

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**An Archaeological Evaluation at
St Mary's Water Lane, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, 1996.**

B.U.F.A.U.



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**An Archaeological Evaluation
at St. Mary's Water Lane, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, 1996**

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1.0 Summary

An archaeological evaluation was conducted at St. Mary's Water Lane, Shrewsbury by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in November 1996. Proposals are underway to redevelop the site, and previous excavations in the vicinity have revealed surviving remains of the Medieval Dominican Friary (Blackfriars). The evaluation concentrated on an area along the base of the gradient to the south of St. Mary's Water Lane, since a test pit excavated further to the east earlier in 1996 suggested the potential for survival of well-preserved archaeological deposits in the area of the proposed redevelopment (Baker 1996). Two trenches were excavated during the evaluation, and although archaeological deposits of probable medieval date were encountered in one of the trenches, there was no evidence for the survival of *in-situ* Friary-period remains, such as those revealed in the earlier test pit to the east.

2.0 Introduction

This report outlines the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out at St. Mary's Water Lane, Shrewsbury (centred on NGR. SJ 49411263: Fig. 1A). The work was undertaken from 25th - 29th November by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU), on behalf of Shropshire Homes Limited. The site is the subject of proposals for a residential development and an evaluation was required in order to provide information for an appropriate mitigation strategy to protect and preserve the archaeological resource. The archaeological evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994), a brief prepared by the archaeological consultant, Dr Nigel Baker (Baker 1996) and a specification prepared by BUFAU (Jones 1996).

3.0 Site Location (Fig. 1B)

The area around the site, off St. Mary's Water Lane, lies on a steep slope falling away from the high ground of the town centre down to the bank of the River Severn, and is now terraced. The proposed development area lies on the raised terrace, to the west of the main terrace, at the foot of the gradient below the former Nurses Home. The site is flanked on the west side by a steep bank up to the former Nurses Home, and on the east side by a retaining wall of probable 18th-century date.

4.0 Archaeological Background

In the medieval period, the area towards the lower part of St. Mary's Water Lane was the site of Shrewsbury's Dominican Friary (Blackfriars), founded in c.1231 and suppressed c.1536.

More detailed historical background to the site is provided elsewhere (Buteux 1989 and Baker 1996). A number of archaeological excavations and evaluations have been undertaken in and around the proposed development area. Friary remains were located in excavations during the construction work for the new wharf at the bottom of St Mary's Water Lane in 1823 and in excavations carried out in the back garden of Union Wharf House in 1973.

More specifically, an archaeological evaluation carried out by BUFAU in 1989 (Buteux 1989) included the excavation of a trench (Trench E) on the Upper Terrace at the foot of the Nurses Home. The trench, which was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.5 m, located a probable demolition deposit which could not be investigated further due to health and safety considerations. Further evaluation in January 1996 identified the remains of a well-preserved medieval building in Test Pit 4, located in the car park, on the lower terrace, and to the east of the retaining wall, suggesting the possibility that these remains extended further to the west, possibly underlying the demolition deposit encountered in Trench E in 1989. It has been suggested that archaeological remains in this area may have been protected by natural erosion deposits (Baker 1996).

5.0 Objectives

The objective of the archaeological evaluation was to determine the nature, extent and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits along the base of the gradient, between Trench E cut in 1989 and the site of the old Pathology Laboratory, to enable an appropriate mitigation strategy to be devised.

6.0 Methodology

Two trial trenches were excavated on the site, adhering as closely as possible to the locations and dimensions specified in the brief. In practice, variations had to be made in order to cope with site conditions. The trenches could not be excavated too close to the retaining wall at the east of the site, and excavation to the west of the site was limited both by the presence of an underground sewer which was running roughly northwest - southeast at the foot of the steep bank, and by the need to avoid destabilising the bank itself.

The aim in both trenches was to mechanically excavate down to the uppermost level of probable Friary destruction deposits, exposing an area of at least two metres square. The destruction deposits were then to be excavated by hand down to intact Friary deposits, should they survive. Any intact Friary deposits encountered were to be left *in-situ* but any post medieval features cutting such deposits were to be wholly or partially excavated in order to provide a free section through the earlier deposits.

Trench A (1996) involved the mechanical re-excavation of Trench E, cut in 1989, down to the level of the probable demolition deposit encountered. Trench A, orientated approximately north-south, measured a maximum of 6.8m x 4.6m at the ground surface, and was stepped all four sides for safety. The trench was excavated by machine down to an average depth of 2m below the surface (58.65m AOD), exposing an area 4m x 3m in size, at which level archaeological deposits were encountered. An area in the south of the trench

was mechanically excavated to a slightly lower depth (58.21m AOD), to reach the base of the 1989 trench (Fig. 2). All remaining excavation was by hand, conducted within an area measuring 2.8m x 1.4m, and dug to to an average depth of 58m AOD, with a sondage at the southern end to maximum depth of 57.7m AOD (Figure 3).

Trench B (1996), orientated approximately north-south, and measuring 8.2m x 4.2m, was also stepped for safety reasons. It was mechanically excavated down to a depth of approximately 3m below the surface (57.29m AOD), exposing an area of 3.5m x 1.1m at that level (Figure 6). Following shoring, further hand excavation was undertaken in area measuring 1m x 1.1m, and to a maximum depth of 3.5m below the surface (56.71m AOD). It was not possible to expose a wider area at the lowest level in this trench for safety reasons. Auguring was carried out in the deepest part of the trench.

Archaeological recording of the trial trenches was undertaken using a continuous numbered context system and BUFAU pro-forma record cards. This was supplemented by plans and sections drawn at an appropriate scale and colour slide and monochrome print photographs. The locations of the trial trenches were surveyed and spot heights on significant levels were recorded.

7.0 Results

Trench A (1996) (Figs. 2 - 5)

The earliest deposit encountered in Trench A was a compact brown clay (2017) containing flecks of charcoal, sandstone and old root material. This deposit was hand excavated in the sondage at the southern end of the trench down to a depth of 57.7m AOD, and was exposed in section for approximately a depth of 0.3m before excavation ceased. No artefacts were recovered from this material. Overlying, and merging indistinctly with this deposit was a layer of compact red clay (2009) containing small fragments of sandstone, Harnage slate, mortar and charcoal. This clay was exposed in plan (Fig. 3) and was seen to be sloping downwards to the west from a ridge on the eastern side of the trench. A section was exposed in the sondage to the south and was shown to vary from 0.05m to 0.15m in thickness.

Overlying the red clay (2009) was a silty deposit (2015) which varied in thickness from 0.1m to 0.3m, containing fragments of sandstone rubble, mortar and sherds of medieval pottery and medieval glass. Overlying this deposit on the west of the trench was a thin spread of Harnage slate roof tile rubble (2013), and adjacent on the east was a spread of sandstone and red clay rubble (2014). These layers appeared to be contemporary with each other, and lay at an average depth of 58.25m AOD. Above these two rubble spreads was a soft brown-grey silty layer (2012), in turn overlain by a layer of clay, sandstone and mortar rubble (2011), both containing medieval pottery. The latter deposit (2011) lay at an average depth of 58.40m AOD, and was the deposit contacted at the bottom of Trench E in 1989 (Buteux 1989; Contexts 1004 and 1005).

Overlying the rubble deposit (2011) was a loose, orange sandy deposit (2010) containing medieval pottery. Two features were bedded upon the sand - a cobbled surface (F3), composed of rounded cobble stones with occasional small sandstone fragments (2005), and

adjacent on the east, a linear sandstone feature (F2) composed of large, drystone red sandstone blocks (2004). Fragments of ceramic roof tile and two sherds of 16th century pottery were recovered from the fill of the sandstone feature. The two features were set together forming a flat surface, at a depth of 58.60m AOD. To the west of the cobbled surface was a red clayey sand (2008) which was unexcavated, and therefore the relationship between this material and the cobbled surface (F3) was undetermined. To the east of the sandstone surface was a large shallow cut (F6) filled with a silty rubble deposit (2007) containing sandstone, mortar and ceramic tile fragments. This feature, dipped down to the south, and was cut through the underlying layers (2010, 2012, 2014 and 2015). The cobbled and sandstone surfaces (F2 and F3) and the rubble filled cut (F6) were all cut at the southern end by a shallow pit (F4), approximately 0.2m deep, filled with brown clayey silt rubble (2006) containing ceramic tile fragments of probable post-medieval date. This feature and the rubble filled cut (F6) were truncated on the south by the cut of the 1989 Trench E.

Overlying these features (F2, F3, F4, F6) was a deep deposit of post-medieval made ground (2003) consisting of a mixture of loose loamy garden soils and layers of brick rubble. Above this made ground was a layer of modern brick and mortar rubble (2002). Cutting these deposits was the rubble filled cut of the 1989 Trench (F1, 2001), and sealing the trench was a layer of grey gravel (2000) forming the current ground surface.

Trench B (1996) (Figures 6 - 7)

The earliest deposit contacted in Trench B was a compact brown clay (3008) containing flecks of charcoal, sandstone and old root material, and a few tiny fragments of Harnage slate. This deposit was exposed in plan and section in a sondage in the centre of the trench for approximately 0.4m. No artefacts were recovered and excavation ceased at a depth of 56.71m AOD. Overlying this layer, with a rather indistinct interface between the contexts, was a compact red clay material (3006) containing small fragments of charcoal, mortar and sandstone. This layer was a maximum of 0.3m in depth and was overlain on the eastern edge by a softer, more sandy deposit (3007), sloping down to the east and running under the eastern baulk. A fragment of floor tile, possibly medieval, was recovered from this material. Above these two deposits was a layer of demolition rubble (3005), approximately 0.45m thick and sloping down to the east and south. This material contained large fragments of red sandstone, mortar and cobble stone and at its uppermost level lay at a depth of 57.50m AOD.

Above this was a deposit, approximately 0.3m thick, of fairly compact, black loamy silt (3004) mottled with flecks of charcoal, mortar and brick or tile. A sherd of post-medieval pottery was recovered from this deposit during machining. Overlying this was a deep deposit of extremely loose brick and sandstone rubble (3003) which was cut diagonally across from northwest to southeast by a 'French' drain composed of loose bricks. Above this rubble deposit was a layer of loamy garden soil (3002), approximately 1.1m thick, overlain by a modern brick and mortar deposit (3001) sealed by grey gravel (3000), forming the ground surface.

8.0 Finds

Introduction

The finds from the evaluation consist mainly of pottery, tile, glass and bone. 69 sherds of pottery were recovered from the trenches, 67 of which were from Trench A. The glass from contexts 2012 and 2015 is medieval in date. All the identifiable fragments of bone recovered are animal in origin and represent a normal butchery assemblage. They consist mainly of cattle, sheep and chicken, although there are some less common species represented, such as goat and roe deer.

Pottery by Victoria Buteux

Spot dating

All fabric numbers refer to the Shrewsbury Queen Anne House site fabric series (Buteux forthcoming).

Trench A

U/S

1 body sherd, unidentified vessel. Unglazed sand tempered ware, medieval.

Context 2004 (F2)

2 rim sherds of one drinking jug, German stoneware, 16th century.

Context 2010

1 body sherd. Unglazed sandy cooking pot, Fabric 80, 12th to 13th century.

2 body sherds, glazed jugs. Local Sandy ware, Fabric 14, 13th to 15th century.

2 body sherds, jug. Orange glazed quartz tempered ware, Fabric 89, 13th to 14th century.

Context 2011

2 base sherds, cup, Tudor Green type ware, Fabric 25, late 15th to 16th century.

5 decorated body sherds, jug. Early glazed sandy ware, Fabric 3, 13th to 14th century.

2 body sherds, glazed jug. Local sandy ware, Fabric 14, 13th to 15th century.

Context 2012

2 rim fragments, 3 fragments of handle and 37 body sherds from glazed jug. Local Sandy ware, Fabric 14, 13th to 14th century.

Context 2015

1 decorated body sherd, pitcher/jug. Early glazed ware, Fabric 3, 13th to 14th century.

7 body sherds, glazed jug. Sandy White ware, Fabric 85, 14th to 15th century.

Trench B

Cleaning

1 rim sherd, jar. Red slipped earthen ware, 18th century.

Machining

1 rim sherd, jar or cistern. Glazed red earthen ware, 16th to 17th century.

Discussion

In total 69 sherds of pottery were recovered during the evaluation. Of these 67 were recovered from contexts in Trench A and 2 from machining and cleaning contexts in Trench B.

The earliest fragment was probably the sherd of cooking pot from context 2010. The majority of the sherds from Trench A were from Local Sandy Ware jugs. There were relatively few form sherds present and the vessels cannot be closely dated, although they probably date mainly to the 14th and 15th centuries. With the exception of the Tudor Green type cup the pottery was not very abraded, although almost all of it was residual in the contexts in which it was found.

The small size of the assemblage precludes any detailed comparison with other sites but the medieval pottery present is typical of the type of vessels found on sites in the town (Buteux forthcoming). The excavated pottery assemblages from Shrewsbury indicate that between the 12th and 16th centuries both ecclesiastical establishments and the townspeople were acquiring pottery from the same source, presumably the local market, and that the majority of the pottery was locally produced.

The discovery of German Stoneware is significant as there are almost no published imported wares from sites in Shrewsbury despite its position on the Severn. The relative scarcity of such wares in pottery assemblages from Worcester, further down the Seven, however, indicates that such imports were not as common in inland ports as they were on the coast (Buteux forthcoming).

9.0 Discussion

The evidence from the trial trenches shows that there has been comprehensive levelling-up in this area since the destruction of the Friary. The evaluation trenches reached a depth below that of the Friary remains located in Test Pit 4 without contacting any *in-situ* Friary remains in either trench.

The compact brown clay encountered at the bottom of both trial trenches (2017 and 3008) is almost certainly redeposited and contaminated natural subsoil. The extremely compact nature of the material and the lack of artefacts would support this interpretation, the few tiny fragments of Harnage slate roof tile possibly having been transported downwards by root action. The ridge and slope of the overlying red clay (2009) in Trench A may indicate an indistinct cut, possibly for a drainage feature, and it is worth noting that the ridge runs roughly perpendicular to St Mary's Water Lane. The Harnage slate and sandstone rubble layers in Trench A (2013 and 2014), occurring approximately 0.4m above the level of the Friary remains located in Test Pit 4, can be interpreted as a Friary destruction level.

However, there was no evidence of any structural remains between the destruction level and the red clay (2009).

The series of rubble and silt layers (2010 - 2012) between the Friary destruction deposits and the cobble and sandstone surface (F2 and F3) contained pottery and glass ranging from the 12th - 16th century in date, and probably represent immediate post-Friary levelling deposits. The cobble and sandstone surface (F2 and F3) in Trench A lay some 0.3 - 0.4m above the level of the Friary destruction deposit encountered in Test Pit 4 and no dateable finds earlier than the 16th century were recovered from within these features. It would be reasonable to assume, therefore, that these features date from at least the early post-medieval period, if not later. The sandstone area may represent edging for the cobbled surface and the sandstone blocks used were in all probability derived from the demolished Friary buildings. They were substantial in size, some of them were dressed, and when the feature was excavated a fragment of carved stone, probably part of a window tracery, was found to be part of the fill. It is worth noting that the sandstone surface was on the same alignment as the ridge of red clay below the Friary destruction level.

In Trench B, no *in situ* archaeological deposits of any date were encountered. The sandstone rubble deposit (3005) occurring at 57.50m AOD may possibly represent Friary demolition rubble, recorded at a level well below any such deposits in Trench A and Test Pit 4.

10.0 Acknowledgements

The evaluation was sponsored by Shropshire Homes Limited. The evaluation was supervised by Lucie Dingwall with the assistance of Mark Allen and Roy Krakowitz, and was monitored by Alex Jones for BUFAU, and by Mike Watson for Shropshire County Council. The report was edited by Gwilym Hughes and the figures were prepared by Mark Brendon. The pottery analysis was carried out by Victoria Buteux and we are grateful to Umberto Albarella for commenting on the bone. Thanks are also due to Nigel Baker for his advice.

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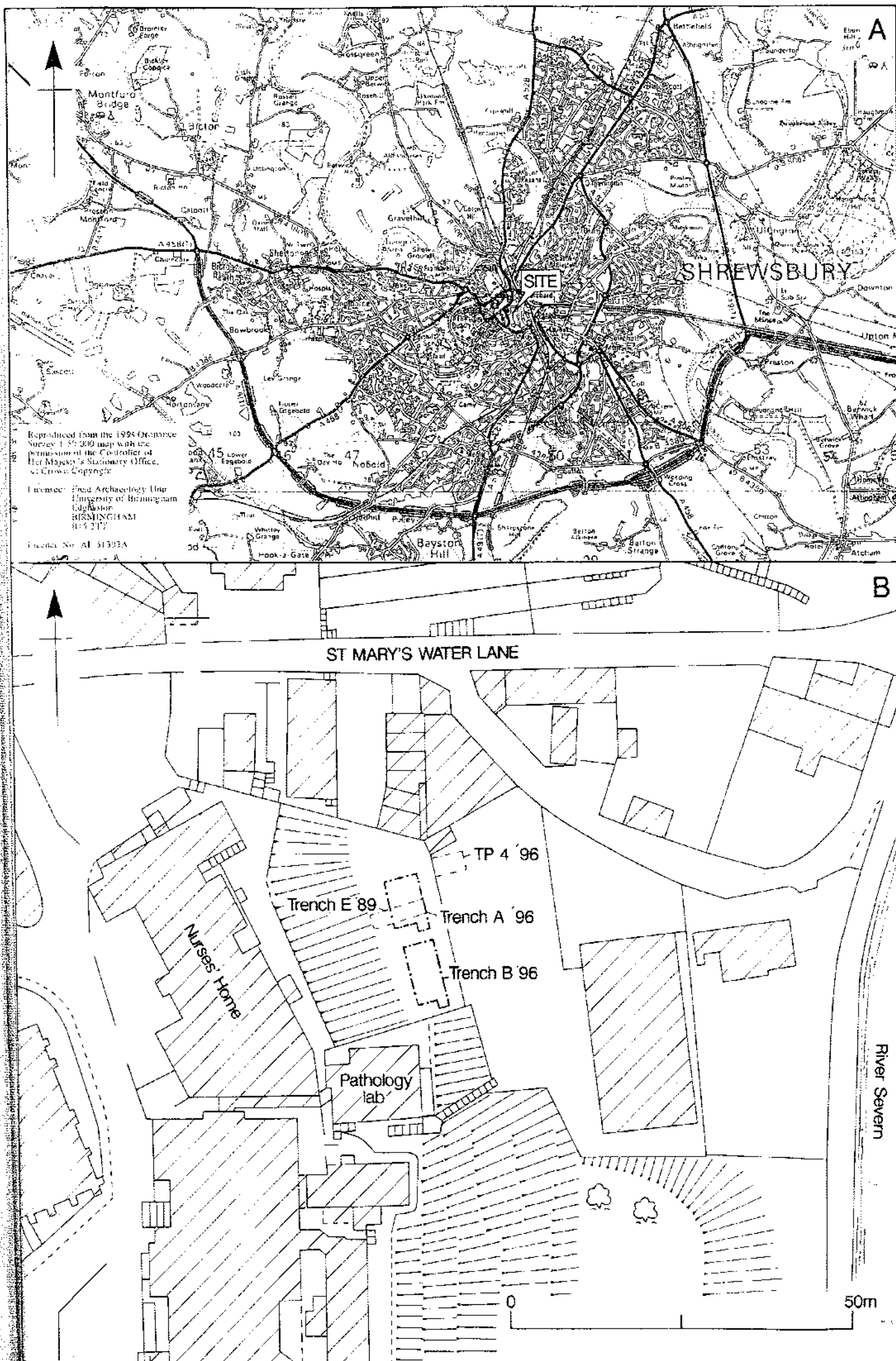


Figure 1

Trench A

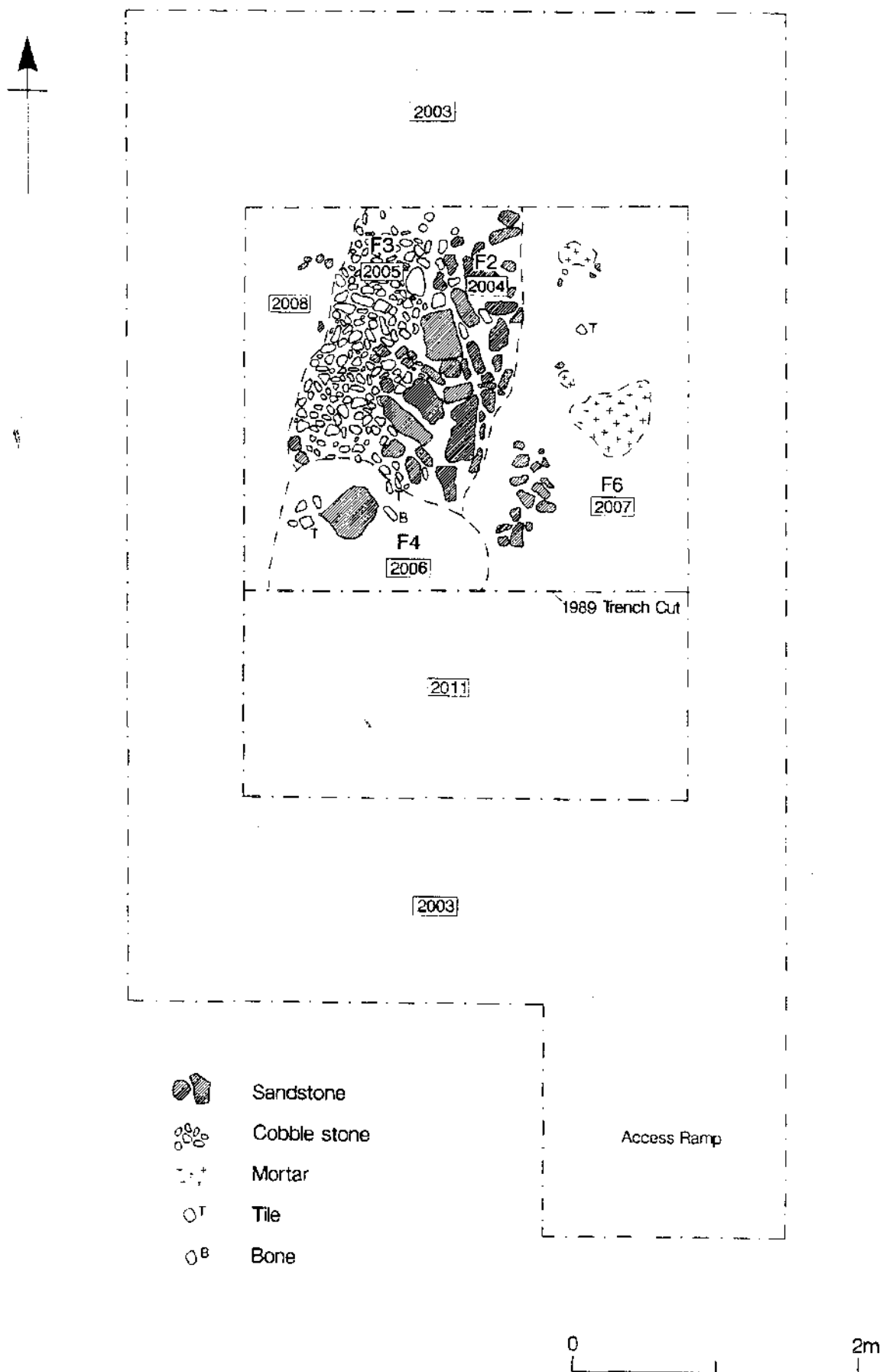


Figure 2

Trench A

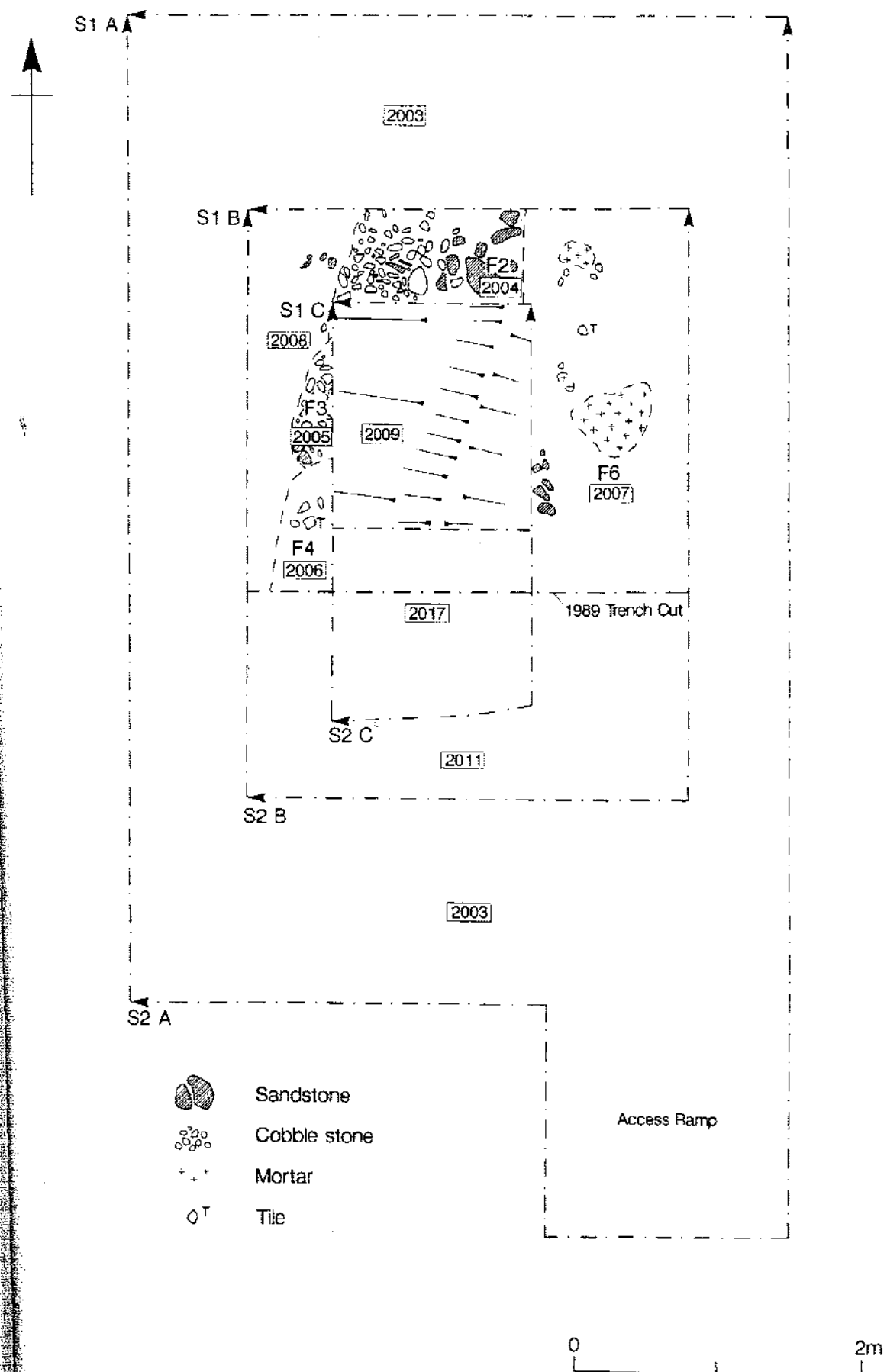


Figure 3

Trench A

S.1

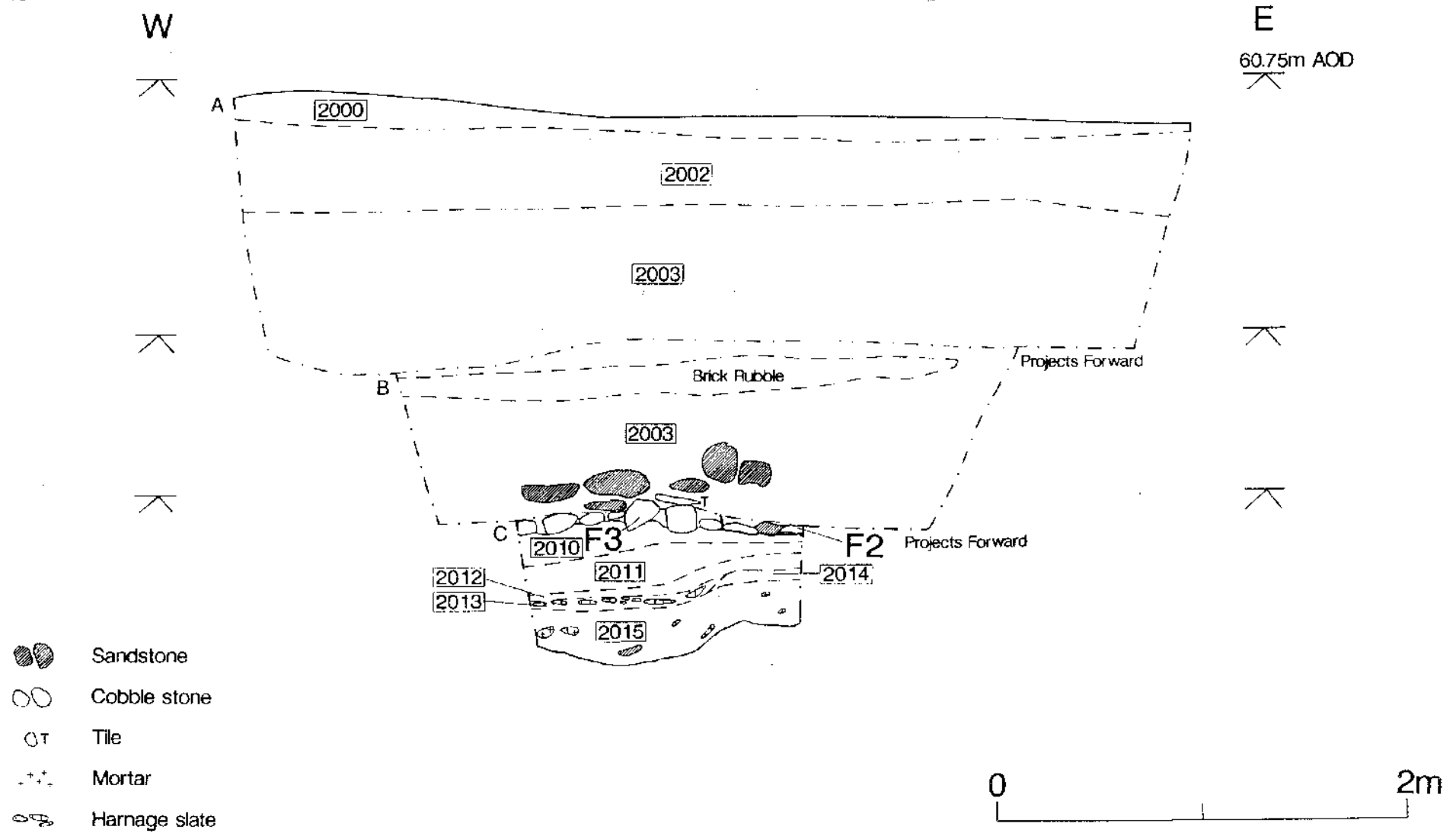


Figure 4

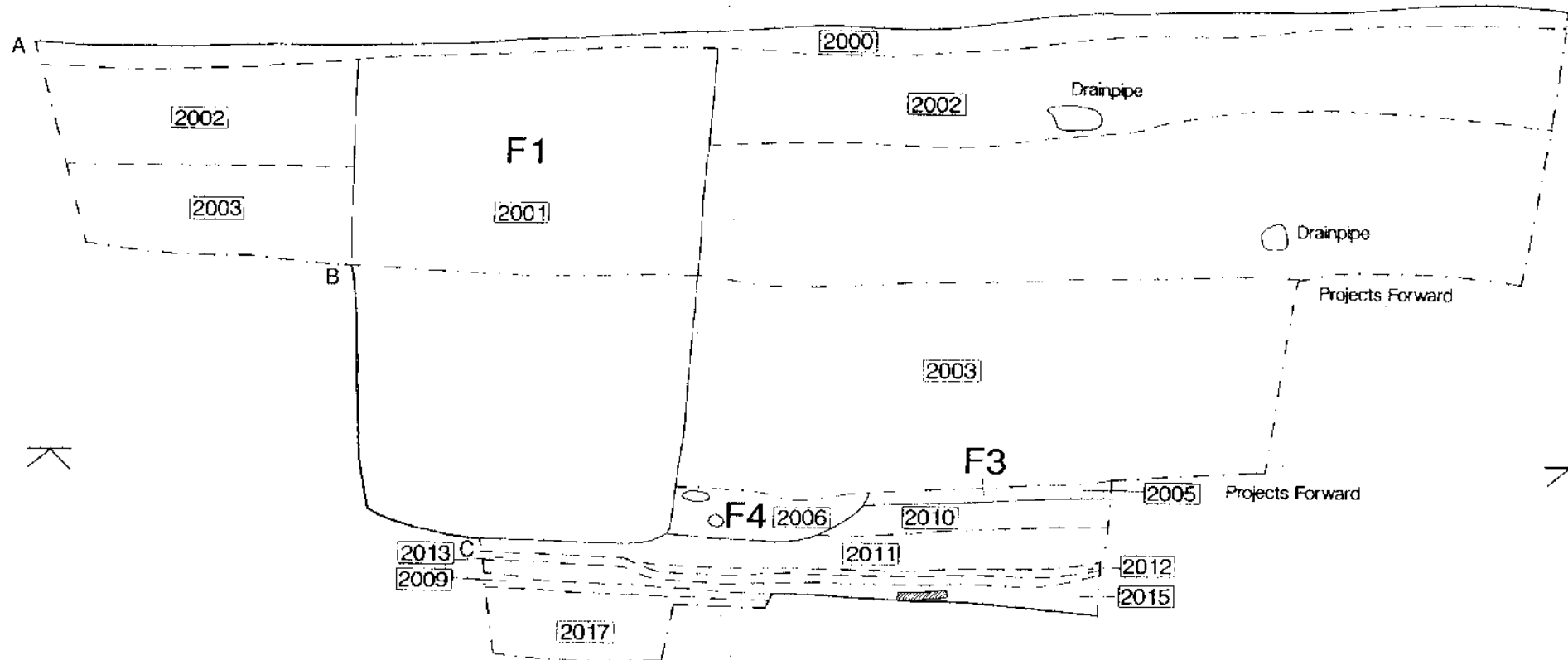
Trench A

S.2

S

N

60.80m
AOD



- Sandstone
- Cobble stone

0 2m

Figure 5

Trench B

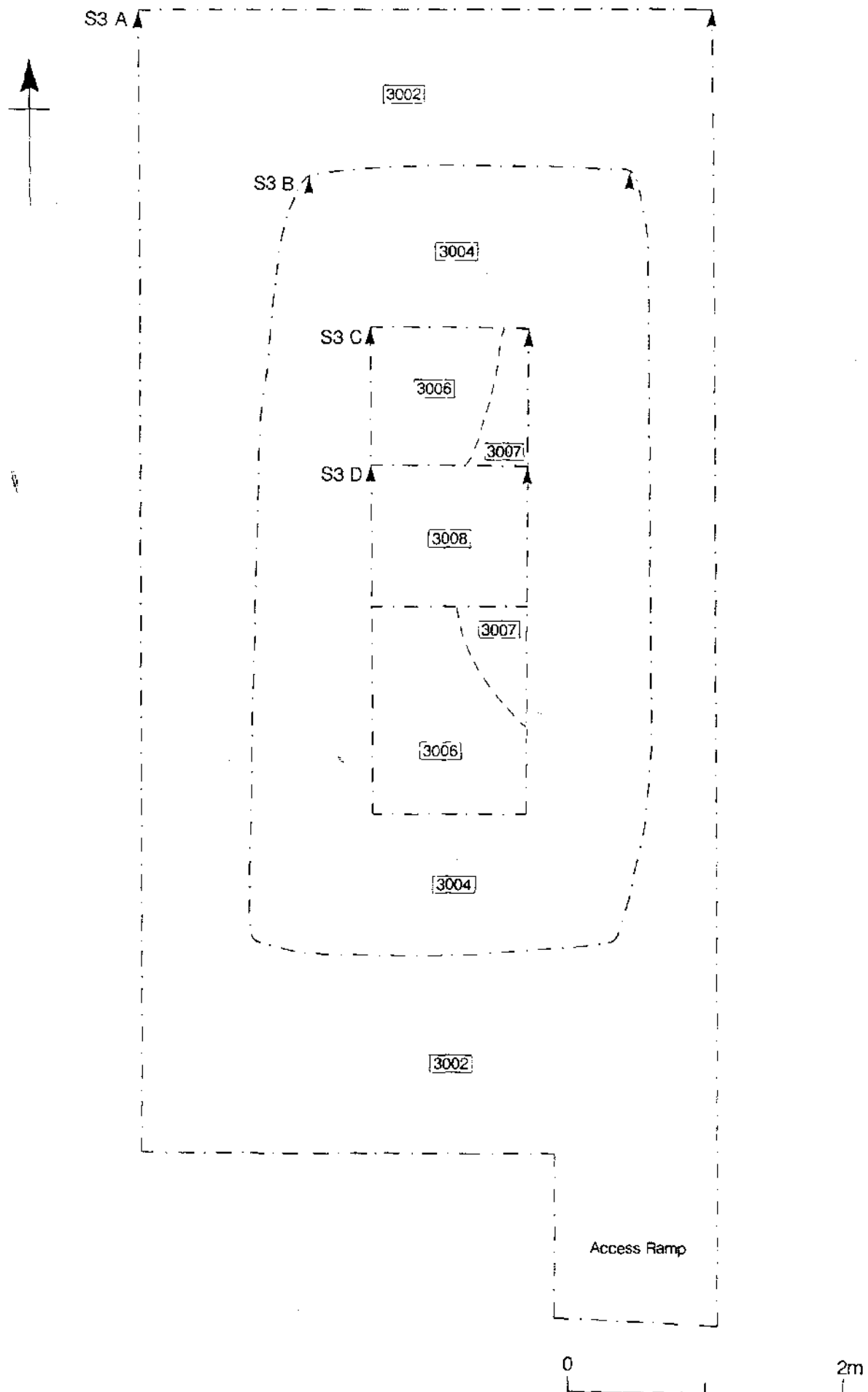


Figure 6

Trench B S.3

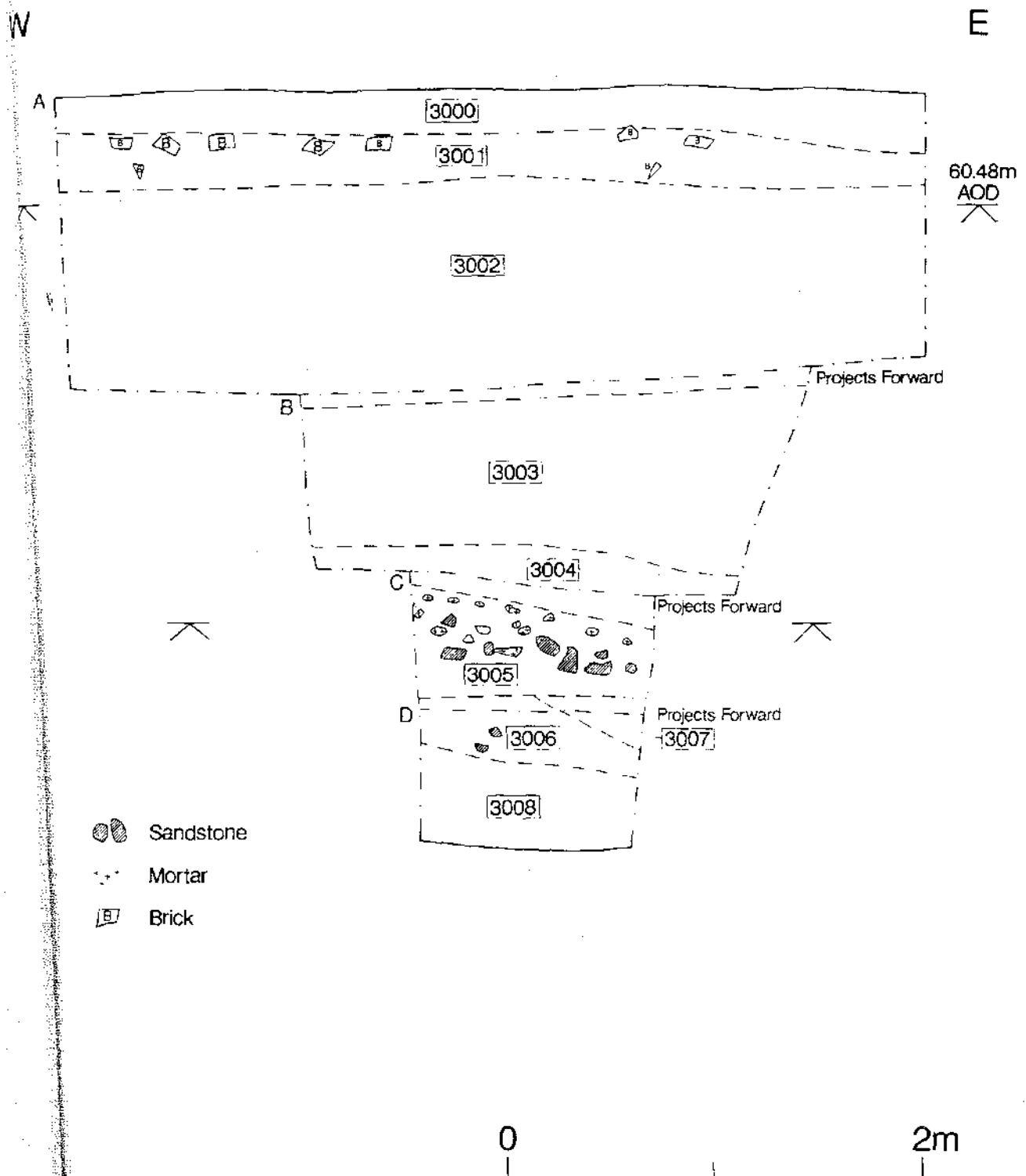


Figure 7