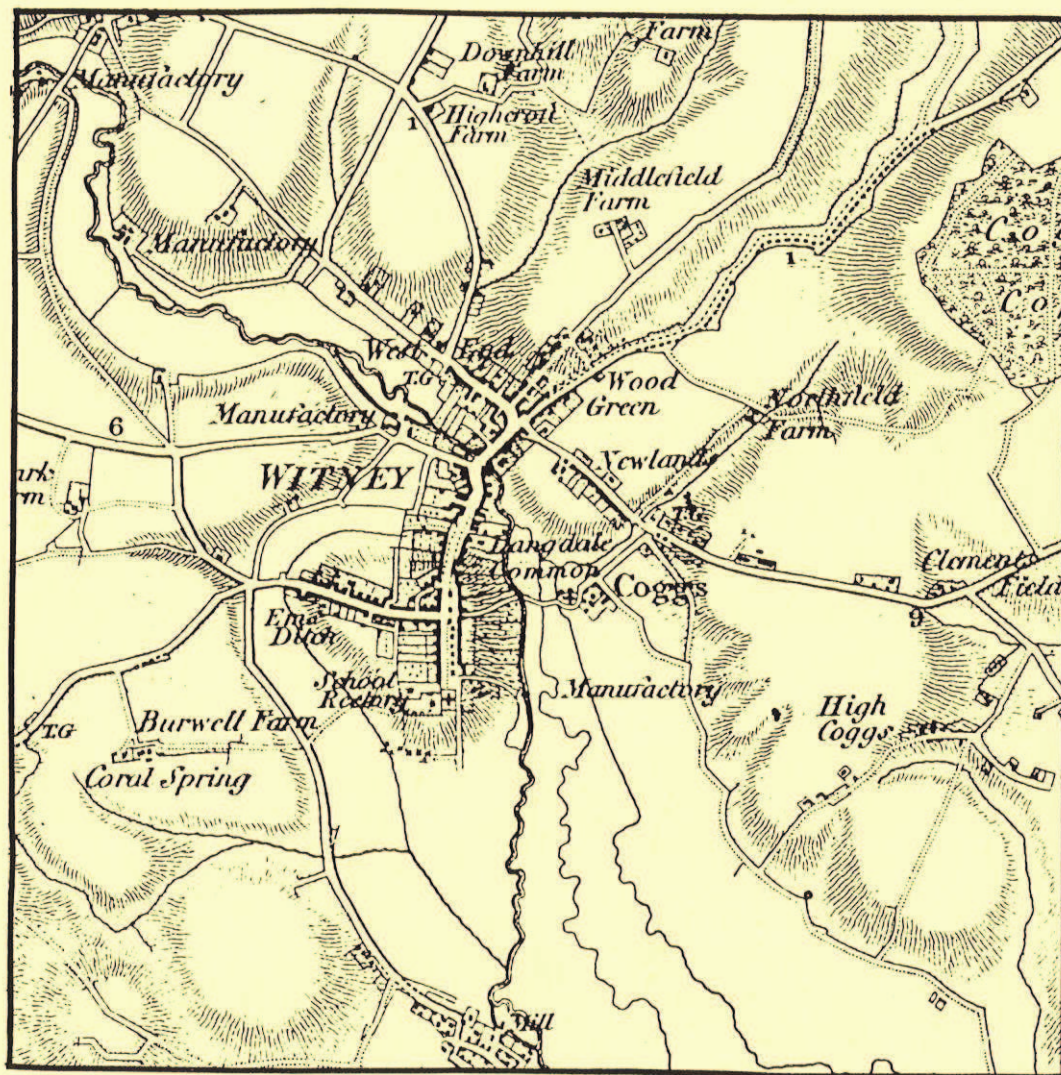


OXFORDSHIRE

WITNEY THE WEAVERS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT



WITNEY, THE WEAVERS. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION PHASE 3

Summary

A field evaluation was carried out by the OAU at the development site of The Weavers development, Witney on behalf of Tarmac Provincial Properties Ltd. There was one area with archaeological remains immediately to the S of the Bishop's Palace site which is in the grounds of Mount House.

Introduction

In June 1992 a field evaluation was carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) on behalf of Tarmac Provincial Properties Ltd in respect of an inquiry following an application for planning permission for a Sainsbury's store. The site was at O.S. grid reference SU 357091 (Fig 1).

The site was immediately to the S of the site of a palace built by Henry of Blois, brother to King Henry II, Bishop of Winchester which is now in the grounds of Mount House, Witney, and was excavated in 1984. An evaluation was also carried out to determine whether the palace extended to the S and E. The phase 2 field evaluation at the site, in 1990, produced evidence for medieval settlement along the N side of The Weavers to the S of Farm Mill Lane (Fig 1). Evaluation trenches, both in 1984 and 1990, showed the line of the moat of the Bishop's Palace lying on the site close to the edge of the terracing around the palace (indicated on Fig 2). The 1990 evaluation found evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity next to Farm Mill Lane in the area of medieval structures to the N and in Trench 1 to the S of the palace, although there were no features positively identified as Anglo-Saxon nor was the position of the late Anglo-Saxon royal palace, which presumably was the centre of the Witney estate from AD 969 to 1044, located.

Topography

The site lies on the S side of Witney where the ground level drops approximately 4 metres from the vicinity of the church to the S end of the site. A stream flows to the E of the site and its former course flowed through the SE part of the site before it was rechannelled when the existing development was constructed (Trench 14, at this point was over 2 m deep, but contained no apparent waterlogged deposits see Fig 1).

The site is approximately 3 hectares in area and its elevation is between 81 and 79 m O D. The natural subsoil across the site was Forest Marble which was overlain by a silty clay subsoil. The site had been used as an industrial area for a blanket factory from the turn of the 19th century until recently.

Evaluation Strategy (Fig. 1)

The field evaluation strategy was based on a less than two percent sample of the area. The sample consisted of six 30 m long and three short 1.6 m wide trenches dug by JCB type mechanical excavator. There were also two further hand dug trenches. This strategy was altered, with the approval of the Deputy County Archaeologist after he visited the site. The trenches in the area of the old railway station were reduced to test pits as the soil profile they revealed did not indicate preservation of archaeological deposits and additional trenches were placed in the areas of most potential to define and quantify the archaeological features located and to determine the slope into the old stream course.

The features were sampled by hand to determine their nature and depth and to recover dating evidence. The features were planned and their sections drawn where they were excavated.

Results

Soils

The general soil type was a silty clay. Under the modern turf was an old ploughsoil containing small fragments of Forest Marble which probably had been dragged from the surface of the bedrock by ploughing. The ploughsoil directly overlay the natural subsoil and varied from 0.46 m to only 0.12 m deep. The natural had been extensively disturbed by the construction of a large concrete building foundation at the SE of the site (Fig 1).

To the W in the area of the old railway yard (Fig 1) all the deposits on, and including, the Forest Marble had been removed to a consistent depth between 79 and 79.3 m O D in Trenches 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12. The only exception being in Trench 10 where the Forest Marble was slightly higher at the N end of the Station Platform, but even here the natural subsoil had been truncated. No archaeological deposits were observed. This disturbance must be associated with the construction of the station as in all the trenches the Forest Marble was overlaid by a compact layer of coal dust.

Finds

In total 18 sherds of pottery and tile and 5 pieces of bone were recovered. Six medieval sherds came from the two ditches observed in Trench 4. Ditch 4/6 contained four sherds of 11th- to 12th century pottery and Ditch 4/7 contained two sherds of later medieval pottery. All other ceramic finds were modern. The preservation of the pottery was generally good. The preservation of bone was good.

Three pieces of struck flint were recovered. Two of these came from Ditch 3/5 in Trench 3. The other struck flint was residual in Ditch 4/7 in Trench 4.

Archaeology

There was one area of archaeology to the S of Mount House, on the highest ground, where the natural subsoil was encountered at a height of 80 to 81.5 m O D. One ditch was observed in Trench 3 and two ditches in Trench 4. The two ditches in Trench 4 were aligned E-W and were 0.37 m (4/6) and 0.52 m (4/7) deep, the ditch in Trench 3 (3/5) was aligned N-S and was 0.40 m deep. Both ditches in Trench 4 contained medieval pottery (Fig. 3 for detail). A possible posthole was observed in Trench 2, but the very clean fill of this feature suggests that it may be a natural depression in the forest marble. Ditches were seen in Trench 1 of the 1990 evaluation (Fig. 2) aligned N-S, they were not present in Trench 4. One of the E-W ditches in Trench 4 may have been identified in Trench III of the 1984 evaluation as a fairly recent field boundary with a possible ploughing headland to the S.

Trenches 1, 6, 13, 14 and 15, to the SE, were on lower lying and wetter ground where the forest marble was encountered at heights of between 79.9 and 78 m O D. No archaeological deposits were observed. Trench 14 may have been in the channel of the old stream course (Fig. 1) but no obvious waterlaid sediments were seen.

Trench 6 showed that the extant concrete slab (Fig. 1) had been cut down into the top of the natural subsoil and would have removed any archaeological horizons.

Environmental

Soil samples were not taken. The environmental potential of the site is dealt with in the Phase 2 report (Durham and Campbell, OAU, 1990).

Overall Interpretation

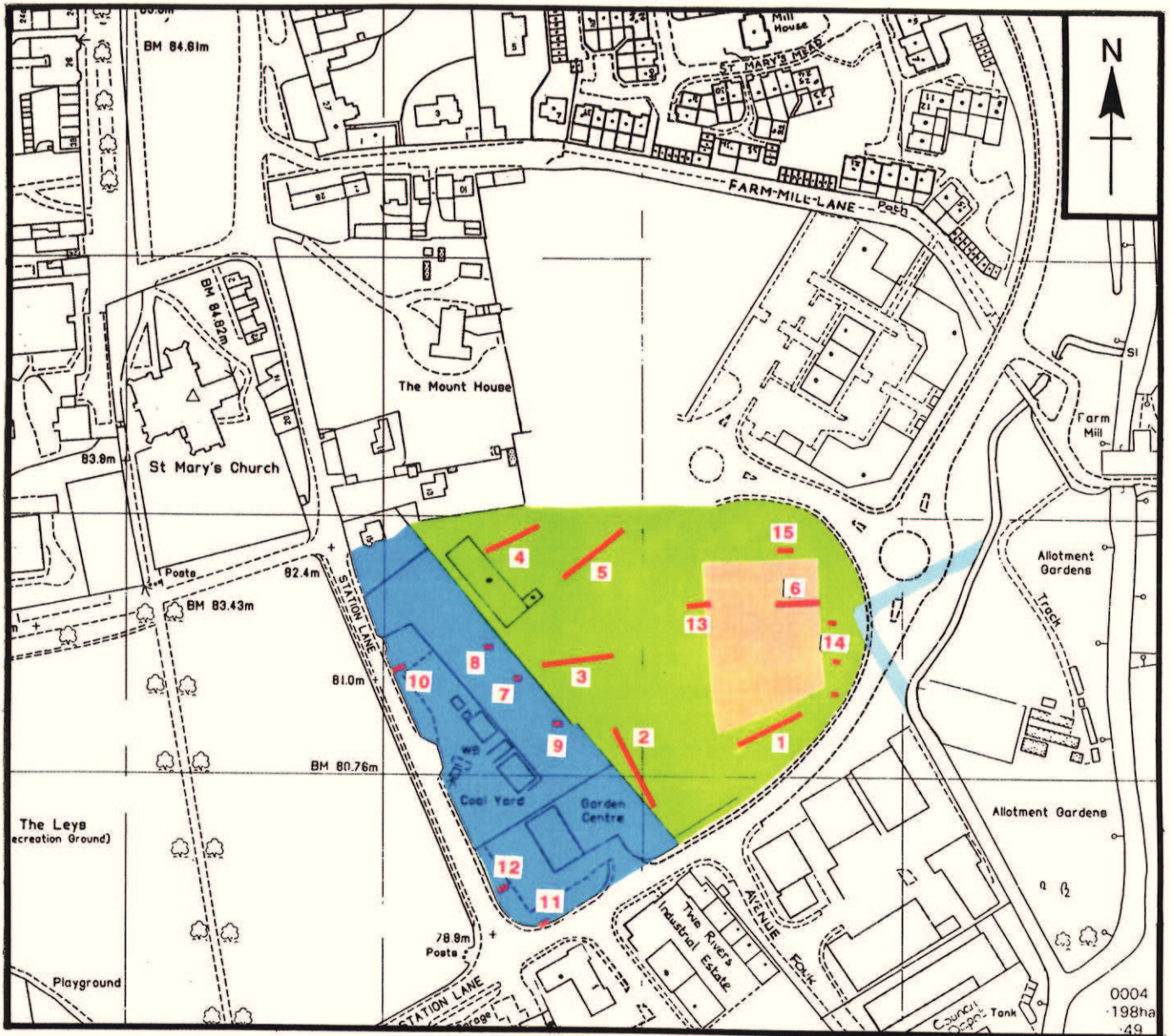
The archaeological deposits were restricted to the higher ground to the S of the Palace. They consisted of ditches interpreted as field ditches, as were the ditches in the 1990 field evaluation. The pottery recovered from the upper fill of ditch 4/6 implies that it was deposited in an open feature which does not adequately date this ditch although Ditch 4/7 is parallel and may be contemporary. The sherds from the lower fill of 4/7 suggest a later medieval date. The presence of struck flints in Ditch 3/5 indicates prehistoric activity in the area although the few flints recovered are undiagnostic as a sample.

The railway station has destroyed the archaeological potential on the W of the site and the wet nature of the ground to the SE probably meant that it was used exclusively for agriculture.

OAU June 1992

Bibliography

Campbell G and Durham B, Witney: The Weavers 1990 Archaeological assessment Report Oxford Archaeological Unit 1990



0 100 200 m.



EVALUATION AREA



AREA OF RAILWAY YARD



AREA OF CONCRETE



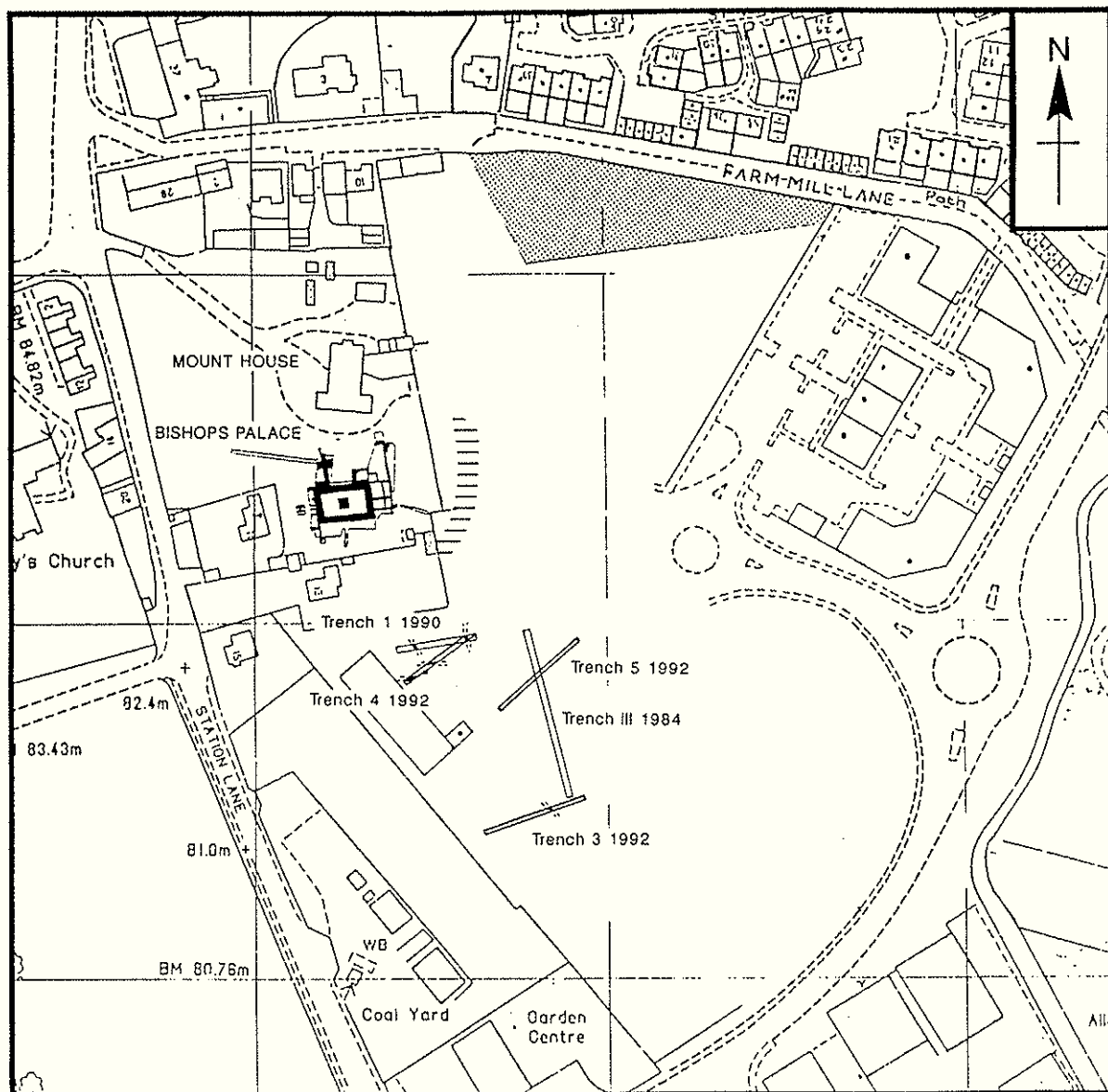
EVALUATION TRENCHES



ORIGINAL COURSE OF STREAM

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Fig 1



0 10m



AREA OF MEDIEVAL STRUCTURES 1990 EVALUATION



POSSIBLE LINE OF MOAT

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Fig 2

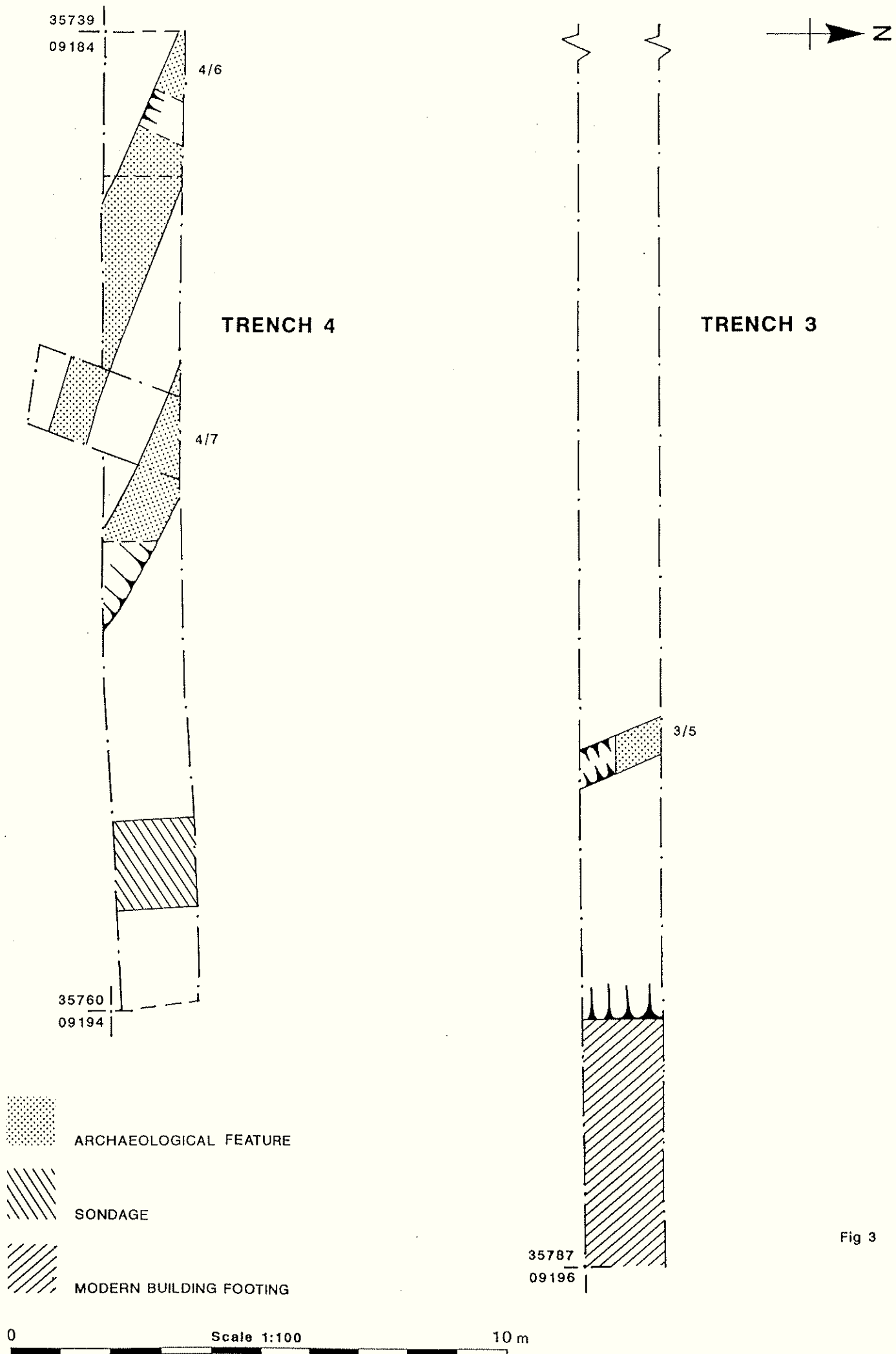


Fig 3



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