

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**An archaeological evaluation at the  
Wolverhampton Art Gallery, 1995**

by  
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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## **An archaeological evaluation at the Wolverhampton Art Gallery**

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### **SUMMARY**

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit at Wolverhampton Art Gallery (SO 915 020) in September 1995. The evaluation followed a proposal by Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council to build an extension to the rear of the existing Art Gallery building. The site lies in the suggested core area of Saxon/medieval/post-medieval Wolverhampton. A single trial trench was excavated. Nothing of archaeological significance could be identified apart from a nineteenth century cellar and associated structures.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The following report outlines the results of an archaeological evaluation to the rear of the Art Gallery on Wulfruna Street/Lichfield Street, Wolverhampton (Fig.1; SO 915 988). The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in September 1995. It was carried out in accordance with a brief prepared by West Midlands Sites and Monument Record in response to a proposal to build an extension to the rear of the existing Art Gallery Building. Arrangements have been made for the deposition of the archive at the West Midlands SMR. The work was undertaken on behalf of Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council.

The site (Fig. 2) lies between Wulfruna Street (to the north), Lichfield Passage (to the east), Lichfield Street (to the south) and St. Peter's Close (to the west). St. Peter's Church is located on a knoll to the west of St. Peter's Close. A desk based assessment of the site has been prepared by the West Midlands Joint Data Team (White and Dingwall 1995). This study suggested possible activity in the area dating back to the prehistoric and Romano-British periods. Wolverhampton was also an important Saxon religious and estate centre and medieval market town. Both Lichfield Street and Wulfruna Street are believed to have been important routes from at least the medieval period. The desk based assessment documents a reference to the discovery of a 'Roman urn' discovered in sand at a depth of 3 yards in 1793 during the excavation of a cellar. This urn was apparently associated with extensive human remains (White and Dingwall 1995, 14).

### **OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the archaeological work was to obtain an adequate record of any archaeological deposits or finds disturbed or exposed by work associated with the development and to ascertain whether human remains are likely to survive on site.

### **METHODS STATEMENT**

Due to the limited area available, it was only possible to excavate a single trial area (Fig. 2). This initially measured 5m x 2m. An extension, approximately 3m x 1.5m, was opened to the west of this trench. Both the initial area and the extension were excavated using a combination of mini-digger and pick and shovel.

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

## **RESULTS (Figs 3 and 4)**

*Main area of Trench* - The whole of the trial trench lay within the confines of a brick-built cellar filled with brick rubble. The western and southern edges of the trench were defined by cellar walls (F2 and F3). The southern wall (F2) abutted the western wall (F3) and had clearly been inserted at some stage as a dividing wall. The western wall continued beyond the limits of the excavation to the north and south. Two openings were recorded through the top of this wall (F5 and F6) possibly used as coal chutes. A brick built drain was recorded along the base of the western cellar wall (F4). The remains of the cellar walls were sealed by a series of demolition deposits (1000 - 1003 and 1006) and a fragment of wall (F1) possibly associated with part of a demolished building on top of the cellar.

A sondage was excavated through the clay floor of the cellar adjacent to the junction between the two cellar walls. This indicated that the cellar was cut into the natural sandstone (1012 and 1013). The total depth of the trial trench, including the sondage, was 3.2m.

A number of fragments of 19th century ceramics were recovered from the backfill of the cellar and the associated demolition deposits.

*Western extension* - An extension to the west of the trial trench was opened with the mini-digger to see if any earlier deposits had survived in the area between the cellar wall (F3) and the modern wall (F7) to the west. Access to this area was very difficult due to the proximity of the two walls. However, the natural clay was recorded at a depth of approximately 1.7m. This was overlain by a series of mixed clay deposits. Much of the southern area of the extension was disturbed by the presence of the possible coal chute (F5).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Despite the suggestion that the site lies close to the Saxon and medieval core of Wolverhampton, no indications of pre-nineteenth century activity could be identified during the evaluation. The only structures that could be identified were clearly related to a former cellar, possibly late 18th century or 19th century in date, and associated structures.

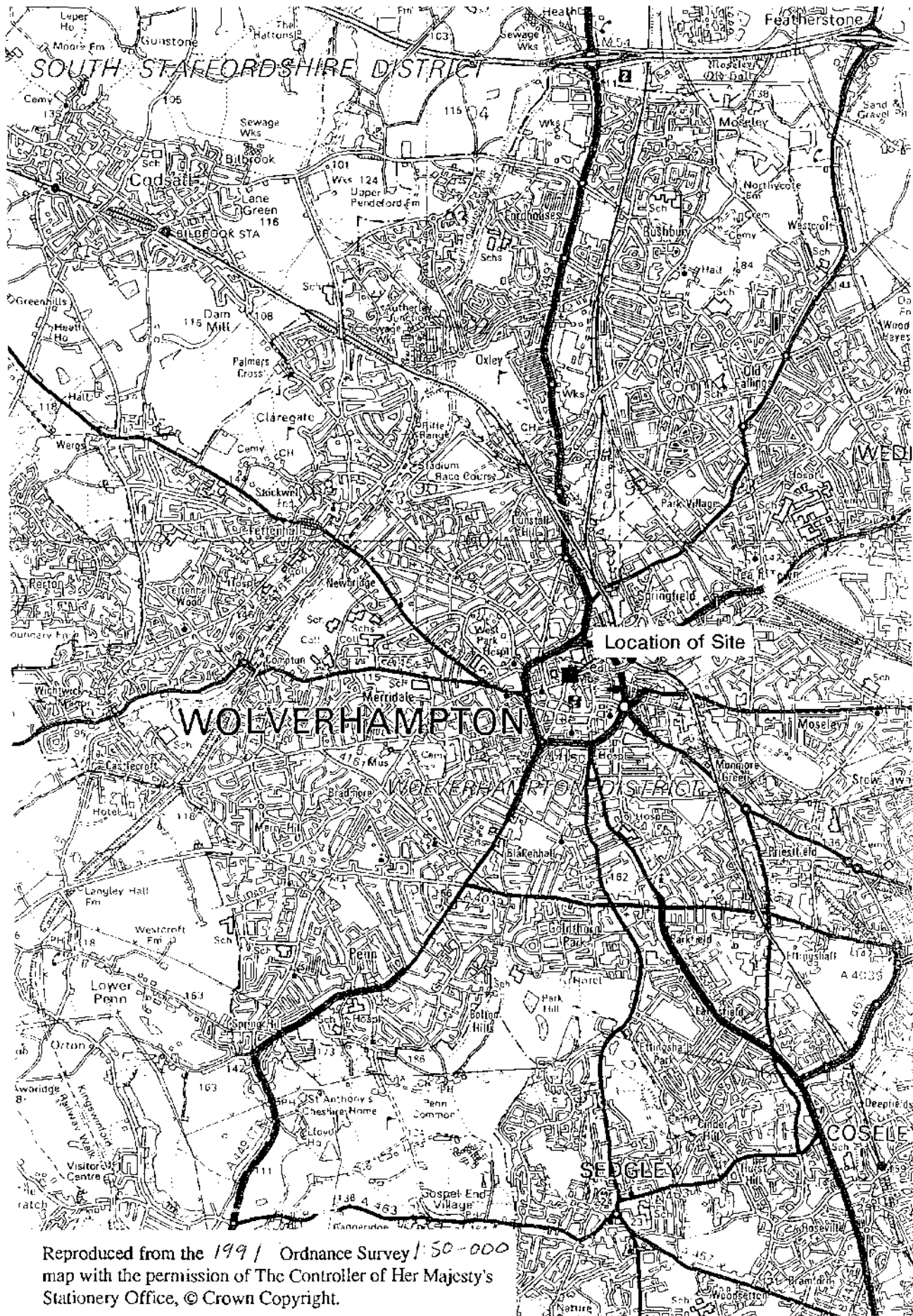
Despite the limited potential of the area in the immediate vicinity of the trial excavation, it is possible that archaeological deposits may have survived in other areas likely to be affected by the proposed development. Foremost amongst these may be the area immediately adjacent to Wulfruna Street, currently the site of a large rectangular prefabricated building (Fig. 2, Building B).

Despite the inconclusive results from the extension to the trial trench, there is still a possibility that some indication of the pre-cellar deposits may have survived to the rear of the wall to the west of the trial trench, ie in the area between the modern wall (F7) and the cellar wall (F3). It may be possible to obtain a record of these potential deposits when the modern wall (F7) is dismantled.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The evaluation was carried out by Jon Sterenberg, Martin Campbell and Mark Hewson. The report was prepared by Gwilym Hughes. Martin Campbell prepared figures 2 and 3.

Thanks are due to Lucie Dingwall (West Midlands SMR).



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Fig. 1

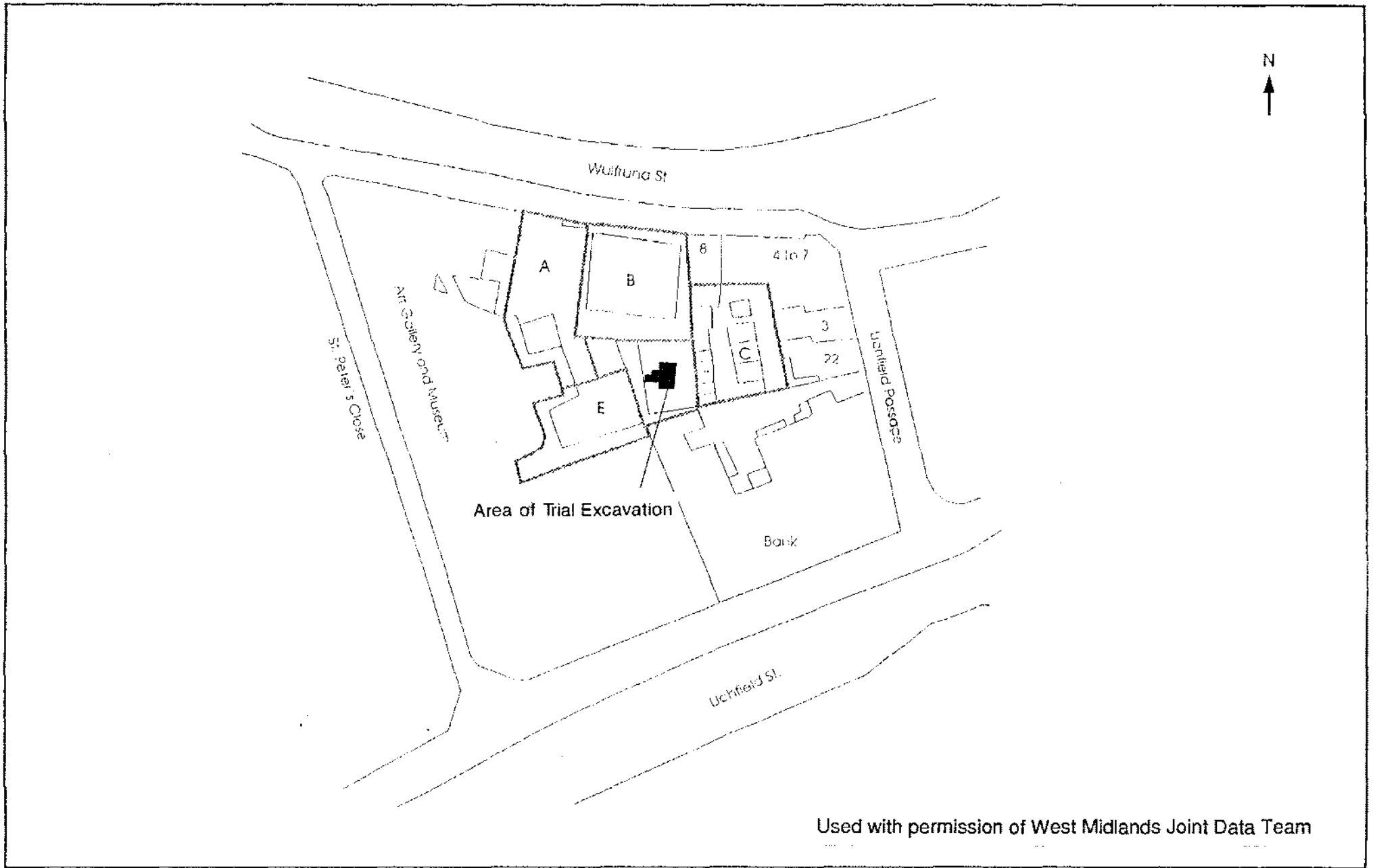


Fig. 2

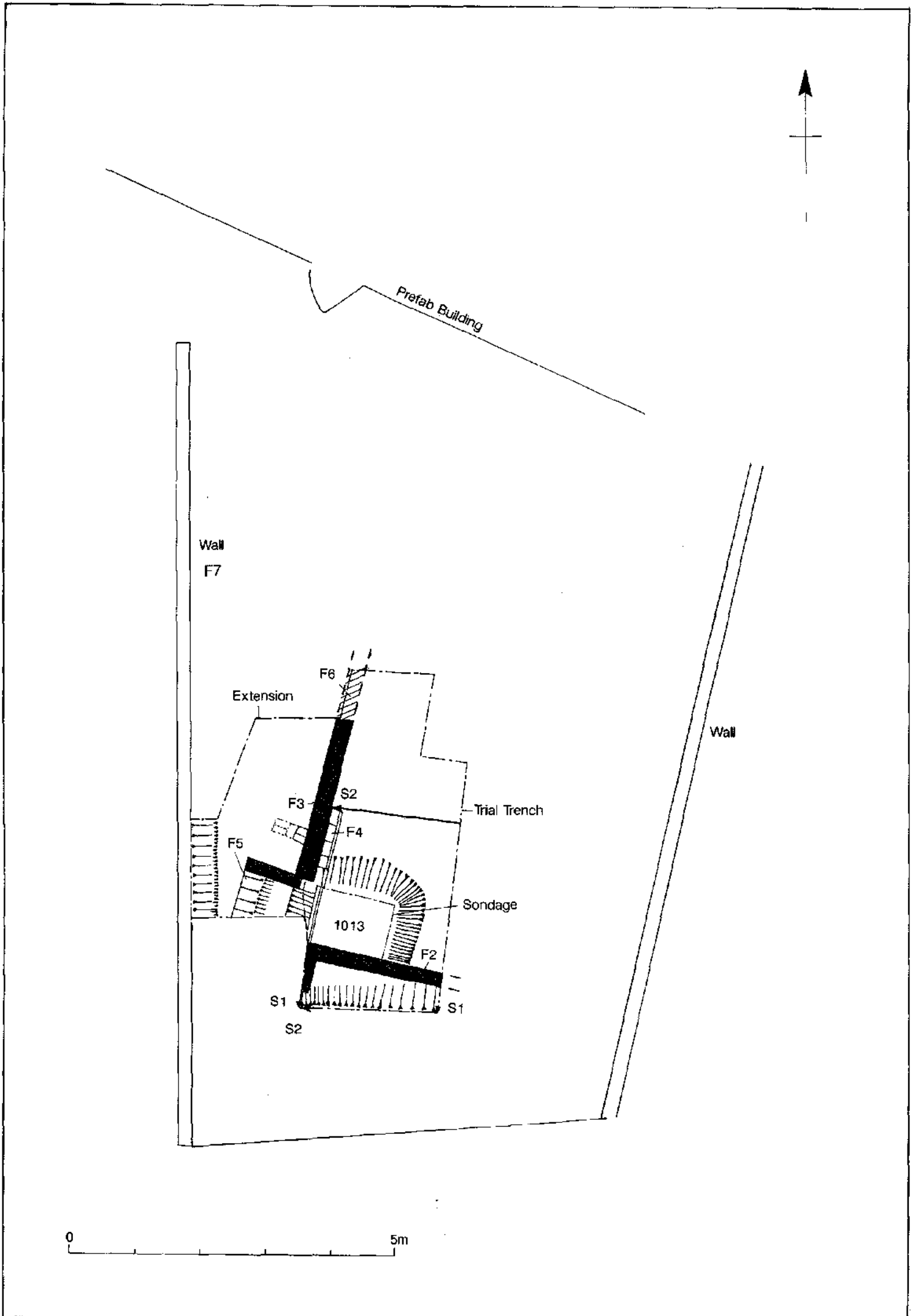
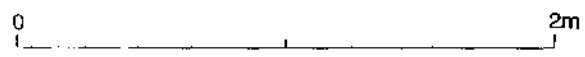
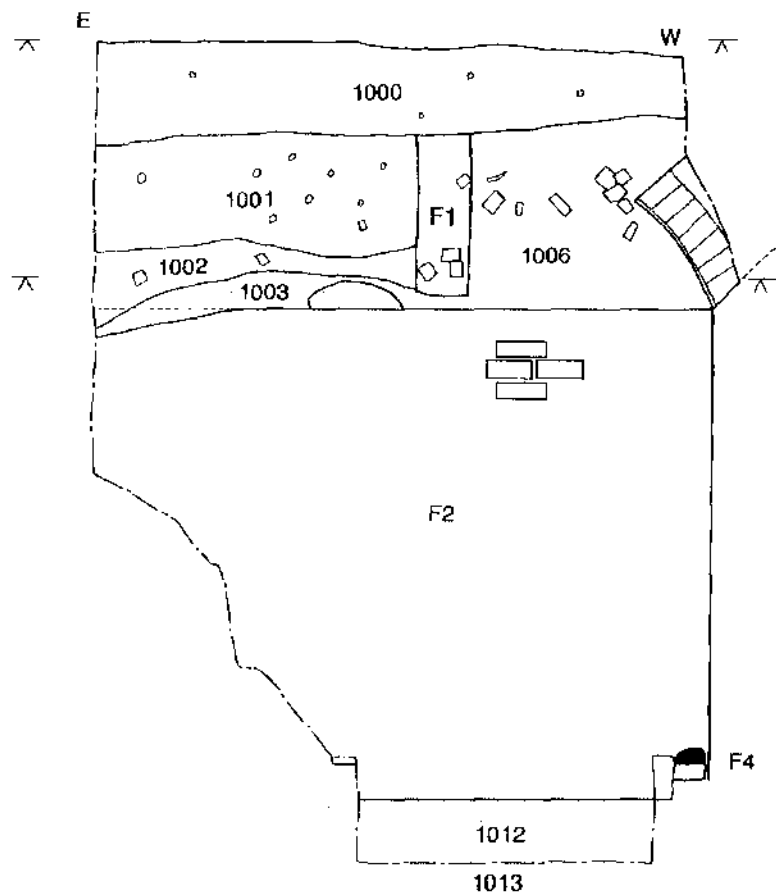


Fig. 3

S1. North Facing Section



S2. East Facing Section

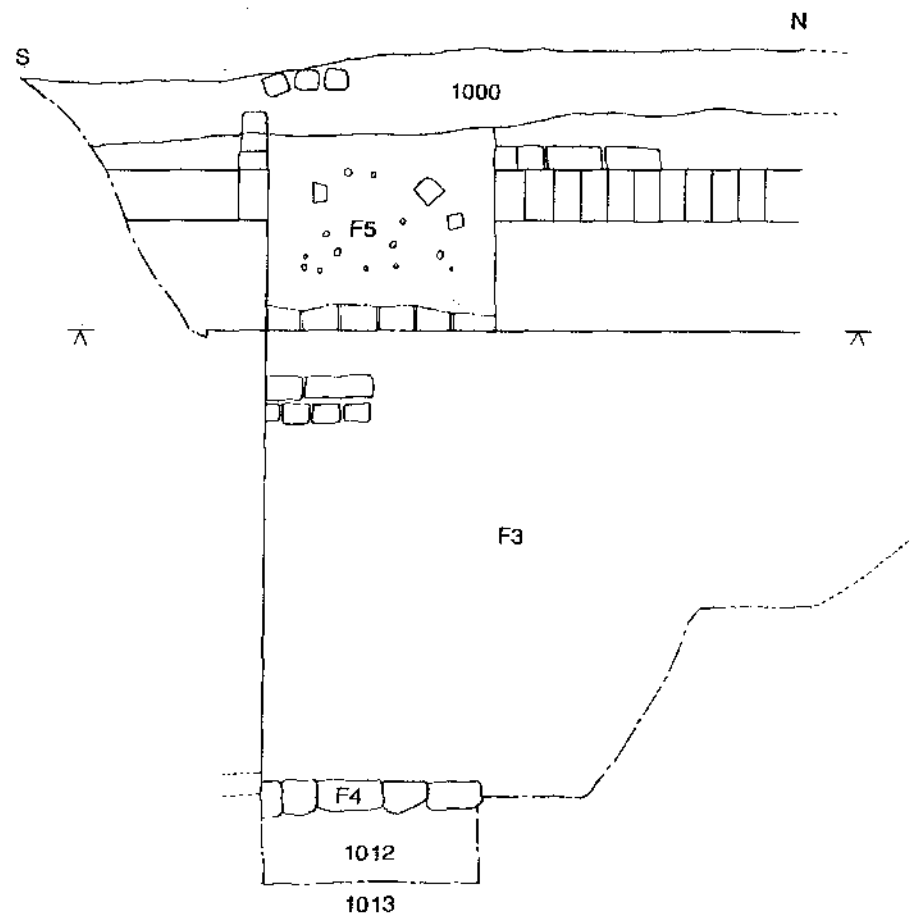


Fig. 4