

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**An Archaeological Watching  
Brief  
of the Perry Hall to  
Gravelly Sewer, Perry Barr,  
Birmingham**

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



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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**An Archaeological Watching Brief of the Perry Hall to  
Gravelly Sewer, Perry Barr, Birmingham**

by  
S.J.Linnane

*For further information please contact:*  
Simon Butcux, Iain Ferris or Gwilym Hughes (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.bufau.bham.ac.uk>

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# **An Archaeological Watching Brief of the Perry Hall to Gravelly Sewer, Perry Barr, Birmingham**

**By S.J.Linnane**

## **1.0 Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was carried out between April and September 1998 during the construction of the Perry Hall to Gravelly sewer. Two areas of interest were identified in a previous desk-based assessment: the possible line of the Roman road, Ryknild Street, and the post-medieval Holford Mill. In the event, no evidence of the Roman road (Manhole No.15) or the mill pond of Holford Mill (Manhole No.13) was identified. However, features associated with possible 18th century industrial activity were discovered in the vicinity of Manhole No. 15. A record of the stratigraphy was made.*

## **2.0 Introduction**

This report outlines the results of a watching brief carried out between April and September 1998 on the line of Perry Hall to Gravelly sewer, Perry Barr, Birmingham. The sewer pipeline was largely created by tunneling and consequently little disturbance to archaeological deposits would have occurred. However, in some areas access to the tunnel was essential and a series of manholes and associated works compounds were constructed. An archaeological desk based assessment (Moscrop 1997) of the pipeline route had identified two particular areas of interest: the site of the post-medieval Holford Mill (SMR 03209) and the possible route of the Roman road, Ryknild Street. It recommended that these areas be monitored archaeologically with a contingency for salvage recording (*ibid.*, 4) if the expected deposits were encountered. These recommendations were approved by the Birmingham City Planning Archaeologist, Dr. Michael Hodder. The groundwork was carried out by Charles Haswell and Partners Ltd., on behalf of Seven Trent Water Ltd. Birmingham University Field Archaeological Unit was commissioned to monitor these excavations to assess the depth, date, extent and nature of any archaeological deposits encountered.

## **3.0 The Site (NGR SO 063 913 to SO 080 916) (Figs. 1 & 2)**

The pipeline route runs from Perry Hall Playing Fields (NGR SO 063 913), in the west, in a general easterly direction to just east of the River Tame and west of the M6 Motorway (NGR SO 080 916). The pipeline runs through the built up area of Perry Barr and the industrial zone of Wilton, with recreational land in between.

#### 4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

This is only a brief summary of the archaeological and historical background of the area affected by the pipeline. For a more detailed account see the desk-based assessment (Moscrop 1997).

The earliest evidence of activity in the area comes from a spread of Romano-British kiln debris and pottery, dated to the late 1st and late 2nd century A.D., discovered on the southern side of Wellington Road (Hughes 1959). No associated occupational evidence was identified and a series of archaeological test pits excavated adjacent to the 1959 discoveries provided evidence of extensive 19th and 20th century ground disturbance (Ferris 1993). Two possible routes of the Roman road, Ryknild Street, (Moscrop 1997, 2; Figs.2 & 3.), cross this area, but no evidence of the road itself has been identified from previous archaeological work (Jones 1993) and it is possible that development has destroyed the road (*ibid.*).

The sites of two mills are recorded in the vicinity of the pipeline, Perry Mill (SMR 03208) and Holford Mill (SMR 03209). Perry Mill was fed from the River Tame, by the 'Old Mill Race' (SMR 20414), and is referred to in the Domesday Book (Moscrop 1997, 2). The mill appears on an estate map dated to 1720 and Botham's 1794 map of Perry Barr. It is recorded in the SMR as demolished in 1890, although cartographic evidence suggests that buildings survived on this site as late as 1938 (*ibid.*). Holford Mill is recorded as a blade grinding mill until 1855, when it was converted for gun barrel boring (*ibid.*, 3). The mill and its mill pond are depicted on Botham's map of 1794 and remains of the mill buildings are noted as late as 1956, in use as offices in a larger industrial complex (*ibid.*)

#### 5.0 Objectives

The principal objective of the watching brief was to identify and record any significant archaeological deposits prior to their destruction during the construction of the sewer. More specifically, there were two particular areas to be monitored:

1. **Manhole No. 13.** Where the sewer proceeds under the River Tame, an access point was designed and this lies in the vicinity of the site of Holford Mill (SMR 03209) and its mill pond.
2. **Manhole No.15.** On the suspected course of the Roman Road, Ryknild Street.

#### 6.0 Method

The excavation of the manholes and their associated compounds was monitored by suitably qualified archaeologists from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. Any significant archaeological deposits were to be excavated by hand and recorded on pro-forma record cards supplemented by scale plans, section drawings

and photographs, where appropriate. All spoil was scanned for finds and these were collected for future examination. Where no archaeological deposit was identified the stratigraphy was recorded and photographed. These records comprise the site archive, which, at the time of writing, is currently stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

## **7.0 The Results**

### **7.1 Manhole No. 13**

This site is located on the west bank of the River Tame.

The site for this manhole and its associated compound was identified as being within the probable location of the mill buildings or mill-pond of Holford Mill.

The ground had been heavily disturbed and the banks of the nearby River Tame have been canalised and probably raised in the recent past in order to control potential flooding. In the initial clearance and preparation of the compound no evidence of early deposits was encountered, although an exploratory trench excavated to the west of the manhole site, along the line of the sewer tunnel, uncovered the foundations of a substantial industrial complex only recently demolished.

The excavation of the manhole shaft was undertaken by machine and again the progress was closely observed but, apart from numerous finds of the 20th century, no evidence of the mill pond, its silting or associated structures was observed.

### **7.2 Manhole No.15**

The first task of the contractors was to construct an access road to the site compound from Holford Road. The topsoil was removed to a depth of c.0.3m along the course of the track which was c.5m wide. On either side of the track a series of pits was excavated at 3m intervals for the erection of fence posts. These pits were generally 1m by 0.6m by 0.9m deep. The general stratigraphy exposed within the pit sections consisted of a topsoil c.0.2m to 0.4m in depth, overlying a subsoil consisting of an orange-brown sand and loam mix with inclusions of sub-rounded pebbles. This overlay the natural, yellow sand, which had pebble inclusions. Generally, no features were exposed during this operation, although at the southern end of the trackway a possible ditch was revealed in section. Pottery within its backfill was dated to the 18th century (Fig. 4, F5).

The site compound was surrounded with timber panel fencing in the same manner as the trackway. The post pits were positioned at 3m intervals around the perimeter. All of the pits were examined in the brief time that they were open but none produced structural evidence and there were no significant finds from their fills.

Within the site compound, the area where turf existed (the centre of the site was already tarmaced ) was stripped to a depth of c.3m and the surface backfilled with hard core to provide a metalled standing area. This work was accomplished in a

methodical manner with the backfilling taking place rapidly after each strip had been excavated by machine. Generally, there were no archaeological deposits visible because the machining stopped short of excavating to the natural sand surface. However, to the south of the site, a series of apparently connected features were revealed.

*Feature 1.* A compact surface consisting of pebbles up to c.0.15m in diameter with the occasional lump of iron slag intermingled. No proper boundaries were observed for this spread of cobbles.

*Feature 2.* A well, constructed of unmortared brick was uncovered and recorded by the site contractors but had been covered over before archaeological recording took place

*Features 3 and 4.* Two parallel ditches were observed running from the north-east to the south-west. The ditches were c.1m wide and c.3m apart. A section was cut through one ditch revealing that the sides sloped at approximately 45 degrees and that the ditch was c.0.7m deep. The fill consisted of a medium brown sandy loam which did not appear to have been the product of gradual silting.

The limited nature and time allowed to investigate these features meant that little interpretation can be made of their relationship to one another and their potential usage and date.

### **7.3 The Finds**

The finds consisted of a sparse collection of post-medieval pottery collected from disturbance of the topsoil. The date range ran from the mid- to late-17th century to the present.

The only other finds of significance consisted of large lumps of iron slag and glassy furnace slag associated with the cobbled surface F1 and the fill of ditch F3. Samples of these materials were retained for future inspection. The presence of such material does not, necessarily, indicate the existence of iron smelting on the site as the material could easily have been transported to the site from elsewhere.

### **8.0 Assessment of the Archaeological Importance of the Site**

Although the cartographic evidence indicated the possibility of the survival of important archaeological deposits, there was no evidence of such features. This may have been because frequently the machining was sufficiently shallow to have allowed archaeological features and deposits to remain undisturbed and unrecorded. It seems probable that the search for the line of Roman Ryknild Street must be concentrated on the alternative route proposed in the desktop survey (Moscrop 1997) which is to be found to the west of the area investigated.

The discovery of, previously unknown, industrial activity on the site is of interest and is worthy of further documentary research whereby its nature and the period within which it occurred might be ascertained. The limited nature of the view obtained does not allow any interpretation as to its usage at this stage. The fact that no structures are recorded on the site in Botham's map of 1794 would suggest that the site had reverted to agricultural use by this time.

## **9.0 Acknowledgements**

The watching brief was undertaken by S.J.Linnane, G.A.Coates and L.R.Jones from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The work was commissioned by Seven Trent Water Ltd. Thanks go to all staff of Charles Haswell and Partners Ltd. and Murphy Engineering Contractors who were helpful throughout. The work was monitored by Dr.M.Hodder, on behalf of Birmingham City Council. The diagrams were prepared by J.Halsted and the report was edited by G.Hughes.

## **10.0 References**

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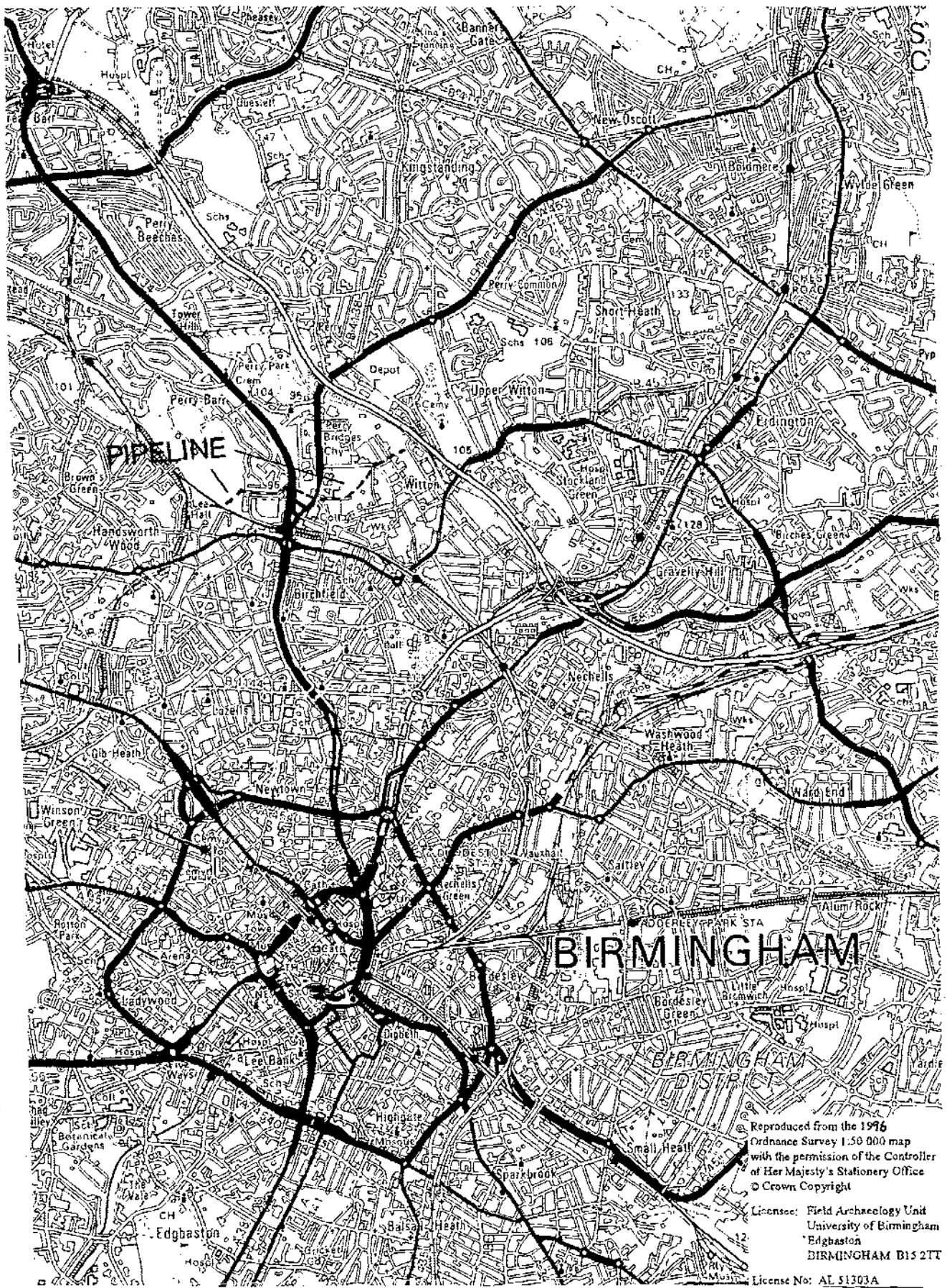
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## FIGURES



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Figure 1



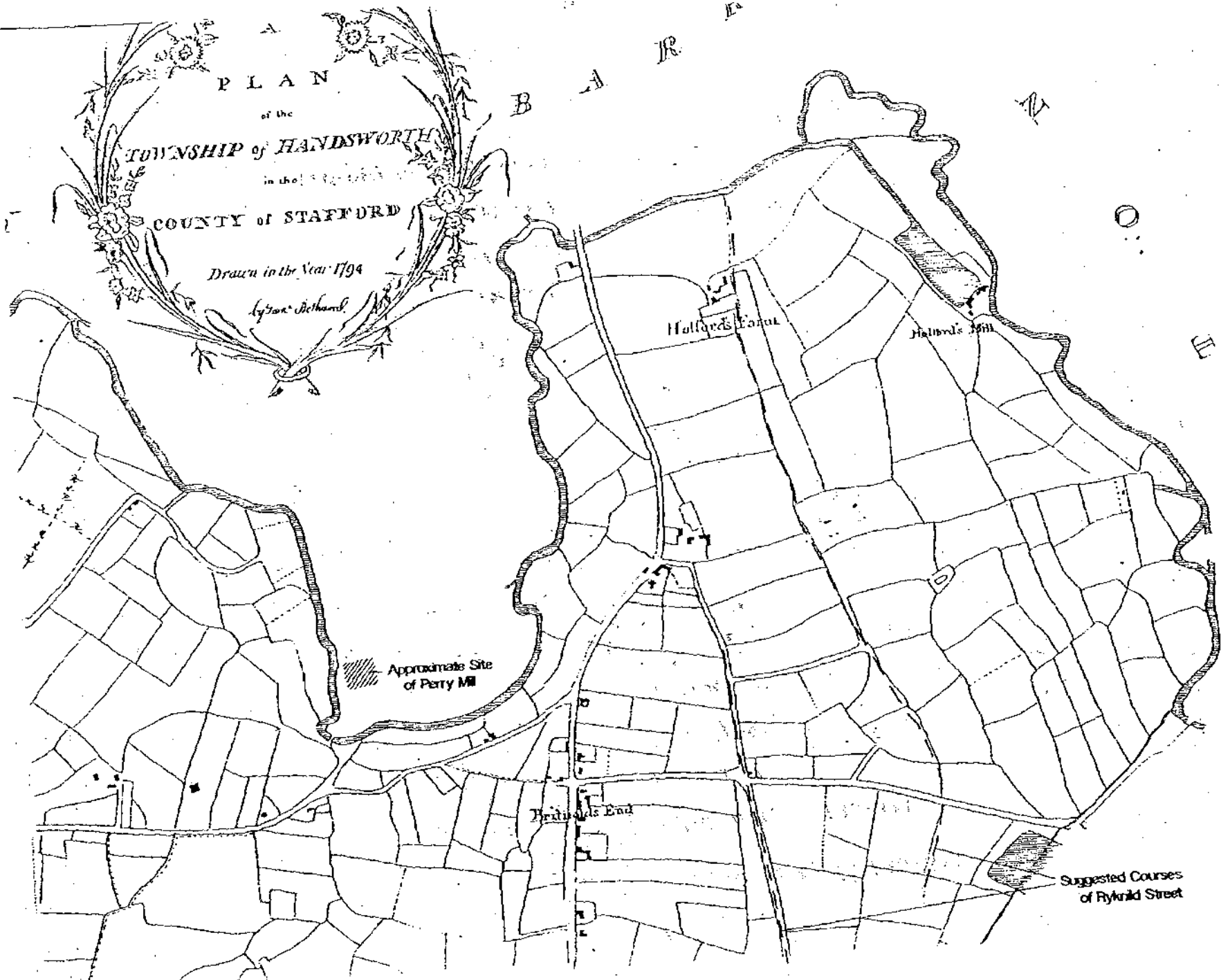


Figure 3

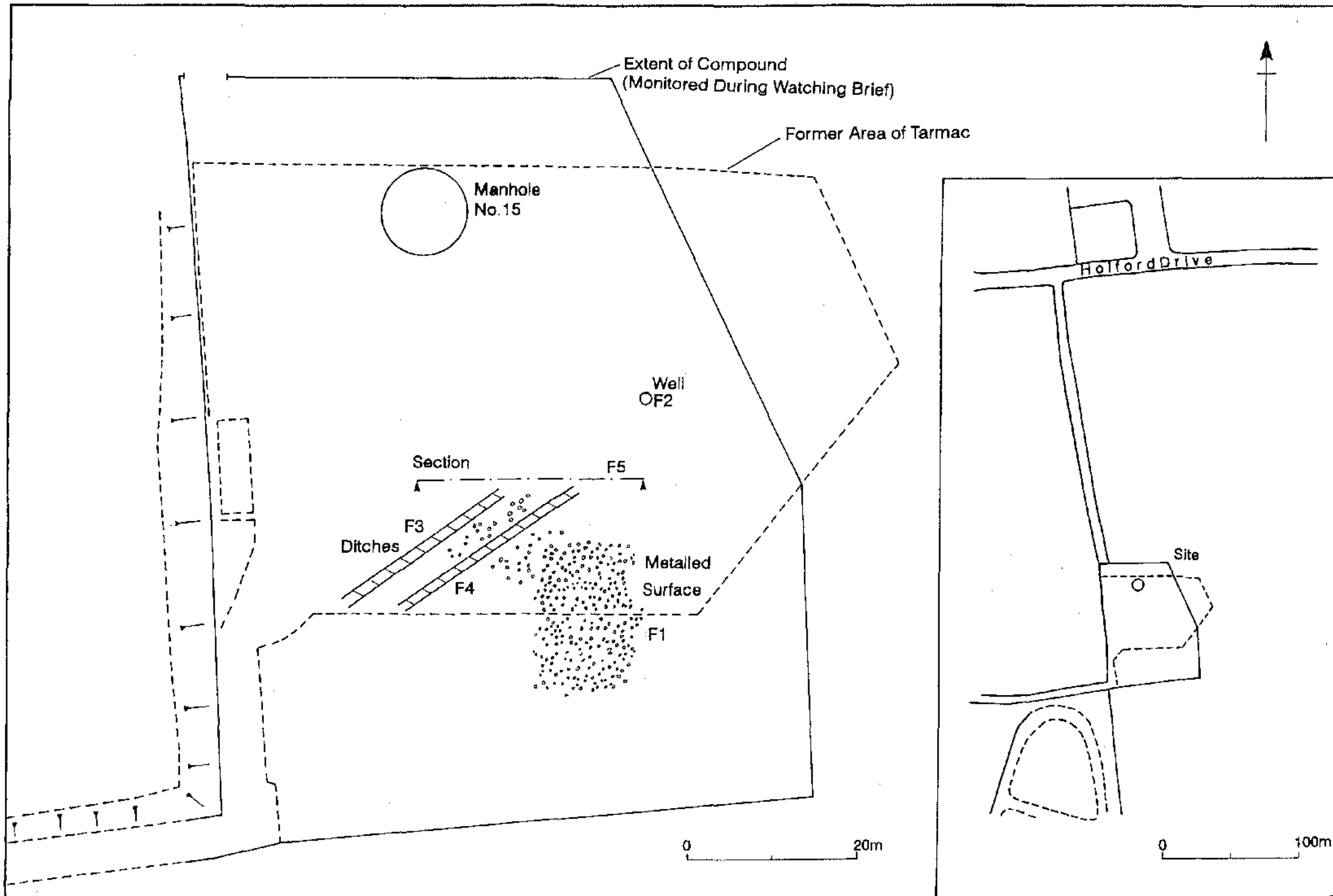


Figure 4