

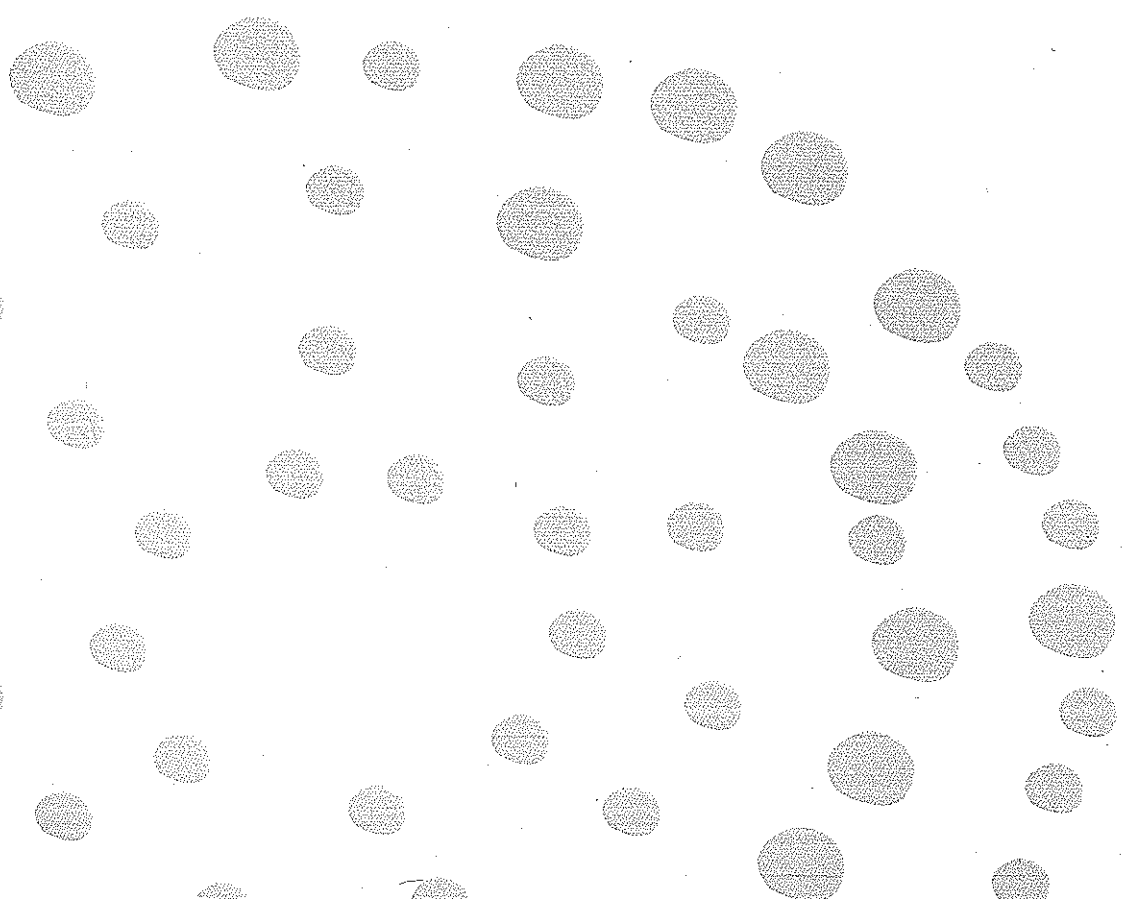
birmingham archaeology



**THE UNIVERSITY
OF BIRMINGHAM**

New Student Facilities,
Medical School,
University of Birmingham

Archaeological Recording 2004



Project No. 1194

New Student Facilities,
Medical School,
University of Birmingham

Archaeological Recording 2004

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**NEW STUDENT FACILITIES
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM MEDICAL SCHOOL
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING 2004**

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1.0: SUMMARY

Archaeological recording was undertaken in May 2004 by Birmingham Archaeology on instruction from the Estate Management Office of the University of Birmingham. The fieldwork was undertaken in advance of the construction of new student facilities to the rear of the University Medical School (centred on NGR SP 042839). A desk-based assessment undertaken in 1999 identified the line of the northern annexe of Metchley Roman forts crossing the development site. Previous investigation of the annexe defences identified two ditches cut to a V-shaped profile, and the base of a turf rampart. The western part of the development area comprised a raised terrace made of soil and rubble and the footprint of a basemented brick building, recently demolished. The eastern part of the area formerly contained a temporary building.

The recording involved archaeological observation during the excavation of two machine-cut trenches located to intercept the northern defences of the northern annexe. No features, or possible features of archaeological interest could be identified, and no artifacts were collected. The western area may have been disturbed to a considerable depth by the former basement.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological recording undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology on instruction from the Estate Management Office of the University of Birmingham. The recording was undertaken in advance of the construction of new student facilities to the rear of the University of Birmingham Medical School (centred on NGR SP 042839, Figs. 1-2). The fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG 16, Department of the Environment, November 2000), and Policy 8.36 of Birmingham Unitary Development Plan. The recording was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2004) approved by Birmingham City Council.

The western part of the proposed development site formerly comprised a basemented brick building, demolished to ground level by the time of the archaeological fieldwork. The eastern part of the site contained a single-storey temporary building, also demolished. The extreme western part of the development site comprised a raised terrace made of demolition rubble and soil.

The development site is crossed by the mapped alignment of the northern defences of the northern annexe of Metchley Roman forts (Jones 1999). The initial fort (Phase 1), located to the south of the development site, enclosed 4ha and was established around AD 48 to contain a garrison of 1,000 men, including a legionary vexillation and auxiliary *turmae* (Jones 2001). The defended area was extended by the addition of annexes on the northern

(Jones 2001), eastern and southern sides of the fort (Jones forthcoming) during Phase 2A, probably dated to Neronian period. The northern annexe was defended by two V-shaped ditches and a turf rampart. The northern defences of the northern annexe were tested by slit-trenches dug in the 1930s (St Joseph and Shotton 1937). As excavated at that time the inner ditch measured 4m wide and 1.6m deep, and the outer ditch 3.3, wide and 1.3m deep (*ibid.*, 72), with the remains of a turf rampart to the south. The ditches were cut at a distance of 6.6m, measured centre-to-centre. These trenches include interventions (*ibid.*, plate XXVI) dug within the present development site. The precise location of the northern annexe defences, although mapped remains to be defined on the ground, particularly since some discrepancies have been identified between the mapped and actual locations of other sides of the fort defences. Later activity within the fort complex comprised the smaller Phase 3 fort, established in the Flavian period, and other later 1st century activity (Jones forthcoming) located towards the south of the military complex, and extending through the 2nd century.

3.0: METHODOLOGY (Fig. 2)

Archaeological recording involved the excavation of two 1.6m wide trenches, cut with a 360 degree excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket, working under archaeological supervision. The trenches were located to intercept the mapped line of the northern defences of the northern annexe. The western trench (Trench 2) was located to test the archaeological potential of the formerly basemented area, and the eastern trench (Trench 1) was intended to test the potential of an area formerly within the footprint of a temporary building. It was intended that the base and sides of the trenches were to be hand-cleaned, but in the event it only possible to undertake limited hand-cleaning, because of health and safety considerations. The extent of trenching was also restricted by the ground-beams belonging to the partly-demolished building.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, supplemented by plans (1:50) and sections (1:20) and monochrome print and colour slide photography.

4.0: RESULTS (Figs. 2-3, Plates 1-2)

4.1: Trench 1

Trench 1 was aligned approximately north-south, and measured 10m by 1.6m.

The earliest deposit identified was a layer of clean orange-brown clay-sand (1001), which was exposed for a depth of 0.5m. This layer may be interpreted as the natural subsoil. This layer was overlain by a deposit of red-brown clay-sand (1002), flecked with ash and charcoal, and recorded for a depth of 1.5m. This layer was the same as layer 1000 recorded in Trench 2 (see below).

No features, or possible features of archaeological interest could be identified in this trench, and no finds were collected.

4.2: Trench 2

Trench 2 was aligned approximately north-south and measured 12m by 1.6m.

The only deposit identified in this trench comprised a red-brown clay-sand (1000), with charcoal flecks. This layer was recorded for a maximum depth of 3.5m in a machine-cut sondage cut at the northern end of the trench, but its base could not be established, for safety reasons.

No features, or possible features of archaeological interest could be identified in this trench, and no finds were collected.

5.0: DISCUSSION

No evidence of the two ditches or the turf rampart defining the northern side of the northern annexe could be identified.

Given that the natural subsoil was identified in Trench 1, it may be that the annexe ditches were located slightly to the north of that trench, which may suggest that the annexe defences are located slightly to the north of their presently mapped location, although following the same alignment. It is less likely that the ditches have been scoured-out because only a temporary building was recorded in this location, which would have not required deep foundations.

The natural subsoil could not be located within Trench 2, dug to a maximum depth of 3.5m below the ground surface. Deposit 1000 may be infilling within the basement that was formerly located here. If the identification of this material is correct the Roman annexe ditches would have been entirely scoured-out by the earlier build.

Despite the limited results from this recording it is nevertheless important that archaeological observation and recording is maintained in advance of development in other areas within and adjoining the Medical School and within the Roman military complex to provide the opportunity to record features and deposits before their destruction.

6.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The archaeological recording was sponsored by the Estate Management Office of the University of Birmingham, with advice from ADP Architects. The archaeological recording was undertaken by Paul Mason. The illustrations were prepared by Bryony Ryder.

7.0: REFERENCES

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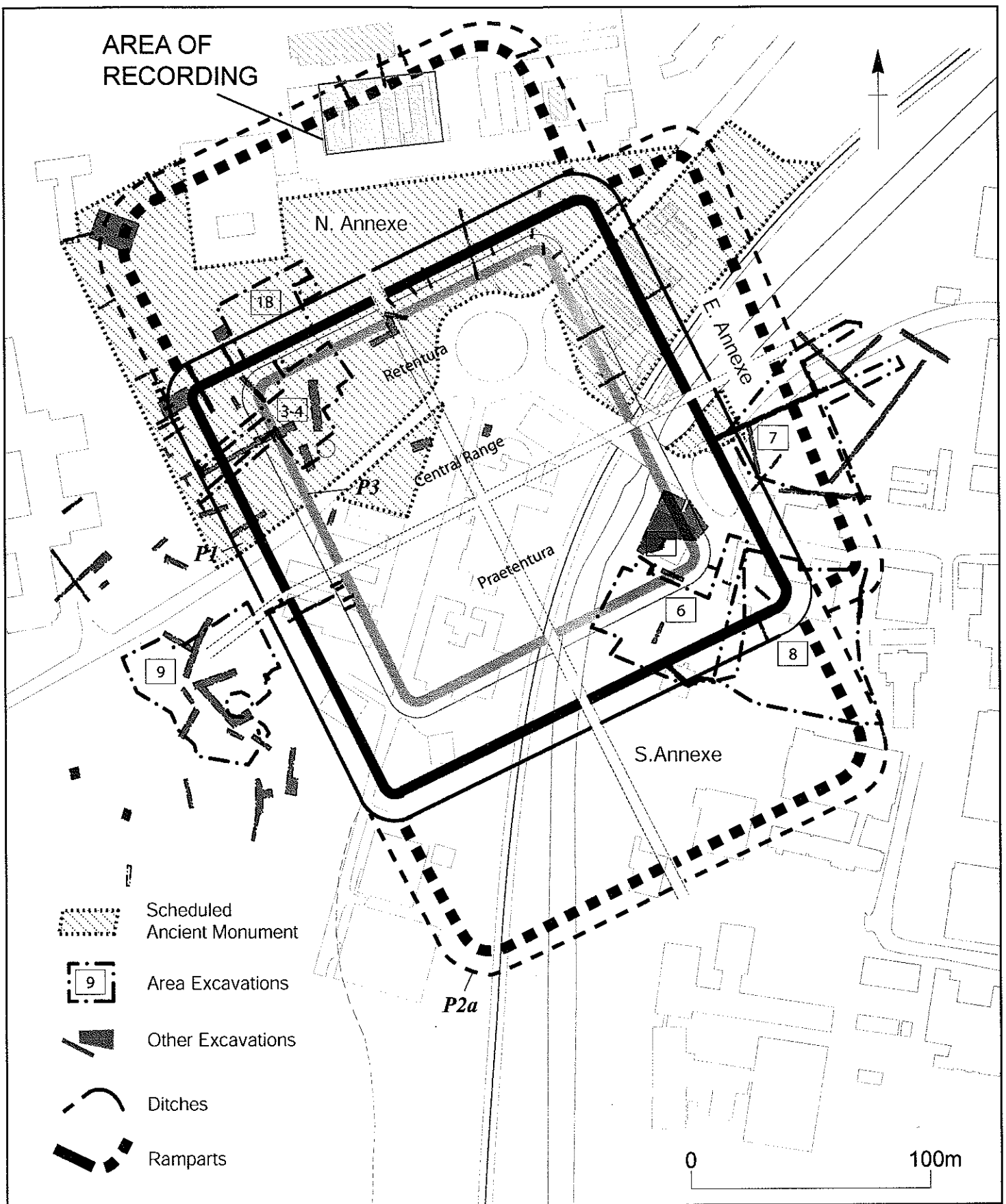


Fig.1

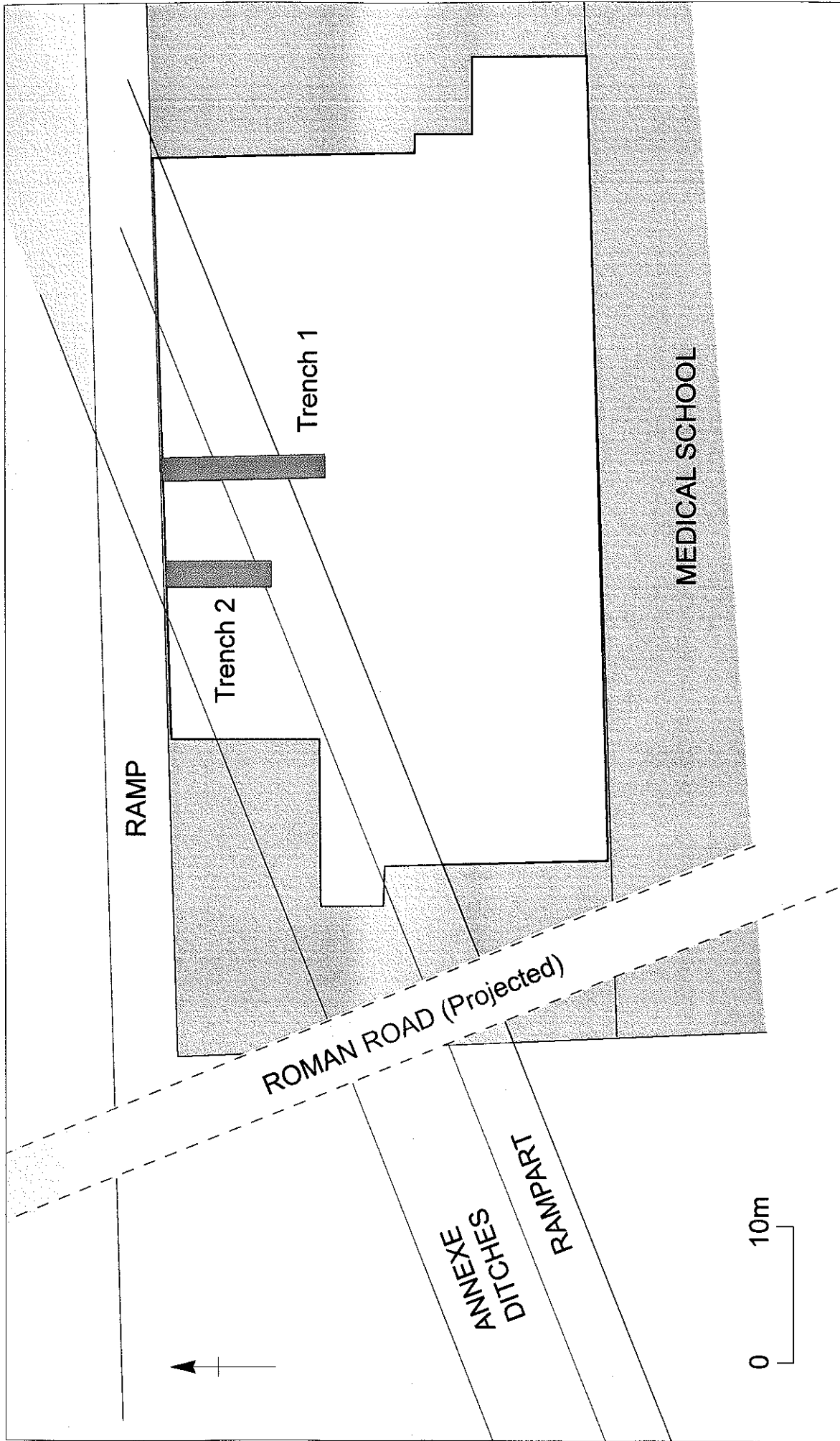


Fig.2

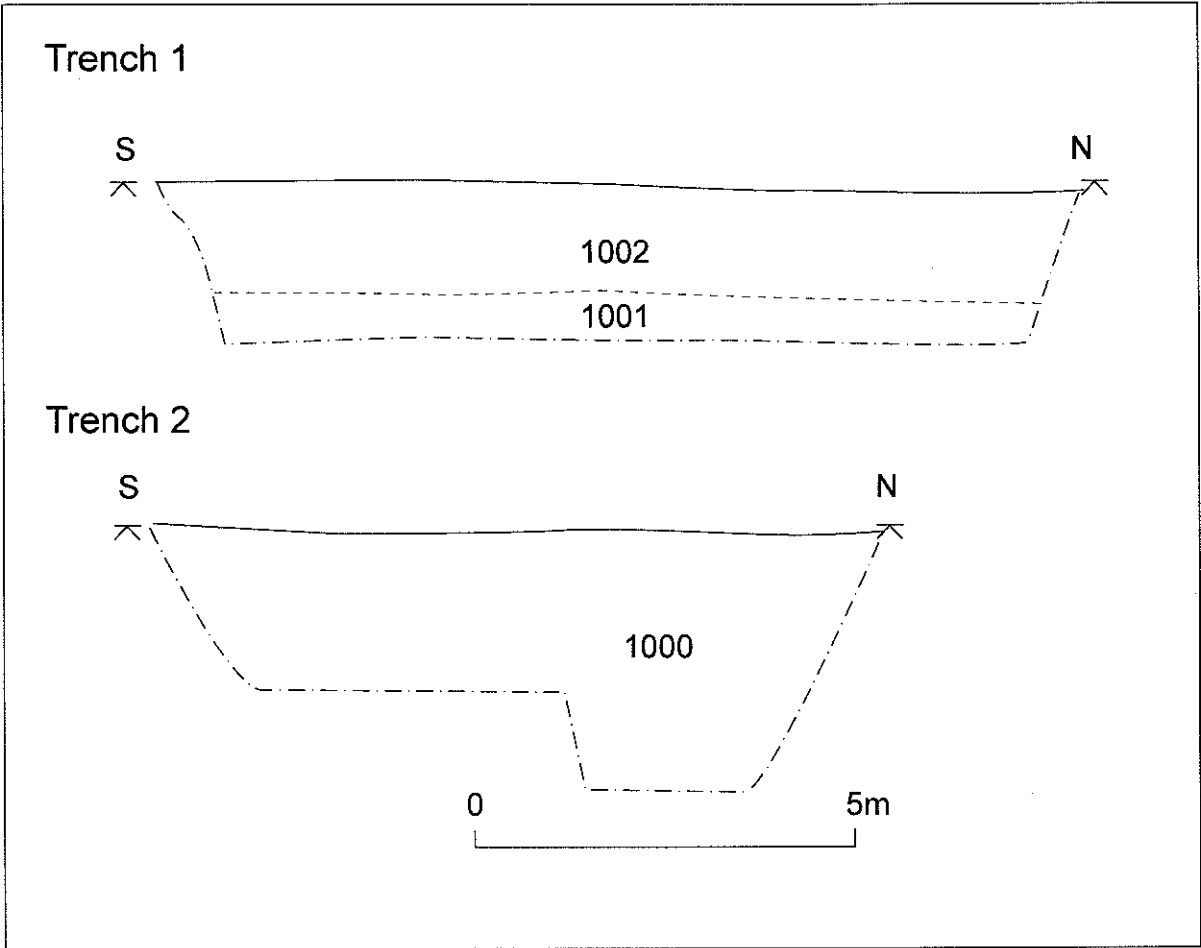


Fig.3

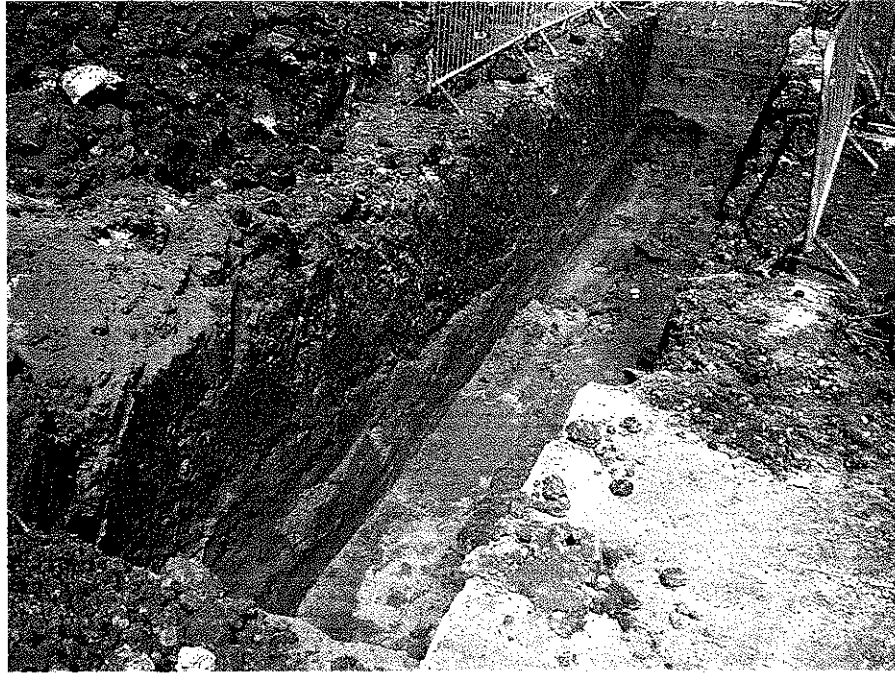


Plate 1



Plate 2