

OLD GAOL, ABINGDON.**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION TRENCH 2****SUMMARY REPORT*****Summary***

John Moore Heritage Services concluded an archaeological evaluation from 18th March – 1st April 2008 within the former Sports Hall of the old leisure centre, just to the south west and attached to the Old Gaol, Abingdon. The investigation involved the mechanical excavation of a trench down onto the uppermost archaeological horizons supplemented by the hand digging of six features. This was done to determine the level above Ordnance Datum at which archaeology survived, the type of any remains present and their complexity.

OVERVIEW:

Following the initial removal of reinforced concrete which formed the floor of the old Sports Hall, the trench was machine excavated down onto the first relevant archaeological horizons where distinct features could be recognised. The trench was dug to a depth of 50.75m AOD towards the NW, 50.70m AOD in the middle and 50.59m AOD towards the SW. Following the removal of overburden, the trench was thoroughly hand cleaned and planned. Features revealed consisted of pits of varying sizes, the remains of a stone capped drain and a possible ditch. Unlike Trench 1 within the car park to the rear of Twickenham House, natural was revealed in plan.

The natural (2/05) consisted of an orange-yellow sand which varied in both colour and texture. This was cut by the irregularly shaped feature [2/21], square shaped pit [2/22], small sub-circular pit [02/30], ditch [2/32] and the largely undefined pit [2/33]. All of these features were left unexcavated due to their proximity to the trench sections and the depth of the trench except for linear feature [2/32]. This was a shallow apparent 'V' shaped ditch containing two sherds of Romano-British/Roman pottery.

Shallow ditch [2/32] was truncated by pit [2/16] on its western side, which contained an early post-medieval finds assemblage, and by large pit [2/15] which contained two sherds of medieval pottery. A sondage placed within [2/15] showed the feature to continue to a total depth of 0.88m (49.92m AOD). The relationship between the early post-medieval pit [2/16] and the possible medieval pit [2/15] could not be proven due to the similar nature of their fills and the extremely poor light conditions inside the Sports Centre. The scarcity of pottery produced from [2/15] makes the dating of this feature far from secure whilst the relationship between this feature and [2/33] could also not be proven. [2/33] was cut by a small circular pit [2/19]. Investigation of this feature produced two sherds of possible Roman pottery. Similarly to [2/15], this makes dating tentative only. However, should the dating of these features prove to be correct then pit [2/33] is of approximately the same date or earlier than [2/19] and must therefore be truncated by [2/15].

A possible square shape pit [2/37] noted in the southern corner of the trench also truncates pit [2/33]. This feature remained unexcavated due to its proximity with the trench section. The relationship between pit [2/37] and [2/15] is unclear. However, pit [2/35] was seen to truncate [2/37].

Small pit [2/30] was truncated on its western side by post-medieval pit [2/28] which contained a thick layer of building debris, primarily roof tiles.

Early post-medieval pit [2/16] noted previously to cut possible Romano-British ditch [2/32] was itself cut by pit [2/17] which produced clay tobacco pipe and brick. From the section [2/17] appeared to undercut the natural (2/05) physically as too did [2/41] (thought to be the same as [2/17]), also seen in this section. The relationship in this section however was not clear.

Pits [2/22], [2/21] and [2/16] were truncated on their western sides by post-medieval limestone built drain [2/10]. The fill of which (2/11) contained two clay tobacco pipe stems.

Post-medieval pits [2/17] and [2/28] were truncated by pit [2/27] (likely to be the same as [2/41] noted in the section dug through [2/17]). A slot was placed close to the SE facing section of the trench through [2/28] to prove that the natural noted in section was not redeposited. Pit [2/28] is also truncated on its east side by possible sub rectangular pit [2/06]. Finds taken from the surface fill of this feature (2/07) give it a very late post-medieval date. The later pits [2/27], [2/06] and the possible medieval pit [2/15] and the post-medieval drain [2/10] were sealed by (2/04), a layer of mixed garden soil containing some evidence of demolition rubble. No evidence of a sub-soil was noted and from the SE facing section (2/04) appeared slightly irregularly in formation above the natural (2/05). It is conceivable that this section shows evidence of truncation perhaps through landscaping of the garden soils. The irregular nature of (2/04) above natural (2/05) could also be a sign of double digging. From maps, the area appears to once have been part of a large garden stretching from the river to Twickenham House. (2/04) was noted to be very compacted when initially encountered and had to be partially removed by the machine using a toothed bucket. A compacted layer of crushed brick and flint (2/02) lay above the garden soil with reinforced concrete (2/01) laid on a plastic membrane completing the sequence.

DISCUSSION

The new trench has established the presence of archaeology with possible Roman, medieval and post-medieval remains present. Of the medieval and post-medieval features investigated, all appeared substantial in size. Similar to the excavations carried out previously at the Gaol between 1972-4, most of the features encountered were pits of medieval and post-medieval date.

Although the archaeological sequence is complex, unlike Trench 1, (dug by JMHS) no unknown vertical stratigraphy was noted beyond the depth of the trench.

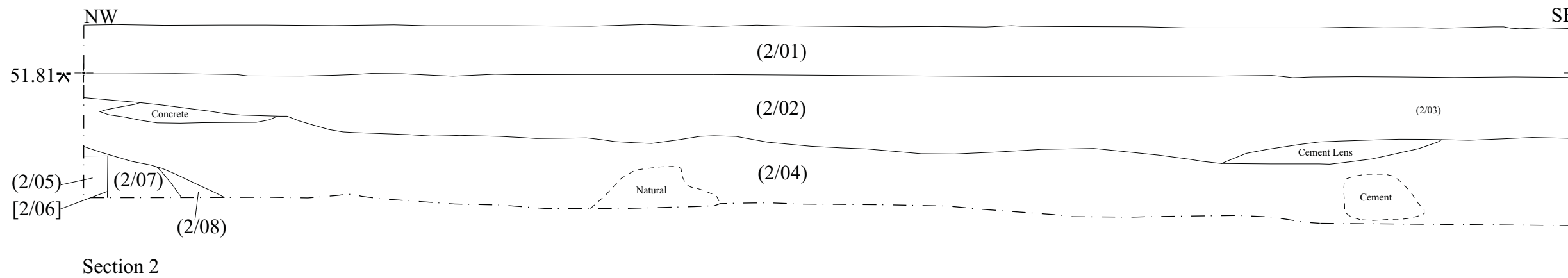
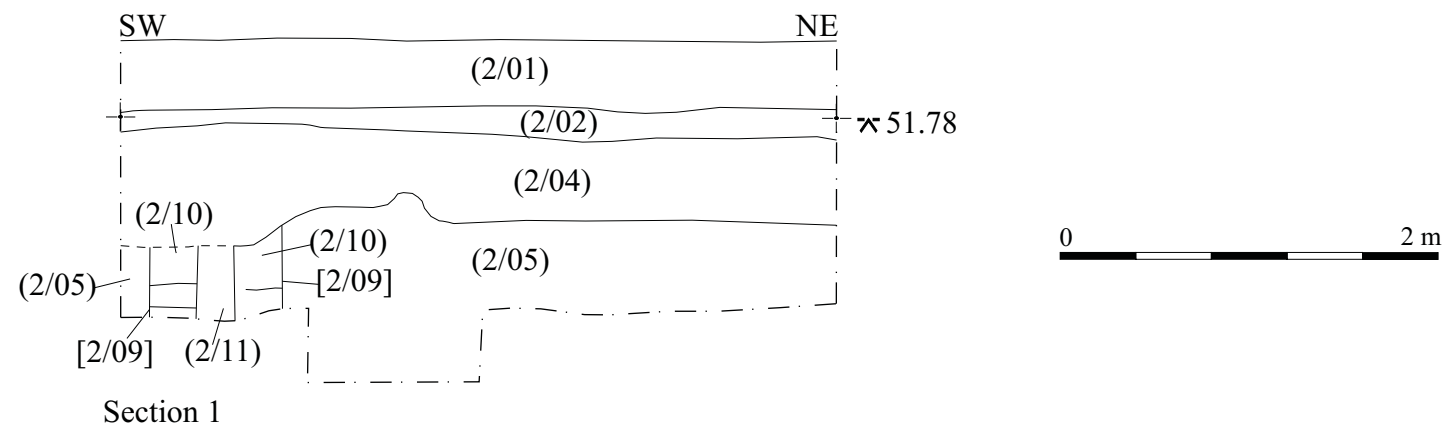
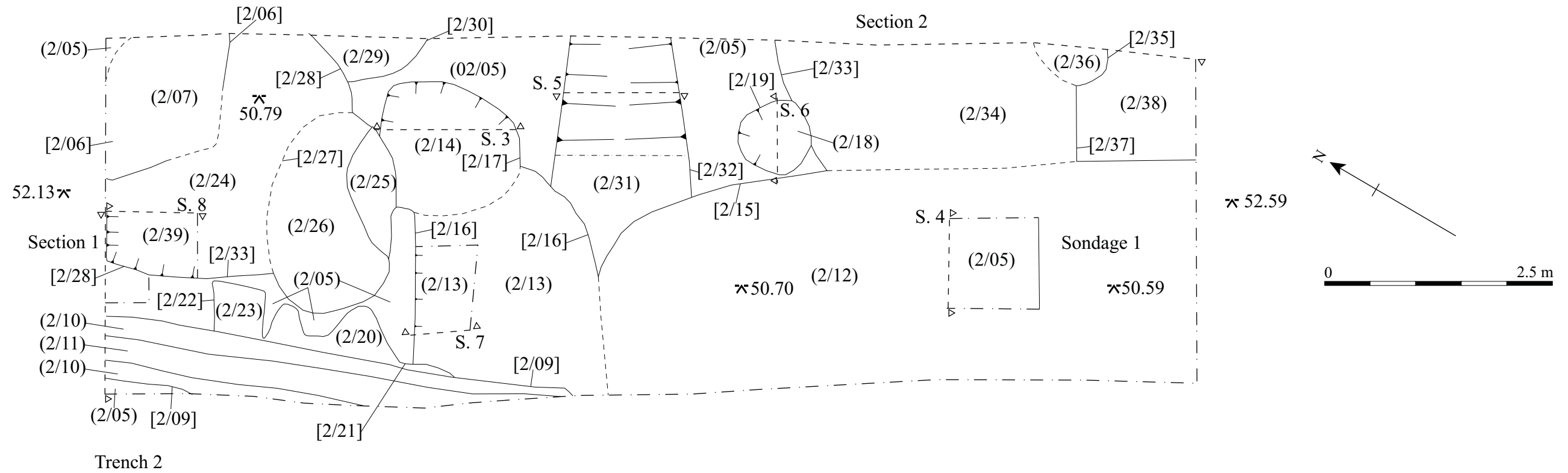
It is possible that the trench has been positioned on the very edge of a terrace, perhaps landscaped during its former use as a garden. This would explain why the natural was seen so high up the SE facing section but not in the other sections. However, this

could be a coincidence and be the result of later pitting/disturbance. More work would establish this.

Dating given above is based on an assessment of the sherds from the various deposits and feature fills. It is possible that some may be later in date than that given due to later sherds not being identified or because of the limited number of finds recovered. However, it is felt that the majority of the dating is correct.

RELIABILITY OF TECHNIQUES AND RESULTS

The reliability of results is considered to be good. However, the exact nature of many of the features is not certain due to the restrictive nature of the trench and the very poor lighting conditions associated with working inside under artificial light.



Trench 2 and sections 1-2

