

**An Archaeological Watching
Brief on the site of
Altus Windows,
Church Hill Road, Wolvey,
Warwickshire 2005**

Project No. 1286

**An Archaeological Watching Brief on land at Altus Windows,
Church Hill Road, Wolvey, Warwickshire 2005**

By Eleanor Ramsey

For further information please contact:

Alex Jones (Director)
Birmingham Archaeology
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston

Birmingham B15 2TT

Tel: 0121 414 5513

Fax: 0121 414 5516

E-Mail: bham-arch@bham.ac.uk

Web Address: <http://www.barch.bham.ac.uk/bufau>

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief on land at Altus Windows, Church Hill Road, Wolvey, Warwickshire (NGR SP 443022 287880) was commissioned by George Stew Limited. The work was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology in March 2005, during the proposed redevelopment of the site.

The site itself is situated between the early medieval settlement focused around the Church of St. John the Baptist (SMR WMA 3594), and the mid-1200s development around the market to the south (SMR WMA 8905). Three phases of occupation were excavated. The earliest evidence suggested occupation by a small holding with toft containing an open fronted barn to the rear. This would have occupied the periphery of the early settlement of Wolvey at this time. Following the granting of a market charter in 1237 new burgages were laid out associated with the market place to the south of the site. Property boundaries were maintained and re-cut into the 15th century. There was no evidence for any early post-medieval occupation suggesting that it had reverted to pasture, this is further evidenced by the presence of a calf burial on the site.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken on the site of Altus Windows, Wolvey, Warwickshire (NGR SP 443022 287880). The work was commissioned by George Stew Limited and carried out by Birmingham Archaeology. The aim was to identify and record any archaeological features and deposits that would be affected by the proposed redevelopment of the site. The proposals were for the demolition of the Altus Windows factory and replacement with 7 dwellings. Also, the conversion of the extant bungalow to provide a further 2 dwellings.

The archaeological work complied with a brief prepared by Warwickshire Museum (2004) and a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology (2005). Guidelines set down in *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994) were adhered to.

2 SITE LOCATION

The site lies on the north-east side of the village of Wolvey, Warwickshire (SMR WMA 8898, Fig. 1). It is an irregularly shaped plot bounded to the west by Church Hill (the modern B4109), properties fronting The Square lie to the south, properties fronting School Lane lie to the east, and properties in Church Close to the north (NGR SP 443022 287880). The underlying geology is Oadby Till (British Geological Survey (England and Wales Sheet 169) Warwick, Solid and Drift Geology, 1994). A bungalow, and previously the Altus Window Factory, now demolished, occupied the western end of the site. The eastern end of the site was open ground.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Wolvey is located in a landscape known to be rich in archaeological remains, with a good and diverse concentration of sites dating from the early prehistoric period onwards. To the north of the village, on the northern ridge, overlooking the Anker Valley survives a relict prehistoric landscape that has been the focus of several seasons of investigations by Paul Garwood (Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, Birmingham University). A Bronze Age axehead (SMR WMA 3593) has also been found closer to the site on the southern bank of the Anker floodplain.

Wolvey was listed, and the church recorded, in the Domesday Survey. The village was originally part of the Combe Abbey estate. Medieval settlement appears to have initially

focused around the church (the Church of St John the Baptist, SMR WMA 3594) to the north-east of the study area (Fig. 2), which retains some of an earlier 12th century structure within its largely 19th century fabric. Pottery dating to the 12th and 13th centuries was recovered from graves that were excavated prior to the construction of the church hall, just to the south of the church. The church also retains structural features and furnishings from the 14th 15th and 17th centuries, which must be seen as evidence of wealth and prosperity in these periods.

The medieval settlement at Wolvey was mainly concentrated to the south of the church, on higher ground rising above the Anker valley (SMR WMA 8898). The village reveals evidence of a certain amount of planned development, with later development taking place around the market (SMR WMA 8905, south of the site) following the granting of a market charter by the Abbot of Combe in 1327. The market place is known today as The Square, and several sherds of medieval pottery, dating to the 13th and 14th centuries, were recovered from an archaeological watching brief, undertaken by Warwickshire Museum in November 2003, at No. 9 The Square. Evidence of medieval field systems (ridge and furrow) is still visible in some of the outlying fields.

In the post-medieval period the community had a thriving knitting industry, and nearly thirty windmills in the locale (Birmingham and Midland Society). A Baptist Chapel (SMR WMA 3575) was established just to the east of the site in 1789, it was extended in 1803, and a minister's house and schoolroom were added in 1834. This complex of buildings, as well as a small associated burial ground survives today. Other buildings of importance in the vicinity include the site of a Smithy (SMR WMA 3578) which was located just a few metres from the site on the corner of Church Hill Road and The Square, on the site of what is now a garage.

4 OBJECTIVES

The aims of the archaeological watching brief were:

- To monitor all below-ground works within the footprint of the new buildings and the access road.
- To record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains affected by the development works
- To identify all previously unrecorded sites in order to update the SMR
- To preserve all archaeological deposits 'by record', and conserve for long term conservation and future analysis all artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site

5 METHOD

The footprints of the seven houses were stripped under direct archaeological supervision, and the groundworks associated with the access road were also monitored.

A representative sample of all archaeological deposits and features identified were excavated. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded and a comprehensive written record maintained. Contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings, survey plan and colour slide and print photography. These, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive.

6 RESULTS (FIG. 3)

The results of the excavation can be placed into 4 phases of activity on the basis of the date of the pottery, the development of property boundaries on the site, and the principles of archaeological stratigraphy. All identified features cut the natural subsoil, and were sealed by a layer of topsoil approximately 0.5m deep.

6.1 Phase 1: 12th-13th Century

Two ditches, likely to be property boundaries, at right angles to one another appear to define the northern and eastern sides of a small plot fronting on to Church Hill. Ditch 1036 was 0.4m wide and 0.16m deep with sloping sides and a flat base. It contained a single sherd of 12th-13th century pottery. Ditch 1030 was aligned roughly north-south, its western edge was truncated by modern deposits. However, a section excavated through the undisturbed eastern edge, determined that the feature was at least 0.9m deep, with steeply sloping sides (Plate 1).

To the rear of this plot lay the remains of a structure defined by three gullies (1026 and doglegged 1015). Gully 1026 was approximately 0.5m wide and 0.1m deep with a flat base, gully 1015 was approximately 0.6m wide with a V-shaped profile. The northern and southern gullies were roughly 10m apart, and were probably eaves drip gullies defining an open-fronted barn.

6.2 Phase 2: 1250-1300

A slight re-alignment of the property boundaries appears to have occurred some time in the mid-late 13th century. Two butt-ending ditches (1002 and 1004) that possibly represented an entrance through a boundary ditch were located in the northern part of area A. They were aligned roughly east-west, with the ends 1.5m apart. Ditch 1002 was 0.65m wide with a U-shaped profile, and contained 3 sherds of pottery datable to 1250-1300 (see Rátkai below) as well as 4 small fragments of tile which may have been intrusive. Ditch 1004 was of a similar width, although shallower with a flat base. To the north of ditch 1004 a group of three post-holes were identified (1006, 1008 and 1010) which may also be contemporary with this phase of occupation. Posthole 1006 was 0.25m in diameter, and 0.2m deep. Posthole 1008 was roughly 0.3m in diameter and 0.12m deep. Posthole 1010 was 0.6m in diameter, 0.36m deep and contained a fragment of medieval roof tile. All had a V-shaped profile.

Towards the frontage on to Church Hill was a third ditch (1038) lying parallel to those described above. It was 0.9m wide and 0.10m deep, and also had a flat base. The butt-end of a fourth ditch (1040) appeared to respect ditch 1038, although it was on a slightly skewed angled to it. This ditch (1040) was 0.6m wide and 0.38m deep with a U-shaped profile. No datable material was recovered from either of the latter two features.

Further south again was another ditch 1032, which had a V-shaped profile and was 0.6m wide and 0.4m deep (Plate 2). It continued eastwards where it had been cut by Phase 3 ditch 1024. It contained four sherds of medieval pottery dating to 1250-1300s (see Rátkai below).

6.3 Phase 3: 15th Century

This phase was characterised by larger ditches being dug across the site, again on a roughly east-west alignment. Ditch 1012 was 2.2m wide and 0.54m deep with a U-shaped profile and comprised two fills (1013 and 1014), a horn core was recovered from 1013 (see Hancox below). Parallel to this lay another roughly east-west aligned ditch (1024) which was approximately 1.2m wide and 0.55m deep with an asymmetrical V-shaped profile that became

steeper at the base, it contained a single sherd of 15th century pottery (see Rátkai below).

6.4 Phase 4: Modern/Undated

Due to a lack of stratigraphy, and no datable artefacts being recovered, pits 1028 and 1034 could not be phased. They were approximately 0.9m in diameter and 0.12m deep with flat bases. Similarly, two postholes (1019 and 1021) were undatable.

In the vicinity of ditch 1032 was a deposit that contained the remains of a calf (1046 see Hancox below) that partially overlay the upper ditch fill (1033). It was not possible to stratigraphically date this deposit, but it was similar in composition to the overlying topsoil which suggests that it was post-medieval in date.

To the south of Area A, were the foundations of a brick building (1023). At the western extent of the road strip the concrete foundations of the works that recently occupied the site were also exposed. To the north of these foundations, within the building, the machined level was higher as it corresponded to the path adjacent to the road, and therefore no archaeological features were exposed.

7 POTTERY SPOT DATING AND CATALOGUE BY STEPHANIE RÁTKAI

1003 Ditch 1002 c 1250-1300

1 x Chilvers Coton A bowl sherd (WCTS WW01)
2 x Coventry-type cooking pot sherds (WCTS Sq 20.2)
4 x cbm (brick or floor tile) intrusive?

1010 medieval

1 x cbm (brick or floor tile)

1025 Ditch 1024 15th c

1 x Chilvers Coton C bowl sherd, internal tan glaze (WCTS Sq30)

1031, Ditch 1030 13th c

1 x grano-diorite tempered sherd (WCTS StR11)

1033 Ditch 1032 c 1250-1300

1 x Chilvers Coton A bowl rim-body sherd (WCTS WW01)
1 x Chilvers Coton A jug body sherd (WCTS WW01)
2 x grano-diorite tempered cooking pot sherd (WCTS StR11)

1037 ditch 1036 12th-13th c

1 x shelly ware (WCTS CS02)

Cleaning 13th c?

1 x siltstone/mudstone-tempered cooking pot sherd (WCTS StR20.1)

7.1 Discussion of the Pottery

The majority of the fabrics originate in north Warwickshire, that is the Coventry type wares, the Chilvers Coton wares, and the granitic ware. However, the pottery from Wolvey forms a

distinct group with some fabrics not recorded or infrequently found elsewhere in the county (Rátkai 1998). At least 3 of the sherds appear to contain temper derived from volcanic sources and it is suggested that these sources lie within the area of the Caldecote Volcanic series, north of Nuneaton and within 11 kilometers of Wolvey. This fabric has previously been noted in other excavations in Wolvey, it has been found at Burton Dassett and is fabric StR11 in the county pottery type series (Soden 1998).

A second fabric, of which there was only sherd from this excavation, is predominantly siltstone/mudstone tempered. However, interestingly it is not the usual Chilvers Coton B fabric which is similarly tempered. This fabric occurs at Bascote, near Southam (Rátkai forthcoming) where it was recorded as StR20? ie a possible variant of the Chilvers Coton B fabric. The evidence from Wolvey would now tend to suggest that this is indeed a separate fabric.

The remainder of the pottery could be divided into two main groups:

1) Sand temper (code Sq and WW). Some of the sherds in this group could be sourced eg Chilvers Coton A (code WW01), Chilvers Coton C (code Sq30), Coventry type sandy ware (code Sq202).

2) Calcareous temper. A single sherd of shell tempered ware (coded CS02 in the county type series), the most likely source for these is Northamptonshire.

The range of pottery suggests normal peasant domestic occupation in the later 13th or early 14th century.

8 ANIMAL BONE BY EMMA HANCOX

A small amount of bone was hand collected from the site. The material came from six contexts, 1010, 1013, 1025, 1046, 1038 and 1040. The cortical integrity of the bone was mostly fair/good but the majority of the contexts produced bone that was extremely fragmented. Butchery, in the form of cut marks, was noted in all contexts except 1033. No evidence of pathology, burning or gnawing was found.

Twenty five countable elements were recorded, twenty three cattle, one sheep/goat and one pig. A single cattle tibia from context 1010 was complete enough for measurements to be taken, but no ageable mandibles were recorded.

The 15 cattle bones recorded in context 1046 were all very juvenile calf bones and probably relate to a single individual. A range of skeletal elements were recovered in this context and it is possible that these bones represent the entire buried skeleton of a calf.

Context 1013 produced a partial cattle horncore with a number of cut marks around the base, revealing that the horn had been removed. This may indicate the working of horn in the vicinity of the site, and is perhaps evidence of a small cottage industry.

9 SMALL FINDS BY ERICA MACEY-BRACKEN

A small number of finds in other materials was recovered from the site including slag, window glass and ceramic and stone tile. The material was quantified by count and was examined

macroscopically for the purposes of this report. The material was fragmentary, although individual pieces are largely unabraded suggesting that they were from primary deposits.

Table of Small Finds:

Context	Slag	Window Glass	Ceramic Tile	Stone Tile
1017	1	1	-	-
1025	-	-	1	-
1031	2	-	-	1
1033	8	-	-	-
1035	-	-	1	-

Most of the material was undiagnostic, although the two tile fragments (1025, 1035) may be of medieval date. The slag was a mixture of ferrous and non-ferrous tap slag. Neither the stone tile fragment, nor the fragment of window glass were of any diagnostic use, but a degree of iridescence was noted on the glass.

10 DISCUSSION

The site lies between the early settlement of Wolvey, which was focused around the Church of St. John the Baptist to the north-east (SMR WMA 3594) and the later development around the market (SMR WMA 8905) located to the south. The archaeological evidence uncovered during the watching revealed that in the early period (Phase 1) there was a small plot on the frontage of the main road which was defined by property boundaries. The rear of the plot was an open fronted barn which may have been associated with a toft. During this period the property was probably a small holding on the periphery of the settlement proper which was focused around the church.

Following the granting of a market charter by the Abbot of Combe in 1327, and the establishment of the market place (the modern day Square to the south of the site, Fig. 2) there appears to have been a realigning of properties across the site (Phase 2). Three ditches (1002, 1004 and 1038) appear to define a long thin property, typical of burgage-style plots of this date. These features all produced pottery dating between 1250-1300.

Some time in the 15th century the property boundaries were once again redefined (Phase 3), with wider ditches being excavated. The re-cutting of the Phase 2 ditch 1032 shows continuity and longevity of this boundary to the rear of properties fronting on to The Square. There was no evidence for any early post-medieval occupation suggesting that land on the site had reverted to pasture, this is further evidenced by the presence of the calf burial.

The watching brief has demonstrated that there was apparent continuity of settlement from the 12th century onwards across the site. It also revealed evidence for the realignment of properties following the granting of the market charter to Wolvey. Overall, survival of the remains was good, and it is not unrealistic to expect further archaeology to survive in pockets across the site that will be preserved in-situ by the new development.

11 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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12 REFERENCES

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Fig.1



Fig.2

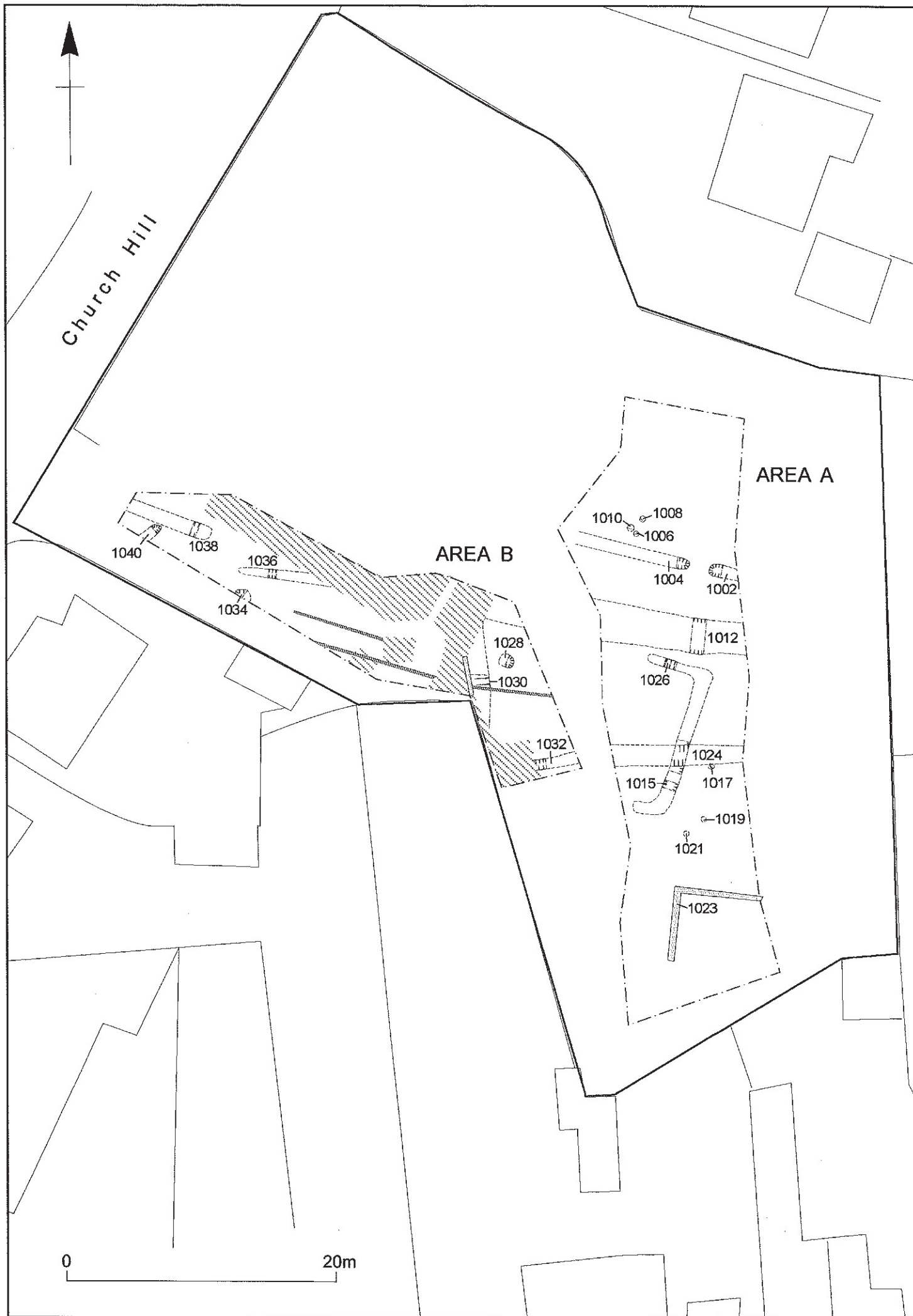


Fig.3



Plate 1



Plate 2