

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**An Archaeological Evaluation
at
Walsall Street/Pritchard Street,
Wednesbury**

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*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

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at
Walsall Street/Pritchard Street,
Wednesbury, 1996**

B.U.F.A.U.



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An Archaeological Evaluation
at Walsall Street/Pritchard Street,
Wednesbury, West Midlands

1.0 Summary

An archaeological evaluation of land at the junction of Walsall Street and Pritchard Street, Wednesbury was conducted by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, in the period 15th-19th July 1996. The proposed development site is located within an Area of Potential Archaeological Importance, as defined in Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's Unitary Development Plan, and this evaluation followed an earlier desk-top assessment (Moscrop 1996) which suggested that islands of medieval or post-medieval stratigraphy could have survived later 19th century disturbance. Prior to this evaluation, below-ground investigations had been limited to the recovery of pottery wasters from a service trench cut in 1913 and the recovery of pottery fragments from one of five geotechnical bore-holes excavated in 1996 (British Geotechnical 1996). No archaeological investigations had been conducted at the site, and the potential for survival of archaeological deposits, their nature and condition, was unknown. Three trial trenches were excavated and the stratigraphic sequence in two of these dated exclusively to the 19th/20th centuries. The incorporation of ironworking slag within feature F200 and feature F203 in Trench B may represent an earlier 19th century stage of localised industrial production, and F201, which ran parallel to the present day Walsall Street, may represent an earlier, pre-19th century agricultural boundary.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation of 16000 square metres of land which is located on the corner of Walsall Street and Pritchard Street, Wednesbury, West Midlands (Figures 1 and 2). The evaluation was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of R. Parsons Design in fulfilment of a planning application requirement that an archaeological evaluation be conducted prior to consideration of a planning application for housing association buildings.

The archaeological evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994), with a brief prepared by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (Waller 1996), and with a Specification prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (Jones 1996). This Specification conformed to Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of Environment 1991).

This report should be read in conjunction with an earlier desk-top assessment prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (Moscrop 1996); information contained therein is not repeated here.

3.0 The Site and its Location (Figures 1 and 2)

The proposed development site is located within the town centre of Wednesbury, in the Borough of Sandwell, West Midlands (centred on NGR SO 39872951), and is located within an Area of Potential Archaeological Importance, as defined in Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's Unitary Development Plan. The site is defined on its eastern side by Pritchard Street, on its southern side by Walsall Street, whilst to the west it shares a boundary with a War Memorial and Garden of Remembrance, and to the north with domestic residences. The site is, at present, a public lawned garden containing shrub borders. It follows the rising south-north gradient of Pritchard Street, and lies at a slightly higher level than Walsall Street. This rise in level may be due to the relatively recent demolition of housing which originally fronted on to Walsall Street. The geology of this area comprises undifferentiated glacial deposits, overlying a succession of grey siltstones, mudstones and sandstones which belong to productive coal measures. The subsoil within the site is highly weathered mudstone (British Geotechnical 1996).

4.0 Objectives

The objectives of this archaeological evaluation were:

- 1) to define the nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains within the area proposed for development, to permit the formulation of an informed planning strategy, including further archaeological mitigation, if appropriate.
- 2) to provide information concerning the late medieval/early post-medieval use of the area, possibly including evidence for pottery manufacture *in situ*.

5.0 Method

Three trial trenches, each measuring 10m x 1.60m, were excavated. The trenches were located in order to test the survival of deposits along the Pritchard Street frontage (Trench A), the Walsall Street frontage (Trench B) and within the backplots (Trench C). The turf was removed and stored by hand prior to a JCB excavator being used, under archaeological supervision, to remove the modern overburden down to the most recent archaeological horizon. The subsoil was defined in two of the three trenches. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeological deposits were identified, and contextual information was supplemented by plans, sections and photographs which together with recovered artefacts form the site archive. The archive is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. However, arrangements for its deposition with Wednesbury Museum are being negotiated.

6.0 The Archaeological Results

Trench A (Figure 3)

(10m x 1.60m; excavated to a maximum depth of 2.00m)

The subsoil was not recorded within this trench. A hand excavated sondage was cut towards the centre of Trench A. Here, a waterlogged, black-brown silt-sand (1008) was sealed by a moist, acrid-smelling, clay deposit containing coal inclusions (1007). This was overlain by a mixed levelling deposit (1006), which comprised brick, tile and gravel, within a brown-black clay-sand matrix. These deposits were located to the southwest of a brick wall (F101), which ran parallel with Pritchard Street. It was not possible, due to the restricted view imposed by shoring, to establish at what depth this wall was founded. However, it was abutted on its northeastern side by a brick surface (F100), which extended to the northeast of Trench A, and was abutted on its southwestern side by a second wall (F103), which appeared to make a return to the southeast beyond Trench A.

A third wall (F106), partially truncated 1006. It formed a right-angle with wall F107 and, together, the two appeared to define a series of backfill deposits (1012, 1013 and 1007). Within the southeastern half of Trench A, an east-west aligned wall (F104) extended across the trench. This wall was founded on top of a loose foundation layer which comprised yellow, unworked, sandstone fragments (1014). Feature F104 was seen in the northwest facing section of the trench (not illustrated) to be abutted by a wall (F105) which continued its alignment to the south beyond Trench A.

A thick deposit of loose demolition material (1015), also including fragments of yellow sandstone, was recorded immediately to the southeast of wall F104. All features and the later deposits were sealed by a layer of demolition debris (1001), which was overlain by topsoil and turf (1000).

Pottery

Layer 1008 contained pottery of late 17th-18th century date. Layer 1007 contained pottery of 18th-19th century date.

Trench B (Figure 4)

(10m x 1.60m; excavated to a maximum depth of 1.50m)

The subsoil (2005) was recorded at a depth of 1.10m below the present ground level. It was overlain by a brown silt-sand layer (2008) which extended across the full length of Trench B. Within the northeastern half of Trench B the subsoil was cut by a wide, shallow, linear feature which was aligned roughly northeast-southwest (F201), but whose full width was not seen within the trench. This feature, which was truncated to the northeast and southwest by service pipes, contained fragments of pottery and bone within its dark silt-sand fill (2004). Feature F201 was overlain by a northwest-southeast aligned linear wall (F200), which appeared to continue its alignment beyond the trench. No foundation cut was associated with this wall, which was constructed from large pieces of ironworking slag. A similarly constructed wall, also aligned northwest-southeast, was recorded in the southwestern half of the trench (F203).

Between walls F201 and F203, layer 2008 was sealed by an uneven deposit of dark grey silt-sand which contained occasional lenses of black coal (2002). A number of *in situ* service pipes were recorded at the base of this deposit. Layers 2002 and 2008 were truncated by the construction of two northwest-southeast aligned walls (F204 and F205; illustrated in section only), each of which incorporated the earlier linear features F201 and F203 as foundation courses. A third wall (F202), aligned northwest-southeast, was recorded at the northeastern limit of Trench B. All three later walls (F202, F204 and F205) were overlain by a deposit of demolition debris (2001) which extended across the whole trench. This was sealed by topsoil and turf (2000).

Pottery

Feature F200 contained coarsewares of 17th-18th century date; material of possible 16th century date was also recovered. Feature F201 contained pottery of 17th century date, including a waster sherd, of possible 16th or 17th century date, a 'second', and a sherd of poor quality.

Trench C (Figure 5)

(10m x 1.60m; excavated to a maximum depth of 2.00m)

The subsoil (3008) was recorded at a depth of 1.50m below the present ground level. This was overlain at the northeastern end of the trench by a thin layer of black-brown silt-sand (3005) which contained a number of pottery sherds. The silt-sand was, in turn, sealed by a thick deposit of re-deposited blue clay, which was mixed with a silty deposit containing coal inclusions, tile, brick and pottery (3003). At the far northeastern limit of the trench the mixed deposit (3003) was overlain by a thin layer of clean, brown, silt-sand (3004). Elsewhere it was sealed by a levelling deposit containing building debris (3006). This provided a foundation for a black machine-brick surface (F300) whose limit was defined by a brick kerb (hatched on Figure 5). This surface was sealed by a layer of demolition material (3001), which was itself sealed by topsoil and turf (3000).

The southwestern limit of surface F300 was defined by a northwest-southeast aligned wall (F301). This feature was founded on top of the subsoil (3008) and its construction had truncated any stratigraphy which had previously overlain the subsoil. The sequence of deposits immediately to the southwest of F300 mirrored that seen to the northeast.

The southwestern limit of this sequence was represented by a second, northwest-southeast aligned, brick wall (F302). This feature formed a right-angle with a third wall (F303) which was seen only beneath a collapse of material in the northwestern section. The walls were each founded on top of the subsoil, and they contained a cellar backfill which comprised a deposit of demolition debris (which included a leaking car battery), mixed with a dark brown silt-sand (3009). A temporary division, comprising wooden furniture panels, was seen in the southeastern section to be holding back a loose deposit of bricks. The area filled by these bricks appeared to continue south beyond the limits of Trench C.

Pottery

Layer 3003 contained pottery of 17th-19th century date. Layer 3004 contained pottery of 19th century date. Layer 3005 contained coarseware sherds of 17th-19th century date.

7.0 The Artefacts

7.1 Pottery *by Stephanie Ratkai*

Trench A

- 1007 1 x Blackware, 18th century
1 x Manganese mottled ware, late 17th-18th century
2 x modern glazed wares, 19th century
- 1008 1 x Coarseware, 18th-19th century
9 x modern Coarsewares
- U/S 2 x Blackware Hollow Ware, 17th century
1 x Coarseware, 17th-18th century
1 x Blackware, 18th century
1 x modern glazed ware, 19th century

Trench B

- F200 3 x Coarsewares, (17th)-18th century
(2003) 1 x unglazed Coarseware, (16th)-17th century ?
- F201 1 x Coarseware, ?17th century
1 x Blackware, (16th)-17th century
1 x Coarseware waster, (16th)-17th century
1 x Coarseware, 17th century
2 x Blackwares, (16th)-17th century
1 x Blackware, not a waster, but at least a 'second'
1 x Coarseware, 16th-17th century, poor quality

Trench C

- 3003 1 x modern glazed ware, 19th century
1 x Manganese glazed ware, but with internal yellow glaze, late 17th-18th century
- 3004 1 x English stoneware, (18th)-19th century
- 3005 6 x modern glaze wares, 19th century
3 x Coarsewares, 17th-18th century
2 x Blackwares, 17th-18th century

This assemblage is composed of sherds of typical domestic pottery, mainly dating to the 18th and 19th centuries.

The assemblage contains a slight hint of nearby pottery production, documented elsewhere in medieval and post-medieval Wednesbury (see Moscrop 1996). One waster sherd was recovered from feature F201 in Trench B, and a second poor quality sherd was found in the same feature. The latter was badly fired, so that the glaze is dull, opaque and has crawled, that is, it has left gaps or craters in the glazed surface. Although no features associated with pottery manufacture were located within the areas investigated, it is possible that medieval or post-medieval pottery production was located just beyond the bounds of the proposed development site.

7.2 Other Finds

Trench A

U/S	1 x ?malting tile
1007	7 x ceramic tile
	9 x ceramic brick
	2 x iron nails
	1 x glass bottle
1008	2 x ceramic tile
	1 x animal bone

Trench B

2003 (F200)	2 x ceramic tile
	2 x animal bones
2004 (F201)	4 x ceramic tile
	3 x animal teeth

Trench C

U/S	1 x British army helmet
	1 x coal shovel
	1 x mangle roller
3003	2 x ceramic tile
	10 x ceramic brick
3005	2 x ceramic tile
	1 x ceramic brick
	4 x clay pipe fragments

8.0 Discussion of the Archaeological Results

The subsoil was recorded in Trenches B and C. This natural horizon was seen at a greater depth in Trench C due to 19th century cellaring. In Trench A, however, the layers yielded 19th century pottery fragments at a depth of 2m (1008). This black silt-sand layer is thought to be equivalent to the deposit contacted in the bore-hole survey, when fragments of pottery were also recovered (British Geotechnical 1996). The stratigraphic sequence within this trench appears to represent a structure, with cellaring to the southwest (also contacted in the earlier bore-hole investigation), and an associated brick yard surface. This extended northeast towards the street, roughly following the orientation of the present day path. A number of property divisions were also identified within Trench A. Although these do not strictly correspond with those mapped by the Ordnance Survey (Moscrop 1996, Figures 5 and

6) their alignment following Walsall Street and Pritchard Street, and the pottery recovered from these features, does suggest that they belong to the mid-late 19th century phase of building on this site. They are likely to represent the boundaries of backplots, which extended back from the Walsall Street frontage.

In Trench B, the subsoil was contacted within 1.10m of the present day ground surface. A stratigraphically early feature (F201) which ran parallel to Walsall Street yielded 17th century, and possibly earlier pottery from its fill. This feature may represent an earlier agricultural boundary or drainage feature which ran parallel to Walsall Street (formerly known as Oakeswell End). Later property boundaries, which ran at a right-angle to Walsall Street, were constructed from ironworking slag (F200 and F203). The re-use of this slag as building material does suggest its easy availability, and it is quite possible that small-scale ironworking was being practised within the immediate vicinity. These boundaries (F200 and F203) were directly overlain by the foundations of 20th century property boundaries (F204 and F205), which correspond to the boundaries represented on the 1890 and 1903 Ordnance Survey maps (Moscrop 1996 Figures 5 and 6).

Although no features associated with pottery manufacture were identified within Trench B, or elsewhere within the site, the identification of a pottery waster, and a pottery 'second' from feature F201 provides corroborative evidence for the location of pottery production in the near vicinity. It is perhaps notable that both the waster and 'second' recovered by the present evaluation, and the wasters found during the excavation of a service trench in 1913, were located in the street frontage area.

Trench C, located towards the rear of the proposed development site, was originally considered to have the highest potential for the survival of archaeological features and deposits. However, Trench C was instead characterised by deep cellaring and wall foundations, associated with a series of levelling deposits, on top of which was founded a brick yard surface. These features represent the remains of 19th and 20th century structures which are mapped by the 1903 Ordnance Survey map (Moscrop 1996, Figure 6).

9.0 Assessment of the Archaeological Importance of the Proposed Development Site

Prior to the commencement of this evaluation no below-ground archaeological investigations had taken place within the proposed development site, and the potential for the survival of archaeological deposits, their nature and condition, was unknown. Although this evaluation has demonstrated that there appears to have been deep disturbance along Pritchard Street and towards the rear of the site, there does appear to be potential for survival of features and deposits within the uppermost 1.10m along the frontage with Walsall Street.

The proposed development site is located within an Area of Potential Archaeological Importance. Its archaeological significance lies in the evidence of medieval and early post-medieval domestic and industrial occupation in the surrounding areas and the evidence, albeit limited, for nearby manufacture recovered from within the site itself. The evidence for nearby pottery manufacture is documented in the earlier desk-top assessment (Moscrop 1996). Trial trenching has not increased our understanding of the late medieval or early post-medieval use of this area of Wednesbury, in that no evidence of pottery manufacture or

structural activity was found, with the exception of the small quantity of material from feature F201 in Trench B. The re-use of ironworking slag in two of the features in Trench B does suggest some form of small-scale industry within the vicinity, and is also of some interest.

10.0 Implications and Proposals

10.1 Implications

Although no evidence of early medieval activity, and only limited evidence of late medieval/early post-medieval activity could be identified by trial-trenching, the potential of the archaeological resource in other areas of this proposed development site, especially along the Walsall Street frontage which have not been subject to cellaring, should not be underestimated. It is possible that further artefactual, or structural evidence of the late medieval/early post-medieval could survive within the proposed development area. Such data concerning the emergence of early pottery or ironworking industry would be of particular academic importance.

Within Trench B, an area which is included within one of the proposed structural footprints, early post-medieval features survived at a depth of 1.10m. The survival of these deposits, and of any earlier archaeological deposits elsewhere within the footprint of the proposed structure, could be affected by wall foundation trenches and by the excavation of service trenches.

It is therefore proposed that an archaeological watching brief be maintained throughout any groundworks associated with this structure.

10.2 Proposals

The proposals below provide an outline of the archaeological mitigation fieldwork which could be required if the proposed development is approved. The precise nature of such mitigation would need to be determined following the completion of a final location design and with the approval of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

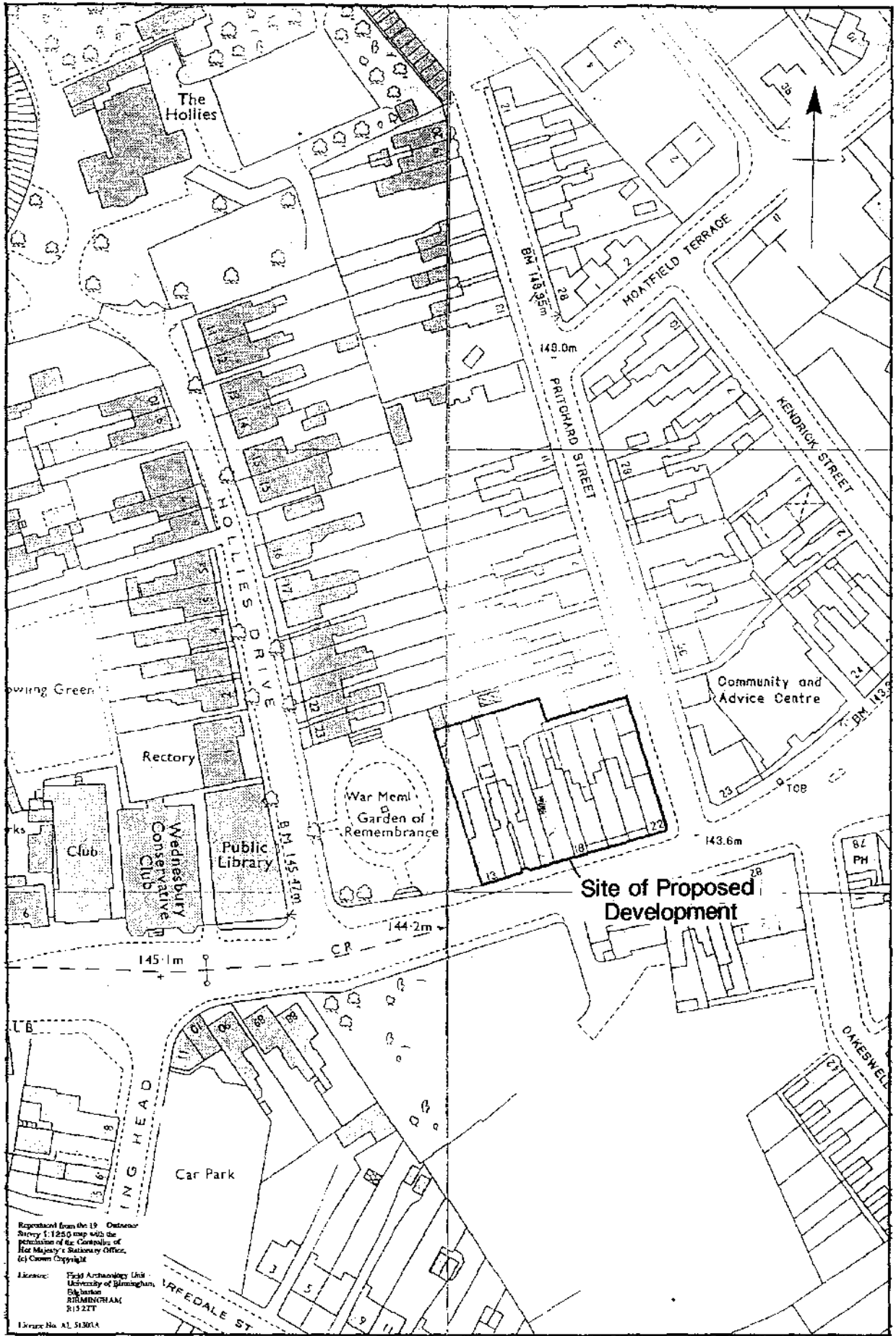
- 1) Provision should be made for the maintenance of an archaeological watching brief throughout the groundworks associated with the proposed structure located close to the Walsall Street frontage. This fieldwork could be carried out in close liaison with the general contractor appointed to undertake the groundworks.
- 2) Should significant archaeological remains be recorded during the maintenance of this watching brief, provision should be made for the salvage recording of the remains in advance of further groundworks, allowing for their preservation by record.
- 3) On completion of such further fieldwork, it may be appropriate to prepare an assessment of the significance of the findings, in accordance with the recommendations of Management of Archaeology Projects (English Heritage 1991), with a view to further analysis and brief publication of the results in a local archaeological journal.

11.0 References

- Jones, A.E. 1996 *Archaeological Specification. Archaeological Evaluation, Walsall Street, Wednesbury, West Midlands*. BUFAU.
- Moscrop, D. 1996 *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment for Walsall Street/Pritchard Street, Wednesbury*. BUFAU Report 427.
- Waller, R. 1996 Brief for Archaeological Work. *Archaeological Evaluation at Walsall Street/Pritchard Street, Wednesbury*. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

12.0 Acknowledgements

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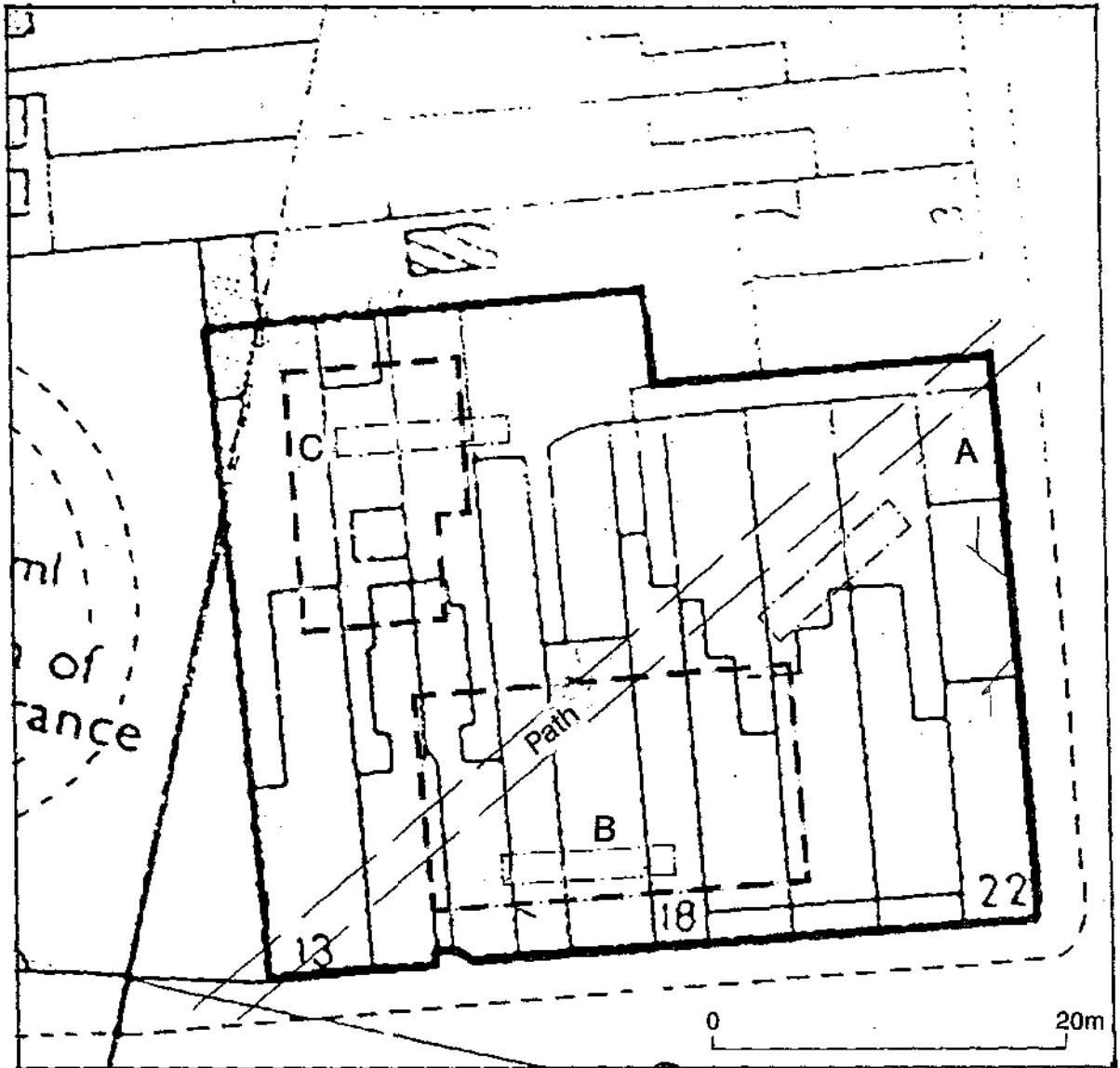


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Fig.1



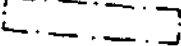

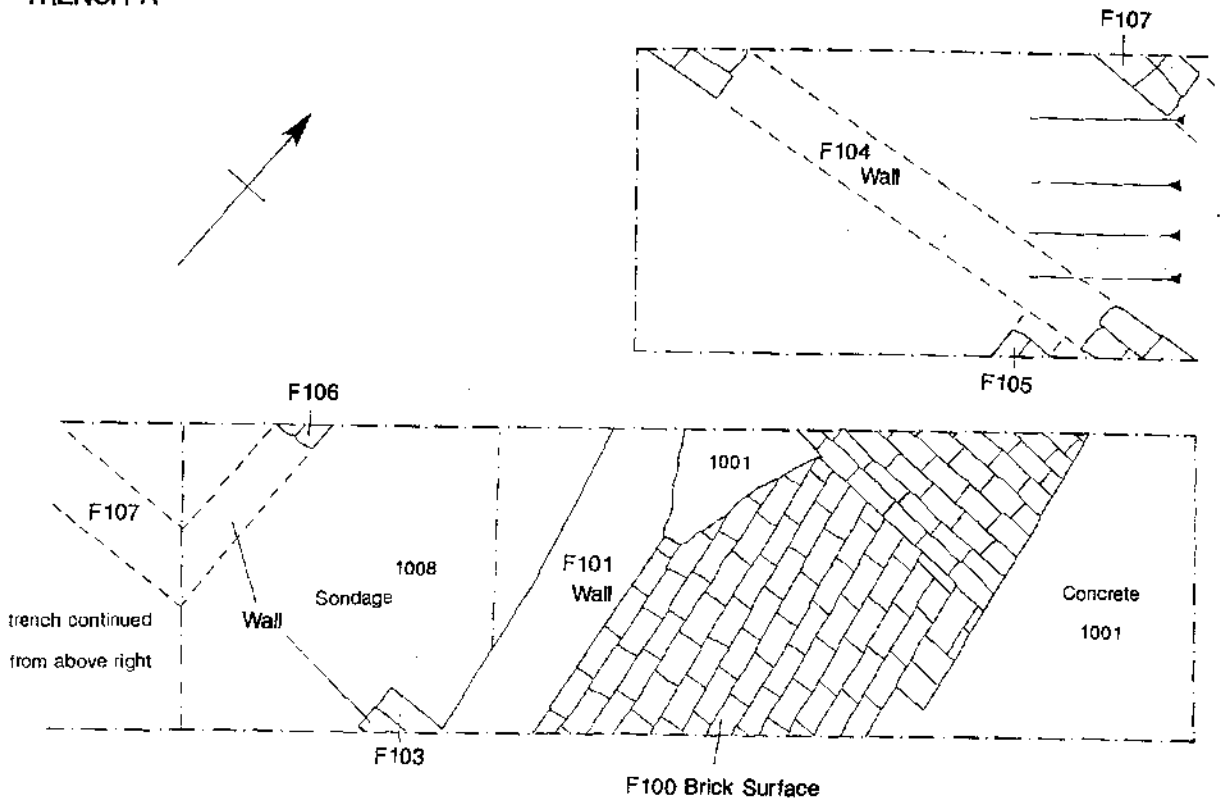
- C  Trial Trenches
-  Footprint of Proposed Buildings

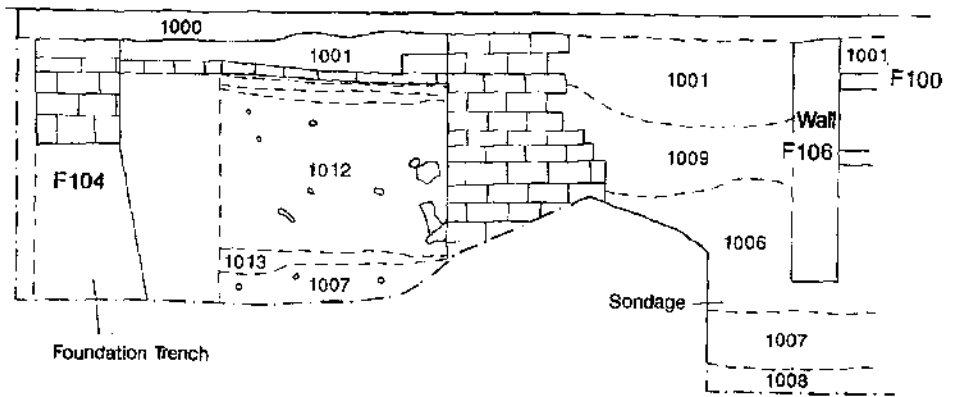
Fig.2

TRENCH A

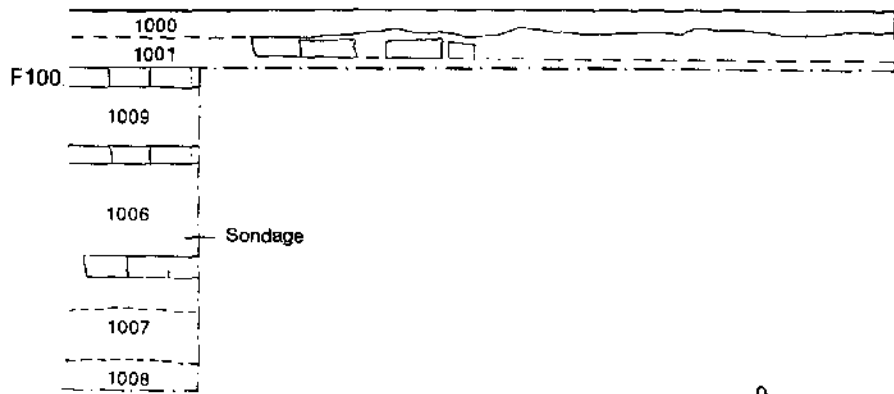


SW

144.6m AOD



NE



0 2m

Fig.3

TRENCH B

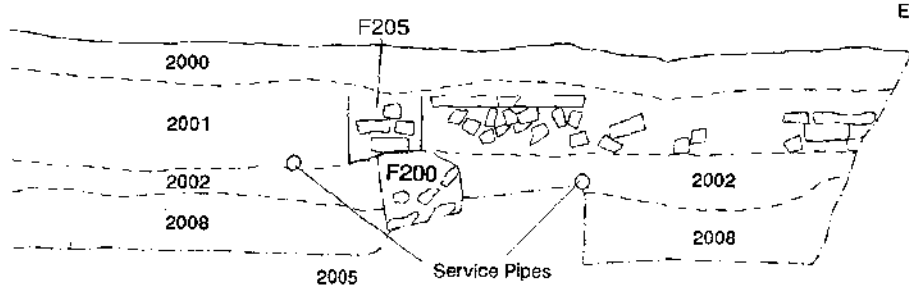
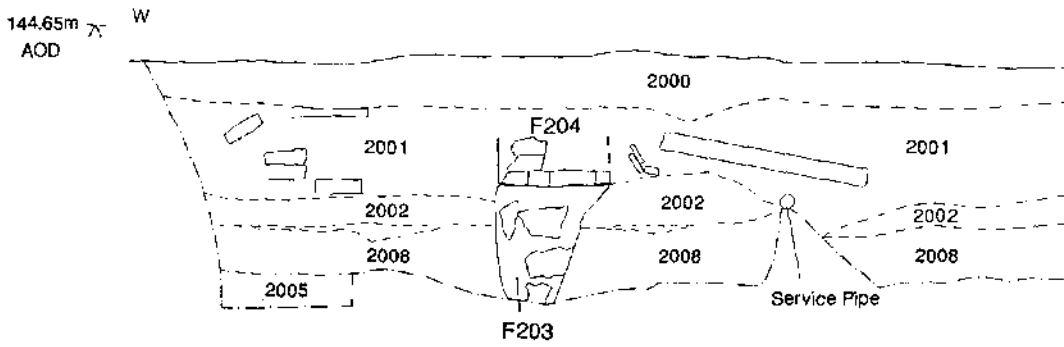
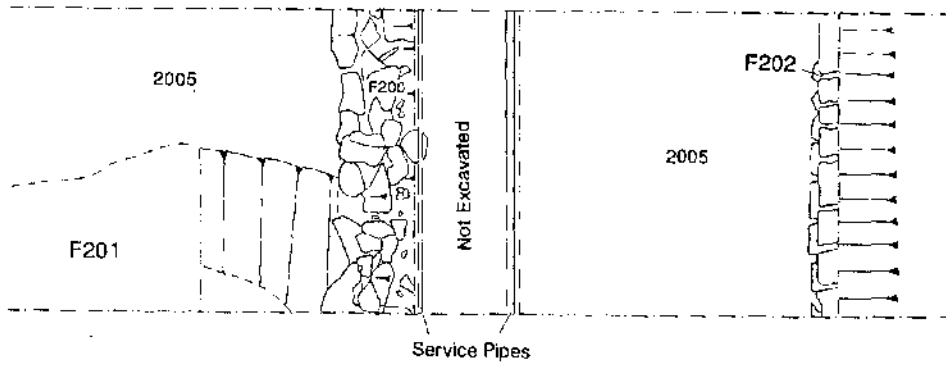
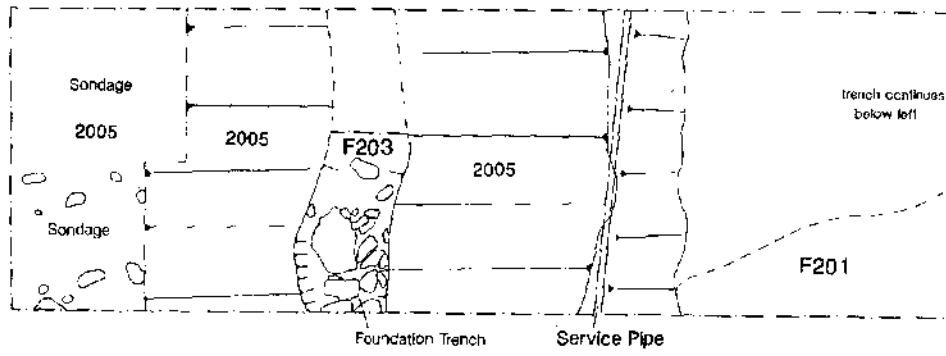


Fig.4

TRENCH C

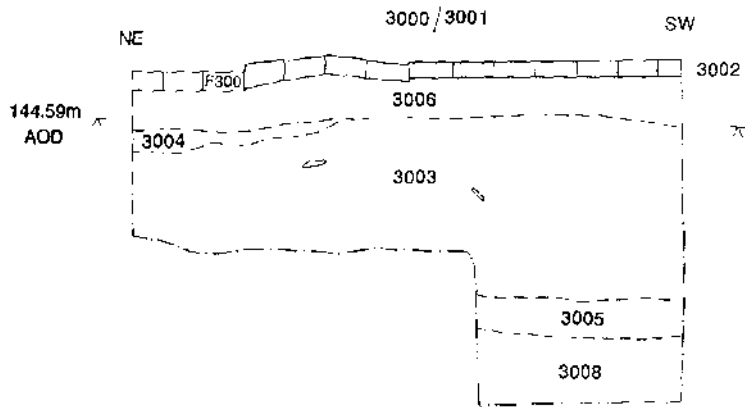
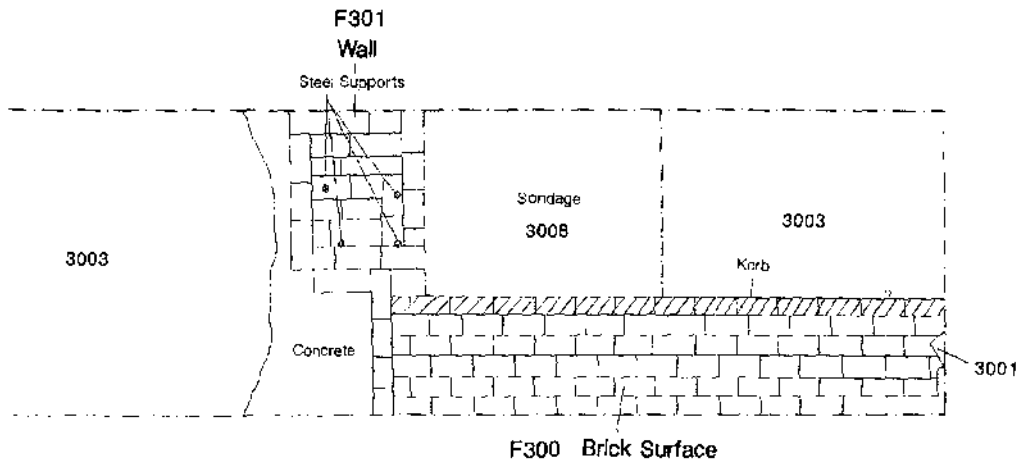
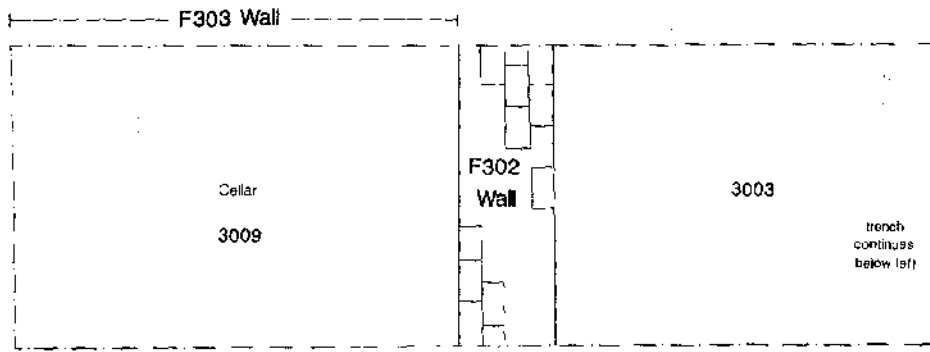


Fig.5