No. 506

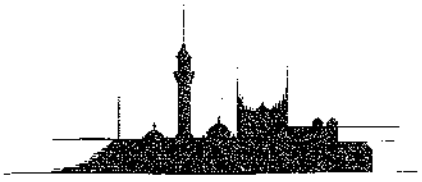
BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

The Gynsills, Glenfield, Leicestershire Archaeological Evaluation

December 1997-January 1998

Post-excavation Assessment and Research Design

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 506
April 1998

The Gynsills, Glenfield, Leicestershire
Archaeological Evaluation and Recording
December 1997-January 1998

Post-excavation Assessment and Research Design

by
S.J.Linnane and Lynne Bevan

For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux, Iain Ferris or Peter Leach (Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516
E-Mail: BUFAU@bham.ac.uk
Web Address: http://www.bufau.bham.ac.uk

The Gynsills, Glenfield, Leicestershire

Archaeological Evaluation and Recording, December 1997-January 1998

Post-excavation Assessment and Research Design

by S.J.Linnane and Lynne Bevan

1.0 Summary

An archaeological evaluation and subsequent area excavation was undertaken at The Gynsills, Glenfield in Leicestershire (SK 545 070) in advance of a proposed residential development. The work was commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants on behalf of David Wilson Homes Ltd, and was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in December 1997 and January 1998.

The possibility of Roman period occupation on the site was suggested by the earlier discovery of a scatter of Romano-British pottery in an adjacent field. The evaluation consisted of 7 trenches situated across the site. The trenches were generally lacking in archaeological remains except for Trench 2, situated to the northeast of the site, where ditches containing Roman pottery were uncovered.

The features identified have been interpreted as belonging to an enclosed rural settlement of the Roman period, the area excavated being on the south-western corner of the settlement. The main features consisted of a boundary ditch enclosing an area to the north and east which contained a sequence of frequently re-cut ditches running from east to west.

2.0 Introduction

Whilst undertaking archaeological field walking, Mr E.Tusa discovered a scatter of Roman pottery sherds in the field to the north of the site presently under consideration. The finds were presented to the Leicestershire County Museum Service where the collection was catalogued and the area registered on the county SMR (50 NE AL). In 1997 an application from David Wilson Homes Ltd. was registered with the Local Planning Authority to develop the site for housing (Planning Application Number 97/0803/1). The archaeological implications were noted and John Samuels Archaeological Consultants were commissioned to prepare a desk-top survey of the site with recommendations as to the needs and strategy of an archaeological evaluation of the site (John Samuels Archaeological Consultants 1997a). In 1997 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit were commissioned to undertake the evaluation, and work began on 1st December 1997.

The evaluation consisted of 7 trenches, each 25.0m. long by 1.70m. wide, excavated by machine to the top of any archaeological deposits, if present, or to the top of the natural clay (Fig. 2). Only in Trench 2, in the northeastern part of the site, were Roman features detected and the trench was extended by 25 square metres on either side of the original trench. Further features were noted, especially to the east of the initial trench. In consultation with Anne Graf, Senior Planning Archaeologist, Leicestershire County Council, it was decided to proceed immediately to an archaeological recording exercise. Trench 2 was enlarged to create an 'L'-shaped trench designed to examine archaeological remains on either side of the first identified feature, and extending as far north and east as possible without causing damage to the root systems of trees which lined the field edge. The new trench covered an area of c.500 sq. metres.

3.0 Location, geology and topography

The site of the proposed development is situated a half a mile to the north of the historic centre of Glenfield (mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086) which in turn lies 2 miles to the west of Leicester, once the important Roman city of Ratae Corinorum, founded by the Fosse Way early in the Roman occupation. The irregularly shaped field (OS Grid Reference SK 545 070) slopes from the east to the west and south towards the Rothley Brook. The drop being 13.0m. from east to west over a distance of 250m. The local geology consists of glacial till overlying Mercian mudstone with sand and gravel deposits at the eastern and southern boundaries of the site (see Trench 6). The area has been used for agricultural purposes from the medieval period onwards. This is most visible in the adjacent field, now municipal parkland, where the undulating contours of ridge and furrow are clearly visible, running in a north-easterly direction. The proposed development area has been neglected in the recent past and consequently evidence of the ridge and furrow is not so readily visible due to the overgrown nature of the site. Trench 7 was positioned on the correct alignment to detect the ridge and furrow in section. Trees and shrubs occur on all boundaries of the field except to the south-east, and a cluster of trees stands in the centre of the field.

4.0 Methods

The approved project specification (John Samuels Archaeological Consultants 1997b) described the methods to be used for the initial evaluation exercise. This consisted of the excavation of seven trenches each 25.0m. long by 1.70m. wide. The trenches were to be excavated through topsoil until archaeological features were identified or natural clay deposits were reached. The trenches were excavated by a mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket. The position of the trenches was indicated in the project specification, and they were intended to provide an adequate sample of archaeological survival over the whole of the proposed development site. After machine excavation the trenches were manually cleaned and one long face photographed and drawn at a scale of 1:20.

Where contexts and features were identified they were recorded on pro forma record cards and sampled appropriately.

5.0 The evaluation (Fig. 2)

Trench 1

1001 topsoil, 1002 subsoil, 1003 natural clay.
Some finds were collected, during machining, of post medieval date.

Trench 2

See Area 2 below.

Trench 3

No archaeological deposits identified.

Trench 4

No archaeological deposits identified.

Trench 5

No archaeological deposits identified.

Trench 6

Mechanical excavation ceased at geological horizons consisting of sands and gravels, different in character from the clay deposits found elsewhere on the site. Only one feature was observed (F6201). This proved to be a bowl-shaped hearth (0.30m. in diameter and 0.20m. deep) with a fill consisting of brown clay rich in charcoal. No evidence for industrial use was found, nor were there any finds capable of providing dating. The whole of the fill was sampled for possible carbon dating or environmental analysis. Surrounding this feature was an area of orange sand, 6002. This was originally interpreted as the fill of F6202 but later recognised as a change in the natural subsoil brought about when the hearth was in use.

Trench 7 (Figs.5 and 6)

Topsoil 7013, subsoil 7014, clay subsoil 7015, grey silt clay 7016, natural red brown clay 7017.

The field to the west of the development site is currently maintained as public parkland, and the larger part of the field consists of closely mown turf. The remains of ridge and furrow, probably dating to the medieval period, are visible running from the northwest to the southeast. The ground of the area undergoing evaluation would likewise show evidence of this agricultural practice except for the fact that it is neglected and the vegetation conceals the underlying contours. The north section of

Trench 7 cuts across the alignment of the ridge and furrow, which was clearly apparent in section (Fig.6).

After excavation by machine, to natural, seven negative features were identified; five trenches and two small clusters of chalk blocks in a grey/brown clay matrix (Fig.5).

The features, running from west to east, were:

F7201 (7001) cluster of chalk fragments, a possible postpad?
F7203 (7003) trench with stone infill, a field drain.
F7202 (7002) cluster of chalk fragments, a possible postpad?
F7204 (7004) trench with mixed clay and chalk fill, a field drain?
F7205 (7005) trench running in a north easterly direction filled by yellow/brown sandy clay, a field drain?
F7206 (7006) trench with mixed clay fill, a field drain.
F7207 (7007) trench with ceramic field drain *in situ*.

It is likely that all these features are of modern date, although in some cases their purposes are uncertain (the chalk clusters). The fact that significantly more activity occurs here, lower down the slope, than elsewhere on the site, might be caused by the greater likelihood of flooding and consequently the greater need for drainage.

6.0 Archaeological recording in Area 2 (Fig. 3)

6.1 Methods

The area was cleared of topsoil and subsoil to a depth of c.0.50m. using a 360-degree mechanical excavator. At the lower, southern end of the site a 1.0m.deep sump was excavated from east to west in order to drain away surface water. Spoil heaps were arranged to the north and east of the site. An arbitrary grid was then established, with a central point given the grid reference East 100 North 200. The site was then gridded in 5.0m. by 5.0m. squares. The area was planned at a scale of 1:20 within the constraints of the grid, and the finds were also allocated grid numbers to identify location. Each grid square was trowelled clean, features located, photographed and planned. Sections were then cut across appropriate points. All features were excavated by hand whilst all finds, identified visually, were collected. No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified.

6.2 Results

At this interim stage it is not possible to attempt a detailed phased analysis of the features uncovered; close examination of pottery and ditch sections during full post excavation analysis will enable a more detailed dissection of the site. The area had been subject to ploughing in the medieval period and the features were all truncated. No evidence of stratified surfaces survived.

The first feature identified during the initial evaluation was F2201, a ditch running in a southerly direction from the northwest corner of the site before turning eastwards.

The ditch was 1.0m. wide and c.0.60m. deep with steep sides and a cluster of stone blocks in the base. On turning eastwards the ditch became much slighter (c.0.50m. wide and 0.30m. deep) and then ran into a large area of grey brown silty clay (F2062) which extended beyond the eastern limit of the excavation. This feature may have functioned as a sump for the main ditch, collecting water before discharging it as an overflow down the hill. The main ditch formed a boundary between the numerous features to the east and a complete absence of features to the west and south. The ditch has been identified as defining an enclosure which would extend to the north and east.

The features encountered within this boundary ditch consisted of a series of ditches generally running from east to west. The ditches had been recut, in some instances up to four times. Only one feature showed indications of a structural nature. F2280 consisted of a ditch c.1.0m. wide and 0.30m. deep running from west to east. On the northern side of this ditch were three semicircular extensions, c.0.30m. in diameter and 0.10m. deep. These were c.2.0m. apart and between them were two circular patches indicative of post holes. The feature has been identified as a palisaded ditch.

The features tended to become more concentrated in the northeastern corner of the site where a series of ditches intersected. Larger ditches ran from west to east whilst subsidiary ditches branched off northwards. Towards the south of the site, still within the boundary ditch, the ditches became scarcer and less evidence of re-cutting was observed. The ditches were also smaller in this area.

Between the main cluster of ditches to the north and those to the south was a comparatively clear area with one uncharacteristic feature, F2281, which ran from west to east initially, then turned north and then northeast before intersecting with F2280.

Figure 4 shows two sections across a complex of ditches comprising F2221, etc. The sections provide an indication of the form of the ditches and illustrate the nature of the repeated re-cutting.

7.0 Roman Pottery

The assemblage consisted of 345 sherds of Roman pottery, 118 of which were unstratified, and a further three of which came from a context contaminated by post-Roman material (Context 1002). The majority of the fragments were small and abraded body sherds, with the exception of several larger fragments from some of the more substantial features, such as two joining rim fragments from a large greyware storage vessel and a roughly-circular 'lid' made from a deliberately shaped fragment of broken greyware (Feature 2201, Context 2017). Several sherds of mortaria, possibly all of which are of Mancetter Hartshill types, were also present in the collection, including a large stamped rim fragment (Context 2025), and two further rim fragments and a spout (Context 2075).

The largest group, comprising 57 sherds, came from Feature 2221 (Context 2025), and a group of 25 sherds came from Context 2022, including two stamped Samian sherds from the pedestal base of a cup or small bowl . Other Samian sherds tended to be small, abraded and plain.

7.1 Fabrics

An initial scan of the pottery revealed at least nine different fabrics, summarised below:

Fabric	*Sherd Count*
Samian (all plain)	20
Mortaria	14
Black Burnished Ware	46
BB Local Copy	11
Oxidised	18
Greywares	215
Shell-tempered	15
Creamwares	4
Black Vesicular	2
Total	**345**

At least three different fabrics are present among the greywares, which account for over 62% of the assemblage, and the oxidised wares and mortaria might also be subdivided on further analysis. The only potentially pre-Roman Iron Age material in the collection are two joining rim sherds from a small jar of a vesicular black fabric (unstratified).

7.2 Dating

An initial scan of the assemblage reveals several indications that the assemblage is early in date, such as the incidence of oxidised wares; handmade, rather than wheelmade, shell-tempered ware; acute lattice decoration on some of the Black Burnished Ware fragments; and the possibility that the mortaria were from the Mancetter Hartshill kilns. These factors suggest a date within the first to second century A.D. (Jeremy Evans pers. comm.), which correlates with the dating of the plate brooch (discussed below).

Although this small rural assemblage might appear initially unpromising - 33% of the assemblage is unstratified while c.62% of the assemblage is represented by greywares - it is recommended that a quantification of the material is prepared for publication. As no large stratified groups are present, only publication of any individual diagnostic and unusual sherds is recommended. The assemblage may otherwise provide spot dating information for the stratigraphic text. Richard Hingley (1989, 1991a, 1991b) has argued that small rural sites have been understudied in Romano-British archaeology, while Jeremy Evans (1995) has shown that well-presented and published data on small rural assemblages of pottery and other materials are crucial to comparative studies that look beyond site-specific problems.

8.0 Other Finds

8.1 Roman Glass

Two fragments of Roman vessel glass were recovered: a blue-green body fragment (unstratified) and a small turquoise blue pedestal base (Context 2030), a diagnostic form for which published parallels should be sought.

8.2 Copper Alloy

An oval-shaped, leaded copper alloy ring and a circular plate brooch were recovered, both of which were unstratified. The brooch, which is decorated with three concentric rings infilled with enamel, the outer one of which had retained most of its bright blue colouration, can be generally dated to the mid-first to late-second century A.D. (Hattatt 1982, 136). More research is recommended on this object, including a search for local and regional parallels.

8.3 Brick and Tile

One fragment of brick and 34 fragments of tile were recovered, of which ten were unstratified and one came from a context contaminated by later material (1002). The majority of the remaining 23 fragments were from contexts which also contained Roman pottery, with which they are generally regarded as contemporary. However, with the exception of two *tegulae* fragments (Contexts 2028 and 2077), the general state of fragmentation precluded the identification of recognisably Roman tile forms. Beyond alluding to this material in the published report, no further action is recommended.

8.4 Stone

One undiagnostic flint flake and two quern fragments were recovered. Geological identification of the quern fragments (Contexts 2023 and 2024) is recommended, with a view to identifying the source of the raw material.

8.5 Iron

Iron objects consist of nine nails, a horseshoe, two fragments of rod and binding strip, and 34 hobnails, 30 of which came from the same context (2026) and appear to represent the remains of a discarded Roman sandal. No further action is recommended for this material.

8.6 Lead

Lead finds consist of a small section of rod and a fragment of plate (unstratified), a washer and a large piece of sheet (Context 2003), and a small strip (Context 2025), all of which, though undiagnostic, are potentially Roman in date and for which no further action is recommended beyond the compilation of a summary catalogue.

8.7 Animal Bone

A total of 217 fragments of animal bone was recovered, 20 of which were unstratified. The bone was generally poorly-preserved and very fragmentary and appears to have been dominated by cattle bones. The majority of the bone originated from contexts containing Roman pottery, indicating the disposal of kitchen waste in large ditches. A short report, including the cataloguing of this material, is recommended with a view to identifying species and butchery practices.

8.8 Post-Medieval Finds

Post-Medieval material consisted of 12 fragments of pottery, two clay pipe fragments, and six fragments of glass including the base of a wine glass. No further action is recommended for any of this material.

9.0 Discussion

The excavation has uncovered the south western corner of an enclosed settlement dating to the first to second centuries A.D. The evidence from the pottery and other finds would suggest that the site is of fairly high status. Although only one feature could be interpreted as being structural, enough evidence was obtained to suggest that the focus of the settlement would have been to the north and east of the excavation area. Geophysical survey of the adjacent field may well provide the form of structure which undoubtedly existed in the vicinity. The absence of building stone and existence of fragments of roofing tile would suggest a Roman form of rectilinear construction, with timber walls and tiled roof.

10.0 Research potential

The archaeological excavation at The Gynsills has provided a significant quantity of artefactual remains closely associated with the excavated features of an agricultural settlement with its focal point to the north-east of the area under discussion. The assessment suggests that this site is of regional importance as defined in PPG 16.

The finds and features deserve analysis and publication as they provide important additional information to our knowledge of settlement in this region in the early period of Roman occupation.

Peter Liddle of Leicestershire County Museum Service has proposed that a geophysical survey be undertaken in the adjacent field. Such a survey would enhance the information obtained from this excavation and may even reveal the form of architecture in use within this settlement. It must be stressed that this additional work will be undertaken by LCMS and does not present any cost implications.

By combining the results of this excavation and the proposed geophysical survey with previous work undertaken in the area a greater understanding of occupation patterns of the period can be obtained in this important area close to the Roman city of Ratae (Leicester) and the Fosse Way.

Detailed analysis of the pottery should provide evidence of trading patterns and allow a tentative assessment of the status and length of occupation of the site. As stressed in 7.2, small, rural sites are understudied in this period, publication of this site will provide a contribution towards rectifying this situation.

Analysis of the bone collection, although small, could provide an insight into the agricultural practices of the settlement.

Further research leading to publication of the data in the form outlined below should consist of.

Geophysical survey of adjacent field (a desirable but not essential component)

Detailed analysis of excavated features and interpretation of their phasing

Analysis of the pottery assemblage

Analysis of the bone assemblage

Comment on individual significant finds e.g. glass and the brooch

Catalogue of other finds

Preparation of research archive

11. Task List.

Below is a list of tasks with a breakdown of anticipated time required to accomplish each task.

1. Preparation of detailed site history, with Harris matrix and phasing, first draft. 3 days. S.J.Linnane.

2. Preparation of finds reports, pottery, a) 5 days, Lynne Bevan
animal bone, b) 1 day, U.Albarella
other finds, c) 2 days, Lynne Bevan

3. Preparation of draft report incorporating information from specialist reports. 2 days.S.J.Linnane.

4. Preparation of drawings in draft, 1 day, S.J.Linnane.

5. Preparation of site and finds drawings, 3 days. M.Breedon.

6. Compilation of report. 1 day, S.J.Linnane.

9. Edit report, 0.5 day, S.Buteux.

10. Amendments and re-editing. 1 day, S.J.Linnane.

11. Dispatch to publisher 0.5 day, S.J.Linnane.

12. Compilation of research archive and proof reading, 1 day, S.J.Linnane.

13. Deposition of archive and finds, 0.5 day, S.J.Linnane.

12.0 Publication Synopsis

Introduction	500 words
Site location, topography and history	1000 words, 2 ills.
Excavation results, phasing and feature description	2000 words, 3 ills.
Results of geophysical survey*	1000 words, 1 ill.
The finds	
Pottery	1000 words, 2 ills.
Animal bone	500 words
Other	500 words, 1 ill.
Discussion	500 words
Acknowledgements	200 words
References	500 words
Totals	**7700 words, 9 ills.**

* This is a desirable addition but is not essential for the progression of the project

13.0 References

Evans, J. 1995 'Roman Finds Assemblages. Towards an integrated approach?', in P. Rush (Ed). *The Theoretical Roman Archaeology Second Conference Proceedings*, 33-58.

Hattatt, R. 1982 *Ancient and Romano-British Brooches*.

Hingley, R. 1989 *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain*.

Hingley, R. 1991a 'The Romano-British Countryside: the Significance of Rural Settlement', in R.F.J. Jones (Ed). *Britain in the Roman Period: Recent Trends*, 75-80.

Hingley, R. 1991b 'Past, Present and Future - the Study of the Roman Period in Britain'. *Scottish Archaeological Review* 8, 90-101.

John Samuels Archaeological Consultants 1997a *A Desk-based Archaeological Assessment of Land at The Gynsills, Glenfield, Leicestershire*.

John Samuels Archaeological Consultants 1997b *A Specification for Trial Trenching of Land at The Gynsills, Glenfield, Leicestershire*

14.0 Acknowledgements

The evaluation was monitored by Dan Slatcher for John Samuels Archaeological Consultants, by Anne Graf for Leicestershire County Council and by Simon Buteux for Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit who also acted as project manager. Thanks are due to David Wilson Homes Ltd. for their sponsorship of the project.

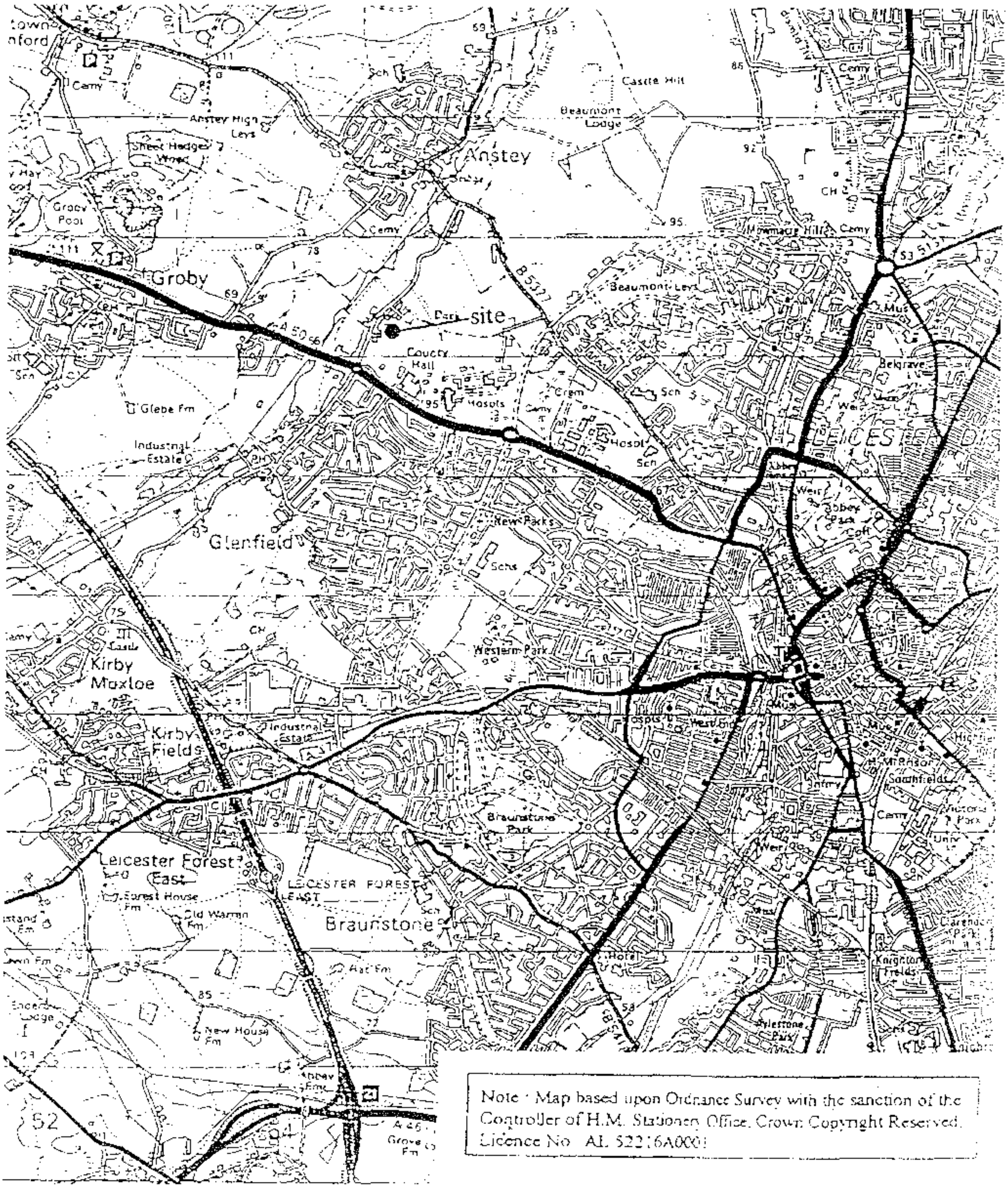
The evaluation was supervised by S.J.Linnane and the field team consisted of J.Hovey, R.Bridgman, L.Mather and L.Bashford.

Especial thanks to Mr.B.Kimberley who worked voluntarily with the project using his skill with the metal detector to obtain finds from the spoil heaps, and undertook a sweep across the site which located the position of metallic finds and consequently features prior to excavation.

Appendix: the Research Archive

The research archive consists of:

Feature cards	c.50
Context cards	c.100
Site drawings	20
Photographs B&W	4 films
Colour slide	5 films
Survey notes etc.	1 A4 site notebook
Floppy disc (Penmap survey)	1
The finds	See sections 7.0 and 8.0



Note : Map based upon Ordnance Survey with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office. Crown Copyright Reserved. Licence No AL 52216A0001

Fig.1

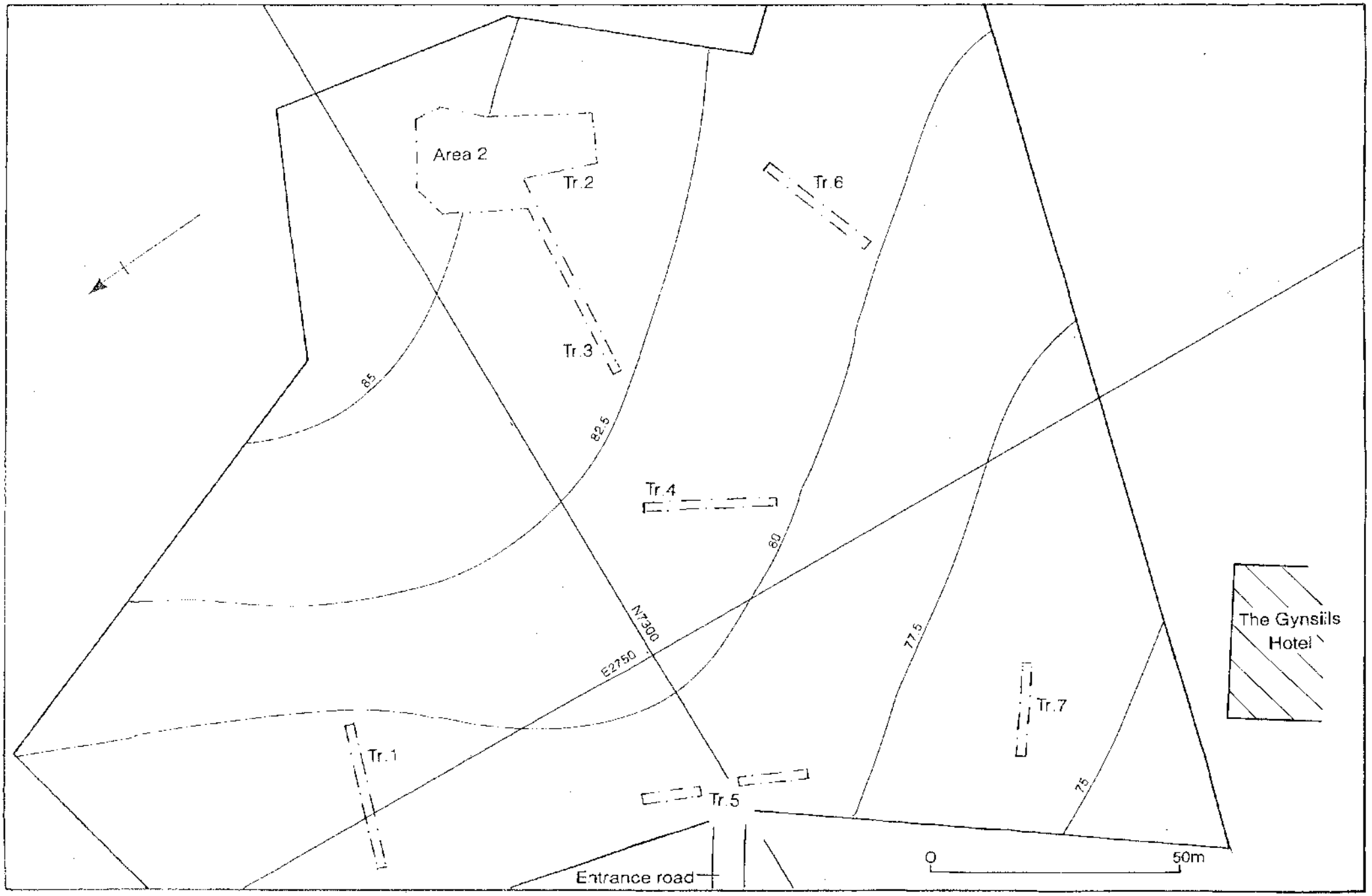

Area 2
Tr.2
Tr.6
Tr.3
85
82.5
Tr.4
80
N7300
E2750
77.5
The Gynsills
Hotel
Tr.7
Tr.1
Tr.5
75
0
50m
Entrance road

Figure 2

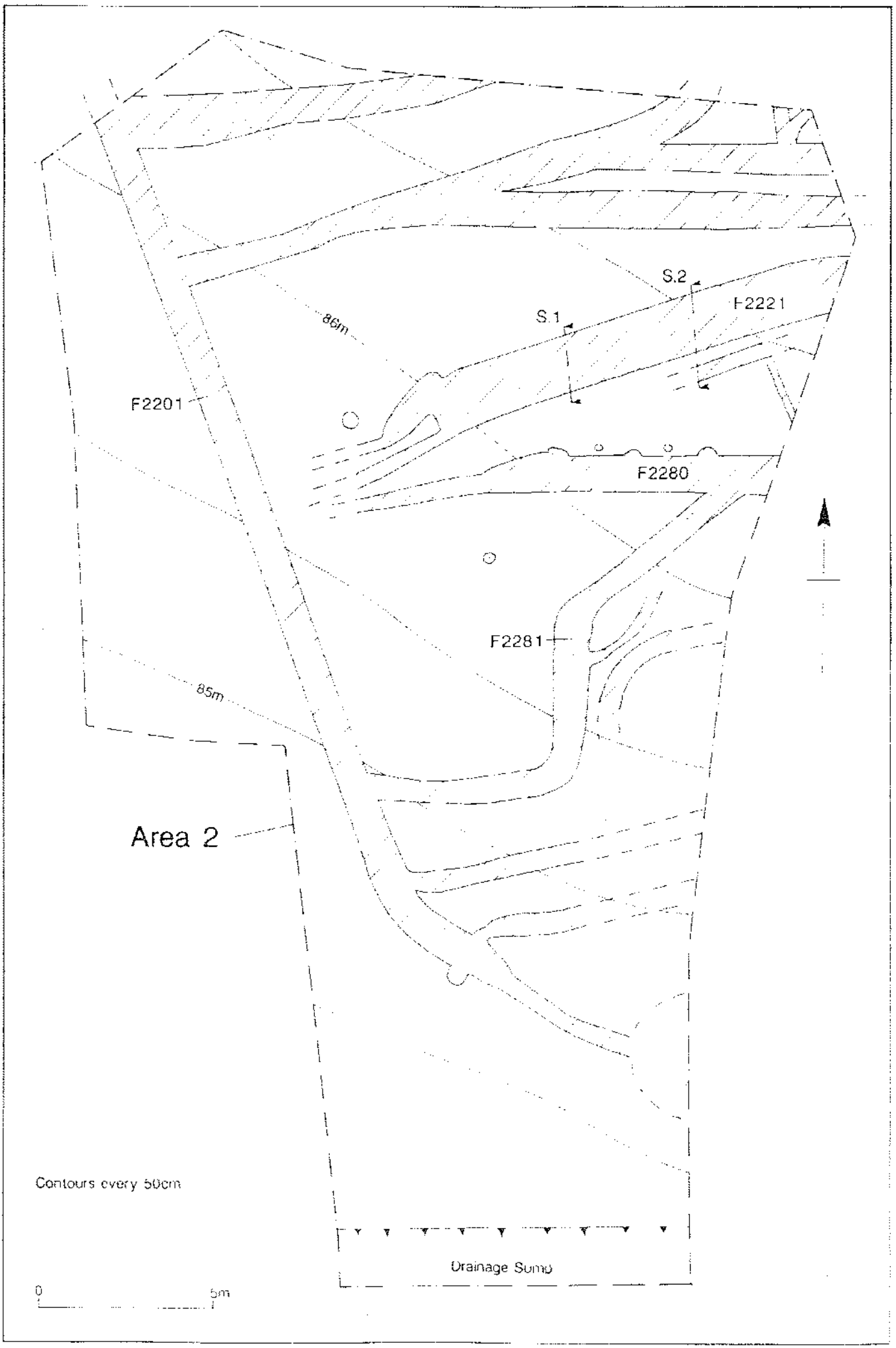

S.2
S.1
F2221
86m
F2201
F2280
F2281
85m
Area 2
Contours every 50cm
Drainage Sump
0
5m

Fig.3

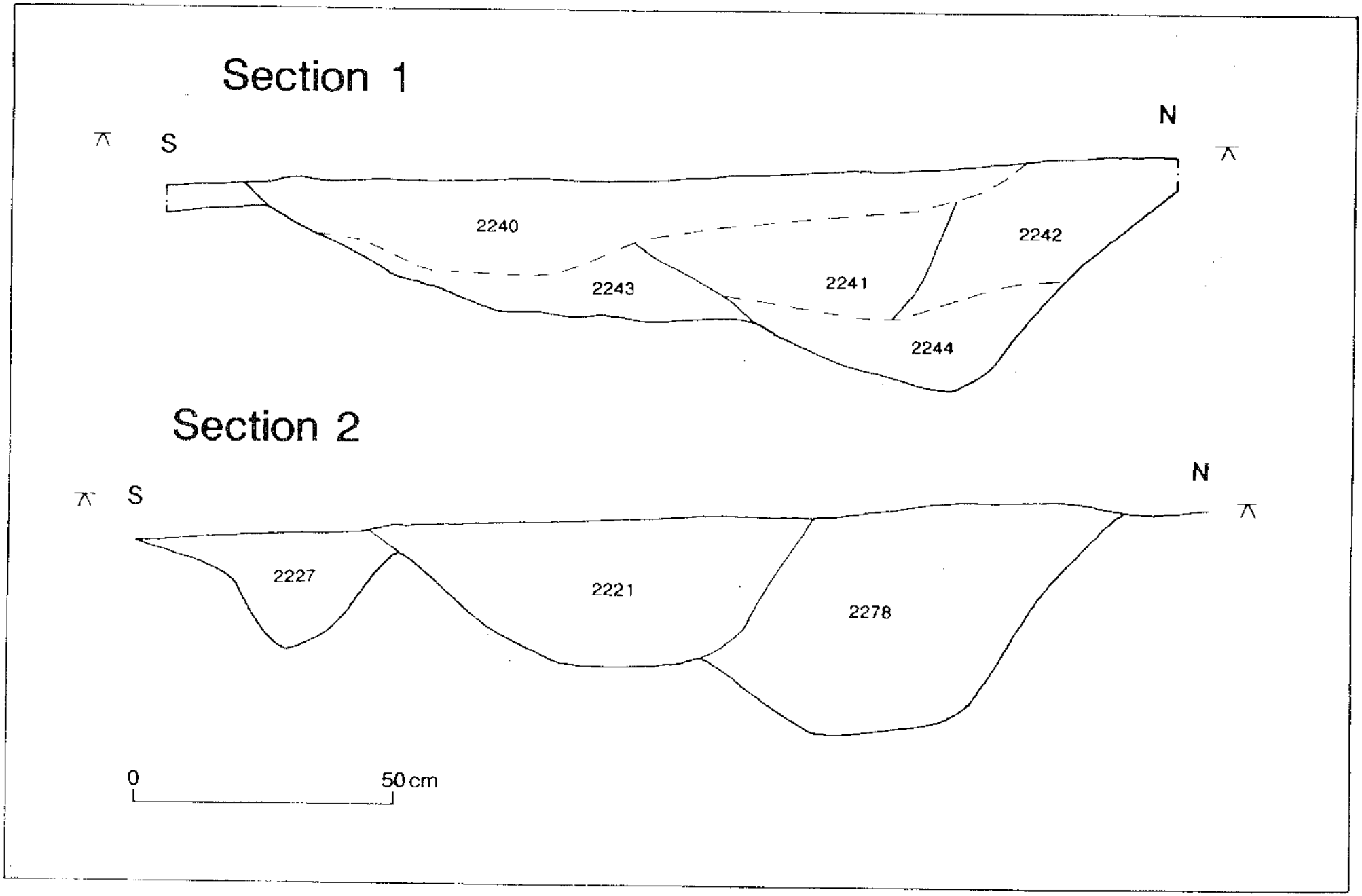

Section 1
S
N
2240
2243
2241
2242
2244
Section 2
S
N
2227
2221
2278
0
50 cm

Fig.4

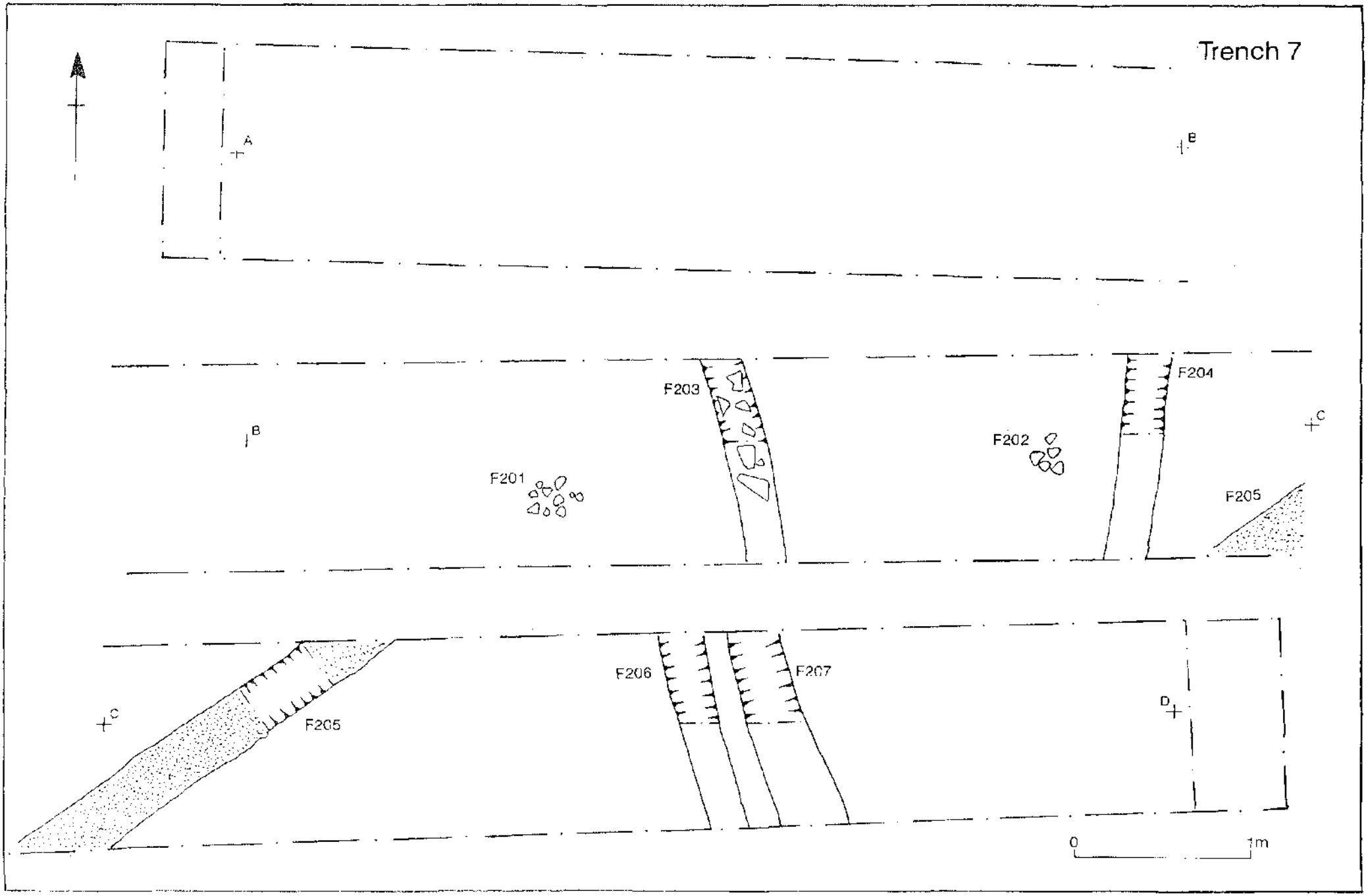


Figure 5

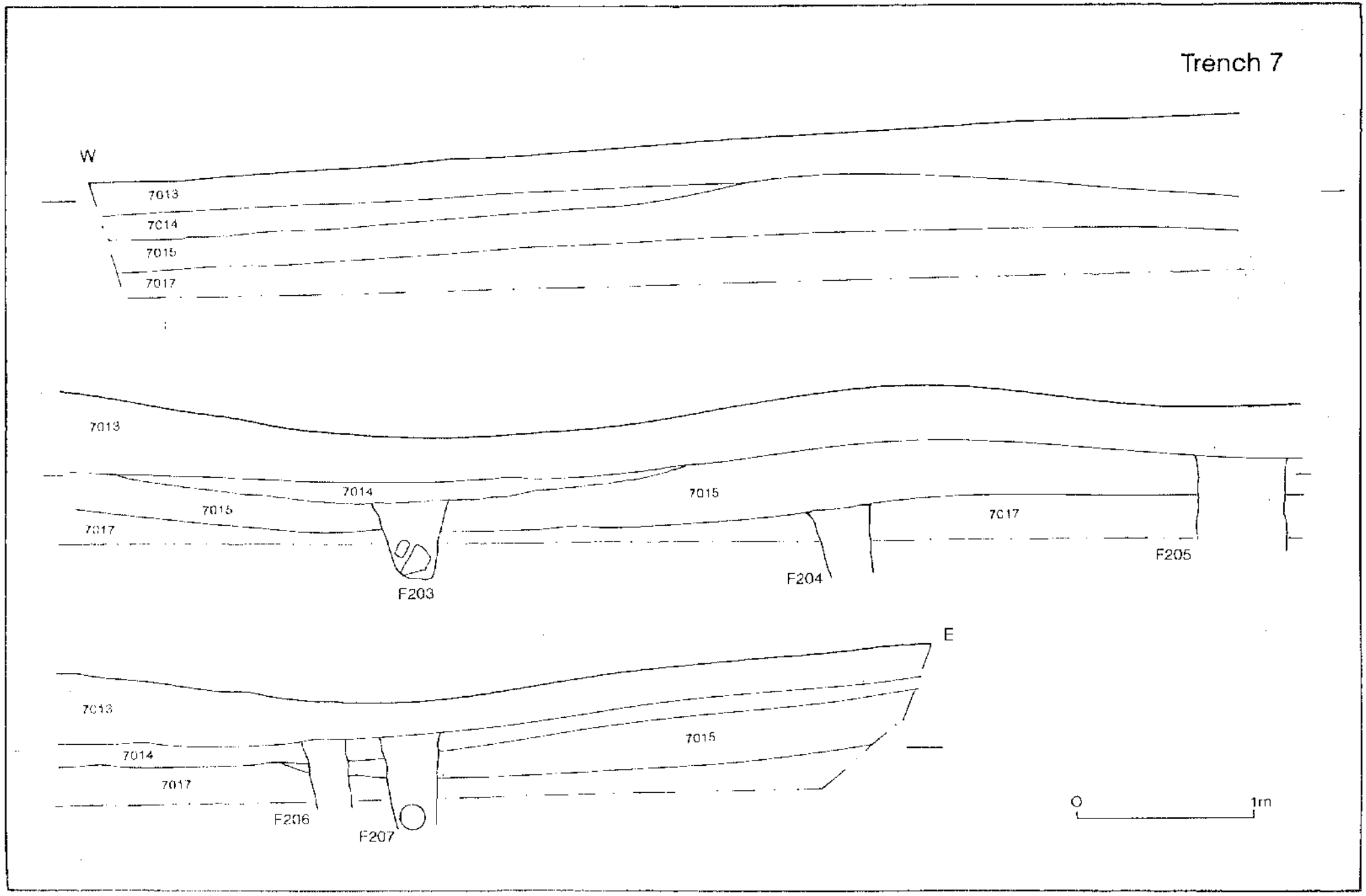

Trench 7
W
7013
7014
7015
7017
7013
7014
7015
7017
7015
7017
F203
F204
F205
E
7013
7014
7017
7015
F206
F207
0
1m

Figure 6