

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**An Archaeological Evaluation at Thurvaston Farm,
Derbyshire, 1995**

by

Gwilym Hughes

For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux, Iain Ferris or Peter Leach (Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit at Thurvaston Farm (SK243379), South Derbyshire in May 1995. The work was undertaken following a proposal to construct an agricultural slurry pit in an area immediately to the north of the remains of a shrunken medieval settlement, part of which has been scheduled as an Ancient Monument (No: 23299).

A total of six trial trenches were excavated, to determine if any trace of the former settlement had survived in the threatened area. However, the only feature of archaeological interest that was identified was an east-west ditch in the southern part of the area. This feature contained several fragments of medieval pottery.

Introduction

The following report outlines the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken immediately to the east of the buildings of Thurvaston Farm (SK243379) in the district of South Derbyshire (Fig 1). The site lies immediately to the north of the extensive and well-preserved remains of a shrunken medieval village, which includes evidence for a moated site, streets and other buildings. The best preserved area has been scheduled as an Ancient Monument (No: 23299). However, it seems likely that the remains of the settlement extend beyond the limits of the scheduled area.

The evaluation was undertaken following a proposal to construct a slurry pit immediately to the north-east of the scheduled area. The work was required to provide the Local Planning Authority with adequate information to determine the planning application, in line with the advice and procedures outlined in PPG16. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by English Heritage to undertake the work in accordance with a brief prepared by the County Archaeological Officer of Derbyshire County Council. It was completed during the first week of May 1995.

Objectives

The objective of the archaeological work was to gather sufficient information to establish the presence/absence, character, extent, state of preservation and date of any archaeological deposits within the proposed development area. The intention was to provide sufficient information for the Local Planning Authority to adequately take into account the archaeological aspects of the proposal, when determining the application.

Method

Prior to the evaluation, much of the site was covered in slurry and rubble and it was felt that geophysical techniques were not likely to be an effective method of characterising sub-surface deposits. Consequently, the objectives were achieved by trial trenching only. A total of six trial trenches were excavated. They varied between 9.5m and 12m in length and were 1.5m wide. The topsoil horizon within each trench was removed by machine. This proved to be fairly thin, up to 0.1m, and in several of the trenches overlay a deposit of grey silty clay with flecks of charcoal up to 0.2m thick. No features, apart from modern drainage ditches, could be identified cutting this silty clay. Consequently, this was also removed by machine and was found to overlie the pebbly clay natural sub-soil. In each of the trenches this was cleaned and any archaeological features identified were sample excavated in order to establish their extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date. In three of the trenches (Trenches 3, 4 and 5), sondages were excavated through the natural sub-soil clay. A slight change in colour was observed, from yellow-brown to a reddish-brown at a depth of between 0.6 and 0.7m below the surface.

Archaeological recording was undertaken using a continuous numbered context system and BUFAU pro-forma record cards. All archaeological features and deposits were photographed and a full drawn record at appropriate scales was maintained.

Results (Fig 2)

Trench 1 (9.5m x 1.5m) - This trench was located in the southern part of the proposed development area and was orientated east-west. The compact yellow-brown pebbly clay natural sub-soil (1001) was identified at a depth of 0.25m. It was cut by a linear ditch (F1) also orientated east-west. Two sections (A and B) were excavated through this feature. A small extension to the trench had to be excavated to determine the southern edge of the feature in Section B. It proved to be 1.4m wide and 0.3m deep with steeply sloping sides and a flat base. The compact, clayey fills were difficult to distinguish from the surrounding natural sub-soil. However, both fills (1002 and 1003) were slightly greyer in colour. Five sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the uppermost fill (1002), which also contained numerous flecks of charcoal. Three further sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the lowermost fill (1003). At the western end of the trench, the linear feature was cut by a north-south orientated land drain (F4). No trace of the feature could be identified to the west of this drain.

Trench 2 (10m x 1.5m) - This trench was located in the eastern part of the development area and was orientated north-south. The orange-brown pebbly clay natural sub-soil (2002) could only be identified in the north-western part of the trench. The remaining part of the trench was badly disturbed by the cut for a modern land drain and by tree roots (2003).

Trench 3 (10.5m x 1.5m) - This trench was excavated alongside the eastern edge of Trench 2. The reddish-brown natural clay sub-soil (3004) was recorded at a depth of 0.7m and was overlain by orange brown pebbly clay (3003). This in turn was overlain

by a grey-brown silty clay (3001). No features could be identified cutting these deposits apart from a modern land drain in the northern part of the trench.

Trench 4 (11.5m x 1.5m) - This trench was located in the northern part of the development area and was orientated east-west. The reddish-brown natural clay sub-soil (4005) was identified at a depth of 0.6m within a sondage at the western end of the trench. As elsewhere, this was found to be overlain by an orange-brown pebbly clay up to 0.2m thick (4002), which in turn was overlain by grey-brown silty clay (4001), with flecks of charcoal, up to 0.2m thick. This deposit contained three small fragments of post-medieval pottery. There was a suggestion that it filled a broad, shallow cut, possibly the truncated remnants of a north-south orientated furrow. These various deposits were cut by a broad, U-shaped drainage gully in the eastern part of the trench (F3) and an area of disturbance caused by a former tree.

Trench 5 (10.5m x 1.5m) - This trench was located in the western part of the development area. The reddish-brown natural clay sub-soil (5003) was recorded in a sondage in the northern part of the trench at a depth of 0.7m. Once again it was overlain by orange-brown clay (5002), with a lens of large stones (5005), and grey-brown silty clay (5001). A fragment of clay pipe stem was recovered from the bottom of the silty clay (5001). The only features were an animal burrow and a modern drainage pipe (F2).

Trench 6 - (12m x 1.5m) - This trench was located in the south-eastern area of the development in order to determine whether the linear feature (F1) continued to the east of Trench 1. Despite careful cleaning of the orange-brown natural clay (6001), no trace of this feature could be identified.

Discussion

The visible earthworks in the northern part of the scheduled area, to the south-west of the excavated area, suggest that the main street forks around a group of building platforms which may have previously extended into the area now occupied by Thurvaston Farm. The eastern fork to the street may have continued into or near to the area investigated. However, the evaluation produced no evidence either for this street or any associated building platforms. It was thought that a slight dip in the field, orientated approximately north-south, and which extended into the north-eastern part of the development area, might have been associated with a street. However, it proved to correspond with the line of the modern drain recorded at the eastern end of Trench 4. Other slight surface features might be associated with the former ridge and furrow. These become more apparent in the field to the east of the development area.

The only feature that was clearly of medieval date was the clay-filled linear feature in the southern part of the development area. Although this feature contained fragments of medieval pottery, it was poorly defined, appeared to be limited in extent, and it is difficult to relate it to the rest of the settlement. It presumably terminates or changes direction between the eastern end of Trench 1 and Trench 6.

Acknowledgements

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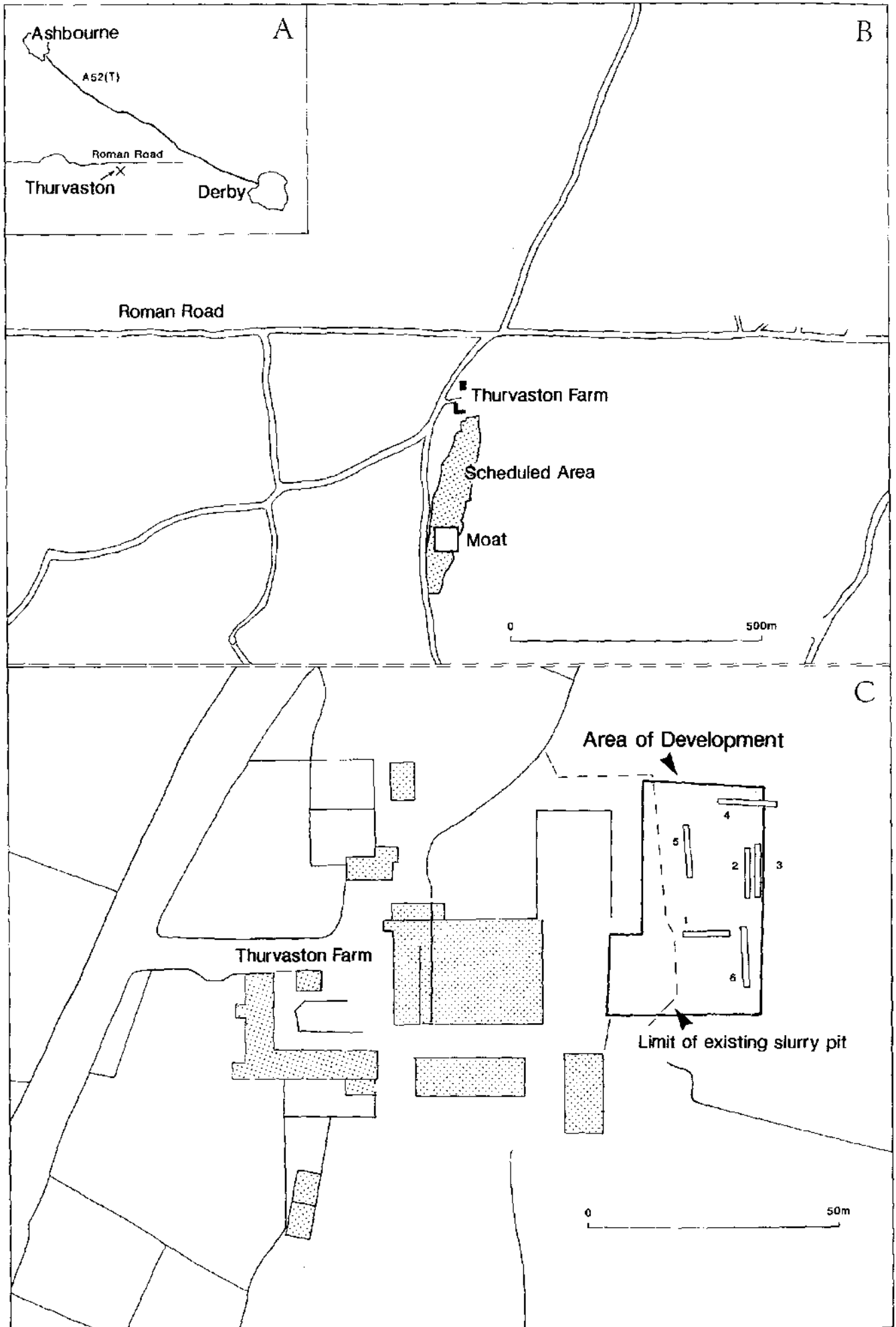


fig.1 Location

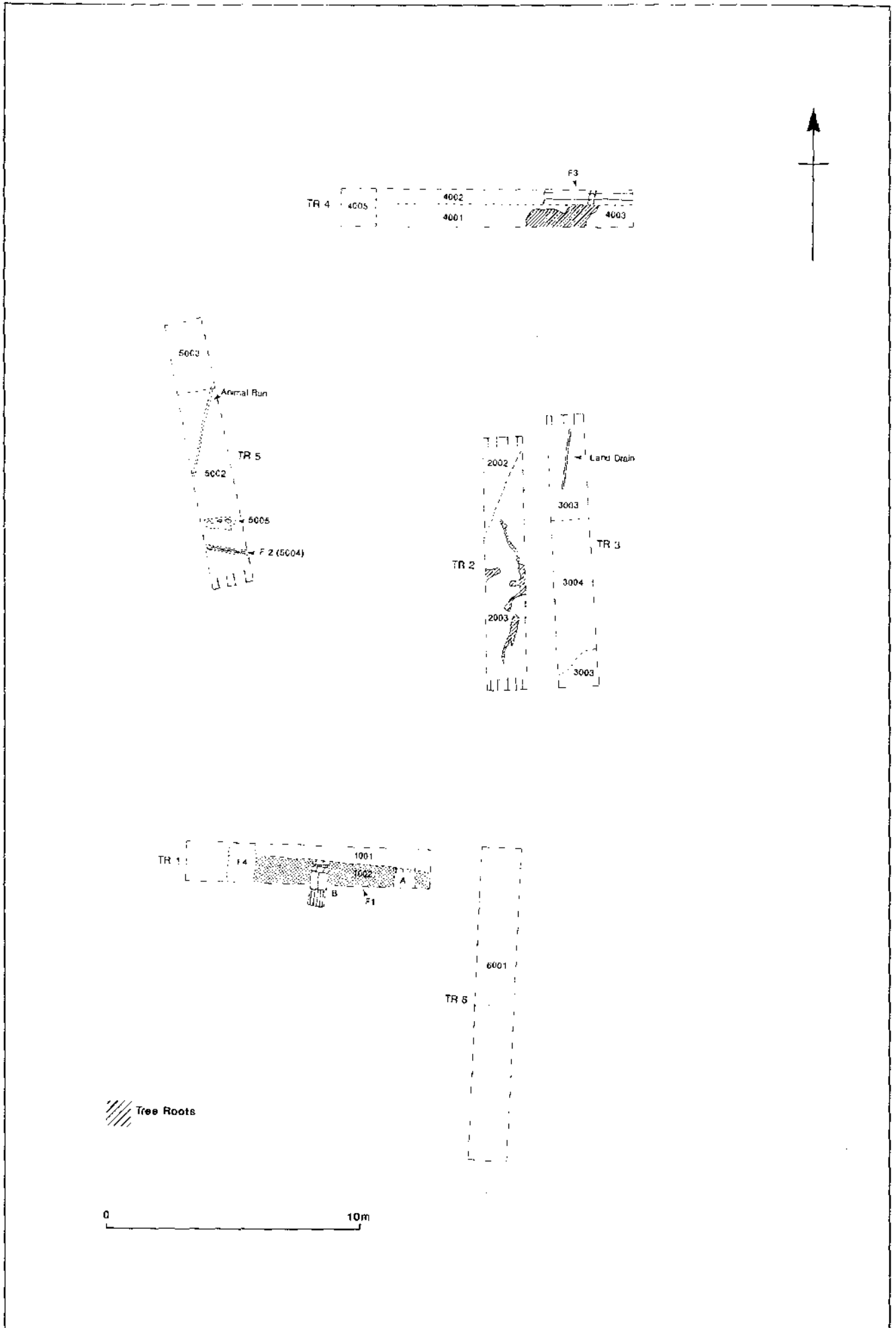


fig. 2 Trench plan @ 1:200



PLATE 1. View of moated site - part of scheduled ancient monument.

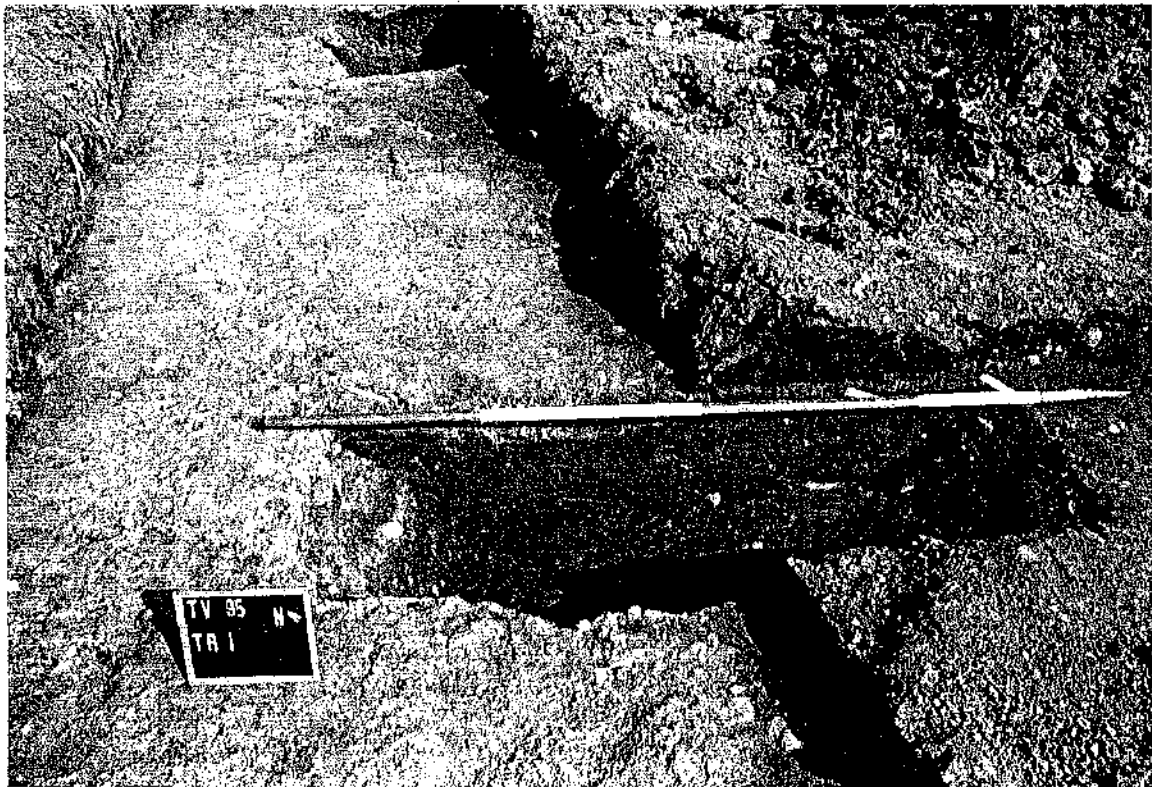


PLATE 2. Trench 1 - detail of medieval ditch. (F 1)



PLATE 3. Trench 4 - after excavation, looking east.