

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**156, CASTLE ROAD, COOKLEY,
HEREFORD AND WORCESTER**

**An Archaeological
Watching Brief 1997**

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 478
October 1997

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HEREFORD AND WORCESTER**
An Archaeological Watching Brief 1997

by
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Summary

A watching brief was carried out at 156, Castle Road, Cookley, Hereford and Worcester (NGR SO 843 802; SMR No. HWCM 21100; BUFAU Project No. 478, Site Code CRC 97) on 30th September 1997. The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, following a brief for the salvage excavation of the site prepared, in 1994, by Hereford and Worcester County Archaeological Service in response to a planning application submitted by Brittain Brothers who proposed a small-scale building development on the site. The current development is being undertaken by Whittingham Property Ltd.

Observations revealed no evidence of any activity earlier than the post-medieval period, much of the site having been previously disturbed by cellar construction apparently dating to the 19th century. However, it was also apparent that the site had been terraced subsequent to this date and that, therefore, any early remains would have been destroyed during this operation.

Introduction

The village of Cookley is named in a 10th-century charter as 'Culnan Clif'. Although no archaeological work has previously been undertaken in the immediate area of the site, its position, near the centre of the village, gave rise to expectations that some evidence for early settlement might be retrieved.

The geology of the area is recorded as Typical Brown Earths of the Bridgnorth Association (Soils of England and Wales, 1:25,000, sheet 3, Soil Survey of England and Wales). The subsoil encountered on the site was soft red sandstone and sand, varying in compactness.

The plot being developed had previously been occupied by a workshop building of recent construction (c. 40 years old - pers. comm. developer) which was levelled as the first stage of the current development programme. The house immediately adjacent to the site, to the north, is of probable early 19th-century date and it seems likely that a similar property once occupied the development site. A newly-built, modern detached house currently stands on the plot to the south.

The groundworks for the development comprised four contiguous trenches, c.1–1.5m deep by 1m wide, forming the rectangular foundation (10m x 6m) for a detached house. An attached garage with shallower foundations is to be constructed later on the north side.

Methodology

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological features revealed during contractors' groundworks, paying particular attention to the potential of the site to contain features associated with possible medieval settlement in the area. Recording

of the trenches involved measurement of their depths below ground level, observation of the sections and, where appropriate, limited hand-cleaning prior to photographic, graphic and written recording of the sections. The unstable nature of some stretches of the trenches made detailed definition and recording difficult.

Results (Figure 1)

Initial observations suggested that the south, east, and west construction trenches (Trenches 1, 2 and 4 respectively) had cut through some areas of previously disturbed deposits, but the northern trench (Trench 3) seemed empty of features. Topsoil had been removed from the site within the area of the building 'footprint' and it was evident from the difference in height of the topsoil surviving at the northern perimeter of the site and that at the southern edge (a drop of some 1m) that the ground had been terraced at some stage, probably to accommodate a building.

In **Trench 1** (10m long by 1m wide and ranging in depth from 0.5m to 1m below ground level) an area of disturbance was noted at the eastern end of the south section. A number of laid red quarry tiles (context 1010) protruded from the section and, to the west, butted up against three surviving courses of a single-brick wall (1009) running perpendicular to the trench. The quarry tiles were bedded directly onto natural sand and were blackened on their upper surface. Above the quarries, and to the east of the wall, was a very mixed context (1004) containing building rubble and mortar. The whole sequence in this area was truncated, and sealed by topsoil (1000).

Further west in Trench 1 another disturbed context (1005) was noted in the north section of the trench (and probably in the south section (1515)) The base of the trench had been excavated to a lower level by the contractors to establish a firm surface. Here, at the base of the north section (c.1m below ground level) and parallel to it, a few courses of rough-mortared brick (1011) were revealed (possibly the rear face of a wall) which were covered with a coating of coal dust (1012) (up to c.15mm thick). Approximately 0.40m to the east, where the trench base was at a higher level (c.0.60m below ground level), a fragment of a north-south orientated, single-brick wall (1014) survived. Its point of relationship, if any, with context 1011 was not visible. Context 1005, a loose mix of dark reddish-brown sand, sandstone chunks and building rubble (including a sheet of corrugated iron) extended along the trench face for approximately 3.5m from the wall 1014, and had caused the north face of the construction trench to become unstable.

The evidence from Trench 1 suggests that the remains here are of cellars belonging to a property that occupied this plot in the 19th-early-20th century. They appear to have been deliberately backfilled, presumably at the time of demolition of the property.

In **Trench 4**, (6m long by 1m wide, ranging in depth from 1m to 1.3m below ground level) at the southern end, a pit had been cut by the trench, remnants of it surviving in the west and east faces and in the bottom of the trench. The fill (1006) of the feature was a dark brown silt sand, mottled and lensed with lighter brown and with some flecks of mortar and charcoal/cinder, the latter increasing in quantity towards the base of the feature. Finds of a 'household' nature were retrieved from the context, namely a teaspoon, fragments of

porcelain, white 'china', and vessel glass. The feature may be interpreted as a domestic rubbish pit of probable 19th- or early-20th-century date.

Trench 2 (7m long by 1m wide, ranging in depth from 1m to 1.4m below ground level) had cut through a large expanse of a very mixed context (1002) made up of gravelly sand, building rubble (including whole and broken bricks, ceramic pipework, glass, roof slate and concrete chunks) and copious mortar, the latter giving the matrix a noticeably pinkish brown colour. The context was apparently bounded to the north and south by double-brick walls (1007 and 1008) running approximately perpendicular to the trench. However, the context extended below the bottom courses of the walls and may therefore represent not just an infilling of the space between the walls but, rather, the fill of a large pit purposely excavated, within what may have been a cellar space, to dispose of quantities of demolition rubble. Since the context includes chunks of modern concrete it would seem that this disposal may be related to a modern demolition episode, possibly at the time of the construction of the workshop premises c. "40 years ago".

At the northern end of Trench 2 a partial void had appeared in the east face of the trench, where the fill (1003) of a feature cut into the compacted natural red sand/sandstone had tumbled into the trench. The context was a very dark, blackish brown silt sand mixed with much cinder/charcoal and containing quantities of metal debris, stones, slate, glass and ceramic debris (broken drainage pipes, bricks, tiles, porcelain and pottery). The feature was cut directly into the natural sand/sandstone and was partially sealed by a thin (<10mm) layer of compacted light buff sand (1013). The contents of the pit suggest a function of rubbish disposal although, since its bottom was not contacted in the base of the foundation trench, this may be secondary use of an existing feature. The straight, clean sides of the pit suggest the possibility of its being a well.

Discussion

The majority of the archaeological features encountered on the site seem to relate to the use and disuse of a probable 19th-century residential property. Much of the ground to the south and east of the site has been disturbed by cellar construction probably associated with this property, the cellars at the east (rear) of the site having been backfilled with destruction rubble presumably at the time of demolition of the building. A relatively recent date for this destruction episode is suggested by the existence of modern debris in the fill of the cellar/demolition-debris-disposal-pit at the rear of the property (Context 1002, Trench 2).

The fact that the site has also been terraced is evidenced by the higher level of the ground surface adjoining the existing ?19th-century property to the north, and also by the truncation of the cellar structures – the surviving floor level of these being approximately 2 metres below the original, ?19th-century ground surface. The nature of Context 1005 (Trench 1), being composed mainly of loose sand and sandstone chunks, along with building debris, is suggestive of redeposited natural subsoil, presumably derived from the terracing activities and dumped in available cellar space. Approximately one metre of strata has been lost at the northern edge of the site and the levelling seems to have continued across the southern property boundary. It seems likely that the terracing occurred immediately after the demolition of the 19th-century house, prior to the construction of the workshop premises that existed on the site before the current redevelopment.

The northern half of the site seems to have been less affected by cellarage but here, as elsewhere on the site, no evidence of earlier activity was encountered.

The terracing of the site has meant that the likelihood of contacting early features is greatly reduced. Therefore the apparent absence of evidence for early settlement activity is not significant in predicting the existence of such evidence elsewhere in this area of Cookley.

Acknowledgements

The watching brief was sponsored by the developer, Whittingham Property Limited. Thanks are due to Mr K. Pugh and the on-site contractors for their co-operation in facilitating access to the site. The watching brief was undertaken by, and the report and illustrations were prepared by Liz Hooper. The project was monitored by Alex Jones.

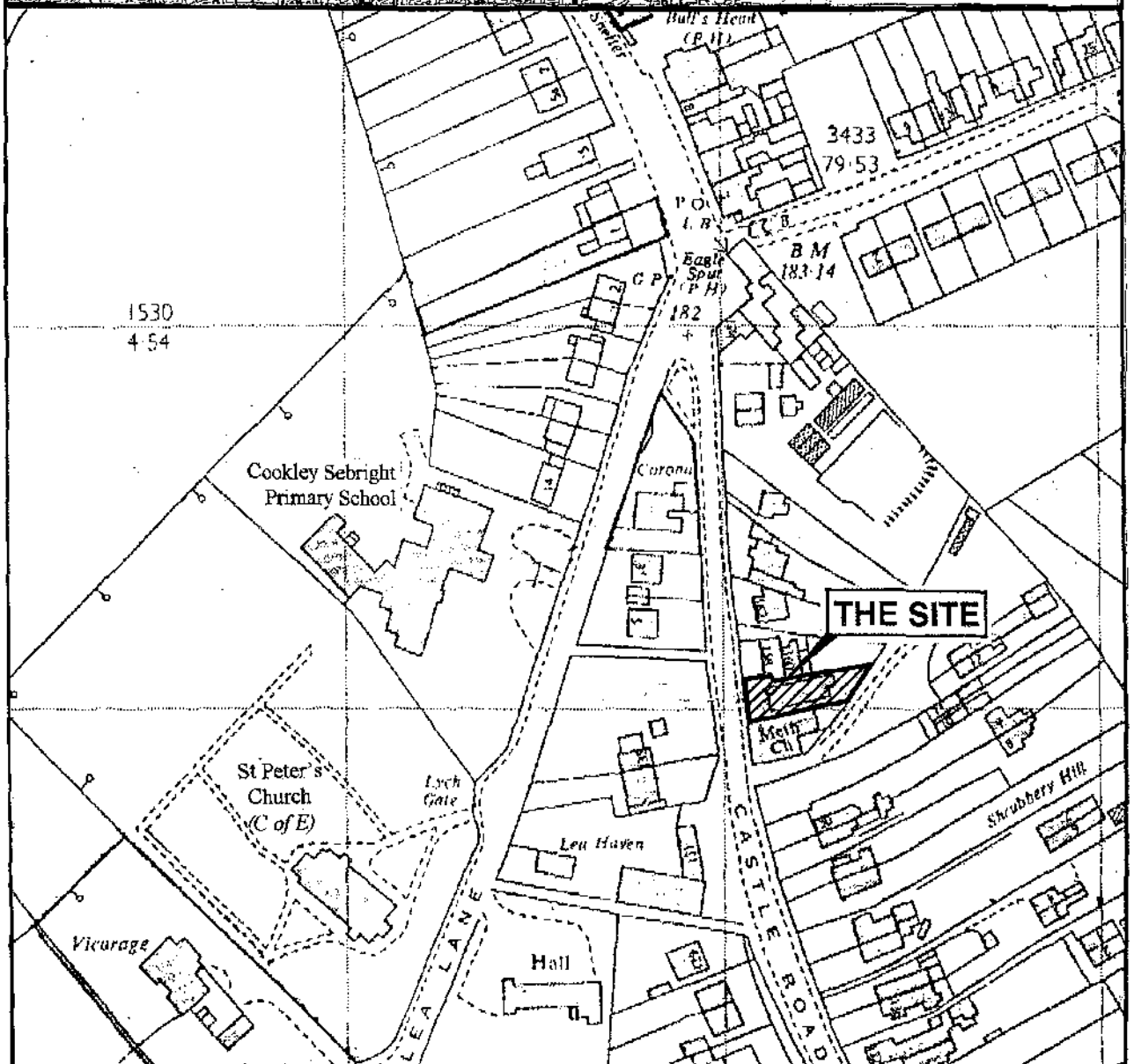
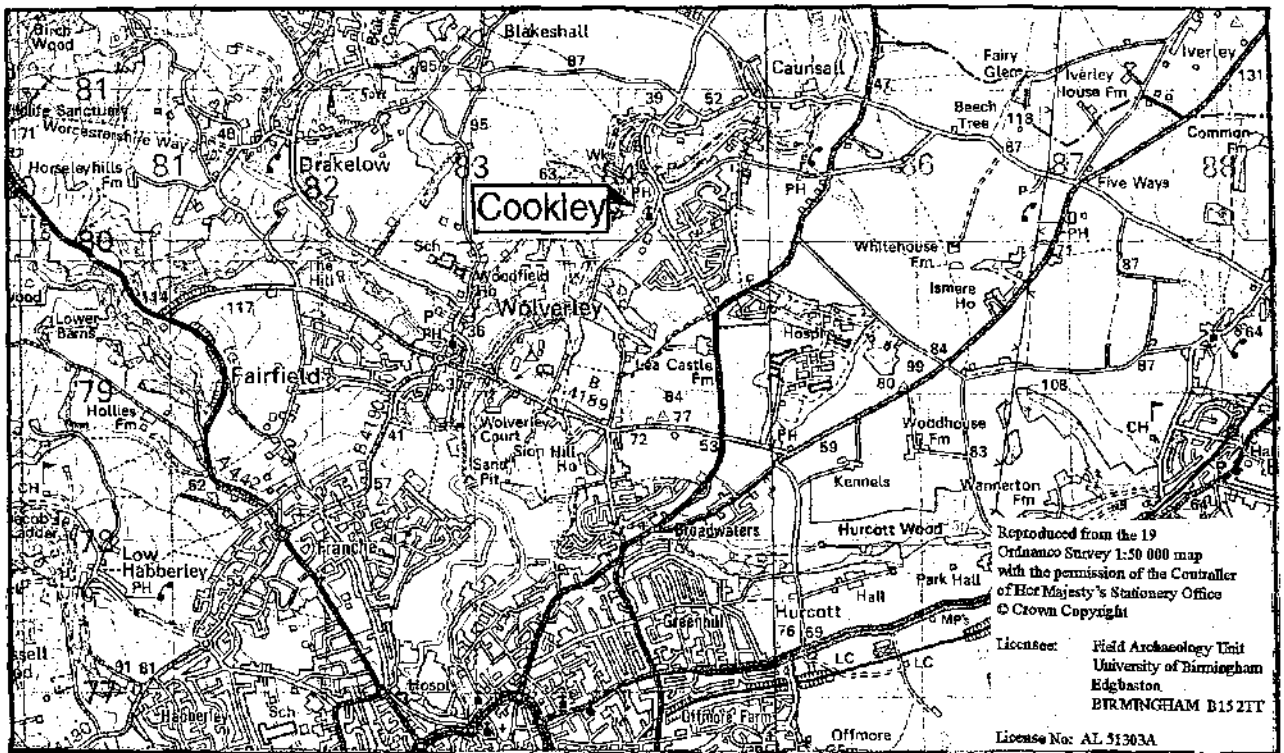


Figure 1. 156, Castle Road, Cookley: Location

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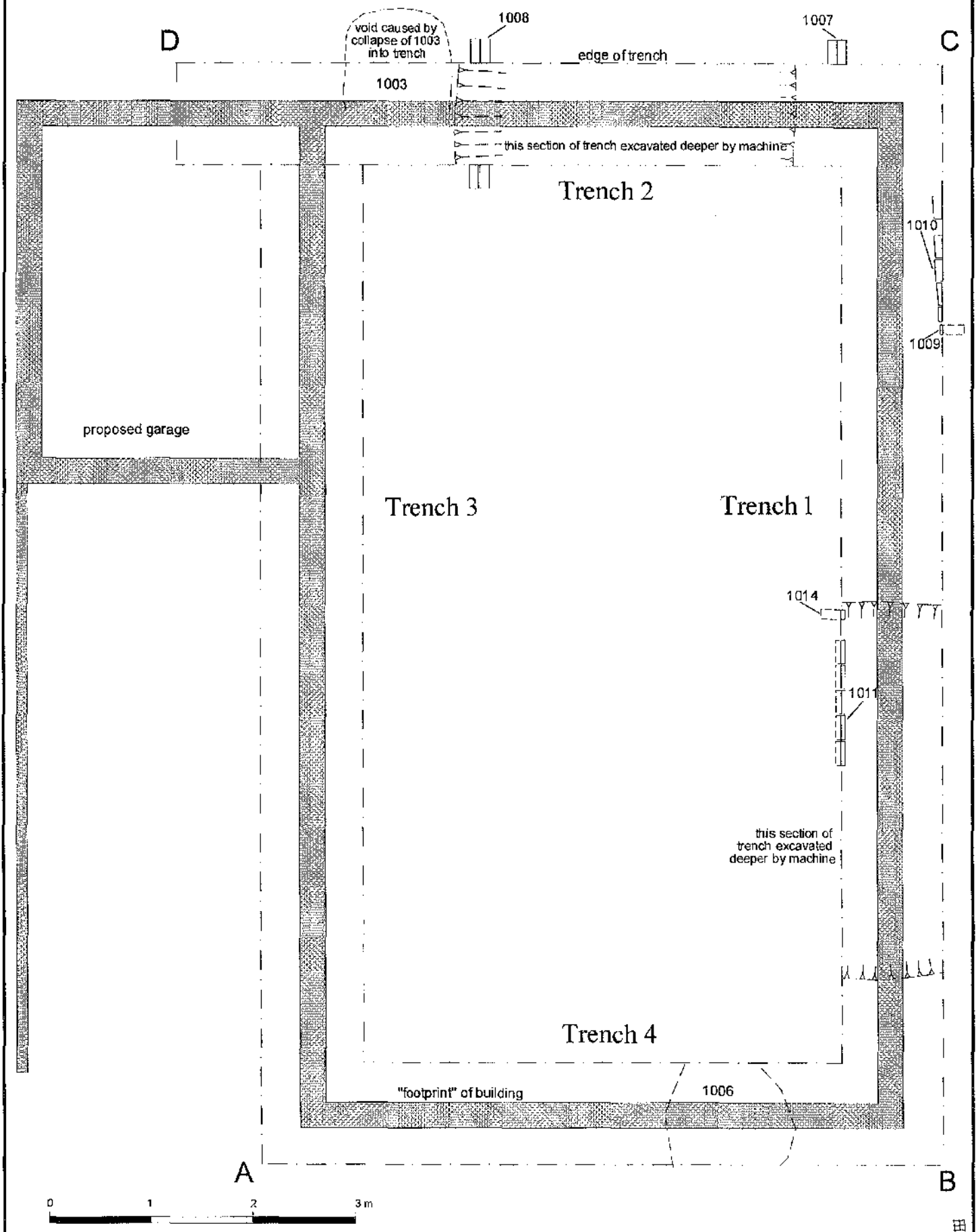
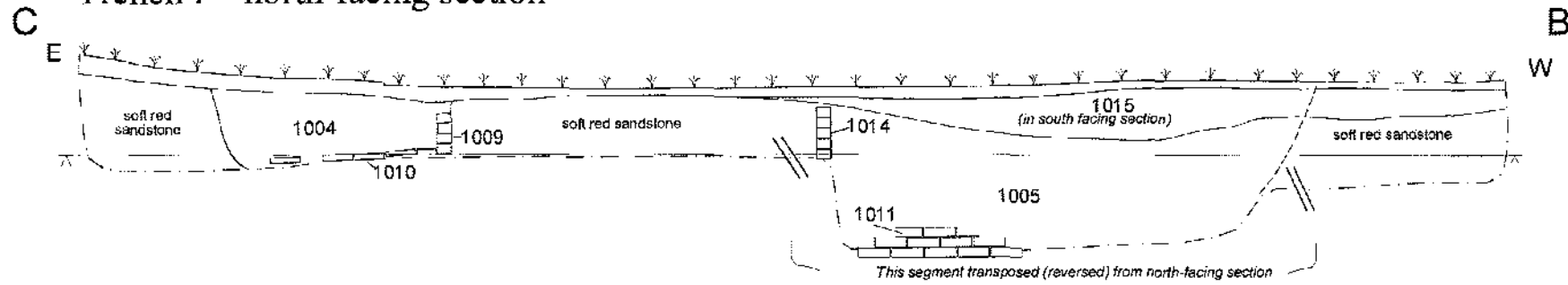


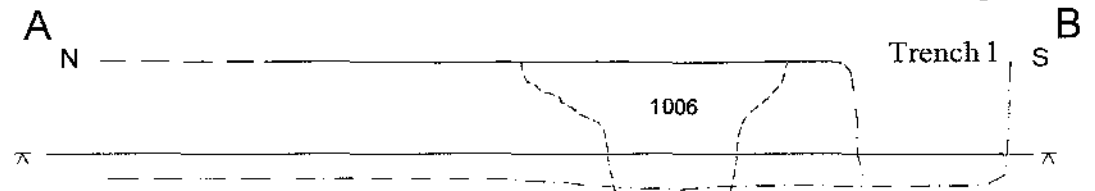
Figure 2. 156, Castle Road, Cookley: Sketch plan of foundation trenches and archaeological features. Based upon developer's plan of building "footprint".

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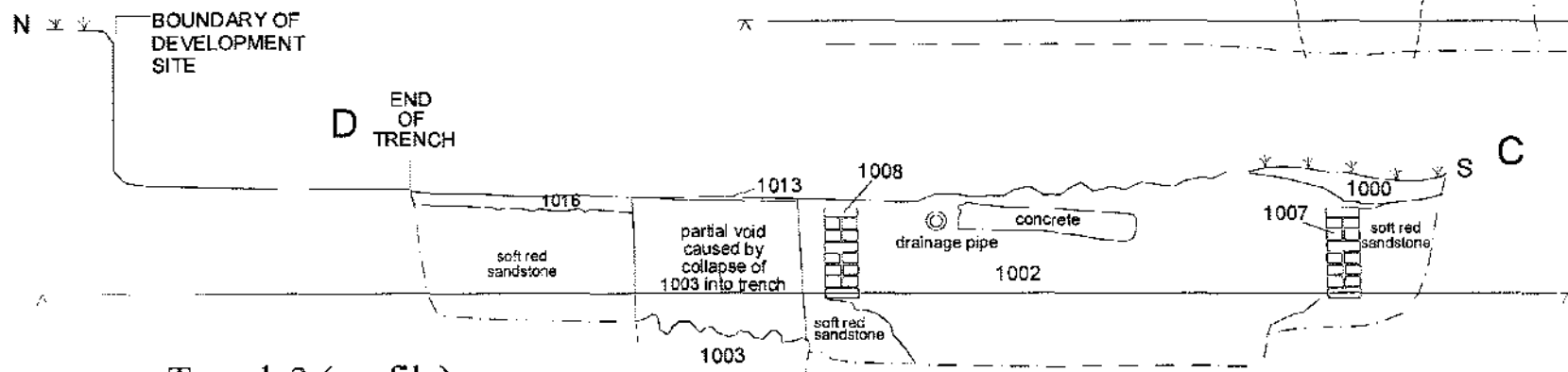
Trench 1 - north-facing section



Trench 4 - west-facing section



Trench 2 - west-facing section



Trench 3 (profile)

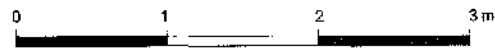
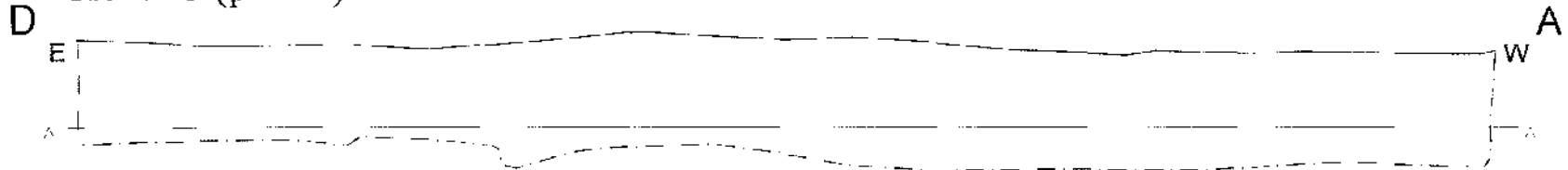


Figure 3. 156 Castle Road, Cookley: Sections and profiles of foundation trenches