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**KETTLE BROOK,
WILNECOTE, STAFFORDSHIRE**

An Archaeological Evaluation 1995

by Richard Cuttler

with a contribution by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford

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1.0: SUMMARY

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation, employing geophysical survey and trial-trenching, carried out in advance of an application for a proposed housing development at Wilnecote, Tamworth (hereinafter referred to as the study area).

No datable evidence of Roman or medieval activity was recorded. The main features defined comprised a track-way (Trench 2), a tennis court (Trench 1), and a clay-pit (Trench 3).

2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the results of an archaeological evaluation of an area of pasture, located at Wilnecote, Tamworth (centred on NGR. SK 22830140: Fig 1). The work was undertaken in July 1995 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, on behalf of Alfred McAlpine Homes Midlands Limited.

In accordance with the guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance note 16 (November 1990), a recommendation for an archaeological evaluation was made by the County Archaeology Office of Staffordshire County Council in advance of a proposed housing development. The methodology of this evaluation conforms to an evaluation brief and schedule prepared by the County Archaeology Office of Staffordshire County Council (Meeson 1995).

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the location, extent, date, character, significance and quality of any archaeological remains which may be affected by the proposed development and to provide a basis for a series of recommendations to mitigate the impact of the development.

This report provides a detailed description of the results of trial-trenching. The results of the geophysical survey, described in more detail elsewhere (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1995), are summarised in Section 4 of this report.

3.0: THE STUDY AREA AND ITS SETTING

The study area lies approximately 5 kilometres to the southeast of Tamworth, in the parish of Wilnecote (Fig. 1). The River Tame lies approximately 3 km to the west, close to the confluence of the River Tame and the River Anker. Kettle Brook, a tributary of the River Tame, borders the study area to the east. Wilnecote Hall lies on the southern boundary of the study area, approximately 80 metres north of Watling Street, a Roman road. The land to the west is open pasture, and the land to the north has recently been developed for housing.

Two parch marked features of possible archaeological origin, located within the study area, were identified from aerial photographic evidence (RCHME/Pickering J./1969//SK2201,1;frame 31, SF142, Meeson 1995). These comprised a linear feature and a small 3-sided enclosure (Staffordshire SMR No. 1313: Fig 2).

On the south side of Watling Street at NGR SK232009, an allotment holder discovered a medieval clay lined pit. This contained fragments of building material and pottery sherds dated to the thirteenth century. One of these sherds included a waster in 'Southeast Staffordshire Ware', and although no kilns have yet been located within the vicinity, it is possible that the nearby coal measure clays could have been exploited for medieval pottery production.

The Roman Period

The Roman road of Watling Street forms a major landmark lying approximately 200m to the south of the survey area. The Wilnecote/Kettle Brook area is midway between the Roman Legionary fortresses of Mancetter (Mandeussedum) and Wall (Letocetum: Margary 1973, 289), which could suggest that there may have been a Roman posting station within the vicinity, associated with Watling Street.

The Medieval period

The Domesday survey of 1086 describes the manor of Wilnecote, within the Hundred of Coleshelle, rated at three hides, as being held at the time of Edward the Confessor by Leuenot. Laws made during this period relate to the safety of travellers upon the four main roads of England, one of which, 'Watling Strete', following the line of the Roman road of that name, which was supposed to traverse the country from sea to sea (Margary 1973, 28).

After the conquest, the manor of Wilnecote was given to the Earl of Mellent with a multitude of other lordships (Dugdale 1730, 1141). The Domesday survey of 1086 refers to the area as Wilmundecote, describing arable land suitable for six ploughs, and woodland measuring one league long and half a league wide. There were eleven villeins and five bordars (tenants of the lord), with two smiths having three and a half ploughs. The value of the whole estate totalled thirty shillings and an iron works or smithy was valued at five shillings (V.C.H. 1947a, 313).

The overlordship part descended with the earldom of Lancaster, during which it was adopted as part of the Hemlingford Hundred first referred to in the pipe of the roll of eight in 1161-2 (V.C.H. 1947b, 1). The area is referred to as Wylmyncote in the Calendar of Patent Rolls 1336 (Gover, et. al., 27).

Post-medieval period

Coal mining had expanded considerably by 1725. Maps published about this time show a group of seven pits in the neighbourhood of Wilnecote (V.C.H. 1947b, 224). Lands to the east of the Kettle Brook were mapped for the 1850 tithe awards (Lakin and Swimburne 1850). Unfortunately no tithe map was produced for the parish of Wilnecote to the west of the Kettle Brook. The most likely explanation for this is that the tithes had already been commuted by the Enclosure Award of 1758 (Warwickshire Records Office QS.9/13). Although several estate maps were produced for the area (Eagle 1810), none appear to have mapped the study area. The 1886, six inch ordnance survey map (Fig. 4), shows a trackway or path leading from the Watling street to Wilnecote Colliery, crossing the study area diagonally. The map describes the colliery as having gone out of use by this time.

4.0: THE GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford

A single area (Figs 2, 5-6), totalling 0.5ha. in area was investigated using a fluxgate gradiometer (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1995).

The results of the survey show that a substantial proportion of the site is affected by magnetic disturbance, caused by a scatter of ferrous objects of likely modern origin. Responses from archaeological features in these areas will not be visible unless they are strongly magnetic. No such substantial responses are clearly recognisable in the data.

A long linear anomaly (A) is a strong ferrous type that coincides with the parch-mark recorded on aerial photographs, and runs along the top of a steep embankment. The magnetic response is of a magnitude that is consistent with a ferrous pipe, though a continuous positive anomaly is not characteristic of such an object. A narrow spread of ash and cinder on the surface of the excavated track (Trench 2: 2004) may have produced the linear anomaly recorded by the gradiometer.

A broader, more irregular ferrous response (B) is more typical of an anomaly produced by a buried pipe. This indicates the presence of a sewerage pipe, the course of which is indicated by two manhole covers in the field. The area of magnetic interference in the southwestern corner of the survey may also contain one, or possibly two ferrous pipes.

A third linear anomaly (C), detected in the southeastern corner of the survey has some archaeological potential. It may indicate the course of a ditch, although excavation revealed this anomaly to be caused by a field drain (Trench 5: F500).

Several pit-type anomalies were detected in the northern part of the site. These may be of archaeological significance, though given the quantities of ferrous debris scattered across the site the interpretation is tentative.

The survey recorded a strong ferrous response that coincides with the course of the linear parch-mark recorded on aerial photographs. Two linear anomalies were detected in the southeastern corner of the survey area, which define the course of a sewer and a field drain.

5.0: TRIAL TRENCHING RESULTS (Figs 2-3)

A total of five trial trenches were located to examine areas of archaeological potential. This trenching amounted in total to almost 108 square metres. In all trenches the overburden was removed by a mechanical excavator to expose the uppermost levels of the natural subsoil. The machined surface was then hand-cleaned to define any archaeological features present, which were sampled by hand-excavation.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-forma recording sheets for contexts and features, supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections, and photographs, which are all held in the archive.

Trench 1

Objectives and results

Trench 1 measured 6 metres in length, and was aligned east-west (Fig 3). This trench was located in the northern part of the survey area, perpendicular to a rectangular parch mark identified from aerial photographs. This coincided on the ground with the eastern side of a small rectangular terrace measuring approximately 33m by 21m.

The uppermost horizon of the subsoil (1003, Fig 3), revealed by hand cleaning of the base of the machined trench, was an orange/brown sandy silt, containing manganese. This was sealed by a layer of medium brown sandy silt with clay (1002), which contained occasional sub-rounded stones and fragments of broken brick. This in turn was overlain by a layer of yellow/orange clay (1001). With a depth of 0.2m at its western extent, layer 1001 diminished towards the eastern end of the trench. The topsoil in Trench 1 (1001) consisted of a compact, brown sandy silt, with an average depth of 0.21m.

Interpretation

Material cut from the western edge of the terrace appears to have been deposited along the eastern edge of the terrace (layer 1001), sealing the original top soil (1002). No cut features were evident in this trench. As mentioned in the brief and schedule (Meeson 1995) the most likely explanation for this parch mark 'enclosure' is that it is the site of a relatively modern tennis court, and the dimensions of this terrace would also support this interpretation.

Trench 2

Objectives and results

Trench 2 was aligned east-west (Fig 2), to intercept a linear parch mark, identified from aerial photographs. This feature can also be seen on the ground as a shallow linear earthwork, aligned northwest-southeast, and measuring approximately 5.5m in width. Trench 2 measured 15m in length and was cut through F200 to the natural clay subsoil (2008, Fig 3). The trench was subsequently widened at its western end, to further investigate the earthwork.

The earliest deposit overlying the subsoil (2008), was a layer of sandy silt with clay (2007), which measured approximately 0.20m in depth. This was overlain by a layer of purple/grey clay with charcoal (2003), measuring approximately 0.15m in depth. This contained flecks of red brick and sandstone. Cutting the purple/grey clay (2003) were two linear features (F201 and F202), which were cut on the same alignment as the earthwork (F200). Features F201 and F202 were evident in the base of Trench 2, approximately 1.8m apart. Features F201 and F202 both had steep sides and a flat base, and measured approximately 0.35m wide and 0.25m deep. No finds were recovered from their crushed sandstone and silt fills (2005 and 2006).

Sealing features F201, F202 and layer 2003 was a layer of light brown sandy silt with crushed sandstone (2002). This measured 0.28m in depth and contained occasional flecks of broken bricks and charcoal. This in turn was sealed by a layer of irregular sandstone which formed a metallated surface (2001), measuring approximately 0.24m in depth, and 3m in width. Two fragments of red brick and three sherds of late 18th-century pottery were recovered from within the stones of the metallated surface (2001). Lying on the surface of layer 2001 was a band of brown and black ash (2004), which measured approximately 0.26m wide and 0.03m deep.

The stone surface of feature F200 was further investigated by means of the widening of Trench 2 at its western end, exposing the uppermost horizon of feature F200 (2001). This extension revealed the spread of ash (2004), was linear in plan, and lay along the eastern edge of the stone surface (2001, F200).

Two further linear features at the eastern end of Trench 2 were modern field drains (not illustrated). Overlying feature F200 and the natural subsoil (2008), was a layer of dark brown sandy silt (2000) measuring approximately 0.22m in depth.

Interpretation

The form, and alignment of feature F200 suggests that it is the trackway or footpath depicted on the Ordnance Survey map of 1886 (Fig 4). The alignment of this feature suggests it originally connected the colliery to the north of the study area with Watling Street to the south of the study area. The trackway may have continued in use as a farm track after the colliery was abandoned, and the excavated evidence suggests more than one phase of construction was represented. Features F201 and F202 may possibly represent the line of wagon ruts cutting the clay (layer 2003).

Trench 3

Objectives and results

Trench 3 measured approximately 10m in length and was aligned north-south. it was positioned to examine an area which had a notably irregular ground surface (Fig. 3). The trench was subsequently extended to the west to investigate feature F300.

The uppermost subsoil horizon revealed by hand cleaning the base of the machined trench, was a red clay (3005: Fig 3), exposed at a depth of 0.4m below the modern surface at the southern end of the trench, and at a depth of over 1m at the northern end of the trench. Careful cleaning of the trench sections revealed a large pit (F300), cut from the base of the topsoil, in the north of the trench.

The excavation of western extension of this trench established that the pit (F300) measured in excess of 8m in diameter, cutting the natural clay to a depth of 0.80m. The primary fill of the pit was a deposit of yellow clay (3004). Measuring approximately 0.45m in depth, the clay (3004) was overlain by two deposits of dark red, decayed marl (3003), which contained silt and manganese to a depth of 0.5m. Both these layers were sealed by a layer of compact, light brown, sandy silt with manganese (3002), varying in depth between 0.18m and 0.61m. Feature F300 was sealed by a layer of light brown silt (3001). The topsoil in Trench 3 was a medium brown sandy silt (3000) measuring approximately 0.21m in depth. No finds were recovered from this trench.

Interpretation

The large cut (F300) may be a large pit used for the extraction of clay, possibly in connection with agriculture. However, no datable artifacts were recovered from the fills of this feature. The irregular surface of the pasture adjoining the trench could suggest that other similar pits were cut in the vicinity.

Trench 4

Objectives and results

Trench 4 (Fig. 2) measured approximately 7m in length and was aligned east-west. This was positioned to investigate an area in the southwestern corner of the study area, which had a notably irregular ground surface. The trench was initially machined to a depth of 0.7m. Once the base of the trench had been hand cleaned, a sondage was cut at the western end, measuring 2m by 2m.

At a depth of approximately 1.0m below the modern surface, a light brown silt with sand (4003) was revealed (Fig. 3), which sloped from west to east. Layer 4003

contained horizontal lenses of dark sandy silt, and was sealed by a thin layer of medium-dark brown colluvium (4002). Measuring 0.16m in depth, 4002 contained charcoal flecks. This was sealed by a deep layer of light brown sandy silt colluvium (4001), measuring approximately 0.67m in depth. The topsoil in Trench 4 (4000) was a brown sandy silt with an average depth of 0.22m. No finds were recovered from this trench.

Interpretation

No archaeological features could be identified in Trench 4. Layer 4002 and 4003 were probably deposited as a result of the erosion of the steep east-facing slope lying to the west of the study area.

Trench 5 (not illustrated)

Objectives and results

Trench 5 examined the area in the southern zone of the study area, closest to Watling Street. Following hand-cleaning of this trench, a sondage was dug through the suspected natural subsoil (5002), to confirm its interpretation.

The base of the sondage revealed a clean natural red sand (5002). This was sealed by a layer of grey sand which was mottled with brown silt (5001). Visible to a depth of 1.0m, layer 5001 sloped from east to west, and had a lens of iron-pan at its base. A recent field drain (F500), aligned approximately north-south was recorded, cutting layer 5001. The topsoil (5000) measured approximately 0.4m in depth, and contained three sherds of late 18th-century pottery.

Interpretation

No features of archaeological interest were identified in Trench 5.

6.0: DISCUSSION

No evidence of Roman or medieval activity, either structural or artifactual was found. The earliest pottery recovered provides a *terminus* in the 18th-century.

The rectangular parch mark, corresponding to a rectangular terrace, partly tested by Trench 1 may be interpreted as a tennis court, an interpretation first proposed in the brief (Meeson 1995). Trench 2 investigated the earthwork bank, which was found to correspond with the track-way or footpath mapped by the Ordnance Survey. The large cut in Trench 3 may have been dug for the extraction of clay, but this activity is undated. The notably uneven pasture surface in the vicinity of the trench and the identification of a number of slight depressions in the surrounding area could indicate that other pits were dug in the near vicinity.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

The track-way recorded in Trench 1 is a survival of the 18th, or 19th-century industrial landscape. The significance of the clay-pit recorded in Trench 3 is difficult to define given the lack of datable artifacts. Given that the study area has been extensively investigated by geophysical survey, and the largely negative results produced by geophysical survey and trial-trenching, further archaeological investigation within the study area may not be worthwhile.

However, consideration should be given to the maintenance of a watching brief in the area proposed for development immediately to the west of the study area, to record any features of archaeological significance exposed during construction groundworks.

8.0: ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was commissioned by Alfred McAlpine Homes Midlands Limited. The fieldwork was monitored for BUFAU by Alex Jones and by Bob Meeson, for Staffordshire County Council. The geophysical survey was undertaken by a team from Geophysical Surveys of Bradford. The trial-trenching was supervised by Richard Cuttler with the assistance of Christine Winters, Lawrence Jones and Martin Campbell. The report was edited by Alex Jones and the drawings were prepared by Richard Cuttler.

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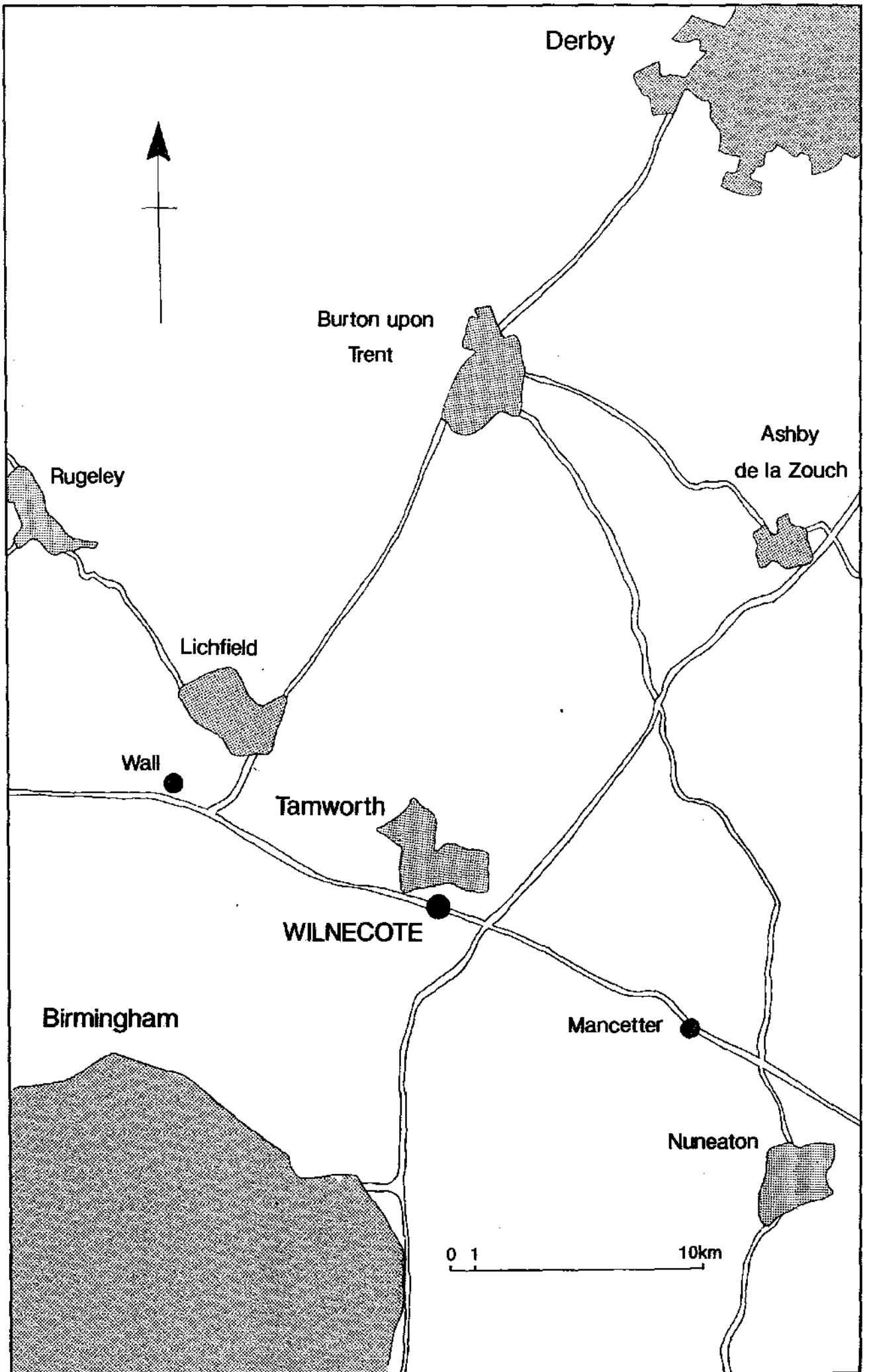


Figure 1

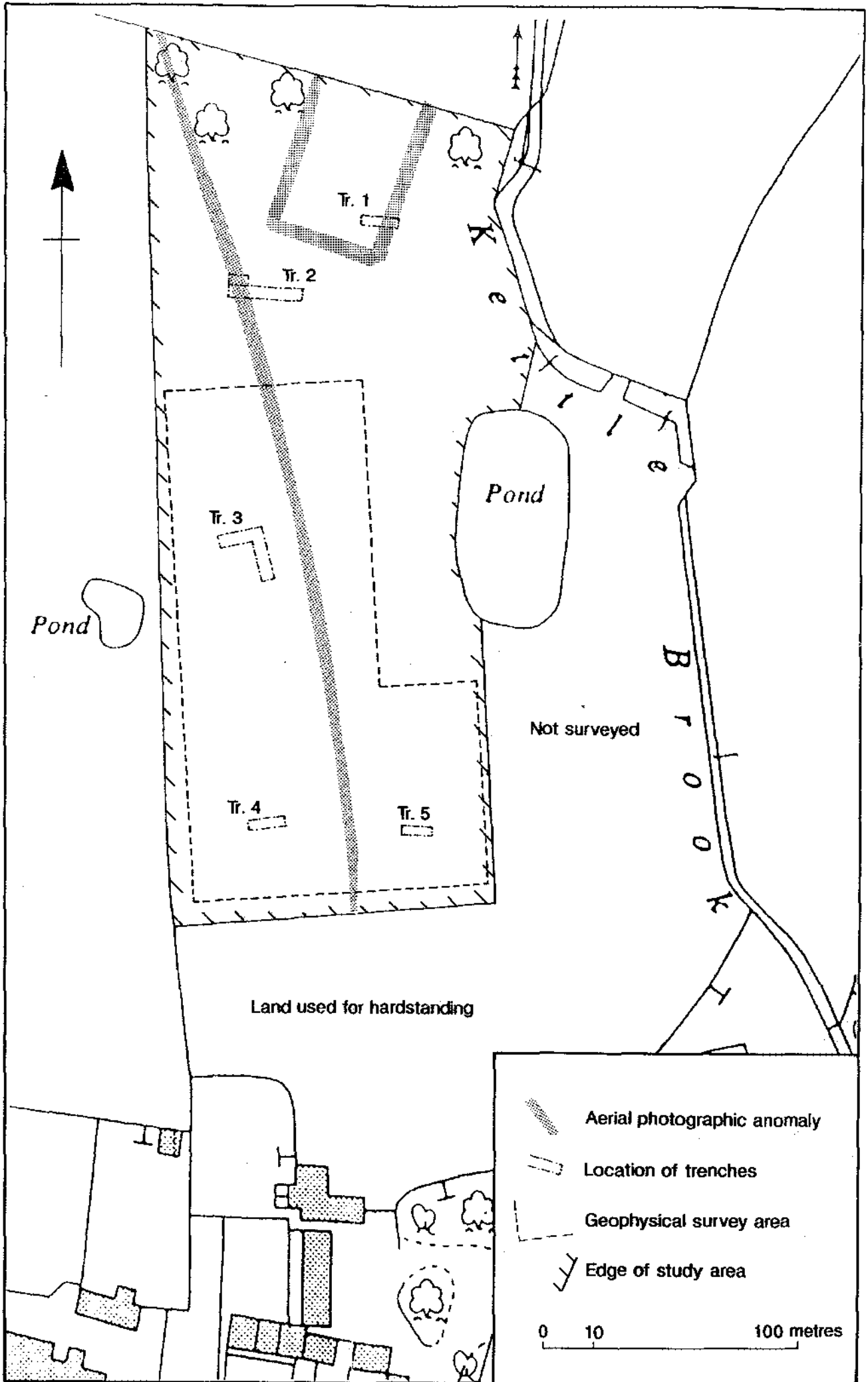


Figure 2

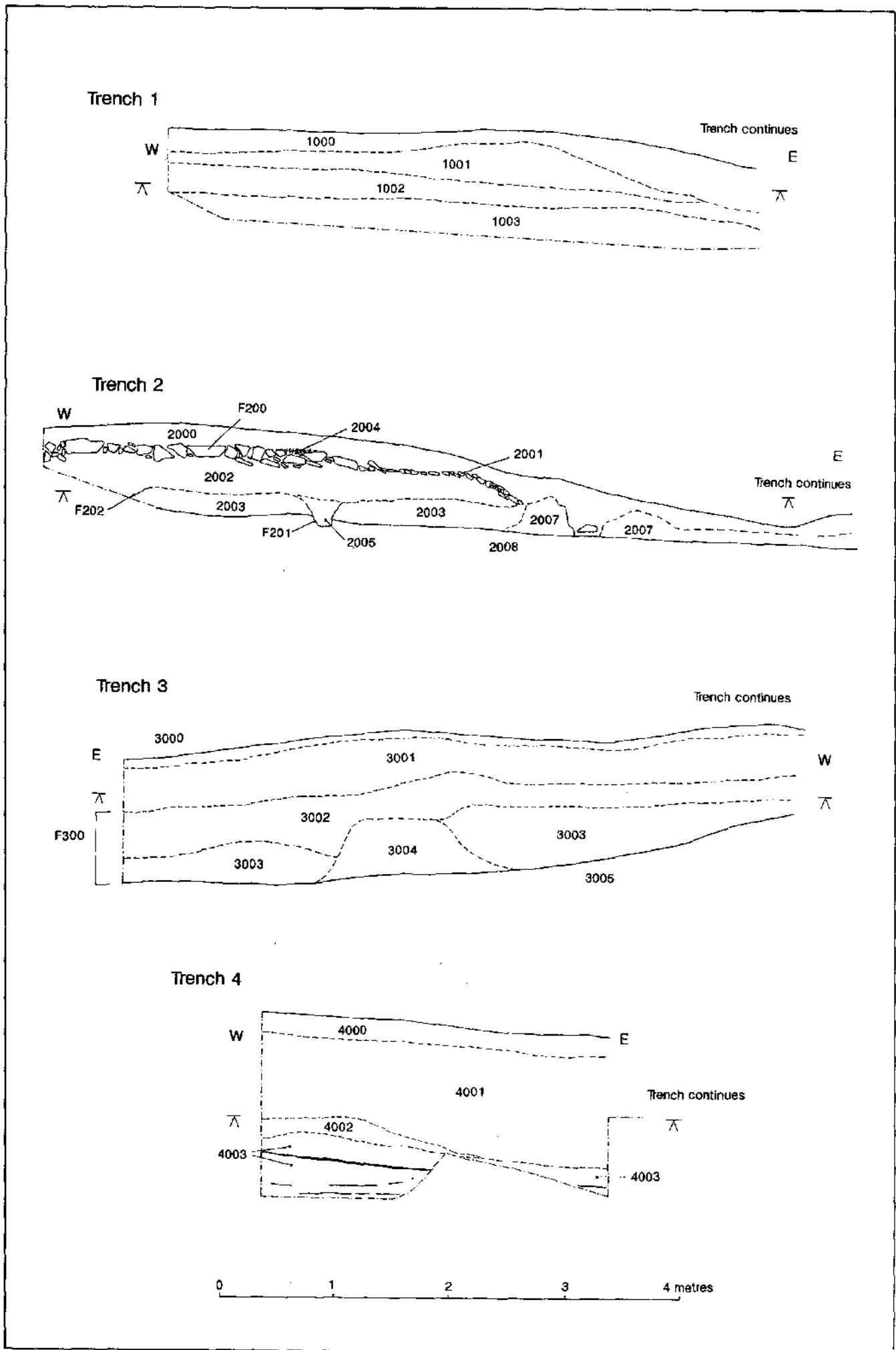


Figure 3

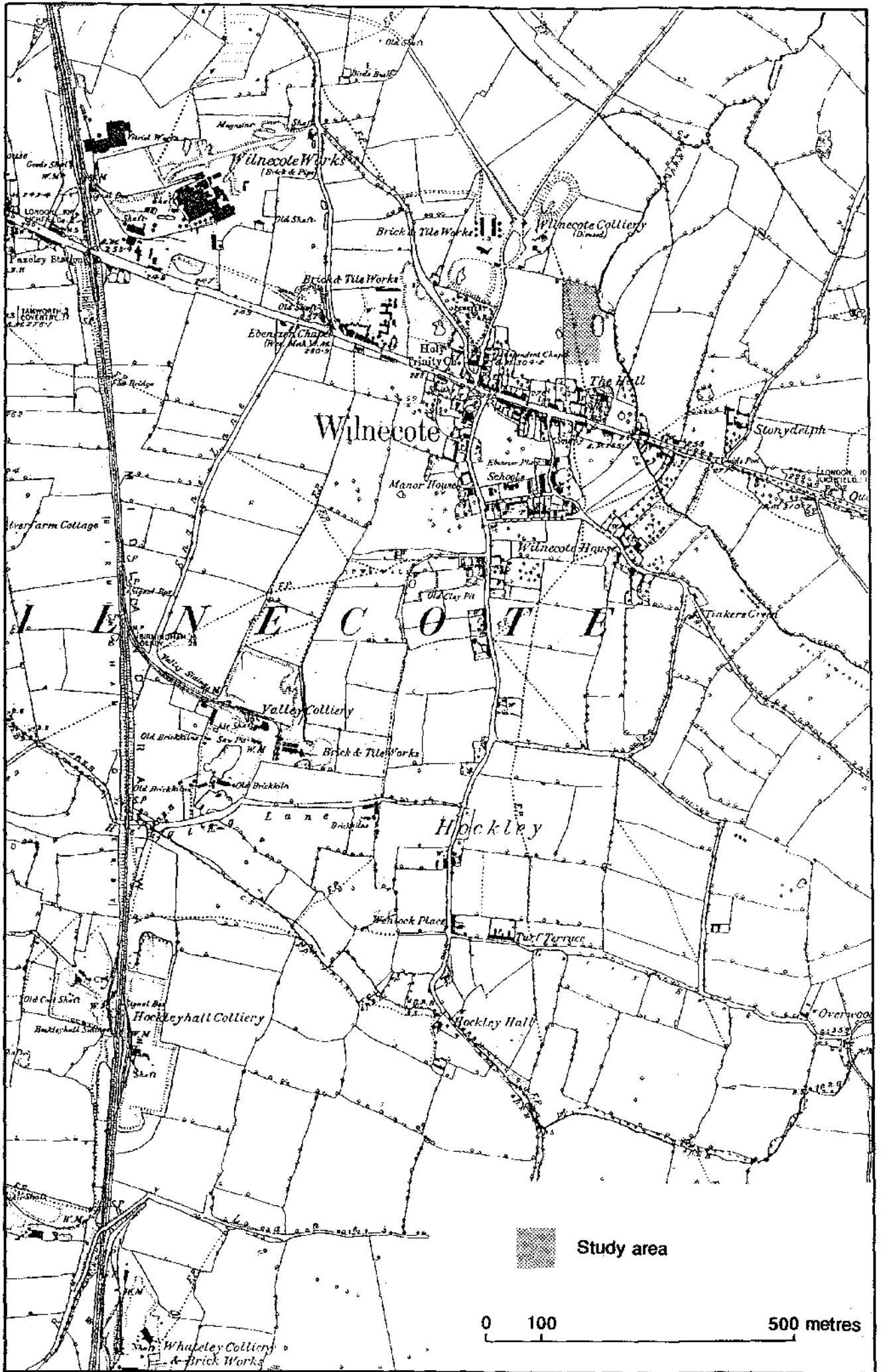
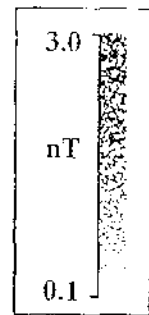
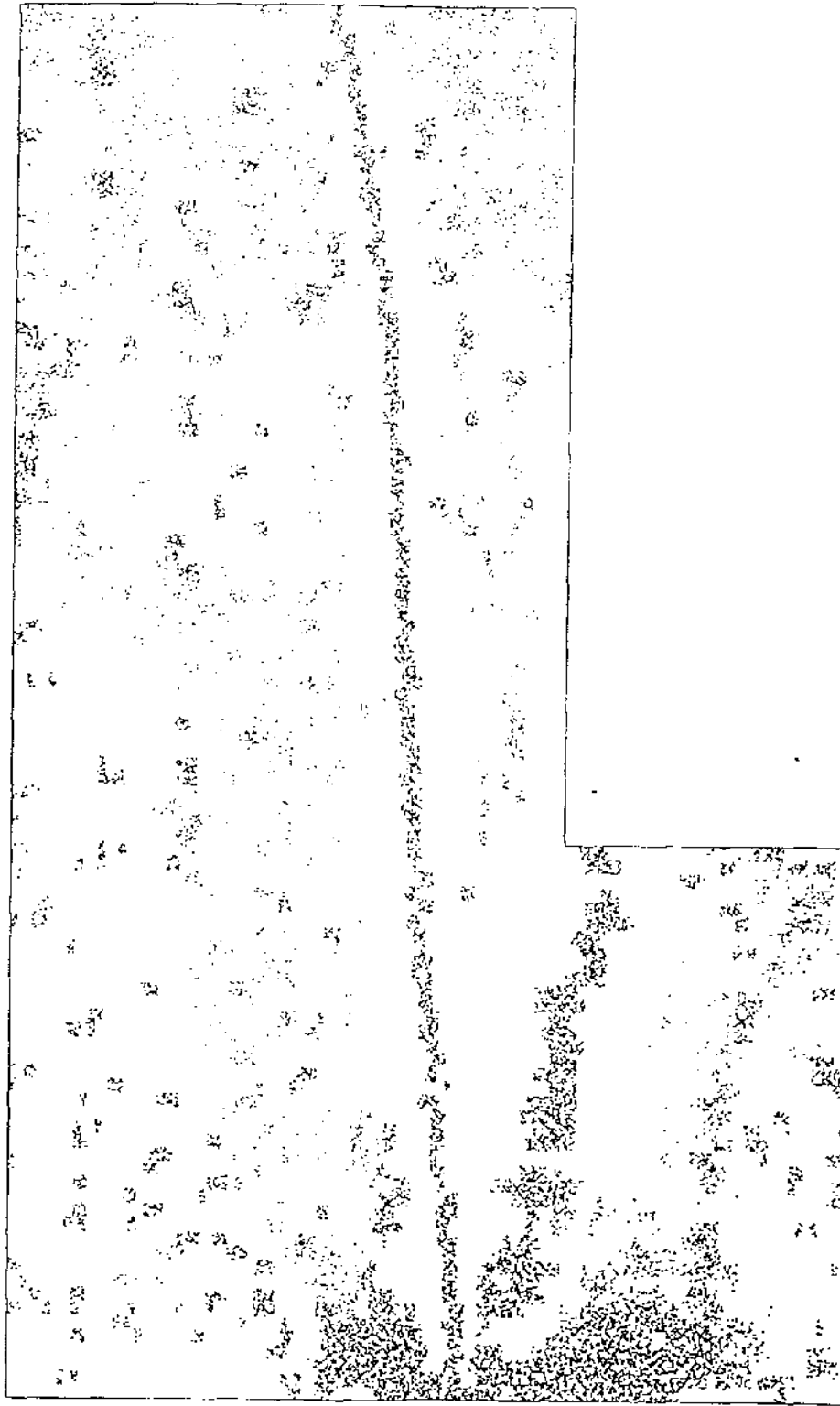


Figure 4

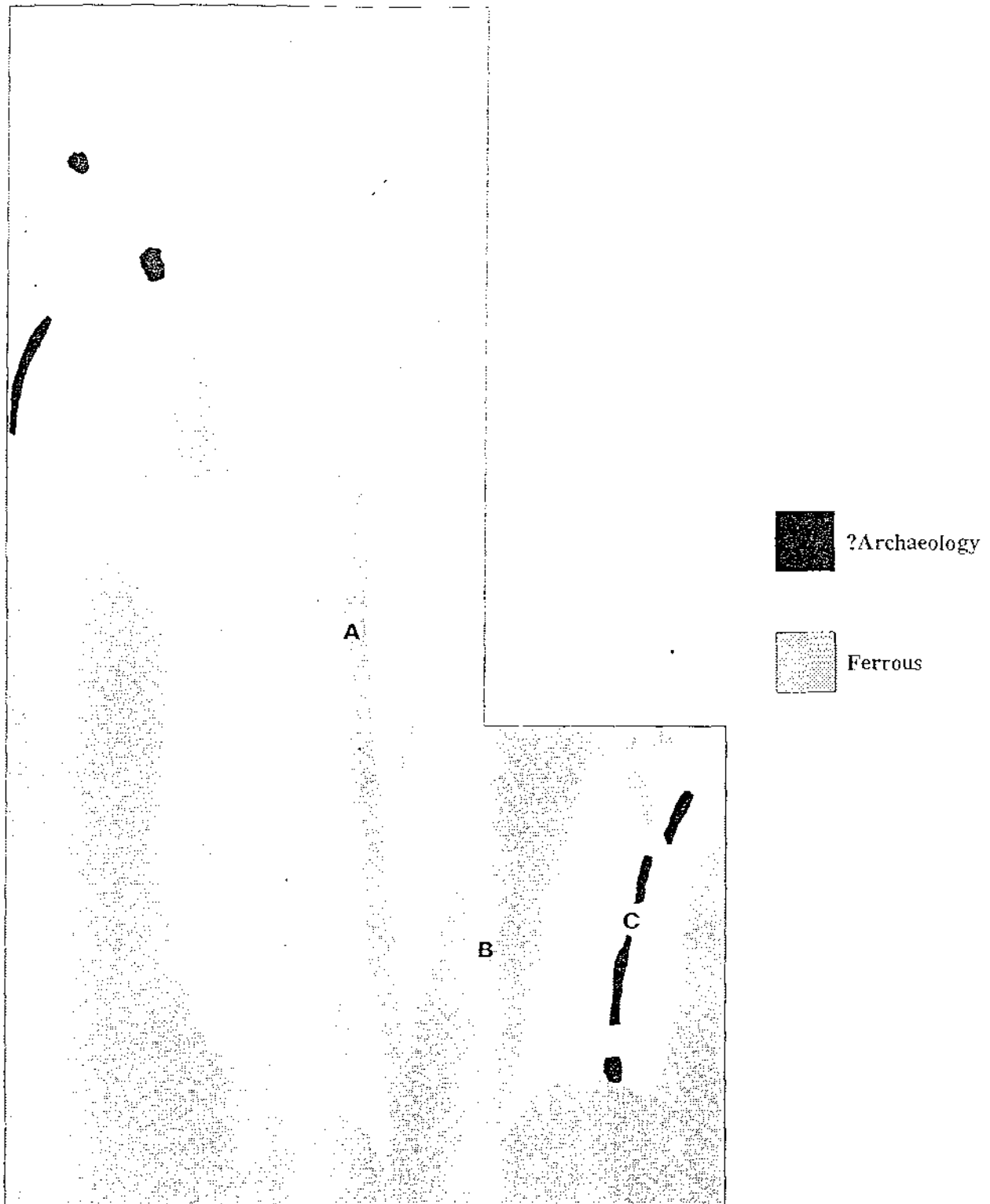
WILNECOTE Tamworth



0 m 20

Figure 5

WILNECOTE Tamworth



0 m 20

Figure 6