No 505

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Woodlands Park Road, Bournville, Birmingham, 1997 (SMR 20061/20016)

B.U.F.A.U.

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 505
January 1998

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Woodlands Park Road, Bournville, Birmingham, 1997 (SMR 20061/20016)

by
Cecily Spall

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/

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT WOODLANDS PARK ROAD,

BOURNVILLE, BIRMINGHAM, 1997

(SMR 20061/20016)

by
Cecily Spall

1.0 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the excavation of sewer pipe and box culvert trenches at Woodlands Park Road, Bournville, Birmingham (NGR SP 0346 8026). The excavation exposed the profile and southward extent of a Bronze Age burnt mound (Mound 1, SMR 20061). A test trench, to the west of Woodlands Park Road, within the assumed location of a second burnt mound identified no archaeological deposits. It seems likely that this mound exists to the north of Gallows Brook (Mound 2, SMR 20016). A former stream channel was also identified and its location suggested that Mound 1 was originally situated on the northern bank of the stream, and not, as is the case today, on the southern bank.

2.0 Introduction (Figures 1 and 2)

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief which was carried out on behalf of Severn Trent Water Limited during the construction of a box culvert unit and associated sewer pipe groundworks at Woodlands Park Road, Bournville, Birmingham (SP 0346 8026, Figures 1 and 2). The archaeological fieldwork was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in November and December 1997.

The watching brief was carried out in accordance with a design brief prepared by Dr Mike Hodder, Planning Archaeologist, Birmingham City Council (Hodder 1997) and a written specification prepared by BUFAU (Jones 1997). Guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994) were followed.

3.0 Site Description (Figure 2)

The site comprised open parkland, a few trees and a small brook (Gallows Brook) running east-west. Woodlands Park Road runs through this parkland at an approximate right angle to Gallows Brook. Visible in the south bank of Gallows Brook are two prehistoric burnt mounds, both identified during a stream walking exercise designed to identify burnt mounds in the West Midlands area (Hodder 1990,108). Mound 1 is now exposed for a length of approximately 30m and is 0.3-0.4m in height. Towards the eastern end of the north facing section is a possible pit (Fig. 4). Radiocarbon dating of this mound has produced a date of 3020 +/- 50 BP (SMR entry 20061). Mound 2 is only visible for a length of approximately 3.5 metres and survives to a height of 0.1-0.15m in the south bank stream section.

4.0 Objectives

The objectives of the archaeological watching brief were to monitor groundworks undertaken by the contractors and to record any archaeological deposits exposed by these works. It was not possible to preserve the prehistoric remains *in situ* so preservation by record was required.

Specific objectives were to:

1) preserve any archaeological deposits in written, drawn and photographic records

2) obtain samples of suitable deposits for palaeoenvironmental analysis and radiocarbon dating

5.0 Method

The objectives were achieved, initially, through a constant monitoring of groundworks; this was later reduced to a daily site inspection. Trench 1 was designed to hold a manhole, sewer pipe and box culvert. Continuous monitoring was carried out during excavation of this trench as it was situated in the area of Mound 1. A test trench (Trench 2) was designed to locate Mound 2 and was excavated by JCB in advance of groundworks planned for this specific area. A service trench (Trench 3) was excavated adjacent to the buildings to the south of Trench 2, and the box culvert trench was continued to the west of Woodlands Park Road (Trench 4). Trench 4 was not monitored continuously, since the test trench (Trench 2) had already been excavated in this area.

A mechanical excavator was used to remove all topsoil and to dig all trenches. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded and contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections and photographs which, together with recovered samples, form the site archive. This is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

6.0 Archaeological Results (Figures 2 and 3)

No artefacts were recovered during the watching brief or test excavation. However, samples were taken for potential palaeoenvironmental analysis and radiocarbon dating.

Trench 1 (Figures 2, 3a-e)
(L-shaped, comprising a manhole trench, a pipe trench and a box culvert trench, the latter aligned northeast - southwest, measuring 55m x 6.5m, and excavated to a depth of between 2m and 3m)

In the manhole trench (Fig. 2 insert; Fig. 3a), the natural red clay (1007) was sealed by a medium grey gleyed clay layer (1006), which was overlain by a lighter grey, clay layer (1005). Overlying this was a burnt mound deposit of heat shattered quartzite pebbles set in charcoal-enriched sandy silt (1004, F20061), approximately 0.5m thick at the deepest point, tapering out in the west facing section (Fig. 3d) and cut by a modern sewer trench (1009) in the northwest facing section (Fig. 3c). This deposit was overlain by two contexts (1002, 1008), both of which were sealed by a red clay levelling layer (1001). Within the sewer trench itself natural red clay subsoil (1007) was overlain by a layer of gleyed clay containing a large quantity of rounded pebbles (1011, Figs. 3b, 3e). This layer of clay and pebbles was overlain by a layer of red silt clay (1013) which was sealed by a buried topsoil (1010). The buried topsoil (1010) was overlain by the red clay levelling layer (1001), which was cut by a recent trench or pit (1012, F2) in the east facing section (Fig. 3e).

The northeast facing section of the manhole was not recorded because it was obscured by shoring. The southwest facing section was cut by the sewer trench (1009) which had removed any earlier archaeological deposits.

Trench 2 (not illustrated here)
(20m x 0.7m, aligned north east - south west, excavated to a depth of 1.5m)

The red clay subsoil (2006) was sealed by a layer of medium grey clay which contained a number of rounded pebbles (2005). This was overlain by a layer of red clay (2004) distinct from the layer above (2003) only by its compaction and silt content. These contexts lay under a deposit of reddish brown clay (2002). This was overlain by the topsoil and turf (2001).

Trench 3 (not illustrated here)
(38m x 0.7m, aligned north east - south west, excavated to a depth of 0.8m)

The red clay subsoil (4008) was cut at the western end of the trench by a modern service trench (F6, 4007), which in turn was cut by a pit (F5, Fig. 2), 1.8m wide, which contained a series of fills (4006, 4005, 4004, 4003). Overlying these features was a deposit of loose sandy silt containing stones and clay patches (4002), which was sealed by a layer of topsoil (4001).

Trench 4 (not illustrated here)
(Box culvert trench - observed for a length of approximately 35m)

In addition to those layers observed in Trench 2 (see above), a pit was recorded in the south facing section of the trench (F7, Fig. 2), cutting the reddish brown clay (2002). The pit, approximately 1.7m wide and 0.95m deep, was filled with a mixed silty clay (2008) containing lenses of charcoal and sandy silt and was sealed by topsoil (2001).

7.0 The Streambank Section (Figures 4a-b)

Both mounds were visible in the stream bank section. Mound 1 measured nearly 30m in length and 0.3m-0.4m in height. A small pit was identified towards the eastern end of this mound (F4, 3003, Fig. 4a). The lowest visible layer, above the stream flow, was a light yellow-brown clay (3005) which was overlain by a clean, dark brown, medium silt (3004). Cutting this layer was the possible pit (F4), which contained heat- shattered quartzite stone and charcoal-enriched silt (3003). The pit was overlain by a medium brown silt (3002) which, in turn, lay underneath the topsoil (3001). In other areas the stream bank had suffered a collapse, partially due to the groundworks close to the southern bank.

Mound 2 was only visible for a length of approximately 3m and survived to a height of approximately 0.1m-0.15m (Fig. 4b). As was the case with Mound 1, the first visible layer was a light, yellow-grey clay (3009) overlain immediately by a medium brown silt containing heat-shattered quartzite pebbles (3008, F20016). This was overlain by a light, pinky-brown clay (3007) which lay underneath a red brown-clay layer (3006) possibly corresponding to the levelling layer in the nearby Trench 2 (2002).

8.0 Discussion

The excavations in Trench 1 revealed the former stream channel (1011) to the south of the present day channel, and evidence of the extent of Mound 1. The tapering-out of the burnt mound deposit (1004) in the west facing section of the manhole trench (Fig. 3d) represents the southward limit of the mound, some 7.5m south of the present day stream bank. The continuation of this edge could not be identified in the east facing section due to the presence of the modern pit (F2). Previous magnetometer and resistivity surveys of the mound have demonstrated that it was sub-circular in plan (Barfield, pers. comm.), which is not unusual for such mounds (Hodder, 1990, 110).

Parallels can be drawn with other burnt mounds that have been investigated in the area, for example the nearby Cob Lane site, which was also found in association with a former stream channel (Barfield and Hodder 1989, 5; Hodder 1990, 106). However, at Cob Lane, a square clay and timber lined pit was found in association with a hearth, whilst at Woodlands Park Road Mound 1, apart from the possible pit identified in the stream bank section, no associated features were exposed by the groundworks. It is

likely that such features are to be found away from the core of the mound, possibly facing onto the former stream channel as was the case at Cob Lane.

No evidence for the second burnt mound (Mound 2) was recovered during the excavation. Neither the test excavation trench (Trench 2) nor the subsequent box culvert trench (Trench 4) contained any deposits that could be associated with the feature in the streambank section. Originally it was thought that the greater part of this mound would have lain underneath the south bank of Gallows Brook. However, the results of the watching brief suggest either that the mound lies beneath the northern bank, or that the feature visible in the streambank section is all that remains after subsequent stream channels have washed through the mound. The former stream channel was much wider than the present-day Gallows Brook and appears to have meandered a great deal more, as would be expected in such a flat area. The present, very straight course of the brook in the area of the mounds is engineered, and this would also have caused sections of both mounds to have been lost.

9.0 References

Buckley, V. and Hodder, M.A. 1997 ***"Bronze Age Burnt Mounds in Britain and Ireland: form, location, distribution, date and function"***, paper delivered at SAA meeting, Nashville, April 1997 (typescript)

Barfield, L.H. and Hodder, M.A. 1989 'Burnt mounds in the West Midlands: surveys and excavations', in ***Midlands Prehistory,*** (ed) A, Gibson, ***British Archaeological Reports, British Series 204***, pp 5-13

Barfield, L.H. and Hodder, M.A. 1991 ***Burnt Mounds and Hot Stone Technology***, papers from the Second International Burnt Mound Conference, Sandwell, 12th-14th October 1991 (Sandwell)

Hodder, M.A. 1990 'Burnt Mounds in the English West Midlands', in ***Burnt Offerings: International Contributions to Burnt Mound Archaeology***, (ed) V. Buckley (Dublin)

Hodder, M.A. 1997 Design brief for archaeological watching brief on sewer pipe trench, Woodlands Park Road, Birmingham (typescript)

Jones, A. 1997 Written Scheme of Investigation, archaeological watching brief, Woodlands Park, Bournville, Birmingham (typescript) BUFAU

10.0 Acknowledgements

This project was sponsored by Severn Trent Water Limited; thanks are due to Dr Mike Hodder, Planning Archaeologist, Birmingham City Council for advice and assistance. Thanks are also due to John O'Leary, Civil Engineer, Birmingham City Council and to Brennan and Murphy for their help and co-operation on site. The archaeological watching brief was carried out by Cecily Spall and Lucie Dingwall. The report was prepared by Cecily Spall and edited by Catharine Mould and Simon Buteux. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds.

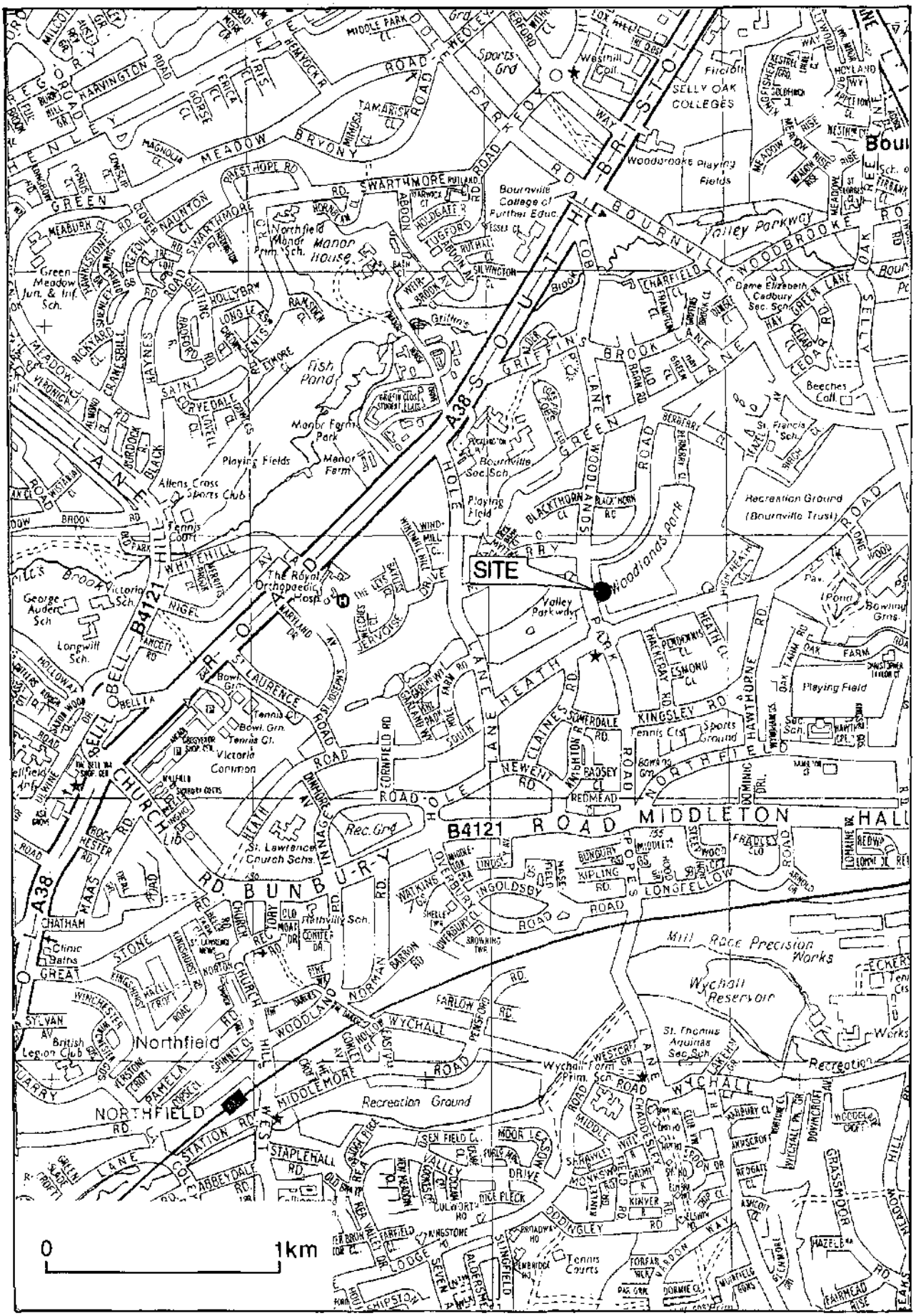

SITE
Woodlands Park
Valley Parkway
B4121
A38
Northfield
Recreation Ground
0
1km

Fig.1

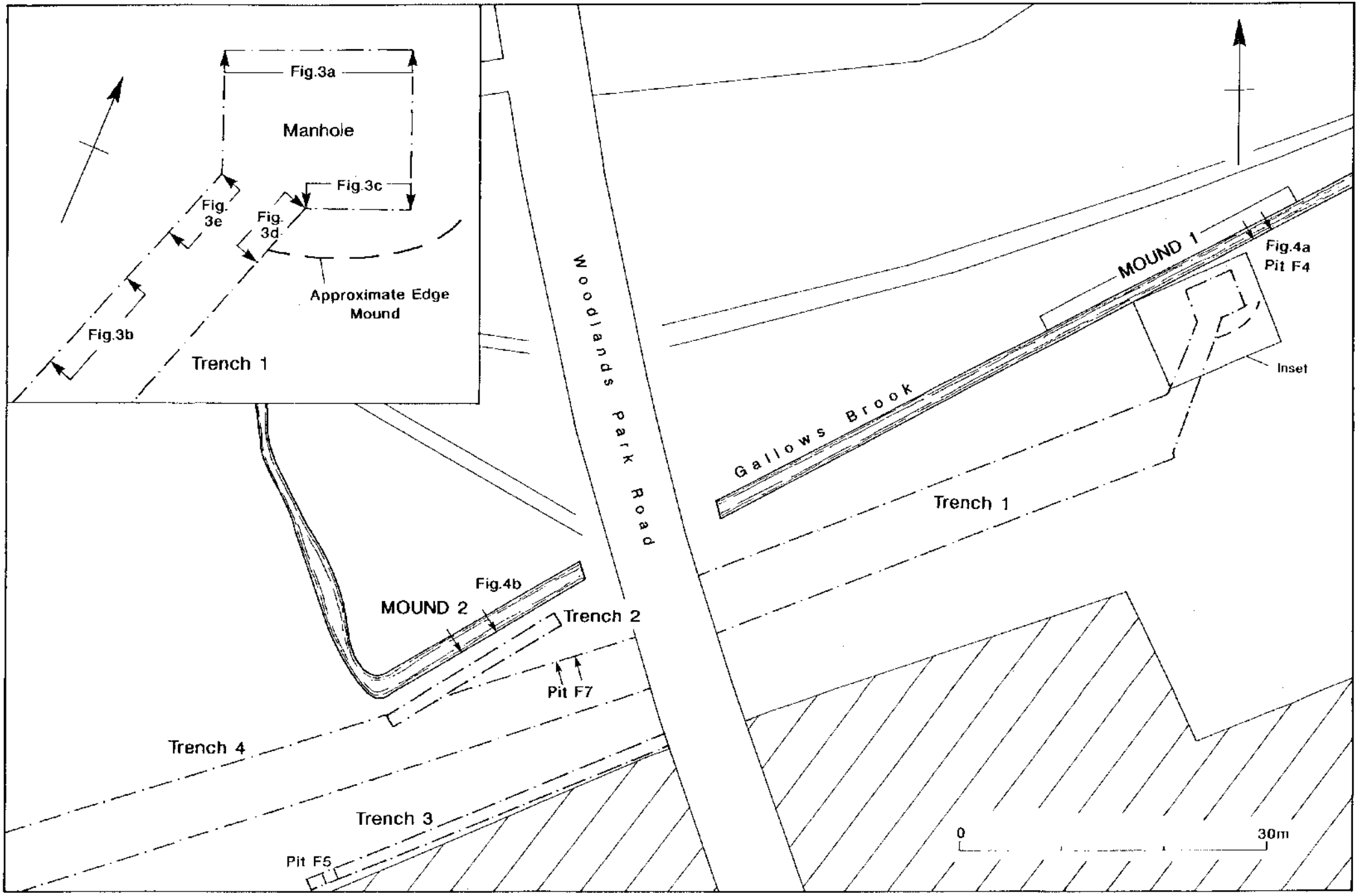
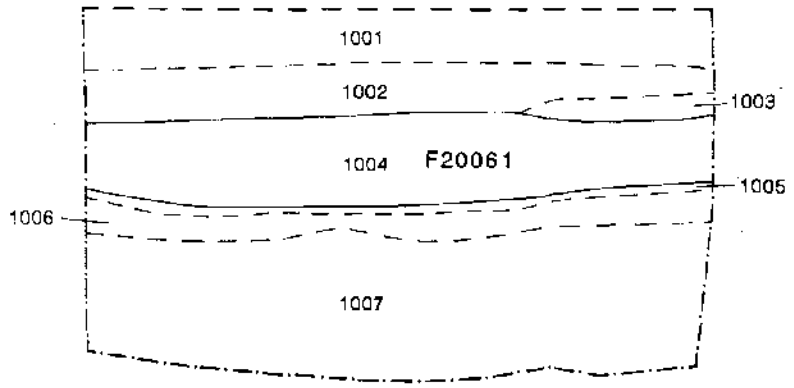


Fig.3a
Manhole
Fig.3c
Fig. 3e
Fig. 3d
Approximate Edge Mound
Fig.3b
Trench 1
Woodlands Park Road
MOUND 1
Fig.4a
Pit F4
Inset
Gallows Brook
Trench 1
Fig.4b
MOUND 2
Trench 2
Pit F7
Trench 4
Trench 3
Pit F5
0
30m

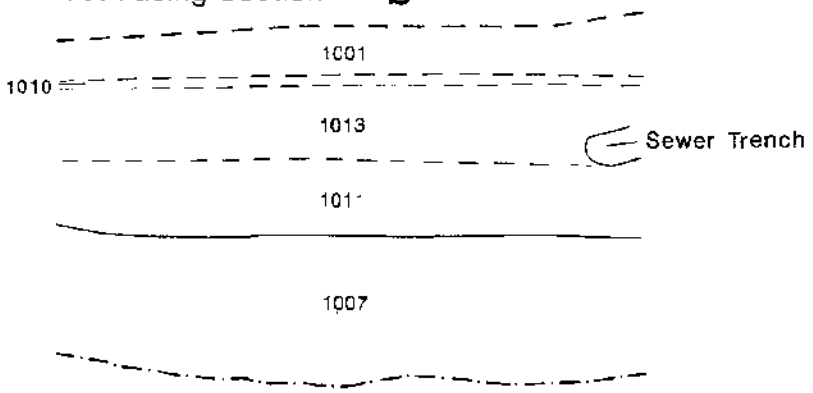
Fig.2

Trench 1

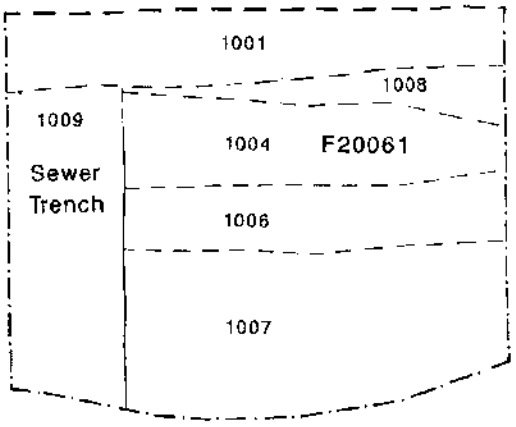
South East Facing Section a



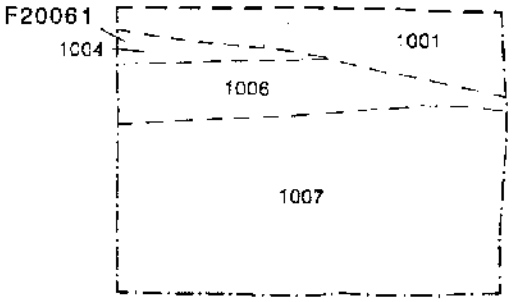
East Facing Section b



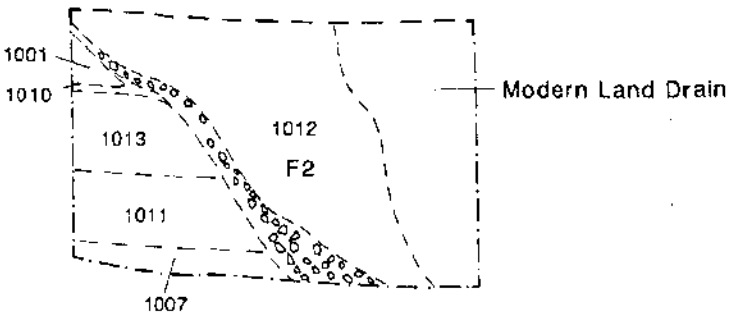
North West Facing Section c



West Facing Section d



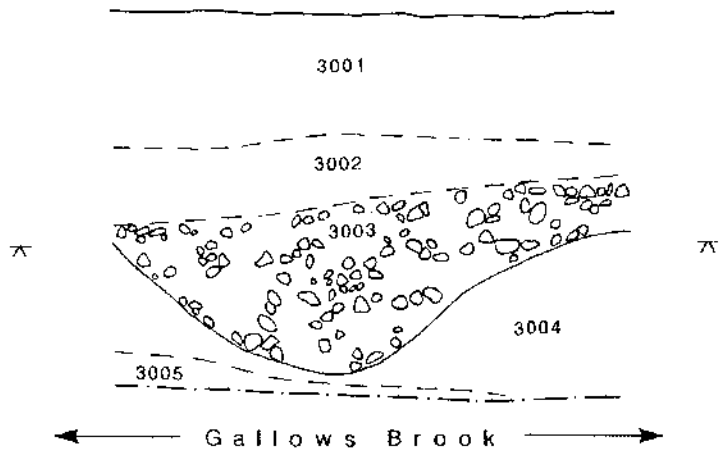
East Facing Section e



0 2m

Fig.3

Pit F4 North Facing Section a



Mound 2 North Facing Section b

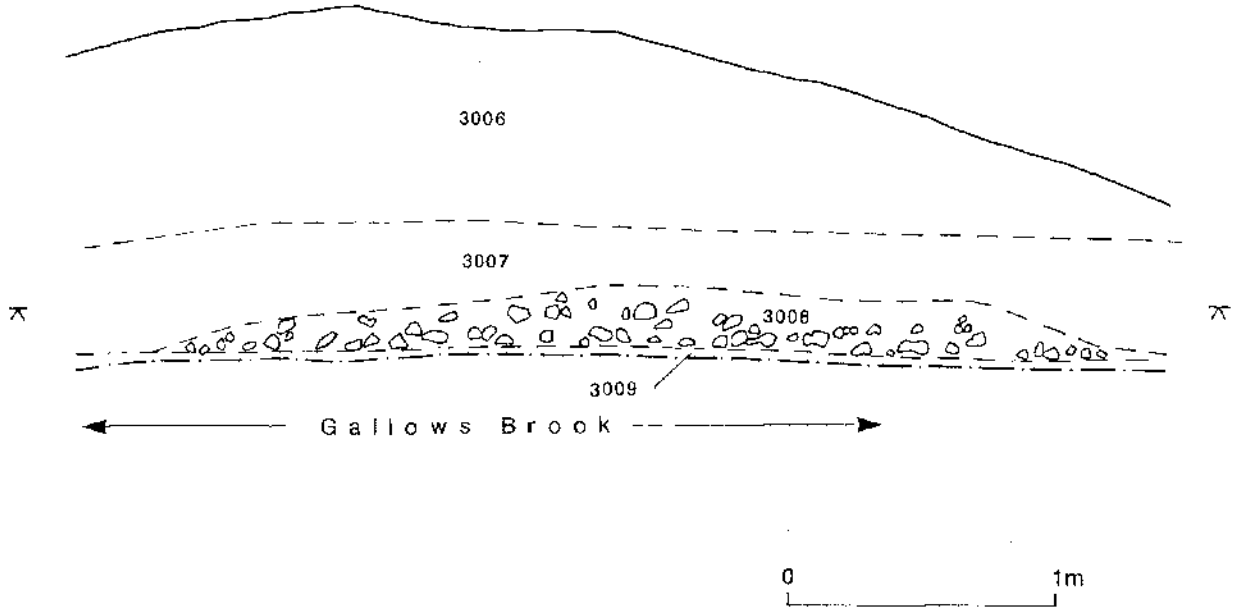


Fig.4