

Longdales Road,  
Birmingham  
Archaeological Watching Brief  
2004

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Longdales Road, Birmingham  
Archaeological Watching Brief 2004

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF 2004**

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# **Longdales Road, Kings Norton, Birmingham**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief 2004**

### **1.0: SUMMARY**

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during the construction of roads and other groundworks for the new cemetery at Longdales Road, Birmingham (centred on NGR SP 05337761). The fieldwork was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology on instruction from Birmingham City Council. The watching brief followed trial-trenching, and area excavation of two Romano-British ditched enclosure complexes, the larger interpreted as a livestock compound. These enclosures adjoined the course of Icknield Street, and other complimentary elements of the Roman landscape, including contemporary field boundaries remaining in use, which have also been recorded by archaeological excavation.

A number of archaeological features, including ditches, pebble surfaces and a possible eaves-drip gully were identified during the watching brief, which investigated areas outside the previous excavations and trial-trenches. A total of 50 sherds of Roman pottery was recovered during the watching brief. The diagnostic material was of later 3rd or 4th century date.

### **2.0: INTRODUCTION**

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief maintained during groundworks preparatory to the construction of infrastructure for a new cemetery at Longdales Road, Kings Norton, Birmingham undertaken during 2004 (centered on NGR. SP 05337761; Fig. 1). Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned to undertake the archaeological watching brief by Birmingham City Council, in accordance with the guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of the Environment, November 1990) and Policy 8.36 of the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan. This report provides a summary of the results of the watching brief. The fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with a Design Brief prepared by the Council (Birmingham City Council 2003), and a Specification prepared by Birmingham Archaeology (Birmingham Archaeology 2003), approved by the Planning Archaeologist, Birmingham City Council.

The site (Fig. 2) of the proposed cemetery is bounded by Longdales Road, Icknield Street and Primrose Hill. Before development the land was overgrown pasture.

The development site is bounded by Icknield Street to the east, which follows the line of a Roman road. Just outside the site boundary is Lilycroft Farm, thought to be of medieval origin and mentioned in a document of 13th century date. The farm is a grade II listed building, including fabric of late 17th and early 18th century date. Previous stages of work comprised a desk-based assessment, walkover survey, and trial-trenching carried out by Worcestershire County Council Archaeological Service (Vaughan 2002) in March 2002. The trial trenching involved machine-cut trenches in Fields 1-2 and 4, which revealed ditches, shallow gullies and some pits/post holes. These features were interpreted as forming a Romano-British settlement focus,

consisting of an enclosure complex to the west of Lilycroft Farm, with an associated ditched field system to the north.

Previous fieldwork by Birmingham Archaeology (Williams 2003) consisted of further trial trenching in Field 1, close to Icknield Street, to determine the extent of activity in this roadside zone, revealing ditches, pits and cobbled surfaces. Following further trial trenching, an open-area excavation (Area A) was undertaken in the southwest of the cemetery site, to investigate the Romano-British enclosure complex which was occupied from the 2nd to the 4th century AD. The sequence of Romano-British activity was divided into three phases. The earliest activity (Phase 1) consisted of three small ditches and a series of pits, largely concentrated in the south of the area excavated. Phase 2 comprised the majority of the features, including the outermost two enclosure ditches, as well as a ring gully and areas of stone surfacing. The latest Romano-British activity was formed by an inner enclosure ditch and an internal, rectangular stock enclosure, cut in Phase 3, possibly during a reduction in site activity. The trial-trenching and Area A excavation results are described in a post-excavation assessment (Williams 2003a), and the associated detailed specialist reports, site narrative and illustrations have been prepared.

The 2003 excavation (Williams 2003b, Area B) revealed remains of a Romano-British settlement dating from the 2nd-4th century AD, represented by three phases of activity. The earliest phase (Phase 1) consisted of a single enclosure ditch or field boundary, with smaller ditches and gullies dug outside the enclosed area. In Phase 2 two possible enclosure ditches were cut in the north of the area investigated; a further ditch, gully and pit were also contemporary. Also belonging to this phase were a number of structural remains, including beam-slots, cobbled surfaces, a ring gully and four post pads, possibly representing the remains of a large timber building with associated cobbled surfaces. One of the cobbled surfaces was covered in an ashy deposit containing the charred remains of spelt and glume, indicating the possibility of malting and beer production. The latest Romano-British phase (Phase 3) was represented by two ditches and a large pit. Little evidence of post-Romano-British activity (Phase 4) was recorded.

### **3.0: METHODOLOGY**

The watching brief was maintained during groundworks associated with new roads, service trenches and within the footprints of new buildings. Areas which had been included in earlier phases of work were excluded from the scope of the watching brief. Archaeological, or possible archaeological features were identified, cleaned and sampled by hand-excavation where possible. Recording within Field 1 adjoined the line of an access road (adjoining Area B, excavated in 2003), and within the footprint of a new building, where these areas had not been previously investigated. Within Field 2 the watching brief involved recording a mainly D-shaped access road, a north-south aligned service trench in the extreme west of the field, and a temporary access road which also extended into Field 4. A service trench in Fields 2-3 was recorded during the watching brief. The southward continuation of this trench was recorded to the south of Primrose Hill and to the north of Measowsweet Avenue. During the watching brief in Field 4 further lengths of access roads, the footprint of a new building and part of the temporary access were also recorded.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, supplemented by scale plans and section drawings, monochrome print and colour slide photography.

Subject to approval from the landowner it is proposed to deposit the paper and finds archive in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

#### **4.0: RESULTS**

The results are described by field, following the numbering in Williams (2003a).

##### **4.1: Field 1** (Figs. 2-4)

Most of the features identified overall during the watching brief were found within this field. The main area of groundworks observed in this field adjoined, and slightly overlapped with, the 2003 excavation (Area B). The main feature groups were in the north and in the south of the areas recorded during the watching brief, and the features, and feature groups are described in that order.

A red/brown clay subsoil with dispersed patches of pale-yellow sand and gravel was recorded at a depth of 0.2-0.4m below the modern surface.

The northern feature group comprised two small ditches or gullies (F109, F110) and a post-hole (F111). Feature F110 was curvilinear in plan. It measured a maximum of 0.5m in width and 0.25 in depth, and was cut to a V-shaped profile. It was backfilled with light grey clay-silt (1008). A small post hole (F111) with a diameter of 0.3m, backfilled with a light-grey clay-silt (1009) adjoined feature F110. To the south of feature F110 a southwest-northeast ditch (F109) was recorded, but not excavated. It was backfilled with light grey clay-silt (1007).

The southern group of features comprised pebble surfaces (F102, F107, F125), post-holes (F104, F105), a small pit (F103), and four ditches (F106, F108, F117, F119).

The main features encountered comprised pebble surfaces (F102, F107, F125), which may originally have formed a single continuous feature. Detailed archaeological recording in this area was hampered by surface water and machine tyre ruts. Although its limits could not be defined with certainty, the pebble surfaces (F102, F107, F125) appeared to be aligned northeast-southwest, possibly joining Ryknild Street at a right angle outside the area investigated. To the immediate west of the area investigated during the watching brief was a similar pebble surface identified at the southern end of Area B (F442, Williams 2003, 5).

The post-holes (F104, F105) and the small pit (F103) together formed a southeast-northwest alignment, suggesting that they may have formed a fence. Ditch F119, recorded for an approximate length of 15m was located to the south of the pebble surface, and may have been associated. Like the surface, the ditch was aligned northwest-southeast. The ditch measured a maximum of 0.7m in width and 0.4m in depth, and was cut to a V-shaped profile. It was backfilled with grey-brown clay-sand

(1022). Northwest-southeast aligned ditch F117 was sealed by part of the pebble surface (F125). It was cut to a U-shaped profile, and measured a maximum of 0.4m in depth. It was backfilled with mottled red-brown-grey clay-silt (1020), sealed by light grey silt-clay (1019).

#### **4.2: Field 2 (Figs. 2-4)**

Previous investigation within the northern part of this field had been limited to trial-trenches. A number of cut features following different alignments were recorded within the field during the watching brief.

A red/brown clay subsoil with dispersed patches of pale-yellow sand and gravel was recorded at a depth of 0.2-0.4m below the modern surface. In the extreme north of this field the subsoil was a light yellow-brown clay-sand.

Three groups of archaeological features were identified, in the north, east and south of the areas recorded during the watching brief, and are described in that order.

The northernmost feature (F120) was a curvilinear ditch, mainly aligned north-south, and recorded for a distance of 4m. It appeared to turn to the southeast at its western terminal. The ditch was cut to a V-shaped profile, measuring a maximum of 0.3m in width and 0.2m in depth. It was backfilled with grey clay-sand (1023). A number of curvilinear ditches, S-shaped in plan were recorded during the Area A excavation (Williams 2003a).

The eastern feature group comprised ditches (F113, F116, F118) cut on different alignments, and a re-cut pit (F114-5).

The northernmost feature of this group was a northwest-southeast aligned ditch (F116). It was cut to a V-shaped profile, and measured a maximum of 0.6m in width and 0.3m in depth. It was backfilled with mottled clay-sand (1016), sealed by mid-grey clay-sand (1015). To the south was a curvilinear ditch (F113), mainly aligned southwest-northeast. This ditch measured a maximum of 1.3m in width and 0.3m in depth. It was backfilled with mottled red/brown/grey clay-sand with frequent small stones and flecks of charcoal (1014), sealed by a mid-grey clay-sand with frequent small to medium stones (1010). This ditch may have cut two small pits; an oval pit (F114) backfilled with many small-medium stones in a sand-clay (1012), which was in turn cut by a smaller semi-circular feature (F115) backfilled with a grey silt-clay (1013). None of this feature group was excavated. A spread of pebbles (1012) forming a yard surface (F121) was recorded to the west of ditch F113. The southernmost feature of the group was an approximately east-west aligned ditch (F118), recorded for a distance of 4m. It measured a maximum of 0.6m in width and 0.4m in depth and was dug to a V-shaped profile. It was backfilled with mid-grey clay-sand with occasional pockets of orange/brown sand and flecks of charcoal (1021).

The southern feature group comprised two adjoining ditches (F122-3), aligned southwest-northeast. Both were cut with flat-based profiles, and measured an average of 1.6m in width and 0.3m in depth. Ditch F122 was backfilled with brown-yellow

silt-clay (1024), and ditch F123 was backfilled with orange-yellow silt-clay (1025). No clear relationship could be recorded between the two ditches.

#### **4.3: Field 3 (Fig. 2)**

A light yellow-brown clay-sand subsoil was recorded beneath 0.2-0.4m of topsoil. No features of archaeological, or possible archaeological interest were recorded.

#### **4.4: Field 4 (Figs 2-3)**

The removal of 0.2-0.4m of topsoil over the line of the main site access road revealed a red-brown clay subsoil with dispersed patches of pale-yellow sand and gravel. Work in this vicinity was undertaken in very wet conditions making the identification of potential features difficult. A spread of pebbles sealed in a dark soil matrix (F112) was observed in the northwest corner of the field, and may relate to the cobbled surface recorded to the northwest during the excavations of 2003 (Williams 2003, 5). The other feature identified during the watching brief comprised a ditch (F106), aligned northeast-southwest, and measured 0.4m in width. It was recorded for a length of 1.5m, but was not excavated.

The excavation of a service trench, following the line of the road, was also observed. Nothing of archaeological significance was noted as a result of this work.

The watching brief was also maintained to the east of the road where topsoil was stripped from the footprint of an outbuilding. The sub-soil in this area was a red-brown clay-sand which was cut by ridge and furrow and land drains. No earlier features were observed.

#### **4.5: Other**

A mainly north-south aligned service trench crossing Fields 1-3 and extending to Meadowsweet Avenue in the south was also monitored. Along most lengths the trench was too deep for an archaeologist to enter for the purpose of cleaning and recording, thus archaeological recording was undertaken from outside the trench.

No features, or possible features could be identified.

#### **4.6: Pottery by C. Jane Evans**

A total of 50 sherds of pottery were recovered from the watching brief, as detailed in Table 1.



**TABLE 1 Details of the pottery**

<i>Feature/ context</i>	<i>Roman sherd count</i>	<i>Spot date</i>	<i>Comments</i>
F110/1008	3	Late 3rd –C4th	Oxfordshire mortarium
F116/1015	5	Roman	SV ware bases and bodies
Layer 1017	2	Roman	Reduced SV ware body sherds
Layer 1018	1	Roman	Reduced SV ware body sherd
F119/1022	31	Late C3rd-C4th	Good diagnostic group (see below)
F120/1023	3	Roman	SV ware body sherds
U/S	2	Roman	(Field 1) SV body sherds
U/S	-	1 sherd post-med	(Field 1, NW corner)
U/S	1	Roman	(Field 2) SV body sherd
U/S	1	Roman/post-med	(Furrow)
U/S	1	Roman/post-med	(Field 2)

Key: SV = Severn Valley

## Discussion

A total of 50 sherds of Roman pottery were recovered during the watching brief, most deposits producing only handfuls of undiagnostic sherds. The largest assemblage came from feature F119. This included some diagnostically later Roman forms: a late 3rd to 4th century BB1 jar, WA type 3 (Seager Smith and Davies 1993, fig. 122) and a Severn Valley ware wide mouthed jar, similar to one dated by Webster to the 4th century (Webster 1976, fig. 6.31). Feature F110 produced fragments from an Oxfordshire mortarium (Type 22, dating AD 300-400+, Young 2000, 68).

## 5.0: DISCUSSION

### 5.1: Field 1

Most of the features and deposits identified during the watching brief were found within Field 1. Many adjoined the Area B excavation, and correlations can be usefully made between the two stages of archaeological fieldwork.

Feature F111, a curvilinear ditch may have joined ditches F405 (in the north) and F410 (in the south), both recorded during the excavation. These ditches were originally interpreted as together representing the northern side of a ditched enclosure, particularly since they were cut at the same separation as the outer pair of ditches of the Area A enclosure. This interpretation is now unlikely.

Feature F109 is a northeast-southwest aligned ditch, not recorded within the excavated area.

Of particular interest is the concentration of features, comprising ditches and pebble surfaces, recorded towards the south of the area investigated during the watching

brief. Pebble surfaces F117, F107 and F102, although not contiguous may represent a northwest-southeast aligned trackway, leading towards Ryknild Street to the southeast. Another area of pebble surfacing (F112) recorded during the watching brief, and extensive areas of pebble surfaces recorded during the excavation (Williams 2004, fig. 3, F442) which may be interpreted as areas of pebble hardstanding recorded to the south of this trackway. Ditches F119 and F117 followed the southeast-northwest alignment of the trackway, and may have been associated. Ditch F117 was partly sealed by pebble surface F125. A notably large collection of pottery, including large, relatively unabraded sherds were recovered from ditch F119, including late 3rd to 4th century forms. In the excavation the pebble surfaces were overlain by quantities of pottery, presumably dumped around the time the settlement was finally abandoned.

## **5.2: Field 2**

Previous investigations within this field had been largely limited to the Area A excavation in the southern part of the field. The watching brief provided the opportunity to test the archaeological potential of the northern part of this field, only previously examined by a single trial-trench (Trench 1W, Fig. 2). No archaeological features were identified in the extreme northern part of this trial-trench.

Curvilinear features F120 and F113 may be contemporary with the curvilinear features recorded within Area A, attributed to the earliest occupation (Phase 1). The association of feature F113 with two pits (F114-5) could suggest that it formed an eaves-drip gully. This interpretation cannot be proved or disproved from the data provided by the watching brief. The eaves-drip gully identified in Area A (Williams 2003, F318) was associated with the enclosure complex. Although only limited investigation was undertaken within Field 2 no trace of the ditched bounds of an enclosure associated with the possible eaves-drip gully could be identified. The other ditched features were too small to have defined a ditched enclosure. The ditches identified followed a variety of orientations. Ditches F122-3 were aligned southwest-northeast, roughly parallel to the eastern side of the field which may have been Roman in origin. Ditch F116 was cut on an alignment close to north-south, roughly parallel with the northern side of the Area A enclosure, which may suggest that they were part of the same overall layout. The remaining ditch (F118) was cut close to an east-west alignment, not identified elsewhere within the field.

The pits (F114-5) and possible eaves-drip gully, if correctly interpreted, could suggest an unenclosed occupation focus within the centre of the field. The negative evidence from the watching brief suggests that few field boundaries were located in the zone to the north of the Area A enclosure. It may have formed a large field, possibly given over to pasture.

Archaeological observation was also maintained during the partial stripping of topsoil along the line of a temporary access road in the south of this field. Only approximately half of the topsoil was removed, consequently no features of archaeological, or possible archaeological interest, were identified.

### 5.3: Field 3

The cutting of a pipe trench was observed within this field, the only archaeological investigation carried out within Field 3. Nothing of archaeological interest was identified. It is possible that at least part of the modern field boundaries date to the Roman period.

### 5.4: Field 4

The only features identified in this field during the watching brief comprised a pebble surface (F112) and a ditch (F106), confirming that the activity recorded during the Area B excavation and during the watching brief extended to the south of the northern boundary of Field 4. No other features had been identified by trial-trenching within this field.

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## 6.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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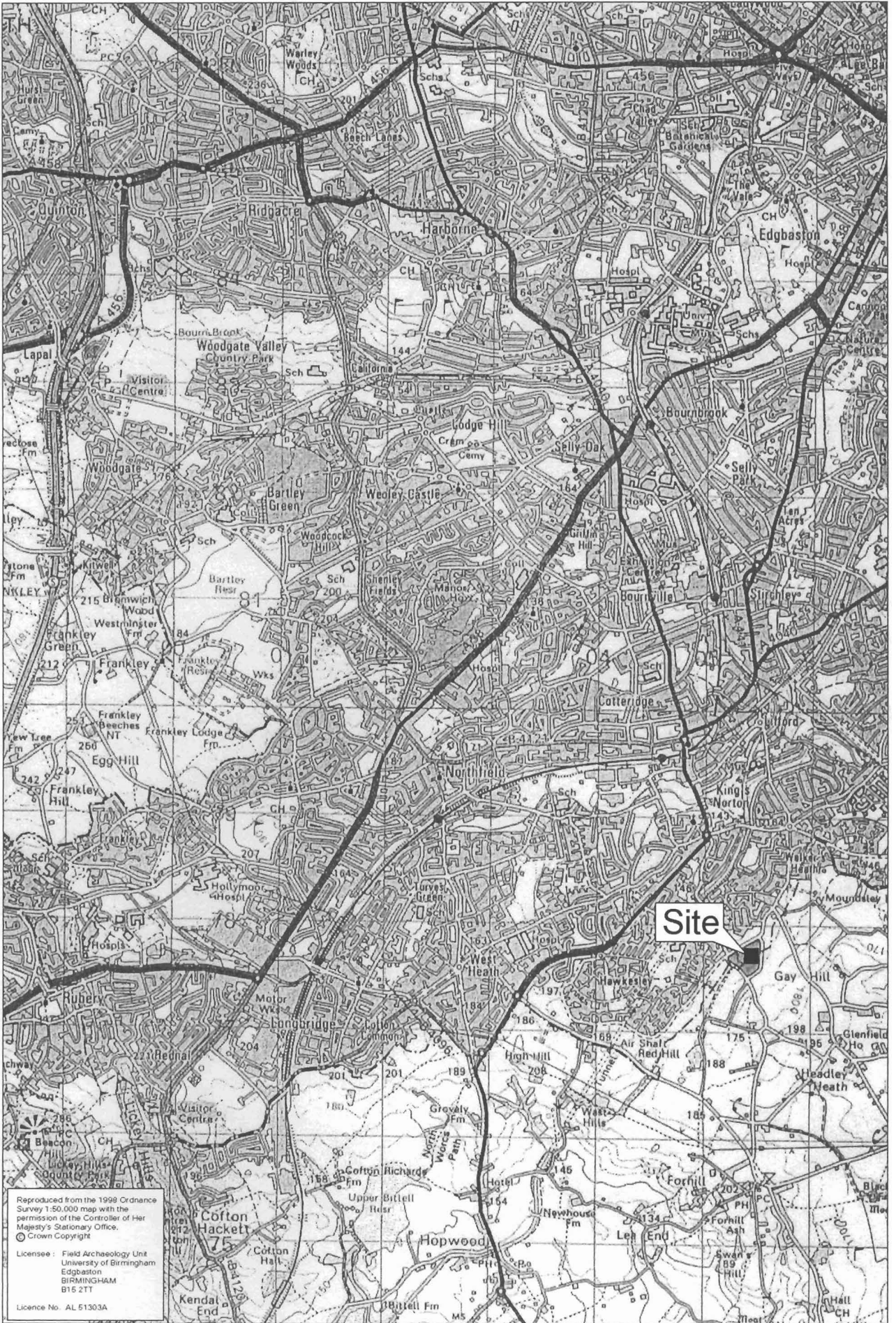


Fig.1

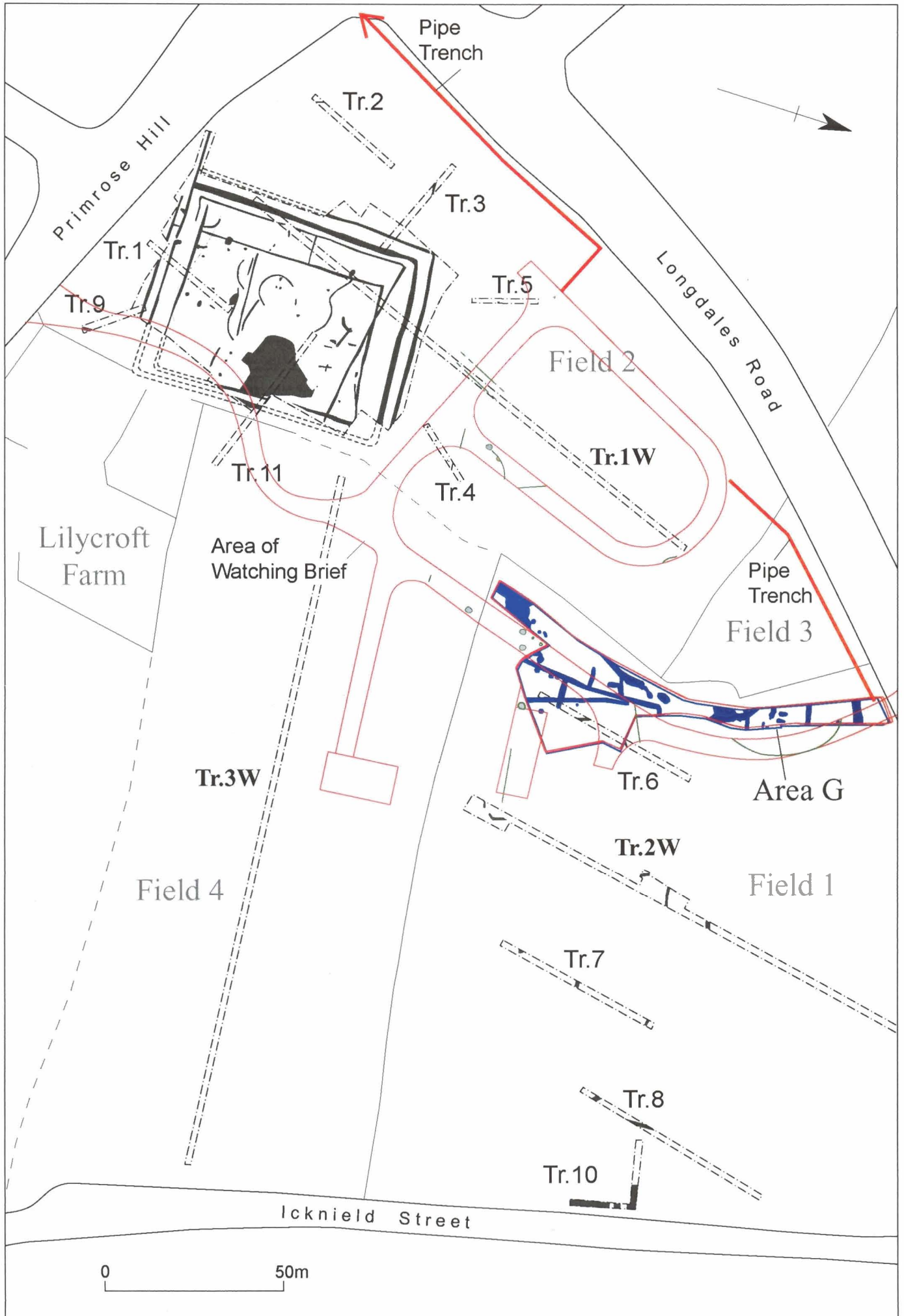


Fig.2

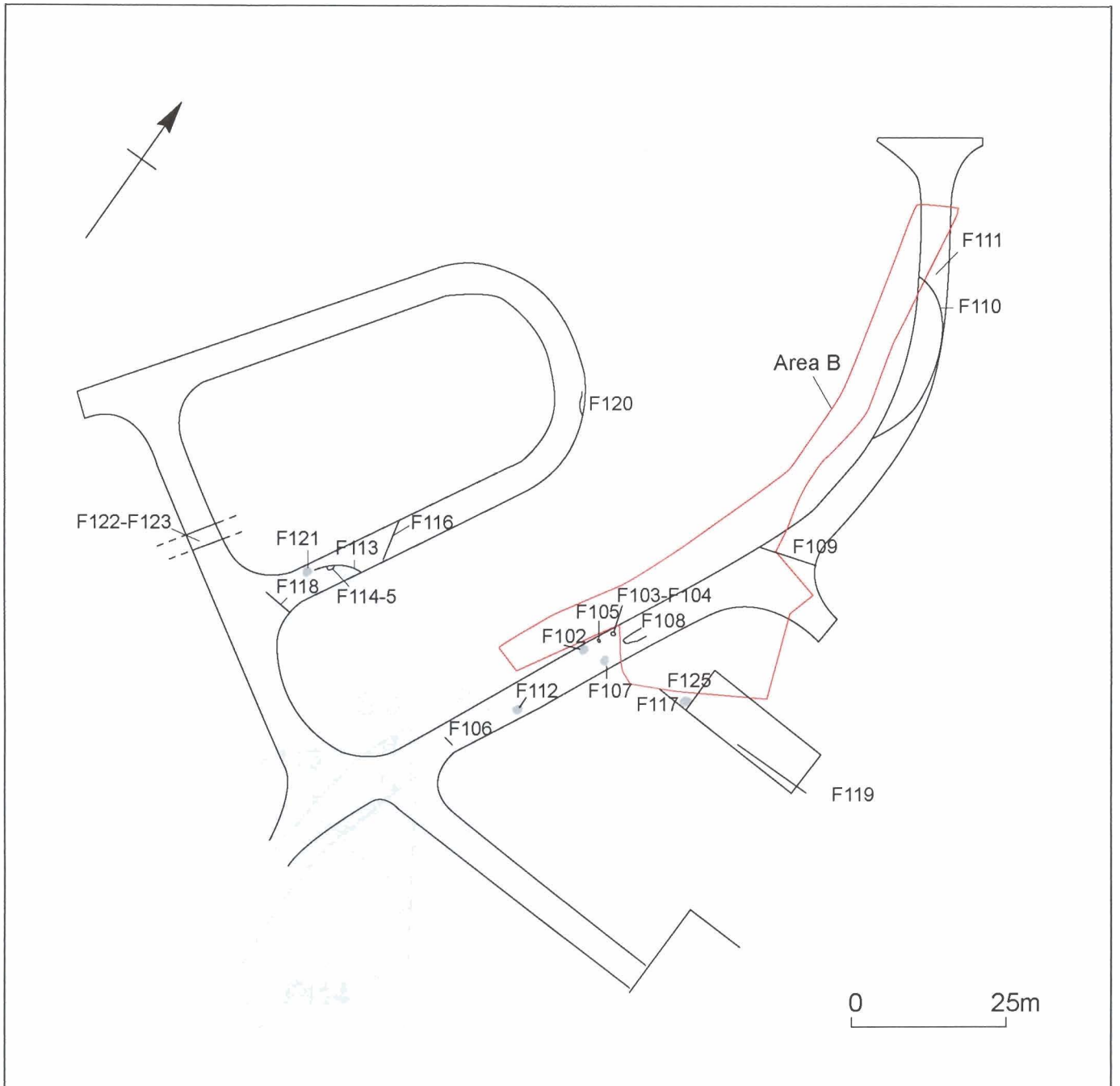


Fig.3

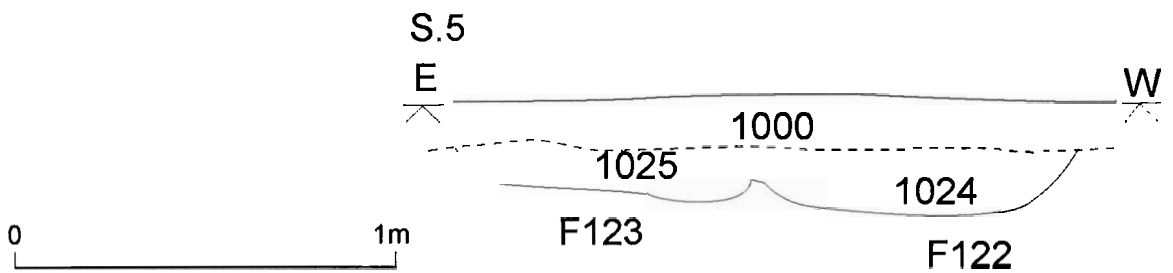
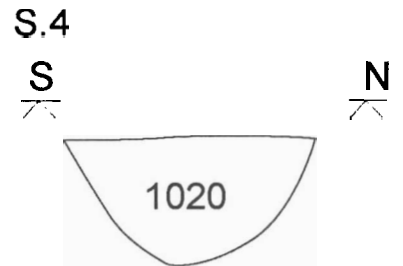
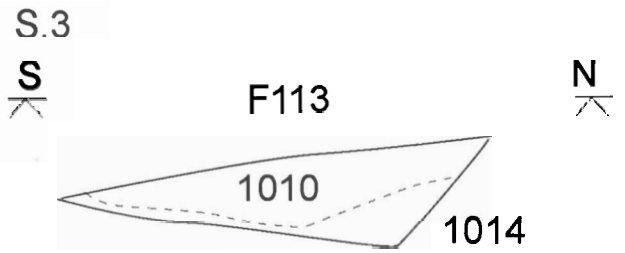
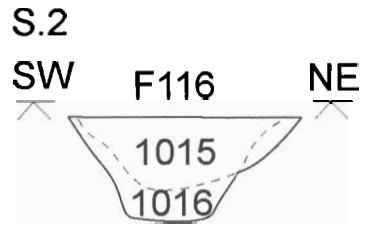
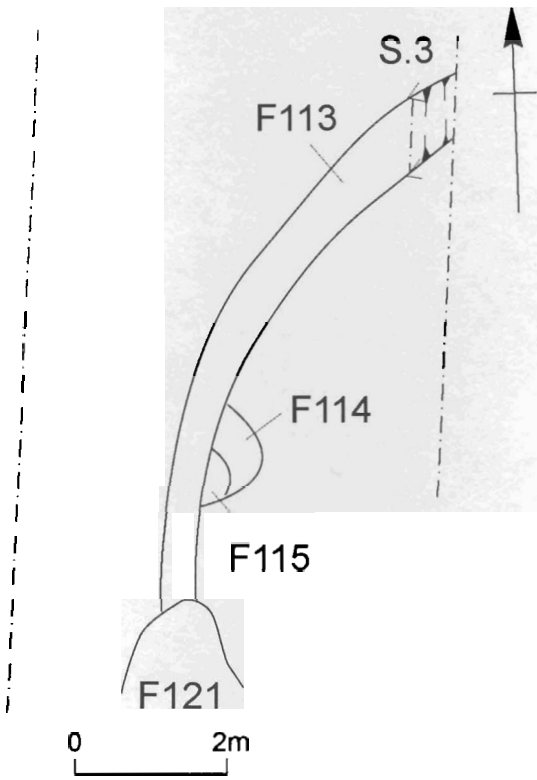
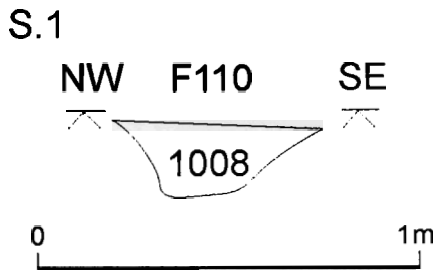
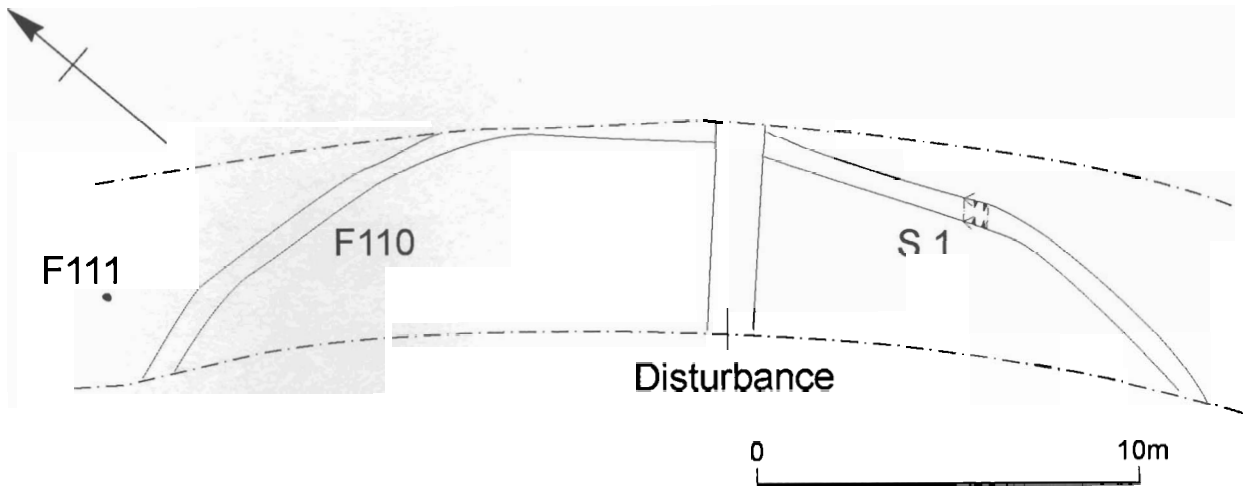


Fig.4