

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 926

**An Archaeological Evaluation at
The Bicycle Shed,
Tanner House, Tanner Street,
Thetford, Norfolk**

40167 THD

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July 2004

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Local Authority No. 100019340

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Location: Bicycle shed, Tanner House, Tanner Street, Thetford, Norfolk
District: Breckland
Grid Ref: TL 8701 8302
HER No.: 40167 THD
Date of fieldwork: 24th to 26th February 2004

Summary

An archaeological evaluation within the footprint of a disused bicycle shed fronting onto Tanner Street, Thetford, was undertaken by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit. This work revealed in excess of 1m of post-medieval building rubble which overlay an undated habitation deposit containing shell and charcoal. A chalk block-lined drain was also observed. Two sherds of pottery (one medieval and one post-medieval) were recovered from one context ([8]). Auger holes located natural sand at a depth of c. 2.10m from the surface.

1.0 Introduction

(Fig. 1)

An archaeological evaluation within the footprint of a disused bicycle shed fronting onto Tanner Street, Thetford, in south-west Norfolk was undertaken by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit. The survey area encompassed an area of 9 squared metres. The street line is thought to be of Saxon origin and the location of the excavation was in a position likely to encounter archaeological deposits from possible street frontages of the Saxon and later periods.

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the invitation of Mr D Pratley of Norfolk Property Services.

This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Method Statement prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU Ref.: ARJH/11/08/03) and a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA Ref.: 1668/JB).

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 — Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

Thetford is near the interface between the underlying solid Upper Chalk which covers central Norfolk, and the Lower and Middle Chalk of the west of the county. Overlying this is the soils associated with the local Breckland landscape, namely brown sand and sandy colluvium in lower topography.

The elevation of the site was approximately 11.75m OD and was well drained, lying on the northern slope of the river Thet.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

(Fig. 1)

Thetford is a town which has a rich archaeological history with many sites of interest recorded on the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER).

The development of Thetford prior to the Saxon period was founded on its strategic situation in the south-west of Norfolk: fording the confluence of the Rivers Thet and Little Ouse, on the route of the Icknield Way.

Early origins for settlement can be seen in the (possibly) 5th century BC fort in the south-east of the town (Fig. 1) and the Late Iron Age ceremonial centre revealed by excavation on Gallows Hill at Fison's Way (Gregory 1982). Evidence for Romano-British activity is known from the north-west of the town and Early and Middle Saxon occupation in the vicinity of Red Castle (Andrews 1995).

Thetford grew to become an Anglo-Danish town of considerable importance. Occupation on the south bank of the rivers in the later 9th century, a period of Viking intervention in the area, expanded onto the north bank to cover some 60 hectares. At the compilation of Domesday Book (1086) the town had a mint, was well defended with a bank and ditch and had a population ranking it amongst the first six towns in the country. Between 1071 and 1094 Thetford hosted the See of East Anglia.

During the later 11th and 12th centuries the fortunes of Thetford declined. The town contracted onto the northern river bank, with the southern area reverting to farmland. It was not until the post World War 2 period of expansion that Thetford again became a major provincial town.

An NAU excavation in 1999 (Crowson), adjacent to the public library at the east end of Tanner Street, found remains of the defensive ditch aligned to the south-east of Tanner Street and Well Street, towards the river. Evidence from the fill of the ditch suggested a 10th-century date with backfilling in the 12th century and recutting soon after, with a final filling and levelling in the late 12th or early 13th century. Although the alignment of the ditch appeared to be too far to the south-west to be picked up by the excavation at Tanner House, the fact that Tanner Street was a Saxon thoroughfare meant that possibilities of evidence of frontages was strong.

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that an area of 9 square meters be opened for inspection within the footprint of the existing building. The initial trench dimensions (3m x 3m) were found to be impractical due to the presence of metal uprights, as a result the trench dimensions were altered to 4.5m x 2m.

The excavation was carried out by hand due to the restricted space. Two diametrically opposed slots (A and B) were excavated within the trench area, both measuring c. 1.8m by 0.75m. Slot A was located along the south-east edge of the trench and Slot B along the north-west edge.

Information provided by the client concerning the development impact on the site indicated that the footing trenches to be dug would disturb deposits in the area of the evaluation only to an estimated depth of 1m and slightly deeper only to the rear of the site.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds, other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

A level was transferred from an Ordnance Survey benchmark of 12.10m on the north-west corner of Thetford Methodist Church. Although a non-permanent peg was used as a temporary benchmark on site, a level (11.78m OD) was taken on a stand-pipe cover adjacent to the south-east corner of the Methodist Church hall garden wall.

Due to the lack of suitable deposits, no environmental samples were taken. Site conditions were dry due to being covered and the site easily accessible from the street.

5.0 Results

(Appendix 1. Figs 3 and 4)

Slot A

This slot in the south-east corner of the main trench measured 1.8m x 0.75m and was excavated to a depth of c. 1.25m. Beneath the upper deposits ([1] and [2]) there was a 0.30m thick modern rubble make-up layer ([15]) containing red brick, flint cobbles chalk and mortar fragments. Below this was the major deposit of the trench, the chalk lump rubble ([3]) which extended to a depth of 0.85m.

Below the chalk rubble was the thin layer of black soot ([4]). Beneath which was a deposit of compact mid yellow brown sand clay ([7]) which equated with that found in Slot B ([12]). It was noted that the compacted chalk floor found in Slot B ([5]) was not present here.

The deposit below the clay layer was a moderately compact dark brown organic silt ([8]), which contained occasional chalk lumps, with moderate chalk and occasional charcoal flecks. Recovered from this deposit was a fragment of animal bone, mussel shell, a fragment of tile and two sherds (one medieval and one post-medieval) of pottery.

At the base of the slot beneath deposit [8] a compact mid to light grey clay chalk deposit, [9], of uncertain thickness was observed. As this deposit was at the limit of safe excavation, at 10.50m OD, an auger was utilised to determine the underlying deposits.

The first auger sample below the compact clayey chalk, [9], was 0.18m thickness of soft chalk ([19]) which may have been part of the compact deposit above it as there was no clear interface observed between the two deposits. Below this was a 0.17m thick light brown chalky sand silt ([20]) which was similar to the augered deposit [18] found in Slot B. Soft orange brown natural sand was located beneath this last deposit. Two further auger holes were implemented within the slot and these gave identical results to the first.

Slot B

Slot B was located in the north-west corner of the trench and measured 1.8m by 0.75m and was excavated to a depth of 1.2m. The main deposit beneath the covering of modern surface gravel and topsoil ([1]) and a bedding deposit ([2]) was approximately 0.8m of loose medium and large sized block chalk rubble containing brick and tile ([3]). Several of the chalk blocks were found within this deposit that had been shaped and had visible tool marks. These blocks had evidently been used previously for building purposes. No dating evidence was found within this deposit other than post-medieval roof tile fragments.

Beneath deposit [3], as in Slot A, there was a thin layer of black soot-like deposit ([4]). Unlike in Slot A a surface of pale grey compact chalk ([5]) containing occasional charcoal flecks was present. This deposit varied in thickness from 35mm to 12mm and was thicker to the north-west than the south-east of the area exposed. This deposit was approximately 1m in depth from ground level at c. 10.63m OD.

The deposit beneath the chalk surface was a compact mid grey-brown sandy silt ([6]) 35mm to 40mm thick, containing moderate chalk and occasional charcoal flecks and possibly represented an earlier surface. Below this was a compact mid yellow brown sandy clay deposit ([12]), approximately 0.21m thick, which was possibly another early consolidated surface.

Cut into the clay deposit [12] was a shallow gully ([16]; Fig 3) which was south-east to north-west aligned. The gully measured c. 1.8m x 0.20m and 0.10m deep, it contained a loose mid greyish brown organic sandy silt fill ([11]) with occasional chalk and charcoal flecks and fragments of animal bone. The shape of this fill was slightly elliptical, perhaps suggesting a constricted drainage flow. The edges of the gully cut was lined with closely fitting irregular shaped chalk blocks ([10]), similar in appearance to those found above ([3]).

An auger was employed to determine the depth of underlying deposits below the maximum safe depth of 1.2m. Beneath a further 80mm of the clay deposit [12] at the base of the slot was a dark brown organic soil ([17]) 0.15m thick, containing chalk flecks which resembled deposit [8] in Slot A. Below this was a sandy clay deposit 0.10m thickness ([18]) which was interpreted as a primary subsoil which lay over a deposit of soft clean orange brown natural sand.

6.0 The Finds

(Appendix 2)

6.1 *The pottery*

(Appendix 3)

A total of two small sherds of pottery, weighing 0.008kg, were recovered during this evaluation, both from context [8] in Slot A. These consisted of a rim sherd from a coarseware cooking pot or jar and dated between the 11th to the 13th century and a fragment of Pearlware dish with a transfer printed decoration dating from 1770 to 1850. As both these sherds have widely differing dates, it is likely that the earlier pottery is residual.

6.2 *Ceramic building material*

One piece, weighing 0.016kg, of post-medieval flat roof tile ([8]) was recovered.

6.3 *The faunal remains*

(Appendix 4)

A total of 0.095kg of faunal remains were recovered from two contexts. Context [8] produced a fragment of skull and a chopped rib, both identified as sheep/goat. While fragments of large mammal skull, ?cow, were retrieved from context [11]. A chop mark was noted on one fragment, so the skull had been butchered. A single mussel shell was recovered from context [8].

7.0 Conclusions

The possibility of locating deposits and finds of archaeological interest was reasonably high considering the proximity of the line of the adjacent Saxon street.

The results of this evaluation, however, suggest that while archaeological deposits exist in the vicinity of the Tanner House bicycle shed, they have been heavily truncated, possibly during the post-medieval period.

Recommendations for future work based upon this report will be made by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

Acknowledgements

The evaluation was carried out by Helen Stocks and the author. The animal bones were described by Julie Curl, the finds processed by Lucy Talbot and pottery assessed by Richenda Goffin. Information from the Historical Environment Record was provided by Jan Allen. The report was digitised by Sandrine Whitmore and illustrated and produced by Maggie Footit and edited by Alice Lyons.

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Trench	Category	Description	Period
1	-	Deposit	Gravel/soil surface	Modern
2	-	Deposit	Makeup layer	Modern
3	A/B	Deposit	Chalk lump rubble	Post-medieval
4	A/B	Deposit	Thin black deposit above [5]/[7]	Post-medieval
5	B	Deposit	Rammed chalk surface	Post-medieval
6	B	Deposit	Brown silt beneath [5]	Post-medieval
7	A	Deposit	Clay bedding layer	Post-medieval
8	A	Deposit	Brown silt beneath [7]	Post-medieval
9	A	Deposit	Compact chalky clay layer	Unknown
10	B	Deposit	Line of chalk rubble blocks	Post-medieval
11	B	Deposit	Fill of ?gully/drain [16]	Post-medieval
12	B	Deposit	Clay base of chalk surface [5]	Post-medieval
13	A	Deposit	Compact clay ?surface	Unknown
14	A	Deposit	Chalky silt deposit	Unknown
15	A	Deposit	Rubble (brick) layer	Modern
16	B	Cut	Gully/drain cut	Post-medieval
17	B-auger	Deposit	Dark brown organic loam	?Post-medieval
18	B-auger	Deposit	Clay sand with chalk flecks	Unknown
19	A-auger	Deposit	Soft chalk deposit below [9]	Unknown
20	A-auger	Deposit	Clay sandy silt-same as [18]	Unknown

Appendix 2: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
8	Pottery	2	0.009	Medieval and post-medieval
8	Ceramic building material	1	0.016	Post-medieval
8	Animal bone	-	0.009	-
8	Shell	-	0.002	-
11	Animal bone	-	0.086	-

Appendix 3: Pottery

Context	Fabric	Form	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Date
8	Medieval coarseware	Everted cooking pot or jar rim sherd	1	0.002	11th to 13th century
8	Pearlware	Transfer printed decorated dish	1	0.006	1770 to 1850

Appendix 5: Faunal Remains

Context	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Species
8	2	0.09	Sheep/goat. X2, skull fragment and piece of chopped rib
11	10	0.86	Skull fragments, probably cattle. Chop mark on one piece



Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

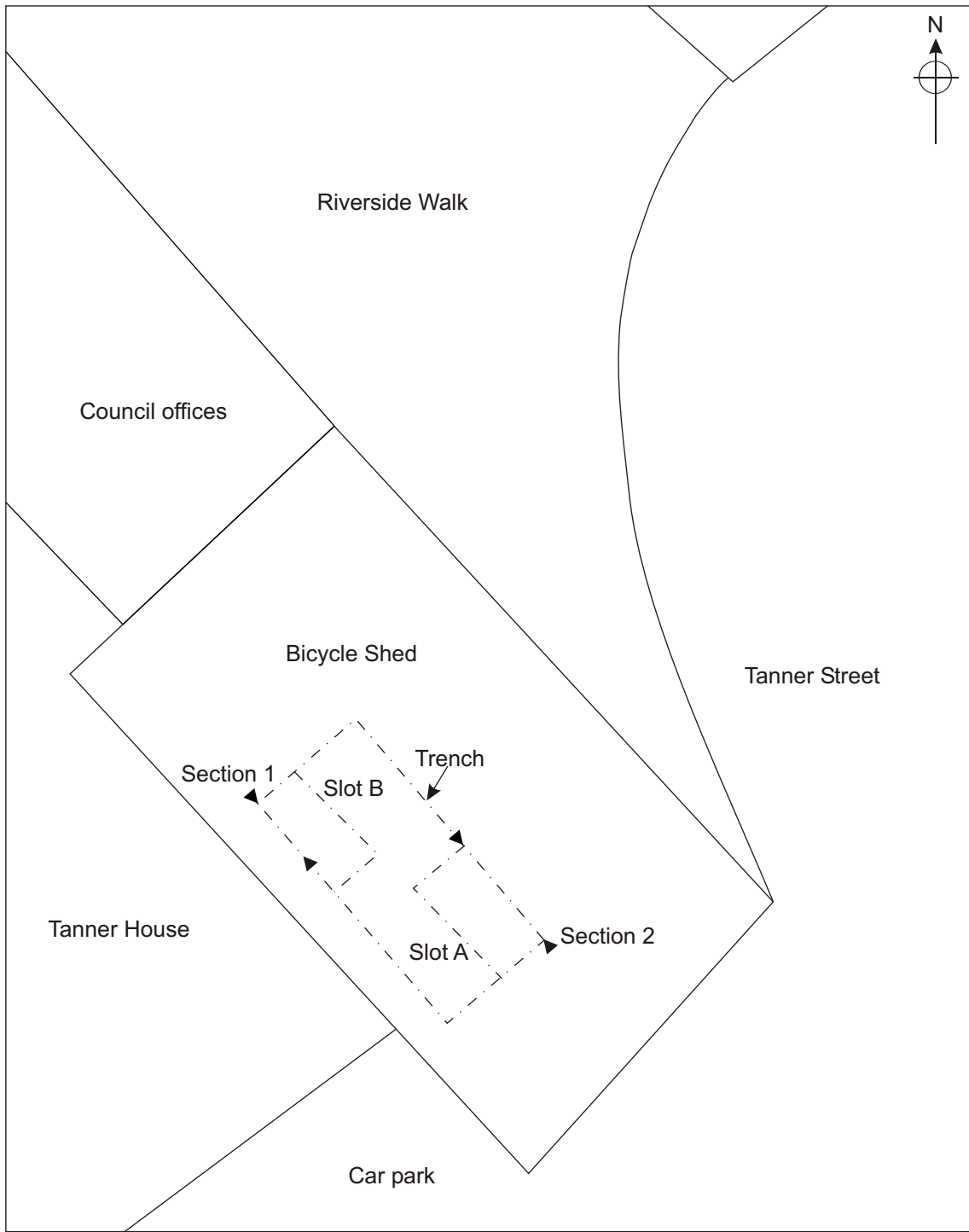


Figure 2. Trench plan. Scale 1:100

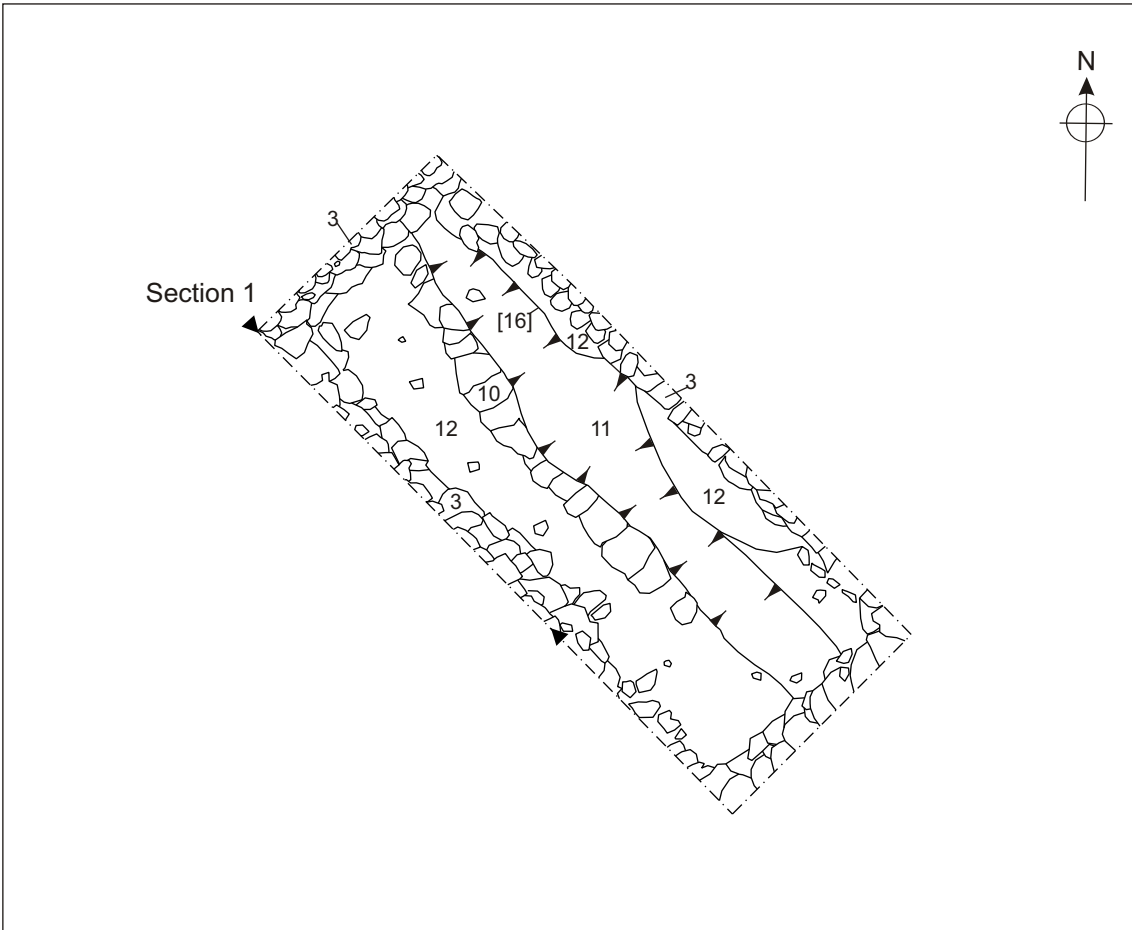


Figure 3. Plan of Slot B. Scale 1:20

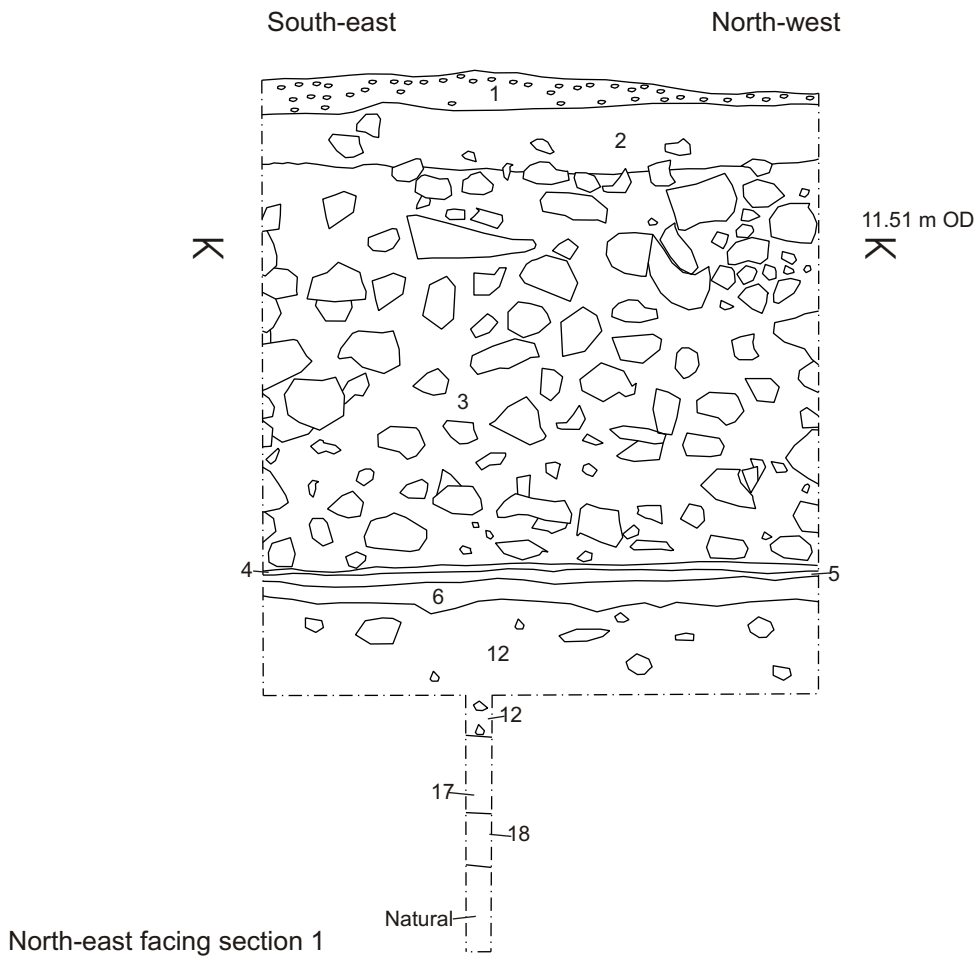
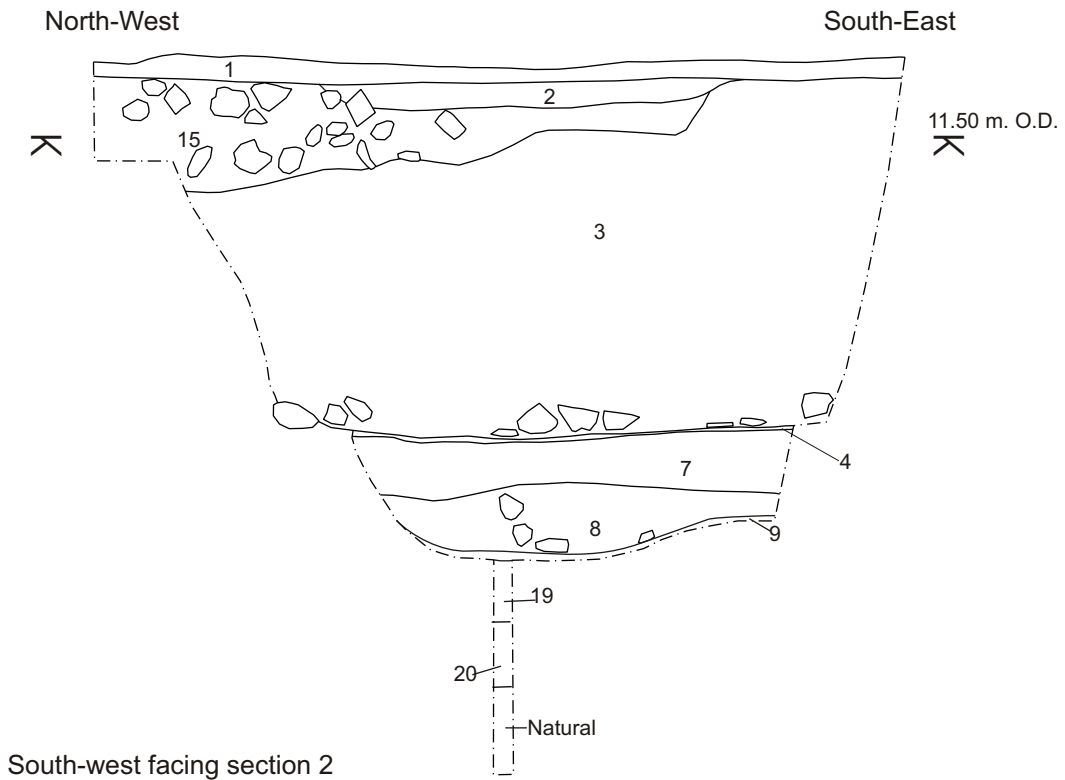


Figure 4. Sections. Scale 1:20