

**An archaeological watching brief at
Lullingstone Roman Villa, Lullingstone, Kent**

**Alan Ward
May 2006**

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Introduction

In April 2006 the present writer paid a single visit to the above site situated at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference TQ 5304 6505 (centred; Fig. 1) to undertake observations whilst a water pipe trench was dug adjacent to the monument car park. Thanks are extended to English Heritage for funding the archaeological work and to their representatives, Judith Roebuck and Paul Rees, and the on-site contractors for every assistance.

Location

Lullingstone Roman villa lies 1km to the west of the village of Eynsford within the hamlet of Lullingstone.

The villa is situated some 50m to the west of the River Darent at an O.D. height of about 44m above sea level. The villa had been cut into the south facing slope of the valley. The river runs just 4m away from the eastern edge of the car park at an O.D. height of about 40m. The trench was to be dug between the car park and the river and along the line of an existing water pipe trench. The trench extended for a total length of about 45m from the public convenience, the first 11m in an easterly direction before turning to the north-east.

Eroded clay-with-flint overlies the chalk through which the river has cut. Alluvial deposits have been lain across the valley flood plain.

Archaeological and historical background

The history and excavation of the villa is well known and is not repeated here (Meates 1963, 1979, 1987; Neal 1991).

The villa site was excavated between 1949 and 1961 and within what was to become the car park area details of a substantial granary were recovered (Meates 1979, 111-118). The only hint that any work may have been undertaken to the south, in the area of the watching brief, comes from Figure 2 of the excavation report. There the area was classed as 'garden' and 'rick and cart standing'. The only note that the present writer has found within the report (1979, 170) states '... the garden area which stretched evenly to the bank of the river, flanked on the north by the granary and on the south by the *presumed* stack-yard or cart-standing' (present writer's emphasis). This interpretation perhaps hints that the area was cleared of overburden and that a gravel courtyard was seen. This writer finds it difficult to believe that a cart-standing area would not consist of a gravel surface.

Whether cleared or not during the excavation, there is certainly no record of any work being undertaken when the public convenience was erected (Judith Roebuck *pers. com*). It was hoped that the watching brief would clarify the situation.

The project

The c.0.45m wide trench was dug by machine for a total length of c.45m (Fig. 2) and for the most part was just c.0.60m deep.

Along the river frontage the whole length of the trench, even in those areas not within the old water pipe trench, was dug through disturbed soil. The sides of the trench were cleaned down with trowel at selected points and again all the soil was disturbed, both by modern deposition and the presence of tree roots. A large concrete slab had been laid in part, and beyond the limits, of the trench. The purpose of this slab is unknown, but it may have been a strengthening of the river bank against erosion.

Nearer the public convenience disturbed soil, gravel and flint mix deposits were noted. Roman tiles were recovered from these deposits, but post-medieval brick or early modern and decomposing timber was also present. It is possible that this gravelly soil represents the remains of excavation spoil heaps, levelled off when the car park was constructed, or possibly the disturbed and levelled gravel courtyard deposits of the suggested cart-standing area. The tile fragments were given to the

custodian of the villa for public handling.

In this area, at the base of the trench, an area of dark grey clayey loam was observed for a length of 1.80m (Fig. 3). A definite cut through this deposit was identified. It seems likely this is a buried top-soil deposit, presumably of Roman date.

Conclusions

It seems probable that the dark grey soil observed at the west end of the trench was a buried top-soil and it seems likely that it is of Roman date. To the east disturbance and levelling had probably taken place and adjacent to the river the soil had probably been piled up, presumably in an attempt to lessen the chance of flooding of the car park.

It is here assumed that the remains of the barn discovered during the excavation were left *in situ*. If that surmise is correct then the picture obtained from the narrow watching brief trench is *not* typical of the car park as a whole and, hence, the area is worthy of further observations as and when the opportunity arises.

Alan Ward

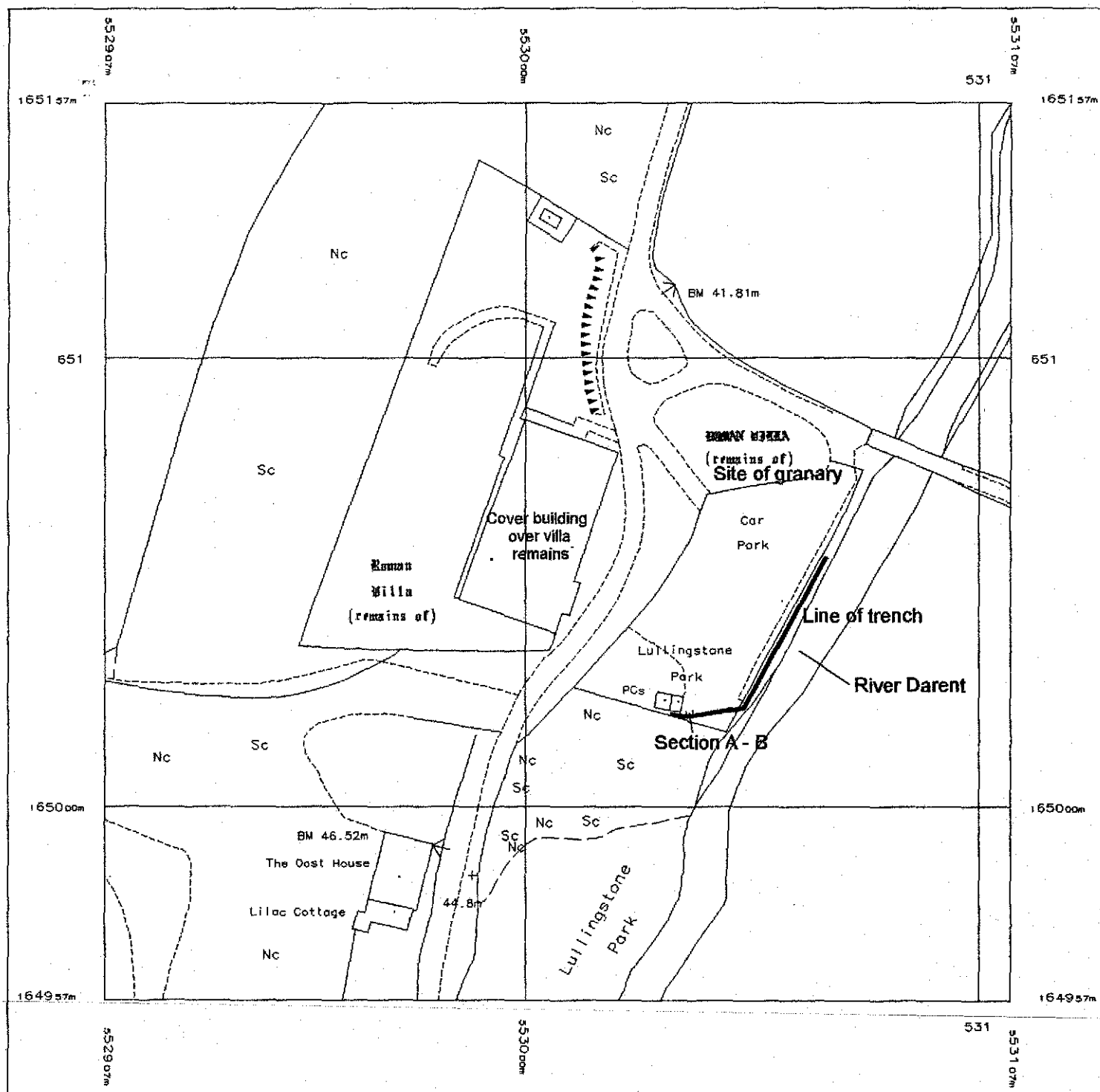
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References:

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FIGURE 1: Location plan
Scale 1:1250



(Ordnance Survey 1:1250 scale plan of the area)

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Figures 2 and 3 Plan and section

Plan scale 1:100
Section scale 1:20

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Drawn by AW

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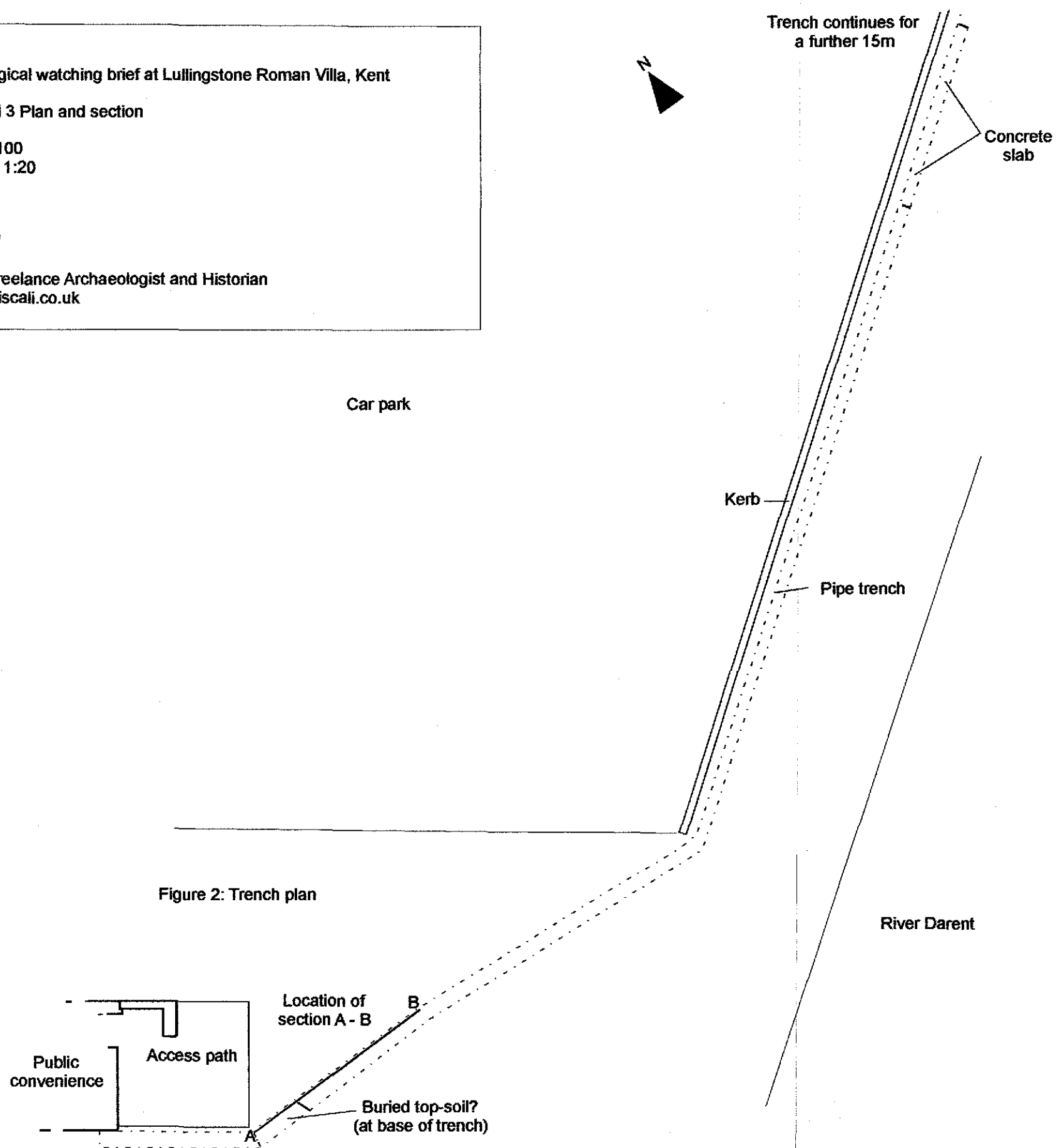


Figure 2: Trench plan

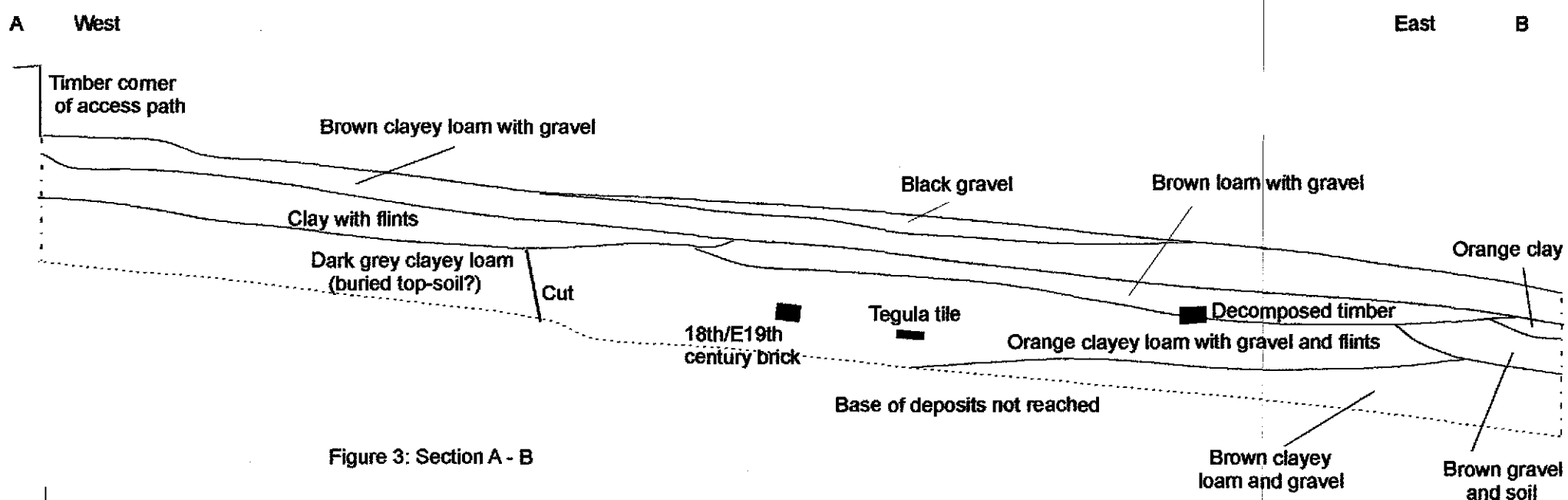


Figure 3: Section A - B