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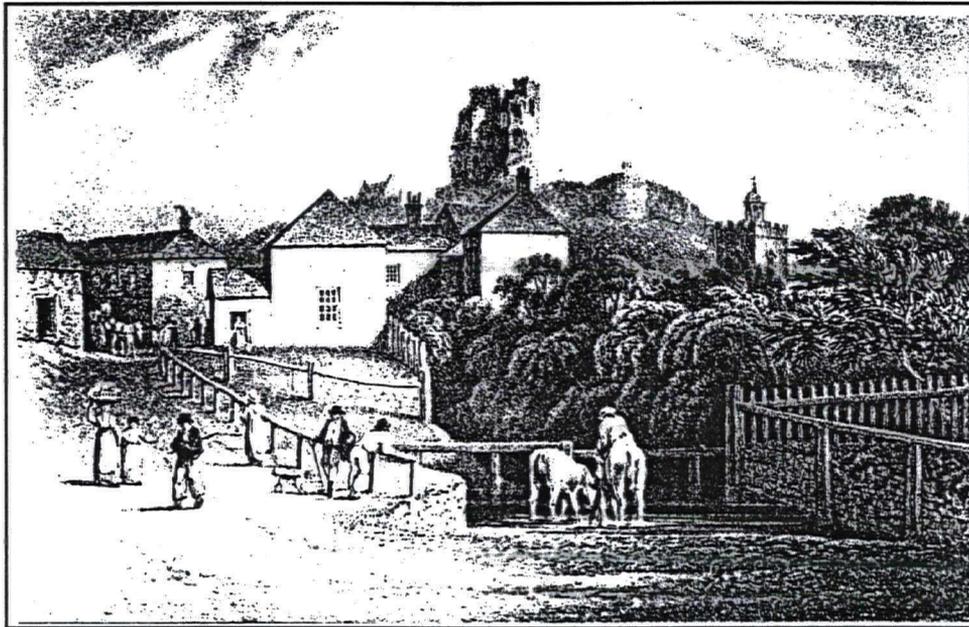
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*An Archaeological Evaluation  
of the former Convent School,  
Queen Street,  
Scarborough*



*A view of the site from Castle Road in 1824 from a lithograph F. Nicholson. The waterfilled ditch in the foreground is the last vestige of the town moat. The northern boundary of the present site is hidden among the trees (courtesy of Scarborough Library).*

by Trevor Pearson

**SCARBOROUGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
INTERIM REPORT NUMBER 22: 1996**

## 1: Introduction (Figure 1)

Between May 17th and 19th 1996, the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society undertook an archaeological evaluation of the grounds of the former Convent School situated off Queen Street, Scarborough (NGR TA 042 889, site code STS96) to specifications set by the North Yorkshire County Council Heritage Section. The work was undertaken at the request of Harrison Construction of Malton whose development scheme for the site proposes the conversion of existing 19th century school buildings into flats, the demolition of a 1960's block and the construction of two rows of houses within the area of the former school playground. The latter is currently a tarmac sports pitch used by the YMCA. In order to evaluate the nature of archaeological deposits on the site, the County Council Heritage Section proposed the excavation of two trenches in the area of the playground prior to the start of building works.

During the course of the weekend, a second team from the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society excavated a trench in the grounds of YMCA property to the south of the former school playground. The results of this excavation are reported on here (appendix one) because they have a bearing on the archaeological picture of the development area.

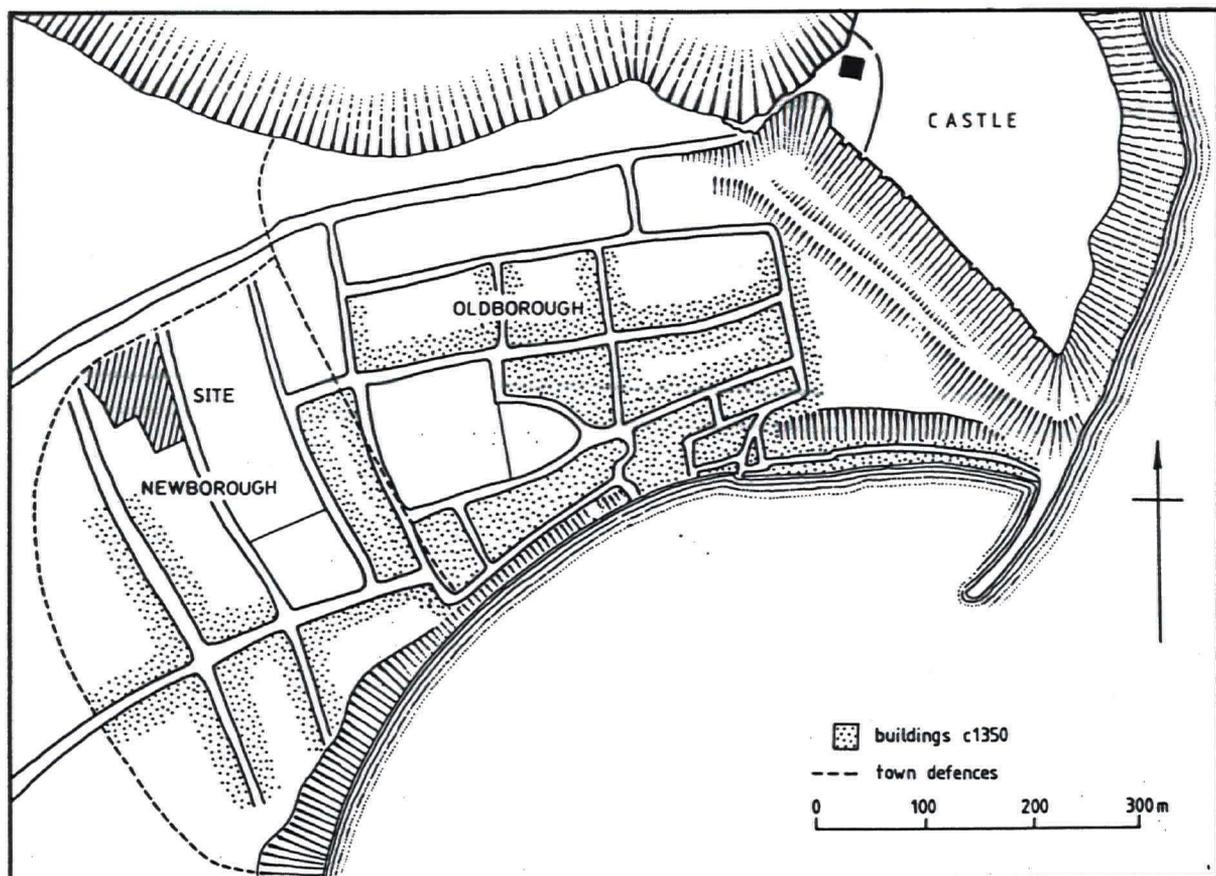


Figure 1 Map of medieval Scarborough showing the location of the site

## 2: The Site and its Setting (Figure 2)

The former playground is bounded on the west by YMCA buildings fronting on to St Thomas Street and to the east by buildings belonging to the former Convent School. To the south the ground level drops by some two metres to an area that was formerly the school garden. It is now partially in the ownership of the YMCA and though predominantly grass, an area has been tarmaced and is used by the YMCA for parking. The wall forming the northern boundary of the playground is of several periods of construction. On the west the wall is constructed of coursed stonework mostly obscured by modern render (Plate 1). Further to the east, masonry survives to an unknown extent behind a free-standing wall of 19th century brick whilst the eastern end of the boundary is constructed of modern brickwork with no trace of masonry visible. This boundary is reputed to

follow the line of the town's medieval defences and the stonework is thought to be a surviving part of the town wall constructed during the reign of Richard III (see below).

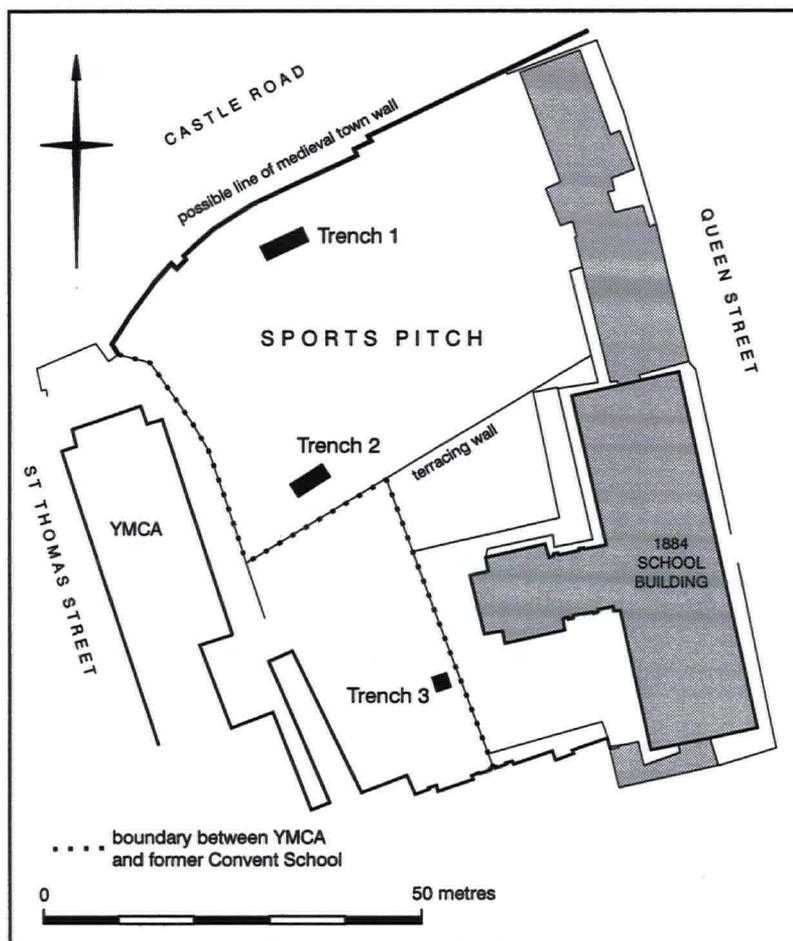


Figure 2 The site showing the location of trenches

## 3: Site History

Although medieval pottery has reportedly been recovered from within the grounds of the Convent School by P. Farmer (1), there is no record of any excavation having taken place previously in the vicinity. Castle Road, 20m to the north of the site, is believed to be a Roman routeway leading to the 4th century signal station on the Castle Headland and Roman artefacts have reportedly been discovered either side of Castle Road about 150m east of the present site, during excavations in the 1960s by P. Farmer(2).

In the middle ages, the site lay within the boundaries of the medieval town. It was part of the Newborough which was a grid of streets added to the western side of an existing settlement which later went by the name of the Oldborough. Documentary evidence indicates that both the Oldborough and the Newborough were established during the reign of King Henry II in the latter half of the 12th century (3). As was stated above, the town defences, which ran between the North and South Bays and protected the landward approach to the town, are thought to have run along the line of the site's northern boundary. The defences probably date back to the creation of the

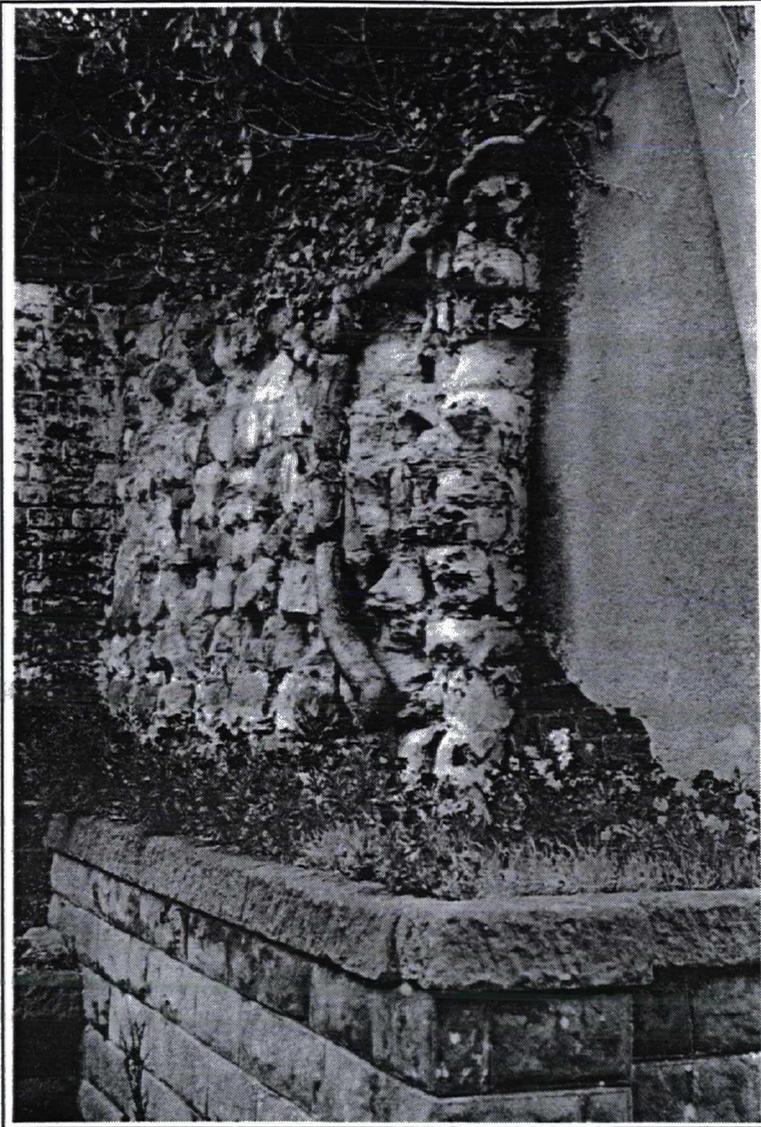


Plate 1 Possible medieval stonework exposed in the northern boundary wall

Bowling Green", whilst Vincent's map of 1747 (figure 3c) depicts the western half of the site, in a somewhat stylised manner, as a formal garden with a chequerboard design of paths, shrubs and trees in nine compartments (9). The map which accompanied Hinderwell's *History of Scarborough* published in 1798 (figure 3d) also shows a garden on the same site, although of a different outline to that shown by Vincent, and with a design of only six compartments (10). Both Cossins' and Vincent's maps show a road separating the northern edge of the bowling green and formal gardens from the town defences. This intra-mural road was presumably part of the medieval street layout of the Newborough. It ran between St Thomas Street on the west and Auborough Street on the east and would have given access to the rear of the defences.

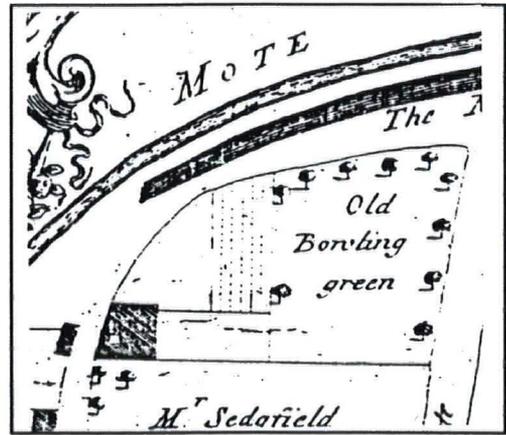
In the 19th century the area was still open ground and the boundaries of what is now the sports pitch can be picked out quite clearly on Wood's survey of 1828 (figure 3e). In view of the discoveries made during the excavation, it is significant that by the 19th century the bowling green was on a different site to where it is shown on the 1725 map. Wood's 1828 survey shows the bowling green to the south of where it was located in 1725. The Convent School building was constructed in 1884 to the design of F.A. Walters (12).

Newborough in the 12th century and for most of the middle ages evidently consisted of a ditch and earthen bank without a wall (4). According to the Tudor antiquarian, Leland, writing in the middle of the 16th century (5), Richard III "began to wall a piece of the town with squared stone" in the late 15th century and the earliest view of Scarborough which is contemporary with Leland's description (6), shows a stretch of stone wall topped by battlements in the vicinity of the present site (see figure 3a).

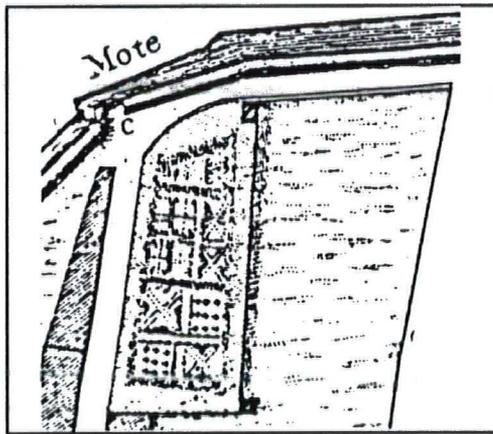
Apart from its proximity to the defences, little else is known about the site in the middle ages. However, it is clear from documentary evidence that in the 14th and 15th centuries the north of the Newborough was open ground, described in contemporary documents as "Town Waste" (7). The Tudor view referred to above shows buildings in the general vicinity of the site but the earliest town map of 1725 published by Cossins, reinforces the view that this part of the town was relatively uninhabited (8). Cossin's 1725 survey (figure 3b) labels the eastern half of the site as the "Old



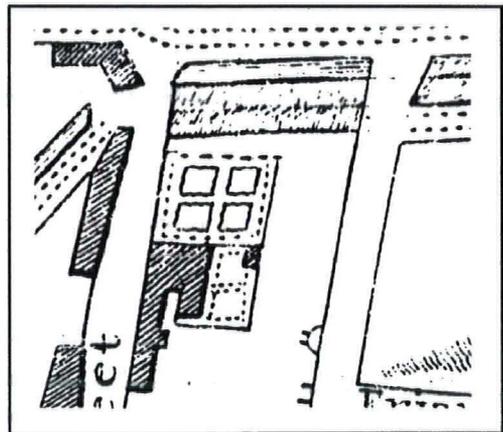
(a) View in the British Museum dated around 1540



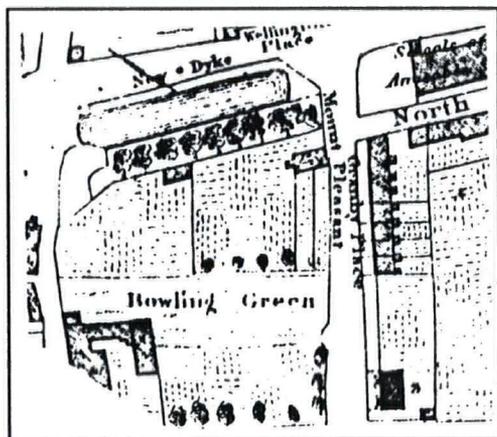
(b) Cossins 1725



(c) Vincent 1747



(d) Hinderwell 1798



(e) Wood 1828

Figure 3 Maps of the site from the 16th - 19th centuries

## 4: The Excavation

Two trenches were opened by machine in locations specified by the County Council Heritage Section in consultation with Harrison Construction. The results are summarised below.

### TRENCH ONE (figure 4 and plate 2)

Trench One, measuring 6m x 2m was laid out parallel to, and 5 m from, the northern boundary of the sports pitch. A mechanical excavator removed the tarmac surface, underlying hardcore and modern soil layers to a maximum depth of 60cm after which excavation proceeded by hand. The sequence of deposits encountered were as follows:-

#### PHASE ONE MEDIEVAL

A reddy-brown compacted clayey soil (layer 107) containing occasional flecks of charcoal overlaid natural glacial clay. It merged into an overlying more greeny-brown clayey soil (layer 104). Both produced exclusively medieval pottery and indicate the gradual build-up of soil on what was probably open ground for much of the middle ages.

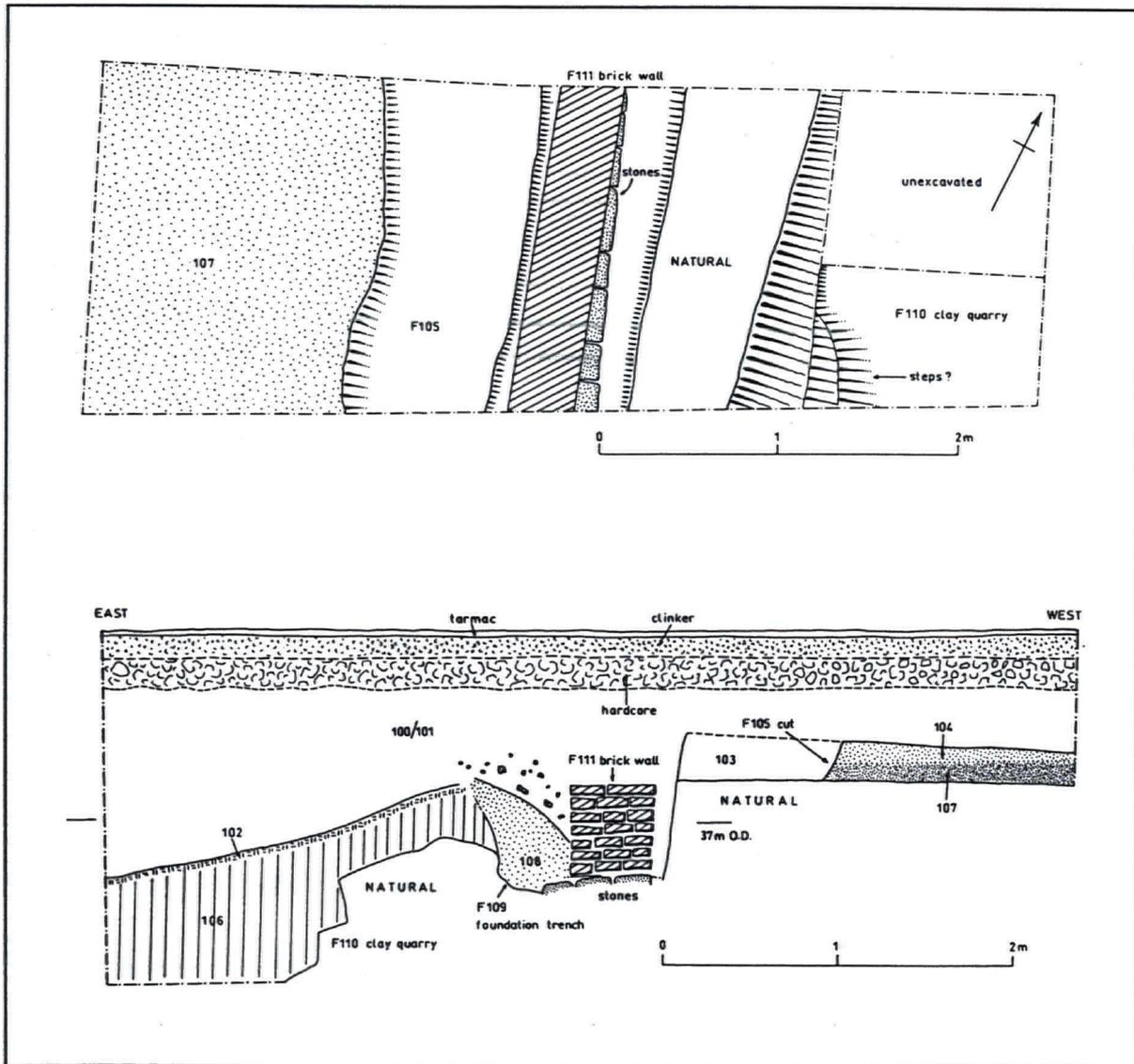


Figure 4 Plan (above) and section (below) of Trench One

## PHASE TWO 18TH CENTURY/19TH CENTURY

A steep sided feature (F110) cutting into the natural clay was partially exposed in the eastern end of the trench. Only one side of this feature fell within the confines of the trench and its overall size is therefore impossible to determine. Excavation was also suspended before the bottom of the feature was reached and therefore its depth is also unknown. The edge of the feature exposed in the trench was found to be slightly undercut and had two shallow steps cut into it. It was backfilled with a greeny-brown compacted clayey soil (layer 106) containing charcoal inclusions and brick fragments. Layer 106 was overlaid by a lens of orange clay (layer 102) containing soil inclusions which dipped from west to east into feature F110. To the west of F110, a second cut, F105, was discovered running parallel with the edge of F110 and cutting through the medieval deposits. It may be that this cut is the outer edge of the clay quarry F110.

Although the overall size of feature F110 was not ascertained, the step-like ledges cut into the side of the feature suggest it may be deep and that steps had to be cut into the side to facilitate access. The feature is quite probably the remnants of a clay quarry dug to provide material for brick and tile making. The pottery contained in the backfill is consistent with a date in the 18th or early 19th century.

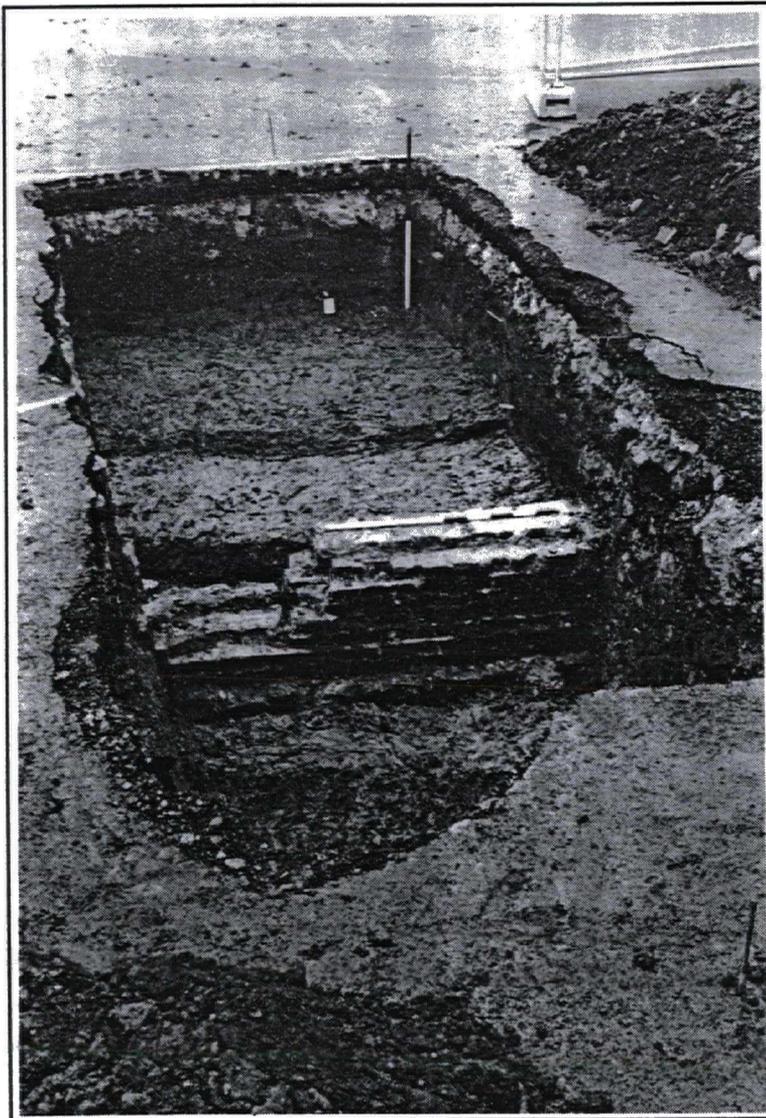


Plate 2 Trench One looking west showing the brick wall (F111)

## PHASE THREE 18TH/19TH CENTURY

A brick wall (F111) resting on a single course of stone was constructed parallel with the edge of the presumed clay quarry. It was constructed of 2" thick bricks and survived to a maximum height of seven courses. The foundation trench for the wall (F109) cut into the quarry backfill and was itself filled by a grey silty soil (layer 108).

The character of the bricks suggest an 18th/early 19th century date. It was noted that the stonework at the base of the brick wall was slightly offset suggesting that the two may not be contemporary and that the stones could be the footings of an earlier wall of unknown date. The brick wall may have been part of a building of which all other traces, such as floor surfaces, have disappeared. Equally possible, however, is that it was a simply a garden boundary wall.

## PHASE FOUR 19TH CENTURY

A layer of dark, loose soil covered the entire trench and was partially removed by machine (layer 100) and partially by hand (layer 101). The soil contained brick and mortar fragments and was quite damp at the time of first exposure. One consequence of this condition is that twigs and larger pieces of timber are preserved in the deposit.

It is unlikely that this depth of soil has accumulated by natural processes alone and probably derives from landscaping of the site at the time the Convent School was constructed.

The hardcore and tarmac at the surface of the site brings the excavated sequence up to the present day.

### TRENCH TWO (Figure 5)

Trench Two, measuring 5m x 2m was excavated 4m from, and parallel to, the southern boundary of the sports pitch entirely by mechanical excavator, apart from manual cleaning of the trench sides to examine the stratigraphy and recover pottery dating evidence. The entire trench was excavated to a depth of 1.2m followed by the excavation of a sondage in the centre of the trench to a depth of 2.6m at which depth the natural clay surface was exposed.

Exclusively medieval pottery was recovered from a layer of orange-brown clayey soil which had accumulated on the natural surface and also from the overlying layer of dark grey soil. Both layers were given the same number (201) and are probably the equivalent of the medieval soil layers 104/107 encountered in Trench One. Layer 201 was a metre thick and was at a depth of 1.6m from the existing ground surface. No features were observed in the cleaned section cutting the medieval deposits or the underlying natural ground surface.

The 1.6m thick stratigraphy above the medieval level comprised mostly featureless soil within which three horizons could be distinguished. Immediately above the medieval level was a black, stone-free and humic deposit 40cm thick, overlaid by a 20cm thick layer of more clayey soil. This was in turn overlaid by a 60cm thick layer of dark brown soil containing brick fragments. As in Trench One, the uppermost level consisted of hardcore below the tarmac of the sports ground.

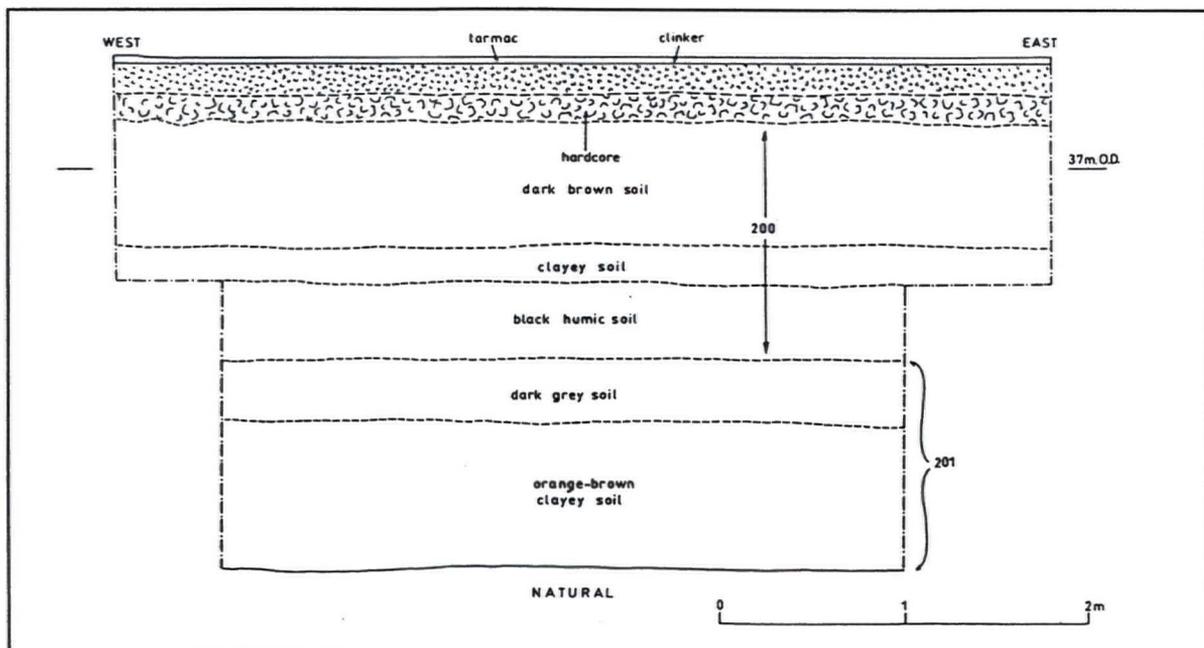


Figure 5 Section of Trench Two

## *(5) Discussion*

The excavation has established that medieval deposits survive at the north end of the former sports ground within 60cm of the surface sloping southwards to a depth of 1.6m from the surface at the south end of the sports ground. Although the levels examined in Trenches One and Two contained no evidence of medieval structures, the trench excavated in the grounds of the YMCA exposed medieval features cutting the natural surface. The same occurrence might reasonably be anticipated within the development site.

The deposits which overlie and protect the medieval stratigraphy and give a level surface to the site could date from the construction of the school or be part of an earlier episode of landscaping connected with the creation of gardens across the site which are depicted on the 18th and 19th century maps of the town previously discussed. The brick wall encountered in Trench One is probably a survivor from the gardens.

Evidence that clay quarrying has taken place on the site in the 18th or 19th centuries means that medieval deposits will have been destroyed over an area that is as yet undefined. If this quarrying took place extensively over the north-east corner of the site, it may explain why the town's bowling green had moved from there to the lower area on the south by the time of Wood's map of 1828.

The excavation shed little light on the character of the town's defences beyond the fact that there was no trace in Trench One of the presumed medieval road shown immediately behind the defences on 18th century maps. Indeed, if North Terrace to the east of the site, which links the northern end of Queen Street to Auborough Street, preserves the line of this route then it would mean the line of the medieval town wall was north of the present site, closer to Castle Road. The stone wall visible today may therefore be a surviving boundary of the bowling green and garden shown on Cossins' and Vincent's maps respectively.

## *(6) Summary and Recommendations (Figure 6)*

The results of the excavation have demonstrated the likely preservation of extensive areas of medieval deposits within the area of the sports pitch in areas not affected by clay quarrying. The discoveries made in the grounds of the YMCA (see appendix one) indicate that medieval deposits and features survive in the lower part of the former Convent grounds to the south of the sports pitch.

The value of the stratigraphy on this site is that it almost certainly comprises the largest area of intact medieval deposits surviving within the Newborough. Other parts of the Newborough have been extensively developed during the last century leading to the destruction or fragmentation of archaeological remains. The former Convent site is therefore an important resource of archaeological information relating to the development of the Newborough in the middle ages and it is imperative that, as far as possible, measures are taken to ensure its future preservation. Where preservation is not practical then it is recommended that further archaeological excavations take place to record those areas facing destruction. It is suggested that the following strategies are adopted during the construction work:-

### **Areas where monitoring should be undertaken by an archaeologist during the building works:-**

#### **AREA A**

*Proposal:* demolition of 1960's block fronting on to Queen Street and replacement by new flats (Block 1)

*Assessment:* archaeological remains likely to have been seriously disturbed or destroyed by the existing building.

*Response:* inspection of new foundation trenches by an archaeologist would be sufficient to record any archaeological remains which might survive.

#### **AREA B**

*Proposal:* minor repair and refurbishment of the northern boundary wall.

*Assessment:* the wall is a multi-period structure which may preserve at its core part of the town's medieval wall.

*Response:* refurbishment work should proceed in close consultation with an archaeologist to allow for examination and possible recording of stonework and structural details exposed when modern render and brickwork is removed.

#### **AREA C**

*Proposal:* construction of houses (Block 3) and gardens at the south end of the site.

*Assessment:* depth of post-medieval stratigraphy indicated by Trench Two is probably sufficient to preserve underlying medieval deposits as long as foundations do not penetrate more than one metre from the existing ground surface.

*Response:* an archaeologist should inspect the groundworks to record any post-medieval features exposed in foundation trenches and service trenches.

### **Areas where the ground level should be raised or building foundations should be rafted.**

#### **AREA D**

*Proposal:* construction of houses (Block 2) and adjacent car parking for 15 cars.

*Assessment:* Trench One has demonstrated that medieval deposits survive within 60cm of the existing ground surface in this part of the site.

*Response:* after the removal of the tarmac the ground level should be restored to at least the same

height to ensure no disturbance of medieval stratigraphy in the area of the car park and around the houses. The house foundations should be rafted for the same reason.

**Areas where further archaeological investigation should take place in advance of construction work.**

#### **AREA E**

*Proposal:* construction of access road and adjacent car park for 12 cars

*Assessment:* the depth at which medieval deposits are preserved in these areas is unknown as neither is in close proximity to either of the evaluation trenches.

*Response:* the scale of disturbance anticipated in both these areas should be clarified by the builder and where lowering of the ground surface cannot be avoided then construction work should be preceded by an archaeological evaluation to determine the depth and character of medieval deposits.

#### **AREA F**

*Proposal:* landscaping around existing Convent building

*Assessment:* the trench excavated in the grounds of the YMCA established the survival of medieval deposits within 20cm of the existing ground surface. Consequently even minor landscaping around the Convent building could destroy or damage medieval stratigraphy.

*Response:* an archaeological evaluation of this area should be undertaken to determine the depth and character of surviving medieval deposits.

#### **AREA G**

*Proposal:* construction of a graded slope between the rear of Block 1 and the car park to the west.

*Assessment:* the grading back of the slope at the rear of Block 1 will destroy an area approx 8m wide parallel with block 1. The character of archaeological deposits in this area is unknown.

*Response:* Preservation of deposits in this area is not an option consequently an archaeological evaluation of this area should be undertaken to determine the depth and character of surviving medieval deposits.

#### **AREA H**

*Proposal:* creation of gardens between Block 2 and the northern boundary of the site.

*Assessment:* the area of these gardens is archaeologically very sensitive because remains relating to the possible town defences are likely to be preserved within 60cm of the existing ground surface. Raising the ground level will provide some degree of protection to these deposits but it is no long term guarantee of their survival. Individual householders may be inclined to extensively remodel their gardens and therefore unwittingly destroy important archaeological information.

*response:* long term preservation cannot be guaranteed for the archaeological remains known to exist in this area. The opportunity should therefore be taken before the construction of the houses to preserve a sample area "by record"; that is to excavate an area adjacent to the possible defences as a record for the future.

**Area where no further archaeological work is required.**

#### **AREA I**

*Proposal:* refurbishment of existing Convent building.

*Assessment:* the existing building has probably destroyed all archaeological remains beneath it and therefore refurbishment poses no threat to the archaeology of the site.

*Response:* no further work necessary.

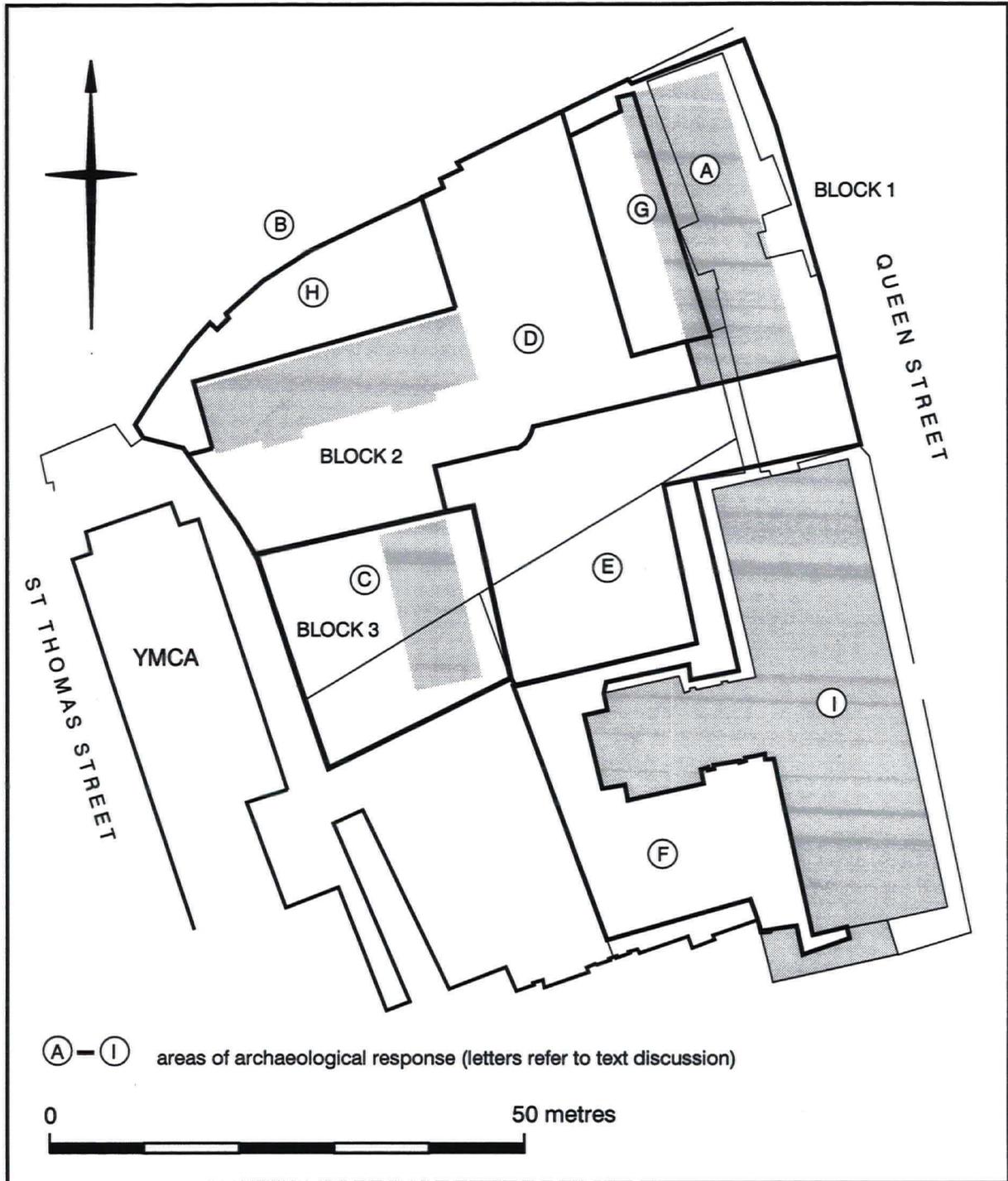


Figure 6 The site showing areas of archaeological interest referred to in the text

## *(7) Acknowledgements*

The excavation was arranged in consultation with Ashley Wilkinson and Stuart Ingle of Harrison Construction and Veronica Fiorato of the County Council Heritage Unit. The following members and friends of the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society are thanked for their assistance with the excavation:- Martin Bland, Bill Broadmore, Jan Brooksbank, Alison and Christine Clapham, Ron Davies, Kay Dunderdale, Chris Hall, Mike Horncastle, Helen Rowley, Ron Storr and Rod Tissiman. Bill Broadmore is additionally thanked for storing the tools and supplying refreshments.

## *(8) References*

- (1) Pearson, T. 1987 An Archaeological Survey of Scarborough Gazetteer Ref 13/2
- (2) Pearson 1987 Gazetteer 10/2 and 12/1
- (3) Curia Regia Rolls 1237-42, 491-2
- (4) Pearson, 1987, 22
- (5) Woodward, D. (ed) 1985 Descriptions of East Yorkshire: Leland to Defoe (East Yorkshire Local History Series No. 39), 16
- (6) British Museum Cottonian Manuscripts Aug I. ii.i
- (7) Jeayes, I.H. 1914 A Description of Documents contained in the White Vellum Book of the Scarborough Corporation, Document 29a
- (8) Cossins, J. 1725 A New and Exact Plan of the Town of Scarborough
- (9) Vincent, W. 1747 A Plan of Scarborough
- (10) Hinderwell, T. 1798 The History and Antiquities of Scarborough
- (11) Wood, J. 1828 Plan of the Town and Environs of Scarborough
- (12) Fieldhouse, R. and Barrett, J. 1973 The Streets of Scarborough, 24

## APPENDIX ONE

### *An Archaeological Excavation in the grounds of the YMCA, St Thomas Street, Scarborough*

#### INTRODUCTION

Between May 18th and 19th 1996, The Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society excavated a 2m x 2m trench in a grass area within the YMCA grounds on St Thomas Street, Scarborough (NGR TA 0425 8885; Site Code STS96 Tr 3). With the permission of Mr Wilby, the manager of the YMCA, the trench was excavated by hand to assess the likely survival of medieval deposits adjacent to the YMCA buildings. There are plans to surface the grass area to make a tarmac sports pitch.

#### THE EXCAVATION (figure 7)

A layer of black loose soil was encountered immediately below the topsoil (layer 300). At a depth of 20cm the stratigraphy changed to an orange-brown clayey soil which produced entirely medieval pottery (layer 301). This rested on the natural clay surface at a depth of 60 cm.

A shallow "U" shaped slot or gully (feature F303) and a possible posthole (feature F305) cut the natural clay surface. The posthole and northern end of the gully were excavated and entirely medieval pottery was recovered from the silty soil of their fill (layers 302 and 304 respectively). At its deepest the possible posthole cut 50cm into natural clay. The change in level within the feature could be due to a recut or be an original constructional detail.

#### DISCUSSION

The limited extent of the excavation precludes interpretation of the two features observed cutting the natural surface beyond the likelihood that they are part of a medieval structure. The importance of the excavation is that it established the existence of medieval occupation on the site as opposed to the featureless garden soil encountered in the excavation trenches to the north. Any plans to landscape and surface this part of the YMCA grounds should be preceded by further exploratory excavations to determine more precisely the nature and extent of medieval remains on the site.

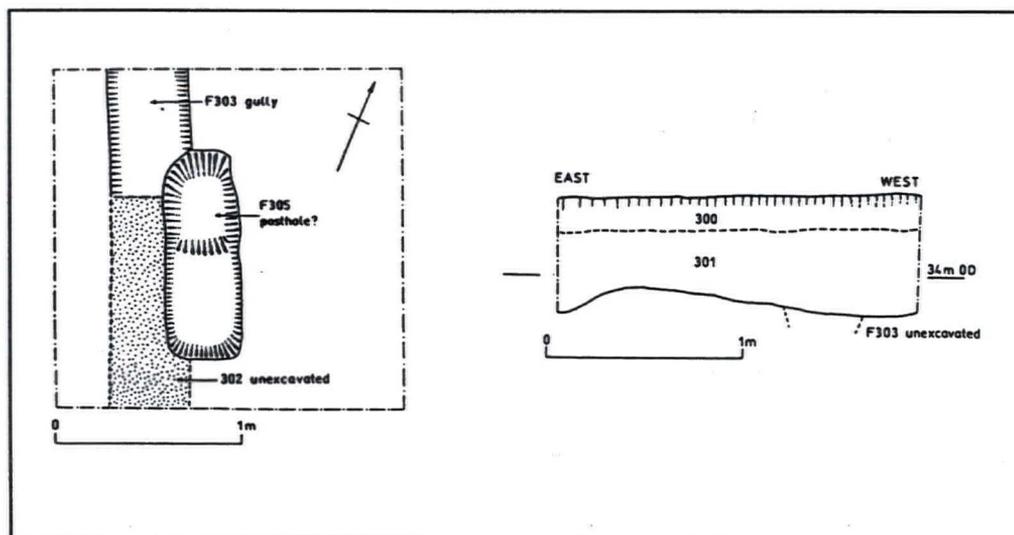


Figure 7 Plan (left) and section (right) of Trench Three