

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF
AT
WHITEMOOR HAYE, ALREWAS,
STAFFORDSHIRE
ARCHIVE STATEMENT

Sarah Phear

Illustrated by Sarah Phear

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

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Archive statement: archaeological watching brief at Whitemoor Haye, Alrewas, Staffordshire

Sarah Phear

Introduction

This report comprises a short summary, for archive purposes, of the archaeological watching brief and contingency salvage recording undertaken from 6 August to 11 October 2007 at Whitemoor Haye Quarry, Staffordshire (NGR SK 180130, centre). The work was carried out by Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service at the request of Phoenix Consulting on behalf of their client Lafarge Aggregates Limited. It formed part of an ongoing programme of archaeological investigation being undertaken in response to topsoil and subsoil removal in advance of gravel extraction in the central application area.

This element of the programme of works was completed in order to investigate and record an area to the south of significant archaeological remains identified during archaeological investigation over the course of the years 2000 to 2004 by Birmingham Archaeology (Hewson 2006). Specifically, the programme of works was to cover part of Phase 7, which involves gravel extraction in the southern extent of the quarry.

The watching brief here covered an area of c. 4.5ha, and incorporated a small part of SAM 200. The watching brief area also slightly overlapped with the southern boundary of a previous excavation area (Area M). It also bordered to the north with the watching brief (Area 5) undertaken by BUFAU (Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit; now Birmingham Archaeology). In excavation Area's M and watching brief Area 5 settlement and funerary remains were recorded, including Bronze Age/Iron Age cremations, Iron Age ring gullies, Iron Age and Roman enclosure ditches, postholes and pits.

A full assessment programme and subsequent report will be undertaken when the current phase of gravel extraction is completed, allowing the excavated area to be placed in its wider landscape context, including previous results from the site published by BUFAU, from archaeological investigations in 1992 (BUFAU 1992), 1997-1999 (Coates 2002), and 2000-2004 (Hewson 2006), and the Tempus Reparatum evaluation (1995). A watching brief also took place in 2006 in the area just north of the site investigated here in 2007 (Area 5 Salvage), although the results have not yet been reported.

Methodology

Topsoil stripping was undertaken by a 360° tracked excavator employing a toothless bucket and topsoil was removed from the area by two 30 tonne dumpers working in succession. Stripping generally took place through a system of long narrow strips, and moving in a southerly direction. An archaeologist visited the site no less than 2 days a week depending on the progress of stripping and presence of archaeological features. As there was a need for subsoil for reinstatement elsewhere in the quarry during the stripping process, areas where a low level of archaeology was present (or none) were recorded, and signed off after discussion with the consultant. This allowed fairly continuous workflow with little disruption to the stripping process.

A concentration of archaeological features was located on the eastern side of the stripped area, and contingency excavation and recording was undertaken here following the previously agreed Specifications (Phoenix Consulting 1995; section 5.1.5). All recording methods during fieldwork conformed to the standard Service Practice (CAS 1995). Selection of features for sampling was determined by comparison with previous excavated features within the designated area, and also in relation to distinctiveness. Features identified as a continuation of those already excavated in previous investigations received minimal attention, whereas the remains of structures (such as

round houses) received greater sampling attention. A total station EDM was utilised as the key tool for site recording and survey.

Communication and good working relationships between the archaeological Field Officer, Lafarge area management, quarry management, the consultant, and the machine operator was crucial to the success of the fieldwork. The co-operation, experience and skill of the plant operator was integral to the successful machining of the area.

Summary of Results and discussion

Palaeoenvironmental

Unlike previous years, no waterlogged deposits were identified. However, over 100 bulk 10L samples (40L per context) were collected from ditch, pit, and posthole fills, along with cremations. Selective analysis of features, particularly those with a high organic content, can yield results relating to Iron Age and Roman settlement and the local environment. Analysis of the cremation samples will inform on funerary practices, including fuel use and some scope for interpretation of the wider environment.

Bronze Age

Like previous investigations by BUFAU at Whitemoor Haye, cremations were identified in the 2007 watching brief. They were located on the east extent of the stripped area amongst later Iron Age and Roman features. Out of three in total, one cremation was situated within a burial urn which has been identified as Bronze Age in date. The urn has suffered plough damage, however fragments of rim display decoration in the form of finger nail impression, and it has a near complete base. A similar sized cremation deposit within a pit was located further west and did not contain an urn. In comparison, the third cremation deposit was within a shallow pit that appears to have been re-cut. It is over twice the size of the other cremations. While only one cremation is firmly dated to the Bronze Age, the other two are also considered to be of this age, although they may reflect elements of cremation rite rather than burial.

The presence of the cremations this far south in the quarry is of interest as past investigations indicated the majority of prehistoric funerary monuments were predominantly situated in the northern area of the quarry (Coates 2002, Hewson 2006). A collection of cremations were also recorded during the watching brief in 2006 in the area to the immediate north of the site (Gary Coates Pers. Comm.) although the results have not yet been reported. As the cremations recorded in the watching brief in 2007 are not associated with barrow monuments (and also those excavated in 2006), they are similar to cremations excavated previously in the central area of the quarry which have been posited to be components of a flat cemetery unrelated to barrows (Hewson 2006, 108). The cremations are thus important in understanding the ritual landscape during the Bronze Age at Whitemoor Haye.

Iron Age

As the watching brief area in 2007 overlapped slightly with the southern extent of previously excavated Area M, there is an overlap and continuation of enclosure ditches and a possible drip gully identified as Iron Age in date. This continued ditch was sampled, in the west and southern corner. Little pot was recovered, although a large concentration of heat fractured stones was present. A smaller ditch was located immediately west that may predate the previous ditch. Certainly, several phases of ditch cutting and re-cutting have been identified previously (Hewson 2006) and the evidence described here likely fits with this interpretation (see below).

A partial drip gully (Structure 4) was also identified in the 2007 watching brief. While no dating evidence was recovered, the gully is likely to be Iron Age due to its morphology and proximity to

the ring gullies in Area M. Several additional small ditches and pits also date to this period and are located close to the enclosure ditches and Area M.

Further south, a large ditch of unknown form runs northwest-southeast and forms the southern boundary of archaeological features, and may form the southern boundary of the settlement. It is associated with another possible enclosure ditch extending east beyond the eastern boundary of the watching brief. It is not clear if they are contemporary at this stage. However, of particular interest were two round-houses, identified through their drip gullies which enclosed pits and postholes. Although only shallow features survived due to plough damage, Structure 1 had a diameter of 9m and had two entrances. A pit within the structure, that had several re-cuts including a posthole, contained Iron Age pottery, and several small sherds were recovered from the ditch fill. A pit surrounded by four post holes may also indicate a structure inside the house, and so too additional small pits and postholes. The drip gully also truncated a large pit on the north extent, although the age of this feature is not known. Structure 2, 7m in diameter, also had two entrances although it had lower preservation levels. Sampling revealed truncation of earlier pits as with Structure 1. Several undated postholes were identified inside the structure. Of note is that the round houses are outside of the enclosed areas, and the presence of undated pits in close proximity may indicate an early Iron Age settlement pre-enclosure.

Features identified in previous archaeological investigations include Iron Age enclosure ditches (Areas J, M), associated hut circles pit and postholes (Areas J, K, M and the Watching Brief), a triple ditch droveway and double ditch in Areas D, E, G, and watching brief, aligned east-west. The majority of Iron Age settlement remains were located in the central and southern area of the quarry, with the northern area largely restricted to the Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary landscape. The results of the 2007 watching brief thus far correspond with this pattern of land use, and indicate settlement on the terrace in the southern half of the quarry. The presence of the round houses outside of the enclosed areas is of interest, and so too is the pattern of enclosure. Therefore, further analysis will provide insight into potential successive land-use strategies (enclosed and un-enclosed) that appear to characterise Iron Age settlement here beside the River Tame.

Romano-British

Evidence of Romano-British settlement was extensive, and included both new enclosure ditches and re-cut Iron Age enclosures. Extending south from Area M, the continuation of one Iron Age enclosure ditch shows evidence of re-cutting in the Romano-British period. However, the majority of the ditch lies beneath un-stripped soil making it difficult to fully characterise. Of note is an additional enclosure ditch running with the same orientation located immediately west and south of the re-cut ditch. Excavation suggests the north-south element of the ditch truncated a large pit, with the east-west element of the ditch cut at a later date. It does illustrate some continuity in enclosure location similar to the Iron Age features. Located outside the enclosure ditches, however, were several large round pits with dense charcoal fills. Several were clay-lined and are similar to pits identified as hearths in Area M (Hewson 2006, 51). However, only one pit contained Roman pot sherds.

Another enclosure ditch also appears to date to the Romano-British period. It runs to the south of the ditches discussed above, and appears to truncate some earlier pit features. Although no dating evidence was identified, a large vertical sided pit with multiple re-cuts and charcoal rich fills was located inside the enclosure. Immediately to the west of these features was Structure 3, also devoid of dating material. It was comprised of 19 post holes/pits with a pit feature in its centre. Rectilinear in shape with an end opening to the north, this structure was situated parallel to the enclosure ditch. This suggests the ditch was still in use when the structure was built, placing its construction in the Roman-British period. However, of note is that rectilinear structures of this kind have not been recorded previously at Whitemoor Haye. In addition, the structure bears striking similarities with Anglo-Saxon structural remains excavated in the Catholme site (Bradley and Kinsley 2002), which is located immediately north of Whitemoor Haye. As such, further analysis is required in order to ascertain temporal clarification.

A small enclosure ditch was located away from those discussed above, to the west. It was quite small (21m x 8m) and appeared to incorporate several large pits, as well as truncating others. Pot sherds from the ditch were Roman. However, it is possible that the southern extent of the ditch re-cuts and older Iron Age ditch connected to the large possible boundary ditch for the area (as discussed in the previous section).

An additional ditch that may form an enclosure ditch was sampled. It ran east-west and north-south and contained a large concentration of Roman pot sherds. Of particular note was the presence of a burnt quern and also fragments of Samian pottery. Samian sherds have been recorded in previous excavations at Whitemoor Haye, in low quantities (Coates 2002, Hewson 2006). Therefore there does appear to be some consistency across the site for the presence of Samian, even if only in minor quantities. As the Samian data-set increases, as well as the overall Roman pottery assemblage, the assemblage can be reassessed as a whole. In conclusion of their investigation, Birmingham Archaeology argued for low-status farming practices in Romano-British times in much the same fashion as the Iron Age (Hewson 2006, 114). Of interest will be consideration of previous results, as well as results from the 2007 assemblage, in comparison to other settlements in Staffordshire, and also in light of evidence pointing to a rise in larger rural settlements in the 2nd to 4th centuries across the East Midlands (Taylor 2006, 150).

Other dated features include large pits, one a possible hearth lined with stones within the ditch (above), and a small ditch feature.

There is therefore a consistency in features identified in the Romano-British period with previous investigations, suggesting a continuity of land use from the Iron Age onwards, with a possible change in the 2nd-3rd centuries.

Post-medieval/modern

One northeast-southwest oriented ditch was identified that truncated numerous pits and ditches. It is possibly a post-medieval boundary ditch, although no dating material was recovered. It could also be more recent in date as it runs on a similar alignment to two land drains which extended across the site.

Undated

Many postholes, pits, and ditches were identified that did not have dating material. Where possible, the features will be dated stratigraphically and on morphological grounds. This includes a row of small pits/postholes extending northwest-southeast across the site (possibly a boundary), a number of pits and ditches, and some isolated postholes in the northwest extent of the area.

Conclusion

The watching brief undertaken during Phase 7 of gravel extraction revealed a dense array of settlement and funerary remains from the Bronze Age to the Romano-British period. The remains appear to largely conform to previous patterns in land-use in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. However, the presence of cremations outside of barrow monuments provides further data with which to characterise the funerary landscape on this river terrace. Issues of enclosed versus unenclosed settlement and farming can be further investigated during the Iron Age, and the presence of Samian pottery may indicate a pattern of land use that is not low status, indicating a new element of settlement history that differs to that already recorded in the Romano-British period.

That such a large concentration of features exists where only two cropmarks were identified certainly gives insight into the preservation levels on the site despite its ploughing history. Certainly while a large percentage of features were situated within the SAM, the presence of enclosures, pits and ditches beyond the SAM boundary illustrates a concentration of settlement remains in this area of the river terrace in prehistoric through to Roman times.

The Archive

Preliminary processing of artefacts has been undertaken and the archive has been checked and cross referenced. A range of bulk environmental samples also currently form part of the archive and will be processed or stored as appropriate as part of the post-excavation programme.

The archive will be placed into temporary storage at the Service offices until completion of the current gravel extraction phase of the quarry. A full programme of assessment will be then be undertaken leading to analysis, and where relevant publication, of the results of the watching brief.

Following completion of fieldwork and post-fieldwork analysis of the entire project, it is intended that the archive will be deposited with the City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent.

The archive for this phase comprises:

627	Abbreviated context records (AS40)
8	Context registers (AS5)
5	Drawing index records (AS4)
401	Scaled drawings
13	Photographic records
1072	Digital photos
4	Sample record index sheets (AS17)
4	Boxes of finds

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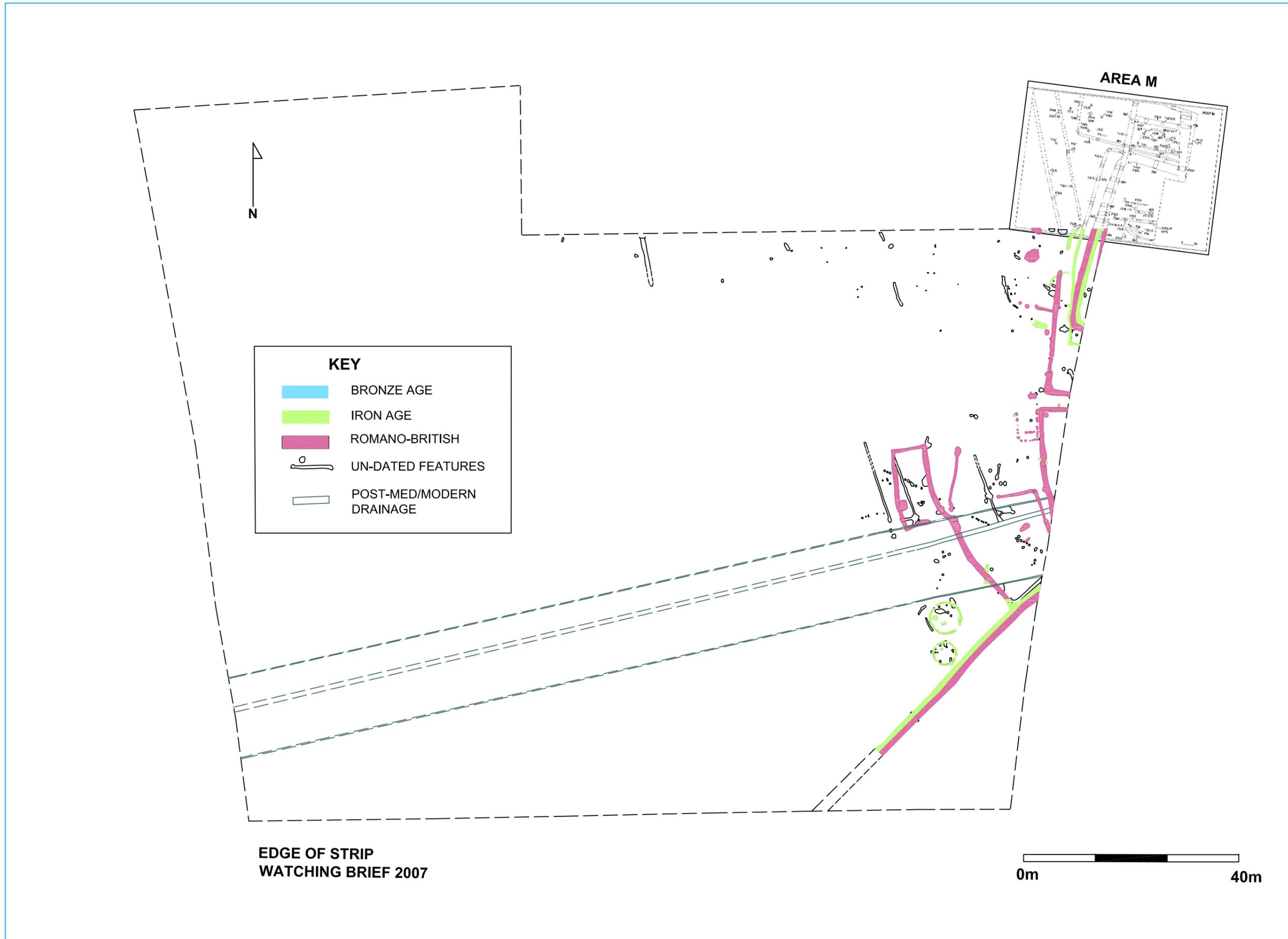
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Figures



Watching brief location within the Phase 7 boundary of Whitemoor Haye quarry

Figure 1



Plan of features by period. The figure also illustrates the watching brief location in relation to Area M, excavated by Birmingham Archaeology (from Hewson 2006)

Figure 2

Plates



Plate 1 Structure 1 Roundhouse, facing east



Plate 1 Structure 3 Possible Roman building, with enclosure ditches to right, facing north