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An Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief at Princethorpe, Warwickshire, 1994

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by

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1.0 Summary

1.1 An archaeological watching brief and subsequent excavation was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit during the laying of a replacement rising main in Princethorpe, Warwickshire. The route of the proposed pipeline passed through the site of a Romano-British settlement and the Fosse Way, a Roman road.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 This report outlines the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the installation of a replacement rising water main by A.M.E.C. Ltd. on behalf of Rugby Borough Council from the B4453 at Princethorpe to the main A423, Oxford Road (Fig 1). The recommendation for a proposal of archaeological work was made by Warwickshire Museum and a detailed proposal was prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit according to a brief drawn up by the museum.

2.2 The section of pipeline covered by the proposals runs between N.G.R. SP 3980 7065 and SP 4030 7030 in the parish of Princethorpe. The total length of the new pipeline was over 575m. This cut through areas of potential archaeological interest including the Fosse Way Roman road and a Romano-British settlement (Warwickshire sites and Monuments Nos. WA3106, WA4888, WA4889 and WA5374). Field work in 1986 identified evidence for a settlement in two fields west of the Fosse Way "along at least 450 metres of the road" (C.B.A. no. 28 1985). Observations and salvage recording were undertaken by staff of Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit between September 30th and October 21st 1994.

3.0 Aims and method

3.1 Field walking prior to topsoil stripping began on September 30th in order to identify and survey any surface features. The aim of the watching brief was to identify any deposits likely to be destroyed or affected by the ground works associated with the laying of the new rising main. This was to be achieved by field walking during the initial stripping of topsoil. The objective of the subsequent excavation was to obtain an adequate record of any archaeological deposits or finds relating to the Roman settlement to be disturbed or exposed by work associated with laying the water main. Care was taken where features or deposits in situ appeared worthy of preservation. Earth moving works were rescheduled by arrangement with the resident engineer enabling a salvage excavation and record to be undertaken. Close consultation with the contractors minimised possible delays to the pipeline completion.

3.2 For the purposes of the archaeological fieldwork the pipeline route has been divided into four sections. Sections one and two form an area to the west of the modern Fosse Way road line and Sections three and four demarcate areas across the

Fosse Way as far as the Oxford Road (Fig 1). All ground disturbance associated with the laying of the pipeline was closely observed by archaeological staff in order to identify any deposits of archaeological importance.

3.3 The groundworks by the contractors were undertaken in three stages. Stage one involved the removal by earthmoving machinery of the topsoil horizon for eventual reinstatement. Stage two involved the cutting of the pipe trench itself, which measured 0.45m wide and generally 1.30m deep, occasionally 1.50m at its deepest. Stage three involved cutting the pipe trench through the existing Fosse Way.

3.4 The sections of the pipe trench were examined for any archaeological features which may have been obscured in plan following the removal of topsoil. Even where no archaeological features were distinguished a record was made of the basic stratigraphy in each section.

3.5 Topsoil stripping began from the western end of Section one to a depth of 0.3m and continued into Section two to the edge of the Fosse Way, forming a corridor 3.8m wide. An opportunity was provided at this stage for the careful examination of the subsoil, natural gravels, and for any intrusive archaeological features.

3.6 In Section two and restricted to an area within 40m of the Fosse Way, 41 sherds of Romano-British pottery were noted in the plough soil (1000). This assemblage included grey wares, imitation white wares and the fragments of a flagon with a splayed neck and thickened upper ring. It was also evident that a colluvial soil horizon (1001) masked any potential archaeological features.

3.7 A number of small sondages (0.2m by 0.2m) were cut along the intended pipe trench route at 5m intervals. This determined the depth of the colluvium and the archaeological horizon. The presence of archaeological deposits were established below a remaining 0.07m of colluvium present towards the east end of Section two, within 30m of the existing road. Once identified, the colluvium (1001) in this area was removed by machine under careful archaeological supervision. An area of the underlying subsoil (1025) measuring 20m x 3.8m was selected and cleaned manually to define features of archaeological interest (indicated in Fig 1). Further earthmoving activity in this area was suspended until all archaeological contexts and artifacts had been examined and recorded.

3.8 Topsoil stripping continued in Section three to the east of the Fosse Way, where initially no deposits of archaeological significance were identified. Colluvium, (1041, Fig. 3), was removed by machine along the central section of the corridor to a depth of 0.4m. Having a total depth of 0.60m, the remaining colluvium provided protection from heavy machinery driving over features or deposits within the corridor of topsoil stripping. During the cutting of the pipe trench a single colluvial/occupation deposit (1040)was identified to the east of the Fosse way.

3.9 The removal of topsoil and the cutting of the pipe trench in Section four preceded cutting the pipe trench across the Fosse Way. A section through the Fosse Way was sampled and recorded in the final phase of this programme.

3.10 A measured survey of surface features was not undertaken. All sections within the area of the watching brief are subject to regular ploughing and no surface features of an archaeological nature were identified

4.0 Summary of results

4.1 Section one Close to the B4453

The pipe trench was cut to a total depth of 1.30m. No surface finds were recovered during fieldwalking prior to topsoil stripping. The natural subsoil comprised of a band of ill-sorted sand and gravel (containing natural flint) to a depth varying between 0.25m and 0.35m, which sealed the natural red boulder clay (1007). No deposits of archaeological significance could be identified in section one.

4.2 Section two West of the Fosse Way

At the eastern end a concentration of archaeological features were exposed. These cut through thin colluvial deposits (1025 and 1002) into the natural red boulder clay (1007). Stratified sequences of features and deposits were recorded in an excavation area 20m x 3.8m (Fig 2).

Two postholes (F100 and F101, Fig 2) were located in the eastern end of the excavation area. Both cut through colluvial deposits (1025 and 1002) into the natural clay (1007) to a depth of 0.20m. Subrectangular in plan, with flat bases, the postholes contained Romano-British pottery, bone and limestone, the latter probably used as packing. The northern most posthole (F101), filled with a sandy silt (1005), contained a small amount of ironslag. Each were cut by later post holes (F103 and F107) whose fills (1015 and 1016) contained no finds or packing stones. Cut to depth of 0.08m and 0.12m and oval in plan, F103 and F107 were cut through the colluvial deposits but not the natural clay. One further posthole (F102), circular in plan and cut to a similar depth, was located between F103 and F107 forming a north-east/south-west alignment.

To the west of the postholes was a large ditch (F106, Fig 2 and Fig.3) with steep sides and a U shaped base, aligned north-east/south-west. The ditch, measuring 2.7m wide and 1.02m deep, showed evidence of a re-cut along its south-eastern edge. The primary fill (1020) contained sherds of Romano-British pottery within a strata of sand and clay lenses indicating water laid deposits. Overlying 1020, a silty sandy fill 0.25m thick (1018) contained Romano-British pottery and large concentrations of charcoal. A 20 litre sample of this deposit was collected for environmental assessment. The primary fill of the recut (1019) also contained a similar strata of sand and clay indicating water laid deposits.

Cut into the upper ditch deposits (1011) was a feature (F104) 0.35m wide and 0.17m deep, with a flue to the south, which was identified as a hearth. A small gulley to the north may possibly have been the remains of a second flue truncated by the pipe trench of the original rising main in 1972. The hearth comprised of a subrectangular shaped single course of brick 0.05m thick. The central area was filled by a dense layer of charcoal, burnt clay, fragments of pottery and burnt wood (1012) which overlay the brick and formed a primary fill for both flues. A 2 litre sample of this deposit was collected and examined for traces of ironscale.

To the west of the ditch (F106) and the hearth (F104) lay a second flue (F105) with vertical sides 0.16m deep and a flat base 0.40m, wide orientated north-east/south-west. The feature showed evidence of a fired clay lining (1013) along the sides, but again had been truncated at the north-eastern limit of excavation by the pipe trench cut for the original rising main. The sandy clay fill of the flue (1010) contained no finds.

To the south east and overlying the ditch was a dark silt clay layer (1006) measuring 0.25m deep and 8.5m in length which became gradually deeper towards the southwest. This contained a large quantity of Romano-British pottery sherds including greywares, mortaria, and samian ware. The deposit also contained

fragments of bone, charcoal, slag, limestone and several large sandstone blocks measuring 0.30m x 0.27m. A 20 litre sample of this layer was collected for environmental assessment.

1006 sealed the natural boulder clay (1007) and one oval feature (F108) which had steeply sloping sides and a rounded base orientated north-south. The single fill of F108 (1021) measured 0.50m wide and 0.25m deep and consisted of compact charcoal with a dense charcoal lens at its' base.

4.3 Section three The Fosse Way and east of the Fosse Way

Under archaeological supervision a trench was cut through the existing Fosse Way, during which the opportunity was taken to record and examine the north facing section of the trench (Fig 3). As in Section two, the natural clay appeared to be sealed by two thin colluvial layers (1032 and 1033). A 20 litre sample of this layer was collected for environmental assessment.

The silty sand and gravel (1030) overlying 1033 to a maximum depth of 0.32m was similar in constitution to 1027 (rising to the surface at the eastern end of section two). This layer appears to have been cut by either a pit or a ditch (F110) with shallow sloping sides and a rounded base (Fig. 3). The exact nature of this feature was difficult to determine since it terminated within the pipe trench and no evidence of its continuation could be seen in the south facing section. This feature was filled and sealed by a layer of dark brown silt and fine-grained limestone (1031) with a calcareous surface marl, possibly Jurassic and probably of local origin. A 20 litre sample of this deposit was collected for environmental assessment. No finds were recovered from this deposit. In the south-facing section of the pipe trench 1031 could be identified as a continuous flat layer truncated to the east by a cut for the modern storm drain (F111 Fig 3). These archaeological deposits were sealed by 0.20m of dark brown sandy-silt colluvium with occasional limestone fragments (1028) and a further 0.20m of light brown sandy colluvium containing small pebbles (1001).

Below the western side of the present Fosse Way all archaeological deposits had been truncated to the natural clay (1007) by a storm drain (F111), and by modern makeup layers (1035 and 1036) for the current road surface (Fig 3).

Below the eastern side of the present Fosse Way were a number of makeup layers (1039, 1042, 1043 and 1044) relating to previous tarmac road surfaces (1038 and 1045). These layers, themselves truncated by modern features, have removed any archaeological deposits to a depth of 0.80m between the Fosse Way and the modern roadside ditch (F113).

To the east of the modern ditch a deposit (1040) was identified overlying the natural clay (1007) and sealed by 0.60m of light brown, sandy colluvium with occasional small pebbles (1041). With a maximum depth of 0.20m the deposit contained flecks of bone and fragments of Romano-British pottery which gradually shallowed out approximately 10m east of the current road line.

4.4 Section four West of the Oxford Road

A small number of sherds were recovered during fieldwalking including two sherds of Romano-British pottery and three sherds of post-medieval fabrics. The topsoil was stripped to a depth of 0.28m which lay directly upon the natural red boulder clay (1007).

Topsoil stripping continued to the east of the Oxford Road beyond the extent of this brief. A brief examination of this area showed a thin layer of topsoil 0.09m, above the natural boulder clay with no evidence of archaeological deposits.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Section one

No features or deposits of archaeological significance could be identified in this section.

5.2 Section two

The ditch (F106), aligned north-east/south-west, and its later re-cut appear stratagraphically to pre-date most of the other features within the area of excavation. The primary fills of the ditch (1018 and 1020) contained a total of 17 sherds of Romano-British pottery, which included part of a samian ware cup, colour coated wares and grey wares dating approximately to the late first century (J. Evans, pers. com.). Pottery (248 sherds) from the re-cut of F106 (1011 and 1017) included lid-seated jars and rusticated greyware fabrics which also suggest a late first century date (J. Evans, pers. com.). Both the original cut of F106 and the re-cut contained primary fills of a sand and clay strata indicating water lain deposits.

Fragments of late first to early second century pottery (13 sherds) from the primary fill of the hearth (1012, F104) suggest that the ditch had fallen into disuse by this time. The flue or stoking chamber (F105, Fig 2) located to the west of F104 may have fed an industrial feature beyond the northern limits of the excavation. The central hearth area of the feature has almost certainly been destroyed by the pipe trench cut for the original rising main.

It seems possible that the two postholes (F100 and F101 Fig. 2), both cutting through layers of grey and orange colluvium (1002 and 1025), belong to the same phase. Each contained 10 sherds of Romano-British pottery. The postholes were large, with a packing of limestone suggesting that they provided substantial support to a structure.

Two later features (F103 and A107) cut into the postholes may possibly be associated with the demolition of the first structure and the extraction of the timber posts from their settings. Alternatively they may relate to a third posthole (F102), set between the two to form a north-east/south-west alignment. This may belong to a second phase of the same structure. No finds were recovered from any of these features.

The occupation layer (1006) appears to post-date the original ditch cut (F106) but could possibly be contemporary with the industrial features since the deposit shallows out before the western edge of F105, and contains a substantial concentration of charcoal. The layer also contained the largest assemblage of pottery (923 sherds), which included rusticated greywares (dating approximately 80 A.D. to 100 A.D.), samian ware, hand made lid-seated jars and military-type forms dating to the late first/early second century.

The feature sealed by 1006 (F108) contained 54 sherds of Romano-British pottery. Evidence of in-situ burning suggests that the feature was used as a hearth. Only a sample of this feature lying directly within the pipe trench cut was excavated. A posthole 5m to the west (F109) and observed within the cut of the pipe trench, contained no finds but lay stratagraphically on a similar horizon to the other features in the excavation area. No sherds of black burnished ware were recovered within

the excavation area, suggesting that occupation did not extend much beyond A.D. 120.

5.3 Section three

Colluvial layers 1032 and 1033 sealing the natural red clay (1007) are almost certainly the same as colluvial layers 1002 and 1025 in Section two. These appear to pre-date any Roman activity and are sealed by what is likely to be a makeup layer (1030) for a continuous deposit of limestone rubble (1031). It appears likely that this deposit is the remains of the original Fosse Way road makeup. An agger (or embankment) provided by the makeup layer 1030 and the camber of the upper surface of the limestone is typical of Roman road construction (Margary 1973). The central feature (F110) may be the remains of a pit or ditch which has been filled by road material.

The existing modern road surface has recently been realigned and moved to the west. Previous to this much of the original Fosse Way road structure would have been subject to agricultural erosion within Section two. The similarities between makeup layer 1030 and a layer of gravel 1027 may suggest that 1027 also provided part of the agger for a now truncated road surface across the western end of Section three. If this is the case, the north-east/south-west aligned ditch (F106) may relate to the primary road construction. This would suggest that the original Fosse Way was located to the west of the existing road at this point. Potential archaeological features to the east of the Fosse Way could therefore lie below or have been truncated by the eastern side of the present road. However, it seems likely that there was little or no significant occupation east of the road at this point

Two sections of the Fosse Way at Princethorpe were excavated in 1959 and 1960 (PRN WA 3105 Fig 1, Stanley and Stanley 1959, Stanley and Stanley 1960). Two distinct surfaces were identified with a total width of 3.6m. The lower road surface appeared to be constructed of smaller stones than the upper. Only one surface could be distinguished in the north facing section of the pipe trench. In both sections (1959 and 1960) a ditch approximately 1m wide was discovered on the west side of the road (which may correspond to the ditch (F106) in Section two), although no similar feature could be identified to the east of the road line.

The relationship between the features to the west of the Fosse Way and the occupation layer 1040 to the east is difficult to determine, due to recent disturbances below the modern road line. Containing a small assemblage (11 sherds) of Romano-British pottery, it is possible that this deposit belongs to a similar phase.

5.4 Section four

No features or deposits of archaeological significance could be identified in this section.

6.0 Implications and recommendations

6.1 Situated between the Roman settlements of Chesterton and High Cross on the Fosse Way, the Roman settlement at Princethorpe represents a valuable archaeological resource. The modern location of Princethorpe, to the north and away from the Roman settlement, has helped to preserve the site, the remains of which appear to survive relatively well beneath ploughed fields on either side of the road. These deposits provide the potential to advance our understanding of early Roman settlements associated with the Fosse Way.

6.2 It is possible that the earliest Roman activity was confined to the area around PRN WA 4888 (Fig 1). This area appears to have been abandoned in the late first-early second century in preference to higher ground to the south (PRN WA 4889). Future investigation into the settlement may establish and define the extent of Roman activity.

6.3 Full post-excavation analysis of the results and the archive of data outlined in this report should now be undertaken. This will involve an examination of the pottery assemblage (a total of 1503 sherds), other artifacts and analysis of the environmental samples. A report on the site could then be published in the Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society. A more detailed and costed proposal to achieve this objective should now be prepared and submitted in accordance with the guide-lines for archaeological projects defined in M.A.P. 2.

6.4 The survival of this archaeological resource is under constant threat from deeper ploughing methods, since it seems unlikely that colluvial layers (1001 and 1041) which protect the site in some areas, extend to cover the whole of the settlement.

7.0 Acknowledgements

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8.0 References

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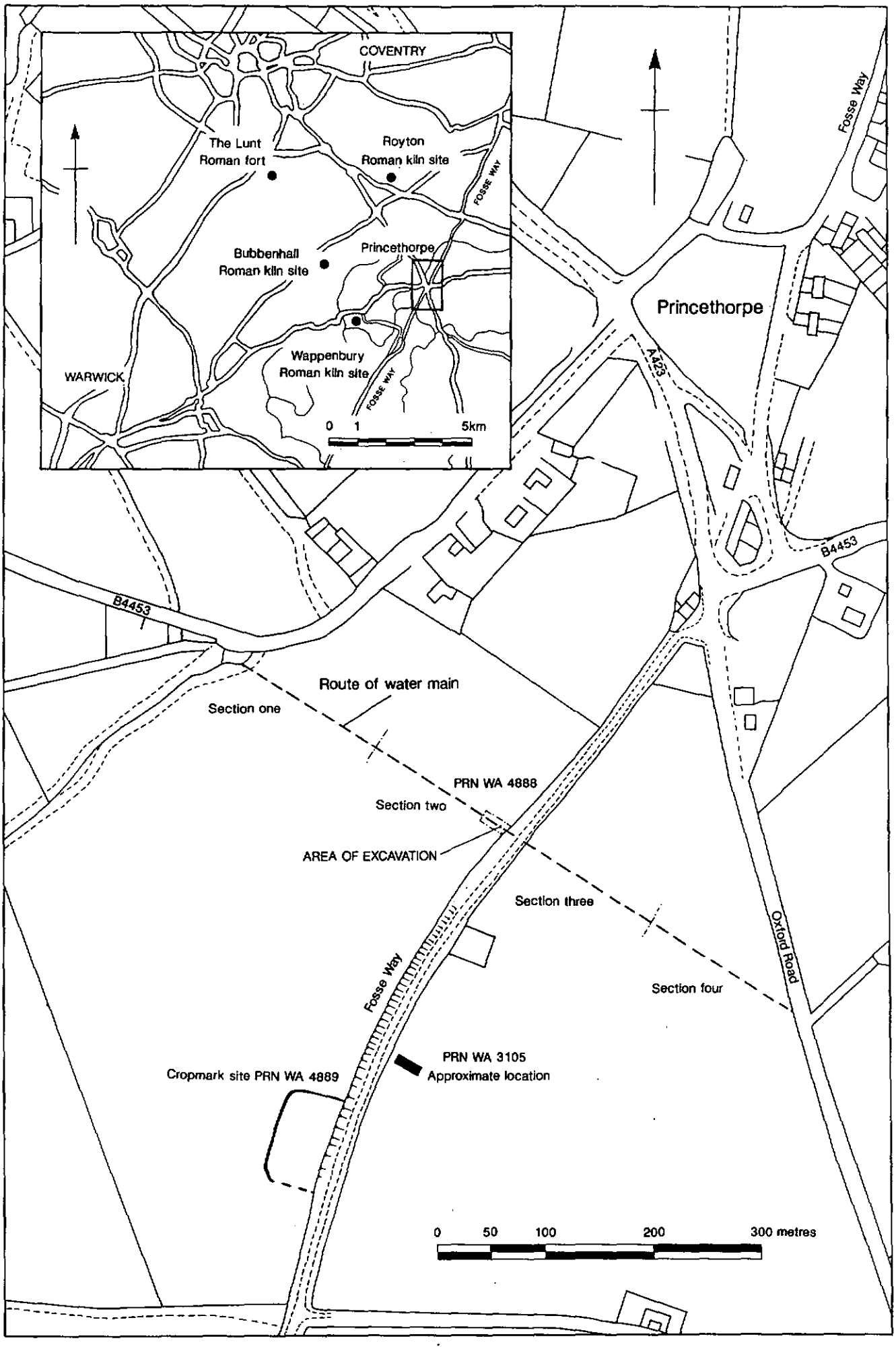

Figure 1 Location

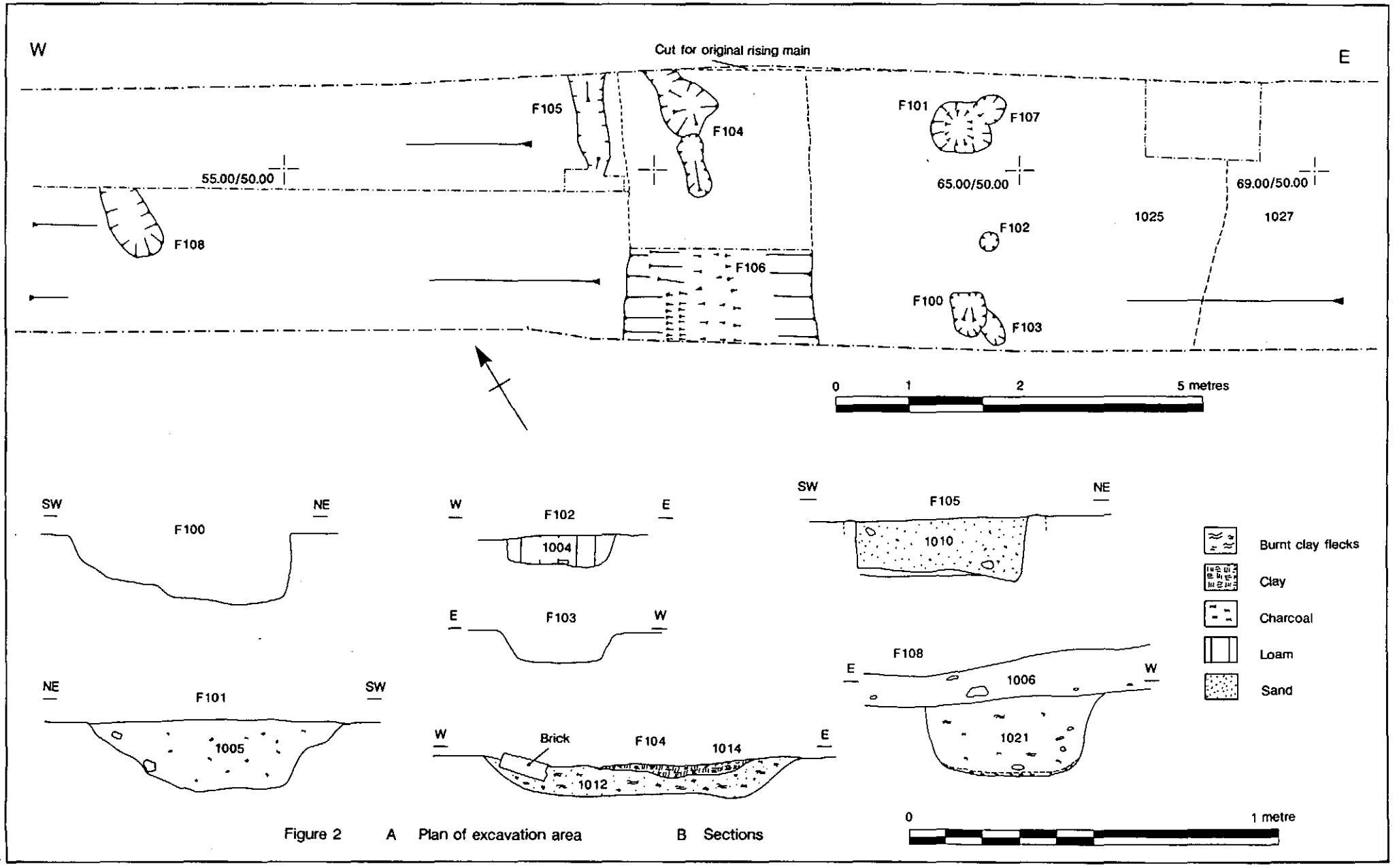

Figure 2 A Plan of excavation area B Sections

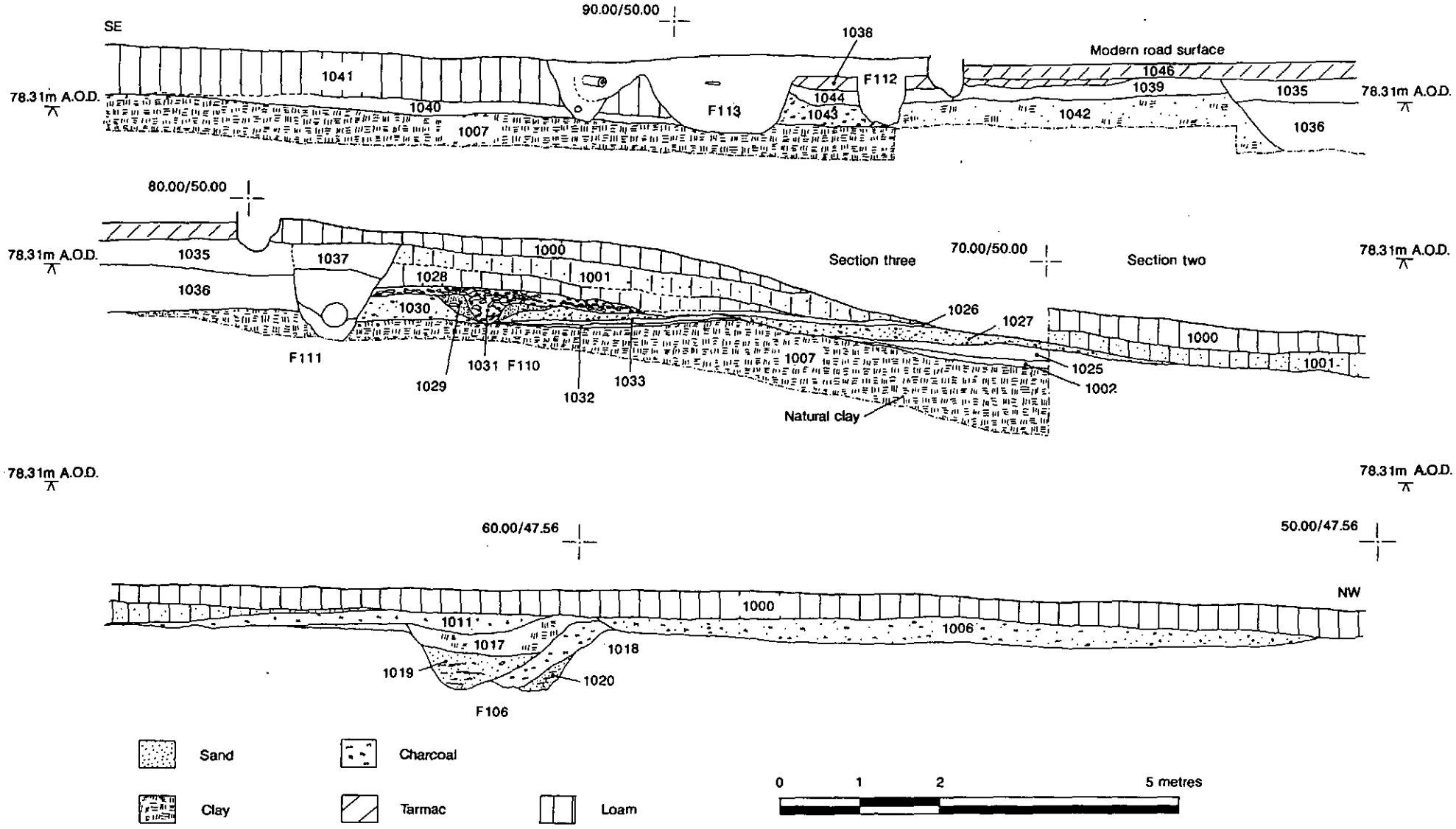
SE
90.00/50.00
1038
Modern road surface
1041
F112
1046
1039
1035
78.31m A.O.D.
78.31m A.O.D.
1040
F113
1044
1043
1042
1007
1036
80.00/50.00
78.31m A.O.D.
1035
1037
1000
Section three
70.00/50.00
Section two
78.31m A.O.D.
1028
1001
1036
1030
1026
1027
1000
F111
1007
1025
1001
1031 F110
1033
1002
1029
1032
Natural clay
78.31m A.O.D.
78.31m A.O.D.
60.00/47.56
50.00/47.56
NW
1000
1011
1006
1017
1018
1019
1020
F106
Sand
Charcoal
Clay
Tarmac
Loam
0
1
2
5 metres

Figure 3