

**An Archaeological Watching
Brief at Hints Quarry, Hints,
Staffordshire 2005**

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**Hints Quarry, Hints, Staffordshire,
An Archaeological Watching Brief 2005**

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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT HINTS QUARRY, HINTS,
STAFFORDSHIRE 2005**

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was carried out in April/May 2005 at Hints Quarry, Hints, Staffordshire (centred on NGR SK 1650 0400). The watching brief was conducted by Birmingham Archaeology on behalf of Tarmac Ltd., during topsoil stripping in advance of mineral extraction in two discrete areas within the quarry. The only archaeological feature identified was a possible hearth-pit, which contained a few sherds of Romano-British pottery, and a large amount of heat-shattered and cracked pebbles. A flint scraper and a flint flake of unknown prehistoric date were also recovered during the watching brief.

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Hints Quarry, Hints, Staffordshire 2005

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of a watching brief carried out in April/May 2005 at Hints Quarry, Hints, Staffordshire (Fig. 1). The work was required as a condition of planning permission granted by Staffordshire County Council, and took place during the topsoil strip in two discrete areas within the quarry (Fig. 2). The archaeological monitoring was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology under commission from Tarmac Ltd.

The watching brief was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology (Birmingham Archaeology 2005; reproduced as Appendix 1), and conformed to the guidelines set down in the document 'Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs' (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

2.0 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

Hints Quarry is located at NGR SK 1650 0400 immediately to the north of the village of Hints, which lies to the west of the town of Tamworth (Fig. 1).

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A desk-based survey was carried out by Entec Ltd in order to assess the potential impact on archaeological remains of proposed extensions to the quarry. The survey identified a set of cropmarked features of possible Romano-British date adjoining Buck's Head Farm (Fig. 1; SMR 01416), which is located approximately 1km to the west of the quarry. A cropmark enclosure (SMR 01414) and a linear cropmark (SMR 01415), both of uncertain date, have been recorded in the area around Buck's Head Cottages, about 400m to the northwest of the quarry, and cropmarks of unspecified date are also recorded about 500m to the east (SMR 01680). The survey did not identify any features of archaeological interest within the quarry itself, or within the areas of proposed quarry extensions. A stray find of Roman date (SMR 01698) is recorded within the quarry at NGR SK 1600 0450. The location of this find is given as uncertain, so it is possible that it came from outside the quarry. The quarry is located approximately 500m to the north of the A5, which follows the route of the Roman road Watling Street (Margary 1967, route 1, fig. 12), along which a change of alignment is recorded in the vicinity of the quarry.

Archaeological trial trenching has been carried out within the quarry by Birmingham Archaeology in 2003 in connection with the A5 Weeford-Fazeley improvement. No archaeological features were identified during this exercise.

Medieval and later activity was focused on the village of Hints immediately to the south of the A5.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The topsoil was removed using a 360 degree mechanical excavator, equipped with a 2m ditching bucket, working under archaeological supervision. The exposed subsoil was then inspected for any archaeological features. Any features, or possible features were hand-

cleaned, hand-excavated and recorded. Recording of archaeological features was by means of pre-printed pro-formas, supplemented by plans and sections, and digital colour photographs. These records, along with the finds, comprise the site archive, which will be deposited with Stoke on Trent Museum, subject to approval from the landowner.

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 Area 1 (Fig. 2)

Area 1 comprised a large, irregularly-shaped field located on high ground (at 145m-151m AOD) towards the eastern side of the quarry.

In Area 1 the subsoil exposed by machining consisted of a reddish-brown slightly clayey sand, which contained small to medium sized gravel pebbles. The only archaeological feature identified was a possible hearth pit (1002) located towards the southeast corner of the area (Figs. 3-4, Plate 1). The pit measured 1.20m (north-south) by 0.70m (east-west) and had a depth of 0.30m. It was backfilled with grey-brown, slightly clayey sand (1003) and contained a high percentage of small to medium sized pebbles, a large proportion of which were heat-shattered or showed signs of heat damage. A few sherds of Romano-British pottery were also recovered from the fill of 1002 (see Evans below).

The topsoil measured 0.3m in depth.

5.2 Area 2

Area 2 comprised the southeastern corner of a large field situated on lower lying ground (105m-120m AOD), towards the western side of the quarry.

The subsoil was a light brown, and, in some areas, reddish-brown, sand. No archaeological features were identified within the area. There was evidence, in the form of narrow, linear plough scrapes filled with topsoil, for deep modern ploughing in Area 2.

The degree of this truncation was suggested by a greater depth of topsoil (up to 0.50m in depth) recorded underneath the field boundary on the southwestern side of the field. The topsoil in the remainder of Area 2 again measured 0.3m in depth.

A flint scraper and a flint flake were recovered from the topsoil towards the southwestern corner of Area 2.

5.3 Pottery by C. Jane Evans

The watching brief produced six sherds of Romano-British pottery, all body sherds, all from feature 1002. Five were in sandy reduced wares, probably made fairly locally. The fabrics were not analysed in detail but four fabrics appear to be represented, all broadly consistent with the range of fabrics noted at Whitemoor Haye (Hancocks 2002, 53; Evans forthcoming). One sherd was from a Malvernian tubby cooking pot (Peacock 1967; Tomber and Dore 1998, 147, pl.

120). This was also noted at Whitemoor Haye although it was not common; for example, only one sherd was included amongst the 1102 sherds of Romano-British pottery from excavations at Whitemoor Haye in 2000 and 2003. Malvernian tubby cooking pots are found across the region on sites dating to the 1st and 2nd century. This sherd therefore provides some dating evidence for the assemblage. It also provides evidence that the occupants of the site had access to wider trade networks.

One sherd shows clear evidence of use in cooking, having burnt residues on the interior. The survival of this also suggests that there is good preservation on the site.

6.0 DISCUSSION

The only archaeological feature identified during the watching brief consisted of a possible hearth pit (1002) located towards the southeastern corner of Area 1. The pit contained a few sherds of Romano-British pottery and a large amount of heat-shattered pebbles. It is unusual not to find other settlement evidence in association with a hearth. It is possible that any associated features may have been of a less substantial nature than the hearth and could have been removed by later agricultural activity. Alternatively, the hearth may be an outlier to related settlement located nearby - perhaps in one of the areas that have already been quarried, immediately to the south and west of Area 1. Alternatively, it could have been associated with occasional use of the area by communities based further afield. Possible Romano-British cropmark features (SMR 01416) have been recorded adjoining Buck's Head Farm to the west of the quarry. More extensive field systems of Romano-British date have been identified by archaeological work in advance of the A5 Weeford-Fazeley improvement.

A flint scraper and a flint flake of unknown prehistoric date were recovered from the topsoil towards the southwestern corner of Area 2. No sites of prehistoric date are recorded for the area within or immediately adjoining the quarry.

There was evidence for deep modern ploughing in Area 2. Any relatively shallow archaeological features located in this area would probably have been removed by this activity.

The watching brief has shown that there is some potential for archaeological features of Romano-British date to be discovered within the quarry. A wider context for this activity is provided by the nearby Watling Street, and possibly by the adjoining cropmarked sites. Further watching briefs may therefore identify other, albeit low-levels of Romano-British activity. However, because of the severity of modern ploughing, it is possible that such features could have been entirely scoured-out. The value of the discoveries made during the 2005 watching brief is emphasised by the relative paucity of artifacts from the surrounding area.

7.0 REFERENCES

Birmingham Archaeology 2005 *Hints Quarry, Hints, Staffordshire Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief.*

Coates, G, 2002 *A Prehistoric and Romano-British Landscape: Excavations at Whitemoor Haye Quarry, Staffordshire, 1997-1999.* Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit Monograph Series 5. British Archaeological Reports, British series, 340, Oxford, Archaeopress.

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Margary, I D, 1967 Roman Roads in Britain.

Peacock, D P S, 1967, 'Romano-British Pottery Production in the Malvern District of Worcestershire.' *Trans. Worcestershire Archaeol. Soc.*, 3rd Series. 1 (1965-7), 15-28.

Tomber, R, and Dore, J, 1998, *The National Roman Fabric Reference Collection. A Handbook.* MoLAS Monograph 2.

8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The watching brief was commissioned by Staffordshire County Council, and was monitored by Stephen Dean of the Historic Record Office. Thanks are due to Chris Jarman the manager at Hints Quarry and also to the contractors Powerplant Excavations Ltd. for their help and co-operation on site. The watching brief was carried out by Derek Moscrop who also wrote the report, which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds. Alex Jones monitored the project on behalf of Birmingham Archaeology and edited this report.

APPENDIX 1

HINTS QUARRY, HINTS, STAFFORDSHIRE WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the programme of work required to undertake a watching brief at the above site. It forms a written scheme of investigation required as part of the planning permission granted by Staffordshire CC. Any variation in the scope of work would be agreed with the Planning Archaeologist, Staffordshire CC, before implementation.

The work will be carried out during the topsoil strip and mechanical excavation associated with quarrying within the existing Hints quarry, operated by Tarmac Ltd. The watching brief relates to two discrete areas (see plan).

2.0 AIMS

The general aim of the watching brief is to monitor all elements of the topsoil strip likely to affect below-ground remains.

3.0 THE SITE

Entec Ltd. prepared the archaeological section of the Environmental Impact Statement. At that stage the county SMR, Record Office and secondary archaeological and historical data was consulted. The assessment indicated that there were no scheduled ancient monuments or listed buildings within the area proposed for quarrying, or in the immediately adjoining area. The nearest listed building is at Buck's Head Farm (SMR 13985/ 148403891). The county SMR indicates the location of a stray find of Roman date (01698) at NGR SK 16000450, although the location of this find cannot be confirmed. Other identified archaeological sites, located outside the quarry application area were also noted in the assessment, including possible Romano-British cropmarked features adjoining Buck's Head Farm (SMR 1416). Medieval and later activity was focused on the village of Hints to the south of the A5, which is on the route of Watling Street. Archaeological trial-trenching carried out by Birmingham Archaeology during 2003 in connection with the A5 Weeford-Fazeley improvement, within the quarry, failed to identify any features, or possible features.

4.0 METHOD

The archaeological watching brief will involve:

- 1) archaeological monitoring during the removal of soil and overburden.
- 2) Inspection of the subsoil for archaeological features.
- 3) Rapid cleaning and hand-testing of any features/possible features identified.
- 4) Archaeological monitoring during the machine excavation of subsoils.
- 5) Examination of spoil heaps for archaeological finds.
- 6) Preparation of an illustrated report describing the results of the fieldwork.

These aims will be achieved through archaeological observation during the removal of overburden in two areas (see plan for locations).

Should significant and unexpected finds be made, the area surrounding such remains will be left undisturbed pending discussions with the Planning Archaeologist, Staffordshire CC as to the resources required for their proper investigation.

Any items of suspected treasure will be reported to the appropriate authority in accordance with the Treasure Act 1996.

No excavation of human remains would be undertaken until the local Coroner and Police were informed and a Home Office Licence obtained. Excavation of human skeletal material would follow current IFA and other guidelines.

Recording will be by means of pre-printed pro-formas, supplemented by plans (1:50), and sections (1:20). A photographic record will be maintained using colour print and monochrome print photography.

All artifacts will be recovered and recorded. All project staff will adhere to the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. The project will follow the requirements set down in the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

Access to the site may be required by the Staffordshire CC Planning Archaeologist for the purpose of monitoring the archaeological watching brief and its results. In the event that significant, or potentially significant finds/features of archaeological interest are identified the Staffordshire CC Planning Archaeologist would be consulted to decide if further, more intensive archaeological fieldwork was appropriate.

5.0 STAFFING

The fieldwork will be managed for Birmingham Archaeology by Alex Jones.

Specialist staff will be, where appropriate:

Dr James Greig - pollen and plant macro-fossils.

Stephanie Ratkai - medieval and post-medieval pottery.

6.0 REPORT

The results of the archaeological fieldwork will be described in an illustrated report, which will contain the following:

- 1) non-technical summary
- 2) aims and methods of the watching brief.
- 3) description of the archaeological background.
- 4) a narrative description of the results and discussion of the evidence, set in their local and regional context, supported by appropriate plans and sections.
- 5) summary of the finds and environmental evidence.
- 6) summary of the archive.

The report will be copied to the quarry operator, the County Council, and the NMR.

The written report will be made publicly accessible, as part of the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record within six months of completion. A summary report will be submitted for inclusion in West Midlands Archaeology.

Additionally, the Staffordshire CC Activity and Source Submission form will be completed.

7.0 ARCHIVE

The site archive will be prepared according to the guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects (English Heritage) and the Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long Term Storage (UKIC, 1990), and Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections (Museums and Galleries Commission, 1992).

8.0 TIMETABLE

The programme of archaeological attendance is dependent on the general groundworks programme, which is not presently available. An illustrated report will be completed within two weeks of the completion of the on-site watching brief.

9.0 HEALTH AND SAFETY

A risk assessment will be undertaken before fieldwork commences. On site field staff will be equipped with appropriate equipment – namely hard hat, boots and reflective jacket and will wear these on site at all times. Protective gloves will be available if required.

Birmingham Archaeology 20 April 2005.

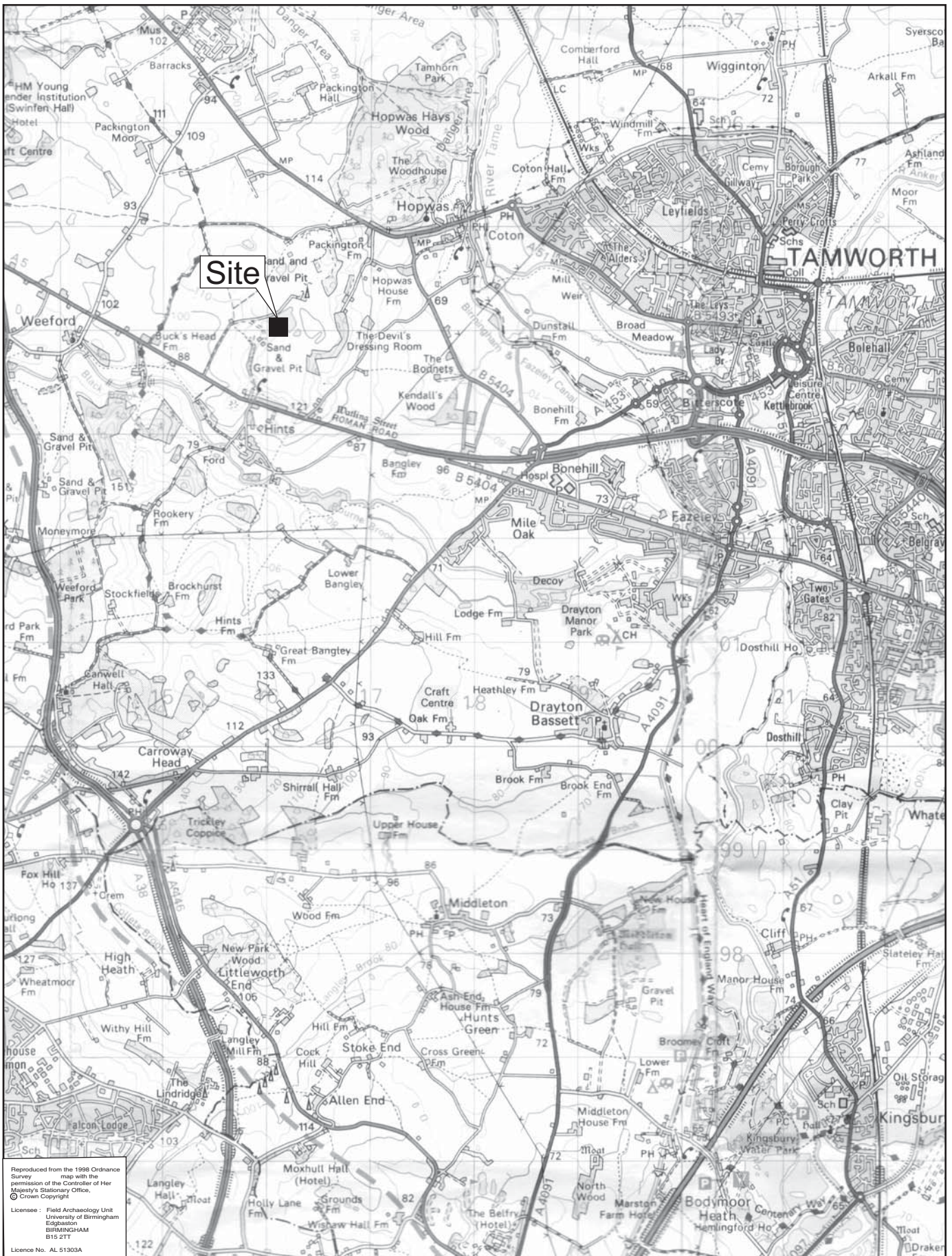


Fig.1

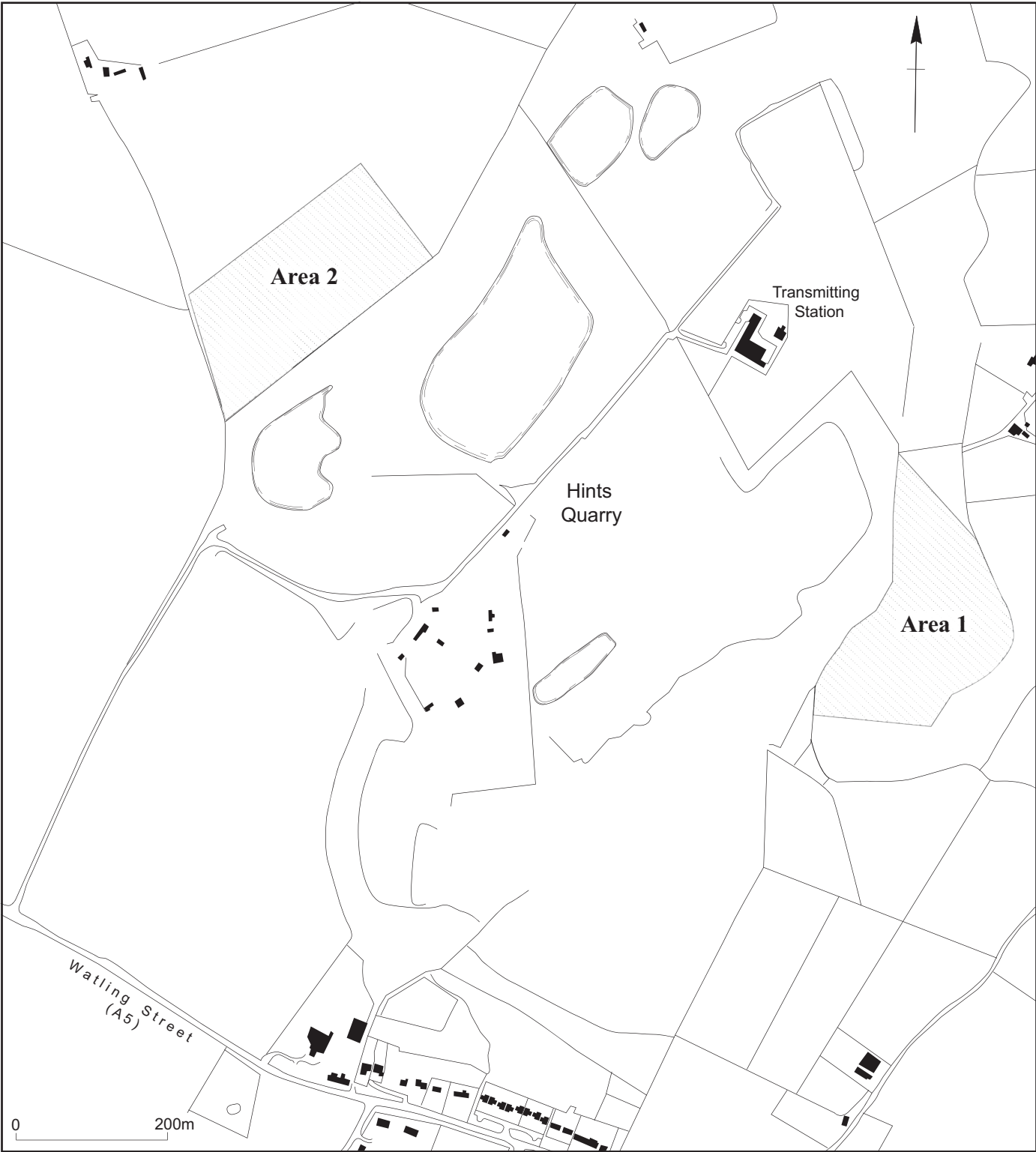


Fig.2

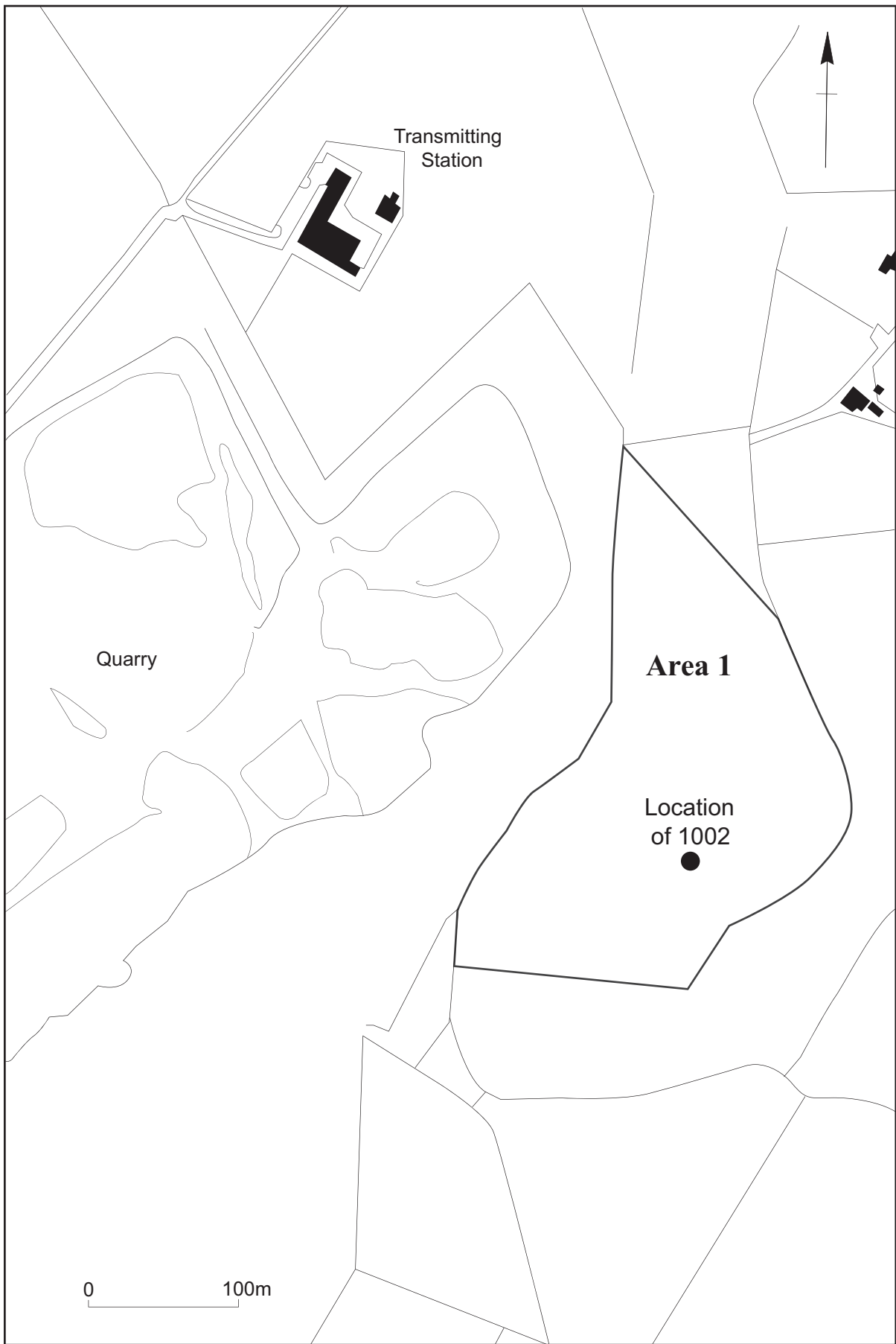


Fig.3

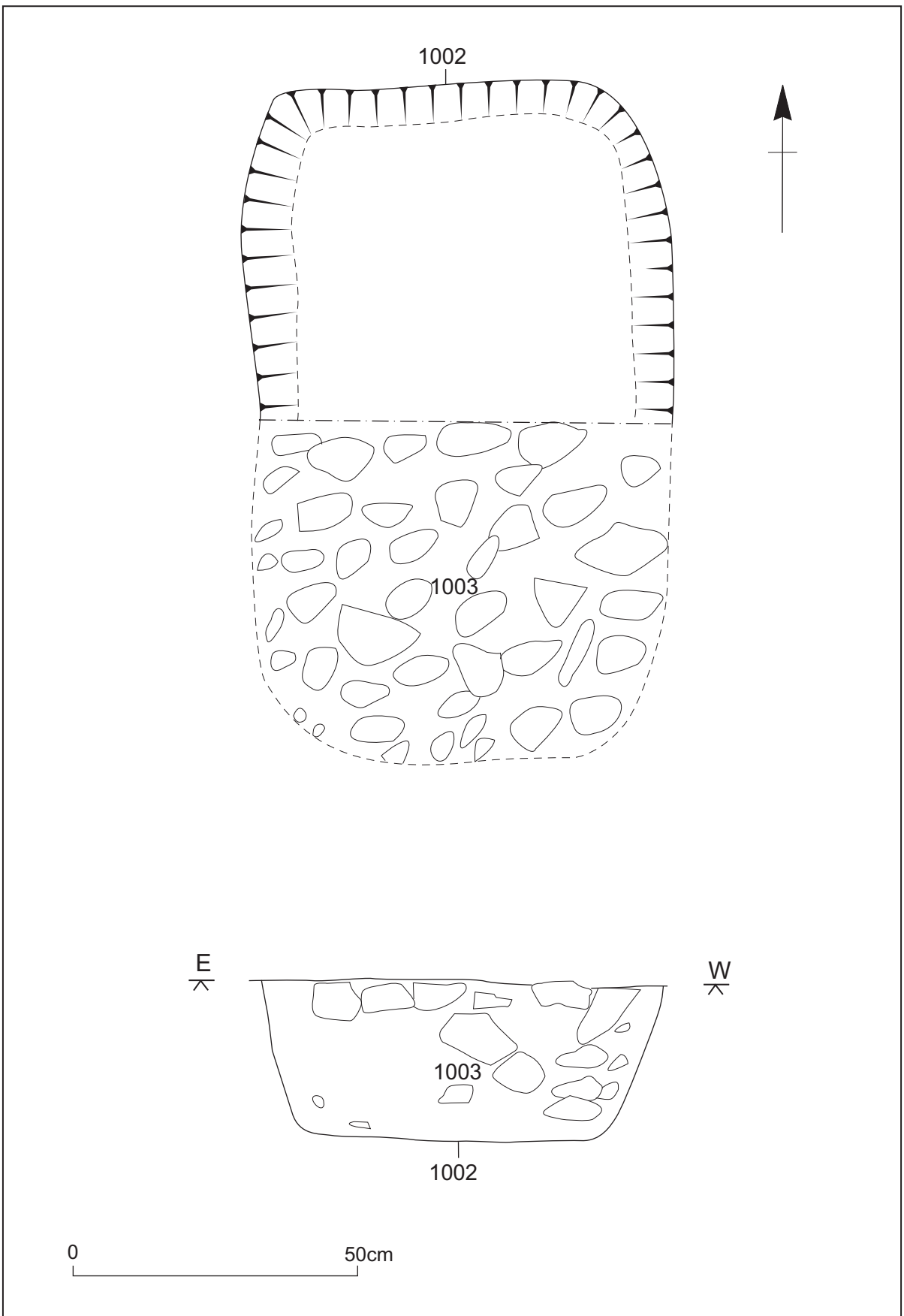




Plate 1