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(MR)

National Trust & Whitbread

Morden Hall Park, Morden Hall Road  
London Borough of Merton

Archaeological evaluation of proposed car park

Site code MHK 95

NGR TQ 2600 6865

Plain unbound copy with  
reduced illustrations

The Oxford Archaeological Unit  
August 1995

## Morden Hall Park, London Borough of Merton Archaeological evaluation of proposed car park

### *Summary*

*Over a period of three days in August 1995, the Oxford Archaeological unit (OAU) undertook an archaeological evaluation of an area of the grounds, immediately to the south of Morden Hall, Merton, Greater London. The work was carried out on behalf of Whitbread and the National Trust in connection with a proposal to construct a car park in the grounds, and was undertaken as part of the considerations for planning consent. The evaluation consisted of five trial trenches totalling 60m in length and three test pits. A number of various shallow features were located intermittently throughout the area of investigation, and these were possibly associated with a former garden layout of uncertain date, but many, or possibly all of these features were related to trees. The footing of a substantial brick wall was found running southwards from the SE wing of the house, and this appeared to be the remains of a boundary wall, though it does not appear on any of the known maps or plans of the estate. The existence of brick rubble, and other dumped material, located throughout the western half of the site suggests that deliberate dumping has taken place to raise the level of the ground in this area, which is still affected by frequent flooding even at its present level.*

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 It is intended to convert Morden hall, Merton into a Beefeater eatery, and as part of this development it is proposed to construct a car park in the grounds immediately to the south of the house, and also to build a new bridge and entrance gate.
- 1.2 Disturbance to possible archaeological remains on the site would be caused by the ground work for proposed new development. Therefore, in accordance with the planning and listed building conditions attached to consents granted on the site, English Heritage advised the Merton Borough that an archaeological evaluation should be undertaken to establish the significance, and extent of any archaeological remains, so recommendations for mitigation strategies, or the need for archaeological recording work could be proposed.
- 1.3 The National Trust as owners of Morden Hall, and Whitbread, who propose the development, consequently commissioned The Oxford Archaeological Unit to undertake the archaeological evaluation and the Field work took place over a period of 3 days during August 1995.
- 1.4 The particular concerns of the evaluation were to establish whether there were any remains which indicated the existence of an earlier house, and to observe

whether there were any deposits related to formal garden layout contemporary with the current, or earlier house. It was also possible that evidence for prehistoric or Roman occupation might be found.

## 2 Location and Topography

- 2.1 Morden Hall Park lies on the east side Morden Hall road in the London Borough of Merton (NGR TQ 2600 6865). The house is situated at the north end of the park, and the area of investigation lies immediately to the south of Morden Hall, consisting of an area of informal wooded garden which is bordered by a shallow moat (Fig. 2).
- 2.2 The land has a very slight general slope from west to east, but also slopes away gradually on all sides towards the moat. The ground level is centred around Ordnance Datum 16m. The underlying geology on the site is gravel and London clay.

## 3 Archaeological and Historical background

- 3.1 Morden Hall is a moated manor house dating from the late 18th century, though possibly incorporating a slightly earlier brick house of uncertain, but probably 17th century date. It is also thought that the moat was an original feature associated with the earlier house.
- 3.2 There is no evidence that there has ever been a formal garden associated with the current house, and an 18th-century watercolour by Wells (Fig. 1) shows the garden to the south of the house, covered in what appears to be newly planted trees. It is possible, however, that there may have been a more formal garden associated with the earlier house, contemporary with the construction of the moat.
- 3.3 An excavation and watching brief carried out in the park by the Museum of London in 1991 (MHP 91) found a former course of the river Wandle and post-medieval building foundations along the southern face of the northern perimeter of the walled garden, which lies at the south end of the park. Other archaeological work undertaken in the near vicinity has revealed some evidence of prehistoric occupation, and a recent excavation in the area to the east of the park at Phipps Bridge revealed a Roman inhumation cemetery, presumably associated with Roman Stane Street thought to run to the south west of the current development site.

## 4. Methodology and Strategy (see Fig. 2 for trench location)

- 4.1 The evaluation consisted of five trial trenches, four 10m long x 1.55m wide.

and one 20m long x 1.55m wide, and three test pits approximately 2m in size. Trenches 1 to 5 were located in the area of the proposed car park, and trenches (test pits) 6 and 7 were positioned in the area of the proposed new bridge and entrance. Trench 8 was an additional test pit, excavated to observe the possible continuation of a wall, located in trench 1. Although the trenches and test pits were roughly spaced to establish the character of the deposits across the whole area of investigation, their exact position was dictated by the existence of mature tree and the need to avoid damaging their root systems.

- 4.2 The trenches and test pits were excavated down to the top of the first significant archaeological deposits, or in their absence down to the top of the natural clay, using a small 360 mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were then cleaned by hand and a representative sample of the features revealed were excavated. As excavation proceeded the various phases of deposits located were described, planned and photographed and sections were drawn where appropriate.

## 5 Archaeological Description (Figs. 3, 4 and 5)

- 5.1 The top of natural clay was located throughout the area of investigation at a depth of between 0.50m and 0.80m, though was not reached in trench/test pit 7 due to the increased depth of overburden caused by an overlying topsoil bank at this point.
- 5.2 A number of shallow features of varying size and shape which were cut into the top of the natural clay were located in all of the long trenches (1012, 1013, 1014, 1015, 1016, 2009, 2011, 3005, 3007, 3009, 3011, 4005 and 5004). The features ranged from posthole size to being over 6m wide, though none of them were more than 0.45m deep. Some of the features seemed to have regular edges, but others were clearly irregular, though all appeared to be filled with a very similar dark grey clay silt. The only finds retrieved from these features was a few small fragments of post-medieval brick tile and glass.
- 5.3 Overlying the shallow features, and extending in an apparently uniform layer throughout the area of investigation was a deposit of dark clay silt which appeared to be the remains of a buried soil horizon (1005, 2007, 3001, 4002, 5002, 6003 and 7004). In trenches 3, 4 and 5 this deposit was directly overlaid by the present topsoil.
- 5.4 Running through the entire length of trench 1, in a N-S alignment was a fairly substantial brick wall footing (1001). The wall which was some 0.40m wide, with a 0.60m wide offset, was predominantly made of unfrosted bricks, but also contained some chalk in the lower foundation. This wall was on exactly the same line as the east wall of the SE wing of the current house. Roughly half way along the wall an E-W wall, of similar width, projected westwards. An extension was made to the west side of the trench to observe the deposits

to the other side of the wall and this revealed that they were the same as on the east side.

An additional test pit (Tr 8) was later excavated on the same line as wall 1001 some 40m further to the south to observe whether the wall continued, and it was indeed located, only 0.30m below the present ground surface (8003). However, at this point the wall foundation appeared to be made entirely of chalk and green sandstone, though was exactly the same width and appeared to be bonded with the same mortar.

- 5.5 A series of dump layers consisting of brick and chalk rubble, gravel, and loam, (1004, 2004, 2005, 2006, 6002 and 7003) was located in the trenches to either side of the wall, and also overlying the buried soil horizon in trenches 2, 6 and 7.

## 6 Discussion

- 6.1 The very similar fills of the shallow features, along with their general character, suggests that they are all related to one phase of activity, and they appear to be post-medieval in date. The most likely function of these features would therefore appear to be that they are activity associated with a former garden level. Though it is possible that some of the larger features do represent the remains of flower beds, there was no evidence of a layout or any spacial patterning, and many of the features were irregular, suggesting that they were in fact treebowls. The known tendency of seasonal flooding in this area within the moat also makes it unlikely that there has ever been a type of garden other than a very basic layout of mostly trees, which is known to have existed from the 18th century onwards, however, it is possible that a garden was started at the time of the original house which was soon abandoned.
- 6.2 The brick wall found in trench 1 and its apparent continuation in trench 8 appears to be the remains of a boundary, or garden wall and was very similar in character to the standing boundary walls which surround the park. The fact that the wall footing is on exactly the same as the east wall of the SE wing of Morden Hall (and possibly runs right up to it) also strongly suggesting that it was a feature contemporary with the present house, though appears to have been a short lived feature as it does not appear on any of the known maps or plans of the estate. It is also noticeable that the wall footing runs parallel, on the east side, of which until recent times, was a traditional line of access or 'vista', which ran southwards from the house. The overgrown remains of the Box hedges which lined this route still survive, and the recently buried gravel surfaces found in trenches 1 (1003) and 2 (2002) are almost certainly the remains of paths on this line.
- 6.3 Although it is possible that some of the deposits of brick and chalk rubble found in trenches 1, 2, 6, 7 and 8 are associated with the demolished

boundary wall, the material appeared to be fairly evenly spread and extended right up to the west boundary wall of the park (trench 7). It therefore seems likely that deliberate dumping has taken place to raise the level of the ground to combat the flooding in this western half of the garden which became an access route.

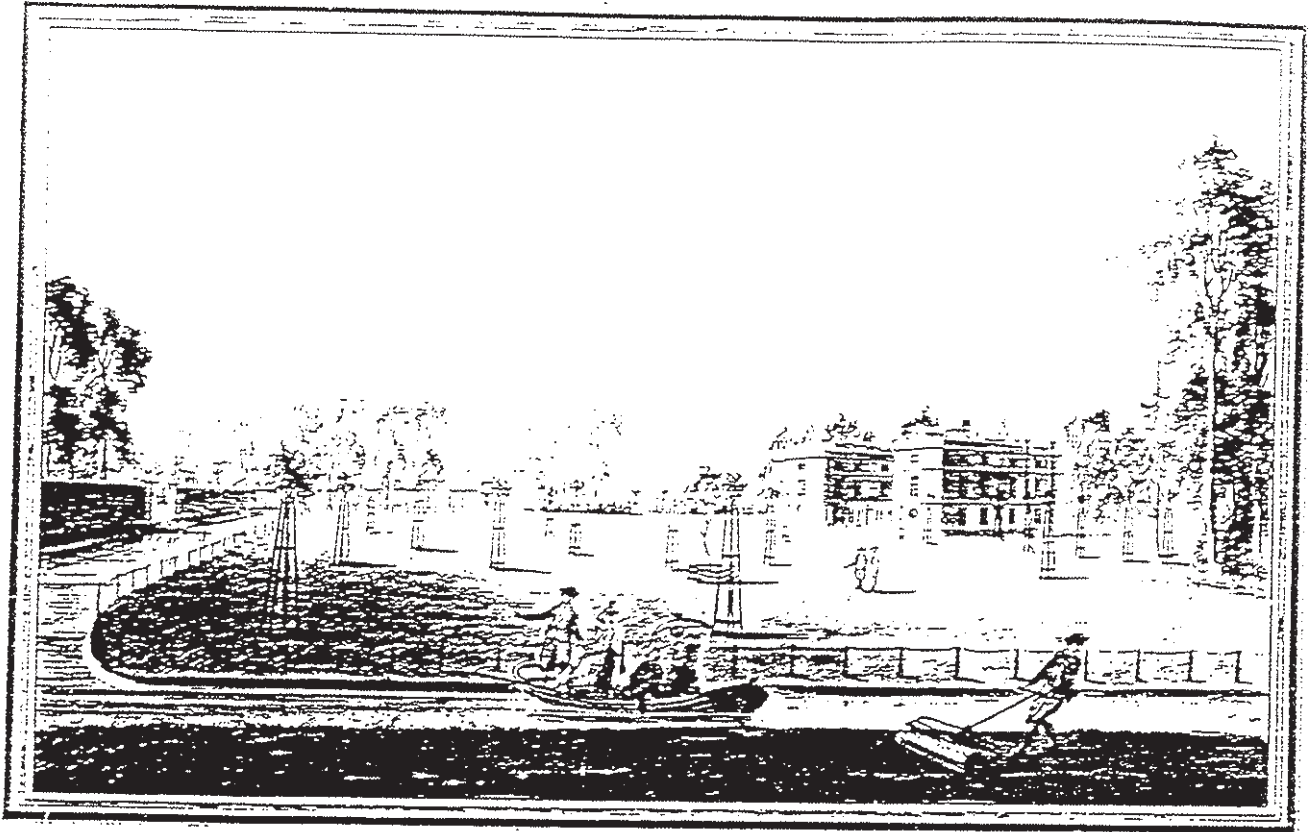
## 7 Conclusions

- 7.1 No evidence was found to indicate that an earlier house existed on the site and no deposits or finds earlier than the post-medieval period were found in any of the trenches.
- 7.2 Although deposits were found which appear to be related to an earlier garden level, this seems most likely to have been an informal layout of trees and lawns similar to that which is known to have existed since the 18th century.
- 7.3 The test pit excavated on the east side of the moat (Tr 6) did not produce any evidence for the dating of the moat, or that it had changed in character, and this could only really be established by excavating a trench in the actual side or bottom of the moat if it was drained. However, as no evidence has been found on the site for any activity earlier than the post-medieval period there is no reason to suspect that the moat is anything other than a garden feature dating from the late 17th or 18th century.

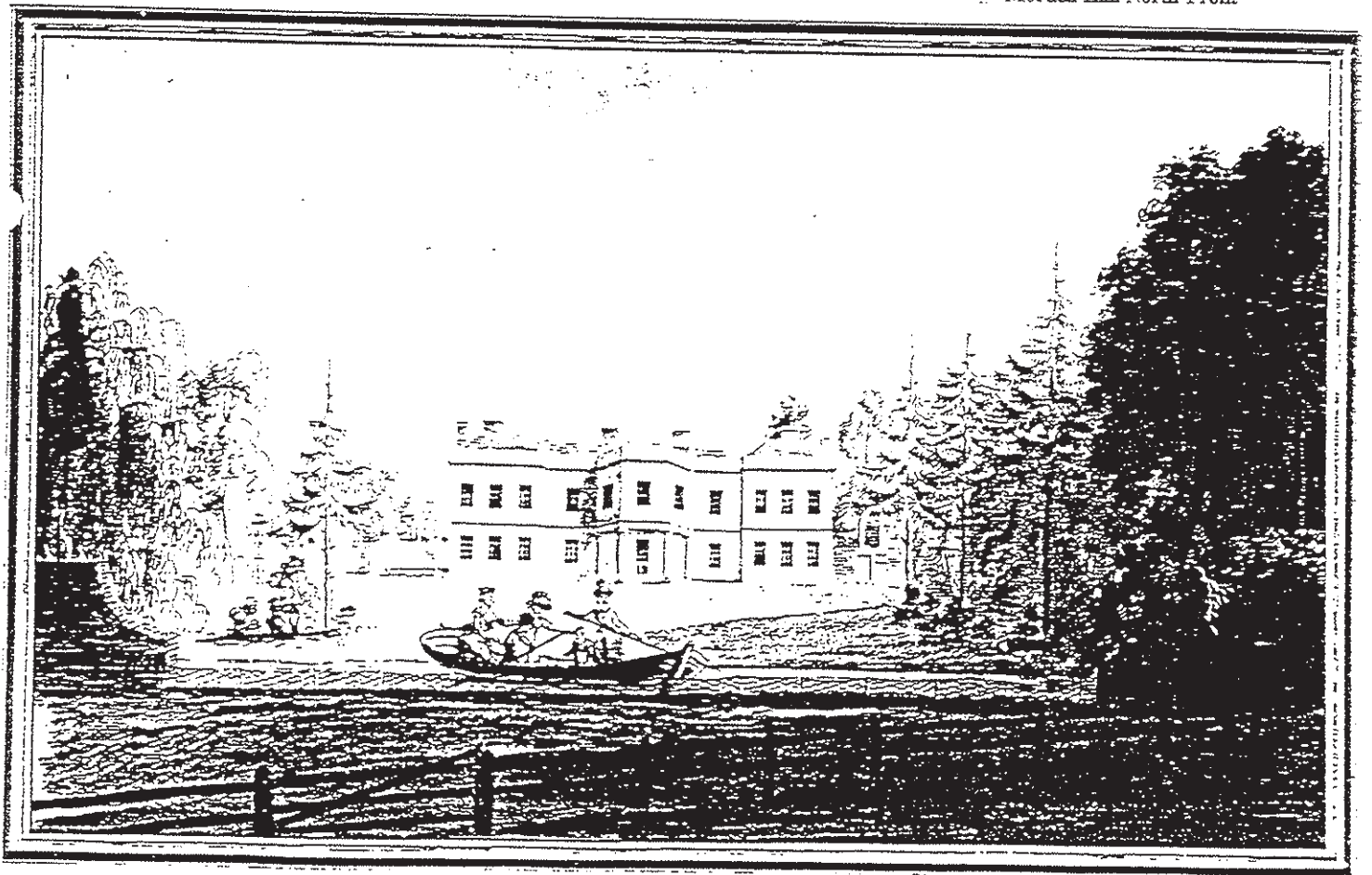
Christopher Bell  
 The Oxford Archaeological Unit  
 August 1995

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Figure 1. C18th Watercolour of Morden Hall  
Morden Hall South Front



C18th Wells Watercolour  
Morden Hall North Front



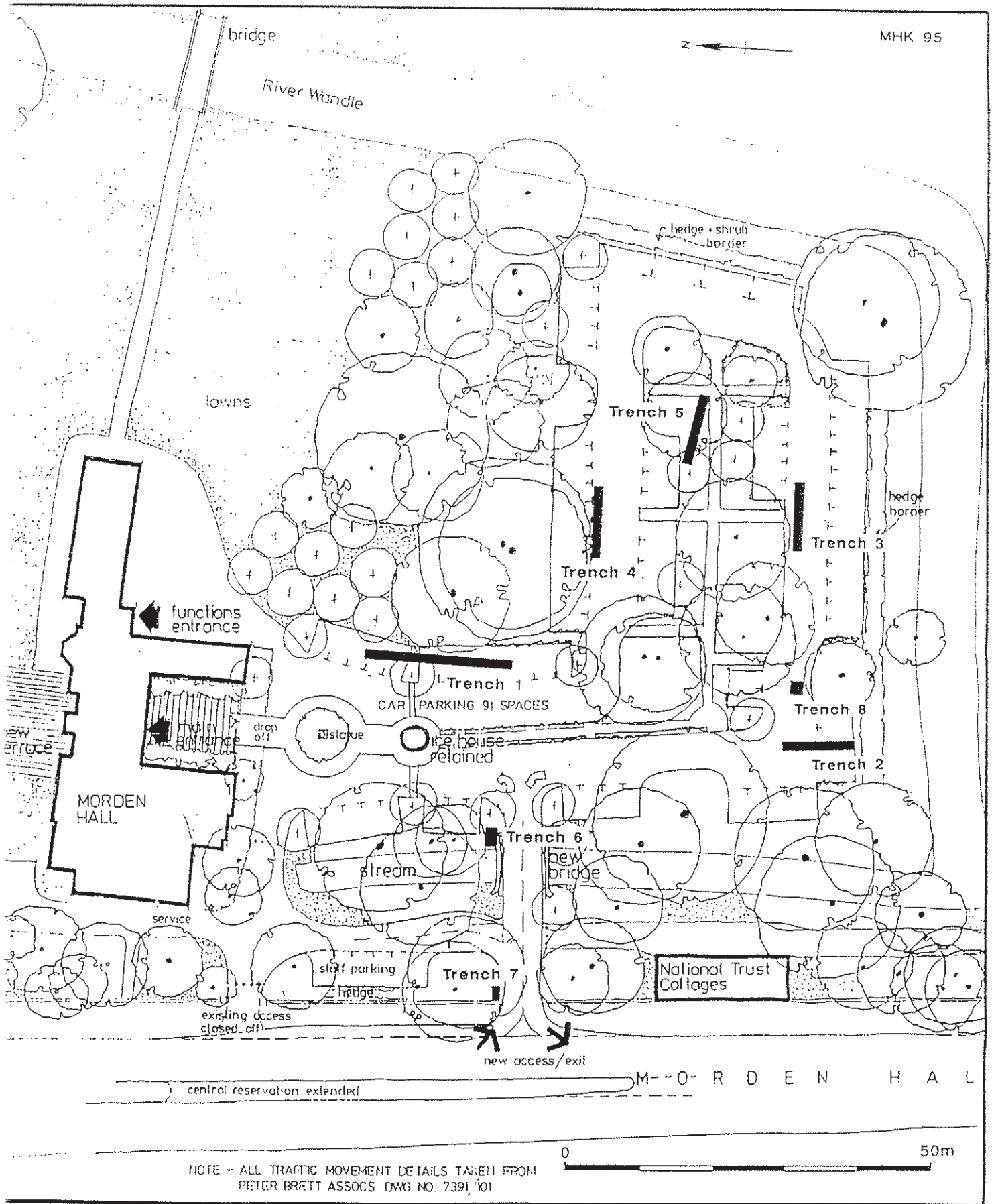
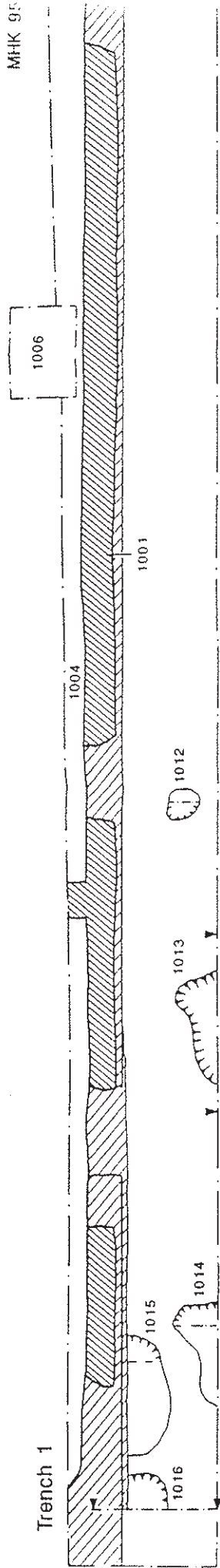


Figure 2

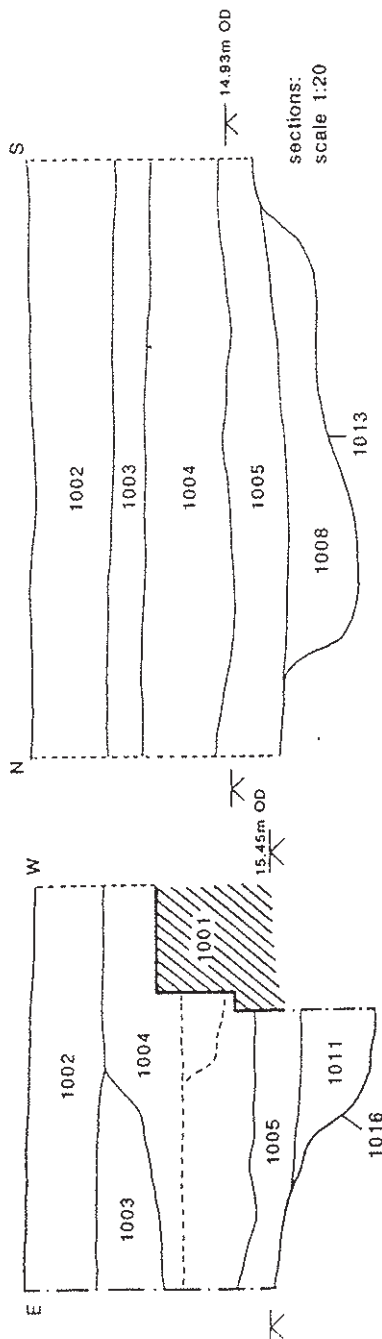




scale 1:50



- Upstanding brick wall
- Offset foundation



Trench 2

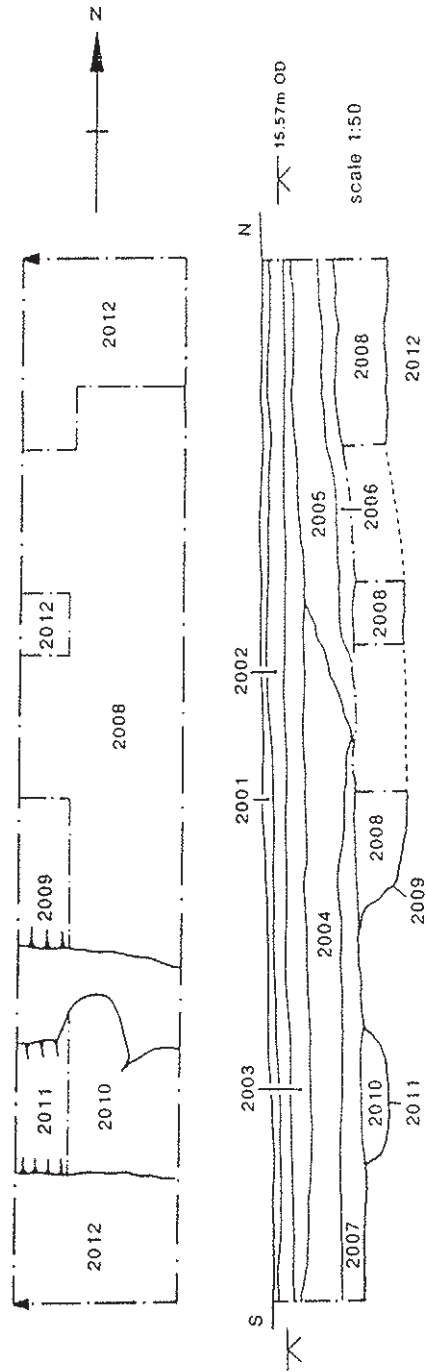


Figure 3

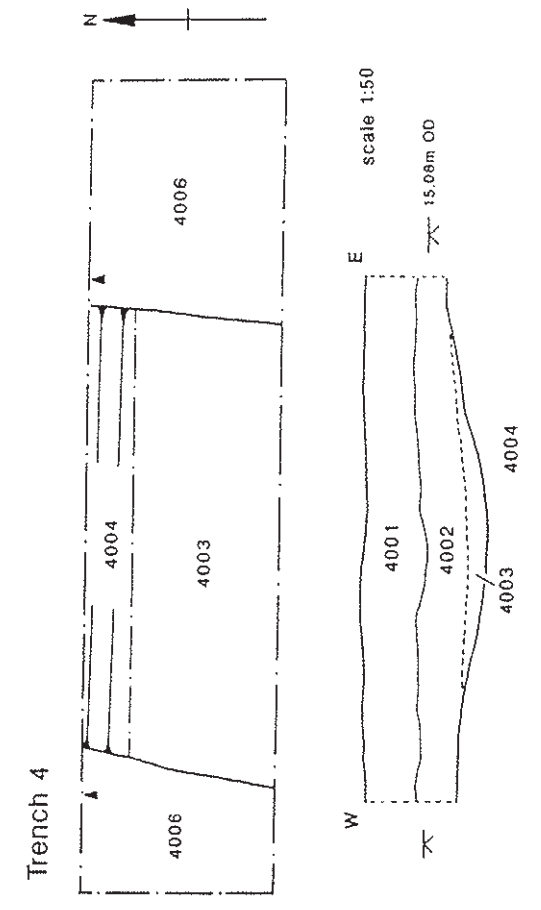
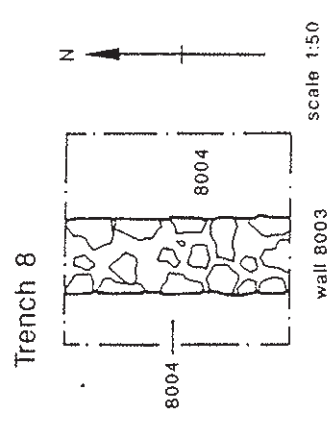
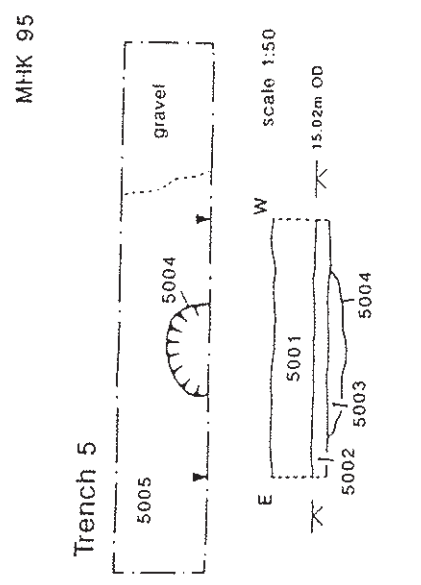
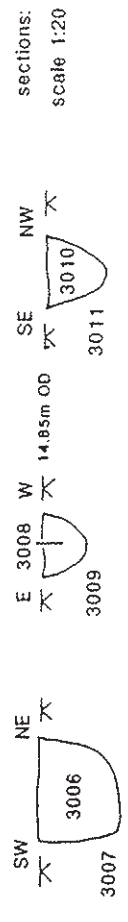
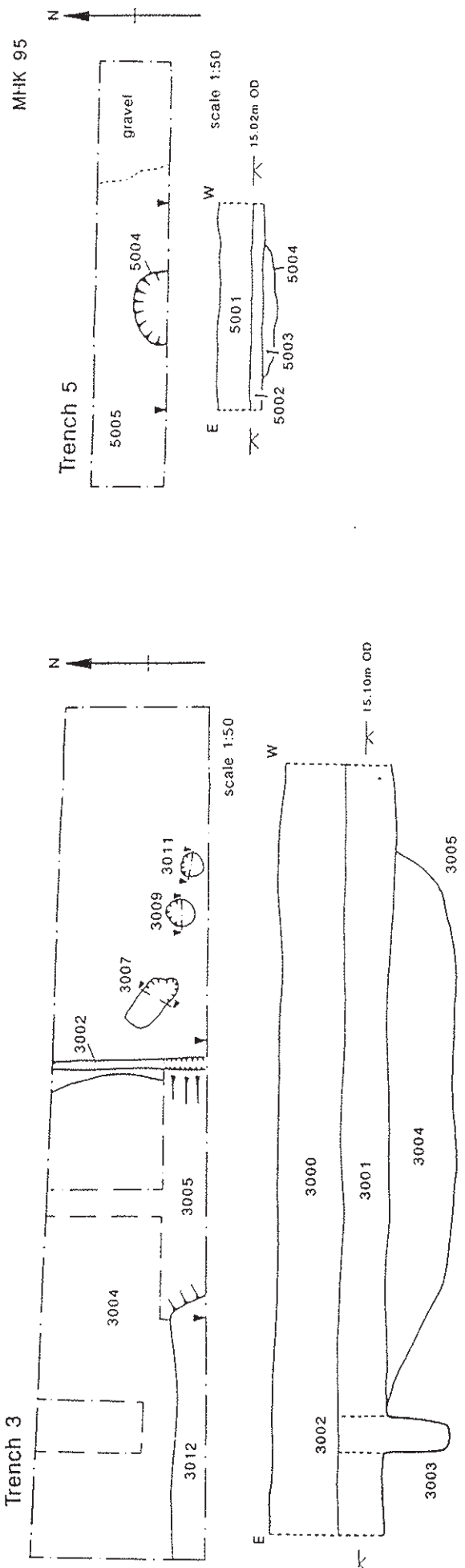
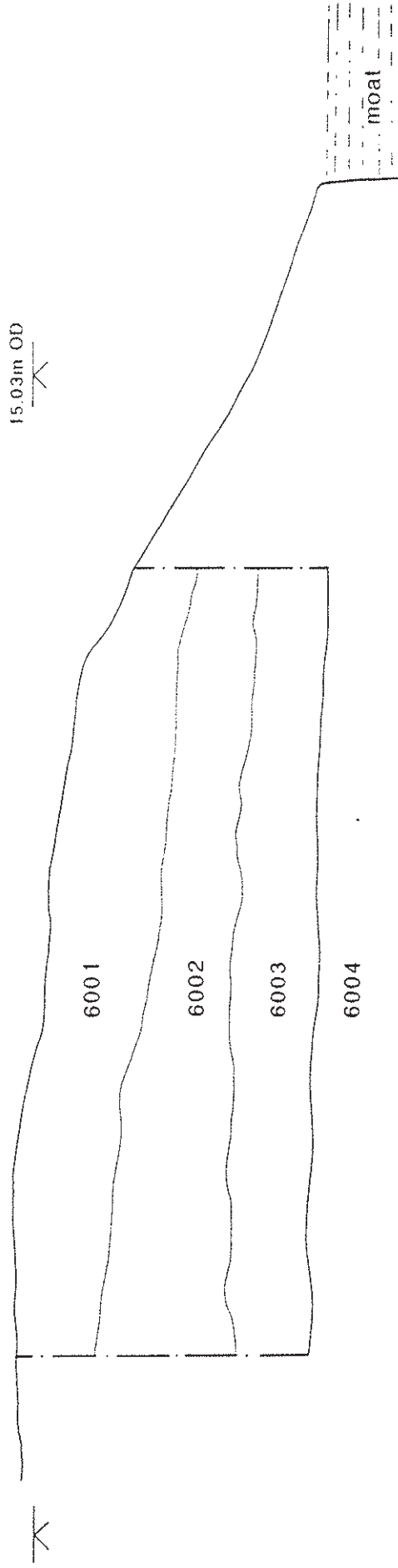


Figure 4

Trench 6



Trench 7

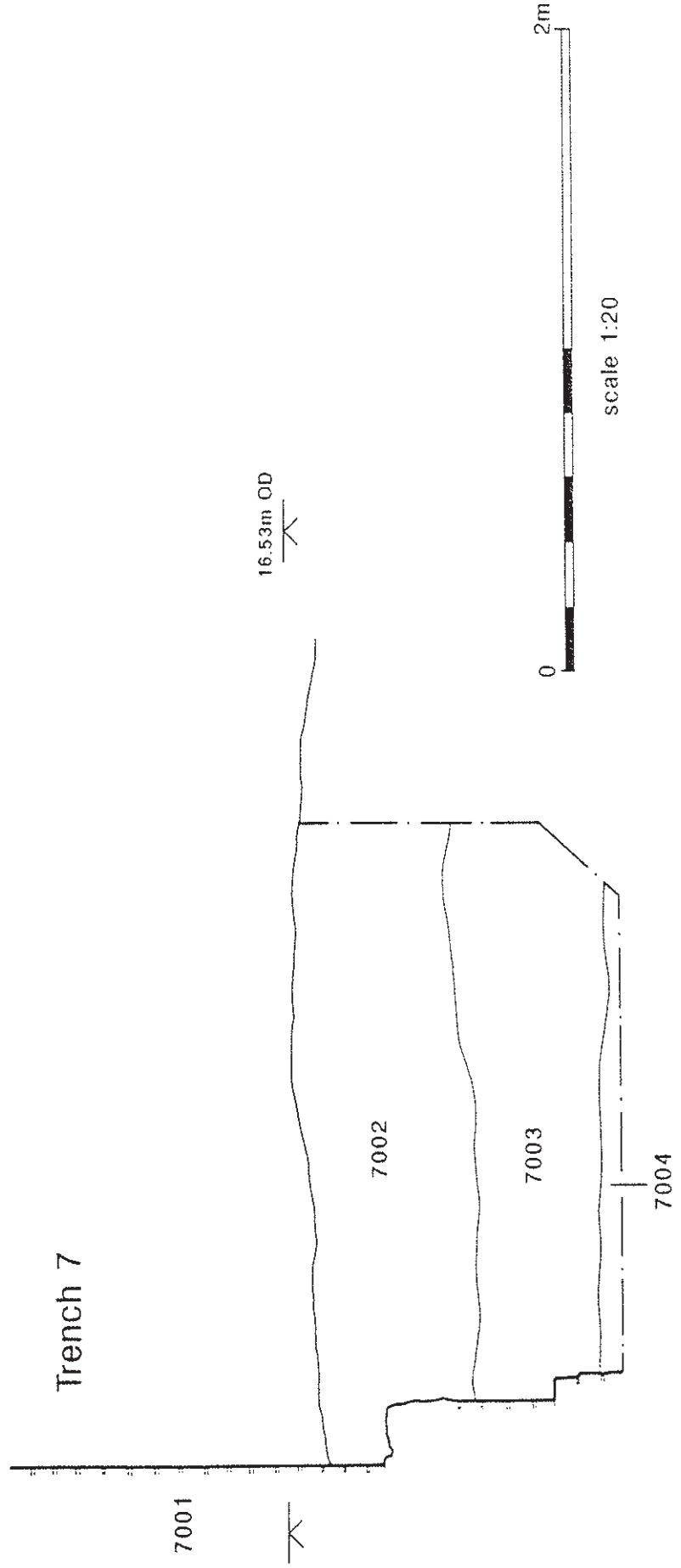


Figure 5



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