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CHURCH STREET, NEWBOROUGH
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (G1382)

REPORT NO. 191

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

CHURCH STREET, NEWBOROUGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (G1382)

prepared for the Director of Housing & Property,
Ynys Môn Borough Council

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT CHURCH STREET, NEWBOROUGH (G1382)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ynys Môn Borough Council intend to build new public conveniences on an open plot of land at the rear of Church Street Carpark, Newborough. In addition, it is hoped to develop the remainder of the plot at some time in the future. The site lies in an archaeologically sensitive area within the Medieval borough of Newborough, and so a planning condition requiring an archaeological evaluation of the site formed part of the planning permission. The Director of Housing & Property, Ynys Môn Borough Council therefore asked Gwynedd Archaeological Trust to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the site. It was decided that the opportunity should be taken to evaluate the whole site (as indicated in Fig. 2), and not just the area to be occupied by the proposed toilet block.

2.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Newborough was a planted town established in 1303 by Edward I. The burgesses were the former inhabitants of the town of Llanfaes in south east Anglesey in the commote of Dindaethwy. They had been removed from Llanfaes so that Edward could establish an English borough in the shadow of the new castle at Beaumaris. The dispossessed tenants of Llanfaes were compensated with ninety and a half acres in the royal manor of the Welsh princes at Rhosyr. The new town was set out along two streets which cross at right angles. In 1330 sand drifts destroyed 183 acres of borough lands together with eleven cottages and 28 acres in Rhosyr (Rhosyr is the term used to describe the crown possessions outside the borough lands). By 1549 it was reported that sand drifts had caused so much destruction in the town that it had become impoverished. From 1561 an attempt was made to address this problem by forbidding the pulling up of marram grass. The loss of nearly two hundred acres of borough lands in 1330 and the damage inflicted during Glyndwrs revolt in the early years of the fifteenth century meant that the town never really achieved its potential. There was a revival of fortunes for a period in the sixteenth century when the county court was moved from Beaumaris from 1507 until 1549.

3.0 DESK TOP STUDY

Remains of the original medieval burgage plots are still visible in the modern lay out of the town. The *placeae* or burgage plots of Newborough apparently had no standard size and this is reflected in the variation of the rentals paid by the inhabitants of the town. It may be that this unusual arrangement reflects conditions previously pertaining at Llanfaes. This makes the task of predicting the exact size of each burgage plot rather difficult. Moreover the burgage boundaries could have varied with time. The burgage plots to the east and west of Malltraeth street for instance appear significantly longer than those elsewhere. There also appears to have been some uniformity in the size of burgage plots on Church street. Surprisingly there are few early maps of Newborough; the town is not included in Speeds (c 1610) plans of north Welsh towns. As with most Welsh towns the proliferation of estate maps in the eighteenth and later centuries only tend to show holdings pertaining to a particular estate, and none have been located which show the plot under study. Therefore the earliest map which shows the town in any real detail is the tithe map of 1838. The burgage plots and field patterns visible on this map are more or less preserved in the modern topography of the area north of Church street, although the block of land under discussion appears to be the remnants of a single north-west to south-east aligned tenement, and the ends of two or three north-east to south-west aligned tenements. However given that there has undoubtedly been a considerable amount of consolidation and fragmentation of burgage plots since 1303, late cartographic evidence used to reflect a situation some 550 years earlier must be applied with caution. During a trial

excavation undertaken by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (see Fig. 2) in 1979, buried soils, ditches and slots for timber buildings were recognised at the front of the burgage plot, belonging to an early phase of the occupation of the borough.

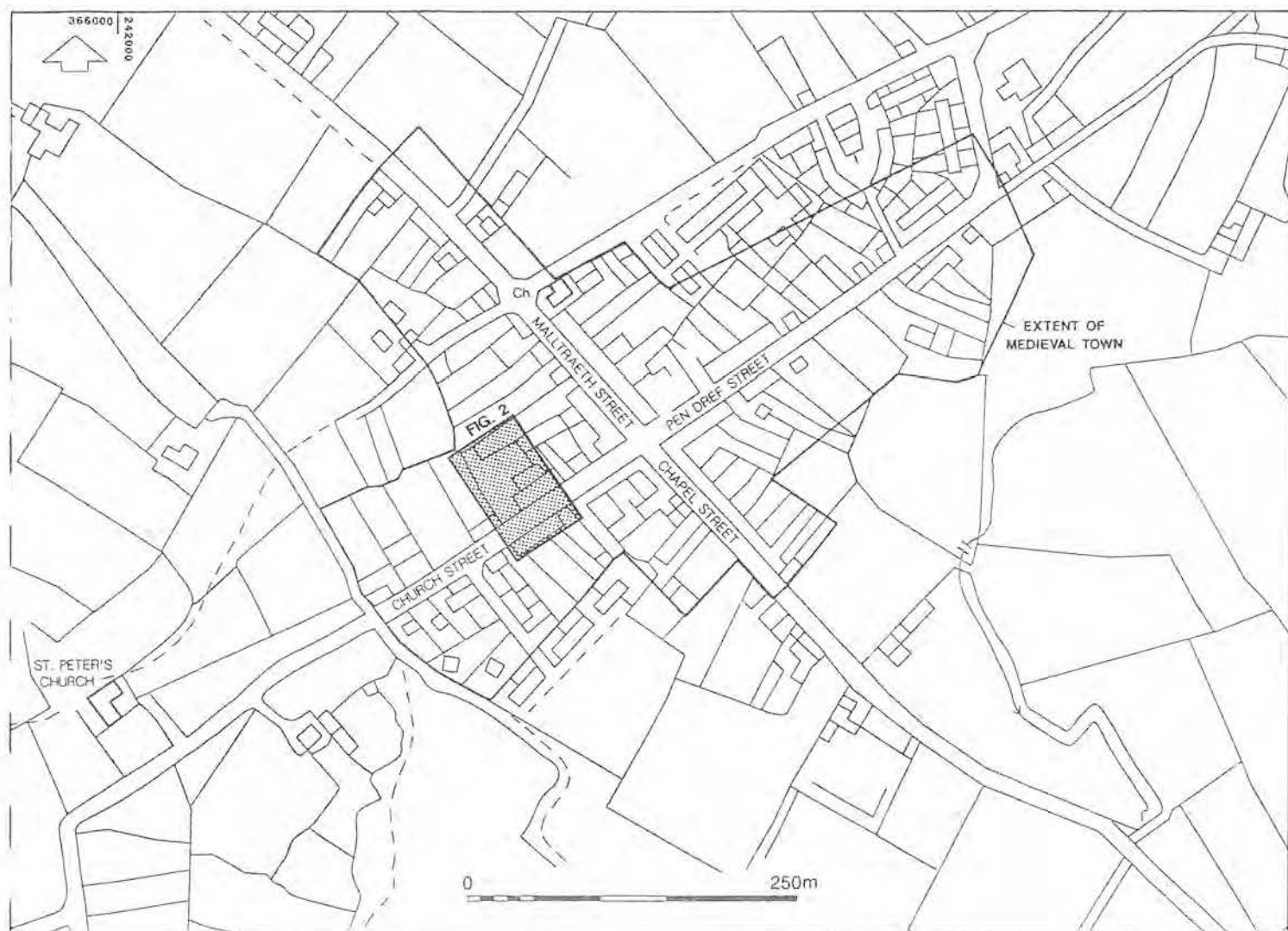


Fig. 1 Location plan of Newborough, showing extent of Medieval town.

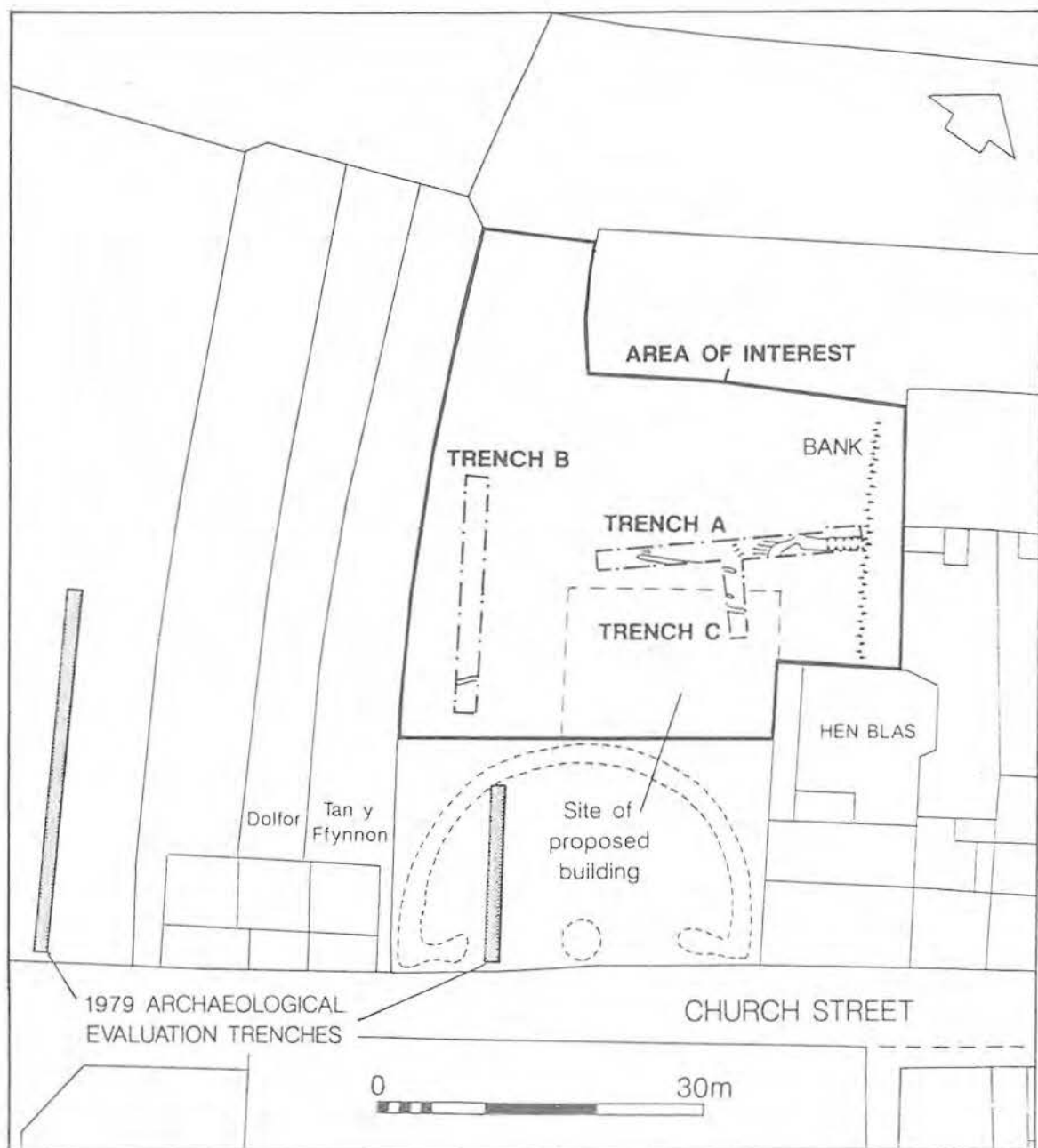


Fig. 2 Location of area of interest and evaluation trenches.

4.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

4.1 Methodology

Three trenches (A - C) were excavated across the site, amounting to some 12% of the area. The trenches were positioned to obtain the maximum information from the area intended for development, as shown in Fig. 2. Trench A measured 24m long by 2m wide, and ran across the site from east to west. Trench B measured 22m long by 2m wide, and was located at the eastern end of the plot and ran from north to south. Trench C was 7m long and 2m wide, orientated north - south, and adjoined the south side of trench A.

The trenches were initially opened by machine and subsequently cleaned by hand. Humic topsoil and an accumulation of wind blown sand up to 1.20m was removed by machine. The sand consisted of an upper layer of fine brown sand up to 0.70m deep overlying a deposit of yellow sand up to 0.35m deep. The depth of the lower deposit of sand varied as it followed the undulations of the underlying buried soil (see Section 1 - Fig. 3).

4.2 Results

A buried soil below the wind blown sand was cleaned by hand and a number of features were identified. The soil, a brown clay soil up to 0.50m deep, overlay an orange clay sub-soil. At the south end of trench C the buried soil horizon contained cockle shells within its matrix. A trial cutting excavated through the brown soil also recovered a sherd of medieval pottery, two post medieval sherds were recovered from the interface of the brown soil and the yellow sand.

A number of linear cut features were recorded and are shown in the accompanying plan (Fig. 3) the majority were quite slight features and it is not possible at present to assign any particular function to them although they might possibly have been bedding trenches. At the east end of Trench A a rather more substantial cut feature was excavated. This linear feature ran for almost nine metres from east to west taking a slight kink to the north before turning to the south and continuing beyond the limits of the excavation. Two sections of the fill were recorded, the furthest east (Section 2) revealed a 0.90m wide cut 0.60m deep with steeply sloping side narrowing to a flat 0.30m wide base. The other (Section 3), further west showed the same feature to be 0.80m wide and 0.30m deep with less steeply sloping sides and a less pronounced profile. The two sections clearly showed that the 'open feature' had begun to silt up before alternating layers of wind blown sand and soil had accumulated within it. The feature was subsequently buried below a 0.70m deep layer of wind blown sand over which an earthen bank had been built. On the north of the feature a deposit of blackened brown soil overlay the old ground surface.

5.0 INTERPRETATION

The evidence from trench B and from the western section of trench A suggests that prior to the sand incursions this area was largely agricultural. There is no evidence of any occupation deposits within the study area, although the 1979 excavations revealed evidence for buildings fronting Church Street, which suggests that the area under evaluation was formerly the rear portion of the Medieval burgage plots. However the ditch recorded in the eastern end of trench B does not appear to relate to any obvious agricultural activity, although it presumably records a separation of functions between different parts of the site, and may therefore be a boundary marker for a burgage plot. It is on the same alignment as current property boundaries to the east, although immediately to the west the fossilised burgage plots at Tan y Fynnon are further north. The feature may however represent an east-west alignment from burgage plots to the rear of Malltraeth street. It cannot be dated and the two post medieval pottery sherds recovered from the buried ground surface do not provide adequate dating for this horizon; the feature does however predate the incursion of wind blown sand. A similar linear feature was recorded at Osborne House Beaumaris, dating from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, which was interpreted as a property boundary. However without

further information on the form of burgage plot boundaries in the planted boroughs of north west Wales it is not possible to speculate further.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation has shown that there are unlikely to be any domestic structures on the evaluated site, (although excavations in 1979 suggested the presence of former domestic structures to the south, fronting Church Street). However, linear features, *i.e.* possible former boundaries of burgage plots, are present. It is therefore recommended that a watching brief is carried out during any future disturbance, to ensure that the archaeological features visible in the evaluation trenches are fully recorded, along with any other, undiscovered, remains.

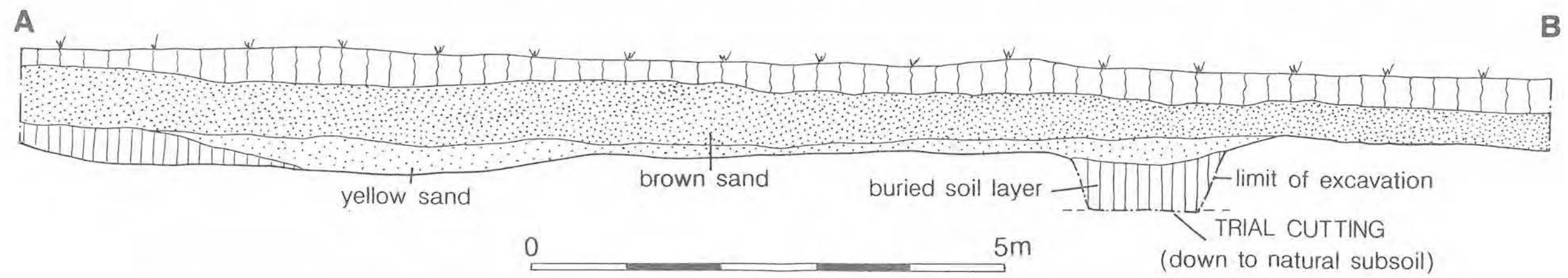
7.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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SECTION 1

(key to sections - Fig. 4)

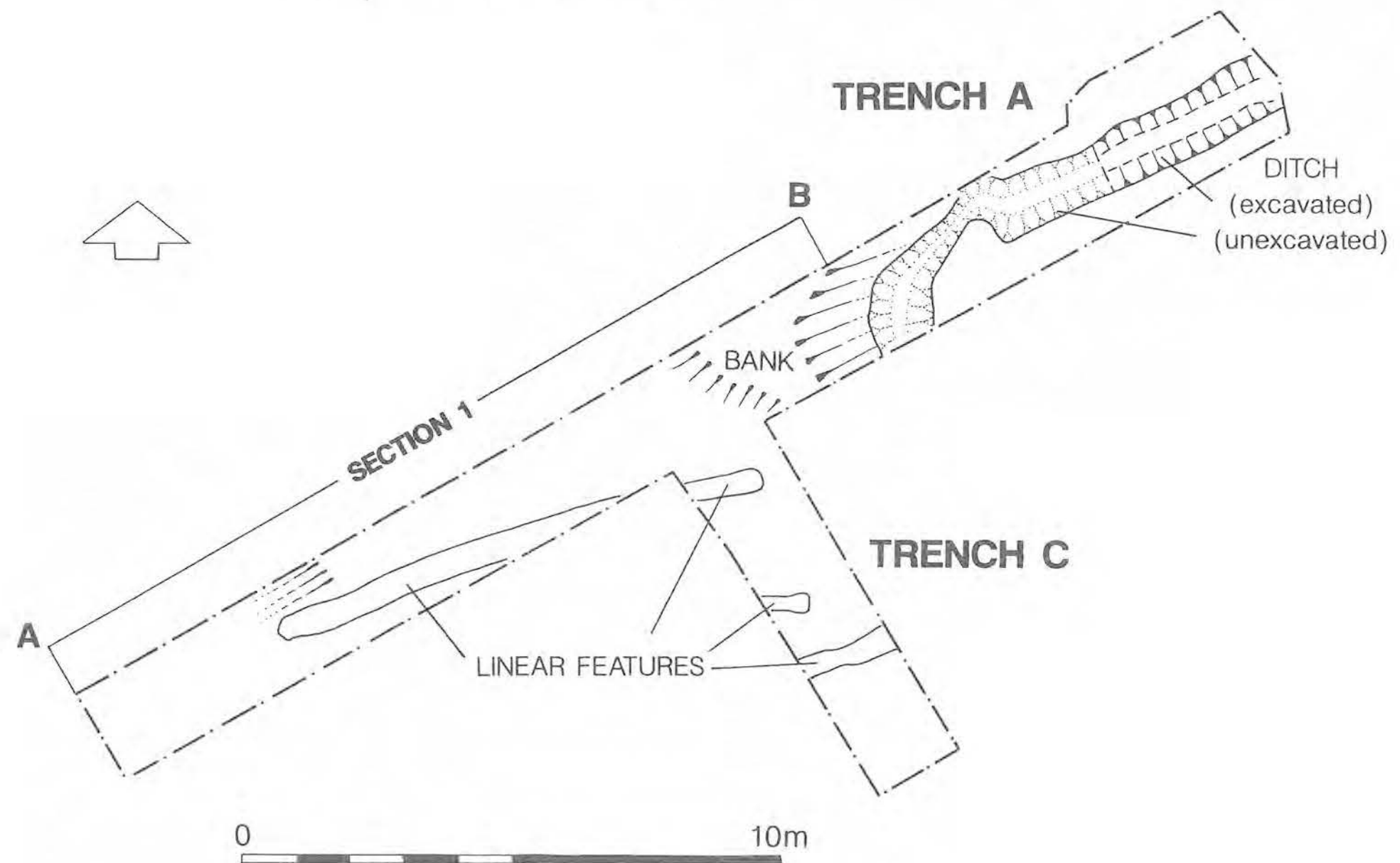


Fig. 3 Plan of trenches A & C, and detail of section 1.

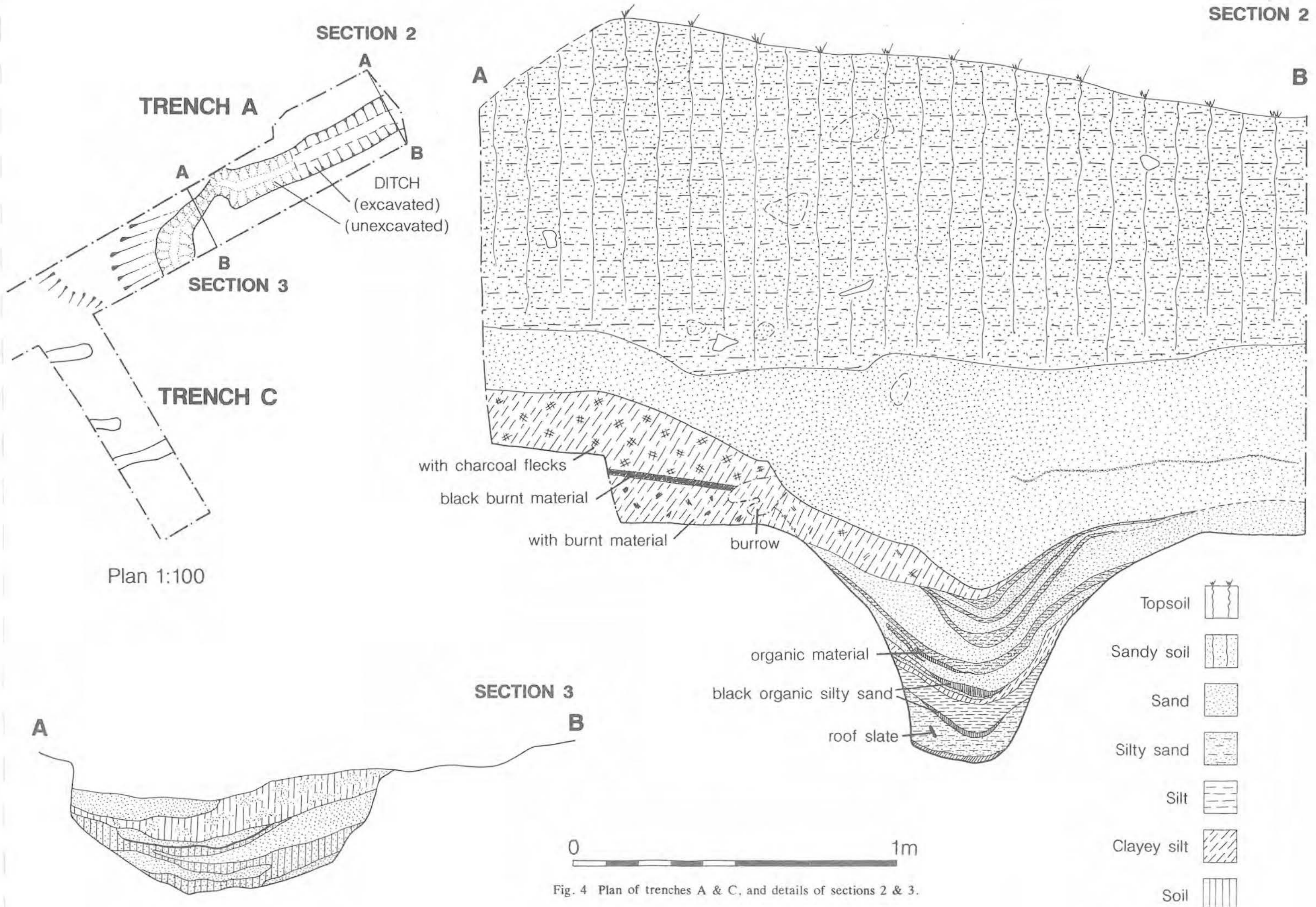


Fig. 4 Plan of trenches A & C, and details of sections 2 & 3.