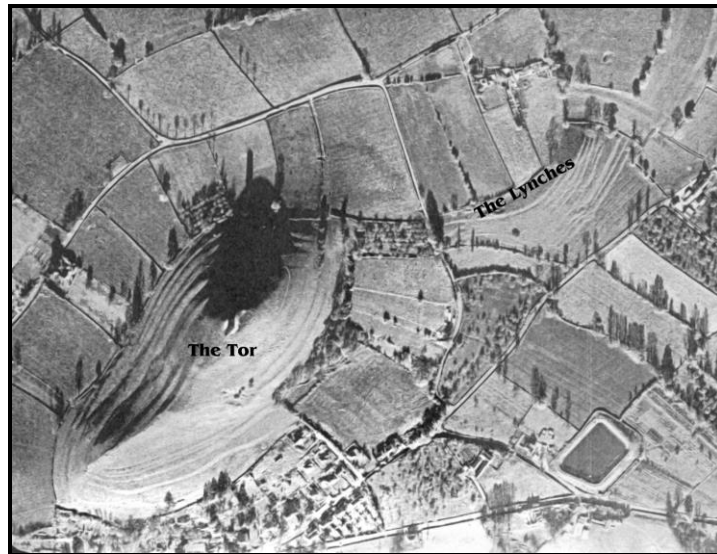


**An
Archaeological Watching Brief
at
Glastonbury Tor
Summit and Paths**

GTOR05

Carried out for The National Trust



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Report number 359

GLASTONBURY TOR
Summits and Paths
Archaeological Watching Brief
GTOR 05

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GLASTONBURY TOR

Entrances and Pathways Enhancement

Archaeological Watching Brief

GTOR 01

SUMMARY

A watching brief on the repaving of the summit of Glastonbury Tor recorded no archaeological features. The gravel build-up for the 1983 repairs is so deep that the 2005 works were carried out entirely within them, so the soil surface around the tower of St. Michael's church was not seen. It has not been possible to determine the extent of erosion of the archaeological horizon. The repaving of the public footpath to the west of the tower exposed the upper surface of the archaeological horizon, identified as layer 2 of Rahtz's excavations of the 1960s. The design of the path paving was changed to avoid any damage to this layer. The extent of layer 2 lies within the scheduled area.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The landowner for Glastonbury Tor, the National Trust, conscious of the greatly increased number of visitors to the site, have been engaged in a comprehensive programme of improvement to the path, gates, hard standings and other improvements. Upon completion of the first phase of improvements, a report of the archaeological watching brief was presented by the present authors (Hollinrake, 2003), who acted as archaeological consultants throughout the improvements.

1.2 The resurfacing of the footpaths on the west side of the lower terraces of the Tor plus the footpath along the eastern side of the hill formed part of the works undertaken in 2001.

This second phase of enhancements concentrated upon the summit of the Tor. The concrete apron around the tower of St. Michael's church was replaced with lias setts and the footpaths leading away from the summit were resurfaced. The upper levels of the western footpath – c250m stretch from the tower along the spine of the hill – were

repaved as part of the second phase of the works. This completes the programme of repaving and enhancing the paths and entrances.

1.3 An integral part of the project design was the archaeological brief written by Mr. Martin Papworth, the archaeologist for the Southwest Region of the National Trust. The brief laid out a strategy for the preservation *in situ* of archaeological features and deposits. The building surveyor, Ms. Helen Brown, designed the works in order to fulfil the requirements for archaeological preservation. The works were undertaken by St. Blaise historic buildings consultants. The archaeological monitoring was undertaken by Charles Hollinrake with John Davey and Bruce Eaton on behalf of C. and N. Hollinrake, Ltd. between 20th April and 1st June 2005.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The summit of the Tor was comprehensively excavated by Philip Rahtz in the 1960s (Rahtz, 1971). These excavations revealed a site with a long and rich history, as described in many of our previous reports for the National Trust, so well known that it hardly needs repeating.

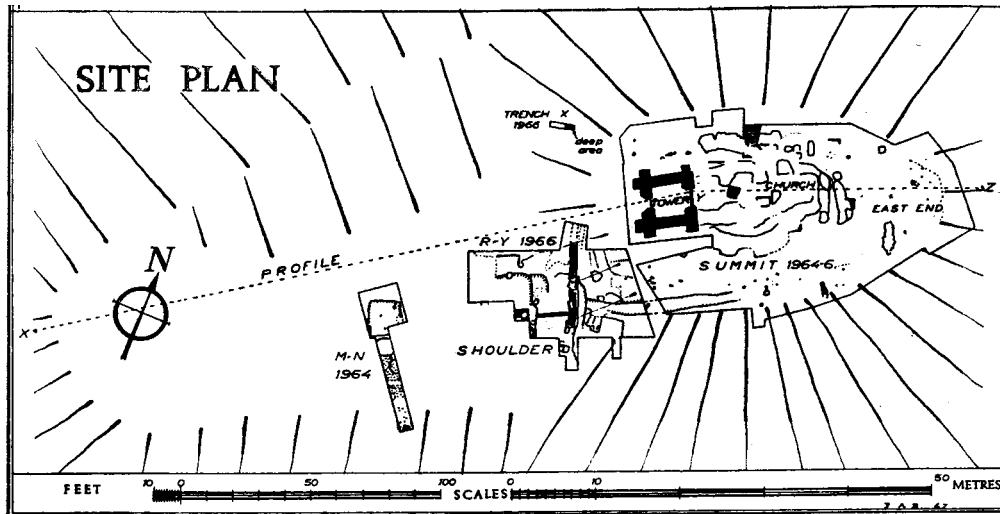


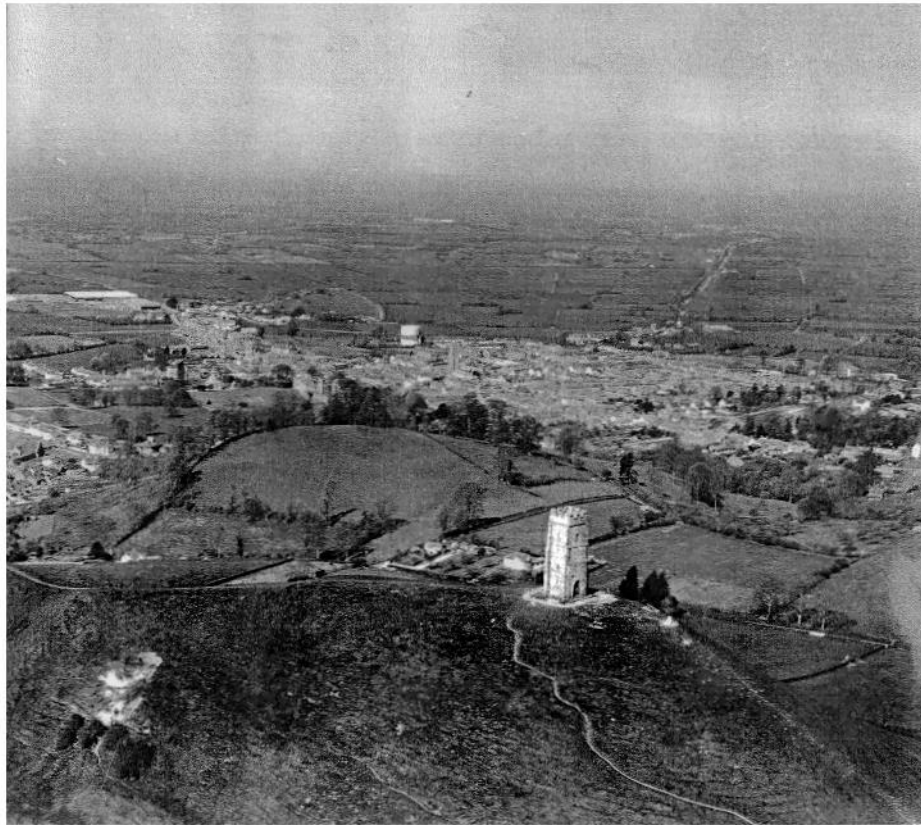
Figure 1. Plan of excavated areas from Rahtz, 1971.

Despite a policy precluding penetration below the features and deposits belonging to the medieval church, these excavations provided evidence of an archaeological site of the greatest national and international importance. Remains of the Dark Age phase of the site, dating to the 5th to 7th century, continue to attract study, comment and varying interpretations from the academic community. Finds from this period included very rare pottery imported from Byzantium and the Mediterranean.

The medieval church appears to have been first built in the Saxon period (8th to 11th centuries), contemporary with the small buildings excavated on the shoulder, which have been interpreted as monks' cells. Recently C. & N. Hollinrake have proposed a new interpretation of the excavations: that some of the features may represent the remains of a Romano-British temple on the summit.

The importance of this site was such that the summit of the Tor has been designated Scheduled Monument number 26700.

2.2 The excavation trenches were backfilled with their own spoil and the grass again covered the summit of the Tor.



Photograph P64, 1972

Figure 2. Aerial photograph of the summit of the Tor in 1972.

2.3 Such was the subsequent rapid rise in the fame of the Tor, that erosion from footfall reduce the level of the summit (Hollinrake, 2001). To forestall any further damage, the National Trust commissioned Caroe and Martin, Architects, to prepare drawings of the exposure of the Tower foundations as a precursor to designing a protective capping to the summit. The works, carried out by Cribbs of Glastonbury in 1983, lasted until the summer of 2005.

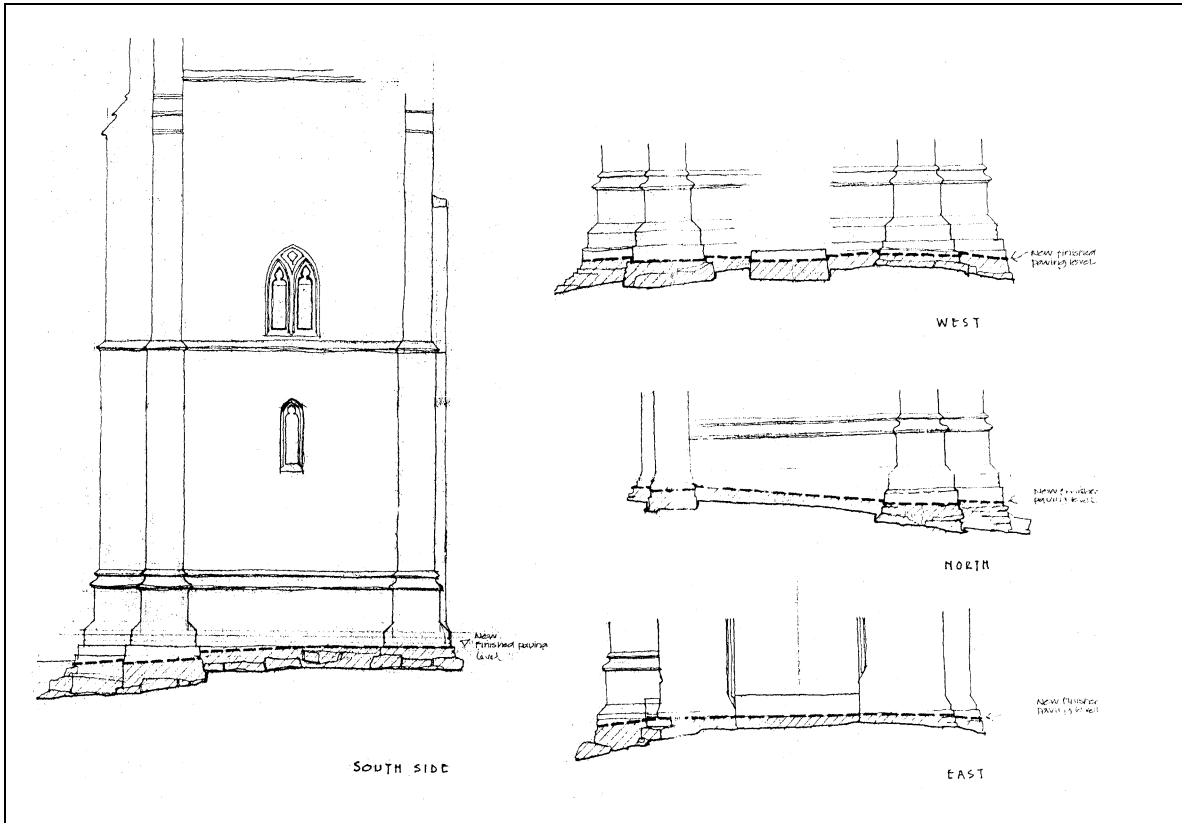


Figure 3. Detail from Caroe & Martin drawing of the Tower of St. Michael's church before 1983 capping.

Figure 3, taken from a photocopy of the original site drawings and works specification drawn up by Caroe & Martin, Architects, shows the extent of the erosion suffered by the tower (hashed) and the finished level of the capping (heavy dashed line).

The photocopy from which Figure 3 was taken indicates a scale of “approx. 1:50” and the following specifications for the capping:

| description | min. depth |
|---|------------|
| 40mm topping of Bredon gravel | 4cm |
| mono B.G slabs type B filled with Bredon gravel | 10cm |
| bedded on 50 sand | 2cm |
| on hardcore fill | |
| total | 16cm+ |



Figure 4. Photograph of exposed 1983 works.

Figure 4 shows part of the upper level of the 1983 works. Best guess/ estimates taken from Caroe & Martin's elevations suggested that the ground in the immediate vicinity of the tower had been eroded to a depth of between 20cm in the middle of the west and east faces, to as much as 60cm on the south side.

2.4 Only one section drawing from the 1960s excavation provides an indication of the level of the archaeological deposits relative to the tower.

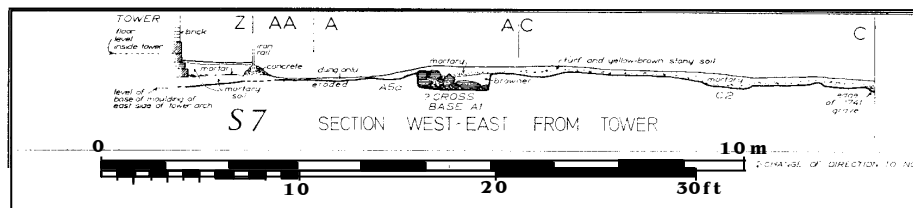


Figure 5. Section west-east from the tower, from Rahtz 1971.

Figure 5 shows that the archaeological deposits to the east of the tower were close to the surface. While it may not be possible to quantify the degree of erosion and consequent damage to the archaeological deposits, it is clear that some truncation of the archaeological horizon will have taken place in the 1970s.

Glastonbury Tor 2005

2.5 The specification for the new apron around the tower could be summarized thus:

| description | min. depth |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Blue Lias Setts | 9cm |
| mortar bedding | 2cm |
| type 1 Mendip gravel | 9cm |
| Total | 20cm |

The depth of these works is a nominal 4cm deeper than those specified for the previous works in 1983, but in reality it was impossible to determine what impact on the archaeology the 2005 works would have. Because the archaeological deposits on the summit of the Tor are of international importance, the general policy was agreed that there would be no excavation of archaeological deposits during this renewal of the hard landscaping.

3.0 METHODS STATEMENT¹

3.1 Should any archaeological horizons or features be exposed during the 2005 summit works, therefore, they will be cleaned by hand and photographed and recorded using our normal recording forms and procedures. Levels will be taken throughout and related to Ordnance Datum (BM on the west face of the tower). If necessary, the contractors will need to make time available for these procedures before depositing hardcore or laying concrete.

Any archaeological features or deposits exposed during the 2005 works will need to be planned at a scale of 1:20. Even if these features were previously recorded during the 1960s excavations, re-planning should take place so that comparisons can be made between any original plans and the present state of preservation of archaeological features, horizons or deposits.

If any archaeological sections or profiles of archaeological features exposed during the 2005 works are required, an archaeological section or profile will be drawn at a scale of 1:10.

3.2 The construction works on the new paths will need to be monitored so that any archaeological features or horizons connected with the terraces, should they be present, can be properly recorded.

¹ from programme of works submitted by C. & N. Hollinrake to National Trust.

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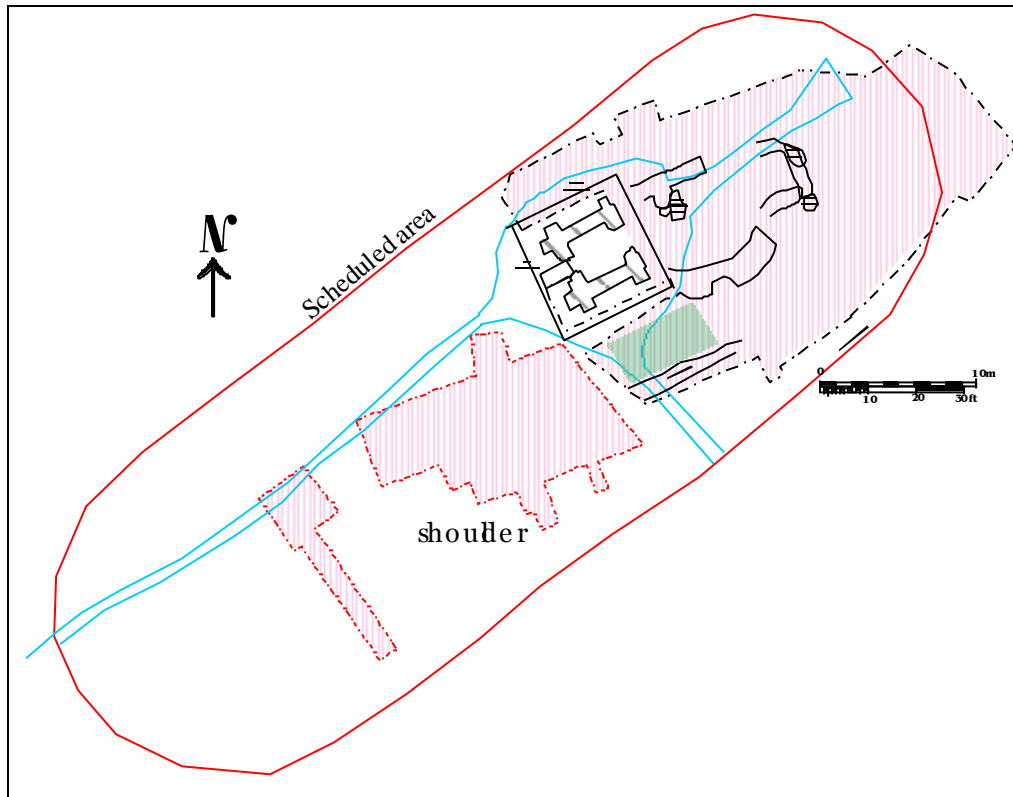


Figure 6. The excavated area on the summit of the Tor (pink), major excavated features, the scheduled area (red line), and the area of Dark Age buildings (green). The 2005 landscaping is marked with a blue line.

This figure was one of those distributed to all personnel on site so that they would all be aware of the extent of the scheduled area and the location of the excavation areas.

4.0 OBSERVATIONS

4.1 The following observations are recorded in the order in which they were made, following the progress of the repaving scheme.

4.2 **North-east pathway** was not paved in 1983, rather it has been created by foot traffic since that time. The turf and topsoil in this area were 8 – 10cm deep above sandy light brown clay. The exposed light brown clay became stonier as it approached the tower.

Towards the east end, where the trig point was, a short holloway had been filled by scalplings. The concrete base of the trig point is still in place. At the widened end of this path the holloway leads to a dark grey gritty clay with 18th and 19th century pottery.

Netting has been laid above the sandy clay surface with yellow sand and scalplings laid on the net. This netting, fixed with metal pegs, extends to roughly half way between the tower and the trig point.

No archaeological deposits were observed in this part of the works. It seems likely that the sandy clay is the backfill of the Rahtz excavations.

4.3 The **apron to the east and south of the tower** fitted the description of the 1983 specifications. The concrete capping was found to be c4cm thick. Sufficient depth was excavated to accommodate the Blue Lias setts before the full depth of the 1983 gravel was reached throughout this area. On the south side of the tower the remaining red gravel extended to c3.5m away from the foundations. Past this area, the concrete lay upon a mid orange-brown sandy soil with frequent small grits and occasional rounded red sandstone lumps. The top of this layer carried frequent small rounded pebbles of various geology – quartz, limestone, etc. – which appeared to be a gravel hard-standing laid down below (before?) the concrete. No features could be seen, suggesting that this was the backfill of the excavation trenches of the 1960s,

On the east side the gravel extended to c2.7m, after which there was a rectangular cut filled with hard yellow sand, c30cm wide. A hard grey mixed clay surface then

continued to 4.5m, where there was a step c6cm high above the backfill for the north-eastern footpath.

The levels at which the excavations for the new Lias setts ceased were recorded. No archaeological deposits were encountered.

4.4 The **southern path** continued to display soils similar to the orange-brown sandy soil described in 4.3 above. The works to the upper stretches of the steps and pathway in this area replicated that recorded during the enhancement works in 2003; the details are described in Report number 312, section 8. Two further steps were added at the top of this path, additional to those recorded in 2003, both cutting into excavation backfill.

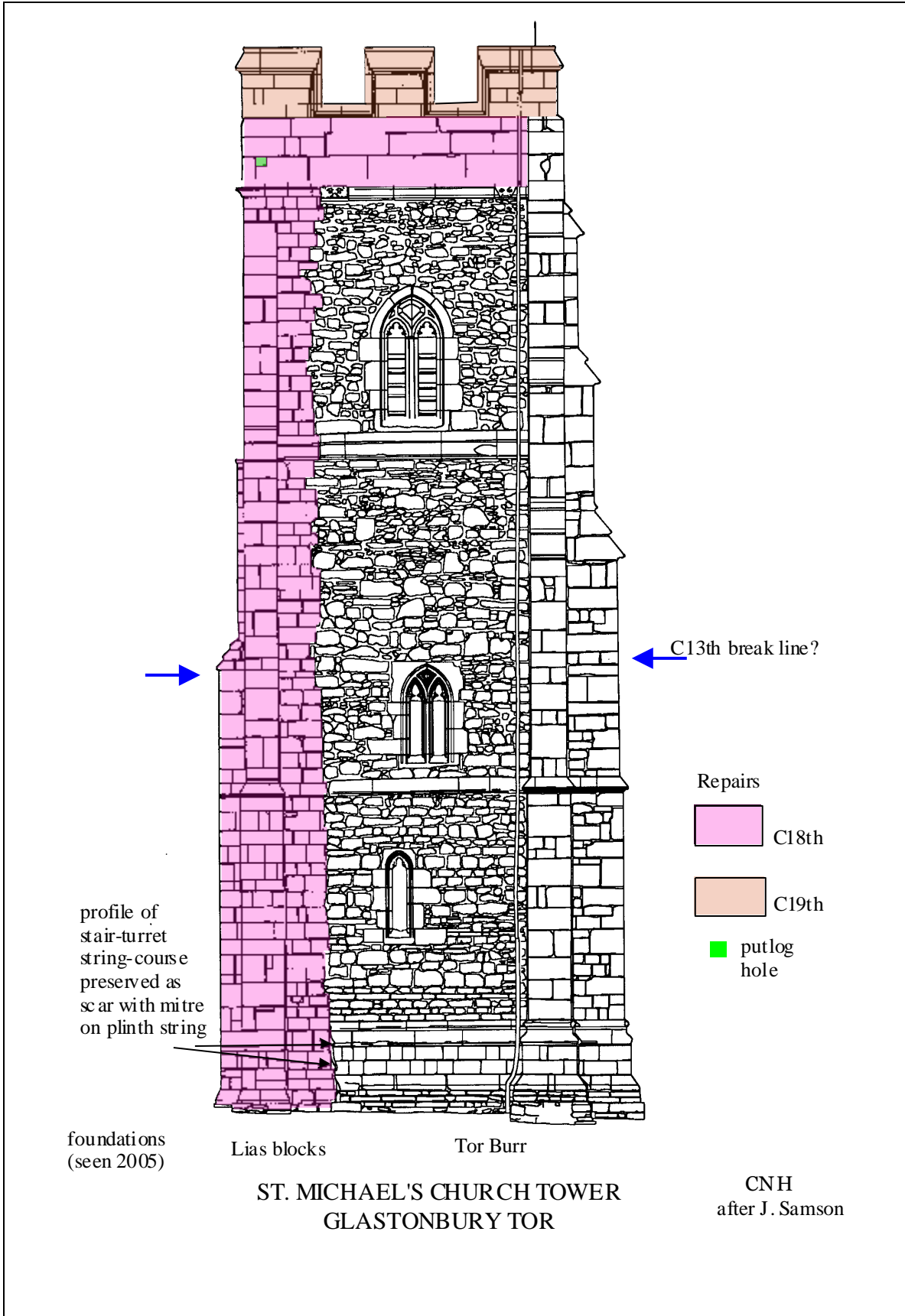
No archaeological deposits were encountered during this operation.

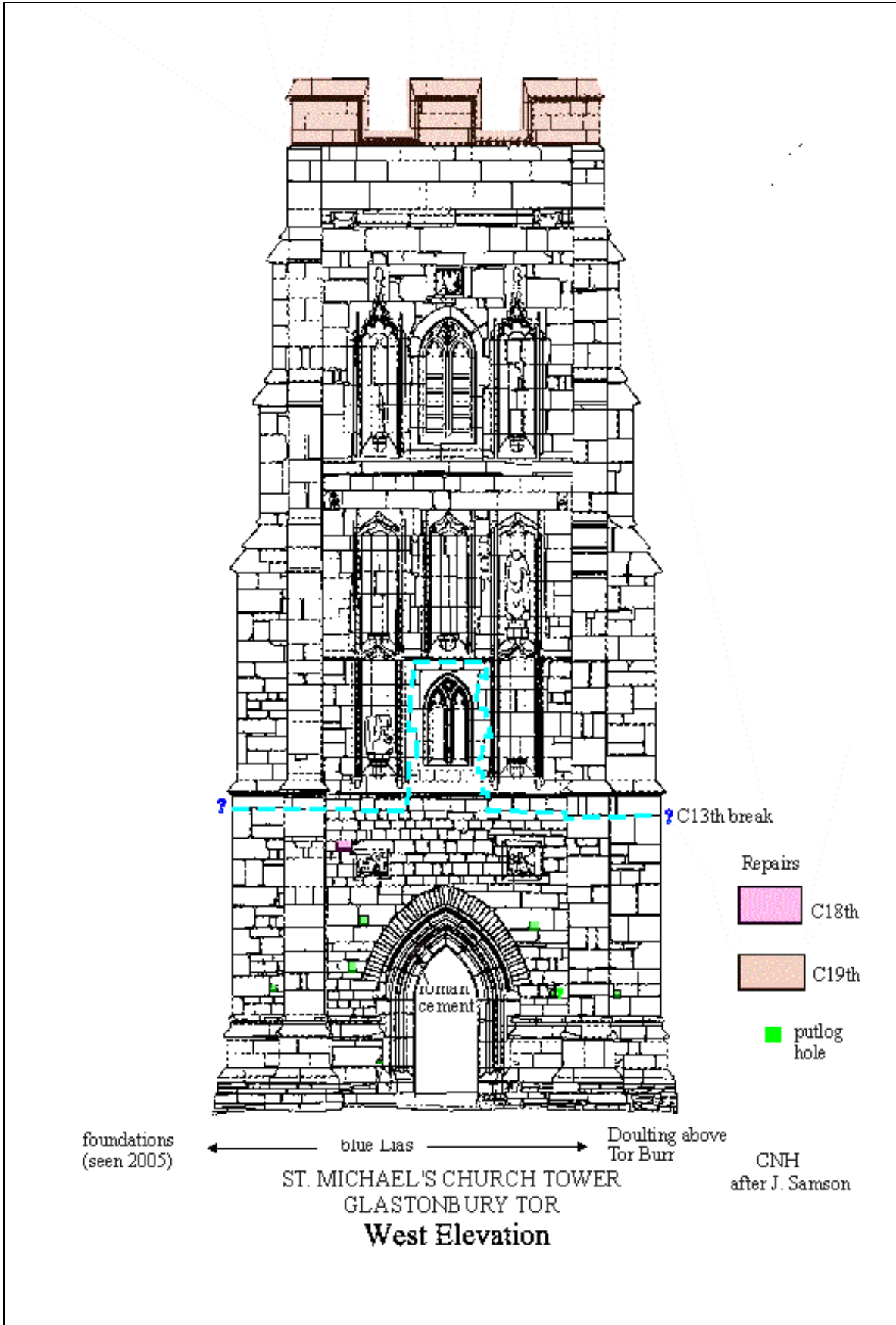
4.5 The sequence below the concrete **apron to the north and west of the tower** mirrored that of the other two sides of the tower: concrete above netting above yellow builders sand (c5cm thick) above red gravel hardcore. No soil layers were encountered.

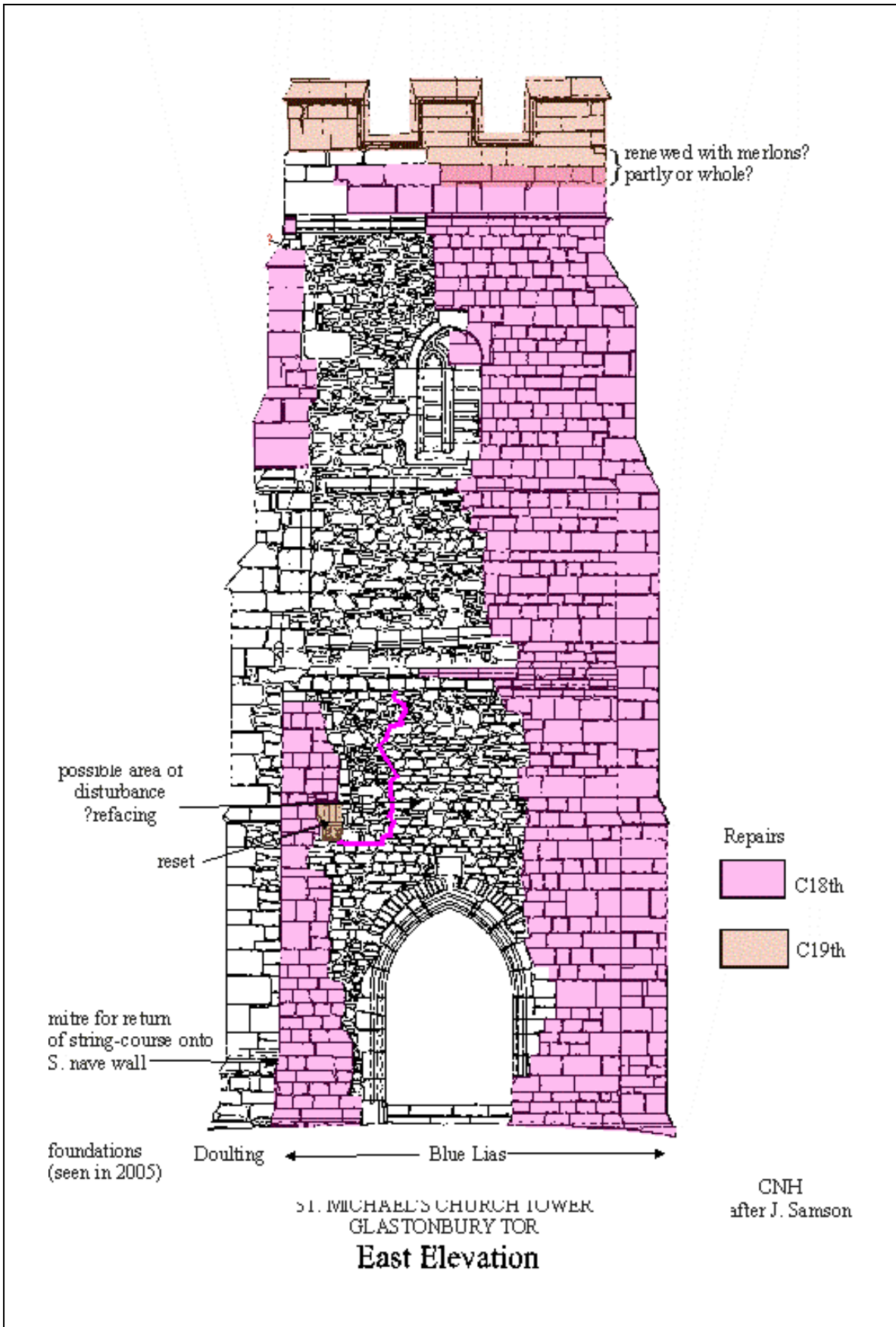
4.6 The **exposed foundations of the tower** were inspected, with the following observations:

- The north-east buttress and north wall to 1.16m from the buttress have been underpinned with Lias blocks. To the west of this the foundations were composed of local Tor Burr. This corresponds with the 18th century repairs detailed in Hollinrake 2001.
- Most of the west side of the tower rests upon Lias block, up to three courses exposed in places. The south-west buttress, however, rests on Tor Burr below 3 courses of Doultling, extending c30cm along the west face.
- The east foundations were only exposed on the southern side, where they were seen to be composed of blue Lias.
- No further exposure of the southern foundations took place.

Figure 7. (following pages) Elevations of the tower from Hollinrake 2001 with foundations indicated.







4.7 The **four steps to the west of the tower** and the public footpath lie within the scheduled area. Below the concrete capping of the steps the red gravel diminished to a mere scatter, with topsoil (a mid-brown sandy, gritty clay with frequent small inclusions of stone chips) exposed below. This was an area that had not been excavated.

4.8 Preparations for the repaving of the **public footpath below the steps** revealed a yellowish brown very sandy clay with charcoal and mortar flecks and moderate amounts of small yellow freestone fragments. This deposit, also in an unexcavated area, matched the description given by Rahtz for his **layer 2**, a medieval dumping layer that seals the earlier medieval archaeological deposits on the shoulder of the Tor.

As the paving and hardcore were removed from the footpath, the underlying soil was cleaned by hand for thorough inspection. A slight holloway could be seen, the impression of foot traffic before the footpath was paved. The cleaning produced a small sherd of pottery dating to the 10th to 12th century.

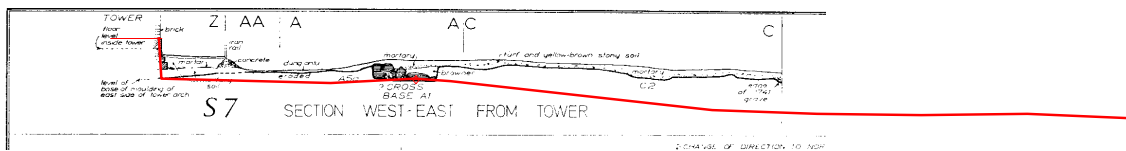
It was confirmed that **layer 2** extends through the length of the scheduled area. As a consequence of this, the design of the repaving was altered slightly to bring the paving up to a higher level and thus avoid disturbance of the archaeological horizon.

Outside of the scheduled area the old paving of the footpath came down to yellow-brown very sandy clay with occasional mortar flecks and fired clay. This soil displays signs of human activity – charcoal and fired clay – with the lighter colour, demonstrating less humus in the soil. Human activity appears to be less intense. By the 3rd step in the path the underlying soil ceased to display any charcoal, burnt clay or stone chips and was indistinguishable from the natural Midford sands. Nevertheless, the path was continued in the same manner, being built up rather than dug down, to avoid damage to any archaeological deposits that might be encountered.

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 The depth of the 1983 gravel throughout the area of the apron demonstrates that the erosion recorded on the foundations of the tower was not confined to the vicinity of the tower, but rather was much more extensive. Since Rahtz's section drawing of the summit indicates that the archaeological horizon lay close to the contemporary ground surface, the implication must be that the archaeological deposits in this area have suffered some degree of truncation due to the erosion formed by foot traffic in the 1970s. The degree of this truncation is impossible to determine.

The surface exposed during the preparation for repaving of the path to the east of the tower was levelled in with reference to the OS benchmark on the south-west corner of the tower of St. Michael's church (158.90m). The resulting profile, marked as a red line, is shown here superimposed upon Rahtz's section drawing below.



While this must remain a speculative illustration, since levels were not taken during the 1960s excavations, it does seem likely that the archaeological deposits have suffered significant damage.

5.2 Different stone sources found in the foundations of the tower reflect its history of construction and repair. It is noticeable that the masonry of the west side of the tower, with blue Lias foundations, differs from the Tor Burr foundations of the north side. This may indicate that a tower stood in this location in the Saxon church, which fell down in the 1275 earthquake (Hollinrake, 2001). It seems likely that when the tower was rebuilt, the west and east faces were constructed on new foundations, with the north face retaining its original foundations and possibly some of the original Saxon masonry. The Doulling string courses and architectural detail could have been inserted. Lias foundations on the eastern face are probably 18th century underpinning.

5.3 The extent of Rahtz's layer 2 below the public footpath suggests that the pre-medieval footpath to the summit probably took a different line from the present footpath. Rahtz's excavations identified a well-worn holloway on the southern side of the summit, with steps cut into the break of slope to the west of the tower. A suggested alternative route for the access path to the holloway, represented as a purple dashed line on Figure 8, takes account of the buildings revealed in the 1960s excavations, but it is important to note that no indications of this path was recognized in these excavations.

N. Hollinrake

12 October 2005

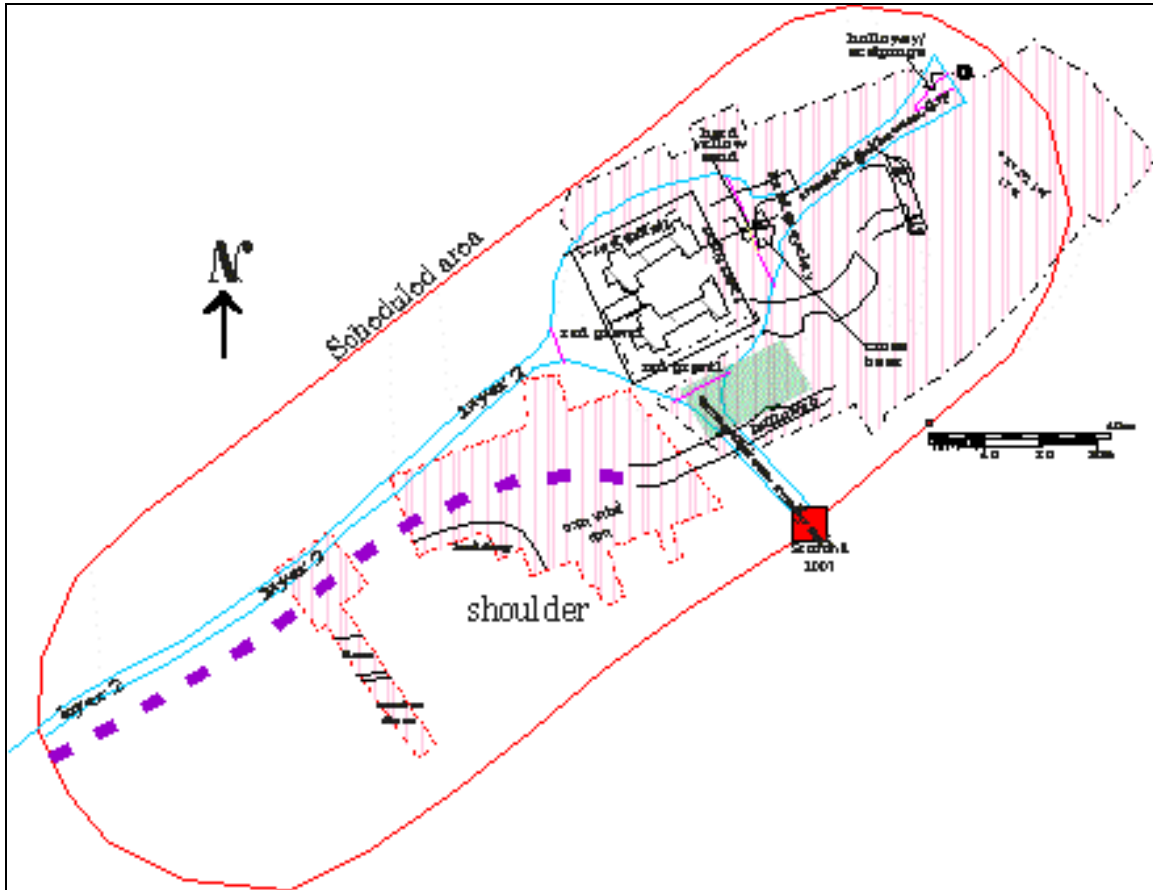


Figure 8. Observations.

PHOTO GALLERY



Concrete apron and path before repaving.



trial ground level reduction, north face



graffiti on tower



trial ground level reduction, east face

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East face reduced level



path east of tower: finished ground reduction



finished level east of tower

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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