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**An Archaeological Evaluation at
Redditch Road, Kings Norton, Birmingham**

by

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Introduction

In January 1992 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (B.U.F.A.U.) was commissioned by Rush Davis Design Partnership, acting on behalf of Servite Houses Ltd., to undertake an archaeological evaluation of an irregular plot of land facing onto The Green, Kings Norton, Birmingham and extending south to the Redditch Road, (Fig. 1) , ahead of the finalisation of plans for redevelopment of the site for sheltered housing.

The evaluation consisted of the excavation of four trenches, initially opened by a JCB excavator and then further excavated and recorded by hand, positioned to investigate the frontages in particular, these being of the highest archaeological potential. The results from each excavated trench will first be presented below and then the overall significance of the results of the evaluation will be considered.

The Evaluation

The Trial Trenches

The evaluation consisted of the excavation of four trenches, one to the rear of The Green frontage (Trench 1), and three smaller trenches to the rear of the building plot (Trenches 2, 3 and 4). A JCB was used to remove the topsoil in all trenches under archaeological supervision; the remaining deposits were excavated by hand and an archive of drawings, photographs and written records was produced for each of the trenches.

Trench 1 (Fig 2)

The trench, which measured c.23.50m in length and 0.75-1.75m in width, was orientated north-south and was situated to the rear of garages immediately behind the street frontage facing Kings Norton green. Topsoil (1000) and, to the north, part of three earlier layers of cultivation soil (1001, 1002, 1003) were removed to a depth of c.1.22m below present ground level at the northern end of the trench and c.1m at the southern end. Five metres from the southern end of the trench were revealed the remains of a brick wall and associated building rubble, dated by post-medieval pottery and modern glass.

To the north, the topsoil sealed three layers of cultivation or garden soil; uppermost was a layer of clay silt containing numerous charcoal flecks, pebbles and some brick (1001) with an average thickness of 0.40m, overlying a silt clay with numerous charcoal flecks, pebbles and some fragments of brick (1002), its average thickness being 0.30m. Both layers contained fragments of animal bone and pottery of mixed medieval and post-medieval date. A further layer of garden soil (1003) underlay 1002, and comprised a fine yellowish brown sandy loam with an average thickness of 0.15m, again with frequent charcoal flecks, some pebbles and occasional fragments of sandstone and brick. Pottery was recovered from this layer, predominantly medieval in date, though with some post-medieval sherds. This layer also infilled a shallow linear depression (F1) from which further sherds of medieval pottery were recovered. Deposit 1003 ended 4m from the northern end of the trench where it abutted layer 1005, a mottled yellow-brown sandy clay with some charcoal flecks and pebbles and with an average thickness of 0.50m. No finds were recovered from this layer which lay directly beneath 1002 at the northern end of the trench.

Layer 1005 sealed a second feature, an east-west aligned linear ditch or gully (F2), which lay between F1 and the northern edge of the trench. This shallow, flat-based ditch, 0.18m deep and 0.68m wide with sloping sides, extended into the section at both sides, and was backfilled with dark grey-brown clay silt (1004) containing charcoal flecks, some pebbles and a quantity of medieval pottery (see below).

A very shallow, 0.05m deep, irregular ovoid depression (F3) between F2 and the northern edge of the trench, was backfilled with layer 1002, and was devoid of any finds.

Layers 1003 and 1005 directly overlay the natural, a yellowish clay silt containing a moderate amount of pebbles, at a depth of 1.22m below the present ground level. The natural was not exposed along the full length of the trench though sondages showed that it was at a consistent depth, apart from at the southern end where building disturbance had taken place.

Trench 2

The trench, measuring 3.80m in length by 1.75m in width and orientated north-south, was excavated to a depth of 0.60m below the present ground surface. A layer of c.0.40m thick humic dark brown topsoil (2000) overlay a layer of clay silt (2001) containing building rubble, brick and roof tiles and some modern pottery fragments. This layer, approximately 0.20m thick, overlay the natural.

Trench 3 (Fig 2)

The trench, measuring 8.0m in length and 1.70m in width and orientated east-west, was excavated to an average depth of 0.50m. Removal of the topsoil (3000) revealed a layer of yellow silt-clay (3001) containing pebbles, charcoal, bone, numerous large fragments of brick and tile, modern vessel glass and sherds of post-medieval pottery dating from the late-19th century onwards. Towards the eastern end of the trench a large feature (F1) was identified, ovoid in shape and measuring 1m x 1.5m, filled with topsoil and containing late post-medieval pottery and the base of a sauce bottle. A further feature (F2), c.1.5m wide, was identified at the western end of the trench, the sides of this ditch-like feature extending across the trench and beyond the trench edges. F2 was filled with sandy clay (3002), mottled dark brown and yellow in colour, containing pebbles, large quantities of brick and tile, numerous flecks of charcoal, coal and some post-medieval and modern pottery. This overlay a deposit of building rubble (3003) comprising fragments of brick and post-medieval roof tiles and mortar, containing some fragments of post-medieval pottery. This

feature was not further excavated, and no interpretational relationship could be determined between layer 3003 and layer 3002 above.

Trench 4

The trench, measuring 10.30m in length and 1.75m in width, orientated east-west, was situated to the rear of the building plot. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.30m. Removal of the topsoil (4000) revealed part of a brick wall (F1) towards the west of the trench, with building rubble banked up against the northern outer face of the wall. Part of a sewer pipe was revealed to the eastern end of the trench, obviously associated with the brick wall, which may have formed part of the foundations of the former police station or related outbuildings known to have occupied this part of the site.

The Pottery* by S. Ratkai

The medieval pottery from Trench 1 was sorted into 15 groups. The pottery was not examined under the microscope and the fabric groups are consequently broad. The pottery came from three contexts; 1002, 1003 and 1004.

There were 267 sherds in total, seven of which were post-medieval, presumably intrusive from topsoil/garden soil 1001 which contained post-medieval pottery.

* Note that the mixed assemblages of 17th-19th Century pottery from Trenches 3 and 4 are not considered below.

Context	Number of sherds			Number of rim sherds		
	1002	1003	1004	1002	1003	1004
Fabric						
1	18	61	70	4(4)	5(5)	11(2)
2	-	6	3			
3a	11	22	10		1(1)	
3b	-	4	2			
3c	-	1	2			1(1)
4	2	17	11		2(2)	4(1)
5	1	2	1			
6		8	2		1(1)	
7		1				
8		2				
9		1				
10		2				
Post Med	4	3				
	36	130	101	4(4)	9(9)	16(4)

(Bracketed figures denote the maximum number of vessels represented by the rim sherds)

The dominant fabric was fabric 1, a coarse sandy oxidised ware, with brown surfaces and grey core. Similar fabrics and rim forms are found at Weoley Castle (Oswald 1962 nos.29-31), Warwick (Ratkai 1991, fabric 113, Fig.15 nos. 62-64) and Burton Dassett (Ratkai (a) forthcoming, fabric 13). Oswald (1962) seems to indicate that this type of pottery had gone out of use before the 14th Century. However, evidence from sites in Warwickshire would seem to indicate continuing use into the 14th Century. Most of the sherds in fabric 1 are heavily sooted. One sherd has an applied strip.

In context 1004 nearly all the sherds are from one vessel, a rounded cooking pot with a dished rim with a marked internal projection.

The second most common fabric is fabric 3a. This together with fabrics 3b and 3c belongs to the Warwickshire grey/black ware tradition. They are found on numerous Warwickshire sites (Ratkai (a) forthcoming) and it is possible that some at least were manufactured in the Forest of Arden. Similar grey/black wares are also found at Weoley Cattle and Birmingham Moat (personal inspection by the author). In general this type of pottery occurs in the 13th Century and possibly into the 14th Century.

The other fabric which is well represented is fabric 4. This generally has oxidized orange/brown surfaces and grey/brown core. The matrix is fairly smooth but with sparse large grits and some organic material. Large grits are also visible on the surfaces. It is probable that fabric 4 is Malvernian Ware. Indeed the distribution of Malvernian Wares (Vince 1977) would suggest a high probability of Malvernian wares being present at Kings Norton. The forms from the site would suggest a 13th Century date.

Of the other fabrics three are also commonly found in the West Midlands. These are fabrics 2, 5 and 6. Fabric 2 is white slip decorated ware. Two types are known; a fine micaceous ware and a coarser, sandier version. All but one of the sherds from Kings Norton falls into the former category. The date range for fabric 2 appears to be 13th - early 14th Century. Fabrics 5 and 6 are sherds of coal measure clays. Fabric 5 is the ubiquitous buff/white ware, found throughout Warwickshire and the southern half of Staffordshire. Many of the examples of buff/white wares come from the kilns of Chilvers Coton (Hayes and Scott 1985) but there are certainly other production sites in north Warwickshire and south Staffordshire. It is most likely that the examples from Kings Norton are from Chilvers Coton. Fabric 6 is a coal measure clay fabric made from a clay with a higher iron content. The colour varies from pale oranges and pinks to deeper oranges and pinks. They are usually oxidized with pale yellowish grey or orange cores. One source of production is Chilvers Coton but there is another group of these wares which are found in Worcester, Bridgnorth, Shrewsbury and Dudley. It has been suggested (Ratkai (b) forthcoming) that some of

these may have been manufactured in the area between Bridgnorth and Dudley. Fabric 6 bears a closer resemblance to these latter wares than to material from Chilvers Coton. The date range of these fabrics is 13th - 15th Century.

Fabrics 7, 8 and 10 are sandy cooking pot fabrics, which it was not possible to source. Fabric 9 is a fine oxidized late medieval (15th Century) ware.

The sherds from Kings Norton came mainly from cooking pots. Glazed sherds occurred in fabric 5 and 6 and there was also a jug rim in fabric 6.

The evidence from the pottery would seem to indicate that the ditch F2 in Trench 1 was filled in the 13th - early 14th Century. Likewise the cultivation soil 1003 contained mainly pottery of this date but the presence of fabric 9, suggests activity in the 15th Century.

The pottery from the site was in good condition, with large unabraded pieces with fairly frequent joins. The material recovered reveals that most of the pottery was of fairly local manufacture and was mainly in the Warwickshire tradition. The pottery from the evaluation has provided a useful insight into a rural medieval settlement in an area where there is a shortage of information on rural sites.

Trial Pit Investigation

Ten trial pits were dug around the southern part of the development area in June 1986 and September 1991, and reported on by Farebrother and Partners Consulting Civil and Structural Engineers. The results of that work will be briefly considered here from an archaeological perspective. The report notes the considerable amount of surface overburden and topsoil, varying from 0.60-0.90m across the site, which suggests that the area has been artificially raised by dumping at some period. There was evidence in Trial Pit 1, towards the Redditch Road, for a brick building with cellars extending down c.2m below present ground level. No other structures or

deposits which could be suggested to be of archaeological origin or significance were encountered.

Cartographic Evidence

The earliest available map detailing Kings Norton is the Tithe Map of 1844, recording the existence here at that time of a small village clustered around the triangular-shaped green, with some ribbon development to the east towards the canal, the settlement lying in a largely-rural landscape. The Green frontage of the plot under consideration was occupied by buildings, with the central zone of the plot being unoccupied. It is likely that the Tithe Map catches in stasis the plan of a village with origins in the medieval period and which plan, though obviously not in the retention of individual structures, reflects the medieval layout of the settlement. Development, based on the proximity of the Worcester and Birmingham Canal, followed shortly afterwards and was further sponsored by the incorporation of Kings Norton into the boundaries of a greater Birmingham. With the publication of the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map of the area in the later 19th Century and the resurvey of 1904 the rapid growth of the settlement during the interim period can be seen, with buildings now also occupying the Redditch Road frontage of the plot under consideration, the structure on the 1904 map being named as the Police Station, demolished in the 1960s/1970s. There were a number of changes in plan to buildings fronting onto the Green but these cannot be analysed in any detail due to the unsuitable scales of the available maps. It would appear that building has never occurred in the central zone of the plot, at least between 1844 and the present day.

Discussion

The evaluation has indicated that there exists the possibility for the survival of significant medieval layers and features towards the frontage onto Kings Norton Green, with evaluation Trench 1 locating an east-west aligned ditch or gulley (F1) which could be interpreted as a property

boundary almost at the northernmost limit of the evaluation. Changes in deposit type to either side of this boundary suggest that to the south of the boundary probably lay cultivated land and to the north tenement plots. The backfill of the boundary ditch contained a significant quantity of pottery and the overall assemblage from Trench 1 (267 sherds) was surprisingly impressive and varied (see detailed report above) considering the small area investigated, and shows from the 13th-15th century date range that, from both a local and regional point of view, the site is of great potential significance for providing information on this crucial but somewhat lacunic period in the area's history. The frontage towards Redditch Road would appear to have been developed at a later date and building here would seem to have potentially destroyed any evidence for possible earlier activity. The central zone of the development area, as examined in Trench 3, would appear to have always been open ground, used for dumping and pit-digging, though pits examined were seen to be relatively recent in date.

Implications and Recommendations

The evaluation suggests that the discovery of a medieval feature towards the northern end of Trench 1 could have implications for the development here and, more particularly, towards the frontage onto the Green where further medieval features and deposits may be expected. The surface of the natural subsoil, into which the medieval ditch or gully was cut lay c.1.20m below present day ground level and there has obviously been a considerable deliberate raising of the ground surface behind the frontage. The pottery recovered suggests that potentially this is a most significant archaeological site, of regional as well as local importance, and that it could tell us a great deal about the origins and development of the settlement at Kings Norton. However, until more information is available about the extent, nature and quality of archaeological features, structures and layers further towards the frontage, where significant redevelopment will take place, no firm recommendations for the overall archaeological response to the development can be sensibly formulated. It is therefore recommended that another short evaluation exercise be conducted along the

frontage immediately after demolition of the existing buildings, to allow an informed decision to be made about the extent of any further necessary archaeological works or about recommendations for the adoption of design-options to leave significant archaeology in situ

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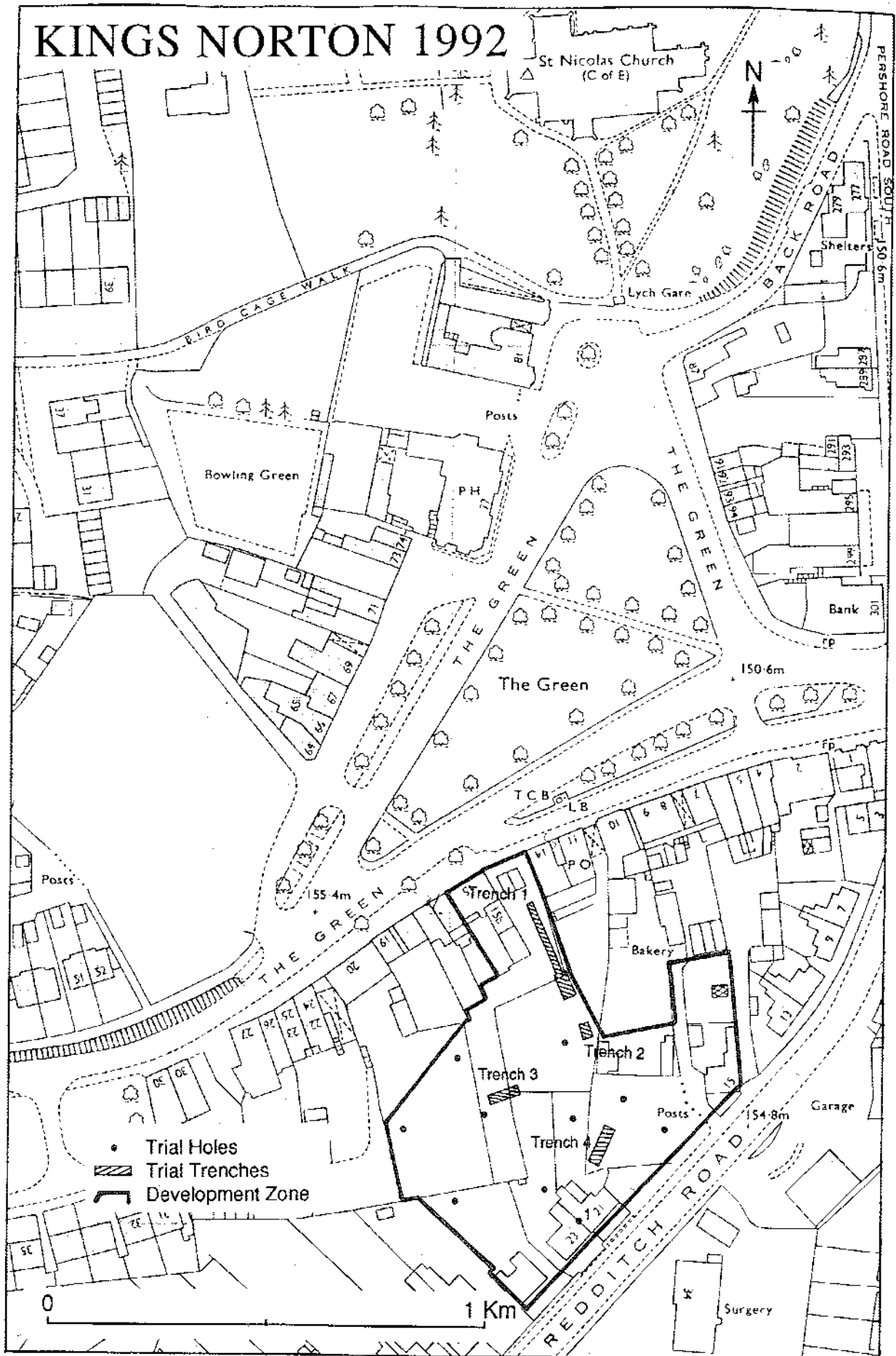


Figure 1

KINGS NORTON 1992

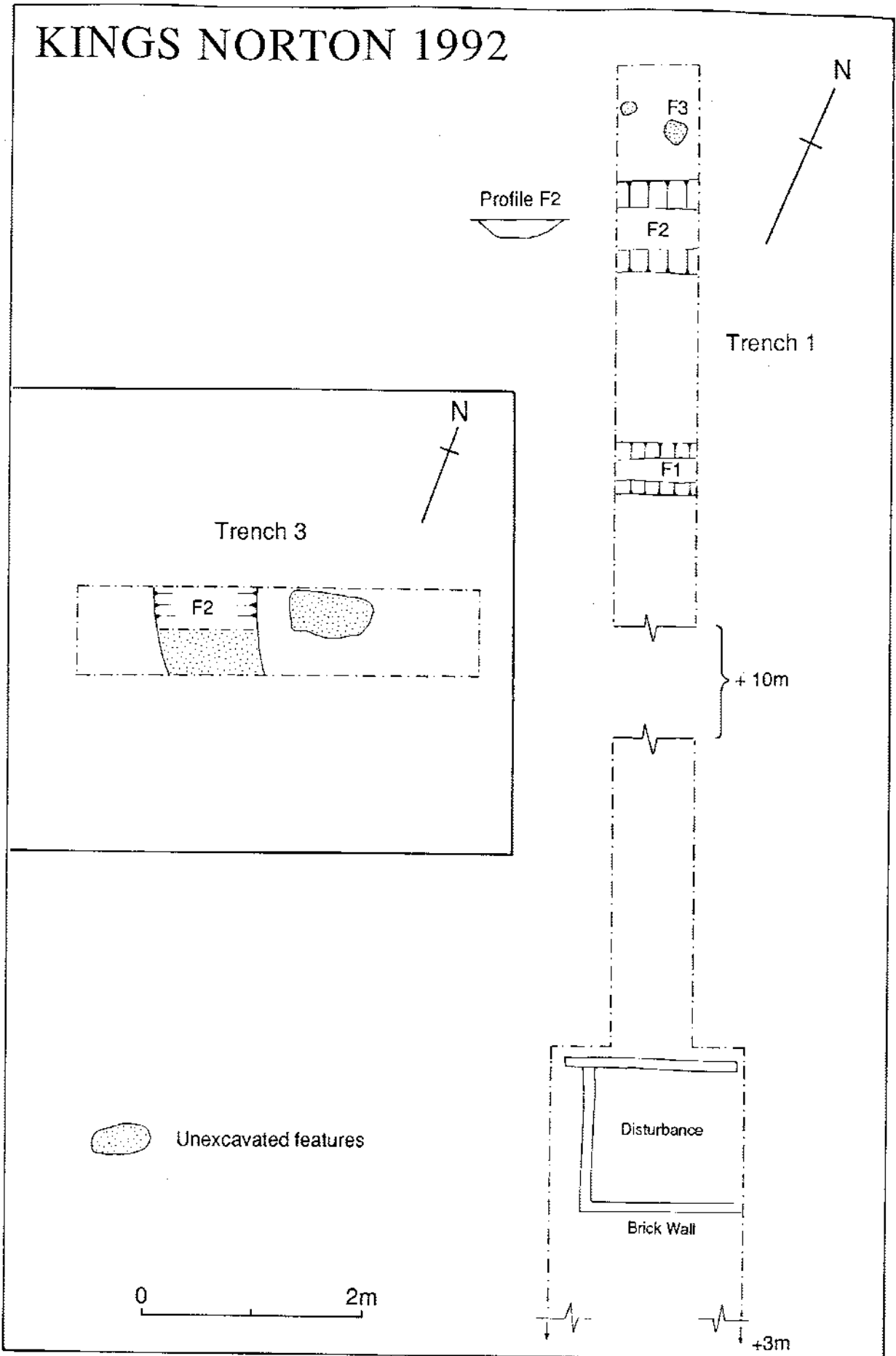


Figure 2