

**Greyfriars Road, Coventry:
An Archaeological
Watching Brief 2003- 4**

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**Greyfriars Road, Coventry:
An Archaeological Watching Brief 2003- 4**

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Greyfriars Road, Coventry: An Archaeological Watching Brief 2003- 2004

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Greyfriars Road, Coventry (NGR SP 3313 7868) by Birmingham Archaeology for John Samuels Archaeological Consultants, on behalf of David Wilson Homes in October/ November 2003 and January 2004. The work was required as a condition of planning consent and carried out during groundworks prior to the erection of a residential apartment block and associated underground car park. Documentary evidence suggested that butchery waste may have been dumped at the site during the late medieval period.

The presence of two residual sherds of medieval pottery recovered from the site may, perhaps, suggest dumping of refuse or manuring took place here in the medieval period. Alternatively the pottery could be derived from later material dumped on the site in the post-medieval and modern periods. The earliest datable deposit recorded contained 17th and 18th century pottery and animal bone, which was preserved within a slight hollow, and could be the remains of a dump of domestic refuse.

No substantial pre-19th century features were recorded and the remains of two small structures, one built partly of reused sandstone and of probable 19th century date, and the other undated and built solely of reused sandstone, may be evidence of small sheds or small agricultural buildings. Traces of a sandstone wall and a 19th century brick culvert were also revealed and appear to coincide with a feature shown on 19th century OS maps, marking the boundary between buildings fronting onto Warwick Row and gardens to the rear. A well, recorded at the eastern part of the site, is probably within a backyard area of one of these buildings.

A brick-built, concrete-floored cellar, probably the remains of a boiler house, was uncovered. Together with three probable soakaway features this appears to be associated with either a brick-built Scout hut, (formerly a Sunday school building) or Sibree Hall. These structures occupied the site until they were demolished recently and are known to have existed from the late 19th and 20th centuries. All these features were sealed by modern layers of overburden, 0.60-1.50m in depth.

1.0 Introduction

This report outlines the results of a watching brief at land fronting onto Greyfriars Road, Coventry (NGR SP 3313 7868, Figs.1 and 2; hereafter referred to as the site). This watching brief was carried out during ground clearance, which was to involve the reduction of the level of site by 3m in depth, prior to the erection of an apartment block and associated underground car park. The site was formerly occupied by a car park, Sibree Hall and Boy Scout headquarters. The purpose of the watching brief, which was required by Coventry City Council as a condition of planning consent (Planning application ref. 44809/M), was to identify and record any archaeological features affected

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by the groundworks. This work followed on from a rapid archaeological assessment (Appendix I) and test pit monitoring by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (JSAC). The watching brief was commissioned by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants on behalf of David Wilson Homes. The work was carried out in accordance with a specification by JSAC (2003).

2.0 Historical and archaeological background

The site is situated outside the boundary of the medieval town of Coventry, close to an important route to Warwick. It incorporates a part of the substantial medieval field called 'The Poddy Croft' (JSAC 2003). This field name appears on historic maps of the area and has been depicted as being heavily contoured. Little is known of the detailed history of this feature; however, it is known that during the 15th century the city authorities ordered that all butchery waste be dumped in pits on the site as it lay outside the boundaries of the city at that time (JSAC 2003). For further details of the history of the site see the rapid archaeological assessment by JSAC (Appendix I).

The excavation of five test pits in November 2001, was monitored by an archaeologist from John Samuels Archaeological Consultants. No evidence of any archaeological remains was found in these test pits, and it was thought that the potential for survival of archaeological remains was low, as 18th and 19th century buildings on the site were likely to have removed any evidence of earlier occupation

3.0 Methodology

The site was excavated to the required ground level by three 360° tracked excavators fitted with a combination of toothed and toothless ditching buckets. The excavation was monitored at all times by a qualified archaeologist. All archaeological features uncovered on the site were recorded by means of *pro-forma* feature and context record cards, supplemented by scale drawings and colour slide photographs as appropriate. These records, along with the finds, form the site archive, which is currently stored at Birmingham Archaeology, and will be deposited with Coventry Museum as soon as possible on completion of the project and subject to the approval of the landowner. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set down in the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (Institute of Field Archaeologists 2001). The Planning Archaeologist, Coventry City Council visited the site to monitor the work.

4.0 Results (Fig. 3, Plates 1 and 2)

The depth at which the natural subsoil (1003 and 1022) was encountered varied considerably across the site. The highest point at which the natural was encountered was in the centre of the site, at 0.8m below the modern surface. The natural then fell away towards the edges of the site, and was encountered at depths varying between 1.0m at the

eastern end of the site and 1.25m at the western end. Due to the design of the development it was necessary to cut further into the natural subsoil to accommodate footings for the proposed structure. As these footings were cut into natural subsoil, they were not archaeologically monitored. The natural subsoil, the upper surface of which was highly disturbed, was an orange clay at the north part of the site (1003) and a grey clay (1022) at the south-west corner of the site. A sherd of possible medieval pottery, three sherds of post-medieval pottery, glass, tile and animal bone fragments were recovered from the disturbed upper surface of context 1003.

The earliest datable deposit on the site was a sub-oval layer of dark humic ashy material (1007), containing 17th and 18th century pottery and animal bone, preserved within a slight hollow. This deposit was 6.05m in length, 3m wide and approximately 0.2m deep. The southern half 1007, which may have been a dump of domestic refuse, was overlain by the remains of a wall (F102). Wall F102, of which a length of approximately 3.5m had survived, was 0.4m high, was crudely made from a mixture of irregularly-sized and shaped sandstone blocks and machine-made bricks, and was only partially mortared. It is possible that the sandstone blocks in this wall may have been reused, and may have originated from an earlier structure.

A well (F103) was located on the easternmost edge of the site, and was cut by a modern drainpipe. This well, measuring 1.10m in diameter, and approximately 8.5m deep, was made from a single skin of stretcher-bonded, unmortared machine-made bricks, and was in good condition. It was partially filled with water and brick rubble, and had, at some point, been capped with a sandstone coping stone. No more specific dating evidence was recorded from this feature.

A series of 19th or 20th century features was recorded at the western end of the site. Three circular brick-built structures (F104; Plate 3, F105 and F106), all measuring 0.78m in diameter and 0.32m in depth, were recorded. These structures were initially identified as wells, but excavation of the fill of the structures showed that all three were very shallow, and did not reach the underlying water table. All three structures were filled with a compact, wet, silty material (1011, 1013, 1015) that contained mainly 19th and 20th century pottery and glass, although a sherd of 15th -16th century Midlands Purple pottery was also recovered from F105 (1013). The presence of joining sherds of glass in the fills of two of the structures (F104 and F105) suggests that they were filled in at the same time, using whatever refuse was to hand.

At the eastern edge of the site were the remains of a wall made from undressed sandstone (F108). Most of the stones that formed the wall had been removed, but the probable line of the wall was still visible. Stones from the wall were still *in situ* at the eastern limit of the site, surviving to a height of 0.61m. An arched brick-built culvert (F107/ F110) lay immediately to the west of the wall F108, running parallel and abutting it, aligned north-south, extending beyond the limit of the excavated area. As with the wall F108 the central section of the culvert had previously been removed, and only the sections closest to the eastern and northern edges of the site survived. The culvert was made of machine-made bricks of probable 19th century date.

The design of the culvert is different at each of the surviving ends. The section by the northern edge of the site (F107) is generally intact and is constructed of a single skin of factory-made bricks, laid header-stretcher style. The arch in this section of the culvert is constructed with the same bricks laid stretcher style, with mortar bonding. There was a gap of 0.3m between culvert F107 and the sandstone wall F108, which was filled with clay and brick rubble. The culvert F107 was partially filled with a layer of compacted soft grey silt (1018) 0.2m thick, overlain by a 0.2m thick layer of compacted soft black silt (1017), with a void of 0.21m between this and the top of the arch. No finds were recovered from these layers.

At the eastern edge of the site one side of the culvert (F110) is formed by the wall F108, suggesting that the wall predates the culvert. The arch in this end of the culvert is formed by the same machine-made bricks, but laid header style. This end of the culvert was partially filled with the same grey and black silts noted at the northern end of the culvert. Again, no finds were recovered from these layers, and it can probably be assumed that the culvert was allowed to gradually silt up.

The remains of a small rectangular structure (F109), 2.5m long x at least 1.7m wide and 0.40m high, were noted in the south-west corner of the site. This was cut into the natural grey clay subsoil (1022), and comprised two courses of reused sandstone blocks aligned north-east to south-west forming part of a wall with two rows of laid sandstone floor on the east side. There was no evidence that any mortar had been used to join the blocks, which were neatly dressed. A sherd of medieval pottery and a fragment of probable 19th century or modern tile were recovered from above the floor surface (1021).

The latest feature on the site appears to be a brick-built, concrete-floored cellar (F100) which cut 1003 and which was situated in the western part of the site. This structure was of late 19th or early 20th century date, 6.1m wide x 6.6m long, and at least 2.5m deep, although as the upper sections appeared to be missing and it was not possible to determine its original depth. On the western side of the structure was a set of brick-built steps descending from the south-west corner of the structure. A brick-built retaining column could be seen at the bottom of these steps, on the northern edge of the structure. The southern wall of the structure was rendered, although the other walls were left as bare brick. On the eastern wall was a brick-built recessed panel extending upwards and outwards from the floor. Set into this panel were two brick flues lined with cast iron. A small quantity of burnt material was associated with this feature, and it seems likely that it was connected with a boiler or furnace that existed in the cellar at some point.

These features and deposits and the natural subsoil 1003 and 1022 were overlain, in places, by a black ashy silty sand (1002), 0.17-0.20m deep, containing 19th century pottery. Layer 1002 and, in places, natural subsoil 1003 and 1022, was sealed by a layer of brick rubble (1001), 0.60-1.10m deep. Above this, in the south-west part of the site was a layer of hardcore and modern tarmac, 0.15-0.20m deep, forming a modern car park surface.

5.0 The finds

Pottery by Stephanie Ratkái

A very small collection of pottery was recovered, most of which dated to the 19th century. A number of ointment or pomade pots were found including one from (1013), marked PRI[JE GOSN[] PERFUMERS TO HIS MAJESTY which presumably dates to the reign of Edward VII or George V.

Only three medieval sherds were present; a Chilvers Coton A fabric jug, a Midlands Purple bung-hole jar or cistern and a whiteware bowl. The fabric of the bowl is very fine with few inclusions visible under x 20 magnification apart from flecks of golden mica (also visible on the external surface) and rare quartz grains <0.01mm. The sherd had a glossy olive-dark green internal glaze and light external rilling. The fabric is unparalleled in the Warwickshire County Type Series and may possibly be a French import. In the same context (1003) there was a thick walled sherd c.20mm with a light cindery fabric containing abundant, mostly burnt out, organic inclusions. The sherd is reduced to dark grey apart from the external surface and a 3mm margin which were oxidised orange-brown. It is not possible to say whether this was some sort of industrial vessel or part of a lining for a hearth or kiln.

Table 1: Pottery quantification

Context	Fabric/Ware	Qty	Weight (g)	Form	Date
1002	Utilitarian whiteware	1	108	ointment pot	19th c
1002	Utilitarian whiteware	1	72	ointment pot	19th c
1003	Feathered slipware	3	76	pie crust edge platter	late 17th-mid 18th c
1003	Fine micaceous whiteware	1	10	bowl	late medieval?
1003	Mottled ware	1	10	straight-sided bowl	later 17th-mid 18th c
1003	Organic tempered	1	43	industrial?	?
1007	Blackware	1	14	jug	17th c
1007	Mottled ware	1	68	straight-sided bowl	later 17th-mid 18th c
1007	Mottled ware	1	4	bowl	later 17th-mid 18th c
1011	Blue transfer printed ware	1	63	flange-rim bowl	19th c
1011	Blue transfer printed ware	1	16	bowl	19th c
1011	Brown salt-glazed stoneware	1	106	ink well	19th c
1011	Light-bodied stoneware	1	242	bung-hole jar	19th c
1011	Utilitarian whiteware	1	72	small jar	19th c
1011	Utilitarian whiteware	1	31	teapot lid	19th c
1011	Utilitarian whiteware	1	68	jar	19th c
1013	Midlands Purple	1	480	bung-hole jar	15th-16th c
1013	Utilitarian whiteware	1	70	ointment/pomade pot	early 20th c?
1021	Chilvers Coton A ware	1	36	jug	c 1250-1300
Totals		21	1589		

The Animal Bone by Emma Hancox

Factual Data

A small amount of bone was hand collected during the watching brief, weighing 2068g. No bulk samples were taken for sieving. The bone came from seven contexts, 1002, 1003, 1007, 1011, 1013, 1015 and 1021. The condition of the bone varied from context to context but in general was very poor with exfoliation of the outer layers of the bone, and fragmentation. Cow and pig were the only species noted. There was no evidence of gnawing, burning or pathology. Butchery was noted in the form of a cut mark on the radius in 1013 and saw marks on two rib fragments in 1011.

Only five countable elements were recorded, a pig tooth, and four cattle elements, a tooth, a humerus, a radius and an ulna. All the bones appeared to be from large modern species with the humerus in 1003 still retaining some flesh.

Statement of potential and recommendations

Given the small size of the assemblage it is felt that there is little archaeological potential and no further work is considered necessary.

Table 2: Animal bone summary

Context	Comment
1002	<i>Bos</i> metatarsal and a fragment, poor condition
1003	Several long bone fragments, weathered and in poor condition and a <i>Bos</i> humerus in excellent condition, still with flesh
1007	<i>Bos</i> upper M1/2 and <i>Sus</i> upper M1/2
1011	2 <i>Bos</i> ribs, both sawn and a <i>Ovis</i> scapula fragment, fair condition
1013	<i>Bos</i> ulna and radius with cut marks, poor cortical integrity but complete
1015	Long bone fragments, very poor condition
1021	Rib fragment

Glass by Robert Bracken

A total of thirteen pieces of glass were recovered from the site. The glass was almost all of 19th and 20th century date, with the exception of a neck fragment from a mid-late 18th century onion bottle (1003) with a moulded wire / string groove around the lip.

Three complete bottles were recovered from a layer of black ash (1002) that overlay the site. All of these bottles were moulded, with seams running vertically from top to bottom, suggesting a mid 20th century date. One of the bottles was a squat-based, aqua green round bottle that is likely to have held mineral water or lemonade. The smallest of the three bottles was a clear glass, sub-oval bottle with a short neck and a wide mouth, suggesting that it may have contained pills. The function of the other bottle, which was a light aqua blue colour, was uncertain.

A near complete bottle was recovered from the fill (1013) of one of the circular brick structures (F105) which were noted at the western edge of the site. This item was octagonal in shape and was missing its base. The bottle was aqua blue in colour, and a

light coating of iridescence covered the entire surface. It is likely that this bottle originally contained medicine of some kind, with the colour and shape of the bottle reminding the consumer of its contents.

Two joining fragments of a dark green probable beer bottle marked with the word PATENT (1011 and 1013) were recovered from fills of two of the circular brick structures (F104 and F105) at the western edge of the site. This bottle was dated to the mid 19th century.

The remainder of the glass assemblage recovered from the site consisted of two fragments of early 20th century brown beer bottles (1011 and 1013), three fragments from green beer or wine bottles of 20th century date (1003, 1007 and 1011), including one with a moulded wire or string groove around the lip (1003) and one (1011) embossed on the underside with the name RICKETTS BRISTOL, and an early-mid 20th century light green neck fragment from a wide-necked pickle jar or bottle with an applied lip (1015).

Tile by Erica Macey

Thirteen fragments of ceramic tile (1003 x 1, 1007 x 2, 1011 x 1, 1015 x 4, 1019 x 4, 1021 x 1) were also recovered from the site. No diagnostic features were noted on any of the fragments and no complete examples were noted. Most of the fragments were in a fine, sandy orange fabric. The only exceptions to this fabric were two fragments in a white fabric of modern appearance (1007, 1021) and a fragment in a coarse red fabric (1015), which may actually be a small brick fragment. All of these fragments appear to be of 19th century date.

Clay Pipe by Erica Macey

A clay pipe bowl (1002) and a fragment of pipe stem (1002) were recovered. The bowl is of 17th century appearance, and has a rouletted lip. A stamp, which appears to have the name JOHN HORNT and a very worn set of letters which may read LABA, is visible on the base of the bowl.

6.0 Discussion

The presence of two residual sherds of medieval pottery may suggest dumping of refuse on the site or manuring at this time, or alternatively they could derive from the later material dumped on the site in the post-medieval and modern periods. No archaeological features or deposits were recorded which might be associated with the practice of dumping refuse on the site in the medieval period. However, the earliest datable deposit of ashy material (1007), containing 17th and 18th century pottery and animal bone, preserved within a slight hollow, could be the remains of a dump of domestic refuse.

No substantial pre 19th century structures were recorded during the watching brief and the site appears to be on the periphery of occupation during the 18th and 19th centuries, probably within an area devoted to cultivation or gardens, as depicted on the 1889 OS map. The traces of two small structures (F102 and F109), one of probable 19th century

date, one built partly of reused sandstone and the other undated and built of reused sandstone, may be evidence of small sheds or small agricultural buildings. Reused sandstone blocks on the site are likely to attest to the presence of earlier structures in the vicinity of the site. The practice of reusing sandstone can frequently be seen in other areas of Coventry, including part of a wall observed during refurbishment of a water main in Lamb Street (Macey 2003), and a similar wall observed during water main refurbishments in the Barracks Car Park (*ibid.*).

Sandstone wall F108 and culvert F107/ F110 appear to coincide with a feature shown on 19th century OS maps marking the boundary between buildings fronting onto Warwick Row and the gardens to the rear. Well F103 is probably within a backyard area of one of these buildings. Recent building work in the vicinity had located similar structures (pers. comm. Iain Soden, Planning Archaeologist, Coventry City Council), and these wells may also be associated with Victorian properties, fronting onto Warwick Row.

It is probable that the brick-built, concrete-floored cellar (F100) was a boiler house and features F104-6 were soakaways associated with drainage probably associated with a brick-built Scout hut, formerly a Sunday school building or Sibree Hall. These structures occupied the site until they were demolished recently, are known to have existed from the late 19th and 20th centuries (pers. comm. Iain Soden) and are shown on OS maps of these dates.

7.0 Acknowledgements

The watching brief was commissioned by Forbes Marsden of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants, on behalf of David Wilson Homes. Thanks are due to Martin Breeze, Costain Limited and the site team for their help and co-operation on site and to Iain Soden, Planning Archaeologist, Coventry City Council. The watching brief was managed by Laurence Jones for Birmingham Archaeology, and was carried out by Robert Bracken, John Halsted, Chris Hewitson and Erica Macey-Bracken. The report was written by Robert Bracken and edited by John Halsted with illustrations by Nigel Dodds.

8.0 References

- Institute of Field Archaeologists, 2001 *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching brief*
- JSAC, 2003 *A Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation of Land at Greyfriars Road, Coventry*. John Samuels Archaeological Consultants unpublished report no. JSAC 1039/03/03
- Macey, E. 2003 *Coventry Water Main Renewal: Archaeological Watching Brief 2002-3*. Birmingham Archaeology unpublished report 1000, 5

APPENDIX I

Results of a Rapid Archaeological Assessment carried out by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants

Site Name: Greyfriars Road, Coventry

JSAC Reference: 918

General Description:

The site is located about 400m south and outside Coventry's medieval defences and close to the medieval road from Coventry to Warwick. About 600m to the east and within the medieval defences was the medieval Greyfriars and Cheylesmore Manor House.

Specific Details:

The site until recently comprised a car park, Sibnee Hall and Boy Scout headquarters. The latter had formerly been a Sunday school attached to Warwick Road church and was probably built in the late 19th century. The remainder of the site had been gardens to the late 18th and 19th century houses fronting on to Warwick Row with the exception of the proposed access road. In 1905 this contained two small buildings of unknown function but perhaps of a more utilitarian function and probably of 19th century origin. In the early 17th century Speed records a number of buildings fronting on to what appears to be Warwick Row up to Greyfriars Gate. A view looking north-west across Warwick Row by Buck in the early 18th century is difficult to interpret because of its perspective but does not seem to show any buildings in this area. Either it is erroneous or the area was devoid of buildings for some time but this seems unlikely. However, whatever buildings have existed on the site they are probably beneath the existing late 18th and early 19th century buildings. No archaeological finds or sites have been recorded within the site or its immediate vicinity. A recent watching brief during the excavation of 5 test-pits within the site found no evidence for any archaeological remains.

Potential:

(High, Medium or Low). Low. Although Greyfriars and Cheylesmore Manor House are nearby, they were located within the town's medieval defences. The area of proposed development was outside the defences but situated on the important road from Warwick to Coventry it is not surprising that some late medieval houses should be built along it and close to the town defences. The existing houses are late 18th and 19th century and have replaced the earlier buildings and probably removed all traces of their existence. More recent development of their gardens will have removed any evidence of burgage plots.

Further Requirements:

Further work is likely to comprise a desk-based assessment and possibly trial excavations.

Sources Consulted:

Victoria History of the County of Warwick Vol VIII, 1969

1905 1:25,000 scale Ordnance Survey Map

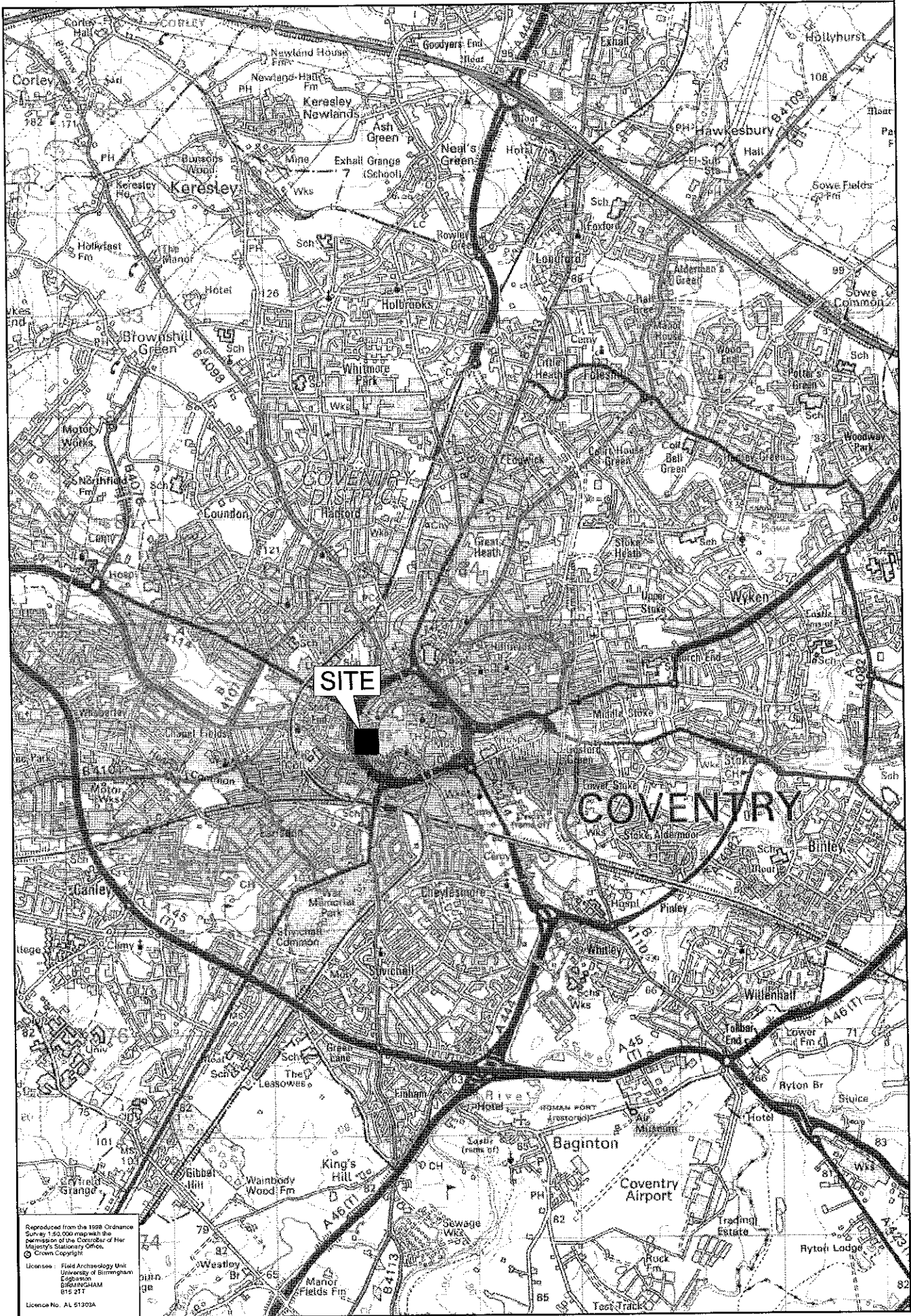
Historic Towns: Coventry ND

Pevsner N. and Wedgwood A. 1966. The Buildings of England: Warwickshire

Speed's Map of Coventry 1610

County Sites and Monuments Record

First Edition one-inch Ordnance Survey Map, 1834 revised 1891



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Fig.1

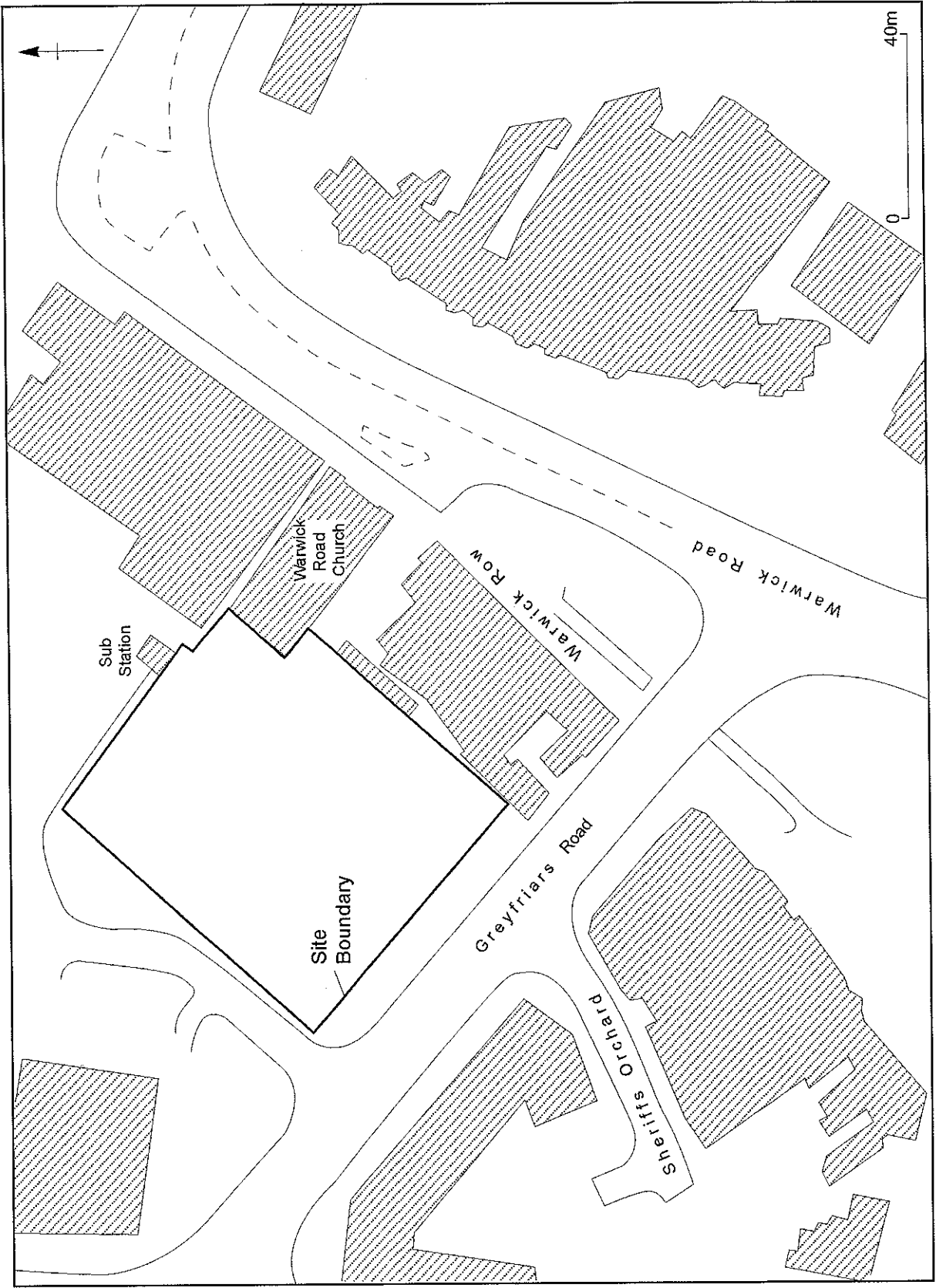


Fig.2

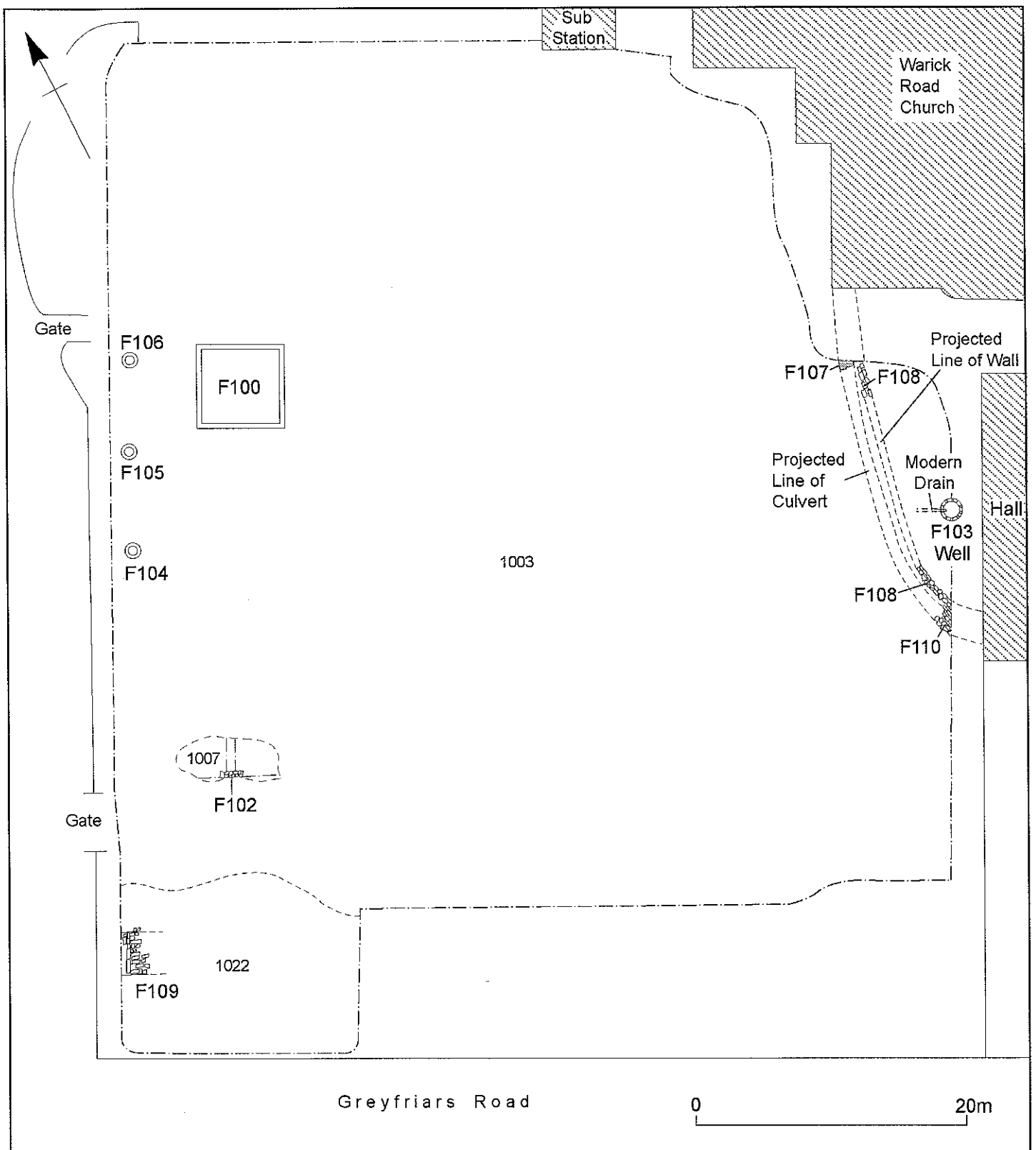


Fig.3



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3

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