

**An archaeological
evaluation on the site of
the Recycling Unit,
Alrewas Quarry,
Staffordshire**

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**An archaeological evaluation on the site of the Recycling Unit,
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by
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Summary

Archaeological trial trenching was undertaken on the proposed site of a Recycling Unit at Alrewas Quarry, Staffordshire (NGR SK 179 148) in April and May 2000. This followed a geophysical survey. Although the results of the geophysical survey were largely negative, cropmarks on aerial photographs suggested the presence of archaeological features including a cursus monument (S.A.M. ST 220b). A series of fifteen trial trenches were excavated to test these possible features.

Very few features of potential archaeological interest were recorded in the trial trenches. A number of linear features aligned north-south were identified and sampled, but these appear to be the remains of medieval and post-medieval plough furrows.

Introduction

The following report details the results of the trial trenching phase of an archaeological evaluation undertaken in accordance with Scheduled Monument Consent for the location of a Recycling Unit at Alrewas Quarry, Staffordshire (centred on NGR SK 179 148, Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Phoenix Consulting on behalf of Lafarge Redlands and was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in late April and early May 2000. The trial trenching followed a geophysical survey (GeoQuest Associates 2000). The programme of trial trenching was based on a scheme of investigation prepared by Phoenix Consulting (Howlett 2000).

Archaeological background (Fig.1)

The site lies within a kilometre of the village of Alrewas, Staffordshire, to the west. The northern extent of the site is bounded by the Lichfield-Burton railway line. The eastern edge is defined by the quarry processing plant and weighbridge, with the access road and Croxhall Road defining the southern and western boundaries. Soil bunds approximately 5m high and 28m wide at the base form the northern and southern site limits, with a gravel compound to the east. The river Tame is approximately 0.6 km to the east of the site. The proposed site has an approximate area of 0.9ha.

Information on past settlement and land use on the gravel terraces of the Rivers Trent and Tame has primarily been obtained from aerial photographic survey, notably by Jim Pickering and Rowan Whimster (1989). These surveys have demonstrated extensive and intensive human activity on the gravel terraces since at least the Neolithic (Gaffney and Hughes 1993).

The site itself lies within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (ST 220b), which is believed to be a Neolithic cursus monument, a type of rectangular ditched enclosure that can range from hundreds of metres upwards; the longest recorded is the Dorset cursus, at almost 10km (Whittle 1999, 71-2). Archaeological evaluation was carried out on the site by the Trent Archaeological Committee in 1973, but no record of their results can be traced (Howlett 2000, 2.2.4-5). However, archaeological evaluation work adjacent to the site in 1991 failed to identify the cursus ditch or any other related archaeological features (*ibid.*, 2.4.1).

In the surrounding area, the earliest archaeological activity relates to the Neolithic period, with evidence of occupation at Whitemoor Haye (Coates 1999a, Lupton 1995) and Fisherwick (Smith 1979), to the south. Immediately north of the site, Catholme and Fatholme also produced evidence of Neolithic activity, including a possible wood henge (Hughes & Coates 1999). This activity continues into the Bronze Age, with ring ditches showing as cropmarks along the gravel terraces of the River Tame. However, some of these cropmarks that have been examined turn out to be later Iron Age hut circles (Coates 1999a). The strongest evidence of Bronze Age activity comes from Fisherwick to the south of the site.

Iron Age enclosures, hut circles and pit alignments are well represented in this area, with excavations at Whitemoor Haye producing a detailed picture of the former landscape (Coates 1999) and archaeological evaluations at Fatholme and Catholme attesting the presence of such features and activity (Hughes & Coates 1999; Coates 1999b). This farming activity continues into the Roman period, with no substantial change in the type and form of settlement at Whitemoor Haye (Coates 1999a), Fisherwick (Miles 1969) and Tucklesholme Farm (Martin 1998).

The archaeology of the area in the post-Roman period is far from clear, despite the fact that Tamworth develops into the recorded capital of Mercia, during the 7th century. Lichfield, the successor of *Letocetum* (Wall), may have been the centre for the early Bishopric of Diuma, and written records suggest that the Trent valley was densely settled by the 8th century (Gelling 1992, 148; Losco-Bradley and Wheeler 1984, 101). A number of 6th-century cemeteries and individual burials have been located, including those at Wychnor, Stapenhill (Burton-on-Trent) and Tucklesholme (Gelling 1992, 28; Losco-Bradley and Wheeler 1984, 105; Hughes 1991). At Tucklesholme a possible cremation burial has recently been dated to AD 409-440.

The discovery and excavation of an extensive early 6th-century Anglo-Saxon settlement at Catholme, containing 15 structures in its earliest phase, provides an invaluable insight into settlement in the area and its relationship to the earlier Roman period (Losco-Bradley and Wheeler 1984, 104). However, Gelling (1992, 28) has commented that 'it is only by virtue of lying adjacent Derbyshire that Staffordshire scrapes into the category of counties which have pagan Anglo-Saxon remains'. Yet it should be noted that the large settlement at Catholme was located on the basis of three hut-shaped cropmarks, only one

of which actually proved to be an archaeological feature. This suggests that further discoveries of this nature may be possible.

During the later Medieval period it is likely that Tamworth declined because of its lack of a strategic position, although Lichfield, a centre for pilgrimages to the tomb of St Chad, was established as a new town during the mid-12th century (Gelling 1992). Within the study area, Smith's (1980) analysis of the landscape around Fisherwick indicates the progress of enclosure in the creation of the modern landscape. Excavation of rural medieval sites within the area has been very rare. The only record within the survey area is the limited evaluation of a possible deserted medieval village at Hamstall Ridware (Meeson 1991).

The site is therefore in an area of the gravel terraces which has evidence of human activity from the early prehistoric period up until recent times. It is also apparent that much of that activity has been of an agricultural or related nature.

Aims

The objective of the programme of trial trenching was to attempt to establish the presence/absence, character, extent, state of preservation and date of any archaeological features or deposits within the study area. The trenching was particularly aimed at identifying the cursus monument (S.A.M. ST 220b).

Method

A total of fifteen trenches was excavated, each measuring 15m long by 2m wide. These provided a total sample of greater than 10% of the proposed development area. The rationale for each of the trench locations was principally based on the results of the geophysical survey and cropmark plot. Each of the trenches was located using a Total Station Theodolite and the ploughsoil was excavated using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 2m toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision. The subsoil horizon below the topsoil was gradually removed by machine until the features were visible. Where appropriate, the subsoil surface was hand cleaned. A representative sample of the features identified were hand excavated to provide information concerning the survival and complexity of feature fills, and to recover artefactual evidence. A detailed context record on individual pro-forma record cards was maintained and all feature and trenches were photographed using both colour and black and white film. Trench plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50 or 1:20 as necessary. Excavated sections of individual features were drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20.

Summary results of trial trenching (Fig.2; Plates 1 & 2)

Detailed results of the trial trenching, including the objectives of each trench location and descriptions of features and stratigraphy, are provided in the appendix. The following is a brief summary describing the principal features recorded.

The ploughsoil over most of the site varied between 0.3 and 0.4m deep. This sealed a subsoil layer that varied in depth between 0.1 and 0.3m. The natural horizon was an orange-brown sand and gravel. In the eastern end (Trenches 8-11) of the site, there was a considerable degree of truncation created by the previous construction of a gravelled compound area.

No archaeological features were recorded during this trial trenching phase. North-south aligned medieval and post-medieval plough furrows were prevalent in most trenches and were sampled in Trenches 1-6 & 13. F101 and F102 (Trenches 5 & 6; Plate 2) had a slightly deeper profile to the plough furrows, but with a similar alignment and no dating evidence it appears that this ditch may be for agricultural drainage or the remains of a former boundary. Two shallow drainage ditches were found in Trench 11, F109 and F110. A high voltage power cable and associated trench cut was visible in Trenches 2, 7, 14 and 15; recorded as feature F108.

Summary results of the finds by Annette Hancock

The results of finds identification are detailed in Table 1 below. With the exception of the post-medieval tile and four sherds of medieval pottery recovered from the ploughsoil (0402) and plough furrow F103 (0603) respectively; the finds listed below were all recovered from either the topsoil or as a result of cleaning.

The most datable evidence retrieved is the medieval and post-medieval ceramics. One fragment of Dressel 20 amphorae was recognised from Trench 6 (0602), a drainage ditch associated with medieval plough furrow. A single base angle of green glazed medieval pottery was recovered from the cleaning surface of Trench 6. This could be dated to the late 12th/13th century. The remaining medieval pottery comprised undiagnostic body sherds. The post-medieval ceramics consisted of single sherds of stoneware, Cistercian/blackware and indeterminate fragments.

The other finds consisted of small quantities of undiagnostic ceramic roof tile and slag of post-medieval date. The finds and archive are currently stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, prior to arrangements being made for deposition with the City Museum and Art Gallery at Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent. The finds archive comprises a single half box of finds.

Find type	Tr.1	Tr.2	Tr.3	Tr.4	Tr.5	Tr.6	Tr.13
Roman pottery (amphorae)	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Medieval pottery	3	-	-	-	7	6	-
Post-medieval pottery	3	-	1	-	2	3	2
Clay pipe	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Post-medieval tile	2	-	-	9	-	4	-
Slag	1	4	-	-	-	-	-
Totals	9	4	1	9	9	14	2

Table 1: Summary of finds recovered from trial trenching

Discussion

No evidence of the cursus monument or any archaeological features suggested by the geophysical investigations (GeoQuest 2000, 5) was recovered. There was evidence of extensive ploughing in the application area, which may have destroyed any shallow features recorded in early aerial photographs. Those features identified by the geophysical survey may have been misinterpretation of the data and certainly pockets of deeper sub-soil may have created mixed signals. The absence of the cursus ditch is more difficult to explain, however. The degree and nature of the trenching on this site suggests that if either the northern or southern ditches had survived it would have been identified. Although there was evidence of extensive ploughing on the site there was an average of 0.2m of sub-soil, which would have provided a degree of protection from the plough. The cursus ditches remain somewhat of an enigma, as excavations elsewhere on this part of the quarry have also failed to identify this monument. It remains a possibility that the interpretation of the cropmark plot is incorrect, although only further archaeological excavations on the projected route will clarify this. However, whatever the explanation may be for the absence of this monument it is clear that there is no sign of it within the application site.

The finds appear to represent and reflect medieval and post-medieval ploughing and manuring activity.

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Appendix

Detailed results of Trial Trenching

Trench 1

Aim: to investigate the possible line of the cursus ditch identified as a cropmark during aerial photographic survey.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated NE-SW.

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was between 0.4 and 0.6m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.1 to 0.2m deep. The natural horizon was a orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

F104: a shallow U-shaped ditch, 2m wide and 0.2m deep. Aligned north-south and filled with a brown silt-sand deposit (0103).

Interpretation: the linear feature identified maybe the remains of a former agricultural furrow. There was no evidence for the suggested cursus ditch.

Trench 2

Aim: to investigate the possible line of the cursus ditch identified as a cropmark during aerial photographic survey.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated NE-SW.

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was 0.4 m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.1 to 0.3m deep. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

F105: a shallow U-shaped ditch, 2m wide and 0.15m deep. Aligned north-south and filled with a brown silt-sand deposit (0203)

Interpretation: the linear feature identified maybe the remains of a former agricultural furrow. There was no evidence for the suggested cursus ditch.

Trench 3

Aim: to investigate the probable modern ditch paralleling the southern edge of the northern soil bund.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated NW-SE.

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was between 0.4 and 0.5m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.1 m deep. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

F106: a shallow U-shaped ditch, 2.1m wide and 0.18m deep. Aligned north-south and filled with a brown silt-sand deposit (0302).

Interpretation: the linear feature identified may be the remains of a former agricultural furrow. There were no signs of a ditch aligned parallel with the northern soil bund.

Trench 4

Aim: to investigate the possible line of the cursus ditch identified as a cropmark during aerial photographic survey.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated NE-SW.

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was between 0.4 and 0.5m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.1 m deep. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

F107: a shallow U-shaped ditch, 1.7m wide and 0.15m deep, aligned north-south and filled with a brown silt-sand deposit (0402).

Interpretation: the linear feature identified may be the remains of a former agricultural furrow.

Trench 5

Aim: to investigate a seemingly archaeologically blank area.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated NE-SW.

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was between 0.3 and 0.4m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.2m deep. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

F101: a shallow U-shaped ditch, 1.2m wide and 0.2m deep, aligned north-south and filled with a grey-brown silt-sand (0503).

Interpretation: F101 had a similar alignment to the plough furrow, but had a different profile and may be an agricultural drainage ditch or boundary associated with the plough furrows.

Trench 6

Aim: to investigate a seemingly archaeologically blank area

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated NE-SW.

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was between 0.3 and 0.4m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.15m deep. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

F102: a shallow U-shaped ditch, 0.9m wide and 0.3m deep, aligned north-south and filled with a grey-brown silt-sand (0602). Appeared to be the continuation of F101.

F103: A shallow U-shaped linear feature, only partially visible in the NE end of trench.

Interpretation: F102 appeared to be the continuation of F101 and was therefore a drainage or boundary ditch associated with the plough furrows. F103 appeared to be the remains of a plough furrow.

Trench 7

Aim: to investigate the possible line of the cursus ditch identified as a cropmark during an aerial photographic survey.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long orientated NE-SW.

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was 0.4m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.10m deep. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

F108: An unexcavated cable trench aligned approximately east-west, 1.5m wide and known to contain a high-voltage electricity cable.

Interpretation: there was no sign of the cursus ditch.

Trench 8

Aim: to investigate a possible stone/rubble ditch/bank, perhaps associated with the cursus monument.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated NE-SW.

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was 0.4m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.10m deep. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

None

Interpretation: No archaeological features were identified in the trench. There was no sign of the stone/rubble ditch/bank.

Trench 9

Aim: to investigate a possible stone/rubble ditch/bank, perhaps associated with the cursus monument.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated NW-SE.

Stratigraphy: a hardcore surface of fine gravel 0.1m thick sealed the topsoil deposit, which had a depth of 0.4m. The topsoil was above a brown sand subsoil, 0.1m thick. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

None.

Interpretation: No archaeological features were identified in the trench. There was no sign of the stone/rubble ditch/bank.

Trench 10

Aim: to investigate a seemingly archaeologically blank area.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated NE-SW.

Stratigraphy: a 0.6m overburden of modern gravel, sand and hardcore was above the truncated remains of the topsoil deposit, 0.1m thick. The natural orange sandy-gravel horizon was below this.

Features:

None.

Interpretation: No archaeological features were identified in this trench, although there had been considerable truncation of the topsoil deposit for the construction of a gravelled compound.

Trench 11

Aim: to investigate a feature which may be a modern drainage ditch surrounding a yard.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated E-W.

Stratigraphy: a 0.5m overburden of modern gravel, sand and hardcore was above the truncated remains of the subsoil deposit, 0.2m thick. The natural orange sandy-gravel horizon was below this.

Features:

F109: a shallow U-shaped ditch, 0.8m wide and 0.1m deep; filled with modern gravel and aligned NW-SE.

F110: a shallow U-shaped ditch, 0.8m wide and 0.12m deep; filled with modern gravel and aligned NW-SE.

Interpretation: F109 and F110 appear to be the remains of a modern drainage ditch.

Trench 12

Aim: to investigate the possible archaeological sub-circular enclosure/ring-ditch.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, aligned N-S.

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was 0.4m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.2m deep. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

None.

Interpretation: No archaeological features were identified in this trench. There was no sign of a ditch associated with a sub-circular feature.

Trench 13

Aim: to investigate the possible archaeological sub-circular enclosure/ring-ditch.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated E-W.

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was 0.4m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.2m deep. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

F100: a shallow U-shaped ditch, 1.6m wide and 0.12m deep. It was aligned north-south and filled with a brown silt-sand (1302).

Interpretation: F100 appeared to be the remains of a plough furrow. There were no other archaeological features identified in this trench.

Trench 14

Aim: to investigate the possible line of the cursus ditch identified as a cropmark during aerial photographic survey.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated NE-SW.

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was 0.4m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.2m deep. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

F108: An unexcavated pipe trench aligned approximately east-west, 1.5m wide and known to contain a high voltage electricity cable.

Interpretation: No archaeological features were identified in this trench. There was no sign of the cursus ditch.

Trench 15

Aim: to investigate the possible line of the cursus ditch identified as a cropmark during aerial photographic survey.

Method: machine excavated trench 2m wide and 15m long, orientated NE-SW

Stratigraphy: the topsoil was 0.35m deep, which was above a brown sandy subsoil deposit, 0.3m deep. The natural horizon was an orange sandy-gravel.

Features:

F108: An unexcavated pipe trench aligned approximately east-west, 1.5m wide and known to contain a high voltage electricity cable.

Interpretation: No archaeological features were identified in this trench. There was no sign of the cursus ditch.

Figures

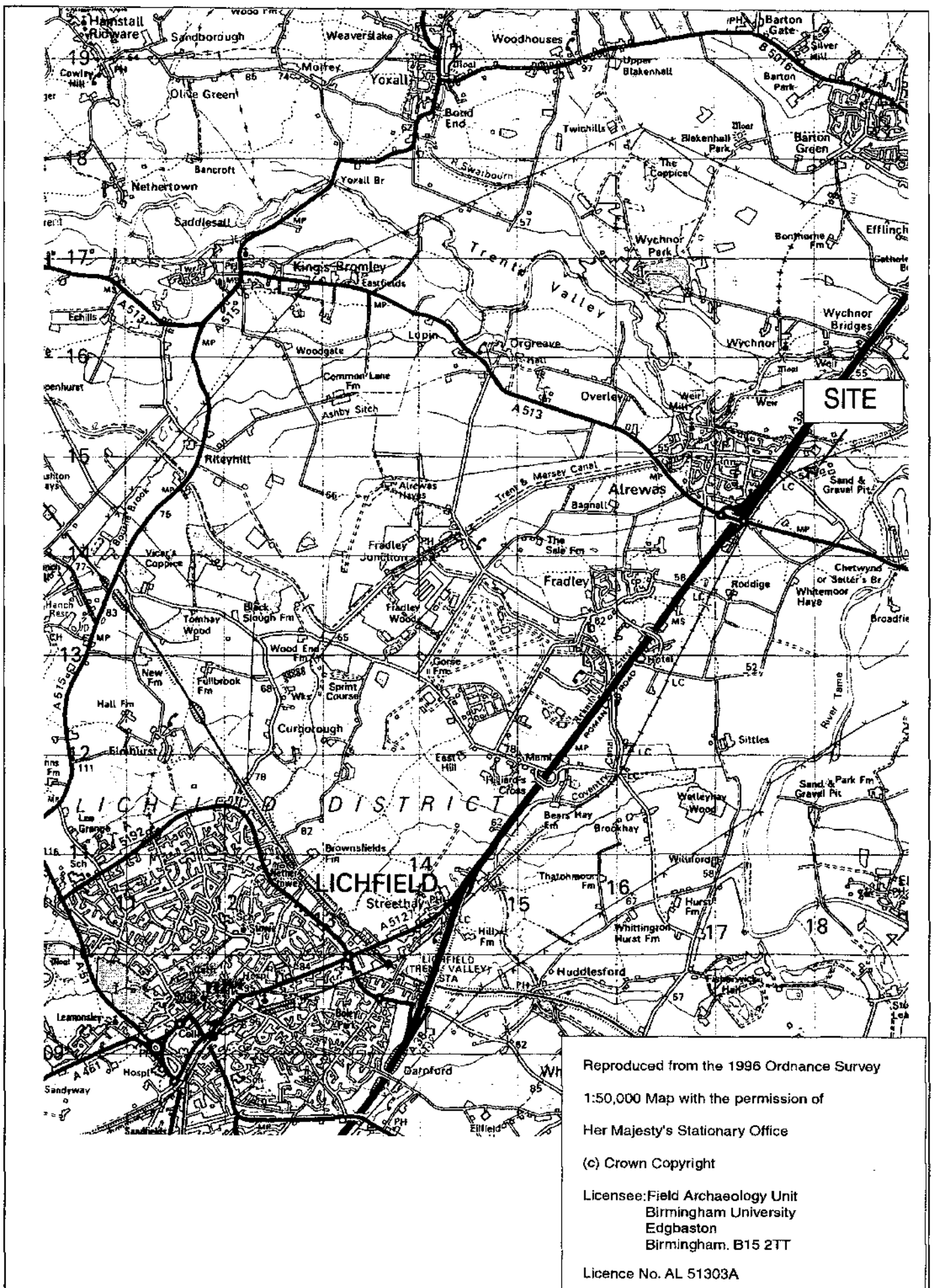


Figure 1

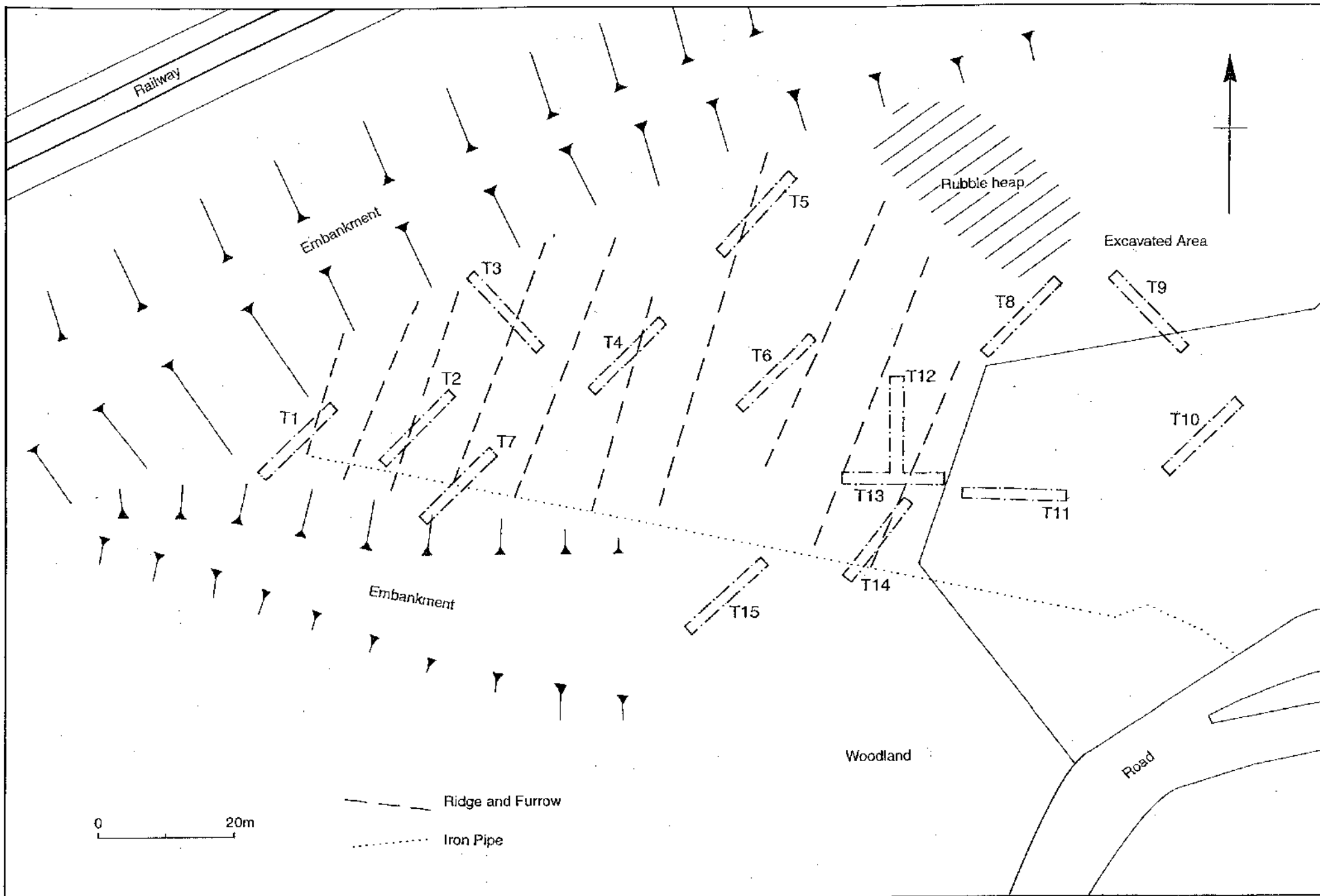


Fig.2

Plates



Plate 1

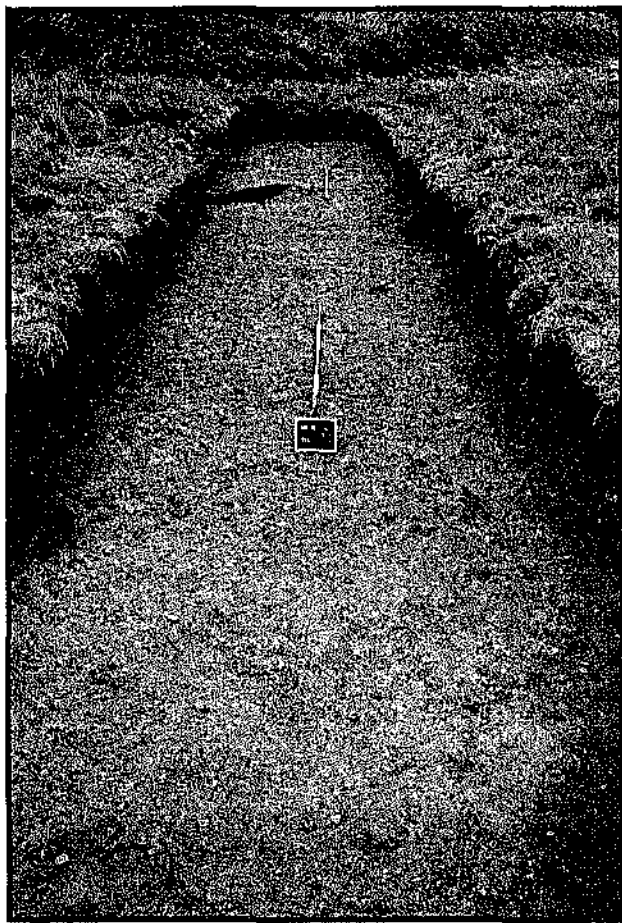


Plate 2