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Vincent House, Vincent Drive, Birmingham Archaeological Evaluation 2004

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Vincent House, Vincent Drive, Birmingham
Archaeological Evaluation 2004

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VINCENT HOUSE, VINCENT DRIVE, BIRMINGHAM
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION 2004

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VINCENT HOUSE, VINCENT DRIVE, BIRMINGHAM ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION 2004

1.0: SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology at Vincent House, off Vincent Drive, Birmingham (centred on NGR SP 044838), on behalf of University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust. The site is located within Metchley Roman fort. It includes part of the western defences of the Phase 1 and Phase 3 forts, and parts of the central range and *praetentura* of the fort, where timber-framed buildings, other structures and gravelled streets would be anticipated. Since Vincent House remains in use, the evaluation was limited to the excavation of test-pits outside the existing buildings, and the surveying of two level profiles along the long axis of the structures to clarify the potential for archaeological preservation within the series of terraces formed during the construction of Vincent House.

Despite the limited area investigated three Roman features were identified, including two roadside ditches (Test-pits 2 and 5) and part of the western ditch of the Phase 3 fort (Test-pit 6). Modern services were recorded in Test-pits 1, 3 and 4. Five sherds of Roman pottery of 1st century date were recovered. The level profiles indicate that Vincent House was built on a series of terraces, with better preservation of buried archaeological deposits anticipated within and adjoining parts of Block A and Block C.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation of land within and adjoining Vincent House, off Vincent Drive, Birmingham, located within Metchley Roman fort (centred on NGR SP 044838, Fig. 1). The evaluation involved test-pitting around the existing Vincent House which remains in use, together with the recording of level profiles, also extending within the footprint of the buildings, to compare internal floor levels and external ground levels with the intention of providing a model of potential archaeological survival within Vincent House and its surrounds, an area of approximately 2,300 square metres. The fieldwork was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology on instruction from University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the requirements of a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2004), approved by the Planning Archaeologist, Birmingham City Council, and the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999). It was undertaken following advice contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG16: Department of the Environment, November 1999), the Birmingham City Council Archaeology Strategy (2003) and Policy 8.36 of the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan.

Only a brief summary of the archaeological background will be provided here; further details can be found in Jones (1999a) and Jones (2001). The area for evaluation comprises part of the central range and the *praetentura* of the Phase 1 and Phase 3 forts, and part of the western defences of the same forts, along with the associated

intervallum areas. The internal areas are likely to have contained timber-framed buildings possibly including granaries (a granary was located by evaluation further to the north, Jones 1999b), barrack-buildings and workshops. The Phase 1 fort defences comprised a rampart of probable turf construction located within the area evaluated, and the Phase 3 fort defences which comprised a single ditch with rampart, probably originally of turf construction, and later re-built in timber, by analogy with evidence from elsewhere within the fort. Evidence of temporary timber-framed structures or compounds associated with the Phase 2B military stores depot would also be anticipated, particularly where the overlying Phase 3 rampart could have provided protection from later disturbance. The survival of ditches attributed to the latest suite of Roman activity (Phase 4), trial-trenched to the north of Vincent Drive (Jones 1999b, Jones forthcoming) may also be anticipated to the south of Vincent Drive. A test-pit (B4) and trial-trench (B3) were dug during an earlier phase of recent evaluation adjoining Vincent Drive, although neither located any deposits of archaeological, or possible archaeological interest (Jones 1999b). Further archaeological evaluation to the north (Trench B1) identified the well-preserved remains of a Phase 1 granary, and a group of Phase 2B ovens. This lawned area, together with extensive areas of the fort interior and defences were included within an extended Scheduled Ancient Monument (Fig. 1) in 2003, and these areas are identified for preservation *in situ*. The area of Vincent House and its surrounds is intended for preservation by record.

Slit trenching had been undertaken by St Joseph and Shotton (1937) within the area evaluated in 2004. The two ditches of the Phase 1 fort were identified at that time (Trench ix), although no details are published. A trench dug further to the south identified an entry-gap (Trench xxxvi). Trenching identified the northern and southern (Trenches xxxv and xxxii) terminals of the western gate of the Phase 3 fort, and the associated turf rampart. A spread of gravel was traced for a distance of 12m to the west of this gate which appeared to respect the position of the west gate of the Phase 1 fort.

Vincent House comprises a series of interconnected single-storey buildings (Blocks A-D) of concrete-block construction, built during the mid 20th century. A brick garage lies to the southwest, and an area of disturbance associated with the Elan Aqueduct is located to the east. The three buildings (Blocks A-D), together form an 'E' pattern in plan. A timber-framed extension is sited at the northwestern end of Block D. Temporary portacabins occupying the spaces between Blocks A-D had been demolished just before the evaluation took place. To the northwest of Blocks B-C is a tarmac drive leading to Vincent Drive which is set within a cutting to the north. Ground level changes in a series of terraces within the lawned area to the northwest of Vincent House, suggesting downcutting of the natural slope within and immediately adjoining the building. Overall, the natural topography slopes from northwest to southeast, with a slighter gradient recorded from the northeast to the southwest (Jones 2001, fig. 2). Earlier test-pitting to the west and southwest of Vincent Drive identified truncated natural subsoil horizons, but no archaeological, or possible archaeological features or deposits (Jones 1999b).

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide a model of predicted archaeological survival within Vincent House and the adjoining area, albeit limited by the existing land use.

Subject to approval from the landowner, it is intended that the archive will be deposited with Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery.

3.0: METHODOLOGY

A total of six test-pits (Fig. 2) each measuring approximately 1.2m square were excavated by mini-digger, working under archaeological supervision, to expose the uppermost horizon of the natural subsoil, or the uppermost deposit of archaeological, or possible archaeological, interest. The test-pits were hand-cleaned as appropriate, and deposits or features of archaeological or possible archaeological interest were sampled by hand-excavation.

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

Level profiles (Fig. 3) related to Ordnance Datum (AOD) were recorded using a dumpy level. Floor levels within the buildings were obtained by measurement through windows, although, of course, the depth of the floor slabs could not be established. The level profiles were drawn at scale 1:100 in the horizontal alignment, and 1:50 in the vertical alignment, to highlight changes in the latter.

4.0: RESULTS (Figs. 2 and 4)

The natural subsoil was recorded in all test-pits. It comprised orange-yellow gravel and sand.

4.1: Test-pit 1

The natural subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.45m below the modern surface (at 145.64m AOD). The subsoil was overlain by a layer of pink clay (1001) measuring 0.3m in depth, containing modern rubble and pebbles. This layer was truncated by the cut for a service trench (F100) which extended over the majority of the test-pit. The backfill of the service trench was sealed by a layer of turf and topsoil (1002), measuring 0.15m in depth. No features, or possible features of archaeological interest were recorded.

4.2: Test-pit 2 (Fig. 4)

The natural subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.65m below the modern surface (at 145.04m AOD). The subsoil was truncated by a northeast-southwest-aligned cut (F200), dug to a V-shaped profile. It measured a maximum of 0.4m in width, and was backfilled with grey silt-sand (2003) mixed with small pebbles and charcoal fragments. The backfilled cut was overlain by a layer of grey sand-silt (2002), measuring 0.13m in depth. Above was a deposit of pink clay (2001) with modern rubble inclusions. The southern side of this test-pit was truncated by a modern service

trench. The backfilled service trench (F201, not illustrated), and layer 2001, was sealed by a layer of turf and topsoil (2004), measuring 0.1m in depth.

4.3: Test-pit 3

The natural subsoil was identified at a depth of 0.155m from the modern surface (at 145.155m AOD). A service trench (F300) was recorded cutting the subsoil. The backfilled service trench was sealed by turf and topsoil (3000). No features, or possible features of archaeological interest were recorded.

4.4: Test-pit 4

The natural subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.24m below the modern surface (at 145.04m AOD). The test-pit was cut by a service trench (F400, a continuation of feature F300 in Test-pit 3). The backfilled service trench was sealed by a layer of turf and topsoil (4000). No features, or possible features of archaeological interest were recorded.

4.5: Test-pit 5 (Fig. 4)

The natural subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.79m below the modern surface (at 144.38m AOD). The subsoil was truncated by a northeast-southwest-aligned cut (F500). It measured a maximum of 1m in width, and 0.3m in depth. It was backfilled with brown silt-sand (5003) with small pebbles. The backfilled cut was sealed by a layer of light brown silt-sand (5002), measuring a maximum of 0.14m in depth. Above was a layer of black-grey silt-sand (5001), recorded beneath the topsoil (5000).

4.6: Test-pit 6 (Fig. 4)

The natural subsoil was recorded at a depth of 1.4m below the modern surface (at 143.49m AOD. The subsoil was cut by a possible ditch (F600), aligned northwest-southeast, which could not be fully defined within the test-pit. This feature was backfilled with light grey sand-silt (6005), sealed by a layer of grey sand-silt (6004). Above was a layer of brown silt (6003), measuring 0.3m in depth. This deposit was overlain by a layer of grey silt (6002). A service trench (F601) was cut through layers 6005-6002. The backfilled service trench and layer 6002 were sealed by topsoil (6000), measuring 0.1m in depth.

4.7: Pottery by Jane Evans

The evaluation produced a very small assemblage of pottery: five sherds, all of which were very abraded. Test-pit 5 (F500, 5003) produced three sherds (17g). Two body sherds were in a sandy, reduced fabric with organic temper; similar to Metchley fabric G06.08, but probably handmade. The third, a base fragment, was in an oxidised sandy ware. Test-pits 2 (F200, 2003) and 6 (F600, 6005) each produced single fragments of pot (both <1g). The former was in a sandy oxidised ware and the latter in an organic tempered Severn Valley ware fabric.

It is impossible to draw any firm conclusions from such a small assemblage. However, all the fabrics are similar to types noted from other excavations at Metchley, and are consistent with a 1st century date.

No other finds were identified, with the exception of pottery of 20th century date, which was not collected.

4.8: Level profiles (Figs. 2 and 5)

Two level profiles were recorded (Fig. 3), extending between the grassed area to the northeast of Vincent House and the northeastern wall of the garage adjoining Block C, to the southwest of Vincent House (Fig. 2). Ground level was recorded outside Blocks A-D, and the top of the floor slab within Blocks A-C of Vincent House. It was not possible to establish the depth of the floor slab because the building continued in use during the evaluation.

To the northeast of Block A both profiles indicate that the natural gradient was terraced (Plate 1). Trial-trenching of the upper terrace (Trench B2, Jones forthcoming fig. 34) revealed a build-up of 0.25m of Roman deposits above the subsoil. This terracing is likely to have removed at least part of those built-up deposits, particularly in the lower terrace. The natural subsoil was recorded at depths of between 0.45 and 0.65m below the modern surface in Test-pits 1-2. These depths and extrapolation from the modern ground surface to the northeast of Block A suggest that most of the footprint of Block A may have been built above the level of the natural subsoil. Subject to the depth of the foundation slab of Block A it is possible that stratified deposits may survive to a greater-or-lesser degree within it. Limited archaeological survival may be predicted in the northeastern part of this block.

A brick terrace retaining wall (Plate 2) is approximately equidistant between Blocks A and B. The height of this terrace (approximately 0.7m) is approximately similar to the depth of overburden overlying the subsoil in Test-pit 2. At the southeastern end of Block B (Test-pit 2) some horizontal stratigraphy may have been removed, and some truncation of features cutting the subsoil may be predicted. At the northwestern end of the block (Test-pit 1) all horizontal stratigraphy will have been removed, and significant downcutting to features cutting the natural subsoil is likely to have occurred.

The natural subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.15 and 0.24m below the modern surface in Test-pits 3 and 4, respectively. This comparatively shallow depth of overburden may suggest only limited potential for the survival of overlying archaeological deposits within the grassed area between Blocks B and C, as well as along the northeastern edge of Block C, although features cutting the subsoil are likely to survive.

Finally, the natural subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.79 and 1.4m below the modern surface within Test-pits 5 and 6, respectively. The natural surface in the latter is likely to have truncated by a Roman military ditch (F600). Because of the depth of overburden (0.79m) it is likely that there is good potential for the survival of stratified archaeological deposits within much of Block C, and especially within the grassed area to the southwest.

The level profiles across Blocks A-C and within the adjoining areas have been extrapolated within Block D, which was not itself surveyed.

5.0: DISCUSSION

Archaeological features and deposits of Roman military origin were identified in test-pits 2, 5 and 6. No features or possible features of Roman date were identified in Test-pits 1, 3 and 4. Test-pit 1 was unfortuitously positioned along the line of a service trench. The other test-pits (3 and 4) where no Roman military archaeology was encountered also contained service trenches. Test-pit 2 was located to the north of the *via principalis*, which was aligned northeast-southwest. The cut (F200) was similarly aligned and may be interpreted as a drainage ditch to the north of this internal road. Similarly, cut F500 in Test-pit 5 may be interpreted as a drainage ditch cut to the south of the road. It is not possible to phase either of these ditches, beyond attributing them to Phases 1-3. Ditch F200 was sealed by a Roman destruction deposit (2002), as was ditch F500 (5002). Northwest-southeast aligned ditch F600 (Test-pit 6) may be identified as the western ditch of the Phase 3 fort.

6.0: IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

6.1: Implications

Only a limited area could be investigated during this evaluation, and the sizes of the individual interventions were also individually small. The footprint of Vincent House itself could not be investigated, because that building remained in use. Because of the limited nature of the evaluation possible the results of this fieldwork should not be treated as conclusive. The extent of disturbance by below-ground services cannot be established, except within the grassed areas. Similarly, the depth of the floor slab cannot on present information be determined. However, archaeological features and overlying deposits have been identified in three of the test-pits examined. Comparison of the level profile data and the test-pit results indicates that a high level of archaeological survival may be found within at least half of the site.

For the purposes of identifying the predicted level of archaeological survival the site has been identified into four zones, as follows (Fig. 5).

ZONE A: potential high level of survival

Features cutting the natural subsoil are likely to well preserved, and significant areas of stratified deposits overlying the subsoil, may be predicted.

ZONE B: potential good level of survival

Features cutting the natural subsoil are likely to well preserved over much of this zone. It is possible that stratified deposits may be preserved in some 'islands'.

ZONE C: potential fair level of survival

Features cutting the natural subsoil are likely to have been truncated to a greater-or-lesser degree. The survival of stratified deposits is not anticipated.

ZONE D: potential poor level of survival

Archaeological features and deposits may not survive extensive downcutting and localised truncation, and no further archaeological fieldwork is recommended in this zone.

6.2: Proposals

Two options may be suggested, preservation in situ, or preservation by record (excavation and reporting of the results). These options are considered in turn below:

OPTION 1: PRESERVATION IN SITU

As an alternative to excavation, buried archaeological deposits could be preserved *in situ*. This alternative would involve demolition of Vincent House to ground level, leaving the floor slabs *in situ*, and no disturbance by downcutting, including new service trenches, or by the movement of vehicles or heavy machinery within the grassed areas between Blocks A-C. It should be emphasised that archaeological deposits within the grassed areas are relatively shallow, and that features and deposits would be vulnerable to disturbance, for example by compaction if gravel was laid as a preliminary to use for car parking. Such disturbance would not be acceptable given that the area is identified as a zone for preservation of below-ground archaeological remains by record (i.e. excavation, followed by post-excavation reporting).

OPTION 2: PRESERVATION BY RECORD

Although different levels of archaeological survival may be predicted, because of differing modern land use, it is important that Vincent House and its surrounds are investigated (and the results reported) as part of a single archaeological operation. Piecemeal investigation (eg along the line of new service trenches) or a staged series of archaeological open area excavations is not recommended.

Recommendations:

Zones A-C, archaeological excavation followed by post-excavation analysis of the results and publication. A greater intensity of hand-excavation and recording will be required in the areas of predicted best archaeological survival (Zones A and B). In Area C archaeological salvage recording may be appropriate.

Any fencing of the excavated area should exclude below-ground disturbance within the adjoining Scheduled Ancient Monument.

7.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluation was sponsored by University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust. It was supervised by Mary Duncan with the assistance of Yianni Alsitoglou. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds and the report was edited by Alex Jones who also managed the project.

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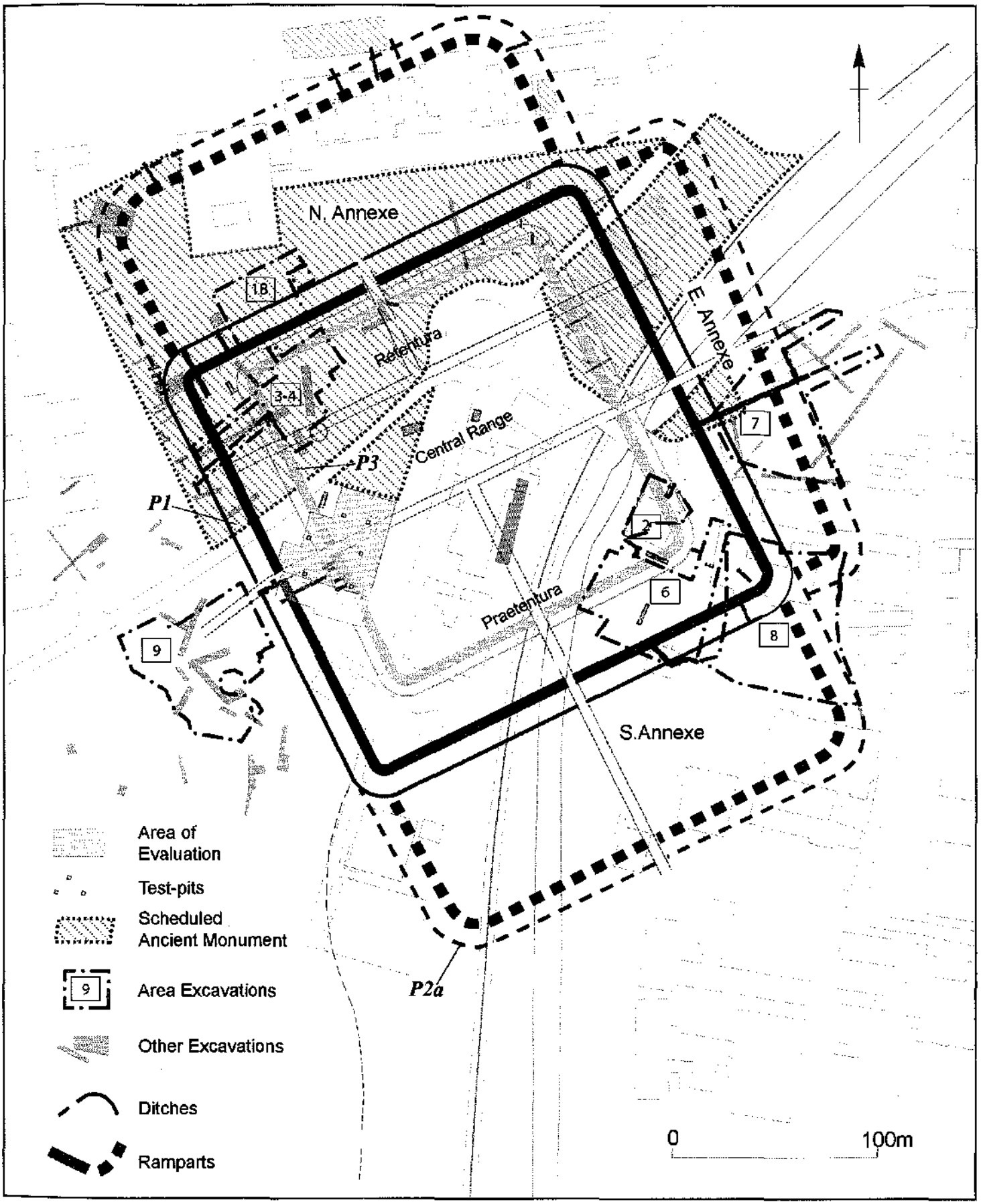
N. Annexe
E. Annexe
Retentura
Central Range
Praetentura
S.Annexe
P1
P2a
P3
1B
3-4
2
6
7
8
9
Area of Evaluation
Test-pits
Scheduled Ancient Monument
Area Excavations
Other Excavations
Ditches
Ramparts
0
100m

Fig.1

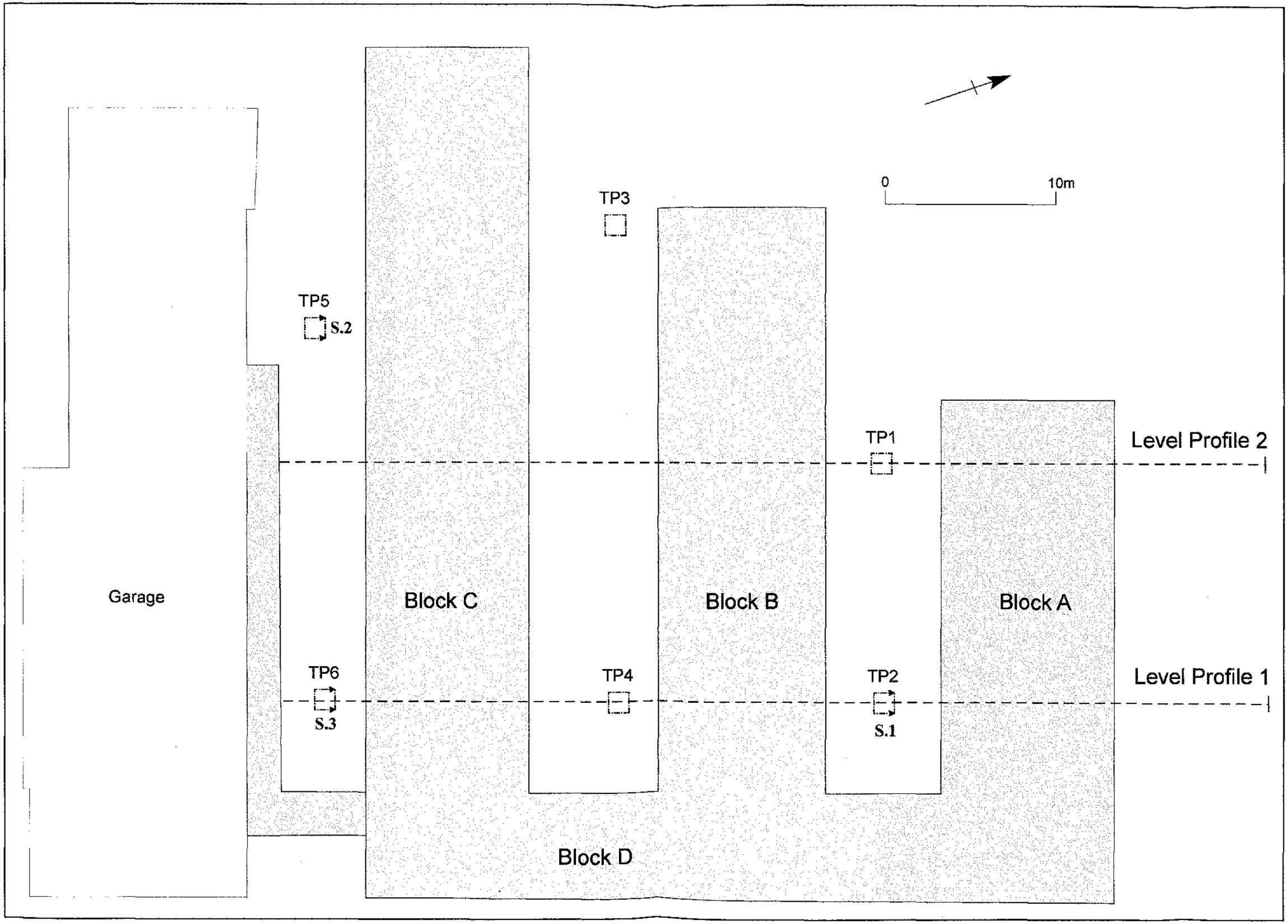
TP5
S.2
TP3
0
10m
TP1
Level Profile 2
Garage
Block C
Block B
Block A
TP6
S.3
TP4
TP2
S.1
Level Profile 1
Block D

Fig.2

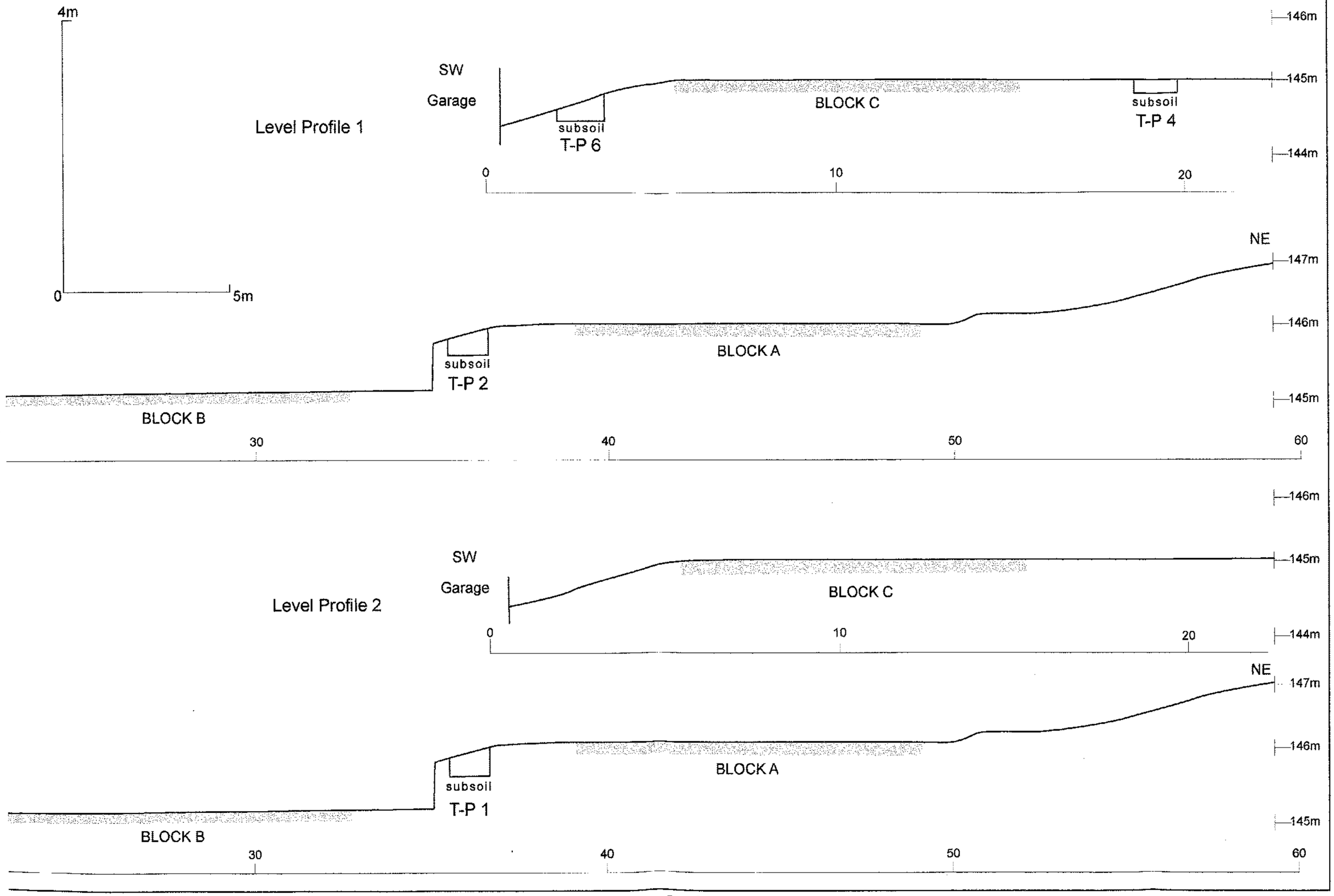
4m
0
5m
Level Profile 1
SW
Garage
subsoil
T-P 6
BLOCK C
subsoil
T-P 4
146m
145m
144m
0
10
20
NE
147m
146m
145m
subsoil
T-P 2
BLOCK A
BLOCK B
30
40
50
60
Level Profile 2
SW
Garage
BLOCK C
146m
145m
144m
0
10
20
NE
147m
146m
145m
subsoil
T-P 1
BLOCK A
BLOCK B
30
40
50
60

Fig.3

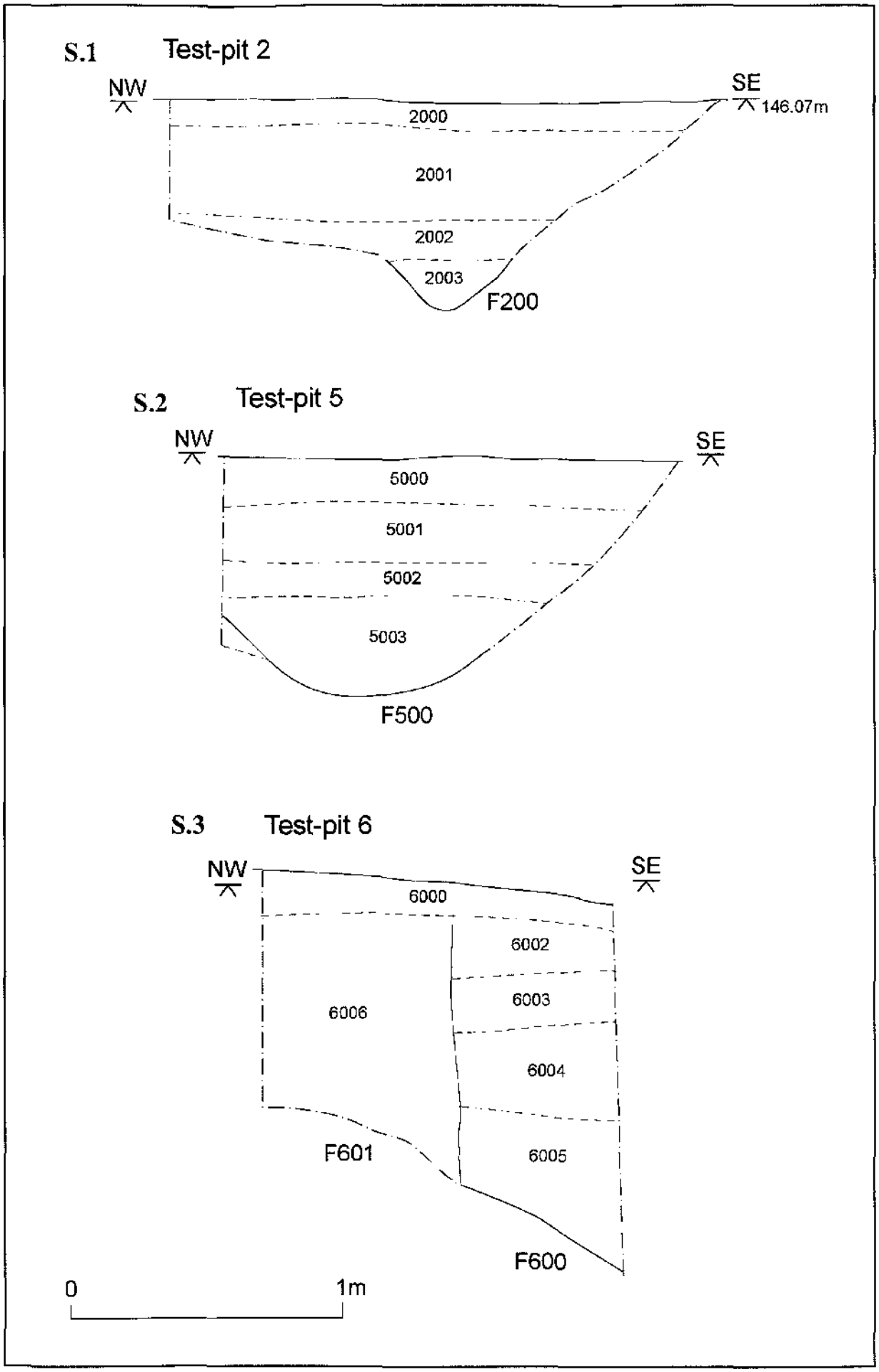
S.1
Test-pit 2
NW
SE
146.07m
2000
2001
2002
2003
F200
S.2
Test-pit 5
NW
SE
5000
5001
5002
5003
F500
S.3
Test-pit 6
NW
SE
6000
6002
6003
6006
6004
6005
F601
F600
0
1m

Fig.4

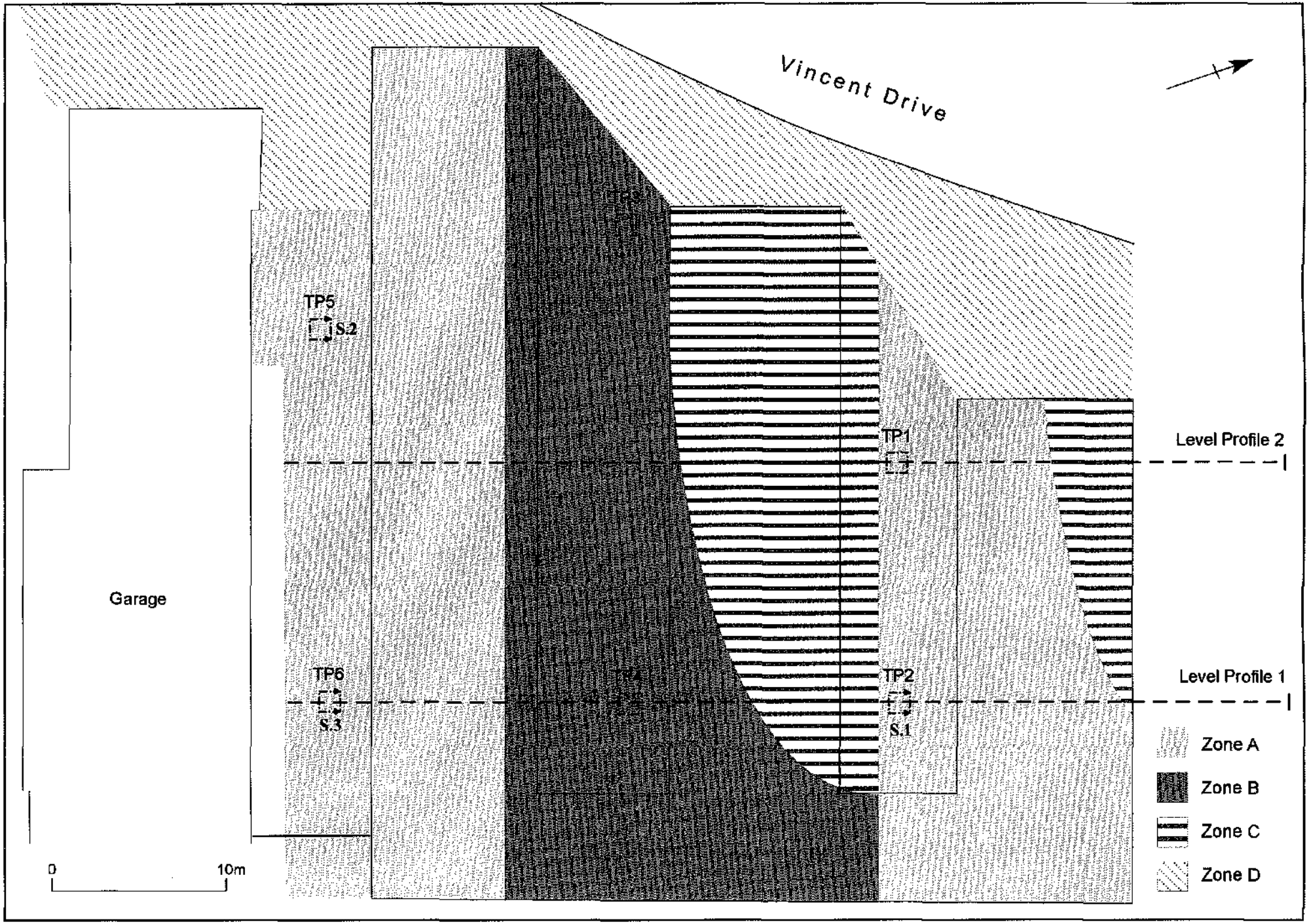
Vincent Drive
TP5
S.2
TP3
TP1
Level Profile 2
Garage
TP6
S.3
TP4
TP2
S.1
Level Profile 1
Zone A
Zone B
Zone C
Zone D
0
10m

Fig.5

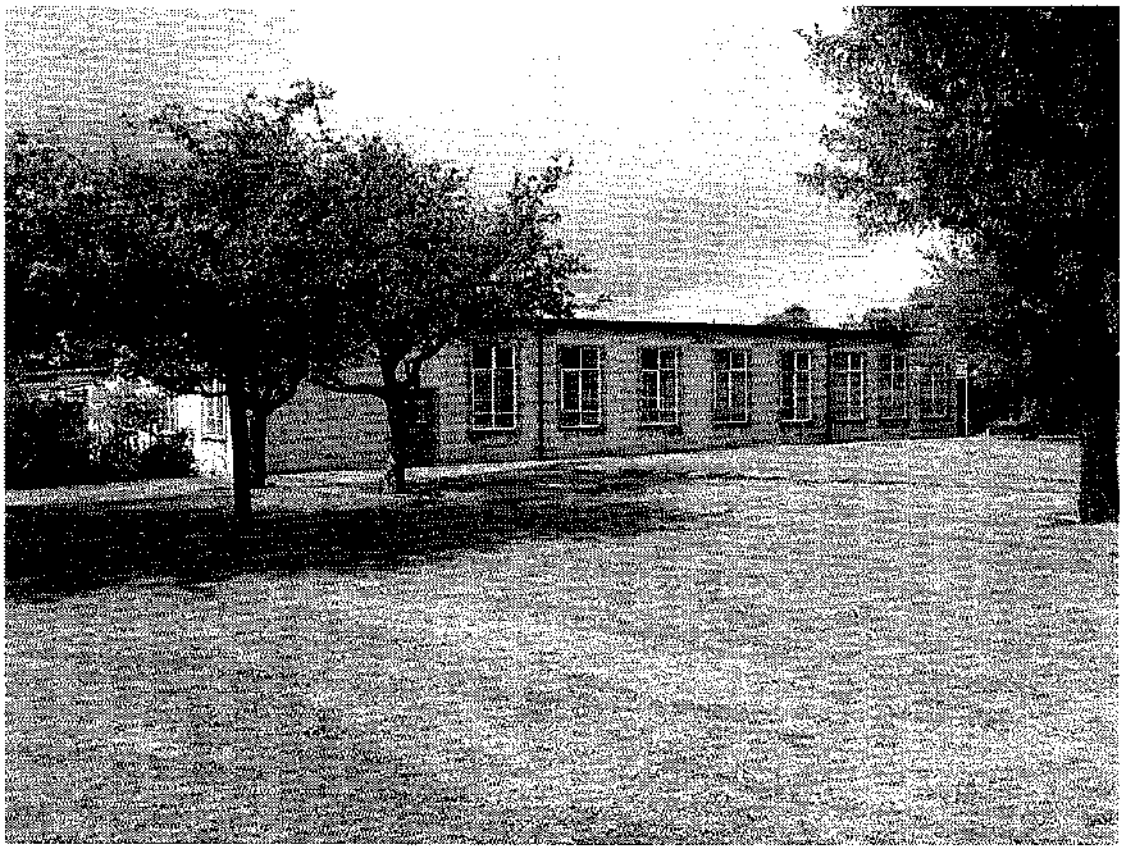

Plate 1

Plate 2

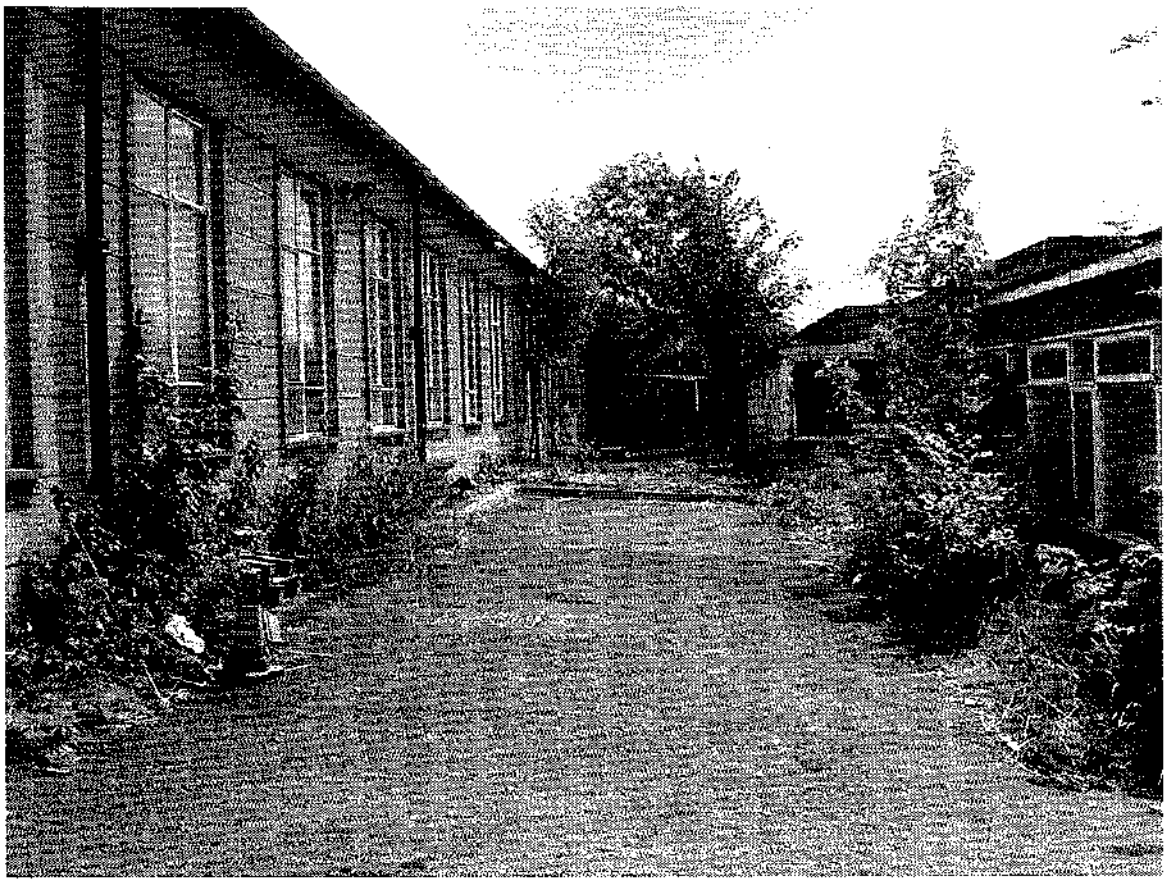

Plate 3

Plate 4