

CAMBRIDGE INDEPENDENT ARCHAEOLOGY – CIA27

Report of the interim excavations at Nine Wells, Whittlesford in 2017

Report on Trench 29 at Nine Wells 2017

Written by Bill Hughes and Jayne Nelson

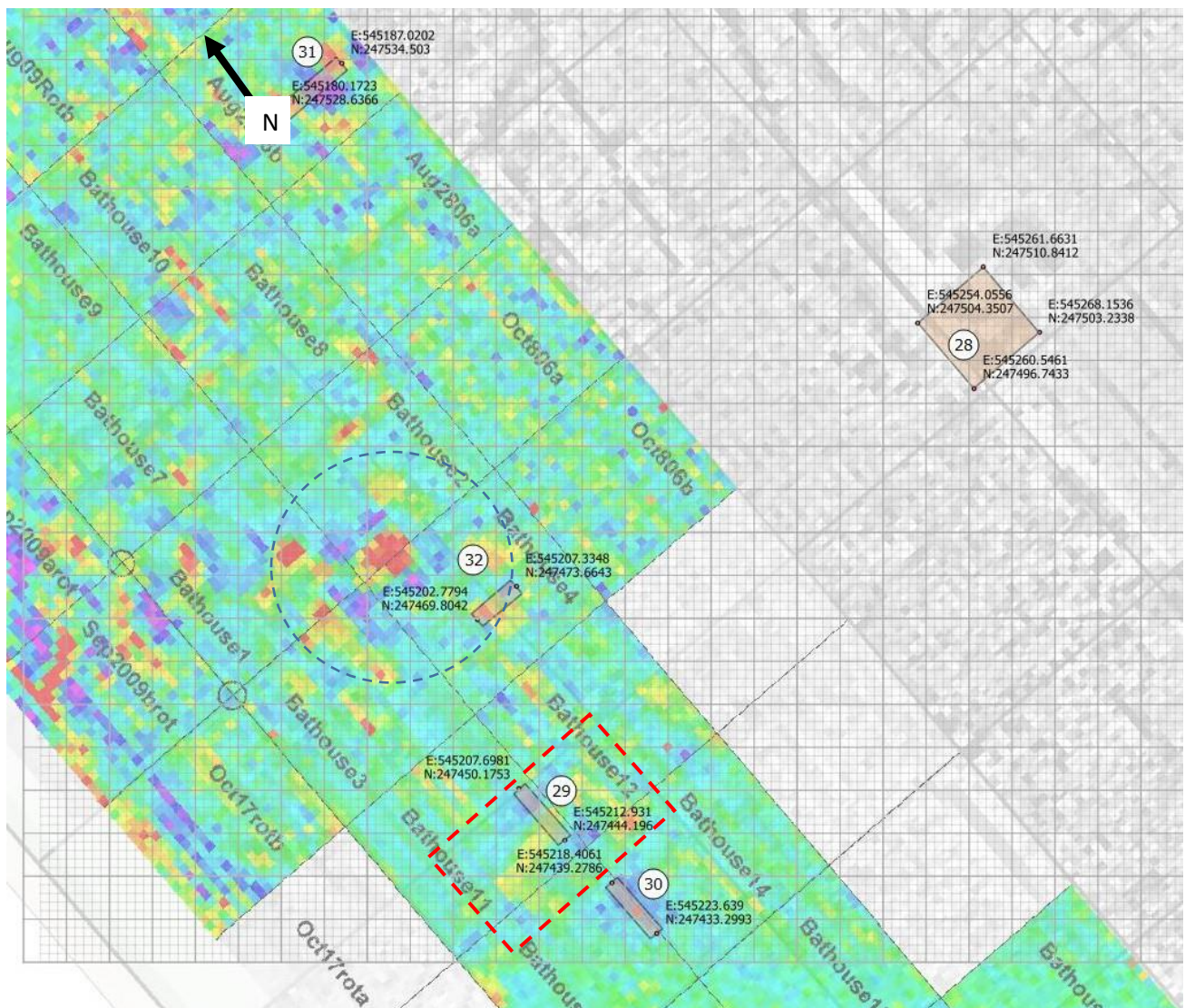


Figure 1: Location of TR29 in relation to the main trench TR28.
Excavated by Bill Hughes between 28 August and 25 September 2017

This trench was a reserve excavation when there was spare capacity of diggers at the main trench excavated in 2017, and therefore was not dug on a continuous basis.

A plan of the location is shown in Fig 1 overlaying the geophysics survey done by RheeSearch Archaeology.

The objective was to explore the area which might have been the gateway to the courtyard of the bathhouse/villa, indicated by blue dotted circle, and the possible foundations of the large rectangular feature which might be a building to the South East on a different alignment to the bathhouse, indicated by red dotted rectangle.

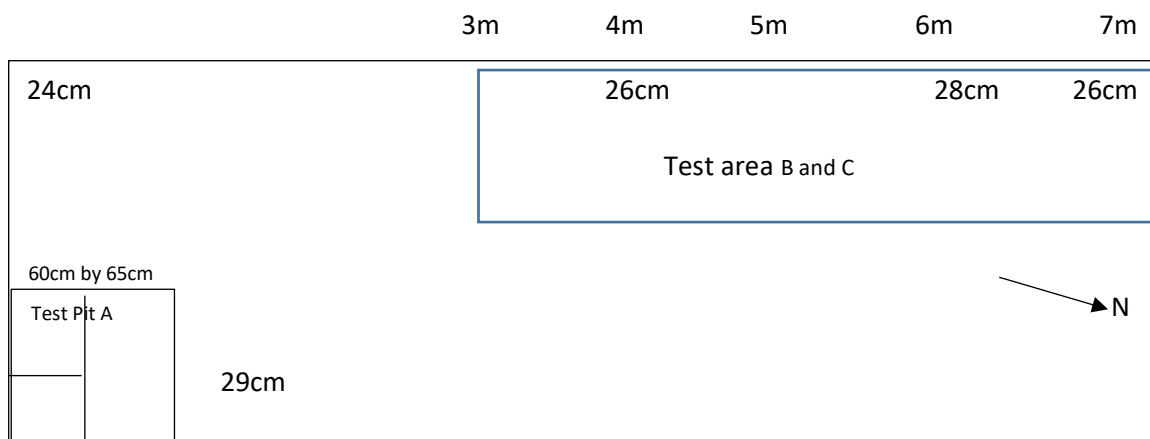


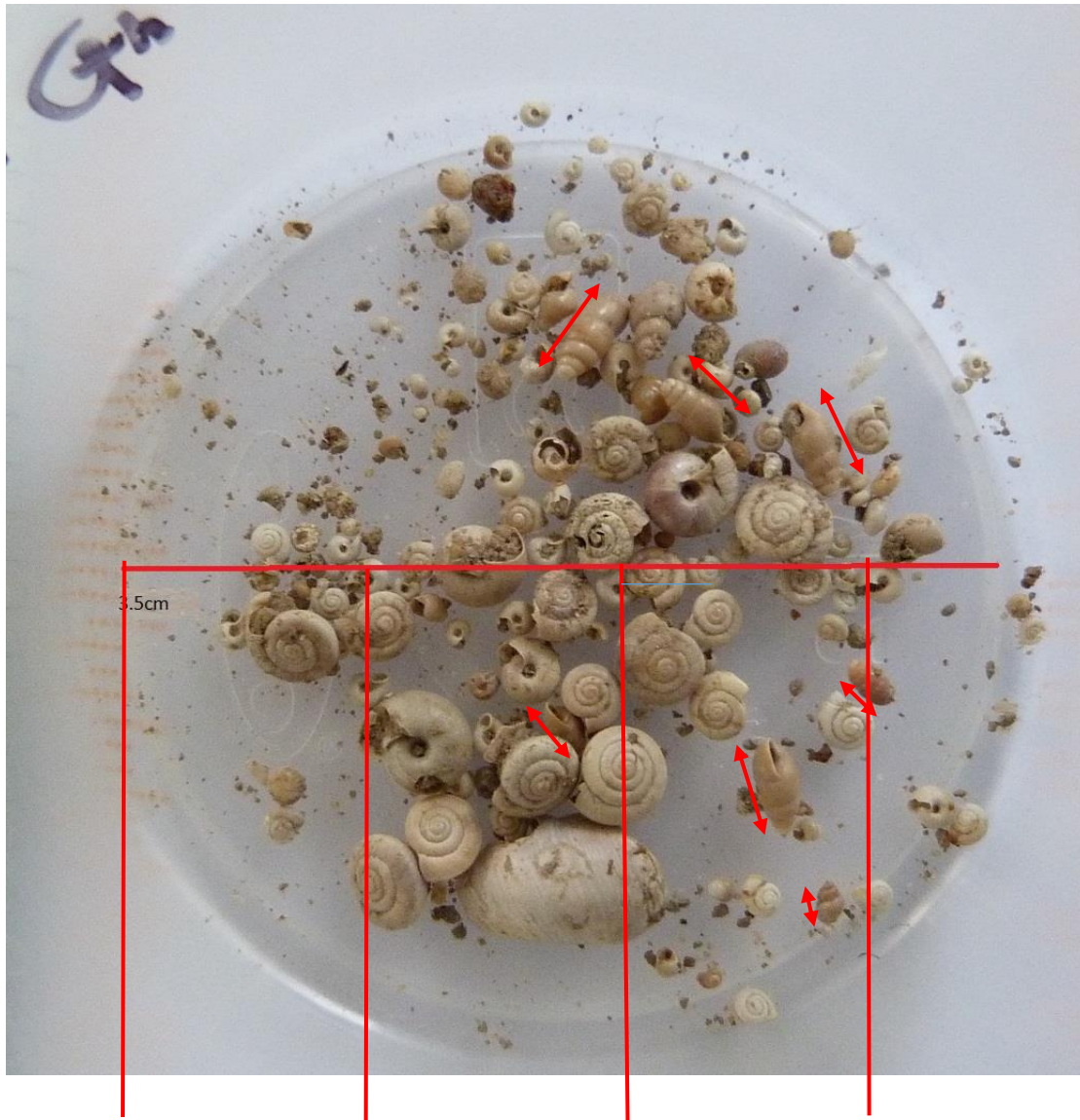
Figure 2: Shows the plan of the machined area with machined depths, and location of the test pits.

TR29 had been machine dug to approx. 25cm. On analysis of geophys and position of TR29 it was thought that with the supposed building that may be present we may expect a wall to be approximately in the centre of the trench on an EW alignment.

Initially Test pit A. (context 1704) was dug to find the depth of natural. However, after digging down to 85 cms this was not found.

It appeared brown throughout the three levels excavated. It was thought there was nothing to record but after discussions on the other area (B&C) within the trench it was thought sensible to dig deeper and see if the grey in evidence in area B&C could also be seen in Test Pit A. Grey was found at 133cm below the 'level' (the level was 15cm above the plough surface), C1755, (Sample S2017/6). See picture 1. Directly above that the fill showed a little layer of blackening, C1754, at 130cm below 'level'. See picture 2. Only a tiny sample was able to be obtained of this, S2017/5, due to the depth and accessibility. Just above that level there was distinct colouring of red in the fill. **A sample was taken.** See Picture 3.

Slightly more above that the fill was less red but contained abundant tiny shell. **A sample was taken of this fill too.** A sample of 100gm weight was floated and passed thro a 200mesh giving a sediment of approx. 35gm (inc water), a residue of clay, sand and broken shell of approx. 40gm mass and 130 tiny shells including several elongated shells as indicated in the picture below, weighing approx 1gm. Some of the shells are tubular as indicated in the picture below.

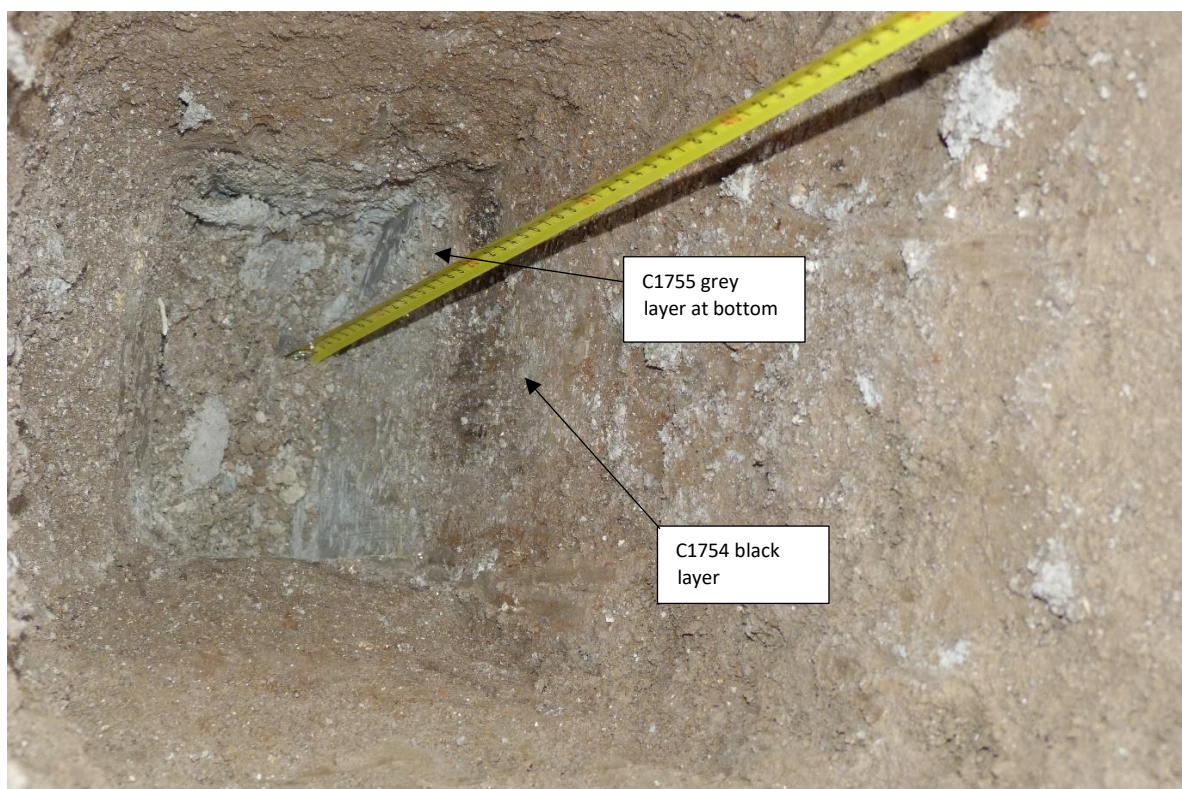


Picture 1 showing the 130 shells within a dish of 3.5cm diameter.

Clearly grey underlies this area of the trench as well and may be a continuation of the sloping grey fill as seen in area B&C towards the junction of this field and the scheduled field and where the Nine Wells arises between the two fields.



Picture 2 The bottom-most level showing the grey.



Picture 3 Black/charcoal? Layer just above the grey, Sample 2017/5. Grey layer S2017/6.



Picture 4 Distinct evidence of red deposit. **Sample taken.** S170?

Test area B and C:

This area extended from 3-7m distance from SW corner and on the West side of the trench. Two small sondages were put in on the NW/SW side, area B and C. One from 3-4m, B, and one from 5-6 m, C, each 50cm wide. The surface of the trench had a distinct grey area in the NW end which broke up to a jagged brown area further south. B was dug to 60cm. C1706. This revealed a grey surface substantially horizontal at the NW end but appearing to progress in slight 'steps' in the SW/NW section.

Finds: C1706: Many red tesserae and a few small white ones. 21 fragments of roof tile.

B was then extended towards C by 30cm, C1716, and dug to 40cm, ie approx. 10cm above the grey surface.

Depths of the grey surface were as follows:

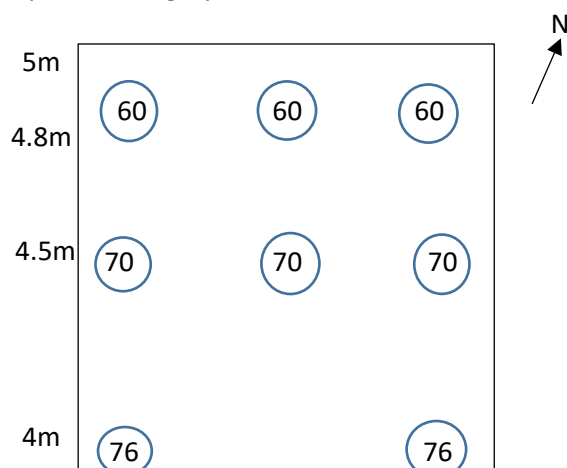


Figure 3: depths of grey surface

Finds: C1716: Many red and white tesserae, quite a few embedded in the grey surface at 70-76 cm deep. Many finds in C1716 tray mistakenly deposited from C 1706.

This excavation was concentrated on finding the possible wall foundation trench of the building feature to the South East by digging Test pit B (context C1706) position 3.0 to 4.0 metre from 0 datum at South West end. This was dug to a depth of 76 cms where a grey silted layer was found. The grey layer was chased out towards the North West from 4.0 metres to 7.0 metres from base datum (context C1718) following the top of the grey silt layer. There was no indication of the possible foundation trench. It was concluded that if it was possible to locate it then it was more to the South East approximately 3 metres to the South East i.e. about 1 metre **further south?** from 0 datum, and that the Trench 29 was not located as per Fig. 1 due to a slight error in matching to the Geophysics survey.

The silt area between 3.0 metres from base 0 at South West end and 3.60 metres was then excavated (context C1733) down to Natural at 1.10 to 1.15metres. This natural was a mottled white chalk with brown inclusions possibly sandstone and this appears to lie beneath the blue/grey layer. It was not considered fruitful to excavate down through the silt all the way between 3.60 metres and 7.00 metres from 0 datum as time was limited. WH believes that this clearly shows it was one side of a ditch or depression but the further excavation of Test Pit A might suggest that this is a continuing layer of blue gray silt from the 30cm sub plough layer at 7m from datum, diving to 130cm at 0m point. Is the mottled/sandy subsoil below, as seen in Area B, 'natural' and therefore perhaps this would have been found under the grey of Test Pit A if investigated, and if so does this area represent a natural depression in the local geology in the form of a pingo?

It seems unlikely that a wall foundation has just been missed between 1m and 3m from 0 but it's not impossible.

A section drawing of the South West side is shown in Fig 5 and other small sections of the sondage in Area B can be found in Figure 6

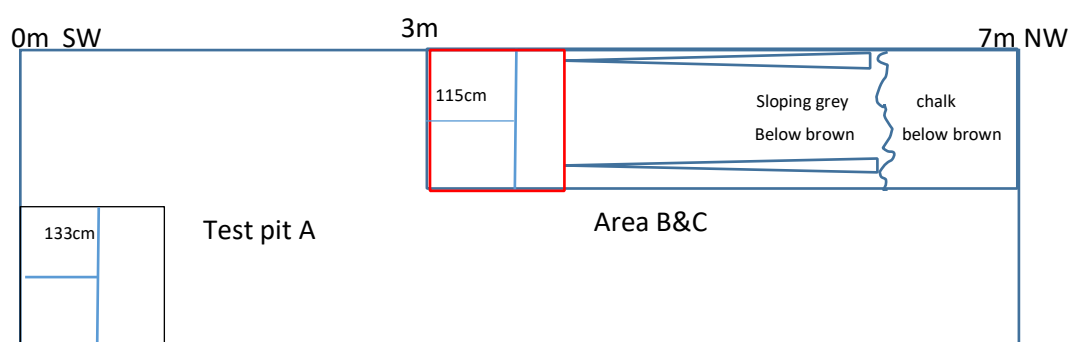


Figure 4: Plan of the area

Depths were taken from a level from SW to NW edge of trench. At 0m the level was approx. 15cm above the ground surface. At 7m it was level with ground surface.

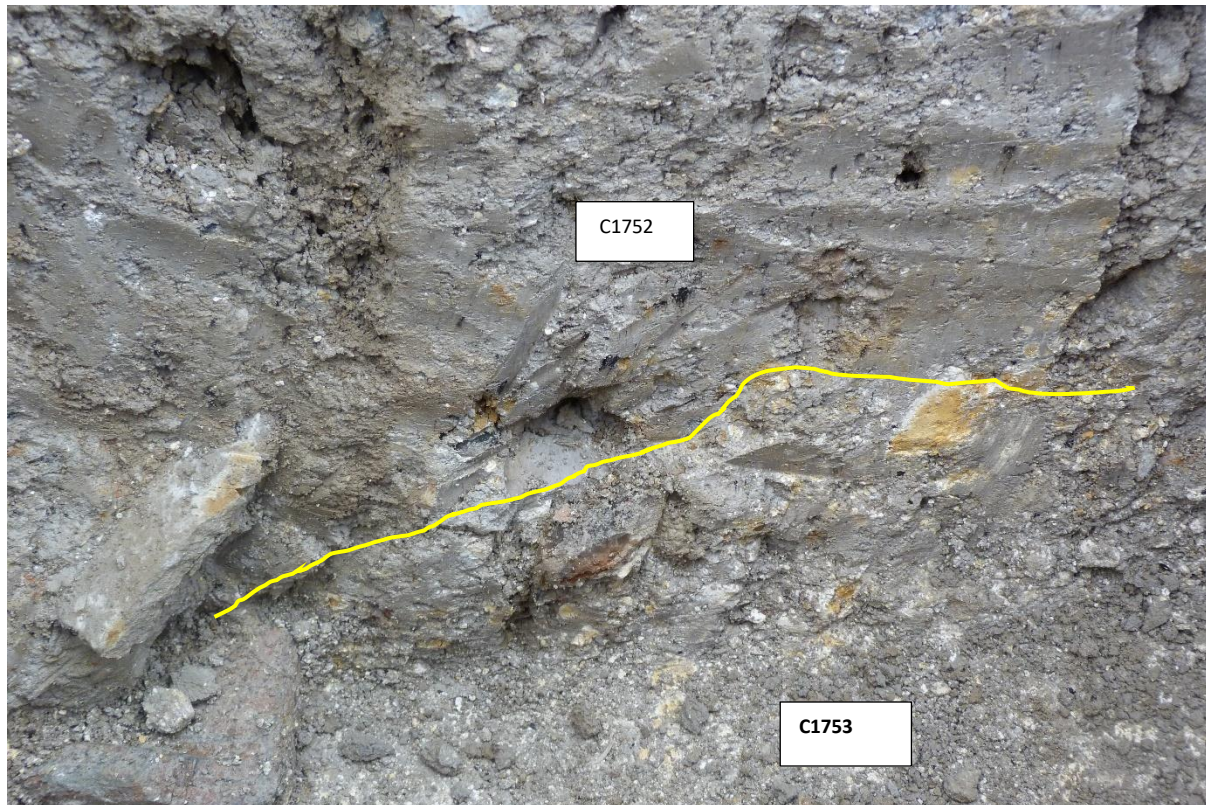
A small piece of green glass found at 150cm from NW corner, 10cm in from SW/NW edge and 46cm depth, C1718.

All sections of the deepest sondage, in area B&C, at 118cm in the red square, showed charcoal chips. Two pieces of pot were found at 118cm at the base, C1733. The fill at 118cm was sloping down from NW towards the SW and was grey but slightly above it the fill was more chalky/grey/ Picture 5.

No further work was possible due to lack of time.

Conclusion

As discussed it is possible that the edge of a ditch/moat that was just outside of the suggested courtyard entrance of the bathhouse has been revealed as it does line up with a linear feature shown on the geophysical survey as a blue line. However, the extent of the depth and distance of the grey silty layer suggested could indicate the edge of a natural depression that contained water.



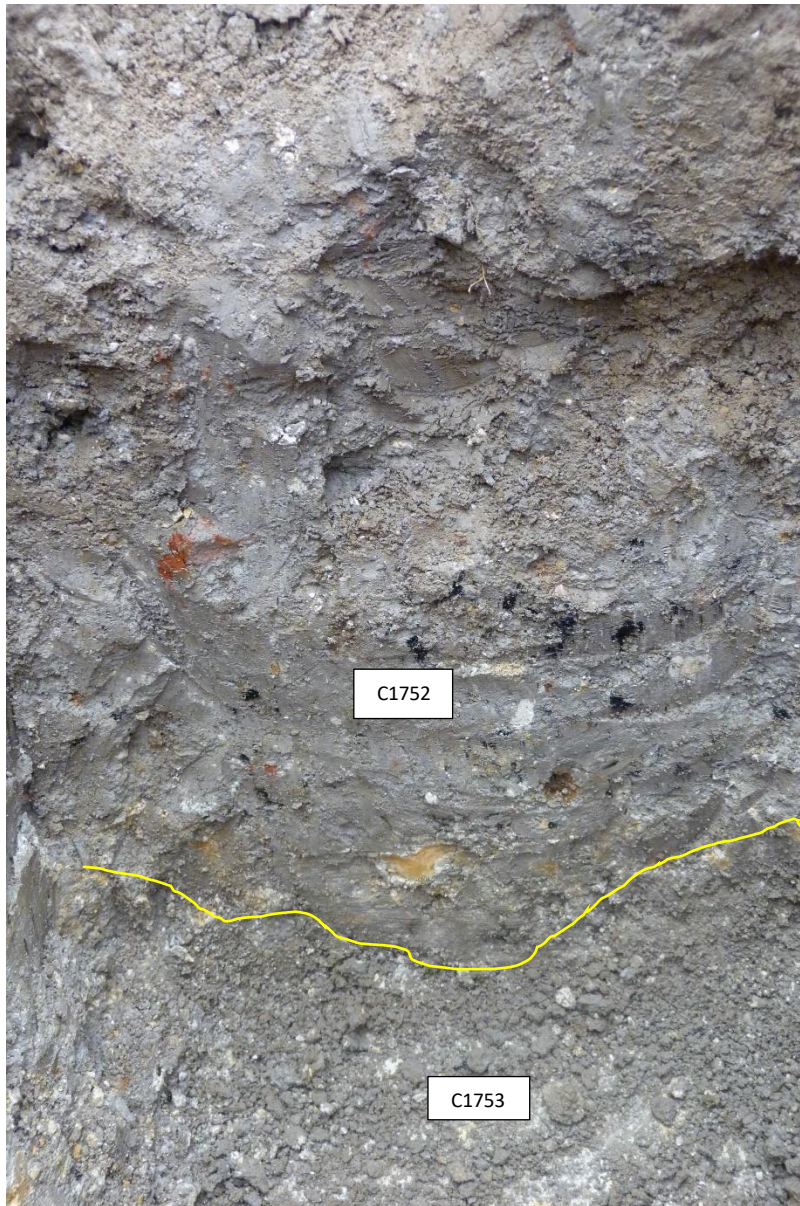
Picture 5; SW/NW section: A lighter chalky layer of looser mix lines the bottom, sloping down as per the grey area.

A sample S2017/4, was also taken from the south face of the deepest sondage, C1752. It was plain grey with tile and tegula embedded at the base. Picture 6.

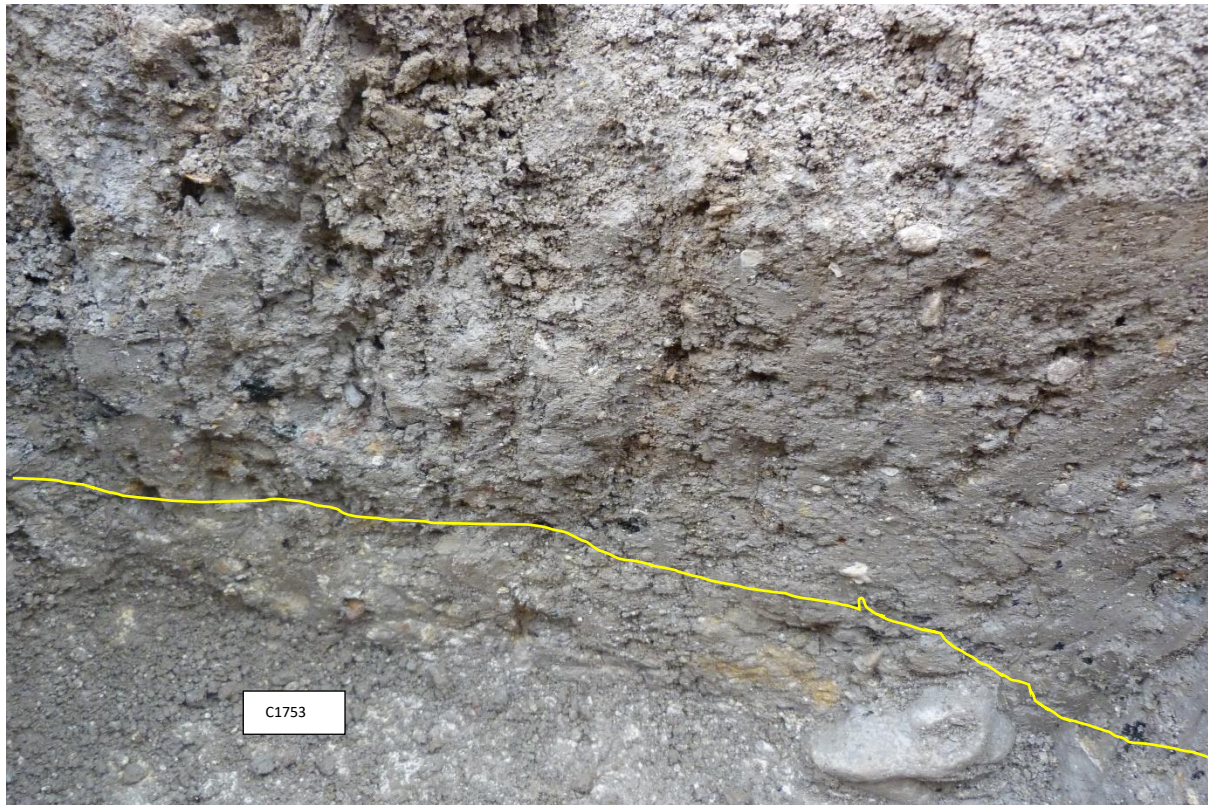


Picture 6 SE/SW section; A sample of the grey of this section was obtained (C1752 - S2017/4). It appears the chalky layer has dived beneath the grey at this point.

The three other sections of the deepest sondage showed the chalky/grey/yellow fill sloping also to the South. See section drawings. A bone was found at the deepest level and bagged. Pictures 7 and 8



Picture 7 NW/NE section of small sondage Area B & C. Below yellow line (new context C1753 for Sample 2017/7) is more loose, chalky/grey



Picture 8: NE/SE section: less charcoal deposits here and bone is found beneath the large stone visible.

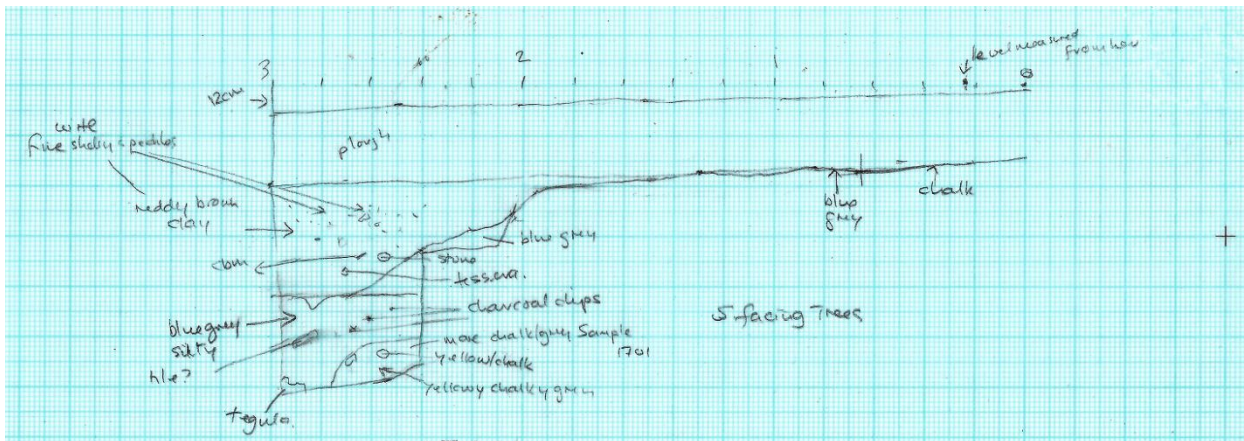


Figure 5: SW/NW section drawing.

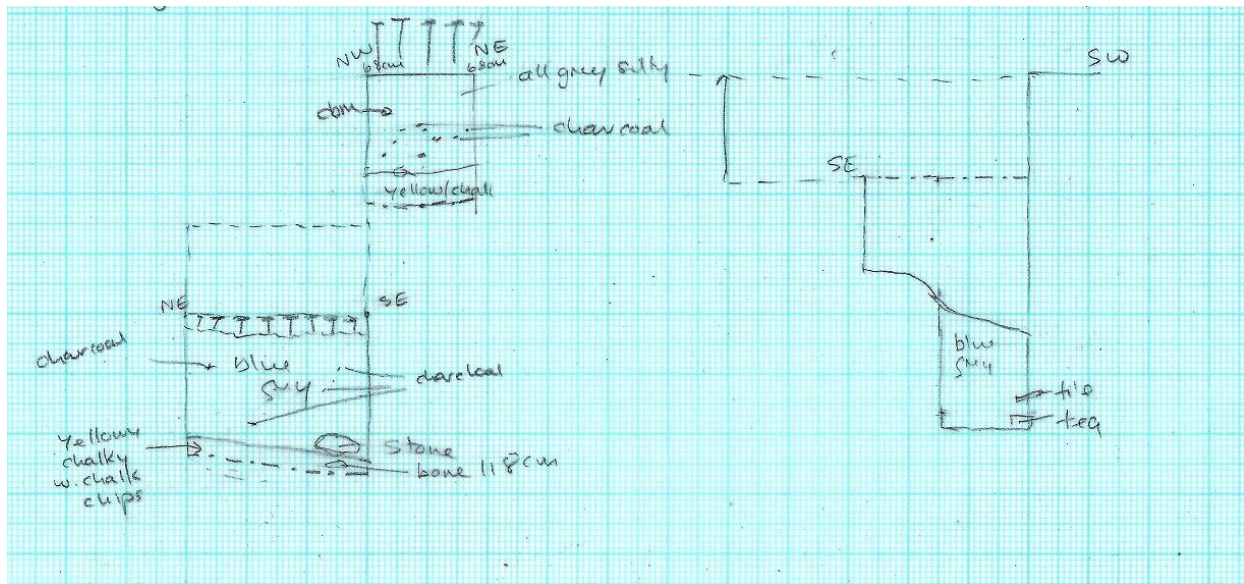


Figure 6: other section drawings of the sondage in B.

