

EXCAVATION OF A HISTORIC WELL AT DELTA, FRANSCHHOEK

Prepared for

Prof. M. Solms

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Prepared by

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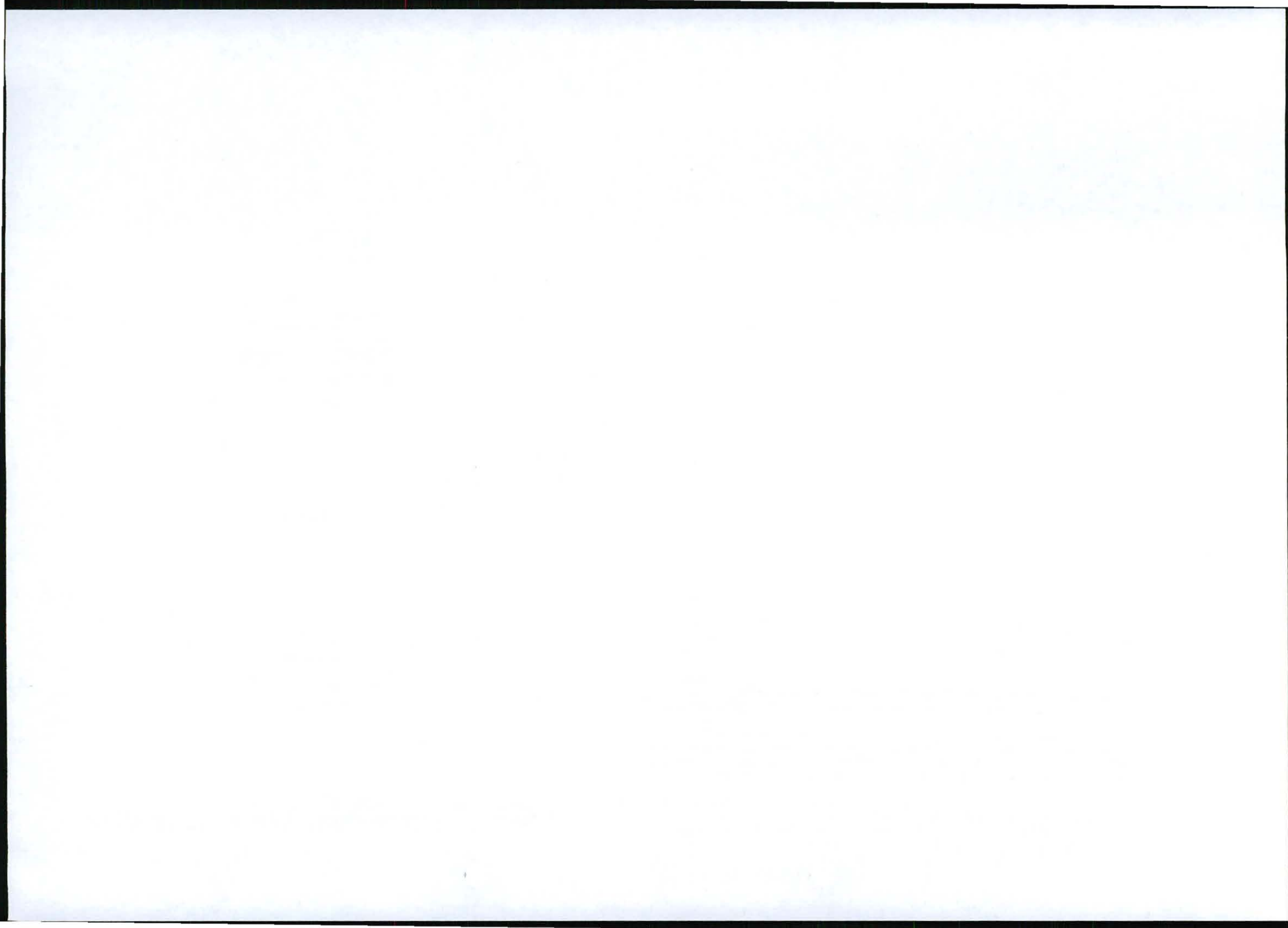
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During a shovel testing program in February 2005 a brick alignment was found which was thought to be a well. Further exploration proved this to be the case. Overlying the well are several layers of modern rubbish, including an ash and charcoal layer implying a rubbish burning episode. The actual well deposits were excavated in five layers.

The uppermost layer appears to relate to the overlying modern rubbish. Layers 2 to 4 appear to represent a deliberate infilling of the well which included large numbers of alluvial cobbles and boulders. These were larger towards the base of Layer 4. Artefactual material in these layers was generally poor, although one complete shoe was found in Layer 4.

Layer 5 seemed to be the only normal archaeological accumulation but was only a very thin layer. No large cobbles and boulders were present in this layer and several bottles were recovered.

The construction materials and content tend to suggest that the well was built during the 19th century and that the deposits accumulated in the early 20th century. The well was not built in the usual manner, but was rather constructed within a large hole which was subsequently backfilled. This method is indicated by the fact that the bricked floor of the well continues beneath the side walls.



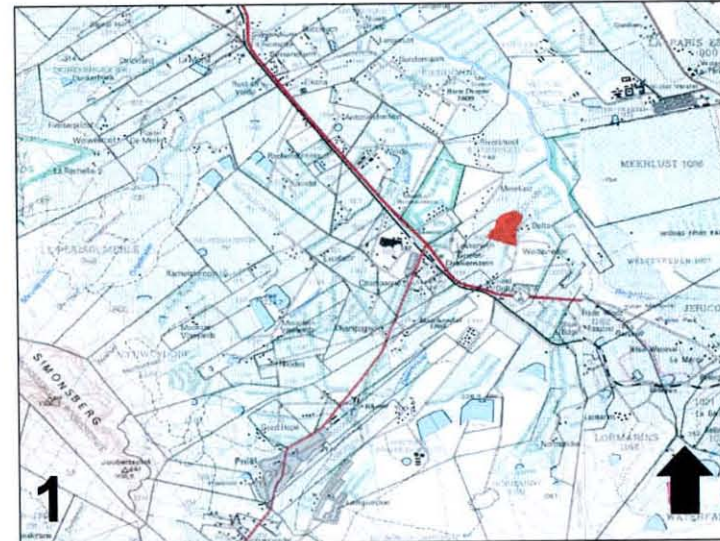
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1. INTRODUCTION

In February 2005, the Archaeology Contracts Office conducted a program of shovel test excavations in the areas around the main house and wine cellar buildings at Delta, Franschhoek (Orton, *et al.* 2005). The Delta farm is located to the north of the R45 and some 10 km to the west of the town of Franschhoek (Figure 1). During the shovel testing program a brick alignment was found in the base of one of the excavations near the wine cellar (Area G, Outside Hole 3). To check this, a further and larger excavation was conducted there and it was found that a brick circular feature of 1.8 m diameter was present. The feature was thought to be a well.

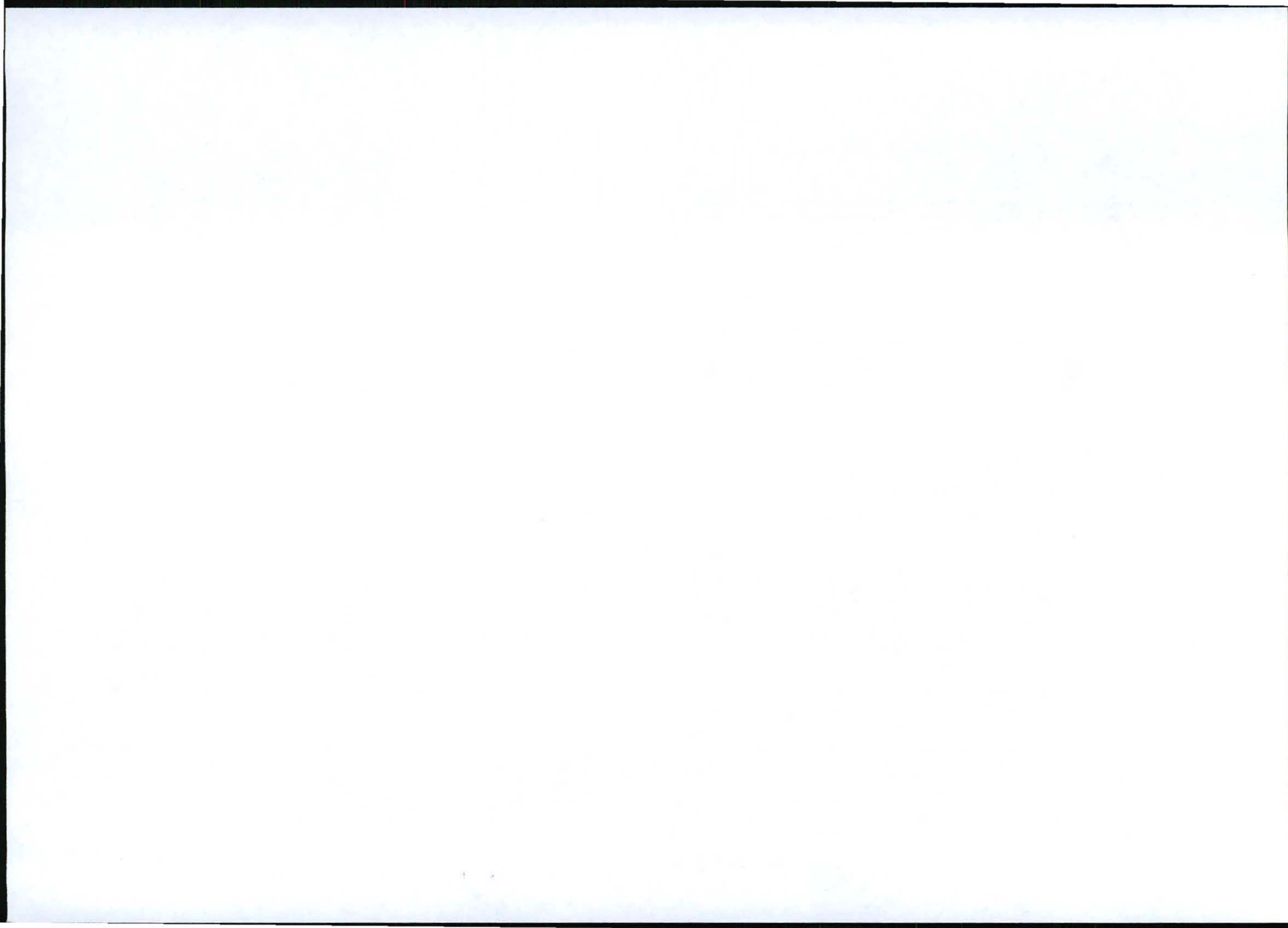
We returned in July 2005 and began formal excavation of the feature which indeed turned out to be a well. This report details the excavation and summarises the findings. The ceramic artefacts will be analysed by Jane Klose.



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2. METHODS

After the initial finding of the brick alignment in a shovel test pit in February 2005, we returned to Delta and expanded the excavation. This confirmed the notion that the alignment might represent the top of a well (Orton *et al.* 2005). At that early stage few historical artefacts had been recovered and the cross-section obtained through the deposits suggested that the



hollow created by subsidence of the well infill had been used for the disposal of occasional burning of modern rubbish.

Although some stratigraphic excavation of these upper, modern deposits had been done, we abandoned this in favour of removing the remaining modern deposits in a single layer. This material was shovelled off (Plate 1) with finds only collected when seen. All artefactual material recovered from the overburden was placed in one layer called "above well". Subsequent layers within the well itself were simply named with sequential numbers. Due to the low density of material recovered and the large amount of gravel present in most of the layers, sieving was not employed until the final layer (Layer 5).



Plate 1: Clearing the remaining overburden prior to excavation of the well deposits.

During the excavations, water seeped into the well at a steady rate and a pump had to be employed to remove it (Plate 2). Throughout most of the well, and especially towards the base of Layer 4, many large river cobbles were found. Some of those in Layer 4 were too large to be lifted or broken by hand and a chain block was used to hoist these from the well (Plate 2).

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Stratigraphy

Aside from the overburden, the well itself was excavated in five layers (Figure 2). The nature of the deposits suggests a rapid and deliberate infilling of the well for most of its depth. Many of the layers contained large numbers of river cobbles and small boulders which had to have been deliberately thrown in. Only the lowest layer, Layer 5, is thought to have accumulated in the normal manner. All six layers are described below.



Plate 2: A chain block was used for removing large rocks from the well and seeping water was pumped out.

Above well

The deposits encountered above the walls of the well were described in detail in an earlier report (Orton *et al.* 2005) and will not be repeated here. However, some clarification of the picture needs to be made. The fourth layer within the overburden extended into the well and that portion contained between the well walls was named Layer 1 (of the well deposits). At that stage it was thought that the river terrace cobbles and sand extended into the well beneath Layer 1 but we now know that it is due to the presence of many cobbles within the well layers that this misconception arose. The river terrace material is only present outside the walls of the well (Figure 2).

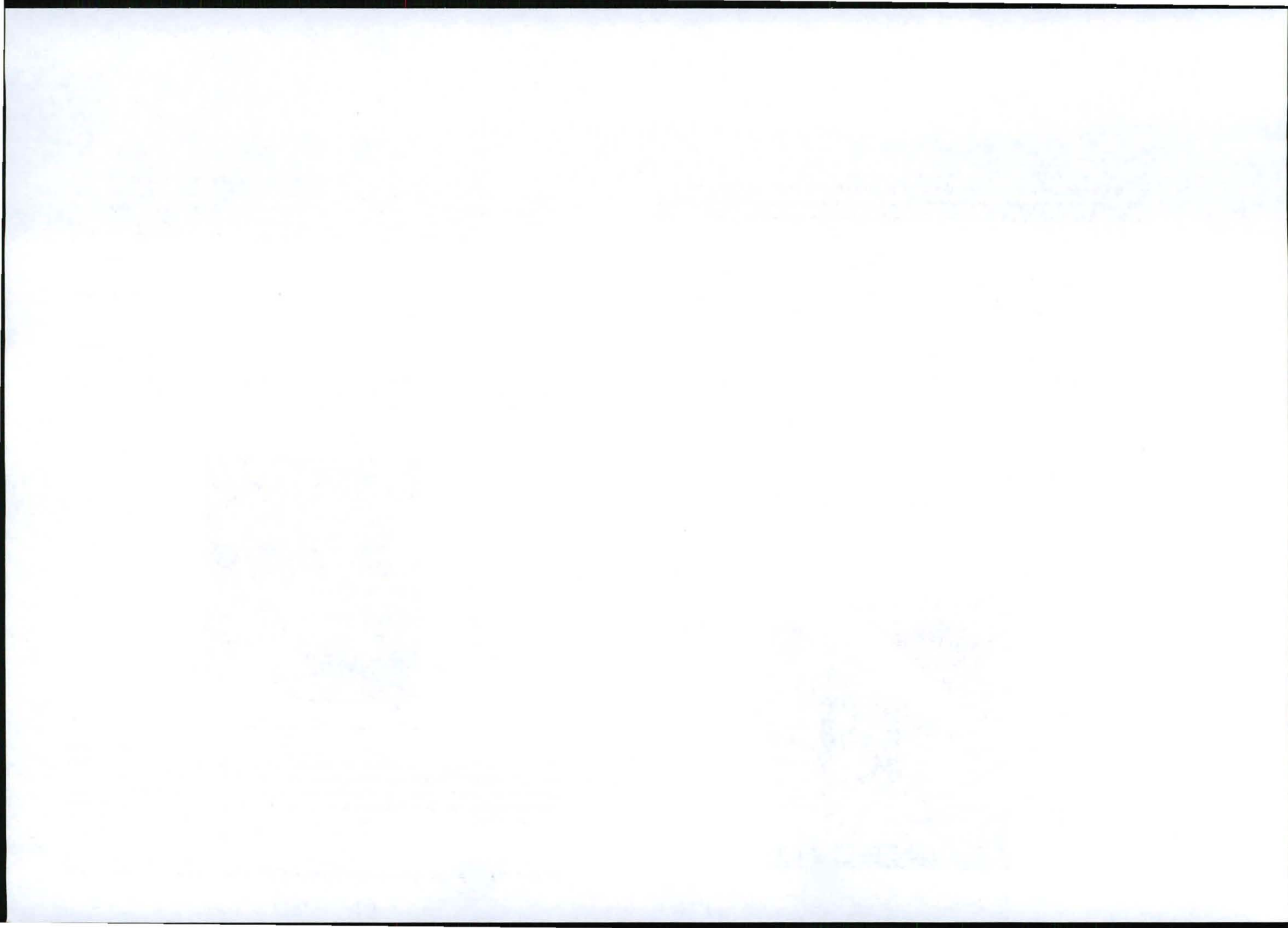
The *Above Well* deposits were variable but generally dark and humic. A clear ash and charcoal lens indicates the presence of a rubbish burning episode.

Layer 1

Layer 1 was dark and humic. It is essentially a continuation of the lowest layer within the *Above Well* layer. The base of this layer slopes down from south to north indicating an infilling from the south. The layer is 0.2 m thick at the southern edge of the well and 0.4 m at the northern side.

Layer 2

Layer 2 was a grey, sandy deposit with many river cobbles in it. It is undoubtedly derived primarily from river terrace material excavated elsewhere on the farm. The bases of this and all subsequent layers were relatively flat and not always easy to distinguish clearly. Layer 2



varied in thickness from 1.45 m at the southern edge of the well to 1.25 m on the northern side.

Layer 3

Layer 3 was similar to *Layer 2* but the sand was generally of a finer texture. Both the number and mean size of the river cobbles increased steadily through this layer with the biggest boulder encountered being approximately 0.4 x 0.3 x 0.2 m. The sand is still grey but becomes progressively darker with depth. Rootlets are abundant in this layer which is 1.05 m thick.

Layer 4

Again this layer is similar to those above it but with a still greater increase in the number and frequency of cobbles and boulders. The largest boulder found in *Layer 4* was about 0.6 x 0.4 x 0.3 m. The sand colour is grey brown. *Layer 4* is 0.5 m thick (Plate 3).



Plate 3: Boulders piled up at one side of the well at the base of Layer 4. The bottle visible between the rocks is at the top of Layer 5.

Layer 5

This was the final layer encountered above the paved base of the well and was just 0.15 m thick. It contained the richest archaeological material, but by comparison to other well deposits, the artefacts were still very sparse. This layer seems more like a regular archaeological accumulation rather than a deliberate infill. Layer 5 was a brown, fine textured silty sand with minimal cobbles.

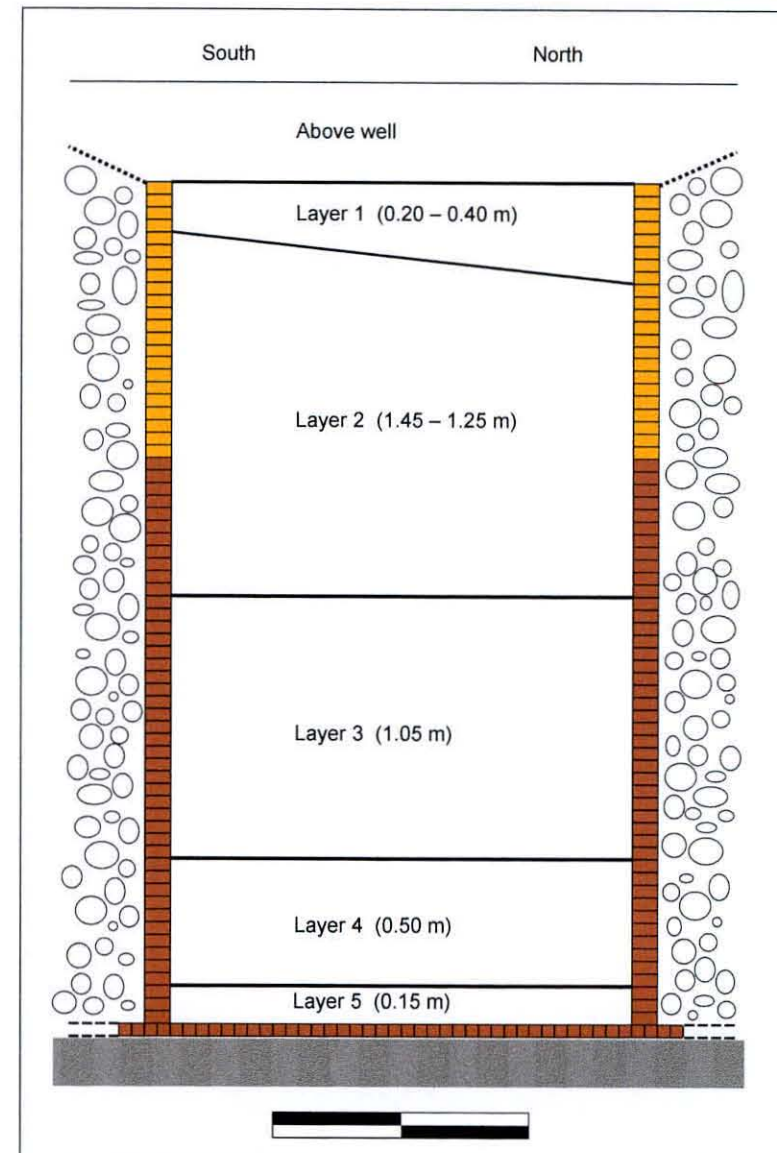


Figure 2: The structure and stratigraphy of the well. The upper walls are made of soft orange bricks while the remainder are of harder, well-fired pink/brown frog bricks.



3.2. Content

A brief listing of the types of artefactual material recovered from the deposits both above and within the well are presented here.

Above well

- a few fragments of a writing slate engraved with a grid pattern;
- a large quantity of green, brown and clear bottle glass including some historical fragments;
- a good selection of animal bones;
- a few fragments of plastic and one of Perspex;
- a large quantity of ceramics but with a smaller proportion of modern material than is apparent among the glass fragments;
- many pieces of iron derived from a variety of items, mostly quite modern but all very rusted;
- several fragments of items made from other types of metal; and
- one almost perfectly round sandstone cobble that must have been used for some purpose.

Layer 1

- a small selection of glass, both modern and historical, mostly dark green but also some light green and clear;
- a small selection of ceramics, both modern and historical
- one fragment of plastic
- a fair amount of animal bone;
- some pieces of iron including quite a bit of wire; and
- a few small fragments of shoe leather.

Layer 2

- lots of green and some brown bottle glass (Plate 4);
- some pieces of iron; and
- very few fragments of ceramics but none obviously modern.

Layer 3

- lots of green and some brown bottle glass;
- very few fragments of ceramics but none obviously modern;
- a single pipe stem;
- two pieces of iron that look like sections of small barrel hoops; and
- several bricks.

Layer 4

- several planks and fragments of wood;
- one complete and several fragments of leather shoes (Plate 5);
- the base of what appears to be a paint tin with most of the metal rusted away;

- two fragments of glass;
- two fragments of bottle corks; and
- several bricks.



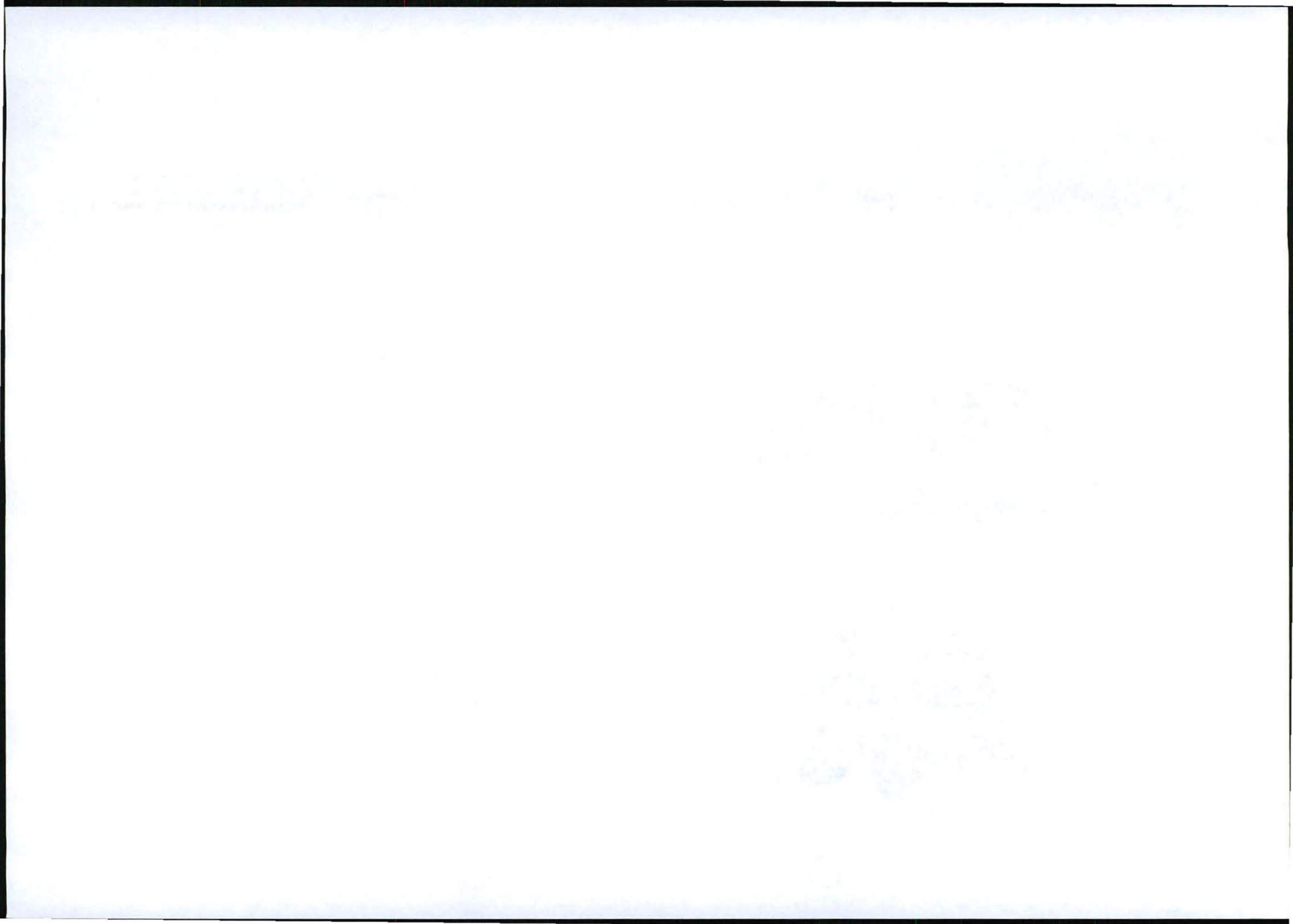
Plate 4: A selection of bottle necks and bases found in Layer 2. The neck at bottom right still contained its cork.



Plate 5: The whole shoe found in Layer 4. Several other shoe fragments were also found.

Layer 5

- nine bottles, of which three are pale green soda bottles with their necks broken (Plate 6), two other bottles are whole and the rest broken (Plate 7), most is green but some brown glass is also present;
- four bottle corks;
- a small collection of ceramics (Plate 8);
- several fragments of wood;



- one iron pipe; and
- two other metal items, probably of brass.



Plate 6: The three soda bottles found in Layer 5. Note the clover leaf and the figure of Neptune on the left- and right-hand bottles respectively.



Plate 7: The entire ceramic collection from Layer 5. Six fragments refit to form a small plate while the remaining three are all from separate vessels.

3.3. Structure of the well

Unfortunately we do not know how much of the well structure has been lost from the top and what the nature of this upper structure would have been. The few bricks found in the well deposits almost certainly derive from the upper, now destroyed portion of the well. What remains, however, is entirely constructed from brick (Plate 8). The bricks are of two types with the upper part of the wall having been built from a softer brick than the remainder (Figure 2; Plates 8 & 9). The internal diameter of the well is 1.8 m and the total height of the remaining side walls is 3.35 m.

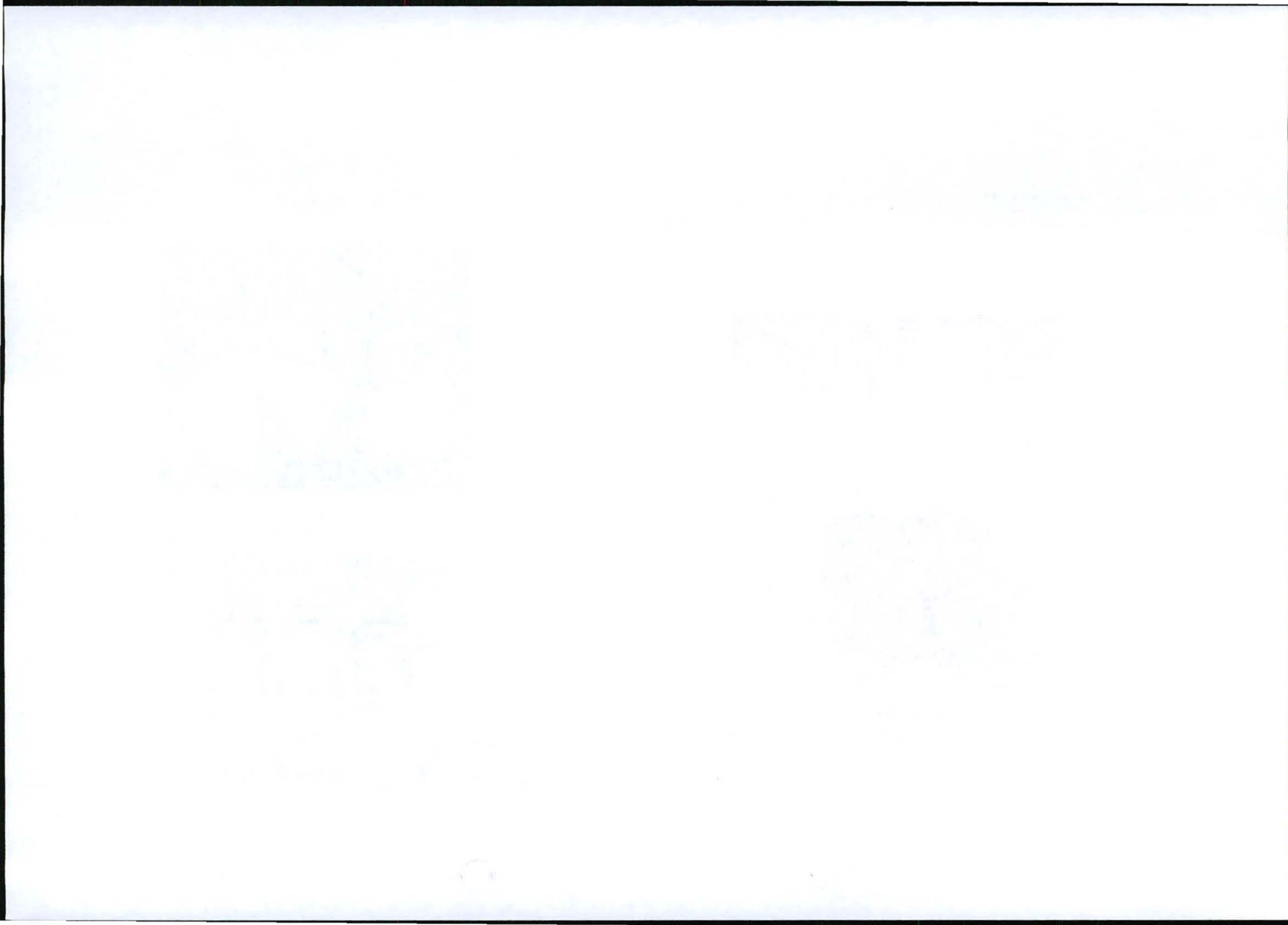


Plate 8: The interior of the well after completion of the excavation.



Plate 9: Close-up photograph showing the transition between the orange and the pink/brown bricks used in the walls of the well.

The upper bricks are a rich orange colour and all measure approximately 250 mm by 120 mm by 80 mm. They are placed such that their smallest surfaces face into the well. About 1.1 m below the uppermost bricks there was a change to better fired, dark pink/brown coloured bricks. These bricks extend all the way to the base of the well and, based on appearance, are assumed to be the same as those used for the paved floor (Plate 10). A brick removed from



the floor of the well measures 240 mm by 110 mm by 70 mm, slightly larger than the overlying orange bricks. It is a typical British brick with a frog present in one face.



Plate 10: Two of the bricks removed from the base of the well. Note the frog (hollow) in the upper surface of the bricks. These indicate a British origin post - 1806.

From the nature of the paving it appears that the usual method of well construction (building the wall on a wooden circle then digging out the sand from the centre) was not employed here. This is undoubtedly due to the difficulties presented by the cobbles of the river terrace. It appears as though a very large pit was dug to bedrock (Malmesbury shale) and the base levelled off. A paved surface was laid without any cement, but with the bricks being packed extremely tightly together (Plate 11). The frogs face down. Then on top of this paving the wall was built with the terrace material being pushed back in behind the wall.



Plate 11: The base of the well showing the tightly packed brick paving extending beneath the side walls.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Although a reference to a well is contained in an estate inventory from 1835, there remains considerable doubt as to whether this is in fact the well referred to. The type of brick used suggests a mid-19th century construction and the artefacts found within the well all point to deposits having only accumulated during the 20th century. The farm was bought by xxx in 1899 and converted into a fruit farm with plums being one of the dominant fruits. The presence of many plum pips in the lowest layer of the well would seem to support a post-1900 date for the accumulation. **Could the well have been cleaned out pre-1900?**

5. REFERENCES

Orton, J, Halkett, D. & Hart, T. 2005. A program of test excavations at Delta (Farm 944), Franschoek. Unpublished report prepared for Prof. M. Solms. Archaeology Contracts Office, University of Cape Town.

6. INVESTIGATION TEAM

Fieldwork: D. Halkett
J. Orton

Report: J. Orton
Archival Research: T. Randle