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**West End House
Main Street
Staxton
North Yorkshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

**N.Y.C.C.
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

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April 2004**

**West End House
Main Street,
Staxton,
North Yorkshire
Archaeological Watching Brief**

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**West End House
Main Street
Staxton
North Yorkshire
Archaeological Watching Brief**

Summary

A Watching Brief was carried out over a single day on land immediately east of West End House, Main Street, Staxton, North Yorkshire during the excavation of the foundations for a detached dwelling and garage. Two features were recorded, the earliest of which was a large, undated posthole. A massive later pit of medieval date contained burnt material, and was probably related to the production of medieval pottery.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the results of an Archaeological Watching Brief carried out during the excavation of footings for a new dwelling and double garage at West End House, Staxton, Willerby CP, North Yorkshire (TA 0160 7918 : Fig. 1).
- 1.2 The groundworks had the potential to affect multi-period archaeological remains, accordingly the developer was required by the Heritage Unit of North Yorkshire County Council to arrange for an Archaeological Watching Brief to be carried out. MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd was engaged to undertake out the archaeological work, which took place on 7th April 2004.
- 1.3 All works were funded by the developer Mr Boyes & Miss Sheader.
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2. Topography and Geology

- 2.1 The site lies on the southern side of Main Street, Staxton, in the eastern part of the plot for West End House (Fig. 1), a location formerly occupied by a workshop and garage. The buildings had been demolished before the arrival of the archaeologist, leaving a level area at an elevation of c. 43m AOD.
- 2.2 The soils are of the Newport 1 Association, described as deep, well-drained, sandy and coarse loamy, over sandy glaciofluvial drift (Mackney *et al.*).

6. Archaeological and Historical Background

- 3.1 The sandy soils on which the site is situated, attracted large-scale settlement in the Prehistoric period. The earliest known activity in the vicinity of West End House is represented by a number of Beaker burials from an area c. 525m east of the site, excavated in 1957 (Stead 1960). Beaker sherds were also found at Newham's Pit sand quarry (c. 550m east of the site) by Brewster (Brewster 1957a). More recently, a complete beaker, possibly associated with an inhumation, was found during the construction of houses at the former Methodist church c. 350m east-north-east of the site (pers. comm. J Halliday, beaker in Doncaster museum).
- 3.2 Considerable excavation has been carried out on the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements between Sherburn and West Heslerton (Powlesland 1986), but the extent to which that 'ladder settlement' extended to Staxton is unclear. Brewster excavated a large Roman enclosure at Newham's Pit, and also found evidence of Anglian settlement there (Brewster 1957b). A large Anglian cemetery is also known to have existed in the vicinity of the Shell Garage immediately west of Newham's pit, a crouched inhumation being found in 1994 (MAP 1994).
- 3.3 Staxton itself existed as a settlement before the Norman conquest. The name, first recorded in 1086, means '*Stakk's* farmstead' and shows Anglo-Scandinavian influence (Smith ed. 1937). Two estates were in the king's ownership at the time of the Domesday survey; at the time of King Edward 5 carucates were held by

Carle and Torfin, with 1 carucate being the soke of Morcar's manor of Bridlington.

- 3.4 The extent and form of the medieval settlement is not certain. The village pattern seems to indicate a 'Street Village', with regular plots aligned north to south, bisected by an east to west road (now Main Street). The present site would appear to lie within the southern row of this Street Village plan, and so would have originally formed part of a property to the south of the axis road.
- 3.5 The medieval village of Staxton was one of three settlements in the Willerby parish (the others being Willerby and Binnington), and seems to have been of moderate size. Seventy-one tax-payers were recorded at Staxton in the 1377 Poll Tax, compared to 81 at Willerby and 36 at Binnington.
- 3.6 Staxton, along with Potter Brompton, has been long believed to be the source of Staxton/Potter Brompton ware (Brewster 1958). The medieval village of Staxton was ideally situated for the production of coarse pottery, having ready access to raw materials in the form of locally outcropping Speeton clay and sand, and a ready source of fuel represented by peat, and perhaps brushwood, from the low-lying Carrs. The industry flourished in the 13th and 14th centuries and archaeological remains relating to the industry would be of national importance. Brewster recorded five sites in the village that he interpreted as associated with pottery manufacture (Brewster and Hayfield 1992).
- 3.7 The closest of these to the development site was Dean's Site, c. 30m to the south, where a large bowl-shaped pit of medieval date was uncovered, containing ashy soils and large amounts of pottery 'wasters'. Brewster also recovered a group of medieval sherds from the Boythorpe Engineering Works, which lies c. 50m west of the site.
- 3.8 Young George Dobson's site was situated c. 175m to the east of the development site, at which Brewster recorded a large medieval pit with associated medieval sherds.

4.2 Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10, and a site plan at 1:50. A photographic record was taken in polychrome print and transparency, and monochrome print, in 35mm format. A written record was compiled under the continuous context recording system on *pro forma* context sheets. Finds were recovered by context.

5. Results

5.1 The site had been partially levelled in the past, probably at the time when the now demolished workshop and garage were constructed. The affect of this was to leave a terrace with a 1.5m high vertical face at the southern end of the site, evening out the original northwards slope of the land. This process had made the southern half of the site archaeologically sterile, and apparently also truncated the northern part.

5.2 Natural deposits consisted of yellowish brown gravely sand. The natural was overlain by a 0.55m deep layer of homogenous brown silty sand (context 1006), which was presumably an agricultural soil, and most likely partly wind-blown in origin. The two features described below cut through this layer.

5.3 The north-western area of the building footprint contained two cut features (Figs. 2 and 3), a pit or large posthole (context 1008), and a large pit (context 1005).

5.4 Cut 1008 was approximately 0.80m in diameter, at least 0.30m deep, and was vertically-sided, extending below the limit of excavation (Fig. 2; Fig. 3, e-f). The brown silty sand fill (context 1007) contained no finds. The circular plan and vertical sides suggest that Cut 1005 was a large posthole. Cut 1008 was earlier than Pit 1005, which cut away 1008's upper limit.

5.5 Pit 1005 was a massive feature with a width exceeding 7m, and was revealed in three of the foundation trenches (Fig. 2). Although wide, the pit was relatively

- 3.9 Brewster excavated a medieval building adjacent to the Hare and Hounds public house, which he interpreted as a potter's workshop; Hayfield reinterpreted the site as being essentially domestic in character. MAP carried out an evaluation on land immediately to the west of the Hare and Hounds in 1995 (MAP 1995), locating evidence for buildings and property boundaries associated with a large assemblage of Staxton Ware pottery. Some of Brewster's previous trenches were also identified. Further work on this site (by On-site Archaeology) recorded pits and quantities of iron slag.
- 3.10 It seems that peasant potters were producing coarse pottery for the East Yorkshire market, possibly from the late 12th to the early 15th centuries, but there is no clear proof that any of the sites that Brewster recorded at Staxton (or Potter Brompton) were ever concerned directly with the manufacture of pottery (Brewster and Hayfield 1992).
- 3.11 The farmstead of Staxton Farm, which adjoins the eastern boundary of the development site, was evaluated in 2002. The four excavated trenches uncovered linear features of probable prehistoric date, along with medieval and post-medieval settlement and possible industrial activity (MAP 2002).
- 3.12 In the Post-medieval period, the other two settlements in Willerby parish began to decline; the 1670 Hearth Tax returns list 25 households in Staxton, with 21 in Willerby and 19 in Binnington. Staxton benefited from the coaching trade; the Hare and Hounds public house is known from the early 19th century, and the former Stirrup Inn (once known as 'The Board') bears a date-stone of 1649.

4. Methods

- 4.1 The workshop and garage formerly occupying the development site had been demolished, the resulting rubble removed and general levelling carried out before the arrival of the archaeologist on site. The foundation trenches were excavated by a rear-acting JCB excavator, fitted with a 0.60m wide bucket, under archaeological supervision.

shallow with a recorded depth of 0.70m; however, as mentioned above, it may have been truncated.

- 5.6 The two sections drawn through the eastern part of the pit showed identical fills (Fig. 3, c-d, e-f). The bulk of the pit was filled with an homogenous yellowish red clay silt with charcoal flecks (context 1004), from which six sherds of Staxton Ware were recovered. Context 1004 was overlain by a deposit of brown sandy silt with angular chalk fragments (context 1003); the upper part of the pit was filled with an even brown sandy silt (context 1002).
- 5.7 The fills recorded in the western part of Pit 1005 were of different character (Fig. 3, a-b). A small layer of dark brown sandy silt (context 1011) occupied the base of the cut in the south-west corner. The bulk of the pit was filled with an homogenous deposit of brown sandy silt (context 1010), with an overlying thin layer of yellowish red crumbly fired clay in the south-west corner (context 1009). No finds were recovered from this part of the pit.
- 5.8 The upper fills of Pit 1005 were overlain by a mixed layer of modern rubble, hardcore and tarmac (context 1001), which was deepest at the west side, but absent from the southern half of the site.

6. Discussion

- 6.1 Although much of the site had been previously truncated, valuable archaeological evidence was recorded during the Watching Brief. Two phases of archaeological activity were present.
- 6.2 The earliest feature consisted of Cut 1008, which was interpreted as a large posthole due to its circular plan and vertical sides. Although it was demonstrably earlier than Pit 1005, it is uncertain whether Posthole 1008 predated the windblown layer 1006 as the relationship between them was obscured where it

was cut away by the pit. Coupled with the lack of finds, it is therefore not possible to state whether the posthole was prehistoric or medieval in date.

6.3 The extent to which Pit 1005 resembled the feature recorded by Brewster at Young George Dobson's Kiln is remarkable. Both were large pits filled with layers of burnt material and soils that had been subject to heating. However, neither pit showed burning or vitrification to the sides or base that would illustrate the *in situ* burning that would be expected from a kiln. Both pits also lay alongside the Main Street, and extended under the present pavement. Brewster's pit contained a sizeable assemblage of Staxton Ware compared to the handful of sherds recovered from Pit 1005, although this may be accounted for by different recovery methods – Brewster hand-excavated a large sample of his feature, whereas only part of Pit 1005 was excavated mainly by machine.

6.4 Hayfield has suggested that such large pits were 'waster pits', but clearly not enough pottery was recovered from the West End House pit to support that interpretation. Its size and general lack of finds within it would tend to suggest that it was not a rubbish pit either. The burnt material in the pit obviously represents debris from a process involving heat, and pottery manufacture is of course the most likely contender, but domestic processes like baking or heating cannot be ruled out. It is likely that such large pits were in fact quarries for the large quantities of sand needed to temper Staxton Ware manufactured in the locality, and which analysis has shown to have a local origin.

7. Bibliography

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Appendix 1

Context List

Context No.	Description
1001	Deposit; chalk hardcore and tarmac surface.
1002	Deposit; 10YR 4/2, sandy silt; fill of 1005
1003	Deposit; 10YR 4/2, sandy silt with chalk frags.; fill of 1005
1004	Deposit; 5 YR 4/6, clay silt with charcoal flecks; fill of 1005
1005	Cut; Pit
1006	Deposit; 7.5 YR 4/3, silty sand; subsoil
1007	Deposit; 10 YR 4/3, silty sand; fill of 1008
1008	Cut; Posthole
1009	Deposit; 5 YR 5/8, crumbly clay; fill of 1005
1010	Deposit; 7.5 YR 4/3, sandy silt; fill of 1005
1011	Deposit; 7.5 YR 4/2, silty sand; fill of 1005

Appendix 2

Finds Catalogue

Context	Wt. (kg)	Description
1004	0.064	6 body sherds (2 joining) Staxton Ware

Appendix 3

Archive Summary

11 context sheets, filled out and checked for consistency

3 sheets of drawing film; 2 x sections at 1:10, 1 x plan at 1:50

7 exposures each in polychrome print and transparency, and monochrome, 35mm format

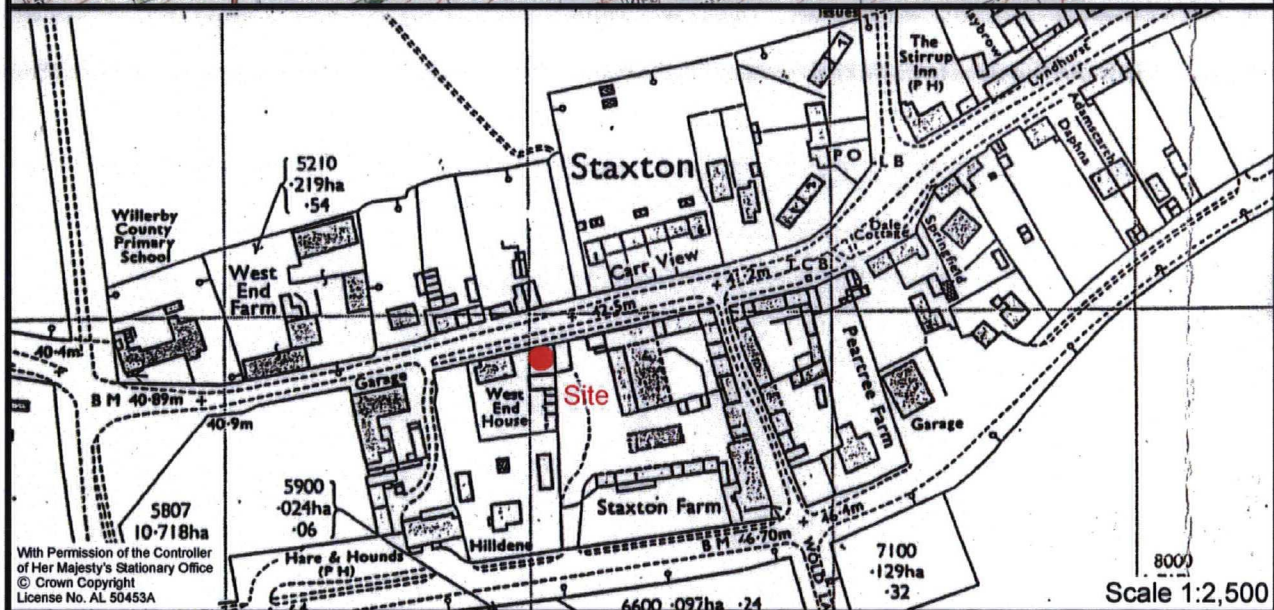
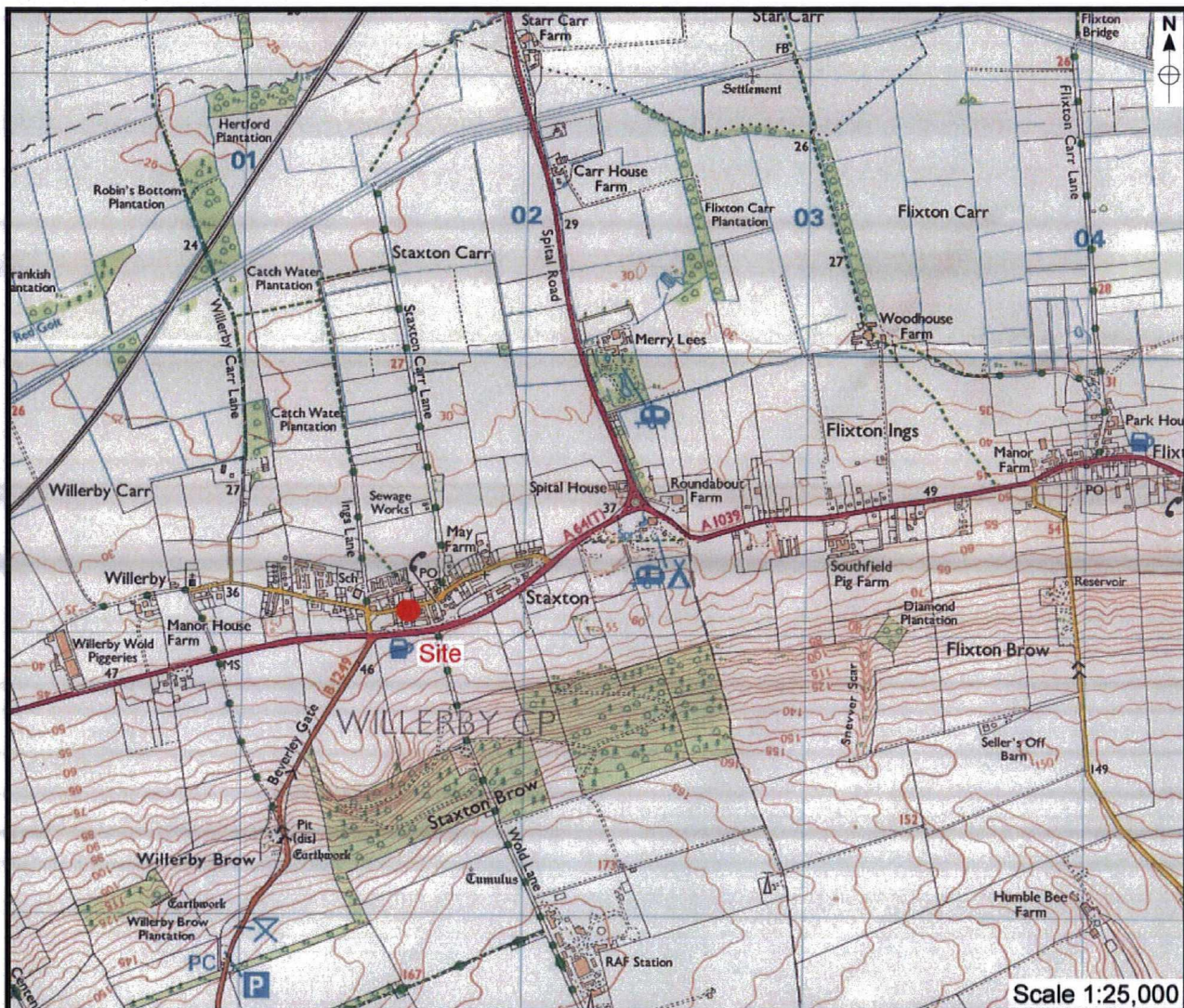


Figure 1. Site Location

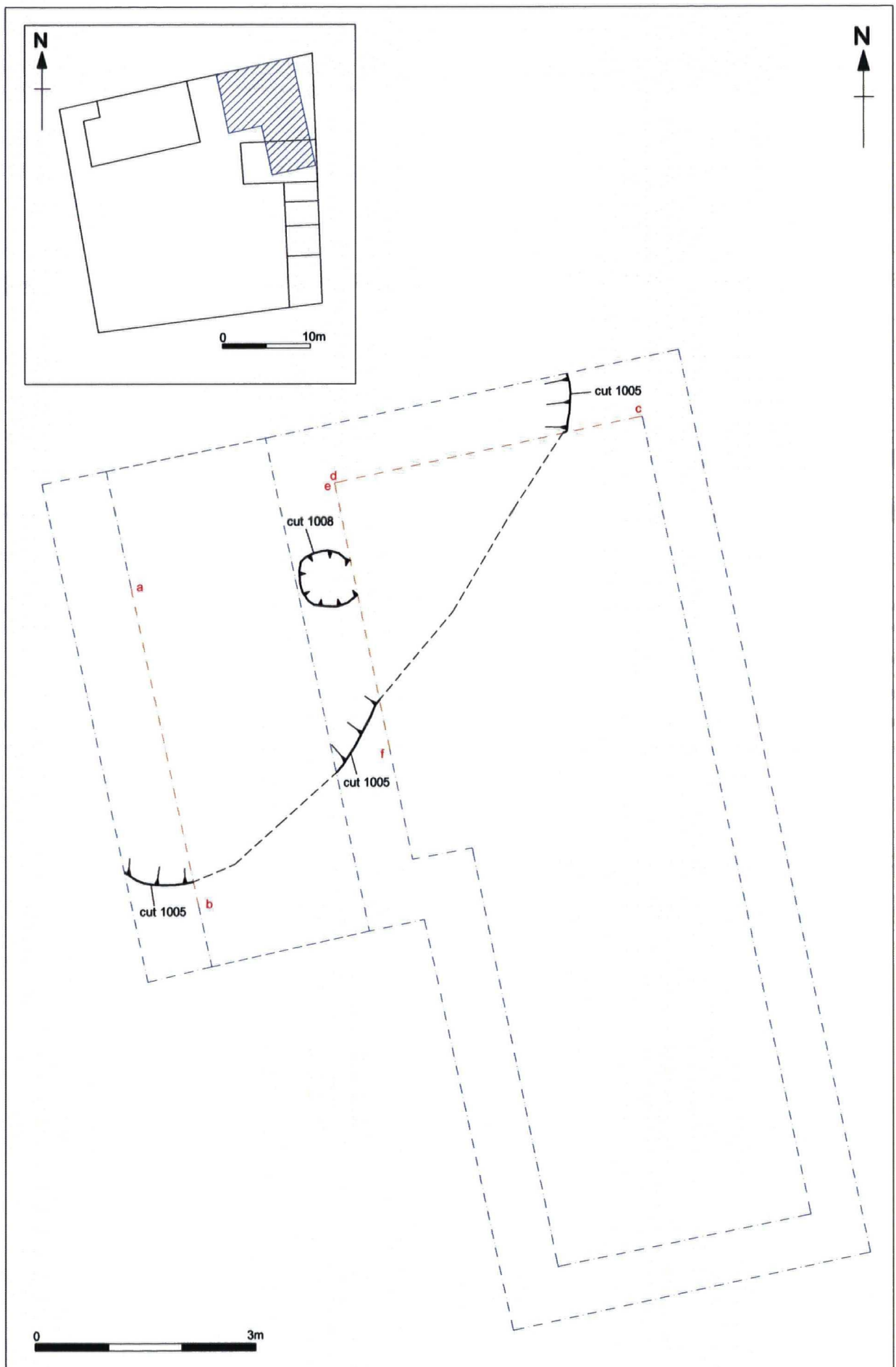


Figure 2. Plan of Watching Brief Features

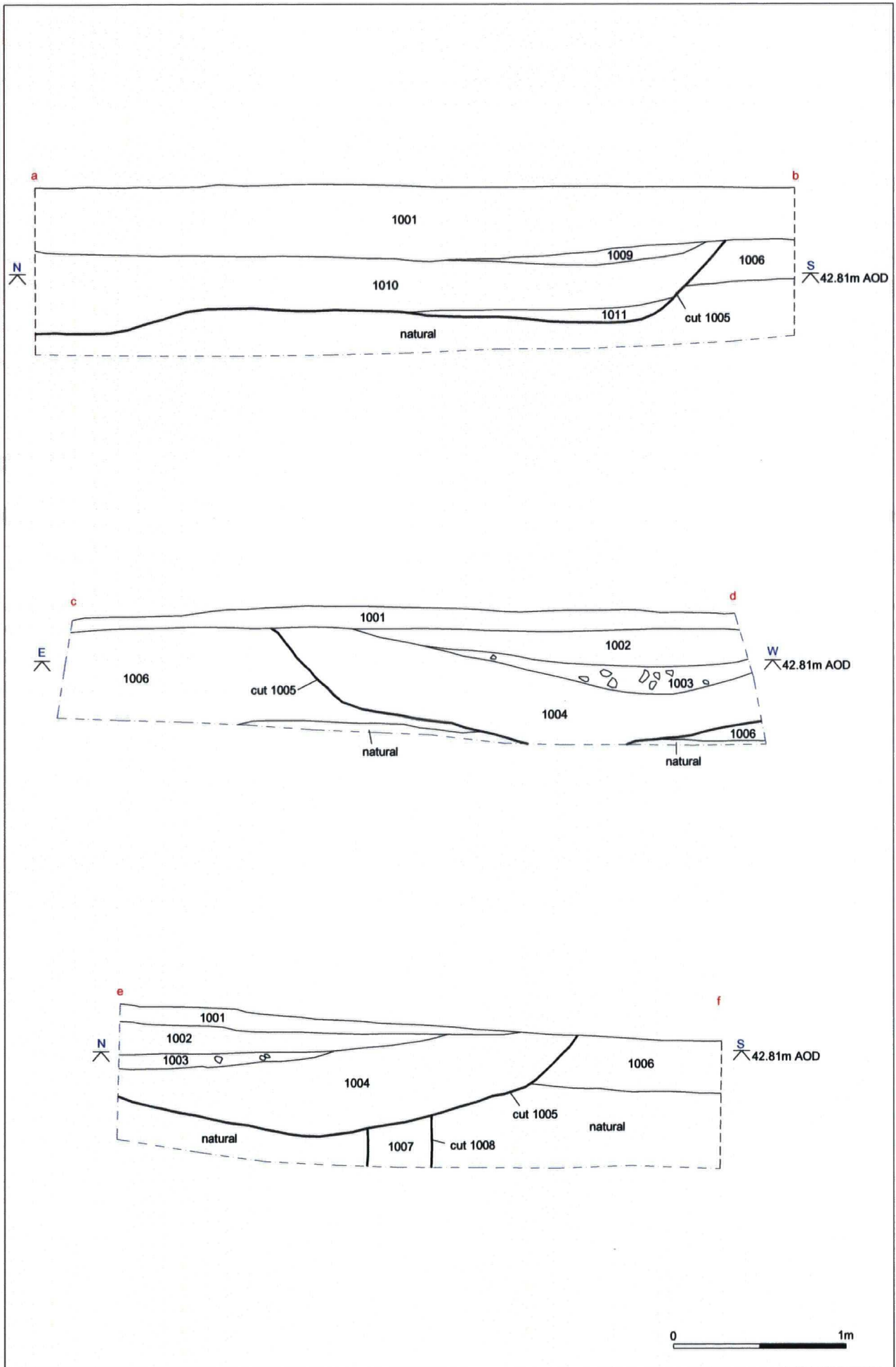


Figure 3. Watching Brief Sections