

BAMPTON (OX)

FOLLY HOUSE, BAMPTON
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

September 1989

FOLLY HOUSE, BAMPTON (SP 315030)

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT IN ADVANCE OF REDEVELOPMENT

Background Information

An archaeological assessment of the above site was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of the owners of the site, Cmdr and Mrs O Lascelles, following an application for planning consent for a sheltered housing development.

Folly House lies 100m south of the medieval market place of Bampton, a small town on the north edge of the flood plain of the Thames.

Archaeological Background

Although now little more than a village, Bampton at Domesday (1086) had the highest valuation of any place in Oxfordshire, including Oxford itself, and had probably been the centre of a large Saxon estate stretching from Witney in the northeast down to the Berkshire and Gloucestershire borders. It is therefore of great significance to the historical geography of Oxfordshire and the interface between Saxon Mercia and Wessex.

Recent excavations in the immediate area of Bampton have been carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit at Calais Farm, and by John Blair and the Oxford University Archaeological Society at Cobb House, Deanery Farm, Kilmore House, Little Place and in the church yard. This work has identified two important manorial sites, the Deanery and Bampton Castle, which each be the centre of major manors recorded in the Domesday survey.

The fourth major landholding in Bampton recorded in the Domesday Book was held by Roger from the sheriff of Oxford, Robert D'Oilly. There had until recently been no indication where it lay, but Simon Townley's research for the Victoria County History has identified 'Doiles' and 'Doiles Orchard' on the Inclosure Award of 1821, where they appear respectively on the sites of Folly House and the field immediately to its south.

A full history of the Bampton Hundred is in preparation by the Victoria County History. It will embrace the findings of the above fieldwork in the town by John Blair. In anticipation of this a note of the documentary evidence which associates Folly House with the medieval D'Oilly manor is attached to this report (see Appendix).

Methods (Fig. 1)

A series of trenches were specified by the County Archaeologist to investigate the proposed sites of a good proportion of the buildings shown on the outline planning application. No trench was specified for the courtyard area, where a south wing is proposed for one of the two stone buildings which are to be retained.

It was agreed with the owner that the trench specified immediately west of the drive should not be excavated to avoid damage to tree roots. On-site adjustments were made to the remaining trenches, mainly to avoid shrubs and facilitate reinstatement.

Four out of five trenches were excavated with a small 360 degree mechanical digger narrow enough to get through an opening into the walled garden. The machine had been hired by the owner of the property, but was supplied without the ditching bucket requested by ourselves. Trench 2 was excavated by hand to minimise disturbance to the croquet lawn.

The machine trenches were dug down to recognisable medieval levels. In Trench 1 this meant the surface of a brickearth soil profile above the gravel, in Trenches 3-5 it meant down to the gravel itself for the most part, because with the exceptionally dry summer this was the only way to see the shape of features.

Results

The results are described in order of excavation. Provisional dating of the pottery is by Maureen Mellor, using comparative material from Oxford, Witney, Bampton etc.

Trench 1 (Fig. 2)

This trench was dug in the yard of Messrs CBL Electric vehicles, in the only space available without major disruption. Beneath a thick stoney yard surface was a layer of dark loam L1/1, which was disturbed at the west end by a modern pit and dumping L1/4,1/5, and at the east end by a modern pipe trench and pit L1/6. Beneath this was a thicker layer of mid to dark grey loam L1/2, which in undisturbed areas seemed to contain only medieval pottery (1 sh. SX III and one fragment). It overlay the original red brown loam topsoil L1/3, average 0.2m thick above natural gravel, with two minute sherds of late Saxon or medieval date and a flint bladelet.

Trench 2 (Fig 3)

The trench was dug by hand. Beneath the turf L2/1 was a layer of loam with 19th century finds of average 0.4m thickness L2/2,

L2/3, deeper where it overlay a shallow gully of similar date(L2/3/1). Owing to the depth of this deposit further excavation was confined to the central part of the trench, where there was a further thick layer of loam L2/4, this time with pottery of the 12th to mid 13th century. To the south this layer was thought to be cut away by a pit or ditch L2/4/1 under the line of the later gully.

Removal of L2/4 showed a layer of laid stones looking like the top of a wall F2/5, with a sherd of overfired local pottery. It was aligned E-W and had little in the way of a robber trench above it or construction trench either side. To the north were two pits F2/6, F2/6/1, which were probably earlier but which could not be separated stratigraphically. F2/6 may indeed have been continuous with the fill of a pit or ditch F2/8 which dropped away sharply just to the south. The pottery from F2/6 and F2/7 predating the wall was again of the 12th to 13th centuries, not appreciably earlier than that above it.

Because of the problems of enlarging Trench 2 a small hole was dug in the ha-ha just to the south, which showed layers of medieval fill L2/7 over a gravel base which sloped slightly to the north, with pottery of the 13th century including an unusual flared rim sherd in Fabric OX AC.

Trench 3 (Fig 4)

This long trench in the walled garden first showed the difficulties of digging with a small machine in the very parched conditions. Beneath the turf was a grey-brown silty loam with 15% small gravel L3/2, with the gravel proportion increasing down to the natural gravel subsoil at average 0.6m depth. In the thickness of 3/2 was a length of stone walling F3/8 possibly forming the side of a garden feature floored by 3/7/1. Other than these most of the remaining features appeared to be medieval.

At the east end of the trench was a disturbed area which was shown to be at least two intersecting pits F3/5, F 3/5/1. At about 7m a shallow ditch F3/4 ran across NNE-SSW (Fabric OX AC, late 12th to 13th century), and at about 11m a large pit with half a cooking pot (Fabric OX AQ, also sherds of BF, CG, R and SX III, first half of 13th century with residual Saxon). At 13m was an irregular pit 3/6 which may have been disturbed by animals or roots, and centred at 22m was a large area of grey brown silty loam filling a depression 8m across (2 sherds OX misc Gp II, 11th to 12th century)

Trench 4 (Fig 5)

The second of the two trenches in the walled garden showed a similar soil profile to Trench 3, with 4/4 the turf, and 4/5 and 4/6 equivalent to the two variants of 3/2. 0.7m from the south end was an isolated post hole F4/1, and at 10m a pit F4/2 (1 iron

nail, possibly post medieval) . At the extreme north end was a shallow pit filled with red brown silt loam F4/3, with a post-hole in the bottom, identified as a typical Anglo-Saxon Grubenhaus. The upper fill of this feature produced profiles of two small vessels of the 6th to 7th century, for which there is no direct parallel in J Myres' Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Pottery, (1977).

Trench 5 (Fig 2)

The final trench ran N-S down the west side of the access drive. Beneath the turf L5/1 was a thick deposit of modern building waste L5/2 which probably was the rubbish from the construction of Folly House (c. 1940s?) used to create a new level drive. It overlay a dark turf line L5/4 at a level of 69.4m OD, and a soil profile L5/4, L5/5 which was generally similar to that in the walled garden. The only exception was a large deep pit or ditch F5/7 about the middle of the trench, which from its pottery seemed to belong to the first half of the 19th century.

Conclusions

The Geology

Folly House seems to lie on the south edge of the gravel terrace which forms the site of Bampton. It is not clear where the natural edge of the terrace lay; it may be reflected by the ha-ha and the south boundary of the Grange orchard, because this is where the gravel drops away now, but if this is so the raised ground south of the ha-ha would have to be regarded as medieval dumping on the flood plain gravels. This is not impossible, but it could only be proved by finding an alluvial profile between it and the gravel, and this was not seen in Trench 2.

The nearest thing to a natural soil was on the upper terrace in the CBL yard in Trench 1, where the distinctive red-brown alluvial soil was largely intact. There was nothing similar anywhere in the grounds of Folly House itself, which may indicate that this area had been more intensively cultivated at some stage in its history.

An Anglo-Saxon Grubenhaus (Fig. 5)

At the north end of Trench 4 was the characteristic shape of a Saxon sunken-floored building, with pottery of the period from the infill.

Grubenhauer are known from many settlement sites in southern England including many in the upper Thames Valley, but this is only the third in the Bampton Hundred. They are often distributed amongst the more conventional hall-type houses of a village, and in some cases can be shown to have a specialised function as a weaving shed. The absence of a beaten floor in the Bampton example may mean that it was of the type which are planked-over at ground level, as opposed to those which

functioned as a half cellar.

Although these structures are not rare, they appear most often on rural sites and comparatively few are known from under medieval settlements. At Bampton it is possible that this building was part of an early nucleus which was to grow into the important Domesday town. It is significant that its south edge was more affected by later cultivation than its north edge, because the north edge adjoins the CBL site where the original topsoil survived (Trench 1), which could mean that any similar features to the north will be in good state of preservation.

The D'Oilly Manor

The purpose of the assessment was to define a suspected medieval manor house, and it is necessary to look at the evidence for that period.

1. There is a distribution of medieval features across the property which concentrate towards the site of the existing house (Fig. 6)

2. The stone building forming the garage of the existing house (which includes presumed medieval work in its south gable), has a floor level 0.75m above the level of the pre-1940s turf in Trench 5, and 0.8m above the top of the medieval deposit 2/4 in Trench 2;

3. A stone wall footing of at least two courses ran E-W along the south lawn, at a point where small shallow pits to the north gave way to large deep pits to the south.

This evidence can be evaluated as follows: the site shows a relatively high concentration of medieval activity considering it is at the limit of where one would expect burghage plots extending back from the Market Place; the medieval features concentrate towards the present house, where a slight rise in levels might indicate that it was replacing older buildings, and there is some support for this from one unusually thick stone wall (information J Blair); the coincidence of the wall 2/5 with the change in gravel levels might indicate that it had been a south boundary.

Assuming that a medieval courtyard house occupied all the area enclosed by a rectangle drawn around the existing house and the excavated south wall, it would be about 30m square, 900m². This compares with say 3500m² and 5500m² for the initial and later phases of the manor house at 'Witney Palace', and would be in rough proportion to their respective values at Domesday.

Could there be a small manor house there? It could not be confirmed without excavating inside the modern 'courtyard', and at present this would only be disturbed by one new building, the proposed warden's accomodation. In any case it is unlikely to be the manor house of the Domesday record, because it would have been in the front line of defence in the civil war of the reign of Stephen, and defensive ditches would be expected to the north and west. It could however to be the site of a new house built

after the suspected replanning of Bampton after those wars (information John Blair), evidently having never needed to provide itself with major defensive works.

This area would accomodate a substantial building of the late 12th to early 13th century, which would account for the quantity of pottery of that period in the walled garden. There was little to suggest occupation of the site beyond the mid 13th century however, and the only strong evidence comes from the Inclosure Award of 1821.

In conclusion it can be stated that the Saxon evidence from the assessment is important for the light it throws on the origins of one of the most important Domesday places in Oxfordshire, and the post-Conquest evidence suggests significant activity on the site which could include a substantial and as yet unproven manor house.

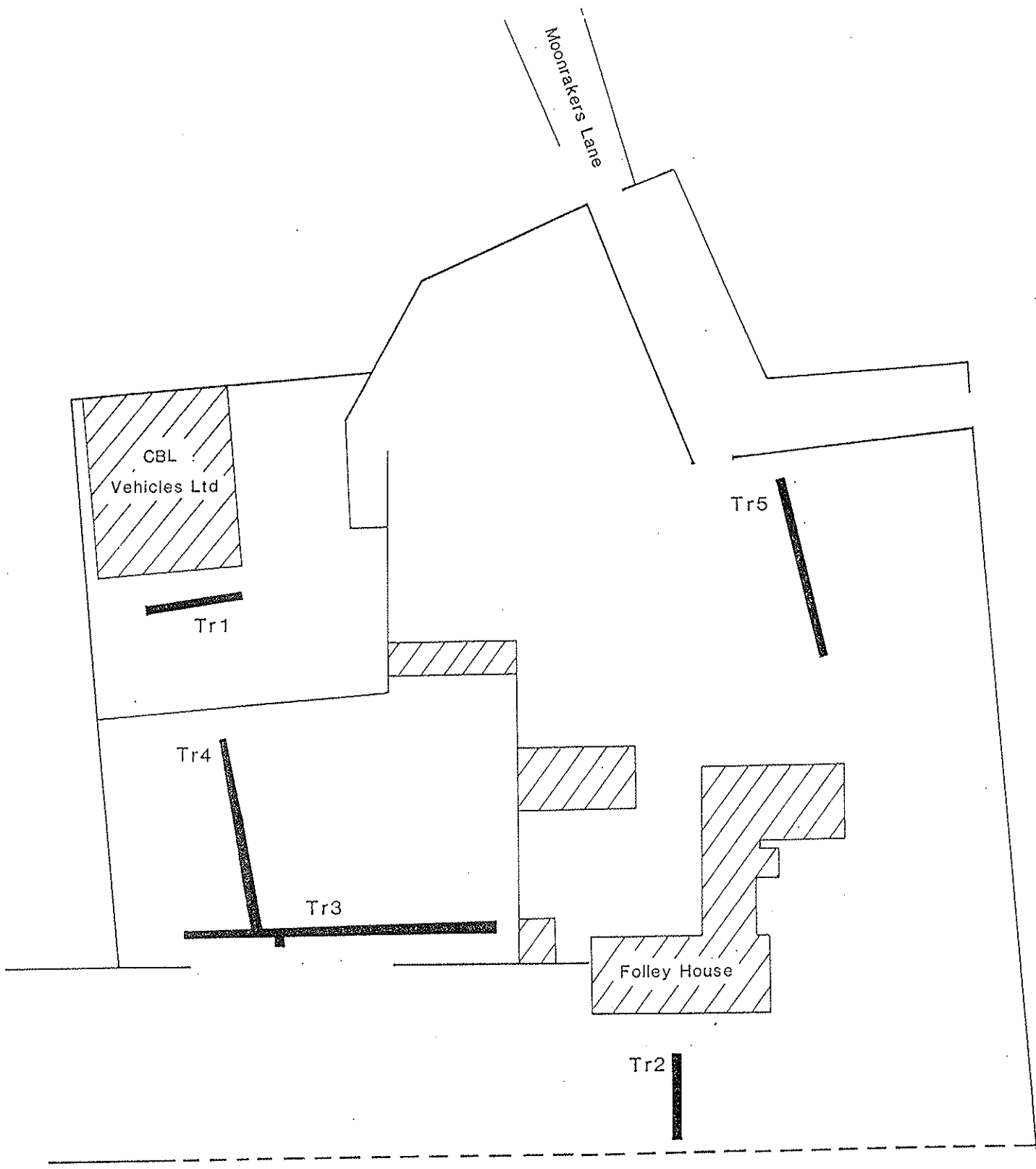
Brian Durham

Oxford Archaeological Unit
September 1989

FIGURES

1. Location of Assessment trenches.
2. Archaeological features: general
3. Trench 2
4. Trench 3
5. Trench 4
6. Distribution of medieval features

Appendix: The Manor House of Bampton D'Oilly by J Blair and S Townley



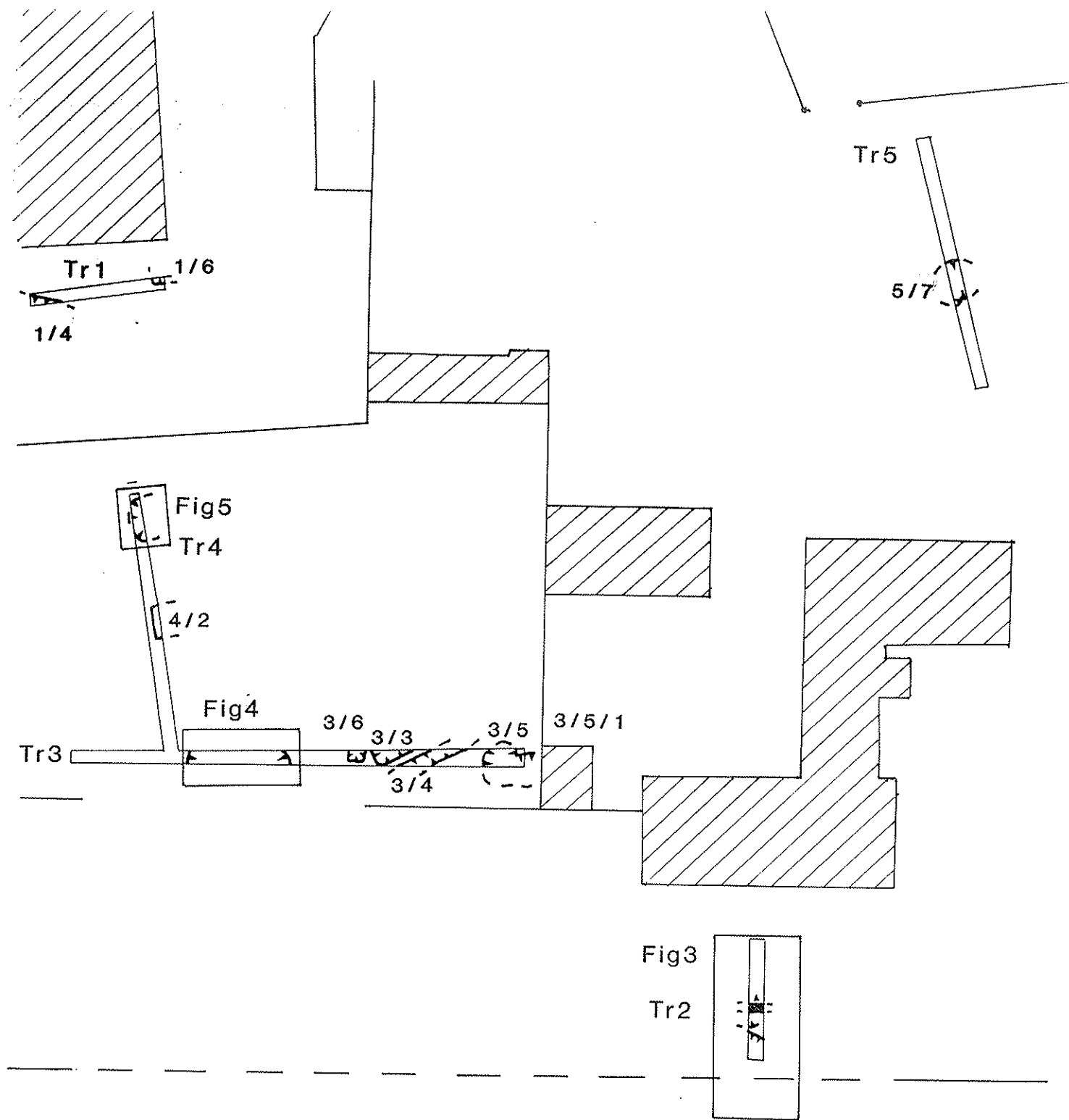
Assessment trench

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0 50m

Fig 1



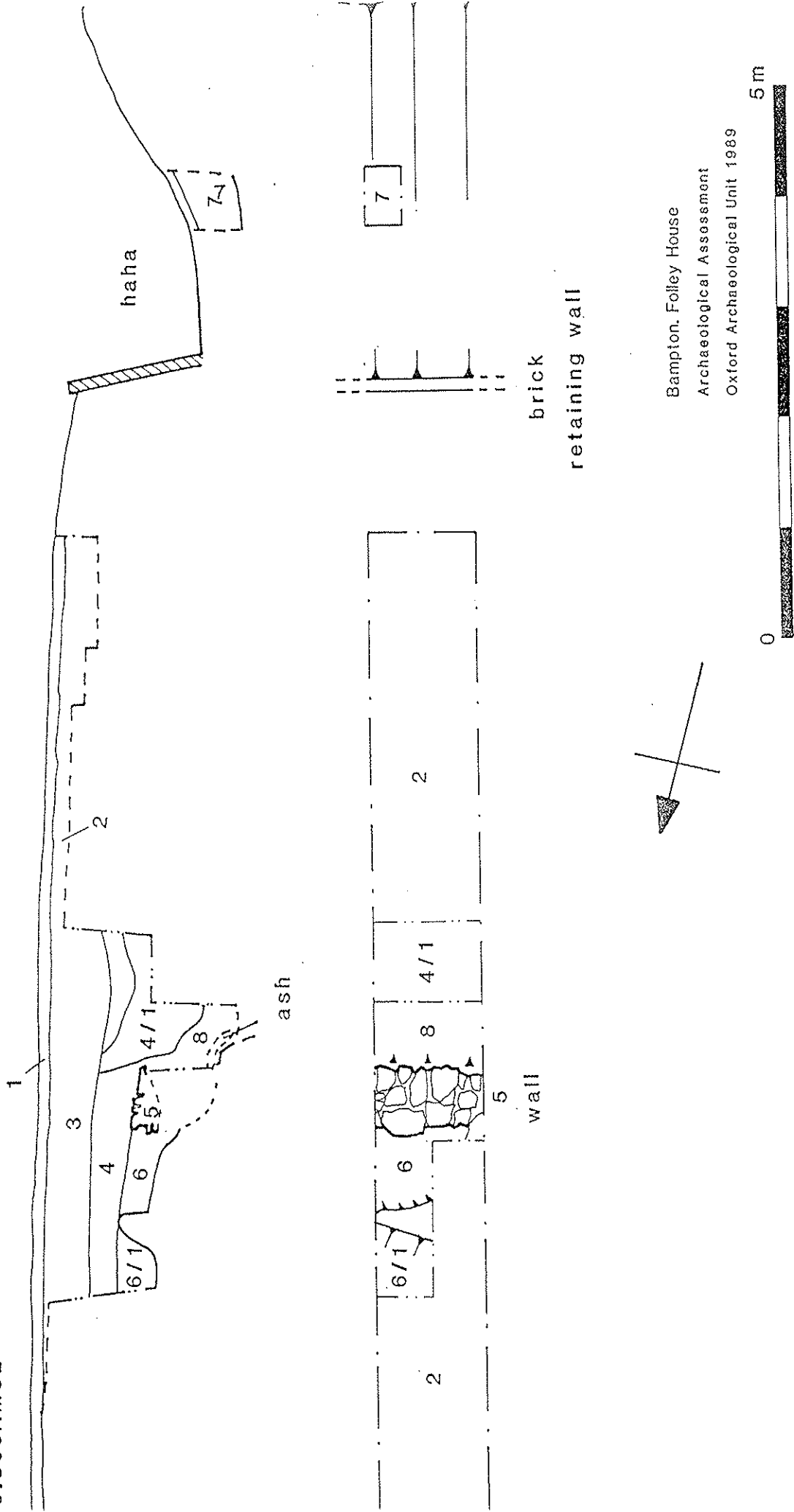
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Fig 2

Tr2

9.865AMSL

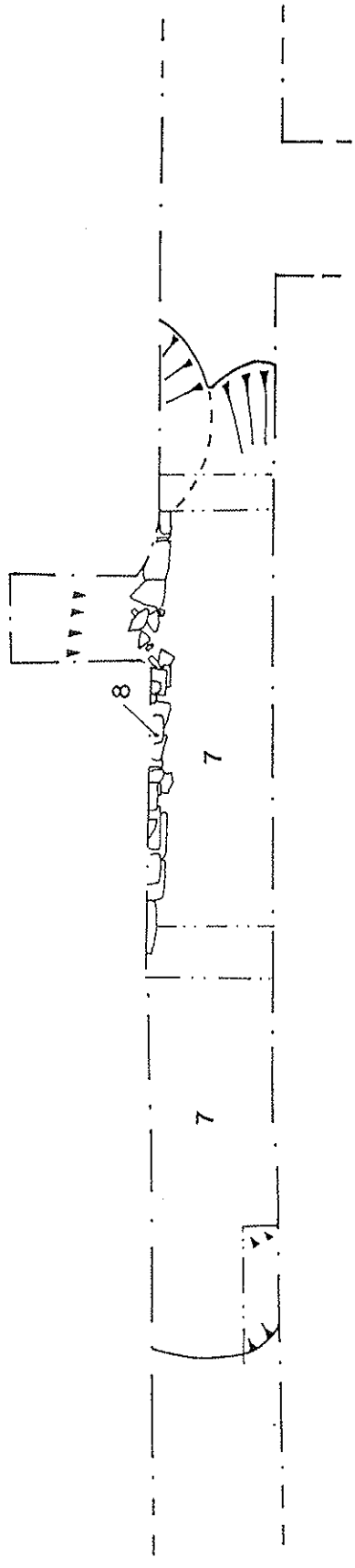
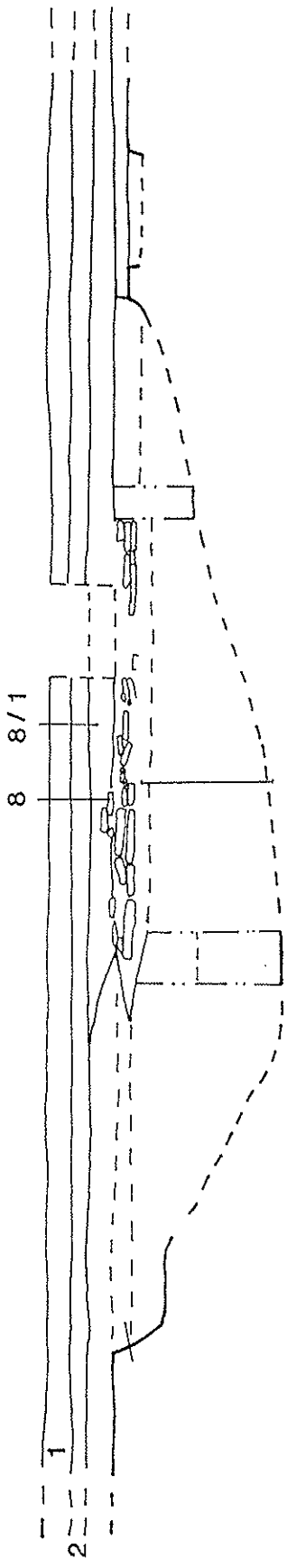


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Fig 3

Tr3

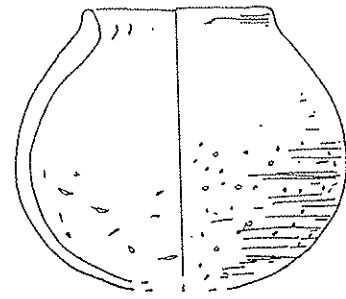
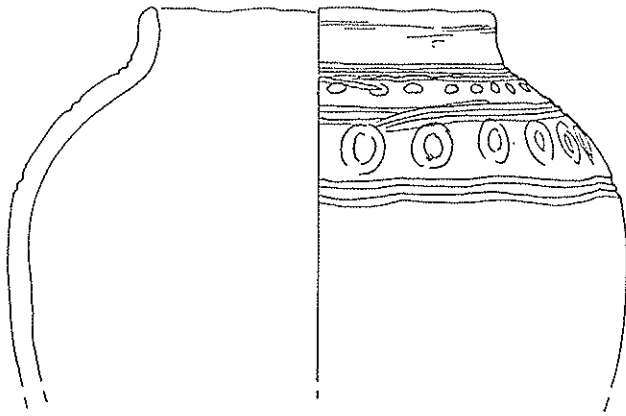
69.865AMSL



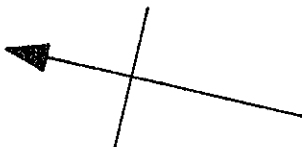
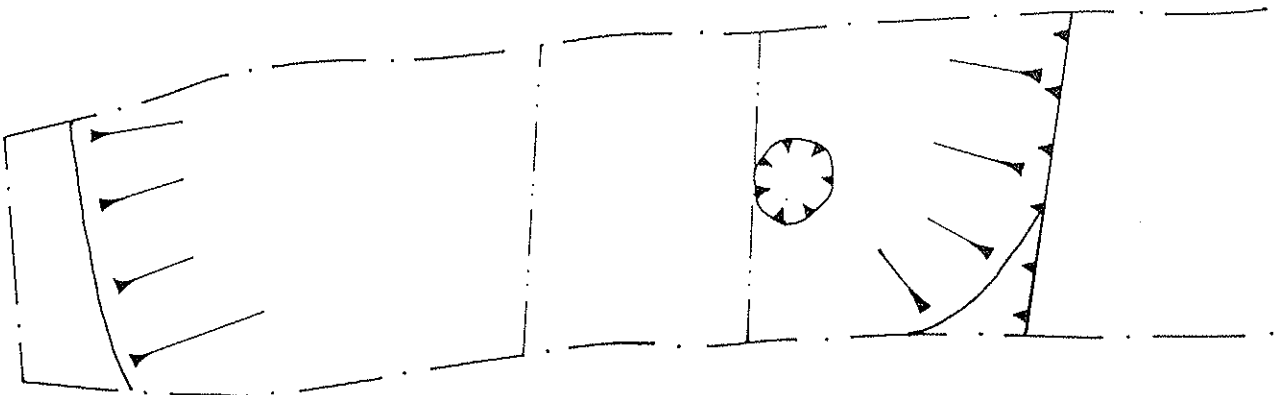
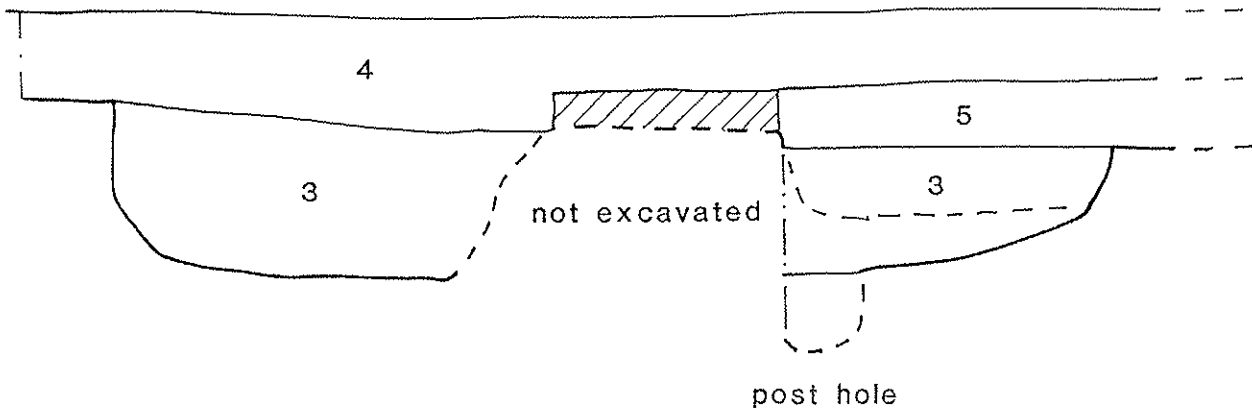
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Fig 4

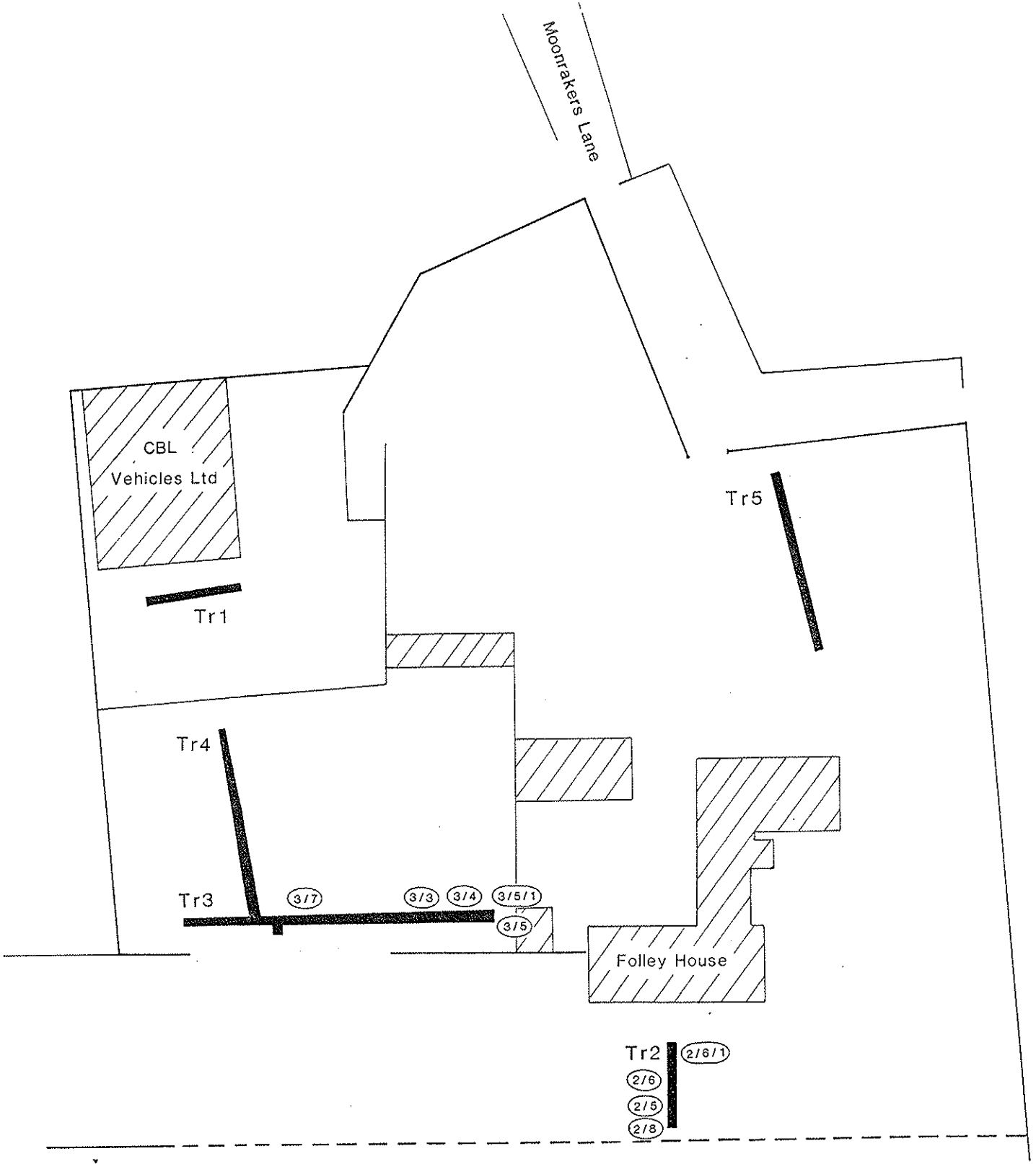


Tr4



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— Assessment trench

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0 ————— 50m

Fig. 6