Archaeological Investigations at Land off Sir Herbert Austin Way, Northfield, Birmingham

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INTRODUCTION

Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited (PCA) carried out archaeological investigations between August and October 2011 on land off Sir Herbert Austin Way, Northfield, Birmingham. The work was commissioned by Sainsbury's Supermarkets Limited ahead of a proposed re-development scheme. The archaeological project was undertaken as a condition of planning permission on the recommendation of the Planning Archaeologist, Birmingham City Council (BCC).

Northfield is a residential area on the southern outskirts of metropolitan Birmingham (Figure 1). The proposed re-development site lies on the west side of Sir Herbert Austin Way, the Northfield Relief Road (the A38) and the central national grid reference of the site is SP 0197 7975 (Figures 2 and 3). The site measures *c.* 210m SW–NE by up to *c.* 42m wide and covers an area of *c.* 0.5ha. It is bounded by Sir Herbert Austin Way to the east, Vineyard Road to the north, Bellfield Junior and Infant Schools to the west, and the rear of properties fronting Hilary Grove to the south. The site is divided into two distinct northern and southern parts by a public footpath (Figure 3). Previously developed, after *c.* 1955, as residential housing on Ulwine Drive, at the time of the archaeological work the site was open ground, partly surfaced with tarmac.

Figure 1 Site location

Figure 2 Detailed site location

Figure 3 Areas of investigation

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Birmingham sits on a geological fault line running south-west to north-east through the city, a line which effectively divides two somewhat different natural landscapes (Hodder 2011). Northfield lies just east of the fault line, where the solid geology comprises rocks of the Mercia Mudstone Group (*British Geological Survey* website). These are dominantly red, less commonly green or grey, mudstones and subordinate siltstones, with thin beds of gypsum/anhydrite widespread and sandstones also known. Although the Mercia Mudstone is generally soft and easily eroded, the siltstones within it are more resistant to erosion and thus formed locally raised areas which have attracted settlement foci since prehistoric times (Hodder 2011). Since the bedrock weathers to clay there has always been a plentiful supply of raw material for the manufacture of pottery, brick and tile, as well as daub for walling. Glacial drift covers much of Birmingham and such material overlying the Mercia Mudstone typically forms locally prominent ridges. Mid Pleistocene Till is specifically known to underlie the area of the site. The main topographical feature in the area of the site is the valley of the River Rea, which flows from the south-west into the River Tame north of Birmingham city centre. The site lies *c.* 1km to the north of the Rea, with a tributary, Merritt's Brook (part of the River Bourn) only *c.* 0.5km to the north. The valley of Merritt's Brook is more likely an influence on the natural topography of the site, since ground level falls from south to north across the site. Ground level was recorded at the southern end of the site at *c.* 186m

AOD, falling to *c.* 184m AOD at the northern end of the southern portion of the site and to *c.* 182m AOD at the northern end of the northern portion.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site was considered to have some archaeological potential largely due to the discovery of archaeological features in 2005 during observation of construction groundworks for the Northfield Relief Road in two locations immediately adjoining the site. The first was on the west side of the road corridor excavated for the relief road, immediately adjacent to the eastern limit of the current site. Here, a pit (Historic Environment Record (HER) MBM 2455) filled with re-deposited clay, charcoal and ash was exposed. Radiocarbon dates of 1750 to 1500 cal BC were obtained from the charcoal in the pit, placing it in the Bronze Age, and three earlier dates were obtained from wood, suggesting residual material. The second was the northern part of the relief road corridor, east of the northern portion of the current site, where a concentration of Roman pottery (HER MBM 2421) was recovered.

A small pit recorded in a service trench near Bournville Lane, Selly Oak, *c.* 3km to the north-east of the Northfield site, produced the oldest pottery found in Birmingham to date. Twenty-eight sherds, representing about five different vessels, in decorated Grooved Ware pottery of Late Neolithic date, were recovered. The Bronze Age pit found immediately adjacent to the site was also a highly important archaeological discovery, since prehistoric structures other than burnt mounds are extremely rare in Birmingham. No late prehistoric activity is known in the Northfield area, and there is little information from the Birmingham area as a whole for the immediate pre-Roman period (Jones *et al.* 2008, 4).

For the Roman period, few occupation sites are currently recorded in Birmingham and it is likely that the concentration of Roman pottery recorded adjacent to the current site in the relief road corridor represents manuring of fields associated with a settlement in the vicinity (Miller 2007). The main Roman period site in Birmingham is Metchley Roman fort, located *c.* 4km to the north-east of Northfield in the area now occupied by Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the University of Birmingham (Figure 2). First identified from cartographic sources and antiquarian descriptions, visible earthworks representing the fort had their period of origin confirmed by archaeological fieldwork only as recently as the 1930s. Established *c.* AD 48, the fort was occupied until *c.* AD 200. Part of the northern fort defences and interior is now a Scheduled Monument. A recent monograph details the results of areas investigated mainly to the west of the Roman military complex in 1999–2001 and 2004–2005 (Jones 2011). Two Roman roads ran southwards from Metchley Roman fort (Figures 1 and 2). To the SSE ran Ryknield (sometimes known as Icknield) Street, laid out between Bourton-on-the Water and Derby in the mid-late first century AD to serve the needs of military communication (*ibid*.). In the Birmingham area the section of this road ran between forts at Wall, to the north, and Alcester, to the south, where the earliest Roman military activity is also, like that at Metchley, of Claudian date. Archaeological work in recent years has established the potential for Roman roadside settlement along Ryknield Street, most notably work undertaken between 2002 and 2007 at Longdales Road, King's Norton, which lies *c.* 4km south-east of Northfield. The results of that work, where extensive roadside activity was investigated, have been recently published (Jones *et al.* 2008). The earliest Romano-British activity there was represented by a large

double-ditched rectilinear enclosure of early to mid-second-century date, situated 220m west of the Roman road. This was replaced in the late second to third century by another double-ditched enclosure in a very similar position. Curvilinear ring gullies within the enclosures are indicative of habitation structures, but it was not possible to ascertain with which phase of enclosure they were associated, or even if they were related to a phase of partially unenclosed settlement activity in the third to early fourth century (*ibid*. 24; 84). Associated with the enclosures were a series of west–east aligned ditched plot boundaries, cut at a right angle to Ryknield Street, some further defined by adjoining metalled roads. One plot was traced for at least *c.* 150m to the rear (west) of the road frontage, assuming that the Roman road was roughly contiguous with the modern road (*ibid*. 58). Plots of two widths were identified, 35m and 28m, the wider plots potentially set out following Roman measurements, being half an *actus (ibid.,* 82*)*. A broad conclusion was that the modern field pattern, itself essentially derived from the post-medieval layout, could in part respect Romano-British boundaries. The preferred interpretation of the function of the overall settlement at Longdales Road is one associated with livestock rearing, collection or management and this includes the long roadside plots, which may have been temporary stock enclosures. A Romano-British settlement is also thought to have been situated at Parson's Hill, close to Ryknield Street, *c*. 3km to the south-east of Northfield. Traces of possible timber buildings and a road surface were recorded during excavations undertaken after the site was discovered in 1949 and pottery of first to third-century date was recovered (Hodder 2011, 64). Excavations undertaken in the vicinity in 2006 revealed a field boundary ditch with first and second-century pottery (Foard-Colby 2010).

Running SSW from Metchley Roman fort was the Roman road (known by antiquarians as the Upper Saltway) to Droitwich, where a fort of Claudian date is also proposed. Although this road has traditionally received less attention than Ryknield Street, with its links along the Severn Valley to Droitwich, Worcester and Gloucester it was arguably a more significant route (Leather 1994). The line of the Droitwich road as it approached the Lickey Hills south-west of Birmingham is well established, although beyond that its route into Birmingham is more uncertain. It is generally accepted that it ran through Northfield, along the line of the A38, Bristol Road South, en route to Metchley fort, a line which runs less than *c.* 100m east of the current site. The Northfield Relief Road now diverts traffic off the A38, around the core of Northfield, for a distance of *c.* 0.8km.

The archaeological record for medieval Birmingham begins in the 12th century (Hodder 2011, 81). Before that there was probably no town or village on its site, although there is evidence for a scatter of villages in its vicinity. Nearer to the current site, the medieval village centre of King's Norton has been subject to no little archaeological investigation, and it has been postulated that this, and potentially other sites in the area, may have been continuously occupied since the Roman period (*ibid*. 98–99). As a medieval settlement and associated manor, Northfield is documented in the 11th century as 'Nordfeld' and St. Laurence Church, the earliest part of which dates to the late 12th century, is one of the few remaining medieval churches in Birmingham. There are just a few other traces of standing remains of the medieval period in the historic core of the village. To date, very little evidence for medieval activity in Northfield has been gathered by archaeological fieldwork. The work conducted in association with the construction of the Northfield Relief Road in 2005–2006 recovered no medieval pottery at all and just a small quantity of ceramic building material

of broad medieval/post-medieval date (Miller 2007, 6–8). Across the broader area of the former manor associated with the village, there are scant traces of ridge and furrow earthworks indicative of medieval open field farming, but the majority of such evidence has been obliterated by modern development. Corn mills of likely medieval origin are documented on the banks of the River Rea.

Throughout the post-medieval period, certainly until the 19th century, Northfield remained an essentially agricultural parish within the northernmost part of the county of Worcestershire (Victoria County History 1913). The area to the west of the Bristol Road seems to have been farmed in common and it is likely that the fields shown on the 1845 tithe map were created in the late 18th or early 19th century (Miller 2007, 9). The road, later designated the A38, was turnpiked in 1762 and the village was a known local centre of nail making as 19th-century industrialisation commenced. Between 1891 and 1901 the population of the village increased from fewer than 10,000 to nearly 21,000, partly due to the influx of a suburban population and partly to the erection of manufactories in the area. Further expansion, including extensive housing development, followed the establishment of the Austin Motors works at Longbridge and Cadbury's 'Bournville model village', south and north of Northfield, respectively, in the first decade of the 20th century. In administrative terms, Northfield became part of Birmingham in 1919.

Historic mapping demonstrates the transformation of the distinct rural village of Northfield into a developed suburb of Birmingham. Ordnance Survey mapping from the 1880s shows the site taking in parts of three open fields west of what is now the A38, with the historic core of Northfield village to the east, accessed by Church Road. There was relatively limited development along the main road at this time, notably the Bell Inn, which dates from the 1850s at least, and a brick and tile works, to the north-east and south-west of the site, respectively. The brick and tile works is depicted with extensive clay extraction pits around the buildings, and in cartographic terms such manufactories clearly demonstrate the beginnings of industrialisation of the rural margins of Birmingham. By the 1904 edition of the Ordnance Survey map, the brick and tile works was disused and roadside development had increased in the vicinity of the site, although not significantly. The last edition of the Ordnance Survey map to show the site undeveloped was produced in the 1950s, by which time development in the area of the site had increased considerably, notably with housing to the south and west. Mapping from the 1960s shows the site developed as Ulwine Drive with semi-detached houses and their gardens occupying its entirety. It is uncertain when the street was demolished but the most recent mapping available indicates that it was in recent decades.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

A trial trenching evaluation undertaken at the site 30 August–13 September 2011 was carried out according to a Project Design prepared by PCA and approved by the BCC Planning Archaeologist (PCA 2011a). The evaluation comprised the investigation of ten trial trenches (Trenches 1–10) (Figure 3). Archaeological remains of apparent significance were revealed in three separate trenches; in Trenches 4 and 5 in the northern part of the site and in Trench 6 in the southern part. As a result of the evaluation findings, the BCC Planning Archaeologist required a second phase of archaeological work, namely three open area excavations, in order to further expose remains of apparent archaeological significance. This work was undertaken following on

directly from the evaluation fieldwork, without a report on the findings of the evaluation being compiled, with the agreement of all relevant parties. The open area excavations were carried out according to an Updated Project Design prepared by PCA and approved by the BCC Planning Archaeologist (PCA 2011b). Area 1, covering *c.* 515m^2, took in evaluation Trenches 4 and 5 in order to further investigate potential Roman period remains (Figure 3). Areas 2 and 3 covered *c.* 190m^2 and *c.* 36m^2, respectively. Area 2 expanded Trench 6 to further investigate potential Roman period remains while Area 3 was located to the south of Trench 7 to further investigate an area of potential archaeological interest. The open area excavations were undertaken 14 September–12 October 2011.

The Site Archive will be deposited with Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery under the site code UDB 11. The BCC Historic Environment Record (HER) entry for the programme of archaeological investigations is EBM596.

THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

Phase 1: Natural sub-stratum

The earliest deposits encountered at the site represent natural geological material, exposed as the basal deposit in all ten evaluation trenches and across all three excavation areas. These deposits represent the drift geology of this part of the Birmingham area where Mid Pleistocene till masks the Mercia Mudstone bedrock. The natural till was of variable colour and composition across the site, in common with much glacially derived material, in terms of composition most typically clay or clayey sand. A fall in height of natural deposits across the site from south to north reflects the natural topography of the area, with the major geological feature in the vicinity being a tributary of the River Rea to the north. The maximum height recorded on natural material was 184.80m OD, this in Trench 10 in the southernmost portion of the site. In Trench 2, natural material was recorded in section at a varying height of *c.* 181.30–181.60m OD, these the lowest values recorded on natural deposits during the investigations.

Across most, if not all, of the site, natural sub-strata had probably seen horizontal truncation to a lesser or greater extent in the modern era, so that its original height was possibly not seen at any point. Across most of the site, a geotextile membrane overlay the natural sub-stratum, with modern overburden lying upon the geotextile. Demolition of housing and/or subsequent landscaping had therefore caused some, possibly severe, horizontal truncation of earlier archaeological levels. For the most part, surviving archaeological features were exposed directly below modern overburden and cut into the natural sub-stratum.

Phase 2: Romano-British

Evidence of Romano-British period activity was recorded in the northern portion of the site; this potentially associated with roadside settlement to the west of the Roman road through Northfield that ran between the forts at Metchley and Droitwich. Five features of suspected Romano-British origin were recorded (Figure 4). A short length of a slightly curvilinear gully [74] was exposed in the northern part of Area 1, cutting into the till sub-stratum. This survived for a length of *c.* 0.85m, truncated to the south-west by a modern feature, but not continuing beyond it, and evidently ending in a rounded terminal to the north-east. The gully was 0.20m wide

and only 40mm deep, although as it was exposed directly below the aforementioned geotextile membrane it is highly likely that it had suffered horizontal truncation by modern landscaping activity. The feature was recorded at a maximum height of 183.11m OD. Its single fill (73) comprised firm, mid yellowish brown silty clay, which yielded a single rim sherd from a necked jar in a reduced ware fabric (see Figure 6), similar to types published from the pre-Flavian Metchley Roman fort assemblage. Given the limited degree to which this gully survived, a confident interpretation is difficult, but it could be part of a ring gully and thus could potentially represent a simple structure, such as a roundhouse. An oval feature [209], which measured 0.88m by 0.54m and 50mm deep, was located within the internal area of the putative roundhouse gully. This may represent the base of a truncated pit. Approximately 2m to the north-east of gully [74] was an interrupted NNW–SSE aligned gully/ditch [212]. In total, *c.* 8m of the feature survived within the area of excavation and it had a maximum surviving width and depth of *c.* 0.50m and *c.* 0.15m, respectively. The feature was probably a truncated ditch and its purpose may have been for drainage or it was perhaps related to another form of land management; its alignment indicates that it probably did not represent a plot boundary extending away from and at a right angle to the Roman road which is suspected as lying *c.* 150m to the east. Cutting into the natural sub-stratum to the west of gully [212] was an oval feature [201], which measured 0.44m by 0.36m and just 20mmm deep, this possibly representing a truncated posthole.

A substantial pit [203] was located *c*. 12m to the south of the cluster of activity described above. In plan this was roughly 'tear-shaped' and it measured 4m west–east by up to 2.40m north–south, although it had been truncated to the south, in its wider, rounded western portion, by a modern intrusion, which turned to cut through its eastern part on a SW–NE alignment (Figure 4 and Figure 6). The maximum surviving depth of the pit was 0.58m, this to the west, and it was recorded at a maximum height of 183.40m OD. It generally had gradually sloping sides and a rounded concave base, this in its western portion (Figure 5). Its narrowing eastern portion had a distinct stepped side this creating a fairly level 'shelf', measuring *c.* 2m west–east (Figure 6). This shelf in the side of the pit was notable for the presence of a stone surface (235), clearly a deliberately constructed feature. The surface mostly comprised medium sub-rounded and sub-angular pebbles, with occasional large river cobbles/boulders, in a light grey clay matrix. It extended *c.* 2.85m west–east by *c.* 1.90m north–south and was up to 0.10m thick. Recovered from the surface was part of a quernstone of Roman date (see Figure 8), evidently deliberately incorporated, following breakage, within the surface. The pit may have been initially dug for the extraction of clay for some purpose, probably construction related or possibly ceramic manufacture. With the stone surface laid on the side shelf in the narrower eastern portion of the feature, a secondary use may have been as a watering hole for livestock. The stone surface would have provided hardstanding for animals using the feature, aiding access and egress.

In the deeper western part of pit [203] was a primary fill (206) up to *c.* 0.20m thick, comprising firm, light grey silty clay with occasional large sub-rounded and sub-angular boulders. This deposit yielded an abraded scrap of Severn Valley ware pottery, only broadly datable to the Roman period. A secondary fill (205), this a localised deposit *c.* 80mm thick at most, comprised soft, mid grey silty sand, which produced a scrap of fired clay of indeterminate date. Both fills were restricted to the rounded lowermost portion of the pit to the west and

both may have accumulated as a result of standing water. The uppermost part of pit [203] was filled with firm, light grey silty clay (204) up to *c.* 0.40m thick. This material may have accumulated naturally within the feature over a considerable period of time following its disuse. It produced a small sherd of medieval pottery, datable to the 13th century, which may have been introduced intrusively or which may simply reflect the length of time the feature took to infill by natural processes. Small quantities of charcoal were recovered from bulk samples of pit fills (204) and (206), and while the charcoal was mostly too small for identification, a single fragment of oak was noted from fill (204).

Figure 4 Roman features

Figure 5 Pit [203] half-sectioned

Figure 6 Pit [203] fully excavated

ROMAN POTTERY, *by C. Jane Evans*

Only four sherds of Roman pottery were recovered, with a total weight of 15.5g. Linear feature [74] produced a single, highly abraded rim sherd weighing 14g from a necked jar with a diameter of 12cm (Figure 7), similar to types published from the pre-Flavian, Metchley Roman fort assemblage (Green and Evans 2001, fig. 35, J20). The rim is in a reduced fabric, with the following inclusions: abundant ill-sorted, sub-rounded quartz <1mm; occasional angular quartz <4mm; sparse black ?ironstone. It has a grey core, brown margins and grey-brown surfaces. The fabric is likely to have a fairly local source. Sandy wares are typical of the known production sites in the West Midlands, for example at Shenstone (Leary 2008, 468–469, fabrics R1–4) and Sherifoot Lane, Sutton Coldfield (seen by this author); both sites are located to the north of Birmingham. The fabric is broadly similar to Metchley fabric 7.3 (*ibid*., 92), which is also thought to have been produced locally.

The other three fragments/sherds, all tiny and abraded, were in Severn Valley ware and can only be dated broadly to the first to fourth centuries. The sherd from fill (97) was residual in context, this being the backfill of a modern service trench in Trench 8. Context (206) was the primary fill of the large pit [203] excavated in Area 1.

Figure 7 Necked jar from linear feature [74]

QUERNSTONE, *by Elizabeth Wright*

A single fragment from a heavy upper quernstone was recovered from the stone surface in pit [203]. The quernstone is of Roman type, displaying part of a central aperture (Figure 8). Its overall diameter is not possible to measure with accuracy as none of circumference survives, however, the thickness of the quern and relatively steep slope of the concave rounded grinding surface suggest that it is unlikely to have been less than *c.* 40cm and more than *c.* 42cm in diameter, a common measurement range for hand querns of Roman date. The estimated diameter of the cylindrical central 'eye' is *c.* 65mm and it is surrounded by a recessed flange *c.* 10mm deep and *c.* 20mm wide. The thickness of the stone at the central eye is 75mm and maximum height at the edge is 105 mm. The upper surface of this upper stone, where it survives, has been peck dressed flat. It is possible that a small recessed area next to the central aperture on the grinding surface could be the remains of

a rynd chase through which the quern has broken, but because of damage this identification remains uncertain. The fact that the quern was massive and relatively little worn at the time of discard suggests that it was taken out of service relatively early in its useful life. There are some slight indications that may suggest proximity to fire or heat, which is sometimes used to render a stone more easily broken. Nevertheless considerable force must have been applied in order to break this thick, heavy and durable stone, and it seems unlikely that it was broken accidentally during use.

The rock is a very massive and well cemented greyish conglomerate, the groundmass being quite fine grained, but having plentiful inclusions from gravel to pebble size. The largest inclusions appear to be of rounded and sub-rounded pebbles of veined quartz, mostly white or white veined with pink, occasionally black and white, or of pink quartzite. Smaller inclusions include small particles of iron or iron minerals, possibly originating in degraded igneous rocks, and other tiny polished sub-angular gravel sized particles of various types and colours, some possibly of polished chert and others probably jasper. Any feldspar content is not conspicuous and the rock is probably non-feldspathic. A small proportion of mica is visible. In her doctoral thesis regarding the petrology of querns in the East of England, Ingle analysed and described what she labeled MG/2 which may have been of somewhat similar composition to this rock (Ingle 1989). Outcrop sources she quoted lay in the Staffordshire area and also in the Melbourne area of Derbyshire to the SW of Derby. However, these descriptions do not appear to include the large pebbles of quartzite and veined quartz seen in this specimen. It is probable instead that the source rock could be a facies of the Old Red Sandstone (ORS), outcropping either to the South of Bristol or in the Forest of Dean area. Descriptions of these ORS beds (Hains and Horton 1969, 22–27) include quite a wide range of conglomeratic sandstones of differing colours and textures. Ingle's (1989, 35–36) description of the Upper ORS from the Forest of Dean area, and in particular the 'Quartz Conglomerate' there may most nearly match the rock of this quern. It is described as '*containing pebbles of vein quartz (or more rarely quartzite) and more minor amounts of jasper and decomposed igneous rock in a sandy matrix with a siliceous cement, and is extremely hard*'. Samples from different areas are described as sometimes lacking the red colouration.

Querns are not readily closely datable as they so frequently occur in secondary contexts, and were a long lived artefact, but a date from early in the second century onwards can be suggested for this example. The flat top tends to suggest a quern from the earlier part of this period rather than the later as the development of Roman querns with more parallel upper and grinding surfaces suggests a technological development to avoid the problem of the quern wearing away around the central eye, which was otherwise the thinnest part of the artefact. Some consideration has been given to the context of this quernstone in an area of stone surface laid on a 'shelf' in the side of pit [203]. The identification of the quern as of Roman date gives a *terminus post quem* for the surface. Whilst the presence of the quern within the surface does not preclude the surface from being of post-Roman date, employing a quern fragment present on site and perhaps unearthed during the digging of the pit, the balance of probabilities appears to be more towards the feature being formed during the Roman period.

Figure 8 Quernstone fragment from stone surface in pit [203]

ROMAN PALAEOENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS *by Charlotte O'Brien*

Bulk soil samples were taken from the primary fill (206) and upper fill (204) of the large pit [203]. These produced small quantities of charcoal which was generally too small for identification, although a single fragment of oak was noted in (204). None of the charcoal was suitable for radiocarbon dating. Charred plant remains were absent.

Phase 3: Medieval

Evidence of agricultural land management during the medieval period was recorded in Area 1. Elements of a long-lived field boundary were initially recorded in the south-western part of evaluation Trench 5. Area 1 subsequently revealed a relatively complex sequence of boundary re-definition at this location (Figure 9). The activity has been interpreted as being of medieval origin, but likely continuing into the post-medieval era as the area continued to be utilised for agricultural purposes.

The earliest recorded element of the land boundary was a slightly sinuous gully [220] traced for *c.* 9.50m running on a WSW–ENE alignment and, for much of the width of Area 1, the southernmost element of the long-lived boundary sequence. Its maximum surviving width was *c.* 0.80m, this to the west, and its maximum surviving depth was *c.* 0.28m. Its clayey silt fill (219) yielded a single sherd of medieval pottery (Warwickshire grey ware of 13th-century date) and four scraps of tile. In addition, a fragment of a flat iron strap or mount (22mm wide and 40mm long) was recovered from this deposit. Towards the eastern limit of excavation, the upper part of the southern edge of gully [220] had been truncated by another gully (216) of which only a relatively short length, *c.* 3m, was traced. Its maximum surviving width was *c.* 0.40m, and its maximum surviving depth was *c*. 0.15m. Its clayey silt fill did not yield any artefactual material but, as a probable re-cut of gully [220], it was also of likely medieval date. To the north, and running on the same WSW–ENE alignment, was gully [224], of which only the lowermost portion survived due to subsequent re-definition of the boundary. This feature may also have been of medieval origin; its clayey silt fill (223) yielded a few scraps of brick/tile. Where excavated in evaluation Trench 5, the feature (recorded as gully [87]) produced a sherd of medieval pottery, broadly of 14th-century date, and a fragment of tile. A bulk sample of fill (223) yielded a relatively large larger number of uncharred plant remains. The seeds comprised shrubs and weeds, such as bramble, hawthorn, thistles and common nettle, these probably growing beside the ditch, possibly within a hedgerow, thus supporting the interpretation of the feature as a field boundary.

Both Areas 1 and 2 revealed the remains of a series of plough furrows running on broadly the same alignment as the gullies. The features in Area 1 were potentially of medieval origin, spaced *c.* 7m apart, while those in Area 2 were perhaps more likely of post-medieval origin, although it acknowledged that the entire group could be contemporaneous. In Area 1, just two furrows [231] and [233] survived due to later horizontal truncation, both revealed in the northern part of the area (Figure 9). In each case, a length of *c.* 5m of the feature survived, and both had maximum surviving widths of *c.* 1m, cutting into the natural clay. Of the two, furrow

[233] had the greater surviving depth, 0.12m; its fill (234) yielded a single sherd of medieval pottery (Deritend ware, of 13th–14th-century date).

Figure 9 Medieval features

Phase 4: Post-medieval

The field boundary recorded in the southern part of Area 1 continued in use into the post-medieval period; three re-definitions of the boundary, gully [222], gully/ditch [218] and gully/ditch [214], have been assigned to this phase. With a rounded terminal to the west, very little of gully [222] was exposed. The northernmost element of the sequence was gully/ditch [218], which to the north truncated a shallow pit, [230]. Gully/ditch [218] was traced across the full width of Area 1, running on a WSW–ENE alignment. An incomplete iron nail was recovered from its fill (217), along with a few scraps of brick/tile. Ditch [218] had been re-defined slightly to the south by ditch [214], the latest and therefore best surviving element of the entire boundary sequence. Running diagonally across the southernmost end of Area 1, a total length of 12m of this ditch was exposed. Its maximum width was 0.95m and its maximum surviving depth was 0.26m. Its single fill (213) yielded a small sherd of English stoneware of late 17th to mid-18th-century date, two large fragments of late medieval/post-medieval tile and a large fragment of modern roof tile, this assumed to have been introduced intrusively into the feature. South of the field boundary and running parallel to it, a group of four plough furrows was recorded in Area 2, cutting into the natural clay. Spaced just *c.* 3m apart these have been interpreted as more likely to be of post-medieval date. They survived to a width of up to *c.* 1.50m and were very shallow features, generally with a maximum surviving depth of only *c.* 100mm. Fill (238) of furrow [239] yielded a small assemblage of late medieval/post-medieval tile; fill (244) of furrow [245] yielded a sherd of late medieval pottery, presumably residual in context; fill (248) of furrow [249] yielded a small assemblage of post-medieval brick/tile (where excavated as furrow [114] with fill [113] in evaluation Trench 6, the feature yielded a sherd of medieval pottery). A probably related furrow [243] was recorded in Area 3. This ran on a roughly north–south alignment, this likely reflecting the location and alignment of a field boundary to the west. Its fill (242) yielded a sherd of medieval pottery and a scrap of tile.

??? Figure 10 Post-medieval features

MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL POTTERY by *Paul Blinkhorn*

The medieval and post-medieval pottery assemblage comprised ten sherds with a total weight of 64g. It was recorded using the codes and chronology of the Warwickshire medieval and post-medieval pottery type-series (Ratkai and Soden 1998), as follows:

- RS02: Warwickshire grey ware, 13th–14th century. 1 sherd, 7g.
- Sq30: Chilvers Coton 'C' ware, 1300–1500. 1 sherd, 4g.
- Sg12: Deritend ware, 13th–14th century. 5 sherds, 20g.
- CIST: Cistercian ware, 1475–1550. 1 sherd, 1g.

- SLM10: Late Chilvers Coton ware, 15th century. 1 sherd, 25g.
- STE01: English Stoneware. 1680–1750. 1 sherd, 7g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The fabric types are all well-known in the region. The medieval material all shows a degree of abrasion which is consistent with material retrieved from ploughsoil. The entire assemblage comprised bodysherds, other than a fragment of a jar rim in RS02 and the base of a mug or tankard in STE01.

	RS02		*Sq30*		*Sg12*		*CIST*		*STE01*		*SLM10*		
Context	***No.***	***Wt.***	***No.***	***Wt.***	***No.***	***Wt.***	***No.***	***Wt.***	***No.***	***Wt.***	***No.***	***Wt.***	***Date***
86			1	4									14th C
113					2	5							13th C
115							1	1					L15th C
204					1	4							13th C
213									1	7			L17th C
219	1	7											13th C
234					1	3							13th C
242					1	8							13th C
244											1	25	15th C
Total	***1***	***7***	***1***	***4***	***5***	***20***	***1***	***1***	***1***	***7***	***1***	***25***	

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL PALAEOENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS *by Charlotte O'Brien*

Bulk soil samples were taken from the fill (219) of the probable medieval ditch [220] and the fills (223) and (242) of post-medieval linear features [224] and [243], respectively. Small quantities of charcoal were present in fill (242). This was generally too small for identification, although a few mineralised oak fragments were identified. No charred plant remains were present in any of the samples. A few uncharred plant remains were noted in the flots, although the fresh condition of some (particularly the birch fruits), suggests that they are modern contaminants. Many of the uncharred fruitstones are also probably later intrusions. A larger number of uncharred remains and a few beetle fragments were present in context (223) which may indicate slightly anaerobic conditions within this feature as it silted up. The seeds comprised bramble, hawthorn, thistles, buttercups, woundworts, campions, common nettle and violets. These shrubs and weeds were probably growing beside the ditch, and may derive from hedgerow vegetation, possibly indicating the presence of a field boundary.

Phase 5: Modern

Much evidence of modern era activity was recorded by the investigations. The majority of this represents development of the site in the post-War era as the residential street Ulwine Drive. The footings and related structural remains of modern era buildings were exposed in both Areas 1 and 2 and in some evaluation trenches. Demolition of the housing in recent decades, followed by landscaping, had also left its mark in the archaeological record. Such activity had caused horizontal truncation to many of the archaeological features.

DISCUSSION

A cluster of features, all of probable Romano-British origin, was recorded in the northernmost part of Area A. All were of shallow depth, less than 0.15m, having suffered horizontal truncation by modern activity. The remains comprised a short length of curvilinear gully [74], a NNW–SSE aligned gully, [212], and a probable posthole and pit, [201] and [209]. The curvilinear gully yielded a sherd of pottery from a jar of early Roman date and of likely local manufacture, but none of the other features produced dating evidence. While it is acknowledged that the features may not be precisely contemporary, they were assigned to the same broad phase of activity due to their proximity, form and the broadly similar nature of their fills. Precise interpretation of these features is difficult due to the limited degree of survival. However, such features are typical of the archaeological record of the Romano-British period and close parallels can be found as close as the site at Longdales Road, King's Norton, which investigated a similar Roman roadside location on the south side of Birmingham. Gully [74] may be the truncated remains of a roundhouse ring gully, two examples of which with diameters of *c.* 8m and *c.* 10.30m were recorded within the roadside plots of early Romano-British date investigated at Longdales Road (Jones *et al.* 2008, 58–61). Within the interior of the large double-ditched enclosure at Longdales Road was around half of a presumably pennanular feature measuring 10m in diameter, interpreted as the eaves drip gully of a roundhouse, the remainder of the feature having been plough-truncated (*ibid*., 24–27). No dating evidence was recovered from this feature so it was not possible to determine with which phase of activity at Longdales Road it was associated. Roundhouses were the dominant domestic dwelling type in the Iron Age, but on many lowland rural sites they were common during the first and second centuries AD and in some regions they remained common into the fourth century AD (Hingley 1989, 34). The Longdales Road roundhouse gully was very similar in form to the feature recorded at Northfield; it had a U-shaped profile and measured 0.30m wide by 0.12m deep. The position of the terminal of the eaves drip gully within the Longdales enclosure demonstrated that this structure would have had a south-east facing entrance, a typical roundhouse entrance orientation; the terminal of the Northfield example was on a very similar orientation and may represent the position of the south-eastern side of an entrance into the putative roundhouse. It was not possible to estimate the diameter of this postulated roundhouse due to the small area of the feature remaining. The oval feature located within the internal area of the possible Northfield roundhouse is of a similar size in plan to pits within the interior of the roundhouse inside the Londgdales Road enclosure, though the Northfield example is considerably shallower due to the degree of horizontal truncation.

To the east of the possible roundhouse, gully [212] is likely to be a truncated ditch either for boundary or other feature definition or drainage. Numerous linear or slightly sinuous lengths of ditch or gully were recorded at Longdales Road. One example, in Plot B, had a U-shaped profile and measured 0.63m wide and 0.15m deep and was interpreted as potentially being related to a trackway associated with a roadside plot boundary (*ibid*. 61–65). Gully [212] may have had a similar purpose; its NNW–SSE alignment appears somewhat at odds with any possible suggestion that it may have defined one side of a plot boundary extending at right angles to the suspected SW–NE line of the nearby Roman road.

The most substantial feature attributed a Romano-British origin at the site was the large 'tear-shaped' pit [203]. It was particularly notable for a distinct stepped side, surfaced with stones, in its narrower eastern part. This surface included part of a quernstone of early to mid-second-century date. The feature may have been a clay quarry pit, later used as watering hole for animals. A large flat based pit recorded in Plot C at Longdales Road was similarly interpreted as an animal watering hole. This too was an extensive feature, measuring 6.40m by 5.80m, although relatively shallow, just 0.26m, and with a narrower western portion giving an overall shape in plan similar to that of pit [203]. Notably, the feature at Longdales Road was surrounded by a possible pebble surface. A parallel for an area of Roman quarrying later used for ponds or watering holes comes from somewhat further field, in eastern England. At a site at Ely Road, Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire, an extensive area was used from the second century to excavate a complex of quarry pits (with more than 40 recorded) and then was evidently used in the third century for ponds (Ranson 2008, 19–20) . The two recorded ponds were extensive features, one measuring 10m long, 5.80m wide and 0.55m deep and with a distinct oval shape in plan, narrowing to the north-east, and thus broadly similar in form to pit [203]. The Waterbeach site also recorded a watering hole of second to third-century date, measuring 5.50m long, 4.90m wide and 1.49m deep (*ibid*. 1314).

The recorded Romano-British activity at Northfield would have been undertaken on land to the west of the nearby Roman road, in broadly similar fashion to activity recorded *c.* 4km south-east at Longdales Road, King's Norton, along the route of the Ryknield Street Roman road. Notable amongst the Longdales Road findings was evidence for a series of west–east aligned ditched plot boundaries cut at a right angle to the Roman road, with one plot traced for at least *c.* 150m to the rear (west) of the road frontage, assuming that the Roman road was roughly contiguous with the modern road. At the Northfield site, which probably lies *c.* 150m beyond the line of the road, no definite plot boundary features were recorded and, therefore, it is probable that the site lay beyond the corridor of managed land, *i.e.* where ditch-delineated plot boundaries extended at a right angle to the road line. The focus of habitation at Longdales Road, represented by a sequence of two double-ditched rectilinear enclosures and a subsequent phase of unenclosed settlement dating from the Later Roman period, was situated *c.* 220m from the road. Topographically this was a more suitable location as it lay near the crest of a natural ridge, providing a better-drained area than immediately adjacent to the road which lay downslope of the ridge (Jones *et al.* 2008, 84). Only limited evidence for activity immediately adjacent to the roadside was recorded within the plots at Longdales Road, and most of activity within the plots seems to have been situated at some distance from the road, in contrast to most Roman roadside settlements where land immediately adjacent to the road was at a premium (*ibid*.). Whilst this may well be due in part to topographic location, site function also seems an important factor. Roadside settlements exploited their location to provide a range of agricultural, industrial and economic services; the most likely function for the Longdales Road settlement is one associated with livestock rearing, collection and management and therefore it would not be necessary to exploit the economic opportunities offered by an immediately adjacent roadside location (*ibid*., 85).

The overall low quantity of cultural material of definite Romano-British date recovered during the investigations at Northfield, just four sherds/scraps of pottery and a fragment of quernstone, testifies to the

fact that the site lay on the extreme periphery of settlement. The watching brief carried out to the east of the site during road construction was located *c*. 100m west of the Roman road, and this too produced a small amount of Roman pottery, including fragments of first to second-century date (Miller 2007; Hodder forthcoming). This pottery was recovered from extensive sub-soils suggesting the presence of a former plough-soil manured with farmyard waste and domestic refuse (Millar 2007, 4). The recovered evidence is interpreted as arriving at this locality due to agricultural practices, rather than testifying to the presence of settlement (*ibid*., 9). However, it was thought likely given the close association between field manuring and settlements, and the density of Roman settlements elsewhere in the region, that at least one Roman settlement was located within 1–2km of this area (Hodder 2004, 64; Miller 2007, 9). The recovered evidence from the investigations at Northfield suggests that the focus for settlement associated with this agricultural use of the land may lie in the near vicinity of the excavated area. Therefore, archaeological work undertaken in association with future development schemes in Northfield will potentially encounter important archaeological evidence of Roman settlement.

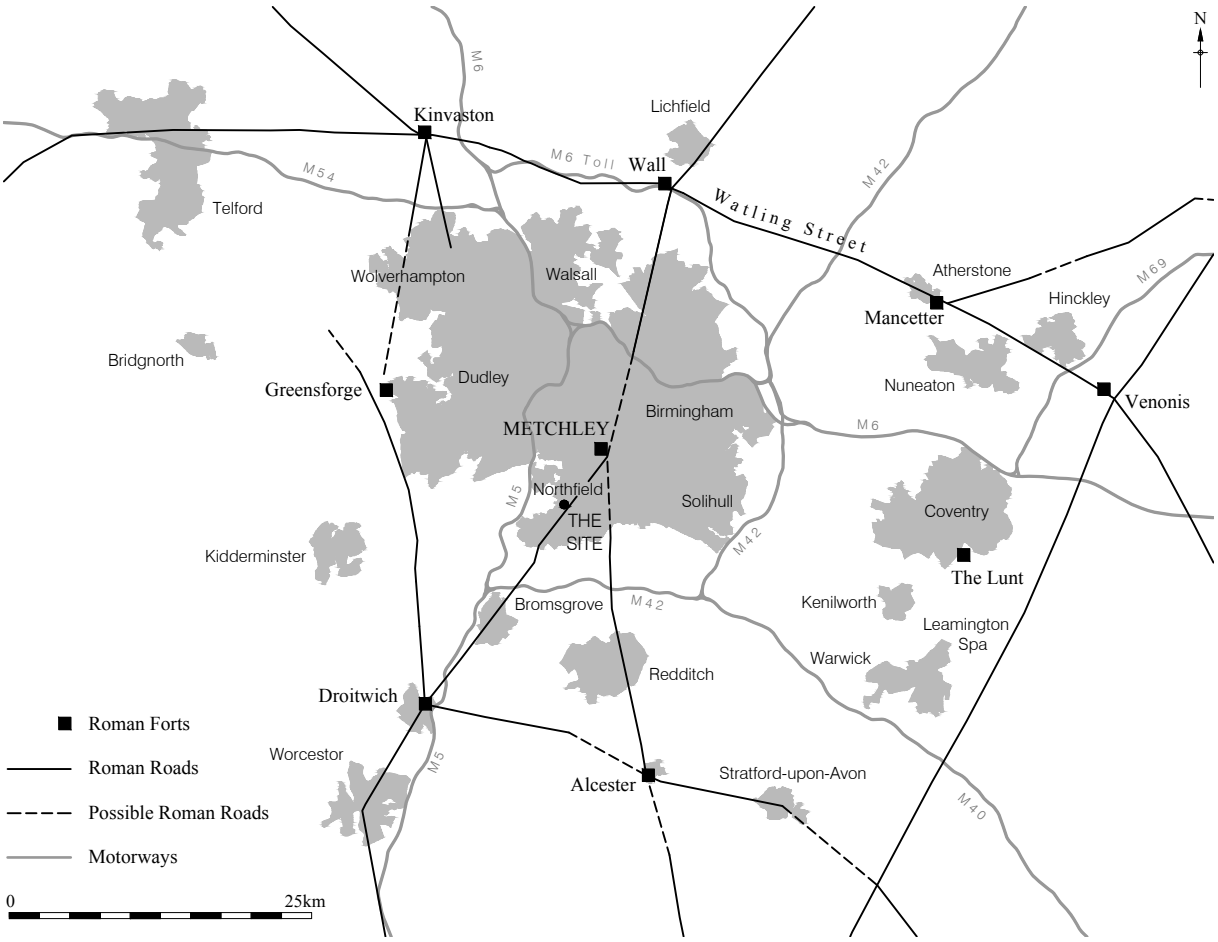


Figure 1
Site Location
1:625,000 at A4

Figure 2
Detailed Site Location
1:62,500 at A4

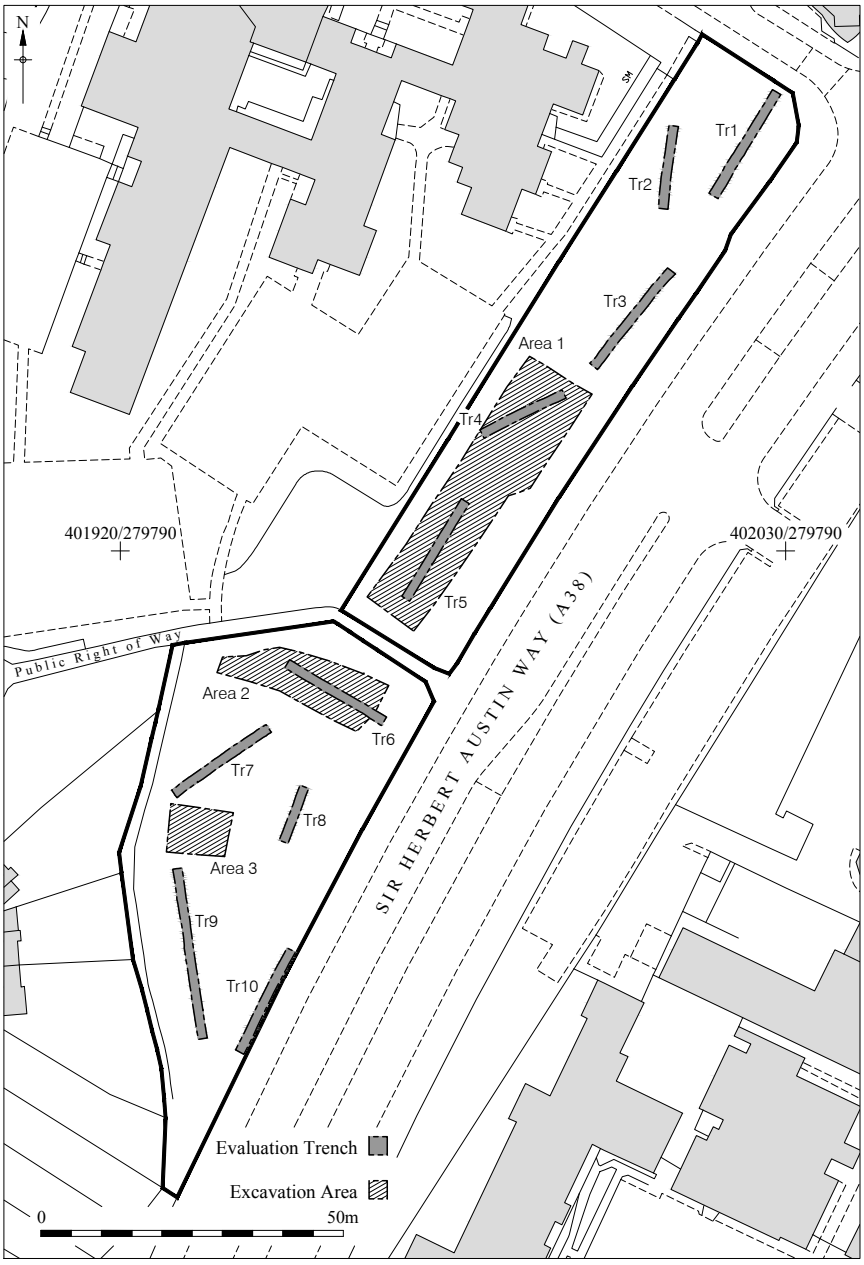
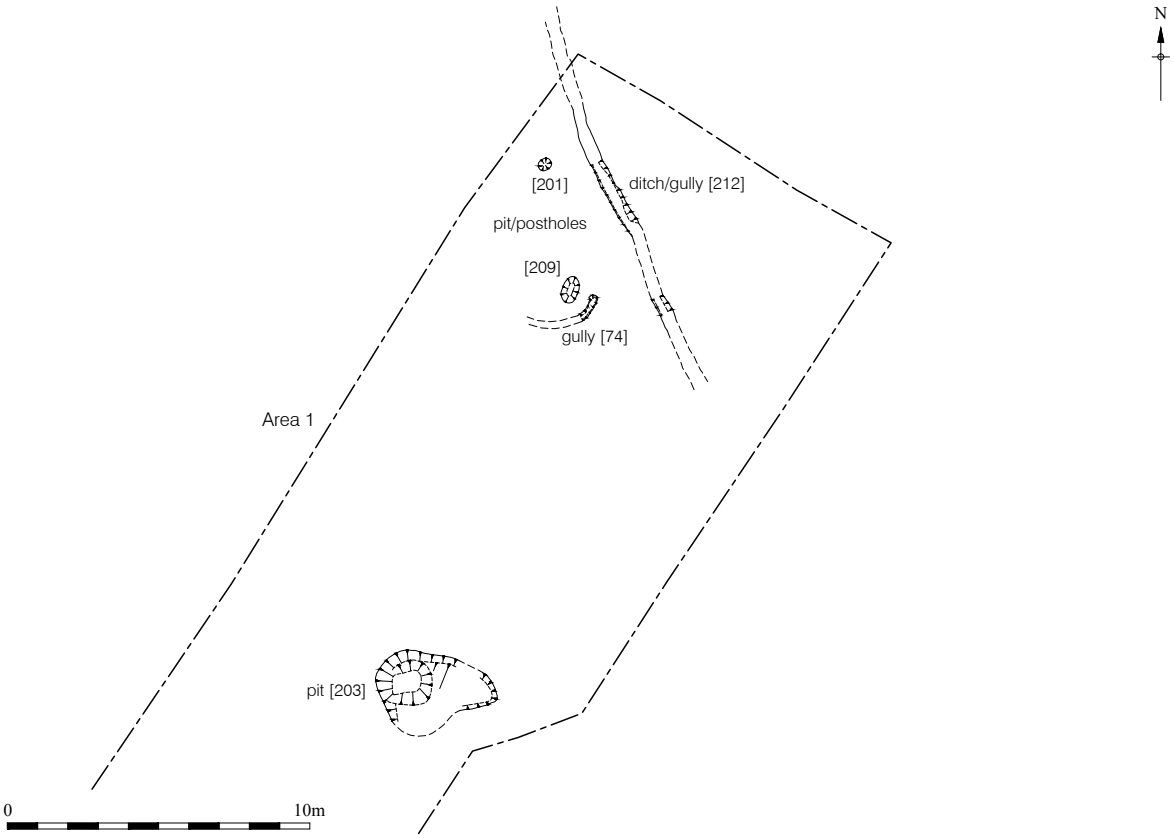
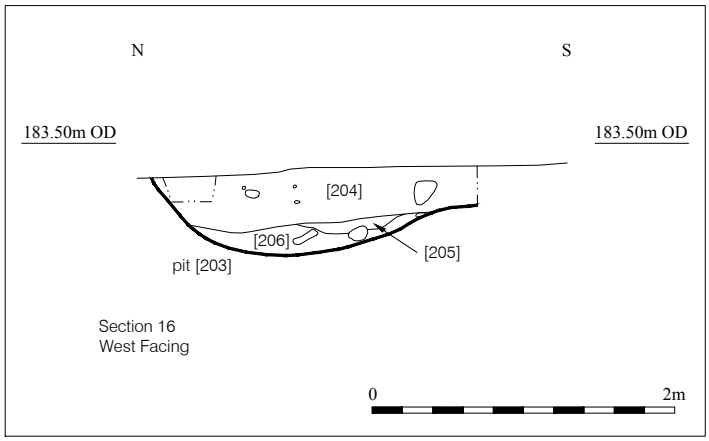


Figure 3
Areas of Investigation
1:1,250 at A4





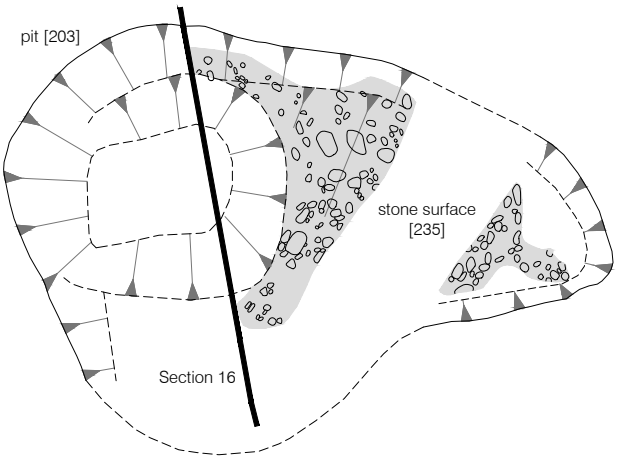


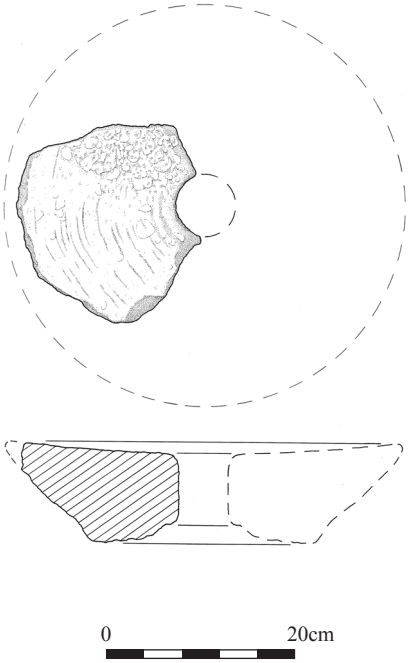
Figure 4
Roman features
Plan 1:250; Detail Plan & Section 1:50 at A4

Figure 5
Pit [203] half sectioned

Figure 6
Pit [203] fully excavated

[73]

UDB11
1:4



UDB11
sf2 [235]
1:8

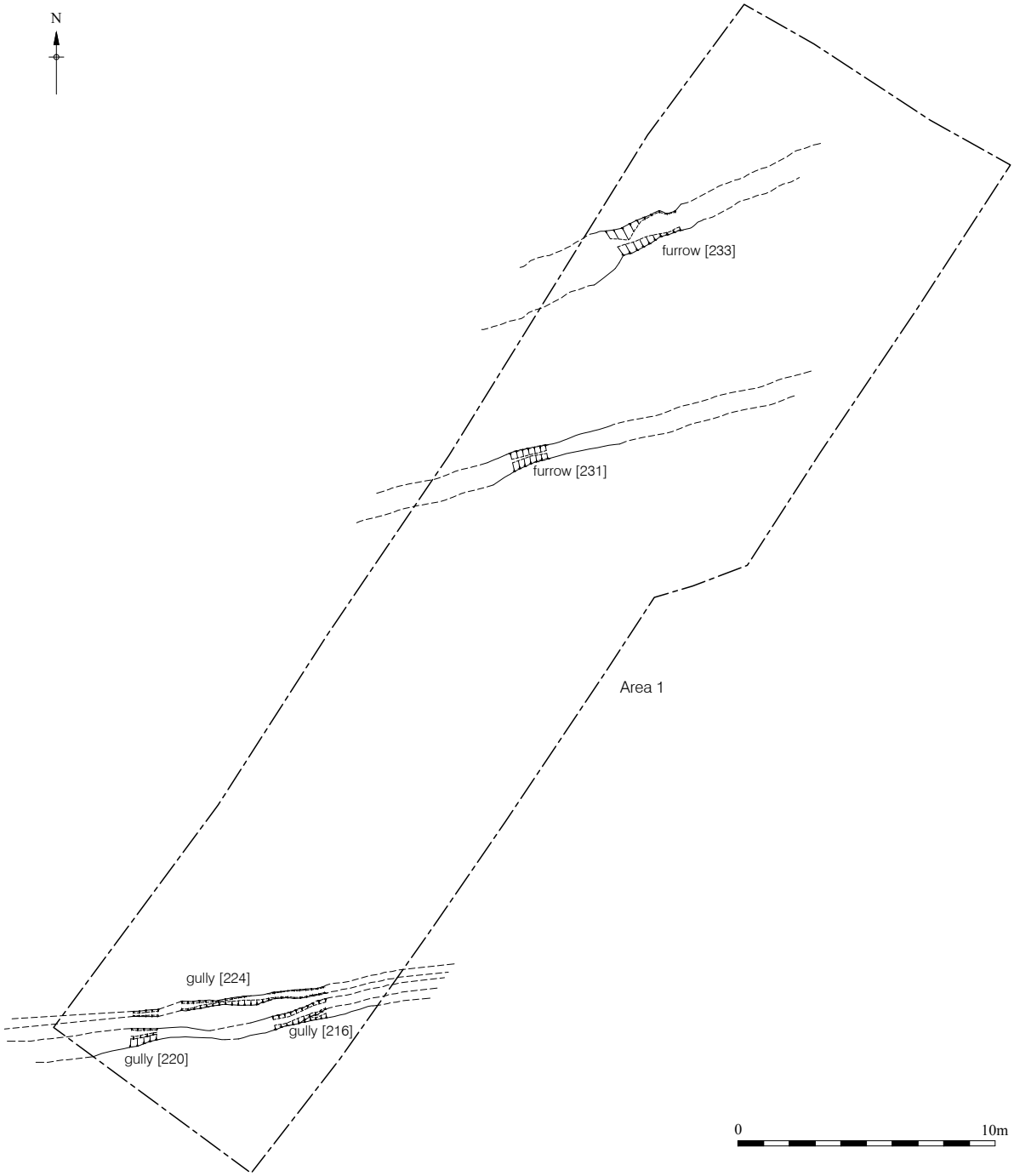


Figure 9
Medieval features
1:250 at A4