

HER PRN

19434

21 HIGH STREET, ILCHESTER

(NGR ST 52052263)

Archaeological Evaluation, 2005

(ILH/05, TTNCM 218/2005)

November 2005

Peter Leach BA FSA MIFA
Archaeological Consultant

Wenlock Edge, Pilton
Shepton Mallet
Somerset BA4 4AZ

Tel. 01749 890241
e-mail: 113204.233@compuserve.com

An archaeological evaluation in the garden of 21 High Street, Ilchester, part of Scheduled County Monument No. 404, October 2005

1.0 Summary

An archaeological evaluation was commissioned in response to a proposal for the construction of a garage in the rear garden of No. 21 High Street, Ilchester. The principal discoveries were part of a well preserved late Roman building, and deposits relating to a part of the earlier town rampart of the Roman town. Only upper levels towards the rear of the rampart were seen and there was no investigation of earlier stratigraphy or underlying natural formations. The outer stone wall of a 3rd-4th century building survived to six courses above further foundation courses. External and internal demolition rubble deposits were present, the latter sealing a compacted mortar floor covered by fallen painted wall plaster. The demolition horizon was sealed by dark occupation deposits associated with a large posthole set into the top of the demolished wall. No finds, deposits or structures of medieval date were recognised below a post-medieval truncation horizon.

2.0 Introduction

2.1: An archaeological evaluation was required by South Somerset District Council in response to a request for planning permission to erect a garage in the garden of 21 High Street, Ilchester. The site is included within part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument, Somerset No. 404, in accordance with the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, 1979. A Scheduled Monument Consent for the evaluation was obtained by the owners, Mr and Mrs T. Foreman, from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, via English Heritage, and subject to a Brief provided by the Culture and Heritage Directorate of Somerset County Council.

2.2: The evaluation was undertaken by the author in September/October 2005, in accordance with the Brief and the conditions of the Scheduled Monument Consent, and in conformity with the *General Specification for Archaeological Work in Somerset*, Somerset County Council, March 1995. The recommendation for this investigation also follows central government advice as set out in *Planning Policy Guidance on Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16) issued by the Department of the Environment in 1990, County Structure Plan policy AH5 and Local Plan policy.

3.0 The site

3.1: The premises 21 High Street, at NGR ST 5205 2263, lie within the southwest quarter of the historic town area of Ilchester (Fig. 1). The proposed garage location is close to the western extremity of the rear garden, which backs onto and has access to Priory Road. In common with many of the properties along the west side of the High Street, no. 21 occupies a long thin plot extending back almost 150m from the road

frontage. Most of the cottages were rebuilt early in the 19th century, although many still incorporate elements of earlier buildings. Today, these gardens cover a substantial portion of the western area of the former walled Roman and Medieval towns of Ilchester, prompting their protection through designation as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

3.2: Previous archaeological work has established an approximate line for the western defences of Roman and medieval Ilchester, corresponding in part with Priory Road (Fig 1). Excavation within the Scheduled area has necessarily been limited, although evidence recovered from many sites around the historic town area suggest that remains of the successive town defences as well as structures and deposits of Roman and medieval date can be expected to have survived in this locality.

3.3 From the 13th century this south-western corner of the town was the precinct of a Dominican Friary (Blackfriars), the site of which may well lie in part beneath the garden of No. 21 (PRN 53016). No trace of this precinct or its buildings survives today, although there were still fragments visible in the 18th century. A recent watching brief in the nearby garden of 1 West Street encountered medieval human burials at no great depth, possibly belonging to a cemetery of the Friary (Webster 2005, 120). Most of the long, narrow garden plots behind West Street and at this end of the High Street are thus presumably of post-medieval origin.

4.0 The Evaluation

4.1: Evaluation of the site proposed for the garage was by means of a mechanically excavated trench 8m x 1.6m, cut to the base of undifferentiated cultivated and mixed soil deposits 500-600mm below the modern surface. Excavation and recording proceeded thereafter by hand, the latter involving the creation of pro-forma written records, scale drawings and photographs of strata and structures encountered, and the collection of associated finds material (Appendix). The excavation strategy applied was designed to gain maximum comprehension of remains and their significance, with the minimum removal of deposits.

4.2: The trench was located as close as possible to the proposed garage location, subject to certain constraints imposed by current use and access to the site (Fig. 2). A more detailed archive of the finds and records of the evaluation form the basis for this report and will be deposited with the Somerset County Museum Service, ref. TTNCM 218/2005.

5.0 Archaeology

5.1: The earliest levels encountered were a series of deposits at the west end of the trench, inclined gently downhill from west to east - 1006, 1010, 1009 and 1005 - in order of deposition. Occasional ceramic tile fragments, animal bone and pottery (Dorset Black Burnished sherds of 2nd century type) were recovered from their very limited excavation. The latest in the sequence (1005) was a thin, markedly stony and darker mixed claysoil,

possibly representing a buried soil. Collectively, these layers are identified as part of a bank or rampart - **F2**. All the deposits were truncated horizontally at the post-medieval soil horizon base - **1000** (Figs. 3 & 4a).

5.2: Sealing the buried soil? **1005** was a relatively homogenous, dense clay layer - **1004** - from which no datable finds were recovered. Up to 350mm thick, this deposit became more stony eastwards to thin out above a surface of tumbled stone rubble and stony clay - **1011**. Little of this was removed but a small group of unabraded 2nd-3rd century Black Burnished ware sherds, two very abraded greyware sherds, and some animal bone was found. To the east this rubble terminated above a large, incompletely exposed, horizontal slab of Ham Hill stone. This was the lowest level reached in excavation at over 1.3m below the surface; the stone, with signs of surface wear and some heat scorching, itself butted against the lowest exposed foundation course of a mortared stone wall - **F1** (Fig. 4b).

5.3: The wall **F1** comprised three horizontal and roughly mortared stone foundation courses, over 0.6m wide, supporting five narrower, well laid and mortared stone courses c. 0.5m wide, the whole surviving to just over 0.8m high. This segment of wall was aligned approximately north northeast - south southwest, with its exterior face to the west. A more limited excavation behind its interior face reached a compact gravel and mortar surface - **1018** - set at the level of the top stone course of the foundation plinth, 0.6m below the surviving top of the wall. No attempt was made to investigate any levels surviving beneath that floor (Fig. 3).

5.4: Two small, partly exposed areas of pink-red mortar associated with some ash and charcoal, indicate restricted areas of heat scorching on the floor surface. Above the floor a thin layer of sandy silt and gravel - **1017** - barely 100mm thick, was banked slightly higher against the inner face of the wall **F1**. Within it were numerous small fragments of painted wall plaster lying both face up and face down, predominantly yellow-orange paint with some black speckling. Also within the deposit were occasional small stone fragments, charcoal flecks, Oyster shell and animal bone, and a few sherds of Dorset BB1 pottery.

5.5: This layer was succeeded by a much coarser and less coherent deposit - **1016**, c. 300mm thick of tumbled stone (Lias and Hamstone) and tile fragments (Clay, Lias and Pennant sandstone), occasional Lias floor tesserae, mortar, gravel, clay, charcoal, many animal bone and Oyster shell fragments, occasional iron nails, and pottery including sherds of 3rd-4th century Dorset BB1 jars and bowls (the great majority), and occasional coarse storage jars, colour coat cups and flagons, and Samian bowl fragments.

5.6: On the outside of the wall to the west what may be equivalent deposits, **1012** and **1001**, were banked against its face to a combined depth of over 500mm. A more limited excavation of the lower level - **1012** - recovered a group of 13 iron nails and 3rd-4th century Dorset BB1 pottery from a deposit of large stone blocks, sandy clay, gravel and mortar fragments. More extensive was the c. 1m wide spread of tumbled stone blocks and rubble with occasional air spaces (mainly Lias with occasional Hamstone) above - **1001**,

which also contained clay tile fragments, occasional animal bones, and pottery - primarily 3rd-4th century Dorset BB1 sherds, with occasional coarse storage jars, greywares, Oxfordshire red colour coat beaker and Samian bowl fragments (Figs. 3 & 4b).

5.7: Also partly beneath the rubble 1001 was a deposit of mixed stony clay with occasional larger stone blocks - 1002, c. 250mm thick, which spread almost 2m westwards to a shallow terrace cut into the earlier clay dump 1004 - marked in places by settings of large unmortared stone blocks - 1003. This deposit contained occasional clay tile fragments, charcoal, animal bone and pottery, including sherds of Dorset BB1 jars, local greyware and colour coat vessel fragments, and Samian - notably a 3rd century East Gaulish Argonne Ware base.

5.8: The final set of contexts post-date demolition of the late Roman building F1, etc. Within its former confines to the east an extensive deposit over 300mm thick of mid/dark brown stony soil - 1015 - contained scatters of larger building stone rubble and roof tile, some clay tile and Lias tesserae, mortar fragments, charcoal, plentiful animal bone and Oyster shell fragments, and the largest collection of Roman pottery from the trench (over 70 sherds), including Dorset BB1 jars, bowls and dishes, local greyware jars, Shepton Mallet mortaria, Rhenish, New Forest and Oxfordshire colour coat tablewares, and a few Samian fragments - the majority 4th century material. Outside of the F1 wall a similar but less stony deposit - 1013 - up to 200mm thick spread almost 3m westwards before thinning out beneath post-medieval truncation, though largely removed by machine excavation (Fig. 3).

5.9: Cut into the top of the wall, a group of large vertically-set stone blocks in dark stony soil - F3 (not excavated further), appear to represent a post-hole setting, possibly contemporary with the deposits 1013 and 1015. Two other features along the southern edge of the trench were also not sampled by excavation, comprising a narrow, east-west aligned strip of mixed buff-brown stony clay and gravel - 1008, and part of a sub-rectangular area of mixed buff-grey clay soil and gravel with a few larger stone blocks - 1007. The latter context, possibly a pit fill, appears to cut across 1008, which itself may be the fill of a ditch that appears to continue beneath the building demolition rubble 1001 (Fig. 3). No finds were recovered from surface hand cleaning.

6.0 Finds

6.1: Roman Pottery was the most common material collected; a total of 160 sherds. The bulk of this was Dorset/Poole Harbour Black Burnished ware (BB1), comprising approximately 75% of the assemblage. The bulk of this was from bowl and jar forms of 3rd and 4th century manufacture, with occasional 2nd century types represented. Other pottery types recognised were small collections of local grey coarseware fabrics, and a variety of colour coat types - including dishes, cups, beakers and flagons from Oxfordshire, New Forest, North Wiltshire and possibly other manufacturing sites. A small collection of Samian included bowl and dish forms representing Central and East Gaulish products, and one fragment of a black Rhenish beaker. The largest assemblages of pottery were

recovered from deposits within the bounds of the late Roman building - 1016, and the post-building occupation level - 1015.

6.2: Building materials included over 40 clay tile fragments, including some from roof *tegula* and *imbrex* tiles. Stone roof tiles were also present, the majority of Lias, although there were also Pennant sandstone fragments. Only a small sample of stone tile fragments were kept. Both Lias and Ham Hill building stone was present, as dressed fragments and built into the wall F1, but none was kept. Around 30 small fragments of cream-white wall or ceiling plaster was collected from the layer 1017, lying upon the mortar floor 1018. The bulk were painted on one face orange-yellow with some fine black speckling, but occasional fragments with darker pink paint were present. Lias stone tesserae (14) were collected from deposits inside the building, though none *in situ* - the majority c. 12mm square. A small collection of iron nails included a group of 13 from 1012 near the base of the wall, the majority probably roof tile nails. Almost all of this material was collected from deposits associated with demolition of the late Roman building, the bulk from 1015 and 1016.

6.3: Environmental material collected comprised almost 100 fragments of animal bone and over 40 fragments of Oyster shell; the largest groups recovered coming from the deposits 1015 and 1016. The animal bone was dominated by cattle, with some sheep/goat, although not all fragments were identified to species. The bone survived generally in excellent condition, and cut marks were visible on some pieces. One piece from 1016 was fashioned as the broken shaft of a hair pin. Charcoal was present in many contexts but generally as small flecks, and no samples were collected. No other deposit samples were collected for further processing.

7.0 Interpretation

7.1: No primary ground levels or natural deposits were reached in this evaluation, the earliest inclined deposits at the west end of the trench (F2) being interpreted as upper components of the earth and clay rampart built to enclose the Roman town, probably near the end of 2nd century. What little datable evidence was recovered conforms with this, and the thin layer 1005, could have marked its upper rear surface. All higher portions of the rampart sequence will have been levelled centuries ago, even possibly in the later Roman period. This structure has been recorded and interpreted elsewhere around Ilchester in the course of more extensive excavations (Leach 1982 and 1994).

7.2: The clay deposit 1004 may represent the earliest phase of such rampart levelling, spread to level up the ground prior to the construction of a large, later Roman building. The stony rubble layer 1011 may also have been associated with this process, although its relationship to the wall F1 was not clearly seen. The wall itself is an exceptional survival, a well-preserved segment standing to over 0.5m above lower foundation courses on a wider plinth. The latter was not fully investigated, but exposures of major building foundations elsewhere in Ilchester would suggest that further courses of alternately pitched drystone

footings at a lower level will support the plinth within a foundation trench.

7.3: Material recovered from overlying deposits indicate the use of brick and clay tile as well as Lias and Pennant stone roof tiles, and both Lias and Ham Hill stone in the building's construction. Only a small portion of an internal mortar floor was seen, although the presence of loose tesserae of different sizes probably reflect some tessellated pavements within the building. A further indicator of its interior was the painted plaster lying above the mortar floor **1018**, possibly from the ceiling in this room since there was no sign of wall plaster remnants adhering to the inner face of **F1**.

7.4: Outside, the incompletely exposed Hamstone paving slab, set well down against the foundation plinth, is more likely to represent an exterior drain rather than just a paved yard or path. Drainage would probably have been necessary along this side of the building, located as it was just behind the slope of the town rampart remains. The unexcavated ditch? (**1008**) and pit? (**1007**) could be further evidence of exterior activity contemporary with the life of the building, possibly also connected with drainage or water collection.

7.5: No reconstruction of the original building is possible from this small fragment although an establishment of some status is implied by what survives. Most of the dateable pottery came from post-building deposits, but this and its relationship to the earlier town rampart suggests that it was built and occupied in the later 3rd and 4th centuries. A substantial building of quality is implied, and its position some way from a main street could identify it as one of the larger late Roman town houses suggested at several sites within Ilchester, perhaps the properties of local wealthy land and villa estate owners? How much more of the building survives as intact as this is unknown, but it seems to be exceptional in the context of such remains as are encountered frequently elsewhere in Ilchester, where stone wall robbing, at least, is normally much more extensive (Leach 1982 & 1994). Could its suspected inclusion within the former medieval Blackfriars precinct have afforded its remains a greater measure of protection?

7.6: The earliest signs of the building's demise are patches of red scorching and ash on the mortar floor, possibly from a fire or brazier stood upon it. Soon afterwards a period of dereliction is implied by finely weathered deposits and the fallen wall/ceiling plaster (**1017**). What followed then was an episode of wholesale building demolition or collapse, represented by the internal deposit **1016**, and **1001** and **1012**, and possibly **1002** and **1003** outside. No direct dating for this event is available, beyond later 4th century pottery from the destruction levels, which might imply that the building survived for sometime into the 5th century?

7.7: Thereafter, further deposits accumulated above the levelled building on either side of the wall and eventually burying it. The character and content of the 'interior' deposit **1015** in particular, suggest that these reflect some continuing period of occupation associated with a substantial wooden? structure, represented by the post-hole **F3**. Little more can be surmised of this, although the absence of any recognisable medieval material from an excavated c. 0.5 cubic metre sample appears significant, and may indicate a rare

intact survival of early post-Roman occupation evidence in Ilchester. No direct dating for this postulated occupation was recovered but the deposit resembles so called 'dark earth' accumulations recorded in other Roman towns prior to later Saxon and medieval reoccupation.

7.8: No evidence of Late Saxon/medieval structures or deposits, even as residual material, was recovered. The horizon of truncation at the base of surface levels 1000, appears to be of post-medieval date, to judge from occasional 18th - 20th century brick, pottery, glass, metal objects, etc., collected but not retained. As suggested above, the previous inclusion of this area within the precinct of the Blackfriars, and its relative remoteness from a major focus of medieval occupation along the High Street might account in part for the absence of such evidence here.

8.0 Conclusions

8.1: This evaluation has demonstrated the survival of a well preserved sequence of later Roman and early post-Roman structures and deposits from a horizon 500-600mm below the modern ground level to depths in excess of 1.3m. No underlying natural ground levels or deposits were reached and no remains dateable to earlier than the later 2nd century AD were found. Previous knowledge of Ilchester's archaeology suggests that earlier sequences of Roman and prehistoric remains can be anticipated to survive here at lower levels, possibly to 2m or more below the modern garden surface.

8.2: The archaeological sequence recorded indicates that the site lay just within the confines of Roman Ilchester's later town defences, and that it also contains some remains of a well-preserved 3rd-4th century stone building of some pretension. The relative protection of these remains from later (medieval) disturbance has ensured the survival of a demolition/dereliction, and possible early post-Roman occupation sequence here. The latter is notable, given the more usual circumstance of extensive medieval stone robbing and disturbance of Roman remains elsewhere as the medieval town of Ilchester developed. One explanation for the absence of medieval disturbance, or of any activity here, might be the inclusion of this locality within the precinct of the Blackfriars - though presumably away from any buildings or its cemetery. Its protection from any earlier medieval development might be accounted for by a relative remoteness from the High Street.

8.3: The evaluation has established the presence of archaeological remains and deposits of national significance on this site. In the event of the proposed development proceeding only the upper levels (1000) to a maximum of 500mm below the modern surface, could be regarded as being of minimal archaeological importance. Despite its limited extent, the evidence recovered appears to justify well the designation of this area as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and its potential for preserving important sequences of Ilchester's archaeology.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Tim and Wendy Foreman, who commissioned the evaluation and for their interest and hospitality; to Fachna McAvoy, English Heritage, and Steve Membery, Somerset County Council, who monitored the project; to John Chant for machine excavation and to Anthony Maidens for assistance on site.

References

Leach, P. 1982 *Ilchester Volume 1 Excavations 1974-5* Western Archaeological Trust

Leach, P. 1994 *Ilchester Volume 2 Archaeology, Excavations and Fieldwork to 1984*
Sheffield Excavation Reports 2

Webster, C. 2005 (ed.) 'Somerset Archaeology 2004' *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History* Vol. 148, 120

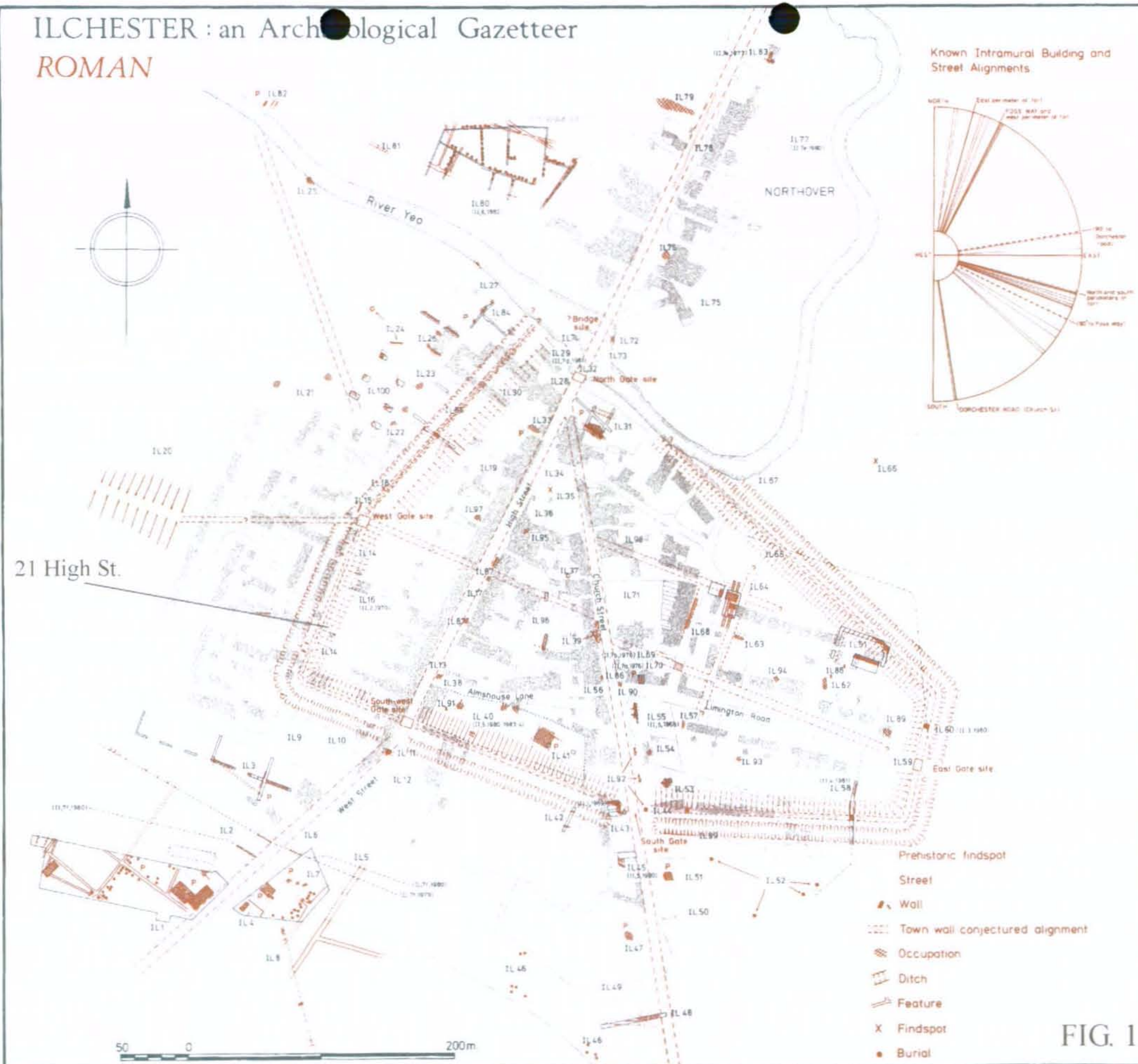
Appendix

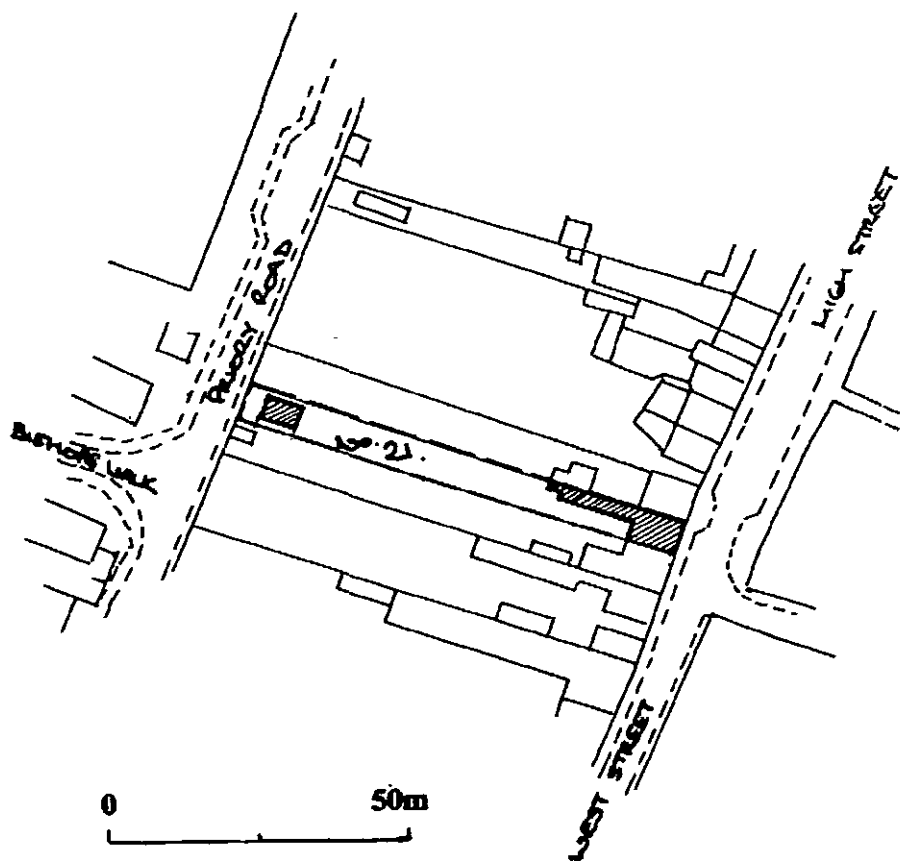
Table of archaeological stratigraphy

Context	Description	Finds	Interpretation
1000	Surface layer >500mm, garden/mixed soil	Modern material, not kept	Modern garden soil, etc.
1001	Tumbled stone blocks, stony soil layer 200-250mm deep	Roman pottery: Dorset BB1, CCs, coarse wares, Tile, Animal bone, Shell	Exterior building (F1) demol. rubble, post- C4th
1002	Stony clay soil with some stone blocks c 200mm deep	Roman pottery: Dorset BB1, Samian, CCs., coarse-ware, Tile, Shell	Exterior building (F1) occupation/demol. Layer, C4th +?
1003	Large stone blocks, rubble, mortar frags.	No finds	West edge of 1002?
1004	Compact, stony clay layer, > 300mm	Animal bone	Levelling above F2
1005	Thin, dark stony claysoil layer, <100mm	Roman pottery: DBB1, Tile Animal bone	Surface of F2 rampart
1006	Yellow-grey/green sandy silt layer, 150mm+	Roman pottery: DBB1,	F2 rampart dump layer
1007	Buff-grey mixed stony clay fill, rectangular	No finds	Late/post-Roman pit fill?
1008	Mixed yellow-brown gritty clay fill, linear	No finds	Late/post-Roman gully fill?
1009	Ashy grey-brown silty clay layer, <100mm	No finds	F2 rampart dump layer
1010	Gritty buff-orange silty clay layer, 150mm+	No finds	F2 rampart dump layer
1011	Surface of tumbled stone blocks and stony clay, with 1012?	Roman pottery: DBB1, Coarseware, Animal bone	Exterior levelling for later Roman building F1, etc
1012	Large stone blocks, rubble, sand & mortar	Roman pottery: DBB1, Iron nails, Animal bone	Rubble sealing F1 exterior foundations
1013	Stony, buff-brown clay soil layer, >200mm	No finds	Post- F1 building exterior
1014	Horizontally coursed Lias and Hamstone blocks, gritty cream-yellow mortar	No finds	Components of stone wall F1
1015	Mixed, stony dark brown soil layer, stone rubble, gravel, mortar frags., much pottery, animal bone, etc. >350mm	Roman pottery: DBB1, CCs Samian, Mortaria, Coarsew Tessera, clay & stone tile, Animal bone, Shell	Post-F1 building interior ?occupation deposit. Post-C4th
1016	Very mixed, buff-brown stony clay layer, gravel, much stone rubble, mortar frags. etc. >300mm	Roman pottery: DBB1,CCs, Samian, coarseware, Clay & stone tile, tessera, Iron nails, Animal bone, Shell	Internal F1 building demolition level. Late/post- C4th
1017	Light buff-yellow sandy silt/gravel layer with much plaster, c 100mm thick	Roman pottery: DBB1,Iron nail, Painted wall/ceiling? plaster, Animal bone	F1 interior room, primary abandonment level. ?Late/post-C4th
1018	Compact cream gravel and mortar floor surface, not removed	No finds	F1 interior room floor, ?C4th
1019	Fill of dark brown stony soil and large set stone blocks, not removed	No finds	Fill of posthole F2 cut into F1 wall
F1	Segment of mortared stone wall and foundation, 8 courses, 0.5 -0.6m wide, 0.8m high	No finds	West exterior wall of a late Roman building - 1014 components

ILCHESTER: an Archaeological Gazetteer

ROMAN





21 High Street ILCHESTER

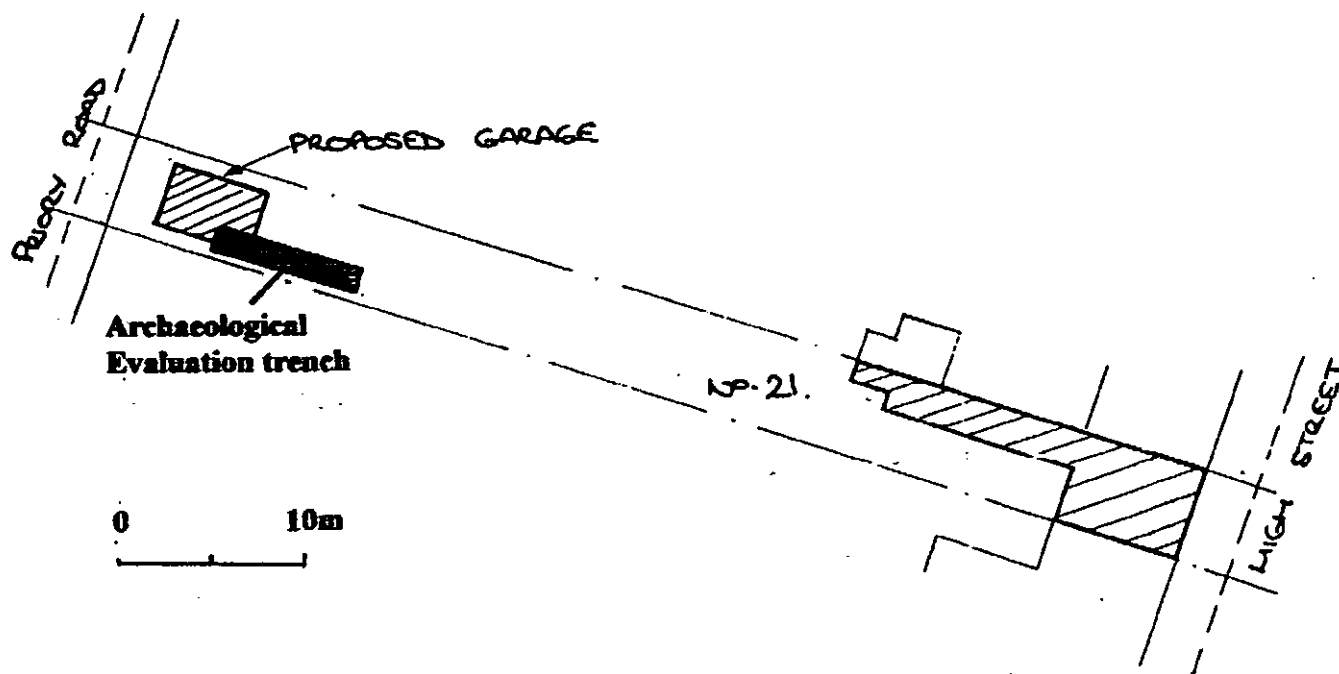


Fig. 2

ILCHESTER: 21 High Street 2005

Evaluation Trench Plan & Section

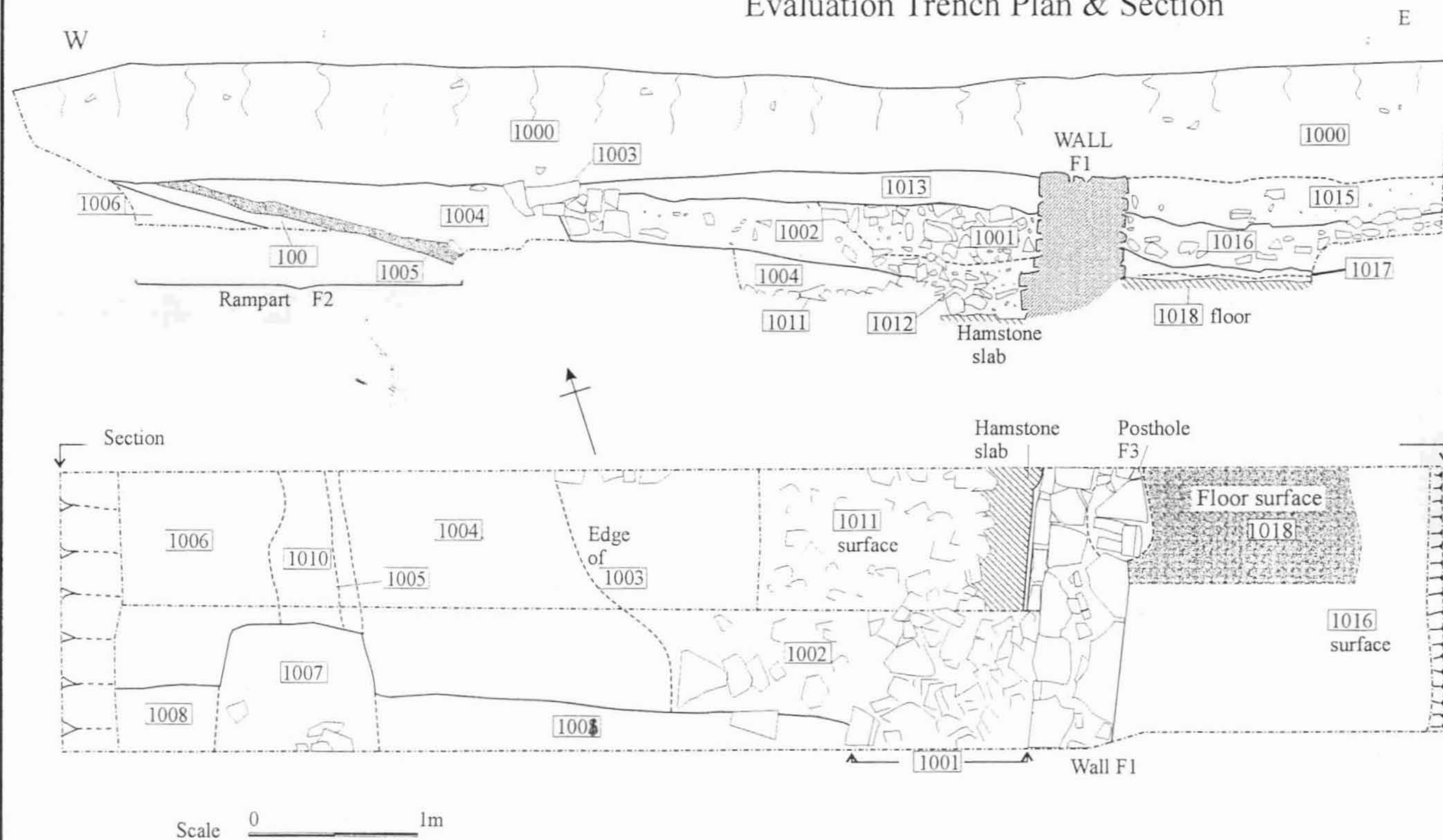


Fig.3



Fig. 4a: F2 rampart bank deposits below 1000, south - facing section



Fig. 4b: F1 wall exterior face behind rubble 1001, view east