

THE HERITAGE CENTRE

DOVER.

An Archaeological Assessment
by
The Oxford Archaeological Unit.
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THE HERITAGE CENTRE, DOVER; AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

An archaeological assessment was conducted by the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit on the Queen St car parks in Dover from 24 October to 11 November for Dover District Council in advance of the construction of its Heritage Centre and Museum.

The Background and Archaeological Significance of the Site

Parts of this site have been excavated within the last 20 years by the Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit in advance of real and possible future development threats and remains of great archaeological interest have been found.

A Classis Britannica fort, the possible headquarters of the Roman fleet in Britain, occupied the site from c. 117AD - 208AD. One other possible base for the fleet is known in this country at Lympne but its site has not yet been discovered. Otherwise the fleet was either stationed at Boulogne or actively providing support for the army, normally in the north of Britain.

In c. 270AD a Saxon Shore Fort was constructed overlying the NE corner of the Classis Britannica fort. This formed an integral part of the Roman defences against incursions by the Saxons and is one of only 10 known in Britain.

After the departure of the Roman army the fort remained in use and Saxon occupation (including that of the early migration period) seemed to be centred within the defences. (Early Saxon deposits are rare on town sites and ports situated on the coast are unusual.) A 7th century AD timber framed Saxon church was built on this site, superseded in the Norman period by a stone-built collegiate church, St Martin-Le-Grand. Dover became an increasingly busy port and the medieval town expanded beyond the boundaries of the fort.

The Classis Britannica period material has been published but little information has been available for the later phases of occupation.

A Summary of the Archaeological Assessment

Six trenches were excavated by machine initially and then by hand. Two were excavated for the soil engineer to assess ground stability and the others to test the depth, position and condition of the surviving archaeology. Information available from previous excavation was also examined.

The earliest material uncovered was a short section of chalk-built wall (? 2nd century AD) with associated painted wall plaster in the east of the site (Trench 1). This was almost certainly contemporary with several structures found by KARU buried below the Saxon Shore Fort rampart and thought to be part of the extramural town associated with the Classis Britannica fort. A short section of wall located in the west was probably part of the west wall of barrack block B23 of the Classis Britannica 11 fort (Trench 4,155).

The Saxon Shore Fort wall was located in 3 of the trenches (Trenches 2,3 and 5) including one which exposed part of the bastion of the S wall (Trench 5,201). This has enabled us to place the major Roman structures on a survey of the site. Nowhere, however, is the wall in good condition, having been damaged by post Roman drains, pits, exposure and by careless backfilling after the excavations.

Later material had mostly been excavated away although some sections of medieval walling remain.

Previous excavation had been extensive.

The Extent of Previous Excavation

Previous archaeological excavation is more extensive than had been thought (see Fig 7). The depth to which digging had continued, however, is variable and walls of all dates seem to have been left intact. The available information seems to be accurate.

The backfill is extremely loose in places, especially in the lower car park and the E end of the upper car park, where large blocks of masonry and concrete have been deposited within loose, dark soil. It is more compact to N and W.

There is a small area of unexcavated material in the NW corner of the site, S of the 1970 Burial Ground Site, and between it and the Car Park site, where archaeology could exist as high as 11.50m OD.

Reasonably large pockets of unexcavated archaeology do exist to the S and E of the site. Some of this will have been disturbed by the electricity sub-station and service trenches, the public toilets, the cellar of the Prince Regent public house and foundations of the Market Hall. At present most of this archaeology will not be disturbed by the scheme and there is no anticipated reason to touch it. Two exceptions to this are an area in the SW of the site and an area on the E edge of the upper car park and below present portakabins. (See below - Depth of the Archaeology -).

The Location of the Archaeology

Using a 1:200 version of the site plan from Philp's *Classis Britannica* excavation report, it has been possible to position the archaeology onto the 1:200 site survey. This has been achieved by using the location of the Saxon Shore Fort wall in Trenches 2, 3 and 5, the W wall of barrack block 23 and the visible remains of St Martin-Le-Grand church. Problems were encountered and it is believed that there is some distortion in Philp's published site plan. This remains a 'best-fit', therefore, but is regarded as sufficiently accurate for the purposes of decision making within the present project.

The Saxon Shore Fort wall is substantial and would not easily be pierced by piles even if this were desirable. Our work has shown that the Saxon Shore Fort's wall lies further N than previously thought. The bastion would not, therefore, have been fully exposed in the viewing area of the proposed structure. The W wall of the Shore Fort re-enters the building site in the NW. It has, however, been largely robbed out here (see Philp 1981, Fig 7).

Large parts of the Classis Britannica fort remain to S and W of the Saxon Shore Fort terrace. The walls are mostly of chalk and not, in themselves, a substantial obstacle to piling. Precise plotting of piles is required to avoid these walls.

The area of known Saxon and medieval remains is Scheduled and Scheduled Monument Consent would be needed for any work here.

The Depth of the Archaeology

The levels of surviving archaeology vary tremendously over the site and this is going to pose problems for future construction.

In the NW archaeology survives at a higher level than elsewhere. This area has been excavated so information is available but the Roman walls remain in situ (Burial Ground site 1970). The Saxon Shore Fort Wall, cutting through the Classis Britannica Fort has mostly been robbed away but part of the footings survive, especially those of the bastion - at 11.04m OD. The rampart within the Saxon Shore Fort has served to protect the earlier fort here and four phases of the Classis Britannica 11 fort and parts of the earlier Classis Britannica 1 fort remain. Classis Britannica 11 phase 3 walls seem to survive to a height of 10.44m OD, phase 2 walls to 10.04m OD and phase 1 to 9.97m OD. The N wall of the Classis Britannica 11 fort is at approximately 10.08m OD and Classis Britannica 1 fort walls lie immediately below at 9.31m OD. (See Philp 81, Fig 23, sections 6 and 7). All these deposits would be destroyed by the floor of the building as it is proposed at present.

Immediately S of this site, between the Burial Ground site and the Car Park site, a small area of unexcavated material exists. Archaeological remains of medieval date could be expected as high as 11.50m OD and some excavation will probably be needed here prior to construction.

To the E of the Burial Ground site the Saxon Shore Fort Terrace has cut away all the early archaeology and extensive excavation has already examined the later Roman, Saxon and medieval layers. The highest surviving deposits were encountered at 8.12m OD.

There is a drop in the ground level to the S. Nevertheless, fragments of medieval walls were found as high as 8.92m OD and part of the Saxon Shore fort S wall to 9.32m OD (Philp 1981, Fig 24, section 11). Where we examined the Shore Fort wall to the W its maximum height was 8.82m OD. Its level drops further E and the top of the bastion was at 7.56m OD. The wall S of the Prince Regent public house was at 5.28m OD (though the bastion immediately to the S of this probably survives at a higher level). The Classis Britannica walls in the S of the site are generally at a lower level. The wall we located was at 8.26m OD; the gateway is at 5.96m OD and the E wall of B23 at 7.72m OD (Philp, 1981, Fig 24, section 9). Not all of this area has been excavated (See Fig 7). In the W archaeological layers can be expected at approximately 9m or even slightly higher and observation may be required here. Further E, in the upper car park, the archaeology will slope down to about 7.50m OD. Under the present scheme no damage would be expected here for the Heritage Centre floor level but where the Museum building raft cuts in at the lower level observation would be required.

The ground level steps down to the E to the Prince Regent public house and again to the market hall area (ie the lower car park). The archaeology below the pub yard is at approximately 6.45m OD. Below the pub itself there are cellars about 2m deep. In the market hall area the archaeology is expected at 5.66m OD. Much of the present car park area has been excavated to a considerable depth (below the water table) and the backfill is loose. Some of the S part of the car park is Scheduled.

Display of the Archaeology

Two areas have already been suggested for display:

1 St Martin-Le-Grand, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, is at present exposed. It is a Norman, stone built collegiate church and overlies remains of a 7th century chapel lying within the Saxon Shore Fort, as well as the Classis Britannica I and II fort perimeter walls. The Saxon chapel was timber framed and this could be difficult to present but this area does offer good potential for showing the continuity of use of the site. Consolidation work would be necessary to the standing structure.

2 The area of the Saxon Shore Fort bastion and Classis Britannica east gateway would also be interesting to display. Only the footings of the gateway survive (Philp 1981, plates VIIIA and VIIIB) but visually this is still attractive. These walls are of chalk, however, which are easily damaged by exposure to frost and some form of covering would be required. (NB the S part of the gateway and the area to the W has not yet been excavated).

The gateway is partially overlain by a Saxon Shore Fort bastion. The top 0.7 of the bastion survives only as rubble wall core. It is loose in places and badly disturbed by later pits and pipe trenches. Where seen, the facing was in good condition.

One other area of potential display is that in the NW corner.

The N wall of the Classis Britannica II fort runs across the site within which lies a barrack building constructed in 4 phases (including an early workshop phase). This sits on a building and the N perimeter wall of the Classis Britannica I fort. Visually this is interesting (see Philp 1981 plates XXA and XXB) but would be complicated to present to the public and without the chronological impact of the other areas. The majority of the walls are of chalk with some tufa blocks.

The SW corner of this site is the only area of reasonable size which would be available for research excavation. It had previously been overlain by Queen Street. Part of the gateway of the Classis Britannica II fort lies here (? Classis Britannica I material beneath) with medieval and post medieval layers above. It is outside the Saxon Shore Fort, however, and would probably not contain the interesting late Roman and Saxon deposits found within. Excavation here may be desirable if the bastion and gateway were to be displayed.

This report is, of necessity, general. Any detailed recommendations about positioning of piles and excavations in advance of construction must await the final building proposals.

Sources

Philp B J, 1981 The Excavation of the Roman Forts of the Classis Britannica at Dover 1970 - 1977. Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit.

The Assessment Trenches

Trench 1 (Fig 1)

This trench was excavated in the NW corner of the old Market Hall for the soil engineer to test the stability of the ground. It was dug to a depth of 3m in the NW corner of an old KARU excavation (Market Hall Site 1982) and used the original sections to N and W.

On the surface it measured 2.0m x 1.6m but was stepped in considerably because of the instability of the backfill despite shoring. At the bottom unexcavated material was removed to straighten the sections.

At 3.44m OD a 1.2m length of wall built of chalk blocks was uncovered. It ran E-W and was faced on the S side. The N side was not exposed. Only 1 course of walling survived (0.12m high) on top of substantial chalk footings with a 0.26m offset to the S. Painted wall plaster had once faced the wall and a gravel surface abutted the wall (? post-use). It is thought that this wall is part of a building of the Classis Britannica II extramural settlement.

Above destruction associated with the wall (35 and 37) was a 0.36m thick deposit of clean silty clay, 34, perhaps connected to the construction of the Saxon Shore Fort.

A deep sequence of complex occupation deposits of very dark silt overlay 34, to 5.53m OD. The significance of these could not be assessed from the section. They seemed to be Roman in date.

A further 0.13m (to 5.66m OD) of complicated stratigraphy - mostly brown silty clays - overlay the Roman occupation deposits. Intercutting pits, postholes and gullies suggested possible wooden buildings but no dating material was obtained. (? Medieval).

0.60m of post-medieval and modern build-up overlay the sensitive archaeology - mostly make-up for the car park. Part of the foundations of the Market Hall were visible 1.28m deep.

The excavation backfill was very loose.

Trench 2 (Fig 2)

A trench 2.10m x 3.0m was excavated to the S of the yard of the Prince Regent public house for the soil engineer. This was on the N edge of an old KARU excavation (Queen St Garage Site, 1974). The fill of some ? medieval pits was excavated.

The S wall of the Saxon Shore Fort was located at 5.28m OD. The full width of the wall was not exposed but a small section of the N (inner) face was

discovered. The face was constructed of large chalk blocks (0.34m x 0.28m) and the core of chalk rubble in cream mortar which was loose and eroded.

The wall was mostly cut away in this trench by a series of ? medieval pits cutting down beyond the depth of the trench. The latest pit, 50, was 2.20m wide, 1.30m deep and capped by large chalk blocks. The pits were cut from 6.31m OD, 0.90m below the modern ground surface of the pub yard.

The deposits above these pits appeared to be modern.

Trench 3 (Fig 3)

This trench, originally 3.0m x 2.6m was excavated to locate the Saxon Shore Fort wall where it would have been pierced by piles of the proposed building. It was extended to the N by 1.4m to fully expose the face of the wall. KARU had excavated here (Warehouse South Site 1973) and only their backfill was removed.

Part of the N (inner) face of the fort wall, 105, built of chalk blocks, was exposed although its precise line was difficult to pinpoint because of later disturbance. The wall core, which was compact here, was constructed of horizontal courses of chalk rubble within cream-coloured sandy mortar with pebble inclusions. It was possible to approximately fix the position of the S face. The wall was at 8.82m OD at highest, 1.48m below the ground surface.

The Shore Fort wall was cut by a large (? channel) pit to the E and a stone-lined tank to the NE.

The deposits seen above the wall were all either excavation backfill or banking for the York Street by-pass road.

Trench 4 (Fig 4)

This trench extended 14.80m E-W and was 1.40 - 2.10m wide. It was excavated to establish the depth of the archaeology in the centre of the proposed building and the extent of earlier excavation in this area.

All the soil removed was excavation backfill (Warehouse South Site, 1973 and 1977-78 and Bacon Factory Site 1976-7) and the remaining deposits were not easy to interpret:

To the E the trench became very deep, presumably where the Saxon Shore Fort terrace had cut into earlier deposits. As archaeological excavation had already taken place here and the surviving deposits would be far below any level of destruction no attempt was made to investigate further.

A very small part (0.50m) of the W wall of barrack-block building B23 was observed (155). It was chalk built, 2 blocks wide and surviving to only 2 courses (to 8.26m OD). It sat on light brown sandy clay (156) and was cut away in the N (? by the Saxon Shore Fort terracing).

Further E part of a flint and gravel cobbled surface was uncovered, 156. This, along with soil layers described but not excavated, was almost certainly Roman. The Saxon Shore Fort terrace, located in the N edge of the

trench cut through some of these layers.

In the W of the site the SW corner of a building, 150, was found immediately below the car park surface at 9.82m OD and slightly bedded into it. The base of the wall was 0.60m wide and built of flint and large beach pebbles (c. 0.30m in size) bonded by compact cream mortar with small flint and gravel inclusions. This clearly corresponds to the 'medieval building' excavated by KARU in 1973 on the Warehouse South Site (Philp 1981, Fig 16).

Trench 5 (Fig 5)

This 3.2m x 3.8m trench was excavated to locate the position of the Saxon Shore fort bastion and part of the S wall. Only previously excavated material was removed (BMW Site 1974).

A 1.60m stretch of the S (external) face of the Saxon Shore Fort wall, 200, was exposed at 6.83m OD to a depth of 6.20m OD. It was constructed of faced tufa blocks. Bonded into it was the bastion wall, 201, surviving to a height of 7.56m OD. The upper part of the bastion here existed only as wall core, formed in the same way as that observed in trench 3, but facing stones of tufa were visible at 6.27m OD and in the joint with the main wall. A tile course was also present here. Part of the facing of the bastion had been destroyed by large blocks of concrete carelessly deposited in the excavation backfill. Pipe trenches had also cut through the top of the wall and the bastion.

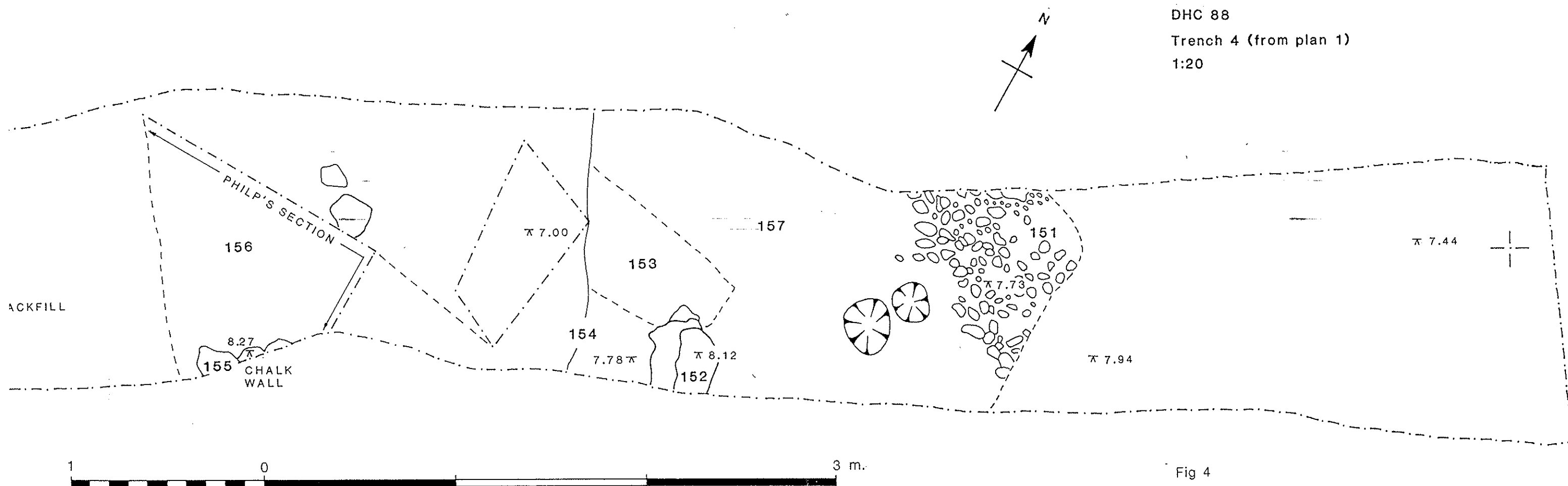
Trench 6 (Fig 6)

In trench 6 (2.2m x 3.4m), unexcavated archaeological deposits survived to a height of 8.12m OD. Here a wall, 254, 0.7m - 0.80m wide ran NW-SE. It was constructed of large and tightly packed chalk blocks. Its foundation trench was cut into light brown silty clay, 258. No datable objects were recovered.

Above was 1.18m of excavation backfill, apparently of 2 sites: (Playground Site 1970 and Bacon Factory Site 1976 - 7). This helped to demonstrate the full extent of previous archaeological excavation.

GILL HEY

NOVEMBER 1988



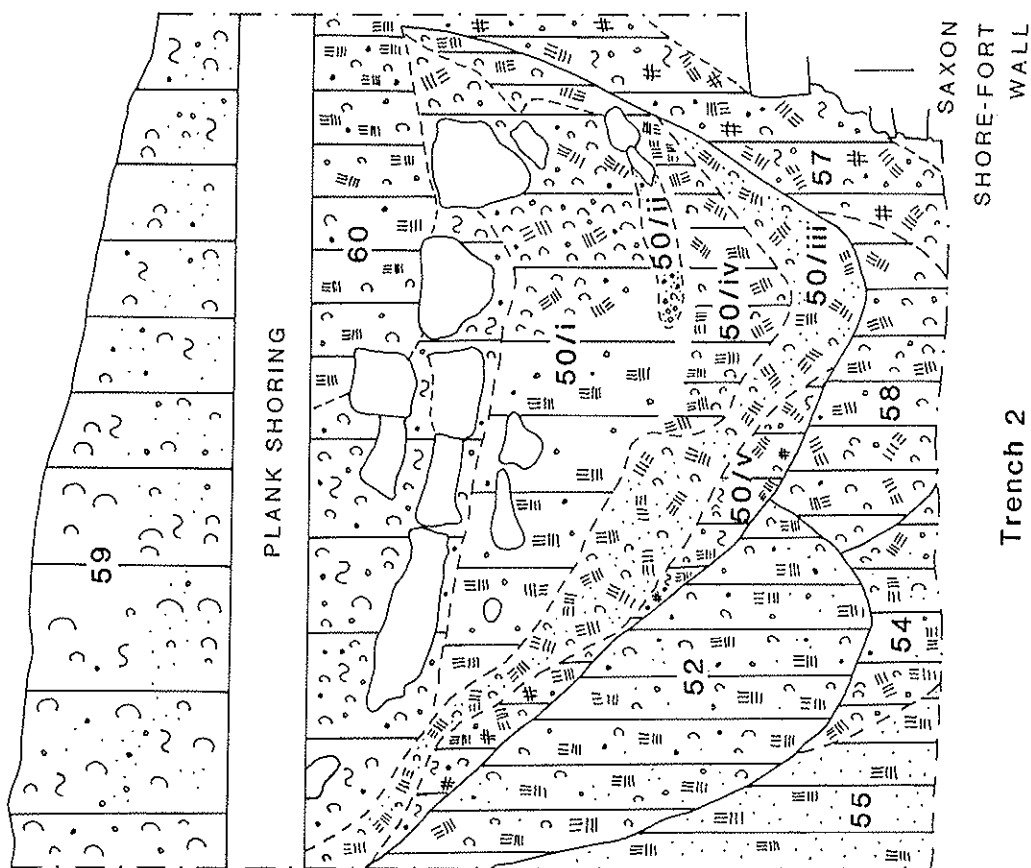
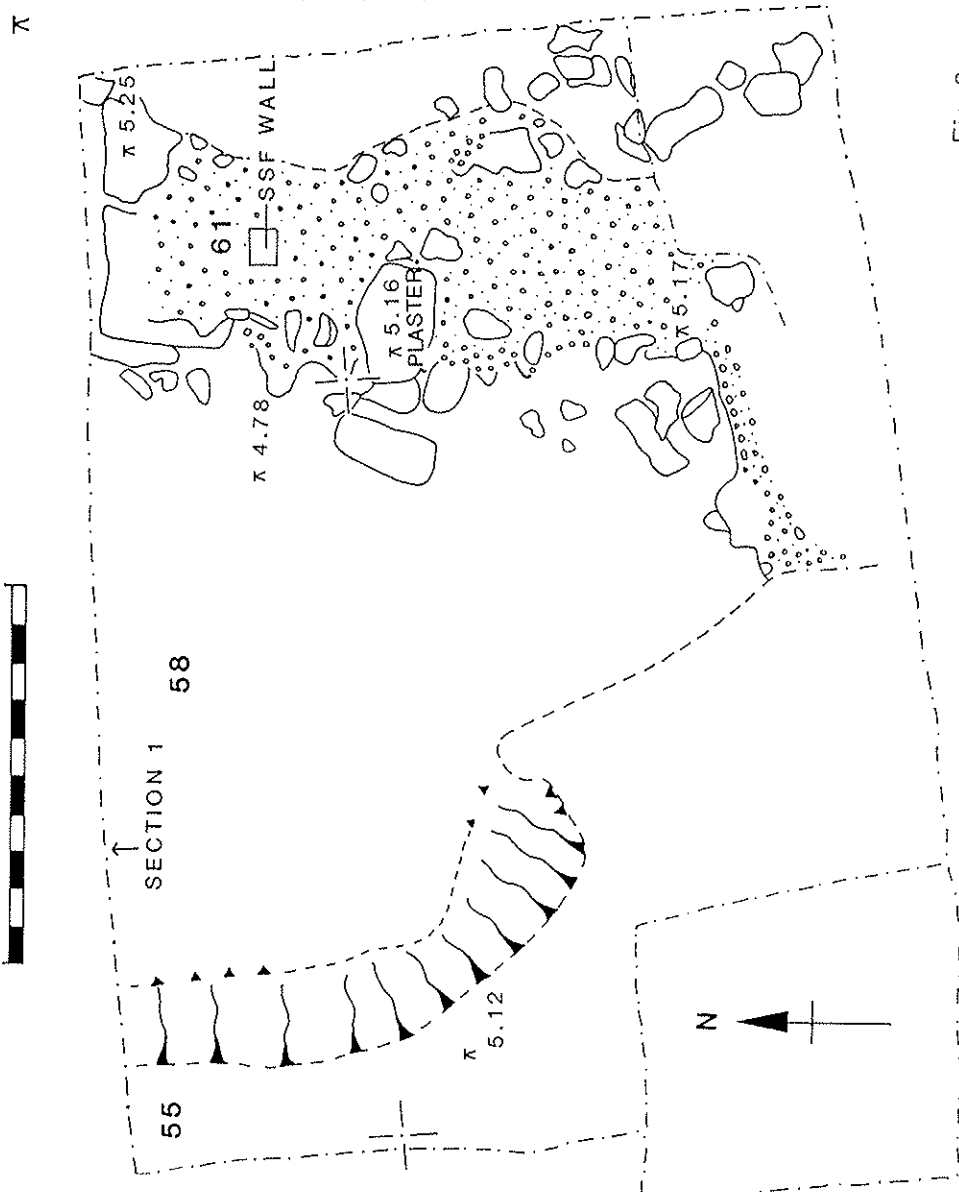
DCH 88

Trench 2 (from plans 1&2)

1:20



6.30m



Trench 2
Section 1
1:20

Fig 2

DHC 88

Trench 3 (from plan 1)

1:20

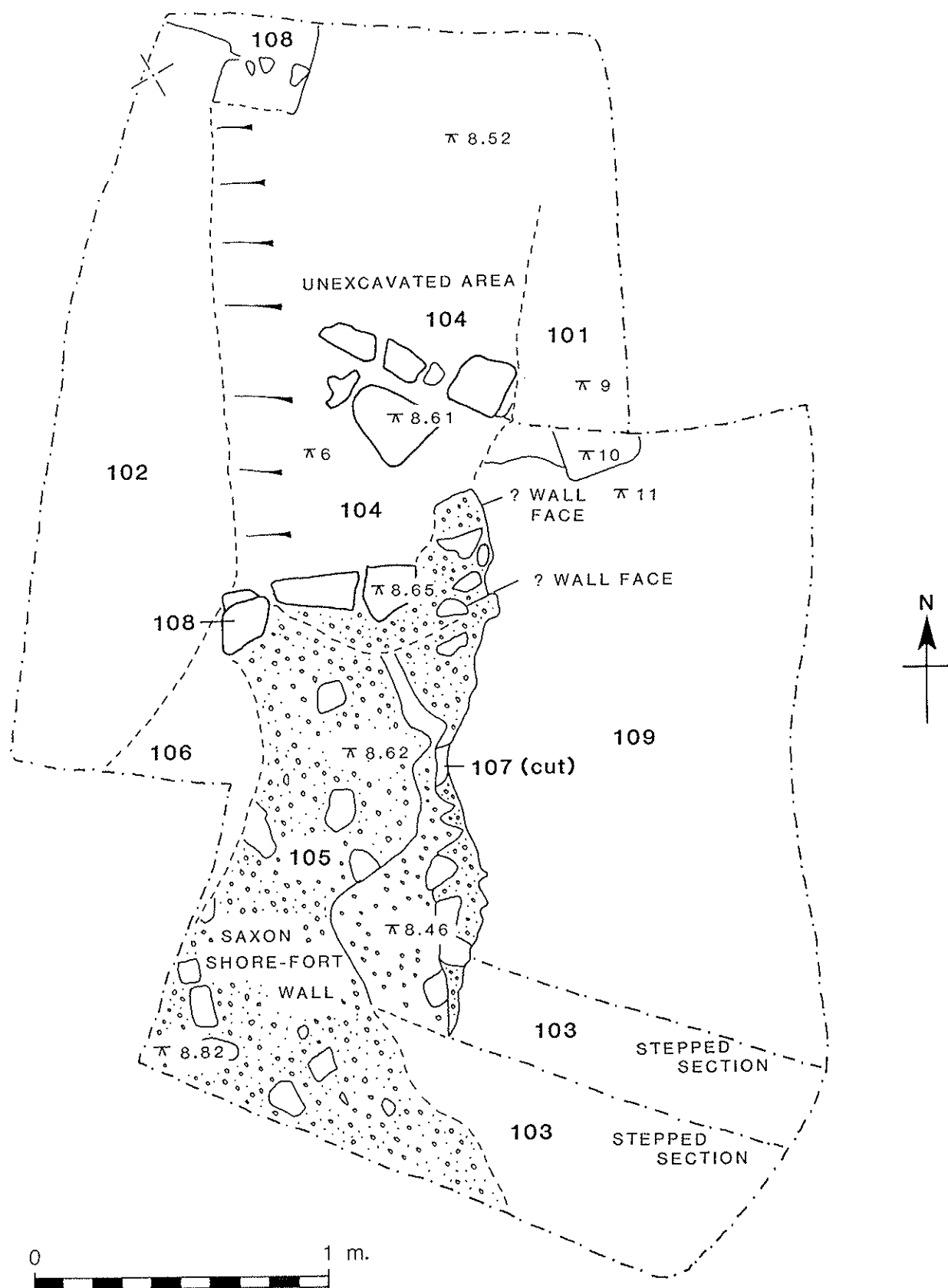


Fig 3 .

DHC 88

Trench 5 (from plan 1)

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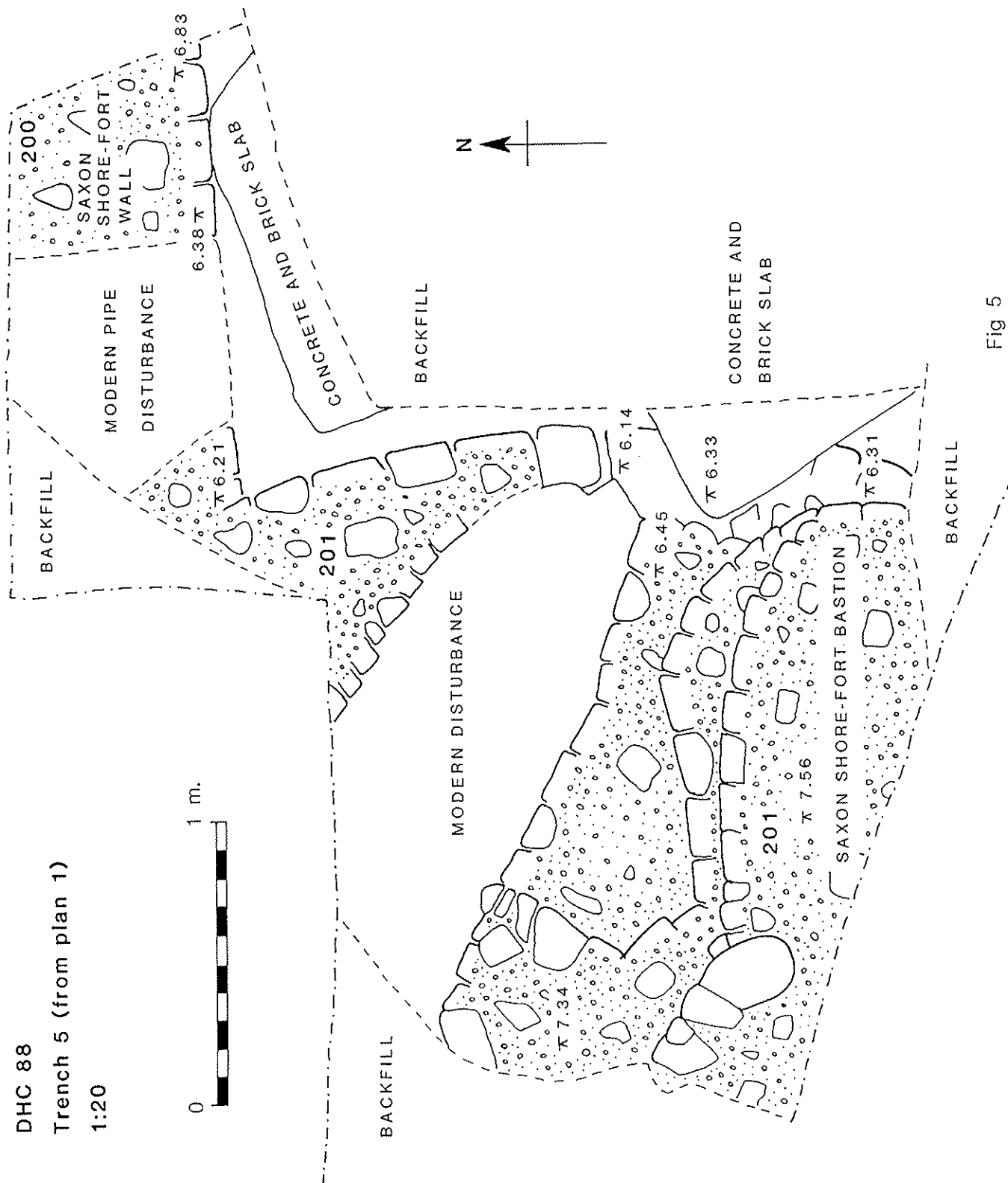


Fig 5

DHC 88
Trench 6 (from plan 1)
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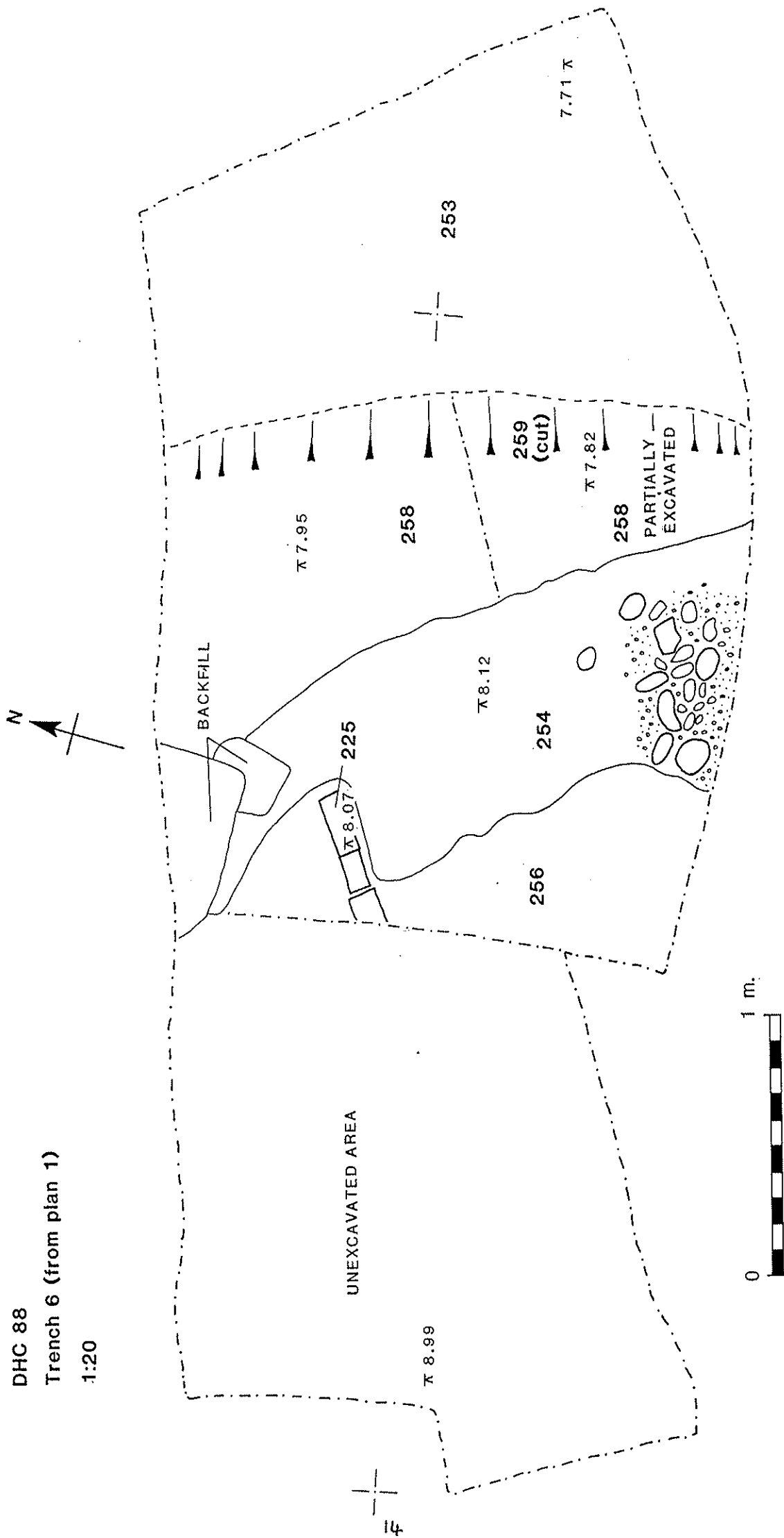
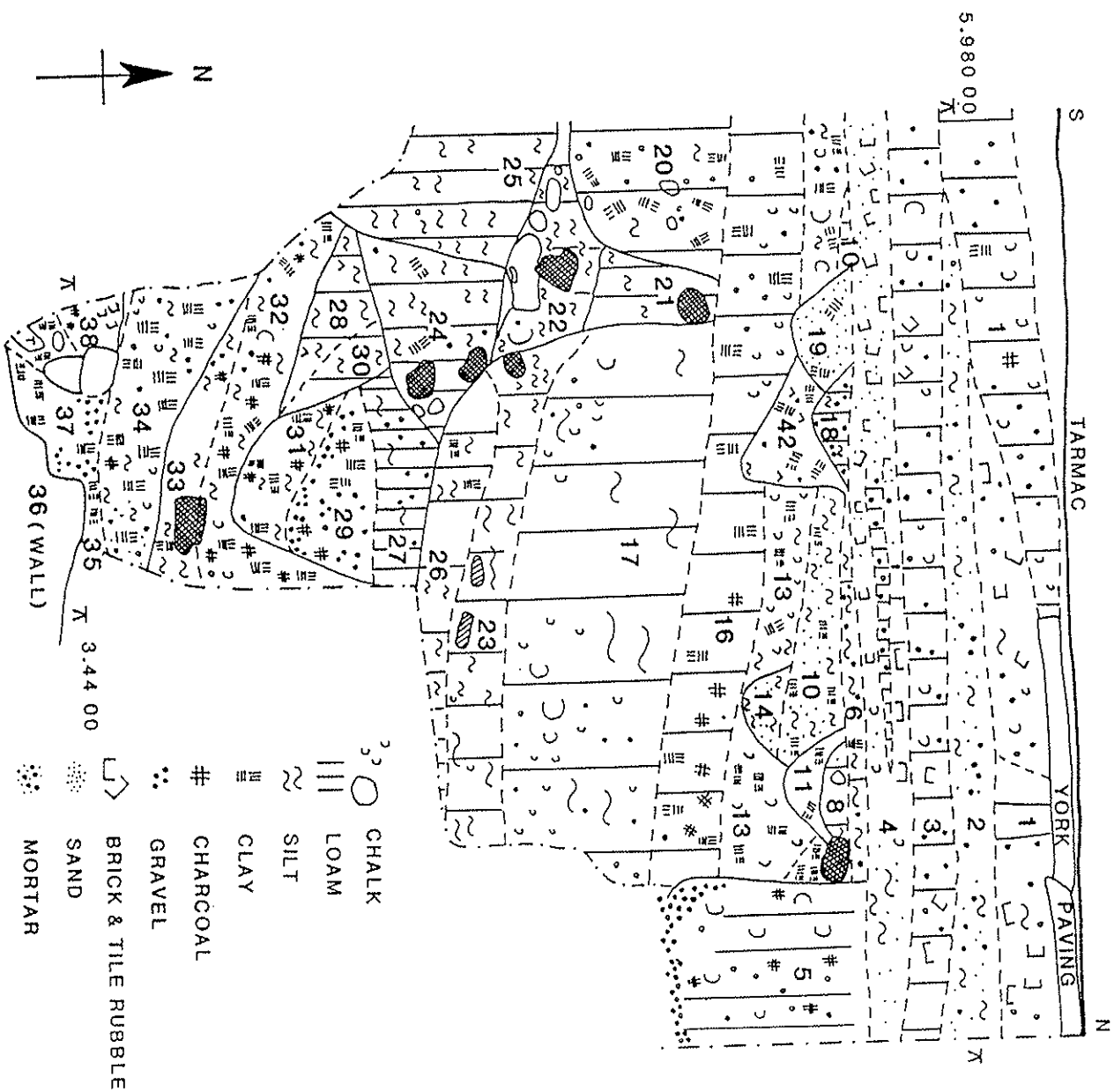
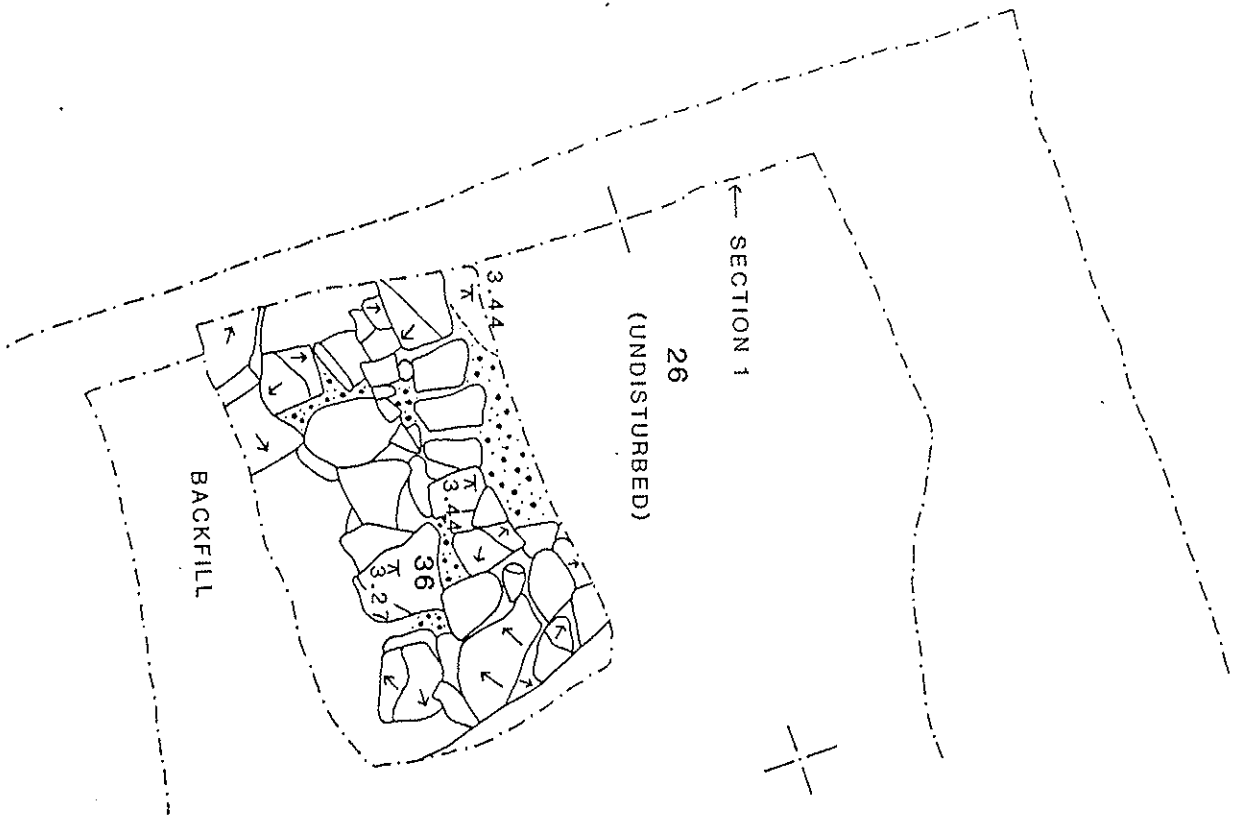


Fig. 6



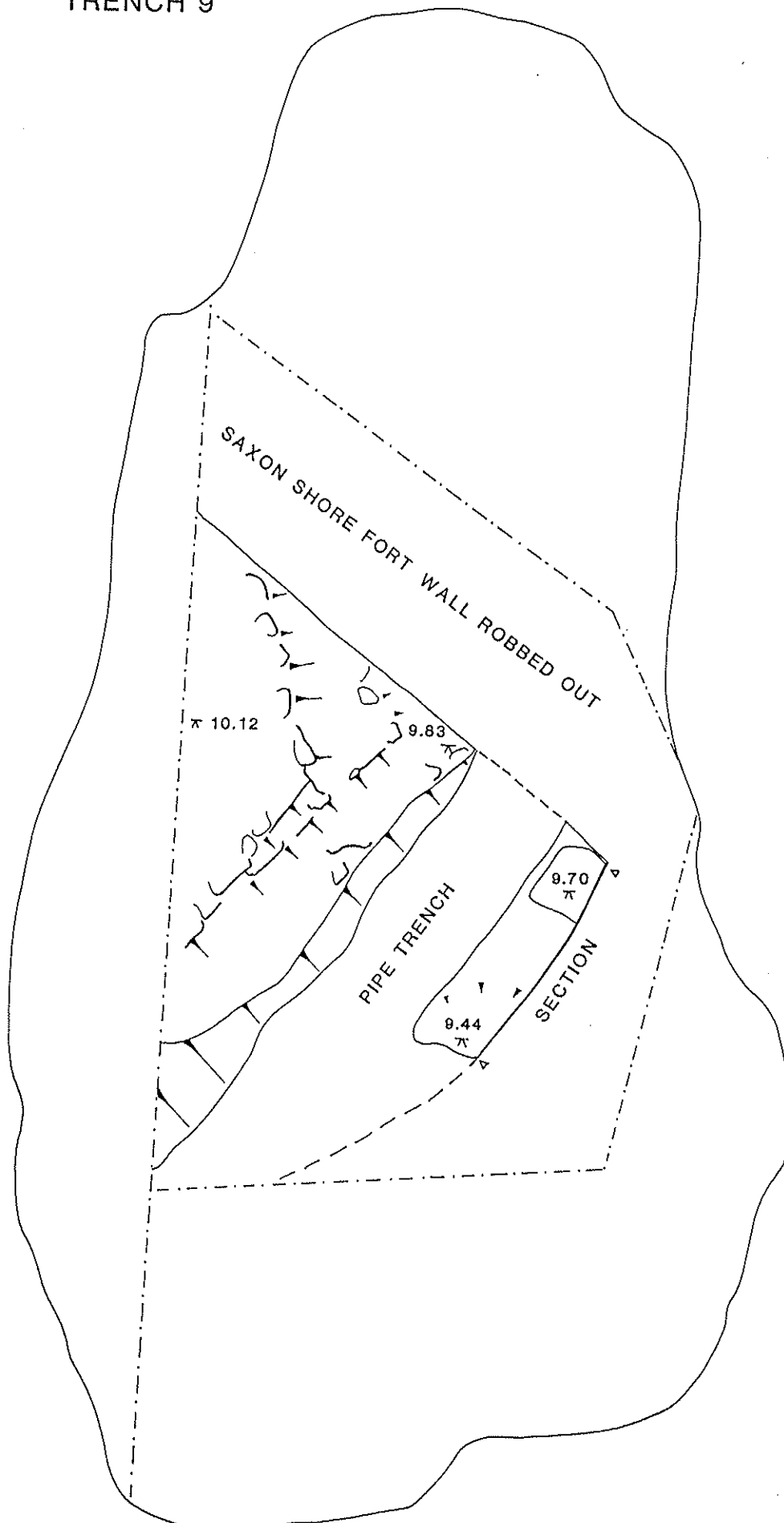
DHC 88

Trench 1 (from plans 1&4)

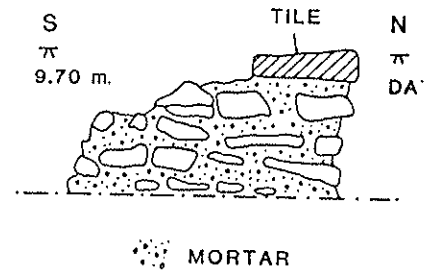
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- Fig 1

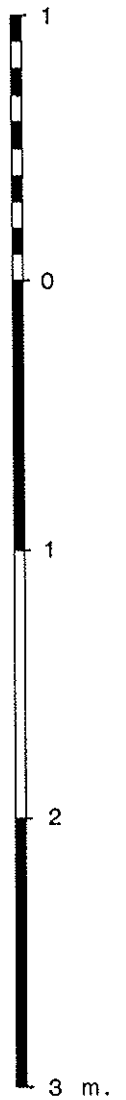
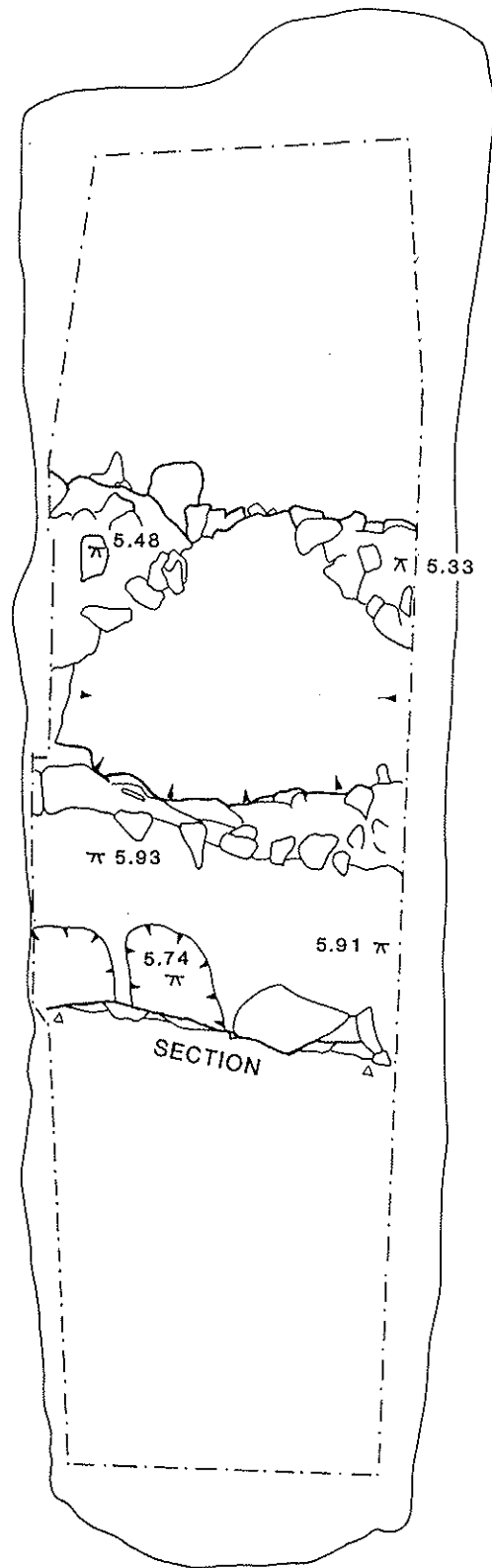
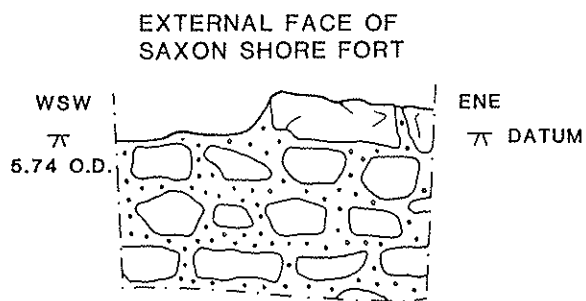
TRENCH 9



FACE OF BASTION

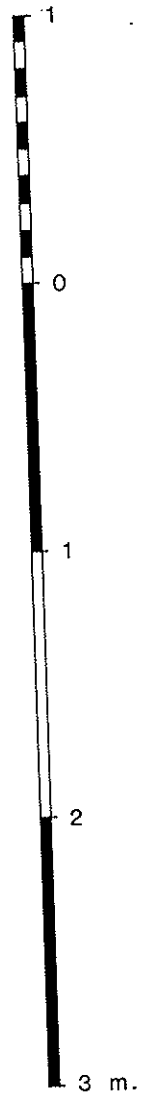
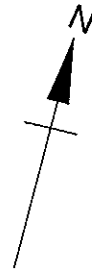
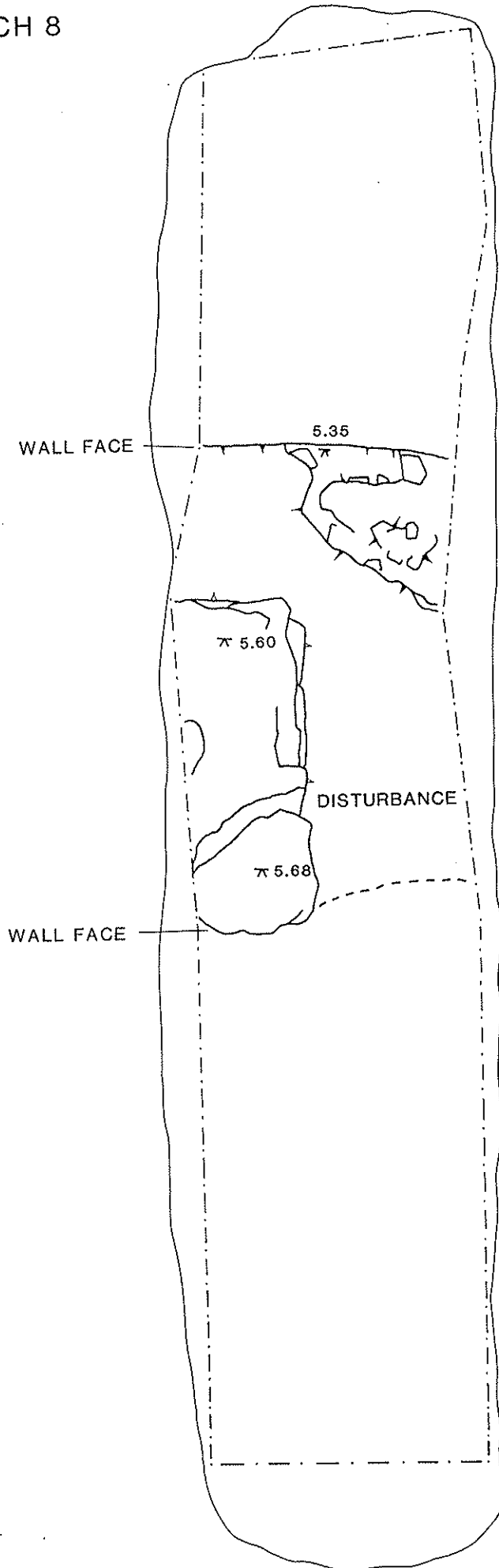


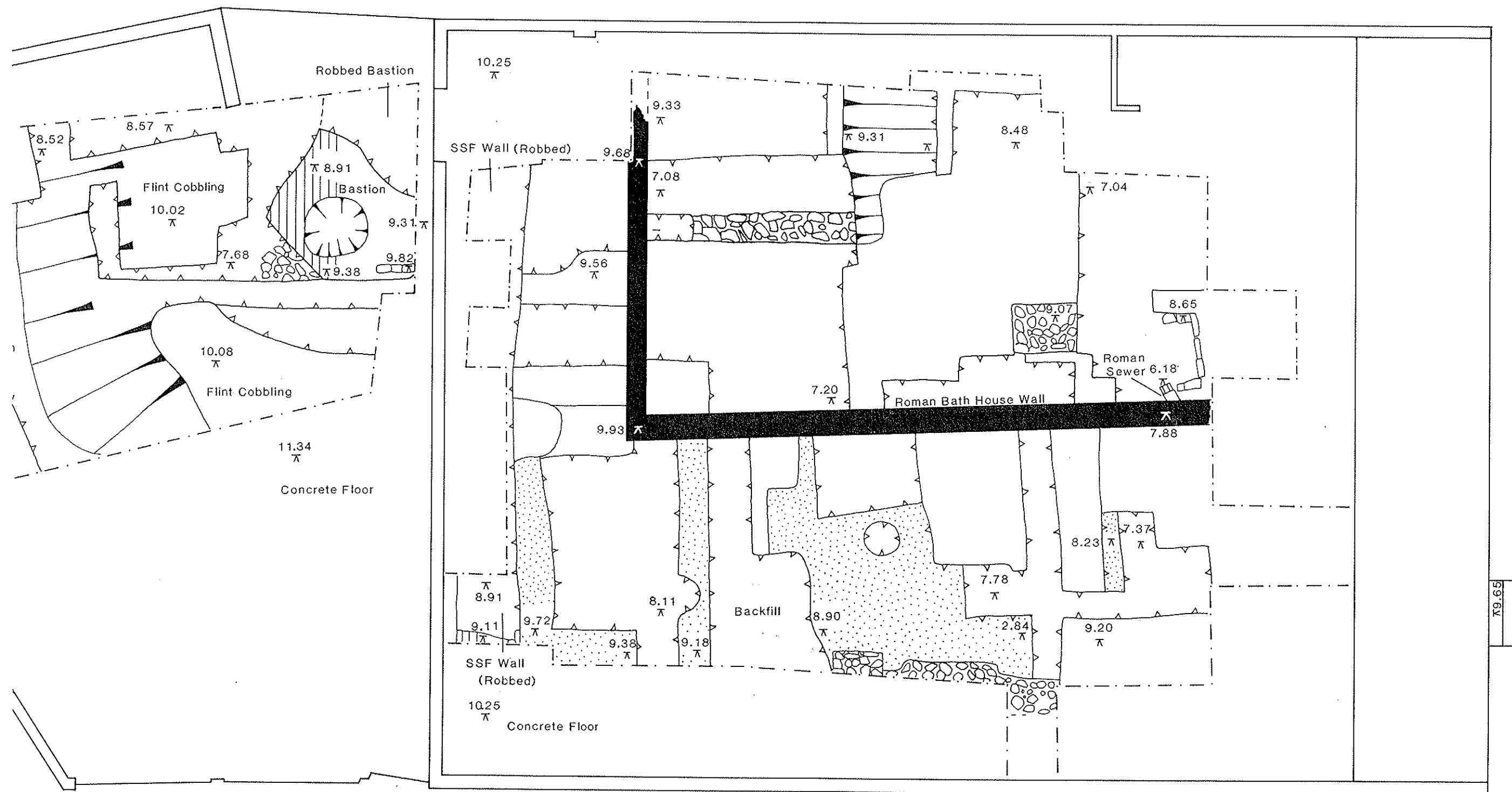
TRENCH 7



TRENCH 8

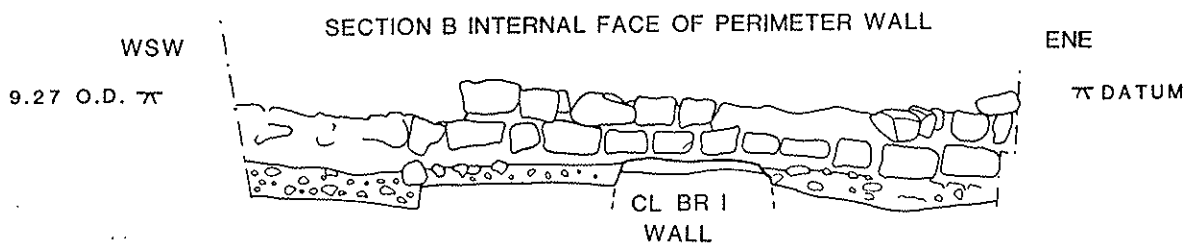
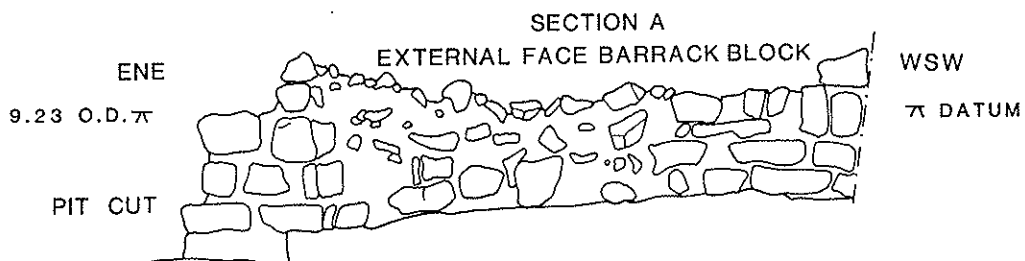
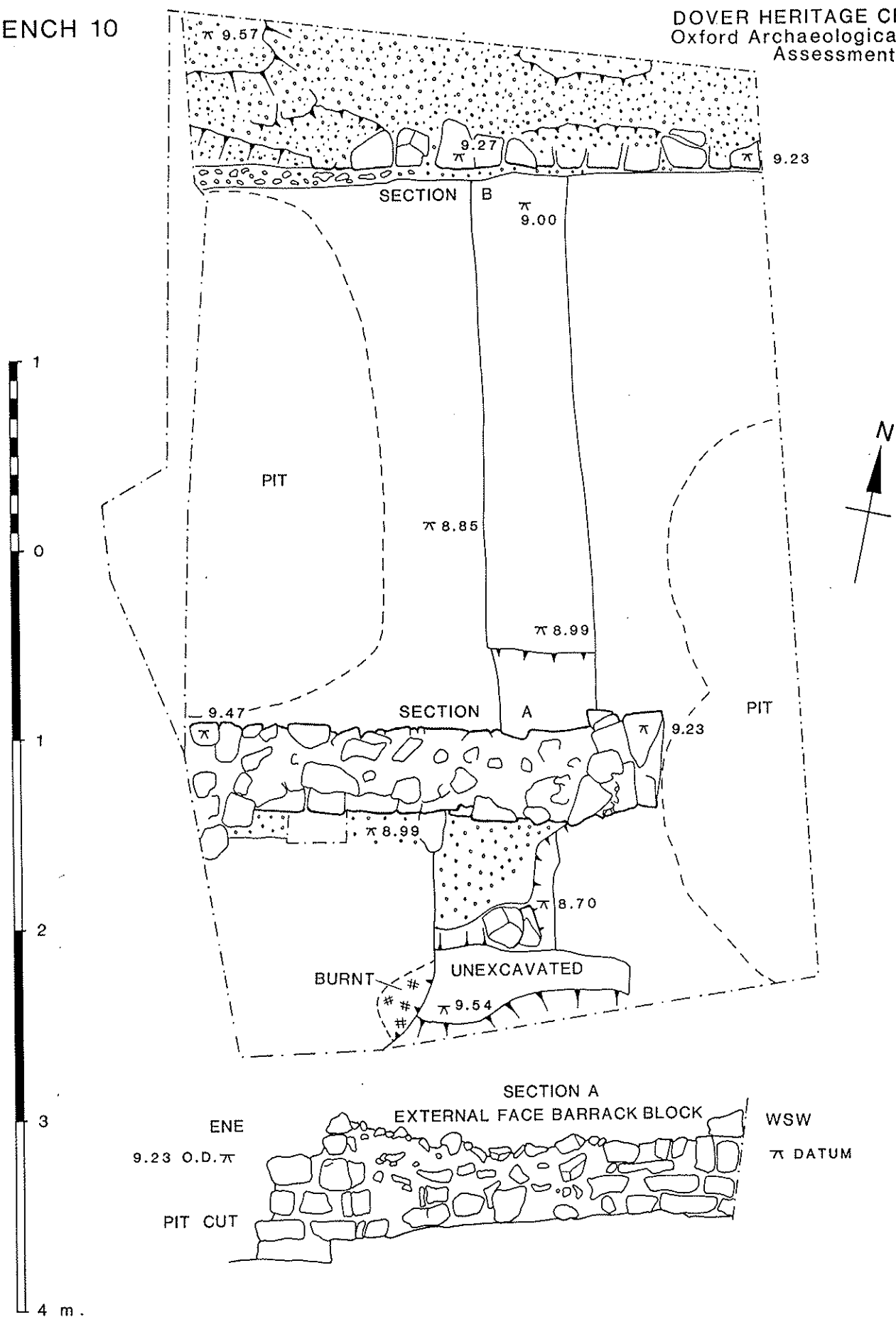
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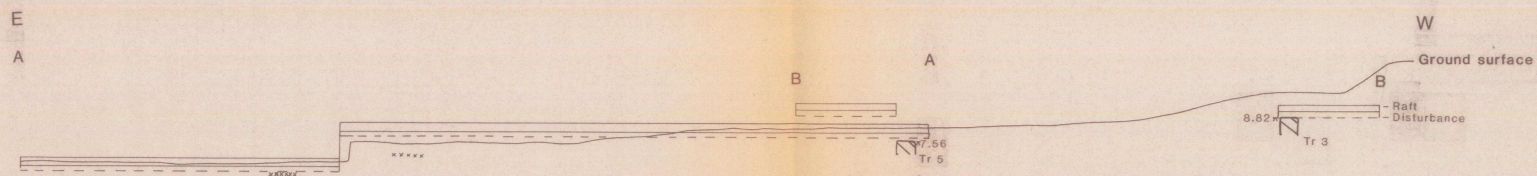




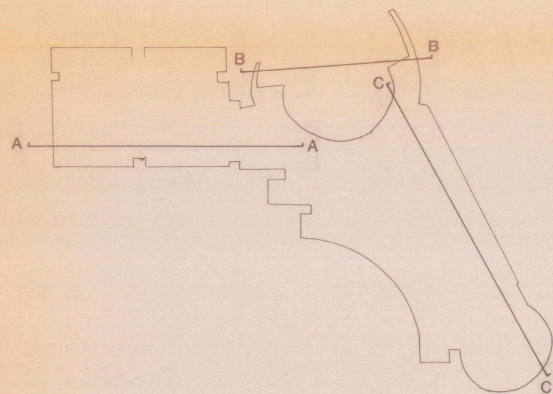
TRENCH 10

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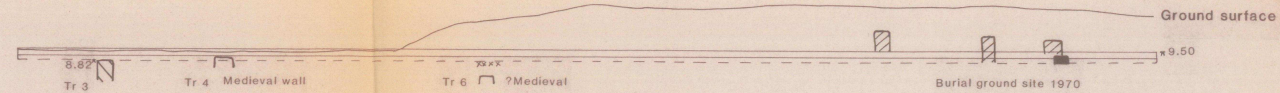




Level of archaeology



S
C



Dover Heritage Centre 1:200
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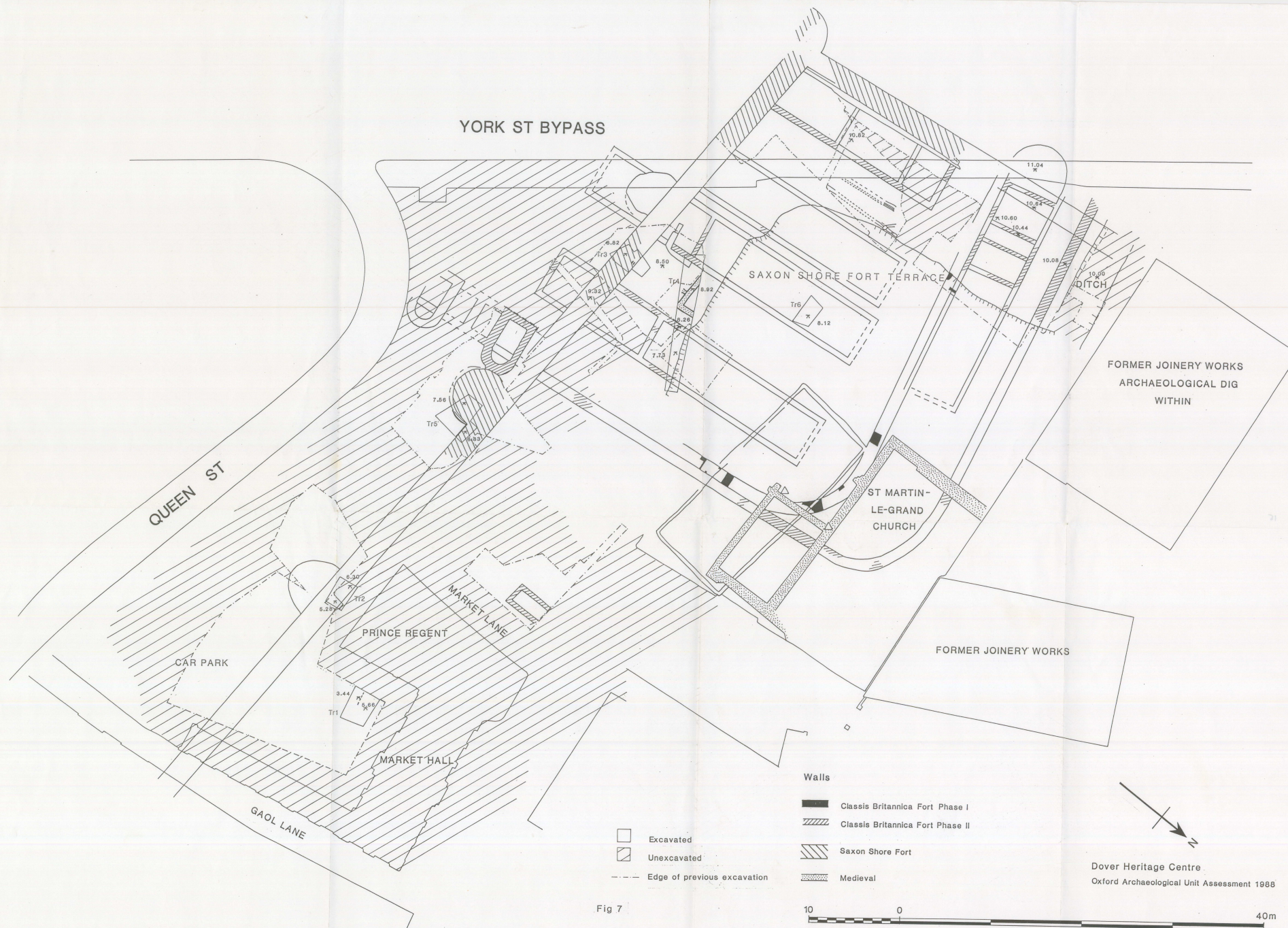


Fig 7