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**An Archaeological Evaluation at the
Former St.John's Hospital,
Stone, Buckinghamshire, 1996.**

by
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Summary

An archaeological evaluation of land at the site of the former St.John's Hospital, Stone, Buckinghamshire, centred on NGR SP 779 800 did not produce any evidence of archaeological features or deposits, other than 19th century or modern features associated with the former hospital. It is probable that any possible archaeological features previously recorded here have been removed by the construction of the Victorian Hospital.

Introduction

The following report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation at the former St.John's Hospital, Stone, Buckinghamshire (Fig. 1). The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in March and April 1996 on behalf of Bovis Homes Ltd. It was carried out in accordance with a brief prepared by Buckinghamshire County Museum in response to a proposal to construct residential housing on the site.

The village of Stone is located on a ridge of Portland Stone and sand, 5 km west of Aylesbury. The area for evaluation was the site of the recently demolished Victorian St.John's Hospital. Archaeological finds, dating to the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, were discovered here in the 19th century.

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. These objectives were achieved by a combination of documentary research and trial excavation.

Methodology

An examination of available primary and secondary documentary and cartographic sources was undertaken. These sources were mainly housed in the County Record Office and the County Sites and Monuments Record.

The area for investigation comprised of 45,000 square metres and the brief required a 4% sample of this area. It was decided, in consultation with the County Museum Service, to excavate thirteen 30m x 1.7m trenches (Fig.2, Trenches 1-11 and 15-16), over 4% of the areas thought to be relatively unaffected by 19th and 20th century building. A further three 10m x 1.7m trenches (Trenches 12-14) were excavated to assess the potential for archaeological survival in areas, until recently, occupied by 19th and 20th century buildings. The positions of some of the trenches had to be changed slightly from the proposed positions indicated in the brief, due to obstructions on site.

Modern overburden and rubble horizons were removed by machine. Where necessary underlying deposits were manually cleaned. A sufficient sample of any potential archaeological features or deposits was excavated in order to establish their extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date. The stratigraphy of all trial trenches was recorded even where no archaeological features were recorded. Archaeological recording was undertaken using a continuous numbered context system and BUFAU pro-forma record cards. Any archaeological features were photographed and a full drawn record was maintained.

Results

Documentary Research

(Codes in brackets refer to entries on the County Sites and Monuments Record and are indicated on Fig. 1)

The large red brick County Lunatic Asylum (CAS 5818) was built in 1850, designed by Wyatt and Brandon, and opened in 1853. During digging of the foundations in 1850 workmen discovered a "well shaft"(CAS 675). Subsequent excavation of the shaft by Akerman (1850) recovered Romano-British finds including many cinerary urns, human and animal bone, leather, bronze rings and a bucket with iron hoops, now in the Ashmolean Museum. The shaft was excavated to a depth of 30 feet. Further finds of cinerary urns and 1st century A.D coins were found nearby (CAS 681, 687). The "well shaft" has been interpreted as a Roman septural or ritual shaft (Ross 1968). Several Romano-British coins have also been found on or near the site (CAS 688, 1021, 1909). To the north-east of the study area, a shaft 27 feet deep found during sand-pit digging in 1862 (CAS 679) contained cinerary urns, human bones and burnt stones. A Romano- British-Pottery kiln (CAS 673) was also discovered in this area. Several other finds of Romano-British pottery, coins and a bronze finger-ring (CAS 670, 669, 671 and 676) have also been recovered from the Stone area.

To the north and north-east of the site on the opposite side of the A418 burials of Anglo-Saxon date have been found. During the digging of sand-pits in 1862 opposite the study area several human skeletons associated with weapons were found (CAS 674) and during road widening in 1955 (CAS 1794) more skeletons were recovered. In the adjoining fields east of the study area many other burials of probable Anglo-Saxon date (CAS 2960) have been found during digging for sand and lowering of the crown of the hill during the last century. An Anglo-Saxon saucer brooch (CAS 678) was also found here in 19th century.

Cartographic Evidence

The earliest available map source consulted was the 1st edition O.S map of 1877, which shows the hospital with its own gasworks and gardens to the south. Later O.S maps show other hospital buildings and the hospital allotment to the east.

Archaeological Background

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at St.John's Hospital by Buckinghamshire County Museum in 1989 (Hunn and Kempster 1989). The two areas evaluated, by means of trial trenching, were in the south-east and east of the hospital grounds. No significant archaeological features or deposits were found. In 1992 further archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Buckinghamshire County Museum Archaeological Service (BCMAS) in the eastern and north-eastern part of the hospital grounds Carstairs and Lawson 1992). The only archaeological feature of any significance was a single Neolithic pit, containing worked flint and pottery discovered in a trench excavated in the south-east part of the hospital grounds.

Trial trenching

Trench 1

Aligned east-west to the west of the former hospital. A layer of brick, mortar and sand, demolition rubble (1000), 0.50-0.70m deep, overlay the natural greenish yellow sandy clay (1001). This was cut by 8 brick walls aligned north-south and

northwest-southeast. These were probably ducts and buildings relating to the former hospital.

Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

Oriented north-south to the west of the former hospital. A layer of brick, mortar and sand (2000) demolition rubble, 0.30-0.50m deep, overlay the natural greenish yellow clayey sand (2001), 0.30m deep. This overlay natural white limestone (2002). 2001 was cut by 7 brick walls aligned east-west. Again, these were ducts and outbuildings associated with the former hospital. One of these brick walls at the south end of the trench cut a sub-circular feature (F3). Extending to the east beyond the edge of the trench, F3 was at least 1.58m x 1.34m and 0.30m deep, with vertical sides and a flat base. It was filled with a dark brown silty clay (2003) containing limestone and brick fragments and flecks of charcoal.

Trench 3 (Fig. 3)

Aligned east-west to the south of the former hospital. A dark brown humic clayey sandy silt layer of garden soil (3000), 0.20-0.25m deep, overlay the natural greenish yellow sand (3002), 0.30m deep. Below 3002 was a natural white limestone (3004). Cut into 3002 was a sub-circular feature (F1), extending beyond the northern edge of the trench. It had vertical sides and a flat base, at least 0.50m x 2.40m and 0.16m deep, and was filled with a dark grey brown silty clay sand (3001) containing sherds of post-medieval pottery and tile and charcoal flecks. Further to the west was an irregular linear feature (F2) with steep sides and a flat base, 0.70m wide and 0.50m deep. It was filled with a dark brown silty clay mixed with bands of yellow sand (3003), extensively disturbed by tree roots containing limestone fragments, a brick fragment and a sherd of modern pottery.

Trench 4

Aligned north-south to the south of the former hospital. A layer of humic dark brown clayey sandy silt (4000) garden soil, 0.22m deep, overlay the natural greenish yellow sand (4002). Below 4000, to the south, this was overlain by a dark brown layer of very sandy clay (4001) containing limestone rubble and brick fragments, 0.70m deep. Below 4000 to the north was a brick floor or yard surface, 5.0m wide and 0.30m deep, overlying 4002. To the north of this, cutting 4002, was a brick wall probably the south wall of the former hospital. North of this was a deposit of brick and mortar demolition rubble (4003) at least 1.6m deep and extending beyond the north end of the trench.

Trench 5

Situated to the east of the former hospital buildings aligned east-west. A layer of humic dark brown clayey silty sand (5000), 0.22m deep, garden soil overlay a natural yellowish brown sandy clay (5001). Cutting 5001 were 3 modern pipe trenches and a manhole.

Trench 6

Orientated north-south to the east of the former hospital buildings. A humic brown clayey silty sand (6000) garden soil, 0.20m deep, contained three unworked flints, three sherds of possible Iron Age, five sherds of Romano-British and one sherd of possible Anglo-Saxon pottery. 6000 also contained brick and tile fragments, post-medieval pottery and animal bone. Below 6000 was a natural yellowish brown sandy clay (6001), 0.30m deep, overlying the natural white limestone (6002). Cutting 6002 was an irregular circular cut (F5) with steep sides and a flat base,

0.30m wide and 0.16m deep. It was filled with medium brown clay silt (6003) containing coal fragments and charcoal flecks.

Trench 7

Located to the north of the former hospital and south of the hospital chapel, aligned east-west. A layer of silty clayey sand (7000) garden soil, 0.20-0.30m deep, containing limestone and brick fragments overlay the natural yellowish brown sandy clay (7001). This was 0.30m deep, and was cut by five modern pipe trenches. Below this was the natural white limestone (7002).

Trench 8

Orientated north-south and situated to the north of the former hospital and to the west of the hospital chapel. A layer of crushed brick (8000), 0.30-0.50m deep, forming the foundations for a service road, overlay the natural white limestone (8001). To the south, a brick wall cut 8001.

Trench 9

Located to the north of the former hospital buildings and aligned east-west. A layer of dark brown clayey sandy silt (9000) garden soil, 0.25m deep, containing brick fragments overlay the natural yellowish brown sandy clay (9001) cut by a modern pipe trench.

Trench 10

Aligned north-south, to the south-east of the former hospital buildings. A layer of dark brown clayey sandy silt (10000) garden soil containing limestone fragments overlay the natural yellowish brown sandy clay (10001). This was disturbed by tree roots at the north end of the trench. A brick wall, orientated east-west, cut 10001 to the north and a modern pipe trench cut the south end of the trench.

Trench 11

To the north-west of the former hospital buildings orientated north-south. A layer of dark brown silty sandy clay (11000), 0.25-0.30m deep, overlay the natural yellowish brown sandy clay (11001) with bands of white limestone fragments. Cutting 11001 were four modern pipe trenches.

Trench 12

Located to coincide with a former hospital outbuilding, aligned east-west. At the west end of the trench was a concrete floor, 0.20m deep, to the east was a tarmac road surface, 0.15m deep. Between these surfaces was a brick wall orientated north-south. Underlying the tarmac and concrete was a layer of brick rubble (12000), 0.15-0.30m deep. Below 12000 was a natural yellowish-brown sandy clay (12001).

Trench 13

Situated to coincide with a wing of the former hospital building, aligned north-south. At the south end of the trench was a cellar belonging to the Victorian hospital building, 1.60m deep, filled with brick demolition rubble. Beneath the brick cellar floor was the natural yellowish brown sandy clay (13001). At the north end of the trench was a layer of tarmac and brick rubble (13000), 0.70m deep, overlying 13001.

Trench 14

Located to coincide with the main part of the former hospital building, aligned east-west. At the west end of the trench was the northern outer brick wall of the Victorian hospital building, aligned north-south. West of this was a deposit of at least 2.0m of brick rubble. Bonded to the outer brick wall, in the north facing section, was another brick wall orientated east-west. This brick wall was bonded to another north-south orientated wall. Between these walls was a deposit of brick rubble (14000), 1.0m deep, containing a sherd of probable Romano-British pottery. Below 14000 was a natural greenish yellow sandy clay (14001), 0.50m deep. Below 14001 was the natural white limestone (14002). At the east end of the trench was a cellar with a brick floor, below which was 14002.

Trench 15

To the east of the former main hospital building, north of the site of a former outbuilding, orientated east-west. A layer of dark brown clayey sandy silt (15000) garden soil, 0.20m deep, containing post-medieval pottery and fragments of clay pipe stem overlay the natural yellowish-brown sandy clay (15001). Cutting (15001) was a modern sewer trench and a pipe trench.

Trench 16 (Fig. 3)

Located to the east of former hospital buildings, aligned north-south. A layer of dark brown clayey sandy silt (16000) garden soil, 0.20m deep, contained two possible sherds of Iron Age pottery, a clay pipe stem fragment and post-medieval pottery and brick. Below 16000 was a natural yellowish brown sandy clay (16001). Cutting 16001 were two modern pipe trenches. At the centre of the trench was an irregular oval feature (F4), 2.50m wide and 0.20m deep, extending beyond the west edge of the trench. It had gently sloping sides and a irregular base disturbed by tree roots and was probably a tree hole. It was filled with a dark brown silty sandy clay (16002) containing a fragment of brick.

The Finds by Jane Evans

Trench 6 (6000) produced nine extremely fragmentary sherds. The only fact that can be stated with any confidence about this pottery is that it is residual. The absence of form sherds, the small size and abraded condition of the pottery made identification very difficult. Three broad fabric groups were noted as follows: 5 sherds in sandy grey ware, probably Roman; 1 sherd in a shell tempered ware with a reduced core and oxidised surfaces, probably prehistoric although also similar to Saxon St. Neots type shelly ware; 3 sherds in a grog tempered fabric possibly Iron Age. Trench 14 (14000) produced, 1 sandy ware sherd possibly Roman. Trench 16 (16000) produced, 2 sherds of grog tempered ware possibly Iron Age. All other finds were residual and of post-medieval date.

Discussion

The evaluation demonstrated that construction of the Victorian hospital and later additions have probably resulted in the destruction of any potential archaeological deposits. In areas relatively unaffected by 19th-century and modern buildings no archaeological deposits were observed. Residual sherds of possible Iron Age, Romano-British and possible Anglo-Saxon pottery are consistent with the reports of previous archaeological discoveries on the site. No evidence of Neolithic features or deposits was found despite the excavation of two additional trenches (Trenches 15 and 16) near the location of the Neolithic feature excavated by BCMAS in 1992.

The evaluation suggests that it is unlikely that archaeological features or deposits survive in the evaluation area. However, there is a very remote possibility that isolated Neolithic features could survive between trial trenches at the south-east corner of the site.

Acknowledgements

The evaluation was carried out by Bob Burrows and Gary Coates under the supervision of Laurence Jones. Jane Evans commented on the finds. The report was prepared by Laurence Jones and edited by Gwilym Hughes who also monitored the project for BUFAU. The evaluation was monitored by Michael Farley, County Archaeologist, Buckinghamshire County Council.

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Appendix: Finds Catalogue

Trench	Context	Description	Quantity		
3	3001	post-med. tile	1		
		post-med. pottery sherds	4		
		unworked flint	1		
6	3003	modern pottery sherd	1		
	6000	Iron Age? pottery sherds	3		
		Iron Age or Saxon? pot sherd	1		
		Romano-British pottery sherds	5		
		post-med. tile	3		
		post-med. pottery sherd	1		
		post-med. brick frag.	1		
		14	14000	Romano-British pot sherd	1
		15	15000	post-med. pottery sherds	2
				post-med. clay pipe stem frag.	2
16	16000	Iron Age pottery sherds	2		
		post-med. pottery sherds	5		
		post-med. brick frags.	5		
		post-med. clay pipe stem frag.	1		
		16001	post-med. brick frag.	1	

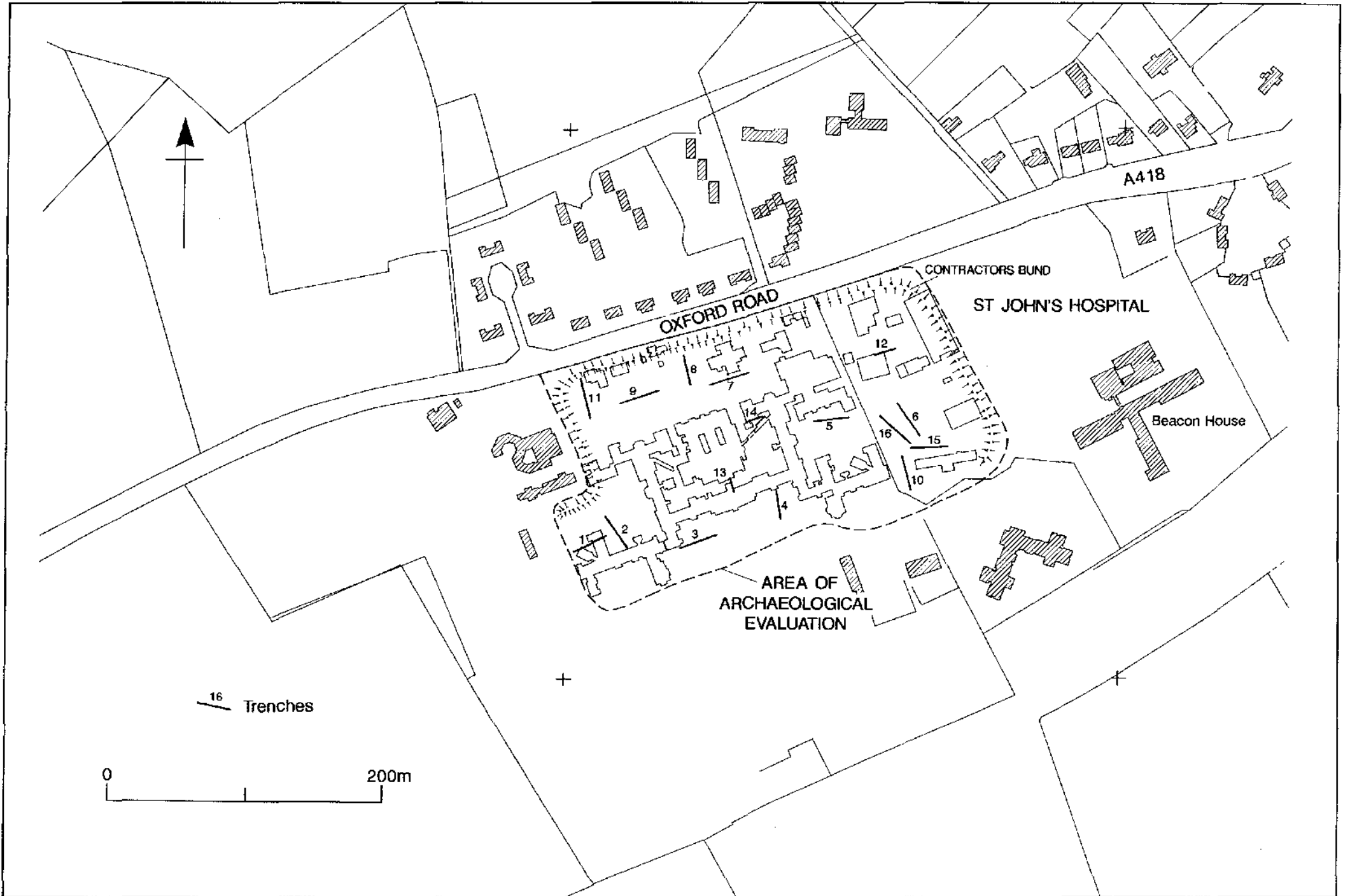


FIG.2

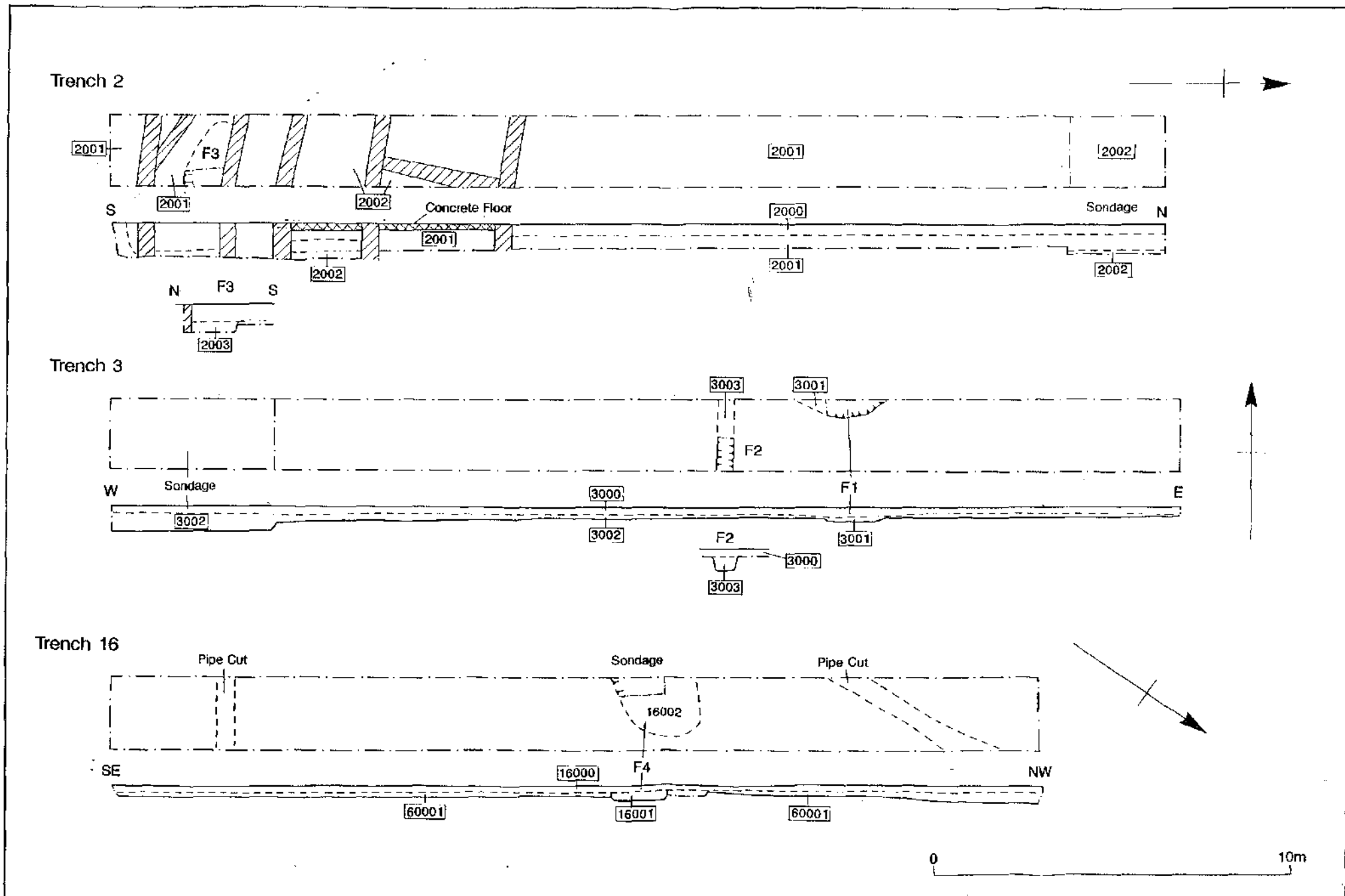


Fig.3