

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

Report No. 334

January 1995

Dudley Castle, West Midlands

An Archaeological Excavation

and

Watching Brief

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1.0 Introduction

A major repair and restoration programme, which included an archaeological element, was conducted at Dudley Castle, West Midlands in the 1980s (Boland 1984, 1985). In 1993 Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council proposed to enhance the castle's status as a visitor attraction by providing an interpretation centre with allied infrastructure. As a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent the Metropolitan Borough Council was required to undertake archaeological excavations in advance of any development programme. A three week archaeological excavation and a consecutive five week watching brief (maintained throughout the installation of new services) was conducted by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in the period February-April 1993. The programme was carried out in accordance with a specification prepared by the Planning and Leisure Department of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (Boland 1993).

2.0 The Archaeological Site

The surviving ruin of Dudley Castle still dominates the modern landscape of Dudley and the southern Black Country (NGR SO 947907). The castle stands at the top of a naturally defensible limestone hill, the limits of which are defined by Castle Hill and The Broadway to the south and west respectively. Castle Mill Woods lie to the north and the Black Country Museum is now located to the east of the castle grounds. The hilltop itself has housed a zoo complex since the 1930s.

Historical knowledge, combined with recent archaeological excavation carried out by the Dudley Castle Archaeological Project (DuCAP Boland 1984, 1985), provided some indication of the likely nature and survival of archaeology to be encountered during the proposed development.

3.0 Previous Archaeological Work

Limited excavation had been conducted in all three of the main areas to be developed and this is detailed briefly below.

3.1 Great Hall

Prior to excavation the Great Hall floor was sealed by a concrete slab, originally designed to support water tanks for Dudley Zoo. The foundation depth for this slab was not known and major archaeological damage was anticipated. An earlier evaluation in the southern quarter revealed a surviving north-south aligned stone-capped culvert.

The surviving 16th-century structural range (Sharrington Range) is only the latest of a sequence which began in the Norman period, and it was anticipated that earlier wall foundations might be encountered. The survival of Iron Age negative features, at the base of the archaeological horizon elsewhere within the Sharrington Range, was also anticipated.

3.2 Refreshment Kiosk

Prior to the housing of a Zoo Aquarium in the northeast part of this area, the whole refreshment kiosk zone had been levelled in c.1900 to the present tarmac surface, erasing any surviving 16th century floor levels and later accumulation. However, a DuCAP excavation did expose a number of walls thought to relate to a pre-14th-century structure and to Sharrington's 16th-century rebuilding of the Castle's domestic range (Boland 1984). It was anticipated that the continuation of these walls would be seen at a high level (Figure 3).

3.3 Stable Block

Major archaeological disruption caused by Dudley Zoo water tanks was expected within this area. Earlier excavation had established the survival of archaeological features and deposits within the Stable Block wall perimeters. Masonry walls, which had survived to a greater extent, were thought to relate to a series of entrance arrangements leading from the Bailey to the Keep (Boland 1984, 1985). It was hoped that the removal of modern overburden would allow a full ground plan to be recorded.

4.0 Objective and Method

The objective of the archaeological excavation was to confirm the location of the uppermost surviving archaeological deposits and to record them in advance of the deposition by contractors of an inert protective layer, prior to the casting of concrete floor slabs. The archaeological watching brief was to monitor the installation of services and to record any surviving archaeological deposits. Disruption to the surviving archaeology was to be kept to a minimum.

Following the removal of concrete slabs from the Great Hall and the Stable Block and the dismantling of a refreshment kiosk, each of the three areas was cleaned and all surviving archaeological features and deposits were recorded. Pro-forma record sheets, prepared by DuCAP, were used throughout the excavation and watching brief. The numbering sequences established by DuCAP for archaeological deposits were used wherever possible. New sequences were allocated to those areas previously unexcavated. Archaeological features in each area were allocated individual numbers within a range of F1-F100. A comprehensive written, drawn and photographic record was maintained throughout the excavation and this now forms the site archive.

5.0 Archaeological Results

5.1 Great Hall (Figure 2)

Two structures which pre-dated the surviving 16th-century facade were recorded beneath the modern overburden (9500). The interior divisions of one building were represented in the southeast corner by three east-west aligned cream mortar linear features (F1-F3). These were truncated to the east by a 20th-century wall trench (F4) and to the west by a modern service trench (F5). The outline of a second structure was represented by a semi-circle of limestone rubble and mortar (9506) with five stone-packed post-holes (F8-F11 and F22). The western half of the structure had been erased by a north-south aligned stone-capped culvert (F15) and two modern service trenches (F16 and F17). The culvert, recorded by an earlier archaeological evaluation, cut a mixed clay surface (9522 see below) and extended north past the Screens Passage and south to the Vaulted Cellar.

No substantial floor surface survived within the excavated area, which was instead covered by a brown clay mixed with varying concentrations of limestone rubble, mortar, plaster and charcoal (9522). The rough surface was cut by six post-holes. These were located at the centre of the 16th-century structure and may have provided supports for a basement roof and first floor surface. Two phases of construction may be represented, as two of the supports were square-cut (F13 and F20), whilst the remaining four were circular (F6, F7, F19 and F23). A further four post-holes (F12, F14, F18 and F21) and the stone-capped culvert cut the clay surface.

A diagonal section (1.73m wide), located by the north and west entrances to the Great Hall, was excavated to a depth of 0.80m in order to accommodate the laying of service ducts from the courtyard to the Screens Passage. Archaeological inspection of this trench was brief, and whilst a description of archaeological deposits was made, no numbers were allocated at this time. The natural clay was overlain by a layer of dirty natural and sealed by two plaster floors, one immediately above the other. The earlier floor was bonded to a wall footing against which was constructed the western wall of the culvert (F15). The later floor was covered with a deposit of trampled material which included white ash. A compacted layer of white ash provided the foundation level for a third floor which was sealed by three levelling deposits. All of the lower deposits had been truncated by a modern service trench.

5.2 Refreshment Kiosk (Figure 3)

The north-eastern area proved badly disturbed by c.1900 clearance and by construction supports and service trenches associated with the Zoo Aquarium and Castle Chapel. A greater degree of preservation was recorded to the south and west.

A bright orange sand deposit with sandstone chippings (2037) represented the levelling of a structure (DuCAP Building B) which predated the 14th-century Chapel and Great Chamber to the north. A structure contemporary with Building B may be represented by a limestone wall foundation bonded with a buff pink mortar (F35).

A structural phase which post-dated the Chapel was recorded to the north. Here, two limestone foundations (F16 and F17) were aligned north-south and east-west respectively. A mortar spread (2012) was noted at the point where F16 abutted the Chapel. The limestone foundations bounded a discrete deposit of dirty mottled clay-silt (2013).

Sixteenth-century activity was represented by a north-south aligned limestone wall (F29 and F32). This wall, which is thought to have continued north to the Chapel,

only survived in the northern section as a robbed out trench (F26), heavily disturbed by 20th-century activity. A second robbed out wall trench (F28), aligned east-west, had been recorded in an earlier excavation (DuCAP 1985). The only surviving surfaces were represented to the north by an irregular spread of plaster (2028), with a dirty sand deposit (2032) and varying concentrations of silt-sand (2029), sand (2030, 2031) and charcoal (2026), and to the south by two trampled deposits (2039 and 2043). These were truncated by three east-west aligned modern service trenches (F31, F33 and F34).

5.3 Stable Block (Figure 4)

Concrete foundations for a Zoo water tank had caused extensive damage to archaeological deposits at the centre of the Stable Block. However, survival of masonry to the south was good and it was possible to ascertain a ground plan for these features.

The 11th-century moat (F16), which would originally have run through this area, was backfilled in the 17th-century with a mixture of demolition material, yellow clay-sand (3002) and redeposited natural. A series of charcoal concentrations was recorded in the western half.

The curtain wall (F5), aligned slightly off east-west, extended across the Stable Block and continued west to the Keep and east to the Gatehouse. The curtain wall was abuted by two, or more probably three, walls (F1, F14 and F17), two of which had surviving construction trenches (F2, F12). A butt joint was noted between one of the above walls (F17) and a masonry "platform" (F20). Two sockets (F3, F4), the function of which are not known, were recorded in the western wall.

A fragment of the 17th-century brick Stable floor (F19) survived in the eastern half. The brick floor was separated from stone flagging by a slightly raised kerb line. Both of these floors were founded on top of the masonry platform (F20), and were set in a thick white mortar deposit.

In the southeast corner a square cut (F18), which had truncated F17 and F20, may be associated with the installation of an electricity power pack, housed there until recently.

6.0 An Archaeological Watching Brief

A five week archaeological watching brief was maintained during the installation of services. Seven areas were affected and the results from each are detailed separately below.

6.1 Service Trench I (Figures 1 and 5)

An existing service trench which ran from the Stable Block to the Queen Mary Ballroom was mechanically re-excavated under archaeological supervision to a depth of 1m. Where the provision of man-holes and duct junctions required the trench to be widened, this was done by hand. The sections were cleaned and as the stratigraphy remained fairly constant and had already been archaeologically monitored when the service trench was first cut, four representative sections only were recorded.

Section 1

The cut of a modern service trench (F2) marked the boundary between the Castle courtyard and the North Gatehouse. To the south of F2, within the courtyard, four levelling deposits (4010, 4011, 4012 and 4016) were sealed by a line of diagonally set bricks (4001). A modern tarmac surface (4000) was laid on top of these. To

the north of F2, within the Gatehouse, a 0.54m deposit of limestone rubble mixed with a silt-sand matrix (4018) provided a level surface for a masonry foundation (F1) which was aligned with the surviving southern Gatehouse arch. A similar arrangement was recorded to the north, where F3 was aligned with the northern Gatehouse arch. In between the two foundations, a clay deposit (4021, 4027) was sealed by a layer of loam (4011) and a trampled surface (4026). Two later trampled surfaces (4024, 4025) were separated by levelling deposits of charcoal (4010), ash (4028) and industrial waste (4029). These were sealed by modern levelling deposits.

Section 2

At the base of this section (not illustrated here) a silt-clay deposit (4008) was overlain by a deposit of black sand-silt (4038) and compacted charcoal (4007). These were sealed by 0.64m of charcoally black silt (4006), overlain by a series of post-medieval and modern deposits as seen in Sections 1, 3 and 4.

Sections 3 and 4

To the south, a layer of green clay (4047) was overlain by an irregular plaster surface (F4) which extended north for 4.60m. Although no walls survived in section, limestone and sandstone rubble, together with the mortar concentrations (4043) seen at the northern limit of F4, may represent the debris of a former structure. The plaster surface was partially sealed by this debris and by a sandy-clay (4046) and a loose sand-silt layer (4045). These were sealed by a black charcoally silt deposit (4006), over which lay a series of post-medieval and modern deposits.

6.2 Service Trenches II and III (Figures 1 and 5)

The provision of services to the Great Hall and to a Plant Room (Screens Passage) required connections from the Service Trench I to be fed into the Great Hall and from there to the Plant Room. An existing service trench was mechanically re-excavated under archaeological supervision to a maximum depth of 0.85m. A series of levelling deposits at the junction with Service Trench I reflected the sequence of stratigraphy already detailed in Section 2 above. To the east, the lower deposits were cut by a pit (F2), which had itself been truncated to the west by 20th-century activity (5016).

Anticipating a future requirement for drainage and mains supply to the south tower, a 0.76m x 1.85m trench (Service Trench III), was mechanically excavated to a depth of 1m in order to provide a connection from Service Trench I. The stratigraphy mirrored that recorded in Service Trench I, Section 2.

6.3 Service Trench IV

A modern service trench was re-excavated by hand and two in situ metal pipes were removed to accommodate the installation of a duct for the Audiovisual Room housed in the Chapel. The new trench slightly truncated a trampled surface to the south (2039).

6.4 Service Trench V

A trench (not illustrated here) was hand-excavated to a maximum depth of 0.80m to connect the Stable Block services to those within Service Trench I. Archaeological deposits were heavily disturbed by existing services, however, some features did survive.

A wall, 1.92m in length, bonded with cream mortar (F22) and its construction trench (F23) were aligned east-west, parallel with F17 in the Stable Block (see Section 5.3 above). Although some truncation had been caused by a modern service cut (F21), two in situ faced stones are thought to represent the eastern edge of F22. An irregular trampled deposit extended south from the wall

and continued to the eastern edge of a north-south aligned wall (F23). This wall abutted F22 to the north and was truncated to the south by modern services.

6.5 Screens Passage (Figure 6)

The Screens Passage was to be converted into a Plant Room and archaeological excavation was required to establish the depth and nature of deposits beneath the modern overburden.

A 1m² sondage established that the uppermost surviving archaeology lay c. 0.50m below the modern ground surface. A layer of grey asphalt (7000) and overburden (7001) were removed by hand.

At the eastern end, the foundations of a north-south aligned wall (F1) were seen as a line of large faced limestone blocks bonded together with a pale cream-brown mortar. A loose sand-silt deposit (7002) separated this wall from the later foundations for the Screens Passage eastern wall (F2), immediately above. These foundations survived as jagged scarring which projected out c. 0.20m. Foundation trenches for the north and south walls were recorded (F3 and F4 respectively), and two white mortar spreads (7011 and 7008) are contemporary with these. The red mortar (7009) is redeposited material. The central surface area was covered by two deposits. A crumbly clay trample which included mortar, charcoal flecks and two yellowed, very smooth limestone flags (7006) and a uniform sandy loam, heavily flecked with white mortar and plaster (7007). The sandy loam continued west towards an entrance with the Great Hall.

The depth of surviving archaeology within the central area of the Screens Passage (221.65m AOD) resulted in minimal disturbance from the laying of service ducts on a north-south gradient from the Great Hall to the Screens Passage. The sandy loam surface (7007) was lowered by 0.20m, all other archaeology remained undisturbed.

6.6 Staircase

This area, located immediately to the east of the Screens Passage, was to house services running into the new Plant Room. Excavation was required to establish the highest level of surviving archaeology and to recommend a minimum depth available for a concrete floor.

The archaeology lay within 0.30m of the modern ground surface, sealed by the same modern overburden as seen in the Screens Passage. Foundations for the Staircase's south-east wall projected out 0.60m from the wall-line. A layer of irregularly-shaped limestone rubble (8001) covered the whole Staircase area. Larger limestone blocks lay close to the northwest wall and the entrance to the Screens Passage. These may represent a continuation south of the curtain wall seen within the Screens Passage. A circular cut, edged with a line of irregular stones, truncated the rubble layer and was filled with a dirty sand-silt deposit mixed with limestone fragments (8002).

The archaeology within the Staircase area remains intact beneath an inert protective layer which is sealed by a concrete floor.

6.7 West Chamber

In order to facilitate the laying of a new floor, 0.20m of modern overburden were removed by hand in the West Chamber. No archaeological deposits were contacted.

7.0 Pottery Assessment by Stephanie Ratkai

7.1 Great Hall

Only a small assemblage of pottery was recovered. The medieval fabrics have all been found during previous excavations. The post-medieval fabrics consisted mainly of Blackwares, Yellow Wares and Coarsewares. These could be paralleled in both form and fabric by material excavated from the Motte (Areas 1, 5 and 6) of Civil War date (Ratkai 1985 and 1987). However, there was a type of Coarseware with a cream fabric which had not been encountered in Civil War levels and may in fact represent later 17th or 18th-century activity. It was found in the Great Hall (9500) and in Service Trench I (4006). In addition there was from the Great Hall (9500) a Slipware dish with a cream fabric with an internal dark slip over which was a trailed floral design in white slip. This is not the usual type of Slipware found at Dudley Castle but can be paralleled by Slipware found at Stafford Castle (Ratkai in preparation) and at Stone (Ratkai forthcoming).

7.2 Refreshment Kiosk

The pottery from this area is much the same as that found in previous excavations immediately to the south and east (Boland 1985). The pottery reflects the use of two buildings, one pre-dating the construction of the Chapel in the first quarter of the 14th-century, the second associated with the remodelling of the castle by Sharrington in the 1530s. The medieval pottery consists of sandy Cookpot jars and glazed, decorated jugs made from coal measure clays. The later material is made up of Cistercian Wares, Blackwares and Coarsewares. Evidence from both Whitefriars, Coventry (personal inspection by author) and Leicester Barn, Kenilworth Castle (Ratkai forthcoming) suggests that in the central area of the West Midlands both Blackwares and Coarsewares were in use in the 16th-century.

7.3 Stable Block

The pottery consisted of mainly modern (sometimes very modern) wares. However, the upper fill of the moat did produce a two-thirds complete Cistercian ware cup which tends to confirm that some backfilling of the moat was undertaken as part of Sharrington's refurbishment of the castle (see above).

8.0 Interpretation and Discussion

The majority of archaeological deposits recorded during the excavation and watching brief are dated to the mid-16th-century onwards. However, some evidence of earlier occupation was identified and it is hoped that this project may shed more light on the less well-documented medieval Castle. The sequence of occupation presented here has been integrated with existing DuCAP phasing (Boland 1985).

The earliest activity recorded by this project is represented by the remains of a timber structure in the Great Hall, formed by a semi-circle of limestone rubble and mortar with five stone-packed post-holes. A similar structure, recorded in the Refreshment Kiosk area by DuCAP, was provisionally dated to the 11th-century, Phase II (Boland 1985 Locock 1988).

A number of features were dated to the 12th-century (Phase III). These were located in the Screens Passage, Refreshment Kiosk area and the Great Hall. A north-south aligned wall foundation in the Screens Passage was associated with a semi-circular tower seen in an earlier excavation immediately to the east (Linnane *pers comm*). Together these represent a curtain wall and defensive tower constructed during the mid-12th-century civil war between Stephen and Matilda. The castle fortifications were subsequently demolished by Henry II in 1175 as punishment for the rebellion of Gervaise Paganel. Contemporary to the curtain wall

and tower was Building B in the Refreshment Kiosk area. Although only the uppermost levelling deposit was recorded by this project, a floor surface, two walls and a possible entrance had been excavated by DuCAP. Building B was aligned with the 12th-century Gatehouse and it was suggested that the structure may represent a Guard House (Boland 1985).

The castle defences remained in a state of disrepair until 1262 when Dugdale records that Roger de Somery began to make a castle out of his manor house (Chandler 1949). In 1264 de Somery was granted a licence to crenellate the castle. The curtain wall and projecting walls associated with it in the Stable Block and in Service Trench V belong to a subsequent programme of fortification carried out by John de Somery in the early 14th-century (Phase V). A blocked-in archway, visible as scarring in the Stable Block eastern wall, would have provided access from the Bailey to the Keep. It has been suggested that an east-west aligned wall would have projected out from the archway to meet with F14. Together these would have supported a raised access to the Keep. No evidence of such an east-west wall was found, but a wall foundation which lay directly opposite F17 and followed its alignment was recorded in Service Trench V. The present interpretation of a raised access to the Keep still seems most likely. However, the layout now suggested by recent excavation would comprise of a number of parallel walls supporting a wooden walkway.

The plaster floors and jagged wall-footing recorded in the Great Hall belong to a pre-16th-century construction phase. The depth of these floors was similar to 14th-century deposits seen elsewhere within the castle and may indicate that building by the de Sutton family did include the Great Hall area and was not limited to the surviving Chapel and Great Chamber (Phase VI). The 14th-century rebuilding programme included the demolition of Building B (Section 5.3 above) in advance of the Chapel and Great Chamber. The Chapel was accessed via the first floor and scarring of a staircase is still visible in the Chapel's southern wall. The foundations of this external staircase may be represented by Features 16 and 17 in the Refreshment Kiosk area.

The most extensive refurbishment of the Castle was commissioned in 1533 by Sir John Dudley, later Duke of Northumberland (Phase VIII). A "Renaissance" style range of buildings was designed by Sir William Sharrington and included a Great Hall, service area, kitchens and servants' quarters. The northern Gatehouse was also rebuilt and masonry foundations recorded in Service Trench I belong to this phase. On the eastern side of the Bailey Sharrington's Range included the Screens Passage and Staircase. The rubble deposit in the latter area would have provided a foundation for a stairwell, giving access to the Great Hall. The staircase scarring is still visible in the surviving wall fabric. In the Great Hall, apart from the walls themselves, post-holes which would have supported a basement roof and upper floor were recorded. A stone-capped culvert cut a mixed clay surface and originally would have been sealed by a floor surface. No evidence of the fabric of this floor was recovered in excavation.

Sharrington seems to have deliberately designed the eastern Range to complement the existing castle frontage. Evidence for this survives in between the 14th-century Chapel and the Gatehouse, where the foundations of a 16th-century facade were recorded. Apart from one section of wall, the ground-plan of this building has survived only as robbed-out foundation trenches.

The plaster floor seen in Service Trench I was located immediately east of a pump or well, and may represent a structure associated with mid-16th-century use of the well. By 1585 a survey recorded that the well had become neglected. Decline was not limited to this one area, the same survey, conducted during the search for a

prison to house Mary, Queen of Scots, reported that the eastern Range was no longer inhabited (Chandler 1949).

During the Civil War the castle was held for the Royalists and evidence relating to a 1647 parliamentary approved "slighting" of the castle defences was recorded in the Refreshment Kiosk area. Here the foundations of Sharrington's facade were robbed out and in the Stable Block, the partially back-filled moat was levelled with demolition from the slighting. The remaining residential quarters were not destroyed and some 17th-century extension did occur. Deposits recorded in Service Trench I, both in the courtyard and within the northern Gatchouse, relate to this period.

It is clear that the recent archaeological excavation within Dudley Castle has enabled an expansion of the existing historical framework. It has also, inevitably raised questions for future research and it is hoped that subsequent restoration plans will allow for this and for the continued preservation of surviving archaeology wherever possible.

9.0 Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Peter Boland and Steve Linnane of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council for their valuable advice throughout the fieldwork and in the preparation of this report. The successful team-work of a great number of people ensured the smooth running of the excavation and watching brief - specific thanks must go to Tony Ecclestone of Linford, Stuart Milner and all of his civil engineering team and to Chris Turner, Clerk of Works for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council.

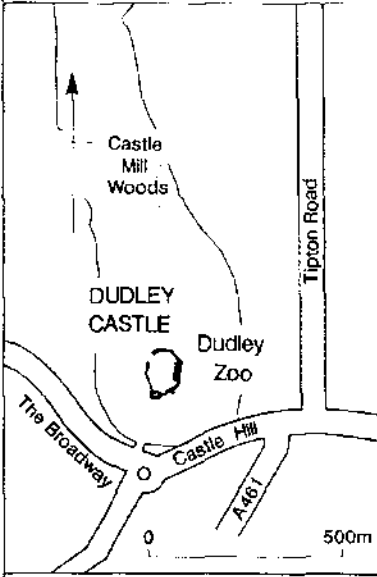
The archaeological excavation was directed by Jon Sterenberg and Edward Newton in the first week and subsequently by Catharine Mould, assisted by Marianne Ridgeway, Derek Moscrop, Sharon Lane, Bob Burrows and Rebecca Roseff. The watching brief was carried out by Catharine Mould. Simon Buteux monitored this project and Iain Ferris edited the report.

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DUDLEY CASTLE 1994



Excavated Areas



I-V Service Trenches

A North Gatehouse

B Buttery

C Screens Passage

D Great Hall

E Vaulted Cellar

F Great Chamber

G Shop Area

H Chapel

J Refreshment Kiosk

K South Gatehouse

L Stable Block

M Keep

N Well

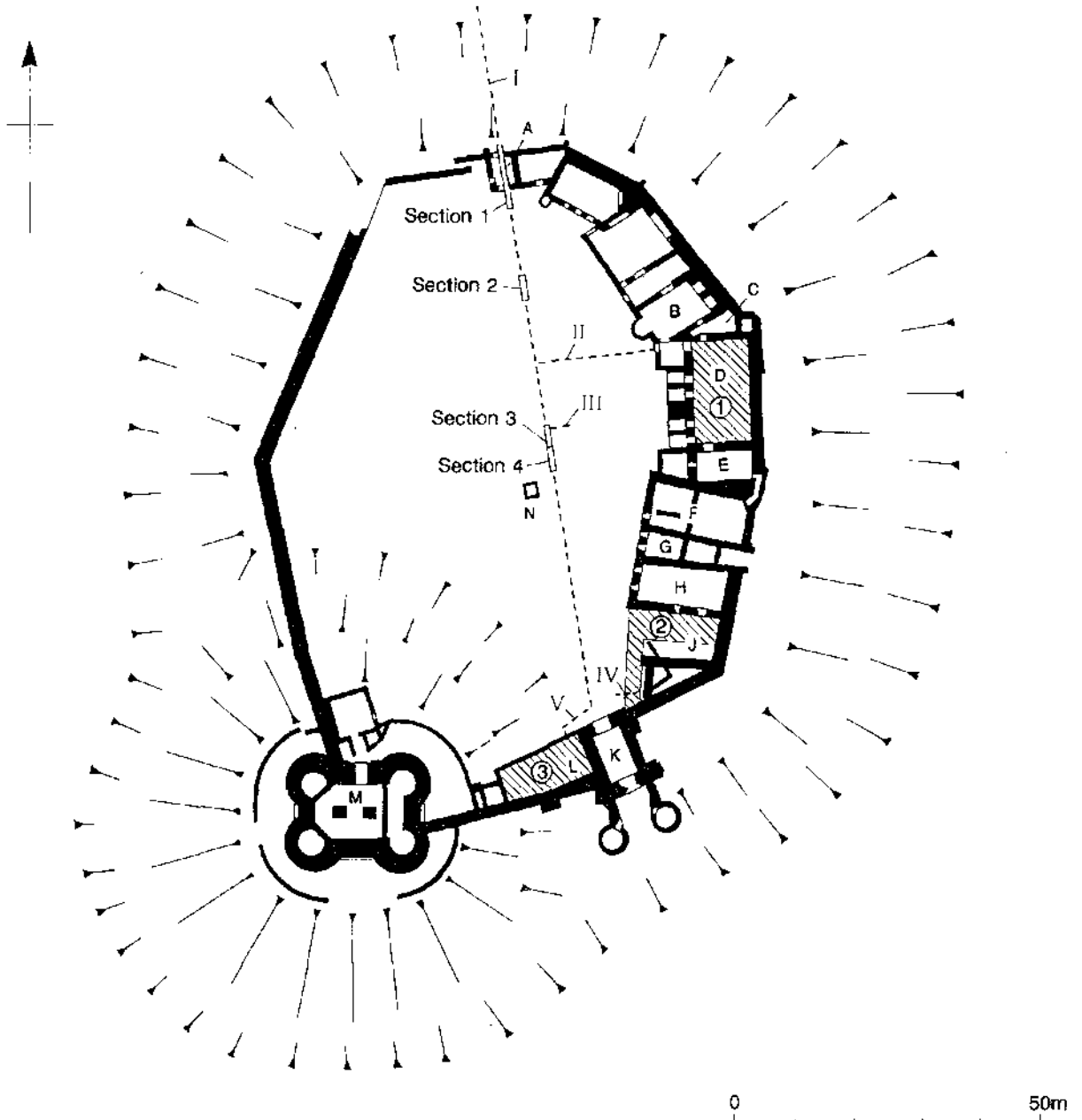


Fig.1

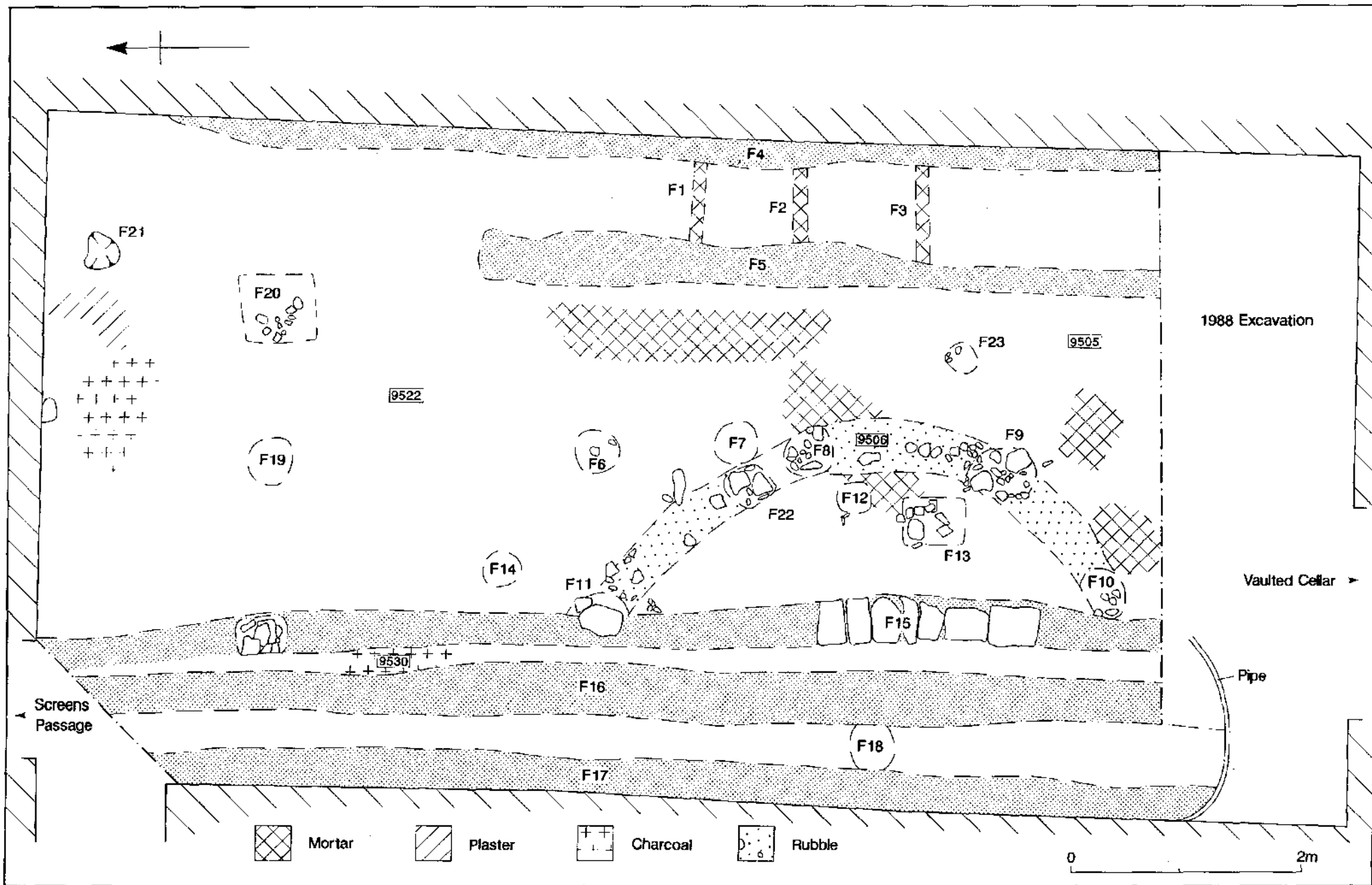


Fig.2.

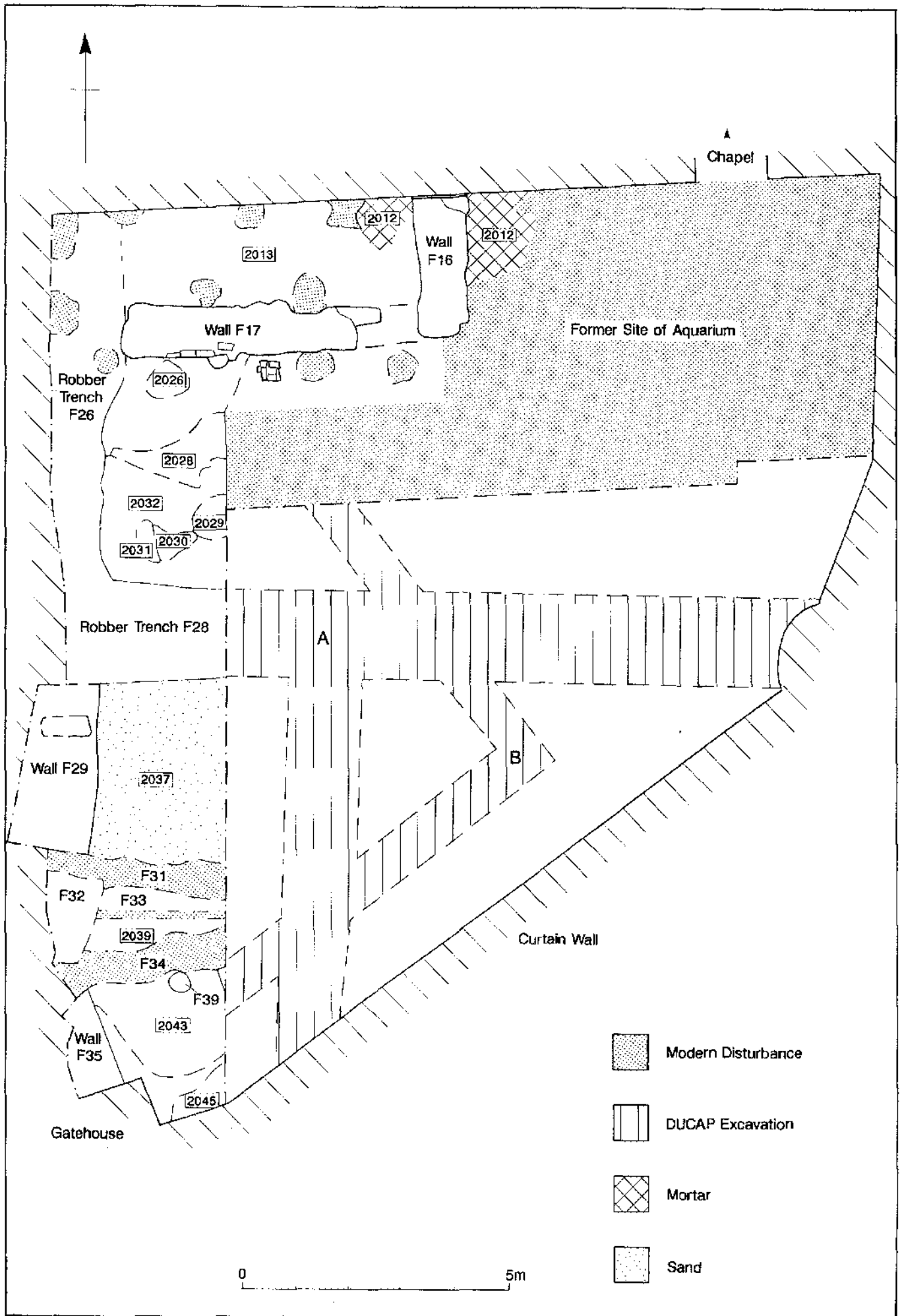


Fig.3.

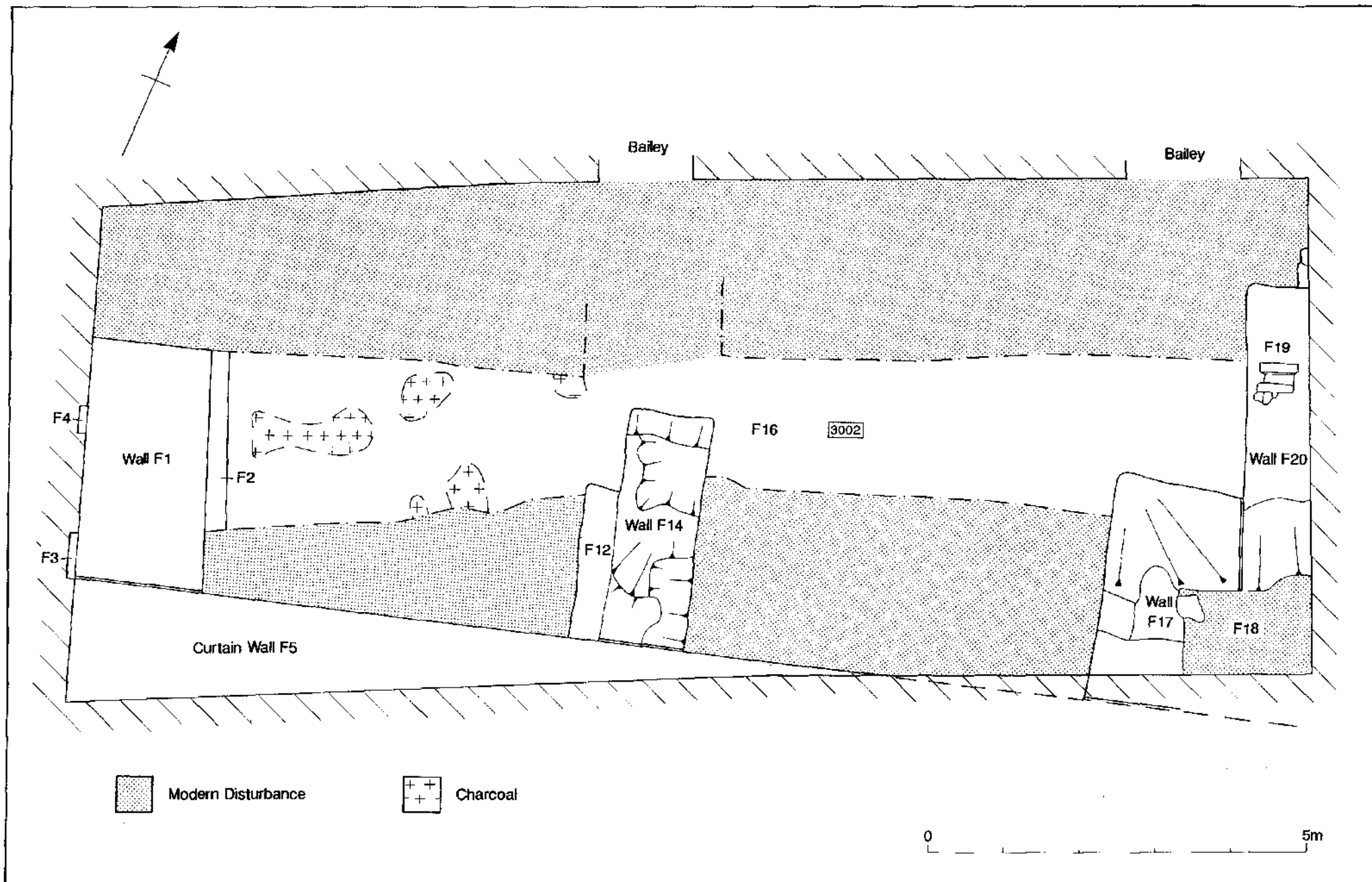


Fig.4.

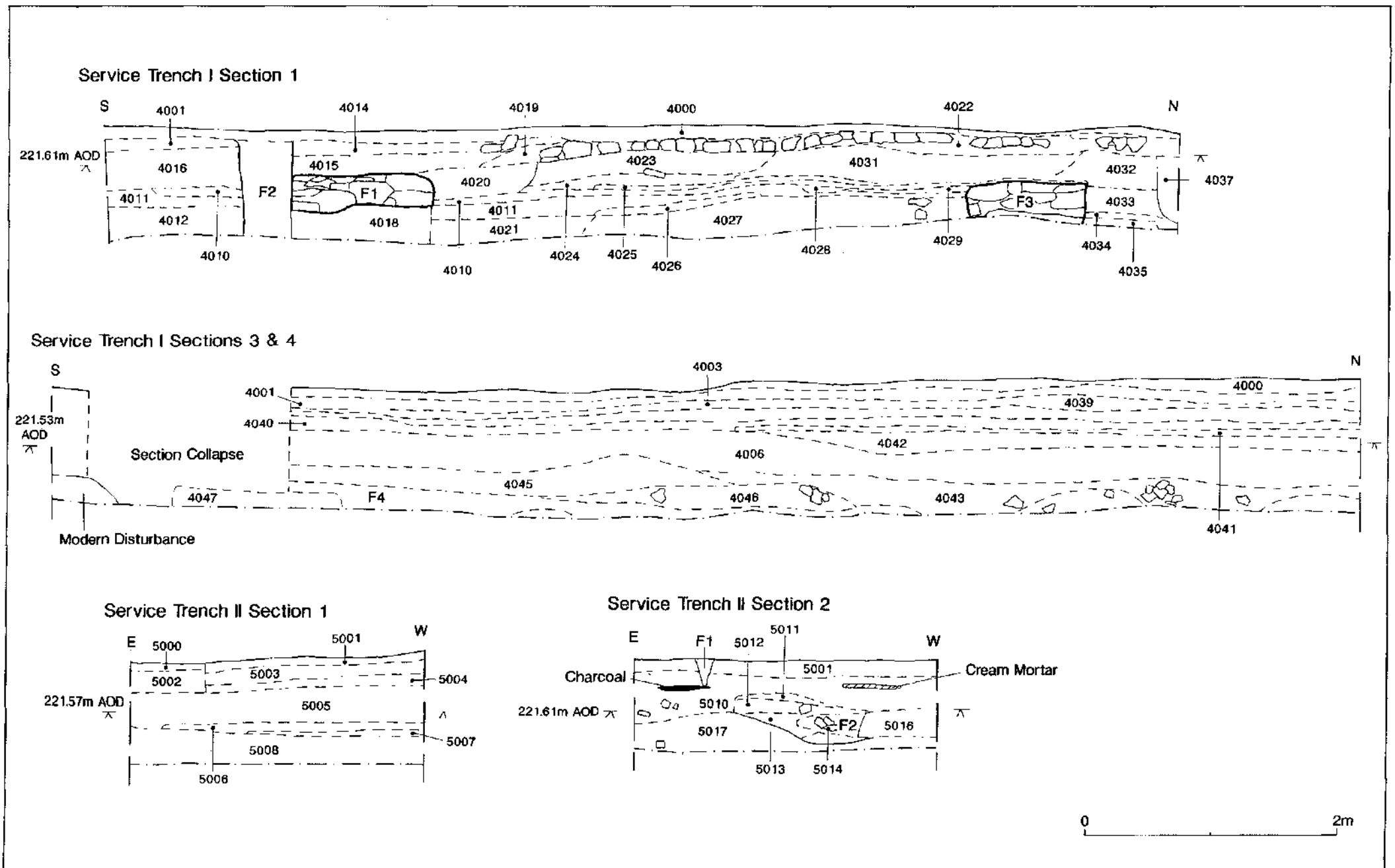


Fig.5.

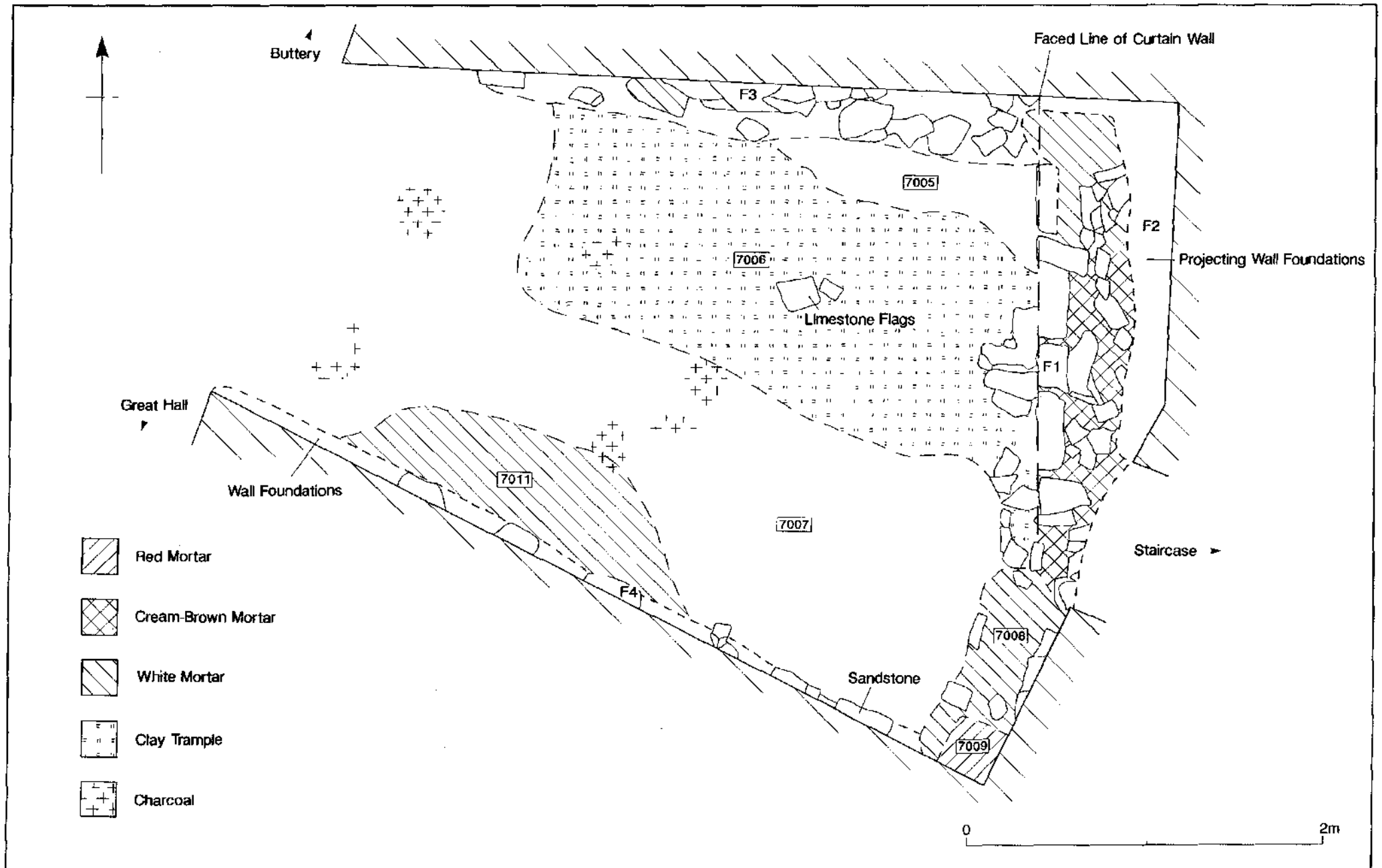


Fig.6.