

WHITEMOOR HAYE, ALREWAS,
STAFFORDSHIRE.
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF (2008):
ARCHIVE STATEMENT

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Illustrated by Sarah Phear

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Project 3114
Report 1671

Whitemoor Haye, Alrewas, Staffordshire

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Introduction

This report comprises a short summary, for archive purposes, of two phases of archaeological watching brief and contingency salvage recording undertaken at Whitemoor Haye Quarry, Staffordshire (NGR SK 180130, centre). The first phase ran from 12 May to 10 July 2008 and the second from 22 September to 30 October 2008. The work was carried out by Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service (WHEAS) 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.

The 2008 watching brief was completed in order to investigate and record part of an extraction area (Extraction Phase 7) at the southern extent of the permitted quarry (Fig 1). It covered an area of c. 8.9ha, and incorporated a small part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County Monument No ST200) for which Scheduled Monument Consent had been obtained (Ref HSD 9/2/10433).

More specifically the area concerned included parts of the quarry to the east and south of significant archaeological remains identified by WHEAS in 2007 (Phear 2007). The 2008 area also slightly overlapped with a previous excavation area (Area M) and areas covered by an earlier watching brief conducted to the north (within Extraction Phase 5) and undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology (BA; previously BUFAU, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit) between 2000 and 2006. In excavation Area N, several ditches were identified of unknown date, while in Area M ditches and pits were recorded dating to the Iron Age. No features were identified in the southern part of Extraction Phase 5 (adjacent to the northern boundary of the 2008 area). However, a further watching brief conducted by BA in 2006 (Area 5 Salvage) covered an area to the north-west and, although the results have not yet been reported, included numerous deposits, the most significant of which related to a major prehistoric cremation cemetery.

In general it was evident that elements of previously recorded deposits extended into the 2008 area, especially from the 2007 area and the excavation areas to the north. From the outset it was therefore recognised that the 2008 watching brief had a very high potential for the identification of significant remains.

A full programme of assessment, analysis and reporting will be undertaken when the current phase of gravel extraction is completed, allowing the excavated area to be placed in its wider landscape context, especially as revealed during earlier programmes of investigation at the site undertaken between 1992 and 2004 (BUFAU 1992; Coates 2002; Hewson 2006).

Methodology

Topsoil and subsoil stripping was undertaken by a 360° tracked excavator employing a toothless bucket, with spoil being removed from the area by two 30 tonne dumpers working in succession. Stripping began to the immediate east of the 2007 watching brief and generally took place through a system of long narrow strips, moving predominantly in an east to west direction. In the summer phase of the watching brief (May-July 2008), a full field team was present due to the high level of archaeological features uncovered during stripping. The need for subsoil for reinstatement elsewhere in the quarry during the stripping process meant the order of stripping the area varied depending on the presence and absence of archaeological features. Where a low level of archaeology was present (or none), features were recorded and signed off after discussion with the consultant and when appropriate, the county archaeologist. This allowed fairly continuous

workflow in relation to topsoil and subsoil removal, with little disruption to the stripping process. A similar strategy was adopted in the autumn phase of watching brief (September-October 2008), although since little was revealed, an archaeologist was only present on site for about 2 days a week to monitor the stripping and record features when present. All soil stripping was undertaken under archaeological supervision.

Archaeological features were concentrated in three main areas – the northern extent (termed Zone A, immediately east of the 2007 watching brief), the central eastern area (Zone B) close to the River Tame, and the central western area (Zone C; Fig 2). In contrast, few archaeological features were present in the southernmost extent of the site (Zone D). The high level of features across Zones A, B and C resulted in the need for contingency excavation and recording which was completed following 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, following discussion with the archaeological consultant and the County Archaeologist, by comparison with previous excavated features within the designated area, and also in relation to distinctiveness. Features identified as continuations of those already excavated in previous years received minimal attention, whereas the remains of structures (such as roundhouses) and previously unidentified elements of settlement enclosures and field systems were subject to higher levels of investigation and sampling. The primary aim throughout was to recover a full plan of all deposits revealed and enable them to be characterised and dated. A total station EDM was utilised as the key tool for site recording and survey.

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

Summary of Results and discussion

All records have been checked and cross-referenced and all finds have been washed, marked and appropriately packaged. A ten litre sub-sample has been processed from each of the bulk samples taken from 48 contexts for palaeoenvironmental monitoring. The following summary of results and discussion is structured around phases of activity on the site, and referred to within the zones listed above. The phases and zones are illustrated in Figures 1-3.

Palaeoenvironmental

No waterlogged deposits were identified during the 2008 watching brief. Preliminary work on the bulk samples recovered has resulted in 478 litres of sample being processed (of a total sample volume of 1149 litres). The resultant flots and residues have been scanned to determine whether the remainder of the sample should be retained for future processing and analysis. As a result 21 samples/contexts have now been fully processed (those comprising 10 litres or less), with the remaining 27 samples (comprising between 20 and 60 litres) partially processed. Of these, rapid scanning of the resultant flots and residues has indicated that 11 samples/contexts warrant retention for full processing at a later date (250 litres). However, the remaining 16 samples/contexts warrant no further work and the remainder of each of these samples has been discarded (450 litres).

The samples derived from the fills of a range of features including ditches, pits, and postholes, along with one cremation (see discussion below). The preliminary scan of the flots and residues indicates that these include at least one very rich charred plant assemblage (predominantly barley) as well as a range of other samples containing potentially useful indicators (charcoal and charred plant remains) of local Iron Age and Roman agricultural practices, woodland use and the wider local environment. Analysis of the cremation samples has the potential to inform on funerary practices, including fuel use and some scope for interpretation of the wider environment.

Bronze Age

One cremation deposit comprising charcoal and highly calcined bone was identified. No evidence for an associated urn or other finds was present. The deposit was located on the west extent of Zone A amongst a group of undated features, although it was also situated close to three cremation deposits identified in the 2007 watching brief. Both the 2007 cremation deposits and a concentration of over 100 cremation deposits identified during the 2006 watching brief (to the north-east) have been provisionally dated to the Middle Bronze Age. As noted in the archive report for 2007 (Phear 2007), the presence of cremations this far south in the quarry is of considerable interest since investigations prior to 1996 had indicated that the majority of prehistoric funerary monuments were situated in the area covered by the northern half of the quarry where both barrows and apparently unmarked cremations have been identified (Coates 2002; Hewson 2006). However, these recently discovered cremation deposits suggest that a distinct prehistoric funerary focus also lies to the south. Preliminary results suggest the cremations recorded in 2006 may have also been associated with a much disturbed barrow monument and it is therefore evident that the funerary landscape extends further south than previously thought. Although this is apparently largely 'non-monumental' activity and of somewhat later date than the barrows identified to the north, there is evidently a complex pattern of prehistoric landuse, settlement and ritual represented.

Iron Age

Ditches defining two overlapping Iron Age enclosures continued into the 2008 area from Area M to the north (Hewson 2006, fig 25) and from the 2007 watching brief to the west (Phear 2007; Figs 2 and 3). These provided evidence for much of the southern half of two rectilinear enclosures. The more substantial of the two had no evident entrance, however, the north-east part of the enclosure was not observed (Hewson 2006) and it is possible that the entrance was located at this point. The second ditch was smaller and only the continuation of the west side and part of the southern boundary of this enclosure were identified.

Within the enclosed area, evidence was recorded for a previously identified and poorly surviving section of roundhouse eavesdrip gully and several small pits. As the eavesdrip gully had undergone previous sampling (Hewson 2006, fig 25, structure 3), it was not deemed necessary to undertake any further investigation in the 2008 watching brief. However, some 12m to the south a second, better preserved eavesdrip gully was revealed in its entirety. This produced several sherds of Iron Age pottery, and several pits and postholes enclosed by the gully are also considered to date to this period through association. The gully measured 9m in diameter and had an entrance to the east. While this differed from two eavesdrip gullies recorded in 2007 (which had two entrances), it is consistent with other roundhouses recorded in the quarry by previous projects including that described above. Conclusions from a national study into roundhouse entrances indicate that east or south-east facing entrances are favoured for non-hillfort structures throughout the country (Willis 1999, 93) and this example is therefore typical both of Whitemoor Haye and the majority of other sites of this period. Two small pits in this vicinity also produced pottery of Iron Age date but otherwise most pits and other smaller features had limited artefactual evidence making dating difficult; it is expected, however, that some of these features date to the Iron Age and are related to the enclosures.

Both enclosures seem to be of comparable dimensions and overall morphology to previous Middle to Late Iron Age settlement enclosures identified at Whitemoor Haye (Coates 2002, 83; Hewson 2006, 112), and it now seems likely that the two unenclosed roundhouses recorded in 2007 relate to an earlier phase of unenclosed settlement within a much less formally bounded landscape. Further analysis should provide insight into potential successive land-use strategies (enclosed and unenclosed) of Iron Age settlement in the southern half of the quarry.

To the south of these enclosures, several substantial ditches appear to represent major land divisions or territorial boundaries. The most extensively observed was a large ditch oriented south-west to north-east continuing an alignment initially identified in the 2007 watching brief and extending to meet the south-east corner of the enclosures described. It also extended into the central western corner of the site (Zone C), although a Romano-British recut had largely removed any trace of an

earlier ditch in this latter area. This feature appears to have formed a boundary between Zone A and Zone B as defined here. In Zone C this ditch turned north to meet a further boundary ditch aligned north-west to south-east (Fig 4) which ran roughly parallel to a palaeochannel. A third ditch crossed the channel at approximately ninety degrees and appeared to demarcate the southern extent of Iron Age settlement since only a few small features of this date lay to the south of the ditch within Zone D. This southern boundary most likely extended across the site (across Zone B) to meet the River Tame, however, it had been recut in the Romano-British period and no evidence of the earlier ditch survived. A fourth large Iron Age ditch was located between Zones A and B and also ran on a south-west to north-east alignment. It is not clear at this stage whether this represents a field boundary or whether it had a more practical function such as drainage, as it was located in a dip in the landscape which runs into a palaeochannel. Interestingly, a cobble and heat fractured stone trackway was associated with the ditch, located beside and over it in places. While it is possible that the trackway was Late Iron Age in origin, it is currently considered to be Romano-British and is therefore discussed in the next section. The final ditch, significantly smaller than those discussed here, was oriented north-west to south-east and was located in Zone B. It is also potentially Late Iron Age based on morphological grounds, although, with the exception of one large pit, the other ditches and features in this area are predominantly Romano-British.

Previous archaeological investigations have revealed Iron Age settlement enclosures, droveways and land boundaries within the area covered by the central and southern parts of the quarry, with deposits in the northern area of the quarry largely restricted to Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary activity. The results from the 2008 watching brief therefore extend this pattern of Iron Age settlement and activity onto the terrace in the southern half of the quarry but only as far as a clear southern boundary ditch. Beyond this, in Zone D, Iron Age dated features are restricted to two isolated pits which appear to be outliers from the main focus of activity and are not associated with either enclosures or roundhouses. The apparent evidence for enclosed activities right beside the Tame (in Zone B) is also of interest, as it is located on low topography compared to the higher ground of the northern area (Zone A). It may be related to river crossing and/or livestock transit activities as suggested for other areas associated with droveways at Whitemoor Haye (Hewson 2006, 112), although this requires further investigation.

Romano-British

The majority of archaeological remains recorded during the 2008 watching brief can be attributed to Romano-British activities. These include a large number of enclosure ditches, other boundary ditches, ditch recuts, pits, postholes, and two trackways which are posited to date to this period. Like previous investigations, materials associated with these features are predominantly heat fractured stones and charcoal and ash layers as well as limited quantities of Roman pottery (though at somewhat increased levels to many other areas of Romano-British activity recorded in the quarry). As with the Iron Age phase of settlement, the archaeological remains are concentrated in Zones A-C.

The most obvious features were continuations of enclosure ditches identified in the 2007 watching brief into Zone A. One of these enclosure ditches, which had also been identified in the BUFAU excavations to the north (Area M) represents a recut of the Iron Age enclosure discussed above. Like the Iron Age enclosure, no entrance was defined in the boundary ditch so an entrance in the unobserved north-east corner is again proposed. Several additional smaller (width and depth) enclosure ditches were located in Zone A and these appeared for the most part to define plots set along the north side of a major south-west to north-east aligned boundary, first established during the Iron Age and re-cut at this time. These enclosures were separated by tracks and could represent successive enclosing activities throughout the period or more probably a string of contemporary enclosures and it is hoped that analysis of the finds will enable the temporal range of these to be refined. Within the enclosures there is no definitive evidence for Romano-British structures, which is generally consistent with previous archaeological investigations. However, some pits and postholes do cluster in broadly rectangular patterns in Zone A (Fig 3) and these may represent buildings. A few pit features could be interpreted as hearths, although there were no certain examples of this type of domestic feature.

Of note in the 2008 watching brief was an unusual feature located in Zone A. In form it comprised a large pit with packing stones around what is posited to have been a large rectangular post. The packing stones were large (from 0.3 x 0.25 x 0.10m to larger narrower pieces), and were mix of sandstone and limestone fragments, including a section of millstone (Fig 5). The stones were set in an organic clay layer which is unusual to the site. It may have been selected in order to provide a stable setting for a large post set in the natural sands and gravels. The feature appears to be truncated by a Romano-British ditch and a shallower pit close to the surface. While it is unclear at this point as to the feature's function, various suggestions can be made. The association with a millstone might indicate that it represents the setting for a post-mill but other possibilities include that it may have been part of a gateway into the enclosed area, or alternatively have held some sort of feature related to water control within the ditches, or demarcated the land as a highly visible boundary marker. In any case, it is hoped that further analysis will inform on this unusual feature from the Romano-British period.

Closer to the River Tame, in Zone B, further evidence for enclosure ditches, albeit smaller examples was recorded. Finds again included heat fractured stones, a quern fragment, and pottery including samian. This latter find is consistent with previous investigations that have documented the presence of samian at Whitemoor Haye, although in low quantities (Coates 2002, Hewson 2006, Phear 2007). The larger of the ditches had been identified previously through cropmark evidence, but many additional features were not visible on the aerial photographs. There do not appear to be any buildings/structures within the enclosures, and it is suggested that these may represent stock enclosures. These potential stock enclosures were situated close to a trackway which is considered to be Romano-British in date (Figs 6 and 7). The trackway surfacing comprised rounded cobbles and heat fractured stones, although the latter were concentrated in certain areas only. The stones were set within a silty matrix, and located running parallel to and above (in places) an Iron Age ditch. The thickness of the surfacing varied, from a layer a single cobble thick to up to c. 0.40m deep in the centre of the feature. As this area of the site lies in a natural depression/dip it is plausible that the area was prone to waterlogging, hence the need for a more stable surface for movement of people, animals and carts.

A substantial ditch extending through Zone C/D into Zone B is a recut of the earlier Iron Age field boundary ditch (discussed above). In fact, all three Iron Age boundary ditches that are present in Zones A, B and C have been recut. This indicates continuity in field boundaries and suggests similar patterns in land use from the Iron Age into the Romano-British period. Other features in Zone C include a probable trackway similar to the one discussed above. It was smaller in both size and depth to the central eastern trackway, and appeared to fade into ruts rather than having a clear surface. The similarity to the dated example suggests that this is probably also Romano-British, but in the absence of finds an Iron Age or more recent date should not be excluded.

With stripping and recording of the southern-most limit of Whitemoor Haye Quarry now completed, it is clear that Romano-British activity, like that during the Iron Age, does not extend into the far southern extent of the quarry area. Instead, the boundary appears to correspond roughly with the eastward curve of the Tame. Evidence for settlement within the enclosures is slim, and use for horse and cattle corralling may be a more fitting explanation (Coates 2002, 87), though the quantities of domestic refuse recovered from some areas appears rather high and further analysis is required to establish more detailed understanding of the character and dating of the activities represented.

The results of the 2007 and 2008 watching brief will invariably help define the nature of Romano-British occupation on the site and beyond, with comparisons with other settlements (such as those across the East Midlands) necessary to characterise issues such as settlement demographics, interaction between groups, and issues of cultural contact.

Post-medieval/modern

Several north-east to south-west and north to south oriented ditches were identified that truncated numerous pits and ditches. A clear post-medieval boundary ditch was also evident, running through Zones C and D, across to Zone B and terminating at the River Tame. Of interest is that this field

boundary ran parallel to the older Romano-British and Iron Age field boundaries, illustrating once again a form of continuity in land division. Several large ditches, oriented roughly north-west to south-east also extended through Zone C into D, and are related to the palaeochannel. A similar large ditch corresponds with the palaeochannel in Zone B, and both are therefore suggestive of a pattern of land drainage. A large ditch with several recuts also runs north to south directly through Zone A truncating many earlier features. This ditch was also observed in BUFAU investigations. Land drains were also observed across the site, although they were not recorded in any detail.

Undated

Many postholes, pits, and ditches were identified that were devoid of finds. Where possible, however, the features will be dated stratigraphically and on morphological grounds. This includes pits and postholes enclosed by both Iron Age and Romano-British ditches, and more isolated features where possible.

Conclusions

The watching brief undertaken to complete Phase 7 of gravel extraction revealed three main zones of settlement – the first located on the highest ground and adjacent to the area of the 2007 watching brief (Zone A), a second area closer to the Tame (Zone B) and a third area providing evidence of activity on the western edge of the site (Zone C). Only sporadic activity was identified in the southernmost area (Zone D).

The settlement remains identified across the higher ground of Zone A correspond with enclosures and linear ditches identified in previous phases of work in adjacent areas and also revealed further enclosure ditches, a roundhouse, two trackways and numerous large landscape boundaries extending to the south and east across Zones B and C. Preliminary phasing indicates that these remains span both the Iron Age and Romano-British periods with clear evidence for landscape demarcation and an apparent relationship between geomorphological features (such as palaeochannels), drainage, livestock movement and settlement patterns. There has been some debate in previous work from the site about the degree of continuity between phases of Iron Age and Romano-British activity with the earliest phases of work suggesting a hiatus in occupation (Coates 2002, 85) but subsequent work suggesting a largely uninterrupted pattern of land use and settlement (Hewson 2006, 114). This recent work provides support for the model of continuity proposed by Hewson (2006).

Other results largely conform to previous investigations at the quarry, supporting the model of Neolithic and Earlier Bronze Age activity focussed within the northern and central areas of the quarry and Later Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British features dominating the southern area. Of particular interest is the identification in recent years of prehistoric cremation deposits in both a major cemetery and as isolated examples, since these provide a significant but previously missing component of the later prehistoric landscape. Additionally, it continues to be the case that many features exist outside the bounds of the SAM, indicating that cropmarks alone are not a good indicator of the complexity or extent of remains in this area. Further investigation and analysis will help to clarify these relationships and highlight any other elements related to settlement and landscape use not yet explored.

The Archive

Preliminary processing of artefacts has been undertaken and the archive has been checked and cross referenced. A quantity of bulk environmental samples has been identified for retention and along with flots and residues from the processed samples will be stored along with the remainder of the archive until a detailed post-excavation programme is agreed.

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 then be undertaken leading to analysis and publication.

Following publication 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:

399	Abbreviated context records (AS40)
10	Context registers (AS5)
5	Drawing index records (AS4)
420	Scale drawings
13	Photographic record sheets (AS3)
985	Digital photos
5	Levels record sheets (AS19)
3	Sample record index sheets (AS17)
33	Boxes of finds
8	Pieces of stone (not boxed)
1	Box of flots and material from sorted residues
250 litres	Unprocessed bulk soil sample (retained for processing at a later date)

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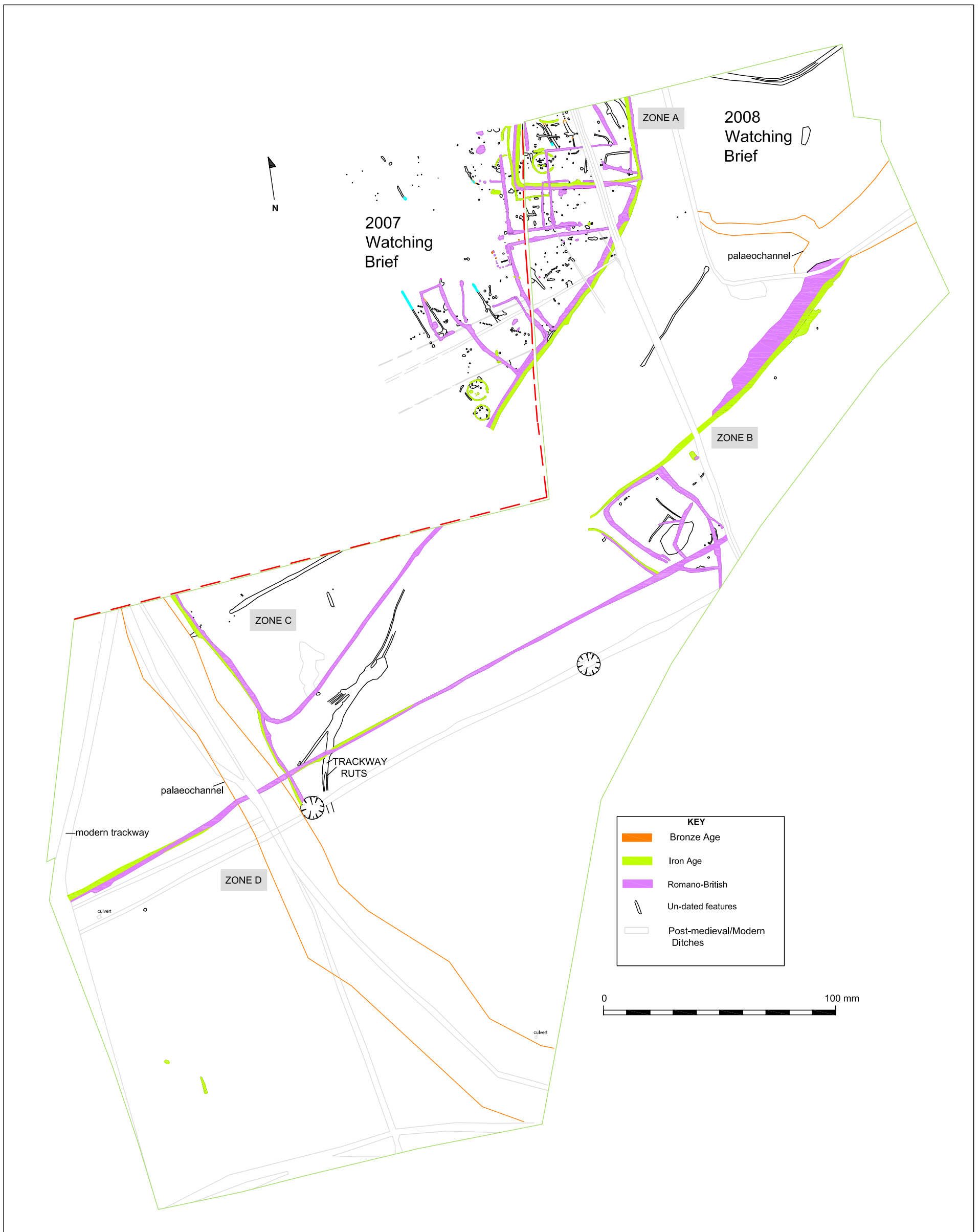
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Figures



Watching brief location in 2007, 2008 and Area M, including the Phase 7 extraction boundary

Figure 1



Plan of features by period, including the features identified in the 2007 watching brief

Figure 2



Zone A : Plan of features by period

Figure 3



Figure 4: Zone C. Iron Age field boundary with Roman recut (top), facing south.



Figure 5: Zone A. Romano-British pit with the post-packing stones (excavated packing is piled behind the ranging poles with those still in situ visible at the base of the section). The pit had been truncated by an Iron Age ditch (east side) and a series of Roman recuts. *Note* The fragment of millstone in the top left corner that had been incorporated as post-packing. Facing north.



Figure 6: Iron Age ditch (foreground) and cobbled trackway in Zone B. Pre-excavation shot. Facing north.



Figure 7: Detail of cobbles and heat fractured stones in the trackway. Facing west
