

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**Archaeological Salvage Recording
at Rear of 5-27, High Street, Bilston,
Wolverhampton, West Midlands**

1998

(SMR 5810)

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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by
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1.0 Summary

An archaeological desk-based assessment, photographic survey and watching brief had been carried out prior to, and during, the demolition of 21-27 High Street, Bilston (SMR 9466). This suggested that surviving roof timbers, which were generally of square-profile scantling, had belonged to a building of 17th-18th century date. Archaeological salvage recording during the re-alignment of Smith Street and its associated drainage works (SMR 5810), to the rear of High Street, recorded the survival of a sandstone property-boundary wall which is likely to be dated to the late-18th century, and a series of post-medieval deposits and cellars. No earlier deposits or artefacts were recorded.

2.0 Introduction (Figures 1 and 2)

This report describes the results of archaeological salvage recording which was carried out during the realignment of Smith Street and the cutting of its associated drainage works to the rear of 5-27, High Street, Bilston, Wolverhampton, West Midlands (centred on NGR SO 9470 9620). The archaeological fieldwork was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of the sponsors, Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council, in February-March 1998.

A desk-based assessment and preliminary recording of the buildings at 21-27, High Street had been completed in February 1997 (Dingwall 1997), along with an archaeological watching brief during their demolition (Mould 1997). This work is reported on separately. However, the results are incorporated in this report.

The archaeological salvage recording was carried out in accordance with a Design Brief prepared by West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record (White 1998) and a Specification prepared by BUFAU (Mould 1998). The guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994) were followed.

3.0 Site Location and Description (Figure 2)

The site comprised the western arm of Smith Street, the former location of Numbers 21, 23 and 25/27 High Street and their backplots, which were represented by an open area of partially compacted demolition material, and by a tarmaced carpark area to the rear of Numbers 5-19, High Street in Bilston town centre (Figure 2).

4.0 Objectives

The objectives of the archaeological salvage recording 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 the road realignment and associated drainage trenches.

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 Wolverhampton Archives Service and the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record.

7.0 Archaeological Results (Plates 1 -8)

Section 1

Section 1 comprised a cellar, which measured 5.50m east-west by 5m north-south and which fronted onto Smith Street. The cellar had been backfilled with a mixed deposit of machine-bricks and structural debris. The uppermost 0.50m of this infill was mechanically excavated. No archaeological deposits were recorded, no artefacts were recovered.

Section 2

A brick-built service-inspection-shaft, with a 1.60m diameter, was recorded approximately 5m to the east of Section 1. This circular feature was constructed from orange-red clamped-bricks. A mixture of bonding had been used, and wedges of stone and tile had been used to create the circular-shape. The feature was partially backfilled with structural debris, and was sealed by an iron plate.

Section 3 (Plates 1 and 2)

A yellow sandstone wall, which formed a right-angle with High Street, extended back towards Smith Street for c.36m. The wall, which was set into the orange-yellow gravel-clay-sand subsoil, survived to a height of 3-5 courses, and was constructed

from roughly-faced sandstone blocks, bonded together by a gritty white mortar. The modern eastern boundary of the adjacent Job Centre, and its carpark area to the rear, followed the alignment of the earlier sandstone wall, and utilised the lower courses as its foundation-base. A number of 18th century pottery sherds, clay pipe fragments and metal-working slag was recovered from a 0.30m thick layer of black cinders which abutted the sandstone wall.

Section 4 (Plates 3 - 7)

Underneath the concrete floor of the former bar/restaurant which fronted onto High Street, a brick-built, dome-shaped feature was recorded. Set 1m down into the orange-yellow gravel-clay-sand subsoil, the feature had a diameter of 2.15m. Constructed with orange-red clamped-bricks, the interior surface was lined and, prior to mechanical excavation, was filled with clear water. The feature had a two-brick thick dome-shaped 'roof', built with orange-red clamped-bricks to a height of 1.50m. A different bond had been used for each of the two layers. The roof had a circular opening at the top. Two ceramic pipes fed into the feature, which had been filled with faced stone slabs, thin strips of wood and fragments of orange tile.

Section 5

The brown clay-sand subsoil was recorded at a depth of 1.40m along the length of Section 5. It was cut, at the eastern end, by a cellar which had been filled with structural debris. To the west of the cellar, the subsoil was partially overlaid by a charcoal-flecked, clay-silt deposit, which provided a foundation level for a machine-brick surface. This surface extended 5.50m to the west of the cellar, and was bounded by the remains of a wall which ran at a right angle to the High Street. A layer of partially-compacted structural debris sealed the brick surface and, further to the west, the subsoil horizon. The debris was overlaid by a concrete surface which extended west from the cellar wall.

Section 6 (Plate 8)

Two inter-connected cellars, each with a vaulted roof, were recorded immediately to the rear of properties which front onto High Street. Access to the cellars appeared to be via a brick-built spiral staircase in the southernmost cellar. A bricked-up doorway in the wall of one of the cellars suggested that additional cellaring was located to the west of Section 6.

Section 7

A series of post-medieval levelling deposits was recorded within this 1.80m deep section. No earlier archaeological deposits or artefacts were identified. The subsoil was not contacted.

Section 8

The series of post-medieval levelling deposits recorded in Section 7 continued east to Section 8. They were cut by a concentration of service trenches which fed into the area from Broad Street. No archaeological deposits or artefacts were identified. The subsoil was not seen within Section 8.

8.0 Discussion

The site is situated towards the western end of the area believed to be the medieval settlement of Bilston. While no evidence of any *in situ* structures dating to the medieval period, or to the early-18th century, was found, cartographic evidence shows this area of the High Street as being developed at the end of the 18th century, and it is possible that the sandstone wall extending north from High Street belongs to this period of activity.

In general, there was a greater degree of activity across the site than was anticipated by the earlier studies (Dingwall 1997, Mould 1998). Areas formerly interpreted as backplots of properties which fronted onto High Street were characterised by cellaring, as in Section 6. In addition, the cellar recorded in Section 1, which fronted onto Smith Street, suggests that this street, which is thought to have formerly acted as a service lane for High Street, itself became built-up as a result of the increasing industrialisation of the town. This industrialisation was heralded by the advent of the railway, and also by the extensive slum clearances carried out after the Public Health Act of 1875. The cellars, and the dome-shaped feature, which may have been a wellcap, are likely to belong to this later-19th century activity.

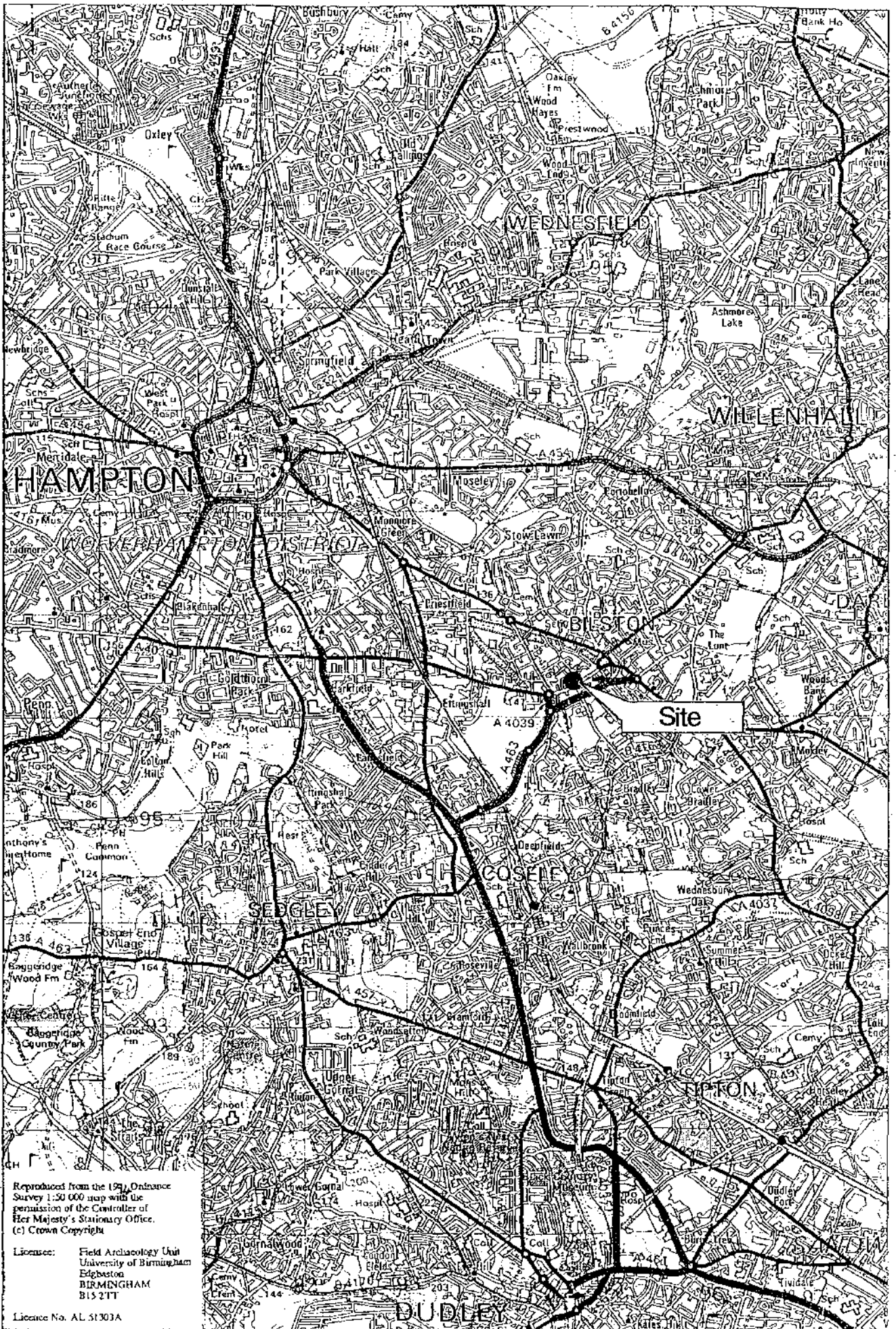
Although the site is thought to lie on the periphery of medieval settlement in Bilston, a history of demolition, rebuilding and cellaring appears to have scoured-out and erased evidence of any earlier occupation in Sections 1-8 of this salvage recording exercise. The absence of archaeological deposits from this site, places greater importance on the potential for survival of deposits and features associated with possible earlier occupation elsewhere within Bilston. Such deposits may have the potential to shed light on the historical development of the area and future development, if preceded by above and below-ground archaeological investigation and mitigation, may help to further our understanding.

9.0 References

- Dingwall, L. 1997 *A Desk-based Assessment and Preliminary Recording of Buildings at 21-27 High Street, Bilston, Wolverhampton, West Midlands*. BUFAU Report No. 466.
- Mould, C.A. 1997 *An Archaeological Watching Brief at 21-27, High Street, Bilston, Wolverhampton, West Midlands (SMR 9466)*. BUFAU Report No. 466.01.
- Mould, C.A. 1998 *Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Salvage Recording at Rear of 5-27, High Street, Bilston, West Midlands*
- White, H. 1998 *Brief for Archaeological Salvage Recording at Rear of 5-27, High Street, Bilston, West Midlands (SMR 5810)*.

10.0 Acknowledgements

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Fig 1

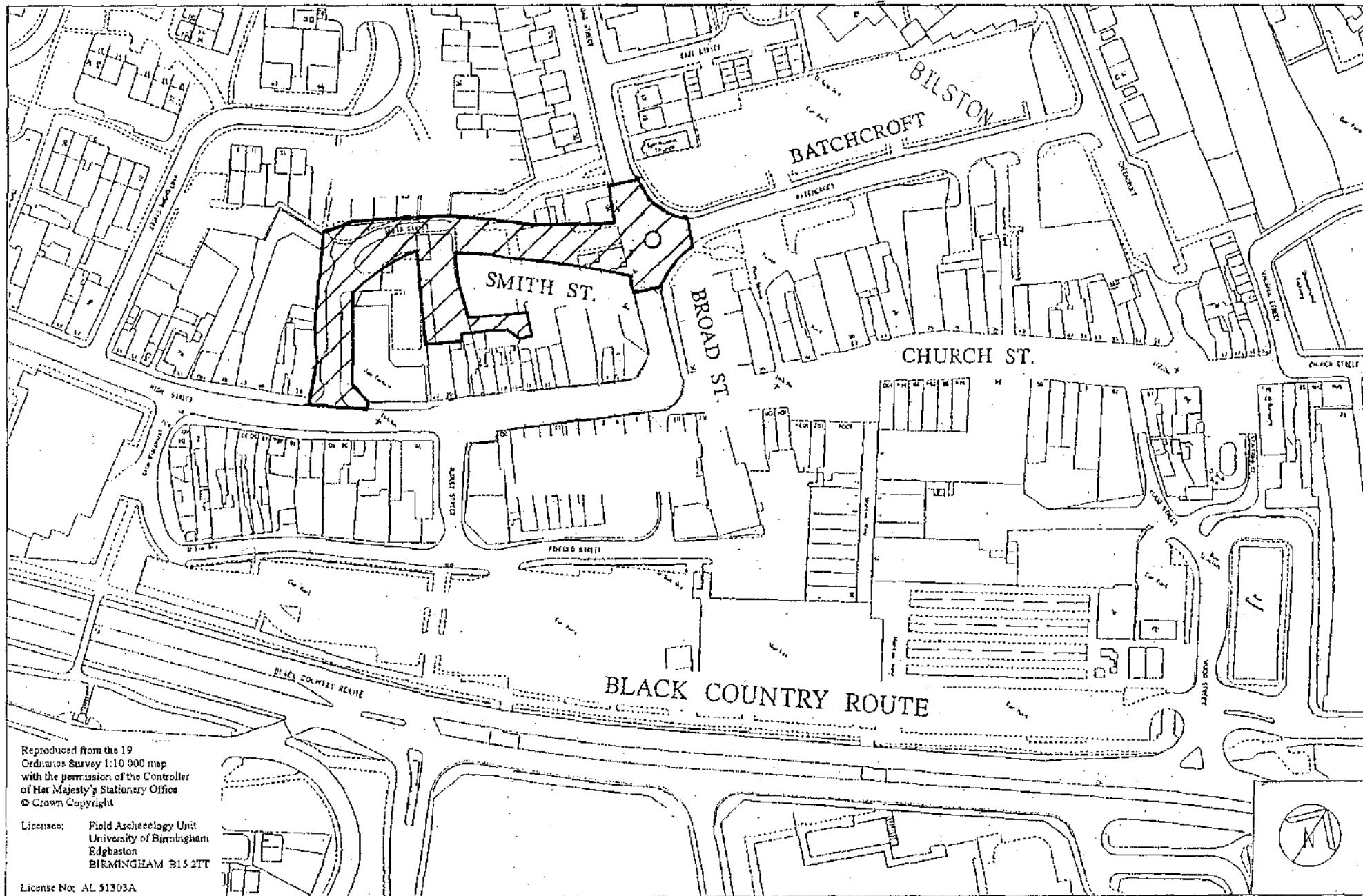
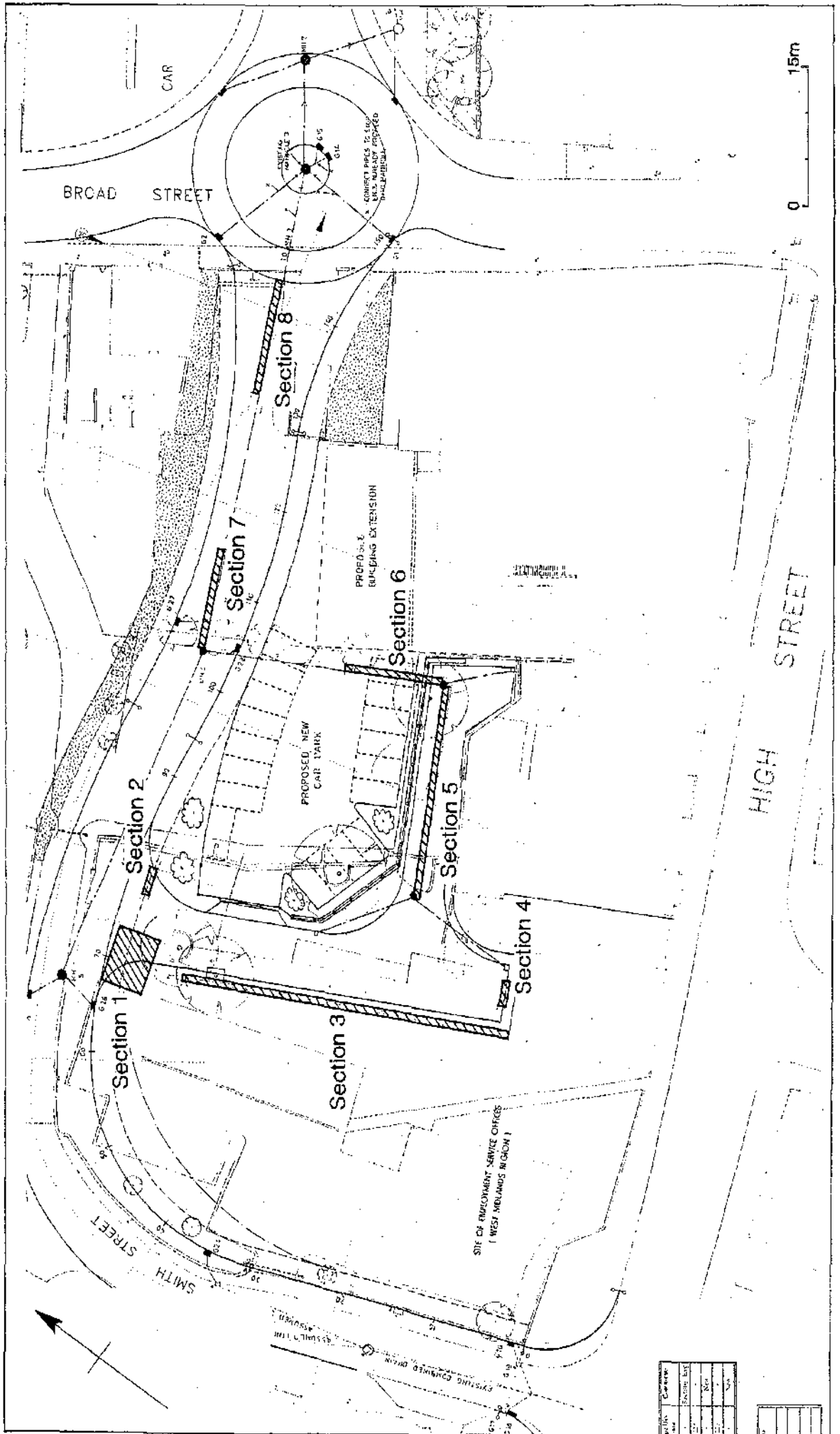


Fig. 2



SECTION	CONCRETE
Section 1	Section 1
Section 2	Section 2
Section 3	Section 3
Section 4	Section 4
Section 5	Section 5
Section 6	Section 6
Section 7	Section 7
Section 8	Section 8

Fig. 3

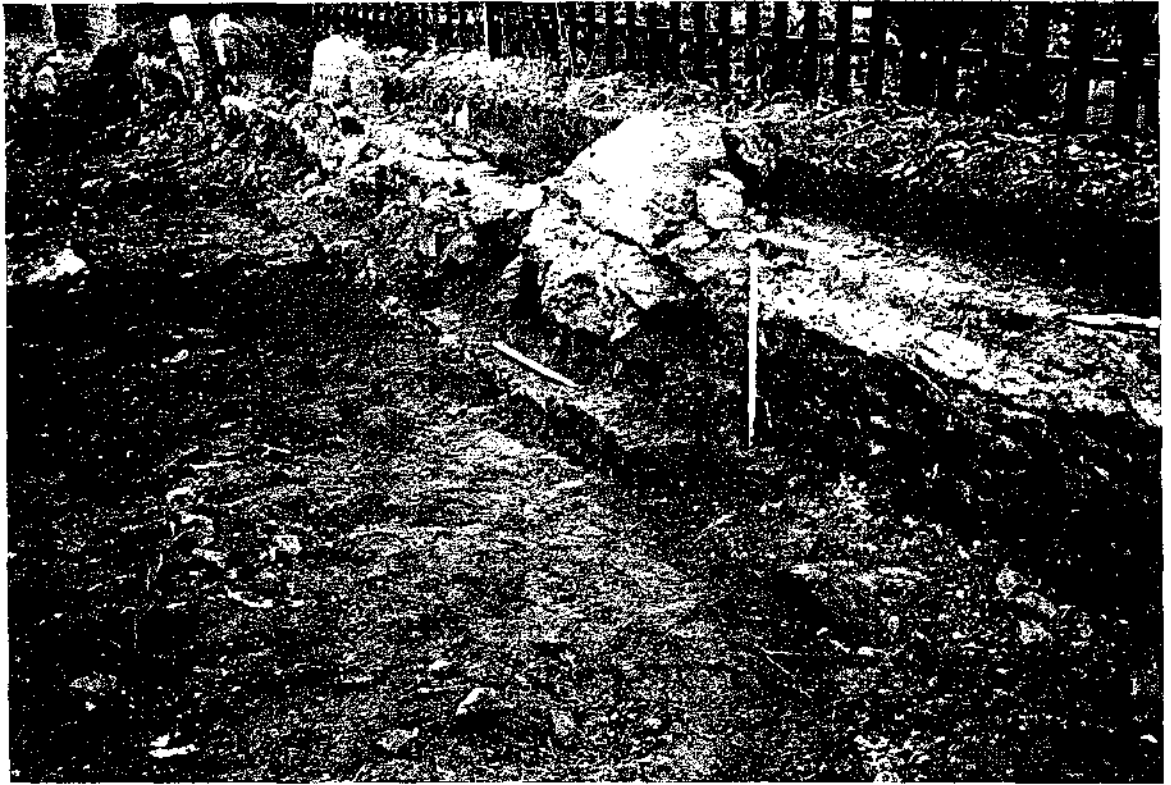


Plate 1: Section 3, sandstone wall



Plate 2: Section 3, detail of sandstone wall

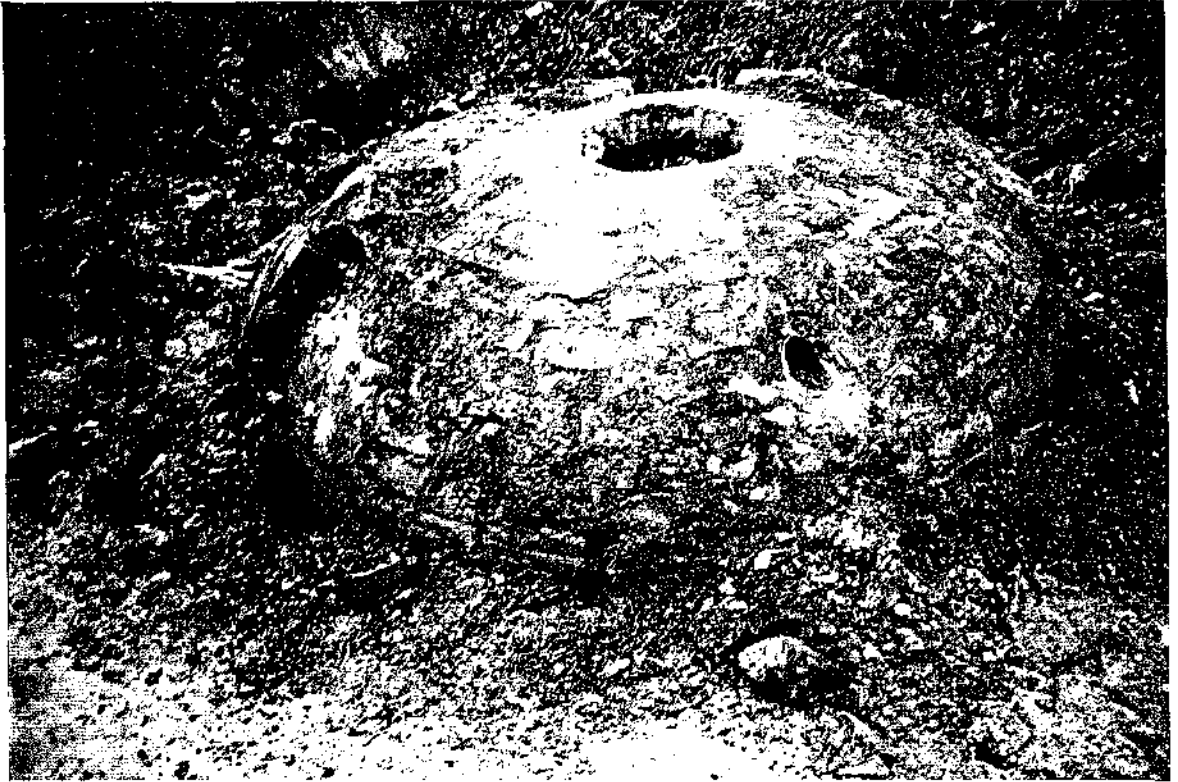


Plate 3: Section 4, dome-shaped feature



Plate 4: Section 4, dome-shaped feature



Plate 5: Section 4, dome-shaped feature



Plate 6: Section 4, section through dome-shaped feature, showing infill



Plate 7: Section 4, detail of lined interior surface of dome-shaped feature, filled with water



Plate 8: Section 6, excavated cellars