

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED
DEVELOPMENT OF LAND SOUTH OF TINNEY'S LANE,
SHERBORNE, DORSET (ST 64411687)**

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Report no. 0896/2/0

May 1996

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1. SUMMARY

In April 1996 an archaeological evaluation was carried out on a proposed development site south of Tinney's Lane, Sherborne. Over 2% of the proposed development area was assessed by machine dug evaluation trenches. In general the evaluation suggested that the site was largely unaffected by modern disturbance, and that archaeological levels, though dispersed and discontinuous, did exist and were well preserved. Trenching in the northeastern part of the site revealed evidence of extensive Medieval quarrying, and a large ditch containing Roman pottery was discovered. In the middle of the site a human "crouched burial" was found, almost certainly of prehistoric date, and possibly contemporaneous with a nearby find of Bronze Age pottery. Other undated features of interest were observed. The southern part of the site produced less of significance in the trenches than the rest of the proposed development area. The south-east had been severely truncated by post-Medieval terracing and the south west, although retaining a comparatively undisturbed soil profile, appeared to be of limited archaeological interest.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report contains the results of an archaeological field evaluation on land south of Tinney's Lane, Sherborne. The work was carried out in late April 1996.

2.2 The work was commissioned by Raglan Housing Association Limited to a specification prepared by AC archaeology and approved in advance by

Dorset County Council Archaeology Service, as advisors to West Dorset District Council.

2.3 The aim of the work was to determine the nature, date, quality and importance of any archaeological remains on the site. The results will enable an informed planning decision to be made in relation to the proposed development of the site.

2.4 The site covers an area of approximately 0.625 hectares. Currently the site is unoccupied waste ground, with a temporary car park cut into the NW corner. It lies on a gradual south facing slope between 71 and 66m OD overlooking the valley of the River Yeo, with underlying geology consisting of oolitic limestone and associated strata.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The site is situated within the town of Sherborne, to the east of the known historic core and north of Sherborne Old Castle.

3.2 There are no records in the Dorset County Sites and Monuments Record of archaeological sites or finds directly within the area of the proposed development, though a number of significant discoveries have been made nearby (see section 4, below).

3.3 The site has an ideal topographical position, being situated on a south facing slope overlooking a river valley. Such locations were important during the prehistoric period, and in some cases provide good evidence of settlement activity.

4. PRELIMINARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

4.1 A preliminary archaeological assessment was carried out prior to this evaluation (Valentin 1996). It will be found useful to summarise it here.

4.2 The assessment involved the collection and analysis of information from a wide variety of sources, historical, documentary and archaeological. A site visit was also made. The assessment suggested that the general area of the site had some archaeological potential, being seemingly little disturbed and close to locations of known archaeological significance. In particular a recently discovered Neolithic/ Bronze Age site exists to the N. of Tinneys Lane. It is also known that 16th-17th century deposits lie directly to the south of the site, and that the area had been used during the Middle Ages for textile processing, and might contain traces of that activity.

5. EVALUATION METHODS

5.1 The evaluation comprised the machine excavation of 4 trenches (Fig. 1). The positions of the trenches were agreed in consultation with the County Archaeological Service, although slight adjustments were made on site in order to avoid obstructions and services. All the trenches were dug to a width of 1.6 m, and they varied between 20 and 21 m in length. A total of 130 m² was excavated, amounting to over 2% of the proposed development.

5.2 Topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator using a toothless grading bucket. Deposits beneath the topsoil that could be demonstrated to be post-Medieval were likewise removed. All machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision.

5.3 Machine excavation was halted on encountering deposits that were either archaeological (Medieval or earlier), or natural (in situ geological strata etc).

5.4 All exposed archaeological deposits were subjected to limited hand excavation in order to assess their approximate nature and date.

5.5 Recording was carried out using the standard AC *archaeology* recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records.

5.6 Unless otherwise detailed, all work conformed to the agreed specification.

6. TRENCH RECORDS

6.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was dug in the northern corner of the site to a length of 21m (see Fig. 1 for detailed section drawings). It was aligned NW-SE, and varied in depth from 0.25m to 1.2m. The majority of the trench was dug to a depth of about 0.5m. The main deposit removed by machine was topsoil 101, a dark brown silty clay loam containing occasional small fragments of limestone, coal, and brick. Deposit 101 was 0.25m deep at the NW end of the trench, but increased steadily in thickness towards the SE, where it attained a depth of 0.6m. The only other layer removed by machine was 102, a similar but very thin layer of lighter "subsoil" colour, directly beneath 101. Both 101 and the top of 102 were observed to contain post-Medieval objects (not collected).

The removal of 102 exposed in situ natural strata in the base of the trench, evidently disturbed by a number of archaeological features and their associated fills. The natural deposits consisted of thin bands of highly fissured limestone overlying a coarse yellow clay, consistent with the base of the Jurassic cornbrash sequence. The two obvious disturbances (Fig.1.) were F103, a ditch 8m from the NW end, and F112 - 114, a succession of pits covering most of the SE half of the trench.

Ditch 103 was cross-sectioned and the fills dug out (Fig. 2A) The upper fill (104) consisted of a mid brown silty clay, containing a moderate number of

small limestone fragments, some of them burnt. Roman pottery was recovered from the fill, along with a fragment of lava stone. Below 104 was 105, a finer textured light brown deposit forming the primary fill. F105 contained numerous small-medium limestone fragments, concentrated in the middle of the ditch. In regard to the ditch profile, 103 had a moderately steep sided "v" shape, was c. 2m wide and 0.8m deep. The short length of the ditch exposed in trench 1 suggested a WSW-ENE longitudinal alignment.

A number of small test sections were dug around the apparent perimeter of F112, in order to provide information about its nature and date. These test sections (see Figs. 2 B&C, 3A) led to three main conclusions. Firstly it was found that the feature was quite complex. A large number of different fills were identified, and it is possible that several pit cuts are represented (see 106 - 109, 112 - 122, Figs. 2 and 3.). Secondly it was found that the sides of the pit were extremely steep, and that it was potentially much deeper than the maximum safe depth of excavation (1.2m). Thirdly, it was observed that despite all the different fills, the Medieval pottery recovered from them was broadly similar in type and date (see section 7).

In summary, it appears likely that F112 and associated contexts are the result of an phase of Medieval quarrying (and backfilling). Even within the limited confines of the trench the volume of rock and clay dug away was considerable, and the exposed sections suggest that the quarrying increases in extent and depth to the NE of the trench. The material removed would have consisted of a mixture of fragmented limestone slabs and clay, ideal for a whole range of building and other purposes, but not ideal for high quality masonry. In regard to the subsequent backfilling, the general sequence involved numerous layers of dirty clay, limestone rubble and occasional lenses of humic loam. Such a sequence is suggestive of large scale infilling with quarry derived waste, possibly in several stages.

6.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was dug from the western edge of the site to a length of 20m. It was aligned SW-NE, and was consistently 0.5m. - 0.6m. deep. The main deposit removed by machine was 200, a 0.5m deep topsoil layer similar to 101 in trench 1. Beneath this a minimal strip of about 0.10m removed layer 201, a stony transitional horizon between topsoil and natural. Beneath 201, a weathered natural level of very fractured limestone brash was encountered (202), at which point machining was halted.

Two presumed archaeological features were observed in the machined surface. The first of these, F203, took the form of a narrow and poorly defined gully, aligned WSW - ENE, in the NE third of the trench. The position of this feature is shown on Fig. 1. On investigation the fill of F203 (204) was found to be less than 0.03m deep. It did however contain a sherd of Roman black burnished ware pottery. Just to the NE of 204 a roughly circular concentration of large unweathered limestone slabs in yellow brown clay (205) was recorded. Excavation of 205 exposed a human skeleton (206) within F207 (see Fig. 3 E). No relationship could be determined between F203 and F207.

Feature 207 was approximately 1m in diameter, steep sided and up to 0.3m deep as excavated. The skeleton within it was exposed and recorded, but not disturbed, and fill 205 was only excavated to the point at which the skeleton could be interpreted. Skeleton 206 was buried on its right side with its skull to the NW and feet to the SE. Both arms were flexed in front of the ribcage, and the legs were severely flexed to position the heels just away from the base of the pelvis. This layout is consistent with the "crouched burials" that occur through much of prehistory. The general condition of the bone was good, although the ribs were in poor condition, and the cranium had been crushed by a large limestone slab. The epiphyses of all the major long bones were clearly unfused, and consideration of shaft lengths leads to the conclusion that the burial was that of a juvenile. It was not possible under the

circumstances of excavation to sex the burial, and owing to the complete lack of artefactual evidence from fill 205, dating is difficult. In the context of archaeological evidence to the north of Tinneys Lane it is most likely that the burial is of Neolithic or Bronze Age date.

6.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 measured 21m in length and was aligned on a NW-SE axis (Fig. 1). It was machine excavated to a maximum depth of 0.90m at the SE end of the trench, but only to about 0.5m generally. Both topsoil (300) and a post-Medieval soil horizon (302) were removed by machine. Deposit 301, a deep layer of post-Medieval quarry waste occurring in the SE half of the trench (ie downslope of F304 Fig. 1) was also machined away.

Several archaeological deposits were encountered below 302 (see Fig. 3, B C and D.). F311 comprised a shallow linear cut measuring 1.20m in width with a depth of 0.08m, terminating within the trench. The fill (312) consisted of a dark-brown silty-clay with occasional small limestone fragments up to 0.03m in size. F309, a probable pit cut, had near vertical or steeply sloping edges and contained three fills. A large area of the upper fill (310) was exposed at the NW end of the trench. Fill 310 was a mid-brown silty-clay with a moderate amount of small limestone fragments up to 0.05m in size and occasional charcoal flecks. The depth exposed was 0.45m. Fill 314 comprised a fairly thin depth of mid-dark brown silty-clay with occasional small limestone fragments up to 0.02m in size. Primary fill (315) comprised a dark-brown silty-clay with quite frequent limestone fragments up to 0.20m in size. All of these fills appeared to be dumped deposits of Medieval date.

F308 and F306 comprised two shallow pits, both of which had been partly truncated by F309. F308 measured approximately 0.8m in diameter, and had steep edges, a flat base, and a maximum depth of 0.20m. The fill (313) comprised a mid-dark brown silty-clay with moderate limestone fragments 0.05m in size and occasional charcoal flecks. F306 measured approximately

1.00m in diameter with gentle sloping edges to flat base and a maximum depth of 0.14m. The fill (307) comprised a black-brown clay-silt with a high charcoal content.

No dating evidence was recovered from F306, although it did appear to cut F308, which contained a late Bronze Age or early Iron Age pottery sherd and fragments of cremated bone. The SE end of trench 3 showed evidence of post-Medieval quarrying, the trench profile displaying a SW-NE cut (F304) with the bedrock removed to the SE. Quarry waste material 301 comprised of mainly limestone rubble and occurred above natural clay subsoil (303).

6.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 measured 20m in length, and was aligned on a NW- SE axis. It was machine excavated to a depth of 0.85m in the SE, and 0.50m in the NW. Both topsoil (400) and a thin transitional soil (401) were removed by machine. The maximum depth of topsoil was 0.50m and comprised a dark-brown silty clay. The maximum depth of 401 was 0.25m and comprised a mid-dark brown silty-clay with a moderate amount of medium sized limestone fragments. The natural strata exposed below 401 (402) consisted of a weathered surface of brashy limestone. Essentially this is an undisturbed soil profile with no evidence of any archaeological deposits.

7. FINDS

7.1 The principal diagnostic finds from all the trenches are summarised in the table below (by number and weight).

7.2 Prehistoric pottery

A single rimsherd of shell-tempered pottery was recovered from context 313. The material is likely to be of later Bronze Age or early Iron Age date.

TRENCH	CONTEXT	PREHISTORIC POTTERY	ROMAN POTTERY	MEDIEVAL POTTERY	POST-MED POTTERY	WORKED FLINT
1	104	-	26 / 233g	-	-	-
1	106	-	-	12 / 71g	-	-
1	107	-	-	13 / 52g	-	1/2g
1	108	-	-	1 / 4g	-	-
1	116	-	-	3 / 15g	-	-
1	122	-	-	3 / 22g	-	-
2	204	-	1 / 12g	-	-	-
3	301	-	-	-	2 / 6g	-
3	310	-	-	14 / 104g	-	-
3	312	-	-	-	1 / 18g	-
3	313	1 / 30g	-	-	-	-
3	314	-	-	6 / 68g	-	-
4	401	-	-	-	1 / 21g	-
TOTALS		1/30g	27/245g	52/336g	4/45g	1/2g

TABLE 1: Summary of principal finds by count and weight

7.3 Romano-British pottery

Much of the material recovered from context 104 comprises fragments of a single vessel, probably a bowl. The fabric is a grey micaceous fineware and the vessel is decorated with a rouletted pattern. The source of the material is uncertain, but similar material has been excavated from north Somerset (?Congresbury Ware) and may be of 3rd or 4th century date. Two other body sherds from 104 are in Black Burnished Ware fabric but not sufficiently diagnostic to be dated. The single sherd from context 204 is a Black Burnished Ware base angle, but not otherwise identifiable.

7.4 Medieval pottery

Much of the Medieval pottery is fragmentary, abraded and unlikely to yield specific information about date and form, even with more detailed analysis and comparative assessment. The assemblage is dominated by fine sandy fabrics, almost 50% of which has traces of glaze. Based on a rapid visual assessment of the fabrics most of the material would be consistent with a date range of the 13th or 14th century. One base sherd is likely to be of 15th-16th century date.

7.5 Lava stone

A single fragment of lava stone was recovered from context 104. This material is similar to Niedermendig stone, which was used widely in southern England for quernstones in the Saxon period. The fragment from this site shows no evidence for surface working and has not been positively identified by comparison with other lava stone. Its occurrence in the Romano-British period is not widely recorded.

8. COMMENTS

8.1 With the exception of the far north-western corner (probably damaged by the terracing effect of the car park), and the far south-east corner (shown to be truncated in trench 3), it is likely that much of the site is sufficiently well preserved to retain original deposits of Medieval or pre-Medieval date. Some of these deposits exist close to the present ground surface.

8.2 The crouched burial found in trench 2 is in itself of significance. When considered together with the late Bronze Age / early Iron Age pottery from trench 3, and the close proximity of the material previously found to the north of Tinney's Lane, the likelihood of further important prehistoric deposits existing *within* the proposed development area should be regarded as high.

8.3 The large ditch discovered in trench 1, and the gully located in trench 2 both indicate a previously unsuspected Roman influence in the history of the site. The frequency and condition of the pottery sherds recovered from ditch fill (104), and the finding of a probable quern fragment, may well indicate settlement nearby, although most likely outside the development area.

8.4 Parts of the site appear to have been subjected to large scale quarrying in Medieval times, probably to satisfy the demand for hardcore clay and rubblestone in Sherborne itself.

8.5 A number of other features were recorded, which, although not proven to be archaeological in origin, are strongly suspected to be so.

8.6 On the above evidence, it appears that unmitigated development of the whole site would have a damaging impact on important archaeological deposits.

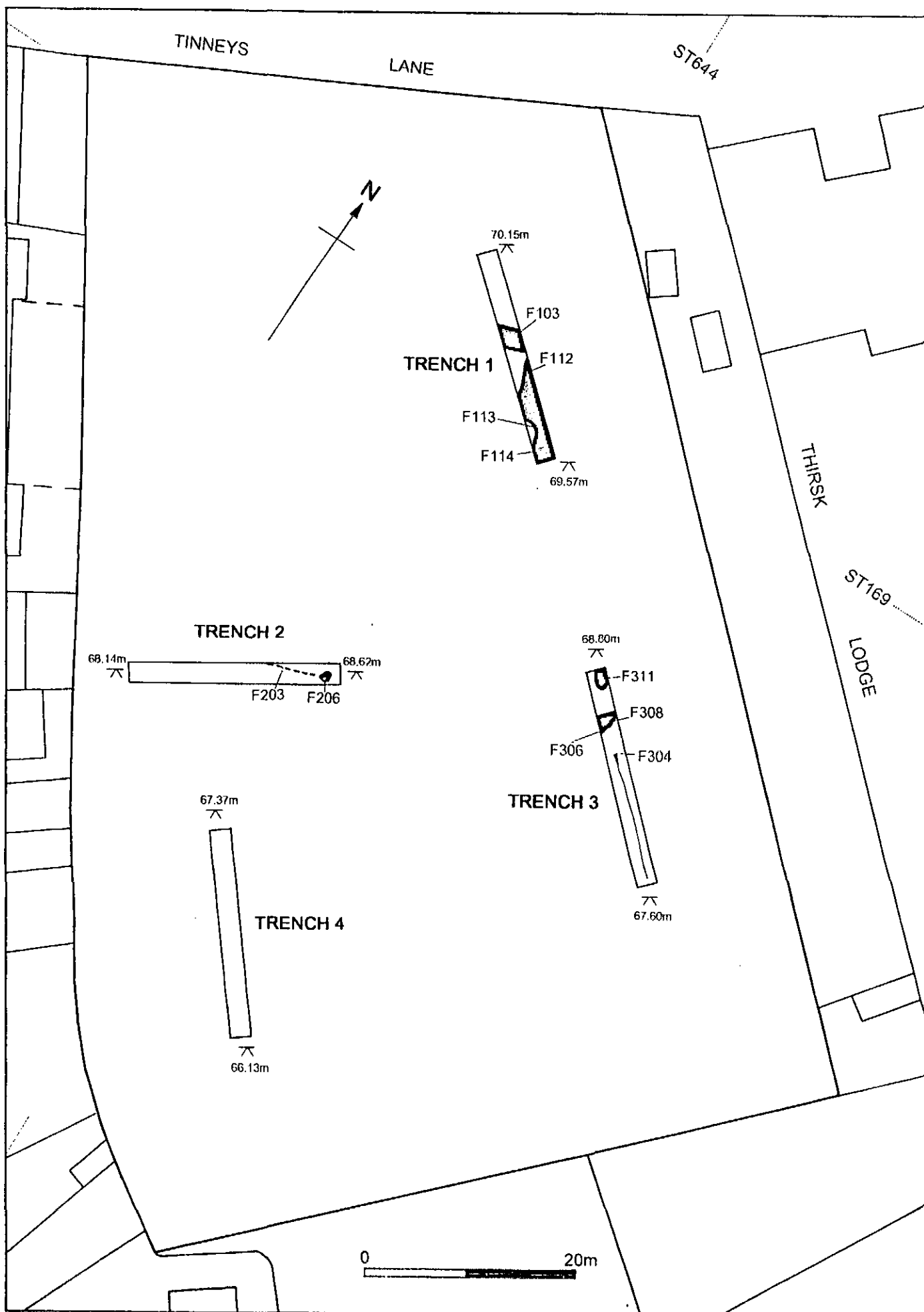


FIG. 1: TRENCH PLAN AND SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES

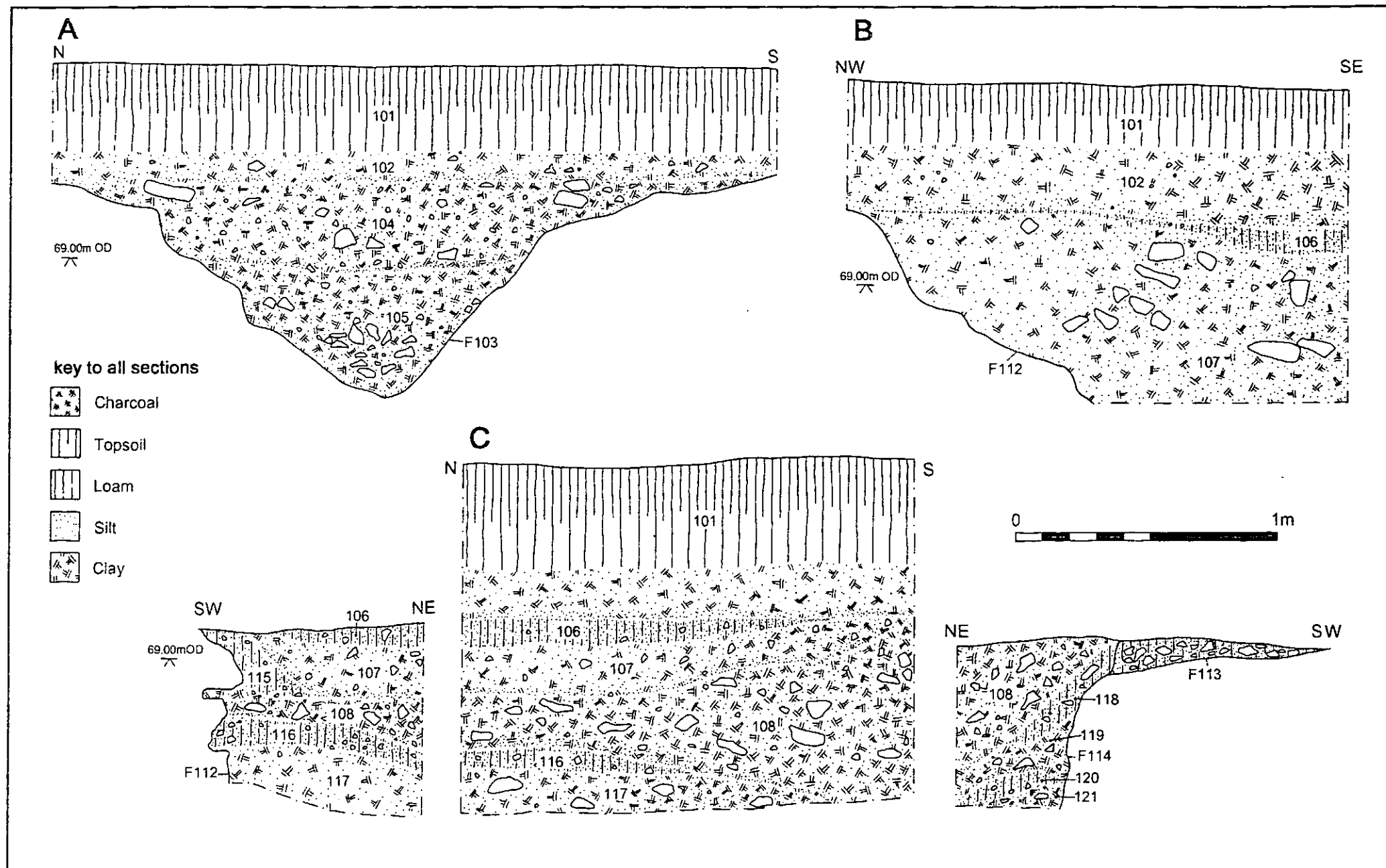


FIG. 2: SECTIONS THROUGH TRENCH 1

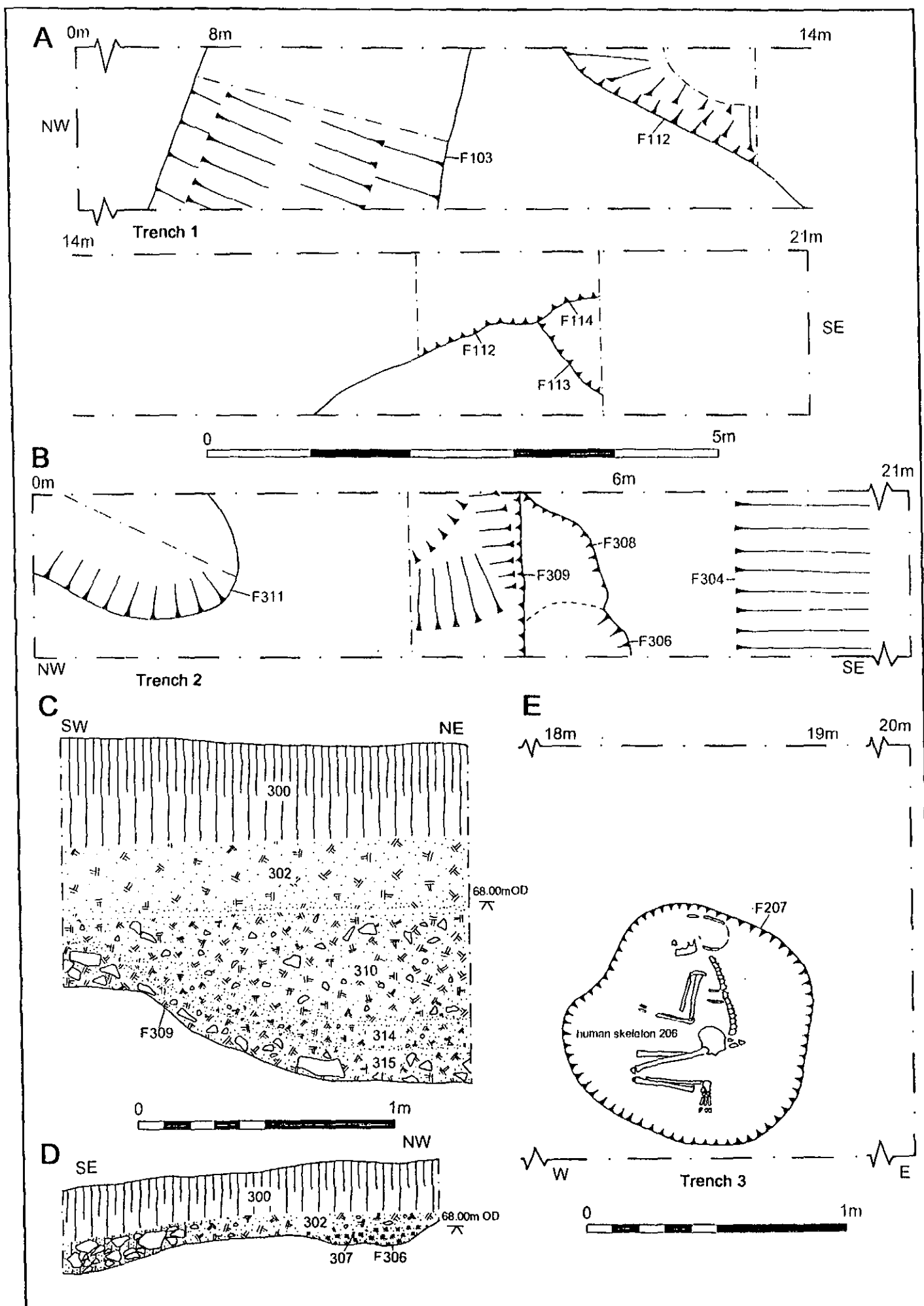


FIG. 3: TRENCH PLANS AND SECTIONS