

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
at
Walsall Street/Pritchard Street,
Wednesbury**

1998

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by
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1.0 Summary

An archaeological desk-based assessment and evaluation had been carried out prior to the development of the site at Walsall Street/Pritchard Street, Wednesbury, which lies within an Area of Potential Archaeological Importance, as defined by Sandwell Borough Council's Unitary Development Plan. The desk-based assessment suggested that islands of medieval or post-medieval stratigraphy could have survived later-19th century disturbance. Two of the three trial-trenches excavated during the evaluation contained exclusively 19th/20th century stratigraphy. One trench, which was located close to the Walsall Street frontage, contained ironworking slag which may have represented an earlier-19th century stage of localised industrial production. A boundary which ran parallel to the present-day Walsall Street may have represented a pre-19th century agricultural boundary. An archaeological watching brief, carried out during groundworks for a residential development, recorded only 19th/20th century deposits and features. No earlier deposits or artefacts were recorded.

2.0 Introduction (Figures 1 and 2)

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief which was carried out during groundworks for a residential development at Walsall Street/Pritchard Street, Wednesbury (centred on NGR SO 3987 2951). The archaeological fieldwork was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in April 1998. It was sponsored by M. & J. Mahoney & Sons, on behalf of Ron Parsons Design.

A desk-based assessment and evaluation had been completed in 1996 (Moscrop 1996, Mould 1996). This work is reported on separately. However, the results are incorporated in this report.

The archaeological watching brief was carried out in accordance with the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

3.0 Site Location and Description (Figure 2)

The site is located within the town centre of Wednesbury, in the borough of Sandwell, West Midlands. 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. Prior to groundworks commencing, the site comprised a public lawned garden with shrub borders.

The geology comprises undifferentiated glacial deposits, overlying a succession of grey siltstones, mudstones and sandstones which belong to productive coal measures. The subsoil is highly weathered mudstone (British Geotechnical 1996).

4.0 Objectives

The objectives of the archaeological watching brief were to monitor all below-ground works during the development and to record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological deposits or features affected by these works.

5.0 Method

The objectives were achieved through a series of site visits during contractors' groundworks. All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeological deposits or features were present. Contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections and photographs which, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive. This is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. A copy of the paper and photographic archive will be deposited with the Sandwell Borough Archaeologist and the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record.

6.0 Archaeological Results (Plates 1 -2)

Area 1 (Plate 1)

Area 1 measured 15m x 9.5m, and was located within the northwestern part of the site, immediately to the east of a boundary with a Garden of Remembrance. An earlier evaluation trial-trench (Trench C) was located within Area 1.

The topsoil was mechanically stripped from Area 1, to a depth of 0.20m below the turfed ground level. A concentration of 20th-century pottery was recovered from the topsoil (1100) along the western limit of Area 1. The outline of an earlier trial-trench (Trench C) was seen in plan.

Area 2 (Plate 1)

Area 2 measured 22m x 12m, and was located along the length of Walsall Street. An earlier evaluation trial-trench (Trench B) was located within the area, and its outline was seen in plan.

The topsoil was mechanically removed from Area 2 to a depth of 0.20m-0.60m below the turfed ground level. The layer below comprised a mixed brown matrix which contained machine-bricks, 20th-century pottery sherds and fragments of ironworking slag. The foundations of former 19th and 20th century buildings, which would have fronted onto Walsall Street, extended back from the frontage.

Trench 1

(1.80m x 3.20m, excavated to a depth of 0.50m)

The subsoil was not contacted in this trench. Fragments of ironworking slag were mixed with machine-brick rubble in the southwest corner of Trench 1, representing the infill of a cellar. The eastern machine-brick wall of the cellar was also recorded. A second machine-brick wall was recorded in the west-facing section of Trench 1.

Trench 2

(1.4m x 3m, excavated to a depth of 2.3m)

The subsoil, which comprised silty-mudstone, was contacted at c. 1m below the turfed ground surface. It was cut by two machine-brick walls, both of which had ironstone foundations.

Trench 3

(1.1m x 2.5m, excavated to a depth of 1m-1.5m)

The subsoil was cut by a north-south aligned machine-brick wall. No other features were identified.

Trench 4

(1.8m x 2.2m, excavated to a depth of 1.7m)

A blue-brick cellar floor was recorded at a depth of 1.5m. The northern and eastern machine-brick cellar walls were seen in section only. The floor was sealed by a thick layer of machine-brick rubble.

Trench 5

(1.5m x 2.3m, excavated to a depth of 1.6m)

The subsoil was not contacted in this trench. A series of wall foundations of former 19th/20th century cellars was recorded. The position of the walls coincided with that recorded in Area 2 and in an earlier evaluation trial-trench (Trench B). The cellar infill comprised black ash and clinker, mixed with some structural debris.

Trench 6

(3.20m x 4.5m, excavated to a depth of 1.60m)

The subsoil was not contacted in Trench 6. Two machine-brick cellar walls contained a series of black ash and clinker deposits. The uppermost deposit was sealed by a compacted layer of hardcore rubble.

7.0 Discussion

The results of the evaluation were borne-out by those of the watching brief, which recorded a series of 19th/20th century building cellars and foundations extending back from the Walsall Street frontage.

As outlined in the evaluation report, the site is located within an Area of Potential Archaeological Importance (Mould 1996). Its significance lies with the evidence of medieval and post-medieval domestic and industrial activity in the surrounding area, and with the limited evidence recovered from the site itself for the production of pottery in the 16th century (Moscrop 1996). While no evidence of any *in situ* structures dating to the medieval period, or to the early-18th century, was found, the re-use of ironworking slag as a material for structural foundations is suggestive of an earlier phase of small-scale industrial activity within the immediate vicinity of the site. The value of the archaeological resource in Wednesbury should not be underestimated. Surviving archaeological deposits within the town as a whole have the potential to shed light on the historical character of the area. Above and below-ground archaeological investigation and mitigation in advance of future developments in Wednesbury could help to further the understanding of this town's historical development.

8.0 References

- British Geotechnical 1996 *Geotechnical Investigation at Walsall Street, Wednesbury, West Midlands*. BG Report BG2157.
- Moscrop, D. 1996 *An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment for Walsall Street/Pritchard Street, Wednesbury*. BUFAU Report 427.
- Mould, C.A. 1996 *An Archaeological Evaluation at Walsall Street/Pritchard Street, Wednesbury*. BUFAU Report 427.01.

9.0 Acknowledgements

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Fig.1



Plate 1: Topsoil Stripping in Areas 1 and 2.



Plate 2: Stratigraphic Section in Trench 5.