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MANOR FARM, CASTLE CARY
Excavation and Recording 1999
An Interim Report

by
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1.0 Introduction

An assessment of the archaeological potential of this site in the autumn of 1998 (Leach and Ellis, 1998) established the requirement for a programme of further excavation and recording to be undertaken here, in response to a scheme for residential development by Fawcett Construction Ltd. (Leach 1999). This programme has been implemented over the summer of 1999, in the course of earth-moving and foundation works undertaken in the early stages of development. A small amount of monitoring may still be required, but it is convenient at this stage to provide an assessment of the results and information gathered so far, and the requirements for its publication.

2.0: The Site

The Manor Farm (Castlegate) development was planned to replace a complex of redundant farm buildings and yards adjacent and to the north of the Manor Farm house, and within the town of Castle Cary, Somerset (ngr. ST 642323). This west-facing, sloping site lies just below the surviving earthwork remains of the medieval castle to the east, overlooking Fore Street and the lower end of the historic town centre (Fig. 1). Following the demolition of farm buildings in 1998, an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching established that infilled sections of the ditch defences bounding the western sides of the Inner and Outer Bailey of the castle had survived beneath the encroaching farmyard. Subsequent to the mid-12th-century destruction of the castle, a manor house occupied the site of the present Manor Farm (which probably replaced it early in the 19th century). The 1998 evaluation suggested the possibility of further structures and deposits contemporary and associated with the later medieval manor, surviving within the development area, and that this complex had been contained within a moated enclosure attached to the west side of the Inner Bailey of the earlier castle.

3.0: Excavation and recording works

A programme of archaeological works was devised in consultation with the developer (Ian Fawcett) to permit limited excavation and recording during the early phases of development, in areas where extensive earth-moving was planned. The sloping nature of the site required that certain areas be graded and that service roads for the site be cut to appropriate levels. Elsewhere, building construction trenches had to be excavated, although many of the new buildings will be pile supported, requiring little new excavation.

All of these earth-moving operations had to be monitored over the summer and early autumn of 1999, and where possible certain areas were left open for further examination and recording. As these works progressed it was necessary to concentrate resources into the zone along the southern boundary of the site, where archaeological remains were most complex and abundant, but at the same time most vulnerable to disturbance. This zone lies closest to the site of the later moated medieval manor house, and while a degree of disturbance and

destruction was unavoidable, it has been possible to recover and provisionally interpret a clear stratified sequence of medieval and earlier developments in this area, and to link it with activity and sequences recorded elsewhere across the site.

4.0: Results

The following account provides an outline of the results and data recovered so far, along with a provisional interpretation of their significance. Some further information may be recovered during later stages of the development, but is unlikely to add or modify substantially the picture obtained to date (Fig. 2).

4.1: Roman

Somewhat unexpectedly, the earliest phase of activity on the site pre-dated the castle and manor house remains by several centuries. Close to the south-east corner of the development area a structure, provisionally identified as a limekiln in the 1998 Evaluation Trench K (F901), was fully exposed and partly excavated within an open area made available for investigation prior to its levelling. This revealed the lower part of a circular chamber, approximately 3.5m in diameter, cut out of the soft natural sandstone (Yeovil Sands) which had been oxidised deep red and orange by the heat during firing. A flue opening to the south west had been lined with mortared limestone blocks, giving access to the chamber with a narrow shelf or step at flue level, above a circular central pit which was cut almost 1m deeper. The central pit contained the product of the last firing, a very compact mass of hardened slaked lime, mortar and partly reduced limestone mixed with some burnt clay and charcoal, the bulk of which was left unexcavated within the pit. Banded deposits of ash, charcoal, burnt stone and mortar survived within the flue and upper levels of the kiln, along with the remains of the last partly burnt charge of large limestone blocks, identified as Douling stone. The upper half of the chamber had not survived, but may have been a corbelled construction built of sandstone blocks, possibly capped with clay or turves.

There was evidence to suggest a deliberate slighting of the limekiln soon after its last firing. The flue and part of the kiln wall to the north was truncated by a cut into the centre of the chamber; its backfill containing burnt fragments of the upper sandstone corbelling, some animal bone and sherds of later 2nd-century pottery. Although later affected by both medieval and modern disturbances, the south side of the kiln had clearly been breached by another, deeper cut (F911), penetrating almost to its centre. Similar finds were recovered from its backfill, but most remarkable was the discovery of a small bronze figurine, approximately 9 cms high, laid face-up upon a lower deposit of mixed stony clay at the base of the cut. A provisional identification by Dr. Martin Henig, Institute of Archaeology, Oxford, suggests that this was a *Lar* - a household god - depicted in this instance as an infant (Plate). Surviving in excellent condition, the piece is finely modelled in classical style and was probably one of a pair. It was almost certainly of Romano-British manufacture, probably of the 2nd-century, and bears comparison with the group of figurines depicting gods and goddesses from the nearby temple at Lamyatt Beacon (Leech 1986).

No other contemporary Roman buildings are known from Castle Cary, although settlement remains are recorded in Ansford (Aston 1976). For the present therefore, this limekiln stands alone, apart from a short segment of boundary ditch (F912) nearby, which may be associated.

However, the presence of such a structure surely implies that a major building of stone and mortar construction was located somewhere nearby.

4.2: *Castle*

We have no precise date for the construction of the castle, whether by Walter of Douai, the first Norman lord of Castle Cary, late in the 11th century, or by his successors - the Lovells - early in the 12th. Excavations and survey towards the end of the 19th century by Gregory (1890) revealed the keep foundations and planned the surviving earthworks. It was already apparent that the 19th and 20th century Manor Farm farmyard had encroached upon the western margins of the castle defences, cutting back into both the Inner and Outer Bailey earthworks. Observation and recording in the 1970s located the ditch and a rampart separating these two enclosures, but little else of early arrangements in this area (Aston and Murless, 1978). The evaluation of 1998 appeared to locate the course of ditches which marked part of the western defensive circuit of the Norman castle, and opportunities for further observation were anticipated during the development (Fig. 2).

As a result of discoveries and recording undertaken in 1998 and most recently, the course and dimensions of these defensive ditches, as presently surviving, can now be plotted with considerable accuracy. It is clear (despite the later intrusion of the moat ditch) that both Inner and Outer Bailey ditches (identified variously as F201, F204, F805 and F902) were a single construction, surviving to between 10 and 12m wide and curving from north east to south west within the development site. No attempt was made to bottom these ditches, although an earlier geotechnical test pit (2) close to Manor Farm had penetrated to 3m through a series of infill deposits. Elsewhere, the evaluation trenches and a degree of truncation resulting from grading and road foundation works in 1999 revealed only a metre or so of upper silt and clay infill. The ultimate depth may, however, be indicated by the c 6m. depth revealed in 1977 through the cross-ditch separating the Inner and Outer Baileys.

This cross ditch was located once again in 1999, though not in full cross-section (Fig. 2, section 24). Both sets of observations indicate a period of rapid partial infill by dumps of loose stone rubble below spreads of finer sandy soil and mortar in the lower half of the cut. These deposits may reflect an episode of structural demolition within the castle, equating either with sieges recorded during the reign of King Stephen or its suspected slighting thereafter, probably in the mid-12th century. A more gradual and extended period of deposition is suggested by an upper sequence of later silt fills. Interestingly, the cross-ditch was not linked directly to the Inner and Outer Bailey ditch; terminating west at a higher level. This may simply be a reflection of the steep natural rise in ground levels to the east, necessitating that the cross-ditch be cut from a much higher level than the western perimeter ditch. Despite the narrow gap between them there is nothing to suggest that both sets of ditches were not contemporary, although this cannot be conclusively proven.

From the largely overgrown, precipitously sloping sections created by the cutting back of the eastern boundary to the farmyard, it can be seen that much of the Inner and Outer Bailey earthworks comprise undisturbed beds of the natural Yeovil Sands. Whatever the details of its original layout, the Norman castle clearly utilised a natural spur extending south west from the foot of Lodge Hill, a factor which to some extent determined its ultimate plan.

4.3: *Manorial enclosure*

In the evaluation of 1998 it was suggested that another major ditch extended west from the outer perimeter of the castle (F702), before turning sharply south as F504, and that this southern turn is reflected by the position of the Horse Pond (Fig. 2). A continuation south of this ditch would link it with Park Pond, creating the third side of an enclosure attached to the south-west side of the castle Inner Bailey. This feature, surviving to over 11m wide, was nowhere bottomed in excavation, although a depth of 5-6m can be estimated, and with a high potential for the preservation of waterlogged deposits towards the south. Its precise period of excavation has not yet been determined, although the inferior relationship of its eastern terminal to the castle perimeter ditch was clearly demonstrated in 1999. Whatever its date, this moat, with presumably an inner bank, defined the later medieval manorial precinct. Within that precinct evidence for an extended sequence of activity was recovered through a variety of opportunities for area excavation or trench recording.

Phase 1

Towards the south-east corner of the development site the castle ditch F805/F902 was traced curving around the base of the hill defining the Inner Bailey and site of the stone keep. Although no great depth of its fill was removed, a combination of natural silting and deliberate infill had evidently obliterated this feature fairly soon following the mid-12th-century slighting of the castle. Thereafter, its site was completely lost and overlain by a sequence of later medieval structures and deposits. The earliest of these may have been a series of roughly built drystone revetment walls set into what was at that time the base of the Inner Bailey mound. This survived as a staggered set of foundations, including F908, F909 and F904, truncated by later farmyard levelling further north, but possibly also continuing for some way around the south side of the mound. For a while these revetments marked a boundary between the earlier castle earthworks (possibly to restrict hillwash eroding from them) and the activity now focused upon the environs of the new manorial centre.

The building of a manor house to replace the castle, as the local centre for what were now the Lovell family estates, may have followed soon after the latter's decommissioning around the middle of the 12th century, but no remains from this period are yet identified. The principal building range almost certainly stood in the vicinity of the existing Manor Farm, some of its remains surviving as ruins until the late 18th century, as recorded then by Collinson (1791). Occupation deposits and traces of stone or timber building foundations (e.g. F915 & F917) were observed at various points to the west of the staggered revetment, but no extensive exposure of these levels was achieved and it is difficult to gain a clear impression of arrangements during the earliest phase of manorial occupation, probably spanning the later 12th and 13th centuries. Further west similar deposits and structural evidence was seen in Evaluation Trench F and subsequently in the section Güi, where an early (though undated) ditch, F506, was also traced for a few metres to the south east in plan.

Phase 2

The focus for a second phase of activity was a large stone-founded structure - Building 1 - defined on three sides by clay-bonded limestone footings up to 2m wide, for a building approximately 35m long and 13m wide (Fig 2). Two or three mortared base courses survived in places, although nothing of the superstructure. Elsewhere, even segments of the foundations

had been robbed out, notably along the south side, although little of this wall has yet been located. Building 1 is aligned approximately north-west - south east, its east end overlying the infilled castle ditch (F805). This required deeply set foundations and in particular, the provision of a buttress at the north end of the end wall F817 to give the building additional stability. Only the north-east interior levels could be examined in any detail, where traces of successive mortar and gravel floors survived. One of the latest features here was the base of a small rectangular, stone-paved and walled chamber, F814, with a pit containing charcoal, ash and burnt clay deposits, F804, set into the corner of the building. This is likely to have been a bread oven with accompanying stokehole. Much of the evidence for the interior arrangements in the western half of the building was disturbed or destroyed by more recent activities. There was no evidence for internal partitioning or of entrances, although one to the south might be supposed.

Wherever observed, Building 1 was cut into deposits of the primary phase of manorial occupation. To the west these sloped gently down towards the moat, F504, and were sealed by sequences of gravel and sandy mortar surfaces, some of which seem to have been yards or tracks contemporary with the building. Contemporary and earlier occupation deposits spread out more thinly to the north, though much disturbed in that direction. The clearest sequence survived to the east, where some more detailed excavation and recording was possible. Between the revetment F908 and the east wall of Building 1, sequences of worn stone rubble, clay, gravel and mortar suggest a yard or trackway, successively renewed, giving access through to the northern part of the moated enclosure and possibly also to an entrance at this end of the building. These gently inclined surfaces, reflecting the slope eastwards up to the foot of the earlier Inner Bailey mound, survived up to 1m above the level of the Building 1 floors. However, the subsequent robbing-out of its east wall and some foundation levels had divorced the higher level yard sequence from direct association with the building within the areas available for investigation. Sequences to the south of Building 1 have so far only been observed in limited construction trench exposures (Trenches P and R), whose relationships with the building have yet to be clarified. No remains of the main Manor House have been encountered (suspected to lie beneath Manor Farm), and thus the precise relationship between it and Building 1 cannot be determined.

Phase 3

Building 1 appears to have become redundant at some time in the late medieval period, when its demolition also involved the robbing of stone from both its south and east wall foundations. The north wall survived best, close beneath the later farmyard surfaces, except where disturbed in places by more recent structures. Following the building's removal the area appears to have been used for a time for rubbish disposal, both within sections of robbed wall trenches and in purpose-dug pits, e.g. F802, F806-F810, F818, and probably F918. Elsewhere, there are traces of mortar surfaces and other occupation levels, although no more coherent picture is available from the evidence collected so far in this area, and some truncation of late medieval and post-medieval levels by the 19th and 20th-century farmyard operations is evident.

To the north west, where terracing had preserved some levels behind it (Sections Gii - 1998 and Giii - 1999), cobbled floor surfaces and the outline of another stone-founded structure - Building 2 - were also recorded. Much of the latter had been destroyed by the terracing along

this edge of the site, probably early in the 19th century, and little more of its function or building date can be surmised.

4.4: *Post-medieval and modern*

The farmyard, buildings, yards and cottages, whose remains were finally levelled in 1998, had all accumulated on the site from the end of the 18th century. These developments almost certainly originated with the demolition of the old Manor House remains and the building of a new farmhouse - Manor Farm. To what extent this process destroyed evidence for earlier post-medieval structures and layouts is unclear, but there appears to be a virtual hiatus in finds or other remains between the late 15th/early 16th century and the early 19th century. This aspect of the site was less well appreciated during the initial site evaluation, thanks largely to the paucity of finds, when indeed, the medieval remains of Building 1 were initially interpreted as possibly an 18th-century structure. The remains of 20th-century activity is, not surprisingly, most prominent. Building foundations, drains, and some cellared areas or slurry pits were found, in places disturbing remains of earlier periods. The terracing back of the slope above Fore Street and the Horse Pond, and the building of cottages here has taken place over the past 200 years. Most of the encroachment upon the western edges of the castle Inner and Outer Bailey mounds probably took place during the past century, the latest in the 1970s. This most recent development resulted in the dumping of a considerable volume of building debris, soil and clay at the north-eastern end of the site (see Evaluation Trenches A, B and C). Earlier yard and buried soil horizons here probably originated in the 18th and 19th centuries, but excepting the Outer Bailey ditch and an undated well, evidence for other activity here was sparse.

As stated, there is little evidence within that part of the earlier moated enclosure available for examination, of the post-medieval arrangements. The top of the medieval sequence outlined above (4.3) lies immediately beneath modern foundation or levelling deposits, with little sign of an intervening phase. The only clue to arrangements in this period may be a map of c 1670 which depicts the Manor House as a cruciform building, although it is unclear whether other buildings stood with it on the site (Aston and Leech 1977, plate 3). There was no sign of a moat at that date, and indeed, this feature may not have been long-lived. Exposure of its east terminal (F702) revealed an extensive dump of stone rubble and mortar, which although undated, could have been introduced in the later medieval period (does this represent demolition of Building 1?).

4.5: *Finds*

Ceramics

Pottery forms the bulk of the finds assemblage collected.

Almost 100 sherds of Romano-British pottery were recovered, the great majority from the fills of the limekiln and associated features. The bulk was of either local greyware fabrics or of Dorset Black Burnished ware. There were in addition a handful of colour-coat or oxidised wares, including at least one mid-2nd-century Samian sherd. Initial impressions suggest an assemblage of mid to late-2nd-century date, which should be readily comparable with other local RB. published groups, e.g. Lamyatt Beacon, Ilchester, etc.

The largest group of pottery is of medieval date - over 400 sherds - ranging between the 12th and 15th centuries. This is by far the biggest assemblage of such material from Castle Cary, collected systematically and almost exclusively from stratified contexts. The bulk appears to be from unglazed cookpots and jars, although sherds from tripod pitchers and a few glazed jugs are present. Published comparanda are available, notably assemblages from Ilchester, but study of this modest group will provide the nucleus of a useful reference collection for the town and its locality.

A small collection of post-medieval ceramics, including glazed earthenwares, porcelain, stoneware, clay pipes and a few tile fragments was made, but the bulk of such material was not retained.

Stone

A small collection of worked flint and chert was recovered from contexts of different period across the site. No readily identifiable artefacts are present although the material is likely to be of prehistoric origin. Similar material has been recorded previously in this locality (SMR. 53648). Stone samples and a few miscellaneous items (e.g. whetstones) were also collected from both Roman and medieval contexts.

Metalwork

Several iron artefacts, including horseshoes, possible implements, and nails were recovered in relatively good, though corroded condition, from both Roman and medieval contexts. Material from post-Medieval levels was not retained.

The outstanding find of non-ferrous metal was the Romano-British copper alloy figurine found within the limekiln (4.1, above). This was in excellent condition and has been cleaned and is currently stored in a stable environment at the Somerset County Museum, Taunton. This item will be the subject of a detailed specialist report in due course. A few other unidentifiable fragments of copper alloy and of lead were also found.

Animal bone

A modest collection of material was made from both Roman and medieval contexts, but no sieving took place. The quality of bone preservation was generally excellent and the material will be assessed to determine whether any further report is statistically worthwhile, given the generally small sample size.

No other environmental samples were collected.

5.0: Summary

At this stage of the project, with over 90% of the archaeological recording completed, the results can at present be assessed in terms of their potential significance, but with the expectation that a better informed report will follow completion of field recording and the analysis and integration of all available data.

The unexpected but fortuitous discovery of a Romano-British presence on the site provides not only a new chapter to the history of Castle Cary, but also presents a puzzle. What building

or settlement is represented by the limekiln and why deposit a high-quality figurine depicting a *Lar* within it? The kiln narrowly avoided destruction when the castle was built, but it is possible that a contemporary building nearby was destroyed. A limekiln of this size implies a supply of lime mortar to a substantial structure, and furthermore, located at no great distance from it. There are no records of any such remains at Castle Cary, nor anything of Roman date closer than a probably modest farm settlement at Ansford. A building on the castle site above would almost certainly have been destroyed by its construction, although nothing of Roman date appears to have been recovered in Gregory's late 19th-century excavation of the keep. Immediately to the south lies Park Pond, almost certainly created as an adjunct to the later medieval manor house and effectively part of its moat, but fed by springs at the source of the River Cary. Here or close by, is an alternative location for a major Roman building, either a villa or perhaps a shrine, appropriately sited to utilise that source. Once again positive evidence is lacking, and the medieval creation of Park Pond might well have destroyed any such remains.

A further curiosity is the manner in which the limekiln was so deliberately rendered unusable, by breaching its sides following its last firing, and then placing the offering or deposit of a *Lar* within the slighted chamber. These are protecting household gods of hearth and home. Did this kiln supply the lime for a wealthy house - a villa - close to the spring, or perhaps a shrine; its slighting somehow signifying an exclusive association with that structure, not to be used again once the building was finished? More light may yet be shed upon these, and other possibilities, but if nothing else this limekiln and its contents hint at the presence of an important and potentially wealthy Roman establishment close by, whether or not any of its remains still survive.

Nine hundred years later this site was once again utilised, this time for its defensive possibilities. Documentary sources relating to the early history and development of the castle are sparse, although it appears to have had an effective life of little more than half a century (Hershon, 1990). The most recent archaeological research has at least now established its full extent in plan. Built upon, and adapting the natural spur which overlooks the deep coombe at the source of the River Cary, the castle and its successive owners undoubtedly stimulated the medieval urban development of Castle Cary, nestling beneath its ramparts. Without further excavations, our present understanding of the site might best be advanced by a detailed topographic survey of the surviving earthwork remains of the castle.

The castle met a violent end in 1153, from which time the site may have been abandoned as the manorial residence. As such, however, it was the administrative centre of an estate, and a new establishment will soon have replaced it. The work at Manor Farm produced no evidence for manorial or other settlement remains which pre-date the castle, but this site certainly developed thereafter as the new centre. It may not be possible to determine just how soon occupation began here following the siege of 1153, given the relatively limited availability of remains of the earliest phase for investigation and recording within the development area. It might be supposed that the construction of a moat was the initial stage in the layout of this complex, but although slight, there is stratigraphic evidence to suggest that some activity on the manorial site preceded it.

The construction of moats in medieval England was, to a large extent, seigniorial fashion rather than military or defensive expediency; a practise which only became widespread from the 13th century onwards. At Castle Cary it is difficult to assign a very precise date for the

moat's construction from archaeological evidence so far available. It certainly followed an interval during which the ?early 12th-century western defences of the castle were quite obliterated. A more likely context for its construction would be the expansion and redevelopment of the manorial complex, possibly during the second half of the 13th century. Part of this expansion may have involved the construction of Building 1, which is also aligned with the north arm of the moat. The status of this building is as yet unclear, but it appears to have stood separate from other manorial buildings thought to lie further south. Some domestic occupation is implied by the mortar floors and remains of a bread oven, although it may have originated as barn. A variety of functions connected with the economy of the manor and its farm, are likely throughout its lifetime.

The moat was watered primarily from the source of the River Cary, where the Park Pond was created - probably a fishpond supplying the manor - although another small stream flowing down Fore Street supplemented it from the north. One unresolved question concerns the presence of an inner bank, which would normally have been created by excavation of the moat ditch. No trace of this has been observed in any evaluation trench or the monitoring of subsequent earth-moving, but any such bank could well have been obliterated long since and its material reused for levelling-up operations elsewhere. Some levels on the site do appear to represent redeposited natural sand, derived presumably from deep excavations of that formation.

Little new light has been shed upon the later history of the site, indeed, there was a notable absence of either structural or artefactual remains attributable to the post-medieval period before the end of the 18th century. Since then the site has been considerably modified by terracing, and by its use as a farmyard, most recently in commercial cheese production. Despite these activities much evidence of its earlier history still survived as material remains, prior to the current re-development scheme. Inevitably, this last has resulted in further disturbance and loss of archaeological resources, but in exchange has come a wealth of new information relating to the development of Castle Cary's castle and manorial complex, as well as a glimpse of something much earlier but perhaps of no less potential significance.

6.0: Acknowledgements

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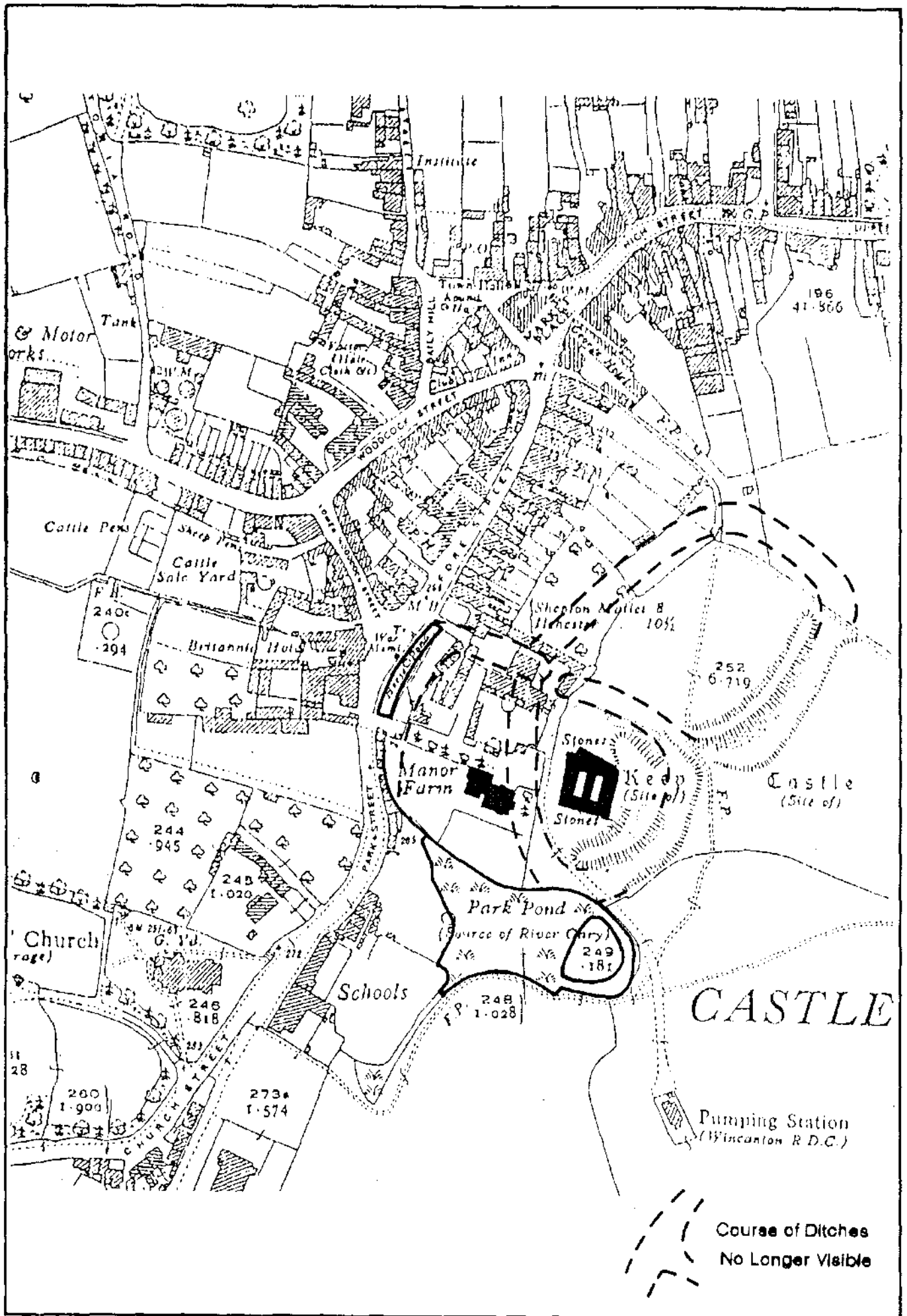


Fig.1

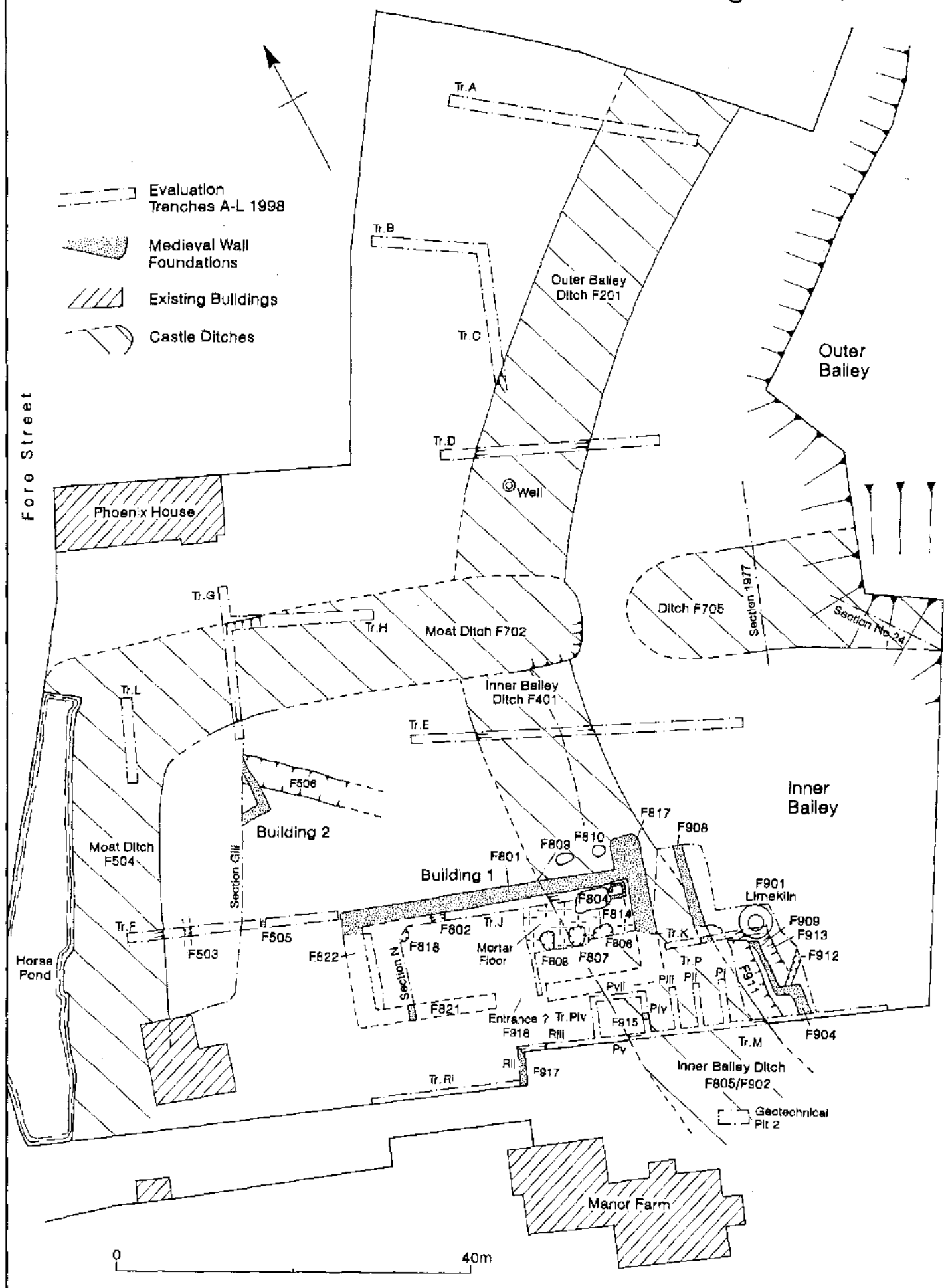


Fig.2

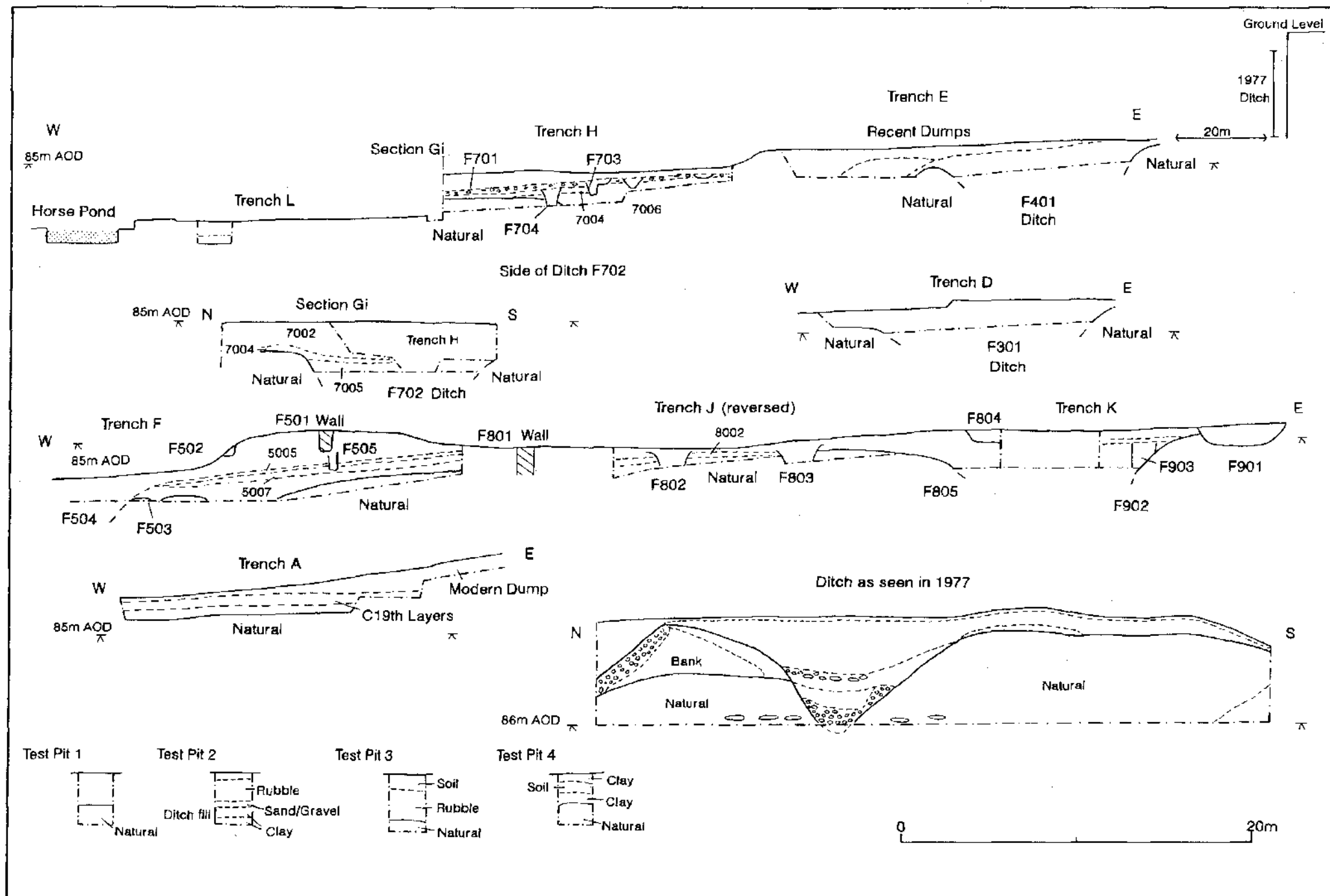


Fig.3

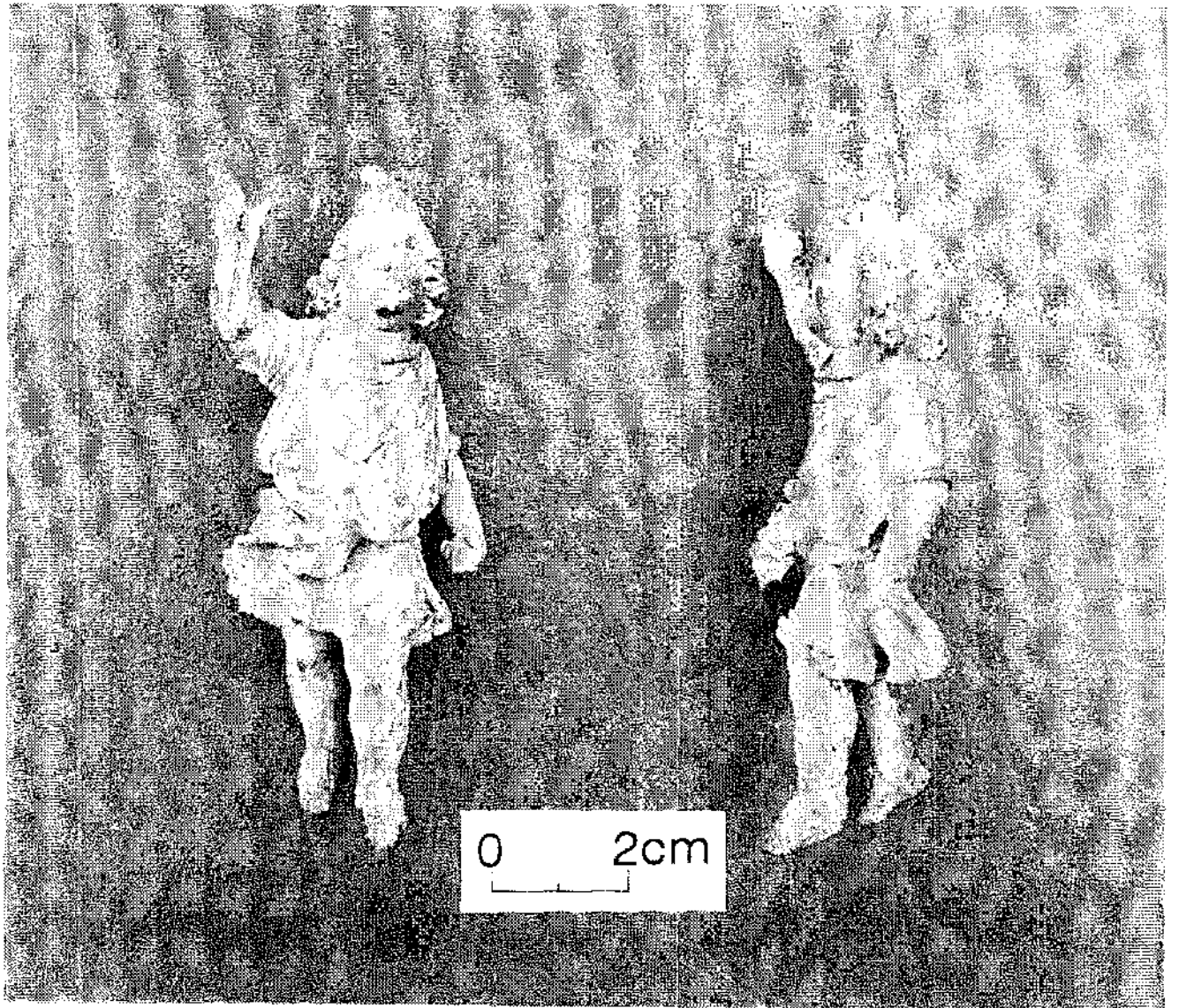


Plate 1