

## **NEW SHOP UNITS, ROCESTER, STAFFORDSHIRE; ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION. Interim statement.**

**This document represents an interim statement only on the results of this evaluation. IT DOES NOT CONSTITUTE A FULL AND FINAL EVALUATION REPORT. No study of the finds and potential environmental data from the site has been undertaken, and a final on-site sampling of exposed archaeological deposits is still outstanding from the evaluation fieldwork.**

### **1. The Archaeological Background**

Details of the archaeological background to the project can be found in the following documents; An Archaeological Evaluation at Mill Street, Rocester, Staffs by Catherine Mould. BUFAU Report No. 447, 1996; Brief for Archaeological Evaluation of Units K,L, and M, New Shop Units, Rocester, Staffs by Chris Welch, Staffs County Council; and Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation, New Shop Units, Rocester, Staffs by Iain Ferris. BUFAU.

### **2. Aims and Objectives**

As laid out in the brief and specification. Principally to discover if Roman deposits and features of the first and second centuries relating to the proven *vicus* here extended into and across this area, as was suggested by the results from Trench 4 in the 1996 evaluation. If located, the extent, depth, survival and integrity of these deposits would be assessed through minimal intervention, given the importance of the *vicus* as already demonstrated by the 1996 evaluation.

### **3. The Archaeological Results (Figures 1-3)**

Four evaluation trenches were excavated (Figure 1). All trenches contained deposits of Romano-British date. Apart from cleaning these Roman surfaces once identified, and recovering finds in the process, no further excavation of these deposits generally took place as it was felt that the principal aim of the evaluation had been met by their identification and location.

#### **Trench 1 (Figure 2)**

(1.70m x 3.0m, aligned east-west, excavated to 87.12m AOD)

The sand-gravel natural was reached within this trench.

A JCB excavating machine was used to remove the Tarmac, hardcore and underlying modern building rubble (1000), to a depth of 0.32m, where the first Roman archaeological deposits (1002 & 1004) were identified. Subsequent excavation by hand exposed three modern pits (Fs 100-102). F100, in the south-east of the trench, and cutting the Roman archaeological layer 1002, was emptied of its 0.30m of modern rubble fill (1001) to reveal a mottled yellow subsoil (1006) at 88.57m AOD. Context 1002 was left *in situ*, as Roman pottery, including Samian wares could be clearly seen within it. F101, lying towards the centre of the trench

was hand cleared of modern fill (1003). Truncating both of the surviving Roman deposits (1002, 1004), and cut into the subsoil, this pit bottomed at 88.04m AOD. F102, occupying the south-west corner of Trench 1, was excavated through to the natural gravels (1007) at 87.12m AOD. Some 0.40m of modern materials was removed to expose the pit sides, cut into the subsoil (1006).

#### Trench 2 (Figure 2)

(1.70m x 7.50m, aligned north-south, excavated to 88.32m AOD)

The sand-gravel natural was not reached within this trench.

0.35m of car-park materials and underlying demolition rubble, together with 0.35m of a dark brown silty material (2001) were removed by machine to expose a black buried soil deposit (2003), interspersed with areas of gravel (2004), and a putative cobble surface (2002) located at the southern end of the trench at 88.39m AOD. A 1.0m wide sondage was hand-excavated through 2003 to a depth of 0.50m to establish the nature and extent of this context. Substantial quantities of bone and Romano-British pottery were recovered, along with several nails, before the sondage was terminated at a new layer (2005), defined by the appearance of a charcoal rich, grey/brown stratum. Deposit 2003 is identified as an old garden soil of 19th or 20th century date.

#### Trench 3 (Figure 3)

(1.70m x 5.0m, aligned northwest-southeast, excavated to 87.60m AOD)

The sand-gravel natural was not reached within this trench.

0.40m of modern materials were machine excavated; the exposed surface over the bulk of the trench, some 4 metres, was made up of demolition rubble (3000), whilst the southernmost metre comprised of a dark silty soil containing both modern and re-deposited Roman materials (3001), identified as the same relict garden soil that appeared in Trench 2. A further 0.4m of deposits was hand-excavated within a 2m wide sondage in the centre of the trench to determine the depths and extent of survival of any underlying strata. At this depth, 88.16m AOD, a dark brown layer of humic silt (3002) containing a substantial volume of bone and first-second century Roman pottery was exposed. This context, some 0.34m in depth, was partially excavated, and subsequently, 0.22m of the underlying charcoal-flecked black silt deposit (3003) was examined. This, the last layer to be exposed in Trench 3, also yielded a large quantity of bone and Roman pottery, together with a single iron nail.

#### Trench 4 (Figure 3)

(1.70m x 6.30m, aligned northeast-southwest, excavated to 87.91m AOD)

The sand-gravel natural was not reached within this trench.

Some 0.70m of modern rubble materials (4000,1) were removed by machine, exposing general cleaning layer 4002, within which several features were visible. An area of cobble stones (4006) was recorded 1m from the south-western limit of the trench and removed to expose a dark brown silt layer (4007), subsequently identified as the highest of the Roman

deposits surviving in this trench. First and second century Roman pottery and a quantity of badly decomposed bone was recovered. Layer 4007 overlay 0.15m of a red sand stratum(4016), beneath which a lighter sandy silt (4017) was exposed and partially excavated to 87.90m AOD.

1.4m east of the trench terminus, cleaning exposed the foundation remains of a sandstone wall (F403), orientated east-west, and approximately 1.70m in width. Several faced blocks survived on either side, with the 1.20m core being composed of sandstone rubble packed within a yellow clay. This wall was not dismantled, and was recorded at 88.40m AOD. Removal by hand of materials (4008,4013) to the east of the wall exposed a small pit, F406 (0.50m diameter x 0.30m depth) with Roman pottery being recovered from the excavation of its charcoal-flecked silty fill (4014). The base of F406 represents the deepest point of excavation at 87.91m AOD. While no independent dating evidence was associated with this wall, it was evident that the foundation had been reused in the quite recent past by the placing of a course of concrete over the sandstone blocks. The original wall build must pre-date the erection of brick cottages here in the eighteenth century and could possibly even be medieval in date.

#### **4. Finds**

A number of interim observations can be made on the finds from the site, though a fuller statement must await processing of this material and the final outstanding sampling of deposits left *in situ* in the evaluation trenches, awaiting development mitigation decisions. About 200 sherds of first and second century Roman pottery were recovered from the site, despite minimal excavation of deposits. RB pottery residual in the old garden soil was in quite small sherds and was abraded. Material from *bona fide* Roman deposits was in the form of large, unabraded sherds. While some samian and an amphora handle were recovered, the majority of the pottery was greywares in various jar forms. This immediately apparent functional bias in the assemblage is most interesting. A single sherd of green-glazed medieval pottery came from the machine clearance in Trench 4; an interesting presence given the entirely unexpected identification of the sandstone wall here. A waster sherd in Midlands Purple ware came from the upper horizons in Trench 3, while both Trenches 3 and 4 yielded a number of sherds of Staffordshire Slipware plates or platters, perhaps an unusual site find in such a location. Some RB iron nails were also recovered, along with part of a melon bead.

#### **5. Conclusion.**

The evaluation confirmed the presence of Romano-British deposits across the whole of the evaluated area, at different heights in each trench as a result of differing levels of previous disturbance. In most cases this means that the Roman deposits survive as 'islands' of archaeology. At the north end of the site Roman deposits survived to a generally higher level. Given the relatively small scale of the evaluation and the strictly limited amount of excavation of deposits that took place, it is not possible to say whether the Roman deposits lie inside or outside of the suggested *vicus* enclosure, though they are certainly part of and

are contemporary with the *vicus* activity. A bias in the make-up of the pottery assemblage may hint at a functional zoning of activity here. A full academic consideration of the importance of the *vicus* at Rochester was given on pp.13-16 of the 1996 Evaluation Report, and it can now be proven that the remains uncovered in the 1999 evaluation of the new shop units must be assessed according to the same criteria. This would make the site of local and regional importance, capable potentially of providing information important also on a national level.

The finding of medieval pottery and higher-status early modern ceramics from Staffordshire sources, along with the enigmatic presence of the building or boundary represented by the sandstone-footed wall adds an extra dimension to the consideration of the importance of the site.

I.Ferris. BUFAU. 12/11/1999.

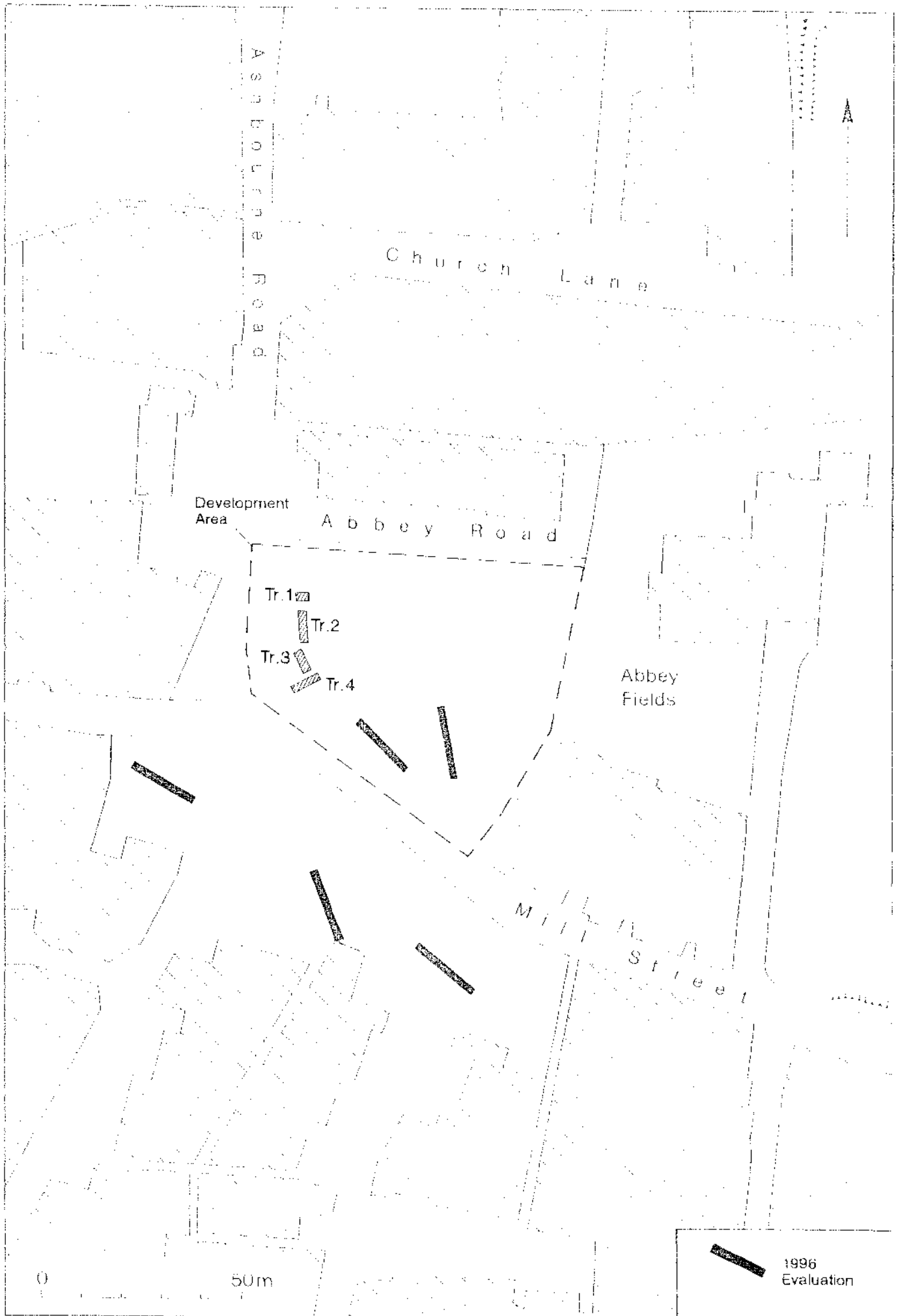
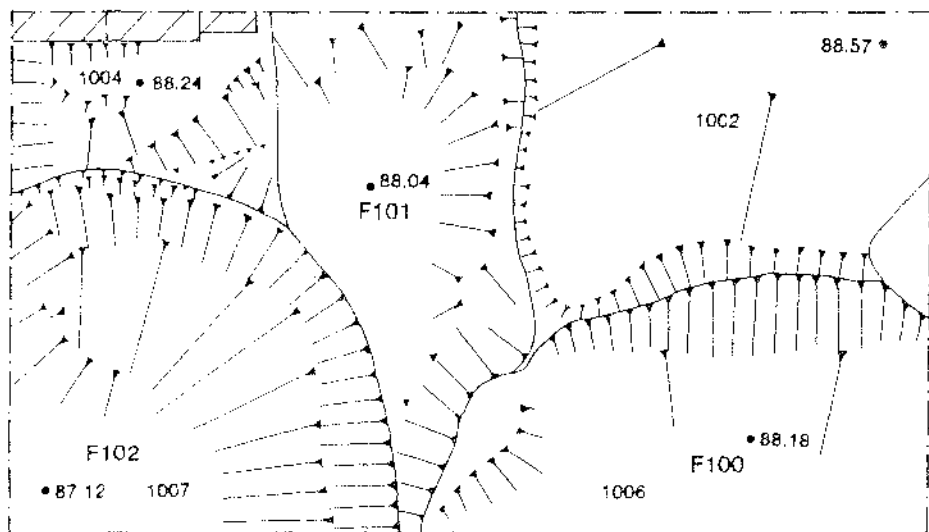


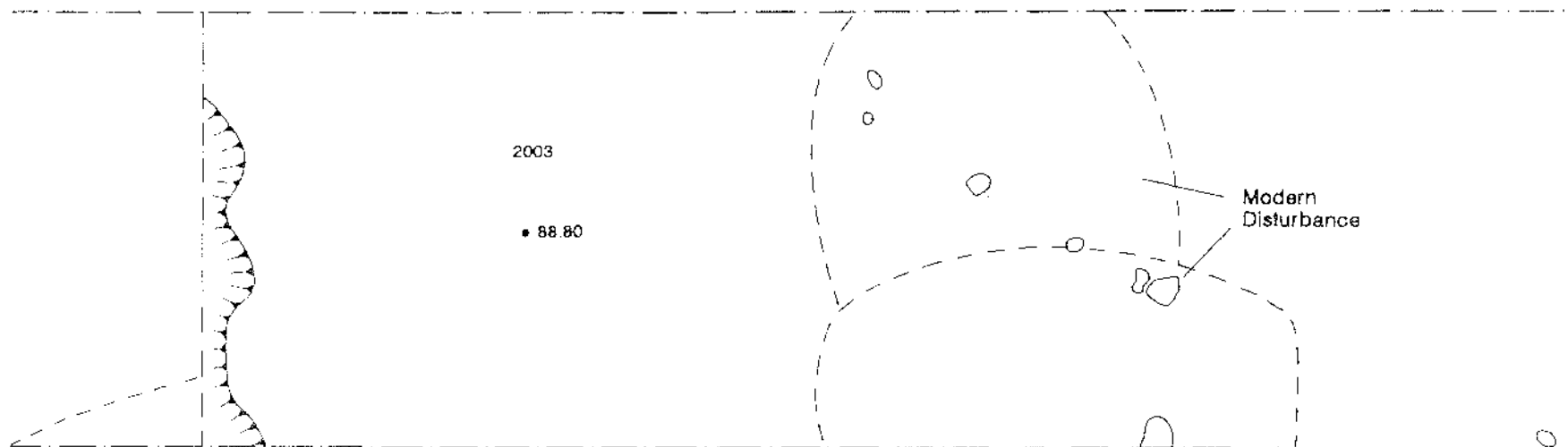
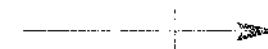
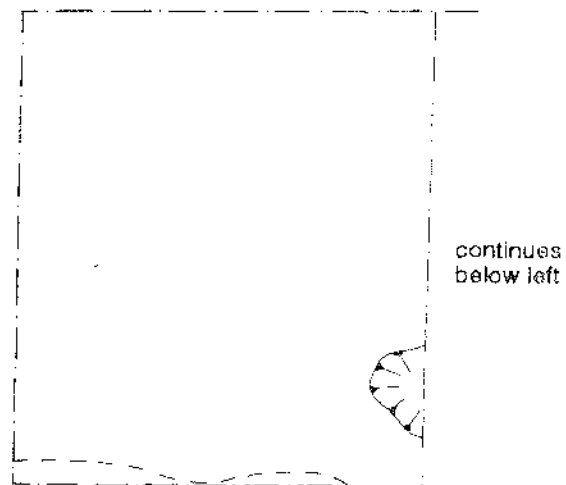
Fig.1

### Trench 1



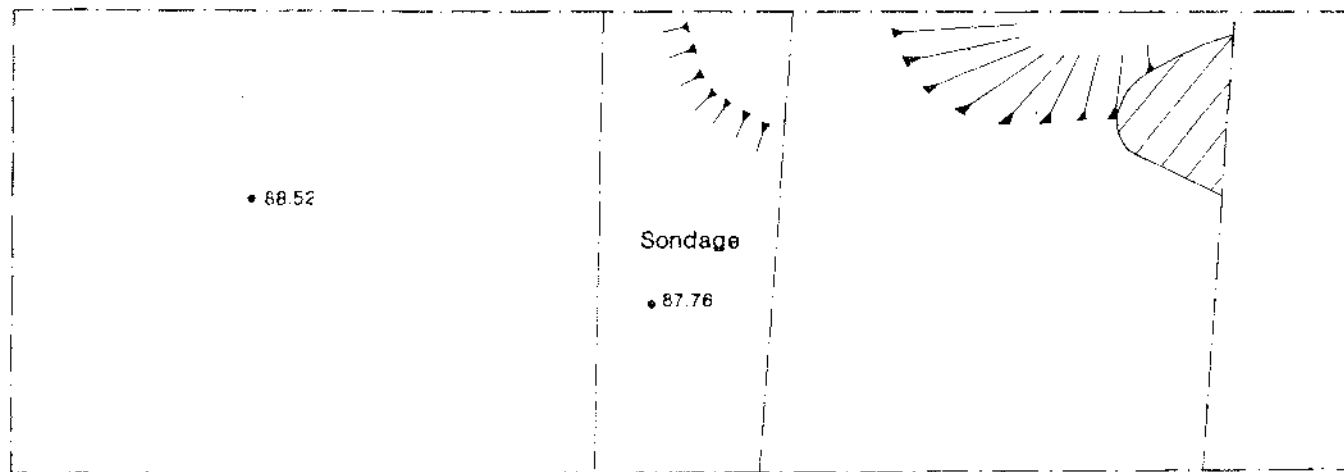
Support Left  
for Slab

### Trench 2



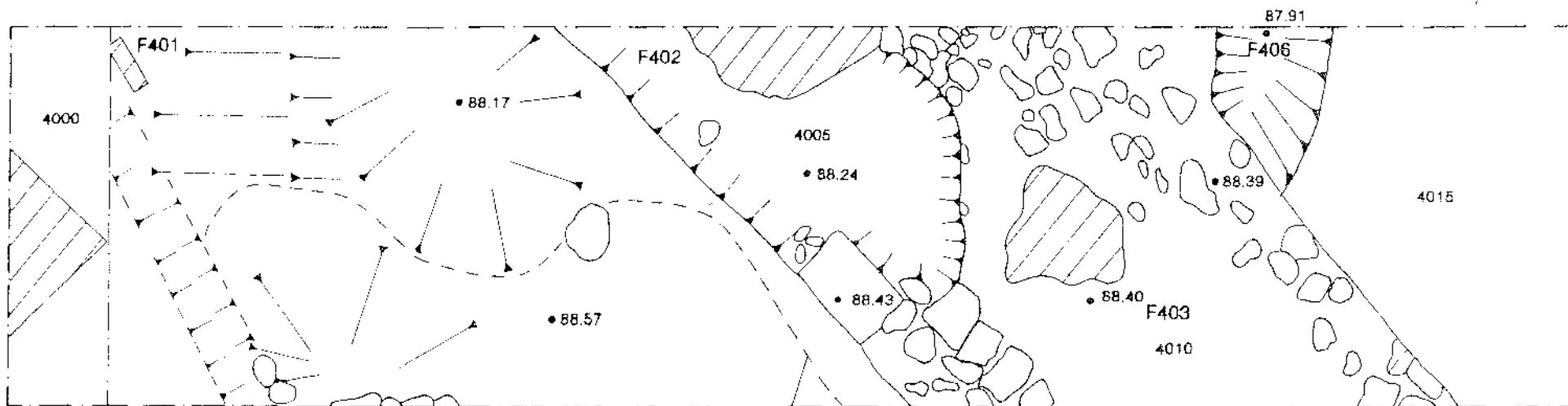
• 88.40 All Heights  
in Metres A.O.D

### Trench 3



Modern

### Trench 4



0 2m

Extent of Cobbled Surface

• 88.70 All Heights in Metres A.O.D