

**263A SUTTON ROAD,
WALSALL:**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF 2009**

Checked by

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263A SUTTON ROAD,

WALSALL:

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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for

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SUMMARY

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Friel Homes Ltd, to undertake an archaeological watching brief in respect of a proposed residential development at 263a Sutton Road, Walsall (centred on NGR SP 0385 9800). The site work was undertaken between 16th and 29th of January 2009. The development area lies immediately to the west of a site known to contain archaeological remains dating to the medieval and post-medieval periods. Consequently a condition requiring an archaeological watching brief was attached to planning consent for the development.

The watching brief took place during stripping of topsoil and during the excavation of foundation trenches. No archaeological features, structures or deposits were identified during the course of the groundworks. No artefacts predating the modern period were recovered. A number of modern drains were located during the excavation, along with a layer of recent demolition rubble.

263a Sutton Road, Walsall: an archaeological watching brief 2009

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Friel Homes Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the groundworks for a proposed residential housing development at 263a Sutton Road, Walsall. The development area lies immediately to the west of a site known to contain archaeological remains dating to the medieval and post-medieval periods. The development area may contain associated below ground archaeological remains which may be affected by the proposed development. Consequently a condition requiring an archaeological watching brief was attached to planning consent for the development.
- 1.2 This report outlines the results of the watching brief carried out between the 16th and 29th of January, and has been prepared in accordance a brief by Walsall M.B.C (2006, appendix 1) and with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2009, appendix 2) which was approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to implementation, in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990). The project conformed to the Institute for Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief (IFA 2008)

2 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The site is located at 263a Sutton Road, 2 km east of Walsall town centre, (centred on NGR SP 0385 9800 , Fig. 1, hereinafter referred to as the site).
- 2.2 The underlying geology consists of the South Staffordshire region is generally complex, consisting of a mixture of marls, different coloured sandstone and some limestone outcrops. The drift geology within the site is principally Wenlock Shale with outcrops of Woolhope Limestone (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1954).
- 2.3 The present character of the site is disused land. The site was occupied by a late twentieth century bungalow until recently. The site is bounded to the northwest by pasture fields, to the northeast and southwest by residential buildings and to the southeast by Sutton Road.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 The principal aim of the watching brief was to record any archaeological features, structures, deposits, or horizons exposed during intrusive groundworks across the site, particularly any relating to the features discovered in previous archaeological work adjacent to the site.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1 A detailed historical and archaeological background for the site is given in the desk-based assessment (Litherland and Nichol 2004), carried out by Birmingham Archaeology in 2004, for the adjacent development at Wood End Farm, 265 Sutton Road. A brief synopsis is given here.

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- 4.2 The historic town, or Borough, of Walsall is situated in and around a shallow stream valley (Baker 1989, 9). Much of the land to the north and east of the town lay within the bounds of the royal forest of Cannock. To the east and south was the Foreign of Walsall, an extensive rural tract surrounding the medieval town, and it is in the Foreign, to the east of Walsall, that the proposed development area lies.
- 4.3 The proposed development area is close to a medieval moated site and contains a stream that may be contemporary. Ponds to the south of the area, visible on later maps, may also relate to the medieval period. This would place the proposed development area in the centre of the medieval landscape and evidence from this time may survive below ground.
- 4.4 The earliest documentary evidence associated with the site is a reference for William Shelford owning a house at Wood End Farm in the 1400s. The Tudman family rented the land at this time and the farm can be traced as being leased by the Tudmans right up until 1794 when William Rawlins is recorded as the tenant. The earliest map evidence, Talbot's Map, surveyed in 1784, depicts three sides of the moat with a range of buildings forming the fourth arm. Immediately to the north of the moat a second structure, perhaps a house, is shown within what may be a garden enclosure. Three other buildings are shown in a field to the east, two on the frontage of the turnpike road (now Sutton Road), these were probably barns and animal sheds. The current farmhouse on the plot was built in 1836 and, according to documentary evidence, used materials from the old house, which was demolished at this time. This later building is depicted on the Tithe Map of 1843 close to the turnpike road.
- 4.5 The most recent owners of the farm were the Downes family, who were tenants in 1893 when the farm was sold to them. They continued to work the farm up to the present. Mr Downes undertook a small excavation on the moat platform during the 1930-40s, these failed to locate any structural remains, and the surviving part of the moat itself were filled in by Mr Downes in 1967 (SMR entry).
- 4.6 The turn-pike road is visible on the earliest map, 1784. Its original course ran through what is now the front garden of the farmhouse. The road was moved to the south in the early twentieth century and the garden of the farm extended up to the new line of the road.
- 4.7 Birmingham Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation (Hancox 2004) at Wood End Farm in May 2004. Four trial trenches were excavated to determine the nature and extent of any below ground archaeology. Also building recording was carried out within the farmhouse to look for any possible re-used timbers from earlier structures on the site.
- 4.8 The evaluation concluded that there was high potential for the survival of below-ground remains within the development area. Trench 1 uncovered a compacted pebble surface, which was almost certainly the remains of the turn-pike road, along with the foundations of farm buildings visible on maps dating back to 1784. Trench 2 produced evidence of earlier features dug into the natural subsoil, which were dated to the late medieval period. Trench 3 located the original front wall of the property c.7m in front of the house, this is visible on historic maps. Immediately south of the boundary wall, a compacted clinker surface was revealed, this appeared to date to the late nineteenth century and may relate to resurfacing of the turn-pike road prior to its being relocated, in the early twentieth century, some meters to the south. Trench 4 was heavily truncated by twentieth century disturbance, however, the northern edge of what was most likely a pond was located in the south end of the trench. Cartographic evidence supports the presence of a pond in this area and ceramic evidence suggested that it had been deliberately back-filled in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century.
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5 METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 Groundworks comprised the stripping of topsoil from part of the site and excavation of foundation trenches using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, working under archaeological supervision.
- 5.2 All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Written records and plans were supplemented by photographs using black and white monochrome, colour slide and digital photography.
- 5.3 The site archive will be prepared according to guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects (English Heritage, 1991), the Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage (UKIC, 1990) and Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological collections (Museum and Art Galleries Commission, 1992). The paper archive will be deposited with the appropriate repository subject to permission from the landowner.

6 RESULTS

- 6.1 During the topsoil stripping, the natural geology was not encountered. A maximum thickness of 0.2m of topsoil (**100**) was removed down to the top of a layer of modern brick demolition rubble (**101**).
- 6.2 During the excavation of the foundation trenches, the natural geology, a light greenish brown clay (**102**) was reached at an average depth of 0.5m below ground level. Several modern drains cut natural 102. A layer of demolition rubble (**101**), 0.3m thick, overlay the natural 102, which was in turn overlain by a dark brown silty topsoil (**100**), with a maximum thickness of 0.2m.
- 6.3 No artefacts predating the modern period were recovered.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Despite the archaeological potential of the site, the watching brief identified no significant archaeological remains within the site. Most of the groundworks were not sufficiently deep enough to expose natural subsoil, into which potential archaeological features may have been cut. The natural subsoil was exposed in foundation trenches that were excavated to a greater depth and no archaeological features were recorded here. The thick layer of demolition rubble present over the site may suggest that the natural subsoil (and any potential archaeological features) could have been truncated in places, perhaps during the construction of the late twentieth century bungalow building which previously occupied the site. Alternatively it is possible that any archaeological features recorded to the northeast of the site during the previous evaluation did not extend into the site.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1 The project was commissioned by Friel Homes Ltd. Thanks are due to Gary Jones and Bill Hertzberg for their co-operation and assistance throughout the project. Thanks also go to Mike Shaw, the Black Country Archaeologist, who monitored the project on behalf of Walsall M.B.C. The fieldwork was undertaken by Dave McNicol who also produced the written report which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds, and edited by Laurence Jones who also managed the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

9 REFERENCES

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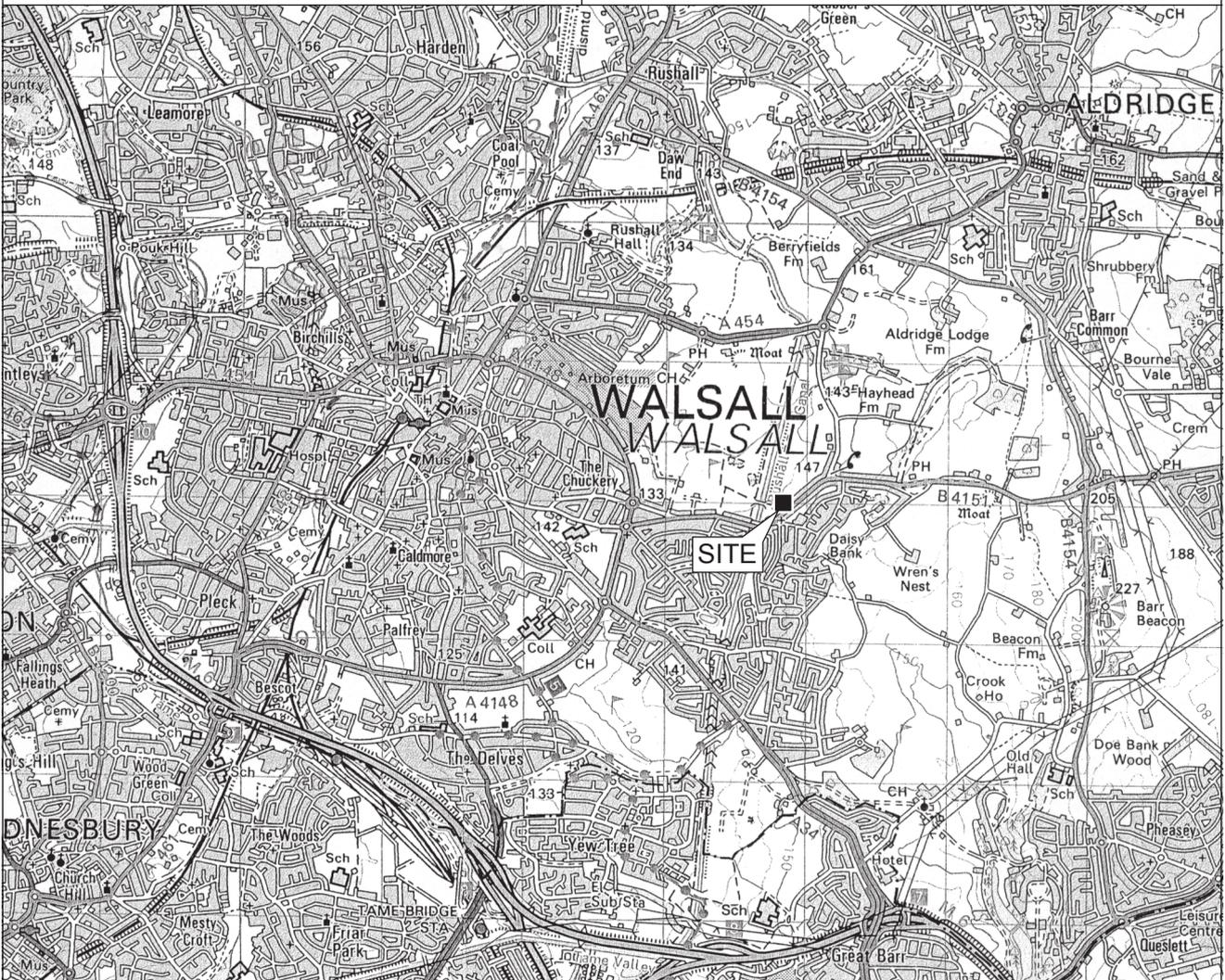
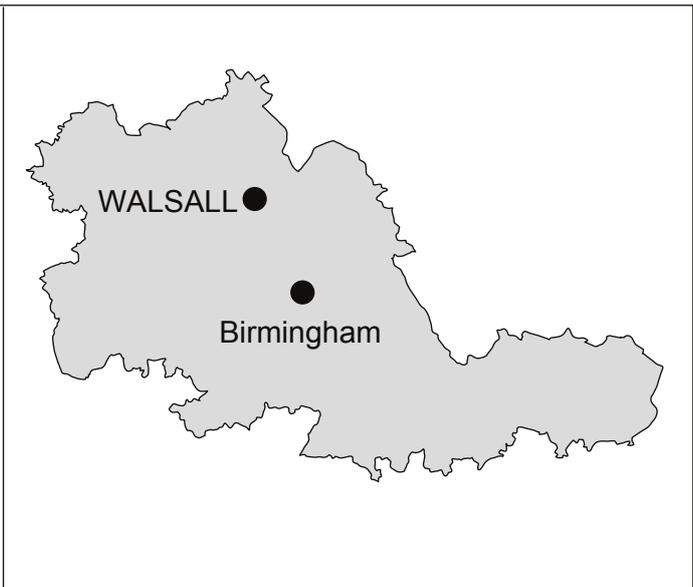
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Figure 1: Site location

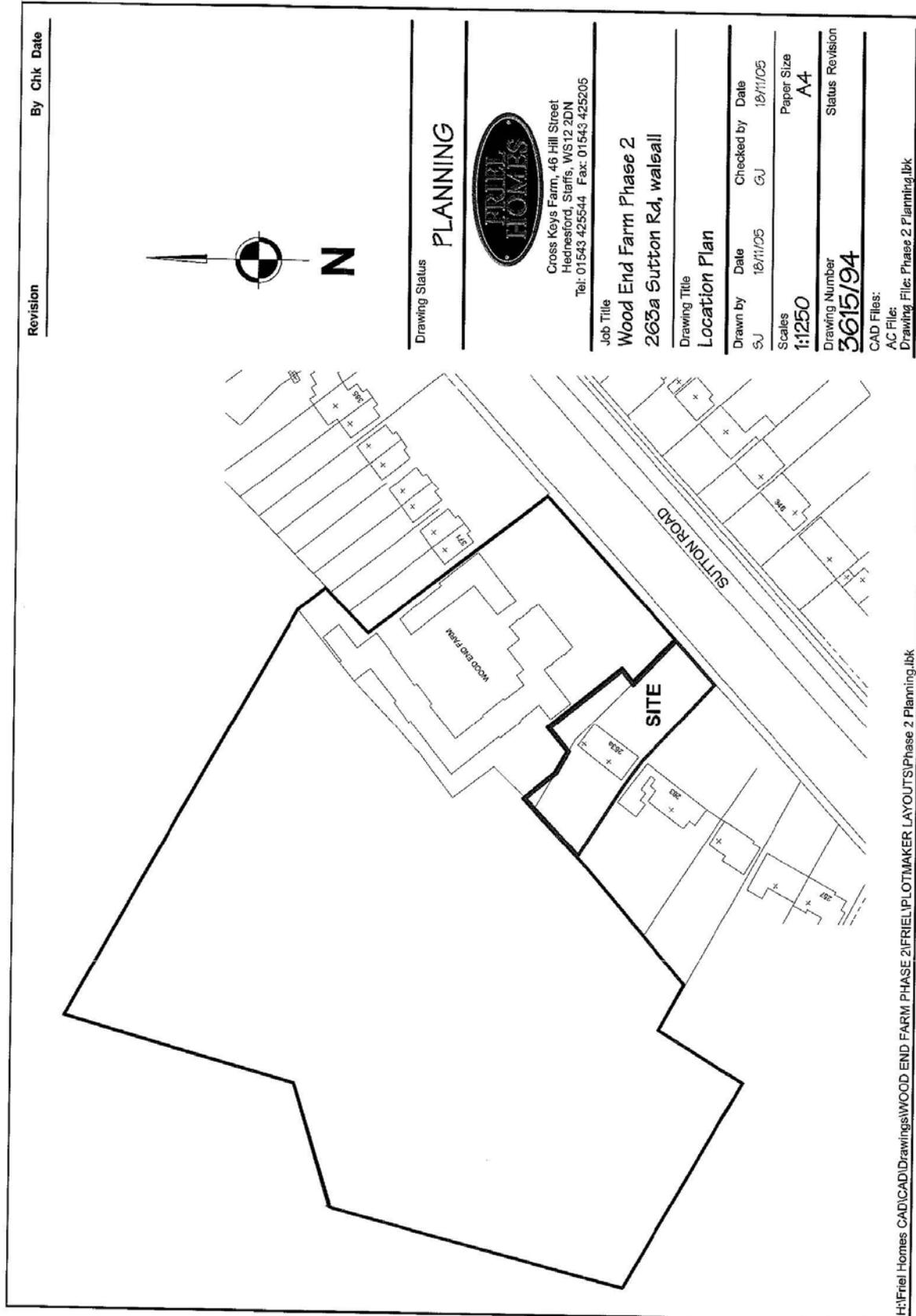




Plate 1: Watching Brief Area



Plate 2: Foundation Trench