



# THE PEEL ARMS SITE, TAMWORTH

SITE CODE: TAMCM 1994/10

NGR: SK20800380

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## THE PEEL ARMS SITE, TAMWORTH; An archaeological evaluation

### 1. Summary

- 1.1 The earliest activity on site would appear to relate to two ditches dating to the 13th and 14th centuries which may form part of the original castle defences. One of these was also identified during documentary research, undertaken prior to fieldwork, where it was labelled "The Castle Retrenchment". The majority of the archaeology, however, would appear to date to the post-medieval period. This consists mainly of structural evidence in the form of 18th-19th century stone and brick buildings, an associated well and flagstone surface.

### 2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a field evaluation at the Peel Arms site, Tamworth, on behalf of Building Design Group. Archaeological fieldwork began on the 23rd of February and finished on the 24th of February, 1994. An assessment of documentary and cartographic sources was also undertaken prior to the commencement of fieldwork. The site is part of a proposed retail development.
- 2.2 The aim of the evaluation was to provide an assessment of the nature, location, extent, significance and date/period of all archaeological deposits encountered, and to offer a provisional interpretation.

### 3. Topography and Geology

- 3.1 The site is situated at NGR SK20800380 and comprises an area of approximately 1377 sq m at the junction of Market Street and Silver Street, fronting onto Kings Street, near the centre of Tamworth (figure 1).
- 3.2 At present the south end of the site is occupied by a mid-eighteenth century inn with an early nineteenth century extension on the west side towards Silver Street. To the rear, and fronting onto Kings Street, is an open yard, formerly a car park. The evaluation was undertaken within the confines of this open area.
- 3.3 The underlying geology within the proposed development area consists of red marls with sandy bands of the Keuper series.

### 4. Historical and Archaeological Background

- 4.1 Tamworth was the chief residence of Offa in 757 AD and continued as a royal residence until 874 AD, when it was ransacked by the Danes. In 913 AD it was re-created as a burgh and although subject to Viking destruction in 940 AD, the town continued to developed inside the burgh defences. The site under investigation is

within this former Anglo-Saxon burh (Staffordshire County Council PRN 1153).

- 4.2 Domesday records 22 burgesses but tells us nothing of Tamworth. By 1086 William the Conqueror had created the royal Forest of Cannock immediately west of Tamworth and at about this time Tamworth Castle was built within the borough defences, dominating the southern entry to the town.
- 4.3 Tamworth continued its small town status from the 12th to 16th century, although its population probably did not exceed more than 150 families during this time period. No charter has survived granting the town a fair or market prior to the fourteenth century, although it is likely that it enjoyed both at a much earlier date.
- 4.4 The site lies in an area that has been occupied throughout the history of Tamworth. Figure 2 shows the evaluation trenches superimposed on The Map of Tamworth Castle OS Survey 1883 (Ref EA6), and demonstrates dense occupation at this time, with buildings shown possibly replacing late medieval structures. The surviving facade of the Peel Arms Hotel, at the south end of the site, a coaching station formerly named The Kings Arms, falls into two sections. The western most section forming the corner with Silver Street is the most recent addition c. 1807-1809 and replaced a possibly late medieval, half timbered building, no later than the seventeenth century. The eastern most section with the higher roof is earlier. Many of the buildings along the northern side of market street were medieval.
- 4.5 Excavations on the opposite side of King Street from the Peel Arms site (Trans. S. Staffs. Archaeol. Hist. Soc. 15 1973-4, pps 5-12) identified a medieval timber-framed building and found the archaeological stratigraphy to be shallow. A ditch of unknown date may cross the north end of the site ("Castle Retrenchment" on Woods map *Borough By Prescription: A history of the municipality of Tamworth*, Henry Wood, 1958.

## 5. Methodology and Strategy

- 5.1 Two trenches with dimensions of 15 x 1.5 m were excavated (a 2% sample of the development area) and positioned to allow representative sampling of the possible range of archaeological features that may be present on the site. The non-archaeological overburden was excavated mechanically using a JCB3CX with a 1.5 m wide toothless ditching bucket. Mechanical excavation continued down to the first significant archaeological horizons or in their absence to the natural subsoil. The resulting surfaces were cleaned, planned, levelled, and photographed; where appropriate a sample section was excavated through the fills of features.
- 5.2 To comply with health and safety regulations and to ensure that the trench would in no way be hazardous, no excavation continued beyond a depth of 1.2 m.



## **6. Results**

### **6.1 Phase 1 (Medieval)**

6.1.1 The earliest activity identified on-site dates from the medieval period. Two ditches dating from this period were sample excavated, one in each trench (figure 3).

6.1.2 In trench 1, a large ditch [121] was identified running from east to west on the same line as the "Castle Retrenchment" marked on Woods map (Wood, H. Borough by Prescription: A History of the Municipality of Tamworth, 1958). A sondage was excavated through the fill [120] of the ditch, although care was taken to minimise disturbance to the overlying stratigraphy. The ditch fill was excavated to a depth of 0.25m where, due to H&S restrictions, it was abandoned. A single sherd of pottery was recovered from the ditch fill and this has been dated to the 13th or 14th centuries. Although the northern edge of the ditch was obscured by an overlying wall, it is likely to have measured 2m in width by 0.50m in depth. In profile the feature was concave and regular.

6.1.3 In trench 2 a second ditch [208] was investigated. This measured 2m in width by 0.60m in depth and was aligned from north to south and was concave and regular in profile. A total of seven sherds of pottery were recovered from its fill; 4 medieval and 3 post-medieval. This would seem to imply that the feature was gradually backfilled over a long period of time.

### **6.2 Phase 2 (post-medieval levelling)**

6.2.1 Once the medieval ditches described above had gone out of use, the site appears to have been levelled. A deposit of grey brown sandy clay (contexts: [106], [107], [203], [217] figure 3) was identified in both trenches, measured between 0.60m and 0.70m in depth. This contained 19 sherds of pottery dating exclusively to the post-medieval period.

### **6.3 Phase 3 (18th-19th century activity)**

6.3.1 A series of sandstone foundations with brick walls was identified in both trenches (contexts: [116], [118], [113], [111], [112], [110], [213], and [206]). These represent the rear portions of buildings which once fronted King Street. Associated with these walls was a flagstone surface constructed of roughly worked sandstone slabs and a brick-lined circular well [207] with a diameter of 1m and a depth of 8m identified in trench 2.

6.3.2 While the brick walls certainly date from the 18th century, the sandstone footings on which they are set may be the re-used foundations of earlier buildings. It is also likely that any earlier frontage structures would be obscured by this more recent phase of construction. Subsequently, the brick buildings were demolished and the resulting debris was used to level the ground in preparation for resurfacing the site as a carpark.

## 7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The natural geology identified at the northern end of trench 1 at 66.90 m OD and 66.54 m OS at the western end of trench 2 suggests that there is a gradual slope in natural from north to south.
- 7.2 Although the only medieval archaeology identified in the evaluation consisted of the two ditches, further medieval features are likely to be preserved beneath the post-medieval levelling. Furthermore, the buildings identified as fronting King Street may overlie evidence for earlier structural activity.
- 7.3 It is significant that no medieval pottery was identified from the post-medieval levelling or from the upper make-up layers and that its incidence occurs only within the earliest deposits identified (120 and 218). Although the fill of Ditch 208 appears to have been truncated during the post-medieval levelling activity, generally the lack of medieval pottery within later deposits implies that, if earlier features are present on the site, these have not been disturbed during later activity. There is, therefore, a high potential that earlier features survive intact.
- 7.4 The survival of 18th and 19th century foundations identified in both trenches, which have been levelled probably during the construction of the present car park is to be expected. Where vertical stratigraphy survives, noticeably to the north of the site and to the east adjacent to Kings Street (Sections 2 and 4; figure 4), there is potential for the survival of earlier structural remains, as identified at the opposite side of King Street (Trans. S. Staffs. Archaeol. Hist. Soc. 15 1973-4, pps 5-12).
- 7.5 The proposed reduction in level of 2.5 m (down to approx. 65.5 m OD), during redevelopment of the site, is significantly lower than the deposits recognized during this evaluation (Table 1). This reduction would destroy the above described archaeological remains.

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March 1994



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Wrathmell, S. and Wrathmell, S. 1976 Excavations at the Moat Site, Walsall, 1975. South Staffordshire Archaeol. and Hist. Soc. XVIII, 1976 - 1977, pps 38-39

Wood, H. 1958 Borough By Prescription: A history of the municipality of Tamworth. (Tamworth Corporation)

Table 1: Summary of deposits

Context Nos.	Type of Context	Depth (m)	Level (OD) Top	Comments
102	Deposit	0.4	67.96	make-up
103	Deposit	0.2	67.84	Tarmac Surface
104	Deposit	0.15	67.76	Make-up
105	Deposit	0.1	67.82	Granite Set Surface
106	Deposit	0.3	67.66	Make-up
107	Deposit	0.35	67.28	?
108	Deposit	0.2	67.34	Make-up
109	Cut	0.5	67.60	Construction Cut
110	Wall	0.6	67.5	Red Brick Wall
111	Floor	0.1	67	Flagstone Floor
112	Wall	0.6	67.03	Red Brick Wall
113	Wall	?	67.07	Red Brick wall;greenstone foundation
114	Cut	0.7	67.80	Pipe Trench
115	Fill	0.7	67.80	Fill of Pipe Trench
116	Wall	?	67.06	Red Brick wall;greenstone foundation
117	Fill	0.67	66.77	Backfill
118	Wall	1.44	66.8	Red Brick Wall
119	Deposit	?	66.85	Natural
120	fill	?	66.80	Fill of Ditch



121	Cut	?	66.8	E/W Ditch
201	Deposit	0.2	68.06	Tarmac
202	Deposit	0.15	67.98	Make-up
203	Deposit	0.4	67.84	Make-up
204	Deposit	0.15	67.58	?Garden Soil
205	Deposit	?	67.23	??Fill
206	Wall	?	67.62	E/W Wall
207	Structure	8	67.74	Well
208	Cut	?0.4	67	N/S Ditch
209	Deposit	?	66.65	Natural
210	Wall	0.6	67.67	Red Brick Wall
211	Fill	?	67.20	?? Fill
212	Fill	?	67.54	Fill of Construction Trench
213	Wall	?	67.6	Red Brick Wall
214	Cut	0.6	67.54	Construction Cut
215	Deposit	?	66.54	Natural
217	Deposit	0.6	67.4	Backfill
218	Fill	o.4	67.25	Fill of Ditch

## **APPENDIX 1: Detailed Trench Description**

### **Trench 1 (Figure 3)**

At the northern extent of excavation a sequence of deposits was identified, which overlay natural; at the southern end of the trench a sequence of deposits overlay the fill of a possible large ditch.

#### **Northern end of trench**

A natural tenacious pinkish red sandy clay (119) was identified at 66.9 m OD, 0.9 m below the present ground surface and was overlain by a tenacious mid-greyish brown sandy clay (107) which contained occasional ceramic building material. Above 107 was a loose yellowish white sandy mortar (108) containing gravel and ceramic building material. This, in turn, was overlain by a friable mid-greyish brown clayey loam (106) with 70 % red brick (typical dimensions of brick 0.12 x 0.22 x 0.10m). This was cut by a vertical sided construction trench (109) which housed a N/S-aligned red-brick (typical dimensions of brick 0.12 x 0.22 x 0.1 m) wall (110; only seen in section) with 6 courses intact. An E/W-aligned red brick wall (112) 0.6 m in width abutted 110 and a flagstone surface with a visible extent of 1 x 1.5 m, consisting of roughly worked stone slabs typically 0.3 x 0.2 x .1 m in size. 110, 111, and 112 were overlain by a loose light yellowish brown sand (104), immediately below the present tarmac ground surface at 67.96 m OD.

#### **Southern end of trench**

An E/W-aligned ditch (121) with a gradually sloping southern edge cut the natural tenacious pinkish red sandy clay (Section 1; figure 4). This was filled by a tenacious mid-brown sandy clay (120) with 30 % rounded pebbles which was identified at a depth of 66.86 m OD, 0.9 m below the present ground surface. Above this ditch was an E/W-aligned red brick wall (116), 0.4 m in width with 8 courses intact, which was set on sandstone foundations. This was the return for an N/S-aligned wall (113), measuring 4 m in length and with equivalent characteristics. A further red brick wall (118; typical dimensions of brick 0.12 x 0.22 x 0.10m) measuring 0.5 m in width and surviving up to 7 courses high cut a tenacious mid-greyish brown sandy clay (117) with 10 % rounded pebbles. This was overlain by 104 previously described.

Walls 113 and 116 were overlain by a tenacious mid-greyish brown sandy clay containing 20 % ceramic building material and 10 % small rounded stones. This was cut by a NE/SW-aligned vertical sided and flat based pipe trench (114), filled by a loose mid-greyish brown sandy loam (115) with 10 % ceramic building material. This was overlain by the present tarmac ground surface.



## Trench 2 (figure 3)

At the western extent of excavation a sequence of deposits was identified which overlay natural; at the eastern end of the trench a sequence of deposits overlay possible fills of earlier features.

### Western end of trench

A natural loose light yellow sand natural with 30 % pebbles (215=209) was identified at the western extreme of trench 2 at 66.54 m OD, 1 m below the present ground surface. It was cut in the middle of the trench by a N/S-aligned ditch with gradually sloping sides and a concave base, which was filled by a friable mid-brown silty sand with 20 % rounded pebbles (218; section 5; figure 5). A friable mid-brown sandy silt with 20 % rounded pebbles (211; possibly the fill of a feature, unexcavated), together with fill 218 was overlain by a tenacious dark greyish brown sandy silt (217) containing occasional ceramic building material and flecks of charcoal. This was cut by a vertical sided construction trench (214) which housed a NE/SW-aligned red brick wall (213), 0.5 m in width and 7 courses high and was filled by a friable yellowish brown clayey sand (212).

### Eastern end of trench

A friable mid-brown sandy clay (205; not fully excavated due to depth restrictions: Section 4 figure 4) with 20 % rounded pebbles was identified at 67.24 m OD, 0.86 m below the present ground surface. This was overlain by a friable dark greyish brown sandy silt (204) disturbed by root activity. The remains of the foundation for a NW/SE-aligned wall (206), with a width of 0.5m and two surviving courses overlay 204. Above 206 was a tenacious deposit of mid-brown sandy clay (203) with 15 % ceramic building material and 10 % rounded stones. A red brick circular well (207; exact stratigraphic relationship unclear. no excavation within its vicinity due to health and safety regulations) with a diameter of 1 m and a depth of 8 m was identified in the eastern half of trench 2.

A compact pinkish red sandy clay (202) with 70 % stone chippings overlay 203, 207, and 212 and was below the present tarmac ground surface, at 68.06 m OD.

## Discussion of archaeology

The majority of the pottery recovered on the site is post medieval in date and was found as mixed assemblages within deposits probably used as make-up or levelling (107, 108, 203, and 217) during the construction of the car park. The remains of red brick walls together with greenstone foundations (206, 116 and 113), suggests that the buildings on the site were levelled in order to make the present surface. Dating evidence for these structures is sparse, with 5 sherds identified within the mortar of 206 an E/W-aligned wall, part of a building fronting King Street, which suggest an 18th to 19th century date. When viewed against The Map of Tamworth Castle OS Survey 1883 (Ref EA6) (figure 2) which shows the structures that were present during the 1883 survey, it is apparent that not all the identified structures correspond with those shown on the map. Although the accuracy of the map cannot be taken

for granted, this suggests that some of the identified structures were present prior to the date of the survey and from this evidence a most likely date for the structures would be 18th to 19th century. The remains of a flagstone courtyard (111) identified at the north of the site, is most likely to be within this suggested date range.

Layers 217 and 117 from trench 1 and 2 are likely to be contemporary. Their depths suggests that they are not representative of natural accumulation and when 117 is seen in section 1; figure 4 it becomes apparent that it has been purposely dumped between the walls of 116 and 118; no construction cut for these structures are visible in section. A possible explanation for these deposits is that they represent a landscaping of the southern end of the site, possibly utilizing the garden soil present in the pre-existing tenement plots backing onto the old King Street house frontage. The date range from the 17 sherds from 217 suggest that this process probably occurred in the 18th century or later. This interpretation offers an explanation why the stratigraphy observed during excavation is significantly deeper than that observed opposite (Trans. S. Staffs. Archaeol. Hist. Soc. 15 1973-4, pps 5-12).

Earlier deposits were identified at the extent of excavation (120, 218, 211 and 205). The excavation of 120 and 218 revealed that they were the upper fills of an E/W-aligned and a N/S-aligned ditch (121 and 208) and both contained medieval pottery. Although deposits 211 and 205 were not excavated to their full extent due to depth limitations, it is conceivable that they too may be fills of earlier features. The position of ditch 121, has been Documented as the "Castle Retrenchment" on Woods map, although more detailed information was not available during this evaluation.



## APPENDIX 2

### Pottery Assessment by *Lucy Bown*

A total of 50 sherds (1.6Kg) have been recorded from 8 contexts, of which 10% are medieval and 90% Staffordshire or later post medieval wares.

The five medieval sherds divide into two fabric types. The majority (4 sherds) are of the same quartz tempered fabric type in a buff/white colour which is found commonly in 13th to 14th-century contexts in Tamworth (Meeson and Sheridan 1973 ). All the sherds from The Peel Arms site are jugs, either with a plain lead glaze on the exterior surface or decorated with painted red slip. One sherd is from the base of a baluster shaped jug. Medieval jugs decorated with red paint are found at a number of sites in Staffordshire and Warwickshire including Walsall, Castle Bromwich, Sharesill and in 14th-century contexts at Woeley Castle (Wrathmell and Wrathmell 1976). These sherds are found at The Peel Arms site in contexts 120 and 218.

The second medieval fabric type is represented by one sherd. This is a coarsely quartz gritted, micaceous sherd with a reduced core and oxidized dark red/brown surfaces. A similar ware is usually associated with 12th to 13th-century cooking pots found in Tamworth (Meeson and Sheridan 1973). This one sherd is found in context 218.

Within the post medieval pottery a few sherds in Cistercian ware and Post medieval Blackware are of an earlier date. Two sherds from the rims of Cistercian Ware cups, dating from the 15th to 16th century, are found in contexts 107 and 217. Four sherds from tankards in post medieval Blackware, of a 16th to 17th-century date, are found in contexts 107, 203, 217 and 218.

The majority (21 sherds, 47%) of the post medieval pottery comprises various products of the Staffordshire industry. Staffordshire brown slipped earthenwares produced between 1720 and 1760 are the most common. Other Staffordshire wares are mottled glazed cups dating from 1700 - 1800 and press moulded dishes with combed slip decoration on the interior dating from 1600 - 1800. These are found in every context except 120.

The remaining eighteen post medieval sherds are later products including mid 18th to 20th-century Mocha Ware, 18th-century Staffordshire White Salt Glazed Stoneware, 18th to 20th-century Creamware and Pearlware with transfer printed decoration. These occur in contexts 108 and 217.

## Pottery Summary

Context	No of sherd	Period	Date Range
107	1	PM	1500 - 1600
107	3	PM	1700 - 1800
108	9	PM	1720 -1900
120	1	MED	13thC -14thC
203	2	PM	1600 - 1700
203	2	PM	1700 - 1800
206	5	PM	1700 - 1800
217	1	PM	1500 - 1600
217	1	PM	1600 - 1700
217	17	PM	1720 - 1900
218	1	PM	1600 - 1700
218	2	PM	1720 - 1760
218	3	MED	13thC - 14thC
218	1	MED	12thC - 13thC
219	1	PM	1720 - 1760



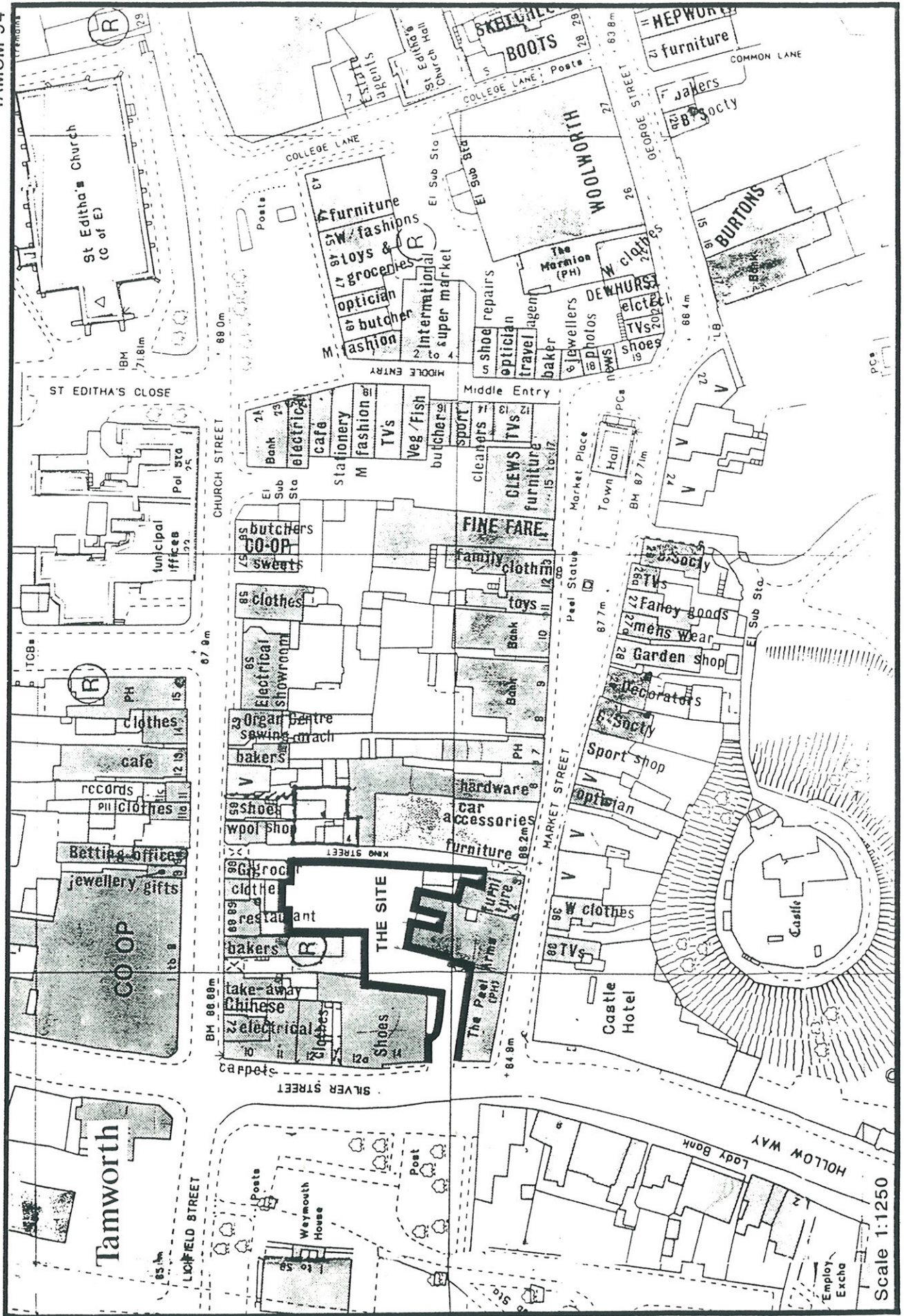


figure 1

Trench location plan superimposed on map of Tamworth Castle O.S. survey 1883 (Ref. EA6)

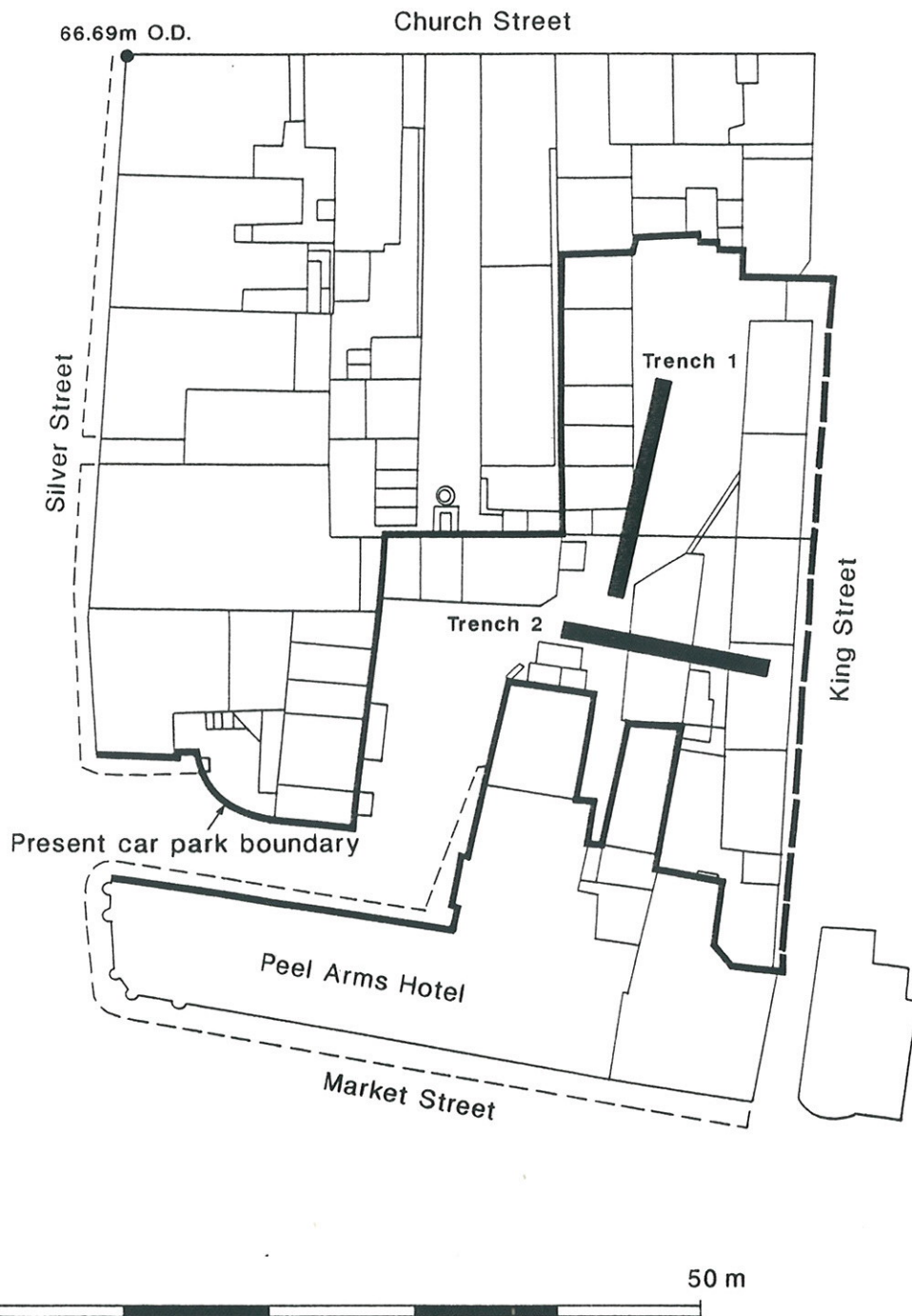
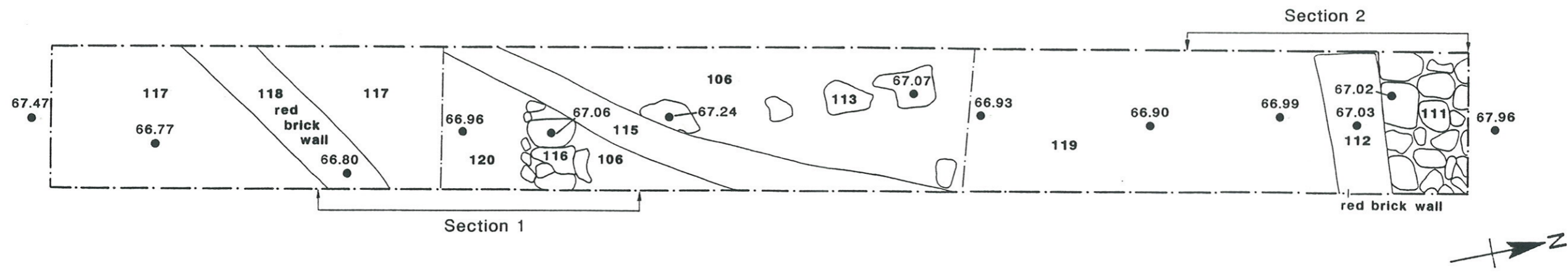


figure 2



Plans of archaeological contexts

Trench 1



Trench 2

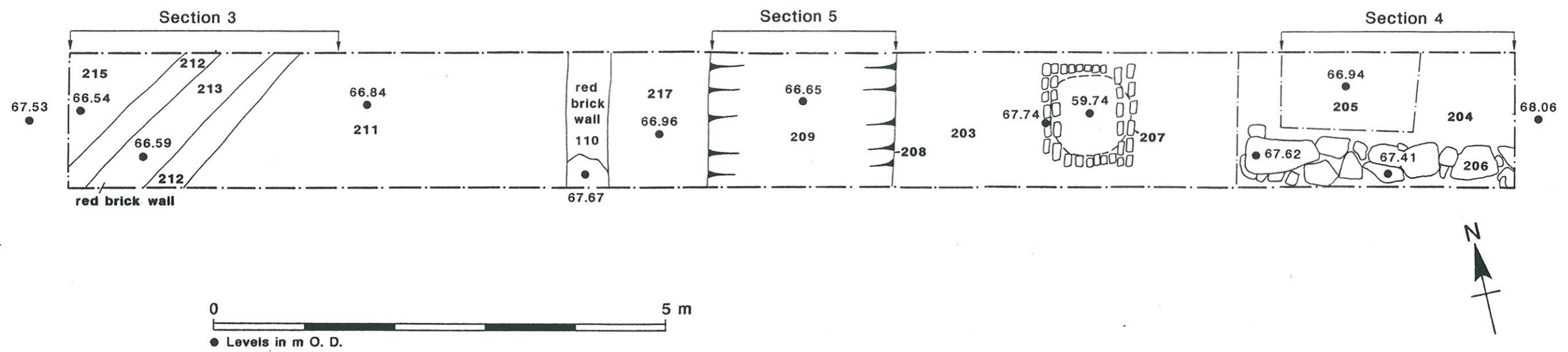
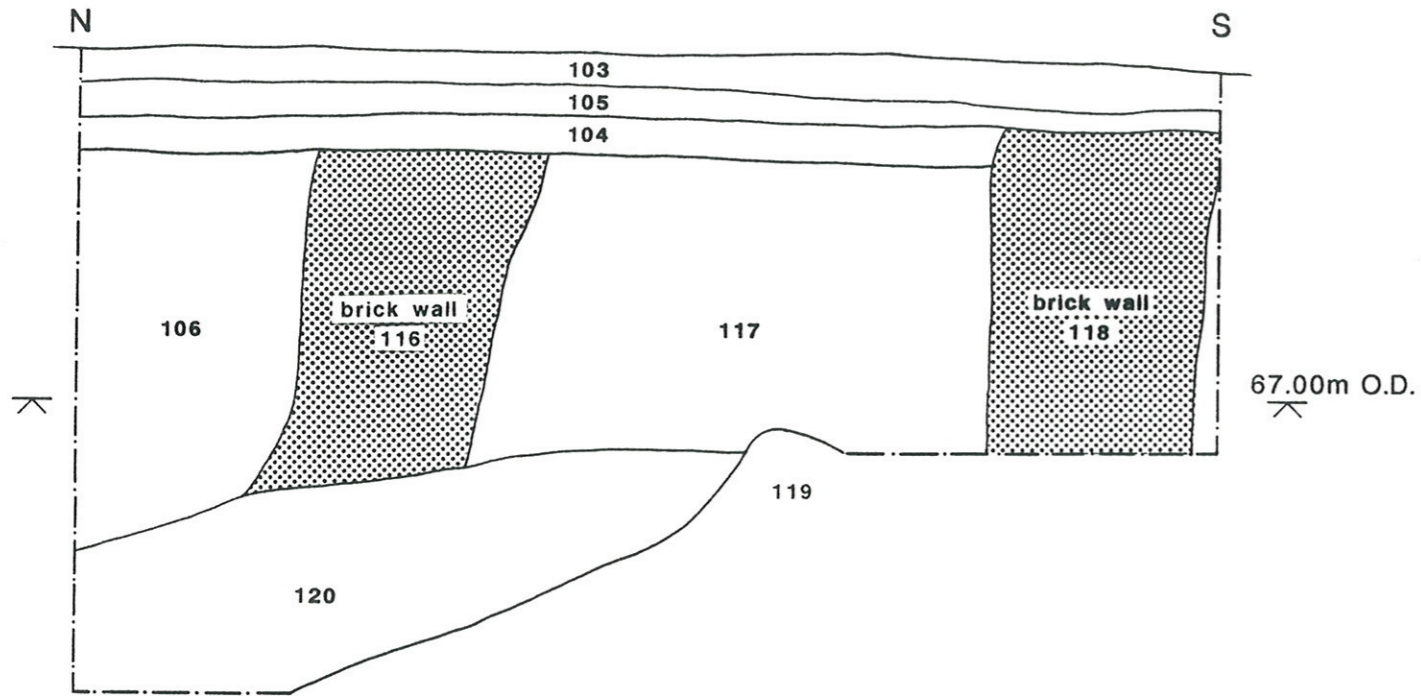
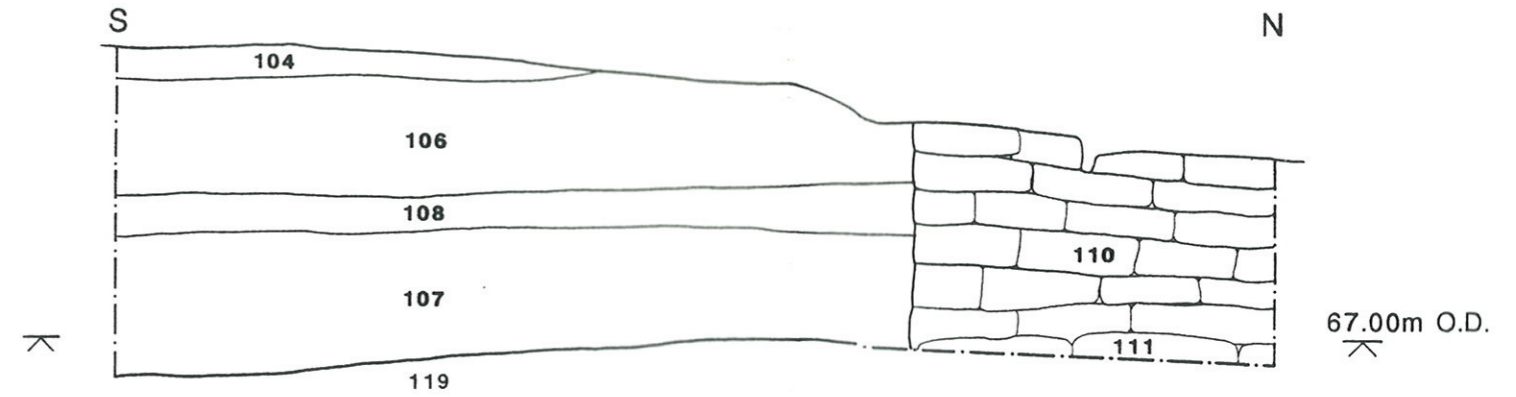


figure 3

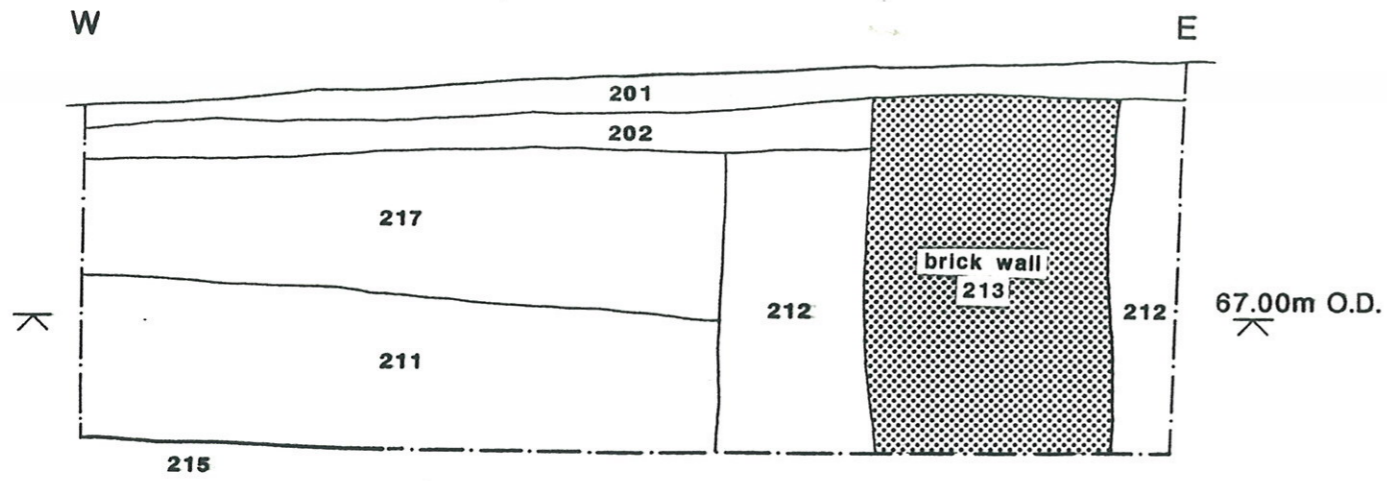
Section 1  
Trench 1 South end: West facing



Section 2  
Trench 1 North end: East facing



Section 3  
Trench 2 West end: South facing



Section 4  
Trench 2 East end: South facing

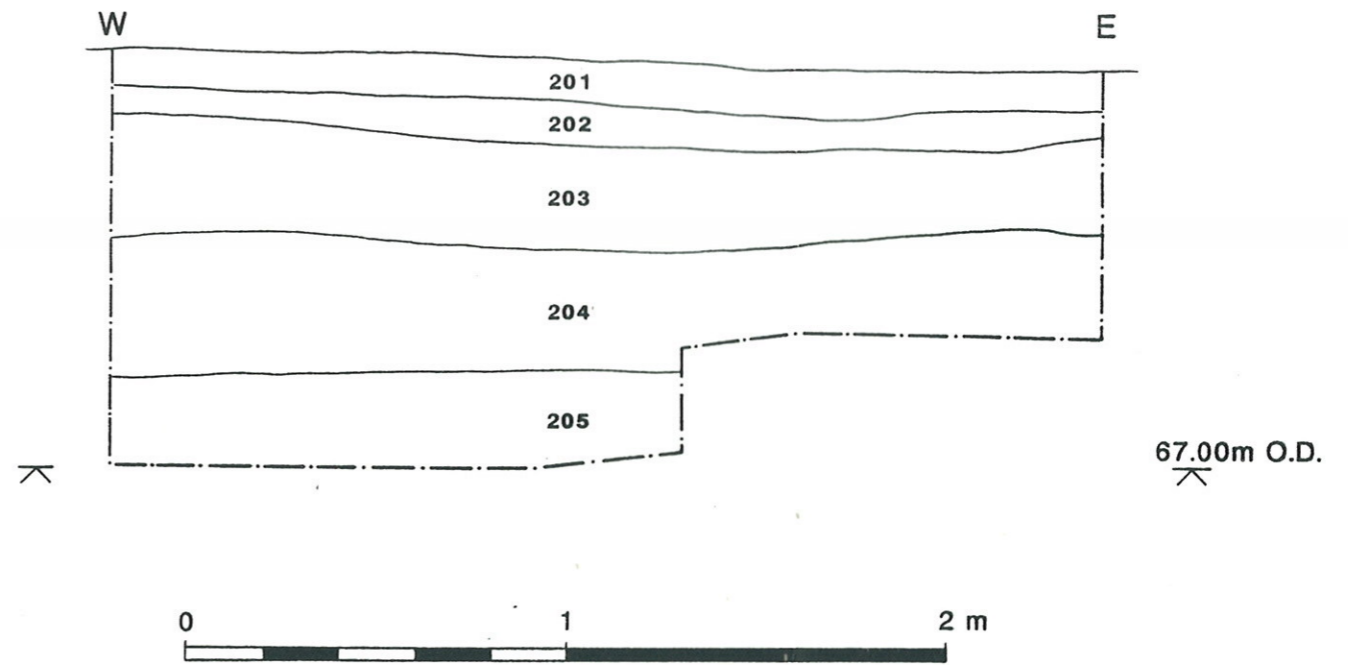


figure 4

Section 5  
Trench 2 middle: South facing

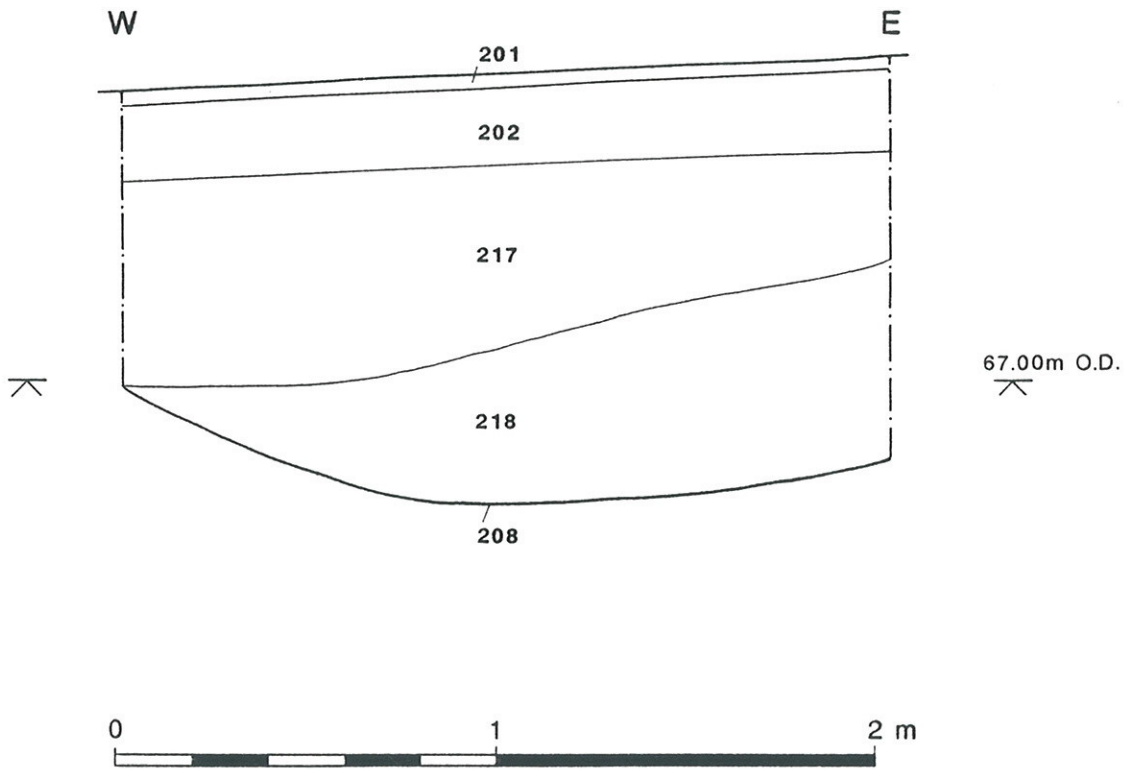


figure 5



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