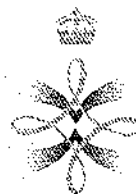




THE UNIVERSITY
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**An archaeological
watching brief
on the site of the
Recycling Unit,
Alrewas Quarry,
Staffordshire**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



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1996

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Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 767
February 2001

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

by
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An archaeological watching brief on the site of the Recycling Unit, Alrewas Quarry, Staffordshire

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the topsoil stripping of the site of the Recycling Unit at Alrewas Quarry, Staffordshire (NGR SK 179 148) in December 2000. This was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, commissioned by Phoenix Archaeology Consulting Ltd., on behalf of Lafarge Redland Aggregates Ltd. This followed a geophysical survey and trial trenching. 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 appeared to be the remains of Medieval and Post-Medieval plough furrows. As a result of the trenching and in accordance with a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent, the topsoil strip was monitored by an archaeologist to identify and investigate any archaeological features which may have been missed during the evaluation. No further archaeological deposits were identified during the watching brief, although the line of the plough furrows were confirmed. The results of the watching brief show that the cursus monument does not lie within the bounds of the site.

Introduction

The following report details the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken in accordance with a condition of 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 Phocnix Consulting on behalf of Lafarge Redland Aggregates Ltd. and was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in December 2000. The watching brief followed a geophysical survey (GeoQuest Associates 2000) and trial trenching (Coates 2000). The watching brief was based on a specification prepared by Phoenix Consulting (Howlett 2000b).

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. This is a type of rectangular ditched enclosure that can range from hundreds of metres upwards in length; 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 2000a, 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). Trial trenching on the site carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in 2000 also failed to identify the monument; a more detailed summary of the trial trenching is included below.

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 turned out to be later Iron Age hut circles (Coates 1999b). 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 1999a; Neilson 2000) 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, Neilson 2000), 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 developed 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 Diama, 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.

The 2000 B.U.F.A.U. evaluation

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.

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. A slightly deeper plough furrow, identified in Trenches 5 & 6, may have been an agricultural drainage ditch or the remains of a former field boundary. Two shallow drainage ditches were found in Trench 11. A high voltage power cable and associated trench cut was visible in Trenches 2, 7, 14 and 15.

Aims

The objective of the watching brief was to attempt to establish the presence/absence, character, extent, state of preservation and date of any archaeological features or deposits that may have been missed during the evaluation. In particular, any evidence for the presence of the cursus monument (S.A.M. ST 220b).

Method

The site of the Recycling Unit was stripped of topsoil by a mechanical excavator fitted with a 2m toothless ditching bucket. This was monitored with a continuous archaeological presence. Where appropriate, possible archaeological features 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 features were photographed using both colour and black and white film. Sections and plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50 or 1:20 as appropriate. Where no archaeological deposits were identified, a record of the stratigraphy was made.

Results (Fig.2)

No archaeological features were identified during the watching brief. Medieval and Post-Medieval plough furrows were identified, which had already been noted by the geophysical survey and trial trenching.

The topsoil was between 0.3 and 0.5m deep and in places was above an orange sand subsoil horizon, which was between 0.1 and 0.2m deep. These two layers were above the natural sand and gravel horizon.

No finds dating to earlier than the 20th century were recovered during the topsoil strip.

Discussion

No evidence of the cursus monument or any archaeological features was recovered. There was evidence of extensive ploughing on the site, which may have destroyed any shallow features recorded in early aerial photographs.

The absence of the cursus monument was not unexpected as the extensive trenching exercise (Coates 2000) had also failed to identify this feature. The conclusion of the evaluation report that there would have been survival of a large monument if it had been within the site remains valid (*ibid.*, 6). 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 was no evidence for its presence within the bounds of the site.

Acknowledgements

Gary Coates carried out the fieldwork and wrote this report. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. The project was managed by Simon Buteux, who also edited this report.

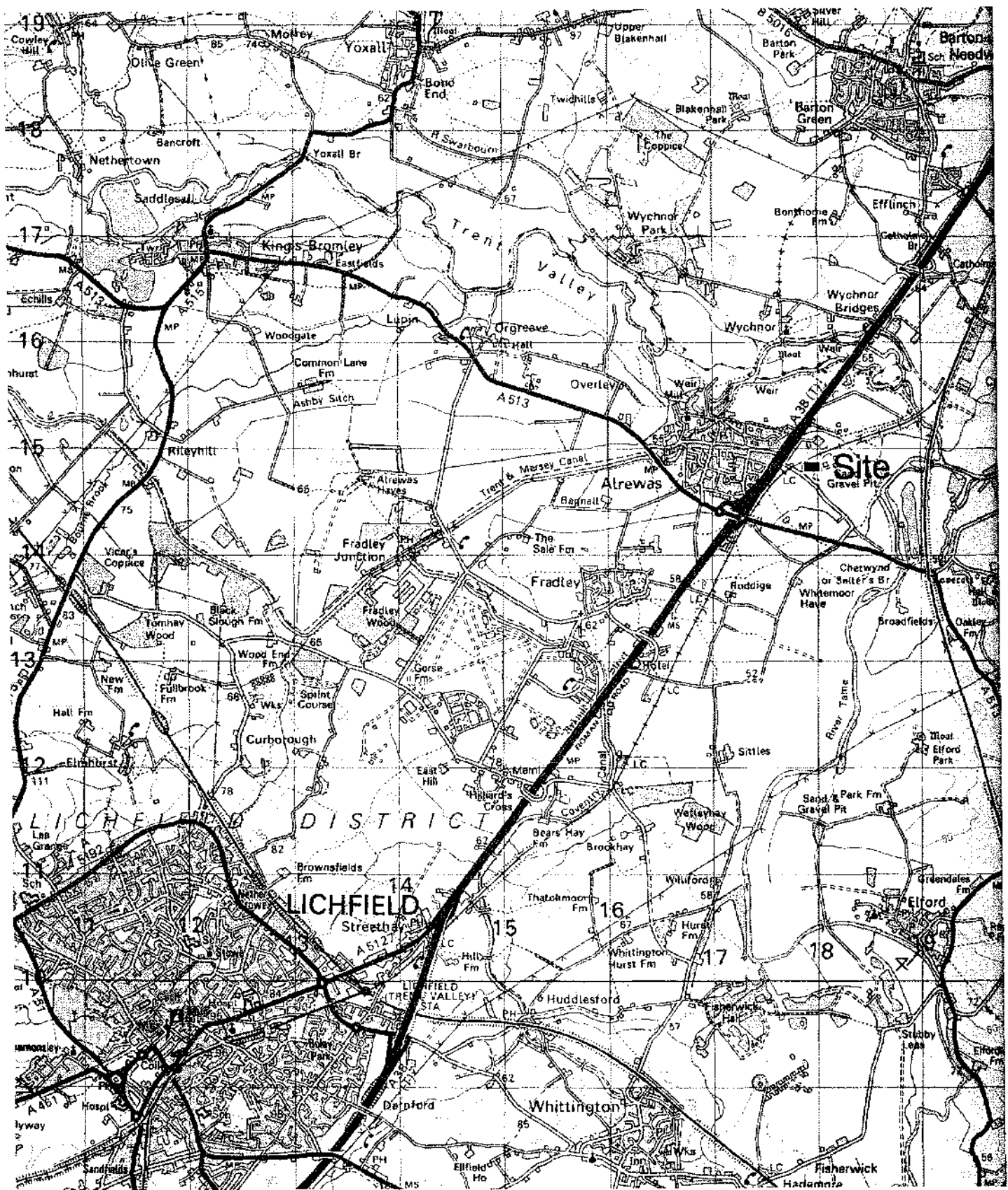
Chris Howlett monitored the watching brief on behalf of Phoenix Consulting and Dr. Paul Stamper on behalf of English Heritage. We are grateful for the co-operation and assistance of the quarry staff and Len Mudd and Ross Halley from Lafarge Redlands. We are also grateful to the plant contractors, Stoke Plant Hire, for their co-operation.

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Figures



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Figure 1.

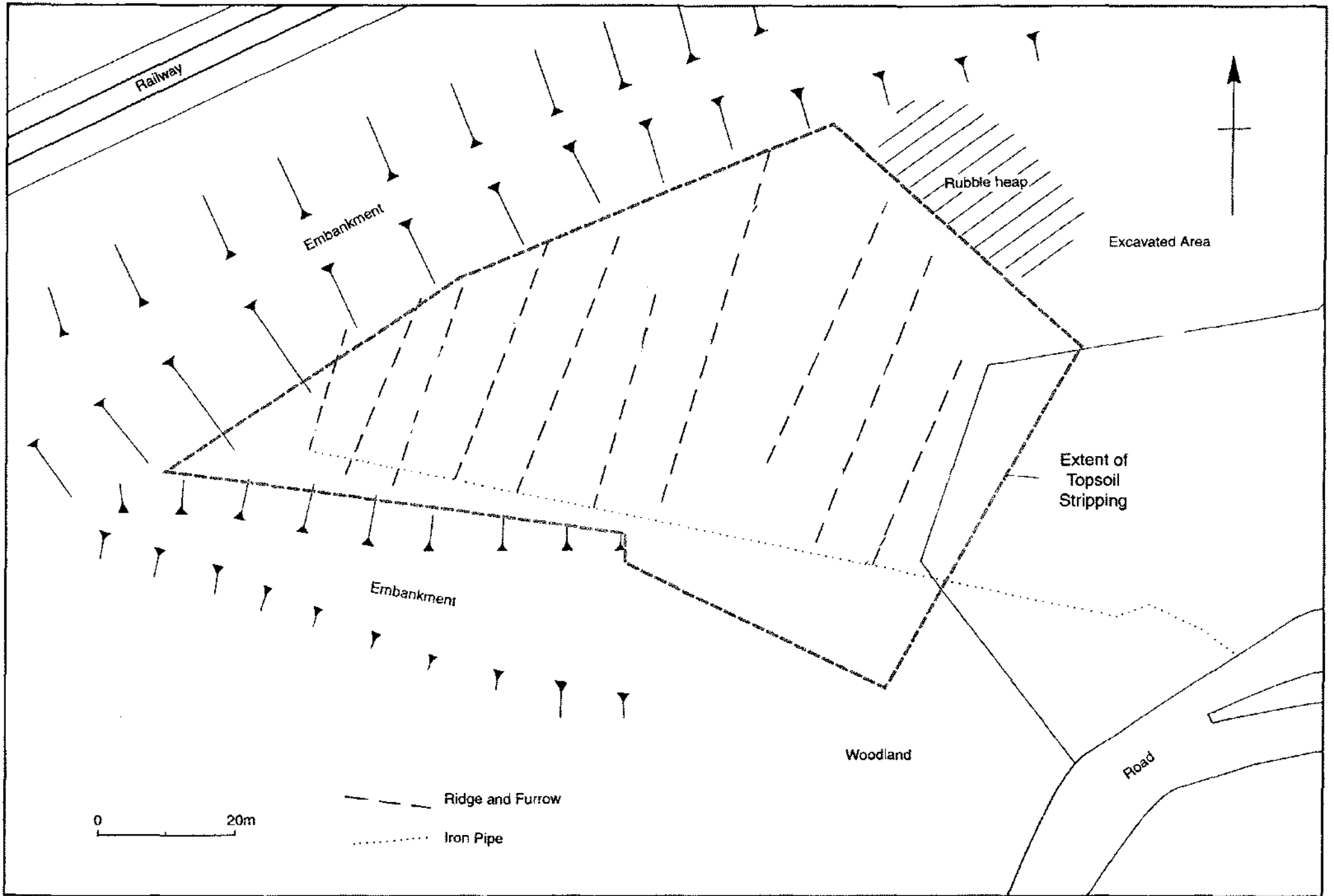


Fig.2

Plate

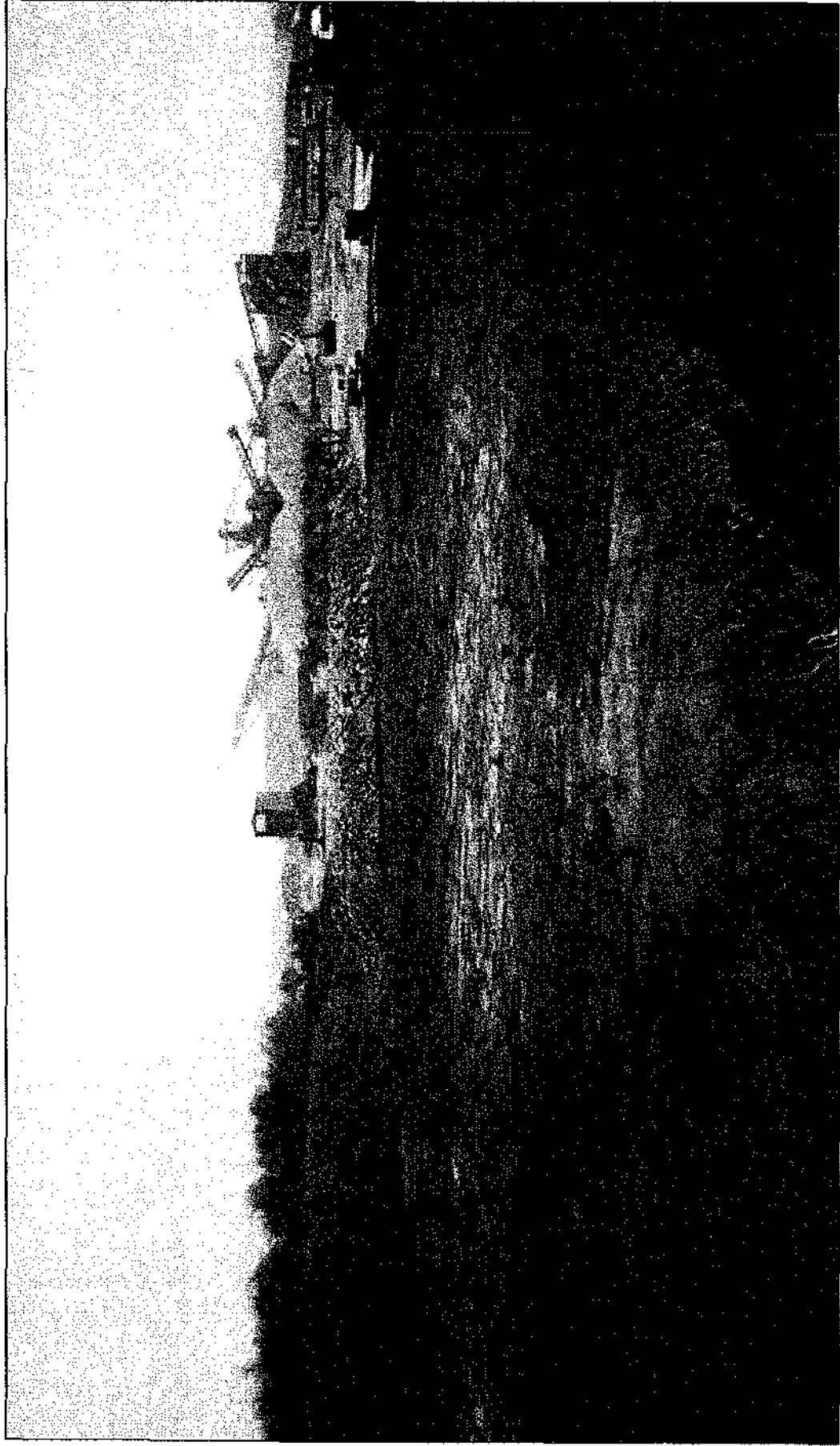


Plate 1