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(OX)

**19 WATLINGTON ROAD, BENSON,  
OXFORDSHIRE  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**



**OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT  
July 1993**

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT 19 WATLINGTON ROAD, BENSON

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook an archaeological evaluation on behalf of Robert Stephenson Associates in a small plot adjacent to 19 Watlington Road, Benson in fulfilment of conditions attached to a planning application for residential development (no. P93/WOO33/0). The area of development covered about 900 sq. m. on the northern edge of the village of Benson (NGR SU 61739189 - see figure 1) on land used as a garden. The work took place over 2 days in early July 1993.
- 1.2 No sites of archaeological interest were known in the proposal area. However, finds of probable late Saxon date had come to light about 70 m. to the east (County Sites and Monuments Record PRN 9952), and the site was therefore considered to have some archaeological potential relating to the early settlement of Benson.

### 2.0 Methods

- 2.1 The evaluation was conducted in accordance with a brief set by the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Officer, Mr Paul Smith. It took the form of three machine-cut trial trenches excavated so as to give a reasonable areal coverage within the constraints imposed by trees and vegetable plots (Fig. 2).
- 2.2 The trenches were excavated with a toothless ditching bucket and then cleaned by hand. Archaeological features were sampled by hand excavation. Finds were also recovered from overburden on an opportunistic basis during machine-stripping.
- 2.3 Due to the difficulty of site access (the width restriction being about 3 feet), the machine employed was a Kubota KH21 mini-excavator with a 0.8 m. wide bucket. This proved to be of insufficient power to complete a 4% sample of the site within the budgetary constraints and, with the agreement of the deputy County Archaeologist, the details of the specification were modified. This involved the excavation of the trenches to a bucket-width (0.8 m), rather than 1.5 m., and the doubling of the length of Trench A to 16 m. In addition, the widths of Trenches A and C were increased where archaeological features were discovered. The total area exposed was 31.6 sq. m., giving a sample of about 3.5%.

### 3.0 Results

#### General

- 3.1 A summary of the features and finds encountered is presented in Table 1. Numbers in square brackets [] in the text below refer to contexts and are prefixed by the trench

letter where necessary.

- 3.2 The modern ground surface, which lies at about 51 m. OD, showed a slight drop from north to south and from east to west (see Fig. 2). The excavations showed that this was largely to be accounted for by a greater build up of soil in the northern and eastern parts of the site.
- 3.3 All the trenches showed similar soil profiles. The upper 250 - 300 mm. [1] was a loose dark grey-brown garden soil. This overlay a compact mid to dark brown silt loam subsoil [2] containing frequent angular flints and yielding relatively large amounts of brick, tile, and post-Medieval pottery. This reached a maximum depth of 450 mm. in the eastern end of Tr. A, but elsewhere was only 150 - 250 mm. deep.
- 3.4 This layer overlay the natural geology of river gravels which here comprised a deposit of angular flints interbedded with sandy lenses lower down. There was thus no stratigraphy surviving above the natural. The upper surface of this deposit was weathered and soily, and without a clear interface with the subsoil. This made the excavation down to, and the cleaning of, this surface quite difficult. Archaeological features were found cutting the natural in Trs. A and C.

#### Trench A

- 3.5 Feature [4]. This was a large ditch encountered at the eastern end of the trench, running SE for 5 m. from a clear terminal or angle. It was largely filled with a grey-brown silty loam containing frequent flints [3]. Its relationship with the subsoil was not entirely clear due to the closely similar nature of the soils, but a section through it yielded exclusively late 12th to 14th century pottery in relatively large quantities, and the feature was interpreted as underlying the subsoil. It was 1.5 m. wide and 800 mm. deep with steep sides and a flattish base (see figure 3). At the bottom of the ditch was a thin layer of soil mottled with ash and containing frequent charcoal [6].

#### Trench B

- 3.6 No archaeological features were found in this trench.

#### Trench C

- 3.7 Feature [3]. This was a circular pit, 1.25 m. in diameter with slightly undercutting sides. It was half-sectioned to a depth of about 1 m. (1.6 m. below modern ground surface) without the bottom being reached. The fills [4], [5] and [6] were very clean without large quantities of refuse. They yielded several fragments of animal bone throughout, including two worked pieces - a possible tuning peg and a notched tally. These are not chronologically diagnostic but are likely to be medieval. (A small fragment of clay

pipe in the top of the feature is considered likely to have been intrusive, and a sherd of 12th century pottery is also of doubtful context). The feature was clearly sealed by subsoil and considered most likely to have been contemporary with ditch A[4]. The lower fills contained occasional small lumps of chalk, suggesting that the feature might have penetrated chalk geology at depth, but it is not known how far down this might be.

#### Comment on results

- 3.8 The evaluation was conducted in fine, dry weather. The difficulty of excavating and cleaning the natural flinty gravel has been alluded to (paras. 2.3 & 3.4), but while this was laborious the problem was addressed and the reliability of the results is not considered likely to have been jeopardised to a large degree. It is, however, possible that some small features (eg. postholes) might have been missed, particularly on trench edges.

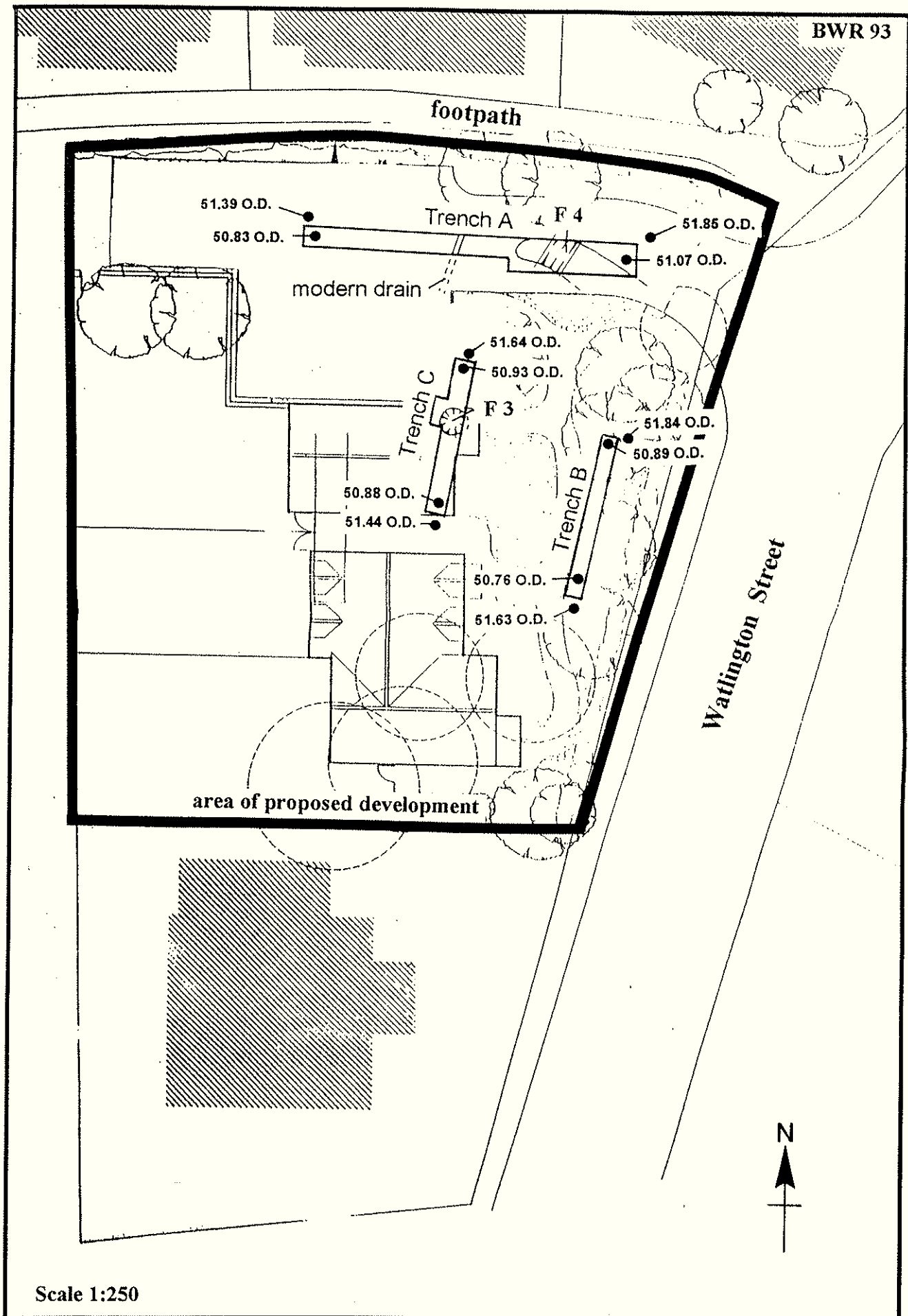
#### **4.0 Conclusions**

- 4.1 The results of this evaluation indicate some early Medieval occupation on this site, but not of an intensive character. A large ditch at the eastern end of Trench A yielded late 12th to early 14th century pottery, and a deep pit in Trench C, while less productive of finds, might be of the same date. No other archaeological features were found, and few finds of archaeological interest were recovered from overburden during machining.
- 4.2 The archaeological features were truncated by post-Medieval ploughing and there was no stratigraphy surviving above the level of the natural geology. There was no indication of other post-Medieval activity on the site.
- 4.3 The ditch, A[4], appears to be a major feature but does not itself suggest a focus of occupation. It probably relates to property division. While the finds indicate a centre of (presumably domestic) activity in the vicinity, it is uncertain where this might lie. The findings from Trenches B and C suggest that activity on the southern side of the ditch was only light, and this area might have been one of backyards rather than dwellings. There was no sign of structures on the Watlington Road frontage.
- 4.4 The evaluation did not yield particularly significant environmental evidence, and the potential of the site in this respect is not considered to be unusually high. However, it can be noted that the lower deposits of C[3] were not examined.

**BWR93: Table 1**

Summary of archaeological features

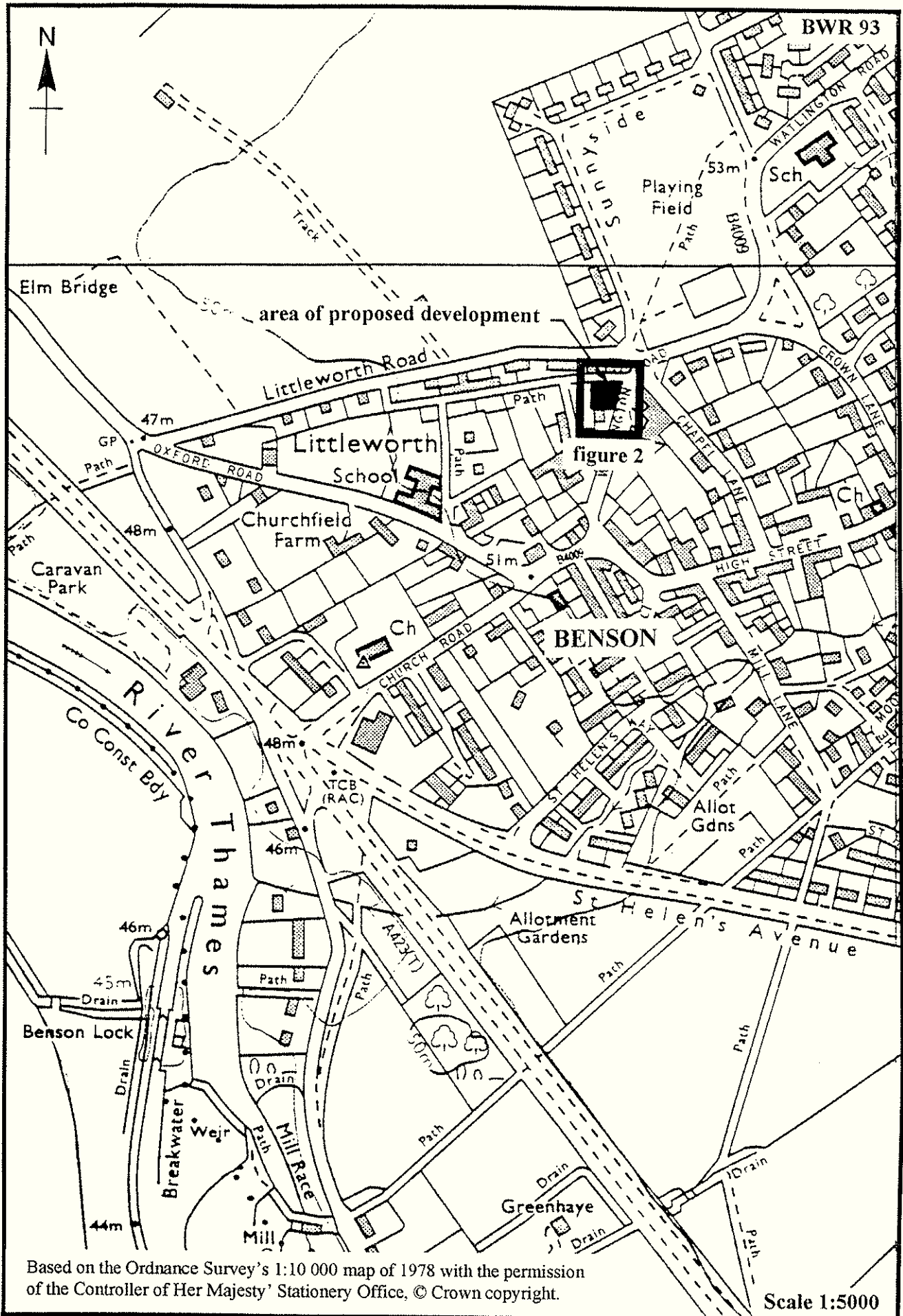
Context	Type	Width	Depth	Finds	Date
1 (A, B & C)	garden soil		250-300 mm		modern
2 (A, B, & C)	subsoil		150-450 mm	brick, tile, pot	18th-19th c.
A/4	ditch	1.5 m	800 mm	41 sherds pot	12th-14th c.
C/3	pit	1.25 m	920 + mm	22 frags. bone, 1 sherd pot?	Medieval?



Scale 1:250

location of archaeological trenches

figure 2

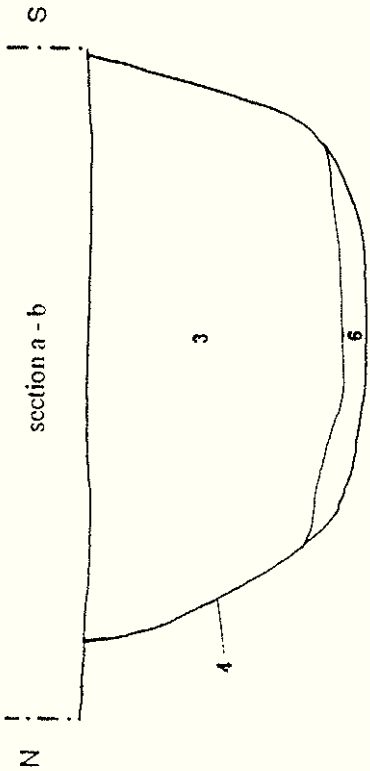
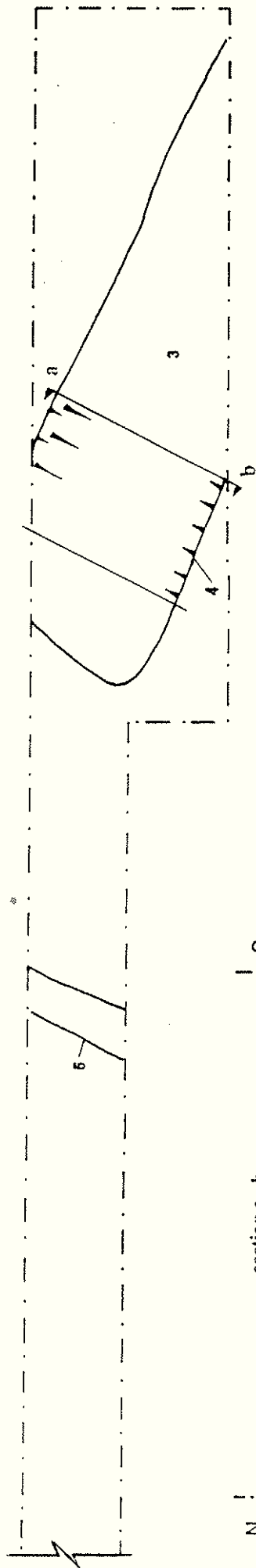


site location

figure 1

Trench A

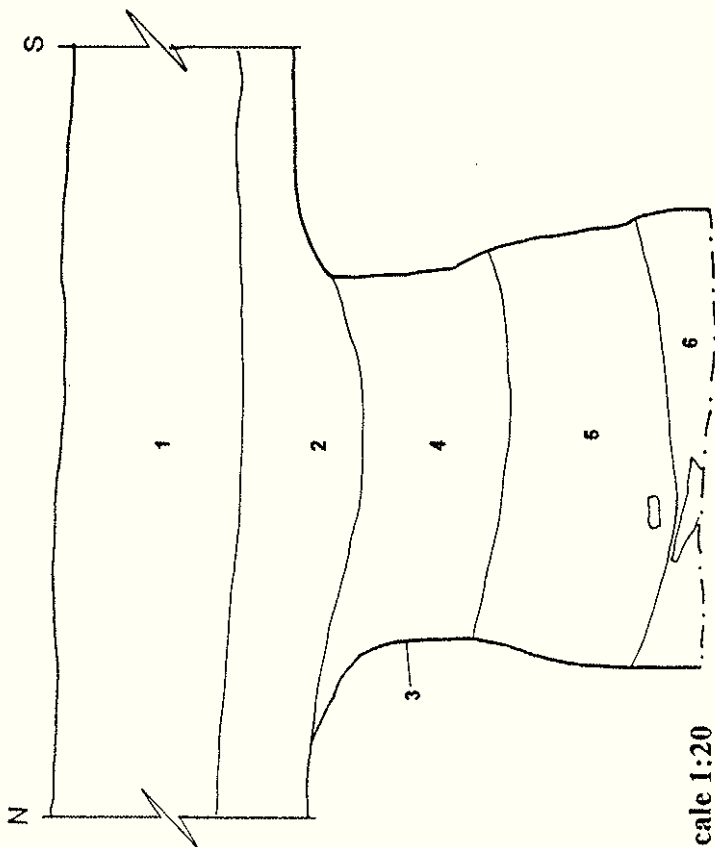
Scale 1:50



Scale 1:20



Trench C section I



Scale 1:20

figure 3