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An Archaeological Evaluation on Land Bordering Lower High Street and Giles Hill, Stourbridge, West Midlands 2001

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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An Archaeological Evaluation on Land Bordering Lower High Street and Giles Hill, Stourbridge, West Midlands, 2001

by
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Summary

An archaeological evaluation on land bordering the Lower High Street and Giles Hill, Stourbridge, West Midlands, (NGR SO 9084 8984) was commissioned by Morris Homes (West Midlands) Ltd. The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in July 2001 prior to the redevelopment of the site, which is located within the Stourbridge Town Conservation Area. A single trench was excavated on the upper terrace of a sheer sandstone face to the rear of the of the frontages onto the High Street. The natural red sandstone bedrock was exposed at a height of 73.9m AOD and was overlain by a layer of clean brown sand with occasional large round river pebbles which was identified as a natural colluvial deposit.

Pits containing pottery dating the late 17th century were identified as the earliest phase of occupation on the site. They were truncated by the remains of a wall and cellar which belonged to a structure, situated in the back-plot area of a property owned by Joseph Pitman, visible on John Wood's survey of Stourbridge in 1837. The structure had been demolished by the time of the Ordnance Survey map of 1903, and a demolition deposit relating to this event was also observed.

Several other pits were also recorded on the site, however, repeated levelling of the terrace over a long period of time had resulted in heavy truncation of deposits across the site. This and the lack of datable finds recovered from the pits meant that they were largely undatable. As well as severe truncation, the levelling process had resulted in a general mixing of deposits which meant that there were high levels of residuality. This has meant that secure dating, where pottery did occur, has been problematic.

1.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken on land bordering Lower High Street and Giles Hill, Stourbridge, West Midlands (NGR SO 9084 8984, Fig.1). The work was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Morris Homes (West Midlands) Ltd to provide archaeological information in advance of development of the site.

In accordance with the guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of the Environment 1990), a recommendation for a programme of archaeological work to accompany a planning application was made by the Borough Archaeologist. The archaeological work complied with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (Nichol 2001, see Appendix) which was approved by Peter Boland, the Principal Conservation Officer and Borough Archaeologist for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council.

The archaeological evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Field Evaluation (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

2.0 Site Location

The site (centred on NGR SO 9084 8984, Fig.1) is situated at the northern end of Lower High Street, which represents the western extent of the site, and is bounded to the east by St Giles public footpath (Fig.2). The site that this evaluation report refers to lies within the south-eastern corner of a larger development scheme and is located on the upper terrace of a sheer sandstone face to the rear of the of the frontages onto the High Street within Zone i (Fig.3). The site lies within the Stourbridge Town Conservation Area.

3.0 Archaeological Background

A desk-based assessment of the study area was previously undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (Patrick 2000), the results of which are reported on separately and only briefly referred to in this report.

The assessment identified several zones of potential archaeological interest (Zones i to viii, Fig.3). The cartographic study revealed that the site being discussed here was once occupied by a structure which was situated in the backplot area of the High Street property belonging to Joseph Pitman. The structure had been demolished by the time of the 1903 Ordnance Survey, and the site had remained undeveloped since that period (Patrick 2000, 6).

4.0 Objectives

The objectives of this archaeological evaluation were to gather sufficient information to establish the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area affected. The results of this would then be used to formulate a mitigation strategy for further recording on site if appropriate.

5.0 Method

A single L-shaped trench was excavated (Fig. 3), the location of which was determined in advance by the client and with the Borough Archaeologist for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. In consultation with the Borough Archaeologist the trench was slightly realigned on the ground, to avoid services and other logistical problems. The topsoil and modern overburden were mechanically removed, under direct archaeological supervision, to the top of the uppermost archaeological deposit, or to the top of the natural subsoil where no archaeological deposits were encountered.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded on BUFAU *pro-formas*, even where no archaeology was present. Contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings, plans (at a scale of 1:50), sections (at a scale of 1:20) and black and white and colour print photography. These, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive which will be deposited with Dudley Museum and Art Gallery.

6.0 Archaeological Results

The natural red sandstone bedrock (1001) was exposed at a depth of c.73.9m AOD, within a sondage located in the south-west corner of the trench (Fig.4). The natural subsoil was overlain by a layer of clean brown sand with occasional large round river pebbles (1019, Fig.5), c.0.7m deep, which was probably a natural colluvial deposit.

The earliest deposits on the site have been dated to the late 17th century and were cut through the colluvial layer (1019). Pit F105 (Figs 4 and 6) measured 1m in diameter and was 0.7m deep. It had sloping sides and a rounded base and was filled by a grey-brown sandy-silt (1008) that contained a high proportion of ash which appeared to be concentrated towards the base of the pit and probably represents the disposal of rake-out from a fire. Brick fragments, and two sherds of coarse ware and one sherd of manganese mottled ware, dated to the late 17th century (pers. comm. Ratkai) were also present. A small pit or posthole (F108) was only visible in the north-facing section of the sondage (Section C, Fig.7). This feature was 0.38m in diameter and 0.22m deep. It had a U-shaped profile and was filled by a mid-brown silty-sand (1011). A base sherd of black ware pottery from a hollow ware vessel was recovered from the fill, and was dated to the second half of the 17th century (Ratkai, pers. comm.).

A third pit which may also date to this phase of activity, but which did not contain pottery, was a small pit (F101) visible in the west-facing section of the trench (Fig.5). It was truncated by wall F103 and cut by a much later pit (F100, see below). This pit (F101) was 0.6m deep and the fill (1004) was a brown silty-sand with brick fragments and charcoal flecks.

Overlying and cutting these early pits was a structure, the foundation trenches, brick walls and the remains of a cellar belonging to Structure 1 were observed in the northern part of the trench (Fig.4). Foundation trenches were visible for the southern wall of the cellar and wall F103, they were backfilled with clean red sand (re-deposited natural 1015, and 1020). The wall (F103), was aligned north-south with an east-west return which ran into the west-facing section (Fig.5), the wall survived to a height of five courses. North of this was what appeared to be a cellar (F104) which had a vaulted brick roof. The roof of the cellar had been partially removed and the cellar was infilled with a brick rubble deposit (1016).

A mixed brown silty-sand layer (1002, Fig.4) that contained a small amount of charcoal was visible overlying the colluvial deposit 1019. It was irregular in depth, varying between 0.15m and 0.35m and probably represents a buried soil associated with the occupation of Structure 1 which it abutted (Fig.6). A series of pits were observed cutting this layer.

The pits are difficult to date as many did not contain datable finds, and due to massive truncation across the site it has proved impossible to date some of them. However, pit F106 was identified as one of the earliest (Section A, Fig. 7). Although heavily truncated by two later pits (F102 and F109), this feature (F106) was identified as a small pit that was filled with a mid brown silty-sand with occasional charcoal flecks (1009). Cutting the western edge of this pit was a shallow, irregularly shaped, elongated pit (F109) measuring between 1-2m in diameter. The fill (1012) comprised a brown silt with much mortar, brick and tile fragments and a small proportion of charcoal.

Cutting the east side of F106 was the edge of a large pit (F102). This pit (F102) had vertical sides and was excavated to a depth of 1.2m below the ground surface. The fill (1005) comprised layers of brown sandy-silt, coke and charcoal, and contained some pottery sherds and occasional mortar fragments. The pottery recovered from this feature comprised two sherds of cream-ware, two sherds of blue shell-edged pearl ware plate, one sherd of blue transfer printed pearl-ware plate and two sherds of industrial slip-ware. These were dated mainly to the early 19th century (Ratkai, pers. comm.).

The latest feature identified in the sequence observed in the west-facing section of the trench was a large pit, F100 (Fig.5). This pit was visible cutting both F101 and F102 and was 2.7m wide and 1m deep. It had a steep edge to the north and a sloping edge to the south, with a flat base. The fill of F100 (1003) was a mixed black brown silty-sand with rubble, containing mortar, charcoal, brick and tile. A few pottery fragments were recovered from this feature, comprising two course-ware sherds and one sherd from a Basalt-ware teapot lid. These fragments were dated to the later 18th century (Ratkai, pers. comm.).

Several features which could not be dated either stratigraphically or from the pottery include small discrete features (F107, F110, and F111). These features each cut the buried soil (1002) and were visible directly beneath the topsoil or the demolition layer associated with Structure 1. A sub-circular pit (F107) measuring 0.76m in diameter and 0.4m deep was observed in the west-facing section of the sondage (Section B, Fig.7). It had curved sides and a rounded base. It was filled by a mid-brown mottled silty-sand with occasional charcoal flecks and a few rounded pebbles (1010). In the south-western corner of the trench a shallow pit (F111, Fig.7) measuring 0.16m deep was recorded. The fill was a soft brown sandy silt with many pebbles, fragments of brick and tile and charcoal flecks (1014). Both of these pits were below the top soil.

Pit F110 was visible in the east facing section of the trench (Fig.6). It was 0.8m in diameter and 0.7m deep and had steeply sloping sides and a flat base. It was filled by a mixed rubble and silt deposit (1013) that contained a large quantity of brick and tile. Pits F105 and F110, and the remains of Structure 1, were sealed by a thin dark brown rubble rich silty-sand layer containing brick, ash and charcoal (1018), Fig.5). This layer was not continuous throughout the trench, only extending as far south as wall F103, suggesting it was a demolition layer associated with Structure 1.

Overlying layers 1018 and 1002 was a 0.15m – 0.40m layer of topsoil which contained large quantities of artefacts, including pottery, clay pipe, glass, brick, tile and bone. The pottery recovered from the topsoil ranged in date from the late 17th

century to the 19th century, and included a mixture of course-wares, black-wares, manganese mottled-wares, industrial slip-wares and blue transfer-printed pearl-ware plate (Ratkai, pers. comm).

7.0 Discussion

The earliest phase of activity, identified from securely dated features suggests a date of mid to late 17th century. These features were smaller and less substantial than the later features, suggesting less intense activity during this period and heavy truncation in subsequent periods.

The remains of a wall and cellar appear to relate to the structure identified in the desk-top assessment report from John Wood's survey of Stourbridge in 1837 (Patrick 2000, 6). This structure was situated in the back-plot of the property owned by Joseph Pitman, and while it was still evident on the 1885 Ordnance Survey map of the area, it had been demolished by 1903 (Patrick, *ibid.*) It is therefore likely that the rubble infills and layers identified within and overlying the wall and cellar relate to this episode of demolition.

The later pits are difficult to date due to the lack of datable material recovered from them, and the heavy truncation of deposits across the site from levelling of the terrace over a long period of time. As well as severe truncation occurring the process of levelling has resulted in a general mixing of deposits which means that there are high levels of residuality in terms of the artefactual evidence for the site. For instance the date of the pottery from the two large pits (F100 and F102) does not correlate to the sequence observed in the west-facing section. The pottery from F100 was identified as being earlier than that of F102, although in the section F100 clearly cuts F102. The quantity of pottery from the later pit (F100) was significantly less than that from F102, and some of the pottery recovered from the unstratified topsoil layer was of a similar date to the fill of F100. That being said, as pit F102 is dated to the early 19th century, with pit F100 being later, it is possible that both pits are contemporary with the structure to the north.

The cartographic evidence evaluated in the desk-top assessment (Patrick 2000) showed the study area to be in use by 1837, and out of use by 1903. The evidence gained by the evaluation suggests that there was a small amount of activity in the area prior to this, but corroborates the cartographic evidence that there was little or no activity after the demolition of the structures.

8.0 Implications and Recommendations

8.1 Implications
No significant archaeological remains will be affected by the proposed development of the site.

8.2 Recommendations
Following discussions with Peter Boland, the Borough Archaeologist for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, no further archaeological work is recommended.

9.0 References

Department of the Environment (DoE) 1990 *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning*

Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999 *Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation*

Patrick, C. 2000 *Lower High Street, Giles Hill, Stourbridge: An archaeological Desk-Based Assessment.* BUFAU Report No. 679

10.0 Acknowledgements

This project was sponsored by Morris Homes (West Midlands) Ltd, and many thanks are due to Stuart Andrews and Steve MacNally for their assistance. Thanks are also due to Pete Boland, the Borough Archaeologist, for monitoring the project on behalf of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council and Stephanie Ratkai for her assessment of the pottery. The evaluation was supervised by Eleanor Ramsey, with the assistance of Kate Bain. Kirsty Nichol monitored the fieldwork for BUFAU and Alex Jones edited the report. The illustrations were prepared by Mark Breedon.

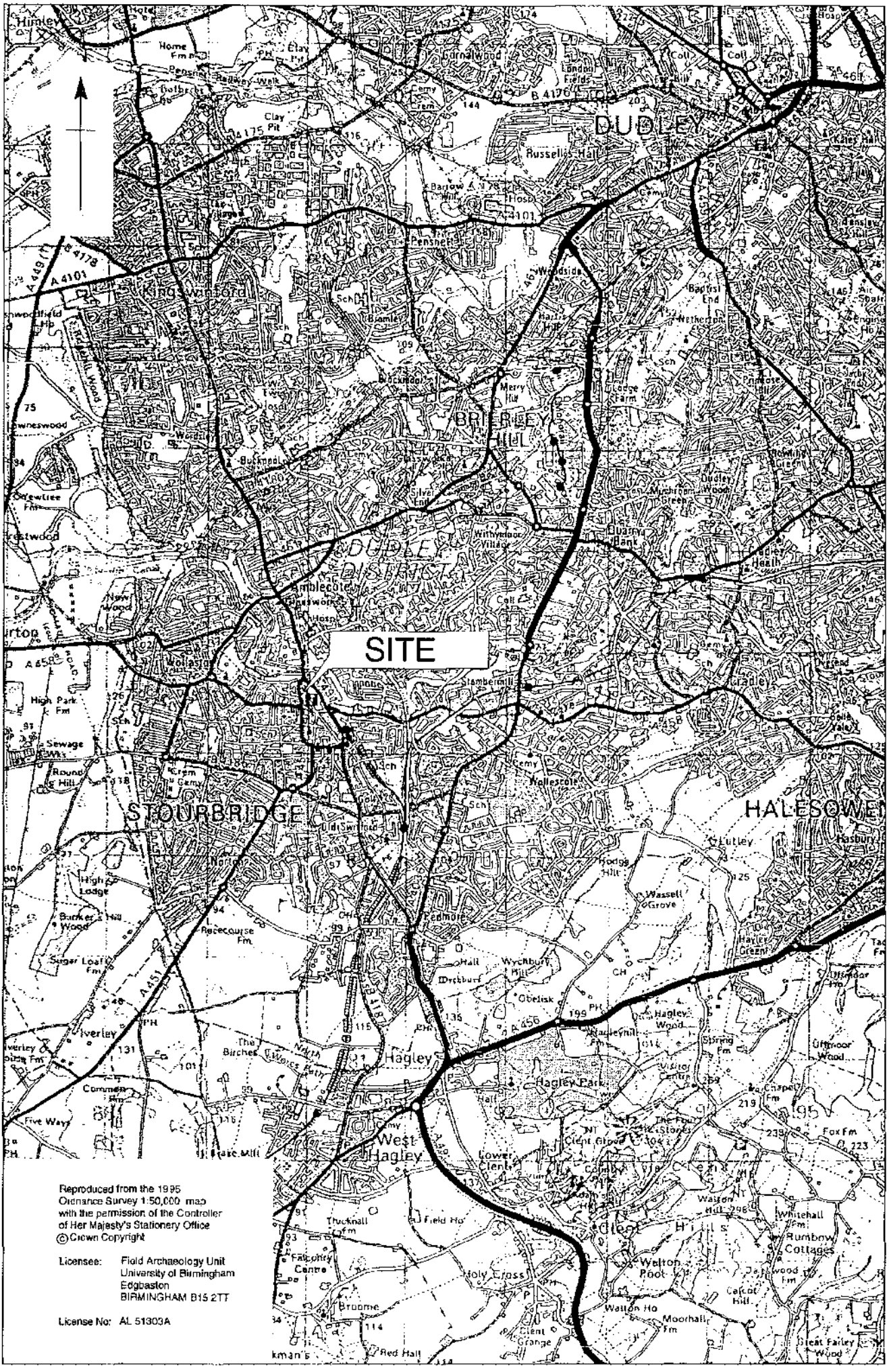
SITE
DUDLEY
BRIERLEY HILL
STOURBRIDGE
HALESOWEN
Hagley
West Hagley
King's Winford
Reproduced from the 1995 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office
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Fig.1


Gas Works
Gasometer
Wharf
Weighbridge
Wharf
Park House
Malthouse
STUDY AREA
SITE
Timber Yd.
Brewery
Play Ground
School
Ingleton
Market Hall
WEST STREET
SHORT STREET
SMITHFIELD
O.S 1885

Fig.2

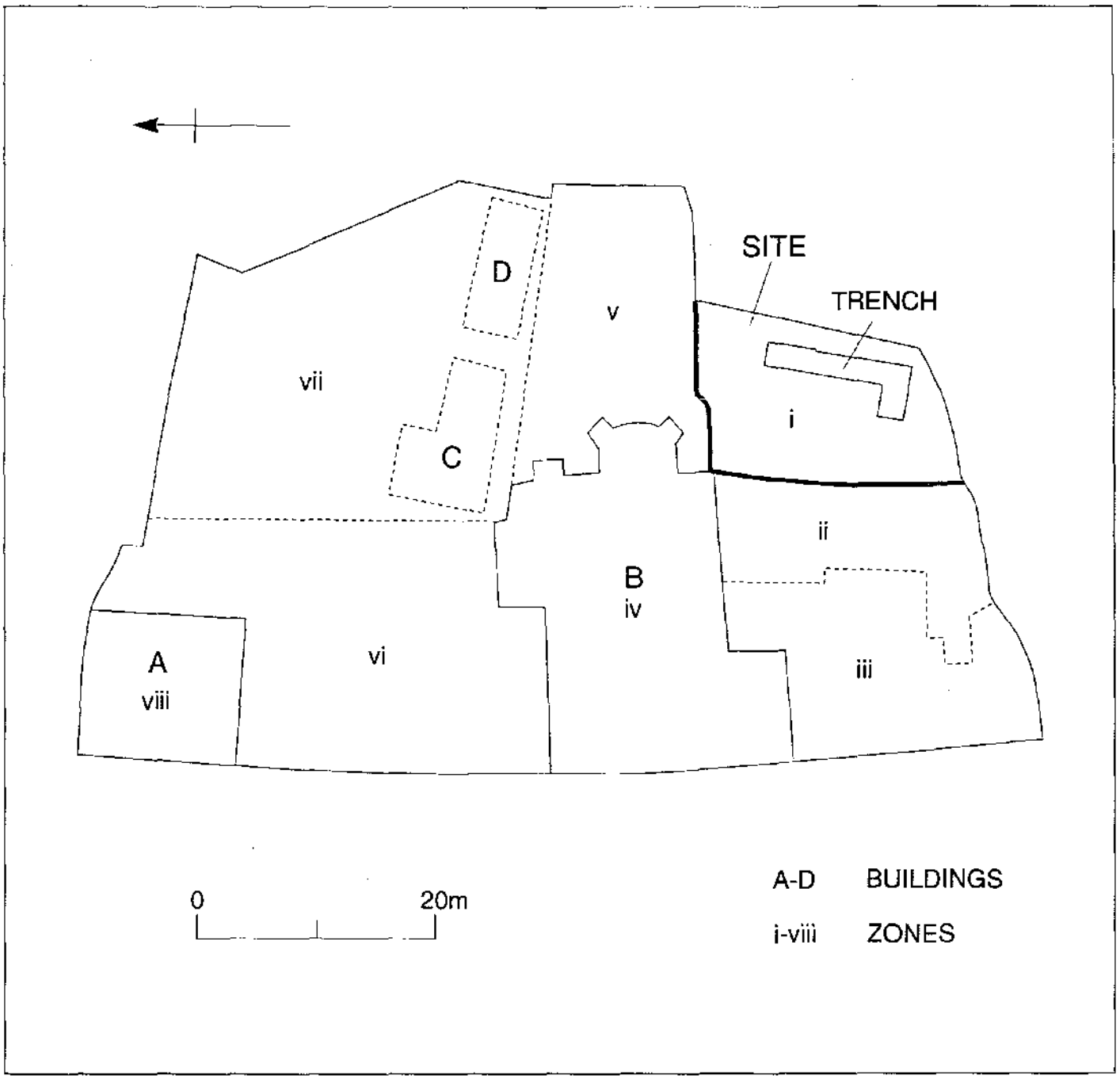

SITE
TRENCH
D
v
vii
C
i
ii
B
iv
A
viii
vi
iii
0
20m
A-D BUILDINGS
i-viii ZONES

Fig.3

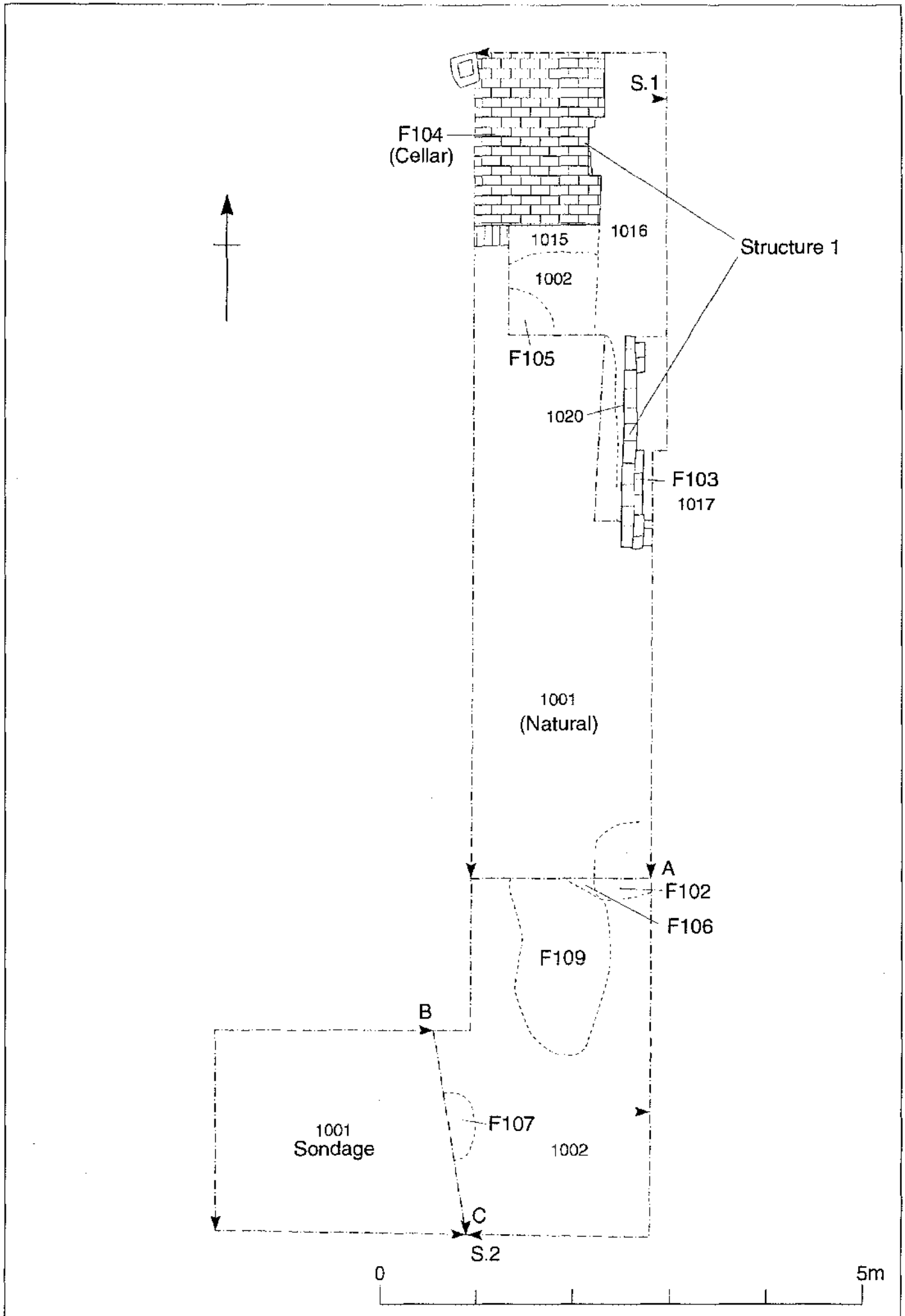

S.1
F104
(Cellar)
1015
1016
Structure 1
1002
F105
1020
F103
1017
1001
(Natural)
A
F102
F106
F109
B
F107
1001
Sondage
1002
C
S.2
0
5m

Fig.4

S.1 Trench 1 West Facing Section

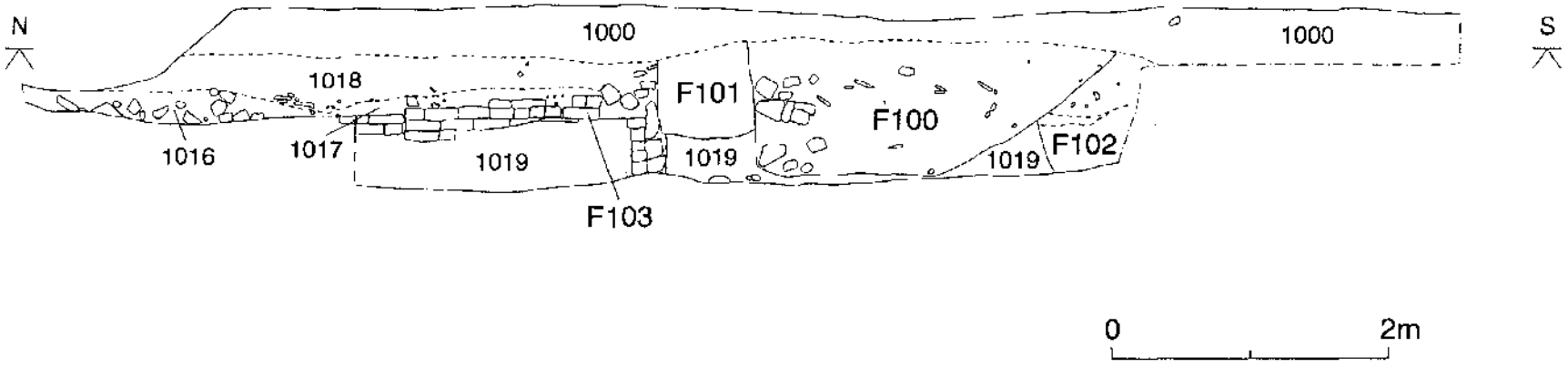


Fig.5

S.2 Trench 1 East Facing Section

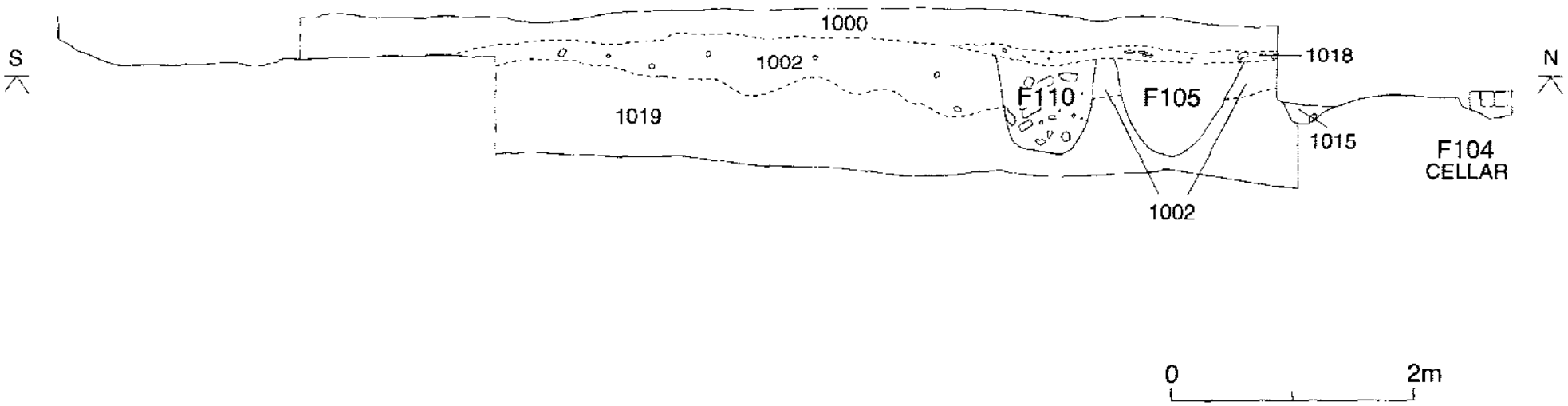
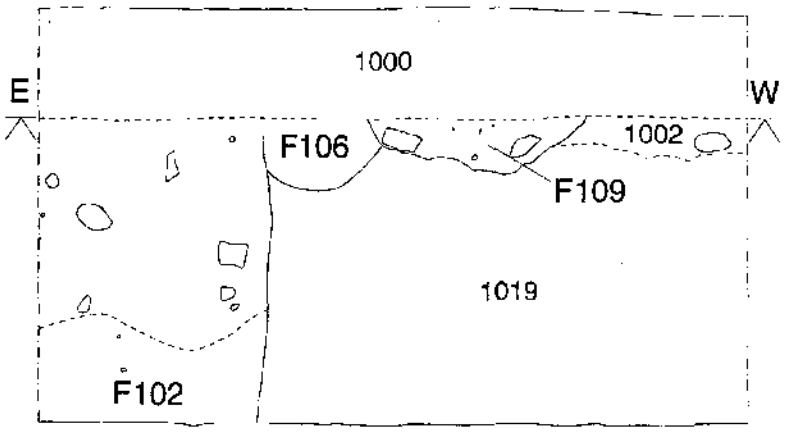
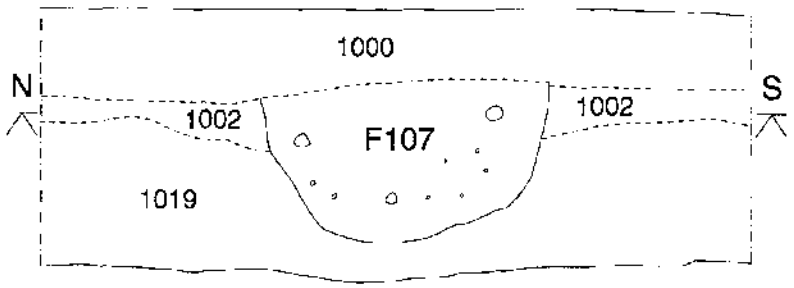


Fig.6

Section A North Facing



Section B West Facing



Section C North Facing

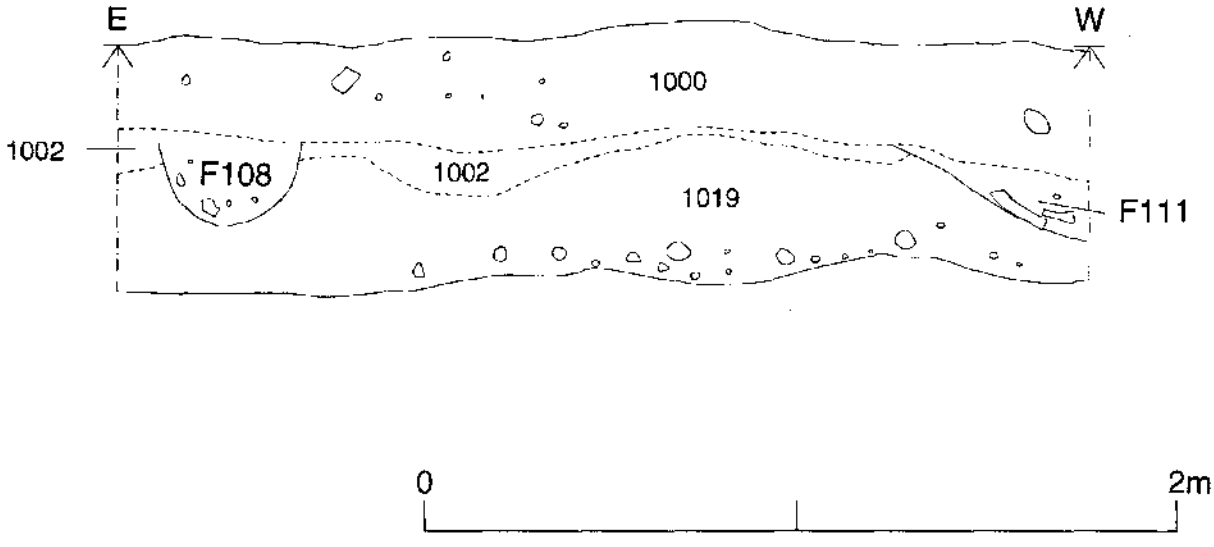


Fig.7

Appendix

Lower High Street, Giles Hill, Stourbridge

Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Field Evaluation

1.0 Introduction

This document outlines the programme of work required to undertake an archaeological investigation at the above site, as required by Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. The document will need to be approved by the Borough Archaeologist for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council prior to its implementation.

While the broad aims and methodology described in this Archaeological Written Scheme will be followed, certain specific details may need to be altered. Such variations would be agreed in advance with the Borough Archaeologist.

2.0 Site Location

The proposed development site (NGR SO 9084 8984) is situated at the northern end of Lower High Street, which represents the western extent of the site, and it is bounded to the east by St Giles public footpath. The area that this written scheme refers to lies within the south-eastern corner of this larger development scheme and is located on the upper terrace of a sheer sandstone face to the rear of the frontages onto the High Street. The site lies within the Stourbridge Town Conservation Area.

3.0 Archaeological Background

An archaeological desk-based assessment of the site was carried out in 2000 (Patrick 2000). The assessment identified several zones of potential archaeological interest which have the potential to add to our understanding of the development of the Medieval and Post-Medieval townscape. The cartographic study revealed that the area to be evaluated was once occupied by a structure in the backplot area of the High Street property belonging to Joseph Pitman. The structure had been demolished by the time of the 1903 Ordnance Survey, and had remained undeveloped since that period (Patrick 2000, 6).

4.0 Fieldwork

4.1: Aims

The aims of the archaeological evaluation are to gather sufficient information to establish the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area affected.

These aims will be achieved through the excavation of an archaeological trial-trench, approximately 1.8m wide and 15m in length.

4.2: Method

The trench layout will be agreed in advance with the client and with the Borough Archaeologist for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council.

A JCB with a toothless bucket will be used to remove modern overburden under direct archaeological supervision. Machining will be to the top of the uppermost archaeological deposit or to the top of the subsoil if no archaeological deposits survive. Subsequent cleaning and excavation will be by hand. Spoil from machine excavation, and hand-excavation would be temporarily stored on-site. Tracking of plant will be limited to an agreed route which will minimise disturbance to below-ground remains.

All archaeological deposits and features will be sampled and their potential for environmental analysis will be assessed. Recovered finds will be cleaned, marked and remedial conservation work will be undertaken where necessary.

Recording will be by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, supplemented by plans (at 1:20 and 1:50), sections (at 1:10 and 1:20), monochrome print and colour slide photography.

Arrangements for the deposition of the archive will be negotiated with the landowner before commencement of fieldwork. A risk assessment will be undertaken before commencement of fieldwork.

4.3: Reporting

This evaluation represents Stage 1 of a proposed programme of archaeological investigation regarding the site. Should significant archaeological remains be found during trial trenching then a decision may be made, in consultation with the client and the Borough Archaeologist, to move straight onto Stage 3 of the programme which will involve opening a larger area for excavation. In the event of this the writing of the evaluation report (Stage 2) would not occur, and would be subsumed into the final assessment and report on the site (Stage 4). In the case of there being little or no significant archaeological deposits found on the site then the results of the archaeological fieldwork will be reported upon, and will include the following:

(a) Description of the archaeological background.
(b) Method.
(c) A narrative description of the results and discussion of the evidence, set in their local and regional context, supported by appropriate plans and sections.
(d) Summary of the finds and environmental evidence.
(e) Specialist assessments of the finds and environmental evidence.
(g) Staffing.
(h) Proposed archive deposition.

All schemes and costs arising in the course of the programme of archaeological investigation will be submitted to the client and the Borough Archaeologist for approval before implementation.

The written report will be made publicly accessible, as part of the Black Country Sites and Monuments Record and Dudley Museum and Art Gallery +within six months of completion. A summary report will be submitted for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology* and to the appropriate national period journals.

5.0 Staffing

The evaluation will be managed for BUFAU by Kirsty Nichol (Field Officer/Project Officer BUFAU, Associate member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists), assisted by an experienced Site Supervisor, and three experienced Site Assistants.

Specialist staff will be, where appropriate:
Lynne Bevan - Small finds.
Marina Ciaraldi – Environmental Officer.
Dr Emily Murray - animal bone.
Stephanie Ratkai – Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery.

6.0 Archive

The site archive will conform to the guidelines set down in *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for long-term storage* (United Kingdom Institute for Conservation 1990) and *Standards in the Museum care of archaeological collections* (Museums and Galleries Commission 1992). The written, drawn and photographic archive, together with recovered finds, will be placed with an appropriate repository within a reasonable time of completion of the evaluation. Advice will be taken from the Borough Archaeologist.

7.0 Timetable

It is anticipated that the fieldwork would be carried out over a five day period starting 9th July 2001. A report would be submitted within four weeks of completion of the fieldwork.

8.0 General

All project staff will adhere to the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

The project will follow the requirements set down in the appropriate Standard and Guidance notes prepared by the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

A detailed Risk Assessment will be prepared prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
3rd July 2001