

**Earthwork Survey
and
Watching Brief
at Shustoke Farm,
Walsall, Black Country**

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**Earthwork survey and Watching Brief at
Shustoke Farm, Walsall, Black Country**

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Contents

	Page
Summary	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Historical Background	1
1.2 The Site and its Setting	2
1.3 Aims	2
2.0 Earthwork Survey	2
2.1 Aims	2
2.2 Methodology	3
2.3 Results	3
3.0 Watching Brief	4
3.1 Aims	4
3.2 Methodology	4
3.3 Results	4
4.0 Discussion	5
5.0 Acknowledgements	5
6.0 References	6

APPENDIX I Brief for Archaeological Work

List of Plates

- Plate 1 North-eastern boundary of Field 1
- Plate 2 Southern boundary of Field 1
- Plate 3 Stream along the southern boundary of Field 1
- Plate 4 Fishpond 1
- Plate 5 Leat linking Fishpond 2 and Fishpond 3
- Plate 6 Fishpond 3
- Plate 7 East end of the access road
- Plate 8 Modern backfill of Fishpond 1

List of Figures

- Fig. 1 Site Location
- Fig. 2 Plan of Study Area
- Fig. 3 Results of the Earthwork Survey

Earthwork Survey and Watching Brief at Shustoke Farm, Walsall, Black Country

Summary

An earthwork survey and watching brief was carried out along the route of an access road for the site of a new training ground for West Bromwich Albion Football Club. The work was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) for de Weijer Architects, on behalf of West Bromwich Albion Football Club. The site of Shustoke Farm (Black Country SMR 3168, NGR SP 036 961) has been identified as a probable medieval moated site. The new development runs around the perimeter of the moat itself, through a relic landscape containing ancient field boundaries and earthworks identified as a series of fishponds (Black Country SMR 10424). The aim of the earthwork survey was to record all elements of relic landscape ahead of the construction of the access road, and then to monitor groundworks during its construction. The survey revealed a series of three fishponds, inter-linked by leats, in fields to the north and west of the moated enclosure. It also identified ancient field boundaries of ditch and bank type, and areas of modern disturbance and dumping.

1.0 Introduction

This report details the results of archaeological fieldwork in advance of the construction of an access road for the new training ground of West Bromwich Albion Football Club. This fieldwork was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in May and June 2001 and February 2002, under commission by de Weijer Architects, on behalf of West Bromwich Albion Football Club.

In accordance with the guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990), a recommendation for a programme of archaeological work to accompany a planning application was made by the Black Country Archaeological Officer. The archaeological work complied with a brief defining the scope of the required survey outlined by the Local Planning Authority (Shaw 2001, Appendix I).

The work comprised an archaeological survey within fields affected by the proposed development (hereafter referred to as the study area, Fig. 1), and the monitoring of ground works during the construction of a new access road (Fig. 2).

1.1 Historical Background

Moats are a large heterogeneous class of archaeological monument. At a conservative estimate there are around five and a half to six thousand moated sites in Britain, the distribution of which has obvious links with both lowland areas and claylands. Within this pattern of distribution several high density areas have been noted; in Yorkshire; in several counties in the midlands - particularly in areas which were once covered by the Forest of Arden; and in East Anglia. An estimated two hundred

moated sites lie within the West Midlands County, making this class of monument one of the most significant and numerous 'types' in the region.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest a direct link between demography and the major moat building phase of the thirteenth century. One of the most widely-accepted demographic trends in Medieval England is the population boom in the first few centuries of the millennium. This increase put pressure on land for agricultural use, resulting in the colonising of areas that had been waste; fenlands, moorlands and any other such marginal land that had never before been cultivated. This process included woodland, and so the process of assarting and deforestation began. The act of moat building has, in some areas, been attributed to this assarting process. Cannock Forest once covered much of the area surrounding Walsall and, it was noted by Larkham (1982, 13), that moated sites occur principally in clusters around the towns of Walsall and Wolverhampton. They lie on the fringes of the forest, rather than in it, due to the strict laws governing the Royal Forest.

1.2 The Site and its Setting

Shustoke Farm has been identified as a moated enclosure. It is represented on the Tithe Map for the Parish of Aldridge (1840-41) as a waterfilled feature, to the south and west of farm buildings. The Apportionment names the field to the west of the site as Moat Meadow. Two arms of the moat appear on the First Edition OS Map as earthworks, and the northern arm of the moat may be represented by an old field boundary. The site is still enclosed on its south and western sides by a ditch defined in places by banks (Shaw 2001, section 4.1). Other earthworks identified as possible fishponds (SMR 10424) are located in the fields to the north and the west (*ibid.* section 1.1). The line of the road will run through some of these earthworks adjacent to the moated enclosure (Fig. 2).

1.3 Aims

The overall objective of the archaeological work was to record and interpret the surviving earthworks as elements of relic landscape and to obtain a record of any archaeological deposits or finds disturbed or exposed by work associated with the proposed road scheme. The moated site itself lies wholly outside the study area.

The specific recommendations addressed in this scheme were to:

- undertake a detailed measured survey of earthworks in fields to the north and the west of the site.
- monitor groundworks during the construction of a new access road.

2.0 Earthwork Survey

2.1 Aims

The objective of the earthwork survey was to provide a detailed hachure plan of visible earthwork features and relic landscapes within the Study Area, thus ensuring preservation 'by record'.

2.2 Methodology

Measured topographic survey was undertaken on the earthworks located in the fields to the north and the west of the former Shustoke Farm.

The survey was carried out using a Total Station EDM, and the resulting plots were related to the OS National Grid. An annotated hachure plan was produced at a scale of 1:500, and was supplemented by colour print and colour slide photography. It is intended to deposit the paper and photographic archive at Walsall Records Office.

2.3 Results

The site is situated on a natural slope that gradually falls away east to west. A series of three inter-linked fishponds was observed in fields to the east and north of the moated site (Fig. 3). The remains of two leats that linked the ponds were also recorded.

The field to the east of the moated site (Field 1, Fig. 3) was a meadow, with the remains of ancient field boundaries surviving on three sides. The east side of the study area was bounded by the Birmingham Road. There was an obvious change in the type and age of vegetation at the northern end of the field, where a large bank had been created. This was modern landscaping associated with the construction or widening of the A34 (Plate 1). Directly to the east was a line of ancient trees and the remains of a short section of very eroded bank and ditch. The southern boundary was very irregular and followed the course of a stream (Plate 2). Although this ditch showed signs of having been recut very recently (Plate 3) the boundary appeared to be of some antiquity. The stream may have once been used as the northern arm of the moat, feeding into the moat from the northeast.

Two fishponds were located within Field 1. Fishpond 1 (Plate 4) was still visible as a slight hollow at the eastern end of the field. A small bank, now very eroded, defined the western extent of the pond, raising the ground level at its lowest point to help retain water. The middle pond, Fishpond 2, was much larger, indeed the largest of the three. It was bounded to the south by the stream, but was undefined along the remainder of its extent. An abrupt change in the vegetation, however, and the ground being slightly boggy in this area was suggestive of some underlying difference which may have been the remains of a pond. A small curvilinear depression and, where this was not present, a change in the height of the vegetation may be the remains of a leat linking the two ponds. It fed water down the slope from pond to pond, as the ground falls away to the northwest. A much wider and better-preserved leat (Plate 5) was visible in the western corner of the field feeding into the waterfilled boundary ditch to the west of the moat.

Field 2 was also a meadow and sloped naturally from south to north. The waterfilled boundary ditch (the northern arm of the moat) also defined part of the eastern boundary of Field 2. The watercourse continued westwards, providing the northern field boundary. The western arm of the possible moat, a substantial ditch with internal and external banks, marked the eastern boundary. The field was bounded to the west and the south by a dry ditch, with the remains of slight, very eroded, banks visible in places. The irregular nature of this ditch is once again suggestive of an

ancient watercourse and, although now dry, may represent the course of a second stream running into the site from the south. Fishpond 3 (Plate 6) lay at the bottom of the slope, in the northwestern corner of the field, and was visible as a bowl-shaped marshy depression.

3.0 Watching Brief by Gary Coates and Kate Bain

3.1 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 encountered during groundworks. Particular attention was paid to areas that may have been associated with fishponds.

3.2 Methodology

The access road and associated service trench was excavated with a JCB, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. This was monitored regularly by an archaeologist and continuously when removal of the topsoil was taking place in areas that may have encountered fishpond deposits. 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 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.

3.3 Results

The access road (Fig. 2, Plate 7) was 7.3m wide and approximately 300m long. The footings were excavated to a depth of 0.25m onto the natural subsoil of sand and gravel, containing lenses of clay. The overburden was mostly topsoil. In some areas there was evidence that the topsoil may have been disturbed or re-deposited, as it contained modern refuse items and some patches of redeposited natural. There was no evidence for archaeological deposits of any antiquity. Where the road cut through the area of Fishpond 1 there was evidence of modern dumping (Plate 8).

The service trench runs along the northern and western edge of the access road, respecting the line of the road. The trench was c.0.9m deep, with the exception of the area toward the vicinity of Fishpond 2 where the surface had been 'made up'. The original turf line could clearly be seen in section, only 0.4m from the bottom of the trench. Below this was evidence of modern dumping, including fragments of house brick.

4.0 Discussion

Shustoke Farm is one of a cluster of moated enclosures that was situated in the 'Foreign' of Walsall encircling the early town. The site remains in good condition overall, with well-preserved elements of relic landscape still identifiable on the ground. Terracing and substantial hard landscaping has taken place to the south and east of the moated enclosure. However, pockets of relic landscape still remain in the immediate area.

It has been recognised that moated sites are often just one element of a much broader water management scheme, and need to be studied in their landscape rather than singularly or in isolation (Bond 1978, 14). Although the moated enclosure itself lay outside the area of this study, the survey has provided an opportunity to gather important information on a key research area for this class of monument; the fishponds.

Although the site had been used for dumping, the dumps have served to preserve sections of bank and ditch that have, in some places, been almost completely eroded. The dumping has also concealed some original features and changed the general character of the landscape. However, enough features of the relic landscape could be identified on the ground to comprehend the layout of the complex.

Fishponds are commonly associated with moated sites, fish being an important part of the medieval diet. The examples at Shustoke Farm were well preserved, with sections of their leats still identifiable on the ground. Three ponds were recorded on the site. However, there may be others surviving outside the study area, further down stream. The middle pond (Fishpond 2) was very large, and compares in size to those at Baddesley Clinton, Warwickshire. The size and scale of the fishpond complex at Shustoke Farm suggests large-scale production of fish, possibly supplying the local market. Deposits observed during the watching brief reveal that the fishponds were used for the dumping of rubbish until very recently.

5.0 Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by de Weijer Architects, on behalf of West Bromwich Albion Football Club. Thanks are due to Mike Shaw who monitored the project on behalf of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. The earthwork survey was carried out by Edward Newton and Kirsty Nichol, the watching brief was undertaken by Gary Coates and Kate Bain. Kirsty Nichol produced the written report and plates, with other illustrations by Mark Breddon. The report was edited by Iain Ferris.

6.0 References

- Bond, C.J. 1978 *The Recording and Survey of Moats*, in Aberg A.(ed) *Medieval Moated Sites*. Council for British Archaeology Research Report No. 17, 14-21.
- Department of the Environment (DoE) 1990 *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning*
- Larkham, P.J. 1982 *Moated Sites in South Staffordshire*. South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions Vol. 24, 8-65.
- Shaw I.M. 2001 *Proposed New Training Ground for West Bromwich Albion F.C., Birmingham Road, Walsall*. Brief for Archaeological Work.



Plate 1 Northeastern boundary of Field 1



Plate 2 Southern boundary of Field 1.



Plate 3 The stream along the southern boundary of Field 1

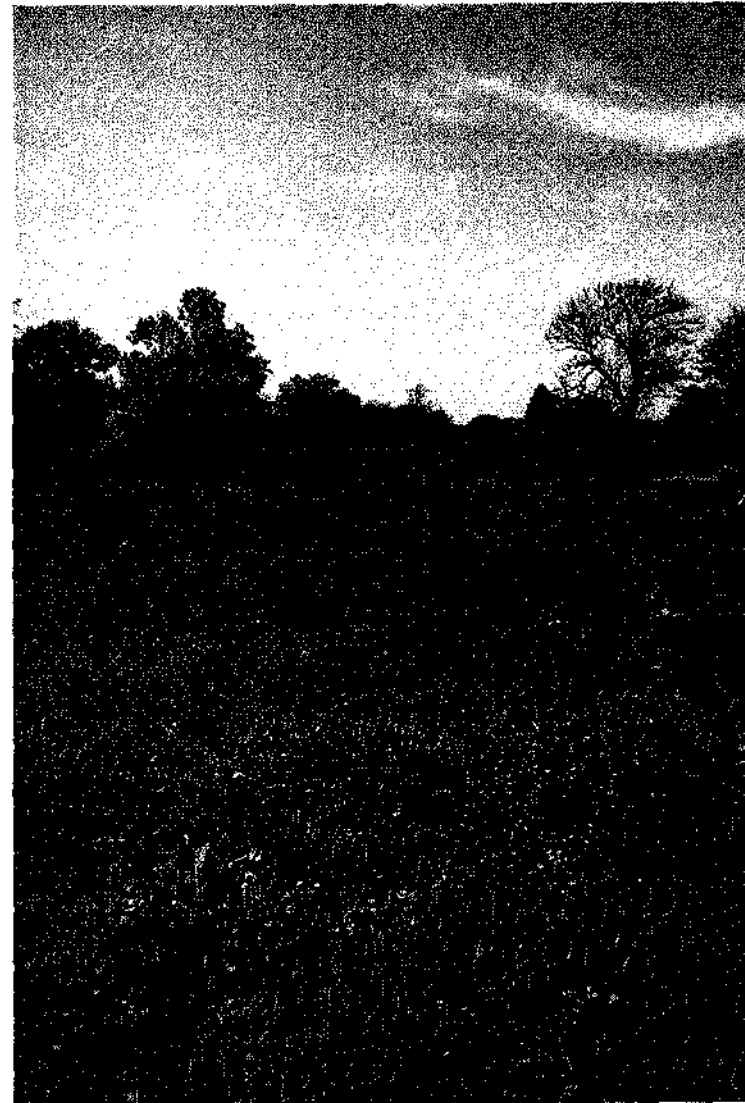


Plate 4 Fishpond 1

Plate 5 Leat linking
Fishpond 2 and
Fishpond 3

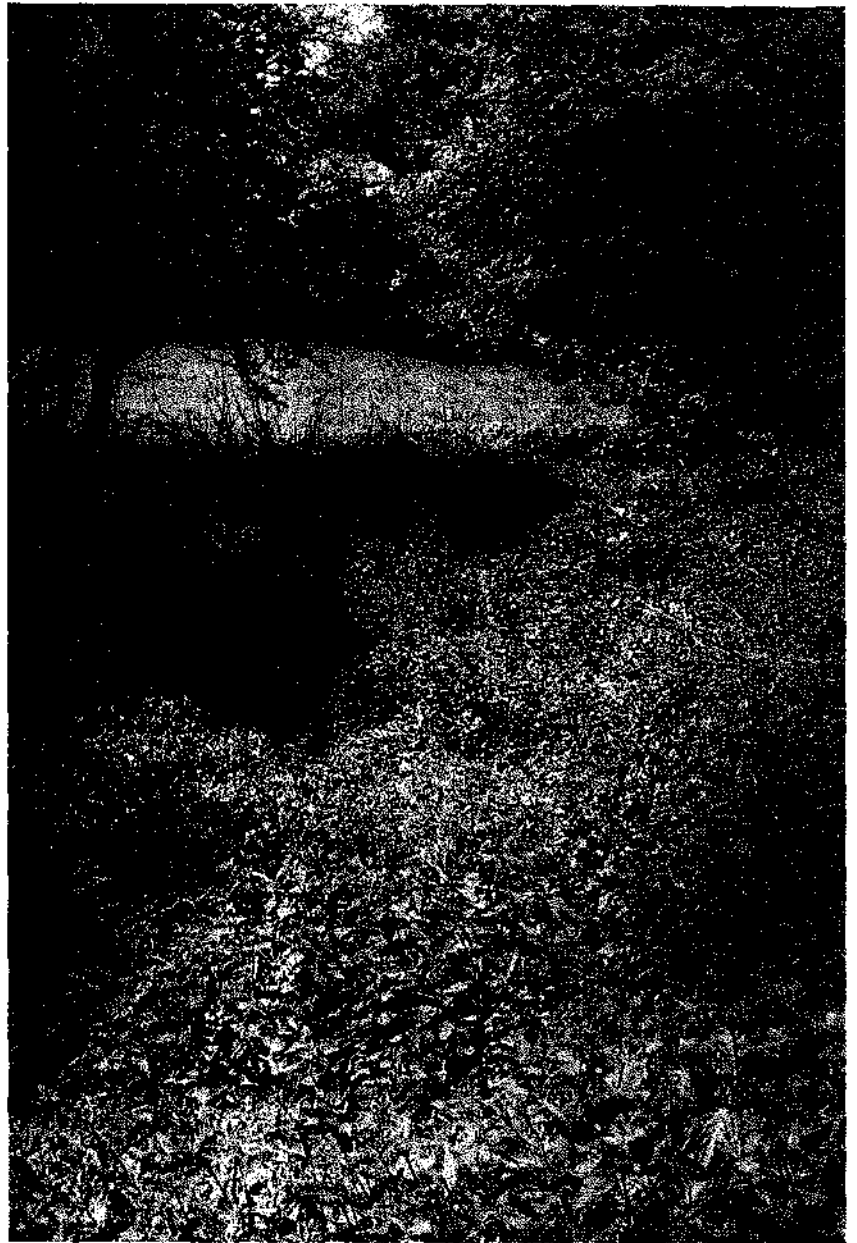


Plate 6 (below)
Fishpond 3





Plate 7 East end of the access road



Plate 8 Modern backfill of Fishpond 1

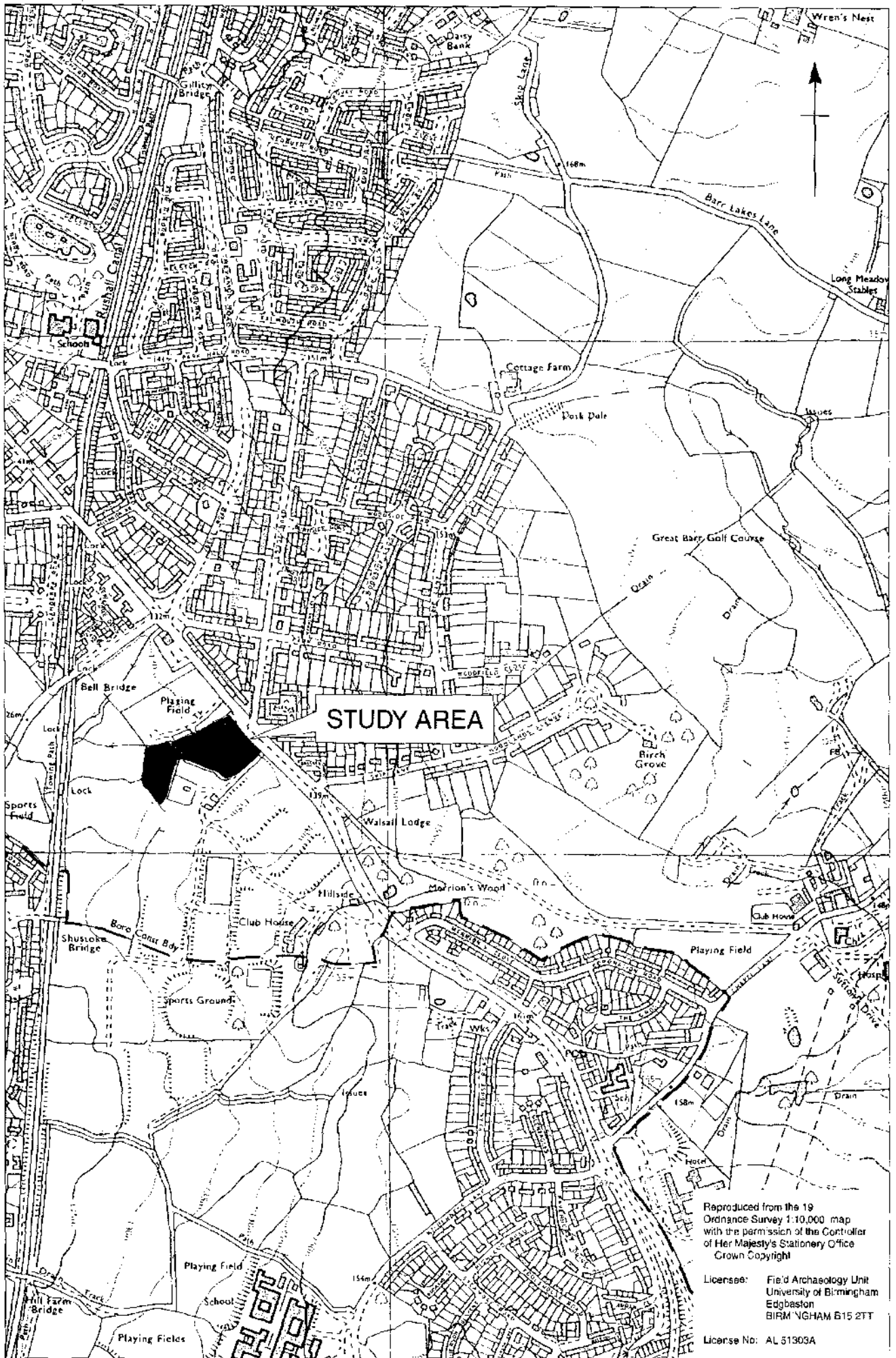


Fig.1

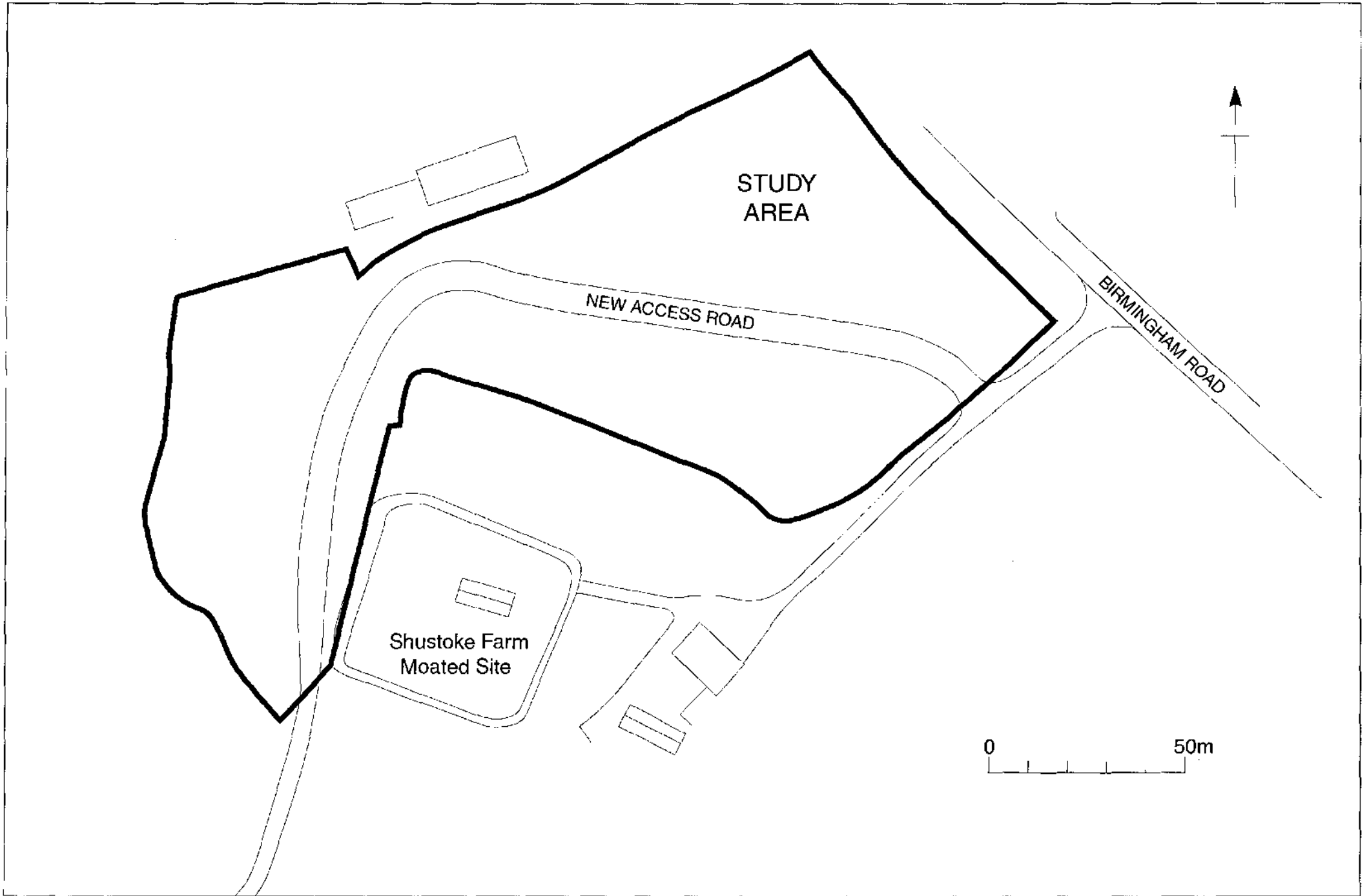


Fig.2

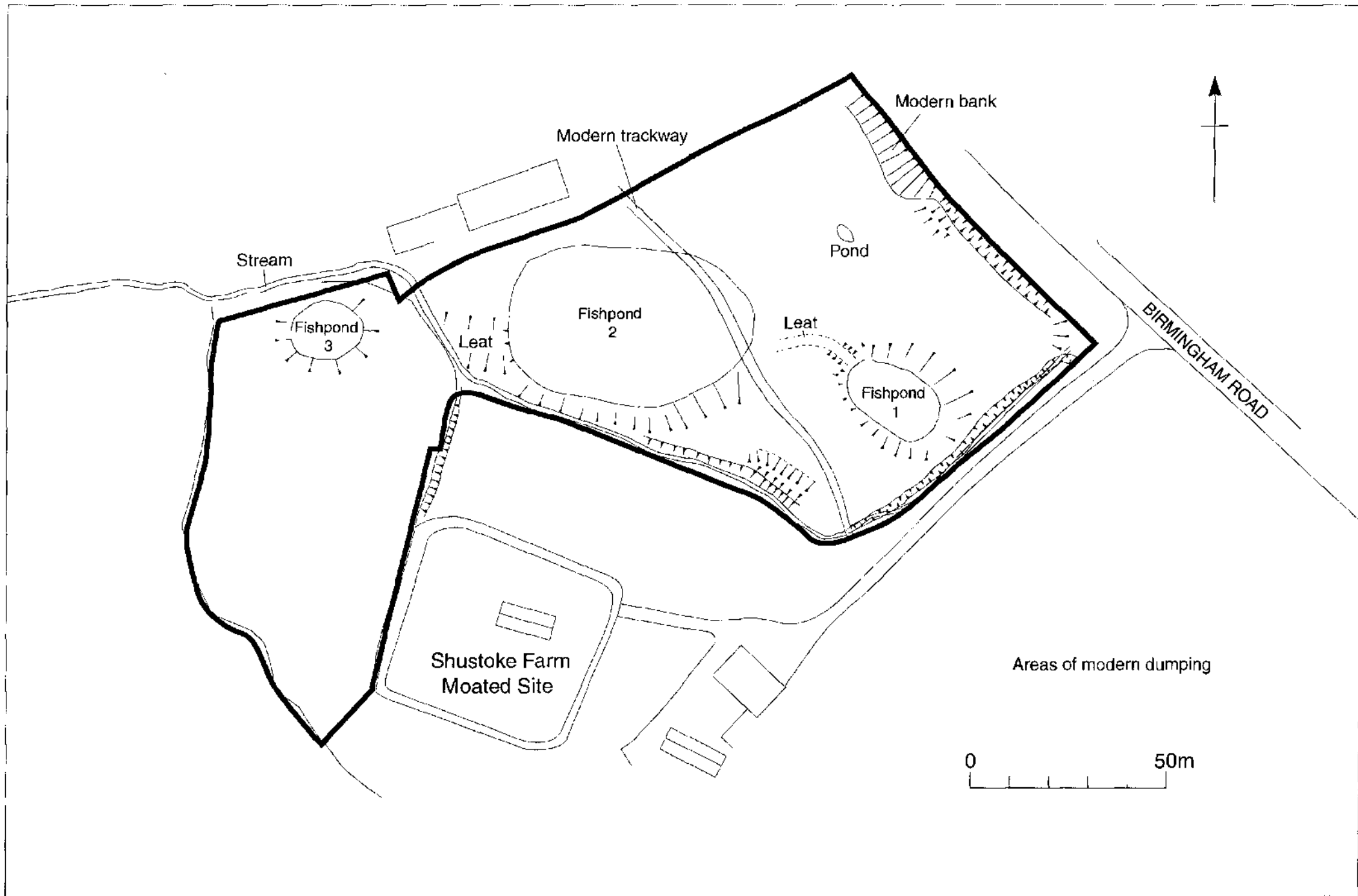


Fig.3

**Proposed new training ground for West Bromwich Albion F.C., Birmingham
Road, Walsall**

Brief for Archaeological Work

1. Summary

- 1.1 The access road for West Bromwich Albion's proposed new training ground runs around the perimeter of the former Shustoke Farm, a possible medieval moated site. The field to the west of the farm contains earthworks which have been identified as possible fishponds (SMR 10424) and other low earthworks are visible in the field to the west. The proposed access road runs through both fields. The brief sets out work necessary to record and interpret these earthworks ahead of and during development.

2. Site location and description

- 2.1 The site lies at the south east end of Walsall borough, to the west of Birmingham Road, at NGR SP038961. At present it comprises rough pasture.

3. Planning background

- 3.1 Planning permission has been granted for a new training ground for West Bromwich Albion F.C. The proposals for new pitches and a changing pavilion do not have an impact upon any known archaeological remains. The proposed access road has been re-sited in order that it runs around rather than through the area of the former Shustoke Farm in order to minimise damage to archaeological remains in the area.
- 3.2 A condition requiring a programme of archaeological work on the site ahead and during the development has been attached. The present brief sets out the work necessary to fulfill this condition.

4. Archaeological Background

- 4.1 Shustoke Farm is shown on the Aldridge tithe map of 1840-1 and the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map of 1884. The farm no longer survives but the area is still enclosed on its south and west sides by a ditch with internal and external banks surviving in parts. This has led to its identification as a possible medieval moated site (Black Country Sites and Monuments Record 3168).

4.2 To the north of the enclosure are further earthworks which may be the remains of fishponds (BCSMR 10424).

5. Requirements for work

5.1 The purpose of the work is to:

- Carry out a survey of the earthworks in the fields to the north and west of the site of Shustoke Farm. The survey should be at a scale of at least 1:500.
- Establish the nature and date of the earthworks through interpretation of the earthwork survey and through the maintenance of a watching brief during the development.
- Record any other archaeological features which are observed on the line of the access road during its construction

5.2 Analysis and report

On completion of the work a report should be produced detailing the results. The report should contain:

- A written summary of the findings together with appropriate illustrations, which should be related to the national grid.
- A copy of this brief
- An analytical summary of features and deposits
- A summary of any artefactual material uncovered

5.3 In addition a summary report should be submitted for publication to West Midlands Archaeology and any other relevant local and national archaeological journals.

6. General conditions

6.1 Suitably qualified and experienced archaeological staff should undertake all work.

6.2 An appropriate recording strategy should be used and the method and justification for this stated in the report.

6.3 The code of conduct, standards and guidance of the Institute of Field Archaeologists should be adhered to.

6.4 A specification for the work required should be prepared by the archaeological contractor and agreed with the sponsor and the local planning authority before the work commences. It is advisable to submit a draft of the specification to the Black Country Archaeologist before the

submission of a tender in order to ensure that the work proposed meets the requirement of the archaeological evaluation brief.

6.5 Archive deposition

On completion of the work the site archive should be deposited with an appropriate museum/public archive. The site owner should be encouraged to deposit any finds with the archive. In this case archives should be deposited with Walsall Local History Centre (01922 721305) and finds with Walsall Museum (01922 654324)

6.6 Publication and dissemination

Two copies of all reports should be submitted to the Black Country Sites and Monuments Record and two copies to the local planning authority. Unless there is a specific request for confidentiality, the reports will be made publicly available six months after their publication and a copy will be deposited with the Walsall Local History Centre.

6.7 Health and Safety

It is the responsibility of the contractor to ensure that all work is carried out in accordance with relevant Health and Safety regulations.

Site procedures should be in accordance with the guidance set out in the Health and Safety Manual of the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers

Where necessary, responsibility for the reinstatement of land after excavation should be agreed with the developer and landowner.

6.8 Monitoring

The work will be monitored by the Black Country Archaeologist on behalf of the Planning Authority and provisions for monitoring should be agreed with him. At least five working days notice of commencement of any fieldwork should be given to the Black Country Archaeologist.

Prepared on 18 May 2001 by Mike Shaw, Black Country Archaeologist, on behalf of Walsall MBC

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