

**An archaeological evaluation at
the old pumping station,
Orchard Road, Welwyn, Herts.**

January 2001

**commissioned by
J R Trodd Builders Ltd
on behalf of the
Stort Valley Housing Association**



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Summary

Four exploratory trenches were dug at this riverside site in advance of the construction of three bungalows. No archaeologically significant features or finds were revealed. The site was found to have been subject to large-scale ground disturbance associated with its former use as a pumping station.

Introduction

This report describes the results of a field evaluation carried out to investigate the archaeological implications of a residential development at the old pumping station site in Orchard Road, Welwyn, Hertfordshire. The fieldwork was commissioned by J R Trodd Builders Ltd on behalf of the Stort Valley Housing Association, and took place on the 11th and 12th January 2001.

The evaluation was prompted by the proposed construction of three bungalows. A desk-based assessment (CAT Report 115) had demonstrated that the property lies in an area rich in archaeological remains: Roman cemeteries and a Roman grain-processing site lie nearby, and Roman pottery and tile have been found within 50m of the development spot. The Dicket Mead Roman villa lies beyond the bypass to the south-east. The site also lies on the eastern fringe of the medieval village of Welwyn, and building materials from a medieval house have been found just to the north of the application area.

The work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared in November 2000 in response to a design brief issued by the Hertfordshire County Council Archaeology Office on 1st November 2000.

Site

This 510 sq m site lies at the end of a lane and is bounded by the River Mimram to the south and allotments to the north (Fig 1). It was formerly occupied by a pumping station. At the time of the evaluation only the pump-house remained standing. The area for the proposed bungalows had been stripped of approximately 100mm of surface concrete in readiness for the exploratory trenches.

The excavation

Four trenches, numbered Trenches 1-4 (T1-T4), were machine-excavated at the locations shown in Figure 2. In addition, a trial trench previously dug by the contractor was recorded (T5). Some variation in trench locations was necessary due to the presence of substantial concrete features, and, in particular, a large rendered brick pool (F1 in Fig 2) in the eastern part of the site. Recording of the lower levels was hampered by ground-water, which rose gradually to the levels indicated in the section illustrations.

Trench 1 (section: Fig 3)

The entire east side of the trench was cut by a concrete foundation that ran the full length and depth of the trench and projected 60cm into the trenched area.

The stratigraphy was as follows:

- L101 Mixed material, mainly a dark greyish brown sandy loam with lenses of reddish brown coarse stony sand. Modern levelling.
- L102 Mixed, greyish brown sandy loam. Modern.
- L103 Reddish brown coarse sand (similar to the lenses within Layer or L101). Modern.
- L104 Brown to dark brown sandy loam with occasional pale brown mottles. Probably a topsoil, predating the construction of the pumping station.
- L105 Same as L104.
- L106 Very dark grey to black sandy silt loam.
- L107 Similar to L106.
- L108 Pale brown sandy silt loam with lenses of dark greyish brown sandy silt loam.

L106 to L108 were sandy silt subsoils varying in colour from very black to pale brown. In the northern and central parts of the trench, L106 and L107 were heavily discoloured by a black oily substance.

Trench 2 (section: Fig 4)

The stratigraphy was as follows:

- L201 Reddish brown sandy loam with medium content of small stones. Modern make-up.
- L202 Reddish brown sand. Modern deposit.
- L203 Mainly yellowish brown fine loamy sand. Modern.
- L204 Reddish brown to greyish brown sandy silt loam.
- L205 Dark greyish brown sandy silt loam.
- L206 Pale grey sandy silt loam with fine particles of grit.
- L207 Mainly dark grey sandy silt loam.

- F201 Concrete foundation. Continuation of F1 (Fig 2).
- F202 Trench fill, mainly brown sandy loam.
- F203 Reddish brown coarse sand with high content of small stones.

Overall, the stratigraphy here seems to comprise modern deposits and intrusions in the form of L201, L202, the concrete foundation (F201), and associated trench (F202), also a cut at the southern end filled with clean sandy gravel (F203). Below these lay a series of variously-tinged silt subsoils (L204, L205, L206, L207).

Trench 3 (section: Fig 5)

The western side of T3 was cut by a deep concrete channel which flanked the pool F1.

The stratigraphy was as follows:

- L301 Tarmac above coarse stony sand. Modern surfacing.
- L302 Dark brown sandy loam with occasional small stones. Earlier topsoil.
- L303 Yellowish brown sandy silt loam with scatter of small stones.
- L304 Reddish brown sandy silt loam.
- L305 Greyish brown sandy silt loam with low content of angular small stones. Similar to and merges with L304, L306 and L307.
- L306 Greyish brown sandy silt loam.
- L307 Similar to L306.

In this trench, the modern tarmac (L301) sealed a topsoil (L302), beneath which were silt subsoils L304, L305, L306 and L307, and possibly L303.

Trench 4 (section: Fig 6)

Situated close to the river bank, this trench was free from modern ground disturbance.

The stratigraphy was as follows:

- L401 Dark greyish brown sandy loam with a low content of small stones. Modern topsoil.
- L402 Yellowish brown fine sandy loam/loamy sand with rare grit and small stones. Lower horizon merges into:
 - L403 Mixed, mainly reddish brown coarse sand with grey silt loam mottles. Lower horizon merges into:
 - L404 Mainly greyish brown sandy silt loam. Lower horizon merges into:
 - L405 Mid greyish brown sandy silt loam.

Layers L403, L404 and L405 were silt subsoils. L402 appeared to be an earlier topsoil, but with a low humic content.

Trench 5

This trench, at the eastern extremity of the site, was dug previously by the contractor.

The stratigraphy was as follows:

- L500 0-100mm. Dark greyish brown sandy loam topsoil (removed as part of the general surface stripping of the site).
- L501 100-750mm. Mid brown sandy loam with occasional small stones and common tree roots.
- L502 750-900mm. Loamy sand dominated by small angular pebbles and grit.
- L503 900mm-1.1m. Mid brown sandy silt loam, becoming greyer with increasing depth.

The remainder of the trench stratigraphy was submerged.

The stony layer (L502) thinned out towards the western end of the trench and was not present further west in T4.

Finds

One find was retained temporarily: a suspected tile fragment from L107 which was contaminated by the black oily substance in T1. This was discarded when subsequent cleaning revealed it to be Portland cement.

Discussion

No archaeologically significant features or finds were revealed in the sampled areas of the site. The ground within the footprint of the proposed bungalows has in the past been subject to severe disturbance from the construction of the pumping station, in particular from the installation of buried channels and at least one large pool.

The observed site stratigraphy may be divided into three categories:

1. 19th- to 20th-century features and deposits associated with the pumping station.
These include the following contexts: L101-L103, L201-L203, L301, F1, F201-F203.
2. Topsoil, predating the construction of the pumping station.
Contexts: L104, L105, L302, L402.
3. Sandy silt subsoils.
Contexts: L106-L108, L204-L207, L304-L307, L403-L405.

In the absence of datable inclusions it was not possible to establish date ranges for any but the latest layers associated with the pumping station.

Archive

The site record and related material will be deposited with Welwyn Hatfield Museum Service, Mill Green Museum, Mill Green, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, under cover of archive code ORW2001.

Acknowledgements

The Trust is indebted to the following for their co-operation at various stages in the investigation of the site: J R Trodd Builders Ltd (James Monk, Wayne Bragg and Scott Beadle), and Hertfordshire County Council (Jonathan Smith, Alison Tinniswood and Stewart Bryant).

Carl Crossan, January 2001

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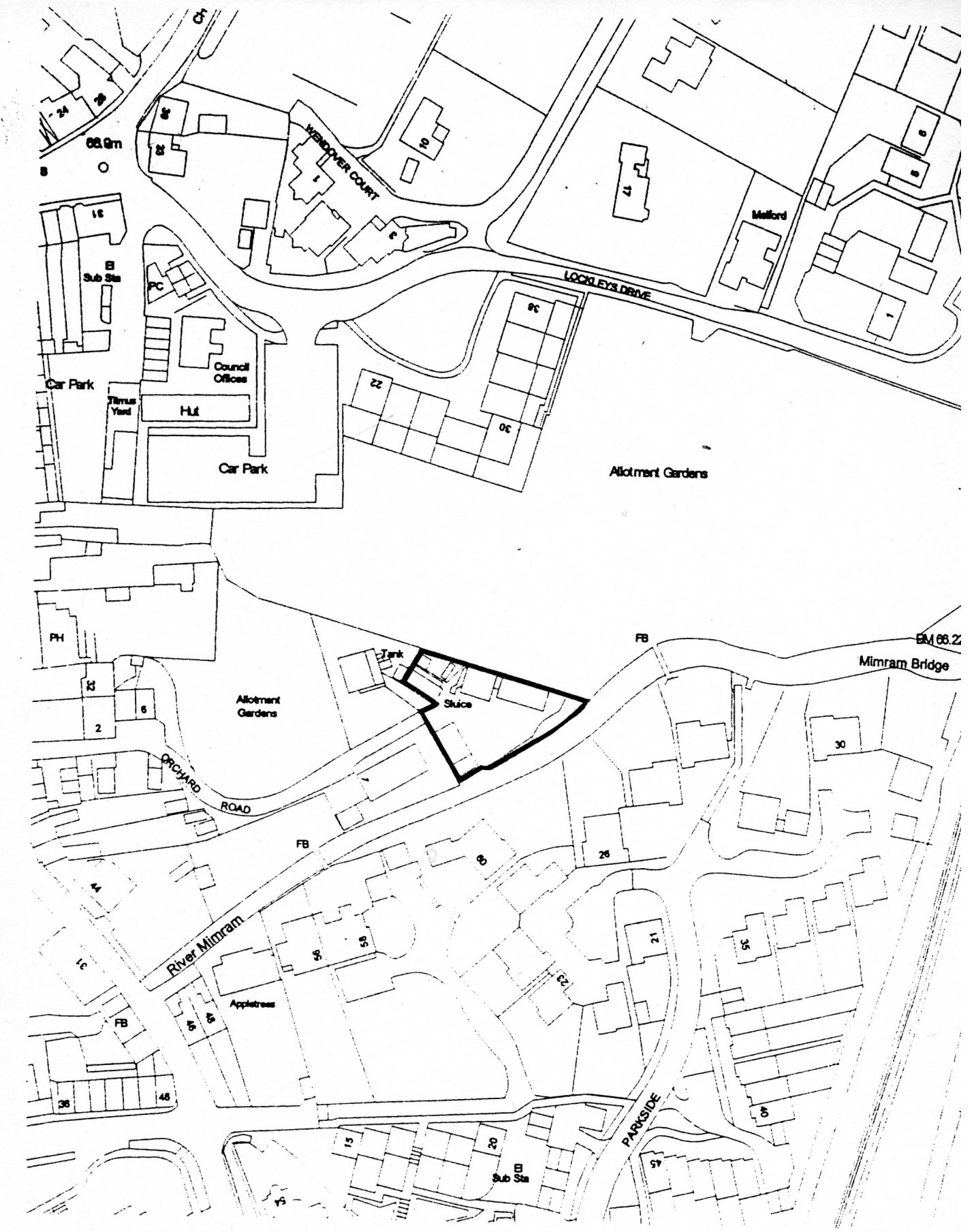
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50 metres



Figure 1: site location

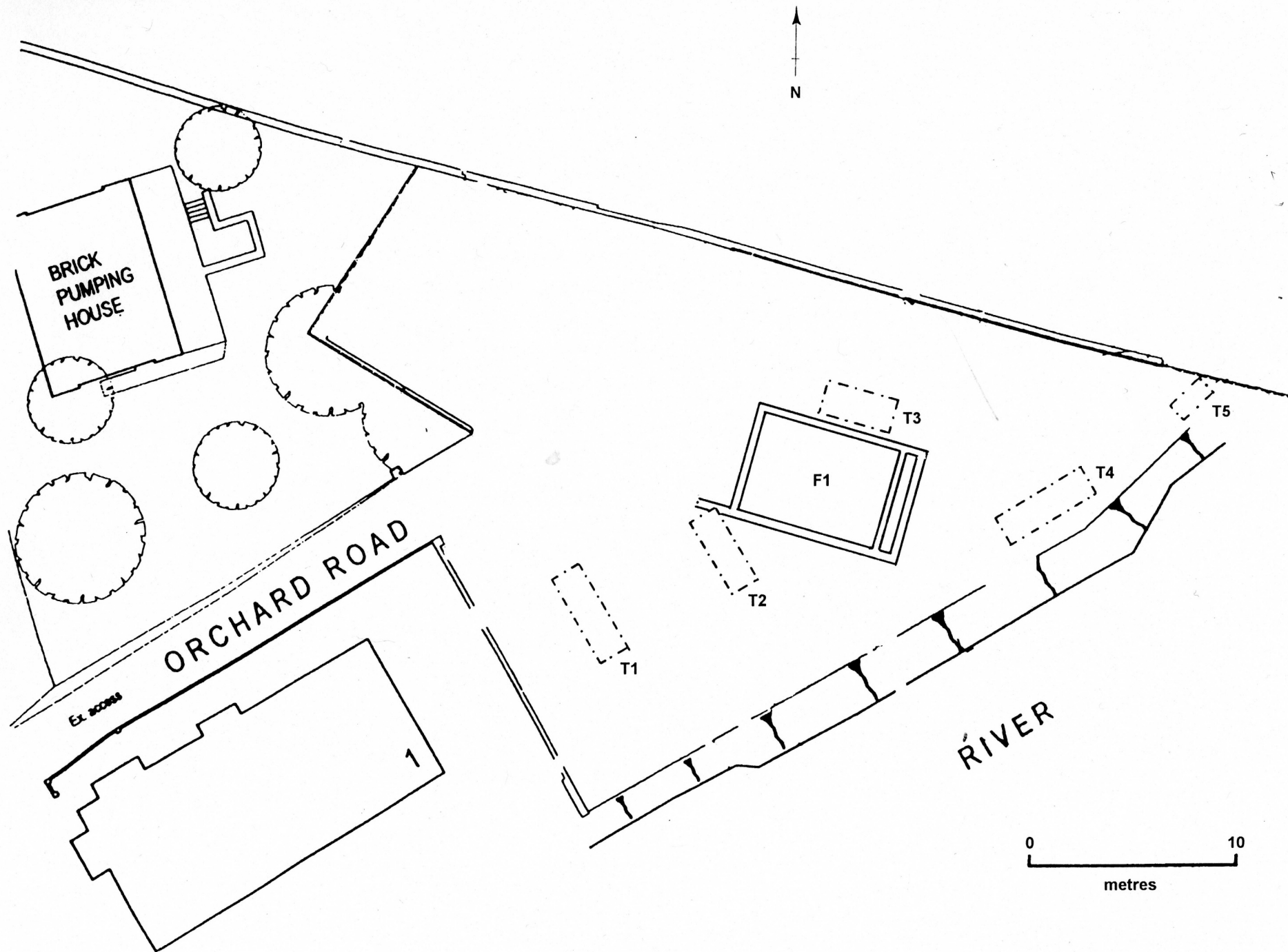


Fig 2 Site plan and trench locations.

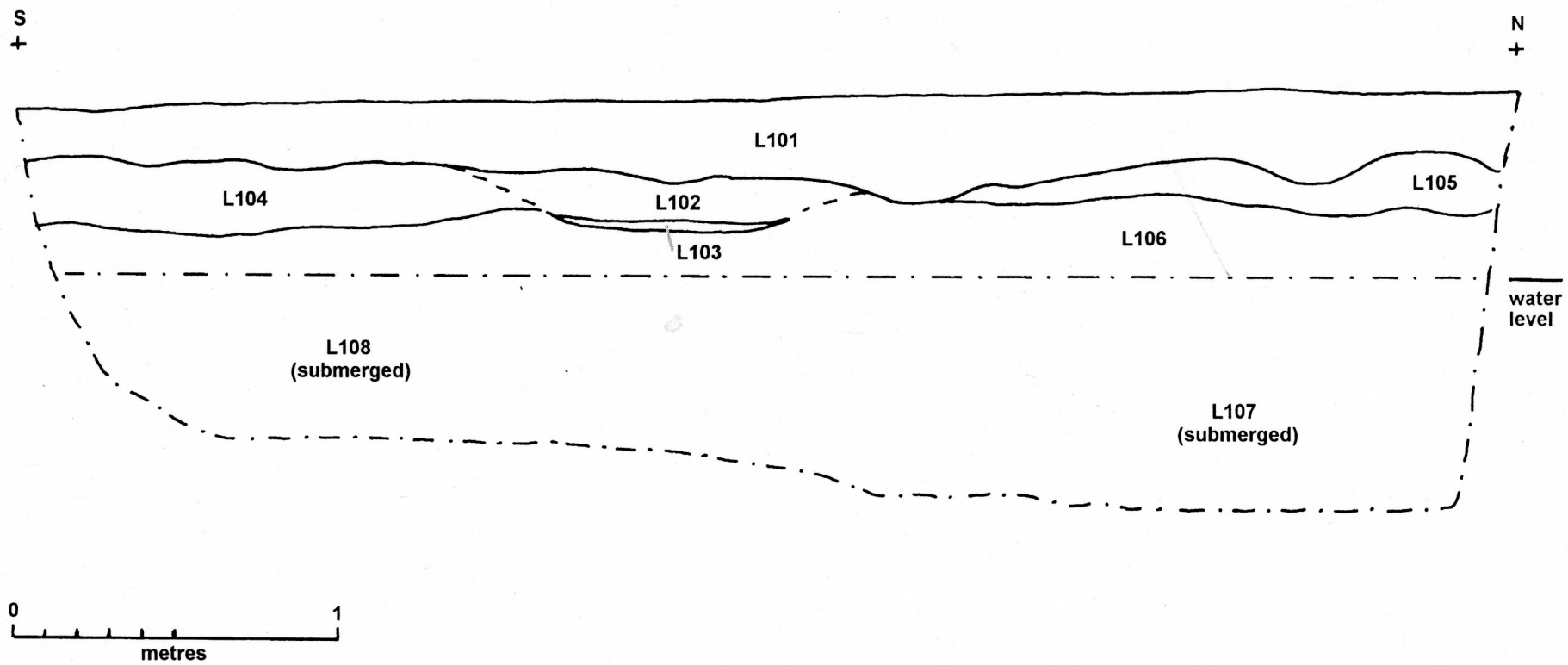


Fig 3 T1 section.

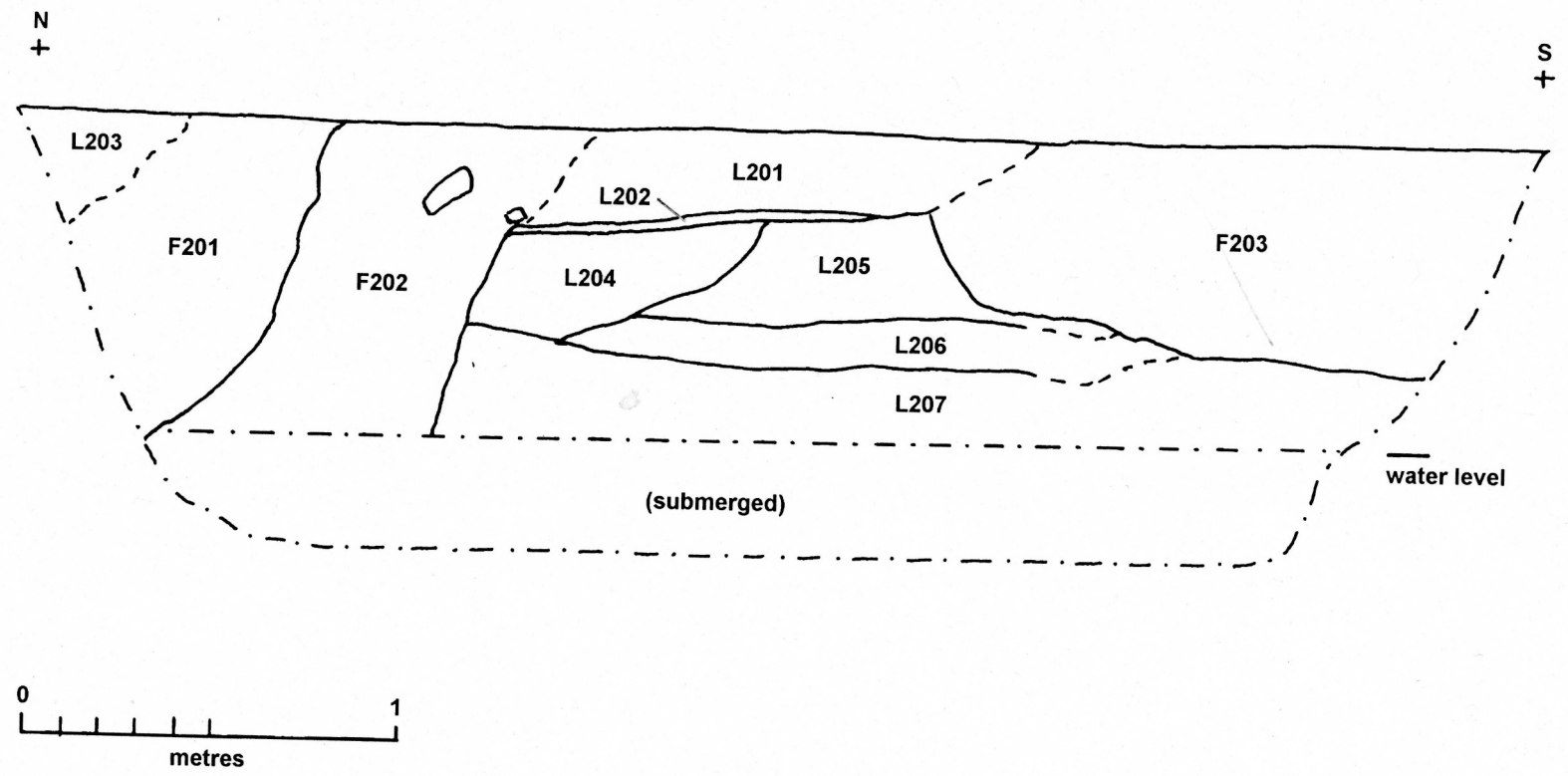


Fig 4 T2 section.

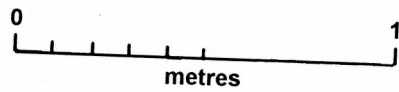
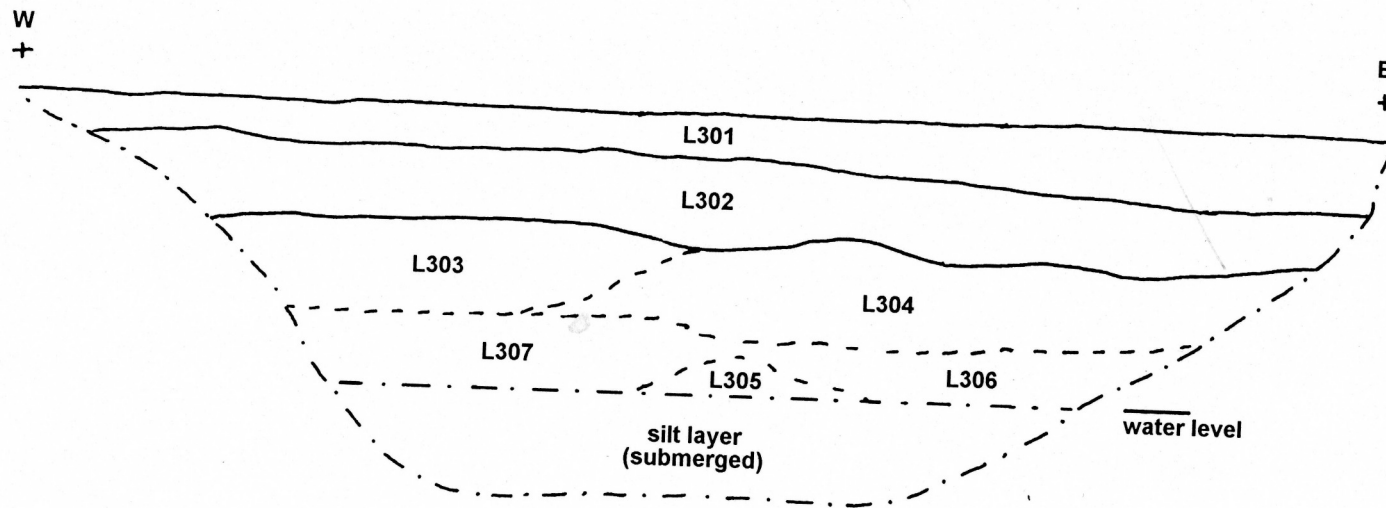


Fig 5 T3 section.

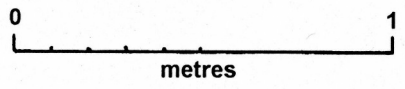
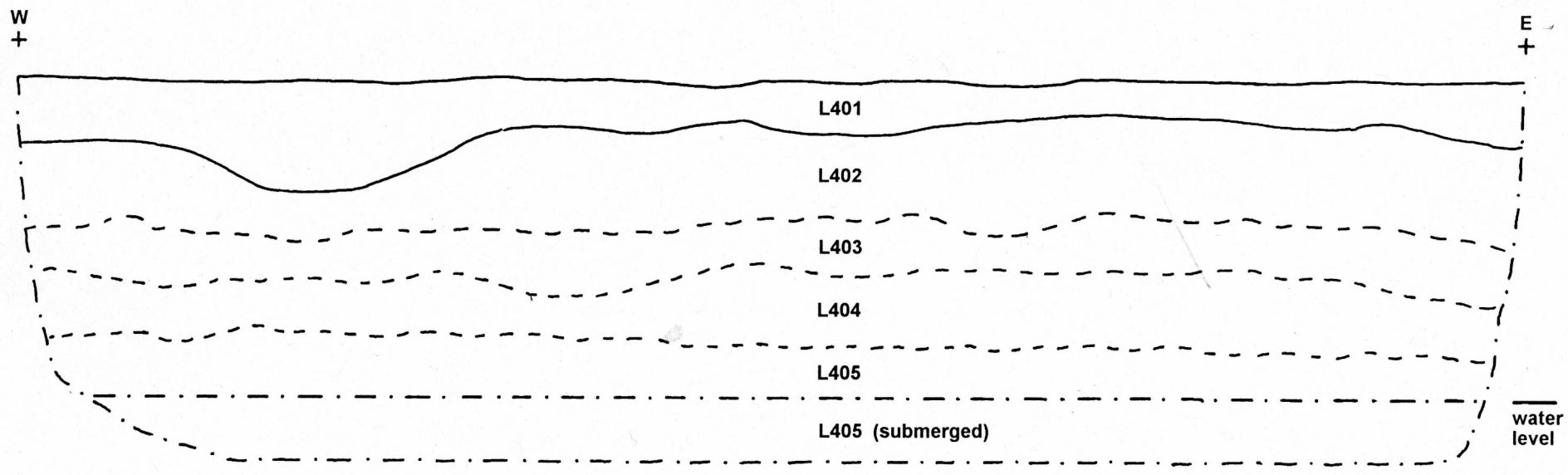


Fig 6 T4 section.