

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**Land off High Street, Feckenham, Worcestershire:
an archaeological watching brief 2003**

(Fieldwork Reference No: WSM 31915)

by

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit at land off High Street, Feckenham, Worcestershire (NGR SP 0083 6148) between September 2002 and February 2003. The work was commissioned by Miller Homes (West Midlands) and was required as a condition of planning consent in advance of the construction of residential housing.

The site is situated immediately to the south of the remains of a royal hunting lodge; an elliptical multi-banked earthwork enclosure dating to the medieval period, with possible origins in the Anglo-Saxon period. The remains of the hunting lodge are a scheduled ancient monument (SAM30004) and are registered on the County Sites and Monuments Record as a site of archaeological interest (WSM 04177). Previous archaeological evaluation of the site by geophysical survey and trial excavation did not record any significant archaeological features or deposits.

During the watching brief a shallow negative feature was recorded, possibly the remains of a curvi-linear ditch or a pit. No finds were recovered, however the feature was overlain by a layer of possible former medieval or post-medieval ploughsoil, perhaps indicating that the feature was of an earlier date. No other features of archaeological significance were recorded, apart from a possible small pit, probably of post-medieval date.

1.0 Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) at land off High Street, Feckenham, Worcestershire (hereafter, the site, Fig. 1) between September 2002 and February 2003. The work was commissioned by Miller Homes (West Midlands) in advance of the construction of residential housing. The development may have affected an archaeological site registered on the County Sites and Monuments Record (WSM 04177). Consequently an archaeological watching brief was required by Redditch Borough Council (Planning Application Ref. R/00/0379), on the advice of the Planning Advisory Section, Worcestershire Archaeological Service, as a condition of planning consent, in line with guidance given in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990).

The work was in accordance with a brief by the Planning Advisory Section, Worcestershire Archaeological Service (WCC 2000), archaeological advisors to Redditch Borough Council, and with a written scheme of investigation prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 2002) and approved by the Planning Advisory Section.

The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the requirements set down in the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (Institute of Field Archaeologists 2001) and with the Requirements and Guidelines for Archaeological Projects in Worcestershire.

The site archive consists of one of A4 file and one A3 wallet of drawings, prepared according to the guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage 1991). It is currently stored at BUFAU and the completed archive will be placed with the appropriate repository, within a reasonable time of the completion of the project and subject to the approval of the landowner.

2.0 Site location and description

The site (centred on NGR SP 0083 6148, Fig. 1) is located to the west of Feckenham High Street on former agricultural land, at the northern extent of the development area. The area of land subject to the watching brief is 15m wide x 100m long immediately adjacent to the southern boundary of the scheduled ancient monument.

3.0 Archaeological background (Fig. 2)

A Sites and Monuments Record search was carried out prior to the commencement of fieldwork at the site in order to establish the potential for, and nature of, the archaeological remains that may be encountered on the site. A brief summary of the results is outlined below. A more detailed assessment of the documentary, aerial photographic and cartographic evidence for the site can be found in the previous evaluation report (Miller and Jones 1999).

During the medieval period the historic village of Feckenham, lay in a forested area covering a large area of the eastern side of the county, running from Bordesley, in the north, to Evesham, in the south. The site lies immediately to the south of the remains of a Royal Hunting Lodge (WSM 04177) which is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM 30004). The upstanding remains associated with the hunting lodge consist of an elliptical multi-banked earthwork enclosure dating to the medieval period but with possible earlier origins in the Anglo-Saxon period.

A previous evaluation of the site (Miller and Jones 1999, WSM 27992), using geophysical survey and trial-trenching did not locate any archaeological features or deposits of significance, although the northern boundary of the site, adjacent to the scheduled ancient monument, was not fully investigated. The evaluation suggested that cropmarks visible on aerial photographs were associated with ridge and furrow, indicating that the site was cultivated during the medieval period. The existence of a former ploughsoil suggested that the ridge and furrow, indicated by the cropmarks, may have been levelled by modern ploughing. The small quantity and recent date of the finds recovered suggested that there was probably no occupation of the site during the medieval period. Map evidence indicated that the site was not built on in the post-medieval period.

The site lies to the east of Bow Brook and a watching brief (WSM 30771) to the west of the site, on the east bank of Bow Brook, revealed evidence of palaeo-environmental deposits which may provide information on the prehistoric landscape of the area. The B4090 Alcester Road to the south of the site, sometimes called the Lower Saltway, is identified as the Roman road between Droitwich and Alcester (WSM 07193). The bridge (WSM 31740), at the crossing point of the road and Bow

Brook, is attributed to the post-medieval period but may have its origin in the Roman period. The parish of Feckenham is recorded as being well known for the manufacture of fishing hooks and needles in the 18th century (Pearson and Jones 2001).

An archaeological watching brief (Bain 2002, WSM 31882, not illustrated) was carried out on the eastern bank of the Bow Brook, to the south-west of Feckenham village centre within an area potentially containing palaeochannels and possible prehistoric activity relating to woodland clearance. Although several layers of stratigraphy were observed during groundworks, no features of archaeological interest were identified.

4.0 Aims

The objectives of the watching brief were to:

- obtain a stratigraphic record of any archaeological deposits or features exposed during ground works,
- establish the presence and significance of archaeological deposits,
- to recover any artefactual evidence and environmental material.

5.0 Method

All groundworks within a 15m x 100m strip at the northern boundary of the development area were monitored and recorded by a suitably qualified archaeologist. The majority of this area was set aside for gardens at the rear of new houses. A stratigraphic record of deposits revealed during groundworks and the extent of these groundworks was made.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections and photographs which, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive.

The potential for environmental analysis of all archaeological deposits and features was assessed. Environmental samples were then to be taken, where appropriate. Recovered finds were to be cleaned, marked and remedial conservation work was to be undertaken where necessary.

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

6.0 Results (Fig. 3)

The watching brief was carried out on an area at the west part of the site. The rest of the 15m x 100m strip forming the site was unaffected by major groundworks as it was to be set aside for gardens to the rear of new house plots.

Area 1 (Fig. 4)

At the northwest corner of the site an area 3.5m x 19m was stripped of overburden during the groundworks. The natural red brown clay (1003) with patches of gravel (1002) was revealed at a depth of 0.45m below the present ground surface. A negative archaeological feature (F101), possibly a curvilinear ditch or a pit, extending beyond the edge of excavation, was recorded at the west end of Area 1. Feature F101 was at least 1.0m wide and 0.18m deep and had a steeply sloping north side and a flat base. It was filled with a dark greyish brown clay silt (1005). F101 and the natural (1002 and 1003) were sealed by a layer of light brown silty sand subsoil (1001) containing gravel, 0.29m deep. Subsoil layer 1001 was cut by a small possible sub-circular pit (F100), with a 'bowl'-shaped profile, 0.35 x 0.40m and 0.36m deep. It was filled with a dark greyish brown silty sand (1004) containing large amounts of gravel. Layer 1001 and feature F100 were overlain by 0.16m of topsoil (1000).

Foundation trenches

The natural red brown clay (1003) with patches of gravel (1002) was revealed at a depth of 0.45-0.75m below the present ground surface. Natural (1002 and 1003) was sealed by a layer of light brown silty sand subsoil (1001) containing gravel, 0.29-0.59m deep. Layer 1001 and feature F100 were overlain by 0.16m of topsoil (1000).

7.0 Finds

The only finds recovered were two fragments of post-medieval tile recovered from the topsoil (1000).

8.0 Discussion

The function, date and extent of shallow feature F101 is not known. It may, perhaps, be the base of a feature truncated by later ploughing. It was sealed by layer 1001, which may be associated with the plough truncated remains of former ridge and furrow earthworks of medieval or early post-medieval date visible as cropmarks on aerial photographs. Layer 1001 may be similar to the possible former ploughsoil layer encountered during the evaluation (Miller and Jones 1999). Possible pit F100, is probably of post-medieval date as it cuts layer 1001.

9.0 Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the staff of Worcestershire Sites and Monuments Record. The watching brief was managed by Laurence Jones who also wrote this report. The

fieldwork was undertaken by Kate Bain, Emma Hancox and Andy Rudge. Nigel Dodds prepared the figures.

10.0 References

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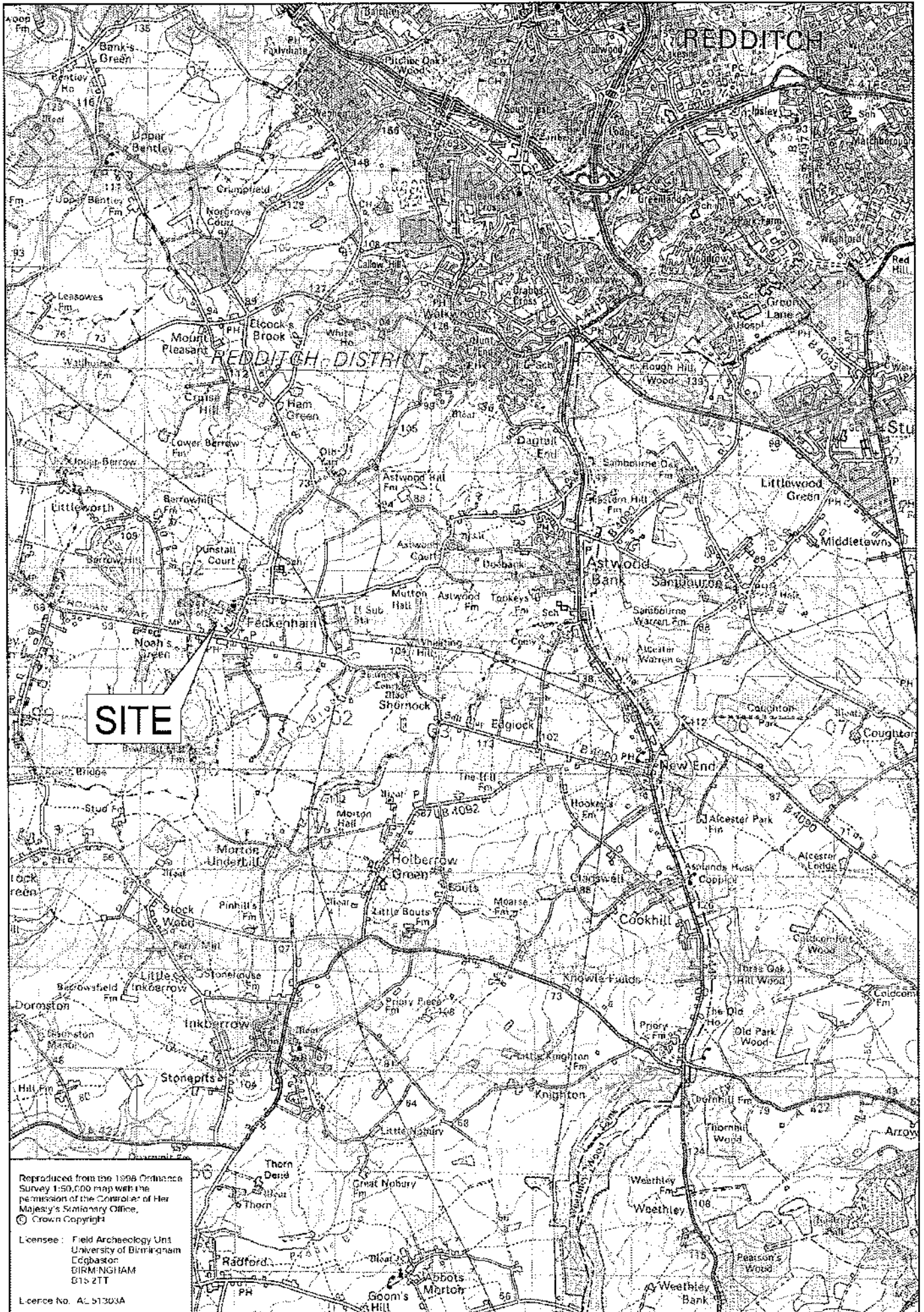


Fig.1

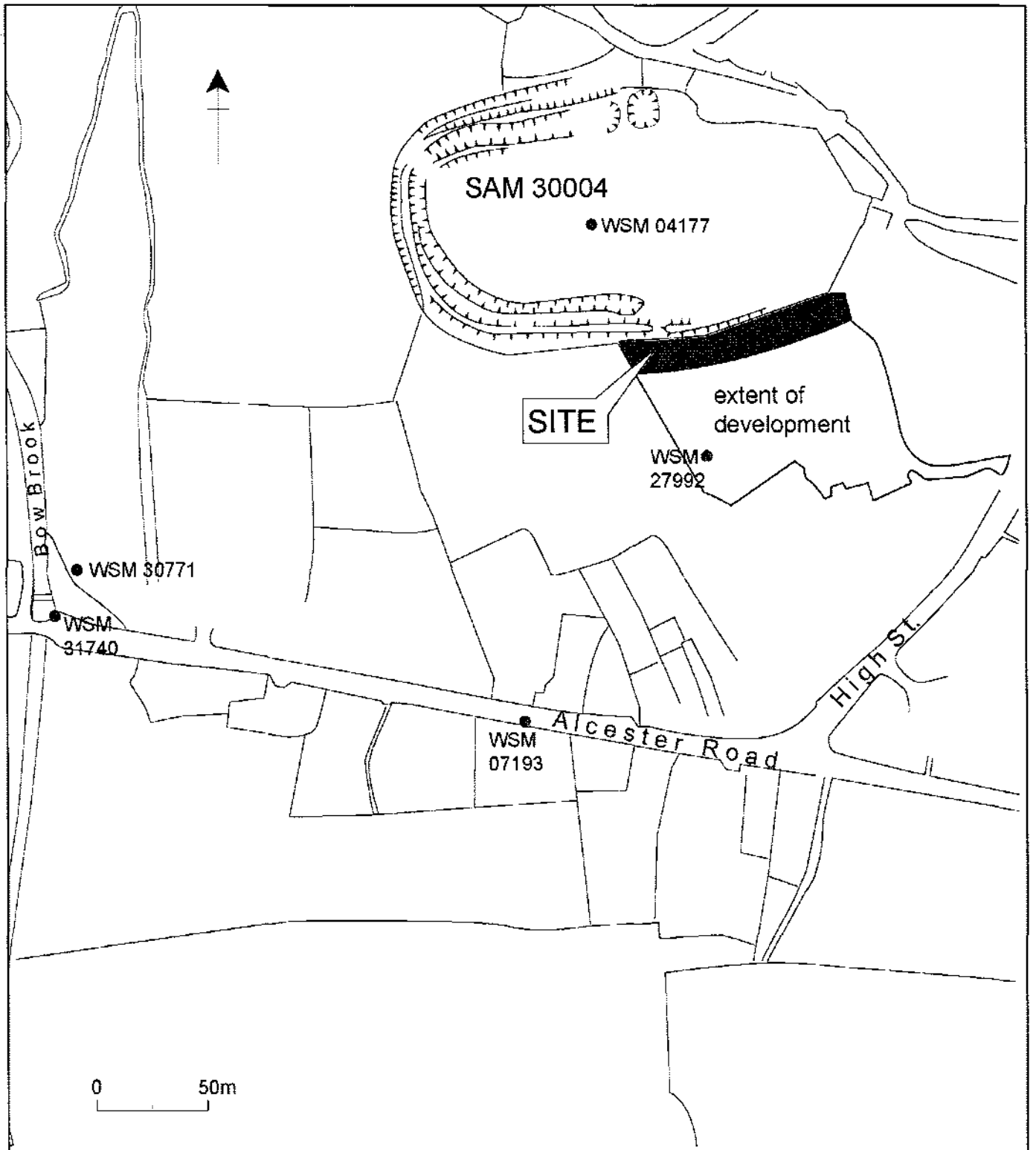


Fig.2

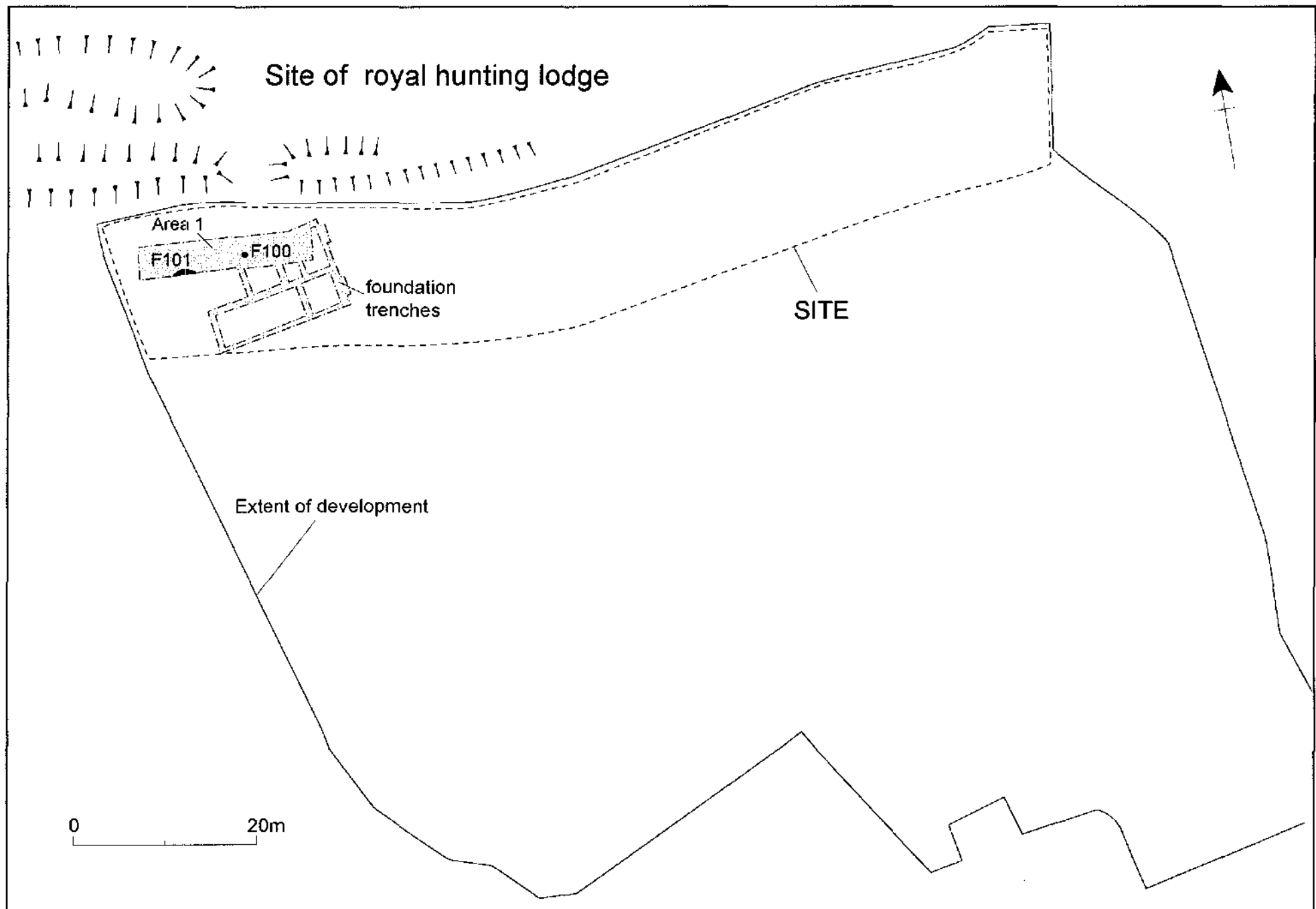


Fig.3

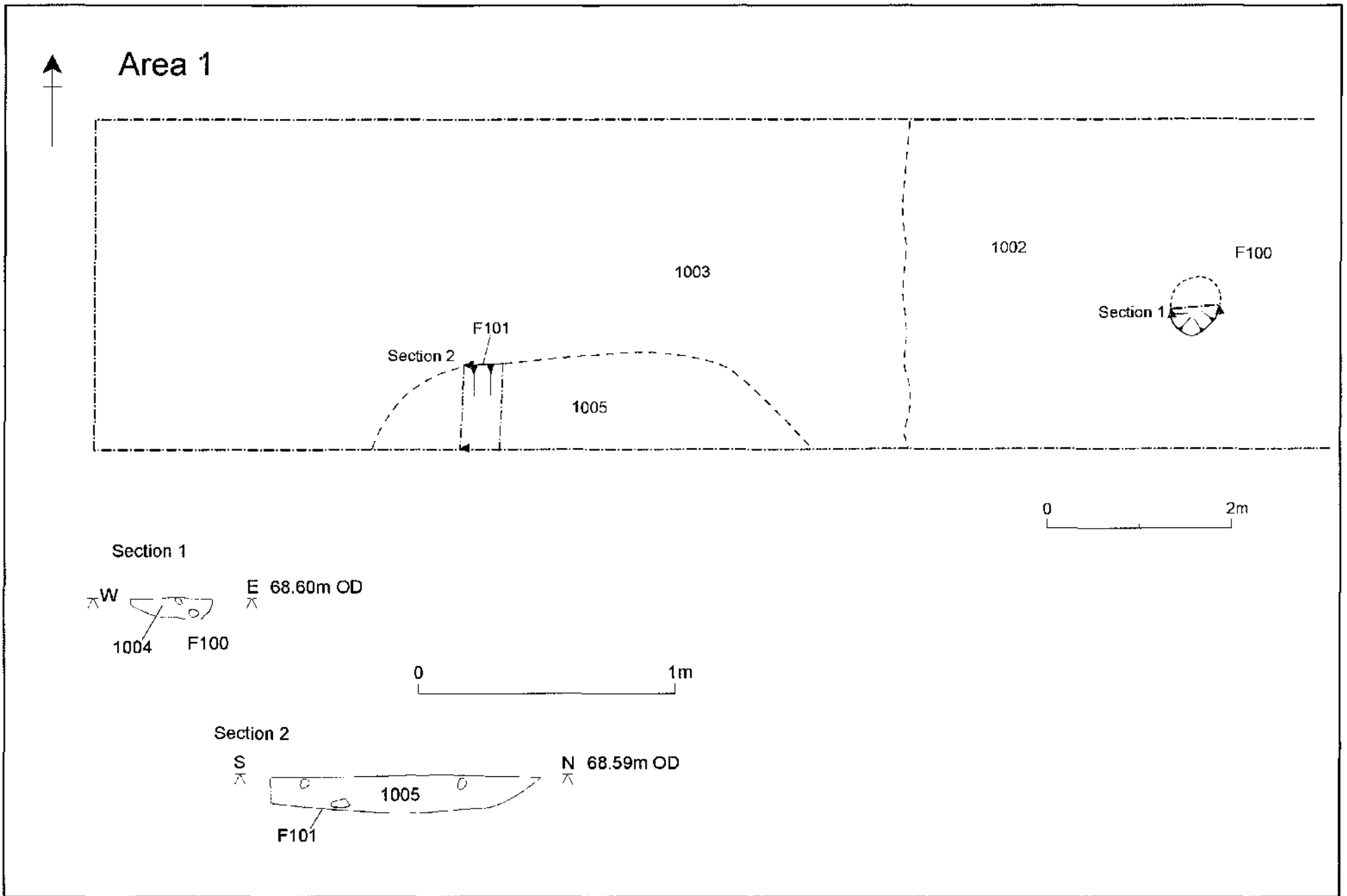


Fig.4