

Oak House, West Bromwich
An archaeological Evaluation
1990

by
Gwilym Hughes

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Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out in advance of the landscaping of an area adjacent to Oak House, West Bromwich (N.G.R. SO 997 908). The evaluation was commissioned by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit between the 18th and 29th of June 1990. The landscaping is to include the construction of an access road and car park for the Oak House museum, and forms part of a scheme involving the renovation of two nearby barns, formerly part of the Oak House farm complex, for use as a visitor centre. The objective of the evaluation was to assess the archaeological potential of the area to the south of the barns and to locate any archaeological deposits likely to be affected by the proposed landscaping.

The Site.

Oak House is a large timber-framed building dating from the late 16th century (Baugh, Greenslade and Johnstone 1972, 25). It is located off Oak Road less than one kilometre southwest of the modern town centre of West Bromwich (Fig. 1a). Dendrochronological dates obtained from roof timbers in 1988 mostly ranged between 1583 and 1626 (Sandwell M.B.C. n.d., 23). Five samples yielding earlier dates suggested that some timbers may have been salvaged from an earlier building. Brick additions appear to have been made to the building during the early 17th century.

The rapid industrialisation of the West Midlands during the 18th and 19th centuries

transformed the area around Oak House. Until then it had been situated on the edge of Bromwich Heath. The Heath was enclosed in 1804 and soon became the site of the new town centre for West Bromwich (Baugh, Greenslade and Johnstone 1972, 4). During the late 19th and early 20th centuries Oak House became surrounded by residential housing and industrial workshops.

The 1886 Ordnance Survey 25" map indicates that the area to the rear of the house was laid out as ornamental gardens. In 1894 the estate was sold in lots. The house and some of the adjoining land was bought by Alderman Reuben Farley who donated it to the corporation in 1895. The building was restored and opened as a museum in 1898. At the same time part of the garden to the rear of the house was converted into a bowling green (Baugh, Greenslade and Johnstone 1972, 25). Meanwhile, the farm buildings to the west of the house appear to have become incorporated into small industrial workshops. These included two barns, one of which displays timber framing of 17th-century date (Sandwell M.B.C. n.d., 24). The larger of the two barns dates from the 19th century. The O.S., 25" map of 1938 indicates that the workshops had, by that date, become the site of the Reliance Joinery Works, and that considerable extensions had been added to the southern side of the 19th-century barn.

By the time of the archaeological evaluation these extensions had been demolished leaving only their concrete foundations. The area between these former works and the bowling green was an overgrown open space. The remainder of the area to be landscaped included a former scrapyard and a number of derelict garages.

pottery were recovered and it is possible that evidence for early activity in this area may have been disturbed by the recent industrial workshops. No residual material from any period earlier than the house was recovered from any of the trenches.

Implications and Proposals

The evaluation has suggested that there is little archaeological potential within the area of the former scrapyard and in the area of the access road to the former workshops, and no further archaeological work other than a watching brief would appear to be necessary here. However, possible 17th-century archaeological features were identified in the area between the workshops and the bowling green. This may have been part of the original gardens to the rear of Oak House. The proposed development in this area includes the provision of an access road from Oak Road to the rear of the barns. As the total depth of the deposits overlying the early features was not less than 0.6m, it may be possible to minimise any disturbance to them during development.

Acknowledgements.

The evaluation was directed by the author with the assistance of Mike Cooper and Martin Lightfoot. Sophie Aubery, Lindsay Ireland and Laura Jones, assisted as part of a schools work experience programme. The illustrations were produced by Caroline Gait and Colette Paterson. Simon Buteux managed the project and edited this report. I am also grateful to Mike Hodder (Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council) for his advice and assistance and to Victoria Buteux for commenting on the pottery. The report was produced by Liz Hooper.

The finds and an archive, consisting of pro forma record sheets, colour slide and black and white photographs, and original on-site drawings, will be deposited with Sandwell M.B.C.

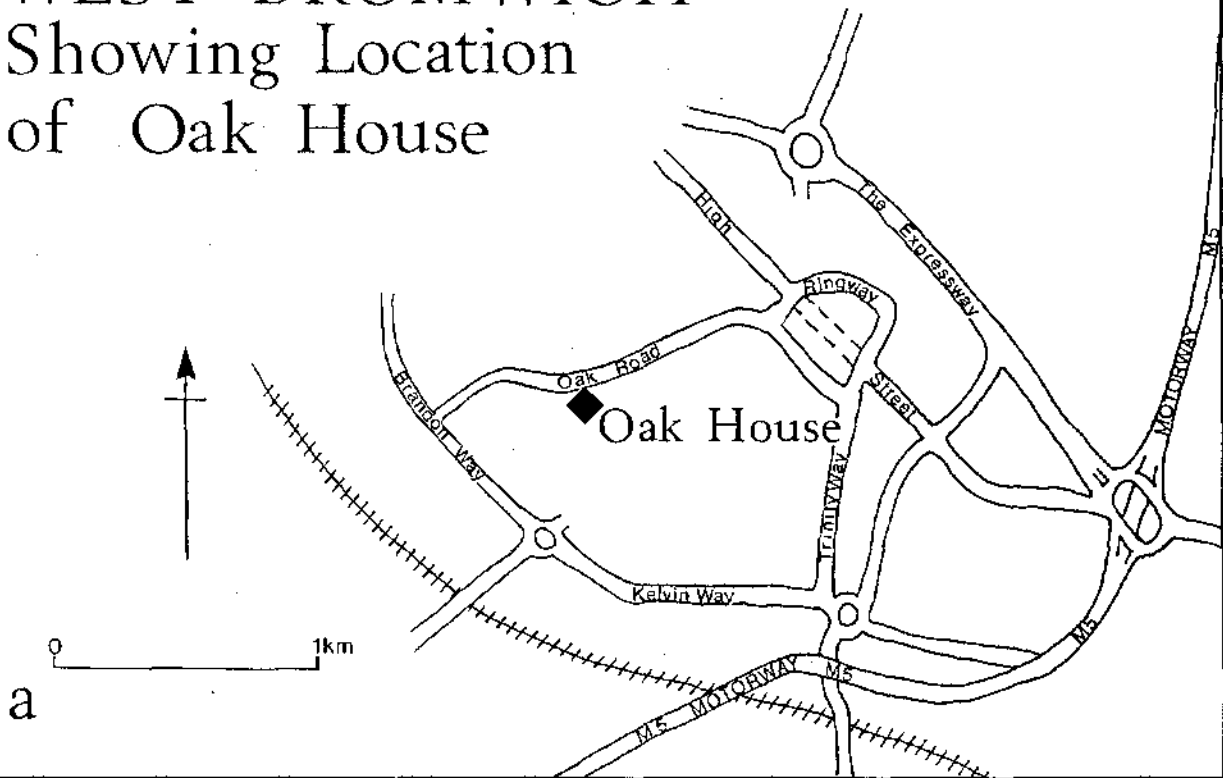
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July 1990

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- Baugh, G. Greenslade,
M. W., and Johnstone D., 1972, 'A History of West Bromwich'
- Victoria County History, A history of the county of Stafford. Vol XVII, Oxford University Press.
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Borough Council, no date, Oak House, West Bromwich. A History and Guide.

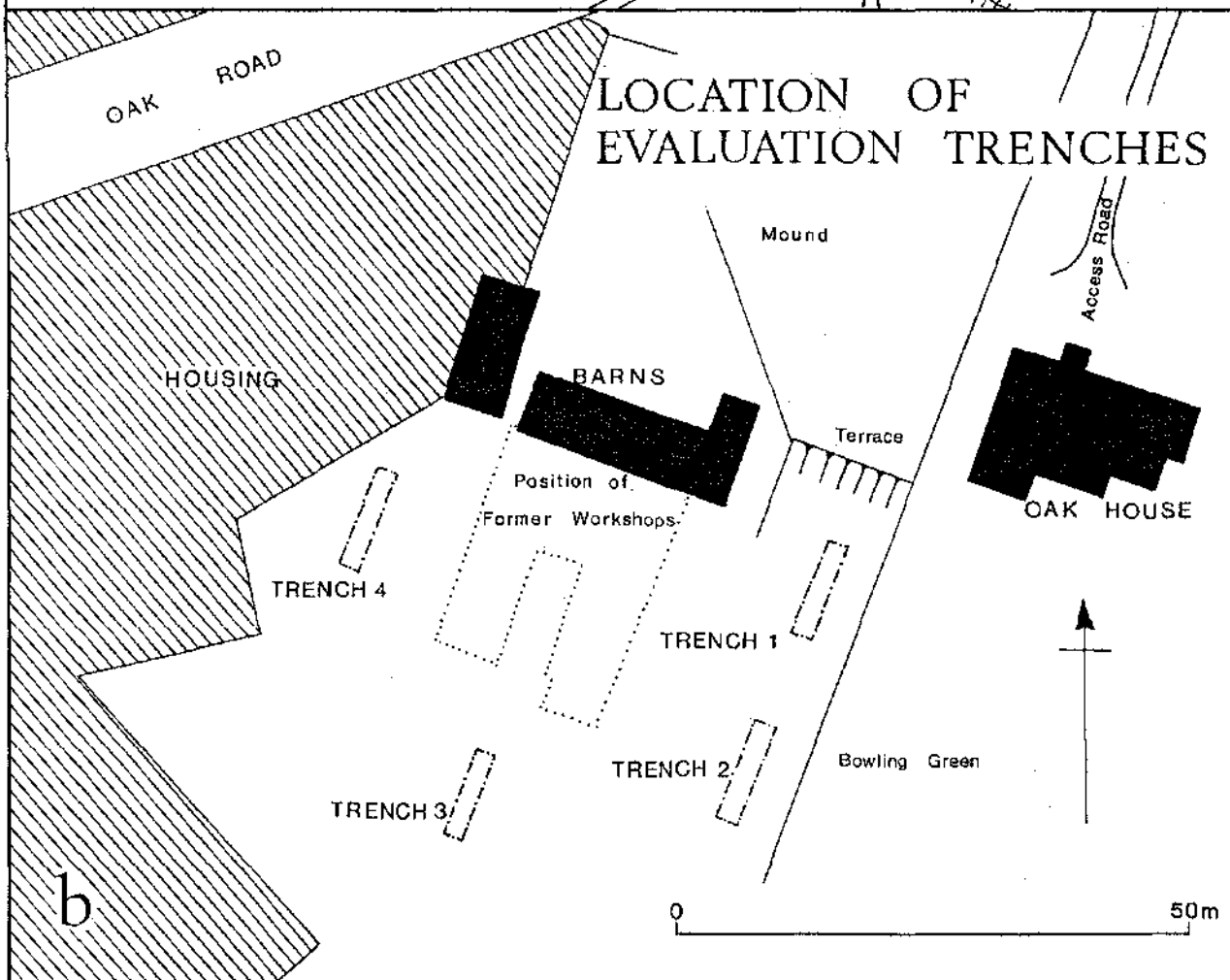
WEST BROMWICH

Showing Location of Oak House



a

LOCATION OF EVALUATION TRENCHES

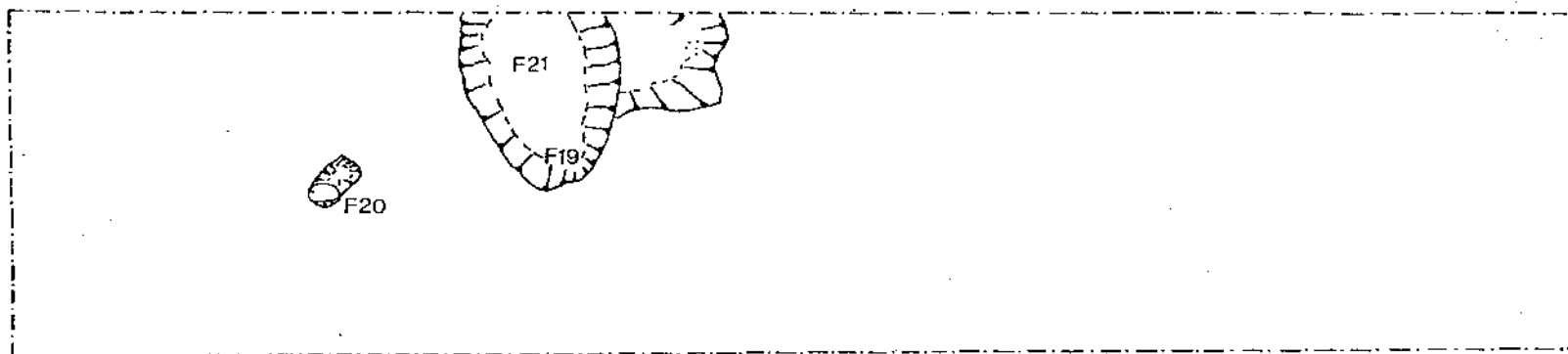


b

Fig 1

OAK HOUSE Trench 1

a: PLAN



b: SECTION (East Facing)

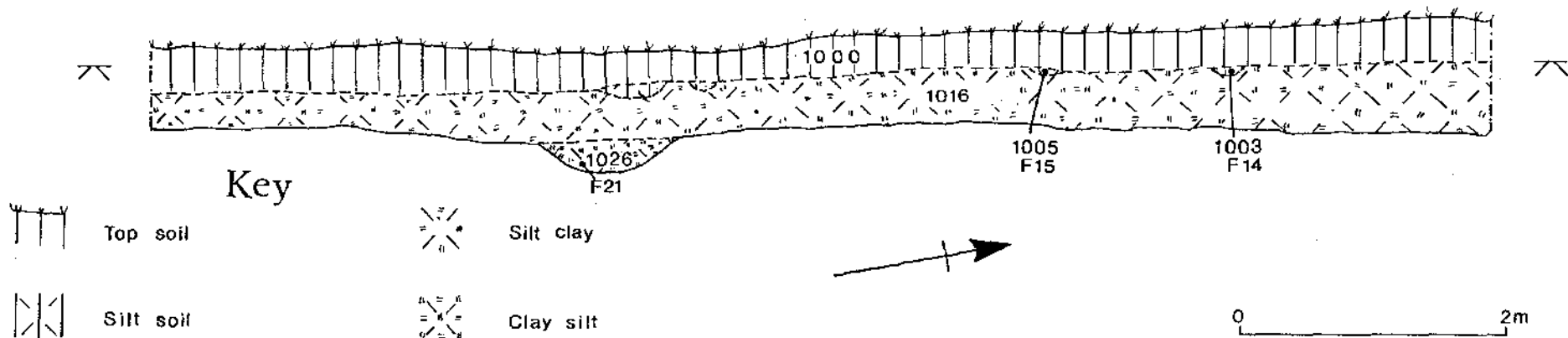
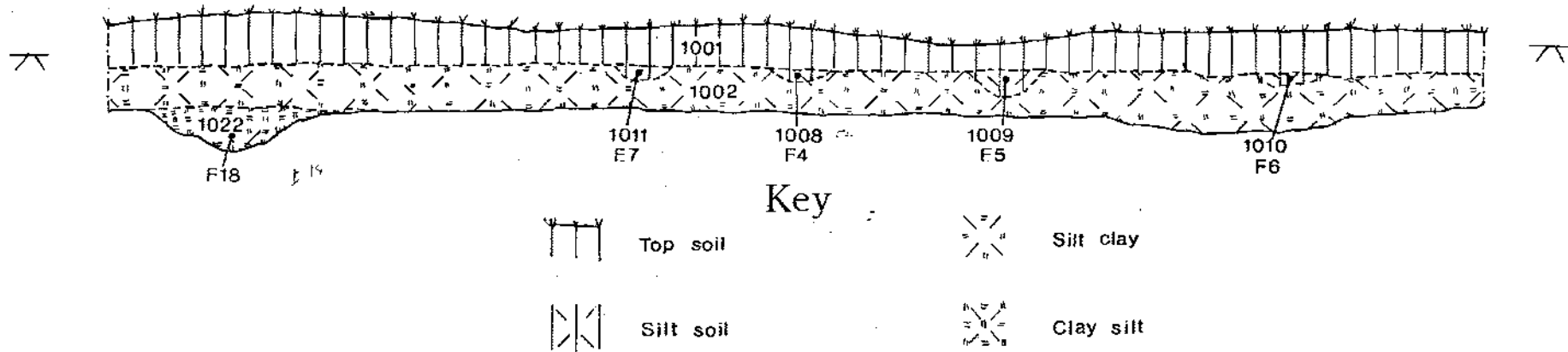


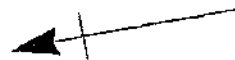
Fig 2

OAK HOUSE Trench 2

a: SECTION (West Facing)



b: PLAN



0 2m

Fig 3