

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**An Archaeological  
Evaluation  
Dove County First School**

**WITH AN APPENDIX ON A  
WATCHING BRIEF**

*B.U.F.A.U.*



**Staffordshire County Council  
Historic Environment Record**

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Source(UID) ST3432

Event(UID) ST1013/ST1014

Monument(UID)

GIS feature Yes

PRNo.

Parish Boxfile "Rocester 2"

Associated records ??

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
Project No. 572

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by  
Bob Burrows

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An Archaeological Evaluation at Dove County First School, Rocester, Staffordshire in 1998.

by Bob Burrows.

**Summary**

A small-scale evaluation ahead of the formulation of detailed development proposals at Dove County First School, Rocester, Staffordshire confirmed the existence here of an intact sequence of archaeological deposits dating from the Roman period through to the Saxon and medieval periods. Evaluation was achieved through the analysis of the unpublished records of excavations at the school in 1986/7, ahead of development at that time, and the excavation of a trial pit to confirm the continuation of the archaeological sequence into the area of the proposed new build.

**Introduction**

The site lies within the tarmaced playground of Dove County First School, on the north eastern fringes of the village of Rocester, Staffordshire (centred on NGR SK11053937-Figure 1), and within an area confirmed as being within the defences of one or more of the Roman forts established here at Rocester in the late-First-Second Century A.D. and of those of a subsequent Third-Fourth Century civilian settlement. It is also an area of the village where Saxon and medieval activity is attested (at the nearby New Cemetery site). The present state of knowledge about the archaeology and history of Rocester has recently been presented and discussed in Esmonde Cleary and Ferris (1996) and will not be repeated here.

**Aims and Methodology**

The aim of the evaluation was to define the presence, character, condition and the extent of any archaeological deposits and features within the area of proposed development and to record the depth of this archaeology, in order to assess the implications of both general and specific development proposals.

A trench, aligned north-south and measuring 4m by 2m, was laid out approximately 4m to the north of the main school building (see Figure 2). The trench was positioned along the western edge of the school playground and was fenced off, in order to cause the minimum disruption while the playground was in use.

Following removal of the tarmac using a floor saw, and the location of an *in situ* pipe during subsequent hand-excavation, the trench was divided into four quadrants, the north-western and south-eastern of which only were excavated, leaving the pipe undisturbed. All excavation below the tarmaced surface was by hand.

In the south-eastern quadrant excavation served to illustrate that the archaeological sequence here was undisturbed (see Figure 3). The quadrant was excavated to a depth of 89.095m AOD, at which depth excavation ceased. The stratigraphic sequence thus established will now be described from the limit of excavation upwards. At the bottom of

the sequence, a dark grey-brown silty sandy clay (1004) was uncovered. The removal of the initial 0.20m of this context revealed a number of Roman and medieval pottery sherds and animal bones. At this level there was no evidence of contamination; no intrusive sherds of post-medieval pottery were unearthed.

Overlying context 1004 was a very dark grey-brown loamy clay (1003) which had the texture and composition of the 'allotment' soil which was observed in the excavation of 1985/6. The vast majority of the datable evidence from this context was medieval or post-medieval in date. Context 1003 was 0.50m in depth and was overlain by a levelling deposit (1002), 0.10m in depth and consisting of demolition material. No datable artefacts were recovered from this layer, which was in turn overlain by a grey-brown layer of charcoal and ash (1001), 0.06m in depth. A reddish brown levelling layer (1000), 0.20m in depth and comprised of small stones and sand, overlay context 1001 and provided the supporting layer for the tarmac ground surface.

### **Interpretation**

It was possible to compare the contexts uncovered in the 1998 evaluation with the deposits which were described in the excavation which took place in 1985/6. Here were defined 13 phases of activity; Phases 1-4 represented Roman military activity, Phases 5-7 subsequent Roman civilian activity, Phases 8-9 Saxon and medieval activity, Phases 10-11 early post-medieval activity, and Phases 12-13 nineteenth and twentieth century usage of the area, most recently, before the building and extension of the school, as allotments. In the 1998 evaluation trench the very dark grey-brown loamy clay soil, context 1003, can be likened to the texture and composition of the 'allotment' soil which overlay and sealed the top of the archaeological sequence along the entire length of the earlier trench. The contexts similarly contained pottery dating from Roman through to medieval and post-medieval sherds. The probably intrusive finds within context 1003 of the 1998 evaluation may be attributable to the 'deep allotment digging' of Phase 13 which was noted in the 1985 report.

The composition of the undisturbed deposit 1004 and the datable finds from here can be compared with Phase 9 of the 1985/6 excavation. A road or track surface which showed considerable signs of damage (F528) was observed in 1985/6, with small pieces of sandstone and occasional cobbles forming its make-up and being incorporated in the surrounding, contemporary horizons. Similar inclusions were seen in context 1004 of the 1998 evaluation, which also contained medieval green-glazed potsherds.

### **Conclusion**

The evaluation of 1998, and reference to the records of the 1985/6 work on the site, indicate without a doubt that the proposed area of development encompasses a zone of very high archaeological potential, with a more-or-less intact sequence of Roman, Saxon and medieval archaeological activity being represented here, protected by only a relatively thin, average c.0.50m, overburden of former allotment soil and then by make-up for the tarmac surface of the school playground. From a local and regional point of view all the periods represented are academically important, and in the context of Rochester this is only

the second site on which all these periods have been seen to be present together, which further enhances their value. As a consequence, any future development should take into consideration the horizons of surviving archaeology here and be designed with an appropriate mitigation strategy in mind, that may encompass preservation *in situ*, preservation by record or a mixture of these strategies. The top of the sequence, however, is relatively close to the present ground level and is thus particularly vulnerable. A formal decision on the mitigation strategy will need to be made by the County Archaeological Officer, utilising the information presented in this report.

### **Acknowledgements**

The evaluation was supervised by Bob Burrows, assisted by Gino Bellavia. The work was sponsored by Staffordshire County Council. Thanks to Chris Welch, the County Archaeological Officer, and to the headmistress of Dove County First School for their help. The project was monitored for BUFAU by Iain Ferris who also edited this report. Illustrations were prepared by John Halsted.

### **References**

Esmonde Cleary, A.S. and Ferris, I.M. 1996 Excavations at the New Cemetery, Rocester, Staffordshire, 1985-1987. Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions Volume XXXV.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Dove County First School, Rocester, Staffs.**

#### **Summary of archaeological watching brief**

Following the recommendations of the evaluation (Burrows 1999) archaeological monitoring was conducted during the excavation of the ground beams to the new classroom at County First School on 13th May 1999. The following briefly summarises the methods and results of the monitoring.

The area was stripped of turf and other surface features by a mini-digger using a 1m toothless ditching bucket and the ground beams were excavated with a 0.5m toothed bucket. The ground beams were excavated to a depth of no more than 0.6m below the present ground surface and were no more than 0.75m wide.

The stripping and ground beams revealed very disturbed deposits; the entire area was characterised by modern services and concrete/brick footings. A typical section revealed hardcore and building debris sealing the former 'topsoil', which consisted of a very dark brown sandy silt. No archaeological deposits were encountered.

It may be concluded that the ground beams were too shallow to encounter any archaeological horizons and that the former 'topsoil' probably equates to the previous allotment activity.

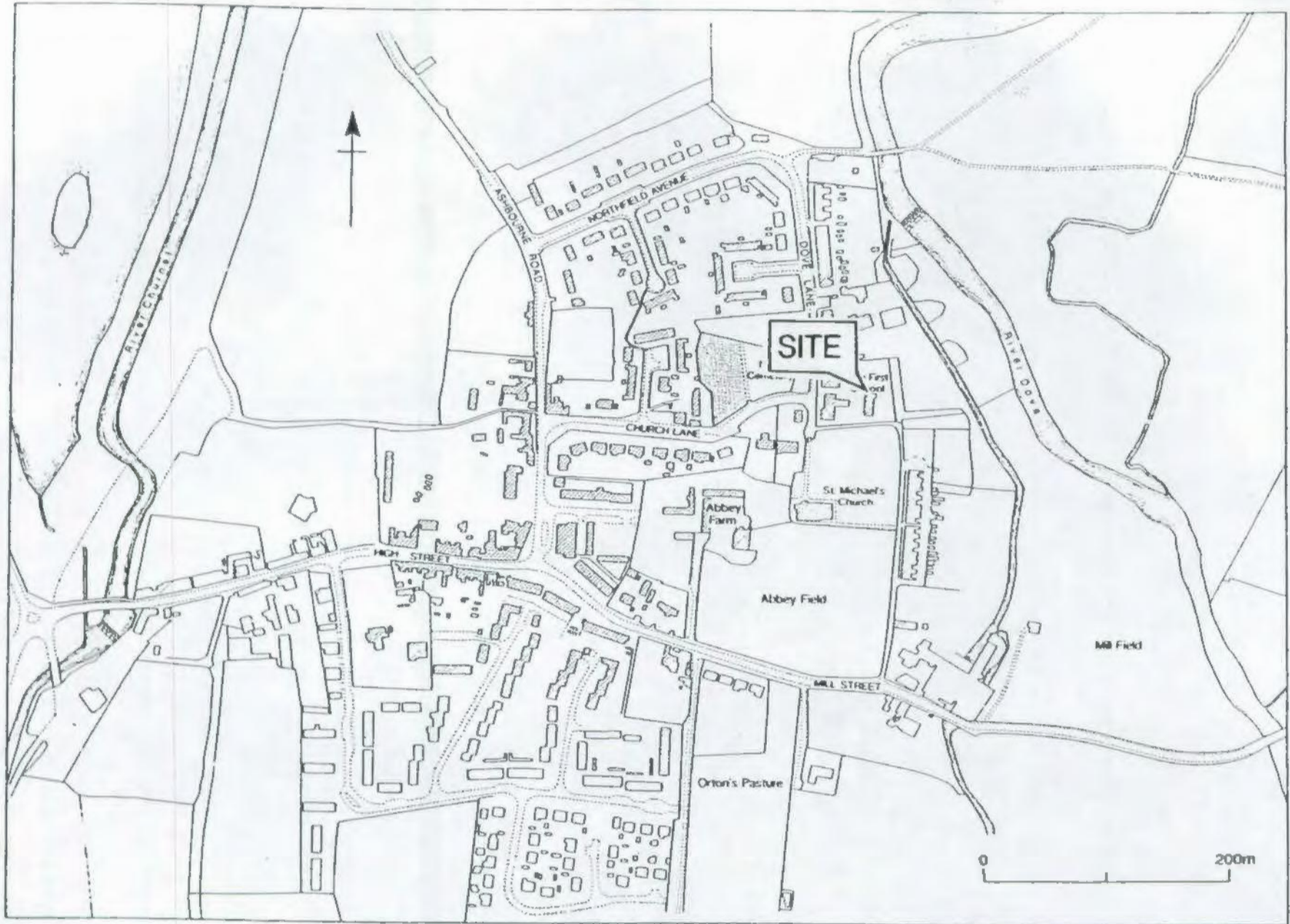


Fig.1



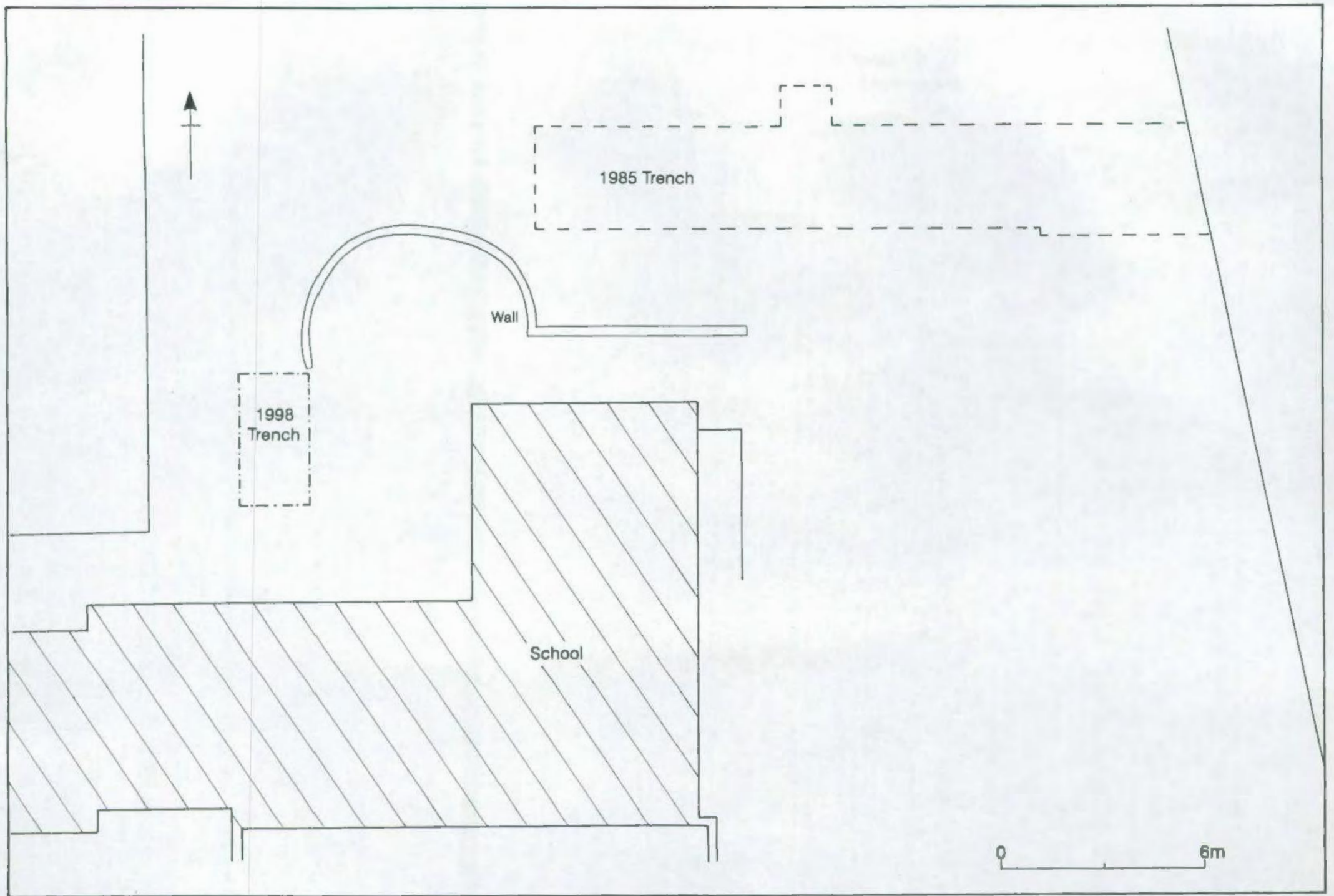
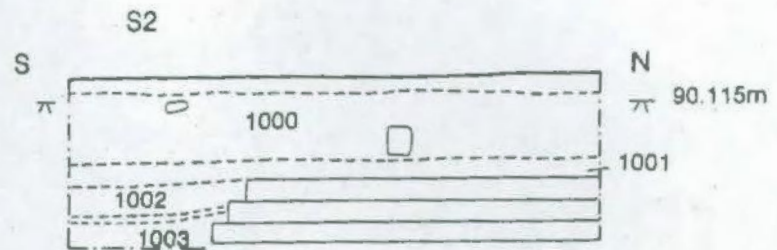
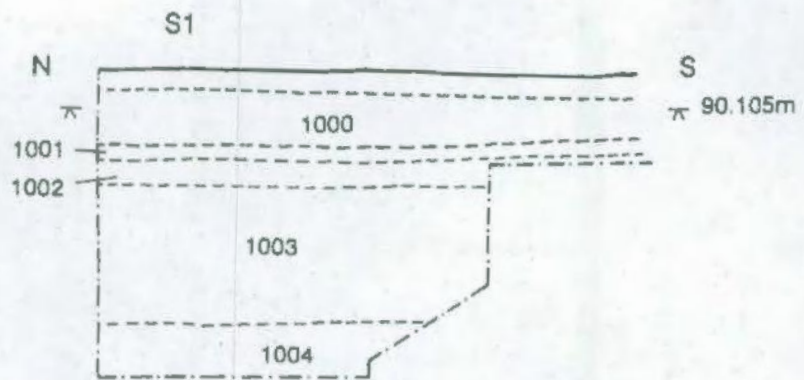
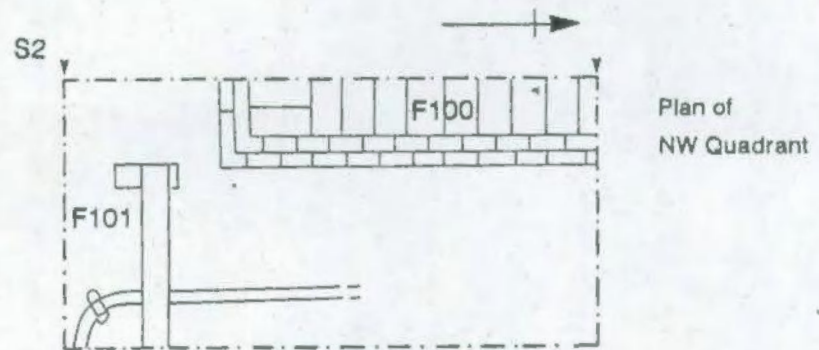
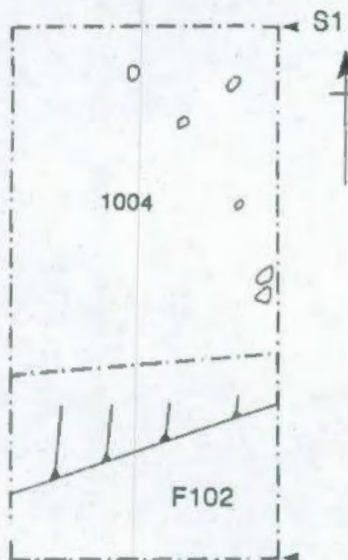


Fig.2



Plan of SE Quadrant



Plan of NW Quadrant



Fig.3