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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT 47, ALLHALLOWGATE, RIPON, NORTH YORKSHIRE (SE 31537142)

A report to Clive Ekin Builders



6th March 2001

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT
47, ALLHALLOWGATE, RIPON, NORTH YORKSHIRE
(SE 31537142)**

SUMMARY

1. On instructions from Clive Ekin, Builders, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken of the above site. No significant archaeological remains were encountered, a situation broadly in agreement that that found on the south side of Allhallowgate approximately opposite to the site, but in contrast with mediaeval deposits which have been identified close to the south-east corner of the site. It is suggested that the area has seen considerable post-mediaeval excavation and landscaping, and that archaeological survival in the general area may be very uneven: within the proposed development site it appears already to have been effectively destroyed.
2. Archive material will be deposited with the North Yorkshire Sites and Monuments Record.

BACKGROUND

3. The site of the evaluation is occupied by warehouses and a yard, formerly the Express Terminals depot: a small area is currently a domestic garden (Fig. 1). Proposals exist to demolish existing buildings and to redevelop the site with 24 new dwellings, under planning and Conservation Area applications submitted to Harrogate District Council in October, 2000 (refs. 6.31.804.E and 6.31.804.F). The archaeological evaluation was required in furtherance of these applications, and was conducted according to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by the office of the County Archaeologist.
4. The proposed development area occupies a site on the north side of Allhallowgate, Ripon, close to its junction with Stonebridgegate. All existing buildings on the site are of modern date, and most of those on Allhallowgate not earlier than the nineteenth century: nevertheless, the street forms part of the pattern of mediaeval development, and the lower end of Allhallowgate in particular is believed to lie within the earliest, pre-Conquest, historic core of Ripon.
5. The area to the rear of No 4, Stonebridgegate (immediately to the south-east of the present site) was investigated in 2000 by On-Site Archaeology. A stratified sequence of mediaeval deposits and pits, with a date-range between the 12th and 14th centuries, was recorded. However, immediately south of the development site, at the rear of the former Fleece public house, evaluation in 1996 by the Brigantia Archaeological Practice showed extensive terracing and excavation for cellars which had removed any trace of whatever deposits may have preceded in date the early 19th century.

6. The development site drops very sharply in level towards the east: the street level on the Stonebridgeway frontage is over three metres below the general levels of the floors of the warehouses facing Allhallowgate. To some extent, it appears that the eastern part of the warehouses sits on a massive concrete raft (an impression confirmed by borehole evidence): it is also fairly clear, however, that the area has been subjected to a certain amount of terracing in recent centuries. Similarly, the ground level at the western end of the development site, at the rear of 49, Allhallowgate, is approximately a metre lower than that of the British Legion Club immediately to the west: here it looks very much as though the natural slope of Allhallowgate has been modified to form more-or-less level terraces. There is, of course, no reason why at least some of this terracing might not itself be of mediaeval date.

THE EVALUATION

7. Fieldwork was carried out over a period of three days in February, 2001. In order to obtain as representative as possible a sample of the development site, a total of five trenches was excavated (Fig. 2): no investigation was made of the north-eastern quarter of the site, because it was already known that it was covered by several metres of fill to level the existing buildings against the natural slope. All but Trench 5, which was in the garden of 49, Allhallowgate, were covered with concrete: this was broken-through by the client before the start of the evaluation. Initial excavation was thereafter by a back-acting mini-excavator fitted with an edentate ditching bucket. This was used to remove clearly modern rubble and overburden, after which trenches were cleaned with hand-tools for recording. Levels are calculated from the OS benchmark opposite 37, Allhallowgate (value 34.30 m.a.O.D.) from which a temporary benchmark was established on the site. Results were as follow (measurements given are from the top of each trench, at present ground surface):

8. Trench 1 (Fig.3)

8.1 This trench, measuring 4 metres long by 1.8 metres wide, was sited as close as possible to the south-east corner of the site: this was only a few metres away from the site of the 2000 evaluation, on the other side of the boundary wall, and as close as could be arranged to the Allhallowgate frontage. The deposits encountered were:

[101]	Concrete.	0-10 cms (top 29.10 m.a.O.D.)
[102]	Broken concrete and dolomite hardcore	10-21 cms
[103]	Light, orange-brown sandy soil, with very little organic component, some gravel and occasional pieces of broken brick	21-120 cms
[104]	Very pale, yellow-brown fine sand (directly over natural)	120-140 cms

[105] Large modern intrusion, apparently a soakaway, cut from directly under [102] and confined to the western end of the trench: it cuts through [103] and is clearly of very recent date, containing pieces of paper in its fill.

8.2 When first excavated and cleaned, it appeared that the sandy deposit [103] was in fact the natural subsoil (which in Ripon varies considerably, but is locally a reddish sand with some clay content). The occasional presence of pieces of modern brick soon showed that it was not, and the matter was confirmed by the discovery of three fragments of window glass (and of a single, unretouched, struck flake of flint) immediately on top of the surface of the natural subsoil. The overall impression is very like that of the area behind the Fleece public house, a few metres to the south, where large intrusions containing modern material had been backfilled with very clean, sandy material. A similar intrusion seems to have been discovered here in Trench 1: the scale suggests a possible cellar on the Allhallowgate frontage. It is understood that the location of this intrusion roughly conforms to one logged in a geotechnical report at the rear of 4, Stonebridgegate, immediately to the east (where it was seen to cut through one of the mediaeval features).

8.3 No fragment of mediaeval pottery was found, nor any other material which might be of a date earlier than the 19th century.

9. Trench 2.

9.1 This was a small test-pit, measuring 2m. x 2m, designed to sample the south-west corner of the open yard. The deposits encountered were:

[201] Concrete	0-10 cms (top 29.89 m.a.O.D.)
[202] Hardcore and dolomite	10-22 cms
[203] Dark grey mixed clay soil with modern rubble	22-32 cms

9.2 In this case, [203] (which appears to represent levelling for the present concrete yard) proved directly to overlie the natural sand. In order to demonstrate that this was indeed the natural, and not a fill like [103], excavation was continued for a metre into this yellow-orange sand (with a fairly high content of clay particles), and its primary and natural nature confirmed. Nothing was cut into the surface of this subsoil, nor was any object of archaeological significance encountered.

10. Trench 3 (Fig. 4)

10.1 This measured 4m. x 1.8 m. and was positioned inside the former Express Terminals warehouse. It was the only of the five excavated trenches to produce anything of any archaeological significance, and even that was of the most nugatory nature. The deposits were:

[301] Concrete, heavily reinforced with steel	0-10 cms (top 29.23 m.a.O.D.)
[302] Hardcore and dolomite	10-25 cms
[303] Chestnut-brown sand with some gravel-sized pebbles and charcoal flecks	25-120cms

[304] Stones

(under [303])

Natural sand, rather similar to [303] but markedly more compact, as well as slightly lighter in colour, directly underlay [303] and [304].

10.2 Two of these deposits require further comment. [303], the layer of brown sandy material, was very similar to the natural, though markedly looser and containing some flecks of charcoal. It also contained, in small quantities, fragments of animal bone (all apparently of Ovis, though too little to make analysis worthwhile), and small, abraded sherds of mediaeval pottery (of 12th- 14th century date, compatible with the material from On-Site Archaeology's evaluation to the east of our site). The layer was absolutely uniform, and had the appearance of material which had been reworked and redeposited.

10.3 The deposit designated [304] was a very small setting of stones, in the extreme north-west corner of the trench. It consisted of no more than three cobble-sized stones, without sign of a definite cut. Immediately associated with the stones were two sherds of pottery, larger and less abraded than those from [303]. One comes from the corrugated neck of a jug or pitcher, with a lustrous, dark green glaze on the outer surface; the other is a body sherd, with splashes of an apple-green glaze. In each case the fabric is hard, sandy and pink-buff: a 14th century date is appropriate. This tiny deposit appears to be the only undisturbed remnant of mediaeval stratigraphy within the five evaluation trenches.

11. Trench 4 (Fig. 5)

11.1 This trench, also 4m. x 1.8m., lay within the northernmost of the warehouse buildings. Deposits were:

[401] Concrete	0-12 cms. (top 29.80 m.a.O.D.)
[402] Clean gravel hardcore	12-25 cms.
[403] Asphalt	25-42 cms.
[404] Dirty mixed hardcore	42-56 cms.
[405] Very dark, black-brown clay loam garden soil, with 19 th century rubbish. Slightly lighter in colour towards the Bottom	56-140 cms.

[406] Pipe trench in NE corner of trench

11.2 The asphalt surface represented by [403] and [404] appears to belong to the site's former use as a 'bus depot. The interesting deposit is the garden soil, [405], which contained blue-and-white pottery, fragments of clay pipe and other indicators of 19th century date. The underlying natural was devoid of any archaeological feature, and it may be supposed that the garden use has effectively obliterated any mediaeval

deposits which may have existed (though it is true that no mediaeval pottery was recovered from this trench, that may be a reflection of the bulk excavation by machine in poor light conditions).

11.3 It is interesting to compare this trench with Trench 3, less than 20 metres to the east, where no trace was found of the modern garden soil which dominates Trench 4. It seems, however, that the brown sandy layer [303] represents an equivalent: a layer which has been formed by disturbance of the mediaeval deposits and their reworking to form a homogenous matrix. The two deposits are physically equivalent- the level of the natural in Trench 3 is only 7 cms. lower than that in Trench 4, a discrepancy which may easily be accounted for by the degree of natural slope- and they may well represent the same episode of post-mediaeval terracing, with the area to the west (Trench 4) subsequently continuing to be reworked and to have material added to it during its use as a domestic garden.

12. Trench 5 (Fig. 5)

12.1 The final trench, measuring 4m. x 2m., was located in the garden to the rear of 49, Allhallowgate, at the western edge of the development site. The deposits were:

[501] Turf	0-25 cm. (top 30.13 m.a.O.D.)
[502] Very loose garden soil, with large quantities of brick and stone rubble, and other modern rubbish	25-105 cms.

12.2 The underlying natural sand, here with more clay than elsewhere, was devoid of any early feature. No object of a date earlier than the 19th century was found.

DISCUSSION

13. It is becoming clear that the pattern of archaeological deposition and survival in Ripon- at least in this area of Ripon- is complicated, and that the pattern is liable to abrupt changes within small areas. That significant survival can occur has been shown by the results of the evaluation of the area immediately to the east of the development site, but to the south and the west of that pocket of survival, archaeological deposits seem to have been devastated by activity within the past two centuries. The cellaring of frontages seems to be an important factor, but it also appears that other landscaping operations, probably concerned with terracing the considerable natural slope of Allhallowgate, have also played their part. It has been suggested to us by a geotechnologist (Patrick Cormick, *pers. comm.*) that parts of Ripon may have been subject in the past to localised collapses of the ground into voids created by the dissolution of gypsum deposits (a process which certainly occurs at the present time) and that the craters so created have been filled in with inert material quarried locally and for the purpose: certainly, this might account for some of the large holes filled with clean material which have been seen on this site (especially in Trench 1) and to the south at the rear of the former Fleece public house.

14. The single, tiny, mediaeval deposit identified during this evaluation is at a level not likely to be disturbed by excavation for strip foundations. The question which remains is whether or not the site has further archaeological potential. It is perfectly possible that deposits do survive, west of Trench 3, which might give a link to those found behind the Stonebridgegate frontage. It is, however, extremely unlikely (given the abrupt change of level) that such deposits would be disturbed or revealed by the digging of foundations: it is fairly clear that the area of the site west of Trench 3 drops progressively in height to the extent that any mediaeval surface would soon be deeply, and safely, buried.

15. There remains a possibility that highly localised pockets of survival may exist on parts of the site. Given, however, the extent of the current evaluation (the results of which have been almost entirely negative), further formal investigation appears inappropriate and difficult to justify: it is suggested instead that a suitable response might be archaeological monitoring of the initial stages of any ground reduction and excavation carried out by contractors.

Percival Turnbull.
5th March 2001

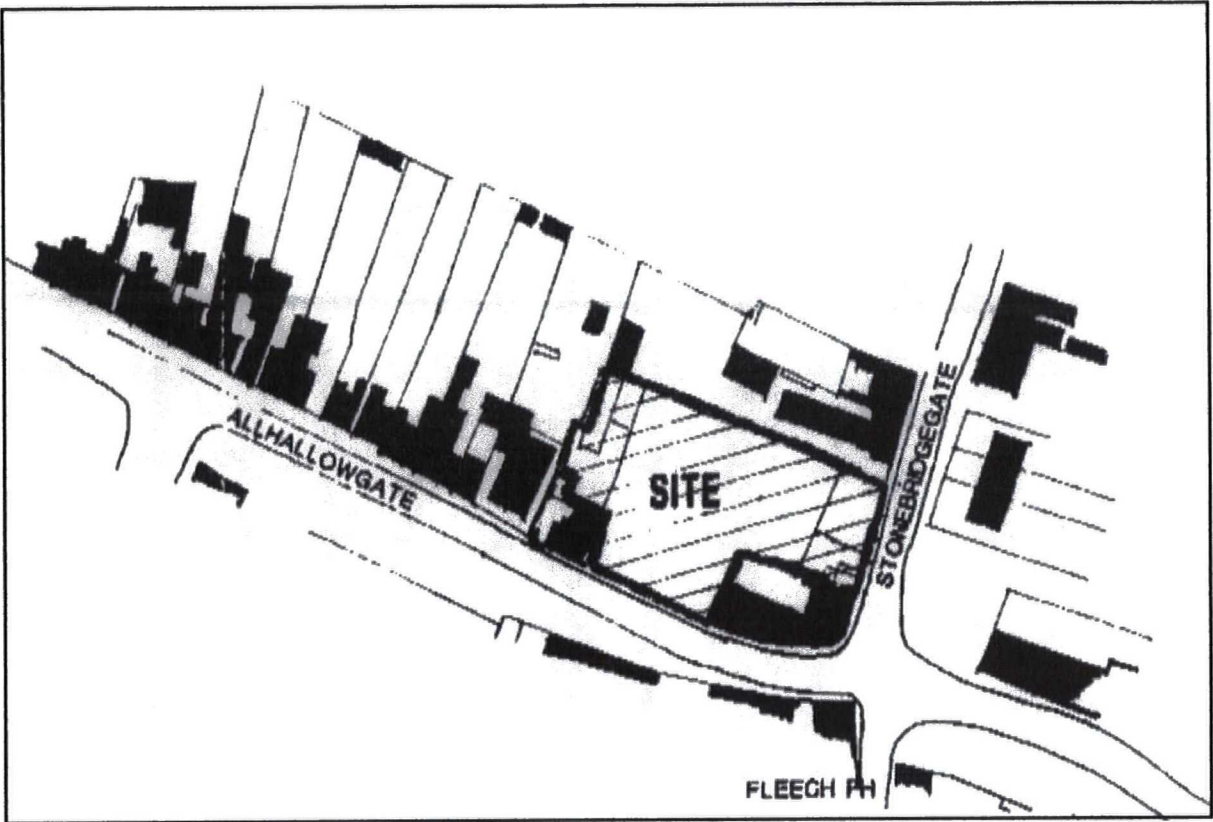
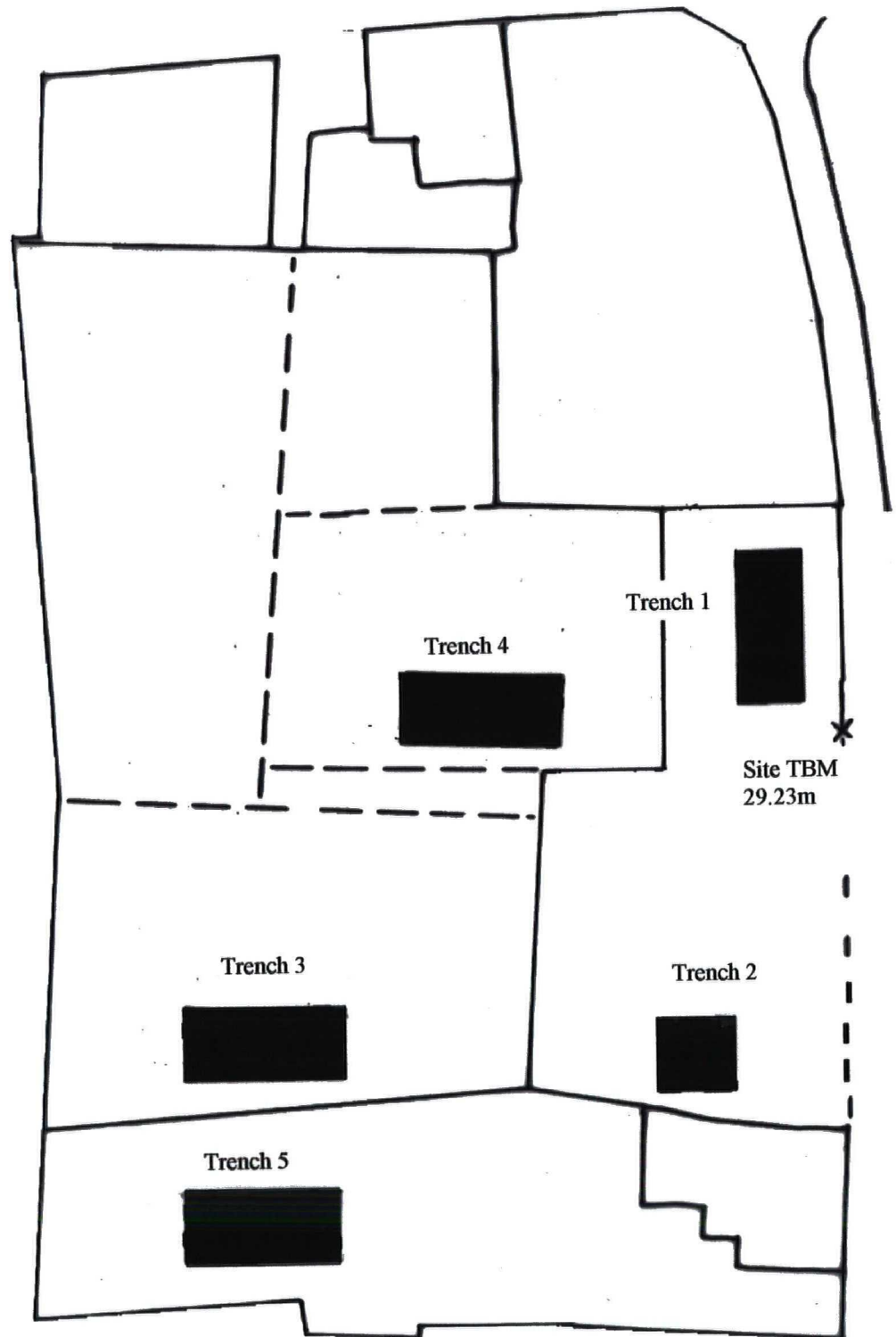


Fig. 1

Site location

Scale approx. 1:1,250



Site TBM
29.23m



Fig. 2
Location of trenches

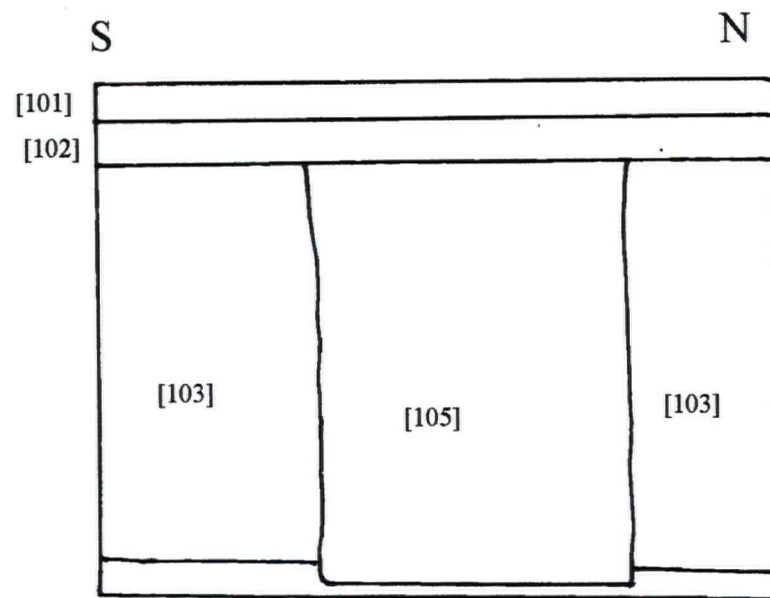
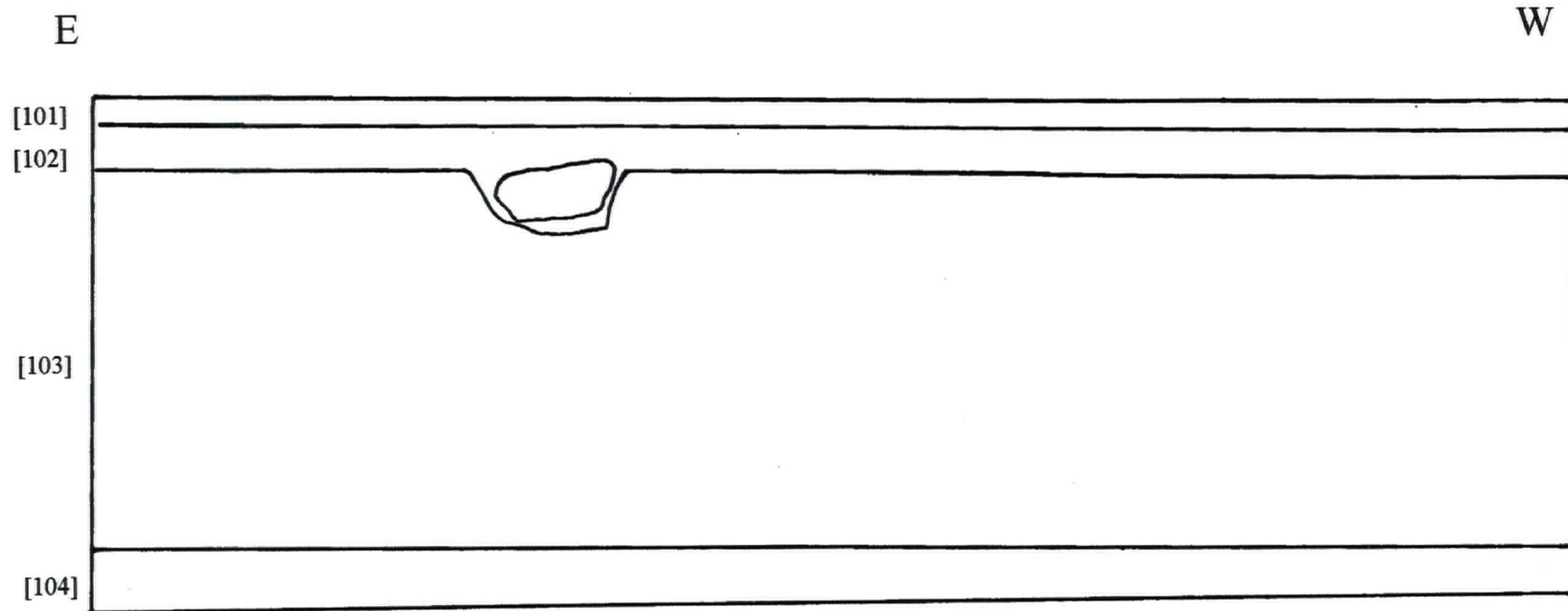


Fig. 3
 Sections: Trench 1
 Scale 1:20

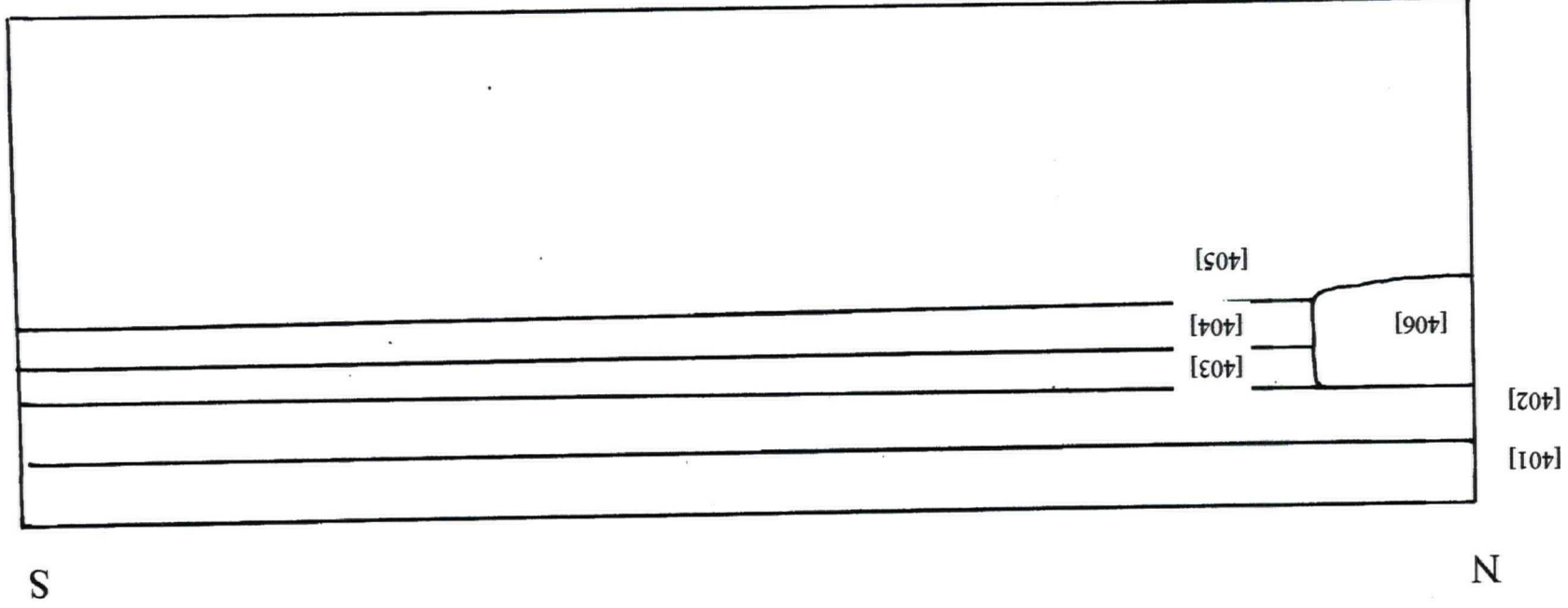


Fig. 4
Sections: Trench 4
Scale 1:20

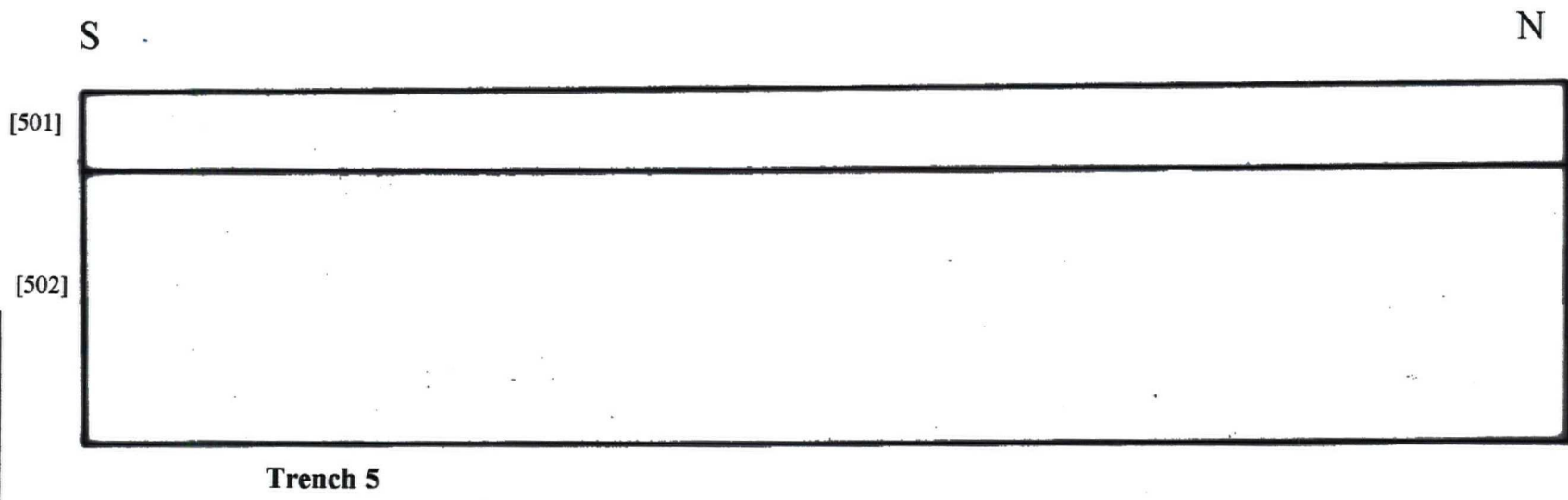
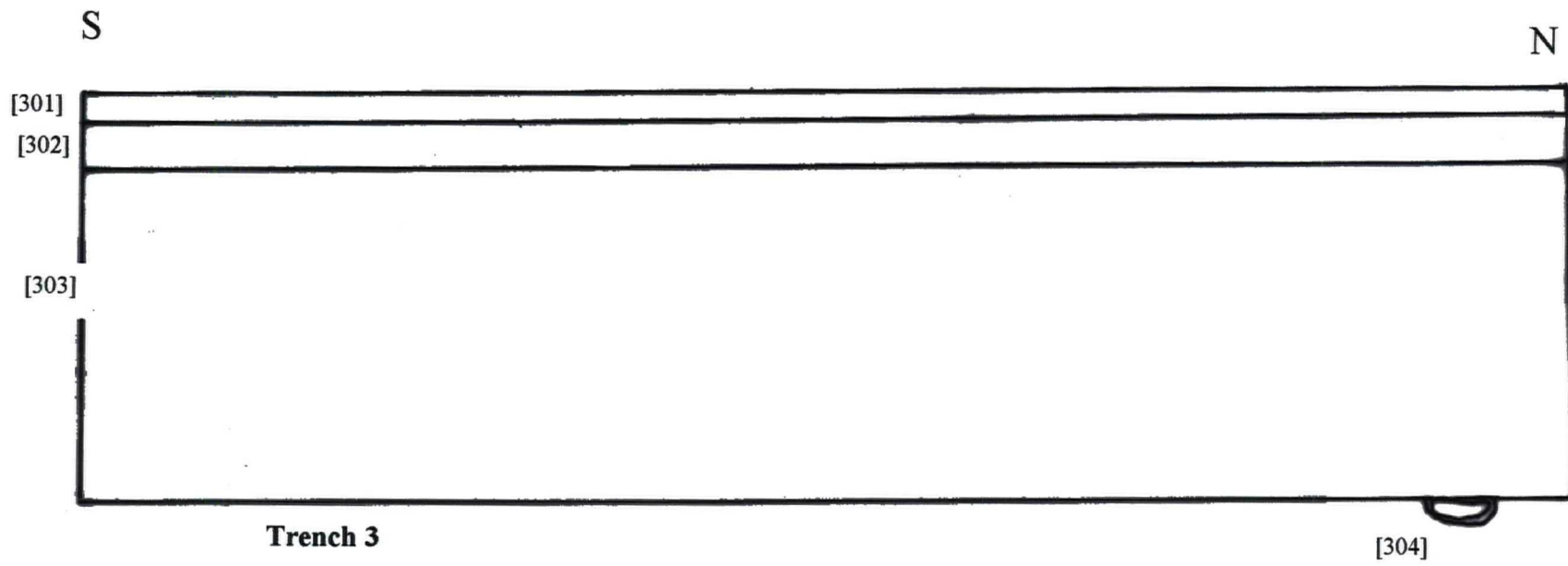


Fig. 5
Sections: Trenches 3 & 5
Scale 1:20