

**Cunnery Farm, Wychnor,  
Staffordshire:**

**An Archaeological  
Watching Brief 2001**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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by  
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## **Cunnery Farm, Wychnor, Staffordshire: An Archaeological Watching Brief**

### **1.0 Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in advance of a redevelopment at Cunnery Farm, Wychnor, Staffordshire (NGR SK 178 162) during July and October 2001. The development site lies on the boundary of the deserted medieval village of Wychnor, a Scheduled Ancient Monument recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record (PRN 00128). The watching brief was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit as a condition of planning consent.*

*A ditch of undetermined date was recorded. A single sherd of Bronze Age pottery and a second possible prehistoric sherd were recovered from a former plough soil. No other significant archaeological features or deposits were observed.*

### **2.0 Introduction**

This report details the results of an archaeological watching brief in advance of redevelopment at Cunnery Farm, Wychnor (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by DS Design and undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit between during July and October 2001. The redevelopment involved the construction of a single replacement dwelling (PA/09349/018). A second phase of archaeological works was undertaken during the excavation of footings for a garage and service trench (PA 09349/020/3). The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological features affected by the cutting of foundation trenches for a dwelling and garage, required by East Staffordshire Borough Council as a condition of planning consent. This was undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by BUFAU (Cutler 2001).

### **3.0 Site location and description (Fig. 2)**

The drift geology consists of sand and river terrace gravel. The development site lies close to the deserted medieval village of Wychnor (Staffordshire Sites and Monuments Record Number 00128). Much of the deserted medieval village is located to the west and south of Wychnor Church and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The village lies on sloping ground immediately above the edge of the floodplain of the River Trent. Cunnery Farm (NGR SK 178 162) is situated about 180m northeast of Wychnor Church, outside the scheduled area.

### **4.0 Archaeological and historical background**

The gravel terraces of the River Trent are known to provide a focus for prehistoric settlement due to the presence of light, well-drained soils. Wychnor bridge, located on the

Roman Road of Icknield Street, provided an important crossing over the marshy valleys of the River Trent (VCH *Staffs. Vol. II*).

Wychnor is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as being held by Robert of Stafford (Darby 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 was established early in the medieval period, and did not alter dramatically in the following two centuries. The 14th century saw a period of economic upheaval and stagnation in England. Staffordshire was affected by the Black Death and subsequent labour shortages, which badly affected rural areas. From the 14<sup>th</sup> century one in every two villages or hamlets began to disappear in southeast Staffordshire (Palliser 1976).

Relevant archaeological work at Wychnor includes an archaeological evaluation of land adjacent to Church Cottage (Mather 2000) and two watching briefs (Litherland 2000 a and b) of land at, and immediately to the north of, Church Cottage. The watching briefs and evaluation found evidence of drainage gullies that were broadly medieval in date, but no activity relating to former house plots.

### **5.0 Aims**

The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to record any archaeological remains uncovered during the course of groundwork, and to recover any artifactual and environmental material, in order to contribute to an understanding of the nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains within the area.

### **6.0 Method**

All foundation trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision. The sections and base of the trench were then manually cleaned and any significant archaeological deposits were examined and recorded. Contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings (plans and sections) and photographs which together with any recovered artifacts form the site archive. Even where no archaeological deposits were identified, the stratigraphy was recorded and photographed. These records comprise the site archive, which is currently stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. Subject to the approval of the landowner the site archive will be deposited with an appropriate repository within a reasonable time, after completion of the project.

## **7.0 Results (Fig. 3)**

The foundation trenches measured between 0.8m to 1.0m in width and were excavated to a depth of c.0.8m.

### Dwelling PA/09349/018

Since a building previously occupied the area of the proposed dwelling, some of the overburden consisted of rubble and thus the identification of features in plan proved difficult.

The orange-red natural sand and gravel (1004) was revealed at depths of between 0.6m and 0.2m below the present ground surface. Three features and possible plough furrows were recorded in Sections A, B and C (Fig. 3).

#### *Section A*

An undulation in the natural ground surface was recorded. These were filled by a light brown silt-sand (1003, 1008) varying in depth between 0.34 and 0.05m. Although fairly sterile, this horizon produced a single sherd of probable Bronze Age pottery. This was in turn sealed by modern deposits of hardcore, gravel and concrete (1002, 1005, 1007)

#### *Section B*

A possible feature (F1013) with an irregular 'V' shaped profile, measured approximately 2m in width and 0.32m in depth. It was filled by a sterile, light brown silt-sand (1012). This was not observed in the opposing section of the foundation trench. This feature was sealed by a dark brown sandy-silt (1011) containing brick, which in turn was sealed by a layer of redeposited sand and gravel (1010).

#### *Section C*

A linear feature (F1018) was evident in both sides of the foundation trench and appeared to be aligned east-west. It had a gentle 'V shaped' profile and was filled with two layers of light brown sand (1016, 1017), and was evident in both the east and west facing sections of the trench. At the north end of the trench was a depression in the natural ground surface (F1019). This was not well defined, measuring approximately 0.3m across and 0.22m in depth. This was filled by a light brown silty-sand (1015) indistinguishable from the layer above. The layer of light brown silt-sand (1015) measured 0.12m in depth and sealed Feature 1018. This layer was in turn sealed by a dark brown silt-sand (1014), possibly the same layer as 1011 (Section B).

### Garage PA/09349/020/3

The garage was located within an area of hard standing to the west of the dwelling (Fig. 3).

The footings for the garage were excavated to a depth of 0.84m below ground level. The natural subsoil (1022) was encountered at a depth of 0.52 below ground level, which was sealed by a layer of brown silt (1021). This measured 0.32m in depth and contained a few

fragments of pottery. Hardcore, bricks and tarmac (1020) measuring 0.20m in depth sealed the brown silt (1021).

#### *Section D*

A service trench (Section D, section not illustrated) was excavated to a depth of 0.32m to the southeast of the garage. The upper surface of the undulating natural (1022) was recorded at a depth of 0.30m and sealed by brown silt (1021). At the southern extent of the trench the brown silt (1021) was truncated by a modern feature approximately 2m in width, and back filled with mixed red clay, silt, stone, wood and brick fragments. This was sealed by a mix of hard core and topsoil to a depth of 0.06m (1023).

### **8.0 Finds**

A sherd, possibly of Bronze Age date, was recovered from Layer 1008 (Section A). This was an organic impressed body sherd, of a coarse fabric, with an oxidized exterior and a reduced inner surface (Annette Hancocks pers. comm.).

A body sherd from a vessel with a coarse, reduced fabric and quartzite temper was recovered from Layer 1021. This may be prehistoric in origin, although due to the small size of the sherd identification proved difficult. A flake of good quality flint recovered from Layer 1023 was humanly-struck but was not diagnostic enough to provide reliable dating evidence (Lynne Bevan pers. com.). Fragments of modern brick were also recovered from Layer 1021.

### **9.0 Discussion**

There appears to have been removal, leveling and deposition of material associated with the former dwelling. Despite this activity the evidence of possible features was observed below what appeared to be a former ploughsoil. Feature F1018 may be the remains of a ditch aligned east-west, although this is difficult to date due to the lack of artefactual evidence. It is also on a similar east-west alignment to what has been interpreted as ridge and furrow, and may be an associated ditch. The two other features (F1013, F1019) were difficult to interpret and produced no finds. These may be of natural origin.

Undulations in the natural ground surface (evident mainly in Section A) are probably the result of ridge and furrow aligned east west. The evidence in section D appears to confirm this although the presence of brick fragments suggests a post-medieval date. This may suggest that the light brown sand (1003, 1008, and 1015) is a former plough soil. While the prehistoric pottery is probably redeposited it seems likely that these sherds and the worked flint relate to activity within, or close to the site.

There was no evidence for the presence of medieval dwellings associated with the abandoned medieval settlement at Wychnor.

## **10.0 Acknowledgements**

The watching brief was carried out by Richard Cuttler and Roy Krakowicz. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds, and the report edited by Lawrence Jones. The project was monitored by Chris Welch, on behalf of Staffordshire County Council, and Chris Forrett on behalf of East Staffordshire Borough Council. Thanks are also due to David Smith (DS Design) for his assistance.

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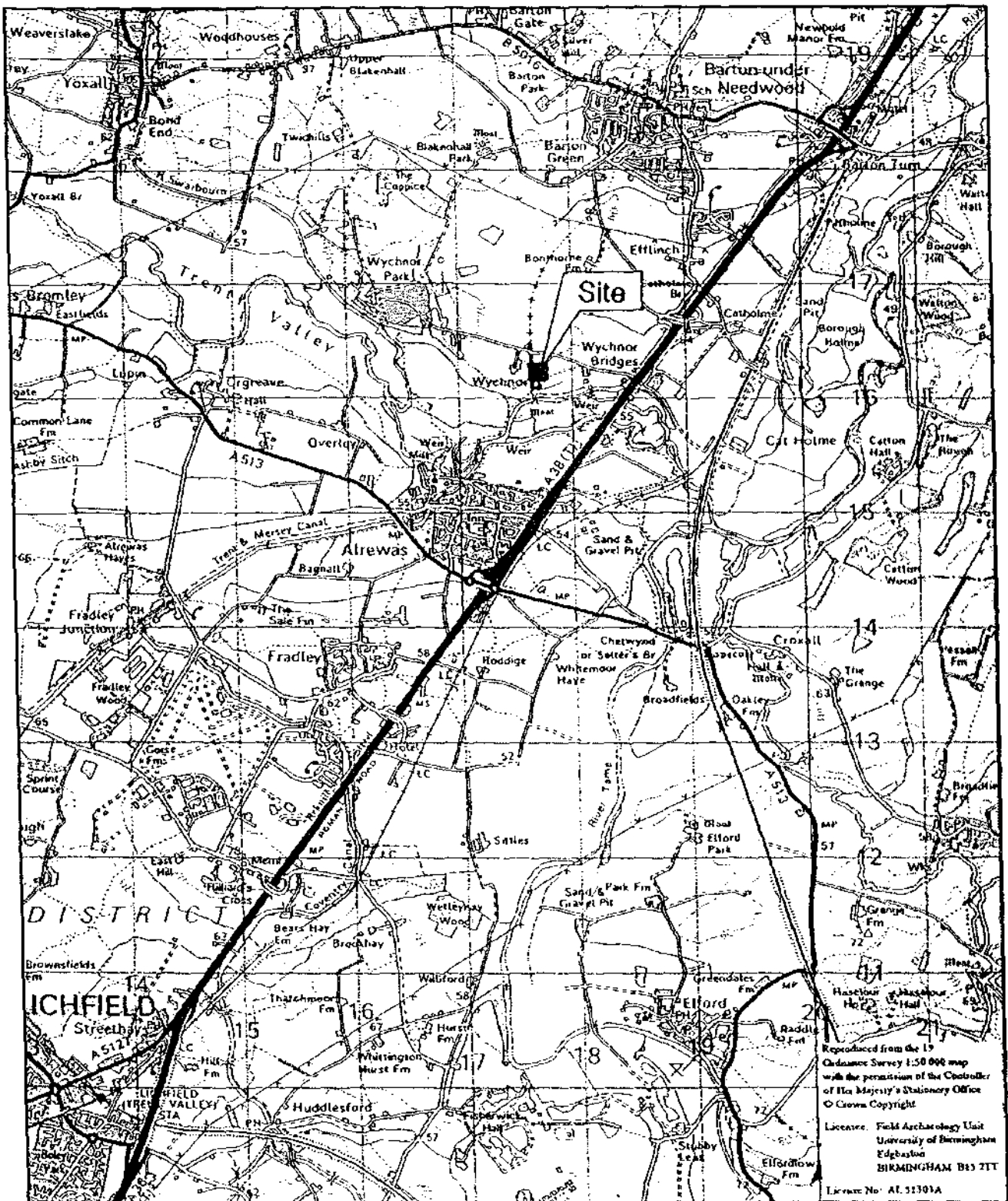


Fig.1



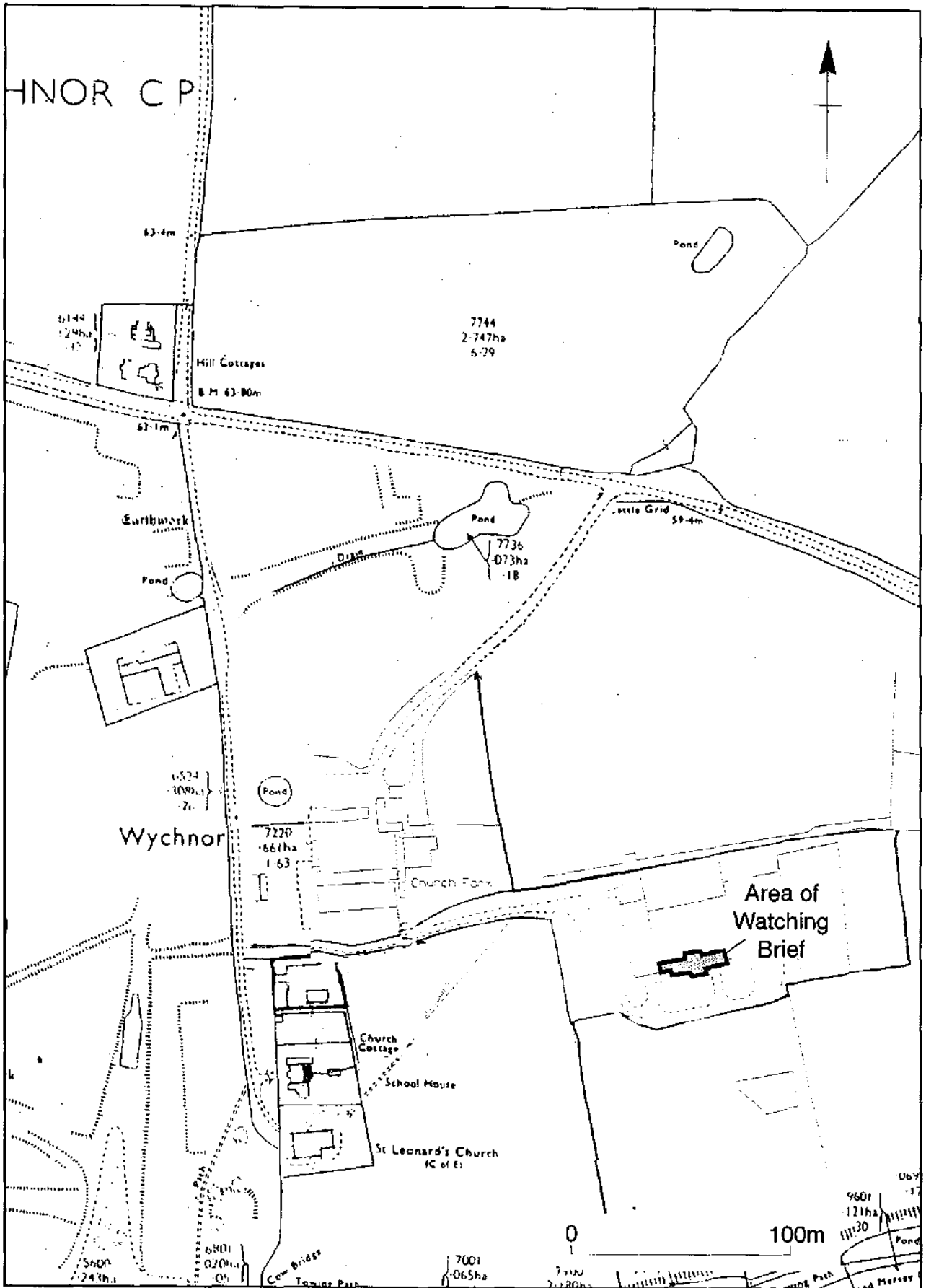


Fig.2

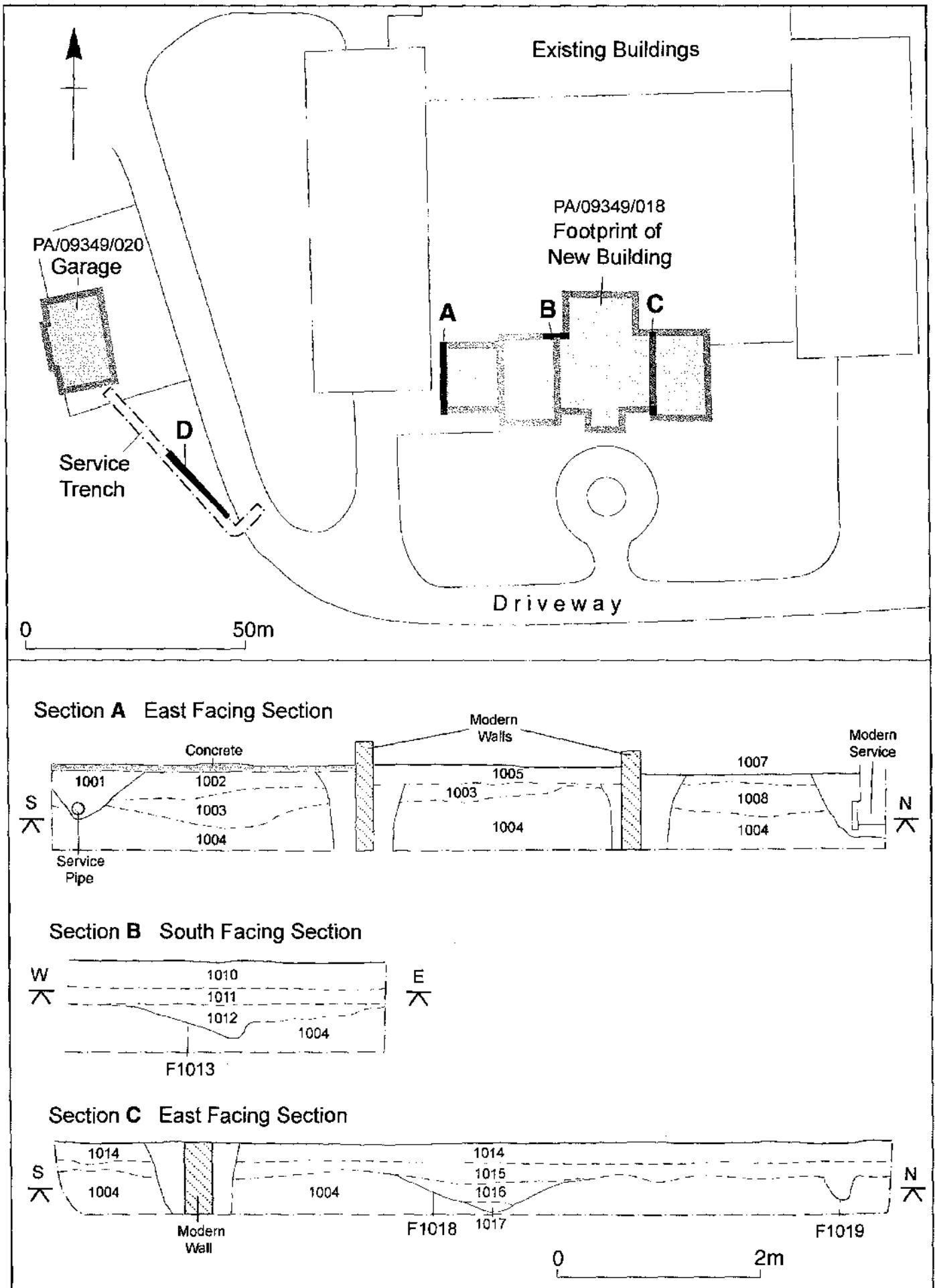


Fig.3