

An Archaeological Assessment of land to the rear of 93 East St, Newton Abbot, Devon

Report by

Phil Newman

On behalf of

Mr Lewis Chappell

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Southwest Landscape Investigations



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Location: 93 East Street Newton Abbot (rear of)

Parish: Wolborough

District/ Planning Authority: Teignbridge

NGR: SX 28607 7117

Planning Application No: 17/00571/FUL

Proposal: Part demolition of former builders /funeral directors yard and construction of two dwellings.

Designations: None

Date of Fieldwork: 15-16 Aug 2017

Summary

An archaeological assessment (watching brief) was carried out on land to the rear of 93 East St, Newton Abbot, as a response to a planning condition required by Teignbridge District Council. Machine excavated groundworks were archaeologically monitored as a precautionary step, to prevent the unrecorded destruction of any archaeological features that may survive.

No structures were noted, but a backfilled ditch was observed and recorded in section, which was likely to have been associated with a medieval property boundary or burgage plot. Knowledge of the existence of such plots in Newton Abbot had been established previously from documentary and cartographic sources, and other examples have been archaeologically excavated in the past.

The ditch remains undated but ceramic finds suggest it was backfilled no earlier than the 17th century, though other evidence infers that a more likely date would be in the mid 19th century, when the surrounding area was being developed.

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological assessment was requested by developer Mr Lewis Chappell, as a response to a planning condition set out by the Devon Historic Environment Team (ref: Arch/DM/TE/30566a), whereby the digging of groundworks for a new development of two dwellings needed to be monitored for evidence of archaeological remains. The development entailed part demolition of existing structures and removal of concrete floors, followed by construction of two adjoining apartments within the space.

The watching brief required that the digging of the groundwork trenches should be monitored and that any indication of archaeological structures, features, deposits or artefacts should be recorded *in situ*.

The site is located in an enclosed space to the rear of 93 East Street, near its junction with Union Street (Fig. 1). It is closely surrounded by buildings under various ownership on three sides, including the Salvation Army Hall in Union Street, and residential and commercial properties in East Street and Union Street. Access to the site is via a narrow entrance at the eastern terminus of Summerlands Close. The property was last used as the premises of a builder and funeral director, run by Turner Bothers, and has lain disused for some years.

1.1 Geology

Much of the town of Newton Abbot is underlain by the Gurrington Slate Formation of the Carboniferous and Devonian Periods. This also includes some igneous intrusions of lava and tuff. The southern part of Newton Abbot, including the assessment site, sits upon Permian breccia rock of the Oddicombe Formation (Weddell 2015, 3).

1.2 Previous archaeological work in the locality

The town of Newton Abbot has been subject to many archaeological interventions over the past four decades, particularly in the 1970s and 80s when alterations to the town's roads and other developments led to several rescue excavations in the Wolborough Street area. Evidence for a number of early buildings was retrieved, demonstrating an occupation from the 13th to 20th centuries (Weddell 1985). More recent excavations in Wolborough Street await publication.

Within East Street, investigation has been limited to building recording and a single archaeological evaluation in advance of the demolition of numbers 20-22 on the south side of the street (Exeter Archaeology 2008). At 160m to the west, this is the nearest archaeological evaluation to the assessment site undertaken so far. Little of significance was noted though evidence of demolished cob buildings was recorded.

Nevertheless, although the assessment site lay outside the residential area of the town as late as the 18th century (Pink 2014), East Street is recognised as having archaeological potential, due to it having been built over an area previously occupied by medieval burgage plots (Weddell 1985, fig 8). There was a possibility, therefore, that evidence of medieval occupation, including buried structures, may survive *in situ* within the site, located only a few metres to the north of East Street.

The structures demolished in advance of the 2017 development comprised timber frames resting on a block or brick, partly revetted half-wall, with a corrugated iron roof. The floor had been fully concreted over a rubble base. The site currently possesses an irregular outline due to its origins as an infill space to the rear of the East Street terrace, hemmed in by later development.

1.3 Cartographic and documentary evidence

On Donn's map of Devonshire, published in 1765, development along East Street had not extended as far as the location of modern Union Street, so the site was outside the built area of the town. The first edition Old Series OS map of 1802-4 depicts some of the street-front properties in East Street, though the area to the north was still undeveloped, and appears to have been occupied by several orchards. A large scale map of 1803 (Fig.2), similarly shows this area to be undeveloped (DRO 1508M/maps & plans/Newton Abbot/map/1).

By 1889, the adjoining terraced developments in Union Street and Summerlands Place were complete and the site contained some buildings, depicted at 1:500 scale on the OS town plan of that year (Fig. 1), but this may have been a covered yard rather than permanent buildings. The space was depicted as building free on the 1905 25-inch scale OS county series map (Fig. 4) and remained so on the 6-inch OS map revision of 1938. The builder's premises were first depicted on the OS 10,560 scale map of 1956. Once again this comprised a covered yard, which survived until 2017.

Prior to c.1800, the land to the north and south of East Street was divided into narrow, north to south tenements or burgage plots. These have been depicted in approximate outline by Weddell (1985, fig. 8), derived mainly

from old map sources including the Wolborough Tithe Map of 1846, on which the plots are clear (Fig. 4). Much building in Newton Abbot occurred after 1846, when many of these plots were effaced, but by 1889, when the OS 6-inch scale map was published, their alignment had clearly influenced the road layout and some had become fossilised into modern property boundaries. Although several documented plots around Wolborough Street were in existence by the 14th and 15th century, in East Street the earliest reference to any plot is 1640 (Weddell 1985, 99), though it may have had earlier origins.

2 GROUNDWORKS

The 2017 development required a foundation trench of 0.6m wide by 0.7m deep to be excavated around the perimeter of part of the site and supplementary trenches were added across the plot (Fig. 5). The agreed methodology of the assessment required that the machine excavation of these trenches was closely monitored at all times.

Prior to the commencement of these groundworks, brick and stone revetments and walls surrounding the site were demolished and a concrete floor removed. With these features gone it was clear that the ground surface had been lowered in the past and levelled within the plot by up to 1 metre. This probably occurred when the covered yard was constructed in the 19th century, or when re-established in the 1950s, to accommodate the concrete base. With the boundary walls removed, the original soil levels were exposed to a higher level under neighbouring properties on the south, north and eastern boundaries, revealing the extent of this level change .

2.1 Results

The soil here is of a reddish, clay type, which rests on a dense grey-green clay/shale subsoil. When the level of the site was lowered, any near-surface archaeology would have been effaced. Several unstratified ceramic finds, of various dates, retrieved from very near the current surface, were recovered during groundworks, which had probably been re-deposited there as a result of that event.

No evidence of structures or of pits or similar features was encountered during the digging of the groundwork trenches. However, a fully backfilled ditch (F1) with a curved profile, could be seen in section, where the groundwork trench ran parallel with a neighbouring boundary on the northern edge of the plot (Fig. 6). The probable continuation of the ditch was visible in the southern boundary trench, confirming that it runs approximately north to south. The majority of this feature, between these two trenches (7.5m long in total) was not investigated due to it being unaffected by groundworks.

One sherd of a South Somerset flanged bowl, datable to between *c.*1580 and *c.*1650, and two clay pipe stems of possible 17th-18th century date, were retrieved from the lower fill (104) of the ditch. Two other (unstratified) sherds were retrieved from the disturbed soils near the surface, adjacent to the assumed course of the ditch and were likely to have come from the fill originally. These were also of South Somerset type: one could be dated to the 17th century and the other to mid 18th century.

The original depth of the ditch was between 0.7m and 1m and the width was a minimum of 1.7m. Both of the exposed sections demonstrated that the upper levels of the ditch had been disturbed in the past. The bottom layer of fill in the ditch (105 & 202) comprised sand and fine gravel. With the exception of one very subtle change in soil colour in the northern section, where (104) probably represents a period of further silting, on the

whole the ditch fill lacked visible stratigraphy. It seems likely that much of the fill was the result of a single phase of backfilling.

3. FINDS

Reliably stratified finds, all ceramic and comprising pipe stems and pot sherds, were retrieved from contexts 102 and 104. Pottery was examined by John Allan but the sherds have not been retained on his advice.

Context 102

1 rim sherd decorated, coarse sandy-ware bowl c.16th-17th century.

1 body sherd with stub of a handle, glazed interior. South Somerset ware, late 17th-18th century.

Context 104

1 rim sherd South Somerset flanged bowl or chamber pot with internal slip, and sgraffito line decoration with flecks of copper dated c.1580-1650.

2 thick tobacco pipe stem fragments, 45mm and 65mm long, with 3mm bore, c.17th-18th century.

Unstratified (from disturbed surface soil adjacent to projected line of ditch)

1 large chamber pot rim sherd. South Somerset ware, or a Devon copy of that style, using a pale clay. Trailed slip decoration with figure-8 scroll on the upper body and slip on top of rim. c.1720-1770.

1 South Somerset small dish with internal green glaze, 17th century.

Unstratified (finds in disturbed surface soil or associated with demolition rubble)

7 sherds, all of 19th -20th date century including:

- 1 body sherd of rough-glazed brown bowl or flagon with white glazed interior
- 5 body sherds of white china
- 1 rim sherd of terracotta urn with brown glazed interior

1 narrow clay pipe stem fragment.

4. DISCUSSION

The location of this plot of land was beyond the area of the town's residential development until well into the 19th century. Even then, it appears to have remained unoccupied by any permanent structures, but was probably used as a covered yard. At some point, possibly in the 1950s, but certainly within the last 150 years, the ground surface of the plot was substantially lowered to accommodate the builder's yard which remained in place until 2017.

A backfilled ditch runs approximately north to south across the site and is coaxial with surviving property boundaries, which extend north from East Street. The latter are believed to represent fossilized medieval burgage plots, which are known from old maps. The ditch therefore was probably associated with a burgage boundary, acting either as a physical boundary or as drainage.

The ditch, which was already partly silted, was probably deliberately backfilled, though the date of this event is not known. Ceramic finds retrieved from the fill of the silt (104) confirm that backfilling was no earlier than the 17th century. However, the actual date of backfilling is more likely to have been in the mid 19th century when the streets around this site were first developed.

4.1 Method appraisal

Despite the limitations of the methodology employed (i.e. observation restricted within narrow groundwork trenches), and the apparent lowering of the ground level long before the latest development, it has been possible to identify and record a substantial buried feature, albeit of no major significance. The method used was therefore adequate in this situation.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to John Allan for evaluating the ceramics finds.

Bibliography

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Fig. 1 Outline of the development in Newton Abbot, imposed on the Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan of 1889-90, showing elements of what was probably a covered yard at that time.



Fig. 2 Extract from a large scale map of Newton Abbot c.1803. (DRO 1508M/maps & plans/Newton Abbot/map/1)



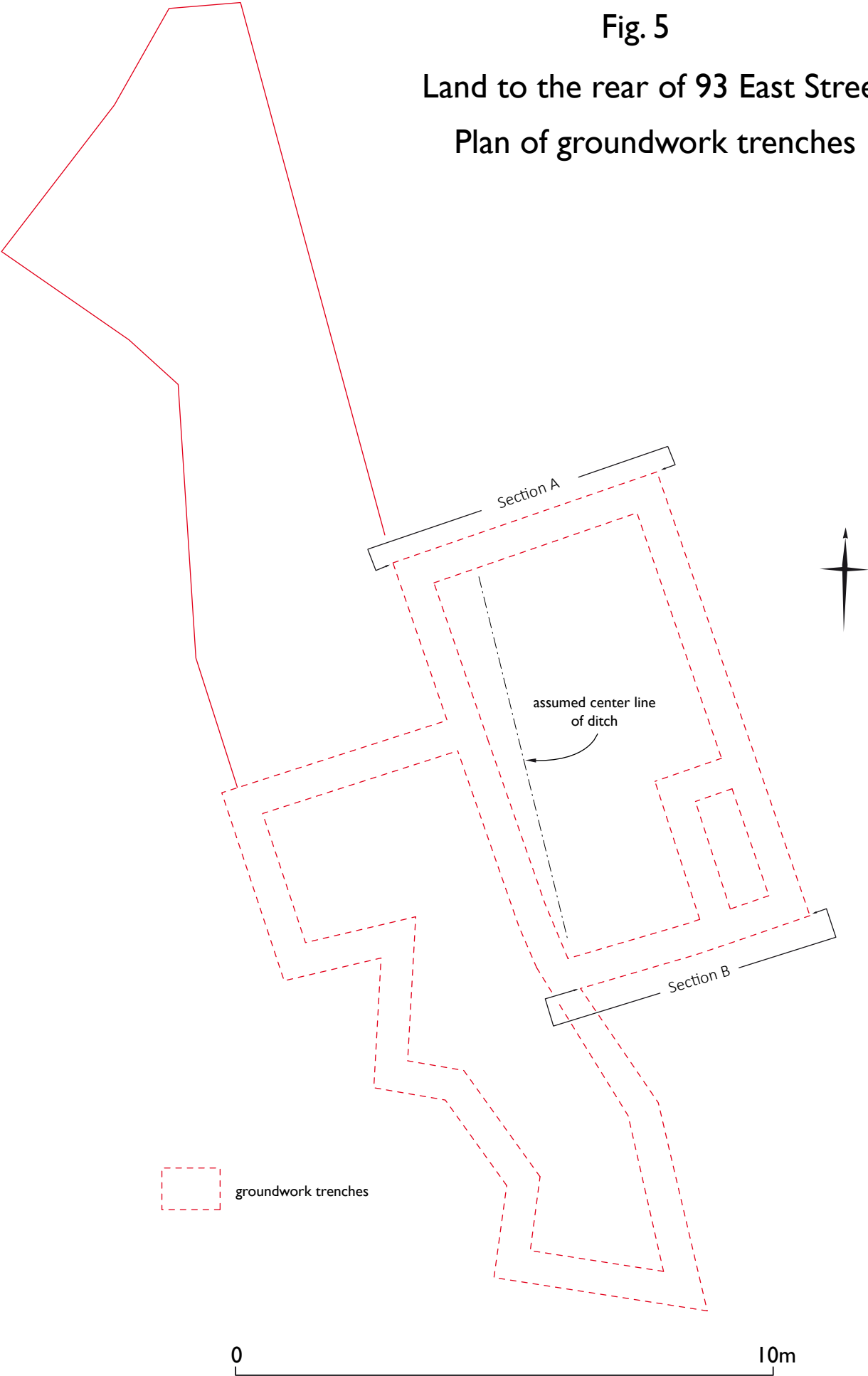
Fig. 3 Extract from the Wolborough Tithe Map of 1846 (DRO).



Fig. 4 Extract from OS 25-inch County Series of 1905, showing the plot without buildings.

Fig. 5

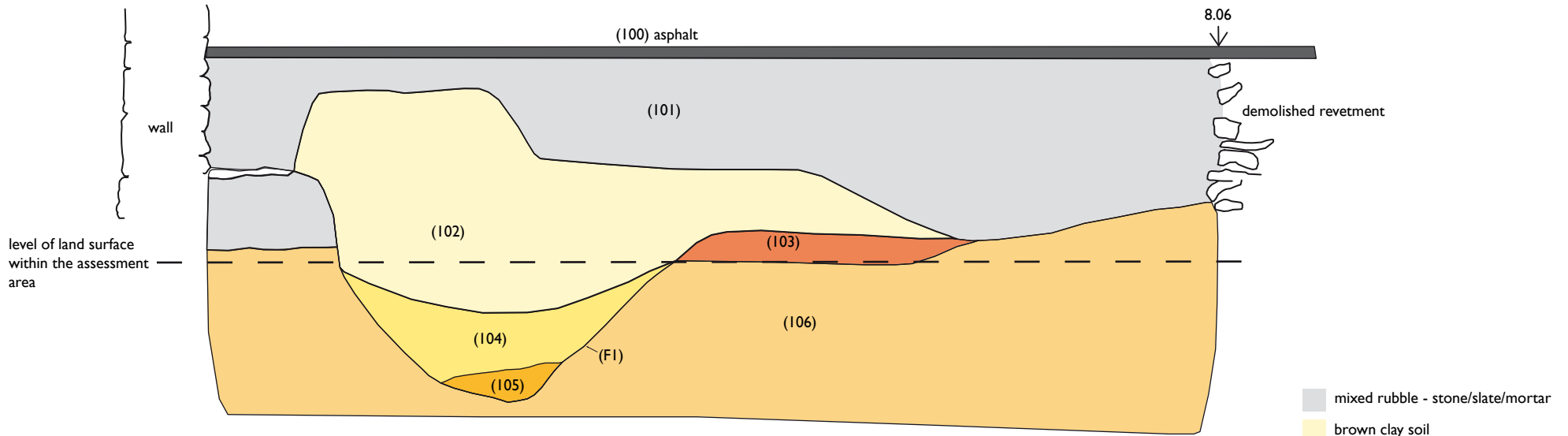
Land to the rear of 93 East Street
Plan of groundwork trenches



 groundwork trenches

0 10m

SECTION A northern boundary



0 1m

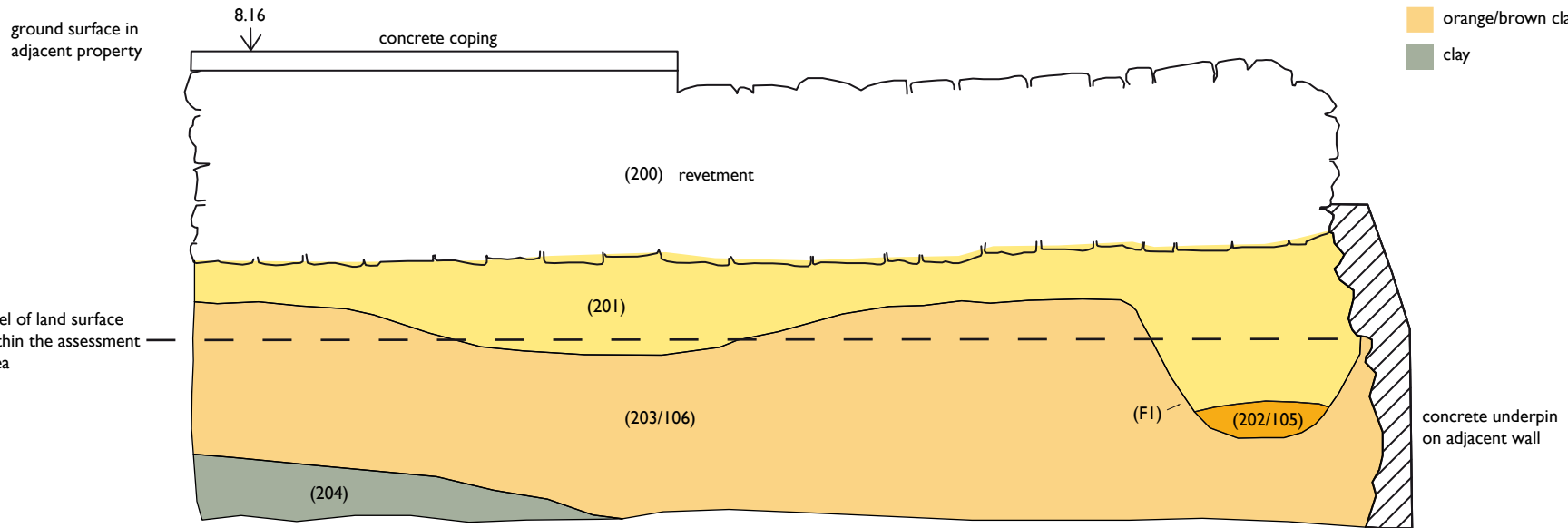


Fig. 6 Section drawings of the north and south boundaries. Contexts 203/106 and 202/105 are likely to be continuations of the same soil layers, though this remains unproven.

SECTION B southern boundary



Fig. 7 View of the northern boundary wall before demolition.



Fig. 8 view of the southern boundary wall before demolition.



Fig. 9 The northern boundary section showing the cut ditch with rubble above.



Fig. 10 corner of the north and east boundaries showing height difference with neighbouring properties.



Fig. 11 Finds from Context 104.



Fig. 12 Finds from Context 102.



Fig. 13 Unstratified finds.