

**An Archaeological  
Evaluation at  
40-41 Underhill Street,  
Bridgnorth, Shropshire**

**February 2000**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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February 2000

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by  
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### 1.0: Summary

*An archaeological evaluation was conducted on land forming 40-41 Underhill Street, Bridgnorth, Shropshire, covered in National Grid Reference SJ718928. A desk-based assessment was undertaken by Jim Hunter of CgMs Consulting, under instruction by The Planning Bureau, followed by an evaluation of the site undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit conducted in order to assess the potential survival of any archaeological deposits that may be disturbed by construction work associated with a planning application for residential development.*

*The archaeological and desk-based assessment were carried out in accordance with an archaeological brief issued by the Archaeology Service of Shropshire County Council and a specification prepared by CgMs.*

*Prior to this evaluation no below-ground investigations had been conducted within the site and the potential for the survival of archaeological deposits was unknown. With the exception of several undated postholes in Trench 1, all other material encountered was of 18th-century date or later. No surviving evidence of medieval activity was found, although sherds of medieval pottery were recovered.*

### 2.0: Introduction

This report outlines the results of an archaeological desk-based assessment and evaluation carried out in preparation of a planning application for building work on an area of land situated on the western side of the River Severn at 40-41 Underhill Street Bridgnorth, Shropshire, currently being used as a garden centre (Fig. 1). The work was undertaken over two consecutive weekends by staff from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, and was conducted in accordance with the brief issued by Shropshire County Council (M.D. Watson 2000) and a specification of work prepared by CgMs. The requirement for a third evaluation trench was withdrawn following a site meeting. The objective of the evaluation was to obtain an adequate record of any archaeological deposits or finds which may be disturbed or exposed by work associated with a proposed development. Two trenches were excavated by machine and sections and plans cleaned by hand (Fig 2).

### 3.0: The Site and its Location, Desk-Based Assessment by Jim Hunter

A report outlining all relevant points of interest, both from the planning and historical point of view, was produced by Jim Hunter of CgMs Limited. It includes details of the proposed development and map detail of the site from the 16th century to the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1884. Included in the document is the Brief for the archaeological evaluation produced by Shropshire County Council. Information from the desk-based assessment will not be repeated here, nor will the full run of historic maps be reproduced.

## 4.0: Methodology

A mechanical excavator was used to remove the tarmac, modern overburden and building rubble to the top of either any significant archaeological features and deposits, or to the top of the natural subsoil. A full record of all stratigraphic sequences, supplemented by scale drawings, was made. Plans, sections and photographs, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive. This is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, to be deposited with the appropriate holding body at a future date. All levels are related to the site TBM which has an approximate value of 11.26m AOD.

## 5.0: Archaeological Results

**Trench 1** 10m by 2m, orientated north-south in the garden centre carpark slightly to the west of Underhill Street. The tarmac cover was cut using a floor saw and removed with the aid of a mechanical digger, in this case a *caterpillar* 478 180degree backacter. The upper deposits were removed under archaeological supervision to the top of archaeological horizons at a depth of 31.24m. The southern half of this trench was shored with a hydraulic system for safety reasons.

**Trench 2** 11m by 4m, was orientated east-west, to the south of Trench 1, also in the garden centre carpark. A similar process to that used in Trench 1 was undertaken to reveal the top of any archaeological deposits. Unlike Trench 1, the excavation of a slightly-wider trench enabled the safe excavation of a central trench along the entire length. Two machine dug 'sondages' were excavated down to the top of the natural river clay layers at 30.34m.

### 5.01: Trench 1 (Fig.3, Plates 1-5)

Excavation revealed the undisturbed natural clay [1016], a slightly mottled grey river clay, seen to be sloping down to the south of the trench, at a depth of 2.60m below the present-day tarmac surface. This material was not investigated further.

Overlying 1016 were two seemingly-alluvial deposits [1014 and 1015]. The earlier [1015] was a c.50m-deep layer of mottled sandy silt, buff in colour with a few traces of manganese inclusions. The later, also overlying 1015 in places, was a mottled brown alluvium [1014], 0.26-0.30m in depth, seen in the western and eastern sections. One small sherd of brown-glazed medieval pottery was recovered from 1014. The upper surface of 1014 was cut by a small posthole [F5] (Plate 3). This consisted of a narrow postpipe, filled with a grey brown silt material [1013], which had traces of timber in its make up, and a brown varried silty clay [1018]. Several pieces of tile and pottery were recovered from the fills, and dated to the 18th-19th century. It is the deepest of the negative features in this trench, cut through 1014 and 1015 and into the natural clay 1016.

Sealing 1014 was a buff brown alluvial material [1009], a 0.30m deep layer extending along the length of the trench, as seen in both the east and west sections. Several medieval pot sherds came from 1009, including a basesherd in an unglazed orange fabric. Layer 1009 sealed posthole F5, as seen in the east-facing section.

Layer 1002 was cut by several rows of related postholes (F1-F3 and F6 in Group 1 and F4 in Group 2) (Plates 1a-c). Three of these postholes (F1, F2 and F3) formed a line at the southern end of the trench, on an approximate northeast-southwest alignment which appeared to match a slight sloping of the natural river alluvium deposits at this end of the trench.

F1, towards the western edge of the trench, was 0.40m square, with slightly-sloping sides and was 0.10m in depth. This larger posthole was filled with a deposit of charcoal-flecked brown grey silty clay [1010]. Recovered from the fill were several pieces of pottery dating from the 18th or 19th centuries. F2, 0.40m square and 0.07m in depth, was filled with a silty deposit [1011] similar in appearance to 1010. A shard of possibly 13th-14th century pottery was recovered from this material. F3, 0.50m square and 0.13m deep, was filled with a deposit of charcoal-flecked silty loam [1012]. One shard of medieval pottery was recovered from a possible disturbance in the posthole fill, along with clay pipe and 17th-century pottery sherds. F6, seen in the eastern-facing section, was 0.60m square and 0.40m deep. It was filled with a deposit of charcoal-flecked, mottled grey brown silt [1017]. No finds were recovered from this feature.

At the northern end of the trench, a series of similar postholes cutting 1009 was contacted. Of these features, F7 and F9 were unexcavated due to time constraints. Sealing F7-F8 and F10 was a layer of crushed sandstone material [1020] seen in the east-facing section only. It contained pottery from the 18th and 19th centuries. F8, a 0.50m square and 0.70m-deep posthole, contained a mixed brick, tile and mortar rubble fill [1022]. F10, to its south, was a similar-sized posthole, 0.50m square and 0.60m-deep, filled by a silty material [1024] which had rotted timber inclusions and some root activity. F11, the shallowest of the excavated features, was 0.30m square and 0.30m deep. It was half-sectioned only. Its fill, a deposit of brown buff silt sand [1025], contained no finds. Sealing F7-F8 and F10 was a layer of crushed sandstone material [1020] seen in the east-facing section only. It contained pottery from the 18th and 19th centuries (discarded on site).

Towards the southern end of Trench 1, a slightly-sloping grey silt alluvium layer could be seen [1008], overlying 1009. This material, which contained two highly-abraded sherds of late 15th century green glazed pottery and a few sherds of 17th-18th century pottery, was flecked throughout with charcoal and contained a small quantity of small pebbles. It was cut, as seen in the west-facing section, by a small depression [F4]. This bowl-scraped feature, 0.30m in diameter and 0.15m in depth, contained no finds.

Layers 1008 and 1009 would appear to have been subject to levelling and truncation at some stage, to judge by the nature of the uppermost parts of the deposits. Sealing 1008 and 1009 was a layer of varying thickness [1007]. This black charcoal-flecked loam silt contained fragments of tile, brick and sandstone. Two pieces of post-medieval pottery were recovered, dating from the 18th-19th century. Sealing 1007 was a 0.50m-thick layer of black brown loamy rubble material [1006], 18th-19th century in date, which could be observed in all excavated sections of the trench. The final levelling of the carpark consisted of various mixed layers and deposits [1003 to 1005] finally overlain by the carpark surface, a 100mm-thick layer of modern tarmacadam.

### 6.07: Trench 2 (Fig. A-1, Plates 7-8)

Trench 2 (1.7m by 4m), was orientated east-west, with its western edge approximately 10m from Underhill Street. The upper tarmacadam surface of this trench was also cut using a floor saw before its removal by machine. The upper deposits were removed to reveal any archaeological deposits. Exposed sections and plans were drawn by hand (where possible). A machine trench was placed centrally along the length of the trench down to the natural clay deposits. These sections were recorded using sketch forms and photography.

In the deepest area of excavation, the natural brown grey river clay [2038] was contacted at both ends of the trench at a depth of 27.04m. Overlying this were three alluvium layers [2037-2036-2035]. The lower was a clean grey silt [2037], approximately 0.80m in depth, which contained a small fragment of highly-abraded coarse grey pot rim, dating possibly from as early as the 12th-13th centuries. Above 2037 was a 1.60m-deep layer of alluvial silt [2036], which contained three small sherds of grey/orange, and green-glazed medieval pottery. Above 2036 was a layer of grey alluvium [2035], approximately 0.80m in depth. This layer produced no finds. Layer 2036 was in turn sealed by an irregular layer of brown grey alluvium [2034], approximately 0.30-0.40m in depth.

Due to the later construction of a building and associated yard surface at the western end of the trench, the north and south-facing section of the trench varied in make-up, and no direct relationship between these structures and the here probably truncated alluvial deposits was seen in section. The east-facing section showed a series of sand/silt deposits below the modern structures. These layers, a grey alluvium layer [2027] and a brown/orange sand/silt [2028], sloped slightly to the east and north. No finds were recovered from either material. These layers, although likely to overlie the alluvial deposits 2034-2038, were indistinct in the section of the machine-excavated sondage to this area of the trench, cleaning of which by hand was ruled out for safety reasons.

A layer of brown grey silt [2026] similar to 2034, and a mottled brown/orange silt/sand layer [2025] completed the sloping surfaces at the western end of the trench. The remaining overlying contexts [2032-2000] were highly mixed and disturbed, as could be seen in the section face, and were probably related to the construction and use of the building here. On removal of the tarmacadam at the west end of the trench a small area of brickwork was contacted. Further cleaning revealed this to consist of four small sections of mortar-bonded brick walling [F200, F201, F203 and F204], associated with a single-depth brick yard surface [F202] (Plates 7-8). These walls and yard surface, dating from the 19th century, cut through a brick/ash rubble levelling material [2007].

### 6.08: Conclusion and Recommendation

Although several pieces of material dating from the medieval period were recovered from the lower levels of Trench 1, and in evidently residual contexts in both trenches the dates obtained from the majority of the layers and features would seem to indicate that they dated to a much later period, principally the 18th and 19th centuries. The so-called alluvial layers encountered deep in both trenches did not in section have the appearance of being anything other than naturally-fall-down materials resulting from the flooding of the Severn. They were certainly very unlike the medieval dumping deposits excavated some years ago at the nearby



found at every site, where they had been laid down and formed in situ once flooding had ended the area of exarid, and hence, some explanation for the presence of medieval brooches in the 'normal' alluvium at Underhill Street therefore has to be sought. They could have been items already deposited in the river as rubbish before its flooding, or they could represent material disposed of *in situ* on the Underhill site at the interface between masses of alluvial deposition. Some pottery is highly abraded in appearance – though not noticeably water-rolled – while most is unbroken, so that a mixture of these explanations may be valid.

The alignment of postholes at the southern end of Trench 1 may well indicate a boundary of some kind between a higher area of land and a possible flood-prone area encountered during the machining of Trench 2. The other postholes in Trench 1 could have formed the footings for a timber structure adjacent to this zone or an aisle from the main course of the Severn. The date of any projected structures here would seem to be pre-18th-century. The subsequent building and yard here was of 19th-century date.

It is therefore most likely that any future construction work that may be undertaken in the area of the carpark will not disturb significant archaeological deposits. It may be deemed appropriate for an archaeological watching brief to be maintained during any deep and extensive ground disturbance work, which exceeds the depth of the uppermost surface of the alluvial deposits into which the majority of negative features of a pre-18th-century date are cut. Any final mitigation decisions, however, will need to be made by the archaeological officer of Shropshire County Council in consultation with CgMs.

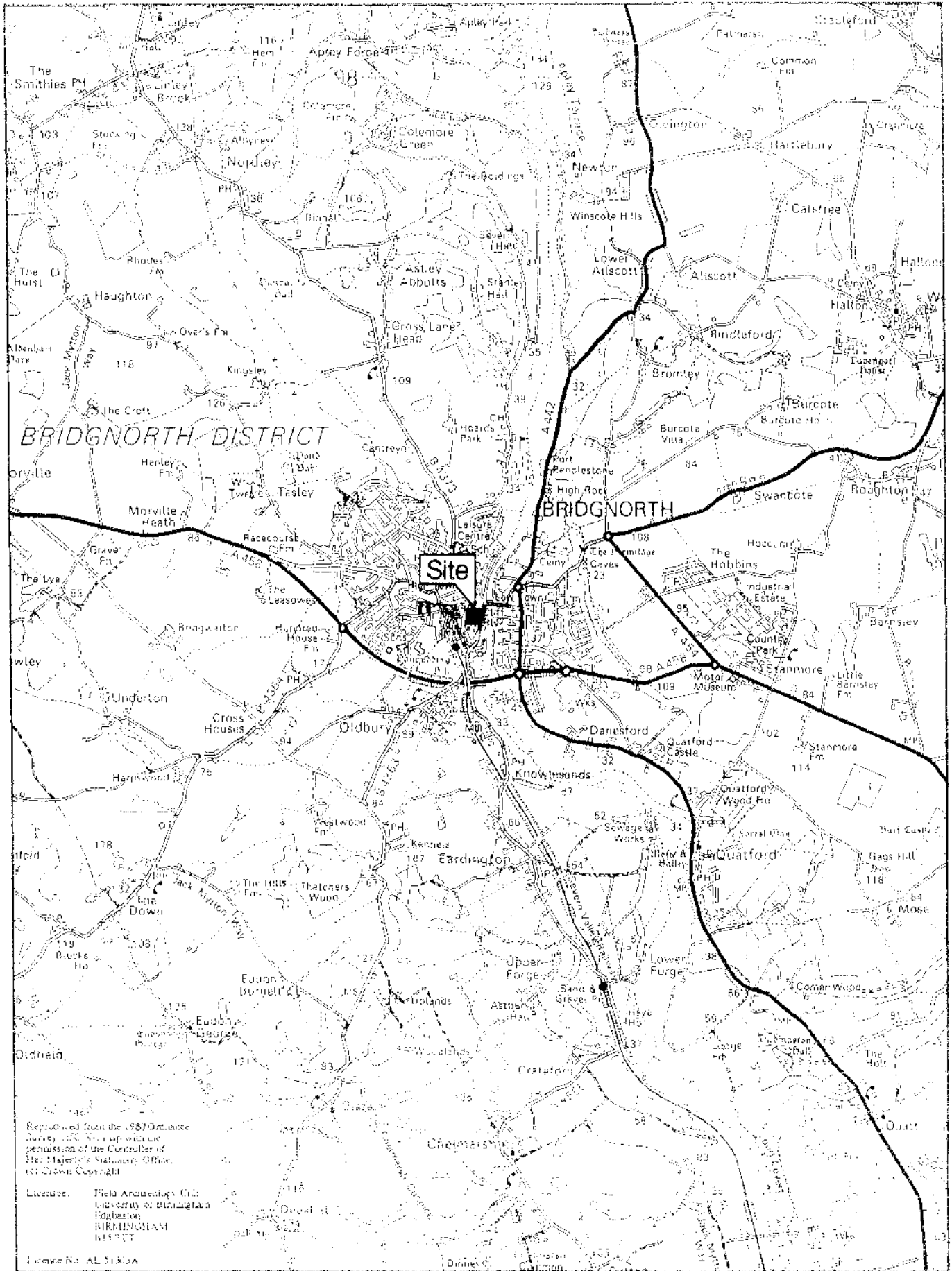
## 7.0: Acknowledgements

The evaluation was undertaken by Jon Stenberg, John Hovey and Ellie Ramsey, and was monitored on behalf of BUFAL by Iain Ferris. The report was written by Jon Stenberg and edited by Iain Ferris. Illustrations were drawn by Nigel Dodds. Annette Hancock's spot dated the pottery and John La Niece prepared the finds table. Many thanks to Jim Hunter of CgMs Limited and Mike Watson of Shropshire County Council for their help, comments and advice. Thanks also to Mr Derek Brooks and his daughter Helen for allowing us to disrupt their garden centre during the excavation. Finally many thanks to the plant operators, Bert and Gordon from F.G Davis and Sons Ltd, Wombourne who undertook the excavation, backfilling and resurfacing of both trenches.

**Appendix I**

**Finds Assemblage Table**

Context	Feature	Spot date	Pottery		Bone (Wgt)	Other Comments
			No	Wgt		
1006		C18th- C19th	8	145		Clay pipe fragment 1
1007		C19th	2	9		Clay pipe fragment 1, shell fragments 2
1008		C19th	6	146		1 pot sherd late C15th, 4 pot sherds C17th/C18th, 1 pot sherd C19th; Clay pipe fragments 3, Fe nail 1, bottle fragment 1
1009		C18th	4	27		3 pot sherds C12th/C13th, 1 pot sherd C17th/C18th; Clay pipe fragment 1, fired clay 1, tile 1
1010	F1	C18th- C19th	1	11		Clay pipe fragments 3, Fe nail 1
1011	F2	C13th- C14th?	2	15		2 pot sherds C13th/C14th; Fe nails 2, Fe object 1
1012	F3	C17th	5	25		4 pot sherds C12th/C13th, 1 pot sherd C17th; Clay pipe fragments 2, Fe nails 2, Fe object 1, fired clay 4, tile 1
1013		C19th	4	18		
1014		C14th- C15th	1	11		
1018	F5	C18th- C19th	3	14	5	Tile 1
1022		C19th	13	91	21	7 pot sherds C17th/C18th, 6 pot sherds C19th; Clay pipe fragment (with stamp) 1, bottle fragment 1
1024		C17th- C18th	6	85		
2014		C18th- C19th	6	80		Bottle fragment 1
2019		C19th	2	6		
2021		C17th	1	23		
2024		C19th	3	30	58	Modern comb 1, modern penknife 1
2029		C18th- C19th	8	145	10	Clay pipe fragment 1, Fe nail 1, bottle fragments 2, tile 1 and leather fragment 1
2030		C19th	5	65		2 pot sherds C17th/C18th, 3 pot sherds C19th; Bottle fragment 1
2031		C18th- C19th	6	71		Tile 1
2036		C14th- C15th	3	15		Fe nail 1
2037		C12th- C13th	1	18		



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Fig 1

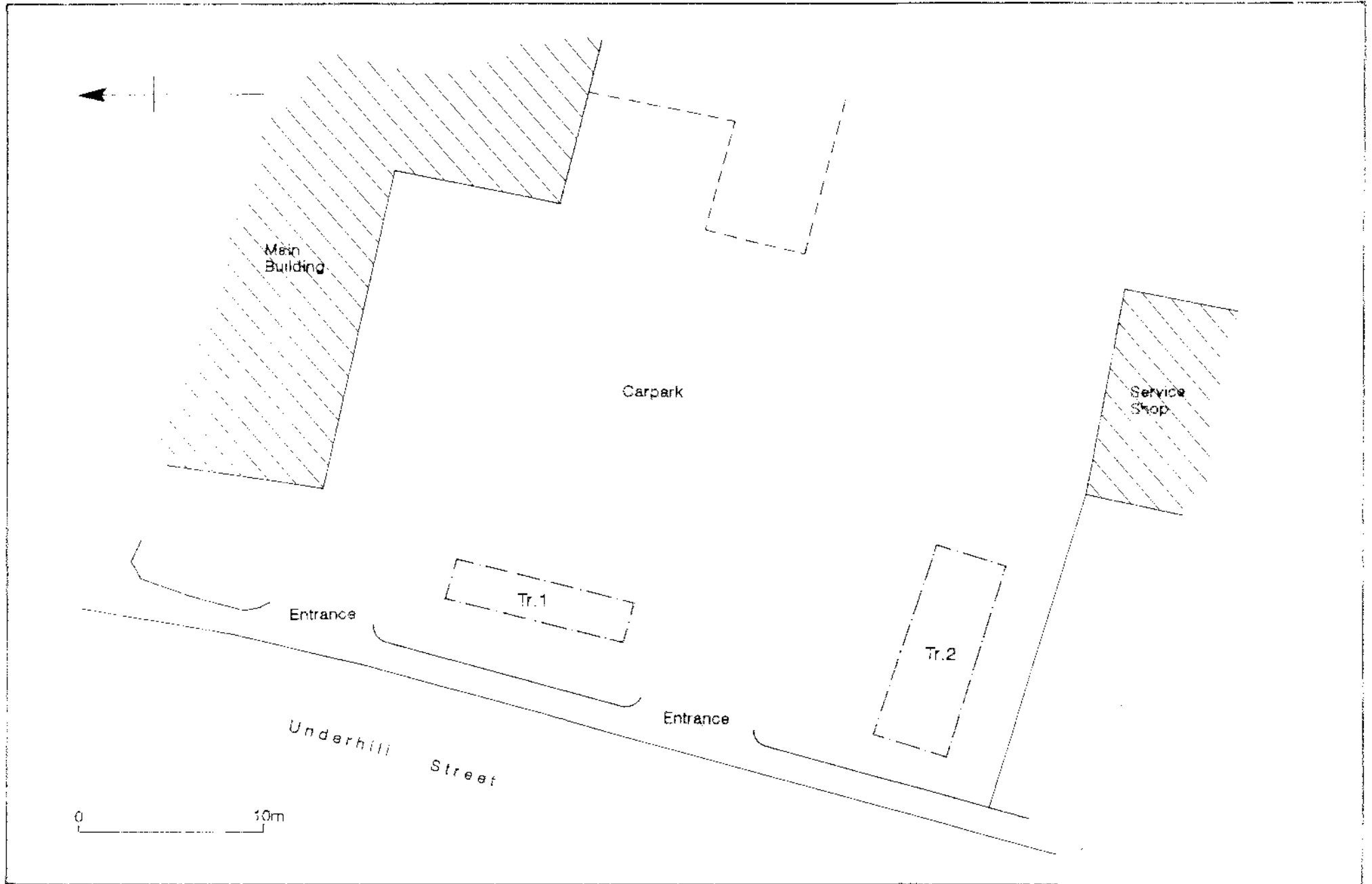
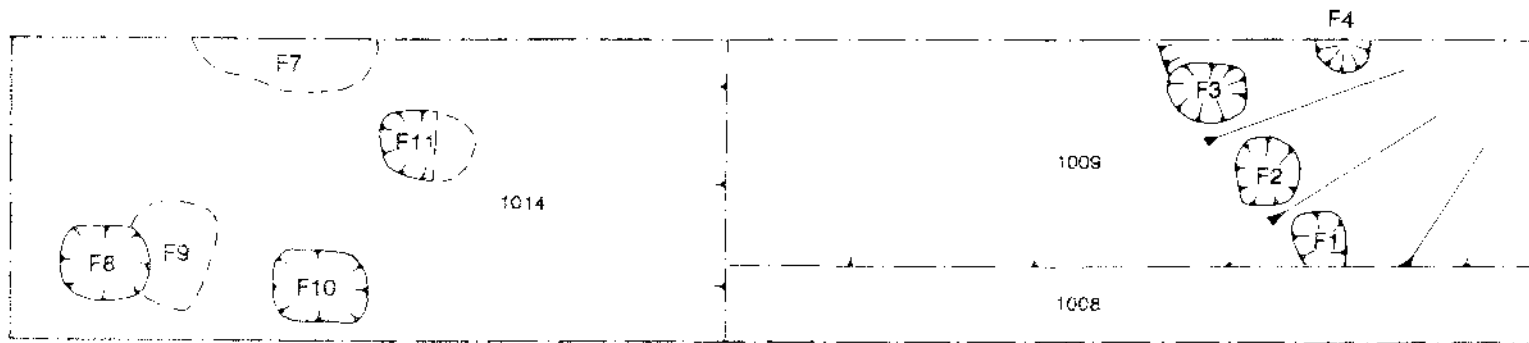
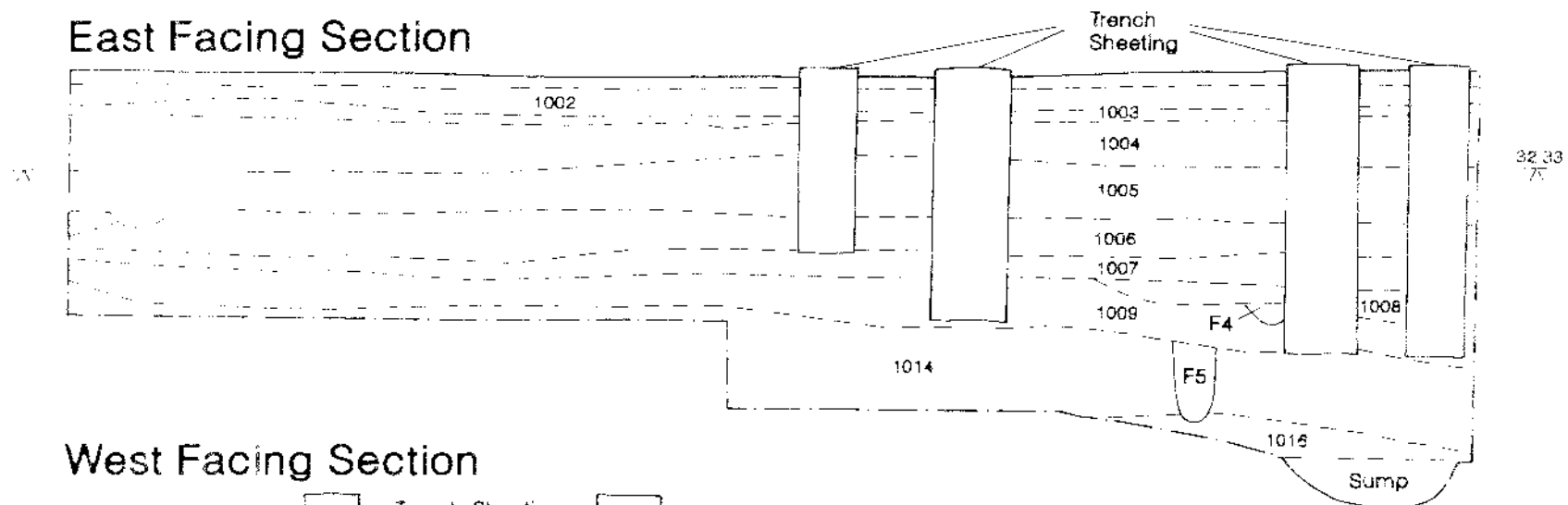


Fig.2

Trench 1



East Facing Section



West Facing Section

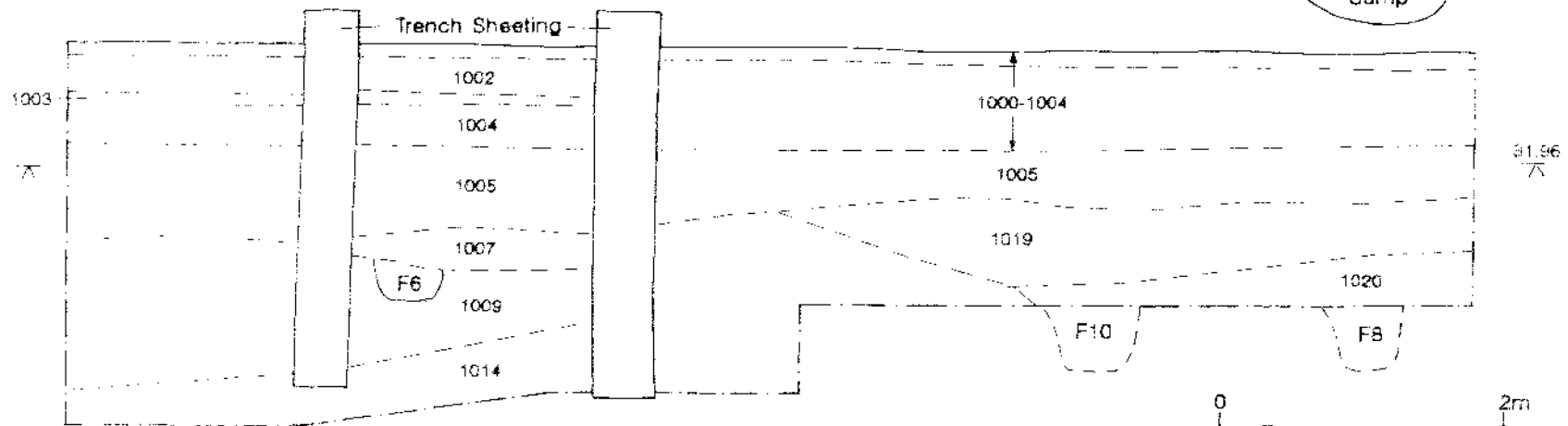
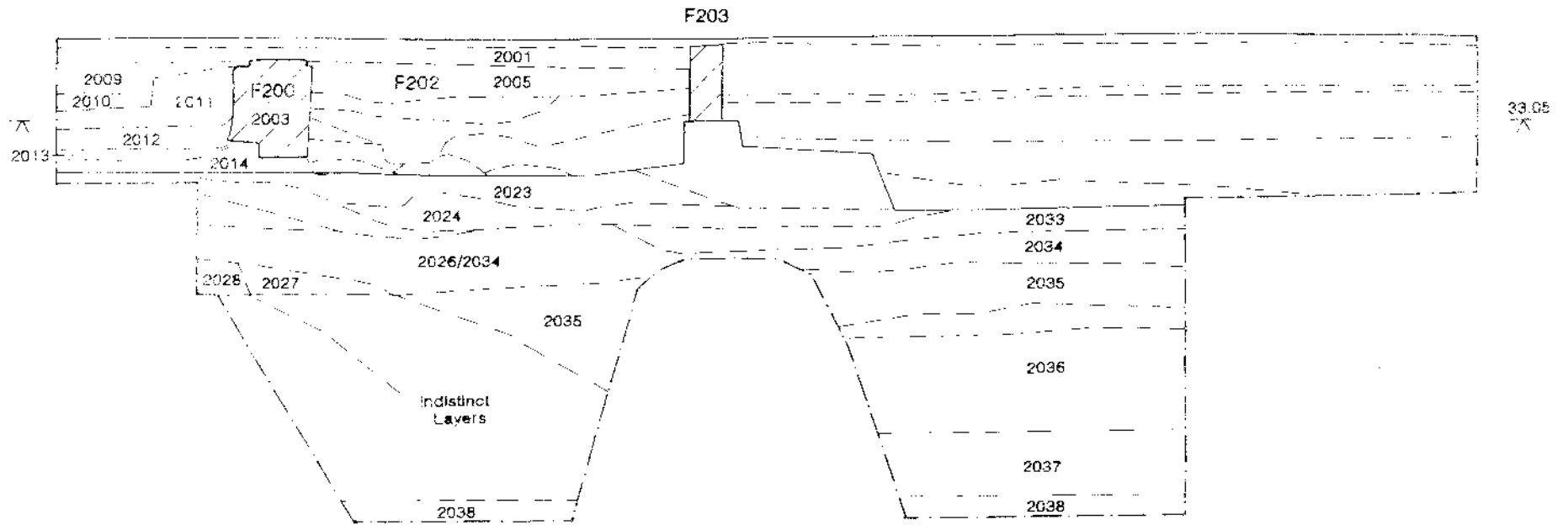
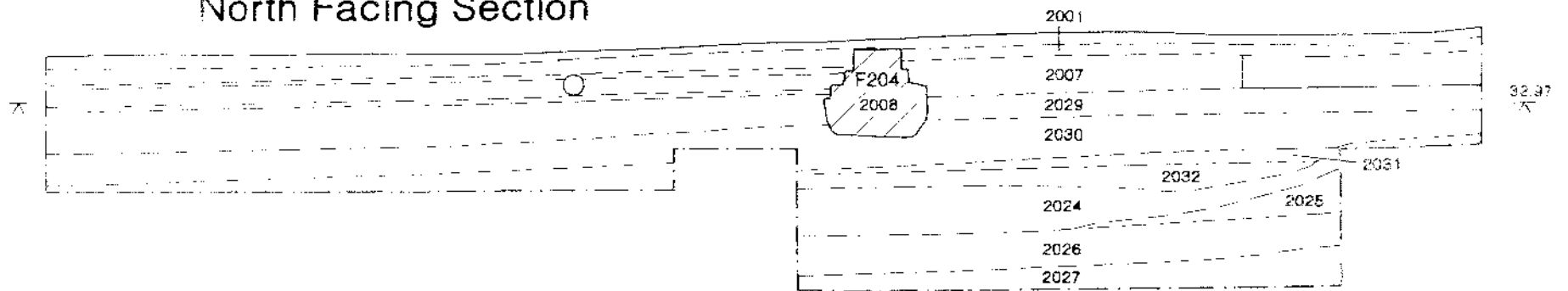


Fig 3

# Trench 2 South Facing Section



# North Facing Section



0 2m

Fig. 4

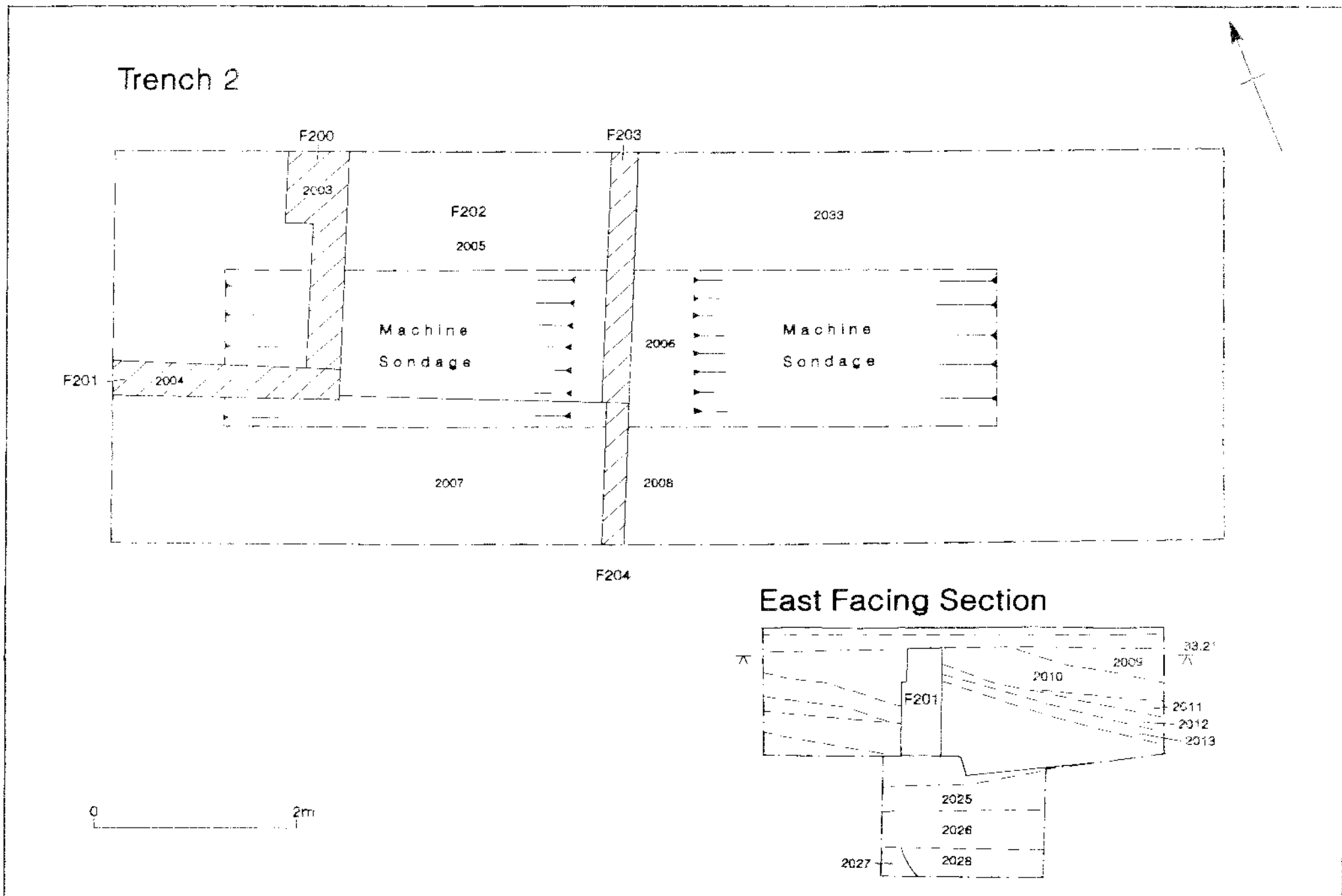


Fig.5





Plate 1. Trench 1. General view of south end of trench.



Plate 2. Trench 1 Levelling material, looking east.



Plate 3. Trench 1. Posthole F5, half - sectioned



Plate 4. Trench 1. Features F7, F8, F9, F10, and F11 pre excavation, looking south



Plate 5: Trench 1.

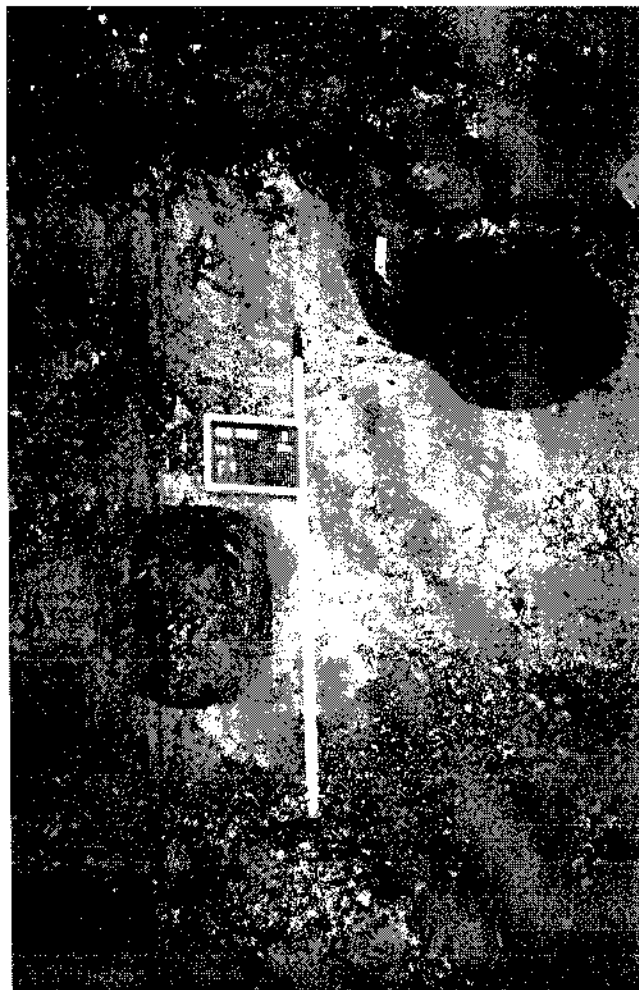


Plate 6: Trench 1. Half-sectioned F11, with F10 to the west



Plate 7. Trench 2. Levelling material, looking west.

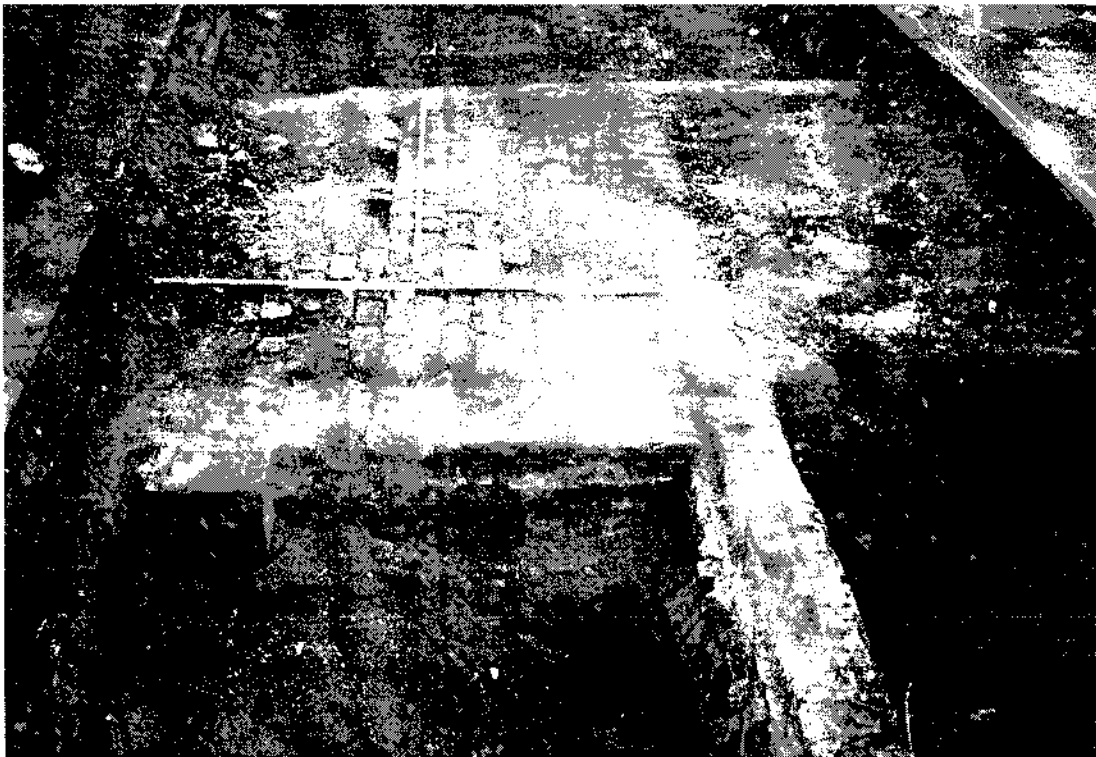


Plate 8. Trench 2. Brick floor and associated walling, looking east.