An archaeological evaluation at The Whitehouse Hotel (former Star Hotel) and adjacent land, 61 Foregate Street, Worcester. 2002

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Summary

Four archaeological trial trenches were excavated on the site of The Whitehouse Hotel (former Star Hotel) and adjacent land, 61 Foregate Street, Worcester (NGR SO 8593 5514). The evaluation was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Miras Companies, in advance of a planning proposal for improvements to The Whitehouse Hotel. The site lies within the historic core of the Roman and medieval city and the evaluation took place in line with the archaeological policies in the City of Worcester Local Plan. A desk-based assessment carried out on the Star Hotel suggested that the site was likely to contain significant Roman, medieval and post-medieval remains (White and Baker 2000). Along the Farrier Street frontage, the evaluation revealed evidence for a network of 18th or 19th century vaulted cellars, passageways and a brick-lined well associated with the former Star Vaults Inn. Near to the Foregate Street frontage the evaluation identified the remains of a large brick-built cellar relating to an adjacent property. A layer of sand and gravel above the natural subsoil has been identified as possible evidence for Roman activity although no dating evidence was recorded. No further deposits of archaeological interest were recorded.

1.0 Introduction

The following report details the results of four trial trenches excavated on the site of the former Star Hotel, 61 Foregate Street, and adjacent land, Worcester (Fig. 1). The evaluation was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Miras Companies, in advance of a planning proposal for improvements to The Whitehouse Hotel. At present the site comprises a busy car park serving the hotel and the general public. A thin layer of asphalt forms the surface of the car park. The paucity of asphalt used has resulted in the formation of hollow depressions over voids beneath the car park. These depressions probably relate to former cellars (Fig. 2). The evaluation was carried out in advance of a planning proposal for improvements to the Star Hotel. Miras Companies is proposing a redevelopment of the site. This is expected to comprise:

- Demolition of extensions to the rear of the main hotel block (these are believed to be 19th and 20th century in origin).
- Demolition of a detached building to the rear of the hotel.
- Refurbishment and extensive reordering of the listed hotel buildings
- Construction of a four-storey wing at the rear of the hotel, to include a ground level swimming pool and extensions to the basement.
- Construction of a four-storey residential block facing onto Farrier Street.
- Associated services and landscaping.

2.0 Archaeological Background

Roman remains have been found to the west and the north of the study area at Farrier Street, Love's Grove and Kardonia excavations (Fig. 1). These sites produced evidence of iron working in the form of waste products or small furnaces.

The rear of the site lies approximately 65m to the east of a Roman road heading north from the defended area of the Roman town, which is thought to be heading towards the forts at Greensforge, Staffs. This road has been observed at Broad Street and Farrier Street immediately to the west of the development area (Fig. 1).

It is possible that Foregate Street itself represents a second Roman road heading north from the centre of the settlement. If this is the case Foregate Street may also have supported a 'ribbon' of suburban development.

Activity within the vicinity of the Roman road may have continued into the Saxon period and may be represented by a 'dark earth cultivation deposit' although there is potential for occupation within this area.

Medieval occupation began around or soon after 1100. The former Star Hotel lies within the Foregate suburb, a planned urban extension developed by the bishops of Worcester. The plots on the west side of Foregate Street were short and terminated at a parallel rear service lane (the present Farrier Street). A tile workshop is recorded in the area in the medieval period.

The suburb was demolished in the Civil War and evidence of that episode of demolition and reconstruction may remain.

This provides a brief summary of the desk-based assessment which has been undertaken for the development area (White and Baker 2000).

3.0 Aims and Methodology

Four trial trenches measuring approximately 8m x 1.6m were excavated in two areas (Area A and Area B) to provide information regarding the character and state of preservation of any archaeological remains (Fig. 2). The trenches were located with regard to the restriction of standing buildings and the need to investigate areas of proposed belowground works within the site.

The modern asphalt layer cut with a rotary floor-cutting saw where appropriate. Mechanical excavation was carried out using a JCB Excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket supervised by an appropriately qualified archaeologist. The excavation methodology was subject to alteration due to the presence of modern services, and other safety considerations. Alterations to the specification were made after consultation with the City Archaeologist.

A detailed context record on individual pro-forma record cards was maintained and all features were photographed using both colour and monochrome film, supplemented by digital images. Sections and plans of excavated features were drawn at a scale of 1:50, 1:20 or 1:10 as appropriate. Where no archaeological deposits were identified, a

record of the stratigraphy was made. These records constitute the site archive, which is currently stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

4.0 Evaluation Results

Area A (Fig. 2)

This comprised an area of land close to the Farrier Street frontage (Fig 2). Area A was in use as a car park overlying cellars of the now demolished Star Vaults Inn. Clearly visible depressions in the asphalt surface outlined the remains of collapsed and backfilled cellars. The presence of voids, and underlying layers of loose building debris posed a health and safety risk. Logistical concerns precluded the use of hydraulic shoring in this area. As a consequence no hand excavation was undertaken. A written and photographic record was made of the unexcavated features and stratigraphy.

4.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Results

This trench was excavated on a northeast-southwest alignment and measured 8m x 1.6m. Initial excavation revealed a capped well (F100, Plate 1) and an intact vaulted structure (F101). Due to the instability of the surrounding ground and the depth of both features it was not possible to fully excavate F100 and F101. A written and photographic record was made of the features. As no further excavation was possible in Trench 1, it was extended to the southwest by 2m in order to sample areas not affected by modern cellars.

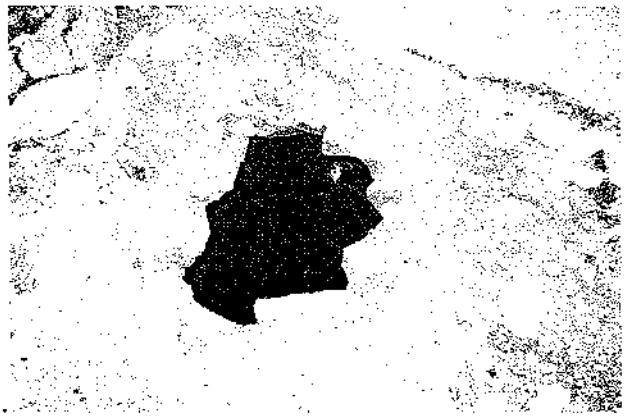

Plate 1: F100 capped well

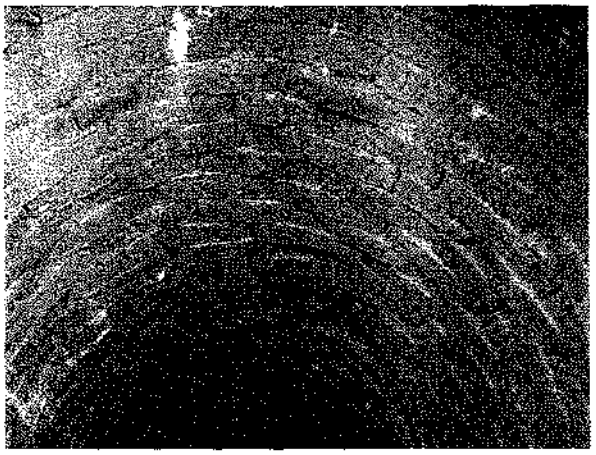

Plate 2: brick lining of well (1003)

The well (F100) measured 0.9m in diameter and 4.16m in depth. The cut for the well had been lined with clamped red bricks (1003) of a probable 18th or early 19th century (Plate 2). These bricks had been dry-laid in stretcher courses. The final brick courses had been laid to form a corbelled cap and were bonded with a limed mortar.
The visible elements of the brick-built vaulted structure (F101, Plate 3) were situated at the southwest end of the trench and measured 1.5m x 3.25m. The vaulted structure comprised red clamped bricks laid in stretcher courses and bonded with a limed mortar (1004). The two visible walls that retained the vaulted roof were two brick skins thick

Plate 3: F101 vaulted cellar looking south

In a sondage at the southern extent of Trench 1 the natural subsoil (1005) was encountered at a depth of 1.5m from the modern. This comprised an orange and pink sand with lenses of dark orange and red sand mixed with gravel and small pebbles. The natural subsoil was overlain by a dark brown and grey mixed earthy deposit (1002) 1.5m in depth which contained fragments of post-medieval building debris such as brick and tile.

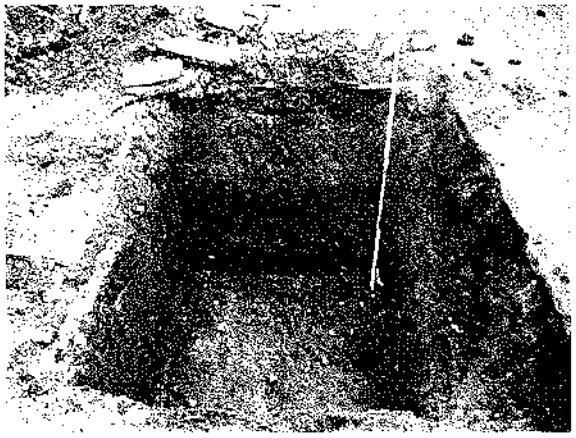

Plate 4: Trench 1 Sondage looking south

Immediately above F100, F101, and Context 1002 was a layer of crushed redbrick hardcore (1001) which ranged from 0.1m to 0.4m in depth along the trench. The modern surface (1000) comprised a layer of asphalt 0.05m in depth.

Interpretation

The grey and dark brown earth layer (1002) represents an episode of backfilling after the construction of F101 and prior to the surfacing of the car park. The nature of the inclusions in this layer suggests a 19th century date for this context. F100 was a well sunk through all the layers and presumably down to the natural bedrock. An analysis of the brickwork (1003) suggested a late 18th or early 19th century date for the lining of the well. The reuse of the bricks from another context, and a later date for the lining of the well, however, cannot be ruled out. F101 appeared to be a brick-built vaulted cellar used for storage. An analysis of the brickwork (1004) suggested a 19th century construction date. It is possible that both F100 and F101 were associated with the former Star Vaults Inn, although they lay to the north of the original structure. The general building debris layer (1001) and the asphalt layer (1000) comprise the latest episodes and form the modern ground surface.

4.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 4)

Results

This trench was excavated on a north-south alignment and measured 8m x 1.6m. Problems with ground instability similar to those in Trench 1 were encountered. The trench was also heavily truncated by live services. A partially backfilled vaulted passageway was encountered towards the southern end of the trench. Hazards posed by voids precluded excavation further than the base of the cellar (F200). The trench was located across a route that formerly provided an access to the rear of the Star Vaults. This contained an area where stratigraphy may have survived between two cellars and it was decided to locate a sondage within this area.

Plate 5: F200 vaulted passageway looking west

The natural subsoil (2006) was encountered at a depth of 2m from the modern surface and comprised an orange and pink sand with lenses of dark orange and red sand mixed with gravel and small pebbles. Above this was a layer of light brown sandy silt with pebbles (2007) to a depth of 0.2m.

Context 2007 had been truncated by two brick-built vaulted structures (F200 and F201). F200 was a probable vaulted passageway aligned east-west and leading towards Farrier Street (Plate 5). The structure was approximately 2m in depth from floor level and 2m in width. The one visible springer wall of the passageway was four brick skins thick and approximately 1.5m in height. A pudlock had been cut into the springer wall (Plate 6). The truncated vaulted roof was two brick skins thick, the surviving visible elements rose to a height of approximately 2m. The brickwork (2003) was constructed from red clamped bricks laid in stretcher courses and bonded with a limed mortar. The interior face of the brickwork had been whitewashed to amplify any available light. This passageway appears to have fitted with electrical lighting in the 20th century as was evident from the remains of modern electrical cable fixed to the springer wall. A brick-lined floor was also identified during machining. The void formed by the truncation of the vaulted roof was filled by building debris (2004) 2m in depth. The debris mainly consisted of 18th and 19th century clamped red bricks and mortar.

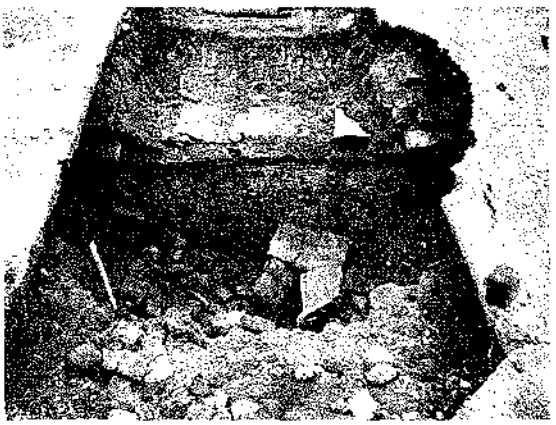

Plate 6: F200 springer wall looking north

To the north of F200 were the highly truncated remains of another brick-built vaulted structure (F201). The surviving elements of the vaulted structure comprised the remains of a truncated springer wall at the northern extent of the trench. The brickwork (2001) was constructed from red clamped bricks laid in stretcher courses and bonded with a limed mortar. The area between the two vaults was filled by a layer of mixed dark and light brown earthy fill with inclusions of modern brick and tile (2005) 2m in depth.

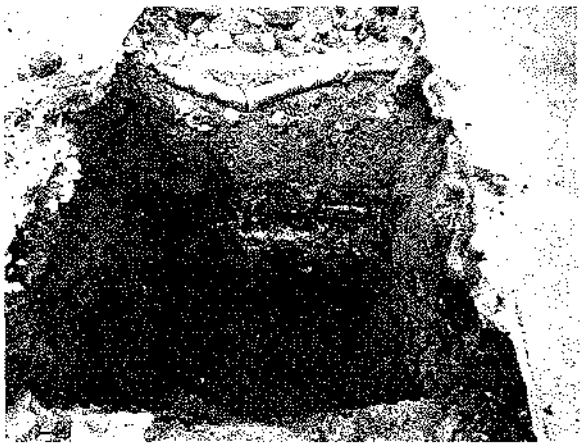

Plate 7: F201 truncated vaulted structure looking south

Directly above F200 and F201 was a layer of mixed dark brown earth with general building debris and stone (2002) up to 0.7m in depth. The modern surface comprised a layer of asphalt 0.1m in depth.

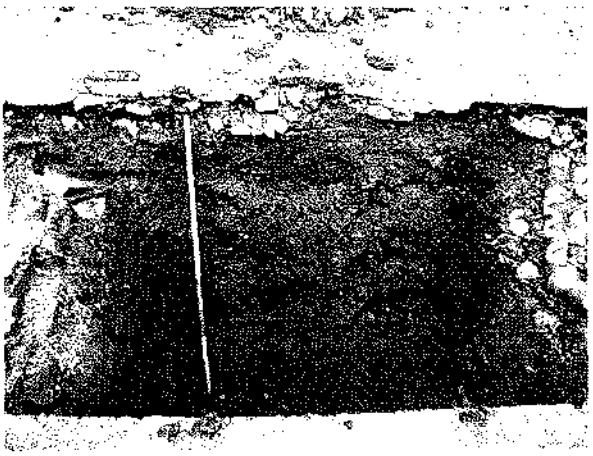

Plate 8: Trench 2 sondage looking east

Interpretation

Given the site's proximity to the Romano-British ribbon settlement (Fig. 1) it is plausible that the light brown sandy layer (2007) reflects Romano-British agricultural activity. No dating evidence was recovered from this deposit.

The two brick-built vaulted structures (F200 and F201) represent the remains of a vaulted cellar complex. The narrow width of both features suggests that they were

passageways linking other cellars in the area. It appeared that F200 continued east under the current site boundary and on to the Farrier Street frontage. It is possible that this passageway ended with an overhead trapdoor that received draymen's deliveries or other supplies associated with the former Star Vaults Inn. An analysis of the brickwork (2003, 2001) suggests a 19th century date for both structures. Given the probable valuable nature of the cellar contents, the pudlock cut into the springer wall (2003) may have received fixings for a lockable door, or alternatively an early lighting arrangement. The remains of electrical cable in F200 indicated that this passageway was in use up until very recent times.

Area B (Fig 2)

This comprised an area of land behind the Whitehouse hotel and neighbouring properties on the Foregate Street frontage. Area B was in use as a car park and was raised approximately 0.7m above the level of Area A. The material used to achieve the raised level was retained by a modern brick-built wall. The unstable nature of the ground and surrounding buildings precluded any hand excavation within Trench 4. The risk of trench collapse required temporary hydraulic shoring in Trench 3.

4.3 Trench 3

Results

This trench was excavated on a north-south alignment and measured 8m x 1.6m. As a health and safety precaution the trench had to hydraulically shored due to its great depth and the instability of the surrounding ground.

The natural subsoil was encountered at 2.5m below the modern ground surface and comprised an orange and pink sand with lenses of dark orange and red sand mixed with gravel and small pebbles (3004). This was sealed by a dark brown mixed earth with inclusions of brick, tile, coke, perished mortar and animal bone (3001) approximately 2.35m in depth. Above this in the southern half of the trench was a base of concrete with brick hardcore aggregate (3002) and a tiled floor (3000). The tiled floor formed the modern ground surface and comprised 6 x 6 inch red quarry-tiles grouted into place.

Plate 9: Trench 3 looking northwest

At the northern end of the trench a layer of compacted black hardcore (3005) 0.1m in depth formed the modern ground surface and overlay 3001.

Interpretation

The earthy deposit (3001) may represent several phases of post-medieval dumping including recent deposition providing a level surface for the car park. The concrete layer (3002), tiling (3000) and retaining wall (3003) are the truncated remains of a now mostly demolished 19th or 20th century structure. No features of archaeological interest were recorded in Trench 3.

4.4 Trench 4 (Fig. 5)

Results

This trench was aligned east-west and measured 8m x 2.6m. The trench was widened as a precaution against collapse. A cellar wall was evident at the southern extent of the trench providing support against loose material.

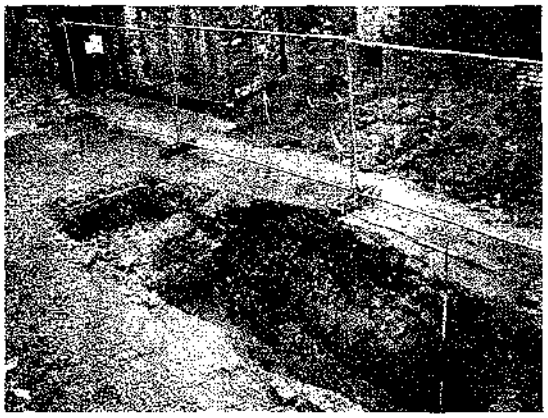

Plate 10: Trench 4 looking southeast

The natural subsoil was encountered at 2.9m below the modern ground surface and comprised an orange and pink sand with lenses of dark orange and red sand mixed with gravel and small pebbles (4004). An overlying lens of grey-green sandy material with stone and coke inclusions (4003) was evident at the eastern end of the trench. This had been truncated by a brick-built cellar (F400) that survived 1.8m in depth. Elements of western and southern walls (4002) comprised two skins of 19th century clamped or machine-cut red bricks laid in stretcher courses and bonded with a limed mortar. An aperture with a metal lintel measuring 0.8m x 0.4m had been built into the southern wall. Similar bricks laid flat and bonded with limed mortar formed the flooring (4005). The cellar had been backfilled with general building debris of a probable 20th century date (4001). The modern ground surface (4000) comprised compacted black hardcore recorded to a depth of 0.1m. No deposits of archaeological interest were recorded in Trench 4.

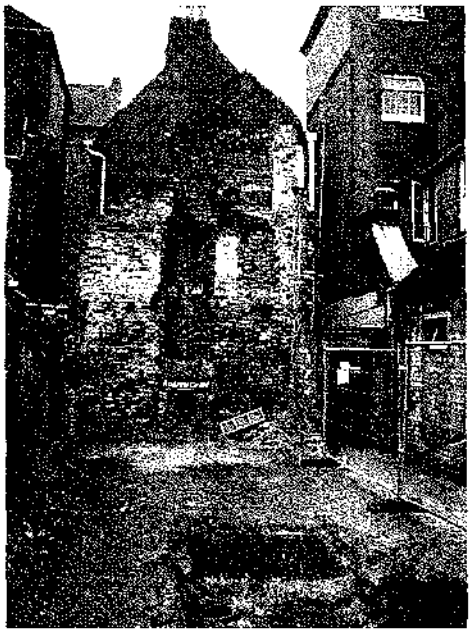

Plate 11: the rear of buildings fronting onto Foregate Street

Interpretation

The small lens of grey-green material (4003) may have been the remains of grouting material dumped during the laying of the brick floor (4005). The large brick-built cellar (F400) was of a vaulted construction and probably served the now mostly demolished structure associated with the former Star Hotel and adjacent properties. An analysis of the brickwork (4005, 4002) suggests a 19th century date of construction. The truncation and backfilling of the cellar appeared to be a relatively recent episode. The backfill (4001) contained a mixed of 19th and 20th century general building debris. The modern ground surface was formed by compacted black hardcore (4000) and dates to the 20th century.

5.0 Discussion

Area A

No significant evidence for Roman or medieval activity was recorded during the archaeological evaluation. Given the vicinity of Roman occupation identified from other excavations it seems plausible to suggest that a layer of light brown sand and gravel (2007) recorded in Trench 2 is Roman in origin. The lack of dating evidence therefore presents a problem. If this is Roman in origin then it is probable in view of the paucity of finds that this area was not occupied, but may have been used for agriculture. While the area has been the subject of intensive development during the post medieval period as suggested in the desk based assessment, it may be that islands of archaeological deposits survive between cellars. Most of the cellaring appears to date to the 19th and 20th centuries.

The natural subsoil was encountered at a level of 1.5m below the modern ground surface, this suggests that the cellars would have removed any ephemeral archaeological deposits within the area.

Area B
The site is more or less level from north to south but is dominated by a slope at the eastern extent, towards the Foregate frontage. Trenches 3 and 4 showed this to be the result of in-filled cellars and dark silt layers. These layers do not reflect modern demolition events but are none the less modern in origin. This may be the result of soil dumping from other areas, perhaps reflecting a natural slope in the gravel terrace. No features of archaeological interest were identified within Area B although this area was certainly within the medieval suburb. It seems likely that any archaeological deposits within this area would have been truncated by post medieval development.

6.0 Recommendations for further work

Area A
Due to the presence of natural deposits at a depth of approximately1.5m within the sondage in Trench 1 and an unidentified, possibly archaeological layer (2007) at a depth of approximately 2m It is recommended that any groundwork below 1.4m are monitored by a continuous archaeological presence. It is recommended that no archaeological presence is required during piling operations.

Area B
An archaeological presence in the form of a watching brief is recommended for groundworks below 2.5m.

8.0 Acknowledgements

Richard Cuttler managed this project. Richard Cherrington supervised the evaluation fieldwork with the assistance of Steve Williams. John Halsted prepared the illustrations. James Dinn monitored the evaluation on behalf of Worcester City Council and Miras Companies were represented by Di Chadwick and Andrew Shaw. We would also like to thank Peter Dyson, Glen Barker and Derek Watkins of the Whitehouse Hotel for their co-operation and hospitality during the evaluation fieldwork.

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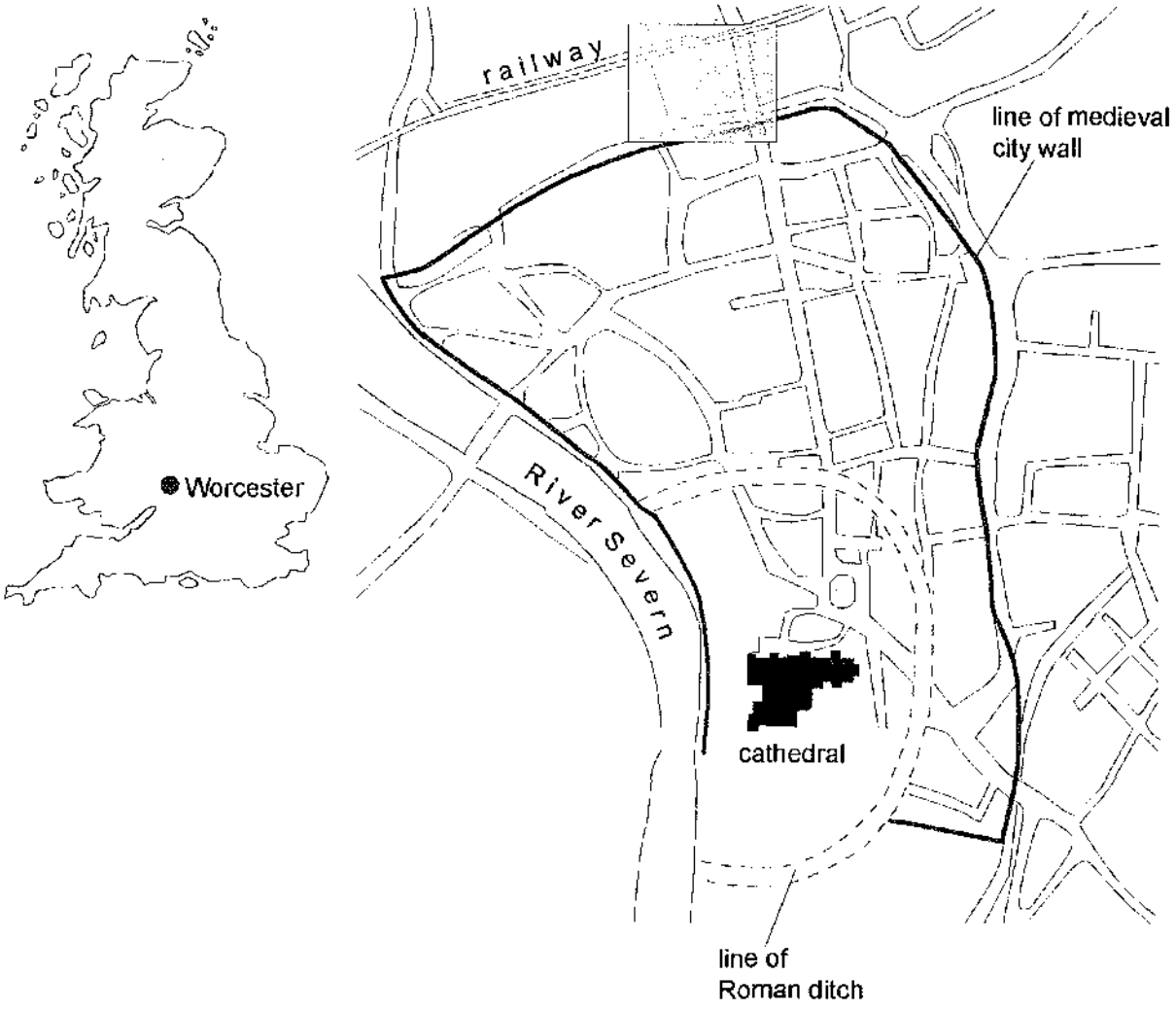

railway
line of medieval city wall
Worcester
River Severn
cathedral
line of Roman ditch

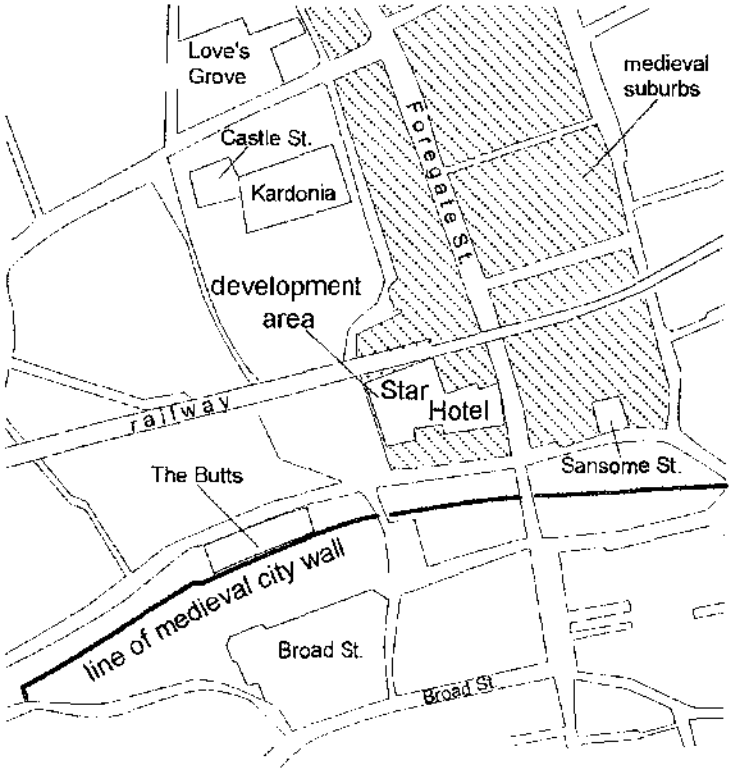

Love's Grove
medieval suburbs
Castle St.
Kardonia
Foregate St.
development area
Star Hotel
railway
The Butts
Sansome St.
line of medieval city wall
Broad St.
Broad St

Fig.1

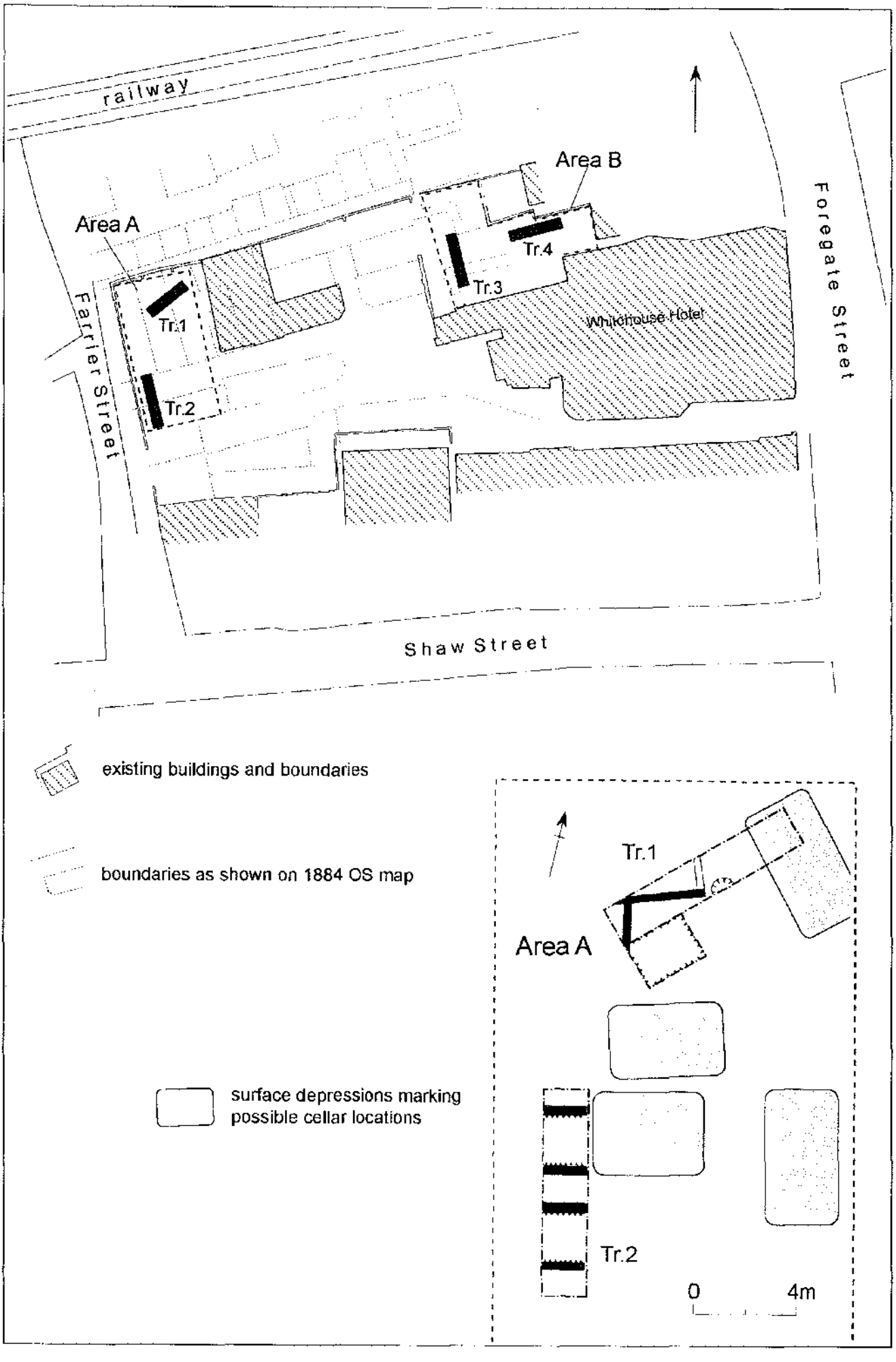

railway
Area A
Area B
Tr.1
Tr.2
Tr.3
Tr.4
Whitehouse Hotel
Farrier Street
Foregate Street
Shaw Street
existing buildings and boundaries
boundaries as shown on 1884 OS map
surface depressions marking possible cellar locations
Area A
Tr.1
Tr.2
0
4m

Fig.2

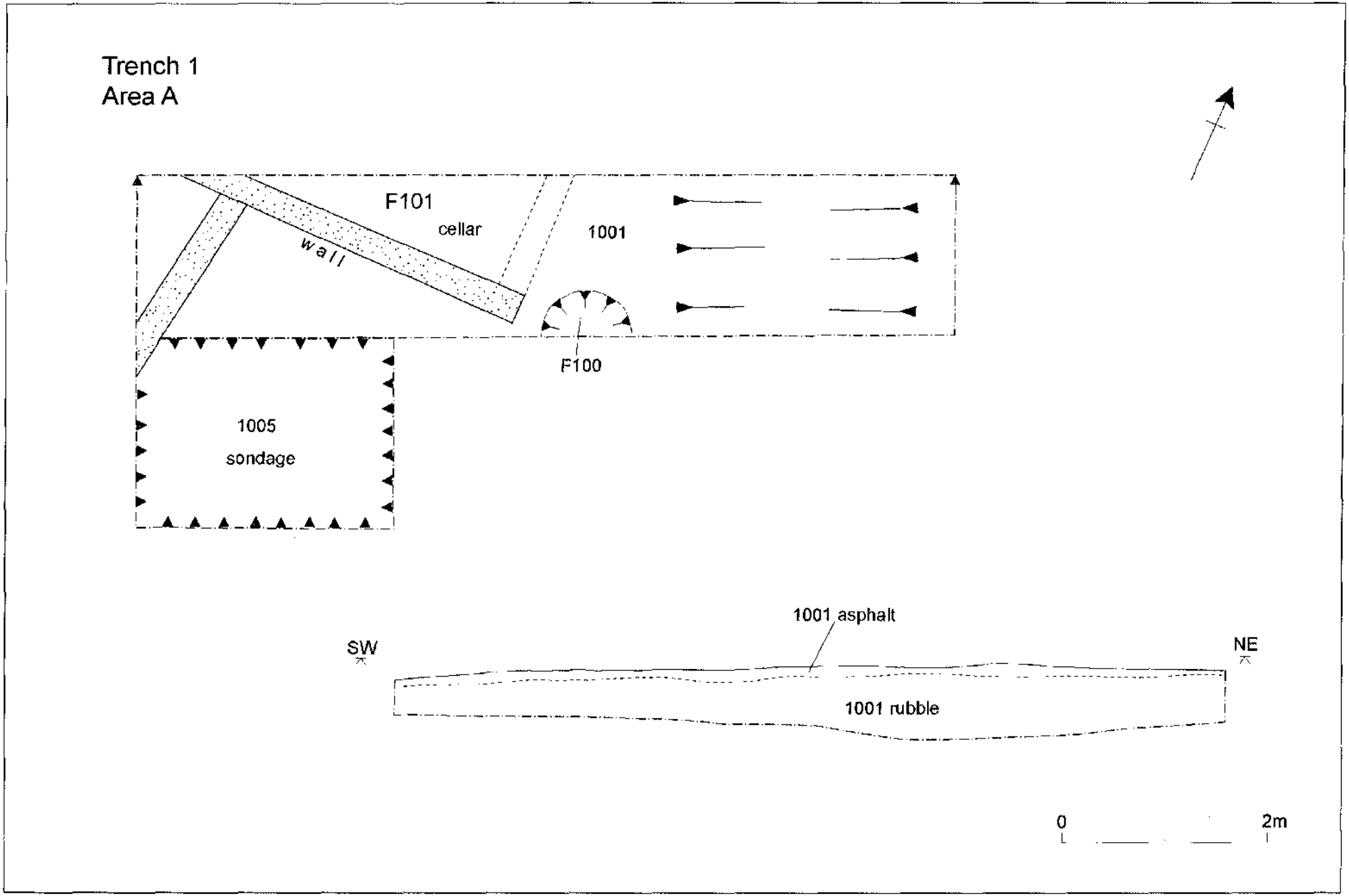

Trench 1
Area A
F101
cellar
wall
1001
F100
1005
sondage
1001 asphalt
SW
NE
1001 rubble
0
2m

Fig.3

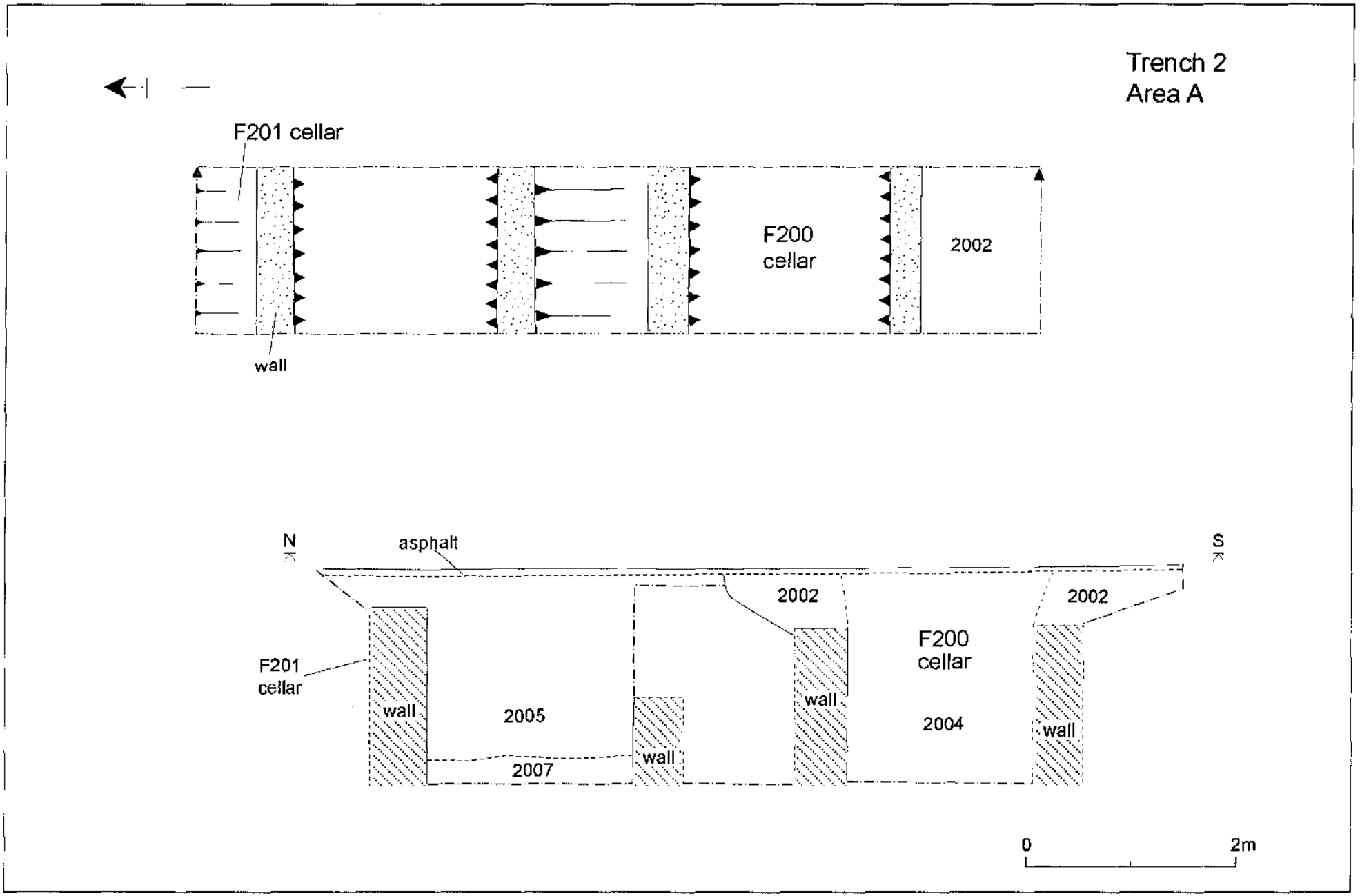
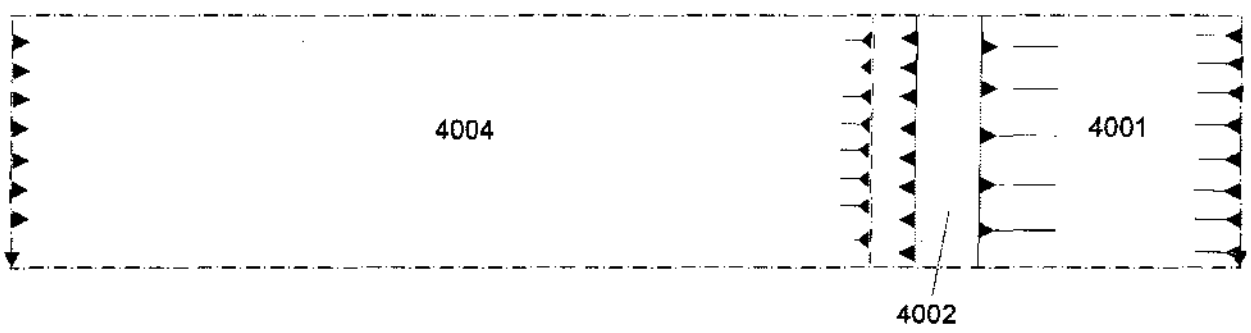

Trench 2
Area A
F201 cellar
F200
cellar
2002
wall
N
asphalt
S
2002
2002
F201
cellar
F200
cellar
wall
2005
wall
wall
2004
wall
2007
0
2m

Fig.4

Trench 4
Area B



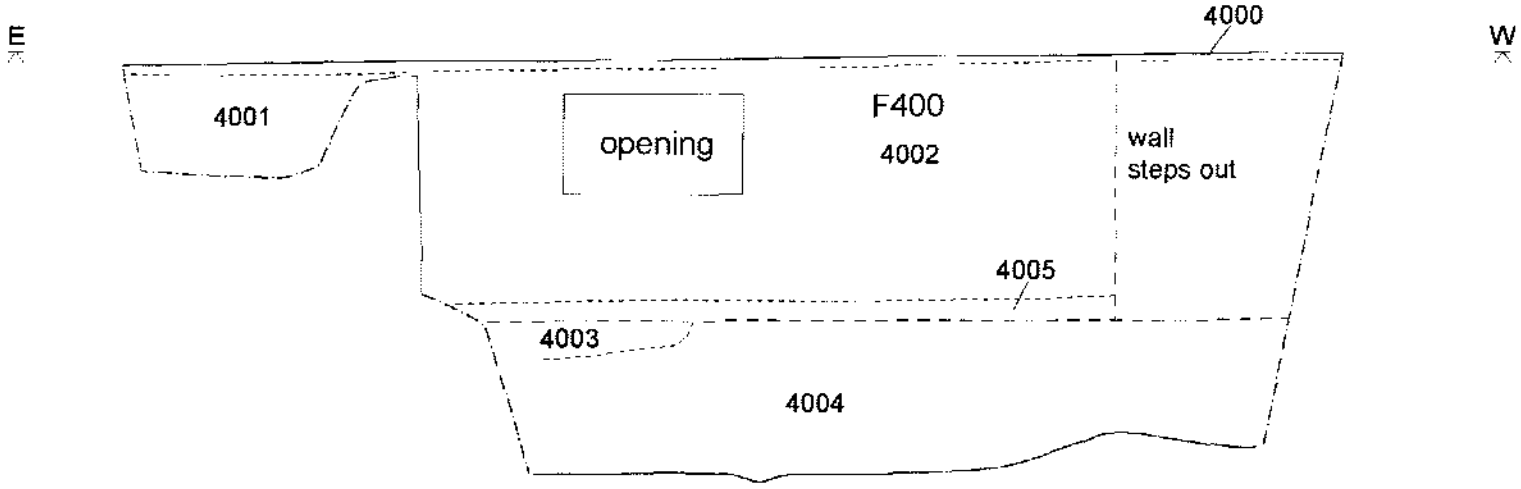


Fig.5