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**Land off River Brook Drive, Stirchley, Birmingham:
An Archaeological Watching Brief 2002**

by
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1.0: Summary

An archaeological watching brief was maintained on a grassed area between the River Rea and River Brook Drive, Stirchley, Birmingham, during works for a flood alleviation scheme (centred on NGR SO 0580/8155). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned to carry out this work by Severn Trent Water Limited. The fieldwork was carried out in January 2002. Features or deposits of archaeological interest were not encountered within the area subject to monitoring and no finds were collected. The machining exposed layers of modern make-up and levelling of a varied nature, including a clay layer of probable alluvial origin and natural geological deposits of clays and gravels.

2.0: Introduction

This report outlines the results of archaeological monitoring carried out during groundworks for the excavation of a storage tank within an open grassy area northwest of River Brook Drive, Stirchley, Birmingham (centred on NGR SO 0580/8155). Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) was commissioned to carry out this watching brief by Severn Trent Water Limited.

The monitoring was carried out in accordance with a Design Brief issued by the Planning and Architecture Department of Birmingham City Council (BCC 2001) and a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 2001). The watching brief was also carried out in accordance with guidelines contained within the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1999).

The results of earlier archaeological monitoring off Linden Road, Bournville, Birmingham on another part of the flood alleviation scheme have been reported separately (Martin 2001).

3.0: Site location

The works were located in an open area of grassland and trees lying between the River Rea and River Brook Drive, adjacent to the confluence of The Bourn and the River Rea. The construction works involved the construction of a storage tank linked to existing services by new pipes and manholes. The groundworks for the construction of the tank involved the excavation of an area 15.5 m by 52.5m in plan and measuring 6m deep (Figures 2-3).

4.0: Archaeological background

No archaeological sites are recorded on the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record within the area affected by the flood alleviation works. Several Bronze Age burnt mounds have been found adjoining stream and river courses, in the area around Stirchley, for example in Bournville and Moseley. It was thought that, since the area to be affected by these groundworks lay near to The Bourn and the River Rea, it was possible that one or more burnt mounds could lie within the area to be affected by flood alleviation works. Burnt mounds consist of heat-shattered and sintered pebbles within charcoal rich soil and are associated with stream courses.

5.0: Aims and methodology

The objective of this watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological features or deposits revealed during groundworks, in particular, any burnt mounds and associated palaeochannels.

The watching brief was conducted in two stages following the contractors' programme of works.

The first stage of archaeological monitoring was carried out during the excavation of a trench measuring 4m in width, and 6-7m in depth, dug along the perimeter of the tank. This trench was excavated first, since as the instability of the sub-surface deposits meant that it was necessary for piled trench supports to be inserted around the perimeter before the interior of the tank area could be safely excavated.

After the insertion of trench supports was completed, the interior of the tank was excavated in stages. The first metre of deposits across the interior of the tank were removed by machine first, to allow the installation of an internal support frame. Observation around the trench perimeter indicated that the first metre of deposits were entirely modern, and this stage of the works within the tank interior was not, therefore monitored. Later, deposits within the interior measuring between 1m and 4m below the modern ground surface were mechanically excavated and a further support frame was inserted. This stage of the works was archaeologically monitored, since observations during excavation within the perimeter indicated that any surviving archaeological deposits would probably lie between 1 to 3.5m below the modern ground surface. The final stage of works involved the excavation of the remaining 2m within the tank interior. All excavations were carried out by tracked 360 degree excavators.

Hand excavation was not carried out and it was only possible to perform limited investigation of some deposits due to danger of collapse from the extremely unstable overlying deposits. A full record of stratigraphic sequences, supplemented by drawings, was made. Deposits were recorded using *pro-forma* context and feature record cards; these records, combined with section drawings and photographs form the site archive and are currently stored at BUFAU.

6.0: Results (Figures 4 and 5)

The earliest deposits encountered were layers of red-orange sands, gravels and clays (1004), recorded at between 3.5-4m below the modern ground level. These layers characterise the drift geology in this area. These deposits were overlain by a layer of grey-blue clay which contained flecks of organic material (1003), and were banded with brown clay, recorded at a depth of 1.5m below the modern ground surface. Layer 1003 measured a maximum of 1.2m in thickness at the southwestern angle of the tank area, reducing in thickness to around 0.5m at the northeastern corner of the area investigated (Figure 5). The clay contained organic lenses, and had probably been laid down in bands, probably by over bank alluviation by the River Rea. This deposit did not lie in a defined palaeochannel, but extended across the entire area monitored, which further suggests that it was laid down by flooding.

Layer 1003 was overlain by a layer of grey-black material which contained soot, clinker, rubble, slag, metal and china (1002). This deposit measured approximately 0.35m in thickness, and was recorded at a depth of between 1.15-1.5m below the modern surface. Above was a red-orange layer of sandy clay (1001), approximately 0.65m thick, recorded between 0.5m and 1.15m below modern ground surface, which included many small stones and gravel. This deposit probably comprised modern levelling-up material.

Across most of the northeastern corner of the tank an area of modern disturbance (1005) was visible (Figures 4 and 5). This disturbance seems to have truncated layers 1001, 1002, and 1003. The disturbance comprised dumped layers containing modern demolition material, including stone rubble and chippings, tarmac, and slag, which were not recorded in detail. The sequence of deposits within this layer indicate successive stages of dumping, cut in turn by modern service trenches.

Layers 1001 and 1005 were overlain by the topsoil (1000), a dark brown sandy silt which contained some small pebbles and rubble. The topsoil measured a maximum of 0.5m in depth (Figure 5).

No features of archaeological interest were identified during the machining and no finds were collected.

7.0: Discussion

No burnt mounds, possible burnt mounds, or associated stream-courses were identified within the excavated area. The amount of alluvium recorded during the archaeological monitoring suggests that this area was probably prone to repeated flooding, although this flooding is not datable. It is possible that any burnt mounds which may have existed in this area and have been scoured-out by flooding, or by modern disturbance, which was considerable. It is also possible that any burnt mounds within the vicinity may have been located further away from this flood-prone area.

The deposits encountered comprised geological clays and gravels (1004), overlain by a clay layer (1003) of probable alluvial origin. Layers 1002, 1001 and 1005 probably

represent relatively modern levelling activities, probably dating to the twentieth century.

8.0: Acknowledgements

The watching brief was carried out by Melissa Conway, Richard Cherrington and Mary Duncan, with advice from Andy Rudge. The report was edited by Alex Jones who also managed the project. Illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. Thanks are due to Sad Buray of Severn Trent Water Limited. Many thanks are due to the site staff of both Forkers and MJS Construction for all their help on site.

9.0: References

BCC 2001 *Land off Cartland Road and off Linden Road, Birmingham. Ripple Road/Cadbury's Flood Alleviation Scheme. Brief for Archaeological Observation and recording works* Birmingham City Council.

BUFAU 2001 *Written Scheme of Investigation Archaeological Watching Brief off Cartland Road and Linden Road, Birmingham.*

IFA 1999 *Standard and Guidance for Desk-Based Assessments* Institute of Field Archaeologists.

Martin, H. 2001 *Land off Linden Road, Bournville, Birmingham. An Archaeological Watching Brief 2001.* BUFAU Report No. 855.

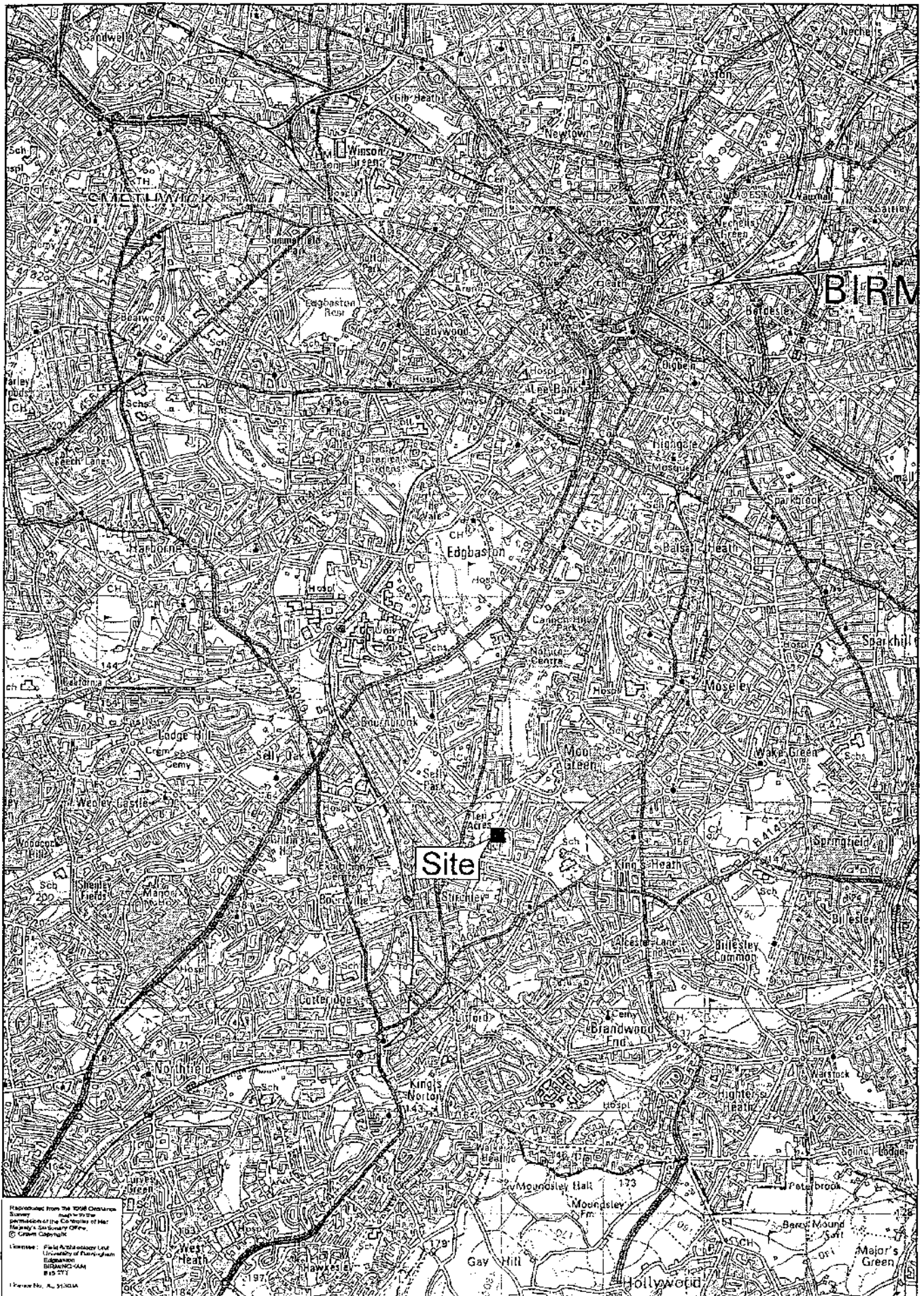


Figure 1

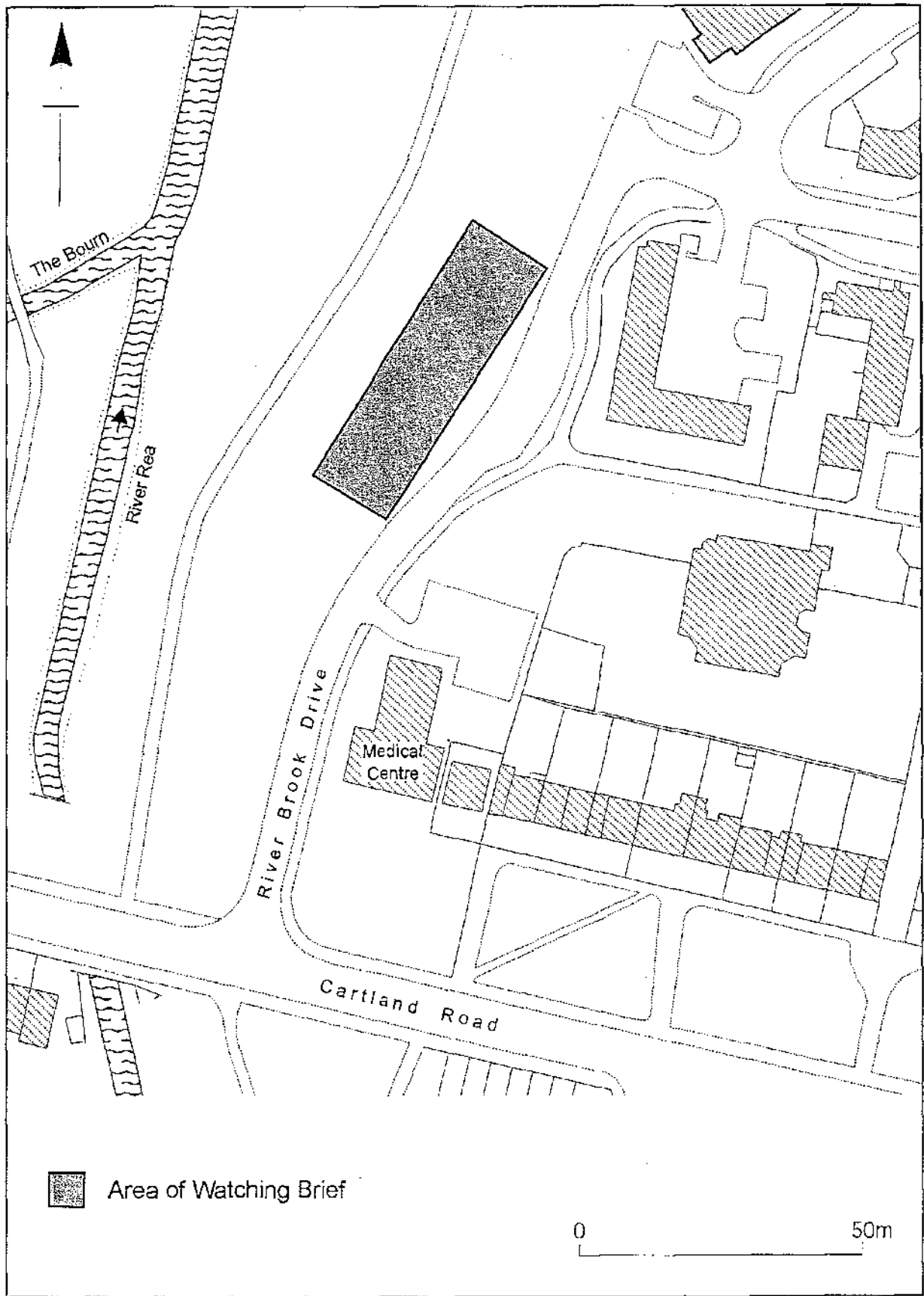


Figure 2

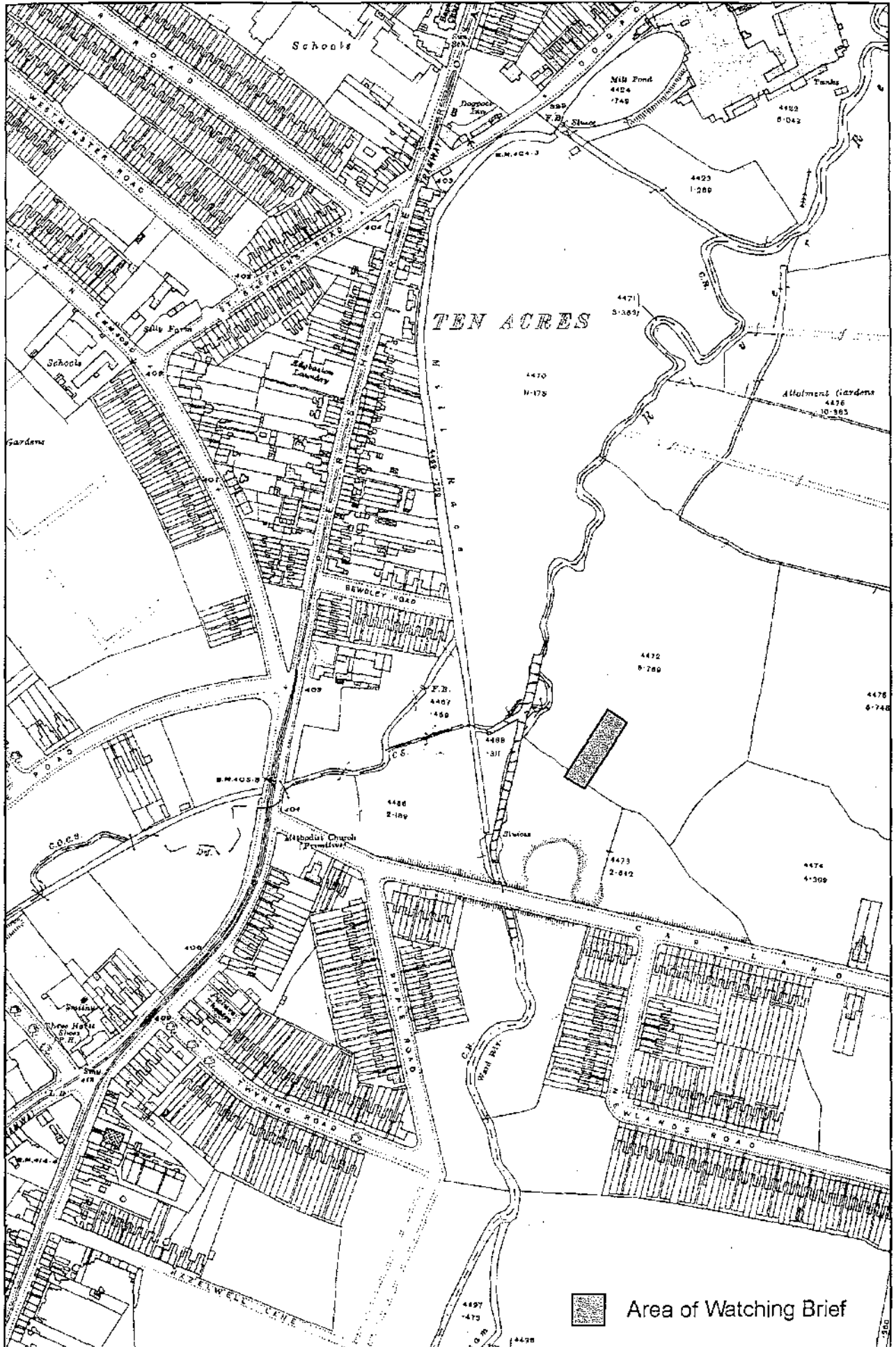


Figure 3

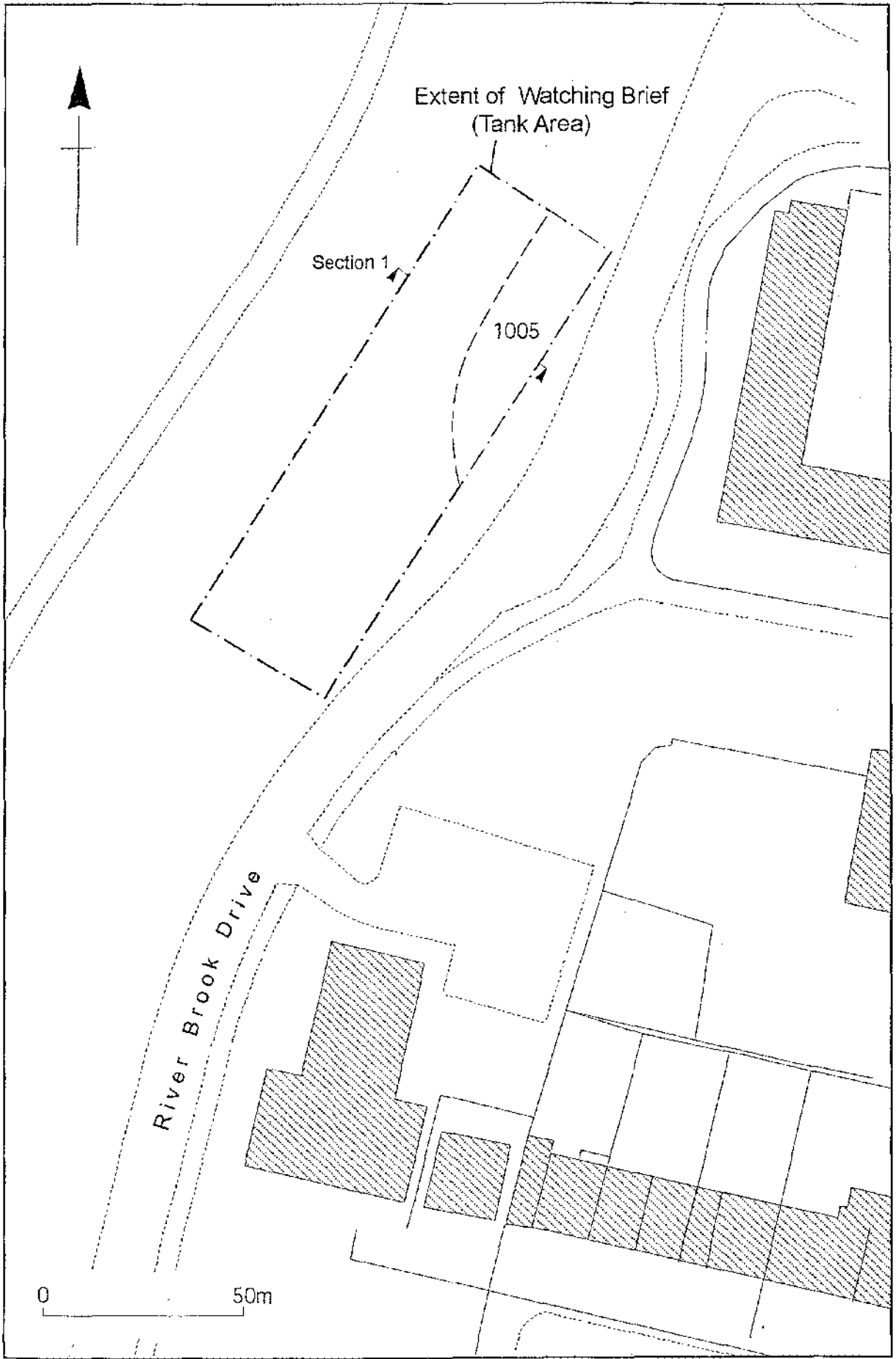


Figure 4

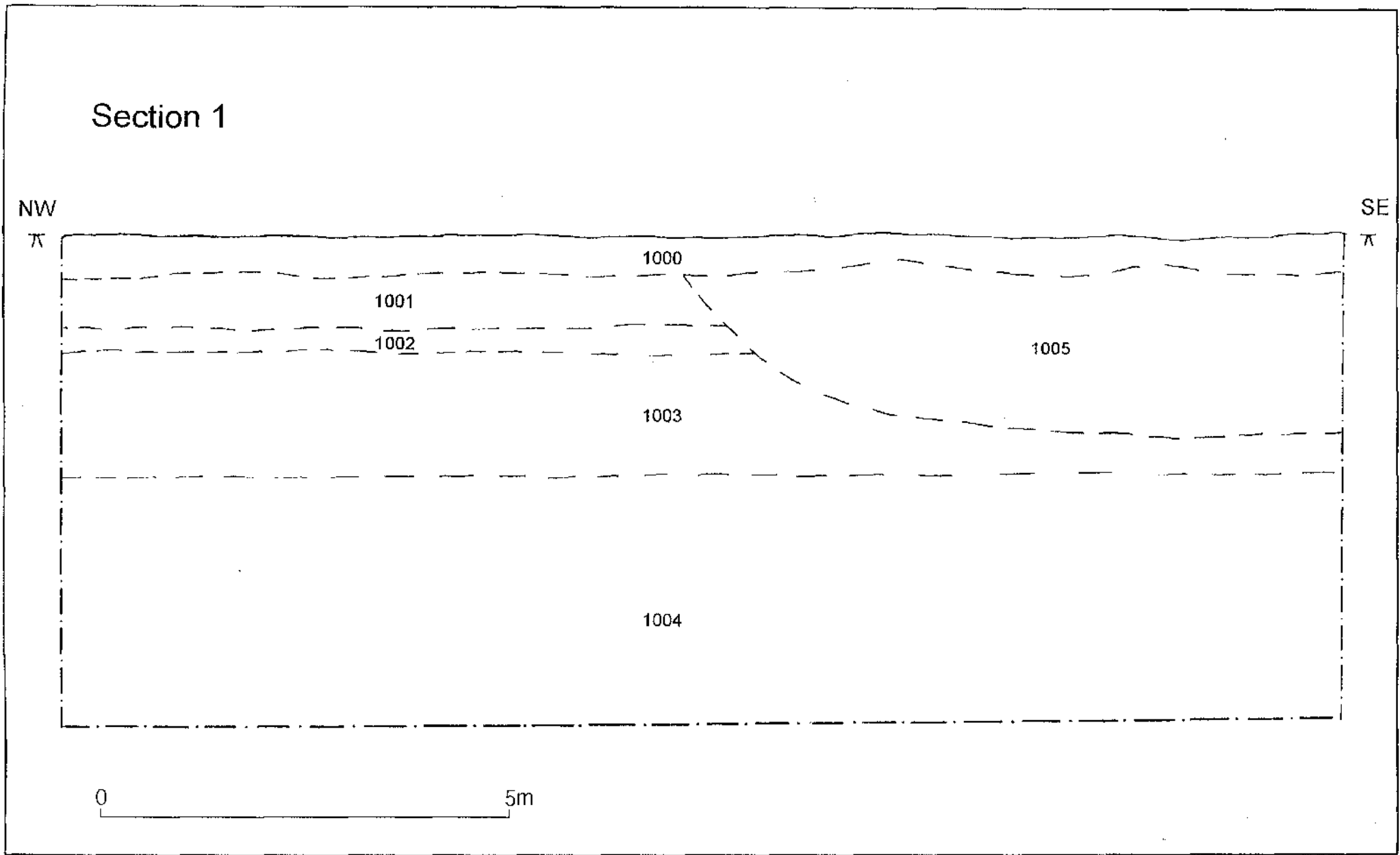


Figure 5