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**An archaeological  
evaluation at  
Weeford Island North,  
Weeford,  
Staffordshire**

*Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit*



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1996

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evaluation at  
Weeford Island North,  
Weeford,  
Staffordshire**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
**Project No. 742**  
May 2001

**An archaeological evaluation at Weeford Island North,  
Weeford, Staffordshire**

by  
Jon Sterenberg and Gary Coates,  
with contributions by Sarah Watt and illustrations by Nigel Dodds

*For further information please contact:*  
Simon Buteux or Iain Ferris (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 evaluation at Weeford Island North, Weeford, Staffordshire.**

### **Summary**

*An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in May 2001 at Weeford Island North, Weeford, Staffordshire (NGR SK 130 050), in advance of the proposed construction of a motorists' service area and following a specification prepared by Staffordshire County Council Archaeological Officer. The work was commissioned by Brian Evans & Associates of Wolverhampton, on behalf of K.B.Jackson and Son (Properties) Ltd, Burton on Trent. A cartographic study and geophysical survey were carried out before the trenching exercise to identify a sub-rectangular enclosure (PRN 4877), which was visible on the rectified aerial photograph. The survey failed to positively identify the enclosure, but did identify features of possible archaeological interest. Four trial trenches were excavated over these features and the possible location of the enclosure. Two ditches associated with the enclosure were identified in Trench 1, although there was no associated dating evidence. No other archaeological features were identified in the remaining three trenches.*

### **1.0 Introduction**

This report describes the results of an evaluation carried out at Weeford Island North, Staffordshire, by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in May 2001. It also incorporates the results of a cartographic survey carried out by BUFAU prior to the trial trenching exercise. A geophysical survey was undertaken prior to the trial trenching by GSB Prospection (Shiel 2000). The work was commissioned by Brian Evans & Associates of Wolverhampton, on behalf of K.B.Jackson and Son (Properties) Ltd, Burton on Trent in advance of the proposed construction of a motorists' service area. The evaluation conformed to a specification prepared by Staffordshire County Council (Staffordshire County Council 1999). A total of four trenches, which totalled approximately 140m<sup>2</sup> in area, was excavated to intercept several features revealed during the geophysical survey and a possible sub-rectangular enclosure revealed as a cropmark.

### **2.0 Location of Site (Figs.1, 2 & 3)**

The site lies to the west of the A38 Birmingham-Lichfield road and to the north of the A5 Watling Street (NGR SK130 050), in the angle formed by the two roads. The site is comprised of two fields: Field 1, to the north of the A5, is currently under crop and Field 2, to the west of the A38, is set-aside.

The underlying geology is Permo-Triassic and Carboniferous reddish sandstone, and there is a gentle slope from north to south across the site.

### 3.0 Cartographic Assessment by Sarah Watt

#### 3.1 Method

All appropriate cartographic information held by Staffordshire County Record Office and the Joint Record Office, Lichfield, was consulted. Staffordshire County Sites and Monuments Record was also consulted, and the aerial photographs held in their collections were examined. All sources are listed in full in Section 10.0. The assessment adhered to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

#### 3.2 Known Archaeology

The site lies along the northern side of Roman Watling Street, about 4km east of the Roman settlement at Wall. The SMR contains two records associated with the site and one on the site itself. PRN 5150 is the Roman Road and PRN 3623 is a cropmark – a large rectangular (probably Roman) enclosure to the east of the A38. The only record for the site itself, PRN 4877, is a cropmark enclosure in the north-west corner of the site. This was identified during evaluation work associated with the Birmingham Northern Relief Road in 1994, and is described as a ‘sub-rectangular enclosure (with possible internal features’ (*Environmental Statement* 1994). The aerial photograph on which this cropmark was seen is held at Cambridge University (ref. CI 077). During this work, a large area of cropmarks was also identified north of Shenstone, to the west of the site.

#### 3.3 Cartographic Information

Yates’s 1775 Map of the County of Stafford shows Watling Street marked as ‘Roman Road’, but nothing is shown on the site itself.

The Ordnance Survey 2” maps, produced between 1815-1840 show the area of the site divided into enclosed fields. At the junction of Watling Street with the current A38 are the initials T.G. To the north-west is a site marked ‘Off Low’, also shown on the first edition 1” Ordnance Survey of 1839 next to a circular symbol. According to Gelling (1988) this is ‘the most notable instance in the West Midlands of a –low place-name which may refer to an Anglian burial.’ It was the meeting place of a Staffordshire hundred and is marked by a tumulus, presumably still clearly visible in 1839. Ploughing has now truncated the mound. As the name Offa was of significance in the Mercian royal family, it is possible that this tumulus was the burial mound of a person of some importance. The presence of this feature in the vicinity of the site may have a bearing on the undated cropmark (4877) observed on the site. The Ordnance Survey 1” map also shows a Brickworks at the extreme south-western corner of the site, opposite Streetway House.

The 1843-4 Tithe map and award for the township of Weeford, shows a Toll Gate (corresponding to the T.G. marked on the Ordnance Survey) and L-shaped building at the junction of the two roads, in the extreme south-eastern corner of the site. This area is listed as belonging to the Trustees of Highways, and consisted of a Toll Gate House and Garden. The tithe map depicts a ‘township’ of isolated farms/homesteads, the

Weeford Hall and Manley Hall estates, and a church. The two estates, the church and the toll gate are the only items listed in the tithe award.

There was no Parliamentary Enclosure for Weeford and no estate maps showing the area of the site.

The 1883 25" Ordnance Survey (First Edition) shows nothing on the site, except a pond in the easternmost field. The second edition, from 1902, shows the pond remaining. In the extreme south-east corner of the site was a cruciform building, another possible small structure, a well, and a linear enclosure along Watling Street marked 'Pound.' These features are also shown on the 1922 Ordnance Survey map.

### 3.4 Aerial Photographs

All relevant aerial photographs held at Staffordshire County Sites and Monuments Record were examined for evidence of cropmark 4877, but it could not be discerned on any of these.

### 3.5 Conclusion

From the map evidence, it would appear that no large-scale industry capable of creating the large cropmark on the site has existed here. The only industry seems to have been a Brickworks shown on the 1839 Ordnance Survey. This does not seem to have been large enough or in quite the same location as the cropmark to have been associated with it, although due to the small scale of this map it is difficult to tell how accurate a representation it depicts. Given the context of the landscape around it, it is possible to suggest that the cropmark is of prehistoric or Roman origin, or possibly of the Anglo-Saxon period, given its proximity to the Offlow tumulus.

### 4.0 **Geophysical Survey (Fig. 3)**

The survey was undertaken prior to trial trenching by GSB Prospection, Bradford (Shiel 2000). Five areas were tested using a gradiometer survey, a summary of the results is listed below:

- Area A was positioned to locate the enclosure and, although a few anomalies of archaeological interest were recorded within the area, the enclosure itself was not identified.
- Area B was positioned slightly to the south-east of Area A to locate any possible subsurface features and recorded anomalies likely to be of a non-archaeological nature.
- Area C was located to intercept several linear features close to the roadside to the north of the A5 (T) and recorded possible ditch-type anomalies.
- Area D was positioned over a region of increased magnetic response and recorded possible pit-type anomalies.
- Area E was located over a possible enclosure and associated pit-type anomalies.

Areas A, C and E were deemed to be the most promising of the surveyed areas, warranting further investigation by archaeological trial trenching.

## 5.0 Aims of the Evaluation

The aims of the evaluation trenches were to:

- intercept any features identified through geophysical prospection and rectified aerial photography;
- identify, through excavation, the nature, extent and date of these features; and
- characterise the site chronology through the study of any recovered artefacts.

## 6.0 Method

Following the cartographic survey and geophysical survey (Shiel 2000) a total of four trenches was excavated as part of the evaluation. The positions of the trenches were agreed in discussions between BUFAU (G.Coates) and the Staffordshire County Council, Development Services County Archaeological Officer (C.Welch).

The removal of topsoil was undertaken with a J.C.B., using a toothless 'ditching' bucket, under direct archaeological supervision. The topsoil was removed to a level where any surviving features could be observed in the natural subsoil. Excavation of any observed features was undertaken by hand, with particular emphasis on the recovery of any dateable artefacts. Excavated features and contexts were recorded using BUFAU pro-forma record sheets. Sections of the evaluation trenches were recorded at a scale of 1:50, individual sections were recorded at a scale of 1:20 with plans at 1:50. A photographic record was made using both black and white and colour transparency film. Where no archaeological features were recorded, a record of the stratigraphy was made.

These records comprise the site archive, which is currently stored at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, with the intention of depositing it with the Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery.

## 7.0 Results (Fig. 3)

### 7.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 4)

*Dimensions:* 20m long by 1.5m wide (east-west), 10m long by 1.5m wide (north-south)

*National Grid Co-ordinates:* west end [502976E 205224N], east end [502997E 205120N], south end [502972E 205112N]

*Level (at ground surface):* 104.70 to 104.24m A.O.D.

Trench 1 was a right-angled trench located to intercept the enclosure ditch of the cropmark (PRN 4877).

The natural subsoil, a orange-brown sand (1001), was reached at approximately 0.34m below the modern ground surface. Several scars produced by deep ploughing of the area were observed cutting at an angle across the trench. Cutting through the natural subsoil was a large, 2.50m wide by 0.52m deep, ditch (F103). Ditch F103 was aligned approximately north to south, and was filled with a deposit of reddish sand-clay (1005). No finds were recovered from this material.



Sealing the natural subsoil and F103 was a thin layer of heavily ploughed topsoil (1000), which was on average 0.34m in depth. One small flint scraper was recovered from the upper surface of this material, but was not associated with any feature.

Located at the north-west corner of Trench 1 were two joining ditches, F100 and F102. Ditch F100 was to the south and F102 formed the main ditch to the north. A shallow sided ditch, F100 was 1.5m wide and 0.50m deep. It was filled with a deposit of mottled sand-silt (1003), which contained no artefacts. Ditch F102 was slightly wider than ditch F100, at 2m in width. It was filled with a deposit of slightly more clayey silt/sand (1002). Excavation of this fill produced no dateable evidence. It was not possible to determine the precise relationship of these two ditches, but it would appear that they were contemporary with each other.

Cutting through the southern edge of F100 and into the natural subsoil, was a large, shallow sided ditch (F101), which measured 2.6m wide and 0.45m deep. Running at an approximate east-west direction across the trench, this feature was similar in shape, size and fill to F103. Excavation of the fill of F101, a deposit of reddish silt-clay (1004), produced a small piece of highly abraded, undatable, pottery.

To the north of F100 two possible stake-holes (F104 and F105) were observed. Stake-hole F104 was 0.06m in diameter and 0.20m deep. It was filled with a deposit of grey silt (1006), which was similar in appearance to the fill (1007) of F105. Stake-hole F105 was 0.07m in diameter and 0.24m in depth. No dateable evidence was recovered from either feature.

## 7.2 Trench 2

*Dimensions:* 25m long by 1.5m wide.

*National Grid Co-ordinates:* south-eastern end [502994E 204940N], north-western end [502971E 204960N]

*Level (at ground surface):* 103.24m A.O.D.

Trench 2 was located to intercept a series of linear and pit-type anomalies recorded in the geophysical survey.

The natural subsoil, a brown silt-sand (2001), was reached at a height of 102.89m. Scars from deep ploughing of the field could be observed cutting at an angle across this material. Cleaning of the trench base revealed no further features or changes in context that may indicate disturbances. Sealing this material was a thin 0.32-0.35m layer of silt-loam topsoil (2000), which was similar to 1000. No finds or dateable artefacts were recovered from this trench.

## 7.3 Trench 3

*Dimensions:* 25m long by 1.5m wide.

*National Grid Co-ordinates:* north end [503205E 204880N], south end [503219E 204850N]

*Level (at ground surface):* 104.31m A.O.D.

Trench 3 was located to intercept several linear and pit-type anomalies, which were identified during the geophysical survey.

The natural subsoil, a silt-sand mix (3001), was reached at a height of 103.91m. Crossing this material at an angle to the trench were a series of scars left by deep ploughing. Cleaning of this surface revealed that no further discernible features could be observed. This natural subsoil was sealed by a thin 0.32-0.35m layer of topsoil (3000). No finds were recovered from either the initial machining or the cleaning of the trench.

#### 7.4 Trench 4

*Dimensions:* 15m long by 1.5m wide.

*National Grid Co-ordinates:* north end [503380E 204852N], south end [503252E 204838N]

*Level (at ground surface):* 106.07m A.O.D.

Trench 4 was located to intercept a series of linear geophysical anomalies close to the roadside of the A38 opposite Weeford Island.

The natural subsoil, in this case banded layers of orange to red sand-silt (4001), was reached at a level of 105.73m. This surface was cleaned but revealed no evident features apart from scars left by deep ploughing. These layers were sealed by a layer of topsoil (4000), which had an average depth of 0.33m. No finds were recovered during the machine stripping or the cleaning of the trench base.

### **8.0 Discussion**

Trial trenches 2 to 4 failed to find any evidence that may be identified as either linear or pit features suggested by the geophysical survey. Evidence of scaring from deep ploughing was observed in all trenches.

Ditches F103 and F101, in Trench 1, appear to be associated with the sub-rectangular enclosure identified from cropmarks (PRN 4877). They may join outside the excavated trench to form the south-eastern corner of the enclosure. The lack of artefacts from these ditches makes them difficult both to date and interpret. In a region associated with Roman activity, if this feature was of a contemporary date we might expect to recover some Romano-British artefacts, although stock enclosures from this period often contain few artefacts. The lack of such finds might suggest that the enclosure is prehistoric in date. The evidence is inconclusive. Ditch F100 was cut by F101, which may suggest an earlier enclosure ditch or feature. Stake holes F105 and F104 may be indications of activity in the interior of the enclosure.

The trial trenching has identified the existence and location of the enclosure (PRN 4877), but has failed to date and characterise this feature.

## 9.0 Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was supervised by Jon Sterenberg and carried out by Melissa Conway, Mary Duncan and Roy Krackowicz. The project was managed by Simon Buteux and Gary Coates. The cartographic survey was researched by Sarah Watt. Chris Welch advised upon and monitored the project on behalf of Staffordshire County Council. Illustrations for the report were prepared by Nigel Dodds, and the report was edited by Simon Buteux.

Brian Evans from Brian Evans Associates and Ken Jackson, from K.B.Jackson and Son (Properties) Ltd liased on behalf of the developers. T.E.Bates Plant Hire provided the machinery. Thanks are also due to Chris Cox for providing the rectified plot of the enclosure (PRN 4877).

## 10.0 References

### Maps:

Old Series Ordnance Survey	1" scale	1839
Ordnance Survey Drawings	2" scale	1815-1840
Ordnance Survey 25"	25" scale	1883, 1902, 1922

Yates's 1775 Map of the County of Stafford  
1843-4 Tithe Map and Award  
Various estate plans held at Stafford County Record Office

Aerial Photographs (all held at Staffordshire County Council Development Services and SMR):

HSL UK, 1963	Black&White verticals	Run 14	5949
1971 collection	Black&White verticals	Run 133/71	108
1981/2 collection	Black&White verticals	Run 32/1981	148
Geonex 1991	Colour Verticals	Run 39	68

### Publications

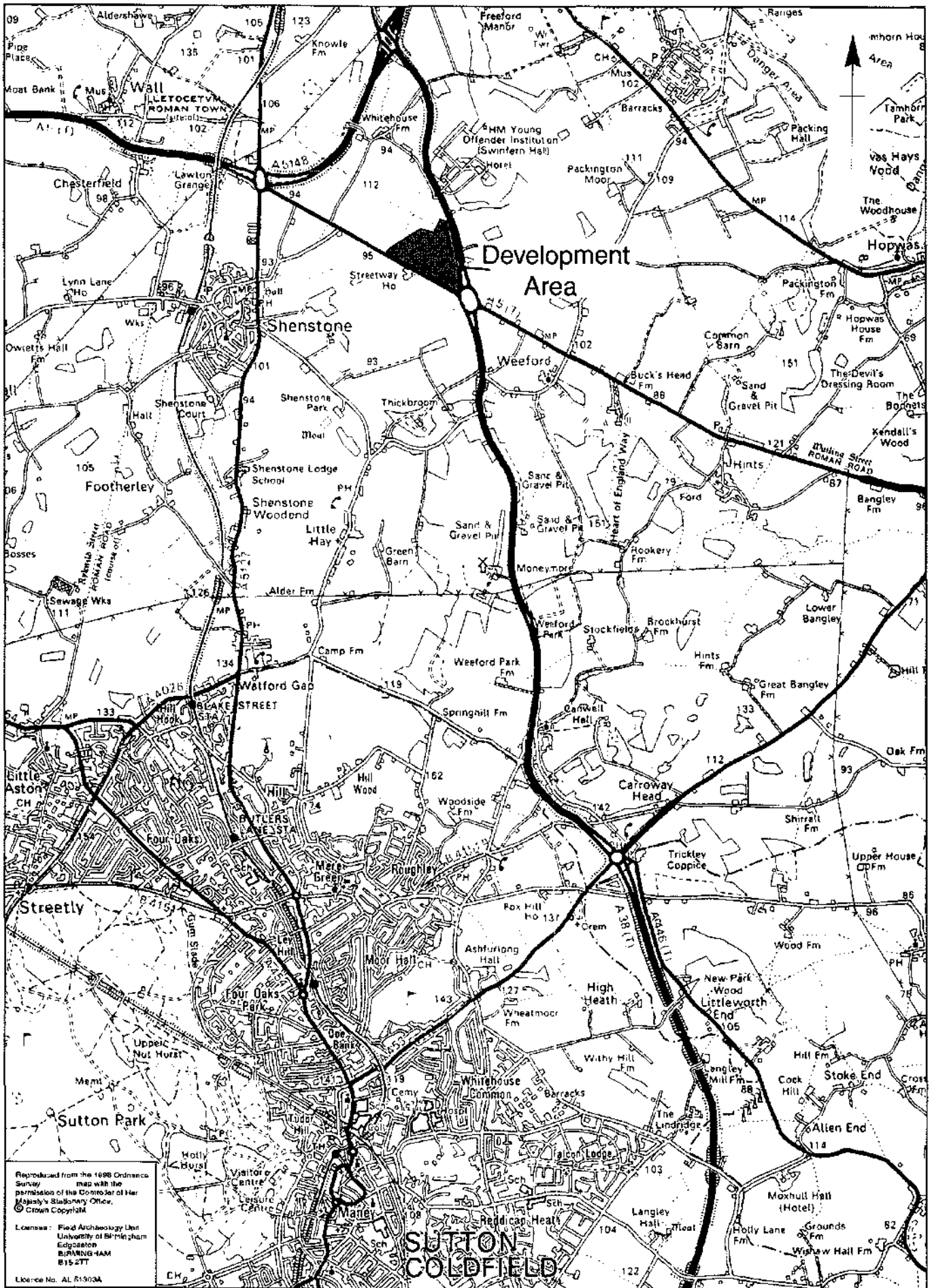
Birmingham Northern Relief Road *Environmental Statement*, Vol.4, Appendix F, Cultural Heritage

Gelling, M. 1988 '*Signposts to the Past*' Phillimore & Co. Ltd.

Shiel, D. 2000 '*Weeford Island North, Staffordshire*' Geophysical Survey Report 2000/81, GSB Prospection

Staffordshire County Council 1999 '*Brief with Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation at Weeford Island North, A5/A38 Junction, Weeford, Staffordshire*'

## Figures

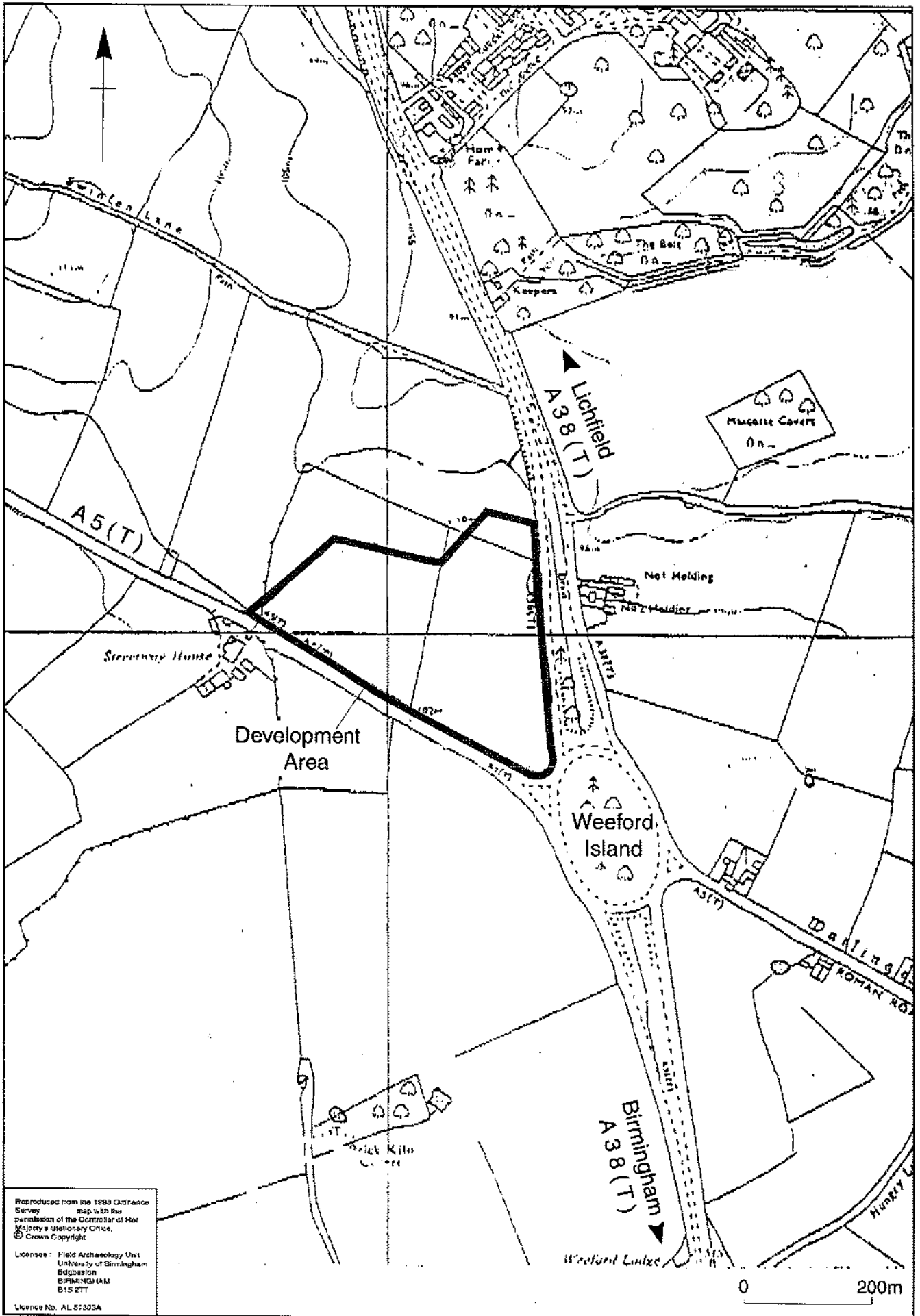


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Fig.1



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Fig.2

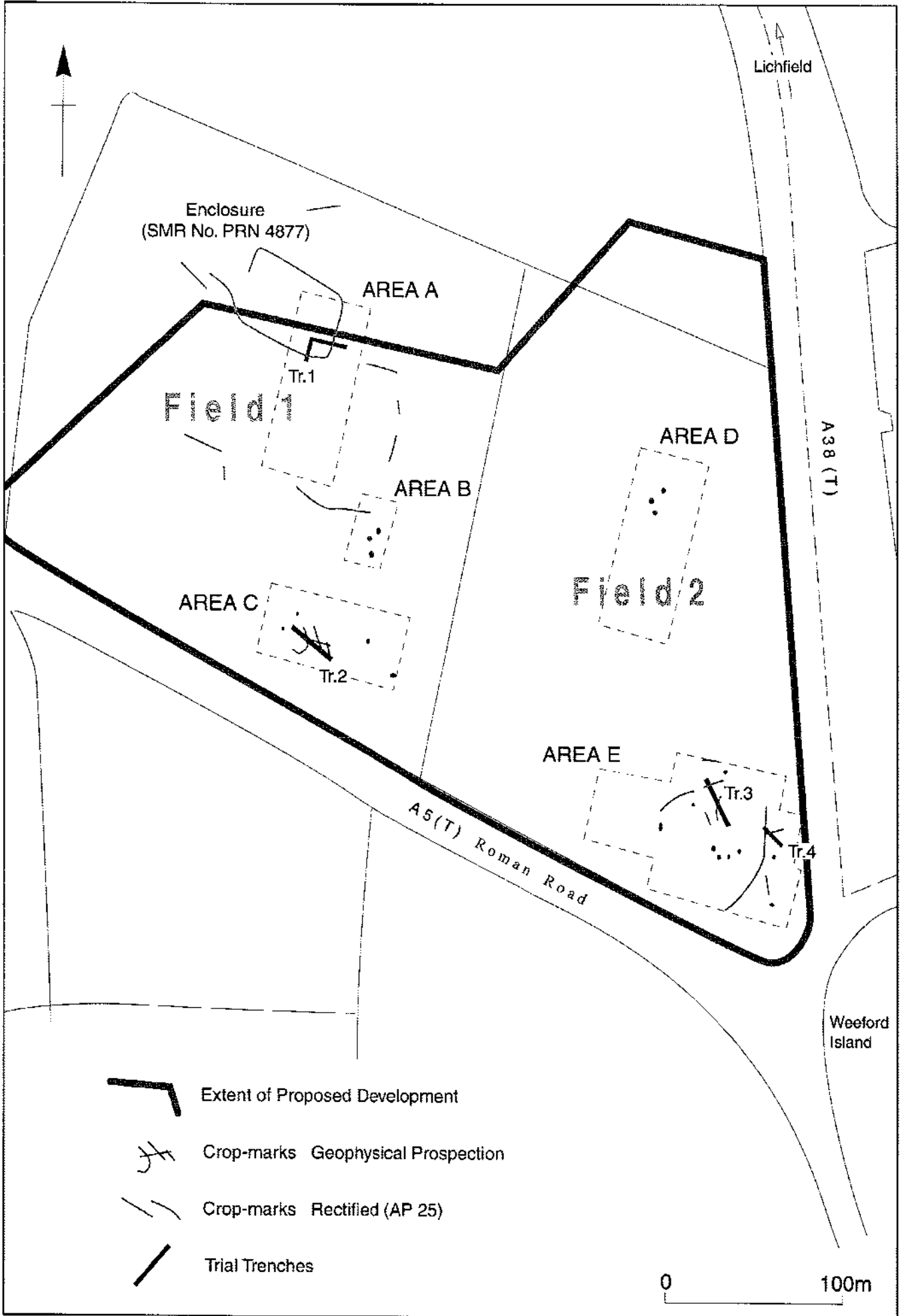


Fig.3

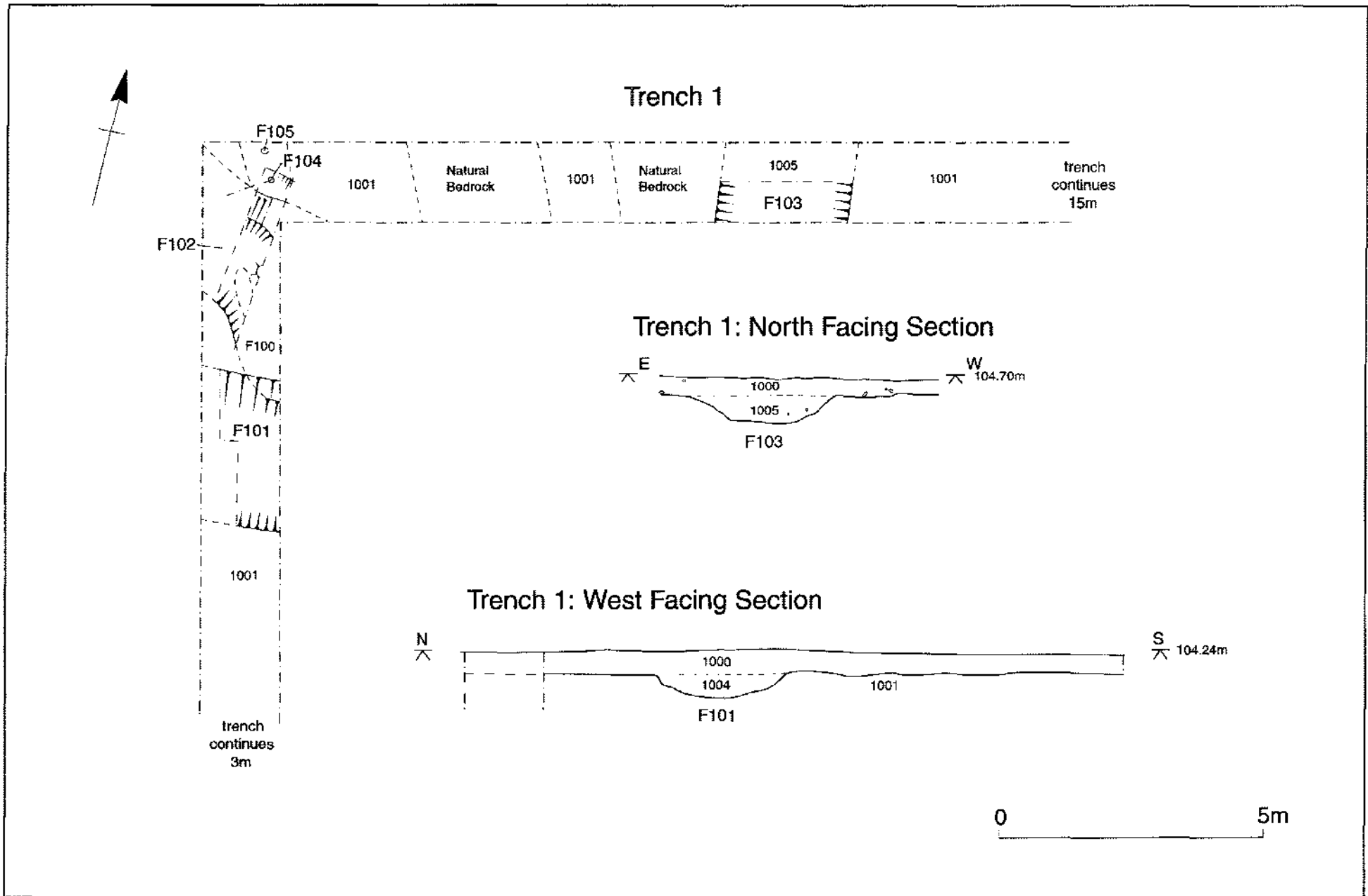


Fig.4



