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The Trust for Lincolnshire Archaeology

An Archaeological Evaluation at Skirbeck Road, Boston, Lincolnshire.

on behalf of Wickes Plc.

December, 1989

INTRODUCTION

During the latter part of November and early December 1989 the Trust for Lincolnshire Archaeology, on behalf of Wickes Europe Plc, undertook an archaeological evaluation on the site of the disused timberyard at Skirbeck Road, Boston, prior to the redevelopment of the site.

The site, which lies outside the southern part of the Barditch, the mediaeval town boundary, but close to the River Witham, is approximately 75m southeast of Hussey Tower, part of a late 15th century manor house, and north of the site of the hospital of St. John of Jerusalem (est. 1220), its churchyard lying immediately south of the Skirbeck Road opposite the excavation.

Four trenches were proposed (Figure 1), two close to the Skirbeck Road, one in the corner of the site nearest to Hussey Tower and one in the northeast corner of the site. There were several factors limiting the precise location of these trenches, these being the thickness of concrete covering the southeastern part of the site, the position of standing buildings on the site, remnants of timber stock and access to the site for demolition contractors. In the week preceding the excavation, under the supervision of Peter McCrone, Projects Manager T.L.A., the four trench areas were stripped of hardcore and the modern makeup for the modern buildings still extant on the site. The trenches were numbered 1 - 4 in the order in which work commenced on them.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODS

To establish the date and depth of archaeological deposits a 1.50m square test pit was cut into each area, these being systematically excavated by 0.10m spits to either presumed natural or the water table. After this primary investigation, it was decided to machine to the top of the more promising deposits, and in the case of trenches 3 and 4 directly to the top of the water table.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

TRENCH 1

A trench running east - west parallel to the Skirbeck Road, 50m x 5m, was excavated, two thirds of this area to its full depth. Of the four trenches this proved to be the most interesting, having five main phases from ?late mediaeval to the 20th century.

PHASE V

Underlying a raft of modern concrete were several dumps of similar material, layers 55, 74, 89, 6, 56, 39 and 2 (section A, figure 2), a compacted grey/brown loam containing many fragments of brick and tile, possibly make up for earlier surfaces of the timberyard. These were cut by features 46, a modern land drain, 52 and 54, two small features seen only in section and 5 (section B), a ditch running east-west, having a

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sides and flat bottoms. They were different in that their fill, 34, was a clean orange sand with no inclusions. The most likely interpretation for all the pits was that they are the result of the quarrying of clay used in the production of bricks. There is no indication that they were salt pits. A possible alternative for 95 and 94 (Figure 2) is foundation trenches for a large square or rectangular building, with 94 being inserted as a secondary phase respecting the already existing footings within 95. There were no dateable finds from these features.

PHASE I

A ditch (72) approximately 3m wide, its sides sloping at 45 degrees and with a flat bottom ran north-south across the trench. It was filled by a grey silty clay with flecks of mortar and brick fragments (71). There was no suggestion as to the purpose of this feature or any dateable evidence from it.

TRENCH 2

Situated in the northwest corner of the site, the closest area to Hussey Tower, the trench was in rough ground outside the limits of the modern sheds. It was 9.0m x 1.50m and 1.20m maximum depth. The main deposit, a soft brown silt/clay alluvium (205) lay over a sticky, grey clay horizon (214), possibly an early ground surface, probably marshland. Cutting these were four features (Figure 3). At the western end a robber trench (204) running east-west was filled with a soft grey/brown loam (203) containing frequent brick, tile and mortar fragments. Parallel to this, in its second phase was a flat bottomed ditch, approximately 1.50m wide (209), filled with a soft brown silt (208) under a loose grey silt with some gravel and a few mortar flecks (207) and a grey silt/clay with a few brick fragments and mortar flecks (206). This truncated 210 which survived only at its lowest level and was filled by a grey, sticky silt/clay with no inclusions (211). Another ditch 212 across the extreme south east corner of the trench was cut from the level of 214 and was filled with a firm, sticky grey clay. A complete profile of this feature was not obtained. Overlying all these features was a layer of soft grey/brown loam, a garden soil, above which was a dump of limestone and modern brick rubble (201). The only finds recovered were of the 19th century, from the robber trench (204).

TRENCH 3

Situated in the southeast corner of the site, approximately 15m from the Skirbeck Road, a 1.5m square test pit was excavated to a depth of 1m and found to be sterile of finds and features. A new trench was then cut 3.50m to the north, avoiding modern concrete foundations. This measured 16.50m east-west and 1.25m north-south and was cut to the level of the water table by machine, its northern section being cut back 0.10m by hand before recording (Figure 4).

Underlying the crushed brick and stone hardcore (301) was a clean, very dark grey/black, silty garden soil (302) covering a path or track of

purple/grey ash (303) which ran north-south across the trench at its western end. This was impressed into a layer of grey/brown silt/clay, 0.25m thick (304), lying over 0.45m of very clean brown naturally deposited alluvium (305), which in turn overlay an horizon of sticky grey clay. Cutting 304, 305 and 308 was a steep sided ditch, 0.75m wide (307) which ran east-west along the western end of the trench and was filled with a single deposit of mixed grey clay and brown silt (306), suggesting the feature had been backfilled more or less immediately after being cut. The only finds came from 302 and were of 19th and 20th century date.

TRENCH 4

In the northeast of the site a 1.5m square test pit was again excavated by 0.10m spits to a depth of 1.0m and then extended by machine to a length of 15m from east-west, its northern face then being cut back and recorded.

A similar sequence of layers to those in Trench 3 was recorded. An horizon of sticky grey clay (405) lay under a 0.40-0.50m thick layer of clean brown silt/clay (404) and a grey/brown silt/clay (403), all without any inclusions. The colour change was probably caused by staining from the upper layer, a dark grey silty garden soil (402), which was covered by modern brick hardcore (401). The only feature noted was a pit (407) in the centre of the trench, filled with a friable black loam with many bricks, tiles and fragments of stone (possibly limestone). The finds were 20th century, including plastic fragments. Work on this trench was curtailed when it filled with water.

DISCUSSION

The excavation produced a considerable depth of archaeological material, mainly post-mediaeval, in the western area of the site, between Hussey Tower and the Skirbeck Road but virtually none in the larger, eastern part. A building may have stood near Skirbeck Road during the 19th century and the fill of pits 33 and 37 indicates a structure in the same area being demolished in the 18th century. The alignment of features in Trench 3 with Hussey Tower rather than the Skirbeck Road suggests activity associated with the manor house. Otherwise, there is little indication of occupation on the site, apart from its use to quarry clay, and the possible division of land by drainage/boundary ditches.

No evidence was found for the graveyard of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem having extended into this area, or for the original line of the Skirbeck Road although the non-alignment of features in Trench 1 to its present route suggest it has moved slightly to the modern line. Evidence for mediaeval occupation is very slight. Features 72 and 212 are, from their stratigraphic position, likely to predate the 16th century and a general spread of residual pottery, including several sherds of Saintonge polychrome wares point to mediaeval occupation in the area.

It would seem unjustified, from the findings of the evaluation, to carry out further excavation prior to the redevelopment of the site, but a

watching brief should be negotiated as an area large enough for significant archaeological features still lies unexamined under the site.

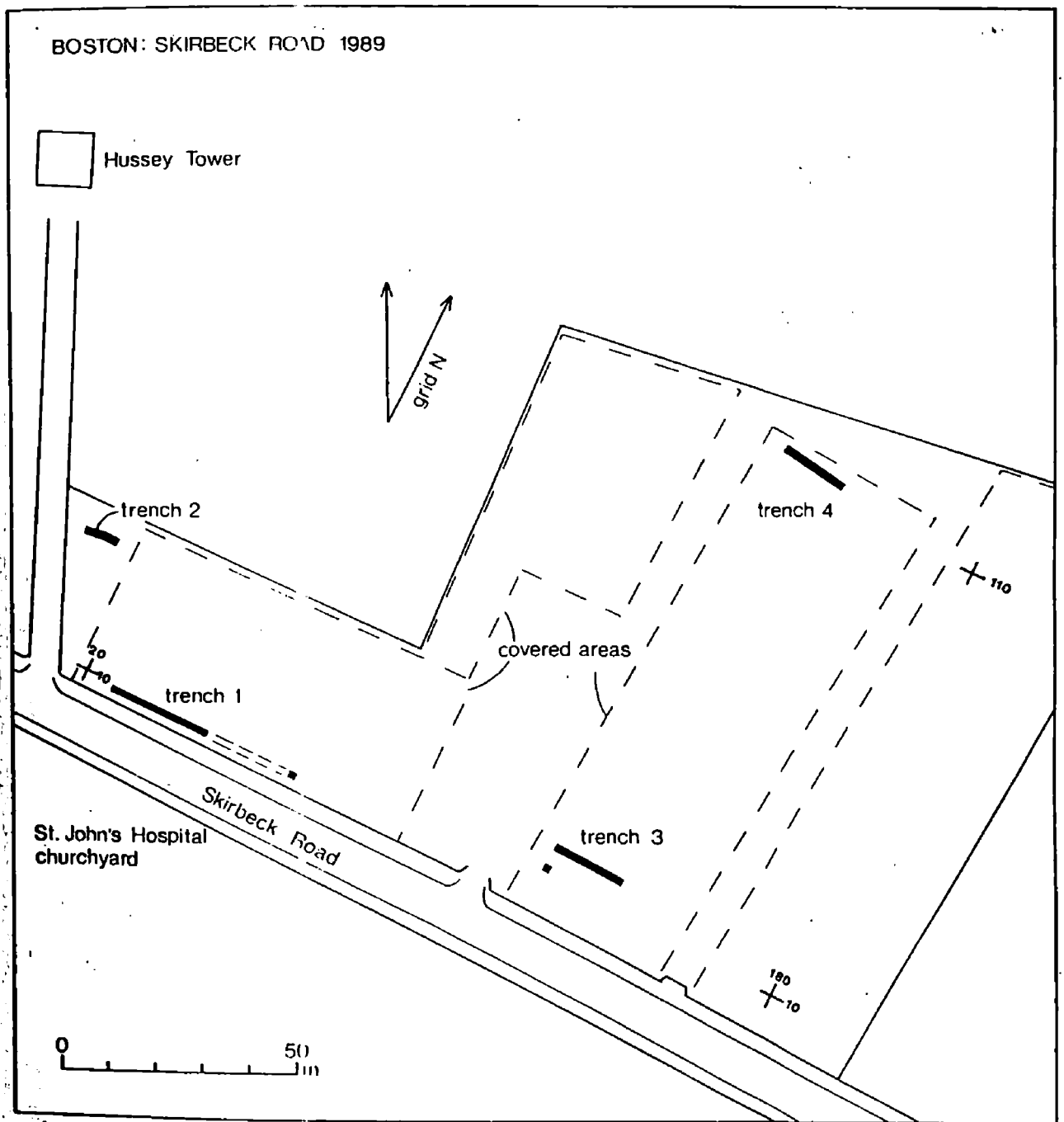
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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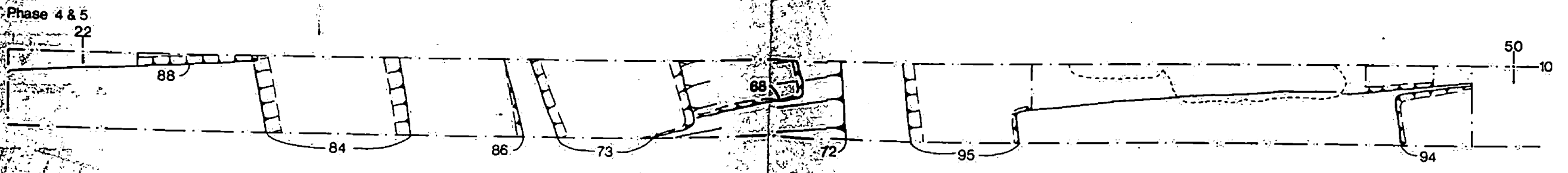
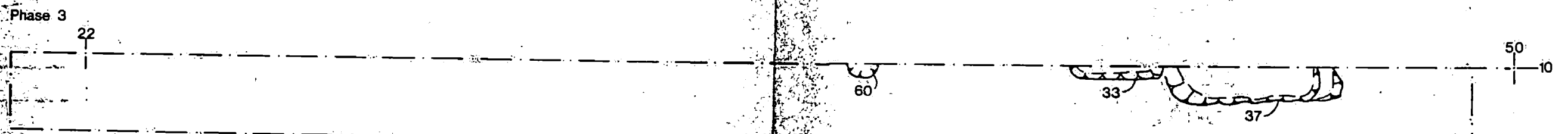
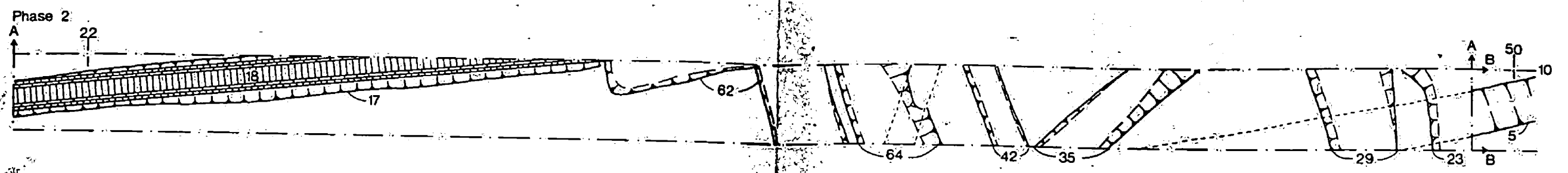
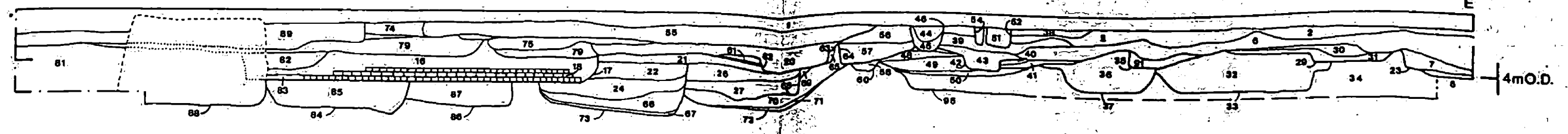
John Dunkley, January, 1990.

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Figure 1



TRENCH 1
Section A
W



- open feature
- closed feature
- truncated
- cut out

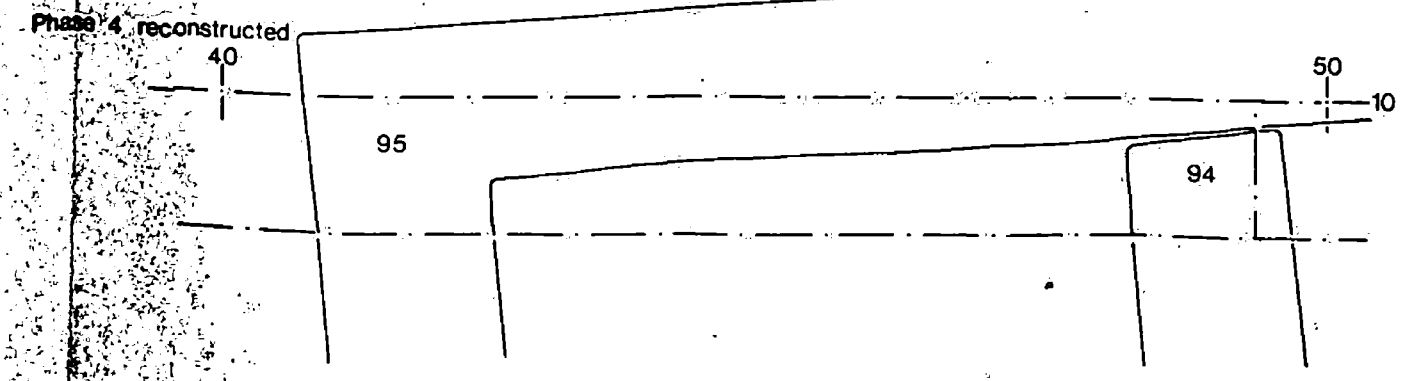
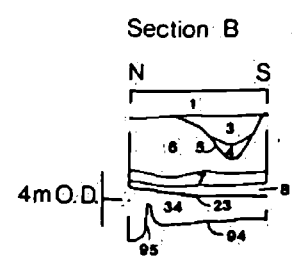
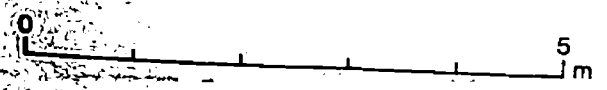
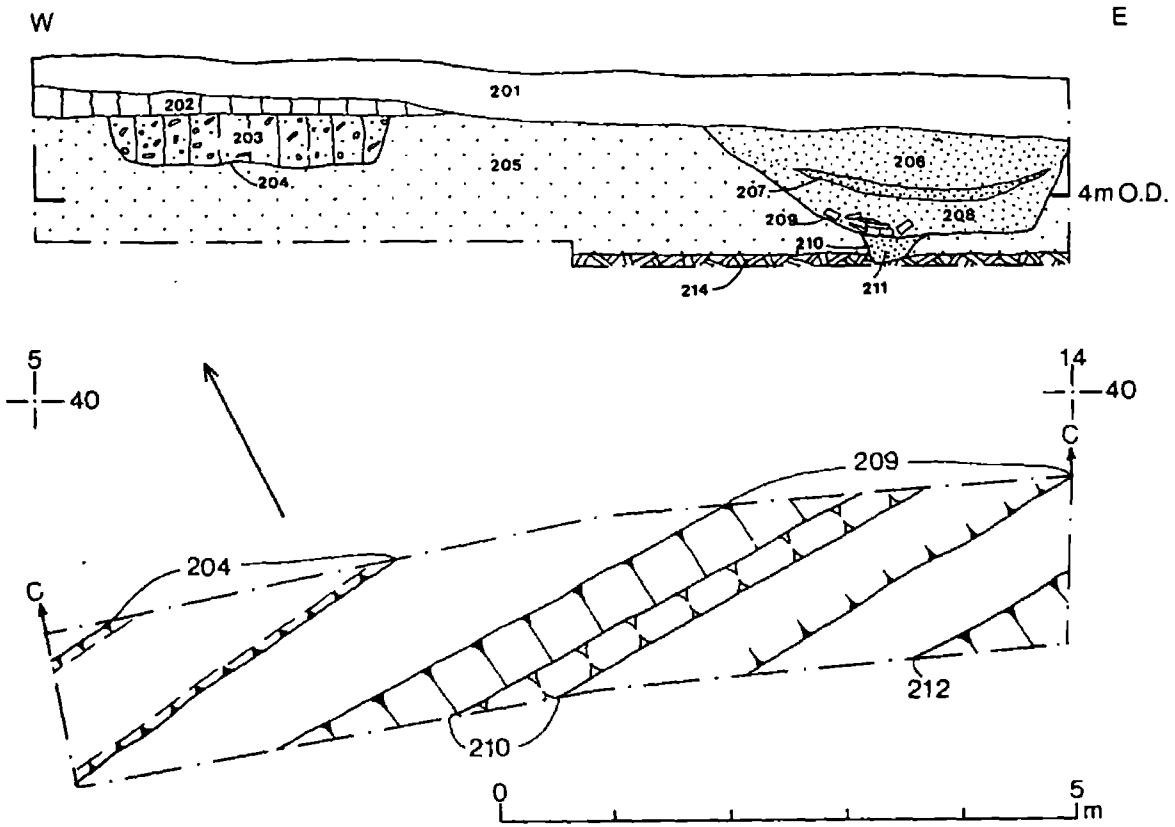


Figure 3

TRENCH 2

Section C



TRENCH 3

Section D

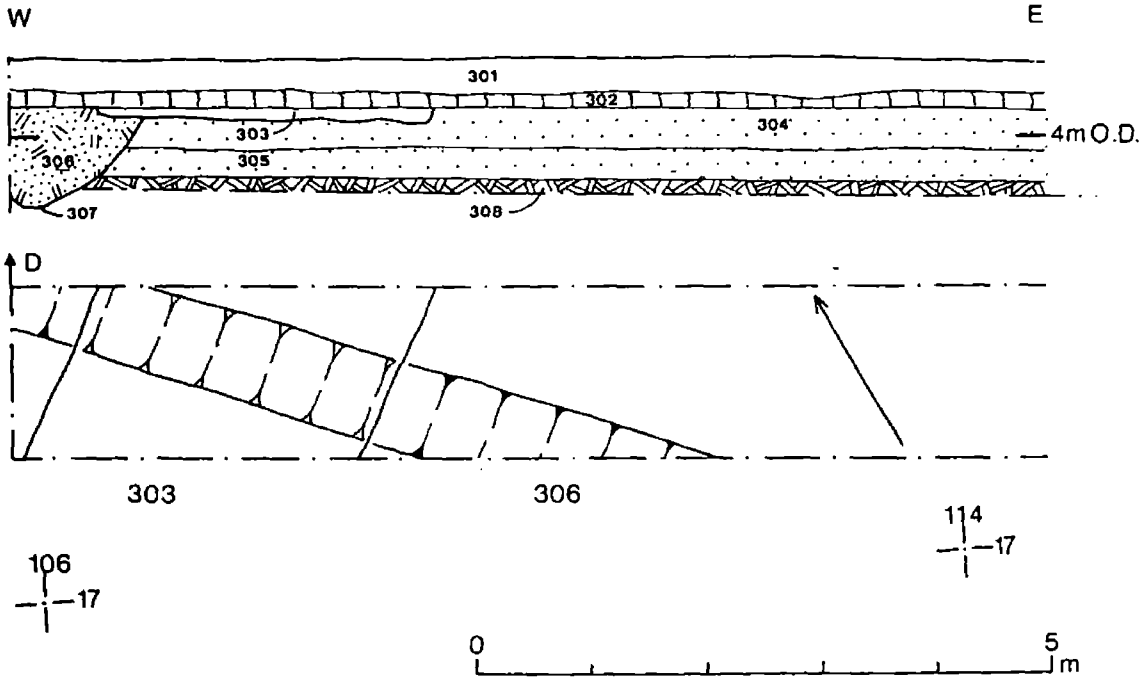


Figure 4

