

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**Stone sewerage Phase 4:
archaeological watching brief**

by

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Stone sewerage phase 4: Archaeological watching brief

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit during the laying of a new sewer pipeline in Stone, Staffordshire, between January and March 1994. Despite extensive ground disturbance no deposits of archaeological significance could be identified.

Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit during the laying of a new sewer pipeline in Stone, Staffordshire (Fig. 1). The work was undertaken between January and March 1994 on behalf of Charles Haswell and Partners Limited, Consulting Engineers.

The total length of the new pipeline was over 230m. This cut through areas of potential archaeological interest including Crown Street, the Crown Street car park and the Stafford Street car park (Fig. 2). The archaeological watching brief focussed on these areas.

Crown Street originally formed the main thorough-fare leading through the town (Stafford Borough Council 1992, 6). During the medieval period it would have formed a back lane serving the rear of the burgage plots fronting onto the High Street. It was actually known as Back Lane in the 18th century.

A gas works, set up by the Stone Gas Light and Coke Company, was established in Crown Street in 1850 and was closed in 1950 (*ibid*, 7). The former site of the works appears on an OS map of 1924.

The car park in Stafford Street was formerly the site of a tanning yard established during the late 18th century (*ibid*, 7). By 1834 at least two yards, associated with the manufacture of shoes, were located in the area of Stafford Street. Other finds from the area include a prehistoric flint scraper found in 1895 (SMR No. PRN 1829).

Aims and method

The aim of the watching brief was to produce a salvage record of any archaeological deposits destroyed or effected by the ground works associated with the laying of the new sewer. This was to be achieved by regular site visits throughout the course of the development. The opportunity was provided to make observations during the course of the development but not to interfere with the progress of the works or to issue instructions to the contractor. The intention was to coincide these visits with the periods of maximum ground disturbance through close consultation with the on-site engineer and contractors.

Work commenced in January 1994 on the section through the Crown Street car park. The section within Crown Street was largely completed during February and the section through the Stafford Street car park during March and early April. Regular site visits were made throughout this period.

The effectiveness of the watching brief was dictated by, and to a large extent restricted by, the nature of the ground works being undertaken. Following the removal of the various concrete and tarmac surfaces the contractors machined to a depth of up to 4m. However, because of the need for steel shuttering this could only progress in short, 5m, sections. The shuttering severely restricted the visual inspection of the stratigraphic deposits (see Plate) and resources did not allow a continuous archaeological presence during the various machining phases of the operation. Furthermore, visual inspection of the spoil removed from the pipe trench was limited because it was immediately loaded onto trucks and removed from the site.

Results

The Crown car park section - The trench for the pipe was excavated to a depth of between 3m and 4m and was approximately 1m wide, although the maximum area of surface disturbance was frequently greater. The route of the pipeline passed directly across the site of the former gas works. The contamination from these former works created considerable logistical problems for the contractors. The stratigraphy, visible through the shuttering, indicated 3.5m of ash rubble overlain by brick rubble and concrete. Clearly the whole area had been considerably disturbed and no deposits of archaeological interest could be identified.

The Crown Street section - the manhole (M10) at the north-western end of the Crown Street section was excavated to a depth of approximately 3m through modern demolition rubble and debris (see Plate). This was also probably associated with the former gas works. The remainder of this section of the pipeline was excavated to a depth of up to 3m and was approximately 1m wide. Again the visible stratigraphy appeared to consist of rubble make up and dumps. No deposits of archaeological significance could be identified.

The Stafford Street car park section - This section was excavated alongside the existing Scotch Brook Culvert (see Fig 2). The trench for the pipe was up to 4m deep and was approximately 1m wide. The only deposits recorded appeared to be dumps of brick rubble, probably of post medieval and modern date. There was no evidence for the tanning yards that are known to have existed in this area, and no other deposits of archaeological interest could be identified. However, large areas of the stratigraphy were obscured by the need to establish shoring immediately following the machining. An area of associated disturbance, adjacent to the 1993 excavations (Hughes 1993), to the north of the High Street was also recorded. This exposed a section of stone walling thought to be the southernmost tip of a wall recorded during the excavation (*ibid*, Fig 2; F3).

Discussion

Despite the known presence of sites of potential archaeological interest, in particular in the area of the Stafford Street car park, no significant deposits could be identified during the watching brief. However, it should be stressed that the conditions for the identification of such deposits were far from ideal.

It is understood that further work may be undertaken in the area of Abbey Street. This might potentially encounter structures and deposits associated with the southern area of the former Priory precinct (Stafford Borough Council 1992, 7). Provision should be made for a further watching brief if this work is undertaken.

Acknowledgments

The watching brief was carried out by Jon Sterenberg and Ed Newton and the project was managed by Gwilym Hughes. The figures were produced by Mark Breedon.

References

Hughes, E G, 1993, *Stone town centre bypass: excavations to the rear of 9 High Street, August 1993. An interim report*, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit Report No 288.

Stafford Borough Council, 1992, *Stone town centre bypass: an archaeological desktop assessment*, Archaeology Section Report No 4.

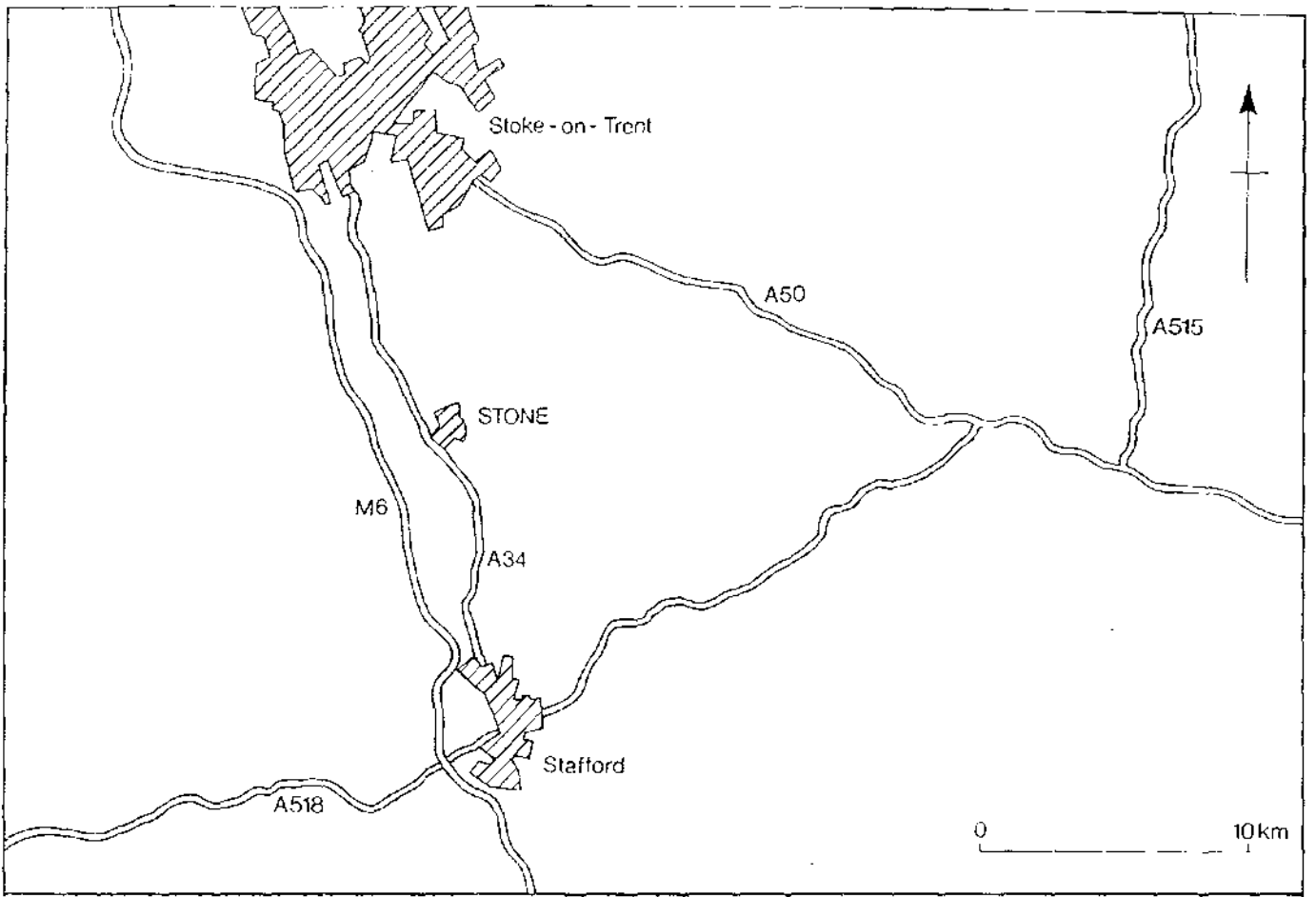


Figure 1

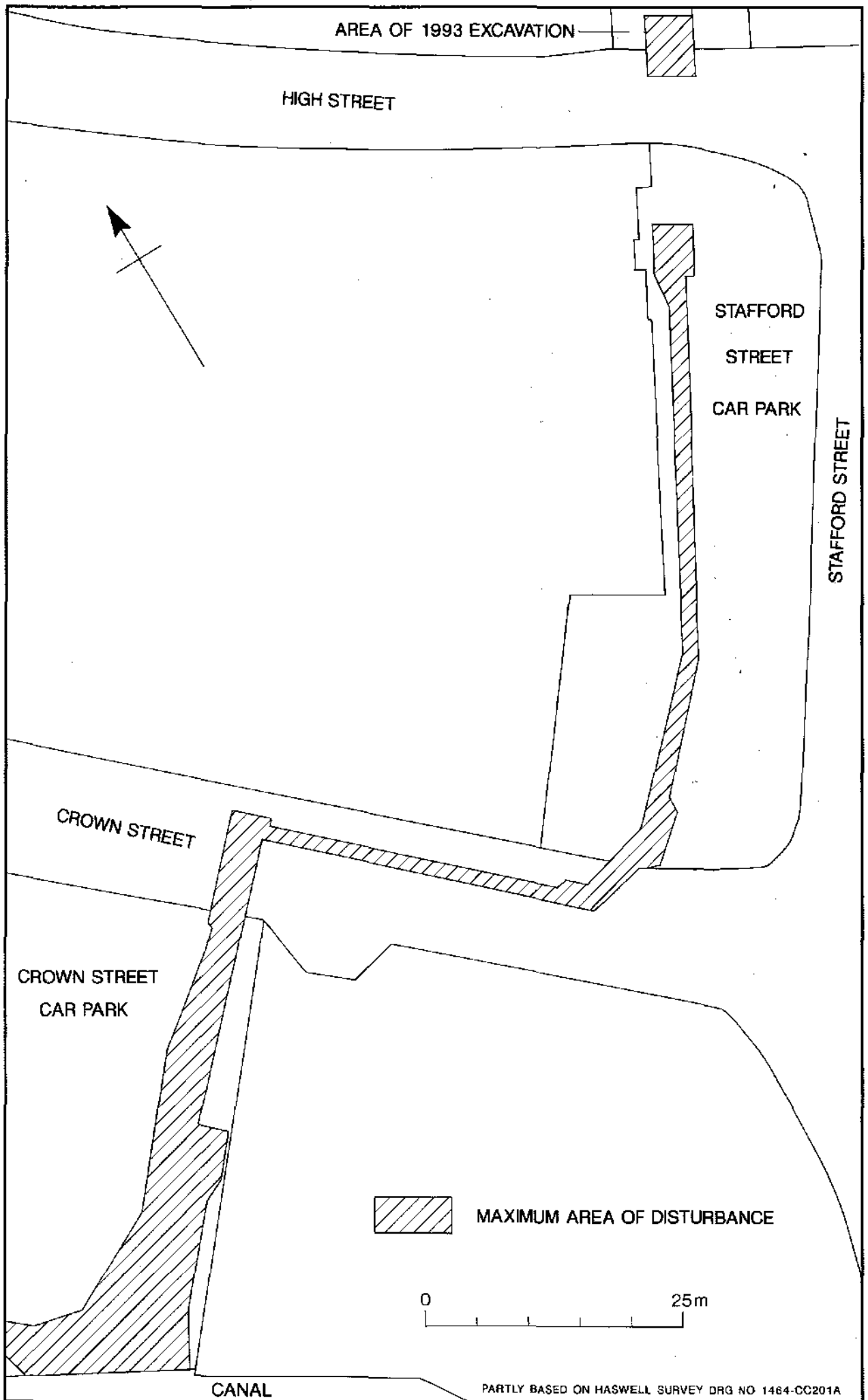


Figure 2



Plate - Manhole (M10) in Crown Street (Photo by E. Newton).