

**THE RECORDER'S HOUSE
TOWN STREET
THAXTED
ESSEX**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit**

OCTOBER 2009

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THAXTED
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

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	ECC HEM
	Essex Historic Environment Record

As part of our desire to provide a quality service, we would welcome any comments you may have on the content or the presentation of this report. Please contact the Archaeological Fieldwork Manager, at the

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THE RECORDER'S HOUSE

TOWN STREET

THAXTED

ESSEX

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

Client: James Boutwood (Architect), on behalf of a private client

NGR: TL 611 308

Site Code: TX 19

Planning Ref: UTT/1821/07

Oasis No.: essexcou1- 60988

Date of Fieldwork: 12th to 15th May 2009

SUMMARY

The Recorder's House dates to the mid-15th century and is located within the historic centre of Thaxted. Archaeological monitoring was carried out on land to the rear of the house during the construction of a new garage and workshop. The new building footprint was rectangular in plan and measured 10m by 5.5m. Monitoring was undertaken on the excavation of a 0.6m wide and 1.1m deep foundation trench around the periphery of the footprint.

Two archaeological features of probable modern date were identified. One was a large pit that appeared to extend beneath the present day property boundary at the east of the site, and the other a steep-sided service trench.

No remains dating to the medieval period were identified, nor any specifically associated with cutlery production. Residual sherds of late medieval and post-medieval pottery were recovered but are not unexpected finds in the garden of a 15th-century town house.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological monitoring carried out on land to the rear of The Recorder's House, Town Street, Thaxted, Essex, during the construction of a new garage and workshop. The evaluation was undertaken by the Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) for James Boutwood (Architect), on behalf of a private client.

As the site was located within an area of archaeological potential, a full archaeological condition was placed on planning consent (planning application ref: UTT/1821/07), following advice given by the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management team (ECC HEM) based on Planning Policy Guidance note 16 (DoE 1990). The investigation was carried out in accordance with an archaeological design brief issued by ECC HEM (2008) and a written scheme of investigation prepared by the ECC FAU (2009).

The new garage/workshop was initially to be constructed upon a concrete raft extending to a depth of 600mm. Fieldwork was to consist of monitoring of machine topsoil/overburden stripping down to that depth and the hand excavation and recording of all archaeological features encountered. However, by the commencement of fieldwork the construction method had changed to the machine-excavation of a rectangular foundation trench with limited ground reduction in the interior of the footprint. After notifying the ECC HEM team officer of the change, monitoring was undertaken on the excavation of the foundation trench.

Copies of this report will be supplied to James Boutwood (Architect) and the client, ECC HEM and the Essex Historic Environment Record. A digital version of this report will be submitted, along with a project summary, to the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis>). The site archive and copies of the report will be deposited at Saffron Walden Museum.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and Geology (Fig. 1)

The Recorder's House is located in the historic centre of Thaxted on the western side of Town Street (TL 611 308). The proposed development area lies to the rear of the property in an area of garden laid to grass with flower borders and occasional trees. Modern disturbance was noted in the south of the site which had formerly been covered in concrete.

The underlying surface geology comprised mixed Pleistocene deposits of sand, silt, clay and gravel.

2.2 Archaeology and History (Fig. 1)

This archaeological and historical background is based on the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) held by Essex County Council at County Hall, Chelmsford and the Historic Towns Project Assessment Report for Thaxted (Medlycott 1998).

The development lies within the medieval town of Thaxted, which was an important centre for the cutlery industry in the medieval period. Documentary sources make reference to a church at Thaxted in 981, while the Domesday Book entry suggests a well-established and prosperous community, which was certainly a large village, if not proto-urban in nature. A market was granted in 1205 and, although not located in a prominent position, the town underwent a period of rapid expansion in the 14th century as a result of its thriving cutlery industry, so much so that the 1393 Poll Tax returns recorded 79 cutlers and 17 other associated trades, suggesting that approximately one-third of the adult male population was involved in the cutlery and associated industries.

The Recorder's House (HER 25870) is a Grade II Listed three-storey, mid-15th century town house, jettied at the first and second storey (LBS No. 122430). To the rear is a contemporary outbuilding joined to the main house with 16th or 17th-century infill.

Excavations in the garden of nearby 23 Town Street (HER 14675, 16200) revealed late medieval features containing bone-working waste, indicating that a cutler's workshop stood nearby.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 Aims

The general aim of the monitoring was to record the location, extent, date and character of any surviving archaeological remains within the footprint of the new building and to preserve them by record.

More specific aims were to:

- Establish the date and nature of the initial and subsequent settlements of this part of Thaxted, paying particular attention to the layout of plots/tenements and determine whether industrial, domestic or commercial occupation was present. Specific attention would be paid to any evidence for cutlery production in the late medieval period.

3.2 Objectives

In the event that significant discoveries were made research objectives for the project will be in line with those laid out in *Research and Archaeology: a Framework for the Eastern Counties, 2. research agenda and strategy* (Brown and Glazebrook 2000).

4.0 METHOD

The building footprint consisted of a rectangular area approximately 10m long by 5.5m wide. Initial groundworks involved the removal of approximately 0.25-0.30m of modern overburden and topsoil from the interior of the building footprint. Archaeological monitoring was then undertaken on the complete machine excavation of a foundation trench around the edge of the footprint. This trench was 0.6m wide and 1.1m deep, when measured from the exterior ground level.

Potential archaeological features were cleaned and hand excavated. Standard ECC FAU excavation, artefact collection and recording methodologies were employed throughout. ECC FAU is a Registered Archaeological Organisation with the Institute of Field of Archaeologists (IFA) and all work was carried out in accordance with IFA by-laws and guidelines (IFA 1997; 2001) and complied with Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (Gurney 2003).

5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS

Two archaeological features of post-medieval/modern date were present in the foundation trench. Detailed context information is presented in Appendix 1.

5.1 Overburden and topsoil

The depth of overburden within the foundation trench varied from 0.60m to 0.95m. It usually consisted of 0.20m to 0.40m of mixed and often loose dark grey brown clay-silt topsoil that contained a variety of modern inclusions (fragments of concrete, tile, brick etc). This overlay a further 0.20m to 0.30m of slightly paler and more compact mid-grey clay-silt, probably an earlier buried topsoil, containing smaller fragments of charcoal, brick and tile. Both layers were heavily root-disturbed. Along the eastern edge of the site the topsoil was sealed by 0.15m of concrete and in the west was overlain by a recent deposit, c. 0.20m deep, of grey silt, mixed with pebbles and brick and concrete rubble. At the northern end of the western foundation trench the buried topsoil deposit was browner in colour, more mixed and contained cream and buff mortar flecks, tile flecks and lenses of yellow clay and was

recorded as context 1. Beneath was a localised deposit of mid grey silty clay (2), 0.10m thick, lying above natural clay at the base of the trench and only identified in section. Finds from this layer, which may have been a less disturbed remnant of earlier topsoil, included abraded late medieval pottery, post-medieval pottery, roof tile and a clay pipe stem.

The underlying natural strata comprised yellowish brown silty clay. Several trees had recently been removed from the garden, one in particular had caused considerable root damage to the western foundation trench. Most of the deposits within the trench were root disturbed.

5.2 Archaeological features (Figs. 2 & 3)

Pit 5 was partly exposed in the eastern foundation trench. It contained two fills (3 and 4). The upper fill comprised mixed dark grey clay silt (3) containing flecks of mortar, brick and tile and occasional pieces of slate and coal. Finds included pieces of post-medieval brick, modern pantile, animal bone and two sherds of residual late medieval pottery. Fragments of coal were also present in the lower fill (4) whilst amongst the finds were further pieces of post-medieval brick and tile and two sherds of post-medieval pottery dating to the 17th century.

In the northern foundation trench was a steep-sided linear feature (7) cut from directly below the topsoil. The feature was 0.45m wide and in excess of 0.95m deep. It was filled with mid to dark grey clay-silt (6) that produced post-medieval roof tile and animal bone.

6.0 FINDS by Joyce Compton

6.1 Introduction

Finds were recovered from four contexts, and pottery sherds and an oyster shell were found unstratified. All of the finds have been recorded by count and weight, in grams, by context; full quantification details can be found in Appendix 2. The finds are described by category below.

6.2 Medieval and later pottery by Helen Walker

A small amount of pottery (twenty-one sherds, weighing 893g) was excavated from four contexts. The pottery has been catalogued according to Cunningham's typology for post-Roman pottery in Essex (Cunningham 1985, 1-16).

Late medieval pottery, comprising Tudor red earthenware and sandy orange ware, was excavated from the fill of pit 5. The fabric of the sandy orange ware and its thin internal glaze is characteristic of north-west Essex and indicates an, as yet, undiscovered production site in this area of the county. Post-medieval red earthenware is the latest pottery in pit 5 and includes a lid-seated jar rim, probably from a one-handled jar or chamber pot. The rim is grey rather than red-brown and the surviving glaze patches are discoloured, indicating the sherd has been burnt. One-handled jars were popular in the 17th century.

Undiagnostic sherds of late medieval sandy orange ware and post-medieval red earthenware were also recovered from layer 2, although the presence of a clay pipe stem in this context confirms a date of not before the 17th century. Further sherds of these pottery types were found unstratified, along with a small collection of modern table and utility wares.

6.3 Brick and tile

Four contexts produced brick and tile, amounting to 29 pieces, weighing 2.5kg. Almost all of the assemblage comprises undiagnostic roof tiles, although two pieces from modern pantiles were recovered from fill 3 of pit 5. Most of the tiles from layer 2 had mortar attached. Pit 5 contained two brick fragments of broad post-medieval date. Unfortunately, very little in this assemblage could be closely dated, although a post-medieval to modern date is indicated.

6.4 Animal bone

Four contexts produced animal bone, amounting to fourteen pieces, weighing 510g. The assemblage is in relatively poor condition, and mostly has the appearance of material redeposited from elsewhere. The elements were identified, where possible, using Schmid (1972). Cattle was the only certainly-identified taxon, although the assemblage is too small and fragmentary for this to be of any significance. Butchery marks were not evident, although the battered condition of most of the bone has masked any marks which may have been present.

6.5 Shell

A small amount of oyster shell was recorded in two contexts and a further shell was found unstratified. All six are small examples, which is not uncommon in post-medieval contexts.

6.6 Other finds

A small piece of stem from a clay tobacco pipe was recovered from layer 2 and an equally small piece of slate came from fill 3 of pit 5.

6.7 Comments on the assemblage

Small amounts of finds were recorded and, although small, the assemblage is typical of those noted elsewhere in Thaxted. No evidence resulting from the local cutlery trade was found, however. No further work is required on any of the finds and all should be retained, although discard of the more recent material could take place at the archiving stage.

7.0 DISCUSSION

Two archaeological features were identified. The largest and potentially oldest feature was pit 5 located in the eastern foundation trench. Finds recovered from its upper fill (3) suggest a modern date (19th/20th century) for its final backfilling. Its lower fill contained two sherds of 17th century pottery and so could be earlier. Although, it seems unlikely that a pit in a garden would remain open for 200 years and so a 19th or 20th-century date for the pit's excavation and initial backfill appears more probable. Pit 5 was broadly situated on the present-day property boundary yet did not appear to be part of a specific boundary feature such as a post-hole or shared well. However, analysis of earlier Ordnance Survey map editions indicates that there may have been some movement of this property boundary in the later 19th century.

The only dating evidence recovered from feature 7 was five fragments of post-medieval roof tile. However, the linear shape of this feature, its depth and near-vertical sides suggests it is most probably part of a modern drainage trench. The trench was not observed in the southern foundation trench implying that it may terminate beneath the footprint of the new building.

8.0 ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

Two features of probable modern date were investigated. No features dating to the medieval period were identified, nor any specifically associated with cutlery production. Residual sherds of late medieval and post medieval pottery were recovered but are not unexpected finds in the garden of a 15th century town house.

The change in project design from open area excavation to narrow trench monitoring, and the lack of medieval remains within the foundation trenches, meant that most of the research aims of the project could not be addressed. It is possible that archaeological features are present within the footprint of the new building, but these should remain undisturbed due to the limited depth of the internal groundworks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Essex CC FAU would like to thank James Boutwood (Architect) for commissioning the work on behalf of his client. The archaeological monitoring was undertaken by Trevor Ennis of the ECC Field Archaeology Unit. Finds were processed by Phil McMichael and analysed by Joyce Compton. The report was prepared by Trevor Ennis with illustrations by Andrew Lewsey. The project was managed by Adrian Scruby and monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Richard Havis of ECC HEM.

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- | | | |
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APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DATA

All dimensions given in metres

Context	Type	Description	Period
1	Layer	Mid brownish grey clay silt, 0.30m thick	Post-medieval/Modern
2	Layer	Mid grey silty clay, 0.10m thick	Post-medieval/Modern
3	Fill of 5	Dark grey clay silt	Modern
4	Fill of 5	Dark greyish brown clay silt	Modern
5	Pit	Irregular, 1.90m x 0.60m+ x 1.07m deep	Modern
6	Fill of 7	Mid-dark grey clay silt	Modern
7	Gully	Linear, 0.6m+ x 0.45m x 0.95m+ deep	Modern
8	Finds	Unstratified finds from machining	

APPENDIX 2: FINDS DATA

All weights in grams

Context	Feature	Count	Weight	Description	Date
2	Layer	4	134	Animal bone; cattle atlas vertebra, incomplete, radius shaft, large mammal; fragments	-
		1	6	Shell; oyster, one valve, small example	-
		1	2	Clay pipe stem	Post med.
		7	720	Roof tile fragments, one with peg hole, most with mortar attached (1/134g discarded)	Post med.
		4	160	Pottery; body sherds	Post med.
3	5	2	70	Animal bone; long bone shafts, one is probably a sheep/goat tibia	-
		1	4	Slate fragment	-
		1	228	Brick fragment with mortar attached	Post med.
		6	590	Roof tile fragments, one has a peg hole, two are from modern pantiles	Post med/ modern
		2	134	Pottery; body sherds	Post med.
4	5	6	292	Animal bone; cattle maxilla fragment with four molars; cattle humerus, distal end, battered/knocked; rib section, large mammal; long bone shaft, medium-sized mammal; fragments	-
		4	20	Shell; oyster, four valves, small examples	-
		1	326	Brick fragment	Post med.
		9	515	Roof tile fragments	Post med.
		3	46	Pottery; rim and body sherds	Med/post med.
6	7	2	14	Animal bone; fragments, battered/knocked	-
		5	94	Roof tile fragments	Post med.
8	u/s	1	20	Shell; oyster, one valve	-
		11	560	Pottery; rim, base, body and handle sherds	Post med/ modern

APPENDIX 3: MEDIEVAL AND LATER POTTERY

All weights in grams

Context	Feature	Count	Weight	Description	Date
2	Layer	3	118	Late medieval sandy orange ware, very abraded body sherds, one showing internal glaze	15th to 16th C
		1	42	Post-medieval red earthenware internally glazed base sherd	late 16th to 19th C
3	5	1	47	Tudor red earthenware, body sherd perhaps from flared bowl, shows streaks and patches of glaze internally	late 15th – 16th C
		1	85	Late medieval sandy orange ware, internally glazed base sherd, abraded on the underside	15th to 16th C
4	5	1	6	Sandy orange ware, body sherd, partial external glaze	14th to 16th C
		2	40	Post-medieval red earthenware: body sherd with partial internal glaze and lid-seated jar rim, rim diameter 160mm, perhaps from one-handle jar, brownish-grey in colour, either over-fired or burnt post-manufacture, discoloured whitish splashes of glaze on inside of rim, some abrasion on rim edge	17th C
8	U/S	1	26	Late medieval sandy orange ware base sherd with patchy internal glaze	15th to 16th C
		4	63	Post-medieval red earthenware, misc. sherds, glazed and unglazed	late 16th to 19th C
		2	18	Nottingham/Derbyshire stoneware joining sherds from horizontal handle	18th to 20th C
		1	77	Modern stoneware, base of cylindrical bottle, linear area of abrasion along one side, possible reuse post-breakage	19th C
		1	321	Modern earthenware base from large ?jar, unglazed, highly-fired, almost a stoneware	19th to 20th C
		3	50	Modern china, includes part of porcelain candlestick decorated with gold band, plus upright cup or bowl rim with blue-painted decoration internally	19th to 20th C
		21	893		

APPENDIX 4: CONTENTS OF ARCHIVE

Site Name: The Recorder's House, Town Street, Thaxted, Essex

Site Code: TX 19

Index to Archive:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Brief
- 1.2 Written Scheme of Investigation

2. Research Archive

- 2.1 Client Report
- 2.2 Finds Reports

3. Site Archive

- 3.1 Context Record Register
- 3.2 Context Records (1 to 8)
- 3.3 Plan Register
- 3.4 Section Register
- 3.5 3 x A4 plan/section sheets
- 3.6 Trench location plan
- 3.7 Photographic Register
- 3.8 Site Photographic Record (1 set of colour prints & digital images on disk)
- 3.9 Miscellaneous notes/plans

Not in File

Finds

The finds occupy less than one box.

APPENDIX 5: ESSEX HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY SHEET

Site name/Address: The Recorder's House, Town Street, Thaxted, Essex	
Parishes: Thaxted	District: Uttlesford
NGR: TL 611 308	Site Code: TX 19
Type of Work: Archaeological Monitoring	Site Director/Group: T. Ennis, ECC Field Archaeology Unit
Dates of Work: 12th to 15th May 2009	Size of Area Investigated: c. 56 sq m
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Saffron Walden	Funding source: Client
Further Seasons Anticipated?: No	Related HER Nos.: - HER 25870
Final Report: EAH summary	Oasis No.: essexcou1- 60988
Periods Represented: Post-medieval, modern	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:	
<p>The Recorder's House dates to the mid-15th century and is located within the historic centre of Thaxted. Archaeological monitoring was carried out on land to the rear of the house during the construction of a new garage and workshop. The new building footprint was rectangular in plan and measured 10m by 5.5m. Monitoring was undertaken on the excavation of a 0.6m wide and 1.1m deep foundation trench around the periphery of the footprint.</p> <p>Two archaeological features of probable modern date were identified. One was a large pit that appeared to extend beneath the present day property boundary at the east of the site, and the other a steep-sided service trench.</p> <p>No remains dating to the medieval period were identified, nor any specifically associated with cutlery production. Residual sherds of late medieval and post-medieval pottery were recovered but are not unexpected finds in the garden of a 15th-century town house.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: none	
Author of Summary: T. Ennis	Date of Summary: October 2009



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Fig.1. Site location

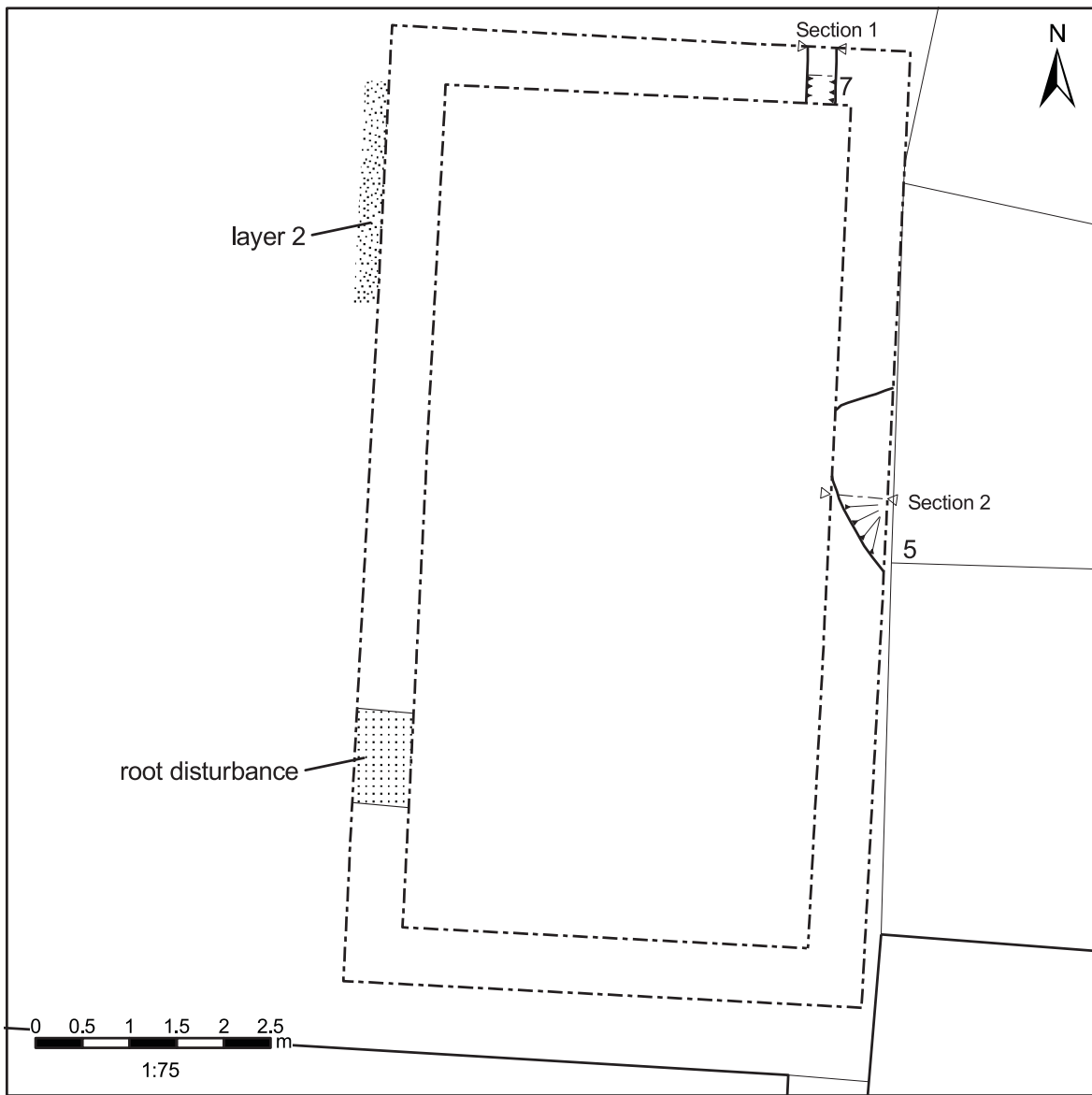


Fig.2. Foundation trench plan

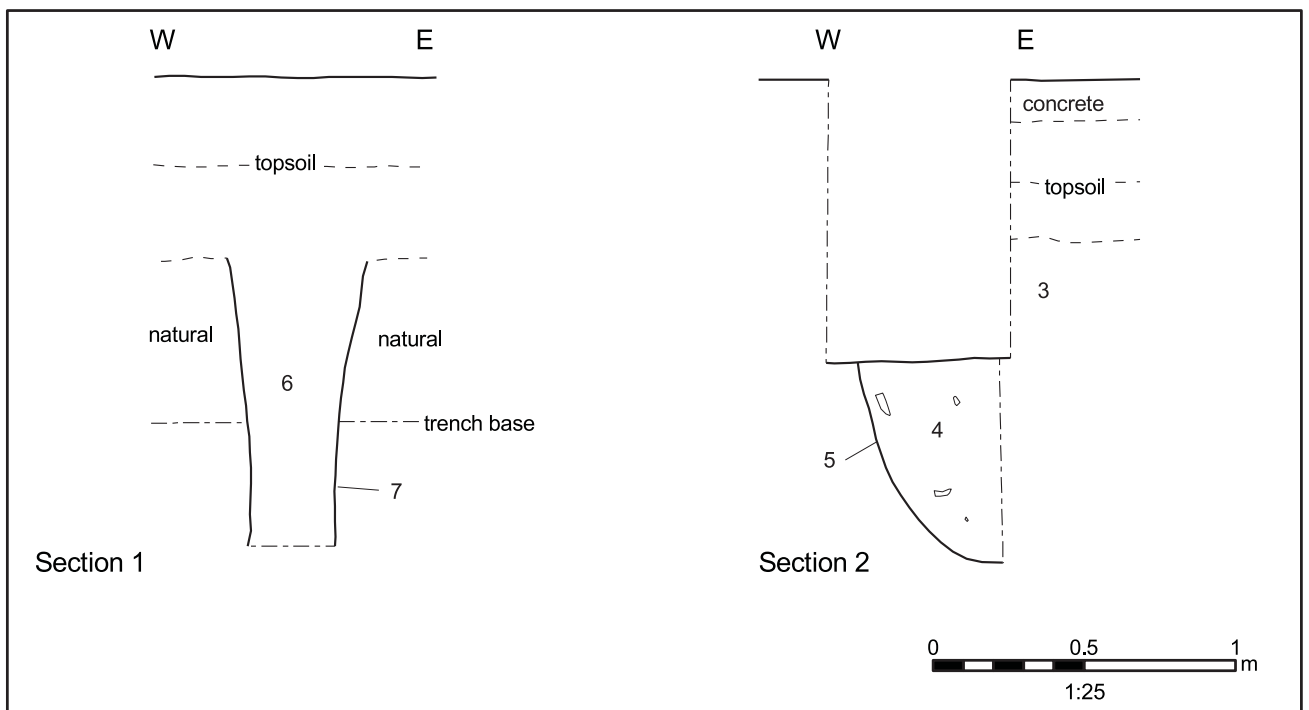


Fig.3. Sections