



THE UNIVERSITY
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**Flood Alleviation work in
Farquhar Road, Edgbason,
Birmingham:**

An Archaeological Watching Brief

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 965
December 2002

Flood Alleviation Work in Farquhar Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham:
An Archaeological Watching Brief

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Flood Alleviation Work in Farquhar Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham:

An Archaeological Watching Brief

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out from September to November 2002 during flood alleviation work along Farquhar Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham (centred on NGR SP 048 843). The work was undertaken by BUFAU on behalf of Haswell consulting Engineers for Severn Trent Water. A field boundary ditch, and a gravel layer were observed cutting and overlying, respectively, a buried soil. Due to the heavy truncation of deposits it remains uncertain as to whether the gravel layer represents the remains of the agger of the Roman Rickniel Street, which is believed to be routed through this part of Birmingham between Metchley and Wall.

1.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out during groundworks associated with flood alleviation works along Farquhar Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham (centred on NGR SP 048 843, Figs 1 and 2). This work was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of Severn Trent Water Ltd in October 2002.

The watching brief was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by BUFAU (Appendix I) and conformed to guidelines set down in Standard and Guidance for archaeological watching briefs (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

2.0 Site Location and description

Farquhar Road (centred on NGR SP 048 843) is located to the north of Metchley Roman Forts (SMR 2005) one of the most important Roman sites in the midlands. The site is listed on the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record as being the possible location of a Roman road, the Rykniel Street. Rykniel Street originally linked Metchley Roman fort with other early military complexes at Wall, to the north, and Alcester to the south. Traces of what was believed to have been the remains of a gravel road (SMR 20267), measuring two feet thick, were observed in 1965. Later observations during a watching brief at number 15 also recorded a gravel deposit. However, it was not possible to positively identify the gravel as the remains of the road (Hodder pers. comm.). A linear earthwork, visible on the First Edition (Fig. 3) and Second Edition OS Maps, is depicted on a southwest-northeast alignment immediately south of the southern extent of Farquhar Road. The earthwork has been identified as the probable location of the Elan Aqueduct, however it may in fact pre-date the aqueduct, indeed it does appear to follow a field boundary. It has thus been postulated that the earthwork may represent the bank and ditch which would have aligned the Roman road.

3.0 Aims

The aims of the archaeological watching brief were to

- to monitor all below-ground works, including the removal of overburden and downcutting of existing levels.
- to establish, if possible, whether the gravel deposit observed during previous groundworks is the remains of the agger of Ryknield Street.
- to record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains affected by the development works.
- to identify all previously unrecorded sites in order to update the SMR.
- to preserve all archaeological deposits by record, and conserve for long term conservation and future analysis all artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.

4.0 Method

The objectives were achieved through a series of site visits during the contractors groundworks. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeological deposits or features were present. Contextual information was recorded on *pro-forma* record sheets and supplemented by scale drawings at 1:50 and colour print photography. These, together with artefacts recovered, form the site archive. It is intended that the archive will be deposited with Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, with the prior notification and agreement of the museum.

5.0 Archaeological Results

The existing cut for the storm water drain was reused as part of the exercise, thus no archaeological were ever visible in plan, only in section. The earlier drain cut had been backfilled as dug. The underlying subsoil was reached at a level of c. 0.7-0.8m below the current ground surface. The natural subsoil (1004) comprised yellow sand overlying red sandstone bedrock. The subsoil had been cut by what appeared to be a ditch (F100, Fig. 4, Plate 1) on a southwest-northeast alignment. It had a V-shaped profile, measured c.0.4m deep and was filled by a light grey-brown sandy-silt (1005). Overlying this feature was what appeared to have been a buried soil, a dark grey charcoal flecked horizon (1003). Immediately to the east of the ditch, in the vicinity of Number 15 Farquhar Road, was a gravel-rich deposit (1006) which was visible overlying the buried soil (Fig. 4, Plate 2). A 0.2m deep layer of black ash and clinker (1002) which contained fragments of brick and tile, and a single sherd of ubiquitous willow pattern pottery overlay layer 1006 and the buried soil. This later, probably 19th-century, layer showed evidence of iron panning. It was in turn overlain by a 0.3m deep layer of orange sand and gravel (1001) which was the levelling layer for the modern tarmac road surface (1000). Modern service trenches were frequent and were not recorded in detail.

6.0 Discussion

Roman roads in and around Birmingham have been the target of investigation for many years, most especially since the establishment of the Roman Roads Project in 1994 when a more systematic approach, involving geophysical survey, cartographic research, and aerial survey, was begun to identify the lost roads of Birmingham. Three Roman roads appear to have converged on the Roman Forts of Metchley, however their exact route as they draw near to the fort has proven elusive. Research along what was thought to be the line of Ryknield Street to the south of the fort, in the area of Selly Park and Stirchley, has proved inconclusive (Leather 1994 103, 1995 109, 1996 100, 1997, 104).

Research to the north of the fort has been more successful, with geophysical survey locating the road in Sutton Park (Leather 1996, 109). It has been suggested that this route (connecting Metchley with Wall) may dogleg around the northeastern gate to the fort (pers. comm. Jones), and it was hoped to clarify this by observing the below ground deposits along Farquhar Road. A field boundary ditch and a gravel layer were observed during the watching brief along with later levelling layers. What may be significant is that the gravel horizon was only observed in the vicinity of Number 15 Farquhar Road. A similar deposit has been noted prior to this project during a watching brief on foundation trenches (Hodder 1995, 108). Unfortunately due to massive horizontal and vertical truncation it remains unclear as to whether the gravel represents the remains of the agger of the Roman road. However, if this was the case, then there does not appear to have been an underlying embankment of any great strength or height either of soil or constructed of stone (Marjory 1973, 20). The gravel appeared to simply sit on the underlying buried soil, and did not appear to have been rammed or, indeed, as solid as would be expected from the foundations of a Roman road. Thus the gravel layer probably represents a pre 19th-century episode of levelling.

7.0 References

BUFAU 2002 Flood Alleviation Construction Work in Farquhar Road, Edgbaston, Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief.

Hodder, M. 1995 Birmingham, Edgbaston, *West Midlands Archaeology No.38*.

IFA (Institute of Field Archaeologists) 1994 Standard and Guidance Note for Archaeological Watching Briefs.

Leather, P. 1994 Birmingham Selly Park Recreation Ground, *West Midlands Archaeology No.37*

Leather, P. 1995 Birmingham Selly Park Recreation Ground, *West Midlands Archaeology No.38*

Leather, P. 1996 Birmingham Selly Park Recreation Ground, *West Midlands Archaeology No.39*

Leather, P. 1997 Selly Park Recreation Ground and Elmdon Road Playing Fields, *West Midlands Archaeology No. 40*.

8.0 Acknowledgements

the project was commissioned by Haswell Consulting Engineers for Severn Trent Water Ltd, and thanks are due to Zamir Hadzovic and Kirt Surti for their co-operation and assistance throughout the project. Thanks are also due to Peter Leather (and Alex Jones (BUFAU) for their comments. thanks also go to Mike Hodder who monitored the project on behalf of Birmingham city council. The watching brief was undertaken by Melissa Conway, Erica Maccy, Kirsty Nichol, Eleanor Ramsey and Andrew Rudge. Kirsty Nichol produced the written report and monitored the project for BUFAU. The report was illustrated by Bryony Ryder.

Appendix I

Flood Alleviation Construction Work in

Farquhar Road, Edgbaston,

Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief

1.0 Introduction

This document outlines the programme of work required to undertake a watching brief at the above site. It forms a written scheme of investigation requested by the Birmingham City Council. Any variation in the scope of work would be agreed with Dr. Mike Hodder, Planning Archaeologist for Birmingham City Council, before implementation.

The work will be carried out during the excavation of flood alleviation construction works along Farquhar Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham.

2.0 Aims

The archaeological watching brief is intended to provide a record of any archaeological deposits or features which might be present below the modern ground surface, and to provide an understanding of the history and the significance of the archaeology of the site as a whole.

These aims will be achieved through a programme of archaeological monitoring visits to the site during contractors soil and overburden stripping and all below-ground works.

3.0 The Site

Farquhar Road (centred on NGR SP 048 843) is located to the north of Metchley Roman Forts (SMR 2005) one of the most important Roman sites in the Midlands. The site is listed on the Sites and Monuments Record as being the possible location of a Roman road, the Ryknield Street. Ryknield Street originally linked Metchley Roman fort with other early military complexes at Wall, to the north, and Alcester to the south. Traces of what was believed to have been the remains of a gravel road (SMR 20267), measuring two feet thick, were observed in 1965. Later observations during a watching brief at number 15 also recorded a gravel deposit. However, it was not possible to positively identify the gravel as the remains of the road (Hodder pers. comm.).

4.0 Archaeological Watching Brief

4.1 Aims

The aims of the archaeological watching brief will be

- to monitor all below-ground works, including the removal of overburden and downcutting of existing levels.
- to establish, if possible, whether the gravel deposit observed during previous groundworks is the remains of the agger of Rynield Street.
- to record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains affected by the development works.
- to identify all previously unrecorded sites in order to update the SMR.
- to preserve all archaeological deposits 'by record', and conserve for long term conservation and future analysis all artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.

4.2 Method

All ground works will be monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist. This will be complemented by salvage recording of any archaeological deposits and features revealed by contractors groundworks. All artefacts will be recovered and a programme of post-excavation analysis will be undertaken following the fieldwork.

5.0: Staffing

The fieldwork will be monitored for BUFAU by Kirsty Nichol (Assistant Project Manager, BUFAU).

Specialist staff will be, where appropriate:

Lynne Bevan - Flint artefacts and small finds.

Marina Ciaraldi - charred plant remains.

Richard Thomas - animal bone.

Dr James Greig - pollen and plant macro-fossils.

Dr David Smith - micro-fauna.

Dr Susan Limbrey - soils.

Dr Ann Woodward - Prehistoric ceramics.

Annette Hancocks - Romano-British ceramics.

Stephanie Rátkai - Medieval and Post-Medieval ceramics.

6.0: Report

The results of the archaeological fieldwork will be described in an illustrated report, which will contain 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. This will include a site location plan and any other maps relevant to the fieldwork.
- (d) Summary of the finds and environmental evidence.

(e) Specialist assessments of the finds and environmental evidence.

The written report will be made publicly accessible, as part of the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record within six months of completion. A summary report will be submitted for inclusion in *West Midlands Archaeology*.

7.0: Archive

The site archive will be prepared according to the guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects. It is intended that the archive will be deposited with Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, with the prior notification and agreement of the museum.

8.0: Timetable

An archaeological watching brief will be maintained throughout below-ground works. Work is due to begin in the week commencing 2nd September 2002.

9.0: 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 Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
August 2002

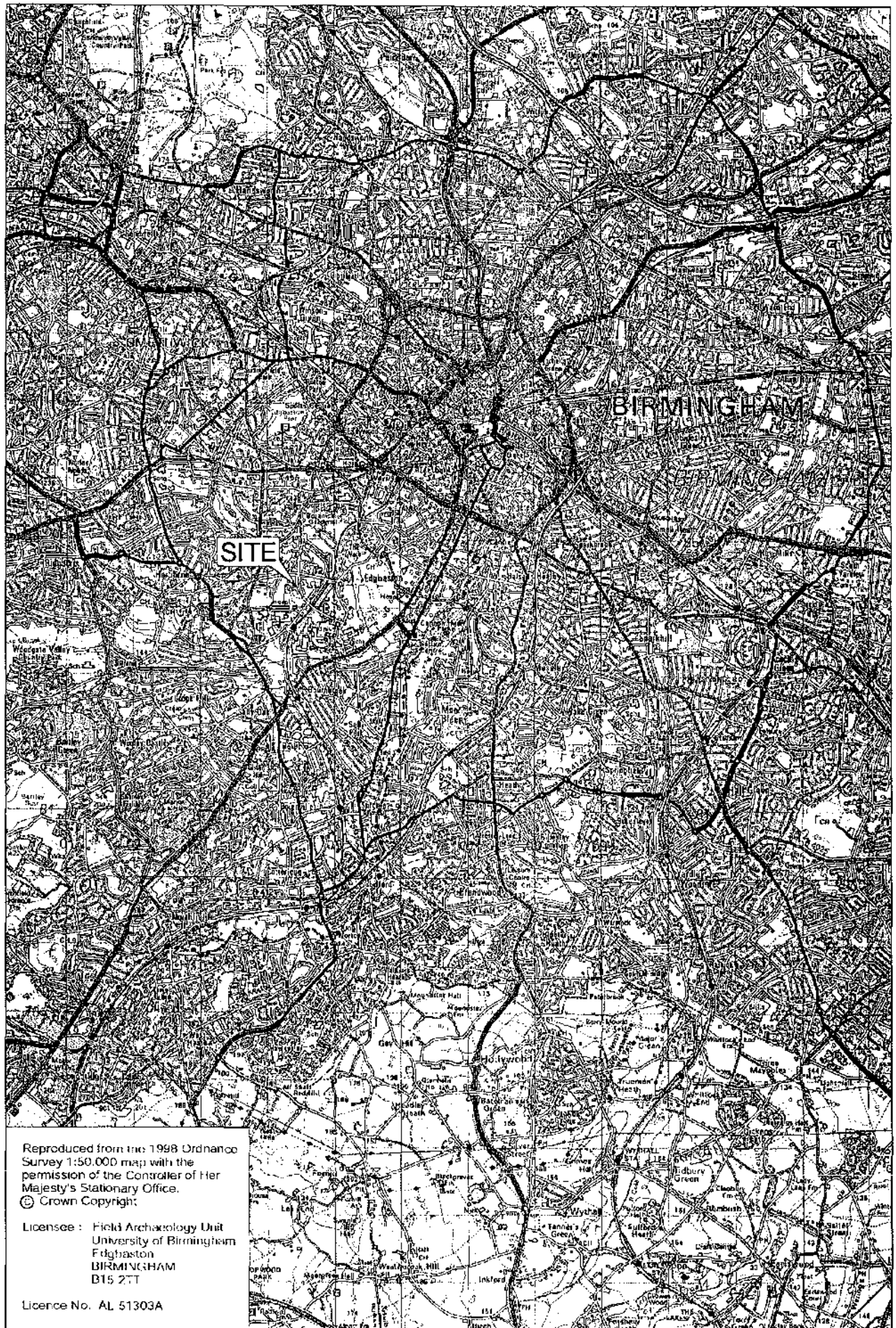


Fig.1

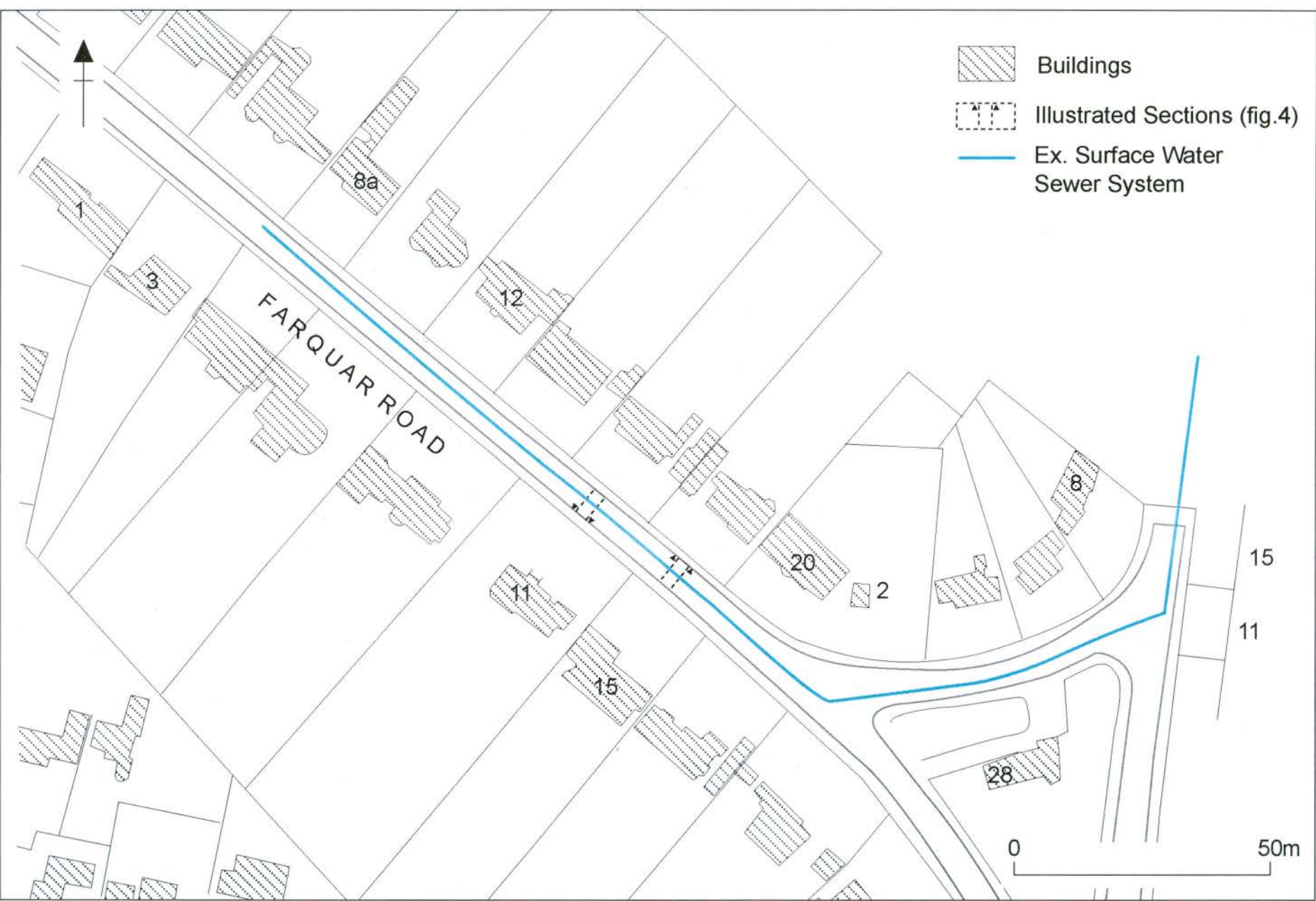


Fig.2

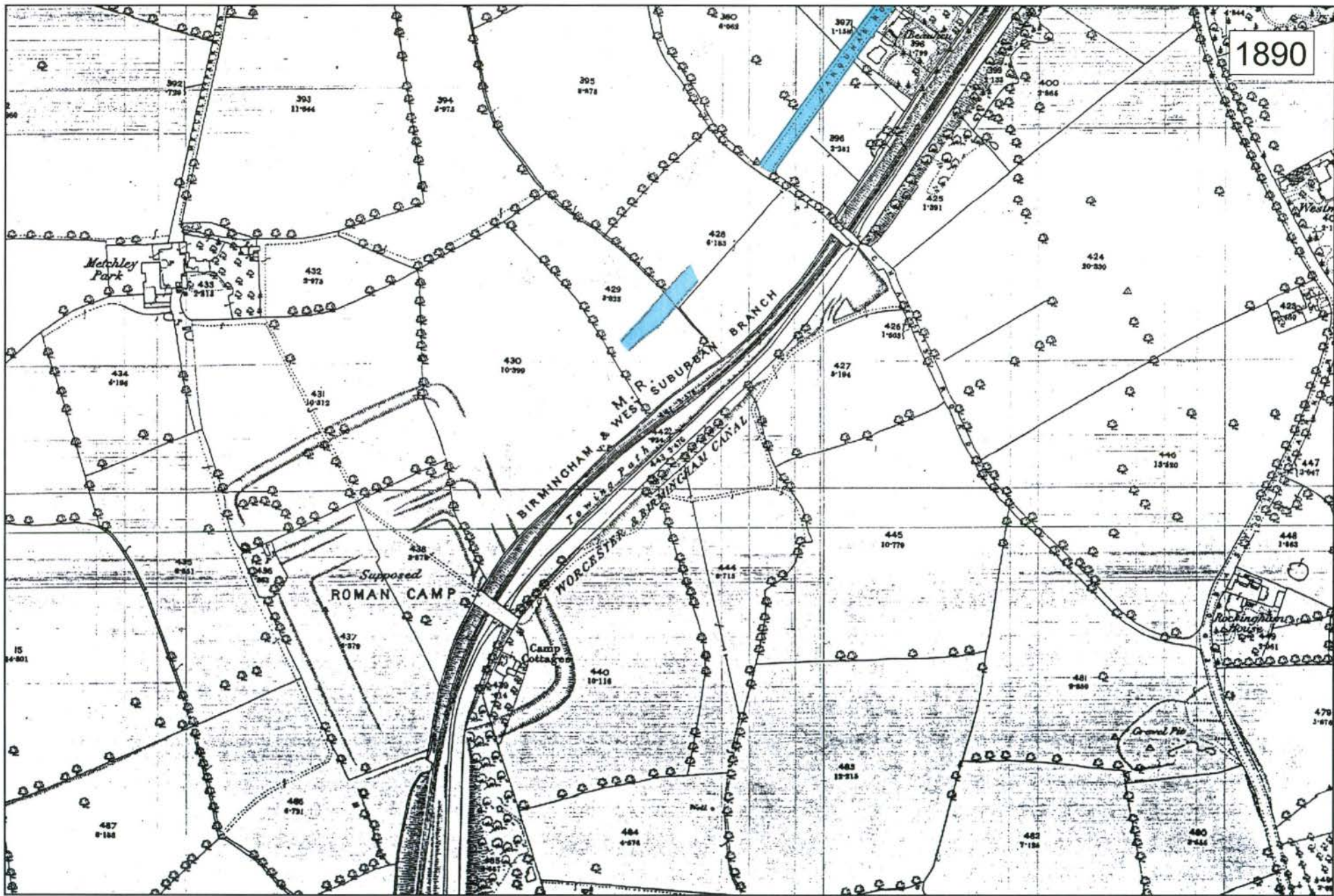
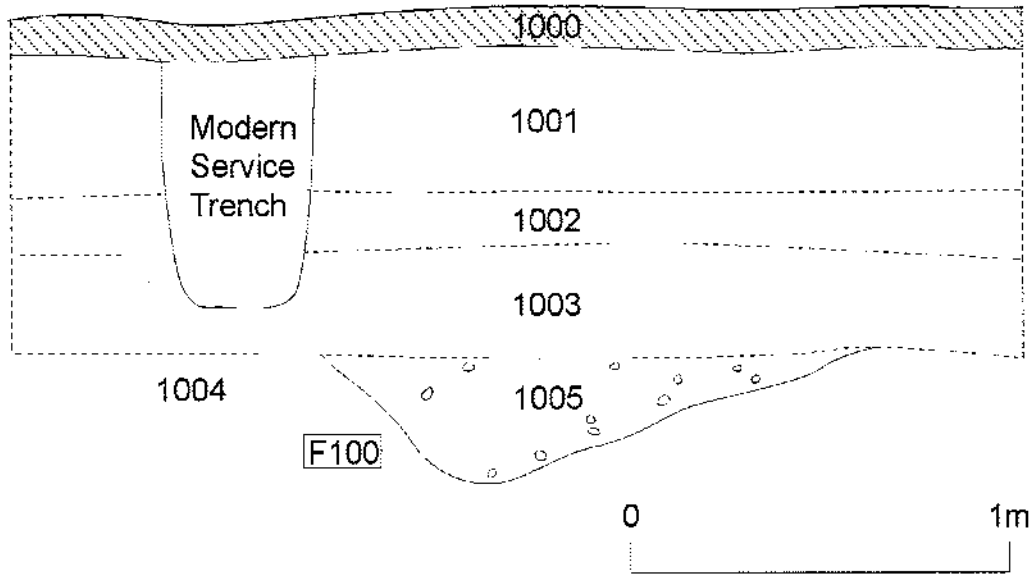


Fig.3

North facing section



South facing section

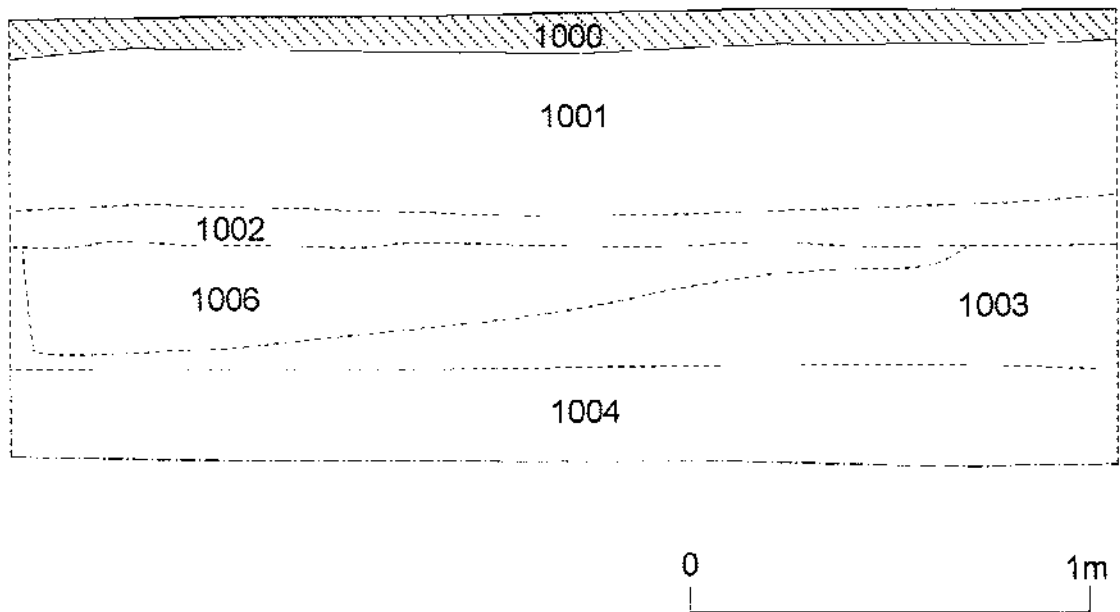


Fig.4



Plate 1, Southwest facing Section showing F100



Plate 2, Southwest facing section showing gravel layer 1006