

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING ACTION
ON LAND ADJACENT TO
CLEMATIS COTTAGE, BACK LANE, ASTON
OXON.**

SP 3385 0325

On behalf of

JULY 2007

REPORT FOR Rybank Homes
c/o lapd architecture + urban regeneration
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Summary

An evaluation was carried out by John Moore Heritage Services on land to the rear of the old school, Letcombe Regis prior to the construction of new residential housing. A series of rubble demolition layers associated with the demolition of a former school building and the re-building of the south part of the main school building were found. These sealed three pits considered to be of nineteenth century date, and a stone-lined structure dated to the turn of the 20th century.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located to the west of St Andrew's Church in Letcombe Regis, centred on NGR SU 3797 8647. The site is the former school playground and contains an extension to the school. The underlying geology is sand and grits of the Upper Greensand.

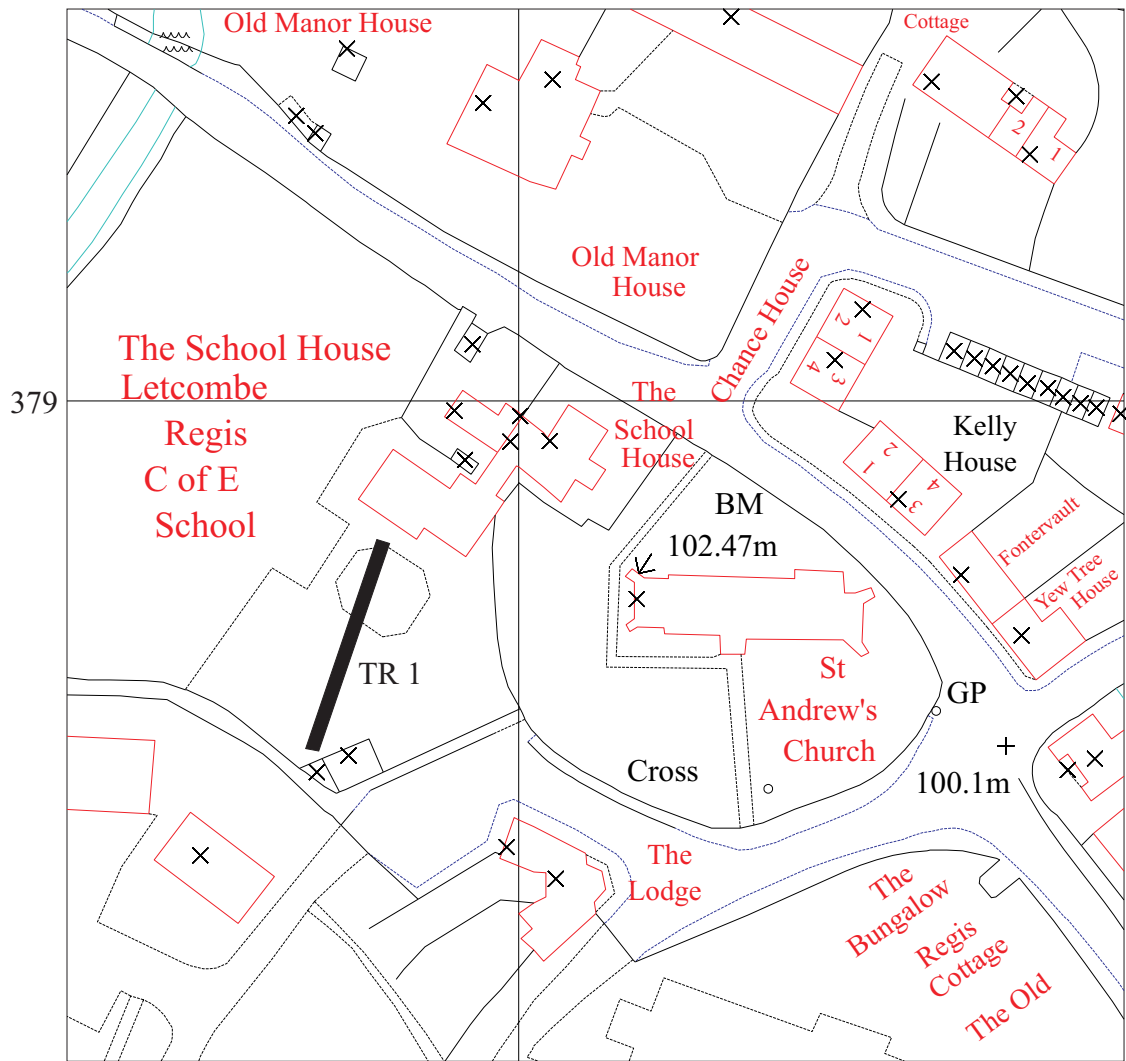
1.2 Planning Background

In September 2001 planning permission was sought from the Vale of White Horse District Council to demolish the existing school extension, convert the existing school building to a dwelling and to erect five new dwellings (LRE/15430/1). Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) originally required a pre-determination evaluation. This was amended to a recommendation that a condition be attached requiring a staged programme of archaeological work when the LPA was minded to refuse the application. Planning permission, with this condition attached, was allowed at appeal. OCAS prepared a Brief for a first stage of archaeological work, namely a field evaluation. The archaeological work was required in accordance with PPG16 because of the potential of archaeological interest on the site. A *Written Scheme of Investigation* submitted by John Moore Heritage Services detailed how the requirements of the Brief would be met.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site is located within the historic core of Letcombe Regis, a settlement that would appear to have its origins in the later Anglo Saxon period. The place name refers to Leoda's valley. To the east lies the parish church of St Andrew, the earliest structural phases of which have been dated to the thirteenth century, although the font is Norman. The church of St Andrew was held by the Abbey of Amesbury until 1086, when it features in Domesday, at which point it became a royal possession (VCH, 1956). In the medieval period the church would have formed one of the focal points of the village with settlement in close proximity. It is possible that an earlier church may have occupied the site. It is not inconceivable that the original graveyard extended beyond the bounds of the current graveyard in the late Saxon and medieval periods. A medieval cross stands in the graveyard.

The manor of Letcombe Regis was held by Cluny from the early 12th century, when Henry I had given the manor as a gift. In 1401, the Crown seized all alien property. Discussions between the Crown, under Henry IV, and the abbey at Cluny ensued in



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Figure 1. Site location

respect of the purchase of the manor. These failed and the manor was finally confiscated in 1414 (VCH, 1908).

The application refers to a listed dovecote within the application area. The EH register however describes this as a school out-building dating to 1782.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* were as follows:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the site
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits
- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present.

In particular to determine

- whether remains associated with the late Saxon and medieval settlement are present
- whether the site lies within an earlier larger graveyard
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with OCAS. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record throughout, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The trench was 30m long and 1.6m wide. The location of the trench was moved to the south, and the orientation of the trench was changed from northeast/southwest to north/south as the 1960s school-extension southwest of the original school house was still standing and in use as a site office.

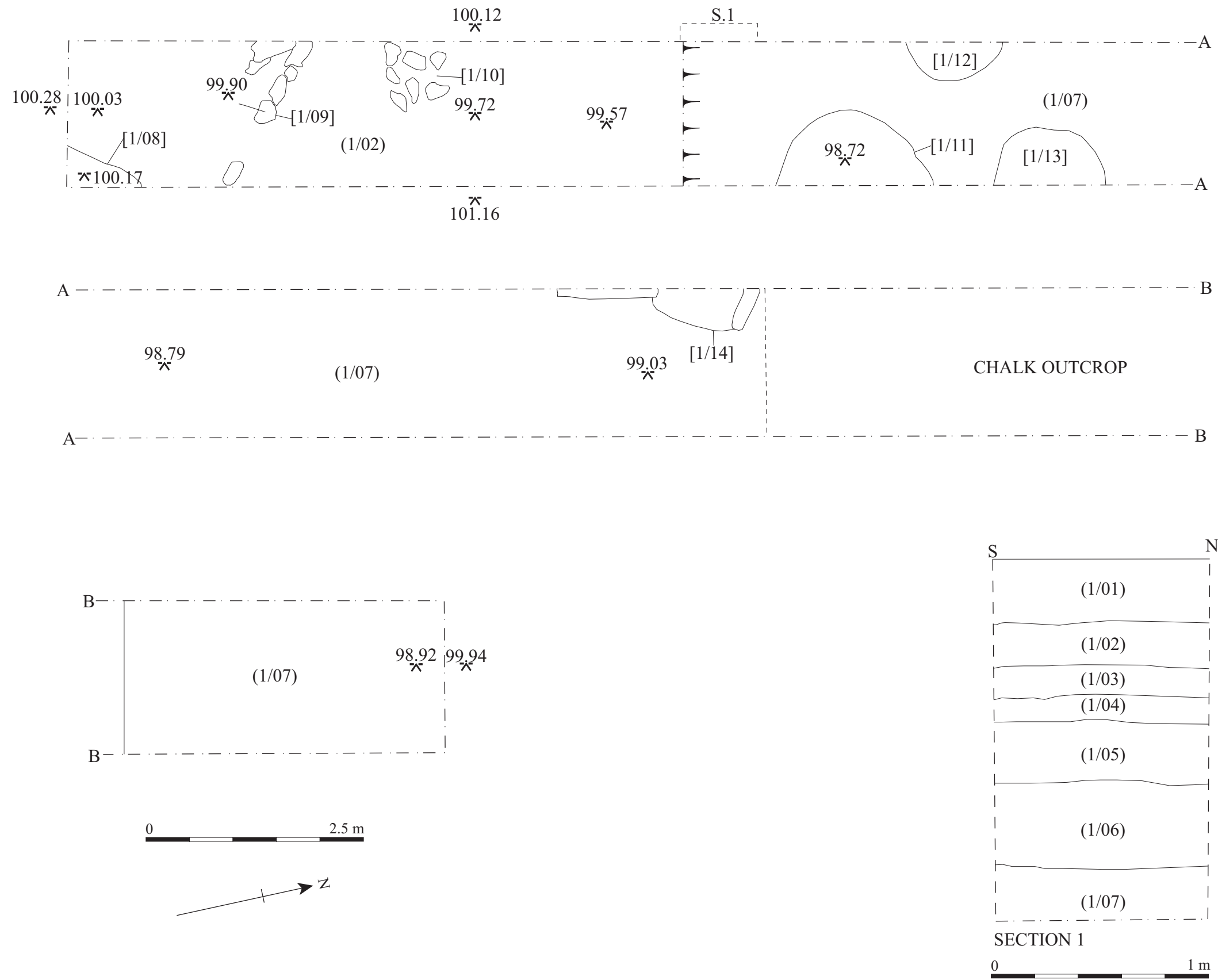


Figure 2. Trench and section 1

4 RESULTS

All archaeological features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. ditch cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material. A general description of the feature fills is given. Ceramic building material (brick and tile) is referred to as CBM.

The lowest layer revealed during the evaluation was natural Greensand (1/07). Natural chalk was also observed as an outcrop at the north end of the trench, beneath the present flowerbed. The Greensand was cut by three possible pits.

The pits contained demolition rubble [1/11], [1/12] and [1/13]. These measured between 1.1m and 1.9m across, as observed. All three were backfilled with apparently loose masonry rubble and a mid brown loamy soil matrix. The pits were only observed during machining and no finds were recovered due to the speed of ingress of water into the trench.

Overlying the pits were a number of dumps of rubble (1/06), (1/05), (1/04), (1/03), and (1/02), all of which were sealed by ballast make-up for a tarmac surface (1/01). The spreads of rubble comprised masonry and brick in slightly differing soil matrices and differing ratios of masonry rubble and CBM, which spread from south to north. Pottery from (1/06) and the find-spot (1/10) is nineteenth or early twentieth century. The south end of the trench was not excavated below the level of the tarmac and ballast due to its proximity to the possible dovecot or school out-building. However, halfway along the trench the depth was increased to the natural, where it became apparent that at the southern end of the trench the rubble spreads were probably thicker than the northern. The uppermost dump of rubble (1/02) had a northwest/southeast line of stone [1/09] running through it

At the north end of the trench these layers of rubble had themselves been truncated by a stone-lined feature [1/14] and groundworks associated with the construction of the new wing of Letcombe Regis Primary School in the 1960s. The stone-lined feature was clipped by the evaluation trench, removing a worked slab of stone c. 0.8m long by c. 0.4m high and c. 0.1m thick; a groove was visible the length of the underside. The fill of the feature was a mid orangey brown clay silt, with no apparent inclusions. A piece of moulded glass was recovered from the feature, pointing to a late-nineteenth or early twentieth century. The 1960s rubble truncated the north end of the chalky rubble spread and overlay the stone-lined feature. It directly overlay the chalk outcrop, continuing to the north back onto the Greensand at the very north end of the trench.

The trench was only excavated at the south end to the top of the latest layer of rubble (1/02), due to the proximity of the possible dovecote or school out-building. Concrete underpinning [1/08] for the building was observed during machining. The ballast and tarmac (1/01) sealed all the other recorded contexts.

5 DISCUSSION

The site is located adjacent to the medieval church of St Andrew. The evaluation was carried out to investigate, amongst other aims, the possibility of the medieval graveyard having extended beyond its current limits. No such evidence was revealed. Furthermore, no evidence for late Saxon or medieval activities was encountered

during the evaluation.

The evaluation revealed a number of chalky rubble layers associated with the demolition of a building which was orientated north-east/south-west across the line of the trench as shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1882-1883 as well as layers associated with the rebuilding of the south end of the main school building in the 1960s. The pottery recovered from the layers of chalky rubble is exclusively late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

The chalky rubble overlay undated pits containing rubble, which were probably post-medieval, if the looseness of the pit-fills is considered diagnostic of a relative date. The pits and the stone-lined structure, which yielded a piece of moulded glass, to the north of them can almost certainly be associated with the school, either as parts of the construction or as latrines.

The absence of any subsoil overlying the natural greensand indicates that the area had been terraced or otherwise reduced at the time of the building of the original school buildings.

6 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record

The project brief

The project report

Written Scheme of Investigation

The primary site records

The archive has been given an accession number OXCMS: 2007.51 by Oxfordshire Museums Service (Oxfordshire County Council), where it will be deposited.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*

Institute of Field Archaeologists. 1994. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*.

VCH 1908 A History of the County of Rutland: volume 1

VCH 1956 A History of the County of Wiltshire: volume 3

APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Interpretation
1/01	Layer	Tarmac/ ballast	c. 0.30m	>1.6m.	>30m	Modern
1/02	Layer	light greenish grey clay and rubble	0.20m	>1.6m	m	Rubble dump
1/03	Layer	loose light whitish grey chalk and rubble	0.15m	>1.6m	m	Rubble dump
1/04	Layer	loose mid reddish brown tile	0.10m	>1.6m	>m	Rubble dump
1/05	Layer	loose blackish grey clay and rubble	0.28.m	>1.6m	>m	Rubble dump
1/06	Layer	loose mid whitish grey chalky rubble	0.36m	>1.6m	>m	Rubble dump
1/07	Layer	natural Greensand	>0.15m	>1.6m	>30m	Natural
1/08	Layer	concrete	0.24m	0.5m	1m	Modern
1/09	Wall	Blocks of roughly worked masonry	0.15m	1.7m	0.15m	Possible wall or part of rubble spread
1/10	Finds	finds number				finds
1/11	Fill/cut	mid greyish brown clay loam & rubble	unknown	0.7m	0.4m	Pit
1/12	Fill/cut	mid greyish brown clay loam & rubble	unknown	0.4m	0.2m	Pit
1/13	Fill/cut	mid greyish brown clay loam & rubble	unknown	0.5m	0.3m	Pit
1/14	Stone-lined pit	mid orangey brown clay loam; stone slab with groove in underside; slab measured 0.8x0.4x0.1m cut was straight-sided, with return to east	unknown	>0.2	>0.8m	Stone-lined structure; little seen due to water ingress, moulded glass recovered from fill