

# Tesco Hamilton Leicester



## Archaeological Watching Brief



**Oxford Archaeology**

25th October 2002

**Client Name: Tesco Stores Limited**

Issue N<sup>o</sup>: 1

OA Job N<sup>o</sup>: 1453

Planning Ref N<sup>o</sup>: 97/0126

NGR: SK 631 064

**Client Name:** Tesco Stores Limited  
**Client Ref No:** N153  
**Document Title:** Tesco, Hamilton, Leicester, Leicestershire

**Document Type:** Watching Brief

**Issue Number:** 1

National Grid Reference: NGR SK 631 064  
Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 1453  
Site Code: A21.2002  
Invoice Code: LEHAMwb2  
Receiving Museum: Jewry Wall Museum  
Museum Accession No: A21.2002

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Document File Location U:\OA\oa\WBEV\LEICS\HamiltonTescoWB\REPORT\REPORT.doc  
Graphics File Location Server10:/OAUpubs/ItoQ\*LEHAMWB2\*Hamilton-Tesco\*ACT.15.10.2002  
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## Tesco, Hamilton, Leicester Leicestershire

NGR SK 631 064

### *ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*In September 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA, formerly Oxford Archaeological Unit, OAU) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the site of the new Tesco Store at Hamilton (Humberstone), Leicester (NGR SK 631 064). Taylor Woodrow Construction commissioned the work on behalf of Tesco Limited. The watching brief was undertaken during groundworks and surface stripping in advance of an eastward extension to the present store. The work was a continuation of the excavations carried out by OAU in 1997-8.*

*The watching brief revealed an extension of the archaeological activity known from previous excavations. A Bronze Age ditch and part of an enclosure of mid-late Iron Age date with ?associated gully were discovered at the south end of the site. A single pit and a posthole were also recorded. The prehistoric activity decreased to the north of the site where the bases of a series of medieval or later plough furrows were noted. A small assemblage of Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery was recovered from a few features.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In September 2002, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the site of the new Tesco Store at Hamilton (Humberstone), Leicester (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 The current development concerns the construction of an extension to the present store, the site of which was subject to an archaeological investigation in 1997-8 by Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU, now Oxford Archaeology, OA) and reported in 2000 (see below). The extension is to be built east of the present Tesco store (Fig. 2).
- 1.1.3 As the development site lies within an area of archaeological interest, an archaeological watching brief was requested by Leicester City Council's Planning Officer responsible for granting the planning permission. This was in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Act of 1990 (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas).
- 1.1.4 Discussions took place between Leicester City's Archaeologist and OA, who subsequently prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (OA 2002) detailing how it would undertake the requirements of the watching brief.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The application site lies in an area of known archaeology (see below) and is located 5 km east of Leicester City centre (NGR SK 631 064).
- 1.2.2 At the time of the watching brief the site was level and covered partly with material from the first construction phase of the store. The site lies on boulder clay on the top of a low hill, at c 101 m OD.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA 2002) and is summarised below.
- 1.3.2 A small quantity of Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery was recovered 0.7 km north of the site (Liddle 1994) and in the same area a Romano-British farmstead dating from the late Iron Age to the late Roman period was excavated (Liddle 1986, 78). The earthworks of the deserted medieval village of Hamilton can be found 1.5 km to the north-east of the development site.
- 1.3.3 The Iron Age settlement (with possible Bronze Age component), excavated by the Oxford Archaeological Unit in the spring and summer of 1998, comprised a total of 1.3 ha. The main site (Area 3000) formed a complex of inter-cutting enclosures and penannular gullies, including probable house gullies and associated enclosures. The earliest phase included a large, north-west/south-east aligned rectangular enclosure, with an entrance on the north-west side. Part of a pebble trackway surface survived in the entrance. The later phase included traces of an un-enclosed group of roundhouses, each with an internal diameter of c.10-12 m. The largest of the roundhouses consisted of two concentric penannular ditches, with internal features including stone-packed postholes and a possible central hearth. A number of irregular enclosures without internal features are likely to be stock pens.
- 1.3.4 Notable finds included a substantial assemblage of East Midlands Scored Ware pottery, thought to date from c. 3rd century BC to the mid-1st century AD, a complete upper quernstone, a bronze pin or awl and a pair of bronze tweezers. No Roman pottery has been found, suggesting that the settlement fell out of use before the Roman conquest. However, two Roman silver coins, one a denarius dated to 31BC, have been found, indicating at least indirect contact with the Roman world (Charles, Parkinson, Foreman, 2000, 113-220)
- 1.3.5 Geophysical Survey and evaluation was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) at Manor Farm (Gossip 1999) and pottery of mid-late Iron Age date was recovered. This site was then excavated during the winter and spring of 2001/2. Two areas of mid-late Iron Age activity were recorded. To the north, an extensive area of ring gullies and pits was revealed, with some evidence of metal working.
- 1.3.6 This appeared to be defined to the north by a linear boundary ditch running approximately east-west, and was a continuation of the ditch observed to the north of the A46/7 link road during geophysical survey. The site appears comparable with the OA Tesco's site, most notably by features recovered from the areas excavated to the west of the main settlement focus. At least one Bronze Age pit was recorded.
- 1.3.7 The second area, clearly separated from the northern complex, comprised a series of apparently linked Iron Age 'enclosures', though not all were fully enclosed. These appeared to have been situated at the junction of two boundary ditches. The first was aligned north-west/south-east, the second north-south. Ring gullies and pits were located within each of the enclosures, including a double ring gully to the south of

the site. Roman pottery and a small collection of coins suggest some continuity into the Roman period.

#### 1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 The principal site contractors were Taylor Woodrow, whose Senior Quantity Surveyor, Tom Gould, was helpful at all times. OA's Guy Cockin carried out the Watching Brief over a period of two weeks in September 2002.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The building proposal was for a new building forming an extension to the existing store. This entailed a site surface strip to formation level and the excavation of foundation trenches.
- 2.1.2 The principal aim was to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area and to establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- 2.1.3 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present. A specific aim was to establish the presence of any further remains associated with the known Iron Age settlement discovered in 1997-8, and to elucidate whether there was an extension of the site into the Roman period as suggested by the discovery of coins of Roman date. Further evidence for the Bronze Age will be sought to accompany the single Bronze Age ditch recorded at the site.
- 2.1.4 To signal, before the destruction of the material in question, the discovery of a significant archaeological find, for which the resources allocated are not sufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard. In this case additional technicians may be required to aid the excavation of the archaeological material.
- 2.1.5 To make available the results of the investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 An archaeological supervisor was in attendance during all ground works likely to affect archaeological deposits. The site was stripped to a depth of 700 mm to 1200 mm from south to north, including overburden deposited on the site after completion of the 1998 excavations and groundworks associated with the earlier building works.
- 2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:50 and where excavated their sections drawn at scales of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film.
- 2.2.3 A general photographic record of the work was made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The earliest deposit on the site was a layer of compact greenish-grey silty clay (16) with occasional stones that was interpreted as the natural. The layer was at least 0.15 m thick as exposed by machining, and lay at a general level of 105 m OD.

##### *Prehistoric mid-late Iron Age enclosure ditch 3=12 (Fig. 4, sections 1 and 4)*

- 3.1.2 The ditch (3 = 12) was located to the south-east of the site and cut the natural (16). The feature encompassed an area of 15 m by 15 m. The north section of the enclosure was aligned north-west/south-east and turned 90° to return to the south. Two slots were excavated through the ditch fills.
- 3.1.3 On its north side the ditch (3) was 1.6 m wide and 0.32 m deep with 50° sloping sides and a flat base. The lower fill (2) was a 0.14 m thick deposit of light grey clay with frequent chalk inclusions. This was overlain by a 0.3 m thick green-grey silty clay with chalk and charcoal flecks (1). Six abraded pottery sherds of mid-late Iron Age date and animal bone were recovered. A flint of ?Neolithic/Bronze Age date was also recovered from the deposit and is likely to have been residual by the time the feature was open.
- 3.1.4 A second slot was excavated through the ditch to the south-west. Here the ditch (12) was aligned north-east/south-west with 45° sloping sides and a concave base. Traces of an animal burrow were noted on the west edge of the ditch. The fill of the ditch here comprised a blue-grey silty clay (11) that was 0.44 m thick and which contained eight sherds of pottery of mid-late Iron Age date and some animal bone.
- 3.1.5 The enclosure was originally recorded in the excavation of the Area 3 complex of ditches and gullies (Context 5068), and the northern extent of that feature has been plotted.
- 3.1.6 At the junction of ditch 3=12, was a pit (24). The feature was circular with a diameter of 1.6 m, and appeared to cut the ditch fills. The fill of the pit was a grey-brown silty clay (23) with some chalk and charcoal flecks.

##### *Prehistoric Gully 22*

- 3.1.7 A north-south aligned gully (22) appeared to respect ditch 3=12 and curved slightly to the north-east on a general north-south alignment. It was filled with a compact blue-grey clay (21) and contained eight sherds of pottery of mid-late Iron Age date. The relationship of the gully to ditch 3=12 was lost due to a later feature (26).

##### *Posthole 20*

- 3.1.8 The feature (20) was located to the south-west of the site and cut the natural. It was circular with a diameter of 0.46 m. It was filled by a compact blue-grey silty clay (19) with occasional chalk and charcoal flecks, but contained no dating evidence.

### ***Bronze Age ditches***

- 3.1.9 Within enclosure ditch 3=12 was a 0.4 m wide east-west linear feature (10, Fig. 4, section 3) with gently sloping sides and concave base. It was 0.2 m deep and filled with a grey silty clay (9). Fill 9 was cut by north-east/south-west aligned linear feature (5) that was 1.1 m wide and 0.35 m deep. It was filled with a compact yellow-grey silty clay (4) that contained frequent charcoal flecks, three sherds of pottery of Bronze Age date, animal bone and burnt stone (Fig. 4). A flint platform core of this period was recovered from the fill.

### ***Modern features/furrows***

- 3.1.10 A shallow ditch (8) at the extreme south-east of the site was 0.7 m wide and 0.15 m deep (Fig. 4, section 2). The basal fill (7) was a blue-grey clay with charcoal flecks containing a pottery sherd of post-medieval date. The fill was 0.5 m thick and was overlain by a compact yellow clay (6) to a depth of 0.1 m and containing chalk flecks.
- 3.1.11 The regular spacing of four east-west aligned linear features (26, 28, 30, 32) north of enclosure 3=12 suggests that they represent a group of ?medieval plough furrows. Sample slots were excavated through the features that were all c 1 m wide and 0.2 m deep (Fig. 5, sections 7 and 8) and filled by grey-brown clay. From context 25, the fill of 26, a small perforated chalk disc was recovered that may have been used as a bead or perhaps a fishing weight.
- 3.1.12 The previous section cut across the west part of ditch 3=12 was noted. Cut 18 was filled by a mixed backfill of blue-grey clay (17) with charcoal flecks. Numerous soil marks across the site appear to be wheel ruts formed recently by heavy plant, and two modern field drains were noted.
- 3.1.13 The fills of all of the features were sealed beneath a general layer of greenish-grey silty clay (15) with charcoal flecks and rounded small stones. The layer was 0.15 m thick and represents a ploughsoil/former topsoil of uncertain date. At the time of the watching brief, layer 15 was overlain by the recent topsoil (14) that was up to 0.4 m thick. This was covered by a thick layer of re-deposited soil and rubble (13) formed after the 1998 excavations (Fig. 5, section 5).

## **3.2 Finds**

### ***Prehistoric pottery by Edward Biddulph***

- 3.2.1 A total of 27 sherds, weighing 119 g, was recovered from six contexts. The pottery comprised small, abraded body sherds. No forms were recognised. Most of it is likely to date to the middle-late Iron Age. Bronze Age and post-medieval fabrics are also represented.
- 3.2.2 The pottery was examined microscopically (x20) and quantified by sherd count and weight. The later prehistoric pottery was assigned to fabric groups identified from the 1997/8 excavation material (Marsden 2000, 171). The post-medieval pottery was given an overall fabric code (Z30).



- 3.2.3 The later prehistoric pottery is divided between the following fabrics:
- G*. Grog-tempered ware. 3 sherds, 3 g
  - Q1*. Sandy ware. 3 sherds, 8 g
  - Q2*. Sandy ware with igneous rock inclusions. 8 sherds, 38 g
  - RQ1*. Igneous rock inclusions. 4 sherds, 31 g
  - S1*. Fossil shell-tempered ware. 7 sherds, 25 g
- 3.2.4 Grog-tempered pottery from the 1997/8 excavations was assigned an early-middle Bronze Age date (Marsden 2000, 172). The few sherds of the same fabric recovered from linear feature [5] are likely to belong to this period. The remaining pottery probably falls within a middle to late Iron Age date range. While fabrics RG1 and S1 can also be found in Bronze Age contexts (*ibid.*), here (contexts 1, 11 and 21) they were associated with Iron Age sandy wares. The small collection from enclosure ditch [3] is particularly notable. It comprised fabrics S1, RG1 and Q2. A body sherd in the final fabric was scored; this form of decoration is typical of the East Midlands middle-late Iron Age (*ibid.*, 174).
- 3.2.5 The condition of the pottery was poor. It was abraded and had an average sherd weight of just 4 g, probably as the result of numerous episodes of disturbance and relocation after initial discard and prior to final deposition into linear features.
- 3.2.6 Overall, the dating of the pottery is consistent with the trends identified from the 1997/8 excavation material, namely deriving from a predominantly later Iron Age settlement, with limited activity in the middle Bronze Age (*ibid.*, 179).
- 3.2.7 Two sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered: a sherd of red earthenware (13 g) from modern ditch fill 25, and one of creamware (1 g) from linear feature (8). Both sherds can be placed within an 18th-19th century range, though the earthenware may date from the 17th century.

*Table 1: Summary of pottery*

Ctx	Feature	Feature type	Sherds	Wt	Fabrics	Date
1	3	Enclosure ditch	6	32	S1, Q2, RQ1	M/LIA
4	5	Linear	3	3	G	BA
7	8	Linear	1	1	Creamware	PM
11	12	Enclosure ditch	8	32	S1, Q1, RQ1	M/LIA
21	22	Gully	8	38	Q2, RQ1	M/LIA
25		Ditch	1	13	Earthenware	PM

#### ***Animal bone by Bethan Charles***

- 3.2.8 A total of 9 animal bones (240g) were recovered during a watching brief at the Tesco site in Hamilton, Leicester. The bones were all in very good condition and consisted of a Sheep metatarsal and cattle rib from context Bronze Age context 4. A cattle ulna and astragalus bone from mid to late Iron Age context 1 and a horse metacarpal from context mid to late Iron Age context 11.

*Flint by Kate Cramp*

- 3.2.9 A total of four struck flints were recovered from three contexts in the course of the watching brief (see table below).

Table 2: Flint by type and by context

Category:	Context			Total
	1	4	29	
Flake	1		1	2
Irregular waste		1		1
Multi-platform flake core		1		1
<b>Total</b>	1	2	1	4

- 3.2.10 Context 1 produced a lightly corticated side-trimming flake with a hinge termination, which can be dated broadly to the late Neolithic or Bronze Age.
- 3.2.11 Context 4 contained a minimally-worked flake core, manufactured on a thermally-fractured cobble of gravel flint. Flake removals had been taken from two adjacent platforms, probably using a hard-hammer percussor; several hinge terminated scars and incipient cones of percussion were noted. The core would be consistent with a late Neolithic or Bronze Age technology.
- 3.2.12 A single piece of irregular waste was also recovered from context 4, consisting of a lightly iron-stained piece of gravel flint exhibiting two or three flake scars. The fragment is undiagnostic, and it is possible that it has been naturally or mechanically produced. Similarly, the flake from context 29 probably represents a naturally struck flint.
- 3.2.13 The limited size of the assemblage and the absence of datable types has precluded a more precise date and interpretation. As such, no further work is recommended.

#### 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The watching brief revealed a continuation to the north of the prehistoric activity noted in the 1997-8 excavations (Fig. 6). The earliest feature was a shallow Bronze Age ditch, presumably associated with the Bronze Age enclosure noted previously, superseded in the mid to late Iron Age by an enclosure ditch.
- 4.1.2 A contemporary gully to the north appears to mark the northern extent of the prehistoric activity as the remainder of the features comprised medieval/post-medieval plough furrows. No further structures to those recorded in the 1997-8 excavations were discovered, suggesting that the watching brief has identified the northern limit of the prehistoric settlement activity.
- 4.1.3 The pottery and flint assemblages shed no further light on the dating of the site established previously.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Height</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	Fill	0.3 m	-	-	Fill of ditch 3
2	Fill	0.14 m	-	-	Fill of ditch 3
3	Cut	0.32 m	1.6 m	-	Enclosure ditch = 12, Iron Age
4	Fill	0.35 m	-	-	Fill of 5
5	Cut	0.35 m	-	-	linear feature
6	Fill	0.1 m	-	-	fill of 8
7	Fill	0.5 m	-	-	Fill of 8
8	Cut	0.15 m	-	-	Possible linear feature
9	Fill	0.2 m	-	-	Fill of 10
10	Cut	0.2 m	0.4 m	-	Possible linear feature
11	Fill	0.44 m	-	-	Fill of 12
12	Cut	0.42 m	2 m	-	Ditch = 3
13	Layer	1.8 m	-	-	1998 made ground
14	Layer	0.4 m	-	-	Topsoil
15	Layer	0.15 m	-	-	Natural clay subsoil
16	Layer	-	-	-	natural
17	Fill	-	-	-	feature fill/wheel rut
18	Cut	-	1.1 m	-	Short linear feature
19	Fill	0.4 m	-	-	Fill of 20
20	Cut	0.46 m	-	-	Posthole
21	Fill	0.4 m	-	-	fill of 22
22	Cut	0.22 m	0.3 m	-	Gully
23	Fill	-	-	-	Pit fill in 24
24	Cut	-	1.6 m	-	Pit?
25	Fill	-	-	-	Ditch fill, modern
26	Cut	-	0.7m	-	Ditch, modern
27	Fill	-	-	-	Fill of furrow 28
28	Cut	0.18 m	1.1 m	-	Furrow
29	Fill	0.1 m	-	-	Furrow fill of 30
30	Cut	0.1 m	1 m	-	Furrow
31	Fill	-	-	-	Fill of furrow 32
32	Cut	-	1.5 m	-	Furrow

## Appendix

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- Charles, B, Parkinson, A and Foreman, S 2000 A Bronze Age Ditch and Iron Age Settlement at Elms Farm, Humberstone, Leicester. *Trans. Leicestershire Archaeol. and Hist. Soc*, 74, 2000
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- OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (1st edition, ed. D Wilkinson)
- OA 2002 Tesco, Hamilton, Leicester. *Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Tesco, Hamilton, Leicester

**Site code:** A21.2002

**Grid reference:** SK 631 064

**Type of watching brief:** Surface stripping, features mapping and sample excavation

**Date and duration of project:** Two weeks, September 2002

**Area of site:** 1 ha

**Summary of results:** The watching brief revealed an extension of the archaeological activity known from previous excavations here. A Bronze Age ditch and part of an enclosure of mid-late Iron Age date with ?associated gully were discovered at the south end of the site. A single pit and a posthole were also discovered. The prehistoric activity decreased to the north of the site where the bases of a series of plough furrows were noted. A small assemblage of Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery was recovered from a few features.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Jewry Wall Museum, Leicester under the following accession number: A21.2002

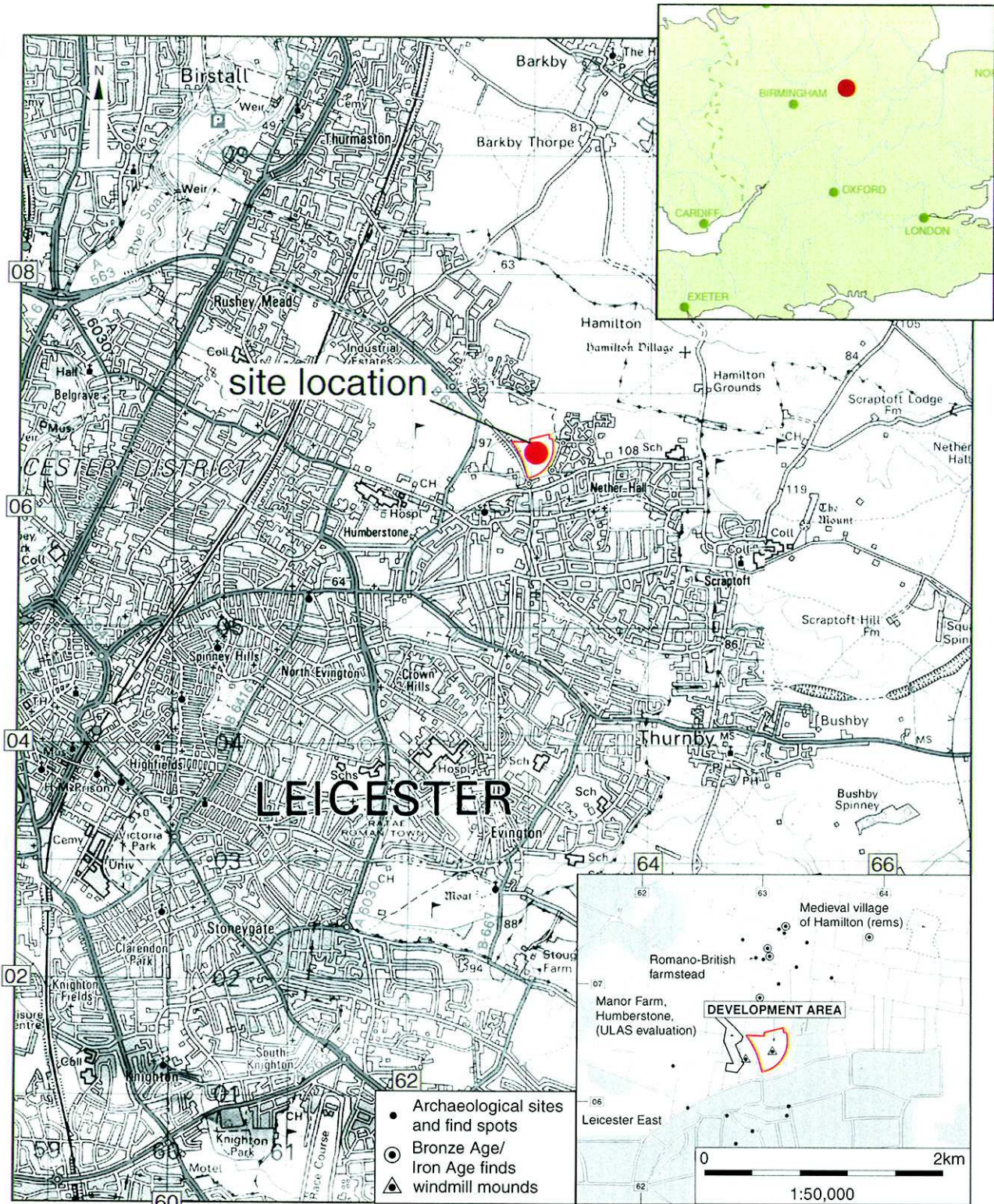


Figure 1: Site location

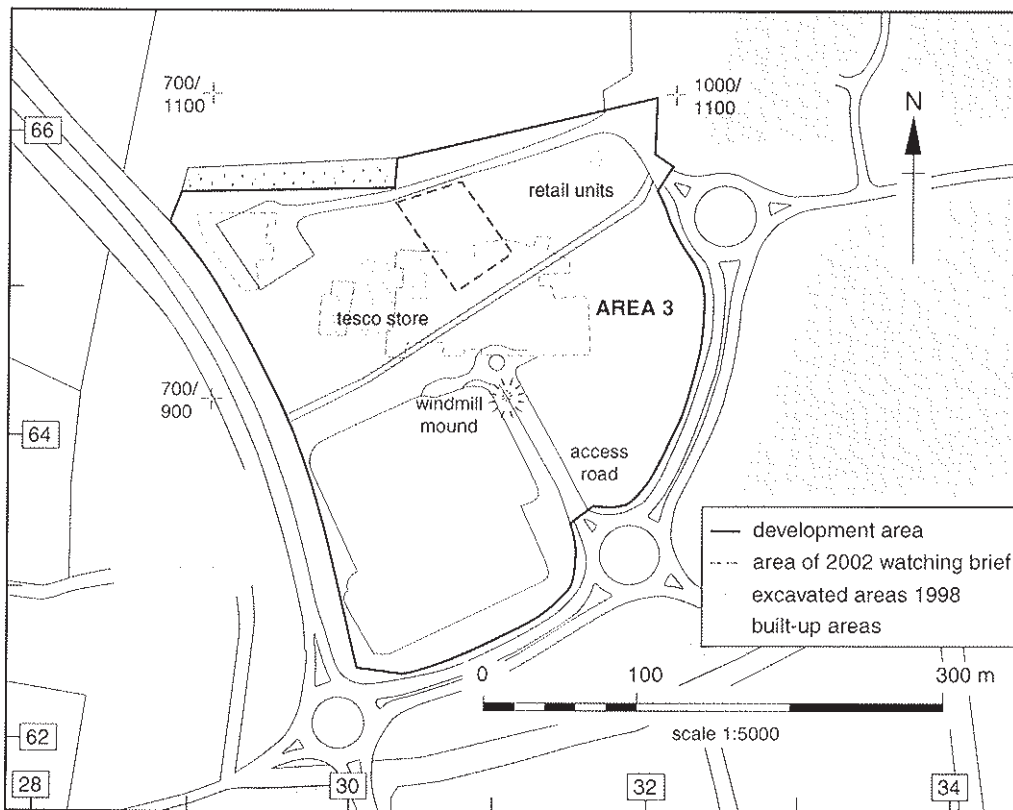
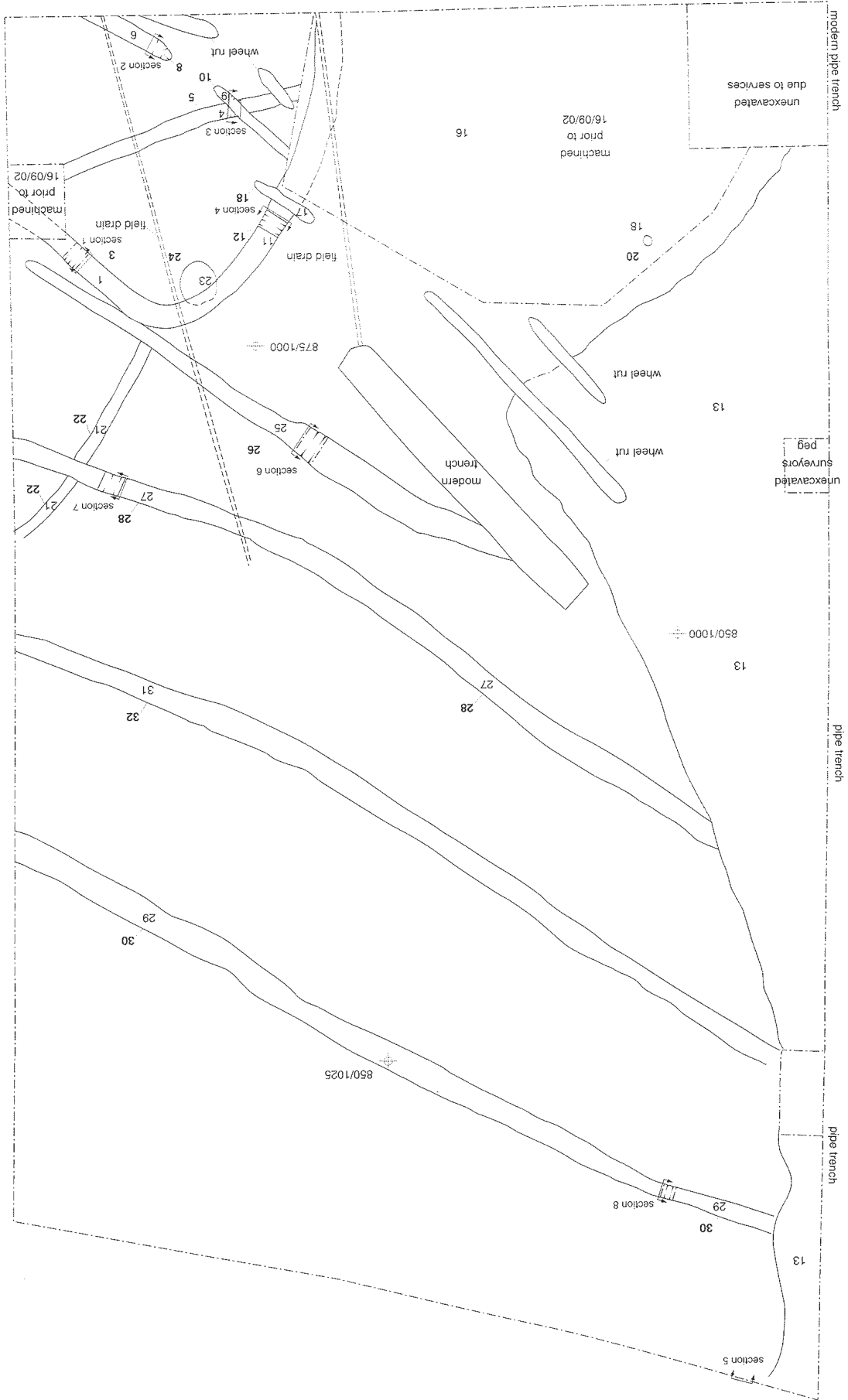
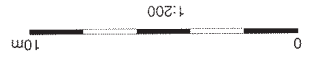
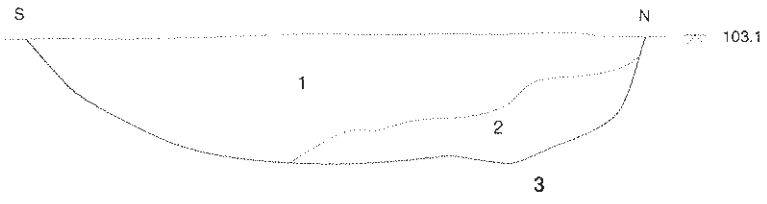


Figure 2: Location of Watching Brief Area

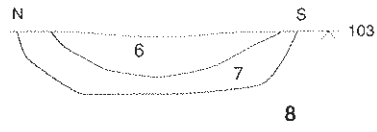
Figure 3: Site features plan



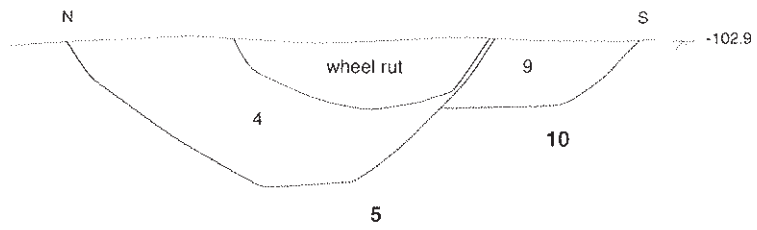
Section 1



Section 2



Section 3



Section 4

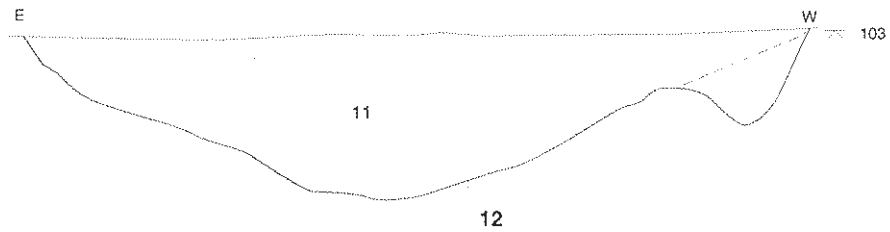
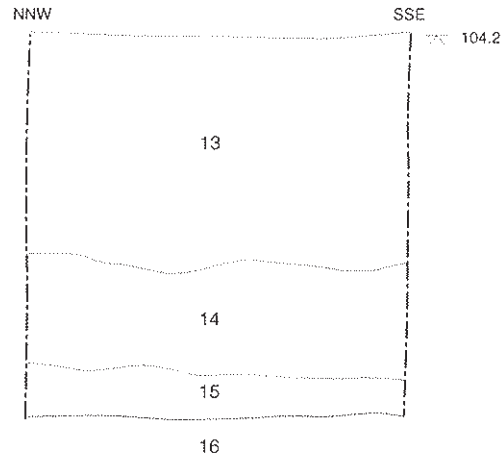


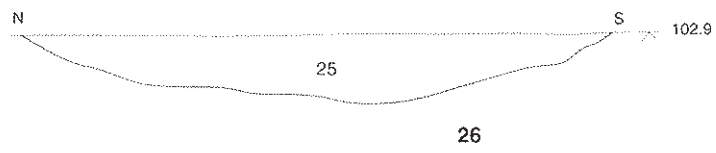
Figure 4: Sections 1 - 4



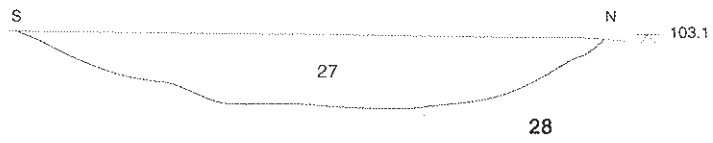
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Section 6



Section 7



Section 8

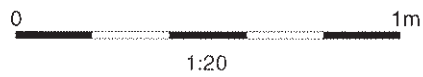


Figure 5: Sections 5 - 8

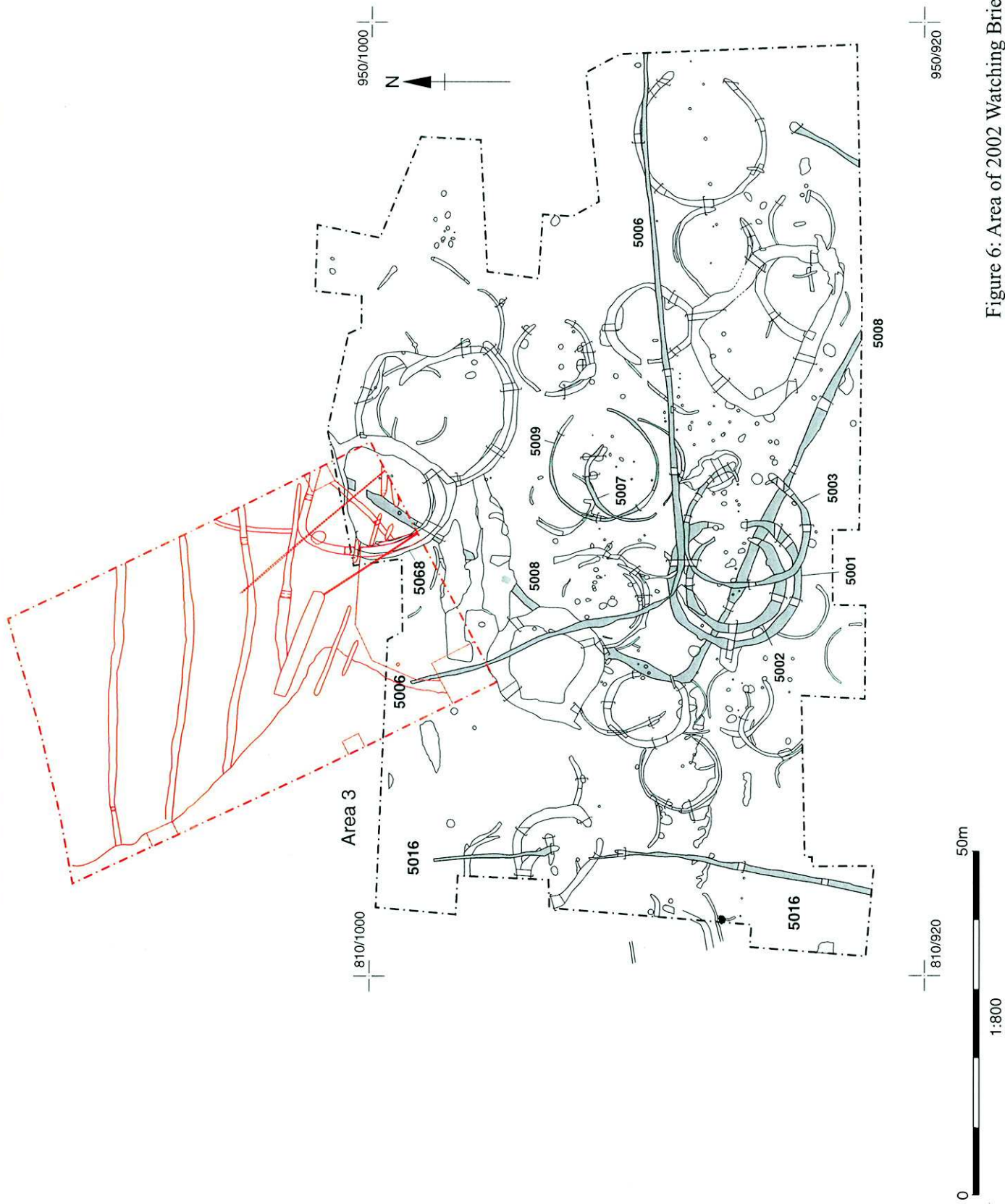


Figure 6: Area of 2002 Watching Brief and excavation Area 3



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