

93-28 OBSERVATIONS AND EXCAVATIONS  
AT NORTH GATE 1978  
(Roman Military)

**OBSERVATIONS AND EXCAVATIONS AT  
NORTH GATE, EXETER, 1978  
PART 1: ROMAN MILITARY**

**by  
J.P. Salvatore**

**Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit**

**Report No. 93.28**

## CONTENTS

### Section 1

	page
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Organisation of this report	1
1.2 The site	1
1.3 Method of excavation	1
1.4 Excavation summary	1
1.5 Site narrative: Roman military	1
1.6 Conclusions	1
Acknowledgements	1
Bibliography	1

### Section 2

2 Introduction	3
2.1 Group and sub-group identification	3
2.2 Context information	3
2.3 The group discussions and sub-group descriptions	3
2.4 The context descriptions and main indices	
Context descriptions	3
General context index	3
Archive section index	3

### Section 3

3 Introduction	8
3.1 The finds listings and other indices	
Finds inventory and dating evidence (pottery)	8
Coin list	8

### List of illustrations

Fig. 1 The location of the North Gate site	overleaf
Fig. 2 A composite plan showing the suspected Roman military drainage ditch and the Roman military ground surface located behind the City Wall. Scale 1:250	2
Fig. 3 Sections through the Roman civil and military remains (801). Scale 1:50 and a location plan of the North Gate site showing the position of trenches in 1978 and 1983. Scale 1:500	4
Fig. 4 Plan of the Roman military and civil remains (Area A) showing the location of section 1a (802). Scale 1:100	5
Fig. 5 Plan of the Roman civil remains (Area B) showing the location of sections 1-6 (803). Scale 1:100	6
Fig. 6 Sections through the Roman civil and military remains (804). Scale 1:50	7

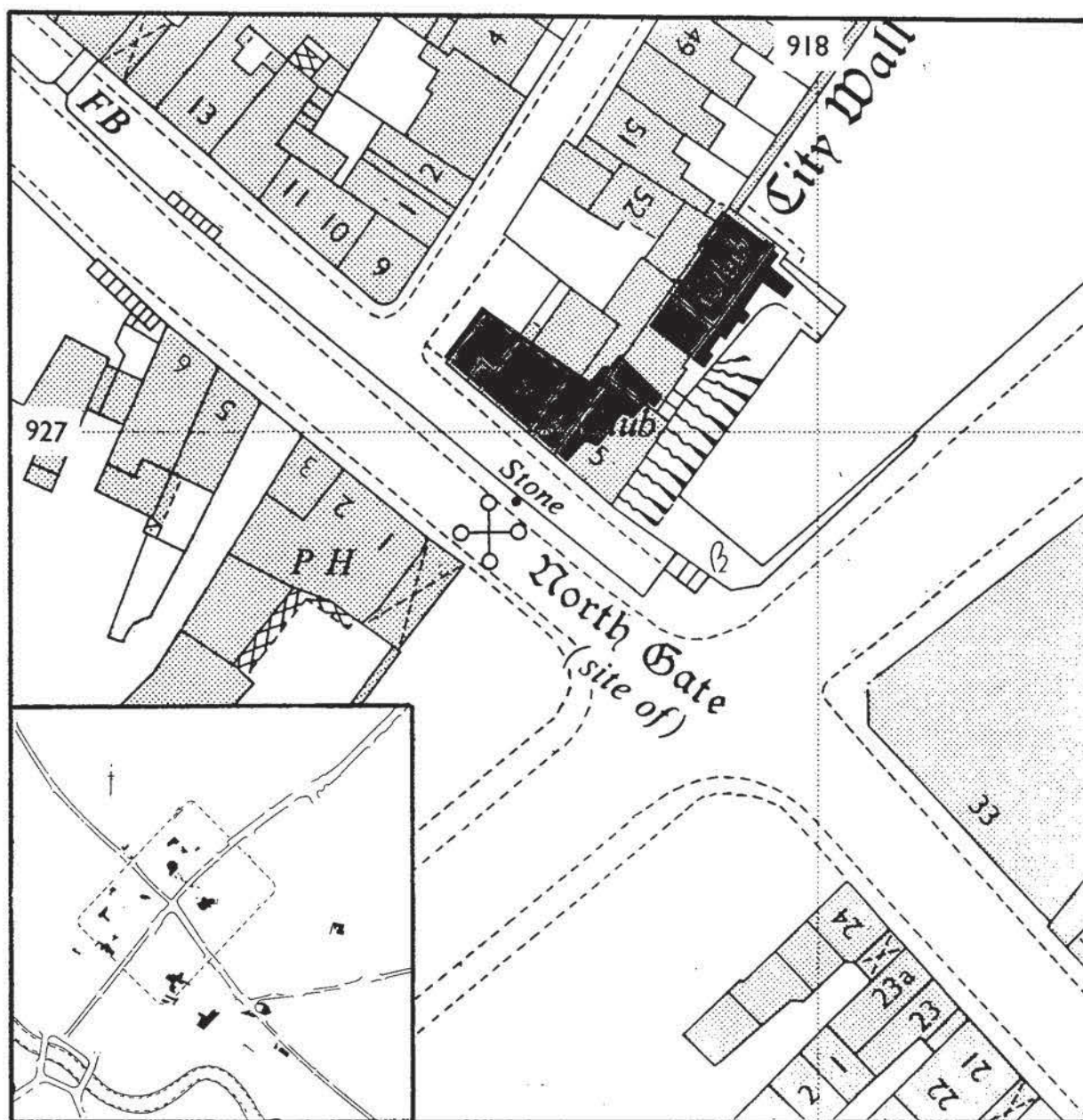


Fig. 1 The location of the North Gate site Exeter 1978. The inset shows the approximate position of the site just outside the fortress defences.

## SECTION 1

### 1 Introduction

In March 1978 the Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit (EMAFU) undertook a watching brief at a site known as the North Gate, this being the suspected site of the Roman city gate on its north-western side. Excavations were later undertaken on a different part of the site immediately behind the City Wall. These excavations took place between October and December 1978. A later observation in 1983 recorded a section adjacent to the Crown and Sceptre public house on the south-western side of Lower North Street but no deposits positively identified with the Roman military period were recorded. Both the observations and excavations were funded by Exeter City Council and were directed by C.G. Henderson. The watching brief and limited excavation in March 1978 was carried out by J. Thorpe. The excavations carried out from October to December 1978 were supervised by J. Pamment (now J.P. Salvatore).

The post-excavation work for this research archive report was undertaken in 1993 by J.P. Salvatore.

#### 1.1 The organisation of this report

The report comprises three sections. Section 1 provides a background to the observations and excavations together with a site narrative for the Roman military period. This places the discoveries at the North Gate site into context.

Section 2 contains the detailed archaeological evidence upon which the site narrative is based.

Section 3 contains a listing of the pottery and other finds evidence.

#### 1.2 The site (Fig.1)

The site consisted of two excavation areas (A and B) situated immediately behind the City Wall in Paul Street Exeter at SX 9179/9271, and an observation trench, sited at right angles to the wall and cutting across its foundations, in Lower North Street at SX 9178/9270. The site is outside the north-western defences of the former Roman legionary fortress at Exeter. Fig. 1 gives the location of the excavation areas and observation trench.

#### 1.3 Method of excavation

Excavation was restricted in the observation trench to the recording of sections and the partial planning of features. The two areas A and B of the later operations were fully excavated. Area A was approximately 10.5m in length NE-SW with a maximum width of 5m NW-SE. Area B was 13m in length NE-SW with a maximum width of 9m NW-SE.

#### 1.4 Excavation summary

Deposits suspected to be of early Roman military date were discovered along with a ditch that may have served to drain the defensive ditch of the legionary fortress. These discoveries were thought to belong within the Roman military period which at Exeter is dated from c.AD 55/60 - c.75/80. The bulk of the discoveries at the site concerned the much later Roman town wall and its development during the Roman civil and later periods.

### 1.5 Site narrative: Roman military

The two excavation trenches behind the City Wall (A and B) both yielded evidence of an occupation layer, perhaps the natural ground surface, that would have lain outside the fortress defences. Pottery finds associated with this layer were dated to the pre-Flavian period within the Roman military occupation. This layer contained some volcanic stone which may possibly have derived from the military road exterior to the defences which was recorded in a nearby trench (trench 14) at the Paul Street site (see Bedford and Salvatore 1993). A layer of degraded natural sub-soil beneath this layer produced a coin of native Durotrigan type (see Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 24).

The observation in Lower North Street supplied evidence of a ditch, at least 1.7m deep, which was found to have run approximately at right angles to the north-western defences of the fortress (Fig. 2). This ditch may have provided drainage from the main defensive ditch of the fortress, some 30m to the south-east, where it would have crossed the lowest point on its north-western circuit, traversing a small valley, before rising again towards the south-western corner of the fortress. The drainage ditch may have been recut on at least one occasion. The infilling of the ditch contained pottery of the Claudio-Neronian period.

### 1.6 Conclusions

The observations and excavations at North Gate have added only a little to the overall picture of the fortress. However, the provision of what appears to have been a drainage ditch associated with the fortress ditch provides a parallel for another ditch located to the exterior of the defences at Paul Street (Bedford and Salvatore 1993, 10).

The relationship of the site to the fortress as a whole will be discussed in a future Exeter Archaeological Report (Salvatore and Henderson forthcoming).

### Acknowledgements

The plans in this report were drawn by various members of the EMAFU and were prepared for publication in this report by T. Ives. The plans were photographed for reduction by G. Young. Pottery information was provided by G. Langman.

### Bibliography

- Bedford J.B. and Salvatore J.P. 1993 *Excavations at Paul Street, Exeter, 1982-85 Part 1: Roman military*, report of the EMAFU: 93.23.
- Goodburn R. 1978 'Roman Britain in 1977: Sites explored', *Britannia* 9, 459.
- Goodburn R. 1979 'Roman Britain in 1978: Sites explored', *Britannia* 10, 324-6.
- Holbrook N. and Bidwell P.T. 1991 *Roman Finds From Exeter*, Exeter Archaeological Reports: 4.
- Salvatore J.P. and Henderson C.G. forthcoming *The Roman Legionary Fortress at Exeter*, Exeter Archaeological Reports.

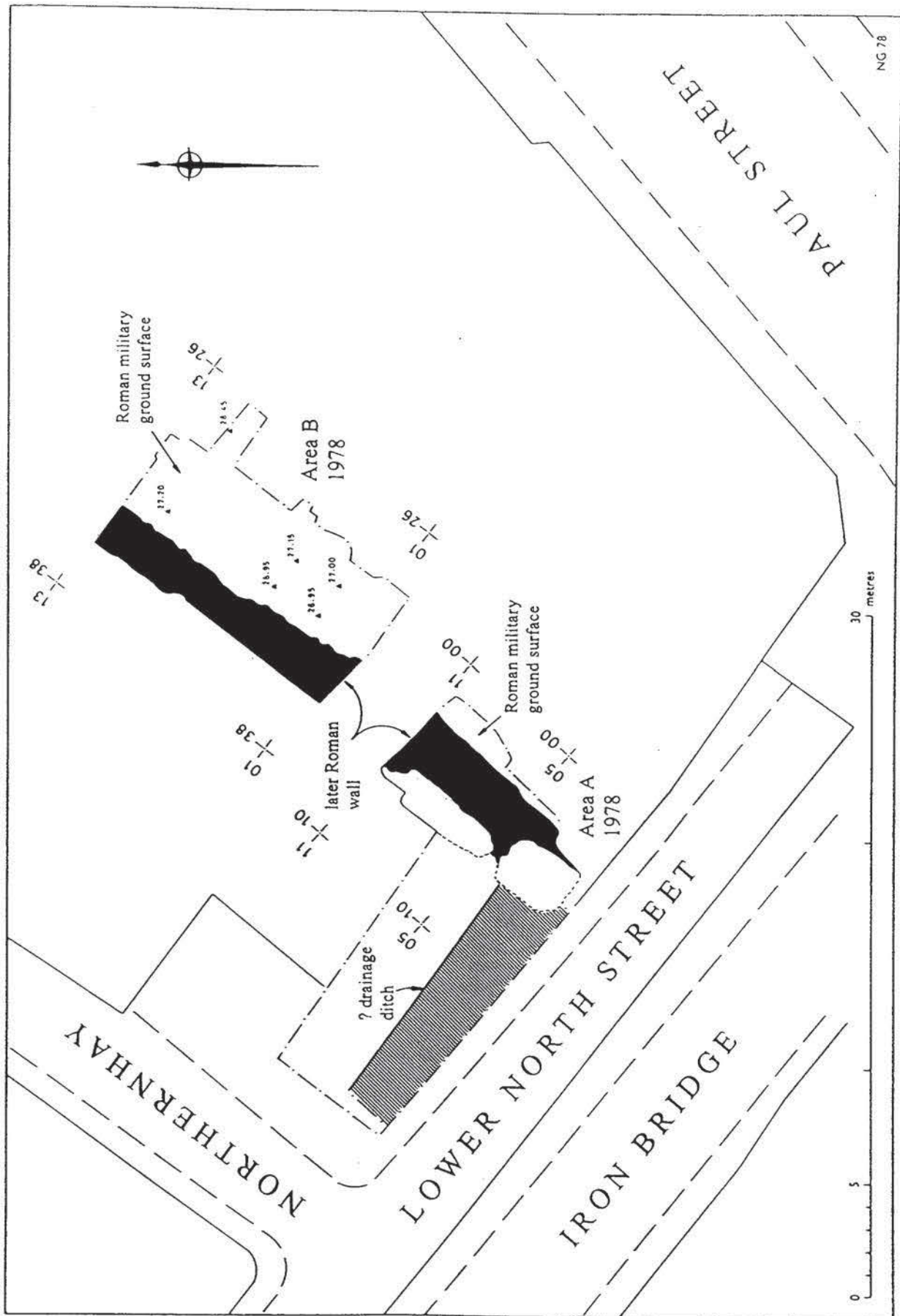
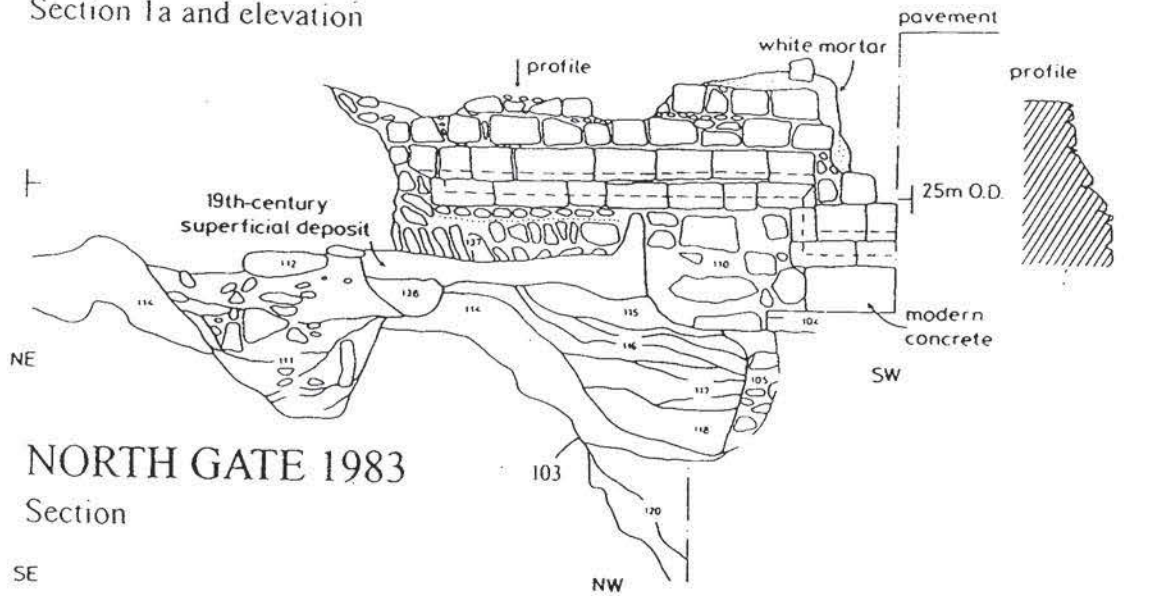


Fig. 2 A composite plan showing the suspected Roman military drainage ditch and the Roman military ground surface located behind the City Wall. Scale 1:250.

## EXETER: NORTH GATE 1978

801

Section 1a and elevation



## NORTH GATE 1983

Section

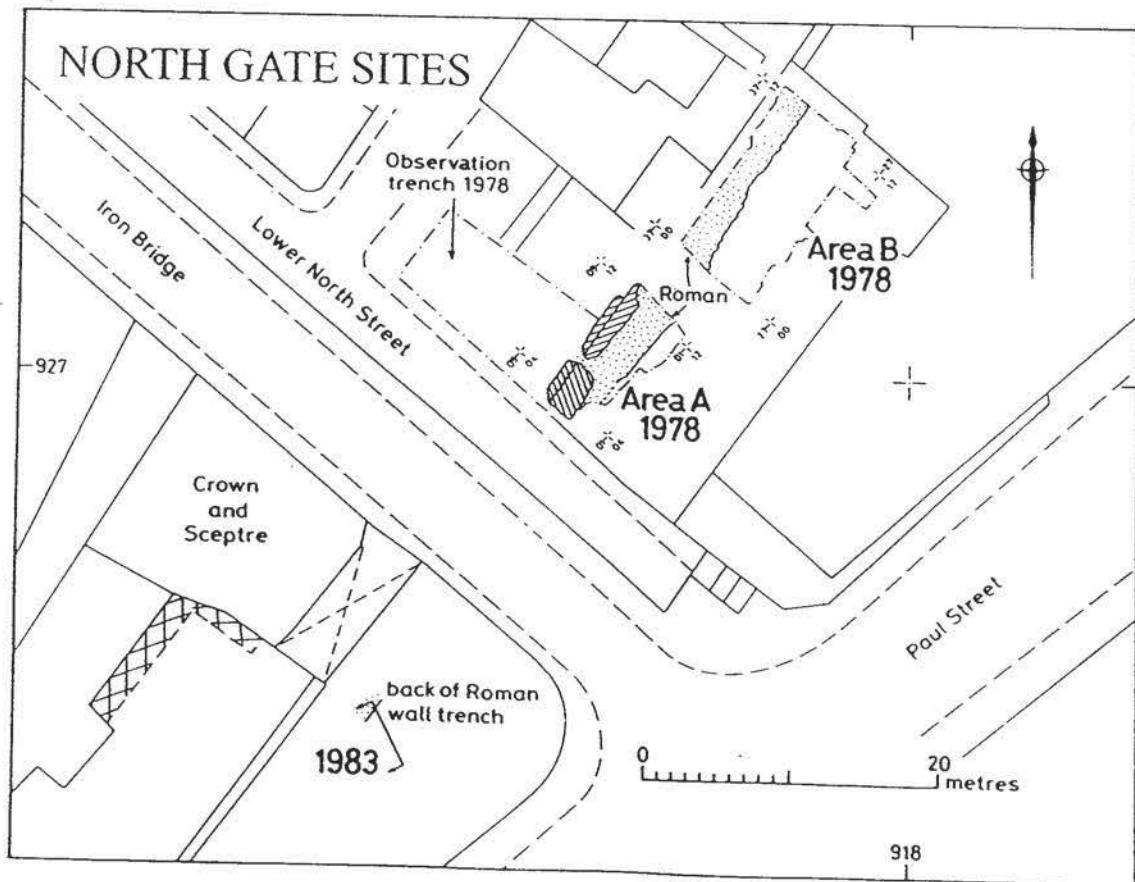
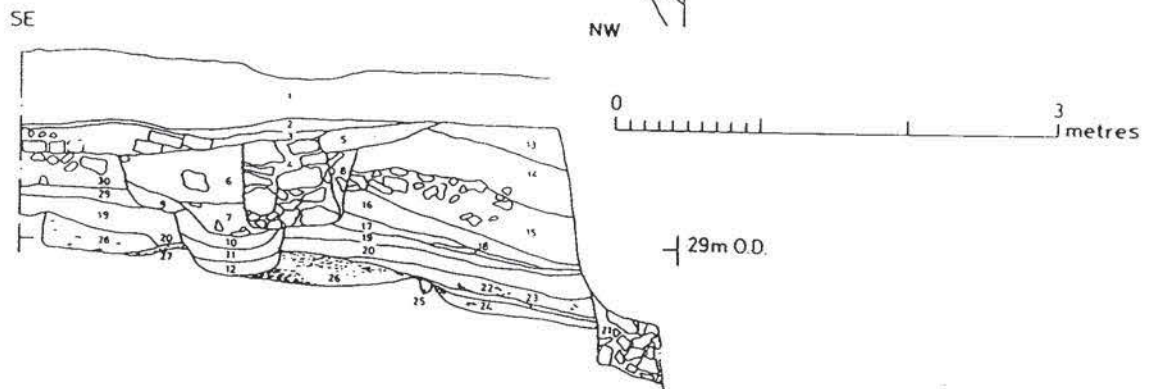


Fig. 3 Section 1a shows the Roman military drainage? ditch (103), scale 1:50.

Lower part shows a plan of the North Gate sites of 1978 and 1983, scale 1:500.

## SECTION 2

### 2 Introduction

This section of the report contains a record of the detailed archaeological evidence upon which the narrative produced in Section 1 is based. Individual contexts are described in a standardised form in numerical order.

#### 2.1 Group and sub-group Identification

The Roman military contexts for the North Gate site fall naturally into just two groups. In the case of Group 2 the ditch cut and its infills have been divided into sub-groups.

#### 2.2 Context information

A standardised summary description of each context in numerical order is included in the report.

#### 2.3 The group discussions and sub-group descriptions

##### Group 1 (see sections 1, 2 and 4 Fig. 6)

This group includes the two layers at the bottom of the stratigraphic sequence that were thought to belong within the Roman military period. The layer at the base of the sequence was a degraded natural clay that probably represented the pre-Roman ground surface (layer 18). Above this was a layer (17) that probably derived from military activity on this area of ground outside the fortress. This layer produced pottery dated to the pre-Flavian period. Sealing this layer were deposits of the Roman civil period.

Contains contexts: 17, 18

##### Group 2

This group concerns the ditch which was observed in the trench in Lower North Street. The ditch was orientated NW-SE and was thus at right angles to the fortress defences. From the restricted observations that could be recorded it was seen that the ditch was at least 1.7m deep and may have been in the region of 3m wide. It is uncertain whether the ditch was recut on at least one occasion.

Contains sub-groups 2.1, 2.2, 2.3

##### Sub-group 2.1 (see section 1a Fig. 3)

This sub-group is for the cut of the ditch only. The cut was recorded only on its north-eastern side but it had an appearance that would suggest the probability of a V-shaped profile.

Contains context: 103

##### Sub-group 2.2 (see section 1a Fig. 3)

This sub-group is for the primary fills of ditch 103 which were recorded in section. Primary silt fill is 120.

Contains contexts: 120

##### Sub-group 2.3 (see section 1a Fig. 3)

This sub-group is for the secondary fills within ditch 103. Fill 114 was a packed brown clay which spread over the lip of the ditch to the north-east; it was c.0.4m thick where recorded outside the ditch. The other secondary fills (115-118) were confined within the ditch and perhaps within a recut although this is uncertain.

Contains contexts: 114-118

### 2.4 The context descriptions and main indices

#### CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

- 17 Light beige/olive clay loam with red clay lumps, some volcanic stone, charcoal flecks, gravel. D = 0.02-0.14m.
- 18 Dull red clay with charcoal flecks and occasional volcanic chipping. D = 0.12-0.14m.
- 103 Cut for ditch. Unbottomed in excavation but recorded to a depth of 1.7m.
- 114 Fill of ditch 103, overflows ditch edge. Packed brown clay with some humic content. Bands of orange and yellow clay with pebbles. Some chippings of roofing tile. Max. D = 0.4m.
- 115 Fill of ditch 103. Secondary fill. Mid-brown silt with occ. charcoal flecks, pebbles. D = 0.2m.
- 116 Fill of ditch 103. Secondary fill. Mid/dark-brown silt with charcoal flecks, pebbles. D = 0.24m.
- 117 Fill of ditch 103. Secondary fill. Mid-brown gritty silt with occ. charcoal flecks and oyster shells, pebbles and yellow clay lenses. D = 0.4m.
- 118 Fill of ditch 103. Secondary fill. Brown silt with many oyster shells. D = 0.22m.
- 120 Fill of ditch 103. Primary silt fill. Brown silt with occ. charcoal flecks, mixed clays and shale. D = 0.6m unbottomed.

#### GENERAL CONTEXT INDEX

Context	Type	Plan
17	Layer	-
18	Natural	-
103	Cut	802
114	Fill	-
115	Fill	-
116	Fill	-
117	Fill	-
118	Fill	-
120	Fill	-

#### ARCHIVE SECTION INDEX

Context	Number	Sheet	Location
17	1,2	804	803
18	2,5	804	803
103	1a	801	802
114	1a	801	802
115	1a	801	802
116	1a	801	802
117	1a	801	802
118	1a	801	802
120	1a	801	802

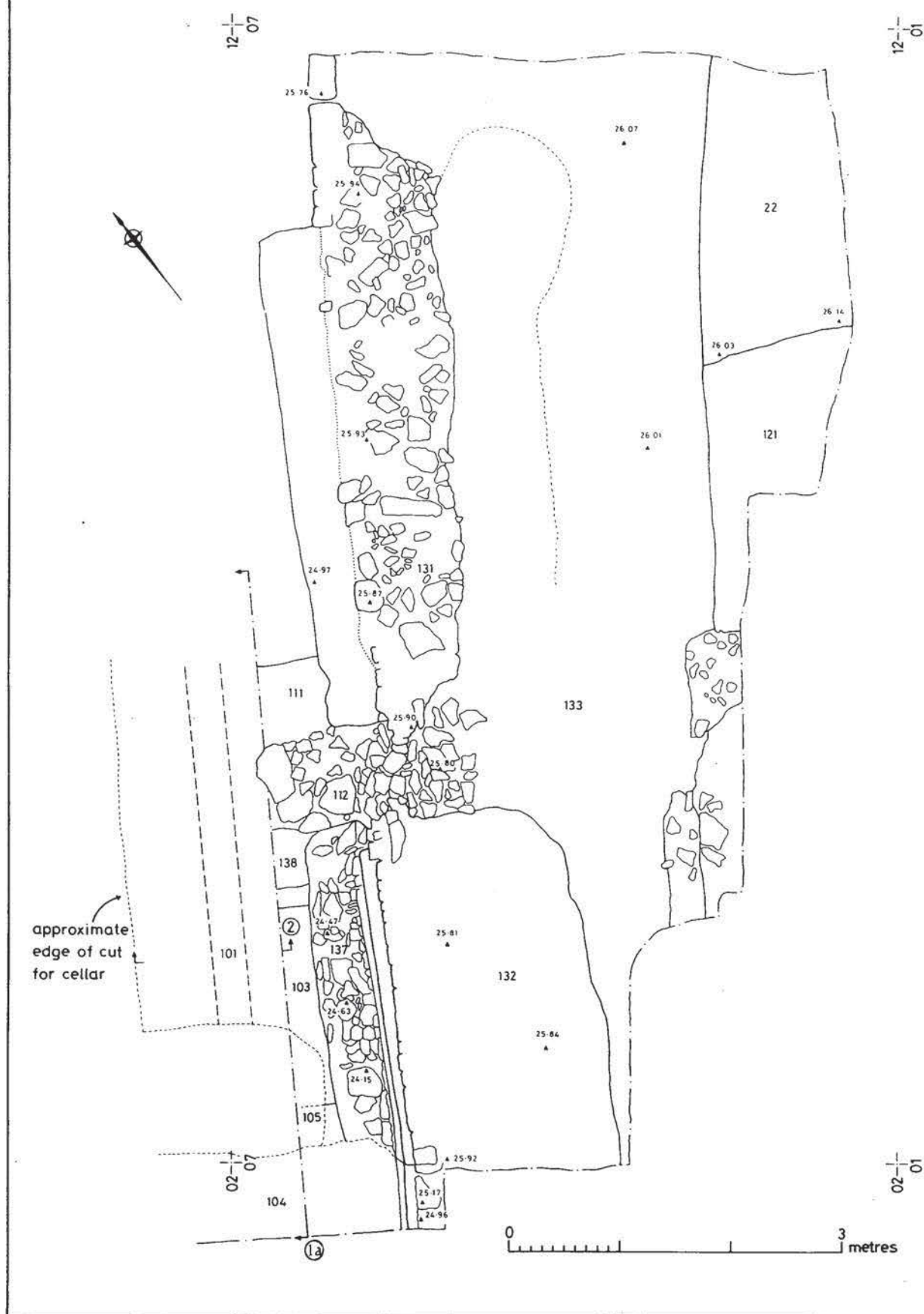


Fig. 4 Plan of the Roman civil and military remains in Area A showing the location of section 1a. Scale 1:100

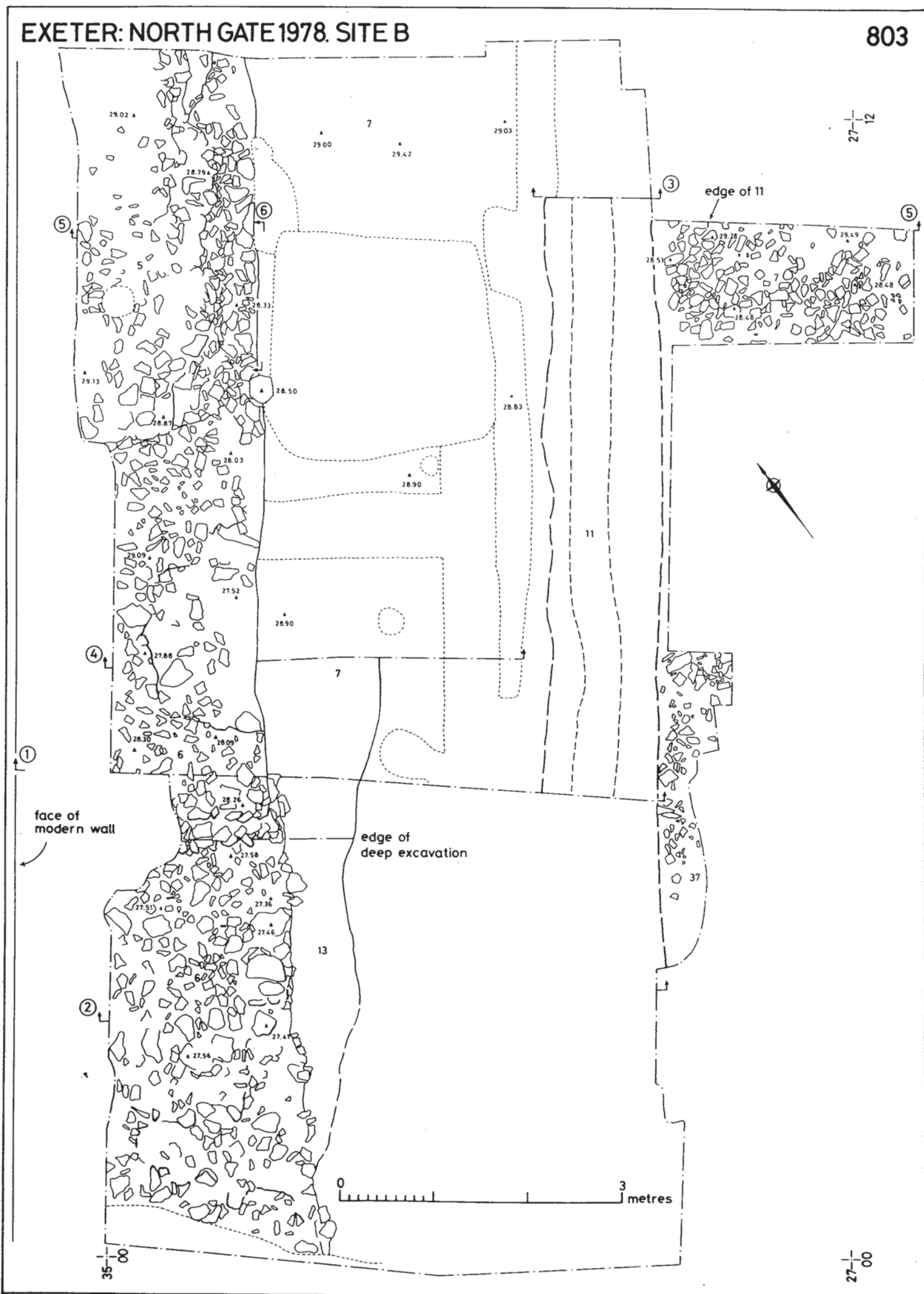


Fig. 5 Plan of the Roman civil remains in Area B showing the location of sections 1-6. Scale 1:100

## EXETER: NORTH GATE 1978. SITE B

804

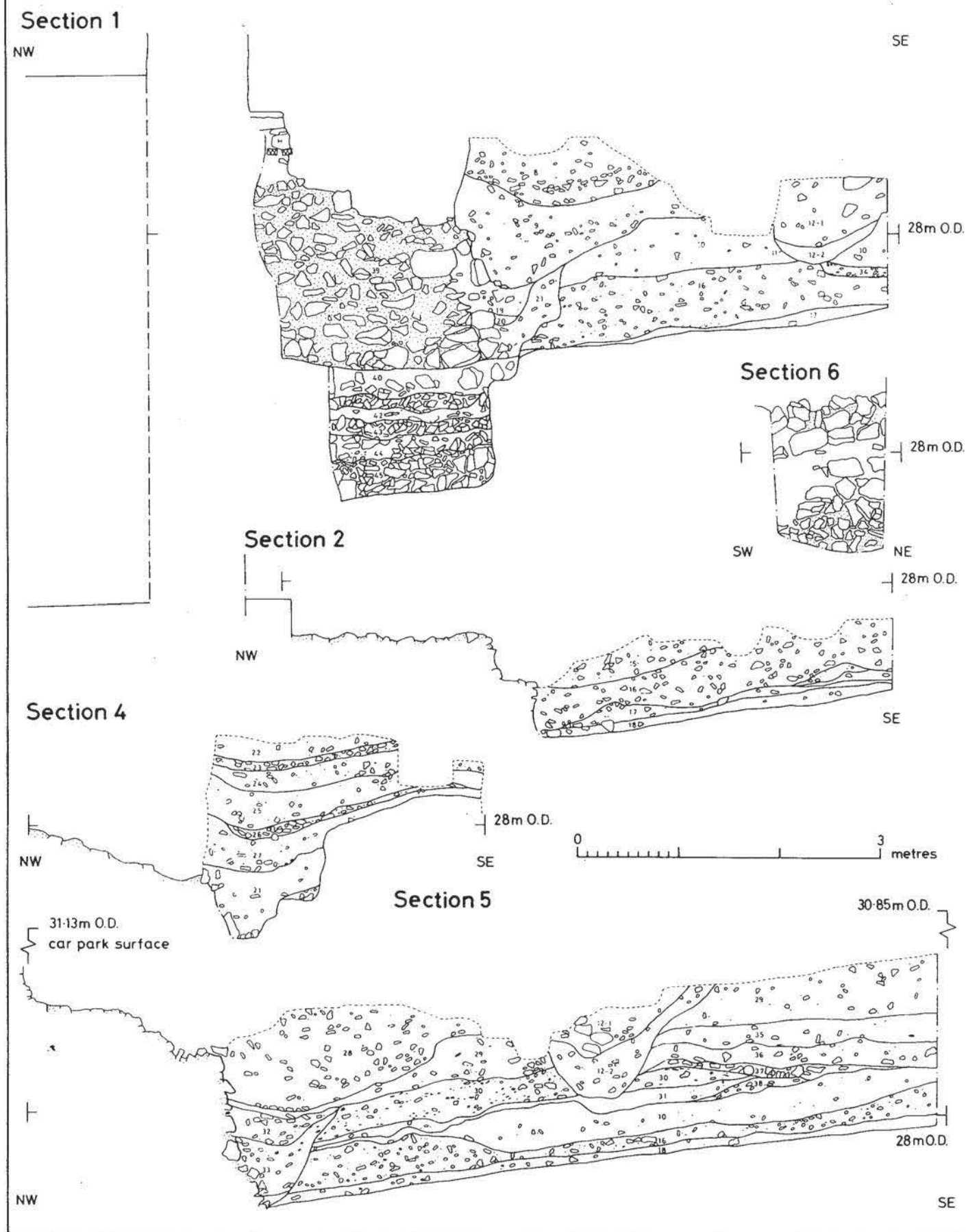


Fig. 6 Sections through the Roman civil and military remains. Scale 1: 50

## SECTION 3

## 3 Introduction

The first part of this section gives a listing of the pottery finds ordered by context. This is followed by a coin list.

## 3.1 The finds listings

List of abbreviations for finds inventory

*Fabric No. Type*

31*	South-East Dorset Black-Burnished Ware
40*	South-Western Black-Burnished Ware
151*	Exeter Sandy Grey Ware
371*	Fortress Ware A
440*	Flagon Fabric
500	Samian-South Gaulish Type
603	Camulodunum 186 (Peacock & Williams 1986, Class 17/18), amphorae

(\* = Fabric Number used In EAR 4)

For descriptions and discussions of fabric and types mentioned see Holbrook and Bidwell (1991).

*Type Abbreviations*

999	Unspecified Type
AL	Acute Lattice
BWL	Bowl
CP	Cooking pot
Dr.	Dragendorff (samian type)
OF	Open form

*Miscellaneous*

MNV	Minimum number of vessels
Qty	Quantity
Wt	Weight in grams

## FINDS INVENTORY

*Pottery**Context*

103						
Fabric	31	MNV	2	Wt	120	
Type	CP AL					Qty 2
Fabric	40	MNV	2	Wt	35	
Type	BWL					Qty 1
Type	OF					Qty 1
Fabric	151	MNV	1	Wt	10	
Fabric	371	MNV	1	Wt	40	
Type	10.1					Qty 1
Fabric	440	MNV	1	Wt	115	
Fabric	500	MNV	4	Wt	120	
Type	Dr.18					Qty 1
	(Neronian-Vespasian)					
Type	Dr.29					Qty 1
	(Flavian)					
Type	Dr.29					Qty 1
	(c. 65-80 AD, P.56, 17)					
Type	Dr.35/36					Qty 1
	(Flavian)					

## 114

Fabric	31	MNV	1	Wt	5	
Type	CP					Qty 1

Fabric	500	MNV	1	Wt	5	
Type	Dr.29					Qty 1
	(c. 70-85 AD, P.50, 77)					

Fabric	603	MNV	1	Wt	65	
--------	-----	-----	---	----	----	--

## 115

Fabric	151	MNV	1	Wt	?	
	(chip)					

## 116

Fabric	40	MNV	1	Wt	?	
	(chip)					

Fabric	371	MNV	1	Wt	?	
	(chip)					

## 118

Fabric	40	MNV	1	Wt	10	
Type	CP					Qty 1

Fabric	440	MNV	1	Wt	10	
--------	-----	-----	---	----	----	--

Fabric	500	MNV	1	Wt	?	
Type	999					Qty 1
	(1C)					

## 120

Fabric	500	MNV	1	Wt	20	
Type	Dr.29					Qty 1
	(c. 50-65 AD, P.56, 18)					

*Coin List**Context Identification*

18	Durotriges. Bronze cf Mack (1953) 318
----	---------------------------------------