

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AND
RECORDING AT STOKENHAM HOUSE,
STOKENHAM,
DEVON**

by

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SUMMARY

Excavation and recording on land to the rear of Stokenham House, Stokenham (SX 80684278) exposed a number of archaeological features. Principal amongst these was a large curvilinear ditch containing pottery dating to the late 13th or 14th century. This ditch is likely to represent part of a large enclosure on, or near to, the site of Stokenham House.

The ditch cut through a sequence of smaller, earlier ditches, also of medieval date. A series of postholes, evenly-spaced and forming an alignment along the inner edge of the ditch, represent the only potential evidence for contemporary activity within the enclosure. Further ditches, all of probable medieval date were identified, but their relationship with the ditch could not be established.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared for Mr Simon Docherty and presents the results of archaeological excavation and recording undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) in June 2008 on land to the rear of Stokenham House, Stokenham, Devon (SX 80684278). The work was required by the local planning authority (South Hams District Council (SHDC)) as a condition of the grant of planning consent (ref: 53/0251/06/F) for the construction of a new dwelling. Preliminary archaeological investigations were carried out by the University of Exeter in 2006, involving a desk-based assessment, geophysical survey and trench evaluation. Features noted in these preliminary archaeological investigations are fully described in this report and the archive from this project includes work from these preliminary investigations.

2. PROJECT BRIEF

A brief for the project was supplied on behalf of SHDC by the Devon County Historic Environment Service (DCHES). The work was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared in response to the brief and approved by SHDC.

3. THE SITE (Figs 1,2)

The site lies within the historic core of Stokenham, and occupies a broadly rectangular area measuring approximately 620m² within the walled garden of the former rectory house. It is bordered to the west by a large boundary wall, and to the north and south by The Old Coach House and Stokenham House respectively. Just beyond the western extent of the site lies the A379. Stokenham House, the modern vicarage, is believed to occupy a medieval moated site. The proposal site lies just to the west of the village green, which has been the historic focus of the village and contains various earthworks.

The topography of the site slopes down from *c.*40m in the west to *c.*37.50m in the east. The underlying geology comprises Lower Devonian mudstones, slates and siltstone overlain by typical brown earths of the (541a) Milford Association (Soil Survey 1983).

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A number of archaeological projects have recently taken place within Stokenham. The majority of these were located within 'Manor Field' immediately to the east of the parish church, which is the site of Stokenham manor house, abandoned during the late 16th century. An initial evaluation identified a number of features and associated wall foundations of two medieval or early post-medieval buildings (Manning & Reed 2002). Subsequent excavation during 2005 (Williams & Turner) further clarified the form of the buildings identified in 2002. A series of pre-medieval ditches were also identified. The buildings probably relate to medieval domestic and agricultural activities that are contemporary with but external to the main manor house complex. During 2007 further excavation was undertaken within 'Manor Field' and components of Stokenham's medieval and Tudor manorial complex were identified (Williams 2007).

4.1 Desk-based work, geophysics and evaluation

The site of the proposed development was the subject of preliminary archaeological investigations in 2006, involving a desk-based-assessment, geophysical survey and trench evaluation. The features noted in the evaluation are fully described in this report.

The evaluation identified a large undated ditch located along the western edge of the site and a spread of post-medieval building debris to the north. The date and purpose of the ditch were unclear but it was suggested that it may have represented a prehistoric enclosure, an enclosure bounding part of a manorial complex beneath the present village green, or part of the medieval moated enclosure located immediately to the south of the site within the southern grounds of the Old Vicarage (now Stokenham House). This moated enclosure may have formed an Anglo-Saxon and Norman precursor to the medieval manor identified in 'Manor Field'. An enclosure of Saxon date would not be unexpected given that Stokenham church is likely to have been the Anglo-Saxon minster church of Coleridge hundred, founded sometime between the 7th and 10th centuries (Thorn & Thorn 1985).

5. EXCAVATION: METHOD

Overlying topsoil was removed from the site by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket, under direct archaeological control. Excavation continued to the either the top of archaeological deposits or the surface of natural subsoil (whichever was higher). Archaeological features and deposits were then cleaned by hand, investigated and recorded. Spoil was also examined for the recovery of artefacts.

The standard EA recording procedure was employed. Stratigraphic information was recorded on *pro-forma* single context record sheets, a drawn record was compiled at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate and a photographic record was made in black and white print and colour transparency.

6. EXCAVATION: RESULTS (Figs. 3-5)

Natural subsoil in the form of weathered mudstone (502) was exposed across the site at a depth of approximately 0.60m. The general sequence of overlying deposits comprised a 0.30m thick layer of brown clayey silt subsoil (501), which produced five sherds of 13th- to late 15th-century pottery, overlain by topsoil (500). Five sherds of pottery dating to the 18th or 19th century were recovered from the topsoil, together with a single sherd of residual medieval pottery.

A number of archaeological features were exposed. All cut from the level of natural subsoil and were sealed by layer 501.

6.1 Inter-cutting ditches 524, 520, 534

These features have been grouped together for discussion as they comprise the only features exposed with clear stratigraphic inter-relationships.

The earliest in the sequence was ditch 524. This was orientated broadly NE-SW and measured 0.65m wide with gently sloping sides and a rounded base. Only the western terminal of the ditch survived; it had been cut through by ditch 520 beyond which point it could not be traced as it lay beneath the formation level for the new build. It contained a single fill (523), very similar to the surrounding natural subsoil, from which were recovered two sherds of pottery dating from the 11th to the late 14th century.

Ditch 520 cut through the western terminal of ditch 524 on a NW-SE alignment. It was traced for a distance of 4m and measured 0.70m wide and 0.20m deep, with a wide, flattish base. To the NW, its terminal had been removed by later features (518, 534) and to the SE it continued beneath formation level for the new build. It contained a single, clean clayey silt fill (519) which was devoid of finds.

Ditch 534 cut through the eastern terminal of ditch 520. It was curvilinear in plan and was orientated broadly E-W but curved markedly to the NW. It was traced over a distance of 4.5m and had fairly gently sloping sides and a flat open base. To the west it had been cut through by a later ditch (503, below) and to the east it continued beneath formation level for the new build. It contained a single, clean clayey silt (535) which produced no finds.

The southern side of ditch 534 was cut through by a pit (518; see 6.4 below), which also removed the terminal of ditch 520.

6.2 Ditch 503

A large ditch (503) was located along the western part of the site. It was aligned broadly N-S and was traced over a distance of 24m. The ditch measured approximately 2.5m wide and is the principal feature exposed by the excavations. It is also the major ditch exposed during the University of Exeter's 2006 evaluation (trench 2, context 204).

The ditch measured 1.20m deep, with steeply sloping sides (the east side slightly steeper than the west) and was infilled by a single homogeneous brown silty clay deposit (504) containing frequent mudstone flecks and occasional clusters of water-worn gravel. A number of sherds of late 13th- or 14th-century pottery were recovered from the upper part of the fill. Despite close examination no evidence could be found for weathering of the ditch sides or silting within the trench while open. The ditch was broadly straight over most of its exposed length, but towards the northern limit of its exposure, it turned markedly towards the northeast, suggesting that the feature represented part of the west side of a substantial enclosure ditch. The ditch cut through, and therefore post-dated, ditch 534, the last in the sequence of ditches described above.

6.3 Ditches 507, 509, 522, 538

These ditches have been grouped together for ease of discussion on the basis that they represent those features for which there are no demonstrated stratigraphic relationships; either between themselves, or with other excavated features.

Features 507 and 522 lay perpendicular to boundary ditch 503, on its eastern (inner) side. They were broadly parallel with each other, set 11m apart on a E-W alignment. Ditch 507 measured 0.76m wide and was traced for a distance of 7m; extending beyond the excavated area to the east. It had steep sides with an open, concave base and contained a single, clean, clayey-silt based fill (508) which produced no finds.

Ditch 538 was exposed 3m to the north, continuing the line of 507, and separated from it by enclosure ditch 503. Its profile and fill were very similar to those of 507 and it is likely to represent a continuation of it. A single sherd of pottery with a production range of 11th - late 14th century was recovered from its fill.

Ditch 522 was located to the north of 507. It was traced over a distance of 5m, continuing beneath formation level to the east. It measured approximately 0.85m wide by 0.34m deep with a profile that varied from V-shaped to gently sloping sides and a flat, open base. The ditch contained a single, clean clayey silt-based fill (521) from which was recovered a single sherd of pottery with a production date range of 11th - late 14th century.

The relationship between the large enclosure ditch 503, and ditches 507/538 and 522 could not be determined as no distinction could be made between the fills, which were homogenous and very clean. It is highly unlikely that they were contemporary.

Feature 509 was a shallow, steep-sided and concave-based ditch located at the southern end of the excavations, south of ditch 507. Aligned NE-SW it was traced over a distance of 3m, extending beyond the excavated area to the east and west. It measured 0.50m wide and 0.28m deep and contained a single fill (510) consisting of clayey silt, the lower levels of which contained a high density of large quartzite fragments. No finds were recovered.

6.4 Postholes 505, 511, 513, 516, pit 518.

These features have no stratigraphic relationships either between themselves, or with other excavated features (with the exception of 518), but are likely to be contemporaneous on the basis that they form an evenly spaced alignment.

All of the postholes were shallow, generally round in plan, with gently sloping sides and rounded bases measuring between 0.22m and 0.50m in diameter and 0.06m-0.12m deep. Each contained only one fill with a single sherd of 11th - late 14th century pottery recovered from posthole 505 (fill 506). The marked shallowness of 513 and 516 appear to reflect a high degree of truncation. Postholes 505, 511 and 513 were equally spaced and formed a straight alignment strongly suggesting that they were associated, perhaps representing a fence line, the alignment of which places it 1-2m from the inner edge of the ditch.

Pit 518 was oval in plan, measuring 1.80m long by 1.10m wide. It was very shallow at 0.12m deep and contained a single clean, clayey silt based fill (517) which produced no finds. It lay to the north of the post hole group, on the same alignment and spacing. Although a much larger feature, it may well represent a continuation of a fence line. There is some stratigraphic evidence to support this is, in that the pit cut through a series of earlier ditches, as did ditch 504.

Posthole 506 may also be associated, as it appeared to be set on the same spacing, perpendicular to the putative fence line.

6.5 Wall 540

The stone-built remains of wall foundations (540) were located 5m from the north end of the site. Of random-coursed mudstone construction bonded with a lime cement mortar, they measured 2.20m long by 0.55m wide and were set within a foundation trench on a broad E-W alignment. The foundations stood to a maximum height of 0.30m but are likely to have continued eastwards below the formation level of the new build; the edge of the wall indicated by the visible edge of its construction trench (542). The area between the wall and the northern limit of the site was covered with a spread of lime-mortared building rubble (541) derived from the demolition of the wall (or the structure of which it formed part). The position and alignment of the wall is consistent with a building shown on current OS mapping, understood to be a greenhouse.

7. THE FINDS *by Graham Langman*

The assemblage comprises a small quantity of lithics, and pottery from the medieval and post-medieval periods. The quantities are summarised in table 1 below.

Context	Date	Medieval pottery		Post-medieval pottery		Bone-faunal		Lithics	
		Qty	Weight	Qty	Weight	Qty	Weight	Qty	Weight
500	18th / 19th C	1	2	5	144	1	20		
501	13th -late 15th C	5	32						
504	late 13th or 14th C	15	164						
506	11th to late 14th C	1	8						
521	11th to late 14th C	1	4						
523	11th to late 14th C	2	2						
539	11th to late 14th C	1	2						
unstrat		25	180					3	42
Totals		51	394	5	144	1	20	3	42

Table 1: Quantification of finds by context and category. Weights in grams.

The Pottery

Medieval

In total there are 51 sherds representing 22 vessels and weighing 394 grams. They were recovered from six stratified contexts, one unstratified context and as residual material within the topsoil (context 500). The majority (41) are sherds from South Somerset chert-tempered coarseware cooking pots. There are no Saxo-Norman diagnostic dating traits, such as combed decoration present on any of the sherds nor any signs of handles or spouts characteristic of the more elaborate early forms. Consequently it is difficult to determine a precise date for this material. All that can be said is that this pottery falls within the general production date range of the 11th century to the late 14th century.

The other medieval fabric present is a distinctive micaceous coarseware from South Devon. This type of ware was produced from the early 13th to the late 15th century, although the presence of hand-made green-glazed jug sherds in context 504 is more characteristic of the late 13th or 14th century. There is also a single residual sherd of a sandy ware green-glazed jug from context 500 which is typically 13th or 14th century.

Post-medieval

There are only five post-medieval sherds, weighing 144 grams, all recovered from topsoil (500). The only recognisable forms are bowls, of which there are three. They are 18th or 19th century in date and are of South West origin possibly South Somerset products.

Other finds

These comprise a single animal bone from context 500, and three unstratified lithic flints (waste flakes) recovered from the excavated spoil.

8. DISCUSSION

The investigations have revealed a number of features, principal amongst which is the major ditch 503. This had previously been exposed during the course of the University of Exeter's 2006 evaluation, but was undated. The current investigations have resulted in the recovery of 15 sherds of pottery from the upper part of its fill, indicating that it was infilled no earlier than the late 13th or 14th century. Sufficient of the feature was exposed to indicate its probable function as being an enclosure ditch. The character of the fill is of interest; very clean and homogenous with no evidence for weathering of the ditch sides, the accumulation of silting within its base, or stabilisation horizons (i.e. soil development) within it. This would point to regular maintenance, i.e. cleaning out of the ditch throughout its life, and a deliberate, single episode of infilling rather than a situation whereby the ditch was abandoned and allowed to silt up.

There is no demonstrable evidence to suggest that the ditch had functioned with a bank. If a bank had been present, it would be expected on the east (i.e. inner) side of the ditch. The identification in this area of a possible fence line represented by the series of postholes, and in particular its alignment, which appears to respect that of the ditch provides some degree of evidence, albeit tenuous, against the existence of a bank. The postholes also represent the only features identified that may have been contemporary with the enclosure, although this relationship is again, tenuous.

Although the majority of features exposed appear to lie within the interior of the putative enclosure, with the possible exception of the postholes none of these are likely to be contemporary with it. It has been demonstrated that the enclosure post-dates the group of inter-cutting ditches within the northern half of the site. As discussed, the stratigraphic evidence for the relationship of the enclosure with the remaining ditches (507, 509, 522, 538) is unclear. On balance, they are also probably likely to be earlier. This would be consistent both with the demonstrated relationship between the enclosure and the inter-cutting features and with the (very limited) dating evidence; all features (including those from the inter-cutting ditches) containing pottery with a date range of 11th -late 14th century as opposed to the late 13th - 14th century date for the infilling of the enclosure ditch.

9. CONCLUSIONS

The excavations have succeeded in clarifying the form and function of the major ditch exposed during the 2006 evaluation and have established that it represents part of the western circuit of a potentially major medieval enclosure. No evidence for internal occupation survives apart from a possible timber structure, which may represent a fence or similar construction. The remaining features, predominantly a series of drainage ditches, are all likely to be earlier. A known medieval moated site to the immediate south provides a likely context for the enclosure. It is also perhaps significant that the line of the ditch appears to mirror that of a field boundary shown on the 1842 Stokenham Parish Tithe map. It may be the case that this field boundary, which extends to the south of Stokenham House represents a fossilisation, in part, of the western element of the medieval enclosure.

10. PROJECT ARCHIVE AND 'OASIS' REPORT

A fully integrated project archive has been compiled and will be deposited at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, under museum accession number AR.2008.29. The project archive

includes the archive of the 2006 University of Exeter desk-based work, geophysics and evaluation.

A report of the excavations (including a pdf version of this document) has been submitted to the on-line database OASIS (On-line Access to the Index of archaeological investigationS), under OASIS ID: exeterar1-52487

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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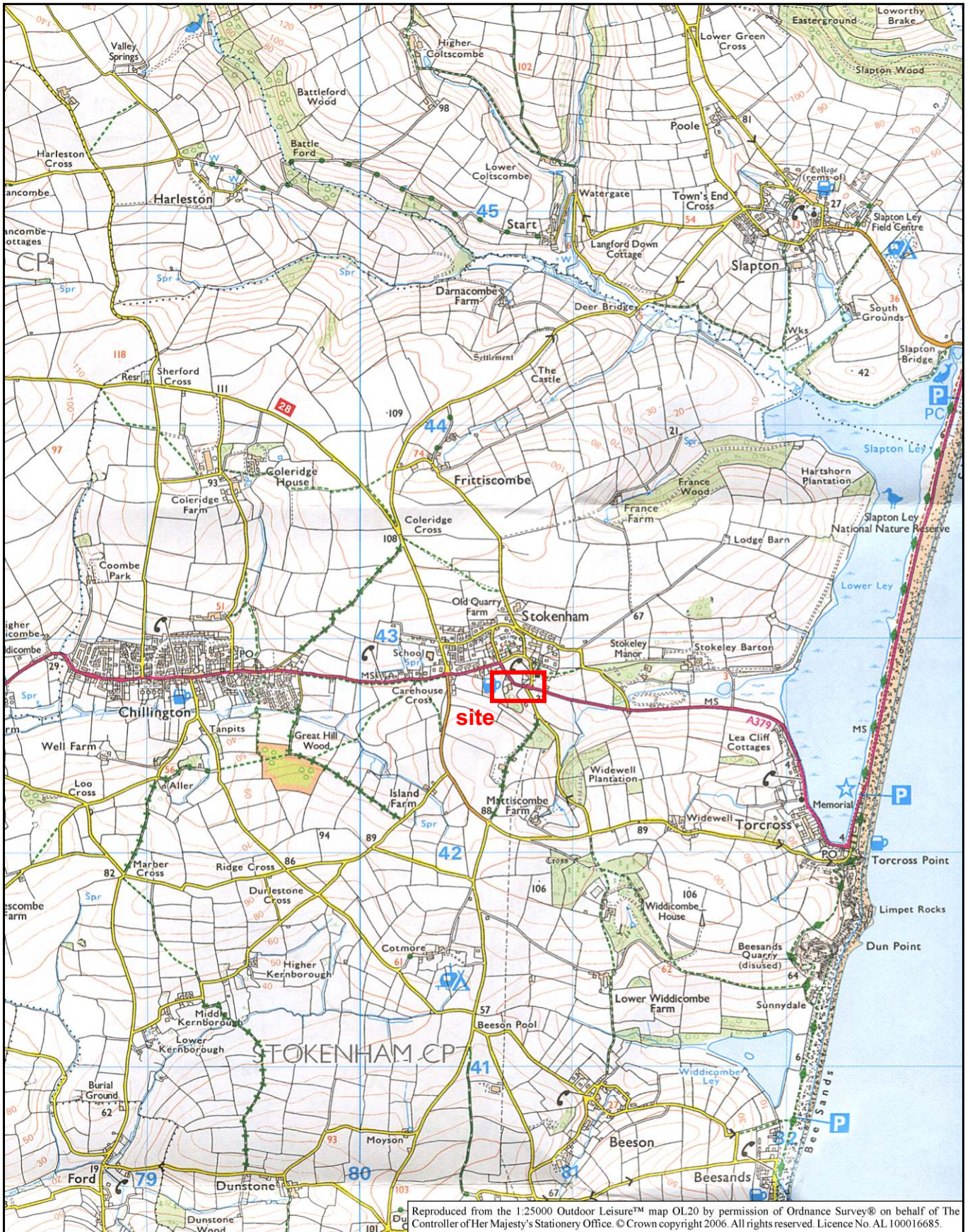


Fig. 1 Location of site.

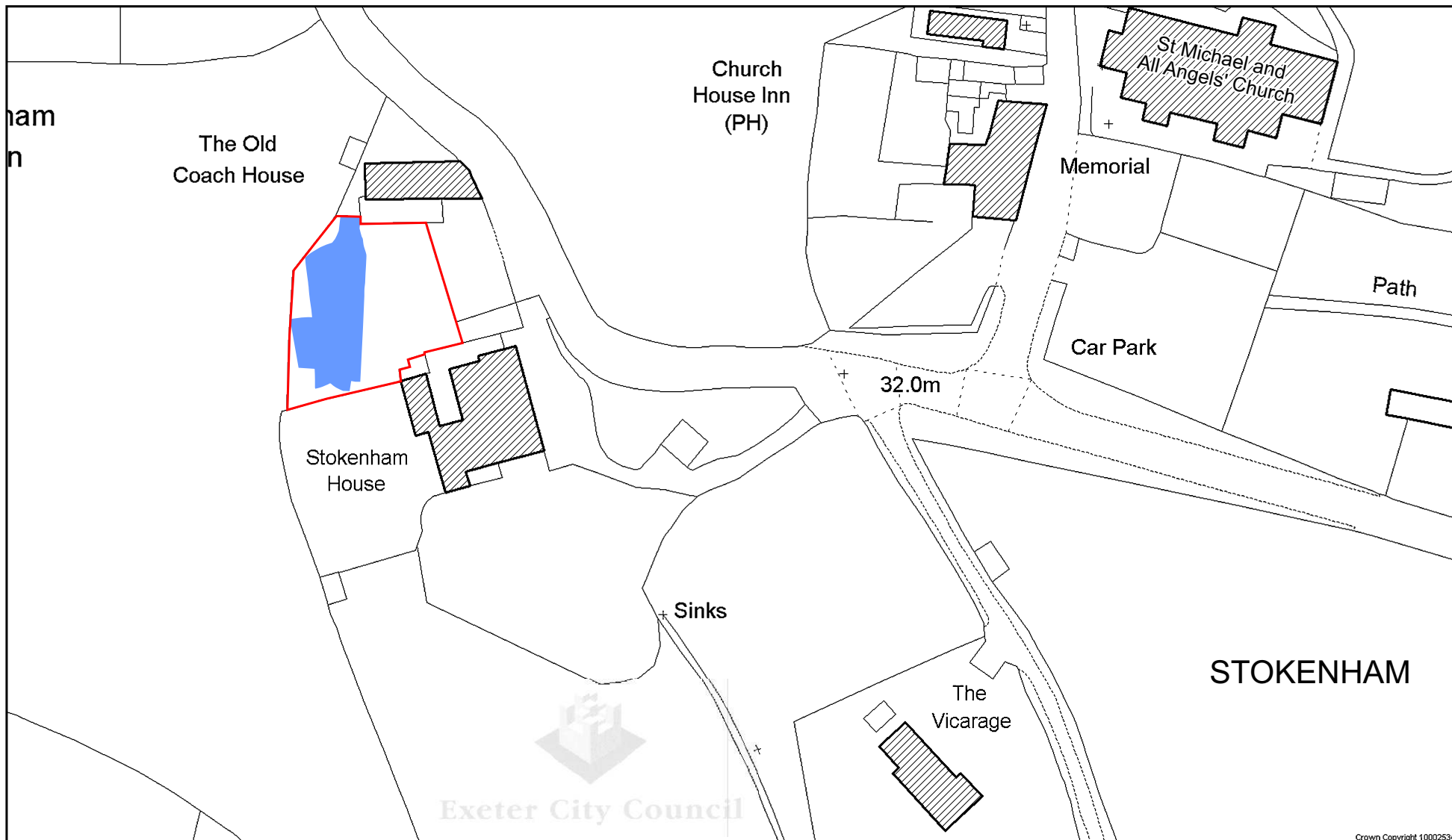


Fig. 2 Plan showing the site boundary (red) and the excavated area (blue).

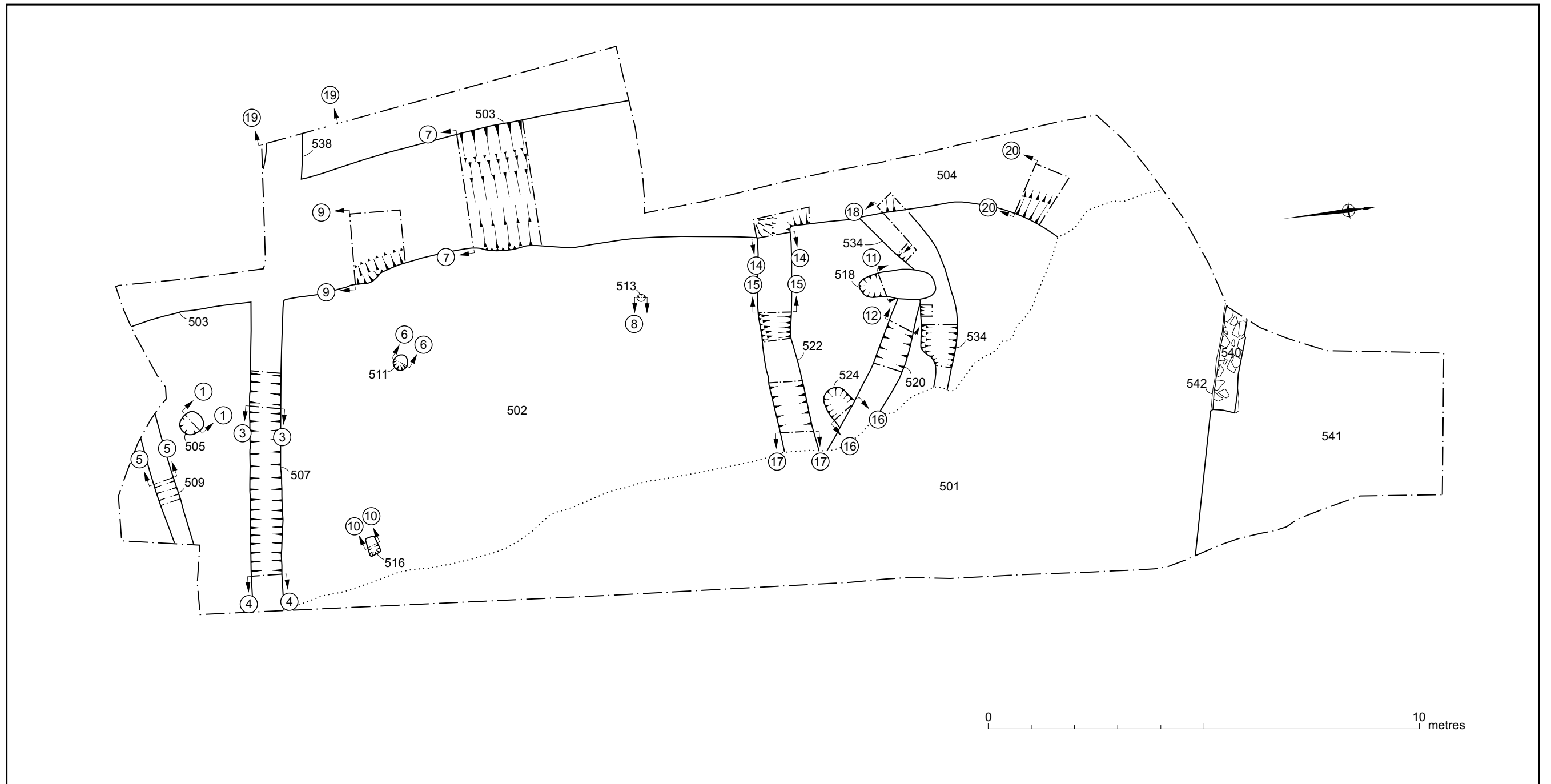


Fig. 3 Plan of excavated features.

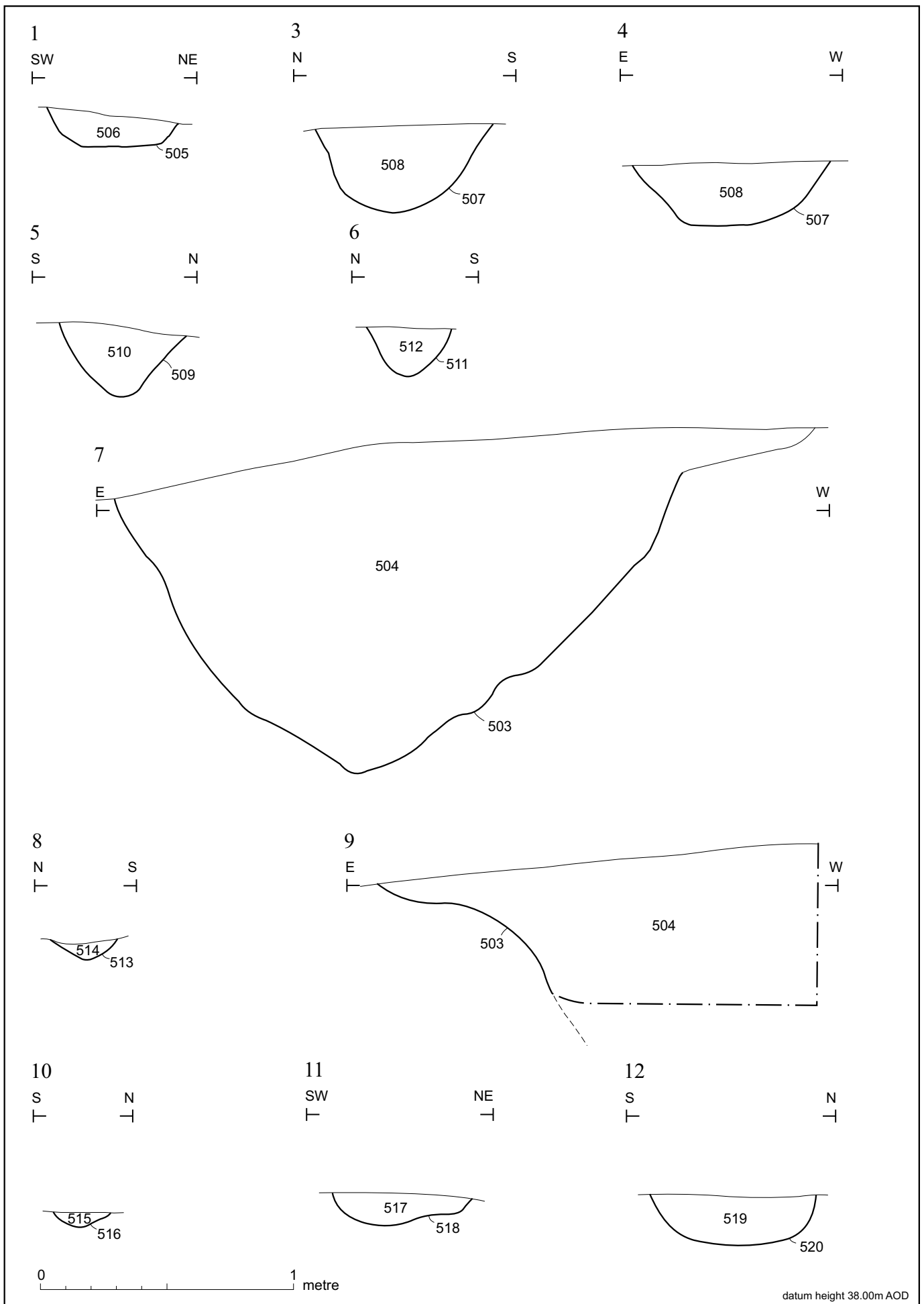


Fig. 4 Sections.

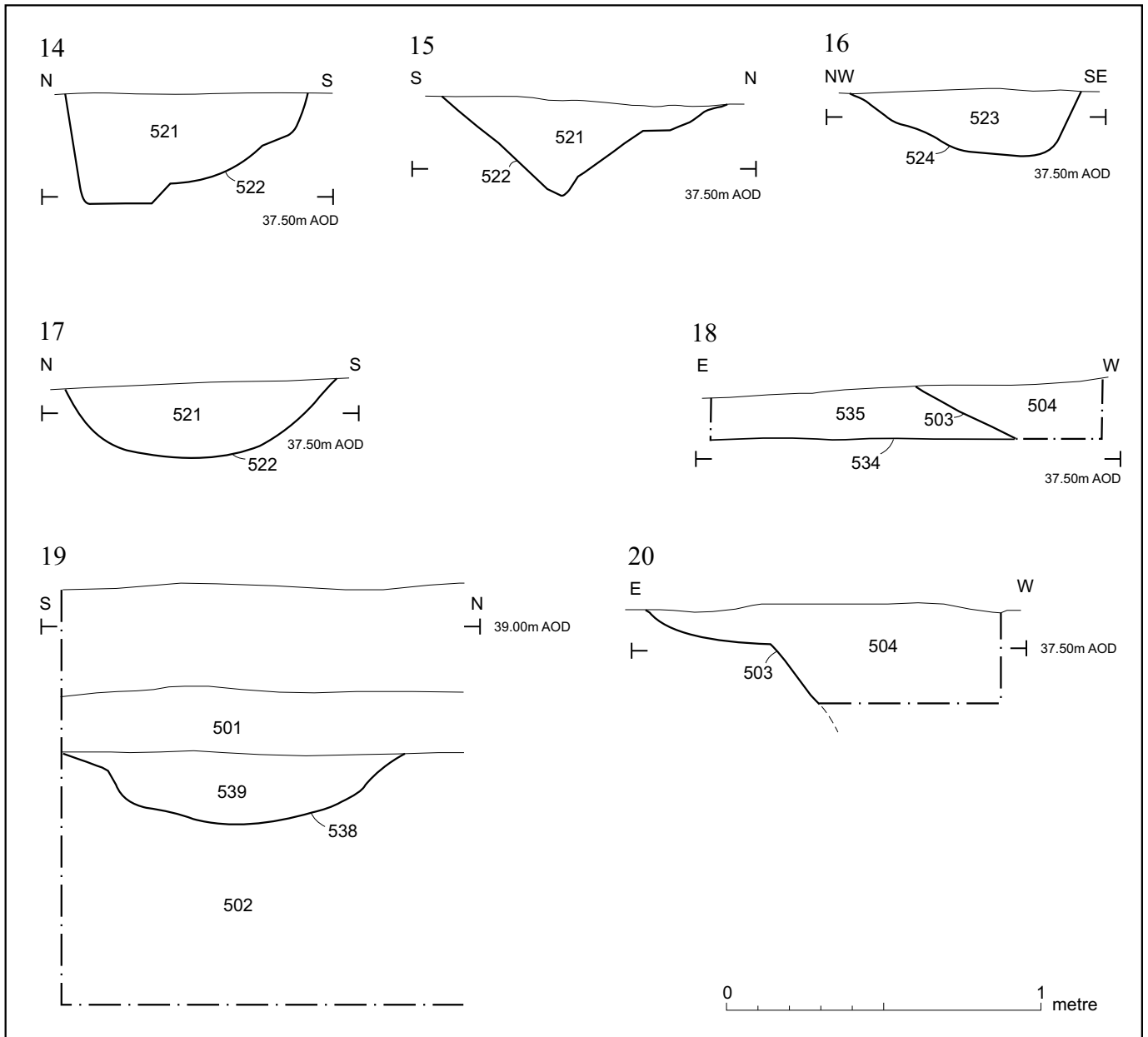


Fig. 5 Sections.

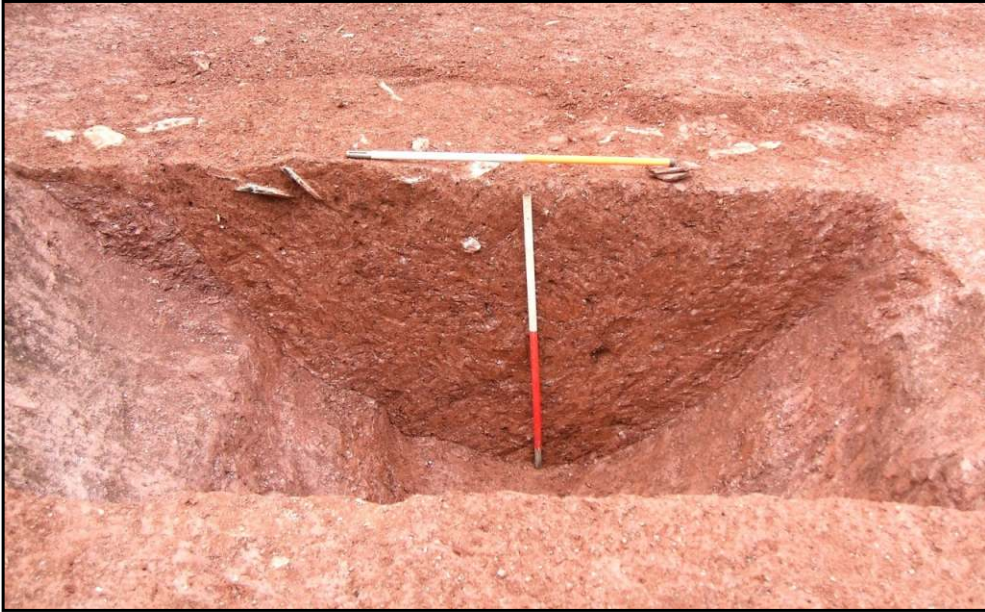


Plate 1 South facing section of ditch 503. 1m scales.

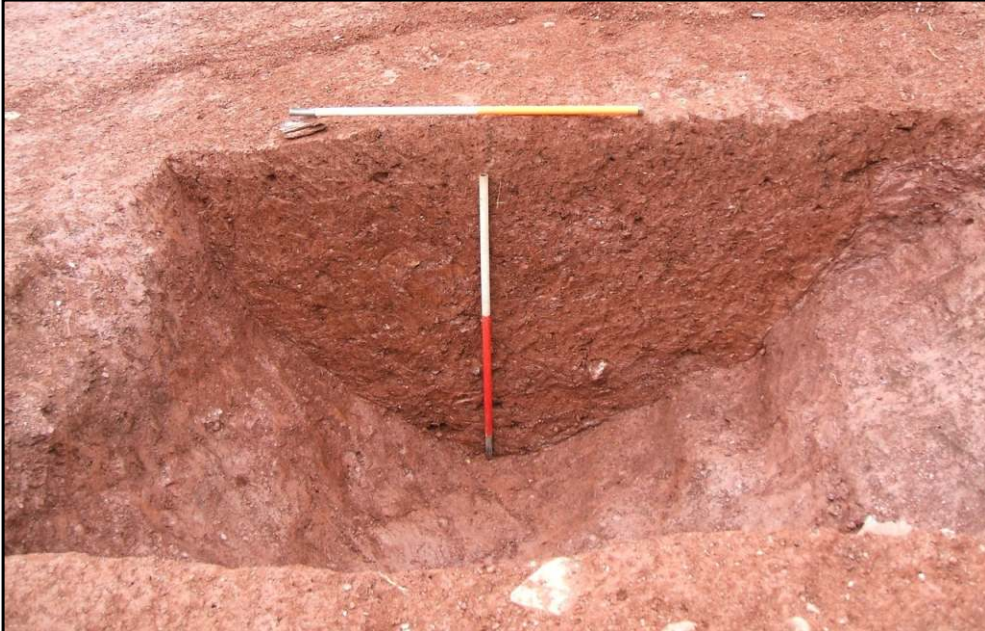


Plate 2 North facing section of ditch 503. 1m scales.



Plate 3 Ditch 507 (upstanding baulk in foreground), looking east. 1m scales.



Plate 4 Wall 540, looking west. 1m and 0.25m scales.