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**Evaluation of Features Located by
Geophysical Survey near
Sandwell Priory**

by
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EVALUATION OF FEATURES LOCATED BY GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY NEAR SANDWELL PRIORY

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Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation of anomalies/features located by geophysical survey near Sandwell Priory, West Midlands. The evaluation was commissioned by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit from 3rd–14th February, 1992. The objective of the evaluation was to investigate magnetic and resistance anomalies detected in a field to the east of the main buildings of Sandwell Priory (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1991). The results obtained may influence any decisions made on extending the area of the Scheduled Ancient Monument to include this field.

The Site

The field under consideration is now permanent pasture and used for horse grazing and camping. In the early 1970s the topsoil was mechanically stripped and taken elsewhere for landscaping purposes. This process has resulted in a very thin topsoil cover, and previous excavations in the field have revealed machine teeth-marks in the subsoil surface (Hodder 1992). Aerial photographs of the field show three linear features, two of which have been examined previously by excavation (Hewitt and Hodder 1988). These were interpreted as Priory precinct boundary ditches which have been subsequently re-used. It has been suggested that agricultural buildings mentioned in a survey of Sandwell Priory in 1526 (Hewitt and Hodder 1988) may have been situated in this field. The pond on the eastern edge of the field was a probable source of clay for medieval floor tiles laid in the Priory Church, and indicated the potential for locating former tile kilns here.

The geophysical survey detected several linear resistance anomalies, possibly representing earthbanks or stone walls, and two magnetic anomalies, possibly representing tile kilns. Fuller information on the history and context of the site

can be obtained from the previous excavation and survey reports (Hewitt and Hodder 1988, Hodder 1991, and Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1991).

The Evaluation Trenches

The evaluation consisted of four hand-dug trenches specifically located over plotted geophysical anomalies.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was opened in order to investigate an amorphous magnetic anomaly detected in the north of the area enclosed by the curving ditch visible on the aerial photographs. The trench measured 2m x 4m and was orientated east-west. Undisturbed subsoil was contacted 0.30m below the surface and consisted of red sandy clay (1002). Overlying the natural was a layer of disturbed sandy clay (1001), 0.22m deep, flecked throughout with fragments of coal, brick and tile and containing a few fragments of post-medieval pottery and glass. The only features in this trench, visible in the surface of the disturbed clay (1001), were machine teeth-marks which were attributed to the topsoil stripping discussed above. Thin topsoil (1000) overlay the disturbed subsoil.

Trench 2

Trench 2, measuring 2m x 4m and orientated north-south, was excavated in order to examine an amorphous magnetic anomaly detected to the south of an east-west anomaly located by the resistance survey. Natural subsoil in this trench consisted of clean, buff-coloured sand (2004) and was contacted between 0.50 and 0.70m below the surface. Overlying this was a layer of clean, brown sand (2001) which yielded no finds and was probably disturbed natural subsoil. Cutting 2004, and possibly also 2001, was a linear feature (F2) running approximately east-west across the trench, composed of brick and mortar rubble faced on the southern side by a mixture of rough sandstone blocks (possibly re-

used) and mortared brickwork (2003). The rubble varied in thickness from 0.20–0.50m and extended into the sections to the north and east. No finds were recovered from the core material apart from fragments of brick. The upper fill of the feature consisted of black silt (2002) containing brick and mortar fragments, from which a flint scraper was recovered. Sealing these deposits was a layer of thin topsoil (2000).

Trench 3

Trench 3, measuring 2m x 4m and orientated east-west, was situated on the western edge of the field, in order to investigate the rectangular linear anomaly detected by the resistance survey. Natural clay (3004) was located 0.30m below the surface and was overlain by a layer of disturbed subsoil (3002), 0.18m deep, containing fragments of brick, tile and coal. Dark lines were visible in the upper surface of this layer but these were not substantial enough to be considered features. A narrow, linear feature (F1) cut through 3004 and 3002. The earliest fill of the feature was a brown, sandy clay (3003) which was overlain by red clay (3001) containing fragments of drainpipe. This feature was identified as a field drain and was overlain by thin topsoil (3000).

Trench 4

Trench 4, measuring 1m x 6m and orientated north-south, was opened in order to investigate an east-west anomaly detected by the resistance survey. Natural grey-green clay (4006) was contacted 0.30m below the surface at the northern end of the trench and was overlain by natural red clay (4011). The earliest feature (F3) cut the natural clay in the centre of the trench at a depth of 0.9m below the surface. This linear feature was 0.6–0.8m in width and 0.20m deep and ran east-west across the trench. The fill (4005) was composed of fragments of un-mortared red sandstone and a few brick fragments. No finds were recovered from the fill. To the north of this feature, a rubble deposit (4004) overlay 4006 and possibly abutted F3, but due to waterlogging the exact relationship remains uncertain. Also cutting 4006, and cutting down to the surface of F3 and 4004, was a feature (F5) filled with a mixture of clay and compacted rubble (4003) approximately 0.7m thick. The only finds recovered were fragments of brick and tile. Cutting F5 and

disturbing the top of F3 was a linear feature (F4) running east-west across the trench and filled with a buff-coloured silty clay (4002), 0.70m deep and containing no finds. To the south of this feature was a series of clean red, grey and buff coloured bands of clay (4007, 4010, 4009, 4008 and 4001 in chronological order), sloping downwards from north to south. Due to the wet conditions, edge definition was extremely difficult and it was not possible to determine the relationship between these and F4. Sitting on the surface of the uppermost layer of clay (4001), at the southern end of the trench, was a stone feature (F6), composed of flat sandstone fragments (4012), angular in shape with dimensions ranging from 0.05–0.20m, and extending under the section to the south and east. No associated finds were recovered. At the northern end of the trench, and continuing under the section to the north, a sloping deposit of silty clay (4013) containing brick and charcoal overlay the natural clay (4011). Sealing these deposits was a thin layer of topsoil (4000).

Discussion

Summary and Interpretation

The results from Trenches 1 and 3 show that no significant sub-surface archaeological features are present. The disturbed subsoil (1001) encountered in Trench 1 is almost certainly a product of the topsoil stripping process carried out in the 1970s. The field drain (F1) cutting the disturbed subsoil (3002) in Trench 3 would suggest that the disturbance occurred some time before the 1970s. An earlier ploughsoil, subsequently truncated, would seem the most likely interpretation and would explain the dark lines observed on the surface of the disturbed layer.

The wall (F2) in Trench 2 is not consistent with the magnetic anomaly detected by the geophysical survey and certainly does not represent the remains of a tile kiln. The sandstone facing indicates a collapsed wall which would be too insubstantial for a building foundation, and since there was no ditch-cut it is unlikely to have been part of a ha-ha. Comparison of brick dimensions from this feature with bricks from the Priory excavations would be helpful for dating purposes.

Trench 4 was the only trench that displayed any correlation with the geophysical survey results. It has been suggested that the linear sandstone feature (F3) is a drain, similar to those excavated at the Priory site. The other two linear features (F4 and F5) may possibly represent an old field boundary as they are on a similar alignment to that of an 18th century sweet-chestnut avenue to the south. F5 may represent the badly damaged remains of a wall whilst F4 would appear to be a later ditch cut, obscured on the southern edge by layers of redeposited natural clay. Again, comparison of brick dimensions with those from the Priory excavations might prove useful. The flat sandstone feature (F6) remains uninterpreted since such a small surface

area was examined and no dating evidence was obtained.

These results should contribute towards making an informed decision on proposals for an extension of the Scheduled Area.

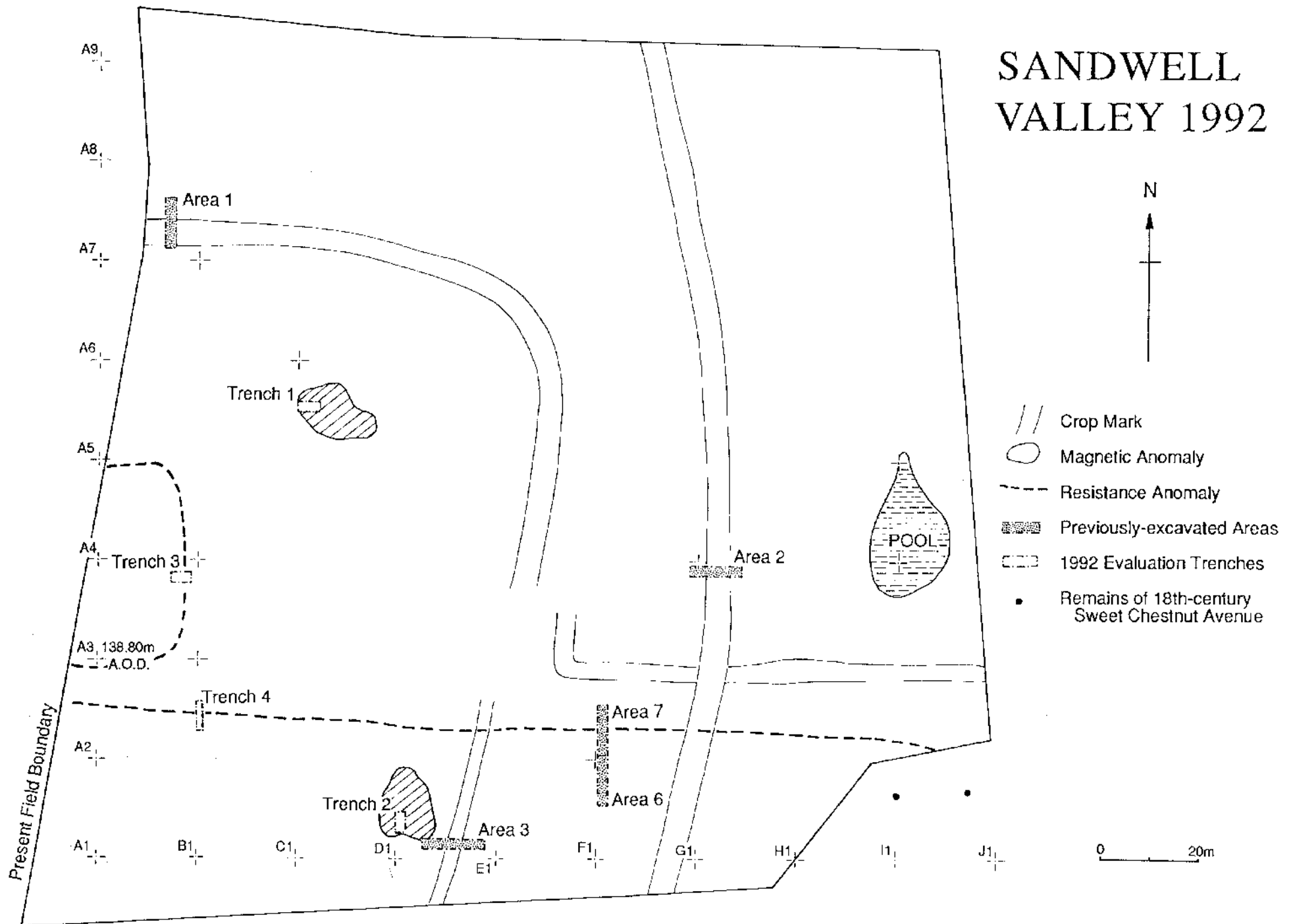
Acknowledgements

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References

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| Hewitt, N.R. and Hodder, M.A. | 1988 | <i>A Landscape Survey of Sandwell Valley, 1982-1987 South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions XXVIII for 1986-87</i> |
| Hodder, M.A. | 1991 | <i>Excavations at Sandwell Priory and Hall, 1982-1988. South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions XXXI for 1989-90</i> |
| Hodder, M.A. | 1992 | <i>Evaluation of Features Located by Geophysical Survey Near Sandwell Priory: Background Information</i> |

SANDWELL VALLEY 1992



- Crop Mark
- Magnetic Anomaly
- Resistance Anomaly
- Previously-excavated Areas
- 1992 Evaluation Trenches
- Remains of 18th-century Sweet Chestnut Avenue



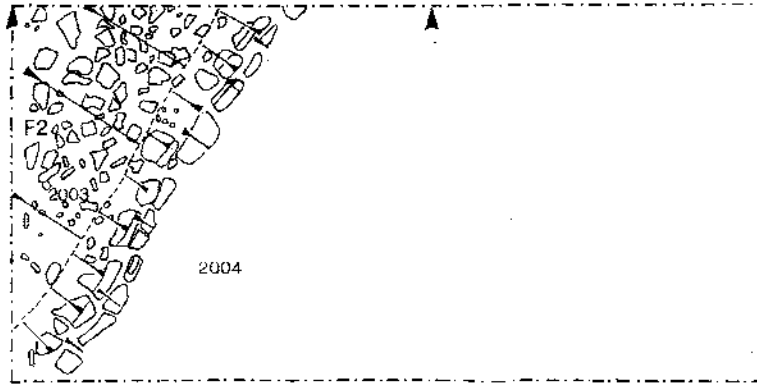
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Figure 1

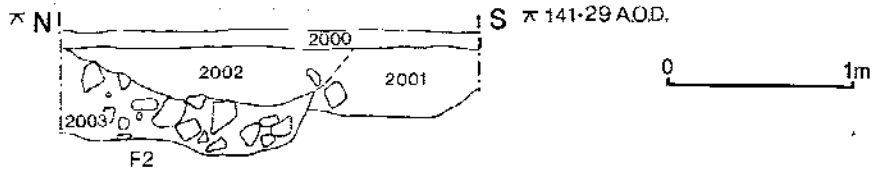
SANDWELL VALLEY 1992



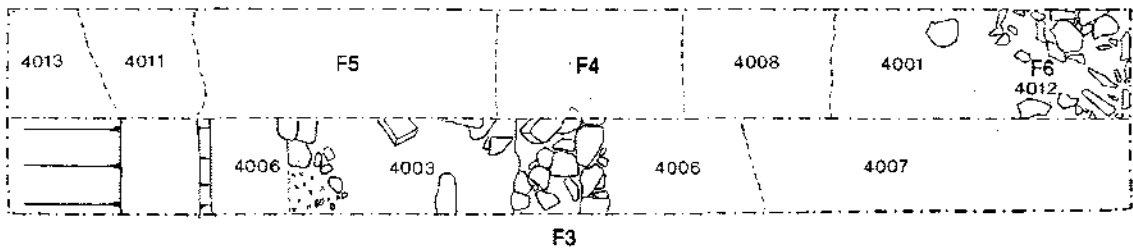
TRENCH 2 Plan



Section (West-facing)



TRENCH 4 Plan



Section (West-facing)

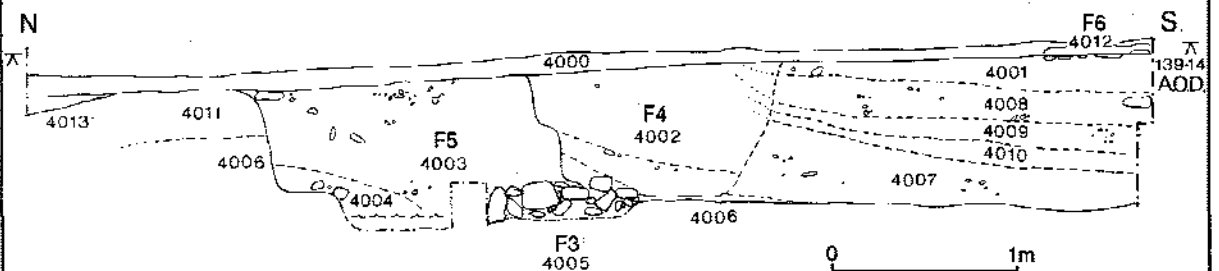


Figure 2