

birmingham archaeology

**SUTTON PARK,
SUTTON COLDFIELD,
BIRMINGHAM**

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF, 2006**

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**SUTTON PARK, SUTTON COLDFIELD, BIRMINGHAM:
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF, 2006**

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was carried out within a Scheduled Ancient Monument in the east of Sutton Park, Birmingham (between NGR: SP 1131 9667 and SP 1118 9707), during works carried out on a National Grid gas main in July, 2006. The work was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology on behalf of National Grid. The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with Scheduled Monument Consent for the groundworks.

Two machine dug trenches were monitored by an archaeologist during the watching brief. No features of possible archaeological interest were identified, and no finds were collected.

1 INTRODUCTION

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by National Grid to undertake an archaeological watching brief during a programme of gas pipeline replacement within Sutton Park, Birmingham (Fig. 1, between NGR SP 1131 9667 and SP 1118 9707 (hereafter referred the site). The groundworks comprised the renewal of a cast iron gas pipe by re-lining with a polythene pipe, requiring the excavation of launch and receive pits, which were archaeologically monitored. The work was undertaken within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SM 30085).

The watching brief followed the requirements of a Brief set by Birmingham City Council (Birmingham City Council 2006), and a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology (Birmingham Archaeology 2006), approved by the Council. Grant of Scheduled Monument Consent enabling the works to take place was dated 27 June 2006. The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with Policy 8.36 of the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan, and the Council's Archaeology Strategy which has been adopted as supplementary planning guidance.

2 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The areas investigated (Figs. 1-3) were located in the east of the park, to the southwest of a railway line, and to the northwest of Lower Nut Hurst (between NGR SP 1131 9667 and SP 1118 9707, Fig. 1), and is located within Sutton Park Scheduled Monument (SM 30085). Sutton Park borders the conurbations of Sutton Coldfield to the east and Streetly to the west. The Park consists of 2,400 acres of woodland, heath and wetland and is a designated a National Nature Reserve.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The general aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological features and deposits affected by the development. In particular, it was intended to record any features or deposits associated with the adjoining medieval deer park boundaries.

4 METHODOLOGY

The two trenches which were monitored during the watching brief were excavated using a mini-digger. This machine-excavation was monitored by an experienced archaeologist. The machined surfaces were hand-cleaned for better definition of any archaeological features or deposits present, but no further hand-excavation was undertaken. Stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Trenches were planned, and sections were drawn through significant vertical stratigraphy. A comprehensive written record was maintained using a continuous numbered context system on pro-forma context and feature cards. Photographs supplemented written records and scale plans.

The paper archive will be deposited with an appropriate repository subject to permission from the landowner.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Sutton Park was formerly part of Sutton Chase, an ancient stretch of heathland created for the conservation and hunting of deer. Many archaeological features associated with the Chase within the park can be dated back to the 12th century. In 1528 a charter was granted to enable the Bishop of Exeter to enclose a section of the Chase, allowing the inhabitants to, not only graze their animals, but also, 'freely hunt fish and fowl there, with dogs, bows and arrows, and with other engines for deer, stags, hares, foxes and other wild beasts' (www.birmingham.gov.uk) and Sutton Park in much of its present form came into being. For the next 230 years local people rigorously protected these rights against landowner encroachment.

In 1756, an Act of Parliament enabled a local landowner to annexe 48 acres of Sutton Park that adjoined his land, thus changing the shape of the park. In 1827 an exchange of land also altered the park's boundaries (Hodder 2004, 128). As part of the agreement Park Road and a new main entrance were constructed. Another exchange of land in 1937 brought Powells Pool into the park.

In the 19th century the park became the focus of more formalized recreational activities in the form of two racecourses, a nine-hole golf course, boating, donkey rides, swimming and the construction of refreshment rooms and pleasure gardens. The railway link to Sutton Coldfield, carved from the northwest to the southeast through the park in the early 1860s, allowed access for daytrippers.

In the same century the park was also commandeered for military training. The military use continued into the 20th century when camps were built during the First World War for convalescing troops and prisoners of war. During the Second World War, the park was again utilized for troop training. The testing of heavy military equipment was also carried out and an internment camp for Italians and Germans was built (www.birmingham.gov.uk).

Due to nearly a thousand years of careful land management, the archaeology of Sutton Park has been generally well preserved. Flint tools from the mesolithic period have been found near Little Bracebridge Pool (Hodder 2004, 24) and six suspected Bronze Age mounds composed of shattered heated stones with associated pits were found in 1921 (Hodder 2004, 30).

Little evidence is available for Iron Age activity within the Birmingham area. A suspected prehistoric timber trackway was uncovered in Sutton Park during peat extraction during the 18th century (Hodder 2004, 27). Analysis from soil samples excavated from under the park's most prominent archaeological remains, the Roman road, has revealed that the Late Iron Age landscape was likely to be dominated by heathland or light woodland (Hodder 2004, 76).

The Roman road (Ryknild Street) was constructed shortly after the conquest in AD43 between forts at Wall and Metchley, Edgbaston. Running north-south for 2km in the west of the park, the road, at the point of its best state of preservation, is some 9m wide and composed of compacted gravel. On either side runs a ditch with associated gravel pits and hollows that provided construction materials (Hodder 2004, 61).

Historical records show that the deer park existed in 1126 (Hodder 2004, 127) and it is possible that it may have had an Anglo-Saxon origin. Deer parks tended to be created within areas of agriculturally poor land, and, in order to maintain livestock control, were established within an enclosed boundary. The sandy, pebbly, and acidic nature of soils within Sutton Park (Hodder 2004, 13), made the site suitable for a deer park. The 12th century boundaries are still visible as above-ground earthworks along Chester Road North, Thornhill Road and Streetly Lane. They would have originally have consisted of a ditch and bank, with a deer proof fence on top of the bank. Within the park there are further banks and ditches associated with the deer park (www.birmingham.gov.uk). Trench 1 (Fig. 3) was located to the south of the eastern plotted extent of one such curvilinear earthwork boundary. Trench 2 was located to the north of the eastern plotted extent of a further earthwork boundary.

6 RESULTS

Two trenches were monitored during the watching brief. Each measured 4m by 1.5m. They were dug to locate the existing pipeline.

Trench 1

This trench measured a maximum of 0.75m in depth. It was located (SP 11326 296678) to the west of a north-south road within the park.

The eastern side of the trench exposed the backfill of the original pipe trench. The western side of the trench was mostly cut slightly outside the backfill of the earlier service trench. Here the sequence comprised a friable orange sand subsoil (1003), sealed by an orange-brown subsoil (1005), overlain by a thin grey-brown, sandy-loam topsoil (1004). The earlier deposits were disturbed by tree root activity. No features, or possible features of archaeological interest were located, and no finds were collected.

Trench 2

This trench measured a maximum of 0.95m in depth and was located to the north of Trench 1 (SP 11188 297073). Aligned northeast-southwest Trench 2 was dug almost entirely on the grass verge to the west of a road. Woodland lines both sides of the road at this location.

The southwestern, and most of the southeastern baulk of the trench exposed the backfill from the existing service trench. Natural red sand (2002) was recorded at the base of the southeastern baulk, at a depth of 0.95m below the modern surface. This was sealed by a layer of grey sandy loam (2003), which measured 0.30m thick, in turn overlain by the modern service trench backfill (2001). Layer 2003 may have been a former topsoil buried during road construction and levelling.

7 DISCUSSION

There was no evidence of any features of archaeological or possible archaeological features, and no finds were collected. Neither trench was positioned across a known above-ground earthwork boundary, although Trench 1 was positioned just to the south of the eastern terminal of one deer park boundary. In most cases the trenches exposed the backfills of earlier service trenches. Accordingly, disturbance to deposits outside the former service trenches will have been minimal.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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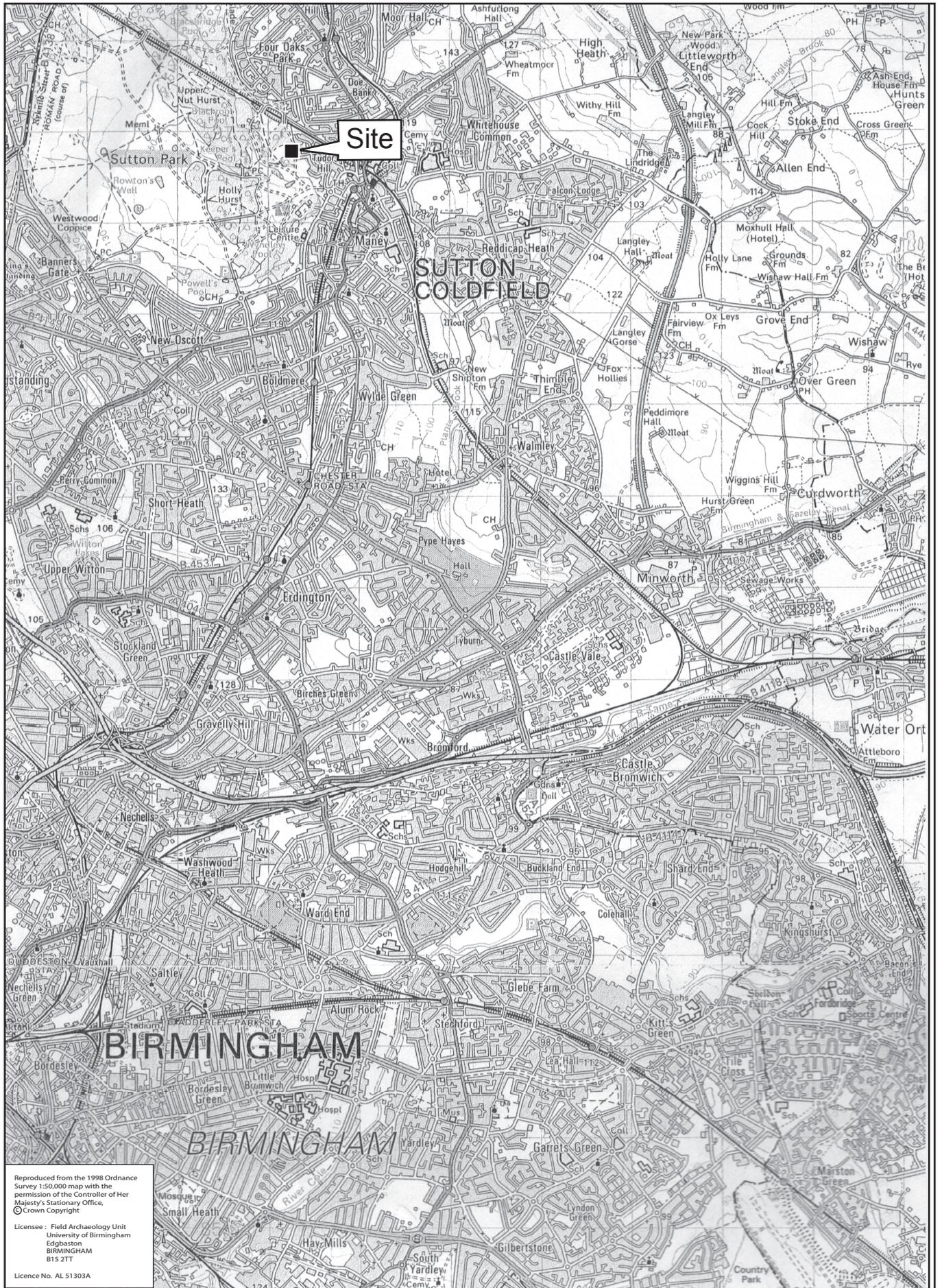


Fig.1

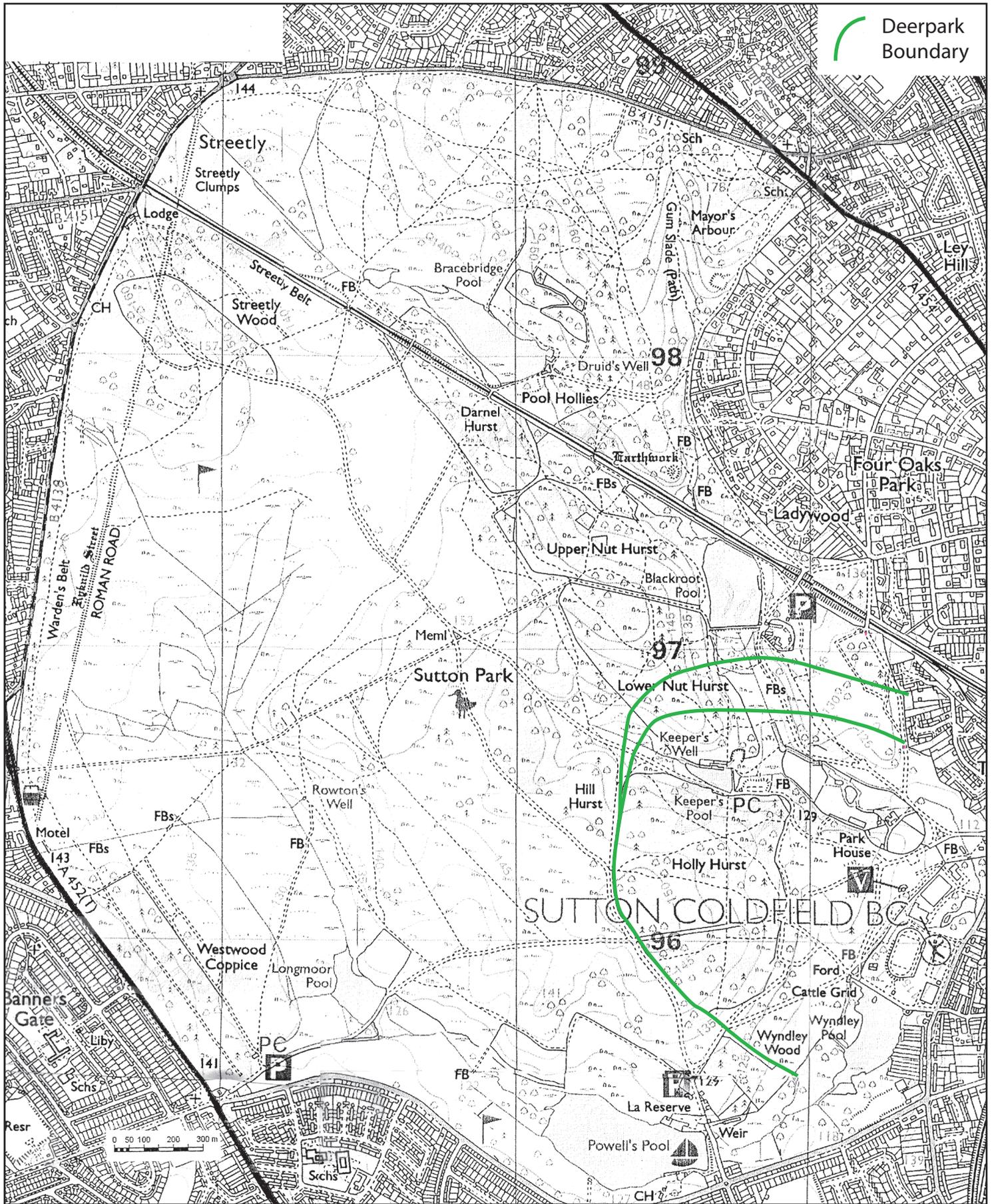


Fig.2

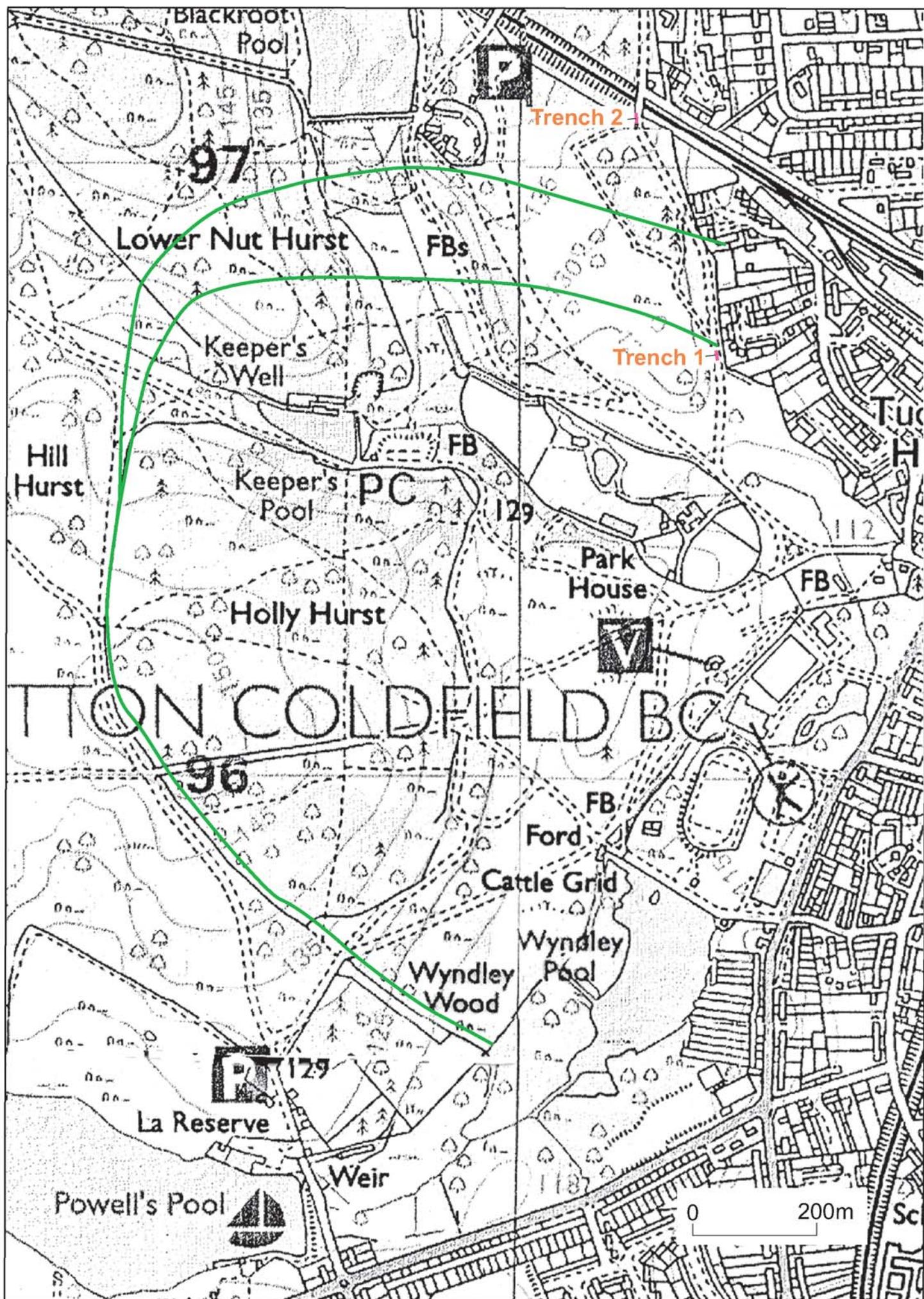


Fig.3