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Minor Archaeological Works  
2008

**Dundrennan Abbey Stables**

PIC Index No.  
Project: HSCO-90114-2008-01

Archaeological Trenching

February 2008

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Kirkdale Archaeology

**Site** Dundrennan Abbey

**Project Description** Digging of pipe trenches to tie the new roof drainage of the stable block to a stone drain crossing the site. Further trenches were dug to install a new railing fence around a monastic drain and to install concrete ramps at the doors to the stables.

**Project Code** HSCO-90114-2008-01

**NGR** NX 7494 4745

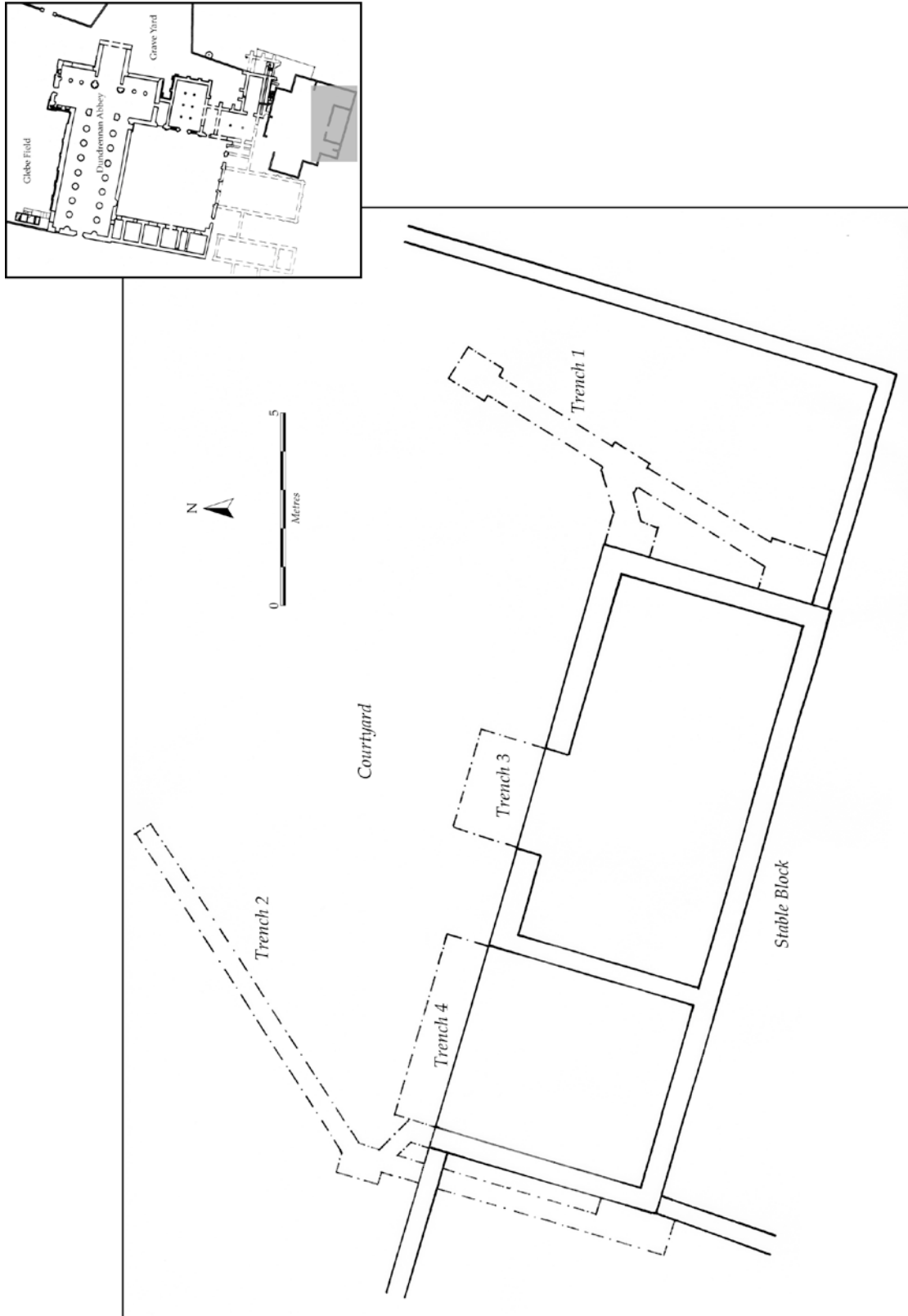
**Contents**

1	Introduction.....	3
2	Exavation Account.....	6
2.1	Overview .....	6
2.2	Trench 1 .....	6
2.3	Trench 2 .....	11
2.4	Trench 3 .....	15
2.5	Trench 4 .....	15
2.6	Trench 5 .....	15
3	Conclusions & Recommendations .....	18
	Appendix 1: List of Digital Photographs.....	19
	Appendix 2: List of Contexts .....	23
	Appendix 3: List of Drawings .....	25

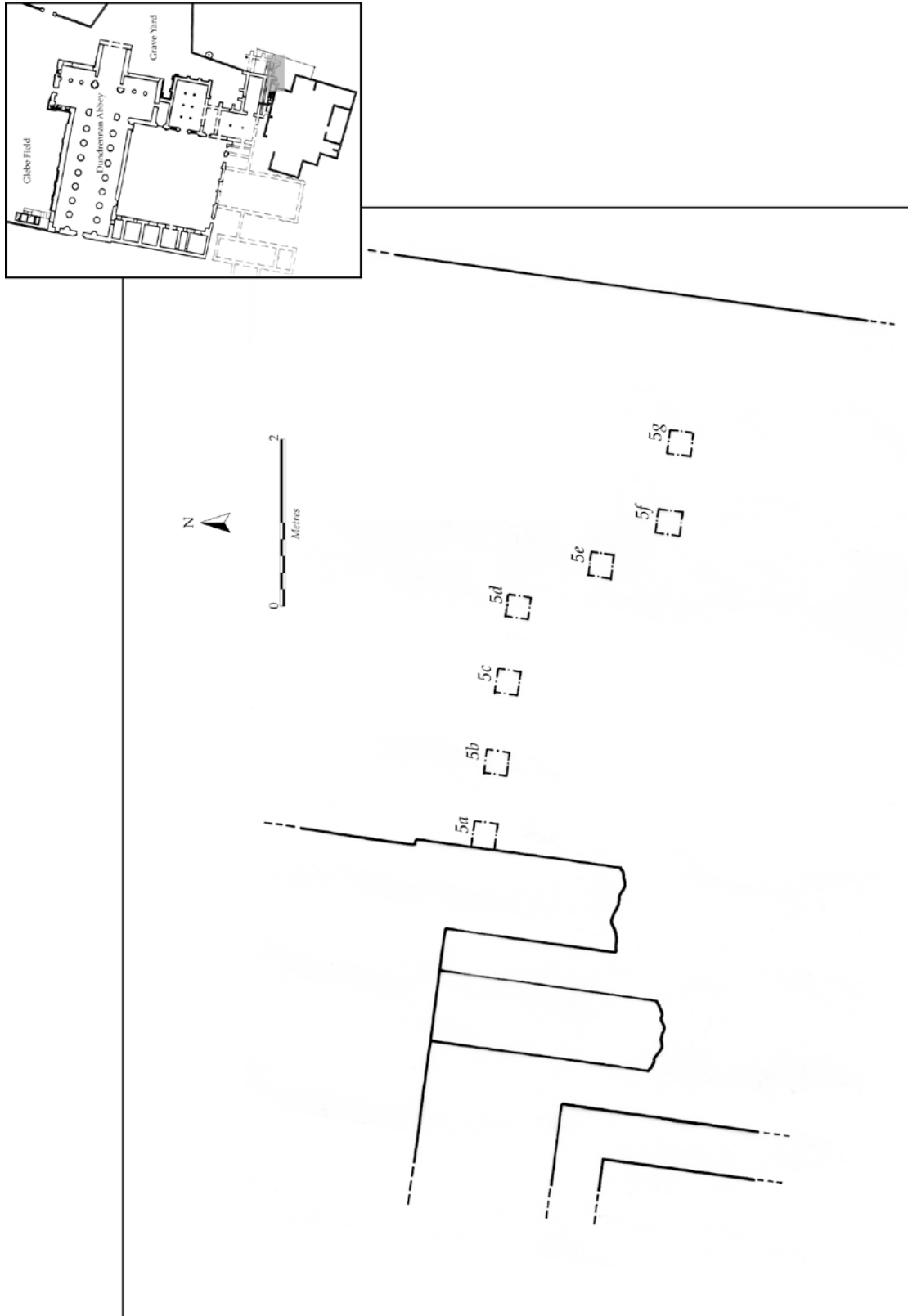
## 1 INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its PIC call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake the excavation of a series of trenches at Dundrennan Abbey near Kirkcudbright. Trenches 1 and 2 were dug to connect the roof guttering down-pipes of the stable block to a stone-capped drain running WNW-ESE across the stable courtyard. Trenches 3 and 4 were dug to allow the installation of concrete ramps at the stable doors. Trenches 5a-5g were dug to install the uprights for a railing fence S of the exposed medieval drain protruding from the E end of the Monk's Latrine.

Dundrennan is a Cistercian Abbey founded in 1142. The stable block lies within a built-up walled courtyard to the SE of the Abbey's South Range and is part of late 19<sup>th</sup> century improvements to the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century Manse (to the W) and its gardens.



*Plan of Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 4.*



*Plan of Trenches 5a – 5g.*

## **2 EXCAVATION ACCOUNT**

### **2.1 Overview**

Trenches 1 and 2 had a stipulated width of 300mm and a depth of 600mm. Trenches 3 and 4 were originally to be dug to a depth of 300mm, however this was before the cobbled surface was discovered. The brief was modified to clear onto the cobbles, which would make an ideal bedding for the concrete ramps. Trenches 5a, 5d, 5f and 5g were 300mm x 300mm x 450mm deep and were dug to hold the main railing uprights. Trenches 5b, 5c and 5e were dug to a lesser depth of 250mm as they were to hold smaller intermediate uprights.

### **2.2 Trench 1**

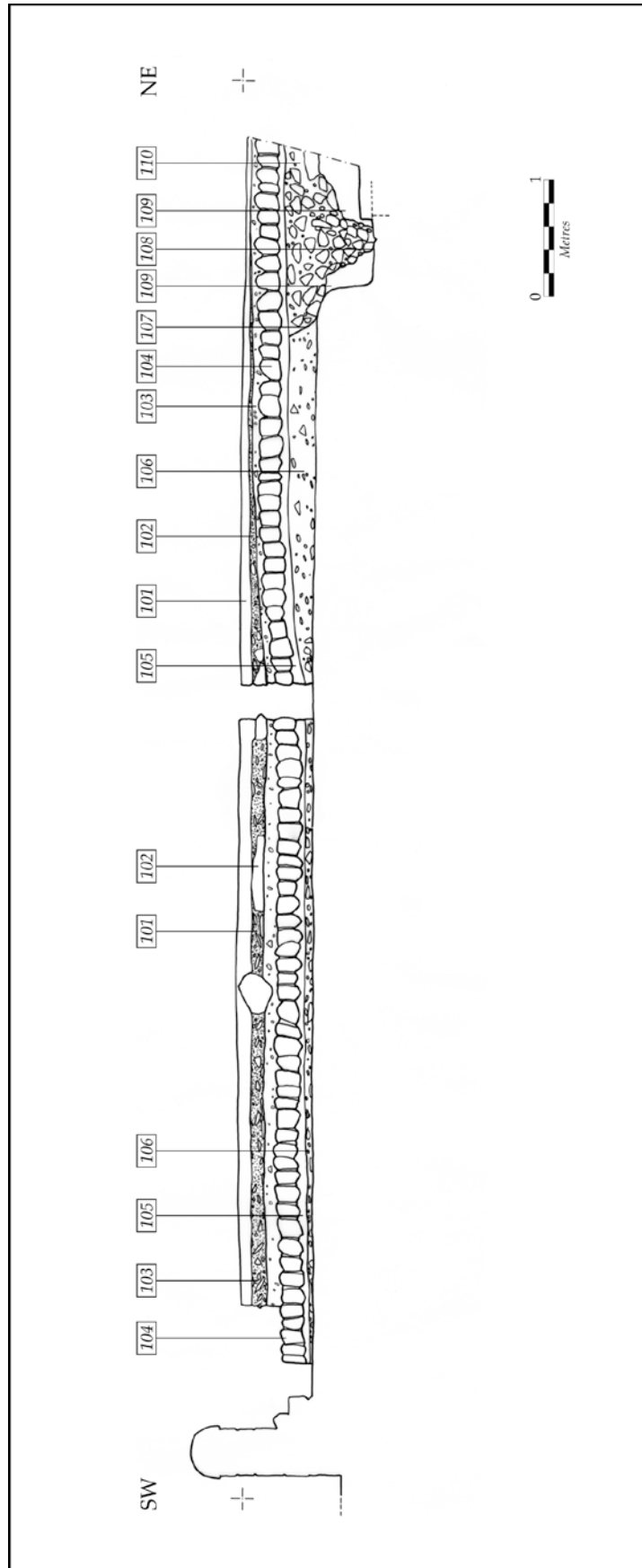
Trench 1 was dug to channel the water from the down-pipes at the NE and SE corners of the stables into the stone capped drain running across the courtyard. This trench was composed of a long trench running 11.10m NE from the SE corner of the stables with an additional 2.30m long dogleg running E from the NE corner to connect into the main trench. To the NE of the main trench, the depth of excavation was increased from 600mm to 1.0m to expose the capstone of the drain.

The turf and topsoil **101** varied in depth from 130mm to the SW and 60mm to the NE. Beneath this was **102**, a layer of make composed of large angular stones up to 350mm across, smaller stones and pieces of slate as well as large sandstone slabs up to 650mm x 650mm x 80mm thick (the trench had to be widened to remove these) bonded within a matrix of greyish sandy gritty ash. The layer was up to 120mm thick to the SW, fading to 10mm to the NE. This layer was demolition debris used as levelling on which to bed the turf and topsoil. The presence of plastic and tin cans within the fill suggests a mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century date for this levelling. Layer **102** had been placed over a layer of mid-brown silt **103** that had formed over cobbled surface **104** below. **103** was between 30mm-120mm thick and appeared to be formed by natural siltation- if the cobbles had been exposed then demolition debris **102** could have been placed directly onto the cobbles. Cobbled surface **104** was exposed at a depth of 380mm to the SW, rising to 80mm to the NE. The surface was composed of tightly packed sub-rounded river-worn pebbles up to 200mm high x up to 160mm across, although of varying dimensions. This surface was found within Trenches 2, 3 and 4, showing that there was a cobbled courtyard contemporary with the installation of the stable block. The cobbles in Trench 1 were set within a bed of greyish white clay **105** up to 600mm thick which in turn sat on a layer of make up **106**, exposed to a depth of up to 260mm. This make up was composed of angular pieces of schist-like rock (up to 120mm x 40mm) within a greyish-brown silty matrix. The NNE-SSW orientated SE

boundary wall shows the dramatic change in ground level from the field to the SE and the made up ground of the courtyard. **106** would appear to be associated with the late 19<sup>th</sup> century make up of the courtyard as opposed to any monastic levelling, although no finds were retrieved from this layer. **106** was truncated to the NE by drain cut **107**- only a small section of the SW side of the cut was exposed- what is unclear is whether this is a proper cut or whether the stone capped drain within was laid out at the same time as levelling layer **106**. The exposed part of the 'cut' shows that it was steep sided and at least 1.60m across x c.1.25m deep. Clay base **105** and cobbles **104** seal the cut and its fills (**108-110**), the suggestion would be that they are all contemporary features related to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century imposition of the stables and courtyard. Within cut **107** was walled sandstone drain **108** with a channel 200mm wide within. The sidewalls are composed of 3-4 courses of roughly dressed sandstone topped by a flat sandstone slab 800mm thick. This drain appears to be connected to the manse to the W and flows out through a small aperture on the SE boundary wall. Within cut **107** over the stone capped drain were two different fills- a softer fill (to the SW and NE) of redeposited greyish brown moderately compact silt **109** and **110**, a mixture of angular pieces of schist-like rock (similar to **106**) within a greyish brown silty matrix, although more voided to the bottom. This was perhaps to aid filtration of water into the drain, though it is difficult to see how this would work when there is a



watertight clay cobble base **105** above. It should be noted however that this clay base is not consistent over the site (See Trench 2).



*Trench 1 section (south-east facing).*

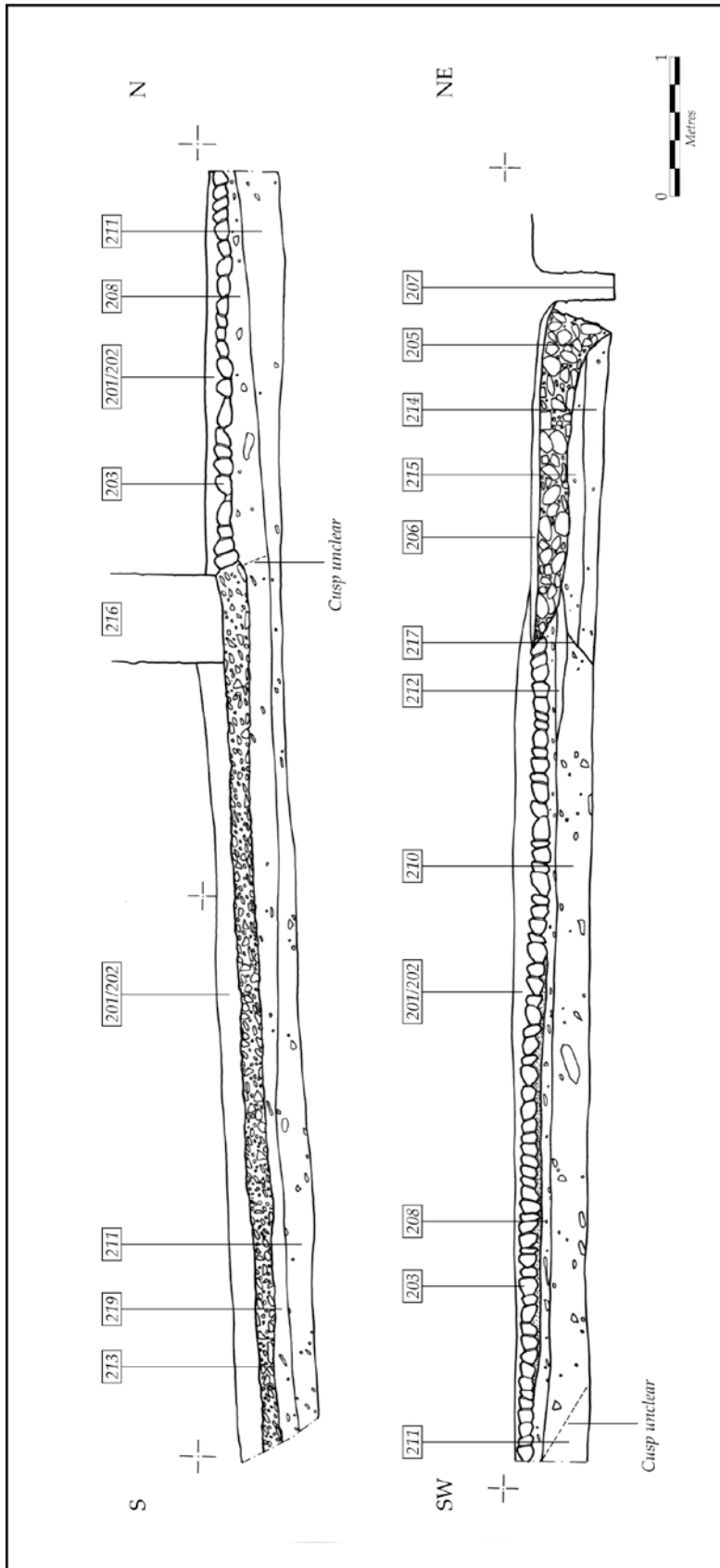
### 2.3 Trench 2

Trench 2 runs N from the SW corner of the stables for 8m before turning NE where it runs for 11m to meet the stone capped drain. A dogleg from the NW corner of the stables feeds NW into the main trench- the dogleg is up to 1.5m long. The trench was 600mm deep x 300mm wide. The points at which the trench angles or where pipe connections had to be made were slightly widened to make installation of the pipe joints easier. The trench ran under a wall **216** formed by the blocking of an old gate entrance and this had to be undermined.

**201/202** were the turf and topsoil respectively- this varied in depth from 120mm to the NE to a thin covering to the NE of wall **216** of 25mm. To the SW of wall **216** the topsoil was consistently 120mm thick. Immediately below the topsoil was a laid cobble surface **203**. The surface was composed of tightly packed sub-rounded river-worn pebbles up to 120mm high x up to 160mm across, although of varying dimensions. The cobbles were generally smaller than those of the corresponding surface in Trench 1, although they were not bedded on a clay base. They were instead bedded on a layer of make up **208**, varying in depth from 250mm to the SW to as little as 20mm to the NE. This layer was composed of numerous pieces of angular schist-like stone up to 140mm x 30mm and slate within a moderately compacted matrix of mid-brown silt. Centrally to the SW-NE stretch of the trench, the cobbles were

bedded on a thin yellow mortar spread **209** up to 30mm thick and 2.5m long, overlying bedding layer **208**. To the NE, a cut **204** had been made through cobbles **203** and bedding **208**. This cut had been made to emplace a concrete spread **206** 50mm thick around an aperture inserted into stone capped drain **207**. This spread was put in to allow water to flow from the courtyard into the stone capped drain **207** and was probably inserted in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The cobbled surface below the turf and topsoil must have been acting as a barrier to surface water that would have pooled on the surface. The bedding for the inserted concrete platform was formed by **205** a redeposited mixture of voided cobbles and pieces of smashed red sandstone. The insertion of the cut for the concrete removed any sign of the original drain cut. The walled sandstone drain **207** had a channel 200mm wide within. The sidewalls are composed of 3-4 courses of roughly dressed sandstone topped by flat sandstone slabs 400mm thick apart from where the grated aperture opens into the drain. To the SW of the drain (below **205**) were two layers that appeared to predate the insertion of the drain and the cobbled surface. **215** was a layer up to 120mm thick of loose pale brown silty clay containing occasional charcoal flecks and some small <50mm stones. Below this was **214** a layer of compact yellow silty clay containing occasional sub-rounded small pebbles <30mm. These layers appeared to be the topsoil and natural subsoil of a buried ground surface. To the SW, lay a layer **210** of moderately loose dark brown silt containing moderate stone, slate and shell fragments exposed to a

depth of 280mm. This layer contained pieces of green glaze pottery (date tbc). **210** sits within cut **217** that truncated **214** and **215** to the NE. There had been some suggestion that **210** filled (and levelled) a natural undulation but if that was the case then layer **215** would not be truncated to the SW and NE- it would dip down over **215** to the SW. Over the NE end of **215** and the SW end of **212** was a thin (up to 50mm thick) lens of fine yellow mortar mixed with dark brown silt, possibly another small levelling layer. The finds from this layer again looked to be of a medieval date (tbc). The relationship between **210** and **211** to the SW was unclear and it may be that **211** was a continuation of **215**. Like **215**, **211** was a layer up to 120mm thick of loose pale brown silty clay containing occasional charcoal flecks and some small <50mm stones. However **211** sits over a mortar spread **218** in its SE corner (See photo 42), which may represent some sort of path. The layer undulates but is exposed to a maximum depth of 320mm. At the SW extreme of the cobbles sits **216**, a wall 620mm thick formed by the blocking of an old entrance represented by 2 stone corner posts. **216** is bedded on a compact layer of angular greyish gravel **213** up to 120mm thick- this may have been a path leading to the cobbled courtyard when the entrance was still unblocked. This is in turn bedded on a compact yellow silty clay layer **219** up to 120mm thick. The relationship of this layer to **208** to the N was not possible to define as their meeting was under the undermined wall and could not be seen.



*East-facing section (southern end, left), and south-east-facing section (north-east end, right) of Trench 2.*

## 2.4 Trench 3

Trench 3 was dug outside the E doorway of the stables. The cobbles were to provide the base for a concrete ramp so the trench was dug onto their surface.

A loose mid-brown silty topsoil **301** was removed to a depth of around 120-140mm to expose the cobbled surface **302** described in Trenches 1 and 2.

Trench 3 was recorded photographically.

## 2.5 Trench 4

Trench 4 was dug outside the W doorway of the stables. The cobbles were to provide the base for a concrete ramp so the trench was dug onto their surface.

A loose mid-brown silty topsoil **401** was removed to a depth of around 200-220mm to expose the cobbled surface **302** described in Trenches 1 and 2.

Trench 4 was recorded photographically.

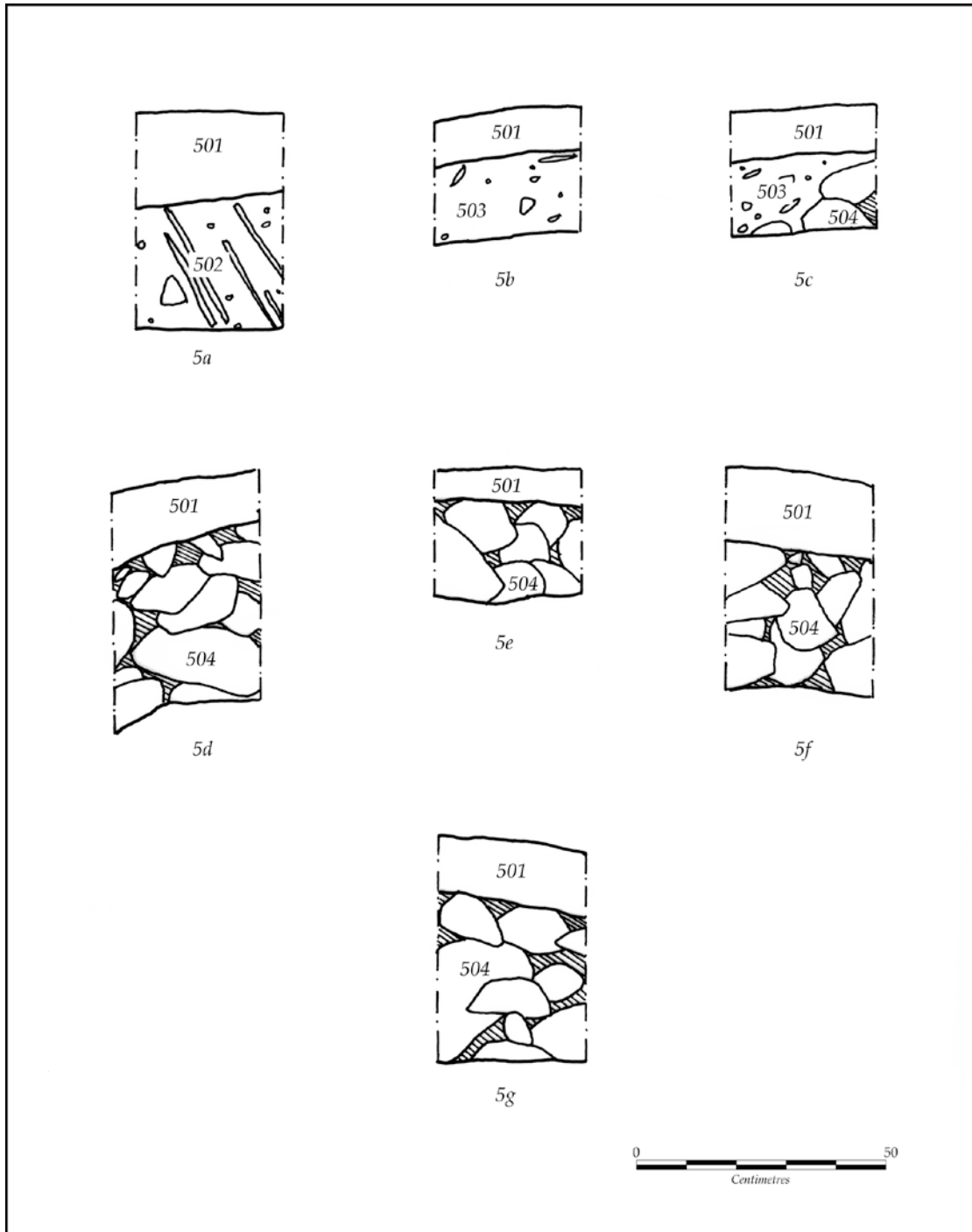
## 2.6 Trench 5

7 small trenches (5a-g) were dug to install the uprights for a railing fence S of the exposed medieval drain protruding from the E end of the Monk's Latrine.

The mound through which they were dug looked un-natural and this proved to be the case. These trenches were not separately numbered to avoid giving out 7 numbers for the same layer. 5a, d, f and g were 300mm x 300mm x 450mm deep and were dug to hold the main railing uprights. Trenches 5b, 5c and 5e were dug to a lesser depth of 250mm as they were to hold smaller

intermediate uprights. The topsoil **501** varied in depth throughout the trenches, from 200mm in 5a to 80mm at the crest of the mound in trench 5e. A compact yellowish grey layer **502** was exposed below the topsoil in trench 5a. There were several long thin roof slates running diagonally within the clay, date tbc. The stylistic dating of the slates may provide some idea of what this layer was. **503** was a layer of stony brown silt seen in 5b and c- it lapped up against voided rubble **504** and seems to be part of the landscaping of the mound. Trenches 5c-g exposed a voided mass of large pieces of yellow sandstone **504** up to 500mm across x 100mm thick below the topsoil. It therefore appears that the mound is a landscaped stone heap, probably of late 20<sup>th</sup> century date.





*Sections (south-facing) in Trenches 5a-5g.*

### 3 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The excavation of these trenches has revealed a complex series of surfaces and levelling exercises within the site adding greatly to our knowledge of the development of the site. The plans provided stipulated a trench section of 600mm depth and this depth was assumed throughout. If a run is required on future trenching then a series of spot heights should be provided to achieve the appropriate gradient. Any further remedial works requiring ground breaking should be carried out by or under the supervision of an archaeologist so that further recording can take place.

## APPENDIX 1: LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Shot	Description	From
1	Trench 2 after topsoil removal looking SW	NE
2	Trench 2 NE end- Concrete 206 and cobbles 203 looking SW	NE
3	Trench 2 Cobbles 203 looking SW	NE
4	Trench 2 Cobbles 203 at SW end	NE
5	Trench 1 Cobbled Surface 104 looking SW	NE
6	Trench 1 Cobbled Surface 104 looking SW	NE
7	Trench 1 Cobbled Surface 104 looking SW	NE
8	Trench 1 Cobbled Surface 104 looking SW	NE
9	Trench 2 NE end after cobble removal	NE
10	Trench 2 Cut 204 and infill 205, Concrete 206 looking NW	SE
11	Trench 2 SW end, Cobbles 203 looking NE	SW
12	Trench 2 SW end, Cobbles 203 looking N	S
13	Trench 1 Drainpipe dogleg trench Cobbles 104 looking W	E
14	Trench 1 Drainpipe dogleg trench Cobbles 104 looking W	E
15	Trench 1 Masonry at Drainpipe looking W	E

Shot	Description	From
16	Trench 1 Masonry at Drainpipe looking W	E
17	Trench 1 Cobbles 104 at SW end looking S	N
18	Trench 1 Cobbles 104 at SW end looking S	N
19	Trench 1 Cobbles 104 looking SW	NE
20	Trench 1 Cobbles 104 looking SW	NE
21	Trench 1 Cobbles 104 looking SW	NE
22	Trench 5a Slates and Clay 502	S
23	Trench 5a Slates and Clay 502	S
24	Trench 5a Post Ex Shot of Plan	S
25	Trench 5a S-Facing Section	S
26	Trench 1 – Stone Capped Drain 108	-
27	Trench 1 – Stone Capped Drain 108	W
28	Trench 2 – Undermined Wall 216	W
29	Trench 5 – location of trenches looking E	W
30	Trench 5 – location of trenches looking E	W
31	Trench 5 – location of trenches looking SE	NW
32	Trench 5 – location of trenches looking W	E
33	Trench 5 – location of trenches looking W	E
34	Trench 5b post ex looking N	S
35	Trench 5c post ex looking N	S

Shot	Description	From
36	Trench 5d post ex looking N	S
37	Trench 5e post ex looking N	S
38	Trench 5f post ex looking N	S
39	Trench 5g post ex looking N	S
40	Trench 2 Post Ex looking NE	SW
41	Trench 2 Post Ex S end looking NE	SW
42	Trench 2 Mortar spread in SE corner	W
43	Trench 1 W facing section over drain at N end	W
44	Trench 1 Shot of drain cap	S
45	Trench 2 – Back of walled drain 207	S
46	Trench 3 Post Ex Cobbles 302 looking S	N
	20-2-2008 photos	
47	Trench 2 ESE facing Section S of Wall 216	ESE
48	Trench 2 SW –NE, SE facing Section N of Wall 216	SE
49	Trench 2 SW –NE, SE facing Section N of Wall 216	SE
50	Trench 2 SW –NE, SE facing Section N of Wall 216	SE
51	Trench 2 SW –NE, SE facing Section N of Wall 216	SE
52	Trench 2 SW –NE, SE facing Section N of Wall 216	SE
53	Trench 2 SW –NE, SE facing Section N of Wall 216	SE
54	Trench 1 SE facing section from SW to NE	SE

Shot	Description	From
55	Trench 1 SE facing section from SW to NE	SE
56	Trench 1 SE facing section from SW to NE	SE
57	Cobbles	E
58	Cobbles	E
59	Cobbles	N
60	Cobbles	NE

## APPENDIX 2: LIST OF CONTEXTS

Feature	Description
101	Turf and Topsoil
102	Stone and Ash levelling below 101
103	Siltation over Cobbles
104	Cobbled Surface
105	Clay Bedding for 104
106	Built up Silt and Angular Stone layer below 105
107	Cut? Through 106 for 108
108	Stone Capped Drain
109	Silty Fill of 107
110	Stony fill of 107
201	Turf
202	Topsoil
203	Cobbled Surface
204	Cut through 204 and 208 for 206
205	Redeposited voided Cobbles below 206
206	Concrete spread over 205
207	Stone Capped Drain
208	Silt Bedding for 203
209	Mortar Spread over 208

Feature	Description
210	Dark Brown Silt containing Slate and Shell
211	Pale Brown Silty Clay
212	Mortar and Silt spread over 210
213	Gravel layer below 216
214	Natural Subsoil below 215
215	Buried Topsoil?
216	Wall to SW of Stables
217	Cut through 214 and 215 for 210
218	Mortar Spread to SE corner of S part of Trench
219	Compact Yellow Silty Clay below 213
301	Topsoil
302	Cobbles
401	Topsoil
402	Cobbles
501	Topsoil
502	Slate and Clay Layer
503	Stony Brown Silt
504	Voided Sandstone Rubble



### APPENDIX 3: LIST OF DRAWINGS

No.	Description	Scale
1	SE Facing Section of Trench 1	1:20
2	E Facing Section of Trench 2 (S End)	1:20
3	SE Facing Section of Trench 2 (NE End)	1:20
4	S Facing Sections of Trenches 5a-5g	1:10
5	Location Plan for Trenches 5a-5g	1:50
6	Location Plan for Trenches 1-4	1:10

String Level for Drawings 1-3 tbc – BS=1.59m

Drawing 1 String= 2.27m

Drawings 2 and 3 String = 2.27m