



Edge Nook Farm, Lancashire

Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology North

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Balfour Haden JV

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SUMMARY

Between 12th August 2003 and 20th August 2003 Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) conducted an archaeological watching brief on the site of Edge Nook Farm Coal Pit, to the east of Queen's Park Hospital, Blackburn, and to the south of Old Bank Lane (centred on SD 697 266). The area excavated under archaeological supervision measured approximately 60m east to west and 50m north to south.

The watching brief was commissioned by Balfour Hadden JV on behalf of the Queen's Park Hospital, Blackburn, in preparation for the construction of an extension to the hospital. The wider development area had previously been considered by a desk top survey and a rapid identification survey, conducted in 2000 by the OA North in its former guise as Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU).

In 2002 OA North conducted an archaeological evaluation to the east of the site of Edge Nook Farm. The site to the east of Edge Nook Farm was selected following the discovery of modern dumps of contaminated material on the site of the farm. The evaluation consisted of three trenches totalling 80m in length, and encountered a low density of archaeological features concluding the area to be of low archaeological potential.

The area of the coal pit was excavated under archaeological supervision with the coal pit, **26**, being clearly visible with a section showing signs of several phases of tipping and back filling with a later pit, **17**, then cut into it. To the east of the coal pit in the upper layers of rubble was a walled enclosure, **5**, with three successive floor surfaces: a stone slab surface, **2**; a Tarmac and stone floor, **4**; and a concrete surface, **6**. These probably all relate to prolonged activity and rebuilding associated with Edge Nook Farm. In addition to these, a brick and plaster walled room with a vaulted stone roof was noted sunk into the natural and the removal of several drains, manholes and a water tank were also observed. The only other features noted were a north-west to south-east linear, **12**, and a pit, **10**, that cut the natural underneath the rubble layers; both of these produced modern or post-medieval pottery and modern detritus.

All of the features noted are of an industrial or agricultural nature and it seems most likely that they are associated with activity at Edge Nook Farm or coal mining. There is no evidence for any activity on the site earlier than the known post-medieval farm, and as a whole the site is considered to be of little archaeological significance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank Balfour Haden JV for commissioning the project, and to Shaun Thomas, Sian Jones and Jon Conlon for their continued co-operation and assistance for the duration of the watching brief.

Dave Hodgson undertook the watching brief, Dave Hodgson and Arran Ferguson compiled the report with illustrations prepared by Emma Carter. Alison Plummer acted as project manager and edited the report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Balfour Haden JV, on behalf of Queen's Park Hospital, commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to undertake an archaeological watching brief on the site of Edge Nook Farm. The site is situated to the east of the existing hospital buildings, to the south of Old Bank Lane and on the south-eastern fringe of Blackburn (Fig 1). The watching brief was commissioned in advance of the proposed extension of the hospital, on the advice of the Lancashire County Archaeology Service (LCAS).
- 1.1.2 The initial Project Design intended the areas of Edge Nook Farm, Whinny Edge Farm, Edge Nook Farm Coal Pits and the buildings of a former workhouse to be the subject of archaeological evaluations. This design was modified prior to the evaluation of Edge Nook Farm as the site of the workhouse lies outside the development area, the site of Whinny Edge Farm is occupied by a car park and large water tank, and the site of the possible coal pits was shown, by geotechnical investigation to be covered by a substantial depth of modern dumping, including asbestos. Consequently, LCAS advised that the site of Edge Nook farm only should be subject to evaluation trenching and that the site of the probable coal pit should be subject to an archaeological watching brief during the course of development work (Fig 2).
- 1.1.3 The evaluation of Edge Nook Farm took place in December 2003. A total of three trenches were opened, 1.55m wide giving a combined length of 80m. These trenches were dug to the east of the building footprint following the discovery of asbestos. Two archaeological features were revealed: a pit of indeterminate function in Trench 1, and a linear feature in Trench 3, which may represent the base of a hedge both of these were undated. In addition a shallow sub circular feature in Trench 2 may represent a further pit. No dating evidence was obtained from any of these features, and the only finds recovered were four sherds of modern pottery from the topsoil.
- 1.1.4 The 2002 evaluation (OA North 2002) concluded that the presence of deep modern dumped deposits, the presence of asbestos and the lack of clear evidence for the archaeological potential of the site suggested that further fieldwork on the site of the farm should not be conducted.

1.2 SITE LOCATION AND GEOMORPHOLOGY

- 1.2.1 The site of Edge Nook Farm Coal Pits is roughly 0.25ha within an overall development area of 9.5ha. It lies to the south of Old Bank Lane, between 196mOD and 200mOD, on an elevated plateau some 2km south-east of Blackburn town centre. This was formerly farmland, but now lies immediately east of relatively recent hospital buildings, and is no longer cultivated or grazed.

- 1.2.2 The underlying drift geology consists of stiff brownish yellow clay. The solid geology comprises rocks of the Silesian Upper Carboniferous series, with Lower Westphalian productive coal measures (Ordnance Survey 1979).

1.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 The Archaeological Assessment Report (LUAU 2000) considers at length the archaeological and historical context of the site. The majority of that information will not be repeated here, although note should be made of the believed origins of Edge Nook Farm and associated Coal Pit.
- 1.3.2 The site of the watching brief is on Whinny Edge, which forms the southern most part of the parish and township of Blackburn (Farrer and Brownbill 1911, 236). The name Whinny Edge is of topographic origin, 'edge' denoting an escarpment, whilst Whinny is derived from the Old Norse *hvin*, meaning land on which gorse, or furze, abounded (Ekwall 1922, 20). This derivation suggests that in the early medieval period the area was moorland.
- 1.3.3 The earliest recorded archaeological evidence in the vicinity derives from the Roman period. A section of the Manchester to Ribchester Roman road passes 0.5km to the south-east of the study area, but no known settlement evidence has been discovered. There is also no known evidence for early medieval or medieval activity in the immediate area of the site (LUAU 2000, 7). The area appears to have been enclosed in the seventeenth century, but there is little evidence that it was settled until the late eighteenth century, and no farms are marked on Yates' map of Lancashire of 1786, although the scale is too small to be reliable (*ibid*). Buildings at Edge Nook were first depicted on the Ordnance Survey map of 1849; they were shown again in 1894, when they were labelled Edge Nook Farm. The 1894 map also marks two 'Old Coal Pits, immediately west of the farm, and to the north of Old Bank Lane; these were not marked on the 1849 map, but this may have been because they were relatively small. Coal was mined in this area from the sixteenth century onwards, and the area is dotted with the remains of old pits (Miller, 1950, 115).
- 1.3.4 The major development in the area was the construction of the Blackburn Union Workhouse in 1861-4, on a site *c* 200m west of Edge Nook Farm (LUAU 2000, 8). In the early part of the twentieth century, the workhouse became the Queen's Park Hospital.
- 1.3.5 Buildings at Edge Nook Farm were still standing in 1982 on the Ordnance Survey map of that year.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 PROJECT DESIGN

- 2.1.1 Further to the client's request for an archaeological evaluation, Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) submitted a project design (Appendix 1). Following formal acceptance of the project design by LCAS, OANorth undertook an evaluation in August 2002 and a watching brief in August 2003. The work conducted was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and generally accepted best practice.
- 2.1.2 A suitably qualified archaeologist undertook systematic observation of ground disturbance throughout the development work. This was restricted to an area 50m wide and c60m in length to the west of the former site of Edge Nook Farm and east of the current site of Queen's Park Hospital. Where any archaeological features became visible, machining was stopped and they were further investigated by hand.
- 2.1.3 Recording was by means of OA North's standard context recording system, with context records and supporting registers and indices. A photographic record in colour slide and monochrome formats was compiled, and section and plan drawings were made of relevant areas.

2.2 HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 2.2.1 Full regard was given to health and safety constraints as well as to all Health and Safety regulations. A risk Assessment was carried out in advance of work commencing; OA North provides a Health and Safety Statement for all projects and maintains a Unit Safety policy. All site procedures are in accordance with guidance set out in the Health and Safety Manual compiled by the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers (rev 1999).

2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design (Appendix 1), and in accordance with current IFA and English Heritage guidelines (1991). The paper archive will be deposited with the Lancashire Record Office (Preston).

3. RESULTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1.1 In total, an area of approximately 3000 square metres was excavated over several none consecutive days under archaeological supervision. The north-west corner of the area was c30m to the east of the current buildings of Queen's Park Hospital and 13m south of Old Bank Road. Excavation was carried out by a mechanical digger with a toothed bucket, however a 10m by 30m strip, 45m to the east of the hospital and 20m to the south of the road, was cleaned by a smaller tracked digger using a flat bladed ditching bucket.
- 3.1.2 *The first phase of site clearance:* the first phase of clearance comprised an area approximately 400 metres square, which was stripped of topsoil and overburden with a mechanical digger using a toothed bucket. This area extended from the southern edge into the centre of the development site. Within this area a number of non-archaeological deposits were identified, which related to the industrial and agricultural background of the site. At the centre of the area stripped the remnants of a brick wall, **5**, surviving to no more than three courses, was located, within which a slab stone surface, **2**, had been laid. A quantity of modern pottery and glass was recovered from between these slabs, indicating a post-medieval construction. The wall was extant in two portions, a north south section that was 10.3m long, with an east aligned return 15.8m long.
- 3.1.3 In the south-east of the area stripped, a layer of rubble and cement, **6**, was located and seen to extend and underlie the stone slabs and brick wall, **2** and **5**. This deposit also contained modern detritus and further supports a late post-medieval construction date for the stone slabs and brick wall (**2** and **5**).
- 3.1.4 *The second phase of site clearance:* the area stripped in this phase of the development amounted to 3500 square metres and located no finds, features or deposits of an archaeological nature. Located adjacent to Edge Nook Farm, the area stripped revealed a single land drain, **12**, blocked by silt and modern detritus (nails, fragments of terra cotta land drain and glass). A large cylindrical steel tank was also uncovered, a possible slurry or water tank, within Edge Nook farm.
- 3.1.5 *The third phase of site clearance:* this encompassed an area of approximately 630 square metres and located a single feature, **26**, interpreted as a coal pit associated with Edge Nook farm. The coal pit is marked on the 1894 OS map of the area. The feature measured between eight and 15m wide, was 13m long, and was located seven metres south of Old Bank Lane. The pit had gradually-sloped concave sides with a gradual break of slope to a rounded base. The pit contained 13 distinct fills, which represented a series of backfilling events. The upper layers, **13** and **14**, comprised ashy black coarse sand with frequent inclusions of coal dust and a small quantity of modern glass and pottery. These overlay earlier phases of backfilling and slumping from the eastern edge (**18** through **25**), all fairly similar in their make-up, coarse sands and sandy clays

of varying colour (mid to light reddish brown) with inclusions of coal dust and post-medieval pottery. A later pit truncated the fills of the original coal pit to a depth of 1.85m. The cut of this feature, **17**, had steeply-sloped sides and a flat base and contained two distinct fills, **16** and **15**. The upper fill, **15**, comprised a dark grey silty sand with frequent inclusions of small angular stones. This overlay **16**, a mid-grey silty sand with lenses of re-deposited natural clays within it. No dating material was recovered from these fills, but it can be deduced from stratigraphic evidence that this pit is of later origin than the coal pit and of little archaeological importance.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 THE WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1.1 The watching brief produced evidence for a modern walled enclosure with three separate surfaces within a rubble destruction layer. This was built upon a rubble levelling layer which had been built up over the natural reddish brown sand. Cut into this were several modern drains, a modern cellar, a water or slurry tank, a ditch and a pit, all of which contained modern or post-medieval pottery and is most likely connected to Edge Nook Farm. Also in evidence was the site of Edge Nook Farm Coal Pit, which appears to have been subject to several phases of tipping and back filling.
- 4.1.2 All of the features noted are of an industrial or agricultural nature and it seems most likely that they are associated with activity at Edge Nook Farm. There is no evidence for any activity on the site earlier than the known post-medieval farm and it would appear that the site as a whole is of low archaeological significance.

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APPENDIX 1: PROJECT BRIEF

APPENDIX 2: PROJECT DESIGN

APPENDIX 3: CONTEXT LIST

Description	Dimension	Location
Context <i>1</i> : Large area of dark modern rubble containing 40% modern brick fragments, 20% concrete fragments, 5% charred metal and plastic fragments and 2% metal fragments	A visible area 20m north to south and 15m east to west. The depth of the deposit varies from 0.05m to 0.2m across the site	Seems to extend from a point 45m east of the current hospital eastwards over the site of Edge Nook Farm
Context <i>2</i> : Roughly-finished stone slabs showing some signs of chisel marks on their upper surfaces	An area 2m north to south by 2m east to west was seen but it is suspected that they extend underneath <i>1</i> . The slabs are 0.5m by 0.5m by 0.1m laid in rows with a 0.05m gap between the rows	The slabs seem to lie in the south-east corner of the area stripped approximately 65m east of the hospital and 60m south of the road
Context <i>3</i> : A layer of dark greyish-brown coarse sand with 60% flecked sub-angular inclusions. Possibly a destruction layer flattened prior to the laying of the slab floor	A visible area of 0.5m east to west and 2m north to south the deposit was 0.1m to 0.06m thick and extends beneath <i>2</i>	As above
Context <i>4</i> : A surface of mixed tarmac and stone, strongly cemented dark grey with lenses of mid brownish-grey 30% flecked angular stone	A visible area of 0.5m east to west and 2m north to south the deposit was 0.04m thick and extends beneath <i>3</i>	As above
Context <i>5</i> : Brick wall surviving in places to three courses made of frogged bricks bonded with a dark mortar. There is no evidence of any form of facing	L-shaped plan 10.3m north to south and 15.8m east to west Bricks are 0.2 by 0.1 by 0.08m	The wall runs north to south c55m east of the Hospital and then returns east c55m south of the road
Context <i>6</i> : Concrete foundation layer made of weakly cemented light pinkish white coarse sand with 5% flecked angular stone and 10% small fragments of brick	This layer is 0.05m thick and extends beneath <i>4</i> and <i>5</i> apparently across much of the site	Seen in an area in the south-east corner of the area stripped approximately 65m east of the hospital and 60m south of the road believed to extend across much of the site

Description	Dimensions	Location
Context 7 : Friable dark brown coarse sand includes 1% brick fragments probably used to level out the ground surface prior to construction	The layer is 0.23m thick and appears to extend across much of the site	As above
Context 8 : A loose mid brown silty sand with 15% medium-sized sub-rounded and angular stones containing large fragments of modern pot and concrete	This fill was 0.7m in diameter and 0.5m thick containing stones c0.1m x 0.05m x 0.05m.	Approximately 60m east of the hospital and 25m south of the road Filling 10
Context 9 : A stiff mid grey clay with yellowish brown mottling. Contained a well corroded metal tube encompassing the full diameter of the pit	This fill was 0.4m in diameter and 0.2m thick	As Above but underlying 8
Context 10 : A Pit circular in plan and with a steep flat based 'U' profile	0.7m in diameter and 0.7m deep	As Above
Context 11 : A mid grey clay with yellowish brown mottling, containing modern nails and fragments of land drain	1.62m across and 0.4m thick	Filling 12 approximately 45m east of the hospital and 25m south of the road
Context 12 : A north-west to south-east linear feature with a wide flat based 'U' profile terminating in the area stripped	1.62m wide and 0.4m deep	As above
Context 13 : A loose dark blackish brown coarse sand possibly containing ash or coal dust	2.2m across and 0.75m deep	Top fill of [26]
Context 14 : A loose mid greyish black coarse sand including 40% small angular stones also contained much modern rubble and pot and glass	3.75m across and 0.85m thick with stones c0.6m by 0.03m by 0.03m	Underlies 13

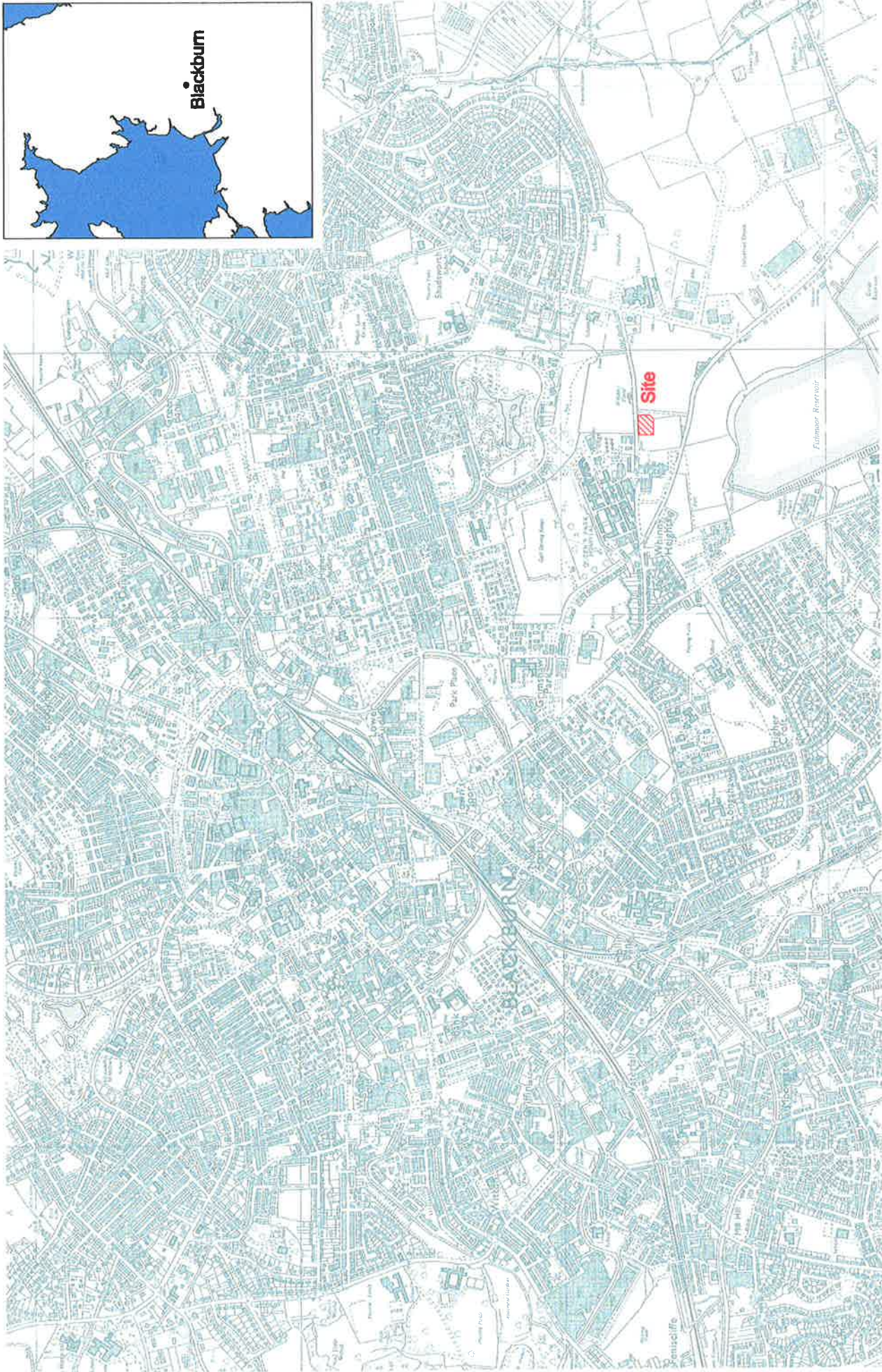
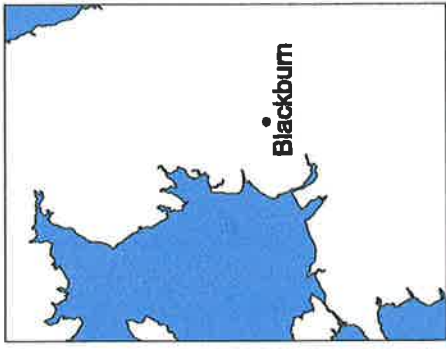
Description	Dimensions	Location
Context 15 : A firm dark grey silty sand with 30% flecks angular stone	2.75m across and 1.15m thick	Upper fill of Poss. Pit 17 Underlies 14
Context 16 : A firm mid grey silty sand with lenses of mid reddish brown with grey mottling possibly a lump of re-deposited natural	1m across 0.65m thick	Lower fill of poss. Pit 17 Underlies 15
Context 17 : Cut for Poss. Pit initially wide concave side dropping into a steep flat based 'U'	3m wide at the top 1m wide at the neck and 1.85m deep	Near eastern edge of coal pit Filled by 15 and 16 Cuts 18 and 20
Context 18 : Firm dark brown sandy clay	3.25m wide and between 0.4m and 1.1m thick	Cut by 17
Context 19 : A loose dark brown coarse sand with yellowish mottling includes 20% flecked angular stone possibly represents re-deposited spoil heaps mixed with natural	1.35m wide and 1m thick	Underlies 18
Context 20 : A firm dark grey silty sand with yellowish mottling	0.75m wide and up to 1.3m deep	Cut by 17
Context 21 : A firm dark grey sandy clay possibly a washed in deposit	0.5m wide and up to 1.3m deep	Underlies 20
Context 22 : A firm mid reddish grey sandy clay, possibly a lump of re-deposited natural	1.7m wide and 1.1m thick	Underlies 19
Context 23 : A friable dark greyish brown coarse sand, possibly washed in or dumped deposit from the original spoil heaps	2.5m wide and 0.5m thick	Underlies 22
Context 24 : A loose dark greyish brown coarse sand containing 50% medium-sized angular stone	2m wide and 0.6m thick The stones are c0.15m by 0.07m by 0.05m	Underlies 23

Description	Dimensions	Location
Context 25 : A loose mid reddish brown sand containing 70% large angular stones probably represents slump following the initial excavation	3.25m wide and 1.7m deep Stones are c0.2m by 0.15m by 0.02m	Underlies 24
Context 26 : Cut for coal pit with a wide 'U' profile and gradual concave sides and base	11.7m wide and 2.8m deep At least 13m of the pear-shaped plan has been visible	Filled by 13 to 25

ILLUSTRATIONS

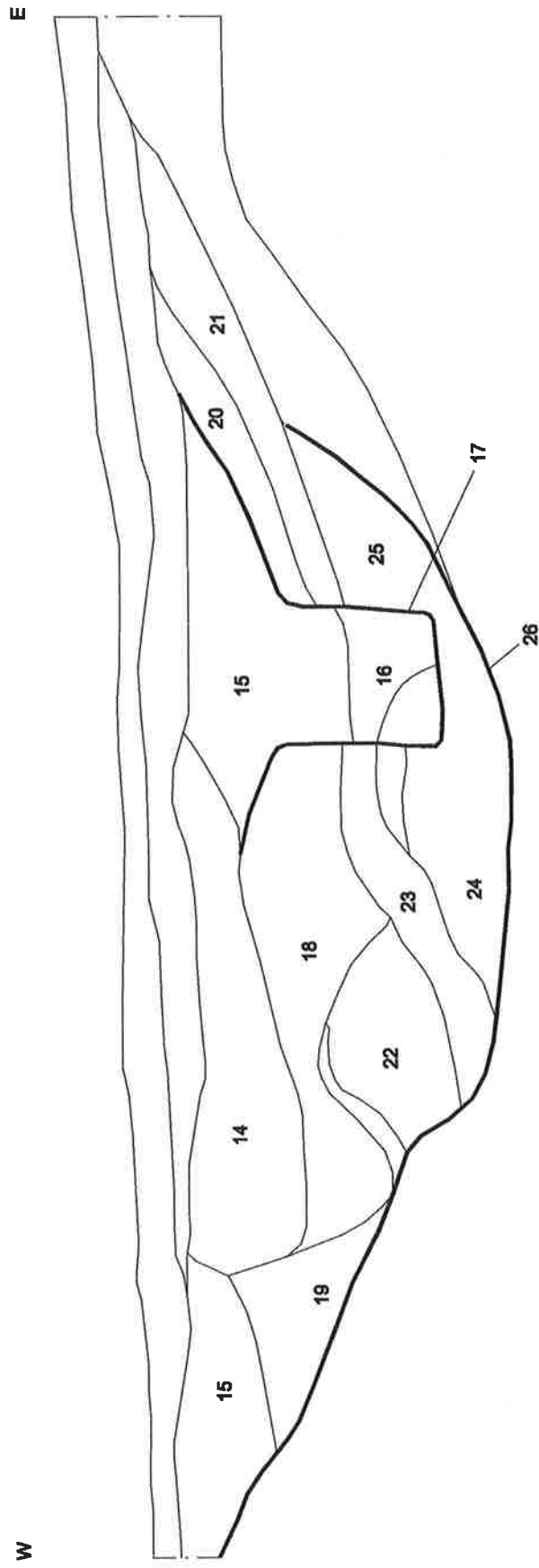
LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1 Location Map
Figure 2 Location of Area Stripped
Figure 3 Section of Coal Pit



based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000
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Figure 1: Location Map



Scale 1:50

Figure 3 : Section of coal pit