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**A WATCHING BRIEF ON THE
A5124 BATTLEFIELD LINK ROAD,
SHREWSBURY**

by
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**A Report for
THE ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT,
SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Archaeology Service

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1 INTRODUCTION

In 1998 work began on the construction of the A5124 Battlefield Link Road, Shrewsbury. The work was carried out by Wrekin Construction on behalf of Shropshire County Council, and was undertaken in two stages. The first stage the construction programme consisted of a new road between the junction of the A528 Ellesmere Road and Harlescott Lane to a new traffic island to the rear of the Battlefield Enterprise Park (SJ 517 167), a distance of around 1.75 kilometres. The second stage comprised the extension of this new road to the junction of the A49 Whitchurch road and the A53 Market Drayton road at Battlefield.

The course of this new road ran through an area of agricultural land containing the cropmark and earthwork remains of medieval ridge and furrow field systems. The road also ran along the southern edge of the site of the battle of Shrewsbury.

Due to the archaeological significance of the road corridor, an archaeological evaluation of the route of the new road was carried out by the Archaeology Service, Shropshire County Council (Hannaford & Phillpotts 1994 & 1996).

The evaluation recommended that the construction of the new road be accompanied by a programme of archaeological investigations and monitoring. These investigations were to consist of a metal detector survey of the line of the road corridor, to be carried out in advance of road construction work, and a topographical survey of a well-preserved area of ridge and furrow earthworks which would be partially destroyed by the new road. A watching brief was also to be maintained on all destructive groundworks associated with the road construction. The Archaeology Service was commissioned to carry out the programme of archaeological work, and this report details the findings of this work.

2 THE HISTORY OF THE SITE

Detailed documentary research was carried out for the evaluation of the route of the new road in 1994, and a site history compiled from this research has already been published in the evaluation reports for the road scheme (Phillpotts in Hannaford and Phillpotts, 1994, and Hannaford and Phillpotts, 1996). The main findings of this work are summarised below.

Prehistoric activity in the study area is evidenced only by a single findspot of uncertain location. In c. 1863 a hoard of bronze implements of Bronze Age date was found during ploughing somewhere in the Battlefield area; most of the objects were melted down by a local scrap dealer, but a few were saved and presented to Shrewsbury Museum.

In the medieval period the study area formed part of the fields of the manor of Albright Hussey (which included Harlescott and Battlefield). At the time of the Domesday Survey of 1086, the manor was held by Rainald the Sheriff from Roger of Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury. Rainald's lands passed to his descendants, the FitzAlans, as part of the Lordship of Oswestry, and the manor of Albright Hussey was held from the FitzAlans by the Hussey family until the 17th century. Until recently, much of the study area was covered by the ridge and furrow earthworks of the manor's medieval strip fields. By the time of the evaluation of the route corridor, however, most of this had been ploughed away. The best preserved remains of these field systems lay on the line of the new road in a field known as *Trooper's Piece and Roushill*, where a radial pattern of ridge and furrow was centred on a group of ponds (Figs. 2 & 3; Site A).

The Battle of Shrewsbury was fought on 21st July 1403 across Albright Hussey's strip fields. Royalist forces under Henry IV and the Prince of Wales, the future Henry V, met here with a rebel army under the command of Henry Percy the younger (Hotspur). The fighting was on foot, and appears to have been a fluid and wide ranging encounter. Both sides had large bodies of archers, and many of the casualties of the battle resulted from the arrow storms they generated. The king's army was ultimately victorious, and Hotspur was among the dead, which may have numbered several thousand. The precise site of the battle is uncertain, although it is probable that Hotspur's army was initially drawn up on the ridge of high ground to the north of the church. The position of the royalist forces is thought to have been in the field later known as *King's Croft*, just to the southeast of the church, although in the 18th century this field name was applied to a field further to the south and now bisected by the railway line. The field immediately to the west of this was named *Trooper's Piece and Roushill*, (the field which contains the radial pattern of ridge and furrow ploughing). The traditional site of Hotspur's death was a mile to the west of the church.

Following the battle, a chapel was erected to commemorate the dead. In 1410 the chapel was re-founded as a college of chaplains, and its church of St Mary Magdalene (SMR no. SA981), which had replaced a smaller chapel at Albright Hussey as the parish church, survived the Reformation to serve as the church of the re-named Battlefield Parish.

In 1638 the manor was bought by the Corbet family, and it was probably during the 17th century that the medieval strip fields were divided up into smaller fields, many of whose boundaries survive to the present day. The roads to Ellesmere and Whitchurch at either end of the study area were turnpiked in the 18th century, and the Shrewsbury to Crewe railway line was built across the eastern end of the area in 1853.

3 THE METAL DETECTOR SURVEY

The Battle of Shrewsbury appears to have been a fluid and possibly wide-ranging engagement. It was also one of the first major conflicts where archers were used on a large scale. It was considered possible that the location of concentrations of arrowheads and other battlefield debris in the topsoil might help to locate more precisely the core areas of the battlefield. A controlled metal detector survey was therefore carried out in February and March 1998 along the proposed road corridor.

A 1,500m long sample of the road was surveyed using a *Garrett Ultra GTA* metal detector configured to detect all metals to a maximum depth of 6 inches (15 cms). The road corridor was scanned at traverse intervals ranging from 10m in those areas deemed especially archaeologically sensitive, to a maximum of 20m intervals. A 2m wide sweep was then made centred on these traverses. In this way a significant sample of the total area was covered by the survey.

The resultant finds totalled some 320 items with a total weight of 1.423 kg, even though many large iron objects were not removed from site (i.e., a car leaf spring, plate iron, and tractor parts). The majority of the objects recovered were iron nails, with a wide spectrum of size, and shape. Nuts, bolts, washers, and corroded lumps of iron accounted for the main body of the remainder of the items. The identification of finds such as silver paper, reinforced glass and even fragments of coal highlighted the sensitivity of the detector. There were two items of greater interest, both of lead or lead alloy. The first item was a trade or bowling green token, 18mm in diameter, embossed on one side with a cross pattern, the other side undecorated. This item, probably dates to the late 17th or early 18th century. The second item was a lead seal c.20mm in diameter and up to 5mm thick. The seal was originally used to seal the wire tie on a sack, in this case of fertiliser, as the seal bears the impression "Webb and Sons Manure Mfrs, Chester". The reverse side bears the Webb Company trademark.

The distribution of finds was such that around 95% of the total came from the road corridor to the west of the boundary of the scheduled battlefield area, marked by the Battlefield Brook (a.k.a. the Albrighton Watercourse). The reason for this is unclear. It is unlikely that this is the result of unrecorded or unreported metal detecting within the registered battlefield area during the recent past, as the worthless objects (nails etc.) would have been discarded near to their find-spot rather than removed from the site and thus would have remained for future detection. It is not known, however, if metal detecting (or treasure hunting) is responsible for the lack of finds of archaeological significance. It is clear that there has been less modern ploughing and other disturbance within the registered battlefield area, and it may be this which accounted for the anomalous distribution of metal finds within the study area.

4 THE EARTHWORK SURVEY

It is evident from the available aerial photographic coverage of the study area that an extensive system of medieval ridge and furrow agriculture existed across much of the landscape between the Ellesmere and Whitchurch roads (Hannaford & Phillpotts 1996, Fig 3). By the mid 1990s only a very small proportion of this of ridge and furrow ploughing survived as earthworks within the study area. The best preserved section of these earthworks lay in the field known as "Troopers' Piece and Roushill" and this would be partially destroyed by the new road (Fig. 2; Site A). The present boundaries around this field are post-medieval in date, and can be seen on aerial photographs to cut across the ridge and furrow which extended beyond the modern boundaries in all directions.

The area of remaining ridge and furrow earthworks was therefore surveyed at a scale of 1:1250 in March 1998. The subsequent plan, reproduced at 1:2500 scale as Fig. 3, shows a radial pattern of ridge and furrow converging on a group of ponds. It is not known if these ponds are entirely natural features or were artificially created, perhaps to collect water drained by the furrows.

The average span between the ridges of the earthworks was around 11m, although there was some variation within a range of between 5m and 20m. The longest ridges were to the southwest of the central ponds and these displayed the distinctive reverse 'S' profile typical of medieval plough lands. All the other ridges in the fields took a more direct and straight route to the pond features, although this may simply have been a reflection of the shorter length surviving of these earthworks. Measured profiles across selected sections of the best preserved ridges revealed that they stood to around 1 metre in height above the furrows. The ridges to the south and west of the pond features were the best preserved, or possibly were better defined during their cultivated life span.

The construction of the new road cut a 235m long swathe up to 60m wide across the southeastern corner of these earthworks.

5 THE WATCHING BRIEF

Phase 1

The construction of the new road was undertaken in two phases. The first phase consisted of the construction of the western section of the road, from the Ellesmere Road up to the link road for the extension to the Battlefield industrial estate. A watching brief was carried out in April and May 1998 during the initial, destructive, groundworks associated with this phase of the road construction.

During the topsoil stripping at the western end of this section, a sandstone-lined drain was exposed, aligned approximately northeast - southwest and located around 30m from the junction of Huffley Lane and the A528 Ellesmere Road (Fig. 1; Site B).

The drain was visible at 0.3m below the turf-line and was cut into the yellowish clay subsoil. A gully around 0.4m wide was sided by red sandstone blocks (Fig. 4; 29 & 30) measuring some 0.8m in length by 0.3m in width, and falling to a depth of around 0.35m. After cleaning up the surfaces of the blockwork a clear pattern of tooling was visible, consisting of closely spaced diagonal chisel marks between 5 and 7 cms across. The gully had been cut through a yellow clay subsoil and the sandstone lining had been laid into the natural yellowish sandy-clay glacial deposits (31) below. Adjacent to both edges of the drain was a layer of compacted pebbles (20) representing the buried remains of a former yard surface. The inclusion of brick and tile fragments and 19th century pottery into this surface dated it to the last century. The top of the sides of the drain were level with the pebble surface, suggesting that the drain had been an open drain or gully. The top 0.1m of the drain was filled with a brownish-grey silt with fragments of red sandstone, orange brick and sherds of 19th- to 20th-century pottery (25). Below this was a layer of around 0.1m thick comprising a brownish silt with fewer red sandstone fragments (26); this lay above a layer of greyish silt of a similar depth (27). The lowest fill of the drain was a grey silt with a black organic content (28) which contained pottery from the mid to late 17th century, suggesting the drain was in use at this time. Excavation of this layer revealed the natural sandy-clay matrix below.

Some 40m further to the east, but around 15m to the south of the alignment of the drain described above, an area of sandstone was exposed sitting on a deposit of grey clay (Fig. 1; C). This probably represented the ploughed out remains of a field-drain. It was of a far poorer quality than the drain to the west which was likely to have been a domestic or yard drain, rather than a field-drain. The exposed stonework of this second drain was in a much decayed state, although two larger stones remained relatively intact, and probably represented capping stones. There was no dating evidence associated with this feature.

Further to the east, and around 30m to the north of the Battlefield Brook (a.k.a. the Albrighton Watercourse) a further sandstone field-drain was encountered (Fig. 1; D). The topsoil strip in this area revealed a linear band of yellowish clay, which was distinguishable against the brownish-yellow clay subsoil. The feature was around 0.75m wide and could be seen running in a northwest-southeast direction

down the slope towards the brook. The feature was cleaned and photographed before a sample section of it was excavated. The fill of the feature was a yellowish-grey clay which was devoid of inclusions. At a depth of 0.5m a sandstone field drain comprised of randomly shaped red sandstone blocks up to a maximum of 0.3m across and large rounded cobbles was noted. There was an apparent void below the exposed stones, which was partially filled with accumulated grey silty clay. The structure of the field drain was not disturbed and the section was backfilled after a further photographic and drawn record was made.

Three pit features were encountered on the brow of the ridge to the north of the brook, in the location of the proposed traffic island (Fig. 1; E). All three-pit features stood out as irregular patches of dry dark red sand with at least one straight edge, against the reddish-brown sand and gravel of the surrounding subsoil. Two of the pits were sample excavated in order to determine their former function and possible date. Both pits were filled with very loose sand with random pockets of greyish-brown gravel and small pockets of boulder clay in the upper levels. At around 1.0m-1.25m below the existing surface several decaying turves were noted in both pits. From the evidence it is apparent that the pits were modern features and were probably trial pits associated with the geological evaluation of the road corridor. It was clear from the excavations that the pits were machine cut. The fill of one pit contained a residual abraded base or rim sherd of Roman Samian ware pottery.

One area of burning was noted on top of the ridge adjacent to these trial pits. An area of black burnt material containing some charcoal lay directly on the clay subsoil, which was burnt red below the centre of the fire. This burnt patch could not be associated with any other feature of archaeological significance.

A further two abraded sherds of Roman pottery were found during the topsoil strip to the south of the Battlefield Brook (a.k.a. the Albrighton Watercourse), although no associated archaeological features were encountered.

Visual inspection of a 3m deep sewer trench, which traverses the site from the Battlefield Enterprise Park to the Battlefield Brook, revealed the bank of a paleo-river channel (Fig. 1; F). In the trench section around 40m to the south of the brook the natural sandy subsoil dipped down to the north at an angle of around 40°. The land in this area begins to slope down to the present brook, which flows in a southeasterly direction within a pronounced dip. The exposed greenish silty-clay of the watercourse could also be seen in the eroded areas of the southern bank of the dip. This material was also apparent in the trench section, separated from the former red sandy river bank by a layer of orange clay, into which the greenish material had leached in the upper levels, and a band of greyish-white clay around 0.30 metres thick which followed the slope of the former bank. On the opposite side of the brook a ridge which runs parallel to the modern watercourse must represent the northern bank of the paleo-river which suggests that the former river channel may have been up to 70m wide.

Phase 2

A watching brief was maintained in August 1998 on the topsoil strip of the eastern section of the new road. No archaeological features or deposits were seen during these works. This section of the new road included the area of the ridge and furrow ploughing recorded by measured survey in the field known as "Troopers' Piece and Roushill". It was reported that a metal detectorist had been given permission to search the road corridor here following the topsoil strip and had found a number of coins and what may have been arrowheads. These finds have not been reported to or been made available for study by the county council's Archaeology Service or Museum Service, or, as far as is known, the Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council Museum Service.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Significant archaeological remains were affected in two discrete areas during the construction of the new road.

The first area lay along the eastern section of the road, where it cut a swathe through the well-preserved earthwork remains of a formerly extensive system of medieval ridge and furrow ploughing. These earthworks had been identified during the evaluation of the road corridor, and a measured survey of the earthworks was undertaken before road construction began. Coins and, possibly, arrowheads may have been recovered from this area by a metal detectorist after the topsoil had been stripped, but this cannot be confirmed.

The second area of remains lay at the extreme western end of the road corridor, at its junction with the Ellesmere Road. Here a post-medieval sandstone-lined drain and an associated 19th-century yard surface were revealed beneath the topsoil. These features may have been associated with a house which formerly stood on the opposite side of Harlescott Lane, depicted on the 1881 OS 1:2500 plan.

A controlled metal detector survey of the road corridor carried out before the topsoil strip began proved largely negative, although a post-medieval trade token and a 19th-century sack seal were recovered from the western section of the road corridor.

7 REFERENCES AND SOURCES CONSULTED

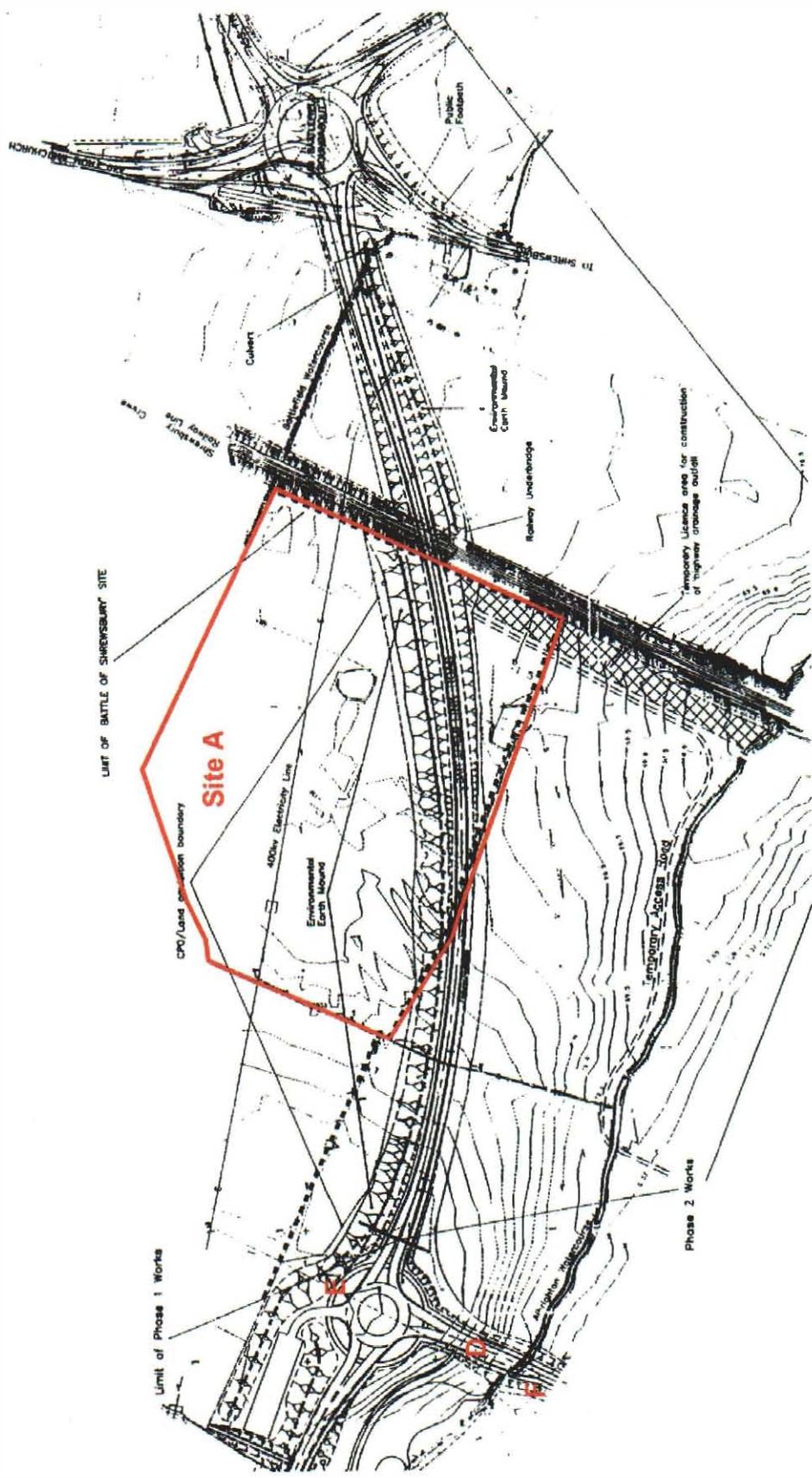
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Abbreviations:

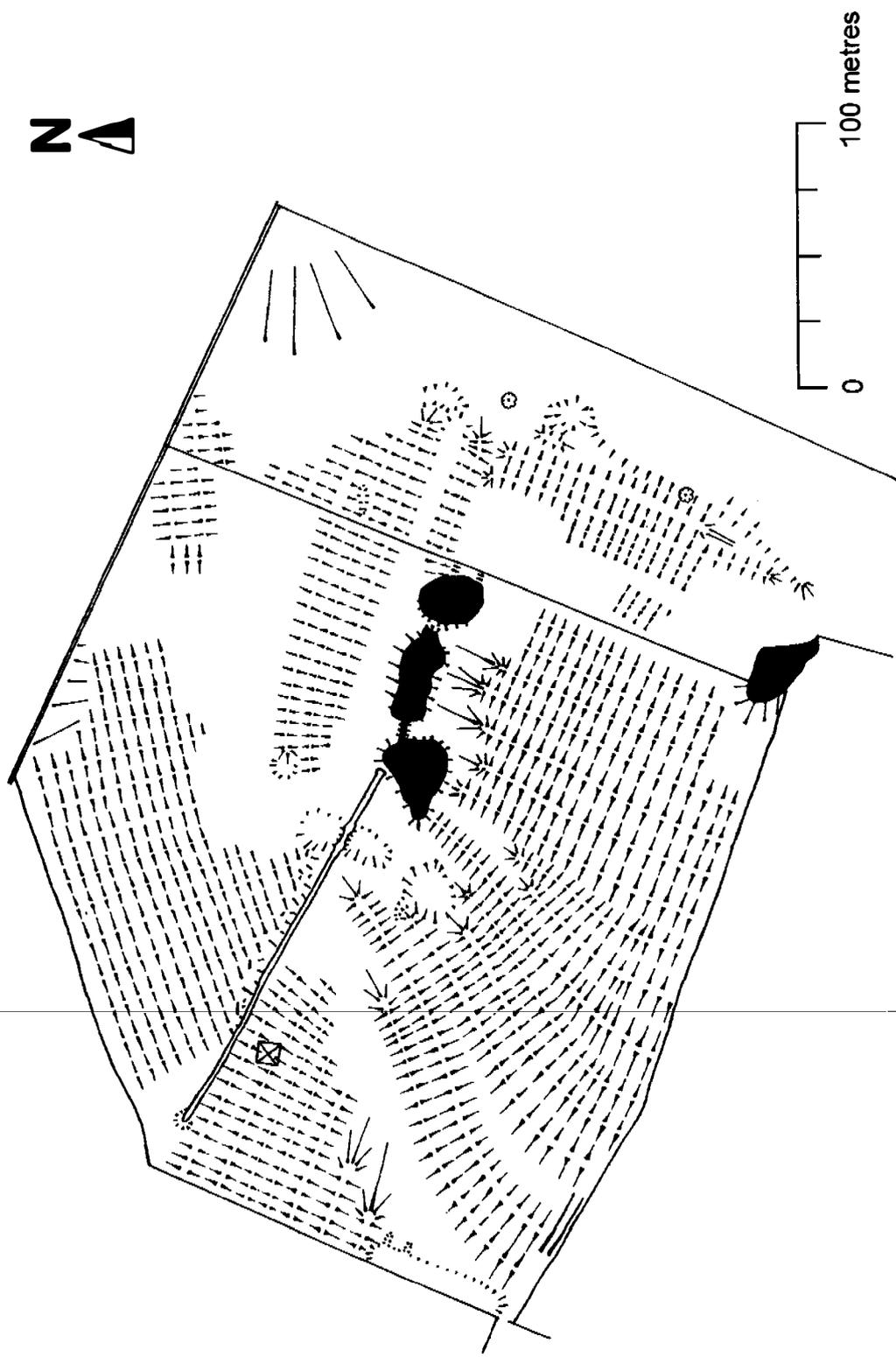
- APs** Aerial Photographs
- CSA** The Cartulary of Shrewsbury Abbey ed U Rees, 1975
- DB** Domesday Book xxv Shropshire ed F and C Thorn, 1986
- OS** Ordnance Survey
- SMR** Sites and Monuments Record, Shire Hall, Shrewsbury
- SRRC** Shropshire Record and Research Centre, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
- TSAS** Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society
- VCHS** Victoria County History of Shropshire

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

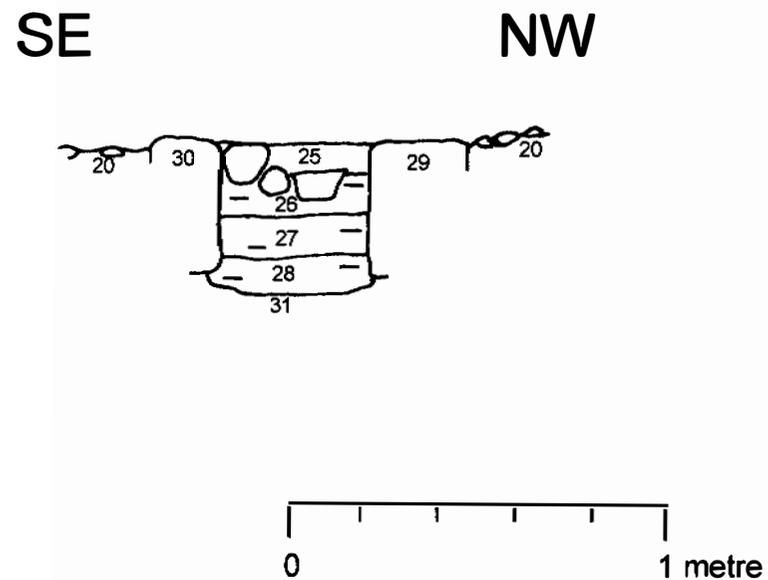
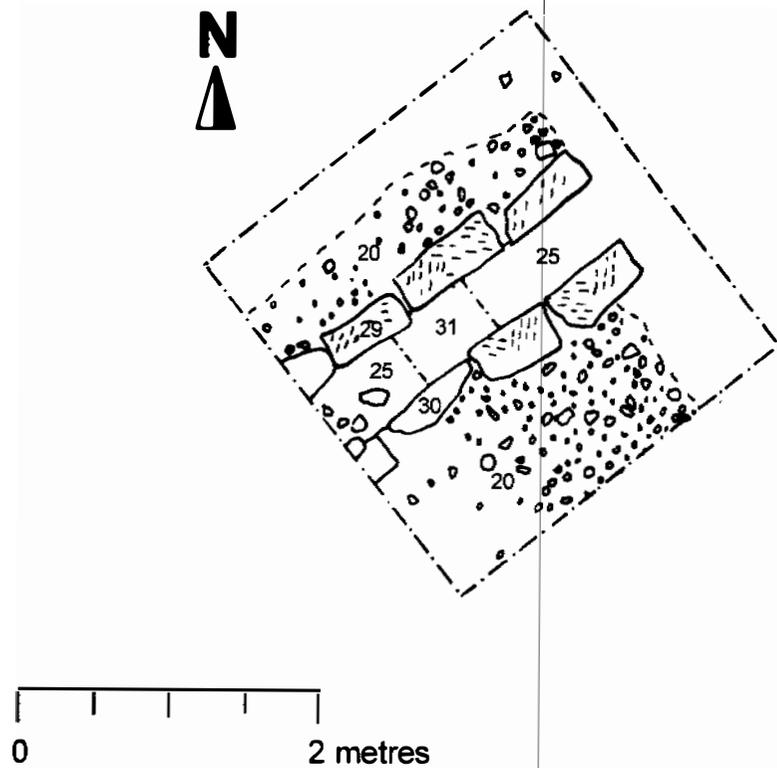
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A5214 BATTLEFIELD LINK ROAD 1998
 Fig. 2: The eastern half of the route corridor (Phase 2); scale 1:5000



A5214 BATTLEFIELD LINK ROAD 1998
Fig. 3: The ridge and furrow earthworks in Troopers' Piece and Roushill (Site A); scale 1:2500



A5214 BATTLEFIELD LINK ROAD 1998

Fig. 4: The sandstone drain near the Ellesmere Road (Site B); plan view (left), 1:50; northeast-facing section, (right), 1:20