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**WHITE ROSE HOUSE,  
WHARRAM - LE - STREET,  
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF**

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## ABSTRACT

*An archaeological watching brief in advance of house construction in Wharram le Street, North Yorkshire revealed evidence for occupation of the site from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century and agricultural use thereafter. A wide ditch appears to represent land division and a large possible quarry pit suggests that the natural chalk was being exploited, perhaps for building stone. An alignment of four post holes marks a change in the character of land use to settlement and two pits for the disposal of domestic rubbish seem to confirm this. Two possibly contemporary later ditches, perhaps with an entrance between, suggest a further change. A nearby ditch with a rounded terminal may also have been of agricultural use. The pottery assemblage was not able to date the activity any more closely than to the 11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Between 10<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> February 1999, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief on a plot of land adjacent to Red House Farm, Wharram-le-Street, North Yorkshire, (NGR SE 8645 6605) (Figure 1). The work was commissioned by the present owners Mr and Mrs May, in compliance with an archaeological condition imposed by Ryedale District Council on the advice of the Heritage Unit of North Yorkshire County Council under planning reference 98/1016/Full.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

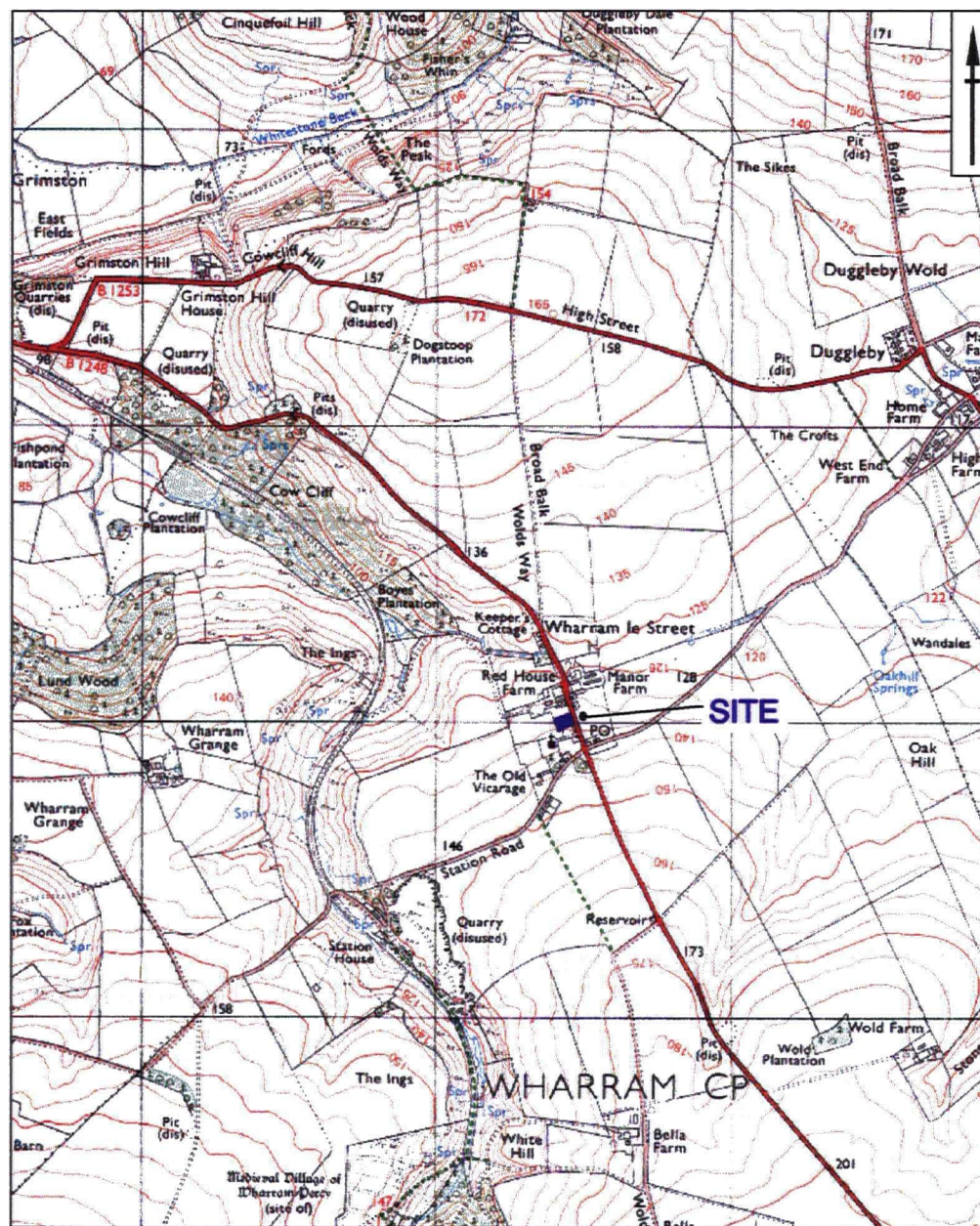
The work involved the observation and archaeological recording of the machine excavation of the access road and foundation platform for a new dwelling, White Rose House, and an associated garage/workshop (Figure 2). The area covered by the development was reduced to 1.30m BGL (metres Below Ground Level) adjacent to Malton Road (B1248) to form an entrance and access road to the rear of the site. This access road rose gradually to the west where the ground level was reduced by approximately 0.80m prior to the construction of the garage/workshop. The area covered by the foundations of the dwelling, which lay to the south-west, was reduced by approximately 0.60m (Figure 4).

All the necessary ground works were carried out by a tracked 360 degree excavator and JCB back-actor under archaeological supervision. The main contractors for this were Wrights of Crockey Hill who carried out the work at the behest of Nigel Capell Construction, Grantham.

One part of the site, located in the south-east of the development area (Figure 3) was not able to be recorded as it was badly disturbed by the constant passage of plant and machinery whilst the ground works were taking place. This area was monitored while the excavations were being carried out and, with the exception of a single feature (Ditch fill 1019), only natural deposits were seen.

All features encountered were recorded as drawn plans at a scale of 1:50 and on sections at a scale of 1:50 or 1:10, and described using pro-forma context recording sheets with a series of 35mm colour print photographs being taken.





BASED UPON ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:25000 MAP DATA WITH  
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CROMWELL HOUSE, 13 OGLEFORTH, YORK. YO17FG.  
LICENCE NUMBER AL854123

Scale 1:25,000

Figure 1, Site location map

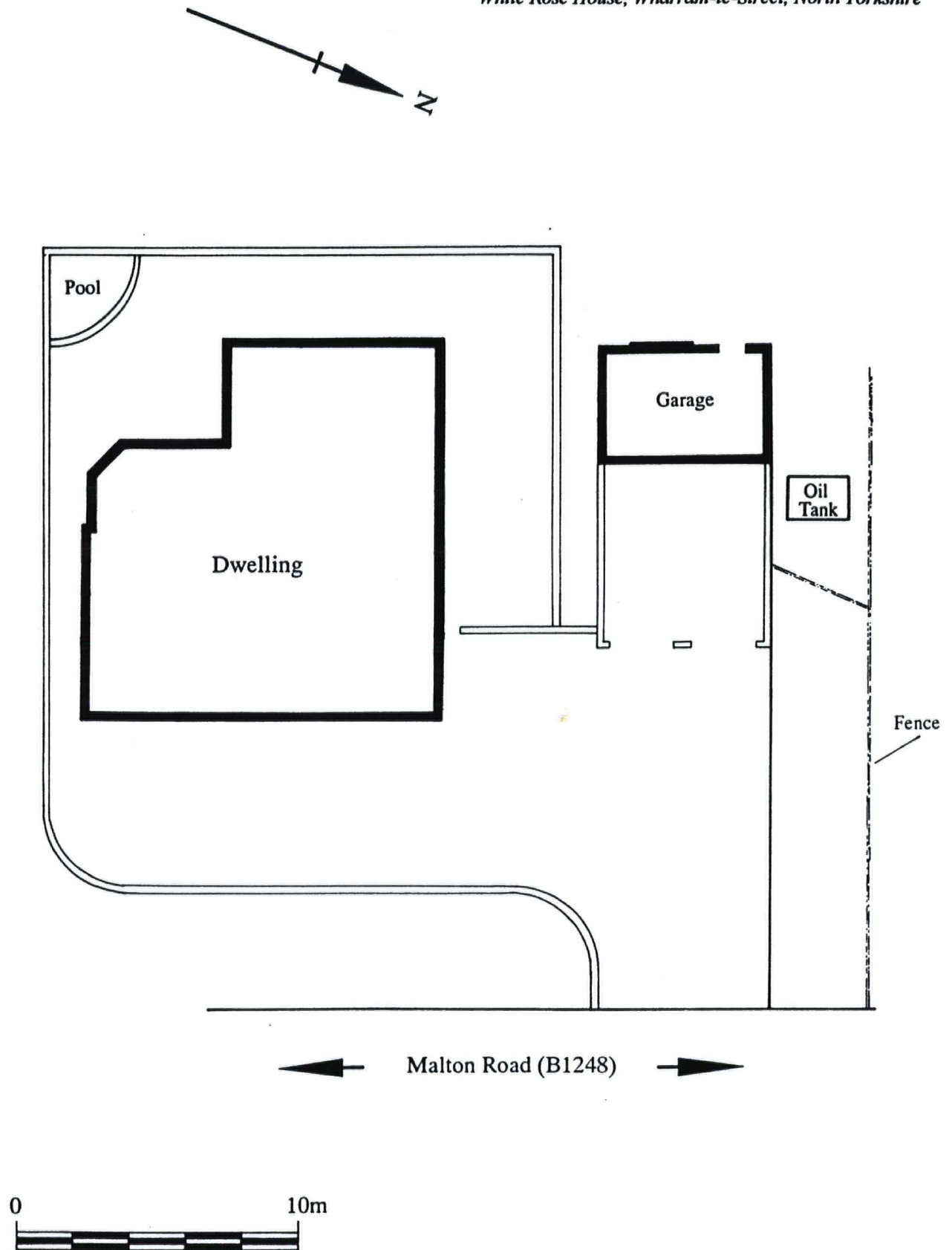


Figure 2, Layout of New Buildings

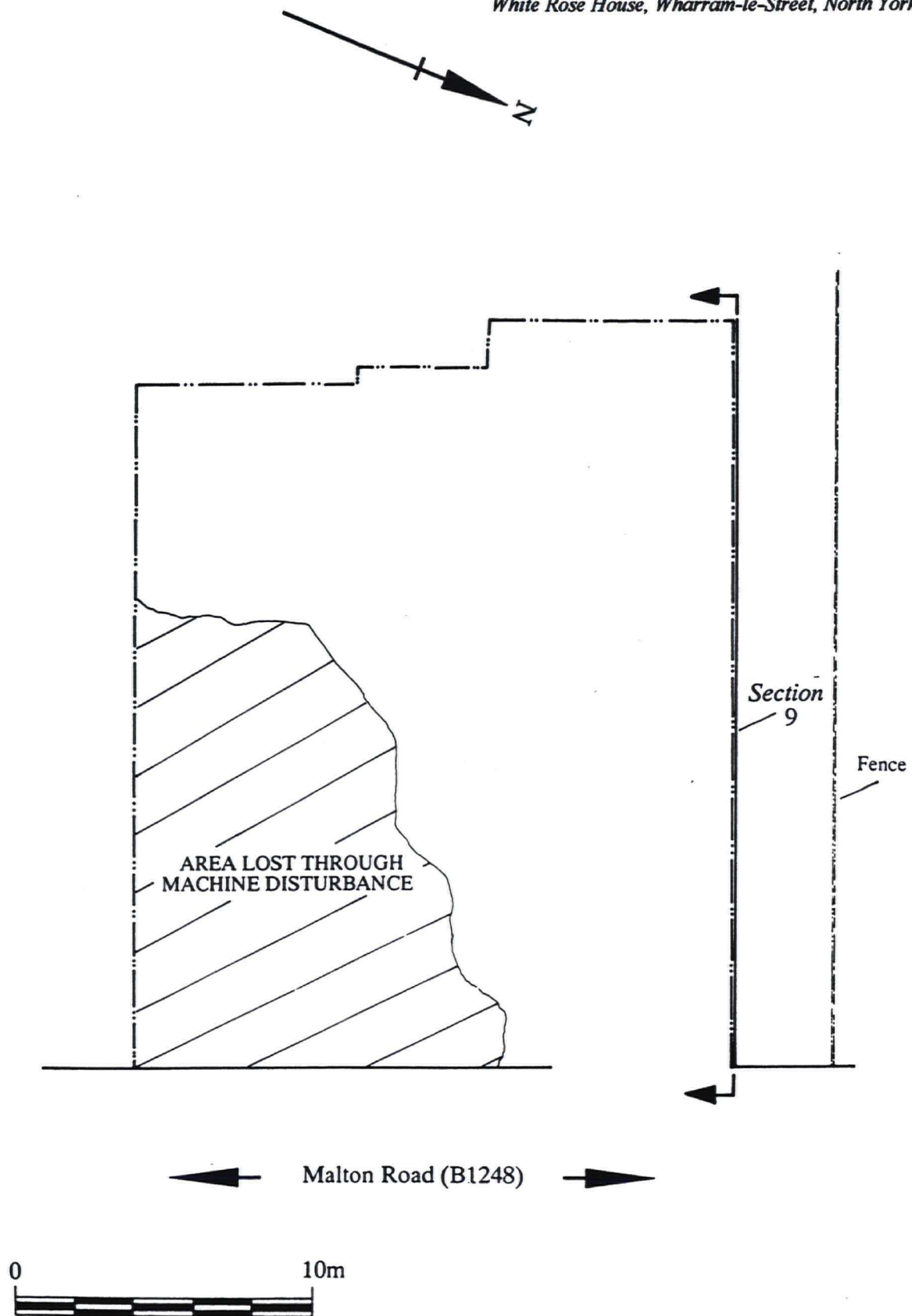


Figure 3, Observed Area and Location of Section 9



The site records and artefacts are currently stored with York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM: 1999.96.

### 3. RESULTS

The earliest deposit seen consisted of a fractured chalk bed rock (1035) (Figures 4 and 7) which fell from 0.70m BGL in the south-west to 1.20m BGL at the north-eastern limit of excavation (Figure 7) following the natural contour of the surrounding area. In specific areas the bed-rock was removed to a depth of 0.20m (Figures 4 and 7) to achieve the correct formation level. The bed rock had been truncated by cuts 1020, 1012 and 1006.

Cut 1020 (Figure 4, Fig. 6: section 7) was a south-west - north-east aligned ditch which was exposed for a distance of 8.80m, was up to 2.50m wide at its south-western end, narrowing to 1.40m and curving slightly to the east at its north-eastern end. In the small area that was excavated, the sides of the cut broke sharply from the surface, fell steeply then gently to an un-excavated base. The back-fill of cut 1020, which consisted of a friable sticky pale to mid brown clay silt (1019) with inclusions of frequent small to medium chalk fragments and occasional chalk flecks, failed to produce any dating evidence.

Cut 1012 (Figure 4, Figure 6: section 4 and Figure 7) may represent the terminus to a 1.0m wide north-west - south-east orientated ditch or a similarly aligned pit. Neither of these identifications is certain as only 1.25m of this feature was exposed, the rest lying beyond the north-western limit of excavation. In the small area of this feature that was excavated, the sides of the cut broke sharply from the surface and fell almost vertically on the east side, less so on the west, to a rounded bottom edge leading to a flat uneven base. The backfill of cut 1012, which consisted of small to medium angular chalk fragments in a matrix of a sticky light brown silty clay (1011), produced no dating evidence and gave no indication of the function of this feature.

The eastern edge of context 1011 was truncated by a 0.44m wide, 0.25m deep sub-rectangular vertical side flat based post hole cut (1010) (Fig. 4), which contained a backfill consisting of a sticky dark grey brown silty clay (1009) with inclusions of occasional small chalk fragments and charcoal flecks.

Cut 1006 (Figure 4, Figure 5: section 3) was a large sub circular pit, 5.0m in diameter and over 0.50m deep which contained several distinct fills. The earliest of these was a deposit of small to medium chalk fragments in a matrix of a light creamy brown silty clay (1041) 0.07m thick. This was sealed by a deposit of slightly sticky mid brown silty clay (1040) between 0.03m and 0.16m thick from which a single medium sandstone 'pot-boiler' was retrieved. 1040 lay directly beneath a deposit of chalk fragments in a matrix of light yellow brown silty clay (1039), up to 0.14m thick which lay beneath the upper fill of the pit which consisted of an over 0.50m thick slightly sticky mid yellow brown silty clay (1005) with frequent flecks to large fragments of chalk and occasional charcoal flecks. The uneven stepped sides of cut 1006, falling vertically then in a series of irregular steps, its large diameter and excessive depth indicated that this feature may have been a quarry pit, for the extraction of the chalk bed-rock, for building purposes. The five sherds of pottery recovered from context 1005 suggested it was back-filled

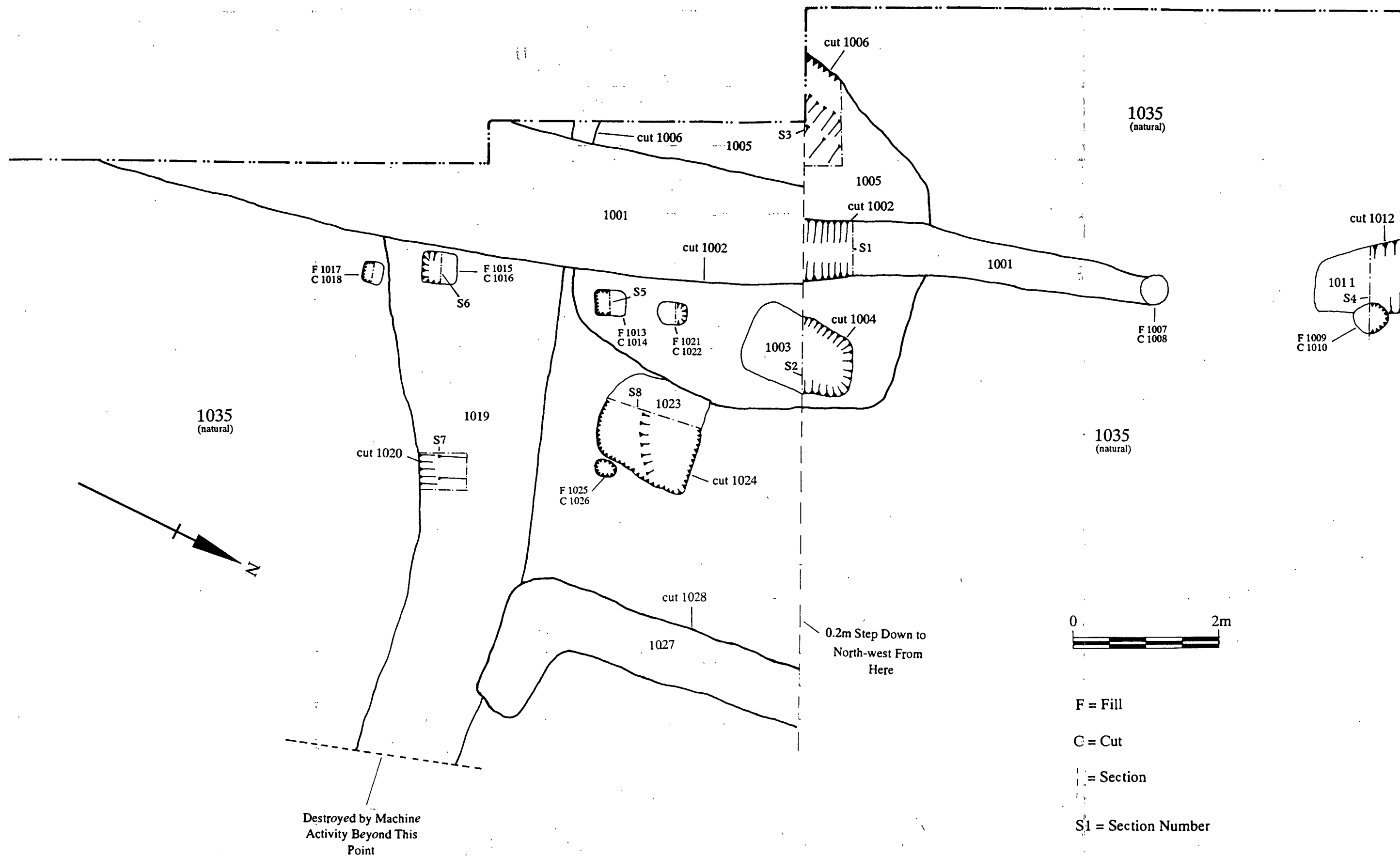


Figure 4, Plan of Observed Features

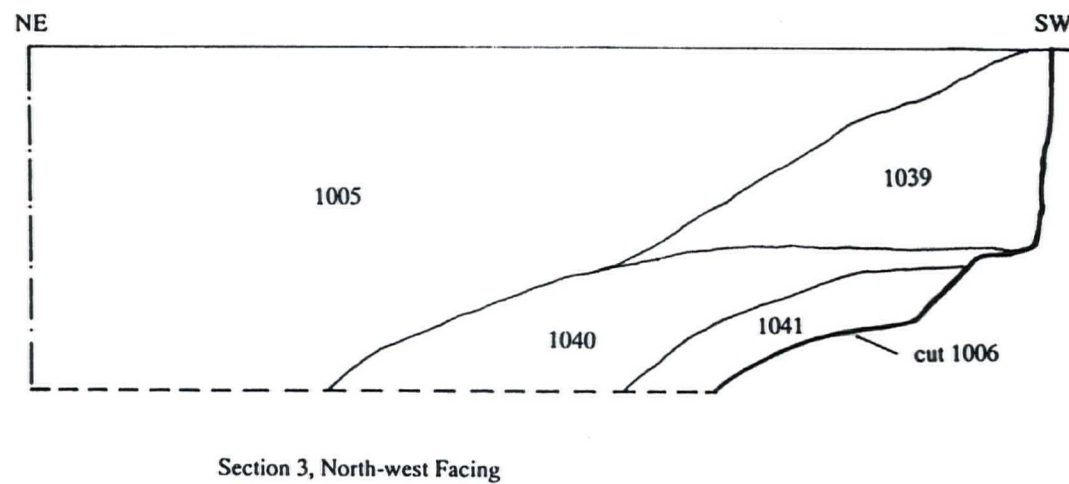
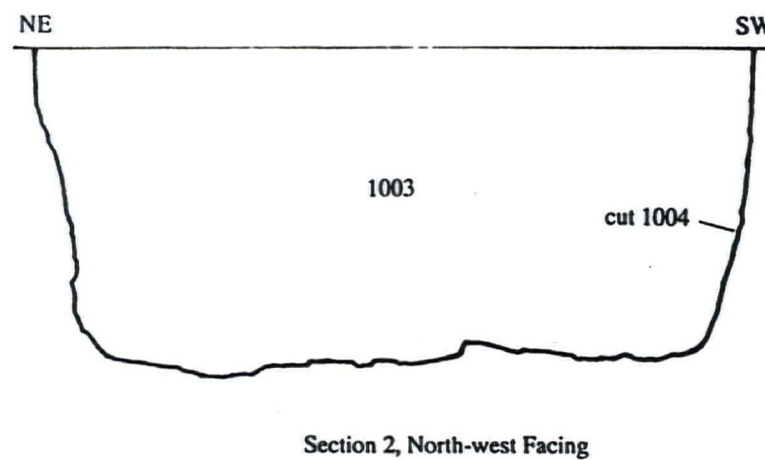
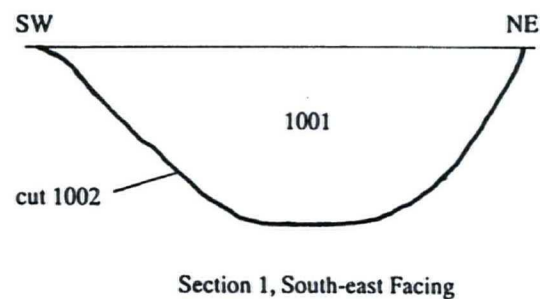
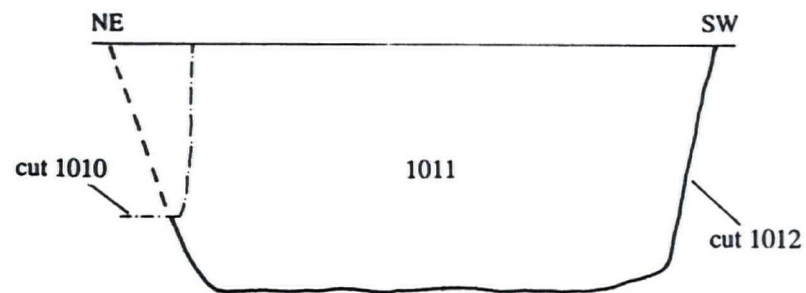
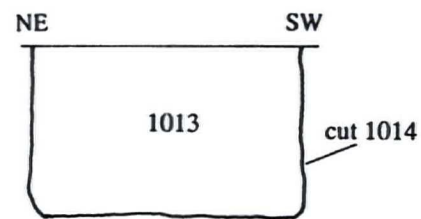


Figure 5, Sections 1 - 3

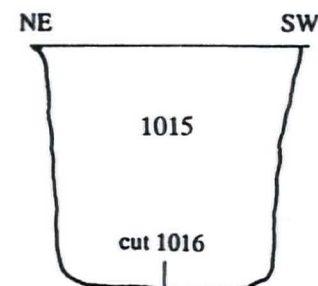




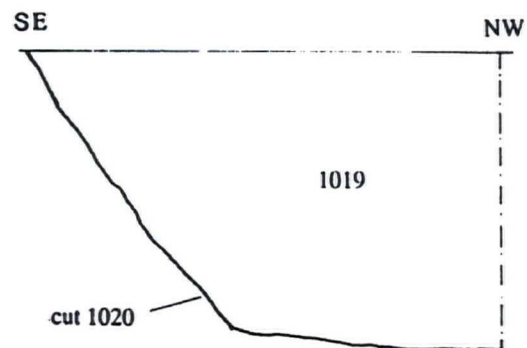
Section 4, North-west Facing



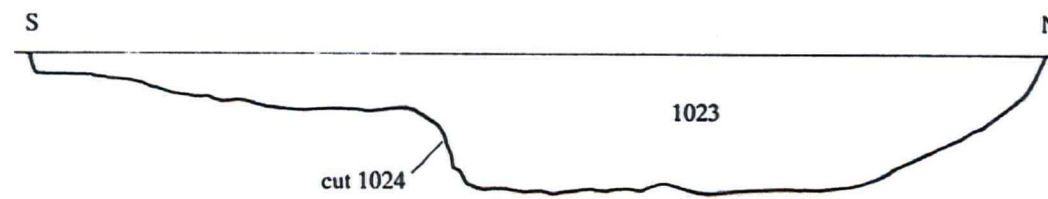
Section 5, North-west Facing



Section 6, North-west Facing



Section 7, North-east Facing



Section 8, East Facing



Figure 6, Sections 4 - 8

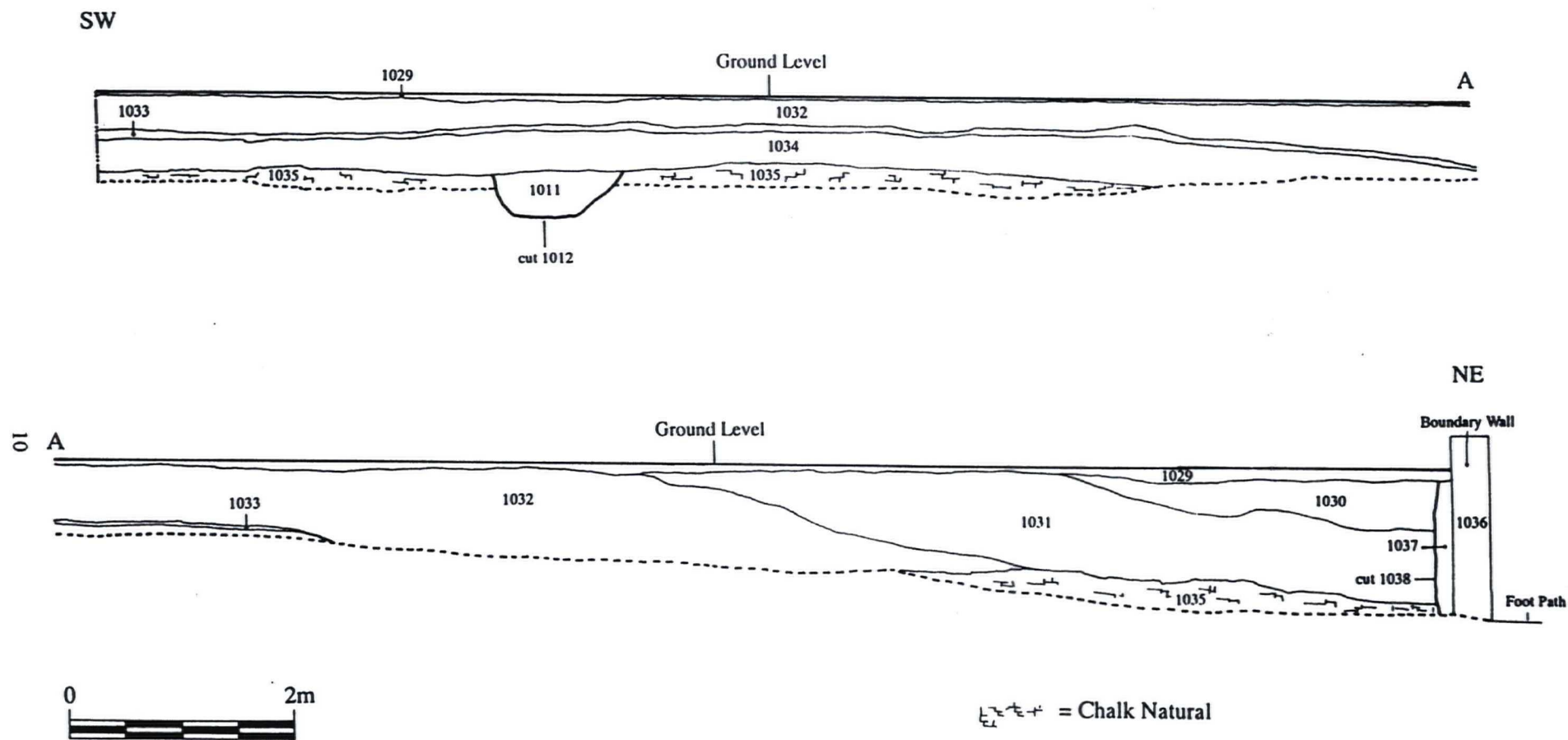


Figure 7, Section 9; South-east Facing

some time between the 11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Context 1005 was truncated by post hole cuts 1022 and 1014 as well as pit cuts 1024 and 1004.

Cut 1022 (Figure 4) was sub rectangular in shape with sides that broke sharply from the surface and fell steeply to a rounded bottom edge leading to a flat base, was 0.40m long, 0.30m wide and 0.12m deep. The back-fill which it contained, a friable mid brown gritty clay silt (1021) with occasional charcoal flecks, moderate small chalk fragments and frequent chalk flecks, produced nine sherds of one incomplete gritty ware cooking pot which provided a date of the 11-13<sup>th</sup> century.

Cut 1014 (Figure 4, Figure 6: section 5) was located 1.0m to the south-east of cut 1022, had a similar rectangular shape, was 0.45m long, 0.35m wide and 0.24m deep with sides that broke sharply from the surface and fell vertically to a rounded bottom edge leading to a flat base. The back-fill of cut 1014, crumbly dark grey silty clay (1013) with inclusions of occasional small chalk fragments, produced two small sherds of 10-11<sup>th</sup> century pottery.

Cut 1024 (Figure 4, Figure 6: section 8) was a north – south orientated straight sided, with the exception of the southern edge which bows out slightly to the south, rectilinear pit which was 1.47m long, 1.40m wide and 0.20m deep. The sides broke sharply from the surface and fell vertically, on the southern edge, to a sharp bottom edge before falling very gently to the north, where a slight vertical step was formed, leading to a rounded base which then rose steeply to the surface on the northern side. The back-fill which it contained, a crumbly slightly sticky mid to dark brown clay silt (1023) with occasional small to medium chalk fragments, produced one small lava quern fragment and several fragments of animal bone, including cranium and teeth. This may indicate that this feature had functioned as a rubbish pit that had, at one point, been used for the disposal of butchery waste. Context 1023 also produced a single sherd of pottery which provided a date of the 11<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> century for this activity.

Post hole cut 1026 (Figure 4) had truncated the natural bed rock (1035) and was situated only 0.05m from the south eastern corner of cut 1024. This was sub-circular in shape and, on its longest north – south axis, was 0.30m long, 0.10m wide and 0.20m deep with sides that broke sharply from the surface then fell steeply to a rounded bottom edge leading to a flat base which fell gently to the south-west. The back-fill of this feature (1025) was the same as the fill of cut 1024 which suggested that they were contemporary.

Cut 1004 (Figure 4, Figure 5: section 2) was located 0.70m to the north-west of cut 1024, was also a rectilinear pit which, on its longest north – south axis, was 1.50m long, 1.0m wide and 0.45m deep. The sides broke sharply from the surface to fall steeply, almost vertically, to a rounded bottom edge leading to a flat uneven base. The fill of cut 1004 was friable sticky mid grey brown clay silt (1003) with frequent chalk flecks, moderate small to medium chalk fragments, occasional large chalk fragments, charcoal flecks and small patches of burnt material. It also contained four sherds of pottery, dating its back-filling to the 11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Approximately 2.0m to the south-east of post hole cuts 1014 and 1022 was a pair of post hole cuts, 1016 and 1018, which appeared to form a continuation of the same alignment. Cut 1016 (Figure 4, Figure 6: section 6), had truncated ditch fill 1019, was rectangular in shape, 0.50m long, 0.40m wide and 0.36m deep with sides that broke sharply from the surface and fell vertically to a rounded bottom edge. Its back-fill, dark grey crumbly silty clay (1015) with occasional small chalk fragments, failed to produce any dating evidence. Cut 1018 (Figure 4)



was a square post hole cut 0.27m wide, 0.06m deep with vertical sides and a flat base. It was cut into the bedrock 0.50m to the south-east of cut 1016 and contained a back fill of sticky, slightly crumbly dark grey brown silty clay with occasional small chalk fragments (1017).

Context 1019, the back-fill of ditch cut 1020, was also truncated by ditch cut 1028 (Figure 4). Cut 1028 was orientated north-west-south east, was 4.20m long and 0.80m wide and turned through 90 degrees at its south-eastern end to run for a further 2.0m towards the east, where a terminus was formed. This feature had originally extended further towards the north-west but had been removed during machine clearance. Due to lack of time and the rate of the development this was not able to be sample excavated. The fact that it had been removed by the machine suggested that it consisted of no more than a shallow boundary or enclosure ditch. The seven fragments of pottery retrieved from the surface of its back-fill, a friable mid to dark grey brown sandy clay silt (1027) with the inclusion of moderate medium chalk fragments, occasional charcoal flecks and small patches of ashy material, provided a date of 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century for when back-filling occurred.

Both contexts 1019 and 1005 were also truncated by a major boundary ditch. Ditch cut 1002 (Figure 4, Figure 5; section 1) was up to 1.85m wide and was aligned north-west – south-east. It was exposed for a distance of 14.25m, emerging from the south-western limit of excavation to run towards the north where it ended in a rounded terminus. A small sondage was excavated to ascertain the depth and profile of the cut and to recover dating evidence. The sondage was located within the area that had been reduced by a further 0.2m (Figure 4) where the depth of cut 1002 was recorded at 0.25m. The real depth of 1002 was approximately 0.45m. The reduction of the ground surface also made the cut appear much narrower to the north-west of the step down in formation level.

The small area of cut 1002 that was exposed had sides that broke sharply from the surface, fell steeply on the north-eastern side, gently on the south-west, to an almost imperceptible bottom edge leading to a gently rounded almost flat base. The fill which it contained, a friable dark brown silty clay (1001) with inclusions consisting of frequent small to medium chalk fragments and occasional charcoal flecks, produced 14 sherds of pottery which dated its back-filling to the 11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> century. This back-fill had been truncated by a post hole cut (1008) 0.40m in diameter, which was located at the northern terminus of the ditch (Figure 4). This feature was not excavated so its depth and profile are not known. The back-fill which it contained was a sticky friable dark grey brown clay silt (1007) with inclusions of moderate chalk flecking and occasional charcoal flecks.

Contexts 1003, 1007, 1009, 1013, 1015, 1017, 1021, 1023, 1025 and 1027 were all sealed by an extensive deposit of a friable mid grey brown clay silt (1034) 0.40m thick (Figure 7) with inclusions of moderate flecks to small fragments of chalk, occasional medium chalk fragments and charcoal flecking which was interpreted as a build up of plough soil.

Directly above this was a deposit of slightly humic friable dark brown clay silt (1033) up to 0.10m thick, with inclusions of occasional charcoal flecks and patches of pea-grit, which was indicative of the decayed turf line of a previous ground surface. This was sealed by a levelling deposit over 0.80m thick consisting of a plastic pale brown clay silt (1032) with inclusions of frequent flecks to large chalk fragments, occasional small to medium brick fragments and small tile, sandstone and coal fragments. The north-eastern limit of context 1032 lay beneath a further



levelling deposit of small to large chalk fragments in a matrix of a plastic pale yellow brown silty clay (1031), 0.85m thick, with inclusions of occasional small brick/tile fragments. This was stratigraphically below a further levelling deposit of sticky friable mid orange brown silty sandy clay (1030) up to 0.45m thick with inclusions of moderate small to large brick/tile fragments and occasional small to medium chalk fragments.

The north-eastern limit of context 1030 had been truncated by a vertical sided construction cut for a brick boundary/retaining wall (1036) 0.15m wide and over 1.20m deep which had been back-filled with loose brick, sandstone and chalk rubble (1037). This was sealed by a top soil of friable dark brown clay silt (1029) up to 0.15m thick, under grass, which formed the garden surface at the time the watching brief was undertaken.

#### 4. Pottery Report

Context	No of sherds	Spot date	Comment
1000	29	11 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup>	7 reduced sandy wares (11 <sup>th</sup> ), 7 gritty wares (11-13 <sup>th</sup> ), 1 Brandsby-type (13-14 <sup>th</sup> ), 7 post medieval (15-16 <sup>th</sup> ), 1 18 <sup>th</sup> century, 4 19 <sup>th</sup> /early 20 <sup>th</sup>
1001	14	11 <sup>th</sup> -13 <sup>th</sup>	Range of unglazed gritty and sandy wares in the gritty and related tradition (11-13 <sup>th</sup> )
1003	4	11 <sup>th</sup> -13 <sup>th</sup>	As for 1001 + 1 glazed
1005	5	11 <sup>th</sup> -13 <sup>th</sup>	3 reduced sandy wares, 2 gritty wares
1013	2	?10/11 <sup>th</sup>	Small sherds with no features but fabrics are softer and they may possibly a little earlier than seen in contexts above
1021	9	11 <sup>th</sup> -13 <sup>th</sup>	All part of one (incomplete) gritty cooking pot
1023	1	11/12 <sup>th</sup>	Very fine small glazed sherd
1027	7	11 <sup>th</sup> - 12/13 <sup>th</sup>	1 reduced sandy ware, 2 gritty, 4 splashed wares
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>		

These 71 sherds belong fairly consistently to the two centuries following the Norman Conquest. The types are exclusively local and they are all domestic vessels. Cooking pots are well represented and there are one or two examples of sherds from jugs. There is little which need date beyond the 13<sup>th</sup> century, except in the upper level (context 1000) where there is clearly much later material as well. One or two sherds are in a softer fabric which may indicate an earlier date (i.e. 10<sup>th</sup> century?) but these are small featureless sherds so nothing can be said about their date with confidence.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the watching brief showed that most of the activity encountered on this site relates to the two centuries following the Norman conquest. Much of the activity related to the settlement of the area which included changes in the way that property or field boundaries were aligned. An alignment of four post holes may have formed the north-eastern wall of a post built structure.

Cut 1020 was a large south-west-north-east aligned ditch which truncated the natural chalk bed rock (1035). No dating evidence was recovered from its fill. It may have been a property boundary or, perhaps more likely, one of a series of ditches delineating plots of land to within a field system. Pit cut 1006 was located only 0.10m to the north of cut 1020 and had also truncated the chalk bed-rock (1035). This was thought to be a quarry pit and may signify the construction of dwellings or other buildings close to the development. The pottery recovered from the upper fill of this feature (1005) suggested that it was back-filled in the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The relationship between ditch cut 1020 and pit cut 1006 is uncertain. It seems unlikely that both were in use at the same time. The clean nature of the material used to back-fill cut 1020 (1019), suggested that it was filled and levelled before occupation of a domestic nature was established close by. The excavation of pit cut 1006, perhaps for the extraction of building stone, may be the precursor of this activity and would therefore appear to be later than cut 1020.

The back-filling of cuts 1020 and 1006 signified a new phase of occupation. This was immediately noticeable in the change in orientation of the majority of the later features, running on a south-east – north-west axis rather than that of cut 1020, which was orientated south-west – north-east. The initial phase of this occupation appears to have been the excavation of post hole cuts 1018, 1016, 1014 and 1022 which all had a similar square or rectilinear shape, shared the same south-east – north-west alignment and, with the exception of cut 1014, contained similar back-fills (1017, 1015, 1013 and 1021 respectively). Post hole cut 1018 appears to be paired with cut 1016 as does cut 1014 with cut 1022. These may represent pairs of post holes flanking a 2.0m wide entrance on the north-eastern wall of a north-east – south-west aligned structure. Post holes relating to the south-western return of the south-eastern and north-western side walls of the structure, if sharing the same spacing of approximately 1.0m, would have been removed by later activity (cut 1002), or have been located outside the excavated area. Dating evidence recovered from the fills of cuts 1014 (1013) and 1022 (1021) suggested that the posts were removed and the resulting voids back-filled in the 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Pit cuts 1024 and 1004 may be contemporary with this structure and were probably excavated for the disposal of domestic rubbish. The pottery recovered from their fills (1023 and 1003) suggested that they were back-filled some time between the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century. Post hole cut 1026 was located only 0.05m from the south-eastern corner of pit cut 1024 and contained the same back-fill (1026). It is likely therefore, that they were related but how the post within cut 1026 functioned in association with the use of pit 1024 is unclear.

Post hole cuts 1018, 1016, 1014, 1022 and 1026 and pit cuts 1024 and 1004 may all have been back-filled prior to the excavation of a major north-west – south-east aligned ditch (cut 1002), with a terminus at its northern end. The back-fill of the ditch (1001) produced several sherds of pottery which indicated that it had also gone out of use and had been back-filled in the 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>



centuries. It had been truncated by post hole cut 1008 which was located at the extreme northern end of the ditch, at the point where the terminus was formed.

Cut 1012 had truncated the natural chalk bed-rock (1035) and was located 2.0m to the north-west of cut 1002. It is possible that this feature may represent the terminus of another similarly aligned ditch or rectilinear pit but only 1.25m of this cut was revealed, the rest lying beyond the north-western limit of excavation. Its fill (1011) failed to produce any dating evidence or to indicate the purpose that it had served. The north-eastern edge of fill 1011 had been truncated by post hole cut 1010. Its back-fill (1009) also failed to produce any dating evidence.

Post hole cuts 1008 and 1010 may have contained timber posts that formed part of a gate to the 2.0m wide entrance formed between the terminus of ditch cut 1002 and cut 1012. This suggests that cuts 1002 and 1012 were associated and were part of a perimeter ditch to a stock pen or enclosure. This hypothesis cannot be proved as the overall plan of cuts 1002 and 1012 was not seen. It may be more likely that ditch cut 1002 was simply a boundary ditch associated with a field system.

Ditch cut 1028 was located 4.70m to the east of cut 1002 and may have functioned as a barrier to steer livestock into the enclosed area formed to the west of cuts 1002 and 1012. Pottery recovered from its fill (1027) suggested that it also had gone out of use and was back-filled in the 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. When these features were back-filled (cuts 1009, 1008 and 1027) the area appears to have been abandoned and the focus of occupation moved elsewhere. This was noticeable in the formation of a deposit of plough soil (1034) 0.40m thick which covered most of the excavated area. This was sealed by a decayed turf (1033) which fell gradually from the south-west to the north-east, from approximately 0.30m to 0.50m BGL.

The area appeared to have remained under cultivation or pasture until it was landscaped to form a tennis court to the Red House. This was achieved by using successive dumps of clay to raise the level of the underlying ground surface by 0.28m in the south-west, rising to 1.10m to the north-east. Context 1032, which sealed the decayed turf 1033, was the primary levelling deposit in this sequence. This was sealed by context 1031 which lay beneath context 1030. The type of brick and pantile fragments within contexts 1032, 1031 and 1030 suggested that the area was levelled in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Context 1030 was truncated by the construction cut (1038) for the brick retaining wall (1036) which acts as the present day boundary wall. The back-fill of the wall construction cut (1037) was sealed by a 0.15m thick turf/topsoil (1029) which formed the ground surface at the time the watching brief was undertaken.



**6. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS**

Watching Brief	Bryan Antoni, Neil Macnab
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