

CAMBRIDGE INDEPENDENT ARCHAEOLOGY – CIA 26

Interim report of the wall found at Nine Wells, Whittlesford in 2016/7



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Background

The group have been investigating this site since 2009. Excavation takes place in the field to the north of the scheduled Nine Wells site, known as 'The Roman Settlement south of Chronicle Hills'.

Much of the previous years' excavations showed that a substantial amount of the remains had been heavily disturbed both in antiquity and by ground levelling in the 1800s. However, in 2016 two test trenches placed over a geophysical anomaly further up the hill gave initial clues that stratified archaeology had survived in this location.

2016 Test Trenches

These trenches (Tr20 & Tr21) were initially established as 6 meters by 0.5 metres. Subsequently, Tr21 was extended by 1.5 metres as a vertically cut pit was found at the very north-east end.

In both of these trenches, sections of wall were found made of cobbles and other large stones found locally, loosely mortared by a yellow sandy mortar.



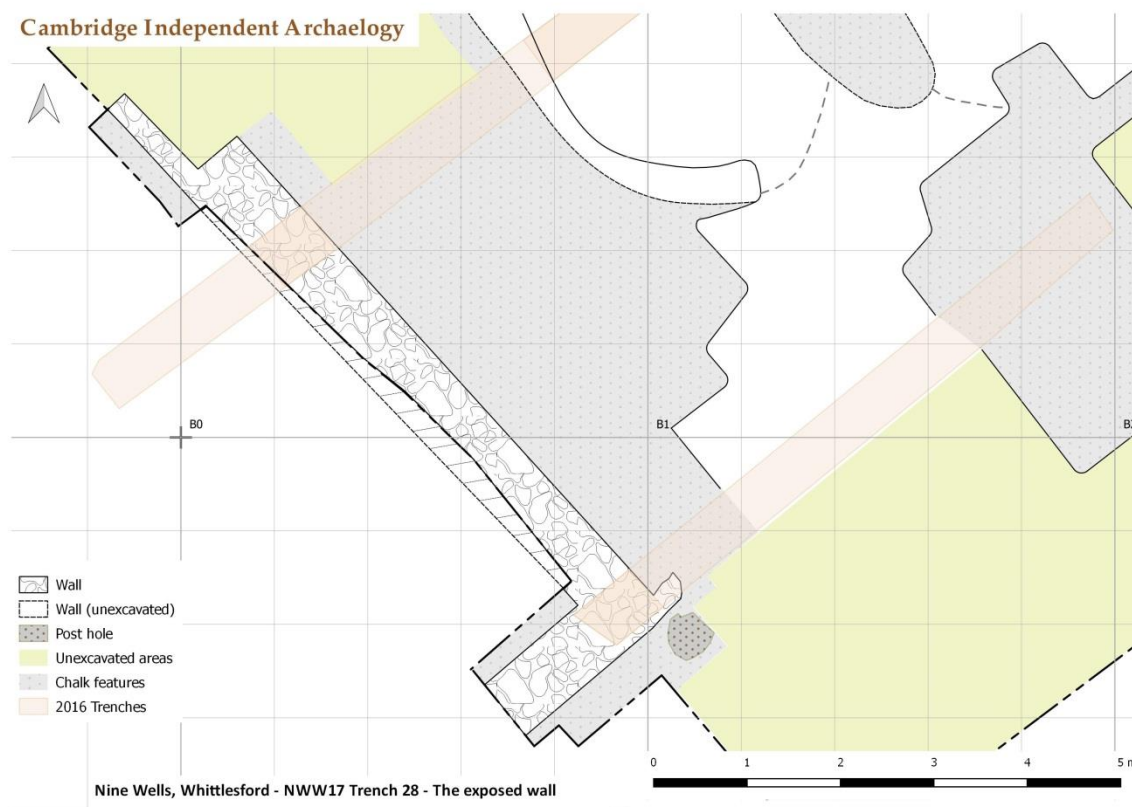
Further very small keyhole trenches were made along the alignment of the wall to determine if it continued. It was found in the north-westerly direction but not in the south-easterly one.

Substantial pits were found in both Tr20 and Tr21 which required further investigation so it was decided to open a 10x10 metre trench over the pits. This would also give the opportunity to investigate the wall further.

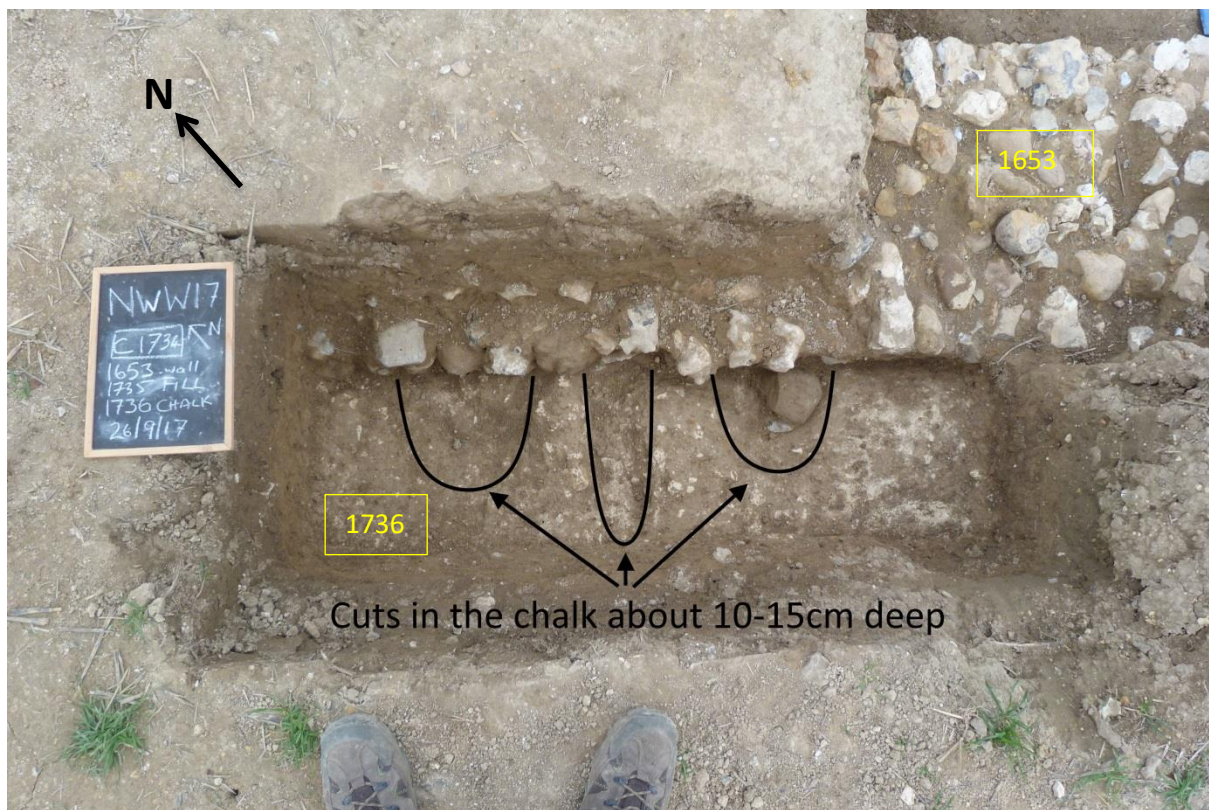
2017 Excavation

The 10x10 metre trench (Tr 28) was positioned so that the wall was at the extreme south-west side of the trench. This report will concentrate on describing the wall and its immediate related features. The 'pit' areas of the trench will be covered by a separate document produced by Peter Cornelissen.

We knew that the wall was present in both the 2016 trenches (Tr20 & 21). The area between the trenches was excavated in order to determine the state of its preservation. This resulted in a length of 7.8 Metres of wall being exposed in straight line.



The northernmost metre of the excavated length was excavated to show the full width of the wall and a small area of the archaeology on the western side of the wall was exposed.

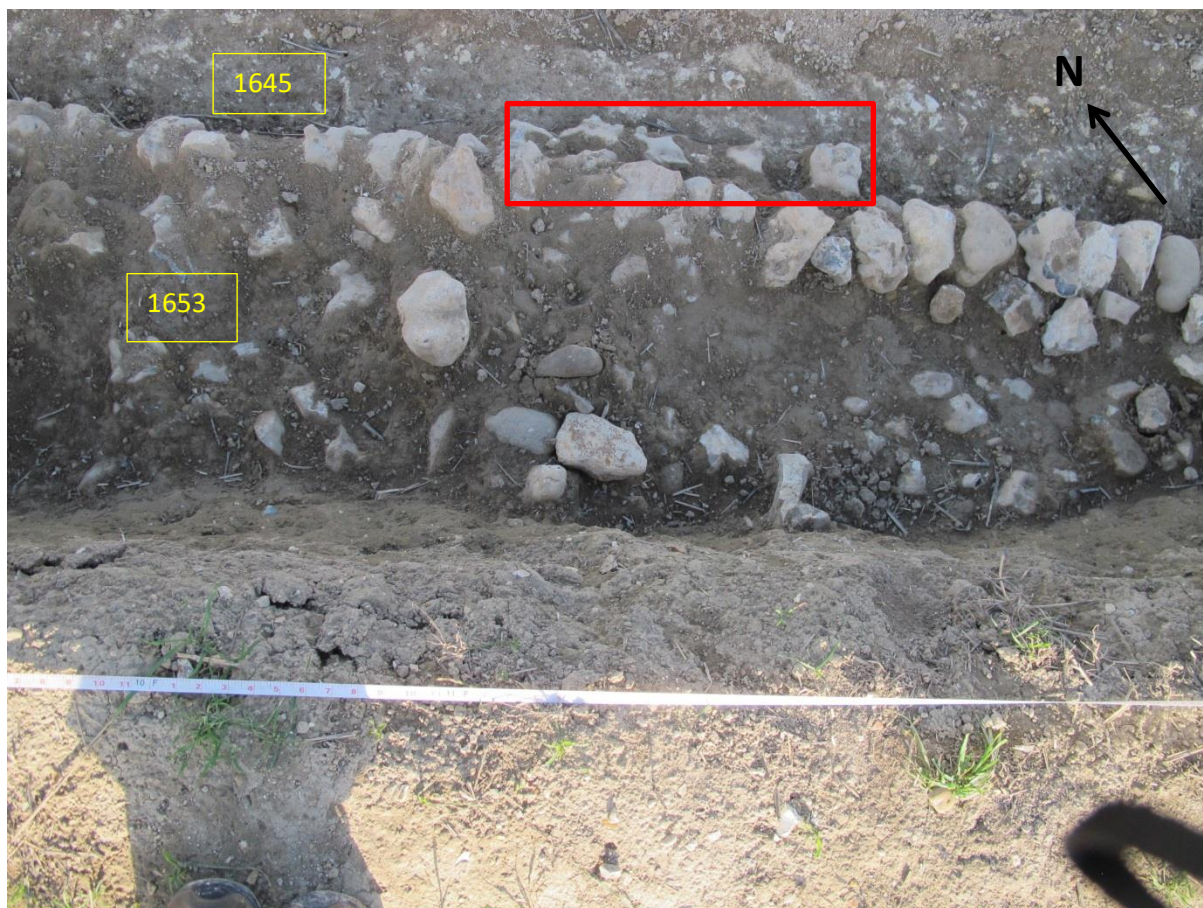


The chalk (context 1736) was found to be generally flat but with 3 depressions up against the wall (marked in black above).

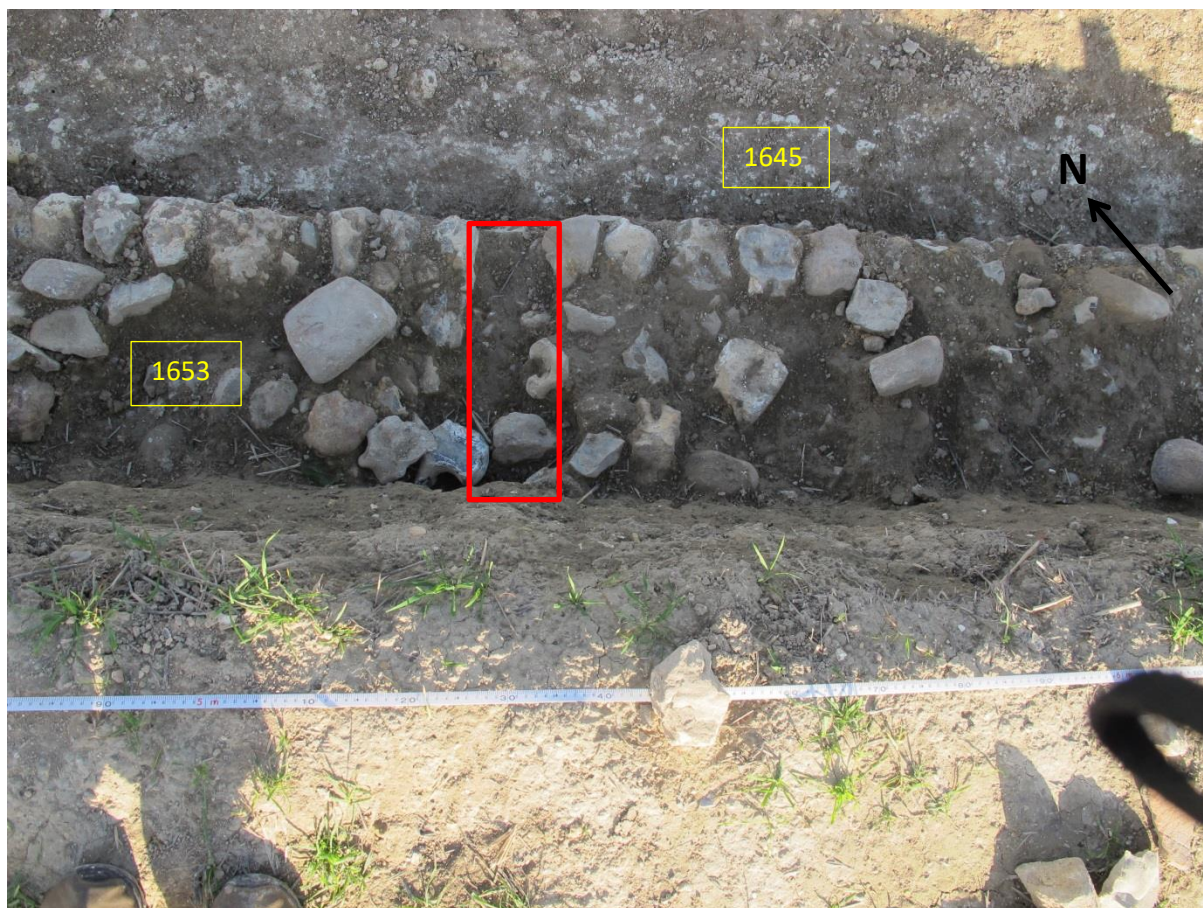
What these represent is not determined at this point. They could be the result of animal burrowing or something archaeological. One theory is that they represent the remains of where construction boards were joined. It is believed that boards typically were used in the construction of such wall foundations. However, this is unlikely to be resolved unless we find similar combinations of depressions elsewhere along the wall. This should be considered for inclusion in the objectives for subsequent excavation.

The width of the wall was measured at 72cms. Although this was not checked along most of the wall, it was consistent with the width at the south-east end of the excavation. It is safe to assume that it has a consistent width along its length.

It is worth noting that NO finds (apart from 2 small pieces of plaster) were found when excavating down to chalk (1736). However, when excavating context 1703 on the other side of the wall down to chalk (1645), substantial amounts of pottery, CBM and oyster shell were found. In places, this spread of finds extended at least a metre and a half in a north-easterly direction (context 1713).



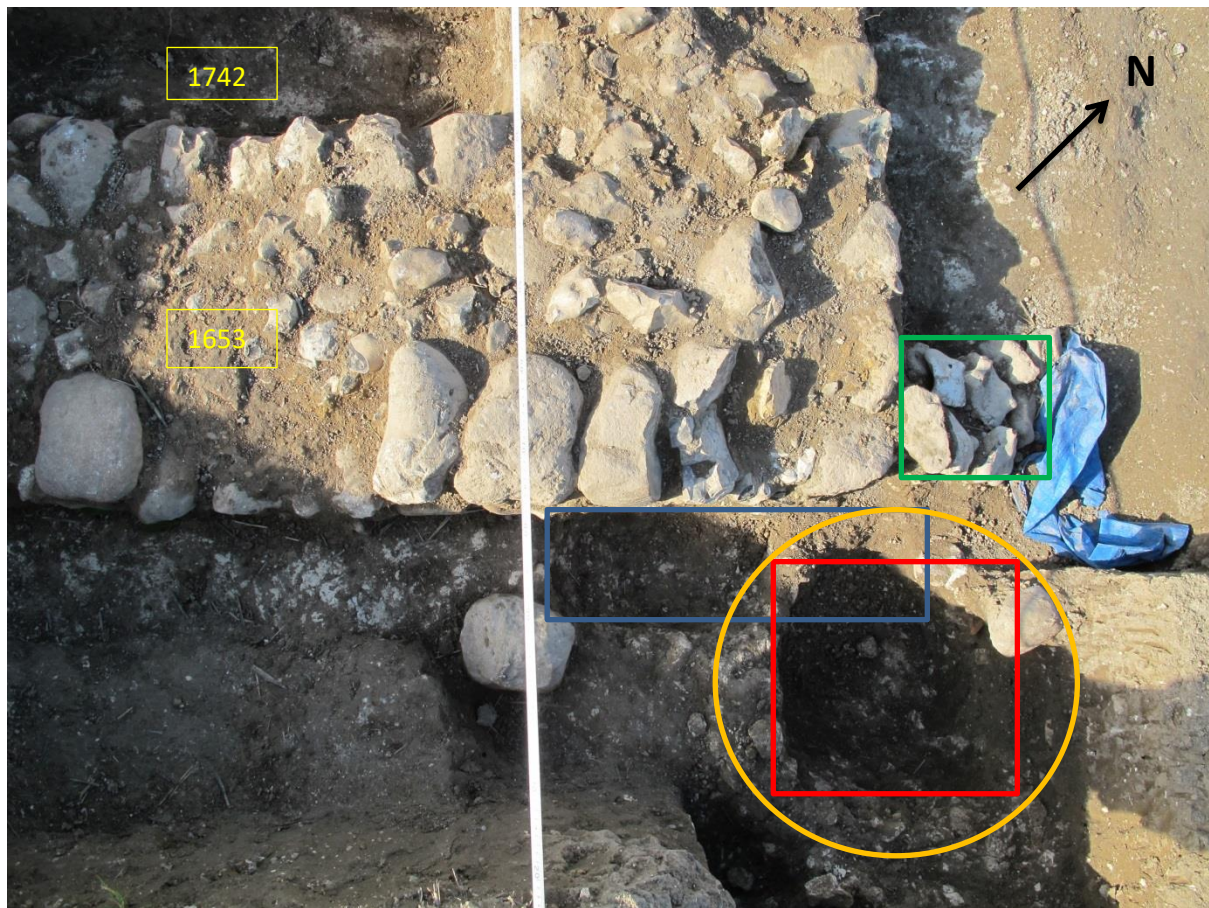
The North-east facing edge of the wall is very straight along the entire exposed length, apart from a small length of 60 cms where a single course of stones protrude. At this stage, it is not known whether this is by design or is accidental. Further investigation is required to see if this occurs further along the wall.



The area highlighted in red in the picture above is a putative slot in the top of the wall (somewhat obscured by some loose stones near the baulk). This is not a confirmed feature until others are found when further areas of the wall are exposed in subsequent excavation but is highlighted here as a possibility for future consideration.



At this point the wall turns 90 degrees to the south-west. It was excavated for 2 metres in that direction without finding an end to it. Inside the turn excavation continued down to the chalk with few finds except for some very large pieces of daub like material.



On the outside of the turn, there appeared to be a small buttress of stones (shown highlighted in green in the picture above).

At the end of the wall, the original excavation trench continued for a short distance demonstrating that this is quite likely to have continued along the length of the wall. This cut (context 1734) is evidenced by the blue box above.

Subsequent to the construction of this wall trench a posthole (roughly square) was constructed (red cut 1744 above). This was approximately x cms square. The chalk rubble packing for the post is still in position (shown by the yellow circle – context 1751). One of the first activities for any subsequent excavation in this area should be to investigate the relationship between this packing and the wall trench. If the packing sits on clean chalk then it can be safely postulated that the posthole is contemporary with the wall. If there is a soil horizon between them then it may not be.

At the moment there appear to be two possibilities for the purpose of this square post:

- A) It is part of the building of which the wall is the base and could have had a support role for an overhanging roof or superstructure.
- B) Perhaps more likely, it could be a gatepost to an entrance at the turn of the wall.

This is definitely a candidate for further investigation in future excavations.

It is easy to assume that a corresponding posthole will respect the line of the wall in a south-easterly direction. However, it is conceivable that it may lie in a north-easterly direction if there was a trackway which post-dated the current pit cluster. Therefore, in future excavation in that area of the pits, particular care must be taken to be aware that a post hole may appear in the surface. One area of possible investigation prior to the next excavation should be to see if we can identify any standard gateway widths that may help us identify possible locations for the other posthole.

Conclusions

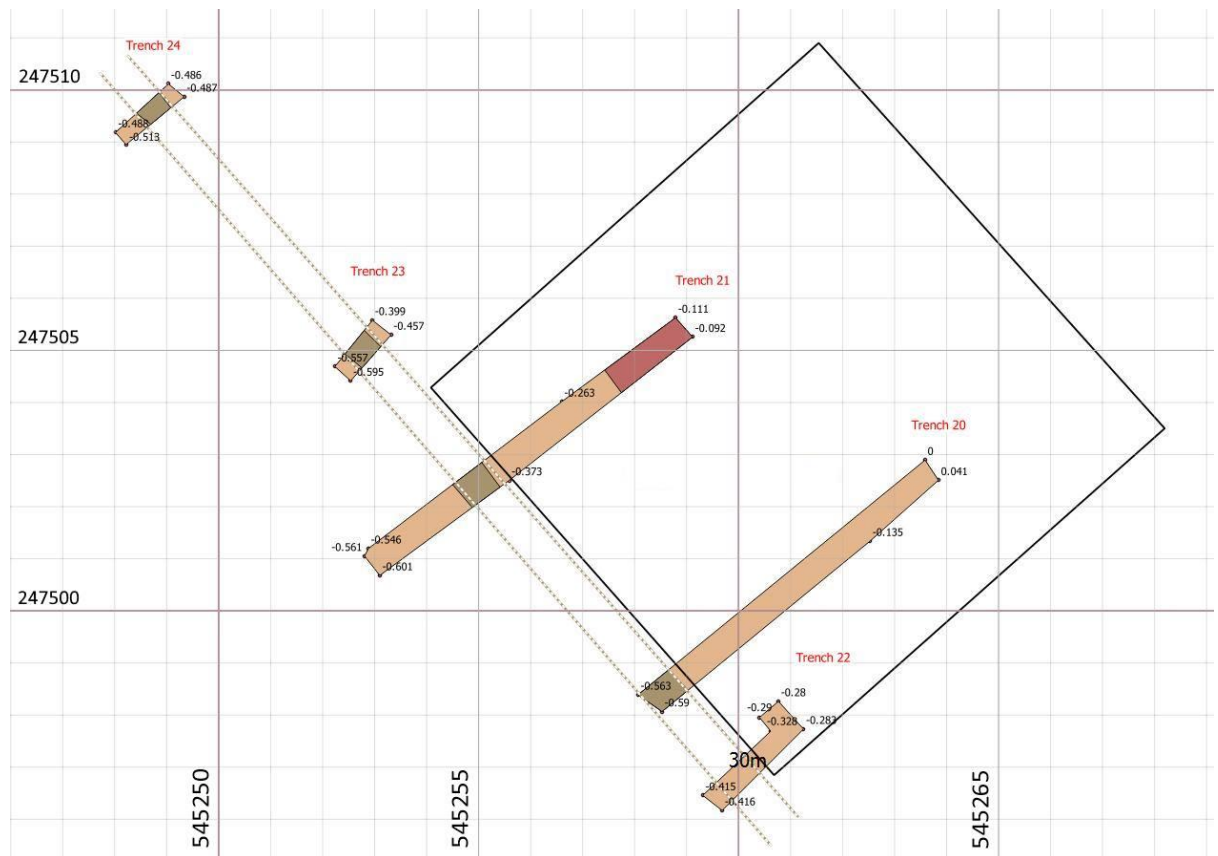
It can be seen from the satellite image discovered subsequently, that the wall appears to be quite extensive.



Indeed, there appear to be indications of possible internal features.

A number of questions need to be resolved efore we understand what this wall represents:

- a) Is it a building or boundary wall? The consistent level and form of the wall excavated so far would indicate that it is a base layer for a wood / wattle / daub superstructure. It is not consistent with the profile of a robbed wall which tends to be varying heights of stones left with areas where all stones are removed down to natural.
- b) Does the SW turned wall terminate cleanly or has it been robbed or even ploughed out as the ground falls away?
- c) If it does terminate cleanly, it probably indicates a building. In that case, is there any evidence of walls, partitions or post holes along the frontage running parallel to the long wall?
- d) Does the long wall continue to the end indicated by satellite image with a consistent profile, i.e no evidence of robbing. The test trenches Tr23 & Tr24 to the NW were not excavated very far down but did suggest the wall was continuing NW (and were recorded by PCA).



- e) Is there a turn at the far end corresponding to that discovered in 2017?
- f) Are there any archaeological features internal to the wall, that correspond with the faint outlines shown in the satellite image?
- g) Is there a corresponding posthole to the south-east or north-east, (see earlier comment re other possibility) of the one found in 2017? If so, what occurs in the intervening space?

It is recommended that these questions, together with those from the pit area, form the basis for formulating the excavation methodology for subsequent excavations

References

- 1) CIA – Nine Wells Whittlesford excavations reports from 2009 to 2015 of the temple and the villa/bath area - Bill Hughes, Rodney Scarle, Robert Skeen and Peter Cornelissen et al.
- 2) CIA – Nine Wells Whittlesford excavations reports from 2016 for the test trenches Tr20 and 21 – Jayne Nelson and Mick James
- 3) CIA - Interim report of excavations at Nine Wells, Whittlesford in 2017 (Pits and Bones) – Peter Cornelissen

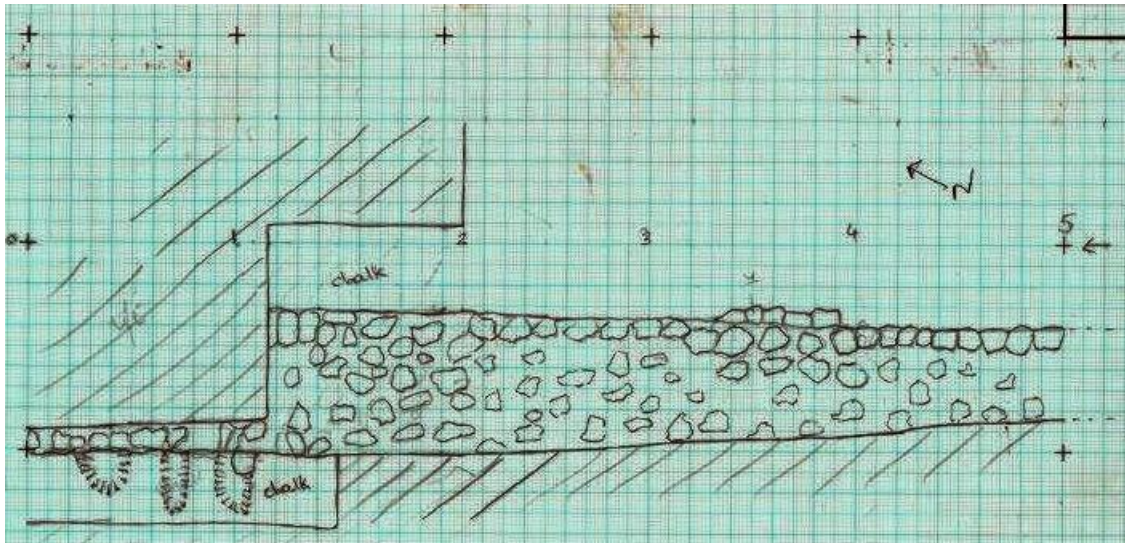
Acknowledgements

- * To farmer Leslie Harrison for site access and interest
- * To Cambridgeshire County Farms for site permission and access
- * Mark Hinman and his team at Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd for their advice and support throughout planning and excavation and for use of their premises for post excavation finds processing
- * A special thanks to all those who have helped with our excavations and for Tim Butcher for finding the satellite image in this document.

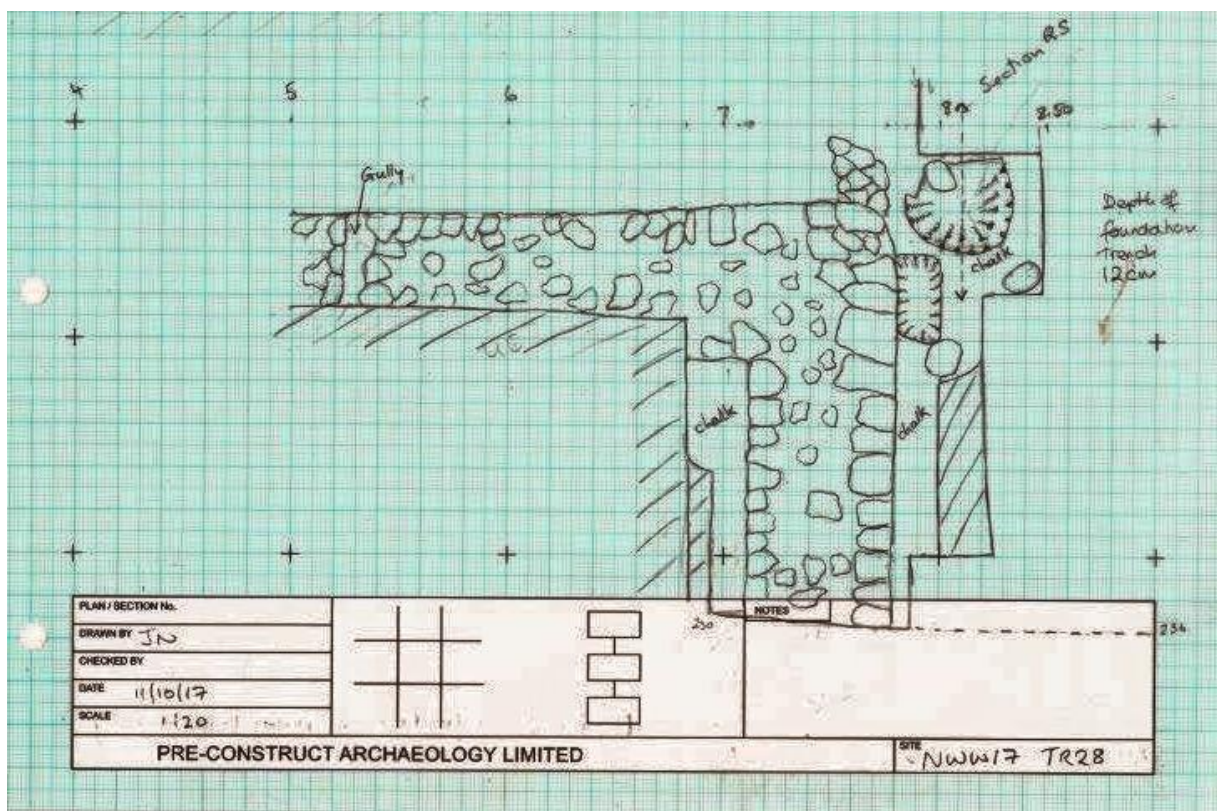
Contexts and Levels

For a complete list of contexts and levels associated with the wall and associated features, please see the Appendices in Peter Cornelissen's report 'CIA25 (NWW17) - Interim excavation report Tr28 excluding the wall area'

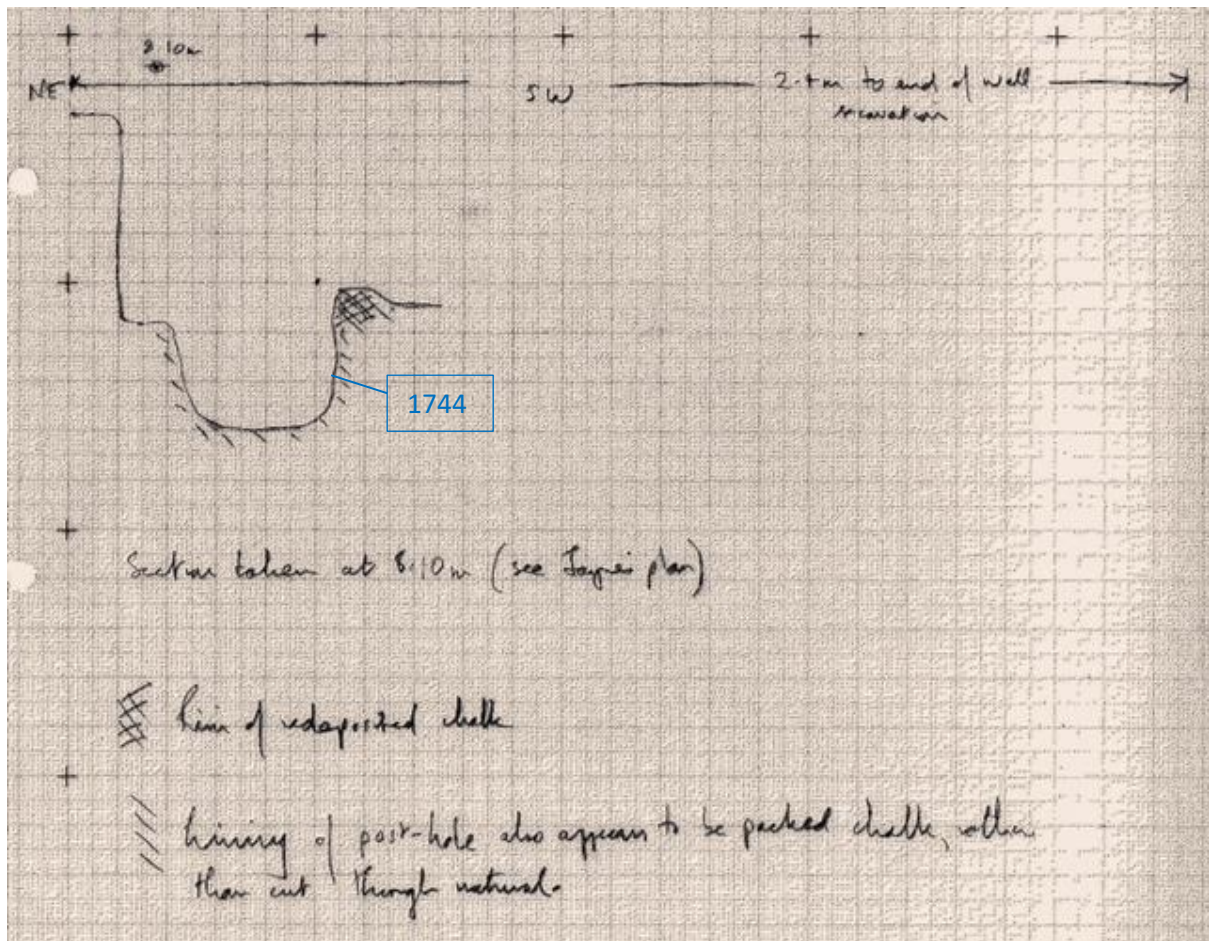
Appendix – Drawings relating to the wall and associated features



Plan of the excavated wall – North west end



Plan of the excavated wall – South East end and return. Also shows associated features at the corner.



Section Drawing of Posthole. Rectangular at the top, sub-rectangular at the base. Approximately 35-40 cms wide, 20cms deep.