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Little Aston JMI School
Forge Lane, Little Aston,
Staffordshire:
An Archaeological Watching Brief
2005

Project No. 1273
February 2005

**Little Aston JMI School, Forge Lane, Little Aston, Staffordshire:
An Archaeological Watching Brief 2005**

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out in January 2005 at Little Aston JMI School, Forge Lane, Little Aston Staffordshire (NGR SK 0935 0076). The watching brief was carried out by Birmingham Archaeology, during groundworks for a car park at the school. No archaeological deposits or features were noted during the watching brief, and the only finds were one sherd of post-medieval coarseware pottery and two fragments of tile, one of which was of possible medieval date.

1.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of a watching brief carried out in January 2005 by Birmingham Archaeology at Little Aston JMI School, Forge Lane, Little Aston, Staffordshire (NGR SK0935 0076), hereinafter referred to as the site. The watching brief was carried out as part of the planning application for the construction of a car park at the school, and took place during groundworks carried out in advance of the construction of the car park. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology (Appendix I), and conformed to guidelines set down in Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (IFA 1994).

2.0 Archaeological Background

The site lies on the line of the Roman road known as Ryknild Street (PRN 01144, Fig 1). Ryknild Street joined Watling Street at the Roman town of Llectocetum, present-day Wall, which was situated 5 KM to the north of the site. The road originally ran roughly north-south through the Midlands linking up with the Fosse Way to the northeast of Cirencester (Margery 1967, 280). Geophysical survey has also been used in an attempt to follow the line of the road southwards out of Birmingham. This work, undertaken by the Roman Roads Project, has shown the road to be elusive (Leather 1994 103, 1995 109, 1996 100, 1997 104).

However, a 1.5 mile stretch of the road running through Sutton Park, Birmingham, remains well preserved and still visible as an earthwork on the ground. The line of the road continues northwards from Sutton Park towards Little Aston (Margary 1967, 286), and appears to have cut straight through the grounds of the school emerging to the north by the sewage works. According to Margary (*ibid.*) just to the north of Little Aston Hall the road is visible as a prominent earthwork continuing as far as a plantation. Today, part of Forge Lane takes up the line of the Roman road, which is subsequently continued by a cart track and hedgerows to the east of the sewage works.

The site is therefore situated in an archaeologically-sensitive area, and may contain evidence related to the original construction of the road and associated roadside activities.

3.0 Methodology

Following the removal of several trees, the site was stripped to the required depth using a mini-digger, equipped with a 2m toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision. The resulting stratigraphy was recorded using *pro-forma* forms and monochrome prints as appropriate. A measured sketch plan was also made of the site. These records, along with the finds, comprise the site archive, which will be deposited with the appropriate receiving body at the earliest opportunity.

4.0 Results

The site was stripped to the required depth of 0.4m, revealing a dark red-brown subsoil with heavy root disturbance (1001). This subsoil was at least 0.3m in depth, and was not bottomed during the course of groundworks. The site was at a slightly higher level than the surrounding area, and it is likely that excess spoil generated during the construction of the school was spread in this area as part of the hard landscaping.

Set into the subsoil were the remains of a square cut of probable modern date. The cut was only partially visible, and the edges became obscured towards the northern end of the site. It seems to have been part of a large structure, at least 6m x 9m in size, which was constructed from modern concrete reinforced with steel bars, some of which were still visible in the southern edge of the cut. The cut was filled with red sand (1002), which showed the same level of root disturbance as the surrounding subsoil. The cut is probably associated with an L-shaped brick structure that joined that cut on the western side. This structure was made of modern machine-cut bricks with extrusion marks. These bricks are of probable early 20th century date (pers. comm. Steve Litherland) and were at least three courses high, although again, due to the depth required for construction, the full extent of the structure could not be ascertained.

The subsoil was overlain by 0.1m of fine grey/brown sandy modern topsoil (1000).

5.0 Discussion

As the depth required for construction of the car park was only 0.4m, and the area appears to have been made up, it is likely that any archaeological deposits relating to the Roman road, lie below this level, and, as such, will be preserved *in-situ*. Any subsequent deeper groundworks on the site will need a further watching brief to see if this is the case.

The L-shaped brick structure, although relatively modern, may be of interest however. There is a possibility that it may be the dog-legged blast wall entrance of an air-raid

shelter that was built for use by the school. The bricks are stamped with [S?]CC, which may stand for Staffordshire County Council. This may suggest that the building was built by the local authority.

6.0 The Finds

The only finds recovered from the site were a sherd of black-glazed coarseware of late 19th-century date (1001) and two sherds of tile (1001 x 1, 1002 x 1). One of these fragments is of possible medieval date (1001), whilst the other is modern.

7.0 References

IFA (Institute of Field Archaeologists) 1994 *Standards and Guidance Notes 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*.

Margary, Ivan, D. 1967 *Roman Roads in Britain*.

8.0 Acknowledgements

The watching brief was commissioned by the Joint Schools Property Unit, Staffordshire County Council, and was monitored by Steven Dean of the Historic Environment Record Office. Thanks are due to the contractors, Dawkes and Son for their help and co-operation on site. The watching brief was carried out by Erica Macey-Bracken who also wrote the report, which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds. Kirsty Nichol monitored the project on behalf of Birmingham Archaeology and edited this report.

APPENDIX I

**Proposed groundworks for car parking
Written Scheme of Investigation for
Archaeological Watching Brief
Little Aston JMI School, Forge Lane,
Little Aston, Staffordshire
Client: Joint Schools Property Unit, Staffs C.C.
Archaeological Contractor: Birmingham Archaeology**

THE UNIVERSITY
OF BIRMINGHAM



Birmingham Archaeology

1.0 Introduction

This written scheme of investigation is concerned with requirements for an archaeological watching brief at Little Aston JMI School, Forge Lane, Little Aston, Sutton Coldfield, Staffordshire and is based upon a Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief produced by the Planning Department at Staffordshire County Council (Brief 2004). The watching brief is to be undertaken as part of the planning application for the construction of a car park at the school. This document was prepared in accordance with the brief and government advice contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16.

2.0 Site description and archaeological background

The proposed site for the car park (NGR SK 0935 0076), which is to comprise eight parking bays, lies on the line of the Roman road known as Ryknild Street (PRN 01144). Ryknild Street joined Watling Street at the Roman town of Lectocetum, present day Wall, situated 5 Km to the north of the site (Brief 2004). The proposed car park is therefore situated in an area which is considered archaeologically sensitive and which may contain evidence related to the original construction of the road and associated roadside activities.

3.0 Objectives and research aims

The aims of the archaeological watching brief will be to:

- Monitor all groundworks which might disturb archaeological deposits.
- Record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains affected by the development works.
- Collect any artefacts and/or environmental material which may contribute to an understanding of Ryknild Street, its development and any associated activities, in addition to sequences of activity which pre-date and post-date the use of the road.
- Identify all previously unrecorded sites in order to update the SMR.

- 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

All soil and overburden stripping will be carried out under continuous archaeological supervision. Archaeological features which are present, whether in plan or section, will be investigated and recorded as rapidly as is possible. Features and contexts will be recorded using *pro-forma* feature and context cards, supplemented by plans (at 1:20 and 1:50), sections (at 1:10 and 1:20), and monochrome print, colour slide and digital photography as appropriate. All stratified artefacts will be collected by context and the spoil heaps examined for other material. Finds will be processed during and immediately following the fieldwork. An immediate assessment will be made of any special conservation requirements, and arrangements will be made for development to be halted for reasonable periods of time in order that adequate recording can take place. All on-site working practices will be arranged with the client/contractor at the earliest opportunity in order that any part of the construction programme requiring time for recording can be identified. If finds are made, which are beyond the level of significance initially envisaged, development will be stopped in order that provision can be made for their adequate recording or preservation. This shall be done in consultation with the Local Planning Authority and all other relevant parties.

The subsequent watching brief report will attempt to put any findings into their historical and archaeological context by using cartographic and documentary sources.

Human remains disturbed by the works will be recorded in accordance with Home Office guidelines.

Contingency

Should stripping reveal archaeology for which the resources allocated are insufficient to provide a satisfactory treatment, the supervising archaeologist will signal to all parties that such a find has been made. This area will then be protected until a site meeting can be arranged. Where appropriate, a written summary of the discoveries will be prepared and forwarded to all parties. In consultation with Staffordshire County Council an amended specification will be prepared which would outline a strategy to deal with such discoveries. In such cases the variation in the scope of work would be agreed in advance with the County Archaeological Officer. A contingency will be set aside for any finds requiring remedial treatment.

5.0 Presentation of results and deposition of archive

The results of the archaeological fieldwork will be described in an illustrated report, which will be submitted to the Local Planning Authority within eight weeks of the completion of site work. This will contain the following:

- A non-technical summary.
- Description of the archaeological background.
- Aims and methodology adopted during the course of recording.

- 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.
- A description of the archive and the location of its long-term deposition.
- Specialist assessments of the finds and environmental evidence.

Two copies of the report will be submitted to the Local Planning Authority accompanied by a completed *Activity and Source Submission Form*. On approval two copies will also be sent to the client and one to the NMR.

A summary of the work will be offered to West Midlands Archaeology and any other appropriate journal.

6.0 Staffing

The project will be managed and directed for Birmingham Archaeology by Kirsty Nichol and undertaken by an appropriately experienced archaeologist. Specialist staff will be consulted and may attend site as appropriate. CVs for all members of staff involved in the project can be provided upon instruction.

Specialist staff will be, where appropriate:

Dr Lawrence Barfield - Flint artefacts, freelance consultant lithics specialist.

Dr Ann Woodward- Prehistoric pottery, Research Fellow, Birmingham Archaeology, University of Birmingham

Dr Jeremy Evans- Roman pottery, Honorary Research Fellow, Birmingham Archaeology, University of Birmingham

C. Jane Evans- Roman pottery, freelance consultant pottery specialist

Stephanie Rátkai - Saxon, medieval and post-medieval pottery, Honorary Research Associate, Birmingham Archaeology, University of Birmingham

Dr James Greig - English Heritage Archaeological Scientist - pollen and plant macro-fossils.

Dr Wendy Smith – Charred plant remains, Research Fellow, University of Birmingham

Matilda Holmes- Animal bone, freelance consultant archaeozoologist.

Dr David Smith - Micro-fauna, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham.

Dr David Keen – Molluscs, Birmingham Archaeology, University of Birmingham.

Dr Megan Brickley - Human Bone, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham.

Dr J. Barratt – Fish Bones, University of York.

H. Wilmot The Conservation Centre, Salisbury.

7.0 Archive

The site archive will be prepared according to guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the *Management of Archaeology Projects* (English Heritage, 1991), the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage* (UKIC, 1990) and *Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological collections* (Museum and Art

Galleries Commission, 1992). It is intended that the archive will be deposited with an appropriate museum, with the prior notification and agreement. This will be the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent. The *Conditions for the Acceptance of Archaeological Material from Excavations and Fieldwork*, as stated by the museum, will be adhered to.

8.0 Health and Safety

All work will be carried out in observance of Health and Safety Policy as outlined in SCAUM Manual, Health & Safety in Field Archaeology, 1997.

9.0 Timetable

Groundwork is scheduled to begin on 6th January 2005 and continue for a number of days. The relevant authorities will be notified as soon as this information is available, and as soon as possible prior to the commencement of groundworks.

If necessary review/ monitoring meetings would be arranged at appropriate intervals during the fieldwork. A programme for these meetings will be made with prior agreement and consultation with the relevant authorities and the client.

10.0 General

Birmingham Archaeology is a Registered Archaeological Organisation with the Institute of Field Archaeologists. All staff will adhere to the Code of Conduct of the Institute.

The project will follow the requirements set down in the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994, revised 2001).

Any items suspected to be 'Treasure' will be reported in accordance with *The Treasure Act 1996*.

A Home Office licence will be requested in the unlikely event that human remains are encountered and no excavation of human remains will begin until a licence is granted.

Birmingham Archaeology
January 2004

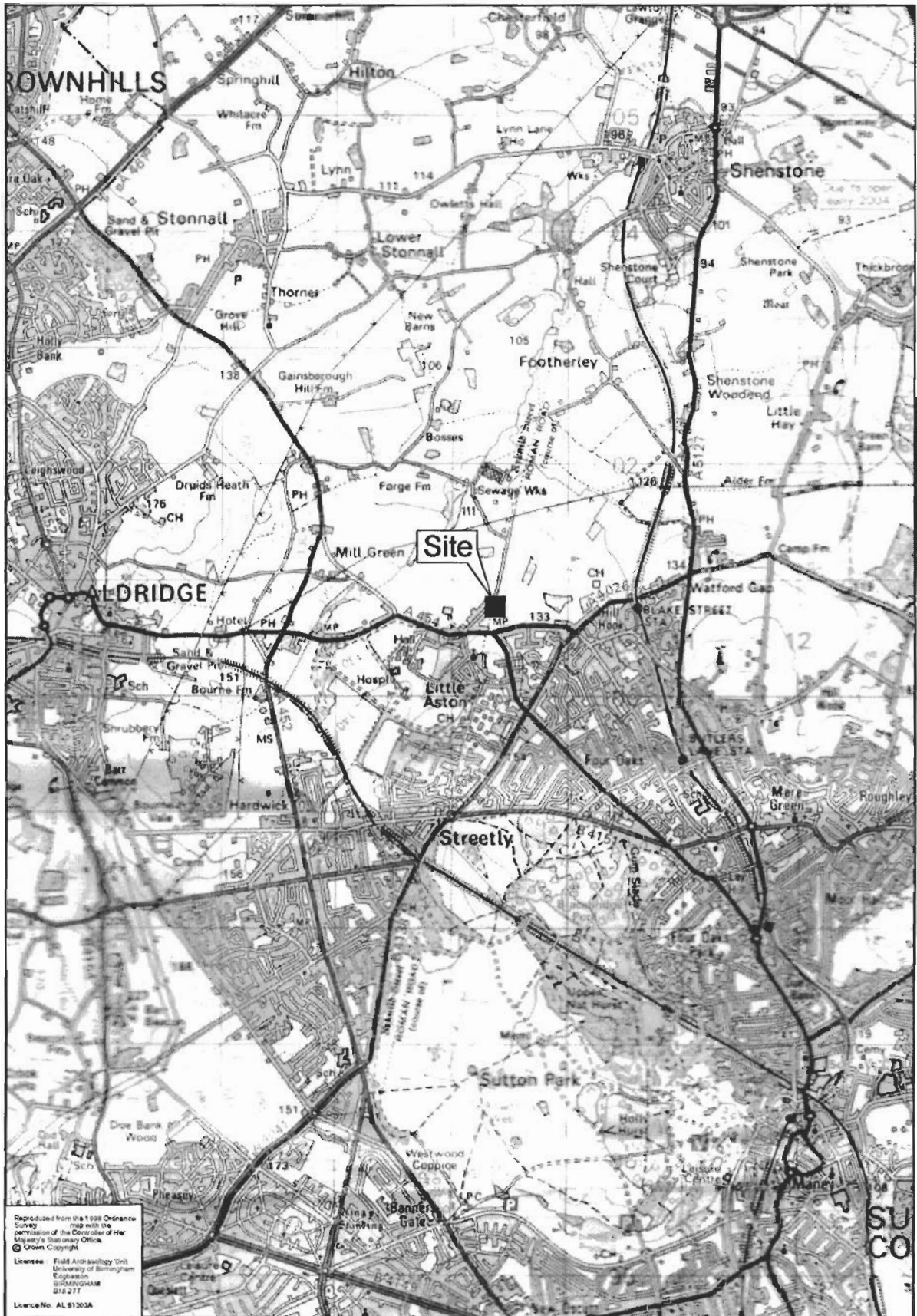


Fig.1

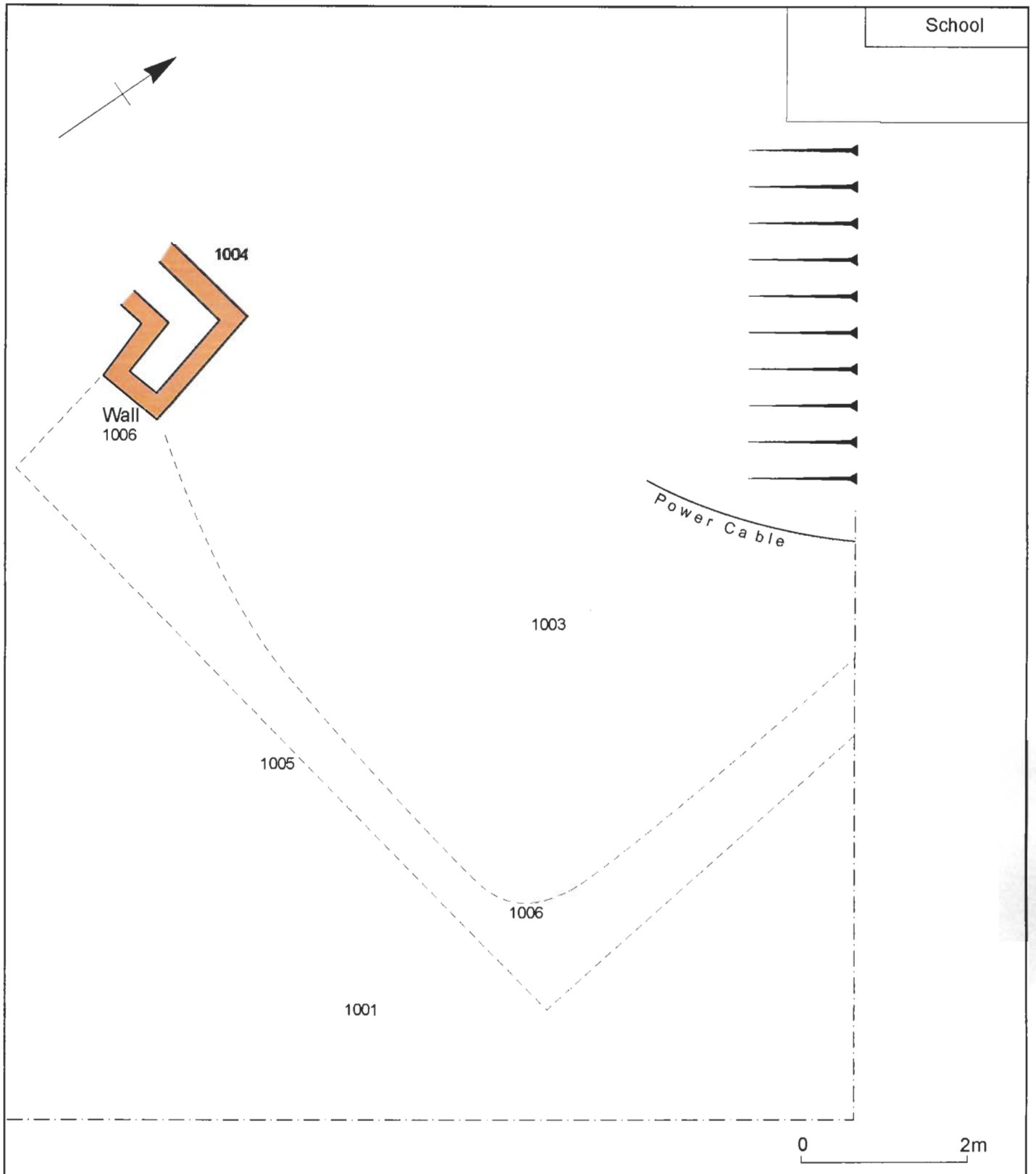


Fig.2