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**Preliminary Stratigraphical Report**

**Ballymount Great  
Dublin 22**

Licence No. 01E0666

By  
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For  
Railway Procurement Agency

Parkgate Business Centre  
Parkgate Street  
Dublin 7

20<sup>th</sup> May 2003

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## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This report outlines the results of an excavation, which took place along the line of the proposed *Luas* light rail track, in the vicinity of the post-medieval manor site at Ballymount Great, Dublin 22 (Fig. 1).
  
- 1.2 The deposits were located during the monitoring of soil stripping in the area under licence number 01E0733 and they took the form of a series of cut features sealed by modern disturbance, the features for the most part cutting through the natural subsoil below (Plate 1).
  
- 1.3 As the construction of the track necessitated ground reduction in the region of 2.700m, a licence was issued to excavate the site to subsoil and the work was undertaken over three weeks either side of Christmas, starting on 17 December 2001 and finishing up on 11 January 2002.

## 2 Archaeological background

- 2.1 The registered monument at Ballymount (DU021;015) has been the focus of much attention since Paddy Healy's report to *An Foras Forbartha Teo.* in 1977. Here, the multi-period nature of the site and its significance as an archaeological landscape under developmental pressure were first recognised. The site consists *inter alia* of a pre-historic henge, the sub-surface remains of a medieval building or buildings and the extensive remains of a post-medieval manor house with later additions.
- 2.2 In the medieval period, the parish of Clondalkin, including Ballymount Great, passed into the hands of the archbishops of Dublin, who were to become one of the three largest sub-tenants of the crown in south county Dublin (MacNeill, 1950, *passim*). The buildings associated with the farm were undoubtedly situated where the remains of sir William Parsons' manor house are today, several hundred meters to the west of the excavation under discussion.
- 2.3 Three excavations have been undertaken in the area of the monument. G. Stout excavated several trenches through the site prior to the construction of the adjacent M50 in 1982, afterwards producing a comprehensive article containing the results of her excavation along with an account of the standing structures on the site (Stout, 1999). M. Conway excavated trenches on the site in 1997 as part of the *Luas* project in the area to the west of the manor house. J. Ó Néill excavated a trench between the masonry structures directly along the line of the track in 2000. He excavated a further area to facilitate the diversion of a small stream for the *Luas* in February 2002 to the west of Conway's excavation.
- 2.4 During monitoring on 13 December 2001, spreads of soil discolouration containing Leinster cooking ware and other local medieval sherds were noted, sealed by upcast from the construction of the M50. This material was located approximately 20m southwest of the post-medieval gatehouse, just to the south of a previously excavated test trench (Plate 2). Work was immediately halted and the area protected from machinery while a new haul road was constructed around to the south of the deposits. Ed Bourke of *Dúchas*, the Heritage Service was informed and permission was obtained to clean up the area and investigate the features under the existing monitoring licence. As it became obvious that significant quantities of pottery were present in sealed contexts, it was decided in consultation with Ed

Bourke to apply for an excavation licence. Work was allowed proceed as a crew was in place and the licence was issued retrospectively (01E0666).

- 2.5 The area directly in the line of the track was excavated to subsoil before the Christmas break in good weather conditions. This area was then covered in *Teram* and grade 804 gravel. The strip of ground under the haul road was excavated after Christmas in order to chase the features running south under the baulk prior to the insertion of a services duct (Plate 3).

### 3 Impact of development

- 3.1 The required level of ground reduction was reached when the features were exposed in an area measuring approximately 14m (east-west) by 6m. The overburden was composed in the main of disturbed soils from the development of the M50. The adjacent ground where no features were found to be present was covered with grade 804 gravel and compacted down to the required level. Concrete was poured over the gravel as a track foundation.
- 3.2 Although the deposits were not being directly impacted upon, all works along the *Luas* where archaeology has been found to be present have had a 400mm buffer zone imposed between the upper deposits and the base of the track formation. In this case, it was decided to preserve the deposits by record and carry on with the track construction after the excavation had finished.
- 3.3 All further ground reduction in the area was monitored and no further deposits were located apart from an area several hundred meters to the west, which was excavated by John Ó Néill in February 2002. This report has already issued to the apposite authorities under the original licence number 00E0538.
- 3.4 The construction and projected vibration impact of the *Luas* through the masonry structures to the west of the site has been the subject of a separate report by this writer and had a separate mitigation strategy which was formulated with the agreement of *Dúchas*, the Heritage Service. At the time of writing, there still has been no agreement with the local authority as to the eventual conservation strategy to be adopted for the protection of the masonry remains.

#### 4 Excavation results

4.1 Three phases of activity were recorded over the site. Phase I relates to the cutting of gullies and trenches which contained over 250 sherds of Leinster cooking ware and locally produced pottery dating from the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century into the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The features cut one another with little discernable pattern and appeared to be all generally contemporary. The main feature excavated may have once constituted a small enclosure. Phase II relates to post-medieval activity on the site, presumably associated with the manor house, which was constructed *circa* 1622 for sir William Parsons. Although several sherds of pottery from this period were recovered from the site, only one cut feature was recorded in the form of a large north-south field boundary, F32. The Phase III activity was associated with the ground works necessitated by the construction of the M50, which ran along the south of the site. This activity appears to have truncated much of the post-medieval deposits in the area to the south of the gatehouse while at the same time truncating the medieval pits and gullies below. The excavated depths of the features described below are therefore not a true indication of their original extents and they were possibly originally much deeper.

4.2 By the end of the excavation the trench measured 26m (east-west) by 11m. The deposits at either side of the trench had been removed by the ground clearance for the M50. A temporary benchmark was established at 64.540m OD.

#### 4.3 *Phase I*

4.3.1 The earliest feature recorded was a deposit of medium brown clay, which was recorded as F28 and F39 over the southern half of the trench, overlying the subsoil. This had an average thickness of between 150mm and 200mm and contained flecks of charcoal, a moderate amount of marine shell, animal bone and quantities of Leinster cooking ware and local medieval wares. It was initially interpreted as being a plough soil but as it only survived in an area measuring approximately 6m by 10m, this interpretation is probably unjustified. The features described below in the southern half of the trench all cut this deposit, however the range of pottery recovered from the fills does not indicate that the cut features were substantially later.

A deposit of brownish/grey sandy silt, F22, with regular inclusions of charcoal and occasional shells was recorded in the southwestern corner of the trench over a small

area of 1.5m by 900mm. It may have been delineated by the F43 gully (see below) to the east as it did not appear to extend beyond it. The deposit contained the same mixture of Leinster cooking ware and local wares as were encountered elsewhere over the excavation.

- 4.3.2 The main feature within Phase I consisted of a horseshoe shaped trench (Plates 4 and 5) with cut numbers F5 and F11, which terminated at its southern end at a metalled surface, F23 (Plate 6). A second terminal was located at its eastern end, which was disturbed by a later pit. The terminals were located at 12m apart. The trench measured between 1.1m and 1.2m to the north of its southern terminal, before widening out to 2.2m at the base of the 'horse shoe'. It narrowed again to the east before widening to 1.6m at the eastern terminal. It ranged from between 200mm and 250mm deep over much of its length, however at its eastern end it measured 420mm in depth.

Two fills were recorded; F6 was located at the northern and eastern areas of the trench and consisted of a brown/grey friable silty clay with pockets of gravel randomly occurring. The second fill, F12 was almost identical and was located over the remainder of the trench. It was slightly more compact than F6, containing more concentrated deposits of gravel. Both fills contained quantities of Leinster cooking ware and local Dublin wares and a fragment of an iron nail was recovered from F6 (01E666;6;21).

The western terminal was cut by a circular pit, F53, which had a maximum diameter of 1.38m and depth of 200mm. It was filled with F33 and F47, the latter, lower fill being a grey-black clayey silt containing the usual range of medieval pottery. The F33 fill constituted a deposit of gravel, which may have been introduced to cap the pit. This feature was originally interpreted as being a posthole associated with the possible enclosure defined by the F5/F11 trench.

- 4.3.3 The metalled surface F23 was located directly to the south of the southern terminal of the trench and it occupied a sub-ovoid area with a diameter of approximately 3m (Plate 7). It was made up of a mixture of angular and sub-angular calp stones with typical dimensions of between 100mm and 120mm. Smaller stones with dimensions of 40mm to 50mm were placed between the larger stones. It sealed F10, the fill of the gully described below.



- 4.3.4 The gully, F9 ran for 4.5m to the north of the F23 surface into the centre of the area defined by the F5/F11 feature (Plate 8). The cut was 600mm in width, widening out to 150mm at its northern end with depths of between 140mm and 220mm. It was filled with F10, a moderately compacted grey/brown fine sandy-silt with irregular orange mottling. The fill contained frequent inclusions of charcoal, cockle and mussel shell, animal bone and sub-angular limestone pebbles with occasional larger stones up to 120mm-150mm. The finds recovered included sherds of medieval local ware and Leinster cooking ware.

The gully cut a small sub-ovoid pit, F26 with an original diameter of 780mm and a maximum depth of 730mm. It was filled with F21 and F27, the latter a material similar to the F10 fill above but slightly sandier. The lower F21 fill was a deposit of dumped ash containing some animal bone; the ash did not appear to be *in situ* and was probably a hearth rake-out. No pottery was recovered but the feature is unlikely to be significantly earlier than the feature cutting it.

- 4.3.5 A large pit, F19 cut both the F10 gully and the F5 trench at the northern end of the gully (Plate 9). The pit had a diameter of 1.5m and a maximum depth of 330mm. It was filled with F20, a slightly compacted brown/grey clay-silt and while it contained several sherds of Leinster cooking ware and other local wares, the fill was distinctive for the amount of cattle horn cores it contained, representing at least nine cattle. This material probably indicates butchery waste as opposed to horn working as none of the cores recovered displayed chop marks (see the discussion in the Animal Bone Report below).

- 4.3.6 A second gully F43, was recorded in the very western extent of the trench in the area opened prior to the insertion of the services duct. It extended for 3.5m, running approximately east-west with a maximum width of 1.2m and depth of 200mm and was scarped away to the north by the clearance associated with the construction of the M50. It was filled with F42, a brown/grey compacted clay with occasional flecks of charcoal and contained animal bone, but no pottery in the length excavated.

It was partly truncated at its northern end by a circular pit, F49 (Plate 10). This had a diameter of 2.3m and a maximum depth of 120mm with gradually sloping sides to a flat base. The fill F34 was a very stony grey clay with a concentration of gravel along

the bottom of the cut. It contained the usual sherds of local wares and Leinster cooking ware and animal bone.

- 4.3.7 The remainder of the excavated area was occupied with smaller cut features cutting the subsoil. Most of the fills contained the range of medieval pottery and animal bone recovered from the larger features and none displayed any evidence of structural members.

#### 4.4 *Phase II*

- 4.4.1 The eastern end of the excavation was delineated by a large field drain, F32, which may in addition have functioned as a boundary (Plates 11 and 12). It measured 3.8m in width and extended from the southwest to the northeast across the 11m width of the excavated area. A section was excavated through the feature against the southern baulk where the trench was 1.2m deep (Section 14). Four main fills were recorded; the lower fill, F48, consisted of redeposited subsoil that had washed off from the sides of the original cut. This probably signifies that the trench was open for a period before the insertion of F38, a stone-lined drain.

The drain had a maximum width of 1.08m and a depth of 340mm. The stones were a mixture of calp and granite, with the latter making up approximately 20% of the feature. A hand-made cinder brick with dimensions of 3<sup>1/2</sup>" x 3" x 1<sup>1/2</sup>" was recovered from the fabric of the drain (01E0666;32;2). The stones had typical dimensions of 200mm by 80mm and defined a channel 200mm wide and 100mm high, which was clogged with black silt.

The drain was sealed by the main fill of the cut, F31, a mid-brown compact clay with inclusions of small stones and gravel. While this fill contained thirteen sherds of medieval pottery, including a fragment of a Leinster cooking ware strap handle (01E0666;31;13), a fragment of a clay roof tile and a sherd of window glass suggesting a seventeenth-century date were also recovered. The difference between the F31 and the F48 material was such to indicate that the drain element of the feature may have constituted a re-cut through the subsoil slippage.

This fill was sealed by F30, a dark-brown, slightly mottled sandy-clay containing frequent flecks of charcoal. Although this fill contained sherds of medieval pottery,

the majority of the finds recovered were 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century in date, including a sherd of Bristol/Staffordshire slipware, a sherd of English pearlware, a clay pipe stem, several clay roof tile and red brick fragments. This fill may have been deliberately laid down over the F31 fill to consolidate the ground, which became quite waterlogged after rain.

4.4.2 A spread of material, F29 was recorded to the west of the drain. This consisted of a light-brown, slightly mottled friable clay with sandy and gravel inclusions. It occupied an area approximately 2.5m west of F32, running parallel with it and was never more than 300mm in depth. Apart from the usual medieval pottery, a fragment of clay roof tile and a clay pipe stem were recovered from the deposit. Due to its relationship with the F32 cut, it is likely that this deposit constitutes the upcast from the drain recut.

4.4.3 This material was in turn cut by a slight field drain F2, running more or less along the line of the earlier F32 (Plate 13). This was up to 800mm in width with a depth of 200mm and filled with small stones and F3, a mid-brown sandy loam with occasional charcoal flecks and pebbles. Again, several sherds of Leinster cooking ware were recovered along with a fragment of clay roof tile and a sherd of possibly locally produced black glazed ware. Several chunks of lime mortar were sampled from the fill and would appear to be demolition fragments, as there was some stone adhesion evident.

#### 4.5 *Phase III*

4.5.1 The deposits relating to Phase III were demonstratively modern in origin and consisted of upcast from the construction of the M50, which runs parallel with the site to the north.

4.5.2 Up to 2.7m of this material had been stockpiled, forming a bank along the line of the track. Several different deposits were evident, including dumps of subsoil and other soils, which may originally have been, dump deposits from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. No archaeological artefacts were recovered during the ground reduction.

- 4.5.3 A small trench was opened in an attempt to further investigate the relationship between the modern deposits, the pre-M50 sod and the medieval deposits below. It would appear that in the area immediately to the west of the area of excavation, that the archaeological deposits were truncated by as much as 400mm by ground clearance work. This would suggest that the cut features excavated may have been more extensive and that other associated features (such as post holes and stake holes) may have survived until relatively recently.

## 5 Discussion

- 5.1 The features were recorded over a well-defined area that appears to have survived the truncation of deposits as a consequence of the construction of the M50. It is difficult to say whether the site was more extensive prior to this, however, several of the features recorded did appear to extend further to the south outside of the area of excavation.
- 5.2 The Phase I features recorded over this part of Ballymount Great are undoubtedly related to agricultural activity, with the possibility remaining that the F5/F11 horse shoe shaped trench may have formed a small enclosure of some sort. The metalled surface surviving at the southern terminal would suggest a deliberate attempt to consolidate the ground at this point. However, as it did not extend across the enclosed area it can more likely be interpreted as a consolidation of the ground over the F10 gully, which may have been constructed to drain the interior of the 'enclosure'.
- 5.3 Specific evidence for animal butchery was recovered from the F19 pit, in the form of the horns of at least nine cattle. There was no further evidence for this activity recorded in the animal bone assemblage, suggesting that the butchering was carried on over a short period of time.
- 5.4 A relatively large amount of local medieval pottery was recovered from the fills of the various trenches and gullies. The pottery has a large date span extending from the late twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. It is unlikely that the activity recorded on the site extended over such a long period and it would appear more likely that it dates to the thirteenth century, when there was a relatively stable political situation which would encourage agricultural activity so close to the foothills of the Dublin Mountains. Stout suggested that the medieval activity recorded several hundred meters to the west indicated continuous activity 'sometime between *c.* 1250 and 1350AD' (Stout, 147) and there is no reason to suggest that the activity recorded during excavation under discussion is significantly earlier or later.
- 5.5 Stout also suggests that the manor of Clondalkin may not have come under the same pressure from raids as the manors of Tallaght, Saggart and Rathcoole did from 1326 onwards. She cites the absence of medieval defensive structures around the settlement to

support the argument. This would suggest that the manor of Ballymount enjoyed a greater sense of security than its neighbours to the south and west, facilitating the long-term cultivation of the area.

- 5.6 The pottery was probably introduced into the gullies to facilitate their drainage. A comparable activity has been recorded by Linzi Simpson at Dunshaughlin, county Meath over a similar period and there appears to be anecdotal evidence from other medieval excavations of using pottery in this fashion (L. Simpson, *pers. comm.*)

## 6 Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the excavation team, which included Simon Dick (who also produced the site drawings), Peter Kerins, Aimée Little and Melanie McQuade (who undertook the initial monitoring and contributed the Animal Bone Report). Nuala Hiney compiled the finds register and identified the pottery. Penny Johnston contributed the Analysis of Plant Remains.

The excavation was facilitated by René Schepers of MVMBNI, Jim Quinlan of the RPA, and Ed Bourke and Colm Ryder of *Dúchas*, the Heritage Service.

Franc Myles MUBC MIAI

20<sup>th</sup> ~~December~~ <sup>May</sup> 2003

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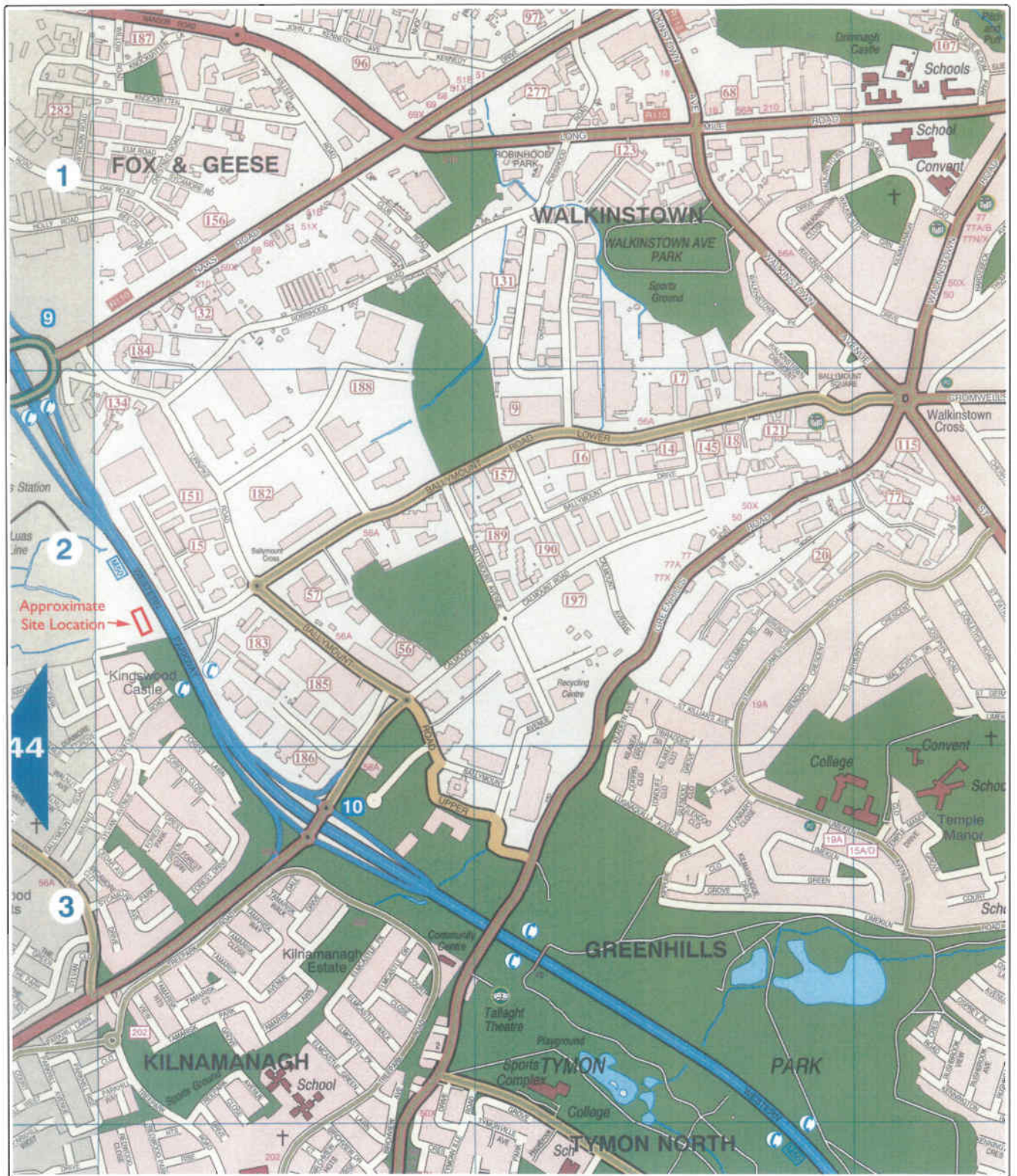
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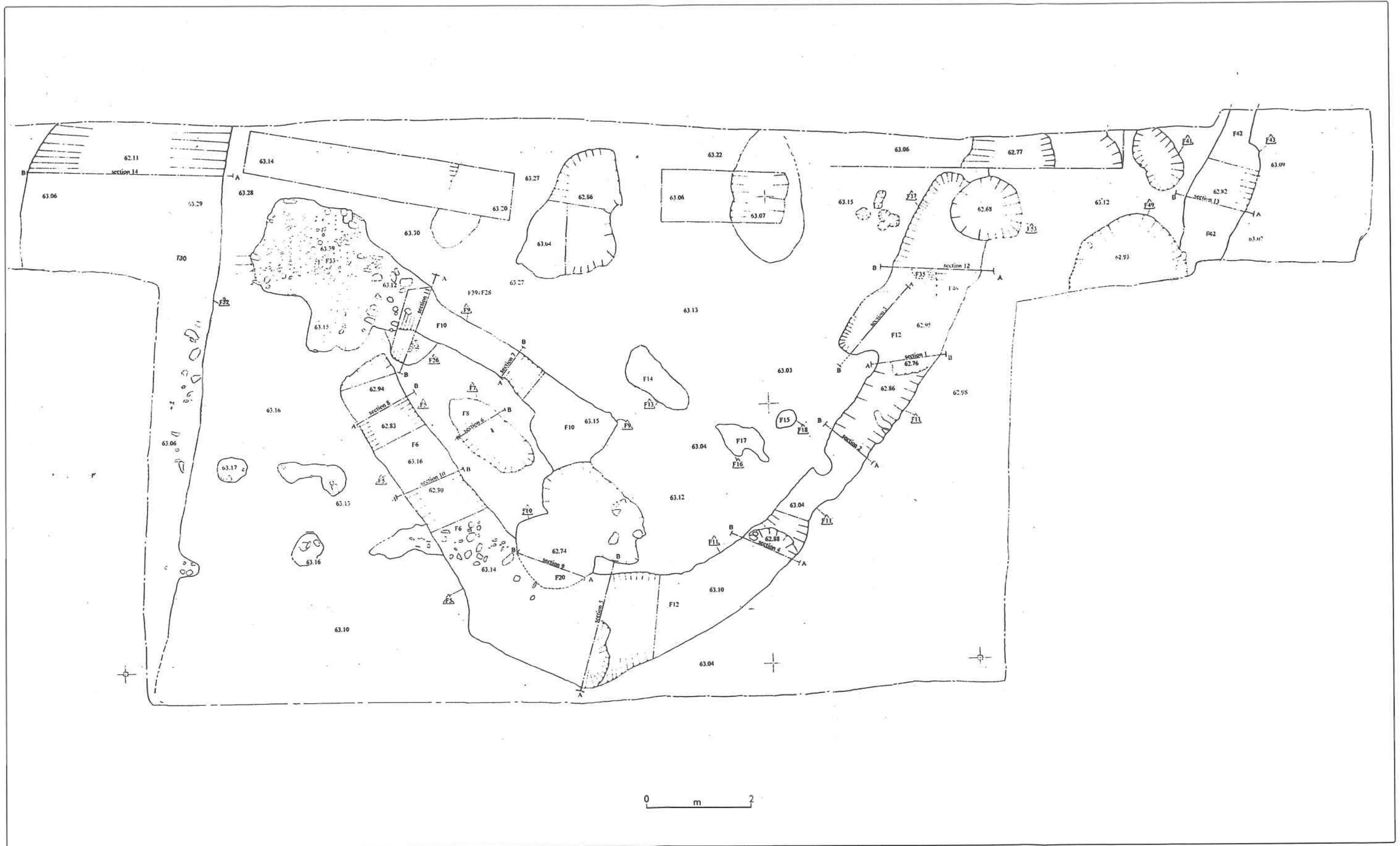
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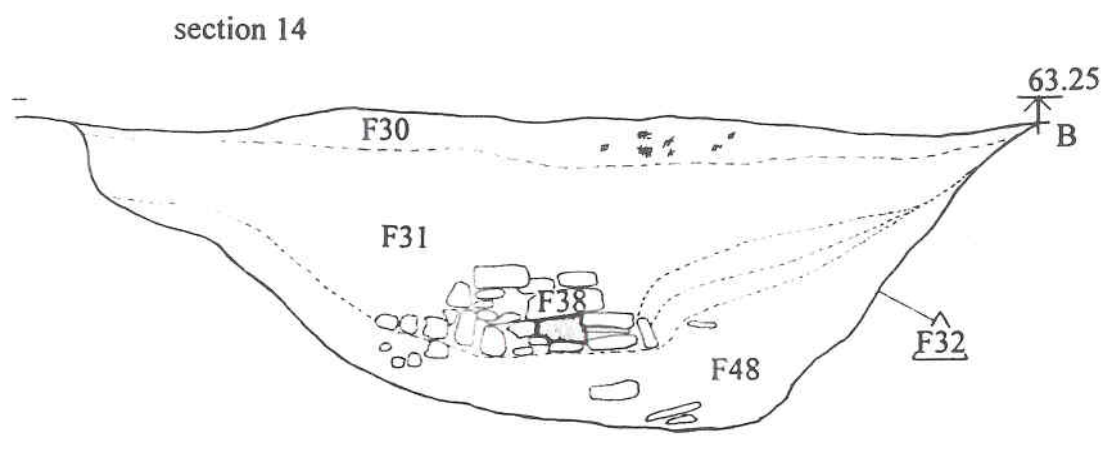
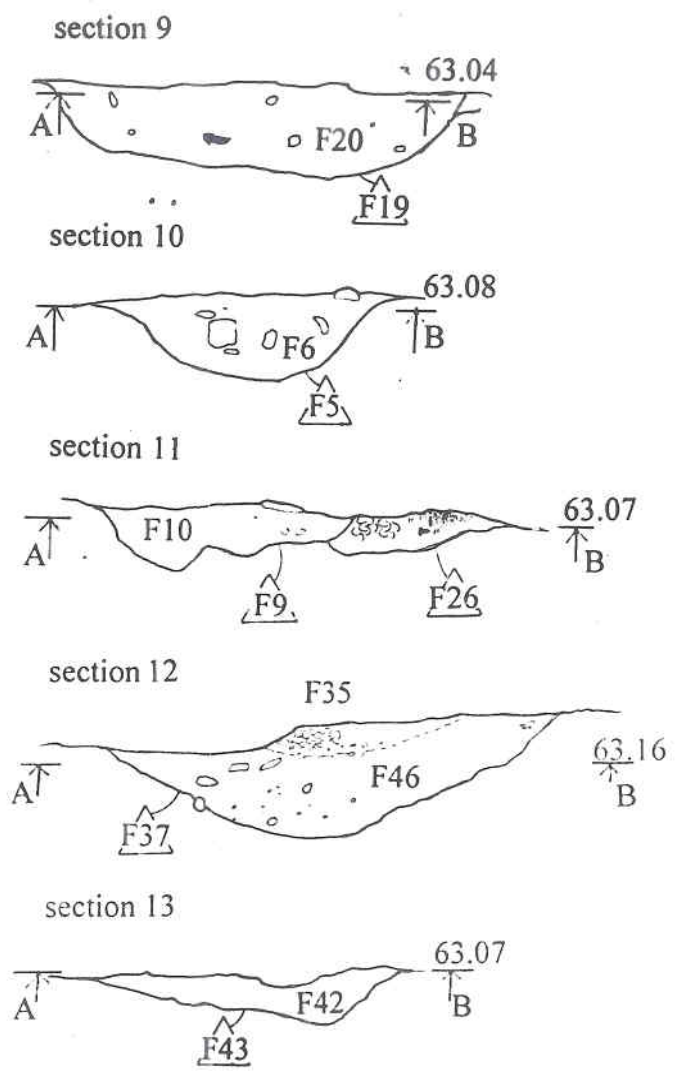
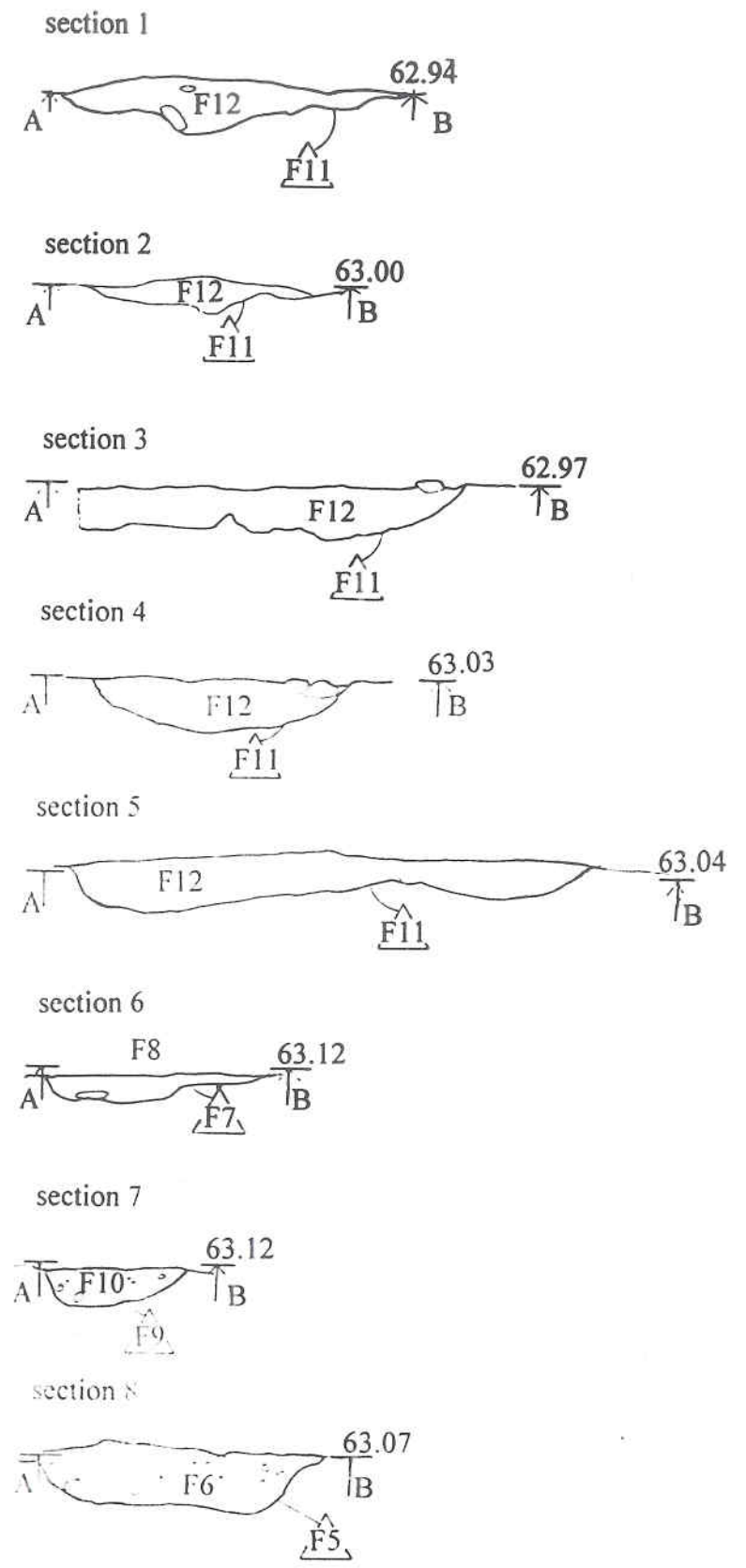




**Job** LRT Line A Construction,  
 Ballymount, Dublin 16  
**Ref.** 99216  
**Date** 29.05.03  
**Client** CIE/LRT  
**Scale** 1:15,000  
**Fig. 1** Location map



**Job** LRT Line A Construction,  
 Ballymount, Dublin 16  
**Ref.** 99216  
**Date** 29.05.03  
**Client** CIE/LRT  
**Scale** As indicated  
**Fig. 2** Plan of excavated features



- Key
- horn cores
  - sea shells
  - charcoal
  - ash

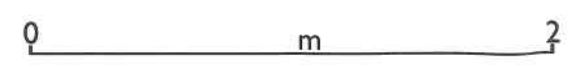




Plate 1 General view of site pre-excitation, looking west towards the manor house



Plate 2 Main features pre-excitation, looking north towards the post-medieval gatehouse



Plate 3 Strip of ground at southern end of site excavated in January 2002. Phase II field drain (F32) to lower left side and metalled surface (F23) to centre

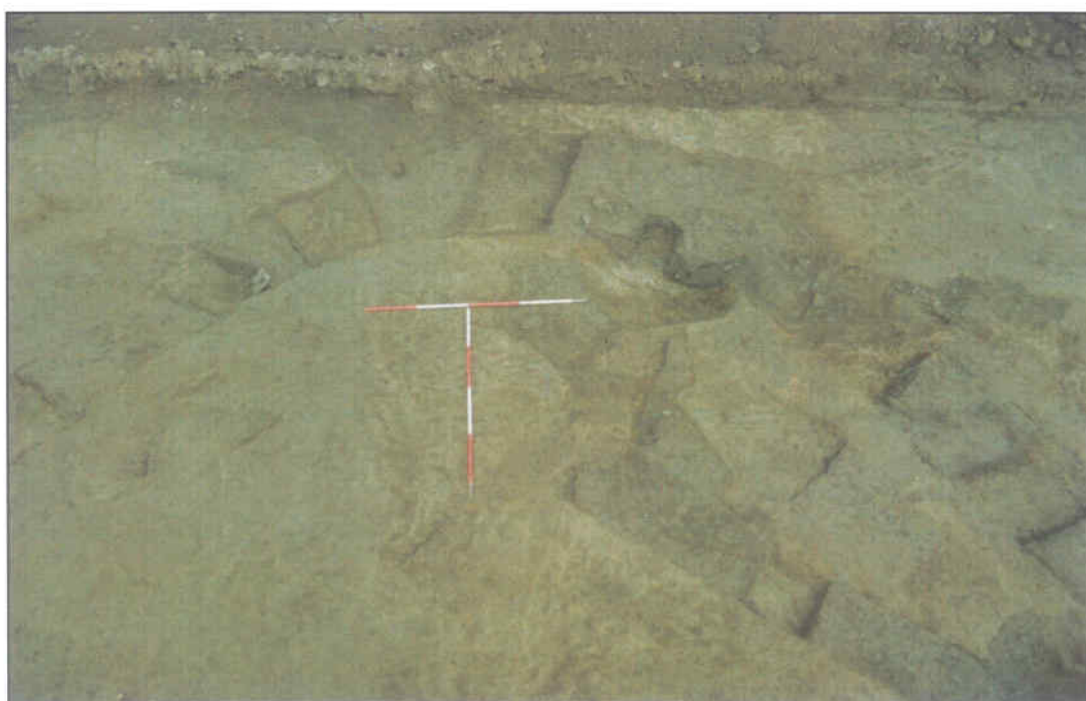


Plate 4 General view of F5/F11 trench looking north, with F9 gully extending from bottom right-hand corner

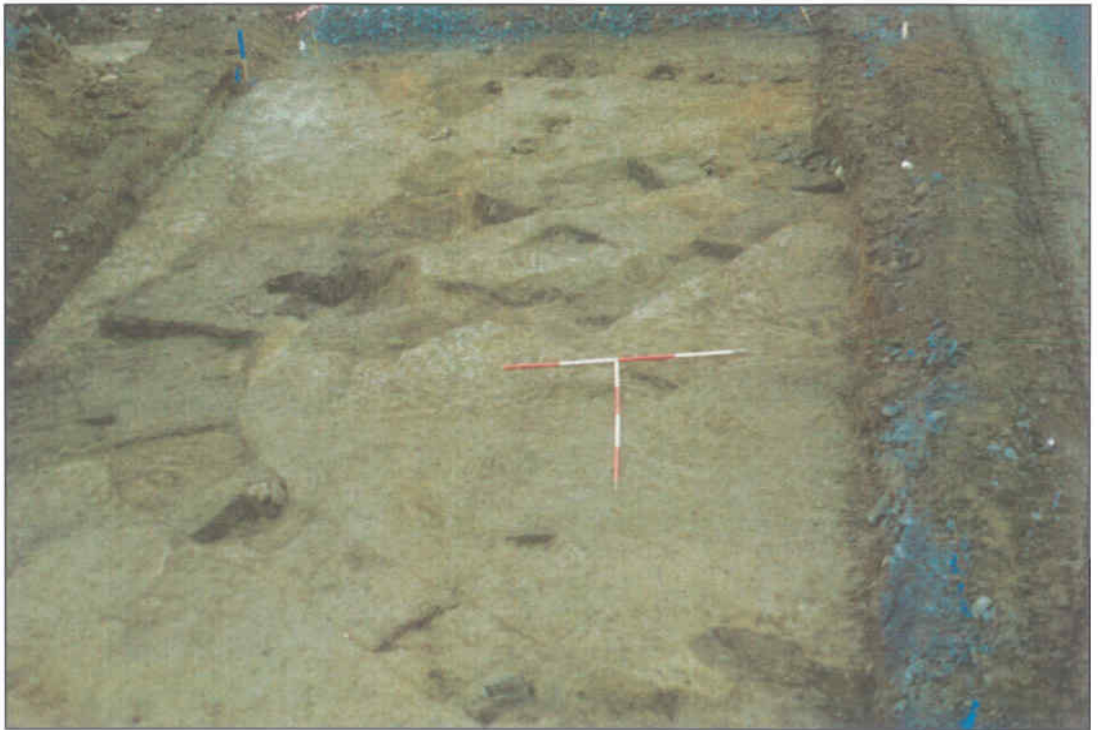


Plate 5 General view of F5/F1 I trench, looking east



Plate 6 Southern terminal of F5/F1 I, with metallised surface (F23) in foreground

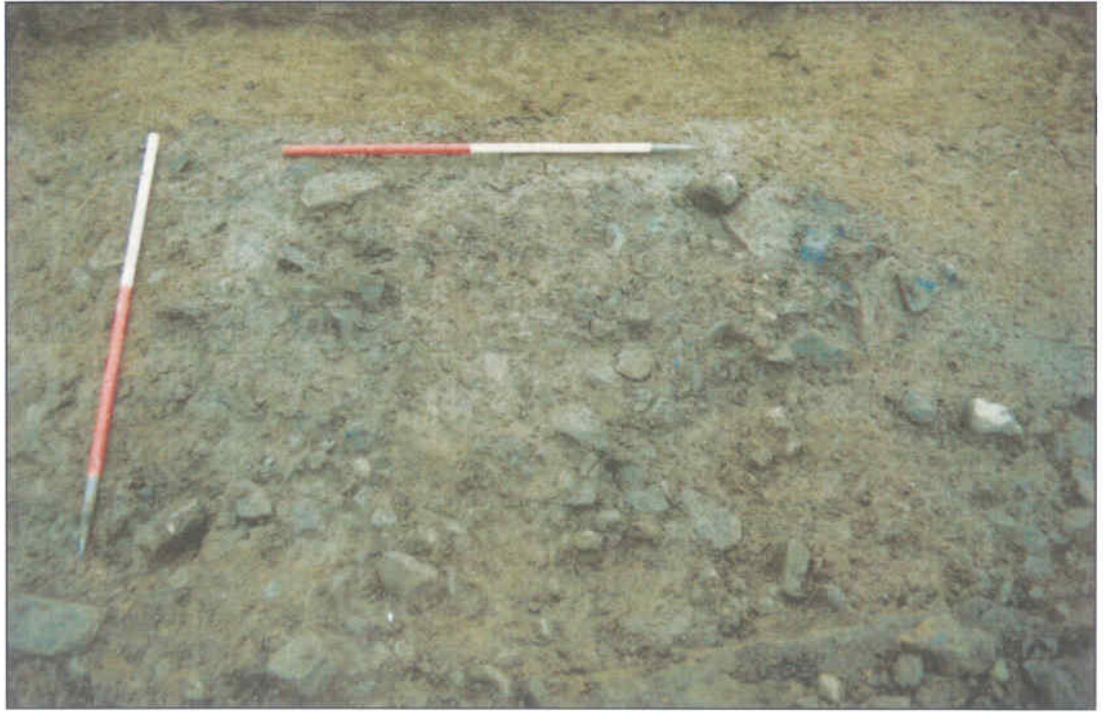


Plate 7 Metallised surface (F23), looking south



Plate 8 F9 gully (centre) extending west from under metallised surface (F23)

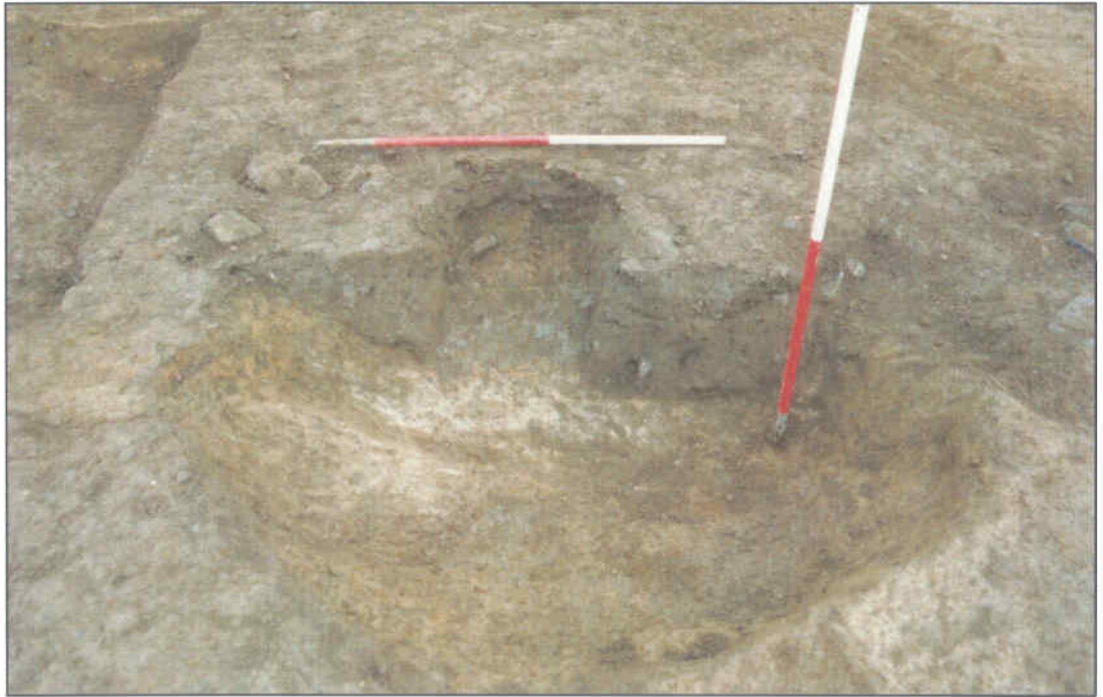


Plate 9 F19 pit, looking north

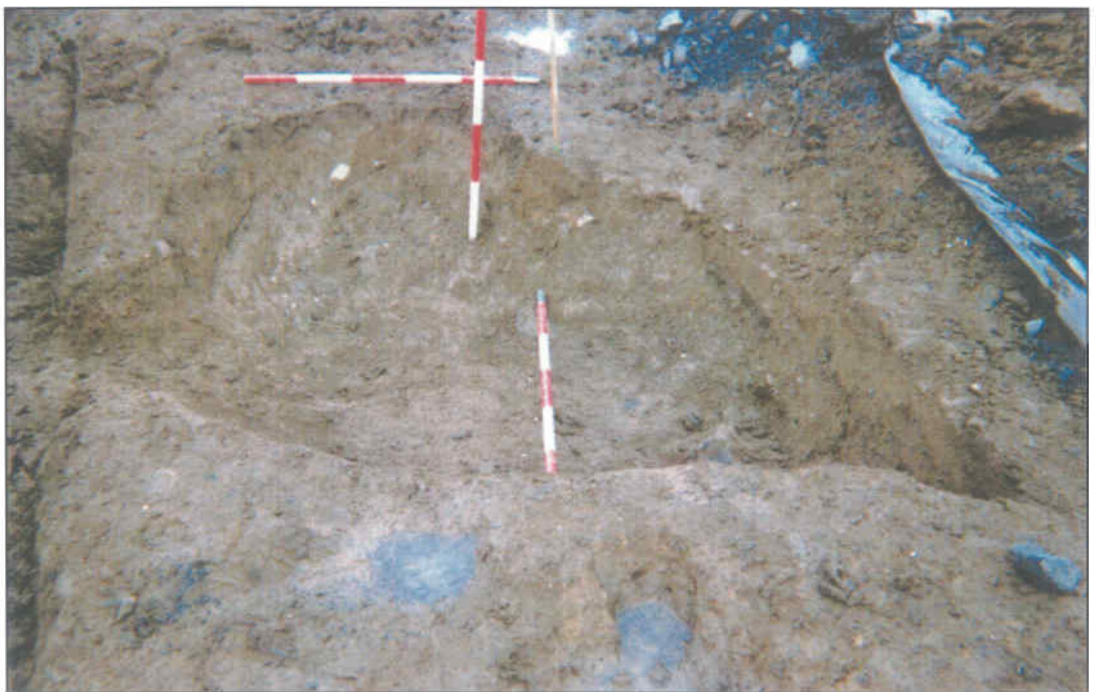


Plate 10 F49 pit, looking east



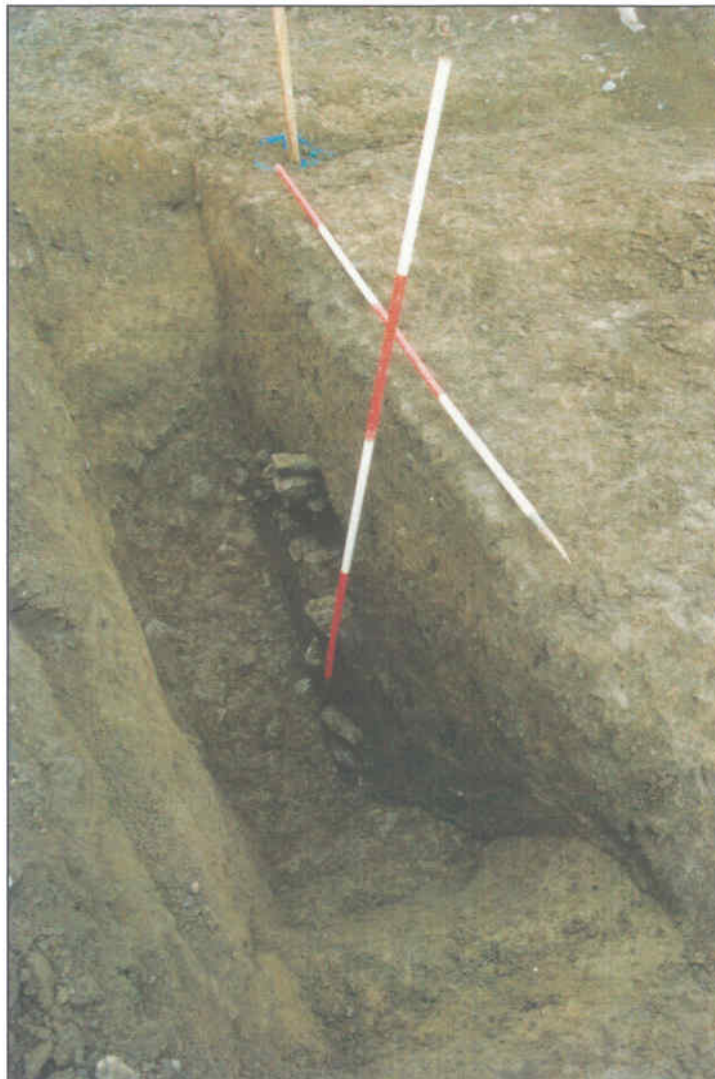


Plate 11 F32 field drain, looking west



Plate 12 Section of F32 field drain



Plate 13 F2 field drain, looking south