

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**An Archaeological Evaluation at
Walsall Retail Park**

by

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Introduction

In March 1994, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (B.U.F.A.U.) was commissioned by Severn Trent Property Ltd., Birmingham, through David Lyons and Associates, to carry out an archaeological investigation on the proposed site of a multi-unit Retail Park in Walsall.

The site is situated in Bescot, to the north of the Sned Brook and River Tame. It is now reclaimed land but previously there had been a sewage works on the site. In the nineteenth century, when the sewage works was being built, the remains of an early ironworking site were discovered. The evidence of ironworking at Bescot is substantiated by written records dating back to the early seventeenth century which refer to an iron mill or smithy and highlight place names such as 'Tame Shrubbes Meadowe' and 'Bloome Smythie Meadowes'.

The site is registered on the County SMR as a site of archaeological interest, SMR 2682. There is no evidence of any previous work or historical research being undertaken on this site.

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken to assess the presence/absence, nature, extent, significance, survival and vulnerability of any archaeological deposits and features on the site, so that adequate provision could be made for protecting the archaeological resource during the proposed development, should any such resource be identified.

Methodology

It was decided to concentrate on one area of the site, the proposed Unit Eight, where three trenches would be excavated - the surrounding area having been already redeveloped, stripped and backfilled with sand and gravel. This lay nearest to the present course of the stream, where an industrial site might be expected to be located. There would be an option for two further trenches in the area of proposed car parking, in the event of this initial machining being positive.

The evaluation eventually consisted of only the three machine dug test trenches 20 metres long by 1.50 metres wide running parallel on a NW-SE alignment within the southern area of the footprint of the proposed building.

Evaluation (Figure 1)

Trench I

A depth of 0.05m of topsoil (1000) overlay a deposit of dark brown soil and rubble (1001) 0.50m thick, increasing to a depth of 1.40m towards the southern end of the trench. Below the topsoil, at the northern end of the

trench, a layer of yellow-brown clay (1002), 0.35m in depth, was revealed. The two previously-mentioned deposits overlay a dark brown, compacted levelling layer (1003), comprised of a mixture of ash, charcoal, brick fragments, wood and nineteenth century pottery, to a depth of 2.0 metres below the present ground surface and overlying the natural clay soil. The southernmost 8 metres of the trench were comprised of a modern sand and gravel make-up layer, extending to a depth of 2.0 metres.

Trench II

A depth of 0.05 metres of topsoil (2000), overlay a dark brown compacted levelling layer (2001), made up of ash, charcoal, brick fragments, wood and nineteenth century pottery to a depth of 2.0 metres below the present ground surface and overlying the natural clay soil. The 5 metres at the southern end of the trench were made up of a modern sand and gravel make-up layer, the result of recent backfilling.

Trench III

A depth of 0.05 metres of topsoil (3000) overlay a brown silty soil (3001), approximately 0.65 metres in depth. The underlying layer (3002) was a very dark brown compacted levelling layer made up primarily of ash, charcoal and demolition rubble, continuing to a depth of 2.0 metres, where the natural clay soil was uncovered. The 6 metres at the southern end of the trench were comprised of recent sand and gravel backfill, extending to a depth of 2.0 metres.

Conclusion and Recommendations

During the evaluation no archaeological features, deposits or finds earlier than the nineteenth century in date were encountered. The machining proved entirely negative so there was no need for the two optional trenches to be dug in the area of the proposed car park.

It is apparent that the site has been raised by the dumping of several metres of waste industrial material during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The area examined by the evaluation contains such an extensive amount of material that any archaeological deposits would effectively have been sealed. The lack of any structures or deposits of significance here, or finds relating to the period of ironworking, or to the industrial processes, suggest that the iron-working site lay elsewhere. The digging out of deposits for Unit Eight would appear to require no further archaeological input, while outside the area of Unit Eight, where foundations of service trenches are not excavated deeper than two metres below the present ground surface, there are apparently no archaeological implications for further development.

Acknowledgements

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WALSALL RETAIL PARK EVALUATION

