



**Gloucestershire**  
COUNTY COUNCIL

*An Archaeological Watching Brief at*

**Cirencester Primary School  
Victoria Road  
Cirencester  
Gloucestershire**

For Rob Barnes, GCC



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Archaeology Service*

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**Details**

Site name: Cirencester Primary School, Victoria Road, Cirencester

Report title: An Archaeological Watching Brief at Cirencester Primary School, Victoria Road, Cirencester

OS NGR: 402941 201511

Site type: Archaeological Watching Brief

Client: Rob Barnes, GCC

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Date of fieldwork: 27<sup>th</sup> March to 11<sup>th</sup> April 2012

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Author: Edmund Stratford

Recipient museum: Corinium Museum

Archived finds: Yes

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## Summary

Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service was commissioned by Rob Barnes of GCC to carry out archaeological mitigation during groundworks for the installation of a new and replacement fence at Cirencester Primary School, Victoria Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire. The site is located within the Scheduled Monument of *Corinium Roman Town* (Scheduled Monument No. 361). The watching brief was undertaken as a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent for the works. Several archaeological features and deposits of Roman date were recorded during the course of the watching brief, including two stone walls, a possible surface, demolition deposits and dumped deposits used to raise ground levels. The finds assemblage comprised 28 sherds of pottery of Roman date, 22 fragments of ceramic building material and a Roman steelyard weight.

## 1 Introduction

1.1 Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service (GCCAS) was commissioned by Rob Barnes of GCC to carry out archaeological mitigation during groundworks for the installation of a new and replacement fence at Cirencester Primary School, Victoria Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire. The site is located within the Scheduled Monument of *Corinium Roman Town* (Scheduled Monument No. 361). The watching brief was carried out between 27<sup>th</sup> March and 11<sup>th</sup> April 2012 and was undertaken as a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent for the works.

1.2 The specific requirements for the watching brief were detailed in the written scheme of investigation (Nichols 2011). The work was carried out in accordance with the Scheduled Monument Consent which was granted in August 2011 (ref: S00017239) and the '*Standard and Guidance for archaeological watching brief*' produced by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 2008). The Archaeology Service is an Institute for Archaeologists Registered Organisation (IfA RO 42).

## 2 Site location

Cirencester Primary School is located on the east side of Victoria Road, c.550m southeast of the centre of Cirencester. It covers c.4.5ha, centred on OS NGR 402941 201511 and is comprised of two distinct areas; the main school buildings fronting onto Victoria Road and open playing fields to the east and north, where the development took place. The site is bounded to the east by a strip of woodland and the River Churn, to the southeast by an embankment of the former Midland and South Western Junction Railway and to the north, southwest and west by residential developments. The site is at a height of c.105m AOD and is geologically situated on alluvial deposits of clay and river terrace gravels of the River Churn, overlying mudstone of the Forest Marble formation (BGS 2011). The study area lies within the Scheduled Monument of *Corinium Roman Town* (SM 361) and is within the Cirencester South Conservation Area. The school building is designated as a Grade II Listed Building.

## 3 Archaeological and historical background

3.1 The archaeological background has been outlined in a desk-based assessment (Stratford 2011) which should be read in conjunction with this document.

3.2 The desk-based assessment established that the study area lies within *Insula X* of *Corinium Roman Town*. The surviving archaeological deposits and features in the vicinity of the study area are almost exclusively Roman in date and include examples of stone buildings with hypocaust systems and mosaics, along with evidence for prior and subsequent raising of the ground level. The uppermost level of the archaeological features and deposits within the vicinity has been shown to vary between 0.2m (directly below topsoil) and 1.5m below ground level. The variation in depth may well be attributed to Roman activity to deliberately raise ground levels. An archaeological evaluation on the line of the northern extent of the proposed fence established that Roman deposits exist at depths as shallow as 0.23m below ground level.

## 4 Methodology

4.1 The initial works comprised the installation of a new fence along the northern boundary (across the playing field) and replacement fencing along the eastern, southern and western boundaries. The fencing

measured a total length of c.450m and required the excavation 184 post holes, generally spaced 2.5m apart. Each post hole measured a maximum of 700mm deep x 300mm x 300mm, except along the northern boundary where three post holes were widened to account for the presence of archaeological deposits (see 5 below). Pro-forma post hole record sheets were used to record the details of the works.

**4.2** All excavation of non-archaeological deposits was carried out by hand by the fencing contractor, monitored by a GCCAS archaeologist. When significant archaeological features were encountered, e.g. walls and floor surfaces (post holes 3, 7, 8 and 9), excavation ceased and the exposed deposits were archaeologically investigated, recorded and left *in situ*. The post holes were subsequently redesigned to utilise a shallow, wide concrete pad, which stayed above the level of the archaeology.

**4.3** In addition to the installation of the fence, an area of tarmac was constructed at the western end of the fence line to provide access into the school grounds. The construction of the tarmac area comprised the stripping of turf to a maximum depth of 0.3m below ground level across an area measuring c.27 square metres. The works were subject to archaeological monitoring and undertaken using a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket.

**4.4** Further monitored groundworks included the relocation of a dog waste bin at the western end of the fence line, involving the excavation by hand of a 700mm deep x 300mm x 300mm post hole, and the cutting down of 125m of fence around the tarmac playground, which involved no below ground disturbance.

**4.5** All works were undertaken in accordance with the Scheduled Monument Consent for the development.

**4.6** The site archive will be temporarily stored at Shire Hall, Gloucester under a unique site code, GHER 40570, issued by the County Historic Environment Record Officer. It is anticipated that the archive will be deposited at Corinium Museum.

## **5 Results of the watching brief (Figure 2)**

### **5.1 The installation of new fencing**

**5.1.1** The installation of new fencing required the excavation by hand of 184 post holes, which for recording purposes were numbered sequentially starting from the western end of the fence line. Several archaeological features and deposits were recorded during the excavation of the post holes.

**5.1.2** A light brown clay deposit (102) containing limestone rubble and Roman ceramic building material (CBM), tile and pottery was recorded at the base of post hole 1. The deposit measured over 0.37m in depth and was interpreted as a Roman demolition layer. Overlying deposit (102) was a mixed deposit (101) of clay and modern building rubble measuring 0.3m in depth which was overlain by the tarmac ground surface (100) which measured 0.03m in depth.

**5.1.3** A layer of possible *opus signinum* (203) was recorded at the base of post hole 2, at a depth of 0.7m below ground level. Overlying (203) was a deposit of brown silty clay (202) containing limestone rubble, ceramic roof tile and oyster shells, which measured 0.26m in depth and was interpreted as a Roman demolition layer. Overlying (202) were layers of modern hardcore (201) and tarmac (200) which measured a total of 0.46m in depth.

**5.1.4** A possible metallised limestone surface was recorded at the base of post hole 3, at a depth of 0.5m below ground level. Surface (304) was comprised of small, compacted limestone pebbles. Overlying (304) was a layer of grey silty clay and gravel which measured 0.1m in depth and contained Roman CBM and roof tile. The archaeological deposits were overlain by modern dumped layers of mixed gravel, soil and cinder (302) and (301) which measured 0.14m in depth. The modern deposits were overlain by a brown silty clay topsoil (300) which measured 0.26m in depth.

**5.1.5** Post holes 4, 5 and 6 contained only modern deposits measuring between 0.44m and 0.51m in depth, sealed by up to 0.23m of topsoil. The modern deposits, which contained residual Roman finds, are thought to represent the backfill deriving from the 1960s archaeological excavations of building X.3, which is known to survive in this location (Stratford 2011).

**5.1.6** A wall of roughly coursed limestone rubble bonded with lime mortar (703) was recorded in post hole 7 at a depth of 0.14m below ground level (Figures 3, 4 and 5). The feature was not excavated to its full extent, but the exposed portion was orientated northeast to southwest and measured over 0.7m in length, over 0.38m in width and over 0.26m in height. It is likely that the wall forms part of the Roman building previously recorded in this location as building X.3. Wall (703) was overlain by a thin layer of mixed soil and mortar (702) which was sealed by a deposit of silty clay containing modern debris (701) and likely to represent the 1960s excavation backfill. The uppermost deposit in post hole 7 was topsoil (700) which measured up to 0.14m in depth.

**5.1.7** A wall of roughly coursed limestone bonded by lime mortar (803) was recorded in post hole 8 at a depth of 0.2m below ground level (Figures 6, 7 and 8). The feature was not excavated to its full extent, but the exposed portion was orientated northwest to southeast and measured over 1.2m in length, over 0.2m in width and over 0.18m in height. It is likely that the wall forms part of the Roman building previously recorded in this location as building X.3. Abutting wall (803) was a deposit of limestone rubble within a silty clay (802), which is interpreted as Roman demolition material. Overlying (803) and (802) was a deposit of silty clay containing modern debris (801) which measured 0.21m in depth and is likely to represent the 1960s excavation backfill. The uppermost deposit in post hole 8 was topsoil (800) which measured up to 0.16m in depth.

**5.1.8** A deposit of limestone rubble (902) containing Roman pottery and CBM was recorded immediately below the topsoil in post hole 9, at a depth of 0.15m below ground level (see Figures 9, 10 and 11). A Roman steelyard weight (Sf 1, see Appendix 2 and Figure 12) was recovered from this deposit. It is likely that the rubble deposit derives from the Roman building X.3, previously recorded in this location.

**5.1.9** A deposit of black silt containing limestone rubble, Roman pottery and CBM was recorded at depths of between 0.15m and 0.5m below ground level in post holes 10 to 36 (see Figure 2). The deposit overlaid the natural clay and ranged in thickness from 0.46m to 0.04m, becoming increasingly thinner as it spread north. The deposit was overlain only by topsoil at its southern extreme, then by increasingly deeper accumulations of alluvial clays to the north. The black silt deposit is thought to represent a Roman dumping deposit, used to raise ground level above flooding and has been recorded during previous excavations across the playing field (Stratford 2011).

**5.1.10** Dumped deposits of silty clay containing Roman pottery and CBM were also recorded in post holes 62 to 67. The deposits were recorded directly below the topsoil at depths of between 0.13m and 0.24m and measured between 0.23m and 0.5m in thickness. The deposits overlay alluvial clays in this area, suggesting a later date than the dumped Roman deposits in post holes 10 to 36. The deposits are located in close proximity to the possible building X.5 previously identified in this area (see Figure 2), and may well be associated with the building's construction.

**5.1.11** Further dumped Roman deposits were also identified at the eastern end of the fence line between post holes 171 and 182. The deposits of silty clay containing Roman pottery and CBM were recorded below the topsoil at depths of between 0.15m and 0.18m. The deposits measured up to 0.52m in depth and overlay the natural clay.

**5.1.12** Across the remainder of the post holes, no further archaeological features or deposits were recorded. The typical stratigraphic sequence consisted of topsoil of up to 0.3m overlying alluvial subsoil deposits of up to 0.5m, which sealed the natural clay.

**5.1.13** A further post hole was excavated to relocate the dog waste bin (see Figure 2). The stratigraphy comprised a silty clay containing modern debris and ash at the base, which measured 0.4m deep, overlain by 0.2m of topsoil.

## **5.2 The new tarmac area**

The stripping of turf for the new tarmac area revealed no archaeological features or deposits. A brown silt containing gravel, modern debris and cinder was exposed beneath the 0.26m deep topsoil.

## **6 Discussion and conclusions**

**6.1** The archaeological monitoring of the installation of new fencing at Cirencester Primary School recorded archaeological features, deposits and finds of Romano-British date.

**6.2** Two walls and associated rubble deposits were recorded at the west end of the fence line and are likely to be associated with Roman building X.3 which is known in this location.

**6.3** A possible metal surface and a further surface of *opus signinum* were also recorded at the west end of the fence line. These features may be associated with building X.3, or may be related to previously unidentified buildings in this area.

**6.4** Roman dumped deposits were recorded at three locations during the monitoring and are likely to be associated with areas of Roman occupation where it was necessary to raise ground level above flooding. The dumped deposits recorded in post holes 62-67 may be associated with possible building X.5 thought to be located in this area.

**6.5** The finds assemblage comprised 28 sherds of pottery of Roman date, 22 fragments of ceramic building material, the majority of which was also of Roman date, and a Roman steelyard weight. The weight was notable for both its flattened spherical shape, most examples having a biconical form, and for its heavy weight, 865g as compared to other examples from Cirencester which range from 197g to 480g.

**6.6** All elements of the construction and groundworks for the installation of new fencing, removal of old fencing, laying of new tarmac and all associated works were carried out in accordance with the conditions of the Scheduled Monument Consent.

## 7 References

- |              |      |  |
|--------------|------|--|
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| Crummy, N.   | 1983 | <i>The Roman Small Finds from Excavations in Colchester 1971-9</i> , Colchester Archaeol. Rep. 2, (Colchester)   |
| IfA          | 2008 | <i>Standard and guidance for archaeological watching brief</i> . Institute for Archaeologists.   |
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| Viner, L.    | 1998 | 'The finds evidence from Roman Cirencester', in Holbrook, N. (ed.) <i>Cirencester: The Roman Town Defences, Public Buildings and Shops</i> , Cirencester Excavations V (Cirencester), 294-323.         |



## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Pottery by Jane Timby

#### 1 Introduction

1.1 The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of a modest assemblage of 28 sherds of pottery weighing 940g and 22 pieces of ceramic building material weighing 1613g.

1.2 Pottery was recovered from just 11 defined contexts so the quantity of material per context is low.

1.3 The assemblage was scanned to assess its likely chronology and quantified by count and weight for the recorded contexts. The resulting data is summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

1.4 The sherds were quite small and fragmentary with an overall average sherd weight of 9.5g although moderately well-preserved in terms of surface finish and edge abrasion.

#### 2 Roman

2.1 The complete pottery assemblage dates to the Roman period with the emphasis on material of earlier and later Roman (4<sup>th</sup>-century) date.

2.2 A moderately diverse range of wares are present with imported Central Gaulish samian tableware, several regional imports, including products from kilns in Oxfordshire, the New Forest, the Lower Nene Valley, and the Midlands. Slightly more local wares include Severn Valley ware and vessels from Savernake, Wiltshire and the North Wiltshire kilns.

2.3 Also present is a single handmade Jurassic limestone-tempered handmade sherd. This type of ware is typical of the later Iron Age and early Roman periods and is likely to be redeposited as it features alongside late Roman pottery in context (801). There is an outside chance it may be sub-Roman but the presence of other 1<sup>st</sup>-century sherds in the group intimate some early Roman activity nearby.

2.4 Other 1<sup>st</sup>-century wares include a sherd of military-type flagon (Cirencester TF 29) and two sherds of Savernake handmade storage jar which could be 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

2.5 The later Roman wares include five sherds of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware with examples, of Young (1977) form C51 and a bowl with demi-rosette stamps; one sherd of white-slipped Oxfordshire ware; two sherds of New Forest white ware, one from a flint-gritted mortarium, Fulford (1975) type 102; a Lower Nene Valley ware dish and a late Roman shelly ware jar from the Midlands area. This latter vessel, along with the mortarium and stamped Oxfordshire ware indicate a date from the later 4<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 3 Ceramic building material

3.1 In addition to the pottery some 22 fragments, 1613g, of ceramic building material (CBM) were recovered (Table 2). Most of this appears to be Roman in date with examples of roofing tile (*imbrices* and *tegulae*) and box-flue. Several pieces comprised just abraded lumps. One *tegula* has the characteristic hard firing of the Minety kilns, Wiltshire.

3.2 One thinner tile from (303) suggests a roof tile dating to the medieval or post-medieval periods.

3.3 Overall the CBM indicates a well-appointed building with a ceramic roof and provided with a heating system in the immediate locality.

#### 4 Potential for further work

4.1 The profile of the assemblage is entirely that to be expected from a substantial settlement such as Cirencester, which was receiving a wide variety of pottery from various sources. Cirencester also has a number of well-appointed town houses and other buildings so the CBM is completely in keeping. No further work is recommended.



**Table 1 Quantification of Roman pottery**

Context	Fabric	Tot No	Tot Wt	Date
149	LEZSA	1	25	C2
177	SAVGT	1	12	C1-C2
403	OXFRS	1	1	mid C3-C4
801	GY	1	15	Roman
801	LIME	1	3	C1
801	SVWOX	8	30	C1-C3
901	DORBB1	1	1	C2-C4
901	LNVCC	1	44	C3-C4
901	OXFRS	2	19	mid C3-C4
901	OXFWS	1	1	mid C3-C4
901	ROBSH	1	7	late C4
10-01	OXFRS	1	33	mid C3-C4
26-01	WILRE	1	1	C2-C4
17-02	NFOWH	1	30	C4
174-01	OXFRS	1	0.5	mid C3-C4
174-01	SAVGT	1	20	C1-2
174-01	WILRE	1	3	C2-C4
22-01/19-01	LEZSA	1	5	C2
22-01/19-01	NFOWH	1	1	C4
31-02	Cir TF 29	1	14	C1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>265.5</b>	

**Table 2 Quantification of Roman ceramic building material**

Context	CBM	Tot No	Tot wt	Date
102	tegula	2	394	Roman
102	imbrex	1	115	Roman
303	rooftile	1	35	pmed?
303	hypocaust	1	163	Roman
403	lump	1	2	Roman
801	tegula	2	45	Roman
901	tegula	1	147	Roman
10-01	tegula	2	309	Roman
13-01	hypocaust	1	54	Roman
19-01	imbrex	2	47	Roman
31-02	lump	2	20	Roman
86-01	lump	1	6	Roman
129-01	tegula	1	151	Roman
174-01	tegula	1	94	Roman
174-01	imbrex	1	19	Roman
174-01	lump	2	12	Roman
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>1613</b>	

## **Appendix 2 Steelyard weight by Hilary Cool**

The steelyard weight (Figure 12) found during the excavations is unusual in two respects. Most Romano-British lead steelyard weights have a biconical form and few are as heavy as this piece. Three examples were recovered from the Beeches Rd excavations in Cirencester and they ranged in weight from 197g to 480g (Viner 1986, 122 nos. 120, 121 and 123) which is a more typical range. Steelyard weights do not have to be a set multiple of any known weight unit, as the weight of what is being weighed depends on which fulcrum the steelyard is suspended by, and where on the arm the counterweight is positioned. Even lighter steelyard weights could thus be used to weigh heavy items (see Crummy 1983, 99 for full explanation of how steelyards worked). A counterweight of the equivalent of c. 2.6 Roman pounds as here indicates the need for very heavy items to be weighed. This, therefore, is an interesting addition to the otherwise scant evidence for weighing in Roman Cirencester (see Viner 1998, 303, 310 Table 16 for a summary of where else such evidence has been found).

Steelyard weight. Flattened sphere of lead alloy with iron loop inset into upper surface. Depth (without loop) 42mm, diameter 56 x 55mm. Weight 865g. Sf 1, ph 9.



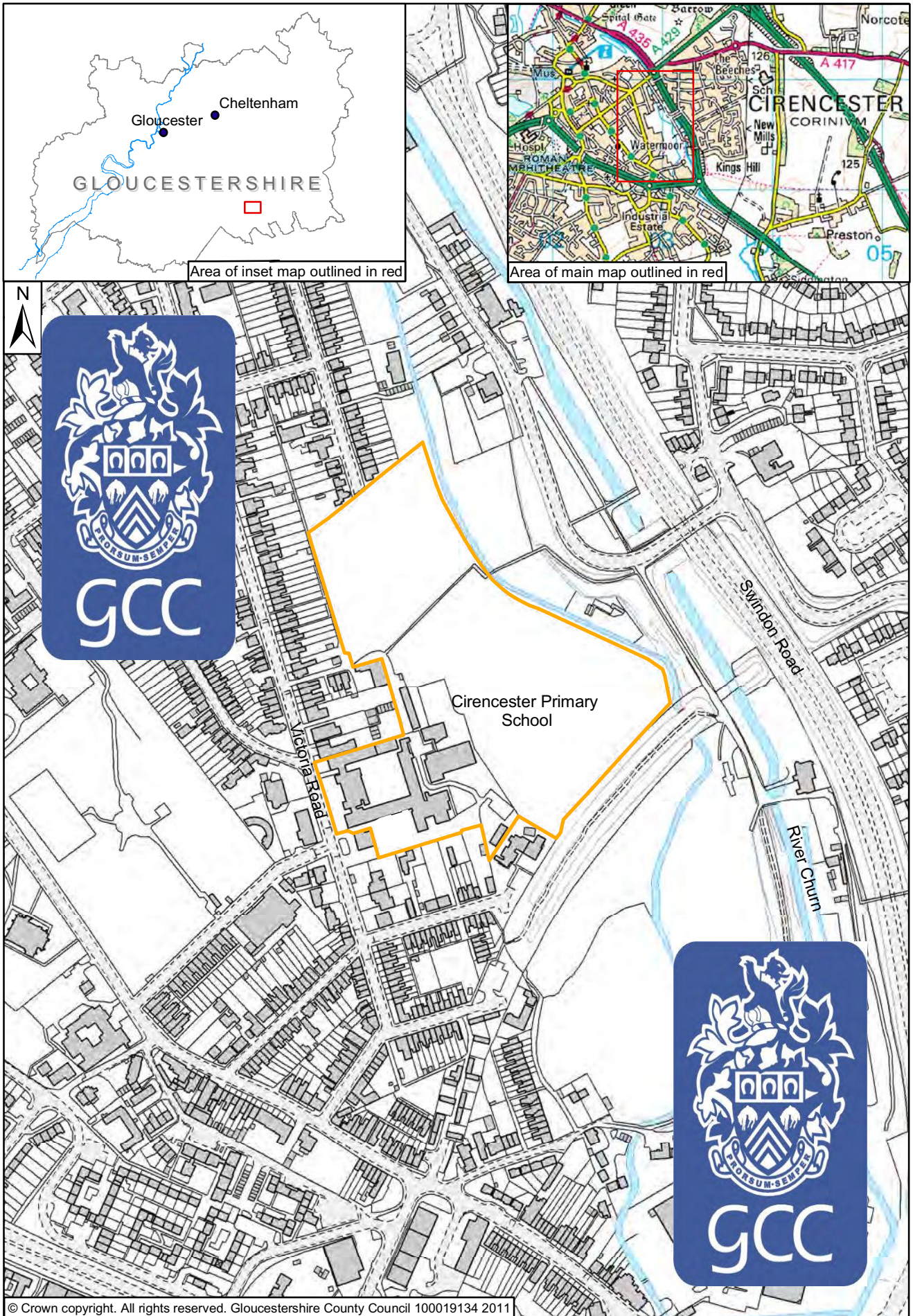


Figure 1: Location map showing study area in orange (scale 1:4000)



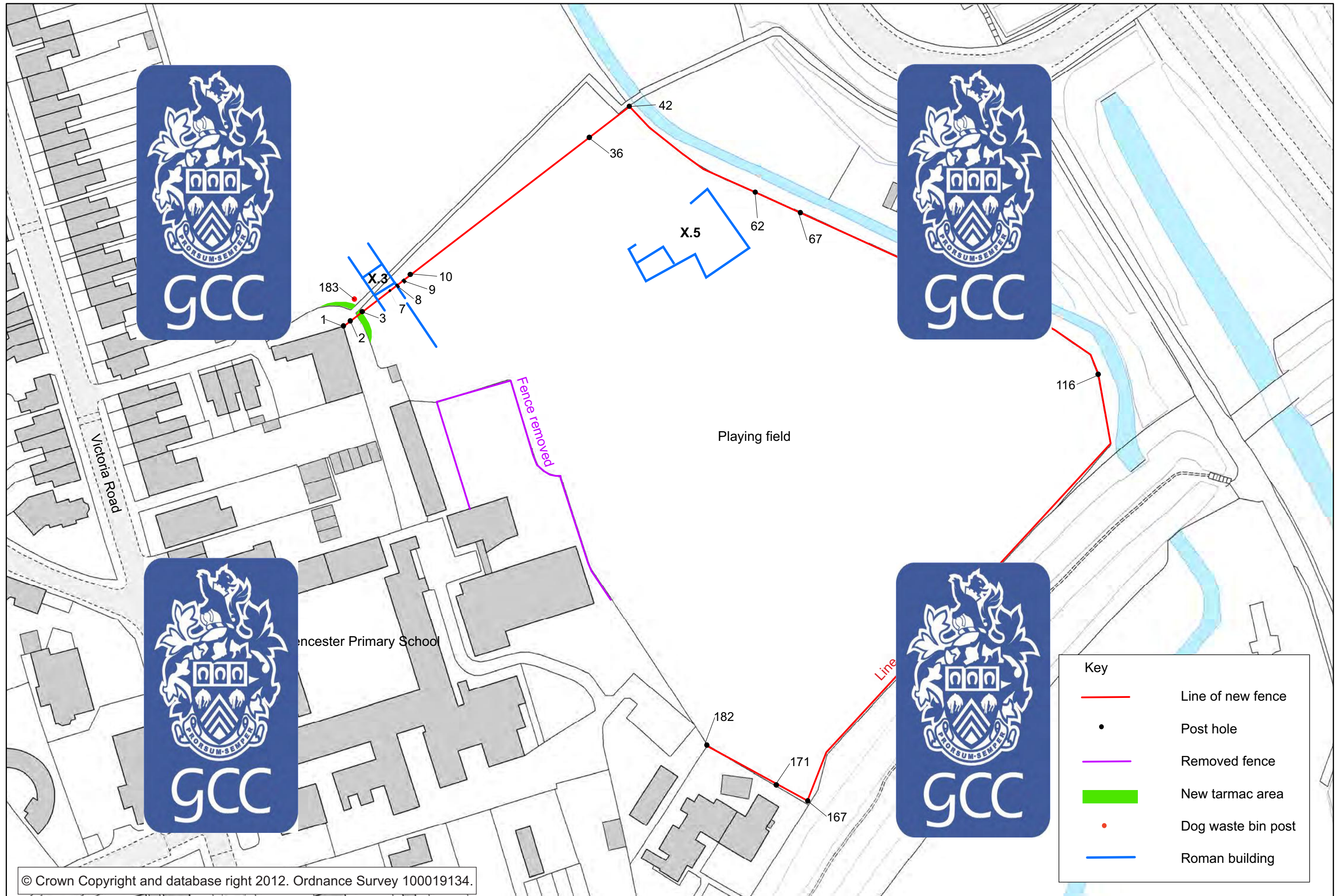


Figure 2: Location of monitored groundworks, significant post holes and known Roman buildings. Scale 1:1000 @ A3.



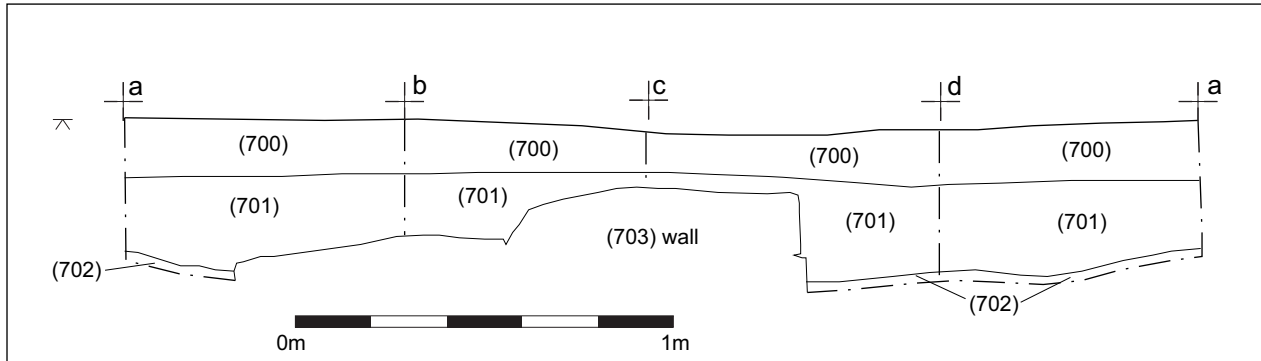


Figure 3: Sections of post hole 7

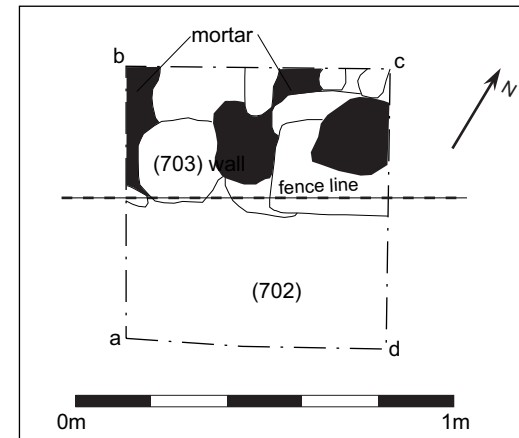


Figure 4: Plan of post hole 7



Figure 5: Southwest facing shot of post hole 7 (scale 0.5m)

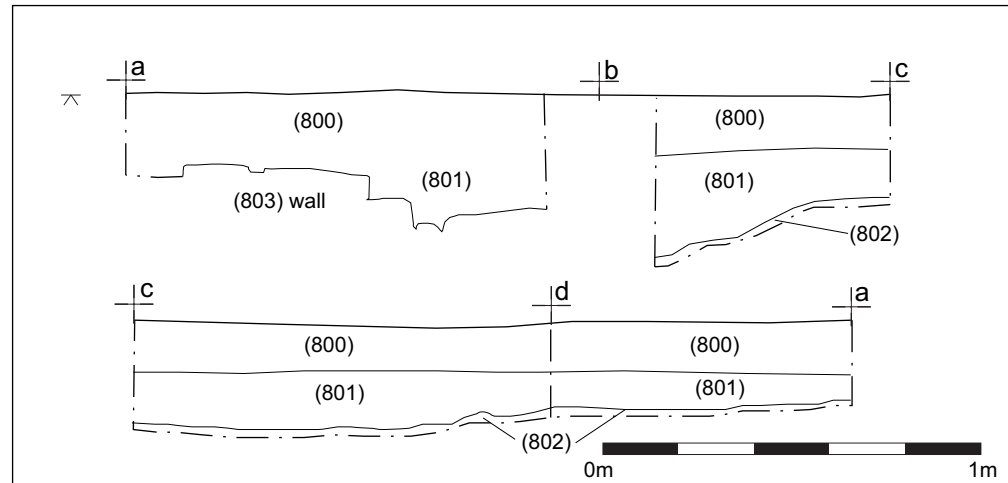


Figure 6: Sections of post hole 8

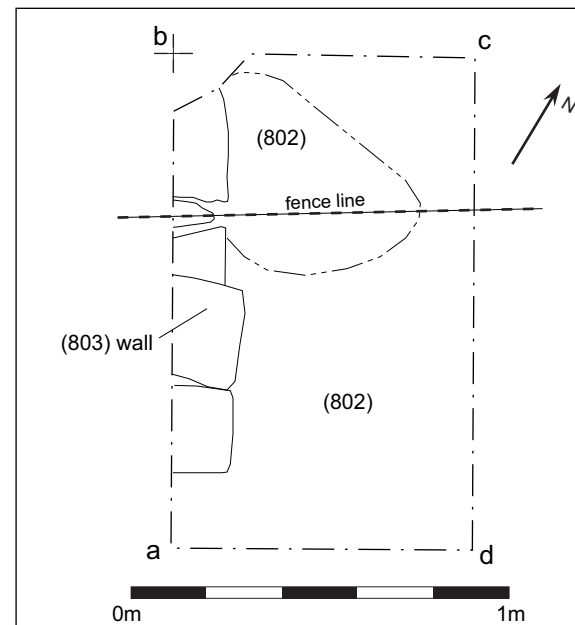


Figure 7: Plan of post hole 8



Figure 8: Southwest facing shot of post hole 8 (scale 0.5m)

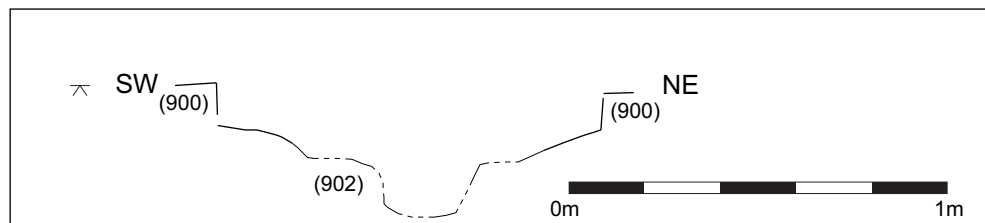


Figure 9: Profile across truncated rubble deposit (902) in post hole 9

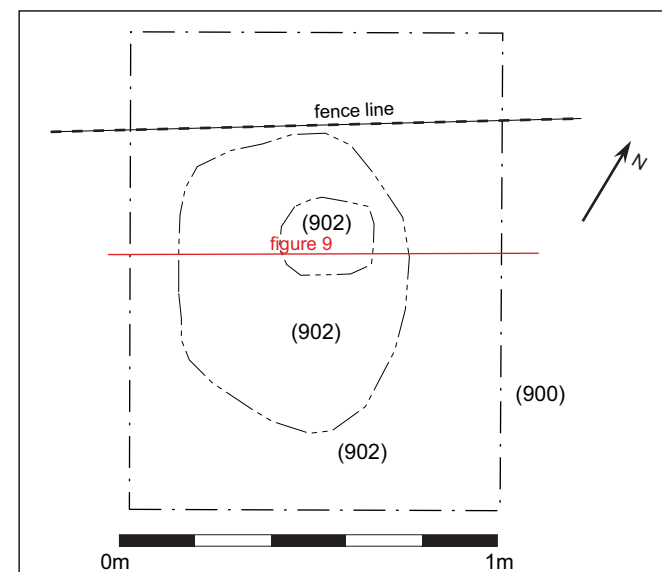


Figure 10: Plan of post hole 9



Figure 11: Northwest facing shot of post hole 9 (scale 0.5m)



Figure 12: Roman steelyard weight (Sf 1)