

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**Land at Minworth  
Sewage Treatment Works:**

**Stage 1 archaeological assessment**

*B.U.F.A.U.*



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
**Project No. 433**  
July 1996

**Land at Minworth Sewage Treatment Works:  
Stage 1 archaeological assessment**

by  
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# Land at Minworth Sewage Treatment Works: Stage 1 archaeological assessment

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# **Land at Minworth Sewage Treatment Works: Stage 1 archaeological assessment**

## **Summary**

A field to the east of the present sewage treatment works is identified as the only area of archaeological potential within the proposed development; the archaeology of other areas has been destroyed in the past. Background research suggests agricultural use from the 17th century to the late 19th century. There is some air photographic evidence of possible features within this field, but none is clearly defined. The field name 'Castle Croft', the evidence of medieval settlement directly to the north, and the possibility of prehistoric activity on the well-drained flood terraces of the river, all suggest the need for further archaeological investigation. A 1% examination by trial trenching is recommended as a second stage approach.

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Background to the study**

The following assessment of the archaeological potential of an area of land at Minworth Sewage Treatment Works, Birmingham, has been prepared by Peter Ellis of Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit for Severn Trent Water Ltd.

### **1.2 Scope of study**

Air photographic, cartographic and written sources have been examined for this assessment as well as the results of geotechnical work. These sources, their types and locations, are listed in the appendix. A site visit has been made.

Air photographs held by Birmingham City Council, by Birmingham Reference Library, by the Warwickshire SMR, by the Warwick Record Office, and by the Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography have been examined. There was insufficient time to assess the National Monuments Record collection held at Swindon and this would need to be examined in any future stage of work.

Early maps held by the Birmingham Reference Library and by Warwick Record Offices have been examined.

Written records examined comprised printed works, principally the Victoria County History for Warwickshire, and other works, principally the PhD thesis by M Hodder (Hodder 1988).

The geotechnical data prepared for Severn Trent by Thyssen Geotechnical have been studied.

### **1.3 The site**

An enlargement of the existing Sewage Treatment Works is proposed. This would involve development of an area of formerly agricultural land to the east of the present works measuring 370m by 90m (Fig 1). Less damaging work would also be undertaken in the southern part of the field. Other areas proposed for alterations have been occupied by treatment works for a number of years and this previous development will have destroyed any archaeology, since the groundwork for it had involved cuttings to a depth of 3-4m (Richard Webber per comm).

The study area has therefore been limited to the eastern section of the proposed development. The field has not been cultivated for some years and is now covered in long grass. The field slopes downward from north to south toward the river Tame 700m to the south. Directly to the west is the present Sewage Treatment Works bounded by a road, and to the south is a former gravel quarry subsequently used as a landfill site. To the north a bank has been created to landscape the area, and a belt of trees runs down the east boundary.

Directly to the south of the existing works, to the south-west of the study area, the ground has been raised by recent landfill to a height of 2-3m above that of the study area.

### **1.4 Geology**

The site is on glacial sand and gravel deposits from the Recent and Pleistocene period. To the south toward the River Tame the underlying deposits are alluvium and River Terrace deposits. To the north is Boulder Clay. These overlie Mercia Mudstone from the Triassic period (Geological survey map, 1:50,000, sheet 168).

Nine boreholes and eleven test pits excavated by Thyssen Geotechnical were located within the study area (Report No 7807: boreholes M2-M10, test pits TP47-51, 56-58, and 63-65). The report indicates that directly beneath the topsoil are layers of sandy silty clays with fine to coarse sub-rounded gravels. At some holes these layers below the topsoil are described as predominantly sand and in others of clay. A distinction is made in places between these head deposits and deposits described as made ground although the descriptions are very similar. Archaeological experience of geotechnical reports would suggest no difference between the deposits, and that both are of geological formation.

River Terrace gravels (in holes M4A, M6, M9, TP 51) and alluvium (in holes TP 50, 57, 58) are also recorded directly beneath the topsoil. It is possible that the alluvium records are of archaeological features. TP 50 is near an AP mark, while TPs 57 and 58 are on the line of a former boundary bank and may mark an associated ditch (Fig 3). Topsoil depths vary but are generally of 0.3m depth. However at M6 the topsoil depth is given as 1m, at M7 as 0.8m, at M9 as 0.9m, and at M10 as 0.7m, suggesting possible features. At TP 65 the topsoil is 0.5m and described as highly organic at its base. Of these holes M7 and TP 50 coincide with an AP mark (Fig 3).

It should be noted that geotechnical reports are difficult to interpret from an archaeological perspective.

## **1.5 Archaeological background**

Evidence of prehistoric activity in the area is limited to surface finds of flint debitage with a few worked artefacts suggesting limited settlement and exploitation of land. There is also a record of a polished stone axe. The impression given is of limited land use in prehistory.

In the Roman period the area was perhaps heathland and there are few indications of settlement.

Early medieval and medieval activity comprised a scatter of villages and farms, generally new settlements exploiting common land. Moated sites indicate the nuclei of small estates. The largest waste lands of the Roman period were conserved as the hunting reserve of Sutton Chase until the demise of the latter in 1528 when settlement was encouraged (Hodder 1988).

Enclosure of the common land increased in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Birmingham-Fazeley Canal cut through to the north of the study area in the 1780s. Narrow strip fields predating the canal suggest the continuation until then of a medieval system. By the 1880s this had been replaced by larger enclosed fields.

## **1.6 Organisation of report**

In Section 2, the archaeological data for the study area is summarised and the potential of the study area itself assessed in Section 3. Section 4 deals with the development impact and mitigation strategies and outlines recommendations for further work. References and abbreviations follow and an appendix lists the evidence.

## **1.7 Acknowledgements**

Thanks are due to the staff of the various collections visited, to Dr. Michael Hodder, Birmingham City Council Planning Archaeologist, and to Richard Webber of Severn Trent Water Ltd.

## **2 The archaeological data (Figs. 2 and 3)**

### **2.1 Air photographic evidence**

A handful of possible features may be suggested on the basis of the air photographic evidence. These are shown on Fig 3. All are plotted from the BCC collection. To locate the photographs see the date on Fig 3 and the list in the appendix. Feature 1 (F1 on Fig 3) includes a rectangular mark and is possibly the location of structures. Features 2 and 3 are suggestions of circular and sub-circular marks, perhaps ring ditches, while Feature 4 may be a large enclosure. However, none is wholly convincing.

### **2.2 Prehistory**

A Neolithic polished stone axe was found during the initial laying out of Minworth Sewage Farm in the late 19th century - its exact location unknown (Birmingham City Council Sites and

Monuments Record PRN 02206). The axe was unused and came from the Lake District (Shotton 1934, 45, Pl VIII; Thomas 1974, 35). Flint flakes have been collected in field walking to the east of Wiggins Hill Road (PRNs 20008; 20182; 20253; 20333; 20335), and at Wishaw Lane (PRNs 20314; 20315). A core and heat-shattered pebbles were also found at PRN 20315, and heat-shattered pebbles were collected at PRN 20333.

### **2.3 Romano-British**

A hoard of 3rd-century Roman coins was found in Wishaw parish, presumably to the east of Wiggins Hill Road (PRN 02972; Hodder 1988, 212). Romano-British pottery has been found in field walking beside Wiggins Hill Road (PRNs 20006; 20007; 20183; 20185; 20251; 20255; 20332; 20335). The name 'Castle Croft' applied to the study area field might be indicative of Roman structural finds (Hodder 1988, 212).

### **2.4 Medieval**

Minworth, Curdworth and Wiggins Hill occur in Domesday Book in 1086; Curdworth church is 12th-century, and mills are recorded in the medieval period (VCH, IV, 61, 65). The Kingsbury Road (A4097) is shown on a map of 1589 and is presumably of medieval origin (WRO, Z 567 (u); original in PRO - MPB 10). A possible deserted medieval settlement is located on Wiggins Hill Road (PRN 02246) and medieval ridge and furrow cultivation is recorded at Minworth Greaves (PRN 20005). A 13th or 14th-century building there was removed and re-erected at Selly Oak (Bournville Village Trust 1952), and there are 14th and 15th-century references to Minworth Greaves (Hodder 1988, 210). Finds of medieval pottery have been made alongside Wiggins Hill Road (PRNs 20006; 20007; 20180; 20181; 20183-5; 20252-4; 20332-5), at Minworth Greaves Farm (PRN 20205), and at Wishaw Lane (PRNs 20313; 20314). There is a 14th-century reference to the common fields of Wiggins Hill (Hodder 1988, 211).

### **2.5 Post-medieval**

There are a number of 17th-century buildings surviving to the north of the study area on Wiggins Hill Road. The 1589 map noted above shows the study area lying within Minworth's common fields. In 1776 the study area comprised two fields both of which were held, together with other land, by the Jessen estate (map by John Snape: BRL, E B and M, 91/1). A map drawn in 1792 (WRO Z 461 (L)) following the construction of the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal in 1783-90 (VCH, IV, 61), shows narrow strip fields to the north of the Kingsbury Road. Although the fields south of the road are not shown, two buildings are indicated opposite Minworth Greaves Farm. As noted above the north-eastern field in the study area was named 'Castle Croft' on a map of 1825 (Sutton Coldfield Corn Rental Map). There is also a 17th-century reference to a 'Castle Way' between Minworth and Curdworth (Hodder 1988, 212). By the first large-scale edition of the Ordnance Survey maps in 1888, the land south of the Kingsbury Road was laid out in small fields (Fig 3). Soon after, in 1896, the Minworth Sewage Farm was constructed, the land having been bought by the Tame and Rea Drainage Board in 1881 (VCH IV, 64). The gravel pits to the south also postdate 1888. The present east boundary of the study area field was established after 1888 and by 1924.

### **3 The archaeological potential**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Many of the finds recorded on the Birmingham City Council SMR are from recent fieldwork especially alongside Wiggins Hill Road and Wishaw Lane, and this imbalance in the record should be borne in mind in assessing the archaeological potential of the study area.

#### **3.2 Prehistory**

For the prehistoric period there is, as noted above, little evidence of prehistoric activity other than the finds of flint flakes where fields have been walked north of the Kingsbury Road. These finds occur on Boulder Clay; the more favoured land in prehistory would have been the well-drained gravel terraces of the River Tame. The evidence might be taken to suggest that the gravels of the study area would have been utilised in prehistory, and this suggestion would be supported by the stone axe find which can be interpreted as having been deliberately placed in a ritual act near a settlement (Darvill 1987, 72). However, gravel extraction to the south of the sewage farm, and the construction of the sewage farm itself have not been productive of chance finds. This can be contrasted with gravel extraction in areas with a high degree of prehistoric settlement, the Upper Thames valley for example, where finds in the 19th and early 20th century were commonplace.

#### **3.3 Roman, medieval and post-medieval**

Romano-British evidence is limited to the coin hoard and finds of pottery. There is good evidence of medieval settlement at Minworth Greaves and beside Wiggins Hill Road. It is possible that settlement extended south of the road. The post-medieval evidence suggests that the study area lay within the common fields until enclosed, perhaps at the time of the 1776 map.

The field name 'Castle Croft' is suggestive of an archaeological site. Although the name may simply refer to its owner at the time, it could also be indicative of masonry finds in the field. If such masonry finds were made it would seem most likely that they were Romano-British.

### **4 Development impact, mitigation strategies and recommendations**

#### **4.1 Development impact**

The Sewage Treatment Works will involve deep groundworks which will wholly destroy any surviving archaeology. To the south there will be service trenches and the damage here will be less.

#### **4.2 Mitigation strategy**

This assessment has suggested some archaeological potential for the site but further work is recommended before determining an appropriate mitigation strategy.



### 4.3 Recommendations

Further work would be necessary to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains in the study area. Trial trenching is suggested with a number of trenches laid out to achieve an overall assessment of archaeological potential. Some of the trenches could be sited to take account of the air photographic features (Section 2.1 above) and the possible anomalies suggested by the geotechnical investigations (Section 1.4 above). The total trench area might represent a 1% sample of the threatened area.

### References and abbreviations

BCC		Birmingham City Council
BRL		Birmingham Reference Library
Bournville Village Trust,	1952	Selly Oak and Minworth Greaves
Darvill, T,	1987	<i>Prehistoric Britain</i> , London
Hodder, M A,	1988	The development of some aspects of settlement and land use in Sutton Chase, unpub PhD thesis Univ Birmingham
PRO		Public Record Office
Shotton, F W,	1934	Stone implements of Warwickshire, <i>Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Arch. Soc.</i> <b>58</b> , 37-52
Thomas, N,	1974	An archaeological gazetteer for Warwickshire, <i>Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Arch. Soc.</i> <b>86</b> , 16-48
VCH		<i>Victoria County History for Warwickshire</i>
WRO		Warwickshire Record Office

## **Appendix**

### **1 Collections consulted**

	APs	Maps	Other documents
Birmingham City Council	yes	no	yes
Warwick SMR	yes	no	no
Warwick Record Office	yes	yes	yes

A telephone enquiry was made to Sutton Coldfield Library

### **2 Air photographs of the study area examined**

1948 RAF coverage, BRL  
1977 BCC, no 107.018  
1980 BCC, no 9281  
1981 BCC, no 273  
1985 BCC, Run 13  
1987 BCC, Run 12, no 6  
1989 BCC, no 93.181  
1991 BCC, no CU 96

### **3 Maps examined**

Ordnance Survey 25" 1888, 1903, 1924  
OS 6" 1889  
Sherriff's map of Warwickshire 1789, BRL 897785  
Sherriff's map of Birmingham - Fazeley Canal 1792, WRO Z 461 (L)  
Greenwood's map of Warwickshire 1822, BRL 897787  
Yates map of 25 miles around Birmingham 1793, BRL 910257  
John Snape map of the Jessen Estate 1776, BRL E B & M 91/1  
1588 map of Minworth, WRO Z 567 (u)  
1589 map showing Curdworth, Sutton Coldfield etc, WRO Z 567 (u) and PRO MP 8, 10

### **4 Other documents not referenced**

Manuscript history of Curdworth by Rev L Mitchell, 1905-38 (WRO DR(B)1/Box 5)

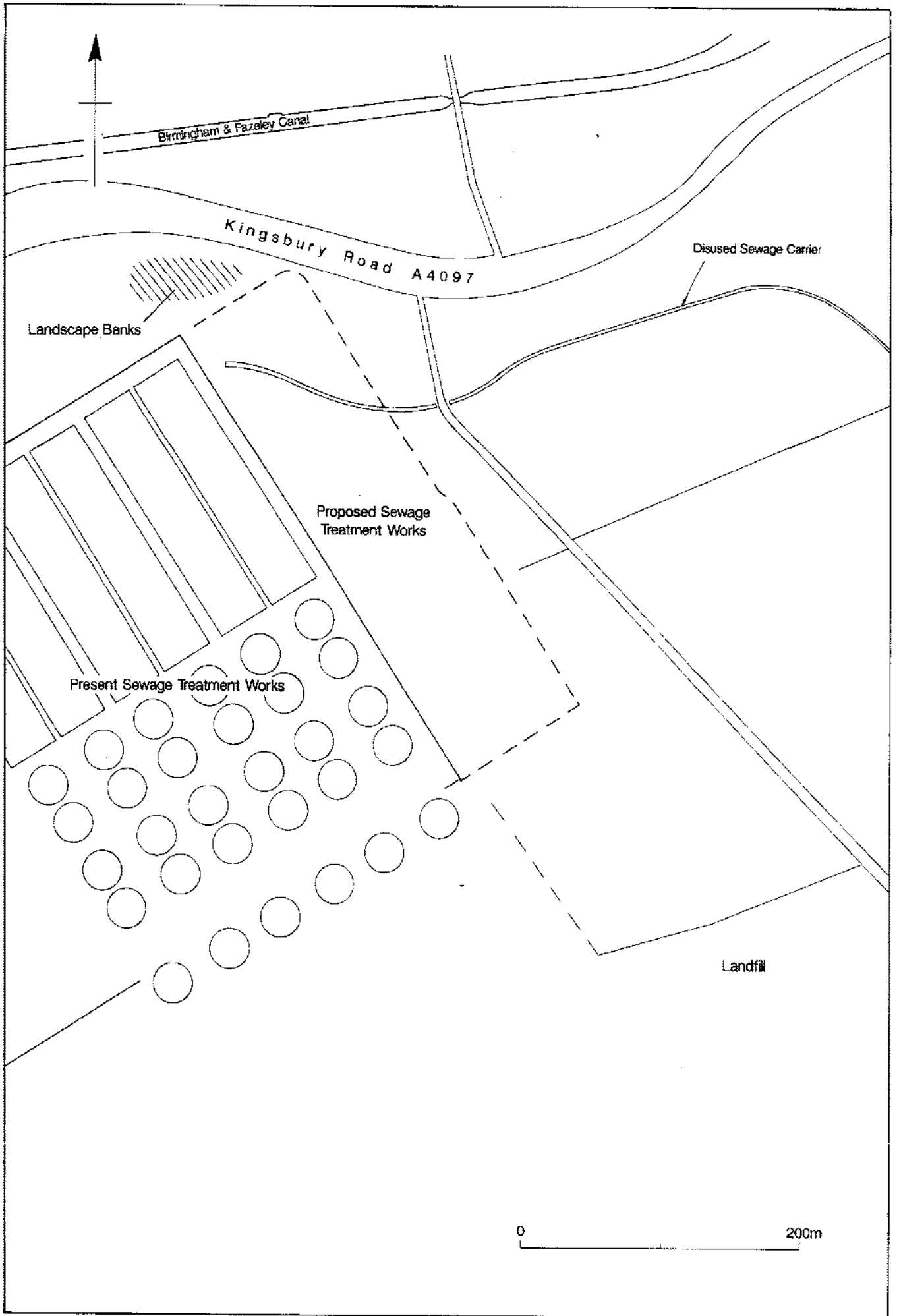


Fig.1

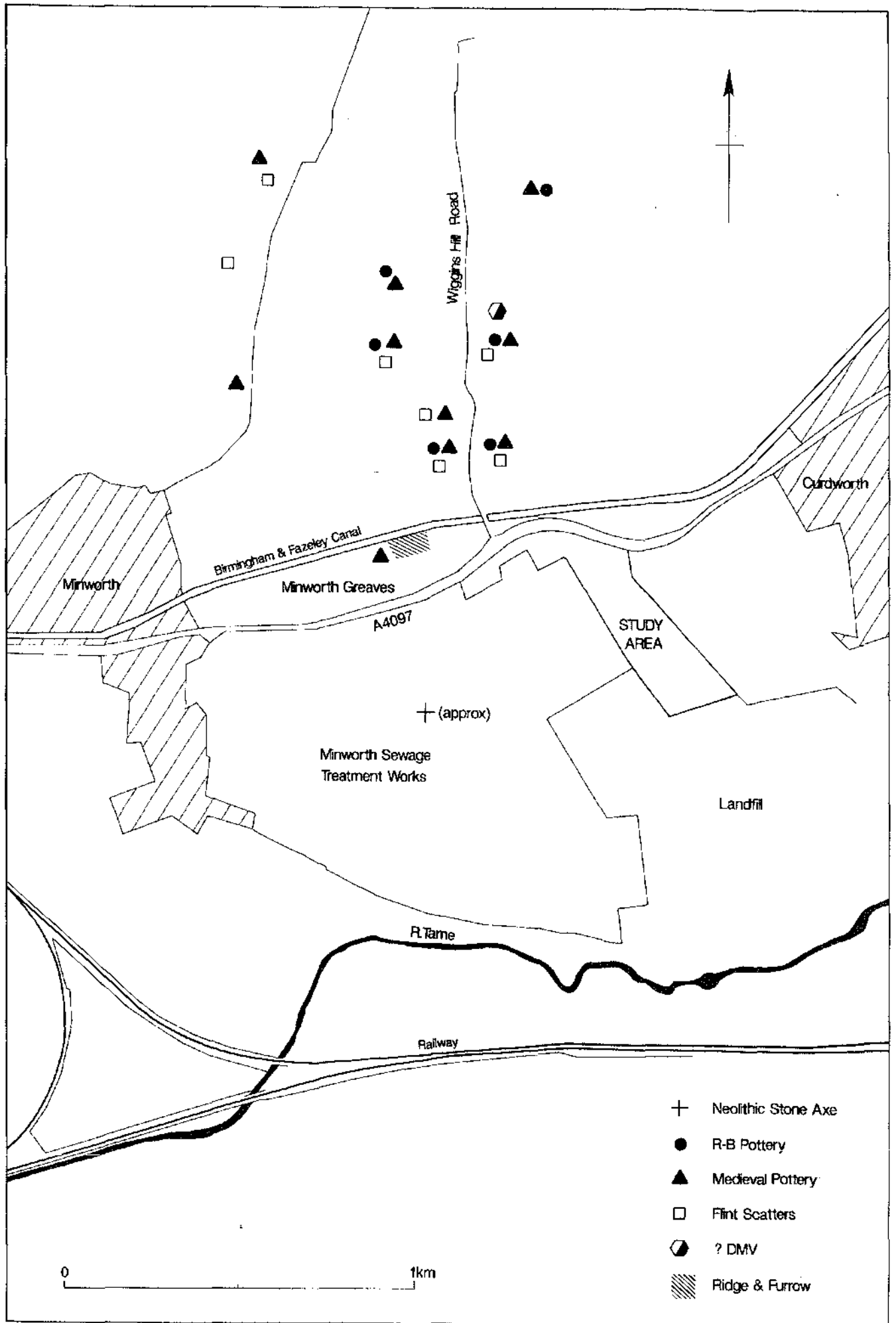


Fig.2

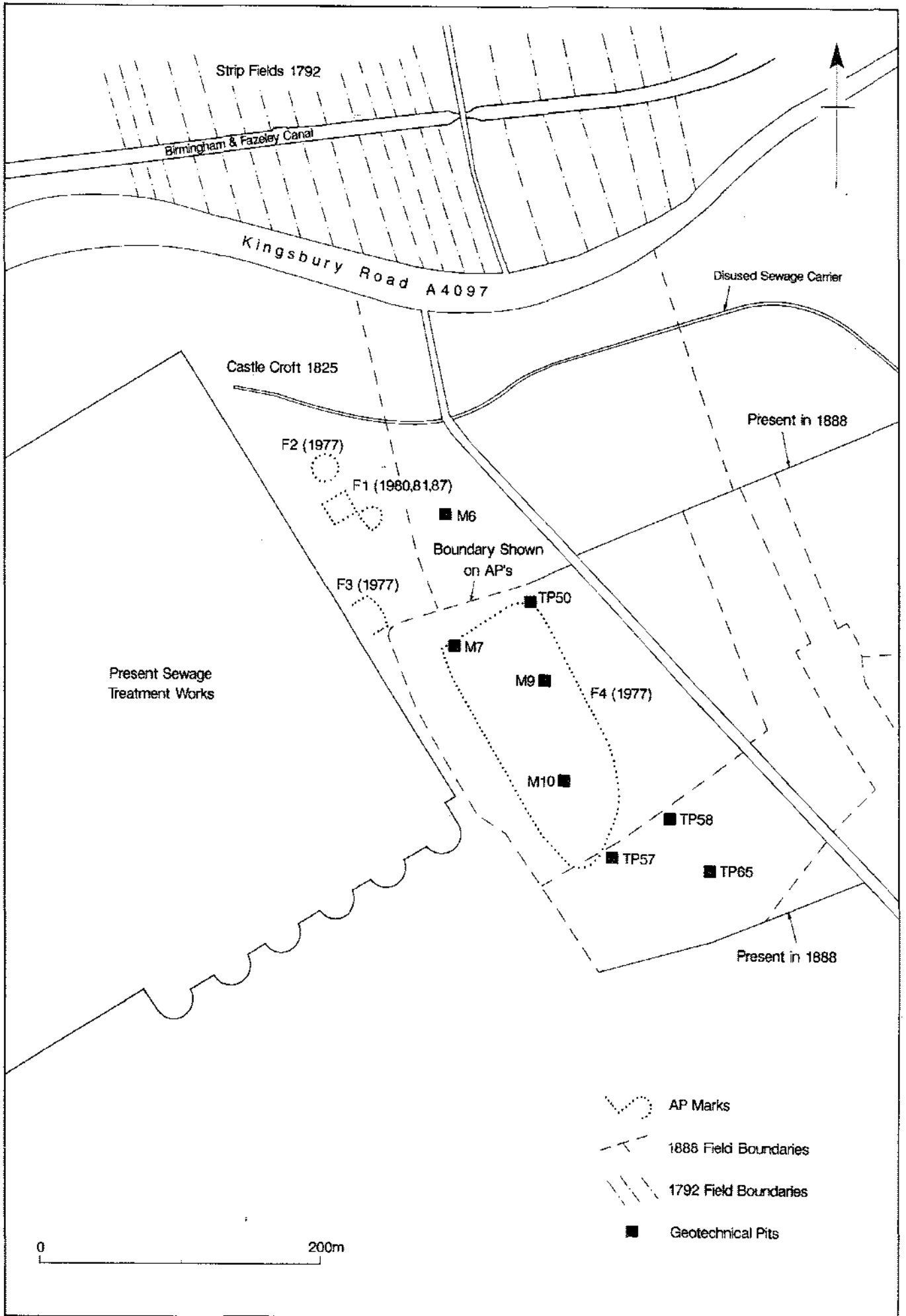


Fig3