

**Trial Trenching at  
Sidenhales Moated Site,  
Blythe Valley Park,  
Hockley Heath**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
Project No. 690  
April 2000

**Trial Trenching at Sidenhales Mooted Site,  
Slythe Valley Park, Hockley Heath**

by  
Kirsty Nichol

with a contribution by Stephanie Ratkai

*For further information please contact:*  
Simon Duteux, Iain Ferris or Cwilym Hughes (Directory)  
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.buiau.bham.ac.uk>

## Contents

	Page
List of Figures	
1.0 Summary	1
2.0 Introduction	1
3.0 The Site and its Setting	2
4.0 Aims	2
5.0 Methodology	2
6.0 The Archaeological Response	3
7.0 Discussion	4
8.0 Conclusion	4
9.0 Acknowledgements	5
10.0 References	5
Appendix 1: Finds Catalogue	6

APPENDIX B. ILLUSTRATIONS  
(Continued)

- Fig. 1 Site location plan
- Fig. 2 Trench location plan
- Fig. 3 Trench 3 location cross-section
- Fig. 4 Trench 3 plan

Trial Trenching at Sidenhales Moated Site,  
Blythe Valley Park, Hockley Heath

## 1.0 Summary

*This report describes the results of trial trenching within the environs of Sidenhales Moated Site, Hockley Heath, undertaken on behalf of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants for ProLogis Developments Ltd. This work follows area excavation undertaken in June-July 1999, when the footprints of three building plots were excavated following extensive geophysical survey. The main aim of the trial trenching was to evaluate an area outside that of previous surveys and excavations.*

*The results of the trial trenching corroborated the findings of previous excavation. Evidence for the early occupation of the site, a buried soil, probably relating to the initial clearance and cultivation of the site, predated the excavation of the moat. A smaller ditch, contemporary with the moat, was probably constructed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This was found to cut an earlier feature, probably a pit. Ridge and furrow, on an east-west axis, was visible overlying the buried soil. Ridge and furrow was identified elsewhere on the site as directly overlying the natural sub-soils; this was masked by a more modern plough soil.*

## 2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of trial trenching at Sidenhales Moated Site (SMR 3056), Blythe Valley Park, Hockley Heath (NGR SP 1375 7500, Fig. 1), hereinafter referred to as the site. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) undertook the work reported upon here in March 2000, on behalf of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants for ProLogis Developments Ltd.

In accordance with the guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990), a recommendation for a programme of archaeological work to accompany a major redevelopment scheme of land within the Blythe Valley was made by the SMR Officer for the West Midlands.

The layout of the proposed development was revised after the initial excavations, resulting in a change from Offices to a Leisure Unit, on plots to the south-west and the north-east of the moat. These areas were outside those previously targeted and it was agreed with the Local Planning Authority that, due to the greater intrusive nature of the development on this plot, a programme of trial trenching be undertaken.

The methodology conforms to an archaeological specification prepared by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (JSAC/228/00/006, 2000).

## 3.2 The Site and its Context

Sidenhales Moat is situated on a slight ridge overlooking the Blythe basin (between 130m and 135m AOD); the Birmingham plateau rises to the north. Although the moat is situated near to the Blythe, the Great Forest of Arden originally covered the area. It is one of a group of moats within the Upper Blythe Valley, many of which, including Sidenhales, occupy positions along the fringes of the flood plain on both sides of the river. The site originally lay within the parish of Tanworth-in-Arden that was divided into two manors during this period, the River Blythe forming the boundary with Tanworth manor to the south and Monkspath manor to the north. A second moated site, Sydenhams Moat (SMR 3059), lies just 1km to the north-east (this site is also within the proposed development area). A third site, The Mount Moated Enclosure (SMR 3065) is located 1.25km to the north on the opposite side of the Blythe flood plain.

Geologically the area is based on Keuper Marl with pockets of boulder clay and deposits of sand and gravel. This means that although the area seems to be well drained the soils are perfect for the construction of wet moats, and where they do survive today they remain largely waterfilled or marshy despite major changes in land drainage over the years.

The area targeted for trial trenching is located to the south-west of the moat proper (Fig. 2). Further details about the site, including a discussion of the cartographic evidence, can be found in Nichol 1999, p3-4.

## 4.0 Aims

The primary aim of the trial trenching was to establish the presence or absence of archaeological deposits. Secondly, should archaeology be present, to determine the location, extent, date, and character of the deposits, and to assess the significance and quality of the remains. The overall aim of the project was to produce evidence which would provide the basis for possible mitigation strategies within the future development.

## 5.0 Methodology

Topsoil layers were removed mechanically, using a 360° machine under direct archaeological supervision, to expose any undisturbed archaeological deposits or the natural subsoil. The trenches were then recorded and a sample of all archaeological deposits was excavated by hand to characterise and date them. Excavation was carried out by qualified field archaeologists from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The site was recorded using *pro-forma* record sheets complemented with scale drawings. A complete photographic record was maintained and finds were kept and processed.

A total of seven trenches was specified for the programme of trial trenching. However one trench could not be opened due to its location under large, established

oak bark. A second trench, Trench 5, was located on the northern side of the moated enclosure, directly to the north-east of Area 5 of the 1999 excavations (Fig. 2). This trench was not opened to its full length as, from the outset, it became apparent that this whole area had been scarped down to below the top of the natural subsoil as had been revealed in Area B. The levelling of this area, and the fact that machinery had been tracking over it before a surface of sand and scalpings had been laid, meant that a decision to abandon the trench was made after consultation with the County Archaeological Officer.

## 6.0 The Archaeological Results

In Trenches 1, 4 and 5 the natural subsoil (4002) was overlain by ridge and furrow (4001), c.0.3m maximum depth, on a north-south alignment. A more modern plough soil (4000), c.0.25m deep, had built up over the top of the ridge and furrow. This plough soil contained pottery dating to the late-17<sup>th</sup>-early-18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-centuries, fragments of tile, and a single fragment of a small glass bottle.

Trench 2 was located along an early east-west field boundary to the south of the site. The ground in this area was particularly marshy and only c.0.2m of topsoil (4000) was removed over the natural sub-soil over much of the trench. This layer produced fragments of 18<sup>th</sup>-century coarseware pottery and brick. At the southern end of the trench an attempt had been made to build up the ground level, and increase drainage, by a dump of 18<sup>th</sup>-century clamped-bricks (4003). No datable evidence was recovered from the dump of bricks, and, given that there were 18<sup>th</sup>-century brick structures on the site until recently (Nichol 1999, Appendix I), it is impossible to say when these bricks were deposited. An animal burrow was excavated at the eastern end of the trench.

Trench 3 (Figs 3 and 4) was located to the west of the 1999 Area A excavation, roughly parallel with the western baulk. A grey sandy-silt, identified as a buried soil (4004), was excavated at the northern end of the trench; it contained fragments of medieval tile. A straight-sided, flat-bottomed cut (F406) containing pottery dating to the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries was situated against the eastern baulk. Due to the edge of excavation this feature could not be fully investigated; it was also truncated to the north by the cut of a ditch (F404). Ditch F404 was orientated on an east-west alignment and cut through the buried soil (4004). It had a steep-sided, flat-based profile and the dark grey-black silty fill contained fragments of brick and tile. The remains of ridge and furrow (4001) was visible overlapping the edges of the ditch cut, and this was overlain with a more modern plough soil (4000) that contained fragments of a 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>-century coarseware bowl or pancheon. A modern ditch (F403), on the same alignment as the medieval ditch, cut through the topsoil; it had been visible as a depression in the ground prior to excavation. The dark grey-black sandy-silt (4005) contained fragments of brick and tile, including a residual fragment of medieval tile, a sherd of pottery dating to the late-18<sup>th</sup>-early-19<sup>th</sup>-centuries and a small fragment of bottle glass.

## 7.6. Trench 3.

The baled soil (4004) located at the northern end of Trench 3 appears to be the same as that identified in Area A (Nichol 1999, p.7). The presence of tile (probably deposited through the process of manuring) suggests that the site was under some kind of agricultural regime prior to the excavation of the moat in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest feature, a straight-sided, flat bottomed cut (F406) has been identified as a probable pit; this feature did not extend into Area A. The ditch (F404) that cut it, however, appears to be the continuation of ditch F119 excavated in Area A. Excavation in 1999 showed the ditch to be contemporary with the moat stratigraphically. The ditch also appeared to have banks, but these were not apparent in the area of Trench 3. Following the construction of the moat the area of land between the moat and the ditch reverted to agriculture, resulting in further development of ridge and furrow (4001).

It is known from previous excavation and research that Sidenhales Farm has a long and continuous history of occupation from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. It is uncertain who originally settled the site, but by 1317 the *de Sidenhale* family (VCH Warw. Vol. 5, 1949, 169) were in residence. There is, however, evidence for the early water management of the site – the excavation of the moat and a ditch constructed to drain the land enough for it to be both habitable and workable. The flat-bottomed profile of ditch F404 suggests that it was also part of the water management system on the site; it may have run into a leat or feeder running from the south-west corner of the moat out to the field boundary ditch to the south. A boggy stretch of ground is now all that is visible of this possible feature today.

It can be assumed that the original house was situated on the moat platform itself, with the occupants farming the surrounding area and breeding fish, either in the moat itself or in the spur off the moat, to sell in the local markets. However, the overall plan of this early occupation remains tantalisingly out of reach and the site, as excavated, merely alludes to this early period. However, there remains potential for further investigation should any development be undertaken on the moat platform itself.

There is very little evidence concerning the early period of occupation. The presence of tile in the earliest buried soil attests to a building of some importance; normally buildings of that date would have been thatched. Comparative evidence is found at Sydenhams Moat (Smith 1989-90), just 1km to the north-east, where excavation of the platform revealed ‘irregular tiled features’ in phase 1B, of mid 13<sup>th</sup>-century date. The absence of material from early in the life span of the moat within the excavated areas may in some part be explained by hard landscaping of the site in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, together with the thoroughness of recent demolition works, but without investigation of the moat platform itself this period may never be fully understood.

## 8.8. Conclusions

A total of 6 trenches were excavated as part of this programme of archaeological investigation. Trench 3 revealed further evidence with regard to water management on the site dating from the medieval period up to the present. Trenches 1, 2, 4, and 5



confirmed that land to the south-west of the area had been part of a medieval field system, and used for agricultural purposes for an extended period. However, no significant archaeological deposits were recorded within this area of the site. Trench 6 was abandoned due to the depth of modern disturbance.

#### 2.6 Acknowledgements

John Samuels Archaeological Consultants on behalf of ProLogis Developments Ltd commissioned this project. Thanks are due to Don Slatcher who monitored the project on behalf of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants, also Jonathan Parkhouse and Ed Wilson who monitored the project on behalf of the Local Planning Authority. Work on site was carried out by M.Duncan, L.Jones, J.La Niece, E.Macey, E.Newton, and K.Nichol. Special thanks are due to Pete McGarry of St Clements Plant for his careful and precise machining. Thanks are also due to Stephanie Ratkai who analysed the pottery. Kirsty Nichol produced the written report, which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds and edited by Simon Dureau, who also monitored for BUFAU.

#### 3.0 References

John Samuels Archaeological Consultants. 1998 *A Desk-based Archaeological Assessment of Land at Blythe Valley park, Hockley Heath, West Midlands (JSAC/228/97/001)*.

John Samuels Archaeological Consultants. 2000 *A Specification for the Archaeological Evaluation Excavation of Land at Sidenhales Moor, Blythe Valley Park, Solihull (JSAC/228/00/006)*

Nichol, K. 1996 *West Midlands Moated Sites Survey. Interim Report 1, Solihull, (BUFAU Report No. 375)*.

Nichol, K. 1999 *Excavation at Sidenhales Moated Site, Blythe Valley Park, Hockley Heath, (BUFAU Report No. 597)*.

Smith, L. 1989-90 'Sidenhales Moor: a 13<sup>th</sup>-century moated manor-house in the Warwickshire Arden'. *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society for 1989-90, Vol.96, 27-68*.

Victoria County Histories 1949 *VCH Warr. Vol.5.*

Appendix 1

Beads Catalogue

With special thanks to my identifier, Ann, by Stephanie Inghel

Context	Vessel	Category	Beads/Find	Count	Date Range
4000	1	2		1	18 <sup>th</sup> -century
4000	2	2	2		18 <sup>th</sup> -century
4000	3	2			18 <sup>th</sup> -century
4000	5		1		18 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> -centuries
4001	1	2	4		17 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> -centuries
4004	5		1		13 <sup>th</sup> -century
4006	3	1	13	2	18 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> -centuries
4009	3		2		13 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> -centuries
4011	3	5			13 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> -centuries
	TOTAL	13	25	2	

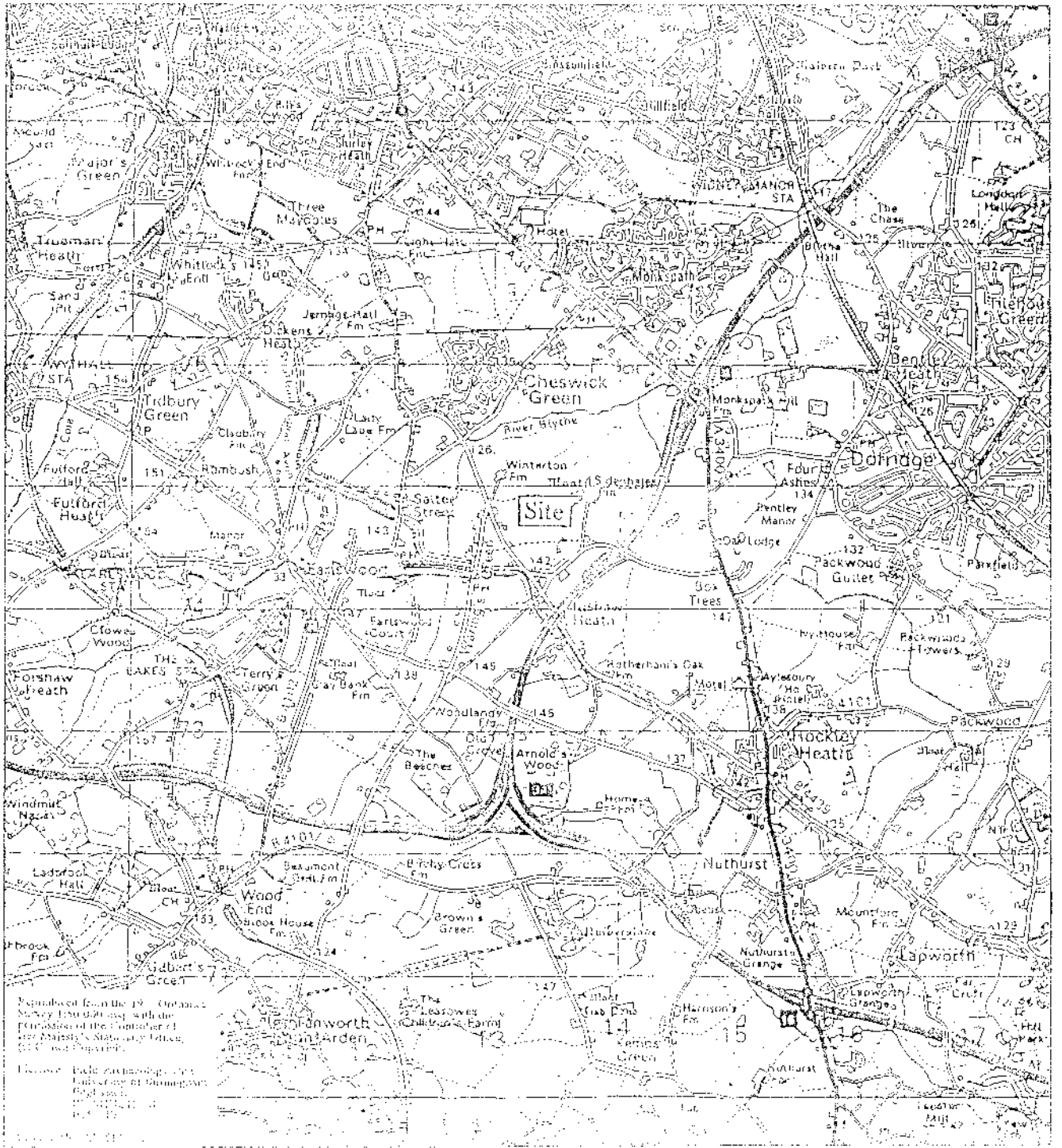


Fig 1

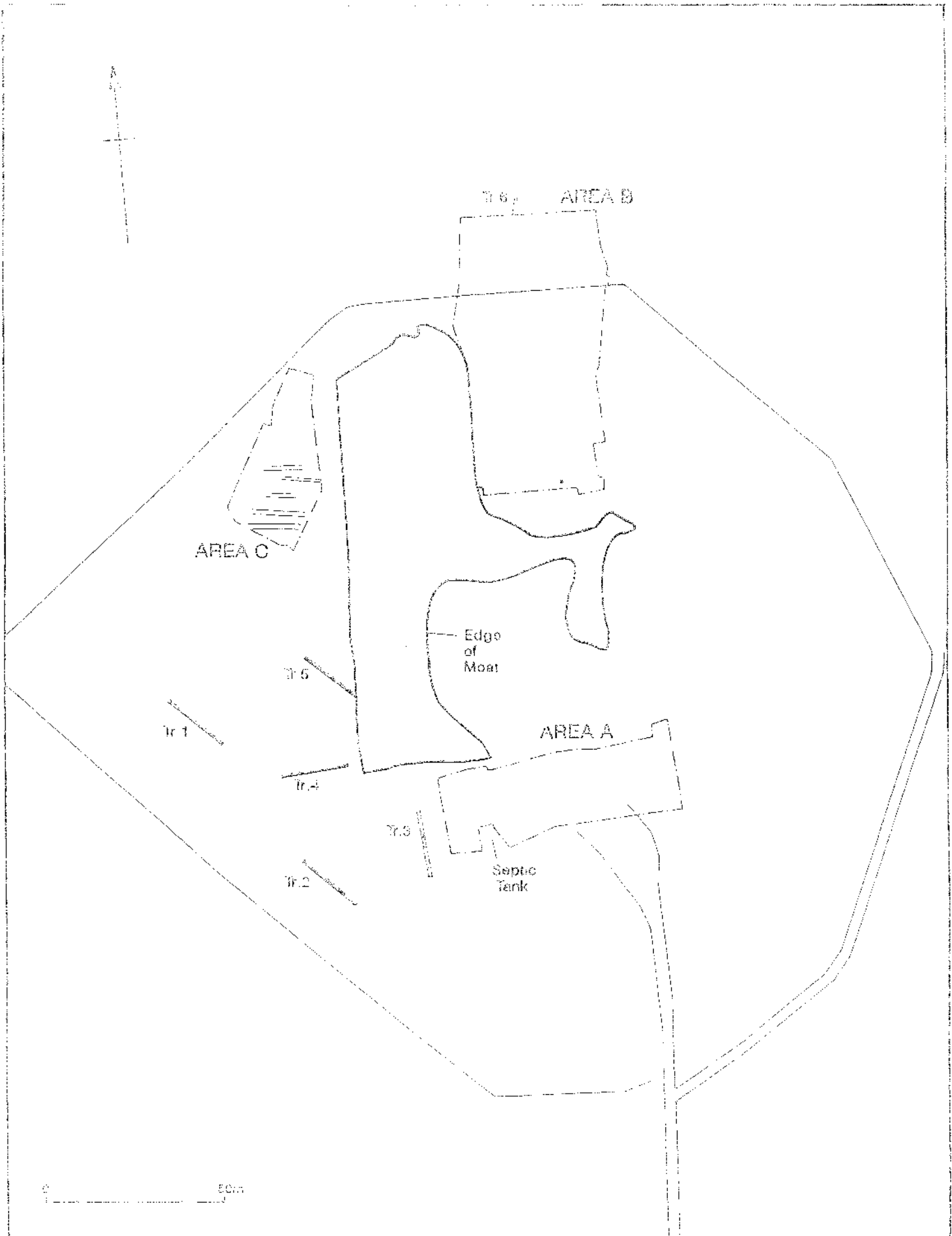


Fig. 2

# Trench 3

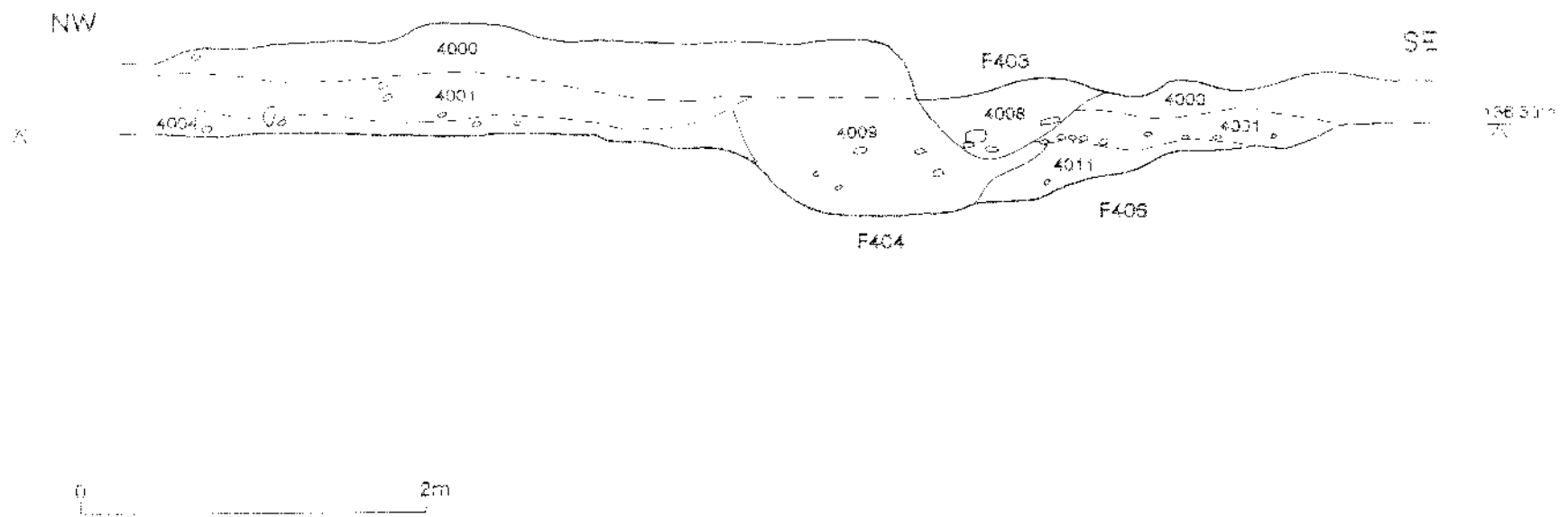


Fig. 3

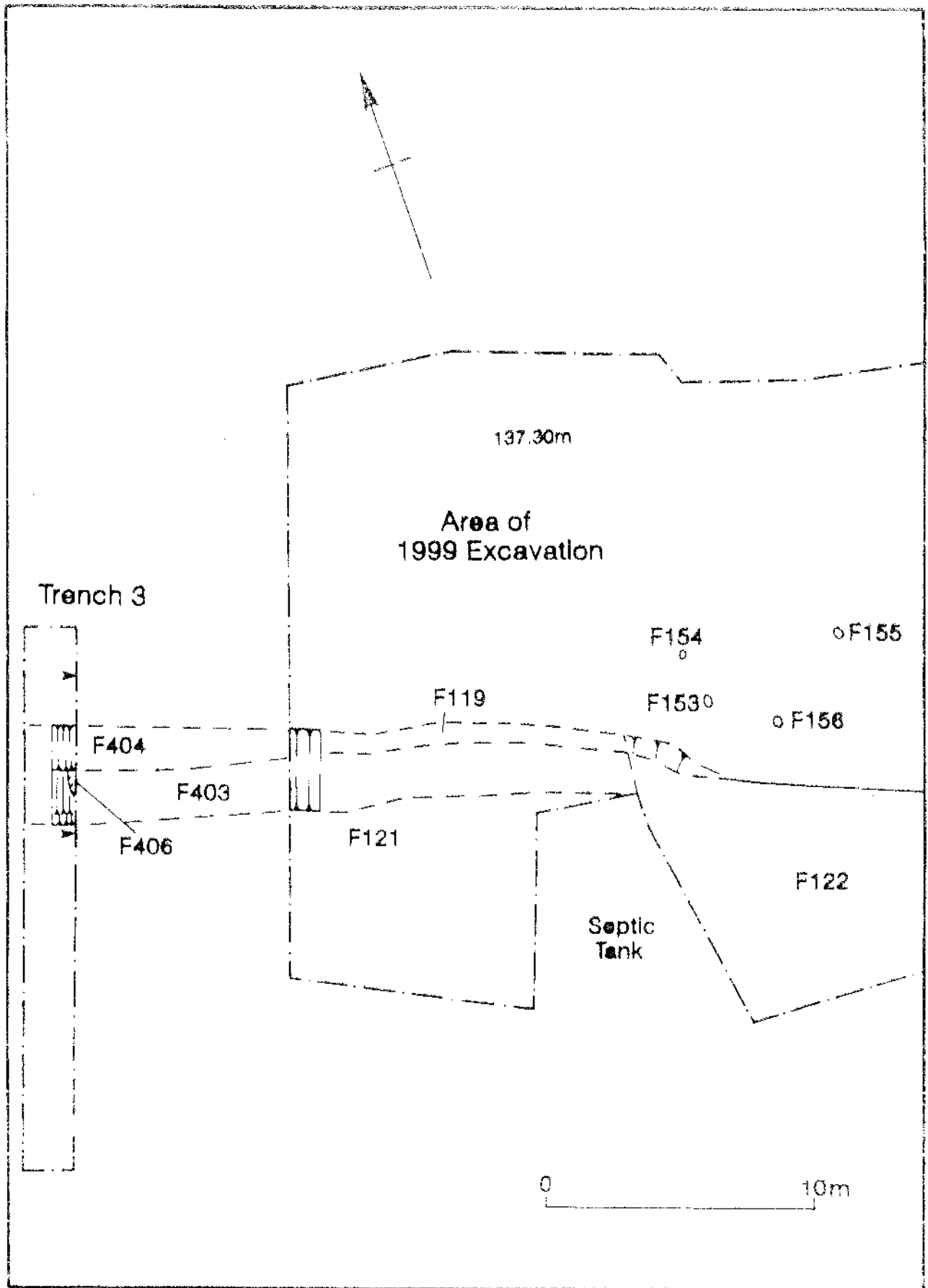


Fig. 4