

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION AT OLD BRIDGE, HAVERFORDWEST.

Prior to redevelopment trial archaeological investigations were undertaken to the north and south of Old Bridge, Haverfordwest. The objectives of the exercise were to ascertain the pre-building topography, to obtain information on the nature of the archaeological deposits and to assess the potential of the area for surviving medieval stratigraphy.

Historical evidence indicates that there was a bridge on the site of the present structure in the 14th century. But it is not until the 16th century that the first suggestions of a settlement to the east of the bridge first appear. Subsequent to the construction of the bridge the area immediately to the south and east of it must have had considerable potential for the siting of a wharf. By the late 19th century a small wharf was in use to the south of Old Bridge (see map, based on the 1st ed. 1:500, 1889). The quay wall to this wharf now divides the properties on the south of Old Bridge from the car park. Older people of the town can remember the unloading of coal barges from Hook at this wharf.

The archaeological trenches to the north and south of Old Bridge revealed blue-grey river clay deposits containing roots and other preserved plant material at approximately 3.25m OD, some 0.2m below the water table. The river deposits in Trench 2 were not reached, despite excavating down to 2.65m OD, at which level a massive boulder was encountered. It seems likely that this boulder was deposited in a minor channel during the construction of the quay wall.

The build-up of layers over the river deposits and over the large boulder are not earlier than the late 18th century. From the excavated pottery, it seems that this 2m or so of stratigraphy, that raised the levels of the area up to the present c 5m OD, accumulated over a very short period of time in the late 18th - early 19th century, and is presumably associated with the construction of the quay wall.

To the north of Old Bridge (Trench 4) floors of 19th century buildings and a yard surface were established at 4.2m OD. The present ground level at c 5m is the result of modern dumping.

There was no evidence in any trench for substantial buildings or for the use of the site earlier than the late 18th century.

Kenneth Murphy, Dyfed Archaeological Trust, March 1989.

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Introduction

Prior to redevelopment trial archaeological investigations were undertaken to the north and south of Old Bridge, Haverfordwest. The objectives of the exercise were to ascertain the pre-building topography, to obtain information on the nature of the archaeological deposits and to assess the potential of the area for surviving medieval stratigraphy.

Historical evidence indicates that there was a bridge on the site of the present structure by the 14th century. But it is not until the 16th century that the first suggestions of a settlement immediately to the east of the bridge appear (pers. com. T. James). A map by P. Lea of 1690 shows two houses directly to the north-east of the bridge and a single house to the south-east. The reliability of this map must be questioned, as a 1729 view of the town by E. Bowen clearly shows the road to the east of the bridge on a causeway, with a row of houses on its northern side and open water to the south (Fig. 1). This configuration is confirmed by the excellent water-colour painting of Haverfordwest by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck of 1740 (in the National Museum of Wales). This painting also demonstrates that the southern side of the causeway functioned as a quay; barges are shown moored alongside it.

The area to the south of Old Bridge was still undeveloped in c1832, according to a map of Haverfordwest by R. K. Dawson (based on Ordnance Survey drawings of a few years earlier), but by the late 19th century a wharf had been constructed (Fig. 2, based on the 1889, 1:500, Ordnance Survey map). The quay wall of this wharf now divides the properties on the south side of Old Bridge from the car park. Older people of the town can remember coal barges from Hook being unloaded at this wharf. A hulk of one of these barges sat for many years in the mud adjacent to the wharf before burial by the car park's construction.

Trench 4

Trench 4 at the rear of 4, Old Bridge was machine excavated across the line of several out-buildings shown on 19th century maps (Figs. 2, 3). The purpose of this trench was to establish the pre-building topography of the area - especially as a large strainer arch in the garden wall to the west suggested the presence of a culverted stream.

No evidence for such a stream was discovered. At approximately 3.2m OD a dark blue-grey river clay containing rootlets and other plant remains (E) was encountered. Above this natural deposit was a 1m thick layer of fine rubble and broken shale in a dark silty-clay matrix (D). This layer, judging by artefacts observed during its excavation, was laid down in the late 18th - early 19th century. The cobbled and flagged floors (C) above layer D were

probably associated with the buildings extant in the 19th century. A large ceramic drain (G) was sealed by these floors and a similar drain (F) was cut through a layer of dark garden soil (B) which had formed over the old floors. A modern hard-core dump topped with tarmacadam (A) sealed all the earlier deposits.

Trench 1

This trench was hand dug within a tin shed on the south side of Old Bridge (Figs. 2, 3).

As with trench 4 blue-gray river deposits were encountered at about 3.2m OD - this was some 0.2m below the water table at the time of the excavation. Above this river deposit was layer 24 - very similar in character to layer D found in Trench 4. The dump layers (14-17, 21-24) topped by a mortar surface (13) superincumbent to 24 were deposited over a very short period of time probably in the late 18th -early 19th century.

The stone-built road-side wall (18) was built subsequently to the deposition of layer 13. Although quite substantial this wall was not designed to form part of a building. Further dumps of rubble (7, 9, 10-12) were deposited against the wall.

The floor surfaces 6 and 8 were associated with an insubstantial stone structure. These were sealed by more rubble dumps (2, 4) and a post-hole (3) that accommodated a timber support for the tin shed. Everything was sealed by a tarmacadam surface (1).

Trench 3.

The stratigraphic sequence in this machine dug trench was very similar to that revealed in Trench 1 except a large, redundant french drain running north to south was uncovered at 3.8m OD.

Trench #2

This machine dug trench was excavated against the northern side of the quay wall. The section of this trench was not drawn as it was very similar in character to that in Trench 1. At 2.65m OD a massive boulder was discovered. As this was 0.8m below the present level of the river it is assumed that this boulder was deposited in a minor river channel during the construction of the quay.

Summary

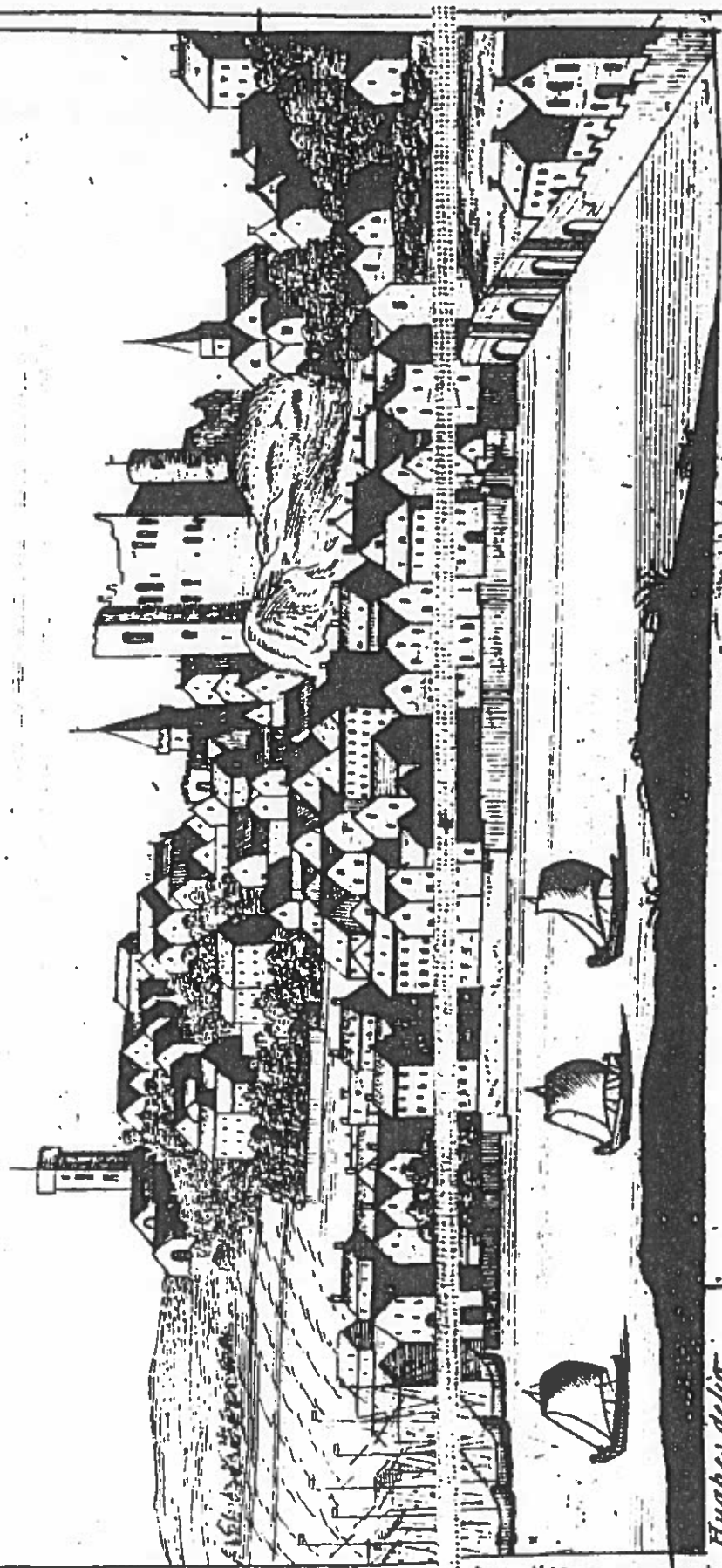
Archaeological and historical evidence agree that prior to the early 19th century the area to the south of Old Bridge was marsh subject to flooding at high tides. The pre-19th century line of the quay alongside the causeway was not discovered in the

excavations, but it may be revealed during redevelopment.

No evidence for substantial medieval or post-medieval buildings was found in the excavations. Evidence for these may be discovered when part of the northern side of Old Bridge is rebuilt, possibly in association with deeply stratified deposits.

Kenneth Murphy, Dyfed Archaeological Trust, March 1989.

H A V E R F O R D W E S T



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Fig. 1

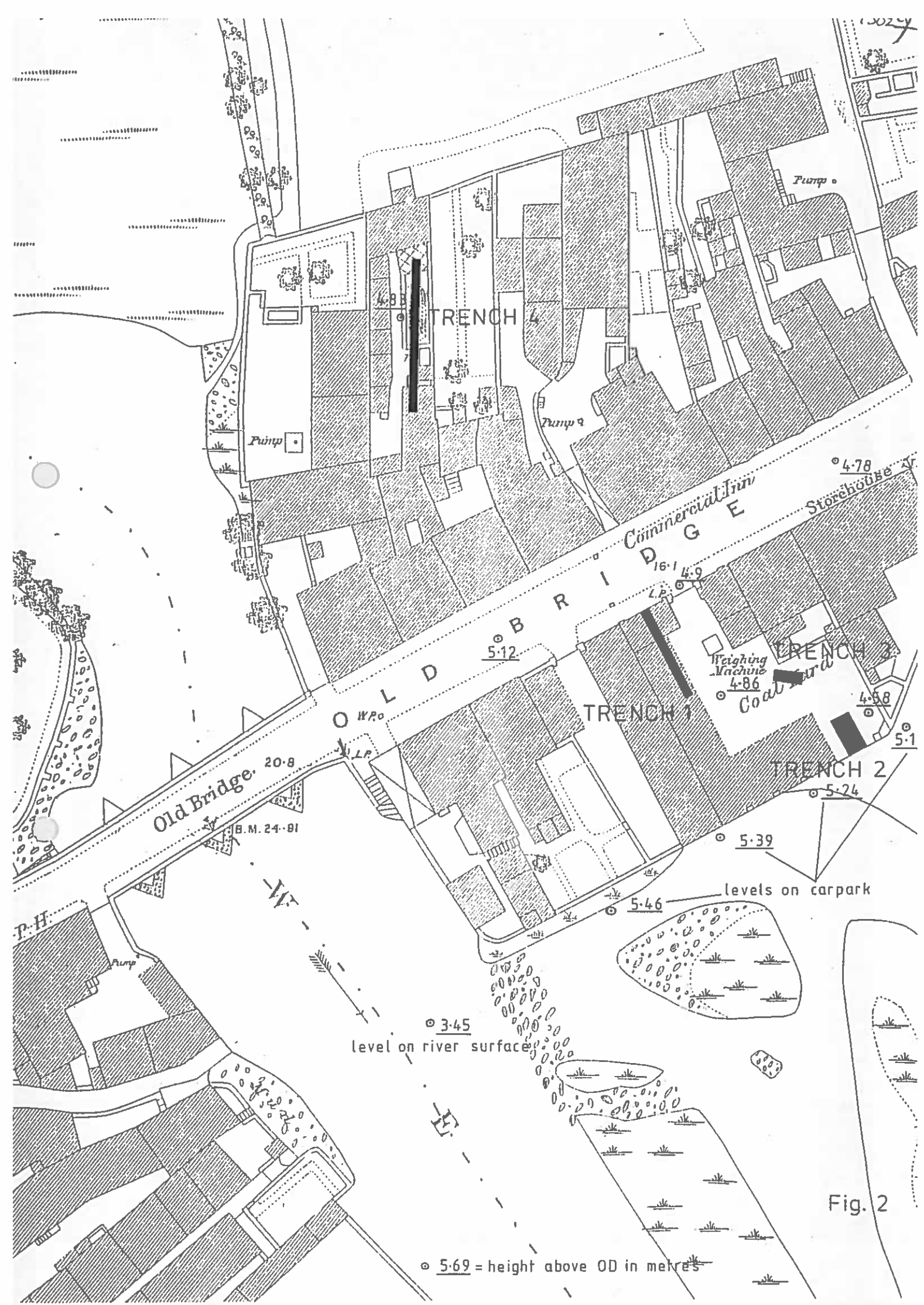
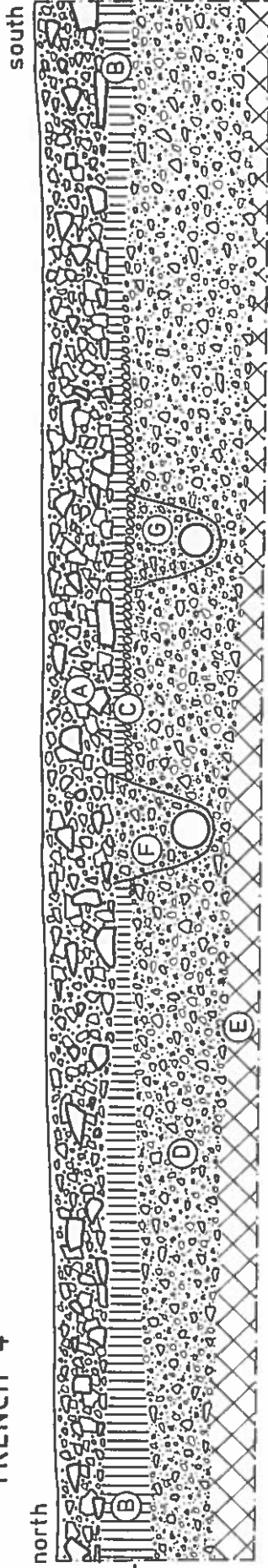


Fig. 2

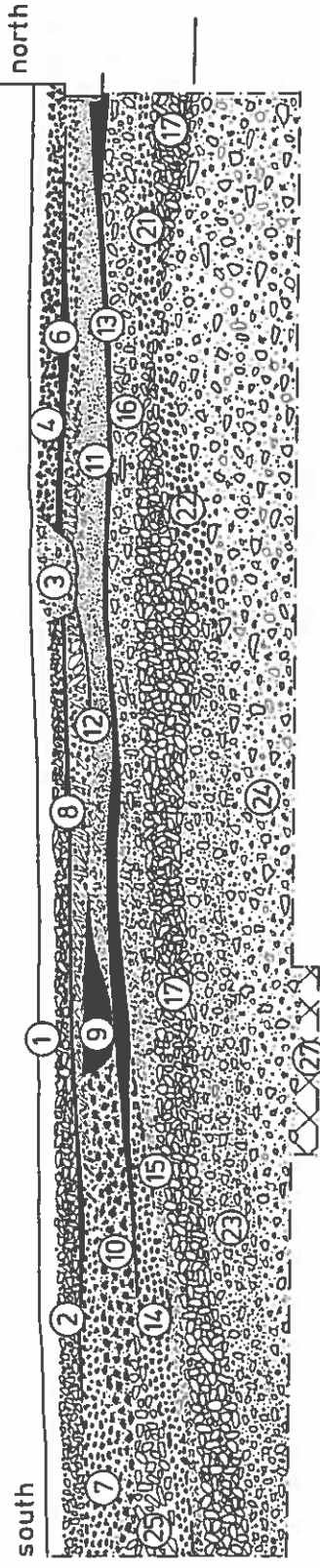
• 5.69 = height above OD in metres

TRENCH 4



0 1 2 3m

TRENCH 1



- mortar
- ⊞ crushed mortar
- ⊞ crushed shale
- ⊞ rubble/shale/soil
- ⊞ sand
- |||| garden soil
- ⊞ river clay

Fig. 3