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Archaeological Excavation and Monitoring
at Rudchester Farm, Northumberland.

(NZ 112 674)

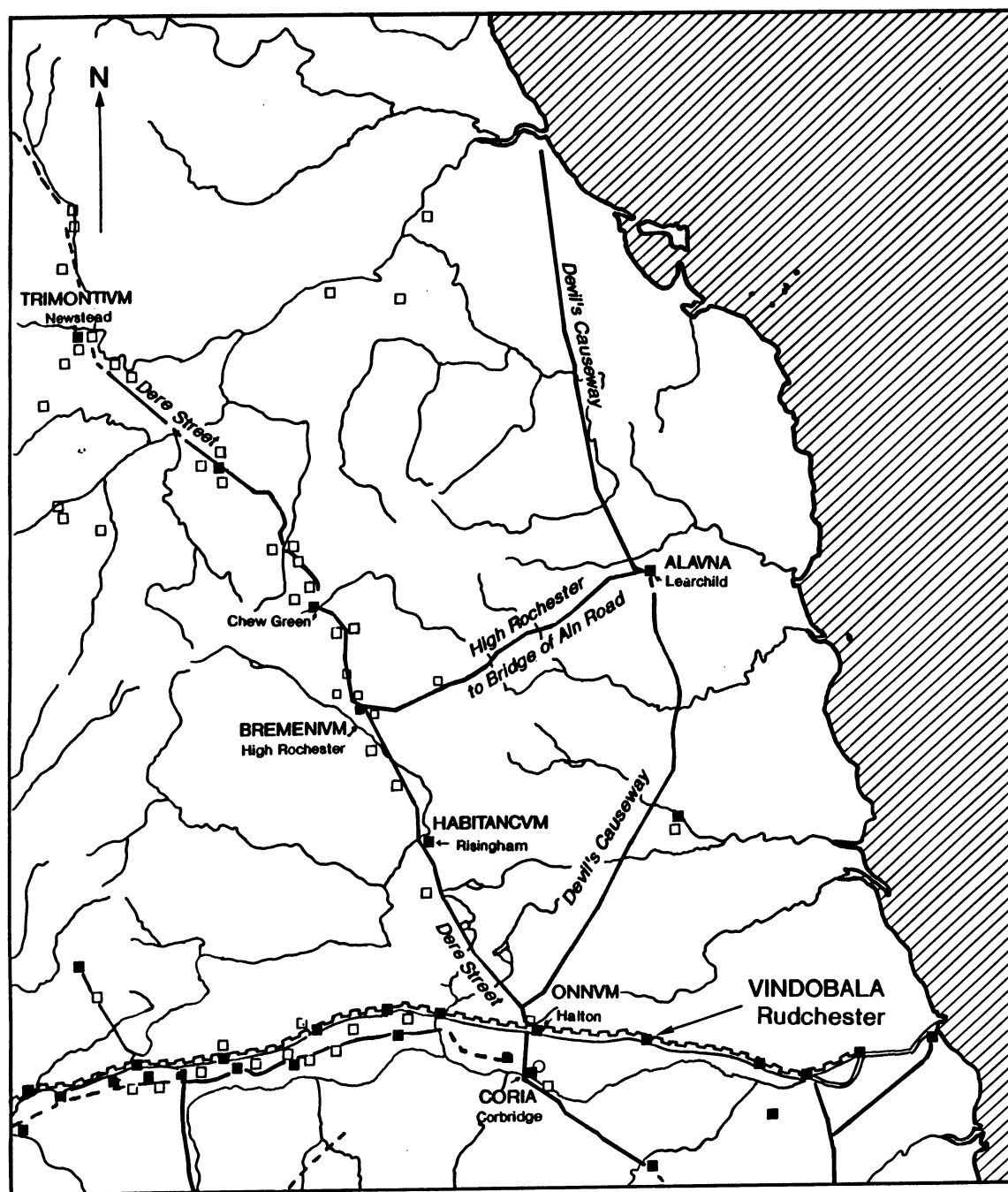
Archaeological Excavation and Monitoring at Rudchester Farm, Northumberland.

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1. Summary.

An archaeological excavation and watching brief were carried out at Rudchester Farm, Northumberland (NZ 112 674) by The Archaeological Practice on behalf of Northumberland County Council in advance of the installation of an underground electricity cable. The adjacent Rudchester Roman Fort (Vindobala) is a scheduled ancient monument. A trench 1 metre wide was archaeologically excavated running through the northern part of the farm to electricity lines situated between the farm buildings and the southern fort rampart. See figure 2. The cable trench immediately south of the electricity lines was machine-excavated by the electricity contractors due to safety constraints and a watching brief was carried out on this stretch.

A series of pits and narrow linear features were uncovered in the northern part of the trench. See figure 3. Two of the pits were excavated, as they lay above the electricity cable's minimum prescribed depth. The rest were preserved in situ.



KEY

- ROMAN FORTS
- ROMAN MARCHING CAMPS
- MAJOR ROMAN SETTLEMENT
- HADRIAN'S WALL

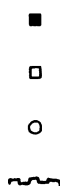


Figure 1. Location Map of Rudchester.

2. Background to the Excavation and Monitoring.

2.1 Planning Background.

An archaeological excavation and watching brief were carried out at Rudchester Farm, Heddon-on-the-Wall, Northumberland (NZ 112 674) by The Archaeological Practice on behalf of Northumberland County Council.

The excavation and monitoring were carried out in advance of the installation of an underground electricity cable. The course of the cable ran through the northern part of the farm to electricity lines situated between the farm buildings and the southern fort rampart. See figure 3.

The adjacent Rudchester Roman Fort (Vindobala) is a scheduled ancient monument (county monument no. 28[3]). Scheduled monument consent (S.M.C.) was therefore granted to Northumberland County Council for the installation of the cable under Section 2 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

The archaeological excavation and monitoring was carried out to a brief prepared by the Northumberland County Archaeologist.

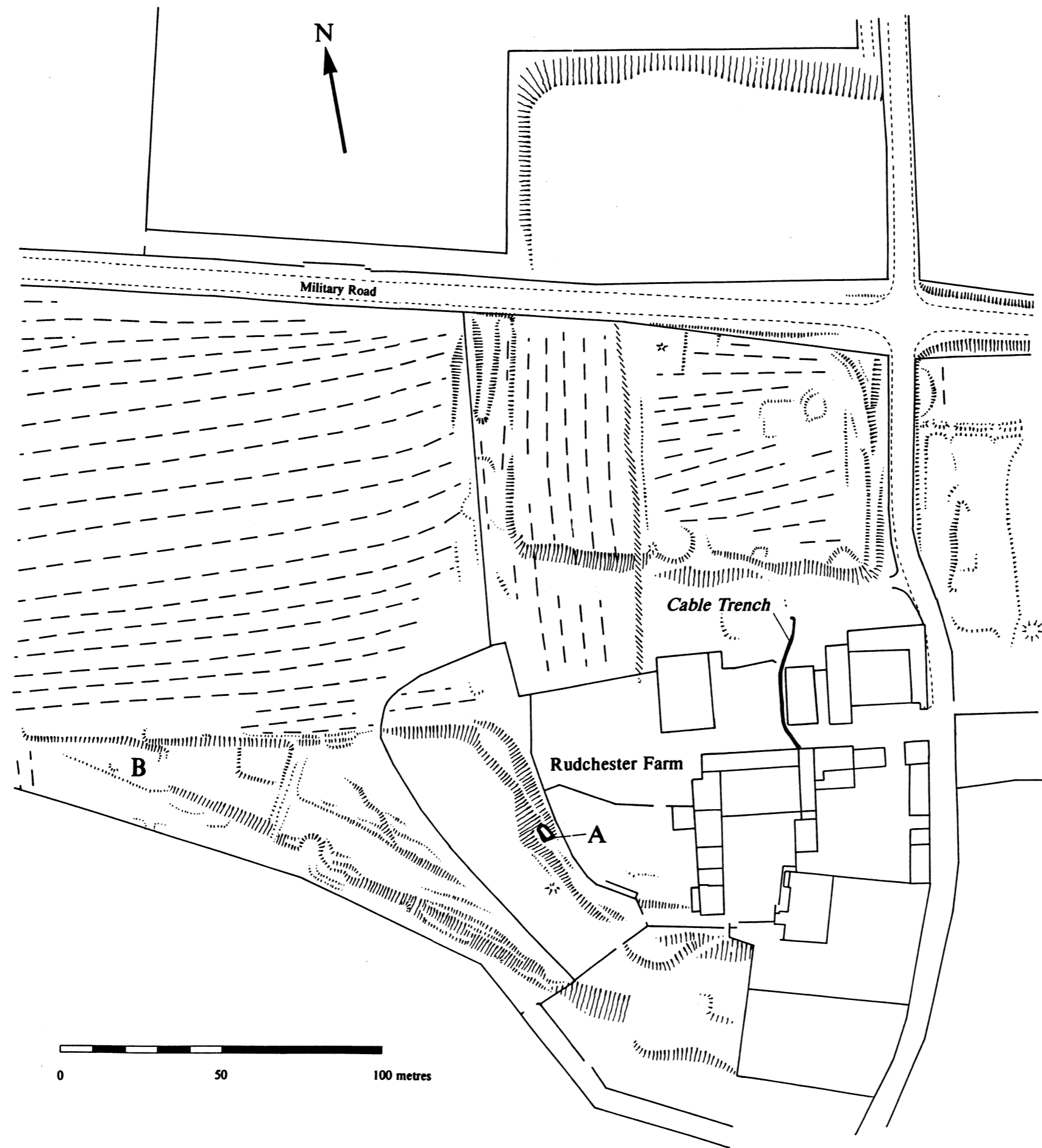


Figure 2. Location of Cable Trench within Rudchester (After Bowden and Blood 1991).

2.2 Archaeological Background.

The Roman fort at Rudchester (Vindobala) straddles the line of Hadrian's Wall, and was constructed during the reign of the Emperor Hadrian. It is not known whether the Wall and its ditch had been built at the time of the fort's construction (Bowden and Blood 1991, 25). The fort is believed to have been more or less continuously occupied, although one excavated building is seen to have gone out of use at some point (possibly the later 3rd century) and remained unused for some time. From this it has been speculated that the fort may have been unoccupied from the later 3rd to the later fourth centuries (Gillam, Harrison and Newman 1973, 82-84). Only one of the military units which served at the Rudchester fort is known, the *cohors Frixagorum* of the late fourth century (Collingwood-Bruce 1863/1978, 76).

The civilian settlement or *vicus* associated with the fort has been variously postulated as being to the south east, the south and the south west of the fort. The tops of walls were apparently uncovered to the south of Rudchester Farm in the mid 20th century, although it is not known whether these features were securely dated as Roman (Gillam and MacIvor 1954, 176-7). A rock-cut water cistern (marked as 'A' on figure 2) and Mithraic temple (marked as 'B' on figure 2) were found to the south-west of the fort, near or within a series of terraces. The temple site showed evidence of previous, almost certainly Roman occupation (ibid, 184-6). It can therefore only be positively proved that the *vicus* existed to the south west of the fort.

The fort has been the subject of several excavations from 1897 onwards, although earlier discoveries were made on the site. The last excavation took place in 1972 (Gillam, Harrison and Newman 1973, 81). The fort and surrounding area was comprehensively surveyed in 1990 by the Newcastle Upon Tyne office of the Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England (Bowden and Blood 1991). Figure 2 of this report is based on a pre-publication illustration of that survey, kindly provided by the authors.

2.3 Method of the Excavation and Monitoring.

A trench of width 1 metre was archaeologically excavated to a depth of between 62.5 cm and 87.5 cm along the course of the electricity cable. Due to the presence of the overhead electricity lines, the northern 4 metres of the cable trench was machine-excavated by the electricity contractor, and an archaeological watching brief carried out on this section.

Due to the presence of archaeological features lying below the maximum allowed depth of the cable, a layer of geotextile was placed over these unexcavated features prior to installation of the cable and backfilling.

3. Results of the Excavation and Monitoring.

The uppermost layers consisted at various stages of turf and topsoil, tarmac, topsoil containing modern rubbish, and builders sand and gravel. This overlay a shallow layer of crushed red stone hard-core material [02]. Below this, and covering the entire length and width of the trench, lay a deep (0.2 to 0.5 metres) context, consisting of stone rubble in a silty loam [03] with a number of sherds of china and other modern pottery. Within the central section of the trench, a dump of brownish yellow clay and rubble was observed [23], again containing small fragments of modern pottery.

A dark silty soil [21] lay beneath the clay [23], covering the central two thirds of the trench and containing 4 pieces of Roman material. This overlay a dark sandy clay soil [24] in the middle of the trench, which contained no finds and overlay subsoil.

Lying below soil [03] in the northern 10 metres of the trench, a dark grey loamy material [04] was found.

Towards the southern end of the trench, a small natural feature [09] was seen cut into the yellow subsoil. c.3 metres to the north, a narrow linear feature [07] was seen, running east-west across the trench. This lay below [03], cutting [24]. It contained small fragments of burnt coal, but no dating evidence.

Within the central section of the trench, a patch of cobbling was uncovered [10], consisting of a single layer of rounded stones, c.2.1 metres in width. Associated with this surface was a sherd of amphora and a brick fragment. This surface was laid directly on soil [24].

A charcoal spread [05] was found to the north of this, associated with a substantial number of pottery sherds of Roman date. This lay beneath the clay dump [23] and over soil [21].

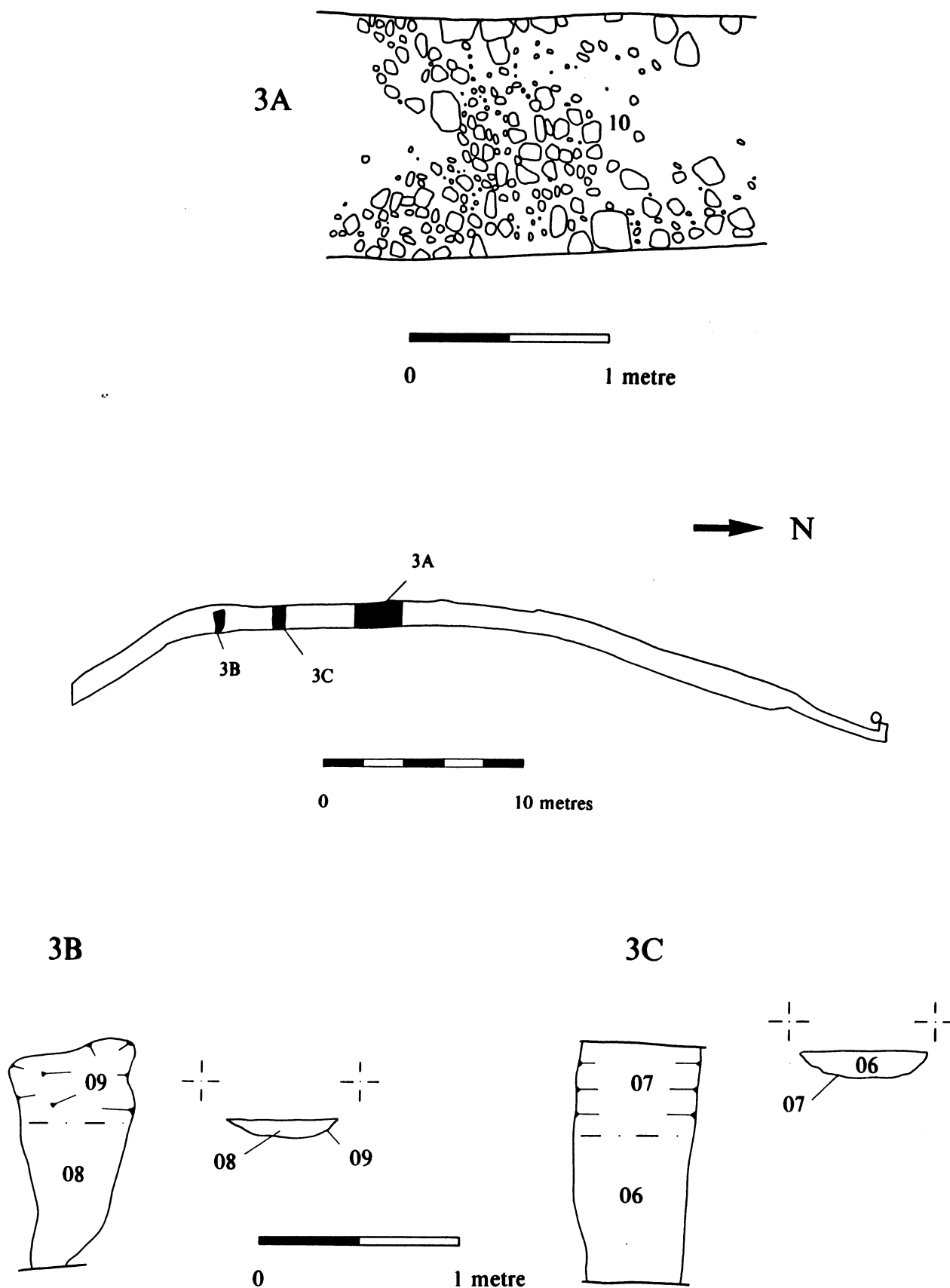


Figure 3. Features [07], [09] and [10] in Plan and Section.

Fig. 5A

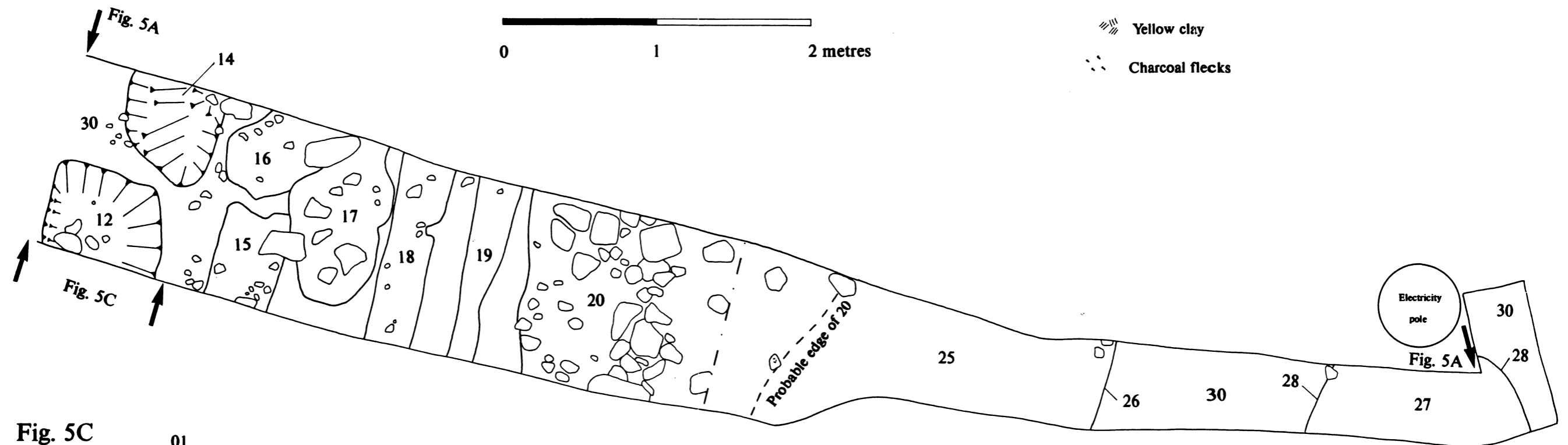
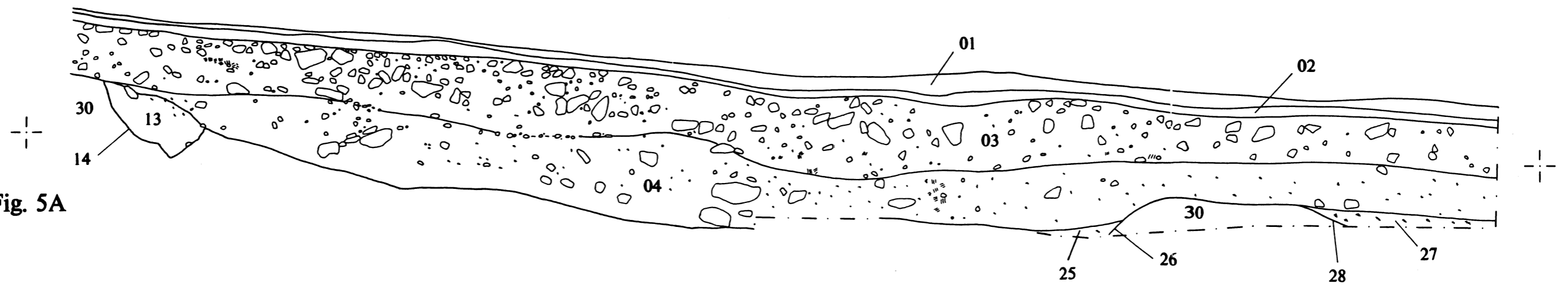


Fig. 5C

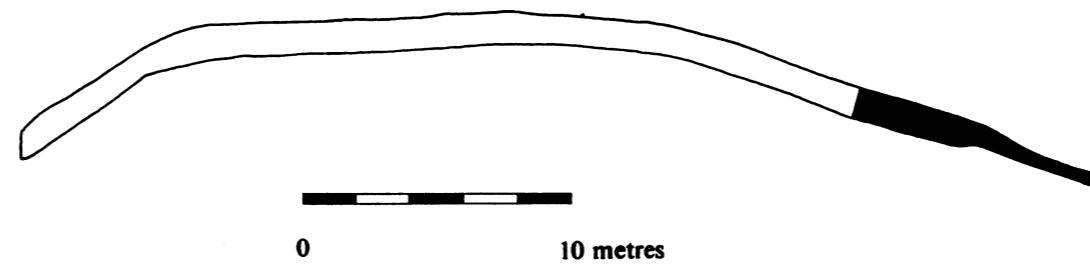
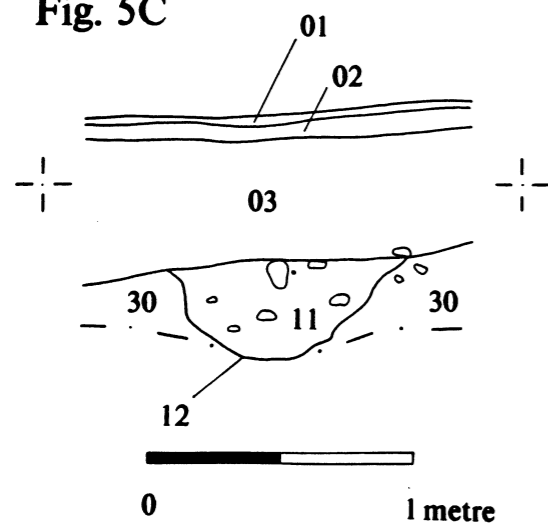


Figure 5. North end of the Cable Trench in Plan and Section.

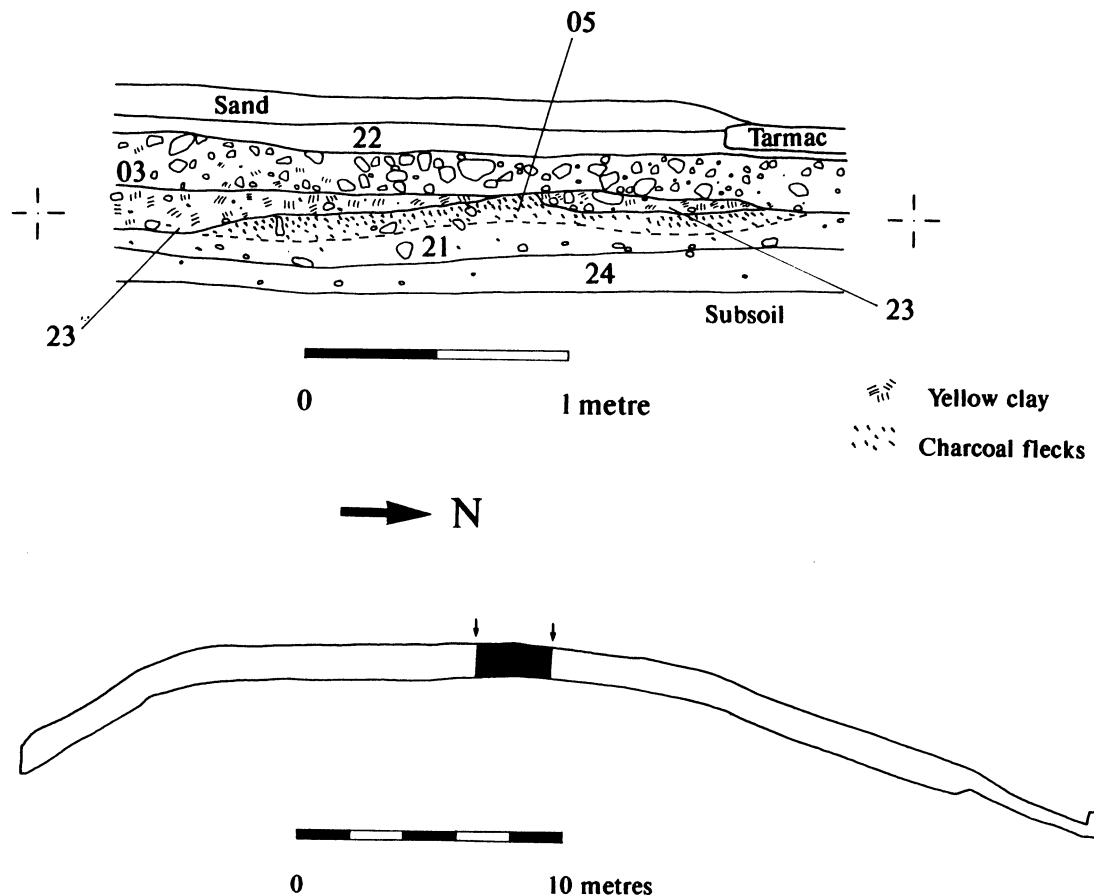


Figure 4. Feature [05] in Section.

The final archaeological features lay in a 10 metre long zone at the north end of the trench. These consisted of 5 identifiable pits ([12], [14], [15], [16], [17]), 2 narrow linear features ([18] and [19]), a stone spread [20], and (where the trench narrowed), 2 more features of uncertain nature ([26] and [28]). All lay below soil [04] and all except the stone spread [20] contained similar grey fills. All except pits [12] and [14] remained unexcavated as they lay beneath the maximum stated depth of the cable trench. The fill of pit [12] contained 2 sherds of Roman pottery and many pieces of animal bone, several identifiable as cattle. Pit [14] contained a single sherd of Roman pottery.

4. Conclusions.

The trench can be divided into two distinct areas for the purposes of this discussion. The northern quarter showed closely-packed features of almost certain Roman date, presumably lying just beyond the fort ditch(es). The stone spread [20] may represent later filling of the top of a fort ditch, and although the exposed width means that firm conclusions cannot be made, it is possible that cut [26] might represent the southern edge of a large ditch. At the point at which these features start, the subsoil [30] is seen to dip down quite sharply.

The southern three quarters of the trench shows only three archaeological features. Layers [03] and [23] appear to be relatively modern attempts to make up and level the ground, probably for expansion of the farm in this direction. It is quite possible, though not certain that the patch of cobbling [10] and the charcoal spread [05] are Roman in date. If so, while it would indicate some Roman activity in this part of the fort environs, the lack of later intrusions into these layers would question the presence of the Roman *vicus* under this part of the farm.

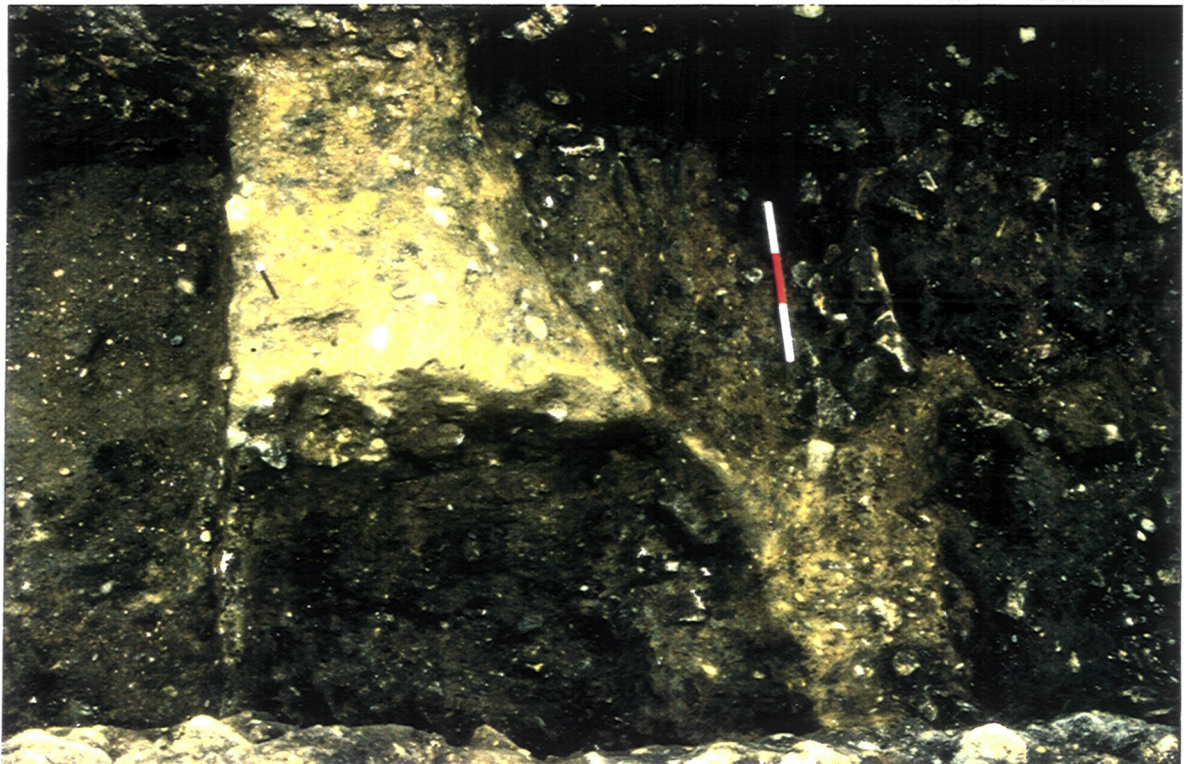


Plate 1. Pits [12] and [14] after excavation. Scale is 0.3 metres.

5. Bibliography.

Bowden M.C.B. and Blood K. (1991) The Roman Fort at Rudchester. in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th Series, Vol. XIX.

Collingwood Bruce J. (1863) *Handbook to the Roman Wall with the Cumbrian Coast and Outpost Forts*. 13th Edition, 1978 edited by C.M. Daniels. Harold Hill. Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Gillam J.P. and MacIvor I. (1954) The Temple of Mithras at Rudchester. in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th Series, Vol. XXXII.

Gillam J.P., Harrison R.M. and Newman T.G. (1973) Interim report on excavations at the Roman fort of Rudchester, 1972). in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th Series, Vol. I.

Appendix 1. Roman Pottery Report.

(Unstratified.)

- 6 pieces of orange ceramic roof tile.
- 1 piece of cream-yellow ceramic roof tile.
- 1 small (37mm diam.) orange and turquoise plastic ball. Perforated.
- 1 5" nail.
- 1 iron nail.
- 3 sherds post-med. orange coarse wares. Cream or cream-yellow glaze.
- 2 sherds post-med. stone wares. Cream or cream-grey glaze.
- 1 Rim sherd Black Burnished Ware 1.
- 1 Body Sherd poss. BB2.
- 1 Rim Sherd (broken) Samian Ware. Dragendorff Type 72. East Gaulish. (Antonine and later).
- 1 Rim Sherd Samian Ware. Dr. Type 31. (2nd half of 2nd century AD).
- 1 Base Sherd Samian Ware. Dr. Type 31R.

Context [05].

- 1 Rim Sherd Samian Ware. Dr. Type 33. Central Gaulish. (Hadrianic/Early Antonine).
- 1 piece Dressel 20 amphora.
- 1 Base Sherd Samian Ware. Dr. Type 31. Central Gaulish. (Antonine).
- 2 Rim Sherds BB2 dishes. (Mid 2nd to early 3rd century AD).
- 3 Rim sherds BB2 jars. (Mid 2nd to mid 3rd century AD).
- 2 Rim Sherds Grey Ware jars. (Mid to late 2nd century).
- 1 Base Sherd Mortarium. White quartzite trituration grits.
- 1 Base Sherd Samian Ware. Dr. Type 18/31R (?). (Hadrianic).
- 1 piece orange fired ceramic brick.
- 1 iron nail.
- 23 sherds unidentified pottery.

Context [10].

- 1 piece probable amphora.
- 1 piece probable hand-made brick.

Context [11].

- 1 piece Dressel 20 amphora.
- 1 body sherd grey ware jar.
- 49 pieces animal bone. 7 identifiable as cattle.

Context [13].

- 1 Body sherd.

Context [17].

- 1 Body sherd BB1.

Context [21].

- 2 pieces unidentified amphorae.
- 1 piece orange fired ceramic.
- 1 sherd Samian ware.

Appendix 2. Context List.

- [01] Turf and current topsoil. Maximum depth 0.1 metres.
- [02] Layer of pink and red stone rubble. Maximum depth 0.15 metres.
- [03] Deposit. Layer of angular, sub-angular, sub-rounded and rounded stones and gravel to 0.25 metres. Within matrix of dark grey silty loam with occasional charcoal flecks and occasional sandy clay patches. Maximum depth 0.5 metres.
- [04] Deposit. Layer of Dark grey loamy sand-clay. Occasional flecks charcoal. Occasional sub-angular stones to 0.25 metres. Maximum depth 0.55 metres.
- [05] Deposit. Layer of charcoal flecks, in a matrix of brown-grey silty clay. Charcoal becomes less frequent with depth. Maximum length 2.05 metres. Maximum depth 0.05 metres.
- [06] Fill of shallow linear feature [07]. Dark brown loamy sand-clay with moderate sub-angular stones to 0.1 metres. Contained fragments of coal and clinker.
- [07] Cut of shallow irregular linear feature. Contains [06]. Runs east-west. Flat base. Maximum width 0.6 metres. Maximum depth 0.2 metres.
- [08] Fill of irregular, natural feature. Light to mid grey silty sand with occasional sub-rounded gravel.
- [09] Cut for irregular, natural feature. Contains [08]. Irregular sides, undulating base.
- [10] Structure. Remnant of cobbled surface. Consisting of a single layer of sub-angular, sub-rounded and rounded stones to 0.2 metres in size. Some evidence of worn cobbles. Maximum length 2.1 metres.
- [11] Fill of small sub-rectangular pit. Soft brownish grey silty clay with patches of greenish yellow sandy clay (stained and re deposited subsoil). Occasional charcoal flecks, occasional sub-rounded and sub-angular stones to 0.1 metres in size.
- [12] Cut of small sub-rectangular pit. Contains [11]. Sides steep and slightly concave. Base flat. Base showed a greenish grey colour from contamination by the fill [11]. Maximum length 0.9 metres. Maximum width 0.5 metres. Maximum depth 0.35 metres.
- [13] Fill of small irregular pit. Light brownish grey gritty clay. Occasional charcoal flecks and occasional sub-angular and sub-rounded stones to 0.07 metres.
- [14] Cut of small irregular pit. Contains [13]. Sides steep, base flat. Shallower at northern end. Maximum width 0.6 metres. Maximum depth 0.3 metres.

[15] Fill of small sub-rectangular pit (?). Unexcavated. Variegated light brownish grey and brownish yellow gritty sandy clay, with sub-angular and sub-rounded stones to 0.15 metres. Maximum width 0.42 metres.

[16] Fill of small irregular pit (?). Unexcavated. Variegated light brownish grey and brownish yellow gritty sandy clay, with sub-angular and sub-rounded stones to 0.15 metres. Maximum width 0.5 metres.

[17] Fill of irregular pit (?). Unexcavated. Variegated light brownish grey and brownish yellow gritty sandy clay, with sub-angular and sub-rounded stones to 0.15 metres. Maximum width 0.6 metres.

[18] Fill of narrow linear feature. Unexcavated. Variegated light brownish grey and brownish yellow gritty sandy clay, with sub-angular and sub-rounded stones to 0.15 metres. Maximum width 0.32 metres.

[19] Fill of narrow linear feature. Unexcavated. Variegated light brownish grey and brownish yellow gritty sandy clay, with sub-angular and sub-rounded stones to 0.15 metres. Maximum width 0.22 metres.

[20] Deposit. Stone spread with associated soil. Angular (some roughly dressed) and sub-angular stones to 0.3 metres in size with dark brownish grey gritty clayish silt. Maximum depth 0.2 metres.

[21] Deposit. Mid to dark grey clayish silt. Some sand content. Occasional charcoal flecks, occasional sandy clay patches.

[22] Deposit. Topsoil of dark brown to black sandy loam with moderate coal fragments towards southern end of trench. Maximum depth 0.1 metres.

[23] Deposit. Dump of orange-yellow sandy clay with occasional dark patches rounded gravel and sub-angular stones to 0.1 metres. Occasional charcoal flecks. Maximum length 3.7 metres. Maximum depth 0.2 metres.

[24] Deposit. Mid to dark brownish grey sand-clay. Occasional orange mineral oxide mottling. Maximum depth 0.18 metres.

[25] Fill of feature [26]. Light grey gritty sandy clay.

[26] Cut. Contains [25]. May be associated with stone spread and soil [20], if so, represents other side of large ditch.

[27] Fill of feature [28]. Light to mid grey gritty sandy clay.

[28] Cut. Contains [27]. Unexcavated.

[30] Natural Subsoil. Mottled yellow, cream and orangish yellow sandy clay. Occasional sub-angular stones to 0.08 metres.

Appendix 3. Photographic List.

No.	Description.
1-2.	Cleaned subsoil and section to south of gateway. Looking NW.
3-4.	Cleaned subsoil and section to south of pits [12] and [14]. Looking W.
5-8.	Cleaned subsoil and section to north of gateway. Looking W.
9-10.	Cleaned trench, northern end. Looking N.
11-13.	Cleaned subsoil and section at north end of trench. Looking W.
14-15.	Cleaned trench, northern end. Looking S.
16.	Cleaned section at northern end of trench.
17.	North end of trench, cleaned (first time). Looking S.
18-19.	Cleaned subsoil and section at south-central area. Looking W.
20.	Cleaned subsoil and section at south-central area. Looking SW.
21.	Cleaned subsoil and section at southern end. Looking W.
22.	Cleaned subsoil and section at southern end. Looking N.
23-25.	Cleaned section and [21] in central area, pre-X. Looking W.
26.	Cleaned section and [21] in central area, pre-X. Looking NW.
27-28.	Charcoal spread [05], pre-X. Looking NW.
29-31.	Northern part of trench, after second clean. Looking S.
32-33.	Northern part of trench, after second clean. Looking N.
34.	Stone spread [20], looking NE.
35.	Stone spread [20].
36-37.	Linear features [18] and [19].
38-39.	Features [12] to [20].
40-41.	Linear feature [07], post-X.
42-44.	Natural feature [09], post-X.
45-46.	Cleaned subsoil and section at southern end. Looking S.
47-48.	Cleaned subsoil and section in central area. Looking NW.
49-50.	Pit [12], post-X.
51-52.	Pit [12], post-X. Looking NW.
53-55.	Cobble surface [10]. Looking S.
56-57.	Cleaned subsoil and section at north-central area. Looking S.
58-60.	Pit [14], post-X.
61-62.	Cleaned subsoil and section in area of cobbles. Looking S.
63-64.	Watching Brief. Fill [25], looking SW.
65.	Watching Brief. Fill [27], looking N.
66.	Watching Brief. Fill [27], looking W.
67.	Watching Brief. Cable in trench, looking N.
68.	Watching Brief. Cable in trench, looking S.