

birmingham archaeology

BLOOMFIELD ROAD, TIPTON

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION AND WATCHING
BRIEF, 2007

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



Bloomfield Road, Tipton
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF, 2007.

Shane Kelleher and Phil Mann

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
	BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT.....	1
	LOCATION AND GEOLOGY	1
2	ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND	1
3	AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	2
4	METHODOLOGY	2
4.1	FIELDWORK	2
5	RESULTS	3
5.1	INTRODUCTION	3
5.2	TRENCH 2A	3
5.3	TRENCH 2B	3
5.4	TRENCH 3 (FIG. 3)	3
5.5	TRENCH 4 (FIG. 4)	4
5.6	TRENCH 5 (FIG. 5)	5
5.7	TRENCH 6	5
5.8	TRENCH 7	6
5.9	TRENCH 10	7
6	THE FINDS	7
7	DISCUSSION	7
8	FUTURE WORK	8
9	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	8
10	REFERENCES	9

List of Figures

- Fig. 1: Site Location Plan
- Fig. 2: Trench Location Plan
- Fig. 3: Trench 3, Plan
- Fig. 4: Trench 4, Plan
- Fig. 5: Trench 5, Plan and Section
- Fig. 6: 1825/26 Piggot-Smith Map
- Fig. 7: 1848 Map of Area
- Fig. 8: 1904 Map of Area

List of Plates

- Plate 1: Trench 2a General Shot
- Plate 2: Trench 2b General Shot
- Plate 3: Trench 3 General Shot
- Plate 4: Pond-Like Feature 3013
- Plate 5: Brick Well, 3007, Trench 3
- Plate 6: Brick Surface 4007, Trench 4
- Plate 7: Brick Surface 4009, Trench 4
- Plate 8: Brick Surface 4005, Trench 4
- Plate 9: Brick Structure 5008, Trench 5
- Plate 10: East End of Trench 6
- Plate 11: West End of Trench 10

SUMMARY

During October 2006 - January 2007 Birmingham Archaeology carried out a programme of archaeological evaluation and watching brief at the former Corus steelworks, Bloomfield Road, Tipton. Seven trenches were excavated across the site. Post-medieval archaeological features, consisting of brick floor-surfaces, backfilled cellars, and a brick-lined industrial well or mine shaft, a stone-lined ditch, a possible pond were identified and recorded within the trenches close to Bloomfield Road.

High levels of truncation were present across the site, with some areas entirely scoured out by later mining activity. The eastern part of the site was disturbed to levels of c.3m+ by later demolition and ground levelling work, and so it is likely that any features of note in this area have also been lost to these activities. This suggests that the potential for the survival of archaeological features in these areas is limited, and therefore no further work is recommended.

BLOOMFIELD ROAD, TIPTON

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF, 2007.

1 INTRODUCTION

Background to the project

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by David Wilson Homes to undertake a programme of archaeological investigation ahead of a residential development at the former Corus steel works site at Bloomfield Road, Tipton. (hereinafter referred to as the site, Planning Application Reference Number DC/05/45017).

This report outlines the results of the field evaluation and watching brief carried out during October 2006-January 2007, and has been prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations (IFA 2001).

There have been two previous phases of archaeological work at the site; Kelleher (2006) produced an Archaeological Impact Assessment of the study area, whilst Lobb (2006) carried out a programme of Historic Building recording at the site.

The evaluation conformed to a brief produced by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (Lewis 2006), and a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2006), which was approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to implementation in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990).

Location and geology

The site is located in Tipton, centred on NGR 9520 9322 and lies to the east of Bloomfield Road. The site is bounded by Brown Lion Street to the north, Barnfield Road and Barnfield Trading Estate to the south and a public footpath and playing fields to the east (Fig. 1).

The underlying geology consists of Carboniferous middle coal measures (BGS map sheet 167, Dudley).

The present character of the site is a complex of standing industrial buildings and hardstanding relating to the 20th century steelworks. These buildings have been subject to an historic buildings survey (Lobb 2006). These standing buildings and associated floor slabs are to be demolished and removed as part of the development.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies in the vicinity of a medieval bloom smithy, known to have been in existence between the 13th and 17th century, representing one of the earliest iron working mills in the borough. Although the exact location of this smithy is uncertain, it is possible that it may underlie the site at Bloomfield Road. Similarly, James Watt's first commercial steam engine is documented from the vicinity, representing a significant technological development within the industrial revolution. It is also possible that this once stood within the bounds of the site. Bloomfield Iron Works was erected in 1826, and further developments relating to ironworking

and innovative processes characterised the development of the site until the early 20th century.

A group of buildings relating to iron working processes built up in the southern area of the site, the presence of the 18th century canal in this area acting as a focus for activity. These buildings were largely cleared by 1920, though further buildings associated with steelworks were erected in the late 1930s and again from the 1960s to the present day. The presence of early residential and cottage industry dwellings, in existence by at least 1849, alongside Bloomfield Road and Brown Lion Street may relate to early phases of industry at the site. It is possible that the demolition material from these buildings may have been used to infill the canal in the southwest area of the site in the 1950s.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principle aim of the evaluation was to determine the character, state of preservation and the potential significance of any buried archaeological remains.

More specific aims were to evaluate the survival of archaeological deposits in each of the following areas:

- **Area 1** The area of Brown Lion Street and Bloomfield Road, which may have contained evidence of domestic and cottage-industry buildings relating to the former ironworks.
- **Area 2** The northern area of the site, which had the potential to contain deposits relating to a medieval mill and the site of James Watt's first commercial steam engine.
- **Area 3** The eastern area of the site, which had the potential for remains of structures associated with the earlier phases of the Bloomfield Iron Works.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Fieldwork

All topsoil and modern overburden was removed using a 360° tracked mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision, down to the top of the uppermost archaeological horizon or the subsoil. Exposed surfaces and archaeological features and deposits were subsequently excavated by hand. A detailed methodology can be found in the Written Scheme of Investigation.

Trench 2, was located in the northern area of the site, and was divided into two separate trenches for logistical reasons; 2a and 2b, each c. 20m by 1.8m.

Trench 3, which measured 50m x 1.8m, Trench 4 measuring 25m x 1.8m, and Trench 5 measuring 50m x 1.8m were located to examine the street frontage of Bloomfield Road (Area 1). A sondage was excavated at the southern end of Trench 3 and in the centre of Trench 4, by machine, using a toothless ditching bucket and under archaeological supervision, in order to test the depth of archaeological deposits here and to evaluate the potential for a sequence in the structures and surfaces identified in the trenches.

Trench 6, measuring 50m x 1.8m, was sited to the west of the site and was intended to evaluate the extent of survival of those structures located on the Bloomfield Road frontages. Trench 7 measuring 50m x 1.8m, and Trench 10 measuring 50m x 1.8m were excavated to the southeast of the site and were intended to evaluate the potential of any surviving building remains associated with the former ironworks (Area 3).

Trenches 1, 8 and 9 were, after consultation with the county archaeologist, left unexcavated due to health and safety considerations.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The following paragraphs represent a summary of the results of the Trenches. Trench locations are shown in Fig. 2.

5.2 Trench 2a

Trench 2a was excavated on an east-west alignment at the northwestern area of the site. The natural subsoil was encountered close to the west end c.0.4m below the present ground surface (Plate 1). Cut through this at the western end of the trench was the eastern edge of a large pond-like feature identified which also extended into Trench 3 (see below). The remainder of Trench 2 was made up of modern overburden and rubble, excavated to a depth of c.1.2m from the present ground surface. This overburden clearly truncated the natural ground surface here and relates to the former presence of an office building in this area, which had been recently demolished and removed.

5.3 Trench 2b

Trench 2b was excavated to the east of Trench 2a, over an area of raised ground (Plate 2). The trench was machine excavated to a depth of 2m through possible colliery slag and modern overburden. Some brick rubble was present in the upper horizon of overburden but this did not appear to represent in-situ brick structures. A modern hardcore layer sealed these deposits.

5.4 Trench 3 (Fig. 3)

The natural subsoil was encountered at a depth of 0.6m below the present ground surface at the northern end of the trench. In the southern end of the trench the natural subsoil was identified at a depth of 2m below the existing ground surface (Plate 3).

Cutting the natural subsoil at the northern end of the trench was a large pond-like feature (3013; Plate 4), measuring at least 9m long, 7m wide and 1m deep. A brick-lined well or mineshaft (3007; Plate 5), c. 3m in width appeared to cut the fill of the pond on its western side.

Two small adjacent circular pit-like features were recorded near the centre of the trench. Pit 3000 was 0.7m in width and 0.2m deep and was filled with brick fragments and stone rubble. A second pit (3003), 1m in width and 0.3m deep was recorded to the north west, and was filled by a coal-rich clinker (3005). An east-west aligned linear ditch or gully (3004) cut the fill of pit 3003. This ditch was at least 12m long, and was recorded cutting natural subsoil. The

feature was c. 0.5m deep and appeared to be lined with stone and slag on its eastern side, and otherwise filled by a coal-rich clinker (3012).

To the south of pit 3000 was an area of disturbed possible floor surface with brick inclusions and a possible southwest to northeast alignment. This was to the north of a brick surface (3010). Adjacent to the south, was another brick surface (3011), which had also been concreted over. To the south of this were the possible stone footings (3016) for a brick wall (3015) running east to west.

A further feature (3002) was excavated within a sondage to the south of the wall. This feature appeared to be a continuation of ditch 3004, filled with coal-rich clinker (3006), though no stone lining was identified here.

5.5 Trench 4 (Fig. 4)

In the centre of the trench the natural subsoil was identified at a depth of 2m below the existing ground surface, overlain by 1.6m of clinker (4018), which was in turn sealed by a brick surface 4007 (Plate 6). Similarly a layer of clinker containing large slag inclusions (4022), located towards the south end of the trench, was overlain by a brick surface (4006).

Several brick surfaces were identified within the trench, associated with walls and drainage gullies. At the northern end of Trench 4 a brick surface (4009) was identified (Plate 7). This had a mix of red and blue engineering bricks and was laid in a random stretcher-type bond. To the east of surface 4009 was a gully (4011) made up of blue engineering brick, and was constructed flush with 4009, which sloped eastwards towards it. To the west surface 4009 was bounded by a brick wall footing (4012). The brick surface had been disturbed and truncated towards the south (4013) close to its junction with a red brick cellar (4015).

On the south side of the cellar was what appeared to be the upper section of the cellar stairway (4016), consisting of a red brick step and possible staircase support. This appears to be a quarter turn stairwell with red quarry tile floor (4017) at the summit. The cellar was filled with brick rubble (4008).

To the south of the cellar the brick floor surface (4007) was recorded. This surface was made up of red and blue engineering brick. A brick footing (4019), aligned east-west was recorded at the centre of 4007.

The brick surface 4007 appeared to have been cut by a later drain infilled with brick (4020). A brick lined gully (4021) aligned east-west divided 4007 from another brick surface (4006) made up of blue engineering brick. A brick wall footing (4026) with 2 courses surviving and aligned east-west, was recorded to the south, overlying layer 4004.

To the south a brick surface (4005; Plate 8), made up of red, blue and yellow brickwork was identified, and this was sealed by layer 4004, which consisted of black clinker with some ash inclusions. The 'L' shaped brick footing 4025 appeared to be contemporary with surface 4005 and had two courses of brickwork surviving, sealed by clinker layer 4004.

A north-south aligned arrangement of stone (4023), possibly served as a wall footing overlay layer 4004. This butted against an east-west-aligned wall 4024. A further layer of black clinker (4001) was present to the south and west of wall 4024, whilst 4002 to the east was a similar clinker layer with frequent ash inclusions. A drain overlay 4002 to the south, whilst 4027

appeared to be a brick plinth, also post-dating 4002, which extended beyond the edge of excavation.

5.6 Trench 5 (Fig. 5)

The natural subsoil, a sandy clay was located in the sondage dug in the middle of the trench. This was sealed by a layer of grey silty clay that contained flecks of charcoal throughout, which in turn was sealed by a layer of clinker (5004). Cut through 5004 to the south of the trench was a brick lined tank or coal bunker (5014) that measured 2.5m in width by 0.8m in depth. This consisted of an orange brick wall (5011) measuring 0.35m in width with bricks measuring 9"x4"x3" to the north of the structure, and coal built walls (5011/5012) measuring 0.3m in width and consisting of large blocks of black coal/stone to the south and west sides. Within this structure was the remains of a red brick floor surface (5013) measuring around 0.8m in width. Filling 5014 was a brown clinker/rubble fill (5010) that was around 0.8m in depth, and sealing this was a layer of mixed black/orange sandy rubble (5002) around 1.2m in thickness that was the result of the demolition works in the area.

Cut through 5004 to the north of the trench was a red brick structure (5008, Plate 9) that appeared to be the remains of the foundations of a cellar, and measured 2.15m in length by 1.15m in width. This structure contained two features in the west wall (5017/5018) that consisted of grey engineering bricks and although step-like in appearance seemed the basis of another function, possibly the formation of shelves in this part of the building. Butting 5008 to the west and running on an E-W alignment was a similar red brick wall (5005) that measured 0.30m in width, although this did not appear to form part of the same building and may have been a later phase of activity. Sealing these walls was a layer of brown/black clinker and rubble infill (5003) measuring 1.87m in thickness.

To the immediate south of 5008 was a brick lined pit (5009) that consisted of red and grey bricks measuring 9.5"x4"x3" and which was bonded by a cement mortar. 5009 measured 1.10m in width by 1.85m in length and was filled by a black rubble infill (5019) consisting of rubble and clinker.

Cutting the northern side of 5008 were the foundations for a small structure, possibly an outhouse or coal bunker (5006). These consisted of grey brick walls measuring 1.30m in length by 0.30m in width, with the bricks themselves measuring 9"x3.5"x9" in size. Filling this structure was a brown/black demolition rubble (5024). To the north of 5006 was an E-W aligned wall (5007) that measured around 0.22m in width and was seemingly unrelated to the other foundations in the trench, the bricks here measuring 8"x4.5"x1.5" in size. This was filled by a dark grey/black rubble infill (5015).

Sealing these wall foundations was a layer of cream stone hardcore (5001) 0.4m in thickness, which in turn was overlain by the surface for the car-park in this area, a black tarmac (5000) which measured 0.1m in depth.

5.7 Trench 6

The natural subsoil in trench 6 was not located due to the level of surviving structures in the area. To the west end of the trench the earliest feature was an area of brick flooring (6002) that measured 0.11m in width and 0.23m in length, although little can be said about this feature due to its size and relative isolation. Sealing 6002 was a layer of grey/orange brick

demolition rubble (6001) 1.0m in thickness, which in turn was sealed by a concrete surface (6000) that measured 0.4m in depth.

Towards the centre of the trench there was more evidence of surviving structures. Running across the trench on a north-south alignment was a red brick wall (6003) measuring 0.44m in width and 0.95m in height (10 courses exposed), and which consisted of an english bond. Butting 6003 and running on an east-west alignment was another red brick wall (6004). Butting 6004 to the west and on a north-south alignment was (6005), which had been cut by a later east-west wall (6006). 6006 measured 0.50m in width and consisted of red hand-made bricks that were bonded with a cement mortar. Overlying 6007 and only seen in section was another wall foundation (6007). This measured 0.54m in width and consisted of four surviving courses of orange hand-made brick.

To the east of 6006 were wall foundations (6008) that ran on a north-south alignment. 6008 consisted of red hand-made bricks and measured 1.7m in length and 0.23m in width. To the east of 6008 was a small area of red brick walling (6009). This measured 0.23m in length and ran on an east-west alignment. The last wall foundation in the area and lying east of 6009 was another north-south aligned wall (6010). Like many of the other wall foundations in the area, 6010 consisted of red hand-made bricks and was bonded with a cement mortar. Sealing these wall foundations was the building demolition rubble 6001 and the concrete surface 6000.

To the far east, the makeup of the trench changed to a series of layers and industrial deposits (Plate 10). To the east of 6010 was a band of yellow clay (6012/6014) into which an area of black silt (6013) was cut. To the east of 6013 was a crude floor surface (6015) consisting of brick rubble, although there was no clear construction pattern to the feature. Lying east of 6015 was a layer of grey-black clinker industrial material (6018) into which both a band of orange-red burnt clay (6016), and a patch of light grey clay (6017) had been cut.

Sealing these layers at this end of the trench was a layer of grey-black coal/clinker material (6011), which in turn was again overlain by the demolition material 6001 and the concrete surface 6000.

5.8 Trench 7

In the sondage dug at the southeast end of the trench the natural subsoil was located at a depth of 3.50m below the existing ground surface. Here it was sealed by a black charcoal rich layer measuring 0.40m in depth, which in turn was sealed by a black silty clay measuring around 0.6m in depth. Overlying this was a layer of grey-white silty clay measuring 1.2m in depth that was sealed by a black silty clay that contained brick rubble throughout and measured 0.50m in depth. Sealing the brick rubble layer was a grey silty clay measuring 0.40m in depth that was sealed by the rubble from the demolition of the buildings on the area.

Towards the northwest end of the trench the earliest context noted was a black silty clay with brick/stone rubble throughout that was located at a depth of around 2.8m below the existing ground surface. Overlying this was a layer of black charcoal, which in turn was overlain by a black silt measuring around 0.3m in depth. Sealing this was a grey clay that had charcoal flecking, which in turn was sealed by a black silt that contained stone/brick fragments and which measured around 0.55m in depth. Overlying the black silt was a layer of grey silty clay that contained brick rubble, and sealing this was the demolition rubble from the destruction of the buildings on the site.

5.9 Trench 10

Trench 10 was excavated to a depth of c.3m, although the natural subsoil was still not located at this point. The eastern end of the trench was made up of predominantly colliery waste, whilst the western end was made up of a series of layers (Plate 11). The earliest of these was a black-yellow silt layer that was overlain by a thin band of grey ash, suggesting a probable industrial background. Overlying the grey ash was a black silty clay, which in turn was overlain by a red crushed brick-rubble layer, perhaps evidence of an early phase of demolition in the area. The trench was sealed by the modern demolition rubble, which was around 0.5m in depth.

6 THE FINDS

Erica Macey-Bracken

Post-medieval pottery, clay pipe and a fragment of ceramic tile were recovered from the site. The assemblage was fragmentary, although individual pieces were largely unabraded. The finds were quantified by count, and examined macroscopically for the purposes of this report.

Context	Pottery	Tile	Clay pipe
3001	13	-	2
3006	1	-	-
3009	-	1	-

The two fragments of clay pipe were both from plain pipe stems, with no distinguishing stamps or marks. The piece of tile was also undiagnostic, but is likely to be of post-medieval date.

Stephanie Ratkai

3001

8 sherds from a 'treacle-top' mug. Misfired. 18th c?

3 x brown salt-glazed stoneware sherds. Two look like possible misfires. 18th or 19th c

1 x ?porcelain saucer with crude overglaze painting. 19th c?

1 x hard vitreous whiteware. Later 19th c?

1 x very badly burnt sherd, possibly industrial slipware, with 'adhesions' (possibly fuel ash slag or similar). 19th c

3006

1 x base sherd 18th or 19th c. The sherd looks like a misfire or waster

Although there is very little ceramic evidence, the assemblage may indicate local pottery production in the area.

7 DISCUSSION

The linear ditch-like feature running southeast to northwest in Trench 3, can be suggested to be of post-medieval date. The feature appears to share the same alignment as a field

boundary depicted on Piggot Smith's map of the area (Fig. 6) dated 1825-6, to the rear of properties fronting onto Bloomfield Road. This field boundary appears to have influenced the siting and alignment of a later presumably industrial structure shown on the 1848 map of the area (Fig. 7), also to the rear of properties fronting onto Bloomfield Road. It is possible that the feature recorded in Trench 3 formed a boundary between the properties on Bloomfield Road, and industrial activity to the south.

The floor surfaces drains, cellars, and wall footings, which are present in Trenches 3, 4, 5 and 6 may equate with those structures present on the cartographic evidence (Kelleher 2006). The fact that these structures overlay a significant deposit of clinker suggest that they post-date at least one phase of industrial activity on the site. The presence of a brick surface (4005) below a layer of clinker, may suggest more than one phase of activity here, though sondages excavated within Trenches 3 and 4 through clinker deposits did not reveal any further structural phasing. The pond or pool uncovered at Trenches 2a and 3 may have been associated with any of the industrial phases on site. The feature pre-dates the large well, cistern or mineshaft recorded at the northern end of Trench 3 (backfilled with brick and rubble).

It is likely that the brick rubble uncovered in the upper level of Trench 2b was deposited following the demolition of houses on Brown Lion Street in the late 1950s. The bank here is likely to relate to mining spoil or waste relating to ironworking, from the vicinity. A raised area is depicted on the 1904 map (Fig. 8) to the south of structures fronting onto Brown Lion Street, and it is therefore likely that the spoil relates to late 19th or early 20th century activity here, and may, at least in part, be contemporary with the Ironworks depicted on the same map.

Trench 7 further to the west of the site showed no evidence for earlier structures, although there was a large amount of demolition rubble that may have related to the destruction of the small buildings shown on the 1849 map in this area and the subsequent levelling of the ground for the construction of rail track in this area.

8 FUTURE WORK

While there was evidence for some surviving structures along the line of the Bloomfield Road, this was very truncated and in some places entirely scoured out by later mining activity. Further to the east the ground was disturbed to levels of c.3m+ by later demolition and ground levelling work, and so it is likely that any features of note in this area have also been lost to these activities. This suggests that the potential for the survival of archaeological features in these areas is limited, and therefore no further work is recommended.

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by David Wilson Homes. Thanks are due to Kathy Critchley and Iain Strang for their co-operation on site. Thanks must also be given to Graham Eyre-Morgan, who monitored the project on behalf of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. Work on site was undertaken by Mark Charles, Mary Duncan, Chris Jones, Shane Kelleher, and Phil Mann. The written report was by Shane Kelleher and Phil Mann, and was illustrated by Nigel Dodds and edited by Kevin Colls who also managed the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

10 REFERENCES

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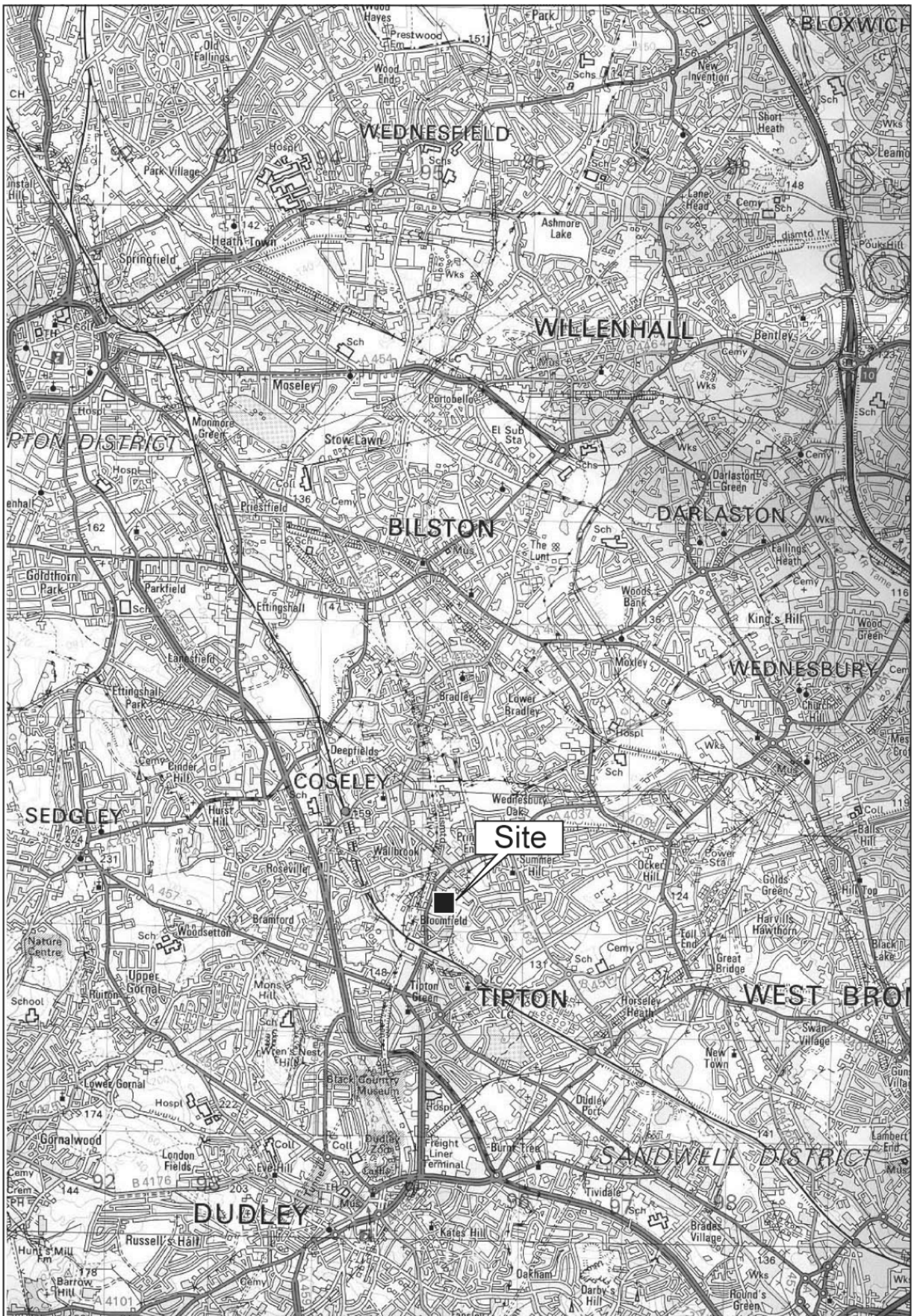


Fig.1

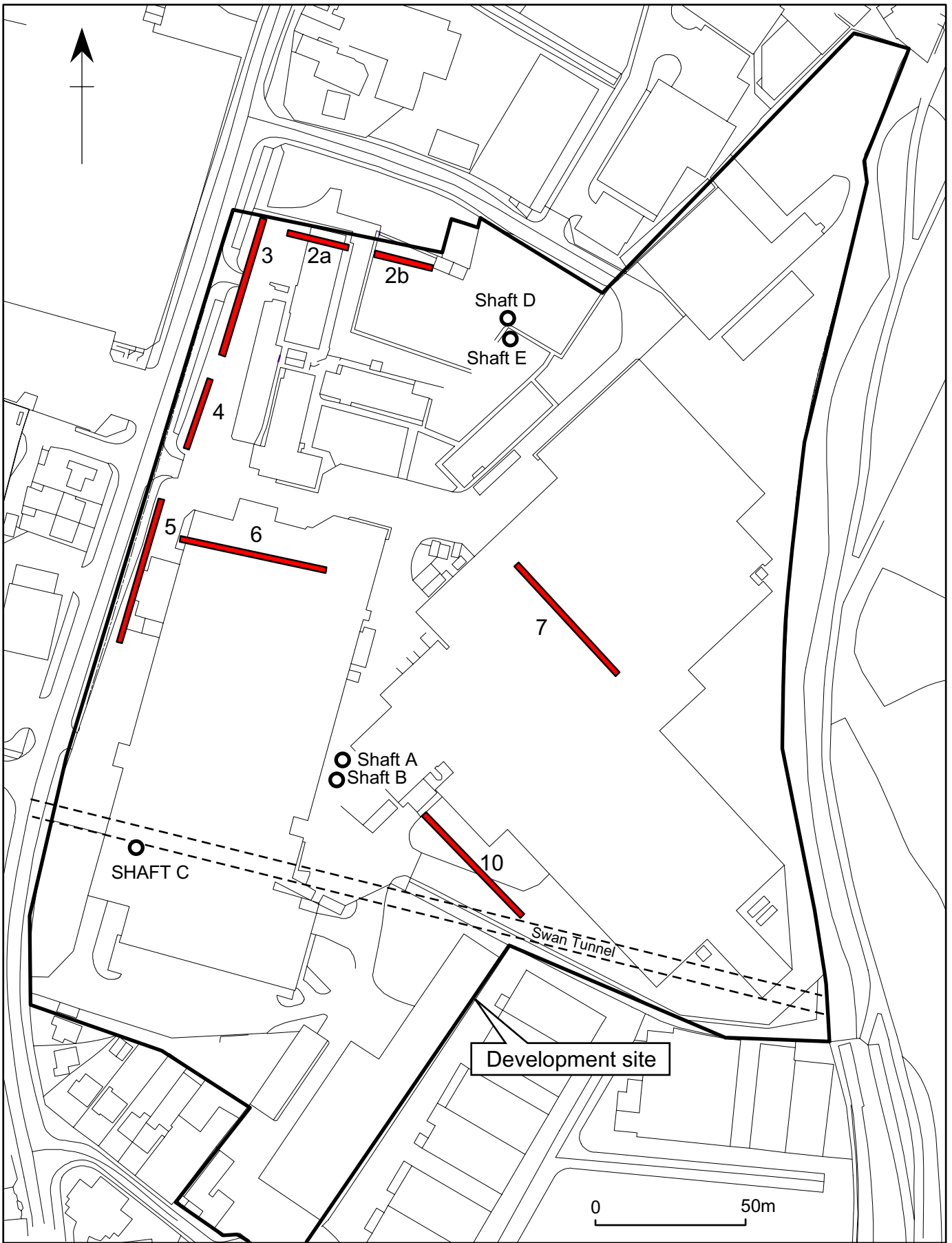


Fig.2

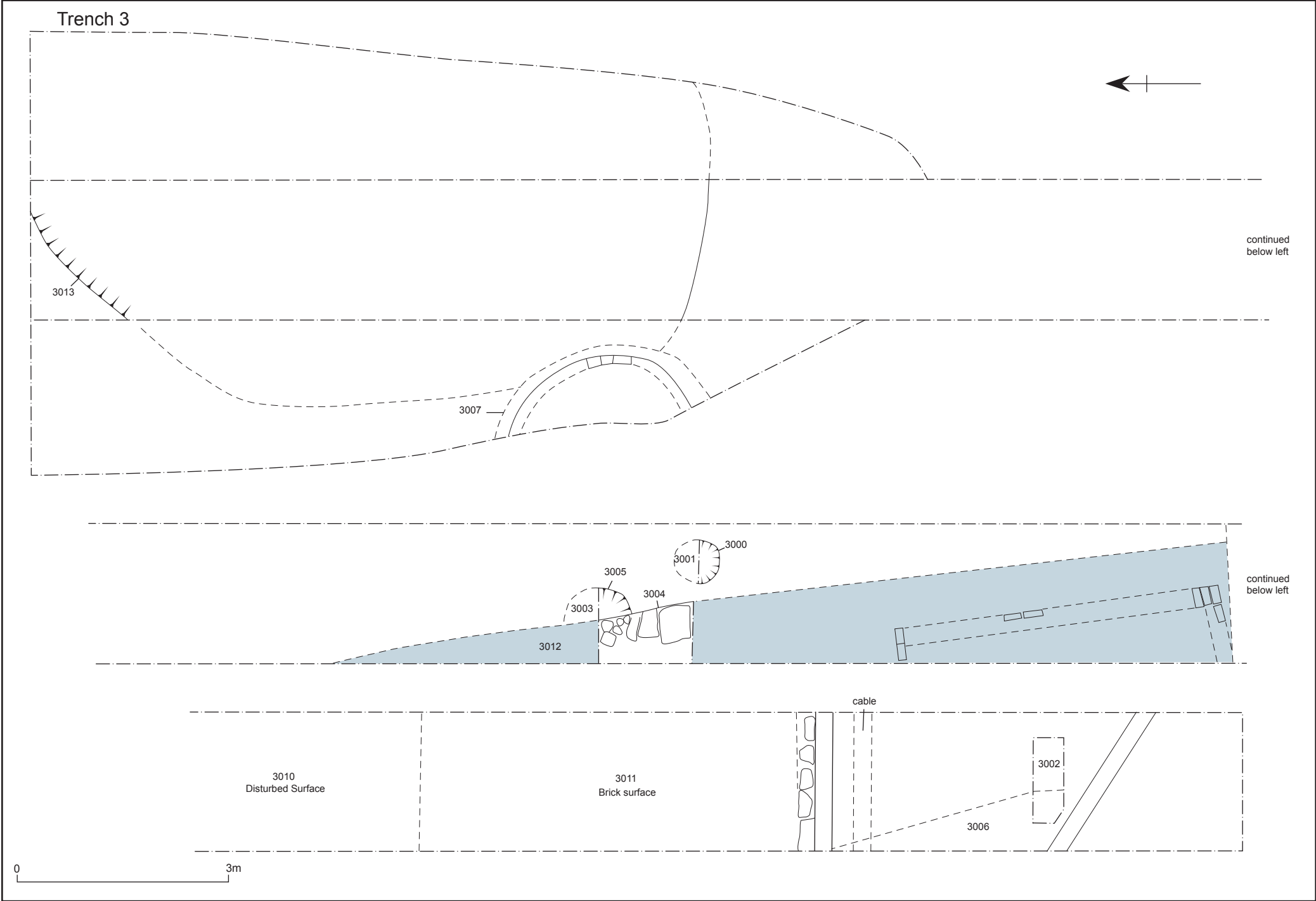


Fig.3

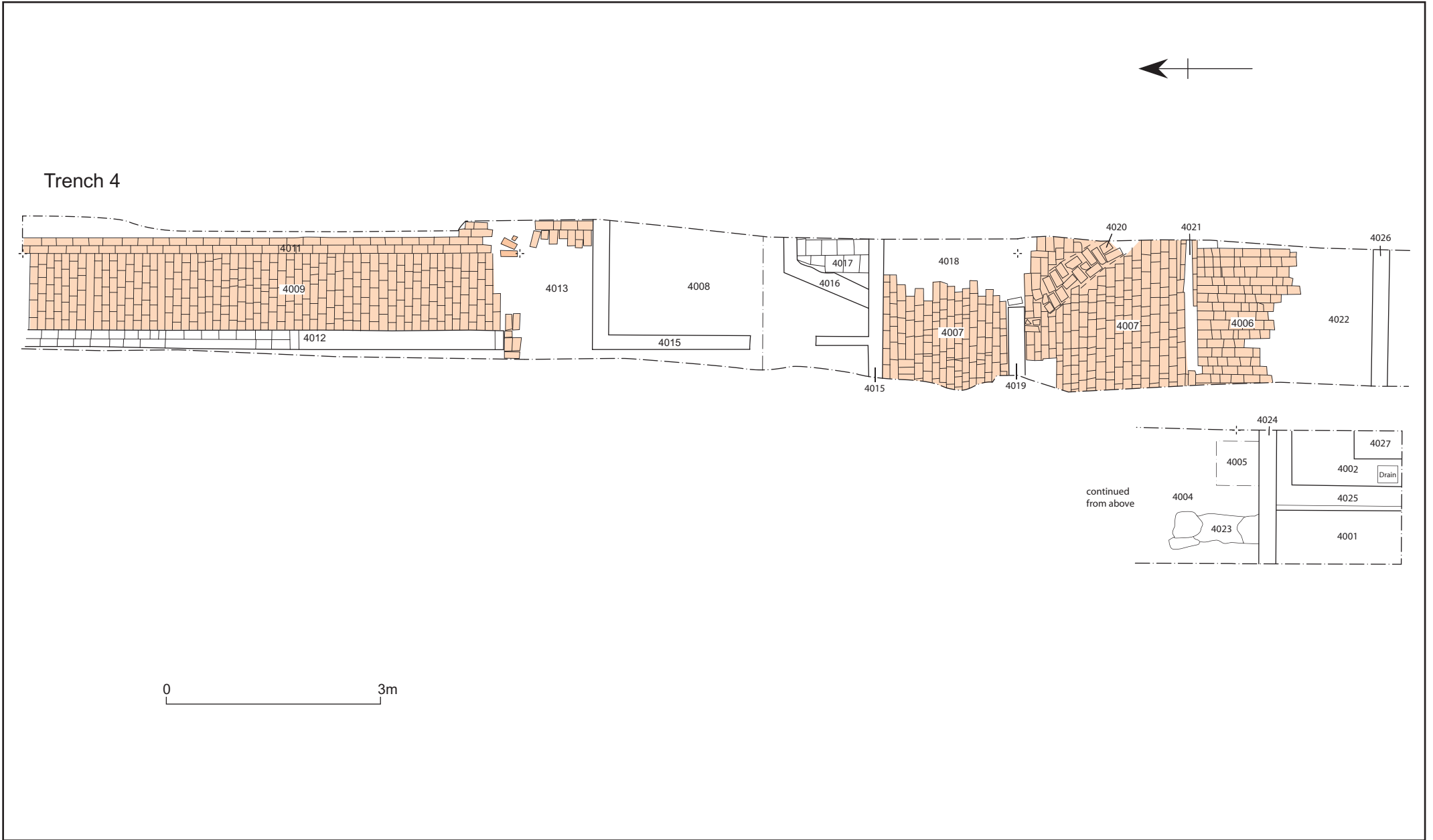


Fig.4

Trench 5

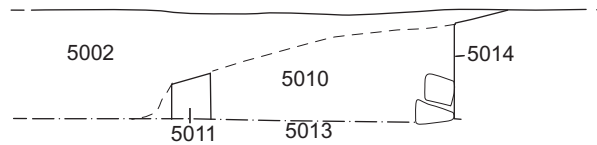
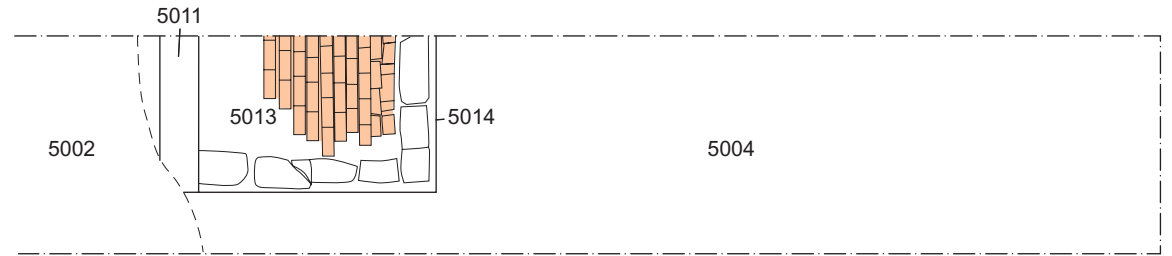
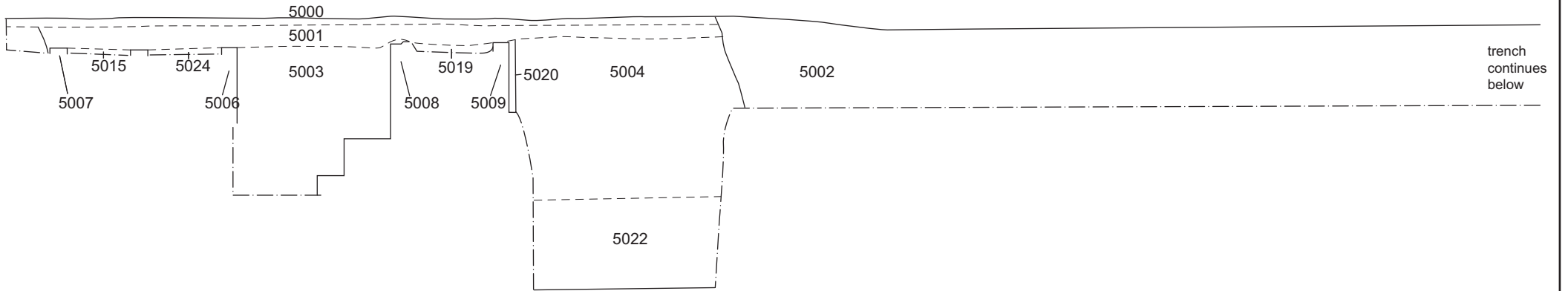
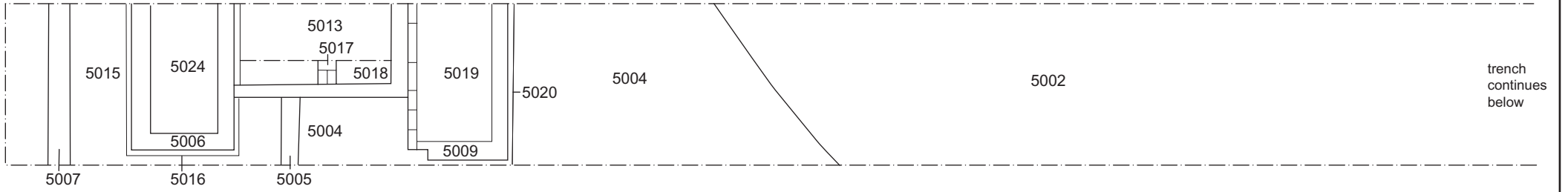


Fig.5



Fig.6

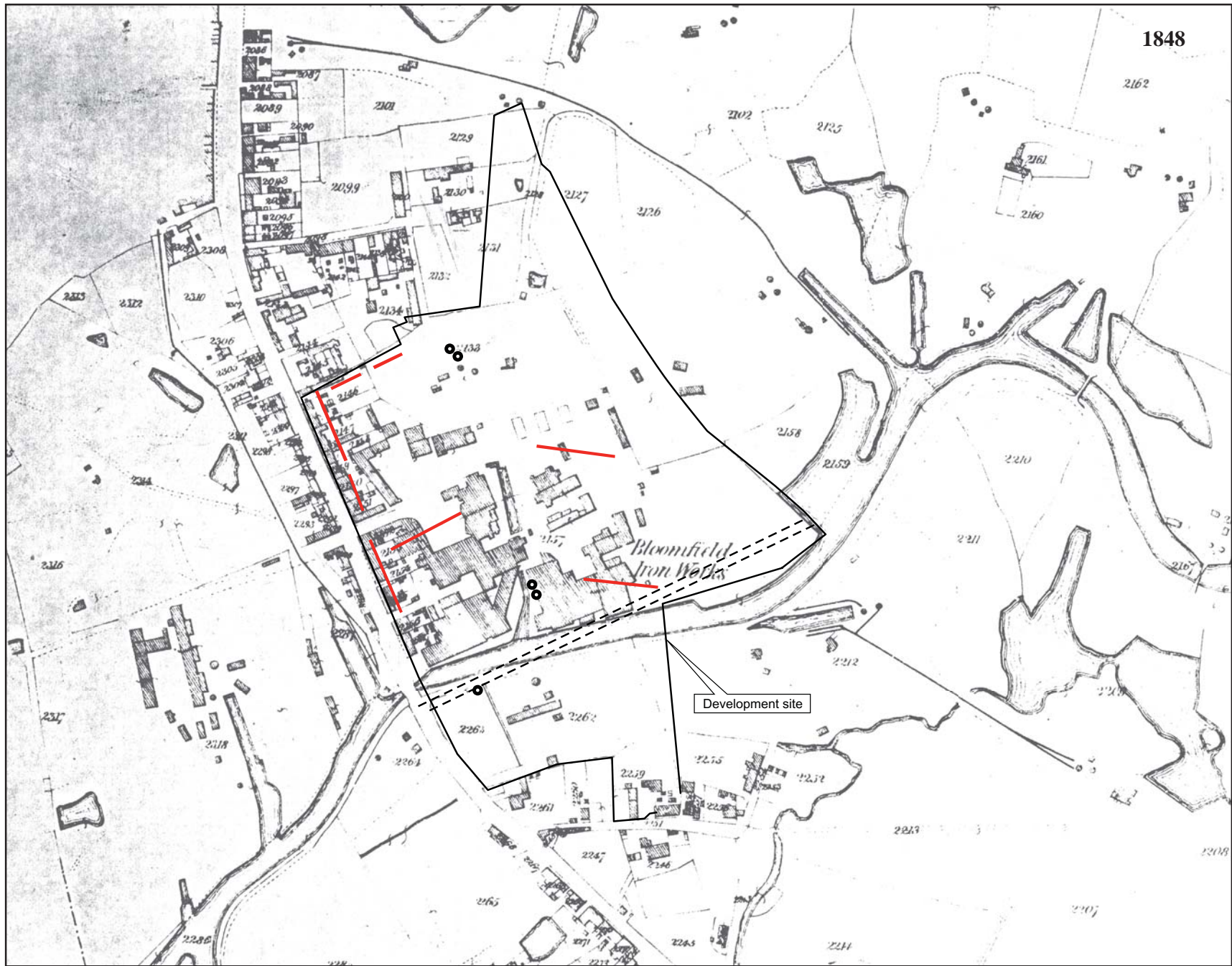


Fig.7

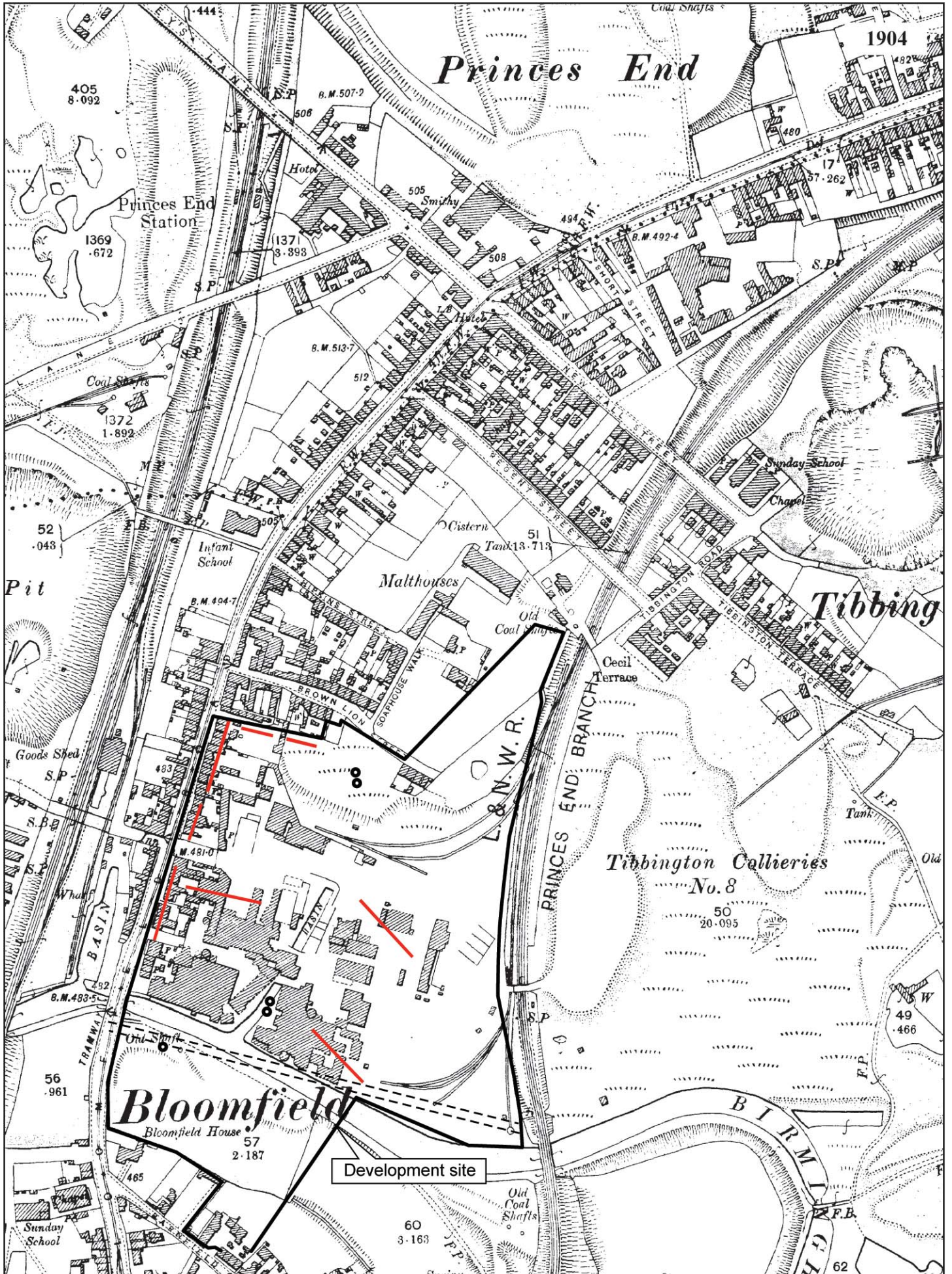


Fig.8



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 11

**SANDWELL MBC SMR
SUMMARY SHEET**

<i>Site name/Address:</i>	
<i>Borough:</i> Sandwell	<i>NGR:</i> NGR 9520 9322
<i>Type of Work:</i> Evaluation	<i>Site Code:</i> BA 1493
<i>Archaeological Contractor:</i> Birmingham Archaeology	<i>Date of Work:</i> October 2006- January2007
<i>Location of Finds/ Curating Museum:</i>	
<i>Title of Report:</i> Bloomfield Road, Tipton: An Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief, 2007.	
<i>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</i> <p>During October 2006 - January 2007 Birmingham Archaeology carried out a programme of archaeological evaluation at the former Corus steelworks, Bloomfield Road, Tipton. Seven trenches were excavated and recorded. Archaeological evidence of note uncovered includes brick floor-surfaces, backfilled cellars, and a brick-lined industrial well or mine shaft, a stone-lined ditch, a possible pond, and evidence of deposited demolition rubble. Examinations of the ceramic evidence and small finds alluded to a post-medieval date.</p>	
<i>Author of Summary:</i> Phil Mann	<i>Date of Summary:</i> May 2007