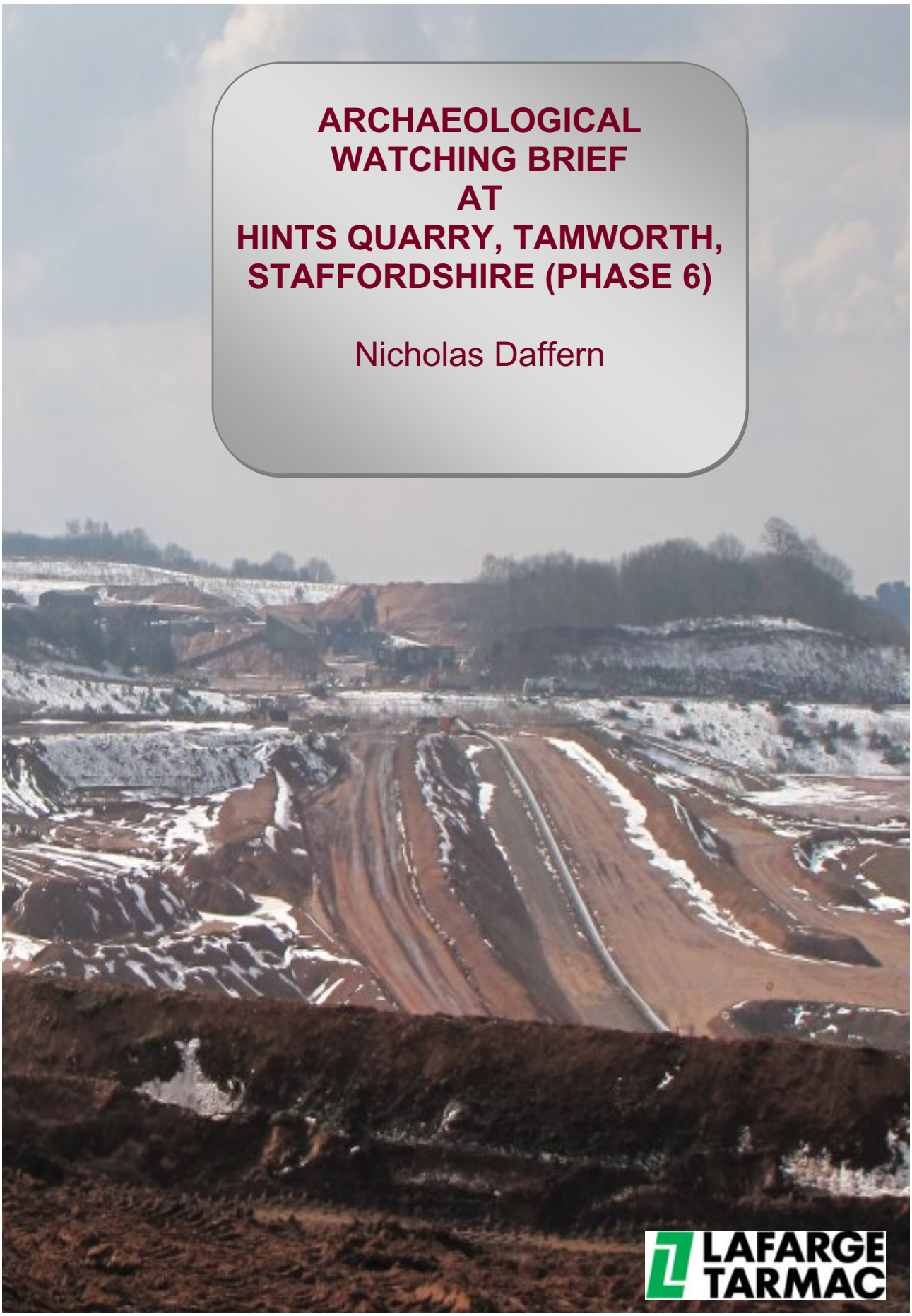
Worcestershire Archaeology

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT HINTS QUARRY, TAMWORTH, STAFFORDSHIRE (PHASE 6)

Nicholas Daffern



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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT HINTS QUARRY, TAMWORTH, STAFFORDSHIRE (PHASE 6B)

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Contents

Watching Brief at Hints Quarry, Tamworth, Staffordshire (Phase 6B)

Nicholas Daffern

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Hints Quarry, Tamworth, Staffordshire (National Grid Reference SK 1600 0480; Figure 1). It was completed on behalf of Lafarge Tarmac, who intended to undertake site preparation works (topsoil/subsoil stripping) in advance of mineral extraction for which a planning permission has been granted by Staffordshire County Council (reference L.02/09/805-808 MW: Section 36) subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works.

No archaeological remains were encountered with the majority of the deposits encountered being a product of post-medieval and modern agricultural activity with the intensity of this activity being witnessed through the frequent presence of plough scoring which had truncated the upper surface of the underlying natural deposits.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken within part of the Phase 6 area at Hints Quarry, Tamworth, Staffordshire (National Grid Reference SK 1600 0480; Figure 1). It was completed on behalf of Lafarge Tarmac, who intended to undertake site preparation works (topsoil/subsoil stripping) in advance of mineral extraction for which a planning permission has been granted by Staffordshire County Council (reference L.02/09/805-808 MW: Section 36) subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works.

The project conformed to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2013) and approved by the Planning Archaeologist for Staffordshire County Council. The project also conformed to the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2012).

2 Aims

Phase 6 had the potential to contain archaeological remains of local and regional significance, most probably of a prehistoric date but potentially also including those of Roman and later date.

These were anticipated as being unlikely to be especially complex or extensive in nature and their survival was expected for the most part to be poor.

The aims of the project were therefore as follows:

A1 To identify archaeological remains present within the site and secure an accurate survey of them thus recording the scale and extent of archaeological remains present;

A2 To undertake carefully targeted investigation and recording of any landscape features (field boundaries, etc) revealed to recover evidence for dating in order to support understanding of their chronological sequence and development;

A3 To undertake a sufficient level of investigation and recording of any occupation, activity focus and/or funerary deposits revealed to establish dating and character.

More specifically, the programme of work within Phase 6 had the potential to contribute to the following research themes:

- Earlier prehistoric occupation and other activity within the landscape (funerary activity, settlement and landuse);
- Iron Age and Romano-British activity (settlement and field systems);
- Post-Roman landscape features;
- Medieval landscape features;

These were considered within the context of both regional and national research frameworks and in particular the West Midlands Regional Research Framework (Watt 2011).

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was undertaken by Nicholas Daffern BA (Hons) MSc who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2007 and has been practising archaeology since 2004 and Jonathan Webster, BA (Hons); who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2009 and has been practising archaeology since 2001. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Robin Jackson BA (Hons) AIFA. Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc Hons).

3.2 Documentary research

Prior to works, reports on previous phases of archaeological work at the quarry by Moscrop (2006), Krawiec (2008) and McNicol 2009) were consulted as was the Written Scheme of Investigation (Jackson 2013).

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

Fieldwork was undertaken between the 22 March 2013 and 16 April 2013.

The works consisted of topsoil stripping under archaeological supervision of an area of approximately 18,000m^2. Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360º tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket and operating under archaeological supervision.

Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012).

3.4 Structural analysis

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

4 The application site

4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context

Hints Quarry is located 1.5km to the north of the village of Hints, 5km to the west of Tamworth and 6km to the south-east of Lichfield. The Phase 6 area lies to the north of the present quarry, to the south of Knox's Grave Lane (Figures 1-3). The site was previously under arable cultivation.

The bedrock geology of the site consists of Triassic sandstone and conglomerates of the Bromsgrove Sandstone Formation (234 – 248 million years (Ma) before present) and the Kidderminster Formation (242 – 248 Ma). Sporadic superficial deposits consisting of Mid Pleistocene till are also recorded within the vicinity (British Geological Survey).

The soils identified within the site by the Soil Survey of England and Wales (1983) are those of the 551a Bridgnorth Soil Association consisting of "well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils over soft sandstone. Occasional deeper soils. Risk of water and wind erosion".

The site lies north of the route of Roman Watling Street which follows that of the modern day A5. Investigations completed in advance of previous phases of quarrying (Moscrop 2006, Krawiec 2008, McNicol 2009; Figure 3) have revealed dispersed features of Bronze Age and Roman date, including both domestic and funerary features, the latter including at least one Middle Bronze Age cremation; however, no significant concentrations of activity have been identified and there was nothing to indicate that deposits were liable to be encountered that are of national significance.

5 Analysis and discussion

The stripped area (Phase 6B) is shown in Figure 2.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

The natural consisted of an orangish red, coarse to medium sand with frequent angular to sub-rounded pebble and gravel inclusions. The former represents the upper reworked/weathered surface of the underlying solid geology whilst the latter is derived from the superficial Pleistocene till deposits.

These deposits were frequently disturbed by post-medieval to modern agricultural activity; either through the presence of bioturbation or tree throws (Plates 3 and 4) or by plough truncation (Plates 6, 7, 8 and 9).

These natural deposits were generally encountered between 0.30 – 0.50m below ground surface becoming shallower towards the crest of the hill to the north and north-east of the stripped area (Plates 5, 6 and 13), although it should be noted that this depth increased to the south and south-west of the stripped area with approximately 1.50m of soil accumulation present in places.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Post-Medieval/ Modern

The post-medieval and modern deposits were represented by a dark brown clayey silt topsoil with frequent mid orangish brown sandy clay inclusions/ lenses derived from mixing through bioturbation and agricultural activity.

Modern and post-medieval fragments of ceramic building material (CBM, Laura Griffin pers comm) were occasionally encountered but due to the fragmentary nature of the material, a more refined date could not be assigned. This material became more frequent to the south and in particular the south-west of the site where it appears there was an element of dumping with CBM including brick and tile fragments as well as metalwork. The latter was fragmentary pipe work with no overall structure being identified thus suggesting the tipping of demolition material.

This topsoil was generally between 0.30 – 0.50m in thickness directly overlying the natural (mineral) deposits although thicker deposits were identified to the south and in particular the south-west of the stripped area. It is likely that the reason for this increased accumulation is due to colluviation with loose, unconsolidated material being transported down slope through rain-wash and soil creep with both being accelerated through intensive agricultural activity destabilising the soils and exposing them to weathering processes.

Evidence for this intensive agricultural activity was evidenced by the presence of the topsoil being deposited in narrow furrows in the natural deposits as a result of plough truncation (Plates 6, 7, 8 and 9). It should be noted that the pattern of ploughing witnessed in the truncations (three or four furrows then a slight gap before the next set of furrows) is still being practiced upon the site and the surrounding fields today (Plates 15 and 16) thus indicating they are a modern feature.

6 Conclusions

No features or artefacts of medieval or earlier date were recorded on the site but this may be due to the intensity of the post-medieval and modern agricultural activity upon the site having truncated any evidence. Also, no residual artefactual or environmental remains were identified during the works which would be expected in the presence of disturbed archaeological features.

It is therefore concluded that either no archaeological activity occurred within the site boundary or it was of such an ephemeral nature that it would have been obliterated by agricultural disturbance.

7 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project. Nick Atkins and Mark Bruce (Lafarge Tarmac) and Stephen Dean (Staffordshire County Council).

8 Bibliography

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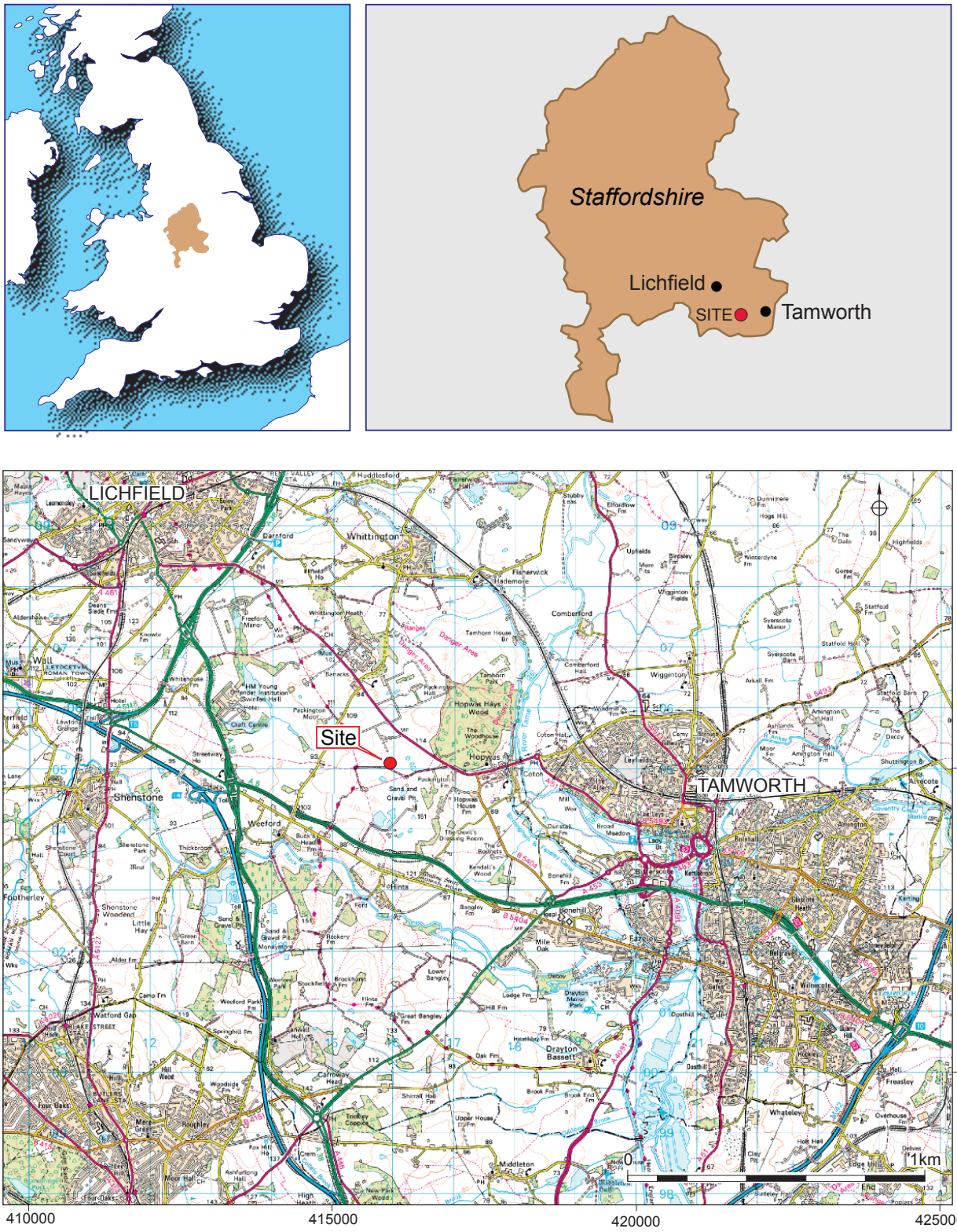
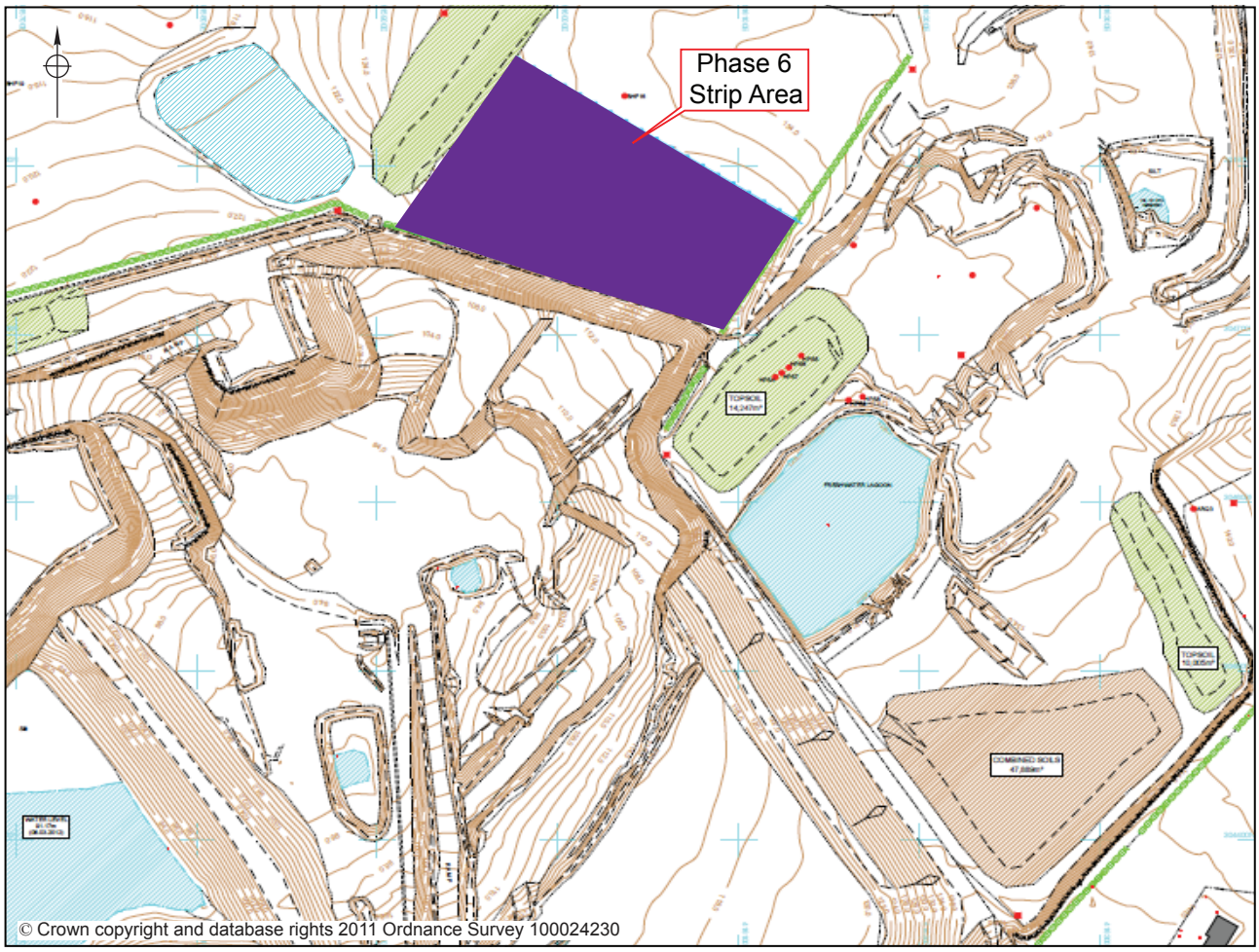
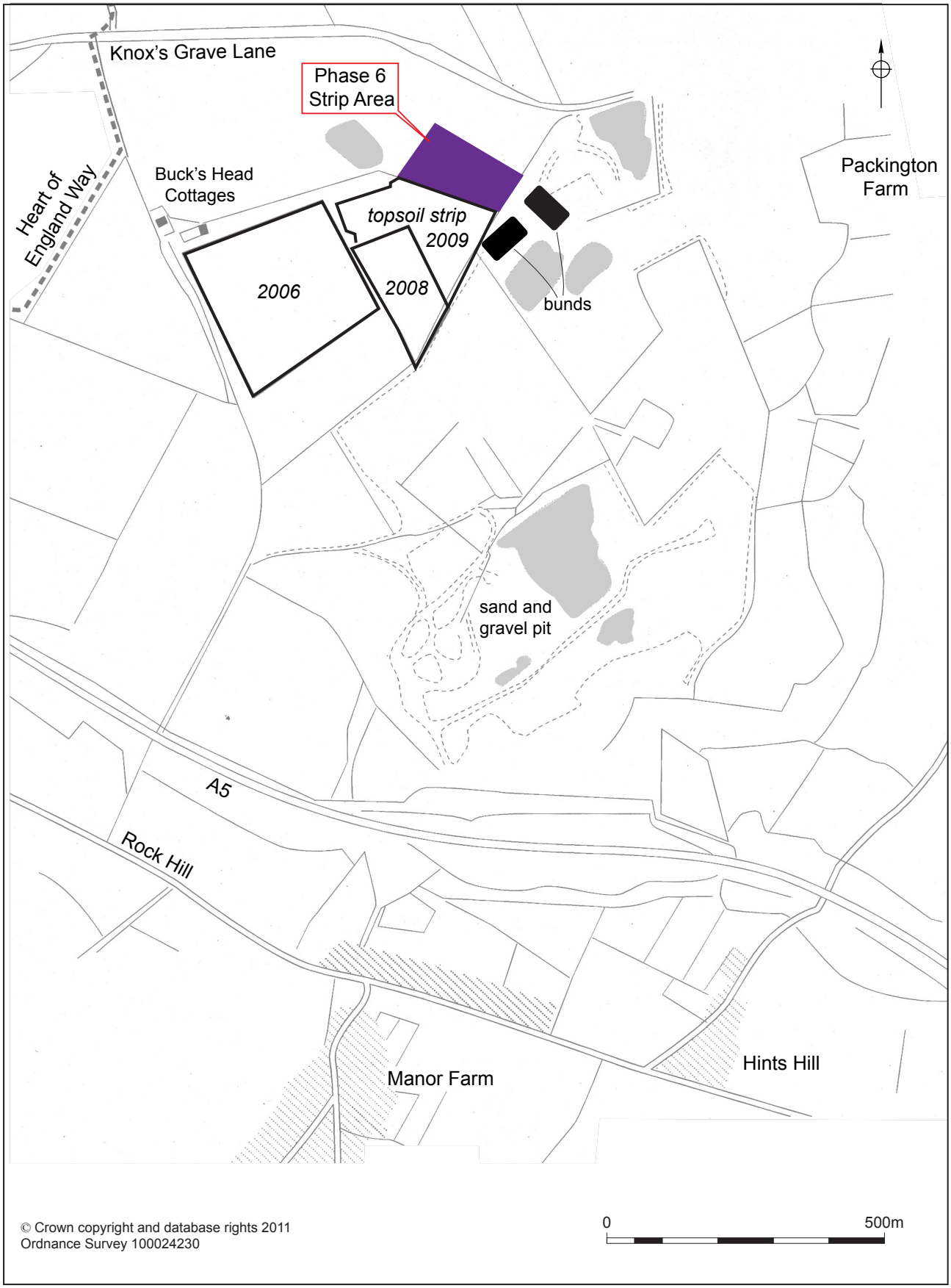
Figures



Location of the site *Figure 1*



Phase 6 Strip Area (based upon Lafarge Tarmac Drg H100-13-0-001) *Figure 2*



Previous investigations *Figure 3*

Plates

Plate 1: Path strip overview, looking south-west

Plate 2: Path strip overview, looking west

Plate 3: Bioturbation and modern tree throw disturbance, looking north

Plate 4: Bioturbation and modern tree throw disturbance

Plate 5: Plough damage to natural, looking north-east

Plate 6: Plough damage to natural, looking north

Plate 7: Intensive plough damage, looking south

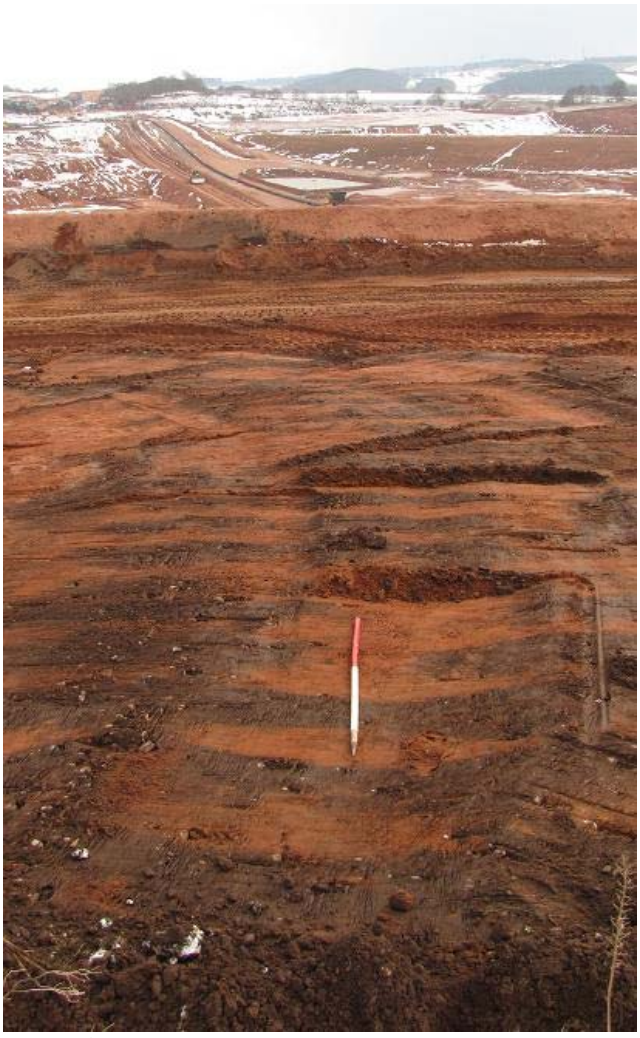


Plate 8: Intensive plough damage, looking south

Plate 9: Perpendicular plough damage, looking north

Plate 10: Excavated plough damage, looking north-east

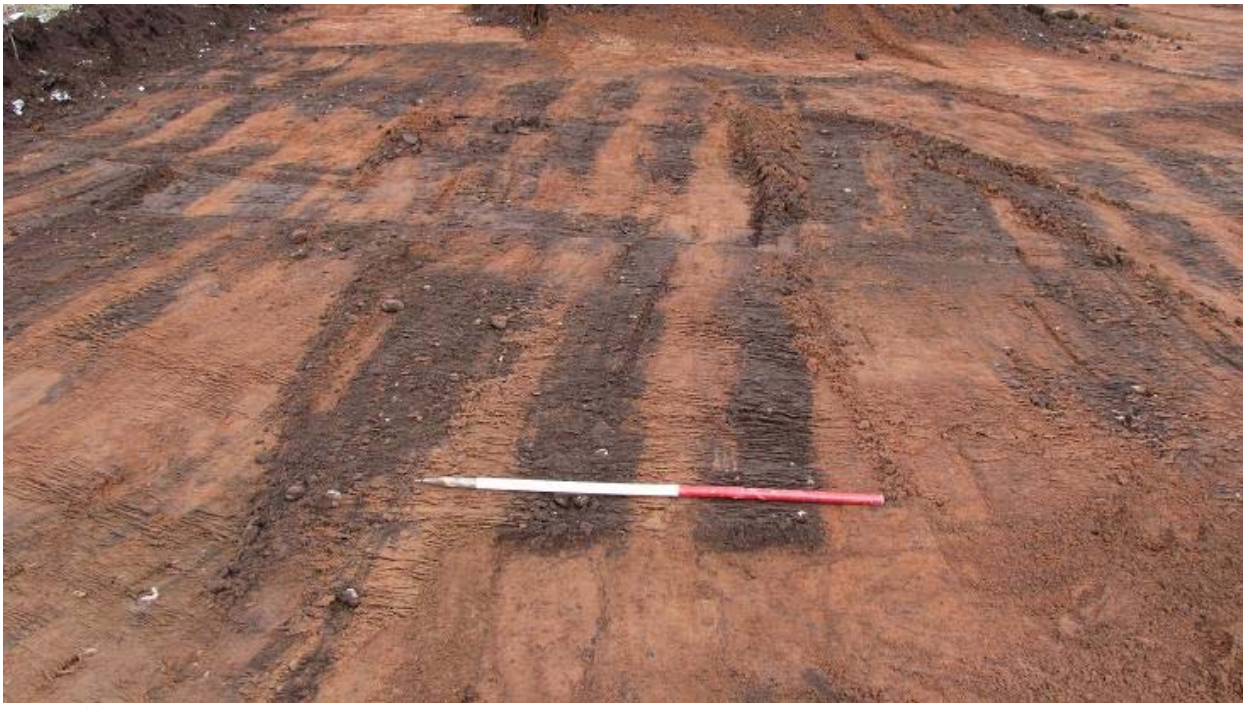


Plate 11: Excavated plough damage, looking north-east

Plate 12: Plough damage to upper weathered surface of geology, looking north

Plate 13: Plough damage to upper weathered surface of geology, looking north-west

Plate 14: Plough damage to upper weathered surface of geology, looking north-west

Plate 15: Modern agriculture to the south of the quarry showing the probable nature of previous cultivation

Plate 16: Modern agriculture to the south of the quarry showing the probable nature of previous cultivation