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**Waterworks Relating to
the Wroxeter Hotel
Shropshire:
an Archaeological
Watching Brief**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



Institute of Field
Archaeologists

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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by
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1.0 Summary

The provision of an extension to the Wroxeter Hotel, Wroxeter, Shropshire (at NGR SJ 5634 0835) necessitated the laying of a new (supplementary) waterpipe, connecting the hotel to an existing water main. A total of three trenches was excavated: two in the grounds of the Hotel, which were excavated without archaeological supervision, and a third that was excavated in the pavement and road immediately outside the hotel driveway. The trenches within the grounds failed to locate any significant stratified archaeological evidence although some Roman period finds were recovered. The trench in the street located the foundation for the wall of a building probably founded in the 2nd century. This was situated at the northern end of the eastern frontage of insula XXVII and is paralleled by earlier geophysical and archaeological evidence for other buildings further to the south and along the same frontage.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during groundworks for the laying of a new water pipe, connecting an existing water main to the Wroxeter Hotel, Wroxeter, Shropshire (Figs.1 & 2). The water main follows the course of a public highway, which passes 80m (west) of the hotel building. The new pipe is connected to the mains at a point some 110m northwest of the hotel's frontage. The installation of the pipework required limited groundworks in the hotel's front lawn and the excavation of a trench across the roadway, centred on NGR SJ 56340835 (Fig.3). Excavations outside the boundary of the hotel property were the responsibility of Severn Trent Water Ltd., who connected the new pipe to the mains.

The Wroxeter Hotel, its grounds and the immediate surrounds lie within the boundary of Wroxeter Roman City, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County Monument No. 32). An archaeological watching brief during groundworks was therefore stipulated by English Heritage as a condition of the granting of the planning application for the water pipe installation. Severn Trent Water contracted Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) to carry out the watching brief and a qualified archaeologist attended the site on March 13th, 2002.

3.0 Site Location and History

Wroxeter Hotel is situated in the village of Wroxeter, Shropshire, which lies on the east bank of the River Severn, some 5 miles (8km) south-east of the centre of Shrewsbury (Fig.1). The hotel and its surrounds are located within the site of Wroxeter Roman City (*Viroconium Cornoviorum*), a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County Monument No.32).

A desk-based assessment of the hotel and its land was undertaken in 1991 in order to examine the history of previous work in the locale (Buteux and Leach 1992). The evaluation highlighted significant archaeological discoveries that had been made nearby. In 2001, Dr. Roger White carried out an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for an extension to the hotel (White 2001). The resultant project report

concluded that there was little evidence for substantial occupation of that parcel of land during the Roman period and none for the Medieval period.

4.0 Methodology

Excavation of the pipe trench was undertaken by hand, with the assistance of a portable, pneumatic drill to break through the road surface and loosen the underlying soil. The trench was typically 0.4m wide by 0.7m deep, but was substantially enlarged (excavated down to 1.2m and widened) at its northwest end, to accommodate the installation of a connection between the new water pipe and the existing mains.

Any *in situ* archaeology exposed by the groundworks was hand-cleaned, then detailed on pre-printed *pro-forma* record cards for features and contexts. These written records were supplemented by plans and section drawings (1:20 scale), and monochrome/colour-print photography. Where archaeological features were absent, stratigraphic sequences of the soil layers were recorded. All artefacts recovered from individual contexts or spoilheaps were placed in suitably labelled bags and transported to the BUFAU Finds Room at Birmingham University, where they were cleaned, identified, and catalogued. These records and finds form part of the site archive, at present held by BUFAU but ultimately to be lodged with English Heritage at Atcham store.

5.0 Results

The pipe trench across the road was not dug as one continuous excavation, but in three separate sections, in order to minimise disruption to vehicular and pedestrian traffic (Fig. 3). Short, intermediary stretches were left untouched – one located at the road centreline and the second to accommodate the roadside kerb. The sections were subsequently interconnected via restricted (sub-surface), hand-excavations, to allow passage of the waterpipe. The trench was located approximately 10m south of Lining Hole 11, excavated in 1999 as part of the works carried out by BUFAU on behalf of Severn Trent Water during their works to reline the water main to Wroxeter (White 2000).

Excavations across the roadside footpath, to a depth of 0.65m, uncovered a modern service trench (F102), which apparently followed the course of the footpath. Feature F102 contained two (parallel) plastic pipes and a backfill (1013). It had cut through a number of deposits, but the stratigraphy on opposing sides of the feature was dissimilar. Four soil layers were visible on the southeast side of F102, underlying the boundary/garden wall of the Wroxeter Hotel, but only two on the other side.

The earliest deposit (1012) was evident on both sides of the feature and comprised a silty-sand of various hues. A layer of brown silt (1011) overlay context 1012, which, in turn, lay beneath a charcoal-rich deposit of dark brown/black silt (1010). Sealing context 1010 was a layer of brown-grey, sandy silt (1009), which was the only other soil deposit to be common to both sides of the feature. Overlying the subsoils was a heterogeneous mix (1000) of gravel, stones and sand, which acted as bedding for the tarmac surface of the path. During hand-cleaning of the trench sides, prior to recording, deposit 1009 yielded sherds of pottery.

In order to accommodate the connection of the new pipe to the existing water main, the third section of trench was significantly deeper (1.3m) and wider at its northwest end. As

planned, these groundworks successfully exposed the '4 inch' water main (Fig.4; trench cut F101, with backfill 1007). However, they also revealed the stone foundations of an earlier wall (1005), roughly aligned 90 degrees to the current excavations and located less than 0.1m to the southeast of the water main trench (Fig.4; Plate 1). The wall-foundation trench (F100) extended down to a depth of 1.3m, stopping abruptly when it encountered a layer of natural, red sand (1014). Overlying the red sand to the northwest of F100 and cut by this feature, was a deep layer of multi-coloured sand (1008), akin to context 1012 – one of the subsoils underlying the footpath.

The lower stratigraphic layers to the southeast of F100 were not evident, as the current excavations did not extend to the base of the feature on that side. At a depth of 0.7m, F100 cut (or wall foundations 1005 abutted?) a deposit of grey-yellow, clayey silt (1003), which yielded fragments of animal bone during hand-cleaning. Overlying deposit 1003, and also 1008, was the bedding layer for the tarmac surface of the road (1000), a heterogeneous mix of gravel, stones and sand.

As regards the contents of foundation trench F100, a grey, silty sand (1004) infilled the base of the cut. This deposit contained flecks of charcoal, a pottery sherd, and a tile fragment. Resting on context 1004 were the remnants of the wall foundation stones (1005), in which large, river pebbles were predominant. However, there was also a (semi-dressed?) block of red sandstone and a number of re-used items within the closely packed foundations. A vertically set, fired-clay tile was evident, plus half a quern stone. Fragments of tile and the worked stone, disturbed by the on-going excavations, were recovered for future reference.

Overlying the stones, but still within the cut of foundation trench F100, was a deposit of brown-grey silt (1002) that contained charcoal flecks. During the groundworks, it yielded several sherds of pottery (including a sherd of amphora), a fragment of fired-clay tile, and fragments of animal bone. Context 1002 lay beneath a deposit of grey-brown, sandy silt (1001) that contained a scatter of charcoal flecks. However, no artefacts were recovered from this context during the excavation or subsequent hand-cleaning. Deposit 1001 was the uppermost infill of feature F100 and was overlain by layer 1000, the bedding for the tarmac road surface.

Prior to the groundworks by Severn Trent Water (STW), separate excavations had been undertaken in the front lawn of the Wroxeter Hotel (Fig.3). These took the form of two irregular holes (LE1 and LE2), circa 0.5m-deep and each about 1m by 1.5m in plan, which were still open when the archaeologist carried out the scheduled visit to the site on March 13th, 2002. Lengths of a flexible water pipe could be seen within the excavations and it was this pipe that STW were connecting to the water main. An inspection of the two holes revealed nothing of archaeological interest in the sides or base, but the spoilheaps proved more rewarding.

Excavation LE1 was located in the northern corner of the front lawn, close to the public highway and hotel driveway. Its spoil yielded sherds of pottery, large fragments of fired-clay tile and a vertebra from a large animal. The second hole, LE2, was located in the lawn close to, and about halfway down, the driveway to the hotel. Spoil from this excavation yielded a number of sherds of pottery (including three small sherds of Samian ware), a large fragment of fired-clay tile, an iron nail and several animal bones, including two horns (ovine).

6.0 The Pottery (by Jane Evans)

The excavations yielded a small assemblage of pottery sherds, within which were several diagnostic pieces. The majority of sherds recovered dated to the Roman period and information relating to these finds is tabulated below.

In addition to the Roman pottery, three sherds of Post-Medieval pottery (all of the same fabric) were recovered from the spoilheap generated by excavation LE 1.

Table 1: Spot dating of the assemblage

Excavation	Context	TPQ/ Spot date
STW Trench	1002 (Feature F100) 1004 (Feature F100) 1009 (Subsoil layer)	Roman Roman Late C4th
LE 1 LE 2	Unstratified Unstratified	Late C1st/Early C2nd Late C1st/Early C2nd.

Table 2: Quantification of the Roman pottery recovered

Site Code: WHW 02		Fabric Group (Sherd count)						Total count: Roman
Location	Context	Samian	Amphora	Reduced	Oxidised	White	Handmade	
STW Trench	1002 1004 1009		1			1		1 1 10
LE 1 LE 2	Unstrat. Unstrat.			1 4				1 13
Total count		3	1	Coarse wares = 22				26
Total weight		2g	57g	Coarse wares = 178g				237g
Total Rim EVE		0	0	Coarse wares = 22				22

Key. Calc = late Roman handmade shelly ware.

The majority of sherds were consistent with a late-1st to early-2nd century date. They included body sherds and a rim from a rusticated jar (Evans 2000, fig. 4.57 JM1.27), and a segmental bowl (op. cit. Fig. 4.66 B12.51). The three slivers of Samian ware were not readily identified by form, but more detailed analysis might allow identification of source, and thus date. No Black Burnished ware (BB1) was recovered, although the absence of BB1 in such a small assemblage may not in fact be significant. Subsoil layer 1009 yielded a single sherd of typically late Roman shelly ware, thereby indicating later activity in the vicinity.

7.0 Conclusions

Excavation of the trench for a water pipe has revealed the presence of substantial wall foundations, dating from the Roman period, beneath the surface of the existing public highway. It is likely that the archaeology suffered some degree of truncation during construction of the road, but stone foundations have nevertheless survived at a depth of circa 0.4m. The extent of the structural remains is not apparent from the limited amount of groundwork undertaken during this watching brief. However, in a separate excavation (Krakowicz 2002) the sparse remains of Roman wall foundations were also revealed some 9 to 10m to the south, beneath the lawn of the Wroxeter Hotel on the same alignment as those uncovered in this excavation. This evidence seems to indicate a stone-footed building, aligned north - south and with its frontage on the street to the north. This is similar in alignment and structure to the building observed in Lining Holes 11A and

12, c 66m to the south and, like that building, would belong to the eastern frontage of *insula XXVII*. Taken with the evidence of a number of parallel buildings along this same frontage south of the building in Lining Holes 11A and 12, this suggests that the frontage of *insula XXVII* was extensively built up along its entire length.

Pottery from deposits within the foundation trench (F100), above and below the remaining stonework, suggests that the structure dates from the late-1st to early-2nd century. Of interest is the re-use of items, from earlier structures, within the wall foundation. Such items include a substantial *pila*-size (c 300mm square) fragment from a much larger bonding or flooring ceramic tile and a quernstone.

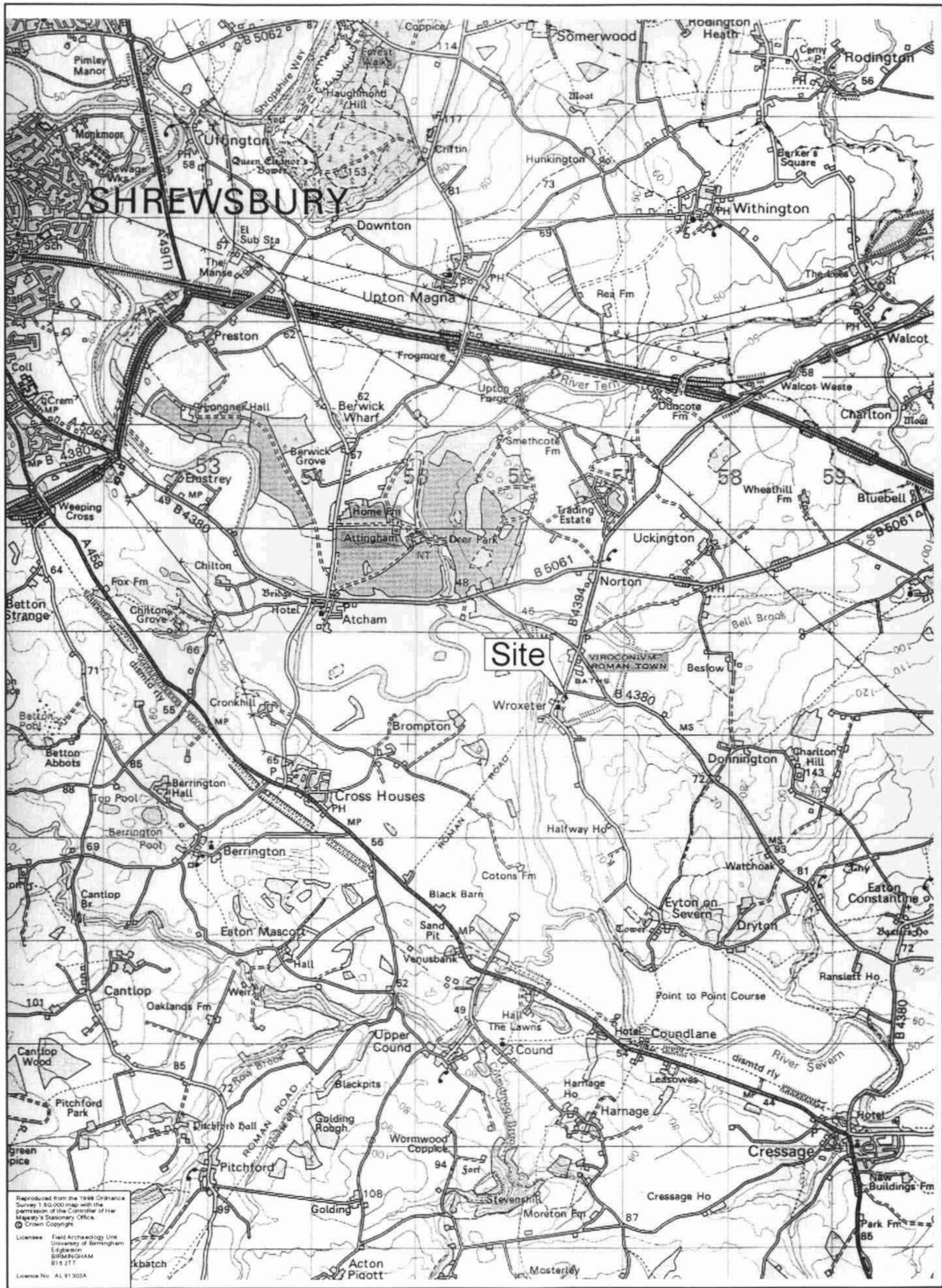
8.0 Acknowledgements

The report was written by Roy Krakowicz and edited by Dr. Roger White, who was also Project Manager. The figures and plate were produced by E. Newton. C. J. Evans identified, dated and commented on the pottery.

The author would like to thank the on-site staff of Severn Trent Water for their patience and assistance during the Watching Brief. Thanks are also due to Mr. Rowley of the Wroxeter Hotel, for the use of the hotel carpark.

9.0 References

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Fig.1

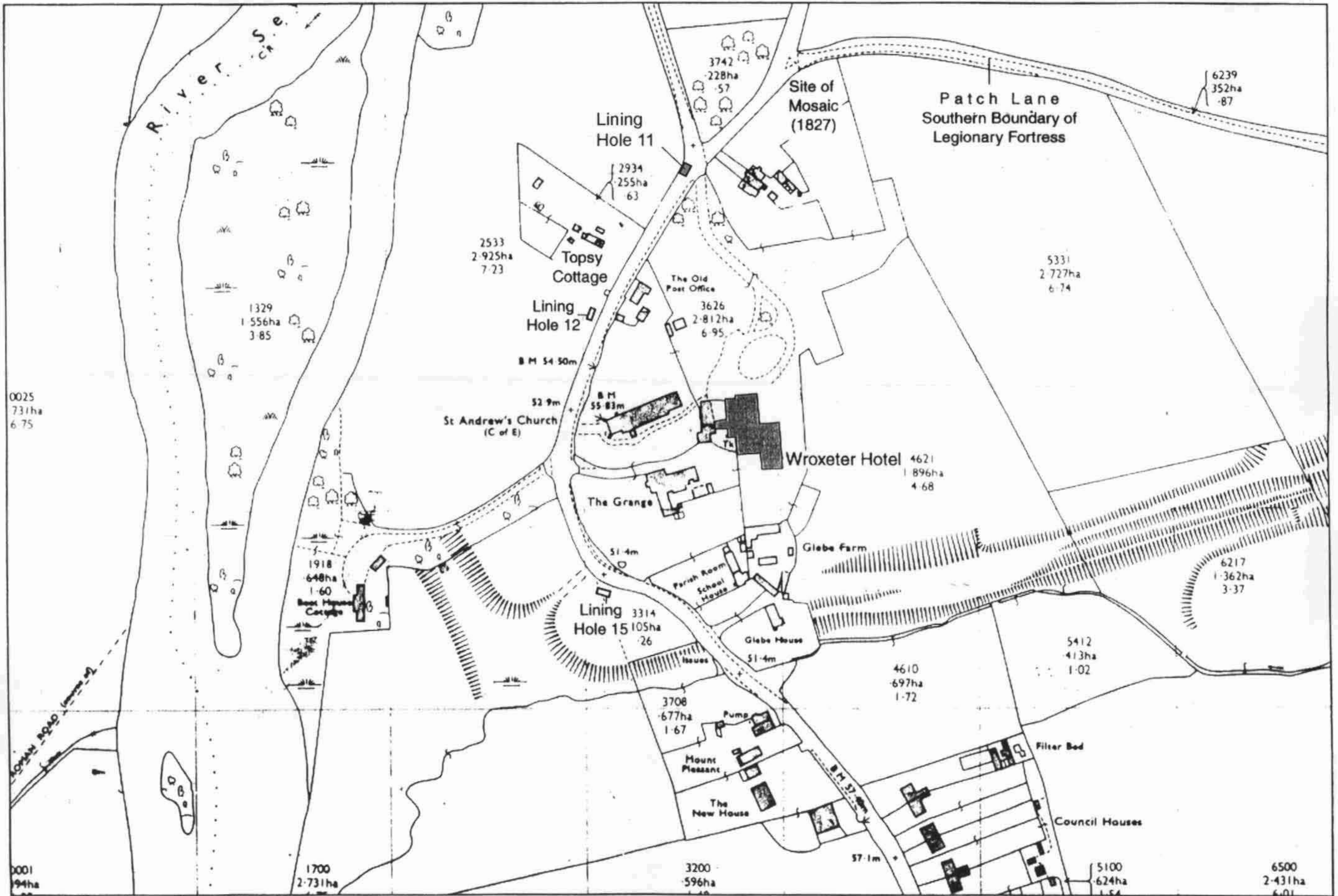


Fig.2



Fig.3

SW Facing Section

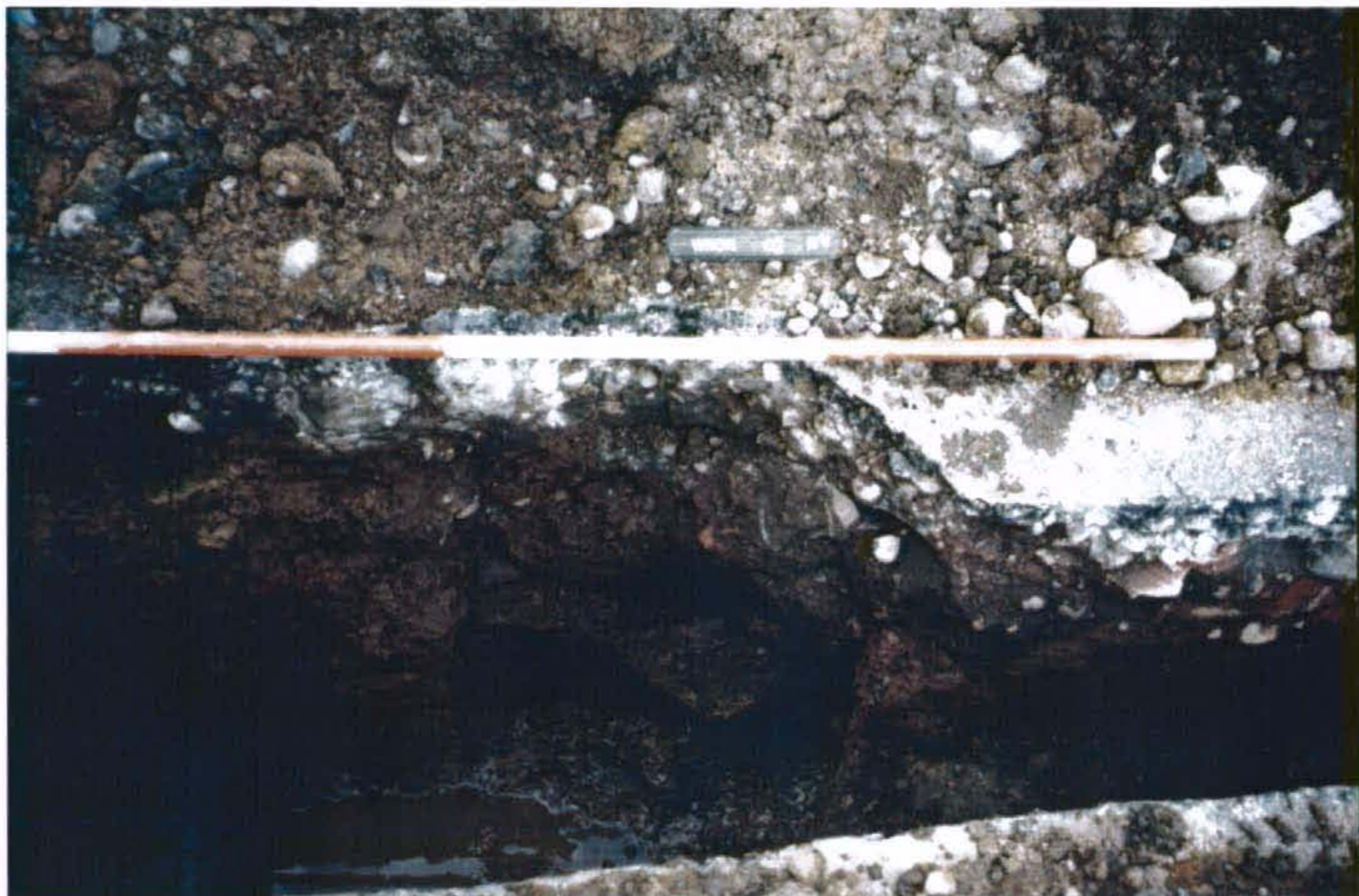
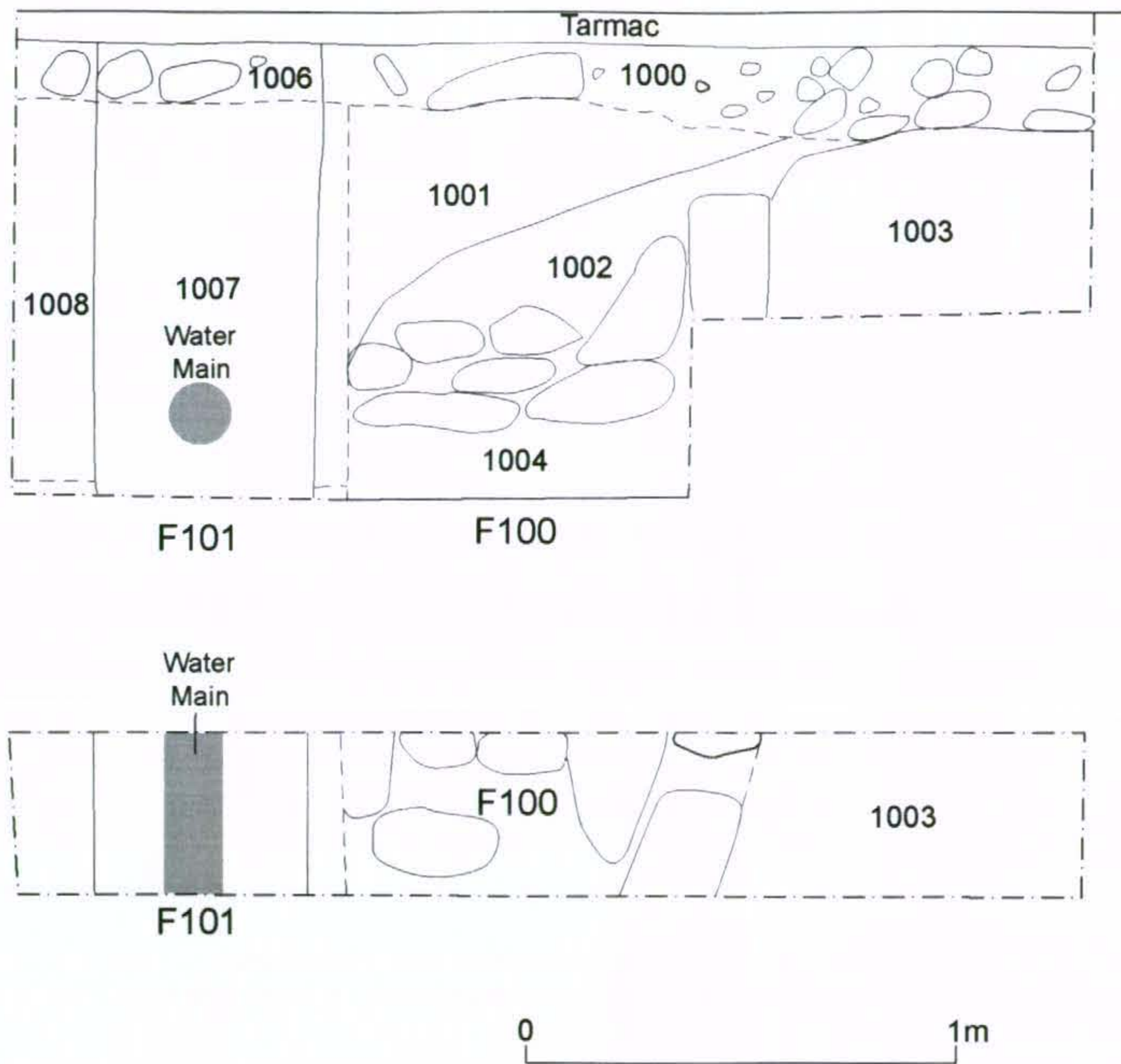


Plate 1

Fig.4

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