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Legions Way/133 Stanstead Road
Bishop's Stortford
Hertfordshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust

HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST
REPORT NO. 224

Legions Way/133 Stanstead Road
Bishop's Stortford
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An Archaeological Evaluation

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February 1997

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**LEGIONS WAY/133 STANSTEAD ROAD, BISHOPS STORTFORD
HERTFORDSHIRE
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 During February 1997, the Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation of a site at 133 Stanstead Road, Bishop's Stortford (NGR TL 4946 2194: Figs.1-2). The work was requested by McCarthy and Stone (Developments) Ltd.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

2.1 The site is situated in the northern part of Bishop's Stortford on the west side of Stanstead Road with the junction of Legions Way. It occupies a level, rectangular area of c.1500 metres (Figs.2-3). The eastern half of the site is currently occupied by three linked two-storey office blocks. The western half of the site consists of a tarmac carpark with access to Legions Way. A small single storey brick building occupies the north west corner and a small wooden shed stands on a concrete base in the south west corner. The eastern and southern borders of the site are grassed with some small trees, and the site is bordered to the south and west by residential properties. The site is unfenced and open to the north and east. The assessment site lies within an *Area of Archaeological Significance* (East Herts District Plan, Sheet 14) encompassing the Cannons Close Estate and the playing fields to the north and west.

3 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

3.1 The site is located on level ground at an elevation of 67 m OD. To the west the land slopes down gradually towards the river Stort, c.0.5 km distant. To the east and north east the land also gradually rises. Soils in the assessment area belong to the *Melford* or *Hanslope* associations (Soil Survey 1983), being chalky tills overlying calcareous clay subsoils. A fuller site description is contained within HAT's desk-based assessment report (HAT report No. 215).

4 METHOD OF WORK

4.1 The archaeological evaluation was undertaken according to a specification compiled by HAT (dated 31/1/97). This required the excavation of trial trenches. HAT had previously carried out a desk-based assessment of the site (HAT report No. 215).

4.2 The aims of the evaluation were to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of surviving archaeological deposits.

4.3 The evaluation was conducted according to Hertfordshire County Council's *Standards and Practices for the Excavation of Exploratory Trial Trenches*. In addition, the project complied with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (1994).

4.4 Using a 180° wheeled excavator (JCB), a total of five trial trenches were excavated across the site, in locations proposed by HAT (Fig. 3). The trenches were up to 10 m long and 2 m wide. Topsoil and overburden was removed by machine. The exposed surfaces were cleaned by hand as appropriate. The deposits revealed were recorded by means of *pro-forma* recording sheets, drawn to scale and photographed.

4.5 The trenches were designed to investigate the areas immediately north and south of the alignment of Roman Stane Street (which runs E-W across the assessment area, see HAT report No.215) to identify any archaeological deposits adjacent to the road and also to examine the road itself. A further consideration was to assess the extent of any ground disturbance associated with the former railway embankment which occupied the southernmost part of the assessment area.

4.6 Site levels were extrapolated from an Ordnance Survey bench mark located on Stanstead Road (east side opposite Nos.89/91), south of the site (value 224.89 ft / 68.52 m AOD).

5 DESCRIPTION OF WORKS Figs. 4-6

Individual trench descriptions are presented below:

Trench 1

Sample section at east end of trench (0.00 = 67.18m AOD).

0.00 - 0.09m	<i>L1000</i> Tarmac surface of car park.
0.09 - 0.19m	<i>L1001</i> Sand and gravel base for tarmac surface.
0.19 - 0.45m	<i>L1002</i> Demolition layer/foundation for car park. Modern brick rubble.
0.45 - 0.53m	<i>L1003</i> Disturbed soil/overburden. Dark brown silt loam with occasional gravel inclusions.
0.53 - 1.10m	<i>L1004</i> Soil horizon. Yellow brown clay loam.
1.10m+	<i>L1005</i> Natural orange/brown gravelly clay.

Sample section at west end of trench (0.00 = 67.30m AOD).

0.00 - 0.09m	<i>L1000</i> Tarmac surface of car park.
0.09 - 0.19m	<i>L1001</i> Sand and gravel base for tarmac surface.
0.19 - 0.38m	<i>L1002</i> Demolition layer/foundation for car park. Modern brick rubble.
0.38 - 0.48m	<i>L1035</i> Levelling layer. Black silt loam containing domestic refuse (broken bottles, ceramics, ashes) dating to the late 19th/early 20th century.
0.48 - 0.98m	<i>L1003</i> Disturbed soil/overburden. Dark brown silt loam with occasional gravel inclusions and sherds of post-medieval pottery.
0.98 - 1.15m	<i>L1004</i> Soil Horizon. Yellow brown clay loam.
1.15m+	<i>L1005</i> Natural orange/brown gravelly clay.

Soil horizon *L1004* is the surviving soil layer immediately to the north of Roman Stane Street.

A single pit *F1006* (Fig.4)(length 2.55m, width 0.65+m, depth 0.96m) with 70 degree sloping sides and a broad, flat base was observed cutting through soil horizon *L1004* (Fig. 5). It was filled by a dark brown clay loam (*L1007*) with occasional flint inclusions, sherds of Roman pottery (6), and fragments of brick (3) and animal bone (4).

The depth of disturbed soil/overburden *L1003* increases towards the west end of the trench where soil horizon *L1004* is denuded.

Post-medieval pottery sherds (6) and a tile fragment were recovered from disturbed soil/overburden *L1003*, suggesting an 18th/19th-century date for this layer.

A modern drain ran N-S across the trench 4.5m from the west end (Fig.4).

Trench 2

Sample section (0.00 = 67.17m AOD).

0.00 - 0.30m	<i>L1008</i> Topsoil. Very dark brown silt loam.
0.30 - 0.38m	<i>L1030</i> Orange/brown silt with occasional flint inclusions.
0.38 - 0.47m	<i>L1021</i> Road surface. Compact orange sandy gravel.
0.47 - 0.58m	<i>L1022</i> Road make-up layer. Compact orange silt "brickearth".
0.58 - 0.83m	<i>L1023</i> Buried soil horizon. Light grey brown clayish silt.
0.83m+	<i>L1024</i> Natural yellow/orange silt.

Gravel road surface *L1021* is patchy and discontinuous in the central part of the trench (Fig.4). At the north end of the trench it is sealed by a layer of silt *L1030* which has accumulated in a dip/worn area of the road surface (Fig. 5, Section 3).

Two archaeological features (*F1017*, *F1019*) were observed in the north end of the trench in an area heavily-disturbed by animal burrowing (Fig.4). *F1019* (length 2.2m+, width 1.5m+, depth 0.6m) was observed cutting through road make-up layer *L1022* (Fig. 5, Section 5). The shape of this feature is difficult to determine due to the constraints of the position of the evaluation trench but it has 45 degree sloping sides and an uneven base. It contains a compact, mixed silt loam (*L1020*), predominantly dark brown with yellow patches, frequent flint pebbles (mainly 0.08 - 0.15m), occasional charcoal flecks, Roman pottery sherds (25), brick fragments (3), iron nails (2) and an animal bone fragment. The flint pebbles were found throughout the lower part of the fill but three areas of denser flint concentration were identified. This feature is interpreted as a structural cut, the flint used as a base to support timber posts or other structural elements. Feature *F1019* also cuts through NE-SW running gully *F1017* (Fig.4)(length 1.9m, width 0.18m+, depth 0.13m) which has gently sloping sides, a slightly concave base and a rounded terminal at either end. It is filled by a mid brown silt loam (*L1018*) with occasional small flint inclusions. It is probable that both these features post-date road surface *L1021* although only *F1019* can be seen cutting road make-up layer *L1022* in section as *L1021* is discontinuous at this point in the trench.

Three post-medieval/modern features cut through road surface *L1021* at the southern end of the trench (Fig. 4): a small, oval pit *F1009* (length 0.63m+, width 0.43m), filled by a mid grey sandy loam *L1010* with occasional flint inclusions and a single sherd of 19th/20th-century pottery, a linear cut *F1011* running E-W across the trench (length 1.5m+, width 0.56m) filled by a loosely compacted dark brown silty loam *L1012* with occasional flints, ash and coal inclusions, a single sherd of Roman pottery, two sherds of post-medieval pottery and four tile fragments and a circular brick-built soak-away *F1015* (1.1m diameter) which was filled by a loosely compacted, yellow brown silt loam and was within a subcircular construction cut *F1013* (1.8m+ diameter), packed around with a light yellow grey silty clay *L1014*. All of these features are of post-medieval/modern date and none were sectioned. Linear cut *F1011* is probably a pipe trench.

Roman pottery sherds (3) were recovered during the machining of this trench but could not be assigned to a context.

Trench 3

Sample section (0.00 = 67.21m AOD).

0.00 - 0.09m	<i>L1000</i> Tarmac. As Trench 1.
0.09 - 0.15m	<i>L1001</i> Sand and gravel base. As Trench 1.
0.15 - 0.28m	<i>L1002</i> Demolition layer/foundation for carpark. As trench 1.
0.28 - 0.48m	<i>L1035</i> Levelling layer. As Trench 1.
0.48 - 1.28m	<i>L1003</i> Disturbed soil/overburden. As Trench 1.
1.28 - 1.43m	<i>L1031</i> Disturbed soil/overburden. Mottled mid brown/yellow brown silt loam.
1.43 - 1.63m	<i>L1027</i> Subsoil. Light yellow brown clay loam.
1.63m+	<i>L1001</i> Natural. As Trench 1.

Subsoil *L1027* survives in the western part of the trench and is equivalent to subsoil *L1004* observed in Trench 1. It is absent from the east and southernmost part of the trench where past ground disturbance is represented by layers *L1031* and *L1003*.

A large cut *F1025* (Fill *L1026*)(length 5m+, width 1.5m+, depth 0.95m) with shallowly sloping sides and a slightly concave base cut away much of *L1003* at the south end of the trench (Fig. 5, Section 2). It was filled by a mixed deposit of orange/brown clay and silt with flint and chalk inclusions. No finds were recovered.

A modern pipe runs E-W across the trench (Fig.4), 2.5m from the north end and a concrete footing was located immediately below demolition layer *L1002* at the northern limit of the trench.

Post-medieval pottery sherds (2) and a bottle glass fragment were recovered from *L1003*.

Trench 4

Sample section (0.00 = 67.20m AOD).

0.00 - 0.08m	<i>L1000</i> Tarmac. As Trench 1.
0.08 - 0.15m	<i>L1001</i> Sand and gravel base. As Trench 1.
0.15 - 0.25m	<i>L1002</i> Demolition layer/foundation for carpark. As Trench 1.
0.25 - 0.44m	<i>L1035</i> Levelling layer. As Trench 1.
0.44 - 0.72m	<i>L1034</i> Road surface. Compact orange sandy gravel.
0.72 - 0.95m	<i>L1023</i> Buried soil horizon. As Trench 2.
0.95m+	<i>L1005</i> Natural. As Trench 1.

Road layer *L1034* is equivalent to *L1021* in Trench 2 (Fig.6, Section 6).

Trench 5

Sample section (0.00 = 67.29m AOD)

0.00 - 0.08m	<i>L1000</i> Tarmac. As Trench 1.
0.08 - 0.15m	<i>L1001</i> Sand and gravel base. As Trench 1.
0.15 - 0.30m	<i>L1002</i> Demolition layer/foundation for carpark. As Trench 1.
0.30 - 0.35m	<i>L1035</i> Levelling layer. As Trench 1.
0.35 - 0.56m	<i>L1003</i> Disturbed soil/overburden. As Trench 1.
0.56 - 0.76m	<i>L1034</i> Orange/brown silty sand with occasional flint inclusions.
0.76 - 0.91m	<i>L1033</i> Gravel surface. Compact gravel mixed with mid brown silt loam.
0.91 - 1.22m	<i>L1023</i> Buried soil horizon. As Trench 2.
1.22m+	<i>L1005</i> Natural. As Trench 1.

Stone surface *L1033* seals old soil layer *L1023* and was only observed in the southern half of the trench (Fig. 6). It has a greater silt content than road surface *L1021/L1034* located in Trenches 2 and 4. It is sealed by a layer of silty sand *L1032*.

A pit *F1028* (length 1.5m+, width 0.81m+, depth 0.52m) with 45 degree sloping sides and a concave base was cutting through silty sand layer *L1032* (Fig. 6). It was filled by a mid brown silt loam (*L1029*) with occasional flint inclusions and a single sherd of Roman pottery. This was sealed by disturbed soil/overburden *L1003*.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 The Roman road *Stane Street* was located in Trenches 2 and 4, within the alignment suggested by the 1976 excavations located immediately west of the study area (Wright 1982). In Trench 2 the road consisted of a layer of brickearth *L1022* (deposited directly above and sealing the old ground surface *L1023*) which was overlain by a compact gravel surface *L1021*. In Trench 4 the gravel surface *L1034* was deposited directly onto *L1023*.

6.2 A gravel surface *L1033* was located in Trench 5 at the northern limit of the road alignment suggested above. This deposit was much siltier than the road surface in Trenches 2 and 4 which was clean orange gravel. It is at a level 0.23m lower than the road surface in Trench 4 and so may be the very edge of the road where more silt would have naturally accumulated. This layer could also represent road repair or resurfacing for which a slightly different material was used.

6.3 A layer of silty sand (*L1030* in Trench 2 and *L1032* in Trench 5) sealed the road surface at the north end of Trench 2 and the road surface in Trench 5. This was probably naturally deposited on the periphery of the road as water drained away. Road-side ditches were not located.

6.4 In Trenches 1 and 3 an old soil horizon (*L1004* in Trench 1 and *L1027* in Trench 3) survives to the north and south of the road alignment. This horizon appears

more disturbed than *L1023* which was sealed beneath the road but a pit (*F1006*) containing Roman finds is cut from the level of the top of this layer (see below).

6.5 In Trench 1 a single large pit of undetermined function *F1006* was located just north of the road alignment and contained Roman pottery sherds (6), fragments of animal bone (4), brick (3) and tile (1). It is cutting into soil horizon *L1004* and is sealed by disturbed soil/overburden layer *L1003*.

6.6 In the north end of Trench 2 a small NE-SW running gully *F1017* and a large structural cut *F1019* which contains frequent flint pebbles (mainly 0.08 - 0.15m, which may be pads for supporting timber posts or other structural elements), occasional charcoal flecks, Roman pottery sherds (25), brick fragments (3), iron nails (2) and an animal bone fragment, cut through road make-up layer *L1022*.

6.7 Pit *F1028*, located in Trench 5 is cutting through silt layer *L1032* which seals road surface *L1033*. It contained a single sherd of Roman pottery and probably also dates to this period.

6.8 Archaeological features representing settlement activity of almost certain Roman date have been located along the northern edge of the road post-dating at least some phases of the road construction. In the 1976 excavation trench nearest to the study area, a single Roman pit was also located on the north edge of the road.

6.9 Three features were located in the southern half of Trench 2 and were all cutting through road surface *L1021*: a small pit *F1009* containing a sherd of 19th/20th-century pottery, an E-W running pipe trench *F1011*, containing a sherd of Roman pottery, sherds of post-medieval pottery (2) and post-medieval tile fragments (4) and a modern brick-built soak-away.

6.10 Layer *L1003* contains sherds of post-medieval pottery (10), a bottle glass fragment and a tile fragment and is located throughout Trenches 1, 3 and 5. It is seen at the greatest depth in Trench 3 (0.95m). This represents ground disturbance of some kind, possibly related to 18th/early 19th-century garden plots which occupied the study area, or to the construction of the railway embankment located to the south of the study area in the 1860's (see HAT report No.215). This ground disturbance truncates all stratigraphy (including any Roman features) in the eastern half of Trench 3 but shallows dramatically in the western half where soil horizon *L1027* survives. It slightly truncates Roman pits *F1006* and *F1028* in Trenches 1 and 5 respectively. This layer does not appear in Trenches 2 and 4, suggesting that its extent is limited to the western part of the study area.

6.11 Large cut *F1025* occupies the southernmost 5m of Trench 3 and truncates layer *L1003*. This is probably ground disturbance associated with the levelling of the former railway embankment during the 1960's (HAT Report No.215).

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 The evaluation reflects the findings of the desk-based assessment. The location and orientation of *Stane Street* is confirmed. Archaeological features representing settlement activity of almost certain Roman date have been located along the northern edge of the road, post-dating at least some phases of the road construction. The archaeological remains have been truncated by the levelling of the former railway and modern activity.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

8.1 HAT would like to thank McCarthy & Stone (Development) Ltd. for their funding of the archaeological evaluation.

9 REFERENCES

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Day I & Wright W J 1982 'Archaeology and fieldwork in East Hertfordshire' 1976-81,
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HAT 237 Legions Way/133 Stanstead Road, Bishop's Stortford Concordance of Finds

Context	Tr	Description	Spot Date	Pottery	Building Material	Other
unstrat	1		Roman	2 sherds (14g) 1 amphora sherd (416g)		
			Post Med	2 sherds (83g)		
unstrat	2		Roman	3 sherds (27g)		
unstrat	3		Roman	1 sherd (5g)		
1003		Layer	Post Med	2 sherds (366g)		
1003	1	Layer	Post Med	6 sherds (374g)	1 peg tile frag (136g)	
1003	3	Layer	Post Med	2 sherds (174g)		1 bottle glass frag
1003	5	Layer	Post Med	1 sherd (53g)		
1007	1	Fill of pit 1006	Roman	6 sherds (51g)	3 brick frags (115g) 1 tile frag (90g)	4 animal bone frags
1010	2	Fill of pit 1009	Post Med	1 sherd (12g)		
1012	2	Fill of gully 1011	Roman	1 sherd (5g)	1 brick frag (102g)	
			Post Med	2 sherds (24g)	3 tile frags (38g)	
1020	2	Fill of cut 1019	Roman	25 sherds (261g)	3 brick frags (280g)	1 animal bone frag, 2 Fe nails
1029	5	Fill of pit 1028	Roman	1 sherd (35g)		

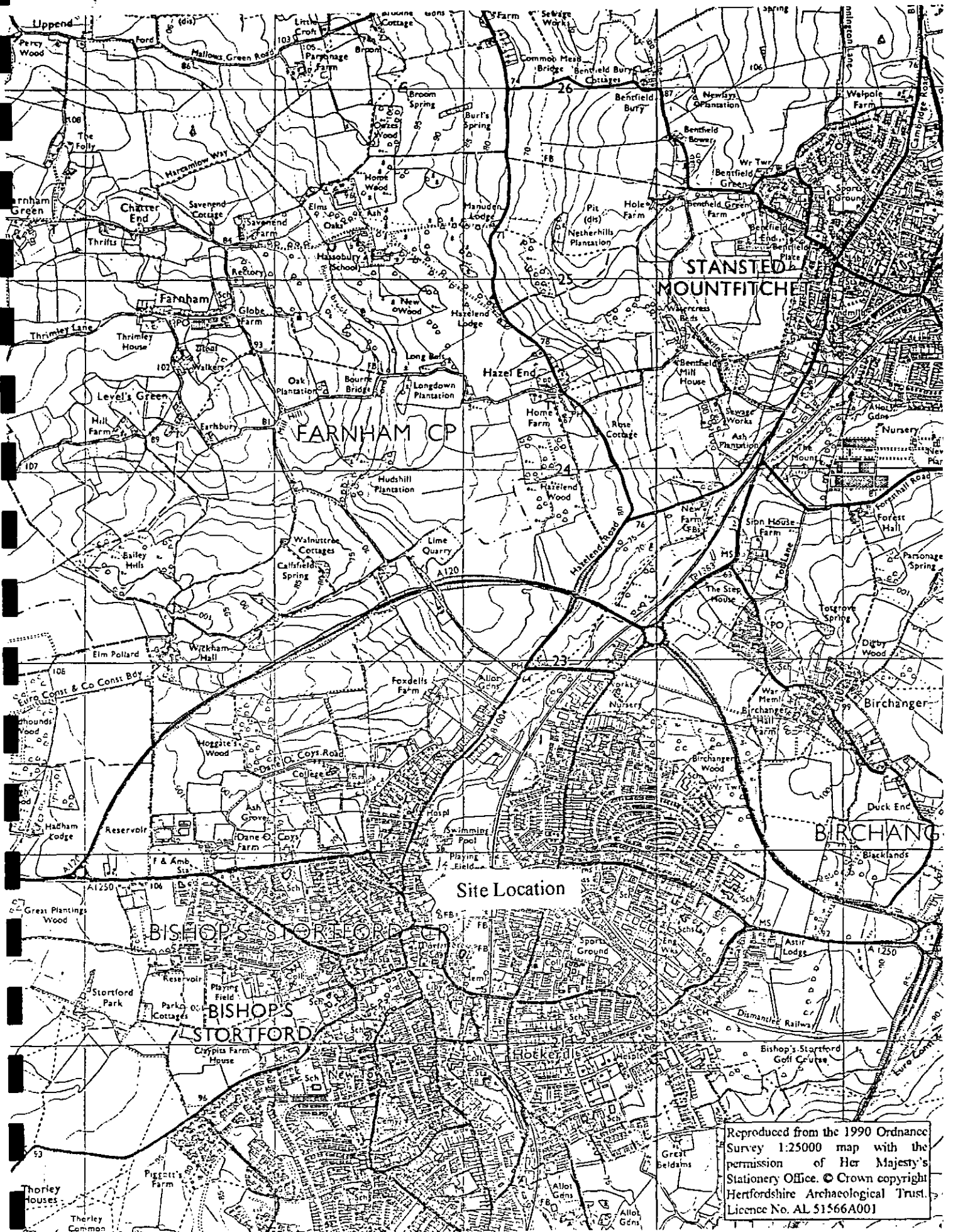


Fig 1. General Location Plan

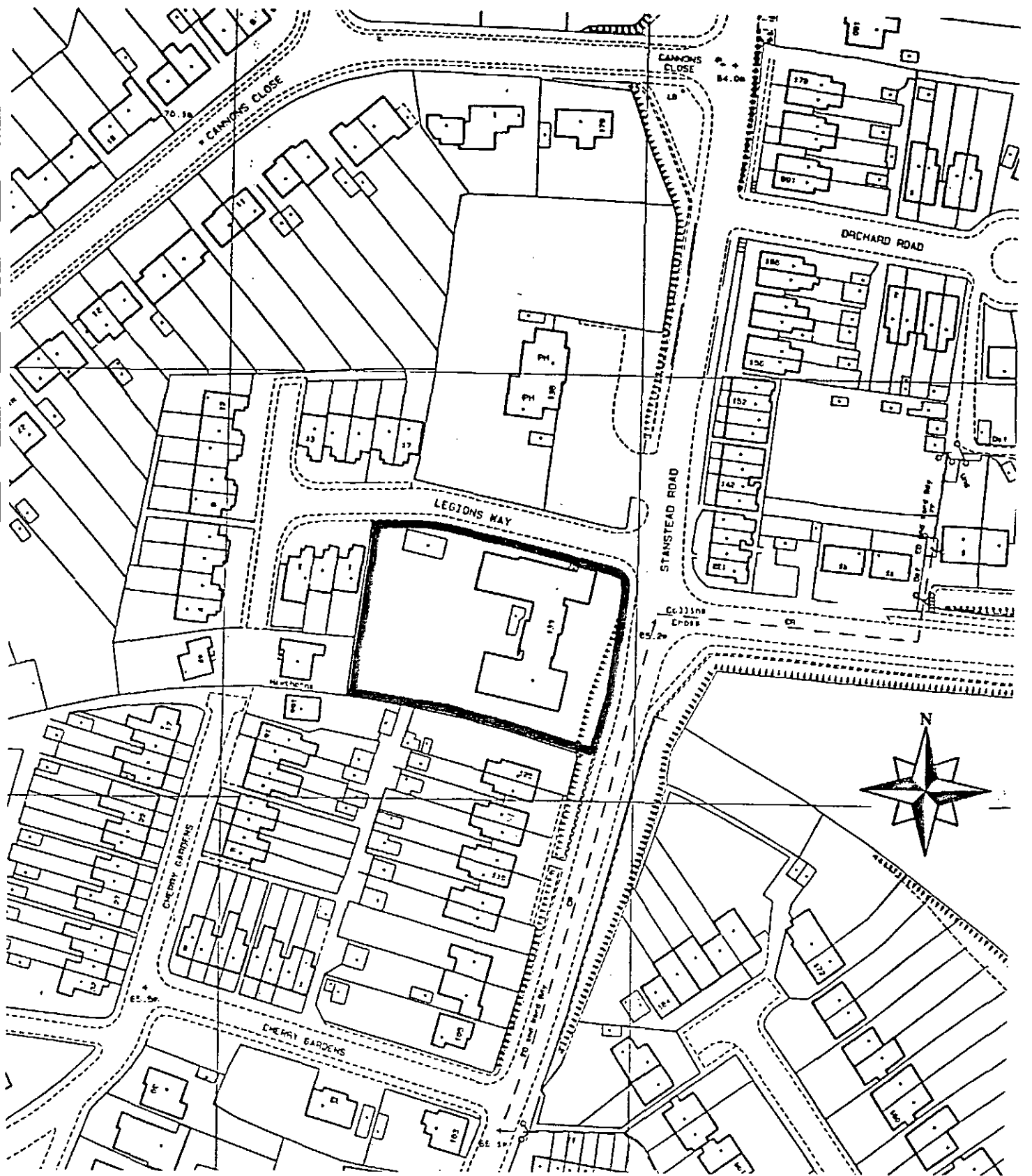
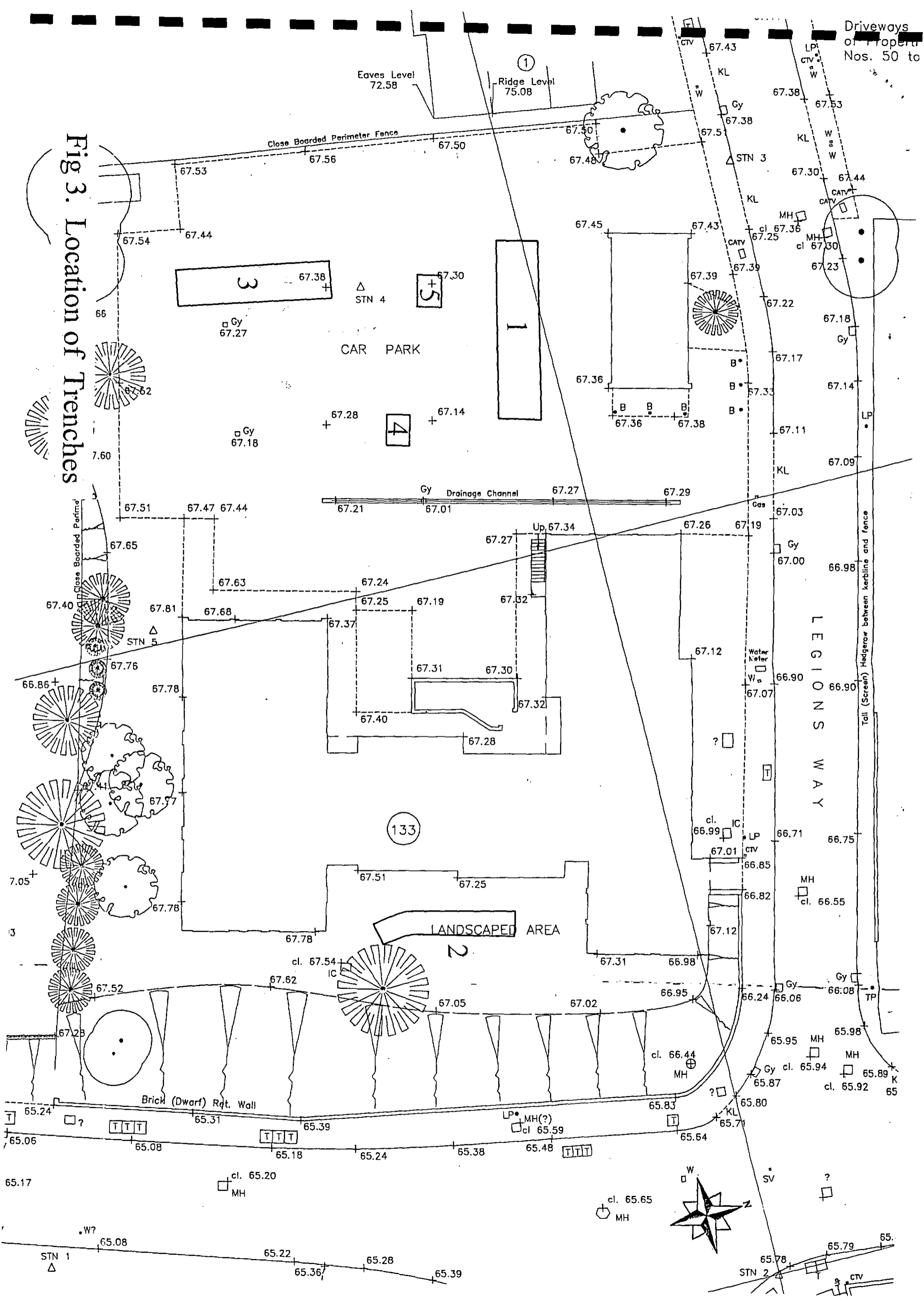
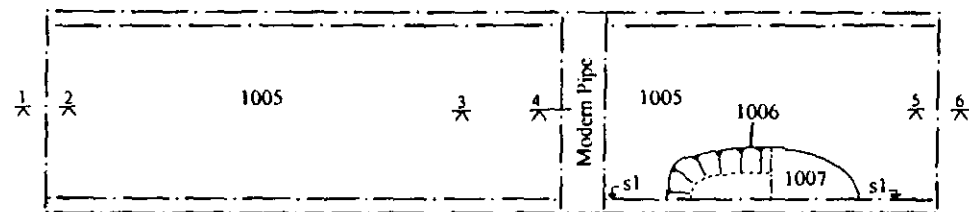


Fig 2. Site Location Plan

Fig 3. Location of Trenches

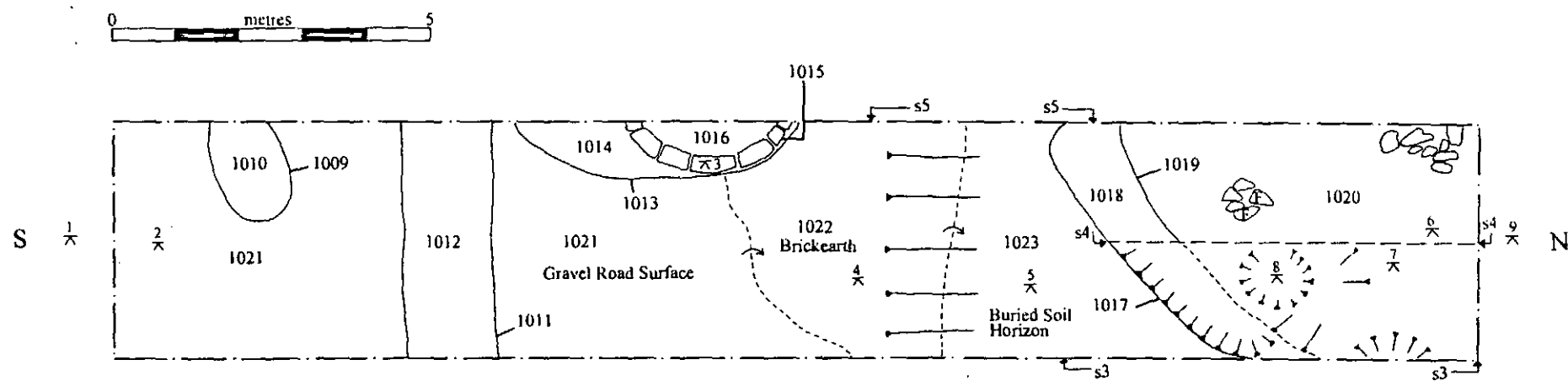




Levels

1.	67.30
2.	65.71
3.	65.78
4.	66.90
5.	66.01
6.	67.18
s1.	66.50

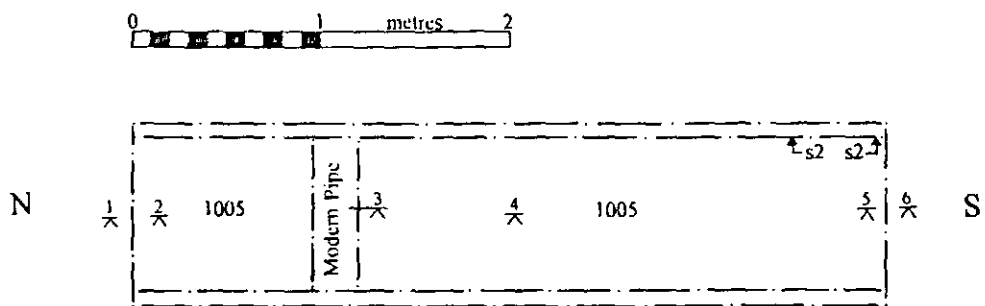
Trench 1



Levels

1.	67.49
2.	66.87
3.	66.81
4.	66.80
5.	66.48
6.	66.25
7.	66.12
8.	65.03
9.	67.17
s3.	67.00
s4.	66.00
s5.	67.00

Trench 2

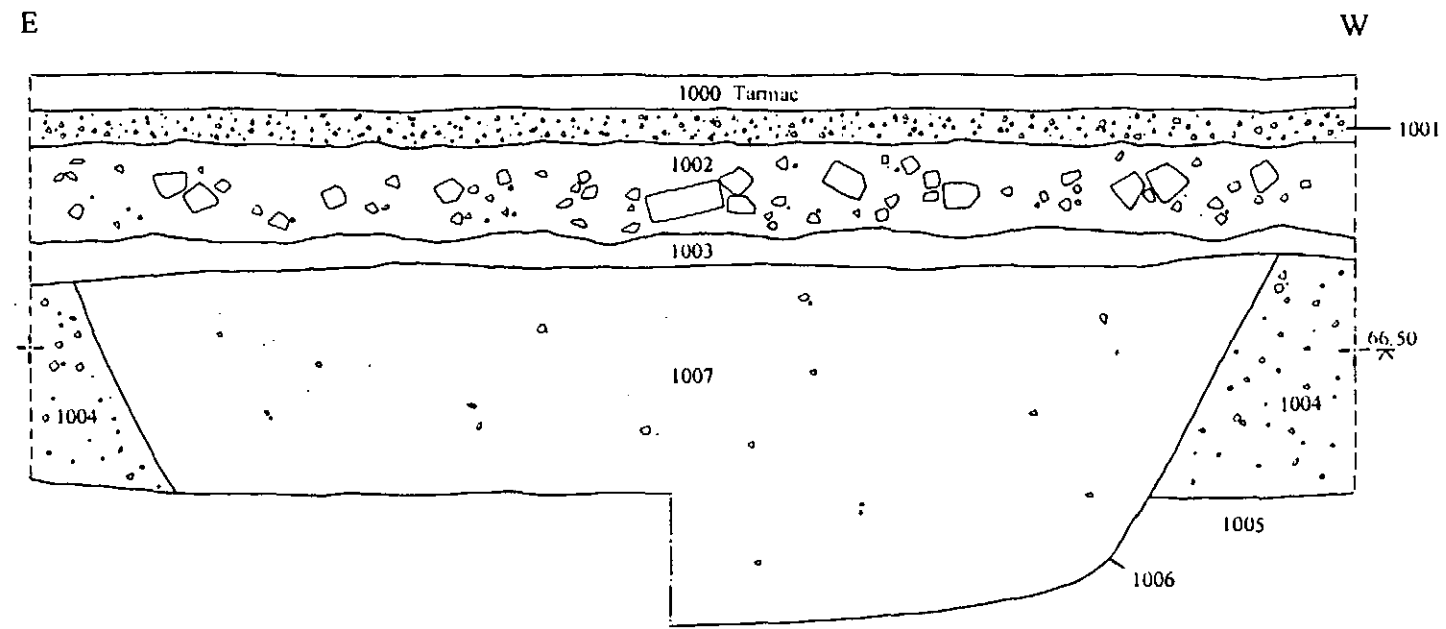


Levels

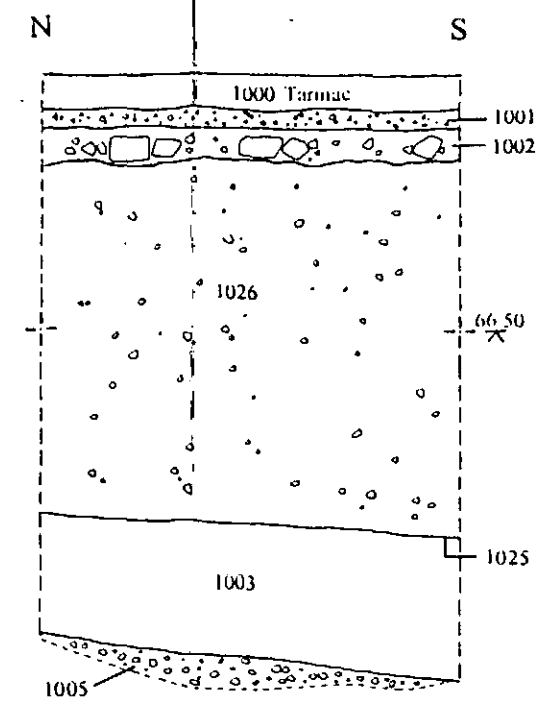
1.	67.21
2.	65.87
3.	66.42
4.	65.67
5.	65.54
6.	67.18
s2.	66.50

Trench 3

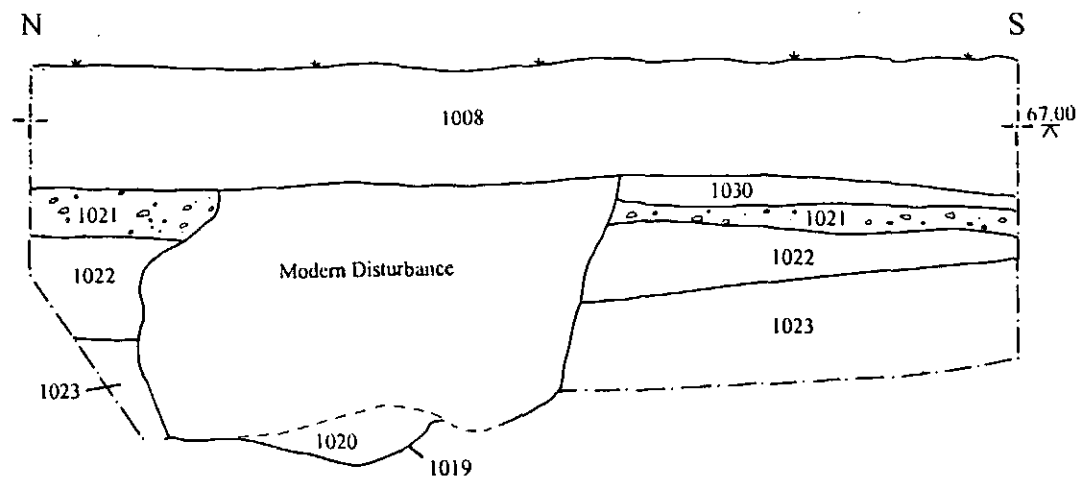
Fig4. Trench Plans



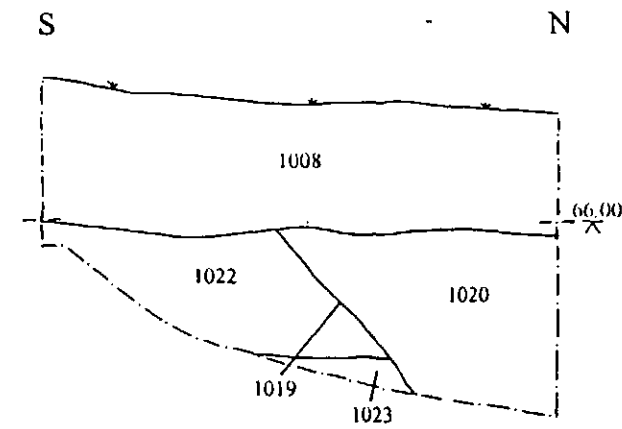
Section 1 Trench 1



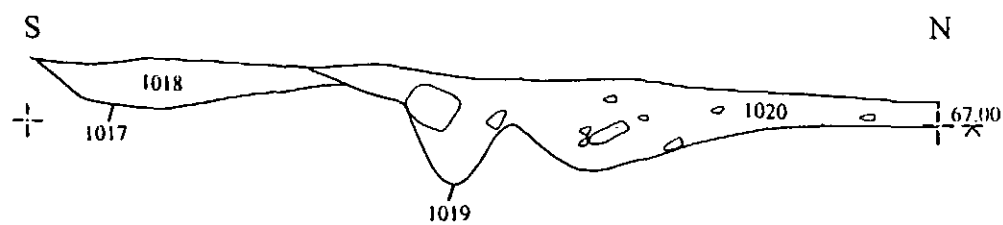
Section 2
Trench 3



Section 3 Trench 2



Section 5 Trench 2



Section 4 Trench 2



Fig 5. Archaeological Sections

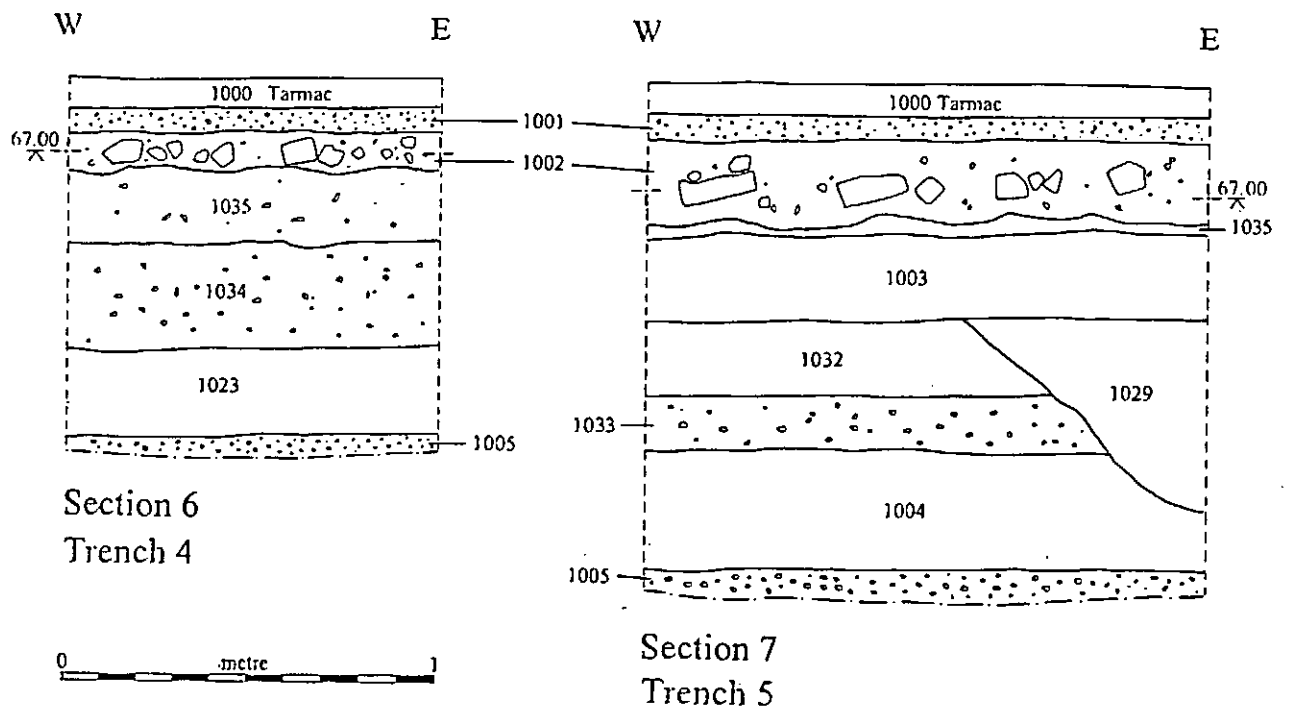


Fig 6. Archaeological Sections