

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
AT HACCOMBE HOUSE ESTATE, NEWTON ABBOT, DEVON**

by

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with contributions by  
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**Exeter Archaeology**

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*A watching brief was undertaken by Exeter Archaeology between June and July 2007 during the construction of a new water main at Haccombe Estate. Archaeological monitoring of the pipeline showed no significant evidence of any archaeological deposits or features, other than two cobbled Medieval/Post-medieval surfaces. Several unstratified sherds of Medieval and post medieval pottery were recovered.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report details the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken in advance of a new water main in the grounds of Haccombe Estate, Newton Abbot (Fig. 1). The work was undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) between the 27<sup>th</sup> June and the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2007 after Balfour Beatty commissioned the project on behalf of South West Water (SWW).

### 1.1 The site

The new pipeline extends over a distance of c.430m from Home Farm (SX 89363 70348) to St Blaise's Church (SX 89789 70211). It starts in the northern field and crosses over the drive into the southern field after approx 28m. The pipe then continues southeast, running parallel with the driveway leading up to Haccombe House (Fig. 2). Construction work will consist of topsoil removal within a 2m working width, which will be followed by the excavation of the pipe trench along the length of the route.

### 1.2 The geology

The route of the pipe lies within a small valley, which is flanked either side by large rolling hills. The Wrington Series, a sub-group of the Credition Soil Association, dominates the geology of the area, which consists of well drained reddish loamy soils over Permian and Carboniferous breccia (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

### 1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

Early cartographic evidence refers to Haccombe Estate as the village of Hackcombe. A copy of an early 17<sup>th</sup> century map shows over thirty medieval dwellings between St Blaise's Church and what is now known as the Old Rectory (SX 89306 70278). The map also details a number of leats, irrigation channels, mill pools and fishponds.

The estate belonged to the Haccombess in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was later passed to the Courtenays, and then in the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century by marriage to the Carews. The present Haccombe House is a plain late Georgian mansion (c.1805) built on the site of a medieval hall (Hoskins 1964: 401-402). The medieval building is mentioned in the doomsday as the estate of hacoma and was pulled down in 1650 (Devon Historic Environment Record, PNR 9243). According to Gray at some point after 1793 the village as shown on the early map, was demolished and the approaching lanes up to Haccombe House were repositioned in order to improve the view and enhance the privacy (1995:115).

The church attached to the house is mostly a 13<sup>th</sup> century building of red sandstone rubble and has a fine collection of medieval floor tiles and effigies. A medieval

secular college for six priests lead by an arch-priest was also funded in 1335. It is marked on the early 17<sup>th</sup> century map as Parsonage house. It died out by 1545 and the building now forms part of the Old Rectory.

## 2. AIMS

The principal aim of the watching brief was to monitor all topsoil stripping and trenching works and to ensure the adequate investigation and recording of any significant archaeological features or deposits exposed.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The pipeline crosses through two fields either side of the driveway. Constant monitoring was required for both topsoil stripping and pipe trenching and included the checking of all spoil heaps for finds recovery. All stripping was carried out using a toothless 0.5m wide grading bucket to create a working corridor 2m in width. The pipe trench measured approximately 0.6m wide, and was excavated to varying depths of 0.8-1.1m.

The standard EA recording system was employed. Information was recorded on pro forma watching brief record sheets and a photographic record was made using digital and black-and-white prints.

## 4. RESULTS

Both plots were stripped of dark reddish brown sandy silt topsoil, which ranged in thickness from 0.15-0.20m (Plate 1). The topsoil deposit overlay a mid to dark reddish brown sandy silt deposit which contained patches of pea-sized gravel. Inspection of the pipe trench revealed this material to be a build up of colluvial deposits.

There appears to be a number of different phases in the build up of colluvium. In places a lens of buried topsoil measuring 0.2m thick and at a depth of 0.6m, was visible sandwiched between the hill wash (Plate 2). Patchy lenses of demolition material measuring between 0.3-0.45m thick and at a depth of 0.3m, could also be seen through out the length of the trench (Plate 3). This contained large amounts of limestone mortar, moderate amounts of sub-rounded flint nodules, and frequent large red sandstone conglomerate boulders, very similar to the building blocks in the church. This rubble could indicate the remains of the medieval dwellings, which originally stood in the grounds leading up to Haccombe House. However, although no definite structures or patterns were discernable it is most likely the material comes from these cottages, and represents backfilling and levelling processes rather than the remains of building foundations.

The presence of a well defined stone surface was observed within a trail hole to the north of the pipe trench (Figure 3a & b and Plate 2). The true extent of the surface was not fully exposed, but it was visible for 1.6m, and measured 0.62m in width and was 1.8m deep. The cobbles were randomly placed and set in a red clay silt matrix with patches of limestone mortar.

Another cobbled surface (Figure 3c and Plate 4) was exposed within the very base of the southeastern part of the trench. This was visible for 2m. The north western edge of this surface was abutted by a brick and slate lined drain, which measured 0.2m wide and run along an east west alignment.

The natural subsoil was only exposed in the trial trench, this was a dark red sandy silt, very similar to the colluvial deposits.

## 5. THE FINDS

Several unstratified sherds of Prehistoric, Medieval and post-Medieval pottery were recovered from the topsoil and spoil heaps. Closer inspection within these areas, however, showed no evidence for any associated archaeological features or deposits. Two small flint thumb scrappers of probable Early Bronze Age origin were also recovered from the spoil heaps. Numerous finds of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> date were found along the length of the pipe route, but were discarded on site

## 6. CONCLUSION

Monitoring of groundworks undertaken as part of the Haccombe Estate water mains upgrade did not disturb any significant archaeological features or deposits within the working corridor of the pipe route. This was based on observations from the spoil heaps, exposed natural subsoil and the pipe trench sections. The two surfaces observed could represent remains of the medieval dwellings but in the absence of any datable evidence this cannot be claimed with any great certainty. The presence of several unstratified medieval and post-medieval pottery sherds along the route of the pipeline was expected but tells us little about the nature of the site.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The project was commissioned and funded by South West Water Limited and J.Valentin of Exeter Archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by R.I. Sims and K. Tyler, the processing of finds was undertaken by J. Wheeler.

## SOURCES CONSULTED

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Hoskins, W.G. 1964. *A New Survey of England: Devon*, Collins.

Soil Survey of England and Wales. 1983. *Legend for the 1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales*.

## APPENDIX 1: FINDS LISTING

by Jennifer Durrant

### Glass

| <i>context</i>        | <i>qty</i> | <i>comments</i>          |
|-----------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| Colluvia<br>l deposit | 1          | Onion bottle c.1690-1710 |

### Lithics

| <i>context</i>        | <i>qty</i> | <i>comments</i>  |
|-----------------------|------------|--|
| Colluvia<br>l deposit | 5          | Two flint thumbnail<br>scrapers<br>Three flint flakes. |

### Pottery & Dating Evidence

| <i>context</i>       | <i>dating<br/>evidence</i>          | <i>sherds</i> | <i>vessel<br/>s</i> |  |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|--|
| Colluvial<br>deposit | Prehist<br>(?BA)                    | 2             | 1                   |  |
|                      | Cp (SN,<br>10-12C)                  | 6             | 1                   |  |
|                      | Crm w<br>(discarde<br>d)            | 1             | 1                   |  |
|                      | Unc cw<br>?ND cal<br>int gg<br>(PM) | 2             | 1                   |  |
|                      | ND/SS<br>cw (PM)                    | 12            | 8                   |  |
|                      | ND cal?<br>bwl rim<br>(PM)          | 1             | 1                   |  |
|                      | Unc cw<br>(discarde<br>d, 19C)      | 1             | 1                   |  |
|                      |                                     |               |                     |  |
|                      |                                     |               |                     |  |
|                      |                                     |               |                     |  |



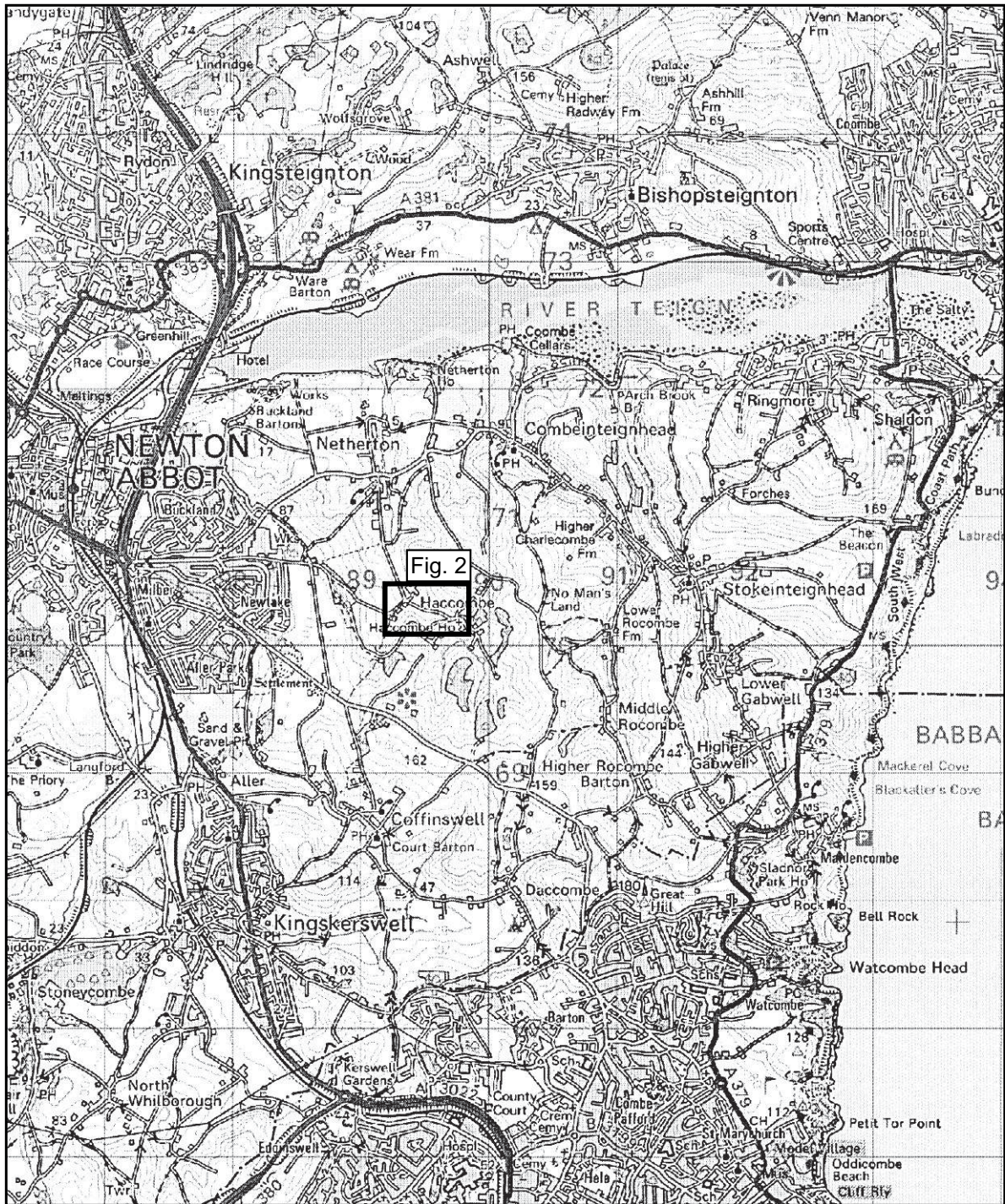


Fig. 1 Location of site. Scale 1:50,000. Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. Exeter City Council 100025345.



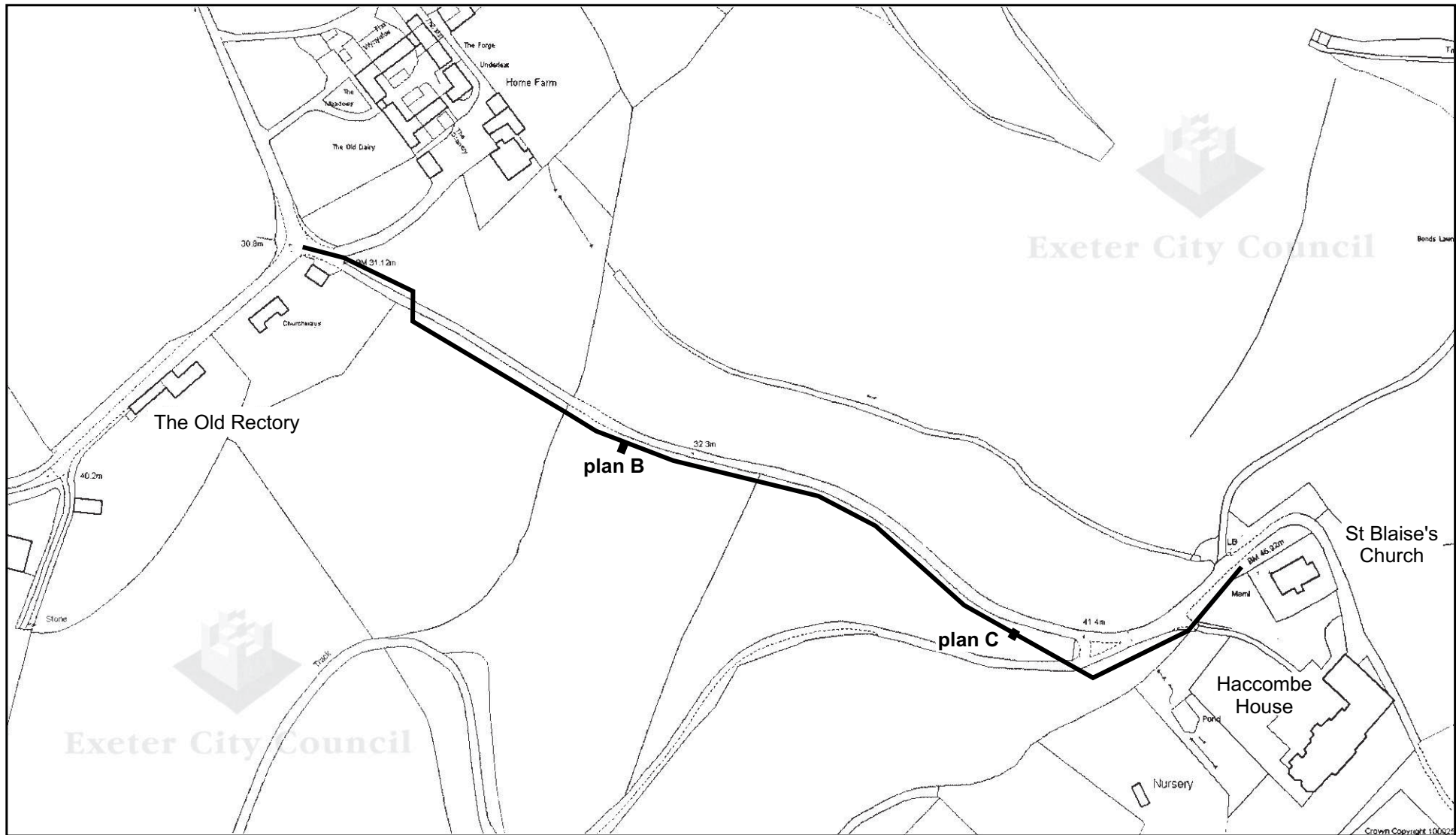


Fig. 2 Pipeline route and location of observations. Scale 1:2,500. Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. Exeter City Council 100025345.



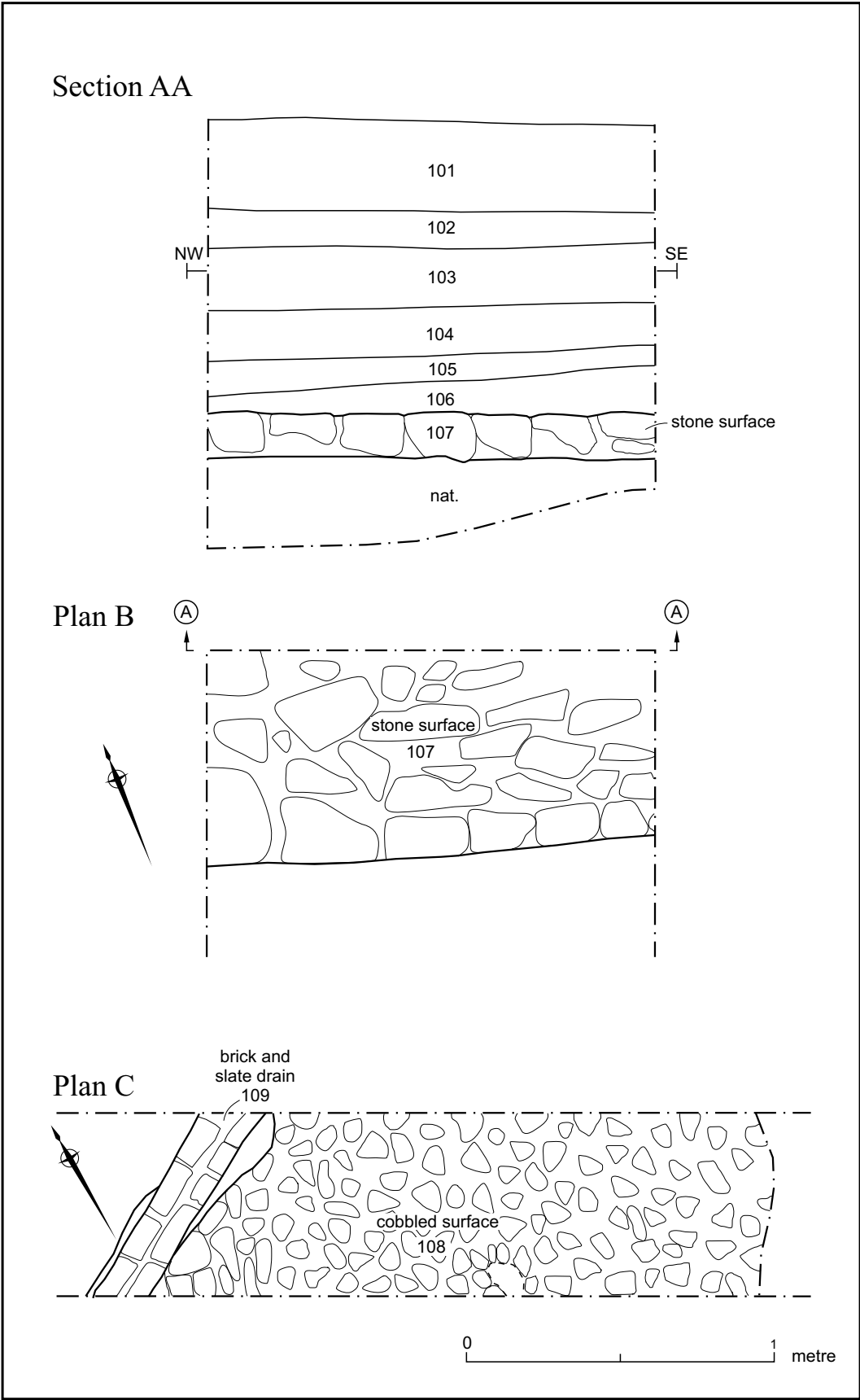


Fig. 3 Section AA and plans B and C. Scale 1:20.



Plate 1 Pipeline route after turf removal. View to south-east, showing Haccombe House in background.



Plate 2 Stone surface [107] within section AA. View to north-east.



Plate 3 Cobbled surface [108] with brick and slate drain [109] to rear. View to north-west.