

Cistern Report
Conservatorium Site, Sydney
May 1998

Cos Coroneos

**THE CISTERN
AREA B**

1.0 SUMMARY

The cultural deposits within the cistern can be separated into three phases, they are as follows :

Phase I (611 and 605/9 and 605/10)

This context has a high concentration of sandstock bricks and some timber beams. It may be that this deposit is associated with the demolition of a building, perhaps the bakery and/or associated structures.

Phase II (604 to 610)

These contexts appear consistent with domestic refuse. Furthermore, contexts 606 and 608 appear to be associated with fireplace and floor sweepings respectively. Binding these contexts together into a single phase, representing a series of depositional events which took place over a relatively short period of time, were fragments of green under glaze ceramic, with a 'Maltese Cross' pattern, which were found in almost all these contexts and seemed to belong to a single plate. The tentative date for this plate is c. 1830s to 1840s.

Phase III (603)

The composition of this context, decomposed sandstone with a high concentration of brick at the southern half of the context, suggest that this deposit is contemporary with the digging of the trench for the agricultural drain.

2.0 RECORDING PROCEDURES

Two physical factors in Area B dictated the way in which the deposits were excavated. They were :

- 1/ The limits of the contexts on a horizontal plane were easily defined. The contexts were bounded by the walls of the cistern.
- 2/ The inundated nature of the deposit. Due to recent rains, the cistern would completely fill up with water each night.

So as to be able to excavate the deposit in a terrestrial manner a pump was employed continuously to de-water the cistern. In order to excavate effectively, a sump had to be dug within the deposit in order to drain water from the surface to be excavated. This was done by digging a hole as deep as a bucket, approximately 0.35 to 0.4 m deep. The width of the hole was approximately 0.30m in diameter. A plastic bucket, with the base cut away, was placed within the hole and the pump head was then placed inside. Each time the level of excavation reached the base of the sump and ground water became a problem, the sump was re-dug.

The material excavated from the sump was given the context number 605. Spit numbers were allocated each time the sump was re-dug. With each change of spit, starting and finishing levels

were taken at the rim and base of the bucket. The reason why there is overlap between the spits is that sometimes it was not possible to excavate to the full depth of the bucket because of obstructions. The sump would also silt up during the course of excavating the surrounding contexts and hence contamination of this context from the surrounding contexts should be expected.

The decision to change spits within contexts, 604 to 611 (excluding 605) was essentially based on rising ground water. When the excavation surface became too waterlogged to work effectively, the sump was re-dug. This was the time when spit numbers were changed.

The depth levels taken were relative to a temporary datum set up on the road in front of the working entrance to the Conservatorium. No levels were taken for the start of 603. The levels for the start of this context could be obtained from Tracy Ireland's report. Alternatively, the start of 603 could also be considered to be level with the base of the agricultural trench which ran through the top of the cistern.

3.0 CONTEXT DETAILS

Context No.: 603

Context type: Fill

Matrix description: Decomposed/crushed sandstone. Mixture of colours from white to pinkish brown. Concentration of fragments of brick in the southern half of the cistern.

Extent: Across the whole of the cistern, which measures, on average, 1.28 m in diameter.

Relationship with other contexts: This context is *above* contexts 604 and 605 and is contained by the walls of the cistern.

Contamination factor: As the top of the context had been exposed during Tracy Ireland's test excavation, some contamination (modern day artefacts) could be expected

Interpretation: Fill thrown into the cistern when agricultural trench was dug. It is likely that the sandstone rubble was the spoil from the agricultural trench. The density of brick fragments in the southern half of the cistern was due to the need to retard ground subsidence along the line where the agricultural pipe ran across the cistern.

Comments: At the interface of this matrix and 604 there was a darkening of the fill to a darker brown colour with a corresponding increase in the clayey nature of the matrix. The majority of artefacts from this context were found at this point. This maybe due to soil and artefacts trickling down through the sandstone rubble.

Description of spits: There were no spits associated with this context.

Artefact description and condition: The majority of artefacts found in this context were fragments of brick, both dry pressed and sandstock, and shell.

Other comments: No starting levels were taken for this context. See **RECORDING PROCEDURES**

Context No.: 604

Context type: Fill

Matrix description: Mid yellow to brown, sandy silt with many flecks of black humic soil, not charcoal, and decayed fragments of bone throughout. There was a tendency for the matrix to become paler (a lighter grey) with depth. Along the wall of the cistern, protruding through the matrix, was a very high concentration of roots which corresponded with a considerable darkening of the deposit. The concentration of roots decreased towards the centre of the cistern.

Extent: Across the whole of the cistern.

Relationship with other contexts: This context is *under* 603 and *above* 605 and 606. It *contains* 605.

Contamination factor: There was most likely movement of artefacts up and down through the matrix due to root action. There was also possibly some contamination of 604/1 by 603.

Interpretation: The dark organic material within the matrix and the presence of domestic artefacts suggests that this context is associated with domestic refuse.

Comments: There was a tendency for the matrix to appear paler in colour with depth. If the matrix was left alone for a period of time, the colour of the surface became darker due to waterlogging and the consequent infusion of black organic material from the roots through out the matrix. This was especially the case for the southern half of the matrix.

Description of spits:

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 604/1 | Matrix seemed to get paler in colour with depth. |
| 604/2 | Not as many artefacts present as in the previous spit. Paler colour throughout the matrix which corresponds with a lessening density of roots. |
| 604/3 | A patch of reddish clay which enclosed fragments of sandstock brick fragments located toward the centre of the cistern was removed as part of this spit. |

Artefact description and condition: A considerable amount of small to large fragments of bone, ceramics, glass, metal, nails, shell, cut stone and sandstock brick were recovered. The majority of the artefacts were found concentrated along the E-N-W edge of the cistern wall.

Other comments:

Context No.: 605

Context type: Deposit (see 604 to 611)

Matrix description: Same as 604 to 611.

Extent: The width of this context was 280 mm, the maximum diameter of a plastic bucket. The context was situated in the southern part of the cistern.

Relationship with other contexts: This context was situated *under* 603 and was *contained by* 604 to 611.

Contamination factor: Contamination occurred during excavation which could not be helped. As each context, other than 605, was excavated, soil filtered into the sump. See **Recording Procedures**

Interpretation: See contexts 604 to 611

Comments: This context is a sense artificial as it was excavated in order to create a sump through which the rest of the of cistern could be excavated effectively.

Description of spits:

The spits for this context equate to the following contexts:

- | | |
|--------|-------------------------------|
| 605/1 | 604/2 and 604/3 |
| 605/2 | 604/3, 607/1 and 607/2 |
| 605/3 | 604/3, 607/1 and 607/2 |
| 605/4 | 607/3 and 608 |
| 605/5 | 607/3, 608 and 609/1 |
| 605/6 | 607/3, 608, 609/1 and 609/2 |
| 605/7 | 609/1, 609/2, 610/1 and 610/2 |
| 605/8 | 610/1 and 610/2 |
| 605/9 | 610/2 and 611 |
| 605/10 | 611 |

Artefact description and condition: See contexts 604 to 611.

Other comments:

Context No.: 606**Context type:** Deposit**Matrix description:** A mixed ash matrix composed of mid grey to brown sandy loam with many charcoal pieces, up to 10 mm in size, and shell (oyster) inclusions throughout. Occasional small sandstone fragments also present.**Extent:** Northern half of the cistern.**Relationship with other contexts:** The context is *below* 604 and *above* 607.**Contamination factor:** -**Interpretation:** This context appears to be an ash/fire place deposit. A lot of charcoal was present but other burnt material was not evident. Some artefacts found in this context have joining ceramic fragments from 604/3. It may be that this ash deposit accumulated at the base of 604, the ash filtering through the less compact refuse of 604.**Comments:** -**Description of spits:** No spits assigned.**Artefact description and condition:** The majority of artefacts recovered from this context were large fragments of bone and ceramic.**Other comments:**

Context No.: 607**Context type:** Deposit**Matrix description:** Mid black to brown, coarse sandy silt. Few charcoal inclusions. Some patchy areas of ash grey at the northern half of the context, similar to 606.**Extent:** Across the whole of the cistern.**Relationship with other contexts:** This context was *below* 604 and 606 and *above* 607. It *contains* 605.**Contamination factor:** -**Interpretation:** The dark organic material within the matrix and the presence of domestic artefacts suggests that this context is associated with domestic refuse.**Comments:** Some fragments of ceramic plate (green under glaze with 'Maltese Cross' patterning) found in this context have joining fragments in contexts 604 and 606.**Description of spits :**

607/1 No comments

607/2 Some ash grey deposit similar to 606 was observed at the northern half of the cistern.

607/3 No comments

Artefact description and condition: This context included large quantities of bone, sandstock brick, glass and ceramic fragments. Shells, nails and leather were also recovered.**Other comments :**

Context No.: 608**Context type:** Deposit**Matrix description:** Mid yellow to brown sand. No inclusions except for the occasional fragment of brick and large fragments of sandstone.**Extent:** Across the whole of the cistern.**Relationship with other contexts:** This context is *below* 607 and *above* 609. It *contains* 605.**Contamination factor:** -

Interpretation: Very thin in places. Possibly sand swept in by wind or floor sweepings.

Comments: In the NW quarter of this context a concentration of decomposed wood was present. It was excavated as part of the context.

Description of spits: No spits assigned.

Artefact description and condition: Few bone and sandstock brick fragments recovered. A complete leather shoe was also recovered from this context.

Other comments:

Context No.: 609

Context type: Deposit

Matrix description: Mid dark to brown, sandy silt with infrequent small stone inclusions mixed with dark organic material.

Extent: Across the whole of the cistern.

Relationship with other contexts: This context is *under* 608 and *above* 610. It *contains* 605.

Contamination factor: -

Interpretation: The dark organic material within the matrix and the presence of domestic artefacts suggests that this context is associated with domestic refuse.

Comments:

Description of spits:

609/1 There was a concentration of wood in the NW quarter of this matrix.

609/2 No comments

Artefact description and condition: The majority of artefacts recovered from within this context were of bone, ceramic and glass fragments. The partial remains of a leather shoe and a shovel head were also recovered.

Other comments:

Context No.: 610

Context type: Deposit

Matrix description: Mid grey to brown loose sandy silt with frequent small stones. In the NW and SE quarters of the context there were patches of yellow to brown sand with yellow clay inclusions.

Extent: Across the whole of the cistern.

Relationship with other contexts: This context was *below* 609 and *above* 611. It *contains* 605.

Contamination factor: -

Interpretation: The dark organic material within the matrix and the presence of domestic artefacts suggests that this context is associated with domestic refuse.

Comments: A large fashioned sandstone block was present within this context

Description of spits:

610/1 Large sandstone block was recovered from the NE quarter of this context.

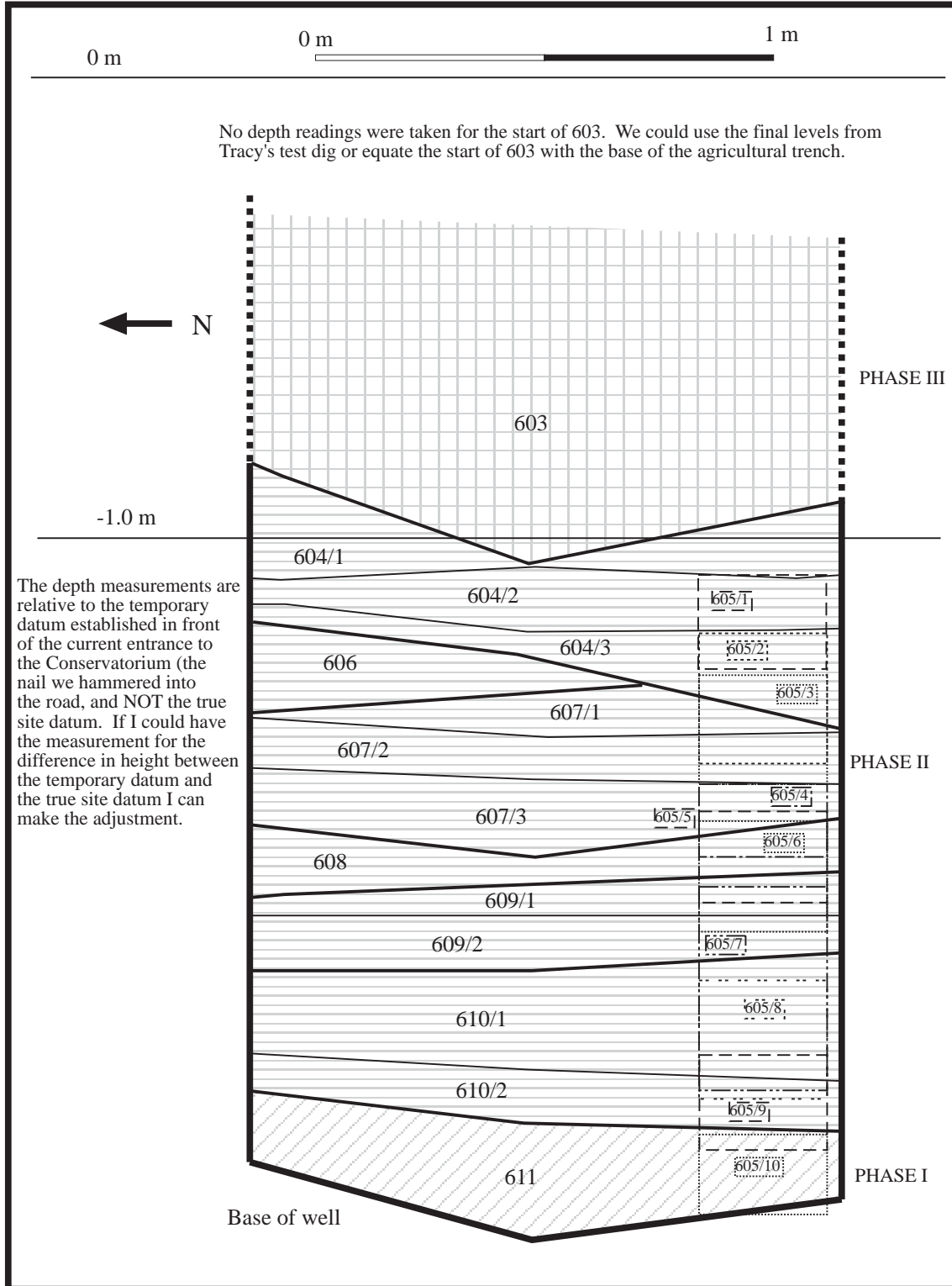
610/2 Though essentially the same as 610/1, the matrix was slightly more clayey.

Artefact description and condition: The density of artefacts in this context was relatively less than in previous contexts. The majority of artefacts recovered were bone, sandstock brick and glass fragments.

Other comments: It appears that the patches of yellow to brown sand was decomposed sandstone. It also appears that many of the sandstock brick fragments recovered from 610/2 were associated with 611.

Context No.: 611**Context type:** Fill (demolition)**Matrix description:** Light yellow to brown silty sand, mixed in places with mid brown silt and organic material and the occasional small stone fragments. There were a large number of sandstock bricks also present throughout the matrix.**Extent:** Across the whole of the cistern.**Relationship with other contexts:** This context was below 610 and above the floor of the cistern. It *contains* 605.**Contamination factor:** -**Interpretation:** This context is markedly different from those above. It appears to be associated with the demolition of a building.**Comments:** -**Description of spits:** No spits allocated.**Artefact description and condition:** Sandstock bricks, many of which were complete, were recovered from this context. Two large fragments of timber were also recovered. These artefacts, as cistern as glass and metal were the only other artifacts types observed in this context.**Other comments:** -

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30/6/98



CONSERVATORIUM, MAY 1998; AREA B - THE WELL; SCHEMATIC PROFILE
 (depth measurements used to create profile are the north, middle and south readings taken for every context and spit)

Schematic section through cistern based on known levels. For details see Chapter 22.3. Cos Coroneos.