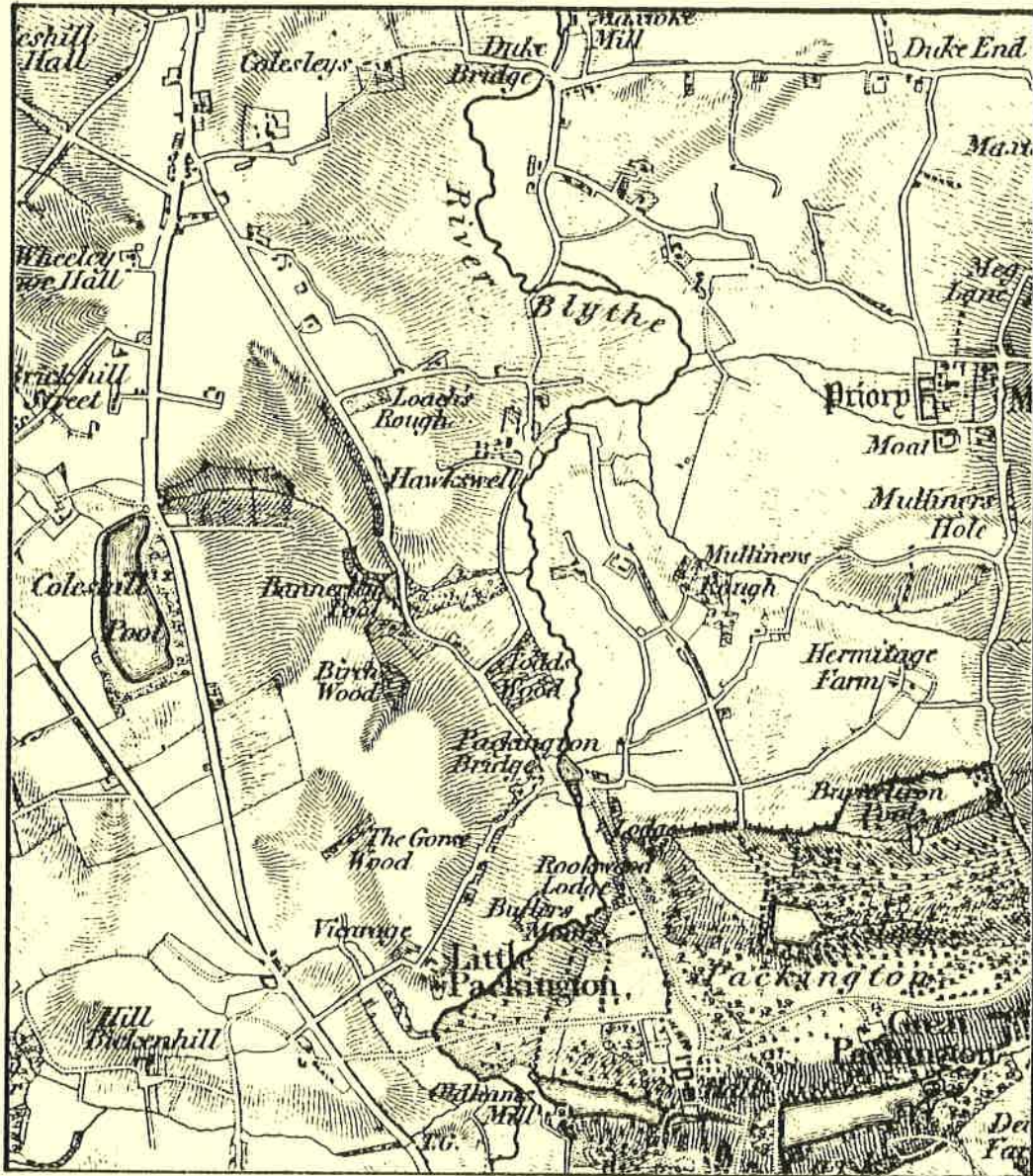


# BIRMINGHAM NORTHERN RELIEF ROAD

## HAWKESWELL FARM

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

December 1993

**BIRMINGHAM NORTHERN RELIEF ROAD  
HAWKSWELL FARM, COLESHILL, NORTH WARWICKSHIRE**

**SITE CODE: HHKF 93**

**NGR. SP 215868**

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# **BIRMINGHAM NORTHERN RELIEF ROAD**

## **HAWKESWELL FARM; ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of Midland Expressway Ltd on land at Hawkeswell Farm, Coleshill, North Warwickshire (NGR SP215868). The site comprised part of the land take of the proposed relief road at its junction with the M6.
- 1.2 The evaluation formed part of a second stage of an appraisal of the effect of the proposed roadway upon archaeological sites and followed a desk-top survey of the area. It took the form of three machine-excavated trenches in a site identified as being of probable archaeological significance in order to assess the extent, nature and quality of archaeological deposits. The work was conducted to a specification approved by the client and the County Archaeological Officer and took place over three days in November 1993.

### **2. Geographical and Historical Background**

- 2.1 The site lies within the upper Trent Valley drainage system on land adjacent to the River Blythe which here flows northwards into the Tame. The geology here comprises mixed clays, silts and gravels of the Keuper series.
- 2.2 The area was known to be of some historical and archaeological importance. The former village of Hawkeswell, which is shown on the 1st edition One Inch OS map (1814-17), lay immediately to the south of the site. Within the evaluation area itself the map indicates a rectangular enclosure oriented N-S, possibly defined on its eastern side by structures, and a parallel roadway further to the east (see cover, this report).
- 2.3 Part of the former village survives as earthworks but is now separated from the evaluation site by the M6 which was constructed over the site of Hawkeswell Hall. Topographic and aerial-photographic examination provides evidence of a subrectangular enclosure in the evaluation area. This is defined on its eastern and western sides by modern hedgerows both of which suggest the northern boundary by slight curves (Fig. 2). The E hedge lies on a pronounced bank which drops into a hollow way marking the course of the former road.

### **3. Strategy**

- 3.1 The three evaluation trenches were located within the rectangular enclosure on land used as rough pasture (see Fig. 2). Trenches 1 and 2 were 30 m long while Trench 3 was extended to 32 m to examine an area of possible features. The evaluation represents a 2.8% sample of the enclosure.

- 3.2 The trenches were excavated down to undisturbed deposits using a 180° machine excavator equipped with a 1.5 m ditching bucket. The trenches were then cleaned by hand and features sample excavated to examine their nature and date.

#### 4. RESULTS

- 4.1 There follows a description of the archaeological deposits and features encountered in each trench. A number of the excavated features turned out to be root-holes and these will not be discussed. A complete list of contexts and finds is presented in Table 1. It can be noted that finds were not systematically retrieved from the superficial layers. In Trenches 2 and 3 only small samples of these finds were collected.

#### 5. Trench 1

- 5.1 The machine-excavated superficial layers comprised 200-330 mm of turf and topsoil (1/1) overlying a fairly stony reddish brown sandy silt loam (1/2) which was 100-200 mm thick. This is considered likely to be a cultivated soil, but yielded no dating evidence. This overlay the natural geology of mixed sand, clay and gravel. No archaeological features were encountered.

#### 6. Trench 2

- 6.1 Trench 2 ran close to the eastern field boundary. The land surface here dropped over 2.5 m from north to south. The superficial layers consisted of 200-350 mm of modern topsoil (2/1) overlying a mid or dark greyish brown sandy and pebbly loam (2/2) which contained large quantities of medieval tile and pottery. This deposit of dumped or otherwise highly disturbed material was 150-200 mm thick and covered the trench with the exception of the N 5 m or so. In this area a cleaner reddish brown sandy loam (2/3) overlay natural gravel and appeared also to extend further south overlying 2/2. This was probably the same layer as 1/2.

- 6.2 Upon the removal of the overburden, the trench showed a great complexity of deposits. A number of the soil variations were found to have been caused by root disturbance and others by natural variations in the colluvial deposits (layer 20) in the central part of the trench. A number of archaeological features were also recorded, cutting both the undisturbed gravels and clays and the colluvium. This colluvium consisted of a build-up of gravelly silt. It was generally left unexcavated, but a sondage revealed that it was about 400 mm deep and without finds.

#### Ditch 4

- 6.3 A broad linear feature at the S end of the trench, running E-W. It had a flat base, a steep N edge and a gradual S edge. It was filled with a light brown sandy loam which overlay a gravelly primary fill. No finds were recovered.

#### Ditch 7

- 6.4 This was a tentative feature running NNW-SSE which was greatly disturbed by a tree-hole and probably cut by Ditch 4. Only part of the W edge was clearly traceable and this was steep. The base was probably flat. Its width would have been about 0.9 m. No finds were recovered.

#### Ditch 9

- 6.5 This was a clear feature running NW-SE in the N part of the trench. Its base and sides were pitted by root disturbance. It was filled with a light brown sandy loam. No finds were recovered from within the ditch, although some later medieval pottery came from the base of Layer 11 which overlay the ditch and formed the uppermost fill. This layer, which was relatively dark and pebbly, was interpreted as essentially part of Layer 2.

#### Ditch 12

- 6.6 This ditch ran parallel to Ditch 9 and about 4 m from it in the central part of the trench. Its composite profile showed a shallow upper edge plunging to a steep/vertical lower edge and a flattish base. It had a single light brown sandy fill (13) which yielded relatively large amounts of early medieval pottery. The post-medieval pottery recorded is considered to be intrusive. It was judged to be cutting Feature 15, but the relationship was difficult to determine.

#### Feature 14

- 6.7 A possible ditch running approximately N-S. Only the W edge was within the trench. Its fill was a mid-brown loam without finds. Its relationship with Feature 22 was not examined.

#### Feature 22

- 6.8 A shallow linear? feature whose form and dimensions remained undefined in an area of some complexity. Originally thought to be a possible narrow beam slot running NE-SW and then turning NW, only the W edge was definable upon excavation. This was found to be very shallow leading to a flat base. The fill (21) was a dark brown sandy loam containing large quantities of roof tile and (unworked) sandstone lumps. Some medieval pottery was also recovered. It is possible that the feature was a shallow pit or a layer of accumulated debris infilling the tops of features underneath.

#### Feature 24

- 6.9 A feature, or perhaps intercutting features, cut by Feature 22 but only partly revealed and not excavated. Its fill (23) was a dark brown clayey loam mottled with light brown sand.

#### Pit 16

- 6.10 A small circular? pit only partly within the trench. It had steep sides and was filled with a mid brown silt-loam without finds.

#### Pit 18

- 6.11 A slightly smaller feature than 16 but very similar and with an identical fill. No finds were recovered.

### **7. Trench 3**

- 7.1 Trench 3 ran E-W across a pronounced dip in the ground. This was thought to be another hollow way, running from the south and petering out within 10 m to the north.
- 7.2 The superficial deposits were quite thin and consisted of a dark grey modern topsoil (3/1) over a reddish brown silty loam (3/2). The latter was present only in the W half of the trench. It contained large amounts of post-medieval tile and pottery and was cut by features 4 and 10. Within the 'hollow way' a thin layer of pebbles (18) embedded into undisturbed silt might have represented a deliberate surfacing.

#### **Post-medieval features**

##### Ditch 4

- 7.3 This was a substantial linear feature running NW-SE at the W end of the trench and apparently cutting Layer 2. It was filled with a friable dark grey-brown sandy loam (3/3) which yielded large amounts of post-medieval pottery, tile and some bottle glass.

##### Ditch 6

- 7.4 A ditch running NE-SW with a slightly asymmetrical profile and a flattish base. Its fill was a tenacious mid reddish-brown pebbly clayey silt which yielded large amounts of pottery and some glass.

##### Ditch 10

- 7.5 A shallow ditch or gully running N-S. It was filled with a dark grey loam which was similar to the topsoil and contained pottery and glass.

### Pit 16

- 7.6 Probably oval in shape, although only partly within the trench. It had steep sides and a flattish base. Its upper fill (15) was indistinguishable from the topsoil and contained large quantities of pottery and glass. The lower fill (19) was a reddish brown, fairly pebbly loam containing pottery.

### **Medieval Features**

### Pit 12

- 7.7 Of markedly rectangular form in plan, and with vertical sides and a flat base. Its mid greyish brown clayey loam fill (11) contained several small rough blocks of sandstone and relatively large quantities of early medieval pottery.

## **8. Interpretation and Discussion**

- 8.1 The features and finds from Trenches 2 and 3 demonstrate occupation in this area from perhaps as early as the 12th century until c. 1800.
- 8.2 In Tr. 2, finds were particularly concentrated in the north-central part of the trench, both superficially and in Ditch 12. The evidence suggests medieval activity which, in view of the relatively large quantities of roof-tile, probably relates to a nearby structure. Concentrations of sandstone were possibly structurally related although no clear evidence of structures was found.
- 8.3 The other features in this trench, while quite numerous, provided scant dating evidence. In view of the absence of medieval material, which was relatively common in the superficial layers, it seems possible that most relate to earlier rather than later occupation, although there is no suggestion of activity predating the early medieval period. The ditches probably represent property boundaries rather than settlement features. The orientation of Ditches 7, 10 and 12 suggest an early organisation of the site on a different alignment to that of the enclosure.
- 8.4 In Tr. 3 features and finds were largely confined to the W part, beyond the 'hollow way'. This depression appears to be represented on the 1st edition OS map as a widening of the N-S road. Like Tr. 2 there was no evidence of structures, but the large quantities of domestic debris suggest occupation nearby. The relatively large assemblage of early medieval pottery from Pit 3/12 (which is probably a rubbish pit) indicates domestic activity of this period.
- 8.5 In Tr. 3 domestic debris dating from c 1600 to 1800 accounted for the bulk of the finds, both superficially and within features. It seems reasonable to suppose that domestic structures were located within the area of the enclosure rather than material being brought in from further away and dumped, despite the lack of structural evidence.

## 9. Summary and Concluding Remarks

- 9.1 The evaluation has indicated some chronological depth and complexity to the occupation in this area. The rectangular enclosure, shown on the 1st edition OS map and suggested by field evidence, appears to have been the ultimate phase in a long history of occupation here.
- 9.2 The occupation appears to have been absent from the northern part of the enclosure. Its extent to the west remains ill-defined.
- 9.3 The earliest occupation can be dated to the 12th - 14th centuries. Here, property boundaries, rather than settlement features are indicated. Nearby medieval domestic activity is suggested by the pottery and tile from superficial deposits and from a limited number of features.
- 9.5 Activity dating from c. 1600 to c. 1800 was concentrated in Tr.3. It is unclear whether or not the enclosure itself was in existence at this time. The orientations of Ditches 3/4 and 3/6 are inconsistent both mutually and with the enclosure, and a number of phases of reorganisation might have been involved.
- 9.7 Little new information was gained about the use of the site in the 18th - 19th centuries. While the first edition OS map suggests structures along the E boundary of the enclosure, there was no solid evidence of them and it must be assumed they left very scant remains. It is probable that the area formed the back gardens of Hawkeswell Hall at this time and it is possible that a certain amount of landscaping took place.
- 9.8 Although the land is still very rough and has not been ploughed for several decades (information from tenant farmer, Mr J Edwards), the quality of surviving remains is not high. The only surviving stratigraphy related to post-medieval dumping and ditch-digging (Tr. 3). No in situ walls, floors or other structural evidence was found.
- 9.9 There seems to have been some cultivation (possibly ploughing) in the northern part of the site after the abandonment of the medieval occupation. Elsewhere the land appears to have been cleared quite thoroughly. However, it is possible that there are pockets of better-preserved remains in the area. Colluvium was found in Tr. 2 on the central part of the hill slope but appeared to pre-date the occupation. Root disturbance was ubiquitous in Tr. 2 and present in some parts of Tr. 3, but this is not necessarily characteristic of the whole site.

ANDY MUDD/OAU/JAN 1994



Table 1

Context Summary

Tr/Cxt: trench/context  
 FO: fill of  
 W: width  
 D: depth (max.)  
 (No.): no. of fragments  
 C: century  
 CP: clay pipe  
 FC: fired clay  
 P-M: post-medieval

Tr/Cxt	Type	W m	D mm	Finds (No.)	Comments
1/1	layer		330	none	mod. topsoil
1/2	layer		220	none	early plough-soil?
1/3	deposit	-	-	-	natural geology
2/1	layer		350	-	mod. topsoil
2/2	layer		200	pot C12-15 (6); tile (13);	disturbed subsoil
2/3	layer		150	none	early plough-soil?
2/4	ditch	2.3	350	-	E-W
2/5	FO 4		250	none	upper fill
2/6	FO 4		150	none	lower fill
2/7	ditch?	0.9?	220	-	NNW-SSE
2/8	FO 7		200	none	
2/9	ditch	1.2	300	-	NW-SE
2/10	FO 9		300	none	
2/11	layer		150	pot C14-15 (2); tile (1); Fe object;	over 2/10
2/12	ditch	1.6	500	-	NW-SE
2/13	FO 12		500	pot C12-14 (21), C17-19 (4); tile (6);	P-M pot intrusive?

2/14	ditch?	?	250?	-	N-S
2/15	FO 14		250?	none	
2/16	pit	0.9	380	-	
2/17	FO 16		380	none	
2/18	pit	0.6	280	-	
2/19	FO 18		280	none	
2/20	layer		400	none	colluvium
2/21	FO 22		170	pot C13-14 (2)	
2/22	gully?	?	170	-	
2/23	FO 24		?		not exc.
2/24	pit?	?	?	-	cut by 22
3/1	layer		400	-	mod. topsoil
3/2	layer		120	pot C12-14 (1), C17-19 (14); tile (2);	P-M dump, cut by 3/4 & 3/10
3/3	FO 4		370	pot C16-19 (35); tile (21); CP (2); vessel glass (5);	
3/4	ditch	1.4	440	-	P-M
3/5	FO 6		590	pot C12-14 (1), C16-18 (36); glass, vessel (6), window (1); bone (2); CP (1); FC (1);	
3/6	ditch	1.6	660	-	P-M
3/7	FO 8		110	pot C12-14 (1), C17-18 (12); Fe nail;	
3/8	root-holes	?	110	-	

3/9	FO 10		310	pot C13-15 (1), C16-19 (5); glass (1); bone (1);	
3/10	ditch	1.0	190	-	P-M
3/11	FO 12		510	pot C12-14 (72); Fe nail (1); bone (1)	
3/12	pit	0.77	510	-	Early Med.
3/13	FO 14		190	pot C17-18 (1)	
3/14	root-holes	?	190	-	cuts? 3/6
3/15	FO 16		130	pot C17-18 (50); glass vessel (9);	upper fill
3/16	pit	0.73	340	-	P-M
3/17	deposit	-	-	-	natural clay/silt
3/18	layer		80	none	cobbled surface
3/19	FO 16		270	pot C17-18 (28)	lower fill

## Appendix 1

Coleshill, Hawkeswell Farm Warwickshire

Pottery Assessment

Lucy Bown

292 (4.4 Kg) sherds of pottery were recovered from two trenches dividing into 35 (.8 Kg) sherds from Trench 2 and 257 (3.6 Kg) sherds from Trench 3. A quick assessment of this pottery included a sherd count, weight and spot date for each context.

Trench 2

Of the small number of sherds found in this trench four are Post Medieval. These are all from context 13 and include Staffordshire Redware bowls/pans and a Nottingham Stoneware tankard dating from A.D. 1600 to 1900. The Nottingham stoneware sherd joins with sherds from Trench 3 context 2.

The remaining thirty one sherds from Trench 2 include a variety of medieval wares. The earliest is a poorly fired, iron rich, quartz tempered fabric in which the predominant forms are cooking pots. A greater quantity of the same fabric occurs in Trench 3 context 11 where several cooking pot rims are found. Although no rims are found in Trench 2 the vessels are likely to be of a similar form and date from the 12th to 14th century. In Trench 2 seventeen sherds in this ware occurs in context 2 and 13.

A second medieval fabric is represented by six sherds in context 2/13. These are in a coarsely tempered quartz fabric which is well fired and probably also of 12th to 14th century date.

The third medieval fabric type is represented by two sherds from a tall jug with strap handle and splashed lead glaze on the exterior. This is a well fired, oxidised pink/white, finely tempered fabric and is possibly a product of the Chilvers Cotton kilns at Nuneaton. The jug type probably dates from the late 13th to 14th century and is found in contexts 2 and 21 in Trench 2.

The fourth medieval fabric present is probably late medieval in date. Three sherds in a finely tempered, reddish/orange, well fired fabric have a continuous lead glaze on the interior. These sherds are from well made glazed jugs and the rim of a deep bowl/ possible dairying pan and are probably 14th or 15th century in date. They are found in contexts 2 and 11 in Trench 2.

Trench 3

Of the 257 sherds recovered from Trench 3, 76 are medieval and 181 post medieval.

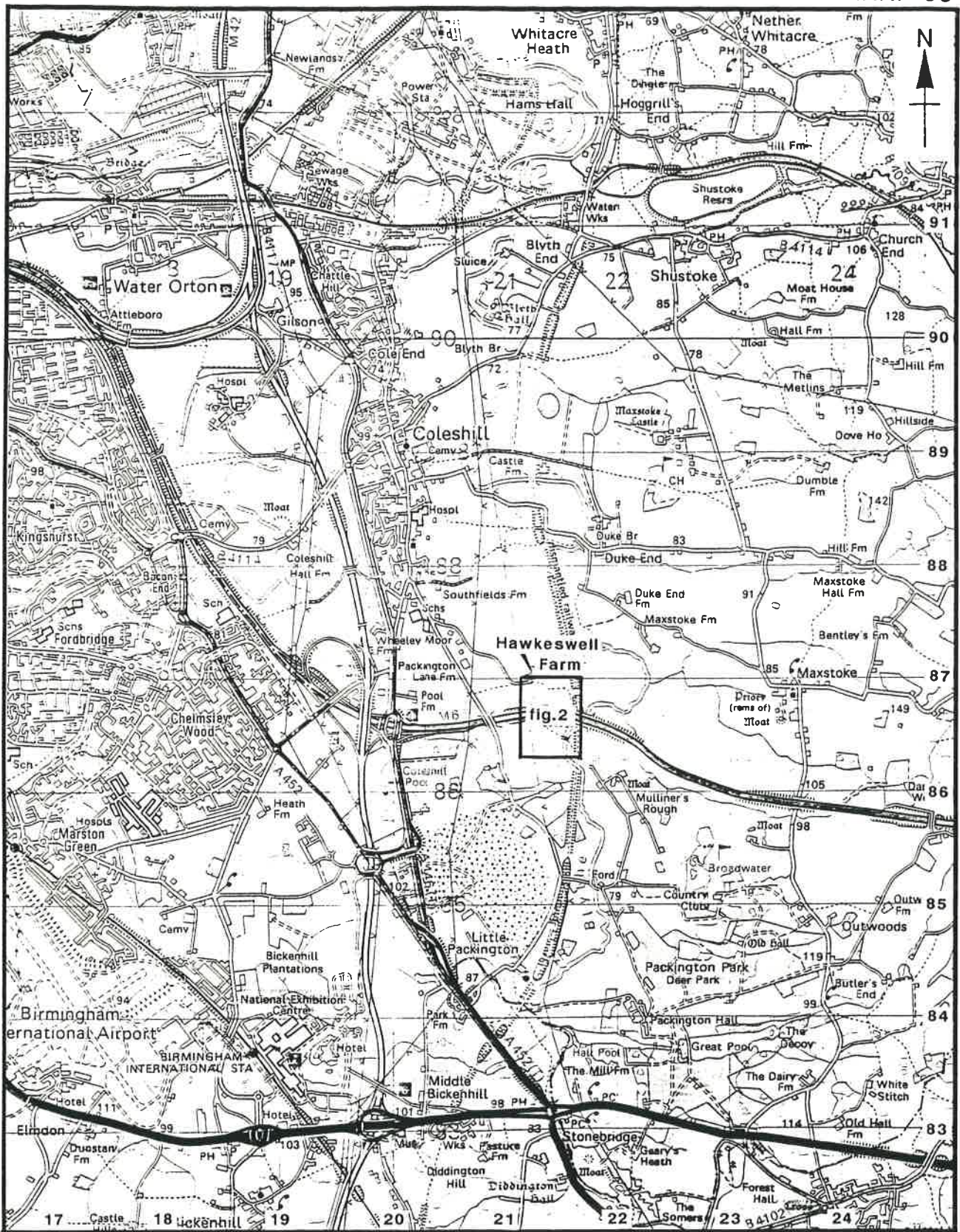
All the medieval pottery in Trench 3 is similar to the earliest fabric in Trench 2 being the characteristically poorly fired, iron rich, quartz tempered ware probably of 12 to 14th century date. Four sherds are scattered between contexts 2, 5 and 7 in Trench 3, whilst the remaining seventy two sherds are from context 11. This group forms a significant assemblage of eight cooking pot rims and one dripping pan which by comparison with pottery from Woeley Castle (Oswald 1962) is probably of mid 12th to 13th-century date.

A fifth medieval fabric is represented by a single small sherd in context 9. The fabric is a hard fired reduced ware possibly of late 13th to 15th-century date.

The majority of the pottery in Trench 3 is Post Medieval. The earliest wares 16th to 17th century Cistercian cups and mid 16th to 18th century Midlands Yellow Ware. Staffordshire products are the most common of the post medieval wares including mottled ware cups and tankards, slipware and press moulded plates, redware bowls/pans and butter pots of mid 17th to 18th century date. Later post medieval wares include late 18th century Staffordshire salt glazed stoneware, late 18th to 19th century Pearlware and Creamware and 18th century Nottingham stoneware.

#### Bibliography

Oswald, A. 1962 Interim Report on Excavations at Woeley Castle , 1955 - 60. Transactions and Proceedings of the Birmingham Archaeological Society Vol 78. 1962 p72.



Site location

scale 1:50000

figure 1



Trench location

scale 1:2500

figure 2

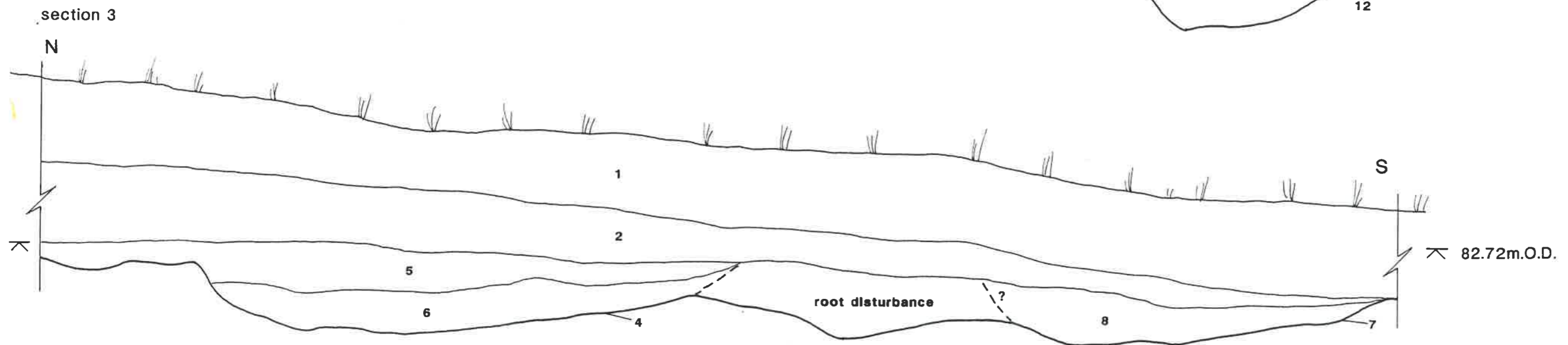
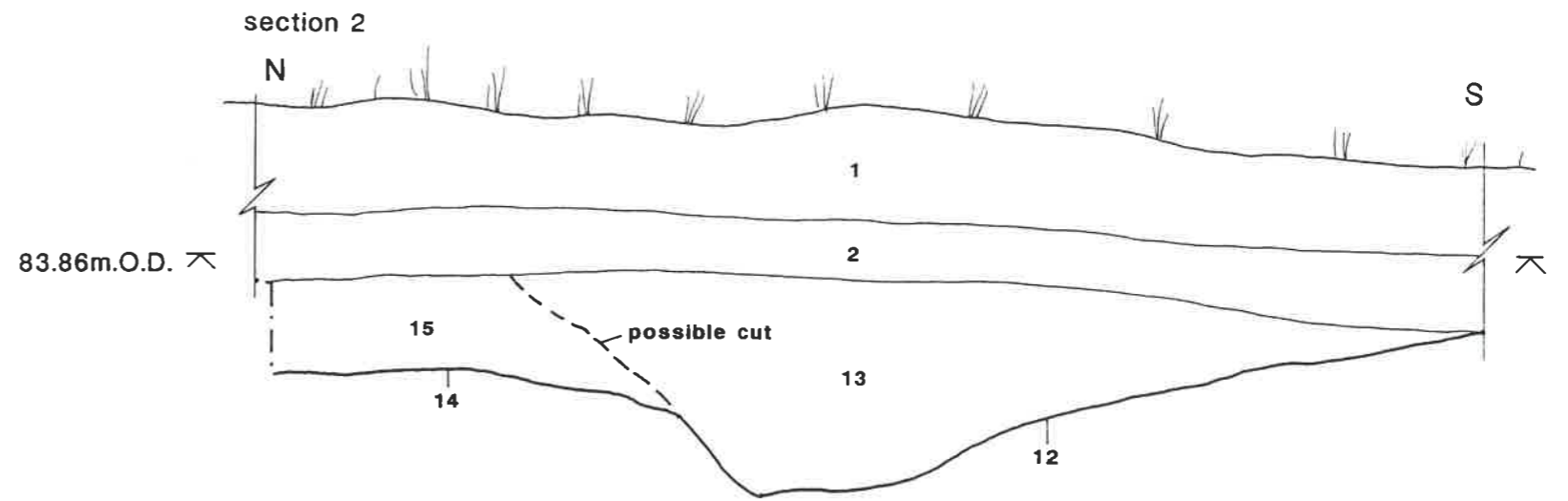
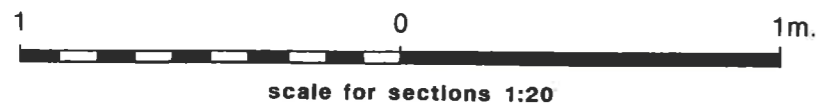
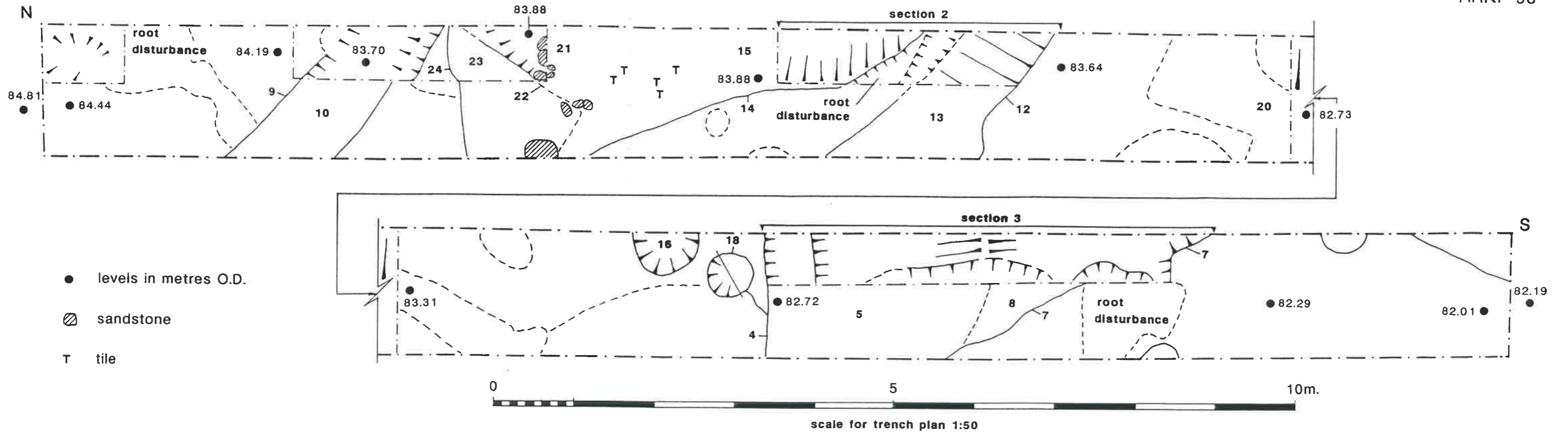
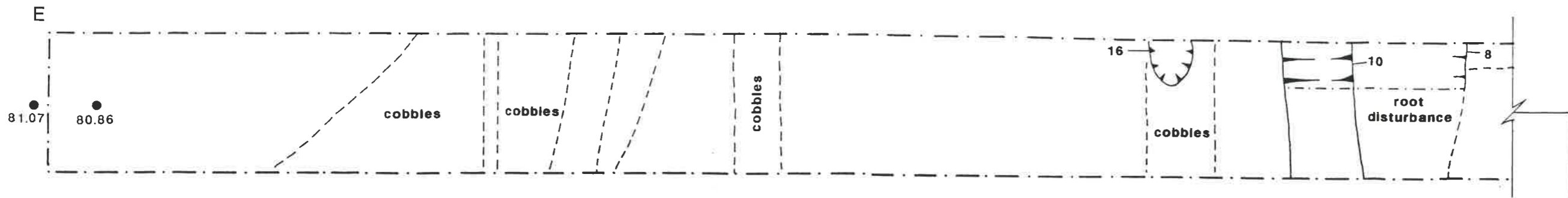


figure 3





● levels in metres O.D.

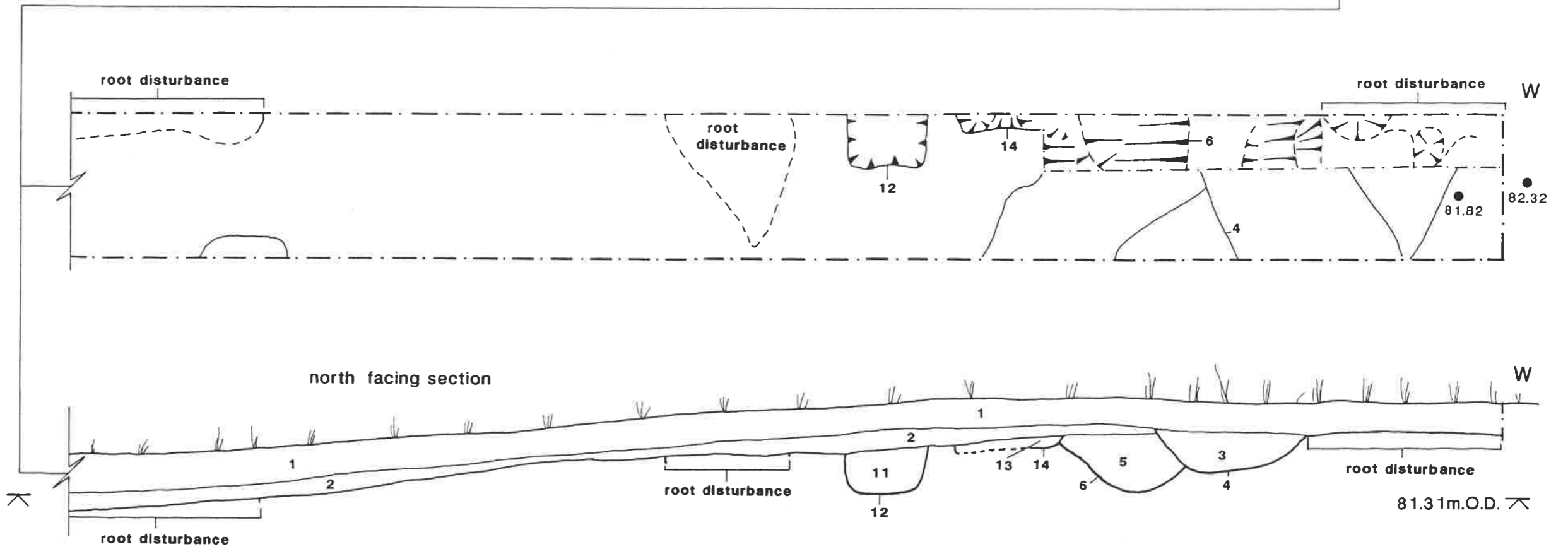
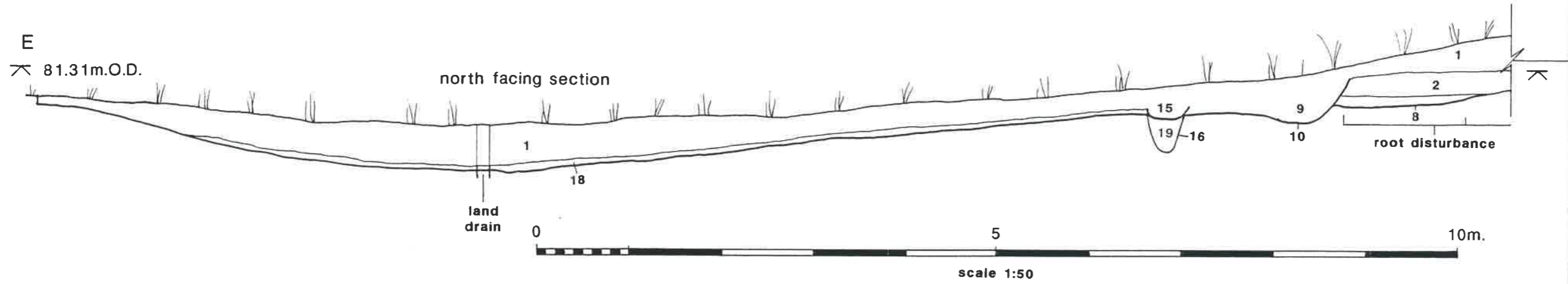


figure 4

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