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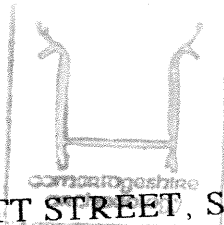
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Medieval Settlement at Pratt Street, Soham



Cambridgeshire
County Council

Rural Strategy



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FULBOURN COMMUNITY CENTRE
HAGGIS GAP, FULBOURN
CB1 5HD Tel: 831614
(Fax 331670)

MEDIAEVAL SETTLEMENT AT PRATT STREET, SOHAM

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSEMENT 1991

By
~~Simon Bray~~ *Alison Taylor + Gerry Wain*

Cambridgeshire County Council, Archaeology
Rural Management Section
Department of Property
Shire Hall
Castle Hill
Cambridge CB3 0AP



Plotting the trenches at Pratt Street, Soham

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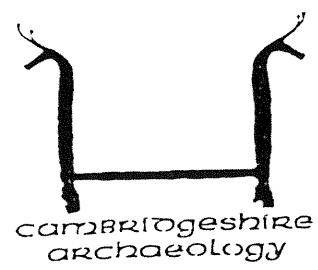
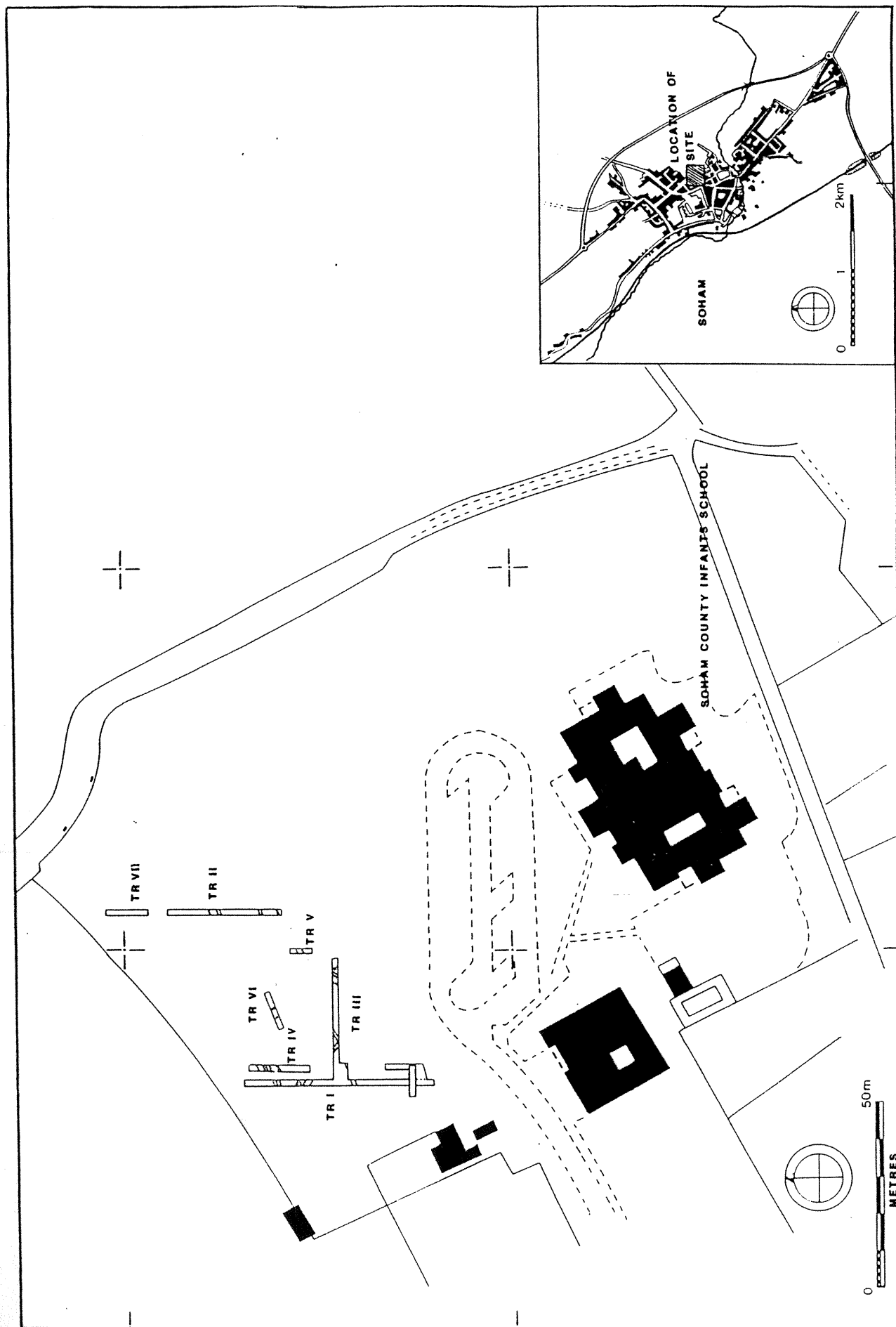


FIGURE 1

SOHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL LOCATION OF TRENCHES



ABSTRACT

A assessment excavation in the grounds of Soham County primary school revealed evidence of Early Medieval domestic occupation and a ditch system corresponding to two ring-ditches shown in aerial photographs. The site archive and finds are deposited in the Cambridgeshire County Council Field Archaeology offices at Fulbourn.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Archaeological features revealed by aerial photography were trenched to assess their state of survival, historical importance and the impact of any proposed development. Saxo-Norman (10th-12th century) ditches were discovered at a depth of ca. 0.75 metres, containing considerable quantities of pottery and animal bone.

1.2 Work was completed by Cambridgeshire's County Council Archaeology Section in April 1991, on behalf of the Property Department, in advance of a proposed sale for development.

2.0 COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL POLICY

- The need for effective management of the county's archaeological resource is clearly recognised by Cambridgeshire County Council. It is the Council's policy to safeguard nationally important ancient monuments and other significant archaeological sites.

- Pipelines over 500metres in length require archaeological monitoring with provision for excavation where necessary.

- Other important statements include the necessity to excavate and record sites with minimal loss of information 'where there is no over-riding case for preservation of an archaeological site'.

- Archaeological planning in Cambridgeshire is essentially based on the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). This consists of over 11,630 recorded entries, varying from find spots of individual artifacts to extensive monuments and archaeological landscapes. 250 of these are currently deemed worthy of statutory protection and are now designated as scheduled ancient monuments by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

- In Cambridgeshire the majority of archaeological sites and monuments only survive below the ground. These can sometimes be identified from aerial photographs, in which they show up as variations in overlying crops. However, there are many sites which do not show up in this way and whose existence is, therefore, probably not recognised. It is accepted that the SMR holds only a fraction of the surviving archaeological remains in Cambridgeshire. Previously unknown sites are continually being discovered. For this reason the lack of recorded evidence cannot be taken as proof that a particular area is archaeologically sterile.

3.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The parish of soham lies on the southern fen-edge and has been an important area for settlement from prehistoric times. Major discoveries from the area were published by Alison Taylor in 1985 (Proceedings of Cambridge Antiquarian Society, Vol.74). Within the present village, mesolithic and neolithic axes, Iron-Age and Roman burials have been found. There was an important Anglo-Saxon burial ground at the southern end of the village, and Anglo-Saxon jewellery and weapons near the church suggest there may be other burials in that area.

3.2 In the early 7th century, St. Felix, who lead the conversion of East Anglia to Christianity, founded a monastery at Soham. This is thought to be near the present church, at the centre of the village. This monastery was burned down by the Danes in the 8th century and was not re-founded.

3.3 Early documentary evidence includes an Anglo-Saxon will mentioning the village "Saegham", in ca. 1000 AD, and an assessment of food rents due to the abbey of Bury St. Edmunds in 1044. Many streets in Soham are mentioned by name in medieval documents. Churchgate street, for example, is "Churchgatestete" in 1462; Hall street is "le Hallestrete" in 1397; and Pratt street itself was probably named after the family of the Mabilla and Thomas Prat recorded in 1312 (Early Place-Name Society, XIX, 1943). The magnificent parish church of Soham, dating from the 12th century, also suggests a wealthy and large village throughout the middle ages.

3.4 Any substantial land without modern disturbance in the centre of Soham, therefore, is likely to contain late Saxon and medieval remains. On this particular site, evidence for archaeological remains was found on aerial photographs taken by the Ordnance Survey in 1974, which revealed two circular enclosures.

4.0 STRATEGY OF FIELDWORK

4.1 The aim of this assessment was to establish whether:-

- Archaeological features exist.
- They survive sufficiently to repay further investigations.
- They are sufficiently important to justify long-term preservation.

4.2 Long trenches, 1.6m wide were excavated by machine to an average depth of 0.50m, in order to cut the archaeological features at right-angles and also to give a good sample of the land between them and to locate the "return" of the enclosure ditches. the sample excavated is approximately 6% of the total area.

Trenches were then cleaned by hand to approximately 0.75m, when archaeological features were exposed. A sample of these features were then excavated and recorded.

5.0 RESULTS

The following archaeological features were examined:-

4.1 LATE SAXON/EARLY MEDIEVAL FEATURES

Trench II [7] (fig.3) - A deep, straight-sided ditch. Silty, dark brown soil with frequent charcoal and mortar inclusions. This slightly curving ditch is thought to be on of the circular enclosures on the aerial photographs, and was recorded in trenches five and six (fig.1) Dated to the 10th-13th centuries by St.Neots and Thetford ware pottery.

Trench II [8] (fig. 3) - A shallow double ditch of a contemporary date to feature [7].

Trench II [9] (fig. 3) - A shallow gully, 0.50m deep, with a light sandy brown silty clay. It contained a small very abraded sherd of early Saxon pottery.

Trench III [6] (fig. 2) - A Medieval drainage gully, 0.50m deep.

Trench III [4,10,11] (fig. 2) - These ditches are orientated approximately north-south. Ditch [11] contained a series of post-holes in the bottom of the ditch, possibly for upright timbers of a hurdle fence or wall. A spread of fired clay with twigs, possibly the remains of wattle and walling found in the lower fill of [4] could be contemporary with the stakeholes. The upper layer of ditch [4] contained a post-medieval sherd, but stratigraphically earlier ditches [10] and [11] (as well as the lower layers of ditch [4]) contained Saxo-Norman pottery.

5.2 POST-MEDIEVAL AND MODERN FEATURES

- Trench I:**
- [1] (fig. 2) - Early 20th century sewer.
 - [3] (fig. 2) - A shallow depression, 0.15m deep, containing mixed pottery (medieval and post-medieval). A square post-holed was cut into its eastern edge.
 - [27] (fig. 2) - A shallow gully, 0.10-0.20m deep, containing a post-medieval sherd.
 - [29] (fig. 2) - A drainage gully, containing a articulated dogs skeleton.
 - [33] (fig. 2) - A 19th century field-drain.
 - [46] (fig. 2) - A 19th century field-drain.

Trench III [5] (fig. 2) - A post-medieval drainage gully.

5.3 UNDATED

Trench I [2] (fig. 2) - A large pond, 12m in diameter. Rising water levels and collapsing sides prevented excavation of this feature. Probably post-medieval and later than the circular enclosures ditches [4,7,,10,11] which it truncates.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Ditches and gullies of Late Saxon or early Medieval date were recorded. They contained relatively large unabraded sherds of pottery, animal bone and in one instance charcoal, mortar inclusions and fired clay with twigs, possibly wattle and walling. This confirms the presence of a site between ca. 900 -1200 AD as suggested by the aerial photographs. It is likely that domestic occupation is either present or very nearby as the charcoal, mortar and larger pot sherds have not traveled far before their deposition in the ditches.

6.2 A number of features, again largely ditches and gullies, are dated to the post-medieval period. In some instances this date attribution is based upon the presence of post-medieval pottery in the topmost fills of earlier ditches.

6.3 The very large, oval, pit or pond in trench I remains undated. This appears to post-dates the Saxo-Norman enclosure ditches [4,7,10,11] which it cuts. This feature may be of interest because of the waterlogged nature of its fill which may have resulted in the preservation of otherwise fragile remains such as wood, seeds, insects, leather etc.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The assessment excavation has clearly demonstrated that there are surviving features dated to the 10th-13th centuries AD. These archaeological remains have the potential to supply essential new information about the saxo-Norman development of Soham; and in comparison with other east Cambridgeshire villages, and with other recently excavated contemporary sites at Ely North Range (Malim, 1987) and The Rectory Stretham (Lucas G.&Horton W.1990).

7.2 In view of the archaeological results, and the importance of the site, preservation of the remains would be the ideal recommendation. This would be achieved if destruction during construction were limited to the top 0.75m.

7.3 Construction requiring groundworks below 0.75m would affect the archaeological remains, and thus necessitate further recording work. This should take the form of several open area excavation by machine to a depth of ca. 0.75m, totalling 1200-1500 sq metres. Within the area a sample of the archaeological features should be excavated. Particular attention should be directed to the waterlogged pond and site with potential for recovery of environmental and other fragile artefacts. A much more detailed excavation strategy should be prepared in consultation with the County Archaeological Office.

7.4 Good historical documentation for Soham and Medieval Soham survives and should be consulted for the interpretation of the site.

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SAXO-NORMAN POTTERY FROM
EXCAVATIONS AT SOHAM PRATT STREET,
CAMBRIDGESHIRE 1991

By
Gavin Lucas

A small collection of saxo-Norman pottery dating from the 10th-13th centuries was examined, and consisted chiefly of st. Neots type ware (62%) and Thetford type ware (22%), sherds; a couple of sherds of Stamford type ware were also found, one glazed, and a few other coarseware and unidentified glazed sherds. From the same site also came some post-medieval pottery probably dating to the late 18th and 19th century, and also one small sherd of early or middle Saxon date.

Thetford type ware sherds were in a hard grey fabric, sometimes with a brown margin under the surface of varying thickness, and tempered with frequent fine/moderate quartzite and occasional coarser flint, quartzite and fine calcite. They were mostly therefore a medium fabric (cf. Rogerson & Dallas' fabric no.3; "Excavations in Thetford 1948-59 and 1973-80" - EAA 22; 1984).

St. Neots type ware sherds were quite a hard fabric with abundant medium-sized fossil shell inclusions, occasional fine grog and frequent very fine dark particles. Colours varied from buff to black. Sherds tended to be quite lightweight, especially those where the shell had partly dissolved out leaving a 'corky' texture.

Early medieval coarseware sherds were in a hard buff fabric with frequent medium/coarse quartzite, and usually one surface (exterior) was grey. Only one sherd had oxidised surfaces, the decorated handle from [6]. This may date later (12th-13th century) than the others.

Stamford type ware sherds were both fine with no visible temper; the glazed sherd possibly dates to the 11th century and the flat rim later, the 12th-13th century (cf. Kilmurry - "The Pottery Industry of Stamford, Lincs. c.AD 80-1250" - BAR 84;1980). Of the other unidentified glazed sherds, the fine greyware with green splash glaze may be attributable to Stamford type, and is probably early, i.e. 11th century; the fine oxidised sherd with brown glaze is probably late, i.e. 13th century, and the coarse green glazed sherd also probably similarly late.

the possibly Saxon sherd is in a soft, brown fabric with black surfaces, tempered with medium/fine rounded quartzite.

Below is a summary of the pottery listed by trench and context. Unless otherwise stated, the sherds are generally medium sized and unabraded.

Trench I

- [3] 1 early medieval coarseware sherd.
1 Thetford type ware sherd: everted, hollowed rim from jar.
1 green glazed sherd.
1 lump of slag.
All the sherds are small and fairly abraded.
- [27] 1 post-medieval sherd with brown glaze on one side and white glaze on the other.
- [28] 1 post-medieval sherd with buff slip and patchy yellow-green glaze on one surface.
- [29] 1 post-medieval unglazed sherd.
- [34.2] 1 coarseware grey sherd.

Trench II

- [7.0] 5 St. Neots type ware sherds.
3 Thetford type ware sherds, incl. 2 rims: everted hollowed rim from a jar (fig. 1.8) and a upright bevelled rim (fig. 1.9).
- [7.1] 2 Thetford type ware sherds: a 'sagging' base, and a large handle with thumbled cordon (fig. 1.10).
1 fragment of burnt sandstone.
- [7.5] 1 St. Neots type ware sherd: everted rim from jar (fig. 1.3).
- [8.0] 1 Creamware sherd.
1 Brick fragment.
- [8.1] 1 St. Neots type ware sherd: everted squared rim from jar (fig. 1.2).
1 Thetford type ware sherd: coarse fabric, large but abraded - possibly handled rim from a storage jar.
- [9] 1 Saxon (?) sherd, plus 3 small fragments. Small and abraded.

Trench III

- [4.0] 1 early medieval coarseware sherd.
- [4.1] 1 St. Neots type ware sherd.
1 Thetford type ware sherd.
1 Stamford type ware sherd: slightly oxidised, fine fabric, unglazed flat rim, probably from Kilmurry type bowl 1 or 12.
1 fragment from a moulded tile in buff fabric - modern (fig. 1.11).
- [4.2] 3 St. Neots type ware sherds.
1 Stamford type ware sherd: hard, fine buff fabric with thin pale green glaze on one side and possibly Kilmurry type 1 glaze.
- [4.3] 7 St. Neots type ware sherds, incl. 4 rims: everted rim from a jar (fig. 1.7), hammerhead rim from a bowl (fig. 1.4) and two inturned rims from dishes (fig. 1.5, 1.6).
1 Thetford type ware sherd.
- [4.4] 5 St. Neots type ware sherds, incl. 1 rim: everted squared rim (fig. 1.1).
1 early medieval coarseware sherd.
- [5] 1 peg-tile, in hard, blue-grey vesicular fabric with oxidised surfaces, one side smooth (with traces of mortar), the other rusticated).
- [6] 1 medieval coarseware sherd: large but slightly abraded handle with thumb impressions and stabbing (fig. 1.12).
1 fineware glazed sherd: hard orange fabric with brown lead glaze.
- [10] 1 St. Neots type ware sherd.
1 early medieval fine grey ware sherd with green splash glaze.
Both sherds are very small.
- [11.1] 1 St. Neots type ware sherd.

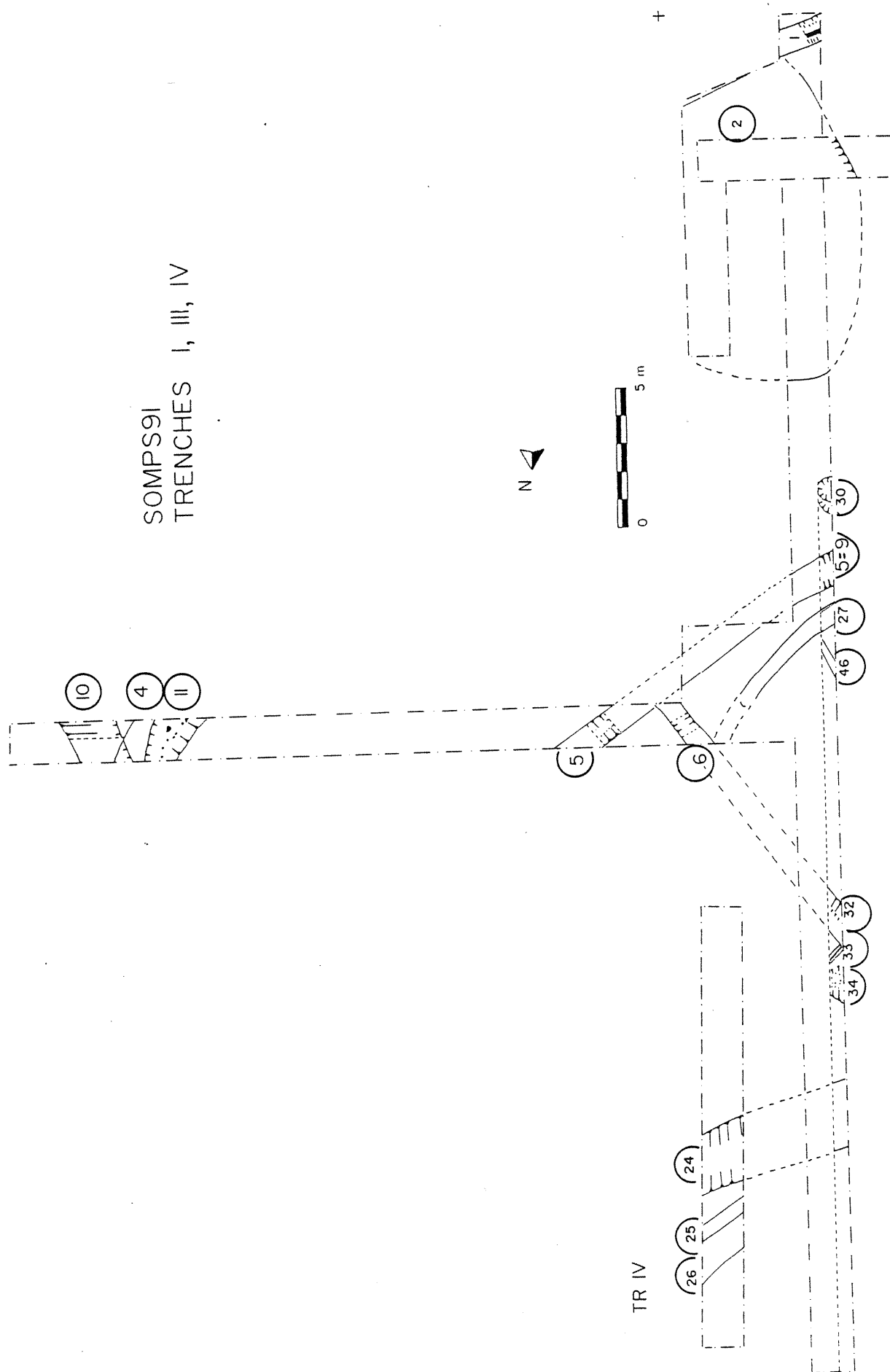


FIGURE 2

SOMPS9I TRENCH PLANS

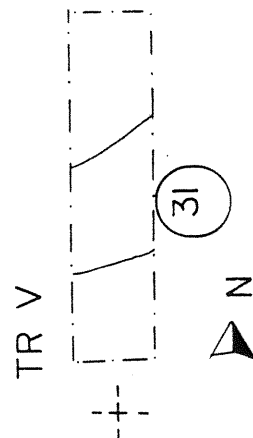
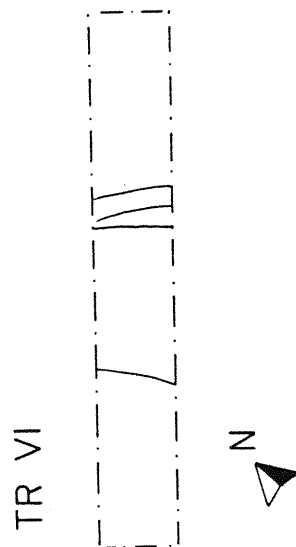
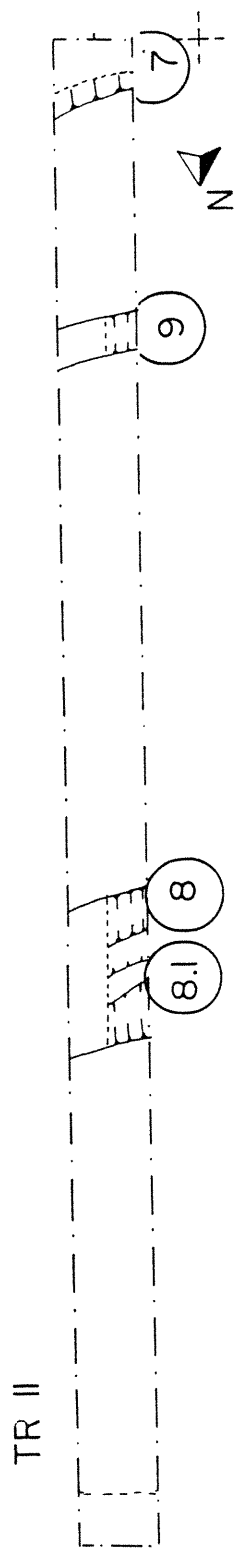


FIGURE 3

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TR III

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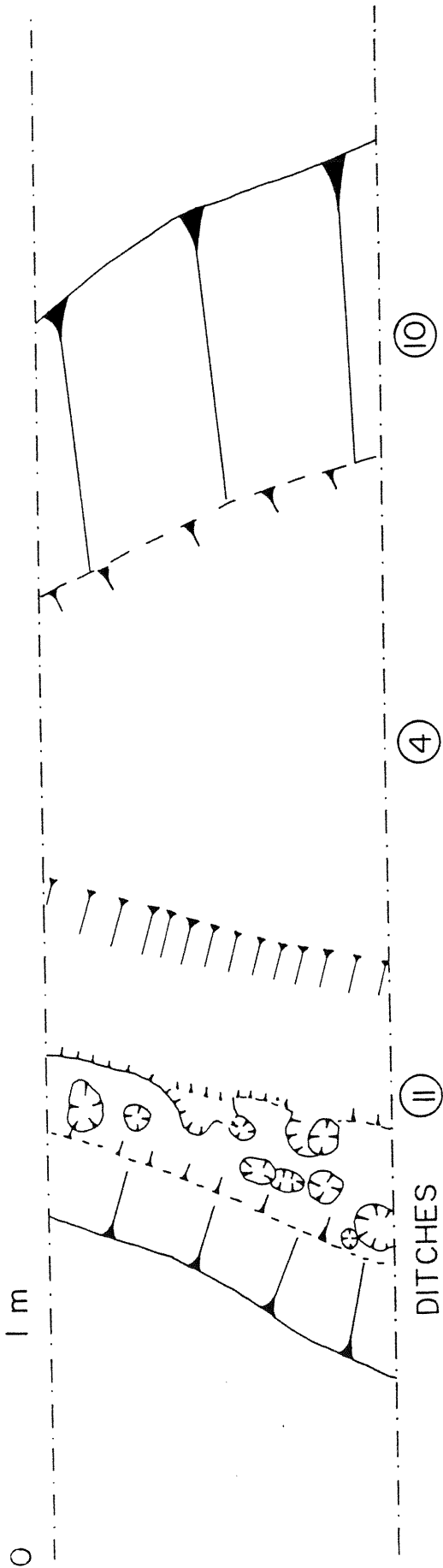
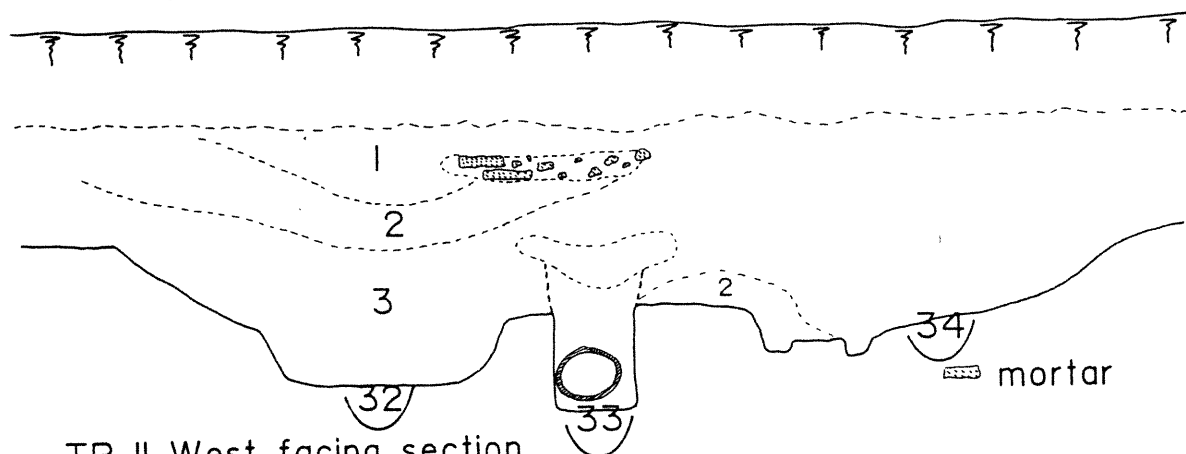
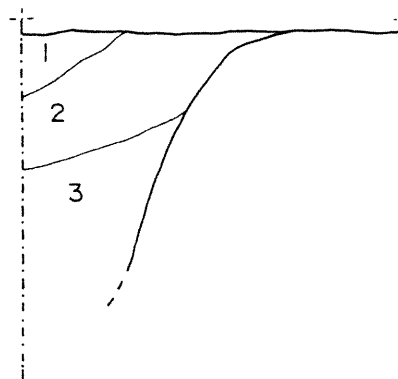
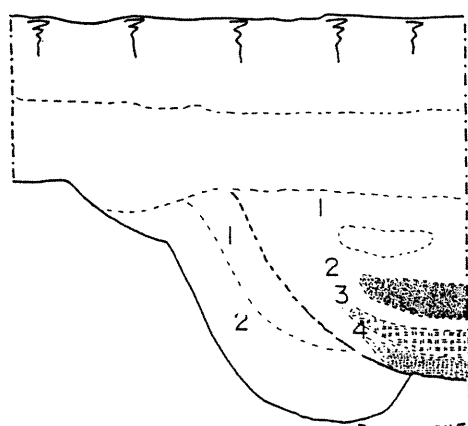


FIGURE 4

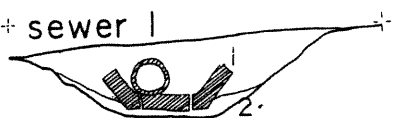
SOMPS91 TR I East facing section
Through features 32, 33, 34



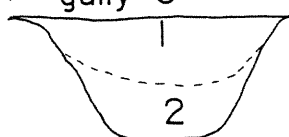
TR II West facing section
Through ditch 70



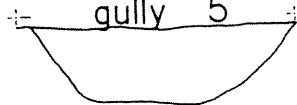
TR I NW facing section
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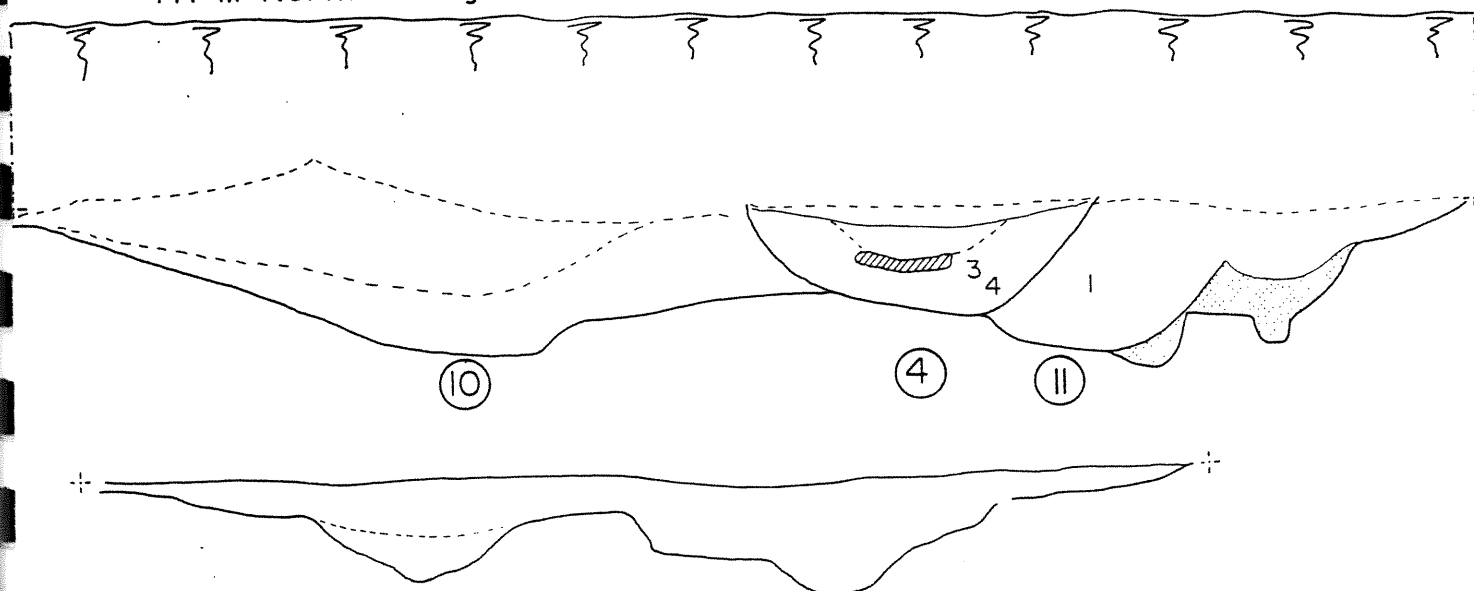
TR III NW facing
gully 6



TR III NE facing
gully 5

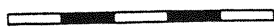


TR III North facing section through ditches 4, 10, and 11



SOMPS 91 SECTION DRAWINGS

FIGURE 5



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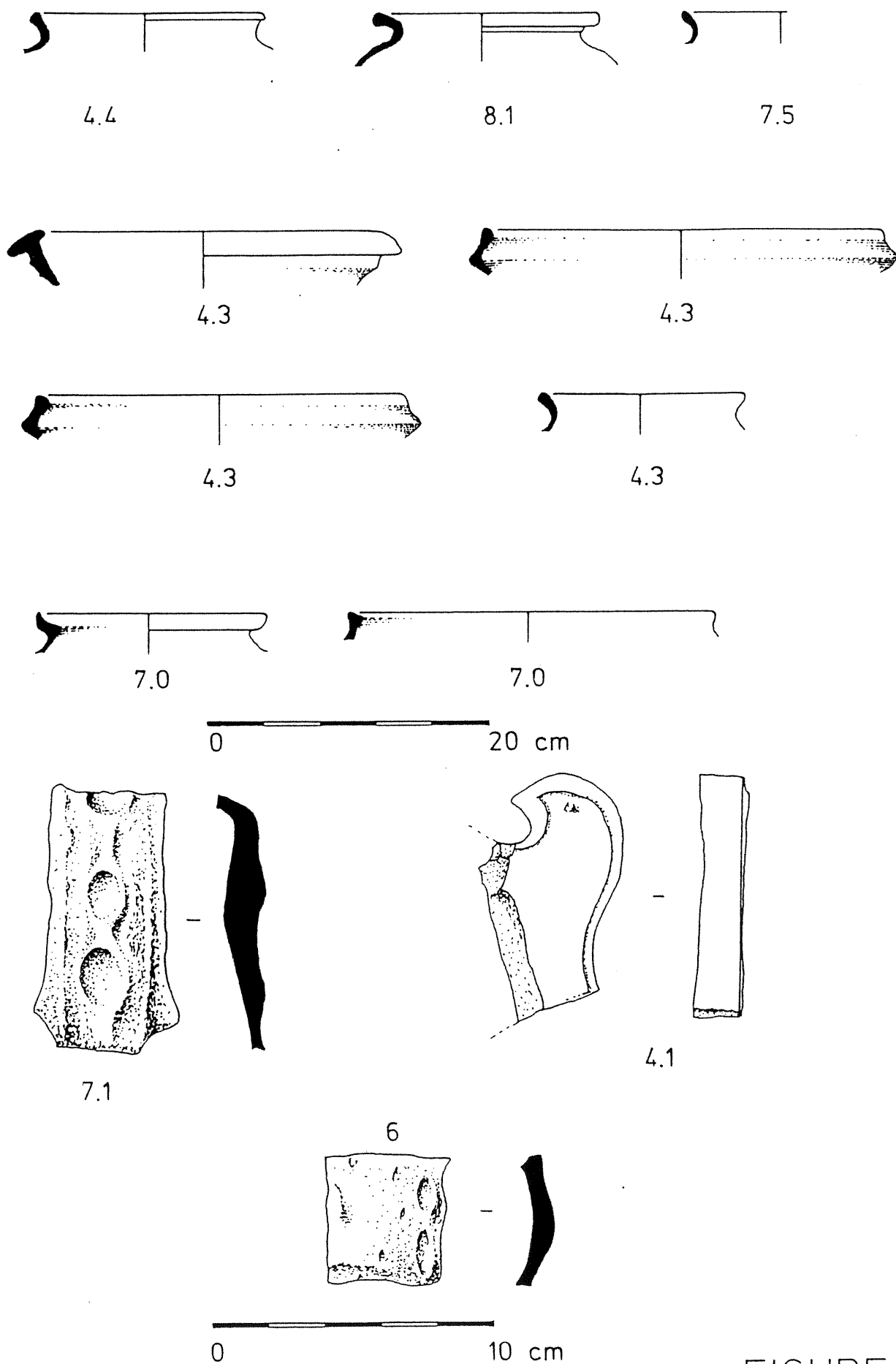


FIGURE 6



Rural Management Division
Department of Property
Shire Hall
Cambridge
Tel. (0223) 317404

The Archaeology Office
Rural Management Section
Department of Property
Shire Hall
Cambridge
Tel. (0223) 317312

