

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**An Archaeological Watching Brief
at Meole Brace, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, August 1994**

by

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in August 1994, during the construction of a car park on land at Meole Brace, Shrewsbury. The watching brief followed recommendations made by the Archaeology Service of the Department of Leisure Services of Shropshire County Council, following an archaeological evaluation in May 1994. The watching brief identified traces of militia trenches and brick foundations, both of recent date, and a single feature containing Romano-British pottery, probably relating to a nearby roadside settlement.

Introduction

In August 1994, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by Shropshire County Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a 'park and ride' development at Meole Brace, Shrewsbury, NGR SJ 490 098 (Fig. 1).

The development is bounded by the A5 Shrewsbury bypass to the south, The A5112 to the west, the Shrewsbury-Hereford railway to the east and the Meole Brace retail park to the north (Fig. 2). The area contains a number of sites of archaeological interest. To the north of the development area and immediately to the east of the proposed access road to the new car park is a double ring ditch (SA14) which appears on aerial photographs and is thought to be of early Bronze Age date. This feature is currently being investigated by the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology at the University of Birmingham. It has been suggested that a second, smaller ring ditch lies to the northwest of this feature (Phillpotts 1994). Further north a ring ditch associated with a group of small pits containing Late Neolithic pottery was excavated prior to the establishment of the retail park (Hughes and Woodward in press). To the south of the development area are the remains of a Romano-British roadside settlement. A large part of this settlement was excavated in 1989 and 1990 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit prior to the construction of the A5/A49 Shrewsbury Bypass (Hughes 1994).

Two linear trenches, which appear on aerial photographs as discontinuous parallel features, cross the area of the development from west to east. These have been interpreted as twentieth century military trenches (Jenks 1993).

An evaluation of the whole area of the development was carried out by the Archaeology Service of the Department of Leisure Services, Shropshire County Council in May 1994 (Hannaford and Phillpotts 1994). This evaluation demonstrated the survival of remains of the Romano-British settlement area in the southern part of the proposed development area. Because of the national and regional importance of the surviving part of this settlement, the evaluation report recommended the preservation of these remains *in situ* (Hannaford and Phillpotts 1994, 17). The area to be preserved is indicated in Figure 2. A further recommendation was made to ensure that the proposed access road avoided the known double ring ditch and the possible smaller ring ditch to the west. However, little evidence for surviving archaeological features were identified within the

remainder of the evaluated area, and an extended watching brief was considered an appropriate response for the remainder of the development.

Aim and Method

The objective of the watching brief was to record any archaeological deposits identified in the area of the development prior to their destruction.

In order to achieve this objective, the topsoil stripping of the whole area was undertaken under archaeological supervision, and the subsoil examined prior to further excavation by the construction machinery. The topsoil was removed by the contractors using a combination of Hymac 360 degree and caterpillar machines to a depth of approximately 0.25m. A provision was made within the construction programme for the recording of any significant archaeological features that might be identified. The area of the site to be preserved *in situ* was protected by means of plastic sheeting prior to the commencement of the works.

The main phase of groundworks was undertaken between August 8th and August 12th 1994. An on site archaeological presence was maintained throughout this period.

Results

The identification of archaeological features was hampered by poor weather conditions. Visibility was also made difficult by the tracks of the construction machinery. Consequently it was necessary to observe the subsoil as it was being exposed by the machines. Unfortunately, this was not always possible when a number of machines were operating simultaneously.

Despite these difficulties the military trenches were clearly visible and corresponded to the positions plotted from the cropmarks (Fig. 3). The western end of the southern trench was sampled and recorded during the watching brief (Fig. 4). It was up to 0.9m deep and 1.35m wide and was filled with redeposited gravel and subsoil. Numerous fragments of green bottle glass, post medieval pottery and barbed wire were recovered from the lowermost fills. One fragment from the base of a bottle was moulded with the inscription "Cockburns Myers" and the date "1863". Several sherds of Romano-British pottery and a single prehistoric flint flake were also recovered from the fill of this trench. The Romano-British pottery included two joining rim fragments from a Severn Valley ware storage jar, two rim fragments from Severn Valley ware beaded rim bowls or dishes and a single body sherd of red colour coated Severn Valley ware.

A second feature, 1m wide and 0.3m deep, was visible in the southern side of the trench (Fig. 4, North Facing Section). A single fragment of Samian ware suggested that this might have been of Romano-British date and it seems likely that this feature was the source of the Roman pottery in the backfill of the military trench. Despite careful cleaning of the gravel subsoil to the north and south of the military trench, no further trace of this possible Roman feature could be identified.

The only other features identified during the watching brief were a series of mortared brick piles with rubble cores, approximately 0.5m square, in the central part of the development area (Fig. 3). It seems possible that these may be related to the use of the site as a racecourse earlier this century (Phillipotts 1994, 10).

Acknowledgments

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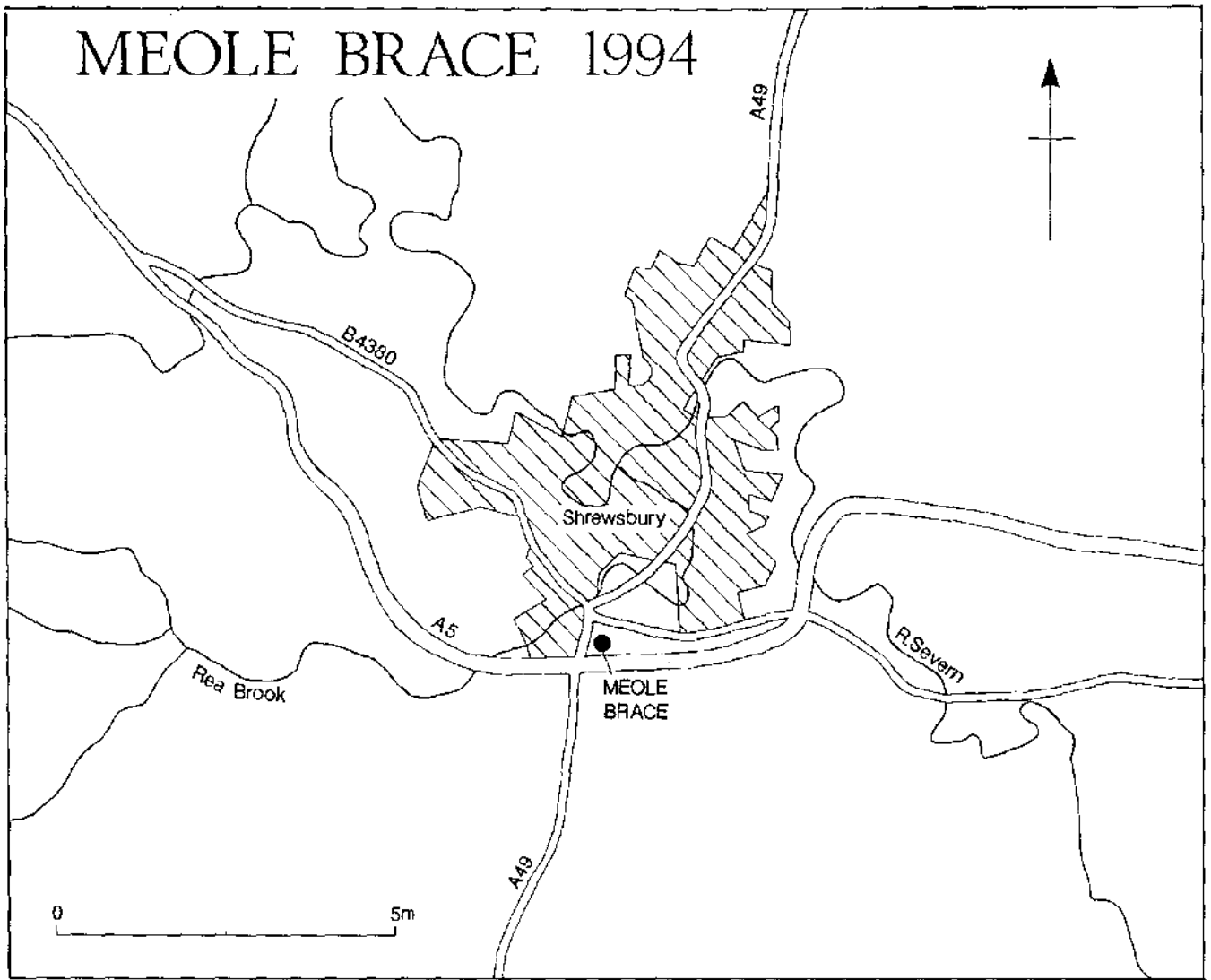


Fig. 1 Location

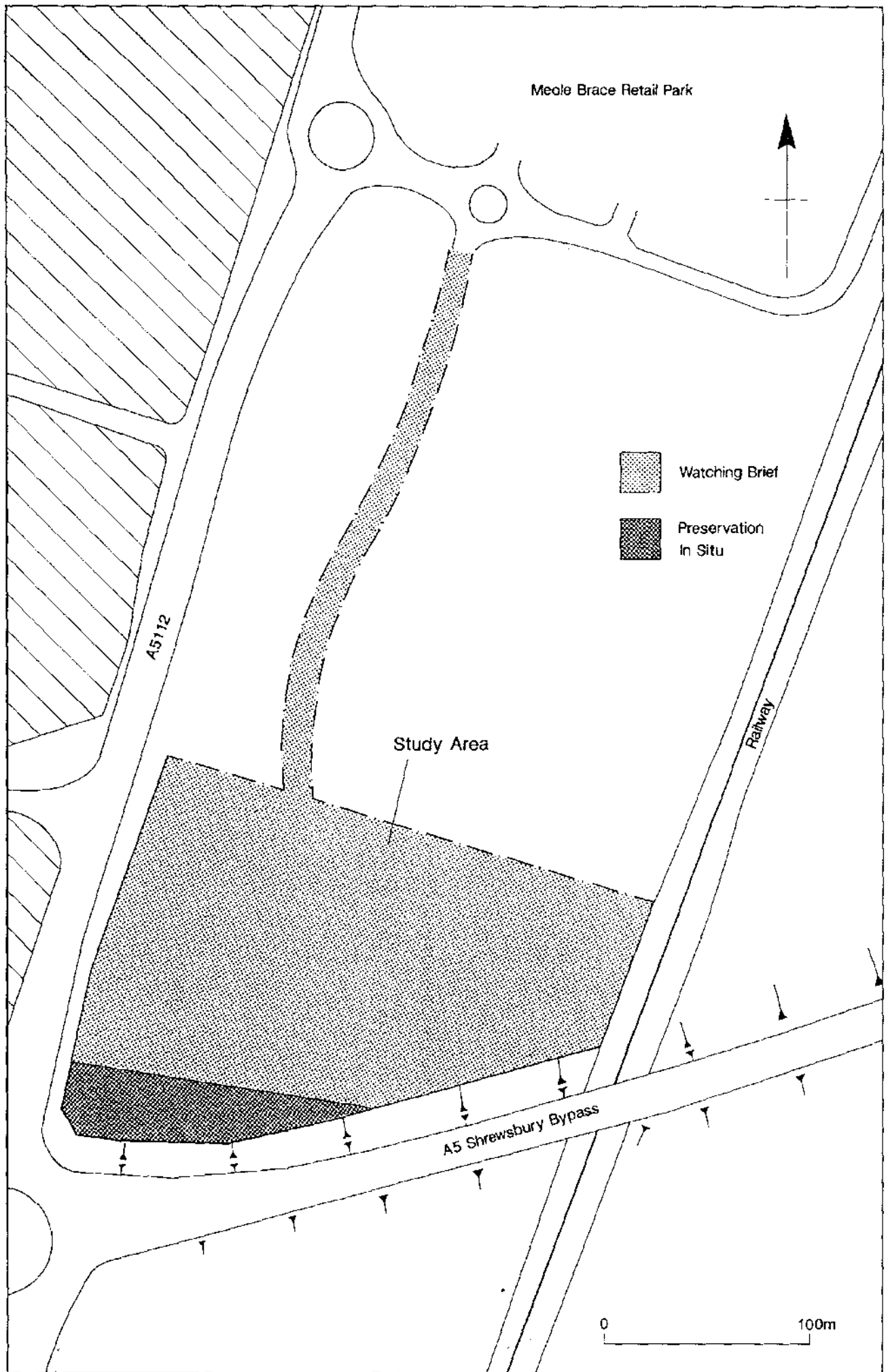


Fig. 2 The study area

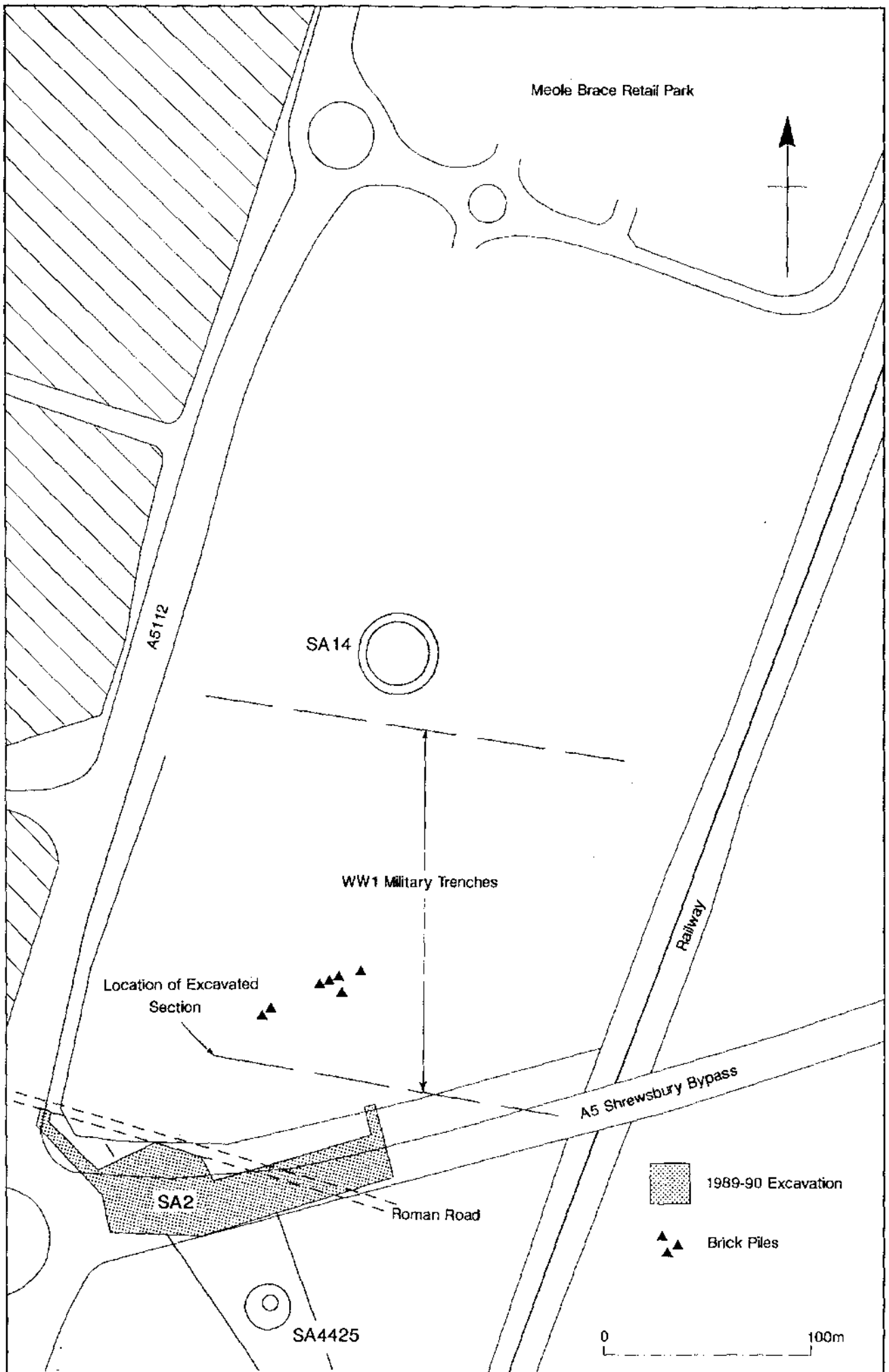
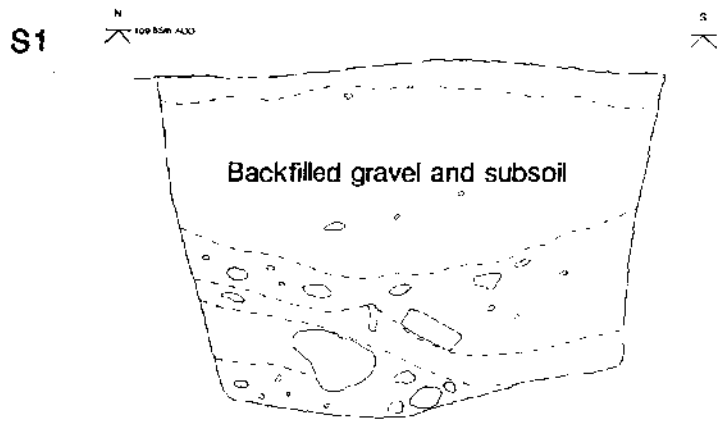


Fig. 3 Archaeological features

Military Trench
West Facing Section



North Facing Section

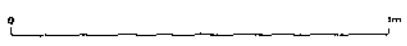
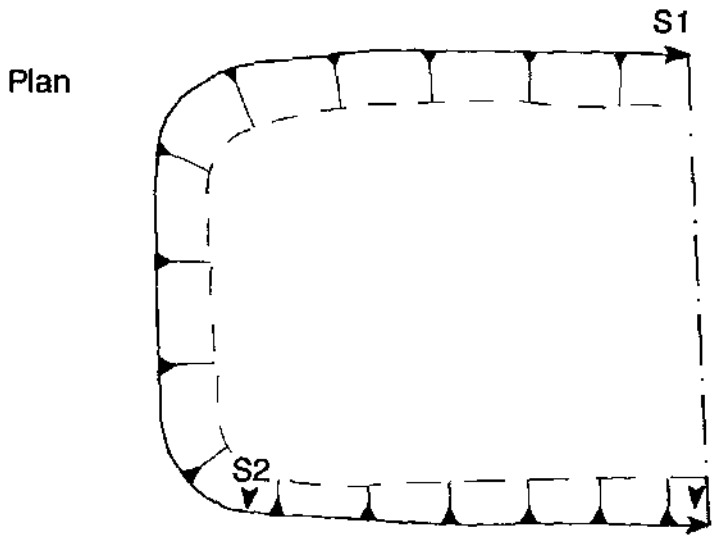
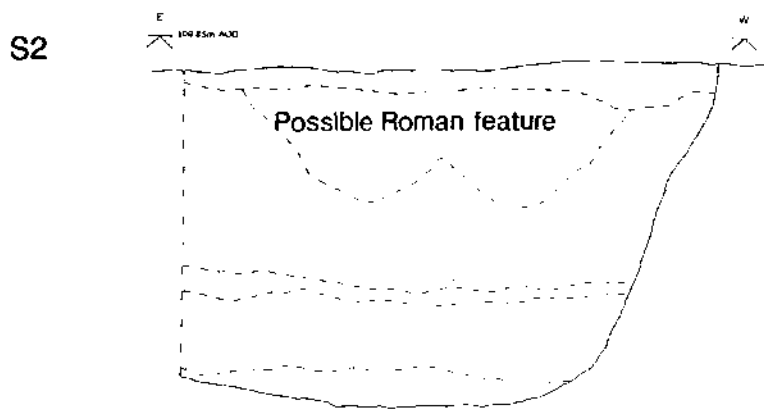


Fig. 4 The military trench