REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF CONDUCTED AT BLYTH ROAD, OLDCOTES, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE (SK 593 885)

TRENT & PEAK
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REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF CONDUCTED AT BLYTH ROAD, OLDCOTES, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE (SK 593 885)

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Summary

1. A watching brief was conducted on behalf of Severn Trent Ltd during installation of a metered bypass and mains extension at Blyth Road (A634) in Oldcotes, Nottinghamshire (SK 593 885).

2. The site of a Roman villa (centred on NGR: SK 5912 8855) lies approximately 200m to the west of the ground works. At least part of the Villa site is scheduled as an Ancient Monument (SMR SAM 83). Although the scheme would not affect the scheduled area, it was recognised by the County Archaeologist that the ground work could uncover unrecorded archaeological remains or features associated with the villa.

3. In the metered bypass trench previously unrecorded archaeological deposits together with datable artefacts were uncovered. A Romano-British ditch was identified cutting through earlier stratified deposits. Two datable artefacts were recovered from the ditch: a small, unabraded sherd of Romano-British grey ware (1st - 4th Century AD); and a fragment of Roman flue-tile.

4. The archaeological remains and features uncovered by the ground works, 200m to the east of the recorded villa, demonstrates that the buried archaeological resource is both well preserved and more extensive than the Scheduled Area.

5. No archaeological deposits were encountered in the heavily disturbed mains extension trench and north-east verge section. However, it is possible that archaeological remains and features may survive beneath and beyond the area exposed.

6. There are indications of a possible earlier road surface (0002 & 0001) and possible remnants of previous soils (0010,0011,0014). However, the limited nature of the trenching prevents secure interpretation.

7. No ancient artefacts were recovered from the mains extension trench.

CONTENTS

List of Figures
Introduction Page 1
Background Page 1
Trenching method Page 2
Results Page 2
Comments Page 5
References Page 6
Appendix Page 7

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The 1:10,000 scale map of Oldcotes showing the area of the watching brief and the location of the scheduled Roman villa site marked in red. Page 8

Figure 2. The 1:1000 scale map, showing the location of the metered bypass and mains extension trenches and sections A - E Page 9

Figure 3. Sections A and B. Scale 1:20 Page 10

Figure 4. Sections C, D and E. Scale 1:20 Page 11

Introduction

The Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust was requested by Severn Trent Water Ltd in December 1995 to conduct a watching brief during installation of a metered bypass and mains extension at Blyth Road (A634) in Oldcotes, Nottinghamshire SK 593 885 (Fig. 1).

The watching brief was conducted by Mark Southgate in March 1996 and managed for the Trust by Daryl Garton. The aim of the watching brief was to record any archaeological deposits exposed during the ground works.

Background

The village of Oldcotes sits at the foot of a gentle dip slope, where the Upper Magnesian Limestone meets the Upper Permian Marl. Just to the south wanders the Oldcotes Beck through a narrow floodplain of alluvial deposits.

The first recorded reference to a village at Oldcotes is in *c.* 1135 (*Ulecotes*) in the Cartulary of Blyth Priory (Gover, Mawer & Stenton 1979, 99). However occupation at the site dates back far earlier. In 1871, the remains of three rooms of a Roman villa and a mosaic pavement were discovered during the building of St. Helen's Church (Nicholl 1871, 66). The field in which the church was built was known as Manor Field and was supposed to have been the site of a medieval manor house (Nicholl 1871, 66-67).

The site of the Roman villa (centred on NGR: SK 5912 8855) lies approximately 200m to the west of the ground works (Fig. 1). At least part of the villa site is scheduled as an Ancient Monument (SMR 83), however the buried archaeological resource is likely to be much more extensive than the scheduled area would indicate. Although the scheme would not affect the scheduled area, it was recognised by the County Archaeologist that the ground work could uncover unrecorded archaeological remains or features associated with the villa.

Accordingly, it was required that archaeological supervision be maintained during ground disturbance to enable the identification and rapid recording of any archaeological deposits uncovered.

Trenching method

The installation of the metered bypass involved the excavation of a trench *c.* 4.5m x 3m and 1.30m deep, along the northern verge of Blyth Road, approximately 5m west of the junction with the B6463, adjacent to Manor Farm (Fig. 2). However, the number and proximity of existing buried services revealed during topsoiling, required the trench to be excavated 2m further to the south of the proposed trench position. The resulting excavated trench protruded 2m out into Blyth road (Fig. 2). This increased the potential for undisturbed archaeological deposits being encountered during the ground work.

For the mains extension a 90mm diameter pipe was laid in a trench *c.* 0.35m wide and *c.* 0.90m deep. This trench extended from the metered bypass trench across the junction with the B6463 and *c.* 5m into the north-east verge (Fig. 2).

Excavation was undertaken using a small toothed bucket on the back actor of a JCB. The tarmac was stripped in small sections to a depth of *c.* 30cm. All spoil was removed from site upon excavation, therefore it was not possible to search the spoil for any datable artefacts.

Pipe-laying and back filling with hardcore took place as separate operations allowing all exposed areas to be examined. The extent of any deposits and sample sections were recorded in accord with Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust watching brief guidelines.

Results

METERED BYPASS TRENCH

At the base of the exposed south section (Fig. 3A), above the natural marl, cleaning of the section revealed a number of stratified layers (context

numbers: 0004, 0005, 0007 and 0008). These layers were apparent due to their varying colours, although they were of similar silty textures.

A small box section was excavated 1.10m along the base of the standing section. This revealed a feature (0006) *c.* 1.10m wide and 0.40m deep, interpreted as a ditch running approximately north - south, cut through layers 0004, 0005, 0007 and 0008 and into the underlying Permian Marl (Fig. 3A).

Two artefacts were recovered from the bottom of the ditch (0006). These were identified by R.S. Leary as: a small, unabraded sherd of Romano-British grey ware (1st - 4th Century AD); and a fragment of Roman flue-tile, possibly from a hypocaust system. This would suggest a Romano-British date for the feature.

Two fills were noted in 0006, a dark to mid brown silty clay (a) above a grey-brown silty clay (b). This could imply a recut of the ditch or may represent post-depositional leaching of the ditch fill (0006).

Bone (upto 250mm) and pieces of charcoal (upto 40mm) were noted but not collected.

As the ditch 0006 appears to cut layers 0004, 0005, 0007 and 0008 (Fig. 3A), it is suggested that these layers are Romano-British or earlier. These layers may represent the remnants of ground surfaces or features, though insufficient of these were exposed to permit secure conclusions on their origins. The layers could not be traced along the length of the trench due to modern disturbance.

The layers 0004,0005,0007 and 0008 and the ditch (0006) were overlaid by layer 0003, *c.* 0.30m of silty clay containing many large pieces of limestone upto *c.* 0.35m (Fig. 3A). This layer, visible along the length of the section, is interpreted as a levelling layer possibly associated with the demolition of a nearby stone structure of unknown date; or a levelling layer of stone associated with the construction of Blyth Road. No datable artefacts were retrieved from this level or above.

Directly overlying 0003 was a layer of silty loam (0002) comprising 80% of small stones (Fig. 3A). This could be interpreted as a previous gravel surface, possibly part of a road construction pre-dating the present road. Above was a thin layer (<10cm) of stone-free silty loam (0001) which may represent soil development on the previous surface (0002). Alternatively, these layers may be part of the make-up material for the present road.

The remainder of the section (Fig. 3A) comprised *c.* 0.40m of Limestone Hardcore and further road levelling layers overlaid by *c.* 0.30m of Tarmac.

The north section of the trench comprised entirely of back-filled soil and service pipes. No undisturbed deposits were observed.

MAINS EXTENSION TRENCH

The western part of the south section of the pipe trench was very disturbed due to numerous services crossing the trench. 1m sections of any undisturbed areas were recorded (Figs. 3B, 4C and D). The limited nature of the trenching prevents secure conclusions being made as to the origins of any archaeological deposits.

The undisturbed sections of trench in the north-west verge (Fig. 3B) showed the kerbstones, concrete and Limestone hardcore directly above silty clay containing many large limestone pieces (0013). This material, similar to 0003 in the metered bypass trench (Fig. 3A), is interpreted as a levelling layer, presumably associated with the construction of Blyth Road.

The section recorded in Figure 4C, north-west of the road junction (Fig. 2), revealed Permian Marl at the base of the section, beneath a clay layer containing large limestone fragments (0012) similar to 0003 and 0013. This layer is overlaid by *c.* 0.25m of relatively stone-free sandy silt material (0010 & 0011). These layers may represent the remnants of a soil developed above an earlier levelling layer (0012) or, perhaps more likely, a dump for levelling the road. Alternatively, layer 0012 may be a solifluxion deposit with the remnants of a developed soil (0010 & 0011) above, truncated by the

road make-up layers.

A similar sequence of layers as observed in figure 4C was recorded in figure 4D, 5m to the east (Fig. 2), and may be similarly interpreted.

The remainder of the trench was entirely occupied by back-filled soil, containing fragments of brick and post-medieval pottery. A sewer, gas and water pipes, and a brick-lined culvert, were visible in section and the base of the trench.

The section exposed in the north-east verge (Fig. 4E) showed redeposited marl, containing brick fragments, below concrete and curbstones, where a BT junction box had been installed. No undisturbed deposits were observed.

No ancient artefacts were recovered from the mains extension trench.

All contexts (0001 - 0016) from the metered bypass and mains extension trench are summarised in the appendix.

Earthworks were noted in Manor Field to the west of the trenches. These may represent building remains associated with the Roman villa or the supposed medieval manor (Fig. 1). Ridge and furrow was noted in the field adjacent to the ground works (Fig. 1).

Comments

The discovery of a Romano-British ditch (0006) cutting through stratified deposits (0004, 0005, 0007 & 0008) suggests that the archaeological resource surrounding the known villa buildings is both relatively well preserved and more extensive than previously known.

No archaeological deposits were encountered in the mains extension trench or in the exposed section of the north-east verge primarily due to the intensity of previous ground disturbance in this area.

There are indications of a possible earlier road surface (0002 & 0001) in the metered bypass trench, and possible remnants of previous soils (0010,0011, 0014) in the mains extension trench.

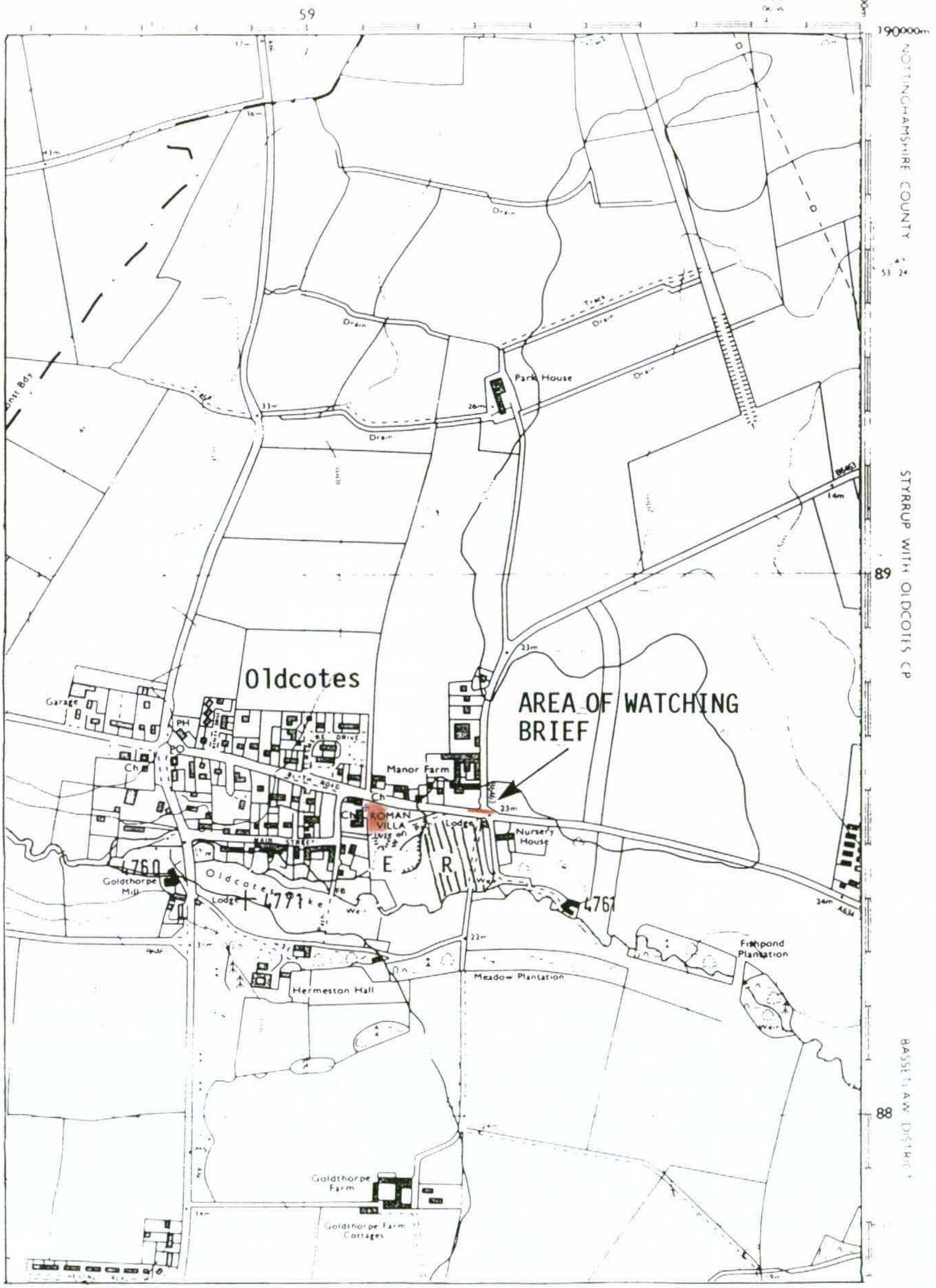
References

GOVER, J.E.B; MAWER A. and STENTON, F.M. 1979 *The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire* English Place-Name Society Volume XVII, p 99.

Nicholls, S.J 1871 *Proceedings at Meetings of the Royal Archaeological Institute* Archaeological Journal Volume 28, p 66-67.

Appendix

CONTEXT	*DESCRIPTION*	*INTERPRETATION*
0001	Dark/mid grey-brown silty loam.	Remnant soil or dump material.
0002	Dark/mid grey-brown silty loam.80% angular stone <10cm.	Previous gravel surface or road make-up material.
0003	Mid grey-brown silty clay. 50% Limestone fragments <30cm.	Levelling layer: demolition of building or road make-up material.
0004 0005 0007 0008	Dark grey-brown loamy silt. Mid brown silty clay loam. Mid orange brown loamy silt. Mid brown silty clay. 40% Limestone fragments <8cm.	Layers 0004,0005,0007 & 0008: remnant Romano-British or earlier ground surfaces or features.
0006 a b	Dark/mid brown silty clay. Dark/mid grey-brown silty clay.	Fill of Romano-British ditch with possible recut (a).
0009	Red-brown clay.	Upper Permian Marl.
0010 0011 0014	Mid grey-brown sandy silt. Mid grey sandy silt. Mid grey-brown sandy silt.	0010,0011 & 0014: remnant soil or road make-up material.
0012 0015	Mid grey-brown clayey silt. 40% Limestone fragments <14cm. Mid grey-brown clayey silt. 40-50% Limestone fragments <15cm.	0012 & 0015: levelling layer/road make-up material or solifluxion deposit.
0013	Mid brown clayey silt. 40% Limestone fragments <15cm.	Levelling layer.
0016	Mid brown silty clay. Contains brick fragments.	Redeposited marl.



E - Earthworks

R - Ridge & Furrow

Figure 1. 1:10,000 scale map of Oldcotes showing the area of the watching brief and location of the scheduled Roman villa site marked in red. Reproduced from the 1981 OS survey map, © Crown Copyright under licence no. ALD 51413A/0001.

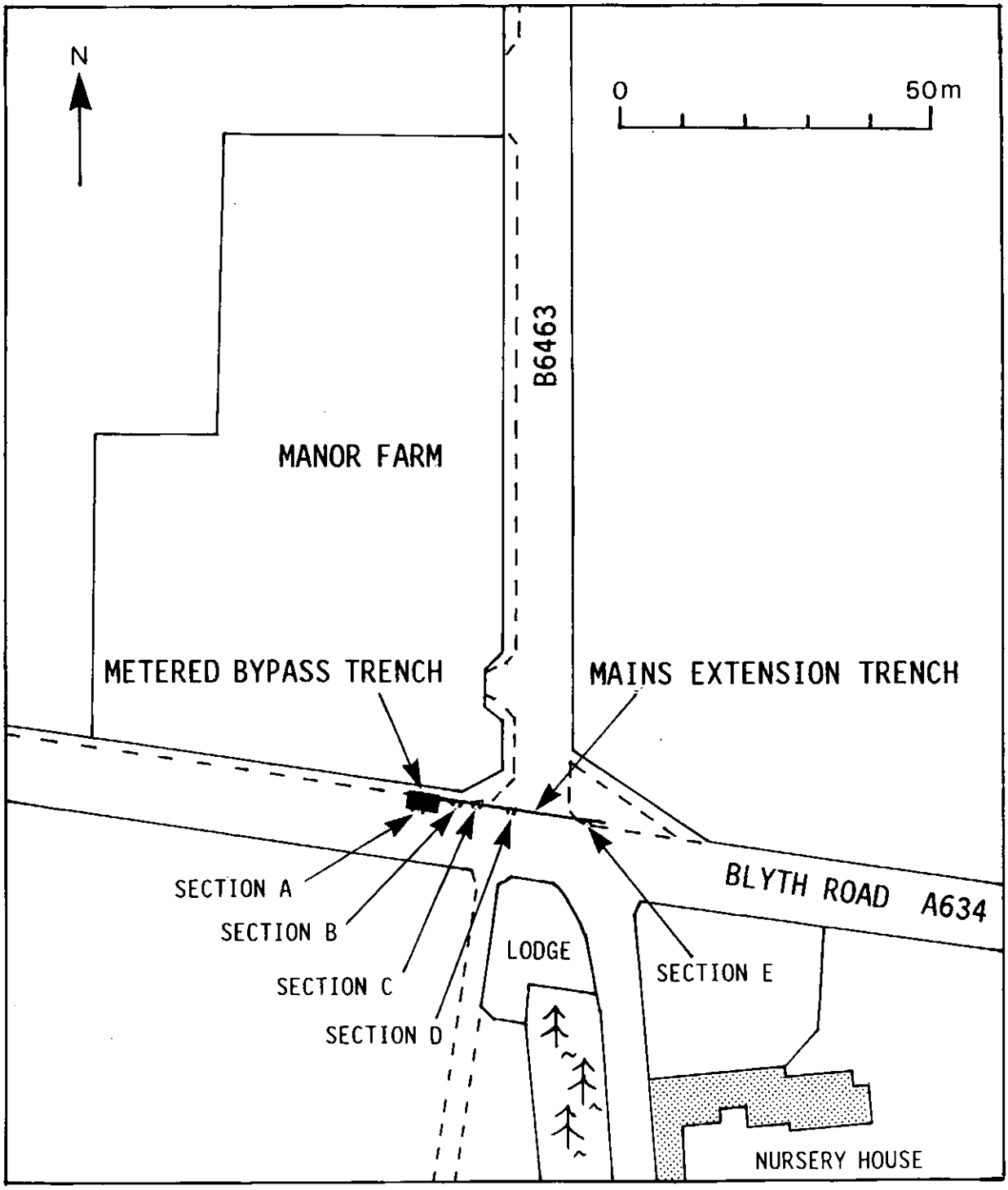
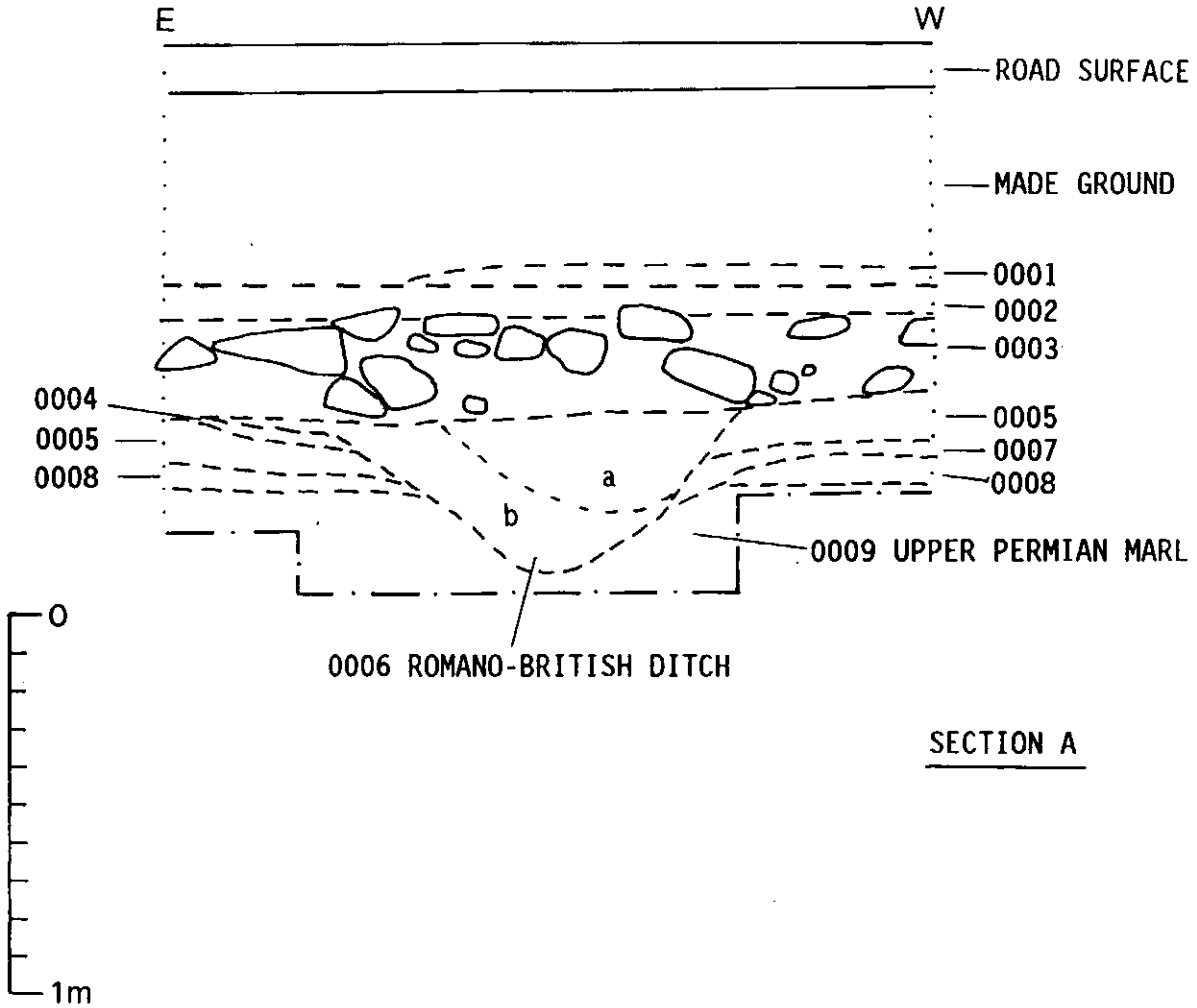
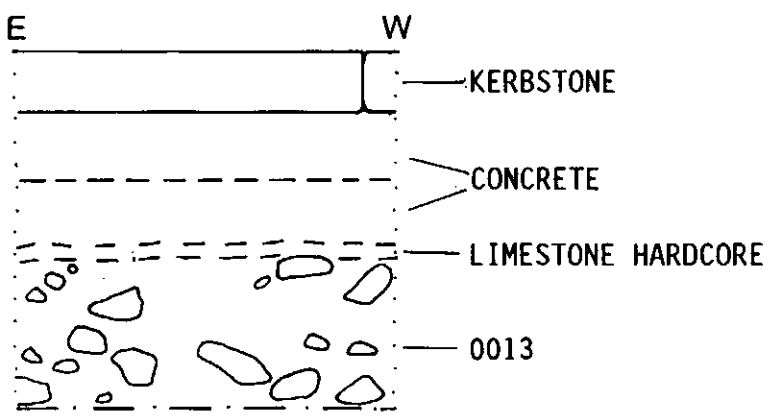


Figure 2. 1:1000 scale map, showing the location of the metered bypass and mains extension trenches and sections A - E.

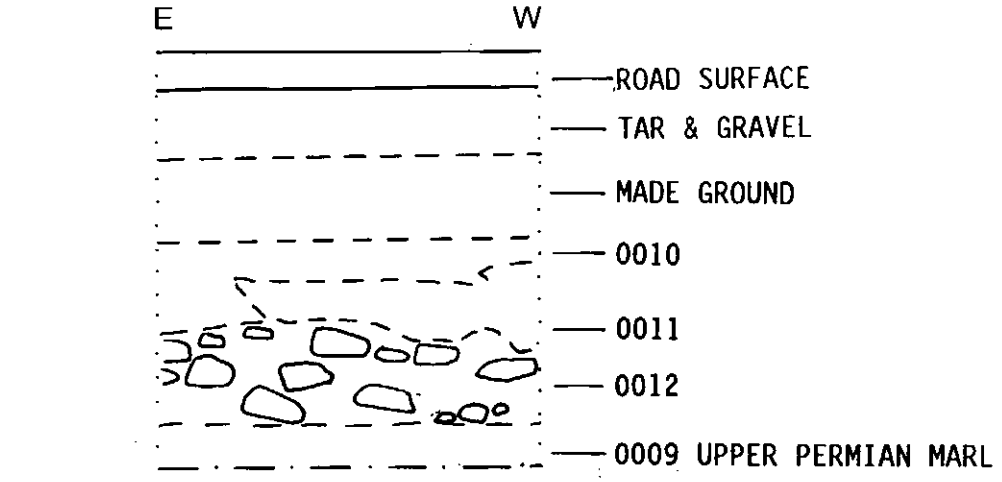


SECTION A



SECTION B

Figure 3. Sections A and B. Scale 1:20



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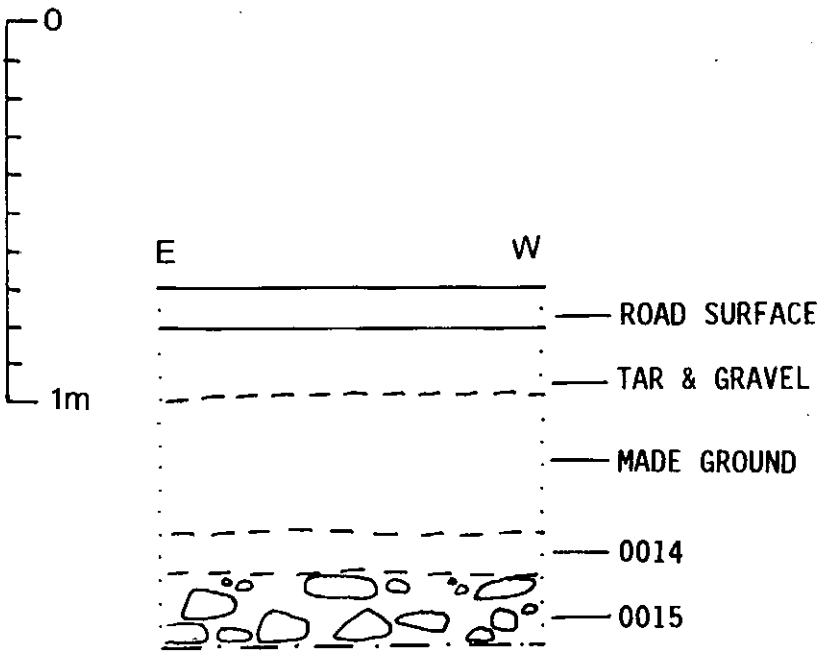

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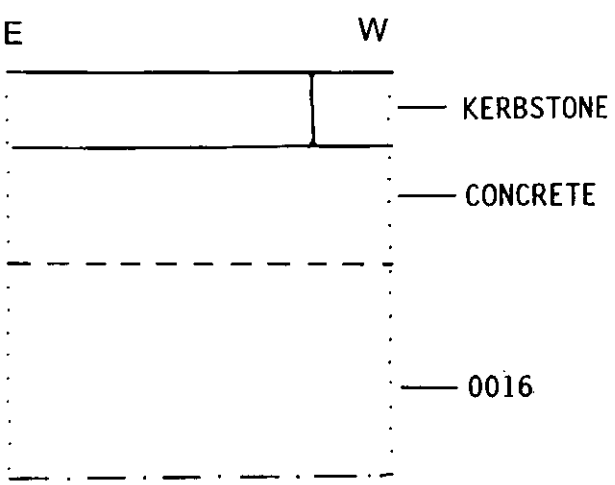

SECTION E

Figure 4. Sections C, D and E. Scale 1:20