

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SALVAGE
RECORDING AT**

**WALSALL ART GALLERY,
MARSH STREET, WALSALL.**

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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MARSH STREET, WALSALL,**

by

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1.0: SUMMARY

This report describes the results of archaeological salvage recording during the groundwork's for Walsall Art Gallery at the junction of Marsh Street and Wolverhampton Street (N.G.R. SP 01109860, S.M.R. 5894). The work was commissioned by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, and was undertaken from February 3rd to February 5th 1997 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

No evidence of buildings pre-dating the construction of the canal were encountered. Deposits within the study area predominantly relate to former 19th century structures.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the results of archaeological salvage recording during groundwork's in preparation for the construction of a new art gallery at the junction of Marsh Street and Wolverhampton Street, Walsall, (hereinafter referred to as the study area, Fig. 1). An earlier desk top and archaeological evaluation of the Town Wharf undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (Litherland 1996) detailed the excavation of 5 trenches within three areas, all bordering the junction of Marsh Street, Wolverhampton Street and Park Street. Trench IV of the 1996 evaluation was located within the study area, and a further trench (Trench V) was located immediately adjacent to the western boundary (Fig. 1). Trench IV, located north-south, within the footprint for the art gallery, identified the presence of "made ground" to a depth of approximately 1 metre.

This earlier evaluation included an historical overview of the study area, suggesting that the focus of the medieval town of Walsall lay to the northeast, with a gradual encroachment into the study area prior to the construction of the canal in 1799. This was followed by rapid "unplanned" urban development subsequent to the building of the canal and the railway.

In accordance with the guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (November 1990), a recommendation for archaeological salvage recording during ground works was made by The West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record. The methodology of this salvage recording conforms to a brief and schedule prepared by The West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record (White 1997)

The construction of a basement required the excavation of all deposits inside the footprint of the art gallery to a depth of approximately 4 metres. The purpose of the

archaeological salvage recording was to identify and record the character of any archaeological remains affected by the machine excavation of deposits above the natural sub-soil. The solid geology of the study area is grey shales of the carboniferous coal measures. The drift geology comprises a yellow-brown boulder clay.

3.0: METHODS

Two trenches, excavated by machine, were located specifically to examine the potential of archaeological deposits and the nature of later disturbances. The remainder of the archive consists of a record of observations made during the excavation of all deposits overlying the natural ground surface, with sections recorded where possible (Fig. 1, Section 3). Test pits excavated to enable chemical analysis of the subsoil (Fig. 1, Section 6) provided an opportunity to examine any sub-surface features.

Trenches 1 and 2 (Fig. 2) were machined to expose the uppermost levels of the natural subsoil. These were located away from the street frontages to avoid possible 19th century cellar disturbance. Sections of the trenches, and the base of each trench were then hand-cleaned to define any archaeological features present. Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-forma recording sheets for contexts and features, supplemented by a scale drawing of the plans and section of the trench with photographs. These are all held in the archive.

4.0 RESULTS

Trench 1 (Fig. 2) was aligned north-south along the eastern edge of the study area approximately 8m west from the Marsh Street road frontage, and measured approximately 7m in length. The earliest deposits consisted of a homogenous layer of yellow-grey silty clay containing charcoal, fragments of crushed red brick, mortar, and clinker (1017), evident to a depth of 0.28m. This was overlain by a layer of charcoal and silt (1016) which contained a lead service pipe at its base. Layer 1016 was sealed by a stone surface consisting of sub-rounded pebbles, which in turn was sealed by a layer of brown silt. These layers had been cut by a brick culvert (F102) aligned northwest-southeast, constructed from "machine made" bricks. At the southern end of the trench was a wall constructed from red brick (F103) and aligned east-west. During the subsequent excavation of areas outside Trench 1 it became clear that the brick wall (F103) was in fact part of an arc of bricks extending from the south, rather than being straight. At the northern end of Trench 1 was part of a corner of a brick structure, surviving to a depth of approximately four courses. This appeared to have returns to the northwest and to the southwest. The remainder of the layers in Trench 1 relate to the use of the area as a car park, consisting of Tarmac, concrete and shale.

Trench 2 measured approximately 6m in length, and was aligned east-west along the southern boundary of the site towards the Marsh Lane street frontages (Fig. 1c). The

natural sub-soil in Trench 2 was overlain by a layer of dark grey silty clay (1025), which contained red brick rubble, charcoal, coal, ash, gravel, and clinker. It seems likely this layer (1025) relates to the make up layer (1017) overlying the natural in Trench 1. The remainder of the deposits in Trench 2 would appear to relate to the later use of the area as a car park.

The results from Section 3 generally mirrored those in Trench 2 suggesting that the makeup layer (1025) covered much of the southern half of the site, gradually becoming shallower towards the east.

Section 6 was observed in a test pit excavated to enable chemical analysis of the subsoil. Section 6 (Fig. 1c) was aligned east-west where the study area fronts onto Wolverhampton Street, and was recorded to a depth of 2m. The main features in Section 6 were two cellars (F105 and F106), evidently the remains of 19th century structures. The eastern most cellar (F105) had been cut by an earlier test pit. These cellars (F105 and F106) were cut into the natural sub-soil to a depth of 1.90m. It was also clear, however that the extent of the cellars fronting onto Park Street were not consistent in each building. Deposits between the cellars consisted of 0.65m of made ground, possibly levelling material again possibly relating to the later use of the area as a car park.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

Most of the deposits encountered would appear to represent 19th century activity. The layer of clay overlying the natural in Trenches 1 and 2 (1017 and 1025), is extensive over most of the southern half of the site and may highlight the early dumping of material from local industries or from barges using the canal. The presence of lead services within layer 1016 suggests that layers above this are likely to be the result of 19th century activity. Cellars located in the northern part of the study area relate to 19th century structures fronting onto Wolverhampton Street.

No structures pre-dating the construction of the canal were identified, possibly originally being very sparse or disturbed by later deposits. This does not preclude the possibility that structures pre-dating the 19th century were located within the study area, since ground conditions during salvage recording would have made the identification of any ephemeral features difficult.

5.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was commissioned by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, and monitored for The West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record by Hilary White. The report was edited by Gwilym Hughes and the drawings prepared by Nigel Dodds.

6.0: REFERENCES

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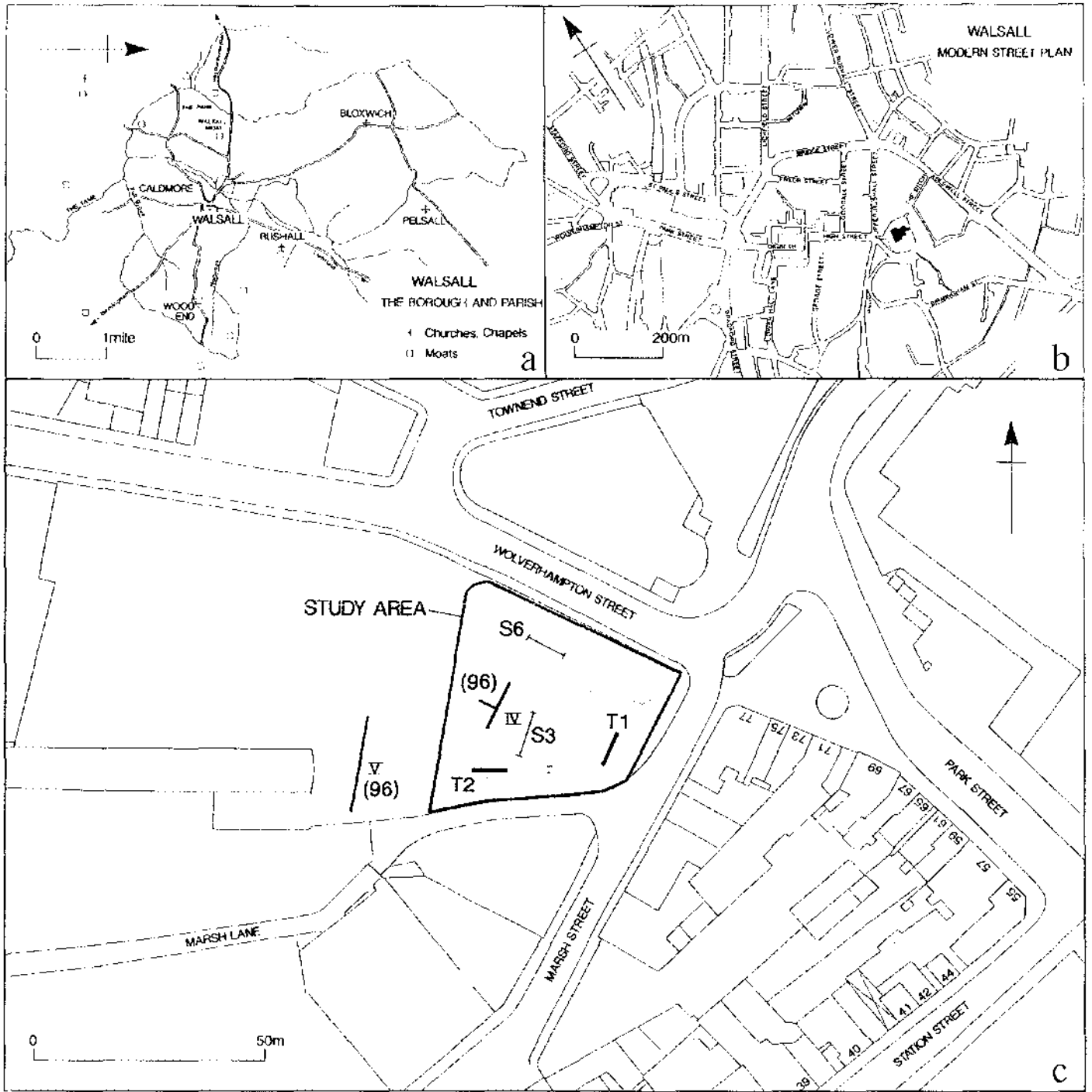


Figure 1

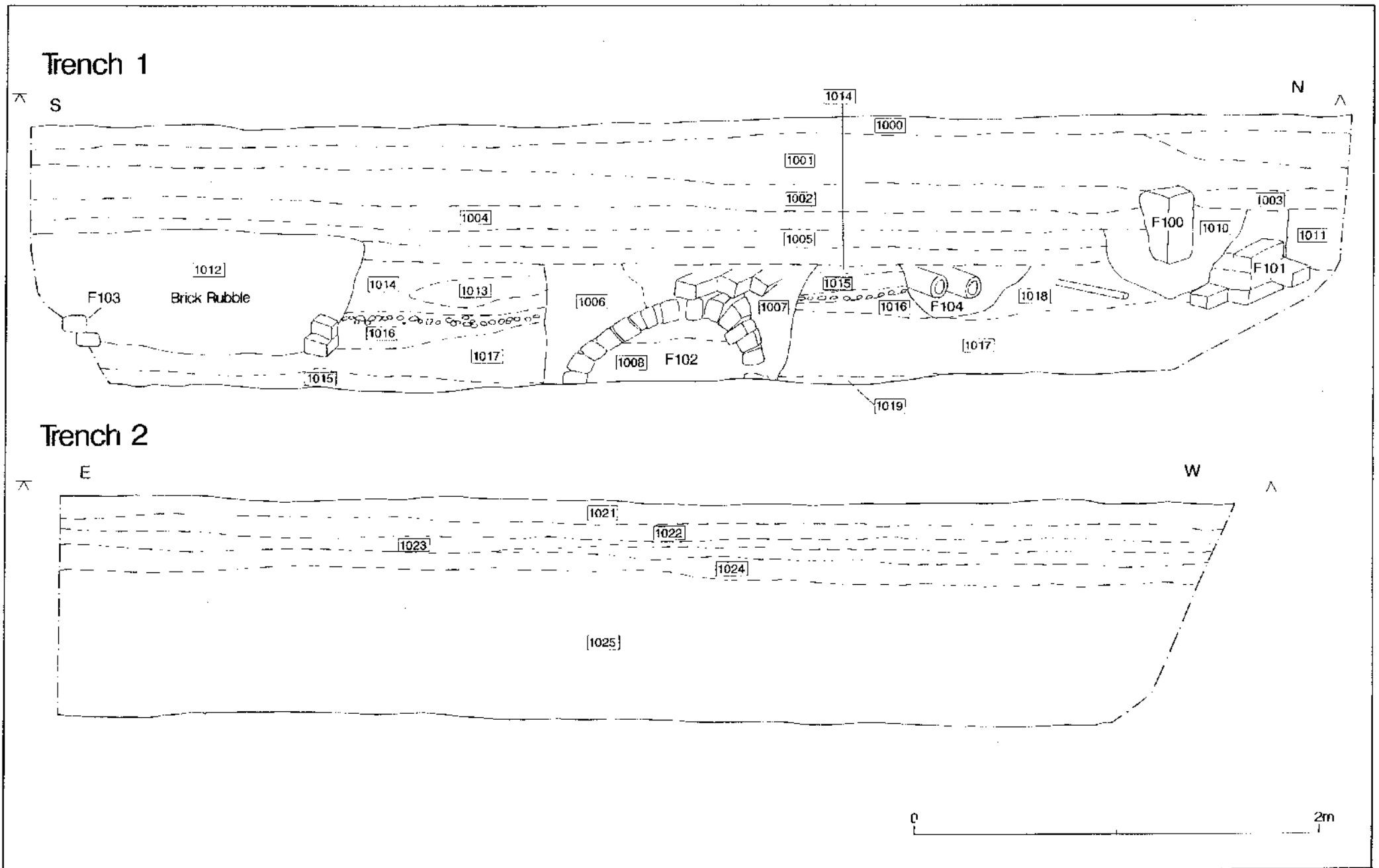


Fig 2