

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**West Dorset Hospital Phase II
Advance Car Park Contract**

Archaeological Evaluation

by

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Introduction

In November 1993, the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit undertook an evaluation within the grounds of the West Dorset Hospital, Dorchester in advance of the second phase of development (Fig. 1).

A desk-top study of the known and expected archaeological features within and around the development, commissioned by the WDH NHS Trust, and prepared by Dr. Ann Woodward (BUFAU Report No.275) formed the basis of the evaluation strategy subsequently endorsed by Mr. L. Keen, the Dorset County Council County Archaeology Officer.

The desk-top study had demonstrated that the site (GR SY 687904) lay in between locations of major Roman cemeteries and a Roman building of some pretension. Whilst there was no indication that further buildings or burials would be found on the hospital site, the area was crossed by the possible alignment of an early Roman road. In addition, the site lay in an area of known early medieval field systems, and these may have supplanted a Celtic field system of Roman and prehistoric date.

Method

Six locations within the development area were examined; one section, exposed by the advance, bulk excavation works, and five trenches opened by JCB excavator (Fig.2).

In accordance with the recommendations of Mr. L. Keen, 170m² or 2% of the development area available for evaluation was investigated.

The site had been landscaped extensively following the completion of the Phase I hospital building. This work had involved the bulk moving of most of the topsoil and some chalk in order to produce banks, mounds and a pond. Thus, few areas of original ground surface remained *in situ*. At the time of the evaluation, in November 1993, the north-east corner of the site had already been developed, and three major zones of bulk excavation had taken place (see Fig.2). The evaluation trenches were located in relation to these constraints.

Firstly, the level of the original ground slope was established by the cleaning and recording of the west face (1) of the largest area of bulk excavation. Trench 2 was located to test the postulated line of the early Roman road; Trenches 5 and 6 were designed to test the survival level of the old ground surface below the existing base levels of the bulk excavation areas. The main area of land not severely affected by the landscaping banks and mounds of

Phase I was located immediately north of the Children's Centre, so two trenches, 3 and 4, were located in this zone.

In each trench the overburden was removed by machine, to natural chalk, or to a maximum depth of 1.4m. The sections, base surface, and any features, were then cleaned by hand. One section in each trench was drawn to scale.

Evaluation

Area 1

Exposed by the advance bulk excavation, this east-facing section was cleaned and recorded. Whilst no artifacts were recovered, the 'pre-landscaping' surface was clearly visible some 0.4m below the current ground surface. It was made up of 0.2m of soil overlaying 0.1m of bitumenised 'path' surface. A level profile of these strata show them to be inclined at 6°, falling from north to south: a slope mimicked by the later landscaping.

Trench 2

Orientated to intercept the putative alignment of the pre-urban Roman military approach road (Woodward, P.J. *et al.* 1993), Trench 2 (14.5 x 1.6m) was machined to a depth of 0.6m, removing top-soil and redeposited chalk to expose natural chalk, overlain in places by 0.1m of modern rubble.

Whilst the postulated Roman road was not encountered within this trench, the possible existence of such a feature should not be ruled out. The second Phase of development within the car parking area to the east will require test trenching, which, with the current ground level of 82m AOD, appears to be equivalent to the early ground surface identified in Area 1.

Trench 3

Trench 3 (38 x 1.6m), orientated east-west, was excavated at the SE corner of the development area. The south-facing section (Fig.3) was recorded, revealing a complex sequence of landscaping.

Feature 1, a Victorian garden/boundary wall was identified running SE-NW, and has been dated from ceramic materials recovered from within its fabric.

Identified during cleaning, three features were excavated at the western end of the trench. Their forms are consistent with 'tree holes', and they may be interpreted as the last vestiges of a hedge or tree boundary. The holes contained no dating evidence; thus the hedge or tree line may have been modern or ancient.

Trench 4

Aligned north-south to transect Trench 3, Trench 4 (18 x 1.6m) was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.40m. Several modern features, including three brick-built drains and a pipe land drain were exposed at a depth of 0.7m.

Trench 5

Sited within one of the areas of bulk removal, and machined to natural chalk at a depth of 0.5m, this trench (13 x 1.6m) contained two distinct but archaeologically sterile strata of redeposited chalk. The level of the old ground surface was not reached.

Trench 6

The second trench (17.5 x 1.6m) to be machined within an area of bulk removal, 1.5m of redeposited materials were excavated without natural being exposed.

It is understood that there may be a second phase of bulk extraction within this area, which should allow for another opportunity to view this trench, extending the recordable depth by c.0.8m.

Discussion

Despite the proximity of the development area to Roman burials to the north and east (Fig.1) and the putative line of a western military approach road, this evaluation strongly suggests that no archaeological features pre-dating the Victorian period have survived the extensive landscaping works. No definite traces of the known medieval field system, or of earlier ditches or boundaries were located.

Although no medieval or earlier features were discovered, this does not necessarily mean that none existed prior to the Phase I landscaping. The existing car park (see Fig.2) appears to lie in an area where landscape remodelling was relatively restrained, and some further evaluation work here could be useful, especially as this area is crossed by the postulated early Roman road alignment.

Recommendations

It is recommended that, following removal of the existing car park, some limited further archaeological evaluation should be undertaken. This would be designed to test the postulated early Roman road line; it could comprise the investigation of one or two of the proposed north-south lines of foundation disturbance.

At the same time, if in accord with the contract schedule, Trenches 5 and 6 could be deepened to the level of the old ground surface.

Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Mr. N. Howard, on behalf of the West Dorset Hospital NHS Trust, and monitored by Dr. A. Woodward.

The excavation was undertaken by Marianne Ridgway and Edward Newton, and was supervised by Jon Sterenberg. Drawings were prepared by Mark Breedon, Nigel Dodds and Edward Newton. Simon Buteux and Ann Woodward edited the text.

Reference

Woodward, P.J. *et al.* 1993 Excavations at Greyhound Yard, Dorchester 1981-4 DNHAS Monograph No.12

Figures

- Figure 1 Site Location: Reproduced from RCHM 1970 Dorset, Vol.II
Part 3
- Figure 2 Archaeological Evaluation: Location of Trenches
- Figure 3 Trench 3: Plan and Section

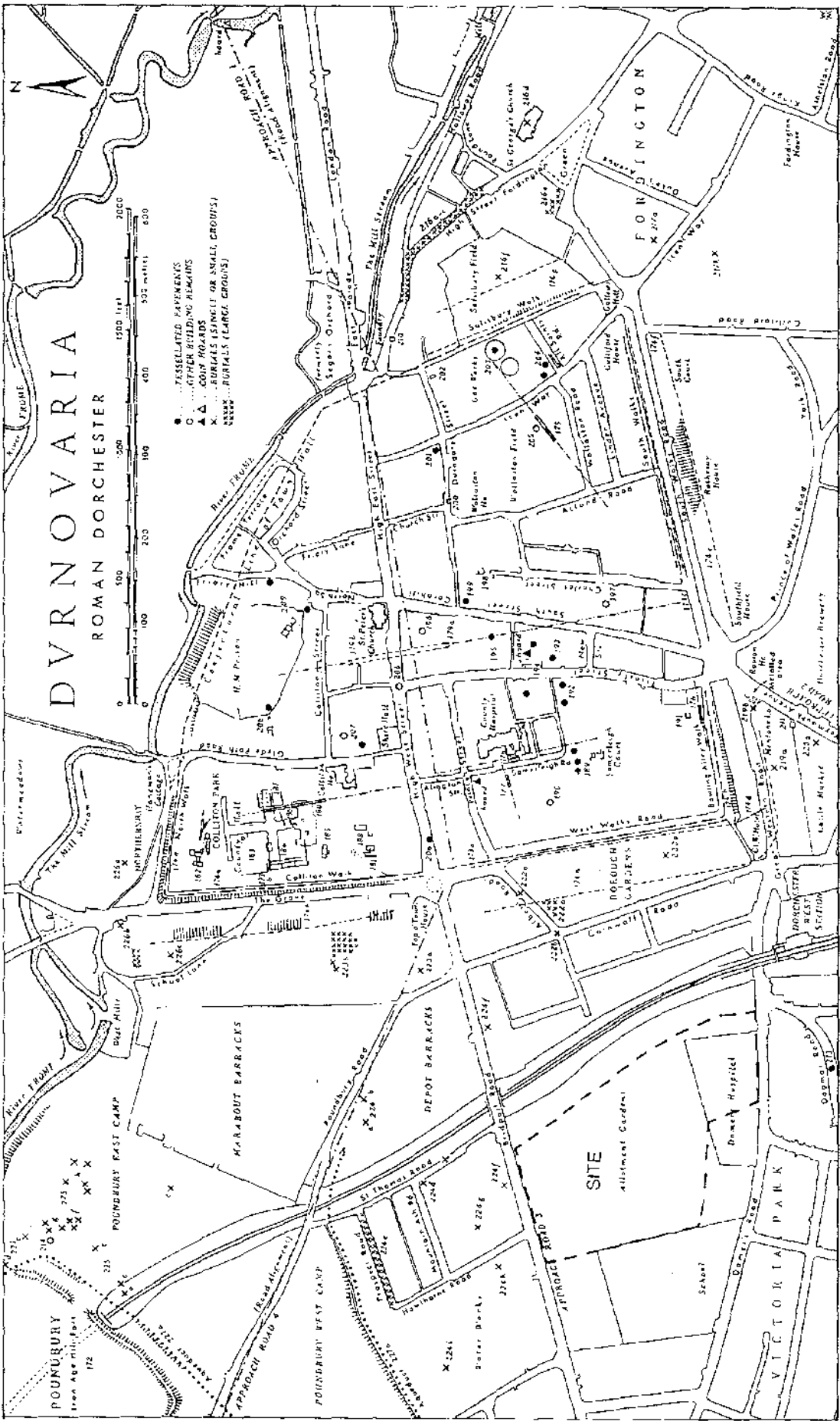
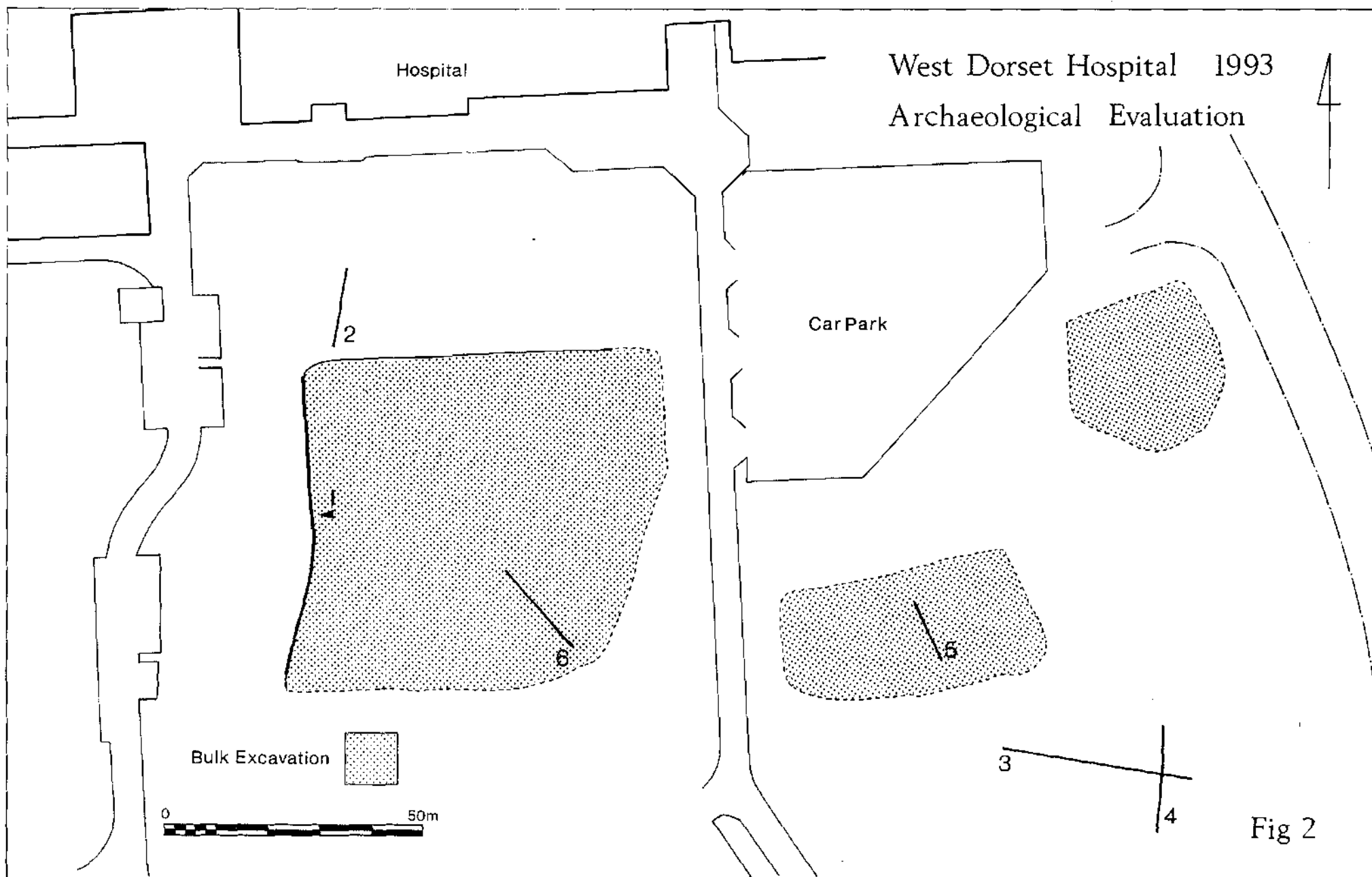


Fig 1



TRENCH 3

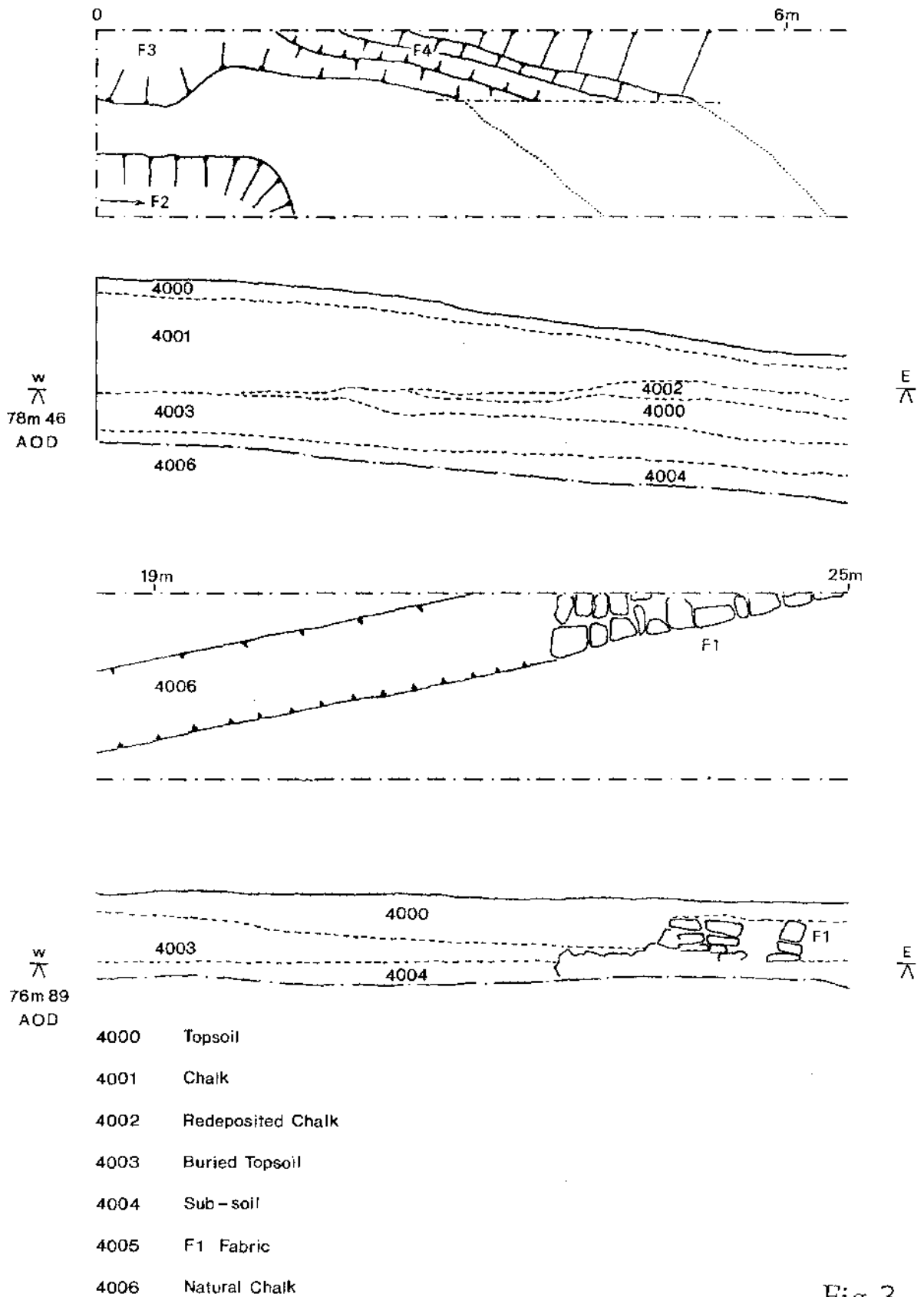


Fig 3