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EDITED VERSION

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

ORCHARD FIELDS - DERVENTIO

THE 1992 EXCAVATIONS

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ORCHARD FIELDS – DERVENTIO

THE 1992 EXCAVATIONS

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Abstract

The results of the testhole survey at the site indicated that the excavation of the low and medium gas pipe trenches had caused damage to in situ deposits. Equally the survey indicated that the excavation of new pipe trenches could not be considered due to the importance of the site. A programme was devised whereby the new medium pressure pipe could be sleeved into the existing low pressure pipe and two trenches to connect the low and medium pressure pipes would be excavated into in situ deposits by professional archaeologists. Further smaller trenches would be excavated into the existing pipe trenches to act as test/plug holes and launch zones. The excavations provided new valuable information on the position and date of structures in the vicus and the Fort which had hitherto being unrecorded.

1. Introduction

The Roman fort of Derventio is located in an open area of pasture (Figs. 1 & 2) known as Orchard Fields.



Figure 1. Scale 1:25000

The site is currently in the ownership of the Milton Peterborough Estates Ltd, but is maintained by Ryedale District Council. The northern portion of the site is a picnic area and a number of information boards are displayed around the site providing minimum information.

MAP Archaeological Consultancy were commissioned to undertake excavation and a watching brief at the site in accordance with Scheduled Monument permission granted on the basis of an application made by MAP on behalf of British Gas in August, 1992.

2. Previous History

The site has only been superficially examined. Excavations undertaken by Kirk and Corder in the late 1920's concentrated on an area of the north-east gateway of the Fort (Kirk & Corder 1930); whereas excavations by Smith and Wenham concentrated on an area to the south-east of the Fort within the vicus (Mitchelson 1964; Wenham 1974). Further limited excavation was undertaken in 1991 when Northern Electric reinstated an electricity cable from Sheepfoot Hill to Old Maltongate. A testhole evaluation of the proposed route was archaeologically supervised and recorded, the results of this evaluation resulted in a watching brief when the entire length of the old cable was exposed during the reinstatement work. The results of the watching brief provided a section through archaeological deposits of the Fort and an unexcavated area of the vicus: new information was provided on the location of a number of walls both inside the Fort and in vicus. The discovery of a large quantity of painted plaster provided further insight into the quality of life for the occupants of one particular building in the vicus in the 2nd century A.D. The watching brief also located a new section of road which now tends to suggest that a road had been constructed to run along outside the northern perimeter of the fort.

The low pressure gas pipe trench excavated in 1949 cut through an area of the fort which had not been studied previously and only superficially recorded by Smith in his excavation diary (Finney 1992, i).

The medium pressure gas pipe trench cuts through the vicus passing through previously unrecorded archaeological deposits, and also an area just to the north of the area excavated by Smith in 1949–52 (Fig. 2).

The testhole survey undertaken in June, 1992 (Finney 1992, i) located areas disturbed by the above excavation and also a disturbed section of wall within the Fort.

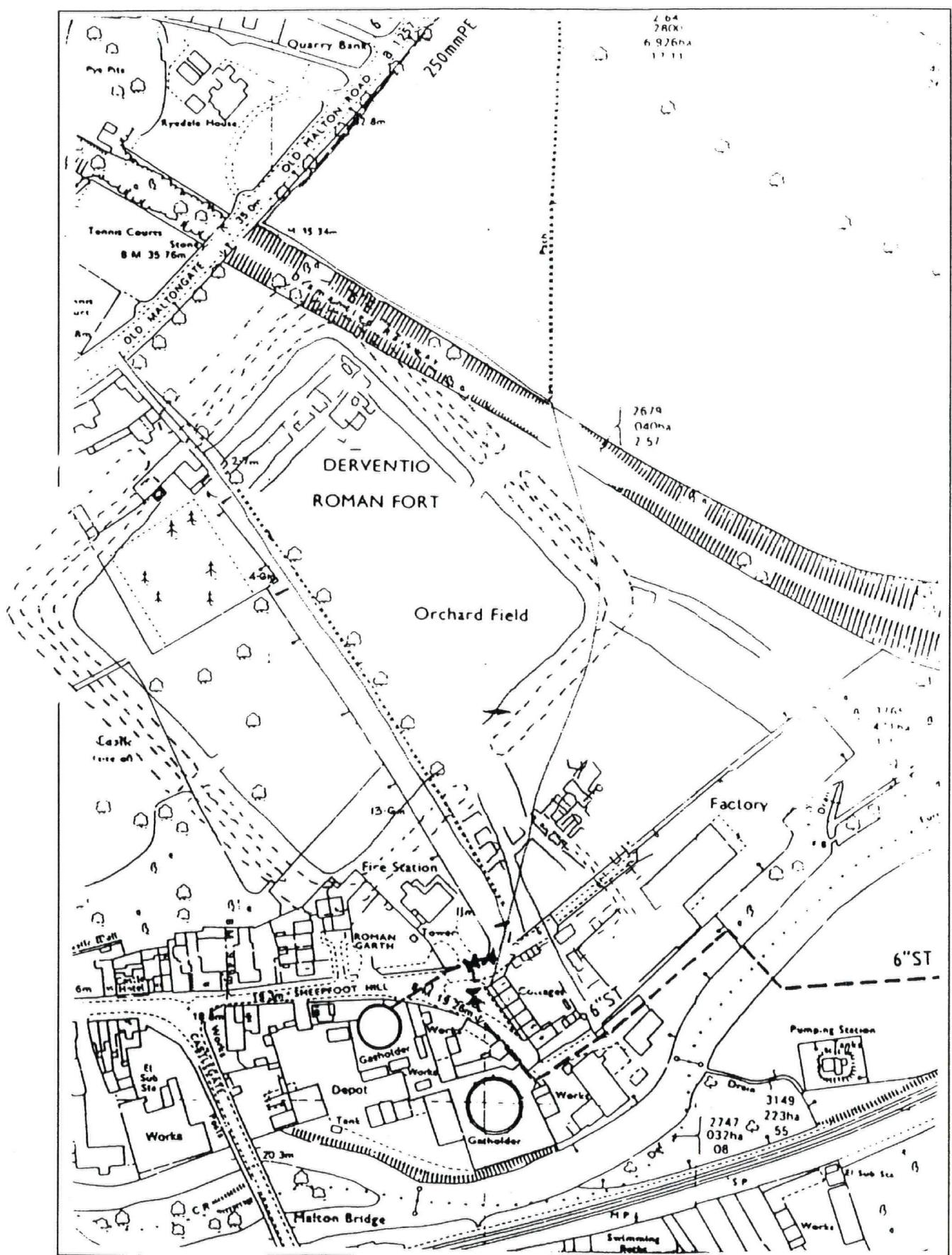


Figure 2. Scale 1:2500

3. Excavation Methods and Objectives

Initially a section of the 1949 gas pipe trench was excavated (Trench 1) to locate the 'bends in the joints' which would determine the exact location for the bypass trenches to be excavated. This trench ran just to the south of Testhole 8 and finished south of Testhole 7 (Finney 1992, i). This trench was hand excavated by British Gas personnel under direct archaeological supervision by employees of MAP Archaeological Consultancy.

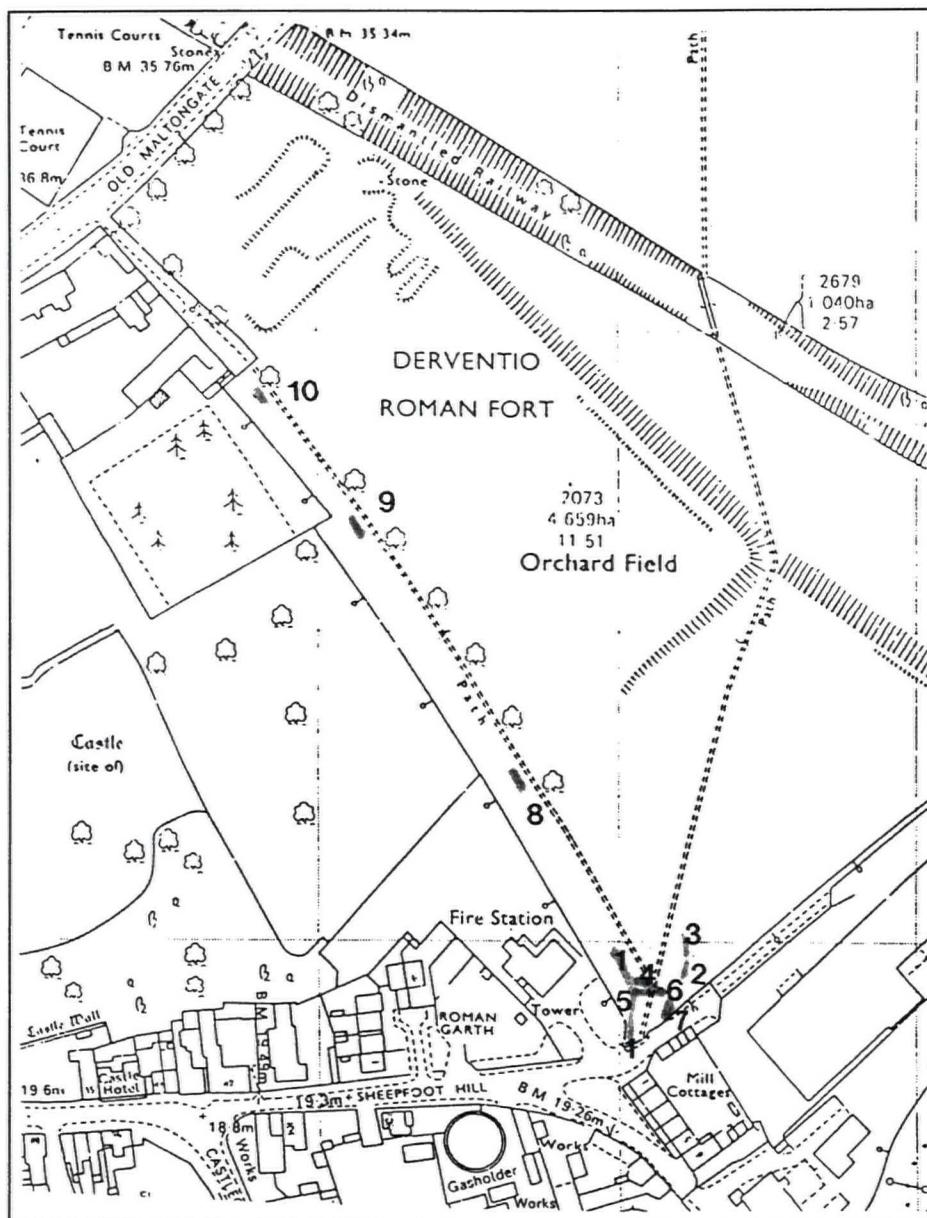


Figure 3. Scale 1:2500.

Trench 2 was excavated to locate the 1960's and 1980's gas pipes, again hand excavated by British Gas personnel with direct supervision. Once both sets of pipe were exposed it was possible to lay out

the position of the trenches to be hand excavated (Trenches 4, 5 & 6). In addition to these trenches British Gas personnel under supervision excavated Trenches 3 and 7 which represented areas where additional work was required on the existing medium pressure pipes, and Trenches 8, 9, and 10 which represented launch zones for the sleeving of the new medium pressure pipe within the low pressure pipe (Fig. 3).

Trenches 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9 and 10 had all previously been disturbed by the excavation and laying of the gas pipes, therefore during excavation in 1992 the trenches were deturfed and then excavated down in 0.20–0.40m spits. This allowed the finds from the trenches to be assigned to specific levels.

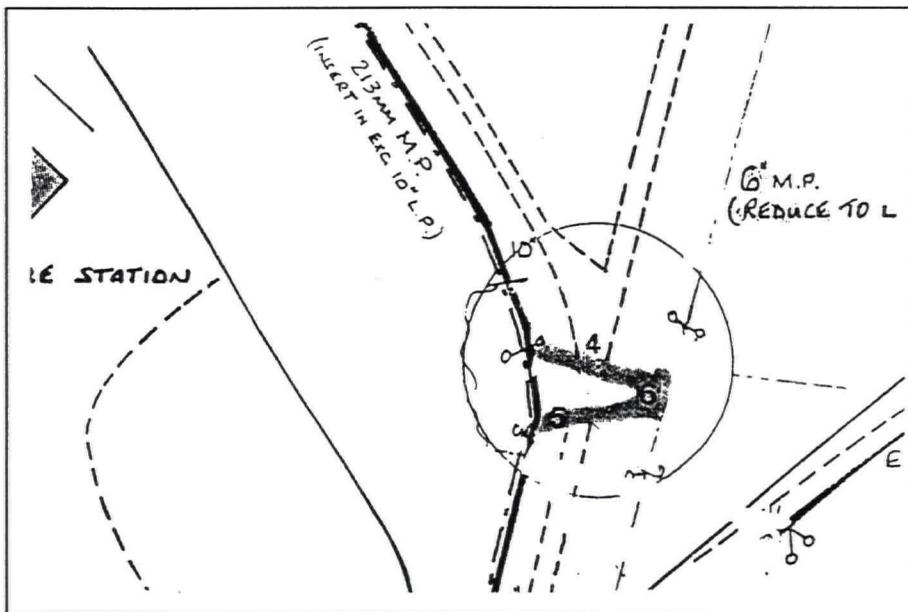


Figure 4.

Not to Scale

All trenches excavated on the site whether by British Gas personnel or by professional archaeologists were recorded either by section (Trenches 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, and 10) or in both plan and section (Trenches 4, 5, and 6). All sections were drawn at 1:10 and produced for this report at various scales, all plans were drawn at either 1:10 or 1:20, all have been reproduced for this report at 1:20. All trenches were photographically recorded by monochrome print and colour transparency (Appendix 11 – p. 123).

After the completion of the excavations and the laying of the new gas pipe all trenches were backfilled under archaeological supervision.

The objective of this project was to allow the upgrading of gas supplies to Malton using existing sections of pipe, i.e. the gas mains laid in Orchard Fields in 1949 – low pressure, and 1960's and

1980's - medium pressure with as little damage to archaeological deposits as possible. The method of sleeving the new pipe within the old 1949 pipe prevented any disturbance to subsurface deposits with the exception of the excavation of the launch zones, but these areas had already been disturbed, as had trenches 1, 2, 3 and 7. The only 'damage' to deposits was the hand excavation of *in situ* deposits in Trenches 4, 5, and 6, but even so this work provided valuable information on a small area of the *vicus*. The project was a success and should provide a model for similar programmes in the future and the results of the excavations albeit limited, provide a basis and a springboard for future work.

The excavation archive has been computerised using the Delilah system.

All plans and sections have been sent to the Royal Commission for Historical Monuments for England for microfilming. A copy of which will be housed at Malton Museum which is also the ultimate location for the storage of the finds and paper archive.

5. Summary

The 1992 excavations of Orchard Fields allowed an insight into a small area of the *vicus* and three areas of the Fort.

The Vicus

Prior to the start of excavation, based on the results of the previous excavations, it was possible to ascertain the type of features to be found within the proscribed excavation areas. It was believed that buildings may be encountered and if so could provide valuable complementary evidence to the known archaeology of the site.

Excavation of all the trenches in the *vicus* indicated that beneath the topsoil where a series of limestone paths some of which had been disturbed by modern intrusions such as drains/soakaways and of course the excavation of the gas pipe trenches in 1949, the 1960's and the 1980's. Where in situ deposits were encountered the stratigraphy indicated a long period of natural build up of loamy soils which equate to the period when Orchard Fields was used as open land either for pasture or for orchards. This deposit sealed a rubble layer which represents the period directly after the abandonment of the *vicus* and the period when a lot of the stone was robbed, probably for building projects such as the castle and local churches.

The limited size of the trenches means that interpretation of the stratigraphy must be tentative, but even so it would appear that the earliest evidence for occupation found during this excavation dates to a phase of timber construction as seen by the presence of the stake/postholes in Trench 6. Based on pottery associations from the layers sealing these feature it would appear that the postholes date to the 1st century A.D. or earlier. Excavation in Trench 5 confirmed a pre-Roman phase at the site by the recovery of Iron Age pottery, as well as the indications that although disturbed by later features some of the contexts encountered may well indicate the presence of early floor deposits from a structure/structures either removed from the archaeological record by the later intrusions or preserved further to the south of the 1992 excavation trench.

Excavation located a section of a building wall measuring 5.8m in length and surviving to four courses in height above foundation and exposed for three courses in foundation. The foundations were of a step construction set into a foundation trench. The wall itself was constructed of mortared limestone with dressed inner and outer faces and a rubble core. Finds from the rubble core of the wall (a coin and a sherd of decorated glass) suggest deposition in the 4th century or later, and therefore indicate that the wall was probably constructed some time in the mid 4th century. Associated to this building wall were a series of floors constructed of hard packed limestone, some of which had been mortared. All the floor layers showed signs of wear and disturbance in the immediate area of the wall. It was clear once the total length of the wall was exposed and the foundation trench excavated on the exterior of the building that this wall had and possibly was still suffering from subsidence. A substantial crack was visible and it was clear that the wall was dipping to the east. Excavation within Trench 4 (i.e. within the building) indicated that there was no feature

within the building for example a cross wall which could explain the subsidence. In fact excavation within the building indicated that whatever the cause of the wall subsidence, was also possibly responsible for the uneven nature of the floors. Each floor was not level, in fact the slope on the floors was quite remarkable over such a small area excavated. The fall in the floors was obviously a problem for the inhabitants of the building and as a floor was replaced attempts were made to rectify the problems. The method used was to even out the slope with sand, broken limestone/limestone slabs, and tiles, before constructing the new floor. As every attempt appeared to fail one must conclude that the subsidence problem was prevalent in the period that the building was inhabited. The reason for the subsidence was not located during the course of the excavation but it is suggested that either a large linear feature runs under the building or the building was built on a unstable area of the site. The geology of Orchard Fields is supposedly oolitic limestone, but it possible that due to the relative close proximity to the river there this part of the vicus may lie on post glacial alluvial and sand deposits.

Whatever the cause of the subsidence it is clear from the pottery associated with the floor levels of the building that the building was occupied from the early 2nd century through to probably the late 4th century A.D. A coin located in the earliest floor layer (context 440) dates to AD 259–270. The problem arises that the date for the construction of the south wall of the Building appears to date to the 4th century, suggesting that all the associated material to the floors is residual being brought in to make up levels from other parts of the site, or that the south wall of the building was a remodel due to the subsidence problems. It is clear that the succession of floor layers in the building would appear to start after c. 260 AD due to the presence of the coin in layer 440.

Externally the building was enlarged by the addition of possibly an annexe sometime in the 3rd to 4th century A.D. the evidence for this rests on the fact that the annexe wall was constructed to butt up to the main wall of the building. The exact size of the annexe is unknown due to the limitation of the excavation. Later the areas immediately to the east and west of the annexe wall were disturbed by a pit and a pit which was further utilised as a posthole for a large timber which was removed in antiquity. The relationship of this post construction to the building and annexe is unknown.

Two infant burials were located, one placed in a shallow grave cut in to the foundation trench of the building therefore postdating the buildings construction, which is dated by the occurrence of 2nd century pottery in the foundation trench and by the ranges of pottery from the floor deposits. The second infant burial was located at the base of the 1980's gas pipe trench and which had been disturbed by the 1960's gas pipe trench. Again based on pottery association the infant burial was associated to contexts dated to the late 2nd/early 3rd century A.D.

To the east of the 1992 building excavation located a floor layer in Trench 3 which was not dissimilar to those found associated with the building in Trench 4. The close proximity of this trench to Trenches 4, 5, and 6 suggested that the floor was either a continuation of one seen in Trench 4 or was a floor surface associated to another room of the Building. Of course only further excavation or geophysical survey could resolve this association.

To the west although excavation was confined to the 1949 gas pipe trench (Trench 1) it was clear that the floors encountered in Trench 4 continued to the west and had been cut through by the trench, equally the wall also continued no return was located in the pipe trench. Therefore the exact size of the building is unknown.

To the south-west observation of Trench 1 confirmed the presence of floor surfaces hinted at in the testhole survey undertaken by MAP for British Gas in June 1992 (Finney 1992, i). A wall was also recorded in section., thus indicating a further building in this area of the site. Its relationship to the structure in Trench 7 is unknown without further work.

Excavation in Trench 7 to the south indicated the presence of another building/room of a building by the location of well mortared walls with a rubble core which had been disturbed by the cutting of the 1980's gas pipe trench.

Therefore the 1992 excavation within this specific area of the *vicus* located a building of unknown size and further sections of walls and floor surfaces which also indicate the presence of additional buildings. Pottery suggests occupation of the stone constructions from the 2nd century A.D. through to the late 4th century A.D. There was also a small amount of evidence for pre-stone construction in the form of wooden structures, the form and nature unfortunately unknown. The occurrence of Iron Age pottery also suggests pre-historic settlement on or near this area of the site.

The Fort

Within the Fort three trenches were observed during excavation for launch zones. All showed that this area had been used for access through the site as evidenced by the limestone constructed paths, beneath which was a thick deposit of natural build-up. Whereas walls were encountered at a relatively shallow depth in the *vicus* area i.e. 0.30m, within the Fort area it is clear that stratigraphy dating to the Roman period is at a much deeper depth in the central portion of the Fort. Excavation in Trench 8 could only suggest the presence of a large ?linear feature below the level at which excavation ceased. In Trench 9 a section of wall was located constructed of mortared dressed limestone blocks and set into a foundation trench. This section of wall had not been recorded by previous excavations and therefore suggests the presence of a well constructed building within this area of the Fort.

Excavation of Trench 10 located a disturbed section of the north wall of the Fort; well constructed of mortared dressed substantial limestone blocks with a rubble core set into a foundation trench.

Dating for the excavation within the Fort again rests on pottery association and unfortunately the relevant sherds from the excavations come from the backfill of the gas pipe trench. Excavation of Trench 8 produced medieval pottery in a quantity not seen elsewhere on the site in the 1992 excavations, but in 1991 the Northern Electric project located medieval pottery again in this area of the site. The occurrence of medieval pottery should not be considered unusual factor considering the close proximity of the castle.

6. Conclusions

The 1992 excavations of Orchard Fields were restrictive due to the nature of the work. The excavation programme was not established to undertake systematic scientific excavation, although this is really what the site needs, but to prevent and record any damage which might occur during the upgrading of the gas supply to Malton.

The recording of Trenches 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, and 10, all areas which had been disturbed previously by the excavation of gas pipe trenches and archaeologically unrecorded, provided new information on the position, form and nature of deposits inside the Fort and within the vicus. New sections of walls and floor deposits were recorded as well as suggesting the presence of features which could not be defined during these excavations but are recorded for future assessment of the site. The excavations of Trenches 4, 5, and 6 although limited indicated the presence of a building built sometime in the 2nd century and which continued in use through to the late 3rd century and most probably into the 4th. The size and function of the building is unknown but the excavations did indicate that structurally this building had problems. The floor surfaces within the structure were not level with high degrees of slope from the south to the north. Equally externally the wall was seen to subside to the east, as though it had been built on top of a large linear feature, which for the life of the building proceeded to cause structural problems.

Excavation in Trench 5 indicated the presence of a further wall which may have been part of an annexe to the building and excavation also hinted at the presence of floor deposits of a period earlier than the building to the north.

The occurrence of two infant burials again provided an insight into the daily life of the population of the vicus and this factor will be discussed later (p.72).

Finally the presence of stakeholes in Trench 6 and Iron Age pottery strongly argues for pre-Roman occupation of the site (p.73).

The 1992 excavations were restricted but even so the levels of information collected from the project are valuable especially as no excavations have taken place at the site since 1952. In forty years our understanding of the site had not been advanced except by drawing parallels from the excavations of other similar sites. The 1991 Northern Electric project had hinted at the type and quality of information which may be forthcoming if excavation could be implemented, the 1992 excavations have gone along way to justify that belief.

7. Discussion

Orchard Fields has suffered much disturbance over the years. The castle and the Jacobean mansion must have caused substantial damage to the western part of the fort, and the levelling of Orchard Field and the cutting of the railway line in 1851–3 affected the north-eastern side. The excavation of the site in 1927–30 showed that systematic quarrying had removed a great deal of the stonework. Landscaping of the gardens attached to the Lodge has removed all surface indications of the fort in this area. Numerous service trenches dissect the site, all were excavated without archaeological supervision. The evidence discovered suggests that these service trenches have caused in the past considerable damage to surrounding deposits, only recent monitored works are helping to redress the balance.

During the late 1st century A.D. an Agricolan fort was constructed on the site of Orchard Fields, it measured 8.4 acres in area and was composed of a clay rampart 9.14m in width, a ditch and timber gateways with wattle and daub buildings and ovens. During the Trajanic period (very late 1st early 2nd century A.D.) the timber defences and gateways were rebuilt in stone. The fort was abandoned during the Hadrianic and Antonine periods (early – mid 2nd century A.D.), archaeological investigation by Kirk and Corder in the 1920's suggested that some form of destruction took place at the beginning of the abandonment but reoccupation took place some time after 154–158 A.D. as shown by the refurbishing of the defences and gateways. Very little is known to date of the fort's history in the 3rd century A.D., but towards the close of the century a systematic burning of wheat was undertaken along the north-east rampart which once interpreted as an evacuation of the fort now seems more likely to represent the destruction of contaminated wheat (Buckland 1982).

A complete rebuilding of the north-east gateway took place in the 4th century A.D., it is to this period that Kirk and Corder's excavations have attributed within the fort the building of several well built stone buildings, one with a hypocaust chamber, and the discovery of 29 infant burials which may suggest that wives and families lived within the fort.

The 1927–29 excavation also indicated a shoddy rebuilding of the north-east gateway and the construction of a large defensive ditch in response it seems to the threat of invasion from the Picts, Scots and Barbarians.

Signs of occupation and further massive defence measures coupled with a gradual decline in standards lasted into the 5th century A.D.

The 1992 excavations were unable to provide much new evidence on the interior development of the Fort; with the exception of the east-west wall. which was only seen in section

The Vicus

All our evidence for the vicus (the roman name for the civilian settlement) comes from the excavations of Kirk and Corder (1927–29), Smith (1949–52), Wenham and Manby (1968–70), and

MAP (1989 & 1991). The excavations have shown along with the occasional spot find found during the course of modern building in the area that the vicus lay to the south of the fort . Over 20 buildings of stone or wood construction have been found, along with ovens, kilns, forges and even a temple. Some of the buildings are obviously houses but others appear to represent shop units. The earliest civilian buildings appear to date from the Domitianic or early Trajanic periods (81-117 A.D.). In the 3rd and 4th centuries the vicus was at its most prosperous and populous. Many of the buildings show some degree of comfort and luxury, the Town House possessed not only a hypocaust system but also a mosaic floor. After this period of prosperity the events of 367-8 A.D.(this refers to the rebellion of the Picts and Scots in the north and the threat of a Barbarian invasion from the Continent) resulted in abandonment and demolition of structures and inferior reconstruction. The archaeological record indicates a decline in standards and prosperity from the mid 4th century onwards.

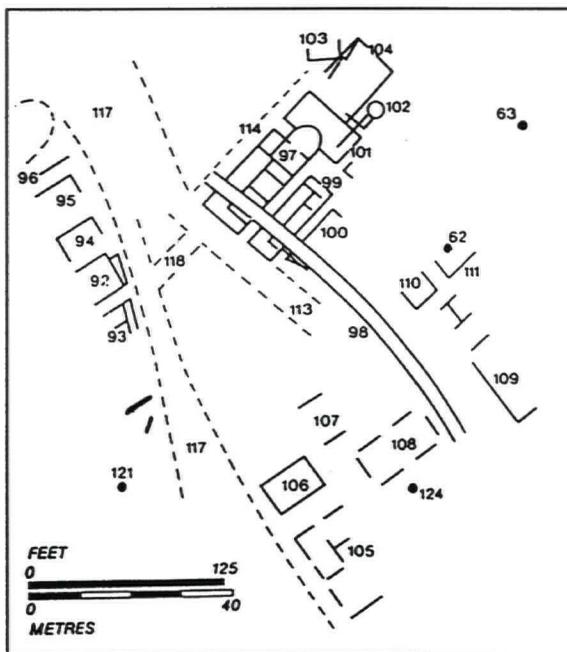


Figure 60

The 1992 excavation was situated directly to the south of the group of buildings interpreted by Mitchelson (1964, 211) as the 'shop unit' (Fig. 60). This unit was composed of Buildings A and B and sections of walls (Fig. 60 : 94–96). The construction of these building walls are almost identical to that of the section found in the 1992 excavations, in that they were constructed of mortared limestone blocks with a rubble core built onto stepped foundations within foundation trenches. Equally in Building A internal repairs on the floor surfaces continued throughout the buildings life suggesting longevity of occupation. The final change in the plan of Building A occurred with the addition of an annexe in the early 4th century A.D.. Again this structural development was noted in the excavations to the south of the 1992 building wall.

Excavation of Building B located three infant burials; a practise which was also confirmed by the 1992 excavations.

The results of the 1992 excavations confirm that this area of the vicus was developed in the 2nd century and continued through to the late 4th. The development of the 1992 building in some respects mirrors to the development of Building A, i.e. the construction of an annexe. The practise of infant burial seen not only in the vicus but also within the Fort was also confirmed by the excavations. It is not within the scope of this report to discuss the reasons for this practise but to suffice to say it would appear to have been relatively common at Orchard Fields in the Roman period.

The presence of timber constructions and Iron Age pottery are also seen elsewhere on the site. Mitchelson reports that the earliest buildings in the 'shop area' were of timber construction and probably dated from the period 75–108 A.D.

Little is known about the site prior to its development in the Roman period. Excavations by Wenham and Manby on the site of Orchard Cottage (to the south of Orchard Fields) located a pre-Roman ground surface with associated finds of quernstones, potboilers, and many artefacts associated with weaving (Wenham 1974). Their occurrence was taken as indicative of a late Iron Age occupation site. Therefore the recovery of Iron Age pottery to the north is not surprising and tends to confirm some form of Iron Age activity on the site.

Excavations and watching briefs at the site has shown the excellent preservation of in situ deposits and also how much new information can be recovered from the recording of the old service trenches. But even so only a tiny proportion of the this important site has been investigated, providing an unique opportunity for further research.

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Trench 2

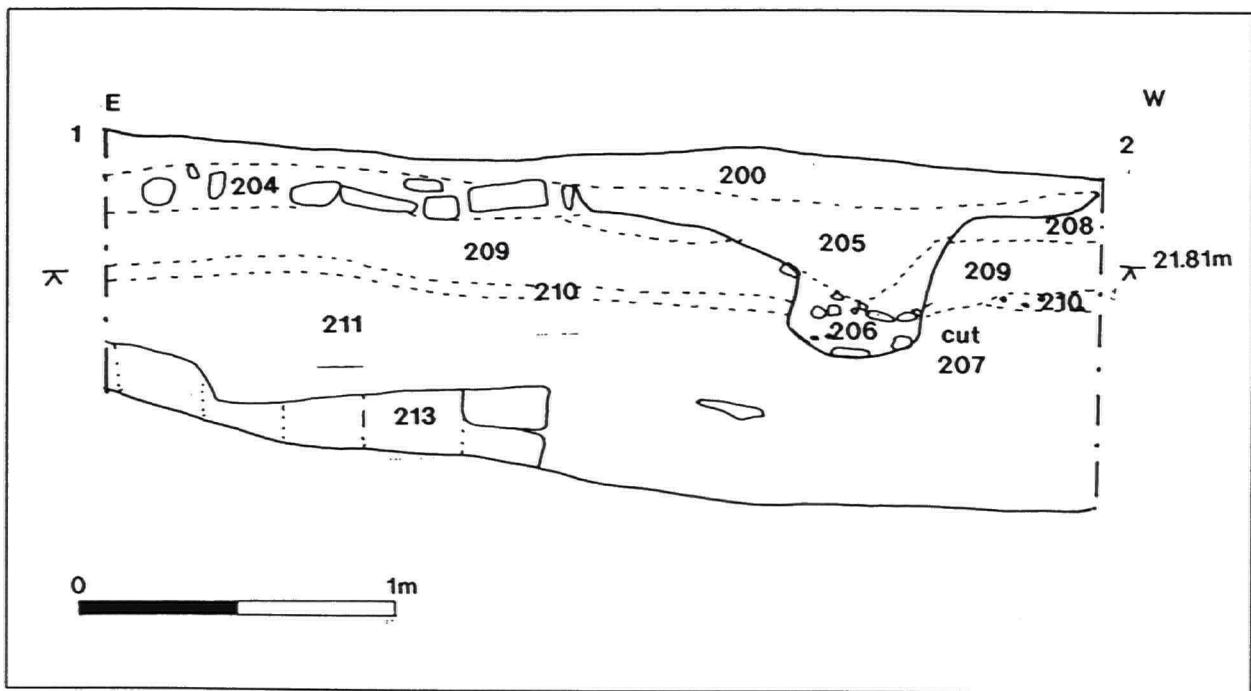


Figure 5.

Trench 3

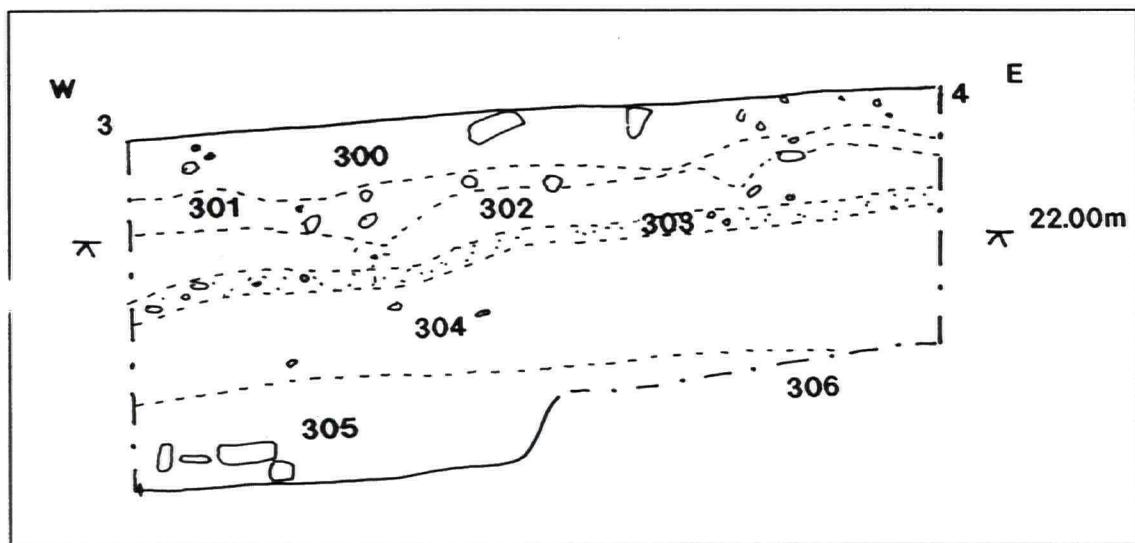


Figure 6. Scale 1:25

Trench 4

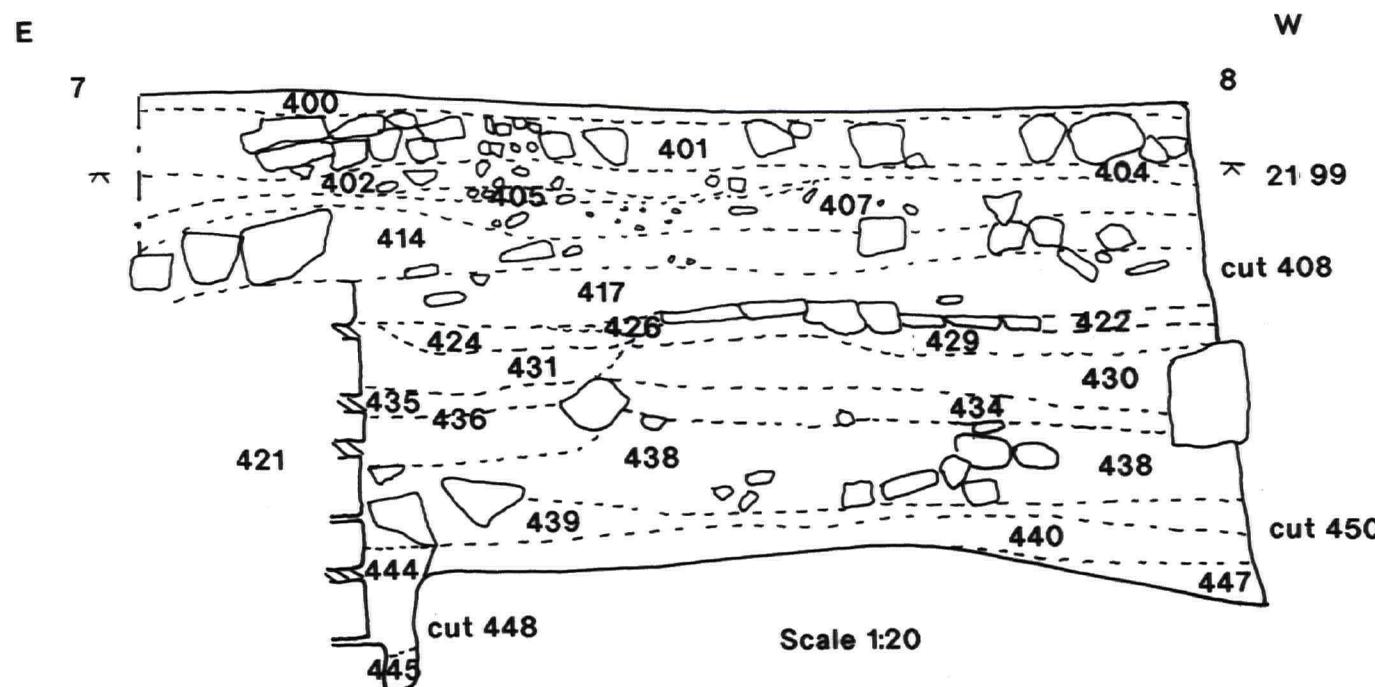
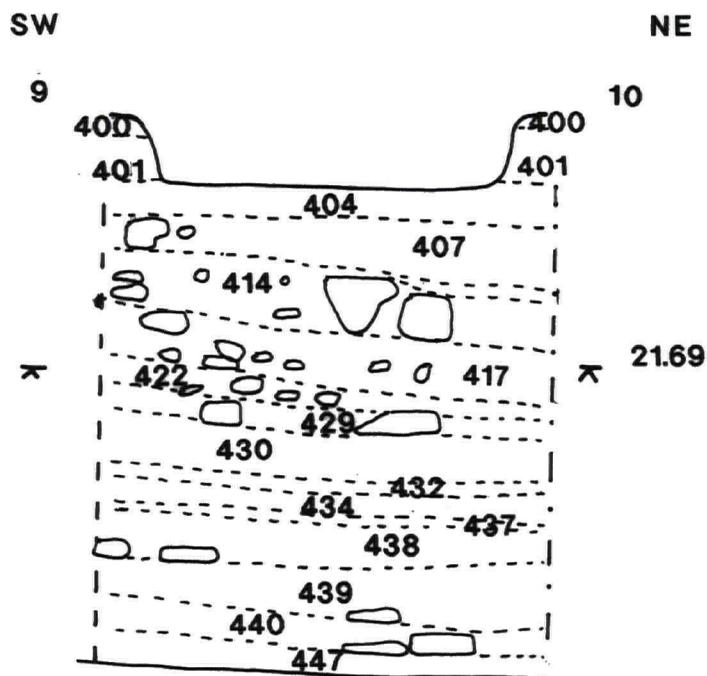


Figure 28

Trench 4



Scale 1:20

Figure 29

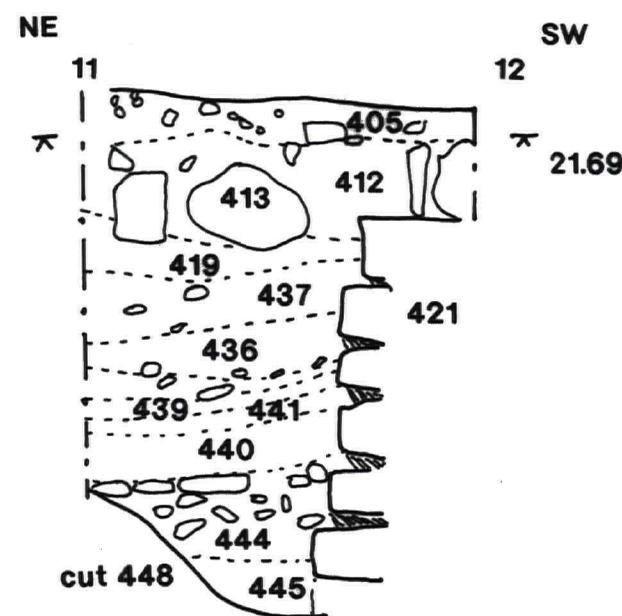
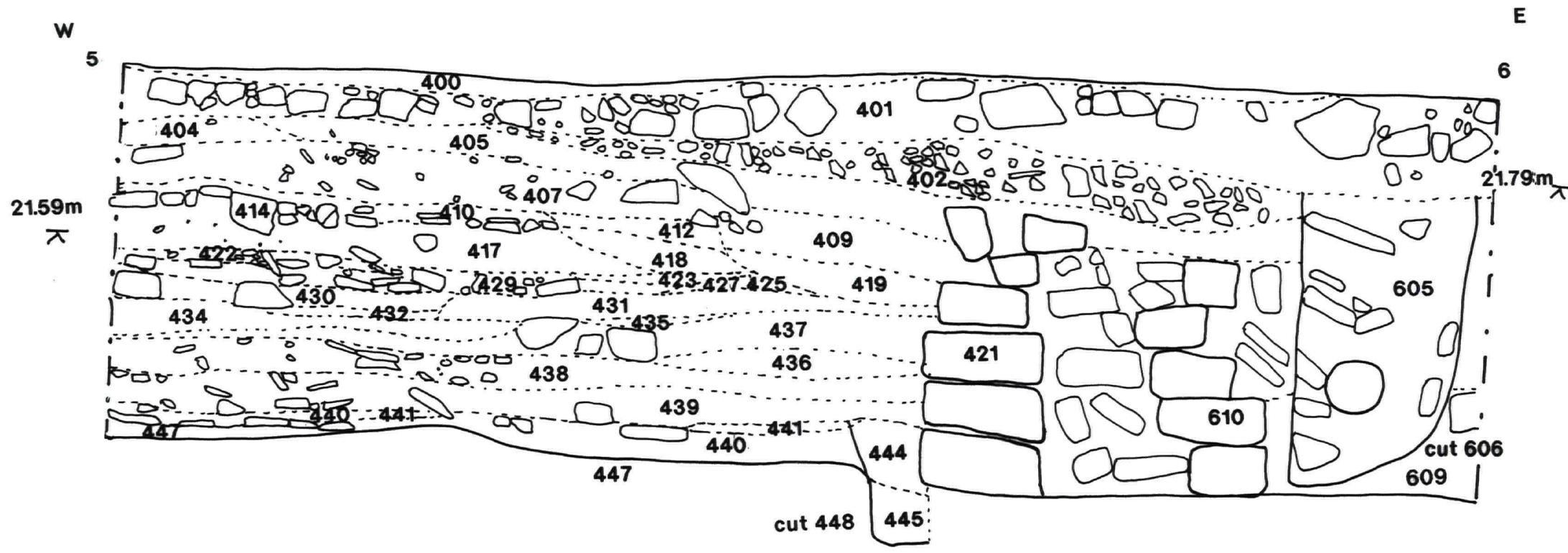


Figure 30

Trench 4/6



Scale 1:20

Figure 27

Trench 4/6

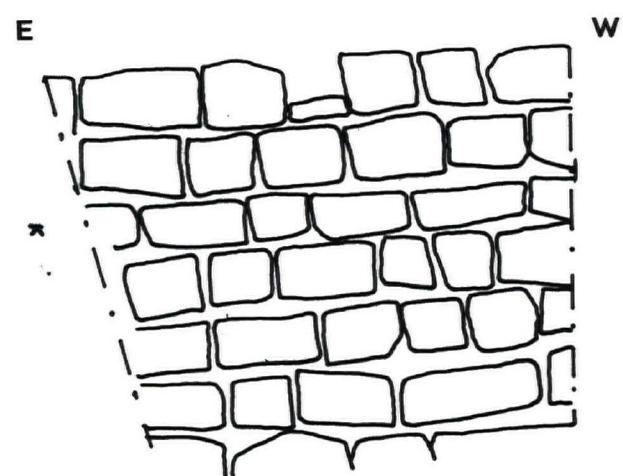
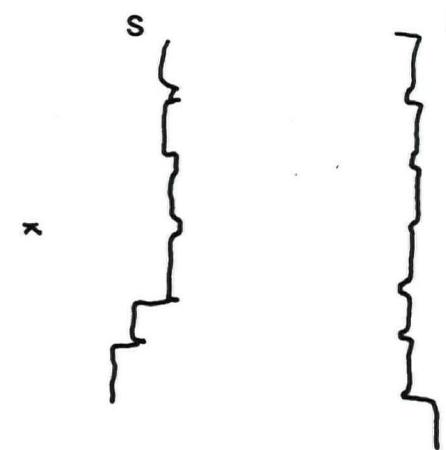


Figure 52



Scale 1:20

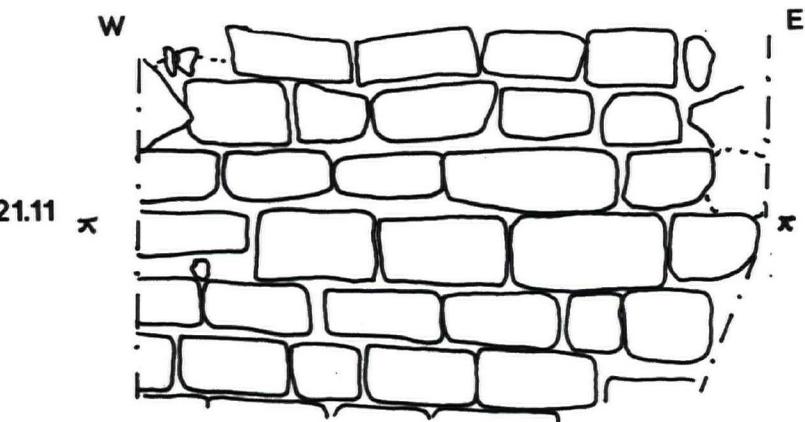


Figure 54

Trench 5

E

W

13

14

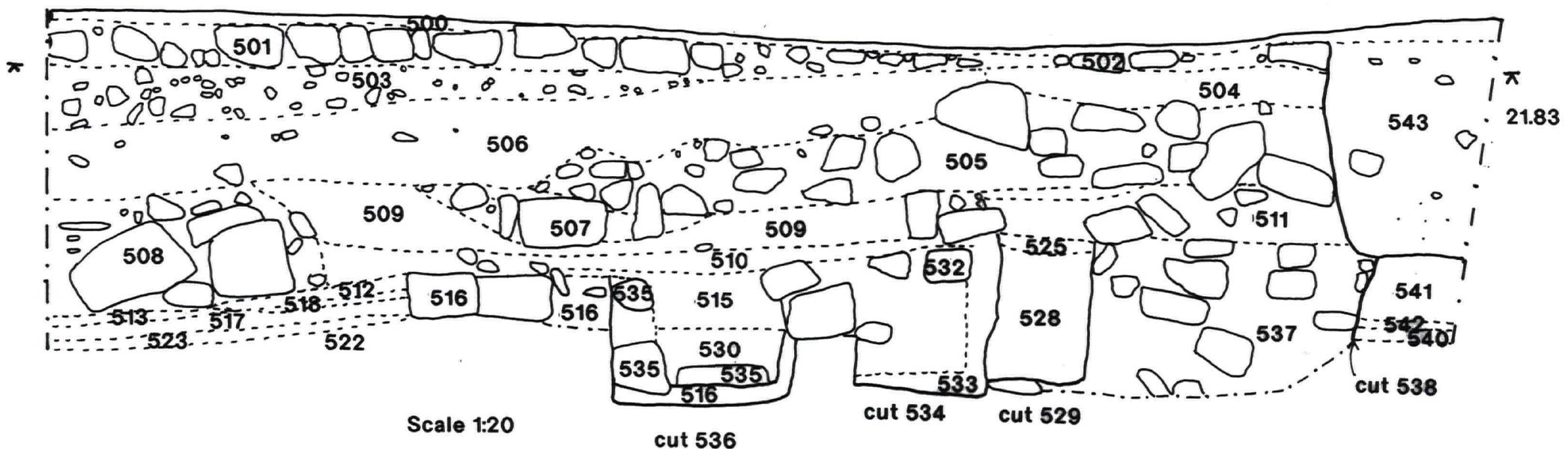
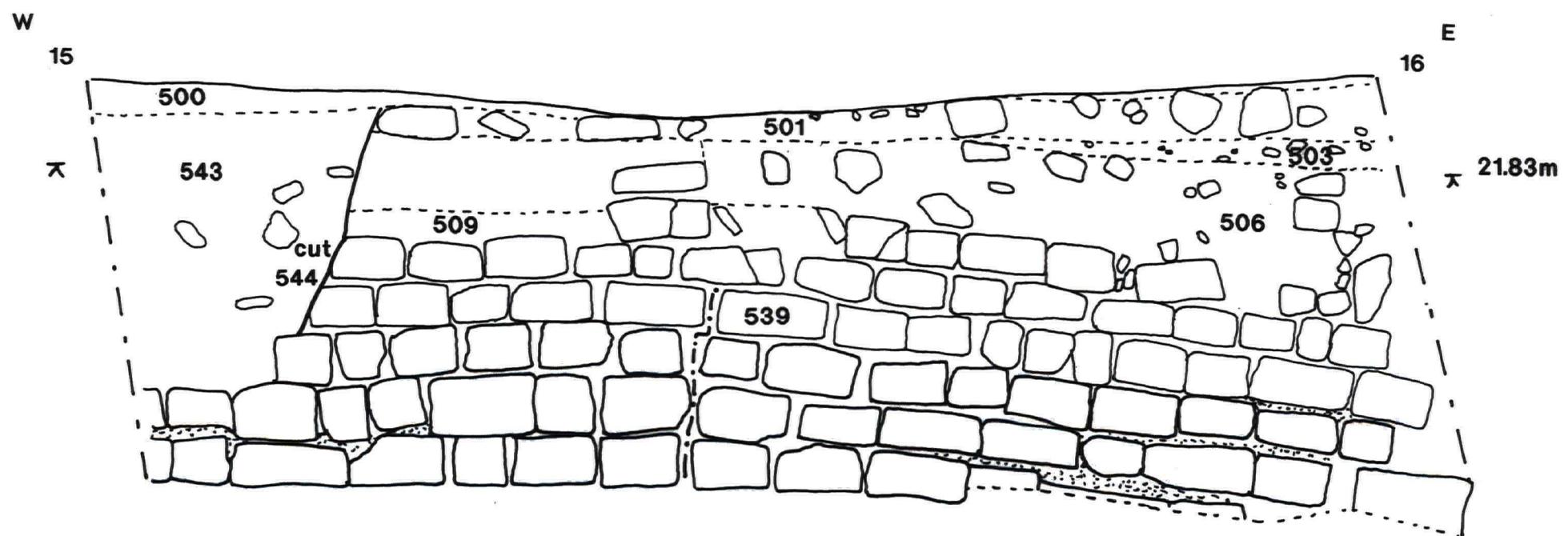


Figure 42

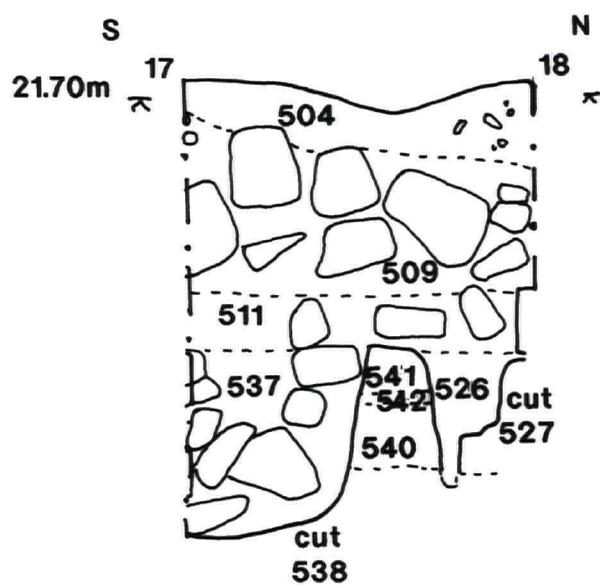
Trench 5



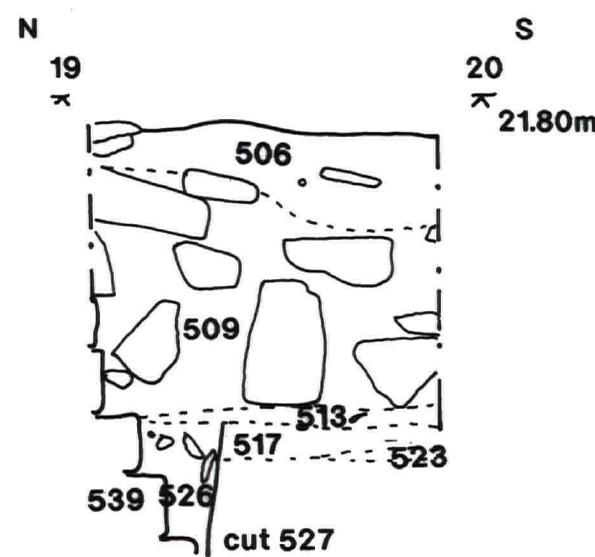
Scale 1:20

Figure 43

Trench 5



64

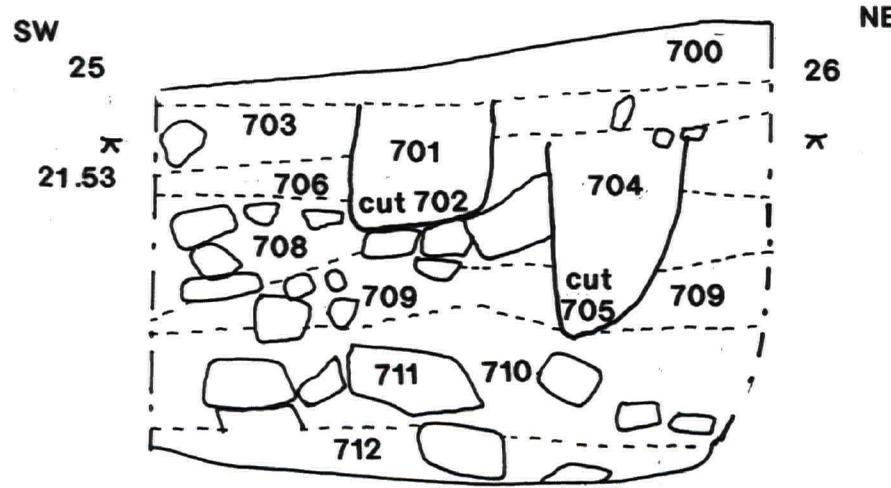


Scale 1:20

Figure 44

Figure 45

Trench 7



Scale 1:20

Figure 55

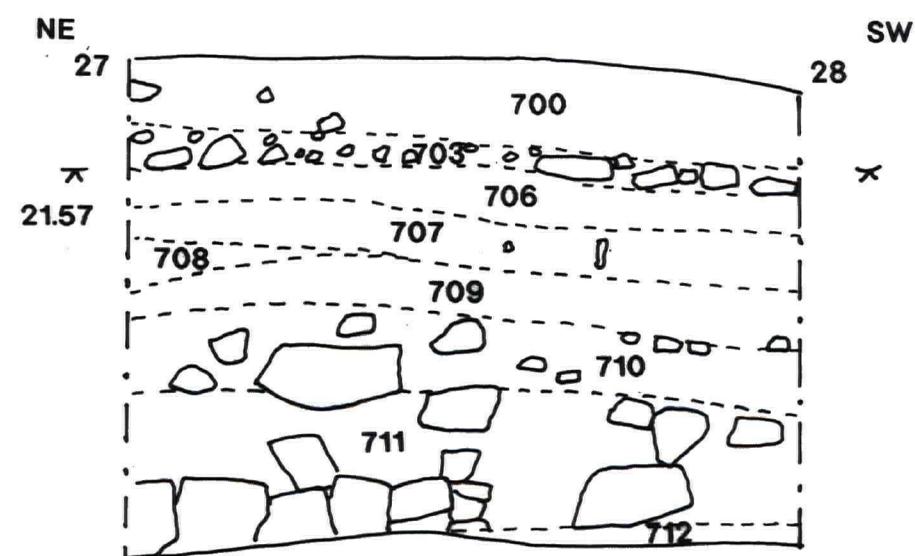


Figure 56

Trench 8

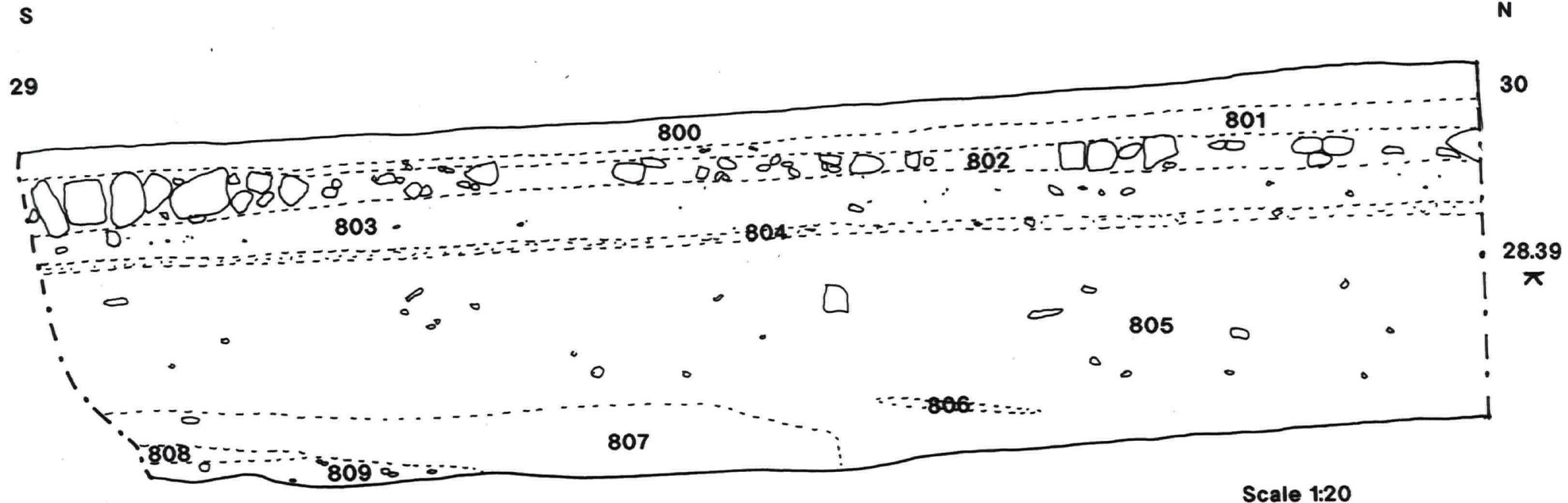


Figure 57

Trench 9

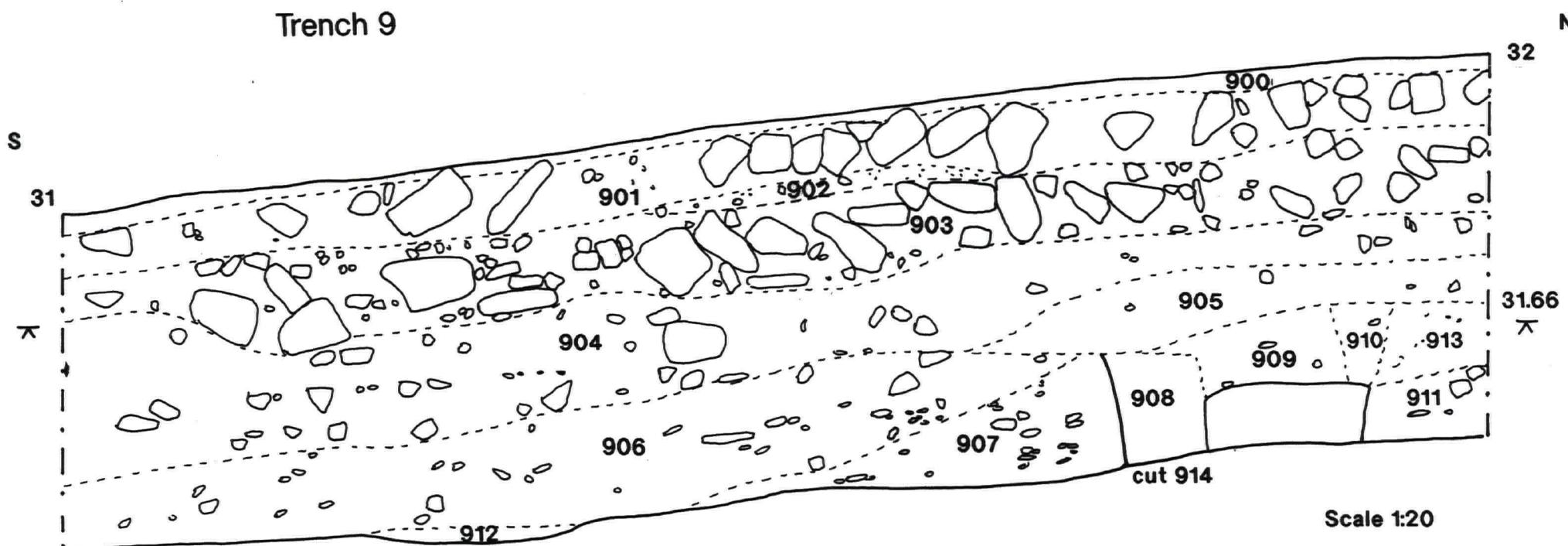


Figure 58

Trench 10

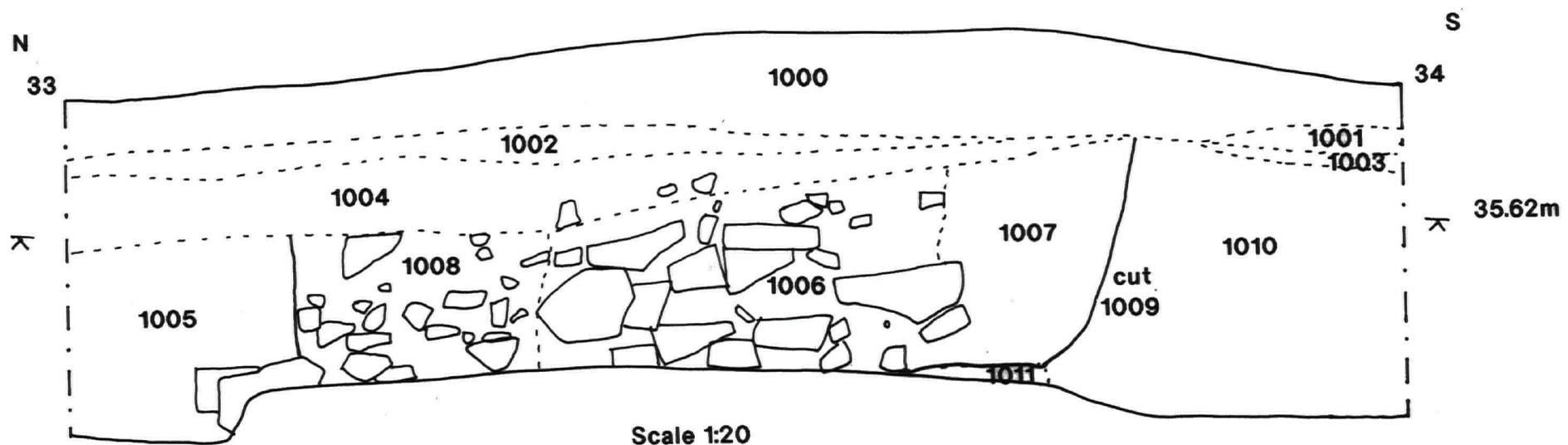


Figure 59