563

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

Springfield Road/Ox Leys Road, Birmingham (SP 147955):

An Archaeological Watching Brief

B.U.F.A.U.

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 563
Month 1996

Springfield Road/Ox Leys Road, Birmingham (SP 147955): An Archaeological Watching Brief

by
S. J. Linnane

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/

Springfield Road/Ox Leys Road, Birmingham (SP 147955): An Archaeological Watching Brief

by S.J.Linnane

1.0 Introduction

This report outlines the results of a watching brief intended to record any archaeological deposits identified during the course of the excavation of a new sewage pipeline near Springfield Road and Ox Leys Road, Sutton Coldfield (Fig. 1). The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in May and June 1998 and was commissioned by Birmingham City Council according to a brief prepared by the Planning Archaeologist (see appendix).

The area examined was the course of a new sewage pipeline running approximately north to south on either side of the Ox Leys Road, shortly before its junction with Springfield Road in Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham (SP 147955). The pipeline extended approximately 80m to the north of Ox Leys Road and 300m to the south (Fig. 2). The trench line runs to the west of the Langley Brook. The area of disturbance was of potential importance due to the close proximity of a prehistoric burnt mound situated to the north of this site and recorded on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR 20318). Burnt mounds are low heaps of heat-shattered stone pebbles and charcoal and are frequently located on the banks of rivers or streams. A number of burnt mound sites from the West Midlands area have been dated to the Bronze Age (Barfield and Hodder 1989 and 1991). The likelihood of similar features occurring within the area to be trenched was considered high.

2.0 Aims

The objectives of the watching brief was to monitor groundworks undertaken by the contractors and to record any archaeological deposits exposed by these works.

3.0 Methods

The groundworks involved the stripping of the topsoil from a 10m wide easement and the subsequent excavation of pipe trenches 1m wide and 1m deep. A site inspection was made following the topsoil strip and areas of potential archaeological interest were recorded and photographed. Subsequent site visits were made during the excavation of the pipe trench through these potential areas of archaeological interest.

All the topsoil deposited on either side of the excavated area was examined for artefacts. Only a small number of late post-medieval pottery fragments were found and these were discarded.

4.0 Results

Within the pipe trench, the natural red/brown clay with lenses of pale blue/grey clay was identified at a depth of 0.4m. This was overlain by red/brown sandy subsoil with a slight clay content up to 0.1m thick and 0.3m of buff to white sandy subsoil up to 0.3m deep. Two areas of dark loam were observed overlying this subsoil following the removal of the overlying topsoil for the pipeline easement (Fig. 2, F1 and F2).

F1 - This situated to the north of Ox Leys Road, some 12m to the north of the hedge line which bounds the field. It consisted of a spread of loam and charcoal with some pebble inclusions. When the deposit was examined in section it consisted of a deposit up to 0.15m deep. Charcoal and larger pebbles were seen to be sparse within a grey loam matrix, although there were concentrations of small pebbles (up to 0.02m in diameter). The deposit extended for approximately 3.0m along the eastern side of the section. A stake-hole measuring 0.03m wide and 0.15m deep was observed cutting the natural below this deposit.

F2 - This was situated in the southern portion of the trench 5m south of the point where the brook becomes piped. The feature consisted of a area of black loam approximately 1m in diameter with ash charcoal and iron slag inclusions. The deposit was effectively washed away by heavy rain and flooding leaving only a few small fragments of iron slag which have been retained.

Areas of burning occurred close to the hedge lines on either side of the Ox Leys road but these areas contained modern glass and metal objects.

5.0 Conclusions

F1 seemed most encouraging but the general consistency of the deposit did not appear to meet the accepted criterion for a burnt mound deposit. The material contained too much loam, too little charcoal and pebbles and there was little evidence for burning. It may be possible that the spread of material lies at the edge of a deposit which has been spread by ploughing activity thus reducing the density of its components. If this were the case then the centre of the feature would lie to the east of the present area. A sample was retained and will form part of the archive for further examination.

Despite the lack of finds F2 may probably best be interpreted as a dump of post-medieval iron-working debris. A small sample of the iron slag has been retained and will form a part of the archive for further reference.

6.0 Acknowledgements

This watching brief was undertaken by S.J.Linnane for Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. Thanks are due to Mr. K. Surti of Birmingham City Council, the Project Leader, to Britam Construction, the contractors and to Dr. M.Hodder,

archaeologist for Birmingham City Council. The drawings are by J.Halsted and this report was edited by E.G.Hughes for BUFAU.

7.0 References

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

Appendix

Brief for archaeological watching brief on sewer pipe trench, Springfield Road/Ox Leys Road, Birmingham.

Birmingham City Council
Department of Planning and Architecture

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE
Brief for *Archaeological watching brief* on sewer pipe trench, Springfield Road/ Ox Leys Road, Birmingham(SP 147955)

1.Summary
The excavation of trenches to lay sewer pipes alongside a stream in agricultural land on each side of Oxleys Road, Birmingham, may expose and disturb archaeological remains which may include prehistoric burnt mounds and associated features. This brief is for an archaeological watching brief to observe and record archaeological features exposed by the works.

2.Site location and description
The location known archaeological sites and the position of the sewer pipe trench are indicated on the attached plan. The site is currently arable, under a ceral crop.

3.Extent of construction works
(i)On the north side Oxleys Road, a new sewer is to be laid for about 80m from an existing manhole and alongside an existing sewer pipe trench which runs along the west side of Langley Brook.
(ii)To the south of Oxleys Road a new sewer is to be laid along the west side of Langley Brook for about 300m.
The works involve stripping topsoil over a width of 10m along the new trench line followed by excavation of the trench itself.

4.Existing archaeological information
A burnt mound(SMR 20318) has been recorded on the west side of Langley Brook to the north of the existing manhole. It was recorded during fieldwalking as a concentration of heat-shattered stones on a ploughed field surface. Worked flint has also been found in fieldwalking in the vicinity of the trench line.

By analogy with other burnt mounds in the Birmingham area, there may be other burnt mounds on the Langley Brook close to that already known. They are likely to be composed wholly of heat-shattered stones and charcoal. There are likely to be one or more pits, a hearth area and stakeholes under the mounds. There may be former stream channels alongside the mounds, which may contain palaeoenvironmental evidence. The mounds may have been established on a colluvial deposit which could seal remains of earlier activity on the site. There may be other remains of other structures associated with the burnt mound, and it has been suggested that settlements associated with burnt mounds might be up to 50m from the mound itself. There may also be other archaeological remains on the line of the trench.

5.Requirements for work
Topsoil stripping and the excavation of the trenches may expose and disturb archaeological remains, therefore groundworks must be observed and and any archaeological features exposed must be recorded. Adequate time must be allowed for archaeological recording.

6.Stages of work
(i)An appropriately skilled and qualified archaeologist is to be on site while topsoil is stripped. All stripped areas are to be observed and any archaeological deposits exposed are to be recorded by written description, drawing and photography. Suitable deposits are to be sampled for paleoenvironmental analysis and suitable deposits are to be sampled for radiocarbon dating. No excavation is to be undertaken beyond cleaning exposed deposits for better definition and the removal of samples. Artifacts are to be retrieved as they are revealed. All finds are to be washed, marked and bagged at the end of the watching brief and any remedial conservation undertaken.
(ii)Where archaeological features or suspected archaeological features are observed during topsoil stripping, the excavation of the sewer pipe trench is to be observed by an appropriately skilled and qualified archaeologist and any archaeological deposits exposed

are to be recorded by written description, drawing and photography. Suitable deposits are to be sampled for paleoenvironmental analysis and suitable deposits are to be sampled for radiocarbon dating. No excavation is to be undertaken beyond cleaning exposed deposits for better definition and the removal of samples. Artifacts are to be retrieved as they are revealed. All finds are to be washed, marked and bagged at the end of the watching brief and any remedial conservation undertaken.

7.Staffing
The archaeological watching brief is to be carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct, Standards, Guidelines and practices of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and all staff are to be suitably qualified and experienced for their roles in the project. It is recommended that the project be undertaken by an archaeological organisation registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists and that the project be under the direct supervision of a Member or Associate Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

8.Monitoring
The archaeological watching brief must be carried out to the satisfaction of the Director of Planning and Architecture, Birmingham City Council, and will be monitored on his behalf by the Planning Archaeologist.

9.Reporting
The results of the archaeological watching brief are to be presented as a written report, containing appropriate illustrations and a copy of this brief. A copy of the report must be sent to the Planning Archaeologist.

10.Archive deposition
The written, drawn and photographic records of the archaeological watching brief, together with any finds, must be deposited with an appropriate repository within a reasonable time of completion, following consultation with the Planning Archaeologist.

11.Publication
The written report will become publicly accessible, as part of the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record, within six months of completion. The contractor must submit a short summary report for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology* and summary reports to appropriate national period journals.

DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE
BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
Date prepared: 21/05/98
Planning Archaeologist: Dr Michael Hodder 0121-303 3161 fax 0121-303 3193
Birmingham City Council
Baskerville House
Broad Street
Birmingham B1 2NA

oxleys.wri

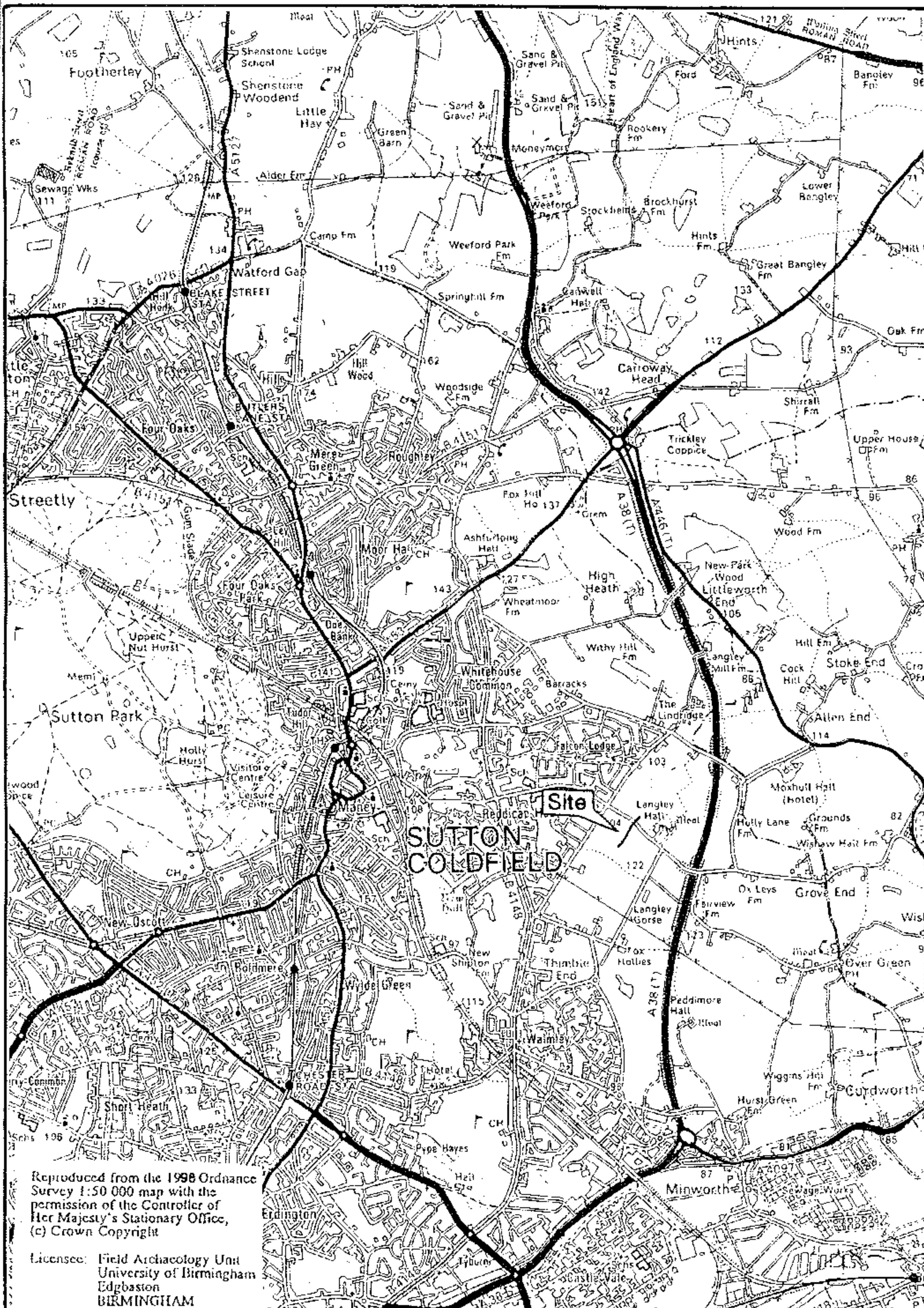

Fig.1

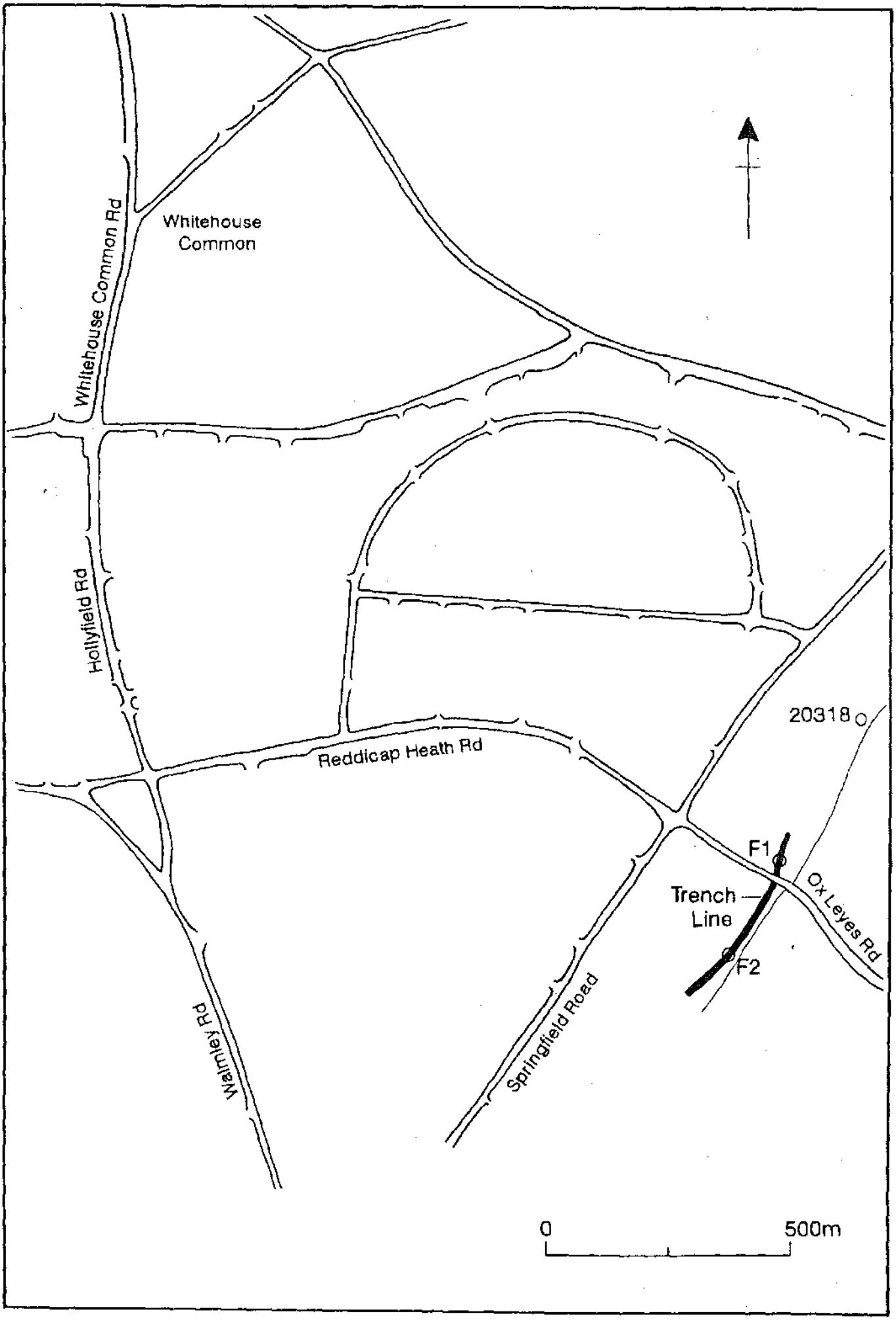
Whitehouse Common
Whitehouse Common Rd
Hollyfield Rd
Reddicap Heath Rd
Walmley Rd
Springfield Road
Ox Leyes Rd
20318
F1
F2
Trench Line
0
500m

Fig. 2