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ARCHAEOLOGICAL
TRUST

**A59/A56 JUNCTION IMPROVEMENT,
WEST OF SKIPTON,
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**



**1998 FIELD REPORT
NUMBER 57**

**A59/A56 JUNCTION IMPROVEMENT,
WEST OF SKIPTON, NORTH YORKSHIRE.**

**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Between 15th and 19th June, on 22nd June and between 6th and 8th July 1998, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief during road works to alter the junction between the A59 and the A56 trunk roads to the west of Skipton, North Yorkshire (NGR SD 9286 5050) (Figure 1).

The main contractors for the project were Kier North East Limited who carried out the work on behalf of North Yorkshire Consultancy who were acting for the Highways Agency.

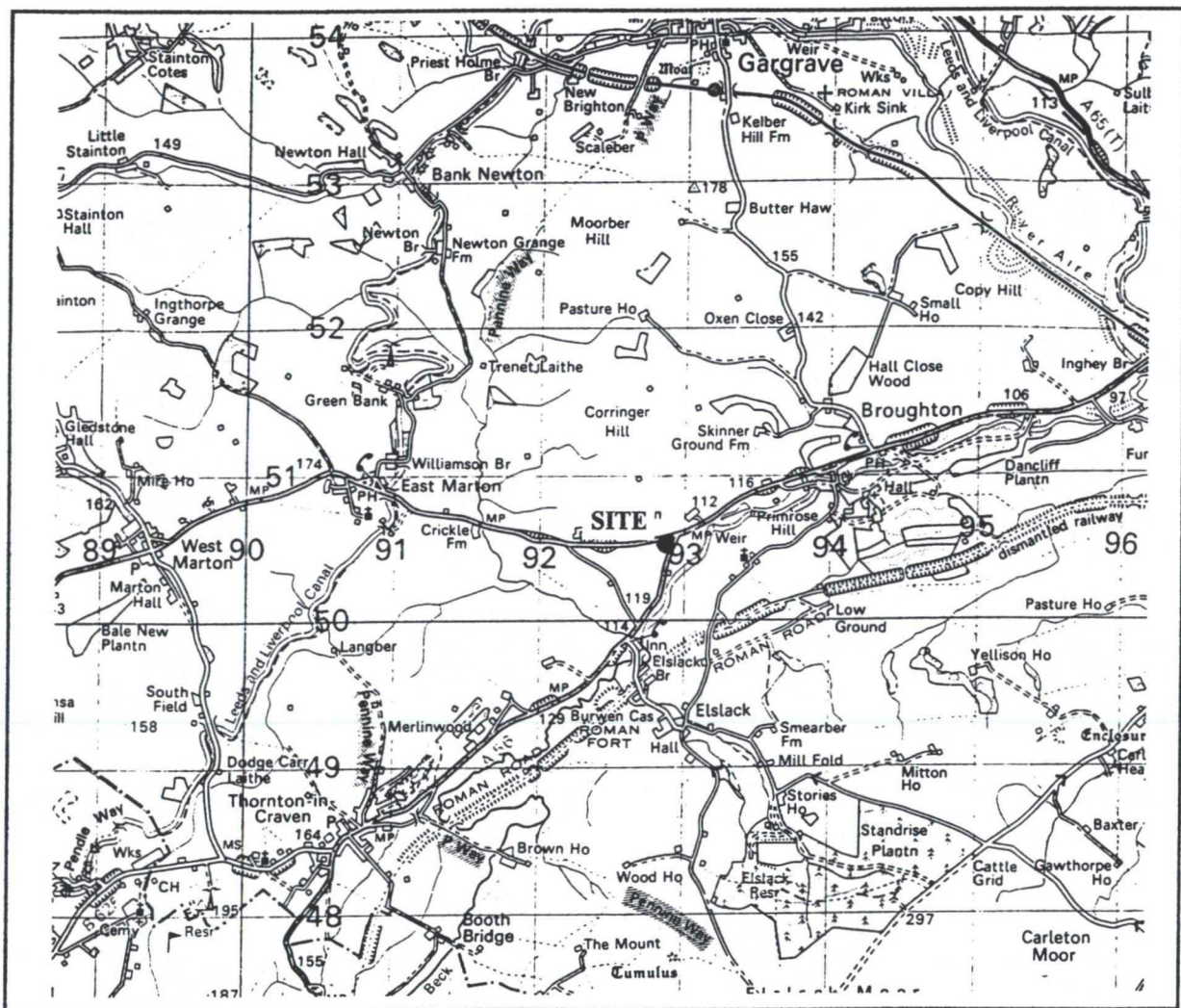


Figure 1. Site Location

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Scale 1:50,000

1.1 METHODOLOGY

The groundworks carried out involved the machine removal of the topsoil and any underlying deposits to a depth of 0.50m BGL (metres Below Ground Level) to reach the formation level necessary for the construction of a new roundabout (Figure 2). A 'soft spot' was encountered where the western access road was due to approach the roundabout. This was caused by the presence of an extensive deposit of peat, which was removed to a maximum depth of 1.95m BGL in order to reach a suitable base from which to build.

Deposits and features encountered during the work were recorded as drawn sections at a scale of 1:10 and described using pro-forma context recording sheets as per the York Archaeological Trust Context Recording Manual. A series of 35mm colour print photographs were also taken.

The site records are currently stored with York Archaeological Trust under the Trust accession code YORAT: 1998.6

1.2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site is located in a rural area close to the southern edge of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, approximately 6 km to the west of Skipton. The area for the new roundabout lies on the 120m contour on the lower slopes of the south facing edge of the valley of Broughton Beck. The valley falls away gently to both the south and east. The solid geology of the area is carboniferous limestone.

1.3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The historical and archaeological background of the site was researched as part of a desk-top study of the area by R.P.S. Clouston.

Whilst on site a number of earthworks were observed which appear not to have been included in the desk-top study. A group of these were located in a field to the east of Broughton Beck, adjacent to Hall Leith (9232) approximately 400m to the south east of the construction site. They were centred on grid reference NGR SD 930 502 (Plate 1), and were recognisable as track-ways and associated field boundaries.

A further group of similar, though less complicated, earthworks was located in field 9862, approximately 150m NE of the excavations (NGR SD 9295 5064) (Plate 2), where the junction of two track-ways or a track-way and field boundary were clearly defined.

The dating of these features is uncertain but they are clearly of some antiquity and may relate to the medieval period or perhaps even earlier.

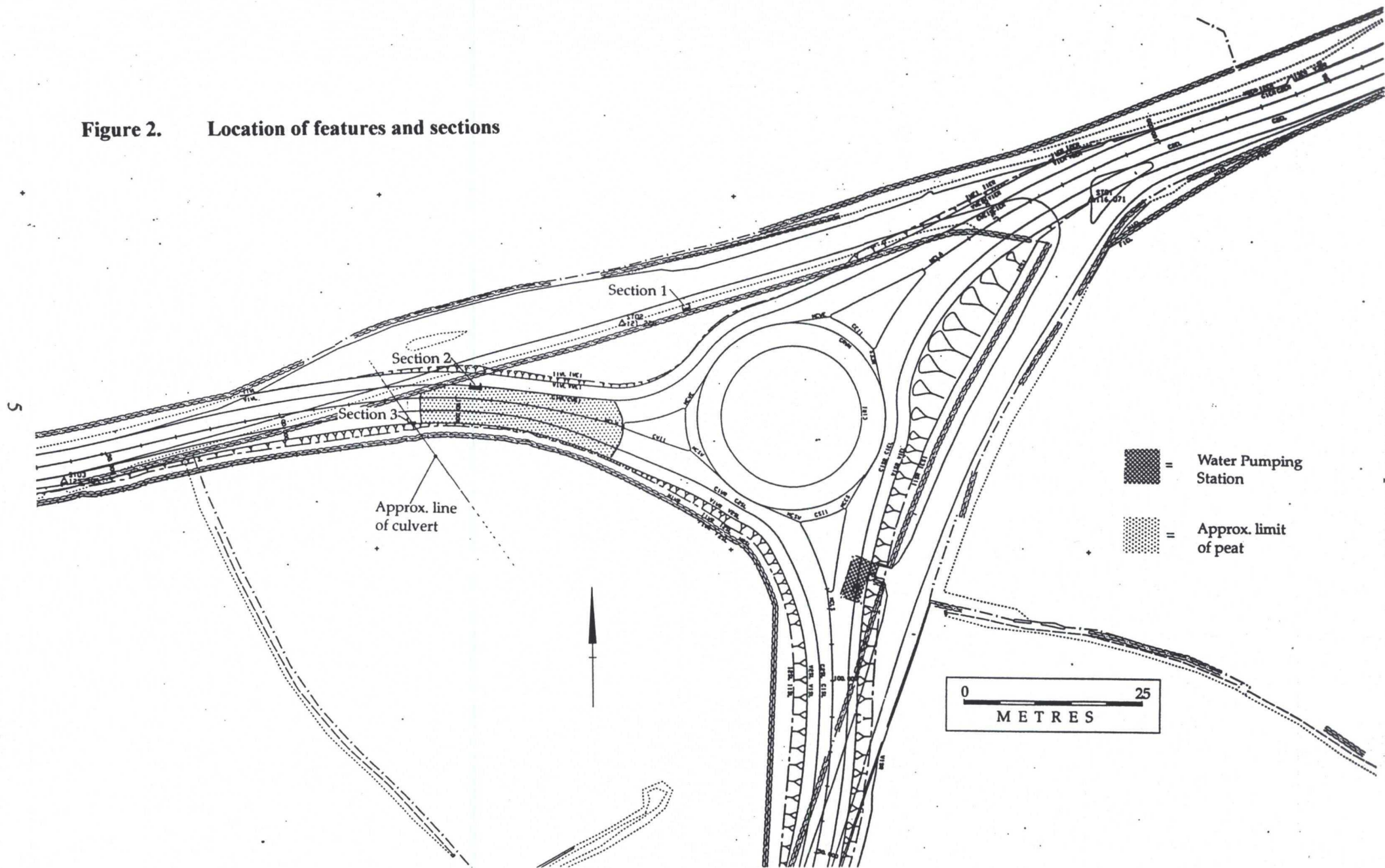


Plate 1. Earthworks to south-east of junction



Plate 2. Earthworks to north-east of junction

Figure 2. Location of features and sections



2. RESULTS

2.1 Section 1 (Figure 3)

The earliest deposit reached was a compact pale orange brown sandy clay (102) at 0.25m BGL which was machined out to a depth of 0.30m. Directly above this was a plastic pale orange brown sandy clay sub-soil (101) 0.16m deep. This was sealed by a friable mid grey brown sandy clay silt with occasional small pebbles and small angular stone fragments that formed the present day plough soil (100) 0.10m deep. The area was under a crop of wheat at the commencement of the watching brief.

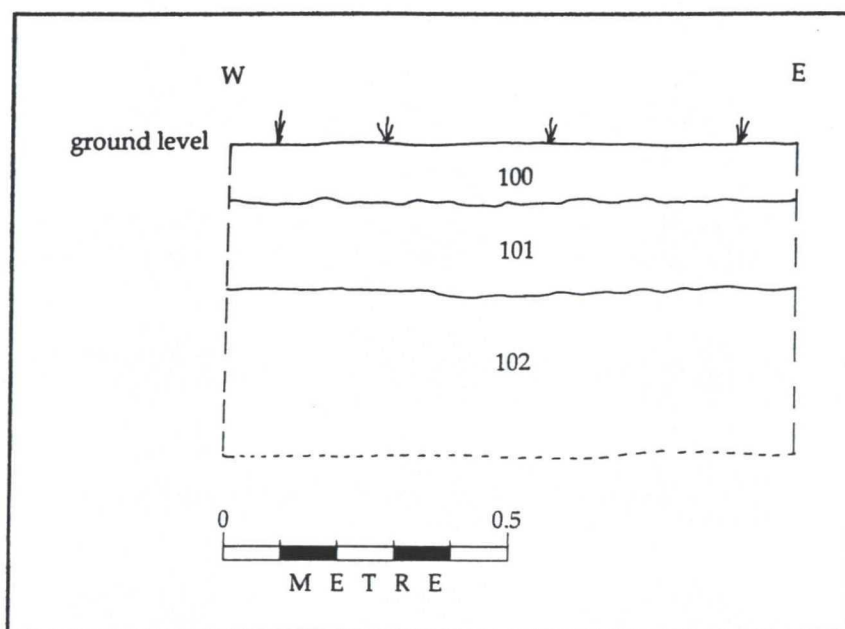


Figure 3. Section 1, south facing

2.2 Section 2 (Figure 4)

The earliest deposit seen in this section was at 1.60m BGL and was machined out to a depth of 0.35m. This consisted of a compact mid grey gritty sandy clay (208), with inclusions of occasional small pebbles and angular stone fragments. Also present were fragmentary decayed tree roots.

Directly above this was a similar deposit of gritty sandy clay (207), up to 0.06m deep, with frequent small angular stone fragments and occasional small pebbles. This was believed to be the same deposit as 208 that had been 'washed out' by running water.

207 was sealed by a plastic, moist off white sand silt (206), 0.40m thick, which contained inclusions of moderate small snail shell fragments, occasional complete snail shells and black rootlets.

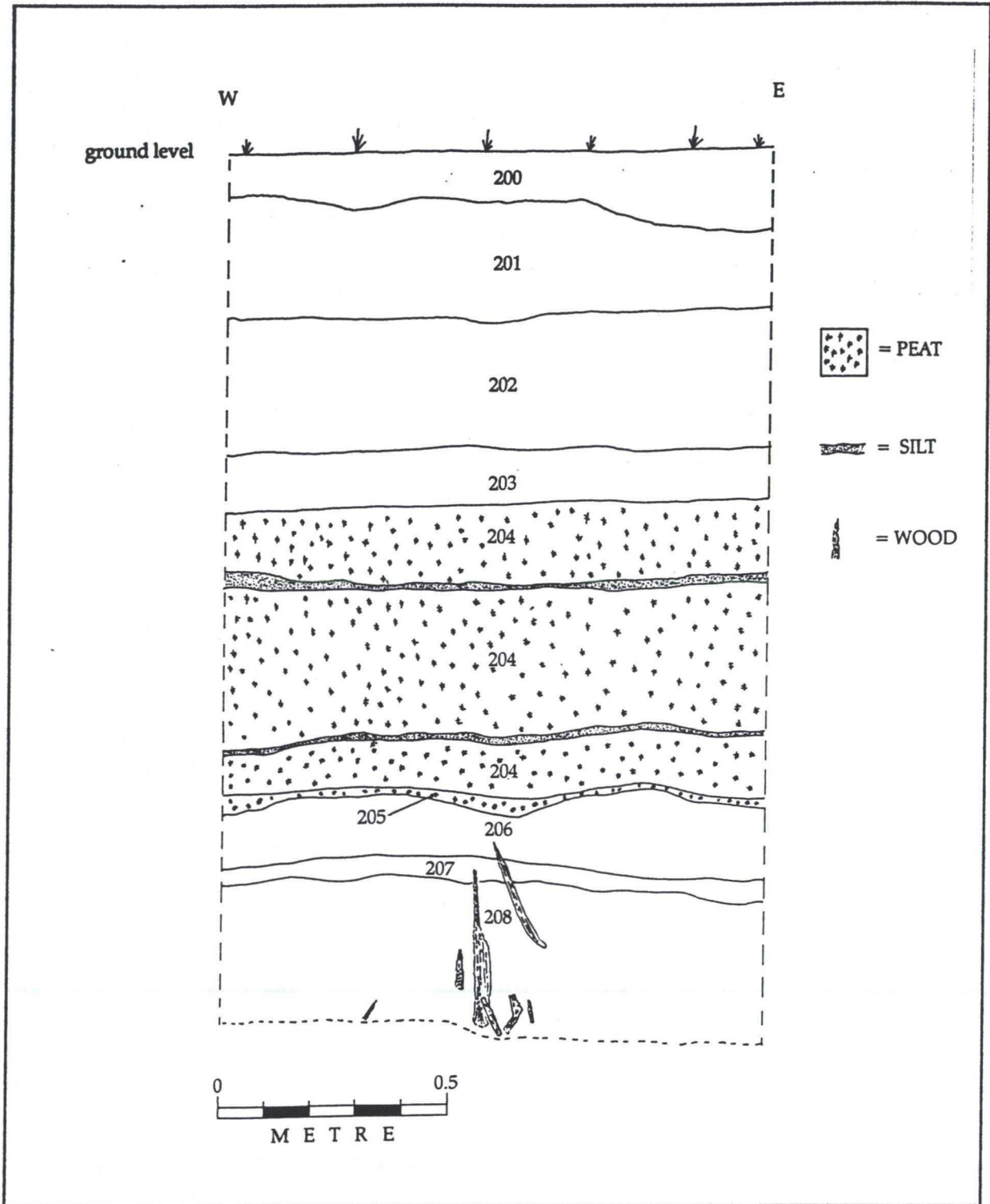


Figure 4. Section 2, south facing

Overlying context 206 was a deposit of moist plastic dark brown fibrous peat (205), up to 0.04m deep which contained moderate numbers of small snail shell fragments. This lay below a similar deposit of peat (204) which, although similar in structure to context 205, was lacking the snail shell inclusions and had formed a considerably thicker deposit. 204

was up to 0.65m deep and varied in colour, ranging from pale reddish brown to a dark chocolate brown. Within this deposit were two thin lenses of pale grey silt which indicated that the formation of the peat had been disrupted on two separate occasions, possibly when the area was inundated by flood water.

The peat bed was sealed by a series of natural clays. The earliest of these was a plastic pale grey silty clay (203) which was beneath a compact light brown flecked pale grey clay (202), itself sealed by a compact stiff orange/yellow silty clay (201). These layers had collectively formed a 0.66m deep deposit underlying the present day plough soil (200) which was 0.19m deep.

2.3 Section 3 (Figure 5)

This was located 10m to the south west of section 2 just beyond the western limits of the peat bed. The earliest deposit seen was at 1.17m BGL and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.11m. This consisted of a plastic pale orange brown silty clay (309), with inclusions of occasional small to large sandstone pebbles and millstone grit fragments.

309 was sealed by a plastic blue grey silty clay (308), 0.06m deep, which lay beneath a plastic purplish brown peaty clay (307), 0.30m deep. The 'peaty' nature of this deposit suggested that it had formed on the fringes of the peat bog. Directly above this was a 0.62m deep deposit of compact mid brown flecked orange brown natural clay (306), which had been truncated by the 1.50m wide x 0.75m deep 'U' shaped construction cut (305) for a stone culvert.

The culvert (304) measured 0.26m high and 0.10m wide internally with an external height of 0.35m and width of 0.43m. The sides were constructed from roughly worked dry-coursed sandstone blocks, four courses on the east side, three on the west. Any irregularity in the construction was remedied by the use of 'chock' stones. The culvert was roofed with a large sandstone slab, 0.54m wide by 0.06m thick with the floor remaining unlined, hence the narrow silt filled erosion gully in the base.

The construction cut was packed, up to the top of the capstone, with a pale brown clay silt (303). The remainder of the construction cut was back-filled with crumbly orange brown clay silt with occasional small sandstone fragments (302) below friable mid grey brown sand silt (301) with moderate small to medium sandstone fragments. The cut was sealed beneath the present day plough soil (300), which was 0.32m thick.

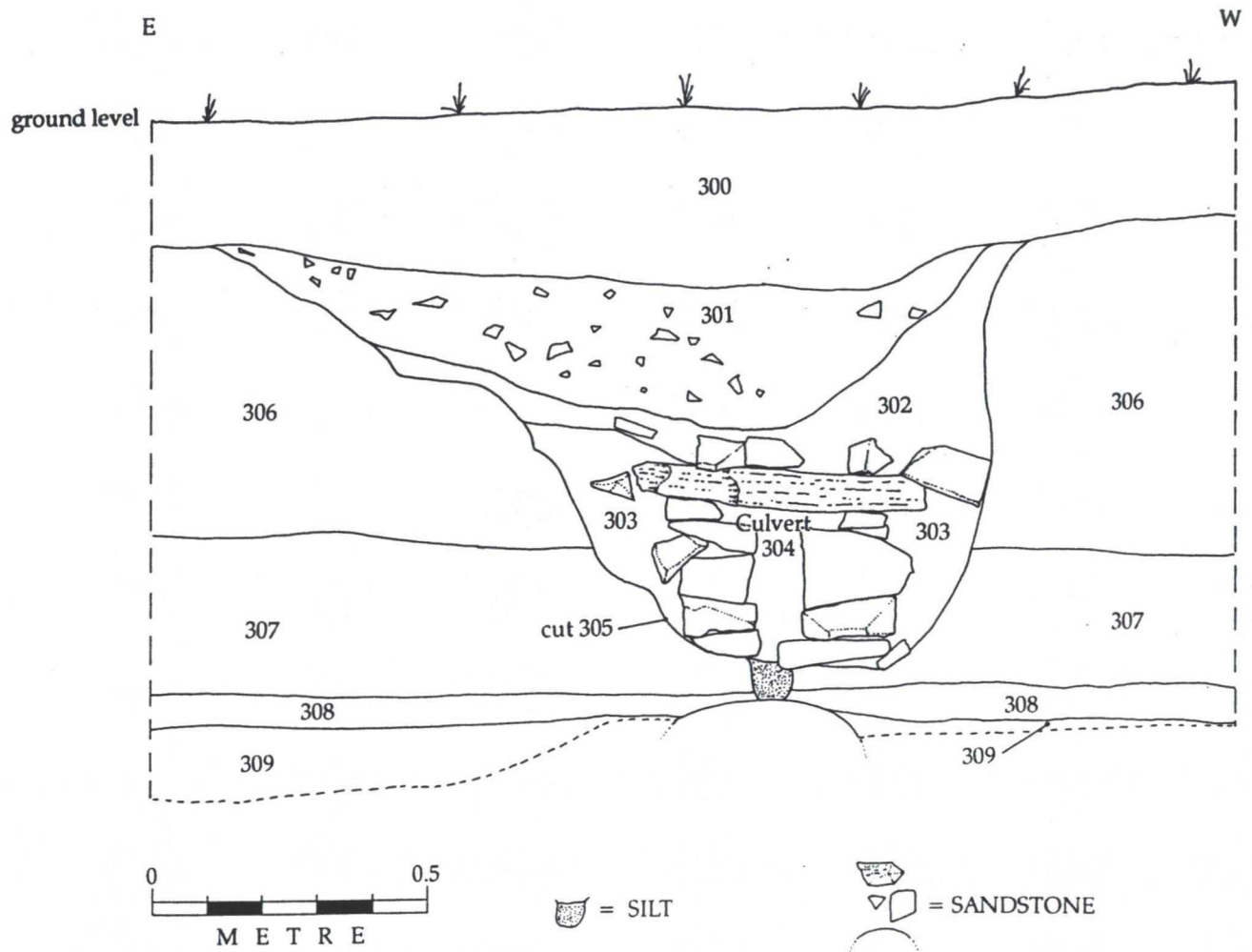


Figure 5. Section 3, north facing

3. CONCLUSIONS

The majority of deposits encountered proved to be natural in origin. The earliest of these may represent an ancient ground surface (208), which had been subject to erosion by running water (207)(Figure 4). It appears that ponding occurred and a deposit consisting mainly of snail shells (206) built up prior to the formation of a bed of peat (205, 204) (Figures 2 and 4).

The peat bed and the underlying deposits were sampled for general biological analysis (Contexts 205 (sample 1), 204 (sample 2), 206 (sample 3) and 208 (sample 4)). The results of this analysis are not currently to hand but they should indicate the type of environment and climate at the time of peat formation and, possibly, provide dating evidence for the peat bed. The antiquity of the peat bed was suggested by the deposits of natural clay which had formed above it. These extended site wide and were recorded in all sections. Variations in the clays were noticeable towards the lowest part of the site, on the floor of the valley, where they became more mixed and contained pockets of pale grey or yellow sandy clay with lenses and patches of gravel or glacial erratics.

The top of the natural clays was truncated by the construction cut (305) for a stone culvert (304) (Figure 5), which may have formed part of the drainage system for the field in which the roadworks took place. It does, however, seem to be excessively large and too well constructed to have performed this function alone. Its alignment suggests that it may have functioned as a drain to remove the surface water from a forerunner to the current A59 trunk road (Figure 2). No dating evidence was recovered from the culvert or its cut but the method of construction would suggest a date of no later than the 19th century.

The back-fills of the culvert construction cut and a series of north east-south west aligned 20th century ceramic land drains (not shown), were sealed beneath the present day plough soil which, at the outset of the watching brief, was under a crop of wheat.

A redundant water pumping station (Figure 2), cutting into the top of the plough-soil, was removed and the resulting void back-filled and stabilised in preparation for the formation of the road bed.

4. LIST OF SOURCES

Geological Survey of Great Britain "Ten-Mile" Map, Sheet Two, 1957

Archaeology and Cultural Heritage - Desk Top Study, R.P.S. Clouston, 1996

5. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Watching Brief, report and illustrations

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