

**ST NICHOLAS CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL, WOAD ROAD,
BOSTON, LINCOLNSHIRE**

SCHEME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING

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Report prepared for

Lincolnshire County Council

by

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Non-Technical Summary

A programme of archaeological monitoring and recording was conducted during groundworks for the extension of a kitchen and erection of a bin store and cycle shelter at St Nicholas Church of England Primary School.

Three areas were examined: Area 1 was located in the central part of the site over the proposed kitchen extension. Area 2 was located to the west of Area 1 on the limits of the school buildings, and Area 3 was located along the eastern boundary of the site. A service trench between Areas 1 and 3 was also monitored.

Area 1 exposed a series of ditches, sealed by a layer, immediately below the tarmac, which yielded only Romano-British pottery. The earlier fills of these ditches also contained small quantities of Romano-British pottery along with animal bones, a corroded metal object and a small amount of oyster and mussel shells. There was a significant deposit of burnt clay in one of the fills which may have come from a dismantled oven or kiln.

Areas 2 and 3 were characterised by relatively modern intervention, possibly when the school was originally constructed. Although some pottery and metal items were recovered from this area, they occurred within deposits which also contained modern artefacts such as marbles.

The service trench stratigraphy was similar to that exposed within Areas 2 and 3 and contained no significant archaeological features despite its proximity to Area 1.

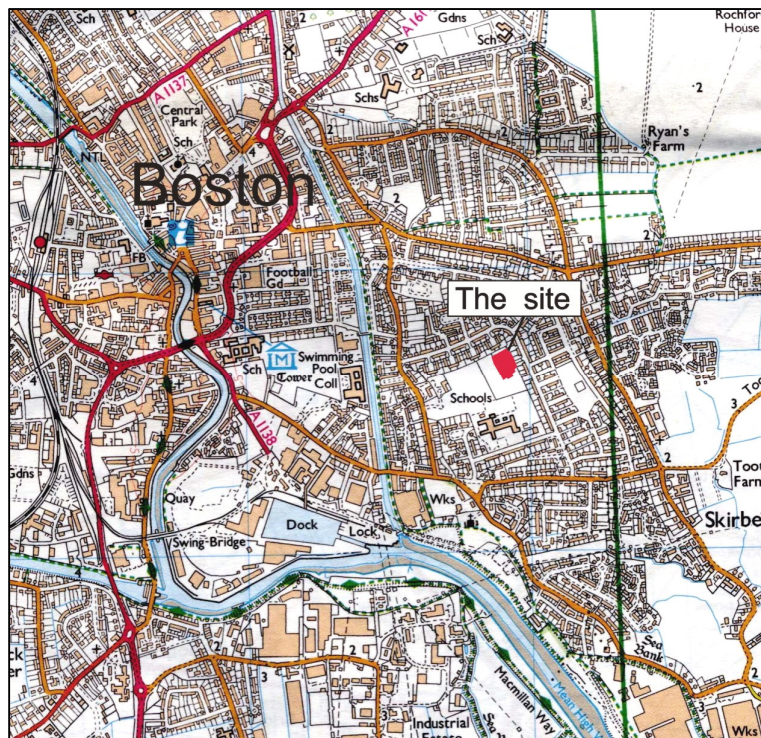


Figure 1: Location of the St. Nicholas Church of England Primary School site (based on the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey Explorer Map Sheet 261 [2000]. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. PCAS Licence No. 100049278).

1.0 Introduction

Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd. (PCAS) were requested by Lincolnshire County Council to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording during groundworks for an extension to the kitchen and the construction of a bin and cycle store at St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Boston, Lincolnshire.

The work was carried out in accordance with a specification for a scheme of archaeological monitoring produced by PCAS and approved by the Lincolnshire Historic Environmental Record, acting on behalf of the planning authority. The scheme also conforms with the requirements of:

- *Lincolnshire Archaeology Handbook* (Lincolnshire County Council 2010, rev 2.1)
- *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE)
- *Code of Conduct* (Institute of Field Archaeologist, 1994 as revised)
- *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 2008 as revised)

The works were conducted over twenty days between 27/4/2010 and 31/8/2010 by Linda Hamilton, Mike Rowe, Julian Sleaf and Fiona Walker.

2.0 Site location and description

St Nicholas Church of England Primary School is located to the east of Boston town centre, and east of the Maud Foster Drain (Fig. 1). It is bounded to the north and east by a residential area and to the west and south by a school playing field. The school is accessed from Woad Farm Road to the east.

The site elevation is approximately 2m OD; its location is centred on NGR TF 3390 4362.

3.0 Planning background

Full planning permission for the works was granted with conditions attached; one of which stated. These include:

“No development shall take place until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation which has been submitted to and approved by the County Planning Authority. The development shall be undertaken only in full accordance with the approved written scheme. No variation shall take place without the prior written consent of the County Planning Authority”.

Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd submitted a written scheme of investigation to Lincolnshire County Council and this was approved in advance of works.



Figure 2: Plan of the school site at scale 1:1000, showing its boundaries and the positions of areas 1, 2 and 3.

4.0 Geology and topography

The soils are on clays and silts deposited on post Romano-British tidal mudflats, overlying mudstone (BGS 1995).

The site is on low-lying, reclaimed land to the north of Boston Haven.

5.0 Archaeological and historical background

Evidence for prehistoric settlement in and around Boston is limited to isolated sites and it is possible that early settlement of the area has been masked by periods of flooding and resultant alluvial deposition.

Roman-British pottery sherds were recovered in 1959-60 during the construction of the present St Nicholas Primary School and in 1970 during the construction of Woad Farm School (APS in Clay 2003). In 1992 an extension to the school found evidence of two ditches that contained Romano-British pottery (Lincolnshire HER).

Some Anglo-Saxon material has been found in the Boston area but much of the area was probably waterlogged during the Saxon period, thus limiting opportunities for permanent settlement. An extended watching brief and excavation by Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) carried out during the construction of a nursery school approximately 200m west of the current site revealed a series of undated linear ditches and two Saxon *Grubenhäuser*, indicating temporary, perhaps seasonal settlement in the 8th century AD (Palmer-Brown 1996). Pottery, fish and animal bones were also recovered.

Boston was not mentioned in the Domesday Book, and appears to have been established as a port and planned town soon after the Norman Conquest (Owen in Palmer-Brown (1996). By the early 12th century, the town had expanded beyond the limits of the Barditch, and continued to prosper from its extensive trade networks throughout the medieval period. Between 1279 and 1289, the port was the richest in the country; the custom duties paid in Boston exceeded those of London by a third (Pevsner & Harris, 1989).

The town's wealth expanded further during the 14th century, largely due to the transferring of the Wool Staple from Lincoln to Boston in 1297 (Wright in Palmer-Brown 1996). However, this prosperity was not to last, and by the early 15th century, the decline of the wool trade and the silting up of the river led to a slow decline in Boston's prosperity.

6.0 Aims and objectives

The primary aim of the work was to identify and interpret any archaeological remains that were disturbed by the groundworks associated with the new scheme and to preserve them by record.

6.1 Methodology (Fig. 2)

The groundworks for this project were undertaken in three phases. The first phase of development took place between 27th April and 10th May 2010, and comprised the stripping of the footprint of and excavation of foundation trenches for an extension to the school kitchen (recorded as Area 1). Groundworks recommenced on 3rd August

2010 with the stripping and levelling of an extension to the school playground (recorded as Area 2) and the area of the bin and cycle stores on the north-western edge of the site (recorded as Area 3). These works were completed on 19th August 2010. The final phase of works involved the excavation of service trenches for the kitchen extension, and took place between 27th and 31st August 2010.

The foundation trenches were excavated by a machine using a 0.5m toothless bucket to a depth of approximately 400mm, under observation by a qualified archaeologist. The sides of all trenches were intermittently cleaned by hand, and all archaeological features were excavated to their full depth.

Context numbers were assigned to all deposits (listed in Appendix 2) and appropriate written records were prepared. Plans were drawn of each of the areas, along with an overall site plan. Sections through archaeological features and sample drawings of long sections were also prepared. A photographic record of both slide and digital images was produced and selected prints have been included in Appendix 1.

7.0 Results

7.1 Area 1 (figures 3-9)

Area 1 was located in the central part of the site and abutted the school kitchen to the south. It measured 19m by 12m and was aligned north-west to south-east. It was initially stripped by machine using a toothless bucket to a depth of 0.4m. The foundation trenches were then dug to a maximum depth of approximately 1.15m from existing.

The most recent deposits comprised a series of modern tarmac and levelling layers, (100), (101) and (102). These lay directly over context (103), a mixed-looking clay deposit which was also removed by machine and sealed a number of cut features. An assemblage of 94 sherds of Roman pottery, chiefly dating to the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries AD, was retrieved from this layer, along with abraded fragments of fired clay that could not be further identified (appendices 3, 4 and 6); no post-Roman material was recorded. Two irregular linear features, [105] and [107], were exposed in plan following the removal of layer (103), and the edge of a further cut feature, [109], was partially exposed (fig. 3; plate 1).

Feature [105] was curvilinear, appearing to form a rounded, right-angled corner extending beyond the stripped area to the north and west. The foundation trench excavations cut sections through this feature at both extremities, showing it to be wide and shallow, measuring 2.20m across and no more than 0.40m deep (figs. 5 and 8). Two fills were seen in the western section: (115), which appeared to be a natural deposit devoid of finds, below dark silty clay (106): only the latter appeared in the northern section. A relatively small assemblage of Roman pottery of mid-3rd century or later date was retrieved from this context, along with some very abraded fragments of fired clay (appendices 3, 4 and 6).

Linear ditch [107] crossed the stripped area on an approximately south-west to north-east alignment: its course was slightly sinuous and its width varied. Three foundation trenches had intersected this feature, although none were exactly perpendicular to its course. Both of the outermost sections were recorded, identifying a sequence of five fills (figs. 7 and 9; plate 4). Four of these fills, (108), (112), (113) and (114), produced the majority of the Roman pottery corpus for this site. This comprised a range of coarse wares typical of those found on sites in southern Lincolnshire, with samian ware and amphora imported from the continent, and suggests that the ditch was

probably in existence by the later 2nd century AD and completely backfilled by the later 3rd (appendix 3). An environmental sample taken from its primary fill (114) in the western section could shed little light on the function of this feature (appendix 8) although, in this environment, the need for effective drainage is likely to have been a major consideration.

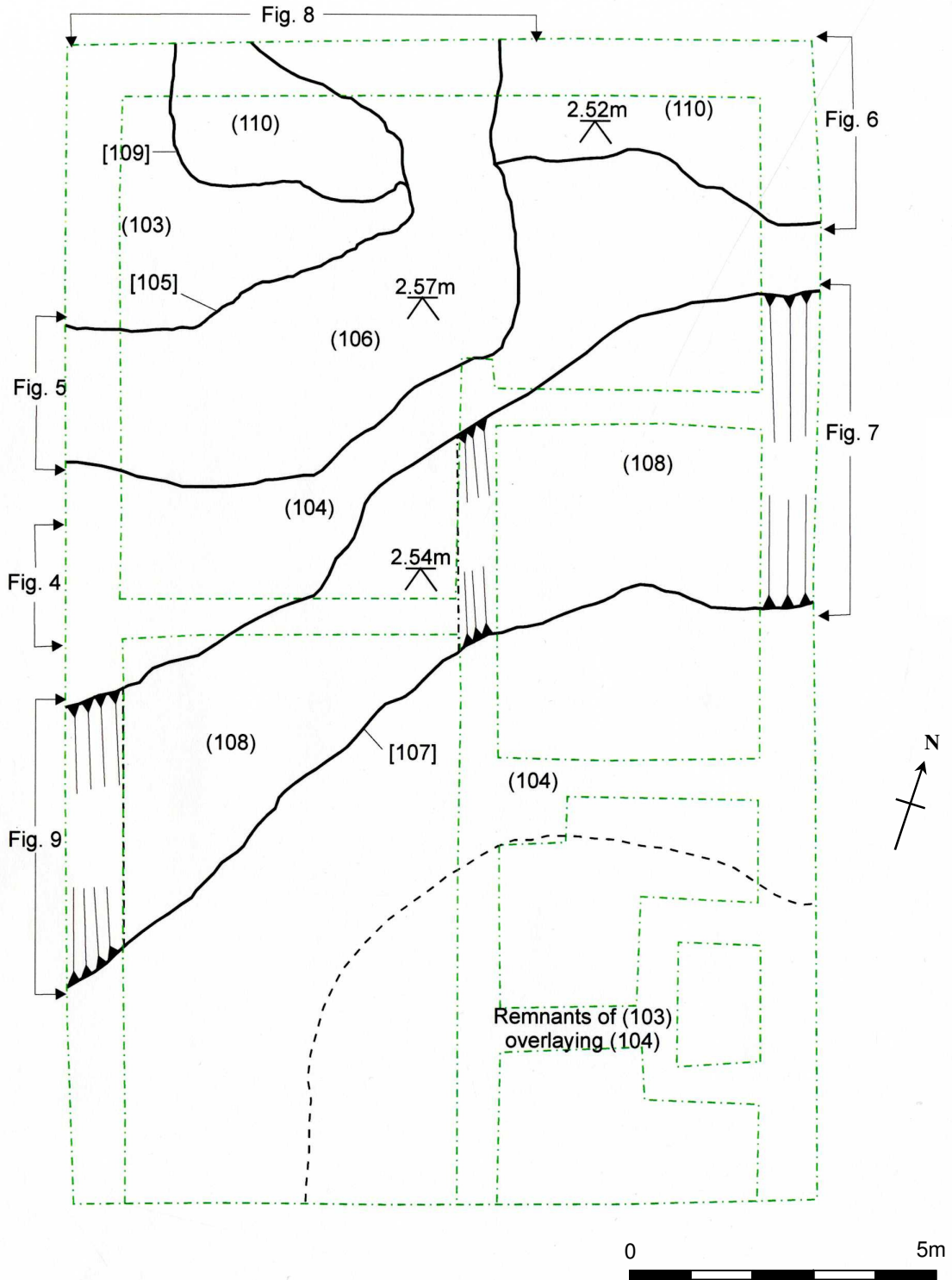


Figure 3 Plan of Area A with ground beam slot in green
Scale 1:100

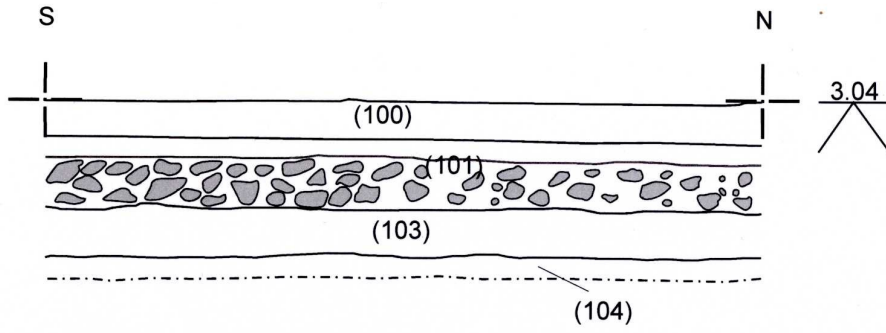


Figure 4 Sample section of machined through layers
Scale 1:20

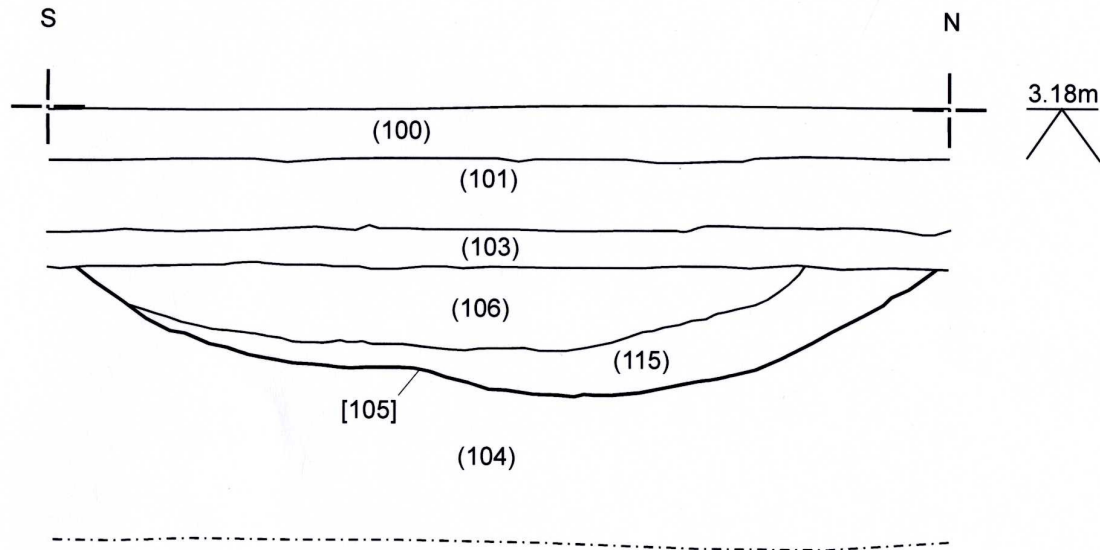
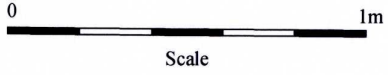


Figure 5 East facing section through ditch [105]
Scale 1:20

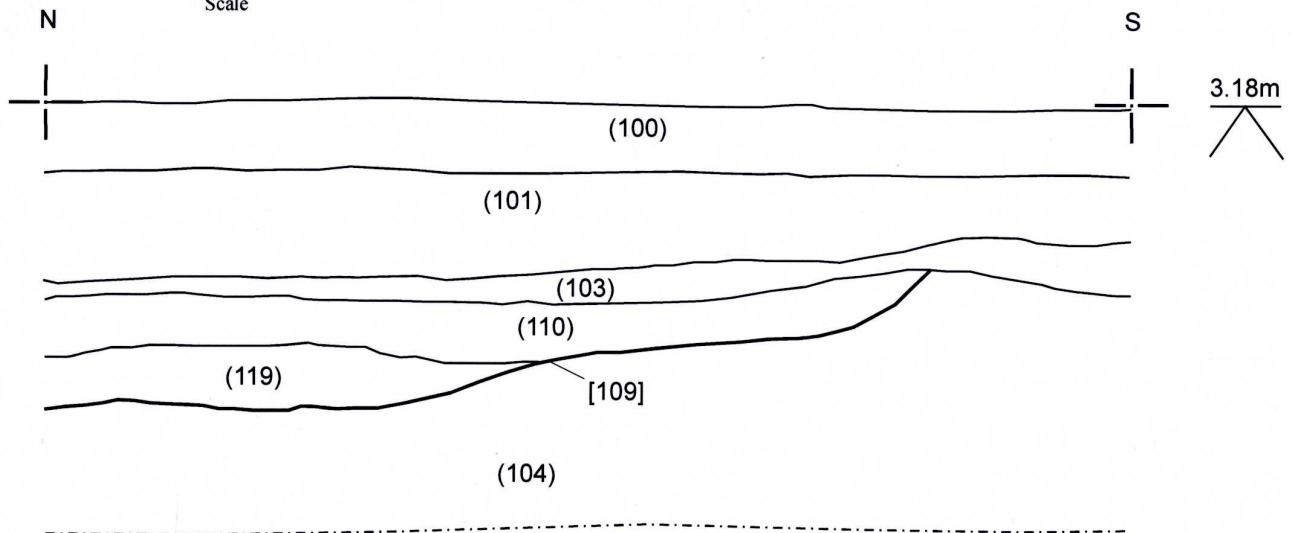
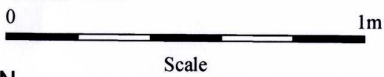
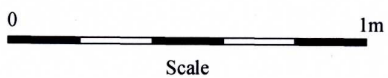
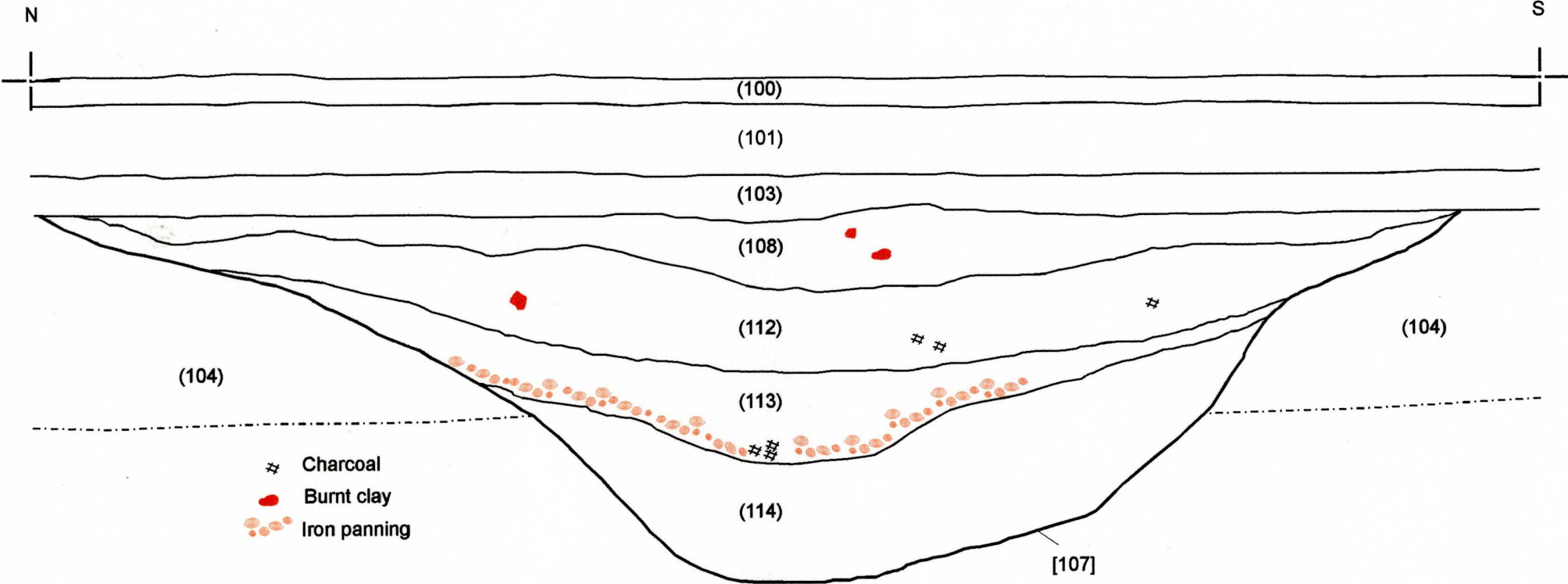


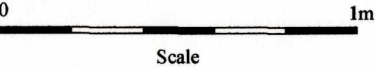
Figure 6 West facing section through [109]
Scale 1:20





- # Charcoal
- Burnt clay
- Iron panning

Figure 7 West facing section through ditch [107]
Scale 1:20



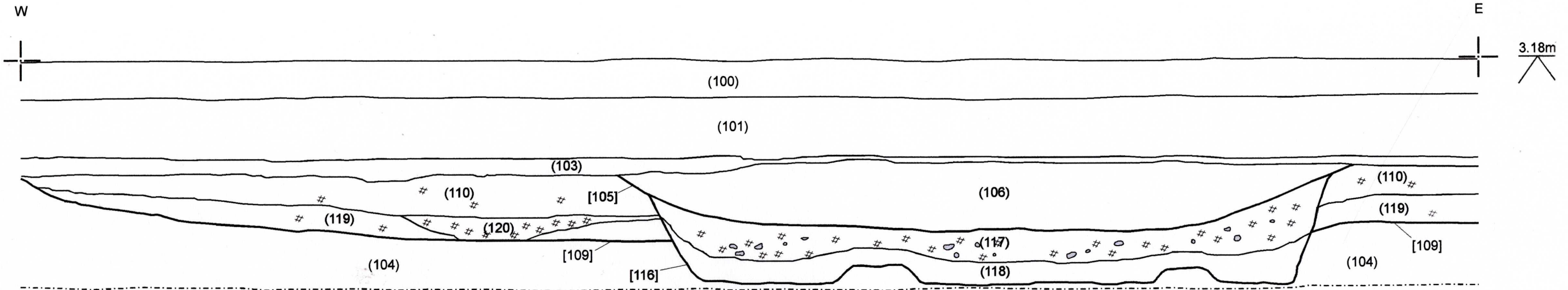


Figure 8 South facing section across Area 1
Scale 1:20

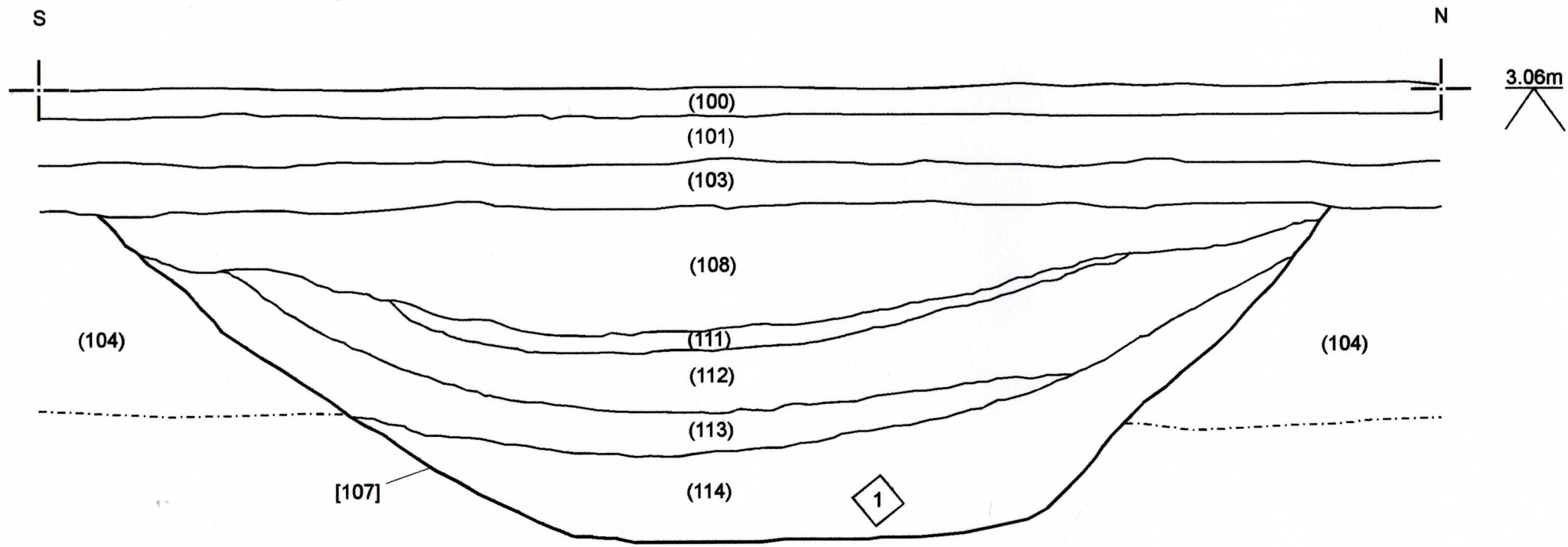
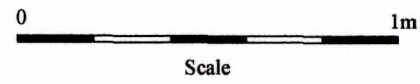
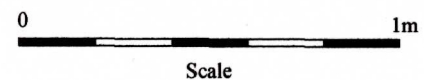


Figure 9 East facing section through ditch [107] showing position of sample 1
Scale 1:20



At the northern edge of the excavated area, feature [105] was observed in section to cut an earlier feature, [116]. It was impossible to tell whether this was a linear feature or a pit, although it may have been a precursor to ditch [105]. That said, feature [116] had an unusual profile, with steep sides and a stepped or ridged base that appeared to divide three channels (fig.8). This suggested to the excavator that the feature may have been an eroded trackway/hollow-way with a number of wheel-ruts in its base. An environmental sample was taken from (117), the upper of its two fills, which was observed on site to contain charcoal and other heat-affected material. A small amount of charred wheat and barley grain, with charred seeds of wild plants associated with arable cultivation, was retrieved, indicating agricultural or domestic waste, but no conclusions about the purpose of the feature could be drawn (appendix 8). No datable material was retrieved from either fill.

A partially exposed feature at the northern edge of the excavated area, [109], had been cut by feature [116]. Only the southern edge and south-eastern corner of this lay within the excavated area, and it is not known whether this represented the western terminal of an east-to-west aligned ditch or the side and corner of a large, sub-rectangular pit. The portion exposed in the foundation trenches was shallow – no more than 0.30m deep – and contained two principal fills, separated near its western edge by a lens of charcoal-rich material (figs. 6 and 8; plate 5). The lower fill, (119), appeared to be of natural origin and was archaeologically sterile, while Roman pottery, including samian ware and a large fragment of amphora, was retrieved from the upper fill (110). The amphora fragment was associated with an internal calcareous deposit and traces of a black tar-like substance, suggesting that it had been re-used for a purpose other than that for which it was originally intended (appendix 3).

7.2 Area 2 (figure 10)

Area 2 was located within the playing field, bordering the playground to the east (fig. 2, plate 6). It measured 36.5m by 7m and was aligned north-west to south-east. This area was intended to form an extension to the current playground, and so no trenching was required after the initial strip of approximately 0.35m depth (plate 7).

At the northern end of Area 2, the strip depth did not penetrate the base of the modern topsoil (201), and no features or earlier deposits were exposed. Over the remainder of the area, the modern topsoil overlay a subsoil, (203), which was removed to a maximum depth of 0.20m but not penetrated. Six sherds of Roman pottery were retrieved from the topsoil and subsoil.

At the southern end of the area, a group of concrete foundations, collectively recorded as structure [202], were cut into the subsoil. These were believed to derive from a swimming-pool building that formerly stood on this site; in this context, a rectangular area of rubble and disturbed ground exposed in the south-western corner of the strip and not removed may have represented part of the infilled pool. The narrow gap between structure [202] and the existing school building contained layer 204, which appeared to be a redeposited mixture of topsoil and subsoil and was interpreted as landscaping material.

No deposits or features of archaeological interest were encountered in this area, and the natural geology was not reached.

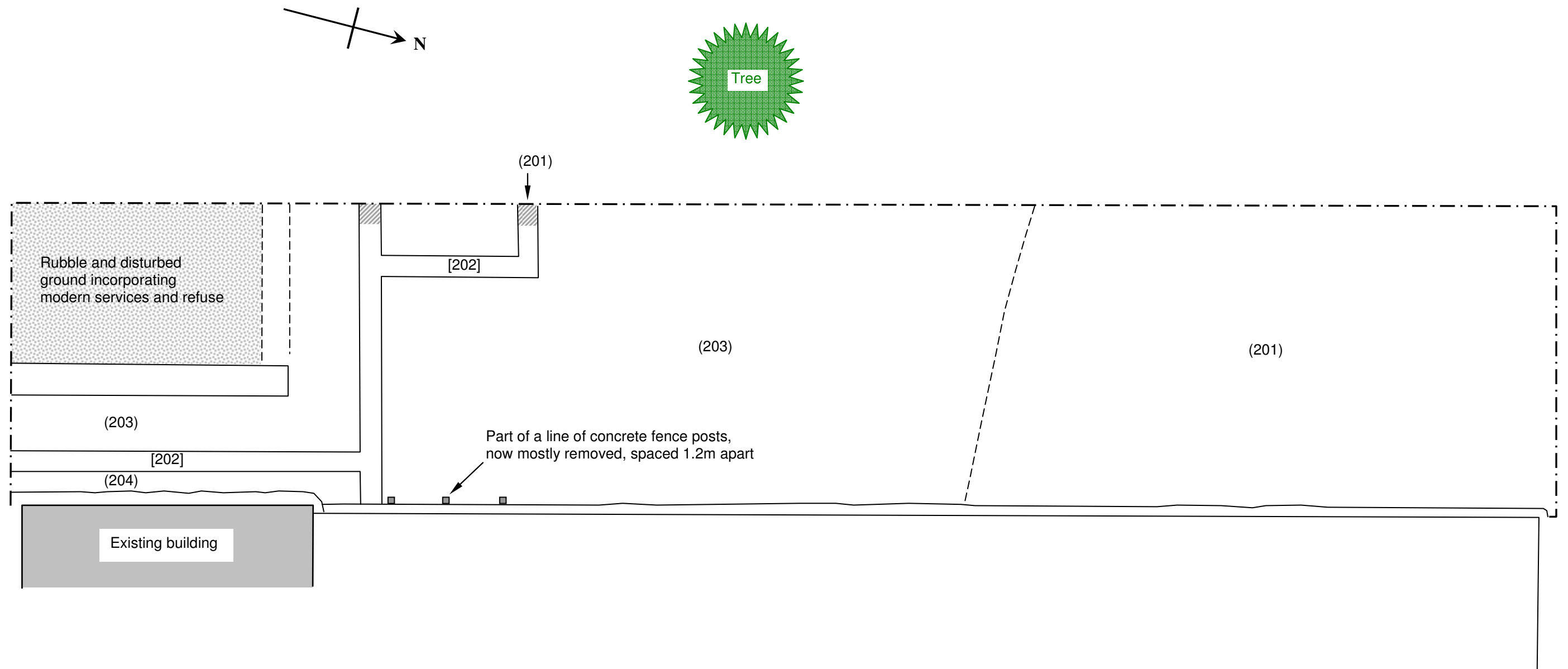


Figure 10: Plan of Area 2 at scale 1:100.

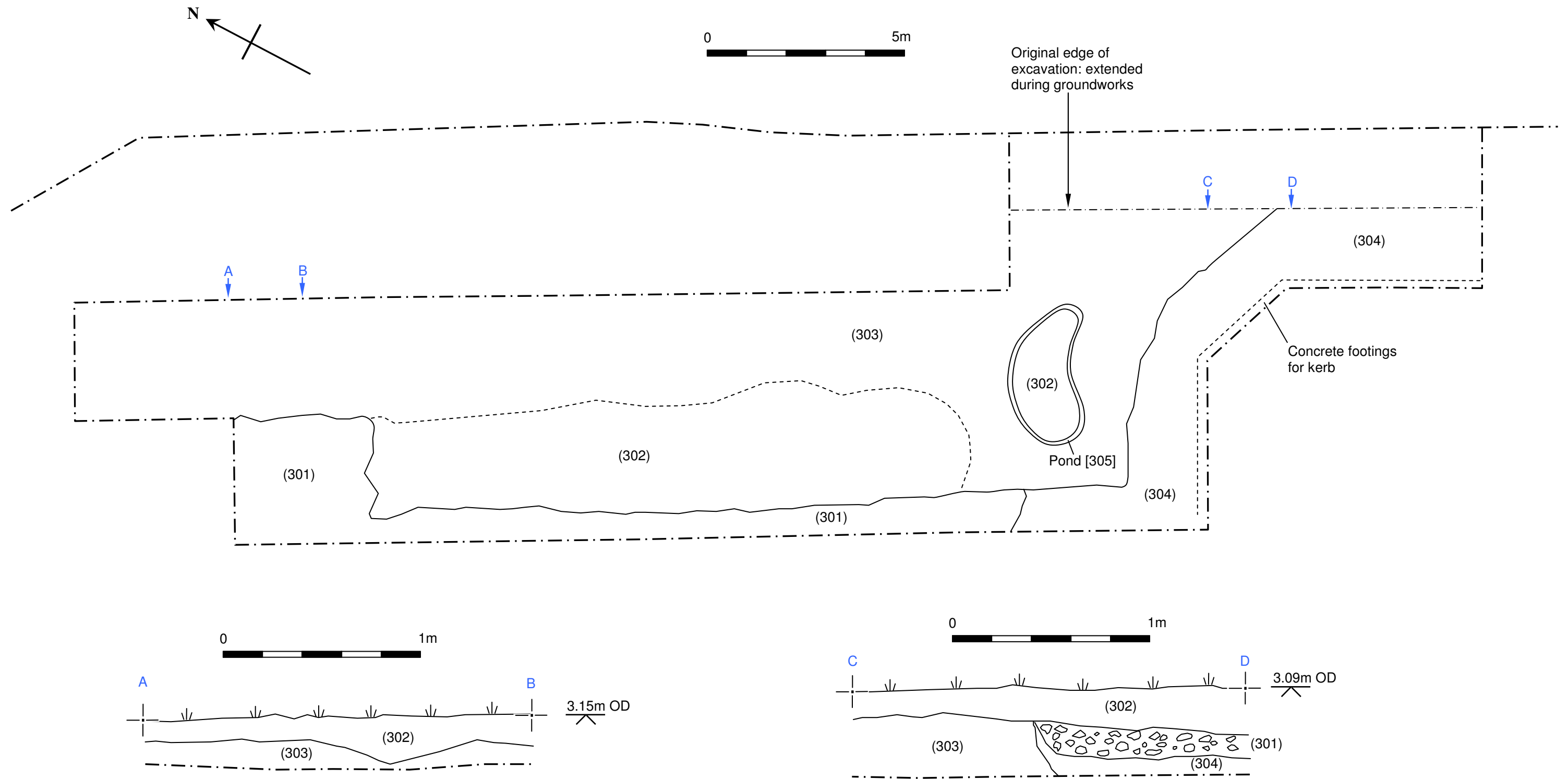


Figure 11 Plan of Area 3 at scale 1:100, with sample sections (located on plan) at scale 1:20.

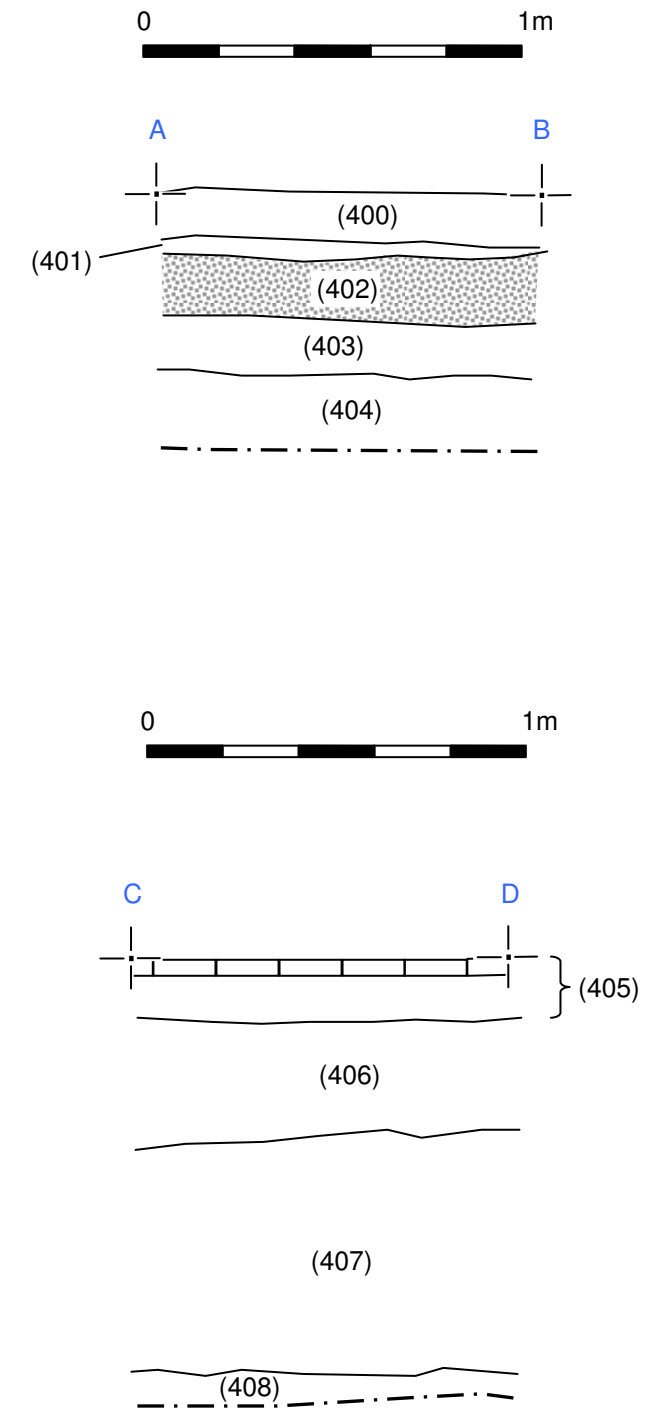
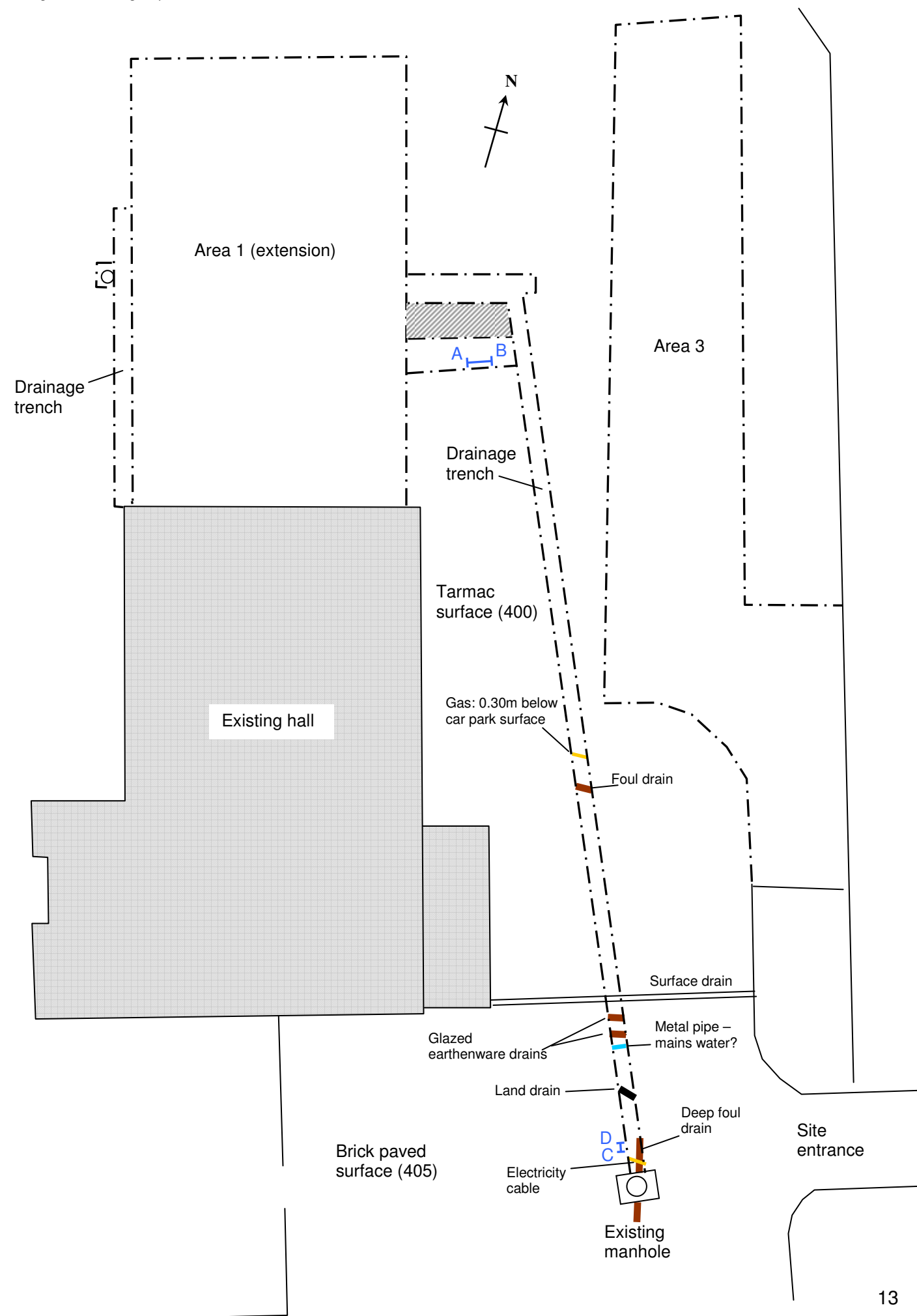


Figure 12 Plan of the drainage trench groundworks recorded as Area 4 at scale 1:200, with two sample sections at 1:20.

7.3 Area 3 (figure 11)

Area 3 adjoined the north-western site boundary to the north of the school entrance. It was an irregular, roughly rectangular area, aligned north-west to south-east, and measured approximately 36m x 8m; the maximum width was extended to 10m during the groundworks. This area had previously been used for bicycle storage: the concrete base of the former school bicycle shed had already been removed when the archaeological monitoring commenced.

The area was machine-stripped to a depth of between 0.24m (at the north-west end) and 0.44m (at the south-east end). The stripped layers included (300) and (301), the tarmac surface and rubble bedding of a modern path providing access to the former bicycle shed, and a thin layer – up to 0.15m deep – of modern topsoil (302), from which two sherds of Roman pottery were retrieved.

The majority of the exposed area was covered with subsoil (303), which was stripped to a depth of 0.12m but not penetrated. Finds retrieved from this deposit included medieval, late- to post-medieval and modern pottery and a glass marble. The rim of a curved concrete feature, structure [305], which appeared to be a small ornamental pond, was exposed (plate 8). Along the south and south-west edges of the area, consolidation layer (304) underlay the former path.

No deposits or features of archaeological interest were exposed in this area, and the natural geology was not reached.

7.4 Area 4 (figure 12)

The final phase of groundworks, recorded as Area 4, involved the machine excavation of drainage trenches with two new manholes to run between Area 1 and an existing manhole near the school entrance. The trenches were 0.3m deep and the manholes 0.4m deep, and were excavated in 6m long sections, with pipes being laid as each section was completed (plate 9). This phase of works encountered only the modern surfacing of the school yard and car park, with associated levelling layers overlying the subsoil (407) (which produced no dating evidence) and natural sand (404) and (408). The trench sections were heavily disturbed throughout by a variety of modern services.

8.0 Discussion and Conclusions

Features of archaeological significance were found only in Area 1, where a sequence of four cut features were sealed by a layer that produced Romano-British dating evidence and no later material. Three of the cut features also produced Romano-British pottery; a fourth feature, [116], produced no datable material, but was stratigraphically dated to the Roman period or possibly earlier. Almost all of the diagnostic pottery was of later 2nd century to the later 3rd century date, although some material from ditch [107], which had no stratigraphic relationships with the other cut features, may have been a little earlier. The date range suggests that the site was in active use by the mid- to late 2nd century AD and that this activity had ceased by the later 3rd century AD. The pottery types represent a range of coarsewares typical of those found on sites in southern Lincolnshire, with luxury goods imported from the continent: the samian ware would have been purchased as a trade item in its own right, while amphorae were incidental to the importation of exotic foodstuffs such as wine or olive oil. Although the pottery corpus from this site is relatively small at 210 sherds, it is an important group, as there is relatively little extant Roman pottery from Boston.

The archaeological record of the fens around Boston shows a general increase in activity in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, although this is generally in the form of small, subsistence-level settlements without roads, towns, villas or a recognisable military presence. The cutting of the Car Dyke from Lincoln to Peterborough indicates that efforts were being made to control the landscape of the wetlands, but there seems to have been little systematic land reclamation at this period, although archaeological investigations have suggested that a wider network of waterways would have been necessary to use the Car Dyke for transport and communications. Settlement of the fenland reached a peak in the 3rd and early 4th centuries, but by about AD 375, deteriorating weather and rising sea-levels once again militated against the safe occupation of the fens. It appears that the fens were then almost completely abandoned: even sporadic occupation did not return for a century or more, and occupation on the Roman scale was not to be seen again until the drainage and reclamation programmes of the post-medieval period (Wright, n.d.)

The presence of the Roman pottery assemblage indicates that there is likely to have been a settlement in the immediate vicinity of the site; unlike the inhabitants of early medieval and medieval agricultural settlements, Romano-British subsistence farmers did not maintain middens from which to cart manure and domestic refuse to spread on outlying fields, and so substantial quantities of potsherds are not routinely found far from habitation (Dr. K. A. Leahy, *pers. comm.*). The features encountered during the archaeological monitoring in Area 1 may have been a sequence of drainage ditches and/or field boundaries associated with a small rural settlement on marginal land, although the small size of the area did not allow for accurate interpretation, or even in all cases confident identification, of the features. The clay layer (103), which sealed the Roman features and was itself datable to the Roman period, may have been laid down by flooding, representing the abandonment of the site and probably of the settlement, although a flood horizon would normally be expected to have an homogeneous appearance, rather than the mixed character recorded on site.

Apart from six sherds of Roman pottery retrieved from the topsoil and subsoil of Area 2, no archaeological remains were encountered in any of the other areas that were subject to archaeological monitoring. This can be partly attributed to disturbances caused by earlier construction works associated with the school, and partly to the nature of the monitored groundworks in Areas 2 and 3: no trenching took place in these areas, and machine-stripping did not penetrate deep enough to reveal any remains that might have been present, effectively preserving any such remains *in situ*.

9.0 Acknowledgements

PCAS would like to thank Lincolnshire County Council for commissioning this project, and Langwith Builders (Holbeach) for their co-operation during the groundworks.

10.0 Project Archive

The documentary and physical archive for this scheme is currently in the possession of Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd. This will be deposited at The Collection, Lincoln before the end of December 2011.

11.0 References

British Geological Survey (BGS), 1995, *Boston: England and Wales Sheet 128, Solid and Drift Geology 1:50,000 Series*.

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Wright, N. R., n. d., *The Site of Boston during the First Millennium*. Consulted online 30/09/11 at <http://www.bostonuk.com/timeline.php?id=8&f=Boston>