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ARCHAEOLOGICAL

TRUST

STREET LIGHTING SCHEME, MINSTER ROAD, RIPON, NORTH YORKSHIRE

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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STREET LIGHTING SCHEME,

MINSTER ROAD, RIPON,

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ABSTRACT

An archaeological watching brief undertaken during the excavation of eight small pits for new lamp standards to the north and west of Ripon Cathedral revealed three burials in one trench and a limestone wall in another. No dating evidence was recovered but more than one phase of burial was clearly represented. The other six trenches revealed only modern deposits.

1. INTRODUCTION

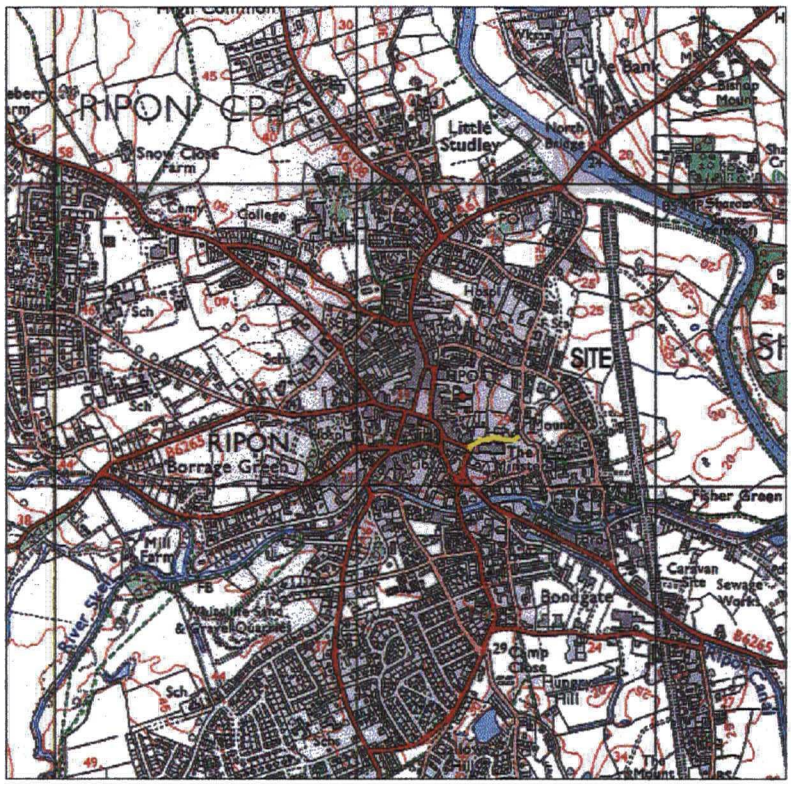
On 14th April 1999 York Archaeological Trust undertook an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of eight small trenches for a series of new street lamps. These were located adjacent to Minster Road to the north and west of Ripon Cathedral, North Yorkshire (NGR SE 3144 7113), (North Yorkshire County Monument No 1282) (Figure 1). The work was commissioned by Environmental Services, North Yorkshire County Council in compliance with section 2 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, 1979 (as amended) as the area around Ripon Cathedral forms part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument (NYCC ref. B6265/3/13 EW).

2. METHODOLOGY

The work carried out involved the observation and archaeological recording of the hand excavation of several trenches intended for new lamp bases (Figure 2). These were located adjacent to the existing street lamps, were 0.40m square, and were excavated to a depth of between 0.74 to 0.80m BGL (metres Below Ground Level). All of the trenches were located either in the area of the footpath (Trenches 1 - 5) or in Minster Road (Trench 8) except for Trench 6 which was located within a grassed area between the north wall of Ripon Cathedral and the Cathedral precinct wall. Trench 7 was excavated and back-filled without any archaeological supervision or observations taking place. The human burials that were exposed during this work were recorded, removed and, upon completion of the excavation, replaced in their burial position prior to the installation of the new lamp base.

The deposits and features exposed in the excavation of the lamp bases were recorded as drawn sections and a plan at a scale of 1:10 as well as being described using pro-forma context recording sheets. A number of 35mm colour print photographs were also taken.

The site records are currently stored with York Archaeological Trust under the Harrogate Museums accession code HARGM: 9791.



Scale 1:25 000

Figure 1, Site location plan

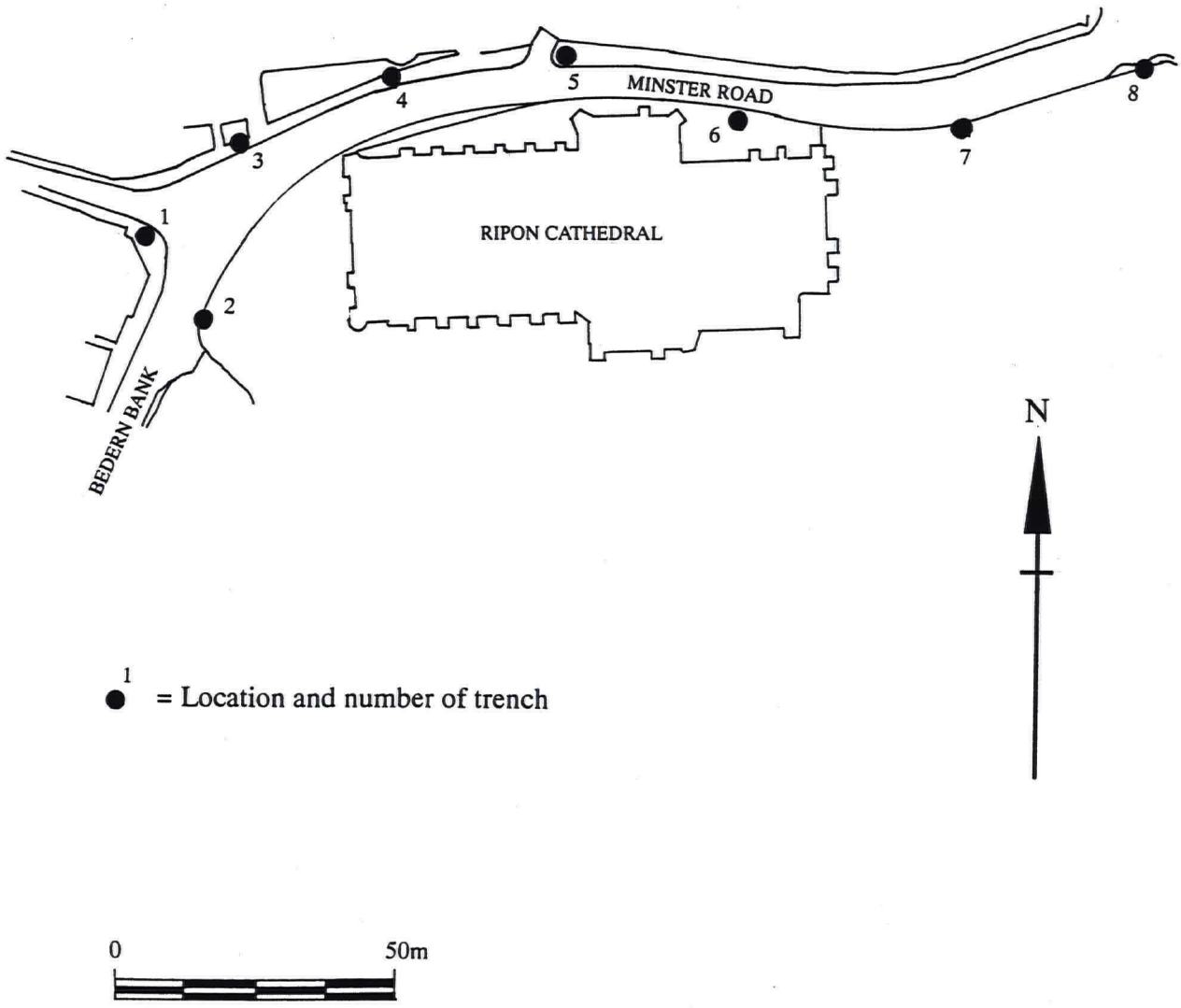


Figure 2, Location of trenches

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Trench 1 (Figure 2, Figure 3; Section 1)

Trench 1 was hand excavated to a maximum depth of 0.80m BGL. The earliest deposit observed was loose mid brown clay sand (102) with inclusions of small pebbles, brick fragments and small clay patches. This was seen at a depth of 0.44m BGL and continued beneath the base of the trench. A steel water water pipe located within context 102 suggested that it was the back-fill of a modern service trench. This was sealed by a levelling deposit consisting of compacted crushed brick, limestone and small pebbles (101), 0.25m thick, which formed the make-up deposit for the overlying tarmac foot-path (100).

3.2 Trench 2 (Figure 2, Figure 3; Section 2)

Trench 2 was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.75m BGL. The earliest deposit observed was loose mid brown medium grained sand (202), with inclusions of occasional small pebbles, large pebbles and small patches of pale brown sand, which was thought to be natural in origin. This was observed at 0.26m BGL and continued beneath the base of the trench.

Directly above context 202 was a levelling/make-up deposit consisting of compacted loose limestone hard core (201), 0.14m thick, which formed the bed for the sandstone slab pavement (200).

3.3 Trench 3 (Figure 2, Figure 3; Section 3)

Trench 3 was excavated to a depth of 0.71m BGL. The earliest deposit observed was at 0.18m BGL and continued beneath the base of the trench. It was a levelling deposit consisting of friable pale to mid brown gravelly silt sand (301) with inclusions of frequent crushed brick/tile and mortar flecks, moderate small brick and stone fragments, occasional medium brick fragments and small mortar fragments. Directly above context 301 was the tarmac (300) that constitutes the present day footpath.

3.4 Trench 4 (Figure 2, Figure 3; Section 4)

Trench 4 was excavated to a depth of 0.80m BGL. The earliest deposit observed was a levelling deposit at 0.13m BGL which continued beneath the base of the trench. This consisted of friable mid brown slightly clay silt sand (401) with inclusions of moderate flecks to small fragments of mortar, occasional small to medium pebbles, small to large stone fragments, small brick fragments and charcoal flecks. It was sealed by the tarmac (400) that forms the present day footpath.

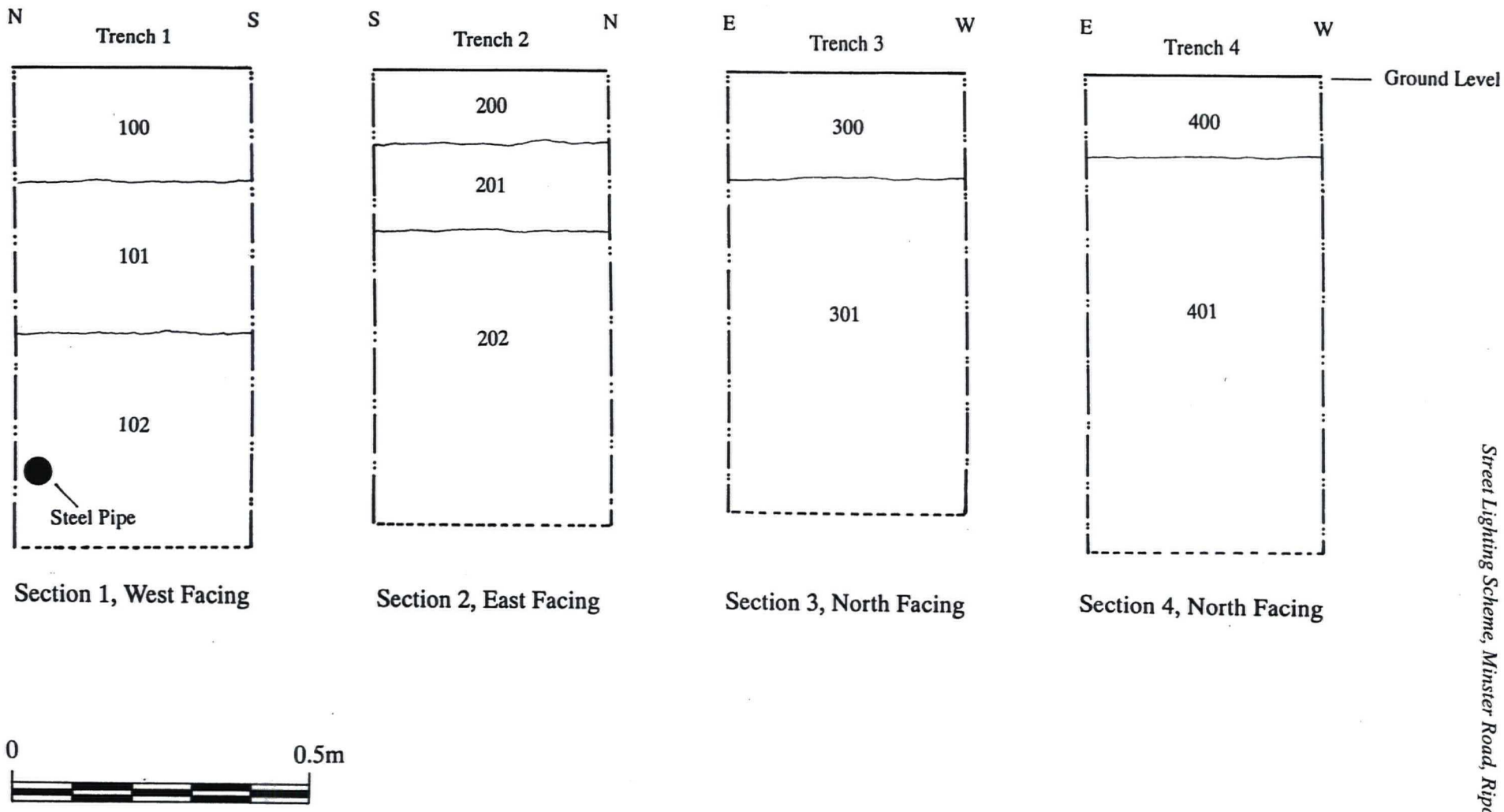


Figure 3; Sections 1 - 4

3.5 **Trench 5** (Figure 2, Figure 4; Section 5)

Trench 5 was excavated to a depth of 0.80m BGL. The earliest deposit observed consisted of loosely friable mid orange brown coarse sand (502) with inclusions of occasional large concrete fragments, small to medium brick fragments, large cobbles, medium sandstone fragments, limestone fragments, flecks to small fragments of mortar and charcoal flecks. This was observed at 0.20m BGL, continued beyond the base of the trench, and was either a levelling deposit or, more likely, the back-fill of a modern service trench. It was sealed by a levelling/bedding deposit consisting of loose, coarse, mid brownish yellow sand (501), 0.13m thick, for the concrete paving slabs (500) forming the present day footpath.

3.6 **Trench 6** (Figure 2, Figure 4; Section 6 and plan of trench 6)

Trench 6 was excavated to a depth of 0.80m BGL. The earliest deposit observed was at 0.25m BGL and continued beyond the base of the trench. This consisted of friable sticky mid orange brown silt sand (601) with inclusions of occasional mortar flecks, small sandstone fragments, small pebbles and small clay patches, which was thought to represent a build-up of grave yard soils.

Three articulated human burials (SK 604, 603 and 602) were located within context 601, at approximately 0.60m BGL (Figure 4, plan of Trench 6). Although all three skeletons were only partially exposed within the small trench it was obvious that they were in-situ, were supine and orientated east - west with the head to the west. In all three cases the remaining bone was in a soft, crumbly poor to fair condition.

The earliest of the inhumations were skeletons 602 and 604. The left and right tibia, fibula and both femurs of Skeleton 602 were present. Skeleton 604 was located 0.10m to the south of skeleton 602, was at the same level but only the left-hand side of the body was within the trench. This consisted of the spinal column, pelvis, ribs, scapula and left humerus.

Skeleton 603 was laid directly above skeleton 602 and may originally have also covered skeleton 604. It had survived as a partial upper spinal column, ribs and both left and right humerus.

Directly above context 601 was a friable mid to dark grey brown sand silt (600) with inclusions of occasional mortar flecks and small brick/tile fragments which formed the present day topsoil of the grassed area immediately to the north of the Cathedral.

3.7 **Trench 8** (Figure 2, Figure 4; Section 8)

Trench 8 was excavated to a depth of 0.80m BGL. The earliest feature observed was at 0.58m BGL and continued beneath the base of the trench. This consisted of a substantial wall (805) constructed from large magnesian limestone ashlar blocks bonded with a stiff creamy white mortar. The nature and alignment of the structure of which this wall formed a part remains unknown. The trench for the lamp base cut directly into the upper surface of wall 805 and the limestone continued beyond all four sides of the trench.

Directly above wall 805 was a 0.20m thick levelling deposit consisting of a friable, sticky dark grey brown sand silt (804) with inclusions of moderate small pebbles, occasional small – medium brick fragments, small sandstone fragments and flecks to small fragments of mortar. This was sealed by a surface (803) of small to large cobbles in a matrix of dark grey brown gritty silty sand with occasional charcoal flecks, 0.10m thick. Above surface 803 was a make up/levelling deposit consisting of compacted loose yellowish white crushed limestone 0.12m thick. Directly above this was a 0.06m thick deposit of loose mid brown coarse grained sand (801) that formed the bedding for the present day pavement of brick setts (800).

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

Undisturbed natural deposits were only encountered in Trench 2 (202), elsewhere, with the exception of Trenches 6 and 8, all of the deposits observed proved to be modern and related to the excavation of service trenches or successive repairs and/or re-paving of the modern footpath.

The dating of the burials in Trench 6 (SK 602, 604 and 603) is uncertain as they were not accompanied by any dateable artefacts. However, the lack of any indication of a coffin or coffin fittings and the shallow nature of the burials, only 0.60m deep, may suggest that they were medieval in date. The condition of the bone suggested that they had been in the ground for at least two hundred years. The lack of visible grave cuts was most probably due to the similarity between the grave fills and the material (601) into which the graves were excavated.

The earliest feature in Trench 8 proved to be a mortar bonded limestone wall (805). The small size of the trench means that the orientation or type of structure that the wall formed a part is unknown. The thickness of the visible stonework, over 0.40m, suggested that it was part of a substantial building or boundary wall.

The rough nature of the upper surface of wall 805 suggested that it had been partially demolished before the area was levelled (804) and also raised by 0.20m, before the cobble surface (803) was laid. The date of the surface is not known as it did not produce any dating evidence.

The deposits sealing context 803 (802 and 801) had raised the ground level by 0.19m and related to the make-up and bedding for a foot path of brick setts (800) which was in use at the time the watching brief was undertaken.

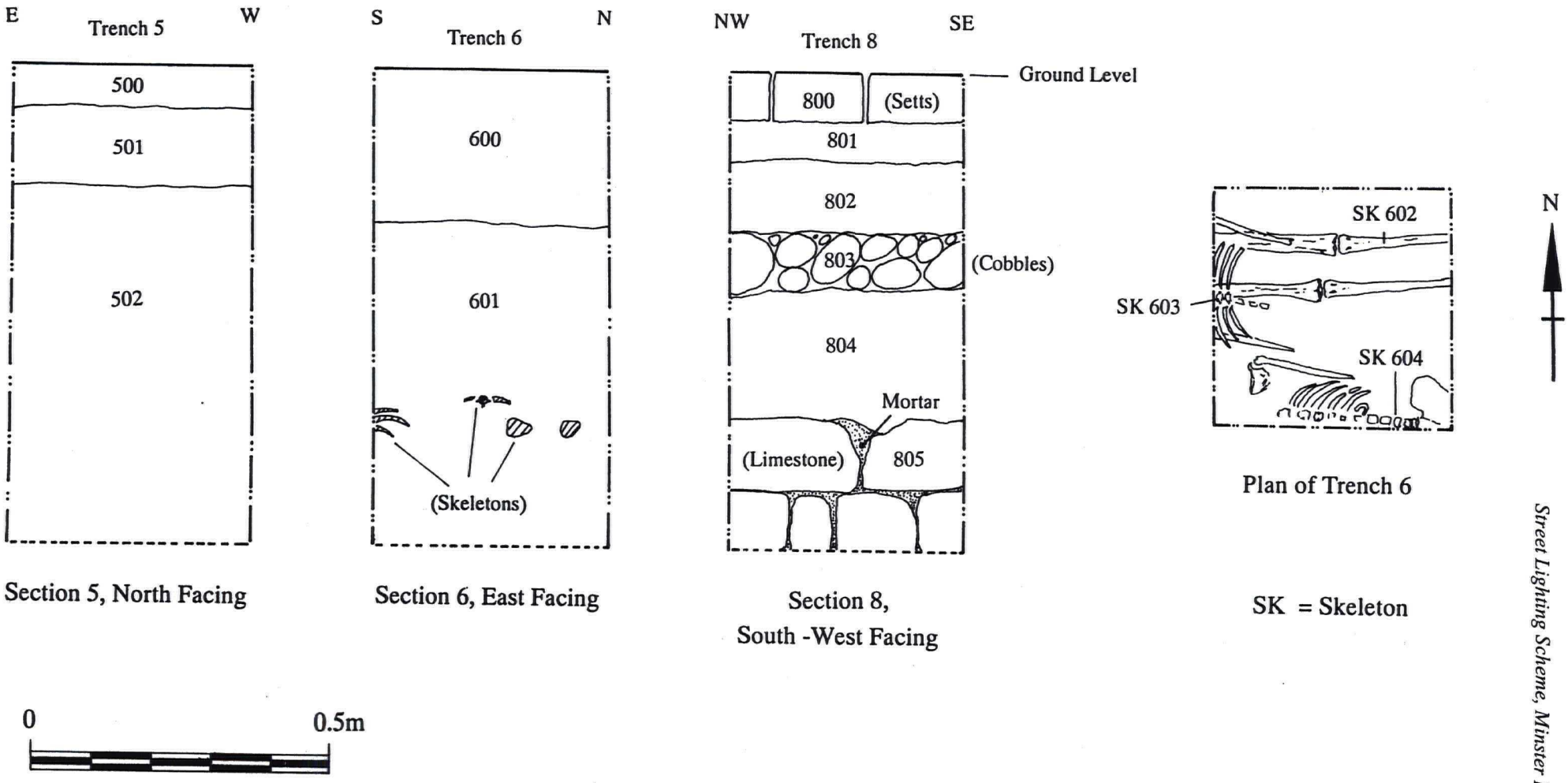


Figure 4; Plan of trench 6 and sections 5, 6 and 8

5. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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