WEST OXFORD (OX)
CUMNOR

OXFWFN
89/93

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT FARMOOR RESERVOIR, 1991

SUMMARY

An evaluation by the Oxford Archaeological Unit was carried out on the site of the Farmoor Water Treatment Works in May 1991, in advance of building construction. Trenches revealed mostly modern disturbance and dumping from the construction of the adjacent reservoir.

INTRODUCTION

Geological and archaeological background

The site is situated in Cumnor parish and lies at the S end of the Farmoor Water Treatment Works (c SP 451064), on the E side of Farmoor reservoir, 6 km due W of Oxford City centre. The Farmoor Water Treatment Works are situated on Oxford Clay with alluvial deposits immediately to the W and gravel terraces to the SW. Excavation on the gravel terraces about 1 km SW of the present site was undertaken in the late 1970s (Lambrick and Robinson 1979). This work revealed widespread Iron Age and Roman settlement close to the River Thames. It was thought that comparable activity might occur on the threatened site.

THE EXCAVATION

The construction of the present Water Treatment Works dates from the mid-1970s, and the proposed development of new units, on an area of some 1500 square m, is on land raised by dumping, with a steep bank leading up to the water tanks and buildings to the N.

The evaluation was carried out on behalf of Thames Water and funded by the construction company PWT. About 10% of the affected area was examined. Five trenches of varying length (and in some cases considerable depth, because of the dumping) were excavated by JCB machine in order to identify the extent and nature of any archaeological deposits (for plan see Fig. 2). The results of this work are detailed below.

No archaeological features were positively identified and most trenches contained deposits principally of recent date. For this reason only short selected lengths of section were recorded in detail.

TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS

Trench 1. Fig. 3 Section (A).
Aligned N-S. 8 m x 1 m. Maximum depth 1.54 m.

Removal of the topsoil (1/1) revealed five layers of modern make-up, (1/2-1/6). A layer of redeposited gravel overlaid a mixed loam layer which included modern concrete and bricks. Three very mixed clay layers below this were interpreted as modern. The lowest layer in the trench (1/7), from c 1.43 m below ground level, was a clean silty clay which may be alluvial. No finds other than modern bricks etc. were retrieved from any of the layers, and no archaeological features were identified.

Trench 2. Fig. 3 Section (C).
Aligned N-S. 20 m x 0.90 m. Maximum depth 1.45 m.

Removal of the topsoil (2/1) revealed a succession of modern make-up layers (2/2-2/13), mostly mixed, mottled clays with gravel inclusions. Just below the topsoil in the middle of the trench lay a group of railway sleepers, which had presumably formed the base of a shed. Redeposited dirty gravel (2/13) up to at least 0.65 m thick was the most distinctive layer at the N end of the trench, dipping quite steeply and extending southwards for 8 m. It was overlaid by a number of mixed clay layers to the S and in turn overlaid similar clay layers at the N end of the trench.

This sequence suggests modern tipping in order to raise the level of the land. No finds were retrieved from any of the layers nor were any archaeological features identified.

Trench 3. Fig. 3 Section (D).
Aligned N-S. 20 m x 1.30 m. Maximum depth 1.75 m.

Removal of the topsoil (3/1) at the S end of the trench revealed a layer of modern redeposited sand (3/2) overlying three layers of mixed, mottled clay (3/3-3/5). These were interpreted as modern build-up. Below these was a layer of cleaner, dark grey sticky clay (3/6), which may be alluvial. At the N end of the trench the ground rises steeply up to a modern building as a result of dumping. The bottom of the trench rose correspondingly; layer 3/6 was therefore not exposed at this point. There were no finds from this trench.

Trench 4. Fig. 3 Section (E).
Aligned N-S. 24 m x 1.30 m. Maximum depth 2.30 m.

Removal of the topsoil (4/1) at the S end of the trench revealed a concrete surface overlying a sandy gravel make-up layer (4/2), which extended 2.0 m into the trench. Below 4/2 were two mixed blue-grey clay layers (4/3, 4/4) down to a depth of c 1.20 m below ground level. These contained modern finds, including rubber, metal etc. A large modern concrete pipe, aligned E-W, in a construction trench c 1.70 m wide, lay 2.50 m from the S end

of the trench. Below 4/4 was a grey clay layer (4/5) up to 0.60 m thick. This layer was much less mixed than the layers both above and below, though the interpretation of this layer is uncertain. Layer 4/5 sealed two further dark grey clay layers (4/6, 4/7) exposed to the N of the concrete pipe in a smaller, deeper trench. This was cut to a depth of 2.30 m below ground level. Both these layers contained some gravel and were generally mixed. Although this may indicate a recent date for their deposition, there was no artefactual or other evidence to support this suggestion.

At the N end of the trench the ground level rises as in trench 3, the bank comprising tips of gravel, sand, clay, rubble, etc. All the deposits except the lowest, (4/13), which was probably the same as layer (4/5) at the S end of the trench, were disturbed and contained finds of recent date. No archaeological features were identified.

Trench 5. Fig. 3 Sections (G), (I).
Aligned E-W. 45 m x 1.10 m. Maximum depth 3.20 m.

This trench was approximately on the same alignment as a modern ditch. The presence of this feature and the E-W running concrete pipe seen in trench 4 resulted in the trench being slightly irregularly shaped. The E end of the trench cut through the modern E-W ditch and revealed a layer (5/2) of modern (1960s) rubbish including glass bottles and metal objects. Below this was a layer (5/3) of mixed clay and gravel, disturbed by tree roots and interpreted as modern build-up. Two layers of clean sticky brown clay, (5/4, 5/5) lay beneath this. These possibly represented alluvial deposits.

In the central part of the trench just below the topsoil (5/6) was a layer of limestone blocks (5/7) over a sandy gravel make-up layer (5/8). Layer (5/7) was presumably a laid surface, possibly corresponding to the concrete surface noted in trench 4. Layer 5/3 (seen at the E end of the trench) was also found under 5/8, which in turn sealed a dark grey clay layer (5/9).

As in trench 4 a short length of trench was cut to a depth of c 3.40 m to establish the extent of the archaeology and geology. This deeper cut was situated close to the W end of the trench. The make-up layer (here 5/10) for the stone surface (5/7) was present beneath the topsoil, but no blocks appeared in section. A sandy, gravelly clay layer (5/11) possibly equivalent to 5/3 lay below this, sealing another three layers of mixed, and therefore presumably recently deposited, clay (5/12-5/14). Layers 5/15-5/18 beneath were similar in nature to layer 5/9 in the central part of the trench. It is possible that 5/17 and 5/18, together c 0.38 m thick, represented an old ploughsoil, as they had a distinctly loamy clay texture. There were no finds from these layers, which are therefore undated. The possible ploughsoil occurred at a depth of 2.20 m, and in turn overlaid natural Oxford Clay. Natural gravel was noted at a depth of 3.42 m. There were no finds or definite archaeological features from trench 5.

CONCLUSIONS

No archaeological features were positively identified in any of the five trenches. Modern dumping and disturbance, probably largely related to the construction of the Water Treatment Plant in the 1970s, was extensive. Trench 2 contained solely recently deposited material and the large part of the deposits in Trenches 1, 3 and 4 may also have been of recent date. The date of the sequence in Trench 5 is quite uncertain, as are the details of its interpretation. A possible ploughsoil was located here at a depth of 2.20 m.

Trenches 1, 3 and the E end of trench 5 contained possible alluvial layers, but there was no evidence for the date of such deposits. A stratigraphically similar layer in trench 4 (4/5) overlaid mixed layers of uncertain date. It is possible that there are archaeological features beneath the excavated levels, but if so these are likely to be well below the depth of any disturbance caused by development.

There were no finds other than modern material, none of which was retained.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks are owed to Mike Hall of Thames Water and Alan Cole of PWT for their help and cooperation in the course of the project.

REFERENCE

Lambrick, G, and Robinson, M, 1979 Iron Age and Roman riverside settlements at Farmoor, Oxfordshire CBA Res Rep **32**, Oxfordshire Archaeol Unit Rep 2, London

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - Site Location Plan
Figure 2 - Trench Location Plan
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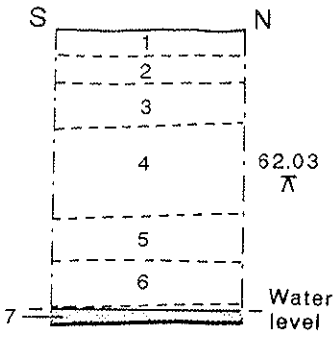
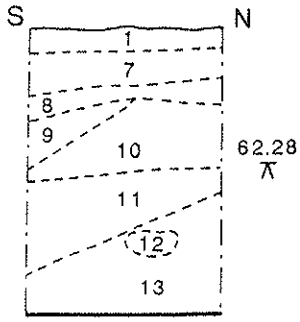
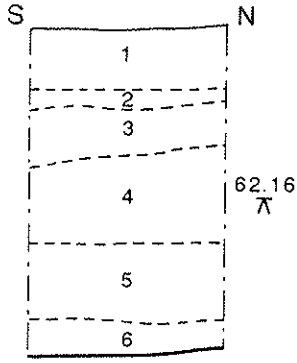
TRENCH 1
SECTION A



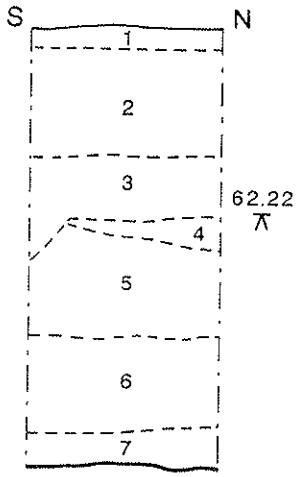
TRENCH 2
SECTION C



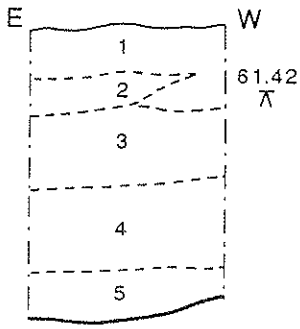
TRENCH 3
SECTION D



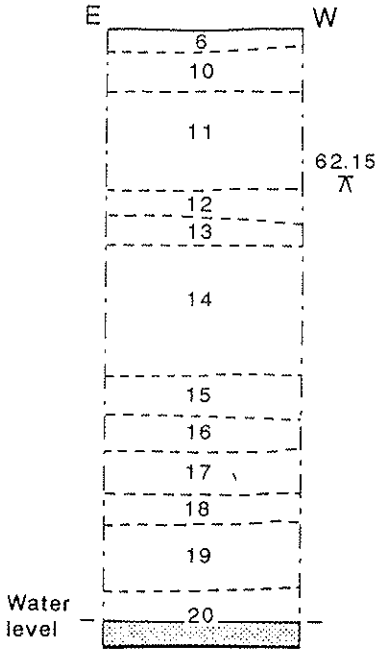
TRENCH 4
SECTION E



TRENCH 5
SECTION G



TRENCH 5
SECTION I



62.16 LEVELS (MOD)

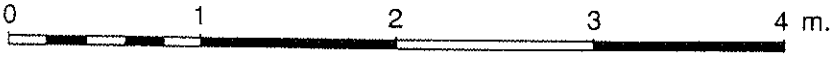


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Figure 3

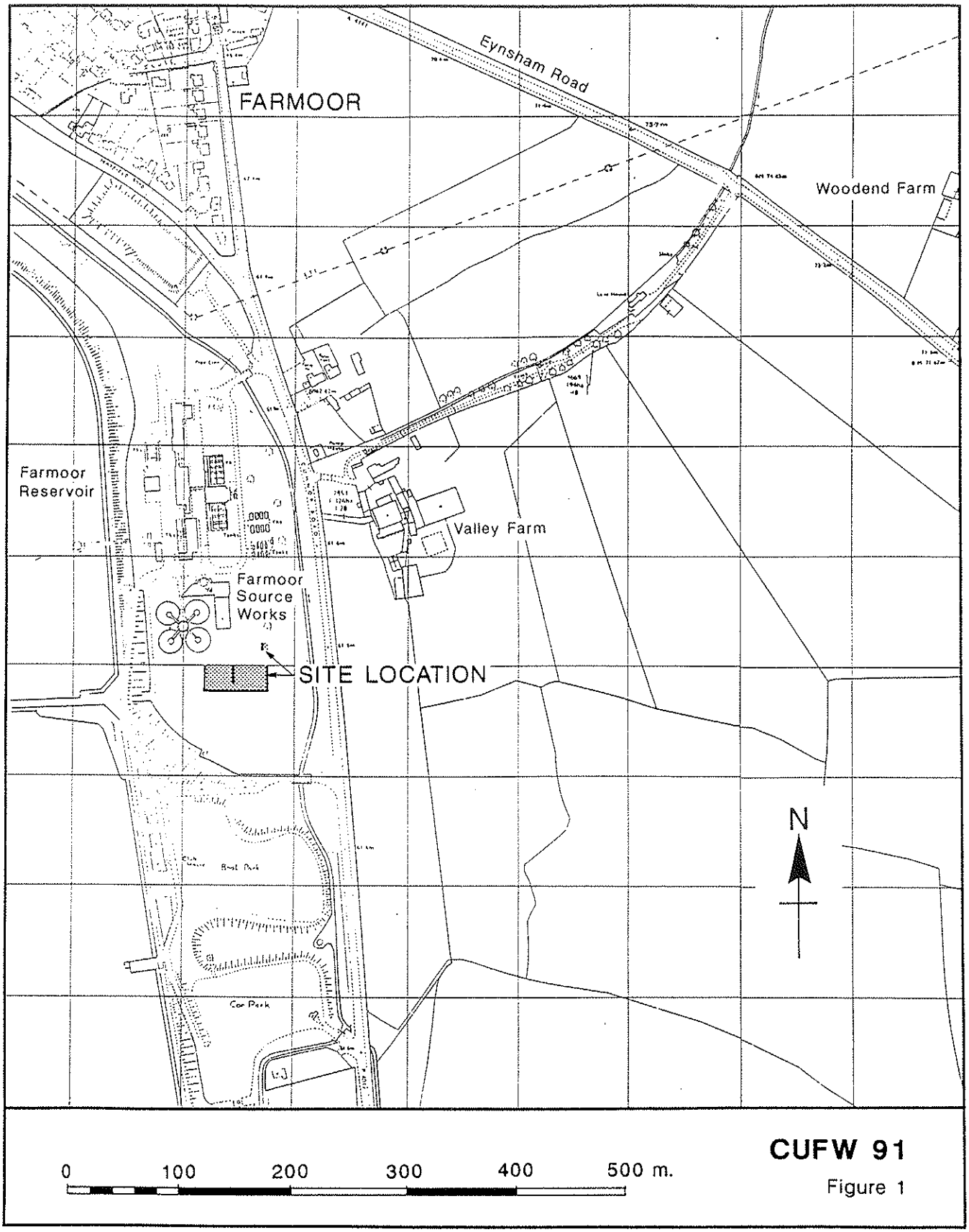

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Figure 1

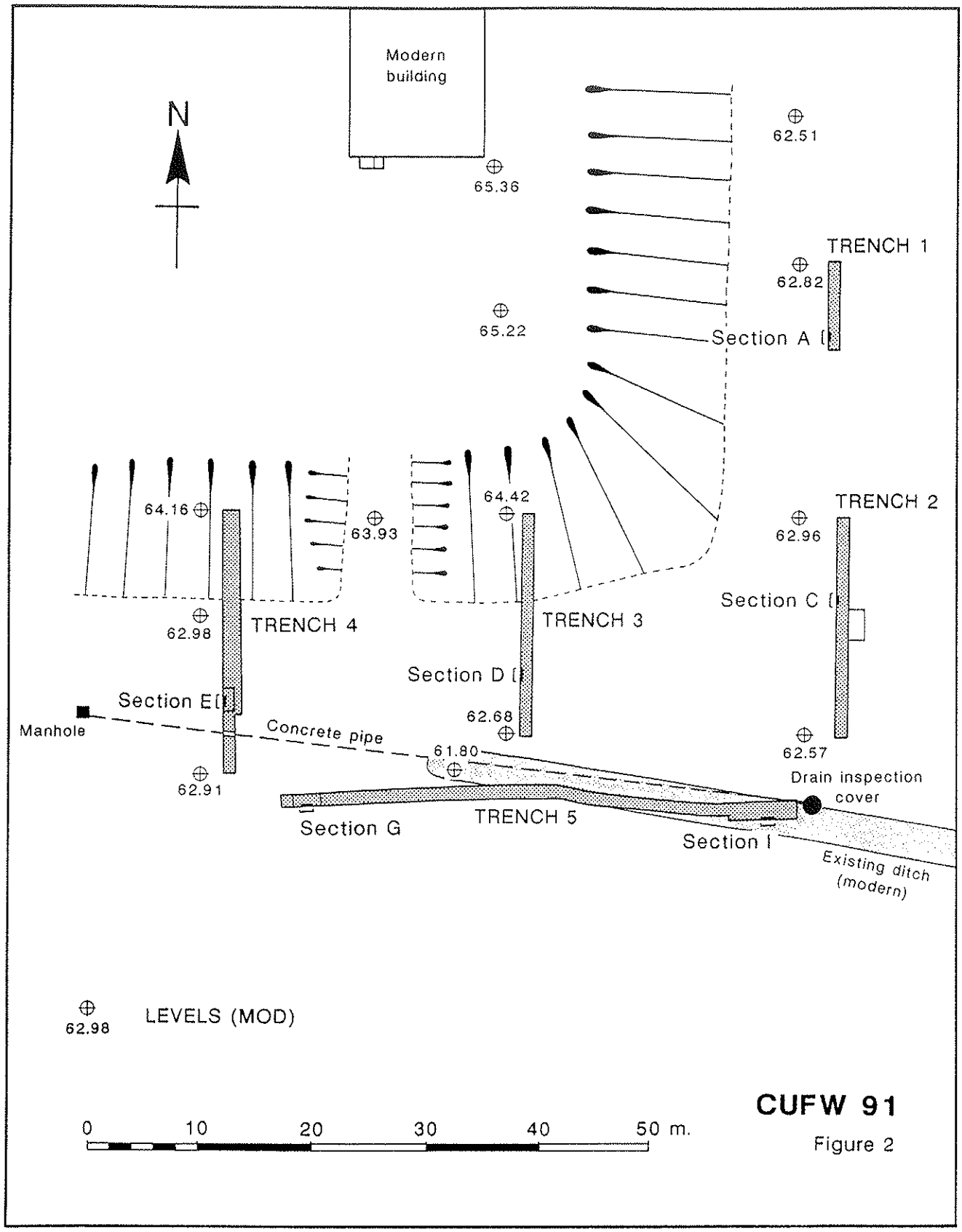

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Figure 2