

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**An Archaeological  
Evaluation at  
Church Farm,  
Fenstanton,  
Cambridgeshire  
1997**

*B.U.F.A.U.*



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
**Project No. 469**  
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**An Archaeological Evaluation  
at Church Farm, Fenstanton,  
Cambridgeshire 1997.**

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**Contents**

	Page
1.0 <b>Summary</b>	1
2.0 <b>Introduction</b>	1
3.0 <b>The Site and Its Location</b>	1
4.0 <b>Aims</b>	2
5.0 <b>Method</b>	2
6.0 <b>Aerial Photographic Assessment</b>	2
7.0 <b>Results</b>	3
8.0 <b>Specialists reports</b>	5
9.0 <b>Discussion</b>	7
10.0 <b>Implications and Proposals</b>	9
11.0 <b>References</b>	9
12.0 <b>Acknowledgements</b>	10

**Figures**

- 1 Location of Proposed Development Site
- 2 Location of Trenches and Cropmarks (Air Photo Services)
- 3 Trenches 1-5 simplified plan
- 4 Trench 4 detailed plan
- 5 Sections of features in Trench 4
- 6 Plans and sections of features in Trenches 1, 2 and 5.

# **An Archaeological Evaluation at Church Farm, Fenstanton, Cambridgeshire 1997.**

## **1.0: Summary**

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit at Church Farm, Fenstanton, Cambridgeshire, in March 1997. The evaluation was conducted in advance of proposed development for residential housing. The Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record lists several important archaeological sites in the vicinity of the proposed development site. These sites mainly comprise concentrations of cropmarked features which are located to the north and east of the site. Evidence from recent archaeological excavations suggests that these cropmarked features may date to the late prehistoric or Romano-British periods.

The evaluation comprised air photograph plotting and analysis, and the excavation of six trial trenches. Archaeological features dating to the Iron Age were identified in Trench 4 and features probably dating to the Iron Age and the Bronze Age were recognised in Trench 5. These features may represent farming or settlement, some of which have been recorded as cropmarked features on aerial photographs, and a possible Bronze Age cremation.

## **2.0: Introduction**

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out at Church Farm, Fenstanton, Cambridgeshire. The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of D.H. Barford and Co. and fulfilled a planning condition imposed by Huntingdonshire District Council in advance of a proposed development for residential housing. The archaeological evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Field Evaluation (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994), a brief prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council (Austin 1997) and a specification prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (Jones 1997). The evaluation conformed to the guidelines contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of Environment 1991).

## **3.0: The Site and its Location (Figures 1 and 2)**

The site consists of an area of 2.46 ha of agricultural land to the east of Fenstanton Church and Church Farm (NGR TL 6865 3230) and excludes land to northwest to be laid out as open space or sports field. The geology comprises third gravel terrace in the valley of the River Ouse. The site is located in an area of known archaeological context. The County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) lists several archaeological sites in close vicinity to the proposed development site. Complexes of cropmarked features to the north (SMR 8826) and east (SMR 8824) include possible settlement features such as enclosures and a possible droveway. Previous archaeological work North of Fen Drayton reservoir has revealed remains of a late Roman structure and evidence of early prehistoric activity.

#### **4.0: Aims**

The objectives of the archaeological evaluation were to determine the nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains within the area proposed for development, to permit the formulation of an appropriate mitigation strategy. In particular, it was intended to provide information concerning the potential for evidence of prehistoric or Romano-British settlement and activity here.

#### **5.0: Method (Figure 3)**

The aerial photographic assessment was completed before the excavation of six 50m x 1.6m trial trenches (a total of 2% the proposed development site). A JCB 3CX mechanical excavator, under archaeological supervision, was used to remove topsoil and overburden to the upper surface of archaeological features and deposits, or the natural subsoil. The location of the trenches was agreed in advance with the County Archaeological Office. The trench layout was designed to transect cropmarked features plotted from aerial photographs and to test areas where there were no such features. Subsequently, Trench 5 was extended by 1m to clarify the nature of features at the eastern end of the trench. The surface of archaeological deposits or of the natural subsoil was manually cleaned, where necessary, and a representative sample of features was manually excavated. Soil samples were taken from selected datable features to assess the survival of charred plant remains. Stratigraphy was recorded by means of pro-forma record cards, scale drawings and photographs, even where no archaeology was present.

#### **6.0: Aerial Photographic Assessment (Figure 2) by Air Photo Services**

This section provides only a summary of the results of the aerial photographic assessment. A detailed description of the methodology employed, the assessment results, and the sources consulted is provided in the full assessment report (Air Photo Services 1997). Immediately to the north of the assessment area, the Cambridgeshire SMR records a complex, probably multi-phase landscape, (SMR 8826). This comprises crop marked rectilinear enclosures, ovoid enclosures and ring ditches which lie on the interface of gravel, clay and alluvial soils. A multi-ditched, probably 'rutted', linear feature which may be interpreted as a drove or access way runs to the southwest, towards and probably into the site. The drive cuts, or is cut by, other linear ditches and enclosures.

Progressing southwards towards the site, the features become much more fragmentary in their appearance. Definite sinuous frost cracks are also apparent. The photographic record requires careful interpretation in this area, as the soil depth varies considerably and masks the continuity of evidence. Various ditches and pits may indicate the presence of possible 'open settlement remains' centering on TL 323 698. To the east and north east of the site remains of ditches and hand-dug quarries can clearly be seen (SMR 8824). Some linear features may represent modern tracks or field paths, although the majority of the cut features here are probably pre-modern. Morphological comparisons, and evidence from excavations near Fen Drayton (G.Wait, then CAU, pers. comm. 1992) suggests that this landscape may date through the Bronze Age to the Romano-British period.

In marked contrast to the northern adjacent fields, the site has shown very little variation in crop tone and density. This may be due to unsuitable crop, high levels of water retention or a greater depth of topsoil. The photographic evidence indicates that the topsoil may be deeper in the eastern part of the area.

In this instance the vertical photographs consistently show few, but indicative, traces of archaeological features over the area and its environs, while all specific detail was interpreted from specialist obliques. A very tenuously interpreted cropmark feature within the site has the appearance of a rectilinear enclosure, and showed on one oblique photograph. It must be stressed that the validity of interpretation is not high, and all features in the area have been interpreted only as 'possible' archaeological, and not as definitely prehistoric features. Prior to the building of houses in the 1960's, the southern adjacent field was similarly unresponsive to the formation of definitive crop marks. Oblique photographs taken in 1992 show a very faint series of positive marks in an unidentified cereal crop over the site. These marks are sinuous and discontinuous, but may represent the faint traces of cut archaeological features and underlying natural geological anomalies.

## **7.0: Results**

### **Trench 1 (Figures.2, 3, 6)**

This trench was designed to transect one curvilinear and two amorphous cropmarked features. The natural subsoil (1002) comprised a brownish yellow, slightly silty sand in the eastern half of the trench and a yellowish brown sand and gravel to the west. Cutting subsoil 1002 was a narrow gully (F100) aligned northwest-southeast, 0.46m wide and 0.28m deep, with very steep sides and a slightly rounded base. It was filled with a dark greyish brown slightly clayey silty sand (1003). This feature was overlain by a brown sandy silty clay (1001) 0.50m deep to the east and 0.25m deep to the west. This was sealed by 0.30m of topsoil (1000). No finds were recovered.

### **Trench 2 (Figs.2, 3,6)**

This trench was designed to transect two linear features, a rectilinear and a curvilinear cropmarked feature. The natural subsoil (2002) here, a yellowish brown sand and gravel, was disturbed by animal burrowing and tree holes. Cutting subsoil 2002 was a linear feature (F201) aligned northwest-southeast, 1.10m wide and 0.22m deep, with a bowl shaped profile. It butt ended to the northwest, and extended beyond the edge of the trench to the southeast. It was filled with a greyish brown silt sand (2003). This feature was overlain by a brown sandy silty clay (2001), 0.20m-0.35m deep. This was sealed by 0.30m of topsoil (2000). No finds were recovered.

### **Trench 3 (Figs.2, 3)**

This trench was designed to transect a linear and two curvilinear cropmarked features. The natural subsoil (3002), a slightly silty yellowish brown sand and gravel, with natural hollows or undulations containing silty sand, disturbed in places by tree holes. The subsoil was overlain by a brown sandy silty clay (3001), 0.22m-0.35m deep. This was sealed by 0.30m of topsoil (3000). No archaeological features were identified in this trench and no finds were recovered.

#### Trench 4

This trench was designed to transect a linear, possible enclosure and a curvilinear cropmarked feature. The natural subsoil was a brownish yellow silty sand and gravel (4002), with bands of red brown silty sand in places. Fourteen features cut the subsoil, one of which was probably caused by animal disturbance. These features are described from the northwest end of the trench, southeastwards. At the northwest end of the trench, was a circular possible post hole (F413), 0.20m in diameter and 0.16m deep, filled with brown sand (4018). Southeast of feature F413 was a linear ditch (F411) aligned northeast-southwest, 1.30m wide and 0.45m deep, with steep sides and a narrow, flat base. It was filled by a brown silty sandy clay (4017) containing a sherd of Iron Age pottery and worked flint. This was by cut shallow linear feature (F409) aligned northwest-southeast, 1.0m wide and 0.17m deep, with gently sloping sides and a flat base. It was filled with a brown silty sand (4003) containing a sherd of Iron Age pottery, which sealed fill 4018.

East of F411 was an irregular feature (F404) probably caused by animal disturbance, measuring 0.28m x 0.35m x 0.30m deep, with very steep sides and a rounded base. It was filled with a grey clayey sandy silt (4004). Further east was a shallow ditch (F402), curving slightly to the north, 0.60m-0.90m wide and 0.20m deep, with a gently sloping west side and a steeply sloping east side with a flat base. It was filled with a greyish brown sandy silt (4005) and contained worked flint. To the east was a linear ditch (F401) aligned northeast-southwest, 1.10m wide and 0.37m deep, with steep sides and a rounded base. It was filled with a brown silty sandy clay (4006). Further to the east was a northeast-southwest aligned ditch (F400), 1.36m wide and 0.39m deep, with a 'bowl'-shaped profile. It was filled with a brown silty sandy clay (4007) and a sherd of Iron Age pottery and worked flint. East of F400 was a northeast-southwest aligned ditch (F403), 0.87m wide and 0.25m deep, with steep sides and a flat base. It was filled with a brown silty sandy clay (4008).

East of feature F403 was a pit (F405), 0.63m x 0.50m and 0.30m deep, with a 'bowl-shaped' profile and filled with brown silty sand (4009). Beyond feature F406 was a shallow, north-south aligned linear feature (F406), 0.63m wide and 0.10m deep, with gently sloping sides and a rounded base. It was filled with a greyish brown sandy silt (4010). Beyond feature F406 was a slightly curving north east-south west aligned ditch (F407), 2.20m wide and 0.45m deep, with steep sides and a rounded base. It was filled with a brown silty sandy clay (4011), containing sherds of Iron Age pottery and worked flints. East of F407 were two oval shallow scoops (F408 and F410), either natural hollows or possibly truncated pits, extending beyond the edge of the trench, 1.0m and 0.70m wide and 0.18m and 0.13m deep respectively and filled with greyish brown sandy silts (4013 and 4012). A possible linear feature (F414) filled with brown sandy silt (4014) was not excavated. To the east was a curvilinear ditch (F412), 0.90m-1.25m wide and 0.50m deep, with steep sides and a rounded base. It was filled with a greyish brown sandy silt (4020) containing a worked flint, above which was a brown sandy silt (4019) sealed by a dark brown sandy silt (4015) containing sherds of Iron Age pottery and worked flint. The subsoil and the infilled features was overlain by a brown sandy silty clay (4001), 0.35m deep. This was sealed by 0.30m of topsoil (4000).

#### Trench 5 (Figures 2 and 6)

The natural subsoil was a brownish yellow silty sand and gravel (5002) with bands of red brown silty sand in places. Three features cut the natural subsoil. At the north east end of the

trench was an possible pit (F502) extending beyond the edge of the excavations, at least 0.60m wide and 0.33m deep. It was filled with a dark brown charcoal rich silty clay (5007) containing Bronze Age pottery, animal teeth and bone and burnt animal bone. This was sealed by a reddish brown sandy clay (5006). The pit was cut by a narrow ditch (F501) orientated northeast-southwest, 0.80m wide and 0.35m deep, with steep sides and a rounded base. It was filled with a brown silty sandy clay (5005) and contained worked flint. To the southwest was a slightly sinuous narrow linear gully (F500), 0.55m-0.66m wide and 0.17m deep, with steep sides and a slightly rounded base. It was filled with a brown clayey, silty sand (5004) containing a single worked flint. The subsoil was overlain by a brown sandy silty clay (5001), 0.20m deep, containing a worked flint. This was sealed by 0.30m of topsoil (5000).

#### Trench 6

This trench was designed to transect a discontinuous 'U'-shaped cropmarked feature. The natural subsoil was a brownish yellow silty sand and gravel (6002) with bands and patches of grey-green clay in places. A northwest-southeast modern ceramic drain cut the subsoil. The subsoil was overlain by a brown sandy silty clay (6001), 0.25m deep. This was sealed by 0.30m of topsoil (6000). No archaeological features were identified and no finds were recovered in this trench.

### 8.0: The Specialists Reports

#### 8.1: Flint by Lynne Bevan

A total of 52 items of humanly-struck flint was recovered, comprising one flake knife or possible rough-out for a leaf-shaped arrowhead (layer 4001), one scraper (4011, F407), one notched flake (unstratified) and three other retouched flakes (4011, 4017- F407 and 5004, F500), three cores (4015, F412 and layer 5001 x 2), and 43 flakes (see table below).

Table 1. The Flint Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>Feature</i>	<i>Flakes</i>	<i>Other Tools</i>
4001	-	-	1 ?knife/?arrow rough-out
4005	F402	2	-
4007	F400	3	-
4011	F407	2	1 retouched flake, 1 core fragment, 1 scraper
4015	F412	25	2 cores
4017	F411	6	1 retouched
4020	F412	1	-
5001	-	1	-
5001	-	1	1 blade core
5004	F500	-	1 retouched flake
5005	F501	2	
Unstratified	-		1 notched flake, 1 core

The raw material was all derived from secondary deposits since, when present, the cortex had the thin, compacted appearance of pebbles from river gravels. The light grey to brown



coloured flint was also of the unpredictable quality associated with gravel flint. The only potentially chronologically-diagnostic items in the collection are a core used for the production of narrow blades which is probably of Later Mesolithic date (5001), and the 'flake knife'/arrow rough-out which might be a rough-out for a Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowhead (4001).

The other two cores, one of which is half of a split pebble, (4015) were also used for blade production. These were accompanied by 25 flakes, none of which appear to have originated from the cores. This group, together with the two smaller groups of material from contexts 4001 and 4017 which include retouched pieces, represent evidence for knapping activities on the site. However, only a low incidence of activity is suggested by these relatively small groups of material, perhaps the episodic usage of the landscape in prehistory rather than settlement of any duration.

## 8.2: Prehistoric Pottery by Ann Woodward

A total of 13 sherds comprised two groups, nine from ditch fills in Trench 4, and four from the charcoal fill of a feature in Trench 5.

The Trench 4 material, from ditches F400, F407, F409, F411 and F412, is of Iron Age date and half of it is abraded. An out-turned rim sherd, an even-curved neck fragment and the coarse fabrics containing varying densities of small to large angular flint inclusions suggest an Early Iron Age date ie pre 300 or 400 BC.

The four sherds from F502 in Trench 5 derive from four different Beaker vessels, of Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age date. Sand-tempered and grogged fabrics are represented, and decoration includes comb-impressed horizontal and diagonal lines, incised horizontal and vertical lines, and paired fingernail impressions. One sherd is slightly worn, the others are unabraded.

The pottery assemblages, although small, can be used to date the two groups of features. The forms and decorative motifs present could usefully be compared with material from other sites in the region. The Early Iron Age rim/neck can be matched at Maxey, while the Beaker decorative motifs need to be assessed against those on entire vessels from the region, and from the large domestic assemblages of the fen edge.

## 8.4: Animal Bone (based on comments by Umberto Albarella)

Eight pieces of animal bone were recovered during the evaluation. The animal bone was in a good state of preservation and was all recovered from the charcoal-rich fill of a pit (F502). The high charcoal content of the fill may have been a significant factor in the state of preservation. With the exception of a small fragment of calcined long bone, all the bone, including three tooth fragments, may have belonged to one individual pig.

## 8.5: Charred Plant Remains by Angela Monckton

### Method of Processing.

Samples from four contexts thought to have potential for the recovery of charred plant remains were wet sieved with flotation into a 0.5mm mesh sieve. The flotation fractions (flots) were air dried and were then assessed.

#### Method of Assessment.

The flots were sorted with a x10 stereo microscope and the plant remains quickly identified and counted.

#### Preservation, Condition and Storage.

Plant remains were charred and, although rather abraded, were in identifiable condition. Uncharred seeds were also found, these were judged to be intrusive, and roots were also present. The flots were stored dry in polythene bags and the plant remains placed in glass tubes with the flots.

#### Results.

##### Trench 5

F407 (4011): 60 mls of flot from a 19 litre sample. A few charcoal flecks and a fragment of cereal grain were found.

F412 (4005): 100 mls of flot from a 23 litre sample. Abundant charcoal and two fragments of cereal grain with 69 fragments of hazel nutshell, together with a fragment of calcined bone and three possible slag fragments were present.

F411 (4017): 50 mls of flot from a 23 litre sample. A few charcoal flecks with a cereal grain and two fragments of hazel nutshell were found.

##### Trench 5

F502 (5007): 120 mls of flot from a 7 litre sample. Abundant charcoal fragments and three cereal grains with 17 fragments of hazel nutshell. A few bone fragments were also seen.

#### Range and Variety of Material.

Abundant hazel nutshell (*Corylus avellana*) was found in two of the samples which also had abundant charcoal present. Evidence for cereals was sparse, amounting to a few abraded cereal grains and fragments of grains.

#### Statement of Potential.

Charred plant remains were found to be present on the site indicating that investigation of more features may provide additional evidence. The samples here need no further analysis as all the remains are recorded, they show the consumption of hazel nuts and the presence of cereals.

#### Recommendations.

Should further excavation be carried out it is suggested that sampling and analysis is carried out to recover evidence from plant remains. Samples of a minimum of 20 litres in size should be taken for flotation from dateable contexts with potential for the recovery of plant remains.

## 9.0: Discussion

The earliest evidence for activity within the site is provided by the residual, probably Late Mesolithic, flint core from layer 5001 beneath the topsoil, sealing archaeological features dating to the Iron Age and the natural gravel subsoil in Trench 5. A similar layer, probably

alluvial in origin, was identified in all the trenches (1001, 2001, 3001, 4001 and 6001) and was seen to deepen towards the eastern part of the site (illustrated on Figure 2). This corresponds with the information from the aerial photographic assessment. The only other find from this layer was a possible rough-out for a leaf-shaped arrowhead, probably Neolithic, from 4001, Trench 4. The site is located approximately 1.2 km to the south of the River Ouse, the above mentioned layers may be interpreted as an alluvial horizon of possible late or post-Iron Age date.

Evidence of further early prehistoric activity on the site was provided by worked flint, probably residual, in later Iron Age features in Trench 4 and possible Iron Age features in Trench 5. The earliest datable archaeological feature identified was the charcoal filled pit F502, possibly associated with a ritual function, which contained sherds of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age pottery.

All the Iron Age pottery, and most of the worked flint recovered from the site came from features in Trench 4. There appears to be a correlation between some of these features and some of the cropmarked features plotted in the aerial photographic assessment. In particular ditch F411, which infill contained Iron Age pottery and worked flint, corresponds with a northeast-southwest aligned linear cropmarked feature which also corresponds with a similar ditch (F500) in Trench 5. Another ditch (F401) in Trench 4, not corresponding with a cropmarked features, appears to be on a similar alignment to ditch F501, Trench 5 and runs parallel with F411/F500. It is possible that these features could be associated with the possible driveway identified as a cropmarked features running towards the site from the north (Figure 2).

Ditches F400, F407 and F412, Trench 4 which all contained worked flint and Iron Age pottery, coincide with cropmarked features forming an oval enclosure and possible associated annexe. Other shallow linear features, and possible pits in Trench 4 may be of a similar Iron Age date.

The presence of a Late-Neolithic/Early Bronze Age feature, with a possible ritual function, may indicate the possibility of the survival of other similar features nearby.

The relative lack of pottery within Iron Age features may possibly suggest an agricultural rather than a domestic settlement function for the enclosure and possible annexe and the linear ditches forming a possible driveway. The enclosure may have been used for animal husbandry. A comparable enclosure has been excavated to the northeast of the site at Barleycroft Farm, Needingworth (Evans and Knight, forthcoming). This produced no pottery, but has been dated to the Iron Age on the basis of a radiocarbon date (C.Evans pers. comm).

The undated linear feature in Trench 1 (F500) may be of recent origin, possibly a drain, in view of its size and shape and the fact that its silty sand fill was noticeably different to that of the other archaeological features. The shallow undated feature at the south east end of Trench 2 (F201), may be of natural origin, with a silty sand fill different from other archaeological features which is similar to fills of natural hollows or undulations encountered elsewhere. However the possibility cannot be totally excluded that these features could be of a similar date to those excavated in Trench 4. No other features of archaeological significance were identified in any of the other trenches.

No features of archaeological significance corresponding to the plotted cropmarks were found in Trenches 3 and 6. These cropmarks could be of geological origin.

## **10.0: Implications and Proposals**

### 10.1: Implications

The evaluation has identified an area of archaeological importance in the central part of the site. All the significant archaeological features appear to be located within a fairly closely defined zone between the middle of Trench 5 and the east end of Trench 4. The evaluation has provided artifactual evidence of Mesolithic-Neolithic activity in the vicinity of the site, although this activity may have been temporary and episodic. It is possible that other Early Bronze Age/Beaker, possibly ritual features, with informative assemblages of pottery, bone and charred plant remains, may survive within this zone.

It has been possible to recognise a possible Iron Age enclosure and annexe and associated linear, possible driveway features, with a small, but informative assemblage of pottery and charred plant remains.

### 10.2: Proposals

For the purpose of framing proposals for further work, in the event of the proposed development proceeding, the site may be divided into three zones (Fig.2).

#### Zone A

If this zone is affected by development proposals, further archaeological fieldwork, in the form of an area excavation would be appropriate. The excavation would be followed by analysis and reporting of the results in a recognised archaeological journal.

However, it should be noted that the overburden in this area (topsoil and alluvium) measures approximately 0.50-0.65m in depth. Accordingly, shallow groundworks may not affect archaeological features or deposits.

#### Zone B

Consideration should be given to the maintenance of an archaeological watching brief in this zone during development groundworks.

#### ZoneC

No further archaeological response may be appropriate in this zone.

## **11.0: References**

Air Photo Services 1997 *Aerial Photographic Assessment: Archaeology. Land off Headlands Fenstanton, Cambridgeshire.*

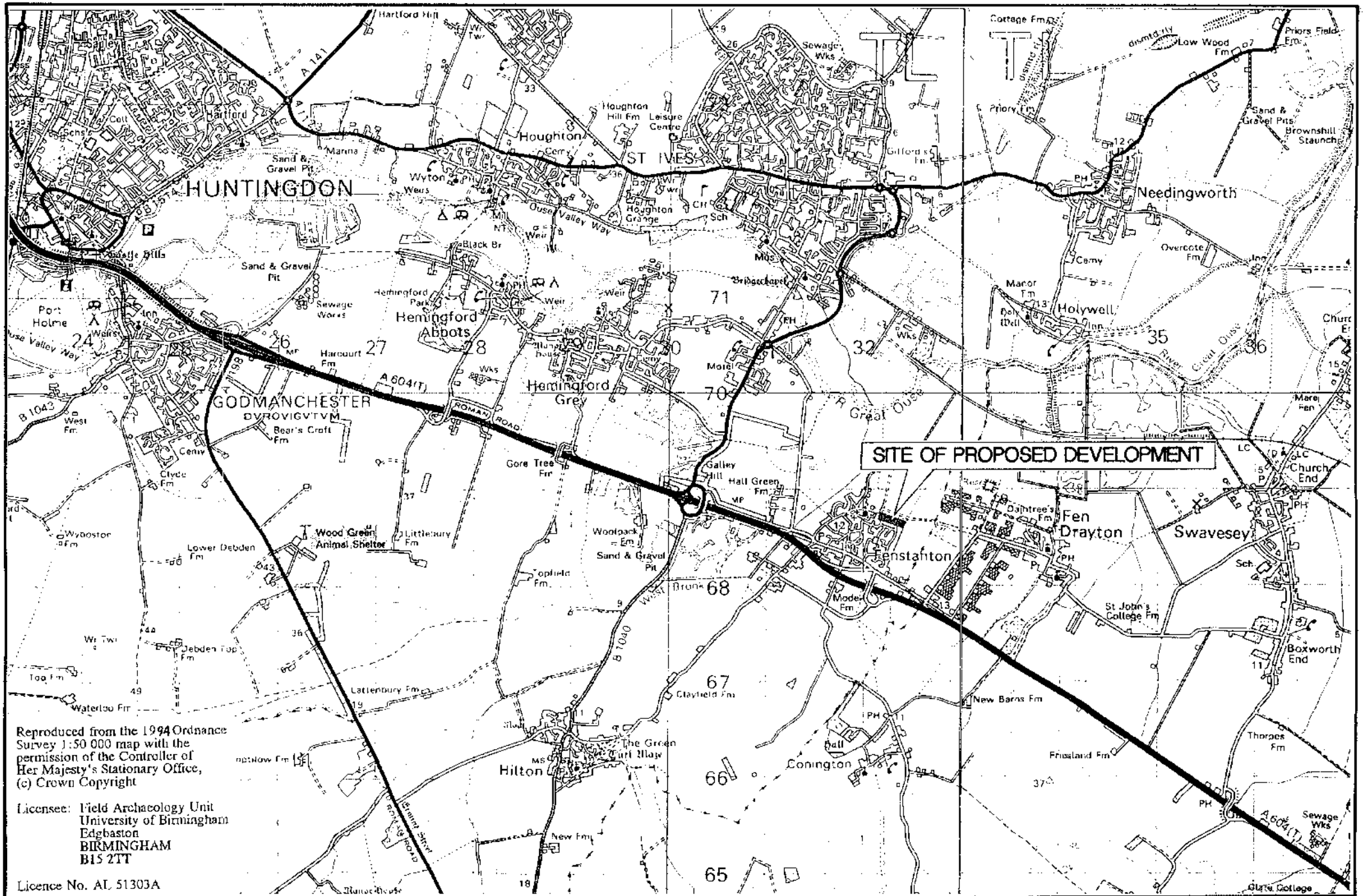
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## **12.0: Acknowledgements**

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Fig 1

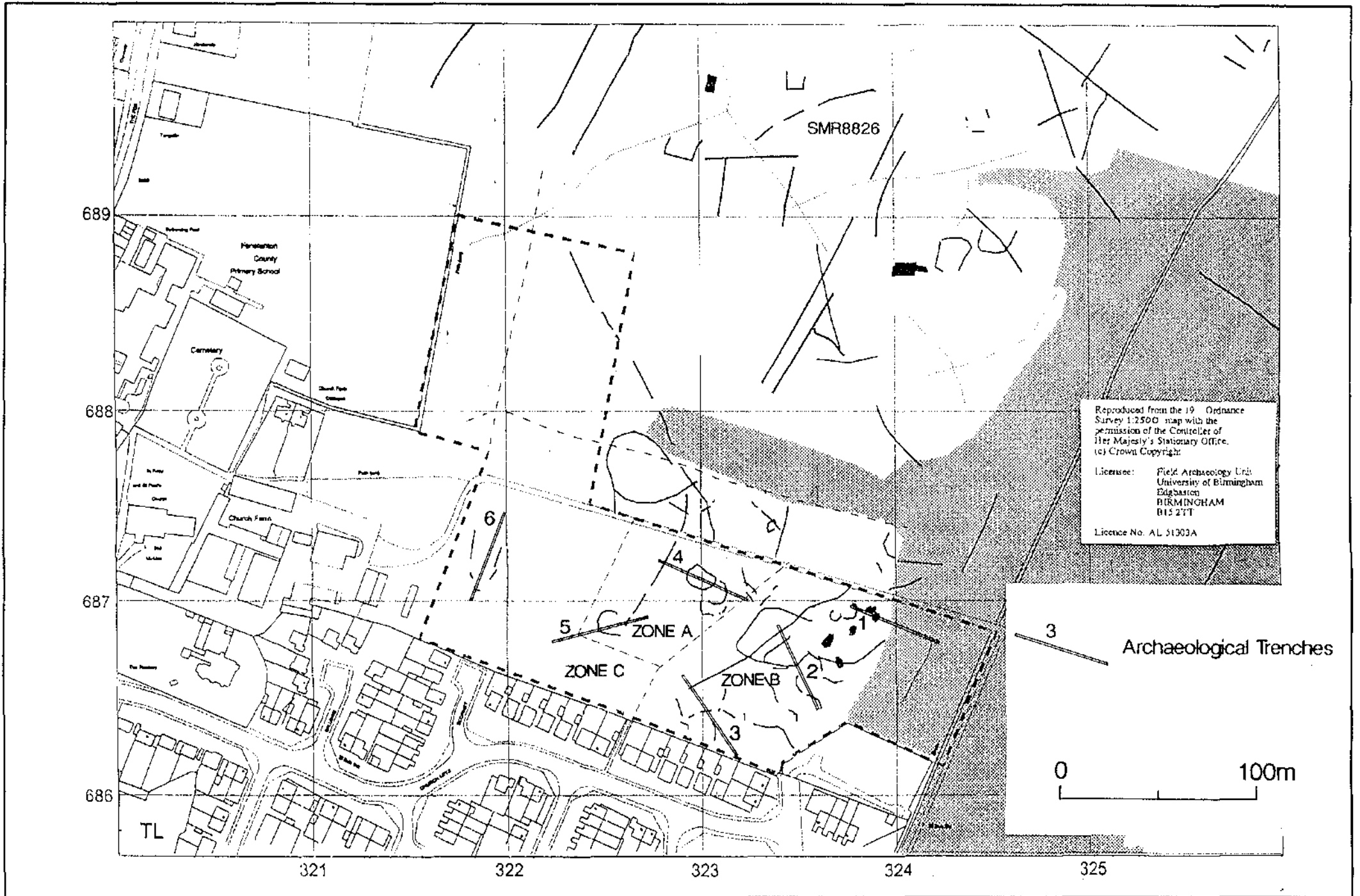


Fig2

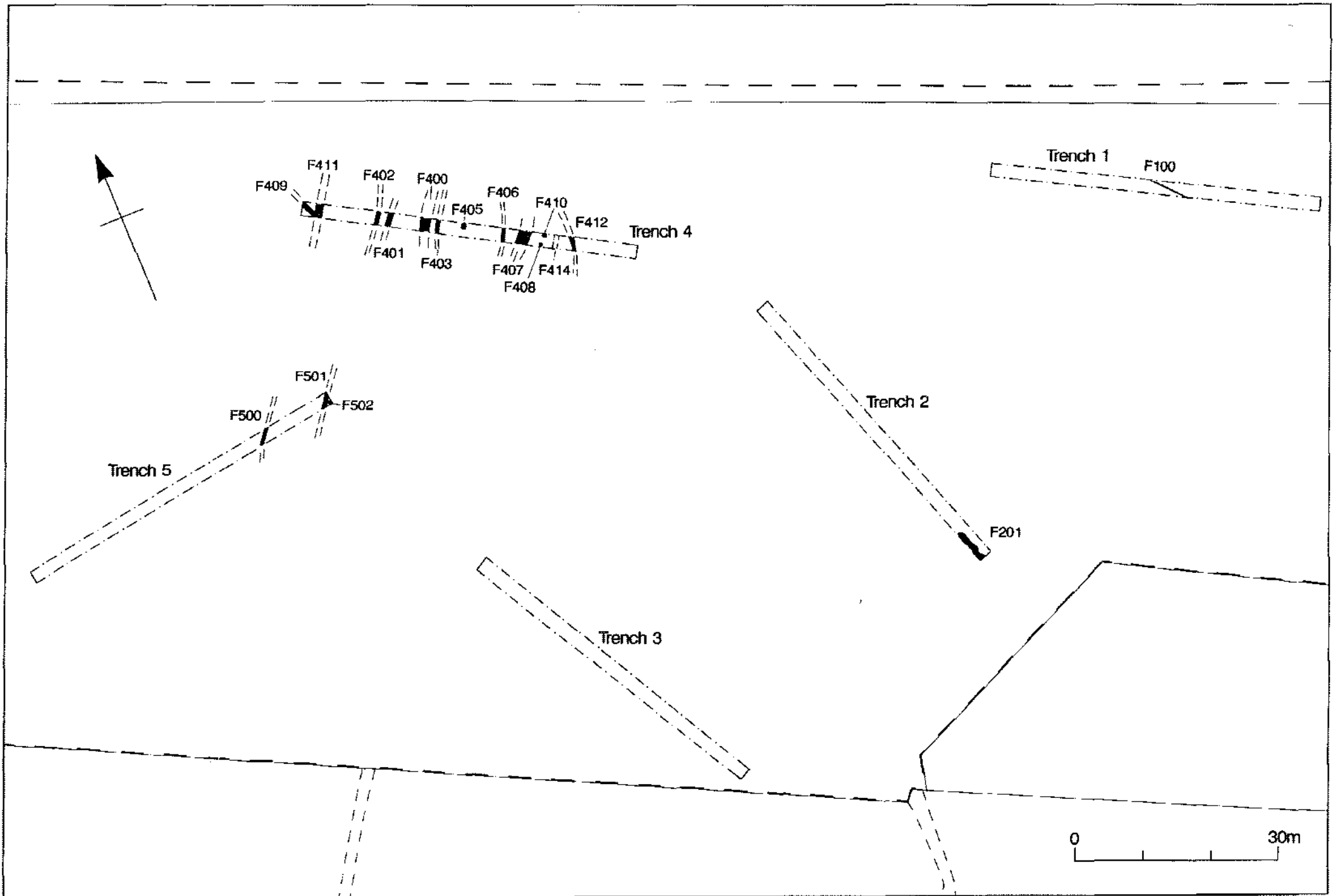


Fig.3



# TRENCH 4

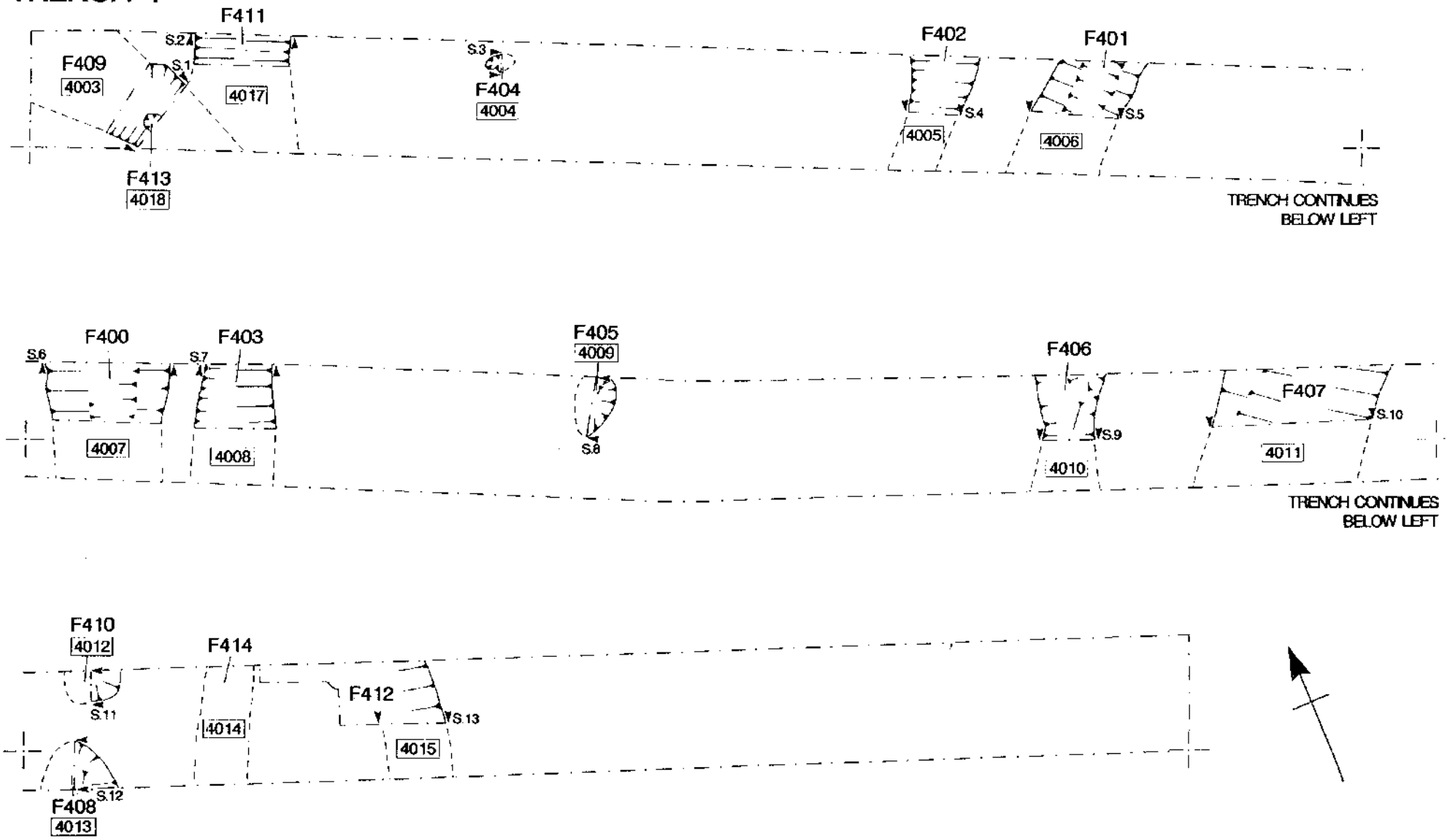


Fig4

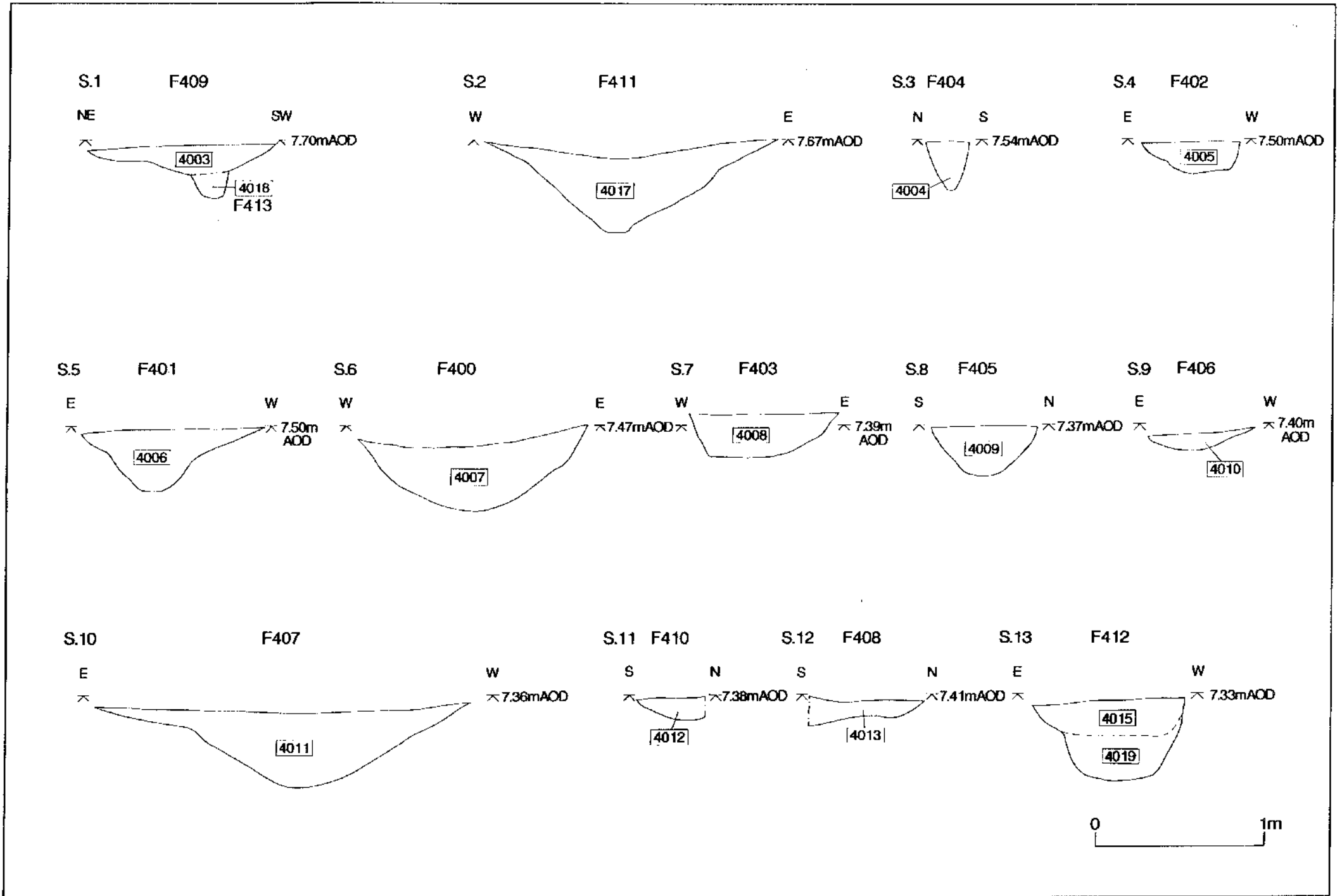


Fig5

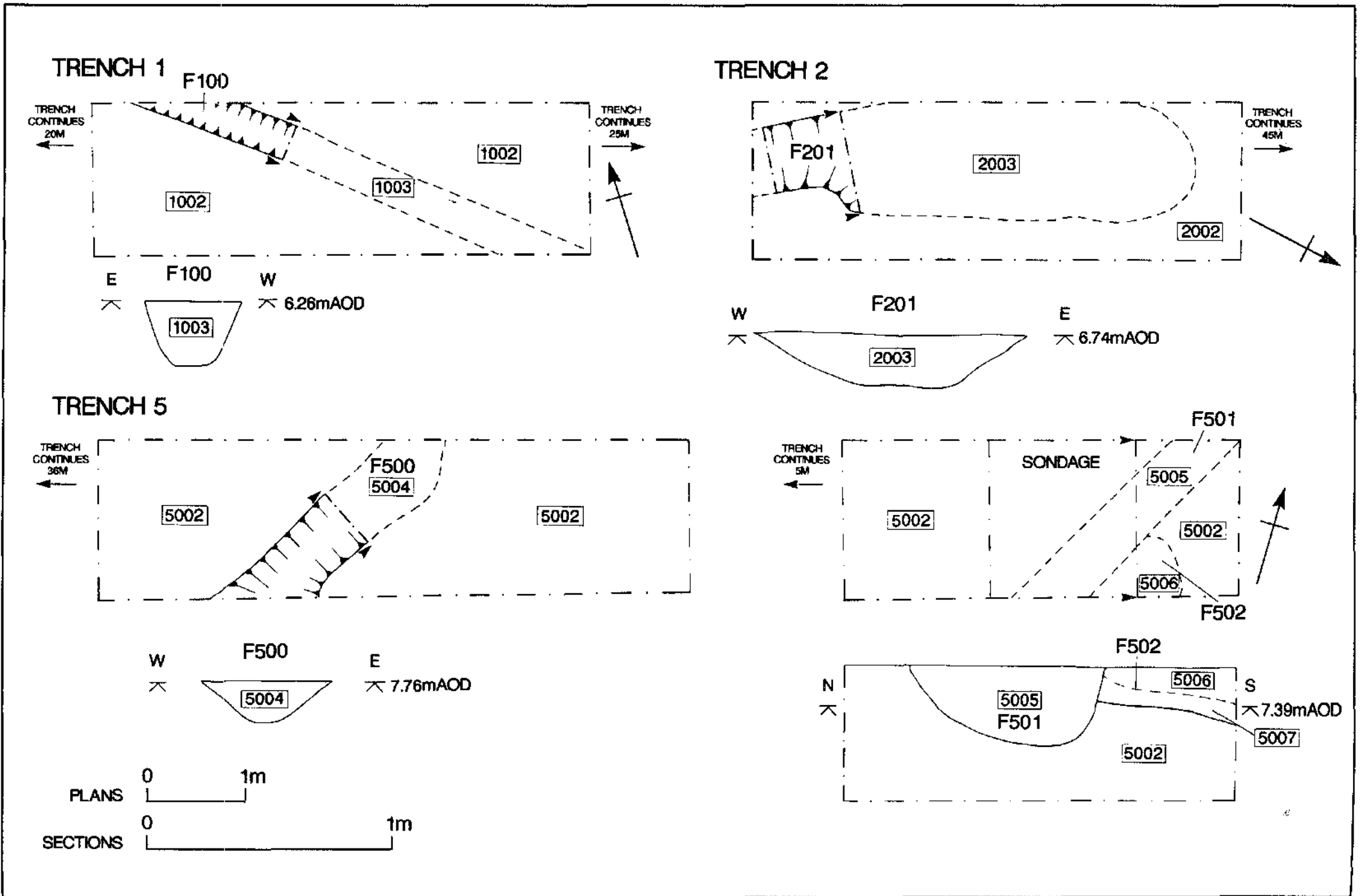


Fig.6