



Source Number 23557 Event Number 6925
Asset Number
Artefact Number Consultation

**Archaeological Watching Brief
At Park View School
Car Park Extension,
Chester-le-Street
Co. Durham**



**Archaeology Section
Cultural Services
Durham County Council**

November 2003

Report No. 2003/05

**Archaeological Watching Brief At
Park View School Car Park Extension,
Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham**

Executive Summary:

Archaeological observation and recording during the construction of a car park extension and associated drains at Park View School located Roman deposits between 0.70-1.30m below ground level.

1.0 Introduction

1.0 The County Archaeology Section, County Durham, was commissioned by *Service Direct* on behalf of Park View Comprehensive School, Chester-le-Street, to carry out an archaeological watching brief on all groundworks associated with a new car park extension off Roman Avenue. The watching brief was carried out by Lee White, Assistant Archaeology Officer in July 2003. The site conditions were hot and dry.

1.2 The watching brief was required as a planning condition to mitigate the impact of the car park on the possible Roman remains which are known to be in the area. The site of the car park is within the *Vicus* (settlement) of *Concangis* Roman Fort.

2.0 Site Location And Historical Background

2.1 The site of the car park extension lies to the south-east of the tennis courts on the southern side of the Park View School complex at Chester-le-Street. Access to the site is from Roman Avenue, opposite house No.6. The central grid reference is NZ 27748 51211.

2.2 The site's geology is characterised by underlying Carboniferous Coal Measures covered by alluvial deposits.

2.3 The site of the Roman fort of Chester-le-Street (SMR 2153), believed to have been a cavalry fort founded after A.D. 175, is also known as *Concangis*. The fort lies c.75m to the west of the north-west corner of the development site. Parts of the site are scheduled (SAM 105).

2.4 Recent excavations conducted c.28m to the west of the north-west corner uncovered a metalled surface (Nolan 2001). It was thought that this was a continuation of a similar metalled area recorded during excavations in 1967 (Gillam and Tate 1968) and again in 1978/9 (Evans *et al* 1991).

2.5 Other small scale interventions have occurred in Church Chare (ASUD 1994), Middle Chare (Evans *et al* 1991) and the north-east area of Park View School complex (ASUD 2002; Turnbull 2003) which have also uncovered features relating to the Roman Fort.

3.0 Archaeological Brief

3.1 There was no formal archaeological brief as the work was carried out at short notice by the Archaeology Section, Durham County Council. The work was necessary to mitigate any impacts caused by excavation to level the new car park and by the excavation of associated drains.

3.2 The aim of the watching brief was to record and sample any archaeological features exposed, and primarily to note if deposits relating to the Roman Fort and associated settlement were visible.

4.0 Results

4.1 Car Park Extension

4.1.1 An area of c.968sqm was topsoil stripped by a tracked 360° excavator and JCB machine with toothless ditching buckets. Topsoil was removed to a depth of 350-450mm across the site to create a level surface on which to place a layer of dolomite followed by a asphalt surface.

4.1.2 The topsoil was a dry dark brown-black slightly clayey-sand loam. There were considerable Post Medieval and Modern inclusions such as brick fragments, land drains, general rubbish and blue/white glazed pottery sherds. A small flint blade was found in the topsoil. The area was also subject to disturbance from the roots of several large trees on site. Two gas mains extended approximately north-south along the eastern edge of the site.

4.1.3 No archaeological features were noted during this phase of the work as the area was not stripped down to subsoil level.

4.2 Excavation of Drain and Associated Works

4.2.1 A new drain was excavated along the eastern edge of the car park. This included three drain traps (see Figure 1) – one in each corner and the third in the middle of the eastern edge.

4.2.2 The drain pits were hand excavated to a depth of c.1.20m below the surface of the excavated ground level, or c.1.60m below ground level. They measured c.1.30m x 0.90m. The pits were excavated before the archaeologist was on site; however, two were recorded prior to the drain traps being inserted.

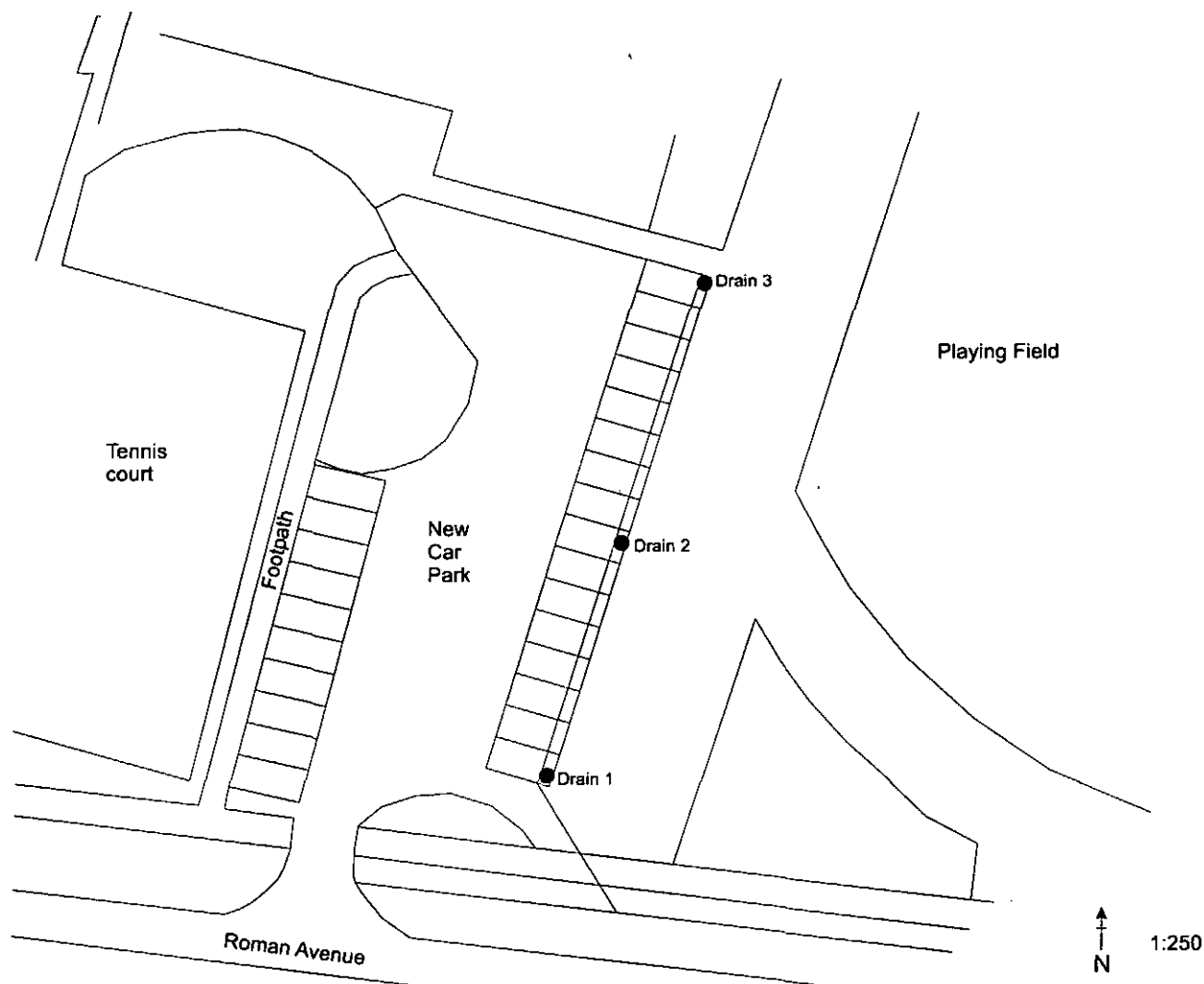


Figure 1: Site Location

4.2.3 Drain Pit 1 (DP1) was located at the south-eastern corner of the car park extension. A pit 1.30m N-S x 0.90m E-W was hand excavated to a depth of 1.58mbgl. The east facing section was recorded (see figure 2).

4.2.4 The top 0.50m of topsoil/plough soil was removed during the excavation for the car park. Context [001] was a continuation of the plough soil to a depth of 0.40-0.45m bgl. Occasional small pebbles and small rootlets were found throughout. A land drain [010] and associated cut [009] was found in the northern part of the section aligned east-west. The plough soil lay directly above context [002] which was a dark brown-grey slightly clayey-gritty matrix. Fragments of coal were present throughout in small quantities. Small rootlets such as found in [001] were still visible in the upper section of the layer. Some small fragments of red brick were noted, and charcoal was seen throughout. Two fragments of pottery were recovered from context [002] – 1 sherd of greyware and 1 possible samian base.

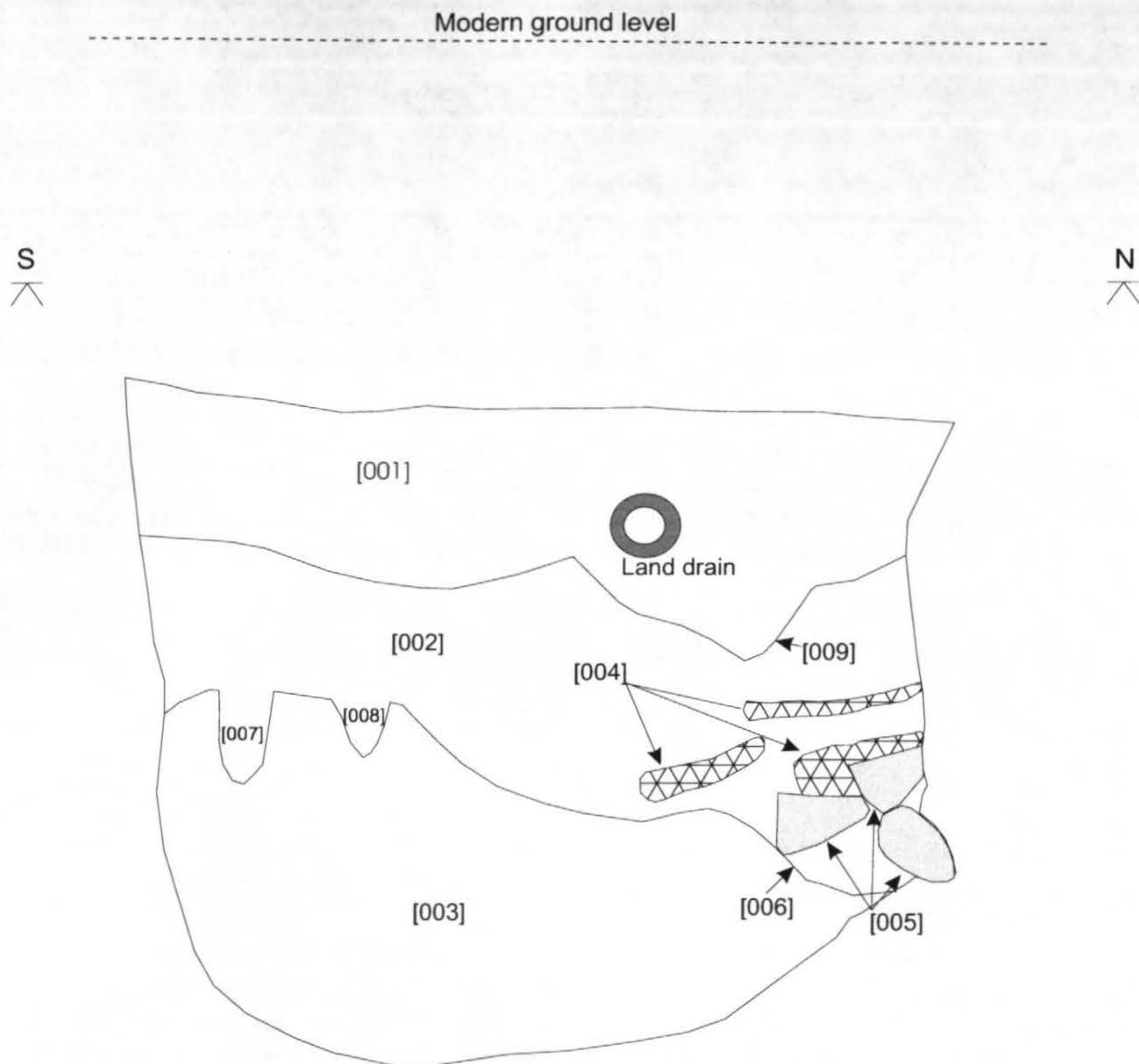


Figure 2: DP1 East facing Section (1:10)

4.2.5 At the northern edge of the section was an area of stonework [005] with a cut [006] which appeared to be extending in a NW-SE direction as similar stonework was noted in the southern corner of the west facing section. The stones appeared to have a thin covering of natural grey clay [004] both above and on the south side. The stones were on average 0.10-0.15m x 0.10m. Cut [006] was fairly steep sided with a shallower cut [011] to the south-west side.

4.2.6 Two steep sided, V-shaped cuts [007] and [008] were recorded at the southern end of the section. Both appear to have been stakeholes cut through the base of [002] into the natural clay [003]. [007] was 0.08m wide at the top and 0.20m in depth. [008] was 0.10m to the north of [007] and was 0.07m wide at the top and 0.10m deep.

4.2.7 Natural light grey clay [003] with orange-brown streaks was found at c.0.60m.

4.2.8 DP2 was located 18.50m north of DP1, 0.50m from the line of the new fence, and was the middle of the three drain pits which were excavated. The pit measured 1.30m north-south, 0.80m east-west and was excavated to a depth of 1.45mbgl. The east facing section was recorded (see figure 3).

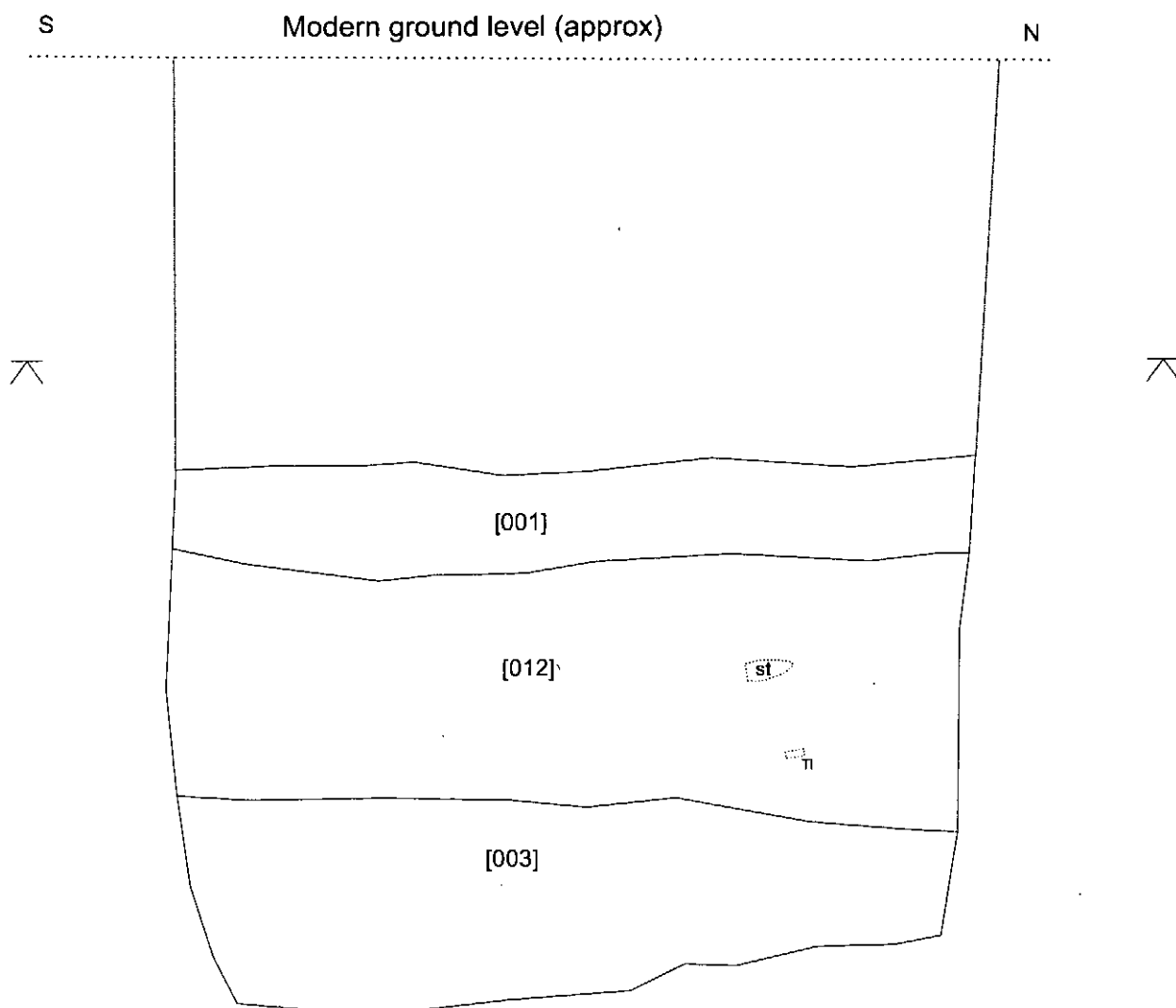


Figure 3: DP2 East Facing Section (1:10)

4.2.9 The top 0.60m of topsoil was removed during the levelling for the car park extension. Context [001] as described for DP1 continued north to this section and was recorded to a depth of c.0.75mbgl. Beneath this was context [012] a very dark grey-black heavy clay-slightly sandy matrix. It was similar to context [002], but given the distance between the two it is unknown if they represent the same contextual layer. Charcoal flecks and coal fragments were present throughout. Small rootlets

and occasional small pebbles/stone fragments were also noted. One piece of possible tile/brick spall was recorded. [012] was horizontally regular, recorded to a depth of 0.75-0.80mbgl. No cut features were noted.

4.2.10 The natural grey clay [003] lay directly beneath [012] and was exposed to a depth of 1.43mbgl.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 The excavation of the drain pits has clearly shown that deposits likely relating to the Roman period are present in this area. This work confirms that done by Nolan (2001) just to the north-west of the car park where Roman deposits were found c.0.70mbgl.

5.2 Given the small scale of the investigation it is impossible to determine the nature of the features noted in the drain pits with any degree of confidence. The stone wall and the two stakeholes may be part of a building in the *vicus* which is thought to have extended into this area. Alternatively, they may have some relation to the possible parade ground found c.28m to the north-west. The associated cut [11] to the south-west of the wall may represent the latter robbing out of the wall for building material.

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 The watching brief during the construction of the car park extension at Park View School identified that probable Roman deposits survive at a depth of c.0.75mbgl. The Post Medieval/Modern overburden in this area is of a sufficient depth that the construction of the car park did not have any impact to this layer. However, the drains were placed at a lower level and did cut into the surface of the probable Roman layer.

6.2 It is recommended that any further groundworks on the south side of Park View School which will impact to depths of 0.70mbgl or greater should be subject to archaeological investigation. This is especially relevant to the cutting of any new service trenches within the school grounds or the immediate environs.

7.0 Acknowledgements

7.1 The County Archaeology Section would like to thank Mr Barry Hives, Bursar of *Park View School*, and John Charlton and Trevor Walker, both of *Service Direct*, for their help and assistance throughout the work. Thanks also to Mark White for assistance with the figures.

8.0 Bibliography

- Nolan, J 2001 Park View Comprehensive School, Chester-le-Street, County Durham: Evaluation On The Site of a Proposed New Gym Store, November 2000. Unpublished site report, Northern Counties Archaeological Services.
- Evans, J, Jones, RFJ, & Turnbull, P 1991 Excavations at Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham, 1978-9, *Durham Archaeological Journal* ~~16: 35-44~~ **7: 5-48**
- Gillam, JP and Tait, J 1968 The Roman Fort at Chester-le-Street, *Archaeologia Aeliana* 4th Series **66**: 75-96
- ASUD 2002 Park View School, Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham: Archaeological Investigation. Unpublished site report No: 924
- Turnbull, P 2003 Archaeological Excavation and Recording at Park View Community School, Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham. The Brigantia Archaeological Practice, unpublished site report.
- ASUD 1994 Archaeological Trial Excavations at Church Chare, Chester-le-Street, County Durham. Unpublished site report No:211