

Marches Archaeology

Hill Street Walsall West Midlands

**A report on an
archaeological evaluation**

May 2003

Marches Archaeology Series 284

This report is produced by

Marches Archaeology

**Marches House
6 High Street
Clun
Shropshire
SY7 8JB**

Tel:- 01588 640976

Fax:- 01588 640796

e-mail:- marches@archaeology.kc3.co.uk

For:-

Paul Clifton
50 Princes Avenue
Walsall
West Midlands
WS1 2DH

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**Hill Street
Walsall
West Midlands**

NGR: SP01739830

A report on an
archaeological evaluation

Report by

Simon Jeffery

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Summary

A trench was excavated at the corner of Bullock Row and Hill Street in advance of a proposed residential development. The area is a focal point of early settlement, and in close proximity to the original parish church of Walsall. Evidence from the evaluation found that cellars had removed any earlier deposits down to natural geology, and services along the frontages of these properties had also heavily disturbed any deposits to the west of the cellars. The brick vaulted construction of the southern cellar and the cartographic evidence, however, suggest a date in the mid eighteenth century for the buildings at the junction of Bullock Row and Hill Street.

1 Introduction

A planning application was granted by the local planning authority for permission to build houses on the corner of Hill Street and Bullock's Row (ref. 02/1286). As a condition of the consent the developer had to carry out an archaeological evaluation of the site. The site is situated at NGR: SP 01739830 (fig 1).

The Local Planning Authority's Archaeology Advisor produced a "Brief for an archaeological field evaluation". Mr K. Towe (the client) commissioned Marches Archaeology to provide the archaeological services detailed in the Brief.

2 Archaeological and Historical Background

Recent discoveries of archaeological sites in the Borough of Walsall have yielded some interesting finds including a scatter of Mesolithic flints and a group of Bronze Age burnt mounds (WMB, 1993). The latter consists of heat cracked stones or pot boilers which would have been used for food preparation or possibly as a method of producing steam for a type of Prehistoric sauna. There is also speculative evidence of Iron Age occupation close to the current evaluation area as it is believed that St Matthews Church is situated on the site of a hill fort (Wainwright, 1999). Running parallel to Hill Street, to the North, is a lane called 'The Ditch' also believed to have been a part of the Hill forts' earthwork defences.

Roman finds consist of coins and other miscellaneous objects which have been found near to the church. The place name evidence for Walsall suggests a Welsh origin. The name *Walhs Halh* translates as 'as a sheltered place belonging to a Welshman or Welshmen' (Vodden, 1995). The word *Halh*, however, can be interpreted differently in Old English as meaning a corner of land or slight valley (Room, 1988).

The first reference to the town could have been written at the beginning of the second millennium AD (OAU, 1998) before the Manor of Walsall was inherited by Edward the Confessor (Vodden, 1995). Rather unfortunately the town appears to have been admitted from the Domesday survey of 1085. It is possible that the inner crypt of the Church of St Matthew dates architecturally from 1150. The Royal Manor of Walsall was granted to William Ruffus in 1159. By the end of the twelfth century a small planned market town had developed around the church, and urban expansion continued throughout the Medieval period with mandates being issued in 1373 by Edward the Third and in 1399 by Henry the Fourth.

The vicars for the parish church were appointed by the Abbot of Halesowen Abbey until its dissolution in 1538. The manor passed to the Earl of Warwick and belonged to him until his execution in 1553 when it reverted to the crown. The Lordship of the Manor and patronage of the church was then bought by Richard and Thomas Wilbraham until their descendants married into the Earl of Bradford's family in the early eighteenth century. During the Post Medieval period the town's economy was based on metallurgy and leather working, and the Church's seating capacity reflects a gradual expansion of population from 5,500 in 1686 to 11,914 in 1821.

The site of the proposed development lies within 'Church lands' indicated on a map of 1679 (fig.2). On this map Hill Street or 'Big Hill Street' can be seen to lead off from Ablewell Street, but the street is not named and there appears to be no houses. In the seventeenth century Ablewell Street was called 'Amblers Street', and has been referred to as early as 1309 when it was called *Abelwellsych* (Currie et al, 1976). A map of 1763 indicates that the site was still empty (fig.3) although a simple explanation for this may be that the land was ignored by early cartographers because it was owned by the church, of no strategic value, and exempt from taxation.

Bullocks Row is not mentioned until the eighteenth century when it first appears on a map of 1782 (fig. 4) where it joins The Ditch and Hill Street. At this time it was also referred to as Bullocks Road (Currie et al, 1976) and its name is possibly derived from the name of a prominent owner/occupier or its use as a drove way for cattle on route to the slaughter house (Blay,1992). On this map, buildings are indicated at the junction of Hill Street and Bullocks Row, and lime workings are indicated to the west of Ablewell Street, suggesting the existence of a quarry which would have taken advantage of the natural limestone outcrop that forms the Church Hill.

A map of 1821 (fig.5) shows the continued development of the site with structures along either side of Bullock's Row at its southern end. The general area of the lime works can be seen to the north of Hill Street with property boundaries backing onto its southern edge.

A print of 1798 (fig.6) shows the northern end of Bullocks Row where it joins The Ditch below a flight of stone steps leading to the churchyard. Interestingly the area in the foreground (bottom left) of the print depicts an open space and a steep slope on the site of the lime works. There are possibly animal stalls, and small sheds or buildings along the eastern frontage of Bullocks Row.

The Ordnance Survey of 1885 (fig.7) shows that the evaluation area is substantially built up with terrace housing and a courtyard. Industrial buildings can be seen to the North. The site of the lime workings is still an open space but a retaining wall has been built to the rear of the

courtyard and terrace housing. This wall is still visible today with brick chimney stacks placed at regular intervals along its length, and now forms part of the boundary of the current development area (fig.8).

3 Scope and aims of the project

The Brief stated that initial site investigations demonstrated that archaeological deposits in the east and north of the site had been destroyed by later development. Therefore the archaeological project would consist of:

One trench which would be excavated in the south west corner of the site. The trench was to be excavated, 45 sq. m at the top, and stepped down to 15 sq. m at its base, to the top of significant archaeology

Any further work would be agreed on site with the Local Authority's Archaeological Advisor, owing to the potential depth of the excavation, and any potentially surviving deposits.

An archaeological evaluation aims to “gain information about the archaeological resource within a given area or site (including presence or absence, character, extent, date, integrity, state of preservation and quality) in order to make an assessment of its merit in the appropriate context, leading to one or more of the following: the formulation of a strategy to ensure the recording, preservation or management of the resource; the formulation of a strategy to initiate a threat to the archaeological resource; the formulation of a proposal for further archaeological investigation within a programme of research” (Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations).

The objectives of this evaluation, based on the above stated aim, were
to define the character and extent of the archaeological remains in the development area and facilitate the development of a mitigation strategy

4 Methodology

Documentary research

Primary and secondary sources were consulted in order to inform the fieldwork phase. Initially a site visit was made and the appropriate local Sites and Monuments Record consulted. The following sources were considered, as appropriate and subject to availability:

Ordnance Survey maps; Tithe maps; Estate maps and other historical maps;
Previous published and unpublished archaeological reports and archive work;
Written non-archaeological sources.

Fieldwork

One trench was excavated, the initial dig was to a depth of 1m over an area of 45 sq. m to the top of significant structures. The trench was stepped down to an area of 5 sq. m and at a depth of 2m was again stepped down to an area of approximately 1 sq.m. Plant and machinery was provided by the client.

The upper and lower deposits were excavated by mechanical excavator to a level determined to comprise natural deposits. No excavation by hand was necessary. Such features as were considered to be of value to the understanding and interpretation of the site were recorded.

The recording system includes written, drawn and photographic data. Context numbers were allocated and context record sheets completed. A running matrix was not maintained as the stratigraphy was not considered complex enough to warrant it. A trench location plan was drawn (fig.8). The photographic record was made using black and white negative and colour transparency film. No samples were taken as no deposits considered to have environmental, technological or scientific dating potential were encountered.

On completion of the fieldwork the trench was left open for inspection by the Local Authority's Archaeology Advisor and was to be backfilled by the client after it was confirmed that no further work was necessary.

5 The evaluation

The Trench

The top layer [1] consisted of turf and soil 100mm thick and then a hard compacted layer of industrial waste [2] 300mm thick. Below this was a dump of soil and brick rubble 600mm thick [3] above several substantial brick walls [4] which formed two cellars and a double chimney base supported by twin arches. The building material consisted of uniform large handmade bricks all of similar dimensions 220 x 110 x 75 mm. The northern cellar was not excavated but the southern cellar was excavated to its base. It had been constructed with a brick double vaulted roof supported in the centre by a narrow brick wall. The eastern chamber of the chimney base had an unusually curved brick pillar projecting from its side which had later been infilled to form the north wall of the cellar (fig.9).

The area to the west of the cellars formed the frontage of Bullock Row and this was considerably disturbed by services. Consequently the area was not excavated below a depth of 1m to reduce the risk of undermining the cobble lane above. A dark brown loam containing large brick fragments [8] was cut by the service trenches. The area to the east of the cellars appeared to contain loose rubble backfill [5]. The cellars were also backfilled with the same material as well as large quantities of loose industrial waste. A circular ceramic mould 290mm in diameter was recovered from this deposit. Other finds also included modern glass vessels and parts of a bicycle. These finds were discarded on site although the mould has been kept.

The base of the cellar to the south of the trench consisted of a brick floor at a depth of 2.7m from the modern surface. On its removal this was seen to be above a layer of reddish brown

gravel and sand [6] 600mm thick. A layer [7] of firm yellowish brown fine sand was excavated to a further depth of 300mm, 3.6m below the modern ground surface.

6 Discussion

The results of the evaluation have shown that the ground within the development area was heavily disturbed by cellars and services. These cellars probably belonged to the buildings indicated on the town plan of 1821 and the partition wall in the centre of the trench is almost certainly indicated on the OS map of 1885. It is possible to predict from the cartographic evidence that there were buildings on the site during the eighteenth century. John Snape's map of 1782 does show a characteristic 'L' shaped development on the corner of Hill Street and Bullock's Row, but without the courtyard to the rear. The style of construction of these buildings with a vaulted cellar roof, double chimney base, and modifications to the ground plan also suggest a date in the late eighteenth century, perhaps as an industrial unit, with continued use in the nineteenth century.

The extent of disturbance along the frontage of Bullock Row could only be defined to a depth of 1m, however, it is possible that earlier deposits may survive below this level and under the existing road. This could be made less likely by the development of buildings on either side of the road during the eighteenth century, although quarrying to the west of Ablewell Street was confined to the east of the evaluation area. This was archaeologically proved by the in situ presence of geological strata below the cellar floor.

Sand and gravel deposits found below the cellar occur as sediments and could lie in a *cirque* or basin caused by glacial erosion of the limestone outcrop. An untested alternative is that the sand fills a solution hole and this has filled voids within the limestone. It would have created an area that would have been quite unstable for the quarrymen, and provides an explanation for the survival of this part of the hill, as well as the continued occupation of the site.

In the absence of quarrying below Butchers Row, there is a possibility that archaeological deposits could survive below the road, but no significant archaeological deposits survive within the present development area, and no further archaeological work would appear to be necessary.

7 References

- Blay W.F 1992 **The Street Names Of Walsall** pub. Walsall Local History Centre
- CRJ Currie 1976 **A History Of Walsall In The Victoria County History Of Staffordshire**
vol. 17
- OAU 1998 Oxford Archaeological Unit 'Archaeological Desk Based Assessment'
- Vodden, D 1995 **The Parish Church Of St Matthew, Walsall** pub. Stafford Uniprint
- WMB 1993 Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. 'Areas of Archaeological

Potential'

Wainwright, J 1999 **7-15 Leicester Street, Walsall, West Midlands** 'Report on an archaeological watching brief' pub. Marches Archaeology MAS 086

Maps

Walsall Ground Plot protracted by 50 poles in an inch. Gregory King 1679. (original document at Northampton Record Office)

Map of Walsall 1763. Walsall Local History Centre

A Plan Of The Town Of Walsall. John Snape 1782

A Plan Of The Town Of Walsall 1821. Walsall Local History Centre

Ordnance Survey c.1885 26" to 1 mile

8 The archive

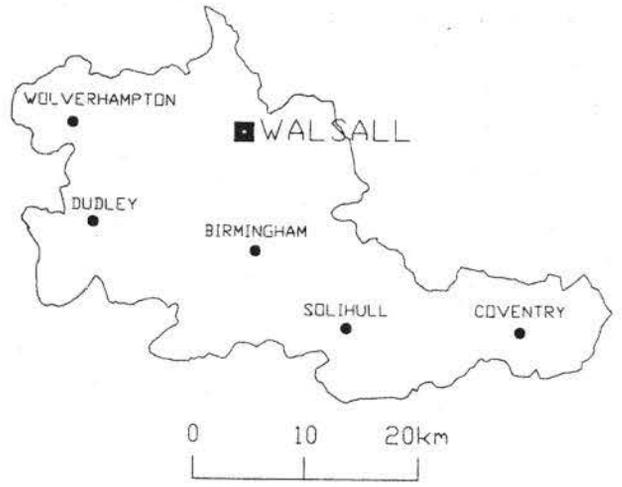
The archive consists of:

- 1 drawing index
- 1 sheet of field drawings
- 1 context index
- 8 context sheets
- 2 photo index
- 1 film of black & white negatives
- 1 film of colour slides
- This report

The site code was HSW 03A

The archive is currently stored at the offices of Marches Archaeology awaiting transfer to the Walsall Local History Centre

Appendix

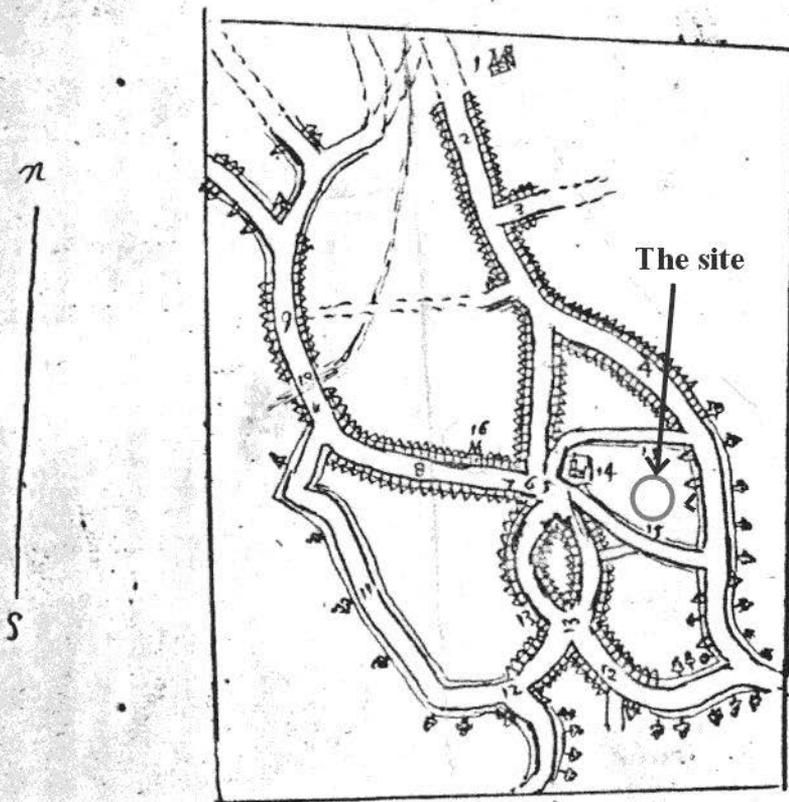


The Site



Fig. 1 Site Location

Walsall ground plot, protracted by 50 poles in an inch.



- 1 Renalds hall
- 2 Ryphall street
- 3 Heyrif lane
- 4 Aumbless street
- 5 market street
- 6 the cross or market house
- 7 the conduit
- 8 Digbath or high street
- 9 Park street
- 10 brook & bridge
- 11 Hall lands
- 12 Hill top
- 13 The hill
- 14 The Church
- 15:15 Church lands
- 16 Tonn hall

Fig. 2 Early Map Of Walsall 1679

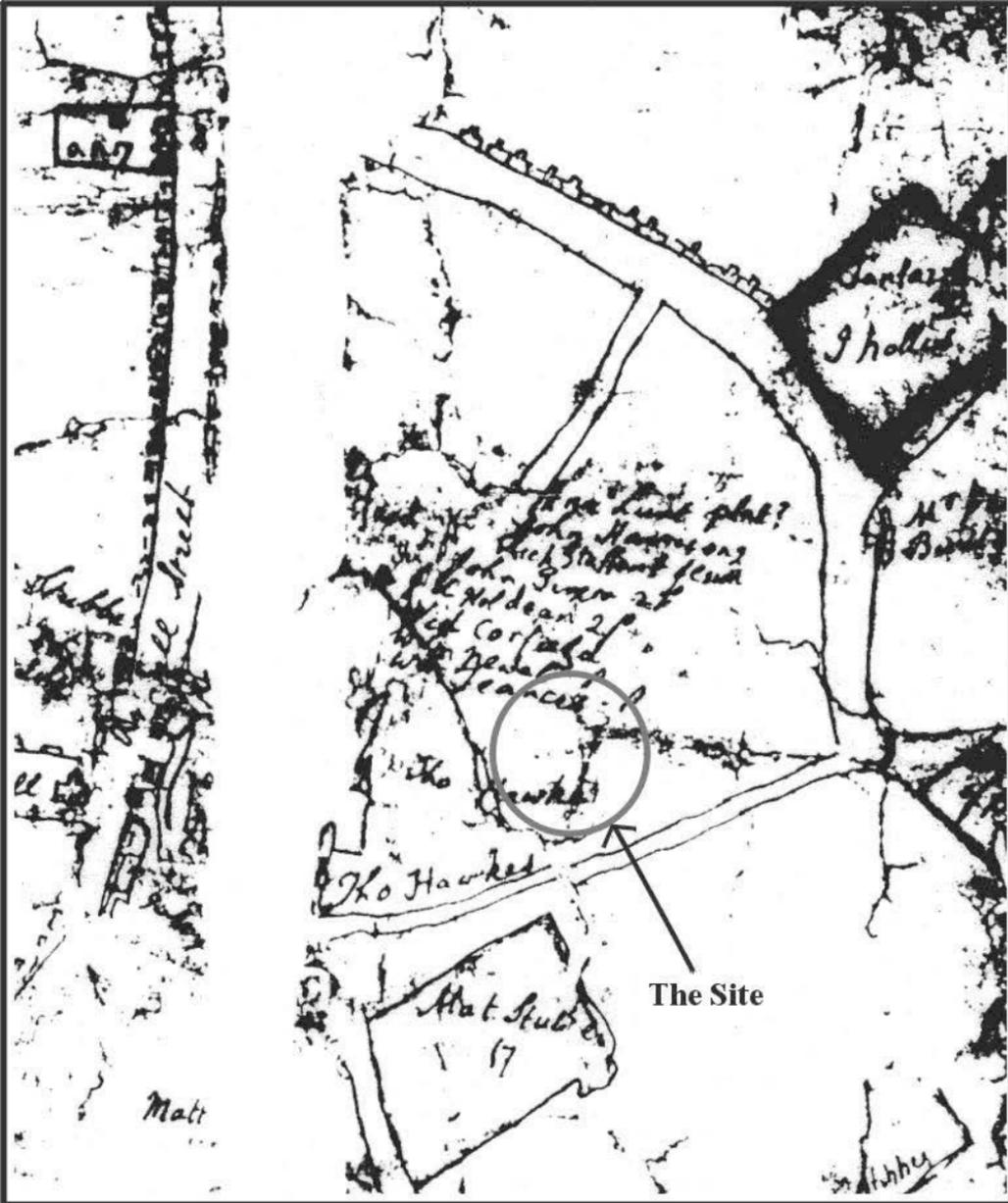


Fig. 3 Map of Walsall 1763

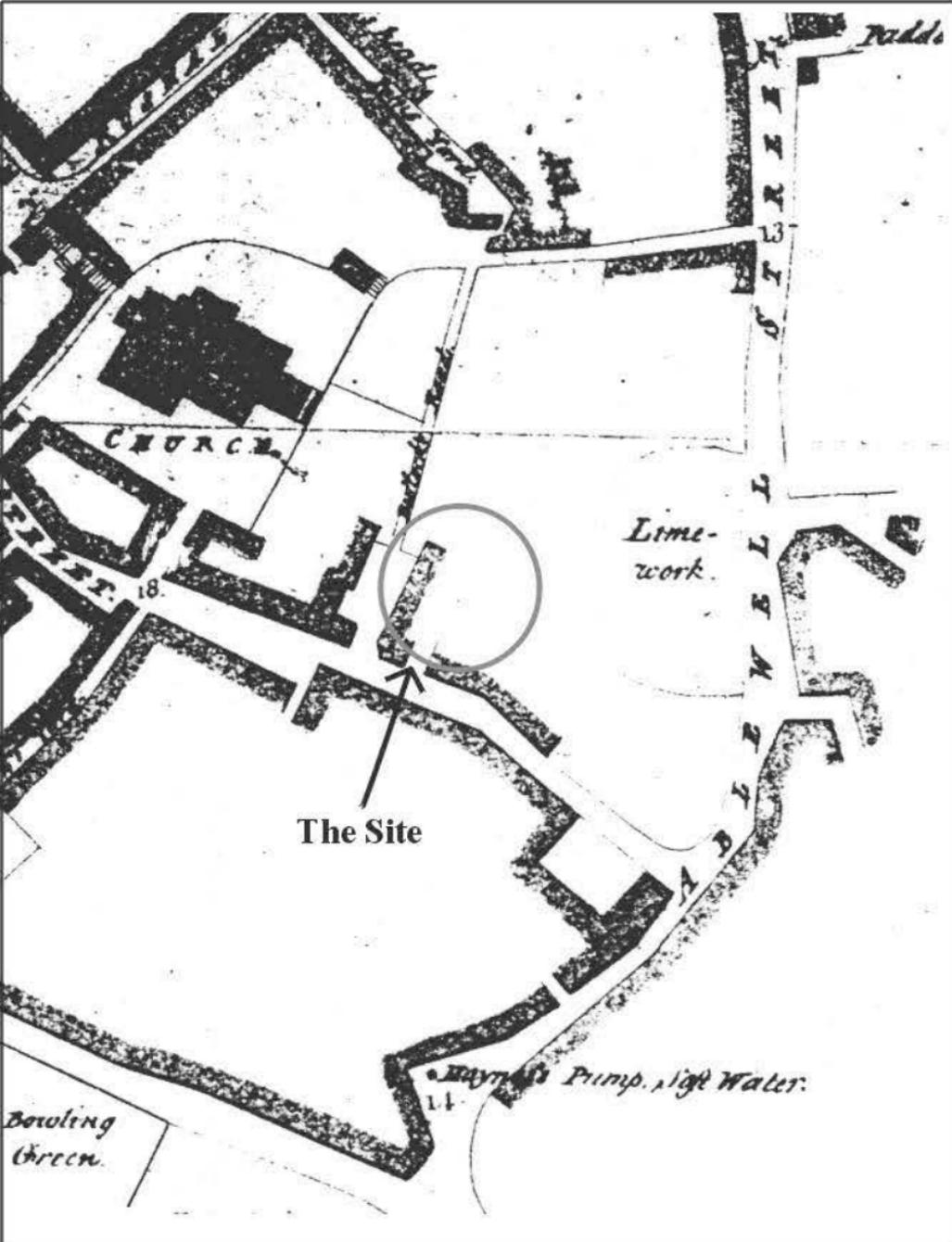


Fig. 4 A Plan Of The Town Of Walsall
by John Snape 1782

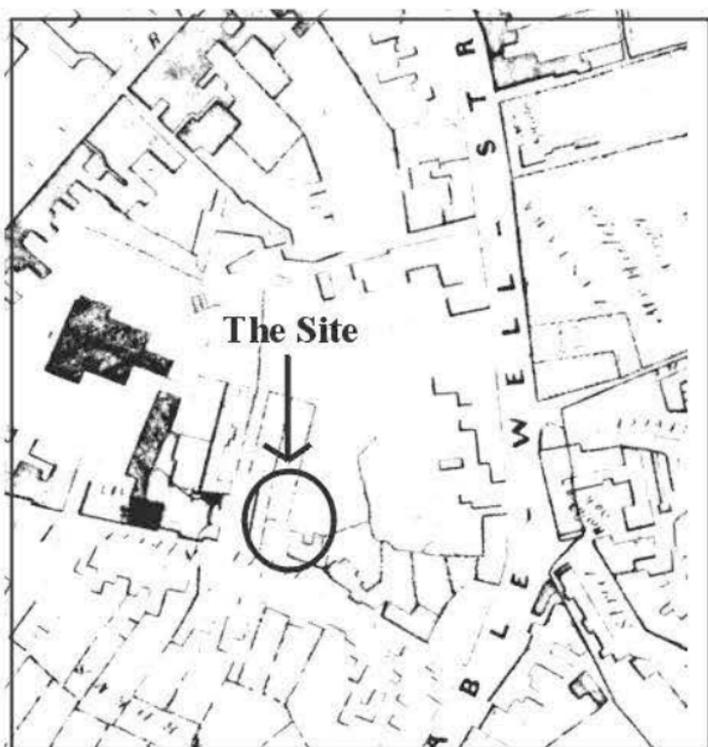


Fig. 5 A Plan Of The Town Of Walsall
1821

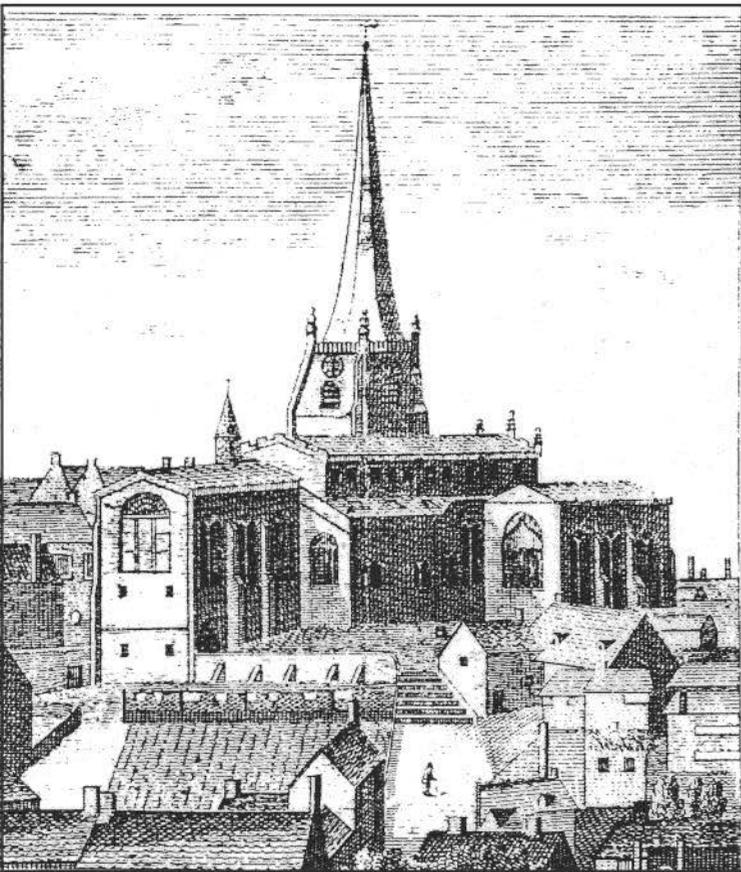


Fig. 6 View Of Church looking NW
1798

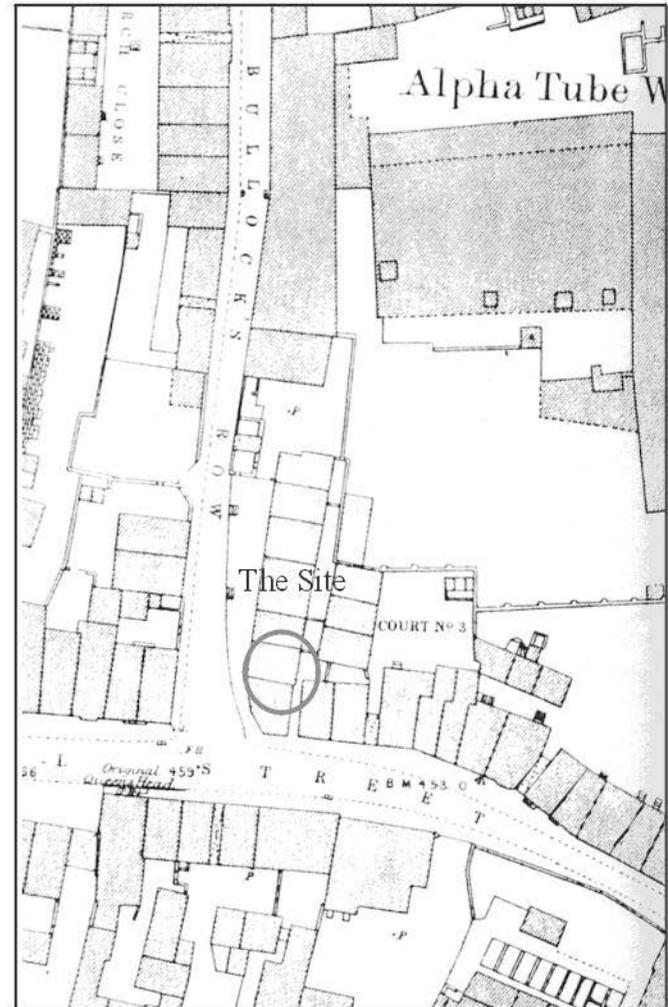


Fig. 7 OS Map 25 Miles to the inch
c.1885

0 30m

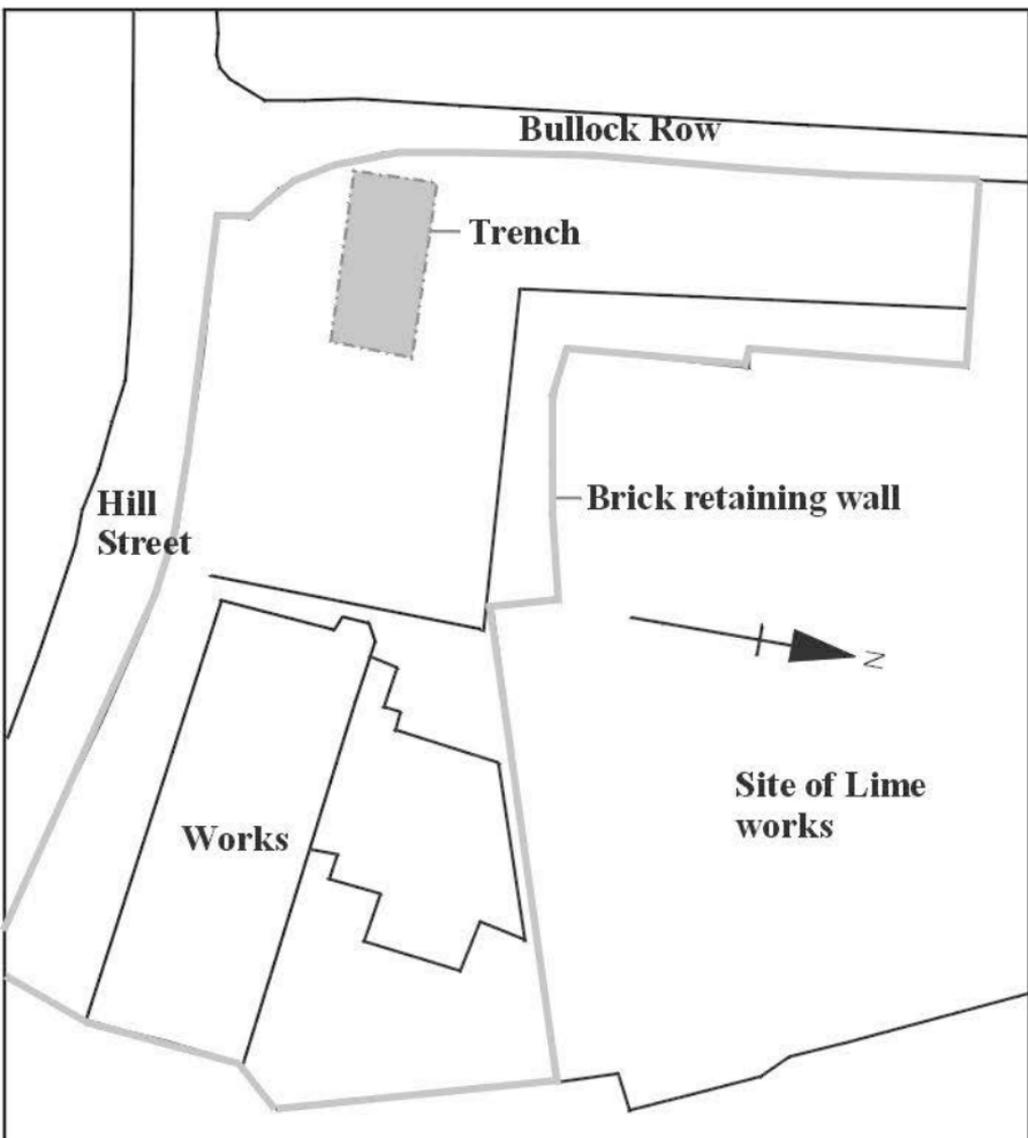


Fig. 8 Location of Trench

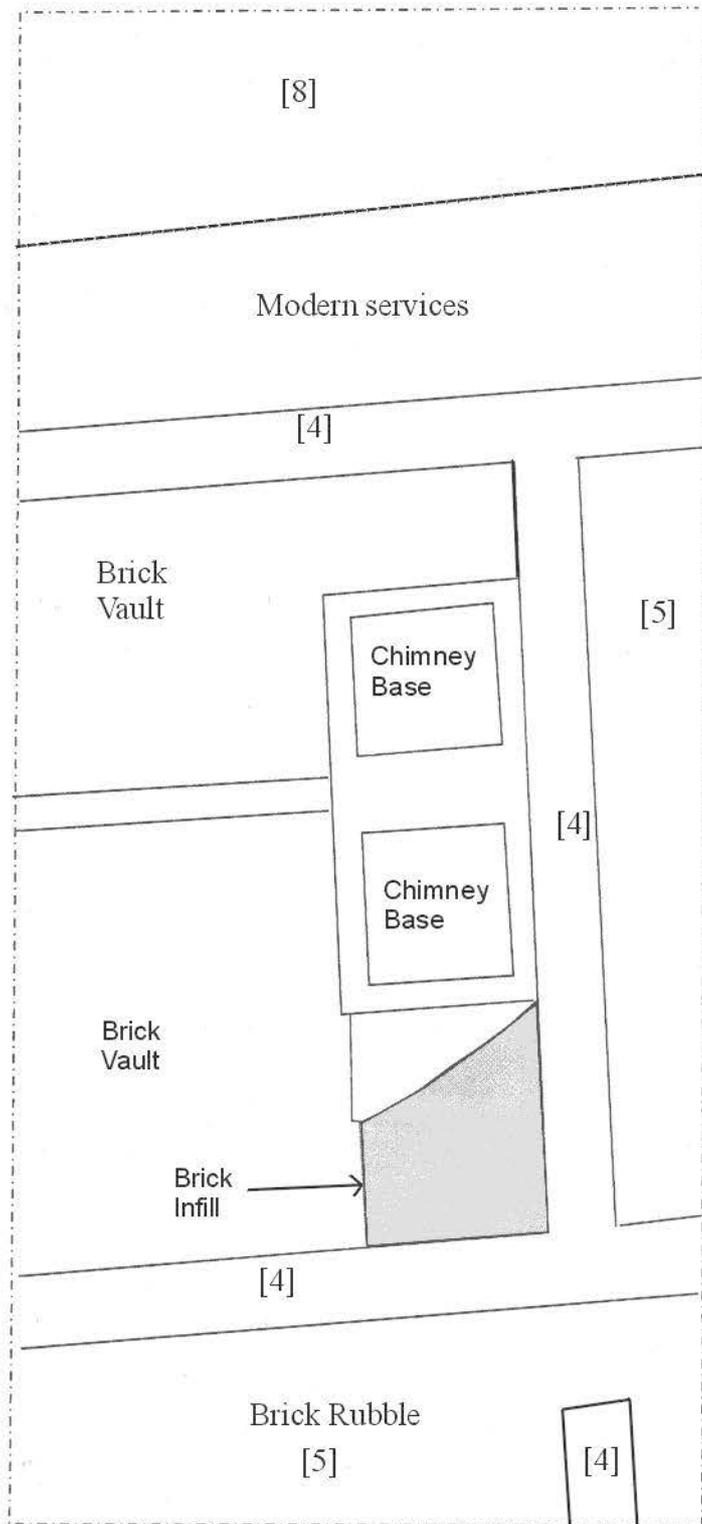


Fig. 9 Trench Plan