BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

Sewage Treatment Works, Minworth, Birmingham

An Archaeological Evaluation, 1996.

B.U.F.A.U.

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 433.01
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Sewage Treatment Works, Minworth, Birmingham

An Archaeological Evaluation, 1996

by

H. M. Roberts.

For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux, Iain Ferris or Peter Leach (Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516
E-Mail: BUFAU@bham.ac.uk
Web Address: http://www.bham.ac.uk/BUFAU/

SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS, MINWORTH, BIRMINGHAM
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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1.0 SUMMARY

The archaeological potential of an area of pasture to the east of the present sewage works was examined by a desk based assessment (Ellis 1996). This assessment recommended an examination by targeted trial trenching of a 1% sample of the area.

The evaluation revealed a sequence of gravel and alluvial deposits, in places overlain or disturbed by modern activity. No significant archaeological features or deposits were identified.

2.0 INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

This report describes the results of the archaeological evaluation of an area of former pasture, now overgrown, measuring 395m by 103m, at Grid reference SP 171 926 immediately to the east of the sewage treatment works at Minworth, Birmingham (hereinafter called 'the site'). The site slopes from approximately 84m AOD at the north to 80m AOD at the south, towards the River Tame, 700m further south. This area would be affected by a proposed enlargement of the present works. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned to undertake the archaeological evaluation by Severn Trent Water Ltd., in accordance with the guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (November 1990). The methodology of this evaluation conforms to a Written Scheme of Investigation (See Appendix), prepared in consultation with the Planning Archaeologist of Birmingham City Council. The project followed the requirements set down in the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation prepared by the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

The purpose of the evaluation was:
(a) to define the nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains within the area proposed for development, to permit the formulation of an appropriate mitigation strategy,
(b) in particular, to provide information concerning any evidence of a continuation of the medieval settlement recorded to the north of the site (Birmingham City Council Sites and Monuments Record PRN 02246 and PRN 20005).

3.0 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The archaeological background of the site is discussed in detail by the Stage 1 assessment report (Ellis 1996), and will only be briefly summarised here.

For the prehistoric and Romano-British periods, evidence is limited to a few artefacts, recovered largely from the area alongside Wiggins Hill Road and Wishaw Lane. This data could suggest only limited land use, with few indications of settlement.

For the medieval period there is good evidence of settlement at Minworth Greaves to the northwest of the site, and along Wiggins Hill Road, and it is possible that elements of this settlement could have extended south of the road, and within the site.

In the post-medieval period cartographic evidence suggests the site was common fields, until enclosure at some time prior to 1776. There are also a number of 17th-century buildings surviving on Wiggins Hill Road, to the north of the site. The name 'Castle Croft' used on a map dated 1825 (Ellis 1996) described a field in the northeastern corner of the site, and this could be suggestive of structural remains of unknown date.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The assessment (Ellis 1996) examined aerial photographs, cartographic and written records, and geotechnical data. This provided information regarding possible archaeological features and areas of potential interest. Trial trenches were positioned to test these areas, following consultation with the City Planning Archaeologist, and with the agreement of Severn Trent Water Limited (Fig. 2). Eight trenches were excavated, each measuring 25m in length, and 1.6m in width, comprising a sample of approximately 1% of the site. Trench 4 was subsequently extended at its western end, to a length of 30m, after extensive modern disturbance was located at the eastern limit of the trench.

Trenches 1 and 2 were located to examine the extent of any medieval settlement extending south of Kingsbury Road, and to test the area previously known as 'Castle Croft'. Trenches 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 were located to test possible crop-marked features identified from aerial photographs by the Stage 1 assessment (Ellis 1996). Trench 8 was located to complete coverage of the area under investigation.

In each trench the overburden, comprising the topsoil and any modern material was removed by a mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision, to expose the uppermost archaeological horizon or the uppermost level of the alluvium. The machined horizons were hand-cleaned in order to define any features present. A sample of the possible features present were selectively excavated by hand to define their form, nature, and preservation, and to recover any artefactual or environmental evidence, as appropriate.

Recording was by means of printed pro-forma record sheets, photography, and drawn plans and sections at appropriate scales. This record is held in the archive.

5.0 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS (Fig. 3)

Trench 1 (Not illustrated)

Trench 1, located at the northern limit of the site, was aligned northeast-southwest. The lowest deposit, encountered in a machine-dug sondage at the southwestern end of the trench, was a dark pink-red sandy clay (1003) containing small rounded pebbles, recorded at a depth of 0.65m below the modern surface (at 83.74m AOD). Deposit 1003 was sealed by an alluvial layer of pale yellow-grey silty sand (1002) measuring 0.20m in depth, containing a

few small rounded pebbles. Layer 1002 was cut by a small shallow linear feature (F101), 1.3m in length, aligned east-west, extending beyond the northern limit of the trench. Feature F101 was filled by a dark grey-brown sand clay silt of maximum depth 0.09m (1001). The only other features recorded in this trench were modern field drains (1004, 1005, 1006). The latter deposits and Layer 1002 were sealed by 0.45m-0.65m of dark grey-brown topsoil (1000).

No features of archaeological interest were identified, and no artefacts were recovered from this trench.

Trench 2 (Not illustrated)

Trench 2 was located to the east of Trench 1, and was aligned approximately north-south. The lowest deposit recorded was a pale greenish-grey silty clay (2005) with orange mottling and containing a few small rounded pebbles, at a depth of 0.45m-0.60m below the modern surface (at 83.65m AOD). At the northern end of the trench deposit 2005 was overlain by a series of pale grey clay alluvial deposits (2006, 2007, 2008) containing gravel and small rounded pebbles. Deposit 2008 was tested by a hand-dug sondage, and proved to have no clearly definable boundary with deposit 2005. Feature F200, a small sub-oval pit 0.70m in length and 0.50m in width was cut through deposit 2005. It was filled to a depth of 0.18m by a dark grey silty clay (2002). This feature proved to be irregular. Deposit 2005 was also cut by irregular curvilinear features F201 and F202. Feature F201 (1.3m length, 0.70m width, 0.12m depth), was very shallow and its base was irregular. It was filled by a mixed dark grey silty clay (2003). It is likely to represent an animal burrow or root action. A possible shallow gully (F202) aligned east-west, measuring 0.80m in width, and 0.20m in depth, was recorded for a length of 1.5m within the trench. Feature F202 was filled by a mid grey silty clay. The latter deposits were sealed by a light green-grey clay silt (2001) up to 0.30m in depth, which was overlain by 0.45m of topsoil (2000).

No features of archaeological interest were identified, or artefacts recovered from this trench.

Trench 3 (Not illustrated)

Trench 3 was aligned approximately north-south and was located to test a possible crop-marked feature. The lowest deposit encountered was a pale yellow-grey clay sand (3002) containing a few small rounded pebbles, recorded at a depth of 0.60m below the modern ground surface (at 82.80m AOD). This deposit was overlain by a red-orange sandy clay (3001) up to 0.35m in depth. Deposit 3001 was in turn overlain by 0.30m of dark grey-brown topsoil (3000).

No features of archaeological interest were identified, or artefacts recovered from this trench.

Trench 4 (Not illustrated)

This trench was located to investigate a possible crop-marked feature, and was aligned approximately northwest-southeast. The lowest deposit in Trench 4 was a dark pink-red silty clay (4004), recorded at a depth of 1.15m below the modern surface (at 82.39m AOD). Deposit 4004 was overlain by 0.35m of black cinder/charcoal (4003) containing modern

debris. The western edge of deposit 4003 was overlain by up to 0.25m of pale grey-brown silty clay (4002), also containing modern brick fragments. Deposits 4002 and 4003 were sealed by up to 0.45m of disturbed pink-red silty clay (4001) which contained small fragments of modern brick and concrete. It is likely that this represents dumping of material associated with the construction of the existing sewage works. Deposit 4001 was sealed by 0.30m of dark grey-brown topsoil (4000).

No features of archaeological interest were identified, or artefacts recovered, with the exception of modern debris.

Trench 5 (Fig. 3)

Trench 5 was located to test a possible crop-marked feature, and was aligned approximately northwest-southeast. The lowest deposit in Trench 5 was a yellowish-orange sandy gravel (5008), recorded in a machine-dug sondage in the centre of the trench at a depth of 1.3m below the modern surface (at 82.07m AOD). An additional sondage located at the northwestern limit of the trench revealed a dark blue-grey clay (5007) at a depth of 1.08m below the modern surface. At the southeastern end of Trench 5 a pale brown silty clay (5005) containing small rounded pebbles was recorded at a depth of up to 1.02m below the surface. Sealing deposit 5007 was a layer of pink-red silty clay (5006), up to 0.75m in depth. The latter deposits may be interpreted as being of natural formation. Overlying deposit 5005 was an orange-brown sandy-silt (5004) up to 0.30m in depth, probably also of alluvial origin, but disturbed by modern activity. Deposit 5004 was overlain at its western edge by a band of cinder/charcoal (5003) in turn sealed by a thick deposit of brown-grey silty clay (5002) up to 0.85m in depth and containing fragments of brick, concrete and partially decayed wood. Deposits 5002 and 5006 were sealed by 0.25m of red silty clay (5001), also containing brick fragments. Deposits 5001, 5002, and 5003 may be interpreted as modern in origin. Deposits 5005 and 5001 are then overlain by 0.10m to 0.30m of topsoil (5000).

No features of archaeological interest were recorded, or artefacts recovered, with the exception of modern debris.

Trench 6 (Not illustrated)

Trench 6 was aligned approximately north-south and was located to test a possible crop-marked feature. The lowest deposit recorded was a red silt clay (6003) containing variable quantities of small rounded pebbles and gravel, recorded at a depth of 0.70m below the modern surface (at 81.72m AOD). Deposit 6003 was cut by possible linear features F601 and F602, both aligned east-west, and extending beyond the trench. Feature F601 was 0.35m in width, 0.12m in depth, with shallow sides and an irregular, concave base, and filled by a dark grey silt clay (6001) indistinguishable from the topsoil. Feature F602 was 0.50m in width, 0.08m in depth and located parallel to Feature F601, 1.5m to the north, and was also filled by dark grey silty clay (6002). Deposits 6001 and 6002 both produced fragments of decorated white porcelain of probable modern date. Additionally, deposit 6002 produced 1 fragment of post-medieval stoneware. These latter deposits were sealed by 0.50m to 0.70m of topsoil (6000).

No features of archaeological interest were identified. One fragment of post-medieval stoneware was recovered.

Trench 7 (Fig. 3)

Trench 7 was aligned southwest-northeast, and was located to test a possible crop-marked feature. The lowest deposit recorded was an alluvial sand silt (7003), variable in colour from yellowish-brown to reddish-orange, and containing a variable quantity of small rounded pebbles and gravel. Towards the centre of the trench deposit 7003 was overlain by a band of pale orange-brown silty sand (7002) containing 50% small rounded pebbles, which may possibly represent a relict stream bed. Deposit 7003 was overlain by a pale grey-brown clay silt (7001) at the southwestern end of Trench 7, and both latter deposits were sealed by 0.30m to 0.40m of topsoil (7000).

No features of archaeological interest were identified, or artefacts recovered from this trench.

Trench 8

This trench was located at the southern limit of the site, and was aligned north-south. The lowest deposit was a pale red-orange sandy silt (8001), recorded at a depth of 0.85m below the modern ground surface (at 79.86m AOD). Deposit 8001 was sealed by 0.65m to 0.85m of dark greyish-brown topsoil (8000).

No features of archaeological interest were identified, or artefacts recovered from this trench.

6.0 DISCUSSION

Trenches 1 and 2 were located to test for the possible southward continuation of the medieval settlement recorded to the northwest of the site, and in particular, to examine the area referred to as 'Castle Croft' on the map of 1825 (See Ellis 1996). However, no features of archaeological interest were recorded in either of these trenches. It may be that the name 'Castle Croft' refers to former ownership by an individual called Castle, rather than to archaeological remains. The absence of artefacts of the medieval or early post-medieval period from this area is also worth noting. This negative evidence, taken with the depiction of the site and surrounding area as common land may suggest that the settlement did not extend to the south of the present Kingsbury Road. The settlement may have avoided the steeply-sloping land within the area of the site, which falls from c. 84m AOD in the north, to c. 80m AOD in the south, which may have been subject to periodic flooding.

The putative crop-marked features tested by Trenches 4 and 5 correspond with areas of modern disturbance identified in those trenches. The crop-marked feature tested by Trench 6 corresponds with modern features F601 and F602, although these are unlikely to be of sufficient size to create such cropmarks. Trench 7 also tested the same crop-marked feature, which correlates with marked differences in the natural deposits. The crop-marked feature tested by Trench 3 was not identified, and may have been caused by variations in the topsoil. Trench 8 again illustrated the variability of the natural strata, previously noted by geotechnical investigation. Natural features such as watercourses may have been masked by modern disturbance and dumping.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

No features of archaeological interest, or possible archaeological interest were identified by trial-trenching, despite the testing of all areas of possible archaeological interest. Nor were any artefacts recovered from the trenching, with the exception of one fragment of post-medieval pottery.

Given the relatively undisturbed nature of the site, which may have been used for pasture from the 16th century, any settlement or associated features on the site could have been relatively well preserved (see Ellis 1996).

Given the negative evidence provided by trial-trenching, further archaeological input, such as a watching brief maintained during construction groundwork, may not be justified. However, it is recommended that an archaeological watching brief is undertaken to monitor any construction groundwork immediately adjoining the southern side of the Kingsbury Road, should construction or services affect this area in the immediate proximity of the medieval village.

8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was sponsored by Severn Trent Water Ltd. The excavation was supervised by the author, assisted by M. Allen and R. Krakowicz. The illustrations were prepared by N. Dodds. The project was monitored for Birmingham City Council by M. Hodder, and by A. Jones for BUFAU, who also edited this report.

9.0 REFERENCES

Ellis, P. 1996 *Land at Minworth Sewage Treatment Works: Stage 1 archaeological assessment. BUFAU Report No 433*

APPENDIX

WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION

Archaeological Evaluation

Sewage Treatment Works, Minworth, Birmingham

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document is based upon a Stage 1 archaeological assessment (Ellis 1996).

While the broad aims and methodology described in this Written Scheme of Investigation will be followed, certain specific details may require to be altered as further information becomes available. Such variations would be agreed in advance with the Planning Archaeologist of Birmingham City Council.

An archaeological evaluation of the proposed development area is required in advance of the construction of an extension to the existing sewage works.

2.0 SITE LOCATION

The proposed sewage works extension is located to the south of the modern A4097 between Minworth and Curdworth, and to the north of the River Tame.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The desk-based assessment (Ellis 1996) has outlined the archaeological potential of the proposed development area. Finds of prehistoric and Roman artefacts in the vicinity may suggest some form of activity or settlement nearby. There is also evidence of medieval settlement along Wiggins Heath Road, to the north of the proposed development area. The name 'Castle Croft', relating to land within the proposed development area suggests the possible presence of an archaeological site, perhaps relating to quantities of masonry found on the field surface. A number of possible crop-marked features are also recorded from aerial photographs within the proposed development area, although the assessment has noted that none are wholly convincing as archaeological features.

4.0 EVALUATION

4.1 Aims

The objectives of this archaeological evaluation are:
(a) to define the nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains within the area proposed for development, to permit the formulation of an appropriate mitigation strategy.

(b) In particular it is intended to provide information concerning the potential of the site to contain evidence of a continuation of the medieval settlement recorded to the north of the proposed development area.

4.2 Method

The evaluation will comprise the excavation of a total of a total of 8 trenches, each measuring 25m in length, and 1.6m in width, amounting to a sample of approximately 1% of the proposed development area. Trenching would aim to test the archaeological potential of the proposed development area as widely as possible. In particular it is intended to test the putative cropmarked features revealed by the assessment, the area formerly known as 'Castle Croft', and to sample the areas of potential archaeological potential revealed by the geotechnical survey. Final trench positions would be determined in consultation with the City Planning Archaeologist, and with the agreement of Severn Trent Water Ltd.

The modern overburden would be removed by JCB excavator, or similar, under archaeological control, to expose the uppermost horizon of significant archaeological deposits, or the surface of the subsoil, as appropriate. All subsequent excavation would be by hand. The machined horizon would be cleaned to define the archaeological features and deposits present at their uppermost horizons. A representative sample of features and/or deposits would be hand-excavated to provide information concerning the preservation of features/deposits, and to recover datable artefacts, and to provide samples for environmental analysis.

Finds would be washed, marked, bagged, and conserved, as appropriate.

5.0 STAFFING

The evaluation would be Directed/Monitored for BUFAU by Alex Jones (Research Associate/Project Officer) with the assistance of an experienced Site Supervisor, and two Archaeological Site Assistants.

Specialist staff would be:
Ann Woodward - Prehistoric pottery.
Jane Evans - Roman pottery.
Lynne Bevan - Flint.
Stephanie Ratkai - medieval/ post-medieval pottery.
Angela Monkton, Birmingham Environmental Laboratory - charred plant remains.

6.0 REPORT

The results of the fieldwork will be described in an illustrated report, which will contain the following:
(a) Description of the archaeological background.
(b) The methodology.

(c) A narrative description of the results and discussion of the evidence, supported by appropriate plans and sections.
(d) Summary of the finds and environmental evidence.

A short summary report will also be prepared for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology*.

7.0 ARCHIVE

The evaluation archive will be deposited with an appropriate archaeological store, within a reasonable time of the completion of the fieldwork, and following consultation with the Planning Archaeologist.

8.0 GENERAL

All project staff will adhere to the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

The project will follow the requirements set down in the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation prepared by the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

A Risk Assessment will be prepared prior to commencement of fieldwork.

9.0 REFERENCE

Ellis, P. 1996. *Land at Minworth Sewage Treatment Works: Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment*. BUFAU Report No. 433.

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
25/10/1996

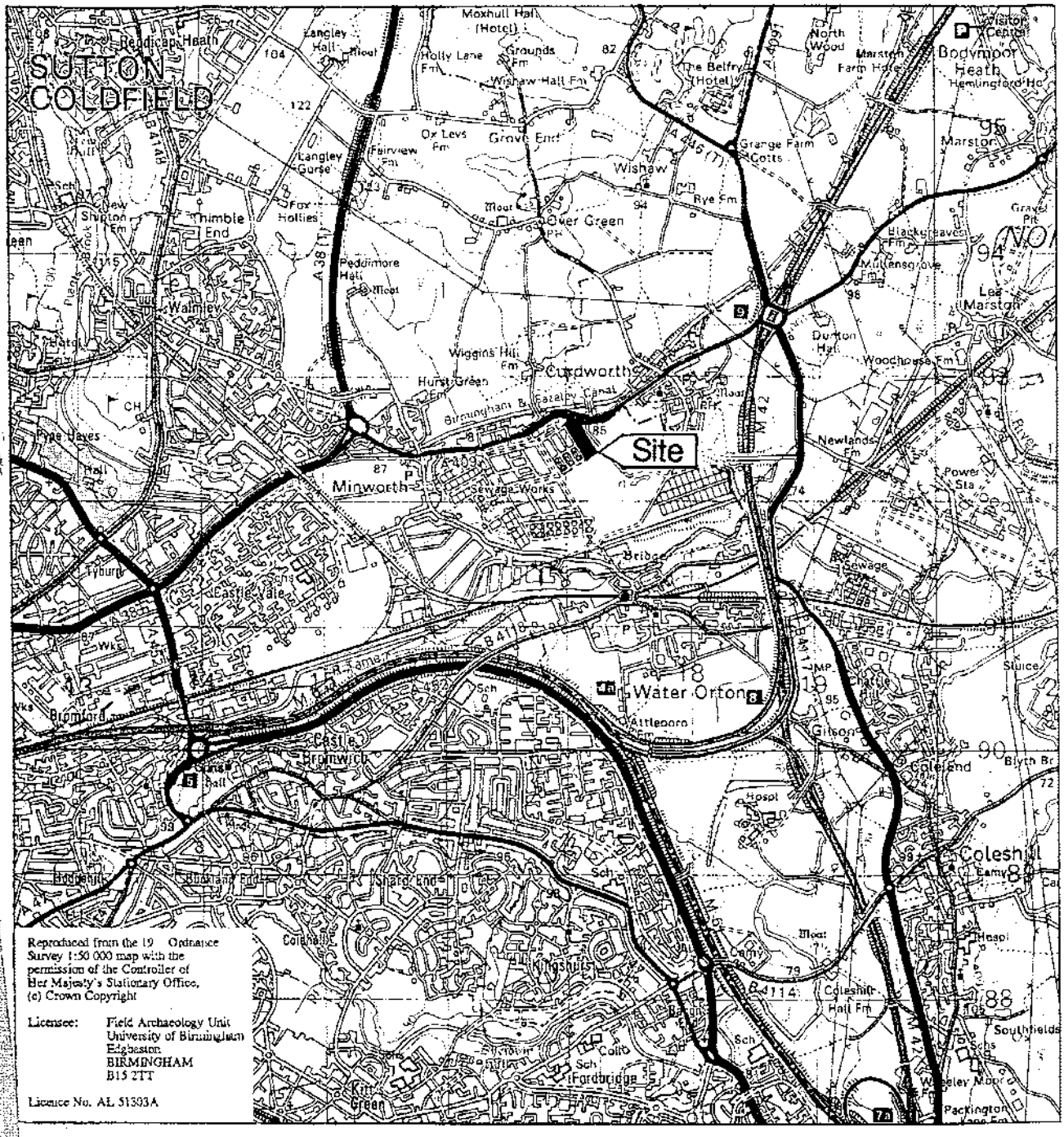
SUTTON COLDFIELD
Site
Curdworth
Minworth
Water Orton
Coleshill
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Fig. 1

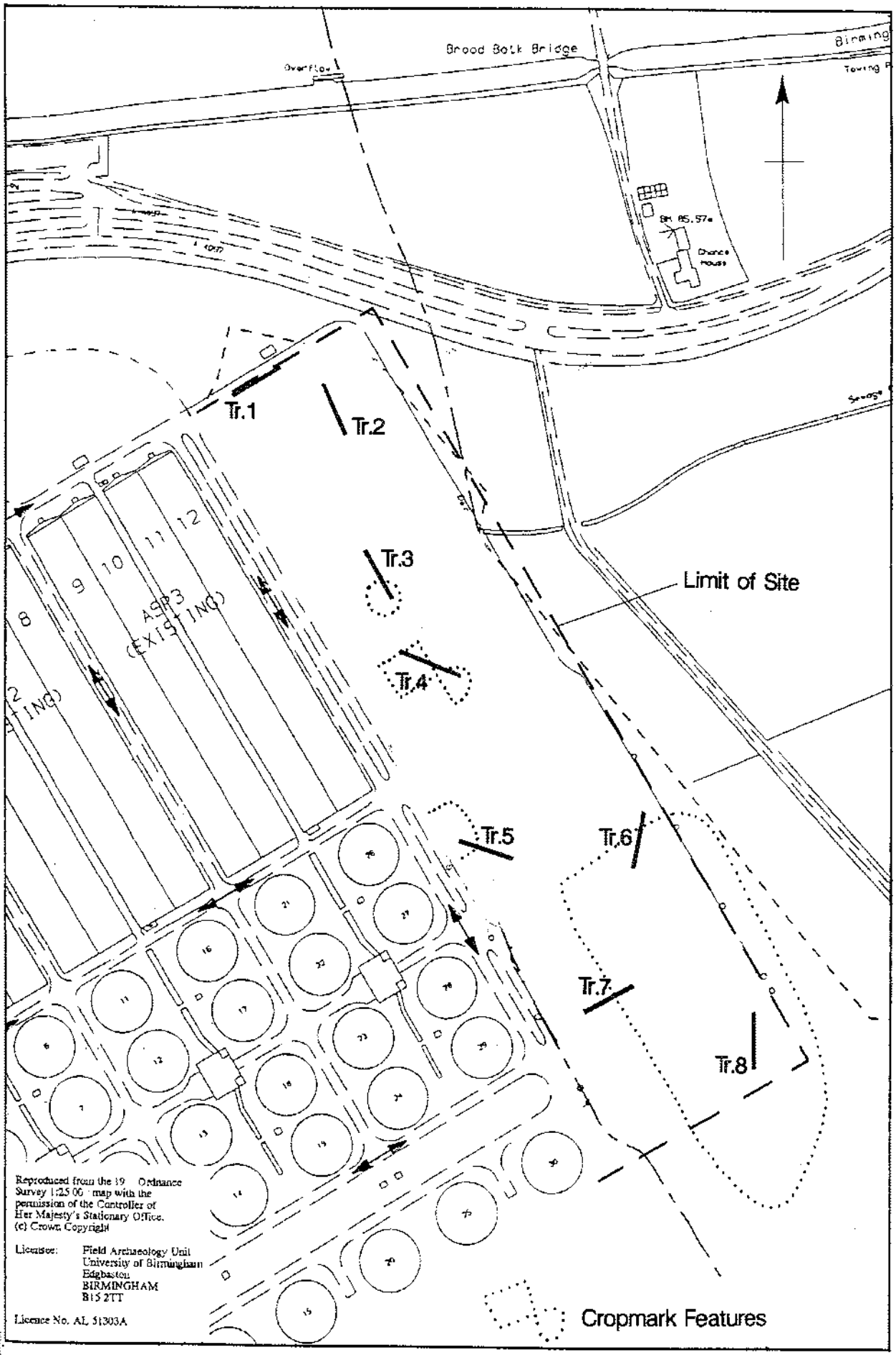
Brood Bolk Bridge
Overflow
Tr.1
Tr.2
Tr.3
Tr.4
Tr.5
Tr.6
Tr.7
Tr.8
Limit of Site
Cropmark Features
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Fig. 2

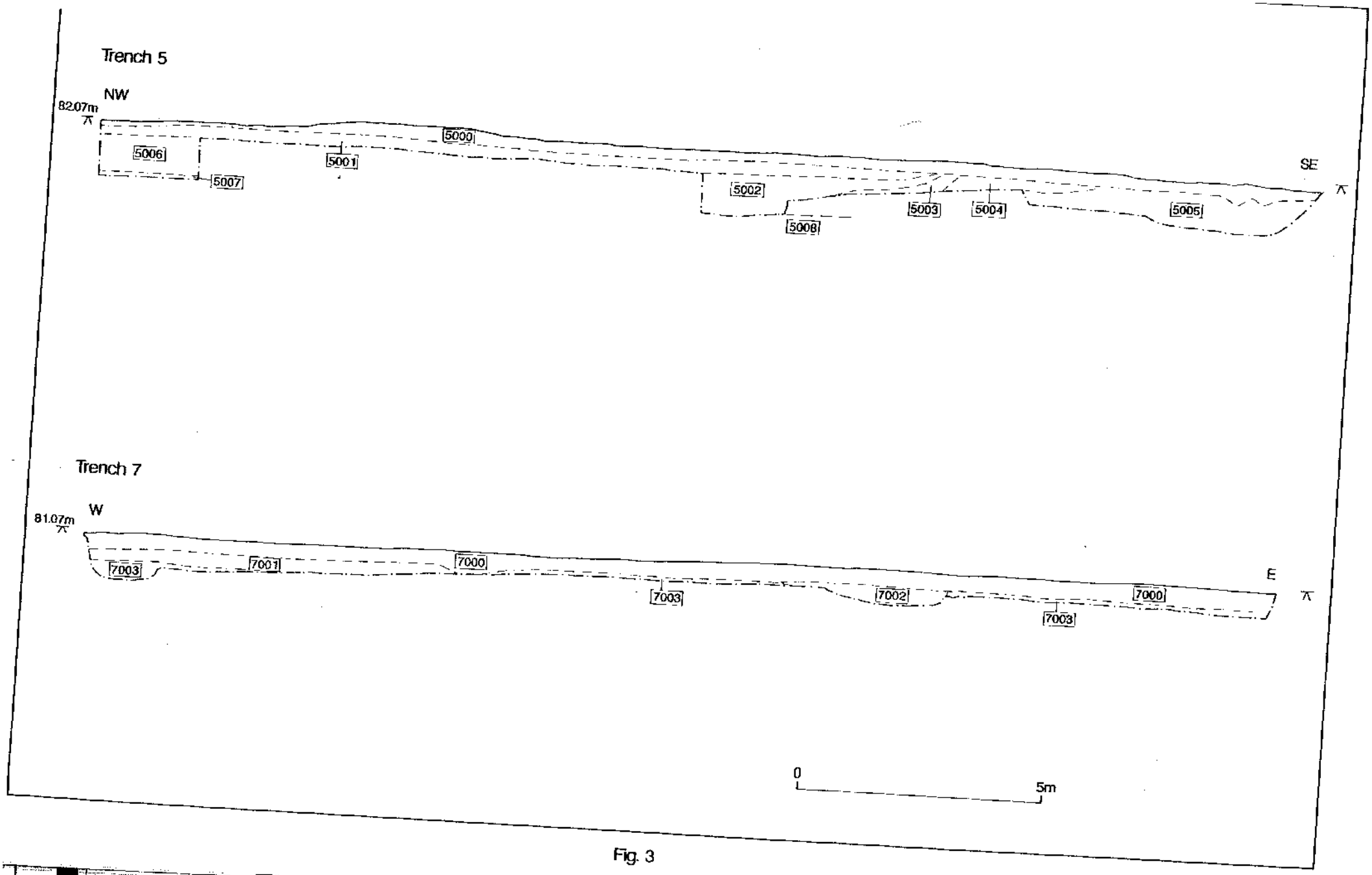
Trench 5
NW
82.07m
5006
5007
5001
5000
5002
5008
5003
5004
5005
SE
Trench 7
W
81.07m
7003
7001
7000
7003
7002
7003
7000
E
0
5m

Fig. 3