CPAT Report No 1154

Morton Ley Farm, Llynclys, Shropshire

Archaeological Watching Brief

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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I Grant
July 2012

Report for Mr J Edwards

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CPAT Report Record

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was invited by Mr Julian Edwards, to conduct an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of new chicken-rearing buildings at Morton Ley Farm, Llynclys, Shropshire (SJ 3130 2320; Application no. 11/02934/EIA). The Historic Environment Countryside Advisor for Shropshire County Council had determined that the watching brief should be undertaken to ensure the preservation by record of any archaeological remains revealed during the construction works; planning permission for the development included the following condition:

> 'No development approved by this permission shall commence until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI). This written scheme shall be approved in writing by the Planning Authority prior to the commencement of works.'

1.2 Whilst the Shropshire Historic Environment Record (HER) indicates that there are currently no known heritage assets within the proposed development site itself, it lies in close proximity to a number of important prehistoric cropmark sites (Fig. 2), including a multivallate prehistoric enclosure (PRN 1401; SJ 3157 2327) and a pair of parallel ditches (PRN 1400; SJ 3152 2292), while Wat's Dyke lies around 750m to the west.

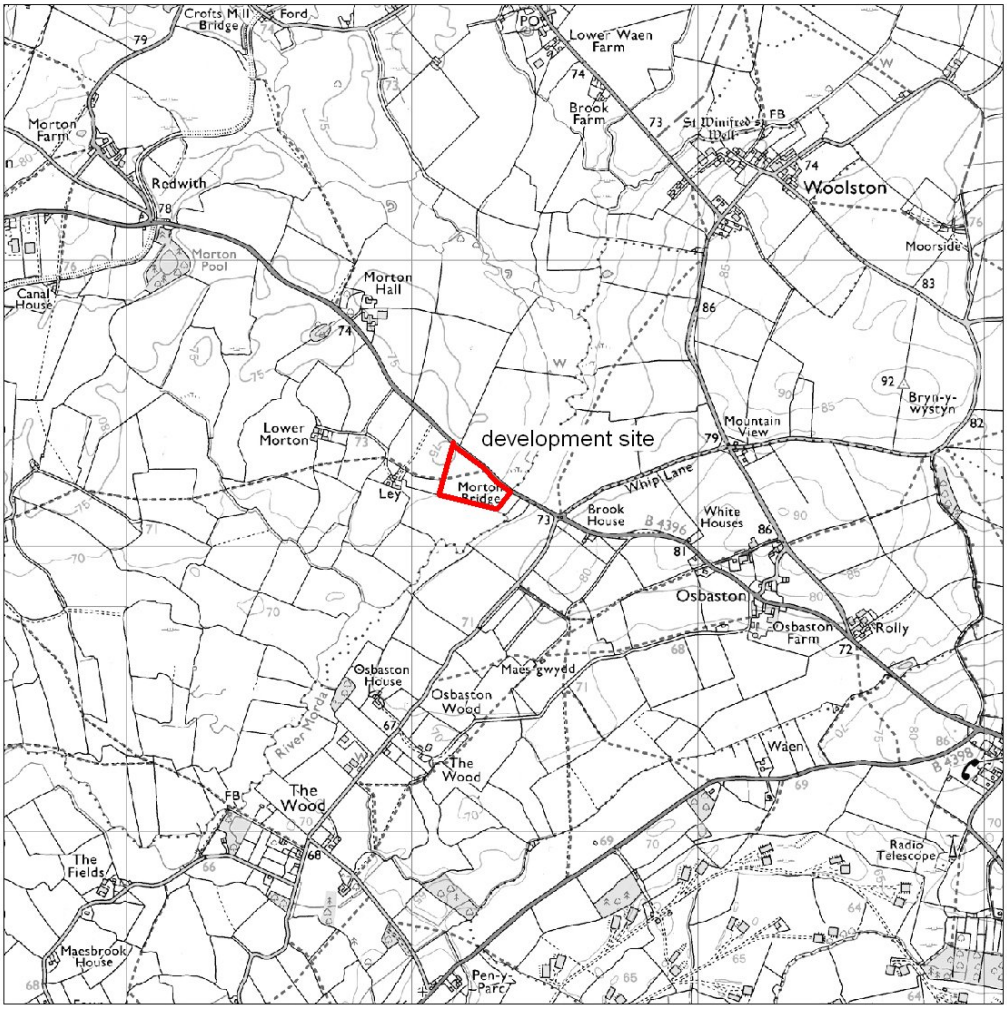

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Fig. 1 Development Site location

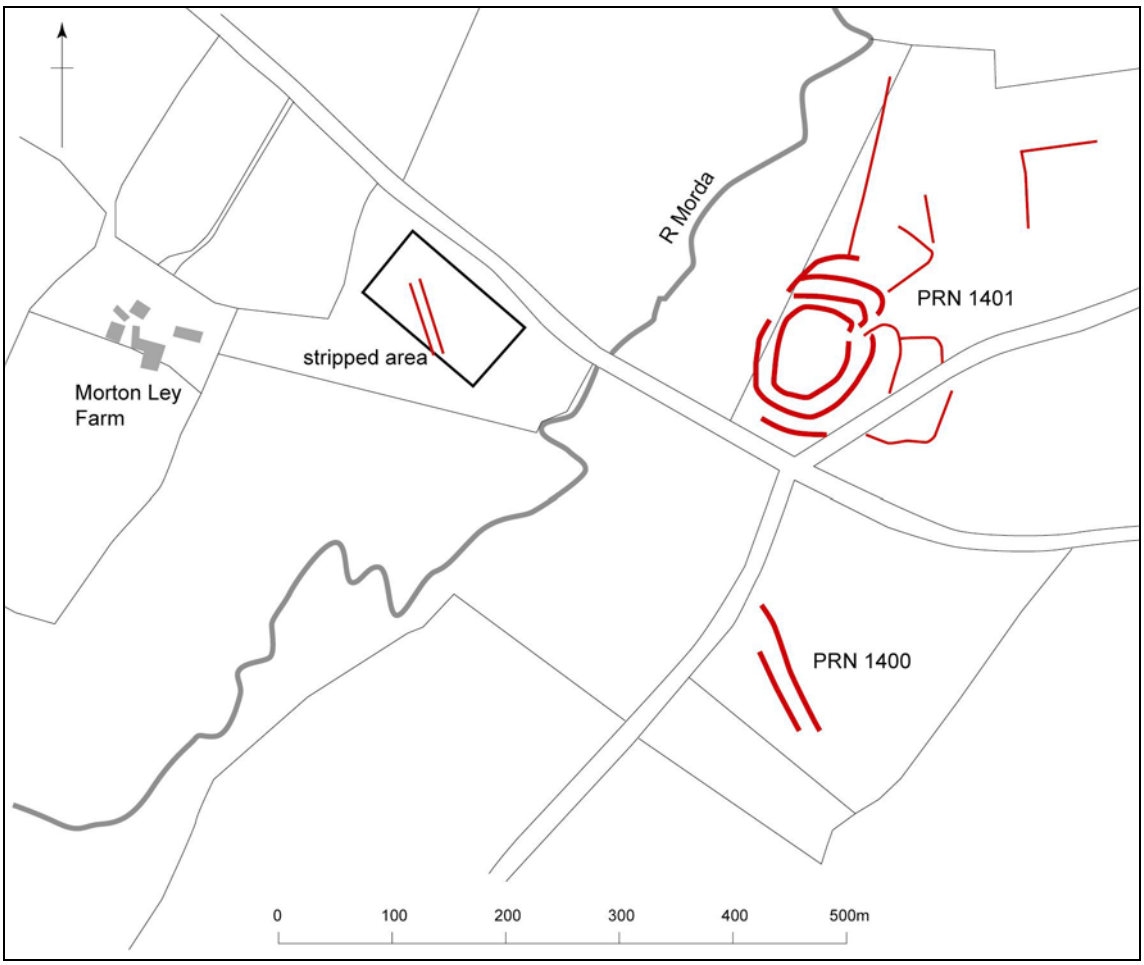

Fig. 2 The location of the stripped area, showing the alignment of the probable Roman road, together with known cropmark sites in the immediate vicinity of the development

2 WATCHING BRIEF

2.1 The watching brief was conducted between 25 June and 5 July 2012, and monitored the removal of 0.30m to 0.35m of topsoil within the footprint of the building development, an area measuring 130m by 66.5m (Fig. 5), and also included the machine access routes.

2.2 In some areas, specifically along the break of slope, an additional deposit underlying the topsoil, a pale grey sandy silt (up to 0.15m thick), was also removed, which may represent either an old ploughsoil or an accumulation of hill-wash. The underlying undisturbed natural subsoil was variable, with a red sandy deposit on the summit of the site gradually giving way downslope to firm yellow clay, banded with occasional mineral panning. At the base of the slope, orientated south-west to north-east, a paleochannel was identified bordering a sinuous river gravel terrace. Once the initial topsoil strip (and archaeological monitoring) was completed the northern quadrant of the site was reduced by a further 2-3m.

2.3 Underlying the ploughsoil (02) in the north-west corner of the site (SJ 31154 23274) an ill-defined pit (08) was identified, measuring 1.2m in diameter and 0.32m deep (Fig. 4). A thin basal fill consisted of bright, orangey red sand, with the main fill being a firm, reddish-brown sand containing occasional small stones and lumps of charcoal. No artefactual material was recovered from the feature.

2.4 A possible well was revealed towards the south-eastern corner of the field (SJ 31318 23202) which was at least 1.7m deep and lined with hand-made bricks (Fig. 3). Two land drains fed into the well on the northern side and larger diameter pipes were visible on the north-west and south-east sides, the latter possibly draining towards the River Morda.

Fig. 3 The brick-lined well. Photo CPAT 3482.0006

Fig. 4 The shallow pit towards the western corner of the site. Photo CPAT 3482.0009

2.5 The most significant and unexpected discovery was two sections of probable Roman road which was initially revealed as a linear stony deposit around 4.5m in width. Limited hand-cleaning subsequently identified flanking ditches to either side of the stone spread and a number of trial trenches were excavated by machine along the projected line of the road in order to establish its extent within the development site. A total station survey was used to locate the trenches and record the position and extent of the ditches and metalled surface. At this point the Shropshire Council Principal Archaeologist, Dr Andy Wigley, was informed of the discovery and a site meeting was arranged for 3 July at which it was agreed that a section of the road should be subject to hand-cleaning and appropriate sample excavation.

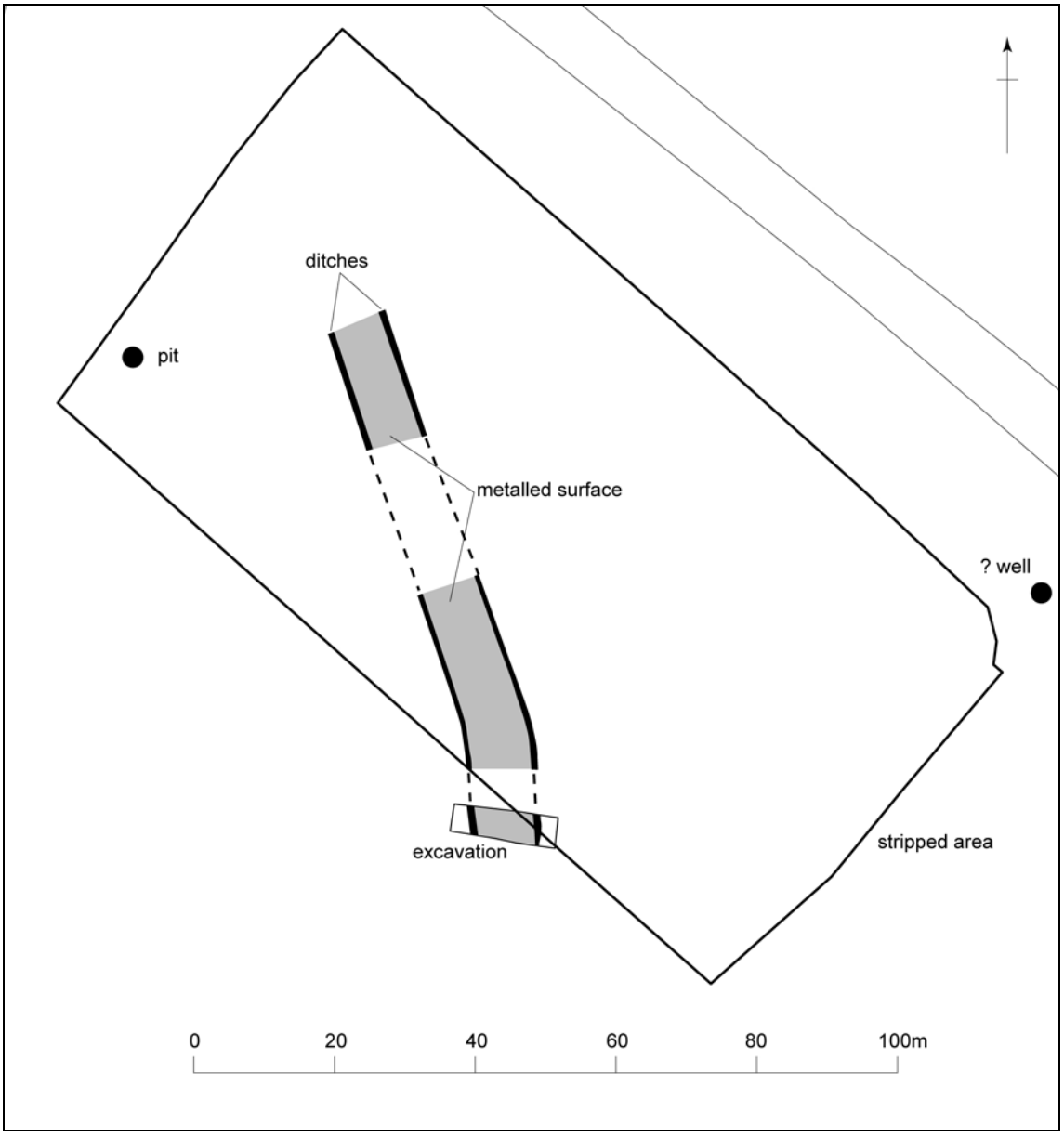

Fig. 5 Plan of the stripped area showing the extent of the probable Roman road and the location of the pit and possible well

2.6 Within the stripped area the road survived for at least 80m, aligned north-north-west to south-south-east, although a central section, 20m in length, remained largely buried beneath a layer of silt. Towards the south-western edge of the stripped area the road turned slightly to the south, following a low-lying gravel river terrace above the narrow flood plain of the River Morda. It is

presumed that at the higher, northern end of the site the road had already been removed by ploughing.

Fig. 6 General view of the site from the north with the road metalling just visible in the centre. Photo CPAT 3482-0021

2.7 The excavation of the road focused on a 4m-wide section of the road at the southernmost end of its visible extent (Figs 9-11). Sections were excavated across both flanking ditches (15 and 18), which at this point were 8m apart. The western ditch (18) was up to 1.5m wide and 0.3m deep, containing only two fills, neither of which contained any stone which might have been eroded from the road material (Fig. 8). The basal fill consisted of a stiff, yellow-brown clay (17), sealed beneath a 0.2m-thick deposit of iron-panned, mid-greyish brown silty clay (16). The ditch had been cut by a later field drain (20).

Fig. 7 The western roadside ditch (18), viewed from the south. Photo CPAT 3482.0109

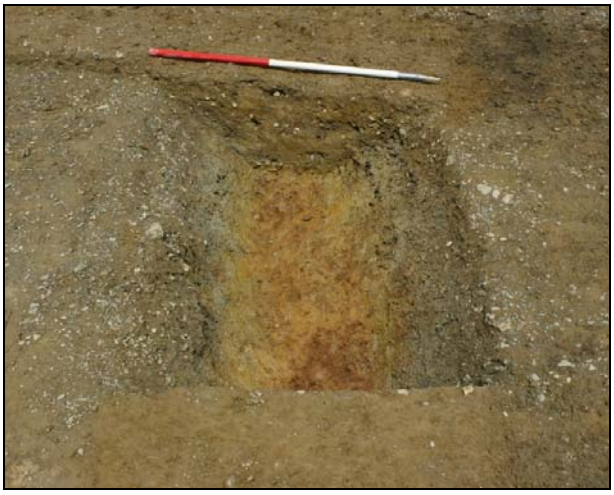

Fig. 8 The western roadside ditch (15), viewed from the south. Photo CPAT 3482.0083

2.8 The eastern ditch (15) was up to 1.5m wide and 0.44m deep (Fig. 8). Along the inner edge an initial 'weathering' fill (14) of fine gravel was sealed by a thin deposit of pinkish clay (14) in the base of the ditch. Overlying this was a firm, 0.14m-thick deposit of mid-brown to bluish-grey clay silt (12). The fill, which contained evidence of mineral iron-panning throughout, may indicate a period of decline in the maintenance of the road. The overlying fill (11) contained quantities of small pebbles and cobbles, presumed to be eroded road surface material. The uppermost fill consisted of brown, silty clay 0.18m thick.

Fig. 9 The surviving road makeup, composed of river pebbles and gravel (09), viewed from the north. Photo CPAT 3482-0080

2.9 Between the ditches the road itself had been largely removed by centuries of ploughing, such that only the base of the road remained, consisting of a band of river cobbles (09) 4.5m wide and only 50mm thick, with occasional worn patches of compacted pea-sized gravel. A sample excavation through the road surface revealed that it was laid down directly onto the undisturbed natural subsoil.

2.10 The excavations failed to produce any artefacts from either the roadside ditches, or the stony makeup for the road.

Fig. 10 The excavated section of the probable Roman road, viewed from the south.
Photo CPAT 3482.0129

3 CONCLUSIONS

3.1 The watching brief produced an unexpected but significant discovery in the form of a probable Roman road. Although badly damaged by centuries of ploughing at least 80m of the road was recorded within the stripped area, following a north-north-west to south-south-east alignment, but turning slightly to the south as it approached the River Morda, where it followed a river terrace.

3.2 The road had been constructed using river gravel and cobbles, laid directly onto the natural subsoil, although ploughing had removed all traces of the road surface. The metalling was flanked by shallow ditches around 8m apart.

3.3 Although undated the form and dimensions of the road suggest that it is likely to be Roman. If so then this forms part of a previously unrecorded route which is not obviously associated with any other confirmed sections of Roman road, lying 25km north-north-east of Forden Gaer and 45km south-south-west of Chester.

4 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

4.1 The writer would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the project: Nigel Jones and Sophie Watson CPAT; Julian Edwards and the construction staff at Morton Ley Farm; and Dr Andy Wigley, Historic Environment Team, Shropshire Council.

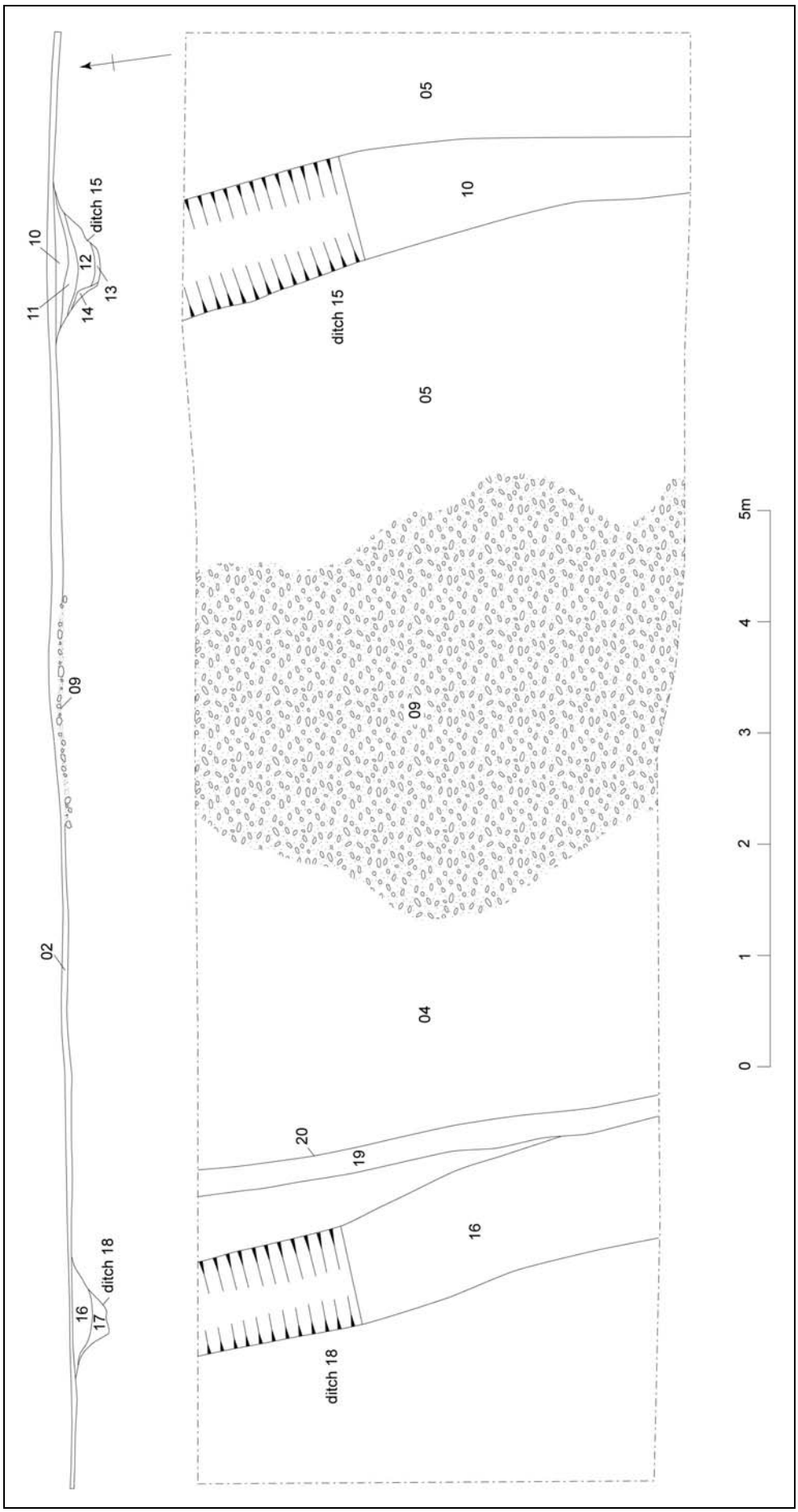

Fig. 11 The excavated section of the probable Roman road

APPENDIX 1
PROJECT ARCHIVE

Site records
20 context record forms
Context Register
Drawing Register
1 A1 site drawing
136 digital photographs, CPAT film 3482
Photographic register

Context Register

Context	Type	Comment
01	Deposit	Topsoil
02	Deposit	Old ploughsoil
03	Deposit	Natural red sandy subsoil
04	Deposit	Natural yellow clay subsoil
05	Deposit	Natural river gravels
06	Fill	Fill of pit 08
07	Fill	Fill of pit 08
08	Pit	Pit 1.2m diameter and 0.32m deep. Undated
09	Stone layer	Remnant road make up consisting of rounded river cobbles
10	Fill	Upper fill of ditch 15
11	Fill	Fill of ditch 15
12	Fill	Fill of ditch 15
13	Fill	Basal fill of ditch 15
14	Fill	Primary fill, initial weather, of ditch 15
15	Ditch	Drainage ditch along E side of road
16	Fill	Upper fill of ditch 18
17	Fill	Lower fill of ditch 18
18	Ditch	Drainage ditch along W side of road
19	Fill	Fill of 20
20	Cut	Land drain