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**A supplementary
archaeological evaluation
at Sawley Cross,
Hemington, Leicestershire**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



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by

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Simon Buteux and Laurence Jones

1.0 Summary

Four archaeological trial trenches were excavated on agricultural land at Sawley Cross, Hemington, Leicestershire (NGR SK 467 294) by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, in order to further inform the design and construction methodology of a rail link associated with a proposed road and rail distribution centre. The proposed rail link passes through an area likely to contain the remains of a Bronze Age barrow cemetery. The purpose of the trenches was to test for the survival of archaeological remains. No archaeological remains were detected during the trial trenching. However, a previous evaluation carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services, in the context of an earlier planning application, located prehistoric features interpreted as the remains of two possible barrows, one of which was on the line of the proposed rail link.

2.0 Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) at Sawley Cross, Hemington, Leicestershire (centred at SK 467 294), between 11th and 17th January 2001. The evaluation was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of their clients, Blue Circle Industries. It was carried out in accordance with a specification prepared by Rob Bourn of CgMs (Bourn 2000b) and approved by Ann Graf, Senior Planning Archaeologist, Leicestershire County Council. The evaluation followed on from an archaeological desk-based assessment carried out by CgMs (Bourn 2000a). A monitoring visit was made to the excavations by Paul Chadwick of CgMs and Ann Graf of Leicestershire County Council on 15th January 2001.

The evaluation was carried out in order to further inform the proposed construction methodology of a rail link associated with a proposed road and rail distribution centre. The line of the rail link passes through an area likely to contain the remains of a Bronze Age barrow cemetery, more fully documented to the south. The evaluation was required in order to comply with PPG16 and Leicestershire County Council and North West Leicestershire District Council archaeological policies.

The evaluation comprised the archaeological excavation of four trenches situated on the line of the proposed rail link.

3.0 Site location and description

The site is located in north Leicestershire, at grid reference SK 467 294 (Fig. 1). It is bounded by Netherfield Lane to the west, the M1 motorway to the east and the Stenton-Sheet Stores Railway to the south. The topography of the site is essentially flat, lying at about 32m OD. At the time of the evaluation the land was used for both

pasture and arable agriculture. The underlying geology is river terrace sands and gravels.

4.0 Archaeological background

A Bronze Age barrow cemetery has been recorded, principally by aerial photography, to the south of the Stenton-Sheet Stores Railway. The main focus of the cemetery appears to lie in the semicircle of land defined by the line of the railway and the curving junction of the A50 Stoke-Derby link road with the M1 (Fig. 2). Various aerial photographs suggest the presence of at least six barrows.

One of the barrows (Site I), situated to the south of the present A50, was excavated in 1954 by Merrick Posnansky (1955). Traces of a cremation associated with a small bronze knife, two flint knives, a flint arrowhead and possible beaker pottery were recovered from under the central area of the truncated remains of a low earth mound. The mound was surrounded by a single annular ring ditch.

An evaluation of the area threatened by the construction of the Stoke-Derby link road was undertaken by the Trent and Peak Archaeological Trust in 1993 and included fieldwalking, geophysical survey and two trial trenches (T&PAT 1993, 21). A trial trench across the north-western side of the ring ditch at Site VI suggested the survival of a slight mound. This mound was subsequently excavated in 1994 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of the Highways Agency (Hughes 2000). Elements of the barrow mound survived up to 0.3m in height and this was surrounded by a ring ditch 33.5m in diameter. The construction of the barrow was preceded by the digging of a group of features which appeared to indicate a complex funerary ritual, including the digging of a circular palisade gully and a central scoop, then sealed by a cremation deposit. To the north of the barrow, on the line of the palisade gully, was a small pit containing two gold armlets, a copper dagger and fragments of two pottery vessels. This exceptional group, which was not directly associated with a burial deposit, represents a unique combination of objects in an Early Bronze Age context. The dagger appears to be an import from Brittany and the gold armlets have their closest parallels in bronze armlets from Scotland (Needham 2000).

At the same time as the excavation of Site VI, a group of pits (Site V) was excavated by the Leicester Archaeological Unit, now University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS), on behalf of Severn Trent Water in advance of the diversion of a mains water pipe necessitated by the construction of the new road (Meek 1995 and 2000, 17). The most significant feature was a circular pit which contained cremated bone, prehistoric pottery and a ceramic pulley-shaped object, interpreted as a dress ornament or an ear-plug (Woodward 2000, 56).

In addition to these two major excavations, other areas to be affected by the road construction were sampled. However, no other barrows or significant archaeological features were identified.

Following these excavations desk-based archaeological assessments of the Lockington barrow cemetery and of the land around junction 24 of the M1 motorway were carried out by the Leicestershire Archaeology Unit (Clark 1995a; 1995b). In

1997 an evaluation of the area of land currently under consideration was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (Ripper 1998). The evaluation was undertaken in the context of a planning application for sand and gravel extraction by Redlands Aggregates Ltd, and comprised geophysical survey and test trenching. Fourteen trenches were excavated in the area of interest, with a further five to the east of the M1 (Fig. 2). Two possible barrows were revealed by the test trenching, one in Trenches 13 and 13b, which lie within the line of the proposed rail link, and one in Trenches 10 and 11, which lie to the southwest, close to Netherfield Lane. The features recorded in Trenches 13 and 13b comprised a group of curving ditches appearing to define a sub-circular enclosure with an internal diameter of about 14m. A worked flint and prehistoric pottery were recovered from the fills of the ditch, which appeared to have been re-cut on several occasions. The curvilinear ditches recorded in Trenches 10 and 11 appeared to describe part of a double-ditched enclosure with a conjectured diameter of between 10m and 15m. While both sets of features in Trenches 13 and 13b and Trenches 10 and 11 could represent structures of various types, for example settlement enclosures or roundhouses, given their proximity to the barrow cemetery to the south the possibility that they represent the remains of barrows – outliers of the main group – is given weight.

The evaluation carried out by University of Leicester Archaeological Services was not conducted in the context of the present development proposals and the location of the trenches was not therefore determined by the route of the proposed rail link. The four additional trenches which are the subject of the present report were specifically located with reference to the line of the proposed rail link.

5.0 Aims

The aims of the evaluation, as stated in the specification (Bourn 2000b), were:

- To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present.
- To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- To determine or confirm the approximate extent of any remains.
- To determine or confirm the state of preservation of any remains.
- To determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present.
- To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of any artefactual evidence present.
- To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence and the forms in which such evidence may be present. To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence and the forms in which such evidence may be present.
- To reconsider the findings and the archive of the previous ULAS evaluation on the site and incorporate the findings of this review.

6.0 Methods

Four trenches were positioned on the line of the proposed rail link (two 30m x 1.9m and two 15m x 1.9m). To prevent confusion, the trench numbers allocated continued the number sequence used for the earlier ULAS evaluation. The positions of the

trenches were surveyed in using a Total Station EDM. The trenches were then mechanically opened using a 360-degree excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket and operating under constant archaeological supervision. The topsoil/ploughsoil was removed to expose the top of the natural subsoil. In trenches where probable alluvial deposits underlay the topsoil, the surface of the alluvial layer was first mechanically cleaned in order to test for the presence of archaeological features. The alluvial layer was then carefully removed to expose the natural subsoil beneath these deposits. Spoil was carefully scanned for artefacts.

Subsequent sample excavation was carried out by hand. Any possible archaeological features, such as pits, were half sectioned. All deposits encountered were described fully on individual *pro-forma* context and feature recording cards. A drawn record was made of all features, at scales of 1:50 or 1:20, as appropriate. A drawn record was made of the long section of each trench. A full monochrome print and colour slide photographic record was maintained throughout.

7.0 Results

Trench 25

This trench was 30m long and 1.9m wide and was aligned northwest-southeast. The natural was a yellowish brown silty sandy clay (1002), 0.60-0.80m (31.06-30.26m AOD) below the present ground surface. This was sealed by a probable alluvial layer of orange brown sandy clay (1001), 0.30-0.60m deep. Layer 1001 was deeper at the centre of the trench, where it filled a slight natural depression. Layer 1001 was overlain by 0.30m of topsoil. No archaeological features or deposits were present and no finds were recovered.

Trench 26

This trench was 15m long and 1.9m wide and was orientated northwest-southeast. The natural was a yellow brown sandy clay with patches of sand and gravel (2001), 0.35m (30.60m AOD) below the present ground surface. At the northeast end of the trench 2001 was disturbed by an animal burrow, 0.03m deep. 2001 was sealed by 0.35m of topsoil (2000). No archaeological features or deposits were present and no finds were recovered.

Trench 27

The trench was 15m long and 1.9m wide and was orientated northeast-southwest. The natural was a yellow clay (3001), 0.20m below the present ground surface (29.67m AOD). 3001 was cut by a modern ceramic land drain and was sealed by 0.20m of topsoil (3000). No archaeological features or deposits were present and no finds were recovered.

Trench 28

This trench was 30m long and 1.9m wide and was aligned east-west. The natural was a yellowish brown sand and gravel (4002), 0.65-0.80m (29.27-29.42m AOD) below the present ground surface. This was sealed by a probable alluvial layer of orange brown silty sand (4001) 0.35-0.50m deep. This layer was only removed at the west end of the trench due to the presence of a water pipe. Layer 4001 was deeper at the west end of the trench, where the ground sloped down to the northwest towards a

stream. Layer 4001 was overlain by 0.30m of ploughsoil. No archaeological features or deposits were present and no finds were recovered.

8.0 Discussion

The trial trenching on the line of the proposed rail link did not detect any archaeological remains. However, the earlier evaluation by ULAS did uncover prehistoric features, on the line of the proposed rail link, which were interpreted as a possible barrow, in Trenches 13 and 13b. These features were sealed by 0.16-0.35m of orange brown sandy clay of probable alluvial origin, similar to layer 1001, Trench 25. It could be argued that any archaeological features sealed by this alluvial layer would be protected if only topsoil was removed and the underlying alluvial layer was left intact, prior to the construction of the railway embankment. In Trenches 26 and 27 the alluvial layer was not present and the topsoil, which was only 0.20m deep in places, directly overlay the natural.

9.0 Acknowledgements

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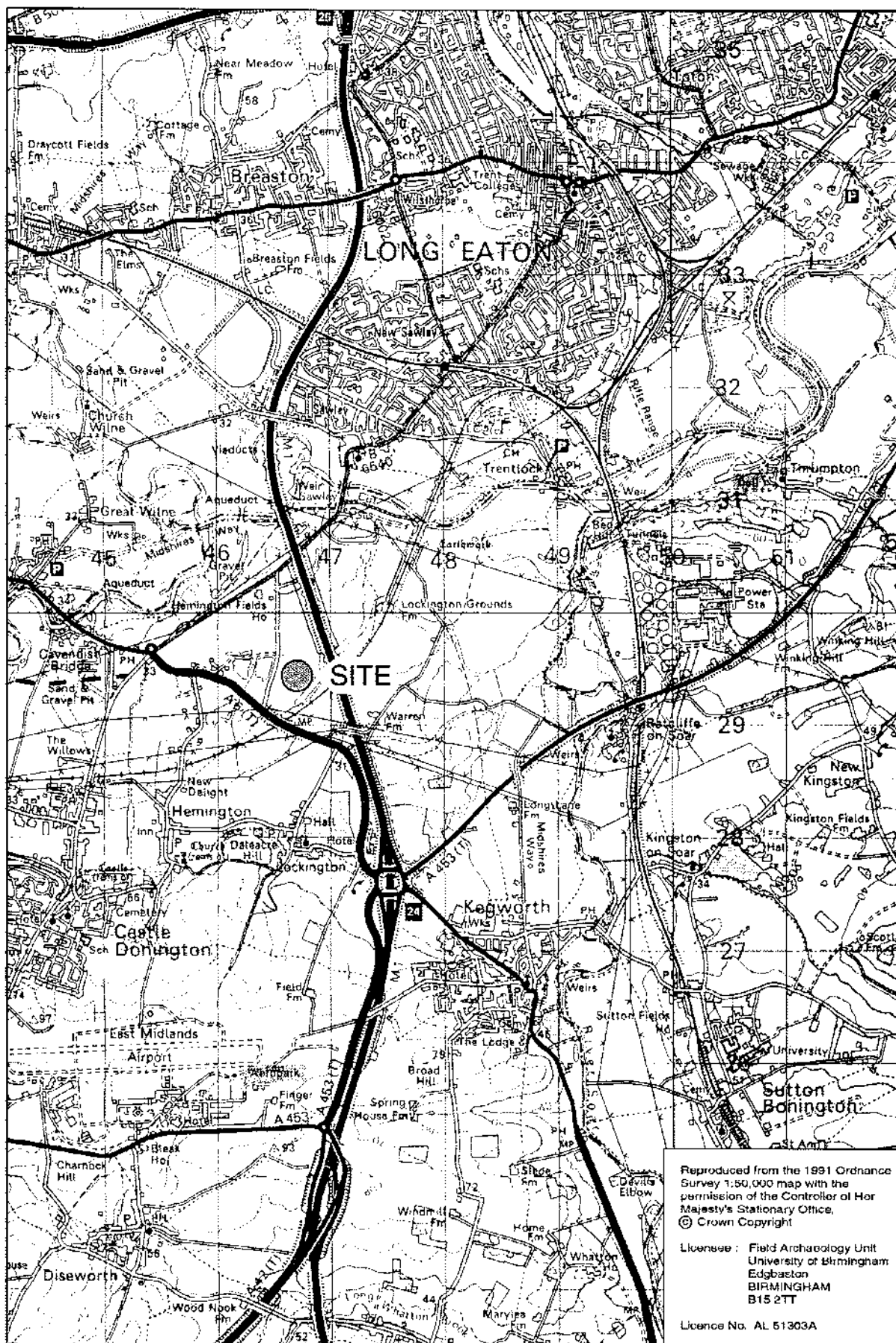


Fig.1

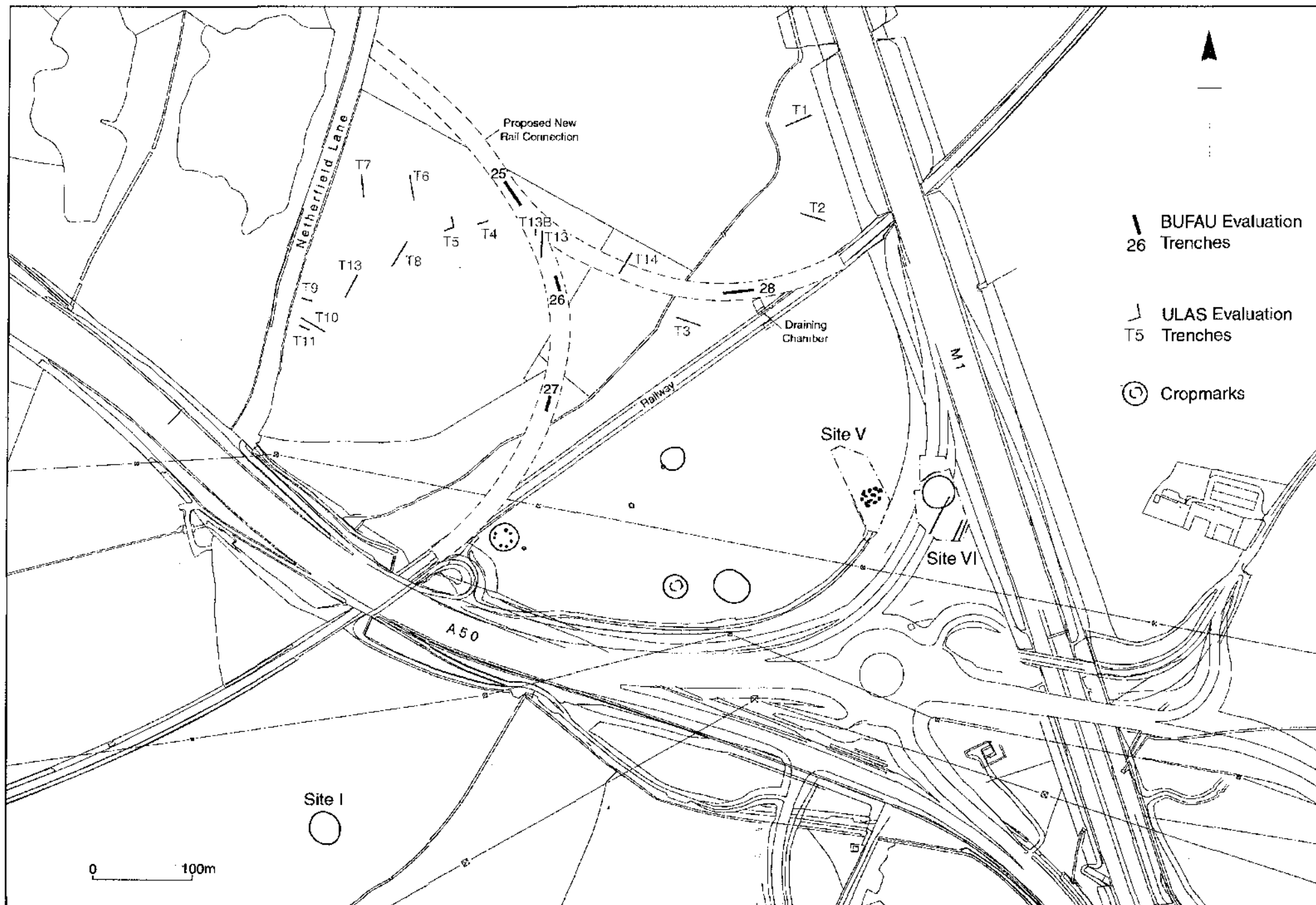


Fig.2