

**W A FAIRHURST & PARTNERS
ON BEHALF OF THE HIGHWAYS AGENCY**

**VAGNIACAE ROMAN SETTLEMENT
NORTH-WEST OF SPRINGHEAD, KENT**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

A2 WIDENING EASTBOUND

NGR 561600 172630

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

February 1998

February/1998 A2 Widening (A2SWANWB) Watching Brief Report

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Summary

In June 1997 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) conducted an archaeological Watching Brief during road widening operations on the A2 at the point at which it passes to the north of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Springhead Roman Town. The work consisted of the excavation of a drainage channel to a depth of 2m and the construction of a pavement, which lay parallel and to the north of the drainage channel, to a depth of 1m. No archaeological layers were disturbed or damaged during any of the construction activities conducted in the central reservation. At its eastern end the drainage channel revealed the top of a possible, although apparently heavily disturbed Roman layer. This deposit may suggest that extant archaeological deposits exist both here and to the east of the area monitored. If such remains exist it would appear that they have been sealed by at least 2m of modern make-up and post-Roman ploughsoil.

1. Introduction.

The watching brief was undertaken on behalf of W. A. Fairhurst & Partners, acting for the Highways Agency, on the advice of the Oxford Archaeological Unit, as the site is located in an area of extremely high archaeological potential, and close to the edge of the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) itself (fig. 1). The work consisted of the excavation of a drainage channel to a depth of 2m and the construction of a pavement, which lay parallel and to the north of the drainage channel, to a depth of 1m. The drainage channel was excavated and observed from 4/6/97 until 13/6/97, and the gullies from 19/6/97 to 2/7/97. The pavement construction trench was supervised from 19/6/97 until deemed unnecessary on 2/7/97.

2. Background.

The A2 at this point passes just to the north of the Scheduled area of Springhead Roman Town (SAM Kent 158). Observations and excavations during the construction of the original A2 (now the eastbound carriageway) in the 1920's and of the westbound carriageway in the 1960's revealed considerable evidence of substantial stone built buildings, roads and associated features and suggested that the A2 may pass through the centre of the Roman town. In March 1997 the OAU was commissioned to undertake a desk-based assessment of the possible archaeological implications of the proposed road widening activities. This report (OAU 1997a) concluded that, although the area of the central reservation had probably been heavily disturbed during the two phases of road construction, the possibility remained that the area contained previously undisturbed archaeological deposits which would be affected by the proposed road widening. It was therefore recommended that an archaeological Watching Brief be carried out during all intrusive activities associated with the road widening.

3. Aims and Strategy.

The watching brief was conducted during all intrusive works connected with the excavation of a pipe drainage trench and connecting gullies, and the pavement construction, which might disturb or destroy archaeological features. The excavation of the drainage trench was monitored, trench sections were examined for archaeological features and spoil heaps inspected for finds. Two sections of the trench were excavated under archaeological supervision, numbered 'Trench 1' and 'Trench 2' (fig. 2). Trench 1 was excavated to a length of 140m leaving a segment of 70m between them which was, unfortunately, excavated without supervision. The trenches were a uniform 0.6m wide and 2m deep. Surface drains were added at 70m intervals, necessitating the excavation of 2m square pits to a depth of 2.5m on the same alignment as the trenches (fig. 2). Connecting gullies were excavated at approximately 10m intervals, though this varied somewhat to the east of Trench 2.

The pavement construction consisted of a 4-5m trench which ran parallel with the drainage trench, 2m to the north, and was 0.6-1m deep. This was observed from west to east until all of the area not observed during the excavation of the drainage channel had been supervised (ending parallel with the west end of Trench 2). Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations the deposits exposed in section were cleaned, inspected and recorded in section and by colour slide and black and white print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets.

Results.

The western end of the drainage channel (Trench 1) was situated on a stretch of the A2 in a cutting. The drainage channel was excavated to a uniform depth of 2m and was 0.6m wide. Two layers were encountered and these are illustrated, in sketch form, on Section 2 (Fig. 3). Layer 1, was a 50cm deep layer of modern dumped topsoil which contained Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery and a roman coin. This overlay layer 5 which consisted of sterile yellow/brown silt. This layer was excavated to a depth of 1.5m and was not bottomed. Both deposits were cut by modern services.

The eastern end of the drainage channel (Trench 2) was also excavated to a uniform depth of 2m and was 0.6m wide. This channel revealed a dark brown silty loam deposit (4) in the most easterly 5m of its length. This layer contained Roman tile and fragments of limestone mortar and chalk. This deposit was not intruded into and was, therefore, not excavated, although a sample of the aforementioned finds were recovered. Overlying this deposit was a further dark brown silty loam (3), containing 2% pea gravel with a depth of 0.6m, within which was found a post-medieval cast iron plough tip. This layer was sealed by a deposit of yellow/light brown clay (2) with 5% pea gravel and a depth of 0.75m with no finds. This was overlain by layer 1, as described above. Contexts (1) and (2) were cut by modern services which did not require archaeological recording.

Trench 2 terminated at NGR 561665E/172605N). It had originally been intended to extend this feature for a further 50m to the east but site investigations revealed an existing drainage trench on the same alignment and this was re-used. The final 50m of this feature therefore had no archaeological impact. The shallow gullies excavated to connect the old and new pipes were supervised and were found to be devoid of archaeology.

The area between Trenches 1 and 2 (see Figure 2), which was not monitored during the cutting of the drainage channel, was observed through the excavation of the gullies and the widening of the carriageway. Redeposited topsoil (1) overlying made up ground (layers 2 and 5 and mixtures thereof) was observed in every case. No other deposits were encountered. The pavement construction was restricted to a maximum depth of 1m. This resulted in only the removal of the previous modern road surface and underlying make up. Where this make up layer was entirely removed, it was underlain by modern made up ground deposits (5) and (2). The pavement construction was archaeologically monitored from NGR 561410E/172690N to NGR 561565/172650 without any archaeological deposits being encountered. The decision was then taken to halt the Watching Brief at this point as the construction activities did not appear likely to encounter archaeological deposits.

Discussion.

Trench 1 was located entirely in a cutting, which had removed all archaeological layers. Two layers were encountered. Layer 5, a sterile silty layer was interpreted as a layer of dumped silt or made up ground. This was sealed by Layer 5, which was interpreted as a layer of re-deposited plough soil, which contained Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery. The provenance of this layer of ploughsoil was impossible to ascertain.

To the east of Trench 2 the natural ground surface appeared to slope away and the road had been brought up to grade by the dumping a layer of clay (layer 2). This layer sealed a Dark brown silty loam (layer 3). This layer, which contained a post-medieval cast iron plough tip, was interpreted as a buried modern or post-medieval ploughsoil. This sealed a fairly compact layer of dark brown silty loam which contained fragments of Roman tile, chalk and mortar. Very little of this layer was revealed and it was not disturbed by the pipetrench. Its significance is therefore uncertain. The presence of Roman material and building debris within it may suggest that it represents a Roman demolition layer or an area of disturbed Roman deposits, although it would also appear possible that it merely represents the top of a later layer containing re-deposited Roman material. To the east of this point the new drain was sited in an existing drainage channel and the excavation of a drainage channel, which may have helped to clarify this point, was found to be un-necessary.

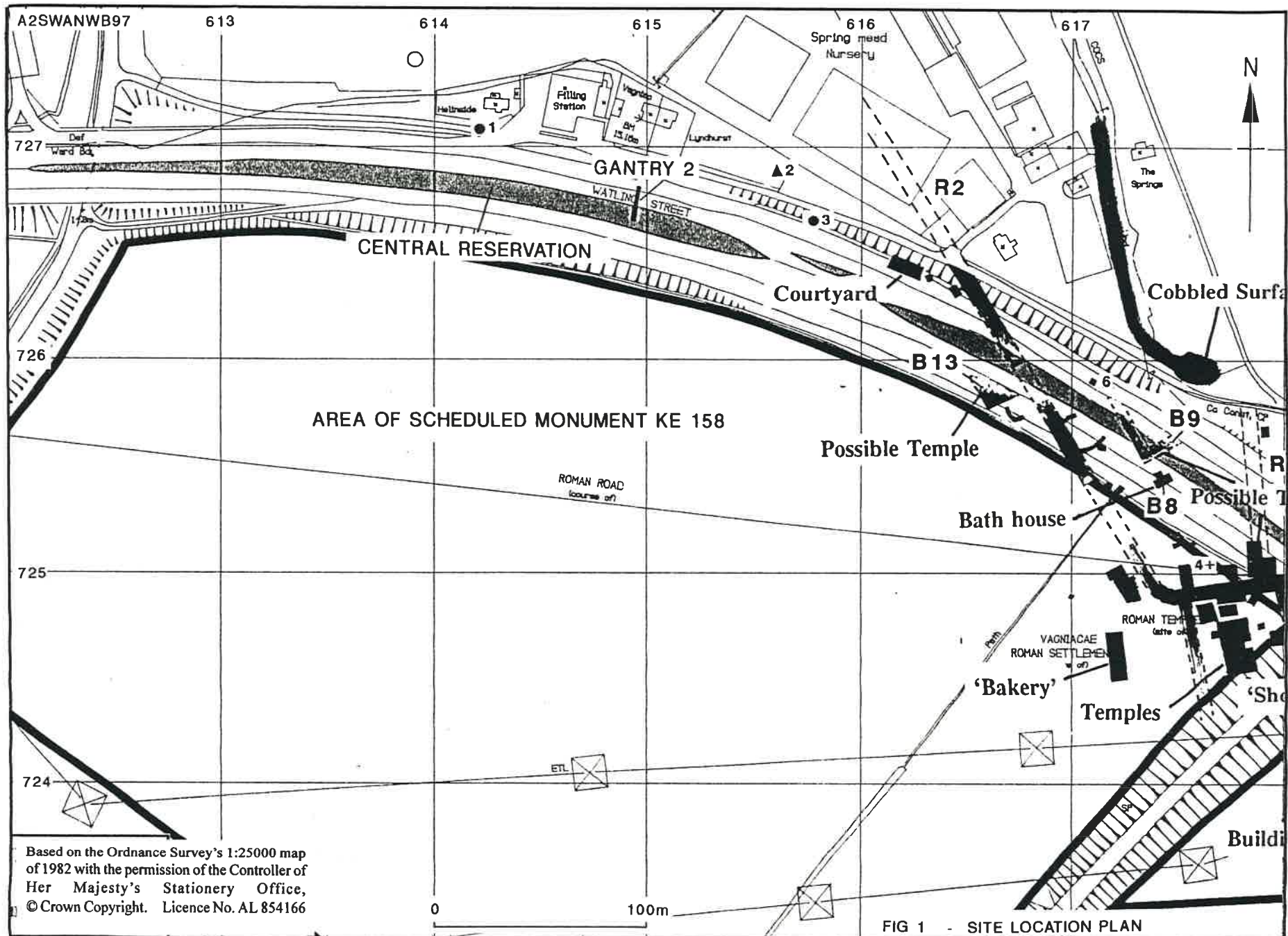
Conclusion.

No archaeological layers were disturbed or damaged during any of the construction activities conducted in the central reservation. The construction activities can be divided into two parts: the pavement and gully construction never extended below a depth of 1m and had no archaeological impact at all. The drainage channel extended to a depth of 2m and, at its eastern end, revealed the top a possibly Roman deposit. This deposit may suggest that extant archaeological deposits exist both here and to the east of the area monitored. If such remains exist it would appear that they have been sealed by at least 2m of modern make-up and post-Roman ploughsoil.

Mark Gocher
OAU
February/1998

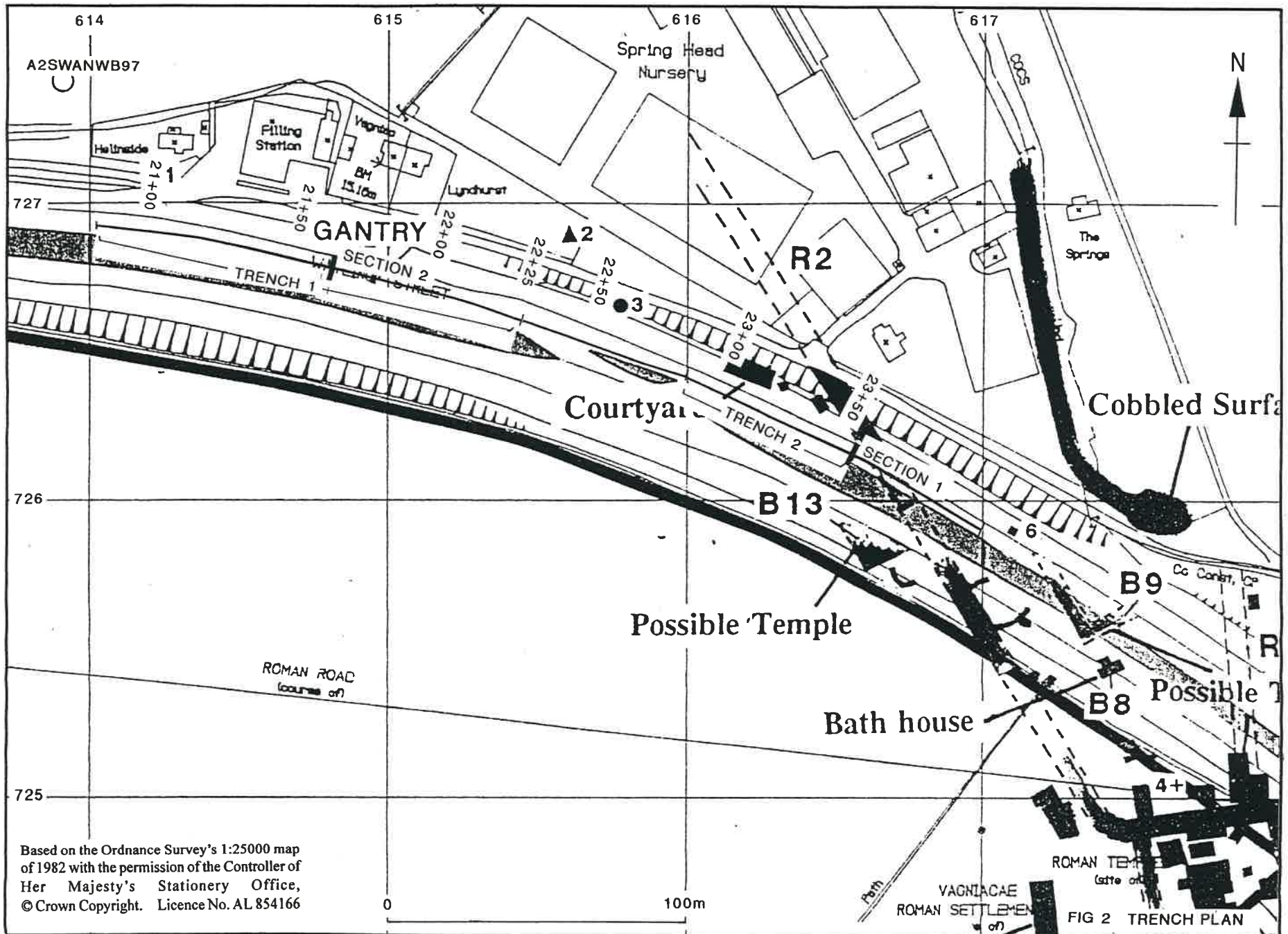
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FIG 1 - SITE LOCATION PLAN



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FIG 2 TRENCH PLAN

SECTION 1

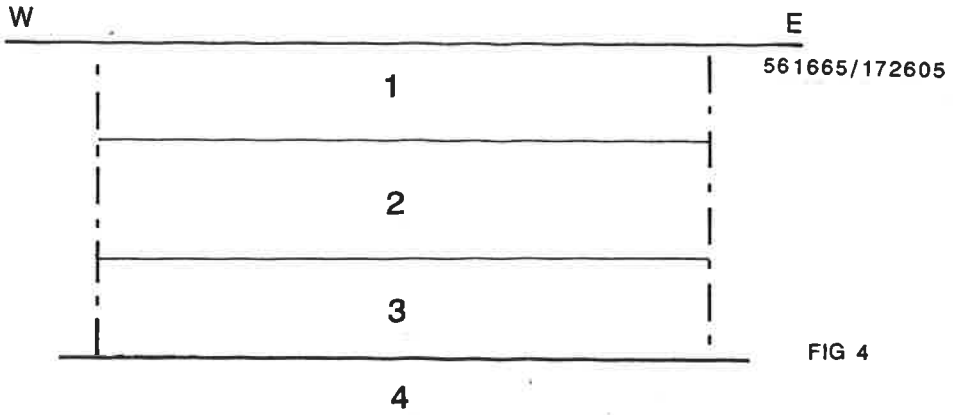


FIG 4

SECTION 2

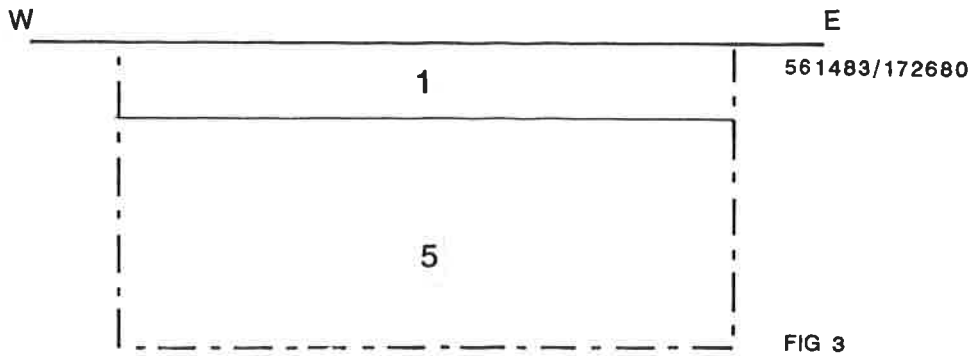


FIG 3

SCALE- APPROX 1:50



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