
**Archaeological monitoring and recording
(comprehensive watching brief)
at the church of St James the Less,
Halse, Somerset
NGR ST 139 277**

16-17 September 2020

**Project number:
RGA 2020_HSJ**

**OASIS ID:
richarda1-425183**

**Prepared by
Richard Anderson**

**on behalf of
the church of St. James the Less,
Halse, Somerset**

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief has been undertaken during groundworks for the final phase of installation of a toilet facility, potable water supply and grey water disposal across the churchyard of St James the Less, Halse, Somerset.

Two shallow and narrow trenches were dug using mechanical mini-digger and hand tools. The first, dubbed Trench 2020-A, branched roughly northwards from the grey water pipe trench installed in 2016 for a distance of 17 metres. The second, dubbed Trench 2020-B, comprised a shallow foundation trench for the toilet building at the northern end of trench 2020-A. At no point did the excavations exceed a depth of 400mm. The trenches dug through a homogenised topsoil which contained two small iron nails, possibly from coffins but not associated with any other material, and a lens representing Victorian-era consolidation of the ground immediately around the present church structure containing a single fragment of a plain glazed fired clay floor tile of broadly later medieval date, most likely deposited in the aftermath of Victorian-era renovations. Two darker deposits in the base of the trench most likely represent infilled grave cuts but were not discernible in the trench walls of homogenised topsoil. No other material or contexts were observed.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Richard Anderson was commissioned by the officers of the church of St James the Less, Halse, Somerset, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the installation of an extension of the potable water supply pipe and grey water drain across the churchyard of St. James'. This was the third and final stage of the groundworks associated with this project.
- 1.2. The groundworks observed during this watching brief formed the final stage of a lengthy process to install a potable water supply to the church, followed by the extension of that water supply via below ground pipe to a newly constructed free-standing toilet block in the churchyard, and to pipe grey water and sewage from that toilet block. Following a Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) visit to the site in June 2014, routes for pipe trenches and the site for the toilet block were ascertained. The DAC report recommendations included the advice that *'the route of the water pipe would be via the now redundant oil pipe and old excavations made for that'*, and the stipulation that *'an archaeological brief will be necessary and, again, the Church Architect will be able to arrange for this'* (Diocese of Bath and Wells 2014). In granting *de minimis* permission for the work the Archdeacon of Taunton, the Venerable John Reed, reiterated this stipulation with the condition that *'the work will be under the supervision of your Church Architect and there will be an archaeological brief as the work is carried out. You accept this as a strict condition'*. Subsequently, Richard Anderson was commissioned by Annie Evans Architects to undertake this work. As the work had been granted *de minimis* permission, and had not travelled through the secular planning process, there had not been a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared to guide this archaeological brief. However, both Richard Anderson and Church Architect Annie Evans agreed that a WSI was essential to frame the work, and the document was prepared by Richard Anderson and submitted to Linda Goodman, Churchwarden. Subsequent phases of the work saw changes to the initial pipe routes and foundation trenches, informed by the positions of known and suspected interments determined by in situ monuments and a graveyard plan drawn up in the mid-C20. The recommendations for works presented in the original WSI were applied to these later decisions, and throughout the works.
- 1.3. The current document presents a report of a comprehensive archaeological watching brief, informed by the *Somerset County Council Heritage Service Archaeological Handbook* (Membrey *et al.* 2011) and relevant Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) and English Heritage Standards and Guidance advice.
- 1.4. The village of Halse, Somerset, is situated 7 miles to the north-west of Taunton, 3 miles south-west of Bishops' Lydeard. The site is centred on National Grid Reference ST 13999 27741. The church of St. James the Less occupies an elevated position of about 74 metres above sea level at the south end of the village. The underlying geology is Triassic Otter Sandstone, with a distinctive red colour, from which the church itself is built.
- 1.5. Archaeological fieldwork was undertaken by Richard Anderson over two days, the 16th and 17th September 2020. Whilst 2020 featured societal 'lockdowns' and work-from-home notices due to the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic, this work was undertaken during a period of relaxed restrictions allowing outdoor work to proceed whilst observing strict hygiene and personal distancing measures.

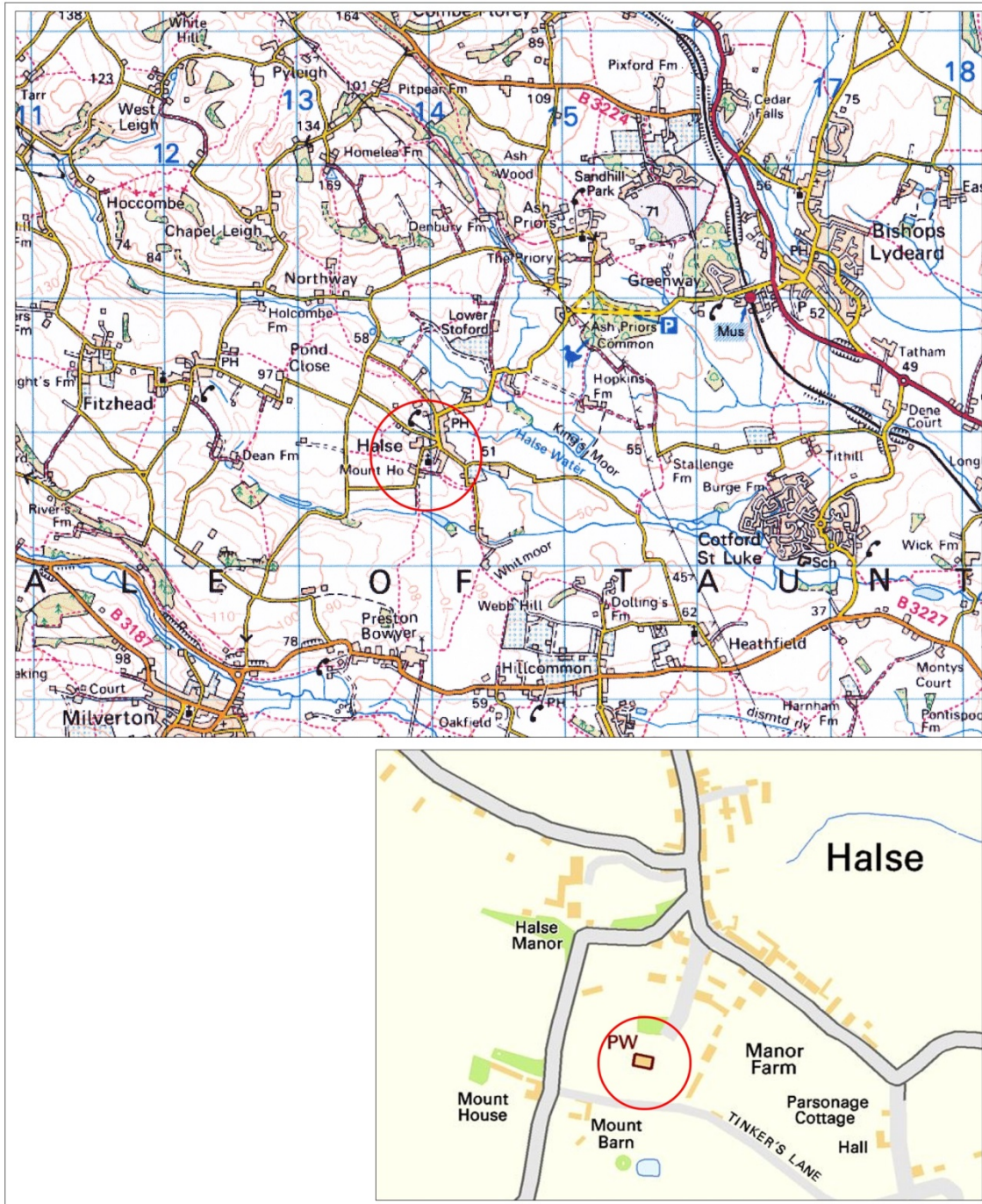


Fig.1. Site location. Reproduced from the 2014 Ordnance Survey Explorer map with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright. Richard Anderson archaeology licence no. 100056159.

2. Definition and Purpose of a Watching Brief

2.1 A watching brief is defined by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) as:

“...a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons within a specified area or site on land or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. The programme will result in the preparation of a report and ordered archive.”

2.2 The purpose of a watching brief is also defined by the CIfA:

- **“to allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works.**
- **to provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard.”**

3. Archaeological Background

3.1. The present church of St James the Less is largely of Perpendicular style but shows 12th century work in the rear arch of the south door, the font, and a fragment of carved stone beneath the east window. A plain tower dates to the 14th century, and the north aisle was added c.1546 (VCH 1985). The extant building most probably replaced a Saxon predecessor, the position of which is unknown but was very likely on or near the footprint of the current structure.

A chantry chapel, bestowed by Robert Arundell who had also given the manor to the Hospitallers, was said in 1374 to have stood in the church until ‘twelve years ago’, namely 1362. The exact position of this chantry is not known but it may have been on the north side of the chancel in a position now covered by the 1546 north aisle, although ‘the corbels in the present arch between chancel and chapel are of the 13th century’ (Baggs *et al.* 1985). It is also possible that the chapel was a free-standing structure elsewhere in the churchyard, as is seen at other Somerset churches including the neighbouring parish of Milverton (HER PRN 43296).

The churchyard has been in use ‘since at least medieval times’ (HER PRN 43239). The churchyard also holds a group of four chest tombs, to the Prior family, which are listed Grade II (HER PRN 17456, 17457, 40166, 40167).

Immediately to the west of the churchyard is a field named Glebe Field (TA 1840, 295), which has now been incorporated into the churchyard for burials. The roadway bounding the churchyard to the west and south, part of which is known as Tinker’s Lane, is recorded as a turnpike of the Wiveliscombe Trust, believed turnpiked in 1786 (HER PRN 26255).

The preceding phases of the current project, being the provision of a potable water source by subterranean pipe completed in January 2015 and the extension of that pipe and installation of grey water disposal and soakaway completed in May 2016, were each subject to an archaeological watching brief. Each was conducted by Richard Anderson, with a summary report filed with the Somerset HER and noted under the HER entry 43239 *Church of St. James and churchyard, Halse* (Anderson 2015) and (Anderson 2016). The reports are also available under the OASIS scheme, under the ID number **richarda1-425183**.

3.2. Historic Environment Record

The Somerset HER holds the following records pertaining to this work at Halse St James –

Primary Record Number (PRN)	Site name
43239	Church of St James and churchyard, Halse
17456	Unidentified chest tomb
17457	Unidentified chest tomb
40166	Richard Prior chest tomb
40167	George Prior chest tomb
18186	War memorial
26255	18 th century turnpike road
43296	Church of St Michael and All Angels, churchyard cross and chantry site, Milverton

4. Methodology

- 4.1 A 17 metre length of trench across the churchyard was excavated from south to north using a mini mechanical excavator with a 40cm bucket, operated by Mark Pike Groundworks. For the purposes of archaeological recording, this trench was designated HSJ2020-A. Earth was removed in gradual spits, to a final depth never exceeding 400mm, with spoil heaped on wooden boards along the length of the trench. The trench was excavated and recorded by plan and section drawings, pipes were laid, and the trench infilled within one working day. The route of this trench was informed by the presence of memorials at surface, and after consultation of the churchyard grave plan, allowing the trench to avoid any known interments. The following day a second trench was to be dug, a foundation trench for the toilet structure. Concern among the groundworkers addressed the shallowness of this trench, occasioned by the gradient of the churchyard. A consensus was agreed that allowed for no increase in depth of this trench and, as this decision would not impact on the archaeological record, the excavation recommenced. Designated HSJ2020-B, this second trench was excavated using a mini mechanical excavator with a 40cm bucket. Earth was removed in gradual spits to a final depth never exceeding 300mm, with spoil heaped alongside the excavation for removal. The excavated trench was recorded by plan drawing.
- 4.2 The archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* published by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA), December 2014, and was partially informed by the earlier project WSI (Anderson 2015). Current Health and Safety legislation and best practice was observed and applied at all times by all site staff, with particular attention to the social

distancing regulations introduced during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic and associated personal hygiene measures.

- 4.3 A drawn record of excavations was maintained, along with a context record. Plan and section drawings were completed at 1:20 scale.

5 Results

- 5.1 Trench 2020-A, running northwards across the churchyard from its intersection with the water supply trench excavated in 2016, reached a depth not exceeding 400mm along a length of 17 metres, and a width of 400-500mm. The ground was almost all of a single homogenised topsoil (001) and (007), broken only by a lens of degraded mortar rubble dating from extensive Victorian-era renovations of the church (006). In the base of this trench two darker contexts were identified, most likely representing infilled grave cuts (003) and (005). These were not investigated further as they lay below the depth required for the groundworks.
- 5.2 Trench 2020-B, a narrow foundation trench measuring 400mm wide and 300mm deep formed a square with outer dimensions measuring 2.5 metres. The ground was of a single homogenised topsoil, context (001). No features were identified within this trench.

6 Finds

- 6.1 Context (006), made up of degraded mortar and fragmented roof slate, produced a small corner fragment of a fired clay floor tile. The fragment is too small to determine whether the tile was ever decorated or was plain, as were the more complete fragments found in the same context during the 2016 trench works (Anderson 2016).
- 6.2 Context (001), the turf and homogenised topsoil layer which covers the graveyard, produced two small, corroded iron nails, which may represent coffin fixings. These were not associated with any other finds, nor were they present in identified grave deposits.

7 Discussion and Conclusions

- 7.1 Trench 2020-A and the position of foundation trench 2020-B had been planned in the hope of avoiding the disturbance of any archaeological features or inhumations. In this the groundworks have again succeeded admirably. Neither trench proved deep enough to disturb any inhumations, and the discovery of only two contexts in Trench 2020-A which may have represented infilled grave cuts further suggests that the graveyard in this location is only sparsely populated.
- 7.2 The plain glazed floor tile, along with those examples found during the 2016 excavations, do not provide much more than very general evidence for a tiled floor at some time during the later medieval period. Barbara Lowe writes that "plain glazed tiles of various regular shapes and sizes formed an integral part of tile pavements but their dating is difficult without fabric analysis since size, shape and surface colour provide insufficient evidence for comparison or dating" (Lowe 2003, p9). The small corpus of tiles from Halse exhibit differing types of keying on their undersides, of types known from other Somerset finds and illustrated in Lowe, 2003, fig.8, p7, but these also can tell us little until some future integrated study of fabrics, associated keying and glaze or decoration brings the possibility of more detailed reference.

- 7.3 Of the thirteen graves discovered over the second and third phases of this project, none showed any evidence of coffins, either in the shape of grave cut or in physical remains in the form of wood at any stage of decomposition, differential soil colouration, or coffin furniture.
- 7.4 The present work has avoided disturbing the potential archaeology of the site due to the shallow depth of the excavated trenches, but it must be assumed that any future work is likely to threaten undisturbed contexts. The location of the Arundell chantry chapel is still not known, and there is as yet no evidence of the position of a possible Saxon predecessor to the present church.

8 Archive

- 8.1 The archive currently resides with Richard Anderson, and comprises 2 digital photographs in .jpg format, excavation plan drawings, context register and one small fragment of a single plain glazed fired clay floor tile, all under the project number HSJ2020. Printed and digital copies of the report will be submitted to the client and to the Somerset County Council Historic Environment Record (Som HER). An OASIS report has been compiled, under the OASIS ID richarda1-425183.
- 8.2 Richard Anderson retains the copyright to this report with all rights reserved, excepting the granting of an exclusive licence to the client for the use of the report in all matters relating to the project detailed herein.

9 Acknowledgements

- 9.1 Grateful thanks to Mike Pike Groundworks again for their skilful, professional work, their very willing cooperation with the archaeological requirements, for their sensitivity to the nature of the site, and for their strict observance of September 2020 Covid-19 regulations.

10 Bibliography

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Appendix 1: OASIS Summary Sheet

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OASIS ID: richarda1-425183

Project details

Project name	CHURCH OF ST JAMES THE LESS, HALSE, SOMERSET
Short description of the project	Report on an archaeological watching brief during groundworks of pipe and foundation trench for a free-standing toilet block, at the church of St James the Less, Halse, Somerset. ~24m of shallow (<50cm d, 30cm w) trench revealed upper fill of 2 prob. grave cuts, no other archae.contexts.
Project dates	Start: 16-09-2020 End: 17-09-2020
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	richarda1-200102 - OASIS form ID
Type of project	Recording project
Current Land use	Other 4 - Churchyard
Monument type	CHURCHYARD Medieval
Monument type	CHURCHYARD Post Medieval
Monument type	CHURCHYARD Modern
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Faculty jurisdiction

Project location

Country	England
Site location	SOMERSET TAUNTON DEANE HALSE Church of St James the Less
Postcode	TA4 3AD
Study area	0 Square metres
Site coordinates	ST 13999 27741 51.042039991359 -3.226862548714 51 02 31 N 003 13 36 W Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Richard Anderson archaeology
Project brief originator	Annie Evans Architects
Project design originator	Richard Anderson archaeology
Project	Richard Anderson

director/manager
Project supervisor Richard Anderson
Type of sponsor/funding body Church of St James the Less, Halse
Name of sponsor/funding body Church of St James the Less, Halse

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No
Digital Archive recipient Somerset Historic Environment Service
Digital Contents "none"
Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography"
Paper Archive recipient Somerset Historic Environment Service
Paper Contents "none"
Paper Media available "Report"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title Archaeological monitoring and recording (comprehensive watching brief) at the church of St James the Less, Halse, Somerset. September 2020.
Author(s)/Editor(s) Anderson, R. G.
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Place of issue or publication Taunton
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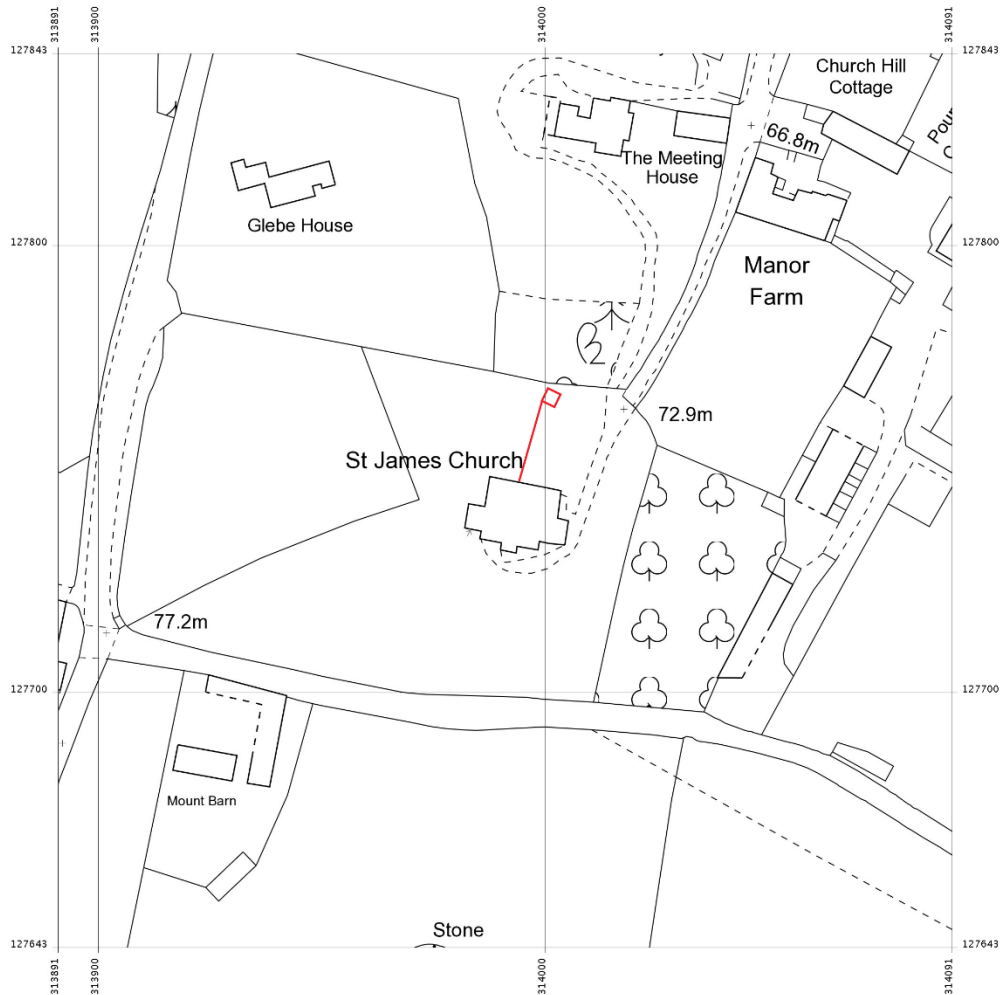
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Appendix 2 Context Register

HSJ 20 – 001	DEPOSIT	Turf and homogenised topsoil
HSJ 20 – 002	CUT	Grave cut of (003)
HSJ 20 – 003	DEPOSIT	Grave fill of [002]
HSJ 20 – 004	CUT	Grave cut of (005)
HSJ 20 – 005	DEPOSIT	Grave fill of [004]
HSJ 20 – 006	DEPOSIT	Victorian-era renovation rubble
HSJ 20 – 007	DEPOSIT	Homogenised topsoil
HSJ 20 – 008	DEPOSIT	Gravel path consolidation

Appendix 3: Position of trench, scale 1:1250



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Metres

1:1250

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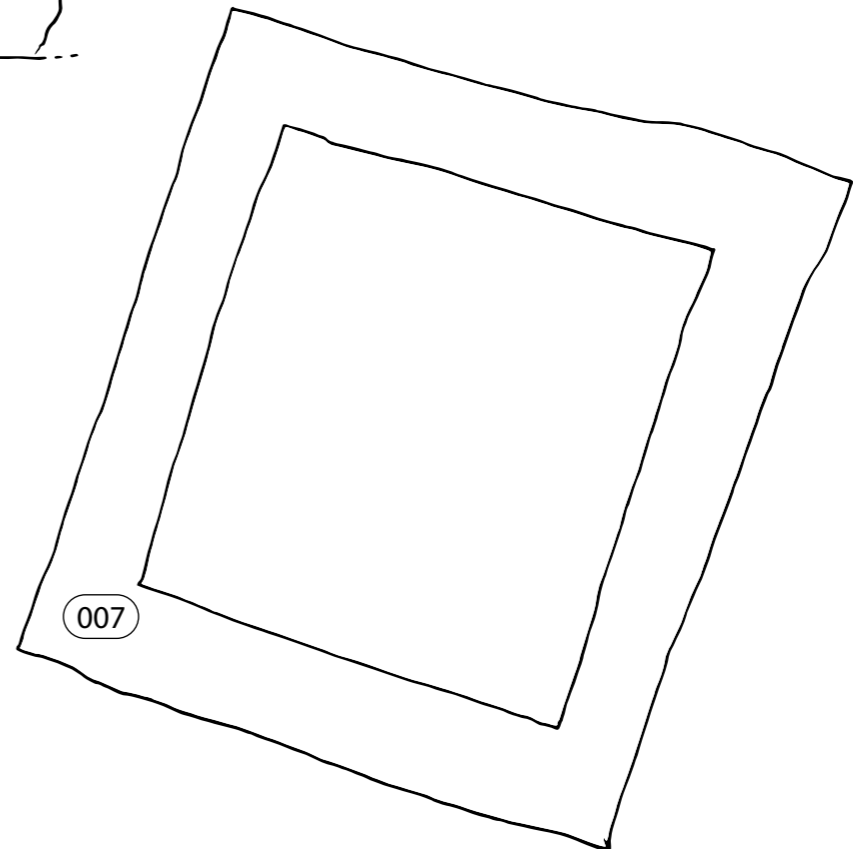
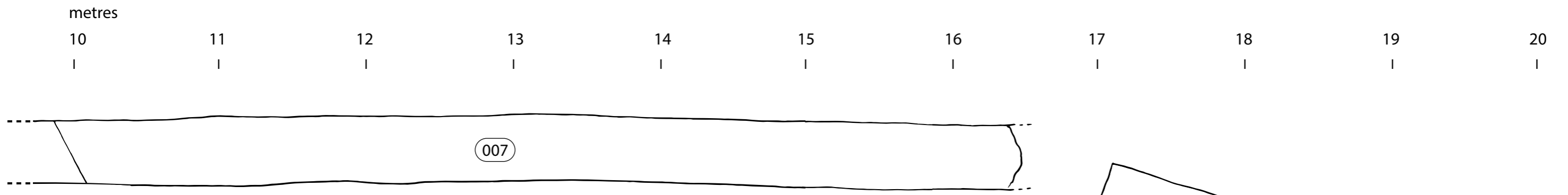
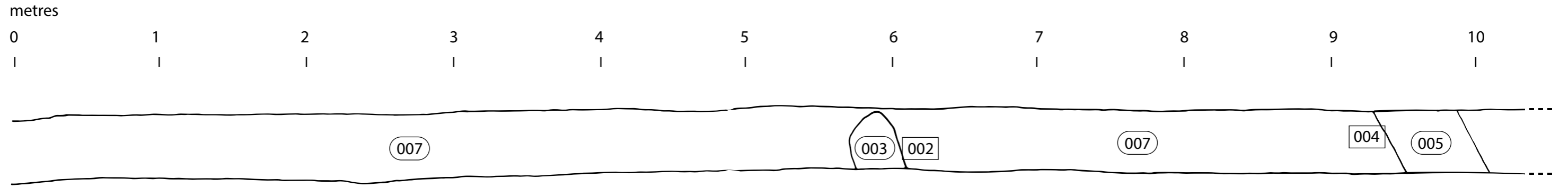


Figure 2: Plan view of trenches 2020-A and 2020-B.

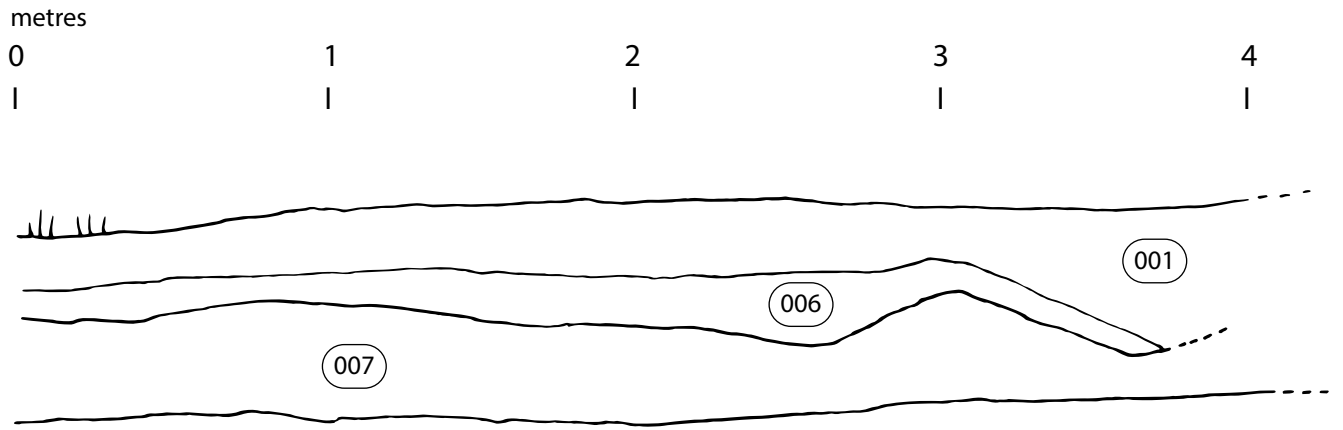


Figure 3: West-facing section view of part of trench 2020-A.

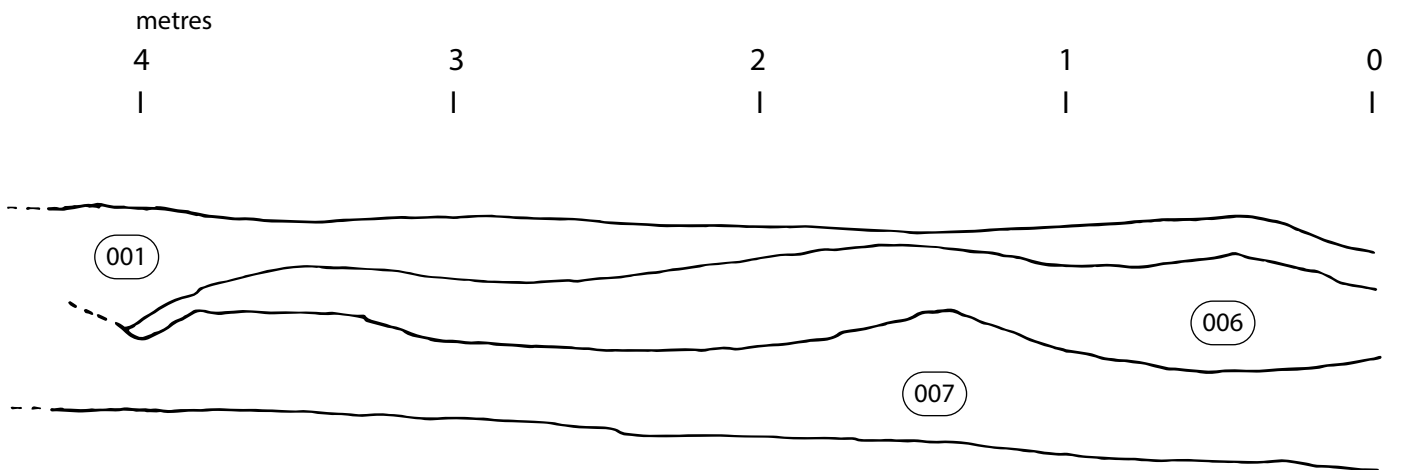


Figure 4: East-facing section view of part of trench 2020-A.