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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT
26 - 30 HIGH STREET, INVERNESS**

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Introduction

It was a condition of planning consent for the redevelopment of this site that an archaeological watching brief was carried out. The author was appointed to carry out this work and to pay particular attention to recording medieval deposits and a possible sand layer recorded from excavations in Castle Street as dating to a tsunami c5,000 BC.

Background

The site lies in the centre of the medieval town of Inverness on the main thoroughfare to the East and South. This street formerly known as *Eastgate* was in conjunction with *Brigend* (Bridge Street) the market centre for Inverness and occupied by merchants and tradespeople. The early burgh of Inverness was probably centred on Church Street the link between the royal castle established by William the Lyon and the parish church adjacent to the river crossing later known as *Friars Shotts*. When settlement expanded into the Eastgate is not certain, though it may have been in the 13th century when a bridge was built across the Ness on the present site (*cf* Gourlay & Turner, 1977 p5). After this Eastgate became the commercial heart of the town with the market and its market cross being sited here.

Excavations in Castle Street in 1979 on the site now occupied by *Mr G's* have confirmed that this part of town was not settled until the 13th century. However this may have been connected with keeping the defences of the castle clear. Archaeological deposits have also been recorded in 1989 from the junction of High Street and Castle Street (now occupied by *Macdonalds*) where Jill Harden obtained a photographic record of a sequence similar to that found further up Castle Street. In 1993 Derek Hall in a similar monitoring exercise to that described below recorded a series of probable medieval deposits in foundation pits cut at 17-19 High Street. A sequence of sand floor deposits was found on the street frontage to a depth of c0.75m. These became less frequent to the North disappearing about 9m from the street, though on the East side of the property there were the remains of a possible burnt building 12m from the street front. This may have fronted Lombard Street.

Method

It was originally intended that the existing frontage of this building should be retained but partial demolition revealed that the fabric was unsafe and the whole building required demolition. As the adjoining buildings had been butted onto the previous structure and were not deeply founded there was considerable incentive for the new foundations to be constructed as quickly as possible. This meant that only half an hour was available to study Pit 4 before concrete was poured. Fortunately the top 1m was not filled in immediately and it was possible to draw this section as shown below. As the East side of the site was cellared, it was decided there was no value in examining further pits after Pit 4 had been recorded.

Results

Only Pit 4 revealed deposits, the pits to the South showing bands of fluvio-glacial sands and gravels. The angle of the deposits and the lack of any medieval pits or other deposits suggested that the Barn Hill had originally extended to a point some 3m from the present street frontage. The present slope was created by later terracing, probably in the nineteenth century on the evidence of the buildings constructed.

The various sand deposits encountered were mostly coarse sands sealed by gravel layers and therefore not likely to have been deposited by a prehistoric tsunami. It is possible that the buried soil observed at the base of the profile in Pit 4 was contemporary with the mesolithic horizon observed in Castle Street in 1979. As this deposit was rapidly sealed by concrete it could not be examined in detail. The evidence for a 'tsunami' sand layer is possible rather than certain as the overlying sand and gravels contain a considerable amount of organic material that may relate to the later medieval occupation. There was no evidence for mesolithic or other human artifacts in this buried soil.

The gravel layers above this were mostly sealed by concrete and were therefore examined from photographs. These show a series of layers that may be derived from tumble downslope as much as by deliberate deposition. No artefacts and no evidence for structures was noted. There was slight evidence for a gulley or hollow 300mm deep on the East side of the trench.

Above this lay a series of rich organic soils interspersed with irregular bands of gravel. The organic material included twigs, fragments of wood, dung, butchered animal bones, shells and eight sherds of medieval pottery, probably of a local fabric. They were clearly midden deposits and there was no evidence for sand floors or trample deposits as was found at Castle Street and at 17-19 High Street. Burnt daub was also not found, though some charcoal was present on the surface of one of the midden layers. There was still evidence for a slight slope from South to North and there were no obvious structural divisions, though there was some variation in the deposits either side of the present property line that may reflect some form of division here.

Conclusions

The tsunami deposit was not convincingly recognised, though a buried soil possibly contemporary with the mesolithic horizon recorded at Castle Street was identified at a depth of 1.5m to 1.75m below the present street level. There was some evidence for disturbance in the gravels above. It is not known when this happened nor whether it was caused by human activity or by natural erosion on the slopes of Barnhill.

The medieval midden deposits above these gravels show that this was a backland plot with the front of the property lying to the North within the area of the present street. This is possibly confirmed by the photographs taken by Jill Harden in 1989 at 12-22 High Street. The pottery found within these layers includes imported as well as local wares and probably dates to the fourteenth century when the local industry was becoming dominant. The sample size is too small to make firm judgements. It does, however complement the evidence from the Castle Street excavations where a midden layer dating to the late 13th/ early 14th century was

succeeded by a planned layout of houses fronting a street. It is probable that a new High Street frontage was part of a re-organisation of the town related to the creation of a new westward route over the River Ness. It may also be connected with new political conditions connected with the War of Independence.

The charcoal observed over the upper midden layer may have resulted from one of the fires that caused the burnt horizon seen in Castle Street in 1979 and thought to date to the 15th century. If this is a valid observation, and the evidence is very tenuous, then the broader layout of High Street did not occur until the middle of the 15th century.

Recommendations

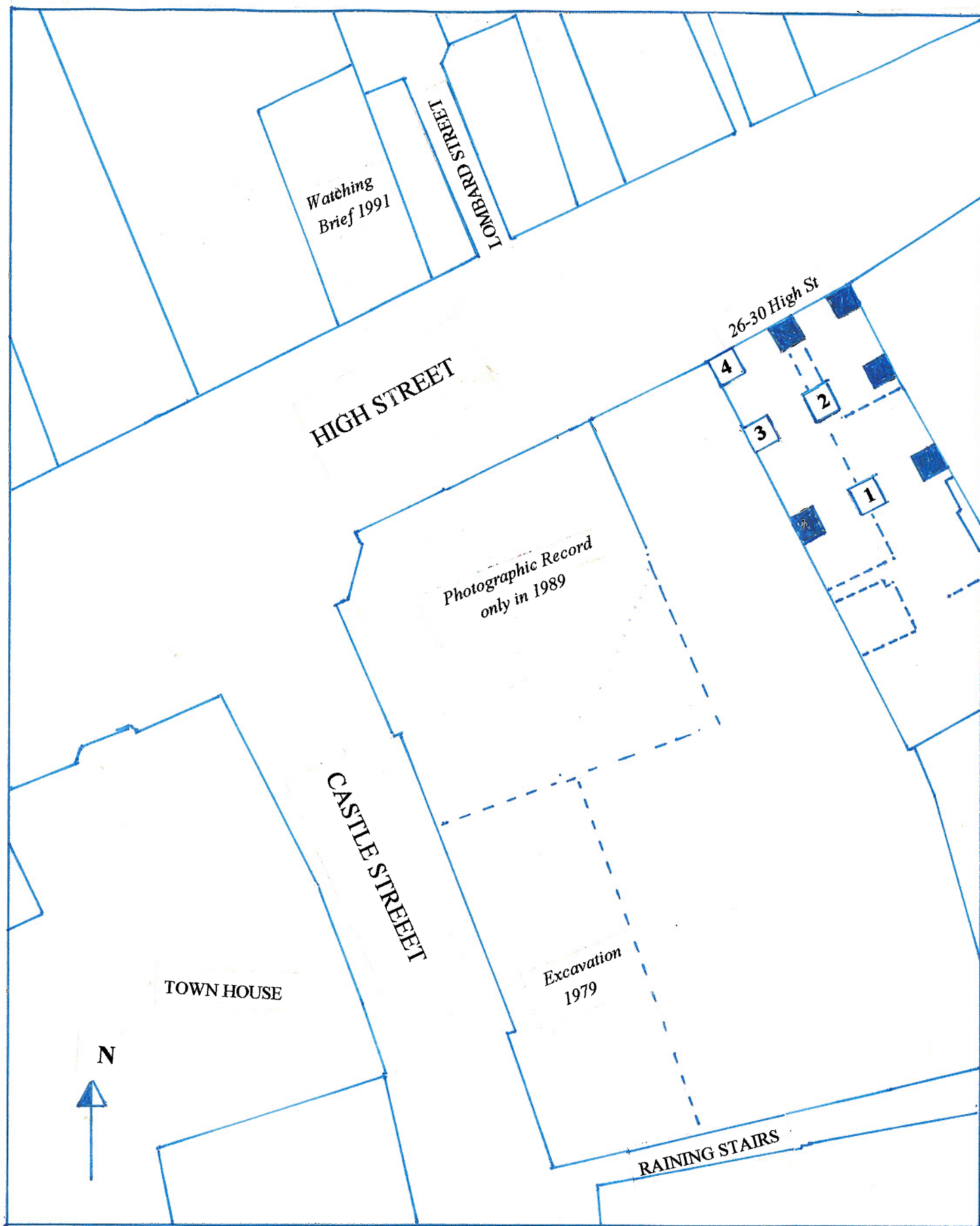
This watching brief established the importance of monitoring all building work in the historic core of Inverness. Indeed it is a matter of concern that the archaeological deposits that contain the detailed history of the medieval burgh are being destroyed without excavation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Robert Kerr of Hector Munro & Associates and Brian Macbride of David Hall and his team for their co-operation during construction work. I also wish to thank Robin Hanley of Inverness Museum for his supplying information on previous work carried out in the town.

Archaeological Watching Brief at 26-30 High Street Inverness

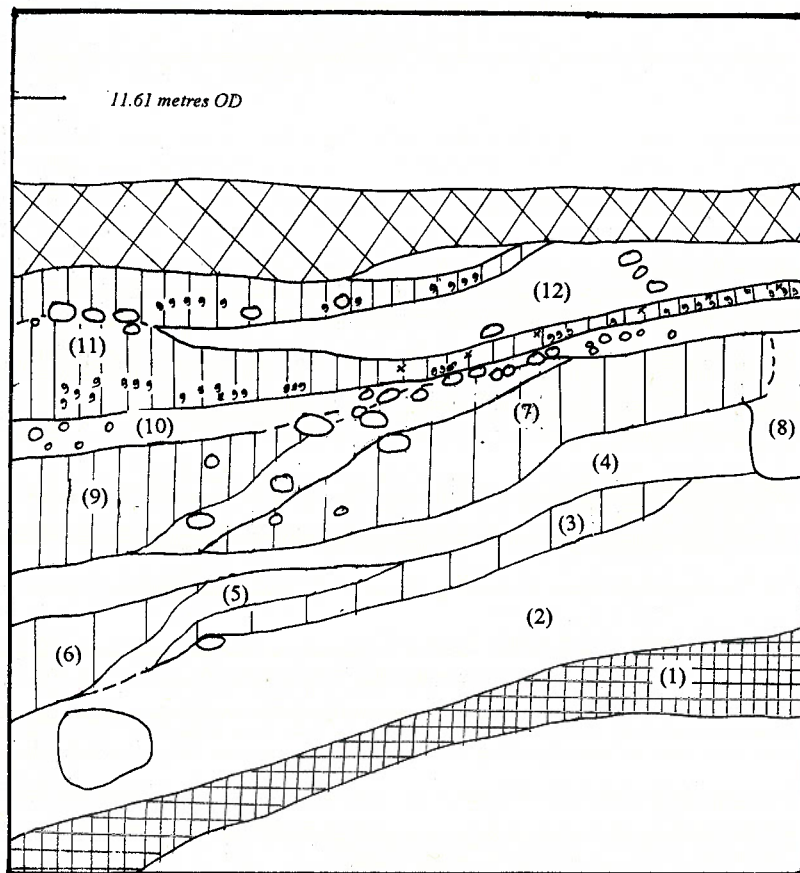
Location of Foundation Pits in relation to previous Archaeological Work



Scale 1:400

Archaeological Watching Brief at 26 - 30 High Street, Inverness

West Facing Section of Pit 4

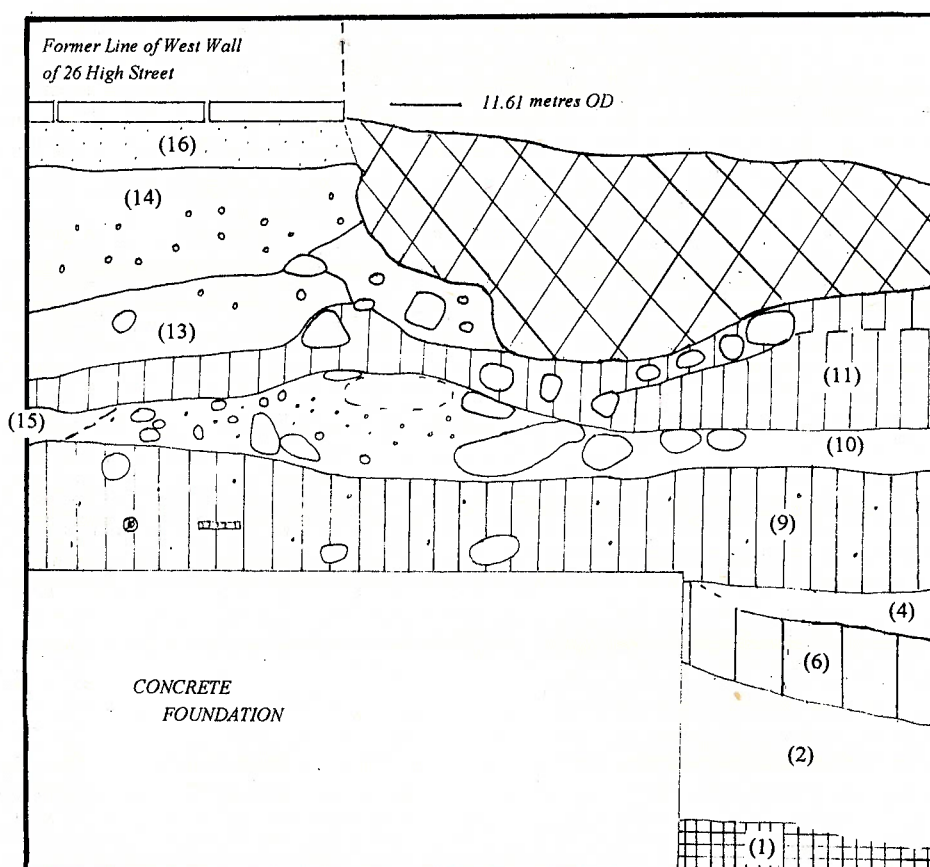


Soil Descriptions

- (1) Dark grey silty sand
Buried soil horizon
- (2) Pale orange slightly silty sand & gravel
Disturbed gravel orig. more humic
- (3) Brown slightly loamy sand & occ. gravel
- (4) Pale yellow brown sand
- (5) V. pale brown slightly loamy sand & occ gravel
- (6) Dark grey loamy sand
- (7) Coarse gravel in loamy organic silt with charcoal & animal bone
- (8) Light brown slightly loamy silt & occ. gravel
Iron pan at base. Prob. pit fill
- (9) Dark grey humic midden with bone & wood.
Sampled
- (10) Brown slightly loamy coarse gravel & stones
- (11) Dark grey humic midden with shells, wood, occ. stones & medieval pottery. Sampled
- (12) Pale yellow/orange coarse sand & fine gravel
- (13) Pale yellow/orange sand & gravel
- (14) Brown loamy gravel
- (15) Mottled silty sand & grey loam
- (16) Yellow sand. Bedding for modern pavement

South Facing Section of Pit 4

1 metre



Codes

- Buried soil
- Organic midden soils
- Less organic humic-rich soils
- Modern rubble & service trench fills
- Stones
- Charcoal
- Winkle shells
- Wood



General view of the site after excavation of Pits 1 and 2
Looking North



South East end of site
Looking North East



1

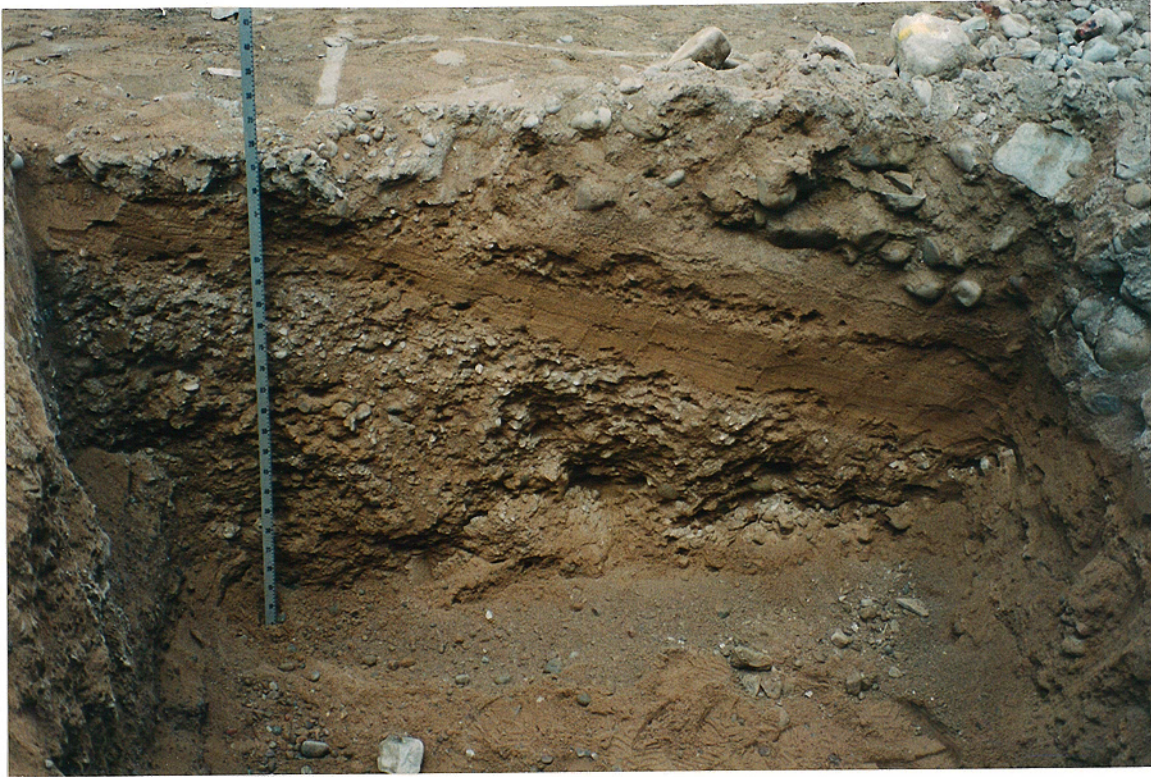
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Detail of sand underlying building at South East end of the site
Looking East



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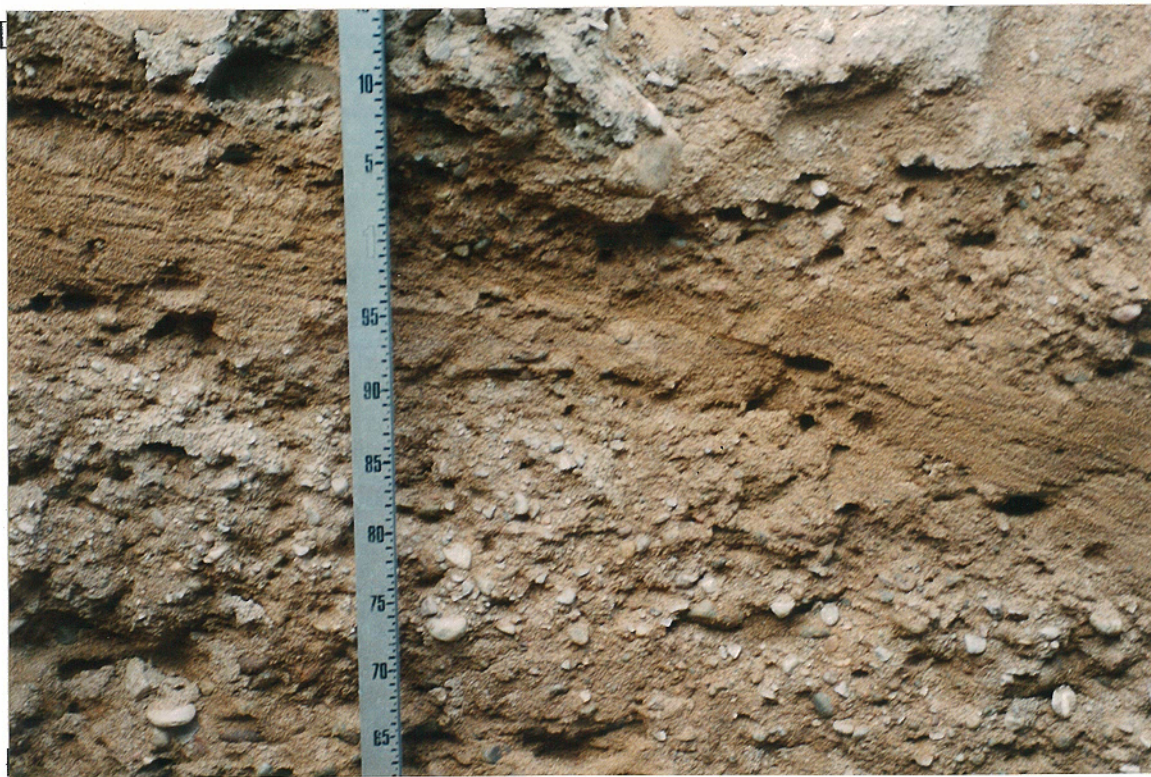
Detail of sand underlying building at South East end of site
Looking East



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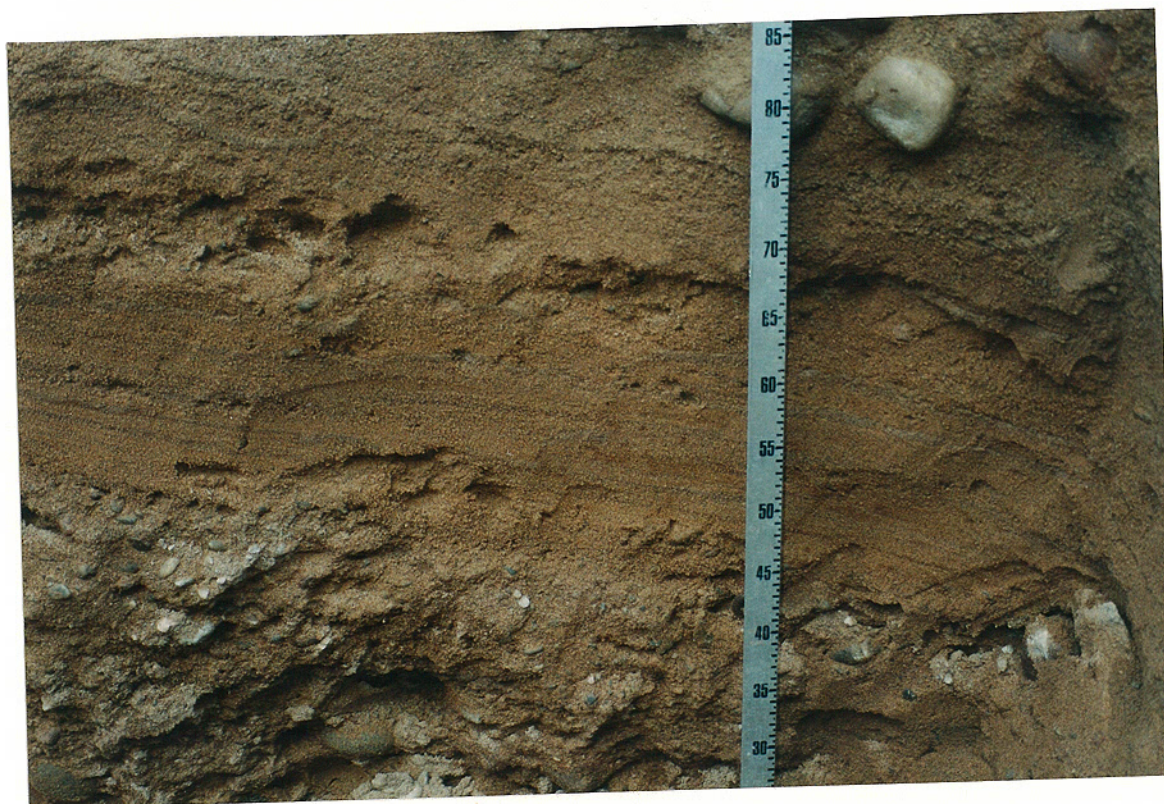
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West section in Pit 1
Looking West



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Detail of West section in Pit 1
Looking West



Detail of sand lenses exposed on West side of Pit 1
Looking West



North section in Pit 2 as excavated
Looking North



1

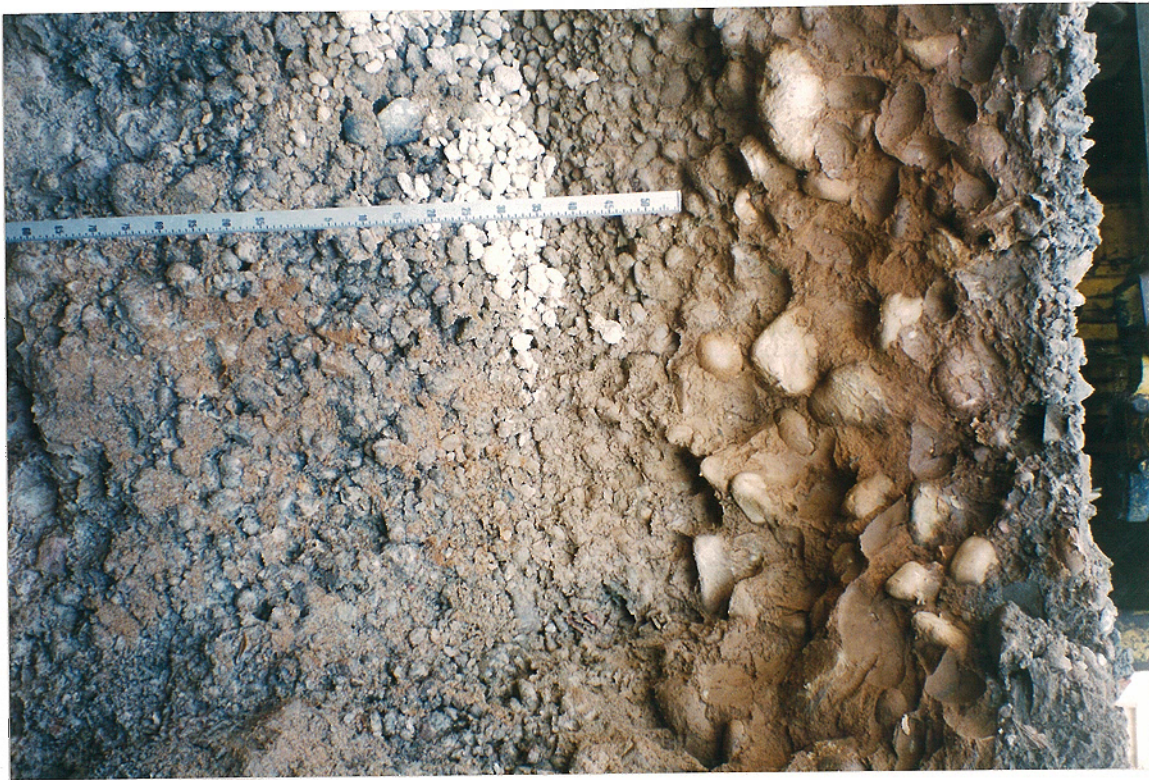
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Pit 2 East section face
Looking North East



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Pit 2 West section face
Looking West



1

1

Detail of North Section in Pit 2
Looking North



1

Detail of North Section in Pit 2
Looking North



Cellar wall from 24 High Street exposed in Pit 3
Looking West



North section in Pit 3
Looking North



Detail of South section in Pit 3
Looking South





Looking from Pit 3 to location of cut for Pit 4
(*n.b.* West wall of 26 High Street has already been removed)
Looking North



Workman attempting to find Cellar wall of 24 High Street
Looking West



1

1

Workman cleaning West side of Pit 4 prior to concreting
Looking South West



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West section in Pit 4 prior to concreting
Looking West



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South section in Pit 4 partially cleaned prior to concreting
Looking South



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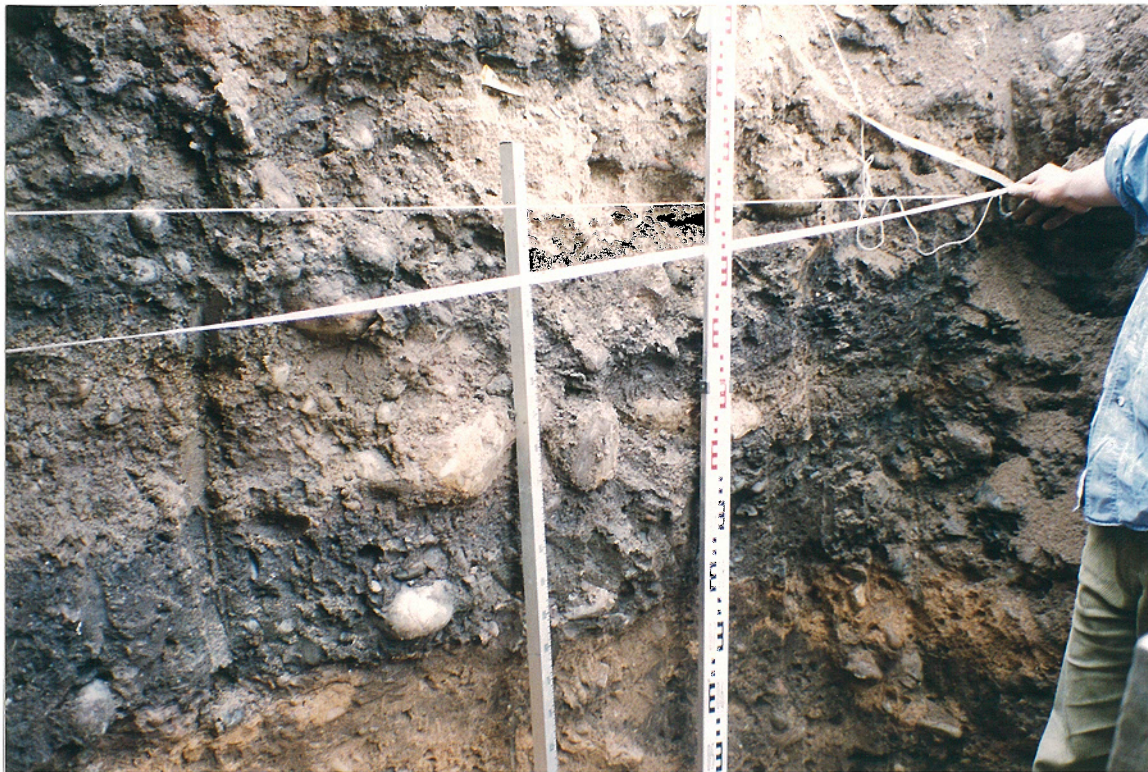
East section in Pit 4, prior to concreting
Looking North East



North Section in Pit 4 prior to concreting
Looking North



Buried soil at base of Pit 4 as observed in North East corner
Looking North East



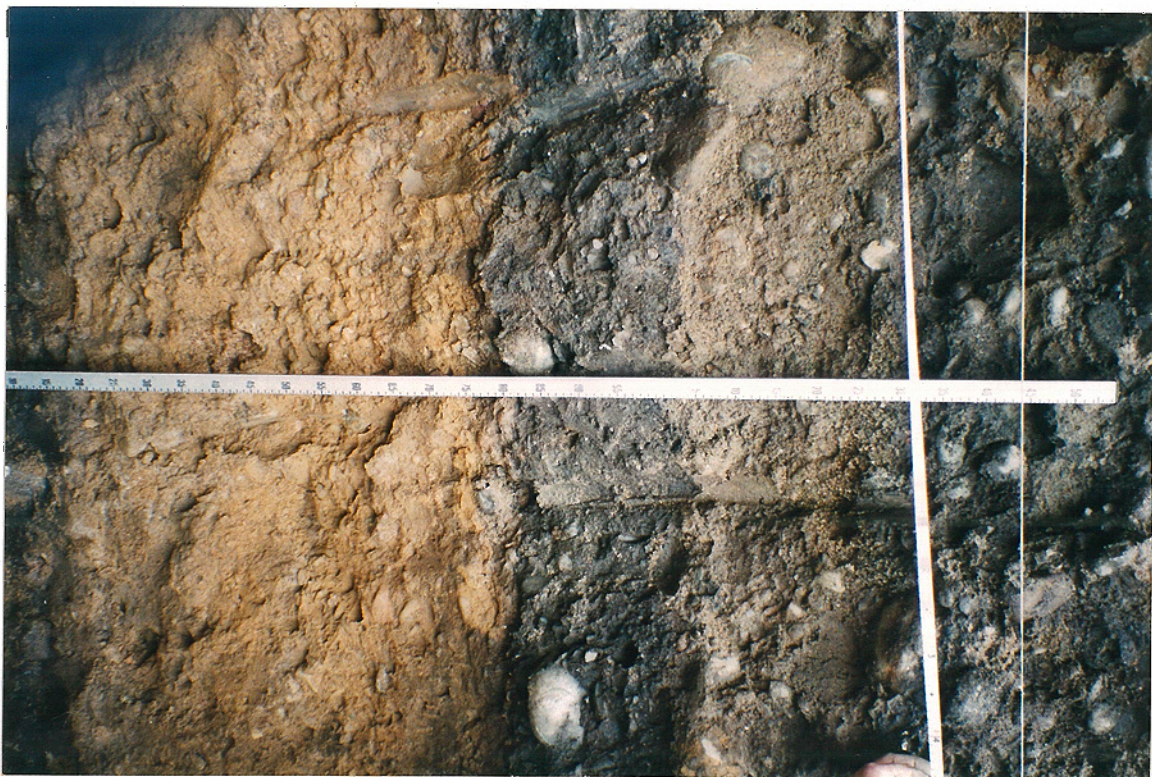
North section in Pit 4, prior to concrete pouring
Looking North East



North Section in Pit 4 after concreting
Looking North



Detail of North Section in Pit4 West end, prior to pouring of concrete
Looking North



Detail of North Section in Pit 4 prior to pouring of concrete
Looking North

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Detail of East Section in Pit 4. Concrete shuttering in foreground.
Looking East



1

Detail of South end of East Section in Pit 4.
Looking East