

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**Archaeological Monitoring
of the
Walsall Inner Relief Road Scheme**

by

Catharine Mould

with

illustration prepared

by

Nigel Dodds

For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux, Peter Leach or Iain Ferris (Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 021 414 5513
Fax: 021 414 5516

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1.0 Introduction

An archaeological assessment of the Walsall ring road and inner relief road scheme was commissioned by Johnson, Poole and Bloomer on behalf of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. The assessment was conducted by Nigel Baker, for Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, in September 1994 (Baker 1994).

The archaeological assessment stated that:

The impact of the proposed road schemes on the archaeological resource would be most significant in the Lower Rushall Street and Ablewell Street/Upper Rushall Street areas. The widening of the present carriageway on the east side of Lower Rushall Street will affect the former medieval and early post-medieval street frontage. The Lower Rushall Street area has previously been identified as an area of outstanding archaeological significance. The street represents one of Walsall's growing edges in the late medieval and early post-medieval periods and its archaeology is potentially of great regional importance. Excavations in the area and surviving/recorded limestone-walled and timber-framed buildings suggest the prospects for the survival of the archaeological resource in this area are good (Baker 1994).

It was recommended that test-pits scheduled to take place in Lower Rushall Street and Upper Rushall Street be closely monitored by an archaeologist. This report summarises the results of archaeological monitoring in Lower Rushall Street undertaken by the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in November 1994.

2.0 Method

Seven test-pits (c.0.70m x 2m) were mechanically excavated in Lower Rushall Street by a geotechnical team (figure). The pits were archaeologically monitored, and a written and photographic record was maintained.

3.0 Archaeological Results

Test-Pit 63

(junction with Walhouse Road)

The natural red sand was contacted at approximately 0.92m below the present ground surface. Above this, a black sand-silt layer was sealed by a brown soil. Although no dating evidence was recovered during monitoring, these two layers could represent intact back-plot deposits. They were overlain by a mottled black-red layer containing some mortar fragments. This was sealed by topsoil.

Test-Pit 64

(Wollaston Court access)

This test-pit was excavated to 3m below the present ground surface. In the northeast-facing section the natural red sand was cut by a large pit, filled with silt-sand and rounded stones. The pit's profile was truncated to the south by modern services. These were sealed by a layer of silt-sand and topsoil.

A northeast-southwest aligned wall, made of pre-industrial bricks, was preserved in the southwest-facing section. The top lay at 0.80m and the base extended down a further 2.20m. The wall was sealed by two layers of redeposited sand and gravel, a layer of silt-sand and topsoil.

Test-Pit 65

(opposite Whittimere Street)

This test-pit was excavated to 4m below the modern ground surface. A north northwest-south southeast aligned cellar wall, constructed from machine bricks made by the "Leamore Brick Company, Walsall" was set on top of a black sand-silt layer. Approximately 2m of cellar backfill was sealed by a metal waste, glass and crushed brick deposit. This deposit was overlain by a black-brown layer, containing some machine bricks and redeposited clay, sealed by a c.0.30m layer of topsoil and turf.

Test-Pit 66

(junction with Holtishill Lane)

The natural clay, overlain by natural sand, was contacted within this 2.70m deep test-pit. The sand was overlain by a redeposited layer of large angular limestone, sealed by topsoil. A brick wall-footing, seen only in the northeast facing section, was recorded at 0.90m below the present ground surface. The wall was sealed by a destruction layer and then by topsoil.

Test-Pit 66A

(carpark entrance to Holtishill Lane)

The test-pit was excavated to 3.60m below the modern ground surface and the natural clay horizon was contacted at 1.30-1.40m. A 0.50m-0.60m thick deposit of coal and charcoal, which sealed the clay, was itself sealed by a layer of redeposited clay mixed with brick and mortar, overlain by 0.10m of tarmac.

Test-Pit 67

(carpark, opposite Warewell Close)

A backfilled cellar, which extended to a depth of 3m below the present ground level, was recorded in the northern half of the test-pit. The cellar debris was overlain by a layer of black silt-sand, with some clay, brick and metal. This was sealed by 0.10m of tarmac. Within the southern half, the natural yellow clay was overlain by a deposit of broken bricks and mortar, sealed by the same black silt-sand and tarmac seen to the north.

Test-Pit 67A

(carpark, opposite Warwell Close)

An arched cellar roof was contacted at a depth of 1.25m. The cellar was still intact and had not been backfilled. The bricks had been painted yellow and may have been pre-industrial. The cellar floor lay at approximately 4m below the present ground surface. The cellar's back wall was stepped. The arched roof was sealed by loosely packed rubble and a black silt overlain by tarmac.

4.0 Discussion

Archaeological deposits in Walsall are a scarce resource, and in 1989 Lower Rushall Street was identified as one of three areas in Walsall of particular archaeological significance (Baker 1989). Documentary and cartographic evidence suggest that Lower Rushall Street was occupied in the Late Middle Ages and was built up in the early post-medieval period. A later pattern of intensive sub-division of plots survived on the eastern side of Lower Rushall Street until slum clearance in the 1930s. Eye-witness accounts of the clearance, and photographs and drawings of the street prior to the demolition, show a mixture of buildings which included a number of timber-framed and some limestone-walled structures. Archaeological investigations in the 1980s found evidence of domestic occupation beginning in the 13th and 14th-centuries, overlain by limestone rubble footings of 15th-16th-century timber-framed buildings (Baker 1988, 1989).

Although no clearly datable pre-medieval, medieval or early post-medieval activity was recorded during archaeological monitoring in 1994, intact archaeological deposits were identified. The combination of undisturbed garden or 'back-plot' deposits in Test-Pit 63, a pre-1850s wall in Test-Pit 64, possible 15th-16th-century limestone rubble (albeit redeposited) in Test-Pit 66 and ?pre-1850s cellaring in Test-Pit 67A does suggest that archaeological deposits were not completely erased by later 19th-century cellaring or by slum clearance in the 1930s. It is clear that surviving evidence on the eastern side of Lower Rushall Street would have important implications for the history of Walsall - especially within the context of recent archaeological investigations elsewhere in the town (Litherland forthcoming).

5.0 Implications and Proposals

5.1 Implications

The archaeological evidence does suggest the need for further archaeological investigation in the areas of Test-Pits 63, 64, 66 and 67A. Two levels of response are recommended.

5.2 Proposals

Due to extensive 19th-century cellaring and 20th-century clearance no earlier archaeological deposits survived in Test-Pits 65, 66A and 67. No further archaeological monitoring is required in these areas.

Intact archaeological deposits were recorded in Test-Pits 63 and 64 and it is proposed that a small-scale excavation should be conducted prior to the commencement of any development work in the area of these two Test-Pits. The excavation should:

- 1) identify the extent of survival, nature and character of archaeological deposits.
- 2) recover sufficient pottery and small finds assemblage to allow dating of the deposits.

On another level, it is proposed that archaeological monitoring be maintained during groundwork in the area immediately surrounding Test-Pits 66 and 67A. This will allow for recording of any surviving "islands" of archaeology, and firmer dating of the cellaring in Test-Pit 67A may be obtained.

6.0 Acknowledgements

The archaeological monitoring was undertaken by Catharine Mould and Marianne Ridgeway. We are grateful to Nigel Baker for his comments on the results and to Simon Buteux for editing this report.

7.0 References

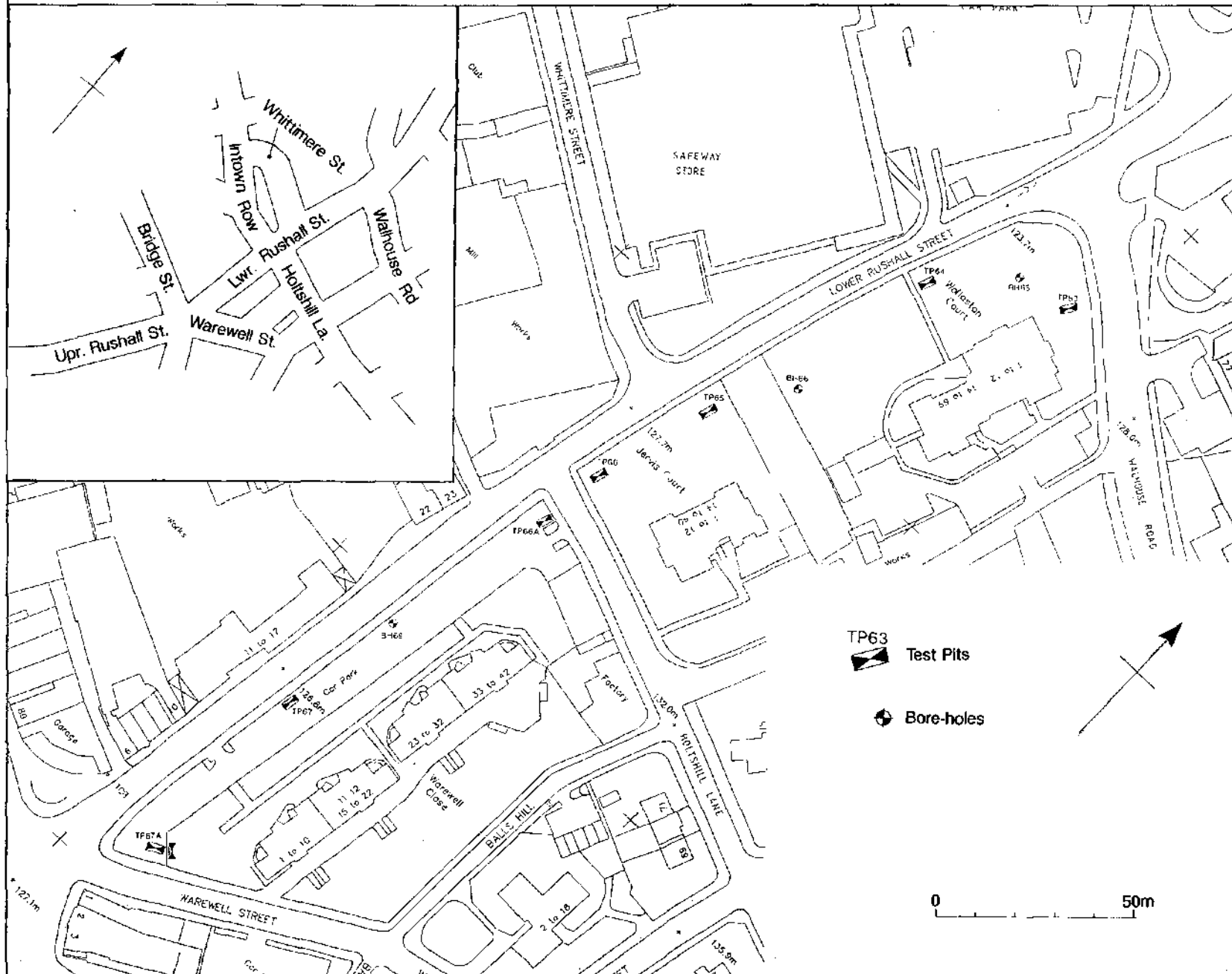
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WALSALL Inner Relief Road Scheme 1994



TP63
 Test Pits

 Bore-holes

0 50m