

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**Stone Town Centre Bypass
Excavations to the rear of
9 High Street,
August 1993**

An Interim Report

by

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with contributions from Lisa Moffett and David Smith

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Introduction

The following report provides a brief summary of the results of an archaeological excavation undertaken at 9 High Street, Stone; a tenement of the former Falcon Inn. The work was undertaken prior to the construction of the Stone Town Centre Bypass. Although the proposed road will be higher than the existing ground level, associated works, including the construction of a sewer and a culvert to carry the Scotch Brook, threatened deposits of archaeological interest. The work was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit during August 1993 on behalf of Staffordshire County Council.

The Site

The site is located at the eastern end of the High Street on its northern side (Fig. 1). It is bounded to the west by the former Falcon Inn (now Changes Restaurant) and to the east by the Scotch Brook. An evaluation undertaken by Gifford and Partners suggested that further excavation would potentially provide the first significant sample of the medieval and post-medieval archaeology of a tenement plot in this small market town (Gifford and Partners 1992).

Method

The excavation was confined to the eastern portion of the tenement alongside the Scotch Brook (Fig. 1b). It was not possible to undertake work in the western half of the tenement due to the structural sensitivity of the adjoining building, No. 11 High Street, to prolonged open excavation.

The excavated area varied between 4 and 5m wide and was 50m long (Fig. 2). The compacted hardcore surface (1000), underlying brick rubble, (1001, 1105) and other modern overburden (1045, 1133), was removed mechanically under archaeological supervision. All underlying deposits and structures of archaeological interest were excavated by hand. A record, which included drawn scale plans and sections and monochrome photographic prints and colour slides, was maintained throughout the excavation. Sampling was undertaken of those deposits which suggested a high potential for providing palaeo-environmental information.

Due to the limited amount of space for the temporary storage of spoil, the excavation had to be carried out in two stages. The southern half of the area was initially investigated. This had to be fully backfilled before excavation could commence on the northern part of the site.

Results

The top of the natural waterlain gravels and silts were encountered at a depth of between 1.6 and 1.8m below the current ground surface. A preliminary examination of the overlying archaeological stratigraphy suggests three main phases of activity. It is likely that these will be refined following a full analysis of the stratigraphic records and finds.

Phase 1 - Medieval

The majority of the evidence for deposits of medieval date appears to be confined to the central area of the excavation. No evidence of any medieval activity could be identified in the northern part of the site and any early deposits that might have existed in the southern area close to the street frontage appear to have been subsequently destroyed by post-medieval activity.

The earliest evidence for activity on the site comprised a thin deposit of dark brown/black waterlogged silt (1041) containing charcoal, fragments of waterlogged wood and possibly leather, overlying the natural gravel in the central area of the site (Fig. 3). A small sondage was excavated through the gravel underlying this material and it was found to overlay a thick deposit of waterlogged dark grey brown silt (1147). A preliminary examination of the beetle fauna from a sample collected from this material suggests a natural, waterlain deposit (see below page 4). By contrast, the beetles from the overlying archaeological material (1041) are indicative of a medieval occupation deposit. A group of small intercutting pits (F 26, F34-35, F37 and F39) cutting the natural gravels was recorded to the south of this deposit (Fig. 3). Unfortunately it was not possible to determine the relationship between these pits and the waterlogged deposit (1041) due to a later intrusive cut (F65, possibly the edge of the evaluation trench) and no datable artefacts were recovered from these features. Several other features cutting the natural gravels were located to the south of this group of features. These included a shallow gully (F33) orientated east-west and three further pits (F24, F32 and F36). The latter was a large circular feature, 1.4m in diameter, and was partially undercut on its eastern side.

Phase 2 - early post-medieval

The waterlogged deposit (1041) was cut and partially overlain by a sandstone wall (F25) orientated east-west across the width of the trench. The lower three courses of this wall appeared to represent a broad stone foundation, 0.8m wide and 0.7m high. Four wooden stakes (F58-59, F61 and F64) had been rammed into the underlying waterlogged silts to provide additional support for this foundation. Three small sandstone blocks at the eastern end of the wall appeared to be all that had survived of the original superstructure. The ledge between the southern face of these stones and the face of the underlying foundation was 0.2 wide. It seems likely that this corresponded with the original level of the associated floor. No trace of a return for this wall could be identified. The eastern end of the surviving fragment had been truncated by the culvert for the Scotch Brook and the western end by the brick wall of a later cellar.

The southern face of the stone foundation was butted by a deposit of dark brown silty clay (Fig. 2, 1044) containing fragments of medieval and post-medieval pottery. This deposit overlay the waterlogged deposit (1041) and sealed the various Phase 1 features. Similar deposits were recorded at the same level to the south (1087 and 1059). This silty clay was overlain by layer of greenish-yellow sandy material containing brick and sandstone fragments

(1039/1079). The level of the top of this deposit corresponded with the ledge between the foundation of the sandstone wall (F25) and the fragment of superstructure suggesting that it may have represented the original floor surface. This in turn suggests that the wall itself represents the rear of the building. No trace of either the internal arrangements of the structure or its front wall could be identified.

A second fragment of sandstone wall (F56) may also belong to this phase of activity although no associated floor was identified and the relationship with the more substantial wall to the south is uncertain.

Two further sandstone walls (Fig. 2, F1 and F3) were recorded within the southern part of the excavation. Both formed part of a late post-medieval (Phase 3) cellar (see below), although it seems possible that the western wall (F3) may have originally formed part of an earlier structure.

Phase 3 - late post-medieval

The southern part of the site is dominated by the construction of rectangular brick built cellars to the rear of the street frontage (Fig. 2). It seems possible that at least one of these has incorporated part of an earlier sandstone wall (F3). Their brick floors, at a depth of 1.8m, were set into a red clay which immediately overlay the natural gravels and would have destroyed any earlier deposits that might have existed. The large rectangular brick structure in the central area of the site (represented by walls F10, F12 and F49) with its internal divisions (F11 and F13) appears to have resulted in less disturbance to the earlier deposits. It seems likely that the walls of this structure that were recorded during the excavation were sub-surface foundations and that the associated floor levels were located at a higher level.

Several other brick structures were also recorded, including parts of two circular features (F18 and F31) and a brick culvert (F50).

The brick cellars towards the southern end of the excavation were backfilled with brick and rubble (1045). The upper deposits consisted of a series of rubble and hardcore layers (1001 and 1105) which sealed the majority of the brick structures.

Summary of finds

<u>Category</u>	<u>No. fragments</u>
Medieval pottery	39
Post-medieval pottery	237
Uncertain pottery	3
Tile	70
Bone	386
Clay pipe	34
Glass	45
Iron	18
Copper alloy	1
Lead	2
Leather	3
Miscellaneous	25

The Coleoptera: an assessment

by David Smith

Background

Four samples of waterlogged material were collected from the site in order to investigate their potential for beetle analysis. Three samples came from organic clays in medieval (1041, 1051) or post-medieval (1063) layers or cuts from within the tenements. One sample came from the dark brown grey clay (1147) that these occupation deposits overlaid.

Processing methods

Approximately 10l of sediment was prepared using paraffin flotation to extract the insect remains. The insect fragments were sorted under the microscope and "scanned" by eye.

Results

The three samples from the medieval and post-medieval layers (1041, 1051 and 1063) contained a large fauna of beetles. All of these samples contained members of a grouping of species that are best described as a "damp house fauna". This includes numbers of *Anobium punctatum* (Geer) the woodworm beetle, the Ptinidae (Spider beetles) and Lathridiidae and Cryptophagidae. Other species suggest the presence of a range of dry and very rotting vegetation. It is noticeable that the post-medieval and medieval faunas contain a differing range of species.

Sample 1147, the dark brown grey clay that laid under the archaeological deposits on site, contained a large number of species. Many of these were species of predatory diving beetles and other aquatic species. In addition, substantial numbers of *Donacia* and *Plateumaris* reed beetles were also recovered. This suggests that the medieval tenement development took place on an earlier reed bed lying alongside the Scotch Brook.

Support for further research

The three deposits from medieval buildings examined here suggest that full identification and analysis of the beetles present would have very informative results on a number of levels.

In terms of medieval and later archaeology of Stone itself, this study will reveal much about housing materials, living conditions and the nature of the urban build-up around a tenement plot within this small market town. It may be able to tell us if we are examining living floors or abandonment deposits at this site.

At present there are very few medieval urban beetle assemblages of this quality examined country-wide. This is the first example of this date and quality within the Midlands region. A more detailed analysis of this material will also give us an opportunity to compare the beetle fauna of a small medieval settlement with those from the larger urban centres of the same period, where insect remains have been examined outside of the region.

A full analysis of sample 1147 will allow us to examine the nature of the immediate environment of the Scotch Brook at Stone before the medieval tenement development. Issues such as the water quality of the Scotch Brook at this time and the nature of the vegetation along its bank can be examined.

Conclusions

There would appear to be a number of strong archaeological, environmental and biogeographic reasons for taking this study on to full analysis. Much of this information cannot be assessed by using other archaeological techniques.

Assessment of the botanical remains

by Lisa Moffett

Introduction

Samples for botanical remains were taken from selected contexts. Most of the samples were taken for charred plant remains from contexts seen to contain other occupation material. These samples have not yet been processed to separate the charred material from the soil, and a complete assessment of these samples cannot be carried out until this is done. Four samples were also taken for plant remains from waterlogged contexts. Sampling from the waterlogged contexts was undertaken in coordination with sampling for beetle remains. Assessment of the waterlogged samples was carried out on subsamples of the organic material extracted from the samples for beetle analysis (for methods see assessment of the beetle remains by David Smith).

Results

The earliest sample was a dark grey brown silt (1147) which underlay the Medieval deposits. This produced abundant seeds from a limited range of taxa of wet ground. There was no evidence in the subsample examined of cultivated plants or weedy plants of disturbed ground which might indicate human activity nearby.

The overlying Medieval occupation layer (1041) and gully (1141) both produced cereal chaff remains and arable weeds as well as some wet ground species. The cereal chaff included rivet or macaroni wheat (*Triticum turgidum/durum*), a wheat once thought to be rare but now increasingly found on British Medieval sites. The grain of this wheat is of poor quality for

bread-making but the straw is long and strong and any possible evidence for the use of the straw would be of interest.

The post-Medieval sample (1063) differed from the Medieval samples. Cereal chaff is abundant, particularly of rye, but there are fewer weed species and no wet ground species were seen in the material examined.

Further analysis

A full analysis of the plant remains from the Medieval deposits could provide significant information relevant to the interpretation of the deposits. It would be of interest to determine whether the botanical remains are likely to be derived from possible flooring or building material, and whether there is evidence of the use of other plant resources which may have been incorporated in the deposits from domestic or other activities. The plant remains may also indicate whether or not there was natural vegetation present relating to abandonment. The difference in character of the post-Medieval assemblage may be related to changes through time in human activity and environment. Further analysis of the natural deposit could obtain a more complete picture of the environment of the local waterside before the Medieval occupation.

The samples for charred plant remains could potentially produce information about crop and garden plants, crop husbandry, crop processing and domestic activities. Previous experience on other sites has shown, however, that abundant charred material tends to be present in only a limited percentage of contexts, and small urban excavations are sometimes not very productive of charred remains. It is assumed here that the overall amount of charred remains recovered when the samples have been processed will not be very large, and would be most effectively dealt with by rapidly scanning through the material for the presence of rare or important species such as garden plants and possible imports, and any further information on crops and other plant use.

Discussion

Phase 1 - The earliest deposits, in the central area of the site, suggest that the initial structure was a timber building of medieval date. It seems possible that the waterlogged deposit (1041) represents the fragmentary remains of a floor surface and that the linear gully may have formed part of an associated structural element. Unfortunately in the absence of any clear stratigraphic relationships it is uncertain whether the various pits cutting the natural gravels were earlier or later than this possible structure.

Phase 2 - the sandstone wall foundation and its possible associated floor surfaces suggest the former presence of a substantial building located between the Scotch Brook and what is now 'Changes' restaurant. It may be that this building corresponds with the structure suggested on the 1780 map of Stone.

Phase 3 - The various brick walls and structures indicate a period of continuous redevelopment during which time much of the earlier evidence for activity has been destroyed. The majority of the features probably date to the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Acknowledgements

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Reference

Gifford and Partners 1992 *Report on an archaeological evaluation of the route of the proposed Stone Town Centre Bypass: report for Staffordshire County Council*, unpublished report.

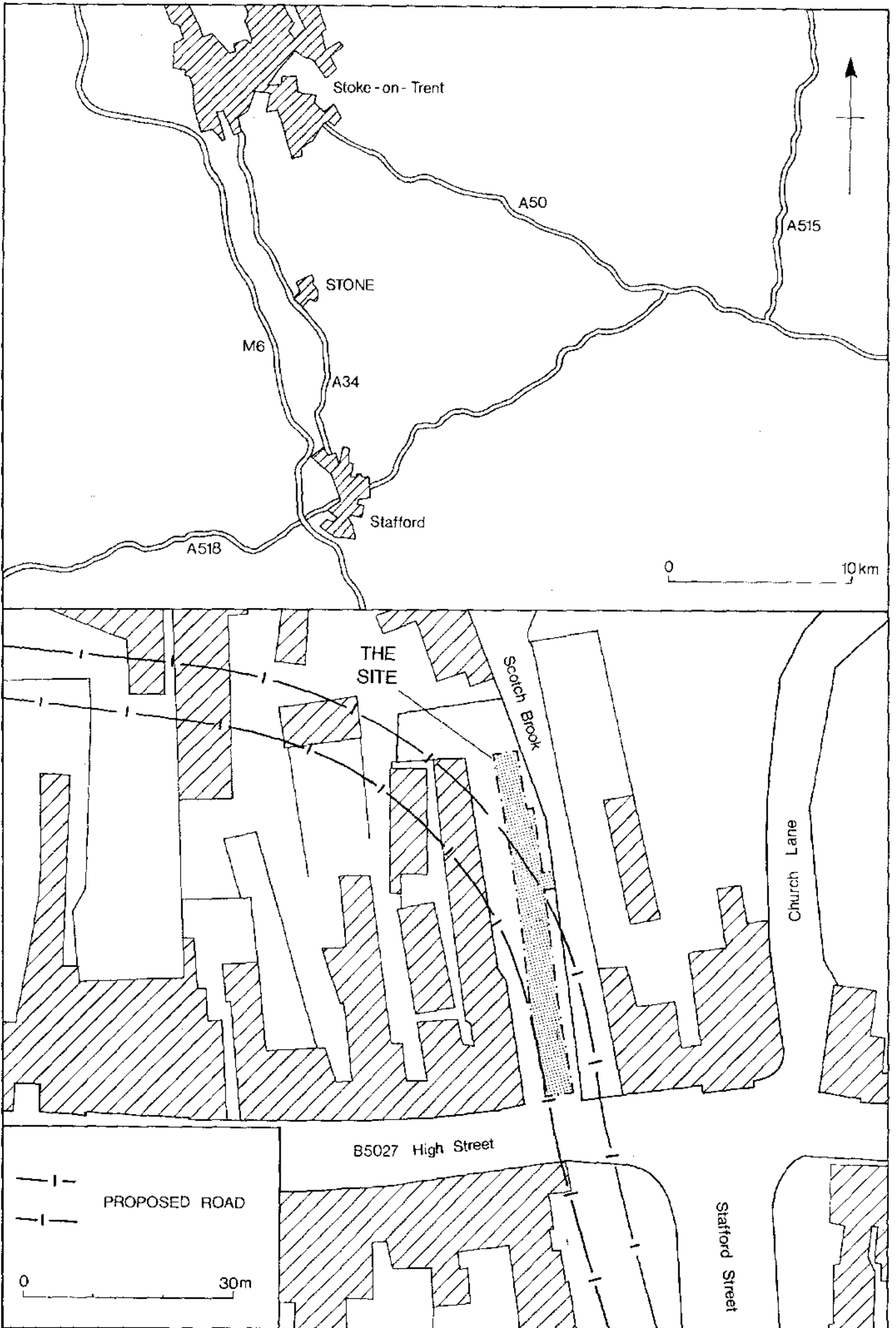
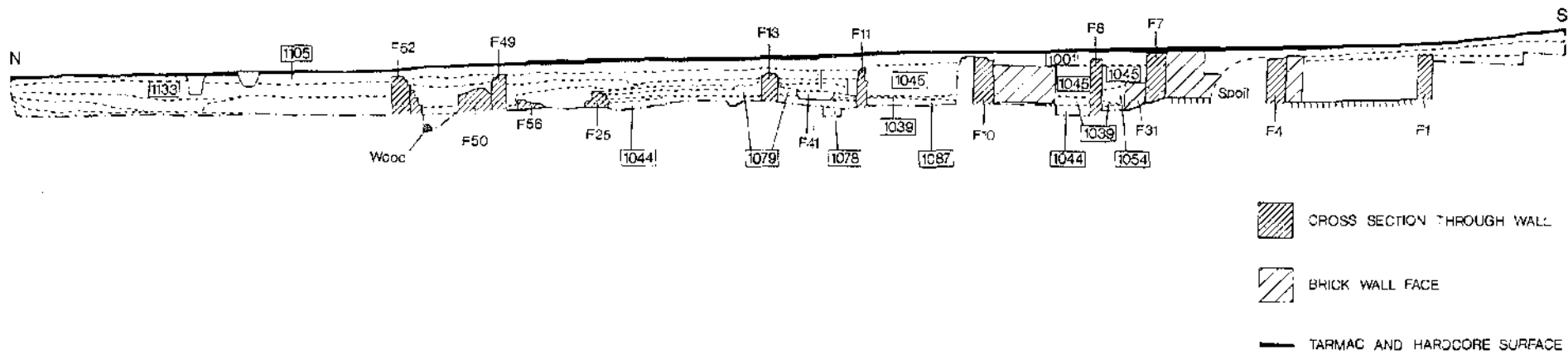


Figure 1

WEST FACING SECTION



PLAN

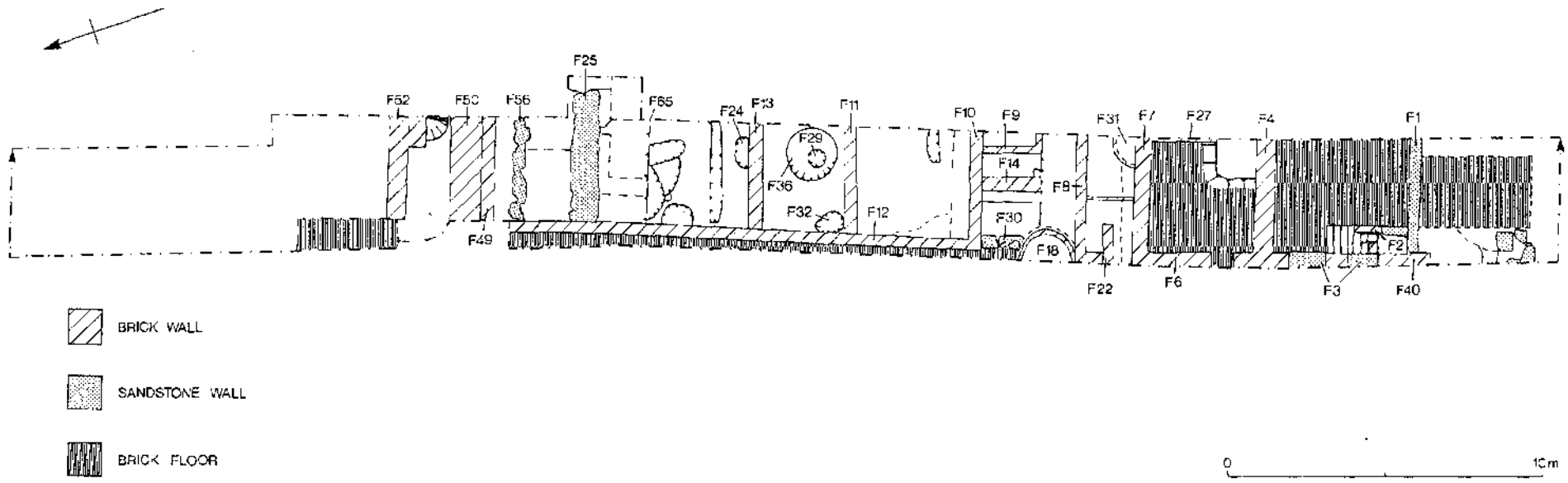


Figure 2

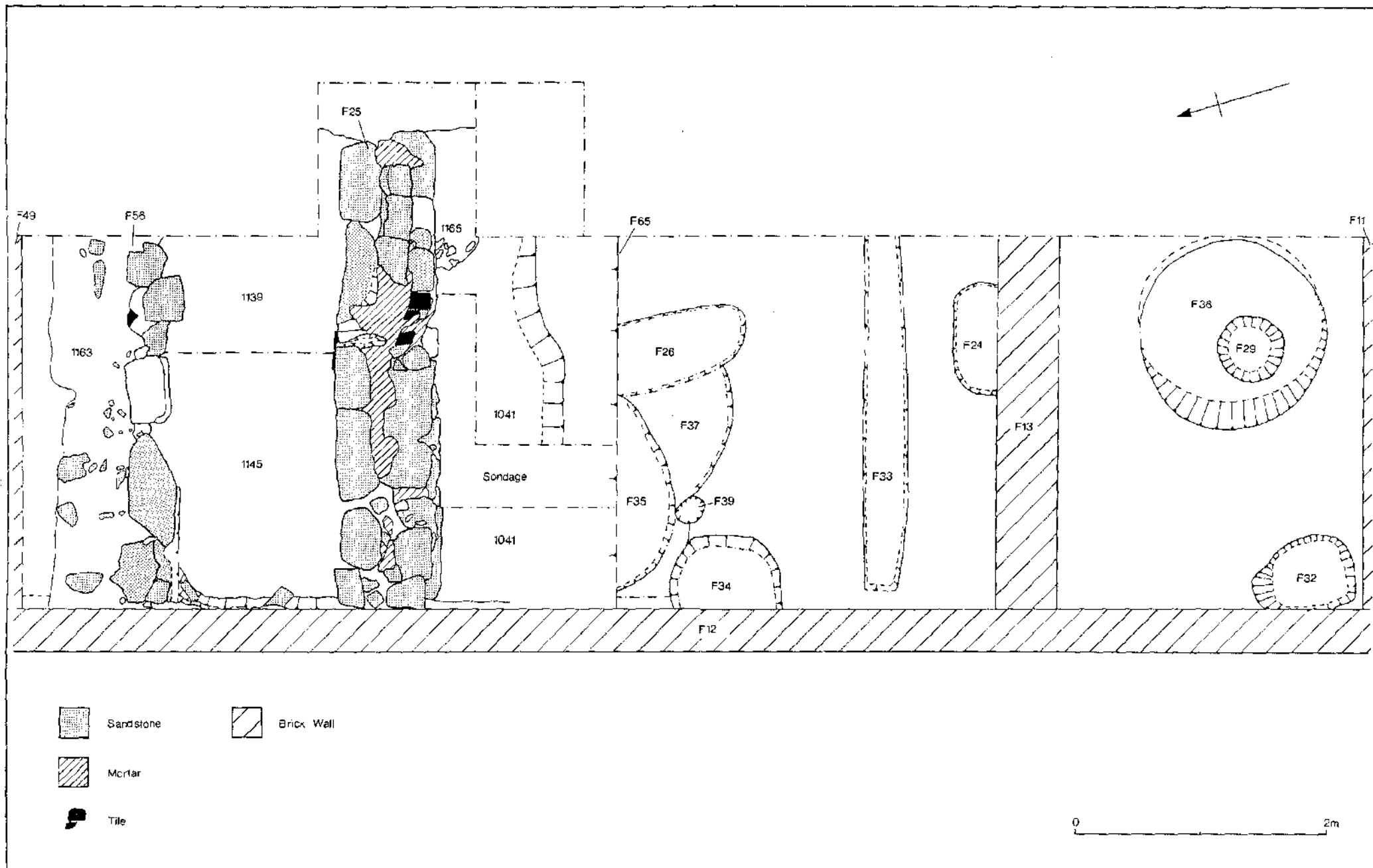


Figure 3