



THE UNIVERSITY
OF BIRMINGHAM

**Land off Coventry Road,
Burbage, Leicestershire.
Residential Development,
Phase 2:**

**An Archaeological
Watching Brief 2002**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



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by

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1.0 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Miller Homes, who were undertaking the second phase of a residential development on land off Coventry Road, Burbage, Leicestershire (NGR SP 433913). This work followed on from a watching brief conducted during Phase I of the project, when 31 dwellings were erected on land adjacent to the current site, and a desk-based archaeological assessment of the Phase 2 development area.

The assessment failed to find any documentary evidence for the use of the site prior to the 19th century, but uncovered cartographic records showing that it was utilised as arable and pasture land in 1841. This lack of historical data, coupled with the absence of any identifiable archaeological features during the Phase 1 watching brief on land immediately to the west, implied that the site had low archaeological potential. However, the above-mentioned watching brief had resulted in the recovery of 32 Bronze Age worked flints from the topsoil and subsoil layers. Hinckley and Bosworth District Council therefore informed Miller Homes that the second phase of the residential development would be allowed to proceed, on condition that a watching brief be undertaken during associated groundworks.

An archaeologist undertook scheduled visits to the site over a period of 5 months, beginning in November 2001, coinciding with groundworks in various parts of the development area. No *in situ* archaeological features were discovered after topsoil stripping or during excavation of trenches for wall foundations and services. A small assemblage of artefacts were recovered from the topsoil spoilheaps and from the surface of the exposed subsoil. This included 24 items of humanly-struck prehistoric flint (dating from the Later Neolithic to the Middle Bronze Age), plus a large gunflint of probable 18th - 19th-century date.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the second phase of a residential redevelopment on land bordered by Rugby Road and Coventry Road in Burbage, Leicestershire (centred on NGR SP 433913; Fig.1). Both Phases 1 and 2 of the project were covered by planning application CS/P/CW/DB/99/01076/FUL, which was granted to Miller Homes by Hinckley and Bosworth District Council on condition that stipulated archaeological evaluations be undertaken. As a consequence, Miller Homes commissioned Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) to carry-out a desk-based archaeological assessment (Watt 2000) of the land earmarked for the first phase of development and, subsequently, to conduct a watching brief (Krakowicz 2000) when groundworks commenced. These archaeological evaluations were followed by a desk-based assessment of the land scheduled for redevelopment in Phase 2 (Watt 2001).

Archaeology encountered during the Phase 1 watching brief was limited to the recovery of 32 Bronze Age worked flints from the topsoil and subsoil layers. This paucity of finds, coupled with the limited amount of data unearthed by the second desk-based assessment, indicated that further archaeological evaluation of the Phase 2 site should be restricted to a watching brief during groundworks. BUFAU were subsequently commissioned by Miller Homes to undertake this work.

The aims of the watching brief were to record any archaeological deposits or features exposed during groundwork in the development area. A qualified archaeologist initially attended the site on November 16th 2001, with further scheduled visits taking place on January 4th, February 18th, March 6th and April 15th 2002.

3.0 Site Location and History

The site of the residential development is located on the southern edge of Burbage, Leicestershire, whose town centre lies one mile southeast of Hinckley and five miles east of Nuneaton (Fig.1). The whole of the development area (covering both phases of construction) is centred on National Grid Reference SP 433913. The site of the Phase 2 work was located to the east of the junction of Coventry Road and Rugby Road. The backs of existing residential plots define the northern and eastern boundaries of the site, whilst Phase 1 of the development forms its western border. To the south of the site lie open fields.

Comprehensive accounts of the archaeological and historical background of the development site are contained within BUFAU Reports No. 717 (Watt 2000) and No. 824 (Watt 2001), which detail the desk-based evaluations of Phases 1 and 2, respectively. With regard to the Phase 2 site, the relevant report concluded that the study area did not have great potential for archaeological deposits, with no evidence being found for the land usage prior to the 19th century. Maps printed in 1841 show that the area was then utilised as arable and pasture land (Watt 2001).

4.0 Methodology

A suitably qualified archaeologist from BUFAU initially attended the site on November 16th 2001. During the visit, it was noted that topsoil stripping of the Phase 2 development area had been completed. Construction activity was much in evidence in the southwestern quadrant of the site and, in consequence, the exposed subsoil surface in that locale had been disturbed by the machine activity - a situation exacerbated by recent rainfall. The stripped area was systematically inspected on foot, in order to ascertain if any features or artefacts were apparent. This procedure was repeated on subsequent visits. Any foundation trenches and/or service trenches that were open whilst the archaeologist was in attendance were examined, to check if features were apparent in the cut sections. Topsoil and subsoil spoilheaps, dotted around the site, were also inspected for artefacts on each occasion.

In the event of finding *in situ* archaeology, features and contexts would be described in detail on pre-printed *pro-forma* record cards, supplemented by relevant plans and

section-drawings of appropriate scale, plus monochrome/colour-print photography. Where archaeology was absent, stratigraphic data would be collected. All records so generated would form part of the archive, initially held at BUFAU, but ultimately to be deposited with Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service (LMARS). Artefacts recovered during the watching brief would be placed in suitably labelled bags and taken to the BUFAU Finds Room for cleaning, identification and cataloguing. At the request of LMARS, any finds were to be allocated the Accession Number X.A38.2002.

5.0 Results

Machine-stripping of the topsoil layer (context 2000), some 0.2 - 0.3m in depth, revealed a yellow-brown, clay-silt subsoil (2001) across the site. The topsoil spoil was formed into low bunds along the northern and southeastern edges of the site, and a large amount of spoil was piled into a heap in the southeast quadrant. During the initial inspection of the site, the archaeologist systematically checked the exposed subsoil 2001, but no features or artefacts of archaeological relevance were identified. There were no excavation trenches on site that were open for inspection and no artefacts were recovered from the spoilheaps.

On the second occasion that an archaeologist attended the site (January 4th 2002), buildings were in various stages of erection in Plots 32 through to 39 (inclusive), Plots 87 to 90, and Plots 92 and 93 (Fig.2). A 0.45m-wide service trench was under excavation, which ran between the front walls of houses in Plots 32 to 34, inclusive, and Access Road 1 (Fig.2). An inspection of the freshly-cut trench sides revealed no archaeological features, but the excavation was useful in providing data on the subsoil stratigraphy (Fig.3).

The base of the 0.9m-deep service trench cut into a layer of compact, brownish-yellow clay (2002), that contained a small number of angular stones and rounded pebbles, randomly scattered throughout the matrix. The thickness of layer 2002 was not evident, but the trench had cut into it to a maximum depth of 0.6m. Overlying this deposit was a subsoil layer (2001) that varied in thickness from 0.3 to 0.5m. Subsoil 2001 was predominantly a compact clay-silt (as referred to above), but the excavation also revealed that it contained diffuse lenses of reddish sand and a scattering of flints, plus rounded pebbles, throughout the matrix.

The archaeologist's next scheduled site visit was on February 18th 2002. At that stage, the developers were erecting buildings in Plots 40 through to 55, inclusive. Foundation trenches for the wall footings in Plots 56 to 60 had been dug, but construction had not yet commenced. The open trenches were duly inspected for evidence of archaeological features, but none was found.

The topsoil and subsoil spoilheaps, which had been mechanically-disturbed and weathered since the previous visit, were re-checked for artefacts. A small number of flints, arguably showing evidence of having been worked, was recovered from the spoil. Eastern and south-eastern sectors of the stripped area, relatively undisturbed by machine activity, were systematically fieldwalked (for a second time). One worked flint was recovered from the surface of the exposed subsoil (2001) within building Plot 71 (Fig.2).

An inspection of the site on March 6th failed to find evidence of *in situ* archaeological features, but a small number of Post-Medieval artefacts was recovered from the exposed subsoil surface in Plots 73 and 74.

On April 15th, when an archaeologist next attended the site, houses were in various stages of erection in Plots 61 to 68 (inclusive), Plots 80 – 82, and Plots 86 and 91. The foundation trenches in Plots 73 - 75 and 83 – 85 had been excavated, and partially back-filled with concrete. The level of the concrete was well below the top of the trenches, allowing the inspection of a significant depth of exposed subsoil. However, examination of the cut sections found no evidence for archaeological features and no artefacts were recovered. In common with other visits, on-site spoilheaps and any relatively- undisturbed areas of exposed subsoil were systematically checked for finds, but the search proved fruitless.

6.0 The Finds (Accession Number X.A38.2002) by Lynne Bevan

None of the artefacts came from stratified contexts. They were recovered from the topsoil (2000) spoilheaps or were found scattered on the exposed subsoil (2001) surface within the topsoil-stripped area.

Flint

A total of 24 items of humanly-struck prehistoric flint was recovered, comprising three cores, one core fragment, four retouched flakes and 16 unretouched flakes. In addition, a large rectangular gunflint of probable 18th- 19th-century date was recovered. The flint was of a generally good quality and 'fresh' appearance, with a low incidence of recortication and burning. The raw material used appeared to be pebble flint from a secondary source, probably local river gravels or boulder clay. Such flint is characterised by a thin compacted remnant cortex and often, although that does not seem to be the case here, by a high incidence of crystalline inclusions and faults, resulting in a raw material of unpredictable quality. There was no evidence of flint from a mined source being exploited. The majority of the flint was dark brown and dark grey in colour.

Small blades suggestive of a Later Mesolithic/Early Neolithic date had been detached from the core fragment, but the other cores had been used to produce flakes, which are more typical of Later Neolithic to Early-Middle Bronze Age industries. This dating is supported by the general morphology of the retouched and unretouched flakes which tended to be broad and squat and suggestive of a later prehistoric (probably Bronze Age) date. Moreover, contemporaneity cannot be assumed between all of the items in this small collection, which might have been deposited over a long period of time in a series of episodes rather than resulting from one period of occupation.

Other Finds

Other finds included six fragments of pottery, three of which were very abraded. Two fragments – one brown-glazed and the other Willow Pattern, were probably of 18th-19th century date. A small quartz-tempered fragment might be from a Medieval cooking pot, although a more recent date is equally possible, and the three abraded

fragments were probably modern, possibly from a flower pot. The small size of the sherds and degree of abrasion precluded closer identification.

In addition, one coin, a very degraded German pfennig of probable 20th-century date, was recovered, and two buttons, one of which was a military button of 20th-century date (bearing the words "Royal Army Service Corps") and the other was a decorative button inlaid with glass of 19th - 20th-century date.

7.0 Discussion

Earlier desktop surveys (Watt 2000; Watt 2001) indicated that the development area had low archaeological potential and this was backed-up by the paucity of finds from the watching brief during Phase 1 of the project (Krakowicz 2001). Inspection of the Phase 2 site after topsoil-stripping, and during subsequent excavation of trenches for services and wall foundations, failed to reveal any evidence for archaeological features within the area.

Artefacts were recovered from topsoil (2000) spoilheaps and a number was found scattered on the exposed subsoil (2001) in the topsoil-stripped area. Of these, a small assemblage of humanly-struck flint items was of most interest. Unfortunately, the assemblage does not indicate settlement of any duration or intensity in the study area. However, in the event of further archaeological investigation of the site and/or its surrounds, a comparison of the flint assemblage with any future assemblages, collected or excavated, might prove useful.

8.0 Acknowledgements

Miller Homes commissioned the fieldwork and thanks are due to Mr. Howarth, the Site Manager at Burbage, for his help in facilitating the watching brief.

The fieldwork was carried out by Roy Krakowicz, assisted by a supplementary site visit from Erica Macey. This report was written by Roy Krakowicz, with Lynne Bevan providing information on the finds and Nigel Dodds preparing the figures. The report was edited by Iain Ferris, the Project Manager at BUFAU.

9.0 References

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|---------------|------|---|
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BUFAU Report No. 732. December 2000. |
| Watt, S. | 2000 | <i>Land off Coventry Road, Burbage, Leicestershire: an archaeological desk-based assessment</i>
BUFAU Report No. 717. May 2000. |

Watt, S. 2001

*Land off Coventry Road, Burbage, Leicestershire,
Phase 2: an archaeological desk-based
assessment*

BUFAU Report No. 824. July 2001.

10.0 Figures and Plates

Figure 1 Location of Site

Figure 2 Location of Building Plots on Site

Plate 1 Site after Topsoil Stripping

Plate 2 Construction of Houses in Progress

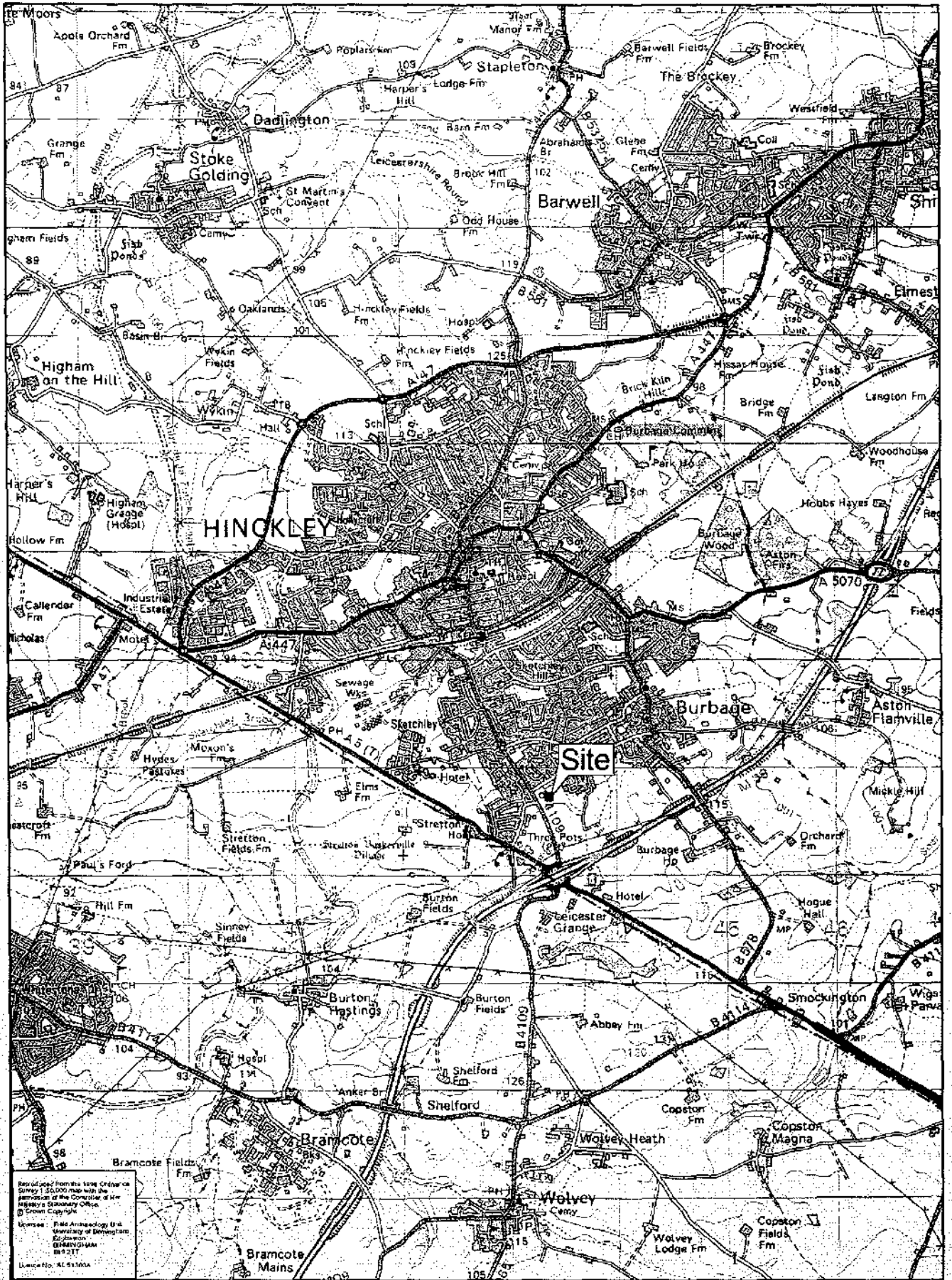


Fig.1

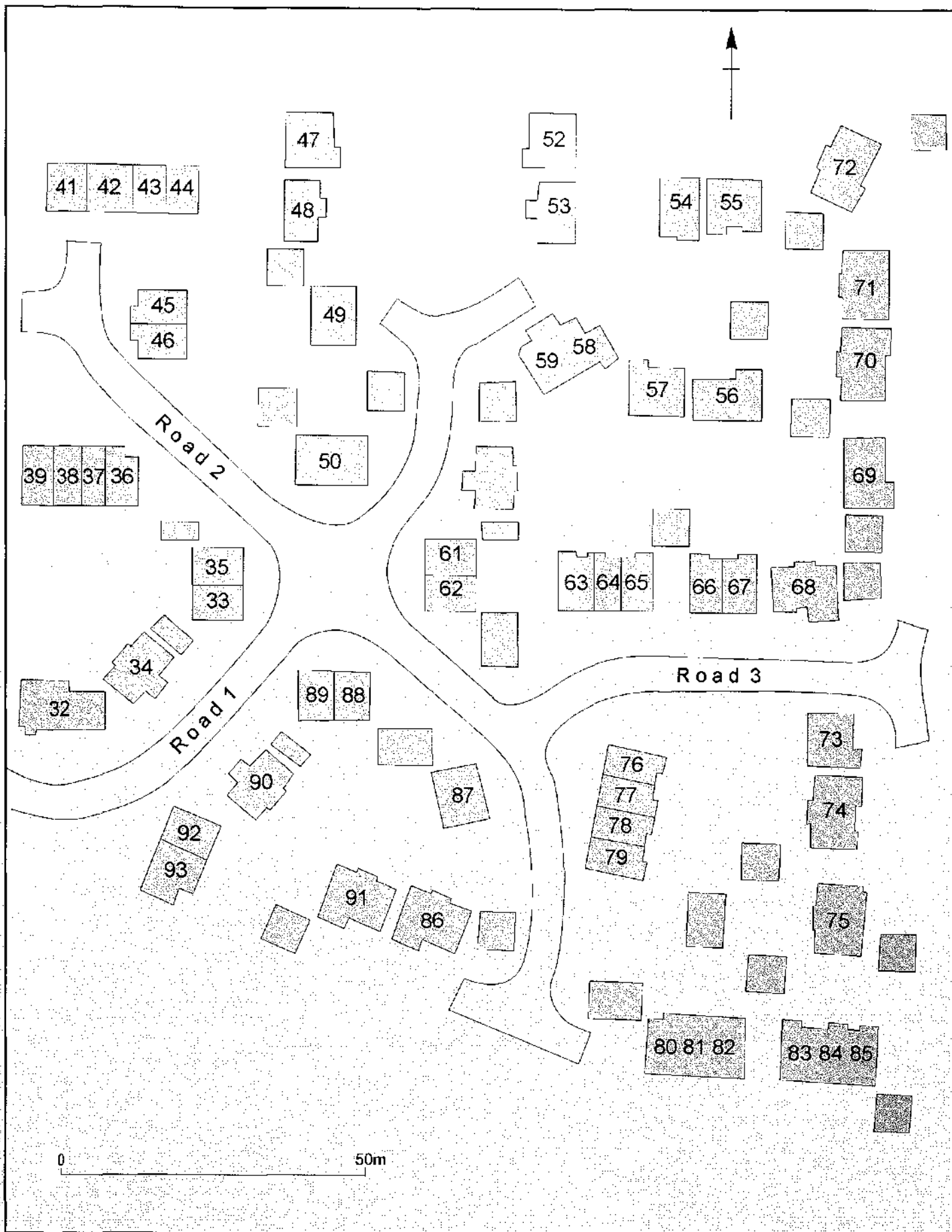


Fig.2



Plate 1



Plate 2