

**Land at Browse Antiques,  
127 Lichfield Road,  
Stafford:**

**an archaeological evaluation  
2002**

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## **Land at Browse Antiques, 127 Lichfield Road, Stafford: an archaeological evaluation 2002**

### **1.0 Summary**

*An archaeological evaluation of land at Browse Antiques, 127 Lichfield Road, Stafford (centred on NGR SJ 9249 2275) was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in February 2002. The work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of McCarthy and Stone (Devs) Ltd. The evaluation was required by Staffordshire Borough Council in connection with a planning application for a development comprising a ground floor primary health centre and upper floor sheltered housing.*

*The site is located immediately to the southeast of the historic core of Stafford within the area of Forebridge, known to have developed as a suburb during the medieval period, and close to the site of the medieval hospital of St. John the Baptist. The site, therefore, offers good potential for the survival of archaeological remains.*

*A single trial-trench was excavated, with a second proposed trench still to be excavated. A shallow linear feature, possibly a beam slot, and two shallow pits and a posthole were revealed. Although these features produced no finds they were sealed by a layer from which sherds of medieval pottery, dating from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, were recovered, suggesting that they were of a similar date or perhaps earlier. Medieval pottery dating from the twelfth to the thirteenth century was also recovered from the upper surface of the natural sand subsoil. Late post-medieval pits and a modern demolition/levelling layer were also recorded.*

### **2.0 Introduction**

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in February 2002 of land at Browse Antiques, 127 Lichfield Road, Stafford, Staffordshire. The work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of McCarthy and Stone (Devs) Ltd. A planning application (ref. no. 40956) has been registered with the local planning authority, proposing the redevelopment of the site, which would involve the construction of a ground floor primary health centre and upper floor category II elderly sheltered housing complex. Stafford Borough Council required the archaeological work to be carried out in connection with this planning application.

The evaluation adhered to a brief prepared by the Development Department of Stafford Borough Council (Walters 2001), which identified the site as having good potential for the existence of archaeological features or deposits dating from the medieval period. The work also conformed to a specification prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 2002). The site was visited by D. Wilkinson and L. Walters of the Development Department of Stafford Borough Council in order to monitor the fieldwork. All work on site was carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

### **3.0 Site location and description (Figs. 1 and 2)**

The site (centred on NGR SJ 9249 2275) is located at 127 Lichfield Road at the junction of the Wolverhampton and Lichfield Roads. To the northeast is Lichfield Road and to the northwest is the Wolverhampton Road. The site is bounded to the southwest by a doctor's surgery building and properties fronting onto Garden Street. To the southeast the site is bounded by the adjacent property fronting Lichfield Road.

The majority of the site is currently occupied by a car park, the premises of Browse Antiques, rear workshops and a builder's yard. The site covers an area of 0.367 hectares. It is located to the southeast of Stafford town centre and lies within the area of the medieval suburb of Forebridge.

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

The archaeological and historical background has been detailed in the evaluation brief (Walters 2001) and will only be summarised in this report. The historic centre of Stafford is situated on the north and east banks of the River Sow on a terrace of sand and gravel. Finds dating to the prehistoric period has been recovered and evidence of Roman settlement has been recorded in the town. Stafford began its development as an urban centre with the establishment of a 'burh' in AD913, and subsequently saw the growth of a flourishing pottery industry producing the widely-distributed Stafford Ware.

At the time of the Domesday survey in 1086, Stafford was the main town in the county, and was surrounded by timber defences. By the fourteenth century settlement had expanded beyond the limits of the town defences and, to the southeast, saw the growth of the medieval suburb of Forebridge, within which the site lies. The site is also close to the location of the medieval hospital of St. John the Baptist, which had a chapel and burial ground. Map evidence from Speed's map of 1610 suggests that burgage plots belonging to buildings, which may have once fronted onto the now truncated White Lion Street, may have extended into the site. Evidence of backyard plot activities such as rubbish disposal or industrial processes may have survived within the site. A house of Austin Friars was also located in the suburb of Forebridge in the medieval period.

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ordnance Survey maps show a building which is probably the building now occupied by Browse Antiques and a number of smaller buildings and gardens plots, present within the site. The building occupied by Browse Antiques appears to be of late nineteenth century date.

### **5.0 Aims**

The general objectives of the archaeological fieldwork, as stated in the specification (BUFAU 2002), were to define the survival, nature, extent and significance of archaeological deposits. The evaluation also sought to clarify the nature and extent of existing disturbance so that appropriate mitigation strategies could be devised.

The specific objectives were:

- to establish the presence or absence of deposits associated with the medieval suburb of Forebridge, in particular the quality and survival of buildings, property boundaries and rubbish pits.
- to recover environmental information as to the economy, diet etc of the inhabitants of the area.
- to establish the presence or absence of post medieval deposits in the form of property boundaries, industrial activity and rubbish disposal.

## 6.0 Method

The aims of the evaluation were to be achieved by the excavation of two trial-trenches.. A trench was located in the western corner of the site to the northeast of the surgery, and measured 24m x 2m (Fig. 2). A second trench was to be located between the west side of Browse Antiques and the Queensway island. In the event, due to problems of access, only the first trench was excavated.

Modern overburden was removed by a JCB excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, operating under archaeological supervision, to expose the uppermost horizon of significant archaeological deposits, or the surface of the natural subsoil. The machined horizon was then manually cleaned to define archaeological features and deposits. A representative sample of features and deposits was hand excavated.

Recording was by means of pre-printed *pro-forma* record cards for contexts and features, supplemented by plans (at 1:20 and 1:50), sections at (1:10 and 1:20), and monochrome print and colour slide photography. Even where no significant archaeological deposits were encountered the stratigraphy was recorded.

Finds were retained by context and finds recording and conservation were carried out by suitably qualified staff. Soil samples were to be taken from suitable contexts to recover charred plant remains and to assess the potential for environmental analysis.

The paper records, together with the finds, comprise the site archive, which, at the time of writing, is stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The archive will be deposited with the relevant repository, within a reasonable time after the completion of the evaluation, subject to approval by the landowner.

## 7.0 Results (Fig. 3)

The natural yellow sand subsoil (1017) was exposed at a depth of 0.75m below the level of the car park surface. At the eastern end of the trench the natural subsoil was disturbed by irregular patches of brown silty sand (1011), possibly the result of root action, containing sherds of pottery dating from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries. The disturbed subsoil (1011), was cut by several shallow archaeological features. An east-west aligned linear feature (F101, Fig. 3, S.1 and S.2), at least 0.18m wide and 0.20m deep, extended beyond the eastern end of the trench and was cut, to the west, by a later

feature. The full width of F101 was not present within the trench and it extended beyond the south edge of the trench. Feature F101 was steep sided with a flat base, and was filled with dark brown silty sand (1005) with some stone inclusions. Roughly mid-way along its length, feature F101 had been cut by a circular pit (F105, Fig. 3, S.3), which extended beyond the south edge of the trench. Pit F105 was at least 0.30m wide and 0.10m deep with steep sides and a rounded base, and contained dark brown silty sand (1010) with some small stone inclusions. Further west, a small circular posthole (F104, Fig. 3, S.1) with a U-shaped profile cut the northern edge of feature F101. Posthole F104 was 0.28m wide and 0.13m deep, and was filled with dark brown silty sand (1009) with small stone inclusions. Immediately adjacent to posthole F104 was a circular pit (F102, Fig. 3, S.1), 0.55m wide and 0.20m deep, with steeply sloping sides and a flat base. It was filled with dark brown silty sand (1006) with small stone inclusions. No finds were recovered from these features. Sealing features F101, F102, F104 and F105 was a layer of dark brown sandy silt (1007) with occasional charcoal flecks, 0.25m deep, which contained sherds of pottery dating from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries and a small unidentifiable fragment of iron. Layer 1007 had been cut by a foundation trench for a later brick wall (F109) and was not present to the west of this feature.

Approximately mid-way along the trench two pits (F103 and F100) were cut into the natural 1017, extending beyond the south edge of the trench. The earliest of these pits (F103) was 1.5m wide and 0.5m deep with gently sloping sides and a rounded base. It was filled with a dark brown to black, ashy sandy silt (1008) which contained sherds of pottery of eighteenth to nineteenth century date, animal bone and brick fragments. It had been cut, on its western edge, by another pit (F100), 1.10m wide and 0.4m deep. Pit F100 was filled with black silty sand (1004) with charcoal flecks containing sherds of post-medieval pottery, brick, animal bone and shell.

At the west end of the trench were two sub-circular pits cut into the natural 1017 and extending beyond the edge of the trench. Pit F106 was at least 1.5m wide and 0.3m deep and extended beyond the south edge of the trench. It was filled with dark brown sandy silt (1012) which contained sherds of pottery of eighteenth to nineteenth century date, brick, tile and animal bone. Pit F107 was not excavated during the evaluation, but was at least 1m wide and extended beyond the north edge of the trench. It was filled with dark brown sandy silt (1013), identical to the fill of Pit F106. Sherds of pottery of nineteenth century date, brick and tile were visible within fill 1013.

Sealing both the layer 1007 and the pits F103, F100, F106 and F107 was a layer of mixed material consisting of dark brown to black silt with lenses of sand, clinker and ash (1003), up to 0.5m deep. Layer 1003 contained substantial amounts of brick rubble, sherds of pottery of eighteenth to nineteenth century date, a fragment of clay pipe stem and an iron nail. At the western end of the evaluation trench this layer had been cut by a modern service trench (F110). Towards the eastern end of the evaluation trench layer 1003 was cut by a north-south aligned construction trench (F109), 0.25m wide and 0.50m deep, for a modern red brick wall (1014). Foundation trench F109 also cut layer 1007 and pit F103.

Sealing layer 1003 and features F109 and F110 was a layer of crushed concrete and red stone mixed with sand (1001), 0.25m deep, which, in turn, was overlain by the tarmac (1000) which formed the surface of the car park.

## 8.0 The Finds by Annette Hancocks

The finds were processed and quantified by count and weight (Table 1) using the standard BUFAU system. The material was rapidly scanned and assigned a spot-date where possible. Pottery of medieval and post-medieval date was the most significant find type recovered. This is discussed in greater detail below.

Material Type	Quantity	Weight (g)
Ceramic: tile	2	31g
Ceramic: brick	2	70g
Medieval pottery	6	150g
Post-medieval pottery	41	1401g
Clay pipe	2	7g
Iron nails	1	60g
Other metal	1	2g
Animal bone	2	101g
Oyster Shell	1	31g

Table 1: Quantification of material by find type

### *Medieval pottery*

A total of six sherds of medieval pottery (150g) were recovered from layers 1007 and 1011. This material dated from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries AD and derived from the layer 1007 and the disturbed natural subsoil (1011) horizon. Some sherds showed signs of external sooting, often indicative of cooking. The types present included a green glazed jug handle, a skillet handle and a cooking pot rim.

### *Post-medieval pottery*

The range and variety of post-medieval pottery varied considerably. A total of 41 sherds (1401g) of material was recovered. This principally comprised of pottery dateable to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and included blackwares, transfer printed wares, trailed slipwares, creamwares and stonewares.

All of the pottery showed little sign of weathering or abrasion. It is recommended that no further work be undertaken on this material.

### *Iron objects*

A single iron nail (60g) was recovered from layer 1003 and a badly corroded object (2g), possibly a small nail head, was recovered from layer 1007.

### *Animal bone*

Two unidentifiable fragments of animal bone (101g) were recovered from post-medieval contexts 1004 and 1008. An oyster shell was also recovered from context 1004.



Context	Feature	Description	Date range
1003	Layer	1x ceramic brick, 22x post-medieval pottery, 2x clay pipe and 1x iron nail	18 <sup>th</sup> /19 <sup>th</sup> century AD
1004	F100	2x ceramic brick, 12x post-medieval pottery, 1x animal bone (4g) and 1x shell	18 <sup>th</sup> /19 <sup>th</sup> century AD
1007	Layer	2x medieval pottery including a green glazed jug handle and 1x other iron	13 <sup>th</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup> century AD
1008	F103	3x post-medieval pottery and 1x animal bone (97g)	18 <sup>th</sup> /19 <sup>th</sup> century AD
1011	Layer	4x medieval pottery including a rim from a cooking pot and a skillet handle	12 <sup>th</sup> -13 <sup>th</sup> century AD
1012	F106	1x ceramic brick, 2 x tile and 4x post-medieval pottery	18 <sup>th</sup> /19 <sup>th</sup> century AD

Table 2: Quantification of finds

## 9.0 Discussion

The evaluation revealed the presence of several shallow archaeological features (F101, F102, F104 and F105) which may be of medieval or perhaps earlier date. Although the features themselves were not directly datable they were sealed by a layer (1007), that produced medieval pottery of thirteenth to fifteenth century date and therefore, gives a possible *terminus ante quem* for these features. The linear feature F101 could be interpreted as a beam slot and, if so, may indicate the presence of a medieval structure or structures in this area, which may have occupied a plot fronting onto the former White Lion Street. The presence of possible medieval pit/ posthole features F104 and F105 cutting F101 may suggest there could be more than one phase of medieval activity. Pit F102 could also be associated with these features. Pits for the disposal of rubbish would be expected at the rear of burgage plots, though the lack of finds and the shallow nature of these features make it difficult to identify their function. The shallow nature of these features may suggest some later truncation has taken place. Medieval pottery of twelfth to thirteenth century date was also recovered from the disturbed natural subsoil (1011).

Elsewhere in the evaluation trench any medieval or earlier archaeological deposits or features may have been disturbed by later activities, including the digging of post-medieval pits of eighteenth and nineteenth century date, and modern service trenches and the construction of a brick wall. Layer 1003 probably results from the demolition and levelling of buildings in the early twentieth century. Alternatively, the layer may have been the result of deliberate importation of material in order to build up and level up the ground surface in later periods. Information from a borehole survey (Manchester Geotechnical 2001) indicated a considerable thickening of this layer towards the north and northeast part of the site.

## 10.0 Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was supervised by Helen Martin with the assistance of Phil Mann. This report was written by Helen Martin and edited by Laurence Jones. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. The assessment of the finds assemblage was by Annette Hancocks. The project was managed by Laurence Jones and Richard Cuttler. The work was monitored by David Wilkinson on behalf of Stafford Borough Council Development Department and by Robert Bourn and Catherine Mould on behalf of CgMs. Thanks are due to the staff and management of the Doctor's surgery for their help and co-operation.

## 11.0 References

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Manchester Geotechnical Ltd, 2001 *Borehole survey report, Lichfield Road, Stafford*

Walters, L. 2001 *Brief for an archaeological evaluation at the site of Browse Antiques, Lichfield Road, Stafford*. Stafford Borough Council Development Department

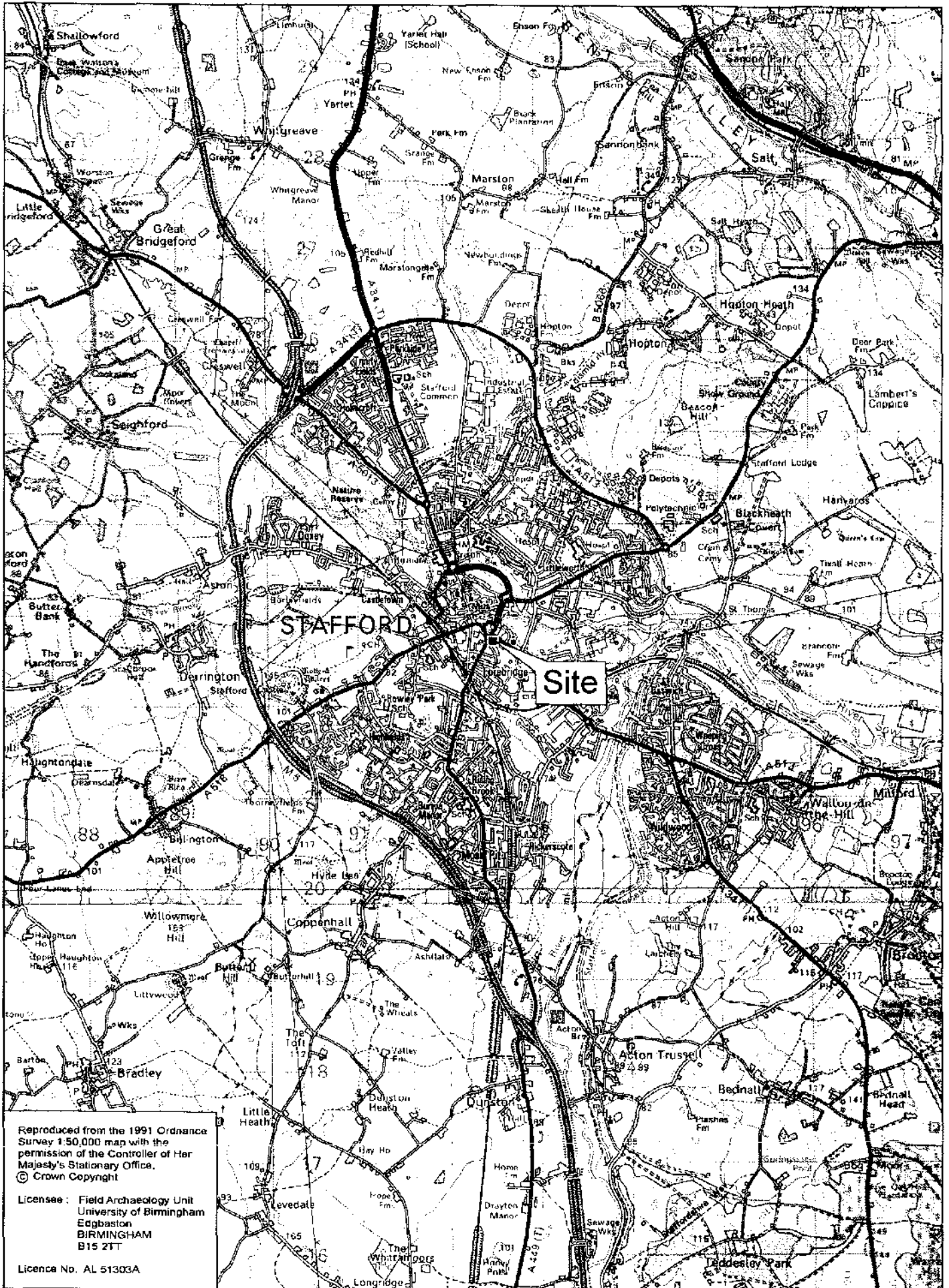


Fig.1

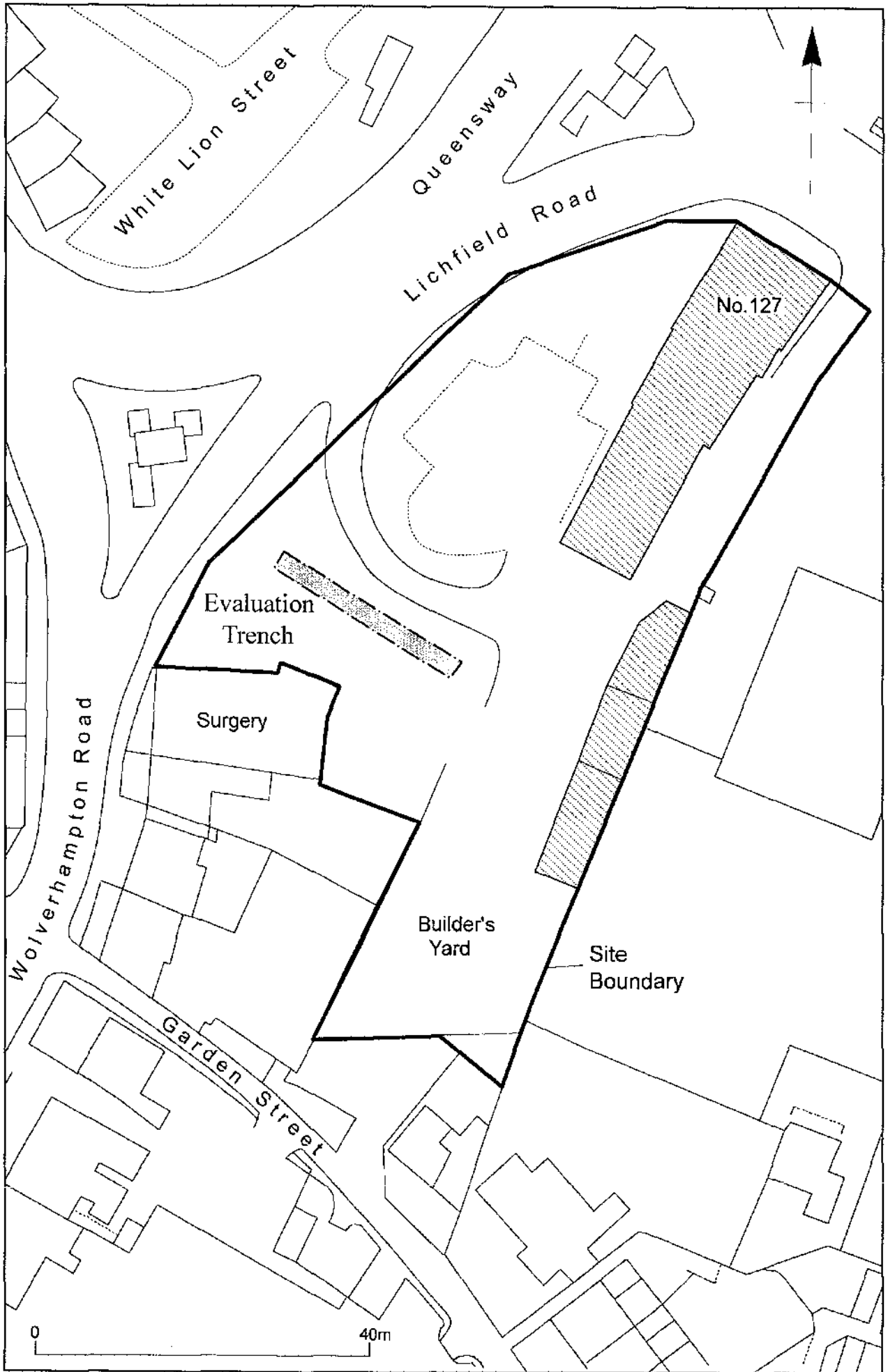


Fig.2

# Evaluation Trench (Section Reversed)

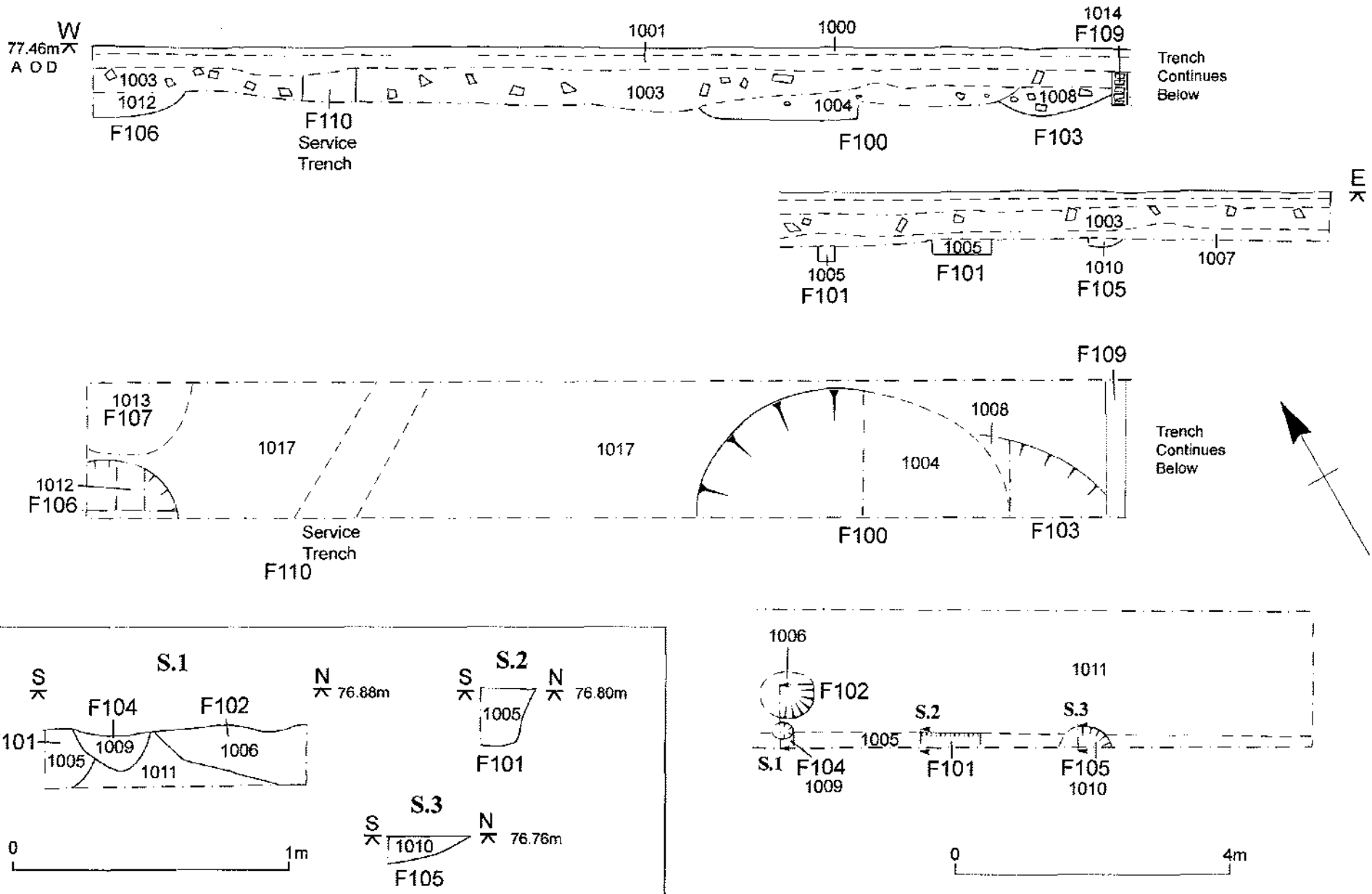


Fig.3