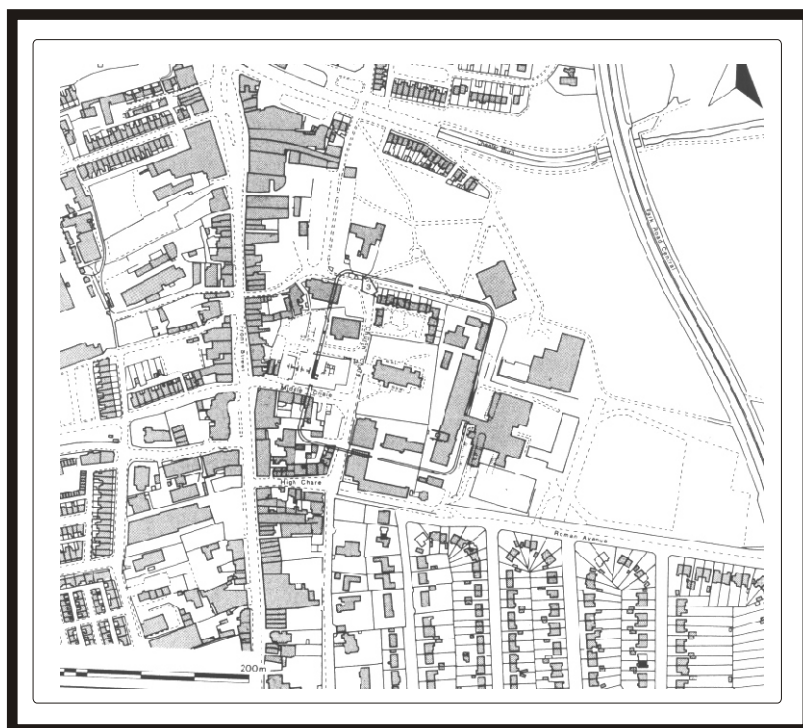


Park View School, Chester-le-Street, County Durham.

An Archaeological Watching Brief



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**Park View School, Chester-le-Street
County Durham**

Archaeological Watching Brief

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Archaeology Department
Tyne and Wear Museums
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The watching brief was undertaken during the insertion of a flood relief pipeline running from the north-eastern corner of the playing field of Park View School. Chester-le-Street, for 300m in a southerly direction to 25 Lindom Avenue (NZ 2784 5100). A watching brief was required on these works as the line of the pipeline ran roughly parallel, and 200m east of the eastern defences of the Roman fort at Chester-le-Street (Concangis SAM 105), with the potential for adding to the existing knowledge of the vicus in these areas.

An east-west metalled road was located to the east of the school with Roman pottery on its upper surface. No buildings were identified to either side of the road, although owing to difficult conditions for observation in a trench of limited width, the presence of timber buildings cannot be ruled out. However at a distance of 55m to the north of the road the corner of a building with substantial clay and cobble foundations was located. The presence of pottery of Roman date within the foundation and in the layer through which the foundation trench was cut strongly suggest that the structure is also of Roman date. The location of the road and structure are significant contributions to the developing understanding of the vicus and setting of the Roman fort at Chester-le-Street.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Project

1.1.1 The project comprised the insertion of a flood relief pipeline running from the north-eastern corner (NZ 2786 5118) of the playing field of Park View School Chester-le-Street, for 300m in a southerly direction, running across Roman Avenue and down to 25 Lindom Avenue (NZ 2784 5100). A watching brief was required on these works as the line of the pipeline ran roughly parallel, and 200m east of the eastern defences of the Roman fort at Chester-le-Street (Concangis SAM 105), with the potential for adding to the existing knowledge of the *vicus* in these areas.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The fort at Chester-le-Street is thought to have been continuously occupied from the later-second century to the end of the Roman period. However excavations at Church Chare in 1990 and at Park View School (1993) identified an earlier clay and timber fort belonging to the first half of the second century AD. There is evidence of considerable extra-mural activity in the Roman period, and it would be typical for an extensive *vicus* to have surrounded the fort, at least until the later-third century. A summary account of interventions and observations including those from the *vicus* is contained in the Archaeological and Historical Background of the project design (Appendix 3).

2.2 Two trial pits were excavated in advance of the laying of the pipe (TWM 2004). In the northernmost trial pit an east-west gully was located cutting the natural subsoil. There was no dating evidence, but its clean fill of redeposited natural clay, suggests that it may be a feature of prehistoric or Roman date.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any previously unknown archaeological deposits disturbed during the process of pipe laying. More specifically the proximity of the pipeline to the fort of *Congancis* meant that there was the potential for adding to the existing knowledge of the *vicus* to the east and south-east of the fort.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 The watching brief was carried out in compliance with all the relevant codes of practice by suitably qualified and experienced staff and to the standards set out in the Project Design (Appendix 3).

5 RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

5.1 Area east of Park View School

5.1.1 Topsoil-stripping - post-medieval trackways

5.1.1.1 In advance of the laying of the pipe a topsoil strip 95.5m by 30m in area with projecting arms at northern and southern ends was undertaken. The topsoil strip consisted of the removal of a 0.30m depth of brown loamy silt (**14**) and a deposit of clinker and ash (**15**) up to 0.20m in depth. Removal of these deposits revealed the foundations of a number of post-medieval trackways (**16**). The trackway foundations varied up to 4m in width and consisted of compressed layers of sandstone fragments and chippings resting on beds of ash and clinker (**18**) (Figure 8). A 1m wide section was excavated through one stretch of foundation, from which pottery of post-medieval date was recovered confirming the date of the trackways.

5.1.2 Pipe Trench

5.1.2.1 Subsequent to the topsoil strip the pipe trench was cut, typically consisting of a trench 0.80m wide and 0.80m deep. Additionally three larger pits (labelled manholes 1-3) up to 5m by 3m and 3m in depth were excavated within this area. The natural subsoil consisting of yellow sandy gravel (**19**) (with interleaving bands of sand and gravel visible at some locations) was traced through these interventions at an average of 0.60m beneath present ground level. Throughout the majority of the pipe trench the natural subsoil was overlain by a brown loam (**17**) 0.30m in depth, clinker and ash deposits (**15**), up to 0.20m in depth, and a loam topsoil (**14**). Archaeological features were identified at two locations; manhole 2 (referred to as Trench 1) and at a point mid-way between manholes 2 and 3 (henceforth Trench 2).

5.1.3 Trench 1

5.1.3.1 In Trench 1 two arms of the foundation of a structure were identified. Although only short stretches of these foundations were exposed it seems most probable that they formed the north-eastern corner of a structure of Roman date.

5.1.3.2 The northern arm of the structure, which was oriented east-west, consisted of a foundation of tightly packed cobbles (**33**) averaging 100mm by 100mm by 80mm in size. The foundation was set in a 0.32m deep construction trench (**47**), cut through a yellow silty sand deposit (**49**) at 0.33m beneath present ground level (14.98m AOD). The cobbles (**33**) were tightly packed and set in a firm pink-orange clay (**34**). The foundation had a flat level upper surface and survived to a width of 1m, its northern side having been disturbed by the cut for manhole 2. This foundation was overlain by brown loam (**35**) and a black ash and clinker deposit (**22**).

5.1.3.3 The eastern arm of the structure, which was oriented north-south, was set in a 0.31m deep trench (44) cut through an orange-yellow silty sand (43). The foundation consisted of tightly packed cobbles (46) averaging 100mm by 100mm by 80mm in size, set in a pink-orange clay (45). The foundation was 0.80m in width, 0.32m in depth and lay at 0.28m beneath present ground level (14.74m AOD). One sherd of samian pottery was recovered from the foundation (46). Three sherds of pottery of Roman date were recovered from the upper surface of the layer (43) through which the foundation was cut. However as this layer was unsealed and disturbed by intrusive activity the three sherds of pottery cannot be used to provide dating evidence for the construction of the building.

5.1.4 Trench 2

5.1.4.1 An east-west metalled road (40=31) was identified in Trench 2 and was constructed directly above the natural subsoil (42). The metalled surface was constructed from pebbles and small sandstone fragments averaging 60mm by 60mm by 40mm in size and lay at 0.52m beneath present ground level (13.67m AOD). The metalled road was 3.50m in width and was a uniform depth of 0.10m, with no evidence for a camber. Following consultation with the Assistant County Archaeology Officer two 1m square sondages were opened to the west of the pipe trench to expose the northern and southern limit of the road in order to look for evidence of roadside gullies or timber structures fronting onto the road. Despite a careful examination no trace of either structures or gullies were located within the sondages or the main pipe trench. However, it is important to note that evidence for timber structures is often ephemeral and that their presence cannot be excluded with certainty given the narrowness of the pipe trench and the speed with which the pipe trench was excavated. The road (40=31) was overlain by a grey loam silt (38=30), 0.20m in depth, and a brown-orange silty loam topsoil (37), 0.40m in depth. Several sherds of abraded pottery of Roman date, with no artefactual evidence of later date, were recovered from the upper surface of the road (40=31) (Appendix 2). Pottery and tile of Roman date (and a single sherd of prehistoric pottery) were recovered from the layer (38=30) sealing the road.

5.3 Lindom Avenue

5.3.1 The pipe trench was continued across Roman Avenue and south for a distance of 100m along Lindom Avenue. No deposits of archaeological significance were located in this stretch of the pipe trench. The natural subsoil (19) lay at an average of 0.60m beneath present ground level, being overlain by a brown loam (59) 0.25m in depth and the present road and its foundation (60), of a combined depth of 0.35m.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 The discovery of a road and the foundation of a structure of Roman date mark a significant contribution to the developing understanding of the setting of the Roman fort at Chester-le-Street. The discovery of Roman pottery on the upper surface of the

road, suggest that it is of Roman date. If its east-west alignment is projected the road can be reconstructed as heading for the south-eastern corner of the fort, although clearly further observations would be required to fix its line with confidence. No buildings were identified to either side of the road, although owing to difficult conditions for observation in a trench of limited width, the presence of timber buildings lining this road cannot be ruled out. However at a distance of 55m to the north of the road the corner of a building with substantial clay and cobble foundations was located. The presence of pottery of Roman date within the foundation and in the layer through which the foundation trench was cut strongly suggest that the structure is also of Roman date. Although the preservation of this structure was poor, with no floor or occupation surfaces surviving, its discovery is important in showing the potential extent of the *vicus*. Although further work would be required to test this hypothesis it is possible that this structure fronted onto a road leading from the eastern gate of the fort. No deposits suitable for environmental analysis were recovered during the watching brief.

6.2 The pottery and tile assemblage, although small, represents a valuable contribution, providing an indication of the quantity of artefactual material associated with the *vicus* that is likely to survive (Appendix 2). A number of sherds of pottery of Roman date were recovered from the upper surface of the metalled road and from the layer immediately overlying it. Although many of the sherds were much abraded the relatively high number of sherds recovered in relation to the small area sampled does suggest a density of activity, perhaps indicating that structures associated with the *vicus* extended into this area. In terms of dating evidence the pottery from the upper surface of the road is consistent with a 3rd century date for the use of the road with Nene-valley colour-coated ware and Black-burnished ware 2 being present. From the area of the road there was a noted absence of later wares (late 3rd/4th Century), by which time the majority of *vici* are thought to have gone out of use. A sherd of Samian of 2nd century date from a wall foundation provides a TPQ for the building located in Trench 1.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

TWM (2004), Parker, J. - An Archaeological Watching Brief at Park View School, Chester-le-Street

Appendix 1: Context List

Context	Description
14	loam
15	clinker and ash
16	post-medieval trackway
17	loam
18	foundation material for 16
19	natural subsoil
20	brick spread
21	modern spread
22	clinker and ash
23	modern spread
24	modern spread
25	natural subsoil
26	natural subsoil
27	cut of modern service
28	modern service
29	loam
30	silty loam=38
31	metalled surface = 40
32	natural subsoil
33	wall foundation
34	bonding for 33
35	loam
36	natural subsoil
37	loam
38	grey loam silt=30
39	natural subsoil
40	metalled surface = 31
41	sandy silt
42	natural subsoil
43	orange sandy silt
44	construction trench
45	bonding for 46
46	wall foundation
47	construction trench
48	brown-orange sandy silt
49	orange-yellow sandy silt
50	modern layer
51	modern layer
52	brown-orange sandy silt

53	modern layer
54	modern layer
55	natural subsoil
56	cancelled
57	modern layer
58	clinker and ash
59	loam
60	road

Appendix 2: Finds List

15	clinker and ash	1 piece of clay pipe 5 sherds of pottery of Roman date (1 Samian; 1 Calcite-gritted ware; 3 other)
18	track foundation	1 piece of clay pipe
29	loam	1 sherd of pottery of Roman date
30=38	silty loam	1 sherd of pottery of prehistoric date 11 sherds of pottery of Roman date (1 Samian; 1 Mancetter-hartshill mortarium; 8 other)
31=40	metalled surface	14 fragments of tile 16 sherds of pottery of Roman date (3 Samian; 2 Nene-valley colour-coated ware; 2 Blackburnished ware II, 9 other)
43	layer	8 fragments of tile (2 tegulae) 3 sherds of pottery of Roman date
46	wall foundation	1 sherd of pottery of Roman date (Samian) 2 fragments of tile
48	brown silty sand	1 sherd of medieval date (green-glazed)

n.b a scrap of lead was recovered during the watching brief that was initially thought to be a Roman lead sealing, however on further inspection this artefact proved to be modern in date.

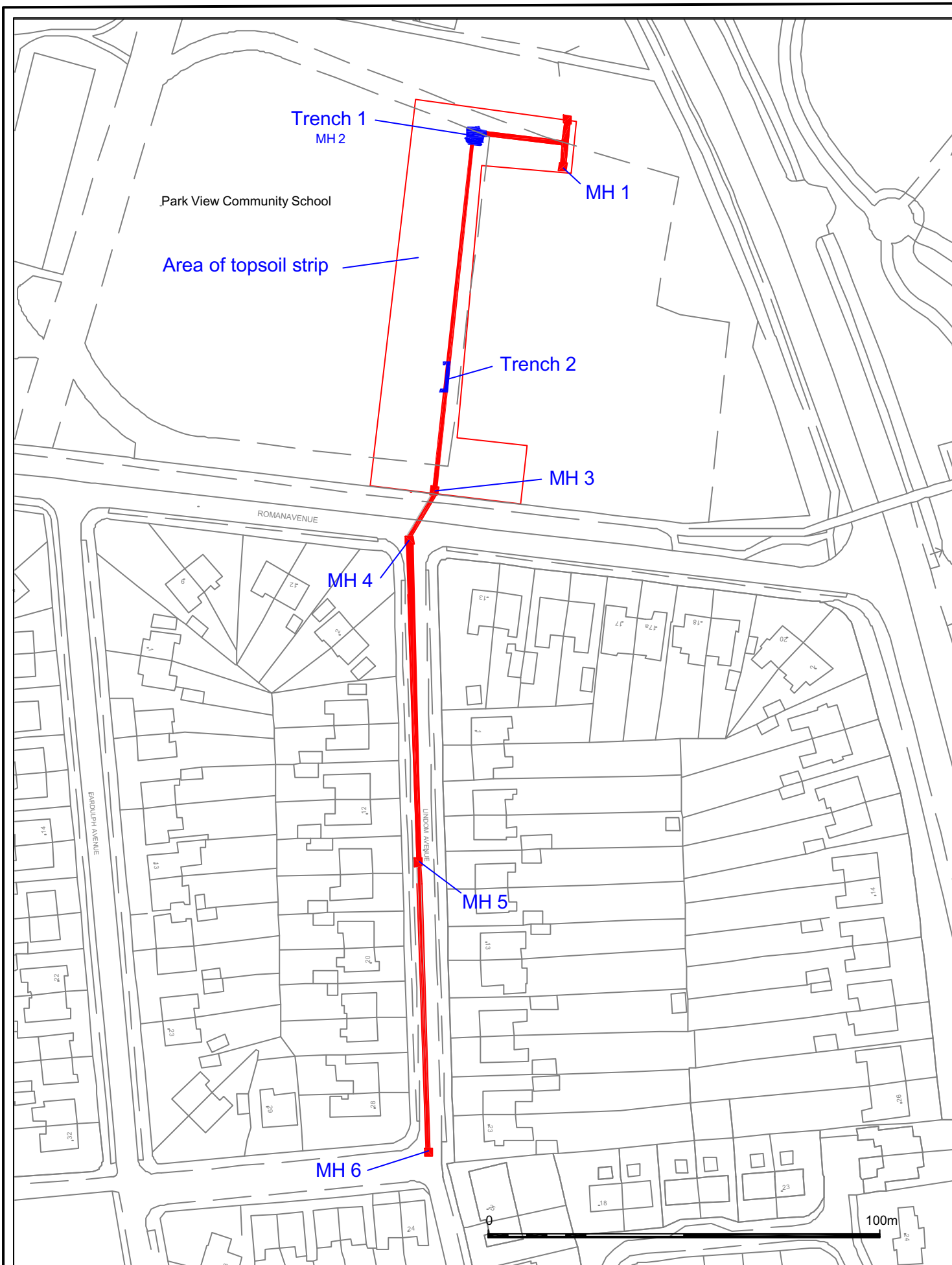


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Figure 1: General Location of Site

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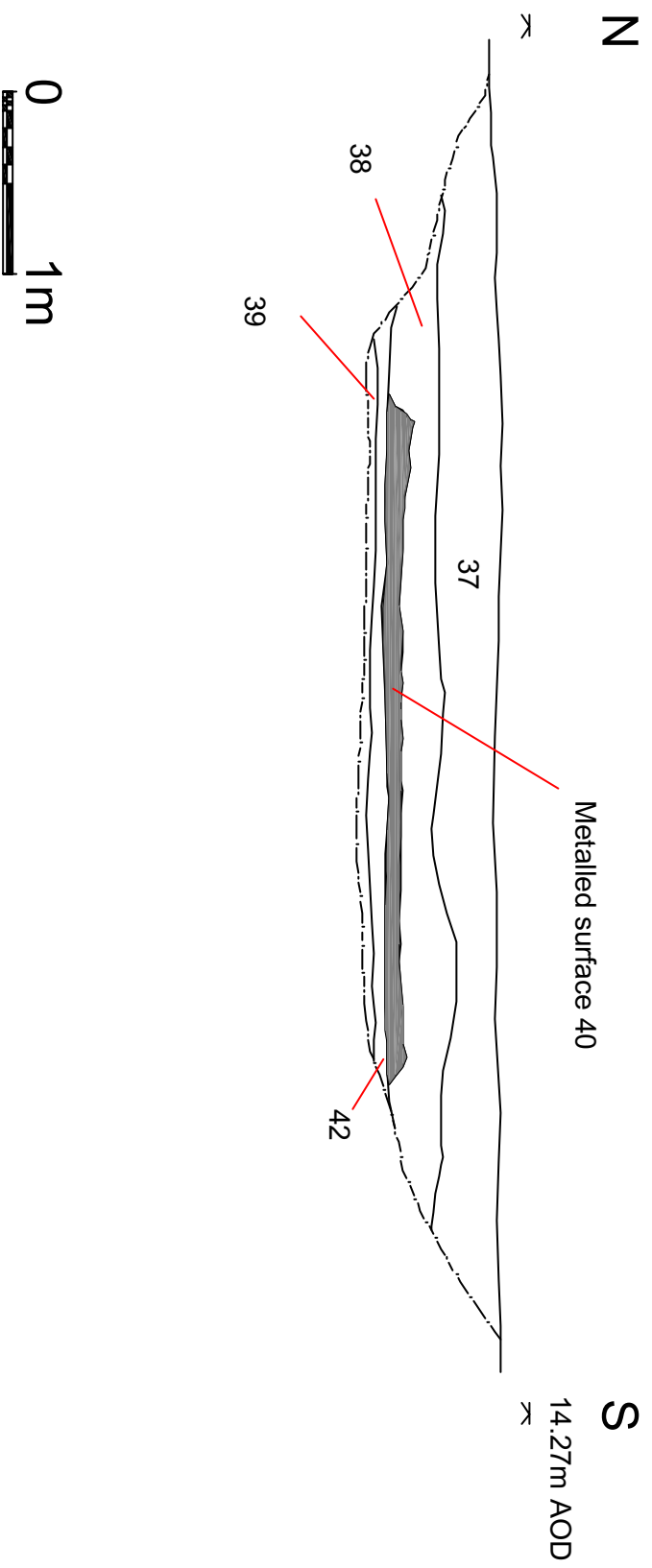
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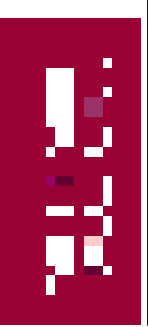
Figure 2: Plan of study area





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Figure 3: Trench 2, west facing section showing metalled surface 40.



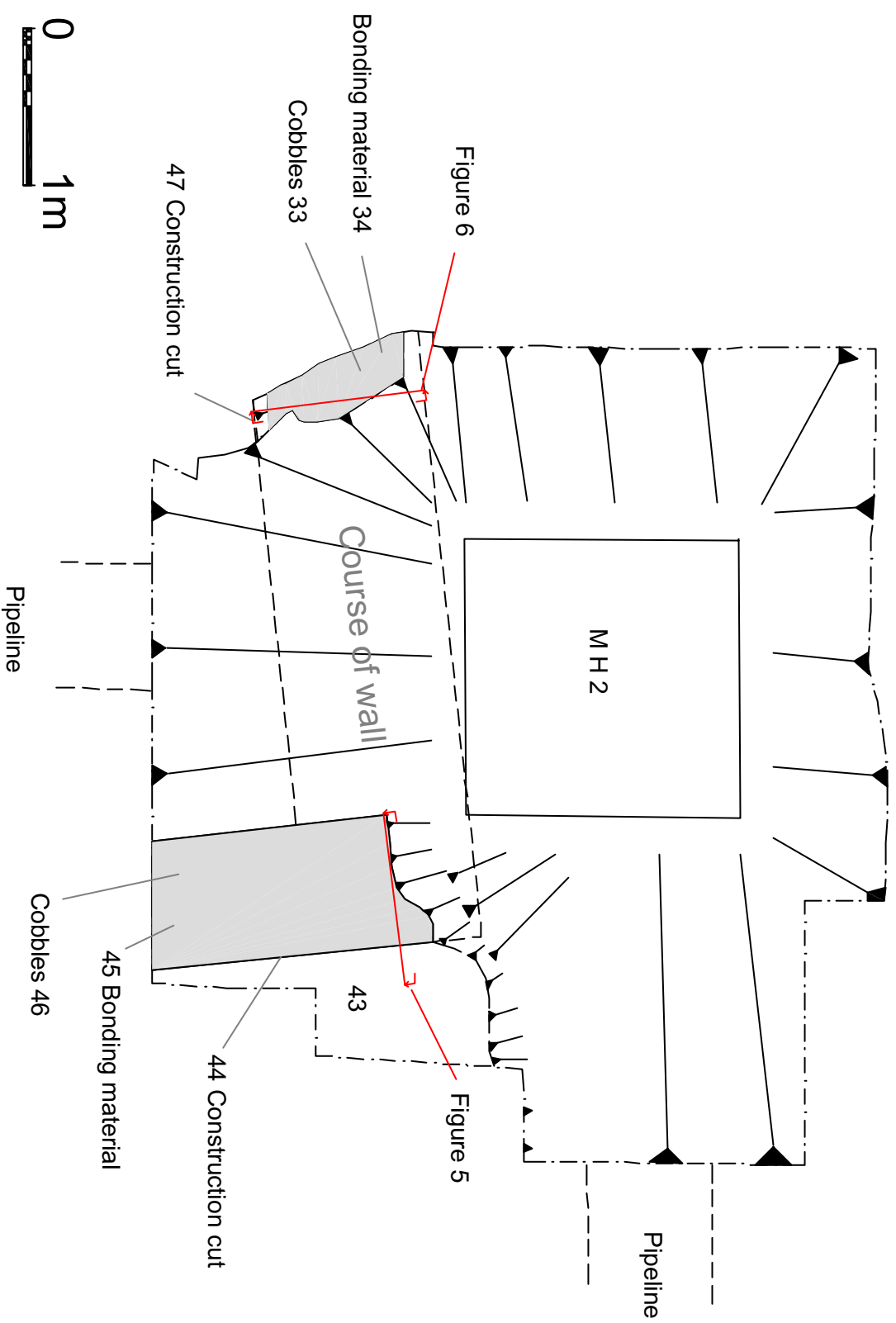
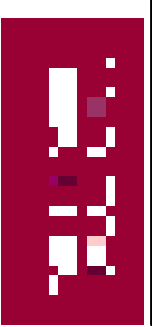
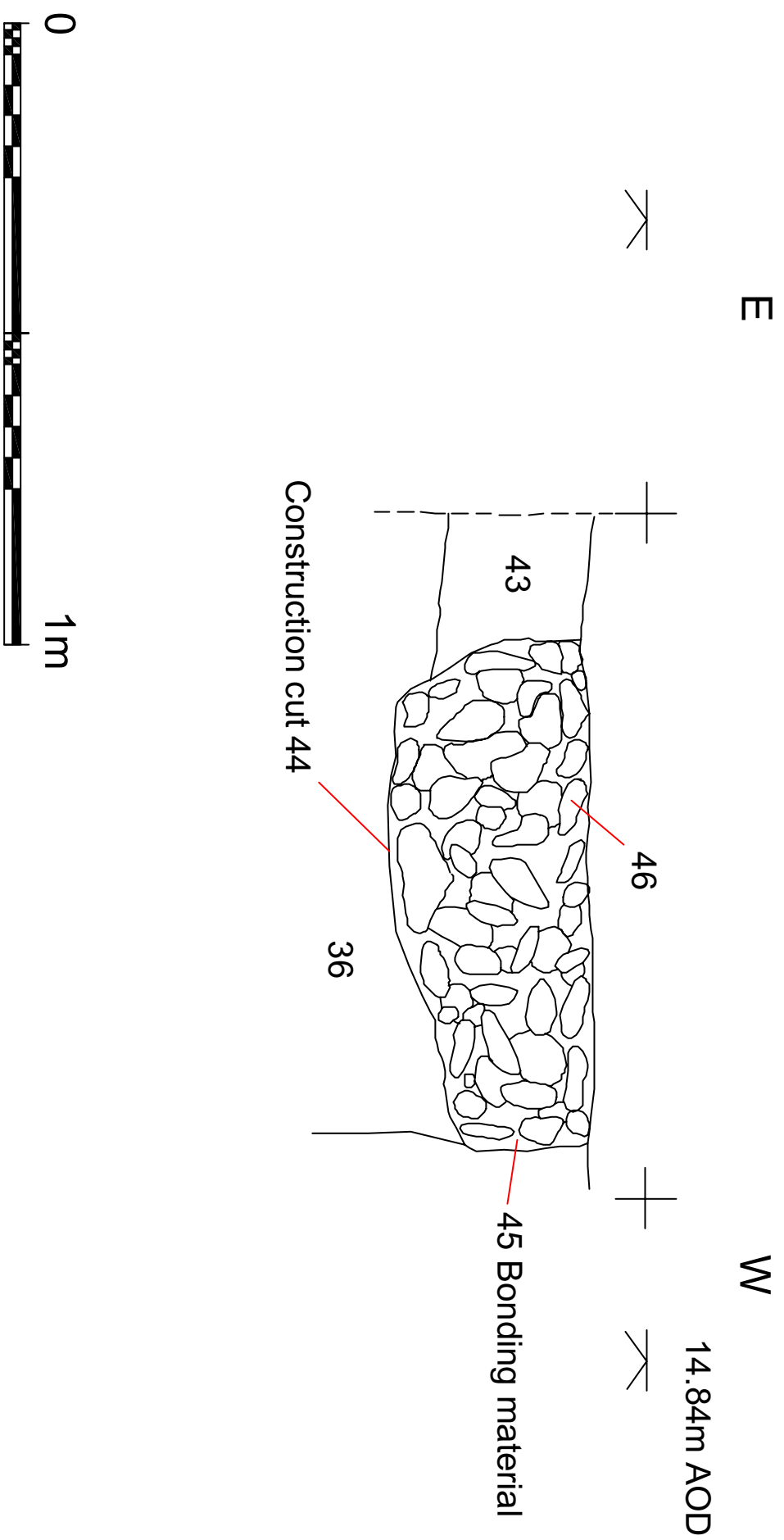


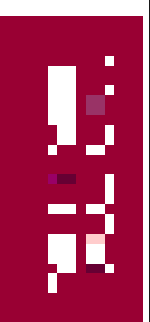
Figure 4: Plan of Trench 1

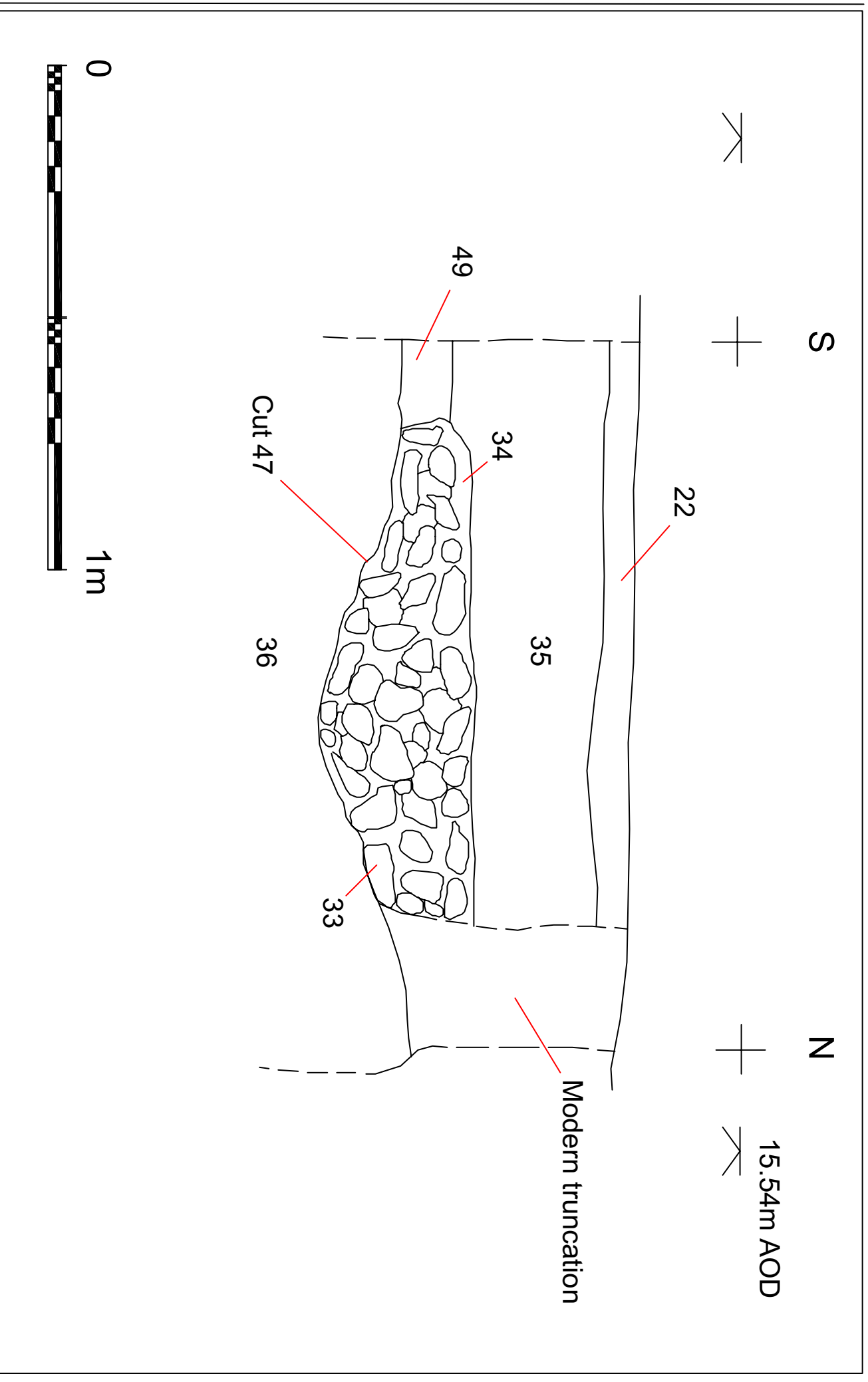




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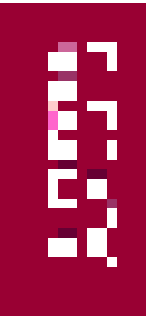
Figure 5: Trench 1, north facing section showing cobbled foundation

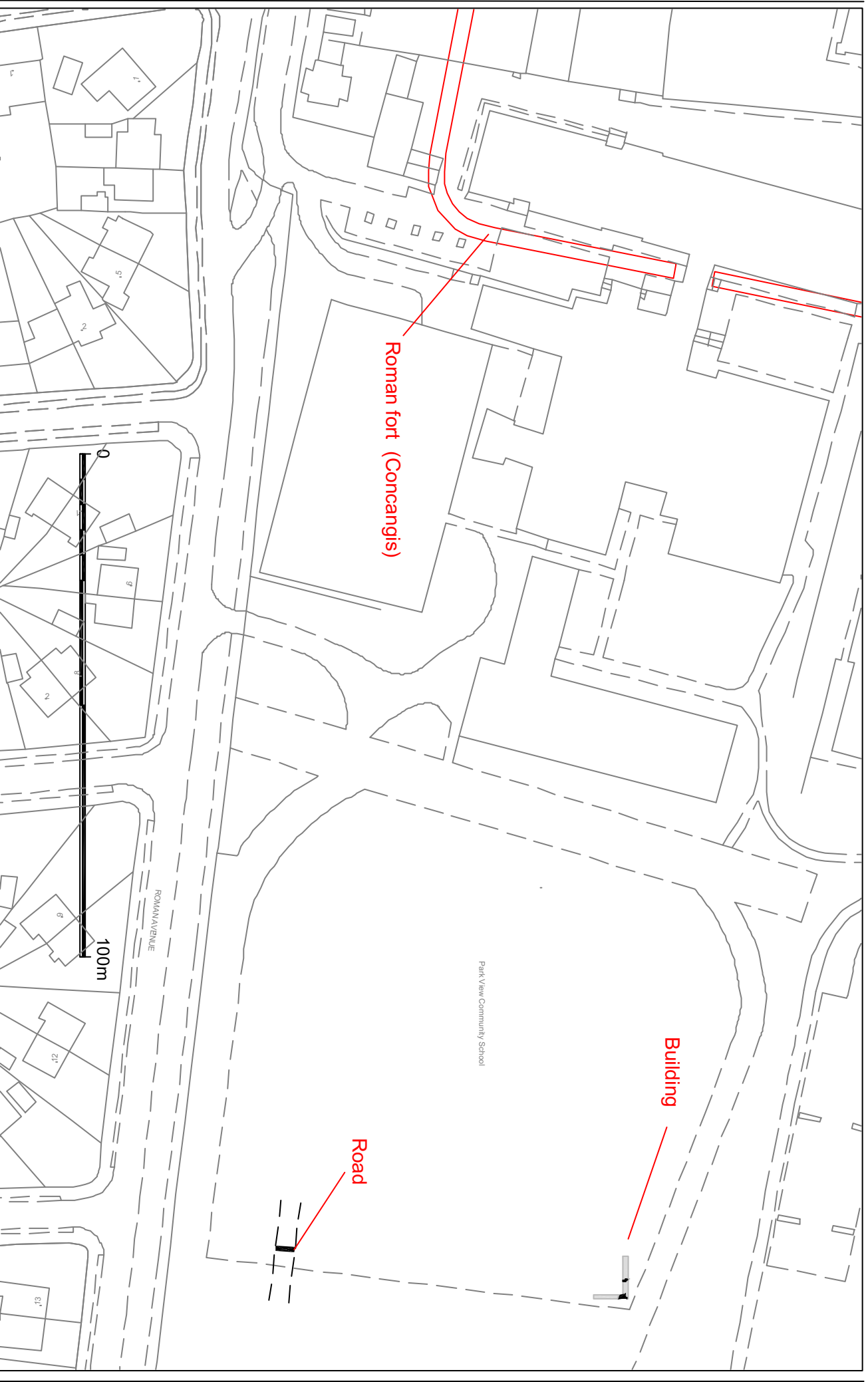




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Figure 6: Trench 1, east facing section showing cobbled foundation



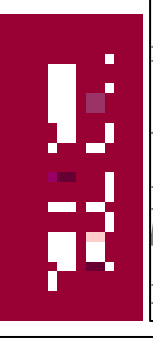


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Figure 7: Plan showing location of Roman fort, road and corner of building.



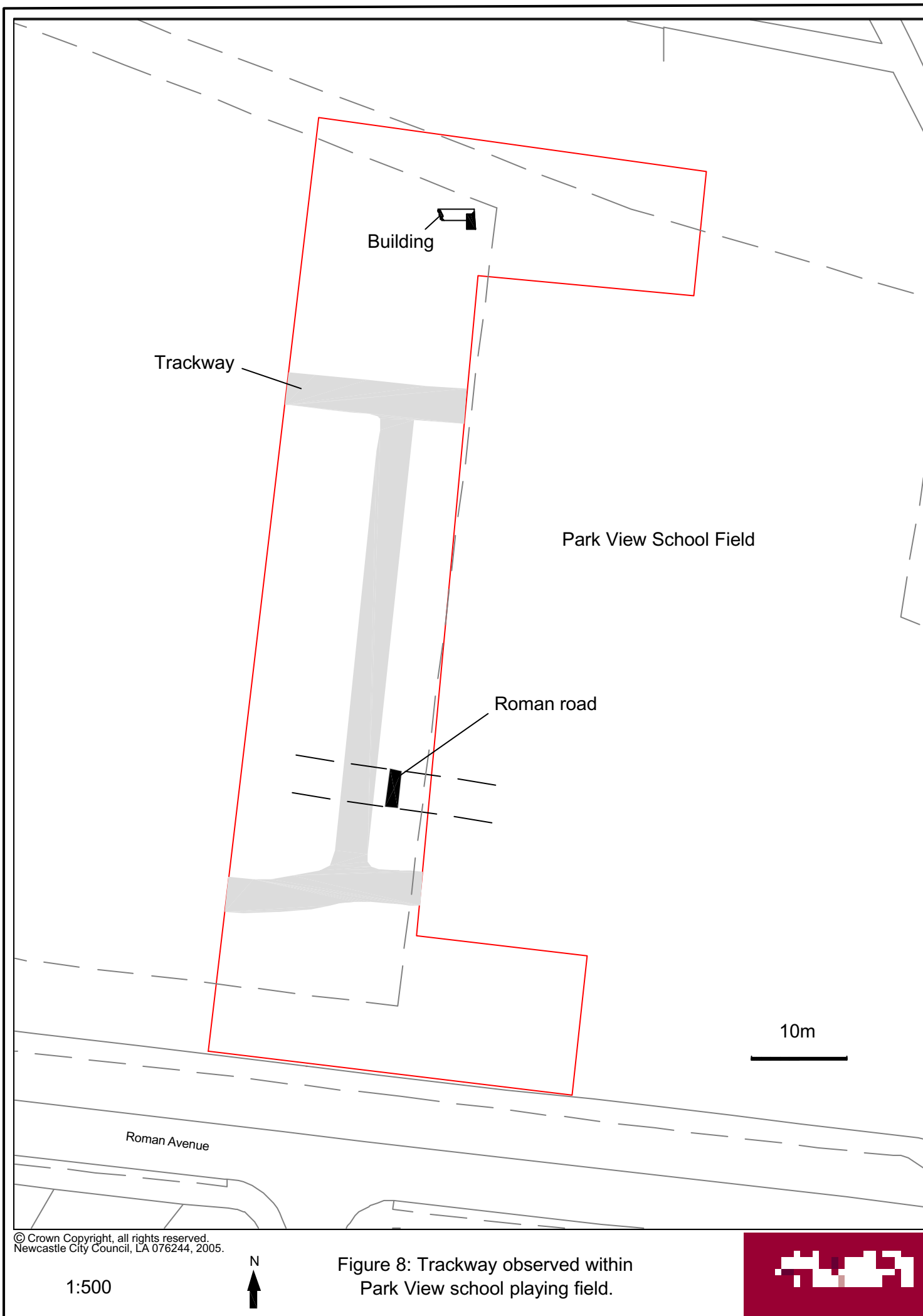




Plate 1: Wall foundation 46 in trench 1.



Plate 2: Wall foundation 33 in trench 1.



Plate 3: Sondage in trench 2 (southern side), showing metallised surface.



Plate 4: Close up picture of metallised surface in trench 2 (southern side).



Photo scale = 0.50m

Plate 5: Sondage in trench 2 (northern side), showing metallised surface.



Photo scale = 1m

Plate 6: Metallised surface in the section of trench 2.