

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MONITORING
AT
MILLFIELDS ROAD, BILSTON,
WOLVERHAMPTON

Tom Vaughan

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

7th December 2006

© Historic Environment and Archaeology Service,
Worcestershire County Council

Historic Environment and Archaeology Service,
Worcestershire County Council,
Woodbury,
University of Worcester,
Henwick Grove,
Worcester WR2 6AJ



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Project P2785
Report 1499
BCSMR EBL 794

Archaeological monitoring at Millfields Road, Bilston, Wolverhampton

Tom Vaughan

Background information

<i>Client</i>	John Sisk and Son Ltd
<i>Site address</i>	Former John Thompson Engineering Works, Millfields Road, Ettingshall, Bilston, Wolverhampton, SO 934 963
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SO 934 963
<i>Black Country Sites and Monuments Record ref.</i>	EBL 794
<i>Associated Sites and Monuments Record references</i>	BCSMR 13097 and 13574
<i>Planning authority</i>	Wolverhampton City Council
<i>reference</i>	05/0521/FP/M
<i>Project design</i>	HEAS 2006
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999

Previous archaeological work

The site has been the subject of a desk-based assessment, geotechnical test pits (Vaughan 2005) and building recording (Robson-Glyde 2005). The former detailed the present state of archaeological and historical knowledge of the site and surrounding area. In summary:

The site lies within the parish of Ettingshall, Bilston and was part of an area formerly known as Catchems Corner (BCSMR 13574). No evidence has as yet been identified for activity predating the post-medieval/modern period. The Millfields Road and Manor Road frontages were occupied by mid/late 19th century buildings of largely residential character, an early 19th century flour mill and a mid 19th century church. Colliery workings occupied the southern half of the site. It is unclear if any of these buildings existed prior to the 19th century, although some settlement around the crossroads is recorded in the mid/late 18th century. The former buildings date from the 1920s as part of the original John Thompson Engineering Co. Ltd, which later became GKN Thompson Chasis, prior to closing in the last few years. The residential properties along Millfields Road frontage were gradually demolished between 1938 and 1974.

The former Holy Trinity church occupied the north-eastern corner of the site between 1834 and 1961. It has been suggested that the original building was of wood, although it was entirely rebuilt in stone in 1874 in the early English gothic style. Although no burial registers exist, nor any other documentary sources identified, there is purported to have been a burial interred either below or adjacent to the north aisle (BCSMR 13097).

Geotechnical survey work undertaken in 2005 revealed a great depth of industrial debris with redeposited sand and gravel over the entire site, probably the result of levelling up of the former colliery workings and the demolition of the flour mill (Vaughan 2005).

The building recording project determined that the first building was constructed on the site around 1910, with later buildings in the 1930s. This included an impressive office building with limestone window and door cills. The first building on the site was also extended in the 1930s using Belfast trusses and steel stanchions from Consett, County Durham. (Robson-Glyde 2005).

Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible.

Methods

General specification for fieldwork	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	Vaughan 2005
Date(s) of fieldwork	10 th - 14 th February 2006
Area of site	c 53,100m ²
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Stanchion bases length 2.20-4.60m width 1.50-3.90m depth 0.65-1.10m
	Vibration trench length 190m width 0.45m depth 1-1.20m
	Lorry park area length 320m width 77m depth 0.75-4.50m

Access to or visibility of deposits

Observation of the excavated areas was undertaken after machine excavation. The exposed surfaces were generally sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, although any less clear may have not been identified. Access to deep trenches was not made for safety reasons.

Statement of confidence

Within those areas of the site that were monitored, access to, and visibility of deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project were achieved. However access was not provided to the groundworks within the vicinity of the site of the former Holy Trinity Church and churchyard with possible burial activity (BCSMR 13097) as was identified in the desk-based assessment (Vaughan 2005, 1, 9 and 11) and stipulated in the proposal (HEAS 2006, 2). Therefore the overall achievement of the aims of the project should be considered as incomplete.

Trench and deposit descriptions

Area 1

Site area: strip for lorry park and loading bay on south side of site

Maximum dimensions: Length: c 320m Width: c 77m Depth: c 0.75-4.50m

Orientation: north-west to south-east

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface - top and bottom of deposits
1000	Overburden	Mixed black cinders, dark blackish brown silty soil, slag, ash and colliery waste with occasional iron waste; overlain by concrete rubble hardcore. Various compact and loose.	0.00->4.50m +

Vibration Trench 2

Site area: slit trench along Millfields Road frontage

Maximum dimensions: Length: 190m Width: 0.45m Depth: c 1.00-1.20m

Orientation: approximately east-west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface - top and bottom of deposits
2000	Overburden	Tarmac and hardcore gravels over mid brown loam with mixed bands and patches of concrete rubble, black cinders, light brownish/off white mudstone clay, occasional mid fawn sandy mortar, iron waste, very occasional china and glass frags, brick rubble and grey roof slate frags; occasional dumps of sub-angular stone gravel. Overlying 2001.	0.00->1.20m +
2001	Brick structures	Brick structures, aligned north-north-east to south-south west and east-south-east to west-north-west. Red machine made bricks, 7x11.5x22.5cm, mixed light pinkish orange fabric without large inclusions, friable fawn/orange sandy and yellow lime mortars. Sealed by 2000.	0.15->1.20m +

Pit 3

Site area: stanchion base for main building foundation

Maximum dimensions: Length: 2.70m Width: 2.40m Depth: 0.75m

Orientation: approximately east-west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface - top and bottom of deposits
3000	Overburden	Mixed pebble gravel hardcore, concrete rubble, coal dust and cinders with occasional iron waste, brick frags, loose timbers and sandy patches. Generally compacted and cohesive.	0.00->0.75m +

Pit 4

Site area: stanchion base for main building foundation
 Maximum dimensions: Length: 2.20m Width: 1.50m Depth: 0.65m
 Orientation: approximately north-south
 Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface - top and bottom of deposits
4000	Overburden	Same as 3000.	0.00->0.65m +

Pit 5

Site area: stanchion base for main building foundation
 Maximum dimensions: Length: 3.10m Width: 2.50m Depth: 0.75m
 Orientation: approximately north-south
 Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface - top and bottom of deposits
5000	Overburden	Same as 3000.	0.00->0.75m +

Pit 6

Site area: stanchion base for main building foundation
 Maximum dimensions: Length: 4.60m Width: 3.90m Depth: 1.10m
 Orientation: approximately north-south
 Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface - top and bottom of deposits
6000	Overburden	Same as 3000.	0.00->1.10m +

Discussion

At no point within the observed groundworks was the undisturbed natural identified. Neither were any relict topsoil or subsoil horizons observed. All deposits were determined to be of post-medieval/modern date.

Area 1, which occupied the southern third of the site, contained mixed industrial waste deposits (1000) and occasional brick and/or concrete foundations associated with the 20th century John Thompson factory buildings, which were demolished as part of this development.

The entire area of the stanchion base pits was raised above the previous ground surface. The depth of each of the pits was not dug below this raised level. For this reason only a small number were observed to ensure that this was the case (Trenches 3-6). The deposits identified comprised redeposited material dug out from Area 1 along the south side of the site coupled with modern imported pebble gravel hardcore (3000-6000).

Trench 2 along Millfields Road frontage, revealed frequent brick structures, which are considered to be the cellars and foundations of the later 19th century buildings observed on cartographic sources (Vaughan 2005, Fig.4), overlain and sealed by mixed industrial dump deposits and levelling hardcore.

Conclusions

No significant archaeological features, structures, layers or horizons were observed, nor any artefacts recovered predating the mid/late 19th century. All deposits were determined to be of later post-medieval and modern date, relating to industrial dumping, probably associated with the colliery activity and subsequent levelling of the site for the construction of the John Thompson works in the early 20th century.

No evidence was identified of the settlement of Catchems Corner, documented in the mid/late 18th century, nor of the flour mill and the largely domestic buildings to the west, set back from the road, which are recorded on maps of the mid/late 19th century. However the middle of the site was raised, and the groundworks observed not to impinge upon the earlier ground surface. It is therefore unclear what is the level of survival of the foundations of these buildings, associated and earlier deposits. The brick structures recorded along Millfields Road frontage are considered to relate to the terraced dwellings recorded on the 1st edition OS map of 1887 and demolished between 1938 and 1974.

The area of Holy Trinity Church and churchyard with the possible burial was not made available for monitoring. The state of preservation of the foundations and associated deposits is unclear, or the status of the burial as recorded at c SO 9357 9626 on Land Registry plans (Vaughan 2005, 9).

Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken on behalf of Coltham Developments Ltd at Millfields Road, Bilston, Wolverhampton (NGR SO 934 963; BCSMR EBL 794). Six areas were observed, comprising the southern third of the site, a slit trench along the Millfields Road frontage and four stanchion base pits.

No significant archaeological features, structures or horizons were observed, nor any artefacts recovered predating the mid/late 19th century. All deposits were determined to be of later post-medieval and modern date, relating to industrial dumping, probably associated with the colliery activity and subsequent levelling of the site for the construction of the John Thompson works in the early 20th century.

No evidence was identified of the settlement of Catchems Corner, documented in the mid/late 18th century, nor of the mid/late 19th century flour mill and other buildings. However the middle of the site was raised and the groundworks observed not to impinge upon the earlier ground surface. The brick structures recorded along Millfields Road frontage are considered to relate to the terraced dwellings recorded on the 1st edition OS map of 1887 and demolished between 1938 and 1974.

The area of the Holy Trinity Church was not made available to monitor. The state of preservation of the foundations is therefore unclear, as is the status of the burial identified on Land Registry maps.

Archive

Fieldwork progress records AS2	2
Photographic records AS3	1
Digital photographs	20
Trench records AS41	3
Drawings	1
Computer disks	1

The project archive is intended to be placed at: Wolverhampton Arts and Museum Service
Wolverhampton City Council
Wolverhampton Art Gallery
Lichfield Street
Wolverhampton
WV1 1DU

telephone 01902 552055

Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Stuart Franks (Coltham Developments Ltd), Matt Ashman, Iftakhar Baz, Dennis Gibbons, Richard Weaving and Mike Woodhall (John Sisk and Son Ltd), David Ashe and Simon Hargreaves (DBK Back Group) and Mike Shaw (Black Country Sites and Monuments Record Officer).

Bibliography

CAS 1995 (as amended) *Manual of Service practice: fieldwork recording manual*, County Archaeological Service, Hereford and Worcester County Council, report, **399**

HEAS 2005 *Proposal for an archaeological watching brief at Millfields Road, Bilston, Wolverhampton*, Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document dated 29th July 2005, **P2785**

IFA, 1999 *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*, Institute of Field Archaeologists

Robson-Glyde, S, 2005 *Building Recording at Millfields Road, Bilston, Wolverhampton*, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished report, dated 2nd December, report no. 1383, **BCSMR EBL761**

Vaughan 2005 *Desk-based assessment of Millfields Road, Bilston, Wolverhampton*, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished report, revised 27th July 2005, report no. 1355, **BCSMR EBL758**

Plates



Plate 1. Area 1 view into south-east corner



Plate 2. Area 1 south side, view west from south-east corner



Plate 3. Area 1 south side, view east from south-west corner



Plate 4. Trench 2 general view east, from west end



Plate 5. Trench 2 sample of stratigraphy at west end, view south



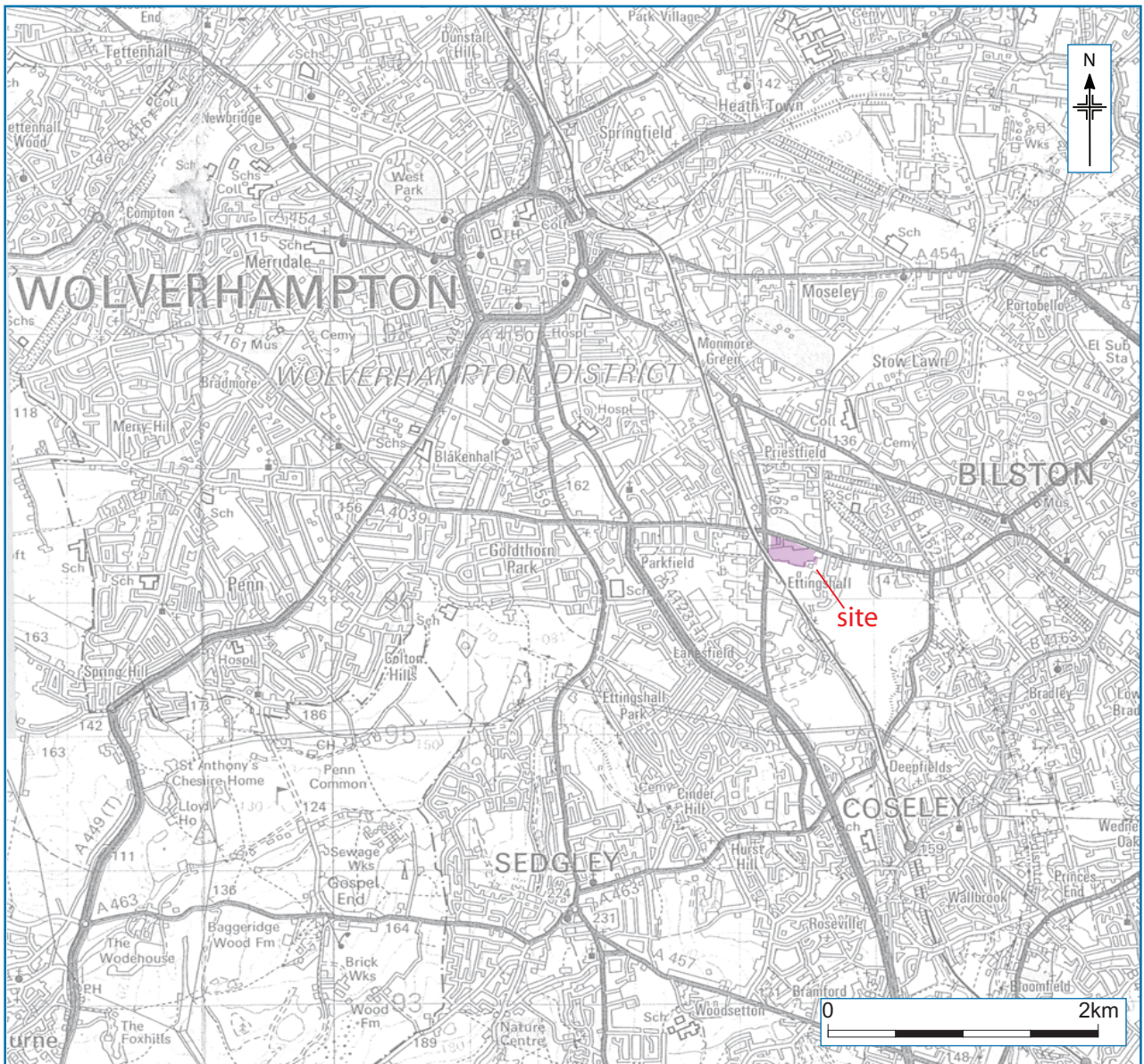
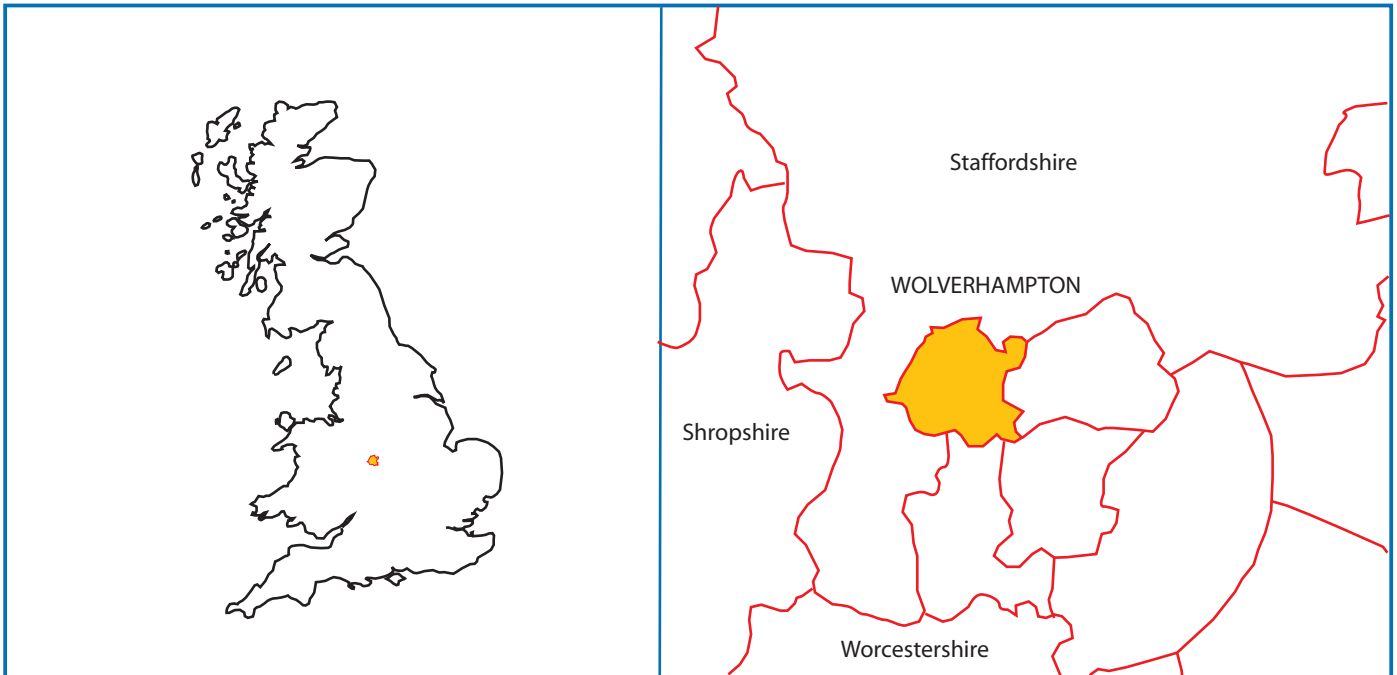
Plate 6. Trench 2 general view east towards east end



Plate 7. Trench 3 view of north section stratigraphy



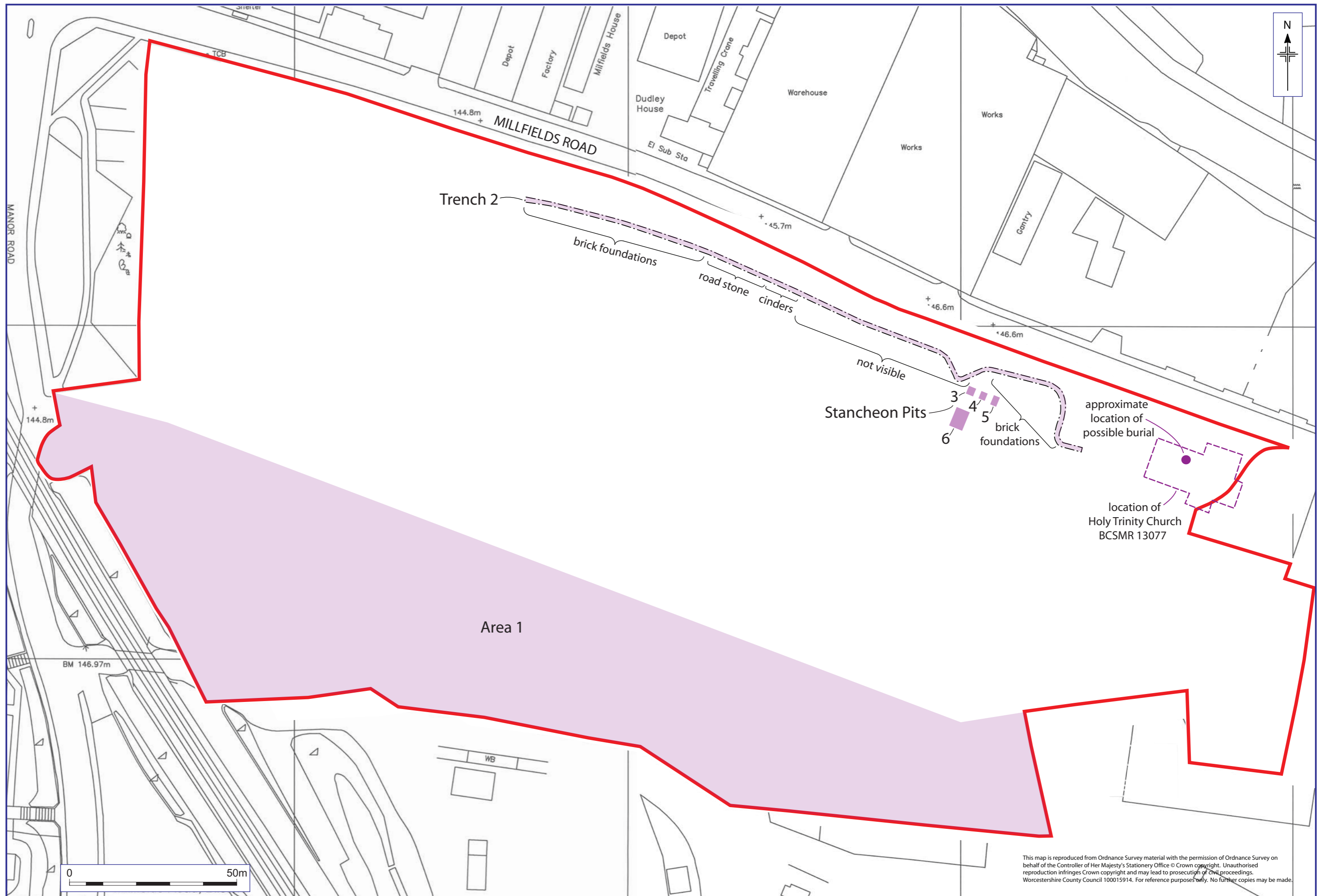
Plate 8. Trench 6 general view south



© Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Worcestershire County Council LA09073L. For reference purposes only. No further copies may be made.

Location of the site.

Figure 1



This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution of civil proceedings. Worcestershire County Council 100015914. For reference purposes only. No further copies may be made.

Areas observed

Figure 2