

**Hungerford Health Centre, Croft road, Hungerford, Berkshire.
An Archaeological watching Brief**

Project 96/23

By Andy Smith

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief commissioned by Mr. P. Davies of West Berkshire Priority Care Service NHS Trust as a condition of planning consent for the construction of a health clinic attached to a surgery, on Croft Road, Hungerford (SU33496859) (Figs. 1 and 2). The archaeological fieldwork was required as set out in **Archaeology and Planning** (PPG16 1990) and was carried out in accordance with a specification agreed with Babbie (advisors to Berkshire County Council).

The watching brief took place during topsoil clearance and the excavation of nineteen foundation trenches. It was conducted by Mel Costello and Andy Smith in May 1996. The site code is HHC96.

Topography and Geology

The site is located to the west of the main high street of Hungerford (SU335686) (Fig. 2). The area is bounded to the south by a railway embankment, the surgery to the east and private property to the west and north. The site prior to the development was used as an allotment. The level of the topsoil indicates a gradual incline to the south, possibly as a result of erosion of the railway embankment. The natural matrix is a silty clay capping over a gravel series.

Archaeological Background

The site lies c. 100 m. to the south of the parish church of St. Lawrence's and on the edge of what is thought to be the limit of the Medieval town. However, the parish church is thought to be the focus of the Late Saxon and later Medieval town (Astill 1978) and it is possible that archaeological deposits relating to Hungerford's early development would be revealed. To the northwest of the main town an excavation at Undy's farm on Charnham lane revealed occupation of Medieval date c. 11th to 14th century (Ford forthcoming). Whereas an evaluation immediately to the west of the current site (Berkshire SMR) was unproductive.

Objectives and Methodology

The watching brief consisted of two components: Monitoring of the removal of topsoil and any other overburden and the examination of the foundation trenches. For the nineteen trenches, a JCB with both a 400 mm. and a 600 mm. wide toothed bucket was used to excavate to a depth of 1.9 m. below ground level (Fig. 3).

Results

A cluster of three pits were identified towards the north east of the site. F3 was to be truncated by a widening of the foundation trench at that point and so was excavated (Fig. 3). The dimensions of this feature suggests a refuse pit (c. 1 m. in diameter by 0.9 m. in depth (Fig. 4) and the surviving fills (51 and 52) contained an amount of pottery, animal bone, a fragment of quern stone and slag/iron ore.

The pottery consists of cooking pots and dishes of a 10th-11th century date (See Appendix 1).

The animal bone consisted mainly of mandibles and long bones of domesticated species i.e. cattle, pig and sheep.

The single piece of slag and the lump of iron ore tentatively suggests the evidence of iron working in the immediate area.

Two more pits (F4 and F5) were observed in section and the relationship between the two appeared that F5 was the later feature. No dating evidence was retrieved from these two features (Figs 3 and 4).

A possible post hole (F6) was observed further south, which contained one piece of tile.

The foundation trenches towards the east cut through a deposit of made-up ground of modern date c.0.10 m. thick (Fig. 3).

Conclusions

This small watching brief has been particularly rewarding in locating several archaeological features. Very few archaeological investigations have taken place close to the core of Hungerford and the development of the town is largely unexplored (Astill 1978). This fieldwork has demonstrated for the first time the presence of Late Saxon/ Early Medieval material and that at least some activity of this date is located, as expected in the vicinity of the parish church.

Appendix 1

The Pottery by J. Timby

A small group of twenty eight sherds of pottery and four fragments of roof tile were recovered from F3 (51). The pottery, includes at least six fabrics, with examples of both cooking pots and dishes. The vessels are hand made and plain. Typologically the simple everted rims of the cooking pots and the character of the fabrics, might provisionally suggest a date in the 10th-11th century for this pit group.

Catalogue

Abbreviations: bs – bodysherds

Pottery

- x5 bs vesicular (limestone) tempered ware
- x2 bs sand, limestone and sparse flint
- x1 bs fine plain sandy
- x1 bs coarse granular sandy with sparse flint and iron
- x10 bs sand and limestone tempered, 4-1 rim dish, 1 rim dish
- x1 rim simple everted rim cooking pot, limestone (shell and ooliths) and sand tempered
- x2 rims cooking pots; oolitic limestone (voids) and fine sand tempered

Tile

- x4 fragments of roofing tile, one with a peg hole

Appendix 2

Quern fragment by Dr. D. Williams

A fragment of quern (206 g) made from Pennant sandstone from the Bristol region was recovered from F3 (51).

Bibliography

- ASTILL, G. 1978: **Historic towns in Berkshire.** Berkshire Archaeological Committee Publication No.2.
- FORD, S. Forthcoming **Charnham lane, Hungerford, Berkshire.** Thames Valley Archaeological Services.
- PPG16, 1990: **Archaeology and Planning.** DoE Planning Policy Guidance Note 16(HMSO).

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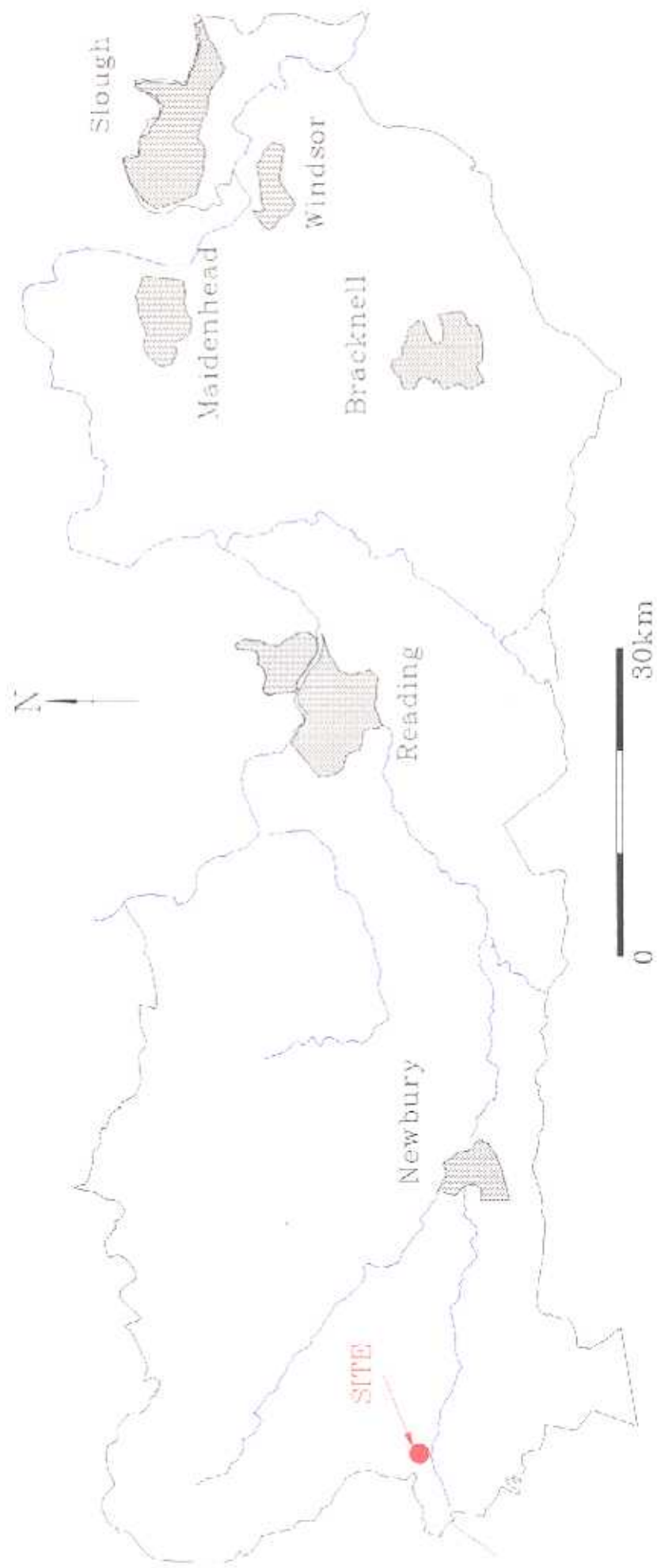


Figure 1. Location of site within Berkshire.

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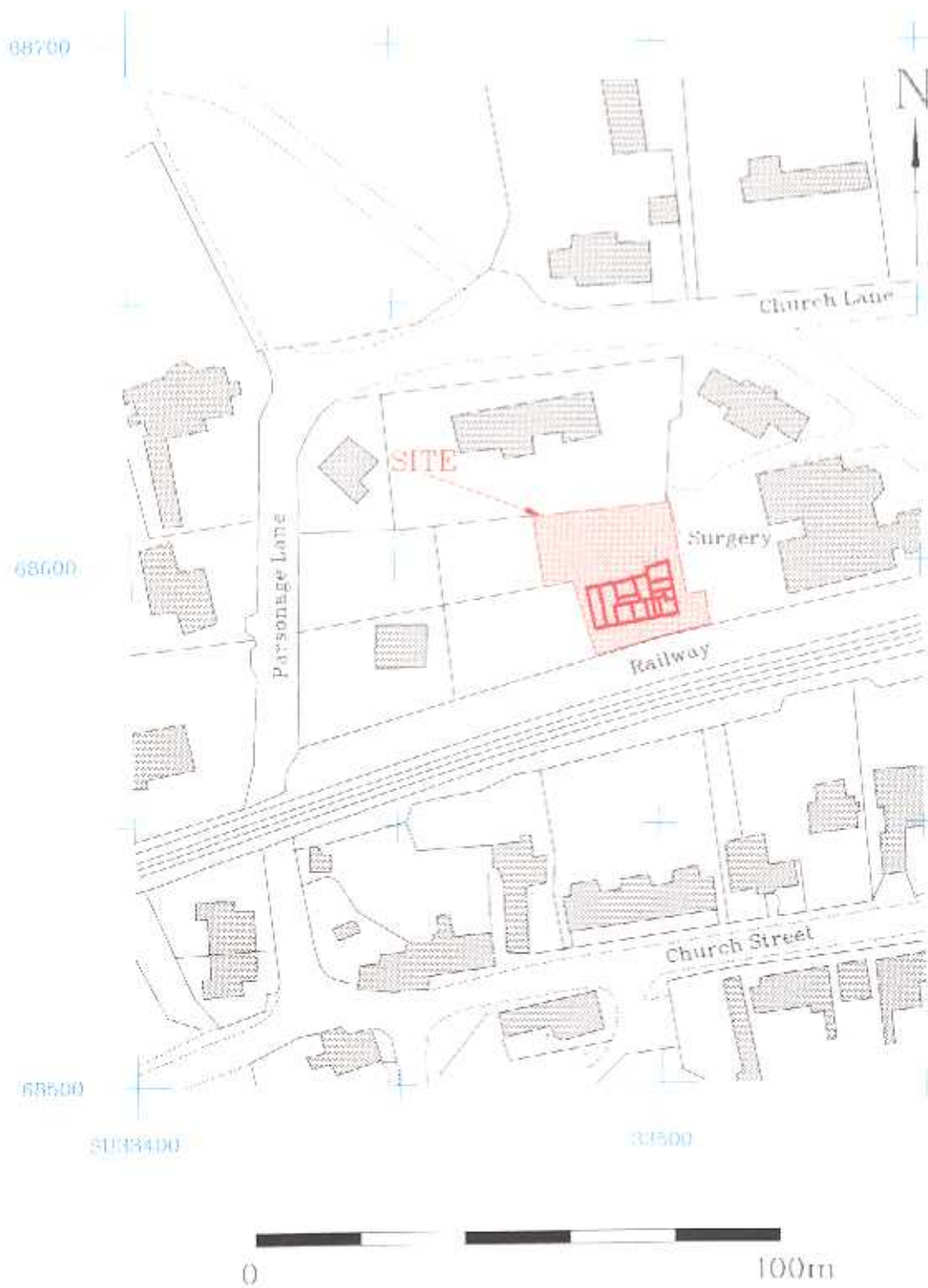


Figure 2. Location of site in Hungerford

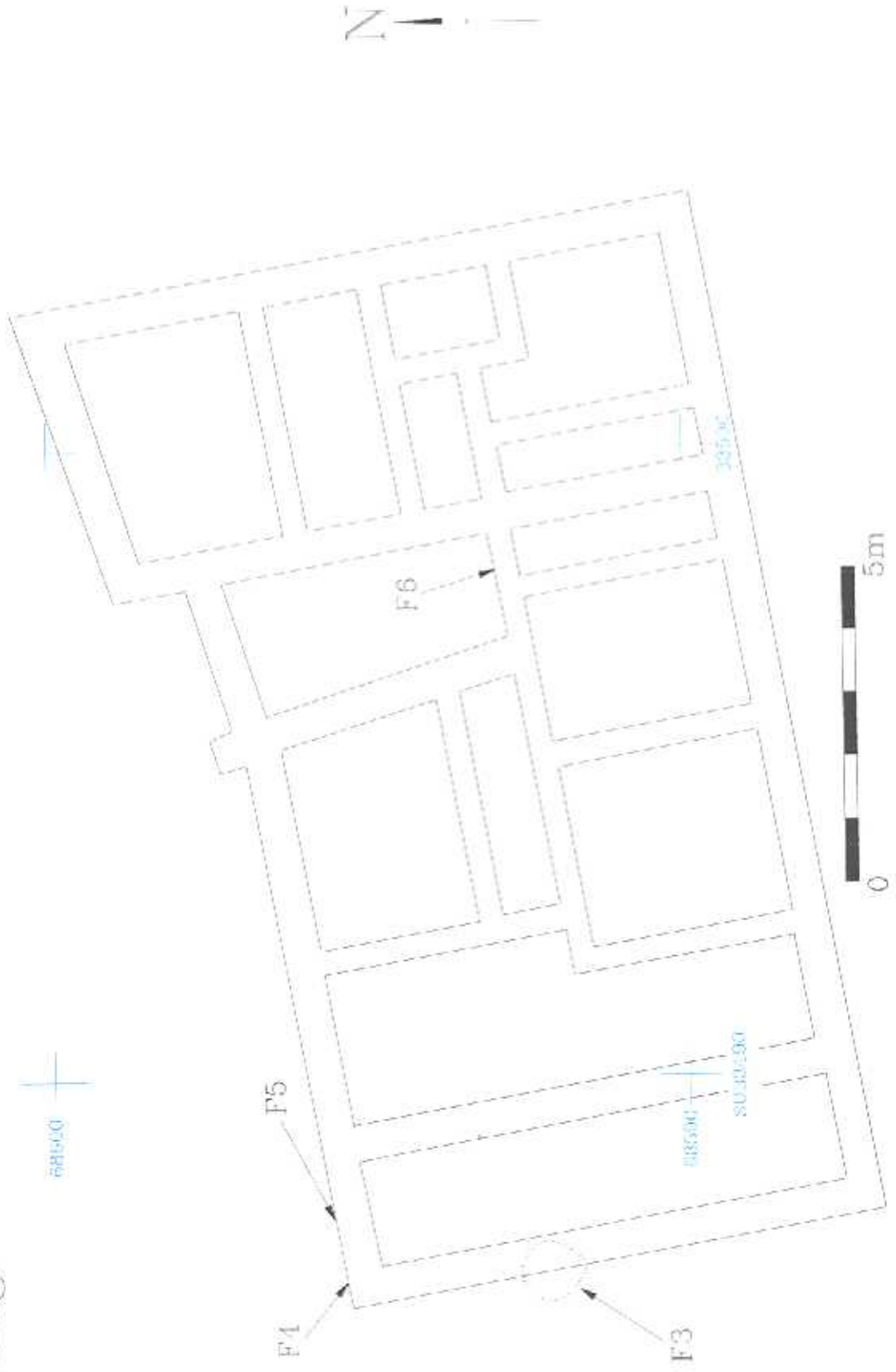


Figure 3. Plan of foundation trenches and location of features.

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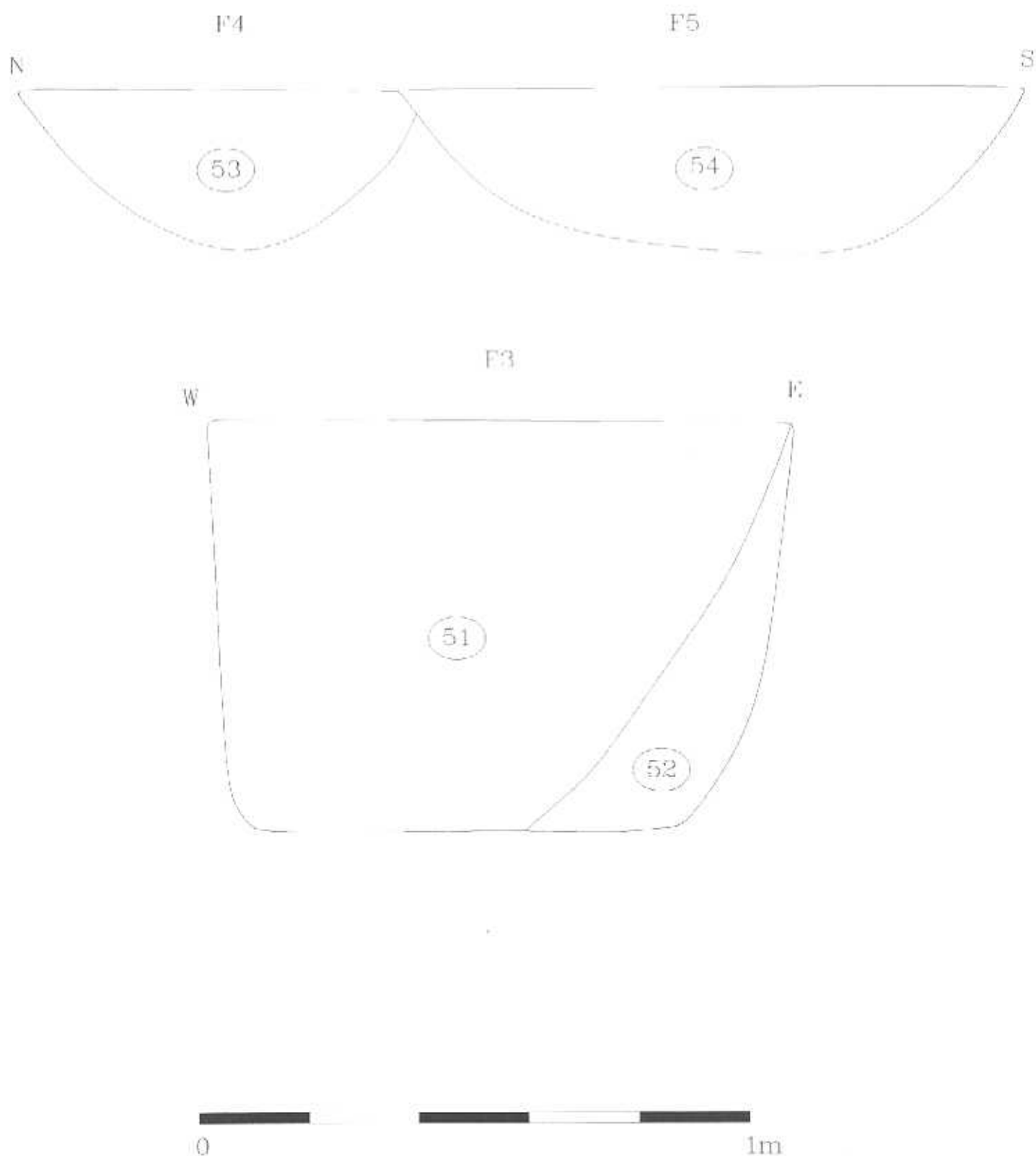


Figure 4. Sections.