

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**An Archaeological Evaluation  
at Pitt Street and School Street Car Park,  
Wolverhampton, West Midlands**

by

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with illustration by Nigel Dodds

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# **An Archaeological Evaluation at Pitt Street and School Street Car Park, Wolverhampton, West Midlands**

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## **1.0 Summary**

An archaeological evaluation was conducted at the Pitt Street and School Street car park (SMR 8637, NGR SO91199835C), Wolverhampton, by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (5th and 6th February, 1996). Prior to this project no below-ground investigations had been conducted within the site and the potential for the survival of archaeological deposits, their nature and condition, was unknown. With the exception of a cellar in Trench 2 which may be dated to the late 18th century, all features and deposits recorded by the evaluation were of 19th century date or later. No surviving evidence of medieval activity was found, and no archaeological deposits lay within the upper 2m of the present day car park surface.

## **2.0 Introduction**

This report outlines the results of an archaeological evaluation of the Pitt Street and School Street car park, Wolverhampton (NGR SO91199835C, Figures 1 and 2). The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of the Department of Technical Services, Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council, and was carried out in the context of Planning Policy Guidance Note 10: Archaeology and Planning (DoE), and in advance of proposed re-grading of the ground surface prior to the creation of a new town square. It was anticipated that re-grading would remove up to a maximum of 2m of surfacing, with drainage channels being cut to a depth of 0.5m in areas adjacent to School Street. This evaluation was conducted in accordance with a brief supplied by West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record (White, 1996).

## **3.0 The Site and its Location**

The site, which is currently used as a car park, is bounded by School Street to the west and by Pitt Street to the south. Its northern and eastern limits are defined by the properties that front onto Salop Street and Worcester Street, respectively. The ground level slopes gradually from east to west. The underlying geology is boulder clay.

Prior to this archaeological evaluation, no below ground investigations had taken place within the car park. However, the site is situated within an area of archaeological potential identified by Dr. N. Baker in 1980 (Baker, 1980). Baker mentions the Puddle Brook, located a little to the north of the Pitt Street and School Street car park, in his review of the development of the

town of Wolverhampton and he suggests that the area of the Puddle Brook should be associated with the medieval "Boblake", a name given to a portion of Worcester Street by 1750. In addition, "Broad Street" which lies below the present-day Salop Street (previously Barn Street), has been identified by Hooke and Slater as a major arterial route in the pre-conquest and medieval periods.

#### **4.0 Documentary and Cartographic Evidence**

(This information is taken from the brief supplied by West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record).

The earliest map of this area (Taylor 1750), shows that the site is already developed. It maps a cluster of buildings and gardens to the west of Worcester Street, and development along Barn Street (present-day Salop Street) to the north. The development along Barn Street is thought to have originated much earlier, as properties were reported to have been destroyed in an extensive fire of 1590. Occupation of the site became steadily more intensive, until the establishment of an electro plating works in the 1930s. A map of 1938 shows the works in the centre of the site; buildings had been cleared from the western and southern parts of the site.

#### **5.0 Objective**

The objective of this archaeological evaluation was to determine the nature, extent, significance, survival and vulnerability of any surviving archaeological deposits within the car park area, in order to allow adequate provision for protection of the archaeological resource during the proposed development.

#### **6.0 Methodology**

Three 2m wide by 10m long trenches were excavated (Figures 2-5). A JCB mechanical excavator was used to remove the tarmac, modern overburden and building rubble, to the top of either any significant archaeological features and deposits, or to the top of the natural sub-soil. The depth of the deposits encountered, and the instability of the trench sides, especially in Trenches 1 and 2, prevented a detailed examination of the features and deposits. However, a full record of all contexts and features was made, using pro-forma record cards, scale drawings and photographs, of the excavated sections and plans. No detailed recording of the base of the trenches was carried out due to the unstable nature of the material in the trench sections. This was agreed after discussions with the Borough Engineers.

#### **7.0 Archaeological Results (Figures 3, 4 and 5)**

##### Trench 1 (Figure 3)

Trench 1 (2m x 10m) was located at the northern end of the car park, and aimed to transect a narrow alley, which may have existed since the 15th century. The sides of the trench were extremely unstable, and it was decided to conduct all recording from the trench top.

The natural boulder clay (1005) was contacted within the eastern half of the trench at 145.05m AOD and within the western half at 144.75m AOD. A concrete floor (F8), whose eastern limit was defined by a north-south aligned wall (F7), sealed the natural clay (1005) in the western-most 5m. The southern extent of the concrete floor was exposed within Trench 1 and continued north and west beyond the trench. The floor was overlain by a mixed layer of reinforced concrete and steel bars.

To the east, the natural clay horizon (1005) was cut by an approximately north-south aligned feature (F3), filled with clean red-brown sand and large rounded stones (1004). No artefacts were recovered from this fill. Feature 3 was sealed by a layer of light brown clay-sand (1003) which extended over the whole length of Trench 1. Within the eastern half of the trench, 1003 was overlain by a layer of black ash and clinker (1002); both of these contexts were cut by a north-south aligned negative feature (F1). This feature was sealed by a thick layer of building demolition material (1001), which continued along the whole length of the trench. The demolition material was sealed by the tarmac car park surface.

Within the western half of Trench 1, 1003 was cut by one wall foundation trench (F2) and the remains of one wall footing (F5). A brick surface (F6) was seen to extend east and west from F5, but the relationship between these two features was not clear. The brick surface was sealed by a deposit of brick fragments, which was itself sealed by a later tile and brick surface (F4). The surface was overlain by a mixed layer of red-brown sand-clay and lime mortar (1008). This layer was sealed by the thick layer of demolition material (1003) which continued across the whole trench. The demolition material was sealed by the tarmac car park surface.

#### Trench 2 (Figure 4)

Trench 2 (2m x 10m) was located on the western side of the car park, close to School Street. It aimed to establish whether any deposits, earlier than 19th century, had survived along the street frontage. The trench sides were extremely unstable and all recording was carried out from the trench top.

The natural brown-red boulder clay (2013) was contacted between 144.70 and 144.35m AOD. The southern 6m of Trench 2 was heavily disturbed a large cellar, which had been backfilled with a very loose mixed deposit of brick, building material and ash (2014). The backfill was overlain by a thick layer of building demolition material (2002) which extended across the whole trench. Context 2002 was sealed by a layer of aggregate bedding (2001) and the tarmac surface of the car park.

An isolated wall (F9) was recorded at the southern end of Trench 2. More coherent remains were recorded, outside the cellar, to the north. Here, the natural clay (2013) was overlain by mixed deposit of brick, ash and clay (2010) which continued along the whole length of the west-facing section, but which was truncated by the cellar in the east-facing section. Contexts 2013 and 2010 were cut by an 8" clay service drain (F4), and by a wall footing which may, due to its similar alignment, be associated with the cellar (F8). It is possible that Feature 8 may represent the footings for a staircase to the cellar. However, the instability of the trench edges prevented a more certain identification. Context 2010 was also cut by an electricity service cable (F3) and by the foundation trenches (F1 and F7) for two east-west aligned walls (F2 and F6 respectively). These walls defined the northern and southern limits of a thin layer

of ash (2008) and a brick yard surface (F5). The yard surface was sealed by the thick layer of demolition material (2002) which had also sealed the cellar backfill.

### Trench 3 (Figure 5)

Trench 3 (2m x 10m) ran east-west along the Pitt Street side of the car park. This trench was initially machined to a depth of 1.2m, with subsequent excavation carried out by hand. A sondage was mechanically excavated at each end of the trench in order to determine the depth of deposits in this area.

The natural brown-red boulder clay (3014) was contacted between 144.54m and 143.89m AOD. At the western end of Trench 3, the natural clay (3014) was overlain by a thick layer of contaminated, blue, greasy clay (3012), containing flecks of modern rubble and clinker. This layer was seen in the section to be sloping slightly to the east, and was cut to the west by a sloping deposit (3015) which had a thick deposit of modern concrete material at its lowest point. Contexts 3012 and 3015 were sealed by a layer of black ash and clinker (3007), which was itself sealed by a mixed deposit of mortar and bricks. Context 3007 was cut by a north-south aligned wall (F2), which appeared to be associated with a second north-south aligned wall (F1) 3m to the east. Both walls were seen, in section and plan, to be double skinned, mortar bonded brick walls. Between them, although more noticeable to the west of F1, was a small area of laid blue brick, which may represent an entrance. A thick layer of building rubble, black clinker and ash (3001) sealed both walls and extended west to the limit of Trench 3. It was sealed by the tarmac surface of the car park.

The layer of contaminated, blue, greasy, clay continued to slope down to the eastern sondage (3013). It was sealed by a layer of clinker and ash (3005), and by a series of levelling deposits of building material (3002, 3003, 3004). A large pit (F3), filled with a mixture of sand, clinker and building rubble, truncated these layers.

## **8.0 Discussion**

The top of the natural clay horizon was defined in each trench. It appears that considerable levelling deposits had been imported into the site in order to compensate for dips in the natural clay and to facilitate use as a car park.

No evidence of medieval activity was found over the site, due to extensive disturbance associated with the construction of 18th /19th and 20th century buildings. The earliest building was identified in Trench 2, where the truncated remains of a cellar were partially exposed. The walls of the cellar were constructed from locally produced clamped red brick, which were 2.5 inches thick. This brick is commonly found in buildings dated to the late 18th/early 19th century throughout the West Midlands region. The cellar walls were of solid masonry, three courses wide. Over this cellar, later buildings, probably of Victorian date, had been constructed. These, in turn, had been demolished to ground level and levelling deposits had been imported to facilitate construction of the car park. No cellar was recorded in Trench 3. However, the sequence of construction deposits and layers does correspond to the later activity recorded in Trench 2.

The presence of a large concrete-framed building in Trench 1 resulted in the truncation of any earlier archaeological deposits to a depth beneath the upper surface of the natural subsoil.

## **9.0 Conclusions and Implications**

With the exception of a cellar in Trench 2 which may be dated to the late 18th century, all deposits and features identified during this evaluation were of 19th century date or later. In all three trenches the subsoil was overlain and cut by either cellar wall foundation trenches, a concrete floor, or deposits of building rubble. Conversation with local people suggested that the remains of structures identified in Trenches 2 and 3 may relate to buildings which were destroyed during the Second World War.

The results of this evaluation suggest that there are no archaeological implications for the development of this site, and that no further archaeological work is required.

## **10.0 References**

Baker, N. 1980 *The Archaeology of Wolverhampton*.

White, H. 1995 *Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation at the Car Park, Pitt Street and School Street, Wolverhampton, West Midlands (SMR 8637)*.

## **11.0 Acknowledgements**

The evaluation was directed by Jon Sterenberg, with the assistance of Robert Burrows, Laurence Jones, Steve Litherland, Derek Moscrop, Catharine Mould and Edward Newton. The project was monitored by Gwilym Hughes; Catharine Mould edited this report. We are grateful to Hilary White of the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record and to members of the Department of Technical Services, Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council, for their advice and guidance.

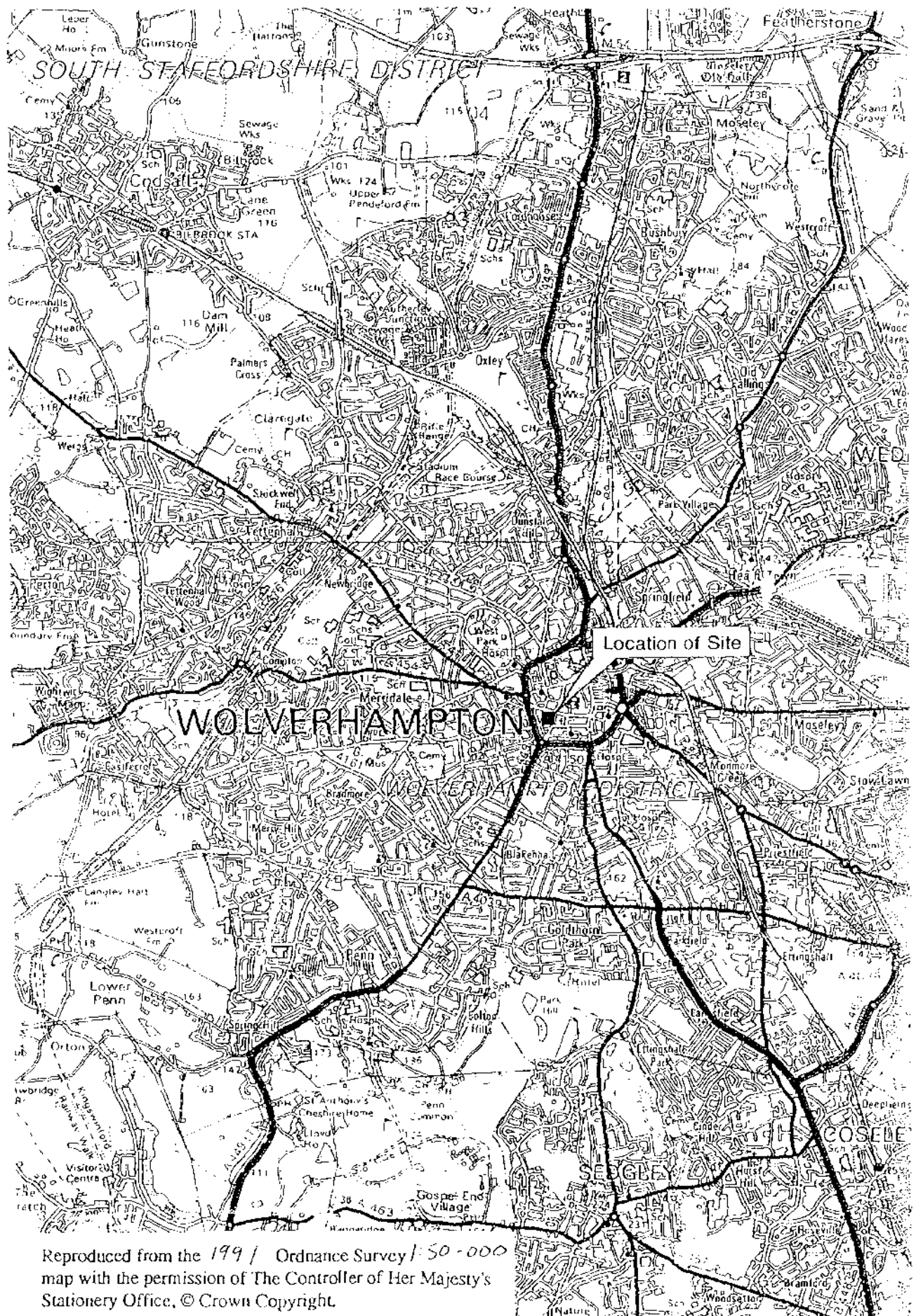


Fig. 1

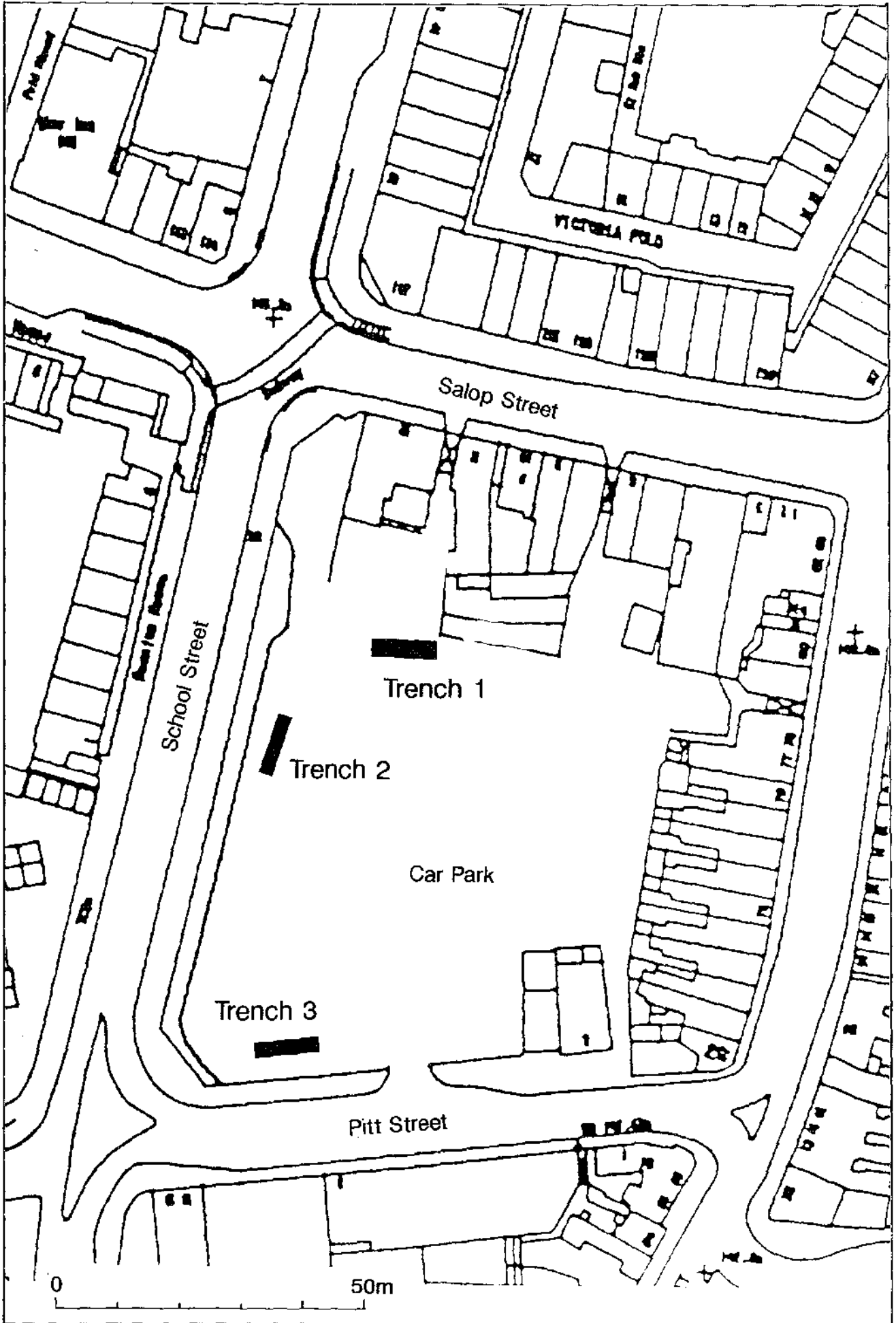


Fig. 2



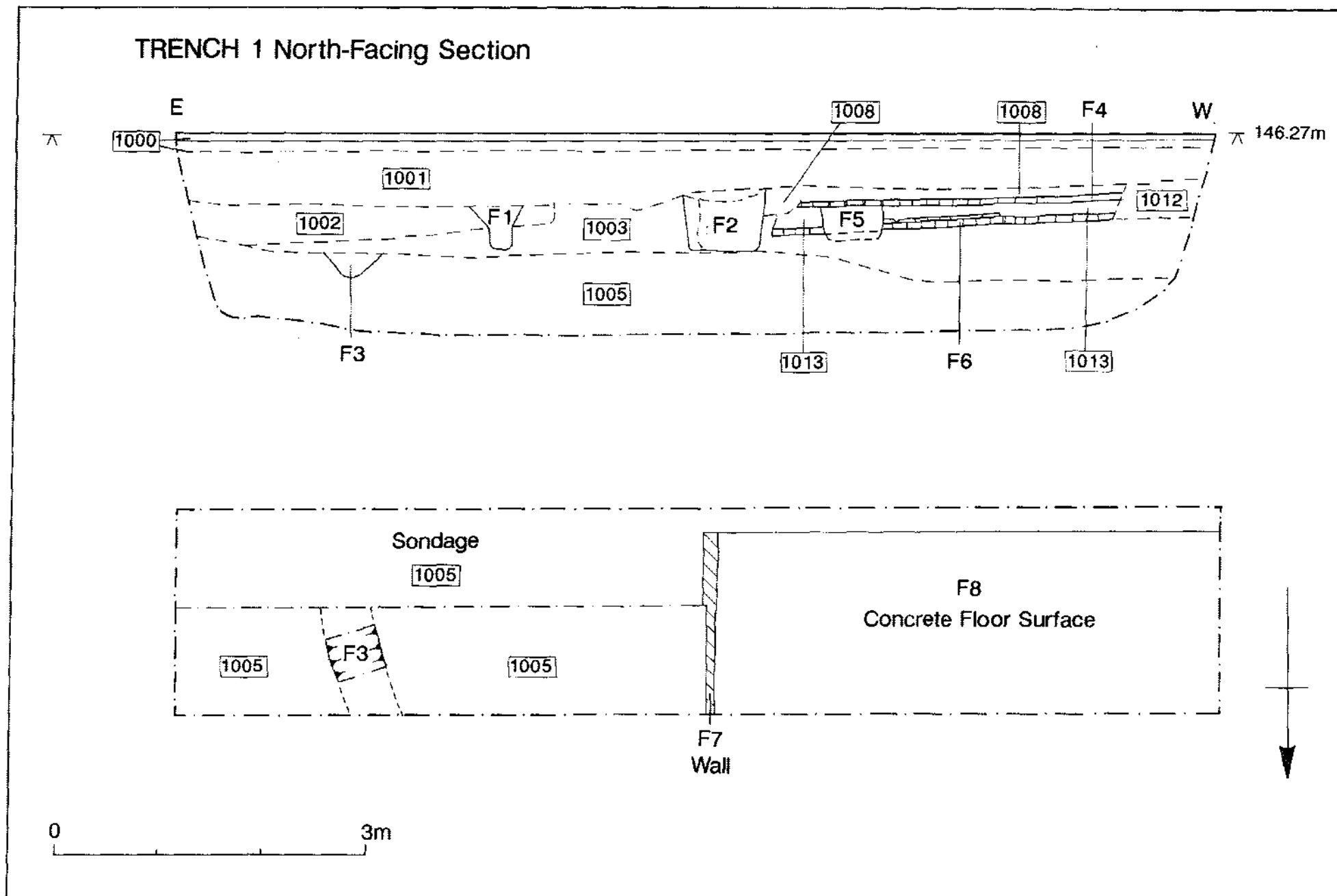
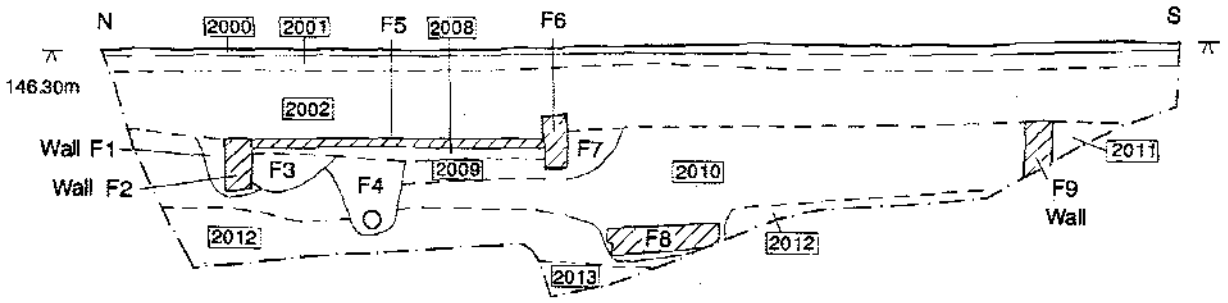
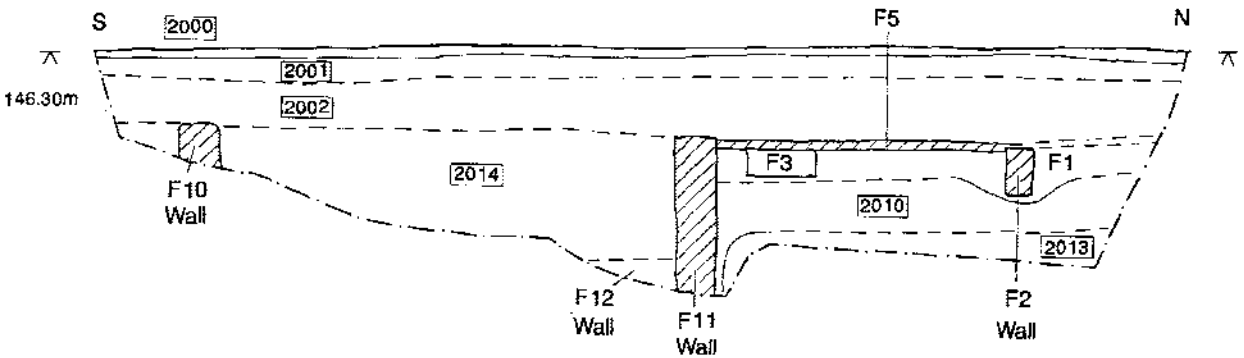


Fig. 3

TRENCH 2 West-Facing Section



East-Facing Section



Plan

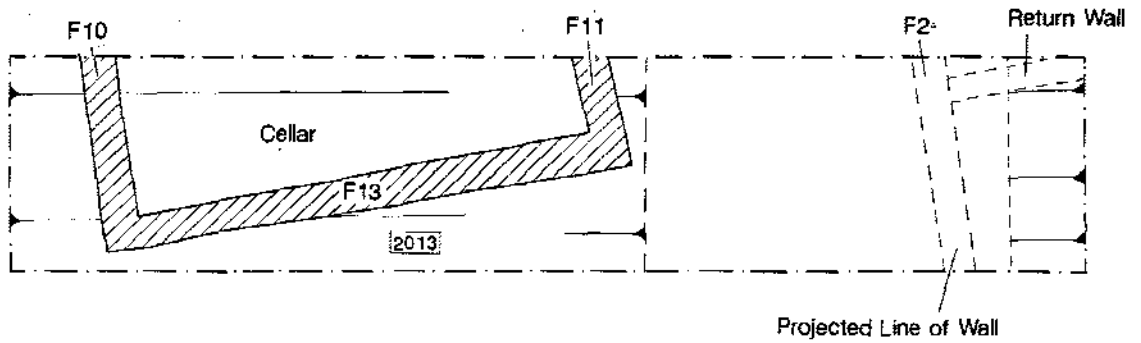
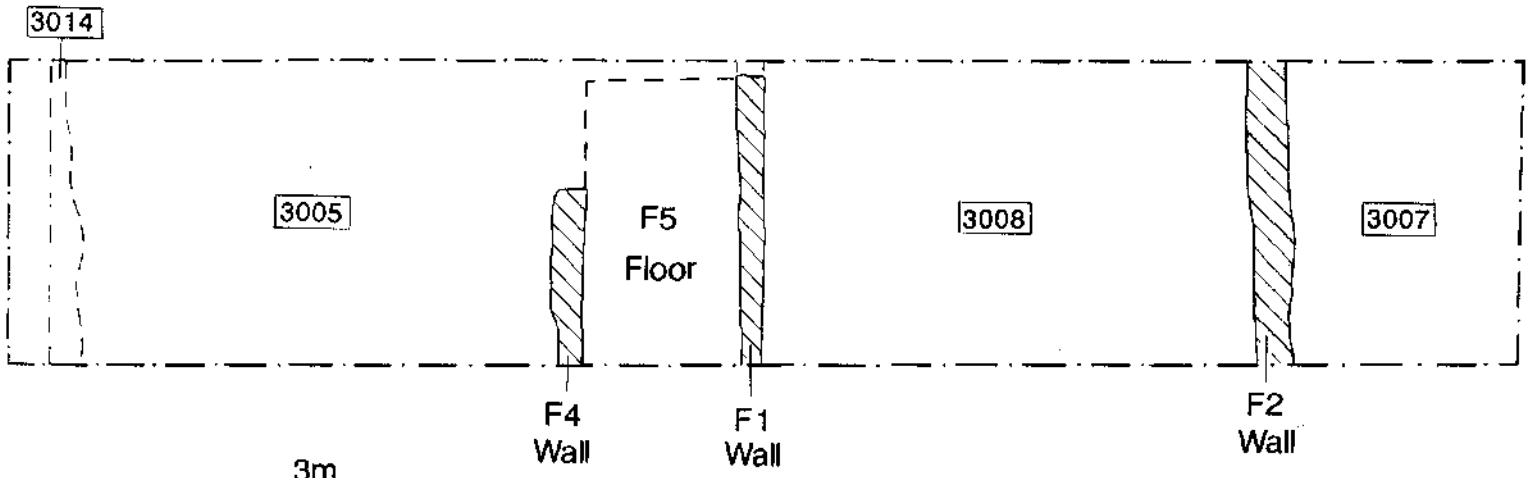
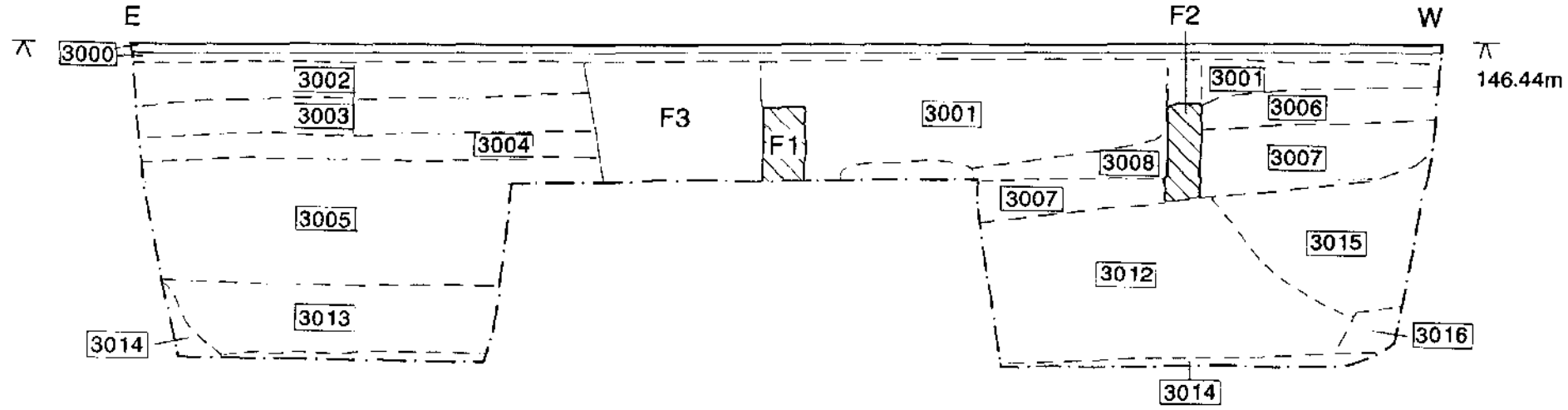


Fig. 4

TRENCH 3 North-Facing Section



0 3m



Fig. 5