

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**The Former Hanson's Brewery Site  
High Street, Dudley  
West Midlands**

**An Archaeological Excavation 1994**

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# **THE FORMER HANSON'S BREWERY SITE**

## **DUDLEY, WEST MIDLANDS**

### **AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION 1994**

by

**Catharine Mould and Stephanie Ratkai**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

An archaeological evaluation of the former Hanson's Brewery site in Dudley, carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in October 1994, identified one zone (Zone F) in which significant archaeological remains were preserved. In view of the coincidence of this zone with that of a proposed foodstore development, it was recommended that more extensive excavation and recording should be undertaken in advance of construction. This would permit the preservation of archaeological deposits by record and would clear the site for development to proceed (Mould 1994). This interim report documents the results of a two week excavation at the former Hanson's Brewery site and comprises a written descriptive and interpretative report which is supplemented by scale plans. An assessment of work required for the preparation of a detailed interpretative report for publication is also presented here.

Both the evaluation and the excavation were commissioned by Antal Development Services Limited on behalf of Netto Foodstores Limited. The excavation fulfilled a planning permission requirement that archaeological work should be completed prior to commencement of the Netto development and it was carried out in accordance with a specification prepared by the Planning and Leisure Department of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (Boland 1994).

#### **2.0 The Site (Figures 1 and 2)**

The site of the former Hanson's Brewery is centred on NGR SO 9410 9008, within Dudley town centre, lying between High Street, Greystone Street and Stafford Street. Until recently the site housed a complex of brewery structures which dated from the mid-19th century to the present day. These structures were cleared to ground level, and the site stood vacant prior to the commencement of the archaeological investigations.

There is little documentation relating directly to this site. A map drawn up by Harry Court, c. 1785, does suggest the presence of buildings, but no property divisions are shown. Treasure's Plan of the Town of Dudley, dated 1835, indicates buildings along all the frontages and it is likely that these are substantially the same as those represented on the 1883 Ordnance Survey 10.56 inches to the mile map (Boland 1994).

Prior to the evaluation the only archaeological evidence relating directly to this site was an east-west property boundary observed within the main cellarage of the former brewery (Boland 1994). The date of the boundary was not known, but it did suggest a potential for more extensive preservation of archaeological deposits in those areas unaffected by the former brewery.

### **3.0 Archaeological Evaluation (Figure 2)**

Fourteen trenches were excavated in order to confirm the presence of cellarage close to the street frontages and to establish the survival, extent and nature of any archaeological deposits in these areas and in those thought to be unaffected by recent development (Mould 1994).

The archaeological evaluation identified the following six zones within the site:

#### Zones A, C and D

Due to extensive cellaring associated with the former Hanson's Brewery and with earlier 19th-century structures (Ordnance Survey 1883) no archaeological deposits survived within these three zones and no further archaeological monitoring was required.

#### Zones B and E

No intact medieval deposits were recorded in these zones. However, the survival of post-medieval deposits did suggest that archaeologically significant remains could lie within 0.40m of the modern ground surface in those areas not seen during the evaluation. It was proposed that archaeological monitoring should be maintained during any groundworks in these zones which would have impact on layers more than 0.40m below the modern ground surface.

#### Zone F

Intact medieval and post-medieval deposits were identified within Zone F. These deposits lay within the footprint of the proposed foodstore and it was therefore recommended that an archaeological excavation be undertaken in advance of further development, allowing the preservation of these deposits by record.

### **4.0 Objective and Method**

The objective of this archaeological excavation was to establish the full extent and character of those medieval and post-medieval deposits identified in the earlier evaluation.

An area, approximately 26m x 10m (Figure 2), was mechanically stripped of modern overburden to allow the excavation and recording of all surviving archaeological deposits and features. A comprehensive written, drawn and photographic record was maintained throughout the excavation and this, combined with those records compiled during the evaluation, now forms the site archive.

### **5.0 Archaeological Results**

The results from the area excavation are detailed in relation to those trenches examined in the earlier archaeological evaluation.

#### Trench 5 (Figure 2)

It had not been possible in the evaluation to date an east-west aligned yellow sandstone wall (F500) or to establish its relationship with a black clay-silt layer (5004) which had been seen to extend over the majority of the site.

Further excavation confirmed an early 19th-century date for the wall (F829) and that it did not cut, but it was sealed by, the black clay-silt layer (8071).

A ceramic service pipe and trench (F828) was seen parallel with the yellow sandstone wall.

#### Trench 6 (Figure 2)

Although the archaeological evaluation had suggested an 18th-century date for the majority of surviving evidence in this trench, the occupational sequence had not been fully understood. Further excavation was conducted within the northern quarter of Trench 6 in order to establish the sequence and nature of this later occupation.

The natural yellow clay (8053) was cut by a pit which banked steeply towards its base (F843). A thin layer of redeposited natural (8109) had slumped into the pit and was overlain by an uneven layer of green-grey silty clay (8067) containing 16th-century pottery. The remainder of the pit was filled by a 0.50m thick layer of dark silty-clay (8063) which directly overlies the natural clay (8053) to the south.

The dark silty-clay (8063), dated to the 16th-17th century, was truncated by two walls, one aligned northwest-southeast (F824) and the other aligned northeast-southwest (F833). A surface of roughly made bricks (F826) was set on top of the silty-clay. This surface was butted with F824 and it abutted F833. A later wall (F834) encroached upon the brick surface, but continued to respect the wall-line of F833. A modern service trench, seen in the evaluation, truncated all stratigraphy at the northern end of Trench 6.

#### Trench 7 (Figures 2 and 3)

Analysis of pottery recovered from this evaluation trench suggested the survival of medieval deposits. The original 3m x 1.80m trench was extended 8m to the west and 3.50m to the southwest. A second area, located immediately to the northeast of Trench 7, was opened. Both areas were completely excavated.

To the northeast of Trench 7, the natural yellow clay horizon (8053) was sealed by two layers of trampled sandy clay (8108 and 8100). These were cut to the northwest by two post-holes (F853 and F854) and to the southeast by a wall trench (F852). A green-grey silty clay deposit (8056 here, 7004 in the evaluation) sealed all three features.

A black gritty clay-silt deposit containing charcoal lumps and pottery (8097) overlies the natural clay (8053) at the northwest limit of Trench 7. This deposit was sealed by a roughly laid stone and tile surface (F847), similar in make-up to F855 and F823, to the north and south respectively. The latter feature was associated with a northeast-southwest aligned wall footing (F844). This wall and all three surfaces were sealed by the green-grey silty-clay (8056) already noted to the northeast. Two irregular pits (F850 and F851), contemporary with F849 to the north, truncated two of the stone and tile surfaces and were themselves sealed by a black sandy clay-silt (8066) which extended over the whole excavation area.

Two associated features were located within the area excavation, 5m to the northeast of Trench 7. The first of these, a wall trench (F837), was similar in construction and alignment to F852. This feature was also cut into the natural clay (8053) and was filled with angular rubble (8084). The second feature, a north northwest-south southeast aligned wall (F821), was set on top of the angular rubble. The wall comprised two orange-pink bricks, one set on top of the other, and a large

faced block of limestone. Both features were sealed by a yellow-green silty-clay layer (8052), which was overlain by modern overburden (8050).

A semi-circular burnt metal feature (F820) was set into 8066. Located 1.50m to the northwest of Trench 7, F820 was first seen, after removal of the modern overburden, as a concentration of pottery within a very loose fill (8054). This fill was removed to reveal a semi-circle of very fragile burnt metal, set with the remains of a feeder pipe and what appeared to be a "drip-tray". A concentration of metal waste was recovered from the base of this feature.

### Trench 13

It had not been possible during the evaluation to do more than record a sequence of intense activity seen in the eastern half of Trench 13. It was hoped that the excavation would be able to establish the character, date and extent of this sequence.

The nature of activity within this area had resulted in the level of the natural clay being found at a much greater depth than in the area surrounding Trench 7. Part of an extensive pit (F801), very similar to that seen in Trench 6, was excavated to a depth of 2.30m below the modern ground surface. The cut of F801 was sealed by a layer of redeposited clay, overlain by a 1.50m deep series of metal waste deposits which contained 18th-century pottery. The upper half of F801 was backfilled with a layer of silty charcoal (8005). The compressed backfill provided a foundation for F802, a northwest-southeast aligned yellow sandstone wall which extended southeast from Trench 13 (F1301 in the evaluation). It seems likely that F802 would continue its course to meet the High Street frontage.

A structure was butted onto the northeastern side of F802. Only two exterior walls survived (F810 and F815), preserved as imprints of white mortar and orange brick (8020 and 8016), set into a stony charcoal layer (8002). The structure was divided into three areas, two of which were accessed from a corridor or alley-way running parallel with F801. Access to the most northeasterly area is unclear. Brick foundations of a fireplace (F813), set into a layer of crushed sandstone and mortar, were preserved within the southwestern area. This crushed layer (8022), found elsewhere within the structure, may have provided a foundation for contemporary floors which no longer survive.

Demolition of this building occurred in the mid-19th century when the site was incorporated into a brewery complex. The brewery remained in use up to the 1990s when the site was again cleared to ground level.

## **6.0 Pottery Assessment by Stephanie Ratkai**

Two hundred and thirty-two of the 600 sherds recovered on site were seen in an initial assessment by the author. These were divided by eye into fabric types and dated by reference to pottery from excavations at Dudley Castle and other sites within the region. Quantification was by sherd count.

The pottery dated from the 13th-17th/18th-centuries, with the majority dating from the 15th-17th-centuries. All the pottery appeared to be of local manufacture.

The earliest material (from contexts 8052 and 8097) was sherds of 13th-14th-century pottery made up of a coarse sandy oxidised cooking pot/jar; the pottery from 8052 being heavily sooted, whilst the sherd from 8097 was unsooted. Buff-White Ware of 14th-century date was found in context 8105. None was sooted and one jar and at least two jugs were represented. One other context (8058) contained two 13th-14th-century sherds and a third sherd probably of 15th-century date.

The remaining pottery consisted of either late 15th-16th-century types, such as hard fired fine red wares, sandy red wares and Cistercian Wares, or mid 16th - mid 17th century Blackwares, Coarsewares and Yellow Wares. The boundaries between these two groups are not always easy to distinguish. For example, the Cistercian Ware tradition develops into, but also coexists with, the Black Ware tradition and the Sandy Red Ware tradition gradually develops into the Coarseware tradition. Change and development from the medieval tradition into a fully fledged post-medieval tradition appears to take place in the 16th century and is a period for which we have few well stratified sequences.

The site itself seems to have some distinct 16th-century groups, in contexts 8067 and 8095, although the latter appears to be late 16th-century. Pottery from 8104 also appears to be 16th-century but a pipe stem may be intrusive or may indicate an early 17th-century date. Contexts 8063 and 8098 are of 16th-17th-century date, whilst the single sherd from 8060 is from a 17th-century pancheon. The latest context is 8066 which contained 18th-century pottery only.

The largest group of pottery came from 8056. Unfortunately there was some contamination by pit digging which has made the dating of this layer problematic, pottery from the pit fills and from the layer through which they were cut having become mixed. However, there were only six medieval sherds. The remaining material was made up of Fine Red Wares, Sandy Red Wares, Cistercian Wares, Black Wares, Coarsewares and Yellow Wares and a single light-on-dark Slip Ware sherd, giving a date range of later 15th-century to mid-late 17th-century. There was also a feathered Slip Ware sherd dating to the later 17th-18th-century. This may be intrusive. The pottery from context 8056 represents typical domestic assemblages, a mixture of kitchen wares i.e. the Coarsewares and Red Wares and table wares such as Cistercian and Black Ware cups and mugs. It is of interest to compare this with pottery from the post-medieval layers on the motte at Dudley Castle. Many of the forms found at the former Hanson's brewery site are found at the castle, but the castle site is distinguished by a greater variety of form and in particular more specialised culinary equipment such as chipping pans and chafing dishes, which presumably reflects differing status.

There was some residual medieval material, none of which appears to be earlier than the mid 13th-century, and some material may have been lost by subsequent levelling or scouring of the area. However, it seems that occupation and development of this part of the town began in the later 13th-century, perhaps on a limited scale, but that by the late medieval period this area was being fully utilised and exploited.

## **7.0 Discussion**

Prior to the recent archaeological investigations at the former Hanson's Brewery site knowledge relating to its historical usage, specifically in the medieval and early post-medieval period, was very limited. It is now possible to offer a more comprehensive outline of the site's history.

The earliest activity is dated to the 13th-14th-century. The majority of the site would then have been given over to agriculture, and it is known from documentary sources that Greystone Field (Figure 1) originally extended southeast up to the present High Street frontage. A cultivation layer (8056) extended over a large area of the site and contained pottery ranging in date from the 13th-century to the later 16th-century. In addition to agriculture, excavation suggested that a discrete area (8097) close to the High Street frontage was given over to a more specific activity involving the small-scale use of pottery, and which included a structural element, represented by two surviving walls (F821 and F837).

In addition to continued agricultural usage (8056), a more distinct structural phase occurred in the 14th-15th century. A number of trampled clay surfaces, located to the northeast of Trench 7, were cut by two post-holes and a wall trench. Together, these could have formed a timber structure, albeit rather make-shift. A more solidly built structure, dated to the 15th-century, was located to the southwest, surviving as a stone and tile surface bounded to the northwest by a stone wall (F844). The stone and tile areas were resurfaced in the late 16th-century and continued in use throughout the 17th-century. Two concentrations of metal waste found against the 15th-century wall may represent the beginning of industrial activity on this site.

Industrial activity was certainly evident in the later 15th and 16th-centuries. The discovery of a large coal seam, relatively close to the ground surface, led to the cutting of two extensive "bell-pits" (F801 and F847) from which the coal was recovered. One of these pits (F847) had fallen out of use by the 16th-century, whilst the other, larger pit (F801), may have continued in use to the later 17th-century. At this time the bell-pit was used as a disposal point for metal waste which may have been produced by metal-working elsewhere on site.

The exhaustion of natural coal resources within this area and the pressure on housing within industrial Dudley resulted in a deliberate levelling over the bell-pits and a subsequent building programme in the later 17th - early 18th-century. This is represented by the brick surface and walls in Trench 6 and by the property boundary and associated structure southeast of Trench 13.

Archaeological evidence relating to the type of metalworking found in the area excavation is limited, not only for Dudley, but for the West Midlands as a whole. It is clear that this site has important implications for the history of metalworking industries in the West Midlands and that further research should be conducted (Litherland 1993).

The history of the site is more clearly documented from the 18th-century onwards. The properties outlined by Harry Court (c. 1785) could well correspond with the building programme at that time. Subsequent divisions, seen in the archaeological excavation as cellaring and as back-plot areas, correspond closely with those mapped by the Ordnance Survey 1st Edition of 1883. These were demolished in the mid-19th century as the brewery complex expanded.

## **8.0 Research Synopsis**

The following research is recommended in order for a detailed interpretative report to be completed for publication.

- 1) Integration of archaeological results from the former Hanson's Brewery site with known documentary sources for Dudley listed in Section 9.0.  
**3 days**
- 2) Additional documentary research.  
**2 days**
- 3) Preparation of interpretative and documentary texts for publication.  
**6 days**
- 4) Full processing, recording and analysis of pottery assemblage.  
**7.5 days**



- 5) Preparation of pottery report.  
2.5 days
- 6) Analysis of animal bone and preparation of report.  
1 day
- 7) Analysis of clay pipes and preparation of report.  
1 day
- 8) Analysis of metal waste and preparation of report.  
1 day
- 9) Illustration of report.  
7 days
- 10) Editing of report.  
2 days

It is recommended that the report be published in one of the following journals: Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society, Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society, or the Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society. Choice of journal will be dependent on the available time scale for publication.

## 9.0 Acknowledgements

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# DUDLEY Hanson's Brewery

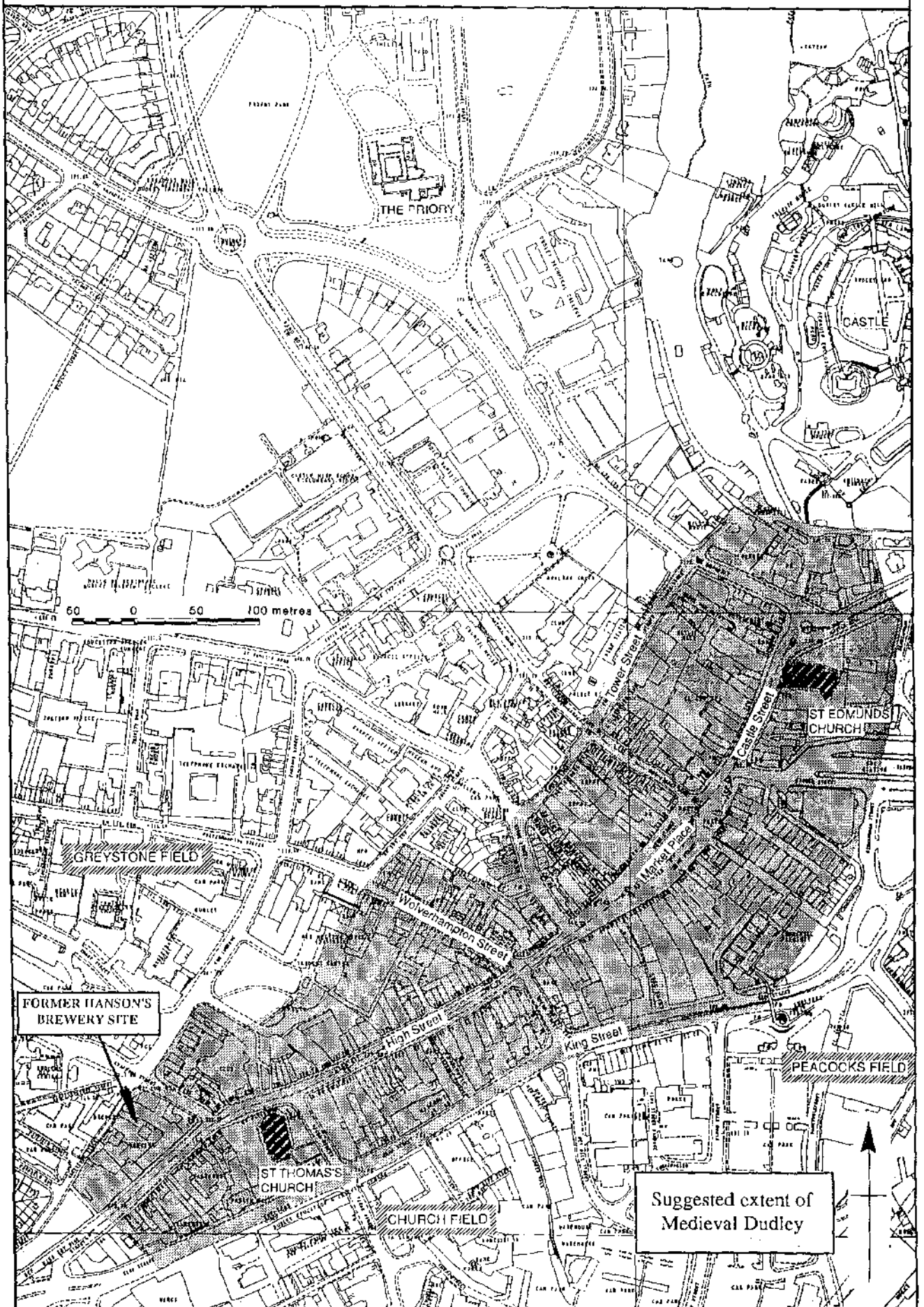


Figure 1

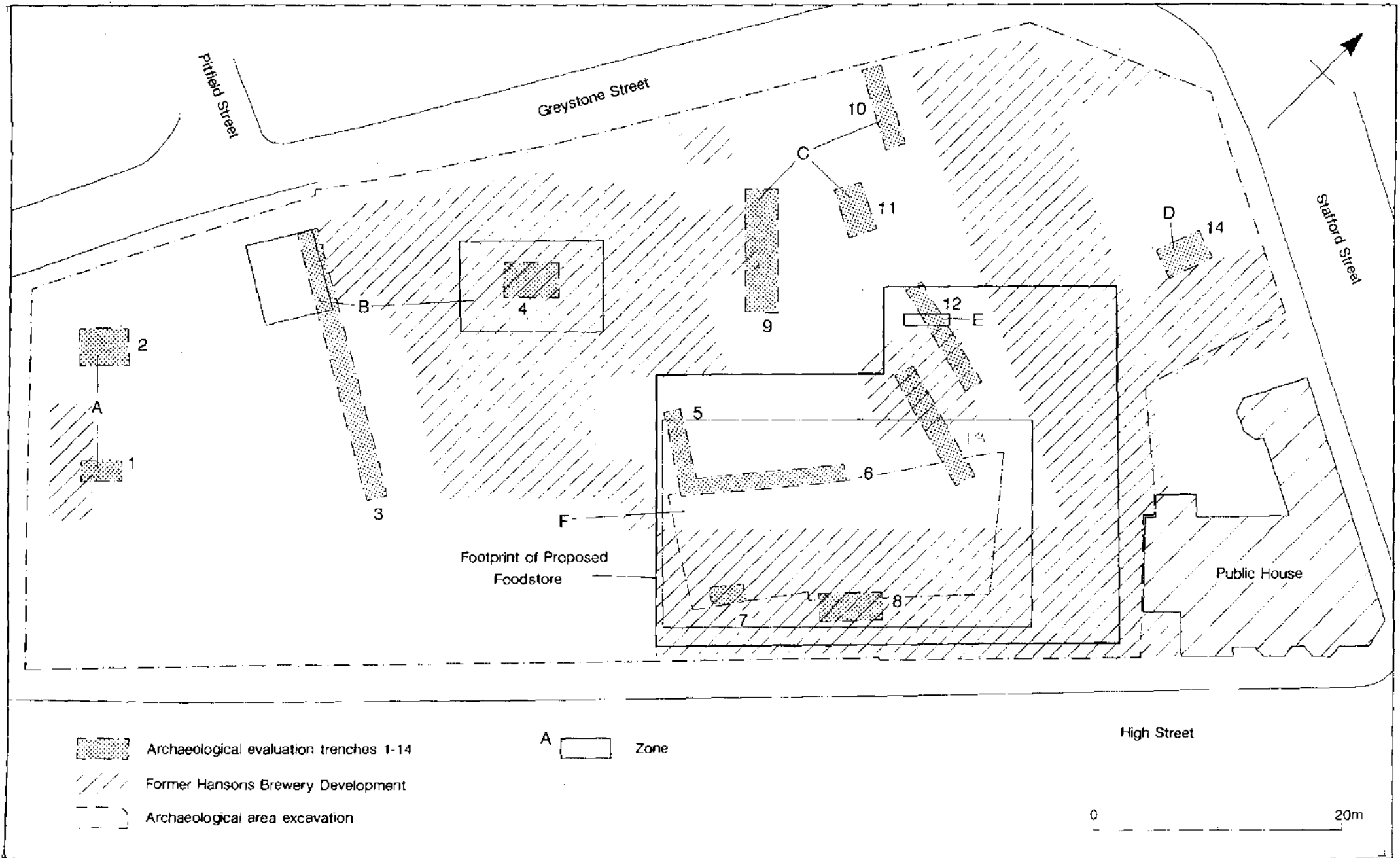


Fig.2

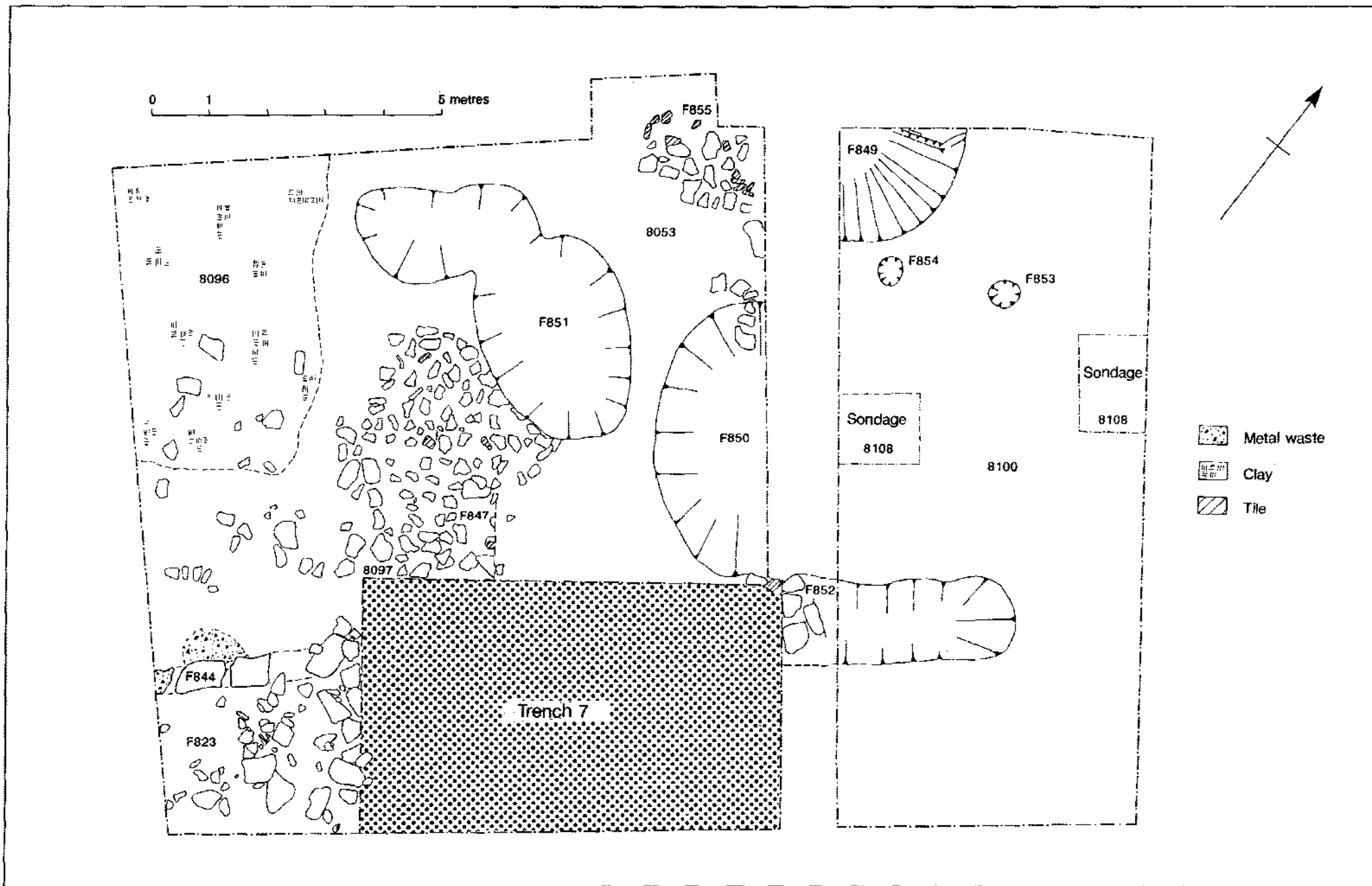


Figure 3