

TRIAL EXCAVATIONS
AT
DRYHAM LANE, NORTH CAVE
May 1992

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Introduction

The trial excavations reported here were carried out in May 1992 by the Humberside Archaeology Unit in advance of quarrying of sand and gravel by Humberside Aggregates and Excavations Ltd., on land north of Dryham Lane and west of Cliffe Road, North Cave (Site code NC92; Ordnance Survey Grid Reference SE 8840 3300; Fig. 1). A strip along the southern edge of the field had already been quarried, and the remainder of the field, awaiting quarrying, was partially under crop. A geophysical survey of the unquarried area, commissioned by the company from Mike Griffiths & Associates, revealed anomalies which indicated the presence of possible archaeological features, and trial excavation was deemed necessary to confirm the results of the survey and assess the nature of any surviving archaeological features.

A subsequent visit was paid to the site in July 1992 to survey the positions of ditches observed in the quarry face, and these could be related to features recorded during the excavations.

Previous archaeological work

Excavations carried out in 1986 and 1987, on land to the north-west of the current site, in advance of sand and gravel extraction by Tarmac, revealed remains of a substantial Iron Age/Romano-British rural settlement comprising roundhouses, ironworking hearths, enclosures, trackways, and numerous boundary and drainage ditches. That site was first located on aerial photographs, and photographs taken further east, combined with the results of the geophysical survey, suggest that the settlement, or at least the field systems associated with it, extend into this site.

The trial excavations

The excavations were carried out by two staff of the Humberside Archaeology Unit, with the aid of a mechanical excavator provided the quarry company. Three trenches were dug, positioned so as to intersect features detected on the geophysical survey (Fig. 2). Topsoil was removed by machine to expose the sandy sub-soil, and the exposed surface was then cleaned using hand-tools to reveal any differences in soil colour and compaction which betrayed the existence of the features. A portion of the fill of each feature was then excavated to reveal its profile, and context numbers were assigned to each feature and fill. Records were made on the *pro forma* sheets used on all of the Unit's excavations, plans and sections were drawn, and photographs taken. Finds were labelled with reference to the numbered features.

Trench 1

(Fig. 3 and Fig. 4, section 1)

This east-west trench was 20m long and 1.30m wide, and was designed to cut across the line of the feature detected in grid square 59 on the geophysical survey. The ground surface was reasonably flat, with an average level of 10.23m OD. On examination the feature turned out to be a large ditch (11), aligned north-east/south-west. It was 3.2m wide by 0.8m deep, with concave sides and

base (at 9.25m OD). It contained a fill of soft, dark grey brown sandy silt with gravel inclusions (12), and iron slag and pottery were recovered from this fill. Ditch 11 had been re-cut along its east side by ditch 13, which was 2.32m wide and 0.67m deep. The fill (14) was a very dark brown sandy silt with no obvious inclusions. Overlying these was 0.3m of topsoil.

Trench 2

(Fig. 3 and Fig. 4, section 2)

This lay 20m to the east of Trench 1 and was of similar dimensions. It cut across features detected in grid square 58 of the geophysical survey. On excavation a series of ditches, all aligned north-east/south-west, were uncovered. The earliest, ditch 5, was at least 1.5m wide and 0.5m deep, and had a steeply sloping east side and a flat base (at 9.77m OD). The west side had been cut by a later ditch. The fill (4) was a mid brown, soft sandy silt containing some pieces of gravel and iron slag. Three metres to the west of ditch 5 was another ditch (7), 1.35m wide by 0.46m deep. Its fill (8) was a dark grey brown sandy silt with occasional pieces of gravel. The east edge of this ditch had also been cut by a later ditch.

Cutting both of the above ditches (5 and 7) was ditch 3. It was 2.35m wide and 0.6m deep, and contained a fill (4) of soft dark grey brown sandy silt with gravel inclusions. Iron slag, pottery and bone were recovered from it. A further 5m to the west of was another ditch (9), on a similar alignment. It was very similar to ditch 7 in form and dimensions. Its fill (10) was a soft grey brown sandy silt.

All of these features were covered by between 0.3m and 0.4m of topsoil. Ground surface sloped gently down from east to west by 0.18m, from 10.60m OD to 10.42m OD.

Trench 3

(Fig. 3 and Fig. 4, sections 3 and 4)

Trench 3 was located in the north-east corner of the field to examine possible features in grid squares 48 and 49 on the geophysical survey. To this aim an L-shaped trench was excavated, the north-south arm being 15m long and the east-west arm being 20m long. The ground surface in this part of the field sloped down from east to west by 0.43m (11.13m OD to 10.7m OD). Directly beneath the topsoil was a 0.5m-thick layer of brown sand (15), sealing all of the archaeological features. This is assumed to have been part of a more widespread layer of windblown sand at the base of the steeply sloping ground to the east. Four features were revealed upon the removal of layer 15.

At the junction of the two trench arms was east-west aligned ditch (23), 1.8m wide and 0.6m deep, with steeply sloping sides and a flat base (at 9.71m OD). It contained two distinct fills; the upper, 24, was a soft mid brown sandy silt, 0.26m thick, overlying 25, a light grey sandy silt with gravel inclusions, 0.34m thick.

The other three features were located in the east-west arm of the trench and were all aligned north-east/south-west. Feature 18 was 8.45m wide by 0.35m deep, and its sides sloped down at around 45° to a flat base (at 9.76m OD). It contained two fills; the upper (19) was a soft brown sandy silt, 0.13m thick, and the lower (20) was a soft mid grey sandy silt with gravel inclusions, 0.12m thick. The lower fill was quite wet in comparison to the fills of other features. Extension of the trench to the north failed to establish either an end to 18, nor a continuation of east-west ditch 23. Immediately to the east of 18 was a small ditch (16), 1.4m wide and 0.24m deep, and containing a soft grey sandy silt (17). In section it appeared that feature 18 had cut the west edge of this ditch. On the west side of 18 was another ditch (21), 1.4m wide and 0.32m deep. The fill (22) was a soft light brown sandy silt very similar to 19, the upper fill of 18. Ditch 21 appears to have cut feature 18.

Feature 18 was probably a trackway flanked by ditches 16 and 21, though while ditch 16 would appear to have turned eastward and continued as ditch 23, trackway 18 continued further northwards.

Ditches observed in quarry face

(Fig.5)

A subsequent visit was made to the site on 24th July 1992, to survey the positions of ditches revealed by quarrying approximately 50m south of Trenches 1 and 2. It was possible to correlate these features with those recorded in the trenches; all of them had become much shallower and would have terminated a few metres to the south of the quarry edge. The exception was ditch 3, which was noted in a section of unquarried gravel another 30m to the south.

Discussion

As discussed above, the field systems associated with the settlement excavated to the north-west have been seen to extend into the area of the site, and the various ditches recorded would seem to have been elements of these. The ditches presumably defined fields and trackways, and the fact that they had been re-cut and re-positioned a number of times indicates land management over a protracted period. The finds recovered, particularly the pottery and iron slag (see below), suggest that these features were contemporary with the earliest phases of the excavated settlement (late Iron Age; 1st century BC/1st century AD), represented by roundhouses and iron smithing hearths, and it is conceivable that other buildings and industrial features lay nearby.

The Finds

Apart from five pieces of iron slag, weighing a total of 1190 grammes, from machine-excavated spoil, the finds were recovered from the fills of three ditches, two in Trench 2 and one in Trench 1.

The Pottery P Didsbury

All of the five sherds recovered are from coarsely tempered, thickly potted, large hand-made vessels. Original tempering survives in the single body sherd

from context 12 (mainly limestone and a coarse grained quartz sandstone, with possible iron slag inclusions) and in the extremely sooted body sherd from context 4 (main ingredients crystalline calcite and shell with some possible chalk). The remaining four sherds from context 4 are leached of their original temper, though the largest sherd displays clear shell voids, and the rim and smaller body sherd have organic and probable shell voids also.

The main tempering materials in these sherds were in use at North Cave (NC86/87) from at least the 4th or 3rd century BC until the middle of the 2nd century AD, when large-scale reception of Romano-British pottery commenced. It is worth noting that calcareous temper only survived in the NC86/87 material when it came from organic-rich pit fills.

Iron Slag

Iron slag was recovered from three ditch fills. Context 4 produced 3 pieces weighing a total of 1943g, context 6 produced 2 pieces weighing 2264g and context 12 produced 9 pieces weighing 3810g.

Bone

A horse's tooth (molar) and a fragment of a pig's scapula, both from context 4, were the only pieces of bone to be found.

Conclusions

From the work carried out in these trial excavations it is clear that the anomalies detected by the geophysical survey were archaeological features, and that these were elements of field systems associated either with the settlement excavated to the north-west in 1986 and 1987, or an eastern continuation of it.

Acknowledgements

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The text is the work of Dave Atkinson, with contributions from Ken Steedman and Peter Didsbury. The illustrations are the work of Dave Marchant and Dave Atkinson.



Fig. 1: Site location.

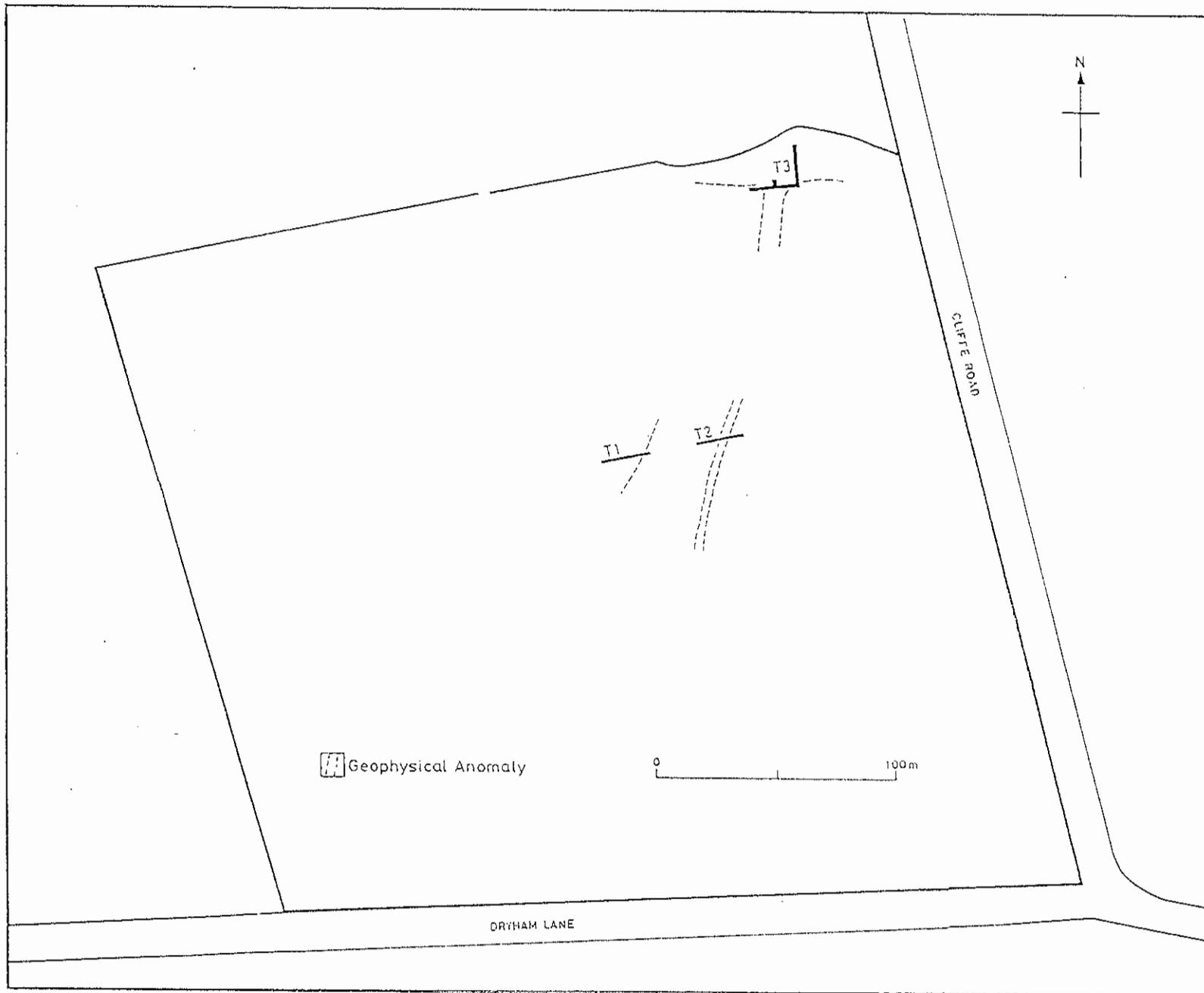


Fig. 2: Position of trenches in relation to anomalies on the geophysical survey.

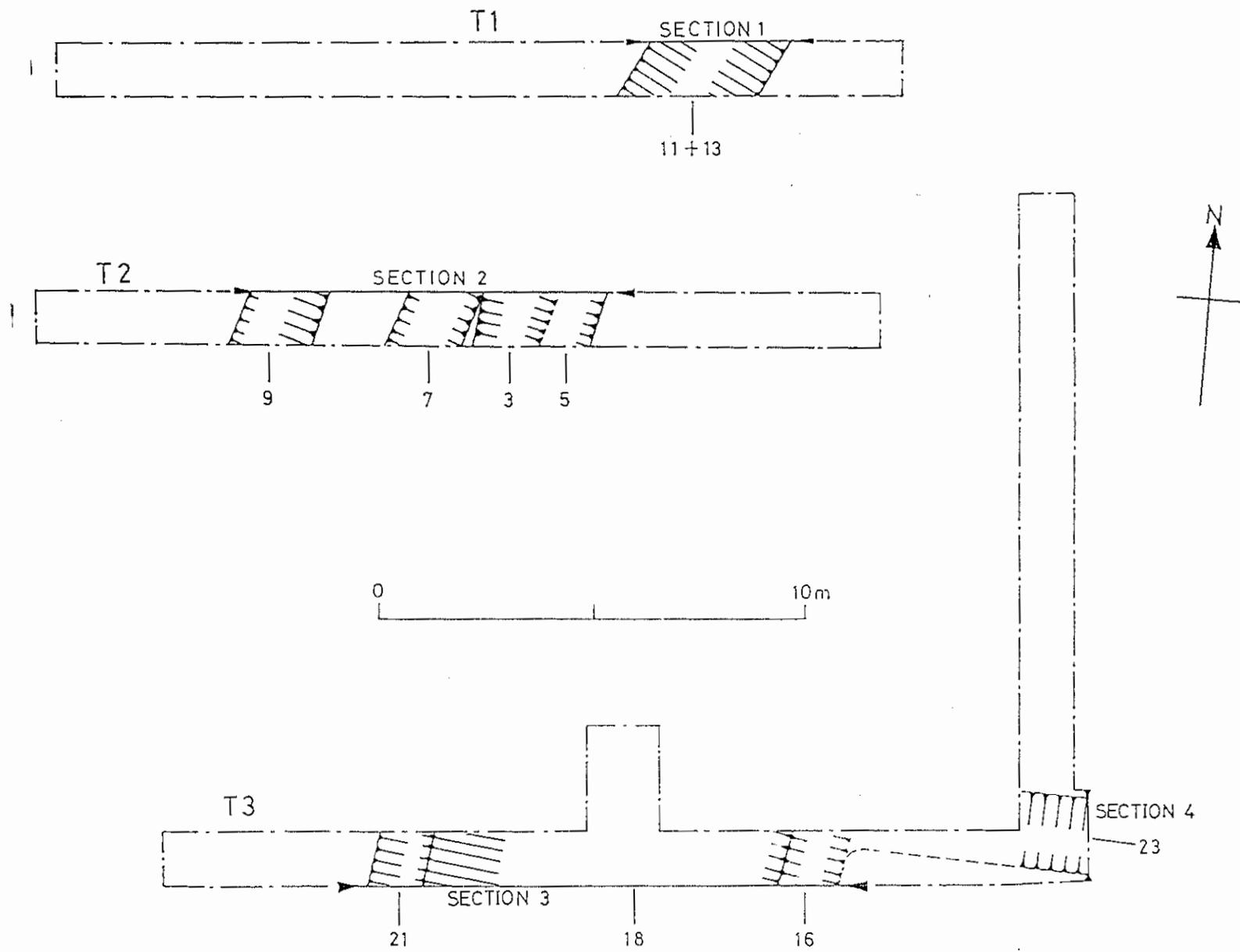


Fig. 3: Trenches 1-3. The excavated features in plan.

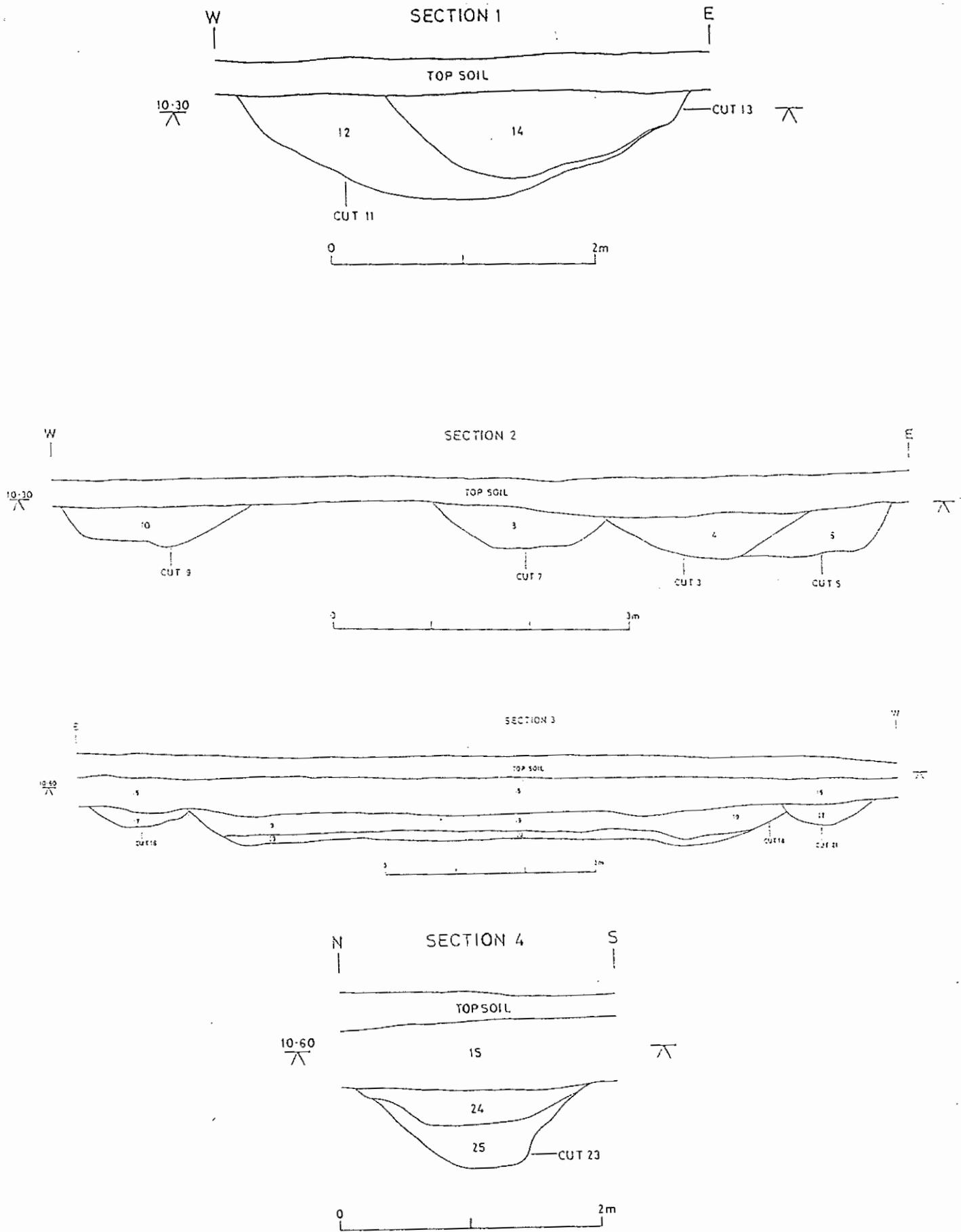


Fig. 4: Sections through excavated features.

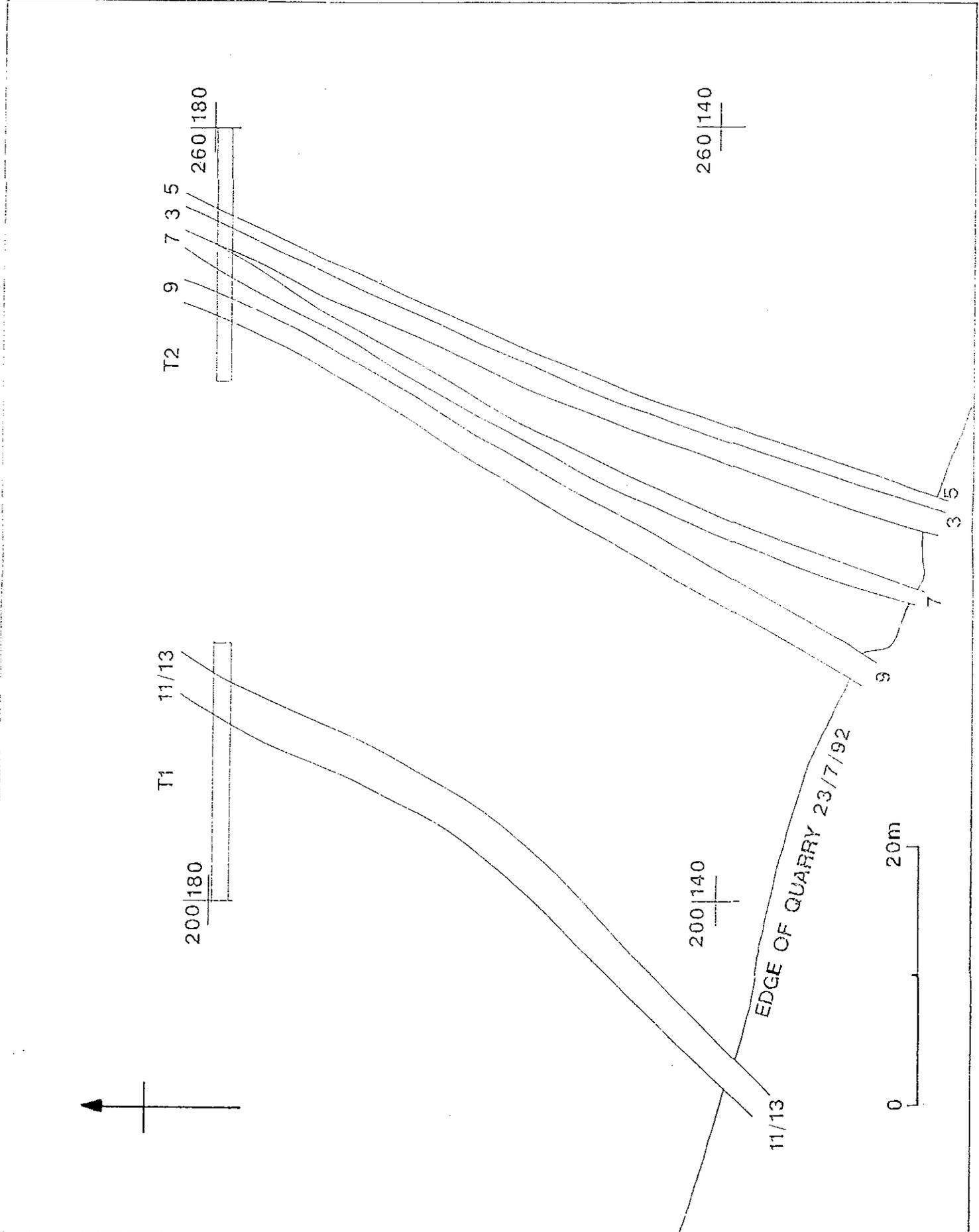


Fig. 5: Continuations of ditches excavated in Trenches T1 and T2

