

**New Sunday School, St Mary's Church,
White Waltham, Maidenhead, Berkshire**

An Archaeological Evaluation

by Simon Cass

Site Code SMW06/28

(SU8549 7749)

**New Sunday School, St Mary's Church,
White Waltham, Maidenhead, Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for White Waltham and Shottesbrook Parochial Church Council**

by Simon Cass

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code SMW06/28

March 2006

Summary

Site name: St Mary's Church, White Waltham, Maidenhead, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU8549 7749

Site activity: Field Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 20th – 22nd March 2006

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Simon Cass

Site code: SMW06/28

Area of site: 200 sq. m

Summary of results: Several features, most likely grave cuts, were located dug through a chalk surface and above accumulated grave earth and clay natural.

Monuments identified: Graves

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Reading Museum in due course.

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| Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 28.03.06 Steve Preston✓ 28.03.06 |
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Report 06/28

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at St Mary's Church, White Waltham, Berkshire (SU8549 7749) (Fig. 1). Planning permission (app no 01/37196) has been sought from Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to construct a new Sunday School building on the site and the Diocese of Oxford was petitioned for Faculty to conduct the works. The work was commissioned by Mr Anthony Hill, on behalf of White Waltham and Shottesbrook Parochial Church Council, c/o Homewood, Innings Lane, White Waltham, Maidenhead, SL6 3RU. As a consequence of the possibility of archaeological deposits on the site which may be damaged or destroyed by the proposed development, a field evaluation has been requested by the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser, in accordance with principles detailed in the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16, 1990), to inform both the planning process and the Diocesan Advisory Committee. A Faculty (6107) for the work issued by the Diocese of Oxford included a condition requiring archaeological investigation.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Simon Cass and Mary O'Donoghue between 20th and 22nd March 2006 and the site code is SMW06/28. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Reading Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on land to the south of St Mary's Church in White Waltham, within the boundary of the existing churchyard (Fig. 1). The proposed development is to lie adjacent to the south side of the churchyard (Fig 2). The natural geology, according to the British Geological Survey, is Reading Beds but with the junction with the upper chalk just to the north (BGS 1985). The clay of the Reading Beds was encountered during the evaluation. Borehole data suggest that it lies at approximately .8m below the current ground surface level. The site lies at a height of approximately 34m above Ordnance Datum but slopes down gently towards the north.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site is derived from its location within the historic centre of White Waltham which has medieval origins but is not documented in Domesday Book. There are Saxon land charters for the area, the earlier (c. AD940) refers to 'Waltham' which suggests St Lawrence, White Waltham and Shottesbrooke were not yet separate (although possibly it refers to Waltham in Essex) whereas a later one of AD1007 refers specifically to Waltham St Lawrence suggesting the separate parishes had been created by this time. The site lies within the graveyard of the church which has at least medieval origins (Ford 1987). The church contains some features of 11th- to 13th-century date. The parish church usually lies at the historic centre of the settlement and there is a possibility of encountering occupation deposits in such a location. There are also features relating to the nearby manor house in the vicinity, such as an extant icehouse (A. Hill, pers. comm.). Given the age of the church it is likely that there are unmarked graves within the area relating to the planning application.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. The work was to be carried out in a manner which would not compromise the integrity of archaeological features or deposits, which warrant preservation *in-situ*, or might better be excavated under conditions pertaining to full excavation.

The specific research aims of the project were;

To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on this site.

To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

To determine if human burials are present and if so their date and the depth at which they occur.

It was proposed to excavate one trench, 6m long and 1m wide, within the footprint of the planned building, on the higher ground which is to be terraced. The trench was to be dug by hand to minimize any damage to archaeological levels and potential unmarked shallow graves. If any features of archaeological, or potentially archaeological, interest were present, the trenches were to be cleaned using appropriate hand tools, and the features planned and sufficient of them excavated to satisfy the aims of the project. This was to take place in such a manner as not to jeopardize any remains that might be better investigated under the conditions of full excavation. Allowance was made for sampling any deposit of environmental potential.

Details of the trench are given in Appendix 1

Results

The single trench was dug in the location as shown on Figure 3. The turf was removed as was 0.1m of topsoil to reveal 0.15m of clay subsoil. This overlay a layer of chalk rubble (55) approximately 0.10–0.15m thick. Through this chalk layer, three coffin-shaped pits and at least one other feature were visible (Fig. 4). The coffin-shaped pits were cut through the clayey subsoil overlying the chalk rubble.

Two of the coffin-shaped pits (2 and 3) were excavated by hand in an attempt to determine their depth, state of preservation, confirm the presence of any articulated human remains and to search for any possible dating evidence such as coffin furniture or other artefactual evidence.

Feature 2 was aligned east–west and was exposed for 0.9m before it exited the trench beneath the baulk. Its maximum width was 0.75m. It was excavated to a depth of .2m and was found to be filled with a mottled yellow/grey clay (53) which had fragments of modern brick and tile within it (Fig. 5). Feature 3 was also aligned east–west, exposed to 0.74m in length and 0.62m in width and found to contain a very similar clay deposit to that in feature 2. Feature 3 was excavated to .35m where ingress of groundwater was encountered. Due to the possible risk of encountering partially preserved organic remains, the decision was taken to cease excavation at that depth rather than continue in an attempt to locate any remains interred.

During excavation of the coffin-shaped pits it was noted that there was a further layer (57) below the chalk rubble (55) and a sondage was dug to ascertain the nature of this layer. It was found to be approximately 0.3m thick consisting of silty clay with chalk and brick/tile fragments overlying the clay natural. This layer is interpreted as grave earth build-up in the churchyard as a whole, rather than as a specific dumping event in this particular area.

The area around coffin-shaped pit (1) was also excavated in order to clarify its shape and stratigraphic position; it is similar to the other two.

Three further deposits were noted (4, 5 and 56). Feature 4, although of a less defined shape is possibly a continuation of the row of coffin-shaped pits. Feature 5 was noted as a break in the chalk layer (55) but from its sinuous shape may be nothing more than root disturbance or an imperfect spread of the chalk deposit. Deposit 56 appeared to be a much more compact than layer 55, consisting of more, larger chalk blocks.

Two rows of badly damaged brick rubble were observed running approximately east-west around feature 3, though no other traces of a structure were noted (Figs 4 and 5).

Finds

No pottery evidence was recovered from within the trench, however, representative samples of the modern brick and tile fragments found within the fills of 1, 2 and 3 and layer 57 (below the chalk surface) were recovered. These have been temporarily retained.

Conclusion

Most of the cut features noted in this trench appear to be consistent with a row of graves near the edge of the current churchyard. No human bone, articulated or otherwise, was observed though it seems implausible that these are empty graves. The apparently shallow amount of grave earth accumulation and the lack of more truncation could, when set against the church's medieval origins, indicate either a lack of intensive use of this area of the churchyard for burial or a relatively recent expansion of its southern edge. The depth of the graves, the fact that no remains were encountered at shallow depth and the presence of relatively modern brick fragments within them indicates a relatively recent (post-Burial Act, 1852) date for them. It may be useful to note that extant headstones immediately to the east and west date from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

References

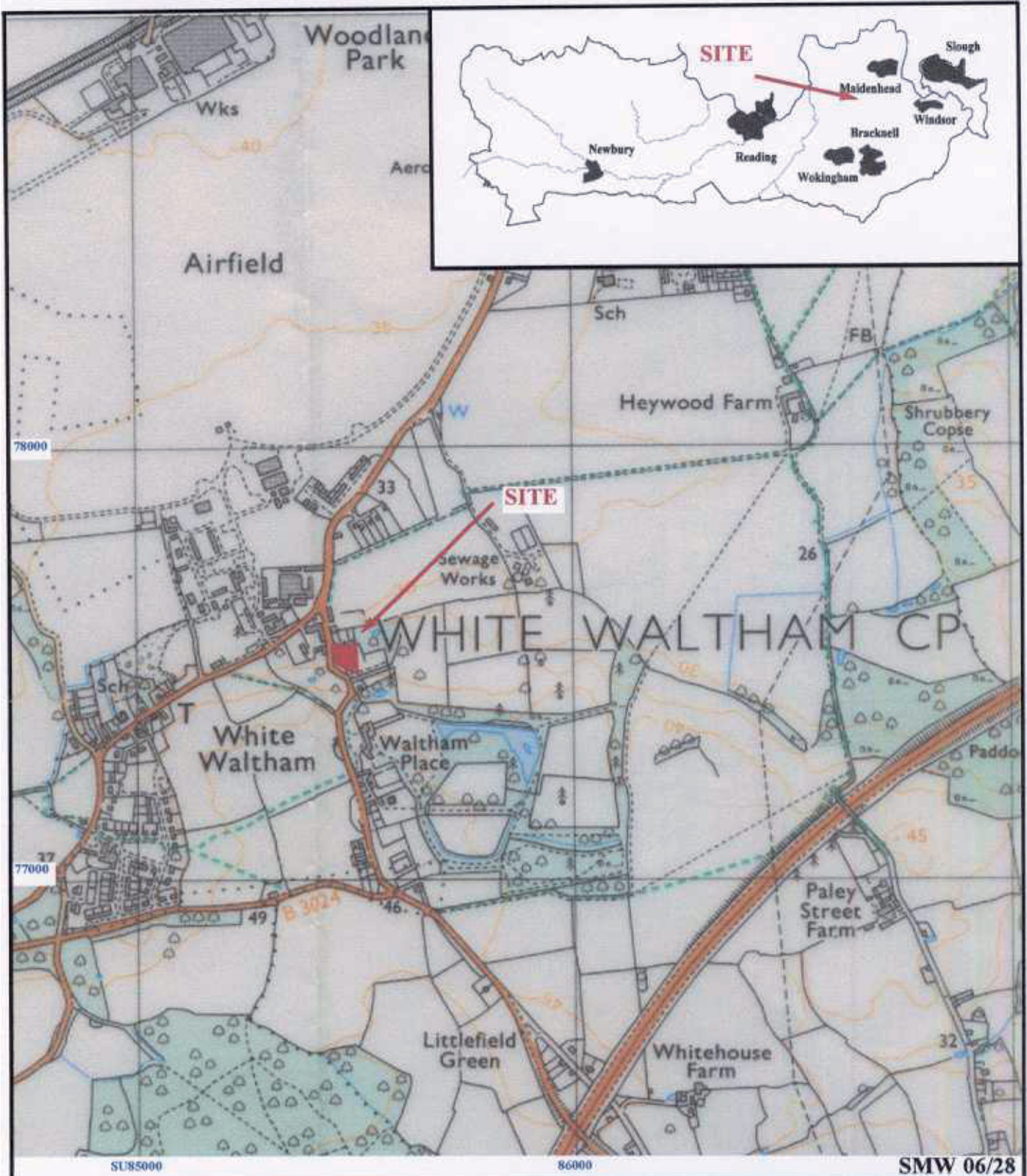
BGS, 1981, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 269, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
PPG16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
Ford, S, 1987, *East Berkshire Archaeological Survey*, Berkshire County Council Dept Highways and Planning
Occas Pap 1, Reading

APPENDIX 1: Trench details

| <i>Trench No.</i> | <i>Length (m)</i> | <i>Breadth (m)</i> | <i>Depth (m)</i> | <i>Comment</i> |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---|
| 1 | 6.1 | 1.0 | 0.45 (N) 0.37 (S) | 0-0.1m turf and topsoil onto 0.15m mid yellow/grey clay subsoil. 4 possible graves, 1 unknown feature, 2 Chalk layers. Brick/Tile recovered. [Plates 1 and 2] |

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

| <i>Trench</i> | <i>Cut</i> | <i>Fill (s)</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Dating evidence</i> |
|---------------|------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| 1 | 1 | 52 | Grave | Modern | Brick/Tile Fragments |
| 1 | 2 | 53 | Grave | Modern | Brick/Tile Fragments |
| 1 | 3 | 54 | Grave | Modern | Brick/Tile Fragments |
| 1 | 4 | -- | Possible Grave? | Modern | Brick/Tile Fragments |
| 1 | - | 55 | Chalk Surface/Layer | | None |
| 1 | - | 56 | Chalk Surface/Layer | | None |
| | - | 57 | Grave Earth Layer | Modern | Brick/Tile Fragments |



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Figure 1. Location of site within White Waltham and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Location of site within White Waltham.

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Figure 3: Trench Location

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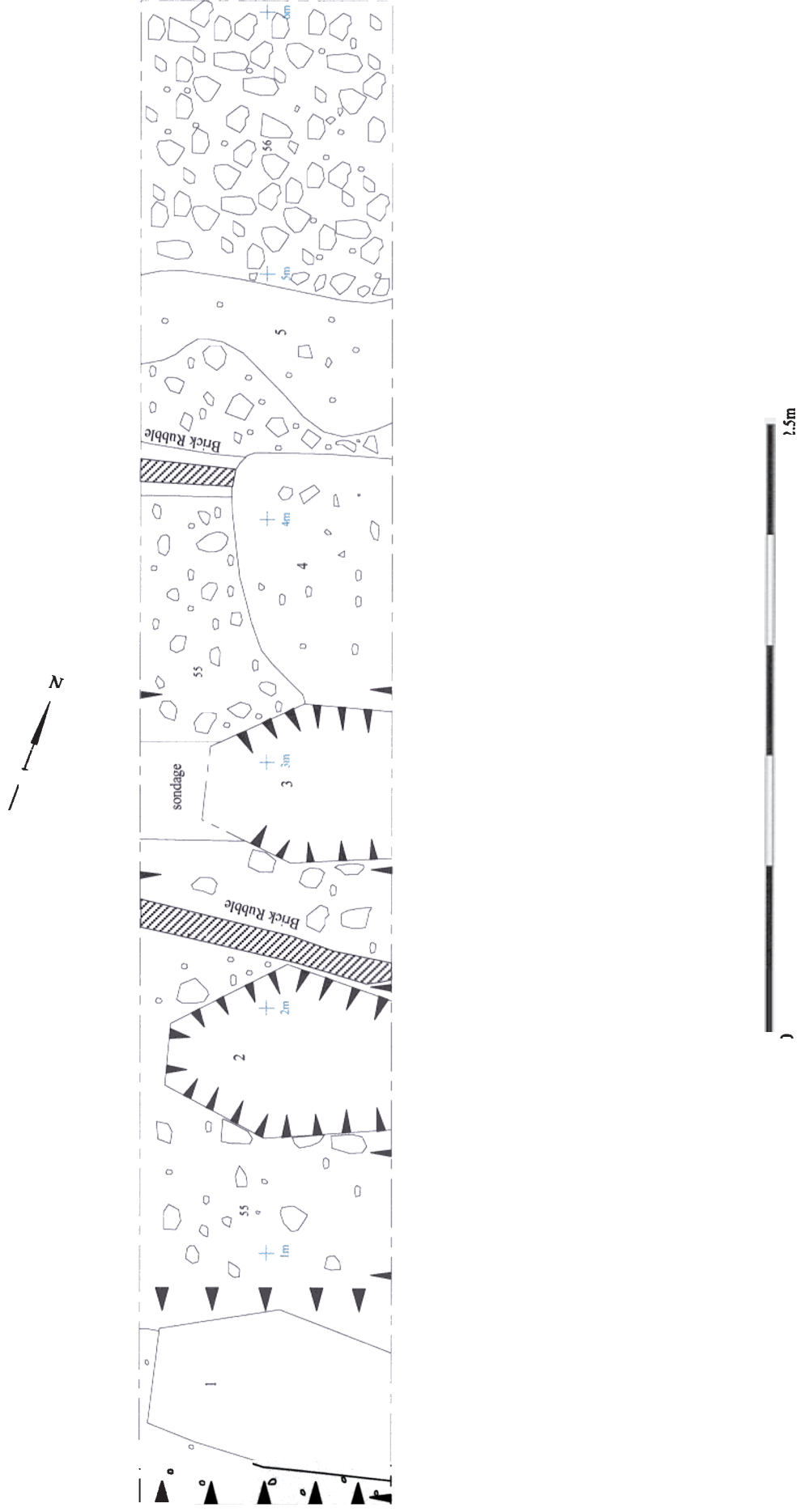


Figure 4: Trench Plan

New Sunday School, White Waltham Church, Maidenhead, Berkshire, 2006

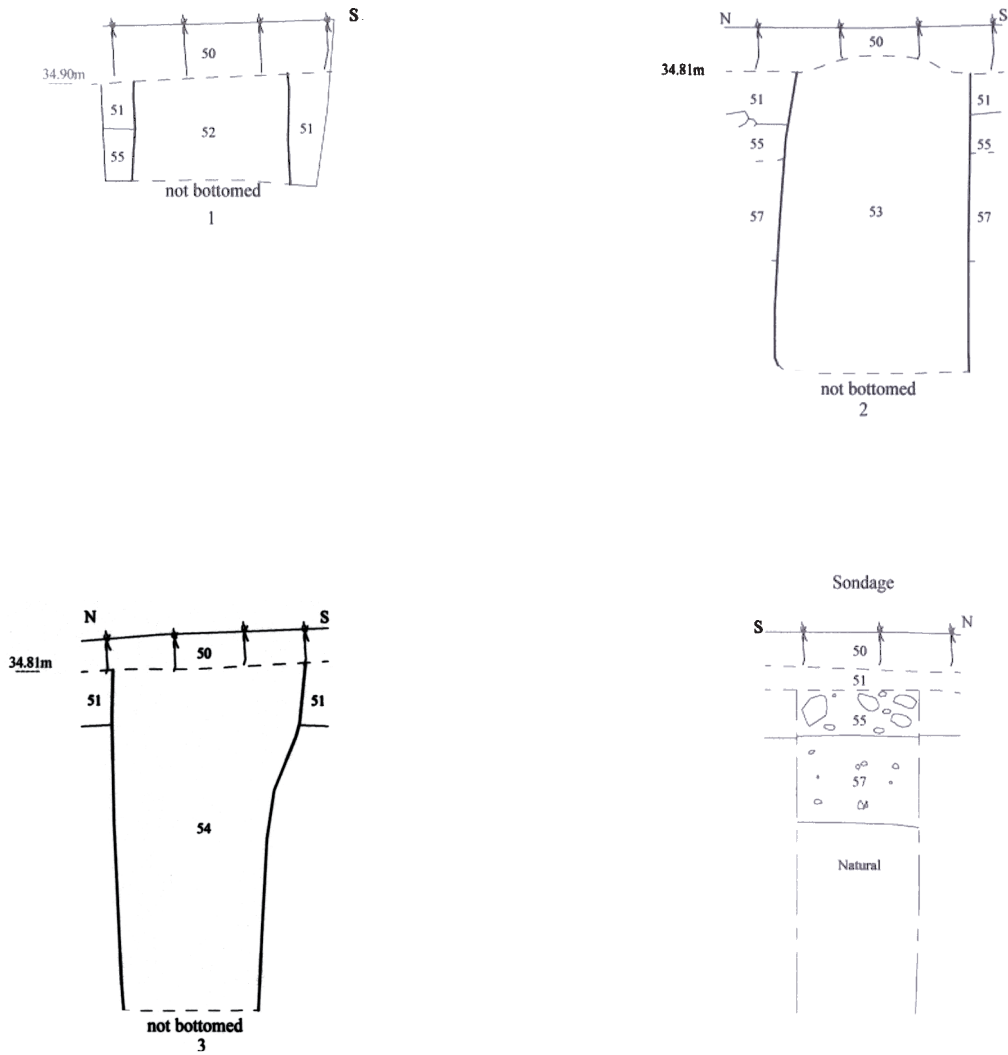


Figure 5: Sections



Plate 1. Trench 1 looking south east. Scales: 1m and 2m.



Plate 2. Cut 2 looking north east. Vertical scale 1m, horizontal scale 0.5m