

CAMBRIDGE INDEPENDENT ARCHAEOLOGY – CIA16

Report of the interim excavations at Nine Wells, Whittlesford in 2014

TR9 Report 2014 – Part I – CIA16

This is a general discussion of the trench, overview of findings,
section drawings and conclusion

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An associated report containing all the daily detail of contexts in pictorial and graphical representation can be found in

CAMBRIDGE INDEPENDENT ARCHAEOLOGY – CIA17

Report of the interim excavations at Nine Wells, Whittlesford in 2014

Context Report and Finds of Trench 9 Extension – 2014 – Part II – CIA17 J Nelson

Both reports can be accessed from www.ciarch.org.uk

Trench 9 Report – 2014 – Part I

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 - b. A detailed report in the form of a pictorial and graphical representation of the detailed excavation of each context worked during 2014 excavations of Trench 9 Extension can be obtained at www.ciarch.org.uk³

1 An Overview of TR9 in 2014

In 2010 a test pit TP11 (I15/16)  was dug in the region of what would become the north east end of TR9 following geo-physic reporting the finding of a high resistance region¹.

In 2011 Tr1 (Mosaic floor trench) revealed an in-situ pila  in the edge of the SW section.

In 2012 Tr2 (Hypocaust trench) exposed this pila and an additional one  in a small extension to the NW of the trench, Tr6.

In 2013, Tr9 was excavated. A 7m x 2m trench extending between the area of high resistance (TP11)  in the NE and the pila in the SE  as revealed in 2012 Tr2.

Reports on all these years excavations can be found on the CIA website¹ www.ciarch.org.uk

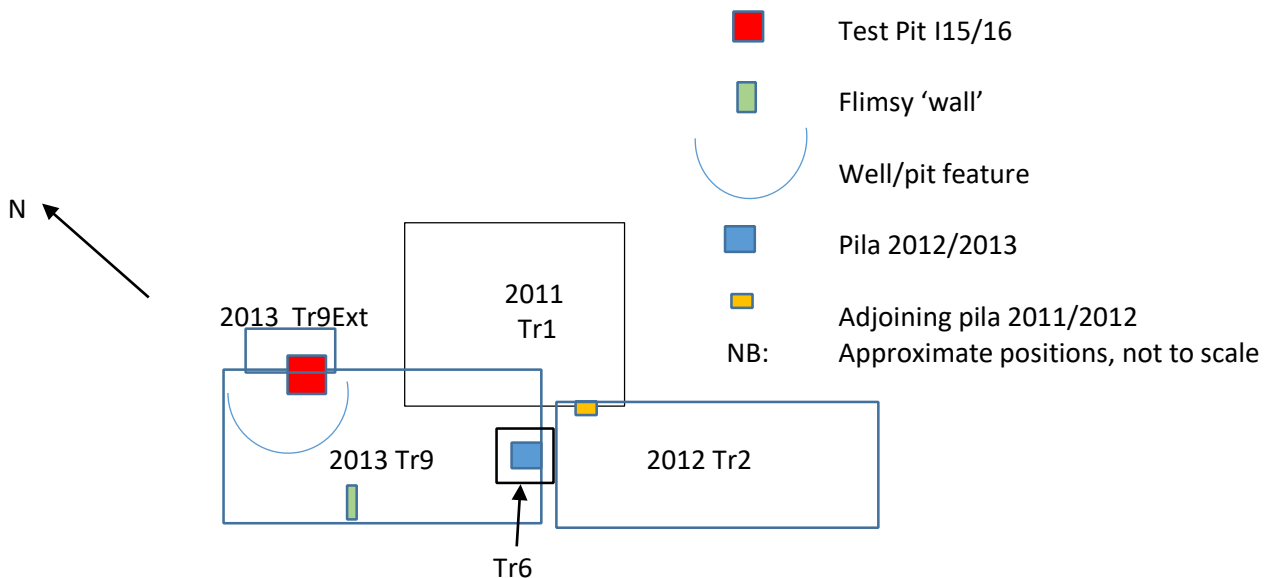


Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the involvement of other excavations, other years to 2014

2 A short review of excavations in 2013:

The overall opinion of the Tr9 2013 excavation was that at the SE end the pila ■ was surrounded by a large amount of ashy black deposit. The ashy black also lay above a significant layer (8-14cm) of opus signinum which again, in places, appeared to lie above ash. It was believed that this was evidence of at least two episodes of rebuilding. It was difficult to establish the presence of any other pilae in the vicinity which made it difficult to decide where walls or floors lay at that time. Further updated information on this area of the Tr9 can be found in the 2014 report on Tr8.²

A trench, Tr1, had been excavated in 2011 which lay adjacent to Tr9 and questions arose in 2013 as to what level of overlap had occurred between the two since the Nine Wells site carried with it problems of relocating past excavations year on year due to lack of sufficient, durable, between-years siting of trenches. Latterly it has been seen that the Tr1 NW/SW trench wall overlapped the TR9 NE/SE trench wall, further to the west, by perhaps as much as 25cm and in a north south overlap of approximately 2.8m. However, the pila, ■ exposed in the SW wall section of Tr1 2011, and its repeat exposure the next year in Tr2 (hypocaust 2012) was not re-exposed in Tr9 2013, and so, accurate positioning of this approximate overlap of 2.8m of Tr1 on TR9 was unable to be firmly established.

In the NW end of Tr9 in 2013 a blue grey area of deposit was soon excavated, the well/pit feature. The finding of this placement coincided with the area of high resistance as found in the RheeSearch geo-physics results¹ and the excavated TP11² in 2010. On further investigation a seemingly circular shape of outline became apparent and excavations began to understand its meaning.



Figure 2: Note outline of feature edged in soft grey with harder paler interior.

Meanwhile, within the remainder of the trench there was a clear difference between the composition of fill around 4m from the SE end and that of the NW end. Half of the trench appeared to be quite yellowy and yet the NW end was remarkably more blue grey. See Figure 3

It was considered that the change in this colouring suggested an inside/outside divide somewhere but no firm proof or conclusions were arrived at about the function or extent of such room/s. As with most of the site, demolition layers appeared to lie at an angle. Largely these layers are higher on the SW side and dip gradually towards the NE and are very complex. Extensive painted plaster was found in the SW section of the trench.

There was a flimsy gathering of suspected wall components made of flints, stone, and mortar  in the SW section. See red arrow Figure 3. It was not thought possible that this was a wall as such but, coincidentally, it occurred where there was a change in appearance of the exposed surface which suggested an inside/outside division of area by the colour of the fill. See Figure 3 and 4. However, due to the nature of the falling layers it could conceivably still be evidence of the angle of fill of a layer of debris/demolition lying towards the NE.



Figure 3: Note the yellow fill in the foreground and the blue/grey in the distance. Note also the change in blue/grey on the left in the midfield and more yellow of the upstanding bulk on the right. Contexts appear to fall from the SW towards the NE



Figure 4: Is the yellow mortar on the left of the red line (SW) indication of a wall base or could this be a context of sharply falling yellow mortar lying underneath the blue/grey on the right of the red line towards the NE?

3 Report on the excavations of 2014 - The well/pit end of TR9

Excavations in 2014 concentrated only on the NE section of Tr9, the well/pit feature, outlined in red dashed line Fig 5. Towards the end of 2013 an extension had been excavated adjacent to Tr9 and by the end of that season the separating baulk had been removed, shown dotted orange, Tr9Ext. Subsequent to this picture a sondage was placed in the approximate position outlined in green.

Knowing that the debris of demolition across the site tended to be in complex, angled, layers the plan was to work from the highest deposits, between the sondages, working with the context layers, until a single context could be established, if possible, across the area.

Firstly, the NW end trench wall section was examined and clear grey/blue contexts were readily seen. See Figure 6.

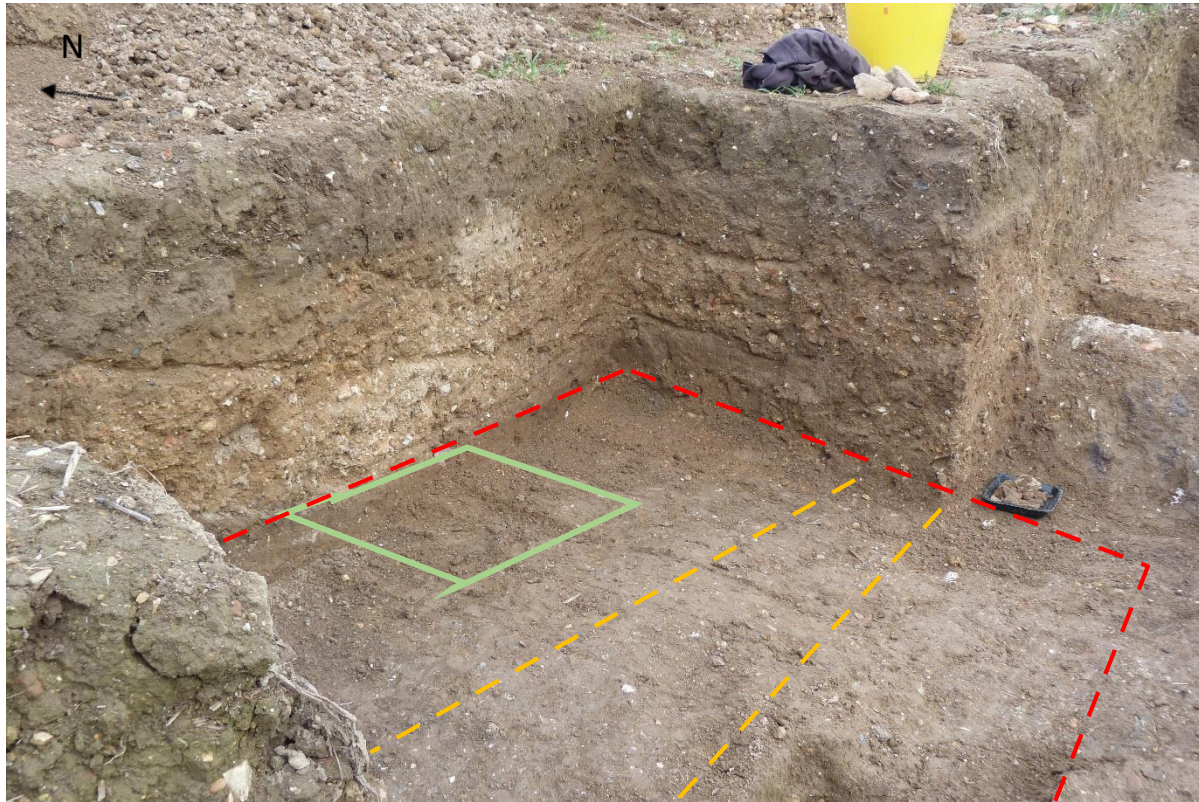


Figure 5: View SE, Tr9Ext. Note middle right hand side of the picture, beyond the chalky white area, is the southern edge of the suspected well/pit feature appearing.



Figure 6: The position of sondage A is just off this picture in the approximate position below 'A' shown.

Next, the surface area between sondages A and B was excavated. See Figure 7. In the SW area of this limited excavation a layer of CBM interspersed with grey (C1451N/S, indicated by red arrows) was chased out. As work progressed further NE it was apparent that other contexts lay above it. As a result excavation continued in that NE area until work could continue back towards this CBM/grey layer in the SW, concentrating on different contexts as they occurred.



Figure 7 Further excavation revealed clearly angled debris layers falling towards the NE, red arrows.



Figure 8: Continued removal of each overlaying context was completed resulting in the end of season 2014 view.

4 Discussion on the findings of the well/pit feature over 2013/2014:



Figure 9: This shows the pit/well feature as at Oct 2013. The view is NE.

It is necessary to revisit earlier excavations to understand some aspects of this well/pit end of Tr9.

In Figure 9 one can see where it is believed to be the NE and SE extent of the earliest outline of this well/pit feature laying with the pronounced grey curved outline on the left of the picture then the upstanding bulk in the middle and the southerly outline on the right of the picture. A feature appeared within the upstanding bulk at approximately 40cm depth from the surface in 2013, C. It was thought to be a post hole. Its outline was seen on the surface of the excavated area adjacent to the trench side. It extended about 35-40cm to the SW and was about 50cm wide, laying NW to SE. It was not excavated to natural but only to a further approximately 40cm. This is marked 'C' in Figure 9. The sondage you see on the left, B, (NE) is the same sondage you see in Figure 6, middle bottom of the picture.

During excavations in 2013 a question kept being raised. 'Where is the evidence of the TP11 (I1516), from 2010 excavations, that should be in this area?'

Late in 2014, when preparing reports, mapping contexts and comparing previous reports in order to understand the area, it became apparent that the above mentioned 'post hole' must be part of TP11 dug in 2010.

TP11 was excavated to different depths in four quadrants. The NE quadrant, S1, dug to 1.30m, the SE quadrant, S2, dug to 60cm, the SW quadrant S3, dug to 45cm and the NW quadrant dug to below plough only. What we had thought was a post hole actually must be the SW quadrant of TP11 partially exposed but some of it still hidden in the trench wall. Indeed, the large sherd of mortarium, reported on in 2010² came from this SW quadrant, the one exposed as shown in Figure 9 'C'. In 2013 it was not recognised as part of a test pit since the other quadrants were not seen, them being buried within the adjoining fill.



Figure 10: Note the remaining indication of the excavated TP11 – yellow arrow – in the trench wall.

'C' itself was dug to a depth of 65cm in 2013, with no natural found and so excavating that feature was discontinued at this point. Later when the bulk was removed no regard was given to seeking further evidence of TP11 since the feature had been considered to be a 'post hole'.

This TP11 is mentioned here because of its relationship to this well/feature and unresolved questions about the test pit's 2010 position relative to 2014. Also, in 2014 an auger hole was discovered within this well/pit area that created a good deal of discussion as to where it lay, how it got there, what age was it and who put it there? As seen in the full contexts report for TR9 2014³ it seemed to have survived because, fortuitously, its entrance had been stopped by the presence of a chunk of chalk approximately 5cm across. The location of this auger hole is under the stones placed in the bottom centre of Figure 11. Also the single stone in the foreground of Figure 13 sits in the hole.



Figure 11: The reason for the interest in the position of TP11 also lay with the mysterious discovery of an auger hole as reported in the detail report of contexts³

Throughout the NE area of this Tr9 extension the contexts lie at an angle from SW to NE. The deepest context is very grey, C1453, see red arrow Figure 12 with brown above it, C1475/1390. (The reason for two context numbers results from contexts being applied to contexts in plan and then those resolving themselves within the vertical trench walls). This grey context, C1453, and the brown above it sweep from the NE trench wall round to the NW trench wall and lie under the chalky layer, C 1474, which itself lies under the rubble layer C1388. (See Figure 12). The section above the C1388 has become quite green in Figure 12 but is more of the general grey seen in the NW end trench wall section.

The dashed yellow arrow in Figure 12 indicates a cut, 1441. Above the rubble, C1388, the contexts appear to carry from the NW to the NE trench walls. However, neither the rubble of C1388 nor the chalk of C1474 extend from the NW trench wall to the NE trench wall at this point. But then, underneath the chalk of C1474, it does appear that C1453 and C1475/1390 again traverse between the two trench walls. Is the total length of this cut, 1441? It is just the depth of C1388 and C1474? Is this the case or is it unclear at present whether the soil contexts, C1475/1390, just extend into a recess into the NW wall section but the chalk still lies behind them? The extent of the cut, 1441, therefore, is at present uncertain and may be resolved in season 2015.

C1463 and C 1464 currently represent the North and South surface, in plan, in this TR9 extension area at the end of season 2014. There are two contexts because the nature of them was different upon exposure. It also appears that C1453 dips under C1464 so, at the start of 2015, it will be necessary to confirm the next context to remove first.

Working out which context is next to be removed has been a continual problem of the well/pit feature.



Figure 12: View NW



Figure 13: View SE

5 Conclusion:

At present there are still many unknowns in this trench. Clearly the well/pit drops further down into the NE corner but there seem to be at least one context still lying above the lowest currently exposed context, C1453 at this time. The rubble context suggests some form of construction underpinned by chalk but this year has still not revealed too much as to the use of this area.

Since the whole site exhibits tumbled deposits there is still uncertainty of dating any contexts accurately by the finds. A rather large amount of painted plaster has been excavated in the whole of this trench and also in this extension to Tr9. Not so much from 2014 but then this season was very slow going with the complex layers in a limited area only. An analysis is being carried of the plaster incorporating measuring of fragments sizes, noting colours, patterns, any fixture impressions, surface angles, and whether the plaster base is yellow or pink and its grade of constituents. All pot found has yet to be dated. Little glass was found, no coins found, and little bone. Otherwise it has been largely fragments of various types of tile, some limestone, copious mortar, opus signinum chunks, some chalk and flint/stone.

Appendix A: Updated section drawings

The nature of the excavation in 2014 was made more complicated by the fact that two sondages had been excavated making it difficult to tie in the vertical wall section contexts to the contexts in plan. There is therefore some doubling up of contexts numbers in some situations. Also, the impact of TP11 on the area caused some confusion e.g by the two upstanding thin grey areas mentioned as C1434 in plan overlying brown soil considered to be the same as C1432. The two grey areas had a strange gap between them which may have occurred as a result of the NE quadrant of TP11 2010 being excavated to 1.3m but, access during digging in such a limited space of 50x50cm, may have caused the sort of profile found in the gap between the two grey areas C1434.

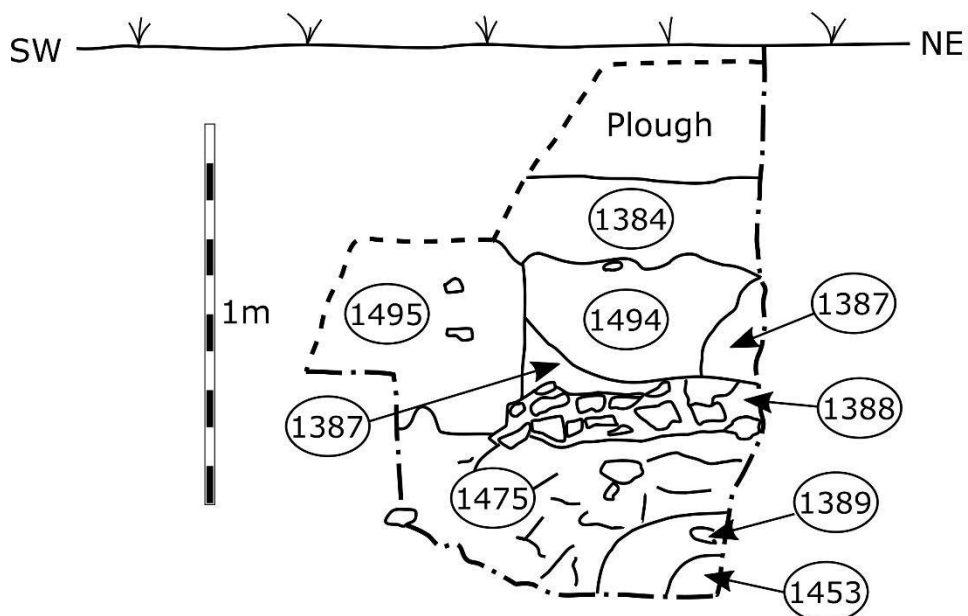
Contexts for Tr9 – Sections 30 View NE, 33 and 35			
Context		Depth	Notes – Most layers are angled so they can cover a range of depths across the area
Original	New		
x	1381	24-36	Mainly soil, some red flecks, little CBM
x	1382	38-70	Crushed CBM, granular
x	1383	26-70	More soil consistency, lighter grey – an angled lens of fill
x	1384	32-90	Hard chalky clay, little CBM, may be a ‘capping’ layer – starts at 32 , drops to 90
x	1385	70-100	Similar to 1384 but more friable - starts at 70 drops to 100
	1386	92-98	This number used in early section drawings of S30 before later contexts assigned in plan. Same context as 1432, hard compact thin layer of CBM with brown soil below. More CBM, stone, flint, mortar.
x	1387	58-	More blue/grey, silty, with chalk chips. Appears to travel round to the NW in S32Ext. Lays over cut 1441
x	1388	83-100	Rubble fill in S51Ext. Layer of brick/tile, flint, stone and chalk. Possible foundation. Start of cut 1441
	1441	83	
x	1389	100-138	Largely soft, brown soil with abundant clumps of soft grey deposits, some small stone, a little CBM. Initially this presented as a hard crust, perhaps trample. On removal the lower layers were often soft, mixed brown and grey.
x	1390/1474	124-138	1390 assigned in NE extension wall S33. 1474 assigned in NW extension wall S32Ext. Soft brown soil – this context removed with 1389 as it was difficult to differentiate, however, there appears to be some clarity of difference visual in the wall section
	1391		A void that was investigated in 2013 and has eroded further over time
	1392/1452	116 -	In earlier 2014 this hard, yellowy mortar area appeared at the base of the deep sondage next to the NE Ext wall, S33 and traverses to S35. Later assigned 1452. Mixed CBM. Triangular fill at about 40°
X	1385/1423		Slim crisp area of CBM with some brown soil
x	1386/1432		Underlying 1423. Brown, softer more soil
	1451	98 -	Abundant CBM interspersed with grey ashy deposit. Finds separated into 1451N and S based on the underlying context having different texture in the N and S areas.
	1453	138 -	Grey, soft fill in NE wall S33. Very soft. Runs under 1463
	1463	≈ 128	Current unexcavated surface in northern half of the area. See note on 1451.
	1464	≈ 132	Current unexcavated surface in southern half of the area. See note on 1451

Contexts for Tr9 – Section 51 TR9Ext: View NW: NB this section stands 30cm further SE from S32 therefore direct comparisons of contexts with S32 may not be appropriate.			
Context		Depth	Notes
Original	New		
a	1384	34-56	More soil, less grey, less chalk, harder
b	1494	54-58	Brown/grey/blue with fragments of mortar, chalk chips, tile – not soft
c	1495	50-100	Very friable, soft blue/grey, earthy/ashy, less constituents, very small stones
d	1387	60-90	Brown/grey/blue with fragments mortar, chalk, tile
	1388	83-104	Rubble beginning of the cut 1441
	1441	82	Cut
e	1475	100 -	Reconstituted chalk
f	1390/1474	124-128	More brown soil
g	1453	138 -	Dark, soft, silty grey
			b and d very grey but b dries to a lighter colour and has less chalk chips



Figure 14: View NW: TR9Ext Section 51

Figure 15: View S: Section 30 and 35 (in foreground)



NWW14 - NW of Tr9 - Section 51 (Rev 2014)

Figure 16: Section 51

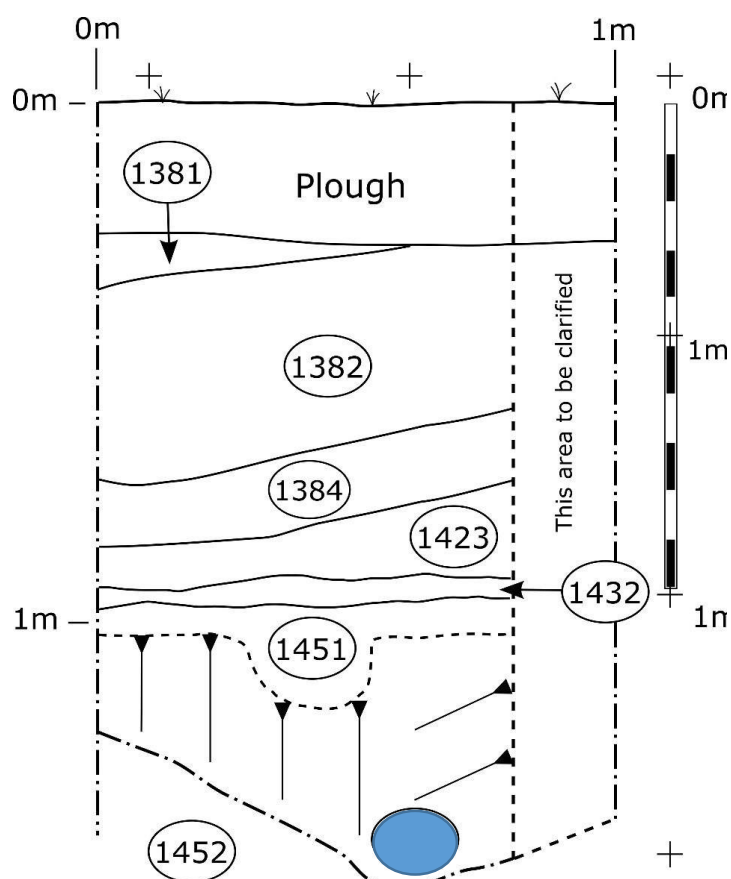


Figure 17 : View SE TR9Ext Section 30 and 35

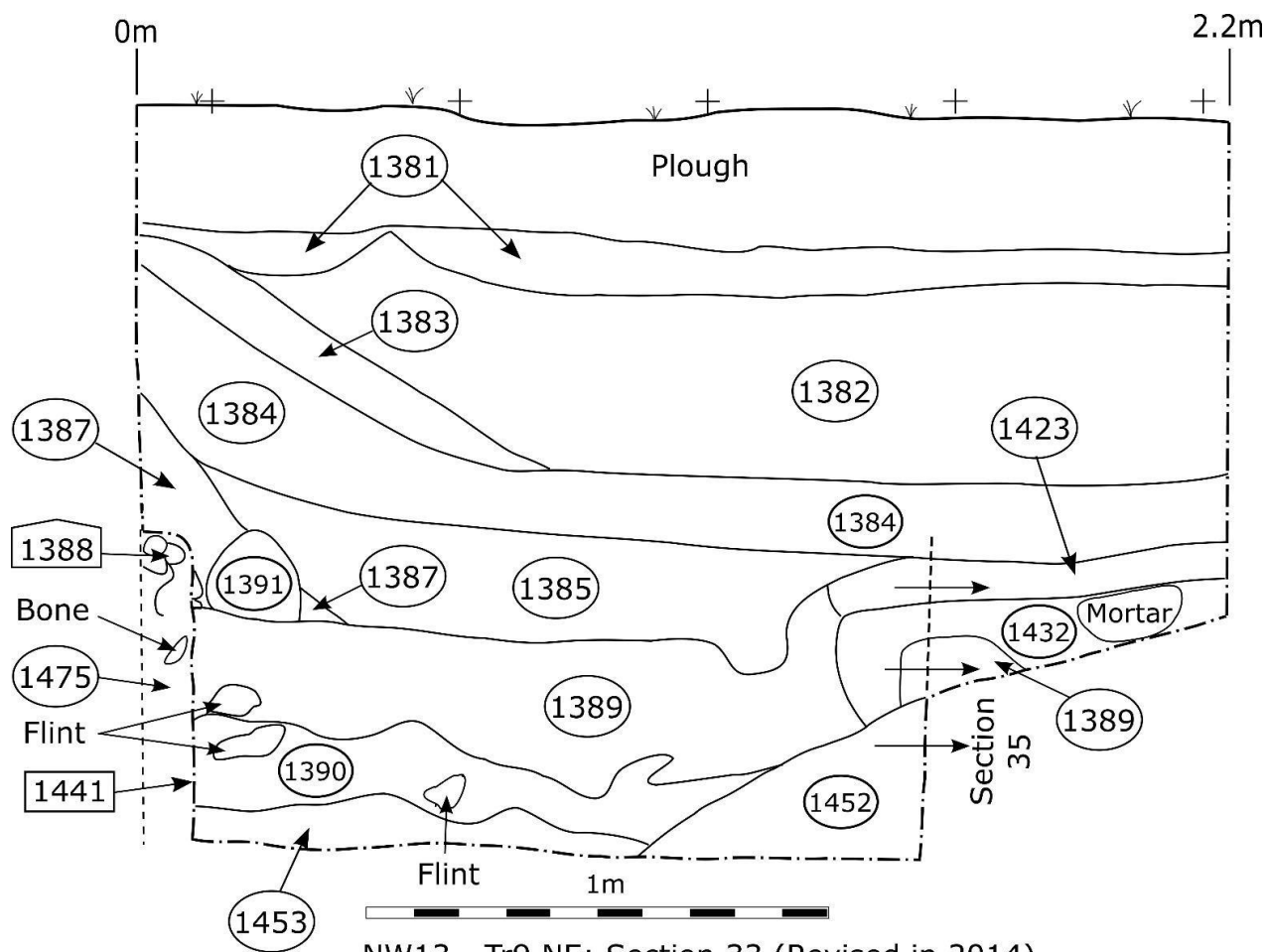


Figure 18: NE view TR9: Section 33:

Contexts for Tr9 – Section 32 View NW			
Context		Depth	Notes
Original	New		
a	1496	54-58	Brown/grey/blue with fragments of mortar, chalk chips, broken tile – <u>not</u> soft/ashy
b	1497	26-46	Grey silty, abundant chalk chips, odd fragment brick/tile
c	plough	0-40 varied	Soil fill (included plough), hard brown with clear 'v' plough line. Compact. - [Probably 'plough' and 'a' in S32Ext]
d	1494	46-64	More soil based. Less grey, less chalk chips, harder. [probably same as 'b' in S51Ext]
e	1495	30-58	Soft ashy grey, dries out pale, less constituents. [possibly same as 'c' in S51Ext]

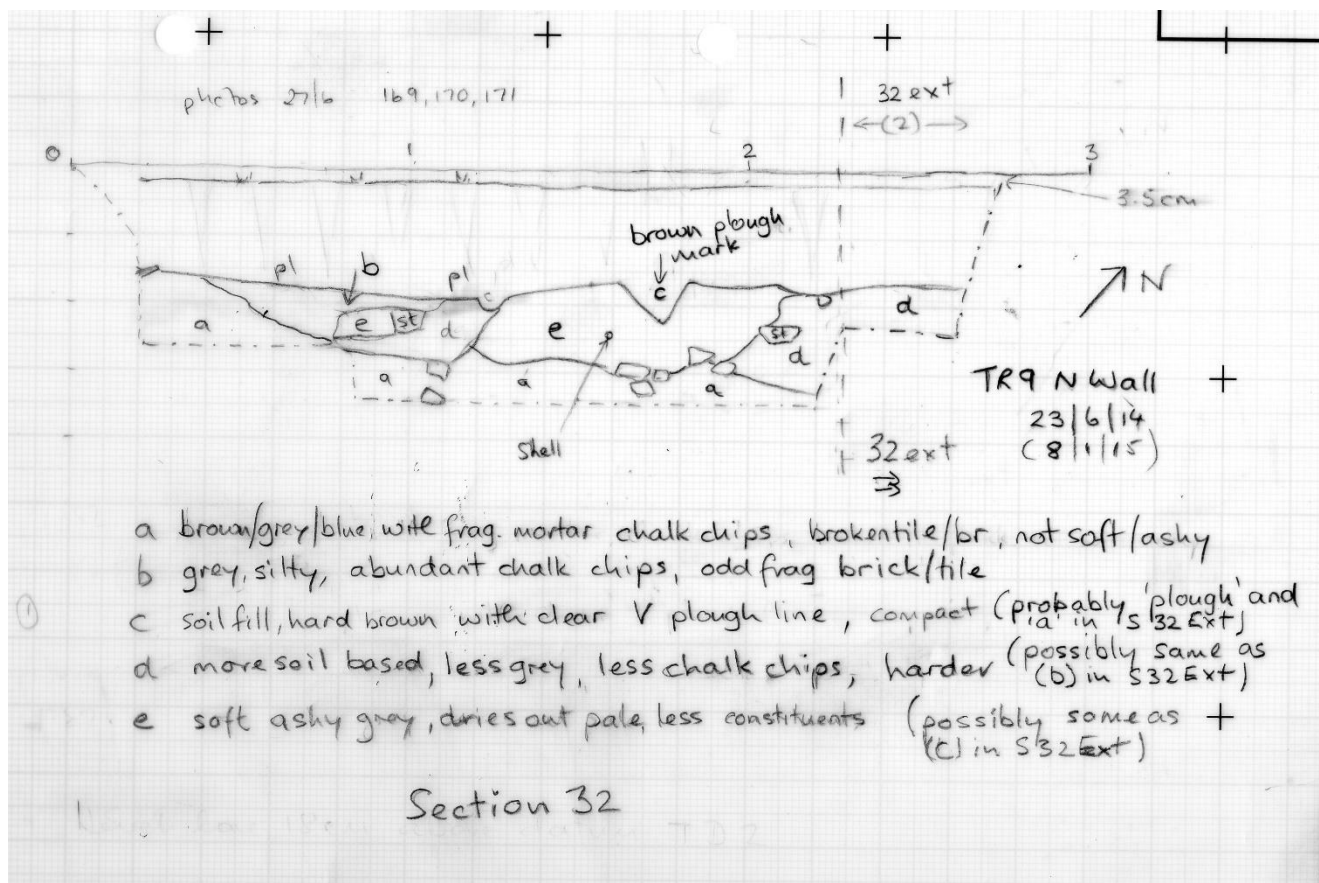


Figure 19: Section 32 TR9



Figure 20: Photograph of Section 33: View NE: TR9

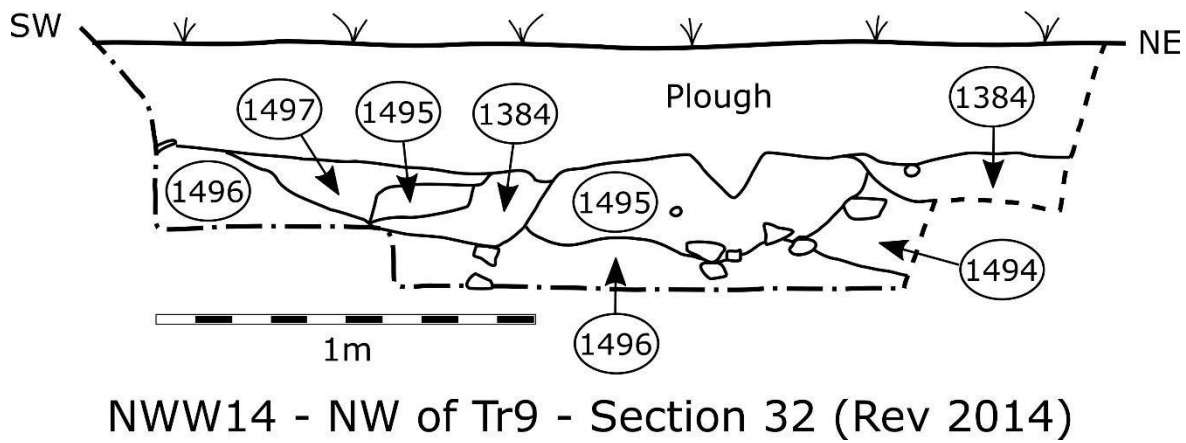


Figure 21: NW trench end wall Tr9: Section 32:



Figure 22: Photograph Section 32: NW trench end wall Tr9

Appendix B: Detailed Report on contexts and Finds..... Separate document at present

Contexts TR9 2014 Part II Draft by J Nelson 2015 - available from www.ciarch.org.uk

Appendix C: References:

1. Rheesearch group publish their findings here: <http://www.rheesearch.org.uk/>
2. Reports on www.ciarch.org.uk
3. *Contexts TR9 2014 Part II Draft* by J Nelson 2015 - available from www.ciarch.org.uk

