 plan view; d) feature 20; (for locations see Fig. 2); scale 1:20



BLUEBELL CROSSROADS, BROMPTON, SHROPSHIRE 2010

Figure 6 a), b) & c) feature 22 section, plan, & profile; d) feature 24; e) feature 30; f) feature 33; (for locations see Fig. 2); scale 1:20

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Photo 1: The works through Pentrehyling fort, looking east



Photo 2: The fort ditch, feature 7, looking northwest



Photo 3: Feature 22, looking northeast



Photo 4: The amphora handle from feature 30

BLUEBELL CROSSROADS, BROMPTON, SHROPSHIRE 2010