

Archaeological Watching Brief At Rugeley Quarry, Staffordshire: Phases B (i) and (ii)



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Archaeological Watching Brief at Rugeley Quarry, Staffordshire, Phases B (i) and (ii)

Jamie Wilkins (project leader)

With a contribution by Rob Hedge

Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Rugeley Quarry, Staffordshire (NGR SK 0045 1865). It was commissioned by Cemex UK as part of a programme of works being undertaken in advance of extension of quarry works.

The only archaeological features observed were two ditches. The westernmost ditch measured approximately 50m in length, followed a north-east to south-west alignment, and featured an earthwork bank on the eastern side, which was subtle, but discernible on the surface. The easternmost ditch was just 15m in length, very shallow, and was only visible below the subsoil.

It is highly likely that these ditches relate to the former, medieval Wolseley Park deer-park, which once covered the area now known as Cannock Chase. The westernmost ditch appears to align with an earthwork bank further to the south-west, which was recorded in 2008, during an earlier phase of quarrying. It is, therefore, likely that these ditches may once have been components of the same boundary. This project broadly supports the premise that the ditches observed here, and in earlier recording projects, form a variety of internal boundaries typical of compartmented deer-parks.

The presence of a residual, worked-flint, end-scraper is indicative of the well documented rich prehistoric landscape focussed around the river terraces of the Trent Valley. Although no prehistoric features or deposits were observed within the confines of this site, the presence of this scraper reflects this prehistoric activity within the wider vicinity.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Rugeley Quarry, Staffordshire (NGR SK 0045 1865). It was commissioned by Cemex UK (the Client), in response to an archaeological condition placed upon planning permission (ref nos CH.00/0577 and S.400/18) for mineral extraction granted to the Client by Staffordshire County Council (the LPA). This period of works comprise Phases B (i) and (ii); with Phase B (iii) set for a later date, pending the removal of overhead electric cables which bound the eastern edge of site.

These works are considered by the LPA and the Curator to have the potential to affect an archaeological site.

No specific brief has been prepared by the Curator for this phase of works, but this project aims to conform to the generality of briefs previously issued, and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (WA 2017).

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014a).

2 Aims

A Written Scheme of Investigation produced by Archaeological Services (WYAS) in 2004, remains the key planning document and details the aims of the project below:

- to ensure the archaeological monitoring of all aspects of the development programme likely to affect archaeological remains;
- to secure the adequate recording of any archaeological remains revealed by the development programme;
- to gather, if possible, sufficient information to establish extent, date and function of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area;
- to determine the extent, condition, character, quality of survival, importance and date of any archaeological remains present;
- to determine the chronological phasing of the archaeology;
- to investigate the site as necessary in order to establish an adequate record and significance of the archaeology;
- to secure the analysis, conservation and long term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.

More specifically the project has the following objectives:

- to undertake a topographic survey of any earthwork banks and ditches previously identified by Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU);
- to establish and record a section across any extant earthwork banks and ditches, in order to investigate/ examine the construction techniques of the banks
- (identifying any phases of repair and/or reuse) and to gather dating evidence from the features;
- to undertake an archaeological watching brief across the area of topsoil/stripping.

More specifically, the programme of work within Phase B has 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; and

- Medieval and post-medieval parkland and landscape features.

These have been considered within the context of both regional and national research frameworks and in particular the West Midlands Regional Research Framework (Watt 2011) and frameworks recently established for mineral extraction areas of Staffordshire (Mann *et al* 2016).

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was led by Jamie Wilkins (BA (hons.)); who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2015 and has been practicing archaeology since 2013, assisted by Peter Lovett (BSc (hons.)). The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Robin Jackson (BA (hons.); ACIfA). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc (hons.); PG Cert; MCIfA). Robert Hedge (MA Cantab) contributed the finds report.

3.2 Documentary research

An archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) of the site was produced by Oxford Archaeology Associates (1991) and the archaeological background for the site presented below (Section 4.2) also draws upon previous fieldwork undertaken and Worcestershire Archaeology's understanding of the aggregate producing areas of Staffordshire (Mann *et al* 2016).

3.3 List of sources consulted

Documentary sources

Published and grey literature sources consulted are listed in the bibliography.

3.4 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2017). Fieldwork was undertaken between 9 January 2017 and 10 March 2017. The Worcestershire Archaeology project number is P4950.

The topsoil and subsoil strip of Phases B (i) and (ii) covered an area of approximately 5.2ha.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket and operating under archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. 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).

3.5 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.

3.6 Artefact methodology, by Rob Hedge

The finds work reported here conforms with the relevant sections of *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014b), with archive creation informed by *Archaeological archives: a guide to the best practice in the creation, compilation, transfer and curation* (AAF 2011), and museum deposition by *Selection, retention and dispersal of archaeological collections* (SMA 1993).

3.6.1 Artefact recovery policy

Recovery of artefacts was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012; appendix 2).

3.6.2 Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* date was produced for each stratified context. The date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site. All information was recorded on pro forma sheets.

Artefacts from environmental samples were examined, and are included below in Tables 1 and 3.

The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and referenced as appropriate by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by Worcestershire Archaeology (Hurst and Rees 1992 and www.worcestershireceramics.org).

3.6.3 Discard policy

The following categories/types of material will be discarded after a period of 6 months following the submission of this report, unless there is a specific request to retain them (and subject to the collection policy of the relevant depository):

- where unstratified (except early prehistoric),
- post-medieval material, and;
- generally where material has been specifically assessed by an appropriate specialist as having no obvious grounds for retention.

3.7 Environmental archaeology methodology

3.7.1 Sampling policy

In the event no deposits were identified which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

3.8 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

4 The application site

4.1 Topography, geology and current land-use

The site comprises an area of plantation known as 'Little Birches' and is located in the north-east part of Cannock Chase, and immediately north of previous areas affected by Rugeley Quarry. The site is contained within the *area of outstanding natural beauty* (AONB) allocated to Cannock Chase and is situated on high ground to the south and west of the Trent Valley. The site topography is varied, with an area of level ground in the north of the site, situated at 160.41m above ordnance datum (AOD), and also contains a considerable slope towards the south where it drops to 148.73m AOD, a full 11.68m lower than the north of site. The site is bounded by further plantations to the north, east, and west, and to the south by previous extraction areas.

The site was recently cleared of the plantation, in preparation for the programme of mineral extraction. Previous evaluation trenching (OA 2001) indicated frequent ground disturbance caused by previous and current plantation operations, and this modern disturbance continued to be observed throughout the duration of the current phase of work.

Geologically, the site is situated on Kidderminster formation sandstone and conglomerate, otherwise known as Triassic Rocks. These formations were formed during the Triassic period and relate to the deposition of sand and gravels to form river terraces (BGS 2017).

4.2 Archaeological context

The archaeological background presented below is based upon information contained in the following:

- Desk-based assessment (OAA 1991);
- Fieldwork 2001 (OA 2001a, 2001b);
- WSIs produced by West Yorkshire Archaeological Services (WYAS 2004; 2005);
- A WSI and reports produced by Cotswold Archaeology following fieldwork undertaken in 2008 (CA 2008a, CA 2008b, CA 2008c).

The background presented also draws on Worcestershire Archaeology's understanding of the archaeology of the region and especially of the aggregate producing areas of Staffordshire (Mann *et al* 2016).

Prehistoric and Roman

No evidence of prehistoric or Roman activity is known in the immediate development area, however, it is possible that sites have been masked from aerial or field detection by the local forest cover. Prehistoric activity has been identified in the vicinity of the site, specifically across the area of Cannock Chase and this includes flints of Late Mesolithic and Early Neolithic date, and earthworks which may represent settlement and/or burial sites. Ploughed out barrows, burnt mounds and possible enclosures have also been identified in the surrounding area and are liable to be of prehistoric or, in the case of the enclosures, Roman date. The nearby terraces and floodplain of the Trent Valley to the north are characterised by a wealth of archaeological sites dating from the early prehistoric period through to the Roman period.

Medieval

The site lies within Wolseley Park, which was created as a deerpark at the end of the 15th century. It is probable that a ditch and bank would have delineated the park boundary. Within the site itself earthwork banks and ditches were recorded during the fieldwork undertaken by Oxford Archaeology in 2001 (OA 2001a, 2001b). Two of these banks (labelled Banks 13 and 14; located within the area now referred to as Phase A) were suggested as potentially representing internal divisions within the park and in September 2008 CA carried out an earthwork survey of two of them (CA 2008b). This demonstrated that Bank 13 survived as an earthwork but that Bank 14 had been levelled during the recent creation of a forest track. A subsequent evaluation (CA 2008c) comprised three trenches excavated across the lines of these banks and this confirmed the survival of a ditch associated with the extant earthwork of Bank 13 whilst, although the other bank does not survive as an earthwork, vestiges of Bank 14 and an associated ditch were recorded below the modern subsoil. No dating evidence was recovered during the evaluation, but the form and location of the boundaries represented by these banks and ditches is consistent with them having formed part of the deerpark.

Glassmaking within Wolseley Park is documented as early as the 15th century and prior to quarrying operations, an excavation was undertaken by Staffordshire's Archaeology Section at the site of a long known forest glasshouse. The location of the glasshouse lies within the current quarry area (just to the south of Phase B), although it is now obscured by a screenmound. The excavations revealed several pieces of large furnace debris, including sandstone blocks and fused glass adhering to the surface and glassworking, including molten glass, glass and crucible fragments and tiles from a collapsed roof. Three large ponds, situated to the immediate east of the development site and on a tributary of the Stafford Brook, may have served an industrial function. It has been suggested that they may have been associated with ironworking and there is documentary evidence of this industry being undertaken in the vicinity of the development site. Alternatively, the ponds may have served an ornamental rather than an industrial function, possibly associated with nearby Wolseley Park House.

Post-medieval

Between 1885 and 1902, a racecourse was laid out within Wolseley Park to the east of South Street. The grass track of the racecourse was still visible during the field survey undertaken in 1991 (OAA 1991).

5 Results

5.1 Structural analysis

The stripped area and features recorded are shown in Figure 2. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

The natural substrate (108) was encountered between 0.15m – 0.30m below the ground surface, at 160.14m AOD in the north of site, and 148.43m AOD in the south of site. It consisted of red/orange sand and gravels, with occasional patches of red marl clay. This deposit was observed across the entirety of the site.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Undated deposits

The only archaeological features observed across the site were two segmented ditches (Fig 2).

The easternmost ditch [118] appeared to be badly truncated by later activity, and only survived for 16.50m, to a width of 1.18m and a depth of 0.12m. It followed a north to south alignment and was located in the centre of site at 159.86m AOD. The ditch was filled with two deposits but no cultural material was recovered. The uppermost fill (116) of this ditch consisted of a dark, wet, peaty clay, which still contained evidence of vegetation and grass. It is therefore likely that this ditch had been left open and gradually silted up via natural processes. No earthworks were observed.

The second ditch [109] was located in the western area of the site (160.52m AOD), and followed a north-east to south-west alignment. This ditch was observed over 51.90m, and was 1.90m at its widest, and 0.41m at its deepest. Despite the disturbance to the surface deposits, the southern 28m of this ditch were visible as earthworks (Fig 5) and here the up-cast natural deposits were observed to form a bank on the eastern side of the ditch.

A smaller, narrower recut [103/112] was recorded in this ditch, and was present along the entire observed length. The uppermost fill (110) of this recut, comprised a dark, blackish, waterlogged clay, and is likely to have formed when the topsoil (101) became waterlogged in the depression left by the ditch. The ditch terminated c 10m from the steep slope present on site and this may have been intentional (as opposed to resulting from truncation). No cultural material was recovered from either of these ditches.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Modern deposits

A disturbed, mixed layer of vegetation (100) was observed across the entirety of the site. This layer was formed from forest floor material, disturbed as a result of tree clearance operations undertaken prior to the watching brief. It overlaid a thin buried topsoil (101) which was a dark, blackish brown in colour and only 0.05m – 0.20m in depth.

In some areas, namely the north and east of site, a yellowish orange subsoil (102) was observed also above the natural substrate (108). It measured between 0.10m-0.20m in depth. It is likely that this layer was formed via repeated ground disturbance from years of plantation activity.

Areas of modern tree and root disturbance were present across the entire site, and are a direct result of plantation operations, including but not limited to the removal of trees.

5.2 Artefact analysis, by Rob Hedge

Quantity 1 Weight 5.6g End-scrapers, Mesolithic — Early Neolithic.

An end-scrapers on a rounded flake was recovered from disturbed ground (100). It was 32.7mm long, 23.8mm wide and 6.4mm thick, weighing 5.6g, and was fashioned on mottled mid-grey flint of moderate quality; no cortex remained.

Abrupt retouch on the distal end blended into semi-abrupt retouch along approximately 2/3 of the left and 1/2 of the right lateral margins. The type is a long-lived one: end-scrapers of this form span the Mesolithic to the Early Bronze Age; however, the piece exhibits signs of careful platform preparation that suggest a date in the earlier part of this range — i.e. Mesolithic to Early Neolithic — although a later date cannot be excluded.

6 Synthesis

6.1 Prehistoric

The presence of a residual, flint end-scrapers in the overlying vegetation (100) is consistent with the location of the site within an area of the early prehistoric landscape associated with activity on the river terraces around the Trent. This site occupies high ground overlooking the Trent Valley to the north; a landscape rich in prehistoric settlements and monuments. Of particular note is the Early Neolithic causeway enclosure located 7.80km away at Mavesyn Ridware (Garwood forthcoming). Although no prehistoric deposits were observed within the confines of the investigate areas, the presence of an end-scrapers reflects this early prehistoric activity within the wider vicinity. This object is probably a stray loss or casually discarded item but adds to the understanding of the widescale use of this landscape and indicates the potential for identification of prehistoric features and deposits in later phases of mineral extraction.

6.2 Medieval / Post-medieval

Although no dating evidence was recovered from the two ditches, it is highly likely that these are features associated with the former medieval, Wolseley Park deer-park. Ditch [109] is consistent with a boundary ditch excavated in a previous quarry extension to the south-west (CA 2008c: Bank 13). Both features recorded in 2017 comprised a north-east to south-west aligned ditch, with a bank on the eastern side. Moreover, the location of one of these ditches [109] appears to align with the previously identified boundary ditch (Bank 13), and may once have formed part of the same boundary for the deer-park. The presence of a recut in this ditch [109] is probably indicative of maintenance work in the upkeep of the deer-park.

There were no earthworks associated with the other ditch [118], and its function remains unknown. It does not appear to have a clear association with the deer-park ditch [109], but may be related to an earlier phase of deer-park activity. The presence of waterlogged turf in the upper fill makes it unlikely that this ditch is much earlier. Rackham (1996) notes that deer-parks required constant maintenance, and were often short-lived, which may account for the presence of seemingly unsystematic ditches within this landscape. Both of the ditches identified appear to terminate very close to the steep, southwards facing slope. This is likely a deliberate attempt at utilising the natural features within landscapes to assist in the control of deer, a strategy identified by Moorhouse (2007) in his study of deer-parks in Yorkshire.

The results of this project, in association with the results from previous investigations (CA 2008c; OA 2001b) broadly support the premise that Wolseley Park was a compartmented deer-park, which had internal sub-divisions consisting of ditches and banks (Rackham 1996).

No evidence of the documented medieval or post-medieval glassmaking industry was observed within the confines of the area investigated in 2017. Some evidence may have been expected due to the presence of a former glassworks just outside the southern boundary of this site (Welch

1997); however, the topography of this location, with a steep, southwards facing slope, may have been deemed unsuitable for industrial activity of this kind.

Continued archaeological investigations at Rugeley quarry have the potential to develop our understanding of medieval and post-medieval small-scale, rural, industrial activity as well as the development of agriculture and parkland; which were identified as research agendas in the Staffordshire Aggregates Resource Assessment (Mann *et al* 2016).

7 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology 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.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Cemex UK at Rugeley Quarry, Rugeley, Staffordshire (NGR SK 0045 1865), in preparation for a new phase of mineral extraction.

The only archaeological features observed were two ditches. The westernmost ditch measured approximately 50m in length, followed a north-east to south-west alignment, and had an earthwork bank on the eastern side, which was subtle, but discernible on the surface. The easternmost ditch was just 15m in length, very shallow, and was only visible below the subsoil.

It is highly likely that these ditches relate to the former, medieval Wolseley Park deer-park, which once covered the area now known as Cannock Chase. The westernmost ditch appears to align with an earthwork bank further to the southwest, which was recorded in 2008, in an earlier programme of quarrying. It is, therefore, likely that these ditches may once have been components of the same boundary. This project broadly supports the premise that the ditches observed here, and in earlier recording projects, form a variety of internal boundaries typical of compartmented deer-parks.

The presence of a residual, worked-flint, end-scraper is a further reflection of the extensive use by prehistoric communities within this landscape focussed around the river terraces of the Trent valley. Although no prehistoric features or deposits were observed within the confines of this site, the presence of this scraper indicates use of this area as part of a wider pattern of prehistoric use of this area.

8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the conclusion of this project, Shaun Denny, Gareth Fenna and Kevin Mellors of Cemex UK, Chris Morrell of Stokey Plant Hire Ltd, and Stephen Dean (curator).

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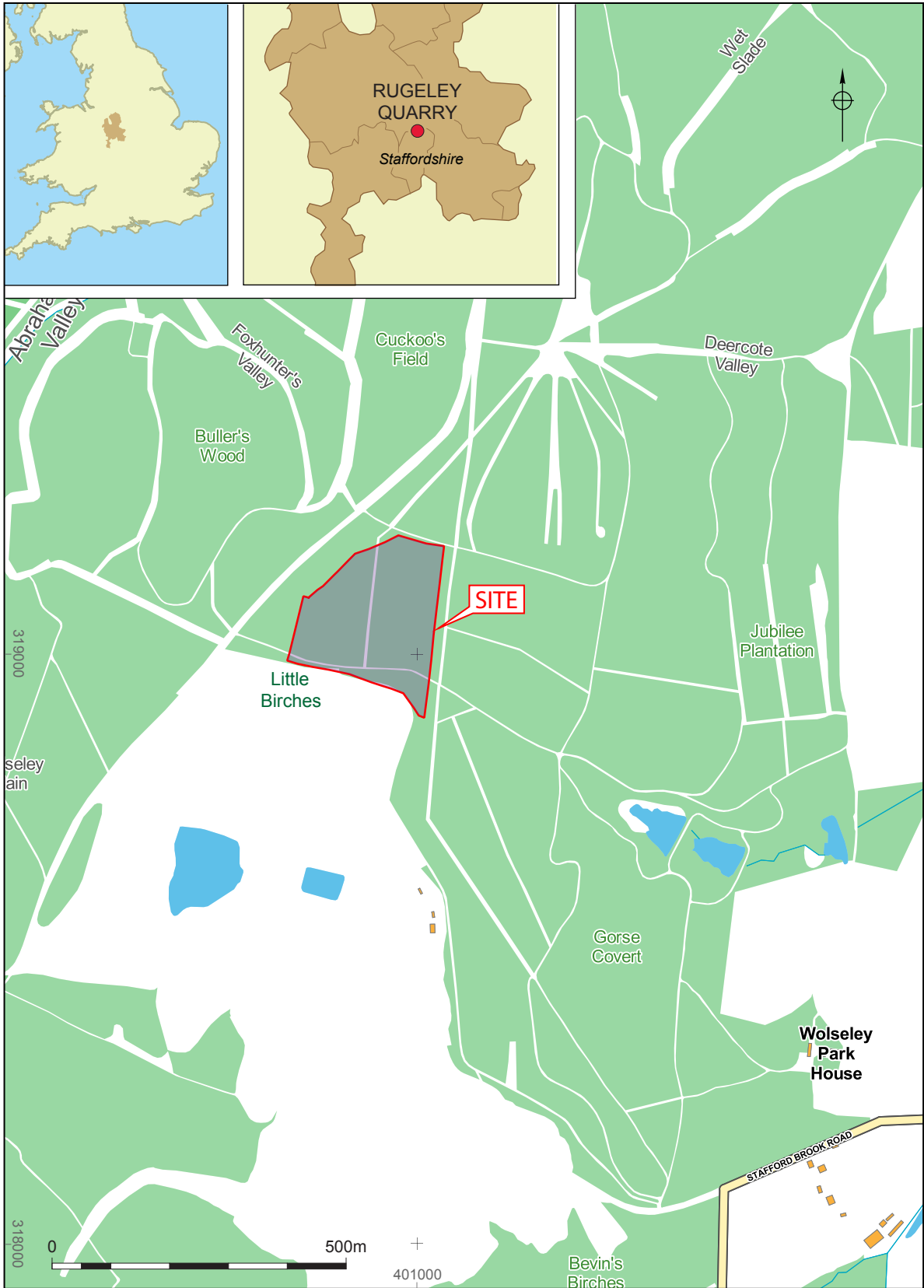
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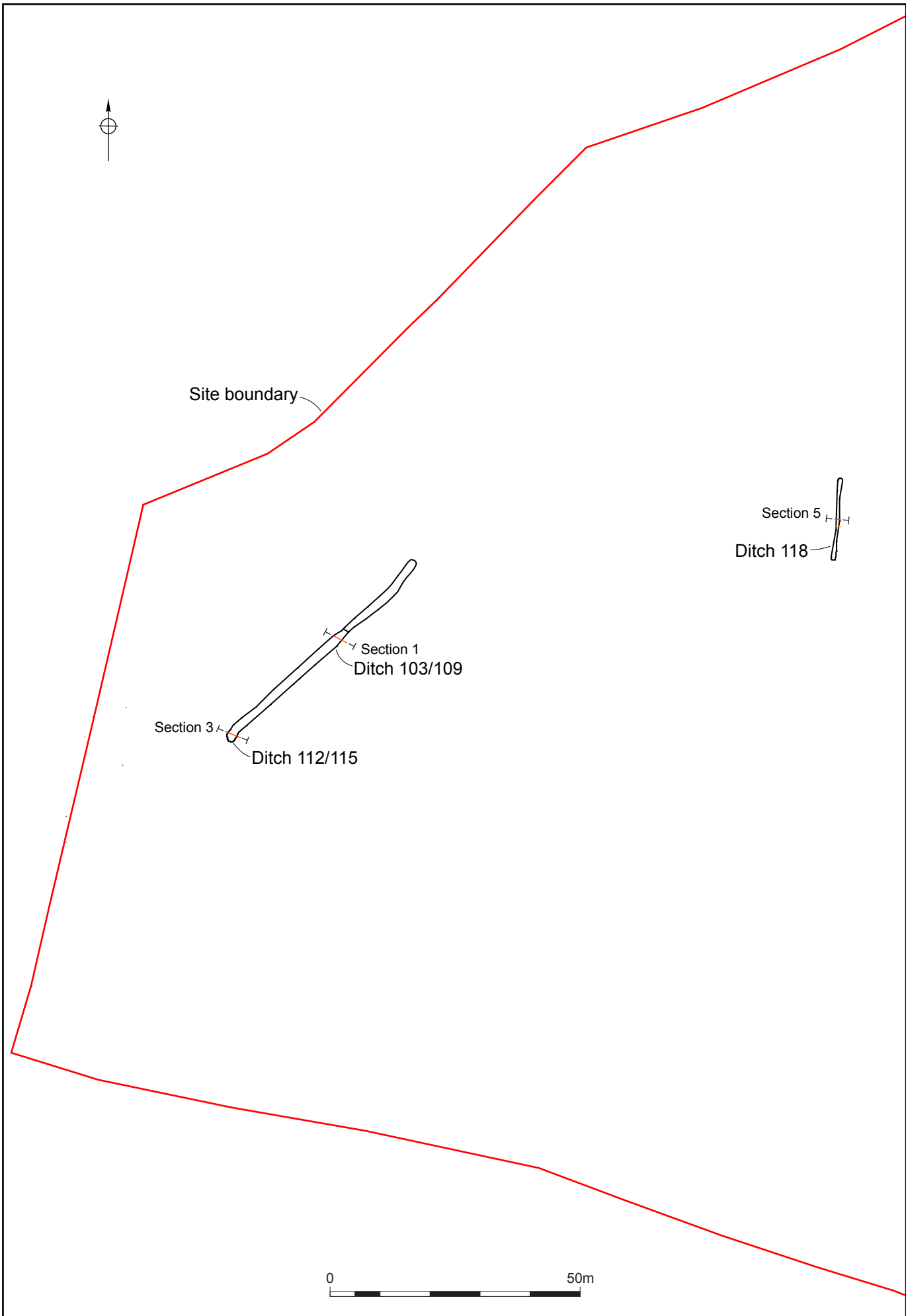
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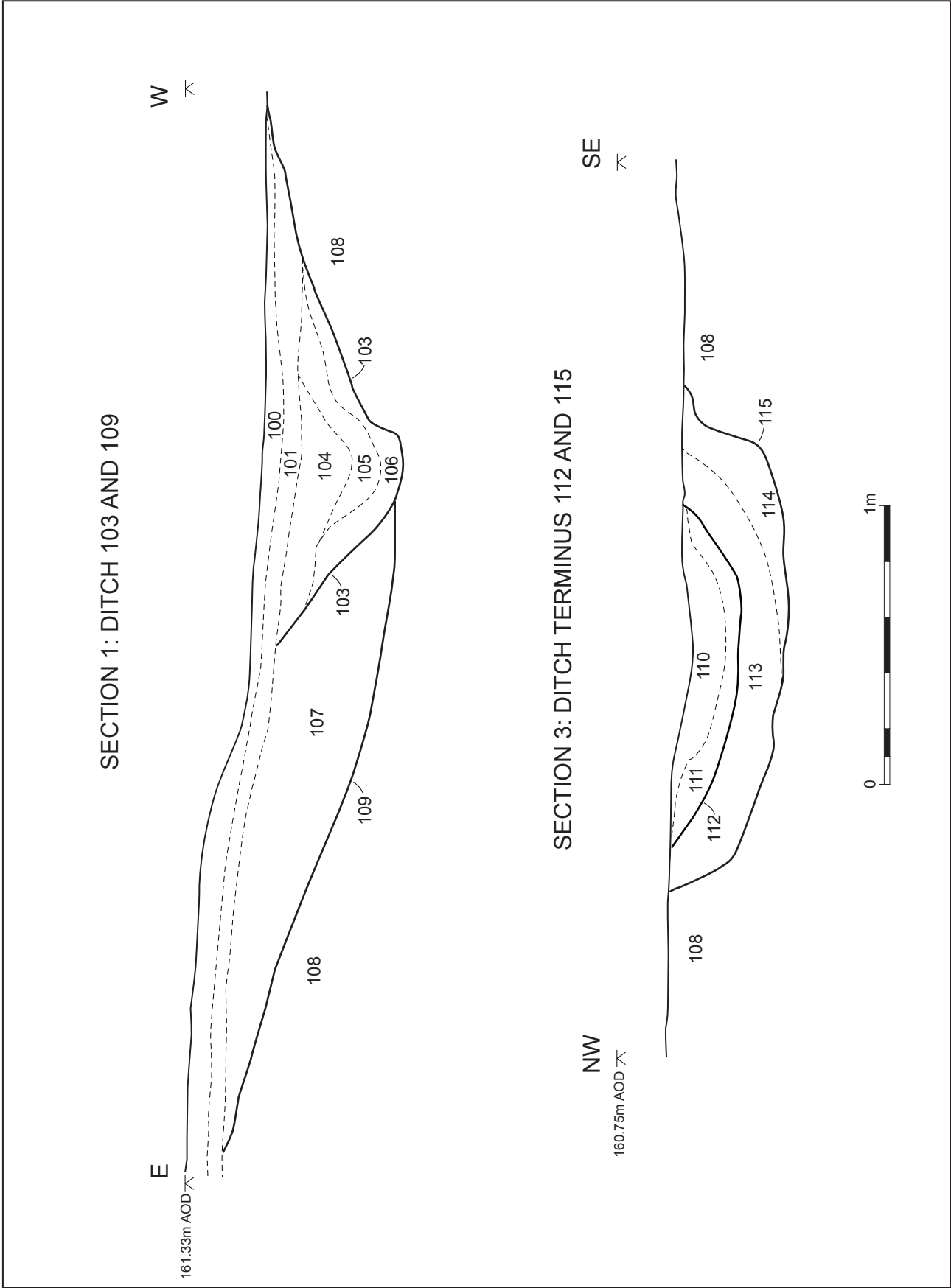
Location of the site

Figure 1



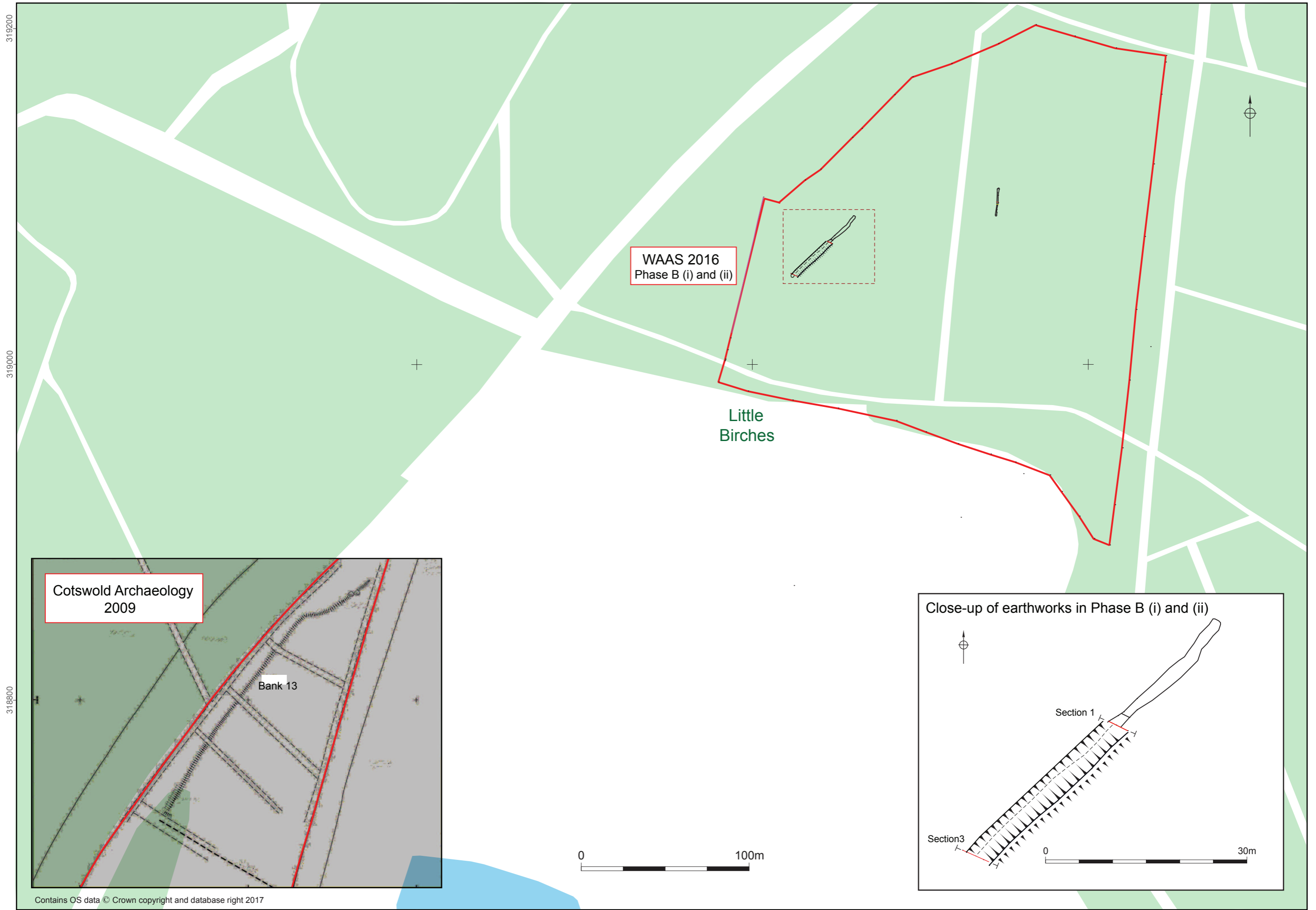
Plan of ditches

Figure 2



Sections 1 and 3

Figure 3



Plan of earthwork bank combined with previous phase by Cotswold Archaeology

Figure 4

Plates



Plate 1. Deer-park ditch [103] / [109]. View south-west. Scales 1m.



Plate 2. Deer-park ditch [103] / [109] with earthwork bank on eastern side. View south-west. Scales 1m and 0.4m.



Plate 3. Deer-park ditch [112]/[115] terminus. View north-east. Scale 1m.



Plate 4. Deer-park ditch [112]/[115] terminus. View north-east. Scale 1m.



Plate 5. Shallow ditch [118]. View north. Scale 0.5m.



Plate 6. Stripped area showing natural geology (108). View east. Scales 1m.

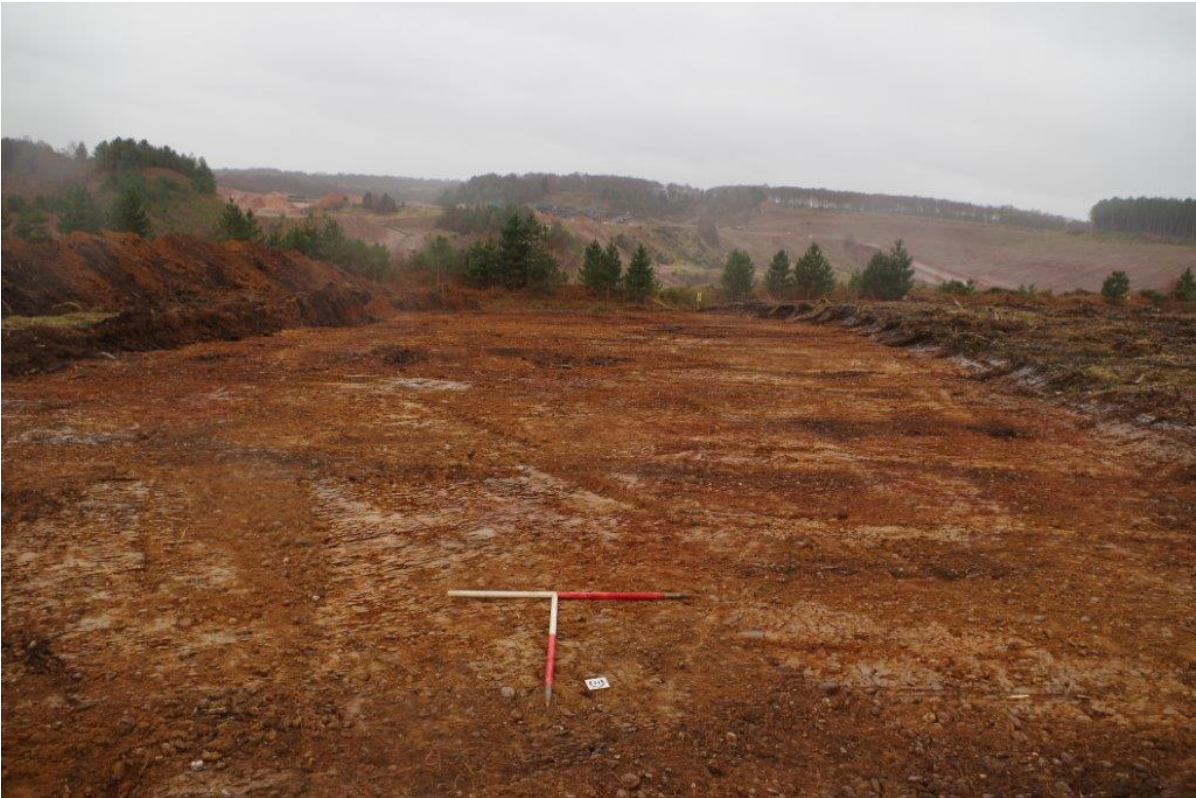


Plate 7. Stripped area, view south towards Rugeley Quarry. Scales 1m.



Plate 8. Mesolithic to Early Neolithic, flint end-scraper. Scale 5cm.

Appendix 1

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth
100	Vegetation / Forest Floor	Disturbed forest floor deposit, consisting of vegetation and frequent sub-rounded pebbles and cobbles. Disturbed during deforestation.	0.08m
101	Topsoil	Soft, dark black, humic silty loam, containing frequent rooting, sub-rounded pebbles.	0.10m
102	Subsoil	Soft, mid yellowish orange, silty sand, containing frequent sub-rounded gravels and cobbles. Not present across the entire site.	0.10m-0.20m
103	Ditch Cut	Cut of ditch, likely associated with the deer-park. Appears to be a recut within ditch [109].	0.38m
104	Ditch Fill	Upper fill of ditch [103]. A slightly humic, dark reddish brown, silty sand deposit, with frequent gravels and pebbles.	0.18m
105	Ditch Fill	Washed in fill of ditch [103]. Soft, mid yellow brown, silty sand with frequent pebbles and cobbles.	0.12m
106	Ditch Fill	Lowest fill of ditch recut [103]. Soft, mid reddish brown, silty sand with moderate pebbles and gravels.	0.09m
107	Ditch Fill	Homogenous fill of original deer-park ditch [109]. Cut by recut [103]. Soft, mid yellowish brown, silty sand with frequent pebbles and gravels.	0.35m
108	Natural	Soft – moderately compact, mid yellow, orange and red sands and gravels with some patches of red marl clay. Natural substrate.	N/A
109	Ditch Cut	Original cut of deer-park ditch, with the remnants of an earthwork bank just about discernible on the eastern side of cut. Later truncated by ditch [103].	0.35m
110	Ditch Fill	Dark brownish black, silty clay upper fill of ditch [112]. Likely a relict topsoil which has become waterlogged in the depression left by ditch [112].	0.13m
111	Ditch Fill	Basal fill of ditch [112]. Compact, dark orangey brown, silty clay with few inclusions.	0.11m
112	Ditch Cut	Cut of ditch terminus which truncates earlier ditch [115]. Likely same as [103]. Visible in topsoil as slight earthwork / hollow. Fairly waterlogged.	0.19m

Context	Classification	Description	Depth
113	Ditch Fill	Fill of earlier deer-park ditch [115]. Soft, mid orangey brown, silty sand with frequent rooting, gravels and pebbles. Cut by [112].	0.22m
114	Ditch Fill	Dark deposit down southeast edge of ditch [115]. Soft, dark orangey brown, silty sand with frequent rooting and pebbles.	0.28m
115	Ditch Cut	Cut of earlier deer-park ditch terminus, likely same as [109]. Truncated by later ditch [112].	0.42m
116	Ditch Fill	Dark, wet, peaty clay fill of ditch [118]. Contains occasional sub-rounded pebbles and frequent waterlogged rooting / vegetation.	0.09m
117	Ditch Fill	Lower fill of ditch [118]. Soft, mid orangey brown, silty sand with frequent sub-rounded pebbles and cobbles.	0.06m
118	Ditch Cut	Cut of small shallow ditch. Similar to ditch [112] as it contains peaty, waterlogged fill. Possible deer-park related. Only around 15m in length.	0.12m

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive (Worcestershire Archaeology project code: P4950)

The archive consists of:

- 19 Context records AS1
- 5 Field progress reports AS2
- 2 Photographic records AS3
- 116 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 6 Scale drawings
- 1 Context number catalogues AS5
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 CD-Rom/DVDs
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery,
Bethesda Street,
Cultural Quarter,
Stoke-on-Trent
ST1 3DW
