Brownhills Common, Walsall

An Archaeological Watching Brief 2000

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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by
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1.0: SUMMARY

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during pipeline construction at Brownhills, Walsall. The area investigated partly adjoined the course of Watling Street, a Roman road, and an undated, crop-marked feature. No features associated with these known archaeological sites, or any other below-ground archaeological features, deposits or finds were identified during the watching brief.

2.0: INTRODUCTION (Figs. 1-2)

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit were commissioned to undertake the archaeological watching brief during pipeline construction by Walsall MBC, acting on behalf of Severn Trent Water Limited. The pipeline crossed an area of scrub land within Brownhills Common (centred on NGR SK 035063) between the modern A5 road in the north, and the Coppice Lane Industrial Estate in the south. One of the areas archaeologically monitored was located to the south of the modern A5 road (formerly Watling Street, SMR No. 9147), close to the junction with the Roman road from Wroxeter to Wall (SMR No. 6255). The second area monitored lay at the southern end of the pipeline, just to the north of the Industrial Estate, adjoining the crop-marked feature.

The methodology of the watching brief conformed with an Archaeological Brief prepared by the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record (SMR 1999: now the Black Country Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record), and an Archaeological Specification prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU 1999).

Subject to permission from the landowner it is proposed to deposit the project archive with a repository approved by the Black Country Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record.

3.0: METHODOLOGY (Figs. 2-3)

The first stage of work required by the Brief and Specification involved the re-plotting of a 'figure of eight' crop-marked feature (SMR No. 9510) which was undertaken using a Mobius network from an original photograph held at Walsall MBC Planning Department (AP 18, WAMBC 1995). The purpose of this re-plotting was the define the location and precise form of this site of possible archaeological interest, to enable an immediately adjoining length of the pipeline to be targeted for archaeological monitoring, and any associated features or deposits to be investigated. The crop-marked feature itself lay wholly outside the pipeline easement.

Within each of the two areas targeted for archaeological investigation, the watching brief was undertaken in two stages, following the general groundwork contractors programme of work. The first stage of archaeological observation involved the examination of the machine stripped surface following the removal of the topsoil, the collection of any finds, and the recording and sample excavation of any identified features and deposits. The second stage archaeological response involved monitoring, hand-cleaning and the recording of any features or deposits of archaeological interest exposed during the cutting of the pipe trench itself, which measured 1m in width.

4.0: RESULTS (Figs. 2-3)

Removal of the topsoil (1000) over the entire width of the pipeline easement exposed a mixed deposit (1001) comprising dark brown clay-soil including large quantities of broken brick and small fragments of coal, or coal dust. This material was a demolition spread, probably associated with the clearance of former colliery structures in the area. In places, the removal of this deposit exposed the uppermost horizon of the underlying subsoil (1002-3).

The natural subsoil into which the pipe trench was cut in the southern area examined comprised a red-orange clay-sand (1002). Within the northern area examined the subsoil was a red-orange clay-silt (1003). This deposit was sealed by extensive deposits of coal mixed with soil (1004), interpreted as colliery waste.

No features, or possible below-ground features or deposits of archaeological interest were identified during monitoring along both of these areas, and no finds were collected.

Within the northern area examined, the pipeline easement crossed the embankment of a mineral railway (SMR No. 9143). The embankment comprised small sub-angular sandstone fragments (1004) set in a matrix of grey sand-gravel. No associated features were recorded.

5.0: DISCUSSION

The plotted crop-marked feature coincided with a slight rise in the ground surface. At present it is not known if the topographic and crop-marked features are of anthropogenic origin, since examination of this area, unaffected by the pipeline, was outside the agreed scope of archaeological fieldwork. Similarly, no features were located adjoining the course of Watling Street (the present A5 road). Since archaeological preservation in this area was anticipated to be good, because of the overlying deposits of coal waste, it may be that this roadside area was not originally settled. No features or deposits associated with the use of the surrounding area as part of a colliery (SMR No. 9145) were found, with the exception of the demolition deposit (1001) immediately underlying the topsoil.

6.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The watching brief was sponsored by Walsall MBC on behalf of Severn Trent Water Limited. The assistance of Alex Milner from Walsall MBC is gratefully acknowledged. The project was managed by Alex Jones, and the archaeological monitoring was undertaken by Roy Krackowicz, Lesley Mather and John La Niece. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds from original Severn Trent Engineering drawings (Figs. 2-3), and the report was edited by Simon Buteux.

7.0: REFERENCES

BUFAU 1999. *Specification for archaeological recording, Brownhills Common, Walsall*, unpublished.

SMR 1999. *Brief for archaeological recording at Brownhills Common, Walsall*, unpublished.

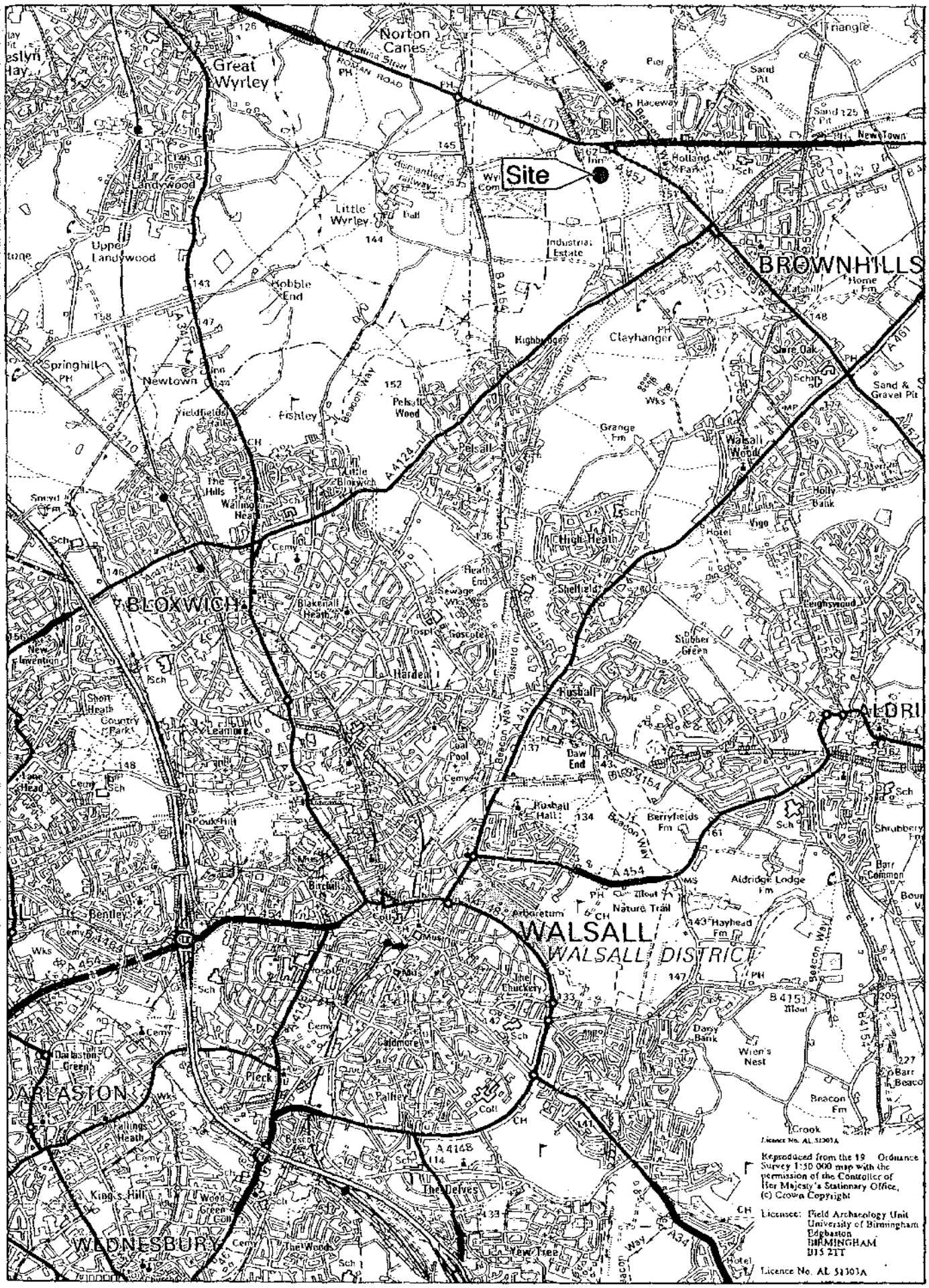
Site
Great Wyrley
Norton Canes
Little Wyrley
Upper Landywood
Landywood
Hobble End
Springhill
Newtown
Fishley
Pelsall Wood
Pelsall
Clayhanger
Highbridge
Industrial Estate
BROWNHILLS
Shire Oak
Walsall Wood
Holly Bank
High Heath
Shelfield
Leighswood
BLOXWICH
Harden
Fusball
Daw End
Rushall Hall
Berryfields Fm
Aldridge Lodge Fm
Barr Common
Hayhead Fm
Arboretum
Nature Trail
WALSALL
WALSALL DISTRICT
The Chuckery
Caldmore
Pleck
Palfrey
Darlaston Green
DARLASTON
Fallings Heath
King's Hill
WEDNESBURY
The Delves
Yew Tree
The Wood
Beacon Fm
Crook
Wren's Nest
Daisy Bank
Bentley
Bilbrook
Short Heath
Leamore
Pouk Hill
Coal Pool
Goscote
Sewage Wks
Stubber's Green
Sand & Gravel Pit
Grange Fm
Beacon Way
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Fig.1

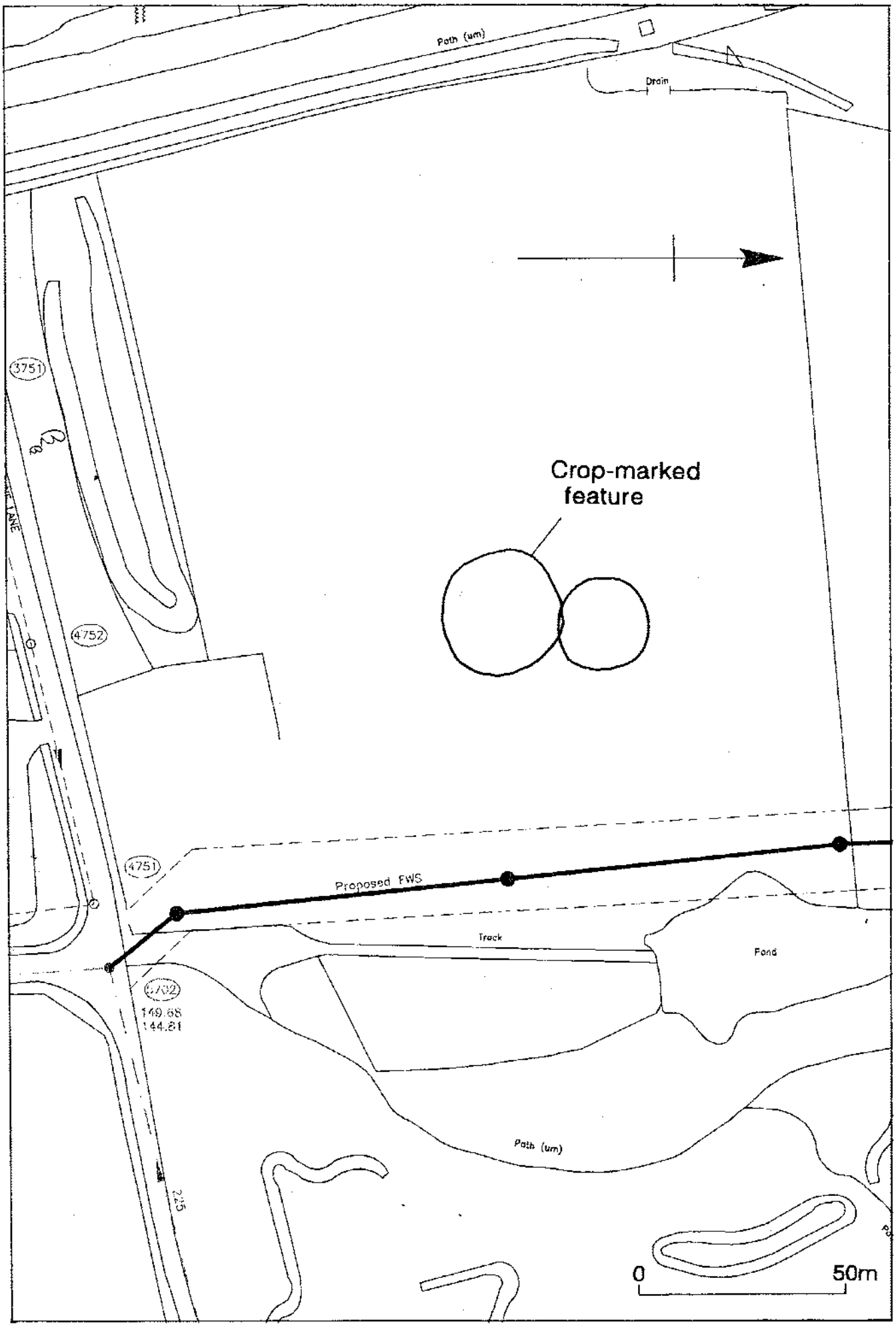
Path (um)
Drain
3751
4752
4751
Crop-marked feature
Proposed FWS
Track
Pond
149.68
144.81
Path (um)
0
50m

Fig.2

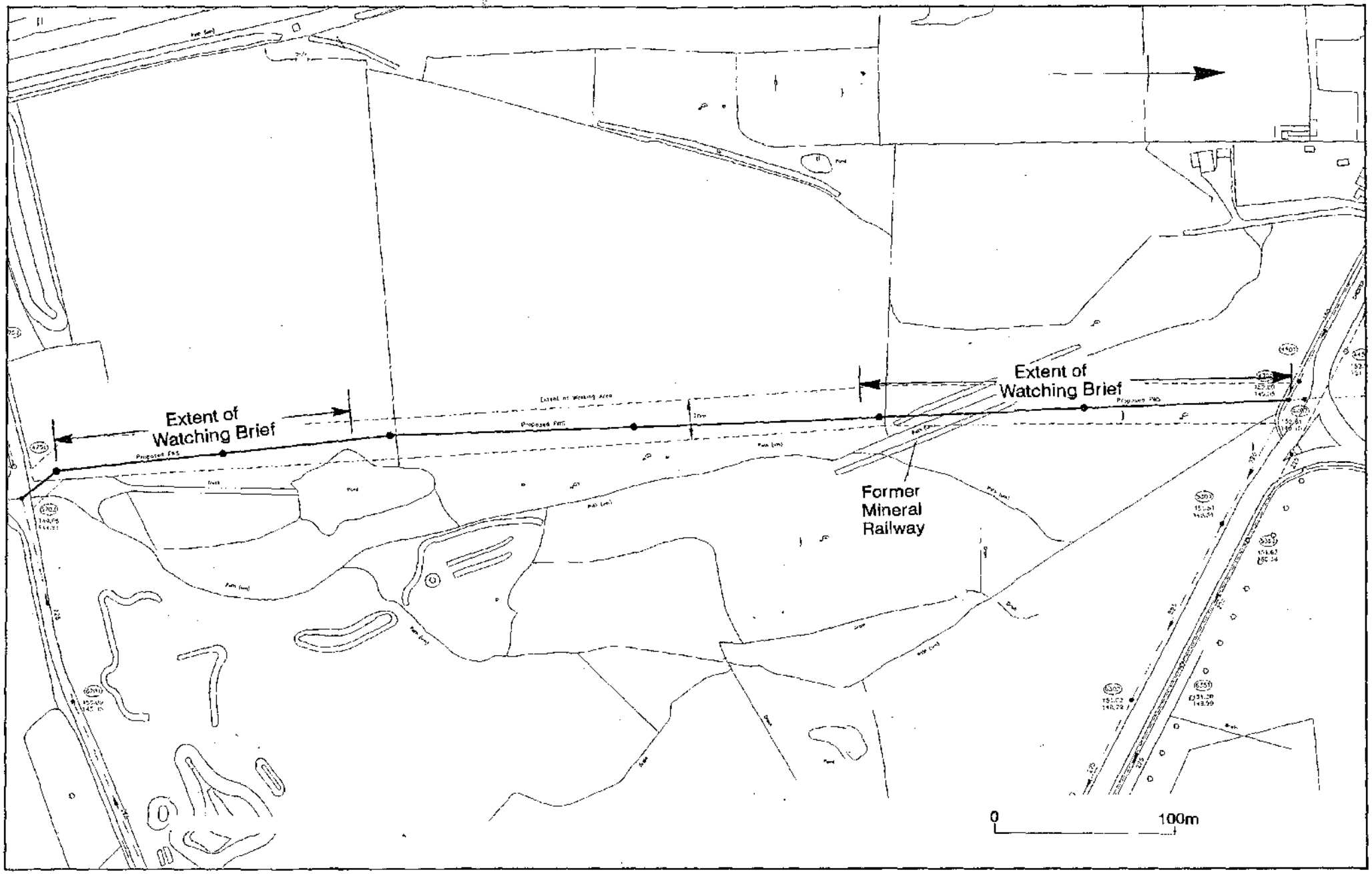
Extent of Watching Brief
Extent of Watching Brief
Former Mineral Railway
0
100m

Fig.3