

**Land adjacent to Church
Cottage, Wychnor,
Staffordshire:**
an archaeological evaluation

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by
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Summary

A small archaeological evaluation was undertaken at land adjacent to Church Cottage, Wychnor, Staffordshire (NGR SK 177 162) in March 2000. The site lies within the deserted medieval village of Wychnor, recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record as PRN 128 and adjacent to an area scheduled as an ancient monument. The aim of the evaluation was to locate any surviving deposits, relating to the village and twelfth-century church, which might be threatened by the proposed construction of a stable block.

A single trial trench was excavated. Two linear gullies containing medieval pottery were recorded. These may be drainage features associated with a former trackway or field boundary. They cut what appeared to be an agricultural soil containing small quantities of medieval pottery.

Introduction

This report details the results of an archaeological evaluation, undertaken prior to the construction of a new stable block, on land adjacent to Church Cottage, Wychnor (centered on NGR SK 177 162, Fig 1). The work was commissioned by DS Design on behalf of Mr and Mrs Windley and was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in March 2000. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a brief with specification prepared by Staffordshire County Council (Wardle 2000).

The site lies within the deserted medieval village of Wychnor (Staffordshire Sites and Monuments Record Number 00128), between Church Farm to the north and St Leonard's Church to the south. Much of the area of the deserted medieval village has been designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The area of the proposed stable block is currently under pasture and lies just outside the scheduled area.

Archaeological background

Much of the land occupied by the deserted medieval village is currently under pasture. Various earthworks can be seen within these areas of pasture, which probably relate to a former network of sunken roads and rectangular platforms on which medieval buildings would have stood. There are also other banks and ditches, some of which form the remains of ridge-and-furrow field systems.

Wychnor is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as being held by Robert of Stafford (Derby 1977). It is described as consisting of four villagers and two smallholders, with land for four ploughs, a mill, meadow and woodland with a total value

of 15s. The basic pattern of settlement in medieval Staffordshire had been established by 1086 and did not alter much in the next two centuries. Wychnor bridge was on Icknield Street and provided an important crossing over the marshy valleys of the River Trent (VCH Vol. II). Such was its importance that it was gifted oak trees from the crown forest at Cannock Chase. Medieval villages began to decline from the 14th Century, and this was true in southeast Staffordshire, where one in every two villages or hamlets began to disappear, possibly due to pestilence and climatic deterioration (Palliser 1976).

Aims

The objective of the archaeological evaluation was to contribute to an understanding of the extent, date, quality of preservation, significance and vulnerability of the archaeological remains within the area of the proposed development, in order to facilitate discussions regarding the need for preservation or any other mitigation measures.

Method

A single trench, 5m by 2m, was excavated within the proposed development area. The location of the trench was predetermined by the project design and subject to the agreement of the Local Planning Authority. The topsoil and other modern overburden were excavated using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.6m toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision. The subsoil surface was hand cleaned and then photographed. A representative sample of the features identified were hand excavated to provide information concerning the survival and complexity of feature fills, and to recover artefactual evidence. A detailed context record on individual pro-forma record cards was maintained and all features were photographed using both colour and black and white film. The trench plan and the sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20.

Results

The natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 1.14m. It comprised a medium, orange/yellowish sandy silt, disturbed in places by root activity. In the western end of the trench, the natural was sealed by an extensive deposit of mid grey brown sandy silt (1006/1011/1012) up to 0.4m thick. In the eastern end of the trench the natural was cut by two intercutting large sub-circular features (F104 and F105) filled with mid brown sandy silts (1016/1015/1014). These deposits and features were cut by two linear gullies, orientated east-west (F101 and F103) and up to 0.5m wide and 0.2m deep. The southernmost of these two gullies (F101) was filled with a dark blackish brown silty sand (1007/1010) and the northernmost (F103) was filled by a yellowish orange sand (1004/1009/1013). The northern gully (F103) cut across the southern gully (F101) at the eastern end of the trench. A circular pit (F100) also cut the underlying silts (1008) in the central area of the trench. This feature was 0.4m across, 0.15m deep and was filled by a brown silty sand fill (1005).

All these deposits and features were overlain by brown silty sand (1001/1002) up to 0.4m thick, and up to 0.2m of topsoil.

Finds by Annette Hancock

The pottery was scanned and spot-dated and a *terminus post quem* was assigned, where possible. The whole finds assemblage was quantified by count, with the exception of the animal bone, which was weighed (g).

A small but significant finds assemblage was recovered (Table 1). Nineteen sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from context 1011. Much of this material appears to be from a single vessel. Small quantities of medieval pottery were also recovered from layer 1008, the pit (F100/1005) and one of the gullies (F101/1010). Two of the sherds of medieval pottery also demonstrated external sooting, evidence of possible use as cooking vessels. Two small sherds of post-medieval pottery may be intrusive in layers 1008 and 1011. Small quantities of animal bone were retrieved from layer 1008 and the fill of one of the gullies (F101/1010). With the exception of one piece of splash glazed decorated ceramic tile, the remaining material proved to be of limited interest.

| Context | Post-medieval pottery | Medieval pottery | Ceramic Tile | Animal bone (g) | Ceramic brick | Spot date |
|--------------|-----------------------|------------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|---|
| 1005 (Pit) | - | 1 | 2 | - | 2 | 13 th /14 th century |
| 1006 | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | ?14 th /15 th century |
| 1008 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 102g | - | Uncertain date |
| 1010 (Ditch) | - | 4 | - | 92g | - | 13 th /14 th century |
| 1011 | 1 | 19 | - | - | - | ?14 th /15 th century |
| 1016 | - | - | 2 | - | - | |
| Total | 2 | 27 | 9 | 194g | 2 | |

Table 1 Summary of finds by context

Discussion

The only coherent activity in the evaluated area appears to be represented by the two linear gullies, one of which contained a small quantity of pottery dating to the 13th – 14th centuries. It is noticeable that these gullies are on the same alignment as an earthwork feature visible in the pasture field immediately to the west of the trackway leading to St. Leonard's Church (Fig. 1). This earthwork has the appearance of a sunken way, perhaps the former location of a trackway within the medieval settlement. It seems possible that the gullies identified in the evaluation trench are drainage features on the southern side of this possible former trackway. Alternatively, the gullies might have been associated with a former field boundary.

The gullies and the associated pit cut layers which had the appearance of a buried agricultural soil and which also contained small quantities of late medieval pottery. These deposits did not appear to be associated with structural activity although possible cut lines were observed in the eastern end of the trench (F104 and F105). It seems more likely that these are related to medieval agricultural activity.

Acknowledgements

Lesley-Ann Mather supervised the fieldwork with the assistance of Mary Duncan. The illustrations are the work of John Halstead and the finds were reported on by Annette Hancocks.

The project was managed by Gwilym Hughes and monitored by Chris Wardle, the Heritage Data Manager for Staffordshire County Council. Thanks are also due to David Smith (DS Design) for his assistance with the archaeological investigation.

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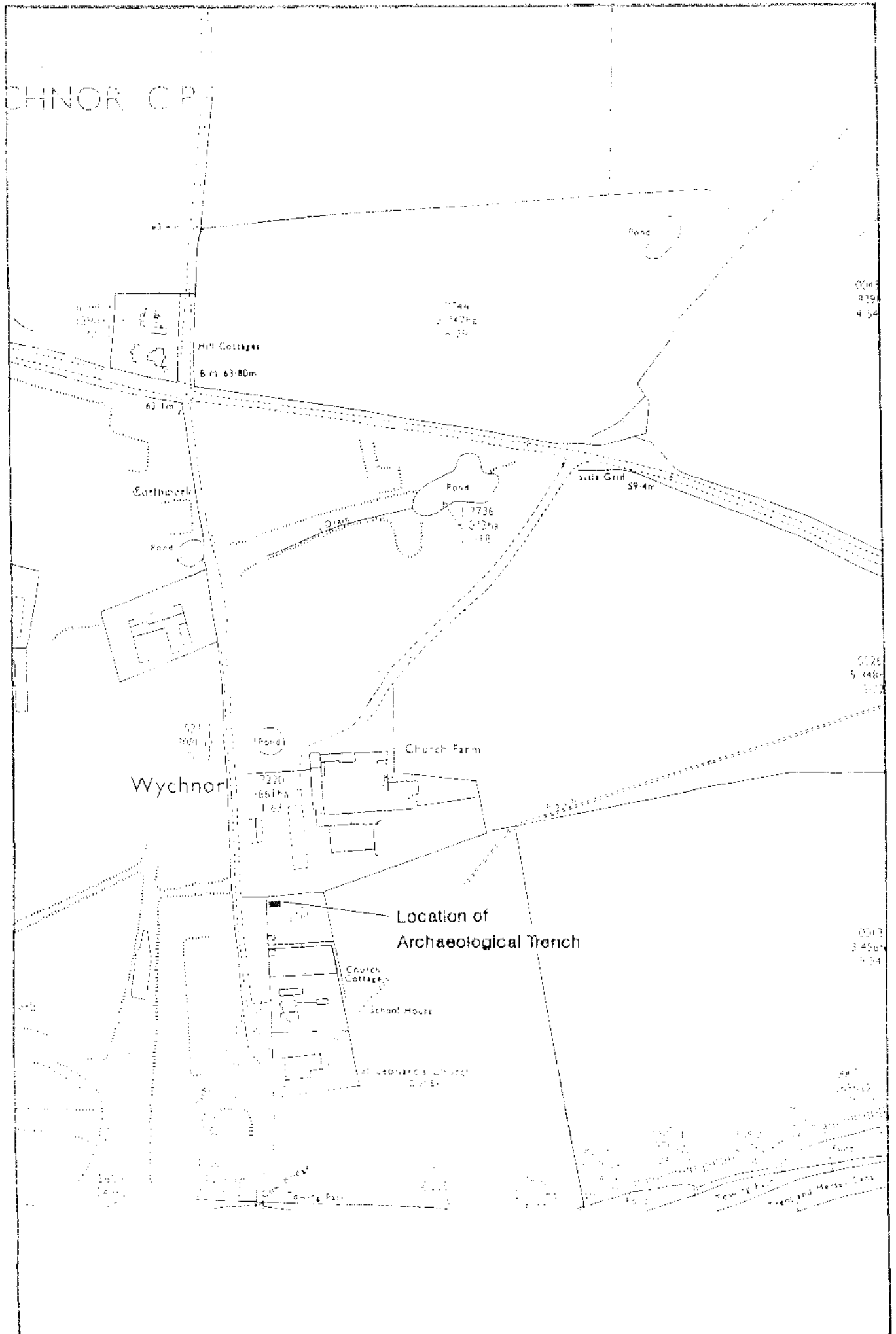


Fig 1 Trench Location

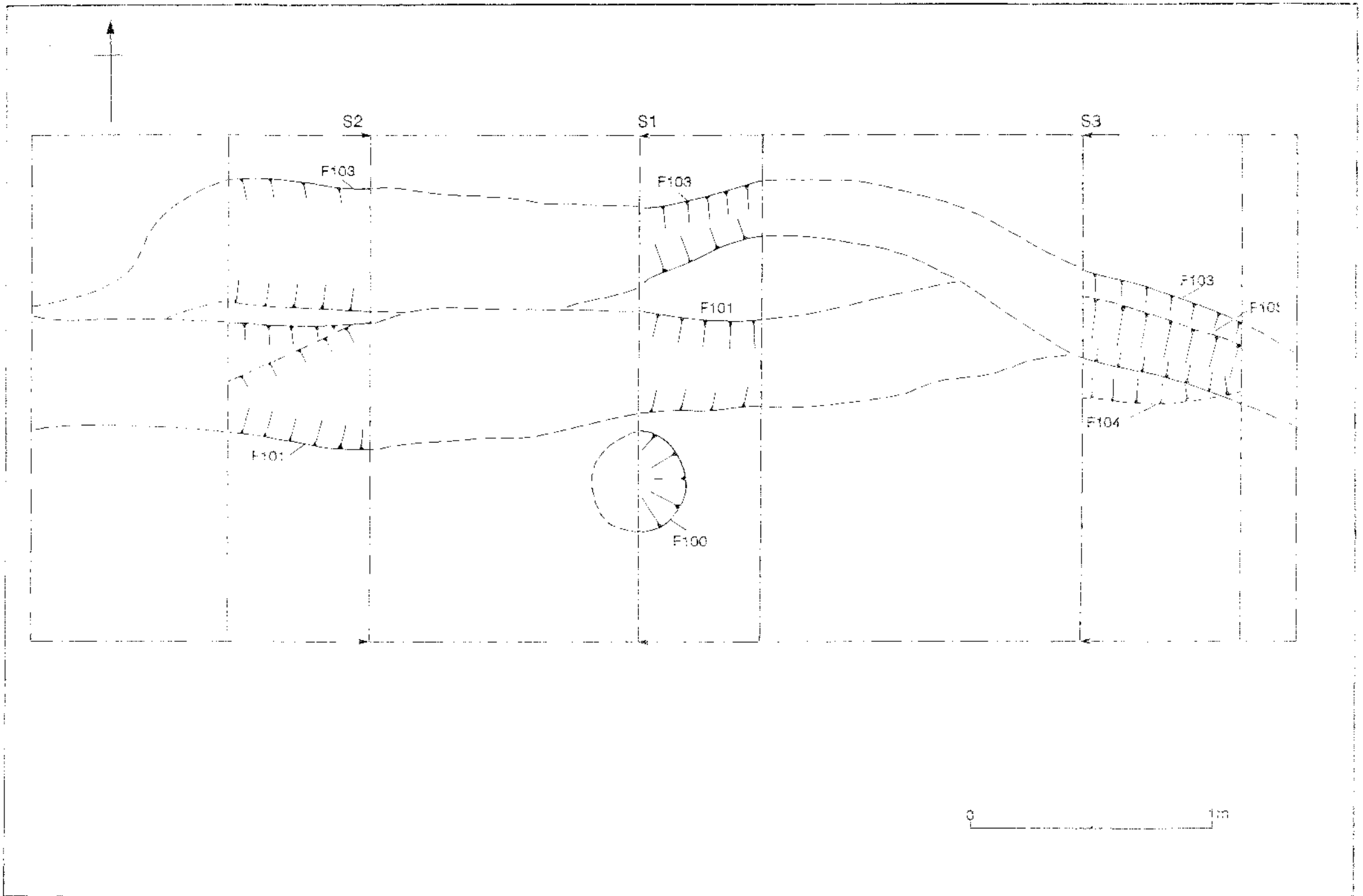


Fig.2 Plan of Trench

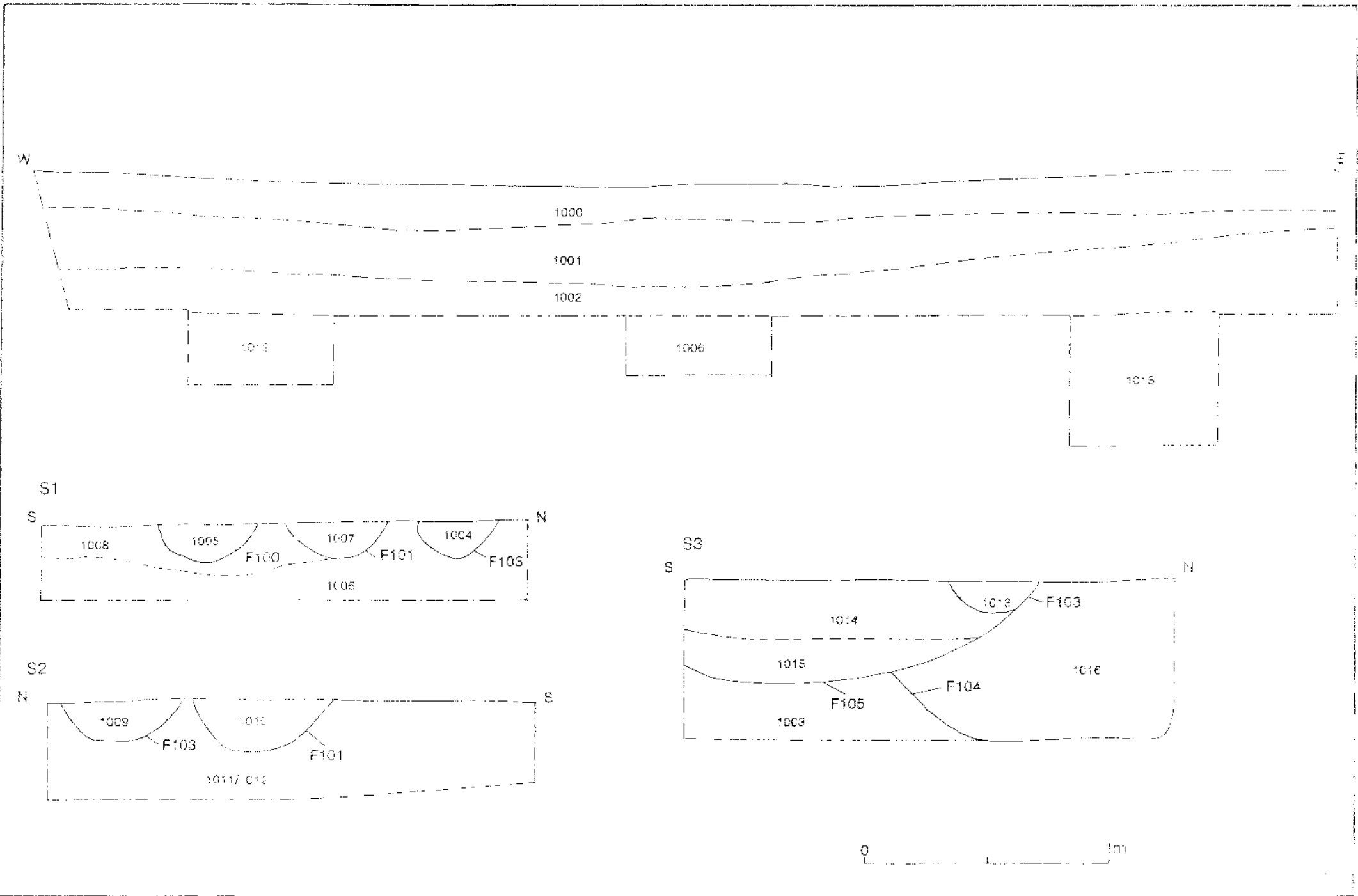


Fig. 3 Sections