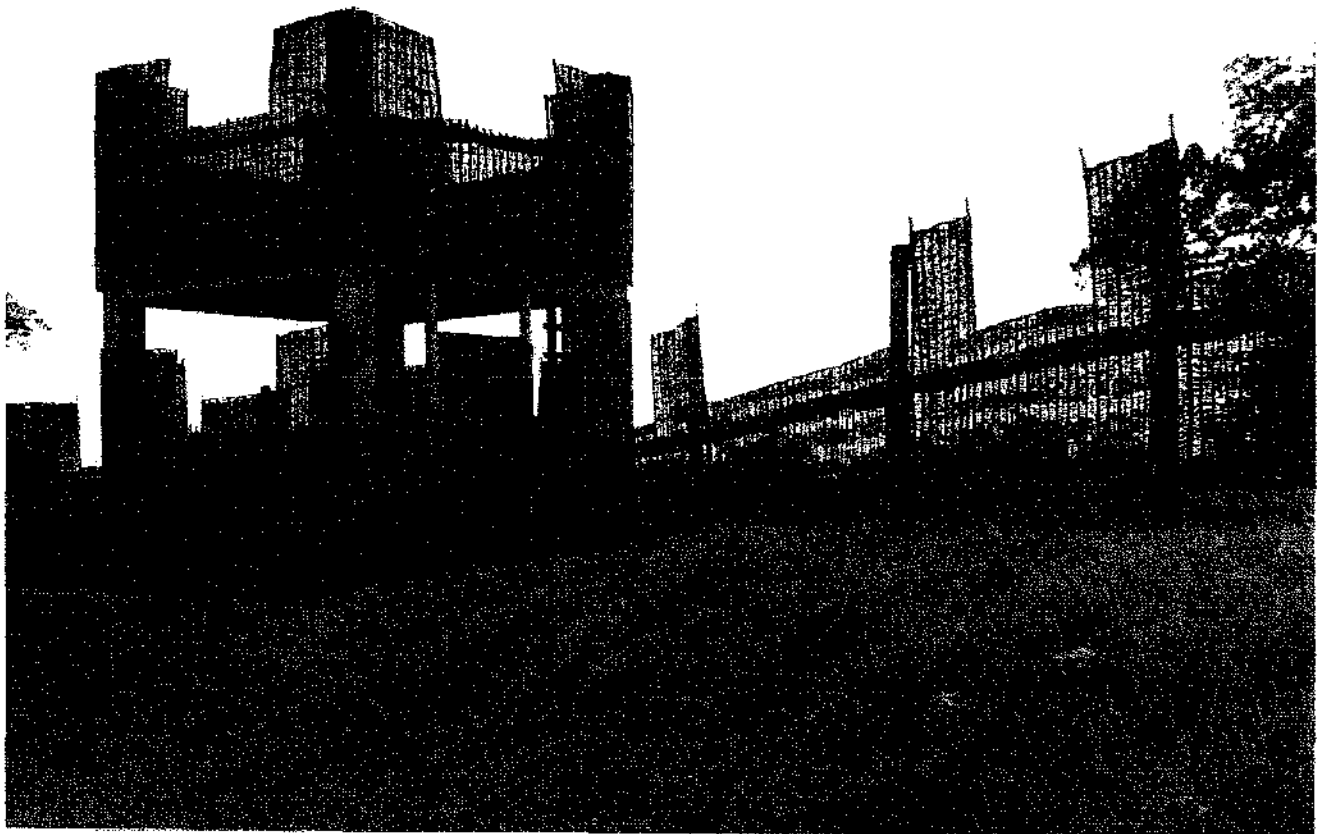




**THE UNIVERSITY
OF BIRMINGHAM**

**UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL
BIRMINGHAM NHS TRUST
METCHLEY ROMAN FORTS**

Area B Test-Pitting 1999



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL BIRMINGHAM NHS TRUST
METCHLEY ROMAN FORTS
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METCHLEY ROMAN FORTS

Area B Test-Pitting 1999

1.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological test-pitting within land to the south of Vincent Drive, located within Metchley Roman forts (centred on NGR. SP 044838, Figs. 1-2, Jones forthcoming), currently occupied by the South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned to undertake the evaluation by the University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust, in advance of a proposed hospital development. The test-pitting was undertaken in accordance with the guidelines contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of the Environment, November 1990), and Policy 8.36 of the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan. The test-pitting methodology conforms to a Written Scheme of Investigation (BUFAU 1999) approved by the Planning Archaeologist, Birmingham City Council.

The test-pitting follows a desk-based assessment of the forts and their surrounds (Jones 1999a) and trial-trenching (Jones 1999b and c) which also examined Area B (Jones 1999b, Area B, fig. 1). The assessment and trial-trenching reports contain full details of the archaeological background and results, which will not be repeated here.

Briefly, the test-pitting examined an area within the interior of the Phase 1-3 forts (Fig. 1). In particular, the test-pitting was located to investigate the archaeological potential of the left side of the forts' central range, which would have contained granaries and administrative buildings, and part of the left *praetentura*, which probably contained barrack-blocks and store-buildings. The test-pitting also investigated a length of the western defences of the Phase 1-3 forts. It was also thought possible that traces of internal structures and the western defences of the latest fort (Phase 4 as defined in Jones 1999a) could also be located by the test-pitting.

Area B presently forms the headquarters complex of the South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust, comprising a mix of temporary and permanent buildings, hardstandings and other open areas.

For simplicity in the following account it is assumed that the forts' main axis is north-south, although the illustrations remain labelled with compass north.

2.0: AIMS AND METHODOLOGY (Fig. 2)

2.1: Aims

The purpose of the test-pitting was to provide details of the ground conditions and the depth and potential survival of archaeological features and deposits within areas where trial-trenching was not possible.

Test-pits 4-5 were located to sample the potential of the left side of the central range. Test-pits 1-2 and were sited to test the potential of the right *praetentura*, and test-pits 3 and 7 were located to investigate the left *praetentura*. Test-pits 6-7 also examined the potential of areas along the projected alignment of the western defences of the Phase 4 fort. Examination of the *praetentura* was considered a priority, since this area of the forts' interior has been comparatively little investigated.

Test-pits 1-2 were located adjoining the west bank of the Birmingham-Worcester canal, to the east of an abandoned range of buildings. Test-pit 3 was sited in an area of hardstanding. Test-pits 4-5 were dug in the lower terrace of a lawned area. Test-pits 6-7 were located in lawns adjoining a range of linked, single-storey, temporary buildings.

2.2: Methodology

A total of seven test-pits, each measuring 1m square was dug under archaeological supervision to expose the uppermost horizon of the natural subsoil or the uppermost level of surviving archaeological deposits, whichever was first encountered. Test-pit 7 was subsequently extended to avoid a service trench. Each trench was hand-cleaned and the stratigraphy was recorded by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, and by drawing and photography, even where no archaeological, or possibly archaeological, deposits were encountered. Hand-excavation of the archaeological or possible archaeological, features encountered was outside the agreed scope of this fieldwork.

3.0: RESULTS

The results of the test-pitting are tabulated in the Appendix, which also includes level information. This section of the report summarises the fieldwork results. Interpretation and discussion of the evidence may be found in Section 4.0.

Test-pits 1-3

The subsoil in Test-Pits 1-2 was gravel (1004, 1018) and clay (1021) in Test-Pit 3. The subsoil in Test-Pit 2 (1018) was cut by a possible beam-slot (F1, 1016), aligned approximately north-south. The subsoil and infilled feature F1 were sealed by a surface formed of sub-rounded cobbles (F2, 1019). This feature was overlain by a sand-silt deposit (1015). With the exception of layer 1003 overlying the subsoil in Test-Pit 1, the remaining deposits contained building debris. The subsoil (1021) in

Test-Pit 3 was overlain by a layer of broken bricks (1020), forming a foundation for the car park surface.

No archaeological features were found in Test-Pits 1 or 3.

Test-pits 4-5

Test-pit 5 tentatively identified the western edge of a north-south aligned beam-slot (F4), cut by a modern soakaway (F3). The full width of feature F4 was not seen in the test-pit. Two irregularly-shaped patches of grey silt (1043-4), both overlying the subsoil (1045), were also recorded within the same test-pit.

No archaeological features were found in Test-Pit 4.

Test-pits 6-7

The earliest deposit recorded in Test-Pit 7 was the uppermost horizon of a layer of orange-yellow sand-silt (1063), which was sealed by a deposit of orange-brown clay-sand (1062), containing burnt stone fragments.

No archaeological features were recorded in Test-Pit 6.

4.0: DISCUSSION

Beam-slot F1 (test-pit 2) may be interpreted as forming part of a timber-framed building associated with Roman military Phases 1-4, constructed in the *praetentura* following the north-south fort alignment. The overlying cobble surface F2 corresponded in position to the suggested line of the main north-south road of the fort (*via principalis*), although the alignment of the surface could not be verified within the limited area investigated. Given the cartographic evidence for a post-medieval hunting lodge in this sector of the fort interior it is also possible to postulate that the surface was associated with this later use of the fort interior. The overlying deposit 1015 and layer 1003 in Test-Pit 1 may both be interpreted as cultivation horizons. Layer 1033 in Test-Pit 4 may be similarly interpreted. Alternatively, layers 1003 and 1015 could be interpreted as night soil, or as material dredged out of the adjoining canal. The latter interpretation is unlikely given the absence of pottery from these layers and the usual association of such deposits at Metchley with large quantities of pottery.

Possible feature F3 (Test-Pit 5) may be interpreted as a beam-slot, constructed following the main north-south axis of the forts. Deposits 1043-4, cutting the subsoil (1045) in the same test-pit, are more difficult to interpret. It is possible that these could have formed parts of temporary wattle structures associated with the Phase 2B use of the site as a stores depot, although this interpretation is highly speculative, based on the present limited evidence.

Layers 1062-3 in Test-Pit 7, the latter not fully excavated, may be the fills of features positioned within the western *intervallum* space of the forts. The suggested alignment of the western defences of the Phase 4 fort intercepts this test-pit. This test-pit was the only one in which the surface of the subsoil was not encountered.

5.0: IMPLICATIONS (Fig. 2)

5.1: Results

The test-pitting data have provided a useful, and wholly complementary, addition to the information from earlier trial-trenching.

The data from Test-Pits 1-2 indicate a particularly high level of archaeological preservation in this zone of Area B, including evidence for the presence of stratified Roman military deposits in Test-Pit 2. Archaeological preservation here will have been assisted by the overlying cultivation horizon (also found in Test-Pit 4). Recent activity has been limited to dumping, which has had the beneficial effect of further raising the ground surface, thus protecting the archaeology from disturbance.

No horizontal stratigraphy was located in Test-Pit 3. Trial-trench B2, cut to the north and also dug in an area of hardstanding, revealed a probably truncated subsoil surface.

No horizontal stratigraphy was recorded in Test-Pits 4-5. In contrast trial-trench B2 dug in the higher lawned terrace to the north (Jones 1999b) identified a deeply-stratified sequence of Roman military deposits, probably belonging to Phases 1-3. It is possible that this lower, lawned terrace was levelled down to the surface of the subsoil preparatory to the construction of the adjoining range of temporary buildings to the west. Similar levelling may be suggested elsewhere around the range of temporary buildings on the basis of the evidence both provided by Trial-Trench B3 (Jones 1999b) and Test-Pit 6.

Test-pit 7 identified stratified deposits (1062-3), indicating that this preliminary levelling may not have scoured-out deposits adjoining or belonging to, the forts' western defences.

The test-pits were, of course, located to avoid live services. In addition to the disturbances noted in the various interventions, account must be taken of the disturbances caused by the cutting of service trenches, although the extent of such activity cannot be presently defined.

5.2: Mitigation strategy

Because of the evidence for the presence of stratified deposits within the raised lawned terrace in Area B the archaeological mitigation strategy for this area involves preservation *in situ* (Jones 1999a, map 7).

The strategy described below refines the outline mitigation strategy set down in Map 7 of the archaeological assessment (Jones 1999a). In combination with the results of earlier trial-trenching, the results of test-pitting suggest the following outline strategy for archaeological mitigation in Area B:

- Permanent buildings. No archaeological mitigation strategy may appropriate within the footprints of these buildings, subject to archaeological observation during their demolition.
- Hardstandings. Here the maintenance of an archaeological watching brief during groundworks, with a suitable contingency for further, more detailed recording, would be appropriate.
- Temporary buildings adjoining Vincent Drive/lower terrace of grassed area. A combination of archaeological excavation and salvage recording would be appropriate. This strategy should also apply in the area of the temporary building adjoining University Road West (an area where archaeological fieldwork has not been possible).
- Zone adjoining canal (Test-Pits 1-2 and surrounding area). The evidence for stratified deposits suggests this area has the highest archaeological potential within that part of Area B where the archaeological mitigation strategy will involve preservation by record (i.e. excavation, followed by post-excavation analysis and reporting of the results). The preservation of archaeological features and deposits within this zone will have been affected by the cutting of numerous service trenches. In contrast, the area identified for preservation *in situ* within Area B has not been affected by the cutting of service trenches to such a degree.

All proposals for the clearance of the existing buildings and surfaces within Area B would need to be defined in detailed method statements to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority before implementation to ensure archaeological remains are protected and not disturbed during the general contractors' programme of groundworks.

In all cases the fieldwork would be followed by a programme of post-excavation analysis and reporting, leading to the publication of the results in a recognised archaeological journal. In contrast the area surrounding Test-Pits 1-2 is thought to contain islands of good archaeological survival, although some degree of disturbance by service trenches is considered to be inevitable.

6.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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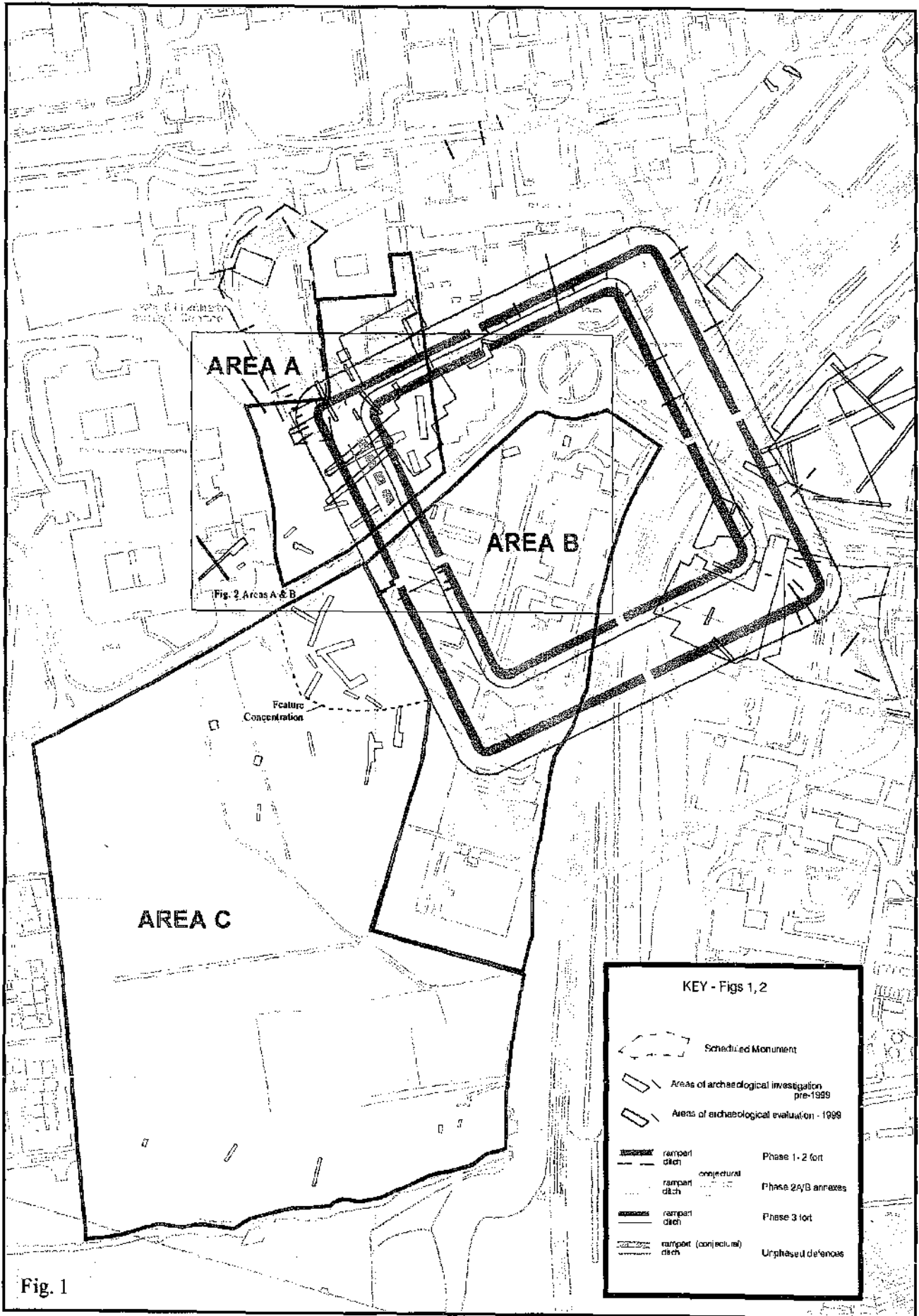
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APPENDIX

The deposits are listed in the order in which they were found, i.e. the first is the latest deposit in each test-pit. The height AOD is given in brackets for the top of topsoil and the subsoil, or the earliest deposit recorded.

| <i>Layer</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Interpretation (Ht AOD)</i> | <i>Depth</i> |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------|
| TEST-PIT 1 | | | |
| 1000 | Black, ashy silt | Topsoil (144.79) | 0.15m |
| 1001 | Grey sand-silt, flecked with charcoal | Levelling-up | 0.3m |
| 1002 | Broken bricks and mortar fragments | Levelling-up | 0.1m |
| 1003 | Grey-black silt with charcoal | Cultivation horizon | 0.4m |
| 1004 | Orange-brown sand-gravel | Subsoil (143.91) | - |
| TEST-PIT 2 | | | |
| 1010 | Black, ashy silt | Topsoil (144.57) | 0.08m |
| 1011 | Dark brown clay-silt-sand | Levelling-up | 0.3m |
| 1012 | Dark brown-black silt-clay-sand | Levelling-up | 0.2m |
| 1013 | Brown-black sand-silt-clay | Levelling-up | 0.07m |
| 1014 | Grey-blue ash and cinder | Path | 0.04m |
| 1015 | Mid-brown sand-silt | Cultivation horizon | 0.38m |
| 1016 | Light brown clay-silt in F1. Above: 1017; below: 1018 | Only fill of possible beam-slot | - |
| 1017 | Sand-gravel in F2. Above: 1015; below: 1018 | Foundation for <i>Via Principalis</i> (F2) | - |
| 1018 | Orange-brown sand-gravel | Subsoil (143.49) | - |
| 1019 | Sub-rounded cobbles in F2. Above: 1015; below: 1018 | Surface of <i>Via Principalis</i> | |
| TEST-PIT 3 | | | |
| 1020 | Tarmac and broken brick | Car park surface and foundation (144.31) | 0.42m |
| 1021 | Red-yellow clay | Subsoil | - |
| TEST-PIT 4 | | | |
| 1030 | Dark grey sand-silt | Topsoil (146.33) | 0.3m |
| 1031 | Red gravel-sand | Make-up deposit | 0.04m |
| 1032 | Dark grey ash | Path | 0.02m |
| 1033 | Orange-brown sand-silt | ?Cultivation horizon | 0.06m |
| 1034 | Orange-brown sand-clay | Subsoil (145.91) | - |

| | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------|
| TEST-PIT 5 | | | |
| 1040 | Dark grey clay-silt | Topsoil (146.39) | 0.31m |
| 1041 | Fill of F3. Dark grey-brown silt. Above: 1040; below: 1045 | Fill of soakaway | - |
| 1042 | Fill of possible feature F4 (cuts F3). Dark grey clay-silt. Above: 1040, 1041; below: 1045 | Fill of possible feature | - |
| 1043 | Patch of dark grey clay-silt | Possible fill of undefined feature | - |
| 1044 | Patch of dark grey silt | Possible fill of undefined feature | - |
| 1045 | Yellow-orange sand-clay | Subsoil (146.08) | - |
| TEST-PIT 6 | | | |
| 1050 | Brown clay-silt | Topsoil (145.16) | 0.49m |
| 1051 | Mottled, buff-orange clay-silt | Subsoil (144.67) | |
| TEST-PIT 7 | | | |
| 1060 | Dark grey-black clay-silt | Topsoil (145.36) | 0.15m |
| 1061 | Dark grey-brown clay-silt | Make-up deposit | 0.2m |
| 1062 | Light orange brown clay-sand. Contains burnt stone fragments | Undefined, possible feature fill | - |
| 1063 | Orange-yellow sand-silt | Undefined, possible feature fill (144.86) | - |



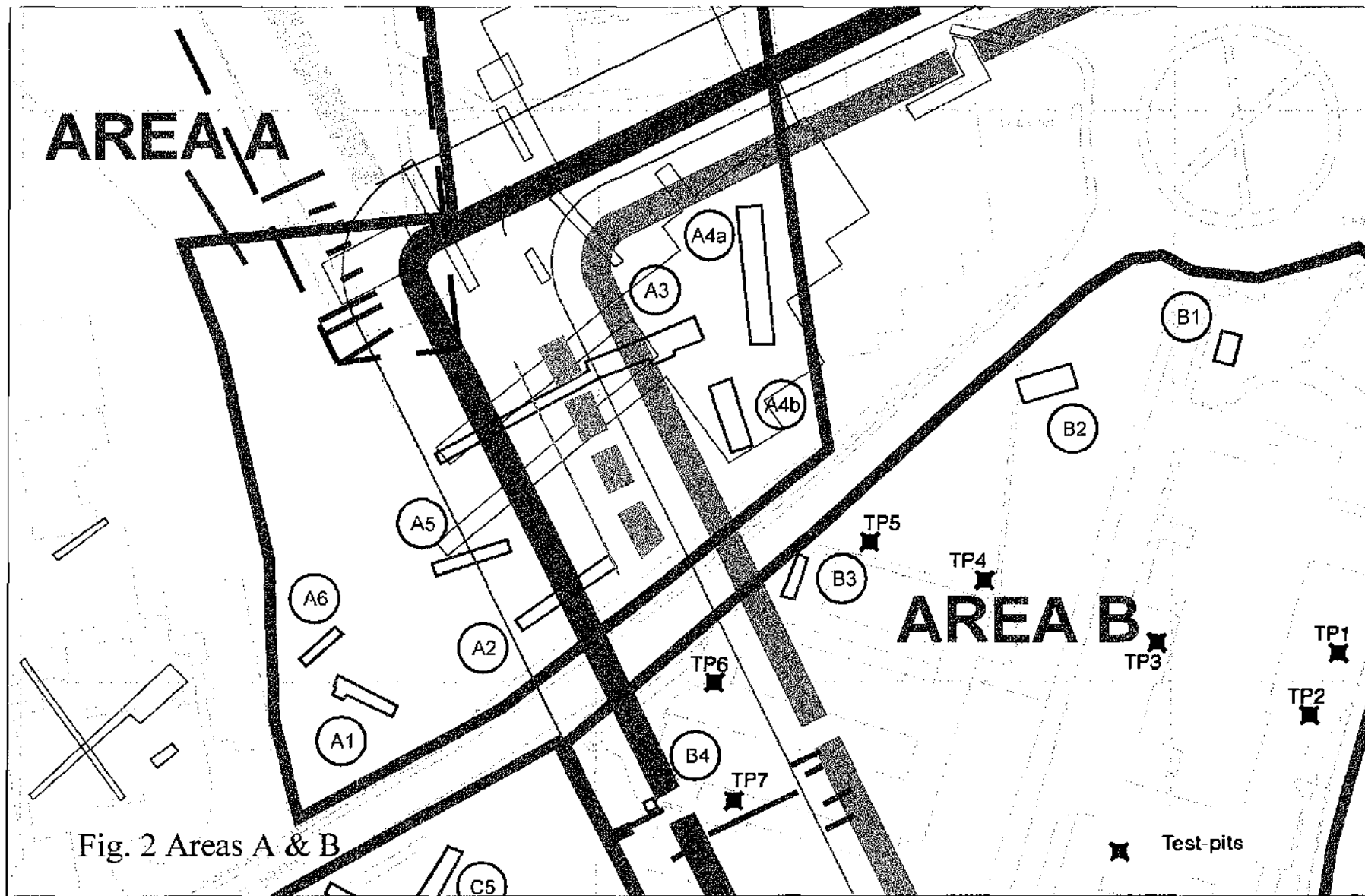


Fig. 2 Areas A & B

Test-pits