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**Land off Coventry Road,  
Burbage, Leicestershire.  
An Archaeological  
Watching Brief 2000.**

*Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit*



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by  
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# **Land off Coventry Road, Burbage, Leicestershire: an archaeological watching brief 2000**

by Roy Krakowicz

**Key words: Leicestershire; prehistoric**

## **1.0 Summary**

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on the site of a new development by Miller Homes on land off Rugby Road/Coventry Road, Burbage, Leicestershire (NGR SP 433913). The project involved the stripping of topsoil from the site, plus the excavation of foundation and service trenches for 31 dwellings. A condition for the granting of the planning application (CS/P/CW/DB/99/01076/FUL) was that a programme of archaeological observation and recording be carried out during groundworks. The contractors, Miller Homes, consequently commissioned Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit to undertake a watching brief on the site. Subsequent archaeological inspection of the development area after topsoil-stripping and during further groundworks, failed to reveal any features of archaeological interest. Thirty-two worked flints were recovered from the surface of the exposed subsoil and from the topsoil spoilheaps.

## **2.0 Introduction**

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the erection of 31 new dwellings on a site bordered by Rugby Road and Coventry Road in Burbage, Leicestershire (centred on National Grid Reference SP 433913, Fig.1). As part of the planning application (CS/P/CW/DB/99/01076/FUL) Miller Homes commissioned Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) to carry out a watching brief during groundworks. This work followed on from an archaeological desk-based assessment of the site by BUFAU earlier in the year (Watt 2000). The latter investigation failed to reveal any known archaeology within the development area and hence the site was deemed to possess a low archaeological potential.

The purpose of the watching brief was to record any archaeological deposits or features exposed during groundwork in the development area. Following commission of the work, an archaeologist undertook an initial visit to the site on July 20<sup>th</sup>. Further scheduled visits took place on August 9<sup>th</sup>, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, and on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November.

### 3.0 Site Location and History

The site of the new urban development is situated on the southern edge of Burbage, Leicestershire, whose town centre is located one mile southeast of Hinckley and five miles east of Nuneaton. The site is centred on NGR SP 433913 (Fig.1) and is bordered on the north by the Coventry Road, and on the west by the Rugby Road (Fig.2). To the east and south are fields.

A comprehensive account of the archaeological and historical background of the locale may be found within the above-mentioned desk-based survey report (Watt 2000). The assessment basically illustrated that there was an apparent absence of records detailing the discovery of archaeological artefacts and features within the development area. However, Neolithic flints, a bronze axe, an Iron Age pot sherd and Romano-British pot sherds have been found in the locale. To the northwest of the site lies Sketchley, whose medieval village core also contains a Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age occupation site (SMR 49SW BY). Located some 500m to the east of the development area lies a Roman occupation site (SMR 49SW BG).

### 4.0 Methodology

A suitably qualified archaeologist from BUFAU initially attended the construction site at Burbage on July 20th. During the visit, it was noted that topsoil stripping of the entire development area had already taken place, but a thin layer of residual topsoil was evident across much of the site. The area was systematically inspected on foot, using a stint and traverse technique, in order to ascertain if any features or artefacts were detectable. The topsoil spoilheaps were also examined in detail for artefacts.

Building construction had already commenced on a number of plots within the southern quarter of the site. This took the form of foundation trenches, some of which had been partially infilled by concrete. All of the trenches were thoroughly inspected, in an attempt to ascertain if any had cut through an archaeological feature.

Any *in situ* archaeology was to be recorded on pre-printed *pro-forma* record cards for features and contexts, supplemented by appropriate plans, section-drawings, and photography. These form part of the archive, which will ultimately be deposited with Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service. Any artefacts recovered would be cleaned, identified and catalogued. They were to be allocated the Accession Number X.A23.2001.

The above-mentioned inspection techniques were employed by the archaeologist during subsequent scheduled visits to the site on August 9<sup>th</sup>, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, and November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2000.

## 5.0 Results

During the initial visit, the archaeologist noted that the development area had been stripped of a layer of topsoil some 0.2 – 0.3m in depth. Beneath the topsoil lay a deposit of red clay, the natural subsoil, which appeared to extend across the entire site (Fig.3). The clay was evident in machine-scooped test pits scattered around the stripped area and in the foundation trenches already excavated. Despite incomplete removal of the topsoil, plus weathering and machine-degradation of the exposed subsoil surface, the latter was examined using the fieldwalking technique of stint and traverse, with intervals of approximately two metres.

No features were detected, but a large, triangular area in the northwest corner of the site had a heavy scattering of modern building debris (slate/brick/tile) and domestic waste. The latter was of no archaeological interest. The search for artefacts ultimately proved more rewarding, with the stripped area yielding seven worked flints, found in isolation and randomly distributed over the surface of the subsoil. An exhaustive search of the topsoil spoilheaps produced only one more find, an eighth worked flint.

During the initial inspection of the site, the archaeologist noted that the existing groundworks had not been limited to topsoil stripping. Foundation trenches for six dwellings, in plots 26 – 31, inclusive, had also been excavated in the southern quarter of the development area. Some had been partially infilled with concrete, but a broad band of subsoil (clay) remained between the upper surface of the concrete and the top of the trench. An examination of the cut faces of the trenches failed to reveal any evidence for archaeological features. A similar inspection of a service trench, undergoing excavation whilst the archaeologist was on site, gave the same negative result.

Discussions with on-site contractors suggested that groundworks were likely to continue for perhaps 6 months, as each plot of land was released for development. With the exception of three dwellings (plots 1,4 and 5), which were scheduled to be built on piles, each unit would require the excavation of foundation trenches.

A second site visit was undertaken by an archaeologist on August 9<sup>th</sup>, in order to inspect groundworks in plots 3, 4, 5 and 20 – 25, inclusive. No evidence could be found for archaeological features in any of the foundation trenches. A repeat of the fieldwalking exercise over the topsoil-stripped area in the immediate vicinity of the plots yielded three surface finds. A sherd of a c17<sup>th</sup>-century slipware platter was recovered from the exposed subsoil in plot 2 and two flints were likewise found in plot 7.

An archaeologist made other scheduled visits to the site on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, 2000. At that stage, work was in progress on the construction of the walls of dwellings in plots 1 to 5, 13 and 18 to 31, hence these were of no further interest to the archaeologist. However, foundation trenches had been excavated in four new areas and infilling with concrete had commenced in all but one. In plots 11, 12 and 17, the level of the concrete was well below the top of the trenches, permitting an uninterrupted view of a significant depth of topsoil residues and the underlying red clay. Backfilling of the foundation

trenches for the smaller of two buildings in plot 14 had not yet started, whilst those for the larger construction were partially backfilled with concrete.

An examination of the cut faces of the foundation trenches failed to reveal any evidence for archaeological features. However, an inspection of the stripped (subsoil) surface in the immediate vicinity of the trenches, which had weathered since the previous visits in July and August, led to the recovery of a number of flints from topsoil residues overlying the natural red clay. A continuation of the search along the northern and western sides of the development area yielded a flint flake in plot 9 (again from a shallow residual layer of topsoil), plus 4 flints from the southwest corner of the site (in the vicinity of the pipe/culvert for storm water). A repeat examination of the main topsoil spoilheap, which had undergone significant mechanical-disturbance and weathering since its initial inspection in July, resulted in the recovery of a further 13 flints.

A final visit to the site was made on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2000. The groundworks attendant to the construction of buildings 6 through to 9, were examined. This examination revealed no evidence of archaeological activity

#### **6.0 Worked-Flint Finds (Accession No. X.A23.2001)**

The flints were subsequently cleaned, then examined by Lynne Bevan (BUFAU), whose observations may be summarised as follows:-

<u>Location of Find</u>	<u>Description</u>
Random Surface Scatter.	One flake core, one core rejuvenation flake, three struck flakes and two retouched flakes, the larger of which may have been intended as an arrowhead
Plot 7.	One struck flake and one burnt flake, too fire-crackled to discern if it is natural or humanly-struck
Plot 9.	One struck flake
Plot 11.	One struck chunk
Plot 12.	One struck flake and one struck chunk
Plot 14.	One struck chunk
Southwest corner of site.	One abraded core, possibly re-used as a hammerstone, plus three retouched flakes (one of which is notched)
Topsoil spoilheap.	Seven struck chunks, five struck flakes and two retouched flakes

Commenting on the assemblage as a whole, the collection is of a generally good quality, mid to dark grey-brown flint from secondary deposits, probably river gravels. The absence of formal, chronologically-diagnostic tools, combined with a high incidence of struck chunks, indicates a later date for their formation, most probably during the Middle to Late Bronze Age. This is supported by the broad, squat shape of the flakes and the occurrence of incipient cones of percussion on two items, which is characteristic of unskilled flintworking using a hard hammer (Lynne Bevan *pers. comm.*).

## 7.0 Discussion

The overall results of the watching brief, from an archaeological viewpoint, were disappointing. The desktop study (Watt 2000) indicated that there was low archaeological potential within the area of development and that the surrounding area had yielded very little in the way of archaeological artefacts or deposits. No man-made features were identified within the area after topsoil-stripping and none were apparent in section in those wall foundation (and service) trenches examined during development. The recovery of a small number of prehistoric artefacts, in the form of struck flints, is of interest.

In the absence of *in situ* archaeology, no record forms were generated and no photographs were taken. The site archive is limited to this report.

## 8.0 Acknowledgements

Mr. Phill Brown of Miller Homes commissioned the fieldwork and thanks are due to the Miller Homes site manager at Burbage for his help in facilitating the recording work on site. The watching brief was undertaken by Roy Krakowicz and Edward Newton. This report was edited by Iain Ferris. The figures were prepared by Edward Newton and Mark Breedon.

## 9.0 References

- Watt, S. 2000 Land off Coventry Road, Burbage, Leicestershire:  
an archaeological desk-based assessment.  
(B.U.F.A.U. Report No. 717)

## 10.0 Figures

- Figure 1 Site Location.  
Figure 2 Plot Locations.  
Figure 3 Site Stratigraphy

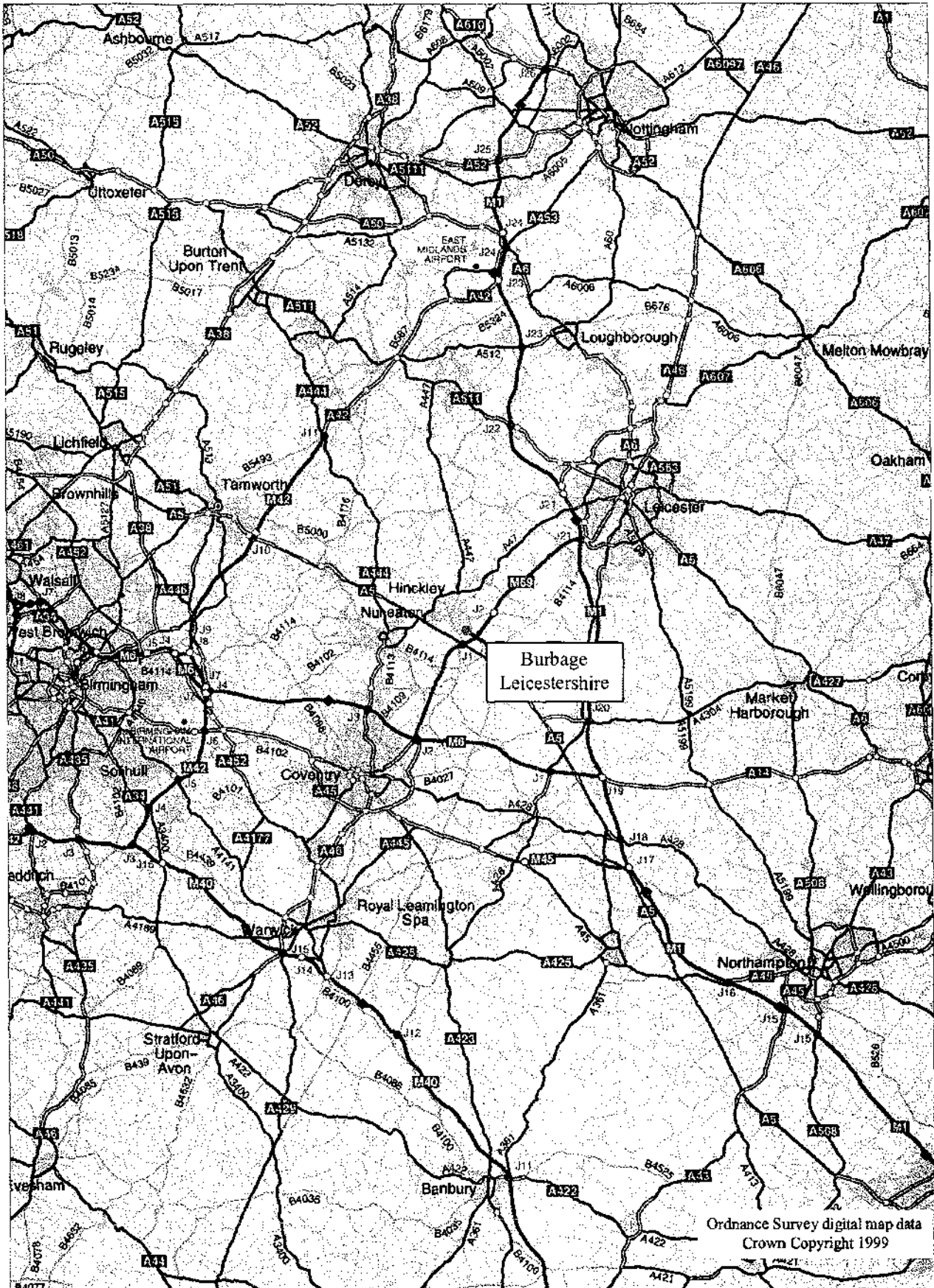


Figure 1: Site Location



# Burbage 2000. Groundworks Schedule

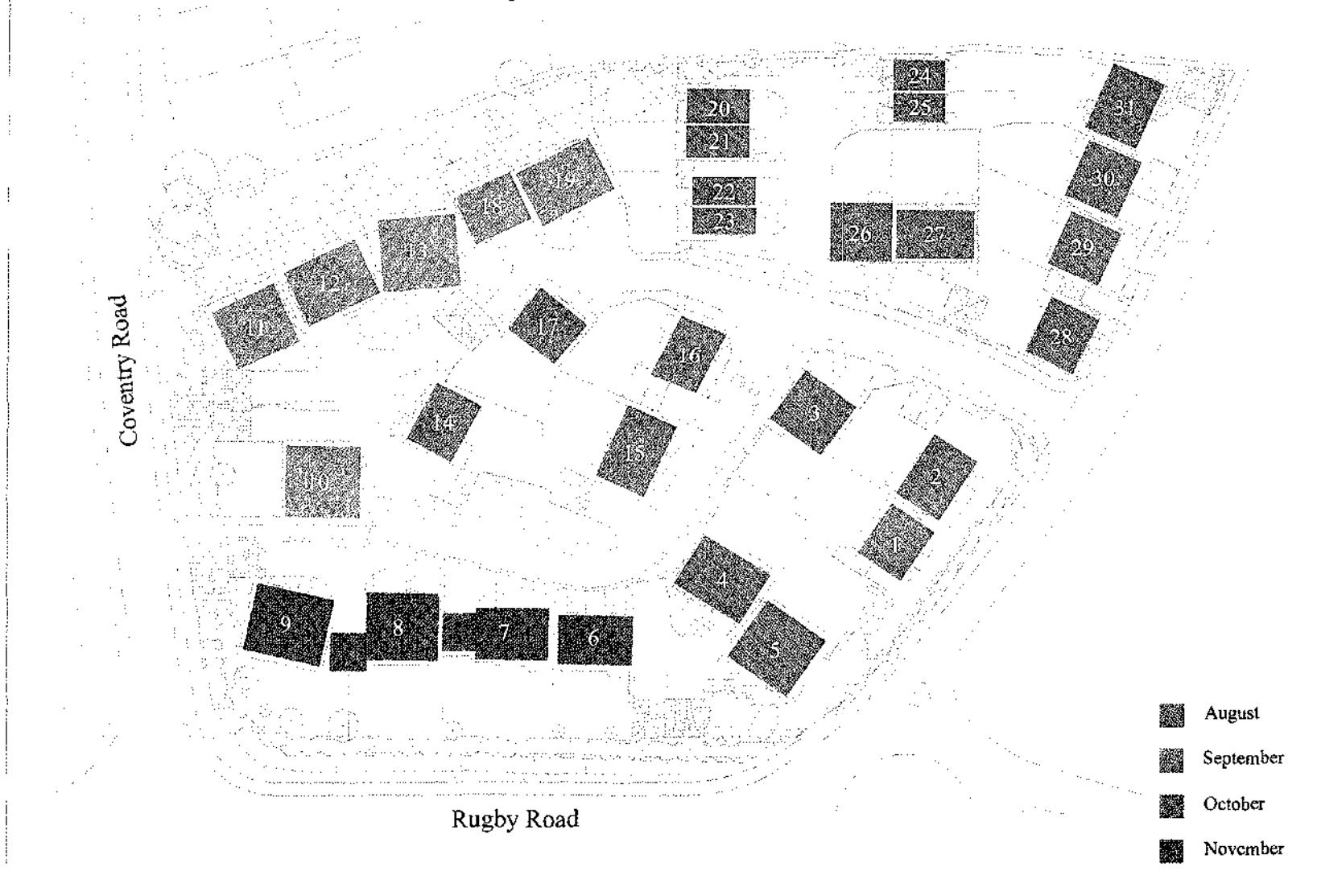


Figure 2: Plot Locations

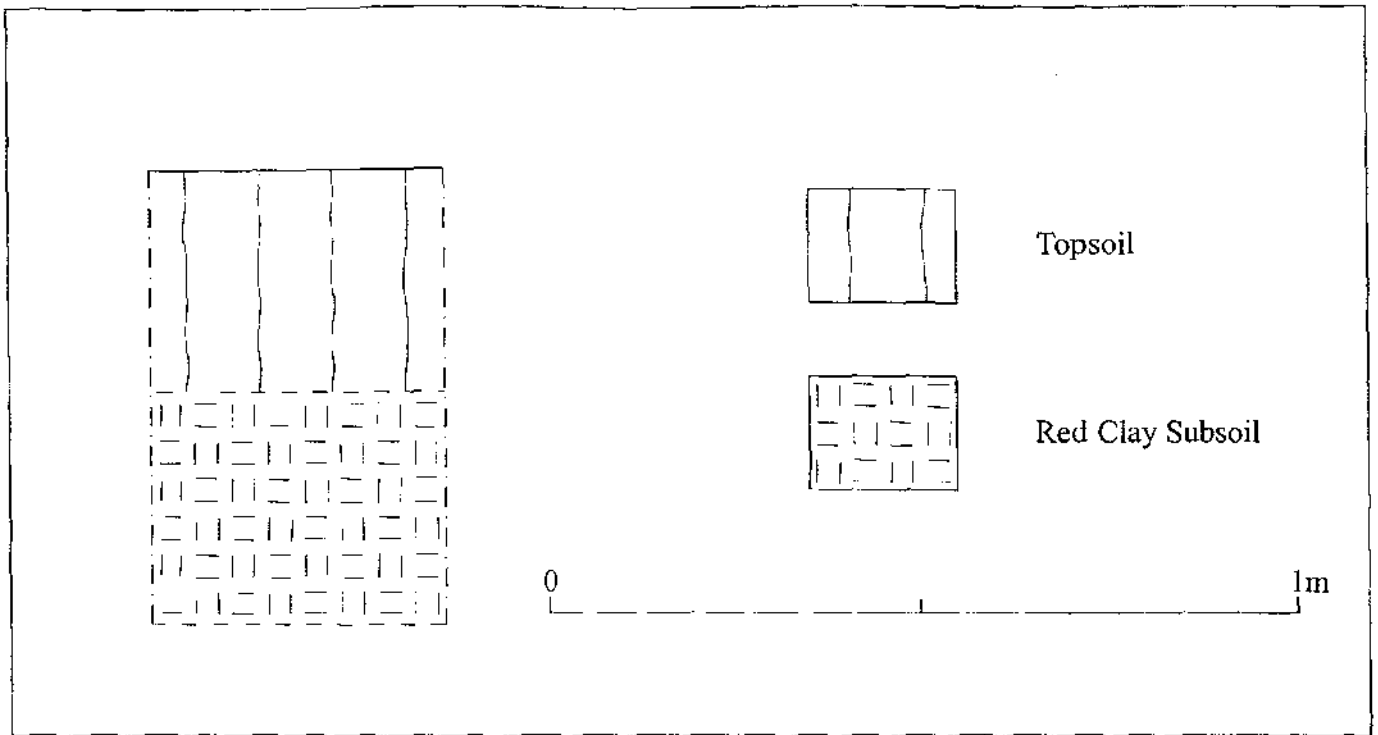


Figure 3 : Site Stratigraphy

