

HERITAGE NETWORK



BUCHANAN HOUSE **Sun Street, Hitchin**

HN522

Archaeological Evaluation



THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation

Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

BUCHANAN HOUSE Sun Street, Hitchin, Herts.

HN522

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Prepared on behalf of G Caratti, Esq

by

Geoff Saunders, BA

Report No.284

April 2005

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The cover photograph shows the study area from the east

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by Geoff Saunders, and David Hillelson. Illustrations were prepared by Geoff Saunders, and the report was edited by David Hillelson.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to Ben Meyer, Eades Hotwani Partnership; D & R Construction Ltd, Plant Hire; and Jonathan Smith, County Planning Archaeologist, Hertfordshire County Council, for their co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

Summary

Site name and address:	Buchanan House, Sun Street, Hitchin, Hertfordshire		
County:	Hertfordshire	District:	North Hertfordshire
Village/town:	Hitchin	Parish:	Hitchin
Planning reference:	1/05/0185	NGR:	TL 17946 28924
Client name and address:	G.Caratti, c/o Eades Hotwani Partnership, Hall's Yard, Tilehouse Street, Hitchin		
Nature of work:	New extension	Present land use:	Car park
Size of affected area:	c.70m ²	Size of area investigated:	c.10m ²
Site Code:	HN522	Other reference:	n/a
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson
Type of work:	Evaluation	Archive location:	NHDC Museums
Start of work	8 th April 2005	Finish of work	8 th April 2005
Related SMR Nos.:	N/a	Periods represented:	Late post-med - modern
Previous summaries/reports:	N/a		

Synopsis: In order to determine the archaeological risk posed by a proposal to construct a new extension to the rear of Buchanan House, Sun Street, Hitchin, the Heritage Network was commissioned by the owner to undertake a programme of archaeological evaluation.

A single trench was excavated within the footprint of the proposed extension. The trench measured 3 x 3.3m, was 1.6m in depth, and was aligned east – west. The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of approximately 1.6m of 19th/20th century overburden over alternating layers of firm, light grey, silty chalk with frequent greenish mottling, and firm, very dark greyish brown silts. These layers have been interpreted as flood deposits from the River Hiz, the present line of which flows less than 60m to the east of the site.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared at the request of the *Eades Hotwani Partnership* acting on behalf of *G.Caratti Esq*, as part of the archaeological evaluation of a proposed extension to Buchanan House, Sun Street, Hitchin, Herts. The determination of the planning application for the development (ref.1/05/0185), controlled by the North Hertfordshire District Council, has been deferred for further information on the archaeological impact of the proposals, in accordance with the provisions set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note no.16 (PPG16) on Archaeology and Planning. The scope of the required investigation has been set out in a *Design Brief for Archaeological Evaluation* prepared by the County Archaeological Office (CAO) of Hertfordshire County Council, acting as adviser to the planning authority (ref. JS 24/02/2005). A full specification is contained in the Heritage Network's approved Project Design dated March 2005.

1.2 The site lies to the rear of Buchanan House, which lies behind no.8 Sun Street, centred on NGR TL 17946 28924 (Fig.1). The development proposes the construction of a two-storey extension to the building with a link, at first floor level, to the rear of no.9 Sun Street.

1.3 Sun Street developed as a formalisation of the 13th century market place, on the western bank of the River Hiz. Most of the properties on the eastern side of Sun Street are Grade II listed for group value, nos. 8 & 9 being of 18th century date. They are likely to have replaced buildings of medieval date. There was considered to be a Low to Moderate risk that features or deposits of Prehistoric, Iron Age and Roman date might survive on the site, and a Moderate to High risk of features or deposits of Saxon and Medieval date (Heritage Network report no.157).

1.4 The aim of the evaluation has been to consider the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any remains that are liable to be threatened by the development, and to provide a local and regional, archaeological and historical context for them, in accordance with the current published regional research agenda (Glazebrook 1997, Brown and Glazebrook 2000), if they were discovered.

1.5 The present report has been prepared to provide the planning authority with sufficient data to allow it to consider the archaeological implications of the proposed development, and to determine what further mitigation measures, if any, may be required.

2. Fieldwork

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 The town lies in the centre of the Hitchin Gap, a glacially derived deep cutting. Hitchin lies in the bottom of the valley of the River Hiz, with the land rising on both the eastern and western sides of the river. The site lies at c.65.00m AOD on the west side of the river.

2.2 The underlying geology is of plastic, light grey, clay with frequent chalk inclusions.

METHODOLOGY

2.3 The trench was located within the footprint of the proposed extension.

2.4 All work was carried out in accordance with the approved *Project Design*, current health and safety legislation, and IFA standards.

2.5 The trench was set out by triangulation from known points (Fig.2).

2.6 A single trench was opened using a tracked 360° mini-digger fitted with a 1.30m wide toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision. Spoil from the machining was inspected for archaeological artefacts. The trench was machined to the first significant archaeological horizon.

2.7 The trench was cleaned by hand, and all potential archaeological features and deposits were sampled to ascertain their nature, depth, date, and quality of preservation.

2.8 All identified contexts were photographed and recorded using the appropriate pro-forma. Scaled plans and sections were drawn on drafting film at a scale of 1:20.

2.9 All levels were recorded relative to the OS benchmark on the front wall of 2 Tilehouse Street, having a value of 64.95mAOD.

RESULTS

2.10 The trial trench was located inside the footprint of the proposed new extension and was aligned approximately east – west. The trench measured 3.00 x 3.30m and was a maximum of 1.60m in depth.

2.11 The stratigraphy in the trench consisted of a layer of modern concrete [101] over a mixture of levelling aggregate and crushed CBM fragments [102]. Beneath this lay a soft, mid greyish brown, slightly sandy silty clay overburden [103], which contained artefacts of 19th/20th century date, including, pottery, peg tile, and glass. This sealed a layer of firm, light greyish brown, silty clay [104], with frequent chalk inclusions, and moderate small flecks of CBM. Beneath this alternating layers of firm, light grey, silty chalk with frequent greenish mottling, and firm, very dark greyish brown, silt, were observed [105] – [109]. Layer [106] yielded a small, abraded, and undiagnostic fragment of late post-medieval peg tile. These layers have been interpreted as flood deposits from the River Hiz, the present line of which flows less than 60m to the east of the site.

2.12 No cut features were observed in the trench.

Recorded contexts

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
101	Layer	Hard standing concrete.	0.10m thick
102	Layer	Mixed aggregate and crushed CBM, levelling layer.	0.20m thick
103	Layer	Soft, mid greyish brown, slightly sandy silty clay.	1.00m thick
104	Layer	Firm, light greyish brown, silty clay.	0.30m thick
105	Deposit	Firm, light grey, silty chalk with occasional greenish mottling. Flood deposit.	0.20m thick
106	Deposit	Firm, very dark greyish brown, silt. Flood deposit.	0.12m thick
107	Deposit	Firm, light grey, silty chalk. Flood deposit.	0.17m thick
108	Deposit	Firm, light grey, silty chalk with frequent greenish mottling. Flood deposit.	0.10m thick
109	Deposit	Firm, black, peat like silt. Flood deposit.	0.20m thick

FINDS CONCORDANCE

2.13 A single small, abraded, undiagnostic fragment of late post-medieval peg tile, weighing 20g, was recovered from context [106]. Context [106] is described as a flood deposit and the condition of the fragment indicates it is residual within this material. Other fragments of similar material along with pottery, and glass fragments, of similar date were observed in overburden layer [103] but were not collected.

2.14 Post-medieval CBM fragments are common finds on urban sites. No further work is proposed on this item.

3. Discussion

3.1 Despite the location of the site in an area of known archaeological potential, as demonstrated in a recent desk-based archaeological assessment for Hitchin Town Centre (Heritage Network report no.157), the evaluation of the site revealed no archaeological features.

3.2 The alternating layers of silt observed in the base of the trench are consistent with flood deposits. Their presence on the site is not surprising as the River Hiz flows within 60m to the east of the site.

3.3 The evaluation has demonstrated that the undisturbed natural geology lies at approximately 2.30m below the present ground surface, which appears to have been artificially raised, possibly as a protection against flooding.

Conclusions

3.4 The archaeological evaluation has demonstrated that the site is located within the former flood plain of the River Hiz. The raising of the ground level appears to have taken place during the late post-medieval period.

3.5 No features of a Medieval or earlier date were encountered and no artefacts or ecofacts indicative of occupation prior to the late post-medieval period.

3.6 On this basis, it is considered unlikely that any significant archaeological features or deposits would be disturbed by the proposed development.

CONFIDENCE RATING

3.7 Although there was intermittent rain in the course of the fieldwork, conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation. Although the depth of overburden encountered was substantial, the 3m wide trench allowed an acceptable area of the site to be sampled.

3.8 There are no other circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the present evaluation which is less than High.

4. Bibliography

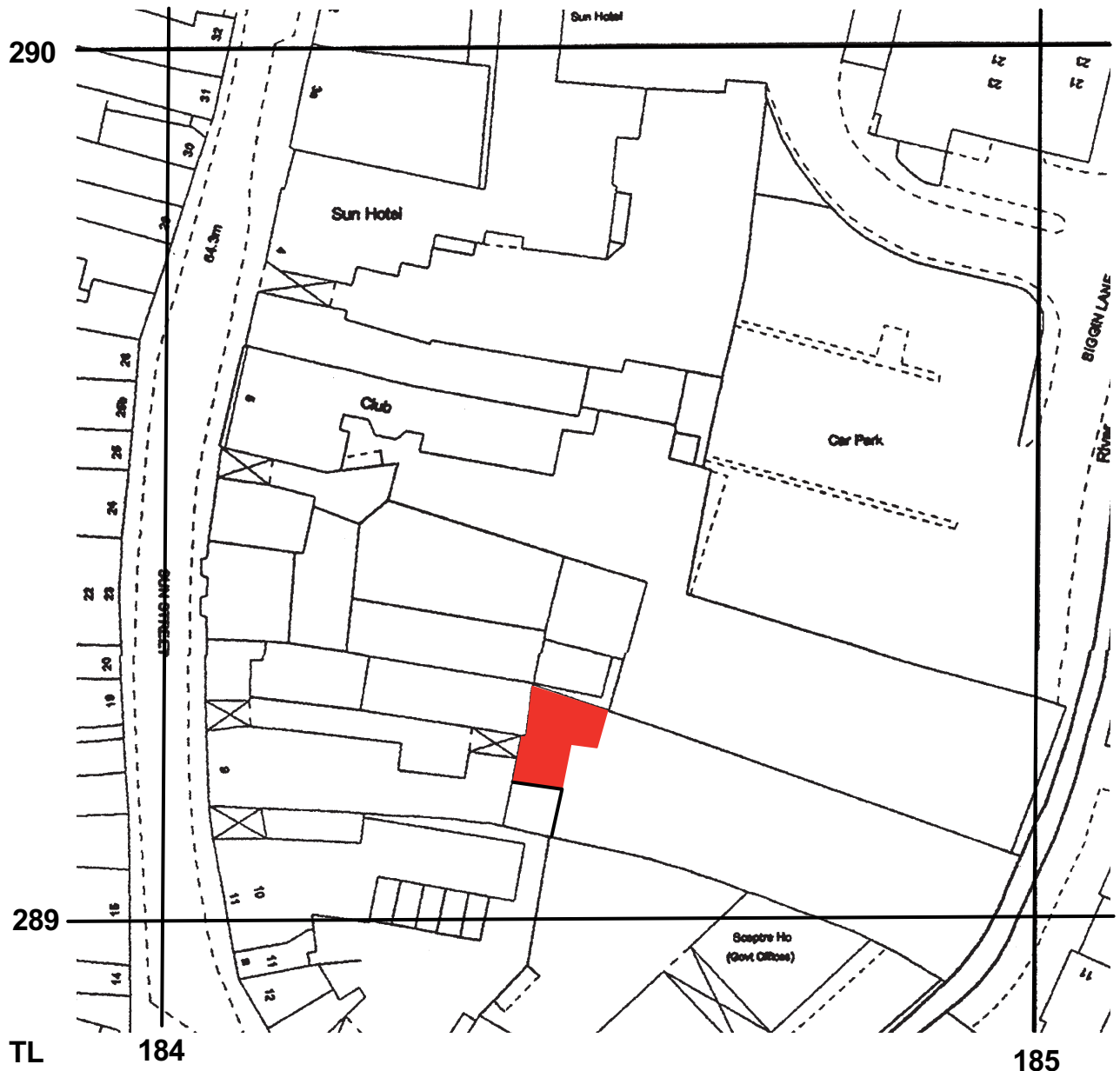
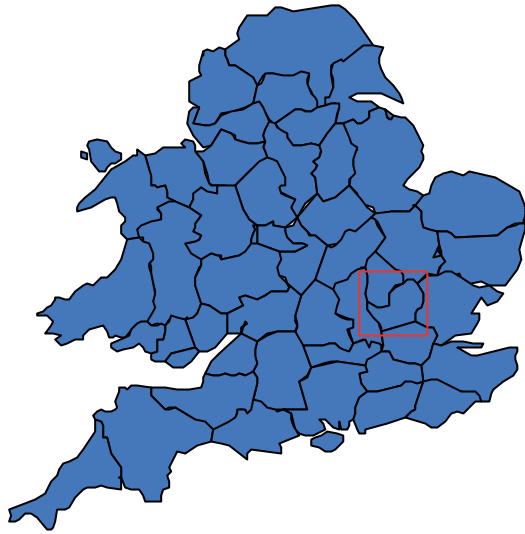
Ashworth, H. & Hillelson, D. 2002. *Hitchin Town Centre Strategy: Desk-based Archaeological Assessment*. Heritage Network, Report no. 157, August 2002.

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Smith, J. 2005. *Design Brief For Archaeological Evaluation: Buchanan House, Sun Street, Hitchin*. Hertfordshire County Council.

5. Illustrations

Figure 1	Site location
Figure 2	Trench location
Figure 3	Trench plan and section

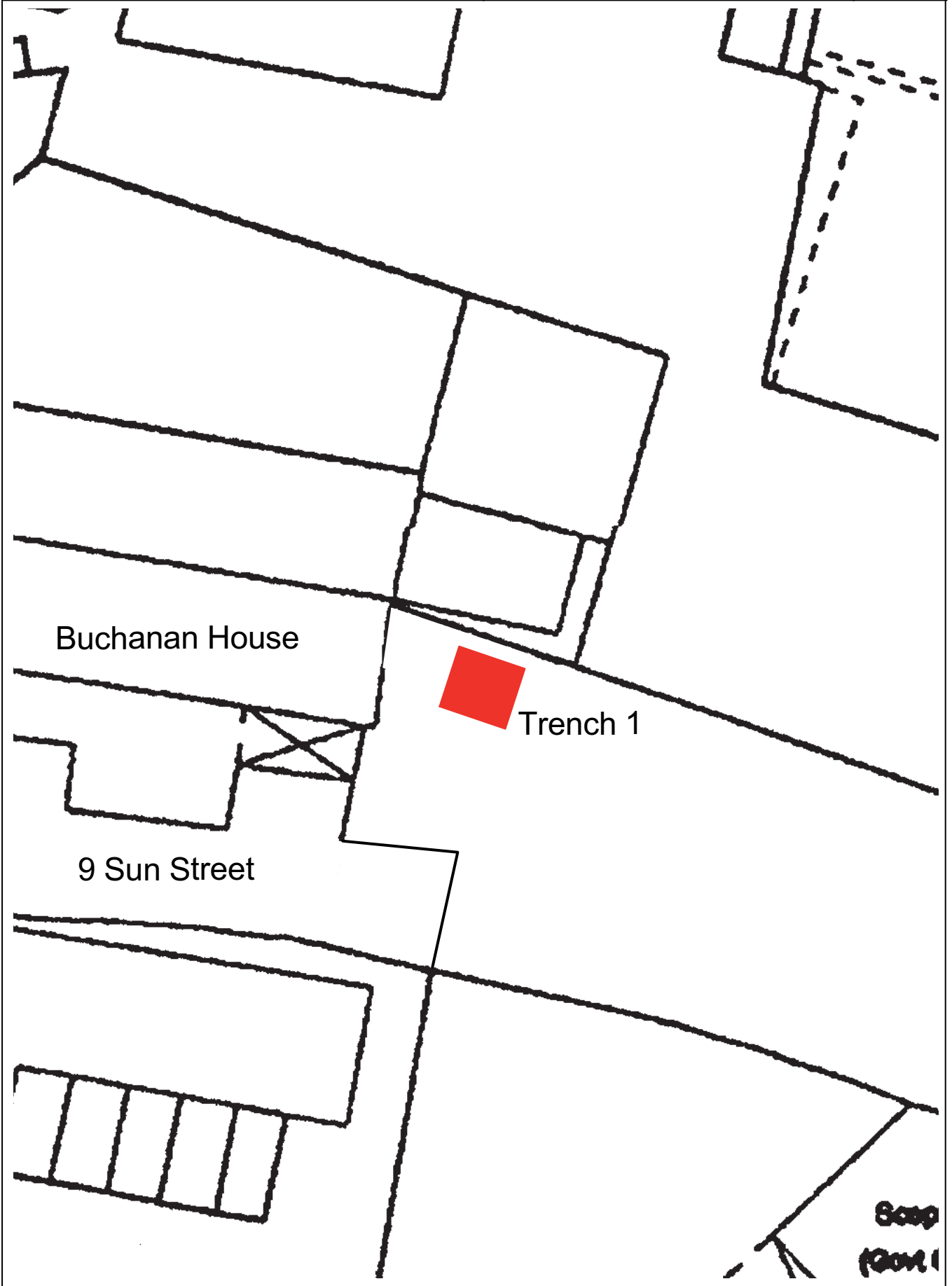


Site Location

Scale 1:750

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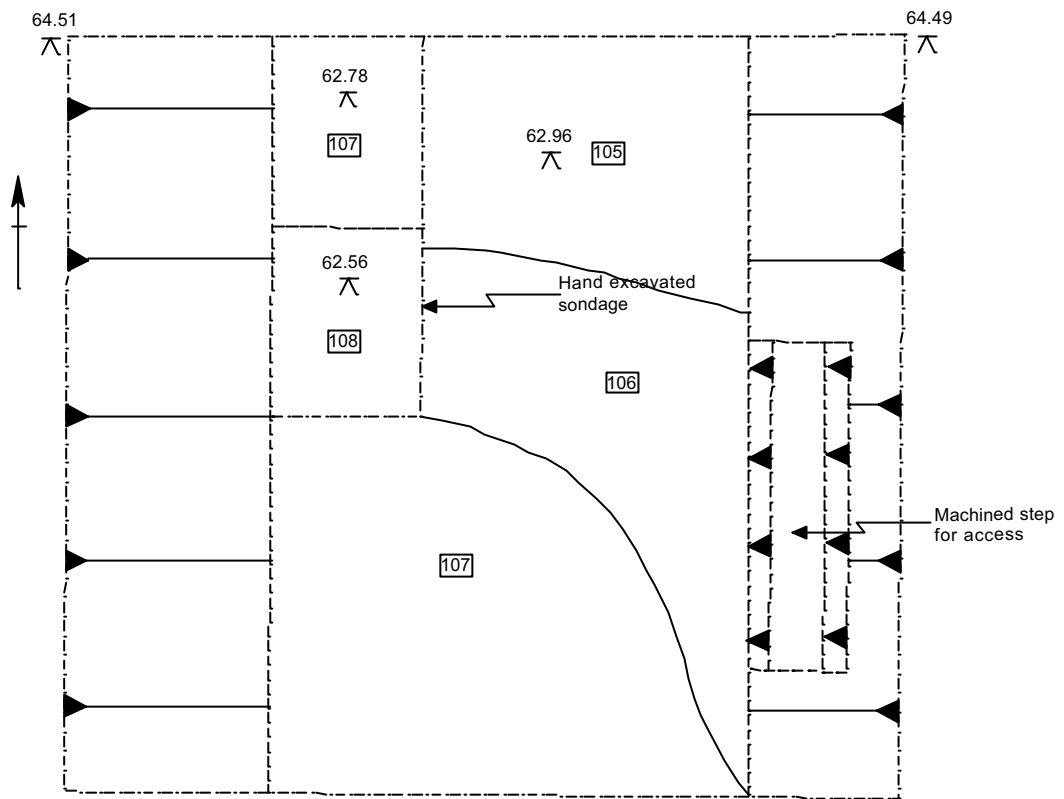
Figure 1



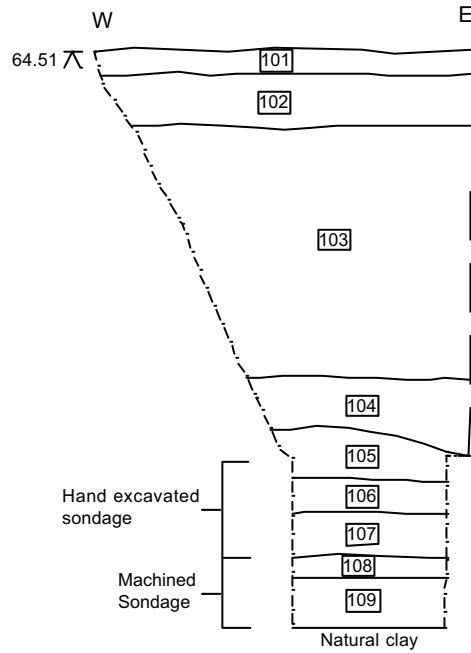
Trench Location

Scale 1:250

Plan of Trench



South facing section, NW corner of trench



Trench plan and section

Scale 1:30

Figure 3