

**Bells Farm Neighbourhood
Nursery, Brockworth Road,
Druids Heath, Birmingham,
West Midlands:**

**Archaeological Investigations
2003**

Project No. 1090
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**Bells Farm Neighbourhood Nursery, Brockworth Road, Druids Heath, Birmingham,
West Midlands:**

Archaeological Investigations 2003

By
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Planning Application Number S/00403/03/FUL

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Birmingham, West Midlands:**

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Summary

Archaeological investigations were carried out during July 2003 in advance of the construction of a neighbourhood nursery at Bells Farm Junior and Infant School, near Bells Farm, Brockworth Road, Druids Heath, Birmingham (centred on SP 0629 7876). The work was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology for Owen Williams Consultants on behalf of Birmingham City Council. The area affected was adjacent to Bells Farm, a 16th-17th century grade II listed building (SMR 01195) and appeared to be located along the line of the associated medieval moat (SMR 03006). Modern overburden was removed within the footprint of the proposed structure in order to determine the presence and extent of archaeological features that would be affected by the development. No archaeological features were identified during the course of these investigations.*

1.0 Introduction

This report outlines the results of an open area excavation on land at Bells Farm Junior and Infant School in Druids Heath, Birmingham (NGR SP 0629 7876) hereinafter referred to as the site. The work was commissioned by Owen Williams Consultants on behalf of Birmingham City Council (Planning Application Number S/00403/03/FUL), and was undertaken in July 2003 by Birmingham Archaeology. The site is situated adjacent to a known medieval moated site (SMR 03006) and Grade II* listed building (SMR 01195). The excavation was undertaken within the area of the footprint of the proposed building.

2.0 Topographical and Geological Setting

The site was located in Druids Heath, approximately 8km to the south of the centre of Birmingham, within a modern housing development. It was situated within the Bells Farm Junior and Infant School playing fields adjacent to the school buildings, and occupied a slight knoll bordered by Brockworth Road to the north and west and Bells Lane to the south, with the school buildings to the east. The underlying geology is lake-clay and boulder-clay, with a generally sandy till. This transition is associated with lenses of sand gravel and clay (Pickering 1957).

3.0 Historical and Archaeological Background

The colonisation of areas of wasteland is one of the key factors within the spatial distribution of moated sites in the West Midlands region (Kirsty Nichol pers. comm.). Population expansion and improvements in farming technology in the 13th century meant that marginal land both needed to be, and could be, brought into cultivation. This led to a process known as assarting, whereby woodland was cleared, and upland areas away from the river valleys became more intensively occupied. The construction of a moat not only improved the drainage of the site, and provided a dry platform for occupation, they also bore testimony to the social aspirations of the occupants, and can, in some cases, represent physical evidence for sub-infeudation. Thus this colonisation of the waste led to a concentration of moated homesteads, as well as manorial residences, around the region (ibid).

In the area of the site this waste, or heathland, is evidenced today by place names such as Druids Heath and nearby Walkers Heath, and reveals that Bells Farm was originally sited on what had previously been inhospitable land skirting the Birmingham plateau. The site fell within the Parish of Kings Norton, which was granted c.1252 to William de Belne by King Henry III (Goodger 1990, 7). However, an archer, one Hugo de Belne is also recorded as having been granted land in Kings Norton in the 13th century, by King Edward I, for services rendered to the crown (ibid). It remains unclear who exactly from the Belne, or Bells family, constructed the moat at Bells Farm, but the principal manor house appears to have been the moated site of Blackgreves Farm, Wythall, Worcestershire.

Today Bells Farm itself (SMR 01195) is a late 16th-early 17th century timber framed building. The moat (SMR 03006), which would have surrounded an earlier structure, or group of buildings, is no longer visible on the ground but is depicted on the First Edition OS Map (1889). Two arms of the possible moat enclosure are shown; the western arm, orientated north-south and waterfilled at the time of the survey; with the southern and south-eastern arms depicted as dry ditches (Hodder 2003). Other known moated sites in the vicinity of the site include Monyhull Hall, Kings Norton, and Moundsley Hall, Worcestershire. There are also fishponds located in fields further south, which were fed by the Chinn Brook, and associated with Kingswood Grange. During the 16th century the house was part of the estate owned by the Middlemore family, who were one of the most prominent families in the area, and whose principal residences were Hawkesley Farm moat and Hazelwell Hall (Goodger 1990, 28).

4.0 Background to the project

4.1 Aims

The general aim of these archaeological investigations was to record all surviving archaeological deposits that would be disturbed by the proposed development.

The specific aims of the archaeological excavation were to:

- establish the presence or absence of archaeological deposits and features within the proposed development site.
- define the nature, extent, significance and date of surviving deposits and features.
- provide information to allow the formulation of a mitigation scheme, possibly involving further excavation and recording in advance of development, where appropriate.

Particularly in relation to the history of this site the aims were to:

- establish whether the medieval moat enclosure extended this far north.
- identify any contemporary features associated with the moat enclosure, such as leats, fishponds, or livestock enclosures.
- identify any possible features predating the medieval settlement.
- define the nature of any post-medieval settlement.

4.2 Method

All topsoil and modern overburden was removed using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision, down to the top of the natural subsoil. Subsequent cleaning and excavation was done by hand. Spoil from machine excavation and hand-excavation was temporarily stored on-site.

All deposits were excavated in order to understand their stratigraphic relationships. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features were planned, and sections were drawn through all cut features and vertical stratigraphy. A comprehensive written record was maintained using a continuous numbered system on *pro-forma* context and feature cards. Monochrome and colour slide photography supplemented written records and scale plans. These records comprise part of the site archive.

5.0 Results

The site was machine excavated on to the top of a horizon of mixed sand clay and gravel. The nature of the subsoil made definition of any archaeological deposits difficult. This resulted in the excavation of a sondage through the glacial geology (1007) which was located along the southern edge of the site (Fig. 3). The natural subsoil consisted of bands of white yellow orange and red-brown friable sand over hard red-brown sandy clay. Bands of black manganese rich sand and hard white clay were present throughout. Overlying the natural subsoil was a compact layer of mixed brown clay and silt with some sand and pebbles (1006). This was present in pockets across the site, most obviously in the centre and along the southern edge of excavation. Overlying this across the majority of the site was a layer of hard core (1005), which was *c.*0.15m deep. This was overlain by a 0.2m deep layer of compact mixed red clay with sand and pebbles with modern building rubble throughout (1000). The whole site was under turf.

A geotechnical test pit was hand excavated against the western facade of the nursery building in order to establish the depth of the present foundations of the school. The stratigraphy was the same as described above, with the absence of 1006. No archaeological deposits were observed in this test pit.

6.0 Conclusion

No archaeological deposits were discovered within the area of archaeological investigation. This reveals that the moated enclosure, visible on the First Edition OS Map to the south of the site, did not extend into the area of the development, and must have returned just to the south of the site, probably under the line of the modern hedge and footpath. All topsoil had been removed from the site during groundworks associated with the construction of the school and levelling for the surrounding playing fields. Thus all ephemeral archaeological deposits related to land use in the medieval period would have been destroyed at this time. However, a compact layer (1006) that survived in pockets across the site, containing fragments of medieval roof tile, may be the remains of a plough soil associated with Bells Farm. The presence of roof tile suggests that there may have been structures in the vicinity during the medieval period, although small spreads of such material may occur due to the manuring of fields during this period.

7.0 Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Owen Williams Consultants, and thanks are due to Ken Evans for his help during the project. Thanks also to Mike Hodder who monitored the project for Birmingham City Council, and the members of staff, especially Patsy, at the school. Work on site was carried out by I. Altsitzoglou, B. Bracken, D. Chuhan, M. Duncan, J. Halsted, and S. Radford. Mary Duncan produced the written report, which was illustrated by John Halsted and edited by Kirsty Nichol who also monitored the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

8.0 Bibliography

Goodger, H. 1990 *Kings Norton*.

Hodder, M. 2003 *Design Brief for archaeological investigation*.

Pickering, R. 1957 'The Pleistocene Geology of the South Birmingham Area' in *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society* 113 pp223-239.

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APPENDIX 1

Design Brief for archaeological investigation as a condition of planning permission

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
PLANNING**

Application number S/00403/03/FUL

Bells Farm, Brockworth Road/Bells Lane(SMR 03006 and 01159; north part of site SP 06297876)

Design Brief for archaeological investigation as a condition of planning permission

1.Summary

Construction of an extension to an existing building near Bells Farm may include the line of a former moat. This brief is for archaeological investigation as part of the development.

2.Site location and description

The development site is located between Brockworth Road and Bells Lane on an area which is now grassland. It is north-west of Bells Farm.

3.Planning background

The development is an extension to an existing school.

4.Existing historical and archaeological information

Bells Farm(SMR 01195) is a late 16th or early 17th century timber-framed building. A former moat(SMR 03006), which would have surrounded a medieval predecessor to this building, is indicated on historic maps such as the first edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch map by a long waterfilled hollow running north-south, to the west of the farm, and a dry hollow running east from the south end of this and then turning north. If these features were parts of a moat then its northern arm would be to the west of Bells Farm, adjoining a path and just within the southern edge of the area required for the new building.

5.Requirements for work

Conditions have been placed on planning permission, in accordance with Policy 8.36 of the Council's Unitary Development Plan and government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, Archaeology and Planning, requiring archaeological observation and recording during development. However, following discussions with the applicant's agent, a programme of archaeological work beginning with a controlled site strip has been agreed as the most efficient way of meeting the archaeological requirements in the context of the development.

6.Stages of work

(i)Topsoil on the part of the site which may include the northern arm of the moat is to be mechanically removed, using a toothless bucket, under archaeological supervision. Exposed archaeological features and deposits are to be manually cleaned and planned.

(ii) If this area is shown to include the former moat, a trench at least 2m wide is to be excavated across the moat, to the base of its infill. Depending on the depth of the deposits the trench may need to be widened, stepped or battered for safe working. Deposits likely to provide environmental data are to be sampled and analysed. Finds are to be cleaned, marked and bagged and any remedial conservation work undertaken.

(ii) Post-excavation Assessment:

An assessment of the potential of the results of the excavation for further analysis, in accordance with the recommendations in English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects* (MAP 2).

(iii) Post-excavation Analysis:

Following assessment, analysis of the results of the project, including dating and interpretation of excavated features, pottery and other finds analysis, and discussion of the results in their local, regional and national context.

(iv) Preparation of a report for publication in an archaeological journal:

A written report accompanied by appropriate illustrations will be submitted for publication in the *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society*.

7. Staffing

The archaeological investigation is to be carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct, Standards and Guidelines of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and all staff are to be suitably qualified and experienced for their roles in the project. It is recommended that the project be under the direct supervision of a Member or Associate Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

8. Written Scheme of Investigation

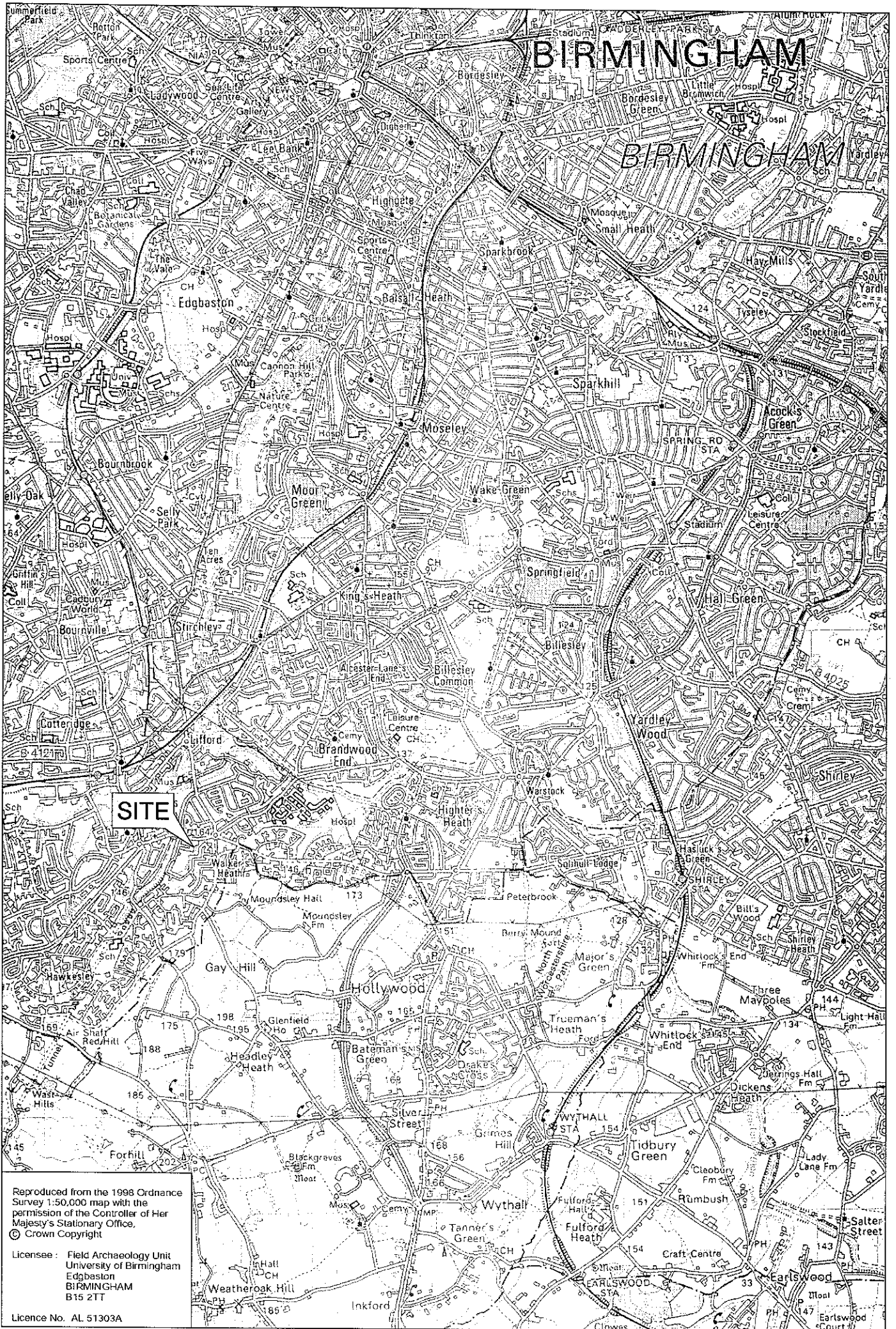
A written scheme of investigation for the archaeological work must be submitted to the Planning Archaeologist for approval in advance of commencement of work.

9. Monitoring

The archaeological work must be carried out to the satisfaction of the Chief Planning Officer, Birmingham City Council, and will be monitored on his behalf by the Planning Archaeologist. At least five working days notice of commencement of the excavation must be given to the Planning Archaeologist, so that monitoring meetings can be arranged.

10. Archive deposition

Subject to the agreement of the site owner, it is recommended that the written, drawn and photographic records of the excavation, together with any finds, are deposited in the Department of Human History, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, within a reasonable time of completion. The deposit will be accepted in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Society of Museum Archaeologists, *Transfer of Archaeological Archives to Museums*. Finds must be deposited in the standard boxes used by the City Museum and accompanied by box lists.



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Fig.1

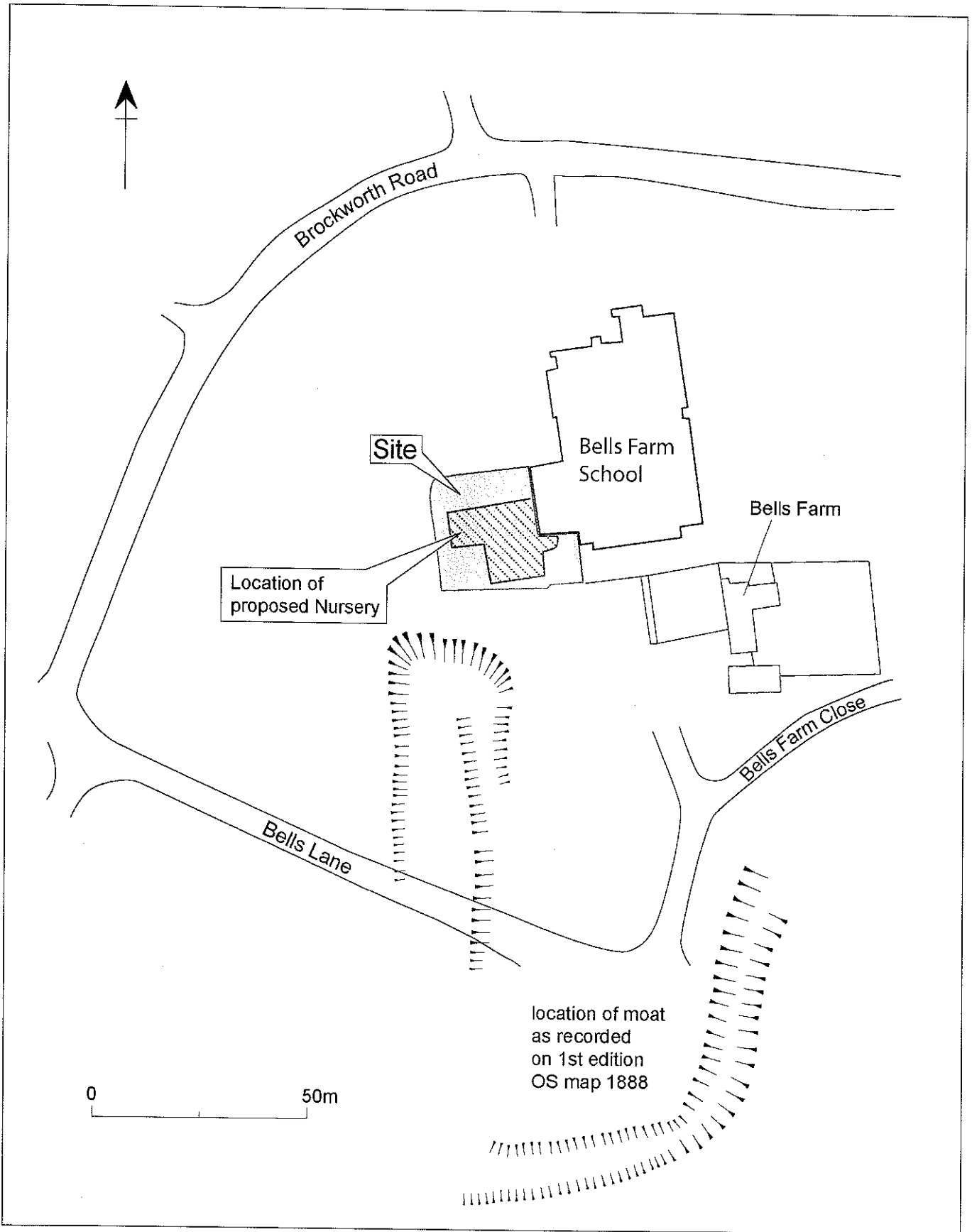


Fig.2

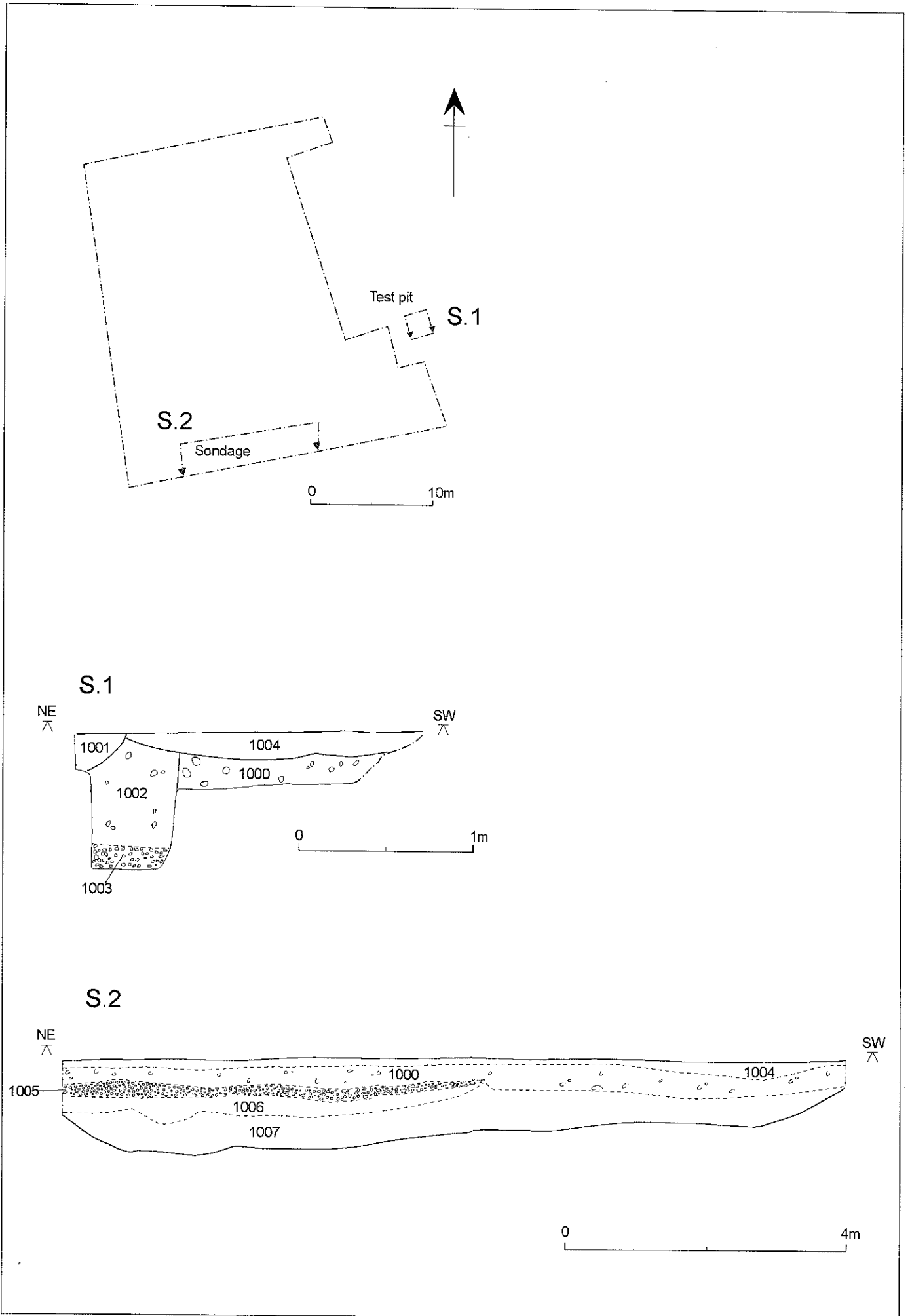


Fig.3

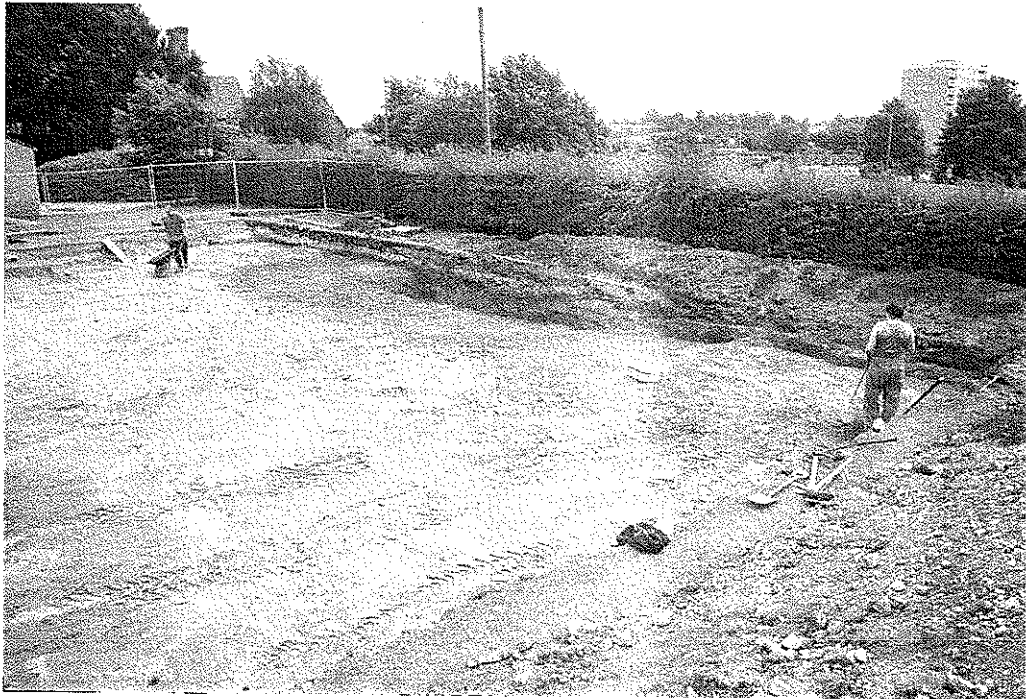


Plate 1



Plate 2

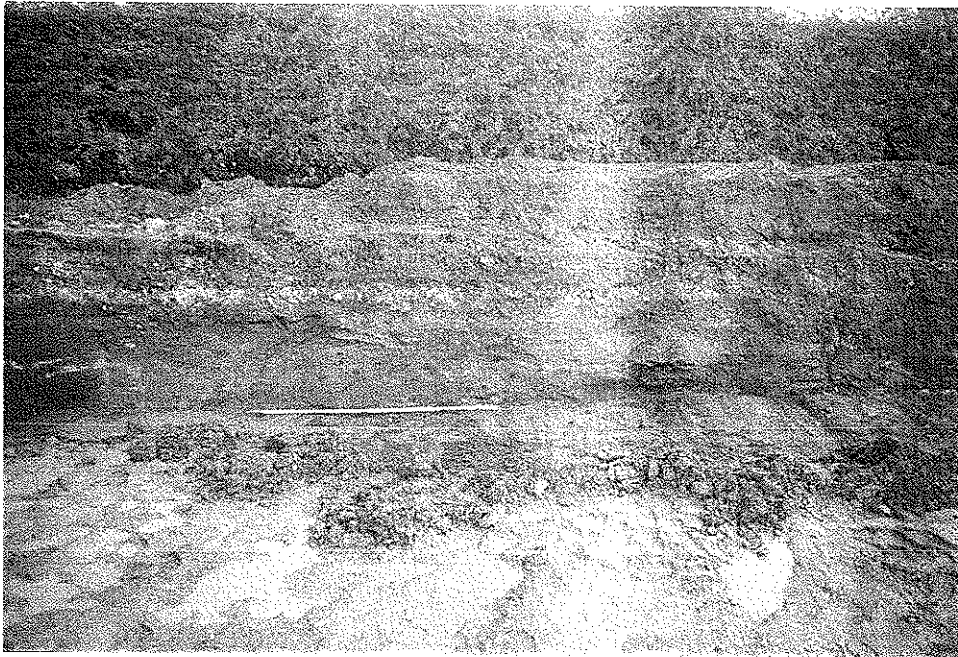


Plate 3

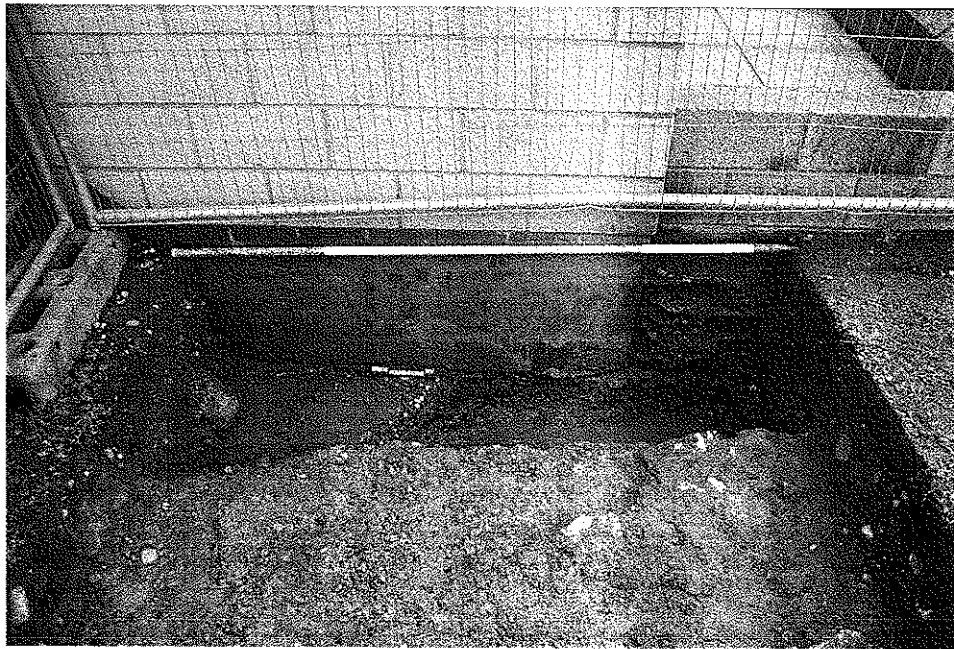


Plate 4