



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

AT

**ST. MARY' CHURCH, BLACK BOURTON,
OXFORDSHIRE**

SP 2859 0421

On behalf of

Carterton Town Council

AUGUST 2006

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Summary

An excavation of this site was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during June 2006, expanding upon previous work conducted in 2002. This excavation revealed early Saxon religious activity in the form of two circular post built shrines, with possibly associated domestic activity, a middle Saxon period settlement of sunken feature buildings and post built structures, with activity lasting into the 11th century in the area.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site of the cemetery extension is located on the west side of the Church of St Mary, Black Bourton. The church is accessed via Burford Road that runs from the B4020 between Alvescot and Clanfield (NGR SP 28590421). The underlying geology is Oxford Clay in the north part of the site with Third Terrace River Gravels in the south. The site lies at approximately 80m OD and the previous land use was pasture.

1.2 Planning Background

Part of a field west of St. Mary's Church, Black Bourton has been enclosed as an extension to the cemetery. An archaeological evaluation of the site was carried out in October 2002. Due to the presence of significant archaeological remains it was agreed that an area will be excavated in order to record the remains before destruction by the digging of graves.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The church originally dates to the early twelfth century but was remodelled in the thirteenth century. The settlement of Black Bourton is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 and would appear therefore to date to at least the later Anglo-Saxon period. To the southwest of the proposed development an Anglo-Saxon inhumation was found. Whether this was an isolated burial or part of a larger group or cemetery is not known. To the west a rectangular enclosure with possible building platforms within it has been identified on an aerial photograph. This is considered possibly to be the manorial enclosure of the Hungerford family that was demolished in, or around, 1800.

An archaeological evaluation in 2002 found what is thought to be a Saxon sunken floored building (SFB) and a number of postholes (JMHS 2002). The pottery, aside from a single Romano-British sherd was all early middle or middle Saxon in date. The assemblage is of some significance, as it contained only the fourth group of middle Saxon Ipswich ware pottery from the county, which given the scale of the excavations, means that the site may be a settlement of some status.

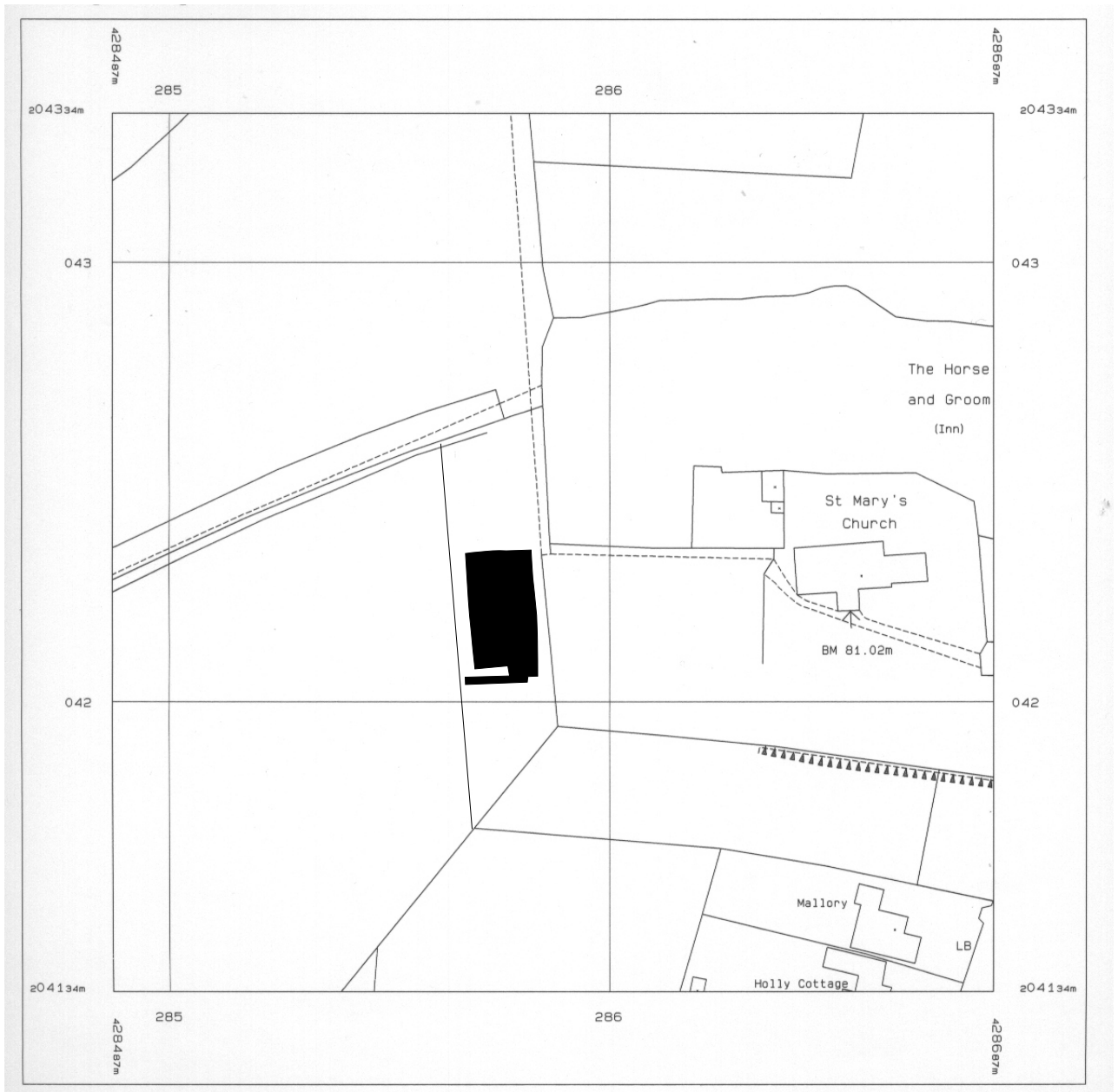


Figure 2. Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

In particular

- To recover evidence for further Anglo-Saxon activity in the area.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services and Carterton Town Council. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of an area approximately 30m by 15m (Figure 1).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

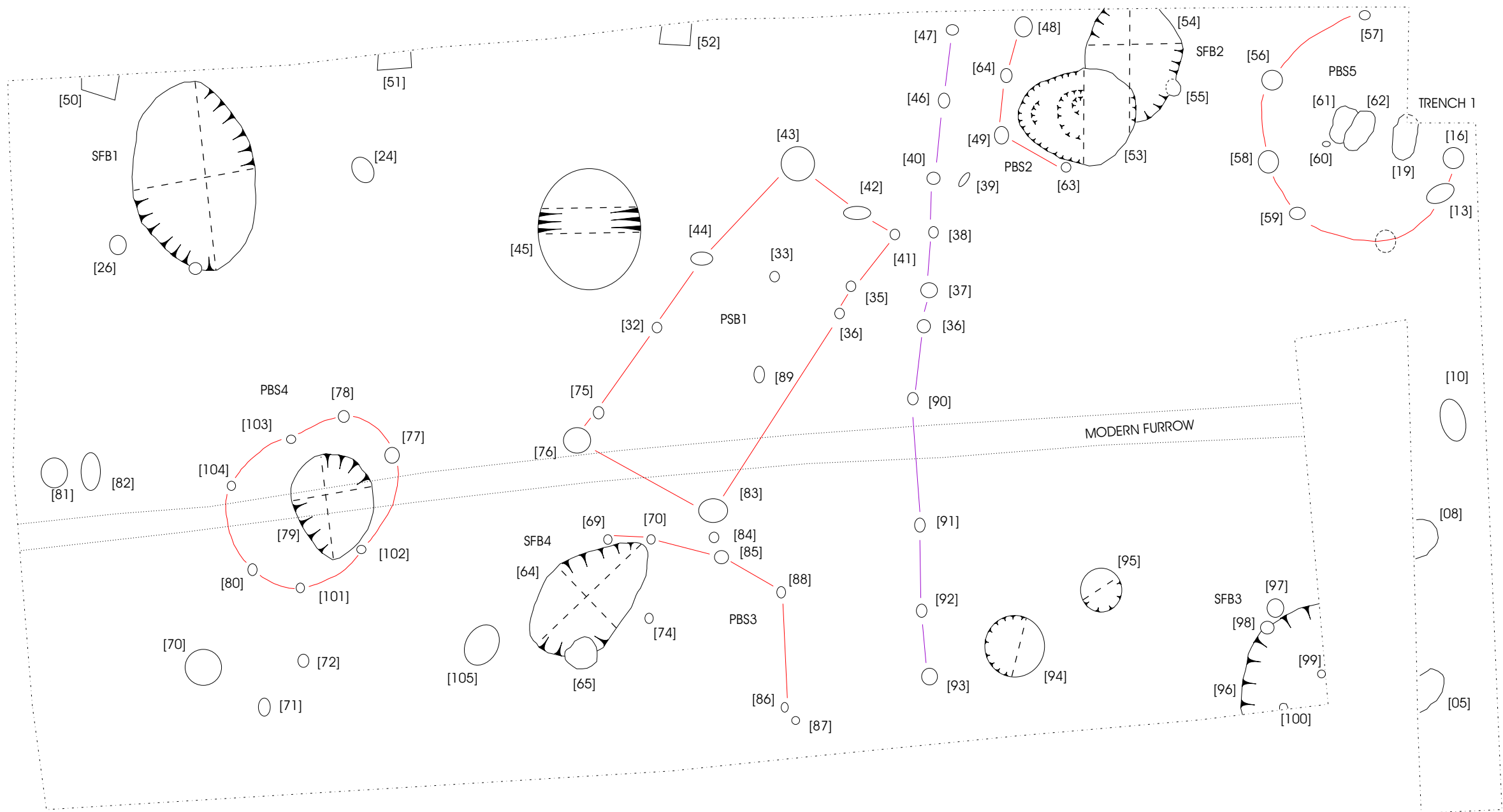
3.2 Methodology

The topsoil was removed by 7 ton tracked 360° tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist. The resulting surface was cleaned by hand prior to hand excavation and targeted sieving of all identified archaeological deposits.

The project was designed as part of a community project and six individuals put their names forward as volunteers on the site. Children from a local school were provided with two activity mornings and helped to wash some of the finds.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced.

The work was monitored by Hugh Coddington of the County Archaeological Services.



4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. pit cuts. Due to time constraints some feature fills were recorded with the same number as their cut. However, significant deposits of material were given separate numbers and indicated thus (). For the sake of continuity the numbering sequence follows on from the 2002 excavation and where previously recorded features have been relocated and their original numbers have been reassigned.

The upper layer was a topsoil of dark brown clay silt loam (01) up to 0.25m thick, which contained some large rough limestone pieces. This lay directly above a ploughsoil of dark yellowish brown clay-silt subsoil (02) that was up to 0.3m thick. In places this subsoil lay above a mid reddish brown silt with frequent gravel (022) that was on average 0.1m thick; it was not constant over the entire site. The natural was a reddish-yellow to brown sand gravel (23).

4.1 Sunken-Feature Buildings (SFBs)

Building 1 (SFB1)

The probable SFB [31] located by the previous evaluation in 2002 was re-investigated. During the course of this excavation it was initially recorded in quadrants before total excavation. The fill was an homogenous brown sandy silt with frequent gravel chips and charcoal flecks. It was oval measuring 4m by 2.5m in plan and was 0.2m deep. The associated posthole [28] had previously been completely excavated.

Building 2 (SFB2)

A second probable SFB [54] was located to the south of [31]. This appeared to be of a similar form only smaller, measuring over 2.5m by 2m in plan. This was recorded in quadrants before near-complete excavation. It was shallow only 0.1m deep with a flat base and filled with a brown silt with frequent gravel. It was associated with posthole [55] which appeared to be contemporary. This posthole was 0.29m in diameter and 0.12m deep with a rounded base. It was filled with a dark brown silt and contained large pieces of limestone used as a packing material. This SFB had been truncated by a later cut [53].

Building 3 (SFB3)

Cut [96] formed the main part of a third SFB. This was only partially exposed during the excavation. Perhaps only a quarter was revealed with the majority remaining under the baulk of the sections. The entirety exposed was fully excavated measuring at least 2m by 1.8m in plan and up to 0.2m deep. Two postholes [97] & [98] were set on the outer edge. The cut of [97] was circular, 0.5m in diameter and 0.25m deep with vertical sides. It was filled with a mid-brown firm silt with some gravel inclusions. The cut of [98] was also circular; it was 0.26m in diameter and 0.1m deep with vertical sides. Set internally around the presumed centre were two small postholes [99] and [100]. Both were shallow, about 0.1m deep and approximately 0.2m in diameter. Both were filled with a dark grey silt.

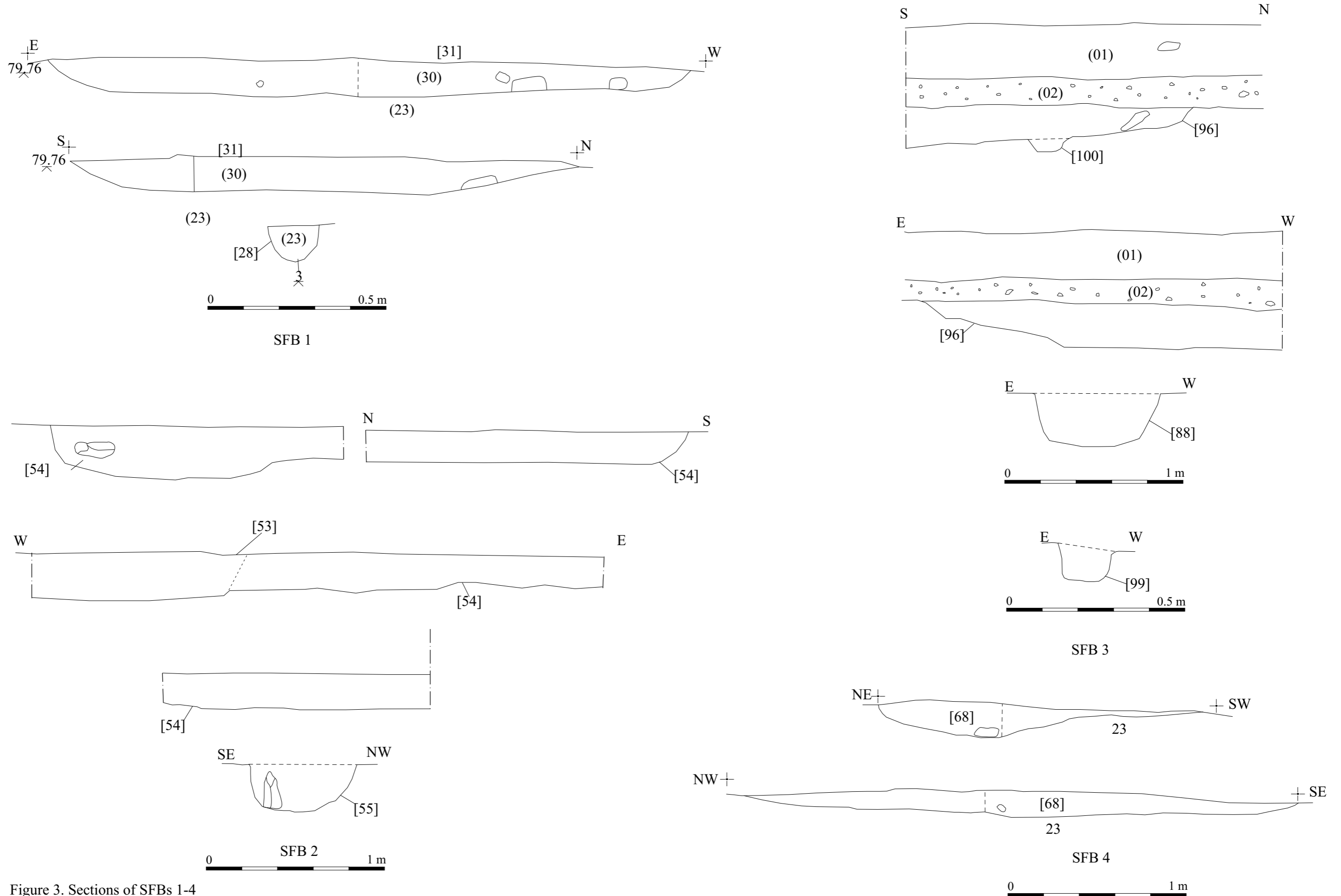


Figure 3. Sections of SFBs 1-4

Building 4 (SFB4)

A possible SFB could be cut [68]. This oval feature measured 3m by 2m and was 0.18m deep. It was initially recorded by quadrant before total excavation. It was filled with a slightly clayey brown silt deposit with some gravel inclusions and charcoal flecks. The southern end displayed a very shallow depression and significant narrowing possibly indicating a post depression or area for a post-pad. The overall shape is similar to cuts [31] and [54] although there is no definite posthole as one would expect however, postholes [69], [70] or [74] could be associated (see below).

4.2 Post Built Structures (PBSs)

Structure 1 (PBS1)

A rectangular PBS with 12 associated postholes was recorded near the centre of the excavated area. The four corners consist of [41], [43], [76] and [83]. Posthole [41] was sub-circular in plan and 0.19m in diameter. It had 60° sloped sides and a rounded base. It was 0.12m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [43] was circular in plan and 0.5m in diameter. It had 45° sloped sides and a flat base. It was 0.09m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [76] was sub-circular in plan and 0.55m in diameter. It had 65° sloped sides and a rounded stepped base. It was 0.13m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [83] was oval in plan and 0.6m in diameter. It had 75° sloped sides and a flat base. It was 0.06m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel.

Six postholes appeared to be associated with the wall lines of this structure; [34], [35], [37], [42], [44] and [75]. Posthole [34] was sub-circular in plan and 0.2m in diameter. It was 0.15m deep with one vertical side the other was stepped, and was filled with a grey-brown silt. Posthole [35] was sub-circular in plan and 0.15m in diameter. It had 60° sloped sides and a rounded base. It was 0.11m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [37] was sub-circular in plan and 0.18m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a rounded base. It was 0.15m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam. Posthole [42] was sub-circular in plan and 0.25m in diameter. It had near vertical sides and a rounded base. It was 0.25m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [44] was sub-circular in plan and 0.17m in diameter. It had near vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.18m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [75] was sub-circular in plan and 0.2m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.09m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks.

The two internal postholes [33] and [89] were also recorded. Posthole [33] was circular in plan and 0.15m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.06m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [89] was circular in plan and 0.35m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.06m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel.

Posthole [84] was set into the ground at an angle suggesting that it may have served as a prop against this structure. Posthole [84] was circular in plan and 0.18m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.15m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel and charcoal flecks.

Structure 2 (PBS2)

It is possible that the four postholes [48], [49], [63] and [64] form the corner of a PBS. Posthole [48] was 0.3m in diameter, 0.1m deep with vertical sides and a flat base. It was filled with a grey brown silt with some gravel inclusions. Posthole [49] was 0.2m in diameter, 0.15m deep with vertical sides and a flat base. It was filled with a grey brown silt with some gravel inclusions and charcoal flecks. Posthole [63] was 0.2m in diameter, 0.06m deep with vertical sides and a concave base. It was filled with a grey brown silt with some gravel inclusions. Posthole [64] was 0.22m in diameter, 0.05m deep with vertical sides and a flat base. It was filled with a grey brown silt deposit with some gravel inclusions.

Structure 3 (PBS3)

The partial remains of a possible third structure are represented by six postholes [69], [73], [85], [86], [87] and [88] possibly forming a wall line and corner. Posthole [69] was sub-circular in plan and 0.3m in diameter. It had near vertical sides and a rounded base. It was 0.08m deep and filled with an orange-brown silty loam with 50% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [73] was circular in plan and 0.21m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.05m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [85] was circular in plan and 0.28m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.17m deep and filled with a dark grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [86] was circular in plan and 0.23m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.07m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with charcoal flecks. Posthole [87] was circular in plan and 0.2m in diameter. It had near vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.05m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel. Posthole [88] was circular in plan and 0.35m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.14m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel and charcoal flecks.

Posthole [74] could possibly be an internal feature associated with this structure. It was circular in plan and 0.16m in diameter. It had near vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.06m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel and charcoal flecks.

Structure 4 (PBS4)

This was a circular structure consisting of a central pit surrounded by an irregular circle of seven postholes. The main pit [79] was oval in plan and measured 2m by 1.6m. It was initially recorded by quadrants before total excavation. Measuring 0.22m deep it was filled with a sandy silt loam with c.30% gravel and occasional charcoal flecks. It had been slightly truncated by a later furrow.

The circle of postholes was formed by [77], [78], [80], [101], [102], [103] and [104]. Posthole [77] was circular in plan and 0.3m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat

base. It was 0.17m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [78] was sub-circular in plan and 0.2m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.1m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel. Posthole [80] was circular in plan and 0.22m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a concave base. It was 0.11m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [101] was circular in plan and 0.22m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a concave base. It was 0.06m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [102] was circular in plan and 0.23m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.04m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [103] was circular in plan and 0.24m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.2m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 20% gravel. Posthole [104] was circular in plan and 0.2m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.05m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel.

Structure 5 (PBS5)

A second circular structure of six postholes centred on three small oval pits. One of the central pits [19] was originally recorded by the evaluation in 2002. It measured 0.4m by 0.7m and was 0.2m deep. The other two [61] and [62] were located during this excavation. Pit [61] measured 0.75m by 0.3m in plan and was 0.2m deep. It contained a mid grey-brown sandy loam with the occasional large pebble. It had been cut by pit [62]. This pit was 0.65m by 0.3m in plan and was also 0.2m deep. The lower fill was a 0.14m thick deposit of compact light grey-brown silt with some limestone blocks. Above this was a 0.06m thick deposit of orange-brown silt loam.

A small stake-hole was also recorded in the interior of the structure, near to pit [61]. This stake-hole [60] was circular and 0.15m in diameter and 0.2m deep. It was filled with a grey-brown silty loam.

Two of the outer circle of postholes [13] and [16] were also previously recorded during the 2002 evaluation. Posthole [13] was oval in plan and measured 0.55m by 0.3m and was 0.2m deep, while [16] was circular with a diameter of 0.4m and 0.15m deep. The other postholes [56], [57], [58] and [59] were located during this excavation. Posthole [56] was circular in plan and 0.2m in diameter. It had sloped sides that widened at the top to 0.4m and a rounded base. It was 0.2m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 60% gravel. Posthole [57] was circular in plan and 0.18m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.19m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel. Posthole [58] was circular in plan and 0.5m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.37m deep and filled with a orange-brown silty loam with 10% gravel. Posthole [59] was circular in plan and 0.42m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.28m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel. An oval patch of soil was noted in the area (see figure 2), initially dismissed as too shallow to be a feature in retrospect it may well have been the bottom of a truncated posthole.

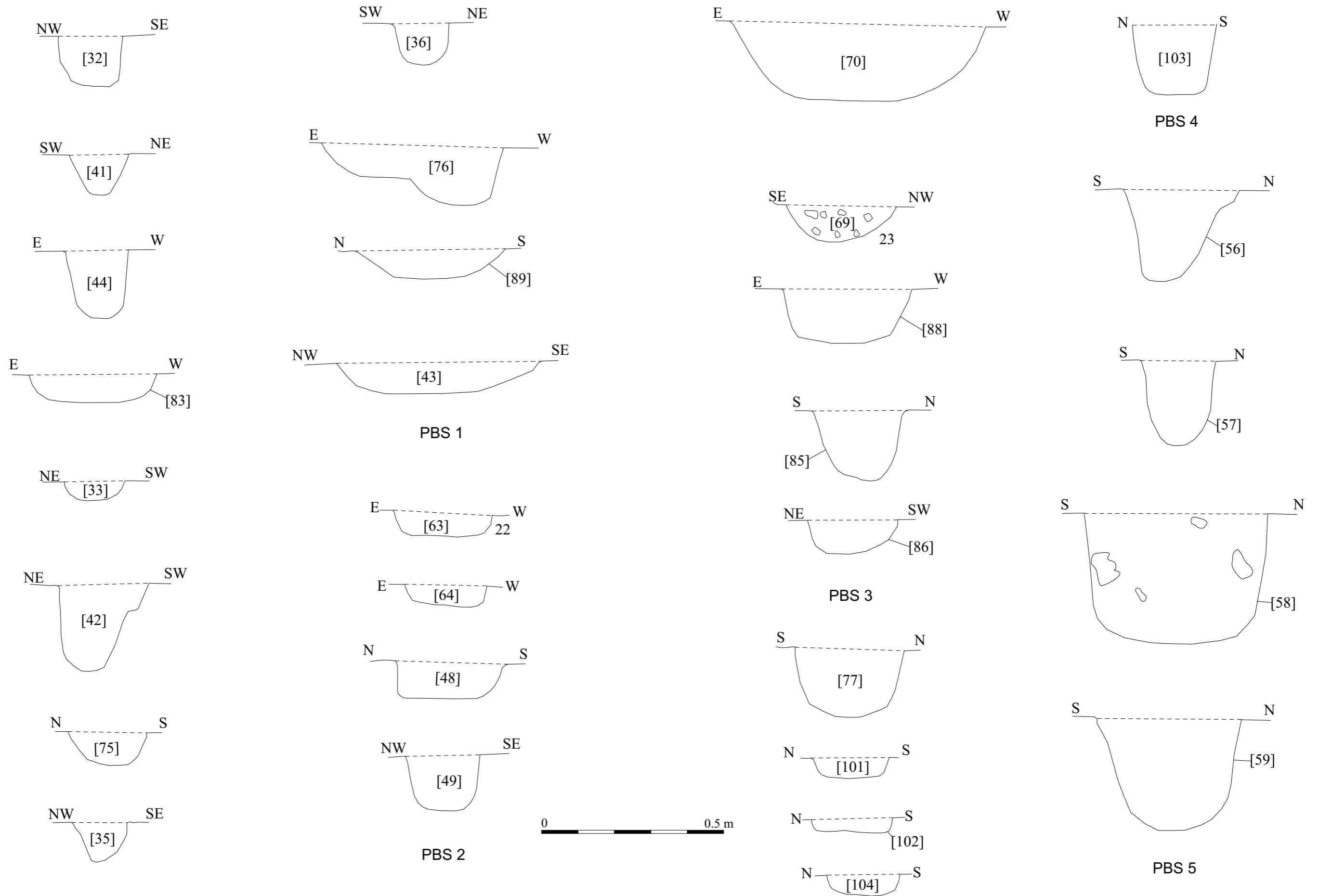


Figure 4. Sections of PBSs 1-5

4.3 Fence Line

A linear arrangement of ten postholes [36], [37], [38], [40], [46], [47], [90], [91], [92] and [93] was recorded running east to west across the site. They were roughly spaced at approximately 1.5m.

Posthole [36] was sub-circular in plan and 0.15m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.11m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal. Posthole [37] was sub-circular in plan and 0.18m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.15m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with charcoal flecks. Posthole [38] was sub-circular in plan and 0.2m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.13m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal. Posthole [40] was sub-circular in plan and 0.17m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.08m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [46] was sub-circular in plan and 0.17m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a rounded base. It was 0.08m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [47] was sub-circular in plan and 0.15m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.11m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [90] was circular in plan and 0.2m in diameter. It had concave sides and a rounded base. It was 0.05m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with charcoal flecks. Posthole [91] was circular in plan and 0.23m in diameter. It had concave sides and a rounded base. It was 0.05m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal flecks. Posthole [92] was circular in plan and 0.2m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.05m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam. Posthole [93] was sub-circular in plan and 0.33m in diameter. It had vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.08m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 5% gravel and charcoal.

4.4 The Well

A large sub-circular feature [53] was half excavated just south of the fence line. It measured 2.5m by 2m in plan and was 1.41m deep. It had near vertical sides near the top that tapered in towards the base. This feature had been cut into the natural (23) and through layers of concreted gravel at approximately 1.1m from the level of the top of the natural. The base of the feature was cut into a layer of loose gravel below the height of the water table at the time, which was a period of drought.

The lowest deposit within this feature was a grey silty clay (66) with some gravel that was 0.25m thick. Above this was a orange-brown silty loam (65) with 25% gravel and some charcoal flecks. It was up to 1.16m deep.

4.5 Pits

Eleven discrete pits were recorded during the excavation; these were considered too large to be postholes.

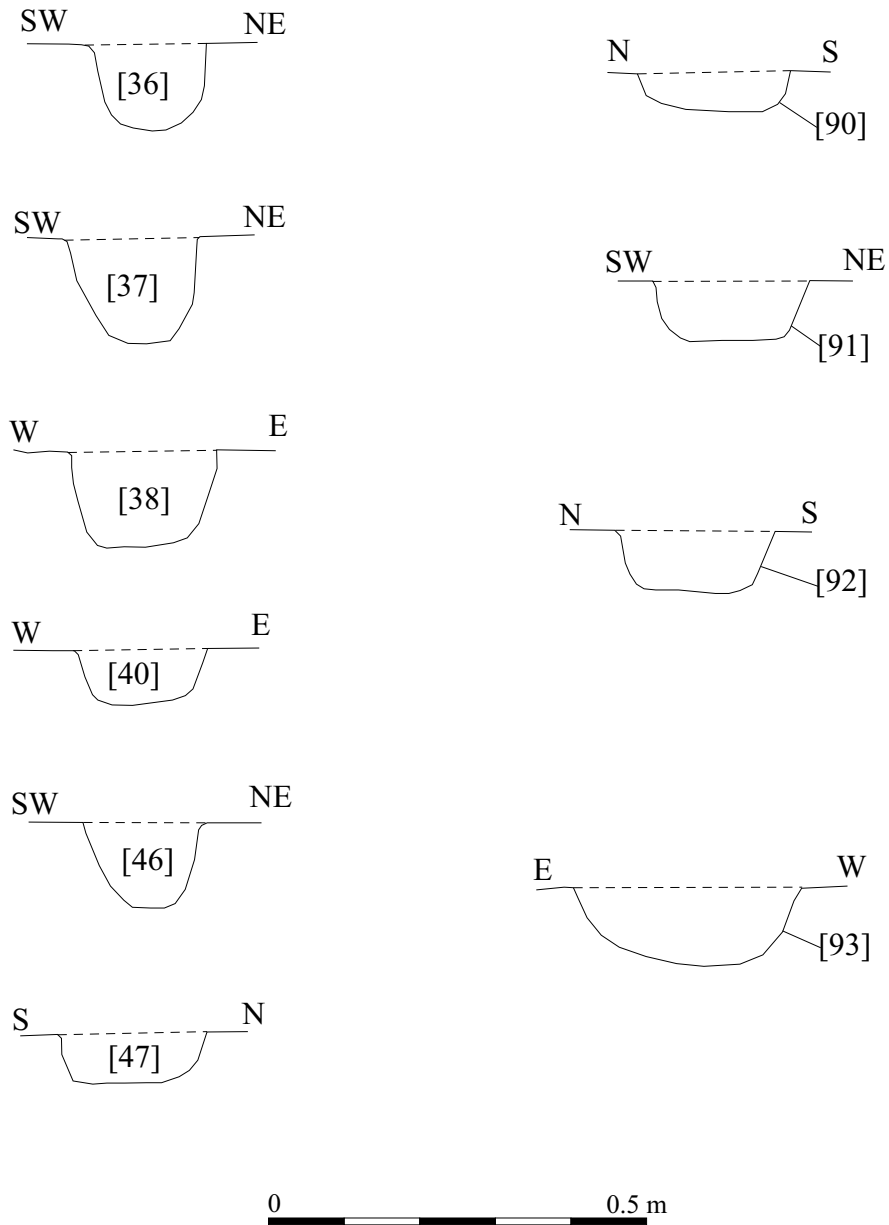


Figure 5. Sections of postholes from the fence

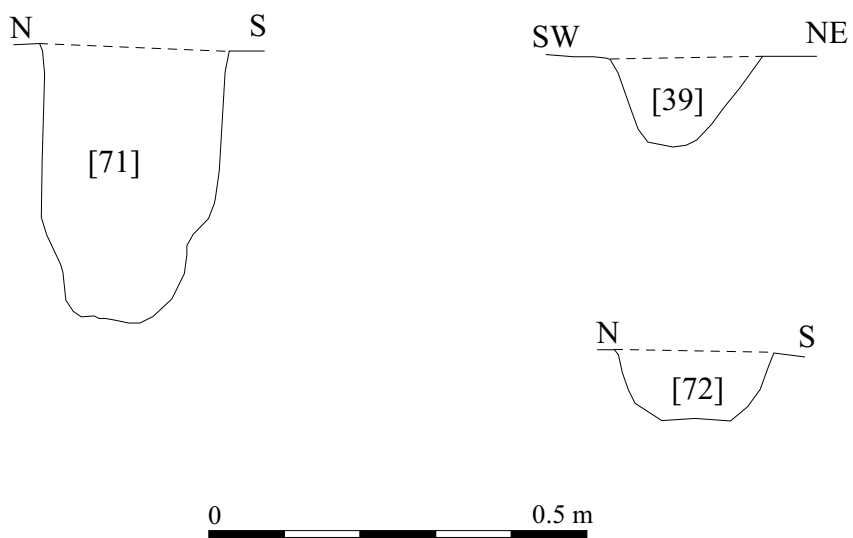
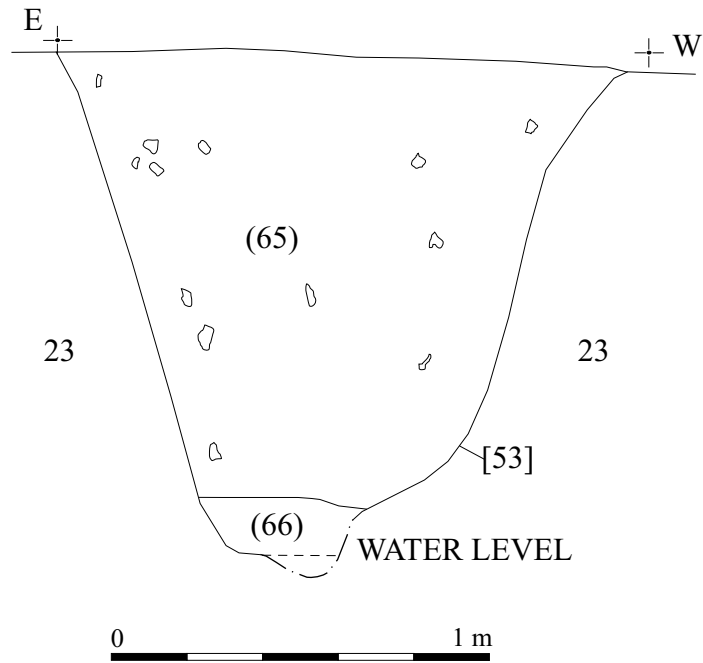


Figure 6. Sections of the Well and un-associated postholes

Pit [45] was roughly circular and 2m in diameter and 0.5m deep. The sides were stepped at approximately 45° and the base was flat. It was filled with an orange-brown silty loam flecked with charcoal and including some gravel. It contained small quantities of animal bone and pottery.

Pit [67] was circular in plan and 0.6m in diameter. It was 0.12m deep with concave base and sides. It was filled with firm orange-brown sandy silt with c.5% gravel. This pit cut the earlier possible sunken-feature building [68].

Pit [70] was sub-circular in plan and 0.9m in diameter. It was 0.21m deep with concave base and sides. It was filled with firm orange-brown sandy silt with c.10% gravel.

Pit [81] was circular in plan and 0.55m in diameter. It was 0.18m deep with concave base and sides. It was filled with firm orange-brown sandy silt with c.20% gravel.

Pit [82] was sub-circular in plan and 0.38m in diameter. It was 0.1m deep with concave base and sides. It was filled with firm grey-brown sandy silt with c.40% gravel.

Pit [94] was sub-circular in plan and approximately 1.35m in diameter. It was 0.3m deep with concave base and sides. It was filled with firm orange-brown sandy silt with c.20% gravel. It contained a single sherd of industrial white earthenware, but there is a possibility that this could be intrusive.

Pit [95] was circular in plan and 0.9m in diameter. It was 0.1m deep with flat base and concave sides. It was filled with firm grey-brown sandy silt with c.25% gravel and some ash, clinker and metal working slag.

Pit [105] was sub-circular in plan and 0.9m in diameter. It was 0.15m deep with concave base and sides. It was filled with firm grey-brown sandy silt with c.30% gravel.

Three obviously modern square pits [50], [51] and [52] were also recorded. These were 0.5m square and spaced at intervals of 6m. It is believed these relate to a geotechnical survey conducted in 2002 or earlier, prior to the area being approved for use as a cemetery.

4.6 Un-associated Postholes

Only three postholes that could not be associated with any structures were recorded. Posthole [39], just south of the fence line, was sub-circular in plan and 0.2m in diameter. It had sloped sides and a slightly rounded base. It was 0.12m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel. Posthole [71] was oval in plan and measured 0.38m by 0.23m. It had near vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.33m deep and filled with a yellow-brown silty sand with 10% gravel. Posthole [72] was sub-circular in plan and 0.26m in diameter. It had near vertical sides and a flat base. It was 0.05m deep and filled with a grey-brown silty loam with 10% gravel.

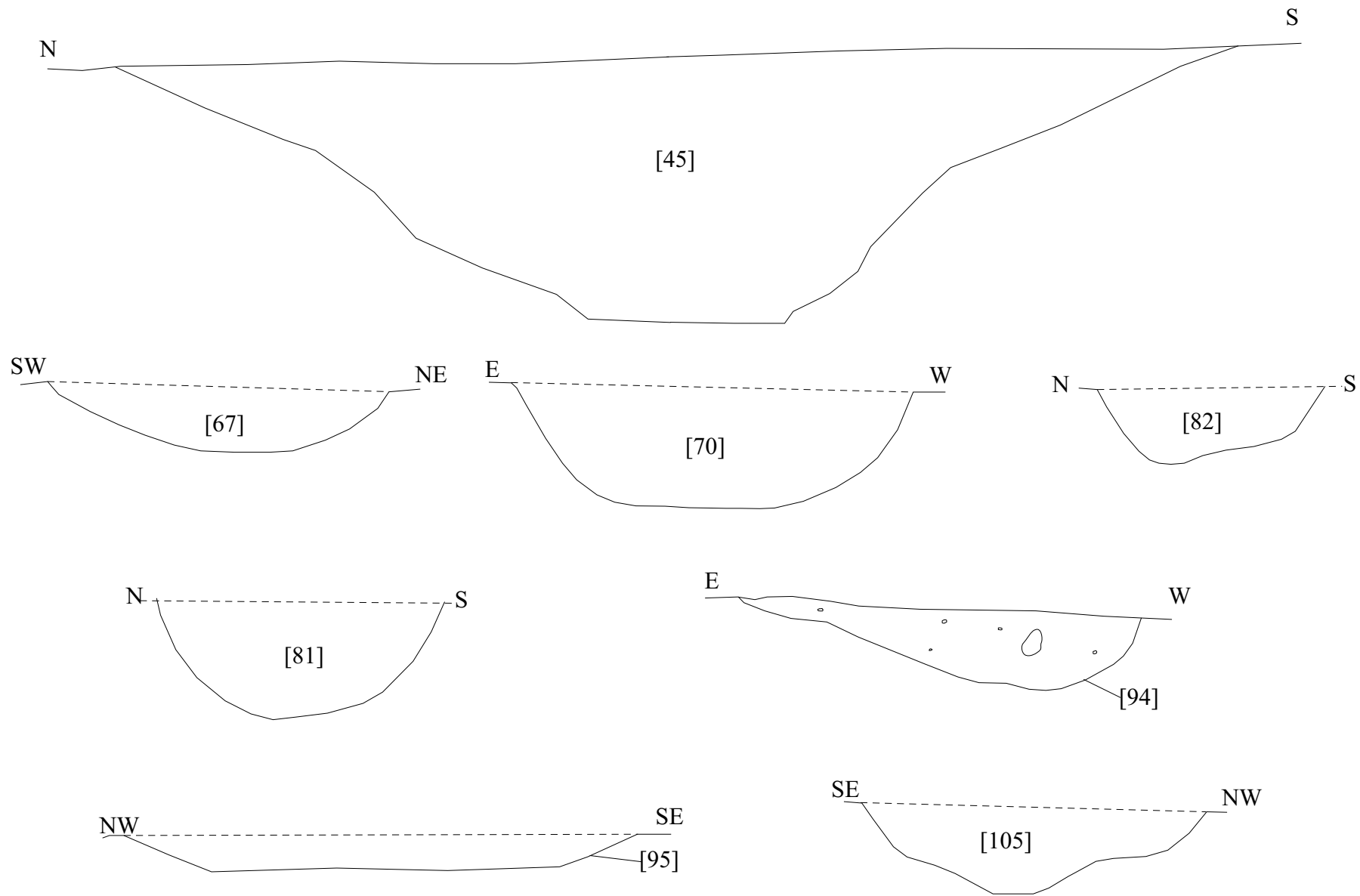


Figure 7. Sections and profiles of the pits



5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery (by Paul Blinkhorn)

The pottery assemblage from the 2006 excavations comprised 145 sherds with a total weight of 1205g. It comprised mainly early/middle Anglo-Saxon wares, along with a smaller assemblage of earlier medieval and post-medieval wares, and a single sherd of Romano-British material. This is in addition to 30 sherds from the 2002 evaluation, all of which came from a single feature which is of middle Saxon date.

It suggests that there were several distinct phases of post-Roman activity at the site. The first was in the middle Anglo Saxon period, between c AD700-850, the second in the earlier part of the medieval period (c AD1050 – 1200) and the third in the early post-medieval period (c later 16th – 17th century).

Middle Saxon

Fabric

Evaluation Excavation Assemblage

The pottery assemblage from the evaluation excavation comprised 30 sherds with a total weight of 203g. All the material came from context 30, which is the fill of context 31 from the later excavation and, a Romano-British rimsherd (21g) aside, was all early/middle or middle Saxon in date. The assemblage is of some significance, as it contains only the fourth group of middle Saxon Ipswich ware pottery from the county of Oxfordshire, which given the scale of the excavations, means that the site may be a settlement of some status.

The following fabrics were noted.

F1: Shelly limestone. Moderate to dense angular shelly limestone up to 2mm. 1 sherd, 7g.

F2: Limestone and chaff. As F1, with moderate chaff voids up to 2mm. 7 sherds, 44g.

F3: Quartz. Moderate sub-angular quartz up to 1mm. 1 sherd, 9g.

F4: Chaff temper. 3 sherds, 10g.

F5: Oolitic limestone. Moderate to dense oolitic limestone up to 1mm. 10 sherds, 53g.

F6: Quartz and limestone. Sparse to moderate angular limestone up to 1mm, sparse angular quartz up to 1mm. 2 sherds, 16g.

Ipswich Ware (Hurst 1976; Blinkhorn in print a). Middle Saxon, AD725-850, slow-wheel made ware, manufactured exclusively in the eponymous Suffolk *wic*. All sherds were Group 1 fabrics: Hard and slightly sandy to the touch, with visible small quartz grains and some shreds of mica. Frequent fairly well-sorted angular to sub-angular grains of quartz, generally measuring below 0.3 mm in size but with some larger grains, including a number which are polycrystalline in appearance. Also present are flecks of mica, some small pieces of chert in the same size-range

as the smaller quartz grains, a little quartzite, a few small discrete grains of feldspar, iron oxides and occasional fragments of ironstone and fine-grained sandstone. 6 sherds, 64g.

2006 Excavation

The following occurred:

F3 Fine quartz. 28 sherds, 159g.

F4: Chaff. 25 sherds, 273g.

F5 Oolitic limestone. 35 sherds, 250g.

F7 Coarse quartz. Moderate to dense sub-rounded quartz up to 3mm. Occasionally rare calcareous material of the same size. 2 sherds, 12g.

Overview and Discussion

The range of fabrics is typical of sites of the period in the region, such as the material found during recent excavations at the Oxford Science Park (Blinkhorn 2001a). The assemblage comprised sherds from a number of vessels, none of which were reconstructable to any great degree. Five small rimsherds were noted, all less than 5% complete, and all were from closed jar forms except for a single example from a small bowl.

None of the hand-built pottery from this site was decorated. Plain pottery of this type is very difficult to date closely, unless accompanied by decorated sherds or datable imports such as Ipswich ware or Continental wares. The Anglo-Saxons largely ceased decorating pottery in the early part of the 7th century (Myres 1977), but such wares were rare even when they were used. Usually, decorated wares only comprise around 3% of the pottery from settlement sites of the 5th and 6th century, such as Mucking in Essex (Hamerow 1994), and rarely occur in small assemblages. Thus, a small assemblage of hand-built pottery lacking decorated sherds, such as this one, cannot be given a date other than within the broad early-middle Saxon period (c AD450-850)

However, the presence of the six sherds of Ipswich Ware may be highly significant, and suggests that at least some of the hand-built wares are likely to be of middle Saxon date. The material is rare in Oxfordshire, with the only find-spots being the Sackler Library site in Oxford (Blinkhorn 2001b), Yarnton (Blinkhorn in print a) and Eynsham Abbey (Blinkhorn 2003). This group of material is as large as any of those from the three sites, and, as the other sherds were discovered during major excavations, the finds at this site may be highly significant. The material is of middle Saxon date, with recent work (Blinkhorn forthcoming) indicating that it can be dated firmly to the period AD720 – 850.

Ipswich ware has a uniquely wide distribution amongst middle Saxon wares, having been noted as far north as north Yorkshire and as far south as Kent, with the most westerly find being Lechlade in Gloucestershire. While it is found at sites of all status, the more distant find-spots from Ipswich tend to be associated with higher status sites such as minster churches. The three previous Oxfordshire finds are a

possible fair site, a farmstead and a monastery respectively. Thus, this site could be of any status, but given the rarity of the material in the county of Oxfordshire, the size of the assemblage and the small scale of the excavations, suggests very strongly that there is a site of some status in the vicinity of this site. The presence of a church may be of significance, as the material is often found near such structures with middle Saxon origins, although St. Mary's is thought to be medieval. Similarly, the proximity of the site to Bampton may be a factor. Bampton is thought to have been a major middle Saxon minster (Blair 1994, 63-4), although there is little positive artefactual evidence to support this other than small quantities of hand-made pottery. However, if there was a minster at Bampton, there is also likely to have been some sort of trading-centre there, as this seems to have been a common pattern in middle Saxon England (Blinkhorn 1999).

It is impossible from the small scale of these excavations to identify the type of site from which this pottery came, but the presence of such a relatively large assemblage of Ipswich ware from such a small excavation suggests that it may be of some status.

2006 Excavation: Medieval and Later Pottery

The medieval and later pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXAC: Cotswold-type ware, AD975-1350. 17 sherds, 67g.

OXBF: North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050 – 1400. 8 sherds, 109g.

OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 2 sherds, 31g.

OXCL: Cistercian ware, 1475-1700. 1 sherd, 1g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 10 sherds, 146g.

WHEW: Mass-produced white earthenwares, mid 19th - 20th C. 14 sherds, 46 g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. It is of note that Brill/Boarstall ware (Oxford fabric OXAM) is entirely absent from the site, despite being extremely common in medieval contexts of the 13th century or later in the region. It is therefore highly unlikely that there was any medieval activity at this site after the later 12th century.

The range of medieval pottery types is typical of sites in the region. The entire assemblage comprised plain bodysherds, apart from two sherds of OXBF which had combed decoration. This is not unusual for pots in this tradition

5.2 Worked Bone

A single example of a modified pig fibula was recorded from building SFB3, context [96]. It is near complete, with a shaft modified to a point at the proximal end and a perforation cut into the distal end. The head is damaged and partially missing, the point is also damaged and the object broken in halves. Its length is 86mm.

Modified pig fibulae are common objects on Anglo-Saxon sites of all periods. They are generally regarded as objects used in weaving or basketry, or as textile implements.

A pointed bone implement was also recovered from the same building, context [96]. It is a 56mm long modified bird bone showing some signs of work at the damaged proximal end. Similar items from other Saxon sites have variously been described as pins, awls, pegs or bodkins.

An incomplete double-sided composite comb was recovered from context (30) during the evaluation in 2002. It consisted of an end segment and parts of the connecting plates with rivets.

5.3 Other Finds

A brass coin weight was recovered from the topsoil (01). It is 28mm in diameter and 3mm thick. It has a raised border on the upper surface with concentric marks from the mould on the other. These are partially obscured by course filing marks. Registered on the upper surface are three stamps of authentication by the London Founders' Company. One of the marks depicted is a sword, another a C and ornate III while the other is less distinct but possibly an ewer. It is dated to the Charles I or II period (Egan 2005).

A gilded copper alloy buckle was recovered from context (01). It measures 41mm long and 29mm wide. It was fitted to a strap by two copper alloy rivets holding a back plate to the tang of the buckle.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Context	RB		F1		F2		F3		F4		F5		F6		F7		Ipswich		OXAC		OXBF		OXY		OXCL		OXDR		WHEW		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
N of church																			3	8	2	6	1	4							U/S
1							7	29	3	9	1	8							12	42	2	52			1	1	9	93	13	45	U/S
2											1	13									3	39					1	53			17thC
30 (eval)			1	7	7	44	1	9	3	10	10	53	2	16			6	64													
31 N. Quad.	1	12					15	107	2	9	13	93			2	12															E/MS
31 S. Quad.							3	13	10	101	12	96																			E/MS
37											1	8																			E/MS
45							1	4			1	2							1	2	1	12									M11thC
53							1	5	1	3	1	3							1	15			1	27							L11thC
54							1	1			1	15																			E/MS
58									1	16																					E/MS
94																												1	1		19thC
95									2	7																					E/MS
96									5	127	4	12																			E/MS
101									1	1																					E/MS
Total	1	12	1	7	7	44	29	168	28	283	45	303	2	16	2	12	6	64	17	67	8	109	2	31	1	1	10	146	14	46	

6 DISCUSSION

The natural (23) slopes upwards from the east towards the west of the site. The deposits above it in the east are approximately 0.6m thick and in the west only about 0.3-0.4m.

The field, although pasture prior to conversion to a cemetery, had been ploughed within living memory. This ploughing may well have truncated features covered only by a shallow topsoil especially to the west of the site.

Traces of slight ridge and furrow cultivation are visible in the field. The base of one of the furrows was seen to cut across the site from north to south, this was uneven in depth and appears to have been recorded in the evaluation of 2002 as feature [10].

Sunken Feature Buildings 1 and 2 appeared to have only one associated posthole, although this is not unheard of (Moore 2001). Truncation by ploughing may have resulted in the loss of other postholes. Building SFB3 may have been a more classical two-hole building, it certainly appeared to be larger than the others. The positioning of posthole [98] on the edge of building 3 conforms to the pattern seen with buildings 1 and 2. However the proximity of posthole [97] to [98] may indicate a phase of rebuild with a larger deeper-set post replacing an earlier one.

The two postholes [99] and [100] within building SFB3 appear to have been set around the centre possibly forming a circle with other postholes not excavated. This may have been associated with the activity that took place within the building.

Building SFB4 possibly had no postholes associated with it, again this is not unheard of for this type of building with several being found at West Stow and some at Pennyland (Williams 1993) and Littlemore (Moore 2001) although truncation from ploughing may be a factor.

Only Building SFB4 did not contain any pottery. The pottery that was recovered from the buildings was of an early to middle Saxon date.

Post Built Structure 1 formed a classic rectangular hall shape as defined by the group of postholes. It was 7.5m long by 3.5m wide, perhaps about average for this type of structure and double the size of those found at Dorchester (Rowley & Brown 1981), and half the size of those at Barrow Hills, Radley (Blair 1994). Little can be postulated about the size of Structures PBS2 and PBS3. If there were other postholes forming a structure these did not survive later activity on the site.

It has been suggested that structure PSB4 could be a latrine. It is a possibility, but one would expect the central pit to be smaller in diameter and deeper, with the fill having a more organic content. Early to middle Saxon pottery was recovered from the fill of one of its postholes [101].

Structure PBS5 consisted of a circular arrangement of postholes with at least three small oval pits placed centrally. One [58] of the outer postholes contained a sherd of early/middle Saxon pottery.

It is possible that the two circular structures 4 and 5 are contemporary and that they possibly served a similar function. It has been postulated that these structures are in fact early Anglo-Saxon pagan shrines. Generally shrines are square rather than circular, however these are on a similar scale and it is not unknown for the enclosure to contain central pits (John Blair *pers. comm.*)

The nearby site of New Wintles (Clayton 1973) displays an Anglo Saxon landscape from the 6th to 8th century. Within this area is a square shrine surrounded by Sunken Feature Buildings, some Post Built Structures and the occasional inhumation. This long lived site was spread over 450m but only a single shrine was recorded.

Linear fence lines appear to be a common feature on Saxon sites such as at Barton Court Farm (Blair 1994) and Pennyland (Williams 1993) where they formed internal divisions within a settlement. Early to middle Saxon pottery was recovered from the fill of one of its postholes [37].

Wells are common on Saxon settlements either as the main supply of water or as an additional supplement (Williams 1993). In the case of Black Bourton this would have provided an additional source as surface water is close by. Many Saxon wells produce waterlogged remains of ladders and wattle lining held by stakes, however the soil conditions were not favourable at Black Bourton for such preservation.

The wells recorded at Pennyland and Hartigans (Williams 1993) had no associated posthole structures. Therefore, it is unlikely that those postholes noted close by to well [53] during this excavation are connected with it and are a separate structure, as recorded (PBS 2).

Pottery from the upper fill of the well indicates that the well had been filled in some time after the late 11th century. The upper fill of this well was very homogenous possibly indicating it was deliberately back filled after a short period of silting.

The pits recorded did not appear to spatially form a coherent group, although, the general form of each was similar. One [95] was of early to middle Saxon date, one [45] was of a mid 11th century date and possibly one [94] was modern. The majority remain undated to a specific phase of the site. It is possible that due to their distribution that these were dug over a number of generations. A common trait for all, whatever their intended purpose, was that the nature of the fill indicated at least an element of purposeful backfilling. A similar conclusion was drawn from the pits at the settlement of Pennyland, Milton Keynes (Williams 1993).

Metalworking was obviously taking place in the area as the slag and debris in the fill of pit [95] shows. It is very likely that this industry dates to the middle Saxon period as the associated pottery from the same fill indicates.

The site was obviously long lived. The early/middle Saxon Building SFB2 is later filled in and a well dug in its old position in the 11th century. The interior of the postulated Structure PSB2 would also have occupied the same area, indicating at least 3 phases of occupation on the site. It would seem that the post holes associated with Structure 2 were destroyed by Building SFB2 and the well, indicating that it was of an earlier date.

Sherds collected from the surface near the church are contemporary with its 12th century origins (Sherwood and Pevsner 1974). The 16th to 17th century sherds are probably from episodes of manuring when the site was used for agriculture. The coin weight of Charles I was possibly deliberately disposed of during the Civil War or Commonwealth period when parliamentary authority was imposed on the area.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The pottery evidence would suggest a continuity of activity from the early Saxon period through until the 12th century. There are at least two phases of Anglo Saxon activity. One early venerating the pre-Christian shrines, the other in the middle Saxon period associated with the domestic activity. There is later Saxo-Norman activity close by.

The proximity of two potential shrines in such a small area would suggest that the site was a focus for religious activity in the early Saxon period. The number of shrine may indicate a site of some importance. The pagan inhumation recorded to the southwest may well form part of a wider religious complex.

Although shrines have been located in proximity to settlements the problems of accurately dating the majority of early to middle Saxon pottery has made it difficult to assess if these religious and domestic activities are contemporary, but it is unlikely a Christian population would be worshipping at Pagan shrines. That is not to say that an early Anglo-Saxon settlement is not associated with these shrines, this would seem very plausible and some of the less well dated SFBs may be contemporary.

By at least the 8th century it would appear that a small settlement had grown up on the site, its importance emphasised by the imported Ipswich ware recovered in 2002. A more Christian population would have their religious influence coming from the nearby Minster of Bampton and also possible attracting some of its wealth by association.

Activity continued in the area with the well being filled in sometime after the late 11th century. A large pit was also filled in during this period, perhaps an abortive attempt to dig another well. The settlement is recorded in the Domesday Book and 10th century pottery has been recovered from the vicinity of the church. This coupled with the well may indicate the 10-11th century settlements proximity to the excavation area, perhaps within the area of the old Church Yard.

The focus for religious activity had obviously shifted away from the excavation area, but perhaps not that far away, as the 12th century Norman stone church was erected within 70m. An earlier church may well have stood nearby. By the 12th century the main settlement had moved, probably to the location of the present village. Pottery dated to the 10th to 14th century has been found in this area.

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