

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT
BRAMLEY BANK, LOW LANE,
CHURCH LENCH, WORCESTERSHIRE

WSM 55830



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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at land to the south-west of Briarbank, Low Lane Church Lench Worcestershire in February 2014 by Mike Napthan Archaeology. The project was intended to provide an indication of the presence or absence of archaeologically significant buried deposits prior to the proposed construction of housing on part of a land parcel "Bramley Bank" which has already been partly developed.

The project produced no finds of note, only a very small number of sherds of early modern to recent pottery being observed. The intended development area was historically part of an orchard field known in the 20th Century as "Bramley Bank", though very few apple trees now remain. The land appears to have been formerly part of the Bank House property, but has been subdivided in the later 20th and early 21st Century for small scale housing developments

The stripping of two trenches totalling 90m in length exposed no archaeologically significant features, and relatively few more recent intrusions other than areas of recently dumped soil and mid-late 20th C service trenches and drainage trenches (with soakaway), all related to the construction of Briarbank in the late 1960s. Evidence was seen of relatively recent alterations to the drainage from septic tank to mains drainage, but no other recent intrusions. It appeared that a dip in the centre of the field had been infilled with surplus topsoil and clay from the construction of Briarbank – this area remained very wet and soft after recent rain. The paucity of artefacts of all periods probably reflects a long period as pasture and as orchard. The archaeological potential of the site may be considered extremely low, and this area clearly lay well outside the historical settlement area of Church Lench

1 Introduction

- 1.1 An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Bramley Bank, Low Lane, Church Lench by Mike Napthan Archaeology prior to the proposed construction of two dwellings.
- 1.2 This report represents the findings of the evaluation trenching. The project was designed to provide an assessment of the historical and archaeological significance of the site recorded as WSMxxx on the County HER. The project design was prepared in accordance with the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994). Codes of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists were followed and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire December 2010.

2 Aims

- 2.1 The aims of the archaeological project were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of the below ground archaeological resource in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature of the resource within the site (including presence or absence, character, extent, date, state of preservation and quality)

These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:

- i) to define and identify the nature of any archaeologically significant deposits present on the site of the new houses, and to date previous phases of historic activity where possible;
- ii) to attempt to characterize the depositional sequence and recover as much information as possible about the any discrete archaeologically significant features or structures surviving .
- iii) Identify any significant features threatened by the proposed development and to indicate appropriate mitigation strategies.

3 Methodology

- 3.1 Cartographic and published historical sources were searched for information relating to the site and its environs.. A search of the County Councils' HER database revealed several records of archaeological interventions in the vicinity but none directly pertinent to the present site.
- 3.2 The evaluation was conducted in February 2014. The trenches were stripped by tracked 3 tonne 360° excavator working under archaeological supervision. The two trenches, totalling 162m² were stripped of topsoil and turf down to the top of archaeologically significant deposits or the top of natural deposits as appropriated. No features other than minor modern intrusions were observed, and recording was therefore restricted to plans of the extent of the observed trenches (Fig 1). The trenches were hand cleaned where necessary, with small sondages to confirm the nature of deposits, and the observed deposits recorded.

4 Background

4.1 *Archaeological background*

- 4.1.1 Only limited archaeological work has occurred in the immediate vicinity – the nearest archaeological observation was an evaluation immediately to the south (WSM 34258 Sworn et al 2005). The site produced only a very small assemblage of medieval and post-medieval pottery (seven abraded sherds in all) and undated features which were interpreted as a ditch terminal and later boundary bank.
- 4.1.2 A Roman site (WSM32811) has been identified as a finds scatter near Rough Hill, approximately 1km to the north of the present property, though the exact location of the 1953 observation (Smith, 1953) has been lost. A scatter of metal artefacts of Roman date has been recorded in the parish, probably in the same area but regrettably PAS records omit any locational information. A skeleton, interpreted as possibly Iron Age was found by chance at Yew Wood in the same general area in 1999 (WSM 27864), and it appears probable that the focus of prehistoric and Roman activity lay well to the north of the medieval settlement, which shows some indications of being a planned settlement.
- 4.1.3 There is little direct archaeological evidence for the medieval settlement other than the 12th Century church WSM 30089 which may have Saxon origins as the settlement was known as Church Lench at Domesday, the present buildings of the village are presently listed as being of post-medieval and later date, mostly being of 17th Century and later origins.

4.2 *Historical background*

- 4.2.1 Church Lench formed part of the gift made by Kenred of Mercia in 708 to Evesham Abbey. Church Lench seems to have been afterwards alienated, as Abbot Mannig (1044–54) is stated to have recovered this township for his church. In 1086 it was held by the abbot and convent in demesne, but it was shortly afterwards granted by Abbot Walter (1077–86) to Urse d'Abitot the Sheriff of Worcestershire His heirs, the Beauchamps, apparently retained it, however, as a survey of the lands of the abbey of Evesham, the probable date of which is about 1150, states that William de Beauchamp, grandson of Urse, held 4 hides at Church Lench of the abbey. The rights of the Abbot of Evesham in the overlordship were recognized until the 13th century at least, when William de Beauchamp was said to be holding Church Lench by gift of Robert the Abbot. After that time the rights of the abbot in the manor appear to have lapsed (VCH III). The Beauchamps continued as overlords, and occasional owners in demesne, of the manor until the 14th century. During the early part of the reign of Henry III it appears to have been held by Roger Roculf or Rotulf, who in 1229–30 conveyed certain land to Ellis

son of Giffard. About the same time the recently founded abbey of Halesowen received from him several grants in which he is designated 'lord of Church Lench.' The present manor seems to have originated in land at Church Lench granted in the reign of Henry III by Roger Roculf, lord of Church Lench, to the abbey of Halesowen. The land and tenements granted by Roger Roculf appear to have been retained until 1538, when it was surrendered to the king by William Taylor, the last abbot. It was granted in the same year to Sir John Dudley. It was probably sold by him to William Scudamore, who died seised of it in 1560, when it passed to his son John. It remained in the family until 1741, when it was sold to Sir Dudley Ryder, whose son Nathaniel, created Lord Harrowby in 1776, was the owner of it in 1779. In 1793 John Callow and Ellen his wife conveyed 'the manor of Church Lench' to John Clarke. The manor was broken up into several parts in the 19th Century.

- 4.2.2 The Inclosure Act for Church Lench was passed in 1783, but no Inclosure map appears to survive. The earliest dated mapping available for the area is the 1813 Draft Ordnance Survey mapping (British Library online map collection). Small scale published "Old Series" Ordnance Survey mapping of 1831 shows the site as open ground. The earliest detailed plan is the 1841 Tithes Awards Plan (Fig 4), this and subsequent Ordnance Survey mapping from the 1884 1st Edition to the mid 20th Century all show the site as open ground and apparently as part of the wider curtailage of Bank House which originated as a farmhouse with farmstead buildings. The cartographic evidence indicates no development of the present property prior to the construction of "Briarwood" in the late 1960s.

5 Results

- 5.1 The stripping of an area of approximately 162m² indicated a very low level of residual artefacts in the topsoil reflecting the position of the site well to the north-east of the historic village focus. The majority of the observed artefacts (all likely to be 19th C or later) were recovered from material dumped on the site in the 20th C to level it up. The dumped material possibly relates to the construction of "Briarbank", as the dumped material appeared to overlie the original overflow pipe of the septic tank. The area of dumping represents a levelling up of the field, and conceals a slight natural dip in the centre of the plot. The roadway lies significantly below the edge of the field (approximately 1.4m) and some of the soil build up along the eastern hedge line may reflect natural soil creep and lynchetting.
- 5.2 The earliest deposits encountered were natural light tan-brown cohesive stoney clay intermixed with bands of clayey gravel. The subsoil consisted of a gravelly brown silty clay which gradually merged with the overlying loamy dark grey brown clay topsoil. There were few indications that the field had ever been deeply cultivated, and no sign of artificially improved drainage. The topsoil was variable in depth from 0.18m to 0.6m, but this appears to partially reflect relatively recent topsoil dumping. Where topsoil dumping had occurred there were interleaved bands of yellowish clay, possibly derived from the excavation of the adjacent (and now redundant) septic tank.
- 5.5 The only cut features seen on the site were relatively modern service and drainage features seen in both Trench 1, and Trench 2, where a soakaway appeared to be filled with brick and concrete rubble including aerated concrete blocks of 1960s date. Service records indicate that gas, water and mains drainage for "Briarbank" all cross the present property. The location of the electricity main was not identified.

6 Discussion and conclusions

- 6.1 The available documentary and cartographic sources indicate that the site is likely to have been pasture, orchard and or roadside waste during the historical period, and the absence of any earlier artefacts indicates that there was little or no prehistoric activity or occupation in the immediate environs. The name Low Lane may be symptomatic of a "Low" which is a widespread early English placename indicative of a burial mound, but the place-name "The Low" is associated with a site a couple of hundred metres to the north of the present site and does not appear on first glimpse to be a typical burial mound location, Low Hill, towards Rous Lench may be the source of the road-name, and lies in the vicinity of reported Roman and possibly earlier activity.
- 6.2 Previous investigation of the site to the south (Sworn 2005) produced some evidence of a large "ditch" of indeterminate date, which was suggested to be potentially post-Roman to early medieval on the grounds that it contained no dateable artefacts and was partially overlain by a dump of soil, possibly a

bank, on top of which was a single sherd of medieval pottery. The “ditch” was not fully excavated in plan nor section and the interpretation and dating remains wide open. Given the location of the feature close to the roadway it is equally plausible that this feature may represent a sunken trackway, field entrance, or clay-pit, and the dating “evidence” is completely inconclusive.

- 6.3 The construction of the intended housing will have no detrimental impact on archaeological resources, and the archaeological potential of this particular plot appears to be extremely low. The site lies out of site of any adjacent heritage assets in an area that is already characterized by modern housing development, and has therefore no visual impact on the historic village core.

7 **Bibliography**

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Sworn, S, Jenkins, A and Hunt, C, 2005 *Archaeological excavation at Main Street Church Lench Worcestershire WHEAS Project 2709 WSM 34258*

VCH III – Willis-Bund JW and Page W (eds) 1913 *The Victoria History of the County of Worcester*

8 **Acknowledgements**

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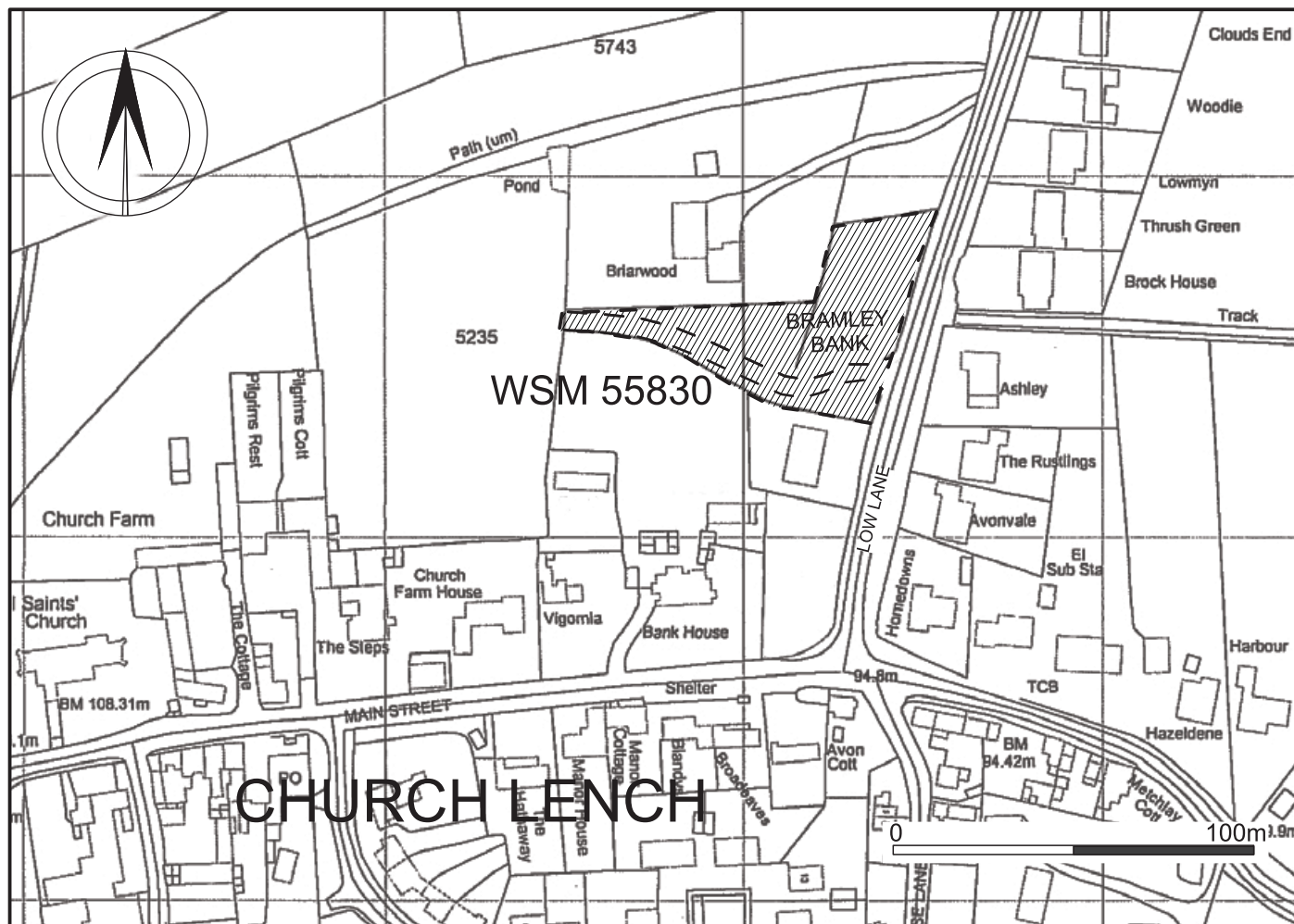


Figure 1: Location of site at Bramley Bank

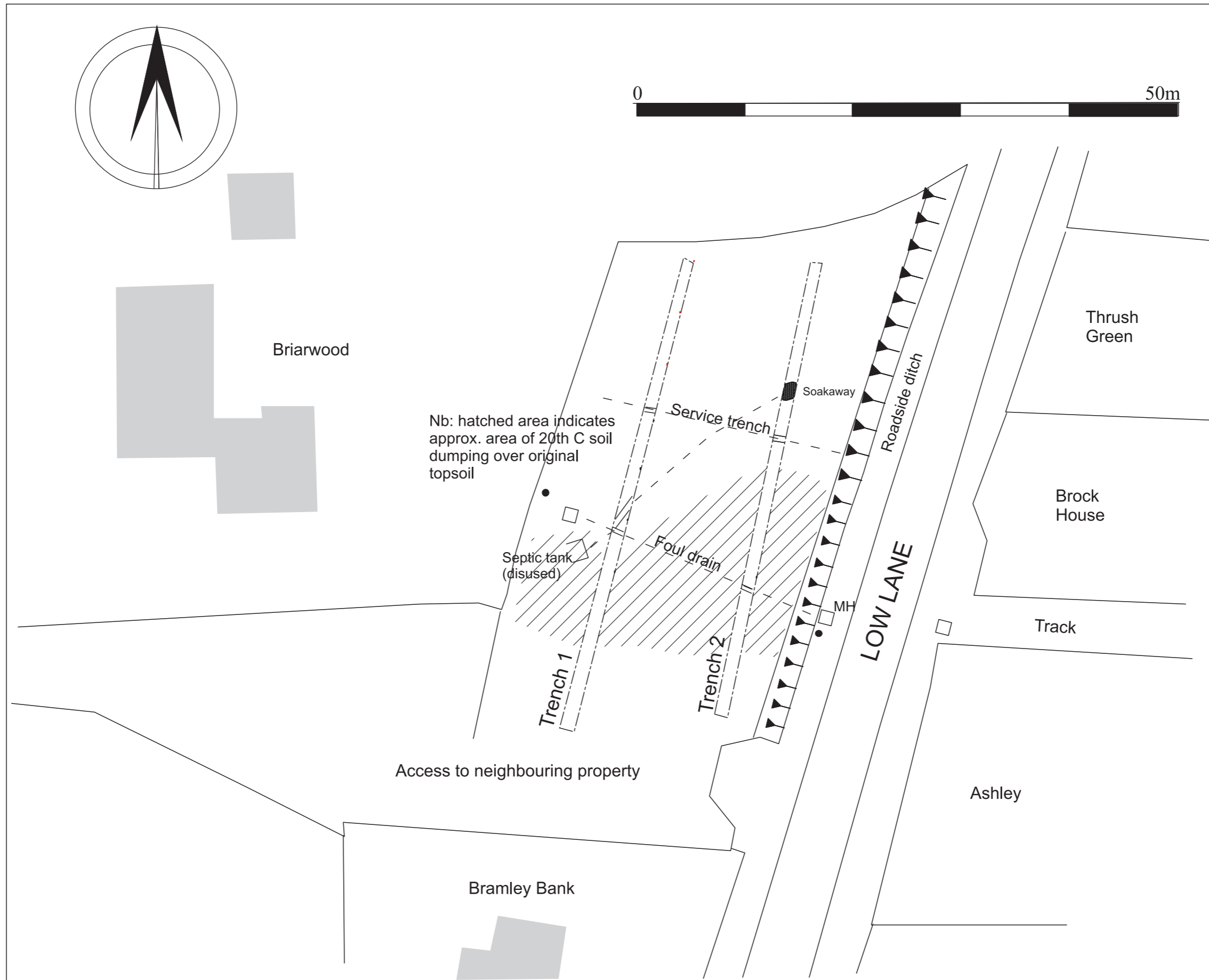
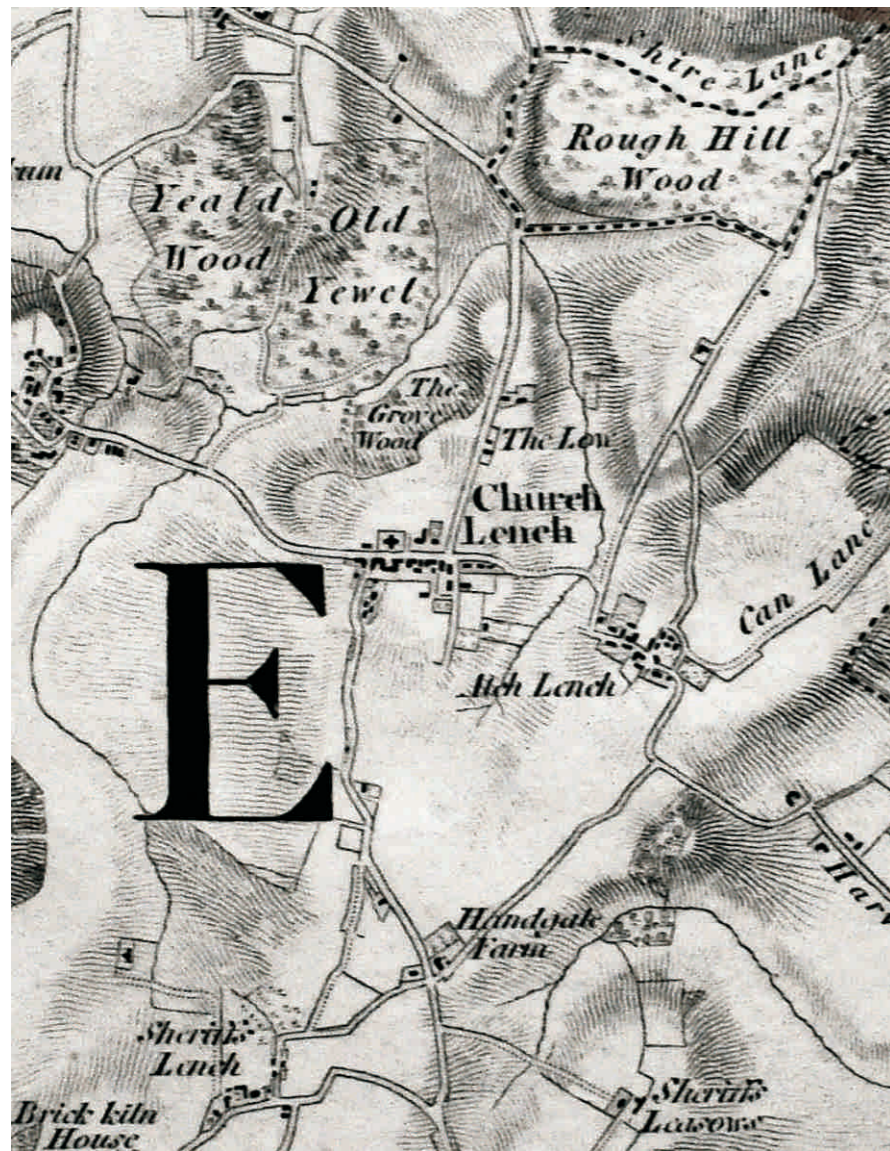


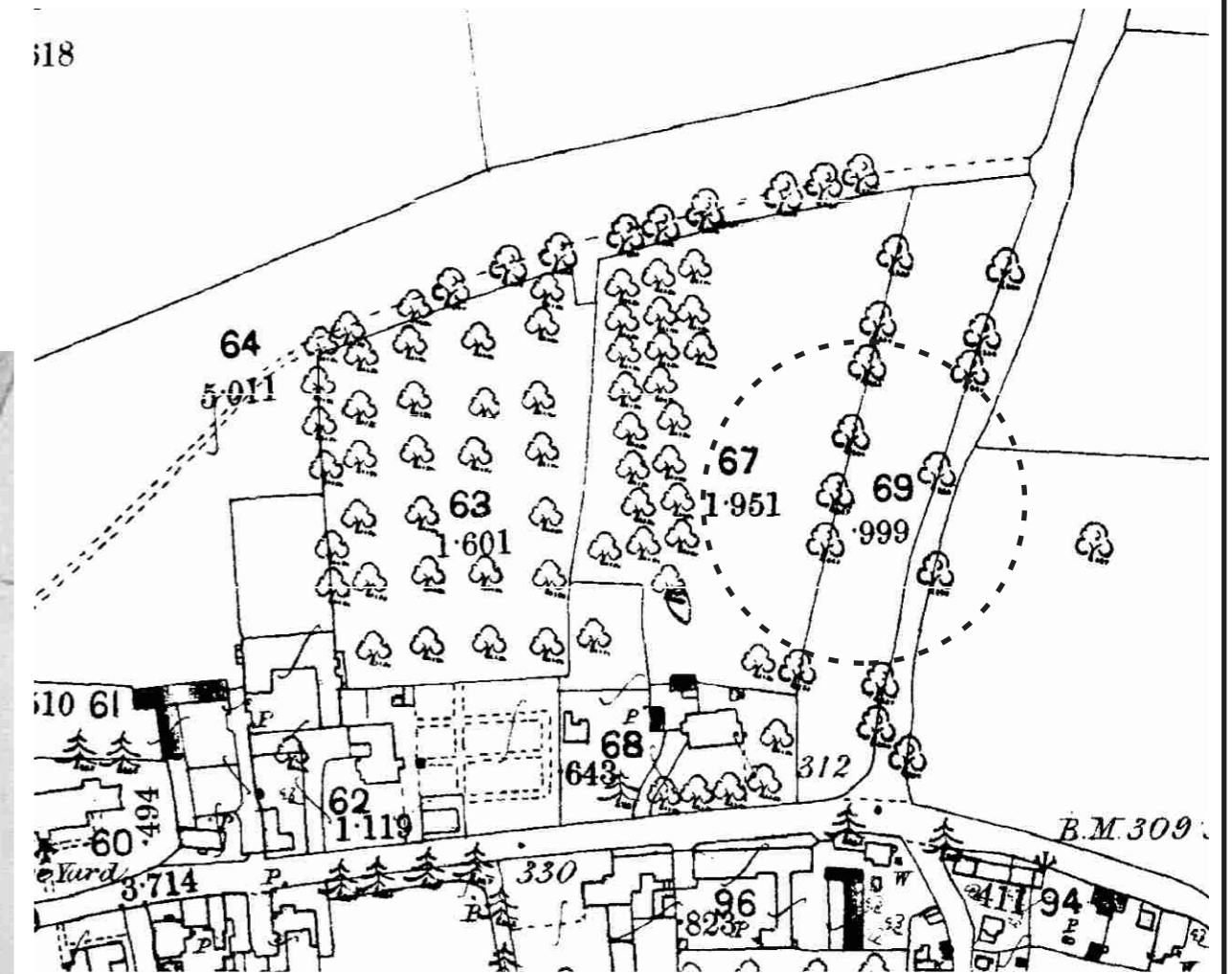
Figure 2: Trench layout and location of observed features



Old Series Ordnance Survey mapping of circa 1830-1



Church Lench Tithe Awards mapping of 1840



1st Edition Ordnance Survey mapping 1883

Figure 3: Historic mapping



Trench 1 view facing north



Trench 1 view facing north east

View facing south along Trench 1



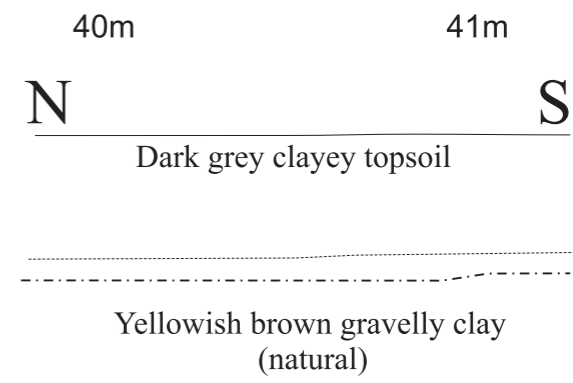
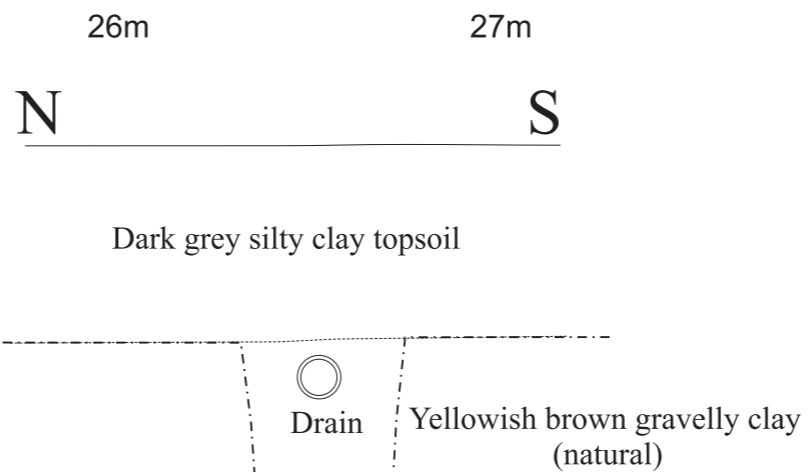
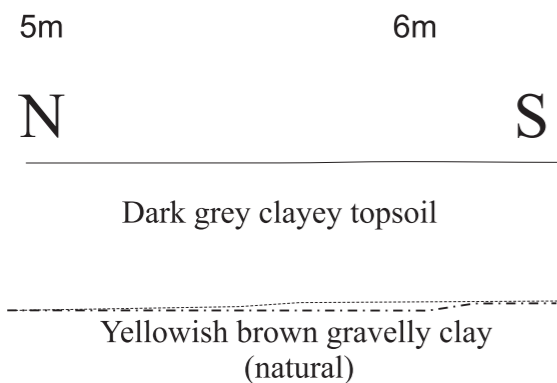
View facing south along Trench 2

Area of redeposited clay and topsoil in Trench 2



Figure 4: Site photographs

Trench 1 Sections



Trench 2 Sections

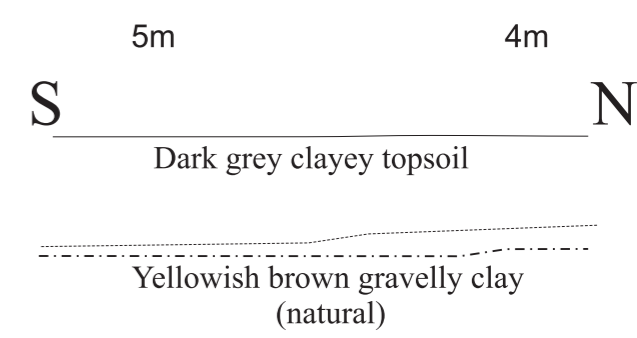
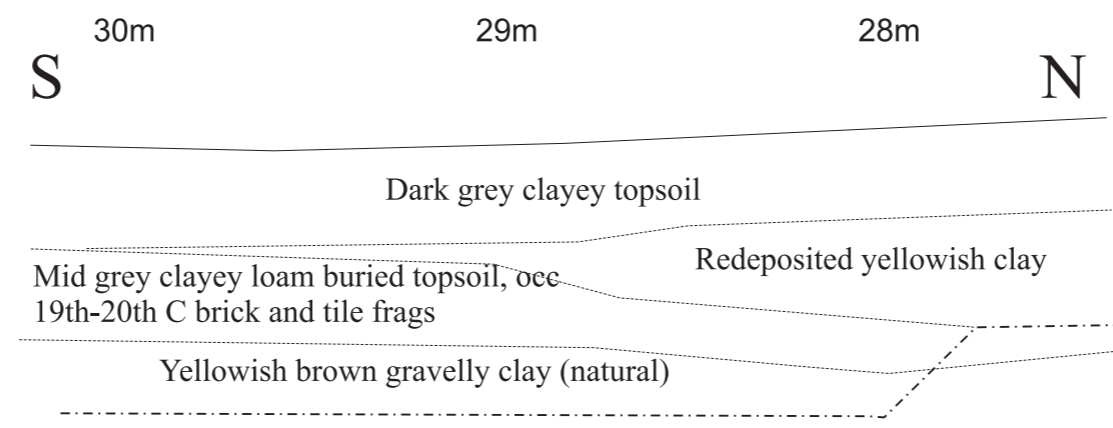
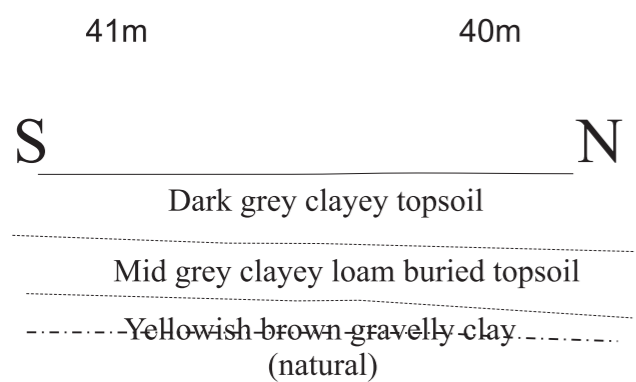


Figure 5: Trench Sections