

***An Archaeological Watching Brief at  
Glebe Farm Barns, Wroxeter,  
Shropshire, 2009***

by  
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March 2010

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT  
GLEBE FARM BARNs, WROXETER, SHROPSHIRE, 2009

by  
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A Report for  
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## SUMMARY

*In October and November 2009, and February 2010, a watching brief was carried out by the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council on groundworks associated with a barn conversion at Glebe Farm Barns, Wroxeter. The development site lay on the line of the southern defences of the Roman city of Viroconium Cornoviorum. The watching brief recorded waterlogged or formerly waterlogged deposits over the northern part of the study area. A small group of pits and a linear gulley containing a small amount of Romano-British pottery were seen in the southernmost part of the site. No other significant deposits or features were seen in the course of the watching brief.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** Wroxeter is situated in central Shropshire, about 7.5km southeast of the centre of Shrewsbury. The modern village lies on the northeast bank of the River Severn, just to the south of the B4380 road, formerly the A5 London to Holyhead Trunk Road (now by-passed). The modern village lies within the site of the Roman city of *Viroconium Cornoviorum*, the fourth largest walled city in the Roman province. The site of the Roman city is a scheduled Ancient Monument (Shropshire County No. 32, "The site of the Roman Town of Wroxeter [*Viroconium Cornoviorum*] Shropshire"). Glebe Farm Barns, Wroxeter (NGR SJ 563 081) lies in the core of the modern village, which occupies the southwest corner of the Roman town.

**1.2** Archaeological monitoring of the excavation of lining pits for the re-lining of a 4" water main in this area in 1999 had demonstrated the survival of deposits associated with the Roman ramparts in the field on the west side of the road (White, 2000). In January 2002 the Archaeology Service, SCC, carried out a watching brief on the installation of a new water supply and telephone line to the Old Schoolhouse and the adjoining Parish Rooms. Deposits possibly representing rampart material were seen in the base of the trench beneath the modern road and in the Old Schoolhouse garden (Hannaford, 2002). During a further watching brief at the Old Schoolhouse in January 2009, the reduction of the topsoil for the laying of a new driveway exposed the top of a layer of clay that may have been associated with the city defences. However, no significant deposits or features were seen in the excavation of a number of foundation trenches around the east and north sides of the property.

**1.3** In the autumn of 2009 work began on the conversion of barns at Glebe Farm Barns to living accommodation. It was initially envisaged that this would entail underpinning work to various walls and excavations for drains and a sewage treatment plant. In the event, ground conditions proved such that underpinning of standing walls was not considered feasible, and instead slab foundations were employed. This modification nevertheless involved ground reduction of typically 400mm below existing floor levels.

**1.4** Scheduled Monument Consent had been granted for the development, and it was a requirement of the Scheduled Monument Consent for the proposed works that the groundworks were to be carried out under archaeological supervision.

**1.5** The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was commissioned to carry out this watching brief by Mr H. Barnes, the owner of the property. The groundworks for the preparation for the slab foundations and for the trenches for the drains and pit for the sewage treatment plant were carried out from October to December 2009.

**1.6** 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.

## **2 THE WATCHING BRIEF**

**2.1** The groundworks for the development were carried out under archaeological supervision in October and November 2009. Initially three test pits were excavated in cells A & C of the northern range of barns and in barn E in the centre of the development area. These test pits demonstrated the presence of a deep layer of waterlogged and formerly waterlogged deposits over the northern half of the site. As a result, the developer changed the foundation design, replacing the underpinning of the main walls with slab foundations. This would remove the need for deep excavations for the underpinning foundations but would nevertheless entail ground reductions of up to 0.4m to accommodate the construction of the slab foundations. The drainage plan remained unchanged.

**2.2 Cell A** The northern range of barn buildings comprised 5 cells (Fig. 2; cells A-D & G). Following the removal of the cobble floor in cell A, a test pit 1.5m long by 0.4m wide by 1.3m deep was excavated through the orange-brown sand bedding (Fig. 3a; 2) for the floor. The floor had been laid directly over a deposit 0.8m deep of a sticky very dark grey silt (3) representing a partially waterlogged deposit. This in turn lay over at least 0.5m of very dark greyish brown, sticky, sandy silt (4) with a high organic content, including straw and twigs.

The deposits here were subsequently excavated to a depth of c. 0.4m below the existing ground level (i.e. layer (2) and 0.35m depth of (3)) to accommodate the new foundation slab. No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen here.

**2.3 Cell B** The deposits here were excavated to a depth of c. 0.4m below the existing ground level in to the top of the organic silt to accommodate the new foundation slab. No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen here.

**2.4 Cell C** The cobble floor (Fig. 3b; 5) in this cell of the barn complex had previously been removed. A test pit 1.2m long by 0.4m wide by 0.9m deep was excavated through the orange-brown sand bedding (6) for the floor. The floor had again been laid directly over the sticky very dark grey silt (7). Again, this in turn lay over very dark greyish brown, sticky, organic sandy silt (8) with a high organic content, including straw and twigs.

The deposits here were subsequently excavated to a depth of c. 0.4m below the existing ground level to accommodate the new foundation slab. No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen here.

**2.5 Cell D** The deposits here were again excavated to a depth of c. 0.4m below the existing ground level in to the top of the organic silt to accommodate the new foundation slab. No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen here.

**2.6 Barn E** A third test pit was excavated in the barn in the centre of the development site (Fig. 2; barn E). The pit was 1.5m by 0.4m by 1m deep and was cut through the light brown sand (Fig. 3c; 9) bedding for the floor of the building to reveal a wet very dark brown-grey sandy silty loam (10) 0.30m deep over a further similar deposit (21) 0.35m deep. These deposits were similar to (and probably the same) the organic and waterlogged deposits seen in the test pits in cells A and C. Here the deposits were shallower and overlay the natural subsoil which here comprised gravel in a sticky red silty sand (11).

The removal of the floor and its hardcore and the silty loam (10) in barn E revealed a cobble surface (20) in the east side of the building which underlay the walls of the northeastern corner of building. No dating material was associated with this surface apart from a fragment of brick within its make-up, but it was most probably post-medieval in date.

**2.7 Area F** The pit for the sewage treatment plant (Figs. 2 & 4; area F) was excavated through the hardcore floor (Fig. 4b; 12) of the eastern bay of a former dutch barn to reveal a soil of a very dark grey-brown humic loam (13) 0.25m thick, which produced a single rim-sherd of a form 37 Samian bowl. This deposit in turn lay over 0.6m of very dark grey sticky humic silt (14) (the same waterlogged deposit seen in cells A –D and barn E). The natural subsoil (15) was reached beneath this deposit at a depth of 1m below the ground surface, and consisted of a sticky red clay.

**2.8 Cells G and I** In cells G and I the removal of the concrete floor revealed a live brick culvert (Fig. 5; 24) 0.9m wide cut into the grey organic silt (25). The culvert joined the main drain which runs across the development site from east to west in cell I. The top of the culvert was removed and the upper 0.2m of the silt deposit (including the floor) was removed for the new slab foundation. A new drain run 0.5m wide to relieve the culvert was also cut through the silt across the cell to a depth of 0.35m. No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen here.

**2.9 Cell H** In cell H the existing concrete floor and hardcore lay over a cobble floor surface which in turn lay over a clean grey brown loam (17) 0.3m thick. Along the southeastern end of the barn the floor was at a higher level – where this had been removed it showed that the brown loam had reached a higher level. The loam lay over the natural subsoil which comprised a buff clay (Fig. 6a; 30). A number of features were cut into the natural . Two small oval pits (38 & 40) were cut into the clay; both were filled with similar dark grey sandy silt flecked with charcoal (37, 39, respectively). Pit 38 was 0.6m long by 0.2m wide and the top of its fill (37) produced a single small sherd of abraded Severn Valley ware Romano-British pottery. A narrow linear gully (36) was cut into the natural clay diagonally across cell H. The gully was filled with a brown sandy silt (35). A further roughly circular pit (34) about 1m in diameter cut this gully. This pit was also filled with a dark grey sandy silt flecked with charcoal (33), and the top of this fill produced a small amount of Romano-British pottery.

**2.10 Cell J** In this cell the hardcore for the floor lay over an earlier cobble floor bedded on brown sand. These were removed to reveal a layer 0.1m thick of a dark grey sandy silty loam similar to the loam layer in the adjoining cell H. Beneath this in the southeastern part of the cell lay natural buff clay (Fig. 6a; 31), and overlying the clay in the northwestern part of the cell was organic silt (32), similar to that seen throughout the rest of the development site, and thus here marking the south edge of the feature containing the silt. No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen here.

**2.11 Cell K** The deposits here were again excavated to a depth of c. 0.4m below the existing ground level in to the top of the organic silt (Fig. 6a; 32) to accommodate the new foundation slab. No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen here.

**2.12 Drain trench L** A trench (Fig. 2; L) was cut across the site to carry the drains from the southwestern wing of the development (cells H, & J) to the sewage treatment plant (area F). Branches to the main run ran from cells H and J and barn E. The trench was about 0.4m wide by 0.25m deep at its southern end increasing to 0.8m deep at its northern end where it ran up to the sewage treatment plant. At its southern end the trench cut through the remains of the former farmyard. This consisted of a band of large cobbles (Fig. 6b; 42) set against the southwestern range of barns with a kerb of large stone blocks (41). These blocks were seen to be the top of a sandstone wall (43) 0.4m wide bonded in buff mortar which may have been a robust kerb for this bit of the yard, but may also have been the wall of an earlier farm building. An area of cobble surface (46) survived on the northeastern side of the wall, but most of this had been taken up earlier. This again lay over the dark grey organic silt which was seen in this drain trench to extend right across the development site.

**2.13 Area M** In the area outside the western end of barn E the ground was reduced by about 0.4m. The disturbed farmyard was removed and revealed a grey silt deposit containing some 19<sup>th</sup> century brick and stone rubble and fragments of timber impressed into its surface. A ceramic drain had been cut from south to north through this area. No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen here.

**2.14 Service trench N** In February 2010 a service trench was excavated for the water and electricity supplies to the development. This trench was cut by machine from the southwest corner of the property adjacent to the road running northeast through the garden to enter the barns by the southeast corner of The Old Schoolhouse. The garden slopes up considerably from the road to the former barns. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.95m by 0.4m wide. The topsoil was consistently of about 0.3m depth; at the western end of the trench, the topsoil lay above a deposit 0.5m thick of very dark grey humic loam mottled with brown sand, which in turn lay over the natural subsoil of brown sand. About 11m from the western end of the trench, a deposit of light brown sand (also natural) overlay the brown sandy subsoil. At the eastern end of the trench, at the top of the slope, the topsoil lay over a deeper buried topsoil, which extended the full depth of the trench adjacent to the Old Schoolhouse. Here the top of a pit containing 19<sup>th</sup>-century brick and mortar rubble was seen in the base of the trench. No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen in this trench.

## **2.15 The finds**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Description</b>
1013	Pottery	1	39g	Roman	Samian form 37 rim sherd
1017	Pottery	2	58g	20 <sup>th</sup> C	
1020	Tile	1	403g	Romano-British	Tegula fragment
1033	Pottery	5	70g	Romano-British	1 x rim and 1 x body sherd BB II ware; 1 amphora fragment; 2 body sherds orange ware (not Severn Valley)
1037	Pottery	1	2g	Romano-British	Samian-type

### **3 DISCUSSION**

**3.1** Glebe Farm Barns lies in a wide flat-bottomed hollow about 30m wide running from east to west just inside the defences on the southern side of the Roman city. The northern edge of the hollow probably marks the edge of the built-up area of the town, the southern edge the tail of the rampart of the later defences. At some stage this hollow had been allowed to fill with water, and waterlogged deposits accumulated. Field drainage probably in the later post-medieval period had dried the upper level and allowed the development of the barns in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**3.2** The deposits encountered during the watching brief mostly related to the formerly waterlogged ground. The only significant archaeological features were those revealed in the southernmost part of the development site (in cell H) and these consisted of three small pits and a narrow gulley of Romano-British date cut into the natural subsoil.

**3.3** No other significant archaeological features or deposits were seen during the course of the watching brief.

## **4 REFERENCES**

- Hannaford, H R**, 2002: *A Watching Brief at the Parish Room and School House, Wroxeter, Shropshire*, SCC Archaeology Service report No. 206
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- Webster, P**, 1995: *Roman Samian Pottery in Britain*, CBA Practical Handbook in Archaeology No 13
- White, R, and Barker, P**, 1998: *Wroxeter: the Life and Death of a Roman City*, Tempus, Stroud
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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ASSC</b>	Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council
<b>CBA</b>	Council for British Archaeology
<b>HER</b>	Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council
<b>OS</b>	Ordnance Survey
<b>PRO</b>	Public Record Office
<b>SA</b>	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
<b>TSAHS</b>	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
<b>TSAS</b>	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society

## **APPENDIX 1: SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT GLEBE FARM BARNS, WROXETER**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** Wroxeter is situated in central Shropshire, about 7.5km southeast of the centre of Shrewsbury. The modern village lies on the northeast bank of the River Severn, just to the south of the B4380 road, formerly the A5 London to Holyhead Trunk Road (now by-passed). The modern village lies within the site of the Roman city of *Viroconium Cornoviorum*, the fourth largest walled city in the Roman province. The site of the Roman city is a scheduled Ancient Monument (Shropshire County No. 32, "The site of the Roman Town of Wroxeter [Viroconium Cornoviorum] Shropshire). Glebe Farm Barns lie over and just inside the line of the southern arm of the ramparts of the Roman city.

### **2 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

**2.1** It is proposed to carry out underpinning work and excavations for drains and a sewage treatment plant at Glebe Farm Barn, Wroxeter (NGR SJ 563 081). Archaeological monitoring of the excavation of lining pits for the re-lining of a 4" water main in this area in 1999 had demonstrated the survival of deposits associated with the Roman ramparts in the field on the west side of the road (White, 2000). In January 2002 the Archaeology Service, SCC, carried out a watching brief on the installation of a new water supply and telephone line to the School House and the adjoining Parish Rooms. Deposits possibly representing rampart material and the clay and cobble core of the rampart were seen in the base of the trench beneath the modern road and in School House garden (Hannaford, 2002). A further watching brief was carried out at the Old School House in 2009. The top of a layer of clay that may have been associated with the city defences was exposed during ground reduction for a new driveway.

**2.2** It is a requirement of the Scheduled Monument Consent for the proposed works at Glebe Farm Barns that the groundworks be accompanied by the implementation of a programme of archaeological work.

**2.3** The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, has been asked by the developer of the site to prepare a scheme of investigation with a view to undertaking this programme of archaeological work.

### **3 AIMS**

**3.1** The aim of the programme of archaeological work is to allow for the preservation by record of any archaeological remains that are encountered during the works.

### **4 METHODOLOGY**

**4.1** All ground disturbance works associated with the proposed development within the study area will be carried out under archaeological supervision. An archaeological watching brief will be maintained on the excavation of the trenches for the underpinning work and for the drain run across the former farmyard. At the same time the overburden will be removed by machine by the client's building contractors from the 2m x 2m area of the sewage treatment plant. The underlying deposits will then be cleaned, sampled, and recorded archaeologically as necessary, before further excavation is carried out.

**4.2** In the event of significant archaeological features, structures, or deposits being encountered, these shall be investigated and fully recorded prior to their removal or disturbance.

**4.3** The written paper record to be employed is based on that developed by the Central Archaeology Service, English Heritage. The graphic record will comprise 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. Drawn records will be related to Ordnance Survey datum and published boundaries where appropriate. A photographic record will be made comprising 35mm monochrome prints and digital photography as appropriate, with a supporting index.

**4.4** On completion of fieldwork a site archive will be prepared to the minimum acceptable standard defined in English Heritage's Management of Archaeological Projects (Map 2). The

written, drawn and photographic data will be catalogued and cross-referenced and a summary produced. The artefactual and ecofactual data will be processed, catalogued and cross-referenced and summaries produced. After an initial assessment any unstratified non-diagnostic artefacts and ecofacts and non-diagnostic samples will be discarded. Further dispersal of artefacts and ecofacts will be in line with the collection policy of the recipient repository and will be documented in the archive.

**4.5** Assessment will be based on the site archive. Any artefacts and ecofacts which require specialist assessment will be submitted for such work.

**4.6** An illustrated report will be produced for the client which will detail the aims and results of the project. A non-technical summary and details of the location and size of the archive will be included. The client will be provided with two copies of the report. Further copies will be deposited with English Heritage, the Historic Environment Officer Shropshire Council and the Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council. The report will be prepared within 6 months of the completion of fieldwork.

**4.7** An OASIS (Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations) data capture form will be completed on the completion of the project.

## **5 RESOURCES AND PROGRAMMING**

### **5.1 Staff**

Project Officer: Hugh Hannaford, MIFA  
(Project management, liaison with client, monitoring of ground disturbance works, finds assessment, report preparation)  
Assistant archaeologist

**5.2** Timetable: It is anticipated that the groundworks will require archaeological monitoring for up to 3 working days during the course of the development. It is proposed to carry out these works in late October / November 2009.

## **6 REFERENCES**

**Hannaford, H R**, 2002: *A Watching Brief at the Parish Room and School House, Wroxeter, Shropshire*, SCC Archaeology Service report No. 206

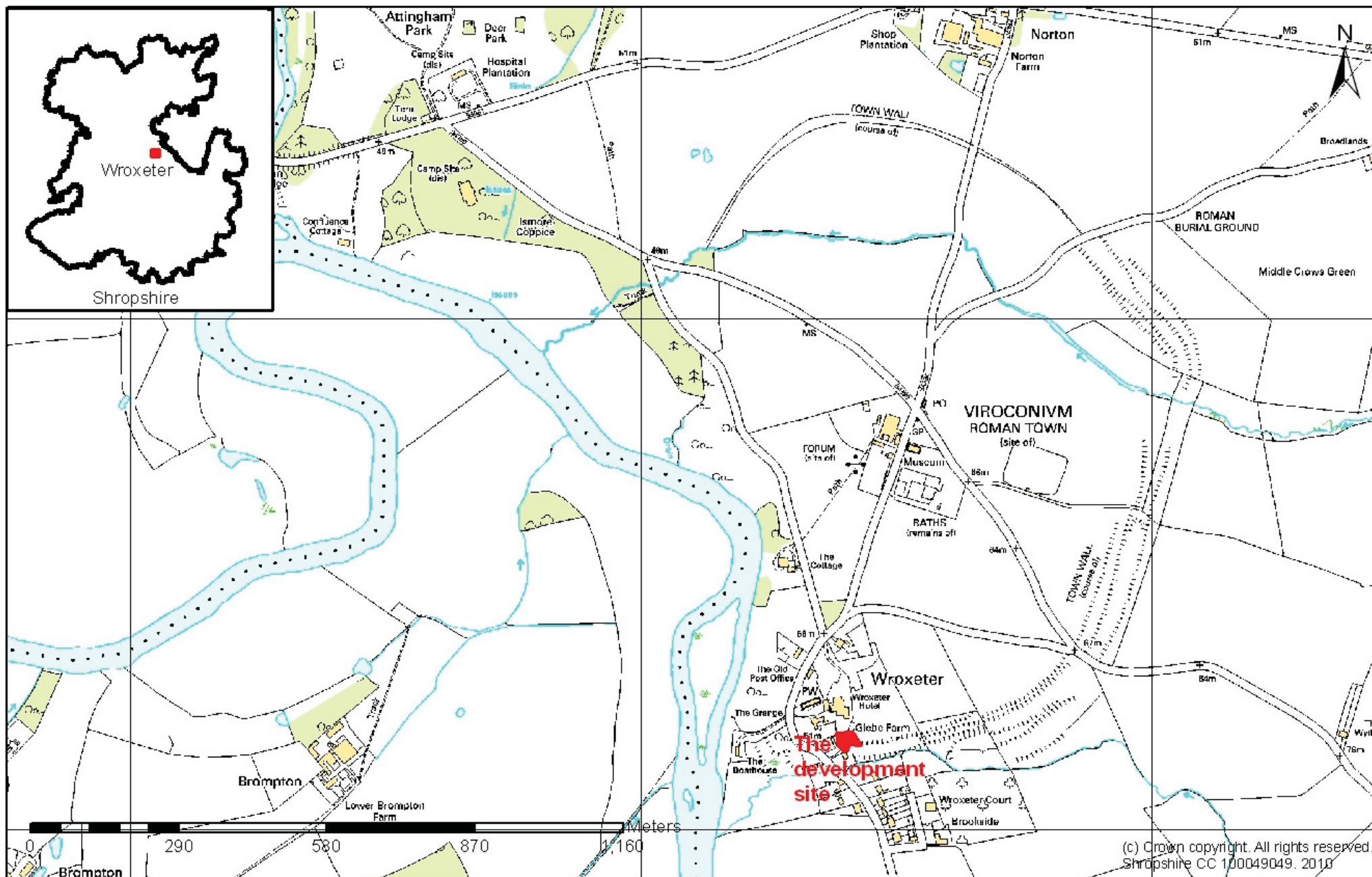
**Hannaford, H R**, 2009: *Archaeological Monitoring of Groundworks at the Old Schoolhouse, Wroxeter, Shropshire, 2009*, SC Archaeology Service report No. 268

**White, R**, 2000: *Final Report On Excavations In Advance Of Water Main Relining At Wroxeter Roman City, Shropshire*, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit Project No. 462.2

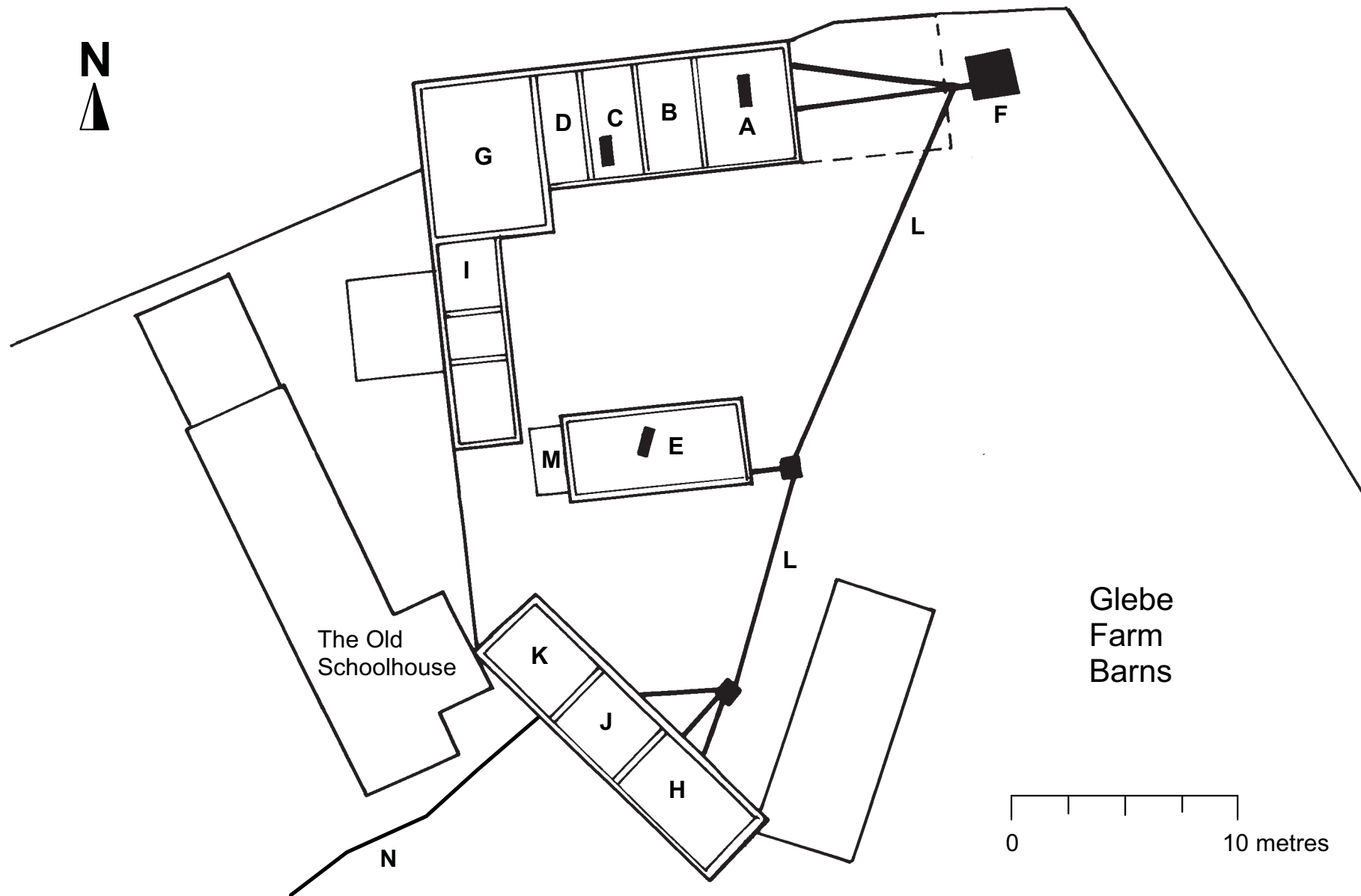
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Community Archaeologist  
Shropshire Council

14<sup>th</sup> October 2009

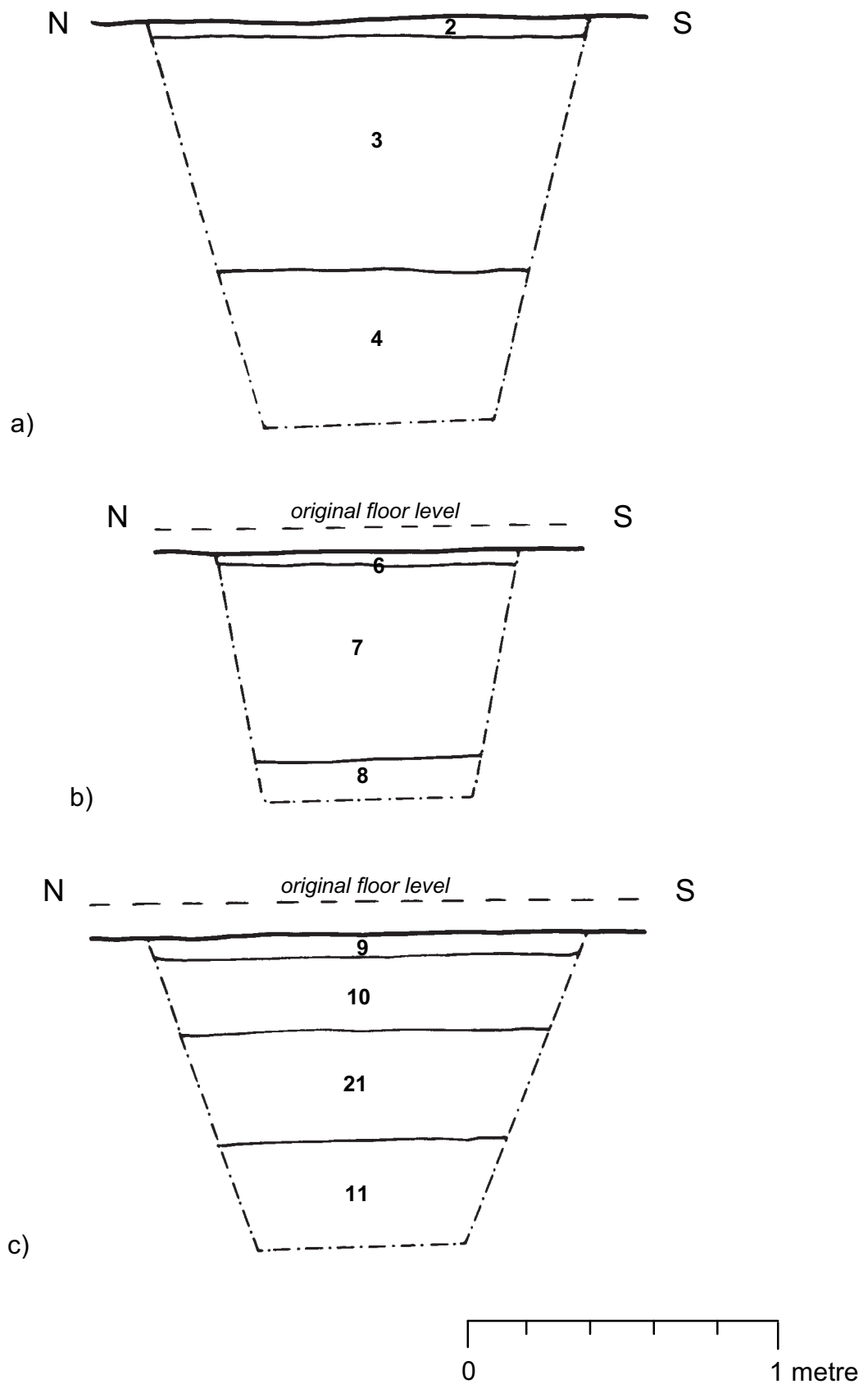
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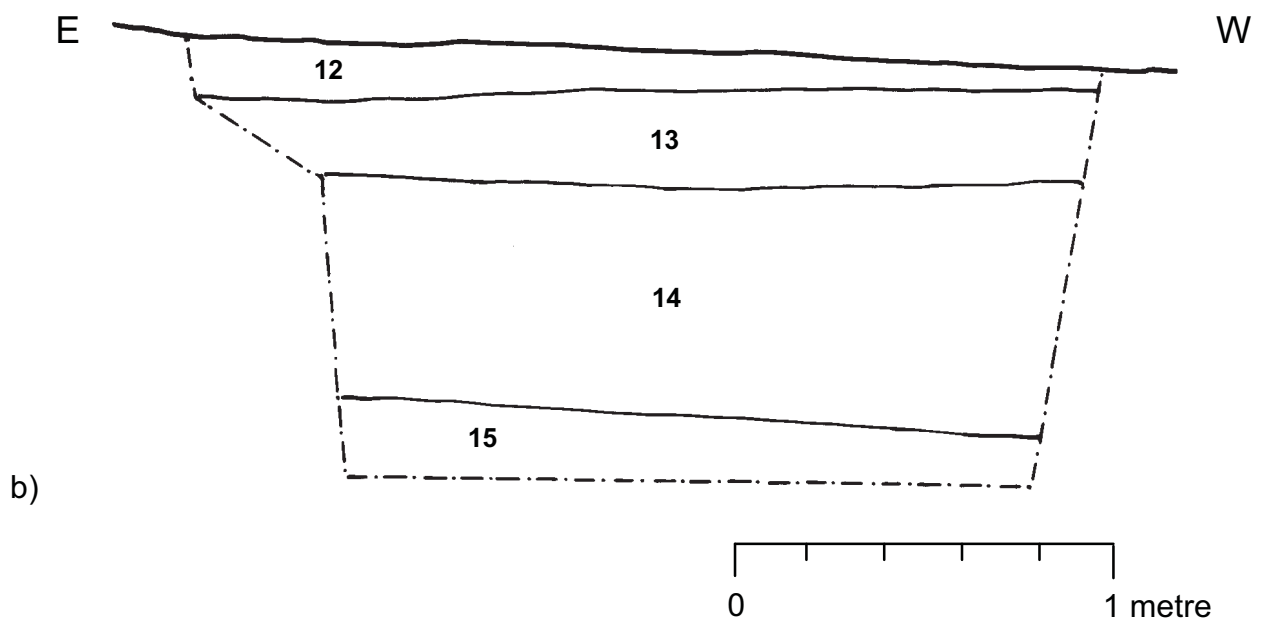
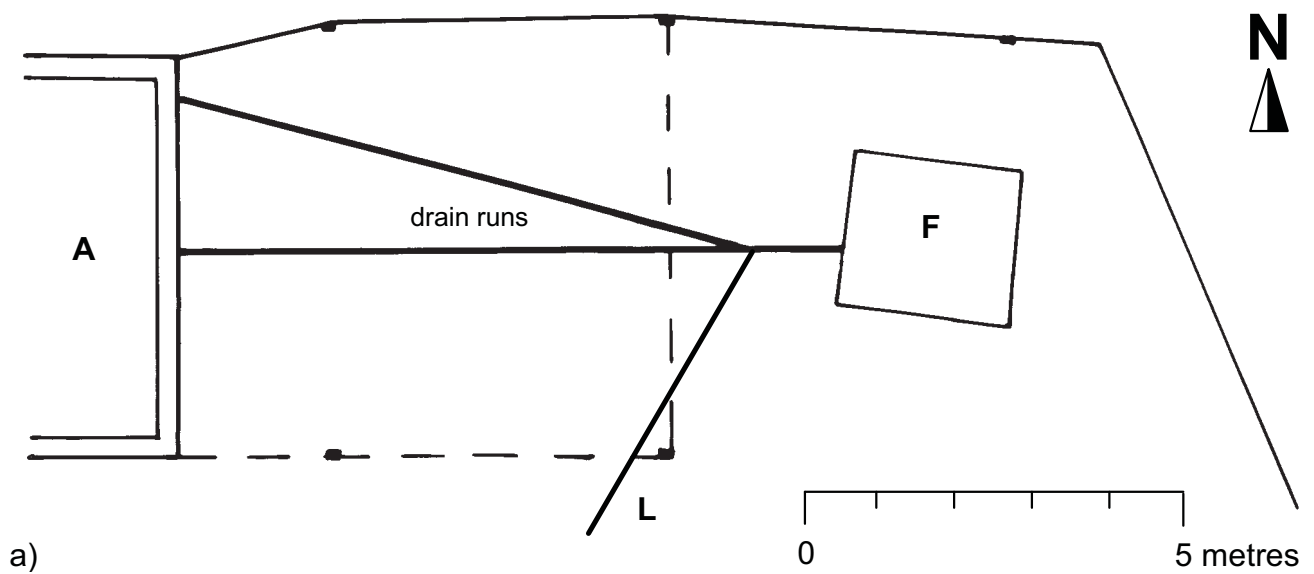


GLEBE FARM BARNS, WROXETER 2009  
Figure 2: Site plan; scale 1:250



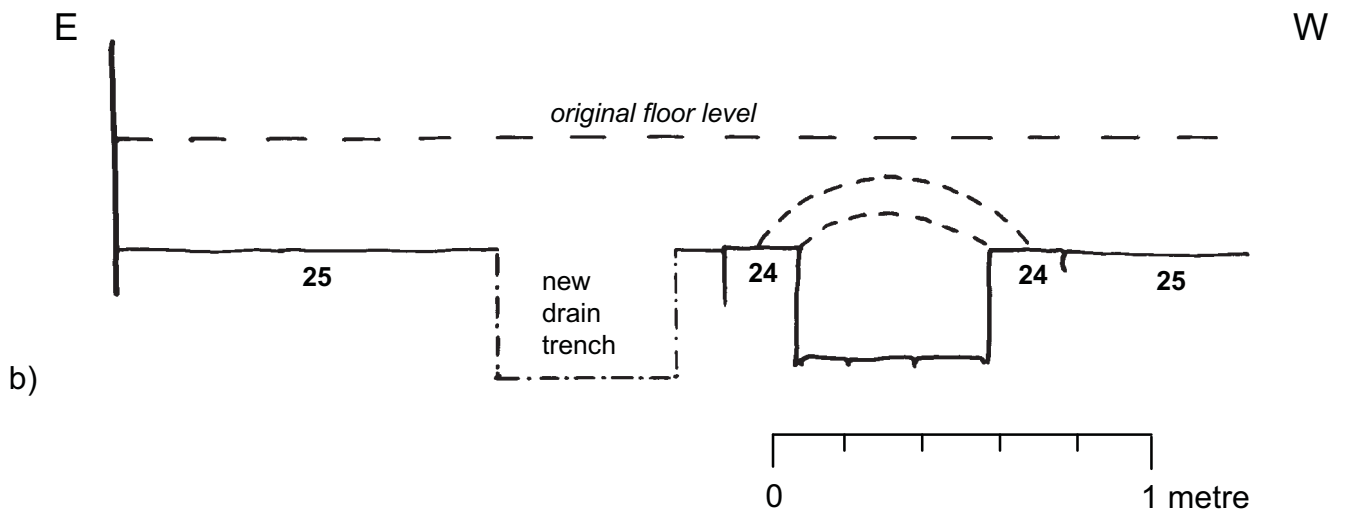
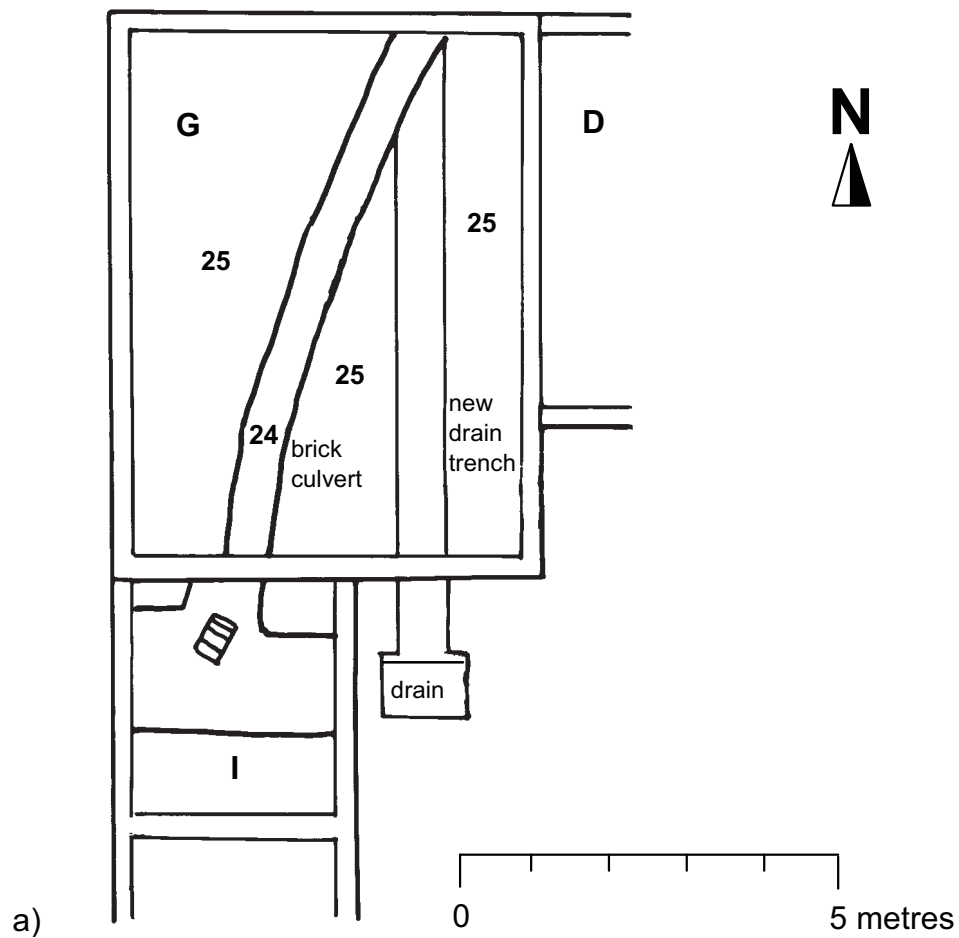
GLEBE FARM BARNS, WROXETER 2009

Figure 3: West-facing sections through the test pits in cell A (a), cell C (b), and barn E (c); scale 1:20



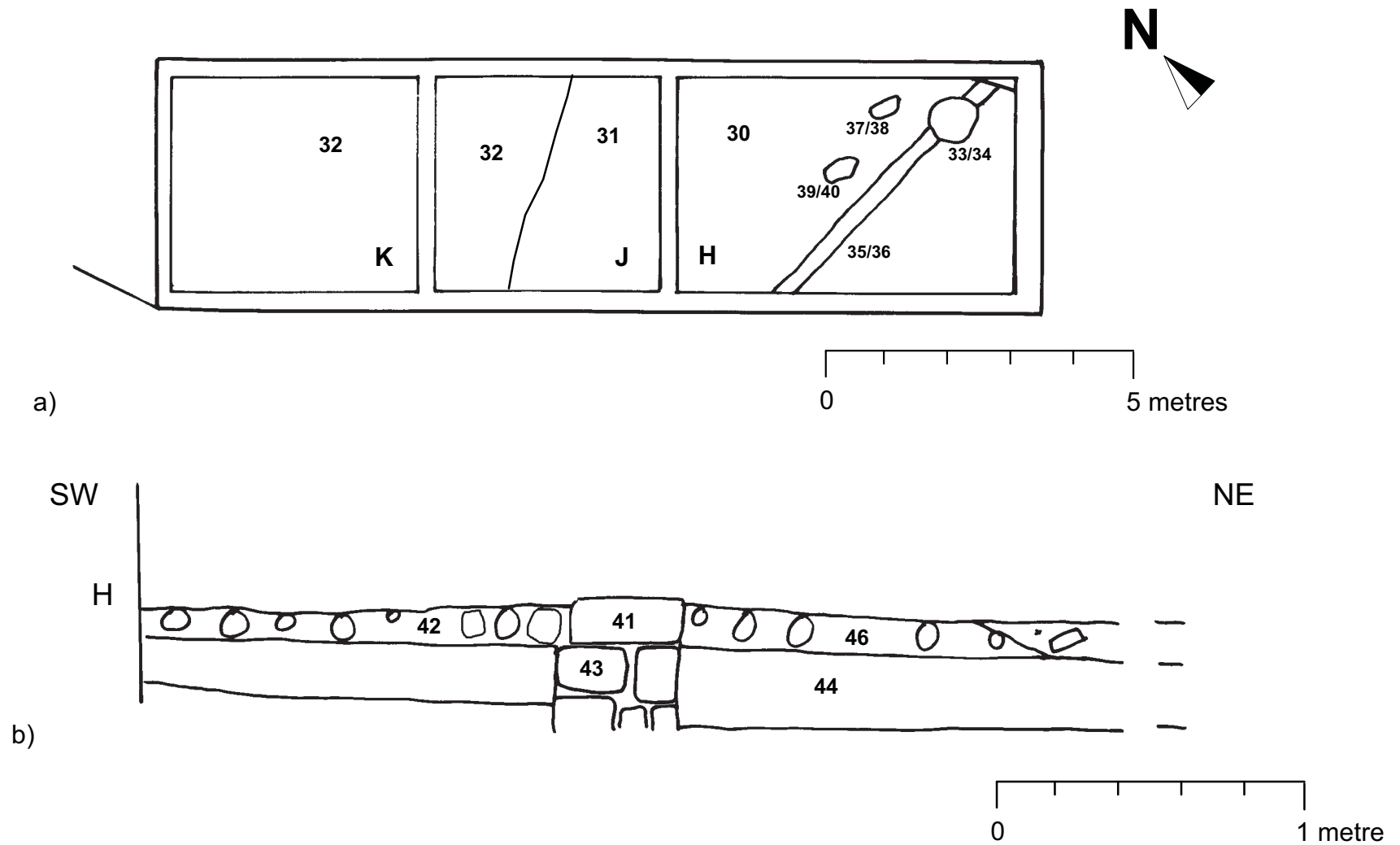
GLEBE FARM BARNS, WROXETER 2009

Figure 4: a) Location of sewage treatment plant pit F, scale 1:100; b) north-facing section through the pit F, scale 1:20



GLEBE FARM BARN, WROXETER 2009

Figure 5: Cells G and I a) plan view, 1:100 scale; b) north-facing section across the culvert, scale 1:20



GLEBE FARM BARNS, WROXETER 2009

Figure 6: a) Cells H, J, & K, plan view, scale 1:100; b) main drainage trench L, southeast-facing section, scale 1:20



Photo 1: Glebe Farm Barns at the start of the development



Photo 2: Test pit in cell A



Photo 3: Romano-British features in cell H



Photo 4: The wall in the farmyard outside cell H

## GLEBE FARM BARNs, WROXETER 2009