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**An Archaeological Evaluation at  
Tower Street, Dudley,  
West Midlands. 1996**

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# **An Archaeological Evaluation at Tower Street, Dudley, West Midlands. 1996**

## **Introduction**

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken in November 1996 in an area to the east of Tower Street, Dudley. The work was carried out by BUFAU on behalf of Focus Housing Group in advance of proposed development on the site. The work was undertaken using the standard terms and conditions of Dudley M.B.C. for archaeological work and in compliance with specifications prepared by P.Boland (D.M.B.C.), Iain Ferris (BUFAU) and E. Schipper (scheme architect - Bowles Whittick Young). All works undertaken were in accordance with Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluations (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

## **Summary**

This evaluation was undertaken with the purpose of establishing the quality and nature of archaeological survival within the area destined for redevelopment. The results were excellent, revealing the medieval ground surface and associated features along with significant early post-medieval structures and deposits. The findings are important for a better understanding of the development of Dudley town centre. This report describes the methodology and results of the excavation and briefly discusses the likely implications of development with the aim of limiting damage to the surviving archaeology.

## **Location**

The proposed development site lies in an area presently covered in tarmac and used by Dudley M.B.C. for car parking. The site extends from Tower Street in the east to Priory Street in the west. The site is notable for being at two levels, the western part being considerably lower than the eastern. The Ordnance Survey reference for the site is SO 39442903.

## **Brief History**

The town of Dudley probably has origins in the Anglo Saxon period and indeed Carbon 14 evidence indicates settlement on the site of the castle, situated on Castle

Hill to the north, in the mid-eighth century (S.J.Linnane, to be published). Nothing is known of the town in this period. The first documentary mention of Dudley comes in the Domesday Survey of 1086 when the castle and town already existed. The present town plan is centred on the Market Place and High Street which run between the two churches of St. Edmund in the north and St. Thomas in the south (both medieval foundations). This ground plan was probably established when the town first obtained its rights to hold a market and its status as a borough. This is generally accepted as occurring in the mid-thirteenth century, although the documentation is somewhat ambiguous. At this time the burgage plots running westwards from the Market Place would have extended as far as Tower Street which was previously known as Pease Lane (a reference to the crops being grown in the area?). This street would have functioned as a "Back Lane", so common in medieval town plans. Consequently the area presently being considered would have lain just outside the town proper during the medieval period and would have been within the open field system.

Although metal working was part of the medieval industrial landscape of Dudley during the medieval period there was a great increase in its importance to the economy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This growth in industrial output was accompanied by an expansion of the town into the surrounding field system. The area to the west of Tower Street should have been a prime site to develop but documentary evidence suggests that throughout this period the site remained as field or garden plots.

In the later eighteenth century the expansion of the town eventually overtook the area under discussion. At the junction between Tower Street and New Street a Baptist Chapel was constructed in 1778 and generally the whole block was developed, with the building frontages facing onto Stone Street to the south and New Street to the north. Later, the western part of the site facing onto Priory Street was used to construct a nail bag factory for a Mr Charles Culwick Hewitt. The eastern part of the site remained as open ground according to contemporary plans. In 1891 the whole of the area was purchased by Mrs Julia Hanson and Sons brewing company for use as a head office and store.

In 1972 the area was purchased by Dudley M.B.C. and cleared for use as a car park.

### **Evaluation Methodology**

Five trenches were excavated by machine to a depth of 1.20m. The trenches were generally 1.70m wide. The location of trenches was necessitated by the need to avoid live services. All sections were photographed in both colour and black and white. Sections were chosen for drawing where maximum information could be obtained. Excavation into sample portions of the medieval ground surface was undertaken by hand. The features revealed cutting into the natural ground surface were photographed and planned. Intentions to sample the fills of some of these features were thwarted by flooding of the trenches. Only one feature was partially excavated, providing a group of medieval pottery sherds. Context numbers allocated to each trench begin with the trench number.

*Trench 1.* Situated in the north eastern part of the site, running from north to south and 5.0m long.

*Trench 2.* Situated 2.0m south of Tr.1 running south for 10.50m with a spur running to the west aligned with Tr.3.

*Trench 3.* Running at approximate right angles to Tr.2 westwards. This trench extends to 1.0m of the eastern wall of the warehouse. The trench was not extended to reach the wall for fear of destabilising the said wall.

*Trench 4.* Situated to the west of the eastern wall of the warehouse acting as a continuation of Tr.3 for a distance of 8.50m.

*Trench 5.* Situated 3.0m to the south of Tr.2 and measuring 2.5m by 1.0m. This trench was excavated in order to establish the presence of cellarage below buildings which once stood in this area. No cellarage was detected.

For ease of use within the text north has been taken to refer to the true north east. all other directions follow from this assumption.

## **The Archaeological Sequence**

### The Natural Subsoil

Contexts: 1012=2006=3005=4001=5006.

The natural subsoil consists of a bright yellow, plastic clay. This overlies mudstone deposits which lie at a depth of some 4.0m below present ground level. The subsoil was encountered in Tr.1, Tr.2 and Tr.5 and formed a relatively flat horizon, running from north to south. In Tr.3 the natural sloped down to the west. The natural was next visible at the western end of Tr.4. In this area the overlying stratigraphy was all fairly modern and it would appear the general natural slope has here been excavated and terraced in order to insert the warehouse and related buildings. In the area of this lower terrace all early archaeological deposits have been removed, except, possibly, on the frontage of Priory Street where the natural slope may approximate to the present street level.

### The Medieval Deposits

A grey green clay loam was found to exist immediately above the natural subsoil with an average depth of 0.20m. Generally the layer was free of stones and appeared to be a buried soil horizon related to the use of this area as part of the open field system surrounding the town of Dudley in the medieval period.

### *Trench 1*

The medieval horizon, 1003, was exposed over the whole area of the trench and a square area at the northern end of the trench was excavated. A series of features was exposed but these features were not excavated. These consisted of 1007, an alignment of limestone blocks running from west to east, and an indication of an extension running northwards in the eastern section. Deposits of a darker grey loam lay to the north, 1011, and south, 1010, of this feature and may indicate the position of associated negative features. In the eastern part of the trench the natural yellow clay had turned into a hard white clay, 1008, which enclosed the corner of a square patch of dark loam in the north western corner of the trench, 1009. Although these features indicate significant medieval activity, the area sampled does not allow a coherent interpretation.

### *Trench 2*

The grey clay, 2002, of the medieval surface was revealed over most of the base of the trench but subsequent flooding ensured that only a small area was actually excavated. The area was covered in patches of dark grey loam indicating the position of negative features. There were also two small patches of the natural clay which had been burnt red. All these features were given the context no. 2007 and none of them was excavated. Within the eastern section, a cluster of limestone blocks, 2011, suggested another structural feature similar to 1007. Again, viewed in so small an area little can be written by way of interpretation.

### *Trench 3*

A square sondage was excavated at the eastern end of the trench to reach natural. Underlying the grey clay surface, 3002, was the end of a trench, 3004, running northwards below the northern section. An attempt was made to sample the fill, 3003, of this trench. Flooding halted the attempt but a small sample of pottery was obtained suggesting that a substantial deposit may have existed within the trench fill.

To the west, a small sondage was excavated to reach natural and a sequence of layers was revealed, consisting of a grey clay loam, 3007, overlying a grey loam with a high charcoal content, 3006, which in turn overlay 3002.

Further still to the west, the J.C.B. excavated to natural in order to ascertain the general slope. The medieval surface was still visible overlying the natural.

### *Trench 4*

No medieval survival due to construction of the warehouse and associated terracing.

### *Trench 5*

The medieval surface (5005) was visible above the natural.

### Post Medieval

Throughout the whole of the eastern part of the site a black loam of an average depth of 0.50m was recorded. The finds tend to provide a date of deposition in the later part

of the seventeenth century or possibly earlier. The deposit seems to have been a garden soil and if used over a couple of centuries would contain pottery from the whole period without any visible stratigraphic sequence.

#### *Trench 1. 1003*

#### *Trench 2. 2003*

*Trench 3.* 3009 overlying 3010, a thin lens of orange sand.

Trench 2 had the additional feature of wall 2015 which ran from east to west, was c.0.60m wide and was bonded by a white mortar and constructed of close grained yellow sandstone. To the north a feature, 2012, cut the medieval ground surface. The fill of this cut, 2013, was indistinguishable from the overlying black loam, 2003. This could well be the construction trench for wall 2015. To the south of the wall two layers overlay the medieval ground surface, a thin lens of yellow clay, 2017, and a compact deposit of black loam with a very high content of iron slag 0.15m deep, 2018. These two layers constitute a floor base within the interior of the building. The slag deposit may well have formed a base for a more substantial surface later removed.

Another substantial wall was butted to wall 2015 and ran southwards internal to the building. This wall, 2016, was constructed of limestone and brick rubble within a white mortar matrix. Its base overlay 2018. Unfortunately its western face had been robbed out and no indication of its method of facing survived. Immediately after this robbing a dump of black loam (2019) was deposited in the area to the south of 2015 and west of 2016. This deposit was similar to black loam 2003 deposited to the north of wall 2015. Possibly the material was brought in from the garden area in order to create a higher floor level although no trace of this was detected.

#### *Trench 5*

The same sequence was observed as in Tr.2.

Black loam 5002 overlying black loam with slag 5003, overlying yellow clay 5004, in turn overlying the medieval ground surface. No finds were collected from this trench.

#### *Trench 4*

No features or deposits from this period were recorded in this trench.

### Eighteenth Century

A substantial trench, 1005 and 2005, and its fill was excavated running from north to south.

#### *Trench 1*

The trench, 1005, was wider than the excavated trench, hence its edges were not excavated and its fill, 1006, appeared in the eastern sections. 1005 was c.2.0m wide

and 1.0m deep, its fill consisted of lenses of black loam, building debris, including brick and white mortar and yellow clay. It was visible in both north and south end sections of Trench 1.

#### *Trench 2*

The trench, 2005, continued southwards in the same manner with its mixed fills of 2004 and towards the south a higher yellow clay content, 2010. The western edge of the trench was observed in the western extension of Tr.2. Trench 2005 runs up to wall 2015 and did not appear beyond it, suggesting that the wall was still part of a standing structure when the trench was excavated.

### Nineteenth Century

*Trenches 1, 2 and 5* revealed no definite features or contexts.

#### *Trench 2*

The remains of a standard 9-inch brick wall, running from west to east, 2014, were found to overlie the stone foundation of 2015. A thin layer of pink sand separated the two phases of masonry. No floor surfaces were observed associated with this wall. The fact that a brick wall followed the alignment of an earlier structure is not surprising as boundaries probably remained fairly constant and any rebuilding would be likely to repeat them.

#### *Trench 3*

Even with the deposition of the black loams in the post-medieval period the ground surface still had a significant slope downwards to the west. Considerable dumps of black loam with high slag content, 3009, were dumped over the site towards the western end presumably in an attempt to make the site more level. No finds were recovered from this context, therefore it could possibly be earlier. Overlying 3009 were more levelling dumps, 3010, this time consisting of lenses of brick building debris, white mortar, orange sand and black loam. A standard 9 inch brick wall, 3012, crossed Tr.3 running from north to south along with a construction trench, 3013 and its fill, 3014 on its eastern side. This wall cut through deposit 3010 and appeared to form a revetment holding this material back. No trace of a floor surface was discovered to the west of the wall possibly because it lay at a greater depth than the archaeological trench could reach. Interestingly the 1900 survey appears to indicate that in this area lay a stable block associated with Hanson's use of the land. Presumably this would have been built as a lean-to against the warehouse.

#### *Trench 4*

The area to the west of the site lies below the eastern part of the site. The division between the two parts of the site is formed by a wall which documentary and map research reveals to be the eastern wall of a building described as a warehouse. This warehouse was constructed as part of an industrial complex dedicated to the manufacture of nail bags. Detailed plans survive showing the warehouse in relation to the rest of the complex and a survey of 1900 provides us with a ground plan and elevation of this structure. Tr.4 was excavated to the west of this wall.

The foundations for the western wall of the warehouse, 4004, were c.4m from the eastern wall, 4013. A construction trench, 4002 and its fill of grey clay loam, 4003, lay to the west of this wall. In between the walls the floor surface survived in perfect condition. The greater part of the floor consisted of bricks set on edge and bedded in mortar, 4005. 4006 was an area 1.0m wide running along the eastern wall. It was much more irregular than the main floor surface and as such was possibly once covered by storage units or some other form of warehouse furniture. By accident, Tr.4 extended westwards directly through the position of the doorway into the warehouse and on the south and north sections remains of two walls projecting westwards were revealed, 4008. These once formed a revetment to the surrounding ground surface and enclosed a flight of steps leading down into the warehouse basement. The steps had been robbed out. Running westwards between these two walls a band of grey clay loam with brick inclusions, 4009, was probably the fill of a drainage trench, 4010, or other service.

### Twentieth Century

#### *Trench 1*

1001 refers to all modern deposits consisting of black loam, overlain by spreads of concrete, brick courtyard surfaces and tarmac.

#### *Trench 2*

2001 equals 1001 with same stratigraphy.

#### *Trench 3*

3015 consists of very deep deposits of building debris and loam situated in the western end of the trench. The deposits were very rich in modern pottery and appear to relate to the demolition of the building associated with wall 3012. The deposits were excavated to a depth of c.2.0m below present ground level and no new layers were reached. 3001 equals 1001 with the same stratigraphy.

#### *Trench 4*

The warehouse was demolished in the recent past and 4011 represents the demolition rubble from this event. The eastern wall of the warehouse was retained as a revetment and was strengthened with the addition of a band of brickwork, 4014, standing at ground level. The top of the wall was capped at the same time to create a kerb upon which iron railings were bedded, 4017.

4012 equals 1001 with the same general stratigraphy leading to the modern tarmac.

#### *Trench 5*

5001 equals 1001 with the same stratigraphy.



## **Conclusions and Discussion**

Although only a small portion of the site was sampled, enough information was recovered to describe the development of the site from the medieval period to the present. The medieval ground surface, in the form of a buried topsoil, represented the area as being within the open field system - but only just. The associated negative features etc. reveal the presence of purposeful but uninterpretable activity especially in the eastern part of the site, close to Tower Street. Perhaps not so surprising that activity should be concentrated here, effectively on the boundary between town and fields.

The post-medieval period provides us with more solid development with the construction of stone foundations in the south-eastern part of the site, whilst the presence of iron slag as part of the floor surface reveals the development of Dudley's iron industry. The black loam deposited at this period and the lack of any structures in the north-eastern part of the site show that this area was used as garden throughout the period. The development of the site in the later eighteenth century and afterwards is fairly well understood from documentary sources. Archaeological trenching confirmed that evidence of such development exists in abundance.

## **Implications for development**

The medieval ground surface survives intact over the whole of the eastern part of the site at a depth of 1.50m below present ground surface. Although not detected due to its likely depth, this surface probably exists as far as the eastern wall of the warehouse, at which point it will have been excavated away in the terracing process required to insert the said warehouse. It is possible that some stratigraphy might exist closer to the street frontage facing onto Priory Street where the natural ground surface will not have required such excavation. In the eastern part of the site early post-medieval layers and evidence of structures survive to a depth a little over 0.30m below the present ground surface. In the light of such excellent archaeological survival it would be expedient to adopt a development strategy which preserved as much as possible of the surviving archaeological deposits.

At a site meeting held on the 7th November and attended by I.Ferris, P.Boland, E.Schipper and S.J.Linnane the process of using pile foundations was discussed. This method would preserve the greater part of surviving archaeological deposits and as stated at the meeting may even be a cheaper option than conventional trenched foundations. The three houses designed to be situated in the area of the warehouse should not pose as great a problem, although a watching brief on the terracing operations should be maintained during the building process. The provision of services to the various new structures will require trenching at various depths and it would likewise be advisable that a watching brief be kept on these trenches in order to record any archaeological disturbance. When detailed plans of the service trenches are produced it will be possible to highlight areas of potential concern.

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## **Acknowledgements**

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- Fig. 4            The eastern section of Trenches 1, 2 and 5. Note: Trench 1 is actually the western section reversed. The eastern section was badly damaged by a service trench.
- Fig. 5            The northern section of Trenches 3 and 2. Note: the offset in Trench 2.
- Figs. 6 and 7.    1900 survey of the nail bag workshop including the warehouse.

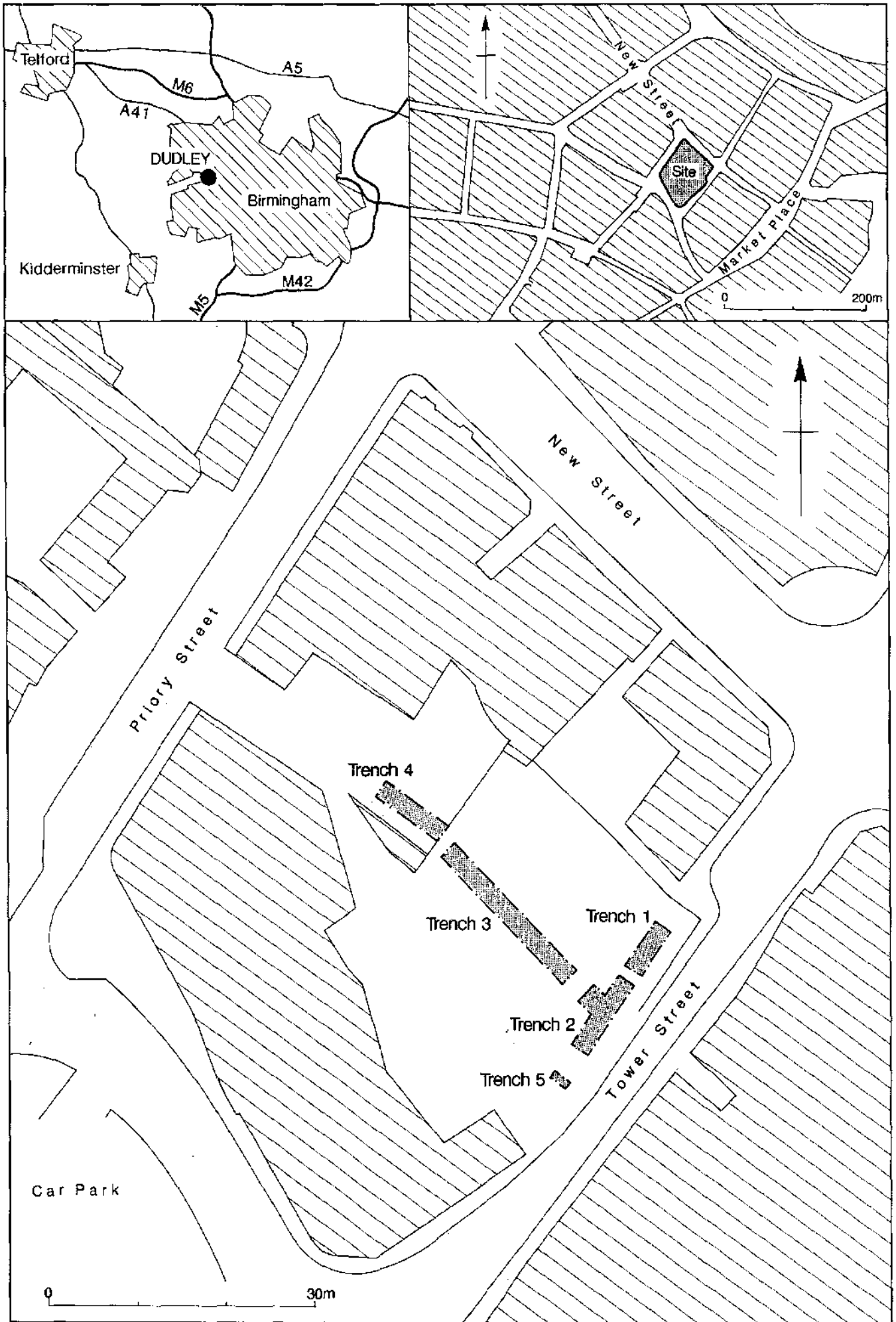


Fig.1

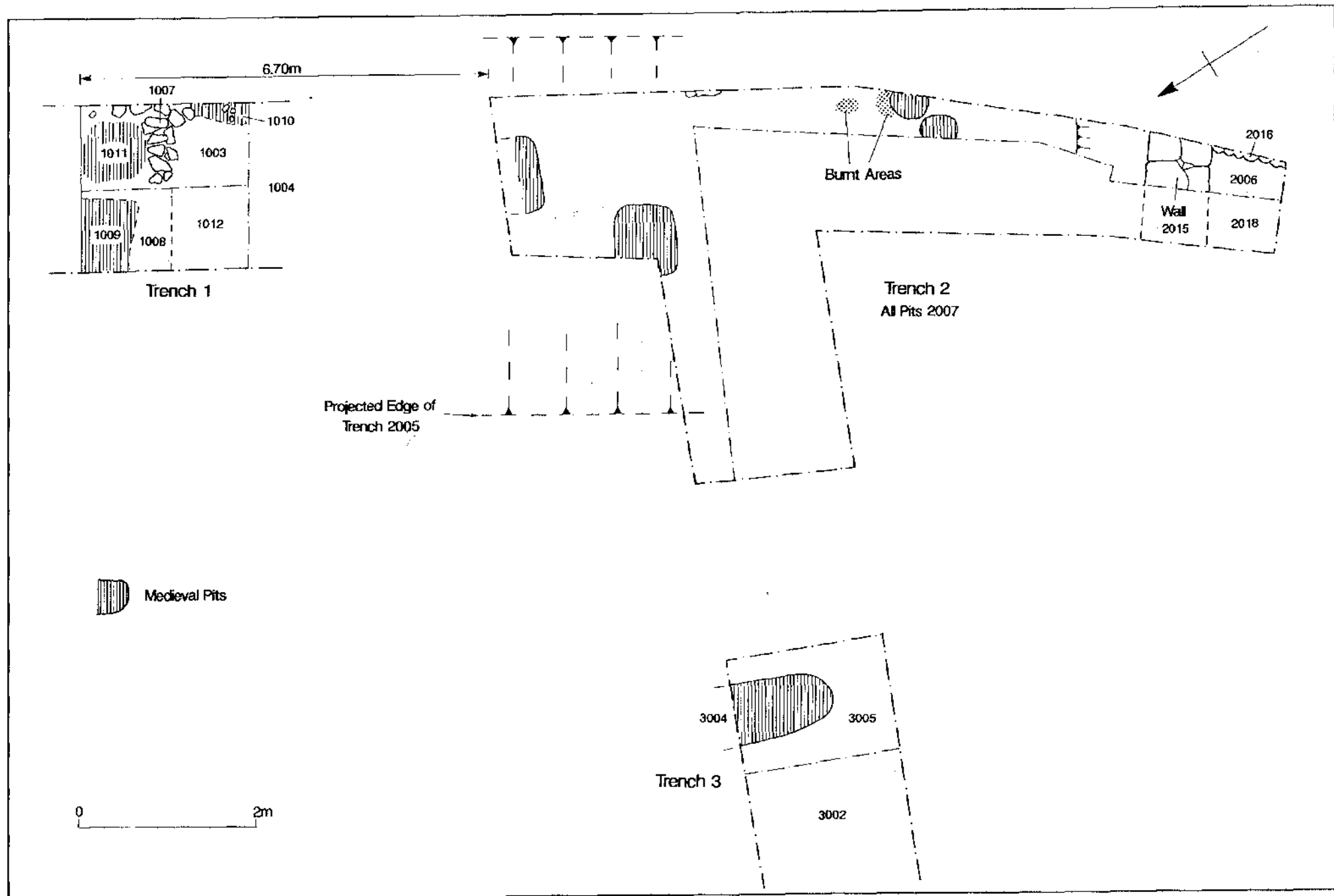


Fig2

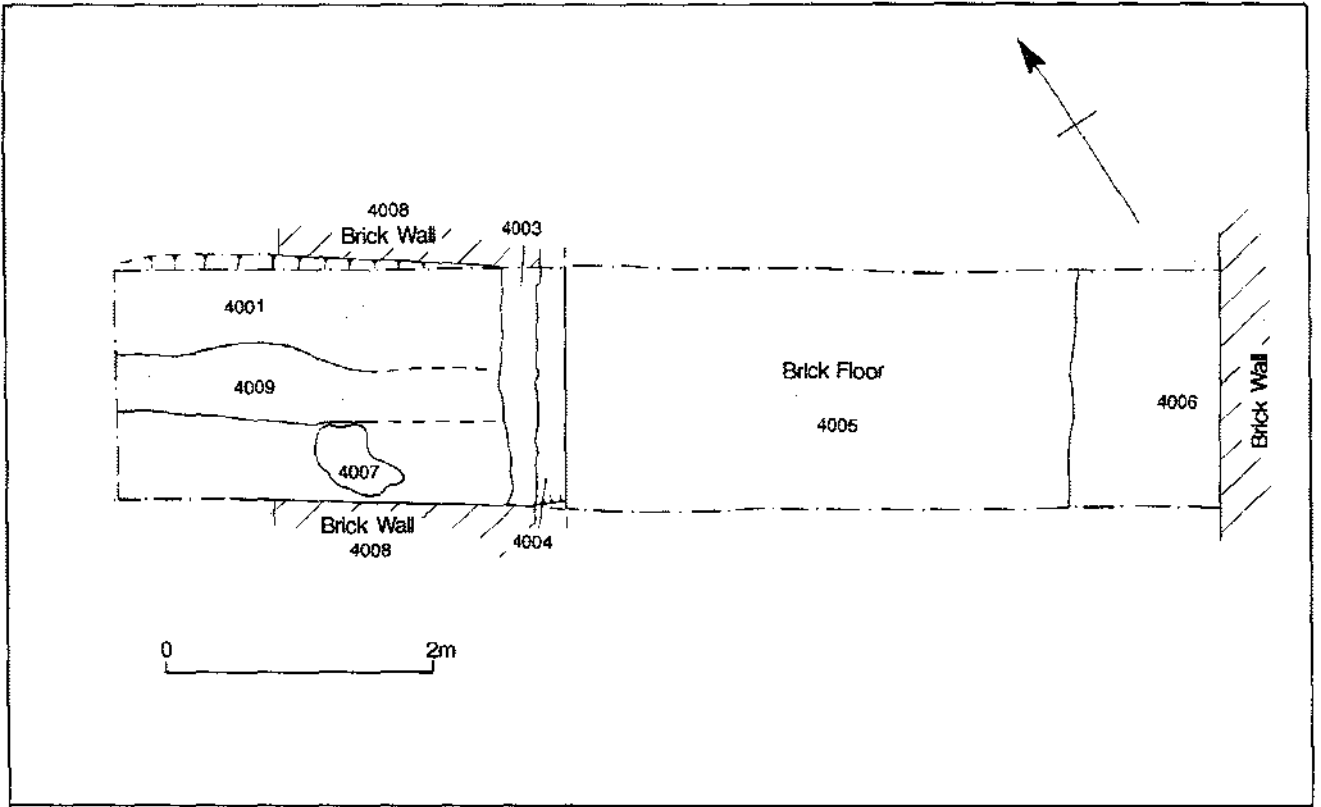
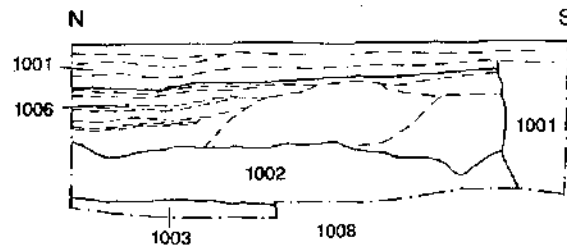
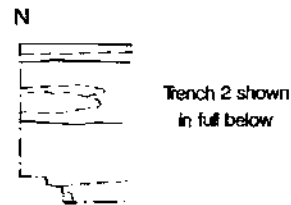


Fig3

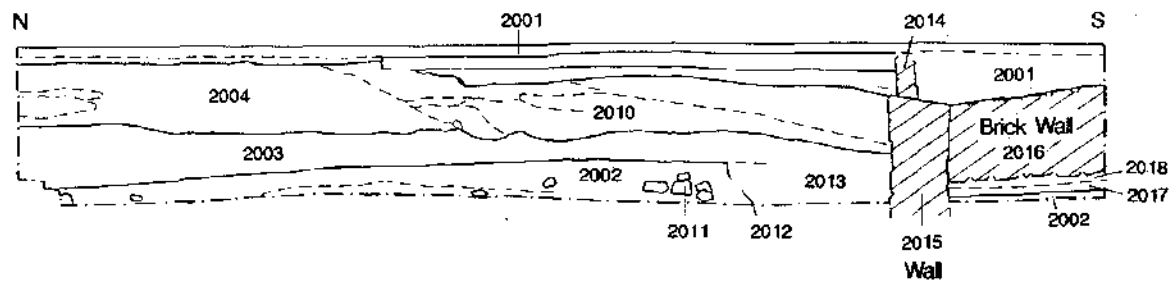
Trench 1



Trench 2



Trench 2



Trench 5

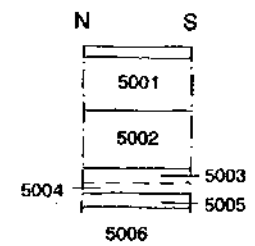
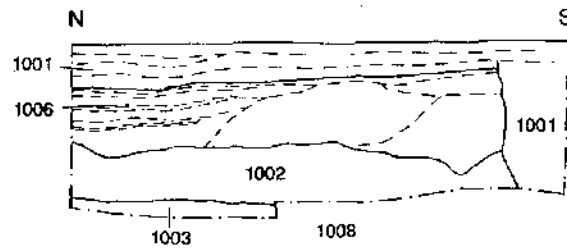
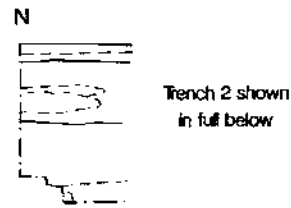


Fig.4

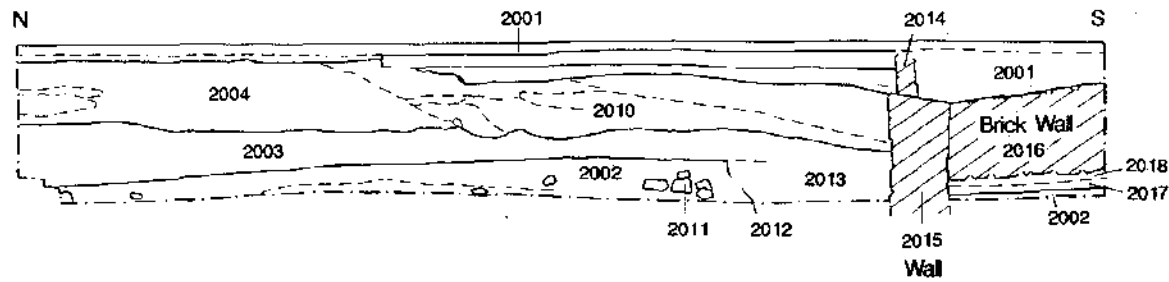
Trench 1



Trench 2



Trench 2



Trench 5

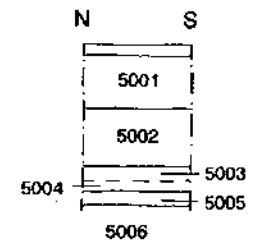


Fig.4



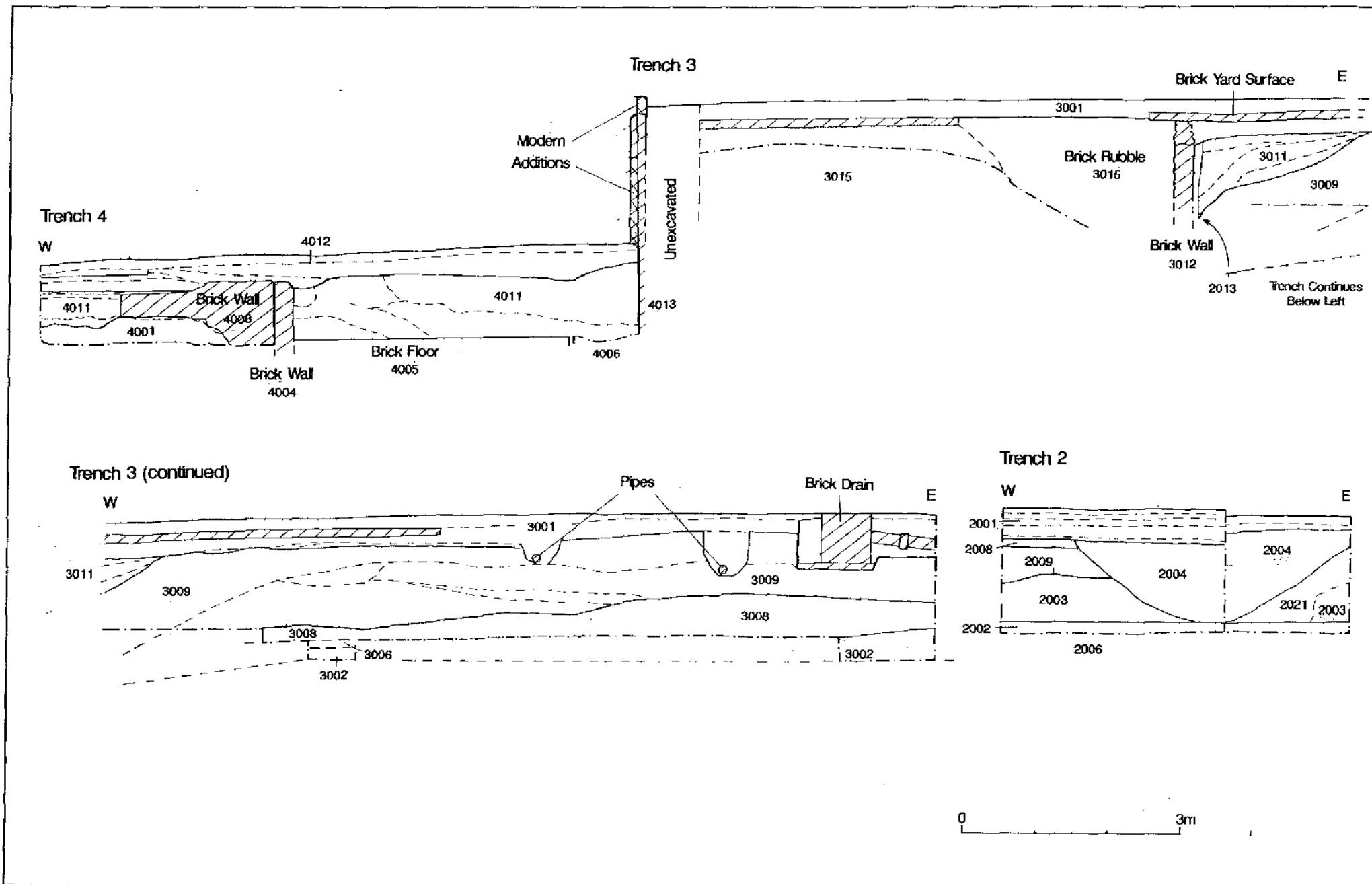
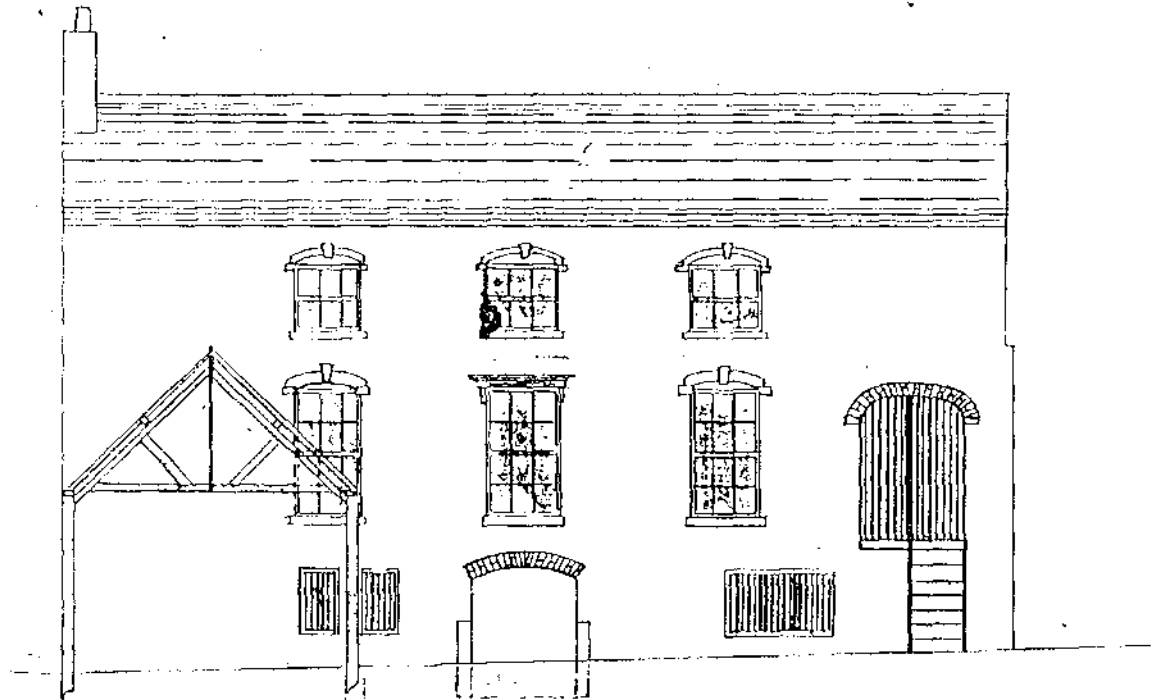
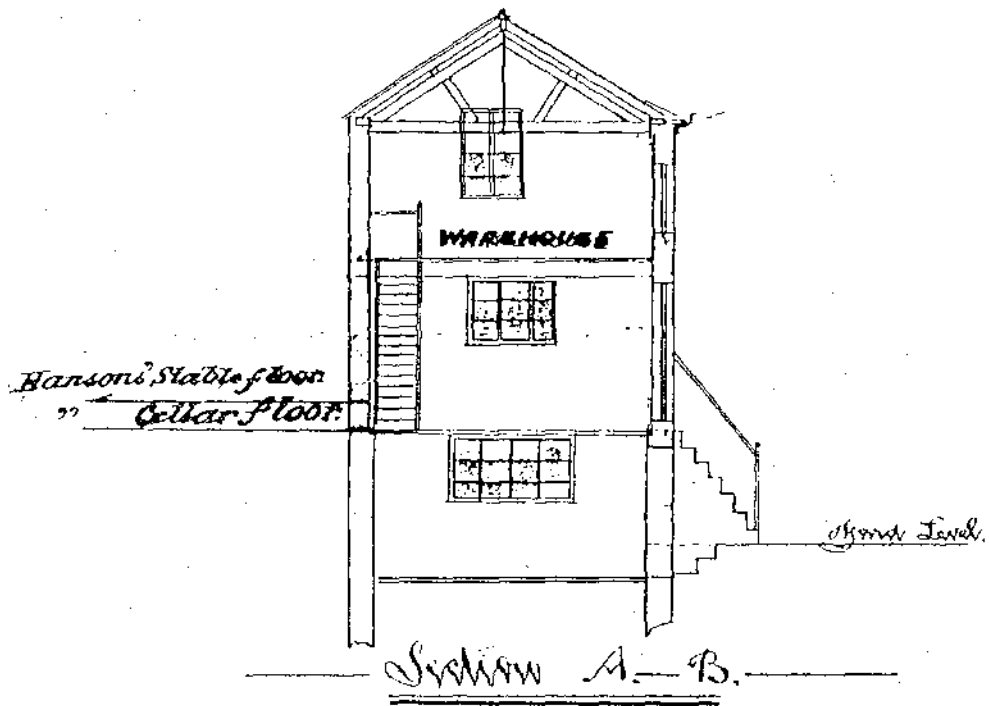


Fig.5

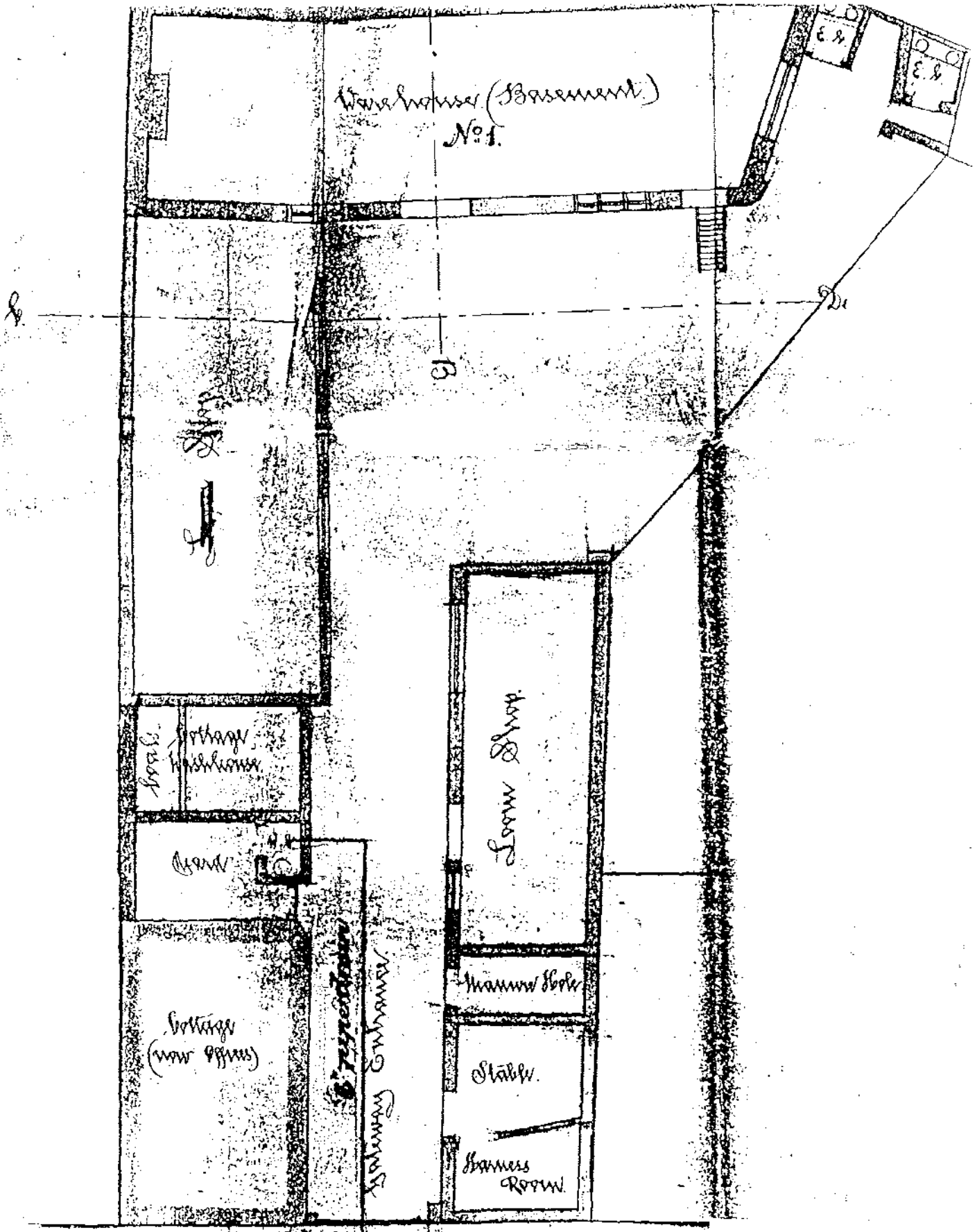


Elevation of Warehouse

B to D.

*John H. Wright's Son*  
*Surveyor*  
 31<sup>st</sup> May 1900.

Fig 6



Prison Street  
Ground Plan

*John H. Knight*  
Surveyor

Fig. 7