

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING  
BRIEF  
ON LAND REAR OF  
STONECROFT, MAIN STREET,  
CLEEVE PRIOR,  
WORCESTERSHIRE

Tom Vaughan and Alan Jacobs

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Project P2910  
Report 1452  
WSM 35088



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## Archaeological watching brief on land rear of Stonecroft, Main Street, Cleeve Prior, Worcestershire

**Tom Vaughan and Alan Jacobs**

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### Background information

<i>Client</i>	Mr & Mrs D A Leese
<i>Site address</i>	Stonecroft, Main Street, Cleeve Prior, Worcestershire, WR11 8LD
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SO 087 495
<i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i>	WSM 35088
<i>Planning authority</i>	Wychavon District Council
<i>reference</i>	W/05/1580
<i>Brief</i>	HEAS 2006a
<i>Project design</i>	HEAS 2006b
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999

### *Location and topography*

The village of Cleeve Prior lies on the south-east bank of the River Avon, approximately 7km north-east of Evesham, within the Vale of Evesham. The site lies within a large rectangular field, laid to pasture, north of the village, at a height of approximately 50m AOD. The predominant soils of the area belong to the Evesham 1 soil association (411a) comprising slowly permeable clayey soils associated with shallow well-drained brashy calcareous soils over limestone. The natural geology consists of Jurassic clay and limestone (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

### *Previous archaeological work on the site*

There has been no previous archaeological work undertaken on the site.

### *Previous archaeological work on associated sites*

Although no archaeological investigations have been carried out within the immediate vicinity of the site, there are a number of sites of archaeological interest within the surrounding landscape. Cropmarks within a field approximately 350m to the north-west have been interpreted as enclosure boundaries, probably of prehistoric origin (WSM 05482). Stray finds of prehistoric worked flints have also been recovered during fieldwalking of fields immediately south of the village (WSM 23281). A site of possible Iron Age occupation has been identified at Little Orchard, south of the modern village (WSM 20008).

Ryknild Street Roman road (also known as Buckle Street; WSM 30556) lies 2km to the east, under the present B4085, linking the Roman town at Alcester to the north with the settlement at Bourton to the south. The aforementioned fieldwalking south of the village also uncovered stray Roman finds, indicative of agricultural rather than direct occupation activity (WSM 23281).

A possible focus of Roman settlement has been identified in fields to the west of the modern village, alongside the River Avon, where pottery and coins have been recovered (WSM 26362 and 02795). The most significant find was the Sheppey Hoard, made 1811 by Thomas Sheppey whilst digging for stone. The hoard comprised *c* 3,000 coins, including *c* 100 gold, *c* 600 silver coins and the rest comprising bronze and copper coinage, contained within two red earthenware pots (WSM 02793). Unfortunately the hoard was rapidly dispersed, the finder using the coins as currency and selling some to local residents, and only brief descriptions of the coins have survived. They coins ranged in date from Valerian (AD 253-260) to Theodosius (AD 379-395), indicating that this hoard was deposited towards the end of Roman rule of the British Isles.

Further evidence of occupation in this period are two probable villa sites south of Cleeve Prior. At Middle Hill there are cropmarks and surface finds have been recovered, including metalwork and numerous coins, indicative of fairly wealthy settlement (WSM 03916). Near Middle Littleton, excavations revealed walls, floors and Roman artefacts (WSM 02803). In the garden of Cleeve House to the north-west an unusual human burial was found in 1935, reportedly laid in a sitting position with two pots, one on either side. The vessels comprised a tankard, probably no earlier than the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century and a Tazza, thought to have been used in domestic rituals, which does not appear in Britain until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (WSM 02794).

A small Anglo-Saxon brooch, probably originating from East Anglia and dated to c 6<sup>th</sup> century was found to the north-west of Cleeve Prior. These types of trefoil headed brooches with a square central plate with triangular projections have been found on a number of cemetery sites (WSM 22898). The village itself was first documented in charters of Æthelred (AD 866-871) when he granted it to the priory at Worcester (WSM 31054, 31057 and 31806). It is also included in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as *Clyve* (WSM 23323; VCH III, 308-312).

St Andrew's church lies 250m to the south-east of the site (WSM 02807). The nave contains 12<sup>th</sup> century Norman elements and the tower is of mid/late 14<sup>th</sup> century date, although it was heavily restored c 1863 (Pevsner 1968, 120-1). The Manor House adjacent is a fine late 16<sup>th</sup> century half-timbered building with 14<sup>th</sup> century elements with a round medieval dovecote to the rear surrounded by and a late 17<sup>th</sup> century formal garden with topiary (WSM 02805, 02806 and 21264; Pevsner 1968, 121). The site of the earlier manor house is conjectured to be slightly north-west of the existing building, from building debris and a 1619 date stone (WSM 23327).

In fields to the north-west of the site there are extant ridge and furrow earthworks (WSM 31640), representing the remains of medieval open field strip farming which then surrounded the village (WSM 23323). The field in which the site is located, was probably farmed as part of the grange lands, owned by Worcester priory.

The 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1891 indicates the layout of the fields surrounding the village to be much as they are at present. The field containing the site is depicted with trees around much of the boundary, and a small pond toward the north-west corner. A number of trees along a north-east to south-west alignment within the field may indicate the course of an earlier field boundary, such that the plot may have been subdivided previously. Otherwise there has been no development of this field, which was regularly ploughed and under crops prior to its purchase by the present owners who converted it to pasture (pers. comm. Mrs Anne Leese).

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## Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible.

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## Methods

General specification for fieldwork	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	HER Sources cited by the HER 1 <sup>st</sup> edition 1891 OS 6":1 mile, sheet 39.XLIII
Date(s) of fieldwork	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> July 2006
Area of site	c 900m <sup>2</sup>
Sampling	area observed sample size
	c 660m <sup>2</sup> . Indicated on Fig 2 c 73%
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	length 40.50m width 21.9m depth 0.25m

### *Access to and visibility of deposits*

Observation of the excavated areas was undertaken during and after machine excavation. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, though any less clear may have not been identified. Selected areas were cleaned by hand. The surfaces and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector.

### *Statement of confidence*

Access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

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## Deposit description (Table 1)

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground level
101	Topsoil	Firm dark grey sandy silt with frequent small rootlets and small angular limestone frags, occasional brick flecks and larger flat limestone frags.	0.00-0.25
102	Subsoil	Firm dark olive green loam with frequent angular limestone frags, occasional charcoal flecks and brick flecks.	0.20m+
103	Natural	Limestone bedrock, in gentle north facing planes, upper strata shattered, light grey weathering to light yellow.	0.20m+

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## Discussion of the stratigraphy

No archaeological structures, features, deposits or horizons were identified. The strip was generally undertaken only into the surface of the subsoil, although the natural limestone bedrock was recorded toward the north-west corner of the site.

## Artefact analysis

### *Artefact recovery policy*

All artefacts from the area of salvage recording were retrieved by hand during observation of the strip and metal detection, and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended).

### *Method of analysis*

All hand-retrieved finds were examined and a primary record was made on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated and a *terminus post quem* date produced for each stratified context.

The pottery and ceramic building material was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

### *Artefactual analysis*

The pottery assemblage retrieved from the excavated area consisted of 7 sherds of pottery weighing 147g; in addition fragments of iron nails, tile, lead waste and bone were recovered. The group came from two stratified contexts and could be dated from the medieval period onwards (see Table 2). The level of preservation was generally fair with the majority of sherds displaying high levels of abrasion.

Context	Material	Type	Fabric	Total	Weight
101	Iron	Nail		4	18
101	Iron	Spindle		1	6
101	Iron	Strip		2	39
101	Lead	Waste		1	4
101	Pottery	Medieval	64.1	3	27
101	Pottery	Medieval	69	1	3
101	Pottery	Modern	101	2	5
101	Pottery	Modern	81.4	1	112
101	Tile	Post-medieval		1	45
102	Bone	Mammal		8	60

**Table 2: Quantification of the assemblage**

## Discussion of the pottery

All sherds have been grouped and quantified according to fabric type (see Table 3). Only a single diagnostic form sherd was present which could be dated accordingly; the remaining sherds were datable by fabric type to their general period or production span.

Context	Ceramic TPQ
101	19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century
102	Undated

**Table 3: Context dating**

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The discussion below is a summary of the finds and associated location or contexts by period. Where possible, terminus post quem dates have been allocated and the importance of individual finds commented upon as necessary.

The pottery assemblage dates from the medieval and modern periods. The medieval material consisted of abraded sherds Worcester type glazed ware (fabric 64.1; contexts 101) of 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century date and a single fragment of Malvernian glazed ware (Fabric 69; context 101) dating from the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century. In addition two fragments of modern plant pot were recovered (Fabric 101; context 101). The only other pottery sherd recovered consisted of a fragment of the handle of a 19<sup>th</sup> century toilet or commode bowl (Fabric 81.4; context 101).

### **Other finds**

A number of fragments of modern iron nails and an iron spindle were recovered (context 101) as well as a fragment of lead waste and post-medieval roof tile. A few small fragments of animal bone were recovered from the subsoil (102).

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### **Conclusions**

The artefact assemblage is too small to have much archaeological significance. As anticipated because of ploughing in the mid/late 20<sup>th</sup> century, both overburden contexts contained material of modern date. The presence of medieval pottery, although residual, is indicative of medieval activity in the area, probably brought onto the site during manuring of the fields associated with Cleeve Prior grange.

The lack of archaeological features, structures and deposits should not be taken as evidence of absence of activity within the site. The soil strip was generally not undertaken into the level of the natural matrix, so archaeological remains may be preserved below the present development. Cartographic sources indicate that the site was part of the agricultural field system surrounding the village throughout the medieval and later periods. Thus any archaeological remains, if present, are likely to be of pre-medieval, probably Roman or prehistoric date, by inference from the surrounding cropmarks and stray finds.

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### **Publication summary**

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Mr and Mrs D A Leese on land to the rear of Stone Croft, Main Street, Cleeve Prior, Worcestershire (NGR SO 087 495; HER ref WSM 35088). The soil strip was generally undertaken only into the subsoil and the natural matrix, in the form of limestone bedrock, was only observed within the north-western corner of the site. No archaeological features, structures, deposits or horizons were identified and archaeological remains may be preserved below the present development. The artefact assemblage comprised a very small quantity of residual material, including medieval and modern pottery, iron nails, an iron spindle and lead waste, indicative of debris deposited during manuring. Cartographic sources indicate the site to have been part of the field system surrounding the village in the medieval period. Thus any archaeological remains, if present, are likely to be of pre-medieval, probably Roman or prehistoric date, by inference from the surrounding cropmarks and stray finds.



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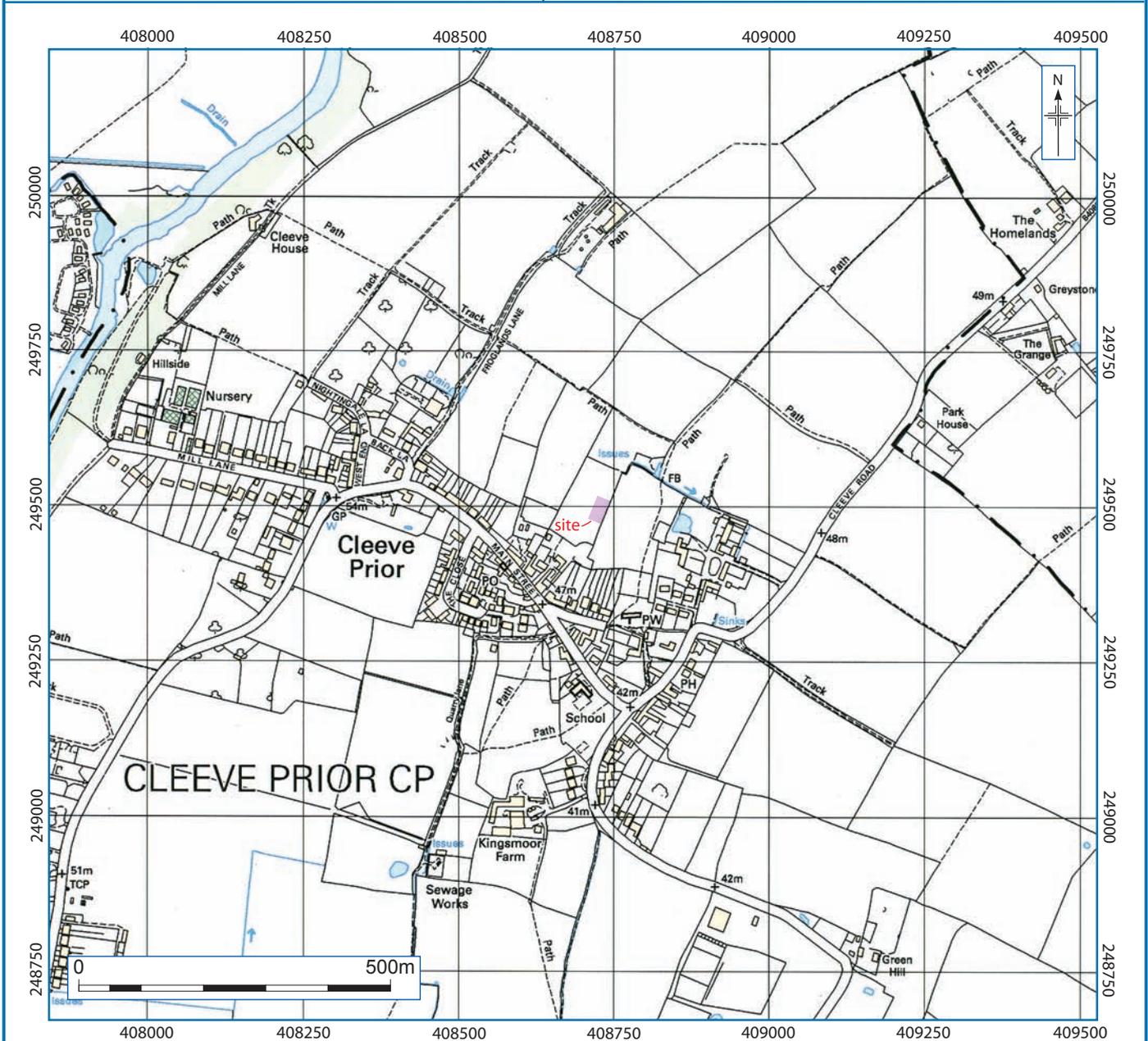
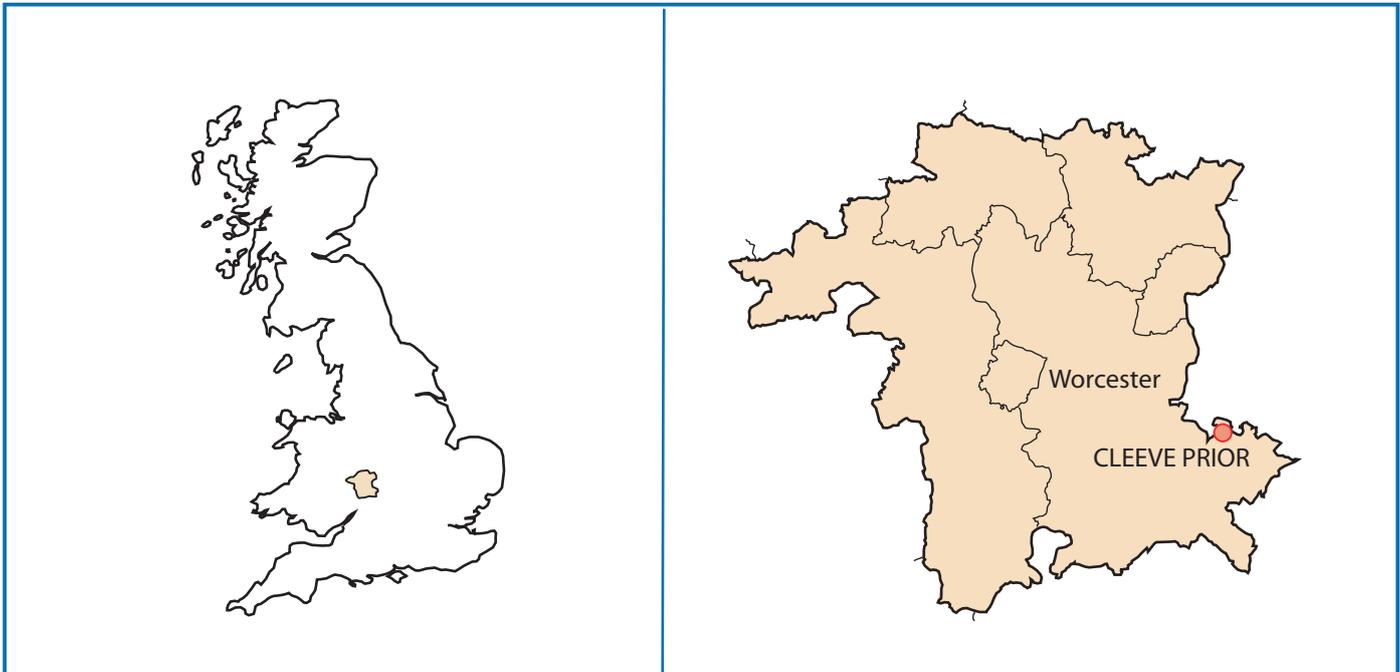
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Plate 1: site strip in progress, view north-north-east



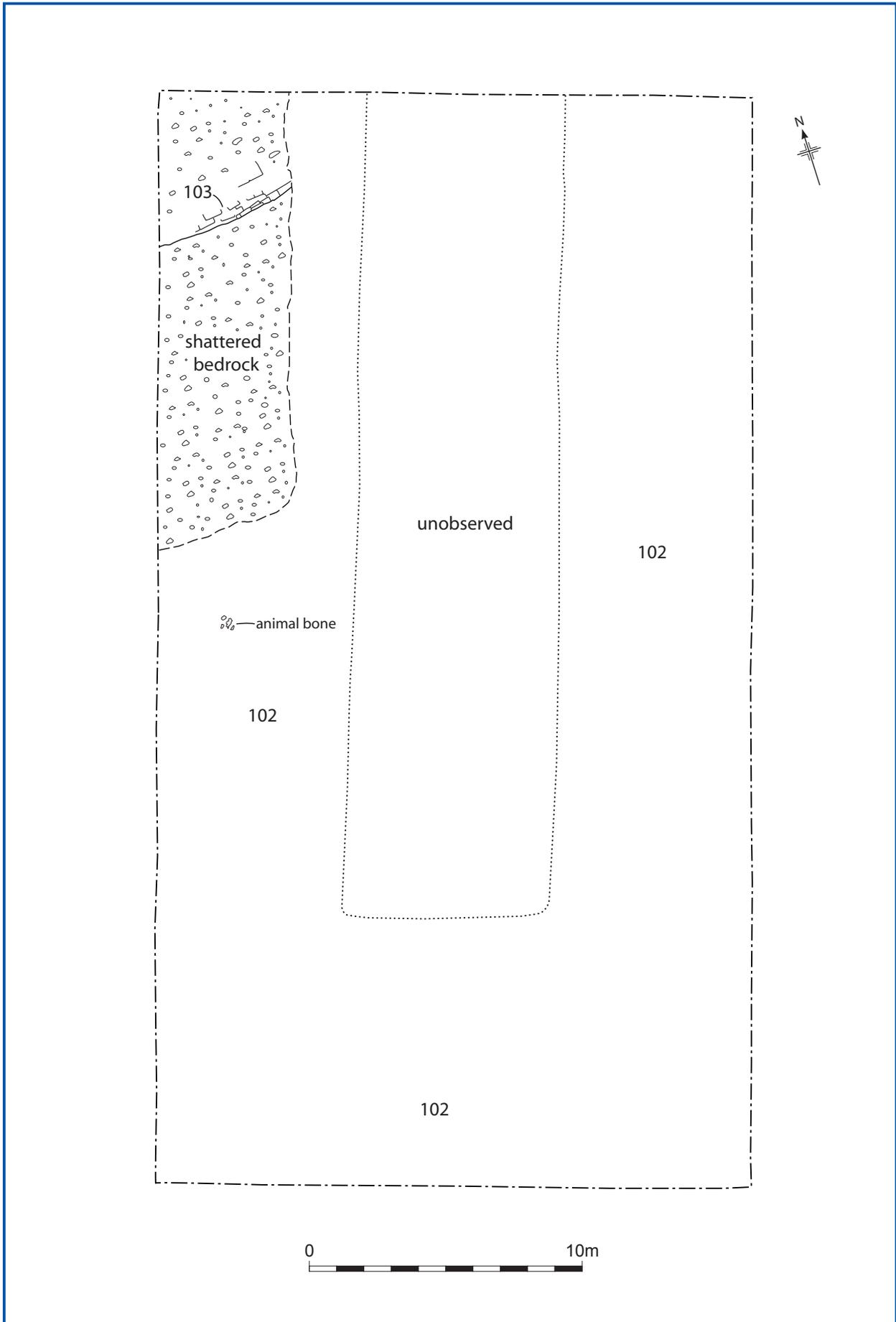
Plate 2: exposed bedrock to north-west side, view north



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Location of the site.

Figure 1



Plan of excavated area

Figure 2