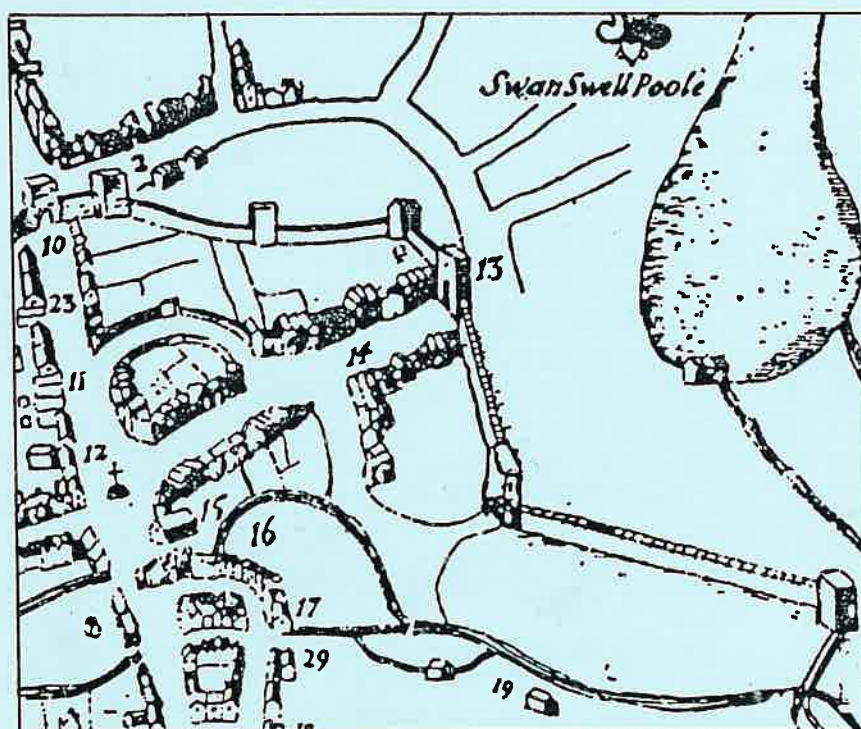


Archaeological Recording at Pool Meadow

Car Park, Fairfax Street,

Coventry



Warwickshire
County Council

Libraries & Heritage

Museum Field Services

Archaeology Projects Group

August 2002

Archaeological Recording at Pool Meadow Car Park, Fairfax Street, Coventry

Contents

	Summary
1.	Introduction
2.	Location
3.	Aims and Methods of the Archaeological Recording
4.	Archaeological and Historical Background
5.	Observation of Trial Trench
6.	Conclusions
	Acknowledgements
	Bibliography
	Appendix A: List of Contexts
	Appendix B: List of Finds

List of Figures

Cover: Detail of Speed's Map of Coventry, 1610

Fig. 1: Site and Trench Location

Fig. 2: Detail from Speed's Map of Coventry, 1610

Fig. 3: Excavated trench in relation to existing ring road

Fig. 4: Wall foundation 114 and adjacent levelling deposits

Fig. 5: Section showing recorded archaeological deposits

Report 0230
August 2002

Warwickshire Museum Field Services
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Summary

Observation of trial trenching at Pool Meadow Car Park, Fairfax Street, Coventry revealed no evidence for the medieval town wall. The geological natural sandy clay was overlain for the most part by layers of 19th century and later date. An area of darker sand in the base of the excavated trench may have been the fill of one of the medieval town ditches, but as this will be unaffected by the current development it was not examined further.

1. Introduction

1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Coventry City Council for the erection of a Gala Bingo Club at Pool Meadow Short Stay Car Park, Fairfax Street, Coventry. As the site of the proposed works may contain important archaeological remains, associated with the known line of the 15th century town wall and earlier defensive ditches, and the proposed development could reveal or damage archaeological remains and it was therefore agreed that a programme of archaeological fieldwork be undertaken to evaluate and record archaeological deposits or finds revealed during the work.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork in accordance with a Brief prepared by the Herbert Museum Archaeological Officer on behalf of the Planning Authority was commissioned from the Warwickshire Museum and carried out in May 2002. This report presents the result of that programme. The site archive will be stored at The Herbert Museum and Art Gallery, Coventry under the site code PM02.

2. Location

2.1 The site of the development lies in the former Pool Meadow car park north of Fairfax Street and east of the Pool Meadow bus station in the city of Coventry, centred around national grid reference SP 33749 79221. The area of archaeological interest covers some 54.95 sq metres within development area.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is alluvium (British Geological Survey 1994).

3 Aims and Methods of the Archaeological Recording

3.1 The programme consisted of the archaeological observation of the excavation of trial drainage trenches in the proposed service road in order to identify and record any deposits or finds of archaeological importance. If significant archaeological remains, such as the remains of the town wall were revealed these would then be subject to further evaluation. The agreed evaluation would take place within the extent of the drainage trenches.

3.2 Particular emphasis was placed on recording the possible line of the town wall. Archaeological deposits and features were recorded using the Warwickshire Museum's Standard archaeological recording system.

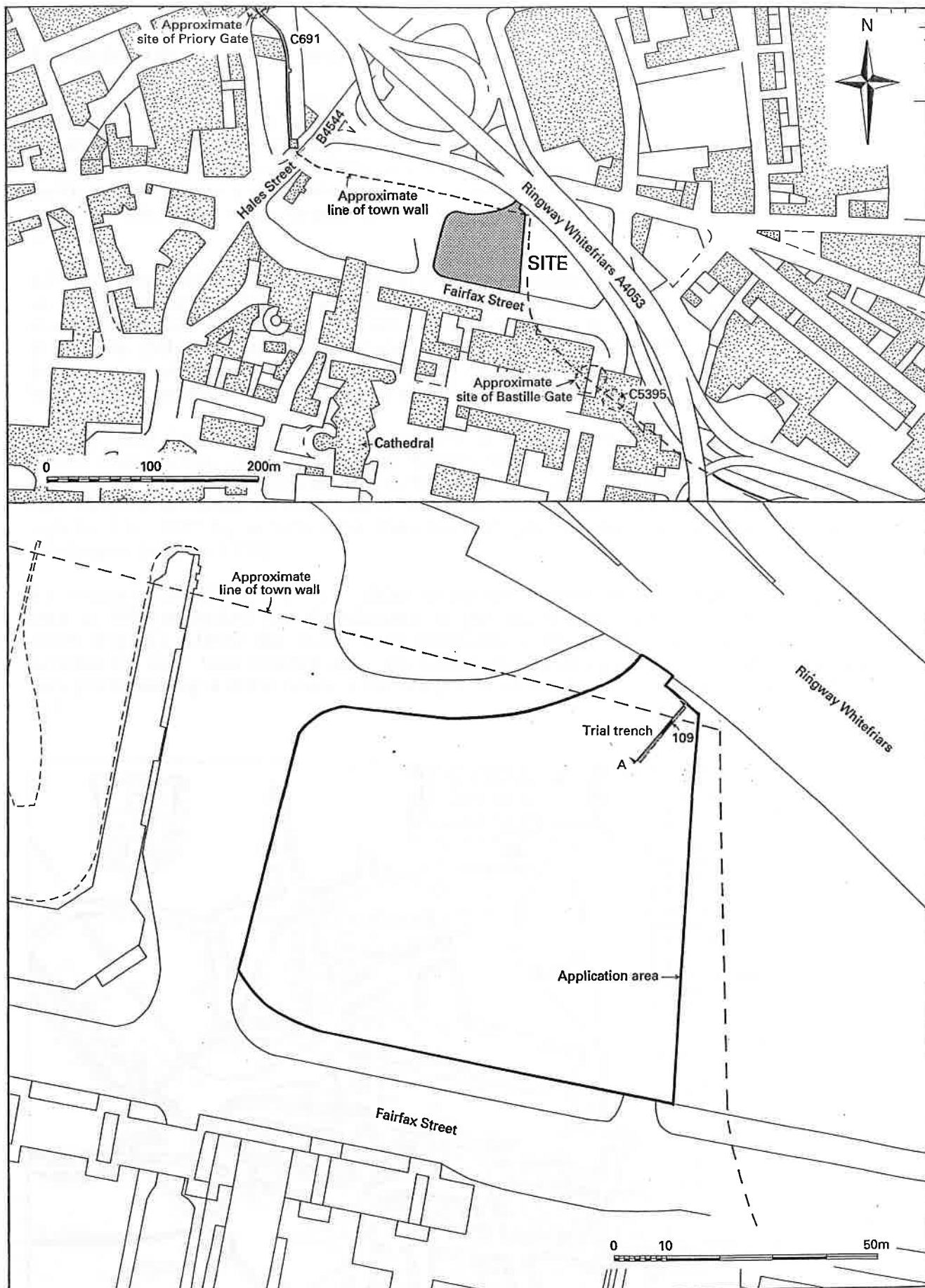


Fig. 1: Site and Trench Location

4. Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 By the early 13th century at the latest the medieval city of Coventry was protected by a defensive ditch with a series of bars where the ditch was crossed by the main roads into the town (VCH 1969, 21). The town wall of Coventry, which was itself protected by an outer ditch, was erected during the 14th to 16th century and continued in use as a defensive structure until the English Civil War of the mid-17th century. The walls were largely destroyed by order of King Charles II in 1662 (VCH 1969, 23).

4.2 The proposed development lies on what is considered to be the line of the wall in an area between the Priory Gate (Coventry Sites and Monuments Records No. C691) and Bastille Gate (VCH 1969, 9). This stretch of wall is thought to have been erected in the late 15th or early 16th century (Gooder *et al* 1966, 95-6). The wall appears in this area on an early 17th century map (Speed 1610), but by the mid 19th century it had been demolished and the area is shown as open parkland (Board of Health 1851).

4.3 By 1888 there were still no structures in the area of the current development which was known as Pool Meadow (Ordnance Survey 1888), though public baths had been constructed immediately to the west. By 1923 a number of small buildings had been constructed in the area (Ordnance Survey 1923) variations of which still survived in 1937 by which time they formed part of the Corporation Store Yard (Ordnance Survey 1937).

4.4 Excavations (SMR C5395) c. 150m to the south-west of the present development area in 1978 recorded the foundations of the town wall together with its adjacent ditch (Fig. 1). Here the town wall foundation, made of large sandstone blocks bonded by clay, was located at c. 1m below the existing ground surface. The wall was protected by a ditch some 1.7m deep and at least 5.5m wide (Bateman 1978, 90-91).

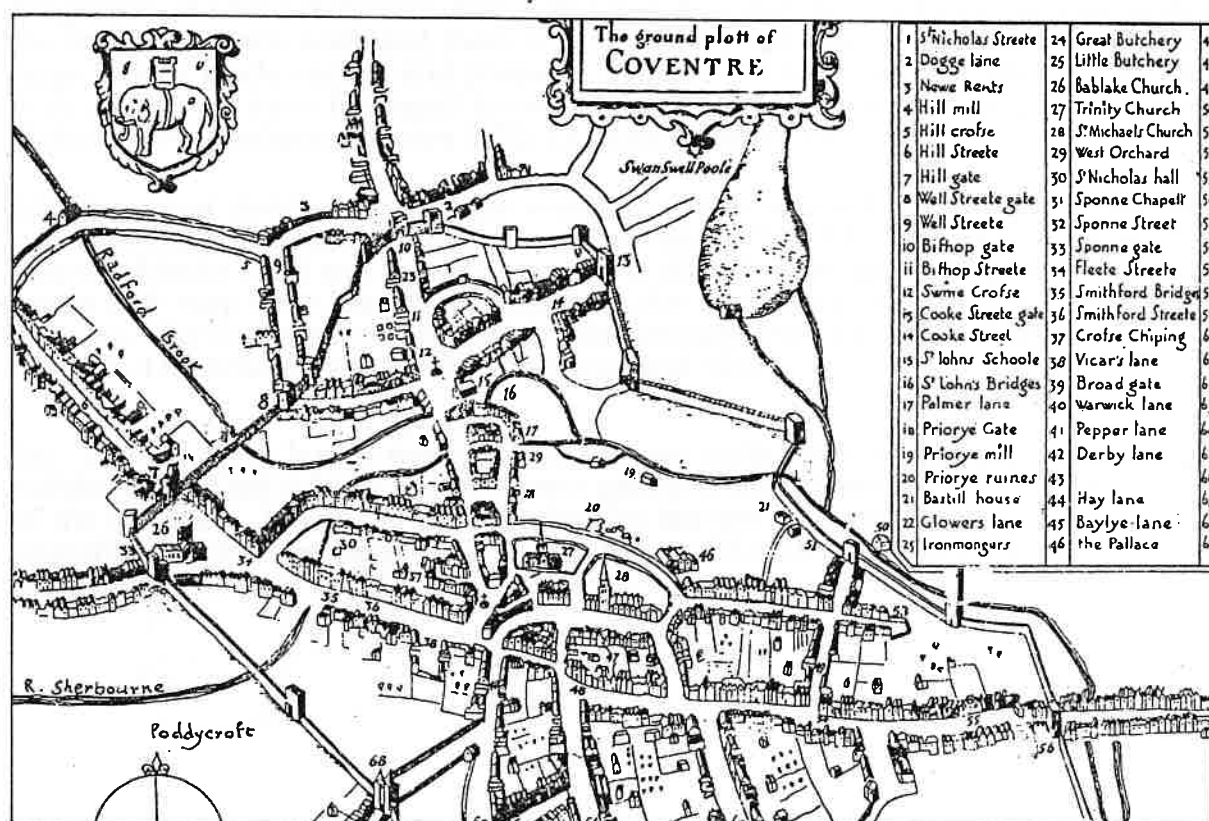


Fig. 2: Detail of Speed's map of Coventry, 1610

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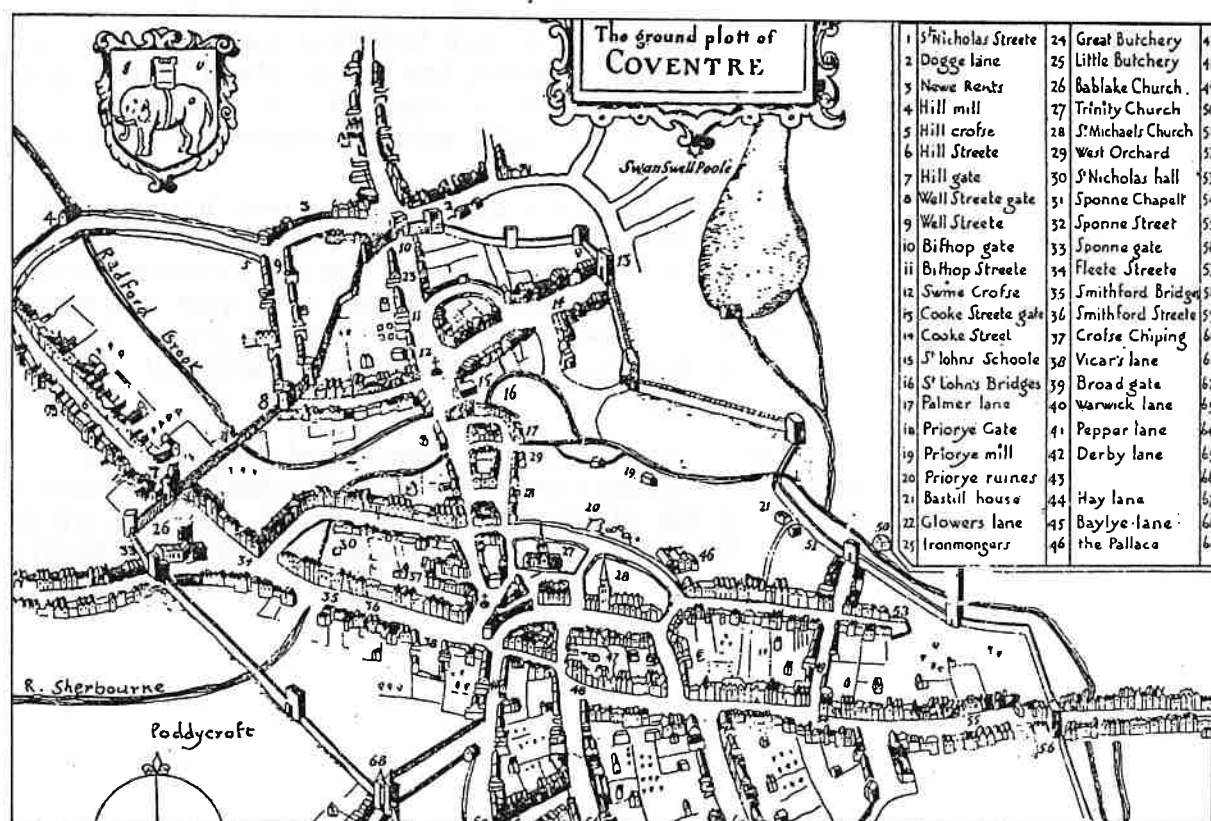


Fig. 2: Detail of Speed's map of Coventry, 1610

5. Observation of Trial Trench

5.1 The trial trench measured 0.5m wide and was excavated by a tracked Hymac-type machine using a toothed bucket. The trench measured 14.7m in length and was aligned roughly north-east to south-west (Fig. 1 and 3). It was excavated to a depth of 1.2m, the maximum depth to be affected by the development in this part of the site.

5.2 The geological reddish brown natural sandy silt (122) was encountered at c. 1m below the existing ground surface at the north end of the trench. In the southern half of the trench this was not revealed and a green-brown sandy silt (109) was present (Fig. 5). This may have been the remains of a leached soil layer, but may have been the fill of one of the town ditches forming the town defences. Unfortunately no datable material was recorded from the deposit, though a fragment of hand made roof tile was recovered. The deposit was not examined further as it was not affected by the drainage trench or the proposed development.

5.3 Both the geological natural (122) and the later deposit (109) were overlain by a buried topsoil layer (108). This clay loam contained pottery of late 18th-early 19th century date. Buried topsoil 108 was overlain at the north end of the trench by a thin layer of grit (121) that may have been a former path or yard surface (Fig. 5). This was in turn overlain by another buried soil layer (106). The buried soils and possible path may represent the open parkland shown on a 19th century map of the area (Board of Health 1851).

5.4 At the southern end of the trench none of the layers described above survived owing to what appears to have been modern disturbance. A mortared brick wall (114) forming the corner of a building aligned north-west to south-east was recorded across the width of the trench (Fig. 4). The trial trench was excavated to the apparent base of the foundation (119) of this wall 1.15m below the existing ground surface. Fragments of stone (115) included in the wall foundation may have originated from the medieval town wall, but there is no evidence for this. The bricks were of the large factory made variety and probably dated to the later 19th or 20th century. The wall is likely to have belonged to one of the buildings shown on maps of the early 20th century (Ordnance Survey 1923, Ordnance Survey 1937).

5.5 It was not clear what layer the wall foundation was cut into but it was overlain by a number of modern deposits of varying nature (107, 112, 116, 117, 120) including concrete blocks (113) and lumps of tarmac (118). These would appear to be levelling layers and may have been associated with the demolition of previous structures in the area. The modern levelling layers also extended over the north of the trench (103, 104, 105, 110) where they overlay the buried soil 106.

5.6 The levelling layers were overlain by an earth layer containing quantities of rubble (102). This is likely to represent a period of abandonment prior to the creation of the car park. Layer 102 was overlain by the grit surface (100, 101) of what was probably a former car park. This was in turn overlain by the tarmac surface (111) of the existing car park (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Excavated trench in relation to existing ring road



Fig. 4: Wall foundation 114 and adjacent levelling deposits

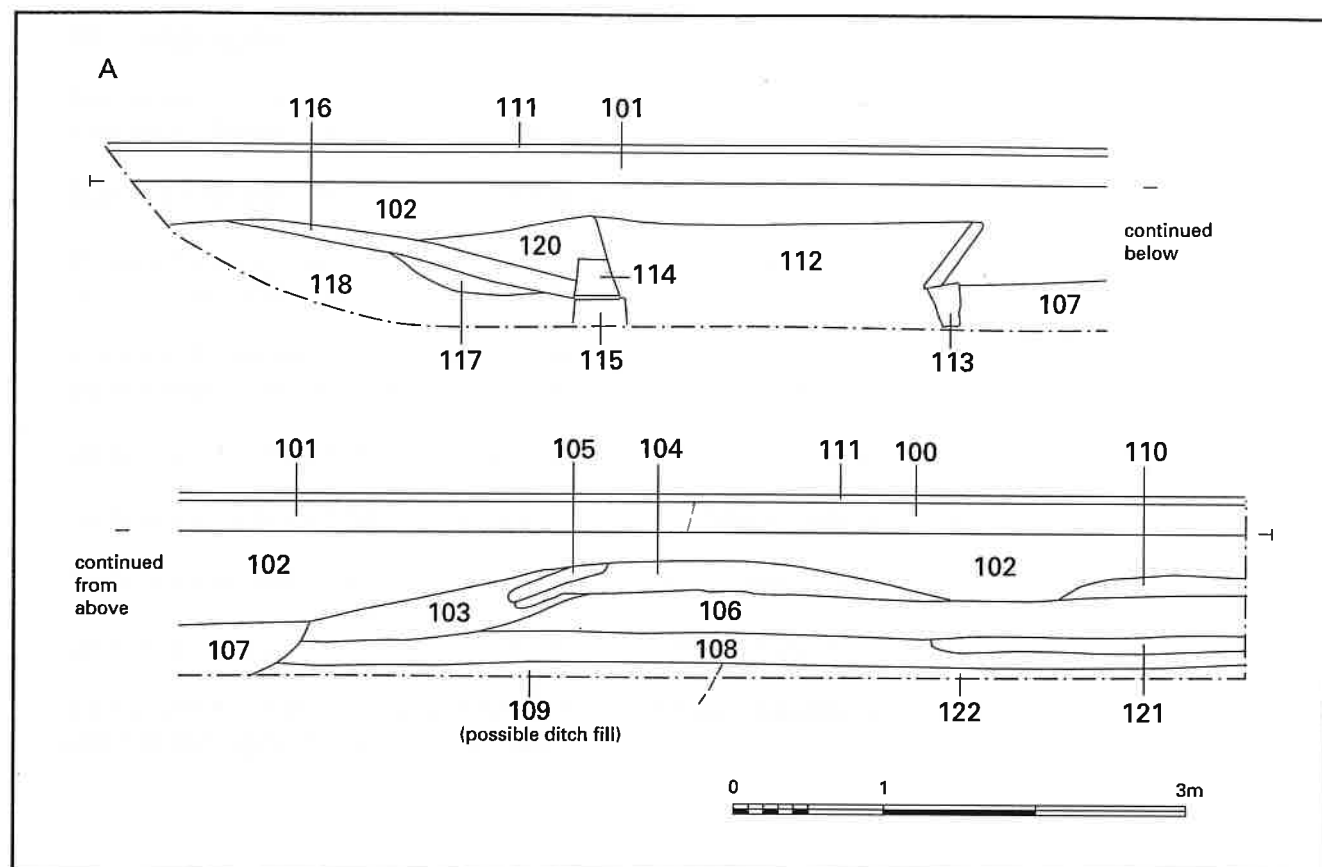


Fig. 5: Section showing recorded archaeological deposits

6. Conclusions

6.1 No evidence for the medieval town wall was recorded during the fieldwork. It is possible that all evidence for the wall foundation has been destroyed by previous modern disturbance. However, a possible ditch fill was recorded, but only a very small area was exposed in the trench. If this does represent part of the town defences in the southern half of the evaluation trench the evidence lies at a greater depth than was to be affected by the proposed development.

6.2 The currently accepted alignment of the town wall would indicate it was likely to be located at the northern end of the trench or at the north-eastern limit of the site. If so then any surviving evidence would almost certainly have been affected during the construction of the ring road in the 1960s (Fig. 3).

6.3 The remains of a late 18th or early 19th century ground surface were recorded. At this time map evidence suggests the area was undeveloped open ground. Subsequent development involved the erection of a brick building that may have utilised sandstone from the demolished town wall in its foundations. The brick wall is likely to have belonged to one of the buildings shown on maps of the first half of the 20th century (Ordnance Survey 1923, Ordnance Survey 1937).

Acknowledgements

The Warwickshire Museum would like to thank project managers Monaghans for commissioning the work on behalf of Gala Group Ltd and Trevor Prew of Monaghans for his help and for providing copies of the plans. Work on site was carried out by Chris Jones and this report was written by Chris Jones with drawings by Candy Stevens. The report was edited by Peter Thompson and checked by Nicholas Palmer.

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Appendix A: List of Contexts

<i>Context No.</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>
100	Grit	Modern surface
101	Grit and pebbles	Modern surface
102	Grey sandy clay	
103	Orange brown clay	Modern dump or levelling
104	Yellow sand	Modern dump or levelling
105	Brown silty loam	
106	Grey sandy clay	Buried topsoil
107	Dark grey sandy clay	Modern deposit
108	Reddish brown clay loam	Buried topsoil
109	Green brown sandy silt	Possible ditch fill
110	Red/brown sand	
111	Tarmac	Existing surface
112	Loose brown sandy loam	Modern deposit
113	Concrete block	in 112
114	Brick wall foundation	
115	Sandstone block	Part of Wall 114
116	Brown sand and mortar	Modern deposit
117	Brown sandy clay	
118	Rubble with tarmac	
119	Mortar foundation	Part of Wall 114
120	Brown sand and mortar	Modern deposit
121	Black grit	Former path or yard
122	Reddish brown sandy silt	Natural subsoil

Appendix B: List of Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Date/Comments</i>
102	pottery	2	19th century (1)
			16th century (1)
107	pottery	2	19th century
108	pottery	2	late 18th-early 19th century
108	tile	1	hand made roof tile
109	tile	1	hand made roof tile