

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

**An Archaeological Evaluation of Land at
New Meeting Street, Oldbury, West Midlands**

1998

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 555.01
October 1998

**An Archaeological Evaluation of Land at
New Meeting Street, Oldbury, West Midlands
1998**

by

Catharine Mould

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.bham.ac.uk/BUFAU/>

**An Archaeological Evaluation of Land at
New Meeting Street, Oldbury, West Midlands**

1998

Contents

	Page
1.0 Summary	1
2.0 Introduction	1
3.0 Location of the Proposed Development Site	1
4.0 Geology and Topography	2
5.0 Objective	2
6.0 Method	2
7.0 Archaeological Results	2
8.0 The Artefacts	5
9.0 Discussion of the Archaeological Results	6
10.0 Assessment of the Archaeological Importance of the Proposed Development Site	6
11.0 Implications and Recommendations	7
11.1 Implications	7
11.2 Recommendations	7
12.0 References	8
13.0 Acknowledgements	8

Table 1: Quantification and Dating of the Artefact Assemblage

Figures

- 1 Location of trial-trenches.
- 2 Detail of deposits and features: Trenches 2-4.
- 3 Detail of deposits and features: Trenches 5-7.
- 4 Zones of Archaeological Potential.

**An Archaeological Evaluation of Land at
New Meeting Street, Oldbury, West Midlands**

1998

1.0 Summary

An archaeological desk-based assessment, commissioned by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council in advance of proposals to develop land at New Meeting Street, Oldbury (Winter 1998), identified six zones of potential surviving archaeological remains. The assessment recommended further evaluation of the below-ground deposits within each of the zones. Subsequent trial-trenching confirmed the results of the earlier desk-based assessment. Surviving archaeological deposits, potentially dating to the medieval period, were identified in Zones 5 and 6, whilst Zone 4 was shown to represent the extent of a former Non-Conformist burial ground. No archaeological deposits were recorded in Zones 1-3.

2.0 Introduction

The following report describes the results of further archaeological assessment of land at New Meeting Street, Oldbury, West Midlands (centred on NGR SO 9916 8977), which is the subject of development proposals by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. An earlier desk-based assessment identified six zones of potential surviving archaeological remains and recommended further assessment of the zones, as any development is likely to have an effect on the buried archaeological remains (Winter 1998).

Assessment by trial-trenching was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in October 1998 on behalf of Planning and Development Services, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, following a brief prepared by Ruth Waller, Planning Archaeologist for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (Waller 1998). The guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994) were also followed.

The results of the earlier desk-based assessment are reported on separately (Winter 1998). However, the results are incorporated in this report.

3.0 Location of the Proposed Development Site (Figure 1)

The proposed development site is located immediately to the north of Oldbury's town centre (centred on NGR SO 9916 8977). It is bounded by Bromford Road, New Meeting Street, Queen Street, the line of a former canal and by a school playing field. An outlying piece of land is located immediately to the east of the canal, adjacent to Poplar Road.

4.0 Geology and Topography

The majority of the proposed development site is located on Carboniferous rocks, including purple and ochreous marls with green grits and conglomerates. It is within these rocks that coal seams are found. Due to faulting, older rocks such as Cambrian diorite and quartzite have been brought to the surface (British Geological Survey 1955). The site is situated on higher ground which is bounded by the route of the former Birmingham Canal. It consists of grassed-over areas with trees and hedges around some of the boundaries and includes a recreation ground and a tarmacod play area.

5.0 Objective

The objective of further evaluation by trial-trenching was to establish the potential presence/absence of any archaeological deposits, and to establish their extent, condition, character, quality and date.

6.0 Method

A total of seven trial-trenches was excavated. The trenches were located to transect known areas of archaeological potential as indicated by the earlier desk-based assessment (Winter 1998), and also to test the remaining areas of the site as widely as possible.

A JCB excavator with a toothless ditching bucket was used, under archaeological supervision, to remove the modern topsoil overburden to the top of any significant archaeological features and deposits, or to the top of the subsoil, in the trial-trenches. This surface was cleaned by hand to identify the form of any archaeological features. Archaeological deposits and features were sampled manually, except where limited by Health and Safety considerations, to determine their character and to recover any datable artefacts from their fills.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections and photographs which, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive. This is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

7.0 Archaeological Results (Figures 1-3)

The location of the seven archaeological trial-trenches is shown on Figure 1. The position of Trenches 2 and 3 differs slightly from that suggested by the earlier desk-based assessment (Winter 1993) in order to accommodate a line of services, demolished buildings and existing tree-lined boundaries. An additional trench (Trench 4) was excavated in the recreation area (Zone 2). A trench which was originally suggested for the southern half of Zone 6 could not be excavated due to the inaccessibility of that area. Trenches 1 and 2 were machined to the uppermost horizon where grave-cuts and memorial stones were visible. Following

completion of the evaluation, the memorial stones were reburied at the southeastern end of Trench 1.

A continuous numbering system was employed for both excavated and non-excavated features and deposits within each of the seven trial trenches. The sequence in each trial trench is described from the base of the trench upwards. However, interpretation of the stratigraphic sequence is reserved for Section 9.0 Discussion of Archaeological Results. A brief quantification of recovered artefacts is given at the end of each trench description. An overall quantification of this material appears in Table 1.

Spot heights were taken for each archaeological feature and trench. The values are recorded within the site archive, and relate to a benchmark marked on Figure 1 (Value 149.70m AOD). Depths given in this section relate to the depth of a deposit or feature below the modern ground surface.

Trench 1 (not illustrated)

(1.80m x 20m, aligned southeast-northwest, excavated to a maximum depth of 1.18m).

Objective: Establish extent of Non-Conformist burial ground.

The subsoil was not contacted in this trench. A machine-excavated sondage at the southeastern end of Trench 1 revealed a deposit of structural debris (1002) which was sealed by a layer of light-brown, stony, silt-sand (1001). This layer extended across the whole trench. The fills of five grave-cuts were visible as rectangular areas of black-brown silt-sand (1003-1007), and were located within the northwestern half of Trench 1, at a depth of 0.23-0.28m.

Artefacts: Two post-medieval pottery sherds, a copper alloy buckle and fragment of moulded stone were recovered from the topsoil (1000). Twenty-three fragmentary, and two whole, memorial stones were also contained within the topsoil.

Trench 2 (Figure 2)

(1.80m x 20m, aligned northeast-southwest, excavated to a maximum depth of 1.10m).

Objective: Establish extent of Non-Conformist burial ground.

The subsoil comprised an orange-brown clay-sand (2006) which was recorded only within the northeastern half of Trench 2. The fills of a further five grave-cuts were identified as rectangular areas of black-brown silt-sand (2007-2011). Within a machine-excavated sondage at the southwestern end of Trench 2, a mixed deposit of structural debris (2004) and a northeast-southwest aligned machine-brick wall (F200) were sealed by a deposit of clinker and brick fragments (2003). This was overlaid by a layer of crushed brick and mortar (2002) which was, in turn, overlaid by a deposit of grey-brown silty sand-clay (2001). This uppermost deposit was sealed by a layer of topsoil (2000).

Artefacts: Three fragmentary, and two whole, memorial stones were recovered from the topsoil (2000).

Trench 3 (Figure 2)

(1.80m x 19m, aligned roughly east-west, excavated to a maximum depth of 1.05m).

Objective: Transect possible strip-field boundaries.

The orange clay-sand subsoil (3003) was cut, in the southwestern half of the trench, by a northwest-southeast aligned service pipe and trench (F300). At the eastern end of Trench 3, the subsoil was overlaid by a 0.25-0.40m thick layer of dark-brown, organic, silty clay-sand (3002). This layer was sealed by a mixed deposit of modern waste and some structural debris (3001), including a large wooden beam with a metal mooring ring attached. A thin layer of topsoil (3000) sealed the uppermost deposit.

Artefacts: One 13th-14th-century pottery sherd, two post-medieval pottery sherds, three fragments of tile, four fragments of clay pipe stems, five piccos of metalworking slag, one fragment of glass and 423g of animal bone were recovered from layer 3002.

Trench 4 (Figure 2)

(1.80m x 20m, aligned north-south, excavated to a maximum depth of 2.05m).

Objective: Establish presence/absence of below-ground archaeological deposits.

The brown-orange clay-sand subsoil (4004) was recorded at a depth of 2.05m, within a machine-excavated sondage at the southern end of Trench 4. It was overlaid by a grey-brown silty sand-clay deposit (4003) which was, in turn, overlaid by a thick layer of ash, clinker and fragments of clamped-bricks (4002). This layer was sealed by a grey-brown silty sand-clay layer (4001) which extended across the majority of the trench. The layer (4001) was cut, at the northern end of Trench 4, by a northeast-southwest aligned machine-brick cellar-wall (F401), and at the centre of the trench by a disused manhole (F402) and associated wall (F403). No archaeological deposits or features were identified in Trench 4.

Artefacts: No artefacts were recovered.

Trench 5 (Figure 3)

(1.80m x 19m, aligned north-south, excavated to a maximum depth of 1.25m).

Objective: Establish presence/absence of below-ground archaeological deposits.

The orange clay-sand subsoil (5008) was recorded at the southern end and at the centre of Trench 5. It was sealed by a layer of charcoal-flecked, brown, organic, silty clay-sand (5007) which was, itself, overlaid by a series of modern levelling deposits (5002, 5003, 5009, 5010). The deposits were cut by an east-west aligned machine-brick wall (F501) and by a service pipe and trench (F500). Immediately to the north of F500, a similar sequence of deposits was recorded. It was partially truncated by three machine-brick walls (F504, F505 and F507) and a foundation trench (F506). The northern half of Trench 5 was characterised by two surviving cellar walls (F502 and F503) and cellar infill (5014 and 5016). A thin layer of crushed structural debris and clinker (5000) and topsoil (5001) extended along the length of Trench 5.

Artefacts: No artefacts were recovered.

Trench 6 (Figure 3)

(1.80m x 20m, aligned southeast-northwest, excavated to a maximum depth of 1.80m).

Objective: Establish presence/absence of below-ground archaeological deposits.

The orange clay-sand subsoil (6014) was recorded at the southeastern end of Trench 6, where it was partially overlaid by a charcoal-flecked, stony, clayey silt-sand, which contained fragments of wood and brick (6005), and by a thick layer of semi-compacted black-brown, clayey silt-sand matrix, containing fragments of coarse machine-brick (6001). Both layers extended to the northwest half of the trench, where layer 6001 partially overlaid layer 6005. Layer 6005 was also partially overlaid by a mixed brick deposit (6002), and by a series of levelling deposits (6008 and 6009) which provided a foundation for a brick surface (F601). These were cut by a service pipe and trench (F602). Other levelling deposits at the centre of Trench 6 (6003 and 6004) were cut by a service pipe and trench (F600). A thick layer of structural debris and black silt-sand extended across the whole trench, and was cut at the southeastern end by a recent pit (F603), filled with redeposited subsoil (6011).

Artefacts: No artefacts were recovered.

Trench 7 (Figure 3)

(1.80m x 18m, aligned southeast-northwest, excavated to a maximum depth of 1.25m).

Objective: Establish presence/absence of below-ground archaeological deposits.

The orange clay-sand subsoil (7012) was recorded at the southeast end of Trench 7. It was overlaid by a deposit of black silt sand and structural debris (7011) which was, in turn, overlaid by a deposit of brown silt-sand and debris (7010). These two deposits were cut by a service pipe (F701). A third deposit of structural debris (7009) was recorded immediately to the northwest of F701. A band of clean blue clay (7007) represented the southeastern limit of a charcoal-flecked silty deposit which was mixed with some structural debris (7003). This was overlaid by a number of layers of structural debris (7001, 7002 and 7006) and a layer of redeposited subsoil (7001). All of these layers were cut by a cellar (F700) lined with clean blue clay (7004). The cellar was filled with structural debris (7005). A thin layer of topsoil (7000) extended over the whole of Trench 6.

Artefacts: No artefacts were recovered.

8.0 The Artefacts

A small assemblage of artefacts was recovered during the evaluation. With the exception of one pottery sherd, recovered from Trench 3 and which may date to the 13th-14th century, the artefacts date to the post-medieval period. All but eleven of the thirty memorial stones had an inscribed burial number which would correspond to a written register held in the Chapel. Three memorial stones had partial inscriptions of names.

Table 1: Quantification and Dating of the Artefact Assemblage

1000	Topsoil	2 post-medieval pottery sherds, 1 copper alloy buckle, 1 moulded stone fragment, 23 fragmentary, and 2 whole, memorial stones.
2000	Topsoil	3 fragmentary, and 2 whole, memorial stones.
3002	Cultivation Soil	1 13th-14th century and 2 post-medieval pottery sherds, 3 tile fragments, 4 clay pipe stem fragments, five pieces of metalworking slag, one glass fragment, 423g animal bone.

9.0 Discussion of the Archaeological Results

No prehistoric, Roman or Saxon deposits or artefacts were recorded.

An organic layer of silty clay-sand, which was recorded in Trench 3 (3002) and in Trench 5, (5007) may represent the remains of a cultivation soil. This corresponds with evidence from the desk-based assessment which identified the presence of strip field-systems, characteristic of the medieval period, in this area. Trial-trenching has shown that these fields may originally have extended further to the south, to Trench 5. No evidence of any associated activity or settlement in the medieval period was identified.

Trenches 1 and 2 identified the uppermost cuts of ten graves belonging to the Non-Conformist burial ground which was in use in the early-19th century. The spatial distribution and quantity of the grave-cuts is not indicative of the burial-ground as a whole. The inscribed burial numbers on the recovered memorial stones suggest that the burial-ground contains a minimum of 639 burials. It is likely that a larger number of grave-cuts would be identified at a lower horizon. The structural debris recorded at the southeastern end of Trench 1 and at the southwestern end of Trench 2 may represent the remains of a chapel which was associated with the burial ground. It was replaced by the present-day chapel on Church Street.

The canal played an important role in the development of the site in the post-medieval period, and the majority of the deposits and features identified by trial-trenching was associated with its use or, in the case of Trench 4, its decommissioning. The structural remains in Trench 4 had truncated any earlier deposits which may have survived there prior to their construction. However, the north-east-south-west alignment of the cellar wall (F401) reflects the earlier alignment of Church Street and the shifting pattern of settlement layout in the post-medieval period. Structural remains in Trenches 6 and 7 correspond to those identified on 20th-century Ordnance Survey maps (Winter 1998) which were associated with the use of the area fronting onto the canal as a warehouse facility.

10.0 Assessment of the Archaeological Importance of the Proposed Development Site

Desk-based assessment and evaluation by trial-trenching suggests that the proposed development site formed one part of the medieval settlement at Oldbury. The cultivation soil identified in Trenches 3 and 5, along with the absence of any structural or domestic features, suggests that the boundary between the medieval settlement and its associated field-system lies to the south of the site. Further archaeological investigation would be needed to confirm this.

The medieval deposits revealed by this evaluation and in the excavations at Church Street (Hodder 1987 and 1992) were well-preserved and were located within 0.40-0.70m of the present-day ground level. Archaeological remains dating to the medieval period are a scarce and diminishing resource in the West Midlands as a whole and, more specifically, within the borough of Sandwell. Any deposit or feature which dates to this period and which is located within the proposed development site has, therefore, the potential to further the understanding of Oldbury's historical development.

11.0 Implications and Recommendations (Figure 4)

11.1 Implications

Archaeological deposits dating to the medieval period have been identified in Trenches 3 and 5, and grave-cuts relating to a 19th-century burial-ground were recorded in Trenches 1 and 2. These deposits and features are located within 0.23-0.70m of the present-day ground surface and may be affected by below-ground works associated with any proposed development of the site. Further deposits and artefacts dating to the medieval period, or to earlier activity, may also be located in those areas not tested by trial-trenching.

11.2 Recommendations

The recommendations below provide an outline for the level of archaeological mitigation within the proposed development site. However, the precise nature of such mitigation would need to be approved by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

The zones referred to below correspond to those identified by the desk-based assessment (Winter 1998).

Zone 1

This zone was not tested by trial-trenching, as construction of the canal in the 18th century would have destroyed any earlier archaeological deposits. However, if the canal bridge is to be affected by the proposed development, it may be appropriate for a RCHME Level 1 photographic survey to be carried out.

Zone 2

Cellaring and the insertion of services and manholes have severely truncated the deposits within this zone, to a minimum depth of 2m. It is unlikely that any deposits pre-dating the post-medieval period will have survived, and no further archaeological mitigation is recommended within this zone.

Zone 3

Deposits and features dating to the post-medieval period overlaid or cut the subsoil horizon which was recorded at a depth of 0.70-1.50m below the modern ground surface. It would appear that terracing, prior to the 20th century development of this piece of land, has erased any earlier deposits. No further archaeological mitigation is recommended within Zone 3.

Zone 4

Grave-cuts and memorial stones were recorded within 0.23-0.28m of the present-day ground surface. Any future development should take account of the statutory consents and licences under the Disused Burial Ground (Amendment) Act 1981.

Zone 5

A medieval cultivation soil, representing the remains of a field system which would have been associated with the medieval settlement at Oldbury, was recorded at a depth of 0.40m. There is potential for the survival of similar archaeological deposits in those areas of the western half of Zone 5 not tested by trial-trenching, and it is recommended that an archaeological watching brief be carried out during any below-ground works associated with the future development of the western half of this zone. As outlined in the desk-based assessment (Winter 1998), the eastern part of Zone 5 has little archaeological potential. The 20th-century engineering works will have truncated any earlier below-ground deposits and may also have caused some ground contamination.

Zone 6

As in Zone 5, a medieval cultivation soil, which represents the remains of a medieval field system, was identified in this zone. It was recorded at a depth of 0.70m. Despite later activity dating to the decommissioning of the canal and its associated buildings, there is potential for the survival of similar archaeological deposits in those areas of Zone 6 not tested by trial-trenching. It is recommended that an archaeological watching brief be carried out during any below-ground works associated with the future development of this zone.

12.0 References

British Geological Survey 1955.

Hodder, M. 1992 Excavation in Oldbury: Medieval and Post-Medieval Settlement. *Transactions of the Warwickshire Archaeological Society*.

Hodder, M. 1987 Excavation at Church Street, Oldbury: *West Midlands Archaeology*.

Waller, R. 1998 Brief for archaeological evaluation at New Meeting Street, Oldbury.

Winter, C. 1998 *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment and Walkover Survey of New Meeting Street, Oldbury*. BUFAU Report No. 555.

13.0 Acknowledgements

This project was sponsored by Planning and Development Services, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. We are grateful to Ceri Phillips of Planning and Development Services and to Ruth Waller, Planning Archaeologist for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council for their assistance throughout this project. The evaluation was carried out by Bob Burrows, Andy Hammon, Ellie Ramsey, Catharine Mould and Christine Winter. This report was written by Catharine Mould and edited by Iain Ferris. Figures were prepared by Nigel Dodds.

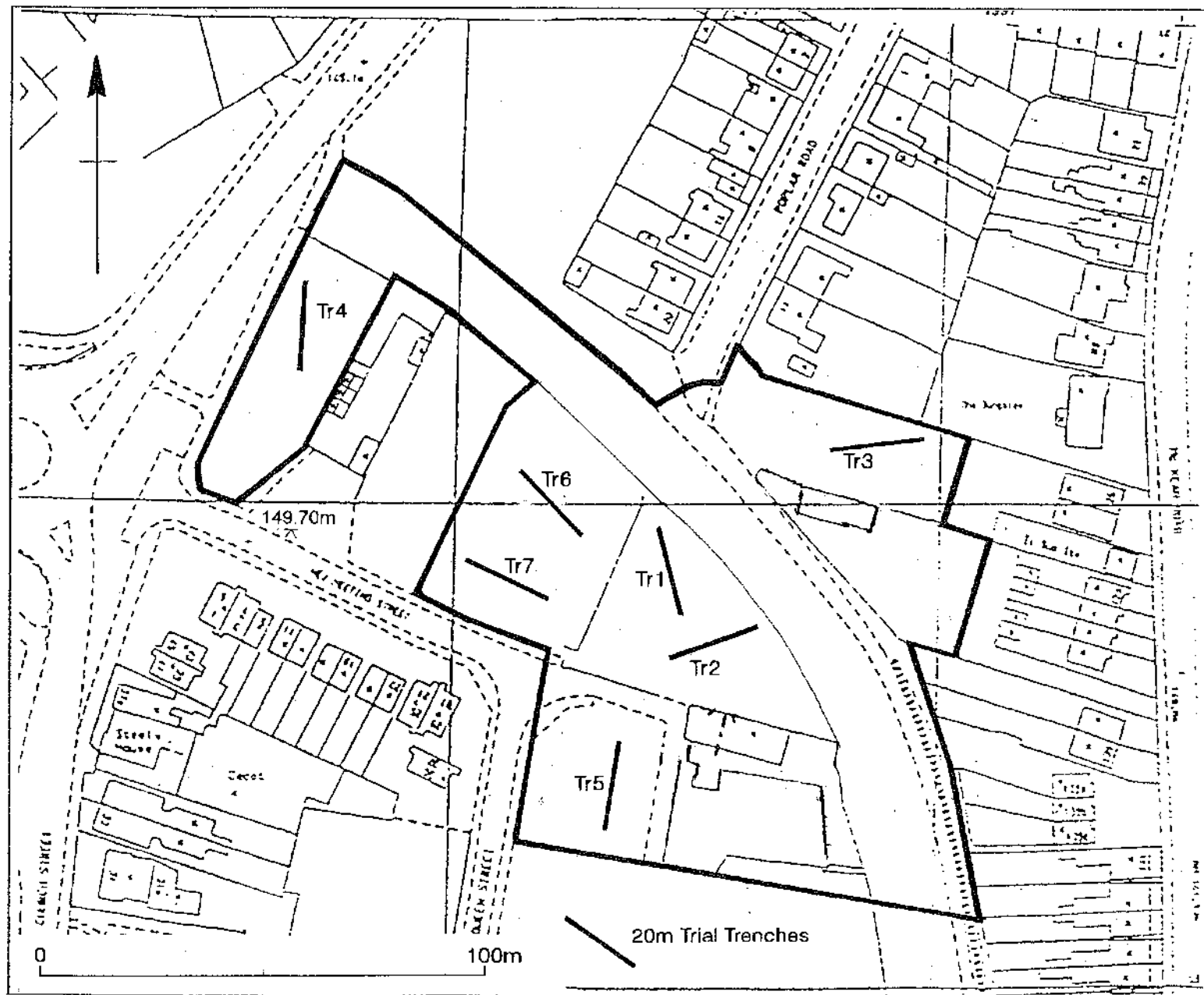
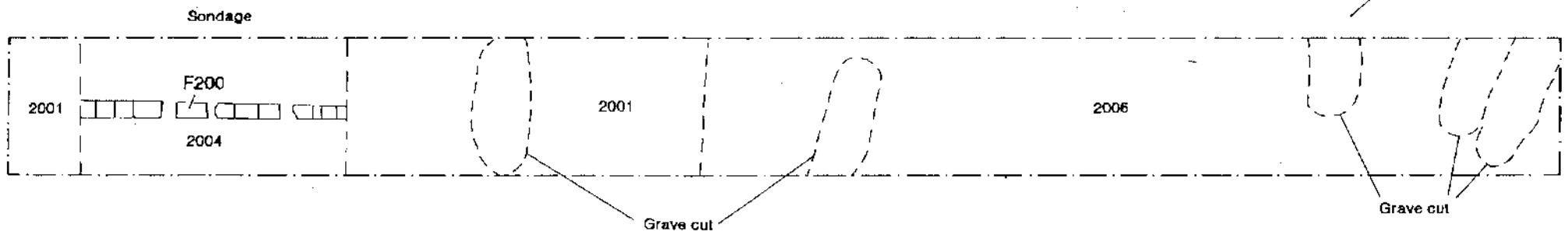
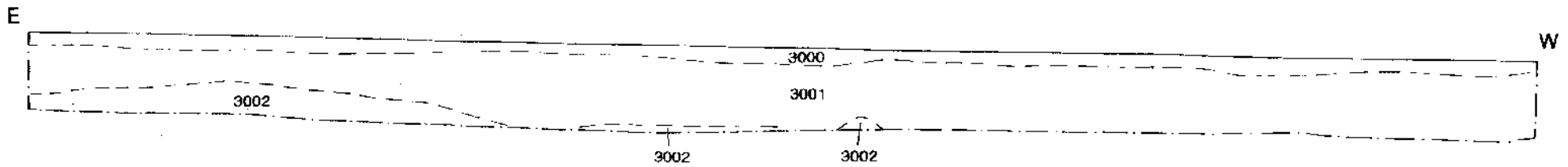


Fig. 1

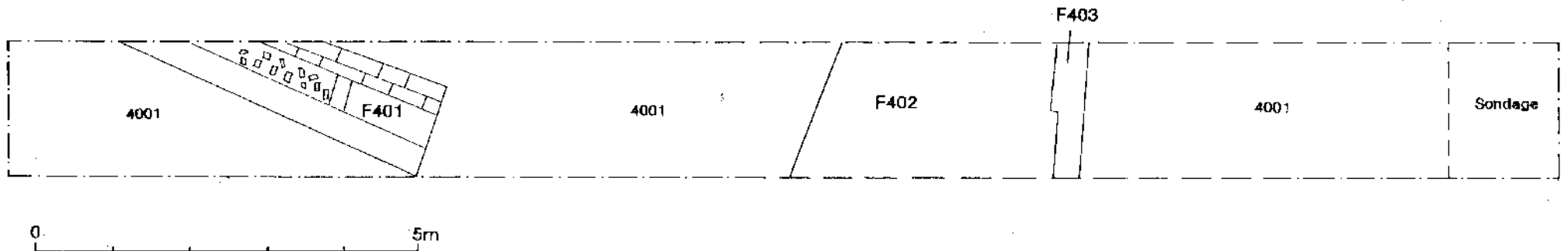
Trench 2



Trench 3



Trench 4



0 5m

Fig. 2

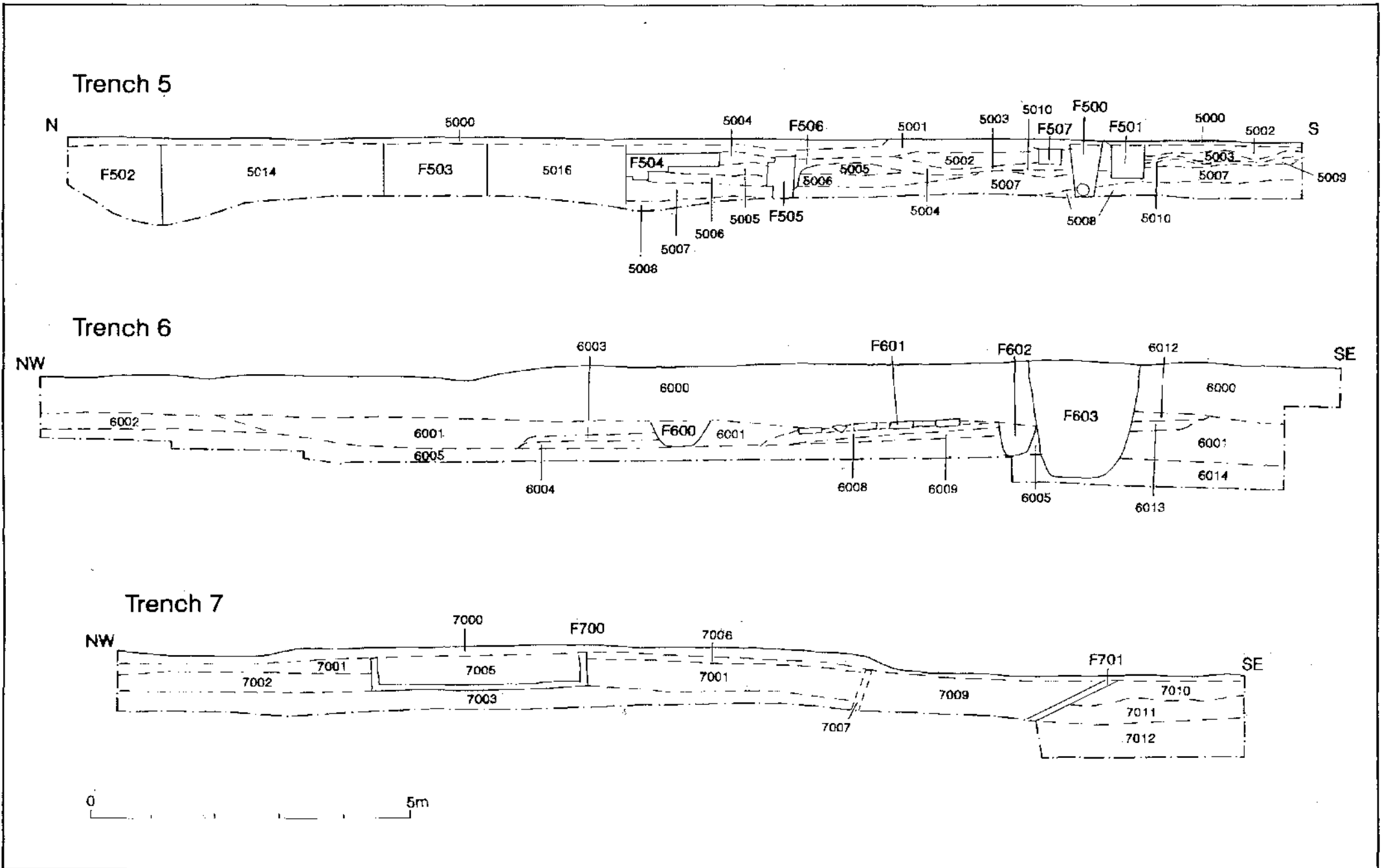


Fig.3

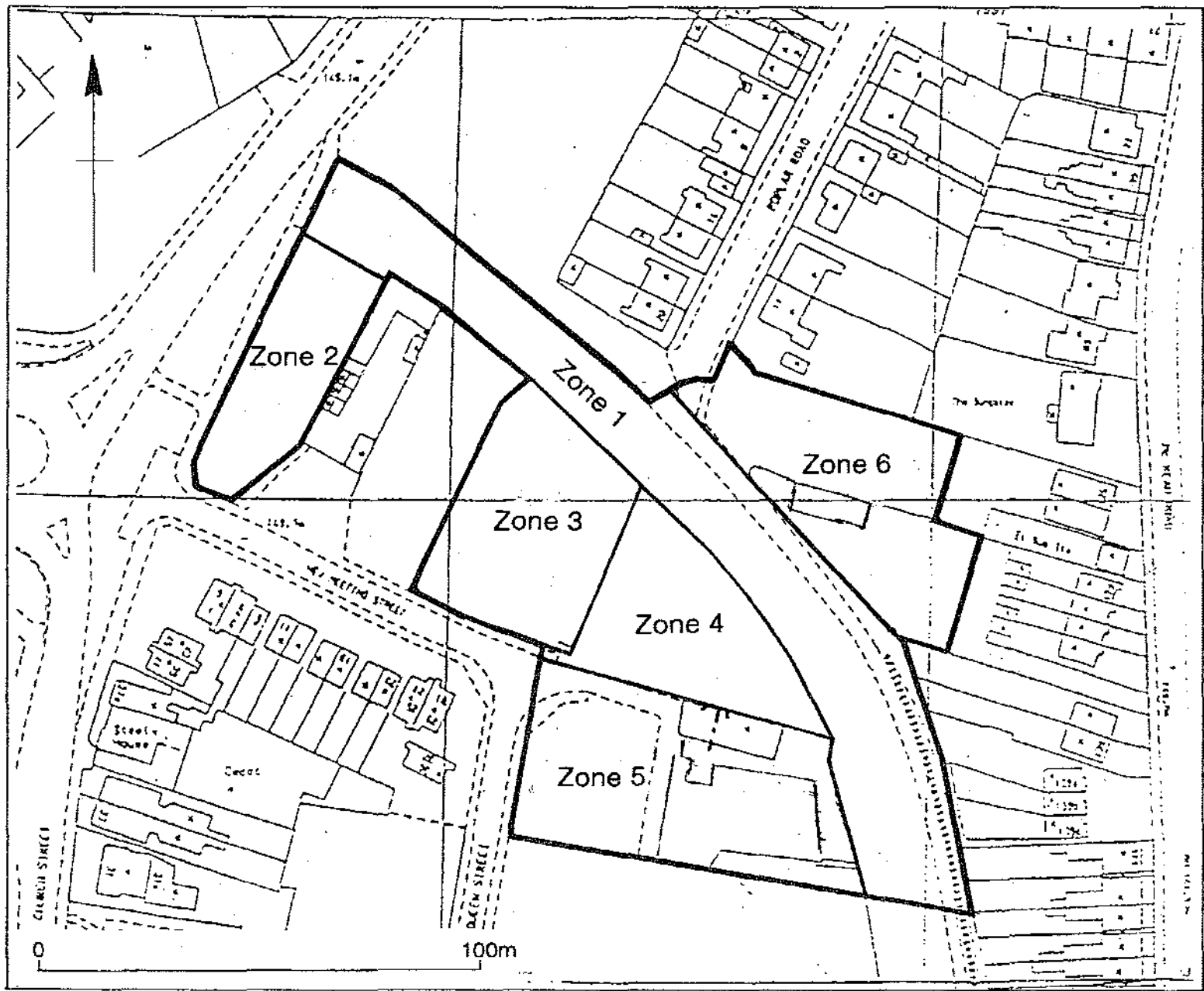


Fig. 4