

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**45-47 LONG STREET ATHERSTONE  
WARWICKSHIRE**

An Archaeological Watching Brief 1995

by  
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**1.0: SUMMARY**

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation, in advance of a proposed housing development at Long street, Atherstone (hereinafter referred to as the study area, Figure 1).

The majority of activity within the study area was of late 17th to early 18th century in date. This included a substantial wooden floored structure.

**2.0: INTRODUCTION**

This report outlines the results of watching brief in the yard to the rear of 45-47 Long Street, in the Parish of Atherstone, (centred on NGR. SP 30659787). The work was undertaken in August 1995 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, on behalf of Flude Holdings Ltd.

In accordance with the guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance note 16 (November 1990), a recommendation for an archaeological watching brief was made by the County Archaeology Office of Warwickshire County Council following an application for two shops and six flats. The methodology of this watching brief conforms to a brief and schedule prepared by the County Archaeology Office of Warwickshire County Council.

The purpose of the watching brief was to record any features of archaeological significance exposed during construction groundworks, and to determine the location, extent, date, character, significance and quality of any archaeological remains affected by the development.

**3.0: THE STUDY AREA**

The total area of the proposal affects approximately 300m sq., which is currently a yard to the rear of the property, and the site of former sheds. The study area lies within the precincts of the medieval town of Atherstone. The eastern edge of the property fronts onto Long street, formerly part of Watling Street, a Roman road. This continued to be used as a major thoroughfare through Atherstone during the medieval period. The underlying geology of the site is Keuper Marl with bands of red sandstone.

**4.0: WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS**

A total of seven trenches were dug by mechanical excavator into the upper levels of the natural clay subsoil, in preparation for the concrete footings of the proposed development. All ground disturbance was observed by archaeological staff in order to identify any deposits of archaeological significance. Four of the main trenches cutting across the study area, were hand-cleaned, and recorded by means of pre-printed pro-forma recording sheets for contexts and features, supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections, and photographs, which are all held in the archive.

## Trench 1

Construction Trench 1 measured approximately 11.5m in length, and was cut along the eastern extent of the study area (see Figure 1). Part of Trench 1 followed the line of the former structure, the foundations of which consisted of large, irregular quartzite blocks, which were removed during machining.

The uppermost horizon of the subsoil (1008, Figure 2), was a red Keuper Marl, evident at a depth of 0.70m. This was sealed to the south, by a layer of medium brown silt with sand and clay (1005), evident to a depth of 0.30m. This layer was cut by a feature (F100), which had steep sides and a flat base. Measuring approximately 1.70m across, and 1.15m deep, the feature (F100), consisted of a single fill of loose, mid-brown sandy silt and building material. This was in turn sealed by a number of modern deposits (1000, 1001, 1002, 1003, 1006, 1009 and 1010), generally consisting of brown silts with charcoal and building rubble. Four sherds of 18th Century pottery were recovered during the machining of Trench 1.

### *Interpretation*

Layer 1005 possibly represents the medieval ground surface, directly sealing the natural sub-soil. No artifacts were recovered from this layer, which was relatively undisturbed. It seems likely that feature F100 represents a foundation trench to a former building aligned northwest-southeast. Activity in this area appeared to be focused towards the northern extent of the trench.

## Trench 2

Trench 2 formed the southern extent of the study area (Figure 1) and was aligned northwest-southeast.

The earliest deposit overlying the subsoil (2004, Figure 2), was a layer of light brown, sandy clay with silt (2003), measuring approximately 0.30m in depth. This was cut at the northwestern extent of Trench 2, by a feature (F200), approximately 1.44m in width and 0.42m in depth. Cut with steep sides and a flat base, this feature was filled by a single fill of light brown, sandy clay with silt (2011). Similar to layer (2003), the extent of this fill (2011) could only be determined by charcoal flecks and occasional lumps of silt. A layer of dark brown silty clay (2012) sealed feature F200 to a depth of approximately 0.37m.

Layer 2003 was sealed further to the south by a layer of dark, charcoal rich silt (2002), which measured approximately 0.09m in depth.

Further to the south, the natural clay was overlain by a layer of light brown sandy silt with clay (2006), measuring 0.20m deep, possibly the same layer as 2003. This was sealed by a layer of dark brown silty clay and charcoal (2007), and a layer of brown silt (2009).

Feature F201, to the northern end of Trench 2, was cut with steep sides and a flat base. Evident to a depth of 0.35m, feature F201 measured approximately 1.05m across and was filled by a light brown silty clay (2014).

Layers 2000, 2001, 2007, 2009 and 2013 consisted largely of silt and rubble make-up. The remaining features F202, F203 and F204 are modern in origin and were generally filled with building rubble and brick.

### *Interpretation*

The date of Feature F200 is difficult to determine. Layer 2003 may represent the medieval ground surface, however, no finds were recovered from this context. Pottery from layer 2002 suggests intense activity from the late 17th Century onwards.

### Trench 3

Construction Trench 3 cut across the middle of the study area (Figure 1), and was aligned northeast-southwest. Layers 2000-2004, at the southern end of Trench 3 (Figure 2), are described in the previous section. The earliest deposit in the northern end of Trench 3 is a layer of light brown clay, with silt and charcoal flecks (3007), being very similar in matrix to layer 3006. Sealing layer 3007, was a layer of brown clay (3003) which contained fragments of red brick. This was overlain by a layer of red burnt clay (3004) which was similar in matrix to layer 3005. The remaining layers (3008 and 3009) represent recent activity.

### *Interpretation*

Deposits in Trench 3 suggest intense activity during the early 18th century.

### Trench 4

Construction Trench 4 measured 7m in length and was aligned northeast-southwest (Figure 1), along the line of a former foundation trench. The earliest deposit, overlying the natural, was a yellow/brown sandy clay, with charcoal flecks and burnt clay (4006, Figure 2), measuring 0.16m in depth. This was sealed by two layers of light brown sandy clay (4005, and 4008), which were all cut by feature F400. Feature F400 measured approximately 5.75m in length and was cut to a depth of 0.58m, into the natural clay sub-soil (4007). At the base of the cut (F400), were five wooden joists (4027 to 4031), laid directly onto the clay (4007). The wooden joists measured approximately 0.10m in width and 0.08m in height. These were sealed by redeposited natural clay, layers 4009, 4016, 4017 and 4019, which were overlain by layers of silty clays (4010, 4011, 4013, 4014, 4015 4021, and 4022).

Feature F400 was sealed by a layer of dark brown silt (4002), a layer of burnt coal (4001), and a layer of orange-brown sand with ash (4012). Two smaller cuts (F401 and F402) were evident cutting the larger feature F400. Feature F402 was cut with steep sides and a gently rounded base, measuring approximately 1.32m in width and cut to a depth of 0.26m. This contained two fills of mid-brown silt with white mortar (4023 and 4024), and was sealed by two layers of mixed, compact red sand (4025 and 4206).

Feature F401 measured approximately 0.78m in width and was cut to a depth of 0.50m. The primary fill was a layer of brown silt with compact clay (4018), which was overlain by two layers of sandstone, quartzite and red tile (4020 and 4012). These layers were all sealed by modern layers of mixed brick fragments and red sand.

### *Interpretation*

The earliest layers are present at the northern extent of the construction trench (layers 4006, 4005, 4008, 4004 and 4003), although no finds were recovered from these contexts. Feature F400 appears to be the cut for a

structure, which is represented by the timber joists 4027 to 4031. Again no dating evidence was recovered from deposits associated with these timbers, however, the condition of the timbers would suggest that they are post medieval in date.

## 5.0 THE POTTERY

1000: Unstratified pottery from Trench 1. Two sherds of hard fired pottery with a black glaze on both sides (late 17th to early 19th Century). Two sherds from two small, hand painted, blue and white pearlware bowls (19th Century).

1002: One 'Black ware; sherd (17th to 18th Century), and one clay pipe bowl, (18th to early 19th Century).

2014: Two joining sherds with an orange fabric, splashed with a purple glaze, (possibly late 15th or early 16th Century). Very similar to pottery found in association with Midland Purple Wares, Cistercian Wares and early black wares found at Atherstone Market Hall, (S. Ratkai Pers. comm.)

3008: One pancheon rim, Polesworth or Nuneaton (18th Century).

4000: One sherd of early 19th century Mocha pottery.

4025: Two sherds of Polesworth or Nuneaton coarse ware pottery, slipped inside and out, with an internal and an external glaze (18th Century). One sherd of 'Black ware', (17th Century).

Unstratified: Two sherds of Polesworth pottery, one from a pancheon and one possibly from a jug, (18th Century). One 'Black ware sherd (16th to 17th Century), one sherd with a mottled manganese glaze, (probably from a tankard, late 17th-early 18th Century). One sherd from a pancheon of unknown origin, having a dark brown lead glaze, and a single line of slip around the rim (18th Century). One modern glazed ware.

No non-ceramic finds were recovered.

## 6.0 DISCUSSION

The pottery assemblage, consisting mainly of Polesworth pottery and black wares, would suggest most of the deposits within the study area date from the 17th century or later. Possible late 15th-early 16th Century pottery was recovered from Features F200 and F201. These features appeared to cut layers containing later material suggesting the pottery was residual. Its presence however, does indicate earlier activity in the immediate vicinity.

Five timber joists, lying directly below pre-existing buildings, and laid on the natural clay, would appear to represent a single structure. This is sealed by layers containing late 17th to early 18th century pottery. Layers to the northeast (4003, 4004, 4005, 4006, and 4008), would appear to pre-date this structure. These layers, evident to within 0.25m of the present ground surface, maybe of archaeological interest should future groundworks be undertaken immediately to the northeast of the study area.

Very little evidence of archaeological activity was encountered in the southeastern corner of the study area.

## **7.0: RECOMMENDATIONS**

Construction works within the footprint of the development, are unlikely to affect any significant archaeological deposits. However, consideration should be given to the maintenance of a watching brief for any ground works, associated with the development, in the area closer to the street frontage, where, as suggested by this assessment, a higher density of earlier archaeological deposits may be present.

Arrangements have been made for the archaeological archive, including all written records and ceramic finds, to be deposited with the Warwickshire Museum. Four copies of this report will be deposited with the County Sites and Monuments Record, on the understanding that it will be made available as a public document.

## **8.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# ATHERSTONE Location Plan

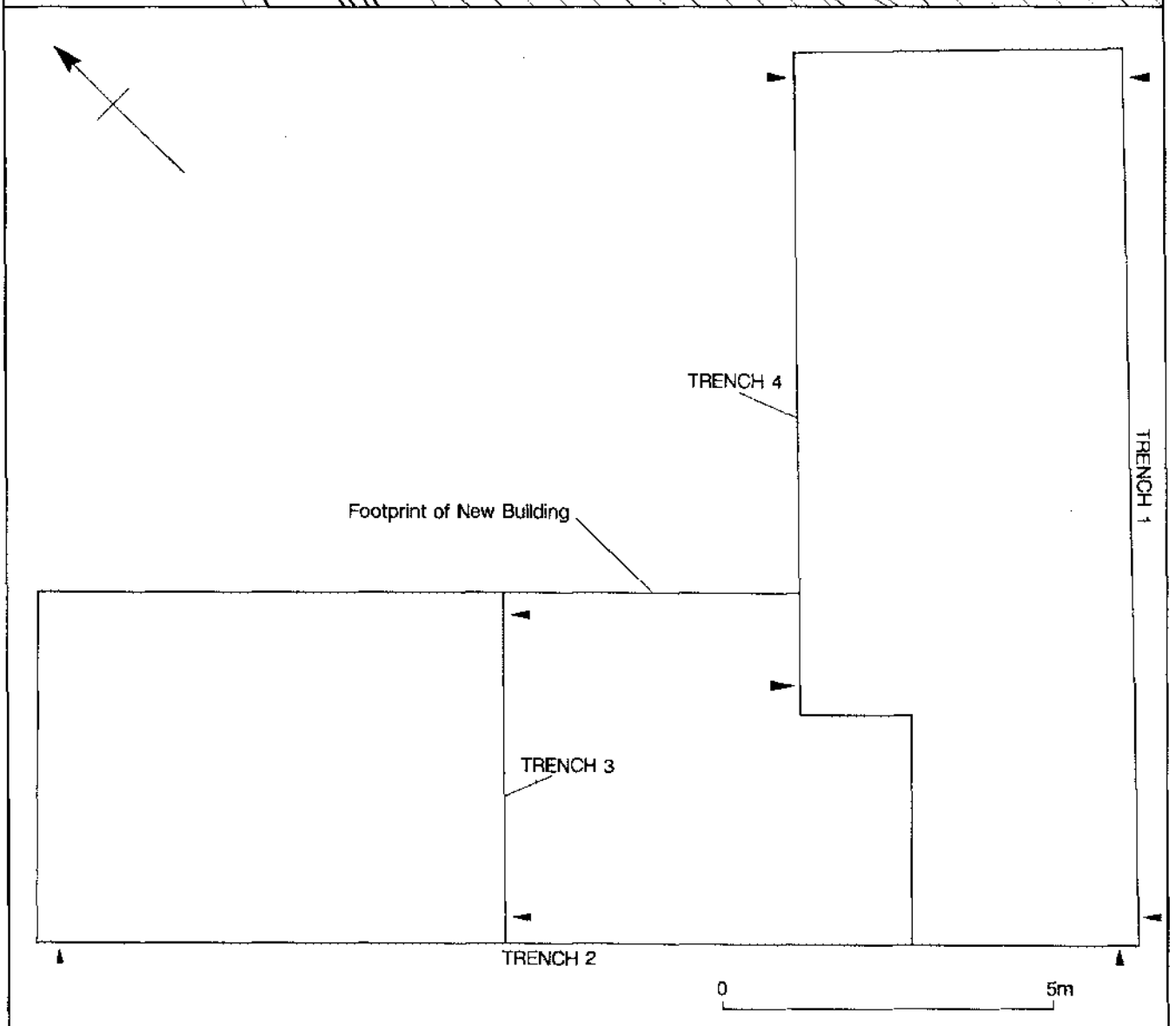
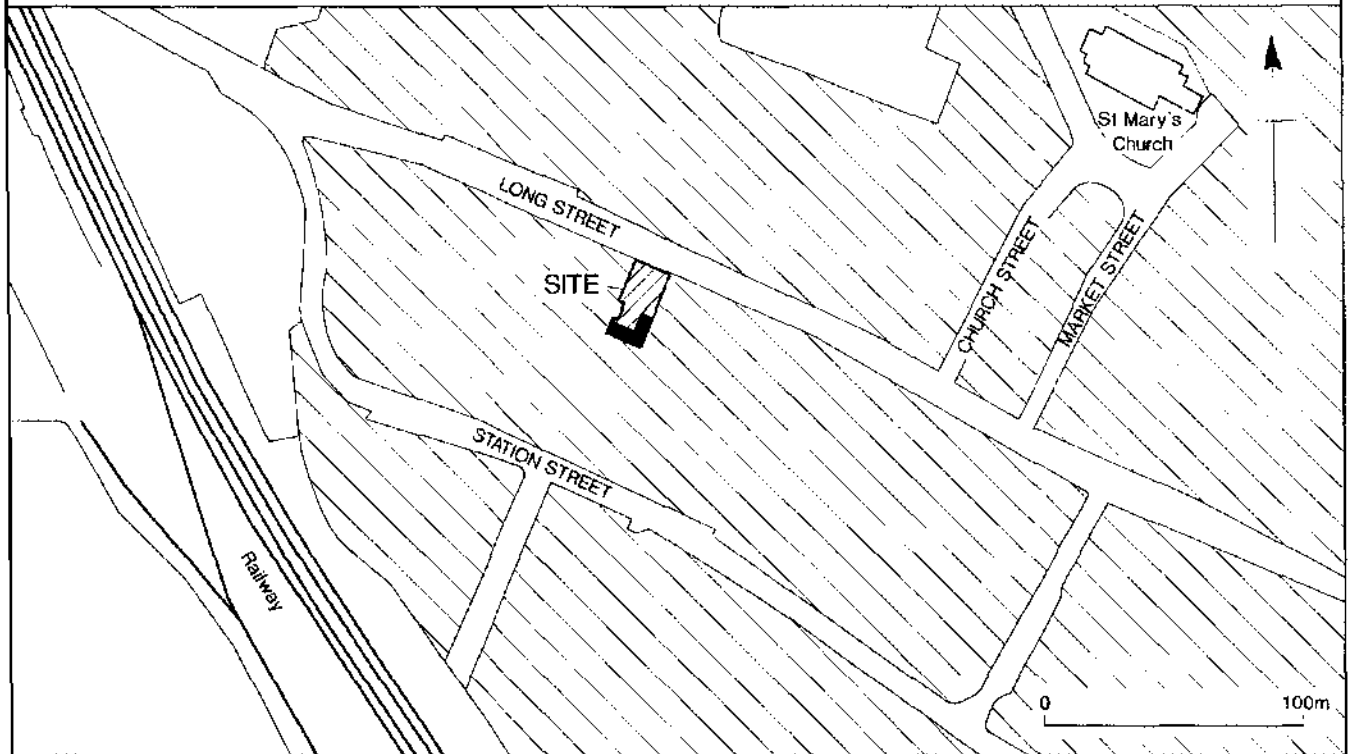


Figure 1



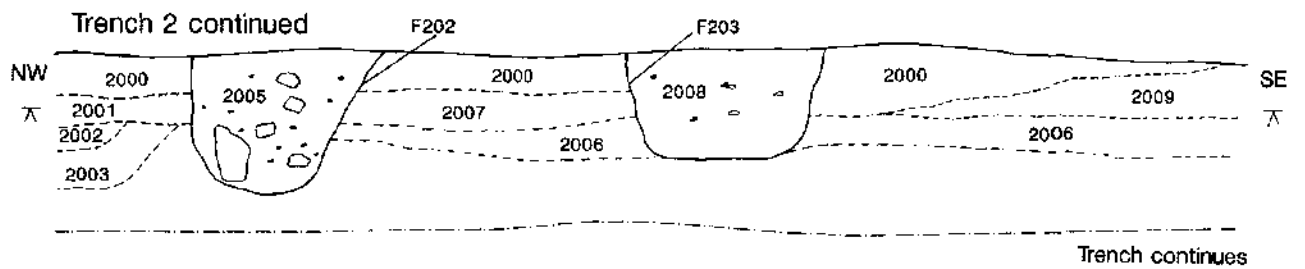
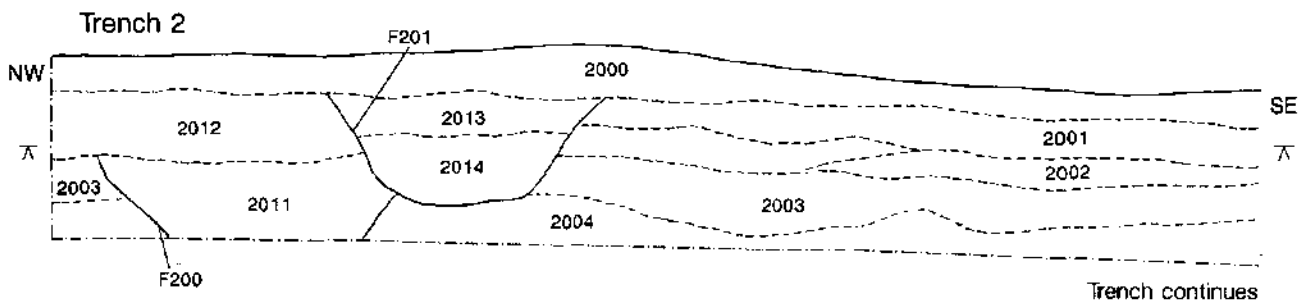
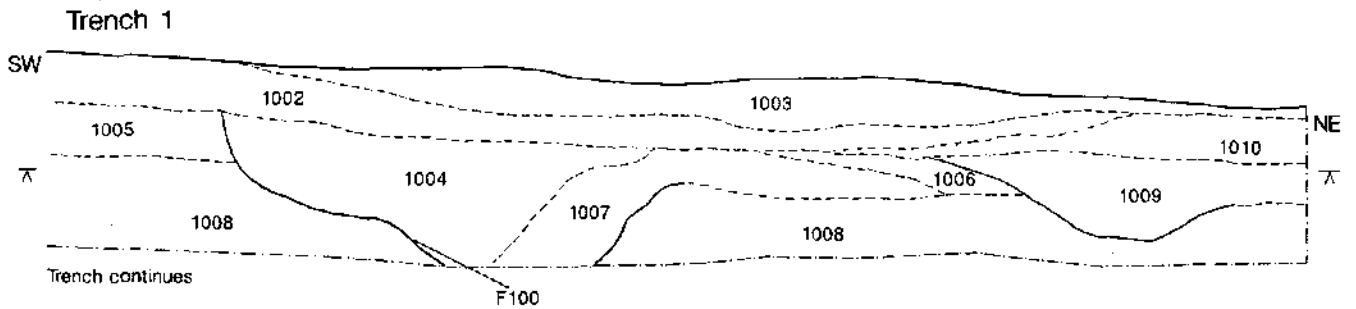
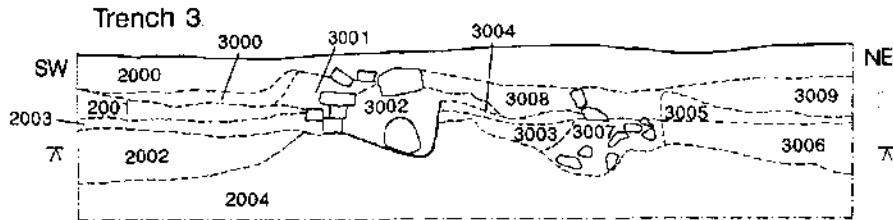
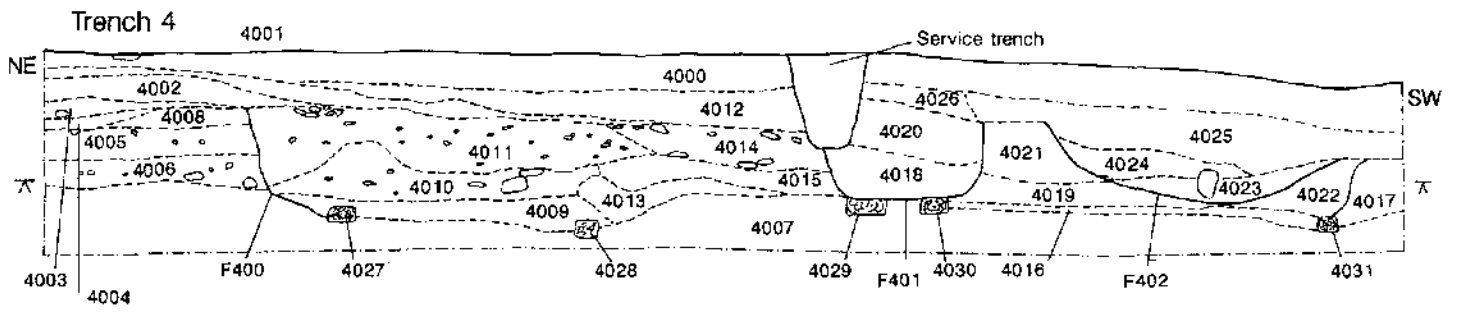


Figure 2