

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

An Archaeological Watching Brief
at
Lower Farm, Aldersley, Wolverhampton,
West Midlands
1998

(SMR 6710/6712)

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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by
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1.0 Summary

In 1997, an assessment of two buildings was carried out at Lower Farm, Aldersley, Wolverhampton (SMR 6710/6712) in advance of a planning application for their demolition. Documentary evidence suggests that there may have been a settlement at Aldersley from the medieval period onwards. However, building recording and analysis suggested that the two buildings belonged to a later phase of activity. Building A, a stable, was dated to the late-18th - early-19th century, whilst Building B, a possible cattle shelter shed, was dated to the late-19th - early-20th century. An archaeological watching brief, carried out during subsequent redevelopment of Lower Farm and enhancement of Aldersley Stadium, found that evidence of post-medieval activity was centred on the former location of Lower Farm, with some post-medieval artefacts being recovered from service trenches associated with the construction of Aldersley Stadium. No earlier deposits or features were recorded. This watching brief could not confirm the presence or absence of medieval deposits beneath the site of Lower Farm. However, the undisturbed nature of ground levels to the west of the farm suggests that the focus for medieval activity and settlement may lie to the east of the present site.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out during the redevelopment of Lower Farm and enhancement of Aldersley Stadium, Wolverhampton, West Midlands (NGR SJ 899 010). This work was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of the sponsors, Tweeds Leisure, during groundworks.

The watching brief was carried out in accordance with a brief issued by the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record (White 1997), and a specification prepared by BUFAU (Mould 1998). The project was carried out in accordance with guidelines set down in *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994), and conformed to requirements set down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of Environment 1991).

An earlier assessment of the two buildings at Lower Farm was undertaken in 1997 by BUFAU, also on behalf of Tweeds Leisure. The results of this assessment are reported on separately (Mould 1997), however the results are incorporated in this report.

3.0 Site Location (Map 1)

The site, which lies to the northwest of Wolverhampton Town Centre, is defined to the north and west by Aldersley Road, to the south by Aldersley Stadium, and to the east by a large expanse of open land which leads to all-weather sports pitches and Aldersley Junction.

In addition to the two brick-built buildings belonging to Lower Farm, the site also included two carparks and associated access roads leading to and from Aldersley Road and buildings formerly located on the northwestern side of Aldersley Stadium.

4.0 Objectives

The objectives of the watching brief were to monitor all below-ground works in and around the two farm buildings, and to record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological deposits or features affected by the demolition and enhancement works.

5.0 Method

The objectives were achieved through a series of site visits during contractors' groundworks. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeological deposits or features were present. Contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections and photographs which, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive. This is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. A copy of the paper and photographic archive will be deposited with Wolverhampton Archives Service and the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record.

6.0 Archaeological Results (Figure 1, Plates 1 - 8)

Former Location of Buildings A and B, Lower Farm (Plates 1-5)

The concrete floor of Building A directly overlay a compacted soil surface (Plate 4).

The concrete slab floor of Building B was broken up and removed from site. It overlay a clamped-brick surface, the northern-most part of which was constructed from engineering bricks (Plate 5).

No other deposits or features were observed within the Lower Farm site, as further enhancement works for creating a village green here comprised landscaping by importing material rather than by reducing the existing ground level.

Section 1 (Plate 6)

The subsoil horizon was not recorded in this section. A mixed, black, sandy deposit mixed with building debris (1003) was partially overlaid by a layer of yellow sand

(1002) and partially by a layer of black cinders (1001). These two contexts were sealed by a thin layer of topsoil (1000).

Section 2 (Plate 7)

A red-brown, silty, clay-sand subsoil (2002) was overlaid by a thick layer of black-brown, silty sand-clay (2001), which contained 20th century pottery, partially corroded metal strips, machine-brick fragments, and a number of small medicinal bottles. The topsoil (2000) also contained fragments of machine-brick.

Section 3

A red-brown, silty, clay-sand subsoil (3001) was overlaid by topsoil (3000), which contained a concentration of partially decomposed tree roots immediately to the east of Lower Farm. No archaeological deposits or features were recorded.

Section 4

The orange-brown gravel-sand subsoil (4002) was overlaid by a dark brown, rooty, silt-sand (4001). Layer 4001 was sealed by topsoil and pasture (4000), which contained sparse brick fragments, crushed stone and 20th century pottery sherds.

Section 5

A yellow-brown gravel-clay subsoil (5003) was overlaid by a cinder-flecked layer of brown-black silt-sand (5002) which contained 20th century pottery sherds and a corroded butcher's hook. This layer was sealed by a sequence of hardcore and gravel (5001), and tarmac (5000).

Section 6 (Plate 8)

The subsoil comprised a red-brown sand-clay with sparse sub-rounded stones, overlaid by a red-brown silty, clay-sand (6001). It was sealed by dark brown topsoil (6000). No archaeological deposits or features were recorded.

Section 7

A red-brown, clay-sand (7001) was overlaid by a layer of topsoil (7000). No archaeological deposits or features were recorded.

Section 8

The brown-red sand-clay subsoil (8002) was cut by a service trench (F800), filled with a brown silt-sand (8001). The fill of the service trench and the subsoil were sealed by a rooty layer of topsoil (8000).

8.0 Discussion

No artefacts or deposits dating to the medieval period, or to any earlier activity, were recorded.

The clamped-brick surface below the concrete floor of Building B may have been constructed from bricks reused from elsewhere within the farmyard. Cartographic evidence suggests that the construction of Building B coincided with the demolition

of a number of farm buildings, shown on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1887 and 1902 (Mould 1997). The engineering bricks recorded in the northern-most part of the floor surface are similar to those recorded at Aldersley Junction (Mould 1997). It has been suggested that Building A may have provided stabling additional to that at Aldersley Junction (Mould 1997), and it is possible that the two sites also shared material resources.

Evidence of the former extent of Lower Farm was recorded in Section 2, where the artefacts and brick fragments are likely to relate to the farmhouse and ancillary farm structures shown on the Ordnance Survey maps between 1887 and 1989. Deposits recorded within Section 1 are also likely to relate to demolition of these buildings. Tree roots recorded in Section 3 may relate to a former field boundary.

This watching brief recorded deposits and artefacts dating to the 20th century but could not, due to the importation of material over the site of Lower Farm, confirm the presence or absence of medieval deposits beneath the existing ground level. These results do not preclude further archaeological investigation in the event of below-ground works within the former site of Lower Farm. The undisturbed nature of the ground to the west of Lower Farm increases the likelihood that the focus for medieval activity and settlement, in the form of moats, fishponds, dovecotes and farm outbuildings, lies to the east of the present site. As stated in the earlier report (Mould 1997), the scarcity of medieval documentation, and the consequent lack of understanding of the origin, location and development of settlement at Aldersley, gives value to the potential survival of these deposits.

11.0 References

- Mould, C.A. 1997 *Archaeological Recording at Aldersley Junction, Wolverhampton, West Midlands (SMR 8629)*. BUFAU Report No. 420.01.
- Mould, C.A. 1997 *Building Recording at Lower Farm, Aldersley, Wolverhampton, West Midlands. SMR 6710/6712*. BUFAU Report No. 477.
- Mould, C.A. 1998 *Lower Farm, Aldersley, Wolverhampton, West Midlands. SMR 6710/6712. Specification for Watching Brief*.
- White, H. 1998 *Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief, Lower Farm, Aldersley, Wolverhampton, West Midlands. SMR 6710/6712*.

12.0 Acknowledgements

This project was sponsored by Tweeds Leisure. Thanks are due to Hilary White of the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record for her help and advice. Thanks also to John Tanner of Tweeds Leisure and to Malcolm Taylor of Higgs and Hill. The watching brief was carried out by Catharine Mould. Graham Norrie (University of Birmingham) prepared the plates for this report. The report was edited by Iain Ferris.

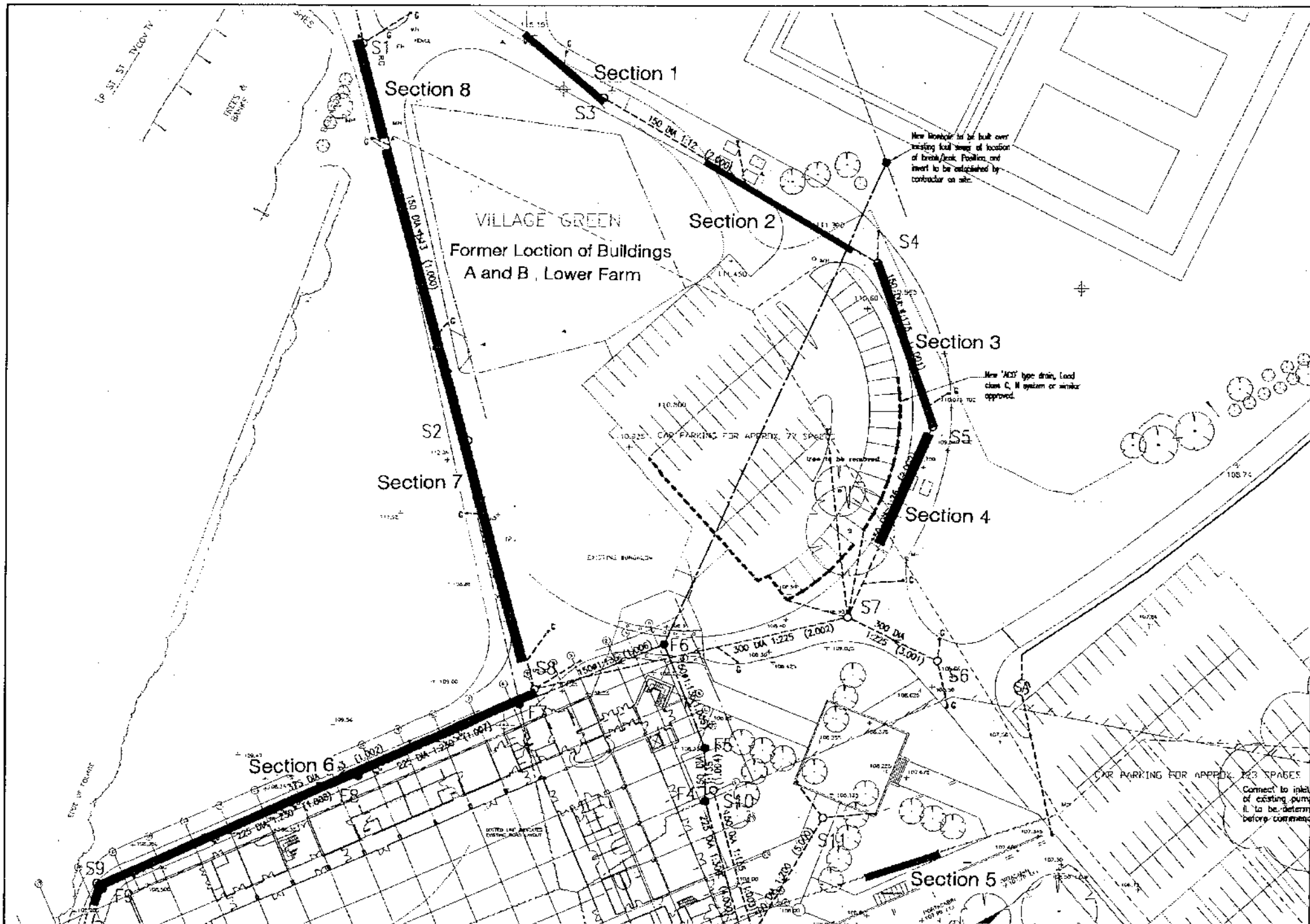
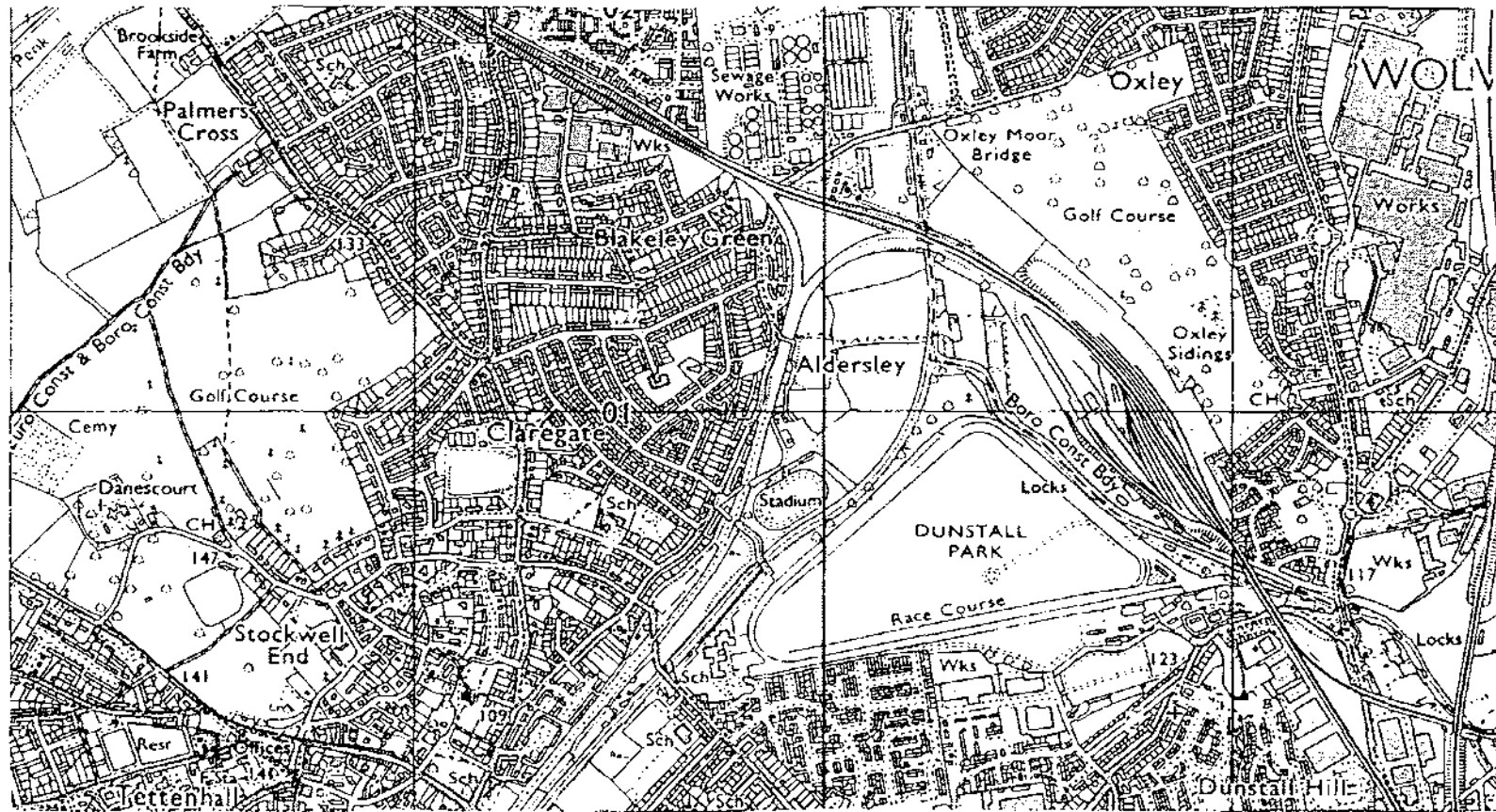


Fig.1



Map 1



Plate 1: Former Location of Buildings A and B, Lower Farm



Plate 2: Former Location of Buildings A and B, Lower Farm

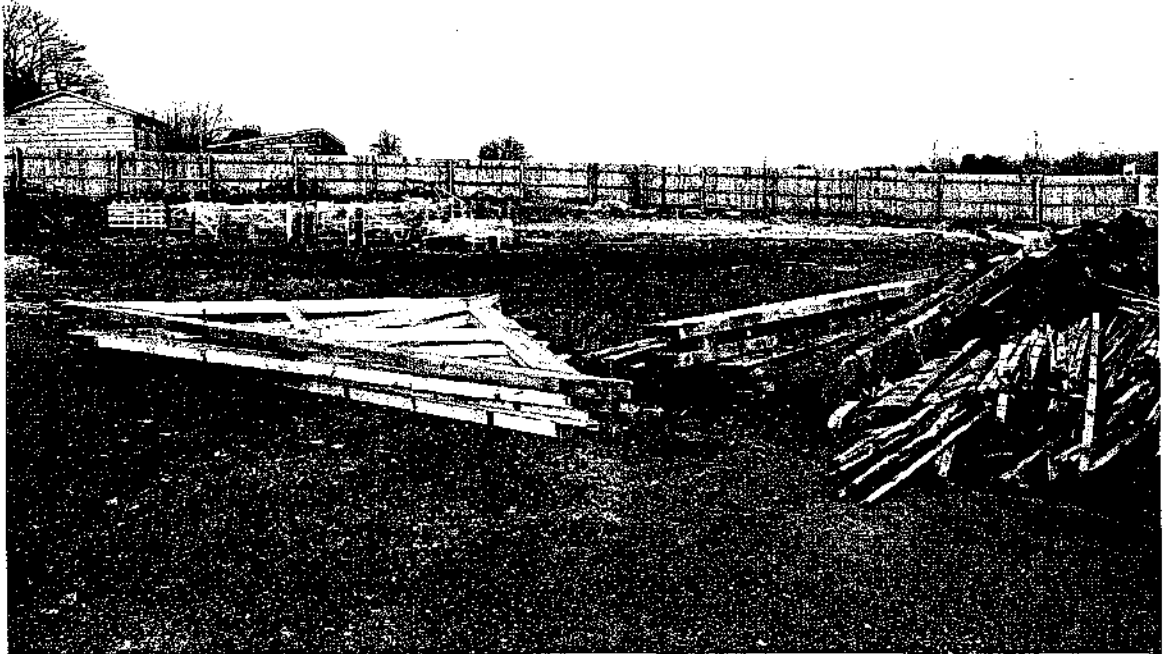


Plate 3: Former Location of Buildings A and B, Lower Farm

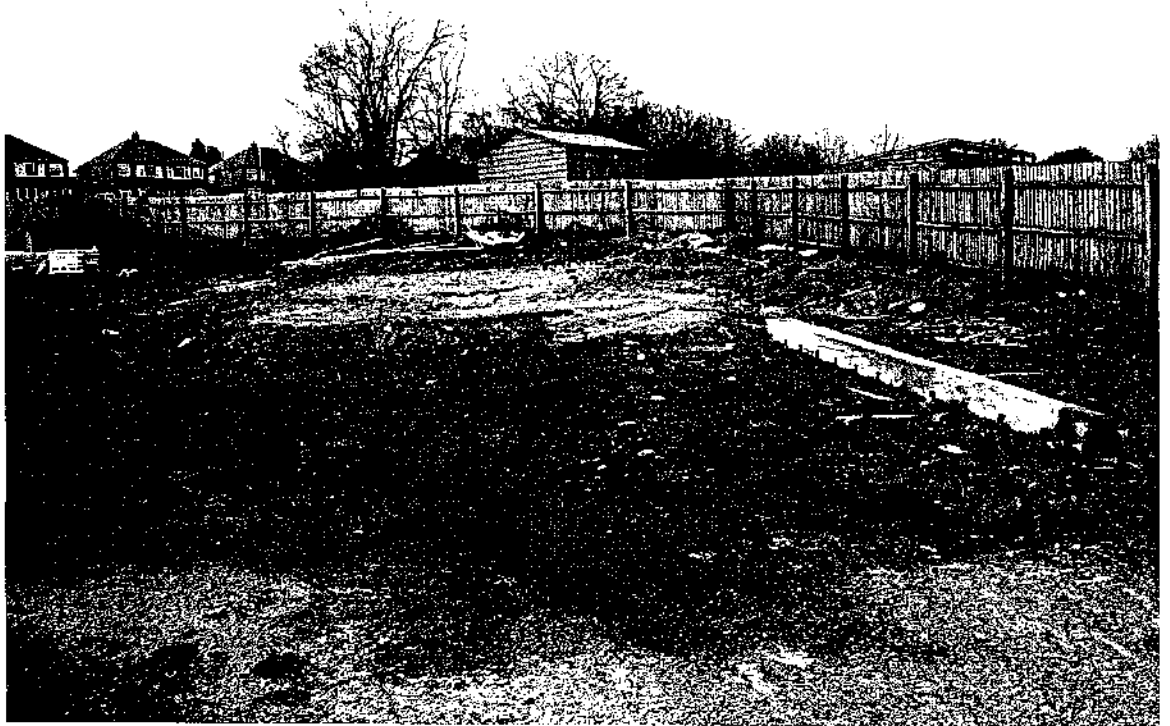


Plate 4: Surface beneath Building A

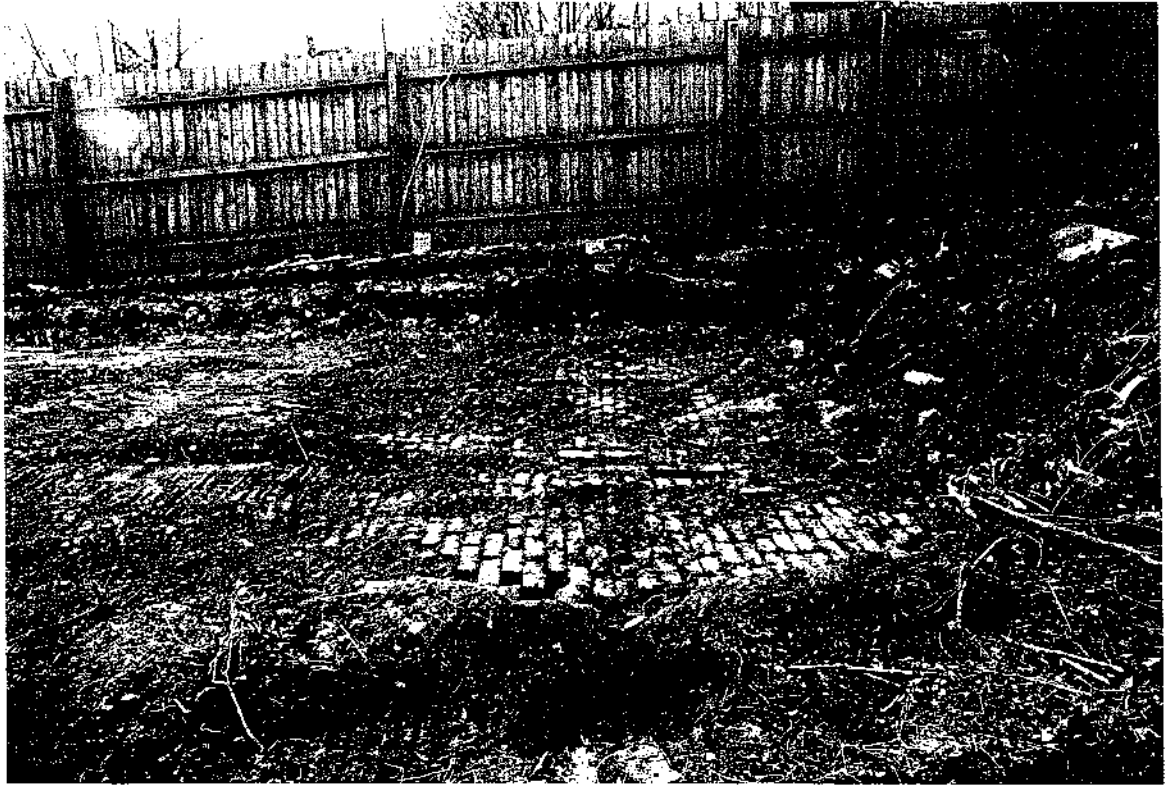


Plate 5: Clamped-brick surface beneath Building B

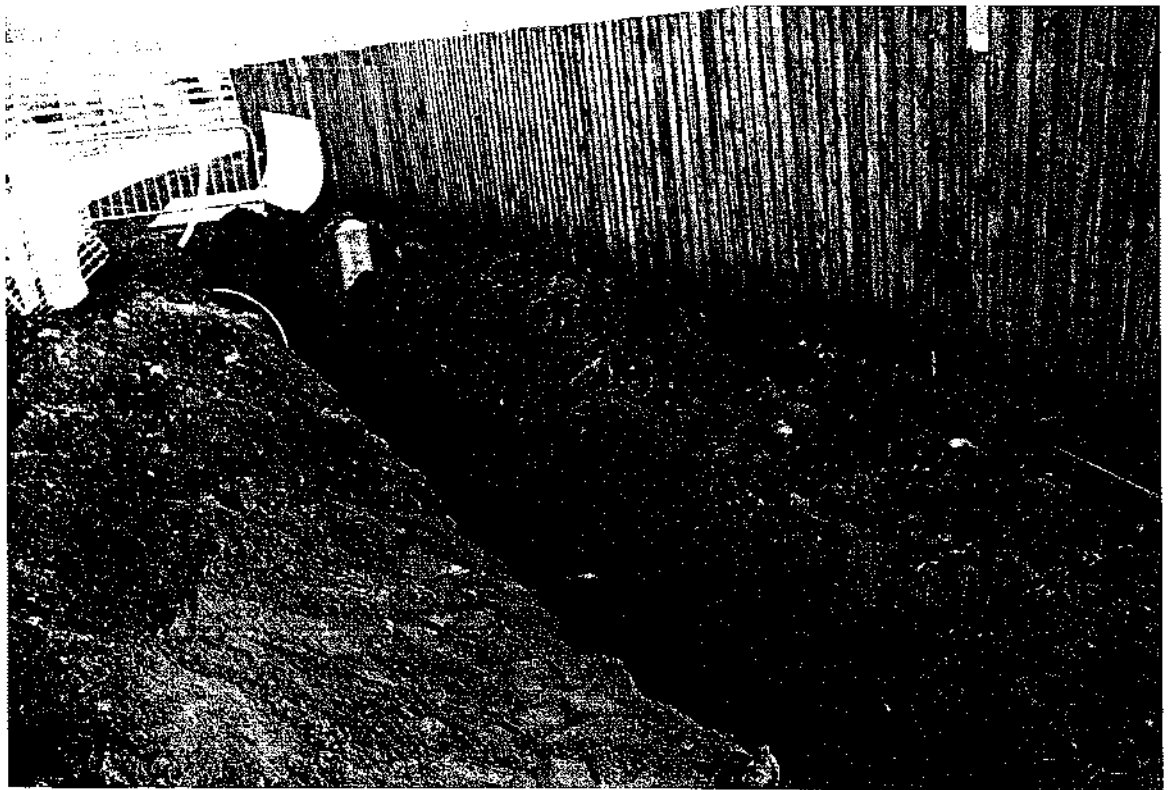


Plate 6: Section 1

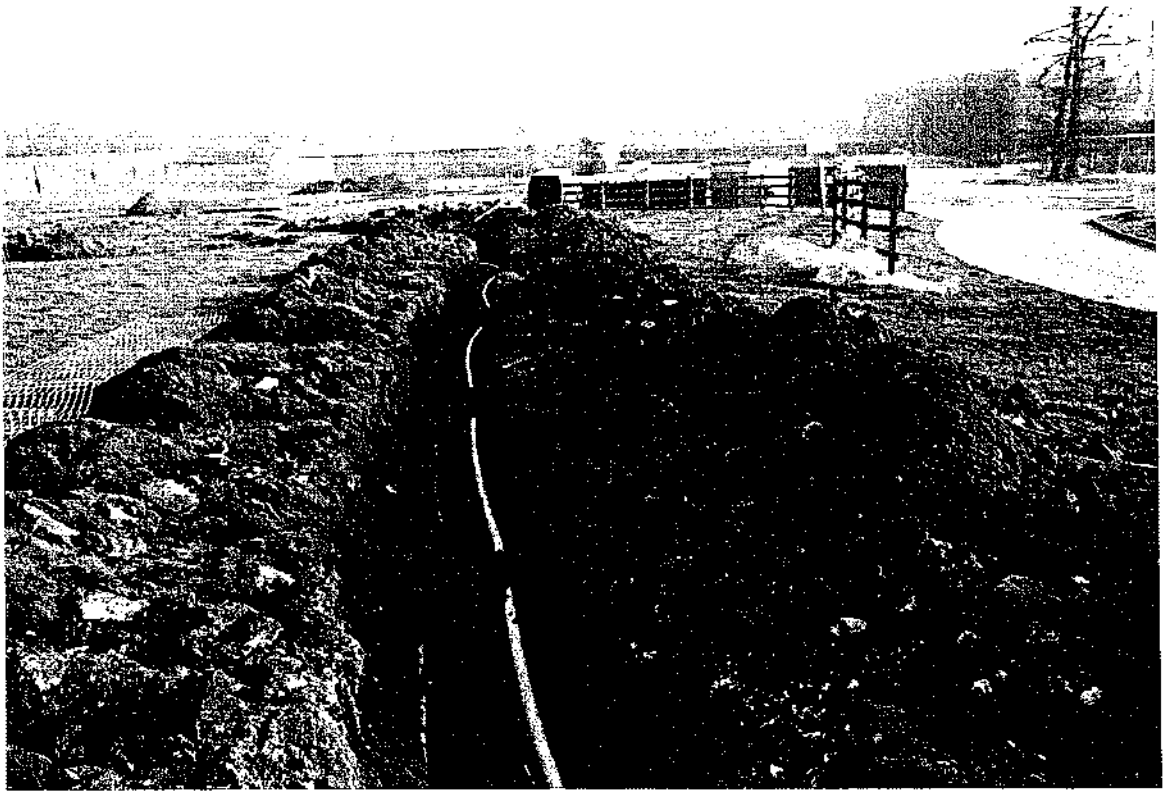


Plate 7: Section 2



Plate 8: Section 6