

AREA 2 - The First Century Features

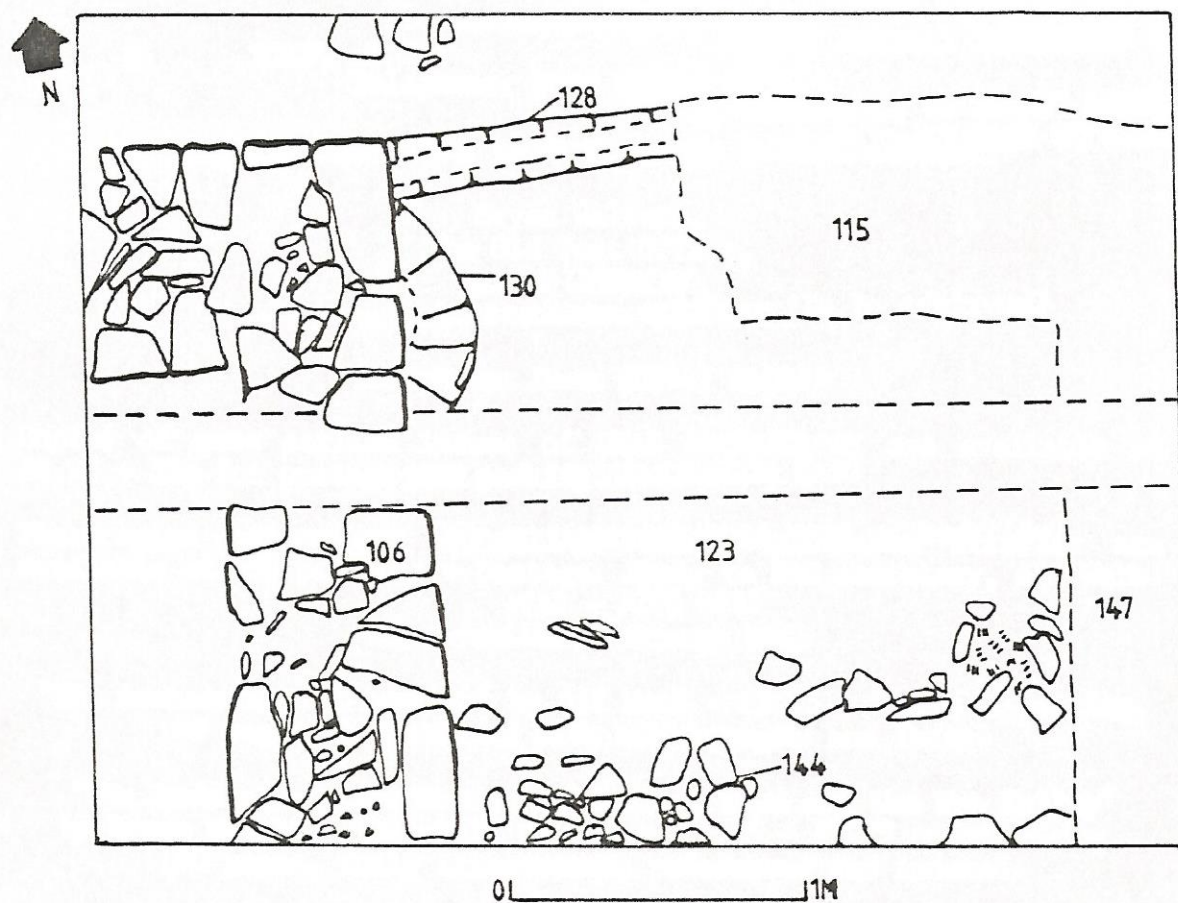


Figure 2



# EXCAVATIONS ON THE ROMAN OCCUPATION SITE AT LEGG HOUSE, BLAKENEY FOREST OF DEAN, GLOUCESTERSHIRE (Second Interim Report 1991/92).

Mark WALTERS

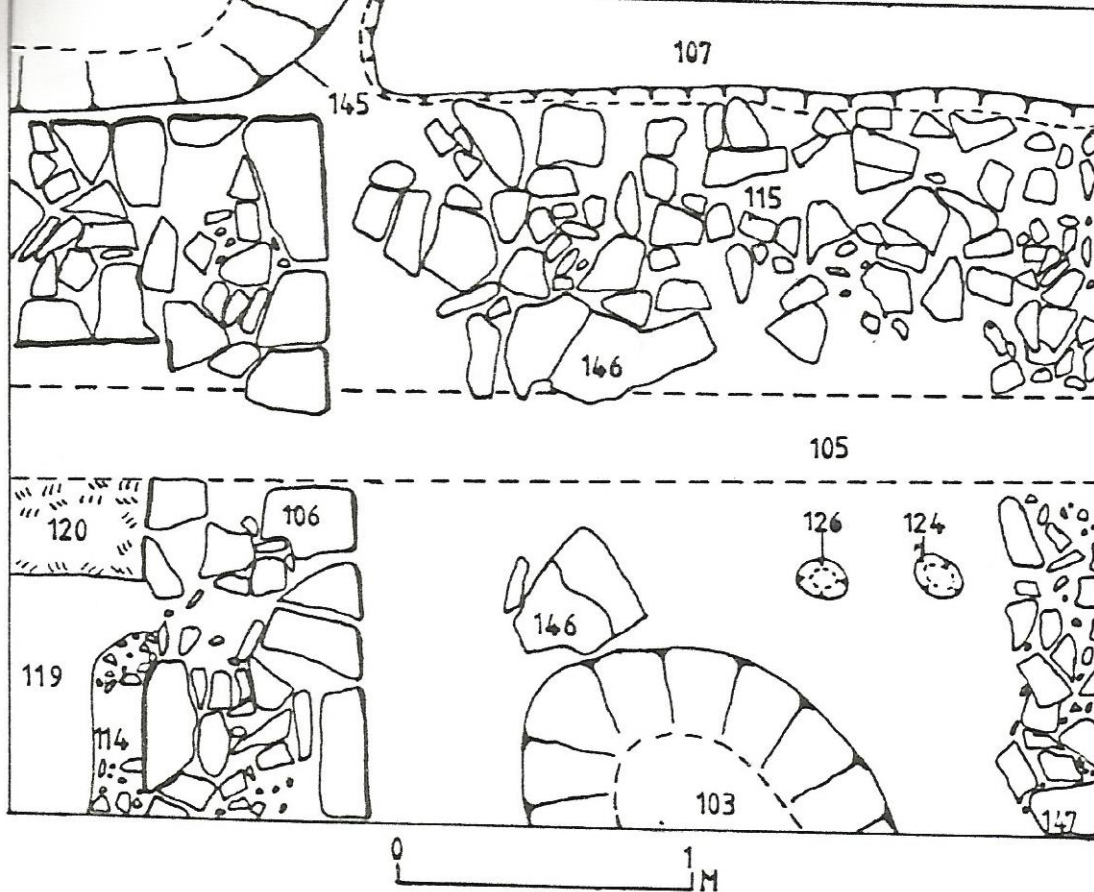
## INTRODUCTION:

Excavations continued in three new areas between December 1990 and February 1992 (Fig.1). Area 2 was opened in the room north of Area 1 within Legg House itself. Excavation revealed a further length of the wall (3) which was recorded in Area 1 together with the continuation of the adjoining foundations (15/16). An earlier, first century structure was found at the lowest levels. Areas 3 and 4 were exploratory trenches excavated in the garden orchard to the east of Legg House. The purpose of the trenches was to locate the possible extension of the archaeological deposits in that direction.

## AREA 2 - THE FIRST CENTURY FEATURES (See Figs. 2 & 4), Phases 1/2.

Natural pink sandy clays were found typically at depths between 0.70m and 0.80m dipping slightly to the north. A sub-circular shallow feature was cut into the top of natural and filled by a black loam consisting of charcoal with small baked clay fragments and later first century pottery (138). Immediately above this, and only recorded in the south section, was a thin surface of crushed red sandstone (142). Above this surface 0.26m of yellowish red sandy silt built up until the next phase of activity (123). A quantity of later 1st century pottery was retrieved including fragments of an amphora, a mortarium and a flagon. Cut into the top of this layer at the northern end of the area was a single timber beam slot (128) aligned east/west. This could not be fully explored as both ends ran under later wall foundations. The backfill of the slot contained late 1st century pottery and broken pilae tile. Immediately south of the slot and possibly cutting its western extension was a circular shallow pit. Flavian pottery, untapped iron slag fragments and a piece of burnt antler were found in the fill. South of this again were traces of the foundations of an east/west wall made up of sandstone blocks up to 0.35m in diameter. The remains of the wall align with the timber slot and both are considered to be contemporary and part of a room or building aligned east/west. The lack of any datable evidence prior to the AD 70s would suggest that this structure was erected some time in the early Flavian period. Its functional lifespan was short, indeed it was probably demolished by the end of the Flavian period. As with the earliest features in Area 1 we found evidence for the demolition of a high status building in the vicinity as is shown by the rejected hypocaust tiles and possible roof tile fragments in the backfill of Phase 1 features. Layers 121, 118 and 140 built up over the early Flavian features and were then followed by a new construction phase which was clearly on a grander scale.





AREA 2 - The Second Century & Medieval Features

Figure 3

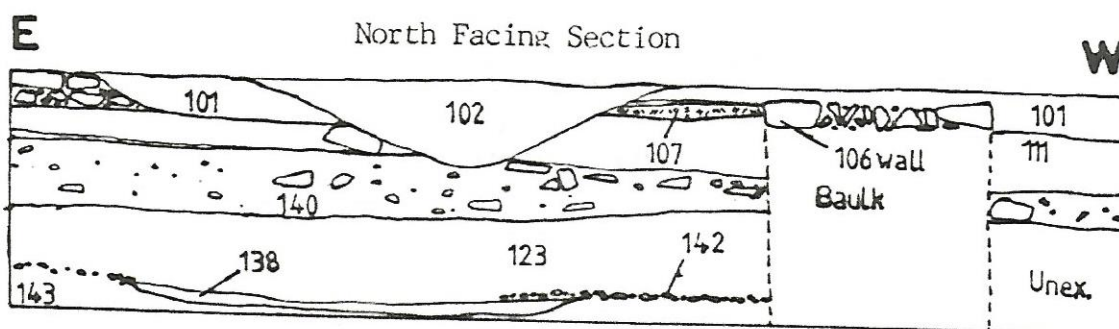
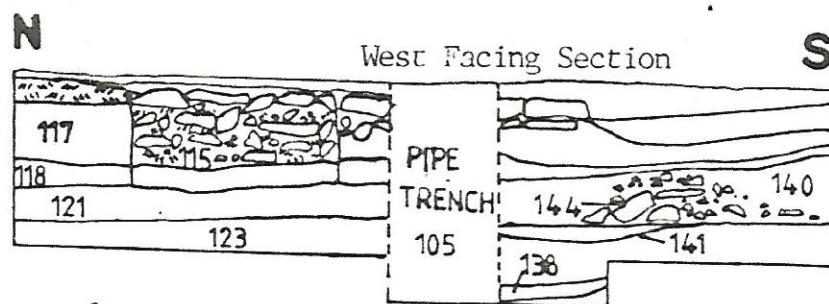
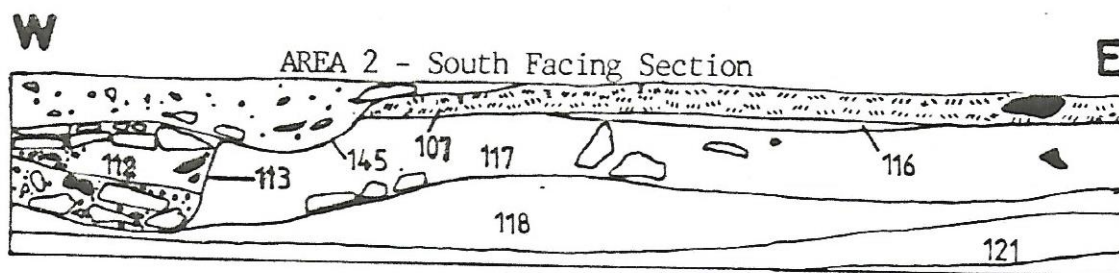
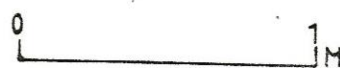


Figure 4





### LATE 1st/2nd CENTURY FEATURES (see Figs.3 & 4) Phases 3/4.

A substantial wall foundation (106) of sandstone blocks was laid on a north-south alignment. This was a continuation of (3) in Area 1. The wall turned 90 degrees to the west within Area 2. The proximity of the brook to the west in the past must have acted as the boundary to the building on that side and it is assumed that the structure was therefore rectangular in shape with its long axis aligned north-south. This essentially late Flavian/early Trajanic building was rapidly expanded with the addition of room extensions to the north and east, within the areas explored, and probably to the south also. These foundations (115, 147, 112) survive only in the form of rough sandstone rubble bases which filled shallow construction trenches. Above these levels the properly coursed stone wall would have been laid. Traces of a flagstone floor (146) were found within the eastern room. Two post-holes (126 & 124), both 14cm in depth, within this room at the north eastern corner may have been part of a staircase/ladder construction to the upper floor. A layer of firm, partially baked clay (107) at the north eastern corner of Area 2 is probably the remnants of a floor level within a room beyond wall (115). Very little information was recovered on the internal stratigraphy of the main living space with wall (106) to the west due to lack of room to excavate and the destruction of the archaeology by the recently laid pipe-trench. A thick layer of dark loam above pink sandy clays was recorded. Pottery recovered immediately above, or back-filling features of this second constructional phase gave dates no later than the Hadrianic period with the bulk of the pottery dating to the late-Flavian/early Trajanic periods. This date range concurs with that of the Phase 3 features in Area 1.

In the top of the fill (112) of wall construction trench (113) a coin was found issued during the reign of Nerva, c.AD 97. The coin, a copper As, had suffered severe corrosion and there were no reverse features identifiable. The head, however, was that of the Emperor Augustus (27BC-AD14) but was not issued during his reign. Some later emperors showed respect to earlier deified emperors by issuing coins with their portrait. These are referred to as 'restitution' issues. The As in question has a bold but partially corroded portrait of Augustus which depicts his bare head facing right. What remains of the legend suggests that it read DIVVS AUGUSTUS. The only 'restitution' issue that satisfies the visible evidence was made by Nerva during his short reign AD 96-98. The boldness of the portrait indicates limited circulation wear. The lack of dating evidence later than the Hadrianic period suggests that this second phase of occupation ended in the mid-second century. There is no evidence for a gradual decay of the building and it is presumed that a deliberate demolition was carried out with retrieval of useful materials for construction elsewhere.



### AREA 3 (see Fig.5)

Two trenches were opened within a grassed yard area to the south east of Area 1 & 2, close to the rear wall of a long range of outbuildings attached to Legg House. The northern trench provided us with the best survival of stratigraphy (see section) and this is concentrated upon in this report.

The uppermost loamy layers (50, 52), the pit (64) and post-hole (56) all date to the late post-medieval period with pottery recovered being typically of late 18th/19th century date. These layers reached a maximum depth of 0.60m in the northern trench and up to 0.75m in the southern trench. At the northern extreme potentially Roman-period surfaces were encountered at a depth of only 0.25m below ground level, while in the southern trench all features had been previously removed, probably in the post-medieval period, down to a depth of 0.70m generally.

The whole of the area explored was seen to consist solely of various surfaces largely datable to the late first and second centuries. The three uppermost surfaces from (57) down were made of crushed bloomery slag fragments with clearly compacted upper surfaces. Small fragments of Severn Valley Ware were found in three surfaces. A thin layer of reddish brown silty sand (70) separated the slag surfaces above from the gravel and cobble surfaces below and may have represented a flood level. Immediately below this the substantial level sandstone flagged surface (62) was found which had clearly been repaired at some stage by the addition of crushed red tile fragments. This surface had been destroyed to the south by post-medieval activity. Two deliberately compacted gravel surfaces were found below this level. These and all earlier layers beneath dipped sharply to the east. On the lower of these two gravel surfaces at the west end, and at a depth of 0.56m, three flint flake fragments were found. No other finds were recovered in layers below this surface. Below the gravel surfaces a substantial worn sandstone and conglomerate surface was located which appeared to be made up of eroded stone taken from the bed of the nearby brook.

The upper surface consisted of a worn, uneven layer of sandstone blocks up to 0.35m in diameter below which was a bedding layer of random, loosely bound sandstone and pebbles within a clay silt matrix. This was the only surface recorded in the southern trench of Area 3 (55), all later surfaces having been destroyed at some later date. A thin clay silt divided (55) from another thin layer of crushed sandstone, below which was another 10cm of similar material lying above a basal layer of natural grey silt with traces of root stem fragments at a depth of 1.02m.

Within such a small excavated area it is difficult to ascertain the precise purpose and function of these surfaces. From occasional finds alone we would have to say that the upper slag and gravel surfaces are Roman in date while the lower surfaces, including the gravel surface with flint flakes, may be much



earlier although it is possible that the flints were imported with the stone from elsewhere. The many repairs would suggest either heavy use or the necessity for repair due to damage caused by local flooding. The most likely function is to provide a dry, metalled yard area to the east of the main buildings. The sloping natural, and subsequent surfaces, may indicate that the buildings to the west were deliberately built on the top of a small area of slightly elevated ground in the valley bottom.

#### AREA 4 (See Fig.6)

A trench measuring 1.5m x 12m was opened 45m directly south of Area 3 to test for the presence of archaeological deposits.

Beneath a post-medieval topsoil and post-Roman to post-medieval sub-soil, at an average depth of 0.60m, a coarse stone surface of river-washed cobbles was recorded along 11.2m of the length of the trench. The stone surface appeared to terminate and shelve off slightly at the south eastern end, and gradually sloped up to the north west. Rare unabridged sherds of Roman pottery were found both on and within this surface. Traces of a possible gravel metalling above the cobbles were noted in places.

Excavation through this surface revealed a number of earlier back-filled features below. At the eastern end of the trench a shallow 3.20m wide ditch was located which was filled by natural silts and gravels. This is interpreted as a former water-course possibly leading from a spring to the north. The water-course is aligned north-south and would have exited into the Bideford Brook to the south. Immediately west of the stream's course a small stake-hole was found. Traces of a gravel surface to the north and west of the stake-hole were cut by two parallel narrow ditches aligned north west/south east and 1m apart. These ditches were both back-filled with cobbles and some domestic debris dated to the Flavian period. In the top of the back-fill of the western of the two ditches a Dupondius of Vespasian (AD 69-79) was found the reverse of which depicted Securitas seated right. If projected beyond the trench, the ditches clearly ran north westward and slightly up-slope towards the main settlement area. It is possible that the ditches terminated at the edge of the former water-course to the south east.

The parallel ditches were most likely cut during the early Flavian period and certainly back-filled by the late Flavian or Trajanic period. The former water-course either dried up or its flow was diverted and the whole area was covered with a rough cobbled surface with gravel metalling. It was not possible to ascertain the date at which the late surface became disused, nor was it possible to determine its function. It is thought most likely that the parallel ditches were part of a drainage system taking water from the main settlement area on higher ground to the north and ultimately exiting into the Bideford Brook via the former water-course. All of this evidence suggests a high degree of importance being attached to land reclamation through water-



course management during the earliest phase of Roman settlement in the valley bottom.

## DISCUSSION

The main conclusions drawn from the previous excavations in 1990/91 have not been altered by the work carried out in 1991/92. A refinement of detail about the plan of the main building complex has been achieved within the confines of the small area available for excavation. There is also structural evidence for the first constructional phase which was postulated in the first interim report only from the remains of demolition debris. The extent of archaeological deposits to the south and east is now thought to be considerable. The total lifespan of the settlement is not thought to be longer than eighty years maximum, that is, from the mid-70s to c.AD 150. The combination of the early date, the wealth displayed in the pottery types, and the size and fabric of the building construction all suggest that a high-ranking, presumably administrative official, had a residence here.

The hypocausted room or bath-house, postulated from the many finds of pilae and roof-tiles, has still to be located. It could be part of the complex already discovered but could equally lie elsewhere within the fields to the east of Legg House. An interesting document was handed to me by the owner of Legg House which would seem to suggest that a high-status building, probably a bath-house, lies in the field immediately to the east of the orchard belonging to Dr.Holland. On the 1841 Parish of Awre tithe map the field is called 'Church Croft'. Bigland, writing in 1786 records the following interesting details:

'Near Blakeney, in a ground called Church Croft, it is said that the church was intended to have been founded, but the part which had been built in the day was removed during the night to the present situation, this ground was a few years since examined by the proprietor Mr.A.Deane. In his research "... several large dumps consisting of various stones, tiles and mortar, strongly cemented, were found, and about 2 feet from the surface a foundation nearly as many deep which consisted of four semi circular walls twelve or fifteen feet in diameter the ends of which intersected and crossed each other with two square rooms irregularly connected with the other building, in one of which were found a number of square bricks for pavement from 7-12-14 inches, some whole, some broken, and a quantity of rubbish of the same kind was intermixed".....'

## FUTURE WORK

No further excavation is presently planned on this site. Future work should use non-destructive geophysical techniques to determine the nature and extent of archaeological deposits both within the orchard east of Legg House and in the field beyond the orchard to the east where a bath-house building is suspected. Any proposed development within the immediate vicinity of Legg House should be adequately scrutinised and

evaluated, if necessary, prior to the granting of any new planning permission.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Drs. S and A. Holland for their combined permission to excavate this site and for supplying copies of local research notes made by a former owner.

Members of Dean Archaeological Group volunteered much time and effort throughout the 1991/92 season. By far the greatest contribution was made by Terry James who, in my absence to take up a new post in Wales, completed the excavation, recording and back-filling of the trenches single handedly. Others who helped at various times included Jill David, Gary and Averil Collier, Virginia Morgan and Brian Johns.

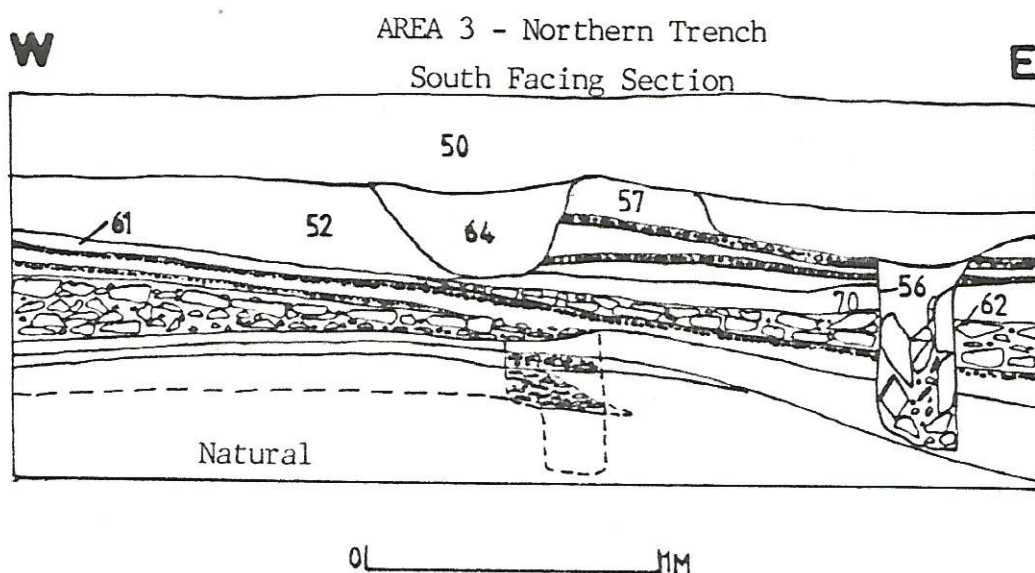


Figure 5

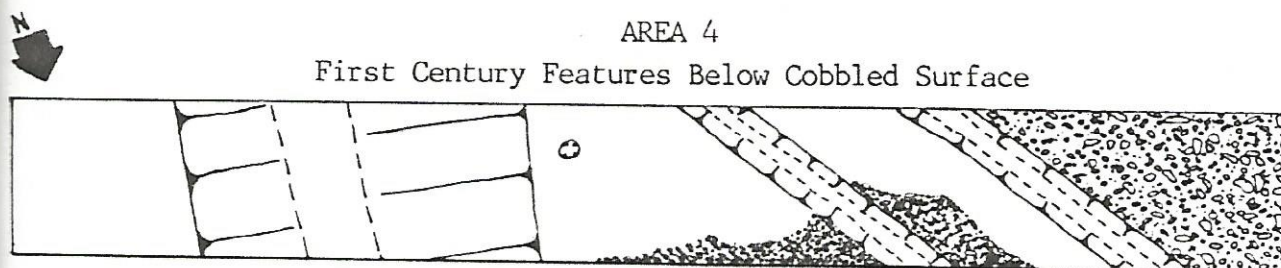
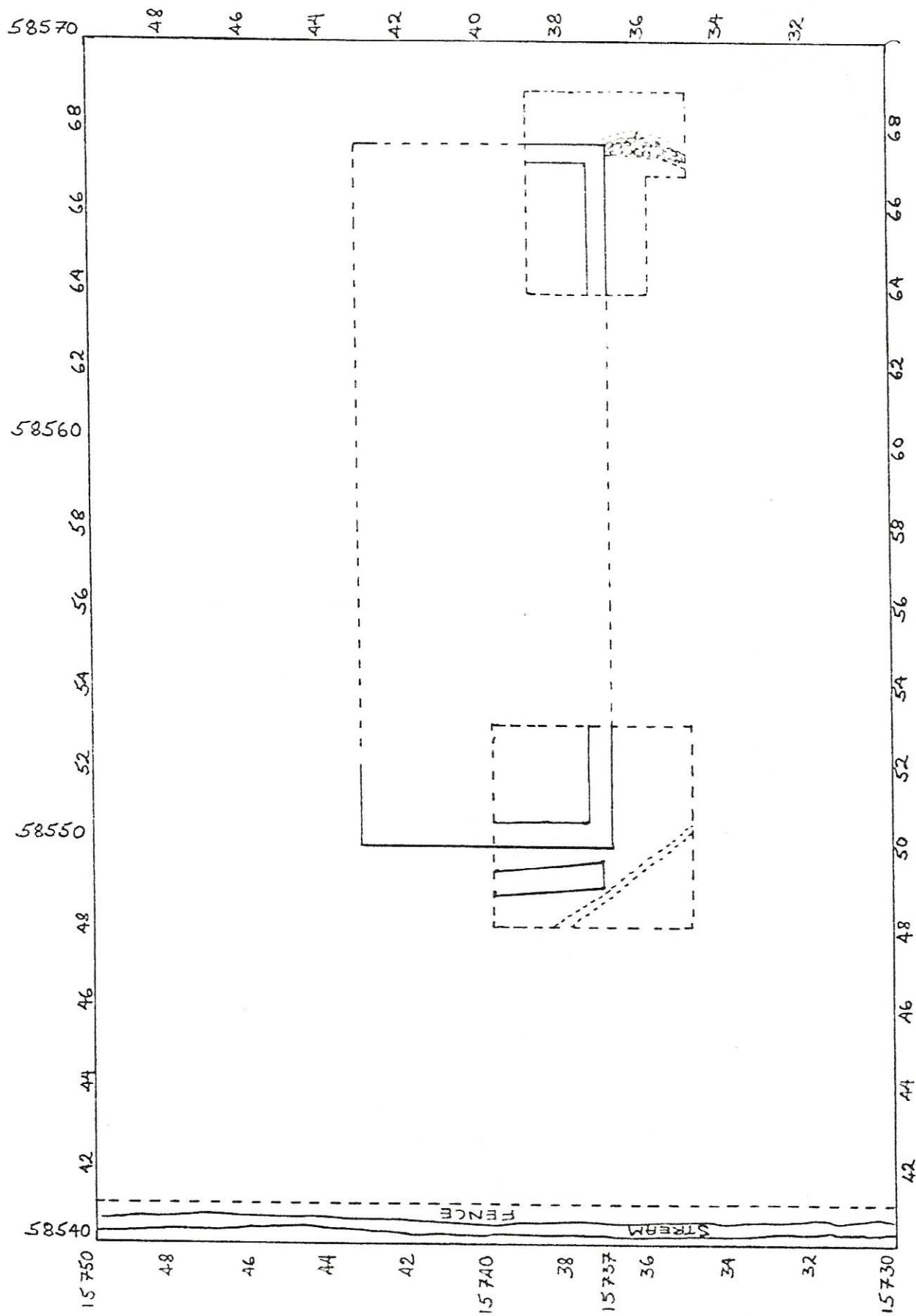


Figure 6





UPPER TUMP, EAST BACH, FIG. 1

BPM  
1631 14 02 92  
1632 02 10 92