

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**43-45 Church Street, St. Neots,
Cambridgeshire.
A Watching Brief 1996-7**

B.U.F.A.U.



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A Watching Brief 1996-7

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43-45 CHURCH STREET, ST. NEOTS, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

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1.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out during construction groundworks at 43-45 Church Street, St. Neots, Cambridgeshire (centred on NGR. TL 185600: Fig. 1A-B). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit were commissioned by McCarthy and Stone (Developments) Limited to undertake the watching brief.

The watching brief followed an earlier assessment of the site, comprising a desk-based assessment and trial-trenching (Jones 1996), which recommended the maintenance of an archaeological watching brief during construction groundworks in certain areas of the development. The methodology of the watching brief followed a Specification (Jones 1996a) approved by the County Archaeology Office of Cambridgeshire County Council.

The purpose of the watching brief was to further examine the potential of the site to contain evidence of Saxon and medieval activity, within areas of the site affected by construction. A basic photographic record was made of the former tannery building (Fig. 1B), and County Record Office sources were further searched in an attempt to provide further details of its dating and use.

Details of the archaeological background, and the trial-trenching results are provided elsewhere (Jones 1996), and will not be repeated here.

Subject to the permission of the landowner it is proposed to deposit the combined trial-trenching and watching brief archive in a Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Office approved store.

2.0: METHODOLOGY

Based on the results of the trial-trenching, and the proposed foundation layout, two areas within the overall site groundworks were selected for an archaeological watching brief during the construction groundworks (Fig. 1B). Area A comprised the footprint of a sub-station base towards the Cemetery Road frontage. This area lay towards the site of the Saxon settlement identified by Addyman to the northeast of the site. Area B comprised a 15m length of the Hen Brook frontage, which was cut back to receive a new revetment, formed by gabions. Recording in this area was intended to test its potential to contain evidence of quayside structures, and also data concerning the sequence of water-lain deposits. Areas within the footprint of the new build affected by pile construction were not selected for the watching brief because this method of construction was not considered to provide a useful opportunity for meaningful archaeological recording in the particular conditions of this site.

The machine-cut sections in Areas A and B were cleaned by hand, where possible, and a rapid written, drawn and photographic record was made of the results.

The Huntingdonshire Record Office was consulted in an attempt to contextualise the former tannery factory. A photographic record (held in the site archive) was also made of this building.

3.0: RESULTS

Two areas within the development were examined during the watching brief.

Area A (Fig. 2, Plate 1)

Two trenches were recorded within the area of the sub-station base, adjoining its western side (Trench 1), and eastern side (Trench 2). Each trench measured 3.7m in length and 0.6m in depth. The lowest deposit recorded in Trench 1 (at a depth of 0.1m below the modern ground surface) was a demolition layer (1003) containing bricks and mortar, sealed by a localised layer of sand (1001). Above was the modern topsoil (1000), which was sealed in the north of the trench by a concrete floor surface (1001).

A demolition deposit (2001) was also recorded in Trench 2 (at a depth of 0.25m below the modern surface). Layer 2001 was sealed by the topsoil (2000), here measuring up to 0.4m in depth.

No archaeological features were identified in Trenches 1 and 2, and no artifacts were collected.

Area B (Plate 2)

The machine-cleaned section adjoining the Fox Brook measured an average of 0.6m in depth (measured from the water level in the Brook). The lower deposits revealed comprised demolition debris (3002), including brick and mortar rubble, recorded just above the water level. Above was a layer of build-up material (3001), principally comprising dark brown clay silt, which was exposed over the remainder of the machined section. In the centre of the machined section was an area disturbed by tree-roots which contained brick, tile and cement (3000).

No archaeological features were recorded in this section and no artifacts were collected.

Former tannery

A basic photographic record was made of the former tannery, which is held in the archive. No additional map or documentary information concerning this building was available in the Huntingdonshire Record Office.

4.0: DISCUSSION

The demolition deposits (1002, 2001) encountered in Area A were probably associated with a terrace of brick houses of possible 19th century date adjoining Cemetery Road (see Ordnance Survey map, 1901 in Jones 1996).

The earliest deposit recorded in Area B (3002) is a demolition horizon, possibly relating to the demolition of late 19th-20th century buildings. This was sealed by a build-up horizon (3001), possibly deposited to artificially raise the ground level of the site to counteract flooding.

No features of Saxon or medieval date were identified during the watching brief, possibly because of the shallow depth of the sections which were recorded.

5.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork was sponsored by McCarthy and Stone (Developments) Limited. We thank Tim Gilbey and Karen Brady of McCarthy and Stone for their assistance. The staff of Huntingdonshire record Office are also thanked for their help. The watching brief was undertaken by Alex Jones and Rob Saner. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds.

6.0: REFERENCES

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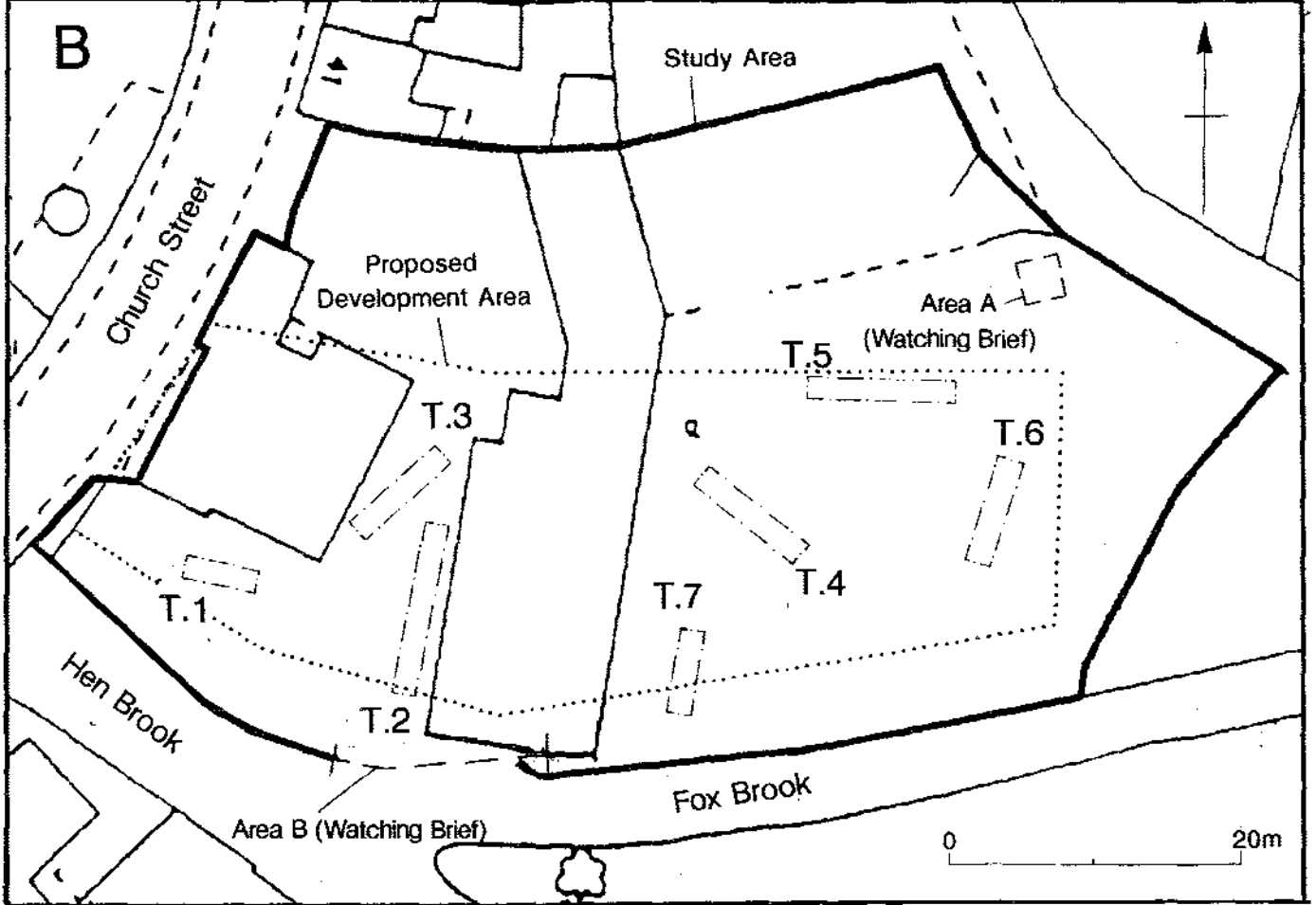
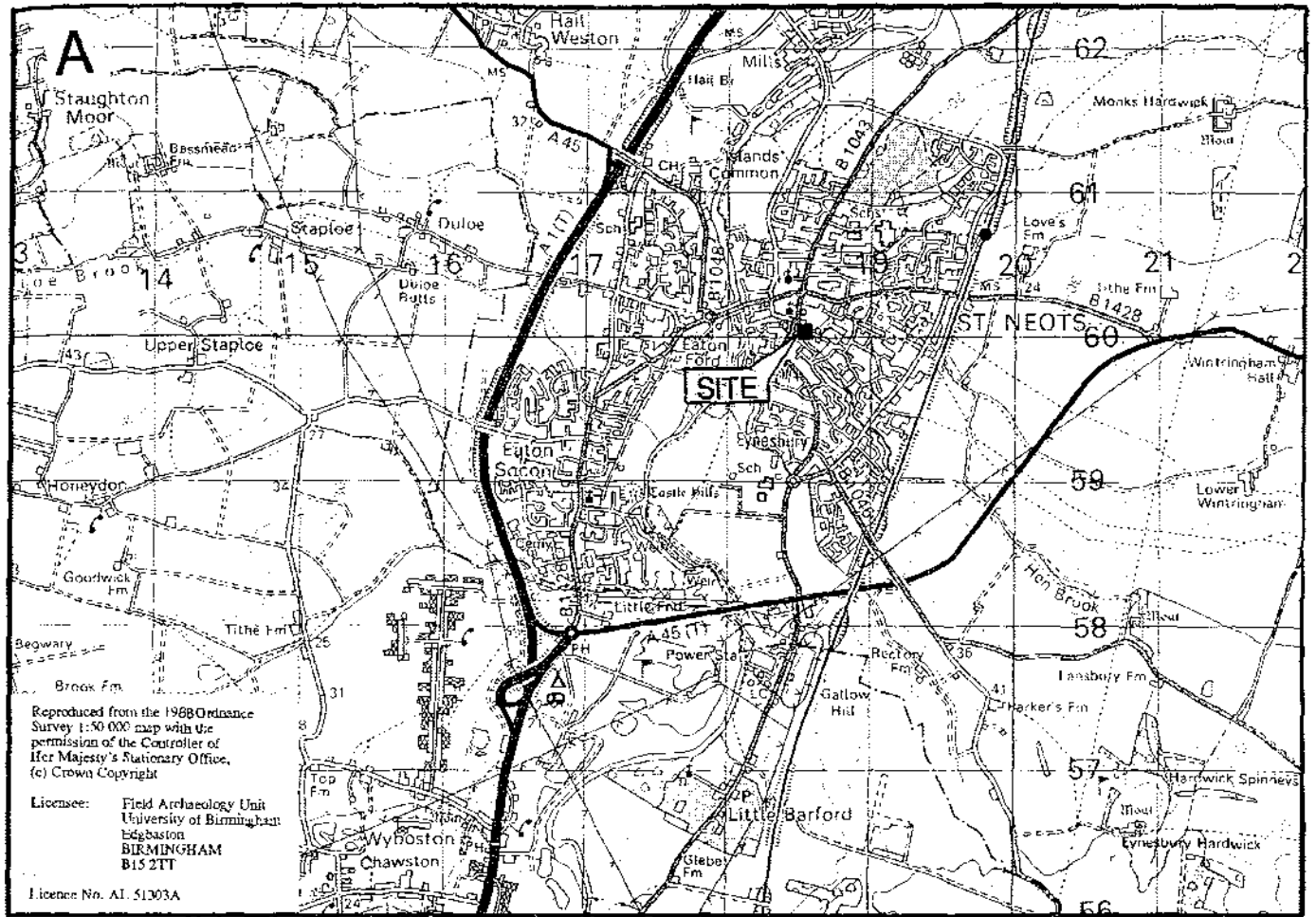


Fig. 1

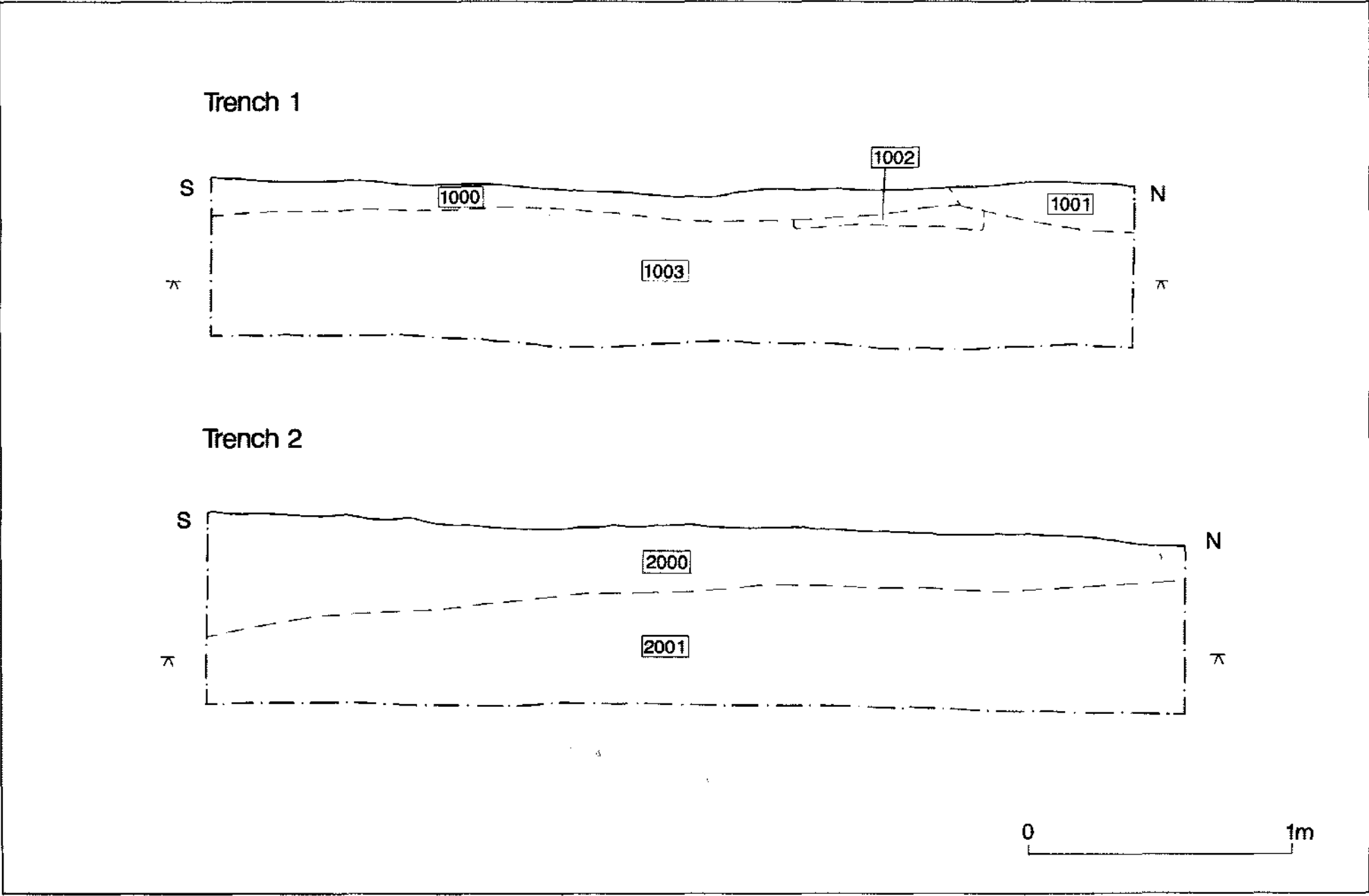


Fig. 2



Plate 1



Plate 2