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Weoley Hill Park
Bristol Road
Birmingham:
An Archaeological Watching Brief
2006

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

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By

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For

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WEOLEY HILL PARK, BRISTOL ROAD, BIRMINGHAM

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief on land at Weoley Hill Park, Bristol Road, Birmingham (NGR SP 034815) was commissioned by ALS Landscape Architecture Ltd on behalf of Bournville Village Trust. The work was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology in August 2006 during the monitoring of groundworks associated with flood alleviation and amenity enhancement adjacent to the Wood Brook.

The site is situated within the bounds of an extensive survey undertaken in the 1980s, designed to locate and identify Bronze Age burnt mounds, which are indicative of settlement in the mid-late second millennium BC. The survey identified a substantial concentration of these Bronze Age burnt mounds close to the south of the current site. Burnt stones have also been recovered from a sewer trench in close proximity to the Wood Brook to the south of the site.

Previous geophysical work as part of the Birmingham Roman Roads Project also surveyed the southern part of the site aiming to identify the crossing point of the Roman road over the water course.

Evidence for landscaping and diverting of the Wood Brook was identified at the north end of the site. No other archaeological features and deposits were identified during the watching brief.

WEOLEY HILL PARK, BRISTOL ROAD, BIRMINGHAM: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF, 2006

1 INTRODUCTION

In August 2006 Birmingham Archaeology carried out a watching brief at Weoley Hill Park, Bristol Road, Birmingham (NGR SP 034 815). The work was commissioned by ALS Landscape Architecture Ltd on behalf of Bournville Village Trust to monitor works associated with remedial works to the watercourse of the wood brook and its surroundings to alleviate flood risk, arrest the degradation of the brook course and improve the levels of safety and amenity (Planning Application Number S/01753/04/FUL).

This report outlines the results of the watching Brief, which was carried out during August 2006, and which was prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief (IFA 2001)

The watching Brief conformed to a brief produced by Birmingham City Council (Appendix 1), and a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2006) which was approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to implementation.

The watching Brief was undertaken following a requirement by Birmingham City Council Development Directorate, in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990), Policy 8.36 of the Birmingham City Council Unitary Development Plan and Archaeology Strategy.

2 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

The site is bounded by Bristol Road to the southeast, Middle Park Road to the southwest, Fox Hill to the northwest and Witherford Way to the southeast. Wood Brook runs through the site, which is centred on NGR SP 033815 (Fig. 1). The site was located upon alluvial silts and gravels associated with the Wood Brook. The present character of the site is currently grassed parkland.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies within an area which has produced evidence for a significant concentration of Bronze Age burnt mounds. Barfield and Hodder describe burnt mounds as “oval, crescentic or kidney-shaped mounds of heat shattered stone and charcoal which are usually adjacent to streams” (Barfield and Hodder 1989, 5), and of all the archaeological features that contribute to our understanding of the prehistoric landscape of Birmingham and the Black Country, burnt mounds, mostly dating to 1700-1000 Cal BC, are the most numerous (Hodder 2002). Though there is discussion concerning the precise function of these monuments, whether they are domestic in function or associated with saunas and sweat lodges, their presence and distribution are acknowledged as indicators of the location and density of as yet unknown contemporary settlement sites (ibid.).

The proximity of burnt mounds to watercourses, which may be subject to less development within urban conurbations as they often run through parks and other open areas, underlines

their importance to the understanding of this period, since other related sites and monuments elsewhere may not have survived past development.

The location of burnt mound sites adjacent to watercourses further increases their importance through the potential for the presence, recovery and analysis of palaeo-environmental archaeological deposits associated with them, that can contribute to our understanding of the overall environmental conditions of the landscape during this period (ibid.).

Intensive fieldwork has been carried out elsewhere in the south Birmingham region that was specifically designed to locate and identify burnt mounds along the watercourses in this area (Barfield and Hodder 1989). The survey successfully identified many burnt mounds, and taking into account methodology, logistics and differential stream erosion conjectured that many more monuments and associated settlement had yet to be identified (ibid.). The largest concentration within this overall study was located within a kilometre of the current site (Figs. 1 and 2), with burnt mounds being identified at Bournville Pool (1), Cob Lane Park (2), Cob Lane Police Station (3) and Woodlands Park (4). More recently, heat shattered stones were discovered in a service trench on the north side of Wood Brook near to Bristol Road (SMR 20721).

More detailed analysis of individual sites including geophysics, excavation and experiments have demonstrated the complexity of burnt mound sites. It has been suggested that there may have been sweat lodge structures associated with the mound, and associated settlement further away on higher, drier ground (Hodder 2002).

The burnt mound site at Cob Lane has demonstrated the potential for the survival of palaeo-environmental deposits in association with burnt mounds, whilst also indicating the presence of agricultural activity and tree clearance in the vicinity (ibid. 2).

The proximity of the site at Weoley Hill Park to a Roman road also raises the possibility of archaeological remains of the Roman period to be present within the site boundaries.

Geophysical work conducted as part of the Birmingham Roman Roads Project was undertaken on the site to investigate the possibility of the Roman road from Droitwich to Metchley crossing the Wood Brook at this point. The road itself was not identified, though the presence of landscape features possibly relating to previous farming or drainage was noted (Leather 1996, 104).

4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principle aim of the project was to assess the survival and potential significance of any archaeology within the study area.

More specific aims were to:

- Inspect the stream banks prior to commencement of works to locate and record any archaeological remains (particularly burnt mounds)
- Observe all the groundworks, including topsoil, grading stream banks and preparatory works for path construction

5 METHOD

All groundworks were monitored at the site by suitably qualified archaeologists. Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-forma record cards for contexts and features, by scale plans and

sections, and monochrome print, colour slide and colour print photography. No archaeological excavation was undertaken other than cleaning, and all stratigraphic deposits were recorded even where no archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

6 RESULTS

No archaeological features or deposits were identified in the banks of the Wood Brook prior to the commencement of the groundworks, nor during the monitoring of the topsoil stripping.

The grading of the stream bank at the eastern end of the site between the bridge and the Bristol Road had a steep slope, and did not widen the existing width of the brook by any great extent (Fig 3, Plate 1). In the section, natural deposits were identified, with gravels at the base overlain by grey silty alluvial deposits. These were overlain in turn by a dirty red clay redeposited natural and brown silt topsoil. Land drains at regular intervals were identified cutting these layers, and running into the water course.

Plate 1

To the northwest of the bridge (Fig. 3) the grading of the southern bank became wider (Plate 2). Several sections along the course of the stream were recorded, with a representative example of the stratigraphy represented in S.1 (Fig. 4). At the base red clay was identified

(1000), overlain by grey sand, silt and gravel layer **(1001)**, which was in turn overlain by a grey green sand silt alluvial layer **(1002)**. This was overlain by a red brown silt sand **(1003)**, which was sealed by the topsoil layer (**1004**, Plate 3). Though the depths of the deposits undulated slightly, this stratigraphy continued through most of the length of the brook.

Plate 2

Plate 3

At the northwestern end of the site ceramic land drains were identified cutting the red clay natural. The red clay and the land drains were directly overlain by approximately a metre of mixed red clay, orange gravel and yellow sand redeposited natural, which in turn was overlain by the topsoil. In this area, evidence of significant landscaping was evident (Plate 4).

Plate 4

No archaeological features or deposits were identified during the monitoring. The topsoil contained fragments of brick, tile and post-medieval pottery that were not retained.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No archaeological features or deposits were identified during this watching brief. Analysis of the maps (Fig. 5) illustrates the extent of the previous diversions to the brook in this area, and the redeposited natural and landscaping identified at the northwest end of the site is likely to relate to these episodes.

It is possible that the land drains identified at the southeast end of the site closest to the Bristol Road relate to the geophysical anomalies identified during the survey conducted by the Birmingham Roman Road Project, as no other archaeological features were identified in this area.

The alluvial deposits recorded at the site can be compared with the context of burnt mounds elsewhere in south Birmingham. The potential of these deposits to mask and preserve archaeological features allows for the presence and survival of burnt stone sites elsewhere in the immediate vicinity of the site. The potential for associated palaeo-environmental remains, as recorded at Cob Lane (Hodder 2002) to the south of the site, also exists within the immediate vicinity of the site at Weoley Hill Park.

It is possible that archaeological evidence relating to burnt mounds is survives on the north bank of the Wood Brook, as its original course may have been further to the north.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Alan Smith of ALS Landscape Architecture Ltd, on behalf of Bournville Village Trust. Thanks are due to Kelvin Laidlaw for his co-operation and assistance throughout the project and to Stuart and George of Simon Tranter Landscapes Ltd. Thanks also go to Dr Mike Hodder, Planning Archaeologist, who monitored the project on behalf of Birmingham City Council. The watching brief was conducted by Andy Gittins and Eleanor Ramsey, who produced the written report which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds, and edited by John Halsted. Alex Jones monitored the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

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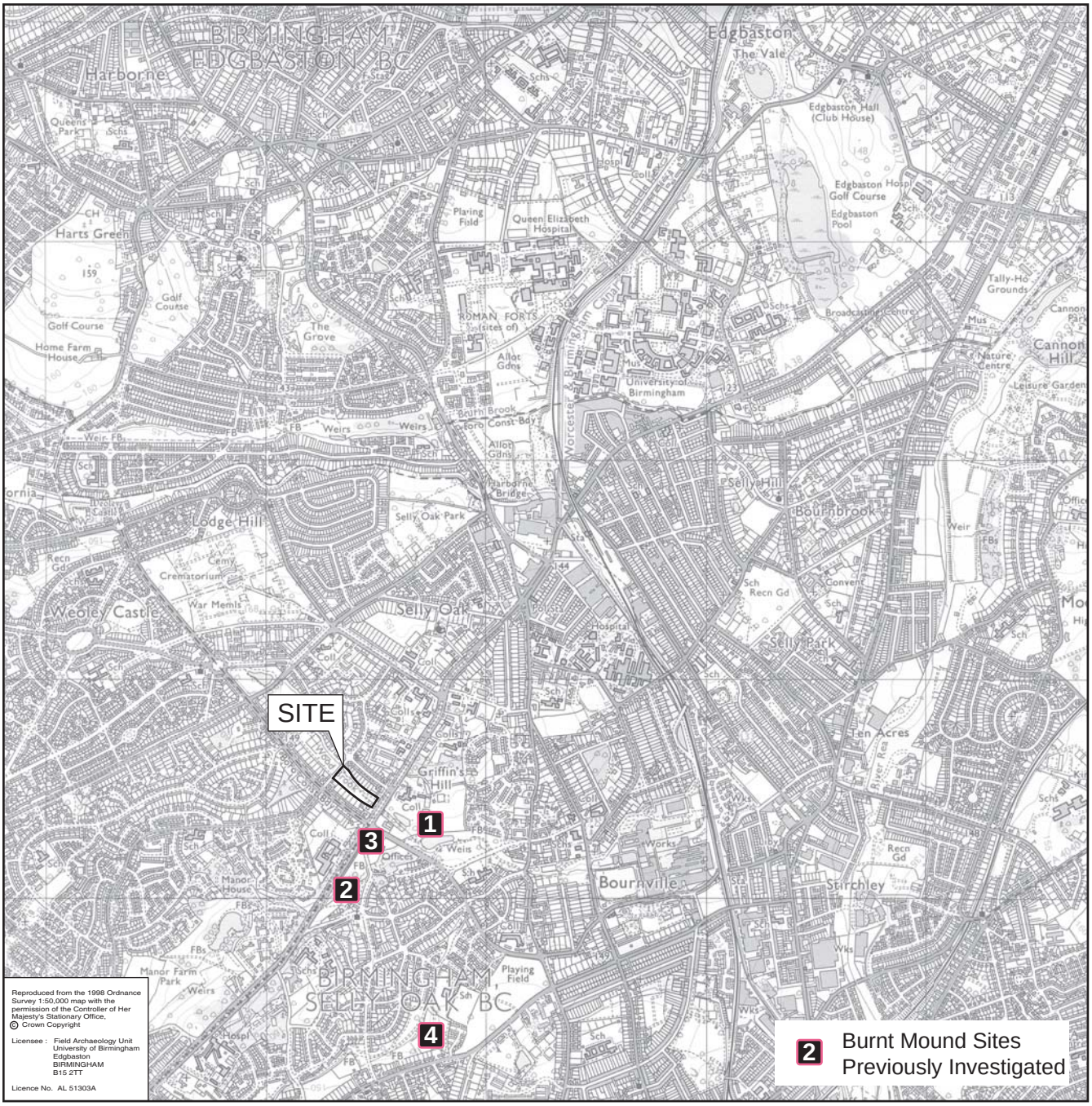
SITE
1
2
3
4
2 Burnt Mound Sites Previously Investigated
Reproduced from the 1998 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office,
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Edgbaston
BIRMINGHAM
B15 2TT
Licence No. AL 51303A

Fig.1

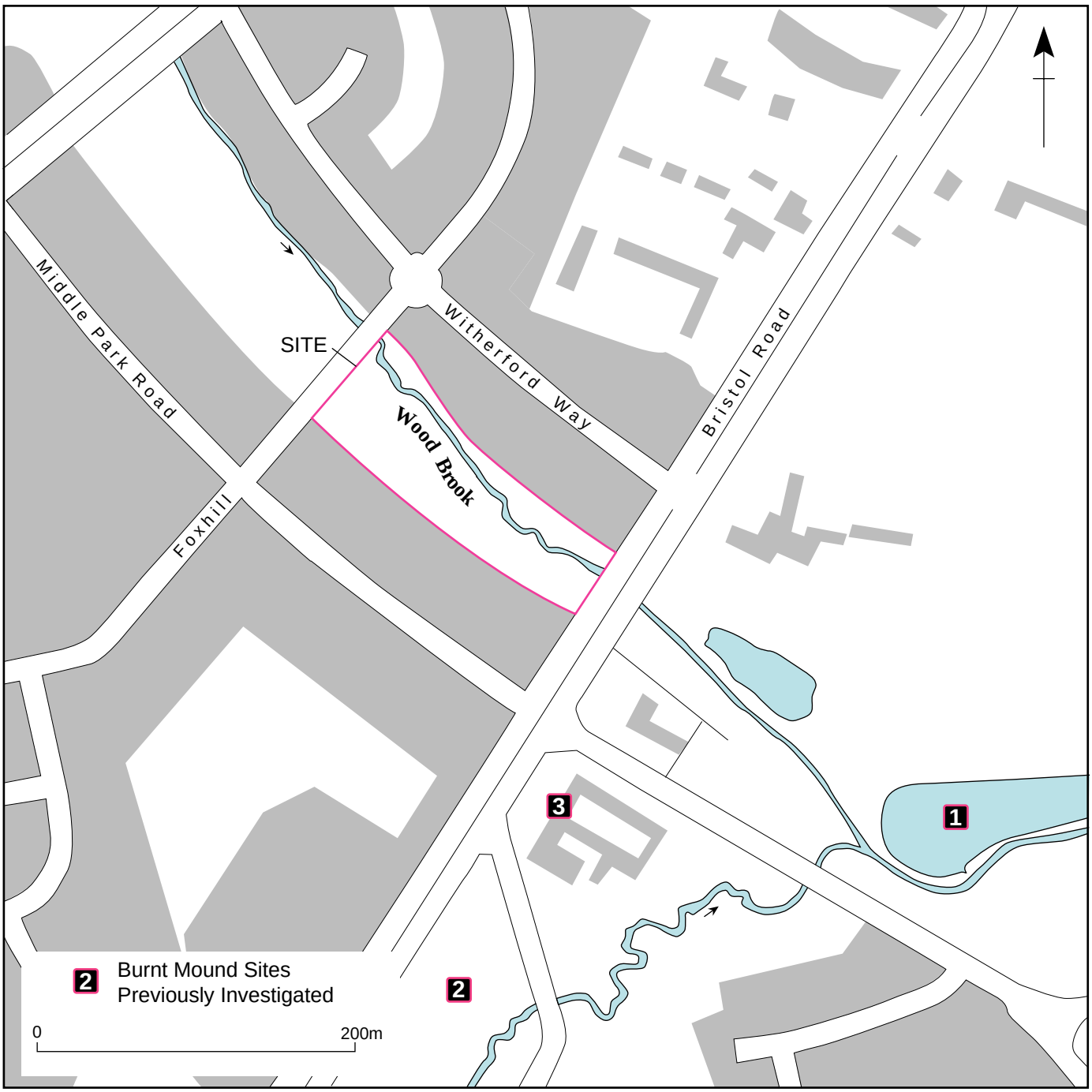
Middle Park Road
SITE
Witherford Way
Bristol Road
Wood Brook
Foxhill
3
1
2
Burnt Mound Sites
Previously Investigated
2
0
200m

Fig.2

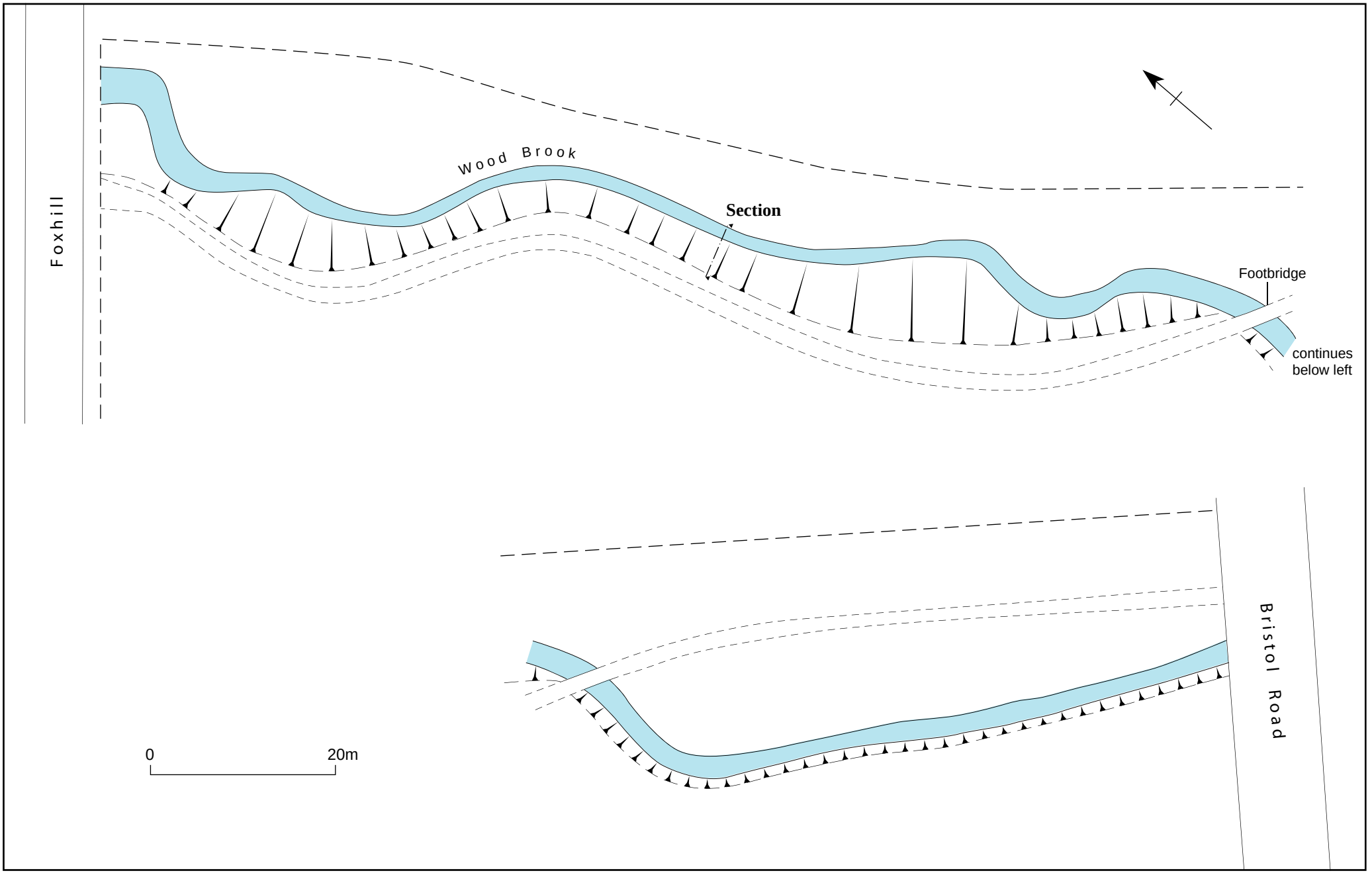
Foxhill
Wood Brook
Section
Footbridge
continues
below left
Bristol Road
0
20m

Fig.3

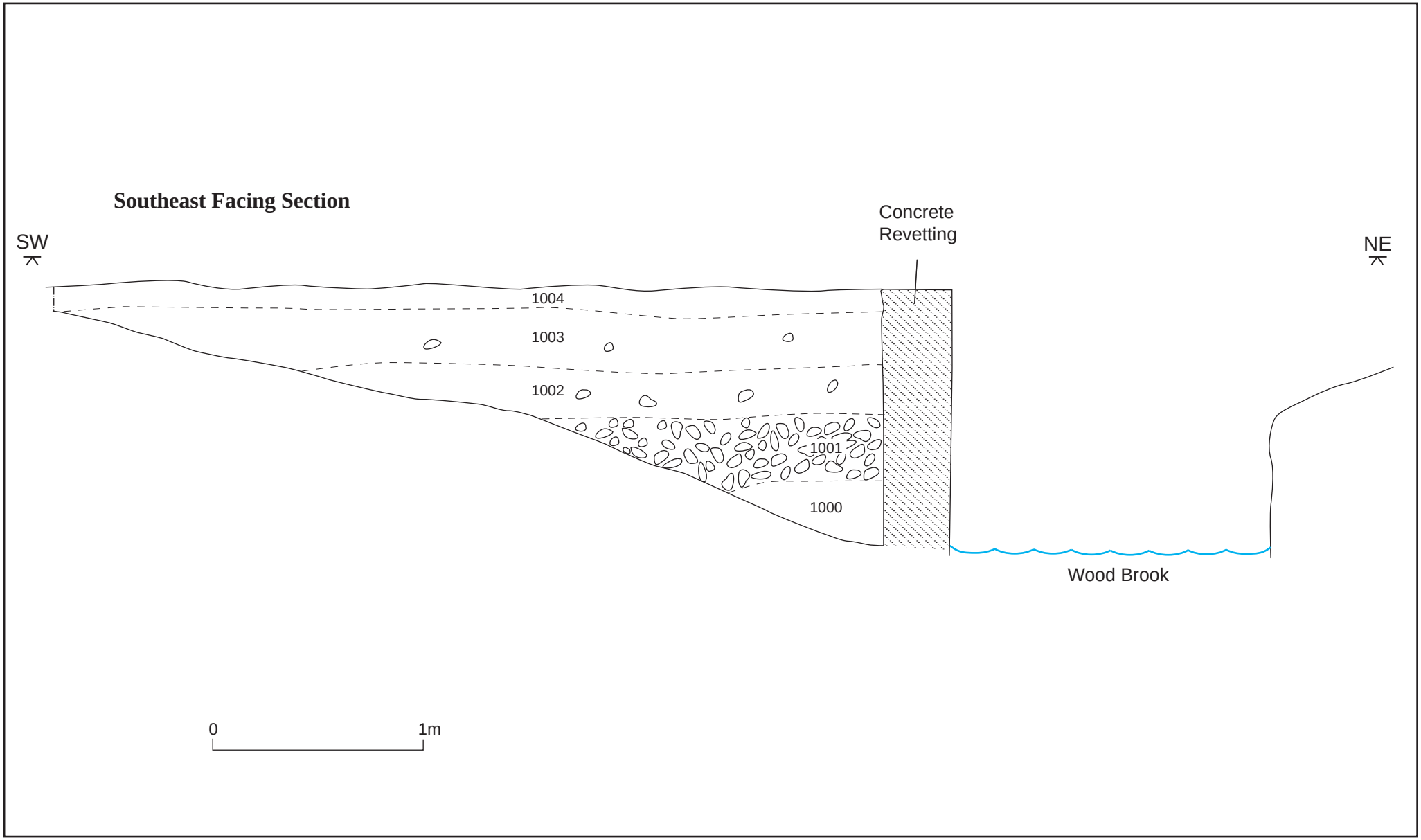
Southeast Facing Section
SW
NE
Concrete
Revetting
1004
1003
1002
1001
1000
Wood Brook
0
1m

Fig.4


1884
Birmingham
Bromsgrove
695
5·936
694
8·765
703
5·145
704
·668
B.M.452·7
458
453
462
1937
Parkway
2209
3·475
F.P.
F.B.
2210
2213
7·110
2212
·586
Slaice
Weir
TRAMW
478
461
1966
WITHERFORD WAY
MIDDLE PARK ROAD
BRISTOL ROAD
Garage
Pond

Fig.5