

**Bioprocess Centre and
Formulation Engineering
University of Birmingham**

**Archaeological Watching
Briefs 2002**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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University of Birmingham
Archaeological Watching Briefs 2002**

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Archaeological Watching Briefs 2002

1.0: SUMMARY

Two archaeological watching briefs were undertaken during construction groundworks within the campus of the University of Birmingham, both within and adjoining the southern annexe of Metchley Roman forts (centred on NGR SP 044838). The watching briefs were undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of the Estate Management Office of the University of Birmingham, in advance of development proposals within the university campus.

No features or deposits of Roman, or possible Roman date were recorded at the Bioprocess Centre (Site 1). The watching brief at this site recorded modern levelling deposits and surfaces, and no Roman finds were collected. Two ditches were identified and sample excavated during the watching brief at the Formulation Engineering site (Site 2). One of the ditches identified probably defined part of the southern side of the southern fort annexe. The second ditch, cut on a different alignment, could also be of Roman date, since no post-Roman artifacts were recovered from within its fills. No Roman finds were recovered from Site 2.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

Archaeological watching briefs were undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) during construction groundworks at the Bioprocess Centre (Site 1) and Formulation Engineering building (Site 2, Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by the Estate Management Office of the University of Birmingham. Site 1 lay within the interior of the southern annexe of Metchley Roman forts. Part of Site 2 intercepted the mapped position of the southern ditched defences of the southern annexe of the forts. Birmingham City Council approved the associated Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 2002).

The complex of Roman forts of 1st and early 2nd-century AD date (Birmingham SMR 2005, St Joseph and Shotton 1937), mostly located within the campus of the University of Birmingham, have been identified by map research, ground inspection and archaeological investigation (Jones 2002). The earliest (Phase 1, dark green outline on plan) fort, dated to the mid-1st century was defended by double ditches and a rampart, which contained timber-framed barrack-blocks, workshops and stores. Later, the fort was extended on its northern, eastern and southern sides by ditched annexes (Phase 2A, light green outline on plan). No internal features could be identified within the interior of the northern annexe (Jones 2002). Excavation within the eastern annexe, slightly misaligned with the Phase 1 fort, revealed evidence of metalworking and possibly breadmaking (Jones in preparation). The southern annexe was first identified by map research (Jones 1999), and later by archaeological investigation (Jones in preparation) which revealed a heavily truncated ditch following the mapped alignment. At this time the fort interior may have been cleared preparatory to the layout of temporary timber-framed structures (Phase 2B), forming a military stores depot. Later in the 1st century a rectangular fort (Phase 3, brown

outline on plan) was constructed within the interior of the Phase 1 fort. After this fort went out of use the site continued to be occupied, with some re-cutting of the defensive ditches, into the late 2nd century (Phase 4). This latest Roman activity may have been associated with the occasional military use of the site, or activity associated with a *mansio* (hostel) or *mutatio* (change of horses) located at the crossroads presumed to adjoin the forts.

Subject to the agreement of the University of Birmingham as landowner it is proposed to deposit the watching brief archives with Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

For simplicity, it is assumed in the following account that the main axis of the fort is north-south, although the drawings remain labelled with compass north.

3.0: METHODOLOGY

The archaeological watching brief at Site 1, a former tarmac hardstanding, involved the cleaning and recording of machine-cut sections around the perimeter of the footprint of the new building which lay on the western side of an existing building. No observation could be maintained during the contractors' machine excavation.

The area monitored at Site 2 comprised grassed lawns bisecting the two linked blocks of the Civil Engineering building. The archaeological watching brief initially involved the observation of hand-dug test-pits excavated to locate the position of live services. Archaeological observation was maintained during the removal of topsoil and other overburden. The uppermost subsoil horizon outside those extensive zones dug away by service trenches or other disturbances was hand-cleaned. This cleaning revealed two ditches which were hand-excavated, to recover their original profiles, and to test their fill sequence. Only limited lengths of these features had survived recent disturbance.

Recording at both sites was by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, supplemented by scale plans and sections and monochrome print and digital colour photography. No finds were collected during the watching briefs.

4.0: RESULTS

4.1: Bioprocess Centre (Site 1, Fig. 2)

The area of the new build measured 6m by 9.5m. Machine excavation was limited to a maximum depth of 0.6m below the modern tarmac surface. The surface of the natural subsoil was not exposed by machine excavation.

The earliest feature was a cut (F100), backfilled with grey sand-silt (1009). The earliest deposits recorded comprised a sandy-clay (1008), sealing feature F100, and red-brown sand-silt deposits (1004-5, 1012) containing modern building debris. Layer 1008 was cut by a shallow disturbance (F102/1010-1). Layers 1004-5 and 1012 were sealed by a shallow pebble surface (1002), overlain by a deposit of hardcore (1001).

Above were further layers of hardcore (1007) and tarmac (1000), forming the modern ground surface.

No features, or possible features of archaeological interest were identified, and no finds were collected.

4.2: Formulation Engineering (Site 2, Fig. 3)

The uppermost horizon of the subsoil, exposed by machining, comprised a yellow clay-silt-sand (1002), recorded at a depth of 0.7m below the modern lawn surface. The majority of the area to the west of the Link Block was disturbed by the cutting of service trenches and other disturbances associated with the construction of the existing adjoining buildings. The area to the east of the Link Block (Fig. 2; not illustrated on Fig. 3), also included within the scope of the watching brief, was wholly disturbed by recent activity. In this part of Site 2 the upper subsoil horizon could not be identified, although truncated subsoil horizons were observed in the bases of modern service trenches.

Archaeological cleaning and hand-excavated was largely confined within an area measuring a maximum of 50m by 10m, to the west of the Link Block. Two ditches were revealed cutting the subsoil, following careful hand-cleaning of the uppermost subsoil horizon. Southwest-northeast aligned ditch F101 measured a maximum of 2m in width and 0.9m in depth. It was cut to a V-shaped profile, with a slight trace of a cleaning-slot in its base. The ditch was recorded for a maximum length of approximately 5m. The primary fill of the ditch comprised a red clay (1006), sealed by a grey clay (1005) with orange flecks, which may be interpreted as collapsed rampart material. This was sealed by a shallow deposit of grey silt clay (1004) containing cobbles, which may have formed a modern soakaway, following the line of ditch F101. Ditch F100 was cut on an alignment closer to north-south. This ditch was recorded for a maximum length of 6m. It was cut to an irregular, roughly U-shaped profile, and measured a maximum of 0.7m in width, and 0.2m in depth. The ditch was backfilled with grey silt-clay (1003).

No other features, or possible features of archaeological interest were identified, and no finds were collected.

5.0: DISCUSSION

At Site 1 the watching brief exposed modern deposits within the sides and in the bases of the foundation trenches which were recorded. Accordingly, it is probable that any Roman features or deposits surviving earlier landscaping and construction disturbances will not be affected by the new build.

As may have been anticipated, only a small part of Site 2 was unaffected by the construction of the existing adjoining buildings, and by associated services. Because of these extensive modern disturbances, no Roman features could be identified within the interior of the southern fort annexe. It is also possible that this annexe interior was devoid of buildings, in which case it may have been used for the storage of materials, or to exercise horses. Ditch F101 coincides with the alignment and mapped position

of the southern side of the southern fort enclosure. The watching brief has provided the first opportunity to identify a well-preserved length of this ditch, first identified from cartographic evidence. Previous excavation has identified a heavily truncated segment of this ditch, within an area subject to deep modern disturbance (Jones forthcoming). There was no evidence of an associated rampart within Site 2. Ditch F100 was cut on a different alignment, and could not be related stratigraphically to the former. The absence of post-Roman finds from the fills of feature F100 could suggest it was associated with the Roman military occupation at Metchley, particularly since several Roman ditches following various alignments have been previously identified elsewhere within the southern annexe (Jones forthcoming).

No Roman finds were collected from either site.

6.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The watching brief was sponsored by the Estate Management Office of the University of Birmingham. Dave Clarke was the project manager for the Estate Management Office and Alex Jones was the BUFAU project manager. The watching briefs were undertaken by Roy Krakowicz and Maurice Hopper. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. The watching brief was monitored by Dr. Michael Hodder for Birmingham City Council.

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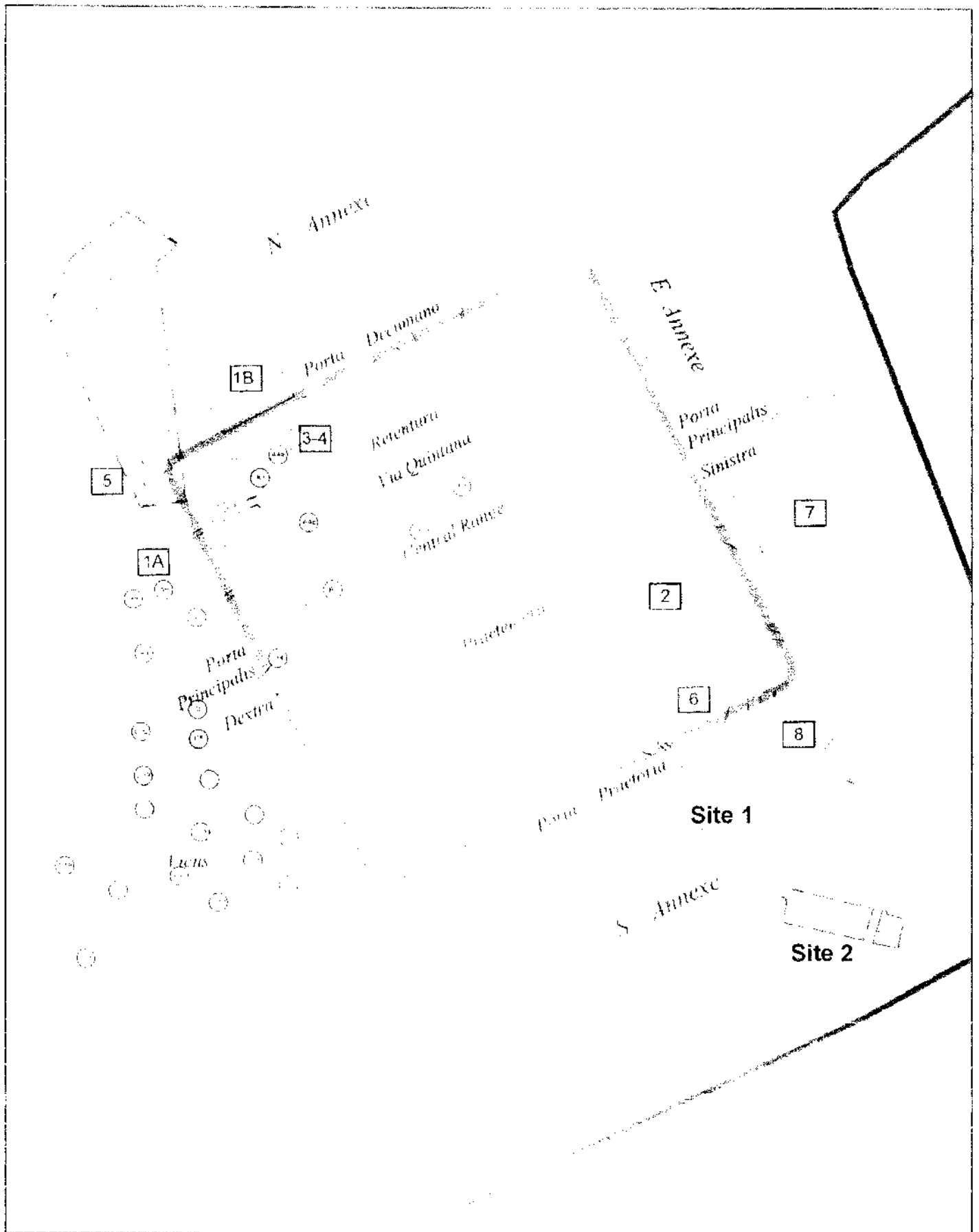


Fig 1

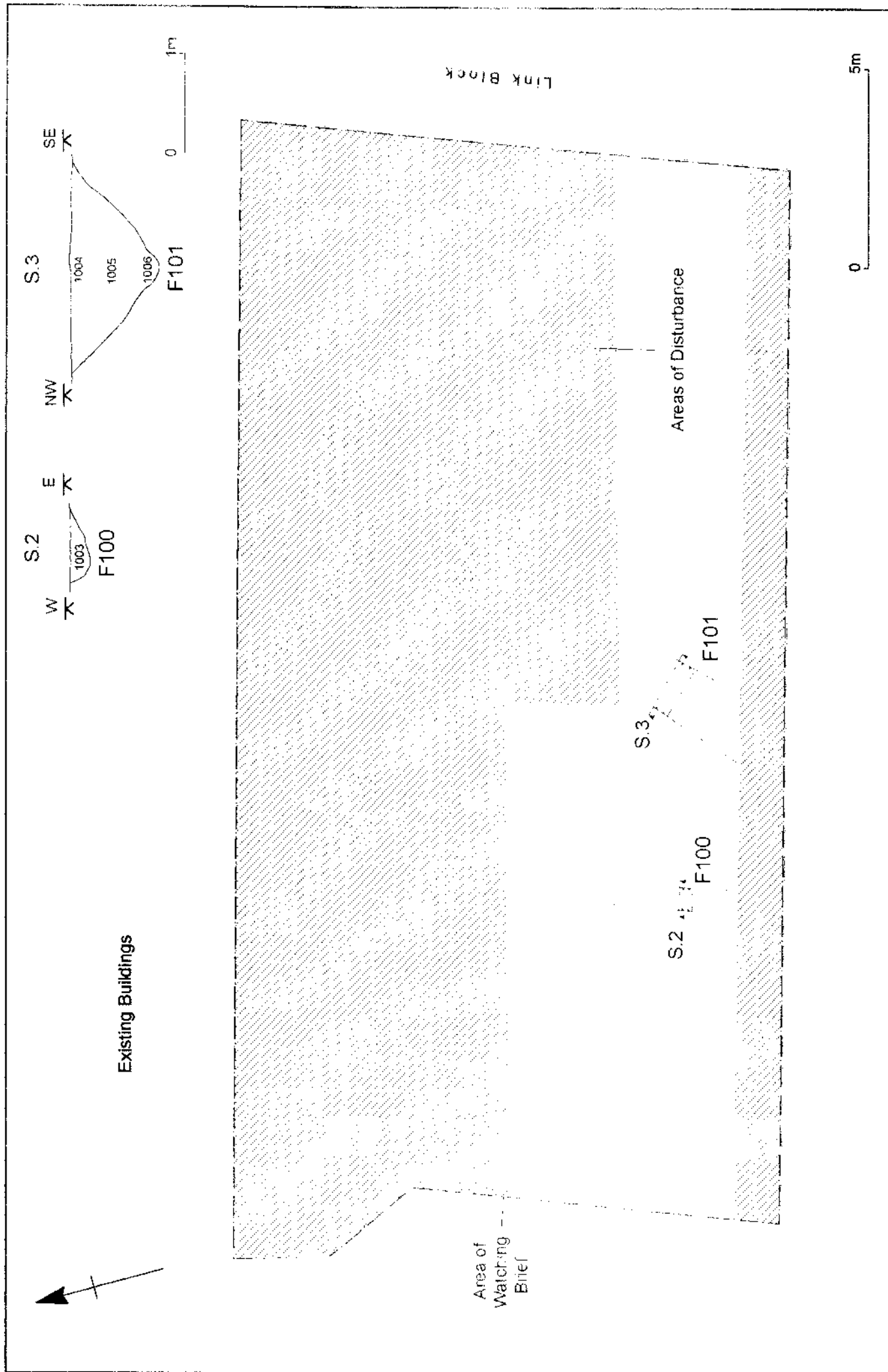


Fig.3